

expat LIVING

Where to

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Competitions &
WINNERS

*Soft
Furnishings*

Touring
New Zealand

*Ideas for
Bedrooms*





New Zealand

Visa Requirement

Australian visitors do not require a visa. British passport holders do not need a visa for visits shorter than six months. Most other nationalities do not need a visa for visits of less than three months. Exceptions include holders of passports from China, India, Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia. www.immigration.govt.nz

Currency

1 Singapore dollar = approximately 1.02 New Zealand dollars

When to Go

Summer: December to February
 Best weather: February to May
 Winter (skiing): July to September

Main Languages Spoken

English, Maori

Religion

50 percent Christian, 25 percent non-religious, small but growing proportions of other religions (increasing with immigration from Asia and Africa)

Electricity

240V, three flat-pin plug (Type I, same as Australia)

Popular Travel Destinations

North Island: Bay of Islands, Rotarua, Auckland, Bay of Plenty, Wellington
 South Island: Queenstown (skiing), Milford Track, Christchurch, Canterbury, Mount Cook

Highlights

Food and wine, adventure and action holidays, scenery, Maori culture and history

Time Difference

Four hours ahead of Singapore (five hours during Daylight Savings Time between November and March)

Flight Time

10 hours, approximately ✈

Think skiing, the haka dance, and sheep – there's about one for each of New Zealand's 4.2 million people. Not to mention breathtaking scenery, glaciers and *The Lord of the Rings*. This is the extreme-sports capital of the world, where the brave can bungee until their eyes pop out and experience the rush of heli-rafting – all of this with a backdrop of natural splendour. Kiwis are renowned for their friendliness and proud of their clean, green environment. Following with a sharp increase in visitors over the past ten years, the government has stepped up its funding of eco-tourism, and many of the country's popular Great Walks, including the Milford Track and the Routeburn Track, must now be pre-booked.

Touring New Zealand

When we told friends of our intention to go on a campervan holiday in the South Island of New Zealand, we were met with vastly different reactions, ranging from "Go for it!" to "You must be mad." The reason for the second reaction was understandable: one, I don't camp; two, this would be our first holiday with our 17-week-old baby, Oscar. Undeterred by the cynics, we decided that now was as good a time as any and booked our flights.

Story and photography by Rebecca Wood





The Route

We decided to go clockwise around the island, starting in Christchurch then swapping our Britz camper van for a hire car at Queenstown and driving up the west coast of the South Island for the second week.

Day 1 – Lake Clearwater

As soon as we arrived in Christchurch, we picked up our Britz camper van, got a quick orientation on how everything worked and set off for our first destination,

Lake Clearwater.

Near-disaster struck early on. On the advice of a friendly Kiwi on the plane, we had decided to change our planned first stop, Lake Tekapo, and instead go to Lake Clearwater. My husband wanted to get away from the hustle and bustle of Singapore and we were told that Lake Clearwater was pretty remote.

How right. As we pulled up, the clouds rolled in and the temperature dropped dramatically. Had we been at a campsite, this would not have been an

issue – we could have plugged in at the mains and kept cosy. But we were “freedom” camping – this meant no electricity. It was a very long night. We left with a dark cloud hanging over us and headed for Lake Tekapo.

Day 2 – Lake Tekapo

What a difference a day makes! **Lake Tekapo** is the most stunning place I've seen. The water is bright turquoise due to the “rock flour” sediment. As we were there at the beginning of the season, it wasn't too crowded. There's a little church that looks out over the lake – you can get married there, and the waiting list is short, according to the local pastor. I can't think of a more dramatic setting for wedding vows.

After the horror of the previous night we decided to treat ourselves to a meal at the local hotel, **Peppers**,

where I had my first New Zealand lamb.

Warmed up and refreshed, we checked in at the local campsite, powered up the camper van and settled in for the night. Heating made all the difference.

Day 3 – Queenstown

We arrived in **Queenstown** in the afternoon after a fairly long drive. Every type of extreme sport can be done here, but having Oscar with us made our experience a tamer one. As you'd expect, the town also has loads of restaurants and shops, but be warned: it's pretty expensive. Strolling round the town we found Fergburger, which claims to have the best burger in New Zealand; we believe they're right. Afterwards, we parked at a **Top 10 campsite**. These are found all over New Zealand and have great family





rooms and facilities, with friendly and helpful staff.

Day 4 – Te Anau

There isn't much to do in **Te Anau**, but as accommodation is so limited at Milford Sound we decided to stay the night and leave early the next morning. The Top 10 campsite is beside a lovely river, so we took Oscar for a walk and went to bed early in preparation for the following day.

Day 5 – Milford Sound

The drive from Te Anau to **Milford Sound** is stunning and the boat trip at the end is the icing on the cake. There are magnificent waterfalls and spectacular views of the forests and mountains. If you're lucky, you'll get to see dolphins as you leave the port. A gleeful Jonathan couldn't wait to regale me with his sighting of these beautiful creatures, but sadly I'd missed them in my haste to queue up at the buffet. My mission from then onwards was to see a dolphin before leaving New Zealand – more on that later.

Day 6 – Arrowtown

This charming town sprang into life due to the gold rush of the 1860s. It's like stepping back in time. The bakery serves a lovely breakfast and there are

some great shops selling local produce. We bought Oscar a lambskin rug for his pushchair – it can be used in Singapore, too, because it keeps a baby cool in summer and warm in winter.

On our tour of the wineries around the Queenstown area, we particularly enjoyed **Peregrine**, which offered a free tasting; most of the others charge around NZ\$5 (the NZ currency is roughly equivalent to the Singapore dollar). In our LBO (Life Before Oscar) days, Jon and I would have jumped on one of the many tours and spent the entire day getting sozzled; instead, we spent time talking to the owners, eating great local food and having a few cheeky sips. The vineyards are well worth a visit, even with a little one in tow.

Day 7 – Wanaka

Sunday morning, we waved goodbye to the campervan and hello to our lovely four-wheel-drive car. As we used Britz for both hires, it was a quick turnaround at Queenstown. Our next destination was Franz Josef; we decided to break up the trip and spend the night at **Wanaka**. This is the "Nappy Valley" of South Island: a pretty town with loads of families, so we fitted in very well.

We stayed at the excellent **Grand Mercure**

Oakridge Resort. The self-contained unit had a washing machine and dryer – handy with a baby. They also do a great breakfast and at \$150 per night it was a fantastic deal.

Day 8 – Franz Josef

Franz Josef is a key stop on any trip around the South Island because of its famous glacier. Our plan was to take a helicopter ride with Oscar so we could all enjoy a view of this amazing natural phenomenon. Sadly, bad weather meant no helicopters. We did manage to get to the glacier, but this is not a place for a buggy, so we decided to divide and conquer: Oscar and I went off for a warming cuppa and Jon braved the glacier. By all accounts it was well worth the effort.

We stayed at **Glenfern Villas**, which was adequate though perhaps over-priced for what you get. We didn't quite do everything we wanted to in Franz Josef, but it was still enjoyable.

Day 9 – Hokitika

Our last stop on the western side of the island was the small town of **Hokitika**. We stayed at the friendly **Beachfront Hotel** with rooms overlooking the Tasman Sea. There's not much to do in Hokitika, though a very good café on the main street offers delicious local food – a beehive behind it produces the shop's honey. The big business in this town is jade, with shops selling

everything from **jade** earrings to jade fridge magnets!

Day 10 – Hamner Springs

Hamner Springs is a lovely town and, as the name suggests, is famous for its natural springs. Jon and I managed to time Oscar's daytime nap so that we could take a dip. There are several pools to choose from, which get progressively hotter. Jon only managed a few minutes in the hottest pool, but I made the most of the break and came out lobster-red. The **Village Lake Apartments** are luxurious and spacious; our two-bedroom pad was great value for around \$200 a night.

Days 11 and 12 – Kaikoura

By the time we arrived at the **Hapuku Lodge and Tree Houses** we were all a little desperate to spend more than one night in a location. We had booked one of the tree houses, which were great, as we didn't have to worry about disturbing the neighbours when Oscar decided to flex his vocal cords. The staff were extremely helpful, and didn't bat an eyelid at our rather irate baby. Freshly baked cookies were waiting for us in the room and, best of all, a huge bath with panoramic views of olive groves and the South Pacific Ocean.

There is loads to do in **Kaikoura**. At the beach, we were literally within touching distance of seals



catching the afternoon rays. Jon and I split shifts with Oscar so we could both swim with the **dolphins**. The experience is as amazing as everyone says. The water was freezing cold, but the dive company provided me with a full-body wetsuit and hot chocolate and ginger biscuits when I was done.

We ate a fantastic dinner at the hotel that night. Although we were offered a baby-sitter, we decided to take Oscar with us. The little gem slept through the entire meal and it was great to have a grownup night out for a change.

Day 13 – Amberly

We ended the holiday on a real high. **Claremont** is a lodge situated in Amberly, about 45 minutes from Christchurch. Lodge accommodation is popular in New Zealand: the historic buildings tend to be set in beautiful landscapes; you eat your meals with the other people staying at the lodge and socialise with them as much or as little as you like.

Having a small baby doesn't go down very well in this type of set-up – most lodges have an over-12-years policy. Not wanting to marginalise families, the owners of Claremont, Rosie and Richard, have built a family cottage on their beautiful grounds. Included in the price was a lovely breakfast hamper and free

wi-fi. The family cottage is \$657 for two adults and two children, but Claremont is truly beautiful and Rosie and Richard make you feel like you're one of the family.

Jonathan, Oscar and I thoroughly enjoyed our trip around this stunning country and failed to find a single New Zealander who wasn't extremely friendly and helpful. Camper-vanning was something new for all of us, and although I can't honestly say that I'll be rushing to book another holiday on wheels, I'm glad that we did it.

If you haven't been to New Zealand, I highly recommend it; I've never been anywhere more dramatically scenic in my life, and it's great to finally be able to go somewhere where the Australians are more joked about than the Brits! 🇳🇿

RECOMMENDATIONS

www.britz.com
www.oakridge.co.nz
www.glenfern.co.nz
www.beachfronthotel.co.nz
www.villagelake.co.nz
www.hapukulodge.com
www.claremont-estate.com

