



Scenic New Zealand: Both Islands Self-Drive in 10 Days

NEW ZEALAND · AUCKLAND · ROTORUA · CHRISTCHURCH · QUEENSTOWN

10D 9N

25-30 PAX

STARTS AUCKLAND

NOT INCLUDED

Explore both New Zealand islands over ten self-driven days, travelling from Auckland to Christchurch without retracing your route. Begin with Rotorua's Wai-O-Tapu geothermal park and Redwoods Nightlights, then fly independently to Queenstown for Milford Sound and its included fiord cruise with lunch. Continue through Haast Pass to the West Coast glaciers before crossing Arthur's Pass to Christchurch. Waitomo, Hobbiton, Wānaka and other experiences can be added according to your interests and timing. Nine nights' accommodation, rental car hire and three selected activities are included; the domestic flight between islands is not. This route suits travellers who want the freedom to personalise the journey while retaining a clear, scenic structure across both islands.

01

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 9 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 at the bottom of Queen Street connects to Devonport and Waiheke Island.

Optional: Sky Tower observation deck (own expense); Weta Workshop Unleashed Tour (own expense); Auckland Harbour Dinner Cruise (own expense).

OVERNIGHT

Auckland

02

Auckland to Rotorua

The drive from Auckland to Rotorua is 240 kilometres via the direct SH1/SH5 route — approximately 3 hours. The route crosses the Waikato plateau and the central North Island volcanic plateau before descending to Rotorua. The sulphur smell on approach confirms you are on a hydrothermal field.

Route options: The direct route from Auckland to Rotorua takes 3 hours. Detours worth considering if time allows: Waitomo Glowworm Caves west of Hamilton (195km from Auckland, adds 90 minutes to 2 hours including the cave tour — own expense); Hobbiton at Matamata (175km from Auckland, then 70km to Rotorua, adds 2–3 hours including the tour — own expense). Both are optional and best suited to those arriving in New Zealand the previous evening rather than the day of this drive.

Rotorua — The city sits on the Taupo Volcanic Zone. Thermal activity is not confined to the parks; steam vents appear in residential back gardens. Kuirau Park, a free public thermal area in the city centre, gives a reasonable introduction before the main geothermal parks.

Optional: Polynesian Spa lakeside thermal pools (own expense); Te Po Indigenous Evening Experience at Te Puia (own expense).

OVERNIGHT

Rotorua

03

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. The gap between them is yours.

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 antimony-and-arsenic rim, and the Artist's Palette silica flat are the most distinctive features. Allow 2 hours.

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

Optional: Skyline Gondola and 3 Luge Rides (own expense).

OVERNIGHT

Rotorua

04

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.

Queenstown — A compact lakeside town on Lake Wakatipu, ringed by the Remarkables and Cecil Peak. The drive from Queenstown Airport into town is 10 minutes. The afternoon and evening are free.

Optional: Skyline Gondola and 3 Luge Rides (own expense); Original Onsen private hot pools above the Shotover River canyon (own expense).

OVERNIGHT

Queenstown

05

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 to reach the fiord comfortably for a midday cruise.

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 en route.

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

06

Queenstown — free day

A free day in Queenstown before heading north to the glacier region the following morning. The car is available for independent exploration.

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. 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).

Optional: Shotover Jetboat (own expense); Dart River Wilderness Jet (own expense); Walter Peak Farm Excursion on the TSS Earnslaw (own expense).

OVERNIGHT

Queenstown

07

Queenstown to the Glacier Region — via Haast Pass

The drive from Queenstown to the Glacier Region is 350 kilometres — approximately 4 hours 45 minutes via the Haast Pass. This is the reverse of the standard South Island circuit direction: you leave the dry schist landscape of Central Otago, cross the Haast Pass into the West Coast rainforest, and arrive in glacier country from the south rather than the north.

Haast Pass (563 metres) — The lowest crossing of the Southern Alps through the Haast Pass / Tioripatea UNESCO World Heritage Area. The transition from Central Otago's dry tussock to West Coast rainforest happens within a few kilometres of the summit. The Haast River gorge on the western side is worth slowing down for.

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

Optional: Puzzling World at Wānaka — an optical illusion attraction on the outskirts of Wānaka, worth 1–1.5 hours on the drive north (own expense).

OVERNIGHT

Glacier Region

08

Glacier Region — Franz Josef and Fox Glacier

A full free day in glacier country. Franz Josef and Fox Glacier are 25 kilometres apart; both are worth visiting. The two nights here allow a weather buffer for the optional heli-hike, which is the most direct way to reach the current ice face.

Franz Josef Glacier Valley Walk — A self-guided walk from the valley carpark to the current glacier viewpoint. Guide boards in the valley mark where the glacier face stood in previous decades; the retreat is well documented. Allow 1.5–2 hours return.

Fox Glacier — 25 kilometres south of Franz Josef. A similar valley walk to the Fox Glacier terminal face. Both glaciers descend from around 2,700 metres to near sea level through temperate rainforest — a climate combination found almost nowhere else.

Punakaiki Pancake Rocks — If you are staying near Greymouth rather than Franz Josef, the Punakaiki formation is 45 kilometres north of Greymouth and worth a stop (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).

OVERNIGHT

Glacier Region

09

Glacier Region to Christchurch — via Arthur's Pass

The drive from the Glacier Region to Christchurch via Arthur's Pass is 240–380 kilometres depending on your overnight location — allow 3.5 to 5 hours. The route runs north then east: from the glacier townships up the West Coast to Greymouth or Hokitika, then through Arthur's Pass National Park and the Waimakariri Gorge to Christchurch.

Arthur's Pass National Park — The main divide crossing on SH73 reaches 920 metres at the pass. Going east, you descend from the alpine environment through the Waimakariri Gorge to the Canterbury Plains. The gorge section below the pass is one of the more dramatic stretches of the drive. Arthur's Pass village is the last stop before the plains; the kea in the carpark are a consistent feature.

Christchurch — The South Island's largest city, substantially rebuilt since the 2011 earthquake. The Avon River precinct and the post-earthquake architecture in the central city are worth an evening walk.

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

OVERNIGHT

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 yesterday (own expense).

What's Included

DEPARTS FROM
Auckland

FLIGHTS
Not included

GROUP SIZE
25–30 pax

INCLUDED

9-day rental car hire with zero or reduced excess
check liability (collected Auckland, returned
Christchurch)

check 9 nights accommodation

check Wai-O-Tapu Thermal Wonderland admission

check Redwoods Nightlights walk, Rotorua

check Milford Sound cruise with lunch

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