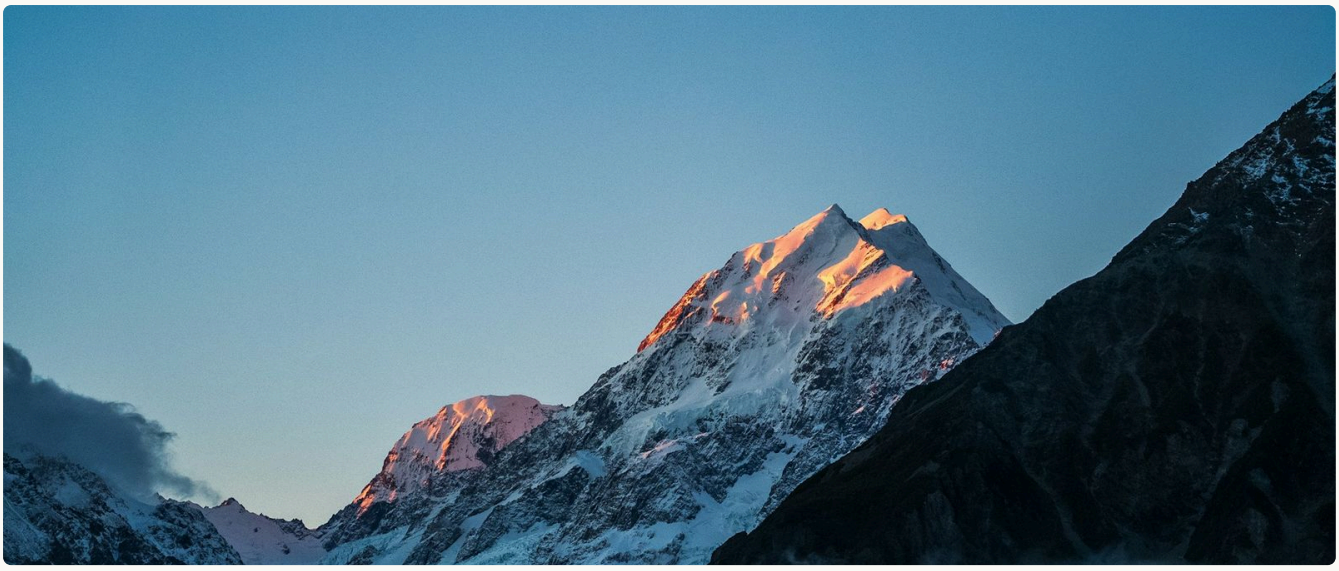

Majestic New Zealand: Both Islands Self-Drive in 12 Days

NEW ZEALAND · AUCKLAND · ROTORUA · CHRISTCHURCH · QUEENSTOWN

12D 11N | 25–30 PAX | STARTS AUCKLAND | NOT INCLUDED

Drive from Auckland to Christchurch over twelve days, combining both islands without retracing your route. The North Island brings Waitomo, Hobbiton, Wai-O-Tapu and the Redwoods Nightlights before an independently arranged flight from Rotorua to Christchurch. Continue along the South Island's West Coast for Franz Josef and Fox glaciers, cross Haast Pass to Queenstown, visit Milford Sound, then return through Aoraki Mt Cook and Lake Tekapo. Eleven nights' accommodation, rental car hire and five selected experiences are included; the domestic flight between islands is not. With time built around the glacier region and major scenic drives, this journey suits independent travellers who want both islands, a clear one-way route and freedom to explore at their own pace.

DAY

01

AUCKLAND · OVERNIGHT 1 OF 1

Arrive Auckland — collect rental car

Collect your rental car at Auckland Airport and drive to your accommodation in the city. The car is included for 11 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 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: Auckland Harbour Dinner Cruise (own expense); Sky Tower and Orbit Restaurant (own expense).

OVERNIGHT

Auckland

DAY

02

ROTORUA · OVERNIGHT 1 OF 2

Auckland to Rotorua — via Waitomo and Hobbiton

The longest driving day on the itinerary — 364 kilometres from Auckland to Rotorua with two stops. An early start is essential; aim to leave by 7:30am. Auckland to Waitomo is 195 kilometres (2.5 hours), Waitomo to Matamata is 102 kilometres (1 hour 20 minutes), Matamata to Rotorua is 67 kilometres (55 minutes).

Waitomo Glowworm Caves — Included. A limestone cave system 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 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 the gardens of 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.

MEALS

Lunch

OVERNIGHT

Rotorua

DAY

03

ROTORUA · OVERNIGHT 2 OF 2

Rotorua — Wai-O-Tapu and Redwoods Nightlights

A full day in Rotorua across the two included experiences. Wai-O-Tapu in the morning, the Redwoods Nightlights in the evening.

Wai-O-Tapu Thermal Wonderland — Included. Drive yourself 27 kilometres south of Rotorua. Position for the Lady Knox Geyser at 10:15am before the main park circuit — the geyser erupts daily, induced with soap powder. The Champagne Pool at 74°C and the Artist's Palette silica flat are the most distinctive features. Allow 2 hours.

Redwoods Nightlights — Included. An evening walk along an elevated treetop walkway through the Whakarewarewa Forest, lit by artist-designed lanterns suspended through California redwoods. 5 kilometres from central Rotorua; free parking. Runs at dusk; allow 45 minutes to 1 hour. Check current seasonal hours on arrival.

Optional: Skyline Gondola and Buffet Lunch (own expense); Wai Ariki Hot Springs and Spa in central Rotorua (own expense); National Kiwi Hatchery Tour (own expense).

OVERNIGHT

Rotorua

DAY

04

CHRISTCHURCH · OVERNIGHT 1 OF 1

Rotorua to Christchurch — domestic flight (not included)

Drive to Rotorua Airport and fly to Christchurch. The domestic flight is not included and must be booked independently before travel. Air New Zealand operates this route; the flight takes approximately 2 hours. Book well in advance — this is the pivot point of the itinerary.

Rotorua Airport (ROT) — 10 kilometres from the city centre. The rental car continues with you on a one-way hire from Auckland to Christchurch; confirm any inter-island one-way surcharge at collection in Auckland.

Christchurch — The South Island's largest city, substantially rebuilt since the 2011 earthquake. The Avon River precinct and the post-earthquake architecture are worth an evening walk. The International Antarctic Centre adjacent to the airport is a good option on arrival if time permits (own expense).

Optional: International Antarctic Centre — adjacent to the airport, covering Antarctic exploration with live penguins and a storm simulation room (own expense); Christchurch Tram Dinner (own expense).

OVERNIGHT

Christchurch

DAY

05

FRANZ JOSEF · OVERNIGHT 1 OF 2

Christchurch to the Glacier Region — via Arthur's Pass

The drive from Christchurch to the Glacier Region is 240–380 kilometres depending on your route — allow 3.5 to 5 hours. The direct route via Arthur's Pass is 310 kilometres; the Greymouth coastal route is longer.

Arthur's Pass National Park — The main divide crossing on SH73 reaches 920 metres at the pass. The Waimakariri Gorge on the approach and the kea (alpine parrot) in the carpark at Arthur's Pass village are the landmarks. The Otira Tunnel at 8.5 kilometres descends to the West Coast.

West Coast — The narrow strip between the Tasman Sea and the Southern Alps receives up to 5,000 millimetres of rainfall per year. The result is dense temperate rainforest right to the glacier's edge. The towns of Hokitika and Ross are on the drive south.

Optional: West Coast Treetop Walkway near Hokitika (own expense).

OVERNIGHT

Glacier Region

DAY

06

FRANZ JOSEF · OVERNIGHT 2 OF 2

Glacier Region — Franz Josef and Fox Glacier

A full free day in glacier country. Franz Josef and Fox Glacier are 25 kilometres apart on the same road; both are accessible as day visits from either township. The second night here allows you to visit both without feeling rushed, and gives a weather buffer for the optional helicopter activities.

Franz Josef Glacier Valley Walk — A self-guided walk from the valley carpark to the current glacier viewpoint, with guide boards marking where the face stood in previous decades. Allow 1.5–2 hours return.

Fox Glacier — 25 kilometres south of Franz Josef. A similar valley walk to the Fox Glacier terminal face. Fox is slightly longer and lower; both are fed by the same neve on the Main Divide.

Punakaiki Pancake Rocks — Optional northern detour: 30-million-year-old limestone formations 45 kilometres north of Greymouth. The blowholes are most active at high tide (own expense).

Optional: Franz Josef Glacier Heli-Hike — helicopter access to the current ice face with a guided walk on crampons, weather dependent (own expense); Heliservices Snow Landing — 20-minute scenic helicopter flight with a snow landing on the Main Divide (own expense).

OVERNIGHT

Glacier Region

DAY

07

QUEENSTOWN · OVERNIGHT 1 OF 3

Glacier Region to Queenstown — via Haast Pass

The drive from the Glacier Region to Queenstown is 350 kilometres — approximately 4 hours 35 minutes via the Haast Pass. This is the South Island's most geographically varied single day of driving: West Coast rainforest, the lowest main divide crossing, the dry eastern ranges, and Central Otago's schist landscape.

Haast Pass (563 metres) — The lowest crossing of the Southern Alps through the Haast Pass / Tioripatea UNESCO World Heritage Area. The transition from West Coast rainforest to the eastern landscape happens within a few kilometres of the summit.

Makarora Blue Pools — A short walk from the Makarora carpark to pools on the Makarora River fed by glacial meltwater from the Main Divide. Clear, cold water. Allow 40 minutes return.

Wānaka — An optional brief stop at the lakeside town before the final drive to Queenstown.

Optional: Skyline Gondola and Buffet Dinner on arrival in Queenstown (own expense).

OVERNIGHT

Queenstown

DAY

08

QUEENSTOWN · OVERNIGHT 2 OF 3

Queenstown — free day

A free day in Queenstown. The car gives you access to the full range of options around the town without being on a fixed programme.

Glenorchy Road — The 45-kilometre drive north along the western shore of Lake Wakatipu is one of the most scenic short drives in the South Island. The river flats beyond Glenorchy toward Paradise are Lord of the Rings filming locations. Allow a half day return.

Arrowtown — 20 minutes from Queenstown on the Arrow River. The gold rush main street and Chinese settlement precinct are worth an hour.

Gibbston Valley — The wine-growing gorge east of Queenstown, planted predominantly in Pinot Noir, with several cellar doors open for tastings (own expense).

All optional activities bookable through your hotel or guide.

OVERNIGHT

Queenstown

DAY

09

QUEENSTOWN · OVERNIGHT 3 OF 3

Queenstown — Milford Sound day trip

The Milford Sound day is approximately 12 hours when self-driving from Queenstown — 287 kilometres each way through Fiordland National Park. Leave by 7:00am.

Driving notes: the road through Fiordland from Te Anau is sealed throughout. The Homer Tunnel is single-lane with traffic managed by lights; wait times up to 15 minutes. Check road conditions at nzta.govt.nz the evening before.

Mirror Lakes — Small tarns off the Te Anau–Milford road that reflect the Earl Mountains on calm mornings. A 10-minute stop.

Homer Tunnel — 1.2 kilometres through the Darran Mountains, opened in 1954. The hanging valley above the portal is one of the more memorable road moments on the South Island.

Milford Sound Fiord Cruise — Included. The fiord is 15 kilometres long with granite walls rising 1,200 metres out of the water. Mitre Peak at 1,692 metres is the most photographed point. Stirling Falls and Lady Bowen Falls run year-round. Lunch included on board.

Return to Queenstown by your own vehicle, arriving evening.

MEALS

Lunch

OVERNIGHT

Queenstown

DAY

10

AORAKI MT COOK · OVERNIGHT 1 OF 1

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.

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 alongside the western shore for 50 kilometres. The lake's turquoise colour from suspended glacial rock flour deepens as you approach the mountain.

Aoraki Mt Cook Village — Free time at the base of New Zealand's highest peak at 3,724 metres. The Hooker Valley Track to the terminal lake below the Hooker Glacier is 90 minutes return.

OVERNIGHT

Tekapo or Mt Cook region

DAY

11

CHRISTCHURCH · OVERNIGHT 1 OF 1

Aoraki Mt Cook and Lake Tekapo to Christchurch

The drive from the Mt Cook/Tekapo region to Christchurch is 230 kilometres — allow 3 to 4 hours. The route descends from the Mackenzie Basin through the Canterbury foothills and across the plains.

Church of the Good Shepherd, Lake Tekapo — A small stone chapel built in 1935 on the lakeshore with a plain glass window framing the lake and mountains. A brief stop; the lake's colour in morning light is different from the afternoon.

Optional: Dark Sky Experience at Lake Tekapo — if it is a Thursday to Monday and you stayed in the Tekapo area overnight, the evening stargazing programme is worth adding (own expense). The Mackenzie Basin holds one of the world's few certified International Dark Sky Reserve designations.

Christchurch — Final night in the South Island's largest city before tomorrow's departure.

OVERNIGHT

Christchurch

DAY

12

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 inter-island fees at collection.

Optional: International Antarctic Centre adjacent to the car return area if not visited on Day 4 (own expense).

YOUR TRIP AT A GLANCE

What's Included

DEPARTS FROM	FLIGHTS	GROUP SIZE
Auckland	**Not included**	**25–30 pax**

INCLUDED

- check 11-day rental car hire with zero or reduced excess liability (collected Auckland, returned Christchurch)
- check 11 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 Wai-O-Tapu Thermal Wonderland admission
- check Redwoods Nightlights walk, Rotorua
- check Milford Sound cruise with lunch

NOT INCLUDED

- Domestic flight Rotorua to Christchurch (Day 4) — to be booked independently
- International flights
- Travel insurance
- Fuel and road tolls
- Meals not specified in the itinerary
- Optional activities and entrance fees
- Personal expenses, laundry and minibar