New encounters in New Zealand

New Zealand awaits with fresh experiences for all — whether you’re young, older, or just restless.

By Luke Tan

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New Zealand is one of the world’s top natural wonders. And while the Hobbit Movie Set in Wellywood should certainly be on the list of any first-time visitor to New Zealand, the country has many more less trodden paths and secret gates to be explored. "Glimpsing the real New Zealand" is truly a magical experience.

The Waitomo Glowworm Caves boast a species unique to New Zealand. Image: Tourism New Zealand

For the family

If you’ve always thought that Auckland is just a bustling city in the north of New Zealand, think again. Auckland is a hub for new educational experiences for the whole family. A four-hour coach ride away lies Rotorua, home to geothermal wonders during both day and night. At the Tungu Volcanic Zone, crater lakes, spouting geysers and bubbling mud pools will delight the whole family. The Waitomo Glowworm Caves, under a 1.5-hour drive from Auckland’s city centre, are the second largest limestone cave system in the world. Thousands of phosphorescent larvae light up the cave roof like a starry sky. It is a mesmerizing experience not to be missed.

For friends Wellington

New Zealand’s capital is a great starting point for adventures. Try spending a night under the stars in Wairarapa (two hours by train from Wellington). The Wairarapa Coastline is one of the only non-road-trip-suitable sites, but also a historic site offering a window into the secrets of lost civilizations.

If you’re a wildlife lover, a visit to the Wellington Zoo is a must. Auckland is one of the few zoos in the world that has successfully bred and released the critically endangered New Zealand hihi. Hally Gorge is another geothermal attraction, offering a heavenly spa experience with its splashing mud pools and hot springs.

A five-minute drive away from the centre of Rotorua lies the Lake Rotorua Whakarewarewa Forest, dubbed “the Redwoods.” It is California’s Redwood Forest reincarnated. It was the scene for the famous Harry Potter movies. You can try out swimming tours, janitorial tours and Arthur’s Pass. Geysers can be one of the natural wonders.

For the romantic Christchurch

There are a myriad of ways to kindle or even rekindle — love in beautiful Christchurch. For one, how about snuggling up in space-bus hot rocking seats aboard the TransAlpine train as it makes its 223-kilometre coast-to-coast journey? For another, how about watching the acrobatic antics of these dolphins. Even if you prefer to stay dry, you could end up making a new friend or two.

For the adventurous

If your love — or both of you — adore animals, take a crash course just for these hours in Kaikoura, where Dolphin Encounter Kaikoura offers the experience of a lifetime: swimming with wild dusky dolphins. Even if you prefer to stay dry, watching the artistic antics of these intelligent creatures from your heart is sure to be another heart-warming experience.

"Glimping” has been in vogue for quite a while now, but no country does it better than New Zealand. Inside the Dunedin Penguin Colony, Yellow-eyed penguins and toa dolphins can be found swimming in the ocean. For the romantic: Christchurch. For the adventurous: New Zealand.

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