

Destination New Zealand

There's a reason the sun shines on New Zealand before anywhere else – every new day in Aotearoa is something to cherish! Small, remote and thinly populated, yes, but NZ punches well above its weight with its outlandish scenery, fabulous festivals, superb food and wine, and magical outdoor experiences. Equally impressive is NZ's potent, mainstream Maori culture. This is a country that recognises and celebrates its indigenous people – the world is a kinder, gentler, more respectful place down here!

In late 2008 New Zealanders will elect a new national government. As you'd expect in an election year, everyone is talking tax cuts. The NZ economy is strong, and the Labour Party government, led by no-nonsense prime minister Helen Clark, has been posting chunky budget surpluses. The coffers runneth over, and the conservative National Party has accused Labour of being Scrooge-like for not delivering tax cuts. Behind in the opinion polls, Labour has responded with a broad-based tax relief package. Critics say it's unwise to add such pressures to the economy when inflation is rising and interest rates are high. If you're reading this post-November 2008, NZ will have chosen the way forward.

Under Clark's leadership, the government has continued its pacifist, anti-nuclear policy, whilst retaining NZ troops in Afghanistan and Iraq. The arts have flourished, unemployment has remained at record lows, and the domestic economy has been buoyant. The flow-on effect of a 2006 minimum wage increase has been a spike in goods and services prices. Travellers have been feeling the pinch – food, accommodation and transport costs have ballooned with demand. This, combined with a stronger Kiwi dollar, means NZ is far from the budget destination it once was.

The national real estate boom continues to mesmerise sellers and infuriate buyers. Rising house prices have stabilized with rising interest rates, but wages have failed to keep up: Auckland, Christchurch and Wellington are among the world's most expensive cities in terms of housing affordability (relative to income).

Meanwhile, tourism is feeling chipper. In 2007, around 2.2 million overseas visitors tramped, wheeled, wineed and dined across the country, up almost 40% from a relatively meagre 1.6 million in 1999. But at what cost? Extra visitors strain the clean, green environment NZ is renowned for, and all this wilderness frenzy is having an impact: the skies above Franz Josef Glacier buzz with droning aeroplanes, tourists still shampoo in creeks, and locals simply avoid entire chunks of NZ because of the tourist hordes.

In response, the Department of Conservation (DOC) has implemented a booking system for its Great Walks to avoid track overcrowding and minimise environmental damage. The NZ tourism industry is embracing all things 'eco', while regionally, eateries and farmers markets selling local produce present sustainable options. Regardless, hardcore environmentalists claim the industry and government aren't moving fast enough. Drought and climate change are fanning the flames...

Although the fanfare surrounding the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy is waning (the films were made almost a decade ago – can we move on now?), visiting the real-life Middle-earth still has a geeky allure. Kiwi *LOTR* director Peter Jackson has shed the specs and kilos, but his filmmaking prowess still holds Wellington (aka 'Wellywood') in its thrall. *King Kong* was another Jackson hit, but *Halo*, which Jackson was set to produce, has never seen the light (or rather, dark) of the cinema. Rumours of *The Hobbit* and a

FAST FACTS

Population: 4.2 million humans, 40 million sheep

Area: 268,680 sq km (similar to Colorado, bigger than the UK)

GDP growth: 2.6%

Inflation: 3.2%

Unemployment: 3.5%

Life expectancy: 100 for tuatara (lizards); up to 2000 for kauri trees

Number of international visitors: 2.2 million in 2007

Number of NZ glaciers over 100m long: 3100

Number of microbreweries: 45 in 2007

Width of Cook Strait: 23km (14 miles)

Lord of the Rings prequel continue to circulate. In the meantime, the NZ-filmed *Chronicles of Narnia* series directed by Kiwi Andrew Adamson, and James Cameron's sci-fi spectacular *Avatar*, another Wellywood special, are keeping local film buffs entertained.

On the broader arts front, Kiwi live music remains brilliant (dub, hip-hop, reggae and rock), while NZ radio remains abysmal. Culturally, debate rages between anti- and pro-arts lobbies: one side would rather chew their arms off than see another art gallery open; the other sees cultural celebration as the future for both community and tourism. How does NZ forge its cultural identity? What role do the arts play? Do cultural attractions lure the tourists? From our perspective, they most certainly do!

And then of course there's the national obsession – rugby. After yet another dazzling failure at the 2007 Rugby World Cup in France, the All Blacks are desperate to redeem themselves on home soil in 2011. The most successful rugby team in history (a 74% winning record!), the beloved All Blacks, were red-hot favourites in 2007, but crumbled under sustained quarter-final pressure from the French. Errors, poor decision-making and appalling umpiring delivered the New Zealanders a 20-18 defeat. The dumbfounded nation wept in the streets and looked around for someone to blame – calls for wholesale sackings were followed by ugly character assassinations in the media. The fragile national psyche took a beating, distraught Kiwis turning to each other and saying, 'We suck at the only thing we're good at!' Until 2011, the team will have to satisfy itself with routine demolitions of Australia and South Africa in the annual Tri Nations and Bledisloe Cups.

Other topics on local tongues include fixed-net fishing endangering dolphins, vexatious treaty settlements, and didymo (aka 'rock snot') infestation in rivers and lakes. And don't get anyone started on petrol prices...

That's contemporary NZ in a nutshell! You're in for an awesome trip. Back home on the couch, your memories will drift from rampaging outdoor activities to world-class food, wine and beer (oh, especially the wine and beer), and chilled-out locals. But your most sparkling recollections will come courtesy of NZ's natural splendour – there are few countries on this lonely planet as diverse, unspoiled and utterly, utterly photogenic.

Getting Started

By world standards, New Zealand is an easy, accessible place to visit. Amiable locals, a moderate climate, good personal security, brilliant roads, well-organised activities and the fantastic i-SITE visitor information centre network (see p705) make travelling here a breeze! There's also a network of 26 Department of Conservation visitor centres around NZ – a handy resource for planning activities in parks, and for natural and cultural features. There are accommodation and eating options for all budgets, from a felafel and a dorm bunk to a crayfish dinner and a spa suite.

If you're scuttling between cities pursuing urban virtues, you won't need to do much forward planning, but if you're tramping into the wilderness or devising a cycling epic, do some research on equipment, accommodation, track and hut passes and weather, and book what you need to well in advance.

There's a multitude of things to see and do here; consider your priorities and allow enough time to achieve them. Don't forget to factor some time into your itinerary for those random, serendipitous moments to happen – they can really make your trip.

WHEN TO GO

The warmer high-season months (November to April) are ripe for outdoor exploration. Summer (December to February) is also when Kiwis crank up the food and wine festivals, concerts and sports events. December in the far north can be rainy, however. If you're a snow bunny, visit when the powder is thickest – June to August is skiing high season. Remember, though, that in winter, warm-weather beach towns might be half asleep.

If you want a *real* holiday, staying and eating in your venues of choice, avoid school holidays (particularly mid-December to early February) and public holidays (p699). Most places are packed to the gills with campervans, tourists, highly strung parents and inexhaustible children in the post-Christmas weeks. The cooler, less touristed 'shoulder' periods (October/November and April/May) are a much better idea.

NZ is smack-bang in the middle of the Roaring Forties – prevailing west-to-east winds buffet the country year-round, ranging from gentle breezes to tempestuous gales. On both islands it's drier in the east than in the west, where mountain ranges snare moisture-laden winds from the Tasman Sea. It's usually a few degrees cooler on the South Island than the North Island.

See Climate Charts (p695) for more information.

DIY NZ

At Lonely Planet we love travel (no kidding...), and we reckon part of the adventure is to fly by the seat of your pants. We're dedicated to bringing you comprehensive in-depth destination coverage, but we also encourage you to ditch your guidebook. Really! Go AWOL for a day or a week and explore NZ beyond the pages of a book.

Low population density = empty spaces – it's easy to get off the beaten track. Buy a detailed road map, pick a little town down a little road and go for it – you can't really lose when the scenery is so great. Scan the bulletin boards at local cafés for performances that night; swap a yarn or two with locals at a country pub. Kiwis are famously friendly – ask them about their favourite places to eat, hang out or blow off steam.

Travel advice, hints and inspiration work both ways: after your trip, drop us a line and tell us what you got up to. The place to 'skite' (Kiwi for 'brag') or tell us how we can lift our game is www.lonelyplanet.com/contact.

Wherever you are, remember that NZ has a maritime climate – the weather changes rapidly. Anyone tramping at any time of year needs to be well prepared for all weather conditions. The NZ Mountain Safety Council has the information you need – available from DOC visitor centres nationwide.

COSTS & MONEY

In recent years the NZ dollar has gained ground against international currencies like the greenback, and burgeoning tourism has seen prices rise with demand. However, if you're visiting from Europe or North America, it's still a fairly economical destination, unless you're throwing yourself out of a plane or jetboating every day. Activities like these generally top expense lists – think carefully about what you'll spend your money on. Action-addicts should consider cheaper accommodation to help finance their exertions, while sedentary types who'd rather dangle a fork in some pasta than themselves at the end of a bungy should curtail the activities.

Gastronomes will find food to be surprisingly pricey – cooked breakfasts at snazzy cafés average around \$16, while main courses at top-end restaurants cost \$30 and beyond. Food in remote areas also costs more, without necessarily being of better quality.

If you do some sightseeing, eat out once or twice a day and stay in cheap motels or B&Bs, budget on at least \$130 to \$150 per day (per person, travelling as a pair), not including car hire or activities. Packing kids into your suitcases obviously means greater expense, but museums, cinemas, and tour and activity organisers usually offer discounts for young'uns, and there are plenty of open-air attractions available for free!

At the low-cost end, if you camp or stay in hostels, cook your own meals, repress the urge to drink beer, tackle attractions independently and travel on a bus pass, you could probably eke out an existence on \$75 per day. But if you want to enjoy the occasional restaurant meal and glass of wine, then \$90 per day is more realistic. Staying in places for longer periods and/or travelling in a group will lower your costs.

TRAVELLING RESPONSIBLY

Since our inception in 1973, Lonely Planet has encouraged readers to tread lightly, travel responsibly and enjoy the magic independent travel affords. International travel is growing at a jaw-dropping rate, and we still firmly believe in the benefits it can bring – but, as always, we encourage you to consider the impact your visit will have on both the global environment and the local economies, cultures and ecosystems.

HOW MUCH?

Cup of decent coffee
\$3.50

Movie ticket \$13

Dorm bed \$20-28

Motel room \$90-140

Magnificent scenery \$0

See also the Lonely Planet Index, inside front cover

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- Double-checking the visa situation (see p706)
- A travel-insurance policy covering you for high-risk activities (see p699)
- Insect repellent to keep the sandflies off your ass (see p696)
- The ability to get excited over a game of rugby (p46)
- A hat and a long-sleeve shirt for summer (the sun kicks like a mule; p695)
- A bottomless appetite for Kiwi food and wine (p62)
- A mobile phone (p705) for booking restaurants and accommodation on the hop
- An open ear and a notepad to jot down the NZ bands you're going to download when you get home (see www.amplifier.co.nz)

It's not hard to make your NZ trip ecosavvy. For starters, check out our GreenDex (p751), which lists ecofriendly operators. Volunteer some of your time to a local environmental program. Consider carbon-offsetting your flights to/from NZ. Taking a tour? Ask about the company's environmental policies: are they NZ-owned? Sensitive to indigenous culture? How do they dispose of rubbish? Support NZ businesses rather than multinational chains: eat at local restaurants and buy from farmers markets that sell locally sourced produce. Instead of car-hire, consider car-pooling to travel from town to town; check hostel notice boards to find a ride. Stay at hotels and hostels that actively engage in recycling and waste reduction. If you're tramping into the forests or along the coast, carry out your rubbish, travel in small groups, camp on durable surfaces, and don't wash in or near water sources.

For more tips online:

Department of Conservation (www.doc.govt.nz) Conservation events and programs that visitors can engage with.

Leave No Trace (www.lnt.org) Low-impact camping and tramping tips.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com/responsibletravel) Tips on sustainable travel.

Organic Explorer (www.organicexplorer.co.nz) Comprehensive guide to ecofriendly places to eat, stay and explore throughout NZ.

TRAVEL LITERATURE

Given NZ's starring role on the world tourism stage, the current bloom in dedicated NZ travel literature isn't surprising. The country's ability to inspire its explorers (at home and overseas – RIP Sir Edmund Hillary) is obvious in most published accounts of NZ wanderings.

'Don't leave home until you've seen the country' is something most Kiwis hear when planning their big 'OE' (Overseas Experience). Taking this advice, Bob Moore, a Wellington-based Englishman, traversed every kilometre of State Hwy 1 (NZ's national drag) then wrote *The 1 Thing: A Small Epic Journey Down New Zealand's Mother Road* (2006).

If you're into cycling, pick up *Long Cloud Ride* by Josie Dew (2007). Dew – a roaming Brit cyclist – chronicles her nine-month, 10,000km NZ journey. Through wind and rain, she gets close to the Kiwi psyche. Photographs and well-observed line drawings complement the gentle narrative humour.

Lyttelton-based Joe Bennett, another Englishman-in-NZ, pens a popular column syndicated to newspapers throughout NZ. *Love, Death, Washing up, etc* (2007) is a collection of his best efforts over the last five years. *A Land of Two Halves* (2004) is Joe's tale of hitchhiking around the country – a fabulous travelogue, full of pithy descriptions, perceptive observations and witty anecdotes.

Liberal-minded travellers who don't mind the odd tree-hug will love *Slipping into Paradise: Why I Live in New Zealand*, by Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson (2004); a gushing sonnet to NZ from a relative newcomer to the country.

How to Watch a Game of Rugby by Spiro Zavos (2004) is a brilliant insight into the national preoccupation by a respected sports journalist. Even if you don't know a 'halfback' from 'half-time', this concise tome will ensure you don't ask stupid questions when you're watching the All Blacks at the pub.

INTERNET RESOURCES

100% Pure New Zealand (www.newzealand.com) NZ's official tourism site, with comprehensive visitor info.

Department of Conservation (www.doc.govt.nz) Indispensable DOC parks, recreation and conservation info across NZ.

TOP 10

NEW ZEALAND • Wellington

MANDATORY MOVIES

Spending an evening or three watching classic NZ movies makes a great intro to the country's much-publicised scenery, and will help you get under the national skin. Captured on celluloid, wry humour and an often-bleak mysticism await. See p49 for reviews of these and other locally produced films.

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| <p>1 <i>Once Were Warriors</i> (1994) Director: Lee Tamahori</p> <p>2 <i>The Lord of the Rings</i> trilogy (2001–03) Director: Peter Jackson</p> <p>3 <i>Whale Rider</i> (2002) Director: Niki Caro</p> <p>4 <i>An Angel at My Table</i> (1990) Director: Jane Campion</p> | <p>5 <i>The Piano</i> (1993) Director: Jane Campion</p> <p>6 <i>In My Father's Den</i> (2004) Director: Brad McGann</p> <p>7 <i>Eagle vs Shark</i> (2007) Director: Taika Cohen</p> <p>8 <i>Rain</i> (2001) Director: Christine Jeffs</p> <p>9 <i>Out of the Blue</i> (2006) Director: Robert Sarkies</p> <p>10 <i>Black Sheep</i> (2006) Director: Jonathan King</p> |
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BRILLIANT BOOKS

Escapist plots, multilayered fiction, reinvented realities and character-driven social commentary: Kiwi literature presents an opportunity to learn much about the country, drawing on NZ's unsettled history, burgeoning cultural awareness and the physical power of the landscape. See p48 for more on NZ literature.

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| <p>1 <i>The Bone People</i> (1988) Keri Hulme</p> <p>2 <i>Mister Pip</i> (2007) Lloyd Jones</p> <p>3 <i>The Carpathians</i> (1988) Janet Frame</p> <p>4 <i>Potiki</i> (1986) Patricia Grace</p> <p>5 <i>Bulibasha: King of the Gypsies</i> (1994) Witi Ihimaera</p> | <p>6 <i>Loving Ways</i> (1996) Maurice Gee</p> <p>7 <i>Hibiscus Coast</i> (2005) Paula Morris</p> <p>8 <i>The Vintner's Luck</i> (2000) Elizabeth Knox</p> <p>9 <i>In a Fishbone Church</i> (1998) Catherine Chidgey</p> <p>10 <i>Mansfield</i> (2004) CK Stead</p> |
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FESTIVAL FRENZY

Kiwis love to party, and many travellers plan their journeys around food, wine and arts fiestas. Following are some of our favourite excuses to get festive. For nationwide events and further suggestions, see the Directory (p697) and the Festivals & Events sections in destination chapters.

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| <p>1 World Buskers Festival (www.worldbuskersfestival.com) Christchurch, January (p535)</p> <p>2 Rippon Festival (www.ripponfestival.co.nz) Wanaka, February (p639)</p> <p>3 Fringe NZ (www.fringe.org.nz) Wellington, February/March (p411)</p> <p>4 Pasifika Festival (www.aucklandcity.govt.nz/whats-on/events/pasifika) Auckland, March (p116)</p> <p>5 New Zealand Gold Guitar Awards (www.goldguitars.co.nz) Gore, June (p668)</p> | <p>6 Carrot Carnival (www.ohakune.info) Ohakune, July (see boxed text, p318)</p> <p>7 Queenstown Winter Festival (www.winterfestival.co.nz) Queenstown, July (p621)</p> <p>8 Nelson Arts Festival (www.nelsoncitycouncil.co.nz/artsfestival) Nelson, October (p463)</p> <p>9 Seafest (www.seafest.co.nz) Kaikoura, October (p455)</p> <p>10 Opotiki Rodeo (www.rodeonz.co.nz/rodeos/opotiki.htm) Opotiki, December (p360)</p> |
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Destination New Zealand (www.destination-nz.com) Resourceful site with excellent website listings.

DineOut (www.dineout.co.nz) Restaurant reviews and info across the nation.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) Get started with NZ summaries and travellers trading info on the Thorn Tree.

Muzic.net (www.muzic.net.nz) Gigs, reviews, bios, charts – Wellington rock to Dunedin dub.

New Zealand Tourism Online (www.tourism.net.nz) Commercial site with 10,000-plus listings and plenty of useful info.

Public Address (www.publicaddress.net) One-stop shop for opinionated Kiwi blogs.

Stuff (www.stuff.co.nz, www.stuff.co.nz/blogs) NZ news (sourced from Fairfax New Zealand publications) and an array of blogs.

Te Ara (www.teara.govt.nz) An online encyclopaedia of NZ.

Itineraries

SHORT BREAKS

AUCKLAND ENCOUNTER Four to Seven Days/Auckland to Auckland

Bounce around Auckland's stellar bars and restaurants, museums, islands and beaches – multicultural NZ at its most engaging.

Check out the Maori gallery at the **Auckland Museum** (p102), then cross the Domain to **K Rd** for lunch (p123). Take our architectural **walking tour** (p115), stopping at **Auckland Art Gallery** (p107) and the impossible-to-miss **Sky Tower** (p107). **Ponsonby** (p124) awaits for dinner and drinks.

Ferry over to **Rangitoto Island** (p133), then to **Devonport** (p125) for a meal. Check out **Cheltenham Beach** (p109), then dine at the **Engine Room** (p125). Explore the **Waitakere Ranges Regional Park** (p145), **Karekare** (p146) and **Piha** (p146), then hit the **Kingsland** (p124) restaurants. Have breakfast in **Mt Eden** (p124), climb **Maungawhau** (p103) then ferry-hop to **Waiheke Island** (p135) for some wineries and beaches.

Not far from Auckland, you can snorkel at **Goat Island Marine Reserve** (p153), explore the legendary **Bay of Islands** (p165), ocean-gaze at **Cape Reinga** (p183) and **Matai Bay** (p183), explore the **Waitomo Caves** (p236), surf at **Raglan** (p223) and beach yourself at **Whitianga** (p205).

Some say Auckland is just Sydney for beginners. We think not. Sydney doesn't have access to TWO oceans, nor does it have the amazing melange of Polynesian culture on offer in the 'City of Sails'. Enjoy the big-smoke, then explore some local highlights with this 450-900km itinerary.



CHRISTCHURCH EXPLORER

Four to Seven Days/ Christchurch to Christchurch

Winging in to Christchurch with a week or so up your sleeve, there'll be plenty to keep you entertained, both urban and wild.

Hit the city running with a kick-ass coffee at a **High St café** (p540), then a juddery circuit on the city's **tramway** (p530) to assess the lay of the land. Jump off at the **Arts Centre** (p526) and have a sticky-beak around the galleries in the area. Other essentials to check off your list include the **Canterbury Museum** (p531) and the **Christchurch Art Gallery** (p531), and don't miss an evening session in the kooky bars in **Lyttelton** (p547) and restaurants in **Sumner** (p539).

The Avon River cuts a lazy, inoffensive ribbon through town – check the flow in the **Botanic Gardens** (p526) or push off into the stream on a **punt** (p532). Close down the day with some boozy wanderings around **Poplar St** and **SOL Sq** (p541).

Swarm into the **shops** on High St (p543), before chilling your bones at the **International Antarctic Centre** (p531), or paddling a Maori canoe and tucking into a traditional Maori feast at **Willowbank Wildlife Reserve** (p531).

Enough city already? Take a trip out of town for a ride on the **gondola** (p531), then cruise out to the formerly volcanic **Banks Peninsula** – explore Francophile **Akaroa** (p547) with its wildlife-rich harbour, and the peninsula's photogenic outer bays.

Spend a few nights on the rambling road: head a couple of hours north for some whale-watching and crayfishing in **Kaikoura** (p452), wander west to **Lake Tekapo** (p566) and the snowy heights of **Aoraki/Mt Cook** (p571), or south to check out the zany boulders at **Moeraki** (p608; don't miss dinner at **Fleur's Place**, p608).



Christchurch has that unusual mix of urban civility and wild abandon just beyond the doorstep. Spend a few days pinballing between downtown bars, shops, museums and galleries, then hit the road (Jack) and chase down some mountains, whales, lakes and forests on this 650-750km trail.

KIWI CLASSICS**12 Days/Auckland to Auckland**

With just 12 days, you're gonna have to move fast to squeeze in all the good bits, north and south!

The City of Sails, **Auckland** (p98) is a South Pacific melting pot – spend a few days here shopping, eating, drinking and savouring NZ at its most cosmopolitan and worldly. Truck north to the **Bay of Islands** (p165) for a dose of aquatic adventure, then scoot back to check out the forests and beaches on the **Coromandel Peninsula** (p194). Further south in **Rotorua** (p322), get a nose full of egg-gas, giggle at volcanic mud-bubbles and experience some Maori culture. Get your skates on and cruise down to **Napier** (p381), NZ's archetypal Art Deco sun-city. While you're here, don't miss the bottled offerings of the **Hawkes Bay Wine Country** (p392). Down in **Wellington** (p399), the coffee's hot, the beer's cold and wind from the politicians generates its own low-pressure system.

Swan over to the South Island for a few days to experience the best the south has to offer. Start with a tour through the **Marlborough Wine Region** (p448), then jump on a boat/plane/helicopter for a close encounter with a massive marine mammal in **Kaikoura** (p452). Refined, manicured **Christchurch** (p523) is next, followed by the coast road south to the wildlife-rich **Otago Peninsula** (p591), which juts abstractly away from the Victorian façades of student-filled **Dunedin** (p578). Try to catch some live music while you're in town!

Head inland via SH8 to bungy-obsessed **Queenstown** (p610). If you have time, you'll never forget an encounter with **Franz Josef Glacier** (p512) and **Fox Glacier** (p516) on the West Coast. Play aeroplane hopscotch from **Hokitika** (p504) to Christchurch and back to Auckland.

Classy cities, geothermal eruptions, fantastic wine, Maori culture, glaciers, extreme activities, isolated beaches and forests: these are a few of NZ's favourite things, and what you'll want to see if you're a first-time, short-trip visitor. Sample the best of both islands on this 3000km trip.

**TRAVEL FURTHER****ICONS & BEYOND****Four to Six Weeks/Auckland to Christchurch**

Virgin visitors to the country will want to check out NZ's tourist icons, and maybe throw in some active wilderness experiences for good measure.

Cruise the sail-filled harbours of hip, inner-city **Auckland** (p98), then take SH1 north to the glorious, winterless **Bay of Islands** (p165): surfboards, kayaks, scuba gear – take your pick. South of Auckland, hold your nose through the sulphurous sweats of **Rotorua** (p322), then hook further south for idyllic **Taupo** (p289) and go tramping around the triple-peaked wilderness of **Tongariro National Park** (p306). Take SH43 west to New Plymouth and an eyeful of photogenic **Mt Taranaki** (p254) then shuffle southeast to Wanganui, detouring along gorgeous **Whanganui River Road** (p278). Stay up late in caffeinated **Wellington** (p399) and watch the nocturnal freakshow pass onwards to oblivion.

Across Cook Strait, head west for some kayaking in **Abel Tasman National Park** (p475), or disappear into the **Marlborough Sounds** (p439) for a day.

Heading west, track down the rain-swept West Coast with its iconic **glaciers** (p512 & p516), all the way to long-lost **Jackson Bay** (p520), then head over Haast Pass to adrenaline-addicted **Queenstown** (p610). Mix and match highways to Te Anau for the beguiling side-road to **Milford Sound** (p620), then backtrack to SH6 and head north, swapping over to SH8 for an eyeful of cloud-piercing **Aoraki/Mt Cook** (p571), before veering east back to cathedral-centred **Christchurch** (p523). Take an afternoon to explore the amazing **Banks Peninsula** (p547) south of town.



Check some big-ticket attractions off your list, with kayaking, tramping and wildlife-watching breaking up the road trip. Take your time on this well-travelled 3300km route – switch into holiday mode, embrace nature and savour the flavours of dual-island travel.

OFF THE BEATEN TRAIL**Four to Six Weeks/Auckland to Christchurch**

Journey to the ends of NZ and experience places far removed from manmade clash and humdrum.

Beat a hasty retreat from hypertensive **Auckland** (p98) to tiny **Tutukaka** (p163) and a visit to the fish-rich waters and underwater labyrinths of the **Poor Knights Islands** (p163). Beyond the Bay of Islands is rugged Aupouri Peninsula, the tip of which is **Cape Reinga** (p183), shrouded in solitude and Maori lore.

Venture back south through Rotorua to the lush leaf-scapes of **Te Urewera National Park** (p377) and the craggy ranges of **East Cape** (p363). Follow SH2 south into the sheepy **Wairarapa** (p426) before soaring over the otherworldly, cloud-wrapped Rimutaka Range and along wiggly Akatarawa Rd to the deserted beaches of the **Kapiti Coast** (p423). If you have time, float offshore to mystical **Kapiti Island** (p425). Chug across Cook Strait to Picton then lose your way in the waterways of the **Marlborough Sounds** (p439).

Detour west past artsy Nelson to ecofriendly, chilled-out **Golden Bay** (p479; more paintbrushes than people) and enormous **Kahurangi National Park** (p484). Travel southwest, where a memorable road north of Westport trundles up to the caverns of **Oparara Basin** (p493). Southbound, divert to the inland extremities of **Arthur's Pass National Park** (p557), and don't miss a voyage on desolate **Doubtful Sound** (p660). Ferry yourself to end-of-the-world **Stewart Island** (p676), then kick back in the overgrown **Catlins** (p669) for a couple of days.

Detour north on SH8 through Central Otago, passing goldrush-era towns en route to mountain-biking **Alexandra** (p597) and hang-glider-hung **Omarama** (p606). Trek back to the east coast via the **Waitaki Valley** (p606) on SH83, then hop south to mellow **Oamaru** (p601) before a big-city reality check back in **Christchurch** (p523).



It's hard to find paths-less-travelled in NZ these days, but this epic 5400km route from the NZ's northernmost fingernail to detached southern toe takes in plenty of vacant landscapes. If your timing's good, you may feel like you've carved off a slice of heaven all for yourself.

TAILORED TRIPS**PLANES, TRAINS & AUTOMOBILES**

With camera-conductive panoramas out every NZ window, getting from A to B is half the fun.

For a bird's-eye view of NZ, take a glider trip over **Omarama** (p606), a scenic flight above **Milford Sound** (p620), a chopper ride over **Aoraki/Mt Cook** (p574) and the **West Coast glaciers** (p512 & p516), or a knee-trembling hang-glide above **Nelson** (p461) or **Queenstown** (p617).

Train-spotting romantics should try the **Taiari Gorge Railway** (p590), the **Overlander** (p131) from Auckland to Wellington via the Raurimu Spiral and Tongariro National Park, or the **TranzAlpine** (p504) epic from Christchurch to Greymouth over snowbound Arthur's Pass.

The best stretches of Kiwi tarmac include State Highway 6 (**SH6**) down the West Coast (especially around Punakaiki and from Haast to Queenstown), **SH73** from Christchurch to Greymouth across Arthur's Pass; lonesome **SH35** around East Cape, the rainy **Whanagui River Road** (p278), bleak **SH2** from Wellington to Featherston over the Rimutaka Range, and **SH60** over Takaka Hill west of Motueka.

Bobbing around in a boat, the **Wellington-Picton ferry** (p420) is a perfect Marlborough Sounds snapshot. Take a kayak trip around **Abel Tasman National Park** (p478), **Doubtful Sound** (p660) or **Okarito Lagoon** (p510), a safari up the **Haast River** (p519), a jetboat thrill-ride in **Queenstown** (p616) or paddleboat cruise on the **Whanganui River** (p275).

**FOODIE NZ**

Forget porridge and meat-and-two-veg: contemporary Kiwi cuisine is a gourmet delight, highlighted by fab food festivals, boutique wineries, locally sourced produce and traditional Maori fare.

Foodie fiestas: **Harvest Hawkes Bay** (p391), **Gisborne Food & Wine Festival** (p373), **Whitianga Scallop Festival** (p206), **Hokitika Wild Foods Festival** (p506), **Kawhia Kai Festival** (p235), **Bluff Oyster & Southland Seafood Festival** (p668), **Seafest** (p455) in Kaikoura, the **Marlborough Wine Festival** (p445) and **Toast Martinborough** (p428).

For local produce, hit the organic greengrocers or **Hawkes Bay Farmers Market** (p395), **Lyttelton Farmers Market** (p546) near Christchurch, **Otago Farmers Market** (p587) in Dunedin and **Farmers @ Founders** (p461) in Nelson.

For a *hangi* (Maori feast), try Tikitiki's **Eastender Backpackers** (p367), or **Mitai Maori Village** and **Tamaki Maori Village** (p327) in Rotorua. Wellington's **Kai in the City** (p414) plates up magic Maori fare.



On the Road



CHARLES RAWLINGS-WAY Coordinating Author

After weeks of drinking too much coffee, watching too much World Cup rugby and raging against the wind in Wellington (p398), I was feeling the need for some open spaces. There are few places on the North Island that fit this bill as well as Castlepoint (p430), on the eastern fringe of the Wairarapa.

PETER DRAGICEVICH Nothing gets the Kiwi heart flutter like the first pohutukawa blossoms of the season. Blooming in early summer, the 'New Zealand Christmas Tree' holds promises of long, lazy beach days just around the corner. I spotted these early bloomers while visiting Goat Island Marine Reserve (p153), an hour's drive north of Auckland – an extraordinary place any time of the year.



SARAH BENNETT I said I'd never, ever do it. Ever. Not in a million years. But, somehow, things felt different on this beautiful, breathless, blue-sky day in Taupo (p288). If ever I was going to leap out of a plane at 15,000ft, the moment had surely arrived. I committed myself to enjoying every minute.



BRETT ATKINSON Come back in winter and the Remarkables mountain range behind me would be swathed in snow, but this glorious spring day outside Queenstown (p610) was perfect for my first foray into hang gliding. The combination of spectacular views and sky-high thrills was the perfect Queenstown experience. Do you want to see my souvenir DVD?

ERROL HUNT Stopping at a lake in Fiordland (p645), I made the mistake of leaving the car window open, and soon enough my car was filled with tiny, voracious sandflies. I resorted to opening the windows as I drove, which got rid of about half of them, but also set the neat piles of brochures and maps from my back seat flying around me in a tornado of paper.



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