

New Zealand Family Vacation ★ 4.71 32 Reviews

New Zealand Family Vacation

13 Days

14 People Max



Let us take care of the details, and enjoy a hassle-free New Zealand Family Vacation.

Explore incredible landscapes of the South Island of New Zealand as a family, from Christchurch to Queenstown and back again, on our 13-day New Zealand Family vacation. Along with two incredible guides who take care of every last detail, you'll be amazed by the new challenges and activities your family will accomplish together. From jet-boat rides on the Rakaia Gorge to staying overnight in Mt Aspiring National Park and visiting a high country sheep station near Aoraki Mt Cook National Park, you'll step away from the busy modern world and into the giant playground of mother nature. You won't have to worry about where to stay, what to eat, navigating the mountain roads or deciding what to do each day - we'll take care of it all for you. Enjoy a family vacation, without a worry in the world, on our New Zealand Family Adventure.

Trip Highlights

Plus ... - Queenstown Family rafting trip

Plus ... - Kiwi viewing

Plus ... - Rakaia Gorge Jet boat

Plus ... - High country sheep station

Kayaking - Lake Mapourika

Hiking - Franz Josef Glacier

Hiking - Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park

Hiking - Option: Hike Mt Aspiring National Park

Hiking - Option: Explore Wanaka

Hiking - West Coast trails

Pick Your Multi-Day Option!

Option A: Mt Aspiring Hut

The Mt. Aspiring Hut option is designed for those that would like to experience a true wilderness area. If your family likes the idea of staying in a rustic mountain hut this might be the option for you! We'll be carrying everything we need in with us in large backpacks. While your guides carry the lion's share of the load, you'll still need to carry your own gear (sleeping bag, dry clothes and some toiletries) and a portion of the group's food. Any excess gear is stored securely in our vehicle for you.

Option B: Lake Wanaka

The Lake Wanaka option is designed for those that want to have some time out with the family with all the creature comforts of home. You'll be staying in the charming country town of Wanaka where there are plenty of things to do, from hiring some mountain bikes to taking a thrilling jet boat ride!

Our Active Adventures Assurance

We value loyalty, and appreciate that it goes both ways. So when you book with us we'll make a few assurances to you so you can book with complete confidence, no matter what's happening in your life (or the world).



COVID-Ready Certified: Safe Travel for our Guests Travelling Overseas

Active Adventures has received the World Travel and Tourism Council's Safe Travels stamp, which guarantees you that we'll follow all ATTA and WTTC health and safety guidelines on all our trips. See how our small group, off-the-beaten-track adventures are perfect to start exploring again.

New Zealand Family Vacation ~ Itinerary

DAY 1

Arrive, wildlife reserve and kiwi viewing

Most people leave the Northern Hemisphere on a Sunday evening, arriving in Auckland early Tuesday morning. You'll lose a day crossing the dateline – but you get it back on the way home! It's a short flight from Auckland to Christchurch in the South Island and we'll meet your family either in central Christchurch or at the airport. We start with a great introduction to the wildlife of a country isolated for over 80 million years! Willowbank Wildlife Reserve is unique in that you can enter a lot of the animal enclosures and even pet some of the more friendly critters! You can see tuatara, the elusive kiwi, wallabies (small kangaroos introduced from Australia), and our cheeky mountain parrot, the kea.

Methven Lodge, Methven (Lunch, Dinner)

DAY 2

Jet boat Rakaia Gorge, hike Peel Forest and star-gazing

After a hearty breakfast and relaxed start to the morning, we have an adventure planned that will knock your socks off – a fun jet boat ride through the winding Rakaia Gorge! Jet boats were originally invented by New Zealander Bill Hamilton to navigate our narrow, shallow rivers. You'll be jetting down rapids, braided river sections and through shallow water just six inches deep in places. This thrilling, yet safe activity is suitable for the whole family. Then we'll head to Peel Forest for a hike amongst ancient podocarp trees and many varieties of ferns. Many of New Zealand's athletes, including our famous rugby team, the All Blacks, wear the fern as a national symbol. After lunch, we'll travel inland to Aoraki/Mt. Cook, New Zealand's highest mountain, and Lake Pukaki – an unreal turquoise-blue-coloured glacial lake. Tonight, the wide open spaces, regular clear evenings and lack of artificial light provide us with the perfect opportunity to gaze at the Southern Hemisphere's constellations, including the southern cross.

Aoraki Mt Cook Alpine Lodge, Mt Cook Village (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)

Hiking: 1 kilometer (0.6 miles), 1-2 hours, elevation +/- 30 meters (98 feet)

DAY 3

Hike Aoraki Mt Cook National Park

We have a few hikes to choose from in this spectacular national park and our favorite is the stunning day hike (weather permitting) to the main ridge above Mueller Glacier. It's a bit of a hike, though it's a real achievement for the whole family to share and you'll remember the view of the Mueller Glacier and the surrounding peaks of the Southern Alps forever! Of course, we always have plenty of options, so there are easier hikes available for you too, such as an impressive hike up the Hooker Valley to a glacial lake (complete with icebergs!) at the base of Hooker Glacier.

Aoraki Mt Cook Alpine Lodge, Mt Cook Village (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)

Hiking: Mueller Ridge Hike : 7.2 kilometers (4.4 miles), 5-6 hours, elevation +975 meters (3,200 feet)

Hiking: OR Hooker Valley Hike : 9 kilometers (5.6 miles), 3-4 hours, elevation +/- 100 meters (328 feet)

DAY 4

Explore Queenstown

Today we'll head through the mountains to Queenstown. We'll stop along the way for some of the best ice cream in the whole of New Zealand – you'll soon find out why! We'll then continue on through fruit orchards and vineyards before arriving in Queenstown. After lunch, we have options including a hike to the historic Sam Summers hut or even a game of frisbee golf in the Queenstown Botanical Gardens.

Scenic Suites Apartments, Queenstown (Breakfast, Lunch)

Hiking: 7.4 kilometers (4.6 miles), 2-3 hours, elevation +/- 355 meters (1,165 feet)

DAY 5

Family rafting near Queenstown, explore Arrowtown

Excitement levels will be high this morning, as we head off for a family rafting trip in Skippers Canyon. Set in a deep, beautiful, rose-lined schist gorge, it's a spectacular float trip – perfect for the whole family. This trip operates year-round, with minor changes during the New Zealand winter. From June to September, rather than rafting, we take a lift on the gondola up Bob's Peak for stunning views over the region and thrilling downhill rides on the luge. After lunch, we'll explore an old Chinese goldmining settlement in the nearby historic village of Arrowtown. Chinese immigrants traveled to New Zealand during the 1800s and like many New Zealand pioneering stories, theirs is one of adversity and adaptation. You can try your hand at gold panning – in 2006 a man found a gold nugget worth \$15,000 in this area, so you never know your luck!

Scenic Suites Apartments, Queenstown (Breakfast, Lunch)

Hiking: 0.4 kilometer (0.2 mile), 0.5-1 hour

DAY 6

Free day in Queenstown

All the comforts of civilization are packed into this tiny resort town: restaurants galore, sidewalk cafés, stylish lounge bars, day spas, and boutiques. There's plenty of family entertainment here too: luge rides, a gondola, lakeside playgrounds, mini golf and a cinema. There are also some more adventurous optional activities such as horse trekking, kayaking, fishing, winery tours, hang gliding, mountain biking, bungee jumping, jet boating and skydiving as well as some great hiking opportunities. Or you can just soak up the atmosphere and lounge about reading a book. Your guides will happily share their favorite haunts and point you in the right direction for your free day today. A great winter option (June to September) is to spend a couple of days skiing or snowboarding at one of four local ski areas: Coronet Peak, The Remarkables, Cardrona or Treble Cone. Transport, lift pass and equipment rental is about US\$150 a day for an adult, slightly less for children, which we will happily organise for you.

Scenic Suites Apartments, Queenstown

DAY 7

Start Of Multi-Day Options

This morning we'll leave Queenstown and head over the Crown Range to Wanaka – a small alpine village on the shores of Lake Wanaka. After lunch, we head off for our various activities.

DAY 7 OPTION A

Mt Aspiring Hut: Hike and overnight in Mt Aspiring National Park

After leaving Wanaka, we'll venture up the Matukituki Valley and hike two to three hours into Mt. Aspiring National Park to reach our home for the evening – a spacious mountain hut nestled in a valley in the middle of nowhere. The track meanders past majestic peaks, fresh mountain streams, and natural beech forest. You'll be carrying a sleeping bag, a few spare clothes, and some food, so your pack won't weigh much more than a regular day pack. The scenery is off the charts with Mt. Aspiring rising 3033 meters (9951 feet) into the blue sky. It's amazing how far you'll feel from civilization after this relatively short walk! Tonight your guide will whip up dinner in the backcountry kitchen while you and the kids relax by the fire.

Mt Aspiring Hut, Mt Aspiring National Park (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)

Hiking: 9 kilometers (5.6 miles), 3-5 hours, elevation + 60 meters (197 feet)

DAY 7 OPTION B

Lake Wanaka: Explore Wanaka

Lake Wanaka is the fourth largest lake in New Zealand and is surrounded by an amphitheater of mountains. There are great walking trails and biking tracks in the area, as well as jet boating and kayaking. It's well worth a visit to the famed Warbirds and Wheels Museum, which is home to an amazing collection of old fighter planes and classic cars. Whether you're skipping stones on the lake's edge or relaxing by the fire at the lodge, Wanaka is a great spot to rediscover simple pleasures.

Edgewater Resort, Wanaka (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)

DAY 8 OPTION A

Mt Aspiring Hut: Hike to trailhead, explore Puzzling World

We have a leisurely start today, enjoying breakfast and a cuppa while admiring the view, before hiking back to the trailhead. Along the way, we might encounter the cheeky kea again – this time in its natural habitat – they're really inquisitive and like to get pretty close at times! After regrouping in Wanaka, we'll head to Puzzling World to explore over a mile of passageways in one of the world's largest modern mazes. Kids of all ages really enjoy trying to beat our wily guides through the labyrinth! Tonight we'll mingle with the 'coasters' in the tiny township of Haast, exchanging tales of our adventures at the local restaurant in front of a roaring fire.

World Heritage Hotel, Haast (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)

Hiking: 9 kilometers (5.6 miles), 3-5 hours, elevation - 60 meters (197 feet)

DAY 8 OPTION B

Lake Wanaka: Explore Puzzling World

After a relaxed breakfast, you'll have the morning to yourselves before meeting up with the rest of the group. After regrouping in Wanaka, we'll head to Puzzling World to explore over a mile of passageways in one of the world's largest modern mazes. Kids of all ages really enjoy trying to beat our wily guides through the labyrinth! Tonight we'll mingle with the 'coasters' in the tiny township of Haast, exchanging tales of our adventures at the local restaurant in front of a roaring fire.

World Heritage Hotel, Haast (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)

DAY 9

Explore West Coast forests and beaches, discover glowworms

This morning, we'll journey up the wild West Coast, stopping on a deserted beach to stretch our legs and keep an eye out for friendly dolphins passing by. A little further north takes us to Lake Matheson for a short walk, where you'll be rewarded with awesome vistas of the Southern Alps. After settling into our accommodation in Franz Josef, we can head out after dark with flashlights for a short night walk to search for the native glowworm while listening to some of New Zealand's nocturnal birdlife, such as the morepork owl.

Rainforest Retreat, Franz Josef (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)

Hiking: 2.8 kilometers (1.7 miles), 1-2 hours, elevation +/- 10 meters (33 feet)

DAY 10

Kayak Lake Mapourika, hike to Franz Josef Glacier

It's an early start this morning for our kayaking trip on Lake Mapourika, a tranquil ancient lake formed during the last ice age. This is an awesome activity, run by specialist kayak outfitters, and it's equally suitable for beginners and experts alike. With some 140 glaciers making their way down from the Southern Alps, this area is fittingly known as glacier country. Few sights equal the spectacle of two of these giant frozen rivers (Franz Josef and Fox Glaciers) imperceptibly grinding their way down through the temperate rainforest to just 250 meters (820 feet) above sea level. Our hike will take us into the Waiho River Valley and offer views of the terminal face of the Franz Josef Glacier. Afterwards we'll return to Franz Josef for the night.

Rainforest Retreat, Franz Josef (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)

Kayaking: 2-3 hours

Hiking: 4.8 kilometers (3 miles), 2-3 hours, elevation +/- 20 meters (66 feet)

DAY 11

Explore West Coast Treetop Walk, visit Hokitika

Today we'll head further up the coast to experience the West Coast Treetop Walk, an adventure among giants. This walk will take you up above the forest floor, allowing you to pass through an ancient canopy of rimu and kamahi trees. We'll then continue to Hokitika, where you can check out the local art galleries and pounamu carving workshops (pounamu is Maori for jade). The beach here is a great place for playing games or making sculptures out of driftwood. Then we'll head back through to Arthur's Pass, the highest pass over the Southern Alps, to settle in for the night.

Arthur's Pass Motel, Arthur's Pass (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)

Hiking: 2-3 hours

DAY 12

Hike Castle Hill Basin

Today, after breakfast, we'll head off to check out the Conservation Centre in Arthur's Pass and learn about the Kea, the only true alpine parrot in the world! Afterward, we're off to the ultimate hide-and-seek spot, Castle Hill. It's a bit of a climb to the top, but it's worth every step as we arrive at an eerie limestone landscape where much of the movie 'Narnia – the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe' was filmed. During a visit a few years ago, the Dalai Lama called this natural labyrinth 'the spiritual center of the universe'!

Darfield Motels (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)

Hiking: 3 kilometers (2 miles), 1-2 hours, elevation +/- 50 meters (164 feet)

DAY 13

Farm show, depart for home

This is the last day of your trip, and we'll head to the small farming community of Springfield to check out a working New Zealand high-country sheep farm. Here we'll watch highly trained farm dogs rounding up stock and see a sheep shearing demonstration. All the kids (young and old!) will have the chance to join in and give sheep shearing a go. Then it's on to Christchurch, where we'll farewell our family and wave you off feeling refreshed, invigorated, and with lasting memories of the adventures, great food, stories, laughs and fun times you'll have had with us in New Zealand!

No Accommodation (Breakfast, Lunch)

Useful Info

Is tipping expected in New Zealand?

Tipping is neither required nor routinely expected in New Zealand, but it is appropriate for very good service. In New Zealand you don't usually tip in restaurants, or if you take a taxi, or get a haircut. Many of our guests do choose to tip our guides and we recommend USD\$20 per day, per guest, per guide. You are welcome to tip an equivalent amount in the local currency. There are plenty of ATM's and banks in the larger towns of New Zealand.

What additional activities are on offer in New Zealand?

You'll be participating in loads of amazing activities during your tour, however, you may be wondering what other cool stuff you can do before or after your trip to make the most of your time in New Zealand.

We've teamed up with the good folk at Everything Travel and you're welcome to book any pre or post-trip 'things to do' directly with them.

For trips starting and/or ending in the South Island, check out things to do before and/or after your trip [here](#).

For trips starting and/or ending in North Island, check out things to do before and/or after your trip [here](#).

Make sure any activities you book are before or after your trip only as your tour itself is already filled to the brim with the adventures we offer!

Where does the trip start?

On the first morning of the trip, our two pick-up locations are [Merivale Manor](#) at 10:30am or the Christchurch airport (CHC) in front of the Help Desk (near door 7) at 11am. You are welcome to book your pre-trip stay at this hotel directly or any other hotel in Christchurch, though you must make your own way to one of the two pick-up points at the pre-designated times.

Where does the trip end?

Your trip ends with a drop-off at either the Christchurch Airport (CHC) in time for flights below or anywhere in Central Christchurch around 3pm.

What flights would you recommend?

Arrival: We recommend arriving in Christchurch by 10am. Many guests like to arrive a day or two early to accommodate potential flight delays and/or explore the city prior to your trip start.

Departure: Flying out on the last day of the trip, we recommend departing from Christchurch after 4pm. Earlier flight times will require a separate transfer booked at your own expense.

How fit do I need to be?

As an [Activity Level 1-2](#) trip, you'll need a good level of fitness for this trip though you'll be hiking on gentle to moderate trails and can still enjoy the scenery and other fun activities! Typically, hikes range between two and four hours to complete, more, or less hiking is available too.

Please head to our [Fitness Guide](#) for great tips on how to prepare along with a workout plan!

What accommodations do we stay at on this trip?

We have selected the accommodation on your trip for its stunning setting, unique character or adventuresome feel - our trips are not designed as a tour of the fanciest hotels in New Zealand. We prefer to stay in quaint, comfortable B&B's, lodges and apartments, some of which have private bathrooms and some shared bathrooms. Rooming on this trip is usually on a two people per bedroom basis, with families being put either in two bedroom units or in adjoining hotel rooms. Things are a little more rustic at Makarora or Mt. Aspiring Hut if you choose that option, and it's a true kiwi experience!

If you've selected a single supplement for your trip, the Mt Aspiring overnight hike is not included as no single rooms are available in the huts, and the single supplement price takes this into account.

While there are laundry facilities at most locations, they may not be convenient or there may only be one machine to service your entire group. We recommend bringing enough clothing to only have to do laundry a couple of times during your trip. The best time will be during your three night stay in Queenstown (during your free day).

Tell me about the overnight hike to Mt Aspiring Hut?

The Mt. Aspiring National Park option is designed for those that would like to experience a true wilderness area. If your family likes the idea of staying in a rustic mountain hut this might be the option for you! We'll be carrying everything we need in with us in large backpacks. While your guides carry the lion's share of the load, you'll still need to carry your own gear (sleeping bag, dry clothes and some toiletries) and a portion of the group's food. Any excess gear is stored securely in our vehicle for you.

It's a two or three hour hike (10 kilometres / 6 miles) along the valley floor with great views of the towering mountains and glaciers in the background. Our goal is to reach Mt. Aspiring Hut, our humble home for the night. Here you'll play cards or read books while we whip up dinner - mountain style! The following day we'll return the way we came, with an extra two hour detour up the Rob Roy Valley to spectacular views of the glacier, and possibly even encounter our native alpine parrot, the Kea!

The hut we stay in is a Department of Conservation (DOC) owned mountain hut. These unique places are open to the public and are warm, dry and comfortable. They're located in very remote areas (with amazing scenery) however they don't have private rooms, electricity, hot water, phones or flushing toilets - though the view from the outhouse is second to none! It's not possible to book these huts, you'll meet and share the experience with other adventurers.

Tell me about the overnight at Lake Wanaka?

The Lake Wanaka option is designed for those that want to have some time out with the family with all the creature comforts of home. You'll be staying in the charming country town of Wanaka where there are plenty of things to do, from hiring some mountain bikes to taking a thrilling jet boat ride! You could also visit the Fighter Pilots museum, watch a movie at the unique Cinema Paradiso or explore some of the many shops, cafes and walking tracks. You'll most likely be staying at the comfortable Lake Wanaka Hotel, which is a short stroll into town and the lakefront.

How much luggage can I bring on this trip?

You are allowed one piece of luggage on your trip, plus a daypack. Your main piece of luggage should not exceed 50 pounds (23 kilograms) and can be anything from a duffle bag to a sports bag with wheels or a suitcase. You'll also want a good quality backpack sized 25-30 liters (2000 cubic inches) to use throughout the days.

If you've chosen the Mt Aspiring option, you'll also require a good quality trekking pack with well-fitting shoulder and waist straps. Your pack should be 60 litre size (3500 cubic inches), large enough to fit your sleeping bag inside along with all your overnight gear.

How do rooming arrangements work?

Trip prices are based on shared arrangements (typically two guests per room), unless otherwise stated. For solo travelers, we'll pair you with another person of the same gender to share rooms and if there's no one suitable to share with, there's no forced single supplement. However, if you specifically request your own rooms, you can opt to pay the single supplement. Solo travelers who book within 90 days of departure, where there are no other solo travelers willing to share, will be required to pay the single supplement.

For Family Vacation bookings, families consisting of four guests traveling with children aged 17 and under will be automatically assigned one shared room. However, the following alternative rooming allocations are available:

Families consisting of four guests with all children aged 13 and above are welcome to opt for additional rooms as per advertised double occupancy adult rates.

Families consisting of four guests with at least one child aged 12 and under are automatically assigned a shared room. However, families can opt to pay the adult rates for all guests in their family to have an additional room.

The same principles apply for families consisting of more than four guests.

Rooming preferences are subject to availability and must be communicated in writing at time of booking. Automatic assignments as per this policy will be applied in the absence of any specification provided by guests. Any request for additional rooms during trips will be at guests' own expense and subject to rates made available by the accommodation provider at the time. All minors (guests aged 17 and under) must be accompanied by at least one adult.

What is not included?

Flights to and from trip start/end points

15% NZ Goods and Services Tax (GST)

Pre/Post Accommodation

Optional extra activities

Travel insurance

Gratuities for your guides

Trekking packs and sleeping bags (if applicable)

General Trip Information

You can find details on recommended flights and fitness, as well as trip start and end in the 'Useful Information' section above.

Accommodation

You'll love the interesting places we've discovered over the years. You'll visit really spectacular and off-the-beaten-track locations and stay in comfortable bed and breakfasts, lodges, apartments and hotels for the most part. Keep in mind the most remote locations have limited accommodation options, but 5-star scenery!

Included

- Our own highly experienced guides, driver, and cook, with you from start to finish
- Industry-leading Guest-to-Guide ratio (averaging 6:1)
- Your own 'Travel Wallet', an online space with everything required for your adventure
- Our knowledgeable Customer Service Team to answer your queries - just a phone call, email or chat away
- Customer Service pre-trip phone calls to ensure you're 'trip ready'
- All accommodations for the duration of your trip
- All meals except where indicated in the itinerary
- Unlimited snacks to keep you fueled
- All activities outlined in the itinerary
- All necessary equipment (well-maintained and safe) for activities, including Hiking Poles
- All park and other entry fees
- Transportation in our air-conditioned vans - safe, clean, modern, and comfortable!

Itinerary Updates

We update our itineraries regularly, so please check our website for the most up-to-date itineraries and pricing. We make every effort to ensure itineraries are updated as necessary, though changes may occur without prior notice due to unforeseen circumstances.

Transportation

Since New Zealand isn't quite small enough to simply walk everywhere and still see all the highlights in a limited amount of time, we travel in fuel-efficient 20-seat Toyota Coasters and our guides make the journey enjoyable. They'll introduce you to some local tunes as well as provide interesting commentary, and we pass the time on the road in a fun, social way, with New Zealand's ever-changing scenery providing a feast for the eyes. Our focus, as always, is getting you out of the vehicle and into the scenery.

Excluded

- International/Domestic Flights to and from the meeting point
- 15% NZ Goods and Services Tax (GST)
- Optional extra activities
- Travel insurance
- Alcoholic beverages
- Gear on packing list (optional to rent some equipment)
- Gratuities for your guides at the end of your fabulous trip

Outdoor Experience

Our trips allow you to make the most of the New Zealand backcountry, whether you're relatively new to hiking or a seasoned trekker. Our highly trained and experienced guides will be at your side, safely guiding you to magnificent places that you wouldn't get to on your own. The challenges are there, if you're looking for them. All we ask is that you're energetic and in reasonable shape and we guarantee you'll have an incredible time. You don't need to have kayaked before to enjoy paddling on the water and you don't need to be a serious cyclist to enjoy most of the rides we do. In fact, we have so many options available that you don't need to paddle or ride at all if you'd rather hike or just laze around!

We hold all relevant government licenses and permits, have an impeccable safety record, and are certified by [OutdoorsMark](#), New Zealand's leading outdoor safety auditors. So, with all the research, logistics, safety and hospitality taken care of, you can focus on the most important thing - making the most of your adventure!