It's not clicking

Why were 100 of the people who died on our roads last year not wearing a seatbelt?
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Arnhem Land

Join Outback Spirit in 2018 for an extraordinary journey through the wild and mysterious Arnhem Land.

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Declared an Aboriginal Reserve in 1931, Arnhem Land has been inhabited by Aboriginal people for more than 60,000 years. Today, the region remains a vital cultural stronghold for Indigenous Australians and an extraordinary part of the Australian continent.

After extensive consultation with Traditional Owners and the Northern Land Council, Outback Spirit has created one of the most extraordinary cultural and wilderness journeys in Australia. Beginning in Nhulunbuy on the Gove Peninsula, our new and exclusive 12-day adventure travels west through the heart of Arnhem Land. On the banks of the Arafura Swamp, you’ll spend two nights at our incredible Murwangi Safari Camp to discover the area with Traditional Owners. Then, visit Ramingining before heading further west to Maningrida for two nights at the Barramundi Lodge. After a visit to Davidson’s Arnhem Land Safaris, Mount Borradaile, you’ll then head north west to the Cobourg Peninsula for two nights at the magnificently redeveloped Seven Spirit Bay, our third luxury lodge in Arnhem Land. Throughout the journey, you’ll take part in authentic cultural activities and wilderness adventures which will leave you in awe of this sacred and mystical land.

Call now and join us for an extraordinary adventure through time, culture and wilderness in 2018.

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12 DAYS | NHULUNBUY - DARWIN
Fully Accommodated | Departs Apr – Sep 2018
FROM $10,995* pp twin share

Tour Highlights & Inclusions

- Travel through the heart of Arnhem Land and immerse yourself in the world’s oldest surviving culture
- Learn from Indigenous guides who’ll share their knowledge and stories about their country
- Take a fascinating journey back to 1838 on a historical tour of the old Victoria Settlement
- Fish for Barramundi on a marine adventure of the Liverpool and Tomkinson Rivers
- Discover the rich marine life of the Cobourg Marine Park Sanctuary on a cruise to Port Essington
- Cruise pristine swamps, creeks & billabongs in small groups
- Spend 2 nights at Mount Borradaile and discover ancient rock art sites and the ‘catacombs’
- Discover the frontier town of Nhulunbuy on the Gove Peninsula
- Visit authentic art centres, including Buku Larrnggay Mulka at Yirrkala. Learn about the Yirrkala bark petitions that started the Aboriginal Land Rights movement in 1963
- Spend 6 nights in Outback Spirit’s new & luxurious wilderness lodges
- Fully inclusive of all meals, activities, permit fees, expert guides and scenic flight from Vashon Head to Darwin

Watch our incredible Arnhem Land video online! Go to outbackspirittours.com.au
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Having a comfortable and reliable car is even more important in your senior years – with a Heartland Reverse Mortgage you can afford to upgrade or even buy the car you’ve always wanted.

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**MAKE IT CLICK**

Many readers of my vintage will recall the ‘make it click’ campaign from the 1970s and 80s. It seems incredible today but, before law changes in the 1970s, wearing seatbelts was only optional and many people felt it was unnecessary. Then the authorities and even family restaurants embarked on a huge campaign to change our safety culture.

There were ads demonstrating the impossibility of All Blacks restraining a baby-sized dummy through muscle power alone; there were ads showing the blinding consequences of not using a seatbelt. There were also upbeat songs sung by kids, telling their parents to ‘make it click’.

That campaign also made something click in our heads. We changed. Today, like the vast majority of New Zealanders, I don’t even think about it: buckling up is an automatic response when getting into a car.

So it came as a shock to learn that, last year, 100 of the 328 people who died on our roads were not wearing any restraint – up slightly on 92 the year before, but up dramatically from 55 in 2012. Police estimate that last year 50 people would still be alive today if they had simply made it click.

For want of such a simple, simple precaution, these people are dead. Somewhere, somehow, we seem to have lost our way.

At the moment nobody knows exactly what has changed. It could be that people rely too much on modern, large vehicles with airbags and are lulled into a false sense of security. It could be there are some who consider themselves such safe drivers they don’t need to buckle up, not understanding that safety belts are a precaution against unexpected mistakes from other drivers as well. It could be any number of reasons.

To find out, the AA Research Foundation and several government agencies have jointly commissioned research reviewing all the recent unrestrained crashes, looking for common factors, in an effort to work out where more effort is needed to get the message through.

As an Association we will also be raising this matter at the highest level as part of our election calls and urging the next government to make it an urgent priority. Our role as an Association is to raise issues and promote road safety among our elected leaders. You can read more about this on page 38.

But I come back to the simplicity of the matter. All cars today have seatbelts fitted, front and back. Buckling up for drivers and passengers only takes a few seconds. Somehow, over the decades since we had the ‘make it click’ campaign, we have forgotten something. The infectious enthusiasm and the sense of public participation has also been lost, taking with it the sense that there are actions everyone can take on the roads to be safer.

If we could make it happen once it should not be beyond us, and our leaders, to do it again. History reminds people of what is possible with the right level of thought, resources and commitment.

Of all the goals and targets the government sets itself to reduce road trauma, I can think of no simpler way to save 50 lives a year than to ‘make it click’.

Brian Gibbons
Chief Executive
Hello

This was a particularly satisfying magazine to pull together as it addresses quite hard-hitting issues and also presents some solutions. We tackle how our lives as motorists can be improved; we also discuss New Zealand’s social, environmental and economic reality with people involved in making positive changes. Hopefully, you’ll find this issue thought-provoking and inspiring.

Kathryn Webster
EDITOR

ALISTAIR GUTHRIE
Alistair says he found it a real joy photographing the feature for this issue, which profiles New Zealanders making change in various fields (p.24). It reminded him why he picked up a camera in the first place: to record life. He found it inspiring to meet, talk to and photograph passionate people who, despite sometimes facing adversity, help make the world a better place – and do so selflessly. Alistair has worked as a professional photographer for many years but says he’s never considered it a job.

LAURAGRACE MCFARLAND
As part of the team that designs AA Directions, LauraGrace’s job is to keep things running smoothly. That can involve liaising with printers, playing stylist on a cover shoot, or making sure pages are ready for print – all the time keeping everyone else happy. When she’s not juggling deadlines, LauraGrace can be found at a gig supporting local music or, even better, out at sea. Her favourite activity is kayaking. She’s most happy when paddling to Rangitoto from her Auckland home or on holiday in Abel Tasman National Park.

TIM WARRINGTON
Life in the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia and now New Zealand has provided Tim with plenty of inspiration for travel tales. Tim writes for clients across the globe, which has seen him chased by giant hornets in Sri Lanka, spied on by tigers in Myanmar and, recently, fulfilling a lifelong ambition to cross Australia’s Nullarbor Plains aboard the Indian Pacific train. For this issue, he left his passport at home and tripped from Wellington to Wairoa by car (p.64).

YOUR PRIVACY: This magazine may contain advertisements for products or services that are available through the AA. The provider may be the Association itself, a subsidiary of the Association, or a third party either under contract or a joint venture partner of the Association. Understand that any information provided by you may be used by the AA for administrative purposes and for the purpose of providing you with information relating to products and services from time to time. Where any Membership is an associate of another Membership, then products and services may be offered to both Members jointly or singly. We are always alert to opportunities for products or services to be made available as a benefit to Members, but if you prefer not to receive such personally addressed information, please write and tell us. The Association keeps a database of Members under its control and you have the right to see or correct any personal information that is held about you. If you wish to make an enquiry concerning a privacy issue, communicate with the Association Secretary, AA, PO Box 5, Auckland, 1140.
There could be a major problem with driverless cars that I have not seen mentioned. All vehicles will be programmed to avoid hitting pedestrians or other vehicles, so what happens when someone deliberately tries to stop a car by standing in front of it or blocking its path in some way? The reasons could be many, ranging from window washers at the lights to carjacking. Food for thought!

J. KEANE
WAIRARAPA

Let’s have a vote!

In the last issue of AA Directions we asked Members what they thought about cars driven by robots.

COOL: 61%
CRAZY: 39%

Should a deceased person’s family be able to override their choice to be an organ donor?

Go to aadirections.co.nz to vote. See p. 27 for the background story.

→ Testing times
Visitor drivers should be tested. I know this is a major difficulty, but it should be a requirement, if only for people used to driving on the right-hand side of the road.

When I visited Vancouver some years ago, I considered hiring a car, but wouldn’t have contemplated driving it without spending at least half an hour with a driving instructor. To me, that seemed logical, in my own interest and also in other drivers’ interest.

I was a chief flying instructor at the time and if any private pilot came to hire one of our aircraft, we would always give them at least a 30-minute flight check.

BRYAN COX
TAURANGA

→ Paying for change
In response to the article Pay and Walk Away (AA Directions, Autumn, 2017): I have not found the new parking meters easy. I don’t have a smartphone and prefer to pay with old-fashioned cash. However, I have not been able to discover how to get the meters to accept coins. If using these things is supposed to be intuitive, then whose level of intuition is used as a yardstick? I get the distinct impression that councils don’t want cash because they don’t want to collect it. That’s why they’ve made it difficult.

I don’t have anything against making it easy for the smartphone crowd, but I wonder how much money is being spent on rolling out all this new technology – a cost that will no doubt be passed on to the consumer.

LESLIE AULT
WELLINGTON

→ Sign here
Between Tauranga and Whitianga there is not one road sign asking slow drivers to pull over and let faster drivers pass. I have seen such signs in other parts of the country. It’s about time this situation was remedied, as I’m sure thousands of other frustrated drivers on Coromandel Peninsula’s roads held up for miles by inconsiderate drivers would agree.

MIKE SHENNEN
TAURANGA

PROVIDING MORE SAFE PASSING OPPORTUNITIES FOR MOTORISTS IS ONE OF THE AA’S ELECTION CALLS. SEE P.38 FOR THE FULL STORY.

→ Auto issue
There could be a major problem with driverless cars that I have not seen mentioned.

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→ Senior moment
I recently took advantage of the AA Senior Driver programme. I take great pride in my driving and am still very self-critical, so the offer of a free professional assessment was too good to miss. And it was very professional.

I am 78 years old and drive automatic and manual cars and a Honda XL700 motorcycle, which keeps me very sharp, but it is easy to develop bad habits and be unaware of road code changes.

I feel more assured about my driving following the assessment and will recommend it to any senior drivers I know. Thank you.

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Join the conversation online. Follow AA New Zealand on Facebook or Twitter @NZAA

We welcome feedback and views on articles in AA Directions, and on any issues affecting motorists. Because of the volume of mail we receive, letters cannot be personally acknowledged. Only a selection can be published and they may be edited or abbreviated for print.

WRITE TO: The Editor, AA Directions, PO Box 5, Auckland, 1140 or email editor@aa.co.nz.
Royal New Zealand Ballet dancer, Madeleine Graham, stars as the leading lady in the company's new production, Romeo and Juliet. She takes time out of rehearsals to share why she chose dance and how she earned her place in the national ballet company.

**Q&A**

When did you begin dancing?
I started ballet at seven. A family friend recommended my older sister try it, so naturally, Mum took me along as well.

What made you want to pursue ballet as a career?
I remember watching The Nutcracker on video and replaying the pas de deux, the dance for The Sugar Plum Fairy, over and over; the music definitely is a strong influence. My training has included classical ballet, jazz, tap, contemporary and character dance. As I continued with dance, I fell in love with ballet. I learned more about the art and gained a greater understanding and appreciation of it.

Describe the moment you joined the Royal New Zealand Ballet?
It was such a surprise. I was in my graduating year at the Australian Ballet School and the previous RNZB director, Ethan Stiefel, watched some rehearsals for our graduate performance. A few weeks later the company asked if I'd go to New Zealand to fill in for injured dancers in the show Giselle. Of course I accepted and two weeks later, just after finishing my final ballet exams, I was in New Zealand, quickly learning the routines just days before the premiere.

Where has dance taken you?
In the four years I've been with the company I've travelled to China, America, the UK, Italy and Hong Kong.

How did you land the role of Juliet?
It was completely unexpected. I found out when artistic director and choreographer, Francesco Ventriglia, gave me a gift before a show earlier this year: a beautiful copy of a book of Romeo and Juliet. Shakespeare's work is a masterpiece and combined with Prokofiev's score, it's a dancer's dream. I'm looking forward to delving into character and enjoying this wonderful opportunity.

What does a typical day involve for you?
Ballet warm-up class starts at 9.30am, followed by three blocks of rehearsals. We have an hour for lunch and finish at 6pm. Dancing six days a week is demanding on the body. Some days you have aches and pains in your muscles and joints and the thought of dancing around on your toes all day seems impossible.
For dancers, our biggest fear is injury because our bodies are our instrument. Having danced from such a young age, I’ve built up the strength to deal with the workload though. I like it when there is a story to follow, because I’m focussed on portraying a character which distracts from how tiring the piece may be.

What do you love most about ballet?
It feels so natural to dance and it’s been my normal for so long. I love moving and being inspired by the music and responding through movement.

The premiere of Romeo and Juliet begins in Wellington on August 16. It tours the country before closing in Napier on September 24. See rnzb.org.nz for more.

WIN!
AA Directions is giving away an A-reserve double pass to Romeo and Juliet in one of the show’s touring centres:
Wellington (August 16-20)
Christchurch (August 25-26)
Auckland (August 30-September 3)
Rotorua (September 8-9)
Dunedin (September 13-14)
Invercargill (September 17)
Palmerston North (September 21)
Napier (September 24)

To be in the draw, send your name, phone number and the region you’d like to attend to: Romeo and Juliet, AA Directions, PO Box 5, Auckland 1140 or enter online at aadirections.co.nz by August 1, 2017.

POWER TRIP
John McCrystal joins an EV road trip.

In February, 1904, the fledgling Auckland Automobile Association held the first of what became known as ‘reliability runs’, in that case from Auckland to Rotorua. Ten cars lined up at the start for the two-day marathon struggle with rudimentary roads and a measure of public hostility along the route. The object, besides having fun, was to prove to the public that automobiles were more than mere rich-man toys.

There was something of the same spirit about the #LeadingtheCharge Tip to Toe Road Trip from Invercargill to Cape Reinga in April. It was less a reliability run than a viability run, a way of demonstrating to New Zealanders that it’s possible to travel meaningful distances on electric power.

I joined the road trip as it left Wellington, travelling with Greg and Kath Trounson in their Tesla S, which can do 400kms between charges.

Greg showed me some of what else the car can do. One of the first things a Tesla owner will do is plant their boot so you can experience for yourself the cheek-rippling acceleration that gearless electric traction can provide. Greg did that. We flew past a Mazda Demio tooting along at 70km/h with little more than a quiet whine and the whirr of tyres on the road.

That’s the Tesla. It’s all very well as a demonstrator of the state of the art, but at over $120,000 for a baseline, new Model S, they’re a rich man’s toy. But there are other, far more affordable makes and models along on the run, too, and while they can’t quite keep up with the Tesla, they’re getting there.

You can see this point being made forcefully when the cars regroup at The Square in Palmerston North, where they’re joined by a dozen or so local vehicles. Most are Nissan Leafs and there are two Renault Zoes, a Mitsubishi iMiev, a couple of Kia Souls, a Hyundai Ioniq and a BMW i3. Most of these have a range of a little over 100km between charges, but an extensive and growing infrastructure of fast-charge stations throughout the country make it possible for these cars to also travel just about anywhere in New Zealand.

Their owners just need to stop along the way. As the owner of a Leaf who is on the trip tells me, it is merely a matter of adopting a different mindset.

There’s a slight evangelical feel to the event: the drivers seek eye contact and then, once it’s made, need no further invitation to hold forth and hand out literature extolling the merits of EVs. There are speeches by politicians and EV owners, and all the while, a few interested members of the public admire the cars – especially the muscular-looking Teslas – listen to their owners talk about them and take them for a drive.

I drove the iMiev and a Zoe – a model that will soon have a range of 300km between charges and a price tag less than $50,000.

In the end, the cars are their own best argument: whisper quiet, cheap to run and maintain and, of course, they’re clean.

“Would you rather share a room with an idling internal combustion engine or an electric vehicle?” as Greg puts it. “Because the world is just a larger room.”
Watch out!

August 14-20 marks Rail Safety Week, an annual community awareness initiative lead by KiwiRail and TrackSAFE NZ with support from other organisations, including the AA. It aims to engage people in safe rail practice and to put the spotlight on the importance of rail safety.

TrackSAFE NZ Foundation Manager, Megan Drayton, says the focus this year is split between two major concerns: the safety of pedestrians in urban zones and motorists in rural areas.

The increasing use of technology paired with the rollout of electric trains in Auckland and Wellington, as well as increasing timetables, particularly in Auckland, means messages of staying alert and focussed need to become more prevalent, Megan says.

“In some urban centres, if you have your back turned to the track, you just can’t hear an electric train approaching; it’s quite terrifying. We encourage people not to use headphones around the tracks.”

Rural drivers are being encouraged not to be complacent; it’s one of the key contributing factors in vehicle and train collisions, Megan says.

“Canterbury has the highest number of level crossings in the country (around 250) and 44% of them are passive, (with stop and give way signs but without bells and barriers). This area sees a very high number of collisions between vehicles and trains,” she says.

“People expect not to encounter a train because they may only see two a week and they become complacent. Our message is to stay focussed; every time you approach a level crossing, expect a train.”

See p.48 for more on what’s being done to address New Zealand’s growing number of railway fatalities.

Go to tracksafe.co.nz for more on Rail Safety Week.

Discover Captain Cook’s Fiordland

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AA Directions is giving away two jackets: one for him and one for her. To be in the draw, send your name, phone number and the jacket you’d like to: Macpac adventures, AA Directions, PO Box 5, Auckland 1140 or enter online at aadirections.co.nz by August 31, 2017.

In the spotlight

Have you wanted to try your hand as a movie director, communicating an idea or message through film? Now could be your time to shine. The New Zealand sector of the International Youth Silent Film Festival is after entries. The condition: movies mustn’t contain any dialogue.

Films are a powerful tool of communication and festival organisers are excited to see the rich dynamics of New Zealand’s multicultural society on the big screen, regional co-ordinator for the US-based Silent Film Festival, Megan Peacock Coyle, says.

Entrants must be 20 years or younger and are required to make a 3-minute, family-suitable silent film. New York composer and theatre organist, Nathan Avakian, 25, creates the film soundtracks and participants must use one of his ten compositions.

Entries close October 1, 2017. Ten films are selected as finalists, with winners announced at a red carpet event in Tauranga on November 22. See makesilentfilm.com for more.
UNDERSTANDING VARIABLE SPEED LIMITS

Electronic road signs are commonly used to display a variable speed limit. A common misconception is that the number displayed is an advisory limit when in fact it’s mandatory. There are several types of mandatory variable speed limits drivers must adhere to.

Rural intersections
Some high-risk intersections on busy rural roads have electronic variable speed signs alerting motorists on approach. Signs typically display a 70km/h or 60km/h speed when sensors detect a vehicle approaching the intersection on the side road, or turning right onto the main road. The lower speed is displayed to warn drivers on the main road to slow down, to reduce the risk of collision.

Bad weather
The New Zealand Transport Agency is trialling electronic variable speed signs in the Kaimai Range, a narrow and hilly route in the North Island notorious for crashes. Poor weather conditions that reduce visibility determine the different speed limits and warn motorists to slow down.

Congested motorways
Wellington became the first city in New Zealand to trial a ‘smart motorway’ that uses road sensors and radars to adjust the motorway speed limit in an attempt to smooth traffic flow and reduce congestion. The overhead signs typically display 60km/h, 80km/h or 100km/h speeds according to the volume of traffic. Variable speed limits managing traffic flow are also implemented on Christchurch’s northern motorway and will be used along the new Waterview Connection in Auckland.

Passing a school bus
The legal speed limit when passing a stationary school bus picking up or dropping off children is 20km/h. This applies to traffic passing in either direction, regardless of the usual speed limit. A child has a 75% chance of avoiding serious injury in a collision with a car travelling 20km/h. Tragically, one child is killed every year when crossing the road after getting in or out of a school bus, while two are seriously injured and four receive minor injuries.

School zones
Approximately one child is killed walking or cycling to and from school a year, while 30 are seriously injured and more than 100 receive minor injuries. Lower speeds reduce the risk of injury to youngsters travelling to school and back, as well as crossing roads. Many schools have electronic signs that display a 40km/h speed limit when children are walking or cycling to and from school. On roads near the school, the 40km/h speed limit is sometimes displayed on static signs, indicating the times it applies. At rural schools, where fewer children walk or cycle, the main risk is vehicles turning into or out of the grounds, and a 60km/h or 70km/h speed limit may be displayed.

See nzta.govt.nz/roadcode for more.
REEFTON

Nestled beneath a bush-covered valley on the South Island’s west coast is Reefton. Liz Light discovers why it’s worth stopping there.

Driving into the town is like entering a historic movie set. In winter, the misty haze from the west coast adds to the effect, dulling colour like an old faded photograph. Victorian buildings and street lamps line Broadway, the main street. Reefton was the first town in the Southern Hemisphere to receive electric street lighting.

The town is named after the gold-rich quartz reef discovered in 1866. After gold had gone, coal was the next big thing. Although the two open cast mines are now closed, there’s still plenty for the locals and in winter, all shops have big fire boxes burning, casting the nostalgic smell of coal smoke throughout the surrounds.

Cafes and bakeries serve treats just like my mother made, while ambient pubs are home to jazz music, pool tables and sports on big TVs. There are two museums, a collectables store and a second-hand bookshop.

I’m told by a local that Reefton is a town in transition. The mining has dried up, but it’s becoming a wilderness playground and heritage attraction. “People need to stay a bit longer to enjoy it and not just drive through,” he says. I couldn’t agree more.

Small Town TREASURES

PHOTOGRAPH BY LIZ LIGHT

EXCLUSIVE TOUR FOR AA MEMBERS AND TRAVEL COMPANIONS

MALAYSIAN GRAND PRIX 2017

Join Formula One personality Bob McMurray and other AA Members this September on an exclusive four-night tour to magnificent Malaysia for one of the most exciting races of the 2017 Formula One season.

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Aotearoa’s Finest

A handful of New Zealand’s most talented artists will join forces for a show promising to pack a soulful punch.

To celebrate their 25th anniversary, Salmonella Dub and former band member Tiki Taane will be accompanied by Fat Freddy’s Drop, TrinityRoots and Ladi6 for three exclusive shows this summer.

The artists will deliver their iconic melodies embodying jazz, soul, reggae and hip-hop.

Performances kick off with Salmonella Dub playing on New Year’s Eve at Northern Bass festival, Mangawhai, followed by a show at Christchurch’s Hagley Park on January 13, where they’ll be joined by Fat Freddy’s Drop and Ladi6. They’ll then perform at Taupo’s Owen Delany Park on February 3, 2018, alongside Ladi6 and TrinityRoots. More acts are to be announced for all shows.

See theticketfairy.com for tickets.

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“I couldn’t work anymore so we lost a wage,” Raquel explains. Reduced to one income, Raquel enrolled herself into the Certificate in Money Management programme to confront this new reality.

She got so much out of the first class, she knew Reuben would too. “I told my kaiako and he said, ‘bring him along,’ so I did and he loved it.”

Reuben agrees and says it was helpful and informative. “It’s definitely been worthwhile. I would, and have recommended this course to others struggling to make ends meet.”

Raquel says the most valuable thing she learned was how to deal with creditors.

“Just by increasing our repayments by an extra $5, our debts started to reduce which was great. We thought we’d never see that happen but it has, thanks to our kaiako Simon.”

Along with advice on servicing debt, Raquel says Simon went above and beyond. When there were times she was too unwell to go to class, Simon would come to her to go over some of the course material, all in his own time.

“The support we received, it was just amazing. Everyone would benefit from at least one aspect of this course.”

“Knowledge is power.”
I catch a young girl’s glazed eye. She yawns and I’m shocked to realise that, surrounded by all this automotive glory, she’s bored. At her age, I’d have been in seventh heaven. All the chrome, glittering paint, and design bespeaking power and speed, conjuring up shimmering stretches of open road...

But on reflection, this is the most interesting aspect of the Car Show Of The Century, staged as part of the Motor Trade Association’s centennial celebrations in Wellington at the end of April: the way in which our attitude to cars has changed over time, and the way it will change in the future.

When the first car in the show, a beautifully kept 1903 Fordmobile, was imported to New Zealand we were just beginning to see the utility in something that had been at best an interesting concept. The advent of mass production, most notably with the Model T Ford (there’s a ’Tin Lizzy’ here, too) and the rapid technological advances during World War 1, meant that by the beginning of the 1920s, few could doubt that the car was the way of the world. By the 1950s, most Kiwi families had come to rely on a car and by the 1970s, it was de rigueur to have two.

The show doesn’t really reflect the average New Zealander’s experience of motoring – there is an emphasis on the high-powered, flashy American stuff of our dreams rather than the stodgy English fare to which we became accustomed. But even the grizzled crowd waxing nostalgic at the sight of New Zealand’s oldest Mini Minor also gaze hungrily at the glorious ’57 Chevvy Bel Air and the stylish Studebaker Hawk. The 1950s and the 1960s were the eras in which the car went from being a simple mode of transport to an objet d’art, and to an outright fetish. You need only look at all the unnecessary material in the luxury-length Chevrolet Impala on show to see that it appeals to deeper psychological impulses than simply the desire to get to work and back.

The various attempts to initiate a New Zealand auto manufacturing industry are commemorated: Alan Gibbs’ little-known Anziel Nova is in the show, close to the fruits of his latest tinkering, the Quadski (a quad bike-cum-jetski) and the seriously cool amphibious car, the Aquada. There’s also the boxy little Trekka, keeping company with a McLaren race car and a Hulme supercar.

The section of the exhibition showing cars of the future features a variety of electric and hybrid technologies; the sheer number of them suggesting the revolution is underway for real. The Toyota stand offers kids the chance to write code that will allow a model car to negotiate a track, and there’s an actual driverless car in centre stage in the shape of a Rinspeed concept car.

It’s here that the glazed eyes of the children come alive again. For the present generation, this is the ideal car: an appliance that does its work unobtrusively in the background while you get on with the better things you’ve got to do, like playing with your iPad.
BIG SAVINGS FOR AA MEMBERS

What your AA Membership provides may surprise you. Besides the value of knowing that AA Roadservice is there to help if something goes wrong on the road, AA Membership has many other benefits. In fact, on average Members receive much more in the way of benefits than the cost of subscription. Check out some of these numbers:

**AA Smartfuel** - AA Members saved more than $30 million on fuel with AA Smartfuel in the 12 months to April.

**Insurance Discounts** - AA Members who insure with AA Insurance, AA Life, AA Health or AA Travel Insurance collectively save about $10 million a year thanks to discounts for Members.

**Specsavers** - AA Members have utilised more than half a million free eye examinations, worth more than $30 million, since our partnership launched in 2012.

**AA Thrifty** – Hundreds of thousands of dollars have stayed in Members’ wallets through discounts with AA Thrifty’s all-inclusive car rental rates.

**EVENT Cinemas** – AA Members have saved more than $275,000 in savings in the 12 months to April 2017.

**AA Ignition** – 110,000 free driving lessons, worth nearly $8 million, have been used by Members and their families, since 2014.

Plus there is AA Roadservice. The peace of mind that provides is priceless.

See [aa.co.nz](http://aa.co.nz) for more information or to sign up.

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**Best scenic drives**

We asked Members to tell us about their favourite scenic drives. Robyn Allen-Dick enjoys the North Island route from New Plymouth to Te Kuiti.

Some years ago, my husband and I drove from Adelaide to Melbourne along the Great Ocean Road. It took three days and there were some spectacular sights, but also long stretches of scenery with nothing but acres of scrubland.

Shortly after we came home, we travelled State Highway 3 north of New Plymouth to Te Kuiti and all points leading north. I found the scenery absolutely spectacular; around every corner was a fresh new vista to take in, unlike Australia where there were miles of nothingness. I have not travelled the road since but I’ve never forgotten how beautiful it was.

We’d love to hear about your favourite drive. Email editor@aa.co.nz
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Sun-strike season is here, Specsavers encourages Kiwis to get their eyes checked

Winter months are the worst for sun-strike and Specsavers optometrists are reminding motorists about the importance of good vision when behind the wheel.

Sun-strike happens when the sun hits the windscreen, causing glare and making it hard to see the road ahead. The problem intensifies on winter mornings and afternoons, when the sun is low in the sky, and Specsavers wants to increase driver awareness of the risks.

**Tips for managing sun-strike:**

- Invest in polarised sunglasses which eliminate 99.9% of glare that is created with reflective surfaces
- Have your eyes tested once every two years to keep your prescription accurate and more frequently if there is a history of eye health issues
- Make yourself visible and turn your headlights on
- Slow down and keep an eye out for cyclists, animals, pedestrians and other vehicles

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WE SPEAK TO NEW ZEALANDERS WHO ARE MAKING A DIFFERENCE

CHANGE
YOUNG REFUGEES often have a raft of emotions locked up inside them upon arriving in a country they’re navigating as their new home. Feelings of confusion and isolation are often emphasised by language and cultural barriers.

The key for some is in the hands of Wendy Preston, creative producer and director of Mixit, an Auckland community arts project that uses creativity to support and empower refugee and migrant youth.

“There’s a real sense of belonging here. It’s a non-judgemental space open to all ethnicities and faiths and it becomes their second family. This is something they feel they belong to. Mixit changes everybody’s lives,” Wendy says.

Mixit was established in 2005 after Wendy, who has an extensive background in dance, was shoulder-tapped by the Fledgling Trust founder, Charmaine Barnett, to do some research. The philanthropist, who supports marginalised adolescents, was curious about the current environment for migrant and refugee youth, and recognised the power of creativity and performing arts. What followed was Wendy immersing herself in six months of full-time investigation.

“I had never thought about the refugee world before. I was interested to know what support was available in New Zealand for young refugees; for youth who often feel neither here or there, who are lost.”

Her studies included picking the brains of psychologists and teachers and approaching hospitals, non-government organisations and community groups. Wendy made a startling discovery: “There was very little for our young refugees.”

“Yes, there were English as a Second Language (ESOL) classes offered in schools which provide upfront support in the first year, but after that they were left to their own devices and were really slipping through the cracks,” she says.

It was an obvious decision to form Mixit, but it needed to be executed with care and consideration.

“One of the key findings in my research was that people didn’t have stability in their lives. I knew once we started, we had to be there for the long haul.”

Twelve years on, Mixit’s doors remain open at West Auckland’s Corban Estate Arts Centre for creative workshops every Saturday: rain, hail or shine. There’s no cost or need to sign up; youth aged between 13 and 20-plus simply turn up on the day. It relies on lottery grants and donations to keep it going.

There’s drama, hip hop dancing, music mixing, graffiti art, aerial acrobatics, food, board games, chat, and lots of laughter to be had during the workshops. The summer performance is where her Mixers, as Wendy affectionately calls them, take to a public stage to showcase a routine they’ve worked on. All creative expression is overseen by a professional artist or choreographer with a migrant background themselves. The Mixit Youth Leadership Programme allows young refugees the chance to be involved in the planning and decision-making of events.

“It’s a gift to witness youth find themselves,” Wendy says.

“We are here to give young people a voice and to ignite fires within. It’s about honouring their growth, journey and self-discovery and giving a platform for them to navigate their way between their two worlds, the old and the new.”

She says it’s humbling watching different cultures interact, despite often being worlds apart.

“We are all humans and we engage as a human race, rather than as a Muslim, an Israeli or a Palestinian. It’s pretty cool to see everyone hanging out, singing, dancing and playing the drums together when in some parts of the world there is war. We leave all that background at the door.”
ANDY TOOKEY STILL remembers the moment he had a choice: to keep going forward as a very squeaky wheel about changing New Zealand’s organ donation system, or do as was being subtly suggested, and for the sake of his daughter, park up somewhere quietly.

“I took a step back for about a week, and then thought ‘hell, no’.”

It’s been 15 years since Andy and his wife, Janice, were told their then six week old Katie had biliary atresia and probably wouldn’t live past her first birthday if she didn’t have a liver transplant.

While trying to process the information about his daughter’s rare liver disease, Andy found it even more confusing trying to work out how organ donation worked. “I discovered that even if you list donor on your driver’s licence, it doesn’t make any difference.”

He set up givelife.org.nz to campaign for a more effective organ donor system. He thought it would be simple. It turned out to be anything but.

Last year in New Zealand, there were 541 people on waiting lists for organ transplants. There were just 61 donors.

While the figure is slowly climbing year on year, which Organ Donation New Zealand attributes to ongoing quality improvement programmes in hospital intensive care units, New Zealand’s donor figures pale in comparison to those in countries like Wales, France, and Spain.

In these countries the organ donor system runs by deemed consent: you are regarded as an organ donor unless you opt out on a national register. When Belgium changed to an opt out system, its donor rate went up 183%.

Andy explains that the problem in New Zealand is that once a person dies their family can override their wishes.

“It wouldn’t even matter if you had ‘donor’ tattooed on your heart.”

While Andy is still slightly incredulous that his mission has turned into a 15-year battle, he’s not giving up.

“I just pick my fights now,” he says. More than anything he wants to change the narrative around talking to a deceased person’s family about donating their loved one’s organs. He says six out of ten families say no to organ donation.

“It doesn’t matter how much you spend on creating link nurses or training health professionals to be aware of how end-of-life processes jeopardise organ retrieval, how many protocols you write, or how many reviews you do, if just one family member says no, that’s it.”

“After all, there are only three things you can do with your organs after you die: bury them, cremate them, or save lives with them.”

“I’d like to see the donor’s wishes honoured over and above those of family members. I’d like to find out why people say no.”

He’s not scared to ask either. He faced death threats after challenging some of the cultural norms that stop organs being removed from a body.

“People are quite happy to take body parts if they need them, but they don’t want to give them,” he says.

It’s the same argument he has for drivers. Around 46% of the 3.5 million licensed drivers in New Zealand have ticked ‘no’ in the donor box on their licence. “I bet if those people ever needed an organ, they would say yes if they were offered one.”

Andy would like more surveys to find out why people tick the ‘no’ box. That way he believes the government can direct resources straight to the problem. “People still don’t realise that even if you’ve told your family you want to donate, they can still override your wishes once you are dead.”

His approach hasn’t made him popular, and few in the organ donation field will work with him. “We have different ideas,” he says, resigned to the fact that he is actively disliked by medical professionals. “But it is frustrating because my argument is really just about autonomy.”

While Katie continues to defy the odds – she turns 16 this year – Andy is wistful: “I wasted so many years worrying about her dying.” But he doesn’t regret the fight, or the personal financial cost.

“After all,” he says, “there are only three things you can do with your organs after you die: bury them, cremate them, or save lives with them.”

Andy believes he has made a difference over the last 15 years and he has no plans to stop. “After all,” he says, “there are only three things you can do with your organs after you die: bury them, cremate them, or save lives with them.”

Mike Noon, General Manager of AA Motoring Affairs, concedes it’s a sensitive issue, but one that the AA will be looking at more closely.

“Organ donation has the potential to give life out of death and Andy Tookey challenges us all to think about whether the system in New Zealand needs to change; because the stakes couldn’t be higher for those in need.”
IT COSTS AROUND $100,000 a year to house just one prison inmate; that’s more than $270 a day.

Auckland District Court judge, Ema Aitken, believes New Zealand’s current justice system must change.

“It’s time to be honest about the cost of the status quo,” she says.

So, she’s doing something about it.

Along with West Auckland’s Waitakere District Court judge, Lisa Tremewan, Judge Aitken has established The Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Court pilot. The pair is making it their mission to introduce a better system of rehabilitation for drug and alcohol addicts awaiting a prison sentence.

Judge Aitken knows firsthand that the current system is failing with a lot of New Zealand’s offenders. When she looks into the eyes of a convicted person, she sees a soul who is “sick and tired of being sick and tired.”

It’s a phrase Judge Aitken has coined after witnessing the look of desperation countless times throughout the years she’s worked in New Zealand courts, sentencing people for crimes relating to drug and alcohol abuse.

“The tools I have as a sentencing judge aren’t always appropriate and it doesn’t take long before I see the same people circling through the system,” she says.

“It’s depressing seeing people go round and round; it certainly doesn’t reduce crime. I often have people tell me, ‘I’m sick of my life, I just don’t know how to change it.’”

Judge Aitken doesn’t deny there’s a place for prison, but it needs to be a last resort, she says, with the focus on holding people accountable for their behaviour and on reducing offending.

The five-year pilot is in its final year and while it’s still too early to say whether it will be a fixed feature in our justice system, Judge Aitken says the numbers show it’s proving effective.

“We have saved literally millions of dollars in prison costs and there are many benefits, including the reduction of reoffending. Participants are offending less often and less seriously, so it has a positive effect on the wider community as well,” she says. “We know where the gaps are and we’ve joined the dots.”

It’s a three-phase, 18-month-long programme designed for high-needs and high-risk addicts who are facing prison, or who have tried but failed treatment programmes in the past.

So far the court’s had 110 graduates. To graduate, offenders must have been drug and alcohol free for 18 months and be employed or enrolled in study.

“They go from being a drain on the taxpayer to being a tax payer,” Judge Aitken says.

The first phase of court sees participants enter a local alcohol or drug treatment programme for up to six months, completely abstaining from their chosen poison. The next steps involve tailored one-on-one courses like anger management as well as volunteer work.

“Part of the recovery process is cleaning up what they’ve messed up. We’ve contributed 20,000 hours of volunteer work over the pilot’s five years,” Judge Aitken says.

“It’s rewarding for them to give back to a community, and it’s in places which are going to enhance their recovery, such as the Salvation Army.”

The ‘therapeutic model’ used in the courtroom means that the focus is on specific behaviour; it’s not a personal attack on the offender up for sentencing.

“I use practices and procedures to enhance wellness and maintain a person’s dignity,” Judge Aitken explains.

“They see the support and respect and start to feel valued. We hold hope for them. It’s the first time for a lot of them that someone’s cared.”

Judges Aitken and Tremewan have tailored New Zealand’s pilot so it offers peer support, often from former addicts who themselves have had run-ins with the law. There’s also a pou oranga, a cultural advisor, whose role is to impact Maori in a positive way; court begins with a waiata and karakia: song and prayer.

“We are transforming lives. It doesn’t happen overnight and we don’t expect to be miracle workers, but I’m constantly humbled by the effort and determination our participants put into their recovery,” Judge Aitken says. “What we see in court is a transformation on every level.”

General Manager of AA Motoring Affairs, Mike Noon, says the AA is fully supportive of the programme.

“The AA’s focus on keeping drunk and drugged drivers off our roads has led us to closely follow Judge Aitken’s work with the Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Court pilot. We have seen serial, repeat drink-drivers successfully stop offending and turn their lives around through the programme,” Mike says. “The AA wants to see these courts expanded through the country, because they work.”
IF YOU COULDN’T read or write, how hard would it be to get a job? How hard would it be to get a driver’s licence?

“Next to impossible,” Mike Williams says. As CEO of the New Zealand Howard League, Mike knows a lot about the ripple effects of illiteracy.

Originally established in Britain in 1866, The Howard League was created to advocate for penal reform. The league has been operating in New Zealand since 1923 and was instrumental in abolishing the death penalty and corporal punishment in our prisons. But it was not until 2011, when Mike Williams was appointed as CEO, that the issue of illiteracy among New Zealand’s prison population came to the fore.

“On their arrival at prison, corrections officers test all prisoners; 73% could not pass NCEA Level 1. They’re basically illiterate,” Mike says. “This means they wouldn’t be able to understand a tenancy agreement. They can’t get a driver’s licence. And that has a knock-on: If you can’t get a licence, which is essentially the sole means of identification accepted in New Zealand aside from a passport, and very few of these guys have got passports, you can’t open a bank account. If you haven’t got a bank account, you’re in the cash economy and the cash economy is a criminal economy.”

They realised that literacy was a key tool in the battle against reoffending, so in 2012 the Howard League Literacy programme began in the Hawke’s Bay. Mike connected the dots between prisoners in need and retired school teachers who were keen to volunteer.

“The first graduate of the programme was tutored by a retired local teacher, Anne. He’d lost count of his prison sentences - it was either 11 or 13 - and they were all for driving without a licence.

He had a family and a roofing job to go back to - he wasn’t so silly that he couldn’t learn. Anne taught him how to read and write over 12 weeks. He got his licence and he never went back to prison.

“Slowly but surely we’ve been introducing the programme into jails and we’re now running in every jail in the country except Invercargill.

“Initially it was difficult,” Mike says. “Nobody wanted to admit that they couldn’t read or write. A lot of prisoners don’t actually think it’s a problem. Plus there’s a lot of shame involved.

“So I stood up in front of a group of prisoners and said ‘hands up if you’d like to improve your ability to read to your kids.’ A forest of hands went up. You can be the biggest scumbag in the world, but you still want to be a good daddy.”

When it comes to tutors, there is no shortage of volunteers. “We have more than 500 volunteers for the prison literacy programme,” Mike says. “It’s a great experience for them. When they finish a course, nine out of ten tutors want to do another one because it’s been so rewarding.”

And it’s rewarding for the prisoners too. “The prisoners know one thing about our tutors: they’re not getting paid. Very often, its the first time in their lives that someone has taken an interest in them.”

With the growing success of the literacy programme, the Howard League turned its attention to the issue of driver licensing as a way of tackling the problem of New Zealand’s overburdened prisons.

“Some of the tougher judges will jail someone for a third offence for unlicensed driving. So our programme works with second-offender unlicensed drivers. The main issues are lack of money and lack of birth certificates, or not knowing how to get a birth certificate. Some of them may need professional driver training, which they couldn’t afford either. So we said, ‘OK, we’ll pay for that’.

“Like the literacy programme in the jails, a bit of attention goes a long way,” Mike says. “If you get people off that pathway to jail, you’re also directing them towards employment.”

Mike would like to see the government adopt the driver licensing programme.

“We think the model of one-on-one tuition and a bit of money to pay for it could potentially save hundreds, maybe thousands of people from a prison sentence. A prisoner is the most expensive beneficiary you’ve got. It costs over $100,000 per year to keep someone in jail. We spent $100,000 last year to get 195 licences. If we kept just one person out of jail for one year, we’re in profit. And you can absolutely guarantee that within that 195 there were more than a couple.”

General Manager of AA Motoring Affairs, Mike Noon, agrees getting a driver’s licence is a positive game changer for prisoners.

“Getting a driver’s licence can be a decisive step towards people escaping a life of crime and finding work. The efforts of Mike Williams and the Howard League are helping people break the cycle and we also want to acknowledge the NZ Transport Agency’s collaboration in the programme as a way of helping improve behaviour on the road.”
BREAKFAST AND A raincoat are, to many children, a given. But too many New Zealand youngsters do not have these basic needs met. They arrive at school hungry, barefoot, wet and cold.

KidsCan founder, Julie Chapman, is helping to fix this.

The concept was born in Julie’s Auckland garage 12 years ago. It supports the education of children in low-decile schools by providing food, shoes, socks, fleece-lined raincoats and basic hygiene items.

KidsCan allows a child to participate and be equal with their peers, Julie says.

“It brings a sense of belonging, a feeling of value so they can get on with being kids and not have to worry about their next meal, or whether or not they can play sport or go on a school trip with their friends because they don’t have shoes or wet weather gear. That causes all sorts of stress; it’s not good for the family, it’s not good for the child.”

The idea to help New Zealand kids came about after hearing constant media reports of children going without the basics. Disheartened, Julie did some research.

“I put questions to 80 low-decile schools to see how widespread the problem was and how it was affecting children in the classroom. I asked things like, ‘are children coming to school without food?’ and ‘do children stay at home when it rains?’”

She found there were three common items school children were going without: food, raincoats and shoes. These may be basic necessities, yet, as Julie quickly discovered, the repercussions of not having them were widespread.

“The problem was much bigger than I expected. Literally thousands of children were disruptive in class and causing fights because they were hungry. Children weren’t showing up to school in winter, or in wet weather, because they didn’t have raincoats, shoes and other material basics,” she says.

When KidsCan began in 2005, the charity fed and clothed children across 40 low-decile schools. Now it reaches close to 650 schools: 25,000 children a week. Two years ago, it introduced health and hygiene items such as toothbrushes, toothpaste and sanitary products.

Last December, the KidsCan team planted more than 300 fruit trees in schools to provide children with ongoing healthy snacks.

Non-perishable foods like baked beans, yoghurt makers and sachets, scroggin mix and bread spreads are dropped off at schools every term. Bread, raincoats, shoes and socks as well as health and hygiene products are handed out year round.

Auckland children are most in need, followed by Northland, Wellington and Christchurch. And there are more than 1,000 children in 18 schools across the country on the waiting list. Julie says 50 cents a day will give a school food for a year and equip a child with a raincoat, shoes, two pairs of socks and health and hygiene projects.

Julie would like to see all families have enough for the basic cost of living, as well as enjoy life and provide for their children without struggling on a daily basis. She believes everyone has a part to play: the government, local businesses and the community can all have an impact on a family’s ability to meet the cost of living.

“I’d like to see workers be paid a living wage, the government invest in warm, dry homes, as that’s a contributing factor to children falling sick, and I’d like to see the community not be so judgemental.

“Everyone has their own story and you can’t judge everybody by thinking they’re doing the wrong thing with their money. In the ten-plus years I’ve been doing this, I haven’t met a single parent who doesn’t want the absolute best for their child.”
IMAGINE RIDING through pristine native bush in a remote part of New Zealand. You stand up on your pedals, spurred on by the exhilaration of discovering an area of the country you’ve never seen before: virtually untouched, definitely unspoilt. You’re hearing nothing but birdsong. You’re breathing nothing but fresh air; you’re hearing nothing but birdsong.

This can now be a reality for anyone who wants to experience it, thanks to the New Zealand Cycle Trail (NZCT), a project that has opened up parts of the country previously inaccessible to cyclists.

At the 2009 job summit, the government was looking for ideas to boost New Zealand’s economy and create employment. “That’s when the idea of creating a cycle trail from Cape Reinga to Bluff came up,” NZCT Chair, Richard Leggat, says. “It would be a project that would not only employ a whole lot of people in the construction, but also boost regional New Zealand and provide a really strong tourism asset that fitted in extremely well with the 100% Pure NZ brand. It was decided that Cape Reinga to Bluff was a bit impractical, but there could be a series of Great Rides across New Zealand, with potential for them to interconnect.”

Construction began in 2011 and today the New Zealand Cycle Trail, Nga Haerenga, boasts 22 rides covering most of the country.

“Our Great Rides are mostly off-road, multi-day cycle trails, featuring iconic New Zealand scenery,” Richard says. “At the moment we’ve got 22 ‘great’ rides, and while they’re all very good, they’re not all great – not yet.”

The Cycle Trail begins in Northland with the Twin Coast Trail from the Bay of Islands to Hokianga as the most northern ride. There are a number of trails through the central North Island, the Rimutaka Trail out of Wellington which goes over the Rimutaka Range and around the South Coast, the Queen Charlotte at the top of the South Island, then down to the Central Otago Rail Trail, the Roxburgh Gorge and around the mountains in Queenstown.

The fact that the trails are spread throughout New Zealand means growth for our regions. “Globally, cities are attracting more and more people, but regions of the world are struggling,” Richard says. “By initiating the Cycle Trail, we’re bringing jobs and activities back to parts of regional New Zealand.

“The Old Ghost Road Trail on the West Coast of the South Island is regarded as one of the best off-road, multi-day rides in the world; attracting attention from keen overseas cyclists.”

While rides like the Old Ghost Road – a challenging grade 4 trail that’s steep and technically difficult – may be attracting attention from keen cyclists overseas, the New Zealand Cycle Trail caters for all abilities. “One of the beauties of Nga Haerenga is that it offers lots of different experiences,” Richard says. “We grade the rides from 1 to 5. Grade 1 is really easy – lots of wide, flat concrete paths that are suitable for beginners and families – to grade 4 or 5 which are narrow, steep and hilly.”

But all of the trails are designed to get cyclists out and immersed in New Zealand. “It’s quite a different way to experience the country from being in a car,” Richard says.

Within the next five years, the goal is to have the route from Cape Reinga to Bluff linked by both on-road connector routes, known as Heartland Rides, and the existing Great Rides. However, the next two to three years will be about upgrading and enhancing the current trails. “We’re doing things like making sure there are toilets on all trails at sensible intervals, and potable water; that there are interpretation boards telling people the story of the region, and a good range of accommodation.”

In the meantime, Richard encourages people to get out there and have a go. “The best part about Nga Haerenga is that there’s something for everyone,” he says. “The trails provide a wonderful experience which can be as easy or as difficult as you want to make it. It’s a really nice way to experience parts of New Zealand that so many people wouldn’t have seen before.”

“Right now we are in a golden period of tourism and there is the challenge of coping with the numbers that we’ve got in the main centres. One of the key initiatives of Tourism New Zealand is to encourage people to come outside of the main times and places: to disperse seasonally and to disperse regionally. The Cycle Trail fits really well into the strategy of getting people to come in spring, autumn and winter and into places beyond Auckland and Queenstown.”

It seems to be working. “Last year one of the global cycling magazines ranked New Zealand in the top three cycling destinations in the world,” Richard says. “At the moment we’ve got 22 ‘great’ rides, which is one of the best off-road, multi-day rides in the world; attracting attention from keen overseas cyclists.”

The best part about Nga Haerenga is that there’s something for everyone,” he says. “The trails provide a wonderful experience which can be as easy or as difficult as you want to make it. It’s a really nice way to experience parts of New Zealand that so many people wouldn’t have seen before.”
NO HUMAN in the world today will live to see an ocean free of plastic.

It’s a sobering fact. Our sea is clogged with plastic waste: from our coastlines to the vast open convergence zones in the middle of the oceans.

But it’s not like one giant island of rubbish, says Hayden Smith from Auckland-based trust, Sea Cleaners. “It’s more like a fog strewn through all of our oceans and waterways. Every plastic item that’s ever been made still exists. It’s a very real problem which, unfortunately, is out of sight so out of mind for the general population.”

Hayden however, sees the problem firsthand and he’s doing something about it. Five days a week, he and his crew, backed by a growing team of volunteers, scour Auckland’s coastlines for the waste that so many people carelessly toss away. “Each morning at first light we’re down at the marina. The day’s location depends on what the wind and tide are doing, but we’ll go ashore and collect rubbish off the shoreline. When we find rubbish floating in the sea, we’ll scoop that up too.”

It sounds simple, and it is, Hayden says. But it’s the scale that’s the real problem. “Each vessel and crew collect about a shipping container full of rubbish each month – it works out to between 10 and 12 shipping containers per year for each crew,” Hayden says. “Every rubbish bag we collect equals 50 litres. Since we started we’ve pulled out over 4.5 million litres of rubbish from our waterways.”

Sea Cleaners began back in 2000. Hayden was working as a kayak guide in Auckland, taking groups out to Rangitoto Island. One day when bad weather cancelled the tours, he took a kayak out by himself. “I set off under the Harbour Bridge, straight into the howling sou’wester. Suddenly I was surrounded by all this rubbish washing down through the convergence zones in the upper harbour. I’d never seen anything like it before. I thought: ‘I have to do something about this!’” And so he did.

After lots of door knocking and cold-calling, Hayden eventually convinced the then five mayors of Auckland to sponsor his initiative, and for the last 15 years he has been working with teams of volunteers to clean up the Waitemata, Manukau and Whangarei harbours.

“Our focus is around the main population centres. That’s where the rubbish is, that’s where the volunteers are and that’s where the communities are that can help us,” he says.

Sea Cleaners is focused on marine litter: primarily plastic trash. “From chip packets and lolly wrappers, to drink bottles, car tyres and polystyrene - you name it, we’ve found it,” Hayden says. “90% of what we collect comes off the land through the stormwater systems. Heavy rain cleans the streets and washes everything into the sea. The ocean is downhill from everywhere, so that’s where it’s always going to go.”

But the ocean has no borders, and with its perpetual system of currents, plastic waste can potentially travel around the whole planet. “We started wondering about what was happening to the rubbish that doesn’t end up on Great Barrier Island as it leaves Auckland.”

Wanting to find out more, he made contact with Captain Charles Moore, the man who discovered the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. “It’s in the northern Pacific ocean, north of Hawaii. It’s a giant eddy, called a gyre – a big circulating vortex of ocean currents.

“In 2009, I chartered a seaplane to go out with Charlie to this gyre. What we saw from the air was the most convincing evidence of the scale of the problem: there were these convergence zones - very similar to what I had seen under Auckland Harbour Bridge – with long lines of debris, like rivers, that stretched from one horizon to the next, lined up one after another as far as the eye could see.”

As horrifying as this sounds, Hayden was not discouraged. “I began to recognise the value of what we were doing. Seeing the volume of rubbish we were removing on a daily basis, I realised we were actually contributing to less rubbish coming into this particular space. For me, it was a real driver to do the multiplication process and focus our efforts on our own city centres.”

By 2020 Sea Cleaners’ goal is to have ten boats running in New Zealand, and they’re just about there already. A key sponsor, the Bobby Stafford-Bush Foundation, has recently donated seven new boats on top of Sea Cleaners’ existing three. “Once we have all ten crews up and running, we’ll know how to deploy these boats in blocks of ten. The next step is to set up in ten countries around the Pacific, with ten boats in each country using what we’ve done in New Zealand as the pilot model.”

With momentum and awareness beginning to build, the last two years have been pretty monumental for Sea Cleaners, and for Hayden personally. In 2016 he was instrumental in arranging a coastal clean-up in Hawaii with the naval forces from 28 nations, including USA and New Zealand. This February he was acknowledged as a Local Hero in the Kiwibank New Zealander of the Year Awards, and in April, also in Hawaii, Hayden was involved in setting up the Ocean Aid music festival.

Hayden hopes to continue the Sea Cleaners’ mission of raising awareness for this very real, global problem.

“The greatest thing that I would like to see happen would be for each person across the whole population to pick up one piece of trash each day. Imagine having 4.5 million people, every day, picking up just one piece of rubbish - whether it’s on the verge outside their house, or walking through a school ground or going for a walk on the beach – just that one piece. Getting that mass support is what we need to do.”

END
The all new Civic Hatch

A 5-door combination of sharp, expressive design and world-class driving dynamics, the Civic Hatch is a stylish sporty addition to Honda’s 10th generation Civic line-up. Totally re-designed and re-engineered from the ground up, the Hatch with its direct-injected turbo engine technology, was designed with just one thing in mind. You.

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IT WAS 1973, I was in London on my OE and I spent all the money I had on this car. I could escape the VAT charges so long as I took the car out of England within a year. That meant lots of trips to Europe before I headed to Canada for work and had the car shipped there. After six months in Toronto I drove it to Seattle, then to San Francisco and put the car on the Timaru Star to Auckland. Then I drove it back to our family farm on the Mahia Peninsula.

In time, married with three kids, a sports car wasn’t really practical, so I sold it. Ten years later the person I sold it to asked if I'd like it back. He had only added around 200 miles on the clock. You wouldn’t believe the look on my wife Cathy’s face when I drove it back to the farm.
Dylan Thomson looks at TEN ways our next Government can make transport better and safer.
New Zealanders will go to the polls to elect our next government this September. As another election campaign hits top gear, the AA is going to all the major political parties with our AA Election Calls. These are ten actions we want the next government to take to make transport safer and better. Of those ten, we are making three in particular our highest priorities.

A simple 'click' can save many lives

As you read this right now there are probably thousands of people out on the roads not wearing a seatbelt. The good news is that they are a very small proportion of the population – the most recent nationwide surveys found 96.5% of people in front seats and 92% in back seats were wearing their seatbelts. Unfortunately, those small percentages still equate to tens of thousands of people not being buckled up when they are in a vehicle and hundreds of deaths that a single click could have saved.

Last year alone, 100 of the drivers and passengers who died in a crash were not wearing a seatbelt. That is 100 out of the 242 vehicle occupants who lost their lives overall in 2016. To put it another way, a staggering 42% of the vehicle occupants who died were not buckled up. Not all of them would have survived if they had been wearing a seatbelt, but a large number of them would have. Perhaps as many as 50 people would still be alive today. It is not uncommon to have crashes where those who are buckled up walk away with minor injuries while those who are not lose their lives.

If we could get every single driver and passenger to make it click every single time they drove our road toll would drop overnight. This is why the AA is calling for the next government to make seatbelts an urgent road safety priority and focus on what can be done to stop these unnecessary deaths.

One of the most disturbing and mystifying aspects of the issue is that the number of people dying when not wearing a seatbelt has skyrocketed in the last three years. From less than 60 deaths a year earlier this decade the numbers jumped to 92 deaths in 2015, then 100 in 2016. There have been 36 deaths in the first five months of this year and the problem is much worse here than in Australia. The three Australian states with bigger populations than New Zealand all have less than half the unrestrained deaths that we did. Queensland had just 18 unrestrained road deaths for the whole of 2016. We had 16 in the month of December alone.

This is not an easy issue, and tackling it will involve answering difficult questions about who those people not wearing seatbelts are. Why aren’t they buckling up, and what would be the most effective way to get them to change their behaviour? But when nearly one in three of the people dying in crashes is not wearing a seatbelt, we have to do much more than we have been. More people died not wearing a seatbelt in 2015 than from crashes involving a drunk-driver (although some deaths will have involved both).

As mentioned in Chief Executive Brian Gibbons’ editorial, the AA and several government agencies have already begun a joint research project to look in detail at fatal crashes where someone was not wearing a seatbelt, but we need the next government to make tackling this issue a core part of its road safety policy.

Number of people killed not wearing a seatbelt in 2016

<table>
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<th>Country</th>
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<tr>
<td>Australian Capital Territory</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Australia</td>
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<td>New Zealand</td>
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* ACT data from 2015 only
Preventing drink-driving attempts

The AA’s second key Election Call is for the next government to ensure at least 5,000 of the highest risk drink-drivers have an alcohol interlock installed in their car.

The AA has been pushing for years for interlocks to be made a mandatory sentence for repeat offenders or those caught at extremely high levels of alcohol, and the current government has recently been moving to make this the case. We have to make sure the intention becomes reality though.

In 2012 when interlocks were introduced, it was expected that thousands of drink drivers would be sentenced to them but it didn’t happen. Only two per cent of the eligible offenders appearing in court ended up having one of the devices put in their vehicle.

The AA calls interlocks the best weapon we have in the fight against drink-driving; they effectively mean a driver must pass a breath test and have no alcohol in their system before they can use their car.

The proof of why we need to be using interlocks much, much more can be seen in the fact that the few hundred devices in use have stopped more than 4,000 attempts to drink and drive since 2013. About ten attempts to drink and drive have been stopped per interlock in action. Ensuring at least 5,000 high-risk offenders a year have an interlock could prevent 40,000 to 50,000 drink-driving attempts. Each time an interlock won’t let a drunk driver start their car, could be the time that prevents an innocent person losing their life. As an added bonus, it prevents drink-driving without using up more police and court resources.

The hidden killer on our roads

Our other priority Election Call is for the government to give the police the power to catch drugged drivers.

Australia has been using roadside drug testing devices for more than a decade in some states and the UK introduced them in 2015. It is past time that New Zealand followed suit and started using technology to fight what the AA sees as a ‘hidden killer’ on our roads.

When blood analysis was done on 1,046 drivers who had died in crashes from 2004-2009, it found that one in three had some form of impairing drug in their system - mostly cannabis. Another study of 453 drivers that crashed in 2010 found 29% of the sober drivers hospitalised as a result of those crashes had potentially impairing drugs in their system.

Introducing testing devices that can use a driver’s saliva to test for some types of drugs will require some big changes to our laws, and they would need to be used in a much more targeted fashion than the mass alcohol testing that is currently done. But other countries have shown it can be done, and some roadside checkpoints in
Australia are now catching more drugged-drivers than drunk ones. The present system is simply not doing enough to send a message and stop someone getting stoned and then getting behind the wheel. If a police officer suspects a driver is affected by drugs, they can make them do an impairment test involving getting them to count, balance and have their pupils examined, but it is old-fashioned, slow and seldom used. Only a few hundred impairment tests for drugs are normally done a year, while Ministry of Health surveys estimate 130,000 New Zealanders are regular users of cannabis, and a substantial number of those admit to driving stoned.

The unacceptable truth at the moment is that a driver who had smoked a joint just a few minutes earlier would have a good chance of passing through a police checkpoint as long as they are under the alcohol limit and can avoid looking obviously stoned for a few moments. Not only does this make our roads riskier, but every time someone drives drugged and gets away with it, it strengthens the idea that it is OK to do so.

From safer passing to fuel price boards...

The AA has made these three issues our ‘hero’ Election Calls, but there are seven others that we will also be asking the incoming government to deliver on.

These are:

☑ Providing more safe passing opportunities for people when they are driving.
☑ Upgrading the safety of key regional roads.
☑ Extending the visiting drivers safety programme nationwide from the South Island regions it has initially targeted.
☑ Installing a network of red-light cameras at high-risk intersections in our major cities.
☑ Creating a congestion-busting taskforce to identify projects that will deliver the best congestion benefits to the public.
☑ Requiring motor vehicle traders to display safety information on their vehicles so car buyers can make better informed decisions.
☑ Requiring service stations to display the price for all fuel types they sell on their price boards.

These Election Calls have been developed through surveys of AA Members to identify the transport issues they care most about as well the AA’s own research and analysis of what positive changes the next government can make. If these ten Election Calls are implemented by whichever parties are elected into power, they will deliver real and long-lasting improvements for safer and better travel for all New Zealanders.

See aadirections.co.nz for more articles on road safety.
Two Toyota Corollas went head-to-head in a recent ANCAP test. Liam Baldwin reports.
ABOVE THE FLOOR at Crashlab in West Sydney is an area which houses mission control and a viewing platform. From here, people watch drama unfold.

Crashlab is where ANCAP - the Australasian New Car Assessment Programme - conducts most of the physical tests to determine the safety ratings of cars. This is where stars are decided. Between one and five stars are allocated, providing instantly understood safety information for motorists.

There are always observers, but on a day in May this year there were more than usual. Underway were preparations for a car-to-car crash. Instead of a standardised honeycomb barrier to simulate an offset head-on crash, two cars were about to be flung into each other at 64km/h apiece.

At one end of the test zone was a 1998 Toyota Corolla; at the other was a much younger sibling, from 2015. The idea of the crash test was to demonstrate the efficacy of modern safety technology in preventing serious injury and death, compared with older vehicles.

Among those on the platform was AA Motoring Services General Manager Stella Stocks. She’s one of two New Zealand representatives involved in the governance of ANCAP. She’s observed a number of standard crash tests before, but this was the first car-to-car test she’d witnessed.

“There were a lot of people watching who had been to numerous tests before. We all thought we knew what to expect, but when the crash happened, the sound of it made our blood run cold,” Stella says. “What followed was silence. It was eerie. Our immediate perception of the crash was that it was far worse for the older car than we expected.”

That was confirmed once the observers were allowed to get close to the wrecks.

“It was clear seeing the result of the crash that the driver in the older car would have had serious leg and chest injuries along with head injuries. I don’t think it would have been survivable.

“The driver of the newer car would have walked away with relatively minor injuries.”

Stella acknowledges the test in May was just one crash scenario. The older Corolla didn’t even have driver or passenger airbags, which would have gone a long way to protect the head and torso of the dummy. This became more apparent after viewing the high-speed video from many angles – including inside the car – that showed the driver’s head smashed into the steering wheel before impacting and destroying the side of the dash near the door.

“What the test clearly shows is much higher protection provided to occupants inside the cabin of a newer car when compared with an older car. The differences were pretty dramatic.”

There are about 3 million cars on New Zealand roads with an average age of 14 years. About 40% of those cars were built before 2000 and involved in 57% of fatalities. Newer cars, built between 2010 and 2015, represented 17% of the fleet and were involved in ten per cent of fatalities.

Stella says there are many factors in a crash than contribute to serious injury or death, but it’s clear that older cars are over-represented.

She says many people think that older, seemingly more ‘solid’ vehicles will protect them better than a newer car which, sometimes, looks worse after a crash.

“This just isn’t true. Over time carmakers started to use different types of metals and steel making techniques along with better, high-tech design to redistribute the forces created in a crash around the cabin to protect those inside.

“Those design changes coupled with airbags and seatbelt pre-tensioners hugely improve the safety outcome of everyone on board. And now with a lot of active crash avoidance technology available, even if it becomes inevitable that a crash is going to happen, the systems work to minimise the impact.”

Stella knows many people aren’t in a position to buy new cars, or even near-new. “We want people to prioritise safety features when they’re looking at buying a car, regardless of their budget. Price is a factor for most of us, and often one of the deciding factors when the choice is made, but we strongly suggest people buy the safest car they can afford.”

**Dummy runs**

In crash tests, ANCAP measures the impact on the dummies used in the vehicles. In the car-to-car crash test, just two dummies were used as ‘drivers’.

Scores between zero and four are given to different areas of the body. The head, chest, upper legs and knees and lower legs are rated depending on damage to provide an overall score out of 16. The dummy driver of the 1998 Corolla received a score of 0.4/16 with only the chest registering any degree of protection. In ANCAP’s opinion, if the crash were real, it would not have been survivable.

In the 2015 vehicle, the dummy’s overall score was 12.93/16 – perfect scores for the head, chest and upper leg areas and 0.93 for the lower leg. While not unscathed – the driver could have had a broken leg as a result of the crash – a life would have been saved.

**Where to look**

ANCAP uses a lab to simulate crashes, the results of which provide an overall score that determines a star safety rating of one to five. ANCAP also measures pedestrian protection and has minimum requirements for safety assist technology in order to achieve the maximum five-star safety rating. See ancap.co.nz.

The Used Car Safety Ratings, which are updated every year, are the result of data crunched after real-world crashes in both New Zealand and Australia. A one-to-five-star rating is applied based on how well the vehicle protects occupants in crashes. The higher the star rating, the safer the car is proven to be. See aa.co.nz/ucsr

**1998**

Toyota Corolla

**2015**

Toyota Corolla
Sitting on the beautifully upholstered front seat and curling my fingers around an almost iridescent-green steering wheel, I gazed down a long, long bonnet and prepared to pull away. I almost had to pinch myself, for I had always wanted to drive an enormous, 1950s car, with big fins and a boot and bonnet as spacious as your average country rugby field. And here I was in a 1959 Chevrolet Impala, alongside its very generous owner, about to become only the second person since he acquired it to be allowed to take control.

When the Impala first went on sale in 1958 it was Chevrolet’s most expensive passenger car, retaining the title until the mid-1960s when the Caprice took that mantle.

It certainly looks special, and you can’t help but appreciate its physical presence, most obviously the deeply sculpted horizontal rear wings which look almost like a seagull’s as it poises for flight. As owner Alex Ross says, you have to admire how complex the process of making those shapes would have been with the relatively limited technology of the time.

It was that tail which led indirectly to Alex acquiring this car. He already owned a 1964 Pontiac Catalina, but the invitations to his 50th birthday party showed the tail of a 1959 Impala, a car his father had owned brand new. So as a surprise, a friend arranged for the Impala to take him to the party. “It was a seriously ‘TV moment’, I felt totally overwhelmed by it, but that was the last I thought of it until three months later when the owner got in touch, as he was selling the car.

“When I drove it away, he was crying…” That was in 2006, and Alex drove it for just over a year before it sustained some damage. “The insurance was paid, but we decided that was the right time to do a restoration and do it all at once.”

It took 16 months, and included a total engine and gearbox rebuild, performance enhancements to the original 4.6-litre engine, and a number of flourishes: “That car now has paint in places GM didn’t know you could put paint.” It even has mirrors under the bonnet and boot lids to reflect the contents.

It has all the original colours but with a whiff of 21st century, “so there’s a green pearl in the cream paint.” The rear suspension was beefed up, and the front brakes got discs – with drums still slowing the rear. There’s a modern sound system too, with speakers tucked into the boot, which is big enough to double as a spa pool.

The end result not only looks fantastic but performs the part. “It sounds fruitier, goes better, and it effortlessly pulls its matching Lilliput caravan.”

Luckily for me, the Impala was also converted to power steering, as it weighs over 1.5 tons.

Selecting drive for the two-speed Powerglide auto, I somewhat gingerly depressed the throttle and crept away from the kerb, soon finding this Impala easy to drive. It has more than enough power, excellent brakes, a cushiony suspension, despite the promise of a ‘firmer’ rear, and steering that’s light, though a bit lifeless. In fact, it initially felt quite vague compared to what I’m
Expect trains
at any time,
from either direction

Complacency is a known factor in collisions at level crossings.
used to, which given the fact you just about need
binoculars to see the corners up front had me a little
nervous about my steering accuracy around our
chosen start point: a park, with rocky verges and
plentiful traffic-calming chicanes.
But once out on city roads, I loved the fact you can
just about twirl the beautiful wheel with a finger.
It made steering through the urban glut far easier
than expected, and as for pulling away from lights...
let’s just say there’s plenty of power on tap, and the
car cruises effortlessly, albeit revving a little high at
100km/h in top, or second, gear.
Vision is also good; the cabin is virtually all window
and soon I felt comfortable. It seemed I could see every
millimetre of the car’s 5.3-metre length and almost
two-metre width.

The Chevy has limitations on its original
suspension – if I braked hard it might have nose-
dived or pulled – and the vague steering wheel could
make any sudden corrections rather less predictable
than I’d like, but then that’s all part of driving a
60-year-old car.
Alex has taken it as far afield as New Plymouth
and Whangamata from his Auckland base, despite
its 20L/100km thirst, and no doubt it turned
heads the whole way. I’m just glad I dressed the
part, for driving this Impala felt every bit the
special occasion I’d anticipated, if a whisker less
intimidating than I’d feared.
The ripple effect

Monica Tischler investigates what’s being done to address the growing number of railway fatalities.

THE LAST MEMORY

Train driver Robert Neale has of the man fatally hit by his train is of the driver’s hand on his gear stick, desperately trying to reverse the car off the track.

Robert could see the driver from the cabin of his 2,000-ton, one-kilometre-long freight train, which was travelling at about 80kms an hour through a rural area north of Auckland. But the driver didn’t see Robert until it was too late.

Robert could not stop in time. In fact, trains at that weight and speed can keep moving for up to a kilometre after the driver slams on the brakes.

“It’s the sound of the impact that stays with me,” he says. “I was sitting there, having a good day when ‘bang’; it just happened out of the blue.”

It’s one of three fatal crashes the Auckland-based KiwiRail train driver has had over the 12 years he’s transported goods along New Zealand’s tracks. There have been “countless” near misses.

Statistics from the New Zealand Transport Agency confirm 32 train and vehicle collisions and just less than 300 near misses last year.

The growing concern lies with pedestrian safety. Several deaths in the past two years have involved the use of headphones around railway tracks.

Last year, eight people, including seven pedestrians and one cyclist, were killed at level crossings; the highest number in eight years. This year has already seen four deaths, including a West Auckland teenager in April. Police say he was running with headphones so didn’t hear the train coming and crossed the tracks in front of it.

Since records first began more than 20 years ago, pedestrian and train collisions and near misses have increased both nationally and globally whereas, while it’s still a concern, particularly in rural areas, vehicle collisions with trains are decreasing.

As a result, KiwiRail is reviewing its method of identifying risks at level crossings to help prioritise crossings for upgrades.

Another factor is the Transport Accident Investigation Commission’s decision last year to include level crossings on its watchlist, along with the likes of the Robinson helicopter which has claimed several lives in recent crashes.
KiwiRail Group General Manager Assets, David Gordon, says the focus is on making pedestrian level crossings at railways safer and more visible.

“There are more people walking around wearing headphones, which is distracting; that’s where the accidents are happening,” he says.

Every year, KiwiRail upgrades approximately eight crossings nationwide. Its current focus is to install flashing LED lights in the ground just before level crossings. This is being trialled in four places, including Wellington, Paraparaumu and Rangiora, with more sites to come if the lights prove effective. The initiative will hopefully bring pedestrians distracted by headphones or smartphones back to reality.

Another initiative is the use of active ‘Expect Train’ signs. These lit-up signals alert motorists, particularly in rural areas, before crossing some of New Zealand’s crossings protected by Stop and Give Way signs but not bells, lights or barriers. The signs are being trialled at crossings in Palmerston North, Marton and Featherston, in the lower North Island, and are designed to reduce driver complacency.

David says the cost of installing pedestrian LEDs and active ‘Expect Train’ signs is about $4,000 per crossing, compared to $160,000 to kit out a crossing with barriers, bells and flashing lights. Money for these safety upgrades comes from three sources: KiwiRail pays half, NZTA a quarter and local councils cover the remainder.

“We believe we’re better to go with small and cheaper initiatives at lots of crossings, rather than big things at a few,” he says.

While the main focus is on urban pedestrian and rural driver safety, another alarming issue has KiwiRail’s attention: impatient drivers are breaking barrier arms. Every week, particularly in Auckland metropolitan areas, about five barriers are broken.

KiwiRail is considering options, including replacing the zigzag design with barrier arms that lower straight across the road so vehicles are unable to weave through once the arms are down.

While the solution isn’t yet clear, the message is crystal: “It cannot go on; people will be killed or badly hurt,” David says.

The AA urges drivers to slow down, be ready to stop and check for trains at every level crossing, even if there are no bells or lights going off. Because of its size, a train can be travelling much faster than it appears to be, so never try to beat an oncoming train.

David urges pedestrians and drivers to take a moment of care before crossing a track and to consider the “ripple effect.”

“If a person is killed on a crossing, life will never be the same for not only their family and friends, but also the driver who hit them and those at the scene. All will be affected; the ripple of impact goes a long way,” David says.

Robert, who’s not only a train driver but a husband and father of two, agrees.

“After each fatal crash I have rung my wife as soon as I could and she’s just burst into tears. It has an impact on the whole family.”
Ian Green provides tips for families of those buying their first car.
REMEMBER BUYING your first car? It’s an exciting, life-changing event and for most people it is the first big outlay in their lives. Getting it right is important. Ideally, the decision will be made with input from experienced, knowledgeable people who they can trust. Quite likely, as a parent or care giver, you’re among them.

Yes, some young people will want to avoid getting mum and dad involved. But some will be open to a discussion about what to buy and how to get the best deal. And for the lucky ones whose parents are funding the purchase or contributing to it, the decision might be by committee. Whatever the scenario, we strongly suggest you take every opportunity to share your car-owning experience with the new motorist in the family, so they understand the true cost of vehicle ownership and choose to buy a car that’s reliable, good value for money and safe.

Talk ongoing costs

Typically the car is going to be an older, second-hand one and might, on paper, look cheap. That’s going to appeal to youngsters with not much disposable income. But the cost of a car extends beyond the initial outlay and they need to understand that. Also, you want to avoid the situation where, having spent all their savings, the car becomes a problem and your son or daughter is tapping into the Bank of Mum & Dad.

Older vehicles, particularly those with significant kilometres on the clock, are likely to require ongoing maintenance. If the vehicle is less common on our roads, for example a European model or a rare import, then the cost of parts for any repair needed will be higher.

But costs to keep any car on the road mount up. The cost of just one basic tyre will set them back around $150-$300; a standard service will leave a similar dent on their wallet. If things go wrong with the vehicle’s cambelt or clutch, that will mean a big bill – possibly headed your way.

Ensure your son or daughter knows to ask for service documentation or receipts for repair work done, advise them to check a vehicle’s ownership history, and urge them to not buy the cheapest car on the lot, because there’s usually a reason why that’s the case. Investing more up front can save time and money in the future.

Registration costs vary for different vehicles. Most older vehicles aren’t considered as safe as modern cars and therefore incur higher registration fees.

This variable proportion of registration (the ACC levies) ranges from $68 to $158 for petrol vehicles, so that is another factor to consider.

Insist on safety first

Fancy features are standard these days: you’d be hard-pressed to find a car for sale that isn’t fitted with power steering and central locking. But what can be overlooked in a first car purchase is safety, and that should take priority over everything else. Performance attributes, superficial finishing touches, the shape of the car... nothing is as important as its safety features.

In 2015, an Australian research company recreated a real-world crash scenario between two used vehicles of the same class that were both being sold for $10,000. One was a 2009 Holden Cruze which had a 5-star safety rating. The other was a 2007 Mitsubishi Lancer, which held a 2-star safety rating.

Fitted against one another in an offset head-on collision at 60km/h, the Lancer fared far worse, with there being an 88% probability of its driver fracturing his or her femur, a 72% chance of them fracturing an ankle and a 38% likelihood of them receiving severe neck injuries. This compared to 1%, 10% and 8% chances of the Cruze’s driver receiving the same injuries.

Each year, a guide to Used Car Safety Ratings is published using real-world crash data for nearly 300 vehicles in the Australian and New Zealand fleet. The latest guide provides important, valuable safety details about vehicles manufactured from 1996 until 2014, broken down into vehicle classes. It identified the 2001-2009 Peugeot 307 as a 5-star safety ranked vehicle in the small car segment. This May, we at the TradeMe listings online and found a Peugeot 307 of that era for sale for $5,000. Other vehicles listed in the same category in the Used Car Safety Ratings Guide, and from the same era, were rated 1-star and were available for the same price. It’s some proof that safety doesn’t necessarily come at an extra cost. Regardless of your age or situation, the AA recommends always buying the safest car you can afford.

Only after identifying a vehicle’s safety attributes should your teen start looking to the other bells and whistles like audio, performance and aesthetics, the non-essentials, which are often the things that they’ll get most excited about.
Stress the value of insurance
Flexible finance options can give young people access to a good range of vehicles. It means they could easily find cars decked with modifications that are within their budget.

What they may not know is that vehicles with larger engine capacities and turbochargers, or those that have been modified to the max, may incur extremely high insurance premiums or the refusal of insurance cover altogether. Advise them to get an insurance quote on the car they want to buy, before handing over a deposit.

AA Insurance’s claims data shows that some car models are involved in accidents or stolen more often than others. These can be attributed to the driver as well as to the type of vehicle they choose to drive. Based on this information, which is constantly refined, the insurance company applies key rating factors, including age, to an initial base premium in order to come up with an individual’s vehicle insurance premium.

Because drivers under 25 years of age tend to have more accidents than those older than 25, their premiums will be higher. Also, if an under 25-year-old is listed as a secondary driver, say on their parent’s policy, then the premium as well as the excess will be higher.

Despite this, it’s important for all drivers to have some form of car insurance. While young drivers with less expensive vehicles might be tempted to go without, they should consider the implications of having a car on the road without cover. If they don’t have insurance but damage someone else’s car and it’s their fault, then they will have to pay for it themselves, either as a lump sum or over a long period of time.

If price is an issue, advise them to at least invest in third party insurance which, at around $4 a week, is less than a cup of coffee. This will cover them for damage they’ve caused to other people’s property.

Offer your time
One of the biggest mistakes made by first-time buyers is being in a rush. They ought to learn as much as they can about the model they’re interested in and shop around. Offer to tramp around car yards with them to get a feel for what’s available in their budget. Go with them to viewings of cars listed online.

Often first-time buyers are so thrilled to be behind the wheel of what might be their new wheels, they neglect to take it on a proper test drive and ignore signs of problems. It’s best to find several models that fit the bill and drive them all, at least once. They can jot down the pros and cons of each on a list, which might help them decide.

You don’t have to have extensive mechanical knowledge to be of use at this stage. Just having driven various cars over however many years gives you an advantage. You will know the basics to check for – wobbly steering, uneven braking, strange noises from the engine or the temperature needle swinging wildly – and there is no shortage of good, inexpensive cars on the market, so go with your gut instinct. If it doesn’t seem right, leave it alone.

Once you and your excited son or daughter have made a decision, consider a pre-purchase mechanical inspection. These are a valuable tool to safeguard against buying a lemon.

Teens might not appreciate being told what to do, but some guidance will go a long way to protect them from the pain of post-purchase regret and excessive expense. As a guardian, consider a gift of an AA Membership for your young driver. Knowing the AA will be there to help if something goes wrong will give everyone in the family some peace of mind.

Stay safe!
The highest risk period for drivers is the first six to 12 months after they start driving solo. Encourage new drivers to:

- Follow their licence conditions. Restricted licences don’t allow the carrying of certain passengers or driving late at night because these have been shown to increase crash rates. Because it is illegal to drive outside of licence conditions, insurance is invalid whilst doing so.
- Never use their cellphone when driving and to keep their mind and eyes on the road.
- Keep good following distances.
- Build their driving experience. Crash rates drop the more time spent driving; let them drive on family outings and get experience in a wide range of conditions.
- Do an NZTA-approved defensive driving course.
Choose the right training

Ride Forever coaching is the perfect way to keep yourself and people you care about safe on the road.

There’s coaching aplenty to be had nowadays. But what’s the best choice if the priority is riding on the highway?

Ride Forever training is designed specifically for road riders, with a course to suit every need. It’s proven extremely popular, now attracting 5,000 riders each year.

There are four courses. Bronze suits Learner or Restricted licence-holders. Silver helps Restricted licence-holders aiming at their Full licence or returning riders refresh their skills. Gold aims at experienced motorcyclists wanting to hone their riding. While, for newbies or commuters, the half-day Urban/Commuter or Scooter course is perfect.

What they say

Avalon Biddle, a Kiwi racing in World Supersport 300, recently undertook a Bronze course to help get her Restricted licence. Without much road riding experience, she was surprised at how much she had to process. “It really impressed on me how many hazards there are to deal with,” said Avalon. “Without the training, I wasn’t always going to pick those up, let alone know how to deal with them.”

Taking the same course, Terri Morris was a more typical rider. She knew she had work to do on her cornering lines, as she tended to ‘tip in’ too early. “I can’t believe the difference it made,” says Terri. “You can realise something, and know what to do, but it’s only when you have an instructor demonstrating and coaching that you really change things.”

An irresistible advantage

Ride Forever is heavily subsidised by ACC, with courses costing just $20 or $50 depending on level. Find out more at rideforever.co.nz/coaching.
Back to BASICS

Liam Baldwin starts the journey to get his motorbike licence.

WHEN YOU'RE in your 40s going back to school can be a little daunting, especially when you have to learn material you think you already know.

My challenge is to obtain a motorcycle licence, which you need to be legal when riding a bike or scooter bigger than a 50cc on the road.

I can already ride a motorcycle. Countless hours spent hooning about gorse-covered and rabbit-infested sand dunes at Piripai, over the river from Whakatane, on an old Yamaha DT125 ensured I have more than just basic handling abilities. However, the skills you need to make sure you don’t come a cropper flying down narrow stock tracks while trying to avoid getting the foot pegs caught in wireweed fall a little short of what’s required on the road.

First up, I need a learner licence. To get one, I need to prove I can operate a bike by passing a ‘basic handling skills assessment’.

When you get a learner licence to drive a car, one of the requirements is supervision. During the learner period, you must have an experienced driver in the passenger seat. For learner motorcyclists, the supervision element doesn’t work because there is no passenger seat. Instead, you have to demonstrate to an assessor that you’re able to start and stop confidently, use indicators and complete ‘head checks’: the habit of checking traffic around you.

So I head to the AA Driving School, which now offers motorcycle training – currently only in parts of the Bay of Plenty and Waikato, although more are in the pipeline.

With a keen colleague, who has never been on a motorbike before, I drive two hours from Auckland to Cambridge to catch up with AA Driving School instructor and motorcycle trainer Mark Revill-Johnson, a former police officer in both New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

Mark’s job is to check our bike handling skills, although his first job is to train my colleague to operate the machine from scratch.

In a closed-off car park, we negotiate four courses marked out with cones. We both pass; each of us only having a couple of points taken off. The marks against me relate to head checks – Mark calls them life savers – which are vital if you are to ensure you’re not pulling out into the path of a vehicle that your mirrors aren’t revealing. It reminds me that moving from the comparative enclosed safety of a car to the exposed seat of a motorcycle is quite a shift. Those checks become even more critical.

When you’ve been a motorist for nearly 30 years, as I have, there are a few habits and rules that need addressing and possibly refreshing. I’ll have to hone up on the road code too, as getting through a theory test is my next challenge.

Then, I’ll find a starter bike that can handle my middle-aged bones, venture onto quiet suburban streets and build
Quality gear protects riders from weather and, in case of an accident, diminishes the damage done to your body. Plus, if you’re not wearing good gear and are cold and wet as a result, your ability to control and operate your bike is compromised.

- Helmets are a legal requirement and full-face, well-fitting helmets are highly recommended. As helmets degrade with time, they should be replaced every five years.
- Gloves should be specifically designed for motorbike riding. Choose tough, armoured gloves that are wind-proof, water-proof and strap tightly at the wrist.
- Boots should be rugged with strong soles, good grip and ankle support.
- Jackets, either heavy leather or tough, high-tech modern fabric, should include pads on the shoulders and back. Consider wearing extra armour for back and chest, and a high-vis vest.
- Pants should be designed for riding, with armour padding on knees and lower spine. They’re far warmer, more waterproof and more protective than standard jeans.
- One-piece, zip-together suits are the safest option.

All the gear, all the time

If a helmet is involved in an accident or dropped heavily, it may be weakened and is no longer reliable. Replace it.

You get what you pay for. Investing in good quality protective gear can make the difference between walking away from a spill, or not.

Size issues

Learner and restricted motorcycle riders need to pick up plenty of skills before they’re permitted to ride powerful machines.

The Learner Approved Motorcycle Scheme (LAMS) was put into place in 2012. It identifies motorcycles that newbies are allowed, based on their performance capability. Essentially, if you’re a learner, you’ve got to take it easy.

It used to be that learners couldn’t ride motorcycles bigger than 250cc. The rules have changed and bigger engines are allowed, depending on their performance.

A handful of 250cc motorcycles are actually prohibited because they have too much power.

A full list of LAMS approved and prohibited motorcycles is on the Transport Agency’s website: nzta.govt.nz

my confidence. I’ll sign up for a few AA Driving School practice tests before going for my restricted licence and I’ll also get some expert training in before my full licence assessment. Plus, I’ll do at least one of ACC’s Ride Forever courses.

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Along for the ride
AA Driving School Motorcycle Training is designed to take riders through the licensing process while improving skill levels and encouraging safety and confidence at every stage.

For learners, alongside the basic handling skills assessment, rider training is offered for those who have never experienced a motorcycle with manual gears. For those with a little more experience, novice rider training is available.

Before attempting the restricted licence stage and undergoing the one-and-a-half-hour assessment, it is recommended riders enrol in the AA Driving School’s urban, highway and rural training.

Training is also offered ahead of the full licence one-hour assessment.

AA Driving School General Manager Roger Venn, a motorcycle rider himself, says concern for motorcycle safety is behind the introduction of these courses.

“All aspects of driver safety are very important to the AA. We felt more needed to be done to reduce crashes involving riders – that’s one of the reasons why the AA Driving School has introduced motorcycle training.

“We also have training available for returning riders who might have had a break from two wheels for a while and want to refresh their skills. And we provide advanced riding techniques, centred on riding safely and efficiently. When you participate in a programme, even if you’re experienced, you find out pretty quickly that there’s always something new to learn that can improve your competence.”

Roger says even minute changes to riding style or tweaking the approach to different scenarios can, and often do, improve ability and confidence on the road.

See aadrivingschool.co.nz

On course
ACC’s subsidised Ride Forever programme is all about reducing bike-related accidents. Motorcycles and scooters make up just three per cent of vehicles on New Zealand roads but are involved in 20% of the cost of vehicle-related claims paid by ACC.

Ride Forever is a coaching programme created to improve motorcycle rider safety in all conditions, on different surfaces and in various environments.

ACC Motorcycle Programme Manager David Keilty says the programme, which kicked off a few years ago is providing “very positive returns”. It doubled in size during 2015 and 2016 and is expected to keep growing.

Most of the courses run for a full day and are available for beginner riders, experienced riders and those who are returning to bikes after a pause and need to sharpen their skills.

ACC covers the $249 cost of the course; participants are required to pay a $20-$50 administration fee depending on the level of the programme selected.

“Regardless of your current skills, ability or experience, there’s always something you can learn to help you handle your bike better and cope more confidently with whatever the road throws at you.”

See rideforever.co.nz
**NEW TO MARKET**

**TOYOTA C-HR**

Toyota’s new super savvy compact SUV has landed, and boy, does it turn heads! Boasting a thoroughly European design heritage, words like ‘muscular flanks’ and ‘extroverted’ are used to describe its coupe-like silhouette. The chassis has a low centre of gravity and, combined with advanced suspension, is a driver-oriented, fun vehicle. One spec, two models (2WD and AWD), it’s powered by a new 1.2L turbo engine which may settle the battle between power and economy by delivering the best of both worlds. And the inclusion of Toyota’s Safety Sense package helped it receive a 5-star ANCAP safety rating. Priced from $37,990.

**KIA RIO**

There’s a whole lot that’s new for this fourth generation Rio. It’s longer, has more cabin space and it’s equipped with heaps of technology. There are three models (LX, EX, Limited) two transmission options and one engine. All 74kW of engine horses come from the new all-aluminium 1,400cc power plant. Most models come equipped with a smooth – Kia’s own words – 4-speed automatic transmission with a 6-speed manual available on the base spec LX. For the first time in a Rio, satnav has been added (in the EX and Limited models), with SUNA live traffic update alerts as well. Priced from $22,490.

**HYUNDAI IONIQ**

This car is purpose-built from the ground up and will be available as hybrid, PHEV (plug-in electric vehicle/hybrid from later in the year) and full electric. The entry-level full electric is priced under $60k. The IONIQ has two variants and can include a few goodies you might not expect from a vehicle that’s all about conserving power; heated steering wheel, heated seats, a wireless smart phone charging dock and a premium sound system with eight speakers. The Elite comes with blind spot monitoring, rear cross traffic alert, smart cruise control and lane keep assist. All models have 5-star ANCAP safety ratings.
SUZUKI IGNIS
Suzuki’s new IGNIS (meaning ‘fire’ in Latin) is a super compact SUV, small on the outside, big on the inside, packed full of features and in a class of its own. The IGNIS is very light but strong thanks to new chassis design, boasting a ten per cent increase in rigidity over similarly sized vehicles. The 1,200cc engine pushes the vehicle along nicely using very little fuel, due to some genius twin-injector, double-overhead cam, variable valve technology. Owners can personalise their Ignis with various colour accents inside and out and, on the white and red LTD models, they can opt for a black roof. Priced from $18,990.

HOLDEN ASTRA HATCH
Holden has gone to great lengths to ensure that this ‘surprisingly Holden’ car is suited to New Zealand despite its European design. There’s a choice of an all-alloy 1.4L turbocharged petrol engine or a sporty 1.6L turbocharged petrol engine, the latter found in the RS and range topping RS-V, which produces 147kW of power and 300Nm of torque. Even the base model 1.4L turbo with 6-speed manual is a very engaging, fun-to-drive car and the experience only gets better as the model range climbs, with extra spec and safety assists added. The sedan version will be available here soon. Priced from $30,990.

BMW 540I SEDAN
The car for those wanting to ride like an MP, without the $200k price tag. The 7-series heritage is evident in the slightly smaller 5-series, priced from $99,900. Is it really necessary to have ‘gesture control’ and display key? Well, they’re great features to brag about and perhaps remote parking makes sense for a big car with big doors dealing with small parking spaces. Together with the head-up display (so you need never take your eyes off the road, not even to check the navigation) very active lane keep assist, auto lights and wipers, and active cruise control system, the car almost drives itself.

BUYING A NEW CAR?
Get advice from the experts.
The AA Motoring Services team test-drives new models and makes of car. Their detailed, impartial reports are available on aa.co.nz in the cars section, along with ANCAP safety ratings.

Fuel economy ratings apply to the models illustrated. To compare fuel efficiency ratings across other vehicles, go to: energywise.govt.nz/VFEL
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IT'S A SMALL settlement about 20 minutes east of Whangarei. The coastline is iwi-owned and land can never be bought; only leased. My close friend has a little two-bedroom bach there. It’s in the middle of nowhere and is really rad. As soon as the sun pops its head out after winter, about 40 of my friends and their families camp in and around the house. We’re a tight-knit group and all take turns with the cooking. My life is constantly focused on my music, so I use it as a complete escape; it’s the kind of spot I can spend all day in my lavalava and togs.

Being from Christchurch originally, I never experienced intense heat and my family didn’t have a bach growing up. I’ve fallen in love with the north and am so grateful to have access to this beautiful spot. Ladi6’s latest album, Royal Blue 3000 is out now.
KAWAKAWA, a tiny junction town in the Bay of Islands, is home to less than a thousand people. Over the last year, the town has had over 250,000 visitors. Why so many? They come to see public toilets designed by a world-famous artist.

Frederick Hundertwasser was an Austrian artist and architect who lived in the area for 20 years before his death in 2000. The toilet block he designed for Kawakawa, a playful creation with organic curves, walls imbedded with bottles, multi-coloured tiles and shiny pillars, has proved a massive hit.

Now the town is building an information centre to “celebrate his life and his relationship with the area,” says Laurell Pratt, a local involved in developing the new centre, who also runs Kings Theatre Creative Space. Laurell says the toilets have changed the town. “It’s created an energy here, a community spirit. Kawakawa is like a cultural junction that tourists, also, are really interested in.”

Down the road, a ‘complementary’ project has recently been given the green light. Whangarei will build a Hundertwasser-designed gallery, having successfully raised the funds needed just as AA Directions went to press. As well as focusing on the art and architecture of Hundertwasser, the centre will exhibit local and national art and provide a permanent showplace for Maori contemporary art. It’s projected to bring $22 million into the region each year and, considering the impact of art on tourism elsewhere in New Zealand, that’s realistic.

What inspires travel plans? For many, it is art. They’ll book a trip to Auckland while an international touring show is on at the Auckland Art Gallery. They’ll check what’s showing at the Christchurch Art Gallery before arranging their weekend. And they’ll drive to New Plymouth especially to visit the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery.

Since the Govett-Brewster reopened two years ago with the addition of the Len Lye Centre, visitor numbers have climbed around 55% annually to well over 100,000, says Director Simon Rees. He says the gallery’s appeal has expanded from a contemporary art audience to a more general audience.

Visitors are also attracted to Taranaki’s festivals, such as WOMAD, and to the new Pouakai Crossing. However Venture Taranaki confirms visitor numbers have steadily risen since the Len Lye Centre opened, despite a decline in business travel due to slowing oil and gas and dairy sectors. And the gallery was a key factor in Lonely Planet judging the region the world’s second-best regional destination in its 2017 Best in Travel Awards.

Elsewhere in New Zealand, public galleries are also pulling their weight in the business of attracting tourists. The Dowse Art Museum in Lower Hutt has opened a new café and Communications Manager, Alex Grace, reports visitor numbers are healthy: “Thanks to a dynamic exhibition schedule providing something new for repeat visitors.” She believes tourists often have ‘a top ten’ of things to do when visiting a new place and the best local gallery will frequently be on that list.

In Whanganui, major renovations for the historic Sarjeant Gallery are being finalised. Serious fundraising is well underway and plans are to have the gallery expanded and refreshed in time to celebrate its centenary in 2019.

Nelson is a few steps ahead. The Suter Art Gallery, a New Zealand heritage building constructed in 1899, last year opened new gallery spaces, a foyer and an internal walkway linking new to old. The project was designed by Warren and Mahoney in partnership with Jerram Tocker Barron Architects. It has won awards and it is attracting more visitors than ever before.

Rodney Sampson of Warren and Mahoney says the architectural firm has worked on many gallery projects over the years. As well as Nelson’s Suter Gallery, Warren and Mahoney was involved in the National Library in Wellington’s refurbishment and is working on the Sarjeant project.

“For the work we’ve been doing recently, we’ve been involved from the early stages when a gallery is considering why they want to rejuvenate. What is the inspiration? More people through the door is just one thing,” Rodney says.

He explains there is a more pragmatic side to gallery renovation. Some of the country’s beautiful but elderly galleries have struggled with inferior exhibition spaces and poor storage facilities.

“Collections need to be safe and secure and galleries need to be seismically safe also, so they can host touring exhibitions, expanding upon what shows they have. It gives them the ability to grow.”

Kathryn Webster looks into the buzz around art tourism.
He notes that the cultural scene in New Zealand is enjoying a revitalisation. “You can see it is generating numbers of people wanting to be involved. Some would say we are culturally mature, we have confidence and are comfortable with being involved in art. People are acknowledging the value of it now.”

Director of Auckland’s craft and design gallery, Objectspace, Kim Paton, agrees. “There is a huge audience. New Zealand’s creative industries are very healthy. How many people have an avid interest in design, a hobby interest in craft or a love of houses? It’s massive.

“The major renovations and developing of art galleries (in New Zealand) is a very positive story and this development is also,” Kim says.

Objectspace, a public gallery dedicated to craft, applied art and design, has received enough support and public funding to upgrade significantly. A new gallery, opening soon in Ponsonby, will be three times larger than the old space and will accommodate an increased focus on architecture.

Kim’s confident Objectspace will be a ‘destination gallery’ that people will travel especially to visit. Most major cities in the world have a design museum; international tourists expect to find quality galleries here that tell New Zealand stories, reveal insights, and add depth to their experience of this country. “I know that when I travel it’s the cultural institutions open to the public that are markers on my way,” Kim says. “And it’s often the smaller institutions that really catch my imagination and that I want to return to, again and again.”
On the road

Delights

Tim Warrington is chased from Wellington to Wairoa by wild weather.

According to the weather forecast, there’s a tiny piece of blue sky somewhere north and I am determined to find it.

From Wellington, I will tiptoe through the rainsodden Manawatu Gorge and head inland along the Classic New Zealand Wine Trail then on to Wairoa and the legend of the golden fish and chips.

It’s slow going at first, skirting slips and earthworks from the storm. I’m heading for Woodville, but my thirsty, troublesome Fiat begs to stop in Featherston to join a smorgasbord of drivers filling up at the pumps. A taciturn mechanic hammers violently at my broken wiper. He seems surprised when it falls off, then shoos me towards the nearby Everest Café while he sorts repairs.

Despite the roll-neck weather, I perch outside to soak up the picture of the world autumn has daubed with umber and vermilion. A hedgehog, fat as butter, totters along the pavement. Drunk? We are in pinot territory. Or simply disorientated by the storm? I offer it a saucer of milk. I sip my latte, delighting in the restorative properties of the bracing Arctic southerlies which recharge me for another stint behind the wheel. My prickly friend seems rejuvenated too, and wanders off.

Mr Feather’s Den: Oddities & Delights is an unexpected treasure. A cluster of taxidermied mice catches my attention. Give me a stuffed rodent in a full ballerina skirt and I’m on board; Mermouse...
and Patrick the sporran-clad Highlander, winsomely framed in a mildewed hutch, are not without their charms either.

I wonder if the adjacent fromagerie, ‘C’est Cheese’, was established to feed these little neighbours. Not surprisingly, for an establishment that stocks more than 100 varieties of cheese, the heady aroma socks me in the schniffer like a sledgehammer. It also seems to obliterate all retail constraint. I spend up big. I’m in love with the Kingsmeade Sunset Blue from Masterton, and the apple mustard jelly, and the rye wafers and the teeny tiny, toasted brioche…

My credit card groans as I enter my pin, so I take the hint and leave Featherston without returning next door to purchase the grim reaper mouse, the elaborately bevelled Frida Kahlo mirror or Mildred the stuffed chicken.

I trundle off in my cheese-filled car past thickly stoned cottages and civic buildings. Early settlers in the area flexed their muscular Christianity, building many handsome churches hewn from local stone.

By the time I arrive in Woodville I am high on blue vein but sobriety is quickly restored by the beguiling vista of antique stores. Hidden among factory-made goods of the most ordinary kind, I discover a refreshingly arty headpiece: a trans-seasonal hybrid deerstalker/baseball cap. Perfect.

After several hours of ooh-ing and aah-ing over the Aladdin’s cave of treats on offer in Woodville I spot a studio tucked away down an alley. Sidestreet Gallery is a symphony of artistic delights. Some are familiar: acrylics, charcoal, chalks, sculptures; and the
ROAD TRIP

WELLINGTON TO WAIROA IN HAWKE’S BAY IS 428KM

- Hawke’s Bay has over 100 vineyards, many with cellar doors and restaurants.
- Orchards sell fruit and honey at the gate and farmers’ markets specialise in locally produced, fresh food. Stock up as you go.
- If you’re travelling in spring, swing into Taniwha Daffodils off SH2 in Central Hawke’s Bay. Pick a big bunch to take home and buy a picnic on-site to enjoy surrounded by flowers.

WHEN IN WAIROA

- Enjoy the walkway and cycleway stretching the length of the town’s riverbank. Grab a bite or a coffee to enjoy in a sunny spot at the water’s edge.
- Explore Whakamahi Beach, where the Wairoa River meets the coastline.

Cloudless skies and delicate autumnal sunshine dance off the copper dome of the recently refurbished lighthouse. In a rare victory of common sense, Wairoa’s iconic lighthouse dodged the scrap heap after retiring from Portland Island off Mahia Peninsula. It was upcycled to its present location on a reserve at the heart of the town.

The museum has been spruced up too, and the heritage colours complement the colonial architecture gracing Marine Parade – the town’s main drag. Great ranks of handsome Norfolk pines garnish the riverbank and the meandering walkway, which is popular with walkers, runners and cyclists. It extends several kilometres to the mouth of the river, the lookout at Pilot Hill and beyond to Whakamahi Beach. Once a busy port town, the bustle of river trade has long since faded, but parts of the huge wharf remain.

It’s impossible to argue with my braids of DNA; I head to the second-hand shops. At Robinson’s Trading my eye catches a tarnished butter knife, heavy with a hundred years of grime.

Later, after a polish, the hallmarks of early-Victorian, Birmingham solid silver are revealed. Further down the road is D&D Secondhand Furniture, a maze for retail rummaging. There are blonde oak and rimu treasures by the score, and a petite cocktail cabinet (now stuffed with cheese) nestles in my passenger seat and joins my adventure.

It’s well past the tourist season, but still the motorhomes come and jostle for a prime position overlooking the mighty Wairoa River. Only a year ago Wairoa was declared motorhome friendly, indicating there are plenty of camping sites around town; as I try to discuss this with a backpacker, he shoo’s me away. “Don’t tell anyone, they’ll all want to come here.”

ABOVE: The writer stops for a break on his road trip, attracted by views of Mahia Peninsula. OPPOSITE: There is no shortage of driftwood on wild Whakamahi Beach, near Wairoa.
At the far end of Marine Parade is the Gaiety Theatre complex, another gem saved from the wrecking ball by a group of local entrepreneurs. There’s the cinema, the Saloon and the Eastend Café and Bar. The café sparkles brightest at brunchtime. Light meals and local fare served up with a chic, modern verve are a delight for the palate. You can’t leave without popping next door to the florist and giftware shop packed with treasures and trinkets. It’s the sort of place where you’ll find exactly what you’re looking for, without ever knowing you were looking.

Wairoa is very walkable, and as I saunter back down Marine Parade I begin to get a feel for its rich history and proud cultural heritage. Once upon a time guidebooks described Wairoa as little more than a petrol stop and place for pies. And while Osler’s Bakery still serves up sublime pastry goods, there is so much more to this little town: Rocket Lab, a film school in the making, a world class recording studio and mountain bike cycle track to name a few.

The Long River Gallery houses a collection of locally made artworks, much of it influenced by the driftwood for which the region is famous. I pop in for a nosy and naturally want to buy everything.

I leave and cross the bridge to North Clyde, to the gold at the end of my rainbow. The fish and chips here are legendary, and there are two to choose from: The Ponderosa Fish and Chip Shop and Tui Takeaways. Never one to pass up a taste test, I sample both and both deliver the Midas crunch.

Discovering Wairoa has been a delightful surprise, the sort of thing that gives travelling a good name. I could have ended my adventure in Napier - many people do - but the beauty of a real adventure is making less obvious choices.
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ROADWATCH AND MAPS • TIME AND DISTANCE CALCULATOR
Flying into Queenstown on the first properly cold day of the year, the plane descended through clouds and mist into more clouds and mist.

Later that night, snug in my Alexandra motel unit, I was woken by howling winds and staccato rain peppering the roof. I made an inventory of my cold-weather gear: coats, hats, gloves, a balaclava I'd knitted myself, merino thermals, serious socks. If I wore everything all at once and dried it out each night, I'd be fine. It's amazing how bold one feels beneath the comfort of a duvet.

Day One: Clyde – Doctors Point (22km)

I'm in Clyde, a hamlet settled in the 1860s following the area's first gold strike. I've been told that in just one year, the region yielded 2,000kgs of gold. Today, the almost impossibly quaint village is like a little time capsule, with the mammoth Clyde Dam serving to remind me which century I'm in.

Saddled up on my hired bike, I roll along Clyde's pretty streets, pass stone buildings reflecting the town's past, and nose downhill before crossing a bridge that appears to have been constructed from Meccano.

The path is strewn with a carpet of gold leaves and bare-branched trees form tunnels overhead, the last of autumn's finery clinging on. Along this leg the track does little more than undulate, but there are a couple of moments when the rain hits hard and I dig deep, hoping to outrun the clouds.

The duns and greys of the rocks on the far riverbank merge into the chalky-green of the water. Mostly the river is as smooth as glass, occasionally disturbed by whorls and eddies. It would be mesmerising to sit and watch it for a while, but that sort of indulgence is reserved for kinder weather.
Because of the iffy weather, the 13-kilometre jet boat ride from Doctors Point to Shingle Creek is pulled at the last minute. The skipper said it was snowing in his neck of the woods and he didn’t want his boat to hit an iceberg. Fair call.

Disheartened, I quickly process the loss because the portion I did knock off was fabulous and in four short hours, give or take, I trundle back into Clyde to set up camp beside the fire at the Bank Café. Rain or shine, with or without a jet boat ride, this was spectacular riding and not too challenging, either.

Day Two: Roxburgh Dam – Roxburgh – Millers Flat (30km)

Waking at Quince Cottage, an adorable B&B in the middle of rural Millers Flat, it’s been another night of torrential rain and howling gales and there is no sign of it clearing.

This leg begins at the majestic concrete edifice that is the Roxburgh Dam. I mount my bike and ride the gentle riverside path with rabbits, hawks, hares, quails and fantails for company. It rains heavily most of the day. On the rare occasions the clouds part and the distant ranges show themselves, snow appears to have edged lower. Sheep grazing in orchards look up at me in disbelief. Beneath my wheels, carpets of sodden leaves range in colour from deep grape to dark chocolate, a base for brave mushrooms who have taken their chances in the middle of the path; clearly they weren’t expecting traffic.

Ten kilometres later, in Roxburgh, I have to spend a penny. Impressive, space-age mechanical loos are a surprise here: robot soap, robot water, robot air-dry, even the loo paper is robot-rationed. The experience is accompanied by a jazzy version of What the World Needs Now.

Back on the path, restorative cuppa and cake in the tank, the rain continues. Ten kilometres later, Lawrence in my sights, I pause to reflect on how I’d made it through the entire two-day ride without having to spend a penny. Impressive, space-age mechanical loos are a surprise here: robot soap, robot water, robot air-dry, even the loo paper is robot-rationed. The experience is accompanied by a jazzy version of What the World Needs Now.

Day Three: Millers Flat – Beaumont – Lawrence (43km)

I wake to a perfect day. There are views for miles in every direction and more snow on the distant ranges. I ride through sunny Millers Flat, past the angelic Anglican Church, the Four Square, the tiny school, the community pool and the hall before turning my back on civilisation. Into the hinterland I go, to find more pretty bush and more fast-flowing turquoise, with several significant sites along the way. I get goose bumps standing at the graves of Somebody’s Darling and William Rigney, the man who saw fit to bury a stranger.

I marvel, too, at Horseshoe Bend Bridge. Built over 100 years ago, it replaced a pulley chair that the children of the area used to cross the river to get to school, until a councillor admitted at a council meeting that the one and only time he rode in the chair, he was so terrified he recited The Lord’s Prayer over and over until he was safely on the other side.

I also spend some time peering inside a cave, little more than a crevice, knowing it was some hardy miner’s digs. Giant hares bound across the path and above me, yellowheads (mohua) are out in force, the welcome sun reflecting off their golden plumage. Punctuating the river’s banks are the ruins of several bridges, all but washed away, serving as reminders of once thriving communities.

After 20kms of contemplation, Beaumont appears and a welcome arrow points me towards the pub. It’s allegedly ‘The Friendliest Hotel in Central,’ with decor a taxidermy tribute to hunting. Following a half pint of Speights, I am back on the trail, Lawrence in my sights and nature in my nostrils. A mountain of intensely aromatic gum chips, a waft of fresh cut pine, warm bracken: cycling seems to sharpen my senses.

But then things get serious. From Beaumont the trail leaves the river and winds up to Big Hill Tunnel. There are no prizes for guessing how this passage earned its name, but once over the pass, it is largely freewheeling to Lawrence.

Yes, it was wet and cold but looking back on those three days, not even seriously inclement weather could dampen my enthusiasm. It was a glorious and memorable ride, through picturesque places and, despite the chilly challenges, it was easy.

Visitor information

The two-day, 73km Clutha Gold Cycle Trail is rated ‘easiest’ and ‘easy’; the one-day, 34km Roxburgh Gorge Trail is also rated ‘easy’ with only a small section at ‘intermediate’ grade.

WHILE YOU’RE THERE

• Taking a short river cruise down the Clutha will provide another perspective on the landscape.

• Central Otago is rich in history. Several sites relating to the region’s gold mining past include the opportunity to pan for gold and museums in Alexandra, Clyde and Roxburgh are well worth visiting.

• At least 50 of Lawrence’s buildings are protected historic sites. Take the heritage trail and uncover the town’s intriguing past.

• Roxburgh is famous for its stone fruits, strawberries, apples and pears. At the right time of year, buying fresh from the orchard gate is a pleasure best experienced from a bicycle.

• Craft and art galleries and artist studios are a feature of Central Otago: visit in Alexandra, Clyde and Roxburgh.

WHEN TO GO

Summer visitors get apricots and cherries, autumn provides a spectacular show of deciduous trees in colour, winter is beautiful in its own snow-tinged right and spring is blossom time.

Pick up a NZ Cycle Trail Guide from an AA Centre.

See nzcycletrail.com for details and maps.

See atraveller.co.nz for itinerary ideas and places to stay.

TRAVEL

91 WINTER 2017
A weekend on an island with a difference provides a peaceful break for Monica Tischler.

ON THE FERRY to Kawau Island, I ask a group of locals what it’s like to live there. They exchange glances and pause to think, before agreeing: it’s quiet. The answer isn’t surprising. There are no proper roads there and no shops, not even a supermarket. But the magnitude of the island’s peace and tranquillity doesn’t register until stepping ashore.

The ferry pulls up at South Cove wharf and we climb off, laden with weekend supplies: walking gear, food and a fishing rod each. A last-minute decision to escape the city had me online looking for holiday inspiration. Kawau Island caught my attention. It’s close to Auckland and easy to get to, yet its environment couldn’t be more of a contrast to the hustle and bustle of urban life.

The ferry’s algae-covered rope slips off the wooden pillar and the hum of its motor grows faint as it edges away. Silence envelopes us. There are no vehicles to be heard, no chatter of a buzzing society, nothing but lapping water and the throaty warble of tui.

Golf buggies are a popular mode of transport here and our rented bach’s owner has left one near the wharf for us, to make the journey up the hill to the house quick and easy. A wallaby bounces across our path as we drive through the gates; several weka scatter off into the bush. It’s hard to believe we’re still in New Zealand.

Glimpses of harbour views are limited as darkness falls, and a thick curtain of mist the following morning teases us some more. The haze doesn’t lift until we paddle our kayaks, provided with the bach, out into a glassy bay where we’re treated to spectacular sights.

We’ve heard there are good fishing spots around nearby Beehive Island, a small, grassy mound with a ring of pale yellow

Getting there

Regular return ferry services depart from Sandspit, about an hour north of Auckland, with a secure car park at the terminal. Once on the island, water taxis are available.

SLEEPING OVER
Both fully-catered and self-contained accommodation is available. Meals need to be planned before your trip. Mansion House Café and Kawau Boating Club serve food and coffee during peak season but are closed in winter.

WHILE YOU’RE HERE
The island is abundant with walking tracks, including near Mansion House grounds. The house’s opening hours are seasonal though, and it’s closed from June 1 to July 31. See doc.govt.nz and search ‘Mansion House’ for more.

While casting a line off the rocks or wharf is fun, so is joining a fishing tour. There are several excursions available. See kawauisland.org.nz for more information.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MONICA TISCHLER

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sand at its base. We paddle around before agreeing on a spot that feels lucky. Conditions couldn’t be more perfect for fishing: the breeze is gentle, barely there, and the smooth, dark green water means it’s deep. A penguin pops its head up.

It doesn’t take long before we feel little tugs at the end of our rods, and then bigger, stronger pulls.

After proudly indulging in fresh fish for lunch, we complete a few nearby walks, including one affectionately named ‘Jock’s Track’, a steep, muddy pathway with a rope to guide us down toward a magnificent, rocky bay. A memorial at the track entrance says it’s a tribute to the bach owner’s late husband who treasured this area.

We jump back in our kayaks and push through the water, past ruins of the island’s old copper mine. Dragging our boats safely onto the rocks, we marvel at the crumbling building that once housed the steam engine and pump to keep the mine free of water. Copper was extracted here from 1844 until the early 1850s and there were at least 300 people living on the island back then. I’m told there are now a mere 85 permanent residents.

Over to the next bay, Dispute Cove, we tie our kayaks up and walk over the hill to Mansion House Bay, sharing a track with fantails and monarch butterflies. The grounds are in full autumnal bloom; auburn and amber carpets surround bare trees; our footsteps crunch. The house of former New Zealand Governor General, Sir George Grey, glows in the sunlight. I let my mind wander to what life must have been like back then. Originally the residence for the island’s mine superintendent, the Victorian home was purchased in 1862 by Grey, who spent a fortune developing Kawau, planting orchards, olive groves and other exotic and native trees. Today, peacocks and wallabies can still be spotted here.

On the return ferry home, a rainbow casts an arch over the shrinking island as we chug across the Hauraki Gulf back toward the mainland. With an environment rich in history and teeming with nature and wildlife, Kawau Island really is a pot of gold.
Taking THE WATERS

Kim Triegaardt escapes Christchurch for a warm spell.

WISPS OF CONVERSATION slip between slow plops of rain. There are five of us lounging in the Maruia Hot Springs rock pools: a German backpacker, a coaster from Greymouth, a North Island visitor, her South Island sister and me. Like an open-air cathedral, talk is hushed as everyone is in awe of the raw beauty of the steep, heavily forested mountains surrounding us. We’re lying in pools hewn from rocks and filled with water piped from a fault that cracks the earth in the nearby riverbed.

Bellbirds are the soundtrack to our slow, toe-wrinkling soak as the sun dips towards the horizon chased by bands of gold, yellow and red clouds before disappearing in a purple wash.

It is only the threat of missing the last sitting in the restaurant that pulls us from the pools. It’s already dark and the air is freezing. The pools are open 24 hours though, so we head back there later after dinner and soak some more, as the light of a million stars tracks over us.

These hot pools were closed for a while but reopened about a year ago, and the new owners have given the once-faded facilities a makeover. The gardens still reflect the aesthetics of the former Japanese owners, but there is now a sauna and steam room, log fires have replaced gas heaters, and there’s a wide deck where you can sit and soak up the morning sunshine. The separate men’s and women’s indoor bathhouses have been combined, but privacy is still an option in several new spa buildings.

We eventually tire of soaking and head out to explore. There are at least 15 different walks around the Lewis Pass and Rahu Saddle area; our French-Canadian receptionist suggests the Lewis Tops track. It’s a three-hour round trip through beech forest that opens up at the top of the pass, with incredible views of the surrounding mountains.

Just ten minutes’ drive past Maruia Springs on the road to Springs Junction is the turnoff for Lake Daniells Track. We once brought a brood of children for a weekend walk in the forest and still giggle at their initiation into the joys of shared tramping accommodation in the Manson Nicholls Memorial Hut. The lake is shallow and the water warm enough for summer swimming. There are also some hapless trout for the committed fishermen, which the boys tried hard to be.

Leaving Maruia Springs, we head 45 minutes down SH7 to Hanmer Springs. While Maruia Springs, with zero cellphone coverage, is definitely a retreat from life’s insanity, Hanmer Springs is all about diving right in. The winding road over the historic, rickety Waiau Ferry Bridge and through quiet tree-lined roads with spectacular views of the Waiau River belies the intensity of the fast-growing town.

There is something to do, and someone doing something, everywhere we look. There is a queue to bungee jump off the Ferry Bridge, and on the
Champagne Flat below the bridge people are clambering out of a jetboat, wobbly from the adrenaline-pumping ride. A couple of mountain bikers pass us, mud-splattered and grinning.

Once a staple of the landscape, the only horses left now are those of the Hanmer Horse Trekking crew. The trek through a river, past a waterfall and to the top of the hills was recommended to us, but when we phone to arrange it, we learn the first space, even though school holidays are over, is next week.

So we join the day-trippers who, with no place to be, amble through the forests that surround Hanmer. It’s beautiful now, but at the turn of last century the area was barren and windswept. The Department of Forestry decided to plant exotic forests and by 1903 more than 97,000 trees had been put in. As they weren’t sure what would grow, they tried various species from around the world. Corsican and Austrian pines rub branches with oaks and silver birch, while Norway spruce and ponderosa pine provide the green in amongst the autumn golds and reds.

It is still light and too early for dinner, so we grab some putters and venture onto the Alpine Crazy Putt. Crazy may be too kind a word. The course has been rebuilt recently and the putting greens are imaginative, to say the least!

We catch the last of the fading sun with a glass of wine and a plate of tender crumbed calamari at Rustic Café and Tapas bar.

Just reading the brochures I’ve collected is exhausting. I’m exhorted to go bungee jumping, jet boating, clay bird shooting, quad biking, golfing, or even taking up archery. But the hot pools are still the highlight of any trip to Hanmer. And they’ve come a long way since they opened in 1894 as sedate bath houses for people to ‘take the waters’; today, the village has 11 spas. There’s an array of wonderfully indulgent treatments on offer, including warm oil massages, hot stone therapy and quantum healing touch. I opt for the Coffee Bean Exfoliation and emerge softened and languid.

Over a cup of tea, Rosemary Ensor, retired teacher and author of Hanmer’s 1983 centenary book, says even as more and more houses are built here, the town manages to stay magical. “It’s just special,” she says. A favourite story of Rosemary’s is of pioneer Bill Fowler who was born in the area in 1872. He lived all his life here and died aged 72 – literally in the saddle. His horse took him home. “Bill just never wanted to leave.”

I get it. After breathing in the fresh alpine air, languishing with a wine distilled from nearby vineyards, surrounded by views of snowy mountains and forests, and softened by the thermal pools, nobody wants to go home.

**Visitor information**

**ON THE ROAD**

Hanmer Springs is 135km from Christchurch and Maruia Hot Springs is 78km from there.

The 450km Alpine Pacific Touring Route runs between Christchurch, Kaikoura and Hanmer Springs, through to Waipara Valley in North Canterbury. It’s promoted as a multi-day road trip to encourage visitors to put Kaikoura back on the itinerary.

Travellers should consider stopping for supplies in Waipara Valley for locally produced wine, cheese, olives and honey. All this and more can be bought at the famously good Waipara Valley Farmers’ Market held in Amberley every Saturday morning.

**GET SWINGING**

Hanmer Springs Golf Club has some of North Canterbury’s most spectacular views. It’s open to visitors, green fee players and groups and is suitable for all ages and abilities.

**STAY**

There are many options of places to stay in Hanmer Springs. See aatraveller.co.nz for choices.
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MORE HOT WATER

Heading for hot springs is a brilliant wintertime day trip option. Luckily, New Zealand is loaded with geothermal activity. In the North Island, Rotorua and Taupo are well-known for their pools, but there are many other hot spots worth taking a drive to experience.

1. Waiariki Pools, Ngawha Springs
Ngawha Springs has two hot pool complexes next to each other. Between them are several unfiltered pools of varying temperatures. They’re basic, very natural, without much in the way of fancy extras and provide a gentle adventure as well as the therapeutic benefits of soaking in mineral-rich spring water.

2. Waiwera Thermal Mineral Pools, Auckland
About 50 minutes’ drive north of Auckland, this seaside spot has a complex of outdoor and undercover natural, geothermal pools. There are hydroslides and a ‘movie pool’, both super popular with children; the private pools and a spa area offer respite for adults. An on-site café serves wedges and ice cream, perfect fodder for hungry swimmers taking a break before they head back in for another soak.

3. The Lost Spring, Whitianga
With waterfalls running from pool to pool, tropical gardens, magical cave-like landscaping, poolside dining and high-end spa treatments, The Lost Spring provides an indulgent experience for adults seeking a dose of serious relaxation and rejuvenation.

4. Miranda Hot Springs, Thames
Miranda’s pools are classic, old-school and popular with local farming families as well as travellers to and from the Coromandel Peninsula by the back road. It has one big outdoor pool and a small, hot, adults-only undercover pool, picnic and barbeque set-ups and a camping ground next door.

5. Mount Hot Pools, Mount Maunganui
You’ll be greeted with families having a blast in the three large, salt water pools, perfect for those with young children. There are two spas and three private pools, if a more relaxed experience is what you’re after. The pools are located in central Mt Maunganui, right below the mountain.

6. Waingaro Hot Springs, Waikato
New Zealand’s longest waterslide tumbles down a hillside into one of several pools; a picnic area adds to the family appeal of this complex. If you’re in the mood to simply soak, there is plenty of space for that, too. These springs are tucked in a valley in the Waingaro hills, about 20kms west of Ngaruaawhia.

7. Opal Hot Springs, Matamata
Two pools within a holiday park make this popular with families. The larger pool has a slide for the kids; the smaller, hotter pool is set right next to it so parents can take up a relaxed soaking position to watch on. There is also a private, even hotter pool in a romantic, scenic setting away from the main pools.

8. Oropi Hot Pools, Bay of Plenty
With an open-roof, private pool ideal for star gazing, this is the spa to visit once the sun has set. For family fun, there’s a larger pool to enjoy, as well as an on-site café and barbeque hire. If you’re keen to stay over, a campground is available for tents and caravans.

9. Tokaanu Thermal Pools, Turangi
The thermal waters of Tokaanu, on the southern edge of Lake Taupo, have been appreciated for generations for their healing qualities. Today the old-school complex consists of a large open-air pool and several private pools.

10. Morere Hot Springs, Gisborne
The setting of these pools is what makes them extra-special. Both the large outdoor pools and the smaller, hotter pools, hidden at the end of a short bush trail, are surrounded by mature rainforest. Bathers soak to the sound of birdsong.
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BECAUSE I AM RIDICULOUS I’m keeping my eyes peeled for bears. Every 30 seconds I ring my bicycle’s dinky bell and then look wildly around. Ben, our local tour guide, has instructed us to chat loudly and occasionally ding-ding our bells.

This is because the worst thing we could do is to come whizzing silently around a corner and surprise a bear. If a bear hears us coming, the logic goes, he’ll scamper away before our paths cross.

“So keep ringing those dinner bells,” Ben says with a grin.

We’re in the ski resort town of Banff, cycling through an incredibly lovely, albeit bear-infested, lakeside forest.

“It’s not bears you really have to be worried about,” Ben shouts as we cycle along. “It’s cougars. You’ll see the bears, but a cougar… you won’t even know it’s there until it’s on you.”

Ding-ding.

The day before, I’d really wanted to see a bear - but that was because I was safely ensconced in a glass-domed carriage on the Rocky Mountaineer.

I’d boarded this luxurious train in Vancouver and spent two days choo-choo-ing my way through Canada’s majestic Rockies before arriving in Banff.

We’d been told bear sightings were not uncommon along the route and there was a very simple system in place to ensure we didn’t miss seeing a bear if one happened to meander by the tracks: they’d tell us.

While the journey regularly tops ‘best in the world’ lists it does take a little while to get to the good stuff.

When you board there is much fanfare; a pianist tickling ivories at the station, a bagpiper pa-rumping outside, champagne fizzing at your seat and, finally, as the train pulls out, a farewell wave from the entire Rocky Mountaineer organisation who gathers en masse beside the tracks as you leave.

It’s a grand exit and gives the trip a real sense of occasion so it’s a shame the first couple of hours are spent chugging »
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through Vancouver’s industrial estates and uninspiring plains. It’s the scenic equivalent of eating your Brussels sprouts before being allowed dessert.

In my travel pack – as opposed to my luggage, which is currently on its own less glamorous adventure where it will meet me at my hotels each evening – is a book I’ve been meaning to read for a long time. I thought this would be a fine time to finally get through it, but I quickly make the decision to leave it in there. This is considered a ‘bucket list’ trip and I don’t want to miss any of it.

The carriages on the Rocky Mountaineer have glass roofs. A see-through roof may not sound like a big deal, but it really is a game changer. Because you can see the sky, you never feel locked in. It also soaks the carriage in light and saturates you in scenery. It’s a brilliant innovation.

There’s a romance to this style of travel, with its gentle rhythm, the click-clack of the tracks, the ever-changing backgrounds. It’s relaxing and tranquil. I’m perfectly willing to concede that anything less than Gold Leaf class, with plush recliners and seat service, wouldn’t have quite the same romance attached to it.

The first notable spot we pass is Hell’s Gate. This gorge on the twisty-turny Fraser River, reportedly almost 180m deep, pushes 200 million gallons of water through a 38m pinch point every minute. It’s foaming and frothy and leaves no doubt that the spot has been named accurately.

We pass through pastures and past grassy mountains that remind me of home. The train regularly slows down at picturesque spots and never seems to break a sweat, even when there’s nothing to see. I’m told the speed is restricted due to the unique double-decker carriages.

We’re on the top floor, underneath is the dining cart which handles two seatings of two services. The food is absolutely delicious and I’m not ashamed to admit that I order two mains (eggs and pancakes) for breakfast. For lunch I gobble down a world-class burger, topped off with homemade chilli sauce from the chef’s personal stash.

Our carriage has four lovely hosts who are excellent storytellers. They regularly jump on the mic to explain the history behind what we are chugging past, direct us to points of interest (such as a 100-year-old osprey nest perched atop a telegraph pole) or reveal some titbit of trivia. This kind of thing can veer into a droning, boring lecture, but these people are engaging and fun.

We pull into Kamloops nine hours later. If you haven’t heard of this town, there’s a reason: it’s small and nondescript. We board the Rocky Mountaineer very early the next day for an 11-hour, 420km haul to Banff. This is the more spectacular part of the journey and why we were all here; we’re entering the territory of the snow-topped Rockies.

There are abundant photo opportunities along the way so I regularly pop down to the open-air area at the back of the carriage. This spot offers the best, unobstructed views and the brisk mountain air snaps away my drowsiness.

As we wind our way around and sometimes through the Rockies, it’s a gentle journey, an unwinding style of travel that I find soothing and calming, with what must surely be some of the world’s best scenery and a decent dose of genuine luxury.

Rocky Mountaineer is the world’s largest privately owned luxury tourist train. Guests can choose from four routes – see rockmountaineer.com for more.

Before you go make sure you’re covered. Visit aa.co.nz/travel/insurance
Memories of the Mekong Delta linger: bicycles tracking over small humpy bridges; silhouetted figures wearing conical hats, manoeuvring their boats with long poles; men naked from the waist up working rich, brown earth; a lunch table in the jungle, laden with multiple exotic dishes - rice paper parcels, crisp fish, banana flowers; classic Vietnamese images, seared into my mind.

At the edge of a tributary, a brick-works is busy with the production of small clay oblongs made from the mud of rice fields. A muscular young man shovels mud into a machine that churns and forms and delivers a sinewy snake of clay; a strong woman cuts evenly, expertly, and stacks. Other family members carry the new bricks into sunshine to dry for a week before they’re set in hive-like kilns to cook for three weeks. Rice husks are used for the firing and, having become ash with cooking, sold back to rice farmers as fertiliser.

The Delta is famously fertile. Three crops of rice can be grown each year; elsewhere it’s typically one. Fish farming is big business and exportable agricultural produce thrives in the stable climate, in soil rich from silt from the long Mekong which starts its journey to the ocean in Tibet. Through China, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Cambodia the river runs, carrying good fortune to the nine branches at its Vietnamese end. Local people are said to be the most relaxed in the country, as they don’t have to worry about tomorrow.

But it’s not taken for granted. Nothing goes to waste. Like the brick operation, a coconut factory we visit is a model of super efficiency. Women, many with their children playing nearby, sort a huge pile of coconuts into shell for charcoal, husks for mats, white meat for toasting and milk for caramelising on-site, where sweets, soaps, oils, jewellery and trinkets are also made. Scraps go to the chickens.
With something like 1,000 kms of canals around the delta, business is done by water and it’s also the best way to see the area. We board long, flat boats and float past intriguing domestic scenes – houses with lush, colourful gardens and rickety wharves poking into the waterways – then step off to walk leafy rural roads fringed with palms and water gardens. Nosy, we stop at a mat workshop and watch women weaving wedge, one on the loom opening the warp, another sliding the weft through.

Tourists on bikes stop to ask directions to the brickworks but actually, it’s impossible to describe. A guided tour is pretty much essential here. It reveals a lot more than could be found by someone new to the place and without the language, not to mention the logistics of hiring boats and tuk-tuks, and knowing which paths to walk down.

Our guide takes us to an orchard to taste spotty-fleshed dragonfruit, rambutan and jackfruit. We sit in the courtyard of the hosts’ home and peek through an open door at their life. A child sleeps on a wooden platform in the cool; an antique table displays family photos and certificates under glass. Sips of jasmine tea revive us.

And then to lunch in the middle of a garden in a tiny, hidden village: fish wrapped with salad in rice paper, prawns with salty dips, fried sticky rice cake...
delivered as a giant, glorious puffball that is deflated on arrival with a sharp stab. Tamarind, fish sauce, coconut juice, lemon grass: such evocative scents are also loaded into my memory bank.

Having gained so much from a guided tour of the Mekong Delta, we decided on a guided tour of Ho Chi Minh City (or Saigon), too. A Street Eats tour of the city at night revealed a menu we would never have experienced without help: famously good baguettes, clams in broth, grilled oysters with peanuts on fried rice, rice paper grills with egg, cheese and squid for the equivalent of about NZ$1. This was served at a pop-up restaurant on a footpath outside Saigon Ford. Staff took orders, stuffed notes into pockets, cut the food at plastic tables with scissors. Quick, quick, next please.

Next stop, grilled octopus with salty sauces, banana fried with coconut. Buzzy, busy street scenes in the deep heart of the city, which we could never have discovered without a local.

The next day, the same guide showed us around his town, past City Hall, past Notre-Dame Cathedral to the post office to meet an 86-year-old public writer who looks after correspondence for those who struggle with words. We saw the CIA apartment made famous with the photo of people clambering from its roof into a helicopter when Saigon fell in 1975. The photo was taken from Caravelle Hotel, a beautiful grand dame of a place, right in the centre of modern action, too.

We called into the public Fine Art Gallery, then walked down Antique Street (where some less-than-antiques are also sold) then to the massive, overwhelming Ben Thanh markets.

North of Ho Chi Minh by a short flight is Hoi An, a low-key coastal holiday spot recommended as an antidote to the busy-city experience. Hoi An is romantic, with its old stone harbour full of traditional lines and poetic shapes, its lanterns and lights, and its bright flame trees, frangipani and bougainvillea shimmering in the heat.

It’s an early-start-to-the-day sort of place. We quickly found a rhythm of rising early, walking around the old town or venturing to the outskirts, before scuttling back to Almanity Resort for a swim in the pool. Later, once the heat had subsided, we’d go back into Hoi An’s centre and join the general throng.

Tourists know about Hoi An’s tailors and shoe makers; the old quarter is lined with their stores, but the samples of woollen coats and winter suits made me prickle, even from a distance.
I was drawn, moth-like, to the bright, silk lanterns, but there were too many colours, patterns, sizes, shapes to choose from. We wandered, back and forth and in-between, finally stopping to recharge with a strong, sweet coffee at a café that was once a family’s home. Up steep, narrow stairs we climbed, to the roof garden, to look down on the neighbourhood’s yin-yang slate-tiled roofs and down into narrow cobbled alleyways, busy with laden bicycles.

One morning, we boarded a boat to visit Thanh Ha pottery village, where family businesses spilled into courtyards, artists worked clay in the shade and elders manned stalls selling pots, bowls, vases, spoons, animal-shaped trinkets. At one workshop an ancient, bent-over woman showed tourists how to throw a pot, while her granddaughter kept the wheel turning with the kick of her foot.

One evening we were treated to dinner on a raft anchored at a corner of the river, with luminous green rice fields all around us. The sky was a riot of storm cloud, lit to look like a giant bruise by the sinking sun. Fish jumped, lamps sparkled prettily and we sat, in peace, a quiet breeze providing relief while we ate multiple courses of Vietnamese deliciousness.

We toasted our last night in this beautiful, exotic part of the world, collecting final memories to carry home.

A word of thanks

On the way to Vietnam, our stopover in Hong Kong turned challenging as a typhoon closed the airport soon after we landed. The super-convenient Regal Airport Hotel accommodated us and helped with the business of rescheduling flights.

On the way home, we waited for our connecting flight from Hong Kong in one of Cathay Pacific’s four business lounges. We settled into luxuriously comfortable seats with views over the runway and logged into the free WiFi as other happy travellers took advantage of the noodle bar, bakery, tea house and drinks bar.

The writer travelled courtesy of World Journeys and Cathay Pacific. See cathaypacific.co.nz for more.
NO SOONER HAD I sat in my canoe, beached on the grassy edge of Australia’s Margaret River than I was told to get out again, quickly.

Confused, I do.
A black flash darts across the bottom of the canoe. My guide Sean scoops up the huntsman spider, returning it to the bush.

“You can get back in now,” he says.

I make my way down from the bank I’ve clambered up, take the paddle and manoeuvre onto the water; heart racing from my close encounter with the rather large creepy crawly. But soon, the tranquil surrounds soothe me and I’m calmed by nature.

I’ve joined a tour with Margaret River Discovery Company, led by owner Sean Blockidge, across some of the region’s most beautiful and remote parts. Today brings the windiest weather seen in eight years which makes it a workout on the water. Wildlife appear shaken up; we see a pair of Baudin’s black cockatoos flee billowing eucalyptus treetops. “Rarer than polar bears,” Sean says. “They could well be extinct in our lifetime, yet years ago they would blacken the sky with their numbers.”

MONICA TISCHLER EXPLORES MARGARET RIVER IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA.

Caves, canoes & creepy crawlies
Sean estimates these particular creatures are about 50 years old, so I feel lucky to have spotted them. They certainly would have witnessed the phenomenal growth here. Despite now being famous for producing world-class wines, the area wasn’t well-known until the 1980s when local winery, Cape Mentelle, won a prestigious wine trophy. It put the region on the map.

We stop at Fraser Gallop Estate for lunch, grazing on local produce set up banquet style in the barrel room, the scent of fermented fruit in the cool air. Kiwi-born Australian wine maker of the year, Clive Otto, chats about the upcoming vintage. He says the light rainfall is welcomed, but not if it steadies, as excess water dilutes flavours. That night, I lie awake listening to the drops become faster and heavier on the rooftop of Cape Lodge, hoping it won’t affect the wineries. I can almost hear them breathe a sigh of relief when the following morning dawns clear.

The Margaret River region seems to have it all: vast beaches perfect for surfing, mild weather great for grape growing, and, driving south through Boranup Forest, plenty of nature for adventure. Roads are lined with towering jarra and marri trees, rows of ripening grapes, and signs cautioning drivers about kangaroos. This area is home to some fascinating geological formations too, including Lake, Jewel and Mammoth Caves.

Climbing the steps down to Lake Cave, I’m struck by how old this beauty is: the entrance was discovered by a local girl looking for cattle in 1867, though it took another 30 years for the cave to be fully explored. The underground hollow was caused by rainwater seeping into the limestone rock. Thousands of delicate stalactites and stalagmites adorn the cave ceiling and floor like an old woman dripping in precious jewels.

I make my way back north, stopping at Amelia Park Wines and then at Eagle Bay Brewing Co on Cape

Visitor information

Margaret River is a three-hour drive south of Perth, a city worth exploring.

WANDER
Join a walking tour with Two Feet & a Heartbeat. Local guides have an abundance of knowledge of Perth’s history, heritage, culture and architecture.

STAY
Crown Towers Perth opened in December, boasting expansive lagoon pools and a buffet restaurant, plus it’s close to the city centre and airport.

EAT
Bib & Tucker offers a tasty bite to eat with ocean views. You’ll find it perched atop the Fremantle Surf Lifesaving Club.

GETTING THERE
Qantas has direct flights from Auckland to Perth between November and April, twice weekly. The airline will operate non-stop Perth to London on the 787-9 Dreamliner from March 2018. See qantas.com for prices.

The writer travelled courtesy of Tourism Western Australia. See westernaustralia.com for more.
Naturaliste for a bite to eat. I notice the brewery out the back of the bar and, on enquiry, learn that washing beer kegs is a bar staff’s worst nightmare, so horizontal tanks in the brewery are connected straight to the front-of-house tap. A handy life hack!

Settling in poolside at the nearby Pullman Bunker Bay Resort seems like the easy activity choice for the afternoon, but I’m eager to explore the beautiful coastline. Joining Cape to Cape Explorer Tours with guide Gene Hardy is the best way to do so; Gene shares knowledge about Aboriginal history and geological landforms, as well as good chat. From Sugar Loaf to Bunker Bay, Gene and I talk as though we’re good friends, exchanging stories about family, friends and life’s journeys.

Then I wave goodbye to Gene and make my way up the sandy pathway to the resort for dinner at Other Side of the Moon, indulging in treats from the in-house French pastry chef.

A miniature train sounds its horn; a signal for passengers to board its quaint carriages. It startles the seagulls who squawk across the cloudy sky. Normally calm, the beach is now choppy. The train takes me up the Busselton Jetty, the second longest in the world, which stretches almost two kilometres out to sea. At the end lies a treasure chest submerged amongst the bright coral: an underwater observatory. More than 300 species of marine life, including New Zealand fur seals, have been spotted here. I circle down the underwater concrete cylinder, pressing my nose up to cut-out windows and marveling at fish and pretty tropical coral attached to the jetty pillars.

Back above sea level, I climb back into my rental and continue north along the coast toward Perth, stopping in sunny Mandurah for lunch. Nicknamed Western Australia’s ‘Little Venice,’ restaurants and art galleries line Mandjar Bay. I decide on a seafood lunch overlooking the estuary. The picturesque setting is made even more spectacular by a show of playful bottlenose dolphins dancing in a boat’s wake.

Visit aa.co.nz/travel/insurance to make sure you’re covered before setting off.
AA Driving School Marketing Manager, Mike Cockcroft, loves helping motorists feel safe and confident on the road.

What does your job involve?
A lot of my work is focused on the AA Driving School website and social media; young drivers around 15 to 17 years old are big Facebook users. We need to make sure our online and social media presence is optimised and I work alongside the AA digital team to achieve this. I get excited about the opportunity to work with the younger demographic and use social media to communicate with them. On the other end of the spectrum is the Senior Driver Programme which offers drivers aged 74 years and over a free lesson to help them retain their mobility, freedom and independence. I receive quite a few letters from these Members saying they really appreciate the AA looking out for them.
Have you witnessed any change or growth within AA Driving School?
AA Driving School has grown so much in the two years I’ve worked here, and Fleet and Business is now an important part of what we offer.
We have about 120 driving instructors across the country, some of whom are trained to focus on health and safety in businesses. They tailor driving assessments to an individual worker or company that’s on the road a lot, like a courier driver or salesperson.

What new projects are you working on?
AA Driving School Motorcycle Training was launched last December (see p.54). We offer training and testing for all levels of motorbike licences. At the moment it’s available in selected areas of the Bay of Plenty and Waikato regions. We’re looking to expand it across the country at a later date, which will be exciting.

What do you love most about your job?
Research shows that youth aged between 16 and 25 years are at the highest risk of being involved in a crash causing death or serious injury on our roads. It makes me feel good that the AA is dedicated to helping people, both young and old, to be safe drivers through multiple platforms including our practical lessons, online quizzes and practice tests.

How can we find out more information about what AA Driving School offers?
Head to aa.co.nz/drivers where you’ll find information on learning to drive, booking a driving lesson and improving your driving skills with our road code quizzes and road code practice tests.

Educational play
AA DRIVER’S TOWN at Auckland’s Rainbow’s End theme park gives kids the opportunity to drive tiny Suzuki Swift replicas while navigating their way around miniature two-way roads, traffic lights and roundabouts. The $1.2 million project opened this March and aims to equip children with road safety skills.

AA Members get 20% off a full-price Rainbow’s End Adult Superpass; a saving of $11.80.

SPEND AND SAVE
AA Smartfuel is one of New Zealand’s largest loyalty programmes. Close to $100 million a year stays in the pockets of motorists actively using the scheme.

BUT PROGRAMME
co-founder and director, Ian Sutcliffe, says there is opportunity for Kiwis to save more. “While there’s a high level of engagement from both AA Members and AA Smartfuel cardholders, with just a few tweaks in spending habits, millions of dollars more could be saved,” he says.

“There are many Members and cardholders who regularly accumulate enough value with their discounts to cover the cost of a tank of fuel. Even if they’re not reaching that level, there are plenty more shaving very meaningful amounts off their total fuel bills.”

Ian estimates he’s saved more than $3,500 since the programme began six years ago.

“And that’s not trying hard,” he says.

“It’s about selecting the retailers that offer AA Smartfuel discounts over those that don’t.”

Good discounts can be achieved almost passively with two significant partners, Countdown supermarkets and Contact Energy, added to the line-up six months ago. It comes down to consumer choice; if Members spend with AA Smartfuel partners, they will save at the pump at BP and Caltex petrol stations.

That’s where the art of accumulating discounts comes in, Ian says.

“You can accumulate with everyday spending on groceries, electricity, fuel and plenty of infrequent spending, such as on tyres and pet food. Over a short time, the accumulated discounts really do add up to a meaningful saving at the pump. And after you redeem, you can do it all again. Every month, plenty of AA Smartfuel participants have enough savings to get a free tank of gas,” he says.
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A windscreen is the wallflower of car parts; it usually doesn't cause much trouble and most of us just ignore it.

**WE KNOW IT’S GOOD** for keeping rain out of our eyes and it prevents wind from entering the car, directing it over the top of the vehicle in aerodynamic perfection. But these days, good visibility is just one function of a modern windscreen. It’s becoming so sophisticated; it pays to know a little more about it.

**Modern mechanisms**
A windscreen of a modern car is quite complex. It’s made up of two thin pieces of curved safety glass, bonded with a layer of plastic in between. The plastic holds everything together if the glass is broken.

In the old days, a rubber seal held the glass in place. Now, polyurethane adhesive is used to glue the windscreen to the car, making it part of the structure. Once in place, the strength of the windscreen and the bond contribute to structural safety and ensure airbags deploy properly in the event of a crash, especially on the passenger side.

In a crash, even if the glass shatters, the windscreen is expected to stay in place to prevent anything, particularly people, from being thrown from the car.

**Super tech**
Nearly every new car is a little bit safer than the model before it. Almost every carmaker has cabin integrity nailed. That means that in a crash, occupants inside the car will be as protected as physics allow. Clever design has created ways of absorbing and dispersing energy from a crash so the cabin stays intact, along with making better seatbelts and airbags.

And there is also, now, a strong focus on crash prevention technology, which is where windscreen science comes in. Advanced Driver Assistance Systems, ADAS, is the collective name for features that are working constantly when a high-tech car is in motion. Lane departure warning, lane keep assist, autonomous emergency braking, adaptive cruise control, adaptive headlights and self-parking are just some of the features in many new cars.

These features prevent crashes from happening, often before the driver is even aware one could occur. Many of these systems rely on cameras and sensors fitted to the windshield and they’re all very sensitive. If the windscreen is broken, your ADAS will need fixing as well.

**Insurance options**
So, while ADAS assists with safer driving and crash prevention, when a windscreen is smashed, there’s more to the cost than just replacing the shattered glass.

In the past year, AA Insurance has handled about 3,000 auto glass claims a month: two thirds for windscreens.

Customers with glass cover added to their comprehensive car insurance are covered for the additional cost, which will vary depending on which systems are on board.

If you opt for glass cover, you’ll be sorted for either all or most replacements and repairs. Call your insurer to specify you’d like AA Auto Glass’ mobile service, available in most areas, and the team will take care of you.

If you don’t have glass cover in your insurance policy, AA Members receive a ten per cent discount on mobile windscreen replacements. Members also receive a free temporary replacement for side windows until they can be repaired properly.

See [aa.co.nz/autoglass](http://aa.co.nz/autoglass) or call 0800 300 120 for more.
A licence to drive

Kiwis love to explore. Often our sense of adventure draws us to far-flung places of the globe. And often, discovering these places requires a set of wheels.

In some countries, a current, full New Zealand driver licence is all that motorists need to be legal behind the wheel. But in some places, including Indonesia, Italy, Brazil and the United States of America, overseas visitors need an International Driving Permit, or IDP.

The AA is the only organisation in New Zealand that can issue an IDP. Getting one makes sense; it’s easy and doesn’t cost much.

The document is authorised by the United Nations and is accepted in more than 150 countries when used alongside a valid New Zealand driver licence.

An IDP essentially endorses the validity of your New Zealand driver licence and provides translations in eight languages that explain which classes of vehicle you’re permitted to drive.

Rules can vary from country to country and can also change, but typically visitors can use an IDP alongside their New Zealand licence for up to a year.

It’s designed for tourists, so if you’re planning on emigrating or working overseas, contact the local licensing authorities to convert your New Zealand driver licence or discuss what other options are available.

The AA advises overseas travellers to make sure they’re aware of the specific licensing rules in the countries they plan to drive in, alongside familiarity with the road rules.

Call into your nearest AA Centre or AA Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agent to get an IDP. It costs $20 and you’ll need a current New Zealand driver licence and a recent passport-sized photo. Alternatively, one can be applied for and issued by post or online. Go to aa.co.nz/idp for more information. If you don’t have a passport photo, one can be taken at an AA Centre.

Explore great spots this winter

Winter is often met with mixed emotions. Some may opt to retreat to the couch while others relish in the fact the long-awaited ski season is here and they can hit the slopes.

AA Traveller’s Great Spot Specials campaign encourages Kiwis to embrace the cooler weather and enjoy the outdoors.

AA Traveller Marketing Manager, Rhys James, says there’s an abundance of winter activities for New Zealanders to enjoy, like skiing, snowboarding, walking, biking, or simply rugging up warm and visiting a new place.

“Few of us can truly say we’ve explored our own country. The Great Spots Specials campaign enables us to get out there and check out some of the parts of New Zealand we’ve never seen.”

Drawing tourism operators and accommodation providers together, the campaign offers more than a million AA Members discounts and deals in some of New Zealand’s best spots.

“Every month we’ll be showcasing different areas around New Zealand and highlighting the activities that make those areas special,” Rhys says.

Deals in Marlborough throughout July and August include:

• Children travel free on Mail Boat Cruise.
• Stay two nights at Kippilaw House, receive a private gourmet breakfast and two-course dinner.
• 20% off Jade Wine Tours.
• Book two nights at Smiths Farm Holiday Park, receive a third night free.

See aa.co.nz/greatspot for more.

Great Spot Specials campaign encourages Kiwis to embrace the cooler weather and enjoy the outdoors.
Why insure your travels?

It can start with a coral cut, a burn from a scooter exhaust pipe, an ear infection or a tropical fever. These things may be relatively simple to sort out while at home but overseas, travellers can face big bills to get themselves patched up, or well enough to travel again.

As Winter Bites, the Pacific Islands become a warm respite for many New Zealanders. And while AA Members are generally responsible travellers, inclined to take out insurance for long-haul trips, they are less likely to insure holidays closer to home. That can be an expensive omission.

Will Ashcroft of Allianz Global Assistance, a partner of AA Travel Insurance, says medical facilities in the Pacific Islands are not necessarily up to the standard of New Zealand ones and that fact alone should inspire travellers to take insurance.

“It doesn’t cost much to get travel insurance for holidays in the Pacific Islands. People think they don’t need it, but if they get into strife and the local medical facilities can’t provide the necessary care, they can end up with a $50,000 medical and evacuation bill.”

AA Travel Insurance repatriates more clients from the Pacific Islands than from anywhere else.

“We’re not trying to scare people,” he says, “it just makes sense to have travel insurance.”

Will says all travellers need to consider three fundamentals: the possibility of having to cancel a trip and protecting the investment made; the potential for loss of personal possessions; and medical cover. “You need to cover these three adequately,” he says. “If the value of the booking is $20,000 or $30,000 for a once-in-a-lifetime experience after the kids have left home – which for some reason you have to cancel – well, you want that investment covered.”

The other consideration when shopping for travel insurance is ‘oddities’, for example terrorism cover. If you’re travelling to what is normally considered a low-risk country and you’re caught up in a terrorist attack, AA Travel Insurance will cover medical and repatriation costs if you’re hospitalised, and additional travel costs if your travel is disrupted as a direct result of the terrorist attack.

“Not all travel insurers have this included in their policies, but we’ve noticed that these concerns are affecting travel plans these days.”

It is also worth disclosing pre-existing medical conditions, Will says. If you do disclose one while you’re arranging insurance online, you’ll be asked to complete a phone assessment to determine whether you’ll be covered or not.

Choose well

• Ensure the policy covers what you actually need.
• Read the wording before you travel so as not to get caught out, for example, if belongings are stolen while unattended, they won’t be covered.
• Keep copies of your travel insurance policy in your hand luggage.
• Go with a reputable brand with good service. Through Allianz Global Assistance, AA Travel Insurance provides a 24/7 medical and emergency assistance helpline.
• As long as they are named on the policy certificate, dependents are also covered by AA Travel Insurance. Children and grandchildren aged up to 21 are included, without additional charge, in the policy.
• AA Members receive a ten per cent discount.

AA Travel Insurance can be arranged at an AA Centre, online at aatravelinsurance.co.nz or over the phone on 0800 500 444.
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