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New Zealand's North Island is just as spectacular as its southern neighbor

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## New Zealand's North Island Essentials

BY MAX BONEM | 2.17.2016

### SHARELINES

 So many reasons to book this as your next trip.

**N**ew Zealand's North Island is often described as less spectacular than its neighbor to the south, the island that's known for essentially being Middle Earth incarnate. However, with endless beautiful beaches, deep redwood forests, and alien landscapes that seem to transport you to other worlds, the Northland contains a ton of wonders that should not be missed. No tour of New

Zealand can ever be all-encompassing, but if you want to get a feel for what makes the North Island truly unique, these are the locations you simply have to visit.

## 1. Cape Reinga



**Gorgeous views of the Tasman Sea from Cape Reinga**

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The northernmost point of the North Island, [Cape Reinga](#), also known as *Te Rerenga Wairua*, is a major spiritual site for the local Maori tribes and truly delivers a sense of presence and scale for the island as a whole. Nearby Ninety Mile Beach acts as an actual beachfront highway, transporting you around the cape to see incredible views of the Tasman Sea and the unspoiled marine wilderness that forms an almost seamless flow from land into sea.



## 2. Bay of Islands



### The Bay of Islands played host to much of New Zealand's early Colonial history

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Paihia's [Bay of Islands](#) was the first European port in New Zealand, so it also acted as one of the first major meeting points between the Maori and foreign explorers. Along with nearby [Russell](#)—New Zealand's first major port town—the Bay of Islands played home to much of New Zealand's early history, including countless battles and multiple failed attempts at flying the Union Jack atop one of the local Maori tribe's most important lookout points.

## 3. Auckland

New Zealand's largest and constantly expanding city, [Auckland](#) is the nation's hub for business and commerce. It is also a hub of New Zealand's treasured café culture. Excellent long blacks and flat whites can be found at cafés throughout town and those catering to the nighttime crowd also offer an endless number of local beers, ciders, and wines from throughout the region. Auckland doesn't always get the best rap from non-locals, but there are plenty of gems around if you're willing to look.

## 4. Rotorua



### The inescapably enchanting Hobbiton

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Considered to be the most geothermally active area in the Northland, [Rotorua](#) is filled with geysers, hot pools, and a constant scent of sulfur in the air—you'll know exactly where you are as soon as you step outside. It's also the official entry point to [Hobbiton](#), the permanent version of The Shire built for both Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* and for *The Hobbit*. Bilbo's house, Sam's garden, The Green Dragon Inn—they're all there, and even if you aren't a huge Tolkien fan, it's impossible to escape the magic of the place.



## 5. Tongariro National Park



### Tongariro National Park

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New Zealand is home to 14 national parks, but none of them can top [Tongariro National Park](#)'s range of landscapes and sense of otherworldliness. Home to Mount Ngauruhoe, which was Peter Jackson's inspiration for Mount Doom in the *Lord of the Rings* films, Tongariro contains one of New Zealand's [nine great walks](#), a 12-mile crossing that takes you from highland prairie to fields of volcanic rock to steep hillside trekking to emerald lakes to temperate rainforest and back again. Wash it down with a Tui beer or two afterward and it'll be the most accomplished you feel during your entire visit to the Northland.

## 6. Wellington

New Zealand's capital and third largest city, [Wellington](#) is the arts-centric mecca of the Northland's hipster and artistic set. Nearly synonymous with *Flight of the Concorde* and home to Peter Jackson's movie-making empire, Wellington is a great slice of modernity in a country that always feels slightly behind the times. Home to more cafés per capita than just about any other city on Earth, Wellingtonians most definitely enjoy a good cup of coffee, a fine brunch, and a properly poured pint (or two, or five).