



The writer and a friend on top of their six-berth United campervan, with Mount Cook in the background.



Kiwi on wheels

Travel blogger **Lydia Yang** takes in the stunning beauty of New Zealand's South Island from a campervan

ROLLING hills, turquoise lakes and icy snow-capped mountains — New Zealand has them all. There is not only plenty to see, there is lots to do as well.

My friends and I wanted a free and easy holiday in the South Island, with some camping out and lots of flexibility, so we decided to rent an RV (recreational vehicle), also known as a campervan.

It may not be the cheapest way to see New Zealand, but it is definitely worth experiencing — even if it is for just part of your holiday.

RV rental aside, here are a few suggestions to get the biggest bang for your buck.

Affordable must-dos

1. Frisbee in the park

You might think that idling away in a park on a trip is a waste of time, but when you are in New Zealand, it is a perfectly tranquil experience.

We found ourselves a quiet park where we just lay down on the grass, read books and played a game of frisbee. There are several outdoor shops in the vicinity of Queenstown that loan frisbees for a small fee of NZ\$8 (S\$7.35) to \$12 in case you forgot to bring your own.



2. Trekking

We went on the Kepler Trek, one of New Zealand's Great Walks. Not recommended for the faint-hearted, this route is approximately a four-hour uphill climb to the first pit stop, but the view at the top makes up for any sore knees and shoulders.

Here's a tip — come prepared with waterproof gear such as jacket, trekking pants, a backpack and sturdy shoes. The weather can be volatile, even in summer, so do check the weather forecast before you set off.



3. Luge's the limit

For a good mix of heady thrills and great scenery, try the Queenstown Skyline Luge. There are varying prices, depending on the route and number of laps you take.

Enjoy the breathtaking surroundings as you ascend up the hill on a cable car or chairlift, and then speed down the twisting track while trying to get ahead of your friends. Guaranteed to thrill the very young, young and not so young. The approximate cost is NZ\$43 per person.



Group shot taken along the Kepler Trek. The rain did not dampen their mood.



Enjoying the view and striking a pose at the jetty at Lake Wanaka, South Island. PHOTOS: LYDIA YANG

Tips for living peacefully with friends in a campervan

1. Personal space

Compromise is key when travelling with friends. Everyone needs to feel comfortable throughout the whole trip, so find a good spot in the RV that you can call your own — and respect everyone else's space.

2. Take turns to drive

As long as you are relatively comfortable driving in a foreign country, share the driving responsibilities and let each traveller get sufficient rest. New Zealand has many breathtaking yet precarious cliffside bends and small gravelly roads. Do not speed — safety always comes first.

3. Toilet rules

Agree on some ground rules for usage and keep them. You do not want unpleasant smells to follow you for the whole trip.

4. Bring along your music

No road trip is perfect without good music. Prepare some playlists in advance that everyone in the group will enjoy — pop, rock, country, Taylor Swift, whatever works for all.

Here is a tip: Store your music in a USB drive for vehicles that do not have an "aux in" cable.


5. Be resourceful

When travelling in a portable home, stock up on some useful items from the DIY or grocery store:


- Anti-slip fabric to keep keys, sunglasses etc in place. ■ Bug spray for insects that make the RV their home at night. ■ S-hooks to hang clothes, towels, small bags and so on. ■ Bags of sweets to keep the driver and co-driver awake. ■ The Lord of the Rings DVDs and soundtracks to get you in the right mood for driving through "Middle Earth".


GuideLines


 We flew from Singapore direct to Christchurch on Singapore Airlines, arriving on Christmas Eve morning. From there, we collected our "United" campervan and went grocery shopping nearby to stock up for five to six days. We drove past Lake Tekapo and stayed overnight in Glentanner Campervan Park near Mount Cook.

 Queenstown has it all. From Ferg Burger to Cookie Monster, both are a must visit and within walking distance of each other.

 ■ New Zealand offers all kinds of accommodation. Depending on your budget, you can choose from backpacker hostels to bed and breakfasts (BnB) to staying in a campervan at a campervan park. ■ It is affordable to rent a campervan lot, and you can do your own cooking at the shared kitchen grounds. A six-berth campervan can technically house six people, but has limited space to move about inside. The best part about living in a motor home is that you do not need to keep unpacking.

 If you must buy souvenirs, get jars of Manuka honey or New Zealand wine which can be purchased at honey farms or vineyards along the roads.

 ■ Travel with like-minded friends when doing a campervan trip, prepare for adventures of all kinds, and always have an extra warm set of clothing. ■ Renting a six-berth recreational vehicle costs from S\$310 to \$350 per day during the summer peak season (November to January). Insurance, full waiver, waste disposal, camping ground rentals and petrol can add to another \$90 to \$110 more per day. ■ For more cost savings, try going in October or between February and March.

 ■ Check out this Singapore-owned website that compares types of RVs, prices and brands: Driveacampervan.com

■ New Zealand Great Walks: www.newzealandwalks.com

■ Queenstown Skyline Luge: www.skylineluge.com

■ Gibbston Valley Vineyard: www.gibbstonvalley.com

■ The Lord of the Rings tours: www.lordoftheringstours.co.nz/main.html

■ www.newzealand.com.au



3. Luge's the limit

For a good mix of heady thrills and great scenery, try the Queenstown Skyline Luge. There are varying prices, depending on the route and number of laps you take.

Enjoy the breathtaking surroundings as you ascend up the hill on a cable car or chairlift, and then speed down the twisting track while trying to get ahead of your friends. Guaranteed to thrill the very young, young and not so young. The approximate cost is NZ\$43 per person.

4. Wine tasting

New Zealand has plenty of vineyards, and we visited one of the more accessible ones, the Gibbston Valley Vineyard, which was just outside Queenstown.

Although it is a bit smaller than most vineyards, a small fee entitles you to a personal guide to take you around the sprawling vineyards and wine cellars. That is what we did, and it was money well spent.

You also get to do some wine tasting (above right), which includes the famous Gibbston Valley Pinot Noir, all included in the ticket price.

5. Cycling around the lakes

New Zealand has more than its fair share of stunning blue lakes. From Wakatipu to Wanaka to Tekapo, every lake we visited had a unique identity and colour — from baby blue to turquoise to deep sapphire.

The best way to enjoy the lake views is to rent a bike and cycle around while the cool breeze whips through your hair and the gentle sun warms your face. It is hard to forget the backdrop of serene lakes and high mountains — a sight so beautiful it seemed unreal.



6. Yoga among the lavender

Get your blood pumping after a long road trip by taking a break and doing some yoga. We stopped in a lovely place that was blooming with flowers, especially lavender and lupins.

It was the perfect setting to unwind and stretch our legs, and breathe in the scented air. The added bonus was the many photos we took.



Not-so-affordable must-dos

My friends and I spent a good portion of our holiday doing things that did not cost us a lot of money, preferring to splash out our extra cash on a few activities that would really make our time in New Zealand extra-special. We went whitewater rafting and we signed up for The Lord of the Rings tour.

1. The Lord of the Rings Tours

There are several tours, covering different locations associated with The Lord of the Rings (left) and The Hobbit films. Going on one tour at least is a must for avid fans, who will find themselves immersed in Middle Earth again.

Fandom does not come cheap, though, so prepare to pay upwards of NZ\$170 for a half-day guided tour.

2. Whitewater rafting/ Jet boating

For more adventurous travellers, no trip to New Zealand would be complete without a shot at whitewater rafting and jet boating.

New Zealand is considered a hub for extreme sports, and whitewater rafting will not disappoint. While they are not necessarily the most thrilling and roughest rapids in the world, trying to conquer the "Toilet", the "Aftershock" and "Jaws" (to name a few rapids) might be more than the average paddler can handle.

The highly distracting beautiful landscapes you pass by only serve to make your paddling more

challenging. Once you get tired, you can — with the permission of the instructor — topple overboard into the river. Even in the summer, the water retains its trademark icy chill.

The approximate cost for both rafting and jetboating is NZ\$320 per person.



Extreme Speed Jetboat Ride at Queenstown.