

South to North Highlights Tour

A highlights tour exploring the iconic attractions of New Zealand. You begin in the 'Adventure Capital' of Queenstown and finish in Auckland the 'City of Sails'. Along the way you'll visit Mt Cook National Park, Kaikoura and the wine region of Marlborough before crossing the Cook Strait to the North Island. Highlights of the north include the Maori culture and thermal wonders in Rotorua and the harbour cities of Auckland and Wellington.

Starts in: Queenstown
 Finishes in: Auckland
 Length: 11days / 10nights
 Accommodation: Hotel 3 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: Late model rental cars
- Includes: Fully inclusive rental car insurance (excess may apply)
- Includes: Unlimited kms
- Includes: Afterhours emergency support while touring
- Included activity: Electronic Travel Guide and In-Country Support App
- Included activity: The Visitor Promise - Cultural Learning Course
- Included activity: Glacier Explorers
- Included activity: Interislander Ferry Picton to Wellington
- Included activity: Wai-O-Tapu Thermal Wonderland
- Included activity: Te Pā Tū Evening Māori Cultural Experience - Dinner Included
- 1 breakfast

Day 1



Collect Rental Car

This tour's from price includes an intermediate-sized vehicle, setting you up for comfortable travels. Yet, we understand every adventure is unique! Feel free to select the perfect wheels from our incredible collection of rental cars, spanning from economy hatchbacks to premium SUVs.

Car Instructions

On collection of your rental car, you will be required to sign a rental agreement and provide a credit card for a security bond authorisation. Remember, the bond is only authorised, not charged, at this stage. While your rental rate may include coverage for mechanical breakdowns (please verify your specific car inclusions), you may also have the option to purchase roadside assistance for non-mechanical issues. All drivers must present a physical credit card, valid driving license and passport to be added to the agreement, with potential additional charges for extra drivers. Debit cards may be used on select vehicles. If you are presenting an international drivers license, this must be accompanied by the original domestic license. Drivers under 21 are not permitted, and those aged 21-24 may face a surcharge, both payable directly to the rental company. For detailed information, please refer to your rental car inclusions. See this important information if you are traveling between the North and South Islands on the ferry

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY - TSS Earnslaw Cruise and Walter Peak Gourmet BBQ Dinner

Enjoy a quintessential Kiwi experience, a delicious gourmet BBQ buffet meal, and a farm demonstration in a stunning lakeside setting. Take in the stunning views of Lake Wakatipu and its surroundings as you cruise across the lake to the historic Walter Peak high country farm aboard the TSS Earnslaw Steamship. Enjoy the ambiance of the heart of the stately homestead while your Colonel's Homestead Restaurant chef prepares a gourmet BBQ dinner. Your seasonal menu includes an extensive selection of local New Zealand produce, including succulent meats and a selection of delicious vegetables and salads. Complete your meal with your choice of delicious desserts, or New Zealand cheeses. After dinner, watch the farm dogs in action with a sheep-herding demonstration and say hello to the other farm animals. Finally, cruise home under the southern stars and enjoy the fresh night air as the lights of Queenstown draw ever closer.

Your accommodation: Copthorne Hotel & Apartments Queenstown Lakeview

Copthorne Hotel & Apartments Queenstown Lakeview is located on Frankton Road, the main arterial route into Queenstown - With the centre of town only a short 10-minute stroll away.



Day 2



Explore Queenstown

Well-known as New Zealand's 'adventure capital', Queenstown is home to a range of adventures, from the world's first and most famous bungy jumps to jet boat thrills, white-water rafting, and skydiving. However, Queenstown offers far more than a fast-paced, action-packed holiday. Settled on the shores of beautiful Lake Wakatipu beneath a soaring panorama of the Remarkables Mountain Range, this alpine town is surrounded by many historic, gastronomic, and scenic wonders. Take a stroll through the beautiful lakefront parks and gardens, browse through market stalls on weekends, dine in wonderful al-fresco restaurants, or ride on the 100-year-old historic Steamship - TSS Earnslaw to Walter Peak Station. Take the Queenstown Gondola up to Bob's Peak and soak up the panoramic views of the magnificent lake and mountain ranges. And after all of that, if you do want the adrenaline rush, Queenstown is known for taking your pick from the Shotover Jet, Canyon Swing, Zipline, Luge, or Heli-hike.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY - Wilderness Jet Experience with Dart River Safaris

Journey deep into the heart of the world-renowned Mt Aspiring National Park, where myth, heritage, and fantasy come to life. As one of Queenstown's most exhilarating activities, the Wilderness Jet adventures on a spectacular journey deep into the heart of the world-renowned Mount Aspiring National Park. It is important you read and understand the risks associated with this activity. For more information please see here.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY - Arrowtown and Wānaka Highlights Tour with Remarkable Scenic Tours

Discover the charm of historic Arrowtown, the serene beauty of Wānaka, and the iconic Cardrona Hotel on this guided tour. Highlights include the Chinese Village in Arrowtown, the famous Wānaka tree, Lake Wānaka's stunning views, the quirky bra fence, and breathtaking lookouts from the Crown Range and Crown Terrace.

Your accommodation: Copthorne Hotel & Apartments Queenstown Lakeview

Copthorne Hotel & Apartments Queenstown Lakeview is located on Frankton Road, the main arterial route into Queenstown - With the centre of town only a short 10-minute stroll away.



Day 3



Queenstown to Aoraki-Mt Cook National Park

Depart Queenstown and head through the Kawarau Gorge and over the historic Kawarau Bridge, a popular bungy jumping location. Choose to participate in this daredevil sport or watch others instead. Continue through Gibbston home to some of the best wines in the country. Follow the gorge to arrive in Cromwell, known for its many fruit orchards. Cromwell was completely submerged when the Clyde Dam was built and Lake Dunstan was established in 1992, the remnants of the old Cromwell town provide a unique snapshot into the history of this area. Head over through the Lindis Pass, one of New Zealand's highest roads, with the summit reaching 971 metres. Its tussock-covered hills are a barren but beautiful sight as you descend into the Mackenzie Basin. You'll go through the towns of Omarama and Twizel, the last stops before you arrive at Lake Pukaki and take the Aoraki-Mt Cook Highway to arrive in the small village

Glacier Explorers

Experience 500-year-old icebergs up close on the Aoraki-Mt Cook terminal lake. The Glacier Explorers tour is the only one of its kind in New Zealand and one of only three in the world! Very few glaciers terminate into lakes and even fewer of them are accessible. See towering ice cliffs and floating icebergs from the safety of a specially designed boat. These boats provide a safe way to view unseen and inaccessible areas of New Zealand's largest glacier The Tasman.

Your accommodation: Hermitage Hotel Room Mount Cook View

The Hermitage Hotel ringed by magnificent snow-capped peaks of the Southern Alps, is a world-renowned tourist destination and has been an icon of superior accommodation and dining since 1884.

Meals included: Breakfast



Day 4



Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park to Christchurch

Leaving Aoraki Mt Cook National Park, travel a short distance for a stop at the visitor centre on the southern shores of Lake Pukaki. Learn about the formation of the region and take in the spectacular views of Aoraki-Mount Cook. Along the way, you'll reach Lake Tekapo which also displays the same reflective qualities as Lake Pukaki, making the waters bright turquoise. It's a great place to take a scenic flight, soak in a hot spring or just marvel at the magnificent views. From here you travel through Burkes Pass and into the rich farming valley that surrounds Geraldine. Continue across the vast Canterbury Plains to Christchurch.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY - Discover Christchurch Afternoon Tour with Leisure Tours

A half-day sightseeing tour of Christchurch highlighting both the damage to the city inflicted by several large earthquakes in 2010 and 2011 and the rebuild which is currently in progress, together with the surviving beauty of the city and the historical landmarks. Experience the grand architecture, beautiful gardens, and scenic viewpoints on a half-day city tour of Christchurch.

Your accommodation: Scenic Hotel Cotswold

The Scenic Hotel Cotswold is just a few minutes walk to boutique shopping at Merivale and Hagley Park. The distinctive architecture of the Scenic Hotel Cotswold reflects Christchurch's image as the most English of cities outside of England.



Day 5



Christchurch to Kaikoura

The drive north from Christchurch to Kaikoura takes you through the rolling hills of North Canterbury's major wine region, the Waipara Valley. Allow time for a detour and visit Hanmer Springs for a dip in the mineral hot pools. Continue on and cross the Hawkswood Range before descending to the spectacular Kaikoura coastline - where the road hugs the ocean for the last leg of the drive.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY - Ocean's Cabin with Whale Watch Kaikōura

Experience New Zealand's only marine-based whale-watching company. Whale Watch Kaikōura offers a once-in-a-lifetime, up-close encounter with the giant Sperm Whale. You are also likely to encounter New Zealand fur seals, dolphins, and albatross. Depending on the season you may also see Pilot, Blue, and Southern Right whales as well as migrating humpbacks. Often orcas can be spotted here and the world's smallest dolphin, the Hector's, occasionally makes an appearance.

Your accommodation: Sudima Hotel Kaikōura

This state-of-the-art waterfront hotel in Kaikōura has a 4.5 star rating with an outstanding in-house restaurant, a bar and conference facilities.



Day 6



Kaikoura to Blenheim

Heading north from Kaikoura, the road hugs the shore for approximately 50 kilometres and offers many opportunities to view the native wildlife such as seabirds and New Zealand fur seals. One of the best seal watching locations is Ohau Point (25km north of Kaikoura), where you can observe the adults on the shoreline and the pups frolicking in the waterfall, just a short walk from the road (signposted). As you drive you will have turquoise waters of the South Pacific Ocean to your east and to the west the towering Kaikoura Ranges. Crossing the dry hills of the Marlborough ranges you head towards Marlborough, New Zealand's largest wine producing region. Blenheim sits right at the heart of Marlborough and is ideally located to enjoy an afternoon sampling the local produce. A great way to do this is to take a guided wine tour with Sounds Connection Wine Tours.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY - Zipline & Native Forest Tour with EcoZip Kaikoura

Enjoy a scenic journey to Kaikōura's beachfront airfield, followed by a 4WD adventure crossing the braided Kahutara River to Rakanui Station. Take in panoramic views of rolling farmland, lush valleys, and snowcapped mountains before embarking on an exhilarating 5-zipline course, including twin lines for side-by-side rides. Learn fascinating local history from expert guides and enjoy a walk through native forest, with a chance to plant a tree during winter as part of Eco Zip's conservation program. An unforgettable eco-adventure awaits! It is important you read and understand the risks associated with this activity before travel. For more information, please see [here](#)

Your accommodation: Scenic Hotel Marlborough

Scenic Hotel Marlborough offers the ultimate in modern comfort and service. Located in the heart of sunny Marlborough, this Blenheim hotel is just a few minutes walk from the centre of Blenheim with some of New Zealand's finest food and wine virtually on your doorstep.



Day 7



Blenheim to Picton

The short drive from Blenheim to Picton takes you through more wine-growing regions and the valley to the west of the Robertson Range. Picton is a port town and its here that the Interislander ferries arrive and depart. The town centre is quite small with plenty of shops and cafes and the waterfront area is a very pleasant place to spend a few hours watching the activity of the ships. The Edwin Fox Maritime Centre on the wharf is worth a visit with the star attraction being the vessel the Edwin Fox, reputedly the 9th oldest ship in the world. The hills to the west of Picton are the start of Queen Charlotte Drive, a very picturesque road to Havelock and Nelson that winds its way along the shores of the sounds.

Interislander Ferry Picton to Wellington

The 92 km journey between Picton and Wellington takes around 3 hours and has been described as 'one of the most beautiful ferry rides in the world'. Around one hour of the cruise takes you through the Marlborough Sounds. This region of bush covered mountains, small islands, crystal clear waters and secluded bays offer remarkable photographic opportunities. From the Cook Strait, spectacular views of the Kaikoura Ranges on the South Island can be enjoyed and often dolphins and sea birds are seen. After crossing the strait you approach Wellington Harbour and pass many interesting points such as Pencarrow Head on top of which is New Zealand's oldest lighthouse (1859). Red Rocks is home to a seal colony and Oterangi Bay is the site which recorded the country's highest ever wind speed of 268 kph (167 mph).

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY - Premium Lounge with Interislander

Escape to Interislander's Premium Lounge for sensational views, child-free serenity, and locally sourced food and drink. Interislander's Premium Lounge has enhanced its offering to bring you an elevated travel experience across Cook Strait. Enjoy delicious food and drink, attentive service, and prime positions for appreciating the spectacular views. Whether you're looking to relax or chat with your travel companions, the Premium Lounge provides the ideal space. With varied seating options, you can choose a cozy spot to watch the stunning scenery and taste a selection of seasonal snacks included in your ticket.

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SUGGESTED ACTIVITY - Zealandia By Night Wildlife Sanctuary Tour

Taking a night tour of Zealandia wildlife eco-sanctuary is an unforgettable experience and one that comes highly recommended. A conservation success and safe haven for some of New Zealand's rarest native animals, Zealandia is home to many remarkable species of birds, reptiles and insects living wild within a beautiful 225 hectare (one square mile) valley, just 10 minutes from the central city.

Your accommodation: Hotel Ibis Wellington

Hotel Ibis Wellington is ideally located in Featherston Street in the heart of Wellington City and easy walking distance to Wellington's famous cafe lifestyle.



Day 8



Wellington to Rotorua

The drive from Wellington to Taupo takes you via the Kapiti Coast and the seaside towns of Plimmerton, Paekakariki and Paraparaumu are worth a short detour. Heading north you pass through the rural towns of Taihape, Mangaweka and Bulls before arriving onto the central plateau. A little further the military town of Waiouru is home to the National Army Museum, an incredible collection of New Zealand's military history and a memorial to its servicemen. Skirting Tongariro National Park, one of New Zealand's three world heritage sites, you can see the 2,500 metre peak of the volcanically active Mt. Ruapehu. You might also recognise the symmetrical shape of Mt. Ngauruhoe as this was used as the scenery of Mt. Doom in the Lord of the Rings Trilogy. The township of Taupo sits on the shores of New Zealand's largest lake, Lake Taupo - a gigantic volcanic caldera formed during one of the world's largest ever eruptions. Just north of the town are the Huka Falls and a short detour to view is advised. The Huka Jet can get you much closer with a thrilling jet boat ride. Nearby Craters of the Moon is a geothermal reserve with great walking tracks around its many boiling pools and steaming vents. Continuing on to Rotorua you pass the volcanic valley, visit either Wai O Tapu or the Waimangu Valley for a closer look. Arriving into Rotorua the city's geothermal activity is evident with steam rising from the roadside and hills. Rotorua is considered the heart of New Zealand's Maori cultural and it's here you can learn of their history and traditions. The Ohinemutu Village is located on the site of the first Maori settlement in the area. One of the most popular introductions for many to the Maori culture is through an evening at Mitai Maori Village. Here you will gain an insight into the traditional Maori way of life through song, dance and entertainment. A dinner prepared in the traditional manner is served to finish the evening off.

Your accommodation: Sudima Lake Rotorua

Sudima Hotel Lake Rotorua boasts a location that is second-to-none, right on the shores of beautiful Lake Rotorua. Adjacent to the world-famous Polynesian Spa complex and just a short stroll to all the attractions in Rotorua.



Day 9



Rotorua

Discover the geothermal, adventure, and cultural wonderland of Rotorua. As you explore, you may see steam rising from cracks in the road, bubbling and hissing water in pools along the lake's edge, and the unmistakable smell of Sulfur. Rotorua is rich in Māori culture and history, with many Māori inhabitants recognising the great potential of the volcanic land. For an outdoor adventure, head to The Redwoods and experience the rainforest treetops from high up. There are a few accessible trails for disabled hikers and great biking trails as well. If you're lucky, you might spot some of New Zealand's native birds, such as the Pīwakawaka (Fantail) and the Tūī. Alternatively, enjoy the Lake Tikitapu Blue Lake Walk or explore Kuirau Park, where you'll find bubbling mud pools and steaming lakes. Don't miss the private thermal reserves such as Te Puia and Wai-O-Tapu, where you can walk among bubbling mud pools, spouting geysers, and Sulfur ponds. Just a few minutes from the town centre, the Agrodome and National Kiwi Hatchery offer an insight into nature. Rotorua's rich Māori culture is a must-see. Spend an evening with Te Pā Tū, complete with a traditional-style dinner or stroll along the lake edge to reach one of the country's oldest Māori villages at Ohinemutu. When hunger strikes, visit Eat Street in Rotorua CBD, a vibrant street lined with delicious eateries and restaurants to satisfy any craving. No visit to Rotorua would be complete without experiencing Rotorua's original tourist attraction - a relaxing spa treatment. This town boasts an array of wellness experiences to unwind in. Whether you are seeking adventure, culture, or relaxation, Rotorua offers an unforgettable experience.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY - National Kiwi Hatchery Experience

The National Kiwi Hatchery Experience is a special opportunity to gain insight into and view this highly regarded conservation centre. Developed with the visitor experience in mind, the hatchery boasts special viewing opportunities and is hosted by kiwi expert guides who ensure guests leave fully informed and all questions answered. Learn all about New Zealand's intriguing national icon and the efforts of the kiwi husbandry team, see and discover what it takes to hatch and rare chicks, and if you're lucky see baby chicks in person!

Wai-O-Tapu Thermal Wonderland

Wai-O-Tapu Thermal Wonderland is a spectacular showcase of New Zealand's colourful and unique geothermal elements sculpted by thousands of years of volcanic activity. You will be introduced to a diversely different natural landscape, extending over 18-sq. km. Enjoy viewing the volcanic features as you walk at your own pace along well-defined tracks. Relax in the first-class Visitor Centre, home to the Gift Shop and Cafe facilities. Visit the Mud Pool, the largest in New Zealand, it was originally the site of a large mud volcano which was destroyed through erosion in the 1920s. See the history and beauty of the Lady Knox Geyser at 10:15 am every day where a daily eruption happens of up to 20 metres.

Te Pā Tū Evening Māori Cultural Experience - Dinner Included

New Zealand's Most Awarded Cultural Attraction, presenting Te Pā Tū. Feast on song, drama, tradition, and divine seasonal kai (cuisine) within the forest Pā (village) blanketed by towering Tawa trees, blazing bonfires, and a forest-formed amphitheatre. Te Pā Tū shares Māori history, traditions, and cultural aspirations across 4-hours of celebration and feasting. These events change with each season of the Maramataka, the Māori lunar calendar.

Your accommodation: Sudima Lake Rotorua

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Day 10



Rotorua to Auckland

The drive from Rotorua to Auckland takes you through the heart of the Waikato and its rich agricultural land. New Zealand's longest river, the Waikato guides you through the art and craft stores of Tirau and the township of Cambridge. Continue on a little further to arrive in Auckland City, your destination for the night.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY - Hobbiton Movie Set Tour from Shires Rest

In the heart of New Zealand, you can step into the lush pastures of the Shire with a guided tour of Hobbiton, as featured in The Lord of the Rings and The Hobbit Trilogies. Hobbiton is located just outside of Matamata in the heart of the lush Waikato farming region. Here you can visit such iconic Hobbit locations as Hobbit Holes, the Green Dragon Inn, the Mill and the Party Tree with a guide sharing behind-the-scenes tales and insight into the making of the films. Spend time wandering through Bagshot Row before being led inside a Hobbit Hole to view the detailed interior, designed to provide an authentic glimpse into the dwelling of a Hobbit.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY - Harbour Sailing Dinner Cruise with Explore

This unique on-water sailing and dining experience is not to be missed while you're in Auckland. Enjoy smooth sailing on the Waitemata Harbour - then watch this photogenic city come alive with twinkling lights. Enjoy your meal as you sail around the beautiful Auckland Harbour taking in the view as the sun slowly sets. You'll be treated to canapes and a drink as you set off towards Westhaven Marina. To finish the evening off, savour your dessert course as you leisurely sail back to Auckland's vibrant Viaduct Harbour.

Your accommodation: Sudima Auckland City

Conveniently located within easy walking distance of Auckland's bustling shopping, arts, dining and entertainment precincts and opposite the New Zealand International Convention Centre.



Day 11



Depart Auckland today

Explore more of vibrant Auckland city before dropping your rental car at the airport depot and continuing your onward journey.

Farewell from Aotearoa / New Zealand

Bid farewell to Aotearoa / New Zealand, taking with you unforgettable memories of its breathtaking landscapes and incredible adventures. In Māori, it is said mā te wā, which is not goodbye, it is see you soon!

Tour details

Departures:	Daily
Tour type:	Nationwide Self Drive
Starts:	Queenstown
Finishes:	Auckland
Tour length:	11
Accommodation:	Hotel 3 star
Car/transport type:	

Accommodation summary

Day 1	Copthorne Hotel & Apartments Queenstown Lakeview
Day 2	Copthorne Hotel & Apartments Queenstown Lakeview
Day 3	Hermitage Hotel Room Mount Cook View
Day 4	Scenic Hotel Cotswold
Day 5	Sudima Hotel Kaikōura
Day 6	Scenic Hotel Marlborough
Day 7	Hotel Ibis Wellington
Day 8	Sudima Lake Rotorua
Day 9	Sudima Lake Rotorua
Day 10	Sudima Auckland City