

Middle Earth Journeys

February 1 – 16, 2018
Detailed Itinerary

Day 1 & 2 February 1 & 2 - International Flight from Detroit to LAX and from LAX to Auckland.

Cross the International Dateline and lose 1 day.

Day 3 February 3 - Auckland

Transfer from airport to the hotel in Auckland. After settling in at our accommodations, you'll have the entire day at leisure to rest or to enjoy the "City of Sails" on your own. Take the optional Hop-on Hop-off Bus with a narrated commentary of 14 of Auckland's major sights. Some favorite activities are to visit the Sky Tower, New Zealand's highest man-made structure, Kelly Tarlton's Antarctic Encounter and Underwater World, take a sail in the harbor or visit the historical Auckland Museum.

Optional: Hop-On Hop-off Bus

Accommodations: Auckland Oaks Hotel (or similar)

Day 4 February 4 - Auckland to Rotorua

We depart Auckland for Rotorua. The first stop along the way in mid morning is Waitomo (wai meaning water, tomo meaning cave) where we visit the world famous Waitomo Caves. You will get the chance to journey underground on a subterranean adventure where you'll discover a labyrinth of limestone caves and formations. Look up and you'll see thousands of hardy little glowworms that are oblivious to the huge number of admirers they have been receiving over the past 100 years and they keep glowing to attract their food in the caves. Then we continue on to Rotorua, the place of fascinating Māori culture, hot springs, geysers and boiling mud pools.

Upon arrival in Rotorua, take the optional Great Sights tour to the city's top attractions. In the evening, take a journey to the Tamaki Maori Village. This unforgettable experience takes us to the most award-winning Maori culture attraction in New Zealand, a Maori village nestled in an ancient forest. The cultural evening of with music and entertainment ends with a traditional Maori *Hangi* feast cooked underground. Round trip transportation to the village included.

Optional: Rotorua Great Sights

Accommodations: IBIS Rotorua Hotel (or similar)

Day 5 February 5 - Rotorua

After breakfast, spend the morning at leisure. Perhaps choose to pamper yourself at the award-winning Polynesian Spa where you can choose from a variety of therapeutic mineral baths. In the afternoon, join the optional afternoon tour where you will experience the magical Middle-earth at Hobbiton.

Optional morning or evening: Polynesian Spa

Optional afternoon: Hobbiton Tour

Accommodations: IBIS Rotorua Hotel (or similar)

Day 6 February 6 - Rotorua to Wellington

In the morning depart by coach through the volcanic heart of the North Island to Wellington, New Zealand's harbor capital city. We pass Lake Taupo, New Zealand's largest lake before ascending up to the volcanic plateau with breathtaking views of Mount Ngauruhoe, Mount Tongariro, and Mount Ruapehu, stunning river gorges with towering viaducts, hidden valleys and lush farming landscapes.

Accommodations: IBIS Wellington Hotel (or similar)

Day 7 February 7 - Wellington

Nestled between a picturesque harbour and forest clad hills, Wellington is filled with museums, galleries, boutique shopping, trendy cafés and fine restaurants. Its compact size makes it easy to walk around and its proximity to the ocean and native forests makes it an ideal place to enjoy nature. Lonely Planet labeled Wellington "the coolest little capital in the world." It is home to the largest cultural attraction in New Zealand, Te Papa Museum which we tour in the morning. Next we take a ride on the Wellington Cable Car for scenic views of the city. The cars run from Lambton Quay to the top entrance of the Wellington Botanic Gardens. We take a relaxing walk through the gardens which feature a large Victorian-style glasshouse, the Begonia House, the Lady Norwood Rose Garden and the Treehouse Visitor Centre before returning to the city center. In the afternoon, take the Wellington Movie tour where you can discover the secrets of how the *Lord of the Rings Trilogy* were produced.

Optional: Wellington Movie Tour

Accommodations: IBIS Wellington Hotel (or similar)

Day 8 February 8 - Wellington to Picton to Nelson

In the morning we take the 3 hour Interislander ferry across the stunning Cook Strait to the seaside town of Picton in the South Island, through the magnificent Marlborough Sounds. Upon arriving in Picton, we have a brief lunch break, then embark on a scenic coach ride to Nelson in northwest region of the South Island known as the sunshine region of New Zealand, known for its sunny weather, sandy beaches, lakes, mountains and native forests.

Accommodations: Quality Inn Nelson (or similar)

Day 9 February 9- Nelson

Spend the entire day on your own enjoying Nelson's numerous art galleries, relaxing in the sun, sipping a wine from one of the local vineyards, or dining on the famous Nelson Bay scallops. Another wonderful choice is to take the optional tour to Abel Tasman National Park, known for its golden sandy beaches, sculptured granite cliffs, and world-famous Abel Tasman Coast Track.

Optional: Abel Tasman National Park Scenic Cruise and Hike

Accommodations: Quality Inn Nelson (or similar)

Day 10 February 10 - Nelson to Greymouth to Christchurch

This morning we depart by coach for Greymouth with a stop along the way for a spectacular walk along the trails at the famous Pancake Rocks and Blowholes. Looking like giant pancakes, the rock formations were formed 30 million years ago from minute fragments of dead marine creatures and plants that landed on the seabed below the surface. Gradually seismic action lifted the limestone above the seabed. Mildly acidic rain, wind and seawater sculpted the bizarre shapes. Then proceed by coach to Greymouth where we climb aboard the Tranzalpine Train for a rail trip of a lifetime, truly one of the world's most famous scenic train trips. From Greymouth, the train travels east through lush alpine beech rain forests of the South Island's west coast towards the Southern Alps, ascending through the Otira tunnel to the alpine village of Arthurs Pass. From Arthurs Pass the train slowly descends through spectacular gorges and river valleys of the Waimakariri River, crossing the Canterbury Plains to Christchurch. Shuttle picks us up from the train station and transports us to our hotel.

Accommodations: Hotel Carlton Mill (or similar)

Day 11 February 11 Christchurch

Today we will have the entire day to enjoy Christchurch, also known as "the garden city" and the South Island's largest city. In the morning we go Punting on the Avon River, then take the optional tour to the scenic town of Lyttleton including a gondola ride with spectacular views of the mountains and surrounding harbor.

Optional: Lyttleton Tour with Gondola Ride

The afternoon is at leisure. Christchurch and the vast Canterbury region have plenty to keep you busy, whether you're a shopaholic, wild adventurer or history buff.

Accommodations: Hotel Carlton Mill (or similar)

Day 12 February 12 Christchurch

Today we will have another entire day to enjoy Christchurch on your own or take the optional tour to Kaikoura, a quaint whale watching village where you will embark on the renowned Whale Watch Safari.

Optional: Whale Watch Kaikoura

Accommodations: Hotel Carlton Mill (or similar)

Day 13 February 13 Christchurch to Mount Cook to Queenstown

In the morning we depart Christchurch by bus for Queenstown, with a lunch stop-over at the Hermitage Hotel in Mount Cook, the tallest mountain in New Zealand that helped Sir Edmund Hillary to develop his climbing skills in preparation for the conquest of Everest. The Mt. Cook National Park (also known as Aoraki National Park) is alpine in the purest sense - with skyscraping peaks, glaciers and permanent snow fields; all set under a star-studded sky. After lunch, relax and take in the stunning views of Mount Cook or take a brief walk through the native forest trails before being transported to Queenstown with a photo stop at Lake Tekapo which gets its milky-turquoise color from the fine rock-flour (ground by glaciers) which is suspended in the water.

Accommodations: Oaks Queenstown Hotel (or similar)

Day 14 February 14 Queenstown to Milford Sound to Queenstown

Recently ranked as the world's most beautiful places, the Milford Sound is a must-do for those visiting the South Island. This included tour departs from our hotel in the early morning and stops at the picturesque Te Anau township on the lake before heading through the Homer Tunnel into Milford. Once there, you will go on an unforgettable two hour boat cruise through the sound exploring soaring peaks, towering waterfalls and New Zealand nature at its best checking out the most amazing scenery in New Zealand along the way. See incredible views of mirror lakes, mountains and cascading waterfalls on this one day trip. Enjoy a delicious buffet luncheon while taking in the breathtaking sights. Then it's back on the bus to take you back to the adventure capital.

Accommodations: Oaks Queenstown Hotel (or similar)

Day 15 February 15 Queenstown

Today we have the entire day to enjoy Queenstown, New Zealand's adventure capital. With a buzzing atmosphere and stunning scenery, you'll find there's no other place in the world quite like Queenstown. In the morning, take the thrilling optional Nomad Safari tour of Skippers Canyon where you will experience some of the most stunning scenery in the country. In the afternoon, consider the optional cruise on the vintage steamship, TSS Earnslaw to Walter Peak High Country Farm where you will have tea at the country estate and a tour of the farm before cruising back on the steamship. In the evening, take an included ride on the Skyline Gondola for breathtaking views across Queenstown and Lake Wakatipu, then delight in an included sumptuous farewell dinner at the Skyline Restaurant, one of the most iconic restaurants in the country.

Optional morning: Nomad Safari Tour of Skippers Canyon

Optional afternoon: Walter Peak Country Farm Cruise, Tour and High Tea

Accommodations: Oaks Queenstown Hotel (or similar)

Day 16 February 16 - Depart Queenstown for US or Optional Extension to Sydney, Australia

Spend the morning at leisure, shopping or taking in any of the exciting attractions of this wonderful resort town. After lunch, depart Queenstown for flight to Auckland and then board our international flight back to the US. Cross the international dateline and gain a day.

Inclusions:

- Standard accommodations
- All airport and rail transfers
- Transportation to destinations per itinerary on deluxe trains and motor coaches
- Services of Certified New Zealand Specialist Guide throughout tour
- World renowned Waitomo Cave Tour
- Wellington Cable Car and Botanic Garden Walk
- Award-winning TePapa Museum Tour
- 3 hour Interislander ferry ride between North and South Island
- Spectacular Pancake Rocks and Blowholes Walk
- World famous TranzAlpine Train Ride from Greymouth to Christchurch
- Mount Cook National Park – New Zealand's Highest Mountain
- Breathtaking Milford Sound Cruise (includes delicious buffet lunch and round trip transportation from Queenstown)
- Skyline Gondola Ride over Queenstown
- Farewell dinner at Skyline Gondola Restaurant
- Roommate matching service (if needed)
- Carpooling to the airport arrangements (if needed)