



ABOUT BEYOND

For sightseeing with a healthy dose of real adrenaline, the only way is up. **Clare Vooght** finds the most vertigo-inducing ways to view the mountains, lakes and beaches of New Zealand

LOVE ADRENALINE

I'm flying at 3,500ft and with a flick of my right wrist I can turn the horizon vertical. Next, it looks like the land's stacked on top of blue sea, then vertical again, and moments later the sky is rotating back round to the right place. It's terrifying, but surprisingly easy to manoeuvre a 200-horsepower 1977 Pitts Special S2A stunt plane 360-degrees sideways into an aileron roll.

Where you look is the most important part: dead ahead to roll right, or out to the side to steer into a loop. The view's not bad here in New Zealand's Abel Tasman National Park. Snowy-peaked mountains tumble down to really green fields, stretches of sandy beach and the crystal clear waters of the Tasman Bay.

Telling people back home I'd be seeing New Zealand in the most vertiginous ways possible prompted a sharp intake of breath and a "rather you than me". But luckily I quite like heights. And being in this tiny red-and-white stunt plane – with U-Fly Extreme

flight instructor **Vincent D'Ath** in the open one-man cockpit behind mine – feels a lot more real than flying as a passenger in a Boeing 747.

Instructor Vincent D'Ath has more than 30 years of aviation experience, including time spent in the Royal New Zealand Air Force and 17 years of flight instruction.

Each **aileron roll** brings a stomach lurch and a dose of adrenaline. Then come the quarter rolls, and my instant reaction is to cling onto my harness with my free hand when we pause halfway, belly up. But (spoiler alert) I don't end up falling head-first out of the plane.

An aileron roll is an aerobatic manoeuvre in which a plane does a full 360-degree rotation on its longitudinal axis, with no change in altitude.

One last swoop over the Tasman Bay, and we're skimming fluffy white clouds as we head back inland – it's an incredible feeling to be at the helm of this beautiful metal bird. It's only when we're on the ground again, playing back the video footage, that I notice Vincent spent half the time waving his hands in the air to prove to the in-flight camera that he wasn't touching the controls.

Next to U-Fly Extreme in Motueka Airport is Skydive Abel Tasman. Skydiving options are 9,000ft, 13,000ft and a maximum 16,500ft, and on a clear day divers can see both the North and South Islands while they freefall. Not one for doing things by halves, I choose a way-above-the-clouds, requires-an-oxygen-mask 16,500ft. Before I know it, I'm strapped to Rod – a dude I've just met, but who assures me has years of experience and has done more than 10,000 jumps – with my feet dangling from the open door of a plane.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: A paraglider over Queenstown, South Island; skydiving the Abel Tasman; New Zealand mountain flight

ONE LAST SWOOP OVER THE TASMAN BAY AND WE'RE SKIMMING FLUFFY WHITE CLOUDS AS WE HEAD BACK INLAND

Photograph by Lachlan Currie, iStock



We don't hang around long enough for me to think about the fact I'm about to hurl myself out of a plane, and tumble straight out of the door, somersaulting through the air into a 70-second freefall. It's like nothing I've ever felt before: disorientating, amazing. Blues and greens are whooshing and whirling around me, adrenaline zings through my body.

The plummeting stops with a lurch as the parachute goes up, and things become weirdly serene. Even though we're falling at 40km/h, I feel like a floating feather. The weather's not good enough to see the North Island in the distance, but I can cop a



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WHALE-WATCHING IS PRETTY EXHILARATING ZOOMING OVER THE OCEAN IN A FOUR-SEATER PLANE

proper bird's eyeful of the South Island landscape below – the lush trees covering the mountainsides and the saturated greens that piece together the fields below – as we glide back to Earth. This drifting vantage point definitely beats hiking up one of those peaks to look out in the other direction.

Kaikoura, on the east coast, is another incredible spot where thrillseekers can get an aerial view of the Kiwi landscape – snow-capped peaks on one side, the big blue Pacific on the other – and spot some sea creatures at the same time, if they're lucky.

Whale-watching might seem like one of the more tame travellers' pastimes, but zooming over the ocean in a four-seater plane is a pretty exhilarating way to do it. As always, wildlife is too unpredictable to fully guarantee a whale sighting, but Wings Over Whales promises there's a 95% chance.

Kaikoura's resident sperm whales can be seen all year round, as can dolphins. Spot killer whales from December to March and humpbacks in June and July.

Twenty minutes in, when it seems we may return to land disappointed, a sperm whale the size of a bus surfaces. He cruises along

MORE HIGHS

AUCKLAND TOWER SKYWALK AND SKYWIRE

Look down through a glass floor into the lift shaft on the way up and you'll get a true sense of the tower's height. Then, depending on your courage levels, tiptoe all the way around the circular tower's ledge, or put your trust in a safety wire for a 192m base jump.

skywalk.co.nz

HAPUKU LODGE & TREE HOUSES

Luxury tree houses in the canopy of a manuka grove, with OMG views of powder-dusted mountains on one side and whirlpool baths that look out to secluded bush and Pacific coastline on the other. Creature comforts include wood-burning stoves and a fine-dining restaurant.

hapukulodge.com

FRANZ JOSEF GLACIER HELI HIKE

One of three glaciers in the world that travel down to a temperate rainforest. Take a chopper up, then don some crampons to explore the blue ice formations, which change almost every day. Unwind in toasty-warm Glacier Hot Pools after.

franzjosefglacier.com

I BREEZE ABOVE TREETOPS AND FERNS THAT FORM GEOMETRIC PATTERNS

Photograph by Blaine Harrington III/Alamy, John ElkGerty



FOOD AND DRINK

STONYRIDGE VINEYARD, WAIHEKE ISLAND

Edible flowers, Pernod mayonnaise and citrus pear salsa made our John Dory fillet one tasty bit of fish. The food, and condiments, are amazing, but people really visit Stonyridge for another kind of sauce: the vineyard's 1987 Larose snared the accolade of greatest red wine ever made in New Zealand. stonyridge.co.nz

SUGAR CLUB, AUCKLAND

At the top of the Auckland Tower, this restaurant already scores maximum points for its view. And the duck fat roasties, kumara miso mash and signature beef pesto are as swanky as the 1930s art deco-inspired design, inspired by the Tilda Swinton film *I Am Love*.

skycityauckland.co.nz/restaurants/the-sugar-club

THE BOAT SHED CAFÉ

The chef in this seafood restaurant – in an old boat shed in Nelson, round the bay from Motueka – is only interested in local produce. Watch the sunset here on a drawn-out evening with the six-course 'Trust the Chef' degustation menu. boatshedcafe.co.nz

spraying everywhere as we circle above, wings almost vertical, until he's gone with a Free Willy-style flip of his tail.

Last stop on the agenda is the charming Waiheke Island, off the North Island, a short hop from Auckland. Boarding the Auckland Seaplane with me are a couple, celebrating the husband's 40th birthday. "That'll never happen to me," quips our pilot, Stephen. "Not the way I fly." Despite the banter it's the tamest flight of my trip, but it has the best view and the added novelty of taking off from the water. Leaving the cityscape behind us, we soar above the crater of the 600-year-old Rangitoto Island, Auckland's newest – but now dormant – volcano.

With a good view of the sprawling Waiheke greenery up ahead, we land back down on the shallows, jump out and paddle to the shore. Once known for hippies and marijuana production, it's more of a home for foodies and vineyards now. Thanks to its off-the-scale beaches and laid-back attitude, Waiheke's now seen as a sanctuary for "lifestyle refugees" keen to ditch the city. Thus it's one of New Zealand's most desirable – and expensive – places to live.

It's also a great place to view the

Auckland is dubbed the 'city of volcanoes': Auckland Museum is built on Pukekawa volcano, one of 48 craters that have erupted in the region in the past 250,000 years.

Auckland skyline.

EcoZip has three 200m flying fox zipwires: the Vineyard Cruise and the appropriately named 50m-high Kurinui (big dog)

are pretty fun, but the best is the City View option. Breezing over treetops and ferns that form geometric patterns when viewed from above, I get an end-to-end picture of the skyline, Auckland Sky Tower and all, across the water. If I wasn't sure before, I definitely am now – and can prove it to all the naysayers – that sightseeing is best done from up high, and it's even better when it's served up with a big hit of adrenaline. **C**

For help planning a New Zealand trip, visit [Tourism New Zealand](http://TourismNewZealand.newzealand.com). newzealand.com

ABOVE: Base jump from the Auckland Tower with a wire for safety. THIS IMAGE: A seaplane on Lake Te Anau, South Island



