

51 Scenic Drives

New Zealand

A scenic landscape of a fjord in New Zealand, with steep mountains and a calm lake reflecting the sky and clouds. The water is still, creating a perfect mirror for the surrounding environment. The mountains are rugged and covered in green vegetation. The sky is a vibrant blue with scattered white clouds. The overall scene is peaceful and majestic.

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51 Must-See Scenic Highlights of New Zealand

New Zealand is a country known for its stunning scenery, lovely lakes and majestic mountains.



As the newest country on earth, much of New Zealand's landscapes have remained untouched and untamed, with natural beauty found around practically every corner.

Read on and discover the must-see scenic highlights of New Zealand and start planning the adventure of a lifetime today!

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North Island - Auckland



1. Rotorua's Blue and Green Lakes

The Rotorua region is comprised of 16 lakes, each boasting unique beauty and wonder. Many of the lakes are popular for fishing however it's the geothermal, volcanic activity that usually draws in the tourists.

Pass through the historic town of Matamata and you will uncover the world of the hobbits. The Mamuka district will also be a scenic highlight, with interesting volcanic terrain dominating the distant landscapes here.

Distance: 230 KM

2. Mission Bay

Just a short drive from Auckland city, Mission Bay is an ideal destination for those looking for a stunning beach, with rich history and an impressive array of trendy restaurants and cafes. Enjoy the pure white sand of the beach and its idyllic surroundings as you stroll along the turquoise water's edge and enjoy the sunshine and warmth of the sun.

Distance: 7.9 KM

3. New Plymouth

The drive from Auckland to New Plymouth will take you through some lovely scenic towns and the last stretch of coastline is sure to be a highlight. Upon arrival in New Plymouth discover a lovely seaside town that is overflowing with beautiful things to see and experience. Mount Taranaki is close by, and is a truly incredibly sight, especially at sunset.

Distance: 359 KM

4. Coromandel Peninsula

The drive from Auckland to the Coromandel Peninsula will take you past the Miranda Hot Springs and through the beautiful Coromandel Forest Park.

The Coromandel Peninsula is world renowned for its natural beauty and boasts many natural hideaways, pockets of pristine forest and stunning golden beaches.

Distance: 148 KM



Coromandel Peninsula



5. Lake Kawaupaka

Nestled on the edge of virtually untouched native forest, Lake Kawaupaka is a hidden paradise that boasts raw natural beauty at its finest. The drive here is relatively short with the highlight of course being the adventure through the native forest.

Distance: 36.6 KM

6. Lake Waikaremoana

The drive from Auckland to Lake Waikaremoana is a long one so be sure to make a stop-over in the beautiful Rotorua region to break up the drive.

Pass through the beautiful Te Urewera National Park and you will eventually reach this remarkable lake. The Great Walk here is a must here, and although the whole track can take up to 4 days, several parts of it should be attempted to experience the sheer spectacle of this awe-inspiring area.

Distance: 396 KM

7. Lake Taupo



Lake Taupo

As New Zealand's biggest lake, Lake Taupo is a must on any North Island adventure. Swim in the pristine waters, relax in the hot pools and enjoy a spot of hiking around the lake, all while enjoying the gorgeous natural scenery that surrounds you here. Set at the foot of some stunning mountains, the scenery here will take your breathe away and leave you awe inspired.

Distance: 278 KM

8. Lake Tarawera

Located near the beautiful Lake Rotorua, Lake Tarawera is the largest of a series of lakes that surround the volcanic Mount Tarawera. The lake is also positioned near some hot water beaches, and is a popular spot for trout fishing and water sports. The drive from Auckland is also a pleasant one, filled with lovely sights and the scenic beauty of the surrounding blue and green lakes of Rotorua.

Distance: 249 KM

9. Lake Rotomahana



Lake Rotomahana

This small lake is situated just east of Rotorua, immediately south-west of the dormant volcano, Mt Tarawera. It also lies within the Okataina caldera and the Pink and White Terraces, which were once considered the Eighth Wonder of the World and were the country's most popular tourist attraction in the 19th century.

Distance: 260 KM



10. Hokianga Harbour and The Kauri Coast

Home to untamed beaches that have barely seen the effects of human modification, the Hokianga Harbour is an essential place to visit for those seeking untouched beauty and unspoiled wilderness.

The harbour is visited by seals and dolphins and is the ideal destination to experience the coast at its best. The drive here is also pleasant and will take you up the very tip of the North Island, through some incredible natural scenery.

Distance: 332 KM

11. Te Urewera National Park

Described by many as remote, rugged and immense, Te Urewera National Park is one of New Zealand's most picturesque National Parks. Home to Lake Waikaremoana and Lake Waikareiti, this park boasts so much natural beauty it will be hard to know where to start.

Distance: 435 KM

12. East Cape

The East Cape is known as the first place in the world to see the sun. The cape is relatively isolated, with few harbours and mountainous, wild bush interior.

The road along the Cape is a windy one, boasting untouched wilderness and dramatic coastal escarpments. Dozens of freshwater creeks flow through the gorges that lie at the bottom of the mountains, making this a fantastic fishing destination.

Distance: 485 KM

13. Waitomo Caves

The inside of the Waitomo Caves is a sight that you will not soon forget. It is a truly remarkable experience that should be embarked on at least once in a lifetime.

The deep limestone shafts of the cave are decorated by the luminous glow of the worms, creating an atmosphere that simply can't be beat.

Distance: 193 KM



Wood crafted Mask

14. Waikato River

The Waikato River is the longest river in New Zealand, starting on the eastern slopes of Mt Ruapehu and running into the waters of Lake Taupo. The river's most visited section would have to be Huka Falls, which are undeniably among the country's most spectacular falls. Following the river will take you through some pleasant towns and cities, exposing you to the true diversity of this amazing country.

Distance: 83 KM



North Island - Wellington

15. Lake Wairarapa

The drive from Wellington to Lake Wairarapa will take you through both Lower and Upper Hut, along with sections of the Tararua Forest Park.

The lake is positioned within the Rimutaka and Tararua Ranges, and is the third largest lake on the North Island. The surrounding land is of the wetland variety and is ideal for bird watching.

Distance: 76 KM

16. Mount Taranaki



Mount Taranaki

The drive from Wellington to Mount Taranaki is mostly a coastal one, and the town of Wanganui is a must stop for tired and weary travelers.

Mt Taranaki is one of those standout mountains that are usually found on touristic postcards. Its prominence adds to its scenic appeal, and it's often snow capped tip makes it one of New Zealand's most beautiful.

Distance: 331 KM

17. Lake Kohangapiripiri

Only just around the corner from Wellington, Lake Kohangapiripiri is positioned within Fitzroy Bay and is home to a vast array of unspoiled wetlands.

The region supports a diverse group of native plants, fish and birds, who rely on the untouched nature of these wetlands for their survival.

Distance: 16.3 KM

18. Lake Kohangatera

Drive through Lower Hut and Sorrento Bay and along the edges of the Rimutaka Forest Park and you will eventually come to the beautiful Lake Kohangatera, another of the freshwater lakes in the Fitzroy Bay area.

Although no fishing is allowed here, the lake is a nice place to absorb the divine scenic surrounds.

Distance: 36.3 KM

19. Mount Tongariro



Mount Tongariro

Following the SH 1 route, this drive will take you through some of New Zealand's most historic and beautiful towns.

Nestled on the edge of the Tongariro National Park, Mount Tongariro is a volcanic complex dominating the central North Island landscape. The mountain is particularly beautiful during the winter months, completely carpeted in snow and rising prominently almost 2000 metres above sea level.

Distance: 332 KM

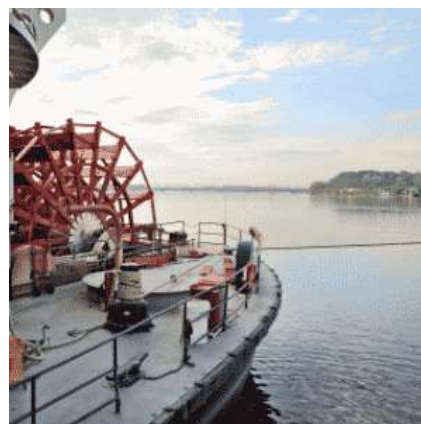


20. Whanganui River

The Whanganui River is one of the North Island's most prominent rivers, spanning a length of 290 kilometres.

The river rises to the northern slopes of Mount Tongariro and close to Lake Rotoaira, with many historic settlements found along its banks and an array of splendid things to see and do.

Distance: 237 KM



Whanganui River

21. Mt Ruapehu

During the winter months in New Zealand, there really is only one destination the crowds flock to. Mt Ruapehu is known as the country's premier ski destination, but it also offers some scenic delights as well.

The drive through the mountainous terrain will be one of sheer beauty and intrigue. Drive through the clouds as you uncover a whole new world of white.

Distance: 305 KM

South Island - Christchurch

22. Queen Charlotte Sound



Queen Charlotte Sound

Journey north up the coast of the South Island, passing some spectacular coastal scenery and passing through wonderful towns like Kaikoura, Blenheim and Picton, until you reach the superb Queen Charlotte Sound. Located within the Marlborough Sounds region, Queen Charlotte is characterised by deep river valleys, majestic mountain terrain and stunning natural forest.

Distance: 407 KM

23. Lake Tekapo

The drive from Christchurch to Lake Tekapo will take you through some great towns like Ashburton, Geraldine and Fairlie and past some truly remarkable scenery. Lake Tekapo itself is regarded as a home to "legendary landscapes, luminous lights" and is nestled in the centre of the South Island. Bask in the shadows of the glorious surrounding mountains or under the clear sky of stars at night.

Distance: 227 KM





24. Lake Ellesmere

The drive to this stunning lake from Christchurch is a small one and perfect for an afternoon adventure. Lake Ellesmere is located in the Canterbury region, just off the Pacific Ocean, and is a relatively large lake, with many water sports a popular past time here.

Distance: 57 KM

25. Punakaiki

This driving trek will take you across the width of the South Island, through the scenic Arthur's Pass National Park and many other hidden pockets of forest. Punakaiki is a lovely, scenic town on the west coast and is perhaps most popular as the home of the Pancake Rocks; a famous set of vertical blowholes that delight tourists all year round.

Distance: 287 KM



Punakaiki

26. Aoraki Mount Cook

The drive from Christchurch to the Aoraki/ Mount Cook National Park will take you past two of the country's most spectacular lakes; Lake Tekapo and Lake Pukaki. Mount Cook is New Zealand's tallest mountain and is a must-visit on any trip to the South Island. Nestled within the Southern Alps, the surrounding glaciers create a truly remarkable landscape and perhaps one of the most scenic sights in the country.

Distance: 330 KM



Aoraki Mount Cook



Kaikoura Peninsula

27. Kaikoura Peninsula

Venture up the rugged east coast of the South Island until you reach the scenic area of Kaikoura. Lying in the shadows of a handful of majestic mountains, Kaikoura offers a unique combination of alpine and ocean scenery and is perhaps most popular for its whale watching and dolphin swimming.

Distance: 185 KM

28. Arthur's Pass

The magnificent Arthur's Pass National Park is one of New Zealand's most scenic areas and is home to a wonderful array of mountain peaks.

Trek through the meandering valleys and marvel at the majesty of the peaks as you embark on one of the many walks that are sprinkled throughout this park.

Distance: 146 KM



29. Abel Tasman Coast

The drive to the Abel Tasman National Park is a long one, but it is full of incredible scenery including the Lake Summer Forest Park, Victoria Forest Park and the Nelson Lakes National Park. The Abel Tasman Coast is home to a fantastic coastal track that extends for 52 kilometres on which hikers should be prepared to be exposed to rugged coastal scenery and lush natural bush land.

Distance: 489 KM



Abel Tasman Coast

30. Lake Matheson

Pass through the beautiful Arthur's Pass National Park and travel along the west coast until you reach the Westland Tai Poutini National Park. Lake Matheson is positioned right on the edge of this stunning National Park and boasts a unique and untouched beauty that will simply take your breath away.

Distance: 410 KM



Lake Matheson

31. Picton

Drive up the rugged east coast of the South Island, passing through the coastal towns of Cheviot, Kaikoura and Blenheim and you will eventually come to the idyllic settlement of Picton. Part of the Marlborough Sounds region, Picton is a charming little seaside village situated at the head of the Queen Charlotte Sound and nestled beneath the shadow of beautiful mountain ranges.

Distance: 338 KM



Picton

32. Lake Pearson

Pass through rugged landscapes and unforgettable National Parks on the road to Lake Pearson. Once you arrive you will be met with a magnificent lake that is ideal for fishing or simply taking some landscape photos of.

Distance: 113 KM



33. Nelson Lakes National Park

The Nelson Lakes National Park is comprised of stunning mountain scenery and forested valleys, with spectacular glaciers the undeniable highlight of the winter season.

Nestled within the Southern Alps, the park also boasts some spectacular lakes, including Lake Rotoiti and Lake Rotorua, which are stunningly attractive all year round.

Distance: 250 KM

34. Farewell Spit

Although it is closer to the city of Wellington, Christchurch is the nearest major city on the South Island. This narrow sand spit is located at the very northern tip of the South Island and is the longest sand spit in New Zealand. This is truly a place of untouched beauty and will make you feel like you are on the edge of the world.

Distance: 527 KM

South Island – Queenstown

35. Franz Josef Glacier

This stunning glacier is widely regarded by many as the gem of the West Coast glaciers. Take a guided tour and discover the sheer beauty of the glacier world. The glacier extends from its origins high in the Southern Alps into the lush rainforests of the Westland's National Park, and boasts some of the most dramatic scenery in the country.

Distance: 353 KM



Franz Josef Glacier

36. Lake Ohau

The drive from Queenstown to Lake Ohau will take you past the beautiful Lake Dunstan and through some of New Zealand's most untouched wilderness. Lake Ohau is nestled amongst stunning mountain ranges and is a stunning deep blue. The scenery will simply take your breath away leaving you overwhelmed at the sheer glory and charm of it.

Distance: 203 KM

37. Lake Pukaki



Lake Pukaki

Nestled at the foot of gorgeous snow capped mountains that reach majestically into the sky, Lake Pukaki paints a picture that only dreams are made of. The clear turquoise waters contrast beautifully with the vivid mountain scenery, and create a landscape that needs to be captured and kept close to the heart for eternity.

Distance: 208 KM



38. Lake Hawea

The mountains that reflect off this lake are essentially what give this lake its raw beauty. The waters are as clear as clear can be and hiking around the lake's edge will expose you to such a remarkable beauty that you may find it difficult to leave.

Distance: 91 KM

39. Lake Manapouri

Lake Manapouri is often described as the "loveliest" of all the lakes, boasting an array of 33 small islands. It is surrounded by the majestic Cathedral Mountain range and is speckled with lovely white sandy beaches.

The drive to this glorious region will take you along the banks of stunning lakes, through some fantastic historic towns and to the outer reaches of the wonderful Fiordland National Park.

Distance: 172 KM

40. Lake Wakatipu

Lake Wakatipu lies on the edge of the city of Queenstown and is one of New Zealand's largest. The Remarkables Mountain range lies on the southeastern edge of the lake, accompanied with other numerous mountains that add to the scenic beauty that this place is so well known for. Adventure tourism is also a popular past time here with ski fields, paragliding, bungee jumping and tramping tracks a plenty.

Distance: 9.6 KM



Lake Wakatipu

41. Lake Te Anau

The drive to the famous Lake Te Anau will take you past dramatic mountain scenery and along the edge of the stunning Fiordland National Park.

Lake Te Anau is New Zealand's second largest lake and is surrounded by the striking mountains of the Fiordland National Park. It is also the starting point for the two New Zealand Great Walks, which each start at opposite ends of the lake.

Distance: 189 KM



Lake Te Anau



42. Lake Hauroko

Lake Hauroko is New Zealand's deepest lake and spans for an impressive 40 kilometres. Surrounded by the charming appeals of native forest and striking mountains, this beautiful lake is the perfect place to escape the crowds.

The drive here is a bit of lonely one, and one on which you will experience the sheer wilderness of New Zealand. However, it is scenic and a truly incredible experience if you are wishing to escape the hustle and bustle of city life.

Distance: 217 KM

43. Otago Peninsula

The Otago Peninsula boasts dramatic escarpments and dazzling coastal settings and is home to an abundance of magnificent world-famous wildlife. Gorgeous headlands dominate the landscapes here and from them, provide spectacular coastal views of this remarkable peninsula.

The drive from Queenstown is a relatively long one so you can break it up along the way by making an overnight stop in one of the many quaint and historic towns speckled along the way.

Distance: 300 KM



Yellow Eyed Penguin

44. Milford Sound

The Fiordland National Park is the undeniable highlight of the South Island, and no area of it is perhaps more beautiful, or more well known than Milford Sound. Regarded by many as the "Eighth Wonder of the World", Milford Sound boasts incredible Fjords, picturesque lakes and majestic mountains that reflect off the water's surface in a way that captures the eye in such a distracting way, you will never want to leave.

Distance: 286 KM



Milford Sound



45. Lake Wanaka



Lake Wanaka

The drive from Queenstown to Lake Wanaka may be a short one, taking a little over an hour, but it will be one filled with scenic beauty and a destination that is sure to inspire awe. This lake is particularly beautiful in autumn, when pastel colours cover the banks of the lake with a thick carpet, creating a gorgeous setting.

Distance: 68 KM

46. Caitlin's Coast

Caitlin's Coast is often described as the hidden gem of New Zealand and is an area of great contrasts. Boasting magnificent stretches of coastline, glorious headlands, hidden coves, sandy bays, inland rolling hills, lush pockets of rainforest and roaring waterfalls, this is a dream come true in terms of amazing sights to see.

Distance: 283 KM

47. Kingston

This small town is situated at the Southern end of Lake Wakatipu and is the perfect destination to soak up the incredible scenery around these parts. The road to Kingston winds between the lake and The Remarkables, creating a scenic drive that encapsulates the essence of this beautiful area.

Distance: 47 KM

48. Lake Gunn

Situated within beautiful National Park settings, Lake Gunn is nestled right on the edge of Fiordland, between Lake Te Anau and Milford Sound. The lake is surrounded by native bush and other small pleasant lakes and the drive to get here will be much the same, taking you past some of the South Island's most spectacular scenery.

Distance: 247 KM

49. Mount Aspiring National Park



Mount Aspiring National Park

Mount Aspiring is New Zealand's highest peak and is positioned in a land flowing with mountains, glaciers, river valleys and alpine lakes.

Straddling the great Southern Alps, the drive here will also take you past Lake Wanaka and Lake Hawea, exposing your eyes to gorgeous views from every angle.

Distance: 130 KM



50. Doubtful Sound



Doubtful Sound

Much like Milford Sound, Doubtful Sound is a largely imposing fjord that boasts natural beauty in every twist and turn.

Boasting spectacular waterfalls and gorgeous deep coves, this fjord may be more difficult to access than Milford, but the trek is well worth it.

Distance: 200 KM Approx

51. The Famous Milford Road



The Famous Milford Road

No road encompasses the scenic beauty of New Zealand quite like Milford Road.

Running through a section of the Fiordland National Park, this road passes through the Southern Alps, the Eglinton Valley, Hollyford Valley, Homer Tunnel and Cleddau Valley.

Regarded as the most scenic highway in New Zealand, highlights of the road include the Mirror Lakes, the Avenue of Disappearing Mountain, Mitre Peak and not to mention a vast collection of striking mountains and valleys that add to this area's wide appeal.

Distance: 171 KM (to starting point)

