



The Ultimate NZ Coastal Safari

Discover New Zealand's wild side on this unforgettable journey from Christchurch to Wellington. This carefully curated self-drive tour follows the dramatic eastern coastline, where snow-capped mountains meet the sea and wildlife thrives in its natural habitat. Watch whales breach off Kaikōura, and wake to birdsong in the serene Marlborough Sounds. In Wellington, experience a guided visit to Kapiti Island, a predator-free sanctuary teeming with native birds and unique wildlife. Prepare to pursue rare kiwi, spot majestic whales, and immerse yourself in the authentic beauty of Aotearoa.



Starts in: Christchurch
Finishes in: Wellington
Length: 10days / 9nights
Accommodation: Apartments
Can be customised: Yes



This itinerary can be customised to suit you perfectly. We can add more days, remove days, change accommodations, mix it up, add activities to suit your interests or simply design and create something from scratch. Call us today to get your custom New Zealand itinerary underway.



Inclusions:

- Includes: Late model rental cars
- Includes: Fully inclusive rental car insurance (excess may apply)
- Includes: Unlimited kms
- Includes: Afterhours emergency support while touring
- Included activity: Electronic Travel Guide and In-Country Support App
- Included activity: The Visitor Promise - Cultural Learning Course
- Included activity: Akaroa Harbour Nature Cruise with Black Cat
- Included activity: Cougar Line Shared Transfer - Picton to Marlborough Sounds
- Included activity: Cougar Line Shared Transfer - Furneaux Lodge to Punga Cove
- Included activity: Cougar Line Shared Transfer - Marlborough Sounds to Picton
- Included activity: Interislander Ferry Picton to Wellington
- Included activity: Ultimate Overnight Tour with Kapiti Island Nature Tours



Day 1



Welcome to Ōtautahi / Christchurch

Kia ora and welcome to Aotearoa, New Zealand. After checking into your accommodation, the rest of the day is yours to explore at your leisure. Christchurch, known in Māori as Ōtautahi, is the largest city on the South Island. Often referred to as the Garden City it boasts one of the largest public parks in the country and the city centre is full of very impressive stone buildings reminiscent of the English university towns. The inner city has almost been completely rebuilt following earthquakes in 2010 and 2011. Explore the city and see how the old mixes with New Zealand's "newest" city.

Collect Rental Car

This tour's from price includes an intermediate-sized vehicle, setting you up for comfortable travels. Yet, we understand every adventure is unique! Feel free to select the perfect wheels from our incredible collection of rental cars, spanning from economy hatchbacks to premium SUVs.

Christchurch Botanic Gardens - suggested activity

Located just 15 minutes from the city center, Christchurch's 75-acre Botanic Gardens boast the finest collection of exotic and indigenous plants in New Zealand. This impressive collection creates a tranquil oasis, with spring daffodils, stunning summer roses and herbaceous borders, vibrant autumn foliage, and cozy conservatories to warm up in during winter. There's something to enjoy in every season. The New Zealand Garden also offers a unique glimpse into the country's wilderness, providing a peaceful escape throughout the year.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY - Christchurch Gondola

In the Heathcote Valley, just a 20-minute drive from the heart of Christchurch City, ride the Christchurch Gondola for nearly a kilometer to the collapsed rim of an extinct volcano, which exploded six million years ago. Take in the spectacular panoramic views of the central city, Lyttelton Harbour, Banks Peninsula, Canterbury Plains, and the distant peaks of the Southern Alps. Wander the summit complex, enjoy a coffee or lunch in the cafe, and choose one of many nature walks to explore or visit the Christchurch Discovery Rice, a dramatic reconstruction of the history of the Port Hills and Christchurch.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY - Christchurch Trams

Trams played an important role in transporting the people of Christchurch until 1954 when they were phased out. In 1995 the city council and Tramway Historical Society brought the beautiful trams back to the city centre for the public to enjoy. Take the delightful journey throughout the central city, including sights such as Riverside Market, the Avon River, the Arts Precinct including the Christchurch Art Gallery and Arts Centre, the Botanic Gardens, and New Regent Street with its Spanish-style buildings and sunny cafes. A commentary is given by the tram driver and you can hop on and off at the various stops as you please throughout the day. It's a great way to see and explore the main city centre attractions.

Your accommodation: Quest on Cambridge

Quest on Cambridge serviced apartment-style hotel rooms offer guests a relaxed and comfortable Christchurch accommodation experience. Each room has an open-plan living area, a fully equipped kitchen, and natural light. Quest on Cambridge is a short walk from the south shopping centre and to the Botanic Gardens.



Day 2



Akaroa and The Banks Peninsula

Akaroa and the Banks Peninsula offer a striking contrast to Christchurch, with rolling green hills, golden beaches, historic settlements, wineries, cafes, and abundant wildlife just 1.5 hours from the city. Over the Port Hills lies Lyttelton, a historic port town whose harbour names reflect its naval past. The peninsula itself is the remains of an ancient volcano that now forms Akaroa Harbour, where French settlers arrived in 1840, an influence still seen in the town's French street names and annual festival. The Harbour itself is teeming with wildlife and a nature cruise is a must do activity. One of the world's smallest and rarest dolphins, Hector's dolphin, are often seen and cruises also offer excursions with the chance to swim amongst them.

Akaroa Harbour Nature Cruise with Black Cat

Experience majestic scenery and stunning wildlife daily on a Black Cat Akaroa Harbour Nature Cruise. You'll see the rare, native dolphin – the Hector's or New Zealand Dolphin. There's also the chance to spot the world's smallest penguin, the White Flipped Little Blue Penguin, Fur Seals and other sea birds. Other cruise highlights are some majestic volcanic cliffs (including the impressive Cathedral Cave) and signs of Akaroa's fascinating past including early Maori, French and British settlements.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY - Swimming with Dolphins Cruise with Black Cat

Akaroa Harbour formed as a result of an extinct volcanic crater being flooded by the Pacific Ocean. It's a beautiful place with sheer cliffs and the picturesque township of Akaroa at its heart. New Zealand's only native dolphin, Hector's dolphin, makes this sheltered harbor its home, and it's here you can see them and if you wish actually swim with these incredible creatures. Following a 12; hour briefing, you depart on your cruise of which around 1 hour is spent in the water with the dolphins. Black Cat Cruises has been operating since 1985 and their success rate at sighting dolphins is over 98%. Swimming with dolphins is not always possible either due to sea conditions, the dolphins' willingness to stay and play, and other environmental reasons such as not swimming when there are babies around. They still manage to swim through on over 80% of their tours. All equipment is provided and all you need to bring along is your swimming costume and a towel.

Please note: To participate in the swim encounter, you must be a confident enough open-water swimmer with a good basic level of fitness, as you will need to swim up to 50 metres unaided and tread water in depths of 15–30 metres. Please be aware that these encounters take place in open-sea conditions where life jackets cannot be worn while in the water.

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Day 3



Christchurch to Kaikoura

The drive north from Christchurch to Kaikoura takes you through the rolling hills of North Canterbury's major wine region, the Waipara Valley. Allow time for a detour and visit Hanmer Springs for a dip in the mineral hot pools. Continue on and cross the Hawkswood Range before descending to the spectacular Kaikoura coastline - where the road hugs the ocean for the last leg of the drive.

Kaikōura

Kaikōura is a stunning coastal town known for its rich marine life and dramatic scenery. Visit the fur seal colony, take a whale-watching cruise, or swim with playful dusky dolphins. The town is rich with attractions, walking tracks, and activities for every visitor. A walk around the Kaikōura Peninsula is a must, where you can explore tide pools teeming with marine life, observe sea creatures basking on the rocks, and, for bird lovers, spot the impressive native albatross. Just be sure to keep a respectful distance from any sea lions you meet. Highlights like Ohau Point and historic Fyffe House offer insight into the region's wildlife and whaling past. Finish your visit by sampling the fresh local seafood, renowned for having some of the best fish and chips in the country, or by taking a relaxing wander through the tranquil Lavendyl Lavender Farm.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY - Zipline & Native Forest Tour with EcoZip Kaikoura

Enjoy a scenic journey to Kaikōura's beachfront airfield, followed by a 4WD adventure crossing the braided Kahutara River to Rakanui Station. Take in panoramic views of rolling farmland, lush valleys, and snowcapped mountains before embarking on an exhilarating 5-zipline course, including twin lines for side-by-side rides. Learn fascinating local history from expert guides and enjoy a walk through native forest, with a chance to plant a tree during winter as part of Eco Zip's conservation program. An unforgettable eco-adventure awaits! It is important you read and understand the risks associated with this activity before travel. For more information, please see here

Your accommodation: The White Morph, Kaikōura

Set on the Esplanade in Kaikōura, The White Morph enjoys commanding views of the ocean and mountains. Just a 10-minute walk into town, The White Morph has been beautifully placed so that you can take in the spectacular scenery of Kaikoura while enjoying the variety of attractions on offer.



Day 4



Explore Kaikōura

Start your day by experiencing the famous wildlife, either on a boat trip to see the majestic Giant Sperm Whales, which are resident year-round, or viewing them from above on an unforgettable heli flight. For a more active approach, consider a guided sea kayak tour to paddle alongside the New Zealand fur seals, or swim beside the playful Dusky Dolphins. Take a gentle stroll along the Kaikōura Peninsula Walkway to observe the seal colonies on the rocks, or perhaps join a hands-on cooking class to learn about local foraging and cuisine. No visit is complete without indulging in the town's namesake delicacy, fresh crayfish, available at one of the famous roadside stands or local eateries.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY - Whales by Air and Dolphins by Sea with Wings over Whales Kaikoura

See the incredible marine ecosystem of Kaikōura from every angle with this exhilarating combo! Begin with a majestic 30-minute whale watching flight with Wings Over Whales for the ultimate bird's-eye view of the giant Sperm Whales. Then, take to the sea on a 3.5-hour boat tour with Dolphin Encounter to get up close with playful pods of Dusky Dolphins. For the ultimate thrill-seeker, this package includes the option to upgrade to an unforgettable dolphin swim. An essential Kaikōura experience showcasing the giants of the deep and the acrobats of the ocean!

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY - Guided Seal Kayaking Half Day Experience with Kaikoura Kayaks

Experience the excitement of watching Fur Seals ducking, weaving and diving around your kayak. Paddle gently along with them as they swim around the Kaikoura Peninsula hunting for their favourite feed of Octopus. Keep your distance while dinner is devoured in front of you, then duck for cover as hundreds of Pelagic (ocean-going) birds swoop in to clean up the left-overs. Continue your journey around the reefs of Kaikoura to search for other marine mammals such as Dusky Dolphins and Blue Penguins. Suitable for all abilities. It is important you read and understand the risks associated with this activity. For more information please click [here](#)

Your accommodation: The White Morph, Kaikōura

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Day 5



Kaikoura to Picton

Today follow the coast to Picton, located at the top of the South Island. As you leave Kaikoura you'll take in the spectacular shoreline and keep a lookout for native wildlife as you go. Stop to view adult fur seals at Ohau Point, and take a short stroll along the oceanside walkway. Continuing on, you'll have the ocean on one side and the Kaikoura ranges on the other before traversing the dry hills of Marlborough, New Zealand's largest wine-producing region. Visit one of the vineyards surrounding Blenheim for a wine tasting or a gourmet lunch before beginning the final leg of your journey to Picton.

Return your rental car

Return your rental vehicle to your designated depot before your next adventure.

Cougar Line Shared Transfer - Picton to Marlborough Sounds

Board your Cougar Line scheduled water taxi to head into the Marlborough Sounds. Stopping at a number of drop off points, this is a great way to see the beautiful sounds with a knowledgeable captain who is always happy to give any information or commentary en-route.

Your accommodation: Punga Cove Resort, Marlborough Sounds

Set amongst stunning scenery in the magnificent waterways of New Zealand's Marlborough Sounds, Punga Cove Resort is the perfect retreat for people wanting to relax in style. The restaurant offers breathtaking views of the entire Endeavour Inlet.



Day 6



Punga Cove to Furneaux Lodge Day Walk on the Queen Charlotte Track

Experience a stunning section of the Queen Charlotte Track with this scenic day trip. Walk or bike from beautiful Punga Cove around the coastline of Endeavour Inlet to historic Furneaux Lodge. This section of the track is famous for its easy, relatively flat terrain, spectacular coastal views, and lush native bush. Finish your rewarding walk with a well-deserved refreshment or lunch at Furneaux Lodge before catching a relaxing water taxi back to Punga Cove.

Distance: 12km, 3.5 to 4 hours on foot

Cougar Line Shared Transfer - Furneaux Lodge to Punga Cove

Connect between two of the Queen Charlotte Sound's most famous lodges with a swift and scenic water taxi transfer! Perfect for Queen Charlotte Track adventurers, this short hop across the beautiful Endeavour Inlet links Furneaux Lodge and Punga Cove, allowing you to quickly reach your next destination or complete your day's walk. Enjoy stunning views without the long walk or the hassle of transporting your luggage. A beautiful link on the world-renowned Queen Charlotte Track.

Your accommodation: Punga Cove Resort, Marlborough Sounds

Set amongst stunning scenery in the magnificent waterways of New Zealand's Marlborough Sounds, Punga Cove Resort is the perfect retreat for people wanting to relax in style. The restaurant offers breathtaking views of the entire Endeavour Inlet.



Day 7



Cougar Line Shared Transfer - Marlborough Sounds to Picton

Return to Picton by Cougar Line scheduled water taxi today via the beautiful Marlborough Sounds. Stop at a number of pick up/drop off points en route.

Interislander Ferry Picton to Wellington

The 92 km journey between Picton and Wellington takes around 3 hours and has been described as 'one of the most beautiful ferry rides in the world'. Around one hour of the cruise takes you through the Marlborough Sounds. This region of bush covered mountains, small islands, crystal clear waters and secluded bays offer remarkable photographic opportunities.

From the Cook Strait, spectacular views of the Kaikoura Ranges on the South Island can be enjoyed and often dolphins and sea birds are seen. After crossing the strait you approach Wellington Harbour and pass many interesting points such as Pencarrow Head on top of which is New Zealand's oldest lighthouse (1859). Red Rocks is home to a seal colony and Oterangi Bay is the site which recorded the country's highest ever wind speed of 268 kph (167 mph).

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY - Premium Lounge with Interislander

Escape to Interislander's Premium Lounge for sensational views, child-free serenity, and locally sourced food and drink. Interislander's Premium Lounge has enhanced its offering to bring you an elevated travel experience across Cook Strait. Enjoy delicious food and drink, attentive service, and prime positions for appreciating the spectacular views. Whether you're looking to relax or chat with your travel companions, the Premium Lounge provides the ideal space. With varied seating options, you can choose a cozy spot to watch the stunning scenery and taste a selection of seasonal snacks included in your ticket.

Arrival in Wellington

Welcome to Wellington! Your premium rental car is ready for collection, & see here for the full range of rental cars available. Your self-drive adventure begins immediately as you exit the terminal.

Collect Rental Car

This tour's from price includes an intermediate-sized vehicle, setting you up for comfortable travels. Yet, we understand every adventure is unique! Feel free to select the perfect wheels from our incredible collection of rental cars, spanning from economy hatchbacks to premium SUVs.

Wellington to Paraparaumu

Leaving Wellington you'll travel along the Kapiti Coast. The coastal seaside towns of Paekakariki and Plimmerton are worth a short detour before arriving into the seaside town of Paraparaumu.

Your accommodation: Aston Road Villa Bed and Breakfast

Aston Road Villa offers a contemporary and spacious two bedroom guest wing. The Villa can be used for a relaxing weekend, or as a base for exploring the Kapiti coast. Aston Road Villa offers you a "home away from home" experience.



Day 8



The Kapiti Coast

Just a short drive north of Wellington, the Kapiti Coast offers a refreshing escape with its long, sandy beaches, stunning views, and laid-back coastal towns. This stretch of coastline is defined by its star attraction: the majestic Kāpiti Island. Kāpiti Island is one of New Zealand's most important and accessible nature reserves. A protected sanctuary for rare and endangered native birds, the island is a genuine ecological treasure. A guided tour is a truly special experience, where you can walk through pristine native forest and get up close with species like the cheeky kākā, the curious weka, and if you're lucky, even the rare takahe. Back on the mainland, a string of charming towns offers a slice of authentic Kiwi life. Paekākāriki, at the southern end, is known for its artsy, bohemian vibe, while Paraparaumu serves as the main hub and the departure point for Kāpiti Island tours. Further north, Ōtaki is rich in Māori culture and history. All along the coast, you'll find boutique shops, vibrant cafés, and beautiful beaches perfect for a walk, a swim, or simply watching the sunset over the Tasman Sea.

Ultimate Overnight Tour with Kapiti Island Nature Tours

Seeing Kiwi in their natural habitat is an experience not to be missed. Kapiti Island is home to over 1,200 Little Spotted Kiwi, making it the most prolific population to be found, and one of the best opportunities to see them in the wild. Spend the night and enjoy famous hospitality and delicious meals, surrounded by stunning native bush and some of our rarest and beautiful native birds. This is an overnight experience with an all-inclusive package on the island. &

Your accommodation: Self-contained Cabin - Kapiti Island Ultimate Overnight Tour

The Lodge on Kapiti Island is more than an overnight stay – it can be a life-changing experience. Your stay is one of the most unique alternatives to Wellington hotels you could possibly find. A comfortable, relaxing, nature-inspired experience.



Day 9



Paraparaumu to Wellington

Continue south along Kapiti Coast. The coastal seaside towns of Paekakariki and Plimmerton are also worth a short detour before arriving into the capital city of Wellington. Wellington City is New Zealand's capital. It sits on a wonderful deep natural harbour and is surrounded by bush clad hills. The city centre itself is quite compact (only around 1 square kilometre) and so exploring on foot is relatively easy. From your city centre accommodation you can easily stroll the cafes and restaurants around Courtenay Place or visit New Zealand's national museum, Te Papa, which is also close by.

Explore Wellington

Wellington, known in Māori as Te Upoko o te Ika a Maui ("The Head of the Fish of Maui") or Te Whanganui a Tara ("The Great Harbour of Tara"), is New Zealand's vibrant capital. Often called a "mini-Melbourne," this cosmopolitan city blends art, culture, food, and fashion with quirky laneway bars, hip eateries, and underground art shows. Stroll the waterfront to Te Papa, New Zealand's national museum, or ride the historic cable car from Lambton Quay for stunning city views. Explore Cuba Street's unique boutiques and visit the iconic "Beehive" at Parliament. Fans of The Lord of the Rings can tour Weta Workshop, the Oscar-winning design studio behind Middle-earth. Just an hour away, Martinborough offers a culinary escape with top-notch food and wine. Nature lovers can't miss Zealandia, the world's first fully fenced eco-sanctuary. End your day sampling Wellington's renowned dining scene—search 'Metro Eats' for the city's best spots.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY - Entry to Te Papa The Museum of New Zealand

Te Papa Tongarewa, meaning "Container of Treasures," is New Zealand's national museum, located on Wellington's stunning waterfront. Renowned for its bold and innovative approach, Te Papa seamlessly blends science, art, history, and Māori culture into interactive and thought-provoking exhibitions. Visitors can explore everything from colossal squid and geological wonders to contemporary art and powerful stories of Aotearoa's people. A visit to Te Papa is more than a museum experience, it's an inspiring journey through the heart of New Zealand's identity.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY - Zealandia Twilight Wildlife Sanctuary Tour

Welcome to the world's first fully-fenced urban ecosanctuary - a conservation success and safe haven for some of New Zealand's rarest native animals. Remarkable species of birds, reptiles, insects and more are living wild within a beautiful 225ha (one square mile) valley - just 10 minutes from central Wellington. Around 40 native and endemic species of birds can be found at Zealandia. Kākā - the playful forest parrots - have made an impressive comeback to the area and are lots of fun to watch at their feeder stations. Endangered hihi (stitchbird), tīeke (saddleback), kākārīki and kiwi are flourishing here and the pair of critically threatened takahē are often seen at the wetlands. Experience Zealandia as it transforms from daylight to twilight during this special guided experience. See birds returning to the sanctuary to settle into their nests, the sight of the evening sky, and hear the changing sounds of birds from day to night. Encounter unique species such as wētā, takahē, tuatara and more. You may even be lucky enough to experience the first sounds of the nocturnal birds as they wake.

Your accommodation: Adina CityLife Wellington

Adina CityLife Wellington is a suite style hotel with every amenity required for a comfortable stay, as well as being in a superb location to explore the compact city centre. Situated on Lambton Quay, you'll find the best shopping, tourist attractions and cultural landmarks all within easy walking distance.



Day 10



Depart Wellington today

Choose to explore more of Wellington's sights before dropping your rental car at the airport depot and continuing your onward journey.

Farewell from Aotearoa / New Zealand

Bid farewell to Aotearoa / New Zealand, taking with you unforgettable memories of its breathtaking landscapes and incredible adventures. In Māori, it is said mā te wā, which is not goodbye, it is see you soon!

Tour details

Departures:	Daily
Tour type:	Nationwide Self Drive
Starts:	Christchurch
Finishes:	Wellington
Tour length:	10
Accommodation:	Apartments
Car/transport type:	

Accommodation summary

Day 1	Quest on Cambridge
Day 2	Quest on Cambridge
Day 3	The White Morph, Kaikōura
Day 4	The White Morph, Kaikōura
Day 5	Punga Cove Resort, Marlborough Sounds
Day 6	Punga Cove Resort, Marlborough Sounds
Day 7	Aston Road Villa Bed and Breakfast
Day 8	Self-contained Cabin - Kapiti Island Ultimate Overnight Tour
Day 9	Adina CityLife Wellington