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Route a1

NEW ZEALAND

Passages to, from and around the coast

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Updated by Tony Bolingbroke using information supplied by Tom & Vicky Jackson, January 2010

For text version, see below

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text version, press 'back' button on
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The Pilotage Foundation is extremely grateful to the following for providing details for this route which is now available for the benefit of others;

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New Zealand, Australia and a suggested combination. Notes by the Ridouts

Having spent time in both countries it has become abundantly clear to us that in many ways New Zealand is much more yachtie friendly. Firstly there is no GST payable by a visiting yachtsman on anything remotely to do with his/her boat. This includes marina fees, chandlery including computers, and all work done on the vessel. Secondly there is a well developed industry that caters for the maintenance of yachts. An industry that is not expensive by European standards. Thirdly there are ample facilities to berth, haul out and/or store yachts. None of this is true in Australia. For these reasons we can only encourage world circling yachtsman to consider these factors.

One possible cruise to be born in mind, especially for the growing number of cruisers who like to spend several months afloat then go home for a spell, is the following:-

May. Leave New Zealand and sail to either Fiji or Vanuatu or New Caledonia or all three.

September or October. Sail to Queensland.

December. Be in Sydney for the start of the Sydney Hobart race and the New Year's Eve fireworks both unforgettable experiences.

January. Sail south and visit the islands in the Bass Strait. Then down either side of Tasmania to Hobart. Tasmania has proved to be one of the most rewarding cruising areas of our circumnavigation so far.

March or April. Sail back to New Zealand, either round the top to the Bay of Islands or to Nelson and Cook Strait.

The months suggested are approximate and the route could easily be altered to give more or less time in some places. We found Vanuatu with its five hundred miles of islands to be the most rewarding of all the Pacific groups we visited. However for those wanting to enjoy more of the summer in the UK then a later departure from New Zealand

NEW ZEALAND MAP



map supplied by [Backpack New Zealand](http://www.backpacknewzealand.com)

**Passages New Zealand
To Bay of Islands from Tonga, Fiji or New Caledonia
To North Cape from Australia**

Getting There :

New Zealand is at the end of the 'Coconut Milk Route' and offers the world cruising yachtsman welcome relief from the tropical islands whilst the Western South Pacific is in its hurricane season. On average there are 2 to 3 tropical revolving storms (cyclones) a year between the months of December to April. These cyclones predominantly affect the Brisbane coast and the islands between New Caledonia and Rarotonga. Most yachtsmen therefore find themselves leaving the South East Trade Winds and battling the equinoctial south-westerly winds that affect the latitudes south of 30 degrees approaching New Zealand. In general terms prudence dictates that one should make the westing 500 miles away from North Cape before laying a direct course for New Zealand, this is easier said than done if you are approaching from Tonga or further east. If this passage is undertaken during the New Zealand winter one can expect more severe weather. The optimum months are September to November with the following preferred passage months and recommended routes:

Passage Nuku'alofa (Tonga) to Opua (Bay of Islands) - distance 1180 miles

October to November

Waypoints 1)22°25'S 179°50'W 2)26°S 175°E 3)35° 09'S 174° 12'E

This course takes one well to the west of Ata Island and The Minerva Reef, thence to a point almost 500 miles due North of North Cape New Zealand, then to the 100 metre sounding just off the Bay of Islands.

On entering the Bay of Islands for the first time particular note should be taken of the dangerous unmarked Whale Rock (35°11'.4S 174°12'.0E). The very narrow channel inside the Albert Reef is the best way to avoid this rock but it easiest to do this for the first time when sailing out of the 'Bay'.

Passage Suva (Fiji) to Opua (Bay of Islands) - distance 1050 miles

Mid October to Mid November

Waypoints 1)19°05'S 177°48'E. 2) 26°S 172°50'E. 3) 35°09'S. 174°12'E

This course takes one west of Kandavu, then to a point 500 miles north of North Cape New Zealand then to the 100 metre sounding just off the Bay of Islands. See note above regarding Whale Rock.

Passage Noumea (New Caledonia) to Opua (Bay of Islands) - distance 880 miles

Mid October to Mid November

Waypoint 1) 23°10'S 166°40'E 2)35°09'S 174°12'E

This course clears the southern end of New Caledonia's dangerous reef and 100 miles east of Norfolk Island, then heads straight for the 100 metre sounding off the Bay of Islands.

A South Tasman crossing to New Zealand should be made during the summer months with a weather eye for the tails of tropical revolving storms (cyclones) which can track as far south as 40 degrees before filling. If heading to New Zealand from Queensland the December to April cyclone season makes the choice of passage times difficult: Jimmy Cornell's World Cruising Routes recommends November to March. One may also consider April and May which are outside the cyclone storm season but before the severe Winter storms.

Passage Sydney to Opua (Bay of Islands) - distance 1160 miles

Waypoints 1) 34°20'S 172°30'E 2) 34°18'S 173°04'E 3) 35°S 174°10'E.

This is a direct route to the South of the Three Kings Islands around New Zealand's North Cape and thence down the coast to the Bay of Islands' 100 metre line as above.

A North Tasman crossing requires far more concern about the cyclone season and also the mid Winter storms, which should be avoided. **April - May and October - November** are the best months.

Passage Brisbane to Opua (Bay of Islands) - Distance 1190 miles

Waypoints 1) 29°46'S 159°E 2) 34°10'S 173°17'E 3) 35°S 174°10'E

The Rhumb line course to New Zealand's North Cape passes right between the 24 mile wide gap between the very dangerous Middleton Reef and Elizabeth Reef. One should therefore not stray north or south of waypoint 1) above. Also near the 159°E. longitude is Lord Howe Island, 95 miles south of this course. The course above then passes North of the Three Kings Islands before rounding North Cape and down the coast to the Bay of Islands.

Returning to the Tropics

Once the hurricane season is over at the end of March, most yachts head back to the tropics to avoid the New Zealand winter. It is just then that the formation of 'bombs' (August 1979 Fastnet or the June 1994 Tonga Cruising 'Queens Birthday' storm) is most likely. These are tropical lows heading South towards New Zealand formed in the early Winter when the sea is still ripe for forming tropical lows but not warm enough to develop them further into cyclones. Care should therefore be taken to choose the correct moment.

April and May are considered the best months for Tonga, Fiji, New Caledonia, Brisbane and Sydney. Rhumb line courses also apply to all locations apart from Tonga where the following waypoints may make a better heading sailing in the South East Trades when they are met at approximately 25°S.

Passage from Opua (Bay of Islands) to Nuku'alofa (Tonga) - Distance 1035 miles

Waypoints 1) 30°S 179°E 2) 22°20'S 175°50'W 3) 21°02'S 175°25'W

This course passes close by the west of New Zealand's Kermadec Islands, thirty miles east of Tonga's southern outpost Ata Island and then to the west side of Tongatapu Island and the main pass into the lagoon.

Visas:

If you are visiting for three months or less and from the 50+ countries listed on www.immigration.govt.nz you will not need a visa.

British citizens and other British passport holders who produce evidence of the right to reside permanently in the UK can visit for up to six months without a visa.

Australian citizens and people who hold a current Australian permanent residence visa or a current Australian resident return visa do not need a New Zealand visa to enter New Zealand.

Generally, once you've stayed nine months you'll have to leave New Zealand and remain away for nine months or more before you can again return as a visitor.

But you may be eligible to extend your nine-month stay by a further three months. In applying for an extension, you'll have to show that during your stay:

- you've supported yourself financially, and have enough money to continue supporting yourself and
- you've not worked, been sponsored, or held a Student Permit.

If you gain this extension you'll have to leave New Zealand at the end of the 12 months and remain away for 12 months or more before you can again return as a visitor.

Customs/Entry Procedures:

Ports of Entry from north to south are Opua (Bay of Islands), Whangarei, Auckland, Tauranga, Gisborne, Napier, New Plymouth, Wanganui, Wellington, Picton Nelson, Lyttleton (Christchurch), Timaru, Port Chalmers (Dunedin) & Bluff.

New Zealand legislation requires the master of every craft en route to New Zealand to provide the following information at least 48 hours prior to the expected arrival time in New Zealand:

- details of the craft
- estimated date and time of arrival
- Customs port of entry at which craft will arrive
- details of all crew and passengers onboard
- the name of the originating port and subsequent ports visited on the voyage to New Zealand.

This information can be provided by completing the Small Craft Inward Report form and the Yachts and Small Craft Arrival Advance Information form.

This documentation, when completed, can be returned to Customs in two formats:

Facsimile:

To fax this information, print Form C1B and Form NZCS 340, complete the details on the forms and fax to +64-3-358 0069.

Email:

To email this information, download (from the Visiting Craft section of the NZ Customs web site) Form C1B txt version and Form NZCS 340 txt version to your hard drive, complete the details, save and email to Yachts@customs.govt.nz. Note: These txt versions have a combined file size of 13 kb and can be opened in any text editor.

You must also notify the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) at the first port at which the vessel is to arrive, or the MAF office nearest to that port. “

On arrival at the designated berth no persons may go ashore. The Customs & MAF officer's will board,

Documents required to be presented on your arrival:

- Inwards Report – Small Craft
- New Zealand Passenger Arrival Card for each person on board
- Valid passport for every person on board (valid for a period extending 3 months beyond the visitors permit)
- Certificate of Registry for the Vessel
- Temporary Import Entry
- Border Cash Report

- Last Port Clearance
- MAFBNZ Masters declaration.(of meat & animals carried on board)
(Plus if applicable a Cargo Declaration, Health Declaration, Firearms Record)

Full details of the NZ Customs requirements will be found under the Small Craft Arrival section on www.customs.govt.nz

Full details on the Importation of Prohibited & Restricted Items can be obtained from the MAF web site www.maf.govt.nz

Full details on the importation of live animals can be obtained from the MAF Biosecurity web site www.biosecurity.govt.nz

Temporary Import Entry

On completion of clearance you will be granted a year's Temporary Import Permit for your yacht which can be renewed if work on the yacht requires longer time. This is a most useful document. Get a dozen photo copies of it. Any goods and services for the boat are free of the 12.5% GST (Goods & Services Tax) if the supplier has a copy of this form.

Weather Forecasts

Weather forecasts are available by phone by dialing 0900 999 99 cost is \$1.30 per minute.

Maritime NZ Radio provides forecasts at 0533,0733,1033,1333,1733 and 2133 hours. The forecast is announced on channel 16 and then broadcast on the area working channel.

In The Bay of Islands, Russell Marine Radio channel 21 gives a continuous (Summer months only) broadcast of weather and safety information .

In Auckland area, Northern Coastguard channels 20 & 21 give a continuous broadcast of weather and safety information including 'Nowcasting' data.

In Whitianga Eastern Coastguard Channel 23 gives continuous broadcast of weather and safety information.

Russell Radio with Ritchie Bloomfield is on SSB 6515kHz. From 0700 NZST and Des Renner on 13137kHz 0800-0900 & 1600 - 1645 NZST. Des also gives an excellent weather forecast on 4445kHz. From 0730-0800 & 1900-2000 NZST. A small charge applies to this service.

For further South, Mary out of Bluff gives an excellent weather report on 4417kHz at 0830NZST, this is aimed mainly at the southern fishing fleet.

Other sources of marine forecasts include:

- National Radio (AM & FM) after the 3am and 5am news.
- Teletext on Television
- Newspapers but these will be published many hours earlier
- Local radio stations especially in summer.
- Private coastal radio stations.
- www.metservice.co.nz (Sea Area Forecasts)
- www.metvuw.com (7 day 3 hourly weather prediction maps)
- www.pangolin.co.nz (Bob McDavitt's weekly weathergram)
- bobmcdavitt@metservice.com (Bob McDavitt's e-mail for detailed weather routing)
- Weatherfax on 3247.4kHz , 5807kHz, 9459kHz, 13550.5kHz & 16340.1kHz

Charts, Pilots and Sailing Directions

The Hydrographic Office of the Royal New Zealand Navy publishes its own detailed charts of New Zealand, The South Pacific and a Chart Catalogue. Prices of charts are about half the cost of British Admiralty ones. Principal Chart agents for the New Zealand & British Admiralty charts are Trans Pacific Marine (www.transpacificmarine.co.nz), 121 Beaumont Street, Westhaven, Auckland City (Phone 09-303 1459). They also stock a range of Pilots.

There is a "Chart Pack" for the Bay of Islands which is a cheap way of getting full coverage

The best range of cruising guides from Cape Reinga to Stewart Island can be found at Boat Books (www.boatbooks.co.nz) 22 Westhaven Drive, Auckland (Phone 09-3585691 Fax 09-358 5817)

Mariners Met Pack South West Pacific by Bob McDavitt, who operates out of Boat Books shop, gives one an appreciation of the weather patterns for the approach to New Zealand. It is also an invaluable guide to forecasting information in the area.

Boat Books also sell 'Memory-map' Digital charts for PC's at \$400 for all of NZ or \$200 for part of NZ (i.e. 98 charts and plans from Napier to North Cape).

Despite the wonderful cruising surprisingly there is not one good complete cruising guide for the most popular area North Cape to East Cape.

A combination of the two David Thatcher publications (*Northland Coast Boaties Atlas* and *Hauraki Gulf Boating Atlas*), the Royal Akarana Yacht Club's *Coastal Cruising Handbook* and a copy of the out of print *Pickmere Atlas* will give you all the information you need.

New Zealand Cruising Guide - Central Area by Murray & Von Kohorn covers the Cook Strait area (Tasman Bay, Golden Bay, Marlborough Sounds & Wellington).

A Boaties Guide to Fiordland by the Mana Cruising Club covers the South Island's Fiordland.

Stewart Island Cruising Guide by the Mana Cruising Club covers New Zealand's 'third' island Stewart Island.

Equipment Requirements

Holding tanks are not compulsory but for ease of cruising they will be useful. The rules are that you must not discharge untreated sewage from your boat unless you are 500 metres or more from the shore or a marine farm and the water depth is more than 5 metres. Many yachts in NZ have 'Lectrasan' toilet treatment systems.

Marinas

With 450 + visiting yachts arriving each Spring it may be wise to pre-book a marina berth. Visiting www.nzmarinas.com show there are more than thirty marinas to choose from, of which 7 are in Northland, 13 in Auckland and 7 in eastern Coromandel/Bay of Plenty.

Primary Cruising Areas on East Coast of North Island

Mangonui to The Bay of Islands

Care should be taken approaching Mangonui harbour to avoid Fairway Reef which lies three miles offshore. Once past this, the harbour is clear but is shallow at its upper reaches. The quaint township of Mangonui provides basic food supplies, fuel, water. Heading south around Berghan Point are several fair weather anchorages before reaching the deep water harbour of Whangaroa. This provides the best shelter on this coastline with a variety of spectacular anchorages under the basalt formations of St Peter & St Paul. Further up the harbour lie an 85 berth marina where stores, water and fuel can be obtained, casual berths may also be available (Phone 09-405-0081, or VHF Channel 62). Stores, fuel & water can also be obtained from Totara North on the north side of the harbour.

There are many fair weather anchorages between Whangaroa and The Bay of Islands with Mehinepua Bay inside the Cavalli Islands being one of the most protected and scenic. A needle rock, The Ninepin, marks the northern entrance to the Bay of Islands.

Bay of Islands

This is one of the cruising gems of the World. With the new marina at Opuia and the floating dock many yachtsmen go no further. Who can blame them, the Bay of Islands has everything for the perfect sailing holiday. You should get a copy from Opuia Marina of the complimentary *Beautiful Bay of Islands New Zealand Cruisers Guide*.

On the main Islands of Urupukapuka, Motukiekie, Motorua and Roberton Island are some of the most charming anchorages. This area tends to get rather crowded during the three weeks after Christmas but there is enough choice around the mainland part of the 'Bay' to escape the crowds if you wish. Stores and fuel can be obtained from the historic town of Russell and a visit to the Department of Conservation's centre will show you the scenic walks. Matauwhi Bay linked to Russell by a short ten minute walk is a better anchorage with use of a mooring This is the home of the 'cruiser friendly' Russell Boating Club.

Water, fuel & Stores can also be obtained from Opuia's 240 berth Marina (phone 09-402-7124) or the 'touristy' Paihia. Te Hue Bay in Manawaora Bay has the best drinking water in the 'Bay', the wharf with the hose has 2.5 - 3 metres depth at high tide. At the entrance to the Kerikeri River lies Doves Bay the home to the Kerikeri Cruising Club & Marina (186 berths). Casual berths can be made by phoning 09-407-4757. The facilities here are excellent and the Club very welcoming.



Doves Bay Cruising Club Marina

Bay of Islands to Whangarei

Rounding Cape Brett heading south out of The Bay of Islands one can join the excursion launches and look at the 'Hole in The Rock' by taking the passage inside Piercy Island.



Cape Brett

Three main harbours lie between Cape Brett and Whangarei these are Whangamumu and Whangaruru which have no facilities and Tutukaka which offers full marina comforts (220 berths some casual berths available Phone 09-434-3441) .Between these lie some of Northland's most attractive coves. Care should be taken of the Elizabeth Reef which extends one mile off the Whananaki shore and is unlit. Also offshore are the Poor Knights Islands which are a 'must' for scuba divers.

Whangarei to Kawau Island

At the entrance to The Whangarei River lies NZ's main oil refinery at Marsden Point. Just up river from the refinery is the busy logging port with the new Marsden Cove marina just up river from that. The channel to the marina is dredged to 3 metres with the first marks at 35°49'.9S 174°28'.4E. Phone 09-432-7740 for bookings.



Marsden Cove Marina, dredged channel at low tide

The Whangarei River is well marked right up to its head (approximately 15 miles) at the Town Basin which has berths for 300 plus live aboard cruising yachts (Phone 09-438-2033 Fax 09-438-

2036 email whangarei.marina@xtra.co.nz. Whangarei Town has been servicing the needs of overseas cruisers for many years probably making it the best place in New Zealand for a major refit. The current on the river runs up to 3 knots and there are many shallows and sandbanks, a first entrance at half flood tide in daylight is therefore essential. Urquharts Bay just inside Bream Head or around the next river bend McLeods Bay offer good overnight anchorages to wait for the tide. The passage south to the insignificant Cape Rodney is a good day's sail. The little harbour of Leigh just to the south of Cape Rodney offers shelter if darkness falls before you can reach the yachting haven of Kawau Island. The segmented light marking the safe entrance to North Channel Kawau Island makes this entrance easier by night than in the day. The red sector of this light marks the dangerous Maori Rock, which is also sometimes marked by a buoy. Mansion House Bay is Kawau's most photogenic anchorage but there are many others to choose from. Fuel, water & limited stores can be found at The Kawau Island Yacht Club which is on the north side of Bon Accord Harbour. The \$50 club membership also gives access to showers, laundry, and the bar which also serves basic meals. North Harbour & Vivien Bay are also recommended anchorages on Kawau.

Auckland & The Hauraki Gulf

Landfall from the north can safely be made on the Moko Hinau Islands whose 27 mile light will usually be seen. From here the wide entrance to the Hauraki Gulf opens and another perfect cruising ground beckons.

The approach from Kawau Island is best through the Tiri Passage where a fascinating stop can be had at Tiritiri Matangi Island, home to some of New Zealand's rarest bird species including the Takahe which can be seen wandering close to the Information Centre. Temporary anchorage can be made North of the wharf behind the reef.

On the southern side of the Tiri Passage is the Whangaparoa Peninsula which is the start of Auckland's urban sprawl. The first Marina 'Gulf Harbour' lies here (Phone 424-6200 or email marina@gulpharbour.co.nz for a casual mooring in this 1036 berth full refitting complex). Lay your course on the Sky Tower take the extinct volcano Rangitoto Island to port and North Head to starboard and you are in Auckland Harbour with all its facilities. Customs clearance is under the only blue 17 floor building on the waterfront.

The Islands of The Hauraki Gulf & Coromandel

Great Barrier Island in the north, Coromandel Peninsular in the east, Waiheke Island in the south and Auckland's North Shore in the west give the cruising yachtsman a variety of safe and beautiful anchorages.



Arran Bay, looking towards Ponui Island and Coromandel

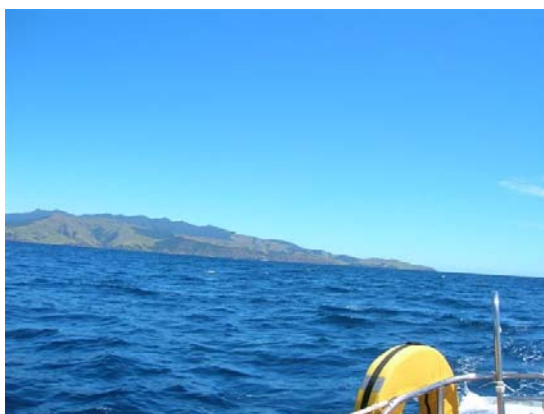
Waiheke Island's North Shore offers some of the best sand beaches of this coastline with the Eastern end of the island giving a wide range of protected scenic anchorages between Pakatoa and Ponui Islands. Northerly winds make the mangrove fringed Southern bays better with a vehicular ferry operating from Putiki Bay. At Matiatia Bay in the west is the 35 minute passenger ferry to Downtown Auckland.

Great Barrier Island (www.greatbarrierisland.co.nz) has some of the feel of early New Zealand with only 400 or so permanent population. It is the place to lose oneself surrounded by native bush. The harbours of Port Fitzroy are very sheltered, if a little deep. The east side of Great Barrier offers interesting cruising when the weather is settled. The energetic will want to climb Mount Hobson, the highest point on the island. The four to five hour walk takes you through some most attractive bush and passes the kauri dam.

On Coromandel's west coast the 'jewel' is Te Kouma Harbour, the perfect anchorage in a gale. The offshore islands and Coromandel harbour (www.coromandeltown.co.nz) offer some shelter. Elephant Cove on Happy Jack Island being one of the more interesting lunch stops.

Cape Colville to Tauranga

Rounding Cape Colville at the end of the Coromandel peninsula opens up yet another cruising ground, this passage can be a challenge because of wind, tide and overfalls.



Cape Colville

Many Auckland 'boaties' are happy to spend all their Christmas holiday in The Mercury Islands. Then there is Whitianga with its small 185 berth marina and finally the twin harbours of Mount Maunganui & Tauranga (www.tauranga.co.nz) which offer full facilities at its two marinas. Many overseas yachtsmen choose Tauranga as a good refit base.

Wellington

Cook Strait has a reputation as one of the windiest places in New Zealand which is not surprising as it is a natural wind funnel lying well within the 'Roaring Forties'. At the western entrance to Cook Strait lies Wellington Harbour; on a calm day there is no more beautiful harbour. New Zealand's capital has several live on-board marinas:

Chaffers (185 berths) [chaffers quik@ihug.co.nz](mailto:chaffers_quik@ihug.co.nz) ,

Mana (305 berths) mana.marina@xtra.co.nz

Seaview www.seaviewmarina.co.nz.

North Island East Coast - Wellington to East Cape

If your inclination is to complete a North Island circumnavigation you have a bleak coastline ahead of you as you emerge from Cook Strait at Cape Palliser. A 150 mile coast with no shelter welcomes you before you reach Cape Kidnappers and its famous Gannet Colony. Napier harbour beckons with its small 100 berth marina www.ahuriuri.co.nz. The next shelter is Gisborne 90 miles further north before talking on the local 'Cape Horn' East Cape where a favourable tide is essential.

Suggested Itineraries, Timing & Weather

In general the small maximum tidal range of 3.2m and the abundance of good anchorages makes for stress free cruising. If one is looking for something other than The Bay of Islands for one's fortnight cruise, a circuit of the Hauraki Gulf would be most rewarding. Alternatively it would be hard to beat a sail up or down the coast lingering in Kawau Island and Northland's harbours. One could expect the following weather:

October & November: The winds are predominantly south west with a regular five day frontal pattern usually giving strong winds from the north through to south west. December & January. With the flowering of the pohutukawa the 'New Zealand Christmas Tree' the front's lose their bite and the anticyclones drift further North, bringing more settled weather with afternoon sea breezes. Just as you are lulled into a sense of security a low of tropical origin or tail of a hurricane can bring an easterly gale turning the coast into a trap. If you are unlucky to have one of these weather spells it can take several weeks to sort out and

you may be wise to reschedule your South Island land visit, where the weather will be beautiful.

February & March: these are the best months for cruising with predominantly anticyclonic weather. Sea breezes therefore prevail, but be warned that a tropical-based depression then can ruin your cruising.

April & May: the end of the Summer can bring some of the best days but the south west winds start to bite. With the end of the hurricane season in the Pacific Islands, it's time to think about heading North again before you get caught in the New Zealand winter.

South Island

The best time for a cruise to South Island is January through to April. If sailing from Auckland an anticlockwise route is recommended sailing down the inhospitable west coast of North Island.

Nelson, Tasman Bay, Marlborough Sounds & Fiordland

As a major fishing port Nelson at the top of South Island offers most marine services and boasts a 515 berth marina. It claims that "low berthage fees and safe facilities make it a great place to spend time whilst your boat undergoes repairs" (www.nelsoncitycouncil.co.nz). Dickson Marine (www.dicksonmarine.com) has an excellent haul out area with all facilities.

To the West of Nelson lies the Able Tasman National Park with its pristine beaches and excellent anchorages. To the East lies D'Urville Island and the Marlborough Sounds, which offer a myriad of coves in a haven of scenic tranquility. The 'Sounds' offers marinas at Picton (600 & 232 berths) and Havelock (340 berths).

For those looking for a really wild and dramatic coastline, the West coast of South Island from Milford Sound to Stewart Island offers some of New Zealand's remotest areas. The recommendation is to sail down to Stewart Island then sail North taking in Dusky Sound, Breaksea Sound, Doubtful Sound, Thompson Sound, George Sound and the most dramatic Milford Sound with its towering peaks, glistening glaciers and sheer rock cliffs. The Sounds ever changing scenery are part of the attraction, one moment misty and mysterious changing to sparkling and mirror smooth waters next. To cruise this area you must have plenty of time as there is seldom a time when there is no wind warning. You must also be self sufficient and be prepared to combat the truly awful sand flies. Finally you must have more than the usual amount of anchor chain as many of the anchorages are deep and of moderate holding.

Cruising in Fiordland

It is generally best to approach the area from the north, down the west coast, either direct from Cape Reinga or from Tasman Bay. Though you are likely to have to get through at least one active front, the weather is generally 'honest' oceanic weather, while that on the East Coast has been 'corrupted' by NZ's mountains. The conventional wisdom, as stated by the NZ Metservice's Bob McDavitt is that the best year is a La Nina year, because the highs tend to be further south and the best month is February.

The excellent cruising guide for Fiordland produced by the Mana Cruising Club is essential for exploring the fiords. Even in high summer you are unlikely to find many other boats in Fiordland, apart from a few fishermen. In general, the cray fishermen have filled their quotas by Christmas, often earlier. In a poor year there will still be a few around in January.

The fiords have very high rainfall (about 8 metres/year). A two week period without rain is a drought! There are regular fronts during which the winds strengthen from the NW, followed by a

strong SW change, but with drier, cooler weather. In sunny weather the fiords develop strong day breezes, sometimes exceeding gale force. These usually develop around midday, and persist until after sunset. By moving mostly in the morning it is often possible to avoid the worst affects of these winds. These day breezes can make dinghy exploration difficult or hazardous.

Sandflies, a species of black fly, are the major down-side of the fiords. Their bites have longer lasting effects than those of mosquitoes. Sandflies are active during daylight hours, but also in lighted areas at night. They breed in running fresh water and so are particularly found near streams. In our experience they swarm during rainy spells, but others say that rain diminishes their numbers. We found that we were rarely bothered by sandflies when hiking in the bush, except occasionally near streams. In general, it pays to stay well covered and to use insect repellent with deet. If you prefer a less toxic product, mix baby oil and Dettol.

For those who are keen fishermen and women, the fiords abound in blue cod, which will bite at almost anything. Trumpeter are also excellent. In January and February there are also albacore tuna along the coast.

Almost all anchorages involve using stern lines with a bow anchor often in quite deep water. Fishermen have set up stern lines in many anchorages, but it is worth inspecting these before relying on them. Some are set up to be tied along-side. Fishermen have also equipped a number of anchorages with water hoses. The water from these is generally excellent, but particularly after heavy rain it is likely to have the colour of weak tea. We found it perfectly drinkable.

The height of the surrounding mountains in Fiordland precludes VHF coverage until offshore. An SSB is thus essential for receiving weather forecasts. There is the excellent local net, Bluff Fishermen's Radio, for both Fiordland and Stewart Island. This is operated by Meri Leask, who is virtually a national institution. She is extremely helpful to both fishermen and yachties, providing weather and receiving position reports. The net operates on 4417 morning and evening. Enquire about times which can vary, when you arrive in the area.

The northern fiords are the most spectacular scenically. Milford is particularly special, but is completely atypical, because of the large number of tourists who come in daily. It also has clouds of sandflies. The only practicable place to moor is in Deep Water Basin, either in a vacant fishing boat pen or alongside the grounded barge. Fuel is available here. If you urgently need some item of equipment, there is a bus service to Te Anau. This is via the only paved road link into Fiordland. There is an un-paved road link to Deep Cove at Doubtful Sound. There are several very pleasant day hikes in the area around Milford village.

Though they have their advocates, Sutherland, Bligh, Caswell and Nancy Sounds have relatively few anchoring options. In the midst of these is George Sound, which has two excellent anchorages, at Anchor Island and Alice Falls.

The Thompson, Bradshaw, Doubtful Sound complex is well worth exploration, it is both scenic and has a number of good anchorages. Perhaps the best of these is at Precipice Cove in Bradshaw Sound. Though it is far less developed than Milford there is some tourist activity at Deep Cove, Doubtful Sound, where fuel is also available, at a significant premium. There are a number of good day hikes around Deep Cove.

Dagg Sound has one good anchorage and the distinction of allowing one to hike a short distance to an arm of Doubtful Sound.

The Breaksea-Dusky Sound complex is probably the jewel of Fiordland. Breaksea has one or two good anchorages. Acheron Passage provides the connection to Dusky. Half-way along the passage is Stick Cove, which is an excellent funk-hole when it really blows – and who could pass up being anchored in Wet Jacket Arm!

Dusky Sound has some of the high beauty of the northern Sounds, but also islands and small coves which make good anchorages. For Cook fans it also has strong historical connections to the great Captain. You can even anchor in Pickersgill Harbour in the very spot where James Cook moored ‘Resolution’ for a month, to refit, after returning from Antarctica in 1773. Luncheon Cove is also excellent, though the bottom has been so ploughed up over the years that the holding is suspect. There are any number of excellent hikes throughout the area.

Both Chalky and Preservation Inlets have a number of good anchorages. Lake Cove at the top of Edwardson Sound and the island anchorage in Isthmus Sound are surprisingly peaceful even in a blow and it does blow hard quite often down in this SW corner, where the fronts bounce off the end of the mountains. Both these Inlets have a number of interesting hikes, often exploring the abortive attempts of early settlers to exploit the mineral resources of the area.

For departing the area, it generally pays to wait for a settled spell of moderate westerlies, whether heading East towards Bluff or Dunedin, or South to Port Pegasus on Stewart Island. Unless pressed for time we would strongly recommend continuing to Port Pegasus on Stewart Island, which also gives the opportunity of rounding one of the five Great Southern Capes. The whole area from the Solander Islands along the southern coast of Stewart Island is also crowded with sea birds, particularly Royal and Buller's albatross. It is worth taking this route just to see them.

Stewart Island

What the Bay of Islands is for northern New Zealand, Stewart Island and Port Pegasus in particular, is for southern New Zealand. Much of the scenery is similar to some of the Scottish Islands. Though the weather is generally somewhat drier than Fiordland, it is still pretty rainy much of the time and the same pattern of frontal weather is to be expected. In general the sandflies are much fewer. There is also an excellent guide for cruising Stewart Island published by the Mana Cruising Club.

As in Fiordland there are stern lines set up in many of the anchorages, which are themselves generally much shallower. There are excellent hiking tracks throughout the Island. The only area of habitation on the Island is the village of Oban at Half-Moon Bay on the eastern coast. There is a ferry from Oban to Bluff. Stores and fuel are available at Oban, but its facilities are not extensive. There has been an increase in tourism at Oban since Stewart Island was named a World Heritage Area in 2002. However, this has little impact or affect on the Island as a cruising area.

Port Pegasus is a small but wonderful cruising ground. It is divided into Northern and Southern Arms. Each has a number of excellent anchorages, though only one or two provide all-round shelter. However, the distances are so small that it is easy to move to complete shelter in very little time. The charting of Port Pegasus is incomplete, so it is necessary to keep an eye out for the kelp, which might indicate a rock.

The best shelter is ironically at Disappointment Cove in the Southern Arm. This is more appropriately known as Peacehaven by the local fishermen and is absolutely protected in even the most vile conditions. Other excellent anchorages are Evening Cove, which is a good starting point for the hike to Magog Peak, and Waterlily, from which one can explore Basin Creek by dinghy at

high tide. There are numerous other good anchorages and two excellent longer hikes, one up the Tin Range Track, which takes all day to return, and the other up to Bald Cone, a half-day return. It is worth a dinghy trip up to the very attractive Belltopper Falls.

The anchorage options at both Lord's River and Port Adventure are more limited, but these are worth a stop. Though not up to the strength of English Channel tides, those of the South Coast of Stewart Island can reach a couple of knots and the irregular bottom can kick up a very unpleasant sea in wind against tide conditions.

Entrance to Paterson Inlet is from the East Coast. Though the Inlet is somewhat protected by the bulk of Stewart Island between it and the westerlies, it can still blow very hard at times, when the wind accelerates through Foveaux Strait to the north. Inside the Inlet there are a large number of excellent anchorages, as well as access to Oban by road. Once again the distances between anchorages are not great. Unlike Port Pegasus, in most cases stern lines are not used. Little Glory, Kaipipi and Kidney Fern all provide excellent protection.

There are opportunities to see kiwi at Ocean Beach and a variety of native NZ birds in the wildlife reserve on Ulva Island. The remains of the Norwegian whaling station in Prices Inlet are also worth exploration. There are a wide variety of day hiking opportunities in the area, as well as longer tracks for the intrepid.

There are a number of coastal anchorages on the north-eastern and western coasts. We have not explored these and it would require a good spell of settled weather to do so.

Departing from Stewart Island is straight-forward if heading East to Dunedin, about 150 miles away, as almost any westerly, of which there are plenty, will do. Bluff just across the Strait to the North is pleasant enough, but has few facilities and the port is set up for fishing boats, not yachts.
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