



Great kiwi road trips

TrailLite Group



See it all on your schedule

New Zealand is a wonderfully scenic country to travel. With so many hidden gems to discover and explore along the way, not having a strict timeline is the perfect way to experience the best of our country. That's why motorhoming and caravanning is a great way to do it.

Our freedom camping laws mean that if your motorhome or caravan is certified self-contained you can park up almost anywhere, giving you access to some of the best camping spots the country has to offer and allowing you the time to really make the most of your great kiwi road trip.

There are so many great routes to take to enjoy New Zealand. In this guide we highlight six favourites that will hit many of the top city and town destinations.









What is certified self-contained?

Basic self-containment criteria for motorhomes and caravans are:

- Fresh water supply (12 litres per person minimum over 3 days).
- Sink.
- Toilet (3 litre sewage tank capacity per person over 3 days) – must be contained within the motorhome or designated toilet tent and have enough space around it to be useable even with the bed made up.
- Holding tank (same or larger volume than fresh water).
- Evacuation hose.
- Approved waste tank treatments.
- Sealable refuse container (with lid).

Vehicles that meet these self-containment criteria display a little blue motorhome sticker. You'll find more information about the self-containment criteria on the [NZMCA website](#) (New Zealand Motor Caravan Association) or by downloading our [Buyer's Guide](#).

Auckland and Northland loop

Start and end with the busy city vibes of Auckland while enjoying the sheer beauty of untouched Northland in between.

Route

- Take SH1 up as far as at Kawakawa before taking SH11 and heading up the east side to Paihia.
- From Paihia, head inland (still on SH11) before turning right onto SH10 towards Kerikeri, Kaero and up to Mangōnui.
- From Mangōnui, continue on SH10 across to the west side of the island until it reconnects with SH1 at Awanui. Turn left and make your way down toward Kaitaia.
- After Kaitaia, keep going along SH1 until you hit Ōhaeawai, then turn right onto SH12. You'll go through Kaikohe, and Opononi over on the coast, then down through the Waipoua Forest, through Dargaville and keep going until SH12 meets up with SH1 again at Brynderwyn, then it's back down to Auckland.

Length of trip

This trip needs at least 6 days but don't be surprised if you find yourself gone for two weeks! There's a little bit of driving (albeit scenic) that needs to be done, so make sure you leave enough time to stop and enjoy the highlights along the way.

Best time of year to go

One of the great things about this route is that it's good any time of year. Even in winter it's fairly balmy up North, although you can experience some heavy rain.







Visit the majestic Tāne Mahuta in Waipoua Forest.

Things to do along the way

- Spend a penny at the artistic Hundertwasser toilets in Kawakawa.
- Enjoy a feed of fresh caught fish and chips from Mangōnui Fish shop.
- Go boarding down the sand dunes along 90 mile beach.
- Gaze out at the Pacific Ocean at Cape Rienga lighthouse.
- Visit the majestic Tāne Mahuta in Waipoua Forest.
- Get a selfie with Opo the dolphin statue in Opononi.
- Leave some jandals on the fence in Kaeo.
- Stand where history was made on the Waitangi Treaty Grounds.
- Swim with dolphins or go fishing in the Bay of Islands.
- Take a boat tour of Whangaroa harbour.
- Get a ferry to Russell, our first capital.
- Drive to the top of Mt Victoria for epic free views of Auckland.

Central and East Coast loop

Taupō, Rotorua, Gisborne, Hawke's Bay

Take a tour off the beaten track in between hitting some of the North Island's sunniest locales.

Route

- Starting in Taupō, drive out the northern end of town and at Wairakei, instead of turning onto SH1, keep going straight along SH5 and head towards Rotorua.
- From Rotorua take SH30A then 30 around the lake and out of town at Tikitere. Follow directions for SH33, which goes straight when SH30 does a 90 degree right turn.
- Drive this way passing until you hit Paengaroa. Drive through and turn right onto SH2 and head for Whakatāne.
- At Matatā you can either veer right and continue along SH2 heading inland towards Edgecumbe, where you'll reconnect with SH30 or continue straight along the Pacific Coast Highway. Both routes will take you to Whakatāne.
- From Whakatāne head to Ōhope continue on the scenic Pacific Coast Highway until you meet up with SH2 again.
- Follow SH2 across country directly to Gisborne.
- Take SH35 out of Gisborne then turn left onto SH2 and drive to Napier.
- From Hawke's Bay, take SH5 back to Taupō.

Length of trip

10 days. There are long, windy stretches of road with no major places to stop along this route so take your time and enjoy the scenery. Keep an eye out for DOC signs signalling bush walks and waterfalls worth stopping for. Add on more time to go exploring up further from Gisborne – you won't be disappointed.

Best time of year to go

Anytime! Summer is great as many of the destinations along this route are known for getting the most sun in NZ but winter offers stunning snowy mountain views across Lake Taupō and you can't beat a Rotorua hot pool swim in winter. With the heating and insulation modern motorhomes and caravans are equipped with, you'll be toasty warm.







Jump off New Zealand's longest pier at Tolaga Bay Wharf. (It's 660m long)

Things to do along the way

- Take in the majestic Huka Falls.
- Go prawn fishing at Taupō's Prawn Park.
- Sample the goods at The Honey Hive outside Taupō, it's the bees knees!
- Enjoy a bush walk to Okere Falls.
- Go white water rafting down the Kaituna River.
- Stay the night and try glow worm spotting at Okere Falls.
- Learn to surf in Gisborne.
- Rotorua is NZ's tourist town – need we say more!
- Catch the very first rays of the sun in Gisborne.
- Take a scenic drive up rugged coastline to Tokomaru bay.
- Sample the best of Hawke's Bay and Gisborne wineries.
- Take the art deco walking tour around inner city Napier.
- Enjoy a coffee at Café L'arte, Taupō's mosaic art café, or at the Lava Glass studio and sculpture garden.
- Visit Hatupatu's rock beside SH1 at Ātiamuri.
- Get a selfie with Wal Footrot and Dog at the Murray Ball tribute statue in Gisborne.
- See the mighty river power of the Aratiatia Rapids.
- Take a stingray feeding tour in Gisborne.
- Jump off New Zealand's longest pier at Tolaga Bay Wharf.

Auckland to Wellington

One way via New Plymouth and the west coast

There are several ways to get between the two biggest north island cities, this route takes you across to the western side of the North Island.

Route

- From Auckland take SH1 to Hamilton.
- From Hamilton, follow directions to find SH3 and follow it down through Te Awamutu, Otorohonga and Te Kuiti.
- Continue along SH3 until you hit the coast at Awakino then continue along this road (still SH3) into New Plymouth. Alternatively you could go down inland via SH4 and SH43 (the “Forgotten World Highway”) and visit the infamous Republic of Whangamōmona!
- From New Plymouth take the coastal SH45 until it meets up with SH3 just south of Hāwera (or go direct via SH3) towards Whanganui and Bulls.
- At Sanson turn right onto SH1 and continue south until Wellington.

Length of trip

6-10 days (not including a decent amount of time spent at your Wellington destination) or longer if you want to stay somewhere – that’s the beauty of motorhoming and caravanning! Plan your stops and places to stay around the activities you want to do along the way.

Best time of year to go

If you prefer sun go in summer, but this area has some beautiful coastlines that look particularly spectacular with the huge surf swells of winter, not to mention the snow-capped peak of Mt Taranaki. Any time of year, this roadie is scenic and beautiful.







Check out Elephant Rock near Tongapōrutu.

Things to do along the way

- Take a detour over to Raglan for epic beach views.
- Wander the picturesque Hamilton gardens.
- Snap some pics of the Kiwiana wall in Otorohonga.
- Be dazzled with a glow worm cave tour at Waitomo.
- Get a selfie with the Riff Raff statue from Rocky Horror Picture Show in Hamilton town centre.
- Slide down the dinosaur at Kōwhai Park in Whanganui.
- Get a culture hit at Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in New Plymouth.
- Surf at Taranaki's epic beaches.
- Enjoy the views and sculpture on the New Plymouth Coastal Walkway.
- Enjoy the colour explosion of the Pukeiti Rhododendron Garden (seasonal).
- Check out Elephant Rock and the Three Sisters rock formations near Tongapōrutu.
- Drive past the waka in Patea with 'Poi E' up loud!

Queenstown to Dunedin

One way via Invercargill and The Catlins

Also known as 'The Southern Scenic Route' this is will take you to what some people call the REAL New Zealand.

Route

- Take SH6 all the way to Invercargill. (If you're dying to see the trout in Gore nip down SH94 from Lumsden then take SH1 to Invercargill).
- When it's time to head back up take Scott Street/Southern Scenic Route.
- Just after Ashers, veer right onto Tokanui-Gorge Rd Highway and follow this.
- At Tokanui this road becomes Niagara-Tokanui Highway. Continue for approx. 18km.
- Turn left onto Chaslands Highway and follow this road to Owaka.
- From Owaka take Owaka Highway to Balclutha.
- At Balclutha join SH1 up to Dunedin.

Length of trip

8 days minimum, but there's so much to do and see along this route and at the start and end destinations that you'll probably might want to allow a lot more time.

Best time of year to go

You can go during winter but as the weather conditions can get dicey beware of road closures and freezing temperatures.







Walk through Cathedral Caves.

Things to do along the way

- Visit the lighthouse at Nugget Point.
- Get a taste for the quirky at Teapot Land in Owaka.
- Enjoy a bush walk to Purakunui Falls.
- Explore the creatively whacky world of The Lost Gypsy. This place is a real gem!
- Take a walk through Cathedral Caves.
- Visit our southernmost towns, Bluff and Riverton. Oysters anyone?
- Get stellar views at Florence Hill lookout.
- See fur seals, sea lions and the yellow bearded penguin from the viewing point at Nugget Point.
- Walk up Baldwin Street in Dunedin, the world's steepest street.
- Check out the largest private collection of cars and trucks at Bill Richardson Transport Museum in Invercargill.
- Snack on some tasty hot cheese rolls from just about any bakery you find.
- Check out the 180 million year old fossilised forest at Curio Bay.

Westport to Haast

The West Coast of the South Island is spectacular and with just one State Highway to travel it might have a few twists and turns but you won't get lost.

Route

- Take SH67 out of Westport until it meets SH6.
- Continue down SH6 to Haast.

Length of trip

4–5 days. It's not a physically long distance but we guarantee you'll want to stop at lots and lots of places!

Best time of year to go

It's a beautiful place any time of year, just be prepared for it to be a bit wetter and wilder during winter.









Marvel at the Pancake rocks and blowhole at Punakaiki.

Things to do along the way

- Marvel at the Pancake rocks and blowhole at Punakaiki.
- Visit Fox and/or Franz Josef Glaciers.
- Make your own knife in Barrytown.
- Take a step back in time at Shantytown Heritage Park or Mitchells Gully Goldmine.
- Head out to the seal colony at Cape Foulwind.
- Duck inland and catch a fish in Lake Brunner.
- Take in the scenery of a Haast river safari.
- Walk Hokitika Gorge.
- Take a short trip up from Westport to Karamea and the Opara Basin Arches.
- Plus look out for DOC signs for good walks and other natural sights worth stopping for.

Christchurch, Nelson, Picton, Blenheim, Kaikōura

This is the top o' the south tour. You'll enjoy some remote driving and scenic views interspersed with small city charm.

Route

- From Christchurch head north on SH1 and turn left onto SH7 at Waipara.
- After a couple of hundred kilometres follow the signs and turn right onto SH65.
- Follow this road and merge into SH6 then follow all the way to Nelson.
- Heading out of Nelson go north on SH6 to Blenheim.
- From Blenheim you can nip up SH1 for a visit to Picton, or it's a reasonably simple drive south on SH1, stopping in at Kaikōura before continuing south back to Christchurch.

Length of trip

10 days – 3 weeks. We recommend allowing yourself lots of time at each destination as there is so much to do on this road trip.

Best time of year to go

The very top of the south rarely experiences freezing temperatures in winter so this is a great trip to take any time of year. It can be a bit cooler nearer Christchurch and inland but even then, a nice crisp, clear Canterbury winter day can be beautiful! Plus, you'll be toasty warm in a nice insulated, heated motorhome or caravan.







You'll have your pick of wineries in Nelson and Blenheim.

Things to do along the way

- Stop for a dip in the hot pools at Hanmer Springs.
- Day trip to Akaroa from Christchurch with a stop at Barry's Bay for some cheese.
- Nelson is a great base to enjoy the amazing Abel Tasman Park.
- Have a feed of crayfish from Nin's Bin just outside Kaikōura.
- Wineries, wineries, wineries! You'll have your pick of them in Nelson and Blenheim. Remember to drive responsibly, all those tastings can add up if you're not careful!
- Take a boat tour of Queen Charlotte Sounds from Picton.
- Visit the World of Wearable Art and Classic Cars Museum in Nelson.
- Check out the Omas Aviation Heritage Centre in featuring Sir Peter Jackson's own collection of World War One aircraft and artifacts.
- Go whale watching in Kaikōura.

Campermate

Campermate is an app that provides travellers with accurate information, feedback and ratings to maximise your happiness and ease while on the road exploring NZ; things like spots to park, the rules for each location, rubbish and dumping stations, fun activities along the way and so much more. It's a great resource for exploring exactly where you can go in a motorhome or caravan.





Haere rā! Enjoy tiki touring
across New Zealand. Send us
some pics of your trip.

Happy trails!

TrailLite Group

77 Paerata Road, Pukekohe, Auckland

10 Innovation Way, Islington, Christchurch

traillite.co.nz