

Central North Island Itinerary – 7 Days of Adventure, Beaches & Culture

Quick Snapshot

- **Duration:** 5–7 Days
 - **Start/End:** Tāmaki Makaurau – Auckland (loop route)
 - **Ideal Time to Go:** October to April
 - **Total Drive Time:** Approx. 10 hours
 - **Trip Vibe:** Coastal gems, cultural highlights, natural wonders
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Day 1–3: Auckland to Kapanga – Coromandel

Drive time: 2.5 hours

- Dig your own spa at **Hot Water Beach** (low tide essential).
- Explore **Cathedral Cove** and its stunning rock archway.
- Soak in the geothermal pools at **The Lost Spring**.
- Hike the **Pinnacles** for epic sunrise views.
- Snorkel the **Orua Sea Caves** or take a kayak tour.

Where to Stay *Campervan*

Options:

- **Freedom Camp:** *Long Bay Reserve, Coromandel Town* – popular beachside freedom camping spot (self-contained only).
- **Paid Camp:** *Shelly Beach TOP 10 Holiday Park* – beachfront powered sites with clean facilities.

Accommodation Options:

- **Budget:** Anchor Lodge Backpackers
 - **Mid-Range:** The Olive Motel
 - **Fancy:** Driving Creek Villas
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Day 3–4: Coromandel to Whakatāne

Drive time: 4 hours (scenic route)

- Drive through **Paeroa**, **Waihī**, and **Tauranga** for great stops
- Book a tour to **Whakaari/White Island** (check access)
- Evening stroll along sun-kissed **Ōhope Beach**

Where to Stay *Campervan*

Options:

- **Freedom Camp:** *Muriwai Drive Reserve* – 3-night max stay near Whakatāne (SC vehicles only).
- **Paid Camp:** *Ōhope Beach TOP 10 Holiday Park* – excellent location with ocean views and full facilities.

Accommodation Options:

- **Budget:** Ōhope Top 10 Holiday Park (also has cabins)
 - **Mid-Range:** White Island Rendezvous
 - **Fancy:** Quayside Apartments
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Day 4–5: Whakatāne to Rotorua

Drive time: 1.5 hours

- Visit **Whakarewarewa – The Living Māori Village**
- Relax at **Polynesian Spa**
- Do the magical **Redwoods Treewalk** after dark
- Ride the **Skyline Gondola** and **Luge** downhill
- Visit **Wai-O-Tapu Thermal Wonderland**
- Book a hāngī dinner and show at **Mitai Māori Village**

Where to Stay *Campervan*

Options:

- **Freedom Camp:** *Boyce Beach Reserve, Lake Ōkareka* – peaceful lakefront freedom spot (limited spaces, SC only).
- **Paid Camp:** *Rotorua Thermal Holiday Park* – hot pools, powered sites, close to attractions.

Accommodation Options:

- **Budget:** Rock Solid Backpackers
 - **Mid-Range:** Regent of Rotorua
 - **Fancy:** Black Swan Lakeside Hotel
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Day 6–7: Rotorua to Waitomo & Hobbiton (via Taupo)

Drive time: 1 hour to Taupo then 2 hours to Waitomo

- Leave Rotorua after Breakfast and drive to Taupō, check out Huka Falls, Taupō Lake front and any other activities you like. If you decide to stay the night and head to Waitomo Caves early the next day that is easy.
- You can explore the magical **Waitomo Glowworm Caves** in the morning and head to Matamata to do Hobbiton Movie set in the afternoon before making your way back to Auckland. It is a big day but a good day.
- On your way back to Auckland, call it to Matamata and visit the **Hobbiton Movie Set** in Matamata

Where to Stay *Campervan Options:*

- **Freedom Camp:** *Waitomo Caves i-SITE Car Park* – overnight parking permitted for SC vehicles.
- **Paid Camp:** *Waitomo Top 10 Holiday Park* – central location, hot tub, powered sites.

Accommodation Options:

- **Budget:** Waitomo Caves Guest Lodge
 - **Mid-Range:** Waitomo Village Chalets
 - **Fancy:** Waitomo Boutique Lodge
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Return to Auckland (Tāmaki Makaurau)

Drive time: 2.5 hours

- Walk through **Hamilton Gardens**’ themed landscapes
 - End the trip with a special dinner at **Ahi** in Viaduct Harbour – try the “Trust the Chef” menu for a true culinary experience
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What to Pack

- Swimmers and towel
 - Light rain jacket
 - Good walking shoes
 - Camera or smartphone
 - Sunscreen & insect repellent
 - Power bank
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Local Travel Tips

- Visit thermal parks early to avoid crowds • Try roadside mānuka honey – it’s a sweet local treat
 - Low tide is essential at **Hot Water Beach** • Don’t touch the hot mud – it’s scalding!
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Must-Try Local Flavours

- **Coromandel**: Green-lipped mussels from *The Mussel Kitchen* • **Whakatāne**: Oysters at *Ōhiwa Oyster Farm*
 - **Rotorua**: Traditional **hāngī** meal at *Te Puia* or *Whakarewarewa*
 - **Waitomo/Te Kūiti**: “Big As Ice Cream” – try *Hokey Pokey* or *Orange Choc Chip*
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Need to Know

- Swim only in patrolled or signposted safe areas

- Book tours and stays early in peak months (Dec–Feb)
- Keep valuables locked in your camper or car
- Respect sacred or cultural areas – follow signs and guidance

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