



Turn to STONE

Mark Andrews carves out a place in New Zealand

Seen that, done that, got the T-shirt. In fact, you've probably got a whole closetful of T-shirts. Unfortunately, souvenirs amount to much the same thing wherever they come from. How many key rings does one person need? Wouldn't it be nice to have something that would do more than just gather dust? Even better, something that is actually made in the country! And what if you made it yourself? Well, that's all possible with the Just Jade Experience in Hokitika, South Island, New Zealand.

Hokitika is a small town, population 3,500, situated on the west coast of the South Island. Settled in the 1860s, it became one of the busiest ports in New Zealand. These days Hoki, as the locals call it, ticks along with tourism, farming, fishing, and forestry. Tourism is largely centred around crafts and the surrounding countryside.

Sights include Hokitika Gorge, 33km away from the town. A swing bridge takes you over the jade-coloured waters of the Hokitika River. Also nearby is Lake Kaniere, which has many walks. The driftwood-strewn Hokitika Beach gets spectacular sunsets and makes for a romantic stroll. Every March Hoki plays host to the famous Wildfoods Festival, in which 20,000 people come from all over the world to savour such epicurean delights as fish eyes and duck tongues.

Craft shops are mainly situated on Tancred Street in the centre of town. Here you can find

anything from possum fur to gold. Two local businesses, Bonz 'n' Stonz, and the Just Jade Experience, allow a more hands-on approach to art.

With Hokitika being the centre of New Zealand's jade industry, the Just Jade Experience really stands out. The master carver Gordon Wells runs the shop. He got into carving 26 years ago after failing to get into university. His art teacher suggested a job in the local jade carving industry. About ten years ago, he met a German girl on the beach who pestered her way into his studio to create a piece of jade jewellery. Word got round and after a string of visitors ate him out of house and home, he ended up opening a backpackers' hostel and a jade-carving workshop.

All the jade terms used in New Zealand can be a bit confusing. Globally there are two types of jade known geologically as jadeite and nephrite. Jadeite is a silicate of sodium and aluminium, found in Asia, particularly China. Nephrite is found in New Zealand, Canada, Australia, and Russia. A silicate of calcium and magnesium, it is known variously as greenstone, pounamu, jade, and nephrite jade in New Zealand. Gordon uses local jade sourced from the Hollyford and Cascade areas of South Westland (the west coast of South Island).

As with all great art works, carving jade starts with an idea. You are encouraged to design your own piece. However, if you are artistically

challenged, there are many pre-drawn designs, including traditional Maori ones, to choose from. Next comes the carving process, carried out in Gordon's driftwood- and pebble-filled workshop. Here he cuts the basic shape from the jade and then carves the design before turning it over to you.

With your carved piece in hand, it is up to you to make this into a wearable stone. First, you use a silicon-carbide stone to rub away the tooling marks. Then there are six grades of polishing sandpaper to go through, starting with 150 grade and culminating with 2000. Wells hovers over, barking "faster" and giving an eventual nod to move up to a higher grade of paper. The process literally takes hours, but with it, you'll feel a part of you has been indelibly rubbed into the stone.

Final polishing is done with a tin and aluminium-oxide paste. Then it is time to rope up and have it handed over to you. And if you're wondering if even a rank beginner can produce something wearable, take a look at the picture. How's that for a souvenir? **KTO**

Hokitika is 40km south of Greymouth on the South Island of New Zealand. Greymouth is accessible from Christchurch in about four hours by train or car. Wells runs the Just Jade Experience hostel (www.madkivi.co.nz) with his wife, Michiko.

