



The Big Bridge

24 days



This itinerary is a great chance to get a taste of the South Island and see the beauty of the north, see the twinkling glow worms of Waitomo Caves, and investigate the geothermal attractions of Rotorua and Taupo. Napier, Hastings and Martinborough are wine growing regions to enjoy on the way to Wellington. Drive through the amazing Nelson Lakes district, before you encounter the wild scenery of the West Coast. Arthur's Pass takes you across the Southern Alps to Christchurch.



Day 1

Christchurch to Kaikoura (3h)

Begin in Christchurch and drive north through Canterbury and its newest wine region, Waipara. There are numerous vineyards where you can stop and stretch your legs, taste some local vino, and have a long lunch. Enjoy the views along the coastline and take a moment to pull over for scenery and a few photo opportunities.

Kaikoura translates into English as a good place to eat kai (crayfish) koura and indeed it is! Don't miss the chance to sample some of the freshest shellfish and crustaceans around. Venture onto the coastal walkway and you may see sperm whales, dusky dolphins, fur seals, and albatross play in the waters off shore. Alternatively, join them in their own environment and take one of the many oceanic tours on offer. Kaikoura experienced major earthquakes in 2016, which disrupted their roads and some attractions. Check <http://www.journeys.nzta.govt.nz/traffic/regions/11> for live updates to be sure your road trip will be a safe and enjoyable one.



Recommended accommodation options:

Campground Option	Free Parking Option	NZMCA Option
Peketa Beach Holiday Park 665 Main South Rd/SH1, Kaikoura www.kaikourapeketabeach.co.nz	Cribb Creek Inland Kaikoura Rd, Kaikoura www.kaikoura.govt.nz	NZMCA Park Kaikoura Trotting Club South Bay Pde, Kaikoura



Day 2

[Kaikoura](#) to [Picton](#) (3h)

Head north through glorious scenery of bays and waterways on your way into Marlborough, a premier wine region of New Zealand. Known for its Sauvignon Blanc, but home to many other award-winning varieties, this is the place to stop for a long lunch. Picton’s Marlborough Sounds are home to one of NZ’s Great Walks, the Queen Charlotte Walkway, and a large percentage of New Zealand's coastline (due to all the bays and little inlets), and dozens of other hiking opportunities. It’s worth stopping a while to take in the sights of one of the loveliest parts of New Zealand – full of history, natural attractions, cafes, shops and spectacular views of the Sounds and surrounding hills. In Picton, drive onto a ferry to the North Island, via the Cook Strait, into the capital city of Wellington.



Recommended accommodation options:

Campground Option	Free Parking Option	NZMCA Option
Parklands Marina Holiday Park 10 Beach Rd, Waikawa Marina, Picton www.parktostay.co.nz	Collins Memorial Reserve Cnr of SH1 & Freeths Rd, Koromiko www.marlborough.govt.nz	POP Crow Tavern 15 Nelson Square Picton

Day 3

[Wellington](#) to [Napier](#) (5h)

Heading north from Wellington through the rural towns of the area, visitors will notice a real change in the scenery from the South Island. In Palmerston North, stop for lunch amidst



picturesque 1920s and 1930s boutique buildings, and admire the public gardens. Your journey will continue north to Shannon, home to a native owl sanctuary. Up this stretch of the Kapiti Coast, offshore from Waikanae, is Kapiti Island, a nature reserve that visitors can visit on escorted tours. A car museum and gourmet cheese factory are other attractions in this area. Stop into Hastings on the way for its famous weekend Farmers Market and stock up for the next leg of your trip.

In Napier you can walk through town to see beautiful 1930s Art Deco buildings, built in response to the devastating earthquake in 1931 which levelled the whole town. This city is proudly known as the world’s Art Deco capital. Other attractions are the gannet colony, aquarium, and world class golf course at Cape Kidnappers. Multiple vineyards and farms dot the area, making Hawkes Bay a mecca for serious foodies.



Recommended accommodation options:

Campground Option	Free Parking Option	NZMCA Option
Kennedy Park Resort 11 Storkey St, Napier www.kennedypark.co.nz	Puketapu Reserve Dartmoor Rd, Puketapu, Napier www.hastingsdc.govt.nz	Erikson Road NZMCA Park 165 Eriksen Rd, Napier

Day 4

[Napier to Waikaremoana \(3h\)](#)

Take the curvy road north from Napier, through the Urewera National Park, and into the town of Wairoa. Stop for a break and to replenish supplies, and then head to the beauty of Waikaremoana, one of the North Island’s most beautiful lakes, and the gateway to Te



Urewera wilderness area. There are walking tracks in the wilderness area for all abilities and the Onepoto Caves are recommended.



Recommended accommodation options:

Campground Option	Free Parking Option	NZMCA Option
Waipatiki Beach Holiday Park 498 Waipatiki Beach road Napier	White Pine Bush Picnic Area SH2 Tangoio	POP 82 Kakariki Pit Rd, Kotemaori, Hawke's Bay

Day 5

[Waikaremoana](#) to [Gisborne](#) (2.5h)

There are two long and winding routes to Gisborne – inland, via State Highway 36, or along the coast on State Highway 2. Either way, you will experience interesting views and nearly untouched New Zealand. Hackfalls Arboretum and Te Reinga Falls can be found along the inland route. The coastal route gives plenty of picnic opportunities and access to the beaches of the Mahia Peninsula.

Gisborne is the first place the sun shines on New Zealand (and the world) each day and its vineyards have soaked up those extra rays to their advantage. The area is best known for its chardonnay and many lovely vineyard cafes who serve it. Gisborne is also known for its surf beaches.



Recommended accommodation options:

Campground Option	Free Parking Option	NZMCA Option
Waikanae Beach TOP 10 Holiday Park 280 Grey St, Awapuni, Gisborne www.waikanaebeachtop10.co.nz	Opoutama Beach Reserve Upoko Tataramoa Dr, Mahia www.wairoadc.govt.nz	POP Kahutia Bowling Club Cobden St, Gisborne, Gisborne

Day 6

[Gisborne](#) to [Te Araroa](#) to [Whakatane](#) (7h+)

Today's journey gives you the option of the much longer and slightly challenging route around the East Cape, through rugged scenery and twisty roads, via Te Araroa, and a chance to view New Zealand's easternmost lighthouse. Tolaga Bay is included in this itinerary, too, with its long wharf, and peaceful village. With this option, stay the night somewhere along the East Cape and enjoy the serenity and a chance to get away from the main centres.

The shorter option is via Opotiki, with its surf beaches and eco-tourism, and into Ohope, a friendly coastal town with some of the prettiest white sand beaches in New Zealand, a chance to surf the waves or swim in the sheltered bay at one end, and a lovely little town with everything you need.

On your way into Whakatane, stop to admire one of the best views in the Bay of Plenty, overlooking Ohope Beach, and then head into this bustling town for some lunch by the bay, a game of golf, or a visit to the local museum. Take a tour out to White Island, one of New Zealand's most active volcanoes, or take a fishing boat out to catch some dinner to cook on



the beach. Swimming with dolphins and eco-tours are available here, too, and some of the best fish and chips, mussels, and berries (in season) you’ll find anywhere.



Recommended accommodation options:

Campground Option	Free Parking Option	NZMCA Option
All Seasons Holiday Park 50-58 Lee Rd, Hannahs Bay, Rotorua www.allseasonsrotorua.co.nz	Maraetotara Reserve Maraetotara Rd, Ohope www.whakatane.govt.nz	Opotiki NZMCA Park 130 ST John Street Opotiki

Day 7

[Whakatane](#) to [Tauranga](#) (1.5h)

There are two roads north toward Tauranga, one of which passes through Te Puke, a town that has turned its kiwifruit industry into visitor entertainment. On the way is Okere Falls Scenic Reserve, where you can walk to see the hydroelectric power station. Back on the coast is Papamoa, a long stretch of sun-drenched white sand beach, leading all the way to Tauranga, a large port city, with an attractive harbour and plenty of shops and restaurants to replenish supplies. Further along the coast is Mt Maunganui, a beautiful beach to visit at any time of year. There is a beckoning mount to climb for the view, and a wealth of varied and popular cafes and shops along its boardwalk. Watch the surfers and try to spot the seals that visit the area. This is a great place to spend a night and enjoy the beauty of the Bay.



Recommended accommodation options:

Campground Option	Free Parking Option	NZMCA Option
Te Puna Holiday Park 4 Minden Rd, Te Puna, Tauranga www.accomodationtepuna.co.nz	Harrisons Cut Carpark, off Papamoa Beach Rd, Papamoa	Tauriko NZMCA Park Gargen Road, Tauriko Tauranga

Day 8

[Tauranga to Whitianga \(3h\)](#)

Once you experience the Coromandel Peninsula, you may never want to leave; it is one of the prettiest areas in New Zealand. The road from Tauranga will take you past historic Waihi, another gold mining town. Stop for photo opportunities at the Athenree Gorge, and for coffee in Katikati, where you can take a stroll and admire the town's famous murals.

The road is curvy and you may want to have several breaks to visit each little town along the way. Whangamata is one of the country's most attractive surf towns, with white sand beaches fringed with pohutukawa, New Zealand's native Christmas tree (it blooms red flowers at Christmastime). Enjoy the beach, cafes and bush walks. Tours for fishing and diving are available here.

You can also hire bikes, windsurfers and kayaks. Several charter companies run day trips to Mayor Island, the summit of a volcano rising from the sea floor. The road north gives you the opportunity to visit Hot Water Beach, where geothermally heated water bubbles up through the sand. For generations, New Zealanders have been digging out their own hot spas on the beaches around here (within two hours of) low tide.



Another highlight of this journey is the walk to spectacular Cathedral Cove, which begins at Hahei. Boat tours are available here, too. If you have time, indulge in a round of golf at Pauanui or enjoy fish and chips in Tairua.



Recommended accommodation options:

Campground Option	Free Parking Option	NZMCA Option
Harbourside Holiday Park 135 Albert St, Whitianga www.harboursideholidaypark.co.nz	Buffalo Beach Buffalo Beach Rd, Whitianga	Whitianga NZMCA Park 101 John Gaskell Dr Whitianga

Day 9

[Whitianga](#) to [Auckland](#) (3.5h)

The very curvy inland road to Coromandel is an option, as is the northern route, which clings to the edge of the coast. You'll enjoy amazing sub-tropical views and beach after beautiful beach, edged with pohutukawa trees. Coromandel was settled by gold miners and later foresters. It is now an artsy seaside village full of craftspeople and environmentalists. The town itself is historic and pleasant to walk around and there is an interesting museum.

The road to Auckland hugs the coast of the Firth of Thames and affords views out to sea for the duration. Stop a while in Thames, a beautiful and historic mining town, and then Pokeno to take a break, have a meal, and explore the area.

Auckland is New Zealand's largest city, with over 1 million people spread across multiple centres. It is situated between two harbours, Waitemata (Auckland) and Manukau, and sits



amongst dozens of volcanic cones. Auckland is a great place to visit museums, art galleries, war memorials, historic Maori sites, parks and gardens, and climb small volcanic hills. It hosts concerts, the ballet and opera, numerous theatre productions and offers unlimited eating and drinking options, as well as vineyards. Its Sky Tower holds a casino and sky walk, where visitors can view the expanse of the city.

Take a ferry over to the Victorian charm of Devonport, or out to Waiheke Island, full of vineyards and craft shops, or venture further to Rangitoto, the volcano that watches over the harbour. St Heliers and Kohimarama are beach areas not far from the city along beautiful Tamaki Drive, and the newly developed Viaduct Harbour area is a pleasure to wander around or stop for a meal and a bit of people watching. There is so much to do in Auckland that it is worth a return trip.



Recommended accommodation options:

Campground Option	Free Parking Option	NZMCA Option
Remuera Motor Lodge 16 Minto Rd, Remuera, Auckland www.remueramotorlodge.co.nz	Waikato River Riverbank Rd, Mercer www.waikatodistrict.govt.nz	NZMCA Park Harvard Ln, Ardmore, Auckland

Day 10

[Auckland](#) to [Kaitaia](#) (4.5h)

It's another long and winding road to Kaitaia, but with lots of attractions along the way. The Whangaparaoa Peninsula offers inspiring views and beckoning beaches, worth a detour for.



Near Warkworth, head east to the town of Matakana, which has seen a sort of reinvention in recent years. It has a boutique cinema, excellent craft shops and restaurants, a famous Farmers Market and toward Snells beach, wineries which include cafes and a fabulous outdoor sculpture park.

Whangarei is a large town where you can re-equip yourself, or head from here out to Tutukaka and Matapouri for some of the best beaches New Zealand has to offer. Farther north lies Kaitaia, the hub for activities in the Far North. From here you can catch a bus tour along Ninety Mile Beach, or visit the very tiptop of the North Island, Cape Reinga. Some roads may only be accessible to official Tour vehicles.



Recommended accommodation options:

Campground Option	Free Parking Option	NZMCA Option
Norfolk Motel and Campervan Park 29 SH10 Awanui Kaitaia	Ramp Road 149-155 Ramp Rd Tokerau Beach	POP The Warehouse 11 Matthews Ave Kaitaia

Day 11

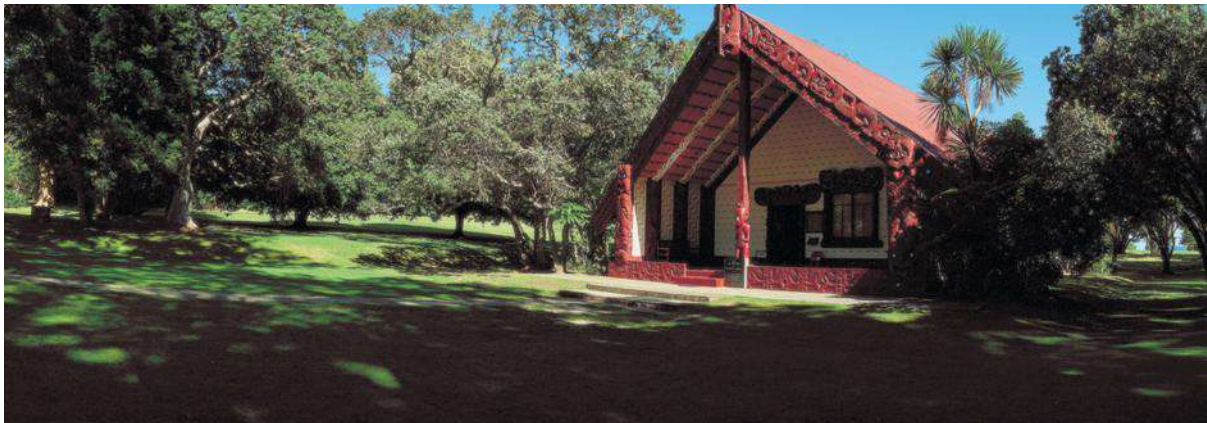
[Kaitaia](#) to [Kerikeri](#) to [Paihia](#) (1.5h)

You'll transverse the Far North as you head east to Kerikeri from Kaitaia. Enjoy the subtropical feel of the place and anticipate lots to do on the other side. At Kerikeri, you'll find lots of fresh produce to buy from road side stalls year-round, and plenty of local chocolates, crafts and cafes to enjoy. Take time to visit the Stone Store, New Zealand's oldest stone



structure, and the Mission House. There are many walks in the area, plenty to fill an afternoon.

There are waterfalls throughout the area, such as Rainbow and Haruru Falls. Paihia caters well to tourists and you can fill a day in the area. Ferry over to Russell, New Zealand's first capital, or visit the Treaty House at Waitangi, where New Zealand first became a bicultural nation. Enjoy the restaurants, cafes, and crafts here and stock up for the next day.



Recommended accommodation options:

Campground Option	Free Parking Option	NZMCA Option
Beachside Holiday Park 1290 Paihia Road Paihia	Ocean Beach Ranui Road Ocean Beach Whangarei Heads	Manganese Point NZMCA Park 232 Manganese Point Road Whangarei

Day 12

[Paihia](#) to [Whangarei](#) to [Auckland](#) (3.5h)

Head south toward Whangarei, but be sure to have a pitstop at the Hundertwasser toilets in Kawakawa, an unlikely but worthwhile tourist attraction that showcases the art and flair of Frederick Hundertwasser in the public restrooms. After some more lovely small towns you'll find Whangarei, which acts as the capital of the north. Despite its size and population, it is still a peaceful and inviting place with its beautiful harbour, museums, art galleries, shops, and natural attractions.



A drive through the Dome Forest leads you into Warkworth, and on to Waiwera, famous for its hot springs spas and pools. And now, meander back to Auckland to enjoy the places you didn't have time for on your way north.



Recommended accommodation options:

Campground Option	Free Parking Option	NZMCA Option
Remuera Motor Lodge 16 Minto Rd, Remuera, Auckland www.remueramotorlodge.co.nz	Waikato River Riverbank Rd, Mercer www.waikatodistrict.govt.nz	NZMCA Park Harvard Ln, Ardmore, Auckland

Day 13

[Auckland to Waitomo Caves \(2.5h\)](#)

South of Auckland is the nation's heartland of farms and more farms. Stop in at Hamilton to see the University, the mighty river, the beautiful public gardens, or some of its museums and galleries. Take a detour here and head out to Raglan, famous for its unique surf breaks. A community of surfers has grown up around the area and it is a great place to visit for a coffee, some interesting cafe food, the laid-back vibe, and a chance to watch (or ride) the exquisite waves.

At Ngaruawahia, turn on to the State Highway 39 towards Waitomo. Waitomo is famous for its caves and Kiwi House. World class systems of limestone caves beneath the surface of this area provide adventure at every level, from serious spelunking to leisurely walking or boat tours. Try the black (a bit less hair raising but still lots of fun) or white-water rafting adventures to fully appreciate the wonder of these underground grottos full of stalactites,



stalagmites and colonies of glow worms. Visit the Kiwi House for an up-close encounter with the national bird.



Recommended accommodation options:

Campground Option	Free Parking Option	NZMCA Option
Waitomo Top 10 Holiday Park 12 Waitomo Village Rd, Waitomo Village, Waitomo www.waitomopark.co.nz	The Haggas Lookout 971 Te Anga Rd, Waitomo	Otorohanga NZMCA Park 9 Waipa Esplanade, Otorohanga

Day 14

[Waitomo Caves](#) to [Matamata](#) to [Rotorua](#) (2.5h)

Your trip to Rotorua takes you through a series of small but interesting towns. Opt for a detour into Matamata to visit Hobbiton, the movie set leftover after the filming, for a one of a kind experience for fans of the Lord of the Rings films.

On the way, you'll come across Cambridge township, located in the heart of the Waikato's affluent horse breeding district. There are historic buildings, a lovely town, and plenty of cafes to stop for a break and to replenish supplies for your trip.

On your way to Rotorua you'll come across the town of Tirau, full of antique and craft shops, and then acres and acres of pine plantations, a major part of the local economy. Closer to Rotorua you'll begin to notice the sulphur smell in the air and a more volcanic landscape.

Rotorua is the hub of New Zealand's volcanic plateau and it lets you know about it with geysers, hot springs, bubbling mud pools and a nether-worldly sort of feel to the landscape.



It's also a hub of uniquely New Zealand tourist experiences. Head to the Polynesian Pools and spas for a soak, boat around one of the stunning lakes, or out to Mokoia Island. Try your hand at the interactive farm experiences available, and visit Fairy Springs to learn about our trout.

The area is a sacred place for Maori and one of the best areas to learn about, interact with, and enjoy Maori culture, from cultural performances, a visit to the excellent museum, or one of the many geothermal nature reserves that have tourist attractions and tours.



Recommended accommodation options:

Campground Option	Free Parking Option	NZMCA Option
All Seasons Holiday Park 50-58 Lee Rd, Hannahs Bay, Rotorua www.allseasonsrotorua.co.nz	Lakefront Parking Mataiwhea St, Ohinemutu, Rotorua www.rotoruanz.com	Ngongotaha NZMCA Park 61 Ngongotaha Rd, Rotorua

Day 15

[Rotorua](#) to [Ruapehu](#) (2.5h)

Today you'll head to Mt Ruapehu. On the way is Taupo, New Zealand's largest lake. There's a lovely village to stop and visit here, and beautiful views as you drive along the edge of the lake. Ruapehu is in the Central Plateau, and there is a complete change of landscape, from steaming earth and lakes to mountains and a desolate, eerie landscape know to Lord of the Rings fans as Mordor. From here, check out the National Park, the nearby volcanoes, walks through Tongariro and finish up with High Tea at the Chateau. It's worth stopping the night here and spending some time experiencing Nature's gifts to the area.



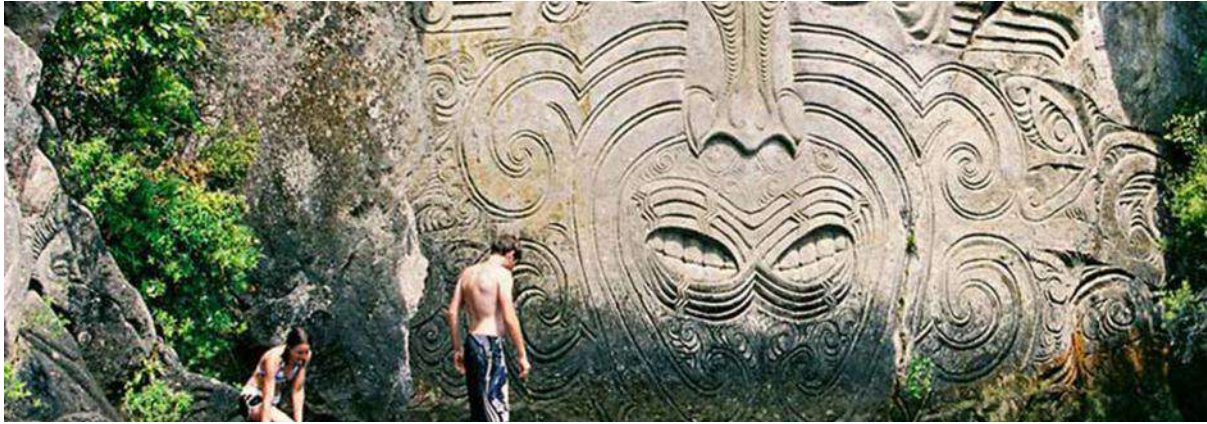
Recommended accommodation options:

Campground Option	Free Parking Option	NZMCA Option
Whakapapa Holiday park SH48, Whakapapa Village, Mt Ruapehu www.whakapapa.net.nz	Summit Rest Area, SH 1 Desert Road Tongariro National Park	POP Owhango Lodge SH4 Main Road South Owhango

Day 16

[Ruapehu](#) to [Palmerston North](#) (3.25h)

The Desert Road is the first lap of your journey – it’s long and straight, with amazing views of Tongariro National Park’s volcanoes. Along the way, you’ll find great photo opportunities at some of New Zealand’s manmade attractions: spot the Giant Carrot of Ohakune, and don’t miss the Gumboot of Taihape! In Waiouru, an army town, you should check out the QE2 Memorial Museum. Have a bit of an adventure in one of the many wild and beautiful rivers and try some rafting. By the town of Bulls, things have calmed down a bit, and the outlook is rural and serene. In Palmerston North, stop for lunch amidst picturesque 1920s and 1930s boutique buildings, and admire the public gardens. It’s a busy little spot to spend a night and stock up for the next leg.



Recommended accommodation options:

Campground Option	Free Parking Option	NZMCA Option
Pahiatua Carnival Park Motor Camp 7 Glasgow St, Pahiatua www.carnivalpark.co.nz	Timona Park Campbell St Fielding Manawatu	Marton NZMCA Park 23 Oxford St Marton

Day 17

[Palmerston North](#) to [Wellington](#) (2.25h)

Your journey south first takes you through Foxton, Levin and Otaki. Offshore from Paraparaumu is Kapiti Island, a nature reserve for close encounters with rare birds. The Kapiti Coast is known for its gourmet delights and lovely beaches; take some time to explore before making your way to our capital city, Wellington.



Recommended accommodation options:

Campground Option	Free Parking Option	NZMCA Option
Camp Elsdon 18 Raiha St, Elsdon, Porirua www.campelsdon.co.nz	Evans Bay Marina Carpark Cnr Evans Bay Pde & Cobham Dr, Kilbirnie, Wellington www.wellington.govt.nz	Plimmerton NZMCA Park 7 Ulric St, Plimmerton, Porirua

Day 18

Spend the day in [Wellington](#)

New Zealand’s capital city, Wellington is a great walking city, full of character, charm, history, and of course, politicians. It is home to Victoria University, and the presence of the students lends a hip, young, artistic air to the place. Its hills are legendary and will keep you on your toes, but the relaxing and foot friendly harbour area is never far away. Wellington has shopping, restaurants, nightlife, street art and theatre, beautiful parks and a gorgeous waterfront.

Of particular note are Te Papa, the National Museum, and for fans of the Lord of the Rings movies, Weta Cave Workshops, where visitors can experience the art and science behind the creation of these award-winning films. Wellington hosts sport, music, theatre, dance and cultural performances year-round, and is proud home of WOW, NZ’s World of Wearable Arts extravaganza, held in early spring each year.



Recommended accommodation options:

Campground Option	Free Parking Option	NZMCA Option
Camp Elsdon 18 Raiha St, Elsdon, Porirua www.campelsdon.co.nz	Evans Bay Marina Carpark Cnr Evans Bay Pde & Cobham Dr, Kilbirnie, Wellington www.wellington.govt.nz	Plimmerton NZMCA Park 7 Ulric St, Plimmerton, Porirua

Day 19

[Wellington](#) to [Picton](#) and [Blenheim](#) (4h)

The passage across Cook Strait and through the Marlborough Sounds is a stunning journey. You'll ferry past island sanctuaries, be greeted by seabirds and the occasional dolphin and arrive in the picturesque town of Picton. This is the Marlborough Sounds, home to the longest coastline in New Zealand, due to its many coves and inlets. The Queen Charlotte Walkway is based here, and is one of New Zealand's Great Walks. Take some time to go on a day trip into bush, alongside river and white sand coves.

The short drive to Blenheim takes you across the Wairau Plains past vineyards and wineries. Blenheim is wine country. Drive through just to enjoy the view, or take a break to go for a walk, sample the local wares, or have a meal and a shopping trip in Blenheim.



Recommended accommodation options:

Campground Option	Free Parking Option	NZMCA Option
Blenheim TOP 10 Holiday Park 78 Grove Rd, Mayfield, Blenheim www.blenheimtop10.co.nz	Taylor Dam Reserve Taylor Pass Rd, Blenheim	POP Blenheim Bowling Club 65E Weld St, Blenheim

Day 20

[Blenheim](#) to [Murchison](#) (2.5h)

Drive through the vineyards of the area and south through the Wairau Valley, full of beautiful rivers and plenty of spots to stop for a picnic or a morning's walk. The alpine village of St Arnaud sits on the edge of the lake against a stunning backdrop of mountains. It's the perfect base for exploring the Nelson Lakes National Park, New Zealand's second-largest national park. There are magnificent hiking trails for all abilities and a host of local adventure tour operators who can take you kayaking, river rafting, biking, and more.



Recommended accommodation options:

Campground Option	Free Parking Option	NZMCA Option
The Clinker Café & Rangeview Gift Shop 15 Beechnest Dr, St Arnaud	Howard Valley Rd, Howard, St Arnaud	Murchison NZMCA Park Fairfax St, Murchison

Day 21

[Murchison](#) to [Greymouth](#) (2.5h)

The road to the West Coast is scenic and interesting with lots to do. You could pan for gold in Lyell Creek before you navigate the dark, forbidding Buller Gorge. At Hawks Crag the road has been hacked out of solid rock – you’ll drive under a dramatic overhang, and find plenty of picnic spots.

Now you'll find yourself officially in one of the South Island's lushest locations: the rugged West Coast, with tracts of rainforest and far fewer people. West Coasters are a breed apart and proud of their laid-back, adaptable, and openminded outlook on life. The area is famous for its gold mining history, when whole towns popped up overnight in the mid 19th century, their inhabitants attracted by the lure of gold and the work available in the many mines in the area. The gold ran out, but many of the people stayed and built lives in the challenging climate and landscape.

Greymouth has museums dedicated to its history and attractions such as Shanty Town, where visitors can try their luck at panning for gold while learning about gold mining history. Long before gold was discovered, the Maori knew the area as a source of pounamu/greenstone, a



beautiful, hard, stone both sacred and useful to them. The West Coast is a great place to purchase pounamu, but it is best to buy it as a gift for others, and not for yourself. The road to Greymouth hugs the coast, providing spectacular views of wild beaches and the tempestuous Tasman Sea. At Charleston you can arrange underground rafting and cave exploring trips.

Punakaiki is famous for its ancient Pancake Rocks and booming blowholes. It is the centrepiece of the Paparoa National Park, which is packed with a variety of stunning landscapes. The visitor centre and track out to Pancake Rocks are excellent, and accessible for any level of walker.

In Greymouth, the local brewery runs tours and provide an opportunity to sample their wares.



Recommended accommodation options:

Campground Option	Free Parking Option	NZMCA Option
Greymouth Kiwi Holiday Park 318 Main South Rd, Greymouth www.greymouthkiwi.co.nz	Jellyman Park Beachfront Area Hill Quay, Greymouth	NZMCA Southside Park 80B Ruatapu Rd SH6 Hokitika

Day 22

[Greymouth](#) to [Arthur's Pass](#) (1.5h)

Classic West Coast river and forest scenery leads you east. Rushing water, impressive bridges, and tiny towns gradually give way to the misty mountains of the Southern Alps.



You will be heading onto Arthur’s Pass, a wonder of both sightseeing and engineering, which has been used since pre- European times as a way from one coast to the other. Do be aware of your weather in the winter months, as the climate here can change quickly, and snow can require roads to be closed. Stop at the township for a hot drink and to have a look at the view. Be wary of leaving any food around, and keep an eye on your caravan – the large mountain parrots here, called kea, are very curious, very clever, and a little too friendly at times!



Recommended accommodation options:

Campground Option	Free Parking Option	NZMCA Option
Jacksons Retreat 4464 SH73, Alpine Hwy, Jacksons www.jacksonsretreat.co.nz	Aitkens Rest Area Otira Hwy, Otira, Westland	POP The Sanctuary 126 West Coast Rd, Arthur's Pass National Park, Arthur's Pass

Day 23

Arthur's Pass to Christchurch (2.5h)

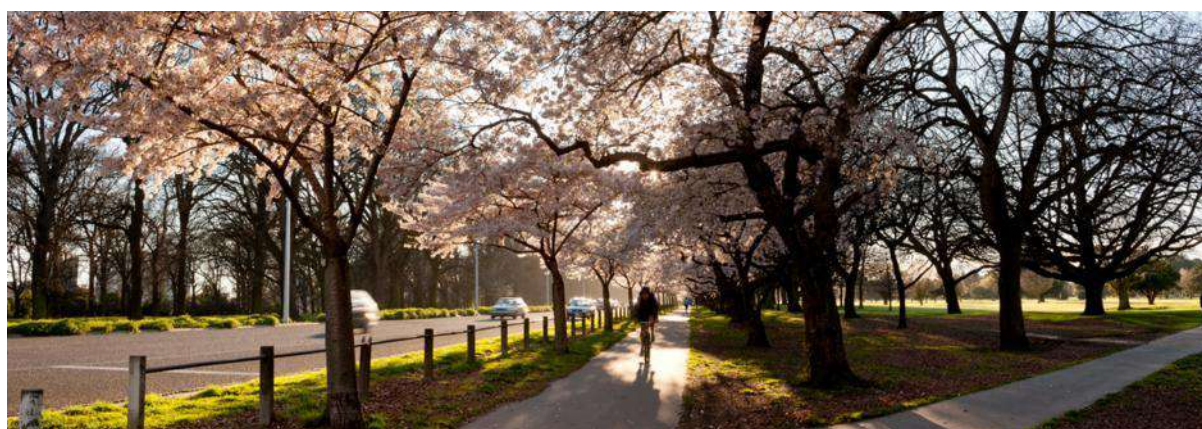
The road from here to Christchurch offers some of the loveliest views and a chance to really enjoy the open road. Once in Christchurch, park up and plan to spend a few hours enjoying this ever-changing city. Christchurch is the South Island’s largest city, and is known for its beautiful public gardens, old world charm and architecture, and its quaint and very walkable city centre.

Much of this changed in the 2011 earthquakes when so much of the city was lost. However, the city is rising to the challenges, quite literally, and it is now home to funky and unique pop



up malls, dozens of new buildings, high street, designer and boutique shops, and restaurants galore. Many of its heritage buildings have been restored, the beautiful Botanic Gardens remain, and the trams have returned to its streets. Take a punt down the Avon, check out the new civic areas along the river, take in a show at the Court Theatre or Isaac Theatre Royale, or meander over the Sumner Beach for some fish and chips.

Make sure you check out the transitional cardboard cathedral in the city centre, and the Margaret Mahy playground, designed with the help of the children of New Zealand to be the biggest and best play space in the country.



Recommended accommodation options:

Campground Option	Free Parking Option	NZMCA Option
North South 530 Sawyers Arms Rd, Christchurch Holiday Park www.northsouth.co.nz	Waimakariri River West Harris Rd, Kaiapoi	NZMCA Weedons Park 286 Jones Road, Weedons Christchurch South

Day 24

[Christchurch](#) to [Akaroa](#) to [Christchurch](#) (1.45 each way)

You have a choice here, to caravan to Akaroa and spend the night or to set out and enjoy Akaroa during a lovely day trip. This way, travellers have a chance to unhitch the car and go for a bit of a joyride over some spectacular, but slightly hair-raising, cliff top roads (The view may best be enjoyed without the worry of the caravan behind.). However, if you would like to sleep by the shores of Akaroa's many lovely bays, chose the Little River route. Regardless



CARAVAN TOURS || WITH NZ4U2U

of your decision, you'll enjoy this little Canterbury gem, a French settlement known for its interesting history, Victorian villas, marine life and wonderful food.

Akaroa Dolphins offer complimentary refreshments along with an informative nature cruise. If you're looking for something a bit more active, Black Cat provides a chance for swimming with the smallest dolphins in the world, the Hector's dolphins.

When you have returned from your cruise, take some time to explore the boutique shops and art galleries that line the main streets in the town. For something uniquely Akaroa, head up the hill to The Giant's House where terraced gardens with sculptures and mosaics are a creative feast and wonderful experience. This really is unique, and a not to be missed, excursion. Plan to take lots of photos! Further over the hill are lovely little out of the way bays and inlets. Find your way to the Okains Bay museum, to see one of the best collections of Maori art and artefacts in New Zealand, presented in a humble but respectful environment.

Enhance your journey back to Christchurch by stopping at Barry's Bay Cheese, where you can watch cheese being made in the traditional way, taste the various types and then buy your favourite block along with other delicacies on offer. The main road back to Christchurch, Highway 75, will take you through Little River, a charming town with a small art gallery and cafes.



Recommended accommodation options:

Campground Option	Free Parking Option	NZMCA Option
Akaroa TOP 10 Holiday Park 96 Morgans Rd, Akaroa www.akaroa-holidaypark.co.nz	Akaroa Boat Ramp 1 Rue Balguerie, Akaroa	Graeme's POP 4 Kotlowski Rd, Takamatua, Akaroa