

**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 geothermal 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 world famous **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, fly into Queenstown

*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.

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After touching down on the South Island, take the local Fernhill 1 **Orbus** to **Queenstown**, or just a 15-minute taxi ride to the center of town. Once checked in, wander the maze of streets and alleys and admire the mind-blowing view from the **Queenstown Gardens** park. Stop at any of the outdoor markets for homemade goods and locally made souvenirs.

Dinner is at **Botswana Butchery**, known for their fine-dining and fireside setting, followed by drinks two blocks away at **The Bunker** on the deck.

## DAY 7

*At a glimpse:* Queenstown from above

*Travel Agenda:* Begin the morning at **Vudu Cafe**, which has the breakfast game perfected and offers it all day. Take the **Skyline** gondola up the mountain to first ride on the **luge track** (get 3 tickets so you can try different tracks!) and race with your new friends/rivals you encounter along the way. This is also the time to freestyle bungee on the **Bungee Ledge** if the mood strikes you, which it should.

*Tip:* Buy the Skyline gondola, luge and bungee tickets in town at one of the many tourist centers. That way you can skip the line at the base of the mountain. Skyline only promote the upscale restaurant, but the cafeteria and cafe have plenty of lunch options!

After, get a cafeteria-style lunch at the **Market Kitchen Cafe**. From here, follow the signs for the paragliders. This will take you 20-minutes to the **Lower Ridge Track** for a beautiful view and peaceful setting overlooking the **Remarkables**.

Head back to the hotel and then plan on dinner at **Bespoke**, a restaurant with fresh, unprocessed and locally focused ingredients, followed by drinks at the lively **1876** bar.

## DAY 8

*At a glimpse:* Adventure morning in Queenstown, exploring nearby Arrowtown and relaxing at the Onsen Hot pools

*Travel Agenda:* Seize the morning by walking to Arthur's Point for the **Shotover Jet** adventure, a thrilling ride through the Shotover River Canyons.

In the afternoon, take the #2 bus 50-minutes to **Arrowtown**, a cute old mining town that feels like you're stepping back in time. Lunch should be on the outside patio of **Provisions**, set in a historic Romans cottage and ideal for people watching.

Just prior to sunset, take the complimentary 10-minute shuttle (but book beforehand) and enjoy the **Onsen HotPools** experience with breathtaking views of the mountains and canyons. On the way back to your accommodation, order a burger and fries from the world renowned **Fergburger**.

## DAY 9

*At a glimpse:* Rent a car in Queenstown and drive to Milford Sound

*Travel Agenda:* Start the day with a bagel or pastries from **Fergbakery** and a couple snacks for the drive to **Milford Sound**. Leave by 9am so that you can get the full experience. Plan on stopping for photo ops at: sheep farms, **Eglinton Valley**, **Mirror Lakes** and **Pop's View** lookout. For longer breaks, try the **Lake Gunn** 45 minute hike, **Lake Marian** 3 hour return hike or the 15 minute **Chasm** walk with rivers and waterfalls.

Arrive before 4:00pm for the overnight cruise on the **Milford Wanderer**, which includes a hike, dinner and a once-in-a-lifetime dip in the Tasman Sea.

*Tip:* Milford Sound weather is incredibly unpredictable and having the opportunity to spend extra time overnight is worth the time and money. There's no service after you hit the Homer Tunnel, so be prepared for about 20 hours off the grid. You can read more about our experience here.

## DAY 10

*At a glimpse:* Milford Sound cruise in the morning and then drive to Te Anau

*Travel Agenda:* Rise and shine on Milford Sound! Enjoy breakfast and spend the morning on the deck taking in the incredible sights.

Back on land, drive to **Te Anau**, possibly stopping at some sights missed along the drive to Milford. Once there, get a hand pie from **Miles Better** for lunch. Then book the scenic ferry to the underground world of **Glowworms** in the afternoon. This ferry ride and cave adventure is unique to New Zealand. For dinner, opt for picking up ingredients and having a picnic dinner by the water.

**DAY 11**

*At a glimpse:* Drive to Wanaka for Lavendar Farms, winery visit and lake exploration

*Travel Agenda:* Get up early and drive the 3 hours to **Wanaka**. Head straight to the **Wanaka Lavender Farm** with 15 acres of lavender fields and gardens. Here you can unwind over a cup of herbal tea, then indulge in lavender ice-creams. The lavender products are some of the best souvenirs!

From there, head to more iconic views at **Rippon Vineyards**, home to Central Otago's oldest vines that lie on the shores of Lake Wanaka. The vineyard is open for free tastings until 5pm.

After settling in to your hotel, check out the adorable town, pick up provisions for tomorrow's hike and grab dinner along the main street – **Burrito Craft** is a treasured food truck for something more casual. Get an ice cream at **Patagonia Chocolates** and walk along the lake to **#ThatWanakaTree** at sunset.

**Day 12**

*At a glimpse:* Hike in Wanaka and drive to Mount Cook for unique walk. Stay at the Aoraki Mount Cook Village.

*Travel Agenda:* Prepare for an early morning, with an alarm around 3am for the **Roy's Peak** sunrise hike. This 5-7 hour hike is considered one of the best with views across Lake Wanaka and up to the peak of Mount Aspiring. Once back in town, grab a hearty lunch at **Big Fig** on Ardmore Street.

From here, drive 2.5 hours to **Mount Cook** with a stop at **Pukaki Lake** on Mount Cook Road. Drive to the trailhead of the **Hooker Valley Track**, an easy but rewarding 3-hour trail with swing bridges and streams that leads to iceberg laden Hooker Lake. A much deserved dinner is at the **Old Mountaineer's Café**.

**DAY 13**

*At a glimpse:* Glaciers in Mount Cook, and then a drive to Tekapo and stay in town

*Travel Agenda:* Start the day with an epic **Tasman Glacier Heli hike** for 2 hours in the AM. Get a true feel for the glacial ice formations that are only accessibly via helicopter. Once the adrenaline has worn off, lunch is at **Tasman Delta Cafe**. Soak in one more look at the Glacier lake with the short 20-minute **Hooker Glacier Trail**, with the trailhead located just down the road.

*Tip:* Schedule your heli hike for the earliest time slot possible. The weather can change quickly and if the conditions force a cancellation in the morning, it could become possible hours later.

Drive to **Lake Tekapo** and stop by the **Church of the Good Shepherd**, a picturesque church that holds interdenominational services. Get dinner on Main Street at the **Blue Lake Eatery & Bar**. Tekapo is a UNESCO Dark Sky Reserve so at night walk to the lake for stargazing and potential Northern Lights viewing.

## DAY 14

*At a glimpse:* Drive to and visit main sites in Christchurch

*Travel Agenda:* Get breakfast at **Astro Cafe** in Tekapo before making the 3-hour drive to **Christchurch**. Once checked in, meander through **Hagley Park** to see the beautiful gardens and fascinating recreational sporting grounds and courts.

A 15-minute walk further is the Quake City Museum, with an interesting history of the earthquake devastation and revitalization plans.

To end the trip, enjoy dinner on **New Regent Street**, Christchurch's only complete heritage streetscape. Finally, walk 10 minutes along the Avon River until you hit **Kong**, a cocktail lounge that will pour you the appropriate farewell beverage.