

Walking Alone at Auckland International

The fantasy is a reality - no people at an airport



The overnight flight from Tokyo arrived 10 minutes early at 7.55 because of a tailwind; it must have been a strong one as we had departed from Tokyo 35 mins late at 7.05 pm because of several other planes in front of us. The early arrival had given me the idea of the possibility of my making the Kapiti Coast flight about 9.00 am, rather than my ticketed Wellington flight at 11.00, which entailed a shuttle bus 30 minutes to the station then the 55-minute train to Paraparamu, and finally a 20-minute walk home. The Kapiti flight would mean a mere 10-minute taxi ride.

By lucky chance my seat was at the back next to the main Exit door, so when the door opened I was the first off the plane, first time ever for me. I walked by myself through the exit ramp covered way, expecting to see someone up ahead, perhaps a steward or some such official. There was no-one, not even at the entrance to the airport building. But any strangeness of emptiness really hadn't struck me because I think I was expecting the usual other folks to appear any moment, either waiting to get on a flight or coming off. It wasn't until about 200 metres on when I reached the first main hall and its long corridor with gates to the left

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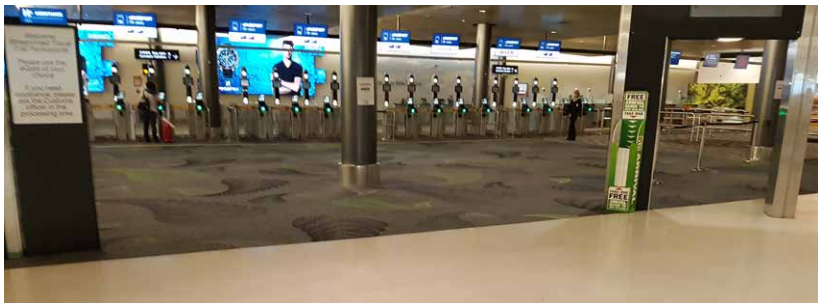
and right that I started to note how weird it was being deserted, not a passenger or official in sight – I was the only one! When I looked back over 50 metres there was no-one because I was walking fairly quickly and no doubt the people coming off the plane were taking their time lugging their hefty cabin luggage.

I couldn't help thinking of the great Gerry and the Pacemakers' song, half singing the lines: "Walk on ... " and then the title line, "You'll never walk alone" and thinking not quite right for this moment, and maybe I should relish it because it would surely be something that would never happen again. After about 350 metres (a conservative estimate) I arrived at Passport Control and chose to go directly to the one woman at a checkpoint rather than use one of the numerous machines – it had been a lonesome walk so far. I asked, "Having a quiet day?" and she said, "You're lucky, the madness is about to start, several flights have come in."

I went down a flight of stairs, turned sharp left expecting my aloneness to be broken and my great innings to end, but not to be. I walked on about 75 metres to Duty Free, a sparkling emporium of bottles, perfume and baubles, as surreal as my empty hike so far because I could see not one person looking or buying, and the sellers must have been hiding. The Marie Celeste came to mind as I approached.



The start of the walk off the plane.



Having a quiet day at Passport Control.