

Sample itinerary: our 21-day New Zealand driving tour



To help you with the preparation of your camper van vacation, we've put together this New Zealand driving tour for you. The tour takes you in 21 days from Auckland to Christchurch, and gives you a few suggestions about what to see and do en route.

Day 1: Auckland

Upon arrival in Auckland, first take some time to explore the city. The best way to do this, is by making use of the Auckland Explorer Bus. The bus stops at the major attractions, such as Kelly Tarltons, Auckland Museum, Parnell Village, the Sky tower and Victoria Park Market.

Day 2: Auckland – Bay of Islands

Morning:

Pick up your camper van and start this New Zealand driving tour by heading for Paihia (240 km, 3.30 hrs).

Afternoon:

Discover this scenic part of the Bay of Islands with the Excitor, an amphibious vehicle/vessel, that takes you from Paihia to Cape Brett and the Cathedral Cave.



Day 3: Bay of Islands – Waitomo

This day, start this New Zealand driving tour by driving back to Auckland (240km, 3.30 hrs), and from there, continue to Waitomo (200km, 1.45 hrs). If you arrive in time, visit the glowworm caves of Waitomo. In summer, the last tour to the Waitomo Caves departs at 5.30pm.

Day 4: Waitomo – Rotorua

Morning:

If you didn't visit the Glowworm Caves yesterday, take some time to do so today.

Afternoon:

Drive to Rotorua (166km, 2.15 hrs). See our page about [Rotorua sightseeing attractions](#) for suggestions concerning your stay in Rotorua.

Day 5: Rotorua

Spend the whole day in Rotorua: this is definitely one of the top attractions of your New Zealand driving tour!

Day 6: Rotorua – Napier

Morning:

Leave for Taupo (Rotorua-Taupo: 80km, 1.15hr), but stop 30 min. south of Rotorua, to visit the Waitotapu Thermal Reserve. Make sure you get there before 10.15am, because that's the time the Lady Knox geyser erupts. Then hit the road again, to stop again just before Taupo at the Huka Falls Lookout. After reaching Taupo, enjoy a nice lunch on the shores of Lake Taupo and, if you like, try your luck at the Hole-in One driving range on the Lakefront.



Afternoon:

Drive from Taupo to Napier (147km, 2 hrs) and admire the numerous examples of Art Deco architecture in this small, pleasant town or go on [a half day wine tasting tour](#).

Day 7: Napier – Wellington

Morning:

Drive to Cape Kidnappers (a few km south of Napier) to have a look at the gannet colony (one of the largest in the world).

Afternoon:

Continue your journey and drive to Wellington (320km, 4.30 hrs). It may be a good idea to stop for a short break at the Martinborough Wine Centre (1 hr before you reach Wellington - open till 5.00pm). Here you can taste some of the excellent Wairarapa wines (or maybe just enjoy the atmosphere and have an afternoon coffee or snack at the Cafe of the Wine Centre).

Day 8: Wellington

Morning:

On the eighth day of this New Zealand driving tour, you don't drive, but instead spend the day discovering the highlights of Wellington! There's one thing you really shouldn't miss here, and that's the excellent Te Papa Museum, the national museum of New Zealand. Allow at least two hours for this visit.



Afternoon:

After lunch, take time to explore Wellington's beautiful Botanic Gardens and take a 1-hour tour through the Parliament Buildings.

In Wellington ends the first part of this New Zealand driving tour. Here you'll take one of the ferries to Picton, on the South Island. (For information about fares, bookings and timetables, see our page about this [ferry crossing](#).)

Day 9: Picton and the Marlborough Sounds

Spend your first day on the South Island by exploring Picton and its fabulous surroundings, the Marlborough Sounds. For example, walk part of the famous Queen Charlotte track or [rent a kayak](#).

Day 10: Picton – Nelson

Morning:

Continue our New Zealand driving tour and drive to Nelson (110km, 1.45 hrs) via the Queen Charlotte Drive. Take your time, as this drive is one of the most scenic of New Zealand!

Afternoon:

Wander around the town centre of Nelson and enjoy its many arts and craft shops. Another nice way to spend this afternoon, is by checking out the unique 'World of Wearable Art & Collectible Car Complex'.



Day 11: Abel Tasman National Park

Start your day early, and drive to Marahou (67km, 1.30 hr), to explore the Abel Tasman National Park by boat or kayak. At the end of the day, drive back to Nelson.

Day 12: Nelson – Punakaiki

Today, drive to Punakaiki (ca. 245 km, 3.30 hrs). At about 20km before reaching Punakaiki, stop at Cape Foulwind (near Westport) to visit the seal colony (a 20 min. walk from the car park). The longer Cape Foulwind Walkway (1.30 hr) leaves from the same car park. At Punakaiki, marvel at the Punakaiki Pancake Rocks and Blowholes.



Day 13: Punakaiki – Franz Josef Glacier

On day 13 of this New Zealand driving tour, we suggest you drive from Punakaiki to Hokitika (84km, 1.15 hrs), a small town, famous for its greenstone carving and glass blowing. Then continue your journey to Franz Josef Glacier (136km, 2.00 hr). This is the place to book a [helicopter flight](#) for the next day (for example, with Fox Glacier & Franz Josef Heliservices); this is a fantastic way to admire the glaciers. In case you just cannot wait to see the spectacular glaciers, go and see the movie 'Flowing West', shown in the movie theatre of the Alpine Adventures Centre Building.

Day 14: Franz Josef Glacier – Wanaka

Morning:

Early morning, drive to Lake Matheson, which is famous for its reflections of Mount Cook and Mount Tasman. The walk around the lake will take about 1.30 hrs. The cafe at the lake is open from 7am. After that, drive back to Franz Josef Glacier for the glacier tour you booked.



Afternoon:

Time to drive your New Zealand camper van to Wanaka (287km, 4 hr) and recharge your batteries on the shores of Lake Wanaka!

Day 15: Wanaka – Queenstown

Today, our New Zealand driving tour brings you to Queenstown (117km, 1.45 hr). Some 28km before Queenstown, stop at the Kawarau Suspension Bridge to have a look at (or jump from) the world's first bungee jump site!



Once you arrive in Queenstown, one of the first things to do, is take the Skyline Gondola up to Bob's Peak. There's lots to do up there and besides, Bob's Peak offers fabulous views on Queenstown and Lake Wakatipu.

Day 16: Queenstown – Te Anau

Before you leave for Te Anau, try one of the other Queenstown attractions), like the famous Shotover Jet Boat Ride.

At the end of the afternoon, drive to Te Anau 172km (2.30 hr).



Day 17: Te Anau – Milford Sound – Queenstown

Drive to the [Milford Sound](#) (120km, 1.45 hrs), to explore this wonderful and famous part of New Zealand by boat. In the afternoon drive back to Queenstown (291km, 4.15 hrs). [If you think this makes too much driving for one day, there's also the possibility to book a Milford Sound tour from Queenstown and fly back.]

Day 18: Queenstown – Mount Cook Village

Day 18 of our New Zealand driving tour, will take you from Queenstown to Mount Cook Village (263km, 3.45 hr) – to discover the Mount Cook region by foot – or to Mount Cook Salmon Farm (on the shores of Lake Pukaki, off the road to Lake Tekapo (200km, 3.15 hr) – to enjoy a [scenic flight](#) over the Mount Cook region with Tekapo Helicopters.

Day 19: Mount Cook Village / Tekapo – Christchurch

The trip to Christchurch will be one of the longest stretches of our New Zealand driving tour (Mount Cook-Christchurch: 331km, 4.45 hr; Tekapo-Christchurch: 226 km, 3.15 hr). Once you arrive in Christchurch, enjoy a relaxing walk in the Botanic Gardens or check out the Arts Centre, the former university building with over 40 retail outlets selling all kinds of arts and crafts. If you have more time to spend, check out some other Christchurch attractions.

Day 20: Kaikoura or Christchurch



If you'd like to go whale watching, Kaikoura is the place to drive to (183km, 2.30 hr). It's also possible to book a whale watch day tour from Christchurch.

Note: In case you don't like boat cruises, consider booking a [helicopter flight to view the whales!](#)

If you'd rather stay in Christchurch, visit the Canterbury Museum (with its fabulous section about the Antarctic) before driving to the International Antarctic Centre, also one of New Zealand's top attractions.

Day 21

Today will be the end of this New Zealand driving tour. Time to drop off your New Zealand camper van and maybe do some last minute shopping for [New Zealand souvenirs](#).

Extension of this 21-day New Zealand driving tour:

If you have more time to spend than 21 days, there are several possibilities to extend this New Zealand driving tour.

On the North Island, you could:

- drive to Cape Reinga in the far North and on your way back visit the giant kauri trees in the Waipoua Forest (west coast)
- drive to Coromandel and at Hot Water Beach (appr. 15 km south of Hahei), dig a hole in the sand and take a bath in the hot water that comes up (but inquire about the times of low tide first – make sure you'll be there around 2 hours each side of low tide)
- walk the [Tongariro Crossing](#), regarded as New Zealand's greatest one-day hike.

On the South Island, you could add some extra days to this New Zealand driving tour by:

- driving to Dunedin to visit Olveston House (a 35-room mansion from 1906), the Otago Museum, Cadbury World (for chocolate lovers) and/or the Speight's Brewery Heritage Centre
- driving to the Otago Peninsula, to see Larnach Castle (halfway the Peninsula), and [admire the albatrosses](#) and [yellow eyed penguins](#)
- taking time to explore the scenic Catlins coast (south-east)
- booking a day excursion on the TranzAlpine – between Christchurch and Greymouth. This train journey is considered one of the five most spectacular in the world.



And of course, you could always extend this New Zealand driving tour by just spending some more time at the locations suggested!

Tip:

- Check out the [Kruse audio system](#), the perfect tour guide for your New Zealand driving tour.