



contributed by Ruth Presland

A weekend in Wellington

WELLINGTON is the third-busiest airport in New Zealand. The site for Rongotai aerodrome was first identified in 1922 when it was still undulating sandhills and rugged terrain. Aircraft began operations on a small area of flat ground behind the sandhills in Lyall Bay in 1911. In 1921 Rudolph Wrigley of the New Zealand Aero Transport Company (later Mount Cook Airlines), fashioned a runway and then built a hangar.

An official opening ceremony for the airfield was held on 16th November 1929, however development was not completed until February 1930. The aero club was gifted several planes early in its history and acquired a temporary hangar in early 1930.

I used to think big and difficult as far as flying into Wellington goes. But actually, whenever I flew in with my parents or later by myself, I found it to be straight forward, the tower helpful and the aero club most welcoming. My last trip was in my Tecnam Golf. It was a windy day and I remember being asked to hold in the Sinclair sector. It was the early days of Tecnam aircraft in NZ and the Control Tower seemed bemused when I was able to comply with 'not less than 90kts IAS when above 300 feet AMSL'. "Not bad for a microlight."

One thing to bear in mind is that the Wellington Airport company has no overnight parking available (at time of print) for light aircraft so a trip there needs to be a day exercise and then fly out to park up at NZPP or NZMS. Trains from both these places are regular and a good way to return to the city for your fun weekend out in the big smoke.

Arrival into WN requires a good read up in the AIP4 and a sturdy look at the map, more than can be described here - however do not be put off, it is like any other airport and if you are organised with your planning then it is a great feeling to land here.

After touching down at Wellington and parking up on the western apron, take the time to introduce yourself to the team at the aero club, who can provide information and tips for your departure. This club is alive and well. They also have a great website which has some interesting newsletters with great photos - check out www.flywellington.co.nz The March/April newsletter has some great shots of the D'Urville Island airstrip and provides an interesting insight to how a club is run enthusiastically.

I remember fantastic times at Wellington aero club, because of the view over the airport and the kind hospitality. In the year just passed, the club has moved from the historical site into new club buildings. Nowadays the club is strong and growing, because they still believe in the original philosophy that an aero club is a place to grow your flying as well as to network socially and to experience many different fly away opportunities.

If you are staying a night or two, there is a huge choice of accommodation in town. I have seen all the backpackers as I like to call in frequently to promote our scenic flights to their clients. Most of them are centrally located and tidy. My pick is the YHA - right in town. However if you are after a romantic weekend, go for one of the hotels. I like the Kingsgate Hotel as it is central. It has a restaurant, is affordable and you can hone into great specials if you book on the internet. www.kingsgatewellington.co.nz

What to do in Wellington? If you are there in November you will be caught up with the fanfare of the world premier of *The Hobbit*. I was there for the world premiere of *The Fellowship of the Ring* in 2001 and I have to say, Wellington had a really fantastic vibe throughout the whole city - but book early! The same can be said for the Wearable Arts Festival - 27th September

to 7th of October. Tickets have almost sold out at time of print.

Old faves - a visit to Te Papa and strolling Cuba Street. However if you would like something different then jump on the train (the station is opposite Parliament House) to Petone for a culinary shopping delight. A must do is to visit the Dutch Shop in Jackson Street, Petone. It sells Liquorice that is salty and liquorice lovers travel to it from all over NZ. I like the cheese which they sell slices of, from large rounds, yum! Opposite the shop is a fantastic Indian supermarket and just around the corner is the Asian supermarket. All three shops have my cupboards stocked for up to a year as they sell quality but in bulk at fantastic prices.

Another good trip is to Martinborough. A tour I did recently is on www.horseandcarriage.co.nz We visited four vineyards via a horse drawn carriage and had a truly memorable day, one of many to be had in Wellington and her surrounds.

Take time out to fly into Wellington International. I guarantee you will be a better pilot for it!



Chris Gee



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Clockwise from top left: 1. Wellington Airport, 2. The Beehive, 3. Wellington Harbour and beaches offer a variety of walking opportunities, 4. Zealandia - The Karori Bird Sanctuary is a short trip from the central city, 5. Vineyard tours at nearby Martinborough.