

24 DAY COMPLETE NZ AUCKLAND – AUCKLAND

Duration: 24 days / 23 nights

Departs: Sundays

Start Location: Auckland CBD

Finish Location: Auckland CBD

First Departure: 15/09/19

Last Departure: 26/04/20

DAY 1: Auckland to Paihia

Nau mai, haere mai (welcome)! Your journey kicks off in New Zealand's largest city Auckland, known as the 'City of Sails' because of its location between the Waitemata and Manukau Harbours, making it a boaters' paradise. Pick-ups start at your accommodation bright and early, before we head north to the seaside town of Paihia, gateway to the Bay of Islands. We stop en-route to hug some of the world's mightiest trees, the native Kauri, and stop for lunch at scenic Waipu Cove. This is followed by a trip to the historic Waitangi Treaty Grounds (own expense), before settling into our accommodation where you'll have a group meal and the evening free to relax. (D)

Accommodation included: Hostel along from the beach

Activities included: Tree hugging huge kauri trees at Parry Kauri Forest, swim or walk to see waterfalls at Waipu Cove (weather dependent)

Optional activities: Waitangi Treaty Grounds

DAY 2: Paihia to Hokianga

This morning we take a wildlife cruise in the beautiful Bay of Islands, a collection of 144 islands bursting with marine life. There's no better way to see it than by boat - keep an eye out for wild dolphins. In the afternoon it's off to the Hokianga Harbour, where we will see the huge sand dunes across the harbour. Tonight, you have the option to take part in a Maori-guided twilight encounter in the Waipoua Forest, where you'll learn about Maori legends and the spiritual inhabitants of the forest, and visit the largest Kauri tree in the world, the "God of the Forest" Tane Mahuta (own expense). Finish the day with a Kiwi classic for dinner, traditional fish and chips. (B,D)

Accommodation included: Harbourside hotel

Activities included: Hole in the Rock marine cruise

Optional activities: Footprints Waipoua twilight encounter, bone carving

DAY 3: Hokianga to Auckland

We start the morning with a ferry ride across the Hokianga Harbour for a sand boarding adrenalin rush (weather dependent) before we start to make our way south through the mighty Waipoua Forest. Here we will have the opportunity to see NZ's largest Kauri trees. We'll stop at the idyllic Kai Iwi Lakes for a swim in the beautiful crystal-clear waters surrounded by a pure white sandy beach, before returning to the 'Big Smoke' Auckland for a late afternoon arrival. (B)

Accommodation included: Central city hostel

Activities included: Hokianga Ferry ride, sand boarding, visit Waipoua Forest (NZ's largest Kauri trees), swim in the Kai Iwi Lakes

DAY 4: Auckland to Hahei

We depart Auckland and head south east to the pristine sands of Hahei Beach, from which you can access the famous Cathedral Cove. Accessible only by foot, boat or kayak, you'll discover some of New Zealand's most spectacular scenery and stunning sea views in this beautiful coastal spot. Cathedral Cove is a 'must see' on the Coromandel Peninsula. We'll also pay a visit to Hot Water Beach, a unique surf beach where you can dig a hole in the sand to create in your own personal spa pool (tide dependent). (D)

Accommodation included: Comfortable beachside accommodation

Activities included: Dig your own spa pool at Hot Water Beach, walk to Cathedral Cove

Optional activities: Sea kayaking trip

DAY 5: Hahei to Rotorua

Today, we'll make our way towards the North Island's main tourism hub of Rotorua. This evening you will be welcomed into the authentic Tamaki Maori Village, where you will discover Maori art, ancient rituals and traditions. Tonight, we dine on a delicious hangi (Maori feast), enjoy an interactive cultural performance and the company of our Maori hosts. (B,D)

Accommodation included: Central city motel

Activities included: Cultural experience with traditional hangi meal, kapa haka (Maori song and dance) and interactive performance

DAY 6: Full day in Rotorua

You have a full free day in Rotorua to discover an area well-known for its Maori heritage, adventure and geothermal activity. Here you have the chance to do some great optional activities, such as a visit to the Hobbiton Movie Set, white water rafting, ziplining through native bush, mountain biking and more. A great option to finish the day is to spend the evening soaking in the hot pools at the luxurious Polynesian Spa. (B)

Accommodation included: Central city motel

Optional activities: Visit Hobbiton, white water rafting, ziplining, mountain biking, spa, luge

DAY 7: Rotorua to National Park

It's a very early start this morning so we can make our way to the UNESCO World Heritage Site Tongariro National Park, where you'll get the chance to do one of the world's best one day walks, the Tongariro Alpine Crossing. Trek through dramatic natural scenery past volcanic peaks, vast craters and stunning turquoise lakes on one of the most spectacular treks in New Zealand. Alternatively, you can go on one the shorter walks around this volcanic region or visit the Volcanic Centre Museum. (B,L,D)

Accommodation included: Alpine lodge

Activities included: Tongariro Alpine Crossing and transfers, or Taranaki Falls walk and Tawhai Falls (Gollum's Pool)

DAY 8: National Park to Blue Duck Station

After your big day of hiking, you get a chance to sleep in and we won't depart until mid-morning. Our destination today is one of the most remote parts of the North Island by road. We're heading for the award-winning Blue Duck Station in Whakahoro, a 7,200-acre high country farm that is both a working sheep and beef station and an environmental conservation leader. This afternoon you get the opportunity to take part in a 4WD Bush Safari and farm adventure, where you'll explore this vast land and the New Zealand native bush, discover the remains of an unbelievable local history, and learn about the farm's conservation efforts. Your dinner is cooked using local produce. (B,D)

Accommodation included: Remote country station lodge

Activities included: 4WD eco-wilderness farm adventure

DAY 9: Blue Duck Station to Wellington

We depart early to arrive into Wellington by early afternoon. Wellington is known as the 'coolest little capital in the world' thanks to Lonely Planet, and it's a great place to check out the lively arts scene, shopping, craft breweries and café culture. As New Zealand's capital city, it is home to New Zealand's parliament and the iconic 'Beehive' government building. This afternoon, you have the option to marvel at the wonders of Te Papa National Museum or wander along the Oriental Parade for excellent views of the city. (B)

Accommodation included: Central city hostel

Optional activities: Te Papa National Museum

DAY 10: Wellington (via Picton) to Abel Tasman

Leaving Wellington, we'll travel across the Cook Strait to the South Island's coastal town of Picton. Here we meet our coach and cruise through the famous Marlborough wine region. We visit a local vineyard's cellar door to sample New Zealand's world-famous Sauvignon Blanc, before heading to the spectacular Abel Tasman National Park. Tonight we enjoy some delicious seafood and a BBQ dinner at our exclusive campsite accommodation. (B,D)

Accommodation included: Accommodation on the edge of the national park

Activities included: Ferry from Wellington to Picton, winery cellar door visit

DAY 11: Full day in Abel Tasman

Today is a free day to experience the incredible Abel Tasman National Park. Explore this stunning coastal area famous for being one of the sunniest spots in New Zealand. Walk the coastal track and discover some of New Zealand's best natural golden sand beaches or choose an optional activity like sailing or sea kayaking (own expense). Tonight, you can self-cater using the BBQ and kitchen facilities at our accommodation. (B)

Accommodation included: Accommodation on the edge of the national park

Activities included: Walk on the Abel Tasman Track and Aqua Taxi ride

DAY 12: Abel Tasman to Franz Josef

We start early to head south along the 'wild' West Coast, travelling on the rugged rocky coastline that makes this stretch of road one of the country's top drives. We'll stop along the way to visit the spectacular limestone Punakaiki Pancake Rocks and blowholes, as well as call in at the historic mining town of Hokitika, one of the best spots to find a greenstone souvenir. From there, we carry on to our next overnight stop in the quaint little West Coast town of Franz Josef, home to the mighty Franz Josef Glacier. (B,D)

Accommodation included: Hostel close to all attractions

Activities included: Punakaiki Pancake Rocks walk

DAY 13: Full day in Franz Josef

Enjoy a free day to get out and explore the mighty Franz Josef Glacier. Navigate the maze of ice and explore the incredible landscape on a Franz Josef Glacier guided tour which we highly recommend (own expense). There are also many excellent bush hikes available in the region. Tonight, you can self-cater in the communal kitchen at our accommodation or take the opportunity to dine at one of the local cafes or restaurants in town. (B)

Accommodation included: Hostel close to all attractions

Optional activities: Glacier heli-hike, scenic helicopter flight

DAY 14: Franz Josef to Makarora

Today we head further down the West Coast towards Mount Aspiring National Park, stopping to take in the breathtaking scenery at the amazing mirror-like Lake Matheson, NZ's most photographed lake. See waterfalls as we travel through the mountainous Haast Pass towards Makarora then visit the stunning Blue Pools. On arrival in Mount Aspiring National Park we go jet boating to experience the best in shallow water boating, skimming just inches from the riverbed, viewing pristine waterways, snow-capped peaks and native bush. (B,D)

Accommodation included: Unique mountain chalets

Activities included: Walk around Lake Matheson, walk through beech forest to the Blue Pools, jet boat Mt Aspiring National Park

DAY 15: Makarora to Doubtful Sound

Fiordland National Park is one of New Zealand's most beautiful locations, with stunning ice-carved fiords, valleys, lakes and mountain scenery; and it is our first port of call today. Within Fiordland we visit Doubtful Sound, the deepest of all the fiords, surrounded by towering peaks and huge waterfalls. We will board a purpose-built boat and enjoy complimentary afternoon tea while cruising past fur seals, penguins and dolphins. There are also sea kayaks available to explore the fiord. (B,D)

Accommodation included: Overnight on the boat, anchored within a secluded bay in a UNESCO World Heritage Site

Activities included: Doubtful Sound overnight cruise, sea kayaking, wildlife spotting

DAY 16: Doubtful Sound to Queenstown

We depart Doubtful Sound around midday, leaving behind stunning Fiordland to head for the 'adventure capital of the world', Queenstown. Queenstown offers an optional big (make that huge!) night out with a wide variety of excellent restaurants, pubs and live music around town. (B)

Accommodation included: Lodge located close to town with awesome views

DAY 17: Full Day 1 in Queenstown

You have two free days in Queenstown to fully explore everything on offer. With so many fantastic activity options, it's a great place to spend a couple days, no matter what your past-time of choice is. Why not start your first free day with the heart pounding adrenalin rush of one of Queenstown's adventure activities? Options include: bungee jumping, zipline tours, canyoning, Shotover River jet boating, skiing and skydiving. Optional activities and meals not indicated are at your own expense. (B)

Accommodation included: Lodge located close to town with awesome views

Optional activities: Any adventure activity you can imagine!

DAY 18: Full Day 2 in Queenstown

Make the most of your final free day doing any of the incredible activities still on your bucket list or simply spend the day further exploring this spectacularly scenic little town. If you haven't already, we recommend riding the gondola or walking to the top of the hill for the best views of the town, lake and surrounding mountains. Optional activities and meals not indicated are at your own expense. (B)

Accommodation included: Lodge located close to town with awesome views

Optional activities: Any adventure activity you can imagine!

DAY 19: Queenstown to Mt Cook

We'll jump back on the bus for a short drive to Wanaka, where we'll spend the morning cycling along some of the world's most beautiful lakeside bike paths. After lunch, we head over the Lindis Pass through the picturesque Mackenzie region to the base of the country's highest mountain, Aoraki/Mt Cook. There is time for a hike through the Tasman Valley for breathtaking views of the dramatic mountain landscape or opt to take an alpine scenic flight (own expense). This is also one of the best places in New Zealand to join an evening stargazing tour. (B,D)

Accommodation included: Alpine lodge

Activities included: Mountain biking in Wanaka, scenic walk in Tasman Valley

Optional activities: Big Sky Stargazing or scenic heli-flight

DAY 20: Mt Cook to Christchurch

Today we make our way through a landscape made famous in the 'Lord of the Rings' films. We'll take a break for a stroll around Lake Tekapo, iconic for its historic church and turquoise waters. Between Tekapo and Christchurch there is an option for thrill seekers to hop-off and join a top-notch Grade 5 white water adventure on the Rangitata River (own expense). Those not rafting will continue on to Christchurch, where your driver guide will point out the highlights of the South Island's largest city. The rafters will rejoin the group at the accommodation in Christchurch this evening. (B)

Accommodation included: Modern backpackers

Optional activities: Rangitata white water rafting

DAY 21: Christchurch to Hanmer Springs

This morning's activity is determined by the weather and what the group wishes to do. The options are to spend the morning taking in the city sights and walking through the Garden City's renowned Botanic Gardens or drive out to the Banks Peninsula to discover the delights of Akaroa, New Zealand's only historic French settlement. Next, we head to the peaceful alpine town of Hanmer Springs, where you can spend the evening surrounded by mountains and forest as you relax in the thermal hot pools. Tonight is a group dinner. (D)

Accommodation included: Cozy alpine chalets

Activities included: Hanmer Springs Thermal Pools and Spa

DAY 22: Hanmer Springs to Kaikoura

We start today with an invigorating walk up Conical Hill for the best views in Hanmer Springs. Then, we'll make our way east to the coastal village of Kaikoura, famous for a huge array of natural wonders from land to sea. We arrive in Kaikoura with plenty of free time to experience all this location has to offer. Why not go out on the water on one of Kaikoura's famous dolphin and whale spotting tours (own expense), see seals sitting right beside the road at Goose Bay or wander around the peninsula and check out the breathtaking views from the lookout. (B)

Accommodation included: Warm modern hostel

Activities included: Conical Hill walk, peninsula walk and seal colony visit

Optional activities: Whale watching, swim with dolphins

DAY 23: Kaikoura to Wellington

Today we'll travel north on a scenic drive along rugged coastal roads to Picton, where we catch the interisland ferry crossing over the Cook Strait back to Wellington. The evening in Wellington is free –we recommend heading out to discover some of this funky town's culinary delights at one of the top-notch restaurants along Cuba Street.

Accommodation included: Central city hostel

Activities included: Ferry from Picton to Wellington

DAY 24: Wellington to Auckland

Today is an express day via National Park back to New Zealand's largest city Auckland. We stop along the way for photo opportunities and have lunch in National Park town, before heading back to Auckland for a late afternoon arrival. We hope you had a blast on your New Zealand journey! (B)

Notes:

- Standard accommodation is **quad share** in hostels, cabins and lodges, except at Blue Duck Station which is six-share
- Upgrades to twin/double and private rooms are available subject to availability
- Room upgrades do not apply in Hahei or on the Doubtful Sound overnight boat cruise
- Luggage is limited one backpack, bag or suitcase per person with a maximum weight of 15kg plus a day pack
- Trips are not suited to children aged 6 years or under. 7 – 17-year-olds may travel if accompanied by a parent or legal guardian
- A basic level of fitness is required for medium length walks

This itinerary is a guide. Given the spontaneous nature of our trips and lack of control over New Zealand's weather(!), what we do each day might occasionally vary.