

JOURNEY TO *new zealand*

Discover the “land of the long white cloud,” where awe-inspiring beauty comes in many forms

Story | KATHRYN HUNTER





New Zealand, known as “the land of the long white cloud” in the language of its aboriginal people, the Maori, is a place as magical as it is far from home. Two long, narrow islands sit like lost ships in the South Pacific, arks of strange plants, flightless birds and striking, varied landscapes.

Beauty takes many forms here, in the cornflower-blue depths of a glacier, the delicate curl of a tree fern, a canopy of sparkling glowworms. No visitor comes to New Zealand without a compass for adventure, or leaves without a deep appreciation for its unique beauty.

THE LAND

Though New Zealand is roughly the size of Colorado, the country’s length and position above shifting tectonic plates make it a treasure chest of diverse terrains and climates. From rainforests and snow-capped mountains to white-sand beaches and volcanic lakes, the scenery often changes dramatically within a few hours’ drive.

The North Island is home to three-quarters of New Zealand’s 4.3 million residents, more than one-third of whom live in Auckland. The far north of the island, a region called Northland, is known for its pristine beaches,

centuries-old kauri trees and subtropical weather.

South of Auckland’s sprawling metropolis, the landscape buckles into bright green, rolling hills studded with sheep and hedgerows of pastel hydrangeas. Taupo and Rotorua literally bubble with geothermal activity, attracting visitors

with geysers, boiling mud pools, hot springs and world-class spas. Wellington, seat of the national government as well as New Zealand’s “cultural capital,” hugs the coast at the North Island’s southern tip.

With its towering mountains, rocky coastlines and dense rainforest, the South Island is a canvas of wild, rugged beauty, a work of art signed by nature’s hand. Cities are few and far between, and each has a character all its own.

To the north, Abel Tasman National Park and the Marlborough Sounds are

popular detours before travelers head toward the coast. The West Coast, more secluded and lush, is one of New Zealand’s best drives when the weather is favorable and includes highlights such as Punakaiki’s Pancake Rocks, Hokitika’s jade artwork and jewelry, and the

Fox and Franz Josef glaciers. On the East Coast, Kaikoura is famous for its marine wildlife, and Christchurch offers a slice of city life along with beautiful beaches and bays.

Venturing inland to Aoraki Mount Cook or through Arthur’s Pass or Haast Pass rewards travelers with stunning vistas of sky, water and mountains. Farther south, Queenstown and Wanaka are hubs for adventure activities, and the mist-enshrouded Fiordland National Park is well worth the drive.

THE CULTURE

Far from any other land mass, New Zealand was once a realm of birds. Apart from bats, no land mammals were present before New Zealand’s first people, the Maori, arrived more than 1,000 years ago. A Dutch ship sighted

the islands in 1642, but the first permanent European settlement wasn’t established until 1840. With its small population and expansive wilderness, much of New Zealand retains a rural, edge-of-the-world feel.

New Zealand is a British commonwealth, and though Kiwis betray their colonial roots in their affection for meat pies and fish and chips, they have a clear and singular sense of identity. Practical and friendly, Kiwis value green living, good coffee and

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TAKE 5

PADDLE IN PARADISE

The 32-mile Abel Tasman Coast Track, one of New Zealand's most popular walks, winds through a picture-perfect landscape of golden beaches and cerulean seas. Travel all or part of this idyllic coastline by any combination of kayaking, hiking and water-taxi transport.

GO BELOW

New Zealand's subterranean world is as dazzling as the land above. Walk through Waitomo's magnificent glowworm caves, or strap on a helmet light and abseil, climb, crawl and float on a guided black-water rafting tour. Green Glow Eco-Adventures operates custom small-group tours.

HIKE A GLACIER

For a one-of-a-kind day trip, book a "helihike" and fly by helicopter to the top of Fox or Franz Josef Glacier, where a guided expedition takes you up close to ice caves and other awe-inspiring formations.

CRUISE FIORDLAND

Achingly beautiful, Fiordland National Park is a remote wonderland of mist, waterfalls and dramatic peaks. A day or overnight cruise to Doubtful Sound, much less crowded than Milford Sound, is highly recommended.

SWIM WITH DOLPHINS

Kaikoura is the top spot to see marine mammals. On an unforgettable 3.5-hour tour with Dolphin Encounter, put on a wetsuit and go overboard to commune with dusky dolphins in the open sea.



outdoor activities. The names of many places, animals and plants are Maori, and uniquely Kiwi sayings like “sweet as” pepper any conversation. The All Blacks, New Zealand’s rugby team, are a source of intense national pride.

To get a true sense of New Zealand’s heritage, visit Wellington and spend a day exploring Te Papa, the Museum of New Zealand, where six floors of cultural and historical exhibits feature all things Kiwi.

ATTRACTIONS

Tourism is a booming business in New Zealand. An extensive, well-organized network of visitor centers and tour operators ensures that travelers find what they’re looking for, whether it’s adventure in the backcountry or an award-winning pinot noir.

For hikers, New Zealand’s trails loop through moss-covered rainforest, follow winding rivers, ascend tall peaks or trace the edge of the ocean. Day hikes and backpacking trails abound, as well as shuttle and guide services. To strike out on your own, stop by any Department of Conservation office for route and permit information. Hut reservations for New Zealand’s “Great Walks,” such as the Routeburn and Milford Tracks, should be made well in advance.

Extreme adventurers will relish in New Zealand’s cornucopia of extreme and unusual activities. In Queenstown, take a leap from the spot where commercial bungee jumping began, the historic Kawarau Bridge. Or if you’re looking for a different type of thrill, you can try your hand at cave rafting, jetboating, heliskiing, kiteboarding, paragliding, Zorbing

(essentially rolling down a hill in a large inflatable hamster ball), ziplining, white-water kayaking, mountain biking, rock climbing, scuba diving or surfing.

For those looking for some urban flavor, New Zealand’s cities and towns offer a wide variety of boutique hotels, luxury bed-and-breakfasts, vacation rentals and independently owned resorts. While accommodation might require a little more planning, the scarcity of commercial chains guarantees a more intimate and interesting stay.

Wine lovers will also have a brimming itinerary in New Zealand. On the North Island, tour the Hawke’s Bay and Wairarapa regions for premium reds. On the South Island, the Marlborough area is renowned for producing the finest Sauvignon Blancs in the world. Other notable

wine regions include Nelson, Canterbury and Central Otago.

And when it comes to wildlife, the birds of New Zealand are fascinating and incredibly diverse. Some, like the plucky fantail, have little fear and treat passersby as a welcome curiosity, while others hide in forest shadows or sound music-box notes from the treetops. The kea, a large green parrot rumored to be as smart and mischievous as a monkey, is a common sight in alpine areas of the South Island. The shy, endangered kiwi bird, however, is most easily seen at a wildlife sanctuary, such as the Otorohanga Kiwi House and Native Bird Park.

New Zealand’s waters are home to penguins and many marine mammals, including whales, dolphins and seals. Outstanding wildlife cruises and tours are offered in Kaikoura and Dunedin. ✦

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LONDON LANDMARK

Host city of the 2012 Olympic Games in July and August, London is the place to be this summer. And the Connaught, a Victorian-era, five-star hotel in the heart of the Mayfair district, is lauded as one of London's most prestigious accommodations.

Recent restoration has introduced new state-of-the-art technology and contemporary design to the historic structure, while faithfully preserving the Connaught's beautiful period details and distinctive character. Since its opening in 1897, the hotel has had only six general managers.

An ideal base for exploring the sights, the Connaught also houses two designer bars and one of the city's top restaurants, helmed by award-winning chef Hélène Darroze. Afternoon tea at Espelette, a highly recommended addition to your itinerary, is an authentic and indulgent cultural experience. the-connaught.co.uk



BAREFOOT CHIC

No need to worry about what to wear to dinner at this secluded Bahaman getaway—at Kamalame, a sarong is well within the dress code. In stark contrast to the busy beaches of Nassau, Kamalame's 19 rooms and suites offer an idyllic escape far from the crowds.

Located on a small barrier island just off the coast of Andros Island, the resort is set among 96 acres of tropical foliage and ringed by warm turquoise waters teeming with brightly colored fish. For an active adventure, snorkel or scuba dive along rich coral reefs to spot manta rays and parrotfish, take a dip in the resort's 50-foot freshwater swimming pool or book a guided fishing trip. Dining options at the "Great House" highlight classic Caribbean cuisine, paired with a signature selection of wines and cocktails. kamalame.com

INSPIRED RELAXATION

The red rocks and rushing rivers of Sedona, Ariz., are a haven for travelers seeking spiritual inspiration and natural beauty. Start your journey at Mii Amo, a top destination spa nestled in Boynton Canyon, with a three-, four- or seven-night all-inclusive package that includes daily meals, spa treatments, a private consultation, activities, fitness classes and lectures.

The design of Mii Amo's 24,000-square-foot, two-level resort resembles that of a Native American pueblo, an aesthetic in harmony with the surrounding scenery. Dramatic views of the red-rock canyon amaze at every turn, and a full range of specialized spa treatments awaken a deep sense of relaxation and well-being. Mii Amo is the first spa in the U.S. to offer the innovative WaveMotionTable, a massage table that inspires a feeling of weightlessness. miiamo.com



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FRANKFURT & HOUSTON CONNECT

Starting Aug. 1, Lufthansa will offer daily service between Houston and Frankfurt on the world's largest passenger jet. Boasting two decks with a total capacity of 526 passengers and economy, business and first-class seating, the A380 is also quieter, more spacious and more fuel-efficient than other wide-body aircrafts. George Bush Intercontinental Airport will be among only six airports in the nation to offer the flagship aircraft, as well as the first in the Lone Star State. lufthansa.com



NEW WHEELS

Ever wish your carry-on bag could carry you for a change? The Only Scootercase is a suitcase that doubles as a scooter, sporting built-in wheels, telescoping handlebars, a fold-out footboard and a step brake. Perfect for zooming between flights at the airport, the case has the same storage capacity as a traditional carry-on bag and is TSA-approved for overhead or under-seat use. \$299.95. hammacher.com

BOULEVARD OF ART & CULTURE

Philadelphia's Benjamin Franklin Parkway, a mile-long stretch of celebrated museums, teaching institutions and gardens, will welcome a highly anticipated addition this spring. On May 19, the Barnes Foundation, relocated from Merion, Penn., will reopen its doors to the public in a new, 93,000-square-foot building at 20th Street and the Benjamin Franklin Parkway.

Housing what is widely considered to be the world's most spectacular Impressionist, Post-Impressionist and Modern collection, including 181 Renoirs, 69 Cézannes, 59 Matisse's, 46 Picassos and seven Van Goghs, the Barnes Foundation is expected to bring art lovers from every part of the globe to Philly's "monumental mile of art." barnesfoundation.org



BYOB

If you're looking for a getaway to sunny California, check in to the Westlake Village Inn, just inland of the Malibu coast. The 141-room boutique hotel exhibits classic California style with its beautiful gardens, wine cellar, and its modern-Italian restaurant, Mediterraneo.

Relax in the luxurious comfort of this Mediterranean-inspired property or take it to the limit with a unique offering that will channel your inner Lance Armstrong. With the BYOB (Bring Your Own Bike) package, you can whisk through the scenic Conejo Valley, along the course Armstrong takes during the Amgen Tour. Customized water bottles, healthy energy snacks and a power breakfast send-off are included and, if you prefer to travel light, bike rentals are available.

CARING CRUISE

Crystal Cruises will continue its popular "You Care, We Care" program in 2012, extending the program to new destinations such as Croatia, Colombia, Singapore, Greece and Italy. This year, every Crystal Serenity or Crystal Symphony voyage will offer a complimentary shore excursion in which guests and crew can give back to a local community in need.

In British Columbia, stock and distribute food and toys at a local food bank. In Cambodia, visit an orphanage to teach children the arts and plant a vegetable garden. At other locations around the world, lend a hand by planting trees, bonding with underprivileged children or disabled adults, and assisting at animal rescue and conservation centers. Crystal Cruises handles all of the logistics, providing an experience that's sure to warm the heart. crystalcruises.com



KATHRYN HUNTER

Kathryn Hunter is an Austin-based freelance writer whose work has appeared in "Texas Parks and Wildlife Magazine."

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