



Great Journeys of New Zealand - Signature New Zealand Up Close Tour 2025/2026

Embark on the ultimate New Zealand adventure on a fully guided rail journey from Auckland to Queenstown designed for those seeking a stress-free and unforgettable experience. This meticulously curated tour links three world-class scenic train journeys. Highlights include exploring the dramatic volcanic peaks of Tongariro National Park, cruising the magical, glowworm-lit Waitomo Caves, and relaxing amidst the stunning beauty of Milford Sound and Lake Wakatipu. With an experienced Tour Director guiding you through spectacular landscapes and vibrant cities, this all-encompassing journey promises to ignite your sense of adventure and create lasting memories with like-minded travelers.

Starts in: Auckland
Finishes in: Queenstown
Length: 17days / 16nights
Accommodation: Hotel 4 star
Can be customised: Yes

This itinerary can be customised to suit you perfectly. We can add more days, remove days, change accommodations, mix it up, add activities to suit your interests or simply design and create something from scratch. Call us today to get your custom New Zealand itinerary underway.



Inclusions:

Includes: All coach transport
Includes: Afterhours emergency support while touring
Included: Hop-on Hop-off Tram
Included: Pounamu (Greenstone) Experience & Hokitika Gorge Walk
Included: VIP West Coast Wildlife Centre Guided Experience
Included: Haast River Safari
Included: TSS Earnslaw Cruise & Farm Show
Included: Northern Explorer Train Auckland to Hamilton
Included: Sanctuary Mountain
Included: Northern Explorer Train Hamilton to Tongariro National Park
Included: Northern Explorer Train Tongariro National Park to Wellington
Included: Marlborough Wine Tour
Included: Paua Pearl Farm Tour
: 16 breakfasts, 3 lunches, 9 dinners

Includes: All pick ups/drop offs at destinations
Included: Dolphin Encounter Experience
Included: Christchurch City Walking Tour
Included: TranzAlpine Train from Christchurch to Greymouth
Included: Scenic journey through the Southern Lakes
Included: Milford Sound Day Excursion
Included: Raglan Sunset Cruise
Included: Zealong Estate Tour, Tea Ceremony & Signature High Tea
Included: Waitomo GlowWorm Caves
Included: Lauren's Lavender Farm
Included: Wellington City Tour
Included: Cruise on the Interislander Ferry
Included: Coastal Pacific Train

Day 1



Explore Auckland

Kia ora! Welcome to Auckland, New Zealand's City of Sails! Auckland is known for its multicultural hub of food, music, arts, and culture. After checking into your hotel and reading your welcome letter from your Tour Director, head out and explore all that Auckland has to offer. This is the perfect opportunity to visit the Sky Tower or go shopping along bustling Queen Street. You may even fancy a drink in one of the charming bars or eateries of Vulcan Lane. Your tour officially begins this evening, as you join your fellow travellers and Tour Director this evening for a welcome reception.

Your accommodation: 4-4.5 Star Hotel

Meals included: Dinner

Day 2



The Beginning of your Scenic Journey

Your journey awaits as you join the Northern Explorer Scenic train. Marvel at rural New Zealand's lush landscapes from the comfort of your scenic carriage. From the sparkling waters of the Waitematā Harbour to the green pastures of the Waikato - you won't want to miss a moment. Arriving in Hamilton, your coach awaits you to bring you to the enchanting Zealong Tea Estate, where an immersive 1.5-hour tour and tea ceremony await, followed by the renowned Signature High Tea experience. Discover the art of tea-making amidst breathtaking surroundings. In the early afternoon, enjoy some free time in the heart of Hamilton before departing for an evening visit to Raglan - a seaside surfer town. It's here that you'll enjoy a Sunset Dinner Cruise on the pristine harbour.

Your accommodation: 4-4.5 Star Hotel

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 3



Discover Endangered and Bioluminescent Species

Immerse yourself in the wonders of Sanctuary Mountain Maungatautari on a bespoke two-hour tour through its ancient forests. Discover the indigenous flora and fauna, their traditional uses, and gain fascinating insights into Māori herbal medicinal practices, the unique Rongoā Rākau. This unforgettable journey will take you deep into the heart of New Zealand's natural beauty and cultural heritage. Your expedition continues after a lunch stop in New Zealand's "Kiwiana Capital", Otorohanga. Make sure you capture a photo of the giant Kiwi birds! Next, discover the famous Waitomo Glow-worm Caves and be dazzled by the seemingly star-filled sky as you glide by boat through this impressive cave formation. Tonight, explore Hamilton's riverside walks and shops on this free evening. Enjoy one of the many nearby restaurants as the sun sets over the Waikato River.

Your accommodation: 4-4.5 Star Hotel

Meals included: Breakfast

Day 4



Explore Tongariro National Park

Joining the Northern Explorer train, today you'll soar over icy mountain streams as you travel to Tongariro National Park, the home of three volcanic mountains. Tongariro National Park has a diverse range of ecosystems and spectacular landscapes. In 1993, it was recognised by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site and was the first property to be inscribed with the criteria describing the cultural values it holds for Māori. Enjoy a mini excursion up to Tūroa ski field. Here you'll want to capture a panoramic photo of Middle Earth before descending into Ohakune. Tonight, enjoy a special dinner with your fellow travellers.

Your accommodation: 4-4.5 Star Hotel

Meals included: Breakfast, Dinner

Day 5



Another day to explore Tongariro National Park

Enjoy the morning with breakfast at your accommodation, then set off on a journey of discovery to Taumarunui. Enjoy the ambiance as you spend a few hours in Taumarunui, exploring a local garden before your lunchtime feast at Lauren's Lavender Farm. Indulge in a hot meat dish accompanied by an array of refreshing salads, followed by a walk amidst the fragrant lavender fields and a visit to the lavender shop. After your garden escapades, you'll return to Ohakune, where the evening is yours to spend how you like. Opt for relaxation in the inviting hot tubs or immerse yourself in the vibrant energy of Ohakune at your leisure.

Your accommodation: 4-4.5 Star Hotel

Meals included: Breakfast

Day 6



Tongariro National Park to Wellington on the Northern Explorer Train

Your day begins with an elevated experience up the northern face of Mt Ruapehu for panoramic views of the volcanic landscape. Drink in the views of Mt Ngāuruhoe, Mt Tongariro, and beyond across the central North Island. Joining the Northern Explorer train once again, waving goodbye to Tongariro National Park, as you settle into your uber-comfortable seat. Don't get too comfortable though; dramatic rivers, gorges, and ravines are just around the bend! Stretch your legs and explore the open-air carriage to get the best view from the train. A little later, why not indulge in a treat from our onboard licensed cafe? As you glide through rich green farmland and past dramatic coastlines, enjoy the picturesque Porirua Harbour as you arrive into Wellington.

Welcome to Wellington - New Zealand's windy capital! You've arrived at Wellington Railway Station which is just a stone's throw from downtown, the Beehive and Parliament Buildings. You won't want to waste a moment of time after checking into the hotel - your evening is free to explore this culinary capital from Queen's Wharf to Cuba street and beyond.

Your accommodation: 4-4.5 Star Hotel

Meals included: Breakfast, Dinner

Day 7



Explore Wellington

The perfect day does exist - and it includes exploring Wellington! Today is free for you to experience vibrant Wellington as you please. Start by joining our Wellington City introduction tour and then head off to explore Cuba Street's cafes, bookstores, and eccentric shops. Get cultured at Te Papa, New Zealand's National Museum, or visit Zealandia Eco-Sanctuary to surround yourself by native birdlife and regenerating forest. You won't get bored with the plethora of activities on offer. From coffee, culture, historic buildings to botanic gardens and much more; the list goes on! If you need any suggestions or recommendations, just reach out to your helpful Tour Director or our Travel Centre to pre-book an experience. Enjoy dinner tonight with your fellow travellers.

Your accommodation: 4-4.5 Star Hotel

Meals included: Breakfast, Dinner

Day 8



Cook Strait Ferry Crossing to Marlborough

This morning you will say poroporoaki ki te motu raki (good-bye to the North Island) as you sail to the South Island, crossing the Cook Strait on the Interislander ferry. As the shores of the North Island slowly disappear, settle down in the comfy seats in the Premium Lounge. Treat yourself to a mimosa and enjoy a hearty seafaring breakfast, but save some room for morning tea! On your journey across Cook Strait you may spot pods of dolphins playing in the wake or, if you are very lucky, whales. Don't spend all your time inside - as you enter the stunning Queen Charlotte Sound, enjoy the views as you cruise past the remnants of whaling stations, remote working sheep farms, pristine native bush and mussel farms. Admire the beauty of this coastal paradise as you arrive into the gateway of the South Island, Picton. Once in Marlborough, indulge in a gourmet experience as you journey through the renowned Marlborough region, savoring a three-course lunch menu at Allan Scott Wines Bistro, accompanied by a glass of wine with your main meal.

Your accommodation: 4-4.5 Star Hotel

Meals included: Breakfast

Day 9



Marlborough to Kaikoura on the Coastal Pacific Train

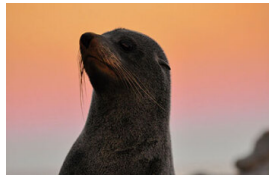
Immerse yourself in the captivating world of the Pāua Pearl Farm Tour, where innovation meets tradition along New Zealand's scenic coastline. After a 45 minute cruise to the outer Marlborough Sounds, begin your journey with a warm welcome and morning tea, followed by a guided tour through the hatchery and growing tanks where these iridescent treasures are nurtured. Learn about the fascinating process of cultivating pāua pearls, then indulge in a tasting of fresh, locally harvested pāua - an ocean delicacy.

Board the Coastal Pacific Scenic Train and relax as the train glides across remote beaches, between mountains and sea, on a timeless journey of breath-taking beauty. Keep an eye out for the fur seals lazing on the rocks! Once in Kaikōura, the evening will be yours to enjoy some iconic kai moana (seafood) at one of the quaint restaurants before enjoying your luxurious ocean-front hotel.

Your accommodation: 4-4.5 Star Hotel

Meals included: Breakfast

Day 10



Kaikoura to Christchurch on the Coastal Pacific Train

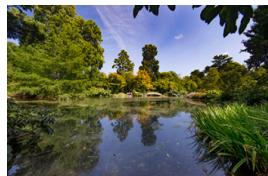
Set out on an unforgettable Dolphin Encounter in Kaikōura, where the ocean comes alive with the playful energy of wild dusky dolphins. Cruise along the stunning coastline as knowledgeable guides share insights into these intelligent marine mammals. Watch as pods leap, spin, and interact in their natural habitat - or elevate your adventure with the option to upgrade and swim alongside them for a truly immersive and exhilarating experience. After this outstanding experience, we're sure you will be feeling peckish. Head to the beach to sample some iconic New Zealand food - you can't go wrong with the humble Kiwiana fish and chips. Work off the deep-fried delights by wandering through the wonderful array of local artisan stores and souvenir shops.

Gather again for the next leg of your journey. Late afternoon, board the Coastal Pacific for the Scenic Plus experience, treating yourself to unparalleled vistas as you glide along the coastline. Revel in dinner and drinks, included with your Scenic Plus package, as you unwind and soak in the breathtaking scenery.

Your accommodation: 4-4.5 Star Hotel

Meals included: Breakfast, Dinner

Day 11



Explore Christchurch

Christchurch, the gateway to South Island exploration, beautifully blends cutting-edge innovation with 19th-century Anglican Gothic Revival architecture. While the city is often remembered for the 2011 earthquake, today it stands as a vibrant, multicultural hub with a strong sense of renewal and creativity. Your day begins with the convenience of the Hop-On Hop-Off Tram, a charming way to navigate the central city and discover its highlights at your own pace. Enjoy a custom walking tour with your Great Journeys New Zealand guide, who will bring the city's stories, landmarks, and hidden gems to life. Explore must-see attractions like the Riverside Markets, Punting on the Avon, the Gondola, and the tranquil Botanical Gardens. Along the way, uncover a variety of boutique cafés tucked into laneways and side streets. This evening, unwind and reflect on your discoveries over a beautifully curated dinner at Earl, one of Christchurch's most acclaimed dining spots, known for its relaxed elegance and refined seasonal cuisine.

Your accommodation: 4-4.5 Star Hotel

Meals included: Breakfast, Dinner

Day 12



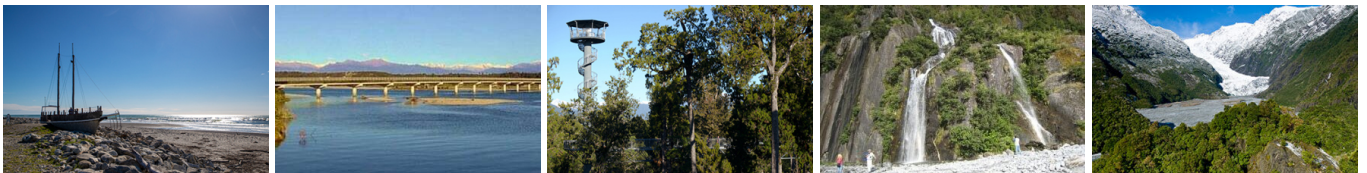
The TransAlpine Scenic Train

The moment has arrived to experience the world-famous TransAlpine, indulging in the Scenic Plus service as you journey through the breathtaking Southern Alps and emerge onto the untamed West Coast. On this unforgettable escape, marvel at dramatic alpine vistas, glide along the ice-fed Waimakariri River, and cross the Great Divide. As the landscape transforms before your eyes, you'll also traverse the historic Otira Tunnel - an engineering triumph over a century old. Along the way, enjoy regionally inspired food and rich commentary that enhances your Scenic Plus experience. Arriving in Greymouth, you'll be met by a private coach and taken even further off the beaten track. Enjoy a custom Greenstone experience - a special insight into the cultural significance and artistry of pounamu (New Zealand jade). Then stretch your legs on a guided walk through the stunning Hokitika Gorge, where vivid turquoise waters wind through lush native bush.

Your accommodation: 4-4.5 Star Hotel

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch

Day 13



Explore the West Coast

This morning, your West Coast journey continues with a VIP experience at the West Coast Wildlife Centre - a special, guided walkthrough designed exclusively for Great Journeys New Zealand guests. Go behind the scenes to learn about the conservation efforts for the rare Rowi kiwi and discover the secrets of this fascinating native species in a truly immersive encounter. After your wildlife experience, enjoy free time in Franz Josef to explore at your own pace. Take a short scenic walk to the glacier viewpoint, browse the charming local shops, or choose from optional adventures such as a thrilling helicopter flight over the glacier or a serene wilderness tour through the rainforest. This evening, rejoin your group for a culinary highlight: a four-course dinner at Te Waonui Forest Retreat, where locally sourced ingredients and refined flavours are served in a tranquil rainforest setting.

Your accommodation: 4-4.5 Star Hotel

Meals included: Breakfast, Dinner

Day 14



Explore the Southern Lakes

Today you will explore the Haast Pass. With changing landscapes around every bend, this journey of about five hours to Queenstown, will be one of the most scenic drives you may ever take. While aboard an exciting river boat and private coach, marvel at the beaches, crystal blue lakes and rivers, mountain peaks, lush vineyards, charming plains and majestic glaciers as your Tour Director guides you between local hidden gems. Stop in unique locations that only locals know about. After an exciting plunge into the history of this gold rush village, you will arrive in the world-famous resort town of Queenstown!

Your accommodation: 4-4.5 Star Hotel

Meals included: Breakfast

Day 15



Explore Milford Sound - The 8th Wonder of the World

Charge your camera and prepare for one of the most awe-inspiring adventures of your journey. Today, you'll travel to the majestic Milford Sound / Piopiotahi, often called the 8th Wonder of the World, aboard our exclusive Cruise Milford Coach service. Relax in comfort as we wind through native rainforests, alpine meadows, and mirror-like reflective pools - complete with custom stops tailored to your group's interests. On arrival, step aboard your boutique cruise and journey deep into the heart of the fjord. Feel the mist from Bowen and Stirling Falls, marvel at the vertical face of Mitre Peak, and take in the dramatic beauty carved by ancient glaciers. For those looking to elevate the experience, there's an optional scenic flight available for your return - soaring above the Southern Alps for a breathtaking aerial perspective of Fiordland. After this unforgettable day, return to Queenstown for a relaxing evening at your own pace.

Your accommodation: 4-4.5 Star Hotel

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch

Day 16



Explore Queenstown

Queenstown truly has something for everyone. Personalise your day to be as active or relaxed as you'd like. Whether it's exploring Walter Peak on a horse trekking adventure, hopping on the gondola for inspiring views, or sipping wine in Gibbston Valley, there is no shortage of activities to delight your senses. Enjoy a 'final hurrah' this evening as we board the TSS Earnslaw Steamship Cruise, dinner, and show. Reflect on your great adventure with your fellow travellers as you cruise to your dining experience at Walter Peak overlooking the beautiful Table Bay. Sit back and watch a true Kiwi experience as you learn about sheep shearing and dog herding in this beautiful setting. This evening will truly encapsulate your great journey as a truly New Zealand highlight. Not ready to call it a night? Sip cocktails and indulge in Queenstown's exciting nightlife alongside the sparkling Lake Wakatipu.

Your accommodation: 4-4.5 Star Hotel

Meals included: Breakfast, Dinner

Day 17



Depart Queenstown

Your journey will end after enjoying a final breakfast with your fellow travellers. You will be transferred to Queenstown Airport for your departing flight.

Tour details

Departures:	Daily
Tour type:	Guided Coach & Train Tours
Starts:	Auckland
Finishes:	Queenstown
Tour length:	17
Accommodation:	Hotel 4 star
Car/transport type:	

Accommodation summary

Day 1	4-4.5 Star Hotel
Day 2	4-4.5 Star Hotel
Day 3	4-4.5 Star Hotel
Day 4	4-4.5 Star Hotel
Day 5	4-4.5 Star Hotel
Day 6	4-4.5 Star Hotel
Day 7	4-4.5 Star Hotel
Day 8	4-4.5 Star Hotel
Day 9	4-4.5 Star Hotel
Day 10	4-4.5 Star Hotel
Day 11	4-4.5 Star Hotel
Day 12	4-4.5 Star Hotel
Day 13	4-4.5 Star Hotel
Day 14	4-4.5 Star Hotel
Day 15	4-4.5 Star Hotel
Day 16	4-4.5 Star Hotel