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DISCOVER NEW ZEALAND ON A 2-WEEK HOLIDAY

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Shopping, culture, Lord Of The Rings and bungee jumping... Take our whistle-stop holiday tour of New Zealand and fit in all the highlights.

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Think of New Zealand and maybe you think of an add-on to a trip to Australia? Or the land of Hobbits? Or both? Not surprising given that they are both so far from us, but New Zealand is all too often lumped together with Australia. In fact, they are more than 1,000 miles apart and, geographically speaking, New Zealand is part of an entirely different continent, Oceania.

New Zealand is comprised of two main islands, with climates ranging from sub-tropical in the North to snow-capped mountains suitable for skiing in the South, along with some of the most fascinating geological events in the world – think geysers, volcanoes and bubbling pools of lava. Add in the extensive wine regions, the vibrant fusion cuisine, ancient Maori culture, cutting edge eco-projects and the adrenaline sport... To give you an idea of just how much there is to see and do, here's an itinerary that could be packed into two weeks, although three would be better (since you're going all that way).

Food and shopping central

The biggest city in New Zealand, Auckland (pictured above), is also the food and shopping capital, so it makes sense to start here. Air New Zealand flies direct from Heathrow with just a two-hour stopover in Los Angeles. It's still 25 hours in the air but Premium Economy, which has pod-like seats for extra privacy, is widely agreed to be among the best.

Recover from your jetlag at the Hilton overlooking the waterfront and get to know this chic city, which showcases the best of New Zealand's amazing fusion cuisine. The Ponsonby area is the place to eat and shop. Book a foodie guide from Zest Tours to help you get your bearings.



A short ferry ride across the harbour takes you to Waiheke Island, above, with miles of vineyards and olive groves. Ananda Tours will chauffeur you between tastings.

Discover Maori culture

Driving is on the left, which makes it easy for UK visitors, and the roads are good, so hire a car to travel to Rotorua, where the original Polynesian settlers made their base. Underground thermal activity heats the land and the water, allowing for hot baths and cooked food even back in the 1300s. Now it's the prime spot for soaking up some Maori culture.



Peppers On The Point overlooks Lake Rotorua and Mokoia island, which is the subject of a beautiful Maori folksong. The museum is a must-see to put all this history in context and just next door to the Polynesian Baths, where you can while away an afternoon experiencing the naturally heated pools and perhaps a massage. In the evening, enjoy the traditional haka warrior dance (pictured above) at Te Puia, along with a meal cooked in the ground the traditional way.

Thermal wonderland



New Zealand is one of the most geologically active countries in the world and the Lady Knox geyser at Wai-O-Tapu park (above) blows at exactly 10.15am every day, sending a jet of boiling hot water soaring 60 feet into the air. So don't be late! Afterwards, stroll around the volcanic landscape to see bubbling lava and pools of sulphuric acid tinged all the colours of the rainbow by the minerals in the soil.

Sail, fly, swim

We know from ancient writings that a supervolcano exploded here back in 186 AD, creating a lake the size of Singapore, filled with water so pure you can swim in it and even drink it. Using the Lake Taupo Hilton as a base, you can explore this aquatic playground in every way imaginable.

View it from the air via a float plane, sail aboard a vintage yacht, The Barbary, or take a trip – either fast or slow – to the dramatic Huka Falls. The fishing is excellent in these pure waters – indeed, the only way to taste trout in New Zealand is to catch one yourself, as the sale of trout is forbidden by law. Even inexperienced anglers can enjoy a day’s fishing on the lake and your hotel chef will be happy to prepare your catch for you in the evening.

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Land of Sauvignon Blanc

With a population of just 4.5 million spread across a landmass the size of Britain, there is plenty of space in New Zealand to cultivate the best produce. And not just for eating. The places on the labels on your favourite bottles of wine – especially Sauvignon Blanc – exist in real life as mile after mile of vineyards. You won’t want to drink and drive, though, so hire a bike from Coastal Wine Cycles in Te Awanga and cycle between world-famous vineyards including Elephant Hill and Clearview, sampling as you go. An overnight stay at Breckenridge Lodge offers more local wines served with exquisite food from the local market, cooked by the owner, Malcolm Redmond.

Art Deco gem

Art Deco gem



So much of New Zealand has been shaped by geological eruptions, and the tiny city of Napier is no exception. An earthquake in 1931 demolished much of the architecture, which was rebuilt in the classic Art Deco style that continues to this day, pictured above. What's more, the earthquake revealed a further 8,000 acres of land, known as The Gift, that had previously been hidden by the sea. The city is easily explored on foot. But a vintage car and knowledgeable local driver will enable you to see it in style – and look great in your 'selfies'.

Eco wilderness



A short plane ride takes you on to the capital, Wellington, then another hop over the Cook Strait to Nelson in the South Island where you can pick up another car – the car hire companies make it easy to drop off and pick up en route – and head into the Abel Tasman, pictured above, an incredible eco wilderness.

Before the arrival of colonialists, New Zealand was very much a Garden of Eden, richly provided with food for diverse species and few natural predators. It's now at the forefront of ecological thinking, with efforts being made to protect indigenous bird and plant life. And a big plus is that just about the only dangerous creature you will come across in your travels is the common-or-garden wasp. Make your base the glorious Resurgence eco lodge in the middle of the nature reserve and

from there explore the area on foot or by kayak. A trip on the water tractor across the sands at Marahau is a must.

Great Coastal Highway



This is one of the great drives of the world: five hours from Nelson to Kaikoura against a backdrop of spectacular views of the Pacific. Take your time and stop to watch seals and marine bird life. Road-side stalls sell seafood fresh from the ocean to keep you going. Just before you reach Kaikoura, turn off for Hapuku Lodge, a stunning hotel that has featured in design magazines around the world. Accommodation is in luxury treehouse suites with views over the ocean from the bathroom and across fields of deer from the bedroom. At nearby Kaikoura you can take a Wings Over Whales flight to watch 20-metre long sperm whales basking and diving in the ocean.

Middle Earth

Another short flight takes you from Christchurch to Queenstown, known as the adrenaline capital of New Zealand. It was here in 1988 that the world's first bungee jump took place from a bridge over the Kawaru gorge. It's worth a look, even if you don't fancy having a go!

Backpackers from all over the world congregate in Queenstown, not only for the adrenaline-fuelled activities but because this was where many of the scenes from Lord Of The Rings and The Hobbit adventures were filmed. The director, Peter Jackson, loved the area so much that he bought a house just outside the town. The scenery is truly spectacular and you don't have to risk life and limb to see it. Horse-riding, four-wheel-drive safaris and all kinds of boats and small aircraft allow you to enjoy scenes of Middle Earth at whatever pace feels most comfortable.

A short drive away is Arrowtown, the site of a gold rush in Victorian times and now filled with boutiques and excellent restaurants. The surrounding vineyards of the Otago region are famous for their Chardonnay and Pinot Noir varieties, so perhaps there will be time for another wine tasting tour? Stay at the Rees Hotel and Apartments which is only 10 minutes from the airport, allowing you to maximise every last minute of your trip before taking an internal Air New Zealand flight back to Auckland, and then home to Britain.