Tour Code
NZ2

ADVENTURESABROAD

NEW ZEALAND & AUSTRALIA

'Lands of the Southern Cross'

31 days

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Day 1 Arrival in Auckland

Arrival in Auckland.

Located in the northern part of New Zealand, the cosmopolitan city of Auckland is the largest metropolitan area in the country. The geographical location of Auckland is such that it lies between the Hauraki Gulf of the Pacific Ocean to the east, the low Hunua Ranges to the southeast, the Manukau Harbour to the southwest, and the Waitakere Ranges and smaller ranges to the west and northwest. The region is also the site of Auckland Volcanic Field, comprising of around 50 volcanoes. This is perhaps the most vibrant and bustling city in New Zealand. Auckland is also the biggest Polynesian city in the world, a cultural influence reflected in many different aspects of city life.

Overnight in Auckland.

Included Meal(s): Dinner

Day 2 Auckland: City Tour

Auckland spreads across a narrow isthmus between two harbours—Manukau to the west and Waitemat to the east—with the Hauraki Gulf opening to the Pacific beyond. This geography earned the city its nickname "City of Sails," but the landscape itself reveals a more dramatic story. The Auckland Volcanic Field comprises roughly 50 volcanic cones, dormant now but having shaped both the terrain and the cultural history of this region over the past 250,000 years. The most recent eruption, Rangitoto Island, emerged from the sea just 600 years ago, witnessed by Mori inhabitants whose oral histories preserve the event.

Our morning explores this volcanic landscape from multiple vantage points. Mount Eden rises 196 metres above the city, its crater offering panoramic views across both harbours—the strategic geography that led Captain Cook to describe this as one of the finest natural ports in the Pacific. From the crater rim, the full extent of the isthmus becomes clear: a narrow land bridge between two oceans, studded with volcanic cones that once served as fortified p sites for Mori communities. One Tree Hill, another volcanic cone, provides complementary perspectives across the city's 50 volcanic remnants dotting the urban landscape.

Between these volcanic viewpoints, we trace routes through the city's colonial and contemporary layers. Parnell Village preserves heritage buildings from Auckland's Victorian establishment, while the central business district along Queen Street—the city's "Golden Mile"—reveals its commercial evolution. The coastal route along Tamaki Drive passes through Mission Bay and Kohimarama Beach, waterfront suburbs where Edwardian villas face volcanic sand beaches. From Achilles Point, views extend across the harbour toward Rangitoto Island, its symmetrical cone dominating the gulf.

Our tour concludes at Auckland Museum, whose collections document the natural history, Mori culture, and Pacific heritage that define this region. Auckland remains the world's largest Polynesian city, home to more Mori, Samoan, Tongan, and Cook Island peoples than any urban center globally—a demographic reality reflected throughout the city's cultural institutions, cuisine, and civic identity.

Overnight in Auckland.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Auckland - Waitomo Caves - Rotorua

Today marks the beginning of our journey south, and we have a full day of travel and sightseeing ahead as we leave Auckland behind and venture into the heart of the North Island.

Our route takes us through the rich farmland of the Waikato region, New Zealand's agricultural heartland. This is dairy country par excellence, where verdant pastures stretch to the horizon. The landscape is a patchwork of green fields separated by hedgerows and shelter belts, a scene of pastoral plenty that has made this region the economic powerhouse of New Zealand's agricultural sector.

We arrive at the world-famous Waitomo Caves, where we'll experience a guided tour of the underground limestone caverns and glowworm grottos. As we venture deep beneath the surface, we'll discover a hidden world sculpted over millions of years. The limestone formations are spectacular, but the true magic reveals itself when we encounter thousands of tiny glowworms illuminating the cave ceilings like a subterranean night sky. These bioluminescent larvae create an otherworldly spectacle that never fails to captivate.

After this unique underground experience, we continue to Rotorua, an area of abundant geothermal activity. Rotorua sits in the middle of the Taupo Volcanic Zone, which runs from northeast to southwest across the North Island. The locals make ingenious use of the hot steam that rises to the surface for heating their homes, cooking, and building their own private hot pools.

This afternoon we'll visit the Te Puia Thermal Reserve and Maori Arts and Crafts Centre. Here we will discover boiling pools of mud that plop and bubble, and geysers that spout up to 30 metres (100 feet) into the air. The reserve is also home to the Maori Arts and Crafts Institute, where we'll gain insight into traditional carving and weaving techniques.

Overnight in Rotorua.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Rotorua - Wellington

Today we follow the 'Thermal Explorer Highway' to the heart of the North Island. This highway takes us through some of the most stunning scenery in New Zealand, along a path well-known for its geological wonders -- from huge limestone caves, to bubbling geothermal areas and volcanic plateaus.

We will view the Wairakei Steam Valley where the thermal energy is harnessed in the world's second largest geothermal power plant. We will see spectacular Huka Falls, located on the rushing Waikato River. We will also visit Lake Taupo, the water-filled crater of an ancient volcano. Surrounded by stunning volcanoes, bush clad mountains and a spectacular landscape; this is the largest freshwater lake in New Zealand and the Southern Hemisphere.

We then continue to travel south to Wellington. Our journey south takes us on the spectacular desert road along the edge of the World Heritage Site at Tongariro National Park. Established in 1887, Tongariro was the first national park in New Zealand and the fourth in the world. This is also a dual World Heritage area, a status that recognizes the park's important Maori cultural and spiritual associations as well as its outstanding volcanic features.

Overnight in Wellington.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Wellington: City Tour - Cook Strait Crossing - Blenheim

Called the world's "coolest little capital," Wellington is known for its vibrant arts scene, world-class café and restaurant culture, and active outdoor lifestyle. Set around an attractive waterfront, you'll be hard pressed to find a city in the world that's easier to get around. A creative, cosmopolitan city, Wellington combines the sophistication of a capital with the warmth and personality of a village.

This morning we enjoy a city sightseeing tour before heading to Te Papa, New Zealand's outstanding national museum. A guided tour leads us through the highlights of the country's natural environment, art, and history — from the geological forces that shaped these islands to the Mori and Pacific cultures that have defined them, and the colonial and contemporary layers that complete the story. It's a rich and accessible introduction to who New Zealanders are and how they got here.

We then board the ferry for the 3.5-hour crossing of Cook Strait to the South Island. Named after James Cook, the strait connects the Tasman Sea to the west with the South Pacific Ocean to the east — and the crossing itself earns its reputation as one of the world's most scenic ferry journeys, with rugged coastal hills framing both shores as the North Island recedes behind us and the mountains of the Marlborough Sounds come into view ahead.

Overnight in Blenheim (we sometimes overnight just down the road in Picton).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Blenheim - Kaikoura - Christchurch

Today we will enjoy a spectacular scenic journey between the mountains and the sea as we travel through the Marlborough region. This geographic region has a growing international reputation for its white wine production. We'll visit a winery en route to the thriving seaside settlement of Kaikoura, an area offering unique whale and dolphin watching experiences. Several different species of whale can be seen off Kaikoura at different times of the year, but almost always the huge Sperm Whales. There is also a large and readily observed colony of Southern Fur Seals at the eastern edge of the town that we will visit.

We continue between the Pacific Ocean and rugged Kaikoura Ranges to Christchurch, the 'Garden City'. Christchurch promises an eclectic mix of historic elegance and contemporary culture. The city is the focal point of what is called the Canterbury Region, which is that portion of the South Island that generally lies east of the Southern Alps. The city's population is a manageable 300,000 or so, and dates from around 1850. It began as a Church of England settlement (hence the name) and was supposed to be a haven for landed gentry and "good Christian souls of lesser caste."

Overnight in Christchurch.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Christchurch - TranzAlpine Train - Franz Josef

This morning we will board the award-winning TranzAlpine Train, one of the world's most scenic rail journeys. Our route will take us across the vast patchwork farmlands of the Canterbury Plains and we will enjoy stunning scenery as we journey through spectacular gorges, river valleys and across the country's greatest mountain range, the magnificent Southern Alps.

After approximately 2.5 hours we will disembark at Arthurs Pass and continue to Hokitika by coach, a journey along the west coast and bringing us to the World Heritage-listed area of South West New Zealand (Te Wahipounamu). Shaped by millions of years of glacial movement, the fiords and coasts of South West New Zealand are outstandingly beautiful.

Hokitika was a gold rush town in the 1860s, and the countryside around Hokitika is dotted with historic sites related to its mining past. Today Hokitika is known for its arts and crafts produced by local artisans. After a break for lunch, we continue to Franz Josef. The magnificent Franz Josef Glacier is widely regarded as the gem of New Zealand's West Coast Glaciers.

PLEASE NOTE: In the unlikely event that we are unable to take this trip by train, we will travel by bus along The Great Alpine Highway. While the Tranz Alpine Train will always be our first choice of transport, travelling by road is equally as scenic.

Overnight at Franz Josef (or nearby Fox Glacier).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Franz Josef - Haast River Valley - Queenstown

Today we journey south along the rugged west coast where the Southern Alps meet the Tasman Sea. Towering peaks rise directly from coastal rainforest, creating one of New Zealand's most dramatic landscapes. Our destination is Haast, a small settlement at the mouth of the Haast River where the highway crosses from Westland into Otago.

We experience a river safari cruising the Haast River through the valley carved by glacial forces over millennia. The river drains Mount Aspiring National Park, its waters fed by glaciers and mountain streams. Towering peaks frame the valley, waterfalls cascade down forested slopes, and dense temperate rainforest—part of the Southwest World Heritage Area—cloaks the mountainsides. The river valley reveals landscapes shaped by ice, water, and tectonic forces where the Pacific and Australian plates collide.

Rejoining our coach, we continue inland toward Queenstown through the Haast Pass, crossing from coast to lake country. The Southern Alps' snow-capped peaks rise in the distance as we descend toward Lake Wanaka and ultimately Lake Wakatipu, where Queenstown sits sheltered by The Remarkables mountain range.

Overnight in Queenstown.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Queenstown: Skyline Gondola & Leisure Time

The Skyline Gondola ascends 450 metres up Bob's Peak, rising from Queenstown's lakefront to panoramic views across Lake Wakatipu and The Remarkables range. The lake stretches 80 kilometres through a glacially-carved valley, its distinctive lightning-bolt shape created by three separate ice flows converging during the last glaciation. The Remarkables' jagged ridgeline marks the fault scarp where tectonic forces continue pushing these mountains skyward.

The remainder of the day is yours to explore Queenstown. The compact town center clusters around the lakefront, its pedestrianized streets mixing 1860s gold rush buildings with contemporary insertions. The waterfront promenade extends along Queenstown Bay, where the coal-fired steamer TSS Earnslaw—launched in 1912—still departs for lake cruises to Walter Peak High Country Farm.

Several optional excursions operate from Queenstown, bookable locally. Jet boat operators run the Shotover and Kawarau rivers through rock canyons—an experience born from Bill Hamilton's 1950s development of the jet propulsion unit for shallow, fast-flowing water. Wine tours visit Gibbston Valley subregion, where high-altitude vineyards produce Pinot Noir in a continental climate defined by dramatic diurnal temperature shifts. Lake cruises aboard vintage steamers provide access to high country sheep stations otherwise unreachable by road. More sedate options include Queenstown Gardens' 19th-century plantings on a peninsula extending into the lake, or the trail to Queenstown Hill summit.

Overnight in Queenstown.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Queenstown - Doubtful Sound Cruise - Te Anau

Departing Queenstown this morning, we travel to Lake Manapouri, gateway to Doubtful Sound. We cruise across this pristine lake—its waters reaching depths of 444 metres/1,457 feet—toward West Arm, where New Zealand's largest hydroelectric power station operates entirely underground within the mountain.

From West Arm we travel by coach over Wilmot Pass, climbing through Fiordland's densest temperate rainforest to the pass summit at 671 metres/2,201 feet. The route provides access to landscapes otherwise unreachable—moss-draped beech forests, cascading streams, and alpine vegetation clinging to steep slopes. Captain James Cook named this fiord "Doubtful Harbour" in 1770, doubting whether winds would allow his ship to sail back out if he entered.

In Doubtful Sound we board the purpose-built catamaran Patea Explorer for a cruise through this pristine fiord. Doubtful Sound stretches 40 kilometres inland from the Tasman Sea, its waters reaching 421 metres/1,381 feet deep in places. Sheer rock faces rise over 1,000 metres directly from the water, waterfalls plunge from hanging valleys, and the fiord branches into multiple arms creating a labyrinth of waterways. The fiord receives over 8 metres of annual rainfall, creating a permanent freshwater layer atop the saltwater that supports unique marine ecosystems.

Our nature guides share their knowledge of the region's ecology and point out wildlife: Fiordland crested penguins nesting on rocky shores, New Zealand fur seals hauled out on rocks, and bottlenose dolphins that frequently patrol these waters. The remote location and lack of development mean Doubtful Sound remains far quieter than Milford Sound—sometimes the only sounds are bird calls and water dripping from rainforest canopy.

After our cruise we transfer to Te Anau, the lakeside town serving as gateway to Fiordland National Park.

Overnight in Te Anau.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 11 Te Anau - Nugget Point - Dunedin

Our journey continues across the South Island to the East Coast and the city of Dunedin, renowned as the 'Edinburgh of the South'.

En route we make a stop at Nugget Point, an iconic panoramic platform on the Catlins Coast with one of the country's oldest lighthouses perched above the famous rocks named by Captain Cook because they looked like pieces of gold. It's a short stroll to the Tokata lighthouse, with sensational views of the big blue beyond. If you look down onto the rocks below the lighthouse, you may see a colony of fur seals frolicking in the surf. It is also home to some of the world's rarest penguins and one of the only places you might see seals, sea lions and elephant seals in the same area. There are also, sooty shearwaters, spoonbills, and a breeding colony of gannets.

We'll have a lunch stop en route and expect to arrive in Dunedin in mid-late afternoon. Known as the Wildlife Capital of New Zealand, Dunedin prides itself on its beautiful built heritage, stunning scenery, and unique biodiversity. Surrounded by dramatic hills and at the foot of a long, picturesque harbour, Dunedin is one of the best-preserved Victorian and Edwardian cities in the Southern Hemisphere.

Before checking in to our hotel, we'll stop at Baldwin Street, one of the city's claim to fame as the world's "steepest street." This 350-metre stretch of road is recognised by the Guinness World Records with an official maximum gradient is 19 degrees (though there are little bits that are 21 degrees); in other words, the ground rises a metre for every 2.86 metres you cover horizontally. The concrete upper section adds to the wall-like appearance; asphalt is avoided for safety reasons -- in hot summers, it would melt and slide right off, while in winter it would get too slippery.

Overnight in Dunedin.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Dunedin & Otago Peninsula

Today we journey to the Otago Peninsula, a 20-kilometre volcanic landform extending into the Pacific Ocean. The peninsula's volcanic origins created steep terrain—rugged on the ocean side, relatively sheltered facing Otago Harbour. This geography supports remarkable biodiversity, making the peninsula one of New Zealand's premier wildlife destinations.

Our scenic drive passes green pastures, small bays, sandy beaches, and volcanic landforms before reaching Larnach Castle. Built in the 1870s by entrepreneur William Larnach, the building claims status as "New Zealand's only castle," though it's actually a Gothic Revival mansion. Since 1967, the Barker family has owned and restored the property, retrieving original furniture and developing gardens that now hold "Garden of International Significance" status from the New Zealand Gardens Trust.

After lunch we continue with a wildlife adventure aboard the "Penguin Express" coach, crossing Reid family farmland to breeding habitats of yellow-eyed penguins, blue penguins, and New Zealand fur seals. The yellow-eyed penguin—hoiho in Mori—ranks among the world's rarest penguins, with only about 4,000 remaining. The Otago Peninsula supports one of the largest mainland populations.

Our final activity is a one-hour cruise aboard the Albatross Express on Otago Harbour. The harbour serves as feeding grounds for royal albatross from the nearby breeding colony—the only mainland albatross colony in the world. These massive seabirds, with wingspans reaching 3 metres/10 feet, soar on updrafts along the harbour entrance. We may also observe mollymawks, petrels, shearwaters, cormorants, and royal spoonbills. The purpose-built twin-engine catamaran features open top deck and enclosed lower deck for comfortable viewing.

We return to Dunedin for overnight.

Overnight in Dunedin.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 Dunedin - Aoraki/Mount Cook

Today we journey north along the coast to view the unique Moeraki Beach boulders before turning inland and traveling towards New Zealand's highlands and the UNESCO World Heritage listed Mt. Cook National Park. Along the way we'll stop at Oamaru, famous for its impressive streetscapes with many buildings constructed of local limestone.

Mount Cook Village is at the base of Aoraki/Mount Cook, probably the most spectacular national park in the country and one that rivals most scenery you'll see in the European Alps. The park, 680 sq km (270 square miles), contains more than 20 peaks over 3000 m (10,000 feet),

including Aoraki/Mount Cook, the tallest mountain in Australasia; indeed the Maori word Aoraki means 'the Cloud Piercer.' It also features the world's longest temperate-zone glacier, the Tasman.

After some time for some exploration we continue to our hotel.

Overnight in the vicinity of Aoraki/Mount Cook or Lake Tekapo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 Aoraki/Mount Cook - Christchurch

This morning, weather permitting, we experience the "Grand Traverse" scenic flight—a flight-seeing adventure exploring Mount Cook and Westland National Parks. The fixed-wing aircraft provides every passenger a window seat, with wings positioned above for optimal viewing below.

The flight encompasses two World Heritage National Parks and 200 square kilometres of New Zealand's most dramatic scenery. We soar above turquoise glacial lakes fed by meltwater, golden tussock lands spreading across the Mackenzie Basin, and braided river systems where multiple channels weave across wide valleys. Remote high country sheep stations occupy valleys accessible only by 4WD tracks, their isolation defining a uniquely Kiwi way of life.

The perspective reveals Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park's scale—over 20 peaks exceeding 3,000 metres/10,000 feet, including Aoraki/Mount Cook itself at 3,724 metres/12,218 feet, Australasia's highest mountain. The Mori name Aoraki means "Cloud Piercer," apt for a peak frequently shrouded in weather. The Tasman Glacier, at 27 kilometres the world's longest temperate-zone glacier, flows down the mountain's eastern flanks. Permanent ice and snow cover the park's upper reaches—a landscape shaped entirely by glacial forces over millions of years.

Pilots provide full commentary throughout the 50-minute flight, explaining the geological processes that created these landscapes where the Pacific and Australian tectonic plates collide, pushing the Southern Alps higher at roughly 7 millimetres per year.

After landing, we visit Lake Tekapo before leaving the high country, crossing the Rakaia River toward Christchurch and the Canterbury Plains.

Overnight in Christchurch.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 15 Christchurch, New Zealand - Fly to Melbourne, Australia

Today we fly to Melbourne, Victoria.

Melbourne flourished in the 1850s when the city emerged as a result of the huge gold rush in the Victorian hills. Melbourne is culturally very diverse and has several times been named the world's "most liveable city."

PLEASE NOTE: The linking flight between New Zealand & Australia is not included in the tour price. If you book your international air with Adventures Abroad, we will include this segment in your ticket. If you book your own flights, we can include this flight for an extra charge which can be variable - contact us for current rate at time of 'guarantee.'

Overnight in Melbourne.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 16 Melbourne: City Tour

Melbourne boasts broad, tree-lined streets and an air of distinction that sets it apart from other Australian cities. Founded in 1835 when

Tasmanian farmer John Batman arrived to establish a settlement, trading blankets and tools with local Aborigines for 500,000 acres of land. The gold rush of the 1850s triggered rapid expansion—by 1861, Melbourne's population had reached 125,000, overtaking Sydney briefly before the northern city regained its lead.

Today we explore Melbourne's heritage through key landmarks. Fitzroy Gardens, designed in the shape of the Union Jack, provides a manicured oasis in the city centre. Within the gardens sits Cook's Cottage—Captain James Cook's family home, dismantled in Yorkshire and reassembled here in 1934 to mark Victoria's centenary. The cottage offers insight into 18th-century English life, contrasting sharply with the grand Victorian architecture surrounding it.

The Shrine of Remembrance honours Australian soldiers who served in World War I and subsequent conflicts. Built in classical style with a stone pyramid rising above a sanctuary, the shrine's architecture conveys both solemnity and civic pride. Inside, a Ray of Light illuminates the Stone of Remembrance at precisely 11:00 am on November 11—the moment the Armistice was signed.

We continue along St Kilda Road past Melbourne University and Parliament House before visiting St Patrick's Cathedral, a Gothic Revival landmark that dominates the skyline and testifies to the city's significant Catholic heritage. The cathedral's spires rise 103 metres above the streetscape.

Overnight in Melbourne.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 17 Melbourne: the Great Ocean Road

Today we drive the Great Ocean Road, one of Australia's most iconic coastal routes. Built between 1919 and 1932 by returned World War I soldiers, the road was conceived both as tourist attraction and memorial to fallen comrades. The project employed thousands of veterans using hand tools and horse-drawn carts to carve the route through cliffsides and around headlands—inspired by California's Pacific coast highways but executed under far more challenging conditions.

The stretch between Apollo Bay and Peterborough earned the name "Shipwreck Coast" for the treacherous waters that claimed over 700 vessels between 1836 and 1932. The combination of reefs, strong currents, and dense fog created deadly conditions for sailing ships navigating these waters before the Otway lighthouse was established.

The Twelve Apostles—towering limestone stacks rising 65 metres/213 feet from the ocean—stand as remnants of a retreating coastline, carved by wind and waves over 20 million years. Despite the name, only eight stacks remain standing today, and erosion continues at roughly 2 centimetres per year. We stop at viewpoints where the rugged cliffs meet crashing surf, the vast Southern Ocean stretching unbroken to Antarctica.

Overnight in Melbourne.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 18 Melbourne - Fly to Canberra: City Tour

This morning we fly from Melbourne to Canberra, Australia's purpose-built capital. The city emerged from federation rivalry between Sydney and Melbourne in 1901—creating a new capital would give the nation its own identity while ending the competition between the two dominant cities. An international design competition in 1913 attracted entries from around the world, ultimately won by Chicago landscape architect Walter Burley Griffin and his wife Marion Mahoney Griffin. Their vision centred on geometric patterns and axial alignments connecting civic buildings to natural landscape features.

We visit the National Capital Exhibition documenting the city's development from sheep paddocks to functioning capital, followed by a guided tour of Parliament House. The distinctly designed building sits partially underground, its roof covered with grass to minimize visual impact on the landscape. The structure opened in 1988 to replace the "temporary" Old Parliament House that had served for 61 years.

Driving through the embassy district reveals how nations express cultural identity through architecture—from the Thai temple-style embassy to the modernist geometries of others. The Australian War Memorial honours armed forces members who died or served in conflicts involving the Commonwealth. Opened in 1941 during World War II, the memorial includes an extensive military museum and is widely regarded as one of the world's most significant memorials of its type. The site provides valuable insight into ANZAC history and

Australia's national identity.

Overnight in Canberra.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 19 Canberra - Fly to Cairns - Mossman Gorge

Today we fly from Canberra to Cairns, Queensland. At 1,745,000 square kilometres, Queensland ranks as Australia's second-largest state after Western Australia, more than twice the size of Texas. The coastline extends over 7,500 kilometres when accounting for the Cape York Peninsula and Gulf of Carpentaria. The state began as part of New South Wales, used as a penal colony from 1824 before free settlers—many arriving illegally—transformed it into agricultural centre. By 1859, population growth justified separate colony status. Settlers developed sheep, cattle, wheat, and cash crops including bananas, giving rise to the nickname "banana benders" that other Australians sometimes use for Queenslanders.

This afternoon we travel to Mossman Gorge and the Mossman Gorge Centre, an indigenous eco-tourism development serving visitors to this World Heritage rainforest. Our Dreamtime Gorge Walk Experience begins with a traditional smoking ceremony—burning native plants to create smoke that cleanses and wards off bad spirits according to Aboriginal tradition. The walk meanders through ancient rainforest past traditional shelters called humpies, while our indigenous guide demonstrates plant uses, identifies bush food sources, and explains the deep relationship between Aboriginal people and this tropical environment. Demonstrations include making bush soaps from native plants and creating ochre paintings using techniques unchanged for thousands of years. We conclude with traditional bush tea and damper, a simple bread cooked over coals.

Note: Air schedules may require moving this activity to our departure day from Cairns.

Overnight in Cairns.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 20 Cairns: Reef Cruise

Today we explore the Great Barrier Reef, the world's largest coral reef system and one of the planet's most extraordinary natural wonders. Stretching over 2,600 kilometres along Queensland's coast and covering approximately 344,400 square kilometres, this colossal ecosystem contains more individual reefs and coral cays than can be precisely counted. The reef's extraordinary biodiversity and ecological significance earned UNESCO World Heritage status in 1981.

Our reef-equipped vessel offers spacious decks and comfortable interior seating for the journey to the outer reef platforms. A buffet lunch is included, with beverages available for purchase. Snorkeling equipment is provided, and introductory briefings ensure even novice snorkelers can explore safely.

Descending into the crystal-clear waters reveals an underwater landscape unlike anything on land. Corals in every imaginable hue—electric blues, vibrant purples, soft pinks—create complex structures that provide habitat for thousands of species. Schools of tropical fish dart through the coral formations: parrotfish grazing on algae, angelfish in striking patterns, clownfish sheltering in anemones. Sea turtles glide past gracefully, their flippers propelling them through the water with surprising speed. We may spot reef sharks patrolling the deeper waters or dolphins investigating the boat.

The reef supports an estimated 1,500 fish species, 400 coral types, 4,000 mollusc species, and countless other marine organisms. Snorkeling here offers direct connection with one of Earth's most complex and fragile ecosystems—a living structure visible from space, built by organisms no larger than a fingernail.

Overnight in Cairns (dinner on your own this evening).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 21 Cairns: Kuranda Scenic Railway & Skyrail Experience

Today we venture into the Australian rainforest aboard the Kuranda Scenic Railway, a engineering achievement completed in 1891 after five years of construction through challenging terrain. The train winds through dense tropical forest, crossing bridges and entering tunnels carved through mountainsides. The route passes Barron Falls, which during wet season cascades 265 metres/869 feet down the escarpment, and through Barron Gorge where sheer cliffs rise on both sides of the track.

Upon arriving in Kuranda village, we have free time to explore the market stalls where local artisans display handcrafted items, Aboriginal art, and tropical produce. The village developed around the railway station, transforming from a remote settlement into a popular mountain retreat.

The Skyrail experience takes us skyward in gondolas soaring above the rainforest canopy for 7.5 kilometres. This aerial perspective reveals the rainforest's vertical structure—emergent trees breaking through the canopy, the dense middle layer where most wildlife lives, and the shaded forest floor. Two stops along the route allow walks on boardwalks where interpretive displays explain the ecosystem's complexity.

At Rainforestation Nature Park, the Pamagirri Aboriginal Experience begins with traditional dance performances in a rainforest amphitheater. Dancers in traditional body paint and ceremonial dress perform ancient corroborees—rhythmic movements and chants that convey Dreamtime stories and spiritual teachings passed through countless generations. A 30-minute Dreamtime Walk with our indigenous guide reveals the knowledge systems that allowed Aboriginal people to thrive in these rainforests for over 40,000 years, identifying medicinal plants, food sources, and the interconnections that sustain the ecosystem.

We enjoy lunch at Rainforestation before returning to Cairns (dinner on your own due to our substantial lunch).

Overnight in Cairns.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 22 Cairns: Fly to Darwin

Today we fly to Darwin, the Northern Territory's capital. Isolated from other Australian states, Darwin developed its own distinctive character influenced by Asian cultures—evident in its food scene, bustling markets, and warm hospitality. The city maintains living connections to Australia's Aboriginal history and art heritage, with indigenous communities preserving traditions and customs.

Darwin's tropical climate fosters an outdoor lifestyle year-round. The city blends old-fashioned frontier spirit with modern metropolitan energy—a place where outback ruggedness meets contemporary vibrancy. Opportunities exist to encounter wildlife including the "Dundees," local crocodile hunters who have become legendary figures in Australian folklore.

Overnight in Darwin.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 23 Darwin - Kakadu National Park

Today we drive along the Stuart and Arnhem Highways into Kakadu National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site encompassing 20,000 square kilometres of ancient landscapes. The park protects both natural and cultural heritage—Aboriginal people have lived here continuously for at least 65,000 years, making this one of the world's oldest living cultures with direct connection to their ancestral lands.

At Nourlangie Rock, an Aboriginal living shelter, we explore an area featuring creeks, billabongs, sandy plains, monsoon forests, and sandstone escarpments. This abundant environment has attracted Aboriginal groups for millennia, who established temporary camps to utilize seasonal resources—fish and waterfowl during wet season, yams and bush fruits as they ripened, and game animals year-round. Ancient rock paintings depicting barramundi, turtles, goannas, and human figures offer insights into daily life, spiritual beliefs, and the animals that sustained people. Some paintings are recent, refreshed within living memory, while others date back thousands of years. Signs and displays explain the art styles and landscape features, enhancing our understanding of this significant cultural site.

The Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre provides deeper context through interactive exhibits showcasing Bininj/Mungguy people's traditions, customs, and artistic expressions—illuminating their relationship with the land, seasonal movement patterns, and the knowledge

systems that allowed them to thrive in this challenging environment.

After lunch, we cruise Yellow Waters Billabong through the South Alligator River floodplain. During wet season, this area transforms into vast shallow lakes; by dry season it contracts to permanent billabongs where wildlife concentrates. As we glide through tranquil waters, we observe waterbirds—jabirus, magpie geese, egrets—and raptors including sea eagles and kites hunting from the air. With luck, we may spot saltwater crocodiles lurking in the shallows, only their eyes and nostrils visible above the waterline.

Overnight in Kakadu.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 24 Kakadu Touring - Darwin: City Tour

Venturing deeper into Kakadu, we reach Ubirr, a renowned Aboriginal rock art site that served as both shelter and canvas for countless generations. A moderate walk leads to lookouts overlooking the Nadab floodplain, where views extend across wetlands to Arnhem Land escarpment. The rock art galleries showcase indigenous artistic traditions spanning thousands of years—x-ray paintings depicting fish, turtles, and goannas with their internal organs visible, contact paintings showing European ships with full sails, and dynamic hunting scenes. At the main gallery, a rare painting depicts the thylacine—the Tasmanian tiger—which disappeared from the mainland over two thousand years ago, providing remarkable evidence of the region's ancient ecosystem and the accuracy of Aboriginal artistic observation.

Optional scenic flight over Twin and Jim Jim Falls is available for those wanting aerial perspectives of Kakadu's most dramatic waterfalls (your Tour Leader can arrange details and pricing). The Wetlands Visitors Centre offers panoramic views and informative exhibits about the region's ecology, seasonal transformations, and Aboriginal management practices.

Returning to Darwin, we tour the city including Parliament House, a tropical-adapted building with wide verandahs and elevated design. Stokes Hill Wharf buzzes with restaurants and cafes overlooking the harbour, while the Mooring Basin preserves Darwin's maritime heritage. The Botanic Gardens showcase tropical and desert plants adapted to the harsh climate. East Point Reserve provides coastal views and World War II gun emplacements—reminders that Darwin was the only Australian city to suffer sustained attack during the war, enduring 64 air raids between 1942 and 1943. Time permitting, we visit the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, exploring Aboriginal art, Southeast Asian maritime connections, Cyclone Tracy exhibits, and natural history collections.

Overnight in Darwin.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 25 Darwin - Fly to Alice Springs

Today we fly to Alice Springs, the Northern Territory's central hub. The deep connection to Aboriginal culture is evident throughout—many Aboriginal people work as stockmen on vast cattle stations, preserving traditional ways of life. Rock art, ancient sites, and cultural centres dot the landscape, testaments to their enduring heritage.

The arid landscape contrasts sharply with coastal Australia: red earth, deep blue sky, and vast open spaces create an otherworldly atmosphere. Alice Springs gained international recognition in 1950 with Neville Shute's novel "A Town Like Alice," later adapted into film. The town's name honours Alice Gray, wife of the telegraph station manager who played a significant role in early development.

Overnight in Alice Springs.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 26 Alice Springs Sightseeing

Our Alice Springs tour begins at ANZAC Hill, providing panoramic views across the MacDonnell Ranges. The memorial honours Australians who served in military conflicts, positioned where it overlooks the town from every direction. We visit the Old Telegraph Station, established in 1872 to relay messages along the transcontinental line connecting Adelaide to Darwin and ultimately to London. The station operated until

1932, its stone buildings now preserved as museum demonstrating how the telegraph transformed Australian communications and opened the interior to development.

The Royal Flying Doctor Service headquarters reveals how medical care reaches Australia's vast outback. Founded in 1928, the service operates aircraft from bases across remote regions, providing emergency response, regular clinic visits to isolated stations, and radio medical consultations. The communications centre coordinates flights across distances where the nearest hospital may be 500 kilometres distant.

Alice Springs School of the Air has been providing education to children at remote cattle stations, roadhouses, Aboriginal communities, and national parks through satellite broadband since 1951. The broadcast area covers 1.3 million square kilometres across the Northern Territory, northern South Australia, and eastern Western Australia—daily lessons reaching students aged 4 to 13 years scattered across impossibly vast distances. Some students live 1,000 kilometres from the nearest classmate.

The Alice Springs Desert Park reveals Central Australian desert ecosystems through three distinct habitats. Hundreds of plant and animal species can be observed along walking trails—from desert oaks and spinifex grass to red kangaroos and thorny devils. The nature theatre features free-flying birds of prey demonstrating hunting techniques, while the nocturnal house displays rare and endangered animals including bilbies and mala wallabies. Local guides explain the interlinking relationships between plants, animals, and Aboriginal people. A cinematic presentation traces 4.5 billion years of desert evolution.

Overnight in Alice Springs.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 27 Alice Springs - Uluru (Ayers Rock)

Today, we have a scenic drive through the Macdonnell Ranges, a rugged mountain range that stretches across the heart of the Australian outback. As we traverse this arid landscape, we witness the dramatic contrast between the red sandstone cliffs and the vast, open plains.

Our journey culminates at Uluru, a colossal monolith that stands as a testament to the power of nature. This iconic landmark, measuring over 300 meters (1,000 feet) in height and 5 kilometers (3 miles) in length, is a remnant of ancient mountains that have eroded over time, leaving Uluru as a solitary sentinel in the desert. In 1989, scientists made a groundbreaking discovery, revealing that Uluru, the Macdonnell Ranges, and the nearby Kata Tjuta (the Olgas) were once part of a single plateau. This geological connection further highlights the significance of this region as a natural wonder.

While British explorers had ventured through the Red Centre as early as 1844, Uluru remained relatively unknown until 1873, when it was named Ayers Rock after Sir Henry Ayers, a colonial administrator of the day.

Upon arriving at Uluru, we embark on a short walk around its base, marveling at its sheer size and the intricate patterns etched into its surface. The changing colours of Uluru, particularly at sunrise and sunset, create a mesmerizing spectacle.

As the day draws to a close, we head to the sunset viewing area, where we witness one of nature's most breathtaking displays. As the sun dips below the horizon, Uluru is bathed in a kaleidoscope of colors, casting a magical glow over the desert landscape.

Overnight near Ayers Rock.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 28 Uluru - Fly to Sydney

We rise before dawn to witness sunrise illuminating the domes of Kata Tjuta, known as the Olgas to early European explorers. As darkness gives way to first light, we tour around the base of these remarkable rock formations. Kata Tjuta comprises 36 conglomerate rock domes spread across 3,500 hectares, the tallest rising 546 metres/1,791 feet—actually higher than Uluru though less famous. The domes form a sacred site for the Anangu people with restricted areas where traditional ceremonies still occur. The name Kata Tjuta means "many heads" in the local language, an apt description of these clustered formations. As sunrise progresses, colours wash across the rock faces—the rounded domes illuminated by horizontal light that reveals their intricate patterns and textures created by water, wind, and sun over millions of years.

Following our sunrise experience, we return to Ayers Rock Airport and fly to Sydney, Australia's largest city wrapped around one of the world's finest natural harbours. The flight traces the change from desert red to coastal green as we cross the Great Dividing Range.

Upon arrival, we begin exploring Sydney. Captain James Cook sailed past Sydney Harbour in 1770, spotting the distinctive headlands but missing the vast harbour hidden behind them. The British fleet arriving in 1788 to establish a penal colony discovered this sheltered harbour that would become the foundation of Australian settlement.

During our stay we visit the Sydney Opera House, a masterpiece of modern architecture whose sail-like shells have become an international icon since opening in 1973. We may take a ferry ride across the harbour for views of the Harbour Bridge—the massive steel arch completed in 1932 that locals call "the Coathanger." The Rocks district preserves Sydney's colonial origins through cobblestone streets, sandstone warehouses converted to galleries and cafes, and pubs operating since the 19th century.

Overnight in Sydney.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 29 Sydney: City Tour

Today's touring begins with a scenic cruise on Port Jackson, Sydney's majestic harbour. As we glide through the crystal-clear waters, we are treated to stunning views of the city's skyline, the iconic Sydney Harbour Bridge, and the pristine white sandy beaches that line the harbour. The Sydney Harbour Bridge, affectionately known as "the Coathanger," is a marvel of engineering, spanning one of the harbor's narrowest inlets. As we pass beneath this iconic landmark, we marvel at its impressive scale and architectural elegance.

Our tour takes us to Bondi Beach, a world-famous destination renowned for its golden sands, turquoise waters, and vibrant beach culture. We also explore the trendy neighborhoods of Paddington and Oxford Street, known for their boutique shops, cafes, and lively atmosphere. King's Cross, another iconic area, offers a glimpse into Sydney's nightlife and entertainment scene.

If not already visited, one of the highlights of our day is a guided tour of the Sydney Opera House, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the world's most recognizable landmarks. This architectural masterpiece is a testament to Sydney's cultural vibrancy and its status as a global city. As we explore the Opera House, we are treated to a behind-the-scenes experience, gaining access to areas that are normally off-limits to the public. We run our hands over the famous shell tiles, admire the elegant custom-made white birch timber chairs, and marvel at the soaring vaulted ceilings. We explore the various theaters and foyers, imagining the performances that take place within these hallowed halls.

Overnight in Sydney.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 30 Sydney: The Blue Mountains

This morning we journey west by coach to the Blue Mountains, named for the ethereal blue haze that blankets the eucalyptus forests. The haze results from oil droplets released by millions of gum trees, the fine mist creating the distinctive blue tinge visible from distance.

Our first stop is Featherdale Wildlife Park, where we encounter Australian wildlife difficult to find in the wild: koalas, kangaroos, wombats, wallabies, Tasmanian devils, and dingoes provide intimate glimpses into Australia's unique marsupial evolution. The park maintains breeding programs for endangered species while allowing close encounters impossible in wilderness settings.

Continuing into Blue Mountains National Park—a UNESCO World Heritage Site protecting over one million hectares—we visit Wentworth Falls Reserve. A short walk brings us to viewpoints where Wentworth Falls plunges 297 metres/974 feet down the escarpment in multiple cascades. The falls were named for explorer William Wentworth, who led the first European party across the Blue Mountains in 1813, finally finding the route west that had eluded earlier expeditions.

We drive along Cliff Drive, winding through rugged terrain with extensive vistas across the Jamison Valley, reaching the Echo Point Visitor Information Centre. Colourful parrots, lorikeets, and rosellas flock to the centre's panoramic windows, drawn by visitors offering seed. From the main lookout we view the Three Sisters formation—three sandstone peaks rising above the valley. Aboriginal legend tells of three sisters from the Katoomba tribe who were turned to stone by their father to protect them from danger; he died before reversing the spell, leaving them petrified forever. The scientific explanation involves differential erosion of the sandstone, but the legend adds deeper meaning to the striking formation.

After a full day exploring the mountains, we return to Sydney.

Overnight in Sydney.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 31 Departure

Departure from Sydney.

BON VOYAGE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast