

BIG NORTH (Previously Jonah)

Start: Auckland*

Finish: Auckland*

Minimum Days: 13-14

Recommended: 2+ weeks

**This pass can start or finish anywhere on this route, however most people start/finish in Auckland.*

Auckland to Paihia

Haere mai (welcome)! Your Stray adventure kicks off in New Zealand's largest city, Auckland. We depart northbound for the relaxed seaside town of Paihia, gateway to the beautiful Bay of Islands. We stop en-route at the Parry Kauri Forest Park to view some of the world's mightiest trees, the native kauri, before cruising up to Paihia for a relaxing afternoon in the stunning Bay.

Accommodation: Hostel along from the beach

Optional paid activities: Catch the ferry to historic Russell (NZ's former capital), skydiving, kayaking, BBQ dinner at the accommodation

Free activities: Visit the huge kauri trees at Parry Kauri Forest

Paihia to Cape Reinga to Paihia

Gear up for a big day, departing early to make the trip to the top of the country. Don't forget to pack lunch, water and snacks to keep you going. Travelling on a custom-built coach you'll drive up 90 Mile Beach to Te Paki Stream, where you'll learn the art of sand surfing on some of the biggest sand dunes in New Zealand. Our destination is Cape Reinga, where the Tasman and Pacific Oceans clash at the northernmost point of the country. The trip home includes a stopover at Mangonui for classic Kiwi fish 'n chips (pay on the day), before returning to Paihia in the evening.

NB. This day trip is operated by a local partner. Ensure you book either with your Driver or in Stray Mate before 11am the day before to secure your seat.

Accommodation: Hostel along from the beach

Optional paid activities: Traditional Kiwi fish and chips option for dinner

Free activities: Dune surfing

Paihia to Auckland

Enjoy a sleep in and spend the morning at your leisure. There's time to do the fantastic half-day Hole in the Rock cruise around the Bay in the morning or take this opportunity to squeeze in another optional activity before we jump back on board the Stray bus mid-afternoon. Destined for the bright lights of Auckland, there are plenty of exciting things to see and do if you have a free day or two.

Accommodation: Central Auckland hostel

Optional paid activities: Hole in the Rock cruise, skydiving; Auckland: skydiving, bungy off the bridge, walk around or jump off the top of the Sky Tower, whale and dolphin safari

Free activities: Walk around Paihia, go for a swim or relax on the beach

Auckland to Hahei

We depart Auckland and head south, travelling to the Coromandel Peninsula via the old colonial town of Thames. Renowned for its natural beauty and pristine swimming beaches, the Coromandel has plenty to offer the active traveller but is also a great place to kick back and relax. When the tides are right, we'll head over to Hot Water Beach, where you can dig your own natural spa pool! Tonight, you have the option to join a group dinner for a classic Kiwi BBQ.

Accommodation: Exclusive Stray accommodation by the waterfront

Free activities: Visit Hot Water Beach for a natural beach spa (tide & weather dependent), walk to Cathedral Cove, explore old cultural sites or simply relax on the beach

Hahei

Today you have a full free day to embrace the laid-back lifestyle that makes this such a popular NZ holiday destination. Make the most of this special place by taking a scenic walk or kayak trip to a hidden paradise at nearby Cathedral Cove or opt to relax on the white sands of Hahei Beach. The coast off Hahei is also part of the protected Te-Whanganui-a-Hei Marine Reserve, which makes it a prime place for a guided coastal boat tour.

Accommodation: Exclusive Stray accommodation by the waterfront

Optional paid activities: Kayaking, guided boat tour

Free activities: Walk to Cathedral Cove, watch the sunrise on the beach, explore old cultural sites or simply relax on the beach

Hahei to Rotorua

We leave Hahei early, travelling through to Paeroa, home of New Zealand's oldest and largest soft drink company L&P, where we'll stop for a fun photo op at a local landmark. Carrying on, we'll arrive in Rotorua, known for its lively geothermal activity, rich Maori history and adventure tourism. Get the adrenalin pumping this afternoon and sign up for a white water rafting adventure, head to the adventure park, or take a walk around town.

Accommodation: Comfortable central city hostel

Optional paid activities: White water rafting, zorbing, adrenaline-fuelled adventure park (big swings, bungys and more)

Free activities: Whakarewarewa Redwood Forest walk, see the bubbling mud pools at Kuirau Park

Rotorua

Often labelled the adventure capital of the North Island, you have a full free day in Rotorua to discover a wealth of adventure activities and geothermal wonders. Go ziplining through native bush, zorbing or take a truly unique guided jet boat adventure to bathe in a hot waterfall. Looking to relax instead? Visit the hot pools and bubbling mud baths at one of Rotorua's geothermal parks or take in a Maori cultural performance. Film buffs may want to sign up for a guided tour through the world-famous Hobbiton Movie Set. The choice is yours!

Accommodation: Comfortable central city hostel

Optional paid activities: River jet tour, white water rafting, ziplining, zorbing, geothermal attractions, Maori village & performance experience, Hobbiton Movie Set tour

Free activities: Whakarewarewa Redwood Forest walk

Rotorua to Lake Aniwhenua

There's time to squeeze in one last Rotorua activity this morning - many people choose to visit Wai-O-Tapu Thermal Wonderland. From here our journey ventures right off the beaten track into the remote area of Lake Aniwhenua for an immersive cultural experience like no other. Your Maori host family will share with you their story and traditions, as well as their vision for making a difference in their remote community. You'll see sacred Maori rock art, play traditional stick games

for hand-eye coordination and watch the preparation of a ground cooked 'hangi', before tasting it for yourself!

Exclusive 'Strademark' experience includes: (Additional cost \$89)

- 1 night's accommodation at the serene lakeside Kohutapu Lodge
- Full hangi buffet dinner & dessert and a continental breakfast
- Guided tour to sacred Maori rock carvings
- Introduction to the Murupara area, its people, history and challenges
- Participation in a local school program designed to inspire the next generation
(participation available on school days only)

NB. A minimum of 9 people is required to stay at Lake Aniwhenua. This 'Strademark' overnight experience is optional, but in our opinion, it's an absolute must do! To skip this experience, you need to catch a public bus from Rotorua to Taupo and then hop back on the Stray bus the next day in Taupo. Please confirm your pickup with our Reservations team.

Accommodation: Scenic lakefront lodge

Optional paid activities: Wai-O-Tapu Thermal Wonderland, learn the Haka, Maori flax weaving

Lake Aniwhenua (via Taupo) to Blue Duck Station

After breakfast we'll make a special visit to the local school to deliver packed lunches to kids that often go without (dependent on school timetable). Then it's on to Taupo, where the brave hearted can opt to plunge from a plane to skydive over Australasia's largest lake or bungy into a canyon! If you're not up for an adrenaline hit, walk the Huka Falls Walkway track, or spend time exploring this popular lakeside town. Our next destination is about as far off the beaten track as you can get in the North Island! Blue Duck Station is a sprawling 7,200-acre high country farm that is both a working station and an environmental conservation leader. On arrival, we will settle in to learn a little about daily life at Blue Duck, then relax and chill out around an evening fire.

Accommodation: Country station lodge

Optional paid activities: Skydiving, bungy

Free activities: Huka Falls Walkway, Spa Park walk

Blue Duck Station

Today is yours to fully explore this truly incredible location. Jump on a 4WD and travel up farm roads, over hilly peaks and through native bush to learn about the station's interesting settlement history and their current conservation efforts. Don your cowboy hat for a guided horse trek or kayak on the river through bush clad valleys and lush green hills. It doesn't matter which option you choose, just get outdoors and enjoy all that Blue Duck has to offer!

Accommodation: Country station lodge

Optional paid activities: 4WD farm tour, half-day horse trek, clay bird shooting, pest control, kayaking (summer only), jet boating (summer only)

Free activities: Walk around the amazing property to take in the lush scenery, walk to Kaiwhakauka waterfall, enjoy your hosts' fantastic hospitality and stories of the local wildlife and history

Blue Duck Station (via Tongariro) to Raetihi

We'll be up at the crack of dawn for an early departure to make our way to the UNESCO Dual World Heritage Site, Tongariro National Park. Today you get the chance to tick off one of the most popular hikes in New Zealand, the epic Tongariro Alpine Crossing. Considered one of the world's top one-day walks, this 19km hike takes you across a rocky plateau with dramatic volcanic peaks, craters and turquoise lakes that you'll remember for a lifetime. The Crossing is open to walk year-round (alpine gear and guide are required in winter), but subject to the weather conditions. Ensure you pack a day pack with plenty of supplies and clothing for all conditions. If the weather prevents you from doing the Crossing, there are alternative shorter walks in the area.

Tonight, unwind after a big day in a cosy historic lodge in Raetihi, with friendly farm animals, a pamper room and spa bath with mountain views.

Accommodation: Historic restored lodge with mountain views

Optional paid activities: The Tongariro Alpine Crossing, hop off to go skiing/snowboarding (winter only)

Free activities: Taranaki Falls walk, visit the Volcanic Centre, Tawhai Falls (Gollum's pool), pet the local farm animals, volunteer tree planting

Raetihi to Wellington

This morning we travel to the bottom of the North Island via the rural towns of Ohakune, Taihape and Bulls. Today is mostly an express day to get to Wellington, our capital city and home to New Zealand's parliament and the iconic Beehive government building. Also known as the 'coolest little capital in the world', thanks to Lonely Planet, Wellington is a great place to check out the lively arts, craft beer and café culture scenes or do some shopping. The afternoon is yours to explore the sights - we recommend wandering down Oriental Parade or viewing the excellent exhibits on display at Te Papa National Museum.

Accommodation: Central city hostel

Optional paid activities: Wellington Movie Tours, check out the great cafes and bars

Free activities: Walk Oriental Parade, head up Mt Victoria for fantastic views, visit Te Papa National Museum, gumboot (welly) throwing

Wellington (via National Park) to Auckland

We depart in the early morning. This is an express day heading back to the 'City of Sails', Auckland. For those who may have missed out on hiking the Tongariro Crossing, you have the option to hop off in National Park and try again. With an early evening arrival, there's still time to wander the streets of Auckland, visit the Viaduct, do some souvenir shopping or hang out with new friends and share stories about your recent adventures. If you are hanging around Auckland for another day or two, don't miss your chance to jump off the Harbour Bridge or Sky Tower, skydive, or take a wildlife cruise around the Hauraki Gulf. We hope you had a blast on your Stray adventure!

This itinerary is a guide. Given the spontaneous nature of our trips and lack of control over New Zealand's weather(!), what we do each day might occasionally vary.