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I don't love you any more ...

As some of you will know I'm a bit of a music nut. I find lyrics interesting and often ponder the meaning in popular songs. I'm also fascinated by the influence of love found and lost in modern music. I bet if you were forced to listen to only songs that didn't mention love, relationships, heartache etc you'd soon get very sick of Midnight Oil preaching to you. Don't get me wrong, a red hot band no doubt and a bit of preaching never hurt I guess. Maybe just dialled down a notch or two. Anyway, I've got the headphones on with songs of love on the play list and a little pain in my heart.

It's confession time dear readers. I've been having a love affair and sadly I think it might be over. I'm probably partly to blame but there can be no doubt my love interest is not what she used to be. She was once carefree, adventurous and a bit wild. No doubt she is still beautiful and has a certain charm, but her personality is not as alluring as it once was.

I recall being smitten when first we met, many many years ago. She seemed a slightly dangerous proposition and reminded me a bit of my other great love, before woke lay ruin. Now she's gone down a similar path with sad and regrettable results. Now, before you all start messaging the managing director and encouraging divine retribution or some singularly unpleasant medical procedure let's be clear. My first great love (other than the MD of course) was my country, with New Zealand a close second.

I've just returned from a month in In Zid and my oh my, the country is pretty but some of what's going on there is not. I'd like to think there are lessons to be learnt but I fear that horse (or sheep) has bolted. It's almost like the Jacinta era has transformed the country into a broke and woke shadow of its former self.

I remember back in the day writing about the difference between road works in Australia and NZ. In both countries there'd be 10 blokes on the job. In Oz 8 would be on safety signage and traffic control and 2 would be on the tools. In NZ the opposite. Now, in NZ there's a level of signage and cones at roadworks that defies description and no one on the tools. The bloke who owns the cone company must have mates in high places coz they have one every metre for kilometres when there's even a hint of impending works. They also slow traffic to 30kph and I thought 60kph in Oz was slow. This with no sign of anyone actually doing anything remotely associated with improving and maintaining roads. I reckon it's all smoke and mirrors. Create the illusion of stuff happening while doing very little. Sound familiar?

One NZ political party has stated that they would happily take money from China to fund roads and infrastructure. If that isn't a sign of a democracy on the brink, I don't know what is.

Anyway, enough of the political rant. What of the NZ tourism experience in the era of woke and broke and what lessons may there be for Australia? Let's start with my favourite whipping boys, the airlines. Our sneaky friends at Virgin continue to sell business class tickets at full price but have closed their airport lounges. You are advised of this not when you buy the ticket but when you check in. Naughty naughty. Yeah, I know, a first world problem Mike. I agree but I paid for a first world experience.

Arrival and departure out of Brisbane International is a gloriously civilised experience when compared to Queenstown. I had the dubious pleasure of observing Queenstown Airport on several occasions as I shuttled friends and family back and forth. Overcrowded and disorganised passenger areas meet failing automated check in infrastructure and broken baggage carousels in an unholy debacle of inconvenience and delays.

The whole dire mess is held together by staff who display good humour and a genuine desire to help. Poor buggers must be exhausted by days end!

In other areas of tourism such as snow sports the “she’ll be right bro” approach has been replaced with myriad staff whose sole gig seems to be telling the paying guests what to do. It’s all lowest common denominator stuff designed to treat the punters like idiots. Here’s a tip ski fields. Take the staff directing guests and put them on lift management and maintenance. The bloody things might run for more than 5 minutes before stopping! Don’t even get me started on lift closures. Once upon a time those lifts would run in winds and weather you wouldn’t take your dog out in. Now all you need is a bit of after Mexican flatulence and the place closes down. To be fair that may not be down to wild wind alone.

Accommodation operators remain some of the most welcoming I know but it’s clear that some of the accommodation I used needed money spent. My favourite apartment in Wanaka doesn’t look to have had a cracker invested on it since we first stayed 15 years ago. It’s got a world class view for sure but that only goes so far. I suspect accommodation managers are simply having problems convincing owners to spend money. Sound familiar?

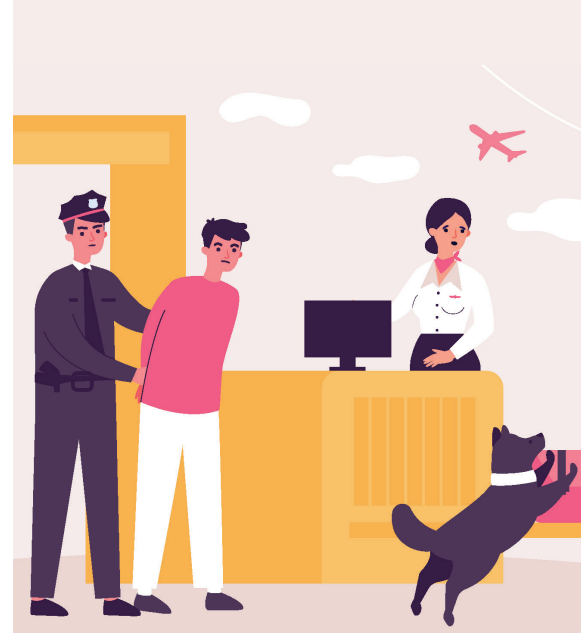
I guess in these days of workplace health and safety, litigation, woke attitudes and a “walk as slow as our slowest person” mentality the sense of danger and adventure that used to accompany trips to NZ is no more. I fell in love with a place of adventure and a bit of a Wild West feel. To some degree that vibe is gone and that’s a shame. Will I catch up with my old love from time to time? Yep, I’m afraid in spite of all I’ve said she’s still beautiful. Just not as wild and crazy as she once was. Hmmm, I miss that.

Let me finish with a little tale about airports, process and responsibility. I had friends stay with me for a while in NZ. One of them, who shall remain anonymous, had an interesting experience. For the sake of this article let’s call him PG.

PG has a long and proud history of having flights cancelled on him. With bad weather, snow, wind and airport closures NZ didn’t let him down. When he finally got a flight out he presented himself at Queenstown check in, was issued a ticket and repaired to the airport bar. He’s not the most confident flyer and finds the effects of Vodka to provide miraculous pre-flight comfort.

Anyway, boarding is called and our nervous aviator steps up immediately. He’s taken his spot when a bloke turns up with a ticket to the same seat. Much discussion ensues and it transpires that said bloke has near identical name to our PG. He is the bona fide traveller and PG has been issued a ticket to the wrong flight. At this stage PG is accused of trying to stow away on the aircraft and security march him from the plane. By now two other flights are delayed as a robust discussion takes place with a baggage handler and his bags are removed from the aircraft. In all this debacle no one says “sorry mate, our blue” when it’s obvious the airline stuffed up and issued the wrong ticket to the wrong bloke. That might suggest the system is not coping and we can’t have that. In the event our anonymous flyer got home and as they say, one day he will laugh about it. I’m laughing already.

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