

DAY 1

At a glimpse: Auckland city day

Travel Agenda: First walk to **Viaduct Harbor** and stroll around the waterfront. This is also where the free tour guides meet, which I would recommend if you want to hear the history of the city and more interesting tidbits from the locals. Then walk up through **Queens Street** and cut across Shortland St to **High Street** and **O'Connell Street** for pedestrian roads and boutiques. Head to the iconic **Sky Tower** for lunch and a view of the city.

Tip: Do not pay an entrance fee at the Sky Tower. Instead opt for lunch and enjoy a light meal in lieu of the entrance fee. It's a rotating restaurant so you're able to see all the views and likely some entertainment aka bungee jumpers right out the window.

After lunch, walk to the **Toi o Tāmaki** gallery, which holds a large collection of New Zealand historic, modern and contemporary art. Or visit **Mount Eden**, the largest volcano in Auckland which has a walkable crater from the last eruption 15,000 years ago. For dinner, your taste buds will enjoy Filipino cuisine at **Nanam**. But save room for dessert at **Giapo**'s world famous ice cream shop. Take part in the flavor tasting before deciding on a specific "creation."

Day 2

At a glimpse: Day trip via ferry to Waiheke Island

Travel Agenda: Buy ferry tickets at **Viaduct Harbor** for a morning ride to **Waiheke Island**. Once on the island, it's about a 30 minute walk to **Mudbrick Restaurant and Vineyard** starting on a path through the forest and then along the road. The tasting is very informal so grab a spot outside and enjoy each wine at a table with a view. From there, you can walk down the road to **Cable Bay**, a more modern take on a New Zealand vineyard. Here you can do a tasting in the barrel room and enjoy lunch.

From Cable Bay, walk 25 minutes or take a cab to **Oneroa Beach**. This beach is beautiful, not too crowded, and a mix of nice soft sand, cliffs and rocks. The town is full of cute cafes and boutique shops. Grab some seafood on the main street at **The Local** and then head back to

the ferry via the local bus. If you want more time, you could take an informal tour via the bus around the entire island!

Once back in Auckland, regroup at your accommodation, grab a bite at the simply perfected **Something Dumplin** and enjoy along the water. It's a 10 minute walk along the harbor to **Soul Bar & Bistro** or **Saint Alice** for drinks and a livelier bar scene.

Day 3

At a glimpse: Rent a car and explore the East side of the country known for some of the best beaches in the world

Travel Agenda: Rent a car and head out early to the **Coromandel Peninsula** area. Before the 2.5 hour drive, stop at a local café or grocery store for lunch items. The destination is **Whangamata** first! Here is where you can begin a unique kayak or paddleboard tour of **Donut Island** in a beautiful blue lagoon.

Post tour, head up the coast to the **Lost Springs**. Now is the time to relax in the geo-thermal pools, indulge in a spa treatment and grab a bite from the restaurant located on site. Drive 30 minutes to **Hahei**, a quaint beachside town and the most convenient starting point to walk to Cathedral Cove in the morning.

Day 4

At a glimpse: Coastal beach in the morning followed by a drive to Rotorua to view the geothermal activity, with Taupo as the final destination

Travel Agenda: Start the day at **Hot Waves Cafe** for breakfast and pack a couple pastries to go. Then set out early to famous **Cathedral Cove**. It is a 45 minute to an hour walk that includes rainforest and seaside cliff paths. Enjoy the secluded beach and a picnic. Explore **Stingray Beach**, aptly named for the stingrays that glide along this beautiful inlet, just a 5 minute detour on your walk back to the car.

Tip: Check the tidal forecast before heading to the coast. When we were there, Cathedral Cove was closed due to rough seas.

Once back in Hehei, drive 2.5 hours to **Rotorua**. For lunch, stop at **Picnic Cafe** or one of the other restaurants in **Eat Street's** food market right in town. Then, drive 8 minutes through town to **Te Puia** to get a dose of the impressive geothermal activity from roaring steam vents, bubbling pits of mud, hot volcanic streams, and the Pōhutu geyser. Buy a ticket that includes a Maori performance to learn about the culture and history as well!

On the 1 hour journey to **Taupo**, stop at **Kerosene Creek** along the way. Slightly off the beaten path, drive along the gravel road until you hit a small parking lot. Then grab a towel and discover a hot spring paradise with mini waterfalls surrounded by a forest.

Once in Taupo, dinner should be influenced by the popular Indian scene. **Incredible India Restaurant & Bar** is a favorite among locals. Before heading back to your accommodation, pick up provisions for breakfast and lunch the next day.

Day 5

At a glimpse: Almost a full day of (worthwhile) hiking

Travel Agenda: Time for the **Tongariro Crossing** hike! Book a round trip shuttle with your hotel or hostel when you first arrive in Taupo and be prepared for a very early morning ride to the base of the mountain. The hike should take anywhere between 5-8 hours depending on your pace and stops. The dramatic views and landscapes are 100% worth it.

Tip: Don't be put off by the warnings for the Tongariro hike! As long as the weather is good and you've got enough food and water, it's a lovely hike! It's a combination of long stretches of flat dirt roads and paths through sandy landscapes and forests, with a few peaks and higher elevation climbs. Be mentally prepared for the climb down Red Crater to Blue Lake, as I found the slippery descent to be the most difficult.

Post-nap or rest, drive just out of town to view **Huka Falls** with its distinctive bright blue hue. Just down the road, **Huka Honey Hive** is a nice stopover to taste test the famous healing mānuka honey and all the other sweet treats, plus stock up on some unique souvenirs. Dinner is

just a couple minutes further at **Pavilion Restaurant**, focused on New Zealand specialities with local ingredients.

Day 6

At a glimpse: Kayaking on the lake in Taupo

Travel Agenda: The best part of Taupo is being on the lake. Book a Kayak Trip (highly recommend over the boat ride) to the **Maori Carvings**. The guides are fantastic and provide fun tidbits, the history of Taupo and suggestions for other things to do in NZ. It's a workout but there's a scheduled stop on the beach where you can relax and enjoy some refreshments.

Once back on land, grab a bite and brew at **Crafty Trout**, a unique brewery that creates craft beer and cider using Alpine Volcanic water. Then it's a 15 minute drive to the **Taupo Airport** and time to say goodbye to the North Island!

Tip: This is the smallest airport I have ever been to. No need to get there early and you'll pretty much just walk on the plane! Though this is not a direct flight, we found it easier than the alternative of driving back to Auckland or all the way down to Wellington.