A few days back, we returned from a one week road trip with Jen’s mom Karen.

When I planned the trip, it was with a keen desire to maximize the possibility of good weather for Karen. The northernmost reaches of the South Island came immediately to mind, it being the sunniest region in all of New Zealand. And we had yet to visit Golden Bay, so I booked three nights in a bach (cabin) on Golden Bay, less than 10 miles from Farewell Spit, which is the very tip of the South Island.

On the drive up, the fall colors and new snow (which fell on our first night in Hanmer Springs) on the mountain peaks were spectacular. We enjoyed many scenic vistas as we followed river valleys on the way to Golden Bay, where the (non-native) deciduous trees disappeared, and the warm weather and sun helped us forget that it was fall. Takaka, Golden Bay’s largest town, brought to mind small hippie towns in Oregon, like Ashland.

Our bach was about 25 kilometres north of Takaka and only a few steps from the beach with good swimming in the calm waters of the Bay and great views out to Farewell Spit. The sun rises over the Bay and the Spit were spectacular, and we enjoyed a good relaxing time. The bach itself was perfect for the five of us.
While at Golden Bay, we took two fantastic walks in the Farewell Spit area. First was Wharariki Beach, which was huge, with rock monoliths worn away by the sea, some into arch formations and caves. This is a spectacular place. Then there was Farewell Spit, where we walked at sunset, first along Golden Bay, and then about a kilometer west to the Tasman Sea on the other side of the Spit. On the walk back to the cars, it became pitch dark and the stars were magnificent.

The three days and nights that we spent on Golden Bay were some of the best and most relaxing of our travels in NZ. It was definitely worth the long trip to get there, and it was particularly nice to share the experience with Karen.

On the way back to Dunedin from Golden Bay, we pushed it to Kaikora, where we spent two nights. Alex and I had a double day of surfing at an awesome point break at Mangamaunu Beach. With the snow-capped peaks as a backdrop, misty air, great surf, and outings at both sunrise and sunset, it doesn't get much better, period. On the same day, Ellie and Karen took a whale watching excursion, and saw a sperm whale with a 10 ton tail (wow!), dolphins, and albatross, but ended up sea sick for most of the outing.

On the last day's long drive, I pushed too hard and ended up getting two speeding tickets, %*#&% (I've picked up the Kiwi propensity for swearing). In the end, the trip was a great one, and all the more so having shared it with Karen.

A couple of shots of our Golden Bay bach.
The kids on Wharariki Beach, an amazing place that pictures don’t do justice to.

Jen, Karen, & kids on Farewell Spit, the furthest north point on the South Island.
And on the same walk, a Farewell Spit sunset.
A Golden Bay sunrise from the beach outside our bach.

Golden Bay hangin'.
Mangamaunu Surfing, near Kaikoura -- an awesome spot!

Kaikoura sunrise. We've caught several sunrises here and they all look like this: glistening, frosty looking, gorgeous.