

New Zealand Itinerary

[Link: New Zealand](#)

Tour Overview

New Zealand - a land of remarkable and spectacular landscapes, from volcanoes and hot springs to steep, deep fjords, snow-capped mountains and huge glaciers. The flora and fauna of these islands are equally remarkable and unique. Over 40 endemic bird species occur on the main islands, including quintessential New Zealanders - the Kiwis, those flightless, wingless, long-beaked ground-dwellers after which New Zealanders are named.

Our New Zealand birding tour takes in both North and South Islands, and offshore Stewart Island, each with its own special attractions and natural wonders. There are amazing birds here - New Zealand wrens and wattlebirds including the endangered Kokako, Saddlebacks and Stitchbirds, the world's rarest penguin - Yellow-eyed, the inquisitive parrot the Kea, flightless Takahe, the scarce Blue Duck, the remarkable Wrybill - surely one of the strangest of shorebirds, as well as diverse seabirds - albatrosses, shearwaters, storm-petrels, petrels. New Zealand is a land of ancient conifers, magnificent Kauri Pines so important in naval history, Southern Beech forests, magical rainforests of huge podocarps, splendid Tree Ferns, and fields of endemic sub-alpine shrubs.

This is the itinerary for our February 2026 tour. Itinerary

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival in Whangarei



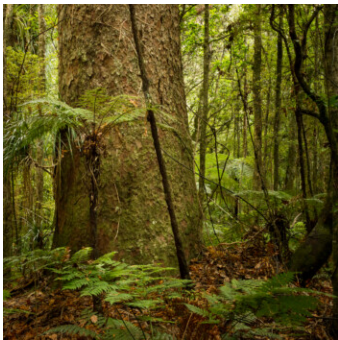
Our New Zealand birding tour begins today and we will meet in the beautiful city of Whangarei on the North Island. There are regular flights from Auckland and you can fly directly there in time for our evening meeting, or you can catch a ride with our guides this afternoon from Auckland for the 2.5 hour drive. We will discuss our upcoming birding adventure over dinner. Night in Whangarei.

Day 2: Hauraki Gulf pelagic birding trip



Today we'll embark on a full-day pelagic birding adventure in the outer Hauraki Gulf. Departing from Marsden Cove, we'll head northeast past the Hen and Chickens Islands to the deep waters of the gulf—an area known for its rich marine life and exciting seabird diversity. As we cruise these productive offshore waters, we'll keep our eyes peeled for an exciting mix of seabirds. Highlights may include New Zealand Storm-Petrel, Black Petrel, Buller's Shearwater, and Flesh-footed Shearwater, along with possible sightings of Cook's and Pycroft's Petrels, White-faced Storm-Petrel, Fluttering Shearwater, and Fairy Prion. There's always the chance of spotting something unexpected, and the presence of feeding flocks often draws in dolphins or even a passing whale. The trip lasts approximately 7.5 hours, returning in the late afternoon. If a full-day pelagic is not of interest, you can do some walking and exploring of Whangarei. Lunch on your own if you are not on the pelagic. Note that there is no discount if you do not participate in the pelagic. Our group will gather again for dinner this evening and discuss the adventure ahead. Night in Whangarei.

Day 3: Trounson Kauri Park



We will leave the hotel after breakfast and check the immediate area for Reef Heron. We will then make our way towards Dargaville for lunch with a stop or two along the way depending on recent bird sightings. We will proceed north after lunch and will scour the accommodation grounds for native eels and native birds (Grey Warbler and Silvereye). Trounson Kauri Park will be our destination in the afternoon. This park protects some of the last of the mighty kauri forests of New Zealand's Northland region. These magnificent trees are among the most ancient species in the world—some boasting trunks measuring over 5m in diameter! The wood is highly prized as a valuable timber and thus most of NZ's kauris were heavily logged until a moratorium was established in the 1970s. We return to Whangarei in the late afternoon. Night in Whangarei.

Day 4: Transfer to Orewa and Tāwharanui Regional Park



We will bird in the area of Whangarei before heading over to Waipu Cove for Fairy Tern, with a detour to look for Australasian Grebe. We continue south along the scenic coastal route making stops via Mangawhai Heads (another locality for Fairy Tern) and Wenderholm Regional Park before reaching our accommodation in Orewa. After dinner we will be making a special night excursion to the Tāwharanui Regional Park for our first chance to see a kiwi! North Island Brown Kiwi are our target for this evening outing. Night in Orewa.

Day 5: Tiri Tiri Matangi Island



Today we take the boat ride to Tiri Tiri Matangi Island—one of the greatest bird conservation success stories in New Zealand. What was once an overgrazed islet supporting little birdlife, is now a predator-free sanctuary covered in native plants, all supporting a vibrant bird community including some of the country's rarest endemics like Stitchbird, Kokako, and the iconic Takahe (giant flightless swamphen). We'll spend most of the day exploring this lovely little island then return to our accommodation in the late afternoon. Night in Orewa.

Day 6: Pukorokoro Miranda Shorebird Centre



We leave early and drive through Auckland to our next destination at Miranda. Our day will be partially organized around the high tide here. The coastal mudflats and saltmarsh of Miranda (NZ's most famous shorebird hot spot) support Bar-tailed Godwits (who fly non-stop from Alaska—11,000+km—to winter here!), Red Knot, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Red-necked Stint, Wrybill, New Zealand Dotterel, Banded Rail, Pied Oystercatcher, and White-fronted Tern. If we're lucky there might be a few other Siberian waders here such as Marsh Sandpiper or Greater Sand Plover. Night in Taupo.

Day 7: Whakamaru Dam



Today we will travel to Taupo, making stops along the way. Depending on what we have seen, our stops may include visiting some forest sights and perhaps a stop at Whakamaru Dam for waterbirds. Night in Taupo.

Day 8: Tongariro and Turangi



Today we visit Tongariro National Park with its spectacular series of snow-capped volcanoes including Ngauruhoe (Used for "Mt Doom" in the Lord of the Rings movies). We stop along the Tongariro River to look for the rare and declining Blue Duck (or "Whio")—a highly specialized endemic of NZ's mountain rivers. Depending on time we can check out a few forest and alpine trails in the park. Night in Palmerston North.

Day 9: Waikanae and Ferry Crossing to South Island



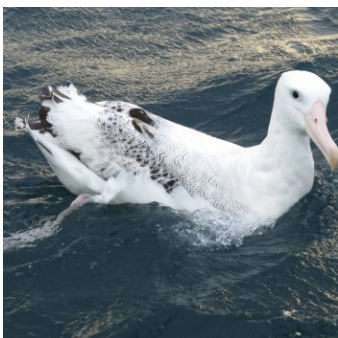
We start off the morning by heading to the west coast of North Island and checking out wetlands and shorebird hotspots such as Waikanae and the Manuwatu estuary. We then head to Wellington for the Interisland Ferry across the Cook Strait Crossing to Picton during which we are likely to see another fine array of seabirds and perhaps whales and dolphins. Night in Picton.

Day 10: Marlborough Sounds



We take a morning cruise through the magnificent Marlborough Sounds, looking for Fluttering and Sooty Shearwaters, White-fronted Terns and especially New Zealand King Shag, a highly endangered species. Hector's Dolphins occur here also. We'll stop at Blumine Island and bird the forest edge looking for Orange-fronted Parakeet and Yellowhead. After lunch, we drive to Kaikoura - world famous for its sea-life as the continental shelf is just over 1 mile offshore. This means you can expect a wonderful variety of seafood on the menu this evening, and it also means that there are a lot of seabirds out there on the waves! We'll enjoy a casual evening on the waterfront, perhaps with an optional visit to the Point Keane seal colony where we may find Double-banded Plovers and Ruddy Turnstones foraging along the shoreline. Sometimes albatross are visible from shore and perhaps we'll be able to see large rafts of Hutton's Shearwaters—a Kaikoura endemic. Night in Kaikoura.

Day 11: Pelagic birding



It's albatross fiesta time! Kaikoura is touted by many as the pelagic capital of the world, so you can expect to see a variety of seabirds at close-quarters today including the massive Wandering Albatross, with a wingspan of 3.5m! In addition to the albatrosses, shearwaters, petrels, and penguins we might encounter, there is a chance we might see marine mammals including several dolphin species and even a Sperm Whale or two! In the afternoon, we have an optional afternoon birding hike in nearby Fyffe/Palmer reserve, or perhaps out to the seal colony at Point Keane if we did not visit yesterday. Night in Kaikoura.

Day 12: Across the Southern Alps to Arthur's Pass



We leave Kaikoura, and head south, stopping at a few coastal birding hotspots such as St Ann's Lagoon in Cheviot along the way where we may be able to add species like Cape Barren Goose, Far Eastern Curlew, and possibly Pacific Reef-Heron. We then head inland to spend the night at Arthur's Pass.

Day 13: Arthur's Pass and Franz Josef Glacier



This morning we explore the alpine meadows and shaded forests of Arthur's Pass National Park. This is a fantastic time of year for blooming flowers and the birding should be fun too with cheeky Keas stirring up mischief and the possibility of NZ Falcon and NZ Rock Wren in the area. We then head down to the coast and drive south to our overnight accommodation at Franz Josef Glacier. We will schedule an optional evening outing to Okarito to try to find the rarest of the kiwis, the Okarito Brown Kiwi (Rowi). Night in Franz Josef Glacier.

Day 14: Franz Josef Glaciers and Haast Pass



We plan to visit Franz Josef Glacier this morning and then take a short walk in the swamp forest along Ship Creek. We travel today along the coast of the Tasman Sea whose isolated beaches and old-growth tree-fern forests give us a taste of what the rest of New Zealand might have looked like before human settlement, and then through the beautiful mountain forests of Haast Pass where, time permitting, we may take a short walk or two looking for Brown Creeper and Yellowhead. Night in Wanaka.

Day 15: Around Wanaka

Today will be a bit of a rest day and a chance to explore the town. We will plan a couple relaxed walks in Wanaka for some easy general birding. Night in Wanaka.

Day 16: Travel to Te Anau via Mount Aspiring National Park



We leave the Wanaka area and travel through the bustling tourist capital of Queenstown (the “Banff of New Zealand”), nestled along the shores of mighty Lake Wakatipu, the scenery dominated by the aptly named ‘Remarkables’ mountain range. Forest birds like Long-tailed Cuckoo, Yellow-crowned Parakeet, and the always sought-after Mohua (Yellowhead) are possible, along with many others. We then drive to Te Anau, the gateway to Fiordland National Park. This is a spectacular park – unrivalled mountain vistas, enormous glaciers, wild rivers, lowland podocarp forests, alpine flora of daisies and buttercups, and superb silver beech forests. We spend two nights in this charming area. Time permitting we could take an optional afternoon walk along start of Kepler track at south end of Lake Te Anau. Night in Te Anau.

Day 17: Fiordland National Park and Milford Sound



We travel the famous Milford Road past superb meadows, forests, and boulder fields through the Upper Hollyford Valley, stopping at Monkey River to look for Blue Duck if we haven’t already found this species, and in high altitude rocky basins for the famous Kea and the rare and declining NZ Rock Wren. We pass through the Homer Tunnel and descend to iconic Milford Sound (technically a fjord). In the afternoon, we board a comfortable vessel where we cruise out to the Tasman Sea, passing mile-high rock walls, spectacular waterfalls, as well as rocks in the ocean which belong to different tectonic plate. We have opportunity for Fiordland Crested Penguin, which can sometimes be seen loafing along the rocky shoreline of the fjord. Night in Te Anau.

Day 18: Ferry to Stewart Island and Kiwi excursion



We drive from Te Anau to Bluff. From here we take the 1 hour Ferry to Oban on Stewart Island for a two-night stay. This Ferry ride is a great opportunity to view large numbers of seabirds including several Albatross species and Diving-Petrels. Upon arrival, the rich native plant and bird life should be evident even around our accommodation in Oban—especially the raucous and inquisitive Kaka (parrot) whose silvery-white crown and flashy pink underparts make it an instant fan-favourite among visitors to Stewart Island. In the evening, we will take a 45 minute boat trip to a remote beach to look for Stewart Island Brown Kiwis (largest of the kiwis) with a chance at hearing or seeing other night birds and critters. This is always a wonderful and memorable experience. Night in Oban/Halfmoon Bay.

Day 19: Ulva Island and Stewart Island Pelagic



This morning we will take a half-day pelagic cruise to the east of Stewart Island. This area provides a wonderful feeding ground for a variety of pelagic birds including several species of Albatross, Petrel, Diving-Petrels and Prions. There is also a good chance of finding the much sought after Fiordland Crested Penguin. In the afternoon, we will go birding on Ulva, the predator-free island with numerous endemic birds - Weka, Red-crowned Parakeet, NZ Fantail, Pipipi, Tui, South Island Saddleback, the Stewart Island race of New Zealand Robin, perhaps even the highly endangered Mohua (Yellowhead). Night in Oban/Halfmoon Bay.

Day 20: Ferry to Bluff, the Catlins and Dunedin



This morning we take the ferry back to Bluff, and travel the scenic southern route through the Catlins region—famous for its lush beech forests, hidden waterfalls, and wild Pacific coastline - to Dunedin. Night in Dunedin.

Day 21: Albatross and Penguins on the Otago Peninsula



Today we travel along the scenic Otago Peninsula to visit the Taiaroa Head—the site of the World’s one and only mainland albatross colony! The Royal Albatross is the second largest albatross in the world, boasting a wingspan of 3 meters! As we watch the colony we should also get great looks at both Stewart Island and Spotted Shags (endemic cormorants). From there we’ll travel a short distance to take a guided hike to the nesting sites of the largest penguin species north of the Subantarctics—the scarce endemic Yellow-eyed Penguin. Here also is the World’s smallest penguin—the aptly named Little Penguin. Night in Dunedin

Day 22: Departure

Our incredible New Zealand birding tour draws to a close and we head home after such an amazing experience. You can depart for the airport and connecting flights home anytime. If you have extra time in the area you may want to visit the local botanical gardens or carry out some sightseeing in Dunedin itself.

What to Expect

Overview

The New Zealand birding tour is a moderately paced trip. You can expect some early morning, pre-breakfast walks, as well as three optional evening forays to look for kiwis and possibly owls. Please note that our guides will not be using laser pointers on this tour due to local regulations.

Food

We generally have breakfast at the hotel before we head out for the day. Sometimes we will have optional pre-breakfast walks. We often take a picnic lunch in the field, but will occasionally stop at a restaurant or cafe for lunch. Dinner is usually at a restaurant close to the lodgings. Each evening after dinner we compile the day's checklist, review the day's activities, birds, mammals and other observations, and plan the next day's activities.

Accommodation

Generally we stay in basic or standard hotel or motel rooms in locations close to where we want to go birding. Due to limited accommodations on Stewart Island and Arthur's Pass, your group may be split between two different lodgings and ensuite rooms will be assigned on a first come, first served basis. We cannot guarantee single rooms will be available at Stewart Island.

Walking

The tour will generally involve easy to moderate walking, however, two of the night-time forays (including the Stewart Island Kiwi excursion) will involve some steep trails, and walks of up to 4 kms (2 miles) in the dark. When at higher elevations, we keep our walking to a slow pace, doing most of our observation from the vehicle. In general, we keep all our nature study to a reasonable pace, maximizing the number of things we see and allowing enough time to properly enjoy them.

Driving

There will be a number of long drives, as we travel almost the length of the country, from Stewart Island off the south coast to Dargaville on North Island. We will take frequent rest stops, and enjoy scenic viewpoints along the way. Expect to travel on winding, mountainous roads, which can be challenging for those prone to motion sickness—consider bringing medication or other remedies if needed.

Climate

Prepare for everything! The South Island is generally cooler than the North Island. Temperatures on the South Island can range from lows of around 5°C (41°F) to typical daytime highs of 15–20°C (59–68°F). The North Island is milder, with temperatures ranging from lows of about 10°C (50°F) to highs of 24°C (75°F). Be prepared for cold winds, which can make conditions feel cooler than the actual temperature. Rain is also likely, especially on the west and south coasts of the South Island. The pelagic trip is likely to feel quite cool due to coastal winds, so it is best to dress in layers. New Zealand's weather can change rapidly and may occasionally impact road conditions and access. Flexibility is key, as we may need to adjust the itinerary to ensure a safe and smooth journey.

Boat Trips

Our itinerary includes pelagic trips as well as inshore cruises and a three-hour ferry ride between North and South Islands. More details below.

North Island Pelagic Tour

We will be birding an area 6-8 miles North East of the Chick's Islands group. Our vessel, a stable 14-meter (45-foot) boat, accommodates 23 passengers plus two crew members, including the skipper. While generally comfortable, conditions at sea can be rough depending on wind speed. Stronger winds often result in more bird activity, but they can also create choppier waters. If you are prone to motion sickness, we highly recommend taking preventative medication before departure. The boat is well-equipped with a full galley, including a fridge and facilities for coffee and tea. There is a lavatory on board, along with ample undercover seating and tables for cameras, field guides, and other gear.

Blumine Island Boat Trip

Enjoy a scenic boat transfer to the Blumine Island Bird Sanctuary. The vessel features an enclosed cabin and an open deck, providing comfort and excellent views. Drop-off at Blumine Island is scheduled for approximately 9:00 AM, with pickup for the return to Picton about two hours later. The operator offers a No Seasickness Guarantee. Please note that no snacks are provided on board.

Kaikoura Pelagic Albatross Trip

Begin the day at the dock, where a café is available before departure. The ride out to prime seabirding waters is typically a short **15-20 minutes**. However, sea conditions can change quickly. If you are prone to motion sickness, we strongly recommend taking preventative medication in advance. The boat accommodates up to 13 passengers and features an enclosed cabin with an open deck that sits low to the water, offering exceptional viewing and photography opportunities. The trip lasts 2 to 2.5 hours, depending on conditions, and is subject to suitable sea and weather conditions. On-board facilities include a marine toilet, though it is in a compact enclosed space, so it is advisable to use shore-based restroom facilities before departure.

Milford Sound Nature Cruise (Feb 2026) - 2-hour cruise Large open-top deck or comfy interior cabins with unobstructed views through full-height windows. Free tea and coffee, picnic lunch available, Toilets on board.

Stewart Island Pelagic

This will be a half-day pelagic trip, east of Stewart Island.

What's Included

Tour Price Includes

- Three Kiwi excursions included (weather permitting)
- All accommodations (Moderate to good quality hotels and lodges)
- All meals and soft drinks
- Ferry, cruise and pelagic boat trips included
- Ground transportation
- Guides: 4 - 7 participants with one guide and vehicle, 8 - 12 with two guides and vehicles

Tour Price Does Not Include

- Travel to and from start/end location
 - Travel Insurance
 - Items of a personal nature
 - Alcoholic beverages
-