



Best of New Zealand: Both Islands Self-Drive in 14 Days

NEW ZEALAND • AUCKLAND • ROTORUA • CHRISTCHURCH • QUEENSTOWN

14D 13N

25-30 PAX

STARTS AUCKLAND

NOT INCLUDED

Drive from Auckland to Christchurch across both islands without retracing your route. The North Island combines Waitomo's glowworm caves, Hobbiton, Te Puia's geothermal and Māori experiences, Napier's Art Deco heritage and the Cook Strait ferry crossing. Continue south through Kaikoura, the West Coast glaciers, Queenstown and the Mackenzie Basin, with Milford Sound available as a recommended optional experience. Thirteen nights' accommodation, rental car hire and nine selected activities are included, while the self-drive format leaves room to explore at your own pace. This itinerary suits independent travellers who want the breadth of both islands with a clear route, useful inclusions and freedom from a fixed daily group schedule.

01

Arrive Auckland — collect rental car

Collect your rental car at Auckland Airport and drive to your accommodation. The car is included for 13 days with zero or reduced excess liability — confirm the specific excess terms at collection. Auckland Airport is 21 kilometres south of the city centre; allow 30–45 minutes for the drive in depending on traffic.

Auckland Waterfront — Viaduct Harbour and the Wynyard Quarter are within easy reach of most central hotels. The ferry terminal connects to Devonport and Waiheke Island for those arriving with time to spare.

Optional: Sky Tower observation deck (own expense); Auckland Harbour Dinner Cruise (own expense); Weta Workshop Unleashed Tour (own expense).

OVERNIGHT

Auckland

02

Auckland to Rotorua — via Waitomo and Hobbiton

A full day's driving with two significant stops before Rotorua. The total distance is 364 kilometres — Auckland to Waitomo (195km, 2.5 hours), Waitomo to Matamata (102km, 1 hour 20 minutes), Matamata to Rotorua (67km, 55 minutes). An early start is recommended.

Waitomo Glowworm Caves — Included. A cave system carved through limestone over 30 million years, now inhabited by *Arachnocampa luminosa* — a glowworm species found only in New Zealand. The guided tour moves through the cave formations on foot before the boat descends into the underground grotto, where the ceiling is a dense field of bioluminescent light. No photography permitted inside the grotto. Allow 45 minutes to 1 hour.

Hobbiton Movie Set Signature Tour — Included. The Alexander sheep farm at Matamata, permanently rebuilt in aluminium and concrete for The Hobbit trilogy. A guided walk through 44 hobbit holes, the mill, the double-arched bridge, and Bag End. The Signature Tour includes a sit-down lunch at the Party Marquee adjacent to the Green Dragon Inn. Allow 2–3 hours.

Drive to Rotorua — 67 kilometres from Matamata, approximately 55 minutes on SH27.

MEALS

Lunch

OVERNIGHT

Rotorua

03

Rotorua — Te Ra and Te Po at Te Puia

A full day at Te Puia across both the daytime and evening programmes. Te Puia is built on the Whakarewarewa geothermal field in Rotorua — an area of continuous Ngāti Wāhiao occupation for over 700 years, home to the Pōhutu Geyser, the Māori Arts and Crafts Institute, and the kiwi conservation centre.

Te Ra Guided Experience — Included. Afternoon guided tour through the Whakarewarewa geothermal valley covering the active geyser field, the Arts and Crafts Institute (where master carvers and weavers work in a living apprenticeship programme), and the kiwi conservation centre. The Pōhutu Geyser — the largest active geyser in the Southern Hemisphere at up to 30 metres — erupts regularly throughout the day. Allow 2–3 hours.

Te Po Indigenous Evening Experience — Included. Evening return to Te Puia: pōwhiri welcome, kapa haka performance, hāngī-style buffet dinner overlooking the geothermal valley, and hot chocolate on the geyser terrace. Cultural performance runs approximately 40 minutes.

Optional: Hell's Gate Mud Bath and Spa — a geothermal reserve east of Rotorua with a natural mud bath and sulphur spa complex (own expense); Secret Spot Hot Tubs — riverside hot pool experience in the forest (own expense).

MEALS

Dinner

OVERNIGHT

Rotorua

04

Rotorua to Napier — via Lake Taupo

The drive from Rotorua to Napier is 220 kilometres — approximately 3 hours. The route passes the eastern shore of Lake Taupo, New Zealand's largest lake, formed in a supervolcanic caldera around 1,800 years ago in the largest recorded eruption of the last 5,000 years. The road then climbs through the hill country of Hawke's Bay before descending to the coast.

Napier — The city was rebuilt in the Art Deco style within two years of the 1931 earthquake that killed 256 people and destroyed nearly every building in the original town. The result is one of the most coherent concentrations of 1930s architecture in the world. The streetscape of Emerson Street and Tennyson Street is the core of the district.

Art Deco Afternoon Walk — Included. A guided walk through Napier's Art Deco precinct covering the architectural context, the earthquake history, and the specific buildings that define the Napier style. Duration approximately 1.5 hours. The Hawke's Bay Museum and Art Gallery on the waterfront has a permanent earthquake exhibition for further context.

Optional: Twilight Wine Odyssey — an evening cycle tour through the Hawke's Bay wine district (own expense, seasonal).

OVERNIGHT

Napier

Napier to Wellington

The drive from Napier to Wellington is 320 kilometres — approximately 4 hours 30 minutes. Two main route options: the Manawatu Gorge and Palmerston North approach (slightly faster), or the Tuki Tuki Valley through Hawke's Bay and the Wairarapa wine region to the Rimutaka Range (more scenic, similar distance). Both arrive at Wellington from the north.

Wairarapa Wine Region — If taking the eastern route, Martinborough is the Wairarapa's best-known wine town, planted predominantly in Pinot Noir. Several cellar doors are accessible on the route south. Own expense and own time.

Wellington — New Zealand's capital city sits on a natural harbour at the southern tip of the North Island, ringed by steep hills. The waterfront from Te Papa to the ferry terminal is an easy evening walk. Cuba Street and Courtenay Place are the best areas for dinner.

Optional: Zealandia by Night Tour — guided nocturnal wildlife tour inside the Zealandia ecosanctuary (own expense); Guided Tour at Te Papa — 60-minute introduction to the national museum's Māori and Pacific collections (own expense).

OVERNIGHT

Wellington

06

Wellington to Blenheim — Cook Strait ferry

Drive to the Interislander terminal and board the Cook Strait ferry. The crossing to Picton takes approximately 3 hours; the final 45 minutes thread through the Marlborough Sounds — a drowned river valley system of sheltered inlets with very little visible development from the water.

Cook Strait Ferry — Included. Depart from Wellington's Interislander Terminal. The strait is 22 kilometres wide at its narrowest point. The Sounds section approaching Picton is the visual highlight of the crossing. Multiple sailings daily; book your preferred departure when confirming the itinerary.

Picton to Blenheim — 30 kilometres, approximately 30 minutes on SH1. Blenheim is a compact town in the Wairau Plain — New Zealand's largest wine-producing region, planted predominantly in Sauvignon Blanc. The town itself is unremarkable; the surroundings are the reason to be here.

Optional: Marlborough Wine Trail — the wineries around Blenheim are accessible by car; several cellar doors are open for tastings and require no reservation (own expense).

OVERNIGHT

Blenheim

07

Blenheim to Christchurch — via the Kaikoura coast

The drive from Blenheim to Christchurch via Kaikoura is 309 kilometres — approximately 4 hours. The SH1 coastal road runs between the Pacific and the base of the Kaikoura Ranges for much of the journey; the mountains come down to within 100 metres of the ocean in places.

Kaikoura — A seaside town on a peninsula 130 kilometres north of Christchurch. The town sits above a submarine canyon that brings nutrient-rich deep water close to shore, creating a marine ecosystem that supports sperm whales, dusky dolphins, New Zealand fur seals, and Hutton's shearwaters within a few kilometres of the coast.

Optional: Whale Watch Tour — a boat-based sperm whale watching operation (own expense, weather dependent — advance booking essential); Dolphin Encounter Swim — a guided in-water encounter with dusky dolphins (own expense, seasonal).

Christchurch — The South Island's largest city, substantially rebuilt since the 2011 earthquake. The Avon River precinct is worth an evening walk.

OVERNIGHT

Christchurch

08

Christchurch to Greymouth — via Arthur's Pass

The drive from Christchurch to Greymouth via Arthur's Pass is 240 kilometres — approximately 3.5 hours. The route crosses the Canterbury Plains before climbing through the Waimakariri Gorge and Arthur's Pass National Park at 920 metres, then descends the western face of the Southern Alps to the West Coast.

Arthur's Pass Village — At 737 metres, the pass village is the highest settlement on the main divide crossing. The kea (alpine parrot) are reliably present at the carpark; the Devil's Punchbowl Waterfall (30-minute return walk) is the best short stop in the village.

Otira Tunnel — 8.5 kilometres through the Main Divide on the western descent. The road emerges into the Taramakau Valley on the West Coast side; the bush changes from alpine tussock and beech to dense podocarp rainforest within a few kilometres.

Greymouth — The West Coast's largest town, at the mouth of the Grey River. The town itself is functional rather than destination-worthy; it is the staging point for the drive south to the glacier region the following morning.

OVERNIGHT

Greymouth

09

Greymouth to the Glacier Region

The drive from Greymouth to the Glacier Region is 175–195 kilometres — approximately 2.5 to 3 hours south along the West Coast highway. The road runs through the narrow strip between the Tasman Sea and the Southern Alps through Hokitika, Ross, and the smaller settlements south of there.

Punakaiki Pancake Rocks — An optional detour north of Greymouth before heading south: 30-million-year-old limestone formations stacked by alternating hard and soft sediment layers, eroded into their distinctive shape by wave action. The blowholes are most active at high tide. 45 kilometres north of Greymouth; the detour adds approximately 1.5 hours.

Franz Josef township — The main base for glacier country, at the edge of the Westland Tai Poutini National Park. The West Coast receives up to 5,000 millimetres of rainfall per year; the temperate rainforest grows right to the glacier's edge. Both Franz Josef and Fox Glacier are accessible for valley walks from here.

Optional: Franz Josef Glacier Heli-Hike — helicopter access to the current ice face with a guided walk on crampons, weather dependent (own expense).

OVERNIGHT

Glacier Region

10

Glacier Region to Queenstown — via Haast Pass

The drive from the Glacier Region to Queenstown is 330–350 kilometres — approximately 4.5 to 5 hours via the Haast Pass. This is the South Island's most varied single day of driving: West Coast rainforest, the lowest main divide crossing, the dry eastern ranges, and Central Otago's schist landscape, all within one day.

Haast Pass (563 metres) — The lowest crossing of the Southern Alps. The transition from West Coast rainforest to the drier eastern landscape happens within a few kilometres of the summit. The Haast River gorge on the approach from the west is worth slowing down for.

Makarora Blue Pools — A 20-minute walk from the Makarora carpark leads to pools on the Makarora River fed by glacial meltwater. Clear water, cold temperature. Allow 40 minutes return.

Wānaka — A brief stop in the lakeside town is optional. Lake Wānaka sits at the foot of the Southern Alps; the drive through the town takes 10 minutes and the view justifies the detour.

Optional: Original Onsen — private outdoor hot pools above the Shotover River canyon, Queenstown (own expense).

OVERNIGHT

Queenstown

11

Queenstown — Skyline Gondola and free day

A full day in Queenstown. The Skyline Gondola gives the best overview of the town's geography; the rest of the day is yours for optional activities or independent driving in the surrounding area.

Skyline Gondola — Included. A cable car from the town centre to Bob's Peak at 450 metres, with views across Lake Wakatipu and the Remarkables range. The luge track at the top is own expense. Allow 1–2 hours.

Milford Sound — The day's itinerary is unscheduled to allow for the Milford Sound optional. The drive from Queenstown to Milford Sound and back is approximately 12 hours (287 kilometres each way through Fiordland). A coach tour option avoids self-driving the full distance. This is a recommended addition to the itinerary but is not included in the base price; enquire when booking.

Optional: Shotover Jetboat (own expense); Glacier Express scenic helicopter flight over the Southern Alps (own expense).

OVERNIGHT

Queenstown

12

Queenstown to Aoraki Mt Cook — through the Mackenzie Basin

The drive from Queenstown to the Mt Cook/Tekapo region is 256–266 kilometres — approximately 3 hours 15 minutes. The route runs northeast through the Kawarau Gorge, past Cromwell and Lake Dunstan, through the Lindis Pass, and into the Mackenzie Basin.

Kawarau Gorge — The schist gorge on the eastern approach from Queenstown, with the original AJ Hackett bungy site visible from the road.

Lindis Pass (971 metres) — The main divide between Otago and the Mackenzie Basin. Tussock on both sides; one of the more photogenic stretches of road in the South Island.

Lake Pukaki — The approach road to Aoraki Mt Cook runs along the western shore for 50 kilometres. The lake's turquoise colour comes from suspended glacial rock flour; it deepens as you approach the mountain.

Aoraki Mt Cook Village — Free time at 760 metres beneath New Zealand's highest peak. The Hooker Valley Track to the terminal lake below the Hooker Glacier is 90 minutes return and is the recommended walk from here.

OVERNIGHT

Tekapo or Mt Cook region

13

Mt Cook and Lake Tekapo to Christchurch

The drive from the Mt Cook/Tekapo region to Christchurch is 220–330 kilometres — allow 3 to 4 hours. The route descends from the Mackenzie Basin through the Canterbury foothills and across the plains.

Dark Sky Experience, Lake Tekapo — Included. An evening stargazing programme at Lake Tekapo covering the night sky, the reserve's designation, and guided telescope observation. The Mackenzie Basin holds one of the world's few certified International Dark Sky Reserve designations. Operates Thursday to Monday only — confirm the operating schedule when planning your departure date from Queenstown.

Church of the Good Shepherd — A stone chapel built in 1935 on the Tekapo lakeshore with a plain glass window framing the lake and mountains. A brief stop.

International Antarctic Centre, Christchurch — Included. Adjacent to Christchurch Airport; use the included admission today on arrival or tomorrow morning before your flight. The live penguin encounter, Hagglund ride, and storm simulation room are the main experiences. Allow 2 hours.

Optional: Christchurch Tram Dinner (own expense).

OVERNIGHT

Christchurch

Depart Christchurch — return rental car

Return the rental car to Christchurch Airport and check in for your international departure. Allow at least three hours before your flight for car return, check-in, and immigration.

Christchurch Airport (CHC) — The car return and international terminal are in the same precinct. The rental car is due back on a 24-hour basis from the collection time in Auckland on Day 1; confirm the exact return deadline and any one-way fees at collection.

Optional: If the Antarctic Centre admission was not used yesterday, it is adjacent to the car return (own expense if the included admission was already used).

What's Included

DEPARTS FROM
Auckland

FLIGHTS
Not included

GROUP SIZE
25–30 pax

INCLUDED

check 13-day rental car hire with zero or reduced excess liability (collected Auckland, returned Christchurch)

check 13 nights accommodation

check Waitomo Glowworm Caves guided tour including underground boat cruise

check Hobbiton Movie Set Signature Tour with lunch at the Green Dragon Inn

check Te Ra guided daytime experience at Te Puia — Arts and Crafts Institute, geothermal valley, Kiwi Conservation Centre

check Te Po Indigenous Evening Experience at Te Puia — hāngī dinner and cultural performance

check Art Deco Afternoon Walk, Napier

check Cook Strait ferry crossing Wellington to Picton

check Skyline Gondola ride, Queenstown

check Dark Sky Experience at Lake Tekapo (operates Thursday to Monday only)

check International Antarctic Centre admission, Christchurch

NOT INCLUDED

– International flights

– Travel insurance

– Fuel and road tolls

– Meals not specified in the itinerary

– Optional activities and entrance fees

– Personal expenses, laundry and minibar