

ESSENTIALS (Previously Short Max)

Start: Auckland*

Finish: Auckland*

Minimum Days: 22-24

Recommended: 4+ weeks

**This pass can start or finish anywhere on this route, however most people start/finish in Auckland.*

Auckland to Hahei

Haere mai (welcome)! Your Stray adventure kicks off in New Zealand's largest city, Auckland. We depart and head south, travelling to the Coromandel Peninsula via the old colonial town of Thames. Renowned for its natural beauty and pristine swimming beaches, the Coromandel has plenty to offer the active traveller but is also a great place to kick back and relax. When the tides are right, we'll head over to Hot Water Beach, where you can dig your own natural spa pool! Tonight, you have the option to join a group dinner for a classic Kiwi BBQ.

Accommodation: Exclusive Stray accommodation by the waterfront

Free activities: Visit Hot Water Beach for a natural beach spa (tide & weather dependent), walk to Cathedral Cove, explore old cultural sites or simply relax on the beach

Hahei

Today you have a full free day to embrace the laid-back lifestyle that makes this such a popular NZ holiday destination. Make the most of this special place by taking a scenic walk or kayak trip to a hidden paradise at nearby Cathedral Cove or opt to relax on the white sands of Hahei Beach. The coast off Hahei is also part of the protected Te-Whanganui-a-Hei Marine Reserve, which makes it a prime place for a guided coastal boat tour.

Accommodation: Exclusive Stray accommodation by the waterfront

Optional paid activities: Kayaking, guided boat tour

Free activities: Walk to Cathedral Cove, watch the sunrise on the beach, explore old cultural sites or simply relax on the beach

Hahei to Rotorua

We leave Hahei early, travelling through to Paeroa, home of New Zealand's oldest and largest soft drink company L&P, where we'll stop for a fun photo op at a local landmark. Carrying on, we'll arrive in Rotorua, known for its lively geothermal activity, rich Maori history and adventure tourism. Get the adrenalin pumping this afternoon and sign up for a white water rafting adventure, head to the adventure park, or take a walk around town.

Accommodation: Comfortable central city hostel

Optional paid activities: White water rafting, zorbing, adrenaline-fuelled adventure park (big swings, bungys and more)

Free activities: Whakarewarewa Redwood Forest walk, see the bubbling mud pools at Kuirau Park

Rotorua

Often labelled the adventure capital of the North Island, you have a full free day in Rotorua to discover a wealth of adventure activities and geothermal wonders. Go ziplining through native bush, zorbing or take a truly unique guided jet boat adventure to bathe in a hot waterfall. Looking to relax instead? Visit the hot pools and bubbling mud baths at one of Rotorua's geothermal parks or take in a Maori cultural performance. Film buffs may want to sign up for a guided tour through the world-famous Hobbiton Movie Set. The choice is yours!

Accommodation: Comfortable central city hostel

Optional paid activities: River jet tour, white water rafting, ziplining, zorbing, geothermal attractions, Maori village & performance experience, Hobbiton Movie Set tour

Free activities: Whakarewarewa Redwood Forest walk

Rotorua to Lake Aniwhenua

There's time to squeeze in one last Rotorua activity this morning - many people choose to visit Wai-O-Tapu Thermal Wonderland. From here our journey ventures right off the beaten track into the remote area of Lake Aniwhenua for an immersive cultural experience like no other. Your Maori host family will share with you their story and traditions, as well as their vision for making a difference in their remote community. You'll see sacred Maori rock art, play traditional stick games for hand-eye coordination and watch the preparation of a ground cooked 'hangi', before tasting it for yourself!

Exclusive 'Strademark' experience includes: (Additional cost \$89)

- 1 night's accommodation at the serene lakeside Kohutapu Lodge
- Full hangi buffet dinner & dessert and a continental breakfast
- Guided tour to sacred Maori rock carvings
- Introduction to the Murupara area, its people, history and challenges
- Participation in a local school program designed to inspire the next generation (*participation available on school days only*)

NB. A minimum of 9 people is required to stay at Lake Aniwhenua. This 'Strademark' overnight experience is optional, but in our opinion, it's an absolute must do! To skip this experience, you need to catch a public bus from Rotorua to Taupo and then hop back on the Stray bus the next day in Taupo. Please confirm your pickup with our Reservations team.

Accommodation: Scenic lakefront lodge

Optional paid activities: Wai-O-Tapu Thermal Wonderland, learn the Haka, Maori flax weaving

See More moment: Meet a respected Maori guide and view NZ's oldest Maori rock carvings at a sacred archaeological site. Learn about Maori traditions, local history and enjoy a sumptuous feast of 'Hangi', cooked underground!

Do More moment: Leftover Hangi is packaged and delivered to community members in need. Sometimes it is donated to elderly people in the area or during the school term donations go to the children at the local school. Meet the children and participate in an inspirational program aimed at driving cross-cultural education in an otherwise isolated part of NZ.

Lake Aniwhenua (via Taupo) to Blue Duck Station

After breakfast we'll make a special visit to the local school to deliver packed lunches to kids that often go without (dependent on school timetable). Then it's on to Taupo, where the brave hearted can opt to plunge from a plane to skydive over Australasia's largest lake or bungy into a canyon! If you're not up for an adrenaline hit, walk the Huka Falls Walkway track, or spend time exploring this popular lakeside town. Our next destination is about as far off the beaten track as you can get in the North Island! Blue Duck Station is a sprawling 7,200-acre high country farm that is both a working station and an environmental conservation leader. On arrival, we will settle in to learn a little about daily life at Blue Duck, then relax and chill out around an evening fire.

Accommodation: Country station lodge

Optional paid activities: Skydiving, bungy

Free activities: Huka Falls Walkway, Spa Park walk

Blue Duck Station

Today is yours to fully explore this truly incredible location. Jump on a 4WD and travel up farm roads, over hilly peaks and through native bush to learn about the station's interesting settlement history and their current conservation efforts. Don your cowboy hat for a guided horse trek or kayak on the river through bush clad valleys and lush green hills. It doesn't matter which option you choose, just get outdoors and enjoy all that Blue Duck has to offer!

Accommodation: Country station lodge

Optional paid activities: 4WD farm tour, half-day horse trek, clay bird shooting, pest control, kayaking (summer only), jet boating (summer only)

Free activities: Walk around the amazing property to take in the lush scenery, walk to Kaiwhakauka waterfall, enjoy your hosts' fantastic hospitality and stories of the local wildlife and history

See More moment: See the three peaks of Mount Ruapehu, Mount Tongariro, and Mount Ngauruhoe from 'The Top of the World', the highest point of the station.

Do More moment: Assist with the farm's pest control efforts by going on a guided hunt and bring back dinner!

Blue Duck Station (via Tongariro) to Raetihi

We'll be up at the crack of dawn for an early departure to make our way to the UNESCO Dual World Heritage Site, Tongariro National Park. Today you get the chance to tick off one of the most popular hikes in New Zealand, the epic Tongariro Alpine Crossing. Considered one of the world's top one-day walks, this 19km hike takes you across a rocky plateau with dramatic volcanic peaks, craters and turquoise lakes that you'll remember for a lifetime. The Crossing is open to walk year-round (alpine gear and guide are required in winter), but subject to the weather conditions. Ensure you pack a day pack with plenty of supplies and clothing for all conditions. If the weather prevents you from doing the Crossing, there are alternative shorter walks in the area. Tonight, unwind after a big day in a cosy historic lodge in Raetihi, with friendly farm animals, a pamper room and spa bath with mountain views.

Accommodation: Historic restored lodge with mountain views

Optional paid activities: The Tongariro Alpine Crossing, hop off to go skiing/snowboarding (winter only)

Free activities: Taranaki Falls walk, visit the Volcanic Centre, Tawhai Falls (Gollum's pool), pet the local farm animals, volunteer tree planting

Raetihi to Wellington

This morning we travel to the bottom of the North Island via the rural towns of Ohakune, Taihape and Bulls. Today is mostly an express day to get to Wellington, our capital city and home to New Zealand's parliament and the iconic Beehive government building. Also known as the 'coolest little capital in the world', thanks to Lonely Planet, Wellington is a great place to check out the lively arts, craft beer and café culture scenes or do some shopping. The afternoon is yours to explore the sights - we recommend wandering down Oriental Parade or viewing the excellent exhibits on display at Te Papa National Museum.

Accommodation: Central city hostel

Optional paid activities: Wellington Movie Tours, check out the great cafes and bars
Free activities: Walk Oriental Parade, head up Mt Victoria for fantastic views, visit Te Papa National Museum, gumboot (welly) throwing

Wellington to Marahau (Abel Tasman)

We catch an early Bluebridge Ferry across the Cook Strait and through the magnificent Marlborough Sounds to the South Island where you meet the Stray group in Picton. Once on the bus, we'll cruise through the world-famous Marlborough vineyard area. Depending on the group's interest, we may stop for a wine tasting to sample the region's specialty Sauvignon Blanc before heading to the coastal town of Nelson. We will stock up on supplies for the next couple days in Motueka and then make our way to our amazing overnight destination Marahau, right on the edge of the spectacular Abel Tasman National Park.

NB. The Bluebridge Ferry price is not included in your Stray pass. Please book in your Stray Mate app.

Accommodation: Unique Stray accommodation on the edge of the national park

Optional paid activities: Wine tasting, skydiving

Free activities: Walks, mussel tasting around the fire, stargazing

Marahau (Abel Tasman)

With a full day at your leisure, don't miss out on the opportunity to explore this stunning, coastal national park on foot, by sea or from the air. Abel Tasman is famous for being one of the sunniest spots in New Zealand and, as home to one of NZ's Great Walks, is a popular place to hop off for hiking enthusiasts. Even those short on time can still use this free day to hike, kayak, sail or take a water taxi to get a taste of the park's natural golden sand beaches and brilliant blue waters.

Accommodation: Unique Stray accommodation on the edge of the national park

Optional paid activities: Full day sailing trip, kayaking, skydiving, water taxi, canyoning

Free activities: Walk in the national park, relax on one of the golden sand beaches, go for a swim

Marahau (Abel Tasman) to Franz Josef

Buckle up for an awesome day driving down the incredibly scenic 'wild' West Coast, an area known for its untamed beaches and spectacular rainforest. Today takes us through Buller Gorge and down a stretch of road that was labelled one of the top drives in the world by Lonely Planet. We'll stop at the Punakaiki Pancake Rocks and blowholes to walk around these unique geological wonders. Our next stop is the historic gold mining town of Greymouth to collect passengers connecting from Christchurch. From here we'll make one last stop via Hokitika (the best place to buy 'Pounamu', a native greenstone) before continuing on to the quaint township of

Franz Josef, home of the famous Franz Josef Glacier and our base for the next two nights.

Accommodation: Lodge in the middle of the rainforest

Free activities: Buller Gorge, Pancake Rocks and blowholes, Hokitika greenstone store

Franz Josef

Enjoy a free day to get out and experience the Franz Josef Glacier, an iconic highlight of the West Coast. The best way to navigate the maze of ice on the Franz Josef Glacier is with a guided tour, which consistently ranks as a favourite activity amongst Stray travellers. The most popular trip features a short heli-hop onto the glacier with a guided educational tour on the ice and includes entry to the local hot pools afterwards. Other options include kayaking, visiting the glacial terminal face for spectacular photos or doing one of the many excellent bush hikes in the region.

Accommodation: Lodge in the middle of the rainforest

Optional paid activities: Glacier heli-hike (entry to hot pools included), kayaking, skydiving

Free activities: Many excellent bush hikes, relax in one of NZ's largest spa pools at your accommodation

Franz Josef (via Fox Glacier) to Wanaka

It's time to leave the West Coast behind. We stop in the morning for pick-ups at Fox Glacier before heading to the amazing mirror-like Lake Matheson to stretch our legs with a short walk. Then, we'll travel inland through the mountainous Haast Pass and Makarora towards Wanaka. This is another superbly scenic drive and we'll stop for plenty of photo ops along the way as we drive from rainforests to mountains, through beech forest and past great lakes. We'll pass by the beautiful Lake Hawea and arrive in Wanaka late-afternoon in time to enjoy this picturesque lakeside town.

Accommodation: Central Wanaka hostel

Free activities: Lake Matheson walk, Ship Creek walk, Blue Pools walk, Thunder Creek Falls walk

Wanaka to Queenstown

Kick start your day with a brisk walk up Mt Iron, an early morning skydive or learn to fly a stunt plane over Wanaka. At mid-morning we'll pack up and make our way to Queenstown, known in New Zealand as the 'Adventure Capital of the World' and the spiritual home of bungy jumping. We stop on our way into town at Kawarau Bridge, the first commercial bungy jumping site in the world, for your chance to take the big leap of faith. Queenstown offers an optional big (make that huge!) night out with heaps of restaurants, pubs and live music to check out.

Accommodation: Central hostel close to all the action

Optional paid activities: Puzzling World, skydiving, mountain biking, pilot your own stunt plane or learn to fly and take a friend for free, bungee jumping

Free activities: Walk Mt Iron, watch people jumping off a bridge!

Queenstown

You need at least one free day in Queenstown to make the most of the wide range of activities on offer. With a buzzy night life, beautiful mountain scenery and an exciting outdoor lifestyle, it's easy to understand why Stray passengers often hop off here to spend extra time exploring. Options include: bungee or swing, zipline tours, canyoning, jet boating, skiing (in winter), skydiving, local bush walks, or just spend a day relaxing and enjoying the stunning scenery.

Accommodation: Central hostel close to all the action

Optional paid activities: Any adventure activity that we mad Kiwis can dream up (bungee, swing, jet boating, skydiving, mountain biking, zipline, horse riding...)

Free activities: Fabulous walks, take in beautiful views surrounding this cool resort town

Queenstown to Aoraki/Mt Cook

Today we head over the Lindis Pass through the beautiful Mackenzie region and past picturesque Lake Pukaki on the way to our amazing stop at the base of New Zealand's highest mountain, Aoraki/Mt Cook. We arrive in the early afternoon with time to do a 4WD & Argo Tour, check out the Sir Edmund Hillary Alpine Centre or do one of the many great short walks in the park. If it's a clear night, make sure you head outside to experience one of the best stargazing spots in the country. There are some incredible longer walks to do if you want to hop off the bus for a few days (we'd recommend you leave climbing Mt Cook to the experienced mountaineers though).

Accommodation: Stunning alpine lodge

Optional paid activities: Alpine Argo tour, visit the Sir Edmund Hillary Alpine Centre

Free activities: Take photos of awe-inspiring scenery, do one of the many great short walks to the Hooker glacial lake (weather dependent), stargazing

Mt Cook (via Tekapo) to Rangitata

Leaving Mt Cook, we make our way through a landscape made famous in the 'Lord of the Rings' films. We'll stop to admire the turquoise waters of Lake Tekapo and the Church of the Good Shepherd, a famous photo stop. Relax in the Tekapo hot pools, go snow tubing or ice skating (winter only) or hike up to the Mt John Observatory where you'll witness stunning views of the lake from above. After lunch, we will continue to our overnight stop in Rangitata Peel Forest. Tonight, we'll stay in a cosy lodge at one of Canterbury's original sheep stations.

Accommodation: Lodge on a Canterbury sheep station

Optional paid activities: Tekapo Hot Springs, ice skating (April-Sept), snow tubing

(June-Sept), stargazing (must hop off in Tekapo)

Free activities: Visit Lake Tekapo, Church of the Good Shepherd, Mt John Observatory walk, Rangitata forest walks

Rangitata to Christchurch

This morning, you can sign up for top-notch grade 5 white water rafting on the Rangitata River at the foot of the Southern Alps or choose to explore the stunning Peel Forest scenery on horseback. Tonight, we'll stay in Christchurch, a city where old meets new, as the rebuild continues following the devastating 2011 earthquake. You will find New Zealand's most modern architecture nestled next to some of the country's oldest buildings. Spend your afternoon wandering the city streets and laneways to discover creative street art intended to bring cheer and colour to a city once buried in rubble.

Accommodation: Comfortable, modern backpackers near the city centre

Optional paid activities: White water rafting (summer only), horse trekking

Free activities: Explore Christchurch by foot, check out the Cardboard Cathedral and inner-city street art.

Christchurch to Kaikoura

We depart early this morning for a beautiful drive up the coast to Kaikoura. Arriving in Kaikoura around midday, you will have the afternoon free for activities to discover the incredible marine world just off shore. Get out on the water and experience one of Kaikoura's famous dolphin and whale spotting tours, see seals sitting right beside the road at Goose Bay or wander around the peninsula and check out the breathtaking views from the lookout.

Accommodation: Warm modern hostel

Optional paid activities: Whale watching by boat or by plane, swimming with dolphins, guided fishing trip

Free activities: Walk around the peninsula and up to the lookout

Kaikoura (via Picton) to Wellington

Leaving Kaikoura in the morning we wind our way up the rugged coastal roads towards the top of the South Island. For those that choose to hop off in the port town of Picton, check out the Queen Charlotte Sound view walk and take advantage of the free fishing gear and bicycles at the Picton accommodation. Those heading to Wellington will catch the afternoon Bluebridge Ferry across the Cook Strait. The evening in Wellington is free so why not explore this funky town's nightlife at any of the bars and restaurants along Cuba Street.

NB. The Bluebridge Ferry price is not included in your Stray pass. Please book in your Stray Mate app.

Accommodation: Central city hostel

Free activities: Wellington: Explore the city's nightlife, Picton: fishing, biking

Wellington (via National Park) to Auckland

We depart in the early morning. This is an express day heading back to the 'City of Sails', Auckland. For those who may have missed out on hiking the Tongariro Crossing, you have the option to hop off in National Park and try again. With an early evening arrival, there's still time to wander the streets of Auckland, visit the Viaduct, do some souvenir shopping or hang out with new friends and share stories about your recent adventures. If you are hanging around Auckland for another day or two, don't miss your chance to jump off the Harbour Bridge or Sky Tower, skydive, or take a wildlife cruise around the Hauraki Gulf. We hope you had a blast on your Stray adventure!

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.