Thermal Wonder: North Island Self-Drive

NEW ZEALAND · AUCKLAND · ROTORUA

5D 4N | 2-8 | STARTS AUCKLAND | NOT INCLUDED

Explore the North Island's geological and cultural core over five self-driven days. Collect your rental car in Auckland and travel south to Waitomo for a guided glowworm cave cruise before continuing to Hobbiton for its Signature Tour and included lunch. Spend a full day in Rotorua, combining Wai-O-Tapu's geothermal landscape with the illuminated Redwoods Nightlights treetop walk, then return to Auckland at your own pace. Four nights' accommodation, rental car hire with reduced or zero excess liability, and four key experiences are included. The route is compact but purposeful, balancing limestone caves, volcanic terrain, forest and film history. It suits independent travellers who want New Zealand's North Island highlights without joining a fixed coach schedule.

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 4 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 sits on an isthmus between the Waitematā and Manukau harbours, with volcanic cones visible from most elevated points — remnants of 53 separate eruption sites on a field that is dormant rather than extinct. The waterfront from Viaduct Harbour to the ferry terminal is an easy evening walk.

Optional: Sky Tower observation deck at 186 metres (own expense); Waiheke Island Hop-On Hop-Off Explorer Bus — the ferry to Waiheke and a circuit of the island's vineyards and beaches (own expense); Auckland Harbour Sailing (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 Auckland by 7:30am. Auckland to Waitomo is 195 kilometres (2 hours 30 minutes), Waitomo to Matamata is 102 kilometres (1 hour 20 minutes), and Matamata to Rotorua is 67 kilometres (55 minutes).

Waitomo Glowworm Caves — Included. A cave system carved through limestone over 30 million years, now inhabited by Arachnocampa luminosa — a glowworm found only in New Zealand. The guided tour covers 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 on site.

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

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, 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 geyser is induced to erupt daily with soap powder; the mechanism is natural, only the timing is managed. 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 in the park. 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 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.

Optional: Skyline Gondola and 3 Luge Rides (own expense); Secret Spot Hot Tubs — riverside hot pools in native bush (own expense); Hell's Gate Mud Bath and Spa — geothermal mud bath east of Rotorua (own expense); Waimangu Volcanic Valley with Boat Cruise (own expense).

OVERNIGHT

Rotorua

DAY

04

AUCKLAND · OVERNIGHT 1 OF 1

Rotorua to Auckland — free morning

The drive from Rotorua to Auckland is 228 kilometres — approximately 3 hours on SH1 via the Waikato or SH5/SH1 through Tauranga. The morning is free in Rotorua before departure; use it for the Kuirau Park thermal area in the city centre (free), the National Kiwi Hatchery Tour, or a second stop in the geothermal parks if you want more time.

National Kiwi Hatchery Tour, Rotorua — A guided behind-the-scenes tour of the kiwi conservation programme at Rainbow Springs, covering the incubation and rearing process (own expense).

Auckland afternoon — Arriving mid-afternoon gives you time for the city waterfront, a harbour cruise, or the Weta Workshop Unleashed Tour at SkyCity covering the production design and special effects work from Lord of the Rings and other films (own expense).

OVERNIGHT

Auckland

DAY

05

AUCKLAND

Depart Auckland — return rental car

Return the rental car to Auckland Airport and check in for your international departure. Allow at least three hours before your flight for car return, check-in, and immigration.

Auckland Airport (AKL) — The car return is in the same precinct as the international terminal. The rental car is due back on a 24-hour basis from the collection time on Day 1; confirm the exact return deadline at collection.

Optional: If your flight departs in the afternoon, the Auckland War Memorial Museum in the Domain is a worthwhile morning stop — the Māori and Pacific collections are among the most substantive in the country, and the volcanic geology display gives useful context to the Rotorua geothermal experience (own expense).

YOUR TRIP AT A GLANCE

What's Included

DEPARTS FROM	FLIGHTS	GROUP SIZE
Auckland	**Not included**	**2-8**

INCLUDED

- check 4-day rental car hire with zero or reduced excess liability (collected and returned Auckland Airport)
- check 4 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

NOT INCLUDED

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