

PACIFIC



SWIM, SNORKEL OFF THE BEACH, DIVE THE REEF ITSELF ... OR SIMPLY LIE BACK AND SOAK UP THE SUN.



AUSTRALIA

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Australia may be an island, but don't be misled by that. If you think you'll be able to whizz around from one side of the country to the other like you'd do in so many other island destinations, think again.

Quite apart from the enormously diverse amount of things to do, the land is so vast you'd have to spend much of your time in a plane. Crossing from Sydney to Perth takes a mammoth chunk out of your day.

In addition, Australia is so naturally beautiful, you'll find you want to be on the ground ... where you can experience the full glory of this wonderfully laid-back country. So, unless you have months in which to vacation, it's best to pick an area or two and explore to the full.

And where else to start but in the beautiful tropical north. Once you see it, you'll understand why the slogan is 'Beautiful one day, perfect the next.' Lazuline skies meet crystalline seas. Golden white beaches merge with pristine rainforest. More fish than you can imagine fin lazily around one of the longest reefs in the world – The Great Barrier Reef.



Although there is no shortage of stunning tropical islands off the Queensland coast, Magnetic Island, just off Townsville and about halfway down the Great Barrier Reef, offers something more than beautiful beaches and great diving opportunities.

Monolithic granite boulders that look like they've been left behind by a playful giant are scattered everywhere. Towering hoop pines offer welcome shade from the tropical sun. And scenic sandy bays fringed with coral reef invite you to come in and take a dip.

As half the island is national park, there is abundant wildlife. So there's every chance you'll come upon a rock wallaby, possum or a koala while on one of the extensive walking tracks. The open woodland found on the Nelly Bay walk is often alive with birds. And you'll get the chance to see just how much life a tropical wetland mudflat can hold on the coastline walk.

When you tire of sun, sand and sea, playing golf or catching 44 pound Spanish mackerel, you can always pop across to the world's largest coral reef aquarium, IMAX theater and casino in Townsville.

You'll find Kelly's Beach on the southern tip of the Great Barrier Reef. Being so far south, the waters are mostly stinger-free and the reef is still superb. Swim, snorkel off the beach, dive the reef itself ... or simply lie back and soak up the sun.

The two coral islands of Lady Musgrave and Lady Elliott are close enough to get to by fast catamaran. You can watch giant turtles creep ashore and lay their eggs at Mon Repos. And you can stand in awe as a migrating humpback whale bursts out of the water right beside the boat.

Inland also holds many delights. Lovely heritage buildings line wide country-town streets. Cabbage tree palms dominate the Burrum National Park. Fields of sugarcane blanket the rolling fields and burn-off time can be spectacular. And the Bundaberg Rum Distillery knows just what to do with the harvest!

Further south again, is the glorious Sunshine Coast. Surrounded by acres of National Parks and rainforests, the beaches are golden, the waters warm and the surf good enough to draw surfers from miles around.

Upmarket Noosa at its northern end is a wonderful mixture of gourmet restaurants lining the beach, classy boutiques and families having fun. Cosmopolitan Caloundra, in the middle, is no slouch either.

World Heritage listed Fraser Island, the world's largest sand island, with its ever-moving dunes, crystal-clear perched lakes, improbable rainforests, dingos and prolific bird life is close enough for a visit.



SPARKLING BEACHES THAT STRETCH FOR MILES, LUSH RAINFOREST HINTERLAND, MULTIPLE CHAMPIONSHIP GOLF COURSES, WORLD-CLASS RESTAURANTS AND ENTERTAINMENT FACILITIES, AS WELL AS TOP-NOTCH SHOPPING.



The hinterland is incredibly beautiful and known for its gourmet organic food and handicraft, much of which is available at the Eumundi Markets. And the Australia Zoo – created by Steve Irwin, the Crocodile Hunter – is a must-do.

Brisbane, the state capital, is worth pausing at before going to catch a ferry to Moreton Island. Southbank, with its markets, cafes and excellent museums; the Casino and Queen Street Mall, places of fun and fashion; Eagle Street Pier, for award-winning restaurants and nightclubs; quirky Fortitude Valley, where you'll find Chinatown and great art galleries.

And, if your timing's right, you'll be able to take part in an iconic pastime – footie! As one Aussie put it, 'a sausage sandwich in one hand, a cold tinnie in the other and some utter carnage going on in front of you on the field.'

Moreton, on the other hand, offers sport of a different kind – sand tobogganing. Not a pastime for the fainthearted! Alternatively, you can simply take a tour, which includes Mount Tempest, the world's highest stable coastal sand dune. The rest of the time, you'll be sunning, swimming, snorkelling, hand feeding the wild dolphins or taking part in another iconic Aussie pastime – barbecuing.

It's little wonder that the Gold Coast is known as 'the Coast with the Most'. Sparkling beaches that stretch for miles, lush rainforest hinterland, multiple championship golf courses, world-class restaurants and entertainment facilities, as well as top-notch shopping.

With 45 miles (70 km) of golden beaches, it's hard to pick a favorite spot. Rainbow Bay, with its gentle surf offers a safe haven to small children. The small rock pools of Currumbin hold many delights. Wide and welcoming Burleigh Beach, with its surfers and cafes, is a favorite with locals and visitors alike. And the busiest, Surfers Paradise - a great spot for families with its perfect swimming beach, beach activities and easy access to nearby cafes and shopping areas.

Inland is home to World Heritage wilderness areas, national parks and quaint rural villages. Natural Arch, home to a large colony of glowworms that stud the cavern walls like stars at night. Lamington and Springbrook National Parks, part of the Scenic Rim, a remnant of an ancient volcano active some 22 million years ago and regarded as the largest caldera in the southern hemisphere. And the densely forested valleys and mountains of Tamborine, whose summit is filled with art galleries, craft shops, antique stores, cafés, boutique wineries and cellar door outlets. ►

FISH, SAIL, SKI, CANOE, AND WINDSURF
ON WALLIS LAKE. SURF AND SUNTAN
ON ONE OF THE MANY BEACHES,
INCLUDING PEBBLY, SHELTERED
BURGESS AND NINE MILE, WITH ITS
ROCK POOL. THE TANKS IS A SAFE
SWIMMING AREA, WHERE THE WAVES
SPRAY HIGH OVER AN UNUSUAL
ROCK FORMATION AND CONSTANTLY
REPLENISH THE POOL.



Theme park capital of Australia, the Gold Coast's Dreamworld, Movie World and Sea World will entertain young and old. Wet & Wild's incredible rides are constantly growing. And Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary and Fleay Wildlife Park give you the chance to get up close and personal with native animals and birds. Feed a kangaroo with a joey in its pouch, hold a koala, or get perched on by a score of brilliantly colored parrots.

The Gold Coast runs without pause into the more relaxed Tweed Coast of Northern New South Wales. Here the beautiful beaches, verdant hinterland and fabulous surfing conditions also continue unabated. Cabarita Beach is perfectly situated to enjoy it all.

The local aborigines call it Bogangar, meaning 'place of many pippies'. And, like the Gold Coast, you'll find fantastic fresh seafood everywhere. Anglers, you have your choice of sea and river fishing!

Take a day out to climb Mt Warning with its spectacular views. Tropical Fruit World's array of exotic fruits and delectable cuisine will entice. And eclectic Byron Bay's shopping and dining will delight. Make sure you go to the Cape Byron Lighthouse – its Australia's most easterly point which offers stunning views. You may even see turtles, dolphins and whales while you're there.

Coffs Harbour, famous for its banana plantations, sparkling ocean and swathes of golden beaches framed by the Great Dividing Range, is another relaxing vacation town. Whether you're part of a couple looking to relax, or a family looking for fun, you'll find it here.

Interact with dolphins and seals at the Pet Porpoise Pool and Oceanarium. Ride a heritage steam train on the Glenreagh Mountain Railway. There's a model Dutch village at the Clog Barn and a working re-creation of early gold diggings at George's Gold Mine.

Dive the Solitary Islands Marine Park; go whale spotting; explore the towering rainforest of the Dorrigo National Park. They've made it easy with a 230 feet (70 meter) walkway suspended in the forest canopy.

The main street of nearby Sawtell is lined with magnificent Moreton Bay Figs; Nambucca Heads has delicious fresh oysters; Macksville has the 'Pub with No Beer'; and 'new age' Bellingen has great arts and crafts.

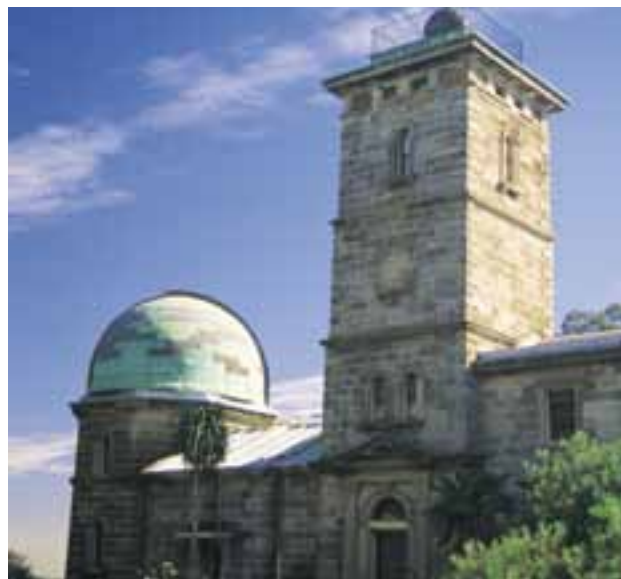
A little further south, at the mouth of the Hastings River and the Pacific Ocean, Port Macquarie has a five-star array of beaches - from Town Beach in front of the town center, to the 10 miles (16 km) golden swathe of North Beach. There's diving at South West Rocks, deep-sea fishing and dolphin and whale watching.

The area is alive with history and there are multiple national parks and reserves worth exploring, including rare coastal rainforest at Shelley Beach. Get an Akubra hat from Kempsey, wine from Cassegrain and local oysters from any of the good restaurants that are scattered all around.

A hop, skip and a jump further south will bring you to the picturesque Great Lakes region, which is a water lover's paradise. The pounding surf of the Pacific to the east, three clear lakes set in lovely surroundings to the west.

Fish, sail, ski, canoe, and windsurf on Wallis Lake. Surf and suntan on one of the many beaches, including Pebbly, sheltered Burgess and Nine Mile, with its rock pool. The Tanks is a safe swimming area, where the waves spray high over an unusual rock formation and constantly replenish the pool.

Catch the stunning views at Cape Hawke in the Booti Booti National Park, fish off Janies Corner, walk through littoral rainforest at Hallidays Point and get a taste of what the coast used to be like at the delightful village of Nabiac. ►



THE AREA IS ALIVE WITH HISTORY AND THERE ARE MULTIPLE NATIONAL PARKS AND RESERVES WORTH EXPLORING, INCLUDING RARE COASTAL RAINFOREST AT SHELLEY BEACH.





Beginning 37 miles (60 km) inland with Lake Wellington, it flows east to Lake King and out into the ocean through a manmade entry at the popular seaside resort of Lakes Entrance. The climate is still mild enough to enjoy vacations all year round, the fishing is world class and the national parks range from temperate to wetland, coastal to alpine.

Whereas Lakes Entrance holds all the watery delights of a coastal resort, the High Country will entertain and entrance in a different way. Although the slopes of the Victorian Alps peak at lower altitudes than US or Europe, there is still first-rate downhill skiing and snowboarding to be had.

Between June and early October, the slopes see a steady stream of experienced skiers, including those who follow the snow around the world. The towns of Mansfield and Bright are ideally situated to enjoy it all.

Mt Buller's runs, from smooth and cruisy to seriously steep and some of the most challenging in the country, are used to host worldwide events. Mt Stirling is excellent for cross-country skiing, snow shoeing and tobogganing. Well-marked trails wend their way through sheltered forests of alpine ash, stunning snow gum woodlands and open plains.

Falls Creek is regarded by many as Victoria's best ski area and Mt Hotham is known as the 'powder capital'. The smallest ski area is the 'boutique mountain' of Mt Buffalo, right in the center of Mt Buffalo National Park.

Few come to Australia without stopping in Sydney and its simply stunning harbor and iconic Opera House. Vibrant and exciting, its nightlife is pulsing, shopping superb and restaurants award winning.

North and south, there is a string of golden beaches to swim, surf and dive. Bondi is a must. Catch the Manly Ferry, dine on a paddle steamer, or climb the soaring Sydney Harbour Bridge.

The Taronga Park Zoo is one of the best in the world, the Royal Botanic Gardens offer a green swathe of peace and the markets at The Rocks are a great place for craft and souvenirs. Kings Cross at night is an eye-opener, Darling Harbour is a great attraction, including an IMAX theater, and Chinatown has some great eateries.

You won't run out of things to do, but time in which to do it. Go four-wheel-driving in the Blue Mountains, savor excellent wines in the Hunter Valley, try some bush tucker and traipse National Parks filled with grass trees.

Some of the most spectacular and unspoiled coastline is found in the national parks south of Sydney. Long, sandy beaches with rolling surf and, only minutes away, rock pools, coves and quiet waters. And the twin towns of Batemans Bay and Tomakin are excellent bases from which to explore it.

Perched on the edge of the Clyde River's broad estuary, Bateman's Bay is home to the famous Clyde River oyster and an abundance of delectable seafood. Tomakin, at the mouth of the Tomago River, though quieter, offers much of the same.

The view from Observation Head is breathtaking; Montague Island's historic lighthouse, seabird and fairy penguin colonies are a standout; and the 27 hole course at Catalina Country Club is a delight. Picnic on Holmes Lookout in Clyde River National Park; check out the mangroves in Cullendulla Creek Nature Reserve; motor up the Clyde River to Nelligen.

Across the border in Victoria, you enter the vast region of Gippsland. Running from the high country made famous in the movie, 'The Man from Snowy River', to more of the incredible Australian coastline, it encompasses the largest lake system in the country.

BETWEEN JUNE AND EARLY OCTOBER,
THE SLOPES SEE A STEADY STREAM
OF EXPERIENCED SKIERS, INCLUDING
THOSE WHO FOLLOW THE SNOW
AROUND THE WORLD.



Even if you're not particularly interested in winter sport or have a young family to keep entertained, the Victorian Alps still offer plenty of excitement. A variety of cross-country trails crisscrosses the region and can be used to explore the snow gum forests and soaring mountain peaks. Lake Eildon is renowned for its fishing. Bright houses Simone's, one of the best restaurants in Victoria. And Mansfield is the town where the infamous Ned Kelly finally went too far.

The smaller Macedon Ranges closer to Melbourne have over 70 natural minerals springs; natural wildlife like kangaroos, possums, echidnas and birds abounds; and the climate is perfect for wineries to create fine sparkling wines.

The area is renowned for its incredible gardens like Forest Glade, Drusilla with its 100-year-old oaks and Bleak House's roses. The Wombat State Forest has the state's highest single drop waterfall. And the country cooking in places like Kynton is legendary.

This is where you'll find Hanging Rock, with exotic rock formations like the Black Hole of Calcutta and the Cathedral, beloved by climbers; the extinct volcano of Mt Franklin; and historic granite, bluestone and sandstone edifices built during the gold rush days.

Phillip Island, with its nightly Fairy Penguin Parade and myriad Fur Seals and Sea Lions, is where you'll find some of Victoria's best fishing

grounds. Take a walk along the treetop boardwalk at Oswin Roberts Reserve to do some koala spotting; walk windswept moors; bird spot at Rhyll Inlet and Swan Lake; and dine at intimate bistros in the quaint village of Cowes.

Across the Bass Strait is Tasmania; a place of wild and beautiful landscapes, wine and food acclaimed worldwide, a rich history, and a relaxed island lifestyle. Its dramatic coastlines, rugged mountains, tall forests and sparkling highland lakes are a nature-lover's paradise.

Wineglass Bay was rated one of the world's top 10 beaches; Strahan has been voted the world's best little town; and your chances of seeing the Aurora Australis are pretty good.

Hobart offers great galleries and historic architecture and is a good base for attractions like the Cadbury chocolate factory, historic village of Richmond, penal colony at Port Arthur, the Tahune Airwalk and much else besides.

Shearwater has a great golf course, the local gardens can be a beautiful riot of color and nearby Launceston has all the shopping you could wish for. The average maximum temperature is 70°F (21°C) but, be warned, it can snow on Cradle Mountain in summer, so always pack something warm. ▶



Sunny Mornington Peninsula, on a finger of land south of Melbourne, is dotted with picturesque seaside villages and is full of Mediterranean charm and sophistication. Waterfront restaurants and cafes are plentiful, art galleries and antique shops tempt passersby, and there are numerous markets with gourmet produce.

Take a leisurely drive through the olive groves to one of the many wineries, well known for their chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot gris. Swim with wild dolphins, play golf or shop at the upmarket boutiques. The leisurely and laid-back Port Bay coast is filled with secluded bays and beautiful beaches. Rosebud, Whitecliff, Rye . . . they're legendary for long, lazy days and pleasant summer nights.

Torquay, near Geelong, is the eastern gateway to the Great Ocean Road, with spectacular ocean drives to Anglesea and the scenic gems of Victoria's magnificent southern coast.

The world-famous surf beaches of Bells Beach, home to a leg of the world championships, and Jan Juc are within paddling distance. You can often pick up a bargain at the leading surfing outlets based in town. There's even a museum dedicated to the history of surfing.

Fishermans Beach is popular with anglers and the beaches, with their wide lawns and shady trees, are very family friendly. You can walk the Surf Coast (or parts of it, if that's all you feel like), taste test at local wineries and visit many interesting attractions.



Then there's the Murray. Curving from the Snowy Mountains in the east across northern Victoria, it is Australia's mightiest river. Not far from its source lies the inland aquatic paradise created by the manmade Lake Mulwala. Yarrawonga, right on the New South Wales border, enjoys more sunshine than Queensland's Gold Coast and is the perfect place from which to enjoy the area's watersports.

When you prefer to stay dry, laze on one of the river beaches, play golf alongside the river or visit the Rutherglen wine region. Take in the sights at the historic townships of Rushworth, Tatura and Kilmore, browse the many craft shops and markets or go bird spotting.

The red earth of Mildura in the northwest is famous for its lush orchards and vineyards, watered by the Murray. Tall red gums line the river as it winds its way through the historic towns and national parks. A place of big skies, carpets of spring wildflowers and wide-open spaces.

The coolest place to be on a hot summer's day is the water. Strap on water skis; swim at the only inland beach with lifesavers, Apex Beach; fish at Lake Cullulleraine; float by on a paddle steamer or canoe.

Big Desert Wilderness Park's mallee scrub is home to emus, kangaroos, Mitchell hopping mice, lizards, birds and flora that only grows in hot, dry regions. Cowangie is where you'll find the award-winning Kow Plains Homestead. The 30000 hectare property of Ned's Corner Station contains some rare landforms and threatened ecosystems. And the Mungo National Park, with its Walls of China dunes, holds true to the remarkable Aboriginal heritage.

To get to the mouth of the Murray, you have to travel all the way to Goolwa in South Australia, which is perched between the ocean and Australia's largest freshwater lake, Alexandrina. Apart from the multiple watersports on offer, there is a wealth of other things to do.

Bird watching is big all around the lake, but particularly at Cox's Scrub Conservation Park and the Barrages. You'll see 'Canoe Trees' in the Finnis area, used by the local aboriginal people for making rafts to hunt in the shallow lagoons. Gaze out to the sand dunes of the Coorong National Park from the hills behind Strathalbyn.

Take a drive through the lovely hilly countryside, past lush farmland, to any one of over 50 wineries in the Adelaide hills. Take a route that goes over the lovely bridges built in 1866 to cross the Finnis River and Bull Creek.

Or simply explore the Mighty Murray aboard one of the beautiful Leisuretime houseboats available to you. Float past drooping willows, towering cliffs and bird-filled red gums. Fish the small creeks and lagoons for a succulent dinner and fall asleep to the lapping of the water.

Way, way west is Busselton on Geographe Bay. Judged Western Australia's top tourist town three times, its sheltered position and endless sandy beaches provides yet another stunning aquatic playground.

The cycle path that meanders along the foreshore is good for all ages; the Tuart tourist drive includes the only natural stand of Tuart left in the world; And Busselton Jetty will keep young and old entertained for hours.

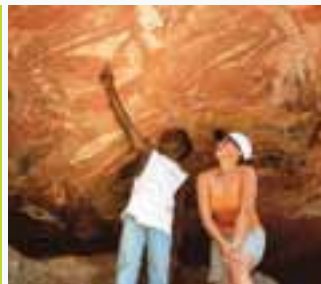
It took 95 years to build and is the longest in the southern hemisphere. Its graceful span stretches over a mile (two km) into the bay and houses an underwater observatory that enables you to see over 300 species of marine life.

Just nearby is the relatively new Margaret River wine region. Blessed with a perfect Mediterranean climate, the wines are stunning, the scenery glorious and the cuisine superb.

Life revolves around the water at Mandurah, as it does at so many Aussie destinations. Just one hour's easy drive south of Perth, it is surrounded by calm, protected inland waterways on one side and the azure Indian Ocean with its abundant sea life and pristine beaches on the other.



YOU CAN BE ADVENTUROUS, INDOLENT OR A COMBINATION OF THE TWO. YOU CAN SPEND YOUR LIFE IN THE WATER OR SIMPLY LAZE NEXT TO IT.



There are first class restaurants and cafes, nightclubs, a shopping precinct and markets around Ocean Marina, wineries to visit, golf to play at one of the areas three world-renowned golf courses or magnificent national parks to explore.

The ocean offers excellent surfing and other water sports – even swimming with wild dolphins. Or you can go boating, yachting or windsurfing in the more protected waters of the Estuary. Try fishing and crabbing; take a cruise or do some bird watching. Alternatively, visit one of the islands just north of Mandurah.

Kalbarri, considerably north of Perth, lies at the mouth of the Murchison River in a national park. It began life as a fishing village, so the angling is excellent. People spend a lot of time in the water as temperatures can rise to over 100°F (40°C) in summer and rarely drop below 50°F (10°C) in winter. Good thing the diving is superb and the beaches beautiful!

Aside from abundant wildflowers, more lobster than you can poke a stick at, and spectacular scenery, Kalbarri is also a good base for the huge Shark Bay World Heritage maritime park. This is where you'll find Monkey Mia's enchanting bottlenose dolphins. And, when you've finished patting one, look for dugongs, manta rays and turtles. The water's so clear they'll be easy to spot.

We began in Queensland and have ended in Western Australia, a journey that would have taken weeks without stopping. And stop you certainly would have to! Which part will you come to on your first visit?

FIJI

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This is just the kind of place you'd expect to find in the Pacific. Pellucid waters filled with amazing coral and even more amazing fish; beaches shaded by palms and fringed with forest; exotic cocktails and delectable fresh seafood; stunning sunsets, warm breezes and even warmer people.

You can be adventurous, indolent or a combination of the two. You can spend your life in the water or simply laze next to it. You can trek the jungle, shoot rapids, mingle with the locals ... or dine in an air-conditioned restaurant after shopping all day.

You can step off the beach to a rainbow of coral and fish, swim with huge, harmless manta rays just offshore, scuba the magnificent While Wall and Astrolabe Reef or surf the awesome Cloud Breaker – the 20 foot (6 meter) high wave off Tavurua.

However, that's about as dangerous as it gets in Fiji. Even the rainforest has no harmful animals or insects. No malaria, no leeches, ►



THE SUN SHINES ON UNSPOILT RAINFORESTS, AND PRISTINE, WHITE-SAND BEACHES.



no crocodiles. Just heaps of magnificent waterfalls - the sacred Bouma Falls on Taveuni were featured in 'Return to the Blue Lagoon'; crystal clear streams and pools waiting to be swum in; and colorful parrots.

For man-made attractions, try the Cultural Center . . . it'll give you an insight into what life in Fiji can be like. Firewalking, hacking out a canoe with a stone axe, bark cloth mat and pottery creation, old Fiji songs and dances.

The markets in Suva are fantastic for local crafts. Carved tanoa bowls (take it with you to a native village and use it to drink some Kava), Fijian combs and t-shirts, woven baskets and mats, animal wood carving, war clubs, 'cannibal forks', pottery, masi (tapa cloth) and the one-size-fits-all sulu.

The food is as multi-ethnic as its population has become. Fijians, Indians, Chinese, Polynesian islanders and 'fruit salad', what the Fijians call those of mixed race. Make sure you try Kokoda - fresh fish marinated in limejuice and served in a coconut; Palusami - meat wrapped in taro; Kuita - young octopus; and a delicious Indian curry.

Spend the night at a Magiti (Fijian feast); and a Lovo, where the food is wrapped in banana leaves, placed on heated rocks in a hole in the ground and then covered with earth. Chicken, seafood, meat - even a whole suckling pig - emerge succulent and tender some hours later.

If you're looking for high-rises, frenetic nightlife and huge air-conditioned shopping malls, Fiji isn't for you. It is, however, an idyllic place to go on vacation - the sort you'll remember for the rest of your life.

NEW ZEALAND

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The Rim of Fire and the ever-moving tectonic plates right beneath these twin jewels have moulded and shaped New Zealand like dough on a pastry board. The stunning mountain ranges were squeezed up when the two plates squashed together. The deep lakes were once active volcanos.

The centuries since then have mantled the peaks with snow, clothed the slopes in swathes of green, skirted the shores with sweeping beaches and filled the land with creatures strange and fascinating. And, yes, there's still thermal activity in the shape of spouting geysers, slowly bubbling mud and gurgling hot springs, but there's so much more that makes New Zealand worth visiting.

The best place to see such natural wonders is Rotorua and the largest reserve is at Te Whakarewarewa, or 'whaka'. Pohutu, its most spectacular geyser, spews hot water up to 100 feet (30 meters) into the

air multiple times a day. You can get Maori craft while you're there. To get the full cultural experience, go to the Tamaki Maori Village. Their hangis are delicious.

To cool off some, head off to Mount Maunganui in the beautiful Bay of Plenty. In the temperate place, the sun shines on unspoilt rainforests, sub-tropical farmlands and pristine, white-sand beaches lapped by the clear blue Pacific.

Beginning with Waihi Beach in the west, past the popular Ocean Beach and on to Whakatane, this area has some of the best surfing and fishing in New Zealand. It's also filled with good shopping, and cosmopolitan cafes and restaurants - where you can have everything from a cappuccino to some locally caught shellfish or a delectable dish made from the kiwifruit grown all around.

Dive Tuhua, Motiti and Whakaari, which houses an active volcano. Take a boat to Moturiki Island to see its awesome blowholes. Dig for Tua-Tua at low tide alongside the locals. Walk along the path that winds up around Mount Maunganui for superb views or under giant kauri trees in the Kaimai-Mamaku Forest Park.

Probably the most striking park on the North Island is the dual World Heritage area of Tongariro National Park. The spectacular Mounts Ruapehu, Ngauruhoe and Tongariro are all sacred to the Maori and the rest of the park is as awesome. Craters and lava formations that bring the moon to mind, glaciers, hot springs, tranquil alpine lakes and a desert-like plateau. There are even two ski fields here, in season.

Pukawa Bay is a good place to use as a base while you're exploring these regions. And it's only minutes from the Tongariro River, perhaps the finest wild rainbow trout fishery in the world. So's Turangi, which is built on the banks of the river. Lake Taupo, not far away, is another good stepping-off point.

Mind you, it's a wonderful place in the summer as well. Quite apart from the clean, crisp blue lake waters, there are fragrant pine forests, plenty of spots to fish for trout, championship golf courses and heaps of watersports.

The Bay of Islands, way up near the northeastern tip, is a mecca for divers - Jacques Cousteau rated the waters around Poor Knights Islands amongst the best in the world. The climate is mild, the beaches superb and there's no shortage of things to do and places to explore.

The quaint townships declaim its colorful history - both Maori and European - and the lure of the sea is all-pervasive. Cape Brett and the 'Hole in the Rock' on Piery Island are a must. Swimming with dolphins is another of the region's specialties.

Like the excitement of big-game fishing? Try catching marlin, kingfish and snapper. At the end of the day, sit down to watch the sunset with a chilled glass of the local Sauvignon Blanc from Kerikeri. ►



For those who prefer to remain close to land, there is a plethora of pristine beaches fringed by azure seas. Paddling a sea kayak in and out of the many nooks and crannies is an adventure in itself. For the golfer, experience breathtaking views from each of Paihia's 18 holes.

The town of Paihia, closest town to the Bay of Islands, is steeped in history. It's the site of New Zealand's first wedding, which was celebrated in 1830. And is just down the road from the historic Treaty House at Waitangi where, 10 years later, the nation of New Zealand was born.

And then there's Auckland. Vibrant, cosmopolitan and a charming mix of European and Polynesian, it spills across an isthmus separating the Pacific Ocean and the Tasman Sea. Its spectacular harbor, numerous bays and multiple nearby islands are such perfect yachting territory; it's often called the 'City of Sails'.

Something else that's abundant around Auckland is vineyards. Some of the best wines in the world come from this part of the world, particularly chardonnay, merlot and cabernet sauvignon. There are some great cellar doors north and west of the city, in Clevedon Valley and the beautiful Waiheke Island.

Their Sauvignon Blanc makes a wonderful accompaniment to the fresh seafood you'll be able to savor in the many excellent restaurants. Though very European in many ways, the cuisine in New Zealand is an interesting fusion of Pacific and Asian flavors. So expect to be surprised and delighted.

To walk off the many delicious meals, go shopping! Chancery, off High Street in the CBD, is for high fashion. Aotea Square Market, with its gay blue and white tents is where you'll find good contemporary jewelry, Pacific arts and crafts, traditional Maori carvings and funky New Zealand fashion. If you happen to get peckish again, there's delectable ethnic cuisine as well.

If you're tired of eating out, you can pick up the catch of the day at the waterfront Auckland Fish Market, supremely healthy organic produce at the Matakana Farmers' Market and freshly picked fruit, vegies and flowers at the Otara Markets. The latter is also the place to sample Asian and Pacific Island specialty dishes. Yum!

The much quieter South Island is breathtaking, which you'd know if you've seen any of the Lord of the Rings movies. Superlatives simply don't do it justice and, no matter what time of year, the landscape will deliver on its promise of outstanding beauty.

Blue-ice glaciers devolve into volcanic lakes that are so still you have to take a second look to work out which is the reflection. Ancient forests threaded with greenstone rivers soak up the sound of your footsteps until you can almost believe you're the first person to have trod their paths. Soaring peaks slice into the sky or vanish into powder-puff clouds.

And, of course, their slopes are ideal for skiing and snowboarding. Mount Hutt, midway down the island, not only has the most reliable snow; it has the longest season in the southern hemisphere. Whether you're a beginner or strapped the skis on hundred of times, Mount Hutt delivers.

In summer, fish for trout and salmon, tramp the Rakaia Gorge or Waimakariri riverbed, shop and explore Christchurch, swim in the Pacific ... or simply relax in tranquil surroundings. When you've done enough of that, take the famous Transalpine train through spectacular Arthur's Pass National Park or drive the pass along a road that's a feat of modern engineering.



ANCIENT FORESTS THREADED WITH GREENSTONE RIVERS SOAK UP THE SOUND OF YOUR FOOTSTEPS UNTIL YOU CAN ALMOST BELIEVE YOU'RE THE FIRST PERSON TO HAVE TROD THEIR PATHS.





This is the route Maori hunting parties used to cross from one side of the island to the other, no doubt to get to places like Akaroa on the east coast, with its safe, pretty beaches and deep natural harbor. This is where you'll find the small, rare Hector Dolphin, as well as prolific bird life.

An historic French and colonial settlement, Akaroa is filled with craft stores, cafes and, thanks to its mild climate, people enjoying all the delights of a seaside vacation. There's also a winery, herb farm, cheese manufacturer and many interesting relics from whaling days.

A little further south lies the inland town of Omarama, internationally recognized for gliding conditions. If you're not a pilot out to make or break a world record and there's no snow in Ohau, go to the Lake Ohau Forest and the scenic Clay Cliffs or try your hand at fly fishing, sheep shearing, abseiling, bungee-jumping, or some other exciting activity.

For an adventure that'll excite your spirit, go to Aoraki Mount Cook. Sacred to the Maori, visitors have been known to gasp when they first see its majestic splendor. The park is an awe-inspiring mix of glaciers (covering over 28000 hectares!), sheer rock faces and fields of alpine flowers.

Even icier is Fiordland National Park. In fact, the seaward edge has been relentlessly carved by massive glaciers over hundreds of thousands of years. Here, you can still find trees over 800 years old and waterfalls tumble dramatically into the midnight-blue water.

When it's not raining, the waters can become impossibly still and mirror like, creating images that'll stay with you for the rest of your life. Go to

WHEN IT'S NOT RAINING, THE WATERS CAN BECOME IMPOSSIBLY STILL AND MIRROR LIKE, CREATING IMAGES THAT'LL STAY WITH YOU FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE. GO TO MILFORD SOUND TO SEE FOR YOURSELF. AND, IF YOU WANT A DIVING EXPERIENCE WITH A DIFFERENCE, YOU'LL SEE DEEPWATER PLANTS AND, MAYBE EVEN DOLPHINS, FUR SEALS AND PENGUINS.



Milford Sound to see for yourself. And, if you want a diving experience with a difference, you'll see deepwater plants and, maybe even dolphins, fur seals and penguins. Most, however, prefer to take a helitour.

Both Queenstown and Wanaka are within reach of this stunning park – if you can drag yourself away from the snowfields, that is! The most popular are Treble Cone, the largest in the South Island, Coronet Peak, reputed to get the best snow, and Cardrona. Après-ski is most lively in Queenstown, which has a multitude of excellent restaurants, casinos, bars and nightclubs.

In summer, the temperatures can soar to almost 90°F (30°C) and the lakes and rivers that abound provide welcome relief. Tours of the wineries are also popular, as is visiting the old gold mining sites like Arrowtown.

Wanaka, on the edge of the lake and dominated by the ragged teeth of the Remarkables range, also used to be a small mining village. Now it's a bustling center for snow and summer fun. If you've never tried bungee jumping, do it off Mount Aspiring, 'the Matterhorn of the South'.

The plates that helped form this mountain still shift and move beneath New Zealand – the South and North islands are sliding apart at the rate of about 13 feet (four meters) per century – and the earth still rumbles and moans a bit. However, that's what's made it the kind of country that captures people's hearts ... and fires their imaginations. Are you ready to let it do the same for you?