

MARTHA STEWART
weddings

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ROAD TRIP DOWN UNDER

New Zealand is a natural study in contrasts, from shockingly green, sprawling pastureland to soaring mountain ranges encrusted with ice and snow. It's ideal for an epic postwedding road trip filled with both heart-thumping thrills and moments of quiet wonder—which is exactly what it was for writer *Rachel Tepper Paley* and her new husband, Jon, as part of an extended honeymoon last year. Here, she takes us on the 1,289-mile journey across the country's two islands—from Auckland in the north to Dunedin in the south—with each stop more memorable than the last.



EARTHQUAKE UPDATE

A 7.8-magnitude earthquake rocked New Zealand last November, causing damage to the roads leading in and out of Kaikoura. The region is slowly inching its way back to life, and State Highway 1—the main road in and out of town—is scheduled to reopen in March. For updates, visit kaikoura.co.nz or call +011 64 3 319 5641.

AUSTRALIA

NEW
ZEALAND



1

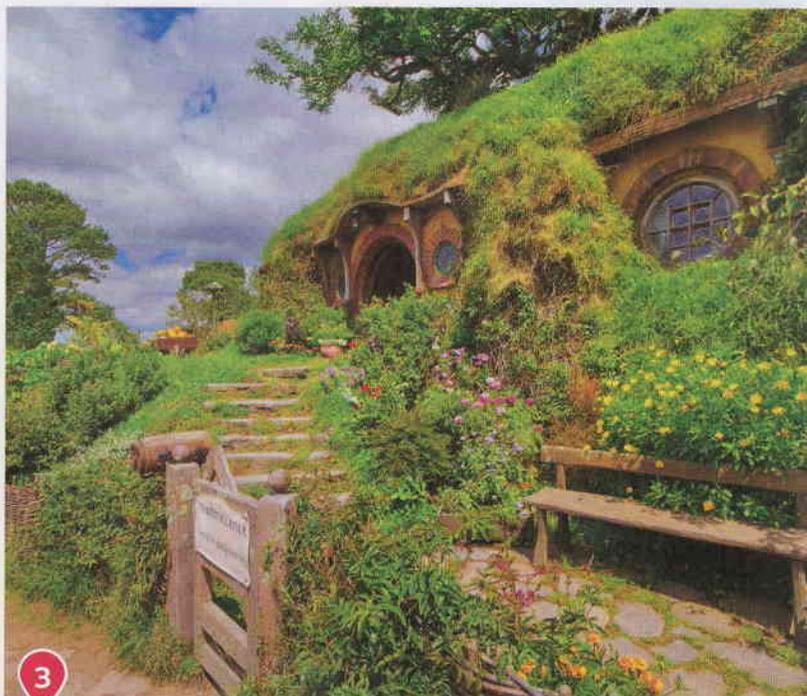
MILE 0: AUCKLAND

We have only one day in New Zealand's largest metropolis, which means no time to experience its standout restaurant scene, Victorian architecture, or buzzing harbor. While many visitors make the short yet steep trek to the summit of Mt. Eden—at 643 feet, the city's highest natural point—my husband, Jon, and I pile into our rented Mitsubishi Outlander—Budget Bardot, as we fondly call her—and wind up the road, passing gaggles of panting hikers en route. The dormant volcano erupted 15,000 years ago, creating a molten landscape of lava and ash; today, the majestic 160-foot-deep crater at the top is blanketed with a lush green carpet (left). The indigenous Maori people believed it housed a deity that guards secrets hidden deep within the earth.

2

**MILE 119 (192 KM):
WAITOMO GLOWWORM CAVES**

Two-plus hours of zigzagging through lush, undulating fields dotted with sheep bring us to this complex warren of limestone caves that's inhabited by thousands of tiny glowworms. After squeezing into wet suits, we plunge into the icy, murky depths, armed only with inner tubes and headlamp-fitted hard hats, along with guides from the Legendary Black Water Rafting Co. ([waitomo.com](http://waitomocaveshotel.co.nz)). In almost complete darkness, the rocky ceiling flickers with a breathtaking number of spectral blue-green pinpricks. We spend the night at the 33-room Waitomo Caves Hotel (from \$75 per night, waitomocaveshotel.co.nz), a striking building dating to 1908. When booking, Jon failed to pick up on one of its key features: It's allegedly incredibly haunted. The place plays the part, with long, dimly lit hallways lined with fading wallpaper and an eerie quiet. Before bed, we join other guests in front of the barside fireplace and trade ghost stories between sips of red wine. Later, cozying up in our room, I swear something is hovering by the bed. There isn't. (Or is there?)



3

MILE 180 (290 KM): MATAMATA

The rural township is best known as the home of Hobbiton Movie Set (hobbitontours.com), the meticulously maintained set where Peter Jackson filmed some of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*. (The land is part of a family-owned farm.) Even casual fans will be starstruck by this blindingly green, magical place, with its grassy Hobbit Holes and manicured vegetable patches. Guided tours take place daily, sometimes led by extras or assistants from the movies. During our afternoon there, I peer around Bilbo Baggins's door—but the home is an empty shell, and I'm jolted back to reality, if only for a moment.

4

MILE 222 (358 KM): ROTORUA

One minute in this small resort area and we understand why it's nicknamed "Sulphur City." The pungent smell comes from tons of thermal activity, including Pōhutu (right), the largest active geyser in the Southern Hemisphere. Up to twice an hour, you can watch it powerfully spew steam and water as high as 100 feet in the air. While in the neighborhood, we take in a performance of Maori dances at the Te Puia cultural center (tepuia.com). It's hard not to be moved by the powerful movements and chanting.



5

MILE 503 (810 KM): WELLINGTON

This compact city at the North Island's southwestern tip is our first major urban center since Auckland, but it hardly lacks for natural splendor. We spend the morning hiking the forested path up to Mount Victoria Lookout, which reveals a dazzling 360-degree view of Wellington and its yacht-lined harbor. Back in town, we duck into secondhand shops on hip Cuba Street and visit the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (tepapa.govt.nz), where the exhibit about World War I is a must-see. We've eaten our share of local oysters, but none are quite like those at award-winning restaurant Logan Brown (loganbrown.co.nz): wonderfully briny and served with lime, mirin, and orange globes of salmon roe.

MILE 660 (1,062 KM): KAIKOURA

A rocky three-hour ferry passage across the roiling Cook Strait brings us to the South Island. Our first stop is Kaikoura, a tiny village renowned for shellfish. Lunch is at Nins Bin (+011 64 3 319 6454), an iconic no-frills seafood shack known for its hot crayfish (less meaty than Maine lobster but just as sweet). For dinner, we sample immense mussels steamed with cilantro, lime, ginger, and coconut cream at Green Dolphin Restaurant and Bar (greendolphinkaikoura.com). But swimming with dolphins is our main objective here. Early the following morning, we find ourselves once again in wet suits, jumping flippers-first into the icy Pacific on an excursion booked through Encounter Kaikoura (encounterkaikoura.co.nz). The guides instruct us to sing (I appropriately choose *The Little Mermaid* tunes), and we're immediately swarmed by a pod of wild dusky dolphins. They're moving too fast to touch, but are seemingly just as curious about us as we are about them.

6



7

MILE 772 (1,242 KM): CHRISTCHURCH

The two-plus-hour drive to New Zealand's oldest city—where we spend two days—cuts through grassy plains and rows of twisted grapevines. On the gentle Avon River, which meanders through the city, amorous couples glide downstream in pole-propelled boats captained by men in Edwardian-era straw hats. After some sightseeing, we opt for more adventurous pursuits at the International Antarctic Centre (iceberg.co.nz), an interactive attraction (the city is a gateway to the frigid continent). After a mere 10 seconds in the indoor polar room—which simulates a storm, blustery winds, frigid temps, and all—I'm pretty sure I could never hack it as an Antarctic explorer.



HIT THE ROAD

Can't venture as far as New Zealand? These natural-wonder-filled road trips are closer to home.

ICELAND

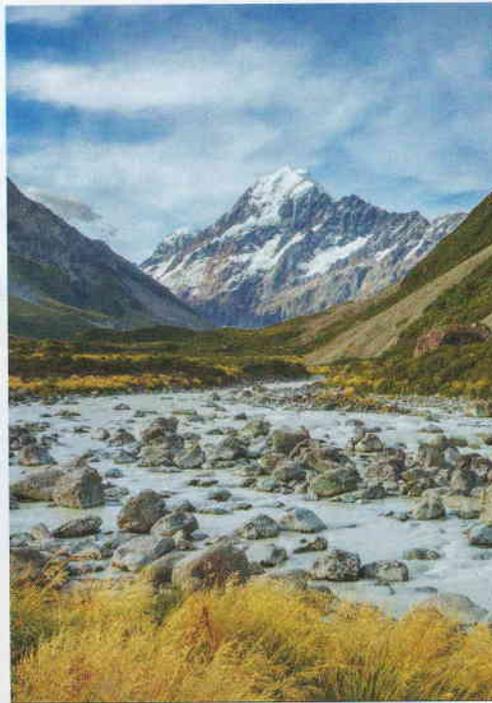
With otherworldly lava fields, moss-covered mountains, and waterfalls at every turn, this Nordic island may be one of the world's most naturally beautiful countries. It's hard to get lost on Route 1 (the Ring Road), which circumnavigates Iceland and leads to many top sites, including Jökulsárlón glacial lagoon. Don't miss a detour west to the Snæfellsnes peninsula for a stay at *Hótel Búðir* (from \$241 per night, hotelbudir.is). In the south, book an excursion that includes a hike in Þórsník mountain reserve with Midgard Adventure (midgardadventure.is).

BRITISH COLUMBIA

The distance between Vancouver and the beach town of Tofino is just 175 miles, but there is plenty to see along the way, including views of the rugged coastline on the car ferry from the mainland to Nanaimo. MacMillan Provincial Park, home to towering red cedar and fir trees that date back 800-plus years, was made for Instagram. Tofino—known for its surfing and, in winter, storm watching—has an impressive dining scene; it's worth the drive through a forest to reach *Wolf in the Fog* (wolfinthefog.com) for fresh seafood and foraged vegetables. Bed down at the rustic-luxe *Wickaninnish Inn* (from \$320 per night, wickinn.com).

UTAH

With five national parks (and the Grand Canyon just over the southern border), this western state is a magnet for outdoors lovers. In Zion National Park, hike or climb among its fiery-red sandstone walls. Bryce Canyon National Park, meanwhile, stands out for its hoodoos, or colorful rock pillars. End at Amangiri (from \$1,400 per night, aman.com), where you can be active—from kayaking to a hot-air balloon ride—or just relax in the spa. —Brooke Porter Katz



8

MILE 965 (1,553 KM): AORAKI/MOUNT COOK NATIONAL PARK

Fortified with classic Squiggles Hokey Pokey cookies, we drive four hours through fields and towns to the snow-tipped peaks of Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park. Upon arrival, we tread on foot along the wooden paths and swing bridges of Hooker Valley Track, an easy four-hour hike through the glacier-kissed foothills of the Southern Alps. Before calling it a night at our Airbnb, we take a stargazing tour at the Aoraki Mackenzie International Dark Sky Reserve (mackenzie.nz.com). It's one of the darkest places on Earth, and I'm rendered speechless by the luminous Milky Way. I see the Southern Cross constellation, the hemisphere's navigational equivalent to the North Star.

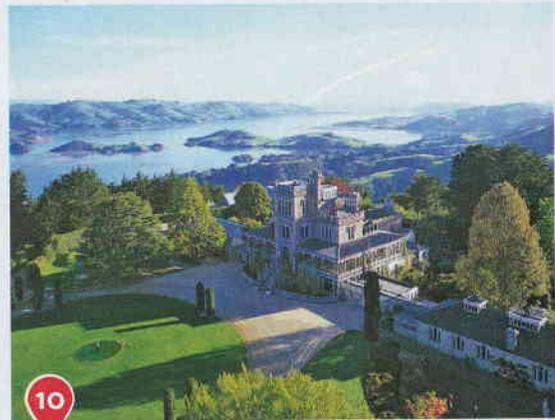
MILE 1,114 (1,793 KM): QUEENSTOWN

While Jon is off on a skydiving adventure, I luxuriate in our peaceful room at the splurge-worthy Matakauri Lodge (below; from \$600 per person per night, all-inclusive, matakaurilodge.com), which comes complete with a working gas fireplace, gratis mini bar, and sprawling views of Lake Wakatipu and the jagged Remarkables mountain range. The gleaming bathroom's deep tub affords the same vista and, even better, a private setting that makes curtains unnecessary.

Add a chilled glass of floral Waimea Estates Spinyback Pinot Gris, and I am perfectly content to be on solid ground.



9



10

MILE 1,289 (2,074 KM): DUNEDIN

Our final destination is a fascinating mix of nature and city living, historic sites and of-the-minute culture. You can climb the regal stairways of the imposing 19th-century Larnach Castle & Gardens and Baldwin Street, the world's steepest residential road, or peruse modern and old masterpieces at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery (dunedin.art.museum). There are also vast, airplane hangar-like caves to explore at Long Beach, where we scan the sea for native albatrosses with 10-foot wingspans. But the highlight is undoubtedly a raucous All Blacks rugby match at Forsyth Barr Stadium. I'm not the sporting type, but the team's fierce *haka* (a Maori war dance that kicks off the match) whips me into a frenzy alongside the screaming fans. It's just one more thing about New Zealand that is larger than life—from the geysers to the outstretched mountain peaks to the infinite map of constellations—and the sheer scale is what stays with me on our flight back to Auckland.