



SUGGESTED ITINERARY

12-14 DAY SOUTH ISLAND INDEPENDENT DRIVING TOUR

This typical itinerary starts and finishes in Christchurch. If you are coming to the South Island from the North, you will probably begin your itinerary from either Nelson (fly from Wellington) or Picton (ferry), and driving through the Nelson-Tasman, Marlborough, Kaikoura-Hanmer Springs Regions. This will add at least 3 days to your overall trip time.

DAY 1 Fly to Christchurch. To maximize your time, arrive mid-afternoon. Choose from accommodation close to the airport (not least because you will be within walking distance of the award-winning **International Antarctic Centre**), or a hotel right in the centre of the city.

You will not need to hire a rental vehicle just yet – explore central Christchurch on foot.

'Reasons To Go':

- * Re-START Container Mall
- * Quake City Exhibition
- * Transitional 'Cardboard' Cathedral
- * New Regent Street
- * Christchurch Tram

Accommodation – throughout the South Island, choose from a wide variety of options depending upon preference and/or budget: motels (Golden Chain is our preferred group); hotels (from budget to some of the nicest in the world with views to match); or spectacular lodges nestled in beautiful, scenic settings.

DAY 2 **Transfer** to Christchurch Railway Station and take the world renowned **TranzAlpine** scenic train over Arthurs Pass to the west coast of the South Island. Depart Christchurch at 8:15am, arriving in Greymouth at 1:05pm.

Pick up your rental car from the train station. Choose from a range of vehicles from **Thrifty Car Rental** (Thrifty also have GPS navigation systems for hire). Drive from Greymouth to Glacier Country (177-200kms / 2-3 hrs).



As an option after picking up your vehicle, drive north of Greymouth (45kms) to visit the famous Punakaiki ('Pancake') Rocks. The coast road to Punakaiki is one of the most dramatic and spectacular pieces of coastal scenery in New Zealand ("one of the Top 10 Coastal Drives in the World" – *Lonely Planet*).

You could also choose to take it easy and spend a night in/around the Greymouth – Punakaiki region. There are heaps of activities and great accommodation to choose from. **On Yer Bike** offers a variety of tours designed to get you out into the West Coast wilderness. In Greymouth, **Hot Tracks** takes you into native rainforest areas inaccessible even by 4WD vehicles; take an 8WD amphibious Argo vehicle for an hour's tour in the rainforest; or get wet & muddy driving a Quad-Bike (no prior experience necessary). Spend the night in a small B&B set right on the beach just north of town (great sunsets over the Tasman Sea).

About 40 kms south of Greymouth, stop at Hokitika and/or Shantytown (a recreated west coast frontier village). Hokitika is the “Arts Capital” of New Zealand and home to the finest pounamu (New Zealand greenstone) with many local artists and galleries to visit (and try your hand at carving your own special souvenir). Another place to stop just south of Hokitika is the **West Coast Treetop Walkway** – 20 metres high in the ancient Rimu and Kamahi tree canopy (be inspired by the sensational vista of the Tasman Sea and snow-capped Southern Alps).

A “must do” when you arrive in Glacier Country is the **West Coast WildLIFE Centre** in Franz Josef Glacier. This all-weather attraction is the official home of New Zealand’s rarest kiwi (Rowi); and tells the stories and history of the people of the West Coast, from gold mining to the incredible evolution of the Glaciers.

Accommodation – Fox Glacier or Franz Josef Glacier. Fox Glacier township offers a more intimate ‘village’ experience than its bigger neighbour Franz Josef.

DAY 3



Take a morning **half-day glacier walk** or a more exhilarating **‘Flying Fox’ - Heli-Hike** (combines thrill of a scenic helicopter flight with a guided glacier walk) on the famous glacier region’s unique natural formations. Glacier forces are greatest in this area and often create spectacular ice caves, arches and tunnels.

In the afternoon (Fox Glacier), visit Lake Matheson - a kettle lake formed by the decaying glacier as it retreated back to the existing valley. A West Coast icon, Lake Matheson provides amazing late afternoon reflections, early morning sunrises and spectacular sunsets. A boardwalk weaves through massive rimu, kahikatea and kiromiko trees surrounding the old glacial remnant providing tantalizing views of the Southern Alps above.

Accommodation – Fox Glacier or Franz Josef Glacier.

After the Glaciers, your next region to visit is the Southern Lakes , which includes Wanaka, Queenstown and Fiordland. To properly visit all 3 locations, you will need at least 6 days. Our itinerary bypasses Wanaka only to concentrate on Queenstown and Fiordland. Lake Wanaka is a year-round destination where the relaxed kiwi lifestyle combines with a landscape just waiting to be explored.

‘Reasons To Go’:

- * Wanaka offers some of the best hiking in New Zealand, from relaxing local walks to single and multi-day hikes and adventure activities in Mt Aspiring National Park, a World Heritage Area with its soaring mountains, pristine glaciers and tranquil river flats.
- * Take an adventure trip into **Siberia**, where a scenic flight (heli or fixed wing), 3hr bushwalk and jetboat ride will provide a truly memorable part of your trip.
- * Relax in accommodation overlooking the Lake, and
- * Visit the unique Puzzling World and Warbirds & Wheels Museum.

DAY 4 Drive from Fox Glacier to Queenstown (382kms / 6hrs). Stop in Wanaka at the **Warbirds & Wheels Museum** (classic cars, modern NZ art and vintage warbird airplanes) and **Puzzling World** (lose yourself in The Maze and be amazed by the Illusion Rooms). Before you get to Queenstown (take the winding but very scenic Crown Range road), stop for an hour or so at historic Arrowtown, made famous during the Gold Rush period.

In the evening, take the **Queenstown Gondola** up to the top of Bob's Peak - enjoy the magnificent views, particularly the sunset at dusk, and stay for the **buffet dinner** before returning to your hotel.



Accommodation - As you will spend at least 2-3 nights in Queenstown, we recommend centrally located hotels like The Rees (5-star - winner of numerous tourism awards), the Rydges Lakeland Resort Hotel (4-star), the Copthorne Hotel & Resort Queenstown Lakefront (4-star), or a beautiful Apartment complex like The Glebe or Breakfree/Peppers. Queenstown has many other accommodation choices, from simple motels to some of the most luxurious lodges and hotels in the world.

DAY 5 Queenstown has many activities to meet any tourist's desire, from adrenalin action to adventure / wine touring and relaxing in the many cafés and restaurants in the village. Choose from one of the following **'Reasons To Go'** for your **Queenstown Activity**:

- **Dart River Safaris** transports you by foot, 4WD and jetboat into Paradise - the heart of the stunningly scenic Mt. Aspiring National Park.
- **Nomad Safaris** take you by 4WD to areas inaccessible by normal means – including a special *Safari of the Scenes* Tour.
- **Appellation Central Wine Tours** will escort you to the great wineries of the Central Otago region (world-class pinot noir), and also include a gourmet lunch.
- **Bike It Now** offers a 'One Day Wonder' Otago Central Rail Trail cycling journey from Queenstown featuring the Poolburn Gorge Section of the Trail (37m high Poolburn Viaduct, two tunnels, the Trail's longest bridge and Central Otago's stunning landscapes).



Accommodation – Queenstown.

Other '**Reasons To Go**' activities in Queenstown can include:

- **Shotover River** or Kawarau River Jetboating
- Queenstown White Water Rafting
- Horseriding
- Ziptrek Flying Fox [located at top of the Gondola]
- Bungy Jumping
- **Skydiving with NZONE**
- Helicopter Scenic Flights
- **Remarkable Experience** - Vintage 1930s Chevrolet open-top bus ride around region
- Golf 4 championship courses (Millbrook Resort; Kelvin Heights; Jacks Point; The Hills).
- Cycle the **Queenstown Trail**, now part of Great Rides – The New Zealand Cycle Trail
- Fish in beautiful back-country rivers
- Hike on the many trails in/around Queenstown (from easy to hard).
- Soak in the **Onsen Hot Pools** (a great way to relax after an energetic day).
- Discover Arrowtown, an historic gold-mining village
- **Wilderness Guided Walks** – from half to full day options.
- Sample some of the great Central Otago Pinot Noir wines at The Winery (town centre).
- Cruise on the vintage 100 yr old steamship **TSS Earnslaw** to Walter Peak Station (and stay for their Gourmet BBQ lunch or dinner).

DAY 6 Optional Extra Day in Queenstown

DAY 7 Spend the morning enjoying the various activities in/around Queenstown. In the afternoon, drive from Queenstown to Te Anau (170kms / 2- 2½hrs). Have a wander around the lake in the late afternoon or visit the **Glowworm caves**.



OR for that special part of your trip, leave Queenstown in the late morning and travel to Milford Sound by 4:00pm (5 hrs). Then take an overnight cruise on the **Milford Mariner**, specially built for the purpose of transporting visitors in comfort. Twin ensuite cabins, plus dinner, cruise, activities and breakfast (a great way to experience this magical region!).

DAY 7-8 For travellers not taking the overnight Milford Mariner, we strongly recommend the **Doubtful Sound Wilderness Cruise** – which begins only 20 mins away from Te Anau on the shores of Lake Manapouri. Doubtful Sound is three times longer and ten times larger and far less 'commercial' than Milford and is a lot quieter. Stay the night in Manapouri or Te Anau.

You can add an extra day in Queenstown if you choose on Day 6. Then on Day 7, leave early morning for the Doubtful Sound Cruise, returning to Manapouri / Te Anau for the evening – or you can still drive down to Milford Sound for the overnight cruise, and depart the morning of Day 8 for your next destination.

DAY 8-9 Drive from Te Anau to Dunedin (290kms / 4hrs). Dunedin is an historic city (the financial centre of New Zealand during the gold rush period) and a major University town. It is equally home to unique wildlife habitats (Albatross and Penguin colonies on Otago Peninsula).



A very different place to stay in Dunedin is **Larnach Castle** with spectacular views (B&B accommodation in themed rooms in the Lodge, located just behind the Castle; or stable rooms). You have free access to the Castle and can also have dinner in the Castle as a Lodge guest. Or stay in a motel, hotel or nice guest house in the centre of the city.

It is very easy to spend 2 nights in Dunedin. **'Reasons To Go'**: Spend the first day in Dunedin City, visiting places like Olveston House, Settlers Museum, Cadbury World, Speights Heritage Brewery; spend the second day on the peninsula seeing albatross, yellow-eyed penguins, fur seals and other wildlife (take **Natures Wonders** 8WD Argo tour). Plus the **Taieri Gorge Scenic Railway** heads into the heart of the old gold mining region of Central Otago.



Alternatively, take the "long way" from Te Anau to Dunedin via the Southern Scenic Route through Invercargill and the Catlins (this will add 2-3 hrs to your journey time).

DAY 10 Travel from Dunedin back towards Christchurch through Mt Cook and Lake Tekapo via the Inland Scenic Highway (319kms / 4-5hrs). A special activity in Mount Cook is **Glacier Explorers**. Small "MAC" boats cruise on Lake Tasman, allowing passengers to touch and feel glacial icebergs. This lake has only existed for the past 30 yrs, created from the quick moving, melting Tasman Glacier.



Accommodation – Mount Cook Region – Twizel / Lake Tekapo / or Mount Cook Village.

DAY 11-12 Choose from 2 different locations for your final two nights (or do them both if you have the time!). Spend the last 2 nights either back in Christchurch or in the alpine thermal resort of Hanmer Springs.

Drive from Lake Tekapo to Christchurch via the Inland Scenic Highway (267kms / 4hrs).

'Reasons To Go' activities in Christchurch include:

- the **International Antarctic Centre** (a winner of Tourism New Zealand's award for Best Visitor Attraction – and where you can travel in a Haggglund vehicle to experience Antarctic land conditions, see the live penguin enclosure and experience their special 4D Antarctic Show);
- Willowbank Wildlife Reserve and Ko Tane (home to the Kiwi Bird and a special Maori cultural centre);
- **Discover Christchurch** operates a vintage London double-decker bus to show you the sights of Christchurch;
- Air Force Museum at Wigram;
- Christchurch Gondola;
- Take a leisurely punt on the Avon River as it winds its way through Christchurch.



OR



Drive from Mount Cook Region via the Alpine Pacific Triangle Touring Route to **Hanmer Springs** (395kms / 5½hrs). Hanmer Springs is the only alpine thermal reserve in the South Island and the soothing hot baths are a great way to end your holiday. An alternative destination to Hanmer Springs is the French-founded village Akaroa, home to many arts & crafts as well as the Hector's Dolphin - one of the rarest and smallest dolphins in the world.

Christchurch, Hanmer Springs has a wide variety of accommodation from motels, heritage hotels and friendly guest houses/lodges.

DAY 13 Enjoy Hanmer Springs (or Christchurch) in the morning before driving back to Christchurch (about 1½ hrs), and returning your rental vehicle at the airport for your preferred return flight home.

As you can see, the ideal trip to the South Island is a 14 day itinerary – and you still miss great places like the Queen Charlotte Sound, Marlborough, Nelson and the Abel Tasman National Park, and the Northern West Coast region – for your next visit!

The itinerary listed above can be changed to suit your time and budget – e-mail tours@nztravel.net for a personalised itinerary.