

## Kia Ora a [Aotearoa](#) (Hello from New Zealand)

As a few of you know Gary and I spent 2 months in Wellington (or in Maori, Te Whanganui-a-Tara, New Zealand. Gary was there as an advisor for the WPI project center, and I was there to fulfill a long-time dream to see the land where The Lord of the Rings and the Hobbit were filmed. I fell in love with the scenery in the movies and wanted to see if it was actually as beautiful as it seemed. It definitely is. Even though some of the scenes were composites of more than one place.

I'm not exactly sure how long it took us to go from Cuenca to Wellington, but it was worth every minute. We took a buseta (a small bus) which holds about 15 people down to Guayaquil where we stayed overnight before catching our flight the next morning to Santiago, Chile. We spent the night there, but since our flight to New Zealand wasn't until midnight of the next day, we had one day to see a bit of the city by bus tour. We found out that afternoon that our bid for upgrade to business class was accepted. This gave us access to the VIP lounge to relax in before the flight and also gave us the lovely reclining seats to sleep through most of the flight. Well worth the added expense for such a long flight through so many time zones and across the International Date Line. We arrived in Auckland, NZ around 4:30AM on some day and arrived at our apartment/hotel about 9:30. It was too early to check in so we left our bags, went for coffee/tea and then a walk down to the waterfront. Wellington has a huge harbor and a lovely waterfront to walk along. That was on the 8th. It was a lovely, relaxing, recuperating day. Plenty of outdoors and sun - and wind. Don't ever forget the wind in Wellington!



*Wellington waterfront*

Wellington is earthquake prone, so most of the buildings are built to withstand some good shakes, but sometimes I felt that there was more necessity to withstand that wind. As you fly into the airport, someone came up with the idea to put up a Wellington sign

(reminiscent to the Hollywood sign) on the hills of the Miramar Peninsula except that this sign has swirls and eddies to reflect the ever-present wind. Toward the end of January, I was walking back to the apartment and the wind was so bad that not only were all the people leaning at an angle, but one gust took my upraised foot and blew it in front of the one on the ground. I nearly fell flat on my face! As far as earthquakes, there were a couple of very light tremors the first week or so and nothing after that. There is a fault line which runs directly under the city and the roads going uphill are marked with lines indicating areas above the tsunami line. Most of the central business district is below that line. Our apartment was above it.

On our first Saturday (the 11th) we took the cable car up to the Botanical Garden and walked from its top about 1/2 way down. It is a lovely garden with many plants and especially many trees. There is one tree that is everywhere in Wellington and we were lucky enough to see the end of its flowering season. It is the Pohutukawa tree which is also called the New Zealand Christmas tree. Beautiful red puffs against very green leaves covering all the branches. The trunks of so many of the trees are gnarled and interwoven in fantastic ways. Of course, everything outside the edges of the harbor is hillside, sometimes quite steep so the gardens are all on hillsides.



*Wellington Harbor from top of Cable Car*



*Wellington from Matiu/Somes Island*

On the 14th we went with the WPI students to Matiu/Somes Island. It's about a 20 minute boat ride to the island. It is Maori land and is predator free (that's both varmints and insects) so we had to scrub our shoe soles and disinfect them and pull everything out of our pockets and purses to check for even just dirt from elsewhere. It is a lovely spot and we spent about 4 hours there looking at the plants and seabirds. The island is home to a colony of little blue penguins, but it was breeding season so we were not allowed near them. Aside from the red flowering trees, throughout New Zealand there are 2 or 3 different types of fern trees and like the flowering trees, they are everywhere. The island was used as a quarantine center in the 1800's and over 150 people died there and that after a 3 - 5 month sailing voyage. The youngest were tiny babies and the oldest was known to be 59. There is a monument on the island to honor them all. There is no way to know where all the bodies were buried.

The Wednesday after this I had my first Lord of the Rings (LOTR) experience. I went on a tour out to the working quarry where the sets for both the Hornburg and Minas Tirith were built. Nothing there now except the quarry. We followed the road along the Hutt River valley and saw several locations. At one in Upper Hutt, we talked with a woman who watched some of the filming and whose son was an extra. During my time in New Zealand I discovered that this was hardly unusual. Actually, every guide we had on the North Island seemed to have been an extra in at least one film. We did walk on a small local beach along the Hutt river where Aragon washes ashore in the 2nd film. It was beautiful and hard to believe that less than 100 yards behind us was a housing development. We also went out to Kaitoke National Park where the Rivendell scenery was shot. The camping area has signs designating it as the Rivendell camp site. After that we rode back through Wellington to Mt. Victoria. The outlook atop the mountain has lovely views of both Wellington and the Miramar Peninsula (and the airport between them). There were several sites on Mt. Victoria where LOTR scenes were shot. From there we went into the Miramar Valley (once below sea level and raised during the 1800's by earthquake) and visited the Weta Workshop. Weta did the special effects/armor/ jewelry for LOTR and so many other movies. It was an impressive visit, but too short to decide what to get at the gift shop. That required a trip on my own by bus to spend time sifting thru everything for what was affordable and what wasn't. (For instance, there was a sword there that was only \$29,000. Copies of the one ring ran from \$150 to over \$1,000.) I ended up getting a tee for myself and a \$60 book and a \$45 book for my grandson. The books are 2 different takes on the locations where the film was shot. On the way back downtown we drove past Peter Jackson's post production editing facility and then passed outside his studios where Avatar II is being produced. We even got a peek from the gate at his enormous green screen.

On Saturday the 18th we flew from Wellington to Queenstown (on the South Island) where we caught a bus to TeAnau. We stayed there the night (did manage a quick walk around town in the afternoon - a lovely tourist town) and about 7:30 the next morning we were picked up for our trip out to Milford Sound. This was some of the most impressive scenery we saw in the 2 months we were there. There were high, sharp mountain peaks and flat grassy valleys and always sheep. Actually, between Queenstown and Milford Sound we saw so many sheep, fewer cattle and a few herds of deer raised for consumption. Obviously lamb and venison are as popular as seafood and beef. We really lucked up with our guide, Karlyn, who has walked from the northern tip of the North Island to the bottom of the South Island and was planning a return walk to the north shortly after he guided us on this tour. I hope the Covid problem there did not interrupt his progress. He uses the "tramp" to raise money for youth at risk. Anyway, Karlyn wanted to show us everything he could think could be of interest to us. We had several stops both going to the Sound and on the return. There are so many narrow waterfalls and lovely riversides. And let's not forget the kea that we saw in a parking lot. A kea is an alpine parrot that is endangered. It is very intelligent and people have to be frequently reminded not to feed them because they do a good job of demanding your food. The one we saw acted like it was his parking lot and that anyone using it

really should be giving him his due. He got on top of a car and started damaging the luggage rack on the top then just strolled thru the people as if they weren't there. We also saw wekas, another endangered bird. They're more like chickens. The boat ride on the sound was amazing from Mitre Peak at the inside end of the sound out to the Tasman Sea. We saw 2 small colonies of seals and the captain brought the boat so close that you could almost swear you could reach out and touch them. All along the sound the mountains drop straight down into the water. There are several waterfalls flowing into the sound and on one of the larger ones the boats are brought right up under the flow. Guess who stayed out longer than anyone else and then discovered that I had no comb with me? It was back in the bus. I never even realized that everyone else went back inside before me. It was entrancing to feel the water and see the fall. Wet jeans, though, aren't too much fun. The trip back was fun as well with quite a few stops. Karlyn asked if anyone absolutely had to be back when the tour was supposed to end. It was supposed to be an 8 or 9 hour tour. Ours lasted almost 12 hours and every minute was enjoyable. We spent the night at our hotel and had the next morning to walk around a bit more. Then we caught the bus back to Queenstown and our flight back to Wellington.



*Mitre Peak, headwaters of Milford Sound*

Local flights in New Zealand are efficient and inexpensive. The only catch is that unless you pay extra for a checked bag, you're allowed only 14 lbs. carry-on. That includes purse and luggage. I got quite adept at packing very light.

I think this is a good time to say that New Zealand is quite expensive although possible not for people who live in the US. For us it was a real case of sticker shock. Also, I should mention that the food in the restaurants or food trucks is very good. One of my favorites is New Zealand green mussels. They are huge (3 or 4 inches long) and quite tasty. Lots of Asian places, Chinese, Thai, Cambodian, Korean, too).

On the 25th we went to the Te Papa National Museum. It's free and huge. We only did one floor. Part was the one about Gallipoli and the part of World War I that was fought there with huge loss of life. The exhibit was built around 4 or 5 biographies and each one has a 3 or 4 times life size figure that was done by the Weta Workshop. They are amazing and moving. I ended up in tears before I left. Almost everyone did. The exhibit depicts the terrible conditions of the battle and the part the Kiwis played in it. The second half of the floor was an exhibit on the flora, fauna and geology of the islands. It was interesting and the local kids really loved the volcano and earthquake part.

On Sunday we caught the shuttle up to Zealandia. Zealandia is a bird conservation area. It is surrounded by a fence that overhangs to the outside and also goes down and outward quite a way under the soil as well. This is to keep predators out. One has to realize that many of the most endangered birds in New Zealand are flightless. The predators were mostly introduced by English immigrants, but when the Maori came, they brought some as well. There are no native animals in New Zealand aside from birds. Even all the people are immigrants, just some earlier than others. The only non-bird species there is the Tuatara. It is a smallish (about 1 - 2 feet long) lizard that is native. Interesting thing is that when they are first hatched they possess a third eye on the top of their heads. It eventually disappears as they grow older. Zealandia is in a valley that in the 1990's was burned out in a forest fire. You'd never know it now. There are gentle, well paved, walking paths and smaller, narrow trails that lead through the floor of the valley and climb the mountainsides. There are different birds in different areas, some very endangered and some making a comeback. There is no way to keep them there, so as the populations have increased, many of the younger birds have left the valley and returned to the open areas suitable to them. Kiwis are avid gardeners so there is plenty of green space for these "escapees" to inhabit. They have kiwis in one of the more remote areas. One of the largest and most interesting birds was a ground dweller called a takahe. It is mostly blue with a brilliant red beak and a white area under the tail. Zealandia has maybe 3, but later on the upper North Island I did see an area with about 6.





*Takahe at Zealandia*

On Friday the 31st we had an early flight to Christchurch on the South Island. Gary has a former colleague from WPI who now lives there and teaches at the Canterbury University. He invited Gary to give a talk to professors who were interested in project-oriented learning. His friend picked us up at the airport and took us to the university. Much of this weekend long trip was paid by the university including Gary's flights, our hotel room and both breakfast and dinner at the hotel. We did take breakfast, but there were too many interesting restaurants in the downtown area where the hotel was located to not try at least some of them. Christchurch is a lovely city that was very nearly destroyed by 2 earthquakes. One in 2010 and the second about 1 1/2 years later in 2011. One was 6+ and the other 7+ in intensity. We were talking with a local couple and they were telling us about the quakes and seemed to almost blame Wellington for not having those quakes since it sits directly on a fault line. There is a National Monument to the victims along the Avon River which flows through the center of the city with linear parks on either side. After getting settled in at our hotel, we walked along the river which was beautiful, but scattered throughout the downtown the earthquake damage is still very apparent. There are older buildings that are shored up awaiting reconstruction and many parking lots and empty places that were formerly high rise offices and the like. There is now an ordinance forbidding any new building higher than 6 stories because the major damage was to those that were higher. The most heartbreaking damage is to the Christchurch Cathedral. There has been no reconstruction on it yet. The archdiocese had to decide whether it was salvageable and

if so, was it affordable to reconstruct it. Happily, they are moving ahead, finally, with reconstruction. On Saturday we set out for the Botanical Gardens after discovering that any tours were just too expensive. There was a lovely offering for a tour, meal, etc. at a Maori Marae, but it would have run over \$300 for the 2 of us. The Botanical Garden was magnificent. There was one charming area that was all blooming rhododendrons and Japanese maples. There were many huge trees including sequoia, redwood and the largest eucalyptus we've ever seen. We spent most of the day seeing all that we could. After we left, we took one of their hop-on-hop off tours that let us see a large part of the downtown area. We also lucked out in that Christchurch was holding its annual Buskers World Convention. Performances were scattered throughout the downtown and we saw several that we thoroughly enjoyed. Friday evening was a bit chilly, Saturday got even chillier and Sunday a warm front moved in from Australia and moved the temperatures up to the 90's. We meandered around the downtown that we hadn't gotten to yet in the morning and then headed out to the airport and back to Wellington. It was a lovely weekend.



*Christchurch Cathedral*





*Giant Eucalyptus in the Botanic Gardens*

Thursday the 6th was Waitangi Day. A national holiday. It commemorates the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840 which gave the the Maori their homeland back and allowed the Maori and English to coexist in this nation to which they are both immigrants. Only recently it was decided that Maori should be taught to all school children. There is also an encouragement of throwing some Maori words into an English conversation. The government and the Maori nations feel that this is the best way for the adult population to grow familiar with using Maori in an everyday setting. It was a warm, sunny day which we started by grabbing coffee and pastry to go and going to the waterfront to see a Haka. This was a ceremonial approach and rowing of a very long canoe (a wake taua or war canoe) that probably held 10 or more rowers. We continued walking along the waterfront to Waitangi Park and then on for about 3 miles or so. On our return to Waitangi Park there was a stage set up and performances were being given, mostly by Maori school kids, of dances, etc. to help maintain the Maori culture.



On February 9th we took the bus to the zoo. It was on a hillside, but quite nice. Most of the enclosures were both animal and people friendly. I did finally get to see a kiwi. Unfortunately, I don't think he was very happy with his surroundings. They are night birds so the room was lit only with red light to make the kiwi more comfortable. It didn't really work for him. He was running back and forth over maybe 8' in one corner of a much larger area made for him. If there were others, they were not coming out of their burrows. This was one of the most kid friendly zoos I've ever visited. Plenty of places for kids to let off steam. In one part of the zoo there was an emu that was free to move about as it wished (right up to the visitors if it is wanted).

On the 12th I went back to the Weta Cave to shop and look around. This is different than going into the Weta Workshop and being there on my own made it very relaxing. Weta worked on many movies besides The Lord of the Rings and the Hobbit. They did Dark Crystal, King Kong, Planet of the Apes, and so many others. In all the exposure to people talking about Peter Jackson here no one has said a bad word about him. Off the job, he seems to be just an average nice guy who trims his own hedges - albeit, a very rich nice guy. I talked with one older man who is kind of a guard at the Cave. He walks around carrying a Weta made sword. Neat guy who says that working there is more like play than work. There was a 1/2 hour movie that traced the history of Weta from a mom and pop operation in a spare room in an apartment to a company that now employs 4 to 5,000 people. Outside the Cave are three huge trolls that were prototypes for the LOTR/Hobbit movies. Really neat, especially for Tolkien fans. Oh, and there is an Uruk Hai inside the Cave.



*Troll outside the Weta Cave*

The Annual Lantern Festival was held on the waterfront on the 15th. Gary decided that he would walk to the top of Mt. Victoria and called me from Waitangi Park to let me know that aside from the lanterns scattered along the waterfront, there was a bagpipe competition in the park. By the time I made it there the competition had only 2 bands left. They were in full tartan and I thought both were excellent. For their intermission there were groups of girls from pre-school to mid-teen doing various highland dances. All in all, very enjoyable. Unfortunately, the weather was very sunny and quite warm. At this event and others in Wellington free sunscreen and water were provided. I don't know if they were provided by the city or by the organizations. There was certainly a conscious effort to encourage people to make use of both. (This even happened at restaurants with outdoor seating and even indoor restaurants place a bottle of water on each table and replenish it as needed. This seems to be an offshoot of a very active society.) Gary and I chose to meet up at Te Papa Museum and do another floor. This one was taken up by an exhibit on Maori culture - how they came to New Zealand, what the 3 tribes represented held in cultural and religious beliefs and what they had contributed to Aotearoa. It was so enthralling and all encompassing. One tribe even brought one of their Marae or cultural/religious meeting houses. It was a very spiritual and impressive exhibit. For me it was very interesting to see the approximate size of the "canoes" that the Maori used to arrive at New Zealand. There were no photos allowed in this exhibit, but oh, how I wished that were so I would never forget the experience. We went back to the apartment to change and back to the waterfront for

the lantern festival and dinner. The festival was so crowded that it was almost impossible to see anything besides people and lines at all the food trucks. Glad we ate at a restaurant.

Just so you don't think that Wellington was only about nature and waterfront, I will make mention of the fact that on the 16th we took a bus to the School of Dance where the Summer Shakespeare company put on an excellent, modern version of A Midsummer Night's Dream. They have been doing various plays every summer since 1983 in various locations both indoors and out.

Today, the 20th, I took the bus back to the cover the lower half of the Botanical Gardens. They have an enormous rose garden which was a delight. Then I walked up hill through the area designated as "bush" and finally to the herb garden that overlooks the rose garden and has views of the harbor as well. The most impressive part was the Peace Garden with a stone from Hiroshima. It is a lovely, peaceful place with a waterfall and pond and benches to just sit and contemplate.

On the 22nd we took a tour (with only one other person) to Cape Palliser. We started early and our, guide, David, like so many, was a retired gentleman. He was very knowledgeable and also was an extra in LOTR (who wasn't?). We drove out past Kaitaki Park and up through the Rimutaka Crossing where there is a memorial to all the soldiers from the Wairarapa valley who crossed by foot to get to Wellington and go off to the battle of Gallipoli. Then we dropped down into a small town where we stopped for coffee and pastry (because that's how it should be). Our first view of Palliser was lovely. Cliffs going down almost directly into the sea.



*Cape Palliser*

The whole area had been sea bottom many geologic years ago. This allowed for the formation of the primary rock in the area called mud rock. David had a small collection of shells that he had gathered there that had eroded from the rock. At least one of them



was about 10 million years old! We also stopped for a couple of minutes at the entrance to the Pinnacle Park. This was where LOTR filmed the Paths of the Dead. Unfortunately, it was a 30 - 45 minute walk each way to the actual pinnacles so we only saw a couple of the formations at the parking lot. Then it was on to the seal colony. It is the largest colony in New Zealand with about 400 or more seals. At the time we visited the males were off doing guy stuff and only the females, pups (about 2 months old) and adolescents were there. It was amazing! Assuming you wanted to take the chance, you could have petted one. The pups were still learning to fish and size up their surroundings so if you had the time, they might come right up and smell your shoes. Watching the pups play was so much fun. Almost as much fun as they were having.



*Look closely. Plenty of seals here*



*The little orange blob on the steps is Gary.*

We finally made it to the beach below the lighthouse on the end of the cape. Gary and our tour companion decided to climb the 200+ steps up to the lighthouse. I elected to stay on the beach. We spent about 20 minutes there before heading to the Ferry Hotel on, you guessed it, Lake Ferry. Seems that Lake Ferry is a bit unusual in that it is fresh water at its farthest point from the sea and salt water near the sea and brackish between. At one time it was only landlocked at low tide hence the necessity of a ferryman. Now there is a permanent dike that can be walked or driven on. The sea still leaks through and goes over during storms. There is an enormous amount of driftwood both lakeside and on the beach. After a very good lunch we hightailed it to Martinborough for a visit to a vineyard and a wine tasting as well. They closed at 4 and we just made it. We sampled 4 different varieties, but what impressed me most was the wonderful grapes we were allowed to taste as well. I would have bought an awful lot of

them to take back to the apartment if they had been for sale. As it was we only bought 2 different varieties. David asked if everyone was good to take a bit of extra time and stop at Kaitaki park to visit Rivendell. We not only visited the site, but walked across a swing bridge and took a short walk through the rainforest there. It was pretty amazing. Some of the bromeliads that grow on the trees weigh enough to kill a man easily if they fall from the tree they're in. And some of the trees are of an age to compare with redwoods. Then it was back to the apartment. Luckily our lunch was late and huge so we needed no supper.

This was a week of local stuff. I went back up to Zealandia on Tuesday to check out what I could see. There were 2 of the takahe out and I did get to see the waka come to their feeders. Waka are a type of parrot. I also was able to have another lovely walk along the bottom of the valley beside the stream. It's so peaceful listening to the voice of the water and the birds, but the foliage is so thick to the sides of the path that it is hard to see the birds. And on Thursday I decided to take a bus and a walk to St. Paul's National Cathedral. It is fairly new, but the interior is lovely. Going over that way also gave me a chance to see part of the city I hadn't yet seen. Inside the cathedral there is a section of wall toward the rear of the building with a memorial to the soldiers who died at Gallipoli and another memorial to the architects and construction workers who rebuilt much of the city after it's last big earthquake. There is also a Lady Chapel off to one side behind the main altar. I was lucky enough to get there in time to attend a mass in Maori. I didn't understand a word, but I know the format of the mass and just listening to the beautiful sound of the language was so uplifting. I was also invited by the priest to receive. What an experience. Also, I walked past the New Zealand Houses of Parliament and the Parliamentary Offices (better known as the Beehive). The area surrounding them is a beautiful park-like one.





### *Parliament and the Beehive*

On Saturday, the 29th, we went to the Wellington City Gallery. It was all modern work and some of it just too far out even for me. Still, the second floor had some interesting work. Then we headed back to the waterfront and the Underground Market at Frank Kitts Park. It's an artisan market and has some interesting things at reasonable prices. Time to finish up the souvenir shopping. On the first I walked over to the Wellington Museum at Queens Wharf. It's a nice but small museum that contains a (very white) history of New Zealand from the early 1800's pretty much to the present. After going up a flight of stairs you come to a maritime history of New Zealand, again from an English point of view. There was a very moving exhibit and kind of memorial for all the people who lost their lives in the capsizing of the "Wahine" ferry in 1968 when it was trying to cross the harbor during a storm. It changed the way boat travel in the harbor is handled. They also had a map of all the shipwrecks around the North Island. Also, there was an exhibit about the suffragette movement in New Zealand and how women got the vote. New Zealand was the first country in the world to give women the right to vote. On the second floor is a very small, but helpful Maori exhibit about the standard doorpost carvings and their meanings.

This is "hell week" for Gary and the students. End of term and so much work. We decided last week to arrange for me to fly up to Auckland and tour the Hobbiton Movie Set. I flew up on Tuesday the 3rd. Arrived at the hotel in time to take a walk around downtown Auckland. The most impressive thing I saw was Albert Park with its amazing trees. They truly look like something out of fairy tales - trunks split so that some of the trees seemed to have caves in them and branches hanging and intertwining almost down to the ground. A beautiful park and not overly big. But the trees!





*ne of the trees in Albert Park*

Anyway, after walking the city until evening I turned in. It was an early morning for the tour. We had to meet at 6:30 about 4 blocks from my hotel. Also had to have breakfast (bought the afternoon before - tea in the room) and check out and have the hotel hold my carryon. Made it in plenty of time. The guide asked if I wanted to ride shotgun with him to make sure he stayed awake. Sure. It was a drizzly sort of day and while the others slept, we chatted about Ecuador and New Zealand. Nice time. We arrived at the Hobbiton Movie Set in time to take the 9:30 tour. What can I say? It was like stepping into the movie, or would have been if the tour didn't have a bit of a rush schedule and if each group of about 20 didn't have a 5 minute space between them. The Hobbit holes are so detailed. They can't be entered, but some of them have working chimneys with real smoke coming out. There is a farm with real produce and every profession that might be necessary to keep a village going was represented. The beekeeper even had hives around the house; the baker, bread; the barrel maker had the supplies necessary. The windows had curtains or shutters and flowers or knick-knacks. Bag End, is, of course, a showplace. Then you meander down to look at the party field and finally past the mill and over the bridge to the Green Dragon. There you could have either a complementary beer or cider. And it was the same building used in the films, carved beams, stonework and all.





*Hobbiton Movie Set*



*the Green Dragon*





*Bag End*

Then it was a drive back to Auckland with a different driver. This one was a Maori young man named Chris who started the drive with a traditional introduction of himself (this states his name, the mountain under which his family shelters, the river that serves his family and much more) as well as asking for a blessing upon the journey back. We arrived in Auckland around 1:30 where thanks were given for a safe trip. On the way back, our driver/guide pointed out a couple of the 53 extinct volcanos on which Auckland is built. I grabbed lunch across from the drop off point and then headed back to my hotel through a park behind it. There are several apartment buildings that back to the park and there is a private kindergarten in it. The playground for the kindergarten is open to any kids wishing to use it. At the very end of the park is a copy of the Moses by Michelangelo. An interesting touch. Got back to the hotel and caught the bus (across the street) to the airport. Got there soooooo early. Had about 1 1/2 hours before I could even check in. Took the flight back and took a van from Wellington airport to our apartment. Gary had dumplings and noodles waiting for dinner. A very busy and exciting 2 days. But fun.

By the way, Wellington has the only airport to be decorated by Weta Workshop. The international departure check-in has Smaug and the main terminal area has 2 eagles, one with Gandalf riding it. There used to be a giant Gollum over the top of the terminal, but it was on a loan contract for only 5 years.





*Smaug*



*Gandalf on an eagle*

That was the last fling in New Zealand. On the 8th we flew to Santiago where as I said last month we had medical checks. Oh, and once again, we were lucky enough to have our bid for upgrade to business accepted. After being home and safe and healthy, I have said to Gary that it wouldn't have been terrible to be stuck in New Zealand for the duration of the Covid quarantining. There certainly are much worse places to be stuck than in New Zealand. But Cuenca is home now and it's good to be here.