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NEW ZEALAND'S SOUTH ISLAND

ROAD TRIPS

This edition written and researched by

**Brett Atkinson, Sarah Bennett,
Peter Dragicevich and Lee Slater**

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Reviews

In the Destinations section:

All reviews are ordered in our authors' preference, starting with their most preferred option. Additionally:

Sights are arranged in the geographic order that we suggest you visit them and, within this order, by author preference.

Eating and Sleeping reviews are ordered by price range (budget, midrange, top end) and, within these ranges, by author preference.

Map Legend

Routes

- Trip Route
- Trip Detour
- Linked Trip
- Walk Route
- Tollway
- Freeway
- Primary
- Secondary
- Tertiary
- Lane
- Unsealed Road
- Plaza/Mall
- Steps
- Tunnel
- Pedestrian
- Overpass
- Walk Track/Path

Boundaries

- International
- State/Province
- Cliff

Hydrography

- River/Creek
- Intermittent River
- Swamp/Mangrove
- Canal
- Water
- Dry/Salt/ Intermittent Lake
- Glacier

Highway Markers

- 1 Highway Marker

Trips

- 1 Trip Numbers
- 9 Trip Stop
- Walking tour
- Trip Detour

Population

- Capital (National)
- Capital (State/Province)
- City/Large Town
- Town/Village

Areas

- Beach
- Cemetery (Christian)
- Cemetery (Other)
- Park
- Forest
- Reservation
- Urban Area
- Sportsground

Transport

- Airport
- Cable Car/ Funicular
- Parking
- Train/Railway
- Tram

Symbols In This Book

- Top Tips
- Link Your Trips
- Tips from Locals
- Trip Detour
- History & Culture
- Family
- Food & Drink
- Outdoors
- Essential Photo
- Walking Tour
- Eating
- Sleeping

- Sights
- Beaches
- Activities
- Courses
- Tours
- Festivals & Events
- Sleeping
- Eating
- Drinking
- Entertainment
- Shopping
- Information & Transport

These symbols and abbreviations give vital information for each listing:

- Telephone number
- Opening hours
- Parking
- Nonsmoking
- Air-conditioning
- Internet access
- Wi-fi access
- Swimming pool
- Vegetarian selection
- English-language menu
- Family-friendly
- Pet-friendly
- Bus
- Ferry
- Tram
- Train
- apt apartments
- d double rooms
- dm dorm beds
- q quad rooms
- r rooms
- s single rooms
- ste suites
- tr triple rooms
- tw twin rooms

Note: Not all symbols displayed above appear on the maps in this book

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Road Trips

1

Sunshine & Wine, 5–7 Days

A seductive blend of wineries, alfresco dining and gentle leisure pursuits. (p17)

2

Kaikoura Coast, 3–4 Days

Enjoy wine tasting and whale-watching along the Pacific Coast. (p29)

3

Southern Alps Circuit, 12–14 Days

A seriously grand tour taking in sublime scenery and stacks of sights. (p37)

4

Milford Sound Majesty, 3–4 Days

Absorb magnificent lake, mountain and forest scenery en route to NZ's ultimate reveal. (p51)





Destinations

Marlborough & Nelson (p64)

Explore this fertile region to find sunshine, water, wine and whales.

Christchurch & Canterbury (p81)

An inspirational go-getting city leads to looming peaks in the Southern Alps.

Queenstown & Wanaka (p96)

Hit this adrenaline-addled destination for adventures, stunning scenery and world-class wine.

The West Coast (p108)

Powerful glaciers grind towards wild, windswept coasts.

Fiordland & Southland (p113)

This scenic wonderland thrills with majestic mountains, mighty fiords and turquoise lakes.



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 windscreen) or tyres, and insurance coverage is often invalidated on beaches and certain rough (4WD) unsealed roads. Always read the fine print and ask pertinent questions.

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.apexrentals.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 network of Department of Conservation (DOC) 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)

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 roadworks, 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.

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 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.

mended that you have a re-energising overnight stay in your city of arrival before getting behind the wheel on NZ roads.

➔ **DriveSafe** (www.drivesafe.org.nz) is an excellent online resource – published in English, French, German and Chinese – for international drivers on NZ roads.

DOC CAMPSITES & FREEDOM CAMPING

A great option for campervan travellers are the 250-plus vehicle-accessible 'Conservation Campsites' run by the Department of Conservation (www.doc.govt.nz). Fees range from free (basic toilets and fresh water) to \$15 per adult (flush toilets and showers). Pick up brochures detailing every campsite from DOC offices and i-SITES or see online.

New Zealand is so photogenic, it's often tempting to just pull off the road and camp for the night, but there are strict guidelines for 'freedom camping'. See www.camping.org.nz for more freedom-camping tips.

➔ Never assume it's OK to camp somewhere: always ask a local or check with the local i-SITE, DOC office or commercial camping ground.

➔ If you are freedom camping, treat the area with respect and do not leave any litter.

➔ If your chosen campsite doesn't have toilet facilities and neither does your campervan, it's illegal for you to sleep there (your campervan must also have an on-board grey-water storage system).

➔ Legislation allows for \$200 instant fines for camping in prohibited areas or improper disposal of waste (in cases where dumping waste could damage the environment, fees are up to \$10,000).

RADIO

New Zealand is well covered by radio, and national station networks can be listened to on different frequencies around the country. Check each network's website for the relevant frequency in various areas of the country.

Radio New Zealand National (www.radionz.co.nz/national) News-oriented station

Driving Problem-Buster

What should I do if my car breaks down? Call the service number of your car-hire company and a local garage will be contacted. If you're travelling in your own vehicle, join the New Zealand Automobile Association (www.aa.co.nz); they can attend to breakdowns day and night. Another option is Motoring 24-7 (www.roadside-assistance.co.nz).

What if I have an accident? Exchange basic information with the other party (name, insurance details, driving licence number). No discussion of liability needs to take place at the scene. It's a good idea to photograph the scene of the accident noting key details. Call the police (☎111) if necessary.

What should I do if I get stopped by the police? They will want to see your driving licence, and a valid form of ID if you are visiting from overseas. Breath testing is mandatory in NZ.

What if I can't find anywhere to stay? Try to book ahead during busy periods. Local i-SITES can often help with last-minute accommodation bookings.

Will I need to pay tolls in advance? New Zealand has three toll roads on the North Island: the Northern Gateway Toll Road north of Auckland, and the Tauranga Eastern Link Toll Road and the Takitimu Drive Toll Road, both in Tauranga. Tolls are specific to a vehicle's registration number and can be paid online at www.nzta.govt.nz or at Caltex and BP service stations. Tolls can be paid either prior to travel, or within five days of travelling on a specific toll road.

Cruising Cook Strait

On a clear day, sailing into Wellington Harbour, or into Picton in the Marlborough Sounds, is magical. Cook Strait can be rough, but the big ferries handle it well, and distractions include cafes, bars and cinemas. Booking online is easiest; sailings can usually be booked up to a couple of days in advance. Exceptions are during school and public holidays, and from late December to the end of January. There are two ferry options:

Bluebridge Ferries (☎04-471 6188, 0800 844 844; www.bluebridge.co.nz; 50 Waterloo Quay) Crossing takes 3½ hours; up to four sailings in each direction daily. Bluebridge is based at Waterloo Quay, opposite Wellington train station.

Interislander (☎04-498 3302, 0800 802 802; www.interislander.co.nz; Aotea Quay) Crossings take three hours, 10 minutes; up to five sailings in each direction daily. Interislander is about 2km northeast of Wellington's centre at Aotea Quay.

Car-hire companies allow you to pickup/drop off vehicles at ferry terminals. If you arrive outside business hours, arrangements can be made to collect your vehicle from the terminal car park. In some cases, it may suit the hire company for you to take your rental car with you on the ferry – eg for relocations etc – so ask them to advise what will be the best deal.

with excellent coverage of local issues, arts and culture.

Newstalk ZB (www.newstalkzb.co.nz) Talkback station where the issues of the day are discussed passionately.

Radio Sport (www.radiosport.co.nz) Understand the difference between the All Blacks, Black Caps and Silver Ferns (respectively NZ's national rugby, cricket and netball teams).

Hauraki (www.hauraki.co.nz) Iconic rock music station with a quintessentially irreverent Kiwi tone.

OUR WRITERS



BRETT ATKINSON

Born in Rotorua, and now resident in Auckland, Brett has been tripping around New Zealand for most of his life. He has ventured to sleepy harbours in Northland and negotiated coastal roads around Coromandel. Together with his wife, Carol, he's explored many countries independently behind the wheel of a car.



SARAH BENNETT

Sarah grew up in Marlborough, but her life-long love affair with Wellington has left her loyalties divided between North and South. What is constant is her obsession with NZ road trips, which keeps her and husband, Lee, on the road in their little campervan for around four months each year. Their mountain bikes always come with them, as do hiking boots, a hot-water bottle and the laptop (of course) because it's not always sunshine and wine.



PETER DRAGICEVICH

After nearly a decade working for off-shore publishing companies, Peter's life has come full circle, returning to his home city of Auckland. As Managing Editor of *Express* newspaper he spent much of the '90s writing about the local arts, club and bar scene. After dozens of Lonely Planet assignments, writing about New Zealand remains his favourite gig.



LEE SLATER

Lee embarked on his first NZ road trip just after moving there from the UK in 1999. What soon became blindingly obvious was the difference between the two country's roads. Swapping 20-mile traffic jams on multilaned highways for empty, winding roads that cut through some of the world's most impressive scenery has been a tough job. Upgrading from pup tent to campervan with his beau, Sarah Bennett, has softened the blow somewhat.

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