

FORGED BY *Nature*

Vast, remote and steeped in quiet mystery, Doubtful Sound — or Patea, in te reo Māori — reveals its natural majesty on an overnight cruise amid towering cliffs, cascading waterfalls and glassy, flawless waters.

WORDS Alexander Simpson

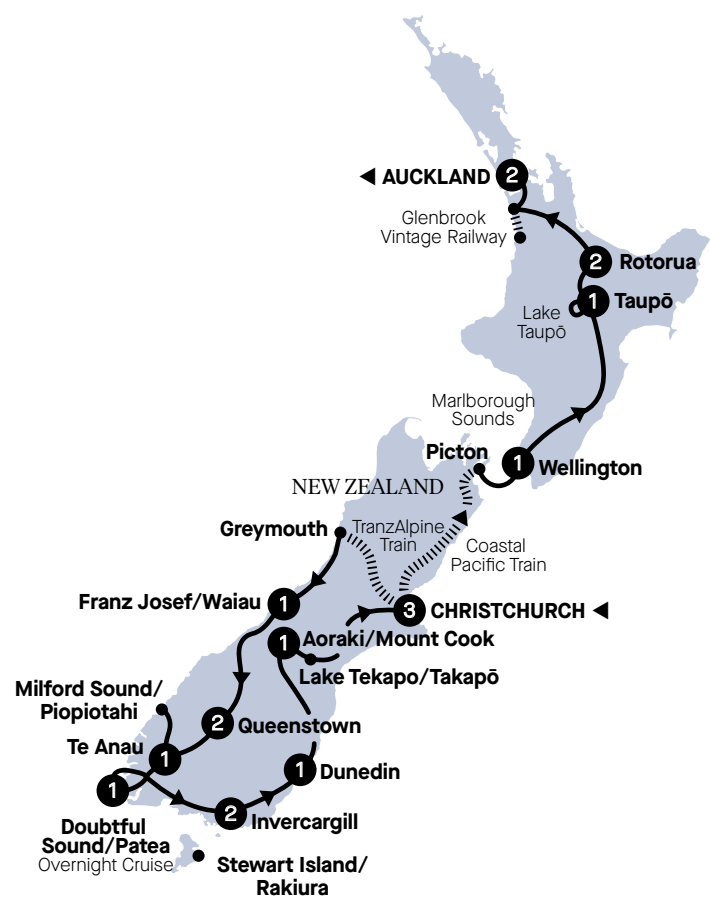




Cradled deep within the South Island’s untamed heart, Doubtful Sound/Patea stretches 40 kilometres into Fiordland’s wilderness — vast, brooding and profoundly still. A natural amphitheatre of staggering scale, with deep waters and hidden coves, Patea captivates through its hushed grandeur and rainforest-draped mountains, all harbouring a silence so profound it feels almost spiritual. Accessible only by water, this remote sanctuary invites a deeper connection to nature. An overnight voyage aboard the Fiordland Navigator unveils the sound’s shifting moods — from veiled mist to sunlit serenity — in rare intimacy.

The first impression is striking: sheer cliffs and verdant slopes dissolve into glassy depths and an ever-shifting play of light transforms the fjord from solemn grey to luminous blue. Here, rain is an artist — drawing silken waterfalls down colossal cliffs in fleeting, ethereal displays. The air is sharp with ocean salt and the earthy fragrance of rainforest. And the soundtrack is elemental: birdsong echoing in the canopies, cascades roaring against granite, bottlenose dolphins breaking the water with playful splashes, and, above all, long stretches of meditative silence. On Patea, stillness is not absence, but presence — the raw voice of nature undisturbed.

The Fiordland Navigator balances expedition spirit with subdued luxury. Combining a timeless nautical aesthetic – inspired by traditional trading scow vessels – with thoughtful modern design, the ship features private en suite cabins





On rainy days, thousands of ephemeral cascades adorn the sound's mountainsides

and spacious viewing decks. Inviting shared spaces frame views that need no embellishment, offering a sense of comfort that complements, rather than competes with, the grandeur outside.

As the vessel anchors in sheltered coves, guests gather over freshly baked scones and platters of local salmon. Soon after, kayaks and tender boats slip into the still water, offering rare proximity to this pristine environment — whether tracing the glassy surface beneath towering cliffs or drifting quietly past basking fur seals. Close encounters with marine life may inspire the boldest guests to later leap from the ship's decks into the sound's icy waters — a jolt of exhilaration that etches itself into memory.

Evening heralds a generous buffet on board: succulent lamb, fresh vegetables and regional cheeses, accompanied by indulgent desserts. Conversation flows easily, buoyed by the warmth of the crew and the insights of an onboard naturalist. Later, a step onto the deck reveals a vault of stars unsullied by city light — constellations glittering over the darkened fjord in luminous clarity. As dawn filters through the mist of morning, breakfast is served against a panorama of awakening peaks before the ship slips quietly into new reaches of the fjord.

An overnight cruise on Patea lingers well beyond the voyage itself. The remoteness, the tranquillity, the ever-shifting interplay of weather and light — together they form an experience of profound depth. Yet what makes it truly memorable is the unique pause it offers within

a broader journey. Beforehand lie the lively streets of Queenstown and the majesty of Milford Sound; afterwards, the grounded charm of Invercargill and the wild solitude of Stewart Island/Rakiura. Between these backdrops, silence and scale conspire, and time stretches. Patea is not simply a place to see, but a place to feel — where nature's rhythm takes precedence and perspective shifts in subtle, lasting ways.

DOUBTLESS PRAISE

APT guests consistently depart Doubtful Sound/Patea with memories that linger long after the journey ends. Felicity Land and her mother, Gay Petfield, travelled through New Zealand with APT. Land describes the Patea cruise as her ultimate highlight, praising the stunning scenery, as well as the ship's crew, amenities and dining. "Fiordland is the ultimate destination for all who appreciate nature's wonders. Every moment of our cruise offered breathtaking views, and I especially loved the sunset mirrored in the still waters, and the chance to kayak and swim in the sound." Her mother also cherished the broader adventures beyond Patea, particularly the rail journeys. Together, their experience captures the magic of exploring New Zealand with APT, where each carefully curated moment invites a deeper appreciation of the country's natural splendour.

Find out more:

Search NRR19 at aptouring.com.au
From \$11,295 per person, twin share.*
Departing January 2026 to April 2028.
**Conditions apply – see page 35*

NRR19 itinerary varies throughout the year, please refer to our website for further details.

19-DAY TOUR

New Zealand Rail and Cruise Discovery

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|------|---|----|---|----|--|
| 01 → | ARRIVE CHRISTCHURCH
<i>Two nights at Rydges
Latimer Christchurch</i> | 07 | TE ANAU, DOUBTFUL
SOUND/PATEA
<i>Doubtful Sound/Patea
overnight cruise</i> | 13 | CHRISTCHURCH, PICTON
<i>Coastal Pacific train journey
Interislander ferry cruise</i> |
| 02 | CHRISTCHURCH
<i>Akaroa Harbour nature cruise</i> | 08 | DOUBTFUL SOUND/PATEA,
INVERCARGILL
<i>Bill Richardson Transport World
museum visit</i> | 14 | WELLINGTON, TAUPŌ
<i>Fell Locomotive Museum visit</i> |
| 03 | CHRISTCHURCH, GREYMOUTH,
FRANZ JOSEF/WAIAU
<i>TranzAlpine train journey
One night at Te Waonui
Forest Retreat</i> | 09 | INVERCARGILL, STEWART
ISLAND/RAKIURA
<i>Stewart Island/Rakiura day tour</i> | 15 | TAUPŌ, ROTORUA
<i>Lake Taupō sailing adventure
Te Pā Tū dining and cultural
experience</i> |
| 04 | FRANZ JOSEF/WAIAU,
QUEENSTOWN
<i>Two nights at Millennium Hotel
Queenstown</i> | 10 | INVERCARGILL, DUNEDIN
<i>Royal Albatross Centre guided tour</i> | 16 | ROTORUA
<i>Freedom of Choice sightseeing</i> |
| 05 | QUEENSTOWN
<i>Freedom of Choice sightseeing</i> | 11 | DUNEDIN, AORAKI/MOUNT COOK
<i>One night at the Hermitage Hotel, in
a room with alpine views
Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park</i> | 17 | ROTORUA, AUCKLAND
<i>Glenbrook Vintage Railway
steam train journey</i> |
| 06 | QUEENSTOWN, MILFORD
SOUND/PIOPIOTAHU, TE ANAU
<i>Milford Sound/Piopiotahi cruise
Taste of Fiordland dinner</i> | 12 | AORAKI/MOUNT COOK,
CHRISTCHURCH
<i>Church of the Good Sheperd visit</i> | 18 | AUCKLAND
<i>Freedom of Choice sightseeing</i> |
| | | | | 19 | DEPART AUCKLAND |