



New Zealand's rugged landscape is ideal for adrenaline seekers and hikers alike; the country offers colourful vistas, from the dramatic gorse-covered sides of Skipper's Canyon near Queenstown (below) to the kaleidoscope of mineral deposits left by White Island's active volcano (top right); spot more than half a dozen species of whale in the waters that surround Kaikoura



# THE WILD FIVE

Picturesque landscapes with vast mountain ranges, steaming volcanoes and a huge coastline make New Zealand the perfect natural playground. *Tristan Rutherford* reveals five of the best adventure activities to keep even the most demanding explorers entertained

## VOLCANIC EXPERIENCE, WHITE ISLAND

► Bobbing in the North Island's Bay of Plenty, White Island is New Zealand's only active marine volcano that spouts white steam high into the sky. "New Zealand cruising is simply remarkable," says Rebecca Pattinson, senior broker at Ocean Independence. "The natural beauty of the landscape and surrounding waters are a nature lover's paradise. And no trip to New Zealand would be complete without visiting the Bay of Plenty."

It was Captain Cook who coined the name White Island in 1769, taking inspiration from the gracious plume of white steam that hovers over the isle. Since then, dozens of mini-eruptions have morphed the island's dramatic topography into the rugged landscape that it boasts today. A natural scenic reserve since 1953, White Island's access remains strictly regulated, which makes immersing yourself in this authentic, active volcano a once in a lifetime experience.

Begin your exploration by dropping anchor at nearby Tauranga, which also provides access to the gorges and waterfalls of the subtropical Kaimai Mamaku Forest Park. From here, White Island's steaming crater complex – the only part of the volcano above sea level – is best accessed via helicopter. Once you're on the island itself, this vivid experience gets otherworldly. Clamber past tumbling lava domes, a steaming crater lake, bubbling mud pits and fumaroles steaming up from the centre of the earth.

White Island's lunar landscape isn't just confined to dry land. Abundant marine life – from giant packhorse crayfish and stingrays, to nudibranchs and sea urchins – congregates around the underwater volcanic vents.

## WHALE WATCHING, KAIKOURA

► "With its vast landscape of mountains, deep fjords, rainforests, glaciers and bubbling geothermal pools, the country has adventures for everyone," says Cristabel Nye, charter broker

at Camper & Nicholsons. There are few places in the country where this sentiment is more accurate than Kaikoura.

Sited on the northeast coastline of the South Island, Kaikoura was affected by an earthquake last November. However, according to our local contacts, all local sealife and marine mammals are as abundant as they ever were. Local divemasters, restaurateurs and tourism chiefs are keen that yachts sail in and help the local economy. Once you do you won't be disappointed. New Zealand fur seals bask on the shoreline's rocks and pods of dusky dolphins play hide-and-seek amid the ocean waves.

But it's the giant sperm whales – many of them weighing more than 60 tonnes – that render this destination an Instagram sensation. Year-round, more than half a dozen whale species also congregate in the waters that surround Kaikoura, including more elusive orcas, humpback and blue whales. Grab your binoculars, then spy these ►

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sleek forms slicing the sea's surface from the comfort of your deck. Alternatively, spot these supreme specimens from a helicopter, taking in thousand-mile sweeps of marine landscape with imposing mountains beyond.

An exciting day spent observing these majestic creatures is a surefire way to whet the appetite. Crack open a bottle of Marlborough sauvignon blanc and ask your chef to prepare a platter of crayfish. As the name Kaikoura means "meal of crayfish" in Māori, the lobster couldn't get any more local.

**FLY-FISHING, GREAT LAKE TAUPŌ**

► Scattered with shimmering lakes, meandering rivers and cascading waterfalls, New Zealand's crystal-clear waters are world renowned. It is little wonder then that the country is home to some of the best fly-fishing in the world.

After starting your trip with a splash through the turquoise bays that surround Waiheke Island, just east of Auckland, explore inland by taking a chopper to Great Lake Taupō. The country's largest freshwater lake plunges to depths of nearly 200m. Better still, it's tucked into the Taupō volcano caldera at the very heart of North Island. Māori rock carvings trim its northwest shoreline, but it's the rainbow and brown trout, which skirt the lake's surface as well as the currents of the southern Tongariro River, that attract keen anglers from around the globe. Knowledgeable local guides can assist visitors in tracking down the lake's most superlative specimens.

"This region has year-round opportunities, set in an amazing landscape shaped by volcanic forces," explains Sam Bourne, a member of New Zealand's 2016 World Championship fly-fishing team. "It's also steeped in both Māori and Pākehā [New Zealanders of European descent] angling traditions - a combination of natural and cultural heritage that makes Great Lake Taupō the trout capital of New Zealand."

There's no finer way to finish off your day than with a sundowner in one of the

region's premier fly-fishing lodges, such as the picturesque Poronui Lodge or the sophisticated Huka Lodge. Here the resident gourmet chefs can barbecue, bake or sauté your prized catch to perfection.

**HELI-SKIING, WANAKA AND QUEENSTOWN**

► In a country famed for its spellbinding sea life, many New Zealand explorers spend their leisure time along the country's 9,000 miles of virgin coast. Yet this picturesque nation also possesses the skyscraping Southern Alps, with plenty of skiing, snowboarding and thrilling winter adventure activities to boot.

Tom DeBuse, director of charter management at Y.CO, places great

*"AFTER RIDING THE KIWI WAVES OR SPLASHING BENEATH THE WATER'S SURFACE, IT CAN BE A CHALLENGE TO LEAVE THE NEW ZEALAND OCEAN FOR TERRA FIRMA"*

importance on choosing the best vessel for your itinerary. His pick for hitting New Zealand's southern ski slopes? The ultimate explorer yacht, the 59 metre *Senses*. "She is experienced in heli-skiing operations. She offers a 6,000nm range, which is perfect for New Zealand's vast coastline. It's the ideal yacht for adrenaline seekers who want to explore off the beaten track."

Base yourself in the South Island's Fiordland then board a helicopter to the resort towns of Wanaka, on the edge of Mount Aspiring National Park, or Queenstown, perched on postcard-perfect Lake Wakatipu. From here, heli-skiing offers the option

of personal itineraries through the snow-topped mountains, each one tailored to your own specific skills. Expect miles of untouched, treeless slopes, plus glacier runs, powder bowls and pristine peaks - as well as a killer après-ski scene. Alternatively, if you find yourself visiting during the summer months, you can make the most of the extensive mountain hiking trails such as the Queenstown Hill Time Walk which offers fantastic views of Lake Wakatipu.

**KAURI CLIFFS CHAMPIONSHIP GOLF COURSE**

► After riding the Kiwi waves or splashing beneath the water's surface, it can be a challenge to leave the New Zealand ocean for terra firma. But Kauri Cliffs - one of the world's most visually stunning golf courses - more than merits an afternoon or two ashore.

Drop anchor in the subtropical Bay of Islands. These clustered 144 islets are sought out for their coastal hiking, superb snorkelling and emerald lagoons. Spend a leisurely day kayaking, paddle-boarding or diving off the nearby Cavalli Islands, one of New Zealand's top scuba sites. Then it's time to head to nearby Kauri Cliffs, perched just northwest on North Island, overlooking Matauri Bay. Regularly ranked one of the top 50 courses in the world, Kauri Cliffs was designed by premier golf course architect David Harman. "The natural beauty is just astounding throughout,"

boasted Harman on its completion.

The par-72 championship course has Pacific Ocean views from 15 of its 18 holes. Half a dozen of them are played alongside the sheer cliffs from which the links take their name. The course also hosts putting and chipping greens, as well as a world-class practice range. The fact that Kauri Cliffs is also a working farm, where visitors are welcome to take a peek at the resident Angus cattle and Coopworth sheep, adds an unexpected delight. And after tackling the course, the Manuka Honey Healing Cocoon massage at the on-site spa offers the perfect way to unwind. ■



*Heli-skiing spectacular Clarke Glacier (top) and jet-boating to the base of the roaring 11m Huka Falls, near Taupō (right), are must-dos for any visitor; balance that with fly-fishing for trout in the Tongariro river, playing the green at Kauri Cliffs in the Bay of Islands, one of the most stunning golf courses in the world, or soaking up the views at postcard-perfect Lake Wanaka (left)*

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