Thermal Discovery: New Zealand's North Island Geothermal Circuit

NEW ZEALAND · AUCKLAND · ROTORUA

5D 4N | 25–30 PAX | STARTS AUCKLAND | NOT INCLUDED

Discover New Zealand’s North Island through the geology and cultural experiences that make it unique. Travel from Auckland to Waitomo for a guided glowworm cave tour and underground boat cruise, then continue to Rotorua’s active geothermal basin. Explore Wai-O-Tapu’s colourful pools and geysers, walk through the volcanic Waimangu Valley, and visit Hobbiton’s meticulously preserved film set with lunch at the Green Dragon Inn. The five-day circuit returns to Auckland after four nights’ accommodation, airport transfers and guided coach travel. Included experiences combine limestone caves, hydrothermal landscapes, Māori arts and film history within one compact route. This itinerary suits travellers who want the North Island’s essential highlights without driving or coordinating several separate tours themselves.

DAY

01

AUCKLAND · OVERNIGHT 1 OF 1

Arrive Auckland

Auckland is the entry point and, given you have just landed, the afternoon is yours. The city sits on an isthmus between two harbours — the Waitematā facing east toward the Pacific, the Manukau opening west to the Tasman Sea. The volcanic cones visible from the city centre are remnants of 53 separate eruption points; Auckland is built on a volcanic field that geologists consider dormant rather than extinct.

Auckland Waterfront — Viaduct Harbour and the Wynyard Quarter are within easy walking distance of most central accommodation. The ferry terminal connects to Waiheke Island and Devonport if you arrive early enough.

Sky Tower — The telecommunications tower at the city's highest point, at 328 metres. The observation deck gives the clearest orientation to Auckland's two-harbour geography. Entry own expense.

Optional: Auckland Harbour sailing or harbour dinner cruise — both bookable through your hotel concierge.

OVERNIGHT

Auckland

DAY

02

ROTORUA · OVERNIGHT 1 OF 2

Auckland to Rotorua — via the Waitomo Glowworm Caves

The drive south from Auckland into the Waikato takes around two hours before the road turns toward Waitomo. The caves formed over 30 million years as water dissolved the surrounding limestone; the result is a system of chambers, stalactites, and underground rivers now inhabited by Arachnocampa luminosa — a glowworm species that exists only in New Zealand. The guided tour moves through the cave formations on foot before the boat descends into the grotto, where the ceiling overhead is a dense field of bioluminescent light. The effect is quieter and stranger than photographs suggest.

Waitomo Glowworm Caves — Guided tour included, approximately 45 minutes. The underground boat cruise is the centrepiece; the cave formations on the walk-in are worth attention. No photography permitted inside the grotto.

Drive to Rotorua — Approximately two hours from Waitomo across the central North Island plateau. The sulphur smell on arrival is normal; Rotorua sits directly on the Taupo Volcanic Zone and the city's thermal activity is not confined to the parks.

Optional: Polynesian Spa — a lakeside thermal spa on the shores of Lake Rotorua, with pools fed by natural alkaline and acidic hot springs (own expense).

OVERNIGHT

Rotorua

DAY

03

ROTORUA · OVERNIGHT 2 OF 2

Rotorua — Wai-O-Tapu and Waimangu

Two geothermal parks, different in origin and character, both included. The small-group format keeps the pace manageable and the guide covers geology, Māori history, and flora across both sites. Start with the Lady Knox Geyser at Wai-O-Tapu before the main park circuit; the geyser erupts at 10:15am daily and is worth positioning for.

Wai-O-Tapu Thermal Wonderland — A geothermal park 27 kilometres south of Rotorua. The Champagne Pool is the park's most recognised feature: a 65-metre-wide hot spring at 74°C, its orange rim formed by antimony and arsenic deposits. The Artist's Palette is a broad silica flat that changes colour with the angle of the light.

Waimangu Volcanic Valley — Formed by the 1886 eruption of Mt Tarawera, which opened a rift 17 kilometres long across the landscape in four hours. The valley it created is now a hydrothermally active bush-covered system with boiling lakes and steaming cliffs. Inferno Crater Lake at 65°C changes colour from blue-green to grey as its level rises and falls on a roughly 38-day cycle.

Optional: Mitai Māori Cultural Experience — an evening cultural performance with haka, waka (war canoe) arrival by river, and a hāngī meal (own expense, evening activity).

OVERNIGHT

Rotorua

DAY

04

AUCKLAND · OVERNIGHT 1 OF 1

Rotorua to Auckland — via Hobbiton

The drive north from Rotorua takes a detour through Matamata to reach the Alexander sheep farm that Peter Jackson's location scouts selected in 1998 as the site for The Shire. The set has been permanently rebuilt in aluminium and concrete since the original wooden structures were dismantled after the Lord of the Rings trilogy, and what exists now is maintained to a standard that makes the specialist guide genuinely useful — the detailing is specific enough to reward someone who knows the films and someone who does not.

Hobbiton Movie Set Signature Tour — A 2-hour guided walk through 44 hobbit holes, the mill, the double-arched bridge, and the gardens of Bag End. The guide covers both the film production history and the construction logistics of rebuilding the set permanently for The Hobbit trilogy. No photography restrictions on the exterior set.

Green Dragon Inn — Lunch is included at the thatched pub on the edge of the Party Field. The menu is a fixed sit-down lunch; the setting is the reason it works as a meal stop rather than a convenience.

Return to Auckland — approximately 2.5 hours from Matamata.

MEALS

Lunch

OVERNIGHT

Auckland

DAY

05

AUCKLAND

Depart Auckland

The tour concludes with a departure transfer to Auckland International Airport. Pick-up timing is confirmed by your guide the evening before based on your flight schedule.

Auckland International Airport (AKL) — International departures from the international terminal. Allow at least three hours before departure for check-in and immigration. The terminal has a reasonable range of dining options airside.

Optional: If your flight departs in the afternoon, the Auckland War Memorial Museum in the Domain is worth a morning visit — the Māori and Pacific collections are among the most substantive in the country, and entry gives context to the cultural elements covered across this itinerary (own expense).

YOUR TRIP AT A GLANCE

What's Included

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

INCLUDED

- check Meet and greet arrival transfer in Auckland
- check 4 nights accommodation
- check Auckland to Rotorua guided coach tour via Waitomo
- check Waitomo Glowworm Caves guided tour including underground boat cruise
- check Wai-O-Tapu Thermal Wonderland admission and guided tour
- check Waimangu Volcanic Valley admission and guided tour
- check Hobbiton Movie Set Signature Tour with lunch at the Green Dragon Inn
- check Rotorua to Auckland guided coach transfer via Hobbiton
- check Departure transfer to Auckland Airport

NOT INCLUDED

- International flights
- Travel insurance
- Meals not specified in the itinerary
- Optional activities and entrance fees
- Personal expenses, laundry and minibar