



Anyone who tackles the Queen Charlotte Track would agree that it's one of Aotearoa/New Zealand's best-kept secrets. The classic one-way, inn to inn walk over 4 or 5 days allows you to walk between lodges covering 70km of the stunning coastal scenery across the Marlborough Sounds – without the need to pitch a tent or carry more than a daypack. Oh, and lunch is made for you each day as well!

If you are new to multi-day walking, or just not into carrying your bed, kitchen and house on your back – the Queen Charlotte Track offers lodge to lodge walking with a bit of challenge but plenty of comforts.



*Not too shabby huh? Your reward at the end of your walk.*

## The length of the track

The 70km track can be covered in 4 days but with the final 2 days offering walks of 25km and 20km consecutively. Staying an extra night and including a rest day for your 4<sup>th</sup> day is not a bad way to break up the walk.

Especially as you are staying on the Sounds, which offer stunning views, sunsets, and options for water activities in the warmer months.



*Turquoise waters and lush greenery, in other words – a hiker's dream!*

## Is it a self-guided or guided track?

You can walk this track guided or self-guided, as it's not a track where you can get lost easily. It's a bit of an adventure to get to the start, as you take a water taxi from Waitohi/Picton (Te Waipounamu/South Island) to the trailhead at Meretoto/Ship Cove.

On the one hour journey, you may be treated to the sight of some local marine life – we were lucky enough to spot some dolphins, but you may also get to see whales!

Meretoto/Ship Cove is a stunning little place to explore before setting off. It's not hard to see why James Cook stopped there many times in the 1700s. The inlet is sheltered, peaceful and now has interpretive signage explaining the visits and Maori heritage in the area.



*This track is easy enough without a guide, but it's totally up to you.*

## How easy is the Queen Charlotte Walk?

The walk begins steeply out of the inlet up through rainforest and ferns with a bit of mud thrown in for good measure. Mountain bikers are also able to ride the track at certain times of the year, so you might meet a few 2-wheelers along the way.

I'm not going to paint this walk as being easy, as it's rated moderately challenging by NZ's Department of Conservation. It definitely has its challenges as the coastline isn't flat. But, what you are rewarded with are some of the most amazing views of the Tōtaranui/Queen Charlotte Sounds. In my opinion, this area really gives the Fiordland region a run for its money – plus with the added benefit of fewer sand flies as well.

When you book your self-guided walk through a local operator, such as Marlborough Sounds



Adventure Company, you will get a packed lunch to see you through and there are a few nice spots to stop for lunch on day one. My favourite places for a lunch break are Schoolhouse Bay/Resolution Bay. But, just watch out for the pesky Weka birds – they know the sound of a brown paper lunch bag from a distance!



*Walking through the rainforest on the first day of the hike.*

## Day 1

The first day is around 14km and it's a welcome sight to see the rolling lawns of Furneaux Lodge in the distance before you reach your first night of accommodation. This Lodge has a bit of history to it and a cosy pub atmosphere. The Furneaux also has an open fire to relax by and stunning à la carte or bar meals for dinner.

Accommodation is spread over the property and has plenty of windows and sitting areas facing the clear waters. It really is a beautiful introduction to the lodge lifestyle.

Your luggage will be in your room when you arrive and all you need to do is pop it outside again the following morning by 9 am so it can be transported to your next stop – Punga Cove Resort.



*After a long day, you can sit down to a delicious à la carte meal at the Furneaux Lodge.*

## Day 2

You can take your time on Day 2 as there is just 12km of easier walking and you might arrive a bit early for Punga Cove to be ready for you. There are a few side trips you can choose though to fill in some time along the way.

There is a waterfall track behind Furneaux Lodge that is un-maintained, but worth it if you like bush scrambling and a creek crossing. After big rains, this track can be slippery though so keep that in mind. There is also an old antimony mine at the top of Endeavour Inlet for those keen to step back in time.

Otherwise, the key for this second day is to go at a leisurely pace. Choose a beautiful spot for lunch along the walk, and by the time you arrive at Punga, you can enjoy a drink at the bar by the pier before checking into your accommodation.

Punga Cove is set into the steep side of a hill that makes walking around this property a challenge – especially after a few drinks! The main dining restaurant is up at the top of the hill, so the pier is a perfect place to enjoy a waterside sundowner before heading up the hill to dinner!



*Crossing over the suspension bridge on the second day of the walk.*

## Day 3

The third day is a big one – around 8 hours or so. It involves 25km of walking and lots of uphill to begin with. You don't want to miss the best views of the day (and the track!) by skipping Eatwell's Lookout, as it's worth the steep-ish climb. It has 360-degree views of the



Sounds – just gorgeous!

The walk takes most of the day to complete, so it's a good idea to stop for an early lunch at Bay of Many Coves Shelter or Manuka Lane. This stop will also allow you to take in the aquamarine views of Kenepuru Sound. This walk shows both sides of the Sounds (Queen Charlotte and Kenepuru) so you are rewarded with views that make the day an absolutely stunning one!

Most walkers will stay at Portage Resort but there is also the option of taking a pre-booked water taxi to Lochmara Lodge (which means reaching Torea Bay by a certain time and keeping a pace). Lochmara Lodge is a great little eco-friendly property with plenty of nature-based activities to keep you occupied on a rest day. Or you can choose from their many hammocks to laze and relax in!

Having stayed at both places, they each offer something different. Whatever you choose, the backdrop is either the Kenepuru Sound at Portage or Tōtaranui/Queen Charlotte Sound at Lochmara Lodge – and both are just divine! Sitting back with a sundowner or coffee with those kinds of views make it really hard to pack up and leave...



*Stopping at the Eastwell Lookout on the third day of the walk.*

## The final day

With only 1 day left to walk, don't be fooled into thinking that it'll be an easy final day. The last day is actually a 20km push to the finish line which is a sleepy fishing village called Anakiwa. Most walkers are booked on the 3 or 4 pm water taxi back to Waitohi/Picton, which gives you a deadline for when and where you need to be.

This final day is also a continuation of the amazing views in both Sounds. You get to see more lookouts, lush green ferns and beech forest that contrast with the azure blue ocean. Photos do not do this final day justice.

Depending on the time of year you walk, you might be lucky to see the amazing fungi along the way, with April being one of the best months for fungi spotting. We allowed 7 hours for the final day with a stop for lunch near a grassy field overlooking the Tōtaranui/Queen Charlotte Sound.

If you go in the peak holiday season (October to early May) or on a long weekend, there is a green caravan that offers barista made coffee at the finish line, before you step aboard the water taxi back to Waitohi/Picton.



*The last day isn't the easiest of the lot, but it's well worth it for the views!*

## Camping vs Lodging

You could carry a pack and camp along this track, but after the first day (or rather, first shower) you kind of have to ask yourself, why would you? The lodges and water taxi services make this experience seamless, unique, and well, really comfortable. While it is a 72km hike, you will still earn that shower at the end of the day.

If you are new to multi-day walking, or you want to avoid injury on longer days – there is the option of taking a water taxi to the next lodge. Taxis are easy to book, so all you have to do is



pay a small fare before you set off for the day.

Taking a taxi is like a backup plan of sorts and is perfect for couples who don't walk together. The non-walking person can take the water taxi and meet their walking partner later at the next lodge.

## Booking the Queen Charlotte walk

The best time of year to do this walk is in the warmer months. Though if you go in February, it actually can get quite warm for walking (by NZ standards!). Autumn months are stunning for fungi and Spring can also be lovely, noting that rain can really fall any time of year. The Lodges reduce their staffing and some services in the winter months but the track is open year-round.

Booking the Queen Charlotte walk is really easy. There are a few operators that offer independent lodge to lodge packages to include luggage transfers and packed lunches. Or you can book a guide and join a group on selected dates.

Big Heart Adventures are a family-owned, Aussie based walking company that offer guided tours along the Queen Charlotte Track, however, due to the current uncertainty surrounding international travel, they won't be hosting these tours until 2022. They can assist with self-guided tour arrangements though and have an info night next month for anyone interested. Click [here](#) for details.

This blog was originally shared in mid-2017 but has been updated with information and links relevant to 2021. Current alerts for the Queen Charlotte Track can be found [here](#) and the latest Australian-NZ travel bubble information can be read [here](#) and [here](#).

***So, when will you make a date with Queen Charlotte?***