



SOUND IDEA – Passengers on the Fiordland Sounds Cruise kayak from Cascade Basin, one of the remote places on the planet. Photo: John C Smith, www.photonz.net

over the map-glass on which Richard is dotting our progress with a marker pen.

We're now all but in Cook's stern wave – his ship *Resolution* (the previous expedition at the helm of *Endeavour* earned him esteem from the British Admiralty as well as his next commission) fetched up in Dusky Sound in 1773, where the crew spent five weeks on rest, repairs and brewing terrible beer.

Cook was an audacious yet clear-eyed explorer: he named Doubtful Bay when he first spied the snarl of rocks at the mouth of the fiord and calculated that if he did navigate his way in, he had little chance of getting out again; Dusky Sound, because he sailed by close to sunset and thought "too dusky, best not chance it". He was also an excellent cartographer; his map of the NZ coastline an astonishing achievement even viewed today.

In the sound's Pickersgill Harbour, a tiny plaque fixed to a rock indicates the 50-metre boardwalk that takes us into the forest and up to Astronomer's Point.

In the 1700s, navigation's holy grail was an accurate method for calculating longitude. Observations made here with a new kind of chronometer proved successful and, for a brief time, thanks to astronomer William Wales and Cook and his

crew, NZ was the most accurately pinpointed place on the globe.

Day Four dawns, and the skipper pays a visit to his cray-pot and retrieves two crayfish. The crew weigh anchor and we depart Cascade Cove, motoring past Indian Island out to the open ocean. Most of us stay on deck, eyes on the horizon to keep sea-sickness at bay.

Passenger Adrian has a hard time of it. "I stacked all my fleeces together to make a pillow and leant my head on a basin for two hours. Small price to pay for being here," he's quick to add, lest a journalist be nearby.

Today it rains and rains, South Island and Chalky Island all but invisible through the low-hanging cloud. The skipper parks us briefly in Chalky Inlet for lunch, then we swing south and into the calm waters of Preservation Inlet – the national park's southernmost fiord, which we'll explore over the next two days.

Next afternoon, the sun breaks free of the clouds which hold it almost unrelentingly hostage (annual rainfall over the 1.2 million hectares of Fiordland National Park varies between four and seven metres), and we have ideal conditions for the 2.5km trail-walk to the lighthouse at Puysegur Point.

## IF YOU GO...

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■ [realjourneys.co.nz](http://realjourneys.co.nz)

Despite a heart-in-throat landing, the swell almost enough to throw the tender up onto the beach, our party is all the chirpier for the two-hour return walk, the sea-breeze bracing, thunderous three-metre waves smashing onto the rocks below.

The sun appears next morning too, for another tricky landing followed by a 10-minute trapeze through the forest before we emerge on to what could only be the most beautiful beach in Fiordland.

The air temp is 14 degrees as I slip off gumboots and socks, roll up my trousers and stroll shin-deep in the shallows. I swim in the sea year-round in Sydney, and every day on this trip I've harboured delusions of sunshine and a skinny dip. This, however, is the kind of cold that, after a minute, starts to hurt.

Back on board we're treated to Dusky Sound crayfish, blue cod, fresh bread and salads. Then it's two hours cruising, deep into Long Sound to reach its cul-de-sac

and Cascade Basin. Here the crew break out 20 one-person kayaks, and at last we find ourselves out on the dark flat water on a sunny afternoon.

Only, this isn't a cascade: it's an up-turned mountain of water, thundering through boulders, too loud for a voice to be heard. Over the next two hours we radiate out across the basin. The sea is brackish to taste – thanks to all that rainfall, a metre of fresh water sits atop the salt. I paddle alongside one rock wall, beneath beech trees that drip eerily with moss, then drift close to Mitch, an experienced kayaker here with his dad Barry.

"Where would you find a place to paddle as remote and wild as this?" Mitch ponders. "Southern Chile, Alaska, the Amazon. The fiords in Norway perhaps, but then you'd never be far from a town or a hiking trail."

On our last day, we transfer to a stinky, decrepit old barge to wait our turn for an exhilarating 20-minute helicopter shuttle run – four passengers at a time – over the snowy peaks, back to Lake Manapouri.

As we exchange farewells, Brian and I express the hope that a summer season in the southern fiords for Real Journeys is not far away. He is of course already booked for April 2018...

\* The writer was a guest of Real Journeys.

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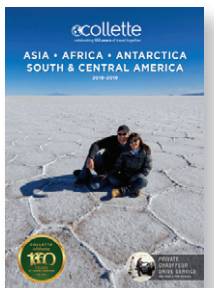
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