



Driving in New Zealand

New Zealand crams diversity into its island borders, and road journeys seamlessly combine ocean-fringed coastal roads, soaring alpine peaks and impressive glaciers.

Driving Fast Facts

- **Right or left?** Drive on the left
- **Manual or automatic?** Mostly automatic
- **Legal driving age** 18
- **Top speed limit** 100km/h
- **Best bumper sticker** 'Sweet as bro'

DRIVING LICENCE & DOCUMENTS

International visitors can use their home country driving licence, or an International Driving Permit (IDP) issued by their home country's automobile association. If their home country licence is not in English, they must also carry an approved translation of the licence. See www.nzta.govt.nz/driver-licences.

INSURANCE

Rental car companies include basic insurance in hire agreements, but it's often worth paying an additional fee – usually on a per day basis – to reduce your excess. This will bring the amount you need to pay in case of an accident down from around \$1500 or \$2000 to around \$200 or \$300. Note that most insurance agreements won't cover the cost of damage to glass (including the windscreens) or tyres, and insurance coverage is often invalidated on beaches and certain rough (4WD) unsealed roads. Always read the fine print, ask pertinent questions, and definitely refrain from driving a rental car along Ninety Mile Beach, Northland.

HIRING A CAR

Hiring a vehicle is very popular in NZ, and the country is perfect for self-drive adventures. Most – but not all – rental car companies require drivers to be at least 21 years old. The main companies are all represented; the following are good-value independent operators with national networks.

Ace Rental Cars (09-303 3112, 0800 502 277; www.acerentalcars.co.nz)

Apex Rentals (03-363 3000, 0800 500 660; www.apexprentals.co.nz)

Go Rentals (09-974 1598, 0800 467 368; www.gorentals.co.nz)

Also very popular is renting a campervan and taking advantage of the Department of Conservation (DOC)'s network of campsites. The following are three well-regarded local companies.

Apollo (09-889 2976, 0800 113 131; www.apollocamper.co.nz)

Jucy (09-929 2462, 0800 399 736; www.jucy.co.nz)

Maui (09-255 3910; 0800 688 558; www.maui.co.nz)

Another option is to contact **Transfer-car** (09-630 7533; www.transfercar.co.nz), one-way relocation specialists for car rental.

BUYING A VEHICLE IN NEW ZEALAND

Buying a car then selling it at the end of your travels can be one of the cheapest ways to see NZ.

- Auckland is the easiest place to buy a car, followed by Christchurch. **Turners Auctions** (www.turners.co.nz) is NZ's biggest car-auction operator, with 10 locations.
- Make sure your prospective vehicle has a **Warrant of Fitness** (WoF) and registration valid for a reasonable period: see the **New Zealand Transport Agency** website (www.nzta.govt.nz) for details.
- Buyers should take out third-party insurance, covering the cost of repairs to another vehicle resulting from an accident that is your fault: try the **Automobile Association** (AA; 0800 500 444; www.aa.co.nz/travel).
- To have a car inspected before you purchase it (around \$150), see **Vehicle Inspection New Zealand** (VINZ; 09-573 3230, 0800 468 469; www.vinz.co.nz) or the AA.
- To establish if there's anything dodgy about the car (eg stolen, outstanding debts), try the AA's **LemonCheck** (09-420 3090, 0800 536 662; www.lemoncheck.co.nz) service.

BRINGING YOUR OWN VEHICLE

As NZ is an island nation, it is extremely rare for travellers to bring their own vehicle to the country. One exception where it could be financially worthwhile is for Australian visitors who are planning on travelling in their own campervan or caravan. Search for 'Importing a Vehicle Temporarily' on www.nzta.govt.nz.

MAPS

- Excellent national and regional maps published by the **New Zealand Automobile Association** (www.aa.co.nz) are available

Road Trip Websites

AUTOMOBILE ASSOCIATIONS

New Zealand Automobile Association (www.aa.co.nz/travel) Provides emergency breakdown services, maps and accommodation guides.

CONDITIONS & TRAFFIC

New Zealand Transport Agency (www.nzta.govt.nz/traffic) Advice on road works, road closures and potential delays.

ROAD RULES

Drive Safe (www.drivesafe.org.nz) A simplified version of NZ's road rules, with the information of most interest to international visitors.

New Zealand Transport Agency (www.nzta.govt.nz) Search for 'Road Code' for the full version of NZ's road rules.

free of charge at regional i-SITES (tourist information centres) and at main international airports. Also free and available at i-SITES are regional maps and guides published by **Jasons** (www.jasons.co.nz).

- More detailed maps including street and topographic information are published by **Land Information New Zealand** (LINZ; www.linz.govt.nz).
- The Automobile Association also has a good online **Travel Time and Distance Calculator** to plan driving routes around NZ.

ROADS & CONDITIONS

- Kiwi traffic is usually pretty light, but it's easy to get stuck behind a slow-moving truck or a line of campervans. Be patient.
- One-way bridges, winding routes and unsealed gravel roads all require a more cautious driving approach.
- Carry tyre chains with you if you're travelling in alpine areas or over high passes during autumn and winter.
- If you stop for a photo, pull well over to the left and ensure your vehicle is not in the way of traffic.