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AOTEAROA

New Zealand
Travel guide

North Island, South Island and three sample itineraries for Australian travellers.

Open the contents

November 2026 edition

TRIP TOOLS

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PLAN

Where to start

Choose the island, the pace and the way you want to travel before you put together a list of stops. A route with room for a second morning in your favourite place will usually feel better than one that changes hotels every night.

Pick your first route

5–7 days	Choose one island. Auckland, Rotorua and Wellington make a culture-led North Island route. Queenstown, Te Anau and Wānaka make a scenic southern loop.
8–10 days	Take one island further. Add Northland or Hawke’s Bay in the north, or the Mackenzie Country and Christchurch in the south.
12–15 days	Combine a selection from both islands. Fly between islands to spend more time in the south, or use the ferry if Wellington and Marlborough are priorities.
3 weeks or more	Make room for a second coastal region, a slower West Coast drive or a southern extension to Dunedin and Rakiura.

Decide what matters

- For Māori-led experiences, geothermal sights and a wider choice of mild-weather coastal stops, start with the North Island.
- For alpine drives, lake towns, fiord cruises and a choice of walking grades, start with the South Island.
- For a trip with little driving, combine city stays, scenic rail, a domestic flight and guided day excursions. Check timetables before booking the rooms between them.

Set your pace

Choose one main activity per day, two-night bases and a spare day around the experience you would most regret missing.

See also p. 34 p. 35 p. 36

PLAN

When to go

Aotearoa has four seasons, with large differences between regions. Choose the conditions you need for your main activity, then plan a route with enough flexibility to use the best day for it.

Seasons at a glance

Dec–Feb	Longer days and the broadest choice of summer activities. Book key accommodation, car hire and family activities early around holidays.
Mar–May	A good fit for vineyard visits, town stays and autumn colours in Central Otago. Expect shorter days and colder nights as May approaches.
Jun–Aug	Snow sports, hot pools and city breaks. Build in rest days and confirm winter road, vehicle and activity requirements before committing.
Sep–Nov	A changeable shoulder season. Allow for cool mornings, spring weather and late snow at altitude. Check opening schedules for seasonal trips.

Regional decisions

- Northland and Auckland work well for coastal and city breaks, with a rain alternative for boating days.
- Fiordland can be wet in any season. Keep a flexible cruise day and take a waterproof layer even in summer.
- Alpine activity suitability follows actual conditions. A sunny town forecast does not tell you what is happening on a high track.

Before choosing dates

Compare daylight, local school holidays and major events as well as average temperatures. Check cancellation terms for weather-dependent tours.

New Zealand climate guide **MetService**

PLAN

Flights and arrival

Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Queenstown can each work as a gateway. Start from your preferred route, then check which services operate from your Australian departure city on the actual dates you want.

Choose the airports around the route

- Auckland is a useful start for the upper North Island. Wellington suits a southbound route ending at the Cook Strait.
- Christchurch gives you choices across Canterbury, the coast and the Southern Alps. Queenstown suits a compact lakes and Fiordland trip.
- Compare a return flight against an open-jaw itinerary, such as arriving in Auckland and leaving from Christchurch or Queenstown. Include any one-way vehicle charge in the comparison.

Make arrival day easy

- Before committing to a same-day connection, account for immigration, biosecurity, baggage, terminal transfers and check-in. A separate ticket can complicate rebooking.
- Check rental desk hours and after-hours arrangements. For a late arrival, stay nearby and pick up the car after breakfast.
- Plan the first transfer before take-off. Save the hotel address, arrival instructions and a phone number for delayed check-in.

A calmer first night

Keep arrival day flexible. A waterfront walk, dinner and sleep leave more energy for the first full travel day.

See also p. 6 p. 7 p. 8

PLAN

Entry and biosecurity

The rules depend on your passport and immigration status. Check Immigration New Zealand against your own circumstances before buying a non-refundable ticket.

Passport and declaration

- Australian citizens travelling on a valid Australian passport generally do not need a visa or an NZeTA before travel. Entry and character requirements still apply.
- Australian permanent residents normally need an NZeTA unless they already hold a valid New Zealand visa. Travellers on other passports should check their own rules and any requirements for returning to Australia.
- Each traveller, including children and infants, needs a New Zealand Traveller Declaration. For air travel, submission opens 24 hours before the trip to New Zealand starts. Use the free official website or app.

Pack for biosecurity

- Check food, animal and plant products, wood and used outdoor gear before packing. Clean hiking boots, camping equipment and other gear that has been outdoors.
- Declare risk items on the form, including food and used outdoor gear when applicable. A declaration lets staff assess whether the items can enter.
- Recheck your daypack and pockets for snacks or items picked up in transit. If unsure, tell a biosecurity officer.

Use the official sites

Save the official declaration reference and keep passport details available. Entry requirements can change between planning and departure.

Immigration New Zealand **NZ Traveller Declaration** **Biosecurity New Zealand** **Smartraveller**

PLAN

Getting around

Choose the transport for each leg. A hire car gives you flexibility between smaller towns, while a rail or coach day gives everyone a chance to enjoy the route.

Match the mode to the journey

Hire car	Good for rural stays and flexible stops. Check one-way charges, insurance excess and whether your vehicle can cross Cook Strait.
Domestic flight	Useful when a cross-island transfer would take time away from a short trip. Compare door-to-door time, baggage and transfer arrangements.
Scenic rail	Northern Explorer runs between Auckland and Wellington, Coastal Pacific between Picton and Christchurch, and TranzAlpine between Christchurch and Greymouth. Check operating days before joining legs.
Coach or private touring	A good option for a winding or winter route, a mixed-mobility group, or anyone who wants to spend the day looking out the window.

Crossing Cook Strait

Wellington and Picton are the ferry gateways. Reserve the right vehicle length, confirm the terminal and allow the operator’s full check-in buffer. A foot-passenger booking can work if you return one rental car and collect another across the strait.

> **Leave a buffer**
>
> Keep a tight flight, prepaid activity or long drive away from a ferry arrival. Weather and operational changes can disrupt connections.

Interislander **Great Journeys New Zealand** **NZ Transport Agency**

PLAN

Driving in New Zealand

Driving on the left will be familiar to Australian visitors. Winding roads, shorter winter daylight, narrow bridges and alpine conditions still change what makes a comfortable driving day.

Before collecting the keys

- Check that your licence meets NZ Transport Agency requirements and that the rental company accepts it. Bring the original licence and confirm all drivers are on the contract.
- Ask about unsealed-road restrictions, ferry crossings, one-way drops, winter tyres or chains, replacement vehicles and roadside assistance for your chosen route.
- Download offline maps and save accommodation details. Keep space in the schedule for fuel, food, photos and rests.

On the road

- Drive to conditions and read the signs at one-lane bridges. Pull over in a safe place to let traffic pass.
- Stop at designated lookouts and parking bays. Avoid planning alpine pass drives after dark or straight after a late flight.
- Check NZTA conditions before departure. In winter, ask your operator how to fit chains and when to turn back or use another route.

Build in travel breaks

Map times exclude breaks and weather delays. If a route depends on a fixed cruise or ferry time, stay closer the night before or choose a guided transfer.

NZ Transport Agency **NZTA Journey Planner** **MetService**

PLAN

Costs and money

Make the budget in New Zealand dollars. Compare the full cost of the route, including the things that sit outside the advertised flight, room or vehicle price.

Build a usable estimate

Flights and transfers	Include baggage, seat selection, transfers and any overnight stay caused by an awkward connection.
Accommodation	Multiply nightly prices by rooms and nights, then include parking and any major holiday or event costs.
Transport	Price fuel, one-way fees, ferry costs, parking and rental excess options. For public transport, include transfers at both ends.
Food and experiences	Confirm which breakfasts and dinners are included. Add cruises, guided experiences, rentals and any paid access for the walks you choose.
Insurance and buffer	Allow for the travel insurance you need and a contingency for an extra night or an itinerary change.

Compare like for like

Check whether quoted amounts are per person, per room or per group. Ask whether prices are in NZD or AUD and which inclusions are conditional. Consider card conversion and transaction fees when comparing payment options.

> **Spend where it changes the trip**
>
> A closer night before a cruise or a few hours with a good local guide can be worth more than a room upgrade every night.

See also p. 10 p. 33 p. 40

PLAN

Where to stay

Use accommodation as part of the route design. Choose a base for what you want to do from it, how you will get there and how easy it will be to leave or change plans.

Match the room to the trip

- A central hotel can cut transport time in Auckland or Wellington. Confirm what the room rate includes and whether parking needs a reservation.
- A motel or apartment can suit families and multi-night stops. Check laundry, kitchenette equipment, bedding and access between the car and the room.
- Boutique lodges and farm stays can add something memorable to the route. Check evening meal options, arrival times and access from the main road.
- Holiday parks can work well for campers and families. Check serviced sites, cabin linen, communal kitchen arrangements and cancellation terms.

Choose the right location

- Pick Te Anau for an easier start to Milford Road. For Aoraki, compare village accommodation with Twizel or Lake Tekapo / Takapō based on your activities.
- Compare Queenstown’s waterfront convenience with quieter bases such as Arrowtown or Frankton. Factoring in traffic and parking can change the decision.
- For walking holidays, book rooms after the huts, shuttles and key access dates line up.

Check the actual room

Get details in writing if you need a roll-in shower, step-free access, twin beds, connecting rooms or a firm late check-in.

See also p. 22 p. 26 p. 28 p. 29 p. 37

NORTH ISLAND

North Island at a glance

The North Island suits a trip that mixes cities, Māori-led experiences, geothermal landscapes and the coast. Choose a through-route or a loop before you add side trips.

Shape the route

Upper north	Auckland → Bay of Islands → Auckland. Pick this for harbours, islands and a visit to Waitangi. Add extra nights for the Far North.
Central highlights	Auckland → Matamata → Rotorua → Taupō. Pick this for film locations, geothermal parks and lakes. Choose one main activity each day.
Southbound	Rotorua → Taupō → Wellington, with optional time in Tongariro or Hawke’s Bay. Fly home from Wellington or use the ferry to continue.

Make room for what you came for

- Choose Rotorua for guided Māori cultural experiences and geothermal sites, and Wellington for museums and a compact city stay.
- Treat the Coromandel as a coastal stay of its own if beaches matter. A quick detour leaves less time for tides, parking and slow roads.
- Allow a weather fallback for Tongariro and boat trips. Try a visitor centre, a shorter forest walk or an indoor activity when conditions change.

> **Good first route**
>
> In seven days, Auckland, Rotorua, Taupō and Wellington make a practical starting shape. Add Hawke’s Bay or Northland when you can give it the extra nights.

Cooee North Island guide **Cooee things to do**

See also **p. 12** **p. 15** **p. 17** **p. 19** **p. 34**

NORTH ISLAND

Auckland / Tāmaki Makaurau

Auckland is a useful place to settle into the time zone and spend a day by the harbour before you take on a longer drive. A simple two-night stay can cover city, waterfront and one island experience.



Auckland waterfront and skyline · Unsplash via the Cooee Tours New Zealand guide

Choose your day

- Start at the waterfront and walk through the Viaduct or Wynyard Quarter. Add Auckland War Memorial Museum if you want more time with the region’s history.
- Take a Waiheke ferry for beaches, food and vineyards. Confirm local driving, bus or shuttle arrangements before relying on a winery transfer.
- Consider Rangitoto for a more active island day. Check ferry times, track conditions and what you need to carry from the mainland.

Choose your base

- A central waterfront stay makes sense if ferries are the priority. Check the walking route to your accommodation and the terminal you will actually use.
- For a late arrival followed by a northbound drive, compare an airport-area overnight with the extra transfers a short city stay would add.

Best use of a spare day

Choose either a harbour island or a city day. Trying to fit both around an early onward flight makes either one harder to enjoy.

Cooee Auckland guide

See also p. 5 p. 13 p. 34

NORTH ISLAND

Northland and the Bay of Islands

Give the Bay of Islands two or three nights if you want time for both the water and the history of Waitangi. Choose one base and build around the forecast.

Explore the bay

- Visit the Waitangi Treaty Grounds for a guided introduction to Te Tiriti o Waitangi / the Treaty of Waitangi and the stories of the site.
- Use Paihia for easy access to many boat departures. Choose Russell for a quieter historic-town stay, or Kerikeri for a more inland base.
- Check what a boat trip includes, where it departs and what happens if the sea is unsuitable. Keep a road or museum option in reserve.

Go further north when time allows

- Te Rerenga Wairua / Cape Reinga is spiritually significant. Allow time for the drive and follow the guidance and signs on site.
- Do not assume a hire car can drive on Ninety Mile Beach. Confirm the rental exclusions and consider a guided trip if the beach route is important.
- For a slower option, use an extra night for the Hokianga or local walking rather than treating the Far North as an extension of a full boat day.

First booking to choose

Decide if Waitangi or a particular boat experience sets the day, then leave the other one flexible for weather and pace.

Cooee Bay of Islands guide **Waitangi Treaty Grounds**

See also **p. 11** **p. 12** **p. 31**

NORTH ISLAND

The Coromandel Peninsula

The appeal is the time between the stops, from forest and coastal roads to beach villages and a swim when conditions allow. Pick an east- or west-coast base and avoid spending the entire visit in the car.



Cathedral Cove / Te Whanganui-a-Hei · Borvan53 / Wikimedia Commons, public domain (cropped)

Choose a side

- Hahei and Whitianga suit eastern beach days and trips towards Cathedral Cove / Te Whanganui-a-Hei. Verify track, boat and shuttle access before leaving your base.
- Thames and Coromandel Town suit a western approach, heritage stops and short drives to nearby walks and lookouts.
- Hot Water Beach is tide-dependent. Check the local tide and safety advice, and allow for walking access and available parking.

Plan around the conditions

- Road maintenance, landslips and seasonal traffic can change access. Check the road network and local notices before locking in a circuit.
- Select a sheltered beach or a town stop for a rough-weather day. Check local swimming advice and keep away from unstable cliffs and closed tracks.

Allow two nights

If the only available time is a single day from Auckland, pick one area or a guided coastal trip and confirm the return plan in advance.

Tourism New Zealand destinations **NZTA Journey Planner**

See also **p. 8** **p. 11**

NORTH ISLAND

Rotorua and geothermal country

Rotorua works well as a two- or three-night base. Choose a geothermal visit, a Māori-led experience and a slower outing around the lakes or forest.



Geothermal activity at Mitai, Rotorua · Nolabob / Wikimedia Commons, CC0 1.0 (cropped)

Pick experiences that complement each other

- Te Puia offers geothermal sights and Māori arts in one visit. Compare what its tours include and whether you want to stay for an evening experience.
- Wai-O-Tapu, Waimangu and Whakarewarewa each offer a different way to see the area. Choose according to walking distance, cultural interests and transport.
- The Redwoods and nearby lakes balance a busy sightseeing day. Hot pools are another option. Ask the operator about access, entry conditions and whether advance booking is needed.

Build a practical day

- Ask how much walking is involved, how much time is hosted and what facilities are available near the meeting point.
- Keep to marked paths around geothermal areas. Steam and water can be hot and ground off the route can be unstable.
- If the group has different interests, plan one shared outing and leave the afternoon free.

Leave an unhurried evening

If you book a hāngī or hosted performance, allow time to hear the stories and enjoy the meal without a late onward drive.

Cooee Rotorua guide **Tourism New Zealand Māori culture**

See also **p. 16** **p. 17** **p. 31** **p. 34**

NORTH ISLAND

Matamata and Waitomo

Hobbiton and the Waitomo caves are often combined on one trip, but their timed visits and transfers make a useful case for choosing the day's priorities before booking.

Decide what kind of day you want

- For a film-focused visit, reserve a Hobbiton tour from the correct meeting point. Allow for check-in, guided walking and travel from your base.
- At Waitomo, compare the standard guided glowworm cave tour with specialist adventure activities. Ask about stairs, lighting, narrow passages and activity-specific requirements.
- If you want both in one day, match the actual session times and allow a meal and travel buffer. A guided combined day can remove the transfer planning.

Fit the stops to your route

- From Auckland, a combined outing can be a long day. From Rotorua, Matamata can work as a shorter excursion if your party wants time to enjoy the town later.
- Do not book an inflexible late dinner or another timed entry straight after a long cave-and-film day.
- For photography, check each operator's rules. Have an alternate plan for anyone who would prefer to stay above ground.

> **Reserve timed activities first**
>
> Build the drive around the confirmed visit times. Keep your hotel change, fuel stop and lunch flexible.

Hobbiton Movie Set **Waitomo Glowworm Caves**

See also **p. 12** **p. 15** **p. 34**

NORTH ISLAND

Taupō and Tongariro

Lake Taupō suits a relaxed stop on the way south. Tongariro is alpine country and needs a separate weather decision, a realistic assessment of your group and a plan for the day.



Emerald Lakes and Red Crater, Tongariro · Jeffrey Pang / Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 2.0 (cropped)

Around the lake

- Start with a lakefront walk, a visit to Huka Falls from designated viewpoints or a booked boat outing when conditions suit.
- From Taupō or Tūrangi, choose a short walk or an indoor alternative if wind or rain rules out a longer hike.
- Decide if you want a lakeside base or to stay closer to the national park. A shorter transfer helps on an early walking day.

The Tongariro Alpine Crossing

- Read DOC’s current track advice. Booking is recommended and shuttle or guided services need their own reservation. Confirm pickup, finish and emergency arrangements.
- The crossing is exposed and demanding. Choose it only if the group, equipment and conditions are suitable. Take operator and DOC advice on whether to proceed.
- Consider a lower-altitude route or visitor centre if the alpine forecast is unsuitable. Winter or snow conditions can require skills, equipment and a guide.

> **Protect the walking day**
>
> Keep the following morning flexible. A fixed ticket out the same night leaves little room for an altered plan.

DOC Tongariro Alpine Crossing **MetService**

See also **p. 8** **p. 32** **p. 34**

NORTH ISLAND

Hawke’s Bay and the east coast

Hawke’s Bay makes a rewarding break from the central volcanic route. Give Napier and nearby food and wine country time of their own if architecture, cycling or restaurants are priorities.

Establish a base

- In Napier, choose an Art Deco walk or a local history visit. The central streets are easiest to appreciate when you have time to stop and look up.
- Hastings and Havelock North suit travellers planning winery lunches, market stops and nearby cycling. Reserve transport if the itinerary includes tastings.
- Treat Gisborne and the East Cape as a distinct extension. Check road conditions, fuel availability and distances between services before leaving the main route.

Plan a day with range

- Pair one booked lunch or tasting with an easy town or coastal visit, rather than scheduling a string of timed tastings.
- If cycling, match the route to the group’s confidence, terrain and wind. Ask about e-bike sizing, pickup and a fallback if a rider wants to finish early.

Time trade-off

On a seven-day north-to-south trip, Hawke’s Bay is an optional detour. Add two nights if you want a full day of local food, wine or cycling.

Tourism New Zealand destinations **NZTA Journey Planner**

See also **p. 4** **p. 10** **p. 33**

NORTH ISLAND

Wellington / Te Whanganui-a-Tara

Wellington is both a destination and an inter-island connection. Allow a full day in the city if museums, coffee, gardens or a wildlife visit are part of the reason you are coming.

A useful first day

- Start at the waterfront and allow time for Te Papa. Check what is open and whether a particular exhibition needs a booking.
- Add the Cable Car and Botanic Garden, or choose Zealandia if native wildlife and conservation are a priority. Confirm the grades, surfaces and meeting points for your group.
- Keep a short indoor list for a windy or wet afternoon. Galleries, cafés and the museum can make a full day without a long drive.

Flying out or taking the ferry

- Check the correct terminal, rental-car arrangements and check-in window before booking the next hotel.
- If you are crossing as a foot passenger, plan how you and your luggage will get between the Picton terminal and the next rental desk, hotel or train.
- Leave a buffer between the ferry and any other fixed departure. If you fly home from Wellington, consider a final night in the city.

> **Choose the city for its own sake**
> Two nights can give you a full day to explore and an unhurried exit the next morning.

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa **Interislander**

See also **p. 7** **p. 21** **p. 34** **p. 36**

SOUTH ISLAND

South Island at a glance

Start with a gateway and choose two or three regions that make sense together. Long coastal distances and alpine passes make a ring around the whole island a different trip from a lakes holiday.

Three useful route shapes

Lakes and fiords	Queenstown → Wānaka → Te Anau → Queenstown. Allow separate lake days and a Fiordland weather buffer.
Alps and lakes	Christchurch → Lake Tekapo / Takapō → Aoraki / Mount Cook → Wānaka or Queenstown. Suits an open-jaw trip with fewer repeated roads.
Coast and food	Picton → Marlborough → Nelson or Abel Tasman, with an onward leg to Christchurch via Kaikōura if time allows. Build the order around your ferry and flight choices.

Know what a detour costs

- The West Coast is worth several days for the coast, rainforest and glacial valleys. Adding it to a busy lakes loop changes the driving burden.
- Dunedin, the Catlins and Rakiura reward a separate extension. Check ferry, wildlife and rural accommodation availability before adding a southern leg.
- Add a quieter base or free half-day between big transfers. If Milford Sound is central to the trip, choose where you will sleep the night before.

Good first route

The 10-day South Island itinerary covers Canterbury, the Mackenzie, Wānaka, Fiordland and Queenstown without trying to circle the island.

Cooee South Island guide **Cooee things to do**

See also p. 23 p. 26 p. 28 p. 29 p. 35

SOUTH ISLAND

Marlborough and Nelson

The top of the South Island pairs the sheltered Marlborough Sounds with vineyards, produce and easy access to the Nelson Tasman coast. Add time here if you are crossing the Cook Strait.

Marlborough

- Picton / Waitohi is a practical ferry and water-based holiday base. Choose a short harbour outing or plan an inland transfer to Blenheim for vineyard visits.
- For the Queen Charlotte Track, decide whether to walk a section or attempt multiple days. Check water transfers, access passes where needed and return times.
- Pick one long lunch or tasting and organise transport. Wine country is enjoyable at a slow pace and easiest when nobody has to hurry to a ferry.

Nelson and Tasman

- Nelson makes a useful city base for food, galleries and a first coastal outing. Motueka, Kaiteriteri and Mārahau put you closer to many Abel Tasman departures.
- A ferry that arrives late can make an onward rural drive less appealing. Keep a night near the terminal if visibility or fatigue might be a concern.

Plan transfers as part of the stay

Match the ferry, hire car handover, train or shuttle before committing to non-refundable accommodation.

Interislander **Tourism New Zealand destinations**

See also **p. 7** **p. 19** **p. 22** **p. 33**

SOUTH ISLAND

Abel Tasman and Golden Bay

The Abel Tasman coast works as a day out or a longer walk. Decide how much time you want on foot, on the water and on the beach before choosing your transfer.

Pick the right outing

- A water taxi both ways can give you a manageable section of the coast track. Book the right beach pickup and ask what changes if the sea state is rough.
- Choose a guided kayak trip only after confirming conditions, paddling requirements and whether land or water transfers are included.
- For a multi-day walk, align hut or campsite bookings with transfer times. Tidal crossings, weather and route direction affect the distances you can cover comfortably.

Make Golden Bay a stay

- Consider Takaka or the coast for a slower visit rather than squeezing it between two timed Abel Tasman activities.
- Ask about travel time over Tākaka Hill, local operating hours and where you will refuel. Book seasonal accommodation and check conditions on the day.

Confirm the details

Check tides, luggage limits, toilet locations and boarding access. A beach pickup may involve steps, sand or wet feet.

Department of Conservation **Tourism New Zealand destinations**

See also p. 21 p. 32 p. 37

SOUTH ISLAND

Christchurch and Banks Peninsula

Christchurch / Ōtautahi is a useful arrival point for Canterbury. Allow time to enjoy the city itself before deciding whether to head towards the peninsula, the mountains or the coast.



Christchurch Art Gallery / Te Puna o Waiwhetū · Cooee Tours South Island guide

A city day that flows

- Start with the Botanic Gardens and the Avon River / Ōtākaro, then choose the Arts Centre precinct or Christchurch Art Gallery.
- Consider a central stay if you plan to walk or use public transport. Arrivals connected to a rail departure should check the actual station location and check-in.
- Use a late afternoon for a market or dinner. A relaxed first city day makes the longer inland drive more enjoyable.

A day on Banks Peninsula

- Akaroa makes a full outing with a harbour cruise or an easy waterfront visit. Narrower roads and viewpoint stops can add time.
- If wildlife is the main reason to go, confirm the operator’s approach to sightings and activity cancellations. Keep a land-based option open.

> **Choose the next leg early**
>
> Use Christchurch as a base for Banks Peninsula or as the gateway to the Mackenzie Country. A fixed rail departure deserves a separate day in the plan.

Tourism New Zealand destinations **Great Journeys New Zealand**

See also **p. 5** **p. 7** **p. 24** **p. 26** **p. 35**

SOUTH ISLAND

Kaikōura and the coast

The Kaikōura coast is where mountain views and marine experiences sit close together. Stay overnight if the boat trip is the main reason for the visit and keep the option to change days.



Kaikōura coastline · AnnWoolliams / Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0 (cropped)

Build a flexible visit

- Book with a reputable wildlife operator and confirm check-in, weather changes, refund rules and any age or mobility restrictions before paying.
- Marine wildlife is wild and sightings vary. Build in time for the coast and township so a change to a cruise does not empty the day.
- Select a shorter section of the coastal walking options if the group wants an easier outing. Check terrain, wind and whether the route fits everyone.

Fit the coast into a longer route

- Kaikōura can work between Picton and Christchurch by road or on applicable Coastal Pacific services. Match your luggage and transfers to the transport mode you choose.
- If connecting with a ferry or a flight, put the wildlife outing on a different day where possible. Check live conditions on State Highway 1 before driving.

Use the shoreline respectfully

Keep your distance from seals and other wildlife. Follow DOC guidance, stay on marked routes and give animals a clear path to the sea.

Department of Conservation **NZTA Journey Planner** **Great Journeys New Zealand**

See also **p. 7** **p. 21** **p. 23** **p. 32**

SOUTH ISLAND

The West Coast and glaciers

The West Coast is best enjoyed as its own journey. Allow time for coastal scenery, rainforest and the glacial valleys rather than treating the region as a shortcut between alpine towns.

Choose a realistic route

- Punakaiki works well for a short coastal stop. Greymouth and Hokitika can anchor a longer overnight route, with options for town walks, food and crafts.
- Franz Josef / Waiau and Fox Glacier / Te Moeka o Tuawe reward a stay with enough flexibility to use a suitable walking or flight window.
- If you cross an alpine pass to or from Canterbury or Otago, check live road conditions and daylight. Place meal and fuel stops before remote stretches.

Pick the glacier experience

- Check DOC for the currently open viewpoints. Ice position, weather and track access change, and valley walks do not necessarily reach the ice.
- Helicopter and guided ice experiences depend on conditions and operator requirements. Confirm what is included if flights are cancelled and set aside an independent alternative.

> **Keep a second option**
>
> A short rainforest walk or town visit can be as useful as a glacier flight for a mixed-interest group, especially if the forecast is uncertain.

Department of Conservation **NZTA Journey Planner** **Great Journeys New Zealand**

See also **p. 7** **p. 8** **p. 20** **p. 32**

SOUTH ISLAND

Aoraki and the Mackenzie Country

Pair the alpine valleys of Aoraki / Mount Cook with the lakes, towns and dark skies of the lower Mackenzie basin.



Lakeside scenery in the Mackenzie Country · Cooee Tours South Island guide

Aoraki / Mount Cook

- Start at the visitor centre or a suitable lookout. Check current DOC track status and conditions before choosing the Hooker Valley Track or a shorter walk.
- Take wind, layers and daylight seriously. Bridge and track restrictions can change, and the mountain may be hidden on the day.
- Staying in the village reduces the morning transfer. Twizel and Lake Tekapo / Takapō give different accommodation choices and useful alternatives in bad weather.

Takapō and the lakes

- Choose a lakeside visit, a hot-pool session or a stargazing outing. Stargazing still depends on cloud, visibility and operator policy.
- Give Lake Pukaki a relaxed stop on the drive and use designated parking areas. Protect the trip by leaving time to turn back or shorten walks.

> **Book a flexible evening**
>
> If a dark-sky experience is important, allow more than one night or ask about rescheduling. Put your alpine walk on whichever day has the right conditions.

DOC Hooker Valley Track **Department of Conservation** **MetService**

See also **p. 8** **p. 10** **p. 23** **p. 35**

SOUTH ISLAND

Wānaka and the Upper Clutha

Wānaka is a useful place to slow down between touring days. It combines a lakefront, easy town-based options and access to more demanding country when conditions and the group suit.

Keep one day local

- Start with the lakefront or a shorter walk. Add a booked attraction, gallery or long lunch so the group has a shared plan if the weather changes.
- For longer walks such as Roys Peak, check DOC conditions, seasonal access and the grade. Choose a shorter outing if energy, weather or daylight is limited.
- Ask about parking and access if travelling with a larger vehicle. A stay within walking distance of the lake can reduce short car trips.

Use the route to your advantage

- Wānaka works naturally between the Mackenzie and Queenstown, or before a West Coast leg when you have several extra nights.
- Do not schedule a large mountain walk on the same day as a long drive. Use an overnight buffer after a tiring activity.

A useful two-night stop

Give yourself one full day without moving the luggage. The easiest plan is a choice between a lake day and a walk, made after checking conditions.

Tourism New Zealand destinations **Department of Conservation** **NZTA Journey Planner**

See also **p. 20** **p. 26** **p. 28** **p. 35**

SOUTH ISLAND

Queenstown and Central Otago

Use Queenstown as a base for a few different kinds of days. The lakefront, Arrowtown, Gibbston and the surrounding landscape give you options across activity levels.



Queenstown and Lake Wakatipu · Cooee Tours South Island guide

Choose a day that fits

- For an easier day, take a lakefront walk or a suitable cruise, then make time for a meal with the group. Ask about step-free boarding if it matters.
- For active days, select an activity by its eligibility, pace and conditions. Compare transport times before combining an adventure booking with another timed outing.
- Use Arrowtown for history, cafés and a slower change of pace. Gibbston works well for a hosted wine visit or a lunch with transport included.

Plan from your accommodation

- A central stay reduces some transfers. Consider Frankton or Arrowtown where the group prefers a quieter base or convenient parking.
- Book early in peak travel periods for the specific room layout, transport or activity you need.

A separate Fiordland decision

Queenstown day trips to Milford Sound can be long. For an easier pace, stay in Te Anau or choose a coach option that fits the group.

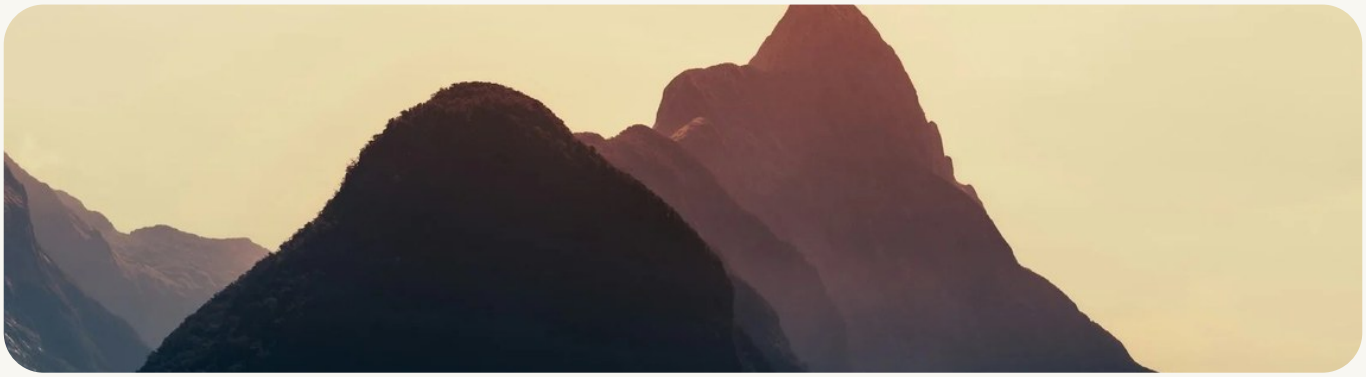
Cooee South Island guide **Tourism New Zealand destinations**

See also **p. 10** **p. 29** **p. 33** **p. 35**

SOUTH ISLAND

Fiordland and Milford Sound

Piopiotahi / Milford Sound and Patea / Doubtful Sound are distinct experiences. Put your Fiordland booking and its travel time near the start of the planning process.



Piopiotahi / Milford Sound at dusk · Cooee Tours South Island guide

Milford Sound / Piopiotahi

- Use Te Anau for a shorter approach. DOC estimates about 2½ hours one way from Te Anau and 4½ hours from Queenstown, before stops. Add time for conditions, parking and check-in.
- State Highway 94 is an alpine road. Check current conditions before departure and make room for mountain weather, traffic and stopping restrictions.
- A coach and cruise can suit anyone who prefers to watch the scenery or have the transfer organised. Confirm the exact pickup and return time.

Doubtful Sound / Patea

- Expect a longer outing with transfers arranged by the operator, typically via Manapouri. Ask what the booking includes and what facilities are available during the day.
- Choose Milford for a classic road-and-cruise day. Choose Doubtful if a longer, more remote outing is one of the main reasons for visiting Fiordland.

Keep a weather buffer

Give Te Anau two nights where possible. Check your operator’s cancellation and rescheduling terms before adding a fixed onward transfer.

DOC Milford Road **NZTA Journey Planner** **MetService**

See also **p. 7** **p. 8** **p. 28** **p. 35**

SOUTH ISLAND

Dunedin, the Catlins and Rakiura

Allow an extension for the lower South Island. The appeal is unhurried coastal stops, wildlife and places that need more time than a brief transit through Dunedin.

Choose the right base for wildlife

- In Dunedin / Ōtepoti, compare city heritage with a guided Otago Peninsula outing. Check schedules and viewing conditions, especially for activities that run late in the day.
- In the Catlins, choose a short list of waterfalls, beaches and viewpoints. Have a meal and fuel plan before driving into sparsely serviced areas.
- Use Invercargill or Bluff as a staging point if a ferry is part of the trip. Rakiura / Stewart Island works best with a stay that leaves room for weather changes.

Keep expectations realistic

- Wildlife sightings vary. Use a reputable operator and follow site guidance for viewing distances, photography and quiet access.
- Confirm ferry access, transfers and any booked walks. Leave a buffer before your return flight, particularly if you are connecting from the island.

> **Trade time for a better visit**
>
> When the trip is short, choose Dunedin and the peninsula or a dedicated deep-south extension. Giving each area time usually improves the trip.

Tourism New Zealand destinations **Department of Conservation**

See also **p. 20** **p. 24** **p. 32** **p. 37**

EXPERIENCES

Māori culture and local protocols

Māori culture is living and local. Choose experiences led by the people who share their own stories, and allow time to learn how place, history and language connect on your route.

Choose an experience with context

- At Waitangi, start with a guided visit and make time for the museums and grounds. This helps you understand more than a single performance or stop.
- In Rotorua, compare geothermal and arts experiences, evening hosting and kai such as a hāngī. Ask what part of the experience is guided and what is included.
- At museums, galleries and locally led walks around the country, be open to different histories and perspectives from the region you are visiting.

Follow the guidance of your hosts

- Ask before photographing people, ceremonies and cultural spaces. Follow invitations and site guidance when entering a marae or a place of significance.
- Use the place names and pronunciations your hosts share. Treat cancellations or access restrictions as part of respecting the place.
- Let the operator know of mobility or dietary needs in advance so they can tell you what can be accommodated.

> **Give the visit time**
> Choose one experience you can give proper attention to. Check the meeting point, start time and return arrangements first.

Waitangi Treaty Grounds **Tourism New Zealand Māori culture** **Cooee Rotorua guide**

See also **p. 13** **p. 15** **p. 19**

EXPERIENCES

Wildlife, walks and Great Walks

The best outdoor day is the one the whole group can enjoy with the actual weather, access and equipment on the day. Use current track information before building a trip around a route.

Choose the right walking level

Short and easy	A lakeside section, visitor-centre walk or marked coastal viewpoint still gives you time outdoors. Ask about surfaces, gradients and toilets.
Full-day walk	Check climb, exposure, track status and estimated time. Share your plan, carry appropriate gear and choose a turnaround time.
Multi-day or Great Walk	Match hut or campsite reservations to the route direction, access, transport and season. Book the relevant route with DOC or the listed provider.

Watch wildlife with care

- Follow site and operator instructions and avoid feeding or approaching wildlife. Choose guided viewing if it helps you understand the place and the rules.
- Clean or disinfect footwear and gear when instructed at track entrances and between waterways. Check local rules, especially in kauri areas.

> **Make a separate weather decision**
>
> A booking is a reservation. Check the local forecast, DOC alerts and actual group capability before departing.

Department of Conservation **DOC booking service** **MetService**

See also **p. 8** **p. 17** **p. 22** **p. 26**

EXPERIENCES

Food, wine and local stops

Build a food day around one or two experiences. A market, lunch and short scenic stop often give you more of a region than a schedule full of timed tastings.

Choose a region for the experience

Waiheke and Auckland	Combine harbour travel with a long lunch, market or cellar door. Match ferry and ground transport before booking.
Hawke’s Bay	Pair a Napier architecture visit with a winery lunch or cycling day. Choose a designated driver or organised transport.
Marlborough	Build a visit from Blenheim around a few contrasting cellar doors. Allow time to return to Picton if using the ferry.
Central Otago	Use Queenstown, Arrowtown, Gibbston or Cromwell as a base, depending on the wines and scenery you want to explore.

Leave room for local food

- Try a farmers’ market or bakery stop and keep space for local produce, seafood and coffee. Check opening days, especially in smaller towns.
- Confirm the tour or meal inclusions and tell providers about dietary needs before travel. Ask what is available for non-drinkers and children.

Plan the way home first

Arrange transport before tasting. In rural areas, check whether a pre-booked shuttle is needed.

Tourism New Zealand destinations **Tourism New Zealand Māori culture**

See also **p. 9** **p. 18** **p. 21** **p. 28**

ITINERARIES

7 days on the North Island

A practical first trip from Auckland to Wellington. It pairs a harbour city, a central geothermal stay and a lake stop before finishing in the capital.

The route

Days 1–2 · Auckland	Settle in, explore the waterfront and choose one city or Waiheke outing. Sleep in Auckland both nights.
Day 3 · Auckland to Rotorua	Travel south and add Matamata only if you have a suitable timed visit. Sleep in Rotorua.
Day 4 · Rotorua	Choose a geothermal visit and a Māori-led experience, with time for a forest or lake stop. Sleep in Rotorua.
Day 5 · Rotorua to Taupō	Drive south, visit Huka Falls or the lakefront and keep the afternoon easy. Sleep in Taupō.
Day 6 · Taupō to Wellington	Make it a transfer day with planned breaks. Stay in Wellington for the evening.
Day 7 · Wellington	Visit Te Papa or the waterfront if flight timing allows, then depart. Add a night for a full city day.

Adapt the route

For a shorter drive plan, take out a detour. For an alpine walk or a Hawke’s Bay stay, add nights rather than compressing the rest.

See also p. 5 p. 12 p. 15 p. 16 p. 17 p. 19

ITINERARIES

10 days on the South Island

A one-way journey from Christchurch to Queenstown, with two-night bases for the Mackenzie, Wānaka, Fiordland and Queenstown. Check one-way hire arrangements before booking.

The route

Day 1 · Christchurch	Arrive, settle in and get comfortable with the time zone. Sleep in Christchurch.
Days 2–3 · Mackenzie Country	Drive to Takapō or Twizel and take a separate day for Aoraki or a shorter lake outing. Sleep in the Mackenzie both nights.
Days 4–5 · Wānaka	Transfer to Wānaka, then choose a lakefront or walking day that suits the group. Sleep in Wānaka both nights.
Days 6–7 · Te Anau	Transfer to Te Anau and take the next suitable day for Milford Sound. Sleep in Te Anau both nights.
Days 8–9 · Queenstown	Finish with the lakefront, Arrowtown or a hosted Central Otago excursion. Sleep in Queenstown both nights.
Day 10 · Depart Queenstown	Allow time for the rental return and a flight buffer. Plan any international connection around actual check-in requirements.

Keep a fallback

If conditions disrupt Milford Road, ask about rebooking and use shorter local options while your group is based in Te Anau.

See also p. 7 p. 23 p. 26 p. 27 p. 28 p. 29

ITINERARIES

14 days across both islands

Start in Auckland and finish in Queenstown. This itinerary uses a domestic flight deliberately so you can spend more time on the places you came to see.

The route

Days 1–2 · Auckland	Arrive, explore the city and choose a waterfront, museum or harbour island day. Sleep in Auckland.
Days 3–4 · Rotorua	Explore geothermal landscapes and book time with a Māori-led host. Sleep in Rotorua.
Day 5 · Taupō	Take a lakeside pause before the drive south. Sleep in Taupō.
Days 6–7 · Wellington	Travel to Wellington and allow a full city day for Te Papa or another local experience. Sleep in Wellington.
Day 8 · Christchurch	Fly to Christchurch and book onward transport on a separate schedule. Sleep in Christchurch.
Days 9–10 · Mackenzie	Choose a base for Takapō and Aoraki. Leave the more exposed outing for the better day.
Days 11–13 · Queenstown	Settle in, explore the lakes area and choose a suitable Milford option if the length of the day suits the group. Keep a backup day.
Day 14 · Depart	Leave from Queenstown with time for check-in and vehicle return.

Prefer the Cook Strait ferry?

Add a night around Picton or Marlborough, and put any onward train or long drive on a separate day.

See also p. 7 p. 19 p. 21 p. 26 p. 28 p. 29

TRIP TOOLS

Plan for the people travelling

Start with how the group wants to spend its energy. A good plan gives everyone a way to participate, with room to opt out of a long drive or a strenuous outing.

For families and mixed-age groups

- Check child seats, family room layouts, meal times and activity age or height rules. Build in outdoor time between longer transfers.
- Combine one shared outing with a free afternoon. Rotorua, Christchurch and lake towns all allow different pace choices.

For travellers who prefer a steadier pace

- Choose two- or three-night bases, short transfer days and a seat or waiting area at timed attractions. Communicate preferred walking distance and pace.
- Ask whether meals, breaks and luggage assistance are part of a tour. A private vehicle or a coach day may make a longer road journey easier.

For accessible travel

- Ask about actual boarding steps, handrails, room measurements, bathrooms, gradients, seat transfers and scooter or wheelchair storage. Confirm in writing.
- Describe the access features you need and ask the operator to check each leg. Accessibility can differ between a hotel, transfer, boat and attraction.

Give specific requirements

“Step-free from vehicle to room” or “about 15 minutes on flat ground” helps a provider give a more useful answer.

See also p. 7 p. 10 p. 38 p. 40

TRIP TOOLS

Before you leave

Run through the route once from arrival to departure. Check the tickets, transfers and one or two experiences that set the rhythm of the whole trip.

A week or more before leaving

- Confirm the passport and entry rules for every traveller. Save the official declaration instructions and check the departure window.
- Confirm each airport, terminal, transfer, rental agreement and ferry or rail check-in. Keep offline copies of key booking references.
- Check insurance cover for your route, planned activities, medical care and evacuation. Read the policy conditions and keep its assistance number somewhere easy to reach.

A day or two before leaving

- Recheck local weather, road and track alerts and operator messages. Clean outdoor equipment and pack layers for your actual activities.
- Share your key bookings and itinerary with someone at home. Carry a charged phone and offline directions for rural travel days.
- Recheck medicines, food and outdoor gear for declaration requirements. Submit the official declaration within the permitted window.

In an emergency in New Zealand

Call 111 for urgent police, fire or ambulance assistance. Follow the advice of local authorities during severe weather or other disruptions.

Smartraveller **NZ emergency services** **NZ Traveller Declaration** **Biosecurity New Zealand** **NZTA Journey Planner** **MetService**

See also **p. 6** **p. 7** **p. 8** **p. 39**

TRIP TOOLS

Sources and travel links

Entry and safety references checked 21 November 2026. Open the official sites again close to departure for current requirements, route conditions and reservations.

ENTRY AND SAFETY

Immigration New Zealand
Entry for Australians and permanent residents

NZ Traveller Declaration
Free declaration and submission timing

Biosecurity New Zealand
Declaring food and outdoor gear

Smartraveller
Australian advice and insurance

NZ emergency services
Emergency number 111

TRANSPORT AND WEATHER

NZ Transport Agency
Visitor licences and driving

NZTA Journey Planner
Road conditions and closures

MetService
Weather, warnings and local forecasts

New Zealand climate guide
Seasonal overview

Interislander
Cook Strait terminals and check-in

Great Journeys New Zealand
Scenic rail routes and timetables

PARKS AND TRACKS

Department of Conservation
Track alerts, parks and wildlife guidance

DOC booking service
Great Walks, huts and campsites

DOC Tongariro Alpine Crossing
Track advice and walk booking

DOC Hooker Valley Track
Aoraki track conditions and access

DOC Milford Road
Driving times and conditions

DESTINATIONS AND CULTURE

Tourism New Zealand destinations
Regional visitor information

Tourism New Zealand Māori culture
Locally led experiences and cultural context

Waitangi Treaty Grounds
Visits and hosted experiences

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa
Visit information and exhibitions

Hobbiton Movie Set
Visit options and tickets

Waitomo Glowworm Caves
Cave experiences and access

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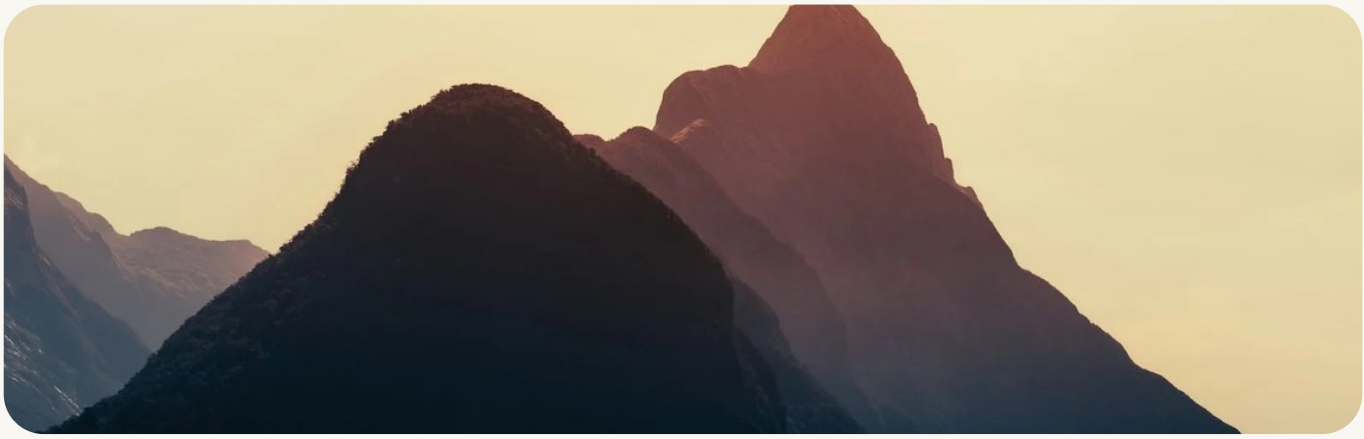
COOEE TOURS

Plan your New Zealand trip

Tell the Brisbane team what you want to see, who is travelling and how you like to spend your days. Cooee can help you compare guided and private touring options.



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What to include in your enquiry

- Travel month and any flexible dates, departure city and which island or islands interest you.
- Number of travellers, room needs, preferred pace and the experiences you most want to include.
- Whether you prefer escorted, private, self-drive or a mix, and any walking, boarding or dietary requirements.

Send a New Zealand travel enquiry

Browse New Zealand tours **Call 0409 661 342**

contact@cooeetours.com.au

Tour dates, prices, inclusions and availability are confirmed on the itinerary page or in your written quote.

Cooee Tours is based in Brisbane, Australia.