

# How long should I visit New Zealand for?

We like to put the “how long should I visit New Zealand for?” question in the same category as “how long is a piece of string?” The answer is, it depends. The short answer is 14 days as a minimum time frame for visiting both the North Island and South Island of New Zealand. That’s roughly one week’s travel time for both islands and is just long enough for any visitor to experience the best of the country.

If time and funds allow then we recommend three weeks for a more in-depth experience. Backpackers might spend 1-2 months in the country but anyone that wants the best of New Zealand in a compact time frame should aim for 2-3 weeks. That will give you enough time to experience your trip of a lifetime. Any shorter and you could miss some wonderful activities and sights. We don’t want you to miss out



Everyone had their own travel style and different opinions of detail and depth. For some people, a year travelling around the country experiencing everything both the North Island, the South Island, and Stewart Island have to offer is the only way to go. For others, a two or three week bucket-list / highlights reel version is the way to go.

## The length of time you need to visit New Zealand depends on the following factors

- What you like to do, see, and experience
- How long (realistically) you have to spend travelling

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- Your budget
- Your preferred style of travel
- How fast you prefer to travel
- How much detail you like to include.

Remember to factor in the travel time to your journey. If you're visiting us from the US or Europe, don't forget the 12-24 hours of travel time. Add on one day or so to adjust to the new time zone and recover from any jet lag and you've already used up a couple of days of your trip.

## How long would it take me to get to New Zealand?

From the US you can make it in 12 hours but it will take longer from the East coast. Most visitors start their New Zealand experience in Auckland and this is the international gateway, so you probably won't need onward internal flights.

From Europe, you'll spend at least 24 hours travelling. There's two 10-hour (or more) flights plus stopovers and airport waiting time to factor in.

Make sure to get a day's rest and acclimatisation after a long flight and before starting any trip (especially if it's a self-drive trip). This is a good opportunity to check out the ultra-cool city of Auckland. You'll love it.

[Here's a handy summary of how long it takes to get to New Zealand and some suggestions for flight routes.](#)

## How long does it take to travel the North island of New Zealand?

Driving from the tip of Northland to Wellington without stopping and keeping within the speed limit and main highways is a journey of 13 hours. We probably don't need to mention that this is no way to see the country as a visitor.

## How long does it take to travel the South island of New Zealand?

To drive from Picton (the arrival port for car ferries on the South Island) to Invercargill (New Zealand's southernmost city) would take 12 hours (via SH1, the east coast route) without stopping. To see the South Island's main attractions you can drive down one coast and back up the other forming a loop. Some of the best bits of New Zealand are inland so it's definitely worth making some crossings of the Southern Alps or visiting the inland high country to visit towns and settlements that are slightly off the main routes but are well-worth your time

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### HOW LONG CAN I STAY IN NEW ZEALAND FOR?



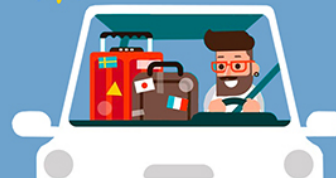
US, CANADIAN, UK & EU  
CITIZENS 3 MONTHS

### HOW LONG SHOULD I **VISIT** **NEW ZEALAND** FOR?



WE RECKON  
YOU NEED  
**2 OR 3 WEEKS**  
TO SEE  
NEW ZEALAND

### HOW LONG WOULD IT TAKE TO DRIVE FROM ONE END OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE OTHER?



ABOUT 30 HOURS NONSTOP

### HOW BIG IS NEW ZEALAND?



### WHAT CAN I SEE IN 14 DAYS IN NEW ZEALAND?



**Moatrek**

NEW ZEALAND SMALL GROUP TOURS

## How long is New Zealand?

NZ is much longer than it is wide. There are two main islands, plus Stewart Island (much smaller) and if you were to stick them all together top to toe, the country would be 1600 km or 990 miles long. For comparison, the widest part of the country is 400 km or 250 miles across.

If you look at the map it might appear that the South Island is longer but in fact, the North is the winner here. The long sliver of land called Northland sneakily adds length to the boxy-looking North Island's landmass.

In a way, the shape of the country makes it easier to travel. Visitors don't have to crisscross and

double-back as much as they would in a more 'square' country such as the United States, for example.

## How long can I travel in New Zealand for?

If you're a citizen of most western countries see the [following info from the New Zealand government about visa waivers](#). The short answer for most people from countries like the USA, UK, Canada and Western Europe is 3 months at least. Our Aussie mates are even luckier, they can stay as long as they like! If you're the proud holder of a Working Holiday Visa then you can stay in the country for up to 1 year. That gives you the opportunity to not only travel but work to support your travel experience. Obviously, that means staying put in some places for longer periods of time but the great part is that you can then make travel plans for 1-2 week trips between work contracts or jobs.

## How long can you visit New Zealand for without a visa?

A very important question for anyone with plans to visit our little corner of the world concerns visa requirements. New Zealand welcomes visitors from all over the world and tourism is a huge part of the economic engine. For most people, it's a very easy process to enter the country and visas are waived for most western countries.

If you're from the UK, congratulations! You can stay for 6 months without a visa. Passport holders of most other countries will get a 3-month visa waiver on arrival. The visa waiver allows visitors to travel in the country. Working or engaging in any kind of business venture is against the rules. We'd just like to point that out.

If you do plan to spend 3 months travelling, relish the opportunity to see almost everything that the country has to offer. That gives you plenty of time to do a full, leisurely loop of both the North and South Islands.

[See more information about passports and visas for visiting New Zealand here.](#)

## How long does it take to travel from the North Island to the South Island?

By air, this won't take long. Flights from Auckland to Queenstown, for example, take less than 2 hours. You can fly from Wellington to Nelson in 40 minutes. Wellington (on the southern tip of the North Island) to Christchurch (the South's biggest city) takes just 50 minutes.

Driving is the best way to see the country and just because New Zealand is split into two islands shouldn't hinder your progress. In fact, 'driving' your car across on an inter-island ferry is a fantastic way of travelling. The beautiful sights of Marlborough Sounds are waiting for you on the journey from Wellington to Picton. The ferry is comfortable and convenient and the bonus is you won't have to change vehicles. Travel time is just over 3 hours, which might seem like a lot, compared to flying but trust us, it's an experience in itself and there's some of the best coffee in NZ on board!

We wouldn't like you to leave without experiencing as much as possible you can so here is our 'can't fail' 100% quality-time breakdown of what to see.

## What can I see in New Zealand in 14 days?

This is the express visit to New Zealand so you'll be packing in the highlights and not wanting to waste time. A note about travel options: you might guess that air travel is the quickest way around but the time spent in airports and the subsequent hunt for transport on the ground can eat into valuable travel time. You also miss some of the best parts of visiting New Zealand, the countryside views. Yep, Mt Cook is nice from 6km up in the air but it's truly spectacular from a car or bus on any nearby road.

- Start your journey in Auckland. A day in Auckland to soak up the sun and enjoy one of the most relaxing big cities in the world is just what you need after a long flight. (1 day)
- Heading in a southwesterly direction along Highway 2 you will reach Tauranga on the Bay of Plenty shoreline in 3.5 hours.
- Tauranga and the adjacent Mt Maunganui are probably the best places in New Zealand to surf and experience true Kiwi beach-life culture. If you visit during the months of December to March, the summer vibe will definitely be on show at the 'Mount'. (1 day)
- Heading directly south, the next stop is Rotorua, the epicentre of Maori culture today and also the North Island's centre for adventure sports. Combine culture and thrills in this unique town. And don't forget the thermal springs and spas, a great way to wind down after some white water rafting or Zorbing. (1-2 days).
- Again heading south from Rotorua (on the way to Wellington via Highway 1) you'll pass by the beautiful Tongariro National Park. Well worth a visit if you have the time.
- Wellington might be the capital city and a place of business and government but it's a fun place to be and very beautiful when the sun is shining. Check out live music and the coolest bars while you prepare to cross the water to the South Island (1 day)
- From Wellington take the Ferry across to Picton and visit the town of Nelson, which is a great base to visit one the most popular parks in the country, Abel Tasman National Park. (1-2 days) If you're a wine lover then definitely make a stop in the famous Marlborough wine



regions, some of the best wineries in the country like Cloudy Bay and Forrest Wines are just half an hour from the ferry terminal!

- Next stop is Kaikoura, which is a must-see for almost every visitor to NZ. The whale watching and beautiful mountain-to-sea views will make a lasting impression. (1 day)
- Mt Cook, New Zealand's tallest mountain sits in the centre of the Southern Alps range about halfway down the South Island. Mt Cook village is about 6 hours drive from Kaikoura. Fortunately, the view is spectacular for most of the route. With the snow-capped peaks to your right and for some of the journey the ocean close by on your left, you won't be short of photo opportunities. We recommend the buffet dinner (or lunch & breakfast) at the Hermitage Alpine restaurant in Mt Cook village. The food is excellent and the view is even better. The perfect way to finish your day. (1 day)
- Moving south again you'll reach the adventure capital of the world, Queenstown. If you've ever wanted to try para-gliding, bungee jumping, abseiling, white water rafting, mountain biking, or any other adventure activity you can think of, this is the place to do it. There are endless possibilities for fun in this town. (1-2 days)

If you have two weeks for your trip to New Zealand you'll want to spend about 12 days on the ground, [see our New Zealand 14 day itinerary in more detail here.](#)

## What can I see in New Zealand in 3 weeks?

An extra week above the traditional 2-week vacation gives the added luxury of some extra relaxation time and the possibility of doing some longer stays in one place.

### Start in Auckland

Start your journey in the largest city in New Zealand, Auckland. The cosmopolitan landscape of high-rise buildings mixed with colonial houses are what define Auckland. Add 50 volcanic cones and craters, two oceans only an hour apart, a glorious natural harbour and hundreds of sailboats dotted around the waters and you have a city that lives and breathes its natural surroundings. (1-2 days)

### Head North

North of Auckland in the long narrow stretch of land called Northland, our pick for your first night is the Hokianga Harbour with a stop in at the Waipoua Kauri Forest on the way. Then on to the Bay of Islands, a relaxing and entertaining place to spend a couple of days. There are 140 islands here and helicopter tours, cruises, and sailing trips are just some of the ways you can visit them. Hop over to Motorua island or Waewaetorea Island and experience some of the most beautiful beaches and water anywhere in the world. (2 days)

### Back to Auckland then onward to Rotorua

Learn about Maori culture and experience adventure kiwi-style in Rotorua, a few hours south of Auckland and another NZ "must-see". The list of things to do in Rotorua is long:

- Experience Maori culture up close.

- Take an eco-tour of the geothermal landscape and native plants and animals.
- Visit the hot pools dotted around the town.
- Relax and unwind in a thermal spa.
- Try bungy jumping, Zorbing, white water rafting, kayaking, hiking and jet boating.

A day in Rotorua is good enough to get a feel for the town and surroundings but two days is better. (1-2 days)

### **Walking in Tongariro, from short day walks to the full crossing**

According to visitors to our shores, one of the most satisfying and rewarding activities to do on the North Island is the Tongariro Crossing. This is a single-day hike (or tramp as we call it down here) is just under 20km long and passes through some of the most diverse scenery in the entire country. If you're reasonably fit and enjoy a challenge, this is the hike for you. It shouldn't take more than 7 hours to complete. Fast hikers can do it in half that time but if you want to stop for a picnic, take photos, and enjoy the experience plan for a day out.

The walk takes you past thermal lakes, volcanic mountains, lunar-like landscapes, and beautifully clear streams.

The crossing is located right in the middle of the North Island, around 1.5 hours drive from Taupo and 2.5 hours from Rotorua. The good news is that if you're driving to Wellington from Taupo or Rotorua you'll pass pretty close to the crossing so it's not too far out of your way. You just need that single day to complete the trek. (1-2 days – include a rest day). If the full crossing is not for you, there are plenty of short stunning day walks all around Whakapapa Village too.

### **Wellington "the coolest capital"**

Wellington is one of our favourite places in the country. You'll feel right at home here if you're a culture vulture and coffee addict. For a capital city, "Wellywood" feels small and cosy. In fact, it's home to 400,000 people. That's a lot if you're from around here but not if you live in New York or London. Still, the city has everything you need for a pleasant day's sightseeing. The waterfront promenade, harbour, vibrant cafe and restaurant scene, and beautiful views make New Zealand's capital well worth visiting. The city is worth at least a day of your time but we reckon an overnight stay will have you keen to see more. (1-2 days)

### **The South Island, Abel Tasman to Kaikoura**

Heading over to Picton via the ferry from Wellington, you have the choice of heading east to Kaikoura or west to Nelson. We recommend visiting using Nelson as your base to explore Abel Tasman National Park. A day spent kayaking around the golden shores of the national park is an unforgettable experience. (1-2 days)

After that, retrace your steps back to Picton and continue on to Kaikoura to see the giants of the ocean in their natural habitat.

Kaikoura has a lot to offer nature lovers. The team at Whalewatch Kaikoura bring you up close to huge sperm whales (year-round), Humpbacks (winter), Blue whales (various times), and many other species. Along the shore, it's easy to spot seals, dolphins, large seabirds such as Shearwaters and Albatrosses. (1-2 days)

After Kaikoura, the next major city is a real gem, Christchurch, the biggest city down South. Christchurch was hit by the earthquakes that affected New Zealand a few years ago. But the people here are resilient and you'll find a friendly, beautiful city that has rebounded from the natural disaster very well. Walking along the Avon River, one might expect to meet locals from an English village on their way to a market. It has that old-world feel that just invites you to sit by the river and enjoy the day. Great for relaxing (1 day)

### **The Southern Alps and Queenstown**

Allow 2-3 days to experience Queenstown's many delights. This little town situated on the shore of Lake Wakatipu has been a centre for adventure-seekers and people escaping the big city since the 1970s. Bungy jumping and jet boating were developed here. The skiing in the surrounding ski fields is world class. But Queenstown isn't all about sport and the outdoors. There are some sophisticated hotels, spas, and restaurants in the town that are worth checking out for some quality relaxation time. Prince William and Kate Middleton stayed at the Wharekauhau Lodge so if you fancy living like a royal for a night or two this is the place to do it. If you want to spend a couple of days enjoying the lake, luxury spas, and eating world-class food, Queenstown is a great choice. (2-3 days)

### **Milford Sound**

No trip to New Zealand would be complete without getting a photo of Milford Sound in Fiordland National Park (4 hours from Queenstown). The waterfalls are located in one of the most remote parts of the country but the journey is worth the effort. This is what many people visit NZ for. You absolutely must make the cruise out on the sound to really immerse yourself in the natural environment here. (1-2 days)

Many tour operators offer scenic flights (helicopter and aeroplane) which perfectly complement the cruise and it sure makes your whole day a lot shorter if you fly back to Queenstown rather than return on the road again.

### **Wanaka and the West Coast**

Many people finish their journey in Queenstown, but for those with the time continuing on to Wanaka and up the West Coast will show you another side of the country, a place many Kiwis reckon is their favourite. Things slow down on the Coast, but the scenery doesn't take a break. Glacier walking might seem like an extreme sport (and it can be) but the professional guides and tour operators at Fox and Franz-Josef Glaciers make things a breeze. Guided tours include easy walks to the glacier terminal face, glacier valley walks, and heli-hiking, where you are transported high up the glacier for stunning views. Both glaciers are on the west coast of the South Island, in



view of the mighty Mt Cook. The glaciers are less than 60 minutes drive from each other so there's a good chance you can walk on both. (1 day).

[Find out more about New Zealand's glaciers and how you can include them in your holiday here.](#)

