

Day 1

Arrive Auckland

Welcome to Auckland. After collecting your rental car, drive into the city. Auckland, New Zealand's largest city, is situated between two enormous harbours and dotted with 48 extinct volcanic cones. It's a place to enjoy marine adventures, wine trails, forest walks and urban sophistication.

You could go on a harbour cruise or sailing trip this afternoon (optional).

Duration 1 Night

Accommodation

Heritage Auckland Hotel

Day 2

Auckland Via Mata Mata to Rotorua 237 kms (148 miles) 3 hours

As you cruise down the highway, suburban scenery gradually gives way to the farmland of South Auckland. A couple of hours south of Auckland lies the lush farmland of the Waikato. Famous for dairying and fine thoroughbred horses, it's easy to see why these green pastures and rolling hills were chosen to portray Hobbiton and The Shire. Although much of the set was deconstructed post filming, hobbit fans can still visit Hobbiton, wander among the hobbit holes and listen to the fascinating commentary about how it was all created. Got a taste for bigger caverns? Check out Waikato's massive Waitomo Caves for dramatic stalactites, stalagmites and zillions of sparkling glow-worms. You can glide through on a barge, take a black water rafting trip, or even abseil (rappel) down into the abyss!

Next stop is Rotorua, which sits squarely on the Pacific Ring of Fire, so volcanic activity is part of the city's past and present. Explore the geothermal areas and discover the unique culture of New Zealand's Maori people.

This evening you could enjoy a traditional Maori concert and hangi at the Maori village of Te Tawa Ngahere Marae Pa (not included).

Duration 1 Night

Accommodation

Millennium Hotel Rotorua

Day 3

Rotorua via Lake Taupo to Tongariro to Mt Ruapehu 235 kms (144 miles) 3.5 hours

Today travel down past Lake Taupo and onto the volcanic central plateau where your destination is the foot of Mt Ruapehu, the largest mountain in the North Island in the heart of the Tongariro National Park.

The road to Taupo will keep you entertained with its unusual, volcanic geography. You'll also drive through large tracts of plantation pine forest. Lake Taupo is famous for its trout, year-round water sports and stunning views across the water towards those mystical Middle-earth volcanoes.

Take a side road to a geothermal park, where you'll discover geysers, silica terraces and craters of boiling mud.

From Lake Taupo, drive to National Park Village, which follows the edge of the Tongariro National Park. National Park Village is well positioned to explore the Tongariro National Park. The volcanic peaks of Ruapehu, Ngauruhoe and Tongariro can be seen from here. The park was gifted to the New Zealand people in 1887 by the Ngati Tuwaretoa tribe and is now a World Heritage area.

Duration 2 Nights

Accommodation

Chateau Tongariro Hotel Mount Ruapehu

Day 4

Tongariro Day at Leisure

The Tongariro World Heritage National Park in the central North Island's Volcanic Plateau isn't just legendary for its dramatic and eerie scenery. What makes the area especially unique is its accessibility - you can ski on an active volcano or take a one-day hike from alpine meadow to mountain summit, with stunning volcanic landscapes along the way. Thanks to a geologically turbulent past, the area provided The Lord of the Rings crew with the perfect raw materials to create vivid scenes of Mordor, Eryn Muil, Mount Doom and the Plains of Gorgoroth.

The Tongariro Crossing is regarded as one of the best one-day walks in the world.

Day 5

Mt Ruapehu via Ohakune to Wellington 377 kms (209 miles) 4.5 hours

Just a short drive from Mt Ruapehu is Ohakune, home to Ithilien camp, which was filmed in the nearby bush; continue on towards Wellington, the capital of New Zealand and film base for Lord of the Rings.

Travel along the Kapiti coast where you can visit Waitarere Forest, the location for Trollshaw Forest and Osgiliath Wood. Home to Peter Jackson, Wellington provided lots of scope for locations. Bree was built

on an old army base, and only minutes away are Minas Tirith, the fortifications of Helms Deep and Isengard. On your way over to the wine district of Martinborough you'll pass the Hutt River (where the hobbits launched their boats numerous times) and Kaitoke Regional Park, home to scenes from Rivendale and the Fords of Isen.

Duration 2 Nights

Accommodation

InterContinental Wellington

Day 6

Wellington

A day to relax in Wellington, although there is plenty to do. You could visit the Parliament Buildings, Te Papa - New Zealand's new national museum or a ride up the cable car for great views over Wellington.

Day 7

Wellington to Nelson 243 kms (152 miles) 3.5 hours

Drop off your vehicle at the Wellington Ferry Terminal this morning. Board your ferry bound for the South Island and Picton. The passage across Cook Strait and through the Marlborough Sounds is one of the most scenic ferry trips in the world. The fast ferry makes the trip in just over 2 hours; the cruise-style ferry takes 3 hours. Both types of vessel can transport vehicles. Highlights along the way include the Red Rocks seal colony, Tory Channel, Cook's Lookout and the beautiful coves of the sounds.

The picturesque seaside town of Picton is the gateway to the marine, forest and island attractions of the Marlborough Sounds. Museums and interesting walks will keep you entertained while you're here.

Collect your new vehicle in Picton and drive to Nelson which takes you through the town of Havelock, which is known as the Green Shell Mussel Capital of the World. Nearby Canvastown is a place to explore old gold mining fields, thousands tried to get rich here in the 1860s. At Pelorus Bridge Scenic Reserve you can enjoy a bush walk or a swim, depending on the time of the year. And if you'd like a glimpse of local life in 1890, Rai Valley has a beautifully preserved cottage museum.

The city of Nelson is home to a fascinating community of beach, bush and art lovers. From here you can organise yourself an eco-adventure or become immersed in the local creative culture. Every year the city hosts the Montana New Zealand Wearable Art Awards, where art comes off the wall and onto the body.

Duration 2 Nights

Accommodation Grand Mercure Nelson Monaco

Day 8

Nelson

With three National Parks, a fascinating arts and crafts community and renowned high sunshine hours, you'll be sure to have loads of fun exploring around Nelson and Motueka.

Start with the art and craft trail where the characters are as colourful as their vibrant works. 'The One Ring' was made by a Nelson jeweller and many local artisans worked on props for The Lord of the Rings movies. Drive over Takaka Hill (Chetwood Forest) for stunning views of Golden Bay and access to the famous Abel Tasman Coastal Track. Take a helicopter tour for a spectacular bird's eye view of the remote site where the Fellowship hid from Saruman's black crows, and Dimrill Dale (Mount Olympus and Mount Owen in Kahurangi National Park). At the end of the day, pop into Harrington's brewery in Richmond, makers of the stout served over the bar in The Prancing Pony!

Day 9

Nelson via Nelson Lakes to Punakaiki 275 kms (180 miles) 5 hours

From Nelson journey through scenic reserves to Westport. Westport is a historic coal-mining settlement; the coal town museum has historical exhibitions and photographic displays. Visit the seal colony before continuing on to Punakaiki.

Duration 1 Night

Accommodation

Punakaiki Resort

Day 10

Punakaki to Franz Josef 227 kms (135 miles) 4 hours

Make your way to the South Island's West Coast. Why not stop at the Punakaiki pancake rocks before heading down to Franz Josef and the mighty Franz Josef Glacier which descends from the Southern Alps into temperate rainforest. There is the option of a scenic flight or for the more adventurous a Heli-Hike.

Duration 1 Night

Accommodation

Scenic Hotel Franz Josef Glacier

Day 11

Franz Josef to Queenstown 404 kms (251 miles) 6 hours

Travel through the scenic wilderness of Haast pass, stopping along the way to take advantage of many short nature walks and picnic spots before continuing to Queenstown, the adventure capital of New Zealand. Take your pick from a selection, jet-boating, white water rafting, bungee jumping or scenic helicopter flights.

Duration 3 Nights

Accommodation

Heritage Queenstown

Day 12

Queenstown at leisure

Today you can get really close to the Hobbits' journey. We suggest pre-booking a special 4WD half or full day tour which will take you off road and into the filming locations for Lord of the Rings, your expert guide will share his stories with you.

Duration 2 Days

Day 13

Day at Leisure

Today is totally free and at leisure. You can take advantage of any optional activities available or simply relax.

Day 14

Depart Queenstown

Today is at leisure until you make your way to the airport for your departure. Please drop off your rental car.