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Auckland Excursions & Day Trips for All Kinds of Travelers

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Piha Beach/Christine Wei

Auckland, the main hub in New Zealand's North Island, is home to more than a third of the country's population. After all, the region's often surprising sprawl encompasses everything from a bustling downtown to lush rainforests and rugged mountains to countless beaches. And while it's not difficult to score a great flight and hotel deal here, it's trickier to figure out just what to do and just how to maximize your time. The good news is that Auckland's spread means truly diverse offerings for all kinds of travelers. Here are just five great excursions you can easily take from the Central Business District (the downtown area also known as the CBD).

For Landscape Lovers: [Best of Both Worlds Tour](#) by Bush & Beach

While this excursion is money well spent for landscape lovers, this is actually our top recommendation for anyone who wants to get their bearings in downtown and also sample the remote areas of West Auckland — after all, isn't stunning nature the biggest reason we all head to New Zealand in the first place? The tour is great value to boot, at 220 NZD (approximately 146 USD) for 8.5 hours, and provides easy access for those who don't have their own wheels.

You'll start with a three-hour city jaunt in the minivan, complete with a brief history lesson of how Auckland was formed by 53 dormant volcanoes, then you'll dive into all things Kiwi, including the influence of the indigenous Maori culture on the country. From there, continue on to the Waitakere Ranges in the rugged west, picking up a to-go lunch of savory pies (at your own expense). Expect waterfalls, a rainforest hike, and more in the rest of the afternoon. We don't want to spoil the experience, but we will say that Piha Beach became one of our favorite places in all of the North Island. Not only is the black volcano sand fascinating, the expansive, reflective seashore — especially popular with surfers in the know — takes on an almost otherworldly quality on sunny days.



For Foodies: Ponsonby & Matakana Food Tours

About a 20-minute bus ride from the wharf (or a five-minute direct drive), the boho neighborhood of Ponsonby is the hip place to be for hungry travelers. Start at [Ponsonby Central](#), a former warehouse that's been converted into an indoor/outdoor home for 29 restaurants, cafes, and grocery vendors as well as five pop-up spaces. It's easy to spot on the main drag, and you'll find everything from ramen noodles to plain grilled fish here. Nearby, the [Street Food Collective](#) features daily rotating food truck vendors in a more intimate, cozy space — complete with a parked truck, shipping container store front, and benches underneath ambient string lights.

For an even more experiential foodie adventure, head into Matakana and meet some of the North Island's top farmers and winemakers in the flesh. Matakana Tours is a great option for an organized and intimate introduction; the tours are capped at 14 and the itineraries can be customized for groups as small as six. The five-hour [Gourmet Day Tour](#) includes four or five food and wine stops as time allows. Depending on the group's interest, you might learn how to shuck oysters in addition to sampling some, then be transported with Italian wines at one of the region's oldest wineries. You can make time, too, for cultural stops like the famous Morris & James Pottery studio. Tours are 300 NZD or 200 USD per person (250 NZD if you're booking for four or more), and pick-up from downtown is available for 50 NZD.



For Romantics: [Devonport](#)

Devonport, a beloved weekend spot for local city-dwellers, is a seaside village with restored 1880s architecture surrounding New Zealand's naval base. It's a perfect day trip for visitors looking to glimpse what Auckland was like before it became the shiny metropolis that it is today. We suggest heading over first thing in the morning to fuel up at [Devonport Stone Oven](#) — home to unforgettable creations like creamy mushroom with bacon on toast (18.50 NZD or 12 USD) and breakfast bruschetta (18.90 NZD) with avocado, tomato, basil, poached eggs, and balsamic reduction drizzle, both big enough for two to share. The beautiful mansions along the port are a sight to see, and souvenir shoppers will find lots of independent stores along and around Victoria Road. If you're there on a Saturday, don't forget to check out the farmer's market. Devonport is accessible by car, but the ferry provides great city skyline views and photo opps. Each ride clocks in at under 15 minutes, and tickets are 12 NZD (8 USD) round-trip.



For Active Adventurers: [Auckland Sea Kayak](#)

A prevailing reason to love any part of New Zealand is that the beach is just a short ride away — not to mention all the over-water adventures to be had right off the coast. In

Auckland, you can get a good workout at sea with one of the most prepared operators we've ever met: Auckland Sea Kayak has extra wool layers at the ready for their customers, and the top-of-the-line kayaks feature neoprene-covered everything (including the space you sit in and the small cubby for your belongings) so that everyone and everything stays dry the entire time. An extra perk is that the guides — veterans who have built kayaks and have led kayaks trips in places like Western Norwegian Fjords — will snap photos for you at no extra cost. One of the company's most popular tours is the half-day option to [Motukorea](#) — an island accessible only by private boats and kayaks, and home to three Maori-fortified villages. Coffee, tea, snacks, and a guided hike, are included in the 135 NZD fee (90 USD). Looking for that brilliant ocean shot? Take the sunset kayak tour, which includes dinner for 185 NZD (123 USD).



For Wildlife Enthusiasts: [Auckland Dolphin & Whale Safari](#)

The appeal of spotting orcas, dolphins, humpback whales, hammerhead sharks, and other marine creatures — and in their own environment — speaks for itself. But here's what you really need to know about the Auckland Dolphin & Whale Safari on the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park: you'll 100 percent see the mammals swim right up alongside your boat during the sail. And you'll 100 percent learn tricks like following the movement of birds diving for fish to predict where a great whale might surface. The 4.5-hour tours depart from the downtown Viaduct Harbour daily. It's 160 NZD (106 USD) per adult and 105 NZD (70 USD) per child, but families can score some nice savings; the family price is 399 NZD (265 USD) total for two adults and two children.



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