Auckland to Queenstown: New Zealand in a Nutshell

Overview

A flight from Auckland to Queenstown will take just under two hours. Driving from the City of Sails to New Zealand’s adventure capital, however, may take as long as a month - but only one of these options will serve up New Zealand in a nutshell. With a trusty motorhome to carry you the whole way, this Auckland to Queenstown campervan itinerary will tick off the majority of New Zealand’s biggest attractions, from its three main cities and many of its tiniest towns, right through to Hobbiton, whale watching, hot springs and so much more. You can take this tour at any time of year, but note that some attractions will be more suited to different seasons - such as the ski fields in winter and the outdoor hiking adventures through summer. This trip encompasses everything there is to Aotearoa, so whatever you do, book in plenty of time with that motorhome so you don’t have to rush through a single moment of it.
By the time you get to the end of Leg One of your New Zealand motorhome tour, you’ll be left wondering what could possibly come close to meeting the bar it set - and wondering if there’s anything else left to see in the country. You’ll spend time exploring New Zealand’s biggest city before heading off to see the country’s most famous movie set, as well as thousands of sparkly little glowworms that will leave you with a sore neck from staring upwards and a sense of awe from watching them shine. The rest of the leg is as much about relaxation as it is about adrenaline, with an even mix of the two throughout the country’s geothermal capital in Rotorua and New Zealand’s largest lake at Taupo. Prepare for a wild and wonderful ride - and don’t forget, this is only the first leg!

There are a roughly 1.4 million people living in Auckland, but every year, roughly double that number pay a visit to see this thriving, enchanting city. Sprawling across the sail-dotted harbour, Auckland city is an Aladdin’s Cave for travellers - you’ve got sights, attractions, history, nature, wildlife, food and drink, adrenalin adventures and relaxing experiences all at your fingertips. So where do you start? If you’re looking to tick off the major tourist attractions, the first place to go is the Sky Tower. This iconic structure is the tallest in the country, and can be seen from just about anywhere in the city. Take the elevator to the top, wander around the 360-degree viewing area, dine in the rotating restaurant, or even pump up the adrenaline and jump off the edge in a controlled fall back to the ground. Another of the must-dos in this city is the Kelly Tarlton’s Sea Life Aquarium. It’s just a short bus ride from the CBD or a quick drive, and this underground aquarium is full of incredible creatures such as penguins, sharks, turtles and all kinds of fish - you can even opt for a shark dive for an unforgettable experience. The other major structure in the city is the Auckland Harbour Bridge, and it’s important to note that there is no access for pedestrians, so you can either drive across for great views of the city and harbour, or take a tour with Auckland Harbour Bridge Climb to get up in the bridge itself. Those with kids (or just a love of adrenaline) should head to the Rainbow’s End fun park, and check out the Auckland Zoo, where you can even
see a rare New Zealand kiwi bird. And before you leave the city, take a ferry ride out to Waiheke Island, which is also known as the country’s ‘Island of Wine’ for its array of world-class wineries. Obviously, there’s rather a lot to do in Auckland, so allow a few days at minimum to visit its best attractions!

When you leave Auckland, head south on State Highway 1 (make a stop in Pokeno for some of the best ice cream on the planet), then turn off shortly before Hamilton to SH39.

The Waitomo Glowworm Caves are one of New Zealand’s most awe-inspiring experiences - and that’s truly saying something. The Arachnocampa luminosa (glow worm) only exists in New Zealand, and when you visit these caves you’ll see thousands of them lighting up the ceiling like stars on a particularly clear night, only they’re just metres away from you as you drift below on a gentle boat ride. This is truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience and the range of tour options will give you plenty of choice when checking out these exquisite little creatures.

Your next destination is one that you’ll have likely already seen more than once on film - the endlessly charming Hobbiton. You’ll have to backtrack north on SH3 to get there, but the slight detour is well worth the drive (plus, it adds another stretch of awesome New Zealand scenery to your trip, too). Back in the late 1990s, film director Peter Jackson flew over a piece of land in Matamata and decided it was perfect as a setting for hobbit holes in his upcoming film series, The Lord of the Rings. It would then take three years to build an access road, create no fewer than 37 hobbit homes, grow gardens and trees, and generally create this little village. Today, you can tour this township to see this beautiful collection of hobbit holes, as well as the Green Dragon Inn and Mill. Of course, part of the tour is a complimentary drink from the Southfarthing range in the inn, and you can also enjoy a themed meal at this restaurant.

Shortly after Hobbiton, direct your wheels to the Kaimai-Mamaku Forest Park. This outdoor space is more than 70 kilometres long and is the perfect place to park up for a while and get out to explore on your own two feet, as it’s something of a hiker’s paradise. With more than 300 kilometres of walking tracks and endless forests of native trees, you could spend days exploring the area. For two of the best hikes, walk from the Te Aroha Domain up to the summit of Mount Te Aroha (less than a kilometre), or try the Waitawheta Track (7.5 kilometres), which will take you through kauri country and up to an old sawmill with a crossing over a huge suspension bridge. For more walking track information, pick up a brochure from one of the many huts throughout the park.

Head back to the road, following SH28 before turning onto SH5 towards Rotorua.

Even for New Zealand, Rotorua is something of a special place. This whole town is situated on a geothermal area, which is the basis for many of its best attractions. The Polynesian Spa is where you will go to make the most of the hot spring action in Rotorua, as it offers everything from relaxing hot pool access, to spa therapies such as massages, facials and mud baths. The Tamaki
Maori Experience is another fantastic attraction, as this is where you can experience Maori culture with a look around a traditional Maori village, a performance and a hangi (feast). You can even stay overnight in the Marae to get the full experience of New Zealand’s native peoples. As a city on a lake, there are plenty of watersport activities to indulge in, and you can easily spend an afternoon simply wandering around the bubbling, steaming Wai-O-Tapu Geothermal Reserve Park, and watching the incredible geysers shoot off jets of steam. Take the Skyline gondola to the top of Mt. Ngongotaha, then zoom down the hill again on the luge track. The Rotorua Museum offers a relaxing explanation of the areas explosive history, while the Agroadventures Adventure Park will have your heart racing with a bungy, a jetboat, a swoop swing and more. There really is no shortage of things to do in Rotorua, so take your time and mix up the experiences with serene attractions such as the spas and museums, as well as the adrenalin-pumping experiences such as the luge and adventure park!

Before you arrive in Taupo, make a stop at the Huka Falls. They are the most-visited natural attraction in the country and you’ll understand why as soon as you arrive - more than 220,000 litres of water rip across the falls every second (which is enough to fill two Olympic-sized swimming pools). You can take an hour-long walk to get to the falls or park close and take a look. If you’re keen to get even closer, jet boat tours are available to bring you as close to the falls as is safe!

Lake Taupo is the largest lake in New Zealand, with a perimeter of roughly 193 kilometres, and a deepest point at around 186 metres. It’s the result of a massive volcanic eruption that shook the skies roughly 26,500 years ago - and is still the largest eruption on the planet from the last 70,000 years. Fortunately, the volcanic activity has died down to almost nothingness, and is now considered dormant. In its place now lies a town abundant with exciting adventure opportunities. Naturally, the lake itself is a major attraction, as you can swim, fish, kayak, and boat on the lake, and there are many options for guided tours to teach your more about the area and show you the hidden gems of this massive water feature. For example, you can only access the Maori rock carvings at Mine Bay by water, and there are a number of coves and bays to check out on tours. The perimeter of Lake Taupo offers a fantastic walking track, but you could instead opt to drive around for marvellous views and scenery. Similarly, the rest of Taupo and the surrounding area is essentially one big outdoor playground - there are more hikes than you can shake a walking stick at, it’s a mountain biker’s capital, and the gardens such as those at Taupo Museum are simply gorgeous.

When you tear yourselves away from Taupo, head south to the Tongariro National Park.
Leg 1 Highlights

Waitomo Glowworm Caves  Hobbiton  Rotorua

Leg 2  Tongariro National Park to Wellington

391 km  05:30:00
Total Distance  Est Driving Time

It doesn’t get much more Kiwi than this - Leg Two is a mixture of all things that make this country so fantastic, from epic scenic hikes, to sheep, beers, rugby, wine, and even a random giant carrot. Your route is not the straightest or fastest, but it does add both meaning to ‘taking the long way round’, and fantastic extra activities and experiences along the way. The time of year you visit will make a difference to your adventures on leg two, as the seasons can either offer hot summer days with plenty of time spent outdoors hiking and drinking vino, or snow-filled adventures and time spent indoors checking out museums and drinking vino. Once again, despite the short distance you cover on the map, plan multiple days to slowly work your way through this fantastic part of the trip.

The Tongariro National Park isn’t just your ordinary national park - there’s as much to do here as there is in 10 normal national parks. It’s a World Heritage Area and the country’s oldest national park as well. Firstly, this is the site of one of New Zealand’s nine ‘Great Walks’. Known as the Tongariro Crossing, this is one hike that you can’t simply decide to do without a bit of training or prior fitness. It’s 19.4 kilometres one way, so will take roughly 7.5 hours to complete in full. You’ll hike past hot springs, steaming vents, lakes, and craters, and when the weather is clear, you can see as far as Lake Taupo, Mount Ngauruhoe, and the Kaimanawa Ranges. Should you find yourself in the park in winter, take a day to check out one of the ski fields on Mt Ruapehu. For keen skiers
and snowboarders, this active volcano offers some of the best snow conditions in New Zealand, and with both Turoa and Whakapapa (which is the largest field in the country) to choose from, you’ll be spoilt for choice. For everyone else, you can at least say you’ve skied/ridden on an active volcano! Come summer, the very same mountain turns into a mecca for hikers and scenery chasers, as you can still take the lifts up the mountain for the incredible views, and even enjoy a snack and a coffee in the country’s highest cafe! And if you loved Hobbiton, take the time to visit Mt Ngauruhoe. This scenic spot is known by another ominous name - Mt Doom - as it featured heavily in the Lord of the Rings series. You could easily spend a few days in this park, so give yourselves plenty of time to see it all.

Ohakune is a fairly small place, and is largely used as a base for those looking to adventure throughout the Tongariro National Park throughout summer and winter. The one thing you have to do before leaving this tiny town, however, is visit the giant carrot. Created in 1984, this massive 4-metre-high vegetable has become something of an icon in New Zealand, and is a must for that holiday photo album.

Continue following SH1 south and turn off onto SH54 before you reach Hunterville. This will take you to the main township in this region - Palmerston North (known lovingly as Palmy to the locals). It may come as absolutely zero surprise to know that New Zealand is rugby mad. It’s a rare thing to find a Kiwi who doesn’t much care for the sport, so a visit to the New Zealand Rugby Museum in Palmerston North is a must for anyone keen to learn more about the sport - or simply why the locals are so fired up about it. It’s home to a full collection of memorabilia (including more than 500 jerseys), a fascinating history of the sport, as well as a ‘have a go’ area where you can test your own skills in kicking, passing, and tackling. Another favourite spot in Palmy is the Victoria Esplanade Gardens, which covers 26 hectares and is known for its scenic railway and lush rose gardens. This is also an opportunity to see more of the country’s best views on foot, by walking the Manawatu Gorge Track just 12 kilometres out of Palmerston North. This hike will take 1.5-2 hours, or 3-4 if you do the whole thing then turn around and come back (it is not a loop walk), and offers some gorgeous native scenery and views of the powerful river along the way.

After Palmerston, you’re going to take a quick detour to one of New Zealand’s smallest towns - Mangatainoka. Why? Because it’s the site is where one of the country’s most iconic beers has been brewed on the banks of the Mangatainoka River since 1889 (the same year the Eiffel Tower was built). Tui beer is a popular drink in pubs around New Zealand, and on your Auckland to Queenstown motorhome trip, you may even spot a couple of their famous ‘Yeah Right’ ads. Take a tour of this famous site and try a few of the beers, go home with a Tui glass, check out the museum and enjoy a bite to eat at the Kiwiana Cafe. Be sure to book in advance and designate a sober driver after this visit!

Further along SH2 you’ll come across Masterton. If you happen to be in town in March, you may have the chance to see what is likely one of the most quintessentially Kiwi events in the country - the Golden Shears sheep shearing competition. Naturally, this event is the world’s premier
shearing and wool-handling competition, and it sees shearers from all over New Zealand and the world descend upon Masterton to show off their skills. Even if you’re not around in March, you can visit **The Wool Shed**, which is the country’s national museum to sheep and shearing. You can learn more about the wool from around the country, and pick up a fluffy and soft souvenir from the gift store on your way out. And before you move on from this woollen theme, pay a visit to **The Alpaca Place**, where you can take an interactive farm tour to meet these cute animals, and check out the on-site store.

By the time you reach **Martinborough**, you’ll have noticed the scenery starting to change as you head towards the middle of Middle Earth, and with it, you’ll see plenty more of the country’s finest produce - wine. Martinborough is an integral part of the Classic New Zealand Wine Trail, and makes for a particularly enjoyable stop right at the end of this adventure- and activity-filled leg of the itinerary. The vino du jour here is Pinot Noir, but the cool climate and rich soils make this area a world-class wine maker’s paradise for a number of other varietals including Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Syrah. There are 24 wineries in total, and you may be best seeing them on a guided tour (so no one has to sober drive), or hiring a bike during warmer weather to potter along to a few of them in a day. Of course, there’s more to Martinborough than just wine, as it also has events such as the **Martinborough Fair** for crafts held twice per year in February and March, and **Brackenridge Day Spa** for a luxurious total body relaxation experience.

From there, it’s just a 1.5-hour drive on to Wellington, New Zealand’s capital and your final stop on Leg Two.

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**Leg 2 Highlights**

- **Tongariro National Park**
- **Whakapapa Ski Field**
- **Martinborough**

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**Leg 3 Wellington to Kaikoura**

Just when you thought this motorhome tour of New Zealand couldn’t get any better, you go and start Leg Three. You’ll start out in the coolest little capital in the world (where you could easily pass a week just ticking off the main attractions), before taking a brief cruise across Cook Strait to make the jump from the North Island to the South. Once there, you’ll immerse yourself in the relaxed,
beachy vibes of the upper South Island, with an abundance of the world’s best beaches, hiking trails and wineries at your fingertips. The remainder of the leg from here is largely focused on stunning coastal views, with a quick but unforgettable stop at one of New Zealand’s very best hidden gems.

**Wellington** is New Zealand’s capital - and is making a name for itself as ‘The Coolest Little Capital in the World’. It’s known for its abundance of cafes that set the bar internationally for an excellent coffee, and is so packed with activities that you’ll never want to leave. You could argue that **Te Papa** - the country’s national museum and art gallery - is the biggest attraction. It hosts a huge number of exhibitions, including a national art collection, a display of Gallipoli history and artifacts, and even a colossal squid. You could equally argue that the **Wellington Cable Car** is the city’s number one attraction. The country’s only running funicular railway, this historic transportation option runs between Kelburn and Lambton Quay in the centre of town daily, offering first-rate views of the city as well as access to the cable car museum, the **Wellington Botanic Garden**, and **Zealandia**. The gardens cover 25 hectares with native forests, bright exotic flowers, and specialised plant collections, while Zealandia is popular nature reserve that lets you see some of the country’s rarest birds and species (including the little spotted kiwi!). As the country’s political hub, you can also check out **The Beehive** - an iconic building that’s part of the parliamentary complex, and take a tour inside to learn more about New Zealand’s politics and processes. Animal lovers should jump at the chance to visit **Wellington Zoo**, which is the country’s oldest and is completely dedicated to flora and fauna as a not-for-profit charitable trust. And before you leave this wonderful city, take a hike up to the top of **Mt Victoria** in the CBD and stroll through the arty, vibrant streets in the centre.

From Wellington, instead of driving out on a road, you’ll drive straight onto the **Interislander Ferry**. Once you leave your campervan in the decks below, wander up to the decks above for one of the most beautiful ferry rides in the world. In fact, it’s more like a short snippet of a cruise than a ferry ride, as this three-hour, 92-kilometre voyage sails from Wellington harbour into the seaside town of Picton. As you cross the Cook Strait between the North and South Islands of New Zealand, you’ll enjoy spectacular views of the ocean and islands along the way. There are plenty of spaces outside and inside for a comfortable trip, and food and beverages available onboard. Plus, there are 11 sailings every day, so you should be able to easily work it in with your travel plans from Wellington.

Once you disembark with your motorhome, you’ll have the opportunity to take a look around
Picton. It’s a small town, but a very pretty one, with an array of cafes, bars and restaurants, as well as an aquarium and floating maritime museum. Plus, being located right on the water, Picton is a great spot for everything from boating and fishing to kayaking and dolphin watching.

From here, take another detour on your road trip to make your way to Nelson. The drive itself is something of a marvel, and this small New Zealand town is full of surprises. Firstly, Nelson will blow you away with its beauty. It’s one of the sunniest locations in the country and that just serves to literally highlight how gorgeous it is. The town is the jumping off point for the Abel Tasman Coast Track, another of New Zealand’s Great Walks, which is one of the most downright jaw-dropping hikes in the world. Even if you only do a few hours or a day in this area, you’ll see the breath-taking beauty of pure golden beaches, deep green trees and turquoise waters bay after bay after bay. The full walk takes anywhere from three to five days, and you’ll typically take a boat back to the starting point when you’re done. Back in Nelson (and the real world), you can explore the World of Wearable Art Museum right in town. Even though this international design competition is now held in Wellington, it all started in artsy, crafty Nelson back in 1987, which is why you can view many of its incredible outfits and mementos of history in the CBD. Another part of Nelson’s arts identity is Hoglund Art Glass, where you can watch skilled glassblowers work their magic and browse the beautiful items on offer in the shop. Finally, don’t skip the chance to try sea kayaking in and around Nelson - those beautiful beaches and shores are just as pretty from a whole new angle.

If the wineries of Martinborough were to your taste, be sure to check out some of those in the Marlborough wine region adjacent to Nelson, too. This is arguably New Zealand’s most famous wine region, and as much as 85 per cent of the country’s vino is created here. Known for its Sauvignon Blanc (roughly three-quarters of Marlborough’s wine is this tasty white drop), the region creates unique wines that are fruity, aromatic, and extraordinarily pure. The coastal location, mountainous terrain and rich soil help create these decadent wines, and you can visit any number of the dozens of wineries that pepper the region around Nelson and Blenheim. Just some of the top wineries in the region include the Saint Clair Family Estate, Villa Maria Winery, Giesen Wines, Cloudy Bay and Fromm Winery to name a few.

After Nelson, make your way back towards the east on the same road you came through (SH6), keeping your eye out for more wineries along the way. Blenheim is quite similar to Nelson with its laid-back vibe, artistic culture and sunny disposition throughout the year. There are roughly 20 wineries within close range of Blenheim, so you can continue enjoying those fine vinos around this town, too. As well as that, the Omaka Aviation Heritage Centre is worth a visit for its awesome Knights of the Sky exhibition. Peter Jackson (the director of the Lord of the Rings series) offers his personal collection of WW1 artifacts and aircrafts for viewing at this centre, complete with detailed depictions of war scenes. Be sure to check out the beautiful (and somewhat hidden) Upton Oaks Garden, which features a 17th-century style Knot garden. And if you happen to be in town on a Sunday between 9am and noon, head to the Marlborough Farmers’ Markets for a fantastic array of locally made crafts and produce.
After Blenheim, you’ll spend a good few hours driving down the east coast of the South Island, which offers endless ocean views along the way. While you can stop just about anywhere for photo opportunities (there are many), one place not to miss is Ohau Point. This stop looks much like any other - there are often New Zealand fur seals relaxing on the rocks opposite the small car park, and they make for a great photo. However, do not get back in that motorhome without taking the short 10-15 minute walk inland. The track is fairly new and a little rugged in spots, but once you arrive at the waterfall at the end, you’ll understand why this hidden gem will probably be one of the country’s best attractions before long. Here, young fur seal pups are left to play in the waterfall and pool by themselves as their mothers hunt out at sea. Depending on the time of year (they’re most active from May to October), this pool can be positively swarming with these gorgeous sea babies, and they’re completely not shy around humans at all. That said, be sure to avoid actually touching or feeding the seals!

Leg 3 Highlights

Wellington  
Cook Strait  
Nelson

Leg 4  Kaikoura to Christchurch

If you were to drive from Kaikoura to Christchurch in a straight line, you’d get there in roughly 2.5 hours. This leg is not a straight line however, and it could easily take you days. That’s all because it includes even more of the country’s best kept secrets and top tourist attractions. Get ready to soak in hot springs and cool off as you wander through a natural cave, get your adrenalin
racing in the great outdoors and meet one of New Zealand’s cheekiest birds, then stock up on delicious treats before arriving in the Garden City.

The name Kaikoura literally translates from Maori as ‘meal of crayfish’ - which gives you a big clue about why this town is a must-see stopping point on the drive from Auckland to Queenstown! Almost everything here is focused on the ocean, and it’s easily the number one spot in the country to go whale watching. There are several ways you can see the sperm whales off the coast, and only one of them is by boat - you can also take a ride in a helicopter or small plane to check out these gentle giants. As well as whales, you might see dusky dolphins, fur seals, albatross, pilot whales, blue whales, humpback whales, and southern right whales during a tour. Diving and kayaking around Kaikoura are also great ways to get out and see the wildlife, and when you’re ready to head back to dry land, take the 3-4 hour hike on the Kaikoura Peninsula Walkway along the shoreline for coastal views and the chance to enjoy the salty sea air. And before you go, refuel at one of the local fish’n’chip shops in town. This New Zealand delicacy doesn’t get much better than in a seaside town such as Kaikoura.

To get to Hanmer Springs, you’ll need to steer away from the coastal road and head inland towards the southwest.

At first, Hanmer Springs started drawing in the crowds thanks to its natural hot springs but it soon became a veritable playground for all ages. Even if for nothing else, the thermal pools are worth the visit any time of year. There are hot pools, cool pools, family areas, aqua therapy pools, private saunas and steam rooms, waterslides, a lazy river, and more. The whole experience is as fun as it is relaxing, and the entire setting is found amidst the natural beauty of New Zealand’s backyard. That said, you might wish to save a day at the pools until last, as everything else in Hanmer is all about the adventure. Hanmer Forest Park, for example, is a 130-square-kilometre nature area packed with all lengths of hikes and mountain bike tracks. Or you can bungy jump 35 metres into air over the Waiau River, go white-water rafting or jetboating in the gorge, or take quad bikes for a spin around this stunning and rugged landscape. And should you arrive during winter or early spring, you may be able to fit in a snow day or two at the Hanmer Springs Ski Area on Mt St Patrick. Finish off your visit with a stop at Marble Point Winery for incredible food and wine that will fill you up and prepare you for the next part of the itinerary.

When you leave Hanmer, you’ll head back towards the coast, through a handful of New Zealand’s ‘blink and you miss it’ towns, then back inland to Arthur’s Pass. This stop is all about giving you a sense of the country’s wild south, where weather can turn in a heartbeat and the scenery is a world all of its own. The tiny township sits next to the Arthur’s Pass National Park, and the whole area is made for exploring. Take a one-hour return walk to the Devil’s Punchbowl, which is arguably the most famous short walk in the region thanks to its awesome 131-metre waterfall. Or, spend roughly 1.5 hours strolling the Village Historic and Interpretive Walk, which gives you a tour of the village and introduces you to the historic sites. Simply pop in to the visitor’s centre to pick up brochures for these walks. While you’re there, you may even spot the elusive Kea, which is the only
alpine parrot in the world and is extremely intelligent - and cheeky. Keep an eye out for their olive-green wings, and don’t let them get too close to your motorhome, as they love to pick off bits and pieces!

On your way bay towards Christchurch, you’ll pass a tiny place called Cave Stream. Here, park in the car park, throw on your headlamp and clothes that you don’t mind getting wet, and follow the paths down to the cave. This cave is 362 metres long, and you can walk through it the entire way - you don’t even need to pay an entry fee or have a guide take you through. Adults will likely get wet up to their waists, and the cave is fine for kids from around the age of 10 with the help of an adult. It will take up to an hour to make it the whole way through, and note that it is rocky so you will need sneakers on your feet and plenty of common sense. Avoid walking through the cave after heavy rainfall (or simply in winter when the water is freezing), but definitely make the stop during summer for a cool and adventurous cave experience!

Only a little up the road is Castle Hill, which you will have noted on your way up to Arthur’s Pass. The Dalai Lama called this the ‘spiritual centre of the universe’ back in 2002, and once you start wandering amongst these giants limestone rocks scattered about a high country station, you’ll see - and feel - why. Take a picnic with you and sit atop a massive boulder, and watch as hikers tour the area around you, and keen adventurers set up mats to climb the boulders. It’s a truly spectacular place throughout summer, and all the more mysterious and wonderful in the rain.

You’ve got one quick stop left before you reach the Garden City of Christchurch, and that’s at the Cookie Time Factory in Templeton. This brand is a New Zealand icon, and when you stop at the factory shop, you can pick up snacks and treats for the rest of your trip for a bargain. Plus, check out the history of this much-loved brand, including its 12-year stint as the world record holder for the largest cookie on the planet (it was almost 25 metres in diameter!).

### Leg 4 Highlights

- Whale watching in Kaikoura
- Hanmer Springs
- Castle Hill

### Leg 5 Christchurch to Queenstown

- 623 km Total Distance
- 08:30:00 Est Driving Time
By the time you reach Leg Five, you may start to understand that at no point does New Zealand ever get dull, and at no point will you ever run out of things to do and see here. You’ll start out in Christchurch, which is rebuilding to become one of the most lively and exciting new cities on the planet, and before you begin your journey to the deep south, you’ll make a quick stop at a historic French village where swimming with the dolphins is just another everyday occurrence. You’ll discover the wild and spectacular views outside your windows at every turn and then still be blown away by the beauty of Tekapo, all before you reach the quaint village of Arrowtown and the adventure capital of Queenstown.

**Christchurch** is New Zealand’s Garden City, and is largely known these days as it’s in the rebuilding stages after a major earthquake over five years ago. Unfortunately, those events have put some travellers off from visiting, but what they don’t know is now is one of the best times ever to visit the city. Why? Because every effort has been made to rejuvenate and renew the town, and it’s quickly becoming more lively and exciting than ever before. In the central city stands the Re:Start Mall made up of brightly coloured shipping containers, where you can pick up souvenirs, stop for lunch, do a spot of shopping and enjoy the buskers. From here, you can take a walk around the rest of the CBD and see important sites such as the old cathedral, which used to be the icon of Christchurch but now lies half in ruins. Its replacement is the incredible ‘cardboard cathedral’, a beautiful structure that was built a couple of blocks away as a temporary cathedral - and while there are strengthened cardboard tubes in the ceiling, the whole thing won’t be falling down as soon as it rains! The **Christchurch Botanic Gardens** are also found right in town, and this gorgeous landscape is ideal for strolling and picnicking. The **Canterbury Museum** is right next door to these gardens, which is where you can learn about the region’s rich history, and while it’s still being rebuilt, the **Christchurch Arts Centre** is also found in this location, and there are plans to reopen parts of it over the coming years. As Christchurch is a major southern city where some flights and ships depart for Antarctica, this is also where you will find the **International Antarctic Centre**, where you can see for yourself what it would be like around the Southern Pole, meet penguins, and take a ride on the Hagglund rugged transport machine.

Before heading south towards Queenstown, take a one-hour drive over the Port Hills into Akaroa, the tiny French village at the edge of the peninsula. While you could easily pass a day here simply wandering along the main street and checking out the shops, don’t forget to book yourselves in for a dolphin watching tour - on some tours you can actually get out and swim with these marvellous
creatures! You can also swim and kayak in the bay, and try even more of New Zealand’s best fish’n’chips on the shore. Also, tucked away behind the main street is the Giant’s House of Akaroa. It’s something of a fairytale come to life, as this historic home has been lovingly and painstakingly decorated with sculptures, mosaics, artworks and gardens, and is one of the most famous gardens in the country.

Tekapo is one of those places that look like it was designed especially for postcards or Hollywood movies. The whole area is part of the UNESCO Dark Sky Reserve, which essentially means it’s one of the best places on the planet to watch the night sky. The Mt John Observatory is a great spot to do this, and it’s even worth a visit during the day for its stunning views and tasty cafe treats. Otherwise, book yourself in for a night-time tour there and watch as the stars open up before you. When you pass Lake Tekapo, there’s no excuse not to stop at the Church of the Good Shepherd, which is a tiny, but unbelievably charming church on the edge of the lake. Catch it on a clear day, and you’ll enjoy views of not just the church and sparkling blue lake, but also the tip of New Zealand’s tallest mountain - Mt Cook - in the background. And for a little adventure in your Tekapo visit, check out Tekapo Springs for its hot pools, outdoor skating rink and tube park through winter.

Shortly before Queenstown, you’ll pass through a small village called Arrowtown. Arrowtown is a quaint and charming village through which you can wander, shop and enjoy the trees on each side of the street. Arrowtown also has an important and rich history, as it was originally settled in 1862 during the Otago gold rush. Much of this history remains today, as you can tour the 60 or so structures such as shops, churches, hotels and cottages used by the original pioneers, as well as the Chinese settlement on the edge of the river. Take a tour or walk it yourself, and have a go at gold panning in the river to see if you can dredge up any leftover gold flakes!

Finally, the road will take you all the way to Queenstown, the adventure capital of New Zealand. If you’re sad about this incredible road trip coming to an end, remember that it’s not quite over yet - Queenstown still has its own treasures to discover. It will be hard to know where to start in Queenstown, but perhaps the best place is right in the heart of the city. Take a stroll along the shores of Lake Wakatipu and wander through the shops and eateries of the township (making a stop at Fergburger, New Zealand’s most famous burger joint, along the way). From there, shock your senses by jumping off a bridge with the very first bungy in the world - the Kawarau Bridge Bungy. Queenstown is also home to the Nevis Bungy, which is the highest in the country at 134 metres. There are plenty more adrenaline-filled adventures to choose from, from horse riding and jet boating to whitewater rafting and skiing or snowboarding through winter on one of several nearby mountains. Make sure you take the Skyline gondola up Bob’s Peak for the most incredible view of the city that you’ll get with your feet on the ground, then enjoy a meal or try the luge track at the top. The golfing here is also second-to-none, with several leading courses within minutes of the centre. And to relax at the end of it all? Treat yourselves to the Onsen Hot Pools, where you can soak and relax in front of the breath-taking views around Queenstown.
Once you’ve ticked off all the attractions in Queenstown that you want to do and see, you’re officially at the end of the road - or at least for this trip anyway. This New Zealand in a nutshell itinerary will have shown you many of the very best adventures, food and wines, historic attractions and spectacular views from all over the country, and by the end of it, it’s likely you’ll have seen more of this bucket-list location than many locals. And if you feel you simply haven’t seen enough of it, or aren’t quite ready to go home, pick up a few brochures as you return your motorhome rental and start planning your next epic New Zealand road trip.

Leg 5 Highlights

Akaroa
Lake Tekapo
Queenstown