

## New Zealand on Two Wheels...

Most of us have undertaken a tour of some sort on a motorbike whether it's a couple of days with your mates somewhere for the weekend, or a couple of weeks around the country. For motorcyclists more often than not it's the journey which is more interesting than the destination. How many of you though, have shipped your bikes to a pre-determined destination, ridden for a few weeks and then shipped them back home again? One or two I'm sure, but an increasing number of motorcyclists are doing just that to experience motorcycling in New Zealand, or taking the easier option and renting a motorcycle on arrival in 'The Land of the Long White Cloud' to commence their touring experience.

For many New Zealand is the land of sheep and the mighty All Blacks rugby team, but for those in the know NZ also represents motorcycling nirvana. New Zealand is roughly the same size as the US state of Colorado, or slightly larger than the Aust state of Victoria— big enough to see plenty of varying terrain and small enough not to have daunting distances. Both the North and South Islands are roughly of similar size and there are regular inter island car-ferry (similar in size to the English Channel car-ferrys) sailings traversing the three hour journey of Cook Strait. Foreign motorcyclists are always pleasantly surprised how readily kiwi motorcyclists return a wave, or to receive help from fellow motorcyclists if they involved in a breakdown on the side of the road.

If you have ever considered motorcycling in New Zealand, you will be in for a treat. The North Island has the volcanic activity, great beaches with many awe inspiring coastal roads, whilst the South Island has the majestic mountains, sweeping forests and relatively uncongested roads and wide open spaces. If one is pushed for time, two weeks motorcycling can adequately cover the major points of interest throughout New Zealand. Summer is the main touring season from November through to March, and indeed in the month of February both islands are jam-packed with touring motorcyclists. Highways in New Zealand are classified by a State Highway (SH) numbering system and virtually all are tar-sealed. Many of New Zealand rural tar-seal roads are undulating and windy, so it is relatively easy to approach a corner with too much speed. South Islands roads are of a better quality tar-seal than the North Island roads due to a ready supply of river shingle for seal chip. Whilst there are thousands of kilometres of gravel roads in the rural parts of New Zealand, nearly all arterial roads are tar-seal, though in the more remote areas motorcyclists do have to pay attention to the locality of fuel stations – petrol is currently (Nov 2012) about \$NZ2.10/litre. Also to factor in are many one-lane bridges throughout the country, and each bridge with their own give way protocol which can easily catch out an unsuspecting motorist. The maximum speed limit in New Zealand is 100kmh (62mph) and usually 50kmh in urban areas - speed cameras and traffic police are a common sight on kiwi roads. There is an instant 28 day loss of your drivers licence if caught exceeding 140kmh, and a demerit points system is in place for other lesser infringements. Earlier this year New Zealand changed its right hand turn give-way (yield) road rule of the past 35years, to that of the commonwealth international community which brings the right hand turn rule in line with Australia and the UK.

Three recognized *must rides routes* within the New Zealand motorcycling community for the North Island both starting from Auckland are: the 1000km Northland three day loop and the four day 1200km Round East Cape Run. The third candidate is the Volcanic Plateau 250km day ride loop from Taupo passing the three central North Island volcanoes of Mount Tongariro, Ngauruhoe and Ruapehu. For the South Island the *must ride routes* are the world rating 120km State Highway 94 - The Milford Sound Road- which is hard to beat with majestic mountains and alpine scenery, along with SH6 which goes the length of the South Island and includes the remote Westland coastal forests and accessible glaciers. If your looking for New Zealand's motorcycling festival calendar show-piece then the four day Burt Munro Challenge held in mid November will be for you (Munro was a kiwi Bonneville Salt Flats motorbike speed king from the 1960s). The Burt Munro Challenge is a four day festival of all sorts of motorcycle racing located at the southern most city of Invercargill. One thing you can not escape in New Zealand is the drizzle and/or rain and even if your planning to ride in the height of summer expect to encounter wet weather at some point of your motorcycle vacation. Temperatures in the mountainous areas particularly in the South Island can drop very

quickly, - even in summer - within twenty minutes, so it is not uncommon for riders to suffer from mild hypothermia if under prepared. It always surprises me that when kiwi motorcyclists regale their bike yarns from yester-year they always seem to remember the rides that involved inclement weather.

New Zealand is one of the few countries in the world where Suzuki is regularly the annual top selling motorcycle marque, and with Honda second, they both have dealerships in nearly all the provincial main centres of the country, should any problems be encountered. Nearly all of the other leading marques too, all have dealerships dotted around the country should mechanical problems arise. Failing to plan is planning to fail, however having said that, New Zealand is an easy country to 'wing it' and to motorcycle tour on a day to day basis. Just like having your first drink after a long day's riding, motorcycle touring in New Zealand - 'The Land of the Long White Cloud' - is an experience to savour.

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