

New Zealand



New Zealand Travel Guide

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1. Why should you visit New Zealand?

New Zealand, also known as Aotearoa in the local Māori language, is known for its diverse and stunning natural beauty. With breathtaking landscapes, including snow-capped mountains, rolling hills, deep fjords, pristine beaches, geysers, crystal-clear lakes and about 70,000 endemic species such as kiwis, tuataras, and Hector's dolphins, New Zealand is a land like no other.



The human population of 5.1 mio people is greatly outnumbered by approx. 26 million sheep and 6 million cows.

With so much to offer, New Zealand is a sought-after destination for adventure seekers who come here for e.g. bungee jumping, skydiving, skiing, and hiking, and casual tourists who want to experience a wonderful and scenic piece of nature.

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Some amazing top instagrammable attractions are located in New Zealand.



2.1 Disclaimer

In this guide we are doing our best to give you the most accurate information. Over time, however, prices, times, and even attractions are subject to change. Therefore, I and backpackandsnorkel.com cannot be held responsible for the experiences of users while traveling. I strongly suggest that you write or call the attractions you plan to visit for confirmation when you make your travel plans.

Also, please stay alert, be aware of your surroundings and keep an eye on your belongings. Pickpockets and other criminals can easily ruin even the best planned vacation.

2.2 Copyright

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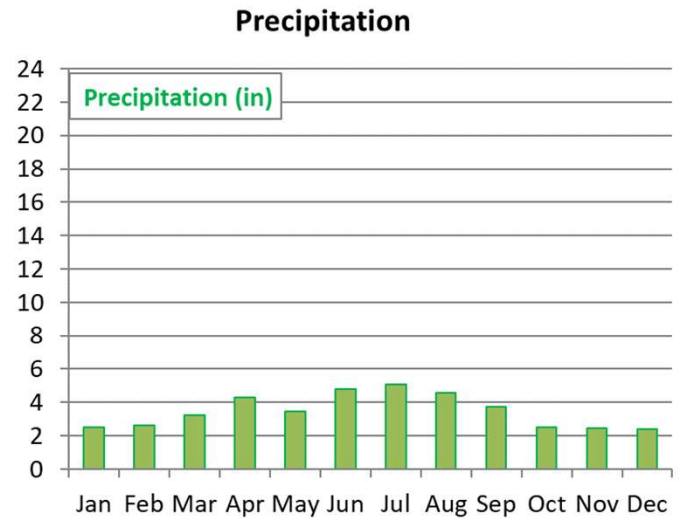
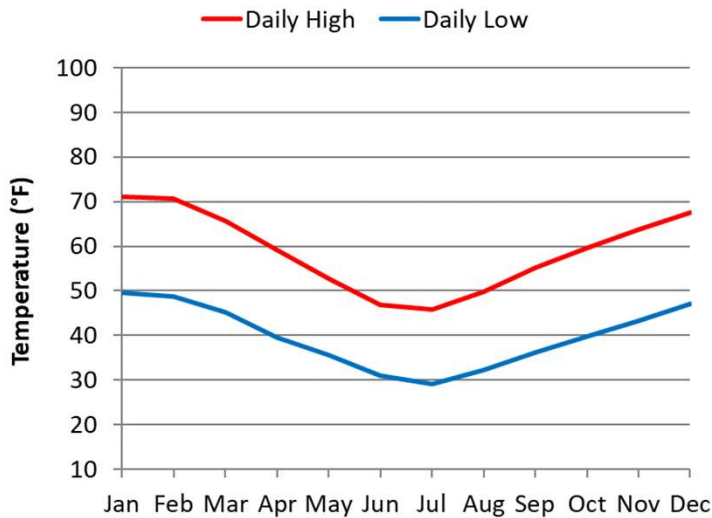
3.2 What is the best time to visit New Zealand?

New Zealand has a temperate maritime climate, with mild temperatures and relatively high rainfall year-round. However, due to the country's geographical diversity, there are significant regional variations in weather and climate.

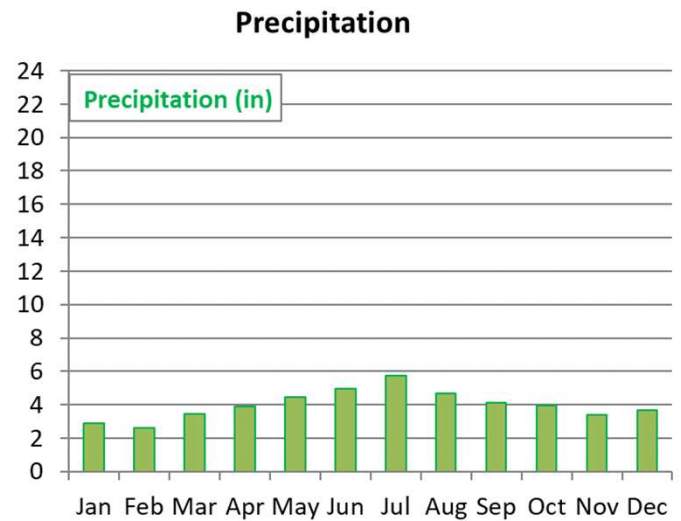
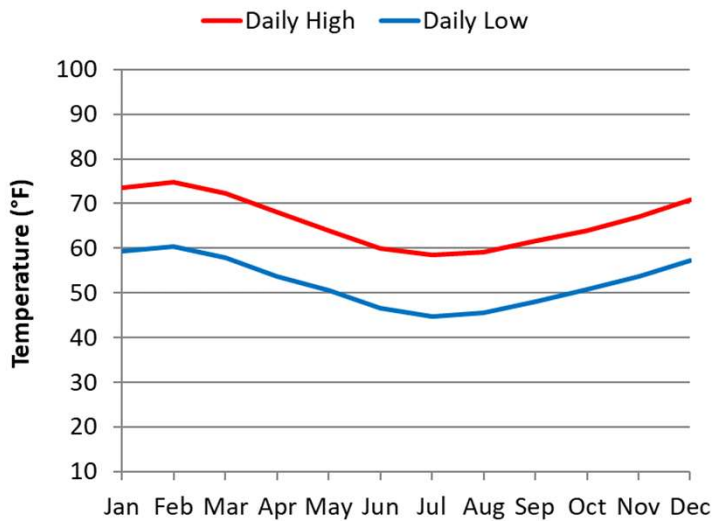
- **Summer (December - February):** This is the peak tourist season in New Zealand, with long days, warm temperatures, and plenty of outdoor activities to enjoy. Prices for accommodation and tours are typically at the highest, and some popular attractions will be crowded.
- **Fall (March - May):** This is a great time to visit New Zealand, with mild weather, fewer tourists, and stunning fall foliage in many parts of the country.
- **Winter (June - August):** New Zealand's winter is generally a quieter time for tourism, with fewer crowds and lower prices. The South Island, however, is a particularly popular destination for winter sports like skiing and snowboarding.
- **Spring (September - November):** This is a good time to visit if you want to see New Zealand's famous wildflowers and baby animals. The weather can be unpredictable during spring, but temperatures are generally mild and crowds are still relatively low.
- If you want to explore New Zealand's famous **lavender** farms, lavender typically blooms from October to December.
- New Zealand's famous **lupine blooms** in the Lake Tekapo area and the riverbeds in the Mackenzie Region of the South Island occur typically from Mid-November to December with the peak in late November.

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The climate of **Cape Reinga**, the northernmost point of the North Island of New Zealand:



The climate of **Auckland** in the North Island of New Zealand:



3.3 The highlights of the history of New Zealand

- 1280-1300 AD: Arrival of the Māori people in New Zealand, which makes it one of the last major land masses to be settled
- 1500: Māori from New Zealand settle the Chatham Islands and form the Moriori culture
- 1642: hostile encounter between a Dutch ship and the Māori
- 1769: First European visit since 1642; Captain Cook maps almost the entire New Zealand coastline. Subsequently, European and North American ships start trade with the Māori and introduce muskets and potatoes to the Maoris
- 1801-1840: Newly introduced muskets used extensively in over 600 battles Māori tribes where 30-40,000 Maoris are killed
- Early 1800s: Christian missionaries settle in New Zealand and eventually convert almost the entire Māori population to Christianity
- 1835: announcement of impending French settlement; in response, the Māori confederation United Tribes of New Zealand sends a Declaration of Independence to England and asks for protection
- 1835-1860s: Moriori genocide: Two tribes from North New Zealand invade the Chatham Islands and kill or enslave the entire Moriori population - in 1862 only 101 Moriori survived
- 1840: Signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, which established British sovereignty over New Zealand
- 1841: New Zealand becomes the British Colony of New Zealand
- 1843: Wairau Affray: first serious clash of arms over land and disagreements over sovereignty between British settlers and Māori after the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi

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	Day	Night
Day 1	arrive in Auckland early in the morning or the night before; Auckland Botanical Gardens	Auckland
Day 2	Auckland self-guided walking tour ; hike up Mount Eden	Auckland
Day 3	drive to Te Paki Sand Dunes (6h); Sandboard on the Te Paki Sand Dunes ; Cape Reinga Lighthouse Walk ; 90 Mile Beach	Paihia
Day 4	Paihia Beach ; Waitangi Treaty Grounds ; Bay islands boat tour	Paihia
Day 5	Haruru Falls ; Kawakawa ; drive to Hahei (6:30h); Karangahake Gorge Windows Walk	Hahei
Day 6	Hot Water Beach (+/-2h from low tide); Cathedral Cove ; Hahei Beach	Hahei
Day 7	drive to Rotorua (3:30h); Katikati ; Kuirau Park ; Gondola and Luge	Rotorua
Day 8	Hobbiton tour ; Zorb Rotorua	Rotorua
Day 9	Wai-o-Tapu thermal area ; Whakarewarewa Village	Rotorua
Day 10	Huka Falls ; Otumuheke Stream ; Taupo Street Art tour ; McDonald in Douglas DC3 aircraft ; drive to Wellington (4:45h)	Wellington
Day 11	Ferry to Picton (3:30h); winery in Marlborough ; drive to Westport (3:30h)	Westport
Day 12	Charleston GlowWorm Cave rafting Adventure ; Punakaiki Pancake Rocks and Blowholes Walk ; Truman Track	Westport
Day 13	Pororari River track ; drive to Hokitika (2h); after dark: Hokitika glow worm dell	Hokitika
Day 14	Hokitika Gorge ; Dorothy Falls ; National Kiwi Centre ; explore Hokitika	Hokitika
Day 15	drive to Lake Tekapo (5:30h); Church of the Good Shepherd and Mackenzie sheepdog statue ; stargaze	Lake Tekapo
Day 16	Lake Pukaki ; drive to Wanaka (2h); Wanaka Lavender Farm ; That Wanaka Tree ; drive to Queenstown (1h); eat burger at Fergburger and meat pie at Ferg Bakery	Queenstown
Day 17	scenic drive to Glenorchy ; Glenorchy Walkway ; drive to Queenstown ; Remarkable Sweet Shop ; sunset at Queenstown Bay Beach	Queenstown
Day 18	drive to Milford Sound (4h); Milford Sound Cruise ; Mirror Lakes	Queenstown
Day 19	drive to Moeraki (3:30h); Moeraki Boulders ; drive to Christchurch (3:45h)	Christchurch
Day 20	International Antarctic Centre ; self-guided walking tour of Christchurch	Christchurch
Day 21	Swim with Dolphins ; Christchurch Botanic Gardens	Christchurch
Day 22	Fly to Auckland and then home	

5.1.1 Heartland Hotel Auckland Airport

([map](#), [reviews](#), [book](#))

This hotel is only a 5 min drive from the airport and therefore in an ideal location for an exhausted traveler. Check-in starts at 2pm and early check-in is subject to availability and, unfortunately, an additional fee.

Should you arrive early, our recommendation is to go shopping and have some lunch at nearby stores and restaurants.

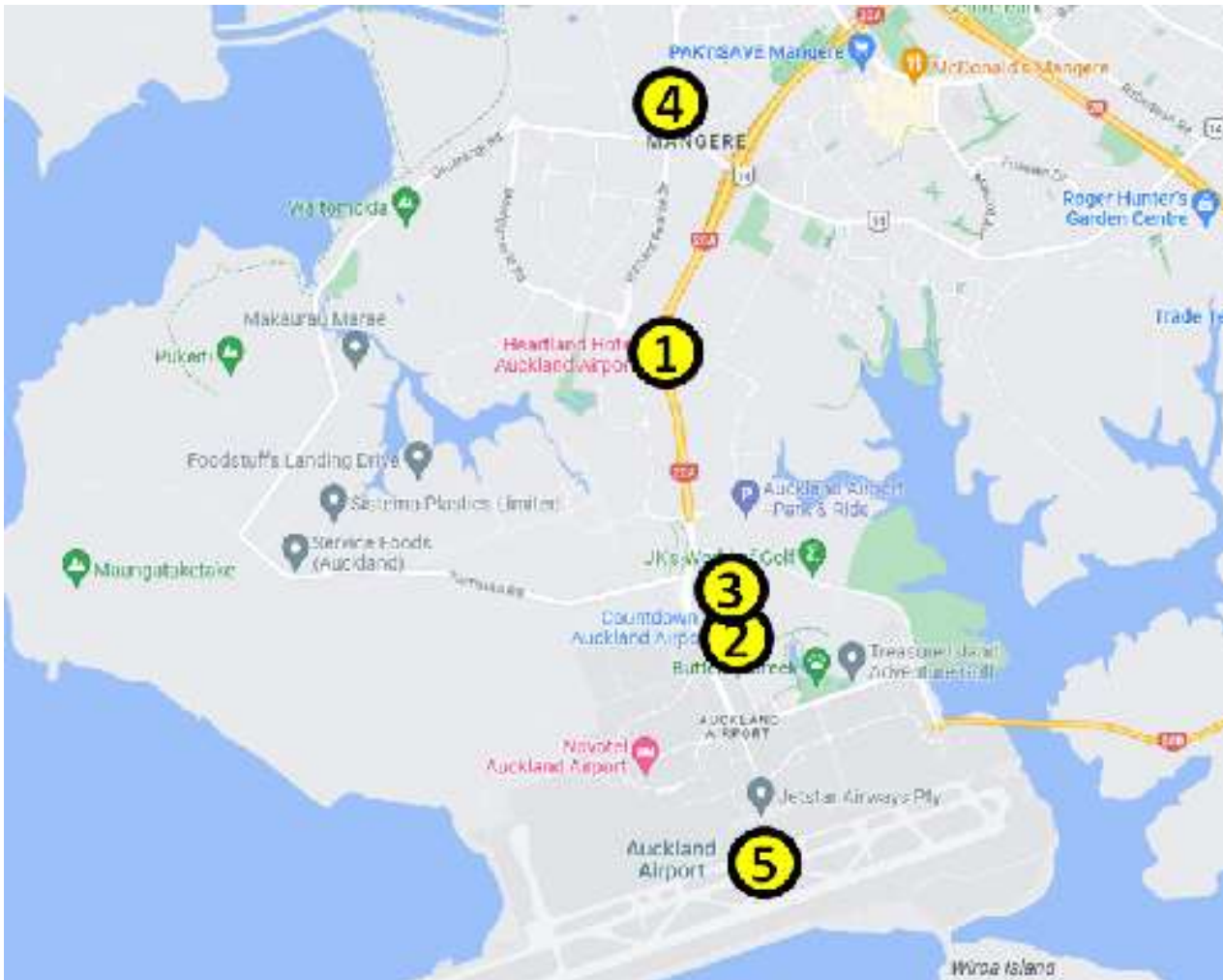
From all the hotels we stayed in New Zealand in this price range, Heartland Hotel Auckland Airport was one of the nicest and it had the fastest wifi. Its breakfast buffet is enormous and yummy. The rooms are clean and show very little wear. The hotel has a free airport shuttle.



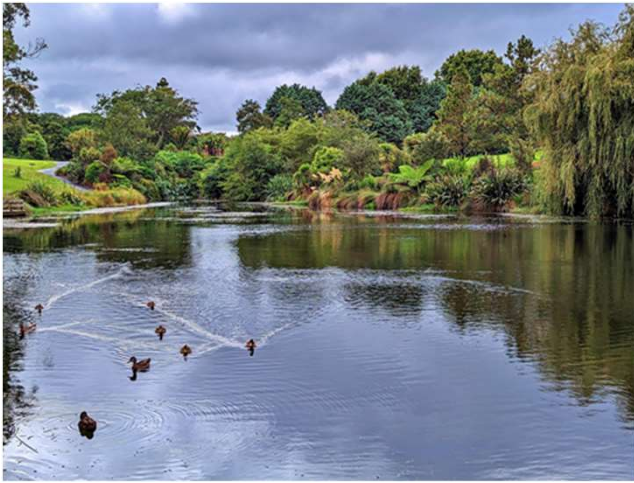


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A short driving distance from the Heartland Hotel Auckland Airport are a couple of stores and restaurants.



- (1) [Heartland Hotel Auckland Airport](#)
- (2) [Countdown](#)
- (3) [The Warehouse - Auckland Airport](#)
- (4) [Bakehaven café](#)
- (5) Auckland Airport



Day 2: Explore Auckland

5.1.3 Self-guided walking tour of Auckland

There is plenty of paid and some free parking available in downtown Auckland. You can start your self-guided walking tour of Auckland at any of the stops below, in case you cannot find any parking near Sky Tower.

The following walking tour is about 3.1 miles (5 km) long.



(A) [Sky Tower](#)

(B) [Saint Patrick's Cathedral](#)

(C) [Viaduct Harbour](#)

(D) [New Zealand Maritime Museum](#)

(E) [Ferry Building](#)

(F) [Commercial Bay](#)

(G) [Queen Street](#)

(H) [Albert Park](#)

(I) [Town Hall](#)

(A) Sky Tower

([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#))

With a height of 1,076 ft (328 m), Auckland Sky Tower is the 2nd tallest structure in the southern hemisphere.

The entry to the Sky Tower is a bit confusing. You enter through the hotel entrance and then take the escalator to your right down into the basement where the ticket counters are. Should you take the escalator up, then you will come to a nice smoke-free casino.

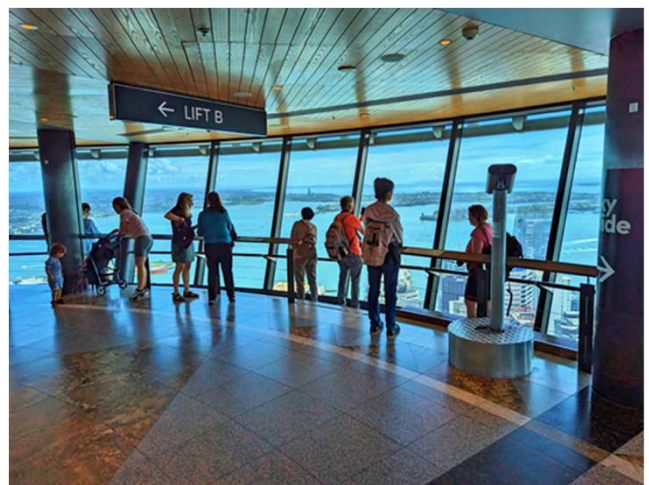
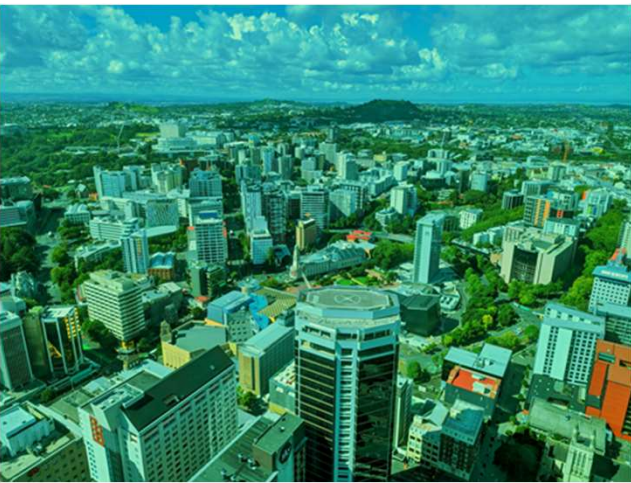
At the time of writing, admission is NZD40 per adult. Discounts are available for two adult tickets, children, families and for tickets booked online.

Besides normal sightseeing from inside the observation deck, separate tickets are available for:

- a guided walk around the outside of the 53th floor on a 4 ft (1.2 m) walkway
- a jump from the 53rd floor
- sliding down 610 ft (186 m) in clear tubes
- lunch or dinner at the Orbit 360 degree Dining facility of the 52nd floor – the restaurant rotates 360 degrees

The elevator brings you to the 51st floor where you have great 360 degree views of Auckland. Another elevator brings you to the 53rd floor which is significantly less busy and has the same great views, but unlike the 51st floor, no explanations of what you can see are available. Stairs from the 51th floor lead to the café on the 50th floor, which also has great views.

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Exit the Sky Tower and turn right and go to Hobson Street. Make another right on Hobson Steet, follow it northbound for 2 blocks and then make another right and you will see your next destination.

(H) Albert Park

([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#))

Albert Park was built in the 1880s on the site of the former Albert Barracks, which was one of Auckland's early European military fortifications. Remaining from this time is a rock wall made from volcanic stones. Two canons and statues are a reminder of the park's history. Before Albert Barracks, this site contained a Māori settlement and later Māori fortifications.

The layout of the park has not changed over the years and many of the trees date back to the time the park was created.

Unfortunately, cyclone Gabrielle has uprooted some of them in February 2023.

The statue of Queen Victoria was cast in England and installed for her Diamond Jubilee celebrations in 1897.

Due to its proximity to the University of Auckland, you will likely see numerous students relaxing and learning in the park.

Underneath the park are the extensive Albert Tunnels which were built in 1941 as air raid shelters. Those tunnels were, however, sealed before the end of World War 2 and they remain sealed to this day even though there were some calls for their reopening over the years.

The park is on a hill, and you will need to climb up a paved path and stairs if you enter it from the west on Kitchener Street – the park itself, however, is fairly flat. From the north side of the park by the cannons, you will find some good views of Auckland.

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Exit the park where you entered it and trace your steps back to Queen Street. Turn left on Queen Street and walk for three blocks until you see your next destination.

5.3.1 Paihia Beach

([map](#), [reviews](#))

If you have a little time today, walk to the beach and enjoy the quite beauty of this place. If you don't have time, don't worry, there will be plenty of beaches in the coming days.

There are three main beaches in Paihia:

- The northernmost beach goes from the Waitangi One Way Bridge to the Paihia Beach Resort & Spa
- The central beach from the Breakwater Motel to the nearby Bayview Motel
- The southernmost beach from the Ala Moana Motel to the public toilets where Seaview Road starts to parallel the beach

The northernmost and southernmost beaches are good for walking while the central beach has lots of pebbles and seashells. On the northern end of the central beach, where the road goes up a hill, is a beautiful mural.





5.3.2 Waitangi Treaty Grounds

([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#))

The Waitangi Treaty Grounds are the location where, on February 6, 1840, the Māori and British signed the document that created the New Zealand that we know today.

Admission is expensive, NZD60 per adult (non-New Zealander) at the time of writing, but we think it is worth it.

At the Waitangi Treaty Grounds, you can visit the historical Treaty House, two excellent museums, the flagstaff which stands where the treaty was signed, a ceremonial waka (giant Māori canoe) and you can wander the grounds and the beach which has great views of the Bay of Islands.

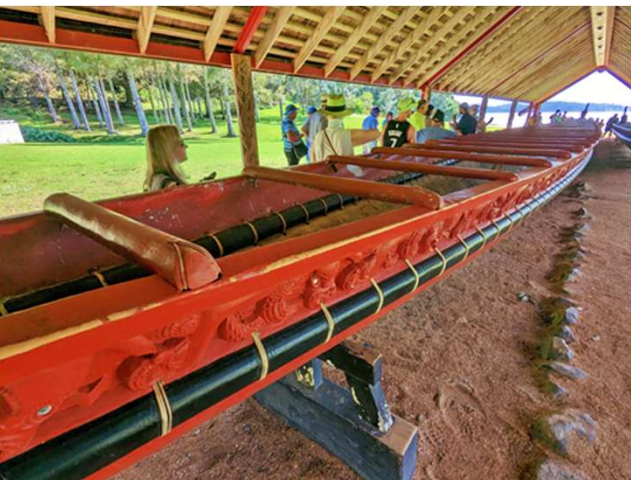
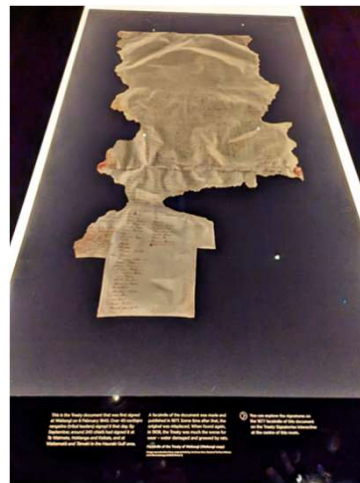
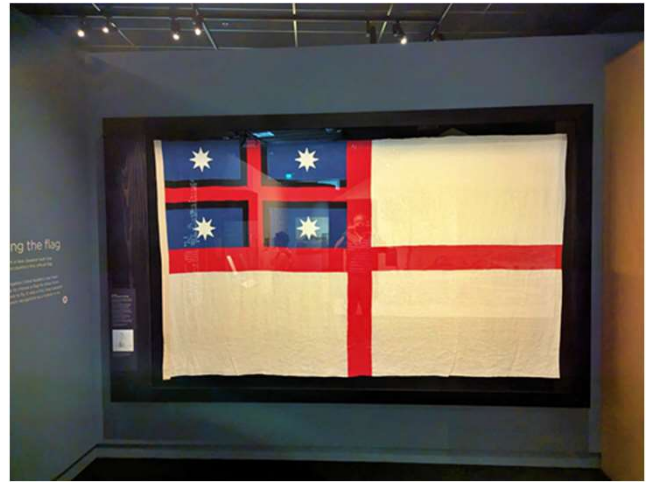
There are free guided tours at Waitangi Treaty Grounds which provide lots of historical context and conveniently end at the building where the, also free, Cultural Performance is held right after the tour. The tours start at the visitor center and are definitely worth it.

The starting times throughout the day vary by month, so check the website. The first tour is typically at 11am and the duration is 1h.

We absolutely loved the 30min long Cultural Performance. Make sure not to miss it. You will need to take your shoes off when you enter the House of Gathering where the performance is held.

Photography is allowed during the performance, but video recordings are not.

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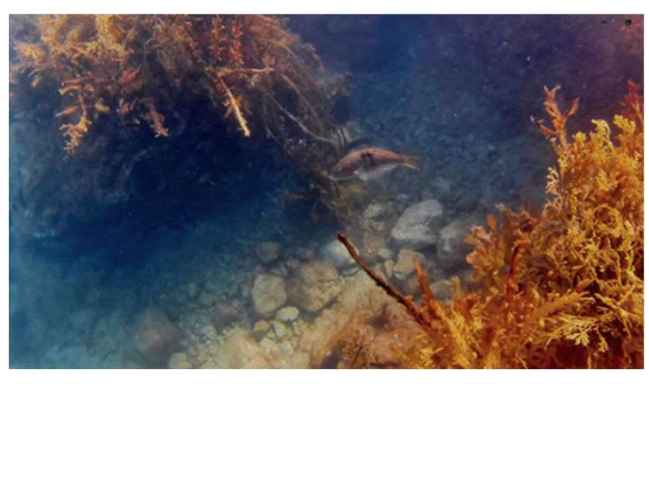
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Robertson Island / Motuarohia Island



Urupukapuka Island or Waewaetorea Island





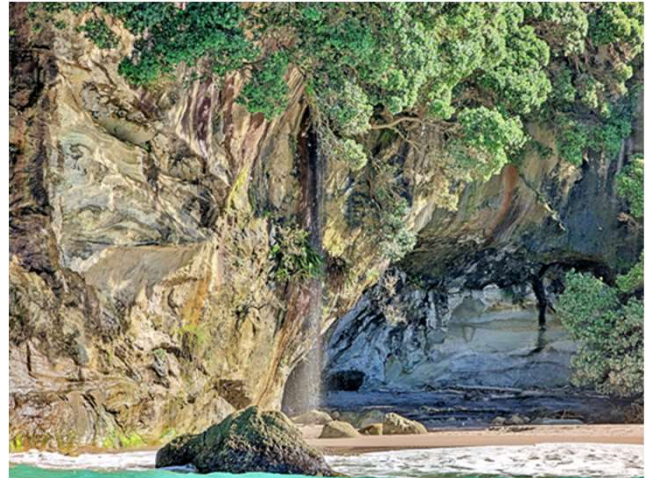
This concludes the activities of Day 4.



Cathedral Cove



Cathedral Cove Beach



Other sights



Day 7: Drive to Rotorua – New Zealand's Center of Geothermal Activity

5.4.5 Katikati

([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#))

If you like murals, look no further than Katikati. The small town of Katikati is known as New Zealand's Mural Town with almost eighty colorful murals throughout town. But there is more: Katikati also has many interesting sculptures, carvings, mosaics, and tapestries on display.

You can either walk through town or stop at **The Arts Junction** ([map](#)) and buy a guide which contains a map with locations of the murals and provides some information about them.



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Day 8: Hobbits and Zorbing

5.5.3 Hobbiton

([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#))

What did your friends and family say when you first brought up that you wanted to New Zealand? Did they mention sheep and Hobbiton? This is, at least what we typically hear.

The Lord of the Rings trilogy and the Hobbit books have catapulted Hobbiton to one of the absolute must-see attractions in New Zealand. And rightfully so. Even if you were not a fan of the movies or books, Hobbiton is still a beautiful and magical place, and we cannot imagine a New Zealand itinerary for first timers without it.

On their website, you are asked to book your tour in advance to make sure that you get in as access is only via a guided tour with limited seats.

The tour guides are knowledgeable and motivated, which you can tell during the tour.

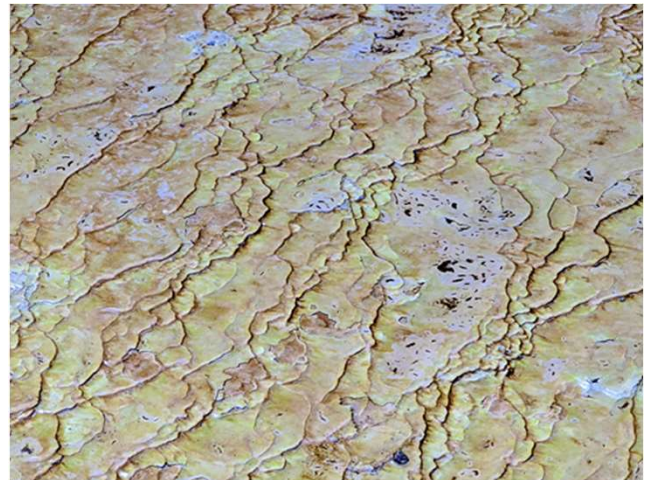
There are different experiences that you can book. The normal Movie Set Tour takes about 2h and departs only from The Shire's Rest, which is about a 70min drive from Rotorua.







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Reserve anything from 5-20 min for this impressive pool of bubbling mud.



5.5.6 Whakarewarewa Village

([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#))

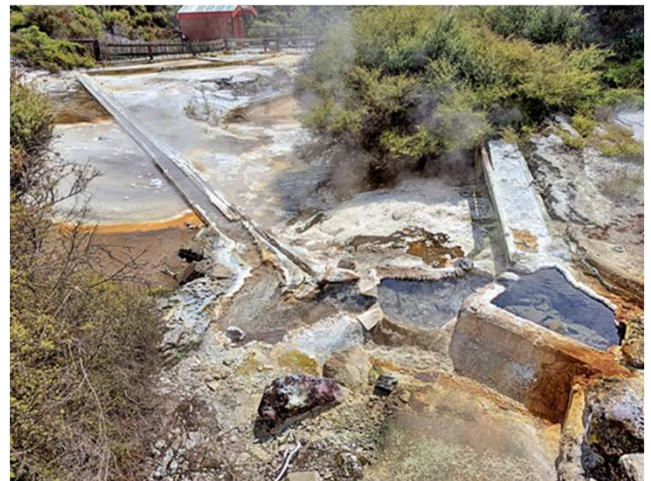
Whakarewarewa Village is an authentic living Māori village, which you can only enter by a guided tour. At the time of writing, 1 hour guided tours are available daily at 10am, 12pm and 2pm and cost NZD40 per adult with discounts for seniors, kids and families.

The tour guides are Māori who are happy to share insights into their life and culture with you. And they can explain to you why so many Māori women have these tattooed beards.

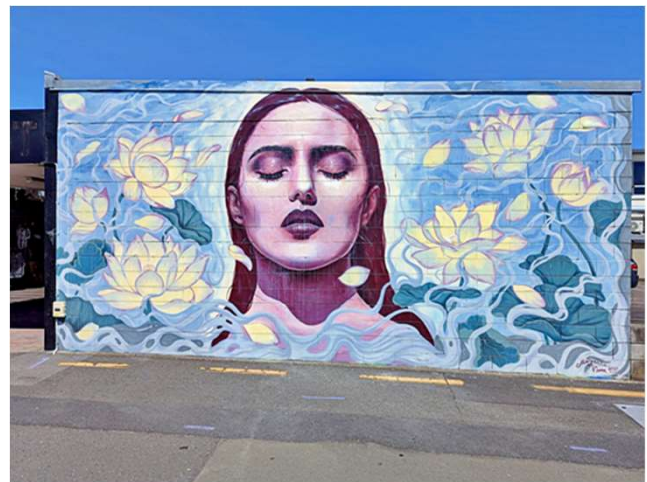
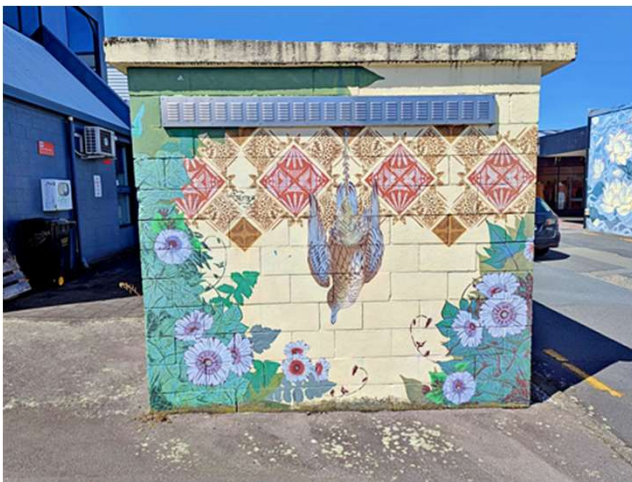
The tour brings you to several important buildings, a public bathing complex, geothermal features and the cemetery and you get to eat part of a corn cob that was prepared by a hot spring.



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Location (A) ([map](#))



Location (O) ([map](#))





5.10.2 Punakaiki Pancake Rocks and Blowholes Walk

([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#))

The Punakaiki Pancake Rocks and Blowholes are a coastal rock formation of uplifted limestone that is heavily eroded.

The formations consist of highly irregular chasms and ridges and layers of strong resistant bands of limestone that are separated by softer mud-rich layers. This layering phenomenon can be found in limestone worldwide and is called stylobedding. Most scientists agree that this layering is not caused by the original deposition of the limestone forming marine organisms, but a secondary feature caused by compaction of the limestone under high pressure.

Thousands of years of erosion by water and wind has exposed the stylobedding as distinctive pancake structures.

The Punakaiki Pancake Rocks and Blowholes features a well maintained mostly flat 0.7 mile (1.1 km) concrete trail which is wheelchair accessible.

Two parking lots, a visitor center, public restrooms and a restaurant are located at the start of the trail.



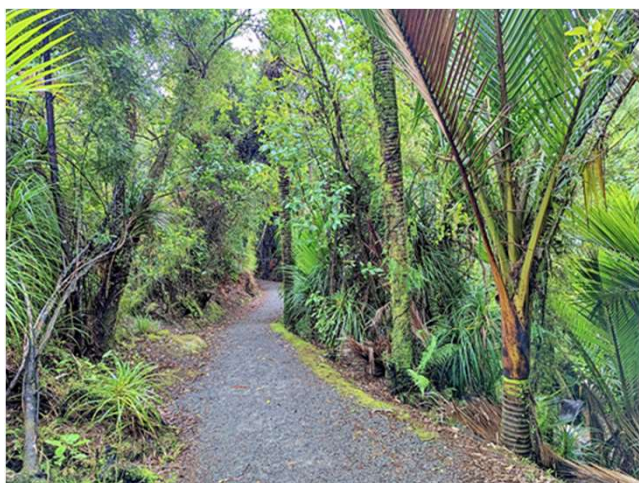


5.10.3 Truman Track

([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#))

Truman Track is a 0.9 mile (1.4 km; 30 min) round trip compacted dirt trail through a subtropical forest that leads to a spectacular coastline with cliffs, caverns, a blowhole and access to a deserted beach with a small waterfall.

There is a small car park along the road where the track starts, but there are no other services near the entrance.





This concludes the itinerary of Day 12.



There are other free glowworm dells and caves, but Hokitika Glow-Worm Dell is the easiest to access.

This concludes the itinerary of Day 13.





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The pink door in the lavender fields is definitely a tourist magnet, but we also loved the purple tractor and kids like to play on the purple poles.





5.15.4 Glenorchy Walkway

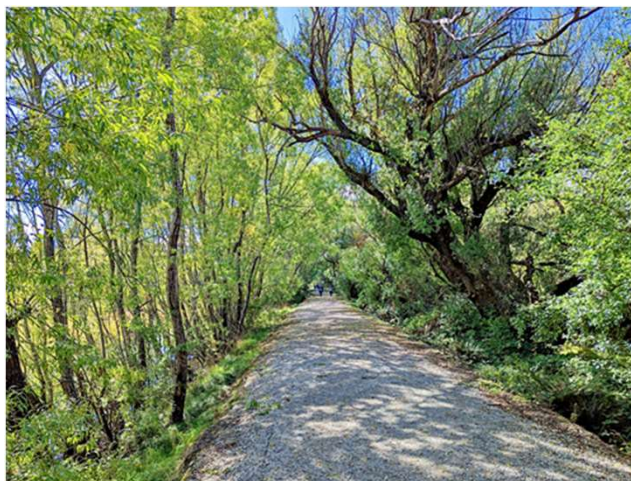
([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#))

Glenorchy is a small town of a bit over 300 people at the northern end of Lake Wakatipu. There are a gas station, a few restaurants, and clean public restrooms.

One of the main attractions is the Glenorchy Walkway, which is an easy 1-2h trail that starts at Lake Wakatipu and then goes through a forested area, wetlands and through the Glenorchy Lagoon.

The path is mostly good quality compacted dirt and pebbles and there is a boardwalk through the wetlands.

Starting at the parking lot, most people walk the Southern Circuit, which takes about 1h and is about 2 miles (3.2 km) for the loop. Some add on the Northern Circuit loop which adds another 0.9 miles (1.4 km) or 30-45min.





Important: If you start the Glenorchy Walkway at the parking lot, do not miss the opportunity to also go to the west where the Rees River flows into Lake Wakatipu. This area is of stunning beauty.



When you are done, you can take the 45min drive back to Queenstown.

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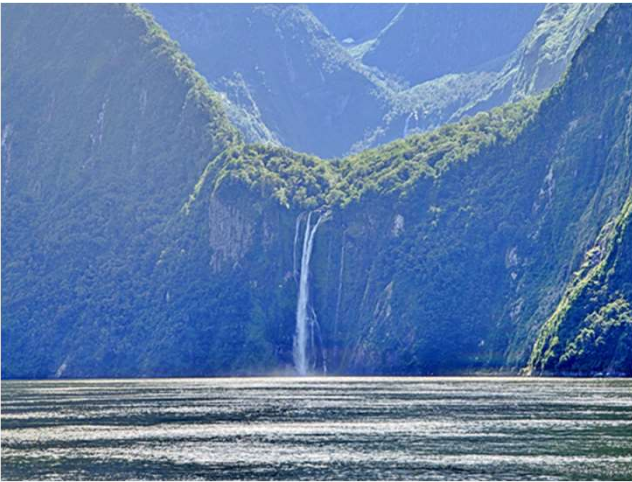
The fjord has steep walls with two permanent waterfalls (Stirling Falls and Lady Bowen Falls). As it rains on average every second day, you will likely see several other short-lived waterfalls. You will also see remains of past avalanches which happen if there is too much rain and the rain-soaked soil slips over the solid rock cliffs.

You will likely see several birds and, if you are lucky, sea bottlenose dolphins, whales and seals.

We found the eastern side of the fjord more majestic and took most of our photos and videos on this side.

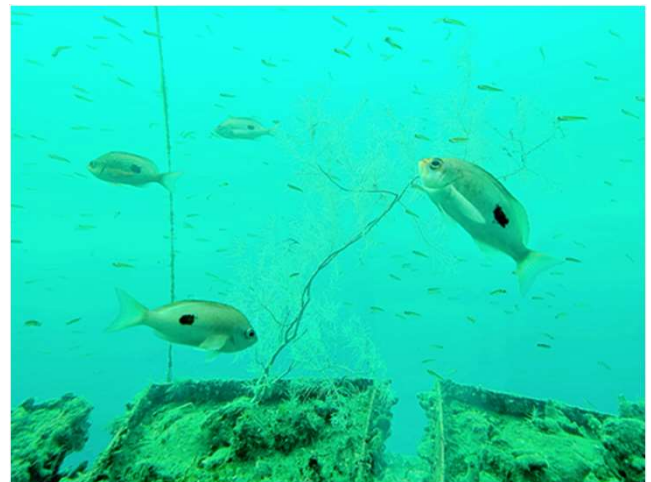
One more tip: It does not matter where you sit when you board the ship as everybody will move around during the cruise.







If you are booked on a Southern Discoveries cruise that includes the underwater observatory, your ship will detour to the former research station where you will go into the underwater observatory and a knowledgeable guide will tell you more about what you are seeing. The former research station has lots of information about Milford Sound, the first settlers, the flora and fauna, etc. The guide will also give another talk in the reception area and provide even more information about this area.





This concludes the itinerary of Day 19.

(E) Riverside Market ([map](#))

Riverside Market is a fairly large and colorful food mall with lots of food stalls on the inside and several on the outside. This is a good place to eat lunch or dinner or just have an ice cream or people-watch.



5.17.4 Christchurch Botanic Gardens

([map](#), [reviews](#), [website](#))

We started our New Zealand adventure with the Auckland Botanic Gardens, and we will finish it with the Christchurch Botanic Gardens.

The Christchurch Botanic Gardens were founded in 1863 with the planting of an English oak tree to commemorate the marriage of Princess Alexandra of Denmark and British Prince Albert.

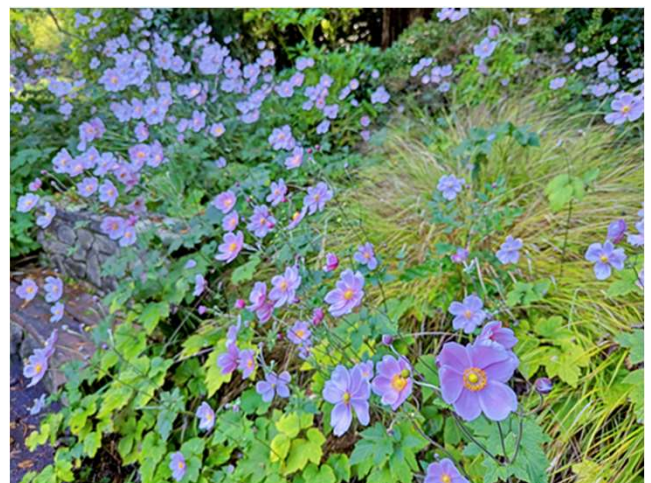
Today, the gardens covers 52 acres (21 hectares) and showcases a large variety of exotic and native plants of New Zealand.

Parking and admission are free.

Start your tour at the visitor center, which includes a gift shop, a small museum, and a café with indoor and outdoor seating.

An interactive [Seasonal Highlights Map](#) on their website shows in which sections of the garden you can see flowering plants and it shows the walking trails in the park.







Day 22: Flight to Auckland and then home





6. Closing Remarks

ABOUT RUDY FROM BACKPACK & SNORKEL

I was born in Germany and emigrated to the US in 2003. My wife and I are a truly multinational couple: I, with my German background, and she with her Chinese heritage. Both of us live in the USA.

Sadly, working in the US means we have much fewer vacation days compared to other countries like e.g. Germany and thus we cannot travel very frequently.

Through a lot of trial and error, we have found our ideal travel and vacation style. **Making Memorable Moments** by focusing on important destinations, planning time for meeting the locals and, of course, for relaxation are our priorities.

We have also learned to appreciate local foods and try to eat as many local dishes as possible. Just for fun, we try to eat at one Chinese restaurant in each country we visit. It is absolutely amazing how different Chinese food is all over the planet.



MAKING MEMORABLE MOMENTS

You may take 10,000 photos during your vacation, rush from one attraction to the next, but what you will remember in your heart is how you were **Making Memorable Moments**.

For me, that was e.g. Spider Rock in Canyon de Chelly (ever heard of this US National Park?). When I first saw it, I was blown away by this majestic natural obelisk and the beautiful canyon that it sits in. I have been there two more times and still feel the same.

Or think of Isla Mujeres, a small island outside Cancun, Mexico. On the surface, Playa Norte is supposedly Mexico's most beautiful beach and it is always crowded and the boats that anchor there play loud music. Below the surface, Isla Mujeres is very relaxed, quite walkable and it has friendly locals, good authentic Mexican food and good international cuisine and is often very affordable.

Isla Mujeres is our personal paradise!



PACK YOUR BACKPACK & SNORKEL AND LET'S GO

Our travel style has evolved over the years. We are packing light these days when we travel and typically only need a small backpack per person - see my [Traveling Light Guide](#).

With this guide, I want to provide value to you and help you plan your own relaxing vacations with the goal of **Making Memorable Moments!**

Please contact me if you have any questions or comments.