Auckland to Christchurch: A Taste of Both Islands

Overview

With its stunning natural landscapes, charming small towns and friendly people, New Zealand has earned a reputation around the world as a wonderful place to visit. Soak up some of the best scenery this beautiful country has to offer by embarking on an Auckland to Christchurch road trip. Starting in the North Island and ending in the South, this popular New Zealand itinerary takes you from one gorgeous city to another, stopping at several quaint villages and breathtaking natural attractions along the way.

Without a doubt, the route between these two cities is a road best travelled in comfort with a NZ campervan hire - read on to discover exactly which famous New Zealand tourist attractions await you on your journey. To prepare you for this road trip, we have also included this handy guide to get your familiar with the road rules of New Zealand. Now you’re ready for anything -
From the beautiful beaches of Auckland to the lush green fields of Waikato, the first leg of your New Zealand tour is a pretty good representation of the country as a whole: there’s so much to see around every corner. New Zealand’s landscape is famously diverse, so be sure to keep your eyes open and your camera ready as you hit the open road.

Before you get too excited though, you’ll want to spend some time enjoying all that Auckland has to offer. Not only is this the best place to pick up your RV rental, it’s also home to some pretty amazing attractions. See below for some great ideas for things to do in Auckland.

*If you’re beginning your trip in Hamilton, find your nearest motorhome rental depot here.*

**Auckland**

Affectionately known as the City of Sails, Auckland is surrounded by water, making it popular with boat lovers, beachgoers and anyone else who craves to be near the sea. Located on a broad isthmus in the upper North Island, the CBD has a distinct coastal feel - and thanks to the city’s rolling hills, you’re often treated to a glimpse of the ocean. One of the best spots to see Auckland from above is the **Sky Tower**, the city’s most recognisable building which enjoys sweeping views of the Waitemata Harbour and the Hauraki Gulf. It’s particularly gorgeous around sunset on a clear day - there’s a revolving restaurant at the top, where you can treat yourself to a lovely dinner while getting to know the city from all angles.

There’s more to Auckland than its harbour, however. With a population of around 1.4 million people, Auckland is New Zealand’s largest city and has all you would expect from a metropolis of
great cafes, bars and restaurants, excellent shops and a thriving entertainment scene. There’s no shortage of great places to grab a bite to eat, especially in the **Britomart precinct**, a trendy collection of designer shops and chic restaurants near the city’s main train station. Another great spot is the **Viaduct Basin** where all eateries overlook a beautiful marina - the perfect place for an evening drink.

If you prefer holidaying away from city centres, don’t be put off by Auckland - the CBD is one very small aspect of this city’s charm. Auckland is the ideal base for a number of short day trips, especially to the North, East and West of the city. Drive over the **Harbour Bridge** and spend the day doing a coastal walk along one of the many **North Shore beaches**, or head west for a hike in the beautiful **Waitakere Ranges**. A campervan hire in Auckland gives you the freedom to explore the areas of the city that appeal to you most.

Those who enjoy the great outdoors would do well to hire a mountain bike at **Woodhill Forest** and carve it up on some of the region’s most popular tracks. Other great outdoor adventures include a visit to see the gannets nesting at **Muriwai Beach**, climbing **Rangitoto Island** or heading north and renting a kayak along **Puhoi River**. With most of these activities less than an hour’s drive from the city centre, it’s easy to see why so many outdoor types love to call Auckland home.

If you’re travelling with kids, there are plenty of attractions to keep your young ones entertained. Two must-visits are **Auckland Museum** and **Auckland Zoo**. The museum is located centrally in Auckland Domain, a beautiful inner-city park that’s perfect for a picnic lunch - and for your kids to stretch their legs and let off some steam! The museum itself has great family friendly exhibitions about New Zealand’s interesting history and native flora and fauna. The zoo is also located near a park (Western Springs) and is a great day out, especially when the sun is shining (just be sure to apply sunscreen - the New Zealand sun is very strong). Highlights at the zoo include the Kiwi enclosure and the meerkat tunnels.

You could easily spend a week or more in Auckland - and many do - but don’t worry, there’s plenty more fun to be had further south. When the time comes to hit the road again, you’ve got a whole new range of activities and attractions of which to look forward.

**Driving south**

The drive to **Hamilton** is fast and flat - simply follow your nose straight down State Highway 1 for about 1.5 to 2 hours and you’ll be in the Tron (as it’s called by locals). In fact, some Hamiltonians find the drive so convenient they commute to South Auckland for work! So if you’re short on time, you can leave Auckland bright and early and be in Hamilton by breakfast. That said, traffic can significantly slow you down, so we’d advise you avoid travelling at peak times (between 7am and 9am, and 4pm and 6pm).

If you’ve got some time up your sleeve, then why not stop in at a few places along the way? There’s
a cluster of great attractions in South Auckland. For some light-hearted family fun there's Rainbow's End, New Zealand's largest theme park. Here you'll find rides to suit all ages, from the scenic Log Flume ride to the adrenalin-pumping Fearfall. You might also enjoy Butterfly Creek, a charming small wildlife park with crocodiles, monkeys and more.

Also located in South Auckland is the Villa Maria Winery and Cellar Door. Villa Maria is a celebrated winemaker with vineyards also in Gisborne, Hawke's Bay and Marlborough. At the Auckland Cellar Door you can take a guided tour and learn all about the wine-making process for just $5. If you're in the mood, you could also stay on for some wine tasting and a delicious lunch at the Auckland Vineyard Cafe (open 7 days).

Once you've finished enjoying South Auckland's many delights, it's time to hit the road again and follow the banks of the Waikato towards Hamilton. You might want to leave with a good appetite, as the next place on the road is known for two classic Kiwi treats: ice cream and bacon.

**Pokeno**

This small town is where many Kiwis stop for snacks as they continue south to Hamilton or the Coromandel. If you have a hankering for ice cream, it's the ideal place to stretch your legs and enjoy a classic Kiwi scoop. There are two ice cream shops located right next to each other, both serving a glorious selection of dairy treats. One even offers a 15-scoop cone - not for the faint-hearted!

Another foodie drawcard is Pokeno Bacon, a local butcher that prides itself on having some of the best bacon in the region. Swing by here to stock up your camper fridge before you head further south, where another small Waikato River town awaits.

**Huntly**

Home to New Zealand's largest power station, you'll know you're approaching Huntly when you see two large chimneys on the horizon. Significantly bigger than Pokeno, but still a quaint small town, Huntly has a bustling village atmosphere with several bakeries, cafes and pubs.

Huntly is also home to several lakes and beautiful bush walks, making it a great place to enjoy some fresh air and exercise before continuing on to Hamilton. Or, if you're not sick of being behind the wheel, you can head to Huntly Speedway to test drive some fast cars.

From Huntly it's just a short drive to Hamilton - keep heading straight down South Highway 1 for about 40 minutes and you'll arrive in this welcoming riverside city.
Leg 1 Highlights

Leg 2 Hamilton to New Plymouth

Beginning in the heart of Waikato and finishing in the beautiful Taranaki region, you’ll encounter many New Zealand tourist attractions on this leg of your campervan holiday. From rolling green fields to snow-capped peaks, to wild surf beaches and flowing rivers, traversing the Hamilton to New Plymouth roads is a feast for the senses - just the way a classic Kiwi road trip should be.

*If you’re beginning your trip here, booking a Hamilton campervan rental is ideal.*

Hamilton

Located on the banks of the Waikato River and surrounded by farmland, Hamilton is a unique combination of countryside charm and vibrant city life. Like many New Zealand cities, it is heavily influenced by agriculture. Dairy is Hamilton’s largest source of revenue, and every year it hosts the largest agricultural trade exhibition in the southern hemisphere, Fieldays. For anyone with an interest in the region’s rich agricultural history, the Waikato Museum makes an excellent day out.
Although it’s hard to escape Hamilton’s farming heritage, there’s much more to this city than agriculture. With a population of around 150,000, Hamilton is New Zealand’s largest inland city and its fourth largest city overall. In the city centre, you’ll find sophisticated cafes, restaurants and shops, as well as a thriving nightlife scene - thanks in part to Hamilton’s large student population. The city also plays host to many events throughout the year. There’s always something happening, so be sure to check an events calendar before you arrive. If you can, try to time your visit with the Balloons Over Waikato festival. Usually held in March, this five-day hot air balloon extravaganza is an annual highlight.

One Hamilton activity you absolutely cannot afford to miss is the award-winning Hamilton Gardens. The city’s most popular attraction, the gardens are set alongside the banks of the Waikato River and internationally recognised as being some of the most beautiful gardens in the world. Separated into 21 different collections, these gardens differ from botanical displays in that they are all designed to tell a story about gardening within a particular historical context. For example, you have a Japanese Garden of Contemplation which is loyal to its origins, as well as a traditional English Flower Garden, an Italian Renaissance Garden and so on. Many gardening enthusiasts travel to Hamilton just to see this beautiful display of craftsmanship. If you’re travelling with your kids, ask for a Hamilton Gardens Discovery Trail activity sheet upon arrival. This free sheet will guide them on an enchanting quest through the gardens and includes some fun activities to keep them entertained, such as fairy counting games and shadow bingo.

Those looking for a more adventurous day out might enjoy walking or mountain biking along the Waikato River Trails, which are about 40 minutes drive from Hamilton CBD. Approximately 100km of tracks are located between Atiamuri and Pokaiwhenua Bridge. You can choose to ride them all (3-5 days) or pick one or two sections to do in isolation. Whatever route you opt for, you can expect beautiful scenery and adrenalin-pumping tracks. The Waikato River Trails head office is based in Putaruru - here you can hire bikes and organise a shuttle to and from the trails.

Before you embark on your drive to New Plymouth, there’s one more destination that’s worth exploring. Located about 45 minutes west of Hamilton is Raglan, a gorgeous coastal town. If you love quirky cafes, sustainable accommodation, world-class surf and local arts and crafts, then Raglan is calling your name. You could easily spend a day here flitting between the beach and the shops - plus it’s got some of the best coffee spots in the region. Not to mention several beautiful coastal walks, a scenic golf course and a calm estuary for the kids to enjoy a swim. As you’d expect,
Raglan is incredibly popular during the warmer months, where Kiwis and international visitors alike flock to its shores for surf lessons and relaxing holidays in the sun.

With such a diverse array of attractions all within short driving distance, it'll be hard to leave Hamilton. Never fear: the next stop on your New Zealand itinerary is yet another exceptional destination. On to Waitomo we go!

**Waitomo Caves**

Less than an hour south of Hamilton you’ll come across a turn-off for a small, unsuspecting town called **Waitomo**. This town might not look like much on the surface, but what lies beneath the ground could very well be one of the highlights of your entire New Zealand road trip. The **Waitomo Caves** are home to thousands of tiny glowworms which light up the grotto beneath the Waitomo River. You can enjoy a leisurely boat ride through the caves while admiring this natural phenomenon. This magical experience is perfect for families - chances are your children haven’t seen anything quite like it. Tours depart every half an hour from 9am to 5pm, 7 days a week and take approximately 45 minutes.

The boat ride through the caves is a popular option as it’s suited to all ages and activity levels. However, if you’d prefer something a little more adventurous, then you can take caving to the next level. Waitomo offers several adventure tourism packages which include activities such as abseiling, black water rafting and flying foxes. Oh, and did we mention you’ll still get to see plenty of glowworms? Talk about the best of both worlds!

Once you’ve conquered your caving fears, it’s time to continue your trek south. Next stop: New Plymouth. If you have time, be sure to make some more stops along the way; **Te Kuiti**, **Piopio** and **Awakino** are all great spots to enjoy a cup of coffee and a bite to eat.
Leg 2 Highlights

Hamilton Gardens
Raglan
Waitomo Caves

Leg 3  New Plymouth to Wellington

After driving through the green countryside of Waikato and Waitomo, the trip from New Plymouth to Wellington could hardly be more different. This coastal drive takes you past some of the best surf beaches in the region and on a clear day you might even see the silhouette of the South Island from the wild and wonderful Kapiti Coast. But first - you’ve got some exploring to do in New Plymouth!

*If you're beginning your trip in Wellington, find your nearest motorhome rental depot here.

New Plymouth

Like many cities, roads and natural attractions in New Zealand, New Plymouth is named after a place in England (you guessed it - Plymouth!). This is where the first English settlers to the region were from. The city has retained a little of its English charm, but is today best known for its proximity to Mount Taranaki. This snow-capped volcanic peak is visible from most areas of New Plymouth. There’s nothing quite like opening the doors of your NZ campervan hire and being greeted with this magical view in the morning - the mountain is basically calling you to get outdoors and enjoy the stunning scenery. To that effect, you’ll want to make the most of the great walking trails in the region. Egmont National Park is a good place to start, with a range of short and long
hiking tracks. As weather conditions around the mountain are changeable, please ensure you check the forecast and pack food, water and warm clothing, plus let someone know before you set out.

If hiking or mountain biking is not your thing, the New Plymouth township offers plenty of activities to keep you well-entertained. With a population of around 74,000, the city is home to art galleries, theatres and historical buildings, as well as great cafes, bars and restaurants. Particular highlights include the **Govett-Brewster Art Gallery** and **Taranaki Cathedral Church of St Mary**.

As with nearly all other New Zealand cities, there’s also a sampling of adventure tourism operators based nearby. How does horse riding, quad biking or extreme go-karting sound? Or what about a fly-fishing tour, helicopter ride, wildlife safari or surf lesson? New Plymouth definitely proves there’s much more to New Zealand’s adventure tourism industry than bungy jumping!

For family friendly fun, head to **Brooklands Zoo**. This free attraction has a range of cute animals for your little ones to admire and makes a great day out. The zoo is open from 9am to 5pm, 7 days a week. If your kids love animals, why not also swing past Pouakai Zoo Park? This family owned zoo has lions, bengal tigers and more. Admission is $16 for adults, $6 for children and $2 for pre-schoolers. Family passes are available.

Other family friendly ideas include a picnic in one of New Plymouth’s lovely parks and gardens (Pukekura Park is a firm favourite) or hiring bikes and riding along the coast. On rainy days, there’s a couple of great options. **Air Zone Indoor Trampoline Park** is the perfect antidote to cabin fever, while **Bowlarama**’s mini golf and tenpin bowling facilities are fun for all ages. For something a little bit different, try the **Fun Ho! Toy Museum**, which houses thousands of homemade toys. You can even opt to watch a toy-making demonstration - but please note, bookings are essential.

A few days in New Plymouth should suffice, unless you’re keen to do several hikes - in which case, stay as long as you need to get your walking fix! When you’re ready to move on, you have a choice of two routes to Wellington. Either opt to drive around Mount Taranaki and hug the coast on State Highway 45, or head inland on State Highway 3. Both routes will take you through Hawera, from where you’ll continue on State Highway 3 until you get to Wellington. So what will it be: coast or countryside? The choice is yours!

**Whanganui**

Located approximately halfway between New Plymouth and Wellington is **Whanganui**, a gem of a New Zealand town. Situated where the mighty **Whanganui River** meets the Cook Strait, this town (also spelled Wanganui) has a population of approximately 42,000 people. Whanganui holds a special place in New Zealand history as one of the first settler towns. You can explore its fascinating past at the **Whanganui Regional Museum** which houses several interesting collections - a perfect day out for history enthusiasts. Even if you don’t visit the museum, you’ll likely get a feel for Whanganui’s early years regardless - there are several heritage buildings throughout the town.
So proud of its past, Whanganui hosts a Heritage Weekend to celebrate its unique history every January - be sure to keep an eye out for it if you’re passing through at this time of year.

Whanganui’s also a superb destination for the active traveller. There are several parks, gardens and nature reserves nearby, with no shortage of hiking trails for you to enjoy, and many visitors choose to explore the river by kayak. A good place to begin is the Whanganui National Park. In this park you’ll also find one of the region’s stranger attractions - the ‘Bridge to Nowhere’. Deep in the park there is a concrete bridge which leads straight into thick native bush. Of course, there’s an explanation for this anomaly - you’ll have to check it out to hear the great story behind this unique bridge! It’s accessible by boat from Pipiriki or Whakahoro, or alternatively you can walk one way from Mangapurua Landing.

Speaking of interesting stories, there are a few more fascinating anecdotes waiting for you on the road yet - just wait until you reach the next stop, Bulls!

**Bulls**

What do you do when your town shares its name with cattle? Why, embrace it of course! Bulls, a farming town about 40 minutes south of Whanganui, is a place of puns. Treat yourself to an ice cream at ‘Lick-a-Bull’ or stock up on some fresh food at the local greengrocer, ‘Veget-a-bull’. If you thought that was enough, wait until you see the police station - sorry, ‘consta-bull’. It’s interesting places like this that make touring around New Zealand so fun.

**Palmerston North (optional)**

From Bulls, you have the option of rejoining State Highway 1 through to Wellington, or you can take a detour along State Highway 3 to Palmerston North, an inland city located in the eastern Manawatu Plains. Visiting Palmerston North (or Palmy as it’s known to locals) will add about an hour to your trip, but if you’re not pressed for time it can be a nice way to break up the drive.

Things to do in Palmerston North include nature walks and hikes, cycling trails, museums, golf and shopping. One of the city’s most popular attractions is the New Zealand Rugby Museum, which houses fascinating memorabilia about the country’s favourite sport. Here you can learn all about the history of the game and gain an understanding of why so many Kiwis take it so seriously. From the oldest All Black jersey to the oldest rugby ball, this dedicated museum has acquired quite the collection. This is a great outing for those travelling with kids as they can let off some steam in the ‘Have A Go’ area, where they can practice their tackles, kicks and other techniques.

If you make the detour to Palmerston North, getting back on the road to Wellington is easy. Simply head down State Highway 56 until it joins with State Highway 57, before turning left onto State Highway 1 just before Ohau. You’ll then travel through some lush countryside before reaching the beautiful Kapiti Coast, the final leg of your drive into Wellington.
Kapiti Coast

It’s almost impossible to drive along the Kapiti Coast without pausing to admire its wild, isolated beaches and quaint seaside towns. It’s no wonder so many Wellingtonians come here to enjoy the restorative power of nature. Less than 20km away from the windy city, it offers a welcome retreat from urban life.

Its namesake, Kapiti Island, provides a gorgeous backdrop for this scenic drive. The island, located about 5km off the coast, is a native marine and wildlife sanctuary. Thanks to careful management, the sanctuary is incredibly prosperous and home to native species such as the Kaka, Weka and Little Spotted Kiwi. You can take a day tour or an overnight kiwi spotting tour to see some of these species up close for yourself. This beautiful attraction has won many awards and is internationally recognised as being one of the best of its kind.

Once you’ve had your fix of Kapiti’s wild beauty, it’s time to continue down State Highway 1 until you reach Wellington, where a whole new array of exciting attractions are waiting for you!

Leg 3 Highlights

Mount Taranaki  Whanganui River  Kapiti Coast

Leg 4  Wellington to Blenheim

Dubbed 'the coolest little capital in the world', Wellington is a thriving hub of arts, entertainment and culinary culture. From quirky cafes to internationally renowned museums, you could easily spend a week or more exploring New Zealand’s fun capital city. We’ll walk you through some highlights, so no matter how much time you have here you can get a feel for Wellington’s unique charm before crossing the Cook Strait and making your way to the South Island.

*If you’re beginning your trip in this area, find motorhome rental from Wellington, Picton or Blenheim.*
Wellington

Located at the base of the North Island, Wellington is quite literally in the centre of the country. With a population of about 204,000, the city may be a lot smaller than Auckland but that doesn’t mean it’s any less fun. In fact, one could argue the compact CBD gives it a more lively atmosphere. Courtney Place and Cuba Street are always buzzing, especially come sunset when the city’s famous nightlife kicks off. Both streets are lined with funky bars and restaurants. Each venue has a distinct feel - you’ll find upmarket dining establishments next to quirky cocktail lounges, or old-fashioned pubs next to late-night espresso bars. The best part is most of Wellington’s key nightlife spots are all within walking distance of each other, so you can hop from venue to venue as the evening progresses.

By day, Wellington is just as diverse. Cuba Street is a great place to end your night, but it’s also the perfect place to start your day. Enjoy a hearty breakfast and excellent coffee at one of many cafes (Floriditas and Fidel’s are two local favourites) before doing a spot of shopping in the street’s boutique stores. If you’re ever in doubt about where to eat in Wellington (not that this is likely - the city is rumoured to have more eateries and bars per capita than New York), Cuba Street is always a good option. Be sure to stop and admire the talented street performers along the way - there’s almost always musicians or artists showcasing their wares.

While it’s likely you’ll spend a lot of your time in Wellington eating and drinking (it’s hard not to in this city!), there’s plenty of cultural attractions to keep you busy between meals. It’s worth wandering down Lambton Quay to see the New Zealand Parliament Building, commonly known as the Beehive due to its shape. Also situated on Lambton Quay is the entrance to the Wellington Cable Car. This old-fashioned car takes you up the hill from downtown to the lovely suburb of Kelburn, where you’ll find the Wellington Botanic Gardens. If you’re travelling with the kids, a visit to the gardens makes an enjoyable day out - they’ll love the excitement of the cable car.

Another great family outing is to Te Papa Tongarewa, the Museum of New Zealand. Located on Wellington’s waterfront, this large museum is full of bright and colourful exhibitions, perfect for kids. Most of the displays are highly interactive, allowing children to learn about New Zealand’s history and landscape through playing games or going on fun rides. If your kids have any fears of museums being dull, Te Papa will show them otherwise!
Those inspired to visit New Zealand by the highly successful Lord of the Rings film franchise will also want to make time to visit the Weta Workshop. Weta is the production company behind most of the film’s intricate costumes and effects. Here you can take a tour of the workshop to see first-hand the craftsmanship that went into Peter Jackson’s movies. Tours range in price and length, starting from $25. For a free experience, you can opt to visit the Weta Cave without taking a tour. The Cave is stocked to the brim with movie memorabilia and is the perfect place to pick up a themed gift to take home.

These are just some of the highlights this vibrant capital city has to offer. Whether you spend one day or one week here, eventually the time will come to move on. The next leg of your road trip is a little bit different - some of it will be travelled by sea.

**Crossing Cook Strait**

To get to the South Island from Wellington you’ll have to take the Cook Strait ferry, the Interislander. You can take your campervan on board so there’s no need to swap vehicles. When you arrive at the terminal, follow the clearly-posted signs for where to drop off the camper. About three hours long, the ferry journey is a tourist attraction in itself. Boasting incredible views of the Marlborough Sounds, it’s the perfect way to break up a road trip. Don’t forget your camera and some warm clothes, as the wind can be quite chilly outside on the observation deck. If you’d prefer to relax and take it easy, you’ll find a good range of food and beverage options inside.

The Interislander drops you off in Picton, a small town at the tip of the South Island. This is a great place to stop for a bite to eat, especially if you’re hankering for a glass of that famous Marlborough wine. When you’re ready to hit the road again, make your way down South Highway 1 until you arrive in Blenheim. The drive will take about 30 minutes at a leisurely pace.

---

**Leg 4 Highlights**

- Wellington City
- Cook Strait Crossing
- Picton

---

**Leg 5  Blenheim to Kaikoura**

128 km
128 km
Total Distance
Total Distance
02:00:00
02:00:00
Est Driving Time
Est Driving Time
Welcome to the first official leg of the South Island part of your trip! One thing you’ll probably notice immediately is the difference between the North and the South Islands. Although they share several similarities, each island has a distinct feel. Which one will be your favourite? There’s only one way to find out... onto Blenheim, Kaikoura and Christchurch you go!

*If you’re beginning your trip in Blenheim, find your nearest motorhome rental depot here.*

**Blenheim**

Wine-lovers rejoice, **Blenheim** is situated in the heart of **Marlborough**, a region made famous around the world for its delicious sauvignon blancs and other fine drops. A great way to explore the many vineyards in the area is by bike. Not only do you not need to worry about where to park the campervan, you’ll also be able to enjoy the stunning scenery and fresh air. **Marlborough Wine Tours By Bike** offers free transport to and from Blenheim, so embarking on one of their excursions couldn’t be easier. Alternatively, you can pick a few vineyards and set out on your own (Craggy Range and Wither Hills are both popular options), although if you’re driving you’ll have to save wine tasting for another day.

Vineyards aside, Blenheim is a nice place to visit in itself. The small town (home for approximately 30,000 people) is one of the sunniest spots in the whole country. If you’re visiting in late summer, you can expect temperatures in the early 30s. The town centre has a lovely village feel, with several artisan food shops and quaint cafes making it easy to sample fresh local produce in a beautiful setting.

While in Blenheim, pop into the **Omaka Aviation Heritage Centre**, which is located in the Omaka Aerodrome. This small museum is dedicated to displaying WWI aircrafts - both originals and replicas. It houses some of the rarest WWI aircraft in the world, making it an important stop for history enthusiasts or anyone interested in aviation. Entrance costs $5 and there’s a cafe onsite.

Once you’ve lapped up enough sunshine and stocked up on delicious Marlborough wines, it’s time to jump back on State Highway 1 again and continue heading south.

**Lake Grassmere**
The drive from Blenheim to Kaikoura is relatively short, but it’s still nice to break up your trip with a little stop along the way. About 40 minutes out of Blenheim, Lake Grassmere is a good place to stretch your legs. It’s also where New Zealand’s salt works are located, making it quite the interesting destination for those who are curious about salt production. Saltworks are not usually found this far south, but Marlborough’s weather conditions happen to be not only perfect for making wine, but salt too. Observe the factory from afar or join a guided tour, before rejoining State Highway 1 on your way to Kaikoura.

Keep an eye out for marine life such as seals, whales and dolphins as you drive along the highway which hugs the coast closely.

**Leg 5 Highlights**

- Blenheim
- Marlborough Vineyards
- Coastal driving

**Leg 6  Kaikoura to Christchurch**

Just when you thought the scenery couldn’t get any better, you’ll arrive in Kaikoura, a picturesque seaside village with dramatic mountain ranges in the background. In winter, it’s quite special sitting by the sea and gazing up at snowcapped peaks - it really is the best of both worlds. As well as being a scenic wonderland, Kaikoura is also where you’re likely to see dolphins, whales.
and other marine life, making it the perfect spot to spend a few days before heading to Christchurch.

*If you're beginning your trip in Christchurch, find your nearest motorhome rental depot here.*

**Kaikoura**

This gorgeous coastal town appeals to people of all ages and interests. Its lively bars draw in a good backpacking crowd, while its delicious seafood restaurants make it popular among foodies. However, it’s Kaikoura’s diverse marine life that is the biggest lure for most visitors. This is thanks to the deep Kaikoura Canyon found around 500m from the coast. Reaching depths of up to 1200 metres, this submarine canyon is a magnet for sea life. The star of the canyon is the Giant Sperm Whale, a ginormous creature that’s truly magnificent to witness first-hand. It would be a shame to visit Kaikoura and not try to see this beautiful mammal in its natural habitat, especially as locating them this close to land is a rarity - usually canyons like this are much further from the coast. **Whale Watch Kaikoura** runs three boat tours per day to see the whales - 7:00am, 10:00am and 12:45pm. While sightings are not guaranteed, the tour company has an amazing 95 per cent track record. They use sustainable, non-invasive techniques to locate whales and usually get great results. In fact, they’re so confident of their abilities you’ll get 80 per cent of your ticket price back if you do not see a sperm whale. Even better, you’ll often see other marine life as an added bonus. Depending on the season, you’re likely to get a glimpse of Dusky Dolphins, Wandering Albatross, Humpback Whales, Pilot Whales, Blue Whales or Southern Right Whales.

A few other marine life tours operate in the area too, including the enormously popular **Dolphin Encounter**. This fun day out provides you with the opportunity to swim with Dusky Dolphins - an amazing experience that you’ll remember forever. Weather dependent, tours run up to three times each day all year, with a great success rate.

If you’d prefer to stay on dry land, you can still enjoy Kaikoura’s wildlife. Take a drive up the coast to the **Ohau Point Seal Colony** to watch seals in their natural habitat, and - if you’re extremely lucky - catch a glimpse of whales or dolphins out at sea. Just remember these are wild seals who may not take nicely to you getting too close; observe from afar if you’d prefer to avoid being pushed (or if you’d like to avoid the smell - seals aren’t the most aromatic creatures on earth). While you’re here, venture across the road and do the short Ohau Stream Walk. This 10-minute stroll offers the possibility of seeing baby seals playing in the stream, and there’s a lovely waterfall at the end. A visit to Ohau Point is an activity the whole family can enjoy and it doesn’t cost a cent!

Those in the mood for a more adventurous experience in Kaikoura could take spotting wildlife to the next level with a Whale Watching flight. **Air Kaikoura** offers scenic flights as well as the chance to get in the cockpit and have a go at flying a plane yourself. Another great adventure tourism activity is scuba diving - take a lesson with **Dive Kaikoura** and see for yourself what it’s really like to live underwater off this pristine coast. If that’s not quite enough to whet your appetite for
adventure, Kaikoura also offers activities such as hang gliding, four wheeler safaris, mountain biking and rafting and canoeing. This gorgeous location truly is one of New Zealand’s best outdoor playgrounds.

With such a diverse range of activities, beautiful scenery and lovely restaurants, you could be forgiven for wanting to stay on as long as possible in Kaikoura. Fortunately the drive to Christchurch includes many pleasant landscapes - this is the South Island of New Zealand after all! When you're ready to leave, you have two options; you can either drive straight down State Highway 1 along the coast (a beautiful scenic route) or you can make a detour inland via Hanmer Springs along country roads. The drive to Hanmer Springs from Kaikoura goes through some lovely (albeit hilly) countryside, however it will add about another 2 hours to your journey to Christchurch. As always, it really depends on how much time you have in the country! Hanmer Springs is a charming alpine village with famous hot pools - a great place to spend a day to recharge in peaceful surrounds. It also makes a nice day trip from Christchurch so you could save this outing for later in your trip.

**Christchurch**

The largest city in the South Island (and the third largest in the country), Christchurch has all the perks of a cosmopolitan urban centre but still retains that welcoming, community atmosphere for which New Zealand is renowned. Cantabrians are a friendly bunch and there’s plenty to see and do in their pretty part of the world. The area has been through its fair share of challenges since the Christchurch earthquake in 2011, but visitors are welcomed with open arms. As reconstruction of the CBD continues, there’s still many activities to keep you entertained during your time here. A good place to start is in the city centre, where you’ll find a unique temporary mall called Re:START. More than 50 retailers sell their wares from colourful containers - a little cozy, but most definitely a great example of Kiwi ingenuity. Located next to Re:START is Quake City, a museum designed to educate and inform visitors about the earthquakes. It’s worth spending a few hours here - you can watch some interviews with locals and gain understanding of how the quakes have impacted the city.

Many Christchurch attractions are located away from the CBD, such as the Orana Wildlife Park and the International Antarctic Centre. Both of these activities are ideal if you’re travelling with kids. Located a short drive from Christchurch International Airport, Orana Wildlife Park is ‘New Zealand’s only Open Range Zoo’. Unlike at other zoos, animals are left to roam in wide open spaces - the experience could be compared to a small safari. The park spans 80 hectares and there are more than 400 animals for you to see. Several organised tours and feedings happen every day, so be sure to plan your visit accordingly if you’d like to see specific animal feedings, such as tigers or lions. Orana Wildlife Park is also home to New Zealand’s only gorillas, making it popular with domestic and international travellers alike.

The International Antarctic Centre is also located near Christchurch airport. This family-friendly
attraction is dedicated to the fascinating destination of Antarctica. Christchurch has strong links with this chilly continent - more than 100 flights depart from Christchurch to Antarctica each year. These flights have been running since 1955 and much has happened between then and now. The International Antarctic Centre displays decades of Antarctic history in a fun and interactive manner. For example, you can experience an Antarctic storm in an all-weather polar room which has a cool temperature of -5 degrees celsius. There’s also a Penguin Encounter, 4D Extreme Theatre and a fun ride on a model Antarctic all-terrain vehicle - the Hagglund.

The above ideas are just a small sampling of the things you can do in Christchurch. Known as the gateway to the South Island, this city and the wider Canterbury region are brimming with tourist activities, from museums and art galleries to skiing and whitewater rafting. What you decide to do will really come down to how long you have to spend here. One or two days will be sufficient to get a taste for the city, but you could easily spend a week or longer exploring the Canterbury region in your NZ campervan - it’s completely up to you.

Encompassing New Zealand’s three largest cities, countless small towns, both islands, both coasts and innumerable photo opportunities, the drive from Auckland to Christchurch allows you to see so much of this beautiful country. While you could do this trip in as little as 5-7 days, the more time you have, the more detours and stops you’ll be able to make. As this itinerary illustrates, there’s so much to do, with something special around every corner. Enjoy every moment of your holiday - these memories will last a lifetime.

**Leg 6 Highlights**

![Whale Watch Kaikoura](image1)
![Ohau Point](image2)
![Re:START Mall](image3)

Whale Watch Kaikoura  Ohau Point  Re:START Mall