

## Lifestyle

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# Thrills galore in New Zealand

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NEW Zealand is an adrenalin junkie's paradise. For a relatively small country, New Zealand boasts a list of thrilling outdoor activities that is almost limitless.

Nowhere else in the world can you bathe in volcanic mud, hike up glaciers, jump out of a plane, explore underground rivers and go whale-watching – all in the space of 48 hours.

**Fire:** As befitting its location on the Pacific "Ring of Fire", New Zealand has plenty of volcanoes and geothermal activity, helping create natural wonders like Rotorua.

Set on a volcanic plateau on North Island, Rotorua consists of erupting hot water geysers, steaming cracks in the Earth's surface and, most famously, hot pools of bubbling mud.



Adrenalin rush: Zorbing in Rotorua; and tandem-skydiving in Queenstown (below). – Tourism New Zealand, and Wayne Johnson

It is spread over a large area, with scores of lakes and beaches, perfect for outdoor activities like mountain biking and the typically crazy Kiwi sport of Zorbing, which involves climbing inside a transparent giant ball and being rolled down a hillside.

The most popular sites for visitors are the mud pools at Kuirau Park, the hot springs at Hell's Gate and the geysers at Waioatapu Thermal Wonderland. If you can block your nostrils against the strong eggy smell of the sulphur, then a bathe in the mud pools is a fun and therapeutic experience.

In fact, the properties of the mud are said to rival some of the best and most expensive spa treatments for the skin.

**Ice:** A glacier is often described as a river of ice and, from a distance, that is exactly what it looks like as you gaze up at Fox Glacier, a ribbon of white spilling down the mountainside of New Zealand's two tallest peaks.



Towering over the small town of the same name, Fox Glacier is one of the very few glaciers in the world where supervised hikers are allowed to explore its ice caves, steep sides and deep crevasses.

The most exciting way to see this force of Mother Nature is to do a heli-hike, which deposits you on the more inaccessible parts of the glacier. For me, the helicopter ride itself was an experience not to be missed as it skirts sheer walls of rock and flies so close to water-falls that you can almost feel the spray.

After landing and being equipped with crampon leather boots, gloves and a stick for support, you get the chance to explore this natural wonder. The thing that struck me the most was the different colours of the ice, which varied from bright white to a deep almost turquoise blue.

And there is a sense of childish amusement to be had in clambering through ice caves and jumping over small but bottomless crevasses.

It is recommended that visitors go with a guide even if you forego the heli-tour, as the ice can be unstable and is constantly changing. Also, be sure to use sun block — being surrounded by ice, you are very exposed to the sun's rays.

**Water:** New Zealand offers plenty of opportunities for canoeing, kayaking and rafting. However, Kiwis like to do things differently, and here you have the opportunity to try black-water rafting. Essentially, this means traversing an underground river in pitch darkness, with only headlamps and thousands of glow-worms to guide the way.

This activity is offered in the subterranean wonderland known as the Glow Worm Caves in Waitomo. The rafting actually consists of giant tyre inner tubes, and is not for the claustrophobic or the physically unfit, as you will be expected to weave, squeeze, jump, abseil and float through cold underground streams, before emerging into a lush green forest.

For a more sedate but no less exhilarating water-based pursuit, you can visit Kaikoura to go whale-watching. This place has become so synonymous with sightings of the great creatures that many of the operators offer refunds if none are sighted. Kaikoura's unusual currents and underwater canyons attract an abundance of marine life, including the giant Sperm Whale, dolphins, orcas and endangered birdlife, such as the albatross.

Also, depending on what time of year you visit, there are Humpback, Blue and Pilot whales in attendance.

**Air:** Queenstown on South Island is home to the original 43m-high Kawarau Bridge Bungy, and New Zealand is the first place to make bungee-jumping into a mass activity.

This daunting leap from a bridge spanning a river-filled ravine, attracts tens of thousands of people each year who opt to plummet forwards, backwards or even in tandem with a friend. You also have the option of simply touching the water or being fully immersed in it before being sprung back into the air.

If hurling yourself off of a bridge is not your thing, then how about jumping out of a plane from 15,000 feet?

You may, like me, be so shocked at the speed of the 200kph freefall that you can't scream —only wonder why you ever decided to undertake such an activity to enjoy the sweeping views of the mountains and meadows.

However, the fear quickly subsided as I remembered that an experienced instructor was attached to my back, and I allowed myself to smile at the cameraman circling around me in mid-air and savoured the silence and feeling of freedom as my chute opened and I slowly drifted to the ground.

It was an experience I'll never forget, and one which everyone should try once.

o For more information, visit [www.newzealand.com](http://www.newzealand.com). Malaysia Airlines flies to Auckland six times weekly.