



Interview with New Zealand Vacation Expert Margot Nahay



Road from Christchurch to Queenstown via Mt Cook

Earlier this year we published an interview about Australia Vacations with Down Under Answers (DUA), one of our favorite companies to work with. We received such a good response to that interview that we asked Margot Nahay from DUA to give us insight into another very popular vacation destination, New Zealand.

FamilyTravelGurus: In your brochure the New Zealand section is titled "New Zealand It's just different!" What makes New Zealand a unique tourist destination?

Everything! It truly is just different.

The adventure activities that New Zealanders have created are probably the most well known reason why New Zealand is known as being a “different” destination. The first one that comes to my mind is zorbing. The activity of zorbing is the recreational practice of humans rolling downhill in a sphere, generally made of transparent plastic. Zorbing is generally performed on a gentle slope. Some zorbs are constructed for a single rider, whereas others are designed to hold two or three. The longer runs are approximately half a mile. Zorbing is very popular in New Zealand and the very first Zorb site was in Rotorua, located on the North Island of New Zealand.

New Zealand is also home to hundreds of species of native wildlife, flora and fauna, one of the best (and little known) places to see these things is Stewart Island. Stewart Island is located off the southern coast of the south island. Stewart Island is New Zealand’s ultimate eco-tourism destination. Its densely forested hills, and untouched coastline of rocky outcrops and creamy golden sand beaches make it a haven for native marine and bird life.

These are only two of hundreds of “different” experiences a traveler can experience while in New Zealand.

FamilyTravelGurus: New Zealand has a North Island and a South Island - do you recommend visiting both for a first timer? What are the highlights of each Island?

If a traveler has at least two weeks to spend in New Zealand then I would suggest seeing both islands. If a traveler only has one week then I would suggest sticking to the South Island.

On the North Island I think the biggest highlight is Rotorua. Rotorua is the home to New Zealand’s geo-thermal activity. You can smell Rotorua before you can see it. This volcanic area is filled with geysers, mud pools and a strong Maori influence and population. This is also home to numerous adventure activities and you can also catch a fun sheep shearing show while you are there.

Also on the North Island is New Zealand's largest city, Auckland. This is also known as "the city of sails". It has a very large sailing culture. For someone staying in Auckland I would suggest taking a cruise of the harbour. You can do these either as a tame lunch or dinner cruise, or you can take a trip on one of the America's Cup sailboats where you can be an active participant in the sailing. Although it may sound as though you need sailing experience to take part in this, no sailing experience is required.

The other highlight of the North Island is the capitol of the country, Wellington. Wellington is the home to the national museum Te Papa. The museum is free and is located in the city centre. It is filled with information about this country's history and culture. Wellington is also a chic and sophisticated metropolitan area and would be an ideal destination for those interested in food and shopping. Besides being the country's capitol, it is also known as the country's food and culture capitol as well.

The South Island is filled with must sees. The biggest highlight and a must see for any traveler to New Zealand is Queenstown. This is the home to adventure activities such as the Shotover Jet – a 20 minute high speed jetboat ride down the Shotover River, suitable for any age or fitness level. If high speed is not your style a traveler can take the Dart River Safari instead. This includes a much longer jetboat ride on the Dart River but at a lower speed and is more about the scenery than the adrenaline. Of course anyone traveling to Queenstown must take the full day trip to Milford Sound, home of Metre Peak. This is a spectacular trip full of New Zealand's most idyllic scenery. However, it is a very long day, I generally suggest taking the bus trip to the sound with a return flight back to Queenstown to shorten the day up a bit.

Christchurch is the major city on the South Island, here one can visit the Antarctic Centre, go punting on the Avon, visit the church in the town square. There is also a train called the Tranz-alpine which departs from Christchurch and takes you through the Southern Alps. This can be done as a day tour, or can be used as a means from traveling from the east to west coast of the South Island. It is a great way to see some of New Zealand's most spectacular scenery.

FamilyTravelGurus: I see you offer both motor coach tours and self drive tours. What type of traveler would enjoy the motor coach tour? The self drive

tour?

Motor coach tours are great for a client or a couple who would like the comfort of having everything planned out for them. It is also great for those who want to meet other travelers and want to share this experience with others and make new friends. Motor Coach tours also have a local guide who travels with them throughout the trip and is there to answer questions. There is a wide range of motor coach tours available in New Zealand from small group to large group, inexpensive to the very upscale trip. It is a great way to see all of the highlights. This is also a great option for those who are uncomfortable driving on the opposite side of the road from what we drive on here in the US.

A self drive is for those who want the freedom to stop whenever they want, and for those who want the privacy of not traveling with a group. This is someone who is a little more adventurous and wants to see some things off the beaten track. New Zealand offers a wide range of vehicles for hire, from compact cars to large campervans.

FamilyTravelGurus: Are your tours "family friendly"? Is New Zealand a good destination to bring kids?

New Zealand is a great place to bring kids, but I would suggest if you are bringing a child to do a self drive rather than a motor coach tour. I think a traveler there with a child would enjoy the freedom of being able to stop as they want and stop and explore different places as they run across them. I also feel that the driving distances on a motor coach tour can be too long for a child on some days.

Some activities that are great for kids would be the Antarctic Centre in Christchurch, zorbing in Rotorua, the luge in Rotorua or in Queenstown, the Shotover Jet, many of the Lord of the Rings tours, visiting the glowworm caves outside of Rotorua in Waitomo. For those families who enjoy skiing and other winter activities there are numerous skiing areas located in Queenstown and Wanaka. New Zealand is a great destination for families, I would just be conscious of the driving times between destinations. A great itinerary for someone bringing children would be 2-3 nights in Auckland, then driving to Rotorua stopping at Waitomo Caves along the way. I would then suggest that

after 2 or 3 nights in Rotorua flying to Christchurch for 2 nights, then driving to Queenstown and staying there for the remainder of the stay.

FamilyTravelGurus: Do you have any tours that visit the scenic sites filmed in the Lord Of The Rings movies? Have you seen an upswing in New Zealand touring since those movies were released?

There are a large number of Lord of the Rings tours offered at all of the different areas in New Zealand where the movie was filmed. Over the time period where these movies were released there was a significant upswing in the number of travelers to New Zealand, but since the movie hype has subsided tourism to New Zealand has decreased slightly as well. For a traveler interested in Lord of the Rings, must see places to visit would be Hobbiton, located outside of Rotorua, Wellington has numerous Lord of the Rings tours which include tours of the movie studios and of course a traveler would have to go to Queenstown and Wanaka to see all of the beautiful sites where these movies were filmed.

FamilyTravelGurus: Thanks Margot. New Zealand is definitely on our "must see" list for a future vacation!

Interested in a New Zealand vacation arranged through Down Under Answers for your family? We can help! Contact us at info@familytravelgurus.com

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