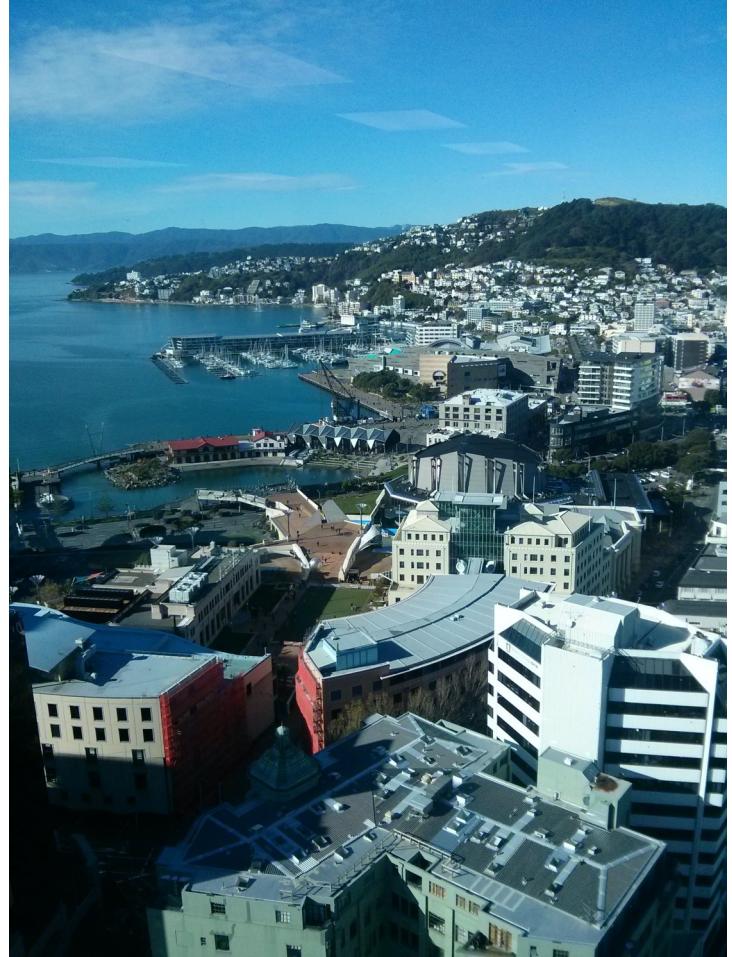




Right, let's get one thing straight, winter on the North Island of New Zealand is really quite mild. On the other hand we were in the UK this time last year having a northern summer, skipping winter altogether. It looks as though not having a winter for two years has made us go rather soft, or nesh as they would say in Yorkshire. I can distinctly remember winter in the UK, cycling to work in sub-zero hale, hard enough to cut my face. By comparison here in Wellington we have had one frost, basically a frosting of frozen rain that was gone before 10am and that's pretty much it, the



air temperature never gets below 5 degrees so this should be no problem. Life is not like that, for a number of reasons: the houses in the UK are much better equipped to deal with the cold, central heating, insulation and double glazing are a rarity here and also I think we have got a little soft, god knows what I



would make out of a dark Manchester morning in January now. Realistically we do get some impressive storms and winds and even the occasional torrential downpour but even so we will get at least one or two good sunny days a week.

We have been living in rented accommodation for over three years now and one can get very bored of beige. Every carpet and every curtain we have lived with has been beige; Steph has finally cracked and insisted we buy some patterned curtains. It is a welcome splash of colour in the lounge. To be



honest we don't often pull the curtains, the view over the inlet is so captivating it seems a sin to shut it out, sometimes I find myself just gazing out over the water or just watching the sunlight sparkle off the surface and throw light patterns across the walls and the ceiling. Sometimes on weekends we don't even pull the curtains in the bedroom so we are gently woken by the sunlight. After all we are only overlooked by seagulls and the occasional kingfisher.



Pulling the curtains has helped keep us warm, as has more heaters, including an internet connected heater that we can extravagantly turn on as we leave the cinema in town or as we are driving home. We also now possess a good quality electric blanket. I associate these devices with mum and dad in the 1970's and have tried to resist the idea of getting one, in the same way that I live in fear that I will start to think that tartan shopping bags are a good idea. Well having now bought one I can say that I find the dual con-

trol magic bed warmer, that can make a bed toastie in 10 minutes in boost mode is an excellent investment.

Things move on, as I have said I am now

part of the mobile team, it's nice to be part of a team. Some friends from previous teams have moved on, JP and David have gone back to the US, Linda has decided that high stress life at Xero is too much and has moved up north. Up until now in New Zealand we have been gaining friends, as you do when you move, these are the first of the new friends we might lose. Having said that Linda does make a big effort to keep in touch, including organising a pub crawl (well 4 pubs) complete with flyer and score sheet, the mid-winter cosy pub challenge was great fun.

We have decided to give sailing a rest – at least for the winter, its much too cold to be splashing around in the water. Instead we have started playing bridge. There is a small local club who don't take it too seriously. They were very inviting and quite surprised to discover that we had been in New Zealand for over three years and not been to



see them – where has we been? Anyway its fun and we even managed to finish top last month – with our handi-cap helping.

We went up to Auckland to see Liz and Andrew, its good to catch up and yakker, and maybe as an added bonus it might be a bit warmer, but to be honest the weather isn't that much different from Wellington. While we were at the airport we did think maybe we could really fly somewhere for some winter heat. Once the idea was planted it quickly took root and we were soon scouring the internet looking for flights and accommodation, two days later we were booked to go away the following week, the only week until October we both had free weeks at work.

It turns out if you want cheap heat in the winter and you live in New Zealand then Queensland, Australia is where you need to go. We got flights and accommodation for a week for 900 NZD (about 450 GBP for people in the UK). The thing is that on the day we were setting off the temperature at home was 12 degrees and in Brisbane it was



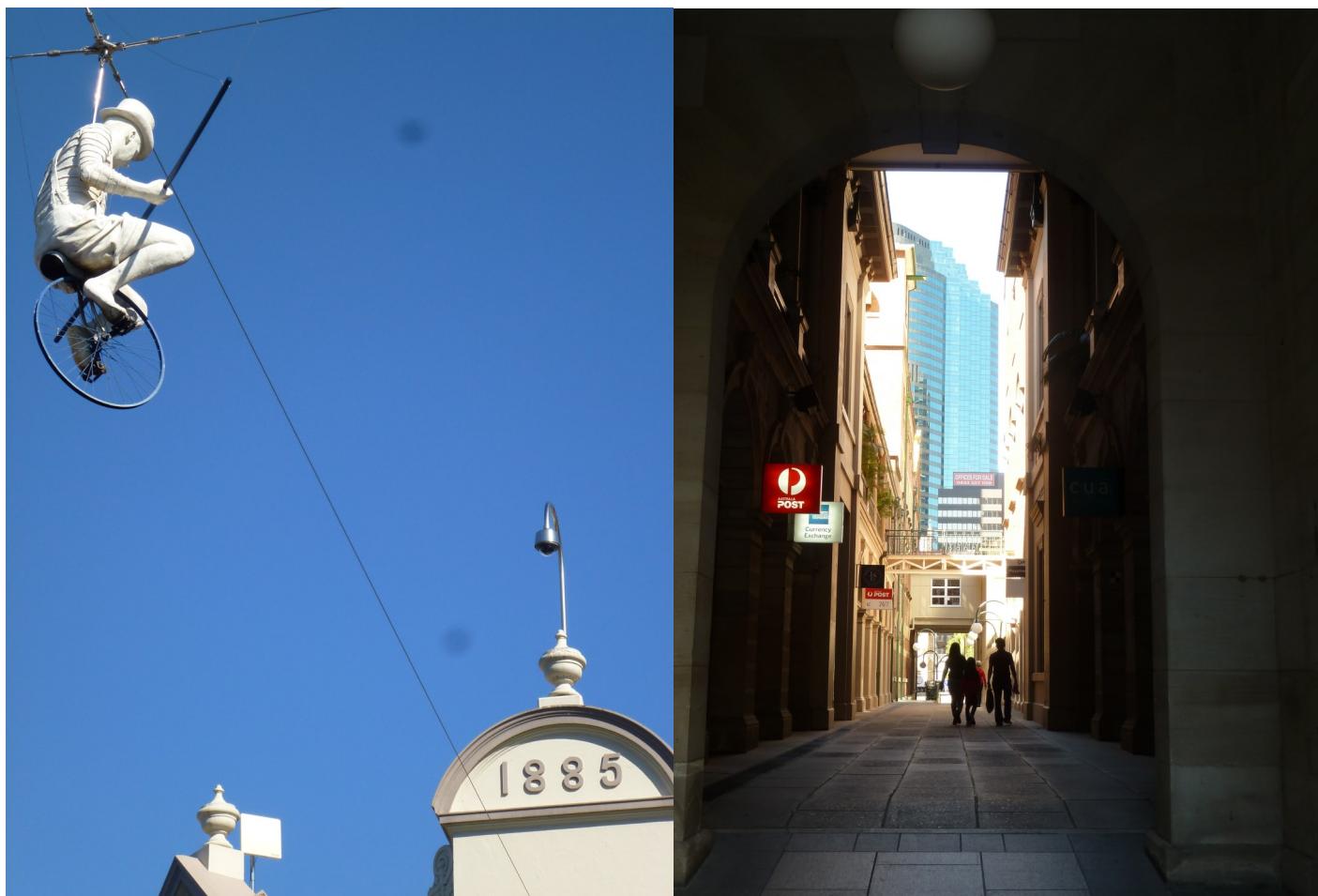
26, nice.

We stayed in Brisbane for the whole week. It was lovely decadence to stay in one place for the whole week and not be rushing around and packing every day. I've never been to Brisbane, never been to Queensland either for that matter and it was a very interesting city to visit.

I know that we were back in Manchester last year but Brisbane really brought back to me how unused to being in cities I have become, I found Brisbane quite



daunting to begin with, after a week we did have a pretty good grasp of how the city worked but initially I found it a bit oppressive in its sheer size. It is a city built around the river, somewhat unimaginatively called the Brisbane River, it's near the coast but not on the coast. In many ways the focus being on the river made it feel a bit like London. The population is just over 2 mil-



lion it's a lot smaller than London but in comparison to Wellington it felt massive. It has a South Bank complete with galleries, theatres parkland and somewhat bizarrely a man-made artificial beach. Not just a beach, it had a lagoon separate from the river with showers, the water was even chlorinated. The good people of Brisbane knew what to do with a sunny Sunday afternoon, hit the beach in the city. And that's the thing strolling along the side of the river in the middle of winter I managed to slightly sunburn my arm, through my shirt. I can only imagine what the sun must be like in summer. In fact I can tell to a certain extent by looking at the architecture. Windows are all shaded here, walkways have canopies, not to keep the rain off, often the canopies are just open slatted bamboo, built to provide some protection from the sun. It's the same in our accommodation, we have wooden slats across the windows that can be opened to catch the breeze but the windows don't have any glass in them, just mesh. Talk about not having double glazing, these win-



dows aren't even single glazed.

The accommoda-
tion is lovely. A
huge deck, shady
obviously, and
kitchen windows
that open out onto
the deck. It is setup



so that the main eating will be done outside. It does all seem back to front, every effort is made to catch every draft and hide away from the sun.

The public transport in Brisbane is great. At some point they have decided: right let's start again. So they dug completely new bus tunnels under the city and produced a GO card so that you can just jump from bus to train to ferry and the card just works out the best fair. The bus lanes are amazing, it's not just a lane along the edge of the road that people park in, it's a whole road network that is only

for busses. We were whisked into town bypassing all the traffic jams. It did make orientation a bit hard as we arrived just after dark and then we caught



a train into the city and then a bus down one of the amazing bus tunnels and then we popped out at our accommodation, in the dark we could not really work out where the city was.

We did have had a lovely break. Down time. We walked in the bush, visited the Koala sanctuary and even caught the train to the coast and a ferry across to “Straddie” island for a great walk along a long white beach, bright and sparkling and fantastic fish and chips on the beach (one snapper and one barramundi).

Which reminds me, we did have a roast dinner; kangaroo (what's that Skippy, you seem to have been trapped in a very hot place), kangaroo is very nice meaty and strong and nothing like chicken.





On Friday after the Koala Sanctuary we stopped off at the state library for a piano recital and then caught the City Cat along the river to the PowerHouse to see some early evening

stand-up comedy and to go to the 2015 Press Photography show, then back along the river for fish and chips in a pub on the way home.

Today we spent almost the whole day in the Gallery of Modern Art. The art was great, I loved some of it, disliked some of it, but it felt good to be made to work out how I feel about a piece. We stopped to coffee and cake and newspapers in the sun at half time, total decadence.

So the brief ray of sun is past and we are back into winter tomorrow, but it will be spring next month. Hmmmm I do seem to talk about the weather, well I've still got my English traits....

