



Riding the Length of New Zealand

HIGHLIGHTS

- o Leaving **Cape Reinga** (p43) and arriving in **Bluff** (p232) – the genesis and the terminus of this adventure will undoubtedly be a massive highlight
- o The lush farmland and tropical **Northland** (p43)
- o The rolling hills of the central and **Southern North Island** (p111)
- o Vineyards and golden beaches in **Marlborough** (p143)
- o The epically challenging and astonishingly stunning **Southern Alps** (p194)

TERRAIN

This ride covers it all – flat farmland, folded hills, windswept shoreline, volcanoes, glacier-clad peaks and enchanting rainforest.

For some riding 'in' New Zealand isn't nearly as appealing as riding 'all' of New Zealand. There are few countries on earth more logically set up to bisect than Aotearoa. For the bold, the ambitious and the motivated, riding the length of the country is a worthy goal and one that is easily achieved – if only on paper.

The well set-up road system lends itself perfectly to this mission. There are ample cycling options that will transport you from the tip of the North Island to the very basement of the South Island. A multitude of route options are available – from a near straight-shot to a drunken-sailor weave that zig-zags from coast to coast with the frequency of a sine wave. You are only limited by your available time and ambition.

There is no doubt that this is the ultimate challenge in terms of cycling in New Zealand. You can expect to be on the road for at least a month. As the crow flies it's a petite 1400km from end to end – but once you start dealing with the up and down and around Kiwi roads the actual figure is more like around 2450km!

Will it be easy? No. Will there be hard days? Yes. Will it be worth all the effort? Most definitely.



THE TORTOISE AND THE HARE

There are two schools of thought in modern bike touring. The traditional method is where one travels with everything they are going to need attached to their bike. This necessitates panniers, possibly trailers, bikes that outweigh their riders and the general feeling of being ready for anything. Tents, sleeping bags, cooking gear and enough gear to ride the Tour d'France unsupported.

The other method is the opposite of this gear-centric ethic, in fact it is the polar opposite. You carry little more than a raincoat tied around your waist and a credit card in your pocket. Instead of seeking out campsites and supermarkets, these light-is-right riders bounce from one B&B to the next, with the odd cafe in between.

Both of these styles have their advantages – light bikes are fun to ride and no vacancy signs really are painful to see. You can tour NZ utilising either style and have a great time doing it – the question is, 'are you a tortoise or a hare?'

PLANNING

When to Cycle

The decision of when to tackle this epic ride is something that could keep nervous planners up at night. Really there may be no perfect time to undertake this adventure. No matter how well you slot into the climate of one region, by the time you get to the next one all could be different. That being said, you'd be asking for punishment if you chose to ride NZ in the winter months. The colder temperatures and, more importantly, the winter winds would make the whole experience perhaps too epic for even the most hardened rider.

The summer months of November through to March are your best bet in terms of enjoyable weather for cycling. You will encounter some hot days (especially up north and in the central South Island) but always be prepared for cold and wet weather in both islands.

Maps

Finding one map that will cover this entire route in any sort of detail is a bit of wishful thinking. A good alternative is a map book – *Kiwi Pathfinder* by Kiwimaps is a good and reliable option. This book has all the detail you need for navigating the countryside and the cities.

North vs South

So do you ride New Zealand heading north or heading south? Is it best to start in the tropical north and head to the blustery south? Or do you bank on tail winds and start from Bluff?

To be honest there isn't a magic formula – both directions have their advantages. Northbound you'll have the southerly winds to push you as you head up the west coast – but remember that strong northwesterly's will blow before the southerly. Heading south you'll have to contend with the short sharp hills of the North Island before finding your cycling rhythm.

The reality is that there really isn't a 'best' direction to go. The best way to decide is often the place and time of arrival – you can fly into Christchurch as easily as Auckland for instance. If it's the spring head south so you get to the cooler regions after things thaw out. If it's the autumn head north so you can take advantage of the last of the nice weather down south. In the dead of summer it's really the same.

Consider also pure logistical factors – are you arriving into Auckland from overseas? Flying out from Christchurch? Also look into where you will be during busy holiday periods, events you might want to see (or avoid) and what sort of side trips you want to include.

RIDING THE LENGTH OF NEW ZEALAND

Duration 30 days

Distance 2448km

Difficulty demanding

Start Cape Reinga

Finish Bluff

Summary This ultimate top-to-tail cycling adventure is one of the world's great rides.