

Rugby World Cup: **Between the Games** »

All the way to the Banksy

Xenia Taliotis spends a day at one of the unhappiest places on Earth

In Wham's *Tropicana*, membership's a smiling face and strangers take you by the hand and welcome you to wonderland. In Banksy's *Tropicana*, membership is a scowling face and strangers would sooner bite your hand than take it as they herd you around Dismaland, a dystopian bemusement park that holds a mirror up to our un-fair — of face and deed — gone-awry world.

Banksy, an artist known mostly for his subversive, anti-establishment urban murals, has gone for all-out, pitch-black humour here, creating a super nightmare in Weston-Super-Mare, UK, on the site of *Tropicana*, a once-beautiful, now-derelict art-deco lido where he spent many a long cold summer as a boy.

"Dismaland," trumpets the website, "is the UK's most disappointing new visitor attraction." It's the very antithesis of theme parks and dream lands and fun fairs — it's a place where an abattoir worker sits on a box of lasagne on the carousel, eyeing up the horses (a reference to Britain's recent horse-meat scandal); where the ferris wheel grinds to a halt mid-cycle; where the demented muzak is interrupted by public announcements — "private property created crime" — and where a crazed Grim Reaper discards his dodgem car to the tune of *Staying Alive*. Or is he trying to break free from his enclosure? Dismaland is deeply disturbing in parts, and hilarious in others.

Banksy and the 50 other artists who've collaborated with him on this project have created a giant installation, an elaborate, artistic pun — in words and images — from start to finish. "Enjoy," "Enjoy," "Enjoy," flat-tone the dour-faced youths manning artist Bill Barminski's cardboard security gates at the entrance. Enjoy? Ah no — "End Joy," "End Joy," "End Joy". That's more like it.

And off we go, past the Jeffrey Archer Memorial Fire Pit, where you can "warm yourself around an authentic real open fire ceremonially lit each day by burning one of the famed local perjurer's novels", to take in a Punch and Judy show that includes references to *50 Shades of Grey* and predatory sexual deviant Jimmy Saville. In Darren Cullen's Pocket-Money Loan Shop tots can take out a bouncy castle mortgage, get a loan for things they can't afford, or sell their teeth to the tooth fairy — "cash transferred straight to your pillow" — to buy an



Underground artist Banksy has curated the park as a social nightmare.



array of toys including PTSD Action Man, complete with prescription meds, cans of Special Brew and a noose. Or how about a pregnant baby doll? Whose baby is also pregnant.

Banksy has created 10 works for Dismaland including a boating lake where a police boat pursues a dinghy crammed with desperate refugees or after-our-jobs migrants (depending on your political affiliations), through waters bearing the bloated, floating corpses of those who didn't make it.

Cinderella's Castle is also Banksy's. You can't see anything in here for the first minute, but gradually your eyes adjust to the gloom and you see, through the nightmare haze of flashbulbs, the body of a fairytale princess, all floaty gown and golden tresses, half thrown out of her pumpkin carriage. Dead. Dead as her dreams of a long and happy life with Prince Charming.

Elsewhere you'll find work by Damien Hirst, David Shrigley and Jimmy Cauty, an artist who's done many extraordinary things in his life, not least of which has been being part of acid-house band The KLF and burning £1m (\$2.4m NZ) as a piece of art. His contribution here is an astonishing 1:87 model of a town frozen in the moments after a riot. "Aftermath Displacement Principle", shows a burned-out, looted city, lit by the flashing blue lights of emergency vehicles — a true dismaland if ever there was one.



Checklist DISMALAND

GETTING THERE

Air New Zealand flies daily from Auckland to London via Los Angeles. One-way Economy fares start from \$1415, including taxes.

airnewzealand.co.nz

Dismaland is on *Tropicana* Pleasure Beach, Marine Parade, Weston-Super-Mare, North Somerset, a 2.5hr drive from London.

DETAILS

Dismaland is open everyday until September 27 from 11am-11pm. For tickets and information visit dismaland.co.uk.

A gloomy interpretation of Disney's castle is an attraction at Dismaland, where the ferris wheel stops mid-cycle. Pictures / Supplied

