

Hobbiton - Mordor - River Anduin (Auckland – Wellington)

Overview

Start Auckland / Finish Wellington

Recommended Length: 4 Days

Distance: 738 km (461 miles)

An easy drive south of Auckland will take you to the verdant Waikato, home to Hobbiton and The Shire. Then carry on to the central North Island's Volcanic Plateau for a dramatic contrast - you'll soon see why these mystical landscapes were so easily transformed into Mordor, Eryn Muil and Mount Doom. Take some time out to enjoy all that nearby Lake Taupo has to offer, then drive on to Wellington, production base for The Lord of the Rings movies and Director Peter Jackson's hometown. Many memorable scenes from the movies were filmed in and around Wellington city - practically in Jackson's backyard!

Day 1 – Auckland to Rotorua

Auckland - Hamilton - Cambridge - Rotorua

127 km (79 miles)

Approximately 1.5 hours

Road Conditions: Motorway/State Highway

Auckland, New Zealand's largest city, is situated between two enormous harbours and dotted with 48 extinct volcanic cones. It's a place to enjoy marine adventures, wine trails, forest walks and urban sophistication.



As you cruise down the southern motorway, suburban scenery gradually gives way to the farmland of South Auckland, an area favoured by bloodstock breeders. You'll enjoy motorway speeds all the way to Bombay, a major market gardening area.

The Waikato River will accompany you for much of your journey through the green countryside. Places of interest along the way include the wine growing area of Te Kauwhata and the coal mining town of Huntly. Before you get to Hamilton, you'll notice side roads leading to Waingaro Hot Springs and Raglan, a surf resort on the west coast.

The city of Hamilton is carved in two by the mighty

Waikato River. Attractions include gardens, riverboat cruising and a giant free flight aviary. Excellent restaurants and cafes can be found at the southern end of the city's main street.

Auckland - Hamilton - Cambridge - Rotorua

23 km (14 miles)

Approximately 0.25 hour

Road Conditions: State Highway

The mighty Waikato River brings a unique beauty to Hamilton city. As well as river boat cruising, local attractions include gardens, museums and a giant free flight aviary. At the southern end of the city's main street you'll discover a wide variety of excellent restaurants and cafes.



The short trip south takes you through prime Waikato farmland. As you near Cambridge you'll notice fewer cows and more horses.

Cambridge township is located in the heart of the Waikato's affluent horse breeding district. It has a relaxed country atmosphere, lovely tree lined streets and many well preserved heritage buildings. While in Cambridge you can shop for antiques and art, attend a horse show, graze the local restaurants, embark on an eco-adventure or simply enjoy the splendid parks and gardens.

Auckland - Hamilton - Cambridge - Rotorua

87 km (54 miles)

Approximately 1.25 hours

Road Conditions: State Highway



On your way to Rotorua you'll come across the town of Tirau, known for its antique shops and animal-shaped corrugated iron buildings. Enjoy plantation pine forest and a refreshing patch of native bush, Fitzgerald Glade, before you encounter the unusual terrain of the Mamaku district. Mini volcanic cones dot the landscape, some showing their solidified lava core. The last part of your journey takes you past the gondola and luge rides of Mt Ngongotaha.

Rotorua sits squarely on the Pacific Ring of Fire, so volcanic activity is part of the city's past and present. Explore the geothermal areas and discover the unique culture of New Zealand's Maori people. Rotorua is

entertaining in any weather, at any time of the year.

Day 2 – Rotorua to Taupo

Rotorua - Taupo

81 km (51 miles)

Approximately 1 hour

Road Conditions: State Highway

The road to Taupo will keep you entertained with its unusual, volcanic geography. You'll also drive through large tracts of plantation pine forest.

Take a side road to a geothermal park, where you'll discover geysers, silica terraces and craters of boiling mud. Towards the end of your journey you'll encounter the Wairakei Geothermal Power Station. Other diversions include Huka Falls and a world-acclaimed golf course.

The resort town of Taupo sits on the edge of New Zealand's largest lake, which is well stocked with sizeable trout. You'll find everything a traveller could wish for, including an excellent choice of restaurants. Most accommodation establishments make good use of the underground thermal activity to provide hot spas for relaxation.



Day 3 – Taupo to National Park

Taupo - Turangi - National Park

47 km (29 miles)

Approximately 0.75 hour

Road Conditions: State Highway



You'll follow the eastern edge of Lake Taupo to reach Turangi. The drive is very scenic and there are many picnic opportunities along the way. Where streams run into the lake, you'll often see trout fisherman trying their luck.

The town of Turangi is the trout fishing capital of New Zealand. There are famous fishing spots in almost every direction, including 'The Delta', 'The Hole', 'Little Big O' and 'Tailrace' (believed to contain the world's fattest trout). The nearby hot springs of Tokaanu are another attraction, or you can try rafting the Tongariro River. The walks and skifields of the Tongariro National Park are also close by.

Taupo - Turangi - National Park

51 km (32 miles)

Approximately 0.75 hour

Road Conditions: State Highway



Your drive to National Park Village follows the edge of the Tongariro National Park. The road to the historic Grand Chateau hotel and Whakapapa skifield turns off to the left. The chateau makes an excellent refreshment stop.

National Park Village is well positioned for those who want to explore the Tongariro National Park. The volcanic peaks of Ruapehu, Ngauruhoe and Tongariro can be seen from here. The park was gifted to the New Zealand people in 1887 by the Ngati Tuwaretoa tribe and is now a World Heritage area. The Tongariro Crossing is regarded as one of the best one-day walks in the world.

Day 4 – Turangi to Wellington

Turangi - Wellington

322 km (201 miles)

Approximately 4 hours

Road Conditions: Motorway/State Highway

On the long, straight Desert Road you'll enjoy amazing views of Tongariro National Park's volcanoes. In Waiouru, the QE2 Memorial Museum is worth a look. As you drive south towards Taihape (the Gumboot Throwing capital of the world), the landscape becomes dominated by rivers and valleys. The Mangaweka Gorge is a scenic masterpiece.

Find time to browse the antique shops of Bulls, or spy on wading birds in the estuary near Foxton. Two beautiful dune lakes are an easy detour from Levin. Offshore from Waikanae Beach is Kapiti Island Nature Reserve. A car museum and gourmet cheese factory are other attractions in this area.

Wellington is compact, cultured and full of character. Nestled between the harbour and the hills, the downtown area is ideal for explorations on foot. Enjoy cafes, restaurants, museums, theatre and all kinds of shops.

Source: Tourism New Zealand (Our thanks to the team at Tourism New Zealand for these itineraries).

