

# New Zealand Travel

## SUGGESTED ITINERARY

### 12 DAY NORTH ISLAND INDEPENDENT DRIVING TOUR

This itinerary operates from Auckland to Wellington. You can also do the trip in reverse from Wellington to Auckland. Days can be added or subtracted depending upon time available or other circumstances.

**DAY 1** Fly to Auckland. There are a number of flight departures (and airlines) to choose from. As you “lose” 2 hours on the flight over, we recommend an early departure to arrive midday / early afternoon.

Pick up your rental car from the airport. We recommend **Thrifty Car Rental** – compact vehicle – Toyota Corolla or similar (Thrifty also offer optional GPS navigation systems with their rentals). Or **GO Rentals** offer late model similar size vehicles at a lower cost.



Drive to the *Northland* region (240kms / 3-4 hrs) via the *Twin Coast Discovery Route*. The Bay of Islands is the heart of the Northland region. Northland is known as the ‘Birthplace of the Nation’ – the original Maori and European explorers first landed in this region; the **Waitangi Treaty House** is located nearby – the important treaty between the English settlers and the Maori chiefs was signed here.

Accommodation – Bay of Islands – Paihia - Golden Chain Motels provide 3/4 star accommodation at affordable prices. All Golden Chain motels are Qualmark rated, and many have kitchenette facilities; or choose from one of the many hotels and/or superb guest houses/lodges in the region.

**DAY 2** Northland activities. Besides important historical locations, there are great activities to choose from :

- ✓ tour to the top of the country with **Dune Rider’s Cape Reinga** adventure;
- ✓ Sail with Dolphin Discoveries – ‘**Discover The Bay**’ to the ‘Hole in the Rock’;
- ✓ experience Culture North’s great Waitangi Sound & Light Show at sunset;
- ✓ take the short ferry ride over to the historic town of Russell, the first permanent European settlement in the country (and known originally as the ‘Hell Hole of the Pacific’).



Accommodation – Paihia, Bay of Islands.

DAY 3 Drive from Paihia over to the West Coast of Northland and the Hokianga (93kms / 1-1½hrs). Maori oral history records Kupe's first landing was on the shores of the Hokianga Harbour. Many small picturesque villages dot the Hokianga.

Accommodation – Hokianga / Omapere.

In the evening, experience the Lonely Planet award-winning activity of **Footprints Waipoua**. Kupe's descendants take you on a guided walk in the Twilight through the famous Waipoua Forest to see Tane Mahuta (the lord of the forest – 2000 yrs old) and Te Matua Ngahere (father of the forest – 4000 yrs old!). These night time tours are full of Maori myth and legend. **'Twilight Encounter'** is an experience that allows visitors to enter the Waipoua forest at a unique time - a time not experienced by many; a time when its inhabitants change; a time when seeing is replaced with listening and a time when the clouds and sun are replaced by stars and the moon.

DAY 4 Depart in the morning after breakfast, and take a leisurely drive down the West Coast. Turn-off towards Baylys Beach (about 80+kms from Omapere, just before Dargaville). Take a walk on the beach and stop at the Funky Fish Café. Continue along the West Coast road (about 50kms) and stop at the **Kauri Museum**. Carry on the Twin Coast Discovery Road (Highway 16) through to the West Coast beaches at Murawai and see the unique volcanic black sand beaches (used in filming *The Piano* and *Xara Warrior Queen*) and Gannet Colony. Turn off at Kumeu to Highway 24 towards Waitakere, following the Scenic Drive. The region around Kumeu is also host to many fine wineries.

Alternatively, drive straight back down to Auckland. Spend the day amongst the many attractions Auckland has to offer. Visit Kelly Tarlton's Antarctic Centre, Sky Tower, Maritime Museum, Auckland Museum, sail on the Harbour to Waiheke Island (arts & crafts / fine wines), Rangitoto Island (extinct volcanic crater) or the exciting NZL40 America's Cup Yacht.

Accommodation – Auckland – stay at one of the many hotels near the Harbour or a motel located on the fringe of the city close to the motorways.

DAY 5 Drive from Auckland to the Coromandel Peninsula along the Pacific Coast Highway (part of the Great New Zealand Touring Routes) – about 2hrs to the town of Thames via the scenic route. The name Coromandel derives from a sailing ship which in 1820 arrived in the area in search of spars for the Royal British Navy. **Discovered by the two great navigators Kupe and Cook, the Coromandel has a rich and colourful past. The area was founded on gold-mining, but it is now a protected and sustainable region which revolves around eco-tourism.**



There are many natural attractions in the Peninsula, including:

- ✓ 309 Road – visit the 309 Kauri Grove, the finest in the peninsula;
- ✓ Hot Water Beach – at low tide, dig your own hot pool in the sand (½hr drive from Whitianga);
- ✓ Cathedral Cove – walk this iconic coastal track to the Beach or take a scenic boat trip;
- ✓ Bay Carving – carve your own unique bone carving souvenir;
- ✓ Lost Spring Thermal Pools & Day Spa, Whitianga;
- ✓ Paku – climb this volcanic peak at Tairua for a spectacular view of the surrounding area (40mins drive from Whitianga).

- ✓ Rapaura – 64 acres of native bush, garden art, bushwalks, water lilies and a cascading waterfall;
- ✓ Waiau Waterworks – 4 acres of fun, humorous, interactive water-powered toys and sculptures;
- ✓ Driving Creek Railway & Potteries at Coromandel Town (also well known as a haven for artists and craftspeople). Driving Creek Railway is a 3km narrow-gauge mountain railway with 2 spirals, 3 short tunnels, 6 viaducts and 5 reversing points!

Accommodation – Coromandel Peninsula – choose from one of the Golden Chain motels on either the west or east coast, or one of the many guest houses/lodges in the region.

DAY 6 We recommend taking the circular drive around the Peninsula (157kms in total / about 2-3 hrs of driving).

In the afternoon, drive from the Peninsula to the geothermal wonderland of Rotorua (146kms from the southern Coromandel / 2 hrs). Rotorua is the centrepiece of the North Island. **Nature's Spa / Warm Spirit of a Living Culture / Incredible Earth Forces** are all found in Rotorua-Taupo. Instead of taking the straight route, you can also take a detour through Waitomo Caves (a visit to **Ruakuri Caves** is special), or for the Lord of The Rings fans, stop at Matamata and explore the **Hobbiton Village** filming site where some of the Hobbit Holes remain.

Accommodation – Rotorua – there are numerous hotels / motels / guest houses in Rotorua for all interests / budgets.

DAY 7 Some of the many activities to see in Rotorua include:

- ✓ Rotorua Museum
- ✓ Skyline Gondola
- ✓ Te Puia Thermal Reserve & Maori Arts and Crafts Institute
- ✓ Rainbow Springs / Kiwi Encounter
- ✓ Kawarau Jetboat Rotorua
- ✓ Wai-O-Tapu Geothermal Wonderland (Lady Knox Geyser erupts 10:15am daily)
- ✓ Waimangu Volcanic Valley
- ✓ Hidden Valley of Orakei Korako
- ✓ **New Zealand Riverjet Thermal Safari** (half day tour down the Waikato River by jetboat to Orakei Korako)
- ✓ Agrodome Leisure Park (home to the famous Sheep Show)
- ✓ Polynesian Spa
- ✓ **Hells Gate / Wai Ora Spa** (great combination of geothermal reserve and mud bath treatments).



DAY 8 Rotorua activities – see details above

Accommodation - Rotorua.

In the evening, join **Tamaki Maori Village – 'Journey of Ages'**. Travel back in time to a pre-European village and experience customs and traditions of Maori through song, dance and spiritual stories (a past winner of the prestigious Supreme Tourism Award). You will be picked up at your accommodation and experience a complete cultural tour including a Hangi meal (not to be missed!).

## OPTION

If you can fit an extra day in your itinerary, head for the Tongariro National Park - home to Mt Ruapehu and some of the best bushwalking in all of New Zealand.



There is also a special place to stay. Chateau Tongariro was originally built in the 1920s. Recently restored and enlarged, it sits in the middle of this beautiful national park. In the summer, you can experience the **Tongariro Trek**, the longest single day Walk in New Zealand, or take a chair lift to the top of the mountain which in winter is one of New Zealand's major ski fields.

## DAY 9

Drive from Rotorua to Hawke's Bay / Napier (220kms / 3 hrs). On the way down from Rotorua through Taupo, stop at **Huka Falls**. Napier is an historic city with some of the world's best examples of Art Deco architecture and Hawke's Bay is one of the major wine growing areas in the country. The **Art Deco Trust** guided walking tour is a must do – or take a special guided tour in a vintage car).



Accommodation – Napier – The motels/hotels are all located close to the centre of town. There are also many guest houses/lodges centrally located as well as in the centre of the wine region. A unique place to stay is the Art Deco themed Masonic Hotel which overlooks Marine Parade.

## DAY 10

Continue to enjoy the delights of the Hawke's Bay region. Places to visit include:

- ✓ Gannet Safari Tour – at Cape Kidnappers
- ✓ Silky Oak Chocolate Company (for all chocolate lovers)
- ✓ Classic Sheepskins
- ✓ Wine Tours – of all types and many wineries to visit.
- ✓ **Odyssey Progressive Dinner Tour** (be driven to 3 different wineries and enjoy the combination of good food and specially selected wines).
- ✓ National Aquarium of New Zealand
- ✓ Ocean Spa (located on Marine Parade facing the ocean).
- ✓ Get active with one of the **Great Cycle Rides** around the Hawke's Bay region

Accommodation – Napier

## DAY 11

Drive from Napier to Wellington (320kms / 4-5 hrs).

Activities in the Wellington area include the following :

- ✓ Stop at the Mount Bruce National Wildlife Centre (40kms north of Masterton).
- ✓ Visit Zealandia: Karori Sanctuary Experience (a 'predator free' environment for birdlife –visit in late afternoon when the birds return to their roosts)
- ✓ **Te Papa** ('my place') is the unique and fantastic national museum of New Zealand; and worth spending at least a couple hours.
- ✓ Visit the Seal colony down at the South Coast.
- ✓ Drive to the top of Mt Victoria for the views.
- ✓ Ride the Cable Car from Lambton Quay to the top of the Botanic Gardens.
- ✓ **Flat Earth Experiences** offer a variety of small group tours – Wild Wellington; Capital Arts; Maori Treasures; City Highlights 'Inspiration'; Middle Earth Filming Locations.



Accommodation – Wellington – stay in one of the many hotels located right in the heart of the city (so you can walk to most attractions and cafés/restaurants).

Wine lovers can also extend their trip by spending a night in Martinborough, only an hr drive north of Wellington, and home to some of the finest wines in New Zealand.

DAY 12

Enjoy a relaxing morning in Wellington before returning your rental vehicle to the airport where you take your flight back to Sydney.

As a 'final splurge', [Zest Food Tours](#) offer a Gourmet Walking Tour of Wellington – Explore our favourite food places as we wander through the capital's best specialist food stores, including tasting coffee, chocolate, cheeses and regional produce (maybe even roasting your own coffee beans). Talk to owners, baristas, coffee roasters and chefs as we go where only Zest can. The tour is topped with a tasting lunch at one of Wellington's best restaurants. This can be done in time prior to heading to the airport. Zest also have similar tours in Auckland, and it really is worth doing one or the other on your trip.