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ESCAPE

NEW ZEALAND

RUSH HOUR

The land of extreme adventure
just got a whole lot better

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OK, you've been. You've got the pics, the memories and even the plastic tiki. But you haven't "done" New Zealand, not by a long chalk. While you've been travelling elsewhere, our near neighbour has kept on adding experiences that compete with the best in the world, and new tourism regions have emerged offering fewer crowds and in-depth experiences of Kiwi culture. Here are 10 excellent reasons to cross the Ditch again.

IT'S CRUISEY

One of the fastest-growing cruise markets in the world is, you guessed it, New Zealand, where cruise ship spending jumped nearly 20 per cent in the past year. The mass-market sector is booming but the hottest trend is luxury smaller-ship cruises that provide privileged access to some of New Zealand's most remote and pristine places as well as ports off the beaten track. They come complete with all-inclusive food, wine and entertainment, personal butlers and crew-to-passenger ratios approaching one-to-one.

Over the next two cruise seasons, a mini-flotilla of luxury lines is heading to New Zealand, including Seabourn, Silversea, Azamara, Ponant, Viking, Crystal, Cunard and Regent Seven Seas. Plenty of itineraries will depart from or include Australian ports.

THERE'S AN INFLUX OF LUXE

If you're an aficionado of fine accommodation, there's a raft of new luxury openings and refurbishments to enjoy, including some in regions previously under the radar.

The very sleek The Lindis five-suite luxury boutique hotel opens in the wilds of the South Canterbury high-country on November 1. Five-star Cabot Lodge also opens its doors in Fiordland on the same day with four chalets looking onto Lake Manapouri and nearby peaks. Early November sees the debut of Cowshed 488, a stylishly renovated 1909 farmhouse 30 minutes north of Greymouth on the South Island's West Coast.

In Auckland, AccorHotels will open a 130-room Sofitel property in the CBD in November. Wellington has a

new 106-room (14 suites) DoubleTree by Hilton and a new 62-suite Naumi Hotel is scheduled for 2019.

Hi-tech travellers are flocking to the recently opened, 57-room mi-pad Queenstown that turns guests' smartphones into room keys and room controls. And if you're a fan of Australia's QT hotels, NZ now has two, in Queenstown and Wellington.

Travellers to the Wellington region can enjoy the recent \$NZ3.2 million (\$2.9 million) refurbishment of Wharekauhau lodge. At Craggy Range in Hawke's Bay, new garden cottages and river lodges will open in the second quarter of 2019. The grande dame of them all, Huka Lodge, was recently recognised by *Travel + Leisure* (USA) magazine as the No. 1 Resort Hotel in Australasia.

THELINDIS.COM, CABOTLODGE.COM, COWSHED488.COM, ACCORHOTELS.COM, DOUBLETREE3.HILTON.COM, MIPADHOTELS.COM, QTHOTELSANDRESORTS.COM, WHAREKAUHAU.CO.NZ, CRAGGYRANGE.COM, HUKALODGE.CO.NZ

IT'S COSMIC, MAN

In the hot, new travel category of astro-tourism (stargazing) New Zealand is, er, a star. Astrophiles from around the world are making a beeline to Aotea/Great Barrier Island, a largely off-the-grid island 93km northeast of Auckland that is one of only four recognised Dark Sky Sanctuaries in the world. In the South Island, the Tekapo area of the Aoraki/

Mt Cook region is home to the southern hemisphere's largest International Dark Sky Reserve.

Night tourism is a big trend in New Zealand, whether for nocturnal wildlife-spotting, sound-and-light shows among the geysers at Te Puia in Rotorua, or tackling the famed Tongariro Alpine Crossing at 2am – but strictly only with a guide!

In the winter months until late October, Southland and Rakiura/Stewart Island are perfect places to view the Aurora Australis, the southern hemisphere equivalent of the Northern Lights.

GREATBARRIERISLANDTOURISM.CO.NZ, REALJOURNEYS.CO.NZ, TEPUIA.COM, ADRIFTNZ.CO.NZ, EARTHANDSKY.CO.NZ, FIRSTLIGHTTRAVEL.COM

YOU HAVE NOT SEEN IT ALL

While the big-gun destinations of Queenstown, Rotorua and Milford

Sound are as impressive as ever, they've been joined by up-and-coming regions. The newcomers have heritage, culture, architecture and environments that offer authentic experiences of Kiwi culture.

In the Central North Island, the Taupo and Ruapehu regions are emerging as year-round destinations for eco and active pursuits. The Whanganui River region, once known as the Rhine of the South, is well worth investigating.

In the South Island, the buzz is about the high-country landscapes and glacial lakes of the Mackenzie District in South Canterbury, as well as the Southern Scenic Route which runs from the South Island gateway city of Christchurch via the Central Otago wine region, Queenstown, Fiordland and Southland.

Super-active travellers are heading to Aotea/Great Barrier for stargazing, Rakiura/Stewart Island for eco-tourism and Chatham Islands, 800km east of the mainland, for adventure.

VISITRUAPEHU.COM, MTRUAPEHU.COM, GREATLAKETAUPO.COM, VISITWHANGANUI.NZ, MACKENZIE.NZ, CENTRALOTAGONZ.COM, FIORDLAND.ORG.NZ, SOUTHLANDNZ.COM, STEWARTISLAND.CO.NZ, DISCOVERTHECHATHAMISLANDS.CO.NZ

MORE THINGS MAORI

If you haven't crossed the Ditch for a while you'll see a resurgence of Maori language and its presence in mainstream culture. More indigenous owned cultural experiences enable visitors to see the country from a Maori perspective. In the Bay of Islands, Papatuanuku Earth Mother Tours shows how Maori traditionally used forest trees, plants and birds.

On Aotea/Great Barrier Island, Motairehe Marae is launching Stars of Aotea, a new Dark Sky Sanctuary business in November.

In Hawke's Bay, Napier Maori Tours provides eco-cultural tours to historic reserves and estuaries plus samplings of contemporary Maori cuisine.