

The far north

Above Auckland, New Zealand fans out into the area that the Maori eloquently describe as "Te Hiku o Te Ika" - "The Tail of The Fish". Sparsely populated but warm of weather, the thin Northland Peninsula will witness two matches, both in the only city Whangarei.

The peninsula's calling card is its scenery: Ninety Mile Beach, which traces the west coast, and is no less majestic for only measuring 55 miles; Cape Reinga, at the north-west tip, where the Tasman Sea and the Pacific butt heads below a lonely lighthouse; the much-photographed Bay of Islands, on the east coast, where sharp inlets spear the land.



Lonely sentinel: the lighthouse at Cape Reinga

The lower south

Awash with peaks, valleys, glaciers and lakes, the lower half of the South Island is the poster image of New Zealand. Here is a bucolic wonderland light on sprawl - even if its two main urban pockets are sufficiently sizeable to appear in the World Cup diary: Dunedin, a university town that wears its 19th-century Scottish origins with relish, hosts four games; Invercargill, a calm outpost flanked by farms on the south coast, has three more.

Invercargill is also the gateway to Stewart Island, which lies 20 miles distant across the Foveaux Strait. New Zealand's final throes is a tree-lined nugget of walking paths, birdlife and un-

hurried peace, and easily accessed by ferry. Stewart Island Experience (00 64 3 212 7660; stewartislandexperience.co.nz) offers return crossings (from Bluff) for NZ\$132 (£69).

A three-hour drive north from Invercargill, Queenstown is the ideal base for exploring the World Cup Island. This idyll, pitched on the edge of Lake Wakatipu, is well aware of its good looks - the surrounding region featured heavily in *The Lord of The Rings* films. Nomad Safaris (00 64 3 442 6699; nomadsafaris.co.nz) operates two half-day "Safari Of The Scenes" routes that tick off some of the key locations by 4x4 - NZ\$153 (£81) per tour.

From Queenstown, you can forge into the wilder-

ness, not least by dashing north to Mount Cook National Park (00 64 3 435 1186; doc.govt.nz), where Australasia's tallest mountain climbs to 12,316ft and Glacier Explorers (00 64 3 435 1641; glacierexplorers.com) offer cruises amid the icebergs that drop into the lake below the Tasman Glacier - NZ\$140 (£74).

Alternatively, heading south-west from Queenstown brings you to Fiordland National Park (00 64 3 249 7924; doc.govt.nz), New Zealand's last corner - 4,800 square miles of raw rock and water, where Lake Te Anau does mirrored placidity and the deep groove of Milford Sound proffers isolated majesty, walls of granite rearing to 5,000ft on each side.



Frozen treat: the Tasman Glacier in Mount Cook National Park

The upper south

Largely unused by the World Cup (only three games will be played here, all in the pretty city of Nelson), the upper areas of the South Island are still worth seeing. Again, the siren call comes from the scenery. North-west of Nelson, Abel Tasman National Park (00 64 3 546 9339; doc.govt.nz) is alive with seabirds, and promises hiking heaven on the 32-mile Abel Tasman Coastal Track. Even further north, Farewell Spit, the tip of the South Island, is a restricted area - but Farewell Spit Nature Experiences (00 64

21 874 655; farewellspit.co.nz) operates tours of this 20-mile sand-strip from NZ\$95 (£47).

In the north-east corner, the Marlborough region is the star player of New Zealand's wine industry, its fertile soil and favourable climate making it responsible for 60 per cent of production. Most of its wineries, dotted around Blenheim, Picton and Renwick, welcome visitors: Cloudy Bay (00 64 3 520 9141; cloudybay.co.nz); Grove Mill (00 64 3 572 8200; grovemill.co.nz); the Saint Clair Estate (00 64 3 570 5280; saintclair.co.nz).



Star player: the Marlborough wine region

Christchurch in recovery

The six months since the devastating earthquake on 22 February have not been easy. Indeed, the seven World Cup games that were due to be played in Christchurch have been moved elsewhere, and parts of the centre remain cordoned off.

Slowly, though, this picturesque enclave of Victorian architecture, located halfway down the east coast of the South Island, is recovering. The airport is open, as are key sites such as the International Antarctic Centre (00 64 3 357 0519; iceberg.co.nz; NZ\$65/£34), which acknowledges the city's position as a regular start-point for Antarctic expeditions. The local tourist authority has further information on the regeneration effort and accommodation: christchurchnz.com.

Sample some coastal cuisine

A monthly series following **Rob Cowen** and **Leo Critchley** as they reconnect with the simpler things in life



Part 6 Foraging for supper

The epithet "wild" is found sprinkled across many a restaurant menu. Its use has come to be a synonym for earthiness. However, relatively few of us would actually consider finding food from nature's larder. The coast is a great training ground in autumn and provides an epic backdrop that beats any supermarket.

Budding foragers should start with something that is easily identified and cannot be confused with anything else. Mussels are a good place to start. Look for them on beaches that are well away from human habitation and have decent-sized outcrops of rock on the lower shore, submerged at high tide but fully exposed when the sea is out.

Mussels sieve through gallons of whatever water surrounds them, so harvest them from areas that are regularly and roughly washed by strong, clean tides. A good place to look for the right spot is the Environment Agencies website (environment-agency.gov.uk). Head for bathing areas certified to a "high" standard of cleanliness

and always rinse your mussels in two changes of clean, salted water before cooking.

Aim to arrive just before high tide and start by walking down towards the water, looking for the dark mass covering the rocks. Follow the sea as it retreats before working your way along and back inshore, keeping the encroaching waves a good distance behind you. Lift up seaweed and scour sea-facing rocks for the telltale wedge-shaped shell with identical hinged halves. If the mussel is healthy, these should be closed tightly.

Gather the shiny, unbroken and firmly closed specimens that are neither the biggest nor the smallest, but somewhere in between. Juveniles may not have developed a full flavour, while the bigger, older mussels can be too chewy; those around 40-55mm long are best. Be sparing in your gathering and move a step or two after picking each one to ensure the colony is unaffected. Collect around half a kilo per person; 15 to 20 mussels each is plenty.

The light drizzle did not spoil our own foraging experience. The rain mixed in the breeze with sea spray, a cooling atomizer to greet us after our journey. Every service station we had passed on a trip through Kent, the "Garden of England" had been the antithesis of foraging, stocked with produce from around the globe, packaged and sold alongside diesel and petrol.



Shellfish pleasures: choose your mussels from the cleanest shores ROB COWEN/LEO CRITCHLEY

Find your own mussel beach

Bolt Head, Soar, South Devon
A few miles south of Salcombe, you come upon spectacular white sands and rocky outcrops fringed by a turquoise sea. Mussels grow in abundance, but are best picked from the lowest rocks at low tide.

Reighton Beach, Fife, North Yorkshire
Walk along the beach at any direction and look out for the rocky inter-tidal zone at

low tide for masses of blue-black mussels in this atmospheric landscape.
Trebarwith Strand, Cornwall
Situating close to Tintagel, a sweep of beautiful shore half a mile in width in exposed at low tide. Head to the water to find outcrops of stone covered with mussels, but always keep a keen eye out for the returning sea.

A few steps towards the sea and we felt the change; we were through the garden, out the back gate and down the path. With the sun brightening to the west, we followed it along the coast road and pulled the car over at any stretch of uninhabited rock or beach to search. Advancing down the shore in one spot we came across the first outposts of a colony, raked by sunlight. Commandeering the rock faces, they were wedged in their thousands on a curving trajectory up and down the shore, as if lava had flowed down from the sandstone cliffs and stuck to the stone. We twisted the best specimens free as gulls shrieked above.

There is a simple delight in eating mussels and few would argue they are best when enjoyed Marinière style, steamed in butter and white wine with shallots and parsley. Use the empty shells as pincers to pull out the meat - this is perfect finger food. Eating them, you enter a ritual of sharing that dates back to our earliest ancestors, seen in prehistoric shellfish middens found around our coast. Now, just as then, eating shellfish after a day at the beach is a form of bonding as well as sustenance; we bond with each other and with the coast itself.

Rob Cowen and Leo Critchley's book describing their journeys around Britain will be published in spring 2012 by Hodder. For more information, follow them on their blog at getbackuk.com

READER OFFERS: TRAVEL

CHRISTMAS IN LAKE ANNECY BY RAIL

SEVEN NIGHTS FROM £899pp



One of the most beautiful areas of France, this tour visits the stunning town of Annecy itself, majestic Mont Blanc and Chamonix, Lake Geneva, the spa town of Evian, the medieval village of Yvoire and the U.N. city of Geneva.

Choose from the three-star Les Grillons (half-board), by Talloires village, with mountain and lake views, or at the friendly three-star Carlton (B&B), in the heart of Annecy town.

- Return Eurostar/TGV from St Pancras or Ebbsfleet to Annecy via Paris including transfers in Paris
- Seven nights' accommodation at the Les Grillons (half-board) on the 21 December, or the Carlton (B&B) on the 22 December
- Guided touring itinerary, coach transfers and the services of an experienced manager

Departing 21 or 22 December, the price includes:
To book or to browse hundreds of other travel offers visit:
independent.myreaderoffers.com
Call: 0844 472 9904 quoting XAN 3SEPII

Prices are per person based on two sharing and subject to availability. Holidays are operated and organised by Travel Editions Group Ltd, Alpha V3020, Aiol 3525, your contract is with them and their terms and conditions will apply. When you respond to offers we may use your information to contact you with other services we believe will be of interest. Please give your mobile or email details if you wish to receive offers by sms or email. We will not give your data to other companies without your permission; please let us know if you are happy for us to do so. 0844 calls are charged at 5p/min from BT landlines.

Open Jaw Where readers write back

'Will this tax be spent for real tourist needs?'

Venice tourist tax of up to €5 per person

These taxes never work. They are difficult to collect from smaller hotels. Competitive cities will always use the chance to contact operators, conference organisers and clients direct to say "Come to us instead and avoid these taxes." London, and many other cities, use more subtle ways to tax tourists and that is to have absurdly high one-way fares on public transport if you pay for just

one journey in cash. No Londoner pays £4 for a short tube ride, but millions of outsiders do before they discover unlimited Travelcards or pay-as-you-go Oyster cards. Neil Taylor

Yet another thinly veiled attempt to fleece the unwary tourist. Anyone foolish enough to pay a "luxury tax" for visiting Delhi or New York City deserves what they get. Kate



Insure thing: Havana, Cuba

A couple of years ago we arrived in Venice in the snow. We had brought rubber boots, carried for a month through Rome and Milan, and finally needed to

walk from the station in Venice to the Lido vaporetto. Will the city clear snow better as a result of this levy? Will there be better public facilities? Doubtful. Can this tax possibly be spent for real tourist needs? Or to improve services during *aqua alta* (high tide)? We hope so. "habitableworld"

Brits plan Olympic escape

I remember what happened in Sydney in 2000: lots of disappointed people left with over-priced, empty apartments. Ron Kerr

Could we devise an Olympics event along the

lines of "Allcomers' UK Get-away"? Gold medal awarded to the UK contestant getting the furthest distance from Dover for a gross spend of under a fiver: Leigh Vernier

Mandatory travel insurance in Cuba

I had no hassle about travel insurance when I went to Havana last year. I hadn't bought any, and nobody asked about it. They seemed to be keener than ever to welcome foreign tourists. Mitchell Beard

Cognac country

The younger the cognac, the more it stays in one's head. For everyday drink-

ing, I would not recommend anything less than an extra aged VSOP as a digestif. Very old cognac is like central heating; you will soon find that it has invaded the corners and extremities of one's body before you can say "Wow, what was that?" P F Bulmer

Sea kayaking in Northern Ireland

I have lived near the Causeway Coast all my life and thought I had seen it from every angle and experienced every form of weather. However, after reading that story I'm going to have to take a kayak trip and experience this for myself. Kathryn McFall