

100% PURE MOTO RCYCLING

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PHOTOS: MM, IN, AR

If you only ride one foreign country in your life, make it New Zealand. If you ride two, make them the North Island and the South Island. NZ is your ideal foreign-touring debut destination because it's cheap, close and everything's easy for us Australians. But the variety, beauty, differences and sheer joy of riding make it worthwhile for even the most experienced jet-setting motorcyclists.

Here's a guide to all the basics before you plan a ride there, and we've followed it up with two stories we reckon will inspire you to go.

FIRST UP: THE BIKE

There is one crucial consideration if you're doing a motorcycle ride in New Zealand: the bike. It won't be much of a ride without it, eh? Until recently you had two options, to ride someone else's bike or to ship your own over. At this stage, you can rule out the latter unless you're prepared to do all the groundwork yourself because no-one is offering a regular service. Get Routed has stopped its bike-shipping service to NZ in favour of other destinations and we're not aware of anyone else doing it.

Renting a bike in NZ is very easy and



surprisingly affordable. Prices have come down recently in this very competitive market, in spite of high demand from international tourists. In a handful of cases you can get a 650 single for well under \$100 a day, but if you want a ballpark figure think \$150-\$250 as a median range. That's Kiwi dollars too.

Choices cover the full range of two-wheelers, most of them close to new, but there are even a couple of companies who rent out classic bikes. BMWs dominate the lists but there are plenty of Triumphs and a good selection of most other brands. Naturally, sports-tourers and adventure-tourers are dominant, but you'll also find tourers, retros and cruisers.

MAKING A PLAN

You won't go far wrong if you grab a map and see where it takes you in NZ. You'll find good roads but having a bit of a plan helps. If you're going it alone, there's lots of info on destinations, tourist attractions and good roads on the web, and the book *Twisting Throttle New Zealand* by Mike Hyde features 50 excellent routes throughout NZ (see our review in issue #98).

It's hard to beat local knowledge,

though, and if you're renting a bike you might as well get an itinerary or join a full tour by the company you're renting from. Whether you've got a day or a couple of weeks, these people will put you on the right track without any stuffing around.

"We know that not everyone can get away for a week or more to do a touring holiday but they could fit in a few days as part of their holiday," Xen Zambas says, summing it up for all those agencies. "We are expert at providing a great riding experience in just a three-day tour — we call them Epic Rides. We know where to find the best roads so you can enjoy your bike to the full."

Whatever you plan, be flexible along the way. NZ allows for it so you don't need to push yourself just to stick to a schedule that's become challenging for any reason.

GETTING THERE

Simple. Book a flight and go. You don't need a visa to visit, just fly in on your Aussie passport. Flight prices vary considerably depending upon the season, the destination and how early you book, but you can get there and back for a few hundred dollars if you find the right fare. Jump online or get a travel agent to chase it for you. Don't get caught out by excess-baggage charges — the weight of your riding gear adds up so it's worth pre-packing so you can weigh it all and book a fare with the weight allowance you need.

THE NATIVES

Our little cousins over the ditch are a funny mob, quick with a joke and always eager to take the piss out of Aussies. They're happy to get as good as they give too, and if you don't come home with memories full of laughter I'd be surprised.

"You won't go far wrong if you grab a map and see where it takes you in NZ. You'll find good roads"



GUIDES AND RENTALS

These are just a few of the agencies that offer rentals, itineraries and/or guides. *ARR* has had experience with each and we recommend them.

Most tour companies offer a number of specific itineraries but Kiwi operators seem more flexible than others and are usually willing to talk about options to fit your circumstances. Ask about riding gear and luggage options if you need them, as well as storage of anything you don't need on the ride.

There are a number of things to check before committing to a tour or rental agreement. Always read the fine print in the contract. You need to know where you stand on topics like insurance excesses and exclusions, costs that may be outside the offer, whether you can ride on gravel roads and so on.

Just Ride Motorbike Tours

Offers: Guided, self-guided, rental and customised tours

Bikes: Aprilia, Ducati, Triumph

Offices: Auckland

Contact: justridemotorbiketours.com, + 64 21 545 534

Motorcycle Rental NZ

Offers: Guided, rental and customised tours

Bikes: BMW, Honda, Kawasaki, Triumph

Offices: Christchurch

Contact: motorcyclerental.co.nz

Paradise Motorcycle Tours NZ

Offers: Guided, self-guided, rental and customised tours

Bikes: BMW, Triumph, Can-Am

Offices: Auckland, Christchurch

Contact: paradisemotorcycletours.co.nz, +64 9 473 9404

South Pacific Motorcycle Tours

Offers: Guided, self-guided, rental and customised tours

Bikes: BMW, Harley, Honda, Suzuki, Triumph

Offices: Christchurch

Contact: motorbiketours.co.nz, +64 3 312 0066

Te Waipounamu Motorcycle Tours

Offers: Guided, self-guided, rental and customised tours

Bikes: BMW, Honda, Suzuki, Triumph

Offices: Auckland, Christchurch

Contact: motorcycle-hire.co.nz, +64 3 372 3537

It's great fun to sit in the pub while any Australia-versus-NZ game is on the box. Kiwis are proud and inventive, as you can see from examples like Burt Munro and John Britten, two men who made outrageously fast motorcycles in their day using little more than hammers, matches and imagination.

New Zealanders speak the same language as us, use dollars and cents that are worth about 90 per cent of ours, ride on the same side of the road, have similar speed limits and do many other things the same way we do, so in reality a visit to NZ is only the next step up from going to Tasmania (or the Big Island if you're already in Tassie). It's the ideal first foreign destination for anyone who's a little reluctant about the idea, yet it's also so different from Australia that it's as good as any overseas adventure.

PAPERWORK AND STUFF

Your Aussie rider's licence is good over there. Your ATM card and credit card will work fine (I always withdraw cash from an ATM over there, reducing the amount of fees the banks get from exchanging currency). Telecommunications tends to be expensive in NZ, so check your phone and data rates before going and consider purchasing a local SIM card when you're over there. Public wireless networks are reasonably common so take advantage of them when using your smartphone or tablet. Coverage in rural areas can be as patchy as back home.

Their road rules aren't very different from ours (they ditched their odd give-way regulations a couple of years ago). You'll find a guide at nzta.govt.nz, where there's also a dedicated e-book for motorcyclists. Police are pretty hot on speeding these days.

As always, buy travel insurance to get you out of trouble and make sure it covers you for riding motorcycles — many policies exclude it.

DAILY DISTANCES

You can ride the full length of either island in a day, but you'd want to be keen. In a week, you could lap one of the islands in a relaxed way, seeing enough of the sights and finding many of the best roads. Even that's optimistic, believes Nigel Howard of Motorcycle Rentals NZ. Everyone's advice is to keep the distances modest and to avoid covering too much ground on your trip.





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“You will certainly be able to sample many types of spectacular scenery, from pristine beaches to forests and lakes, snow-capped mountains and glaciers,” Nigel says. “The general opinion from both my own experience and from fellow bikers is that 350km in New Zealand is equivalent to 600km in Australia.”

This is because NZ roads are slower and the country gives you more reasons to stop regularly to play the tourist, or simply to rest after another intense run of corners. In many places you won't get near an average of 100km/h between stops, let alone through the whole day. Ambitious aims to cover longer distances may make

your Kiwi holiday less enjoyable, as Xen Zambas of Just Ride implies when he says, “we do pure riding for fun. We don't aim to do great distances, although sometimes that happens.”

ROAD CONDITIONS

NZ's sealed roads can be as bad as ours, and sometimes worse due to moss growing on them, especially down south, and gravel strewn across apexes. But they are generally pretty good and you'll feel at home on them — though you'll spend more time leaning over in corners! The greatest threat comes from the dreaded campervan driven by rubber-necking

Europeans who go very slowly and often forget which side of the road they're meant to be on. Be vigilant.

Some roads don't see much sun because of the forest canopy, and you'll find damp, slippery patches on these. Heavy rain often washes debris onto roads and black ice can be an unexpected hazard in cold conditions. You'll encounter untold one-lane bridges, all with a give way sign at one end, but Mike Rose of Paradise Motorcycle Tours has often had car drivers simply fail to see beyond their bonnet and ignore his right of way. “My advice is give way to everyone,” he says. “You're much more vulnerable on a bike.”

NZ's gravel roads are seriously gravelly and come as a shock to many Aussies. They're not always hard-packed like ours, but covered with coarse, loose, deep gravel that can be horrible if you're on fat street tyres. Some rental agencies won't let you take their bikes anywhere near them while others may give you the option. “We have more accidents on them than anywhere else and it can mean the end of someone's dream holiday,” Mike says. He's seen experienced dirt riders end up in hospital after falling on gravel. “If someone can convince me they have good off-road credentials I'll say they're OK to ride them, but generally I say no.”

EATING AND SLEEPING

Except for a few places in peak season, it's easy to find accommodation when you need it, so booking ahead isn't always necessary. Of course, it's good to know there's a bed at the end of your day, but many Kiwis say you're better off maintaining the flexibility of an open destination — just in case the rain comes down in a big way, you find yourself heading down a different road to the one you planned, or you find somewhere else that you can't resist.

Like Australia, NZ has everything from rough pubs to flash hotels, with excellent B&Bs in between. The bach — Kiwi speak for a holiday house — is almost as common as the Aussie barbecue and they're often up for rent, giving you a house at a reasonable rate. As for the food, it's just like home except for the way they pronounce fish 'n' chips. The Kiwis know how to cook good food and quality cafe and restaurants have sprung up everywhere. Lamb shanks are a treat, the coffee is as good ours and the beer's generally better. **ARR**