

2023

Guide to Living and Working as a Lawyer in New Zealand

Includes:

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Nicholas Scott Legal Services

GUIDE TO LIVING AND WORKING IN NEW ZEALAND

Introduction to New Zealand

With a population of only 4.6 million, the Island of New Zealand comprises of two landmasses, the North Island and the South Island. The North Island is home to Auckland, the biggest city in New Zealand and Wellington, the capital of New Zealand, whilst the South Island is home to the third biggest city, Christchurch. With a vibrant culture and famously beautiful scenery, New Zealand offers a relaxing, outdoors-orientated lifestyle.

New Zealand offers a good quality of life. During the summer months temperatures range from 21 to 32 degrees Celsius. With an array of beaches, lakes and national parks only minutes away from most of the cities, there is plenty to explore. There are however high levels of rain all year round, amounting to approximately 137 rain days a year. During the winter months temperatures range from 1.5 to 15.5 degrees Celsius. The North Island remains relatively mild whilst the South Island suffers the worst of the winter with temperatures reaching as low as -10. The South Island is known for its alpine region and is home to several world class ski fields. A 45-minute flight from Auckland to Queenstown is popular amongst skiers and snowboarders.



The Legal Market

Auckland is the largest legal centre in New Zealand and is home to the major domestic law firms, as well as some international firms. As the economy continues to perform strongly there is an increasing demand for legal services. This continuous growth has however resulted in a shortage of lawyers across New Zealand, meaning that skilled migrants are welcomed. Candidates most sought after are those with three to six years PQE, particularly those practicing corporate or commercial law, including construction, banking and finance, M&As and general transactional work. There is also particular demand for Commercial Property Solicitors in Auckland as recent infrastructure developments are driving many new deals in the city.

The legal market in Wellington is also particularly strong, seeking candidates with anywhere between two and seven years PQE in commercial property and corporate law. This market is particularly dominant for in-house lawyers, the main trend in 2016 saw lawyers moving from private practice to in-house positions. The top firms in New Zealand are Bell Gully, Chapman Tripp, Russell McVeagh, Simpson Grierson, MinterEllisonRuddWatts and DLA Piper New Zealand. These firms have offices in both Auckland and Wellington whilst a few also have offices in Christchurch.

Visas and Relocation



In order to move to New Zealand you will need to obtain a visa. The most relevant visa for a lawyer looking to relocate is a 'Skilled Migrant Visa'.

This is a points based visa based on factors such as age, work experience, qualifications and an offer of skilled employment to determine eligibility. You must be aged 55 and under and must meet the skill level for your occupation. You must also meet the English language, health and character requirements.

With this visa you can live, work and study in New Zealand indefinitely. The visa also includes your partner and dependent children aged 24 and under, in your residence application. Allow at least 6 months processing time for this visa and bear in mind that it can sometimes be longer.

Note: Currently they are only selecting Expressions of Interest submitted (EOIs) with 160 points or above..

Salaries

Below is a table showing the range of salaries on offer in New Zealand. Salaries differ depending on size of firm and location and are usually higher for in-house counsel than those working in private practice. Salaries are slowly increasing due to a demand in legal services however, they are not increasing at the same rate as other industries. On top of salaries, companies sometimes offer other benefits such as gym membership, medical cover, mobile phones and bonuses.

Salaries shown are per annum and are in New Zealand Dollars (NZD)

AUCKLAND PRIVATE PRACTICE SALARIES

PQE	Min NZD \$	Max NZD \$
0-1	50,000	65,000
1	60,000	70,000
2	70,000	80,000
3	80,000	90,000
4	90,000	115,000
Senior Associate	130,000	195,000
Partner (Salaried)	205,000+	
Partner (Equity)	325,000+	

WELLINGTON PRIVATE PRACTICE SALARIES

PQE	Min NZD \$	Max NZD \$
1	55,000	65,000
2	70,000	85,000
3	75,000	95,000
4	90,000	135,000
Senior Associate	140,000	195,000
Partner (Salaried)	205,000	
Partner (Equity)	285,000+	

IN-HOUSE SALARIES

Position	Min NZD \$	Max NZD \$
Legal Counsel	75,000	120,000
Senior Legal Counsel	125,000	180,000
General Counsel	175,000+	

The approximate exchange rate as of July 2021: GBP £1 = NZD \$1.99

Below is a table stating the tax rates for each bracket of taxable income. The tax year runs from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022.

Taxable Income	Tax Rate
0 - \$14,000	10.5%
\$14,001 - \$48,000	17.5%
\$48,001 - \$70,000	30%
\$70,001 - \$180,000	33%
\$180,001	39%

There is also a tax on consumption called Goods and Services Tax (GST). This is a 15% tax added to the price of most goods and services in New Zealand. These can include services such as hairdressing or painting, products such as clothing or takeaway food, experiences such as skiing and professional services such as legal advice.

Requalification

In order to practice in New Zealand, overseas qualified lawyers must register with the New Zealand Law Society. The Law Society will then assess your qualifications and confirm which exams need to be sat in order to qualify to practice.

After Work

Whether you're near Auckland, Wellington or Christchurch there will be something for you to do.

Auckland

Like any major city Auckland has a number of attractions for families and adults to enjoy. In the city there are a host of bars and restaurants on offer, including evening food markets and the Sky Tower's Orbit Restaurant, which offers 360-degree views of the city from 190 metres above the ground. More adventurous activities that you can enjoy at the weekend include a short 25-minute boat trip to the Island of Rangitoto, dolphin and whale safari, sunset kayak tours and bungee jumping from Auckland Harbour Bridge. You can also relax at the nearby beaches and wineries or explore the regional parks which offer hiking and walking routes, mountain bike trials and picnic areas.



Wellington

To explore the host of bars and restaurants in Wellington head to Courtenay place which is said to be the nightlife centre of the city. Alternatively head to Cuba Street, a more bohemian area offering ethnic cuisine, quirky bars and great music venues.

During the weekend you can explore Wellington via the historic red Cable Car and choose to hop off at some of the cities main attractions including, the Cable Car Museum, the Space Place at Carter Observatory, the Botanic Gardens and Zealandia Ecosanctuary. You can also take a boat trip to the Kapiti Island, one of New Zealand's oldest and most treasured Nature Reserves.

Christchurch

After recovering from a devastating Earthquake, the newly built city of Christchurch seems to be quirkier and more creative than before. Street art can be found across the city alongside farmers markets and vibrant bars. Christchurch Central, Riccarton and Merivale is where you will find most of the restaurants and bars.

Away from the city, the region of Canterbury offers a number of outdoors activities. A few of these include Rangitata White Water Rafting, heli-hiking the Tasman Glacier, skiing at Mt Hutt, sky diving, canyoning, and hot air ballooning over the Southern Alps.

For those keen to explore New Zealand's wineries the most well-known region is Marlborough. The Marlborough region is located at the top of the South Island and is roughly a 6-hour drive from Christchurch. Rather than drive, you can take the short 55-minute flight from Christchurch to Nelson which is roughly two hours away from the wine region. Alternatively, closer to Christchurch is Waipara Valley, a world-renowned wine producing area. Other places to visit include the Hanmer Springs, Kaikoura and Mount Cook National Park.



For more information – please contact Alison Barrett at alison@nicholas-scott.com

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