



THE ROTORUA express drops slowly down past Ngongotaha and the woman on the other side of the carriage sees Lake Rotorua for the first time. She confides to her friend that Rotorua is not at all what she had expected. Nor is she alone in her surprise, for later, on the station platform, in the hotel sitting-room, you hear the remark repeated by other tourists who are having their first look at New Zealand's most important tourist town.

It is an interesting comment, for it makes you wonder what they did expect. Geysers going up beside the railway line? Mud pools plopping outside their window? Mineral baths in the hotel itself?

Perhaps the writers of the guide books wrote more into them than they saw. Anyway, it is certain that most people spending their first holiday in Rotorua are a little disappointed as they step from the station into a street that differs very little from that of any other country town.

Arriving in Rotorua in peace time is less of a let-down, especially during the summer months when the streets are packed with tourists, when the hotels are packed, too, the boardinghouses, the theatres, the buses, the tennis courts, the bowling greens, the golf courses, the baths. The towns' resident population is less than 7,000, but it has an annual roll call of 500,000 visitors. Half a million people spending the year's leave allowance and out for a good time. Certainly this is enough to keep a smile on the face of the business man.

If this atmosphere is good for a man with a roll of notes and a fortnight's holiday, it is not so good for the forty hour a week resident who has to earn his living from 9 till 5. Any one going to work in Rotorua may find it hard to believe that he is not on holiday, too—until the boss points it out to him.

So what about the average resident who cannot turn the tourist traffic to profit, who does not let rooms or sell curios or run a taxi or dive for pennies off the Whaka bridge? How does he regard the tourist? Not so much as a nuisance perhaps as an amusement. Even if he cannot stay up all night and laze about the Blue Bath next day, he is not envious as much as tolerant. Perhaps, too, he is a little proud that his town should attract so much attention. Personally he is not much interested in mineral baths or geysers—one Maori who had lived in Rotorua all his life was more astounded than *Kovero's* artist when watching the mud pools; he hadn't seen them before—but he realizes that it is the thermal wonders that bring the tourists so—"Long Life to Them."

One resident jokingly suggested that the townspeople should be charged an amusement tax on the camera-hung, black-goggled, queerly draped figures that parade their streets. Actually, the Borough Council has power to levy the citizens a special rate of £1,000 a year for the amusement of their tourist guests. The Council is wondering what would happen if it did so. The tourists would get a little of their own back in laughs, anyway.