

Te Papa Review

Contributed by Lachlan
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Frigate, Why not?

It's 10.30am on Day Two at Te Papa, and the length of the queue is zero. We "did it" in less than 3 hours. The most important question of course is whether Te Papa achieves what it set out to, and the answer is "Yes" – but perhaps not "YES!" Te Papa manages to encapsulate the NZ mind set effectively - but rather wastefully in some areas. Keeping some old friends (the stuffed birds and fish and Phar Lap are still there) but losing some others (te mummy is gone!) Te Papa genuflects to all manner of NZ icons both cultural and bicultural. There can be little argument about choice and balance, but some very expensive floor space is occupied by eg TV screens with near static clips of some actors. There's (understandably) a lot of space for eateries and shops and very generous circulation space. The multi-media experiences (rides) are interesting rather than stunning, are obviously non-commercial, and include some gratuitous technology – eg bar code readers to scan your ride tickets. The inside of the building feels comfortable – "about right" but so many of the displays and so much of the building and fit-out are not durable that we can expect a high on-going maintenance bill each year. The wondrous pastel painted carvings of the new marae made of 4mm taonga-grade particle board are being fingered by so many kids the work can be expected to last about 6 months without repairs. Overall Te Papa is a worthy representation of the NZ state of mind, with a new emphasis on very recent history. Everything is done with eclat, panache and pizzazz; tellingly, the exhibition representing Chinese immigrants, which (like the people) is comparatively reserved. Is it worth the \$317M? Well, the government has spent \$83, representing my personal share of its cost, in far worse places. Steven Young (a consulting engineer and editor of Chinese Voice).