North South Highlights: Both Islands Self-Drive

NEW ZEALAND · AUCKLAND · ROTORUA · CHRISTCHURCH · QUEENSTOWN

8D 7N | 25–30 PAX | STARTS AUCKLAND | NOT INCLUDED

Travel from Auckland to Christchurch over eight flexible days, using a one-way self-drive route and an independently arranged domestic flight to connect the islands. Explore Rotorua's Wai-O-Tapu geothermal landscape and Redwoods Nightlights, with Hobbiton available as an optional stop from Auckland. In Queenstown, ride the Skyline Gondola and cross Lake Wakatipu aboard the historic TSS Earnslaw for a Walter Peak farm excursion. The final drive follows the Mackenzie Basin through Aoraki Mt Cook and Lake Tekapo. Seven nights' accommodation, rental car hire and four included activities provide structure without fixing every day. This itinerary suits independent travellers who want both islands at their own pace and a natural route ending in Christchurch.

DAY

01

AUCKLAND · OVERNIGHT 1 OF 1

Arrive Auckland — collect rental car

Collect your rental car at Auckland Airport and drive to your city accommodation. The car is included for 7 days with zero or reduced excess liability — confirm the specific excess terms at collection. The drive from Auckland Airport into the city centre takes 30–40 minutes depending on traffic.

Auckland Waterfront — Viaduct Harbour and the Wynyard Quarter are within easy reach of most central hotels. The ferry terminal at the base of Queen Street connects to Devonport and Waiheke Island.

Optional: Sky Tower observation deck (own expense); Weta Workshop Unleashed Tour covering the props and special effects work from the Lord of the Rings and other productions (own expense); All Blacks Experience at SkyCity (own expense).

OVERNIGHT

Auckland

DAY

02

ROTORUA · OVERNIGHT 1 OF 2

Auckland to Rotorua

The drive from Auckland to Rotorua is 235 kilometres via the direct SH1/SH5 route — approximately 3 hours. The Waikato plateau gives way to the volcanic plateau south of Taupo; by the time you approach Rotorua the sulphur smell in the air confirms you are on a hydrothermal field.

Route options: The direct route takes 3 hours. Detours that add time but add substance include Hobbiton at Matamata (175km from Auckland, then 70km to Rotorua — add 2–3 hours including the tour); Waitomo Glowworm Caves west of Hamilton (adds 90 minutes to 2 hours). Both are own expense and worth considering if your flight arrives the previous evening.

Rotorua — The city sits on the Taupo Volcanic Zone; the thermal activity is not confined to the parks. Mud pools and steam vents appear in residential back gardens. Kuirau Park, a free public thermal area in the city centre, is a reasonable introduction before the full park visits.

Optional: Polynesian Spa — lakeside thermal pools with natural alkaline and acidic hot springs (own expense).

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, morning and evening. The gap in the middle is yours for independent exploration or optional activities.

Wai-O-Tapu Thermal Wonderland — Included. Drive yourself 27 kilometres south of Rotorua; parking at the entrance is straightforward. Position for the Lady Knox Geyser at 10:15am before the main park circuit. The Champagne Pool, a 65-metre-wide hot spring at 74°C with an orange rim formed by antimony and arsenic deposits, and the Artist's Palette silica flat are the most distinctive features. Allow 2 hours in the park.

Redwoods Nightlights — Included. An evening walk through the Whakarewarewa Forest along an elevated treetop walkway lit by artist-designed lanterns suspended through a stand of California redwoods. The forest is 5 kilometres from the Rotorua city centre; free parking on site. The walk runs at dusk; allow 45 minutes to 1 hour. Check current seasonal operating hours on arrival.

Optional: Te Po Indigenous Evening Experience at Te Puia — a Māori cultural evening with hāngī-style dinner and performance (own expense, evening); Agrodome Farm Show (own expense).

OVERNIGHT

Rotorua

DAY

04

QUEENSTOWN · OVERNIGHT 1 OF 2

Rotorua to Queenstown — domestic flight (not included)

Drive to Rotorua Airport and fly to Queenstown. The domestic flight is not included and must be booked independently before travel. Air New Zealand operates the route directly; the flight takes approximately 3 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. Parking at ROT is available for the duration of the flight if the car travels separately, or drive to the airport and confirm the car logistics with your rental provider.

Queenstown — Collect your car at Queenstown Airport (or confirm how the one-way transfer is handled by the rental company) and drive 10 minutes into the town centre. The afternoon is free.

Optional: Shotover Jetboat — high-speed jet boat through the Shotover canyon (own expense); Original Onsen — private outdoor hot pools above the Shotover River (own expense).

OVERNIGHT

Queenstown

DAY

05

QUEENSTOWN · OVERNIGHT 2 OF 2

Queenstown — Skyline Gondola and Walter Peak Farm

A structured day in Queenstown across two included experiences that show the town and its lake from different vantage points. The gondola in the morning, the Earnslaw in the afternoon — they complement each other well.

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; the views from the viewing platform are the reason to go. Allow 1–2 hours.

TSS Earnslaw to Walter Peak Farm — Included. The TSS Earnslaw is a 1912 twin-screw coal-fired steamship that has operated on Lake Wakatipu since the era when the high-country farms around the lake had no road access. The crossing to Walter Peak takes approximately 45 minutes each way; the farm excursion includes a guided farm demonstration with dogs, horses, and sheep, and afternoon tea in the Colonel's Homestead. Allow 3–4 hours including the return crossing.

Optional: Shotover Jetboat or Original Onsen if not done on Day 4 (own expense).

OVERNIGHT

Queenstown

DAY

06

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's fruit orchards and Lake Dunstan, through the Lindis Pass, and into the Mackenzie Basin. The landscape changes register several times on this drive.

Kawarau Gorge — The schist gorge on the eastern approach from Queenstown, with the original AJ Hackett bungy site visible from the road. The gorge walls are a particular shade of gold-orange in afternoon light.

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 to Aoraki Mt Cook runs alongside the western shore. The lake's turquoise colour comes from suspended glacial rock flour; the colour deepens as you approach the mountain.

Aoraki Mt Cook Village — The village sits at 760 metres beneath New Zealand's highest peak. The Hooker Valley Track to the terminal lake is 90 minutes return and is the recommended walk from here. Free time to explore before settling in for the night.

OVERNIGHT

Tekapo or Mt Cook region

DAY

07

CHRISTCHURCH · OVERNIGHT 1 OF 1

Mt Cook and Lake Tekapo to Christchurch

The drive from the Mt Cook/Tekapo region to Christchurch is 230–330 kilometres depending on your overnight location — allow 3 to 4 hours. The route descends from the Mackenzie Basin through the Canterbury foothills and onto the plains.

Church of the Good Shepherd, Lake Tekapo — A stone chapel built in 1935 on the lakeshore with a plain glass window framing the lake and mountains. Worth a stop regardless of which direction you drove yesterday. The lake's colour in morning light is different from the afternoon; either works.

Optional: Dark Sky Experience at Lake Tekapo — if you stayed in the Tekapo area overnight and it is a Thursday to Monday, the evening stargazing programme is available (own expense). Confirm operating times and whether your accommodation is within range for the session.

Optional: International Antarctic Centre, Christchurch — adjacent to the airport on arrival, a substantive museum with live penguins and a storm simulation room (own expense).

Christchurch — The city sits between the Pacific and the Southern Alps foothills, rebuilt substantially since the 2011 earthquake. The Avon River precinct and the transitional architecture of the central rebuild are worth an evening walk.

OVERNIGHT

Christchurch

DAY

08

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: If time permits before your flight, the International Antarctic Centre adjacent to the car return area is a worthwhile two-hour stop (own expense, if not already visited on Day 7).

YOUR TRIP AT A GLANCE

What's Included

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

INCLUDED

- check 7-day rental car hire with zero or reduced excess liability (collected Auckland, returned Christchurch)
- check 7 nights accommodation
- check Wai-O-Tapu Thermal Wonderland admission
- check Redwoods Nightlights walk, Rotorua
- check Skyline Gondola ride, Queenstown
- check Walter Peak Farm Excursion on TSS Earnslaw Steamship, Queenstown

NOT INCLUDED

- Domestic flight Rotorua to Queenstown (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