



# Wellington

**Cath Bennett is given the star treatment on a visit to the capital.**

Modern pests have been removed to re-create the forest's likely pre-human state.

**Wednesday, 2.30pm:** I have been promised that in the space of 36 hours I'll "step back thousands of years and travel thousands of kilometres". Feeling a bit like Dr Who, I nervously prepare myself for the usual bumpy landing in Wellington and wonder if I have the stomach for this experience.

**4pm:** Wow. I am staying in the Residence Suite on the 18th floor of the centrally located Bolton Hotel. It features two luxury ensuite bedrooms, a huge kitchen, a dining table that seats eight and a balcony that looks out over the city. If I am going to be some sort of time traveller for the next couple of days, I'm clearly going to be doing it in style.

**5.30pm:** Just a few minutes from the hotel, the cab pulls up at Zealandia, a green and natural wonderland that feels a million miles away from the city. This is the part where I step back thousands of years to a place that was millions of years in the making. The sanctuary has opened its new interactive exhibition, which tells the story of New Zealand's native wildlife – from the time of dinosaurs to the present. I spend rather too much time making the lifelike moa's head rise and fall and playing with a radio antenna to learn about rare species.

**8pm:** A group of us take the

Zealandia by Night tour, during which experienced guides point out sights in the forest. Modern pests have been removed to re-create the forest's likely pre-human state and species that have become extinct on the mainland are gradually being introduced. While I'm uncomfortably reminded of *Jurassic Park* as we pass through secure gates, the experts put me at ease – and their knowledge is incredible. They hear before they see a tuatara, New Zealand's own "living fossil" that's been around for more than 200 million years. As the sun goes down we use our ears and noses to try to identify wildlife – apparently the Kiwi smells like a wet dog. While sniffing madly we hear but, sadly, don't see, the call of a young male Little Spotted Kiwi. Its name is apt – and not just because it's small and has spots.

**10pm:** This time travel is exhausting work, so seeing as I have this huge suite to myself there's no harm in cranking up the stereo, slathering myself in the mud face mask provided and hopping into the spa in the bathroom with a glass of wine. Bliss.



**Thursday, 8am:** I have just discovered a second balcony and a sun room in my suite. I wonder if I will discover Narnia lurking at the back of my wardrobe.

**11am:** The Carter Observatory at the top of the Botanic Garden has been reopened following a \$4.5 million refurbishment. I prepare myself to travel thousands of kilometres. Billions in fact. It features a 9m planetarium – a digital theatre which takes visitors on a journey into space, while guides point out stars along the way. It's so realistic we are warned we might become dizzy.

**1pm:** You don't need to travel thousands of kilometres in Wellington to find great food. At the dingier end of Cuba St sits one of the country's best restaurants, Logan Brown. It has a very affordable three-course bistro

menu, which replenishes my energy for my next journey.

**3pm:** Some might consider politicians beings from outer space but those we spot while walking around the Parliament Buildings are quite normal. Our guide is rather stern and school ma'am-ish but she shares a wealth of interesting information about the hub of New Zealand politics. A key part of the tour is an explanation of how earthquake-proof the building is following extensive renovation.

Zealandia and the Carter Observatory have similar protection against the elements.

**6pm:** I've just experienced an earthquake! OK, it might have been simulated but nonetheless Te Papa does a realistic re-creation of the 1987 Bay of Plenty quake – which measured 6.5 on the Richter scale. From one type of seismic activity to

another I head into the Day in Pompeii exhibition – and travel back 2000 years and half way around the globe to Italy. The 3D show is particularly good, conveying the overwhelming power of Mt Vesuvius when it erupted in 79AD, burying the ancient city of Pompeii.

**7.30pm:** It might not be very rock'n'roll, but Te Papa at night is fantastic. On Thursdays it's open until 9pm and there is hardly anyone around.

**Friday, 9.30am:** I prepare to board my plane back to Auckland. I have had a glimpse of life thousands of years ago – and of places thousands of kilometres away – and it was astonishingly easy and non-stomach turning . . . until the aeroplane hits turbulence.

**Fact file**

**Where to stay:**

The Bolton Hotel, cnr Bolton and Mowbray Sts, 0800 996-622. A boutique five-star property in the CBD that proves holidays don't have to cost the earth. [www.boltonhotel.co.nz](http://www.boltonhotel.co.nz)

**Where to eat:**

Logan Brown, 192 Cuba St, (04) 801-5114. [www.loganbrown.co.nz](http://www.loganbrown.co.nz)  
Bisque on Bolton, the Bolton Hotel, (04) 462-3770.

**What to do:**

Zealandia: The Karori Sanctuary Experience, Waiapu Rd, ph (04) 920-9200. [www.visitzealandia.com](http://www.visitzealandia.com)  
Carter Observatory, Wellington  
Botanic Garden, 40 Salamanca

Rd, [www.carterobservatory.org](http://www.carterobservatory.org)  
Tour of Parliament Buildings, Molesworth St, (04) 471-9503. [www.parliament.nz](http://www.parliament.nz)  
Museum of New Zealand – Te Papa Tongarewa, 55 Cable St, (04) 381-7000.  
The A Day in Pompeii exhibition runs until April 25. [www.tepapa.govt.nz](http://www.tepapa.govt.nz)



**High life: The Residence Suite at the Bolton Hotel.**





Wellington's Zealandia – where the past meets the present.