

the new zealand experience

summary

We're delighted to offer you what we feel is the most exciting and diverse trip to New Zealand available. The following summary highlights the features included in your Black Sheep vacation.

accommodation

- Quality, character accommodation, hand-picked and reflecting each region's individual style.
- Double, twin, and single rooms with private baths, except in exceptional circumstances where rooms may be shared with other travelers.

dining

- The best restaurants in each area with a la carte dining featuring regional specialties, accompanied by complimentary tastings of New Zealand's excellent wines.
- Special dietary needs catered for.
- Hearty cooked or continental breakfasts included each morning.
- All lunches included, except on Day 9 in Wellington, Day 14 in Christchurch, and Day 19 in Queenstown.
- All dinners included, except on Day 4 in Auckland and Day 19 in Queenstown.
- Snacks, fresh fruit, and beverages in the vehicles.

activities

- Scenic tour of Auckland.
- Bay of Islands sailing cruise.
- Visit to the Murawai gannet colony.
- Guided nature hike through the Coromandel rainforest.
- Visit to Hot Water Beach.
- Visit to Rotorua Museum and soak in mineral baths.
- Maori concert and hangi.
- Guided trip to White Island or scenic flight over Mt Tarawera.
- Flight from Rotorua to Wellington.
- Ferry ride between the North and South Island.
- Wine tasting in Marlborough.
- Sea kayaking the Abel Tasman National Park.
- Hiking the Kaikoura Peninsula.
- Whale-watching flight in Kaikoura.
- Seal swimming or pelagic birdwatching in Kaikoura.
- Farmstay.
- TranzAlpine train ride over the Southern Alps.
- Cave-rafting or scenic-caving expedition.
- Scenic glacier flight.
- Shotover Canyon jet boat ride.
- Visit to Arrowtown and the bungy bridge.
- Overnight cruise in Fiordland.

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Plus day hikes, bird-watching, swimming, the inevitable cricket lesson, and much more!

We pride ourselves on the wide range of activities included in your tour package. We've chosen those that we feel will enhance your New Zealand experience. You can participate in as many or as few as you like. If you are unable to participate in an activity or there are weather restrictions, alternatives will be provided where possible.

transportation

- Airport transfers within New Zealand.
- All land transportation while on tour in comfortable, air-conditioned luxury mini-coaches.
- Various on-board amenities such as a reference library, binoculars, etc to enhance your enjoyment of the trip.
- All ferry and water taxi trips.

support

- Detailed pre-trip information, including passport and visa requirements, packing tips, and arrival details.
- Professional office staff to help you plan every aspect of your trip.

guiding

- Experienced, trained Black Sheep guides who are experts in enriching your travel experience.
- Care for all of the mundane details, leaving you free to relax and have the time of your life.

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itinerary

Our New Zealand Experience tour truly captures the best of New Zealand. It is one of the few tours available that covers both the country's North and South Island. These islands are very different from each other and both offer unique and spectacular features. So often, we meet travelers who lament that they've not allowed themselves enough time in New Zealand. Though very small, it's a country of incredible diversity and there's a seemingly endless number of things to see and do. This tour is highly recommended so you can gain a full appreciation of New Zealand's culture and beauty.

The itinerary below is broken down into New Zealand's distinct regions to give you a better sense of the diverse areas through which you will travel.

auckland & bay of islands

Day 1: Auckland to Bay of Islands

Welcome to New Zealand! This morning, you are met by your guide for the start of your New Zealand Experience. It's a scenic drive to the Northland region, a remote and breathtaking area that time seems to have forgotten. Our accommodation for the next three nights is in the beautiful Bay of Islands, a popular yet peaceful retreat. An afternoon hike, offering stunning views of the glittering bay, allows you to rejuvenate after your overseas journey. This evening, we enjoy a relaxed dinner overlooking the bay.

Day 2: Hiking in the Bay

This day is spent enjoying the region. Northland was once blanketed by ancient kauri trees, true lords of the forest rivaled only by the redwoods in girth. We spend a day walking amongst these giants and exploring tracks that highlight the grandeur of the magnificent coastline. Alternatively, you can just relax in the comfort of our lodging and soak in the tranquil atmosphere of this special location. For dinner this evening, we enjoy fresh local cuisine from a lovely bayside restaurant.

Day 3: Sailing on the Bay

This morning, we board a sailing vessel for a cruise around the multitude of picturesque islands. You can help set the sails and take the helm if you wish, or just sit back and enjoy the sea breeze and the views. You may even catch a glimpse of the shy little blue penguin resident here. For lunch, we anchor in a secluded island bay where you can step ashore and take a walk, relax on the beach, or swim in the emerald waters before returning to the mainland for our final dinner on the Bay.

Day 4: Bay of Islands to Auckland

We bid the Bay farewell and return to Auckland, stopping at scenic points along the way. Just north of the city, on the ruggedly beautiful west coast, is one of New Zealand's largest gannet colonies. We stop for a close-up view of these wonderful birds as they court, breed, and nest. In Auckland, our hotel is located in the heart of downtown. Dinner this evening is on your own, so you are free to explore the city, its restaurants and nightlife.

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coromandel peninsula

Day 5: Auckland to Coromandel Peninsula

Departing Auckland, we head for the lush and peaceful Coromandel Peninsula. This afternoon, we join a member of an award-winning team of naturalists for a half-day excursion through the Coromandel's subtropical rainforest. We will learn about natural Maori medicines, explore historic goldmines, and stand beneath the world's largest ferns. Our lodge for the next two nights lies in a tiny seaside village, and is just a short stroll from one of the prettiest beaches in New Zealand.

Day 6: Exploring the Peninsula

A casual day is spent enjoying the region. A hike along the coast leads to a secluded cove featuring beautiful sandstone formations – a perfect place to contemplate nature's wonders. During our stay, we take a trip to nearby Hot Water Beach. With thermal waters brewing just below the surface of the sand, we dig our own natural hot pools and soak as we listen to the waves crash against the shore – a truly unique and memorable experience.

rotorua & wellington

Day 7: Coromandel Peninsula to Rotorua

We head south to Rotorua, a cultural center for Maoridom and an active volcanic region. Here, we visit the Rotorua Museum, housed in the historic Bath House where visitors came over a century ago to "take the cures" in the mineral waters. After an educational and entertaining film about the region, those who wish to test the healing theories of the water can head to Rotorua's modern spa facility for a soak in its thermal pools. This evening, we are welcomed as guests at a Maori meeting house, or marae, for a fascinating introduction to Maori culture. Dinner at the marae is an opportunity to sample both traditional and modern Maori fare.

Day 8: Geothermal Activity

There are two options for experiencing the region's volcanic features today, depending on conditions. The first is to travel by land then by boat to White Island, an active volcano 30 miles off the eastern coast. We explore the volcano on foot, hosted by professional guides. If conditions preclude a trip to white island, the alternative option is to take a scenic flight over the giant crater resulting from the 1886 eruption of Mt. Tarawera, then view some of the active geothermal features of the area by land—boiling lakes, turquoise pools, and hot streams which continue to change and develop. We take a hike in the nearby forest and explore other interesting features of this thermal wonderland.

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Day 9: Rotorua to Wellington

This morning, you depart Rotorua and fly to Wellington, New Zealand's picturesque capital city. As well as Parliament, Wellington is home to Te Papa, the country's spectacular national museum. For those who wish to take in this cultural and architectural feat, along with the other wonderful features of the city, your day is free to explore on your own. Our hotel is located in the heart of the city, and we reconvene this evening to dine at a favorite Wellington restaurant. Wellington is the final destination for the 9-day Experience North Island excursion. We bid you farewell at dinner tonight and wish you well for your onward travel. You will be transferred to the airport the following day to meet your flights.

marlborough & nelson

Day 10: Wellington to Nelson

We take the ferry across the Cook Strait to the South Island, gliding past the spectacular coastline of the Marlborough Sounds. Landing in Picton, we travel to the Marlborough wine region, renowned for its world-class Sauvignon Blancs and Chardonnays. After tastings and a winery lunch, we continue on to the sun-drenched Nelson and Tasman Bay region, pausing for a short hike through native beech forest along the way. Our lodge, at the head of the Abel Tasman National Park, is where we'll settle for the next two nights.

Day 11: The Abel Tasman National Park

The Abel Tasman, with its temperate forest, aquamarine waters, and golden sand beaches, is arguably one of the most beautiful parks in the country. Hike through the park at your own pace this day, or join us for a special sea kayaking experience along its coast, ducking in and out of secluded bays, stopping to stroll along its beaches, and drawing in the tranquil beauty of the sea.

kaikoura & canterbury

Day 12: The Abel Tasman to Kaikoura

We depart the Nelson region and journey east to the dramatic Pacific coast and the seaside hamlet of Kaikoura, New Zealand's marine-life center. After settling into our waterfront accommodation, we take a spectacular hike around the Kaikoura peninsula, a dominant feature in the region's landscape. The hike offers magnificent views of the surrounding sea and mountains as it winds past intriguing limestone formations and fur seals lounging on the rocks. Kaikoura means "to eat crayfish (lobster)" in Maori, and tonight is a chance to sample the local specialty.

Day 13: Marine-life Encounters

Today, we'll have the chance to behold some of Kaikoura's tremendous creatures in their natural habitat. In the morning those feeling adventurous can don wetsuits and snorkel gear for an up-close encounter with Kaikoura's playful fur seals. Alternatively, a fascinating boat trip to the feeding grounds of Kaikoura's sea birds offers a unique opportunity to view albatross, shearwaters, and other pelagic wildlife on the wing and in the waters around us. Perhaps the most famous Kaikoura

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residents are the sperm whales. An afternoon whale flight offers the unique opportunity of viewing these gentle leviathans from above. From this perspective, one can appreciate the whale's size, as well as the vastness of its feeding ground.

Day 14: Kaikoura to Christchurch

Departing Kaikoura, we journey south to the Canterbury region and the city of Christchurch, described by some as the most English of New Zealand's cities. Lunch is on your own so you can explore--hire a punt on the Avon, stroll through the botanical gardens, or visit the lively open-air market. From Christchurch, it's a short trip through scenic countryside to the home of a New Zealand farming family for your overnight farmstay. Generally, no more than four guests stay at one home, allowing you the chance for an intimate visit.

the west coast & glaciers

Day 15: Christchurch to Punakaiki

After warm farewells to our Kiwi families, we board the famous TranzAlpine train for a trip over the glorious Southern Alps. Crossing alpine rivers and winding beneath snow-capped peaks, we descend to the wild and woolly West Coast region. Upon reaching The Coast, it's a short drive along stunning shoreline to our accommodation for the next two nights, on the edge of the Paparoa National Park. The afternoon allows you time to explore the area's features, including the intriguing Pancake Rocks, and to take in the bounty of talented craftspeople here.

Day 16: Punakaiki

This part of the South Island is known for its limestone landscape and is honeycombed with intricate cave systems. The morning gives us the opportunity to explore one of these systems in a choice of two ways. Scenic Caving is available for those wishing to explore a natural cave virtually unspoiled by humans. We examine chambers filled with delicate formations and the eerie blue constellations of glow worms as we learn about the cave's creation. Those wanting a taste of the surreal can instead go on one of New Zealand's most unusual experiences, Cave Rafting. Outfitted with wetsuits and inner tubes and led by an experienced guide, we hike through the cave to a meandering underground river where we board our tubes and drift through a magnificent glow-worm grotto. Plenty of laughs are had on this memorable adventure. For those wishing to remain aboveground on this day, other enjoyable alternatives can be arranged.

Day 17: Punakaiki to the Glaciers

This morning, it's a spectacular drive down to New Zealand's glacier region. Upon our arrival in the picturesque village of Franz Josef, we take a scenic flight over the glaciers, passing near Mt. Cook, New Zealand's highest peak. Upon our return, we hike along the glacial riverbed for a view of the imposing glacier face. From Franz Josef, we travel to its sister village of Fox where we settle into our comfortable alpine hotel. Nearby is perhaps one of the prettiest little walking trails in New Zealand where you can stroll beneath a thick canopy of old-growth rainforest before dinner.

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queenstown & fiordland

Day 18: The Glaciers to Queenstown

This morning, we walk around a nearby kettle lake, created by retreating glaciers long ago, but now rimmed by lush forest. From here, it's a stunning drive through the Haast Pass on our way to Queenstown. Dense rainforests give way to the stark mountains of the Mt. Aspiring National Park as we enter the Otago region, New Zealand's Outback and home to its high country sheep stations. After pausing in the serene, lake-side town of Wanaka, we cross the spectacular Crown Range and descend into Queenstown. Resting on the shores of lovely Lake Wakatipu and flanked by The Remarkables, this is a stunning setting in which to base ourselves for the next four days.

Day 19: Queenstown

Queenstown is New Zealand's adrenalin center. In keeping with this, we take an exhilarating jet boat ride through the Shotover Canyon this morning. Before the gold rush of adventure tourism, this was a true gold rush region 140 years ago, reminiscent of America's Wild West. Because there are so many things to do in Queenstown to cater to your diverse interests, we have left the remainder of the day free for you to pick and choose whatever optional activities you desire, be they whitewater rafting, horse-trekking and bungy jumping, or more leisurely pursuits such as walking and wine trails. For that reason, lunch and dinner are on your own this day.

Day 20: Queenstown to Fiordland

This morning, we pack an overnight bag for our excursion to spectacular Fiordland National Park. The journey to the fiord is one of the most scenic on which you could hope to travel, and we stop and explore some of nature's wonders along the way. At the fiord, we board our vessel for the unique experience of an overnight stay. Very few see Fiordland in this way and it allows you maximum time to absorb its overwhelming beauty. We cruise toward the mouth of the fiord, passing alongside thundering waterfalls and fur seals basking on the rocks. From the mouth, we return to our refuge and anchor overnight in a sheltered cove.

Day 21: Fiordland to Queenstown

This morning, we wake to a hearty breakfast as we cruise back to land, rare witnesses to a Fiordland dawn. We return to Queenstown, stopping along the way for a morning walk through moss-laden beech forest to a pristine alpine lake. We resettle at our accommodation for a relaxing afternoon. Our farewell dinner is tonight, where we reflect upon the highlights of our trip and celebrate the friendships we've made.

Day 22: Homeward Bound

On our final morning, depending on your flight schedule, you'll have time to relax, make final purchases, and even reconsider that bungy jump before traveling home or to your next destination.

We're confident you'll leave New Zealand with memories and friendships that will enrich your life for years to come.