

South Island Discovery

16 days



From Christchurch you'll follow the coast to Oamaru, where you can see the amazing Moeraki Boulders. And then on to Dunedin and the drive South to Lake Te Anau and the spectacular Milford Sound. Have fun in Queenstown and Wanaka before heading to the Franz Josef and Fox Glaciers. Stop at the Pancake Rocks and then head to the beaches, wine and art of Nelson and Blenheim. The final legs brings you back via Kaikoura where you can get up and close to whales and dolphins.

Day 1

Spend the day in [Christchurch](#)

Christchurch is traditionally New Zealand's most English city – imagined, laid out, planned and even settled by decree over in England. It was built around its Christ Church Cathedral and Four Avenues, furnished with the University of Canterbury and Christ's College, peopled by the first four ships, and fitted out with Neo Gothic architecture and glorious English gardens; a bit of old England in the South Pacific.

Christchurch is the South Island's largest city, known for its beautiful public gardens, old world charm and architecture, and its quaint and very walkable city centre. Much of this changed in the 2011 earthquakes when so much of the city was lost. However, the city is rising to the challenges, quite literally, and it is now home to funky and unique pop up malls, dozens of new buildings, high street, designer and boutique shops, a world class art gallery and museum, and restaurants galore.

Many of its heritage buildings have been restored, the beautiful Botanic Gardens remain, and the trams have returned to its streets. Take a punt down the Avon, check out the new civic areas along the river, enjoy the unique facades of New Regent Street, or go for a run at Hagley Park. Make sure you check out the transitional cardboard cathedral in the city centre, and the Margaret Mahy playground, designed with the help of the children of New Zealand to be the biggest and best play space in the country.

Outside of the city, Orana Wildlife Park hosts New Zealand's only gorilla encounter, and you may find a kiwi or two of the feathered kind both here and at Willowbank Nature Reserve, where you can also take in a Maori Cultural performance. For a bit of history, head out to Ferrymead, a purpose built 19th century village, where you can experience what colonial life was like for early inhabitants. Once there, spend some time at the shore at Sumner and Redcliffs and enjoy some fish and chips on the beach.



Recommended accommodation options:

Campground Option	Free Parking Option	NZMCA Option
North South 530 Sawyers Arms Rd, Christchurch Holiday Park www.northsouth.co.nz	Waimakariri River West Harris Rd, Kaiapoi	NZMCA Weedons Park 286 Jones Road, Weedons Christchurch South

Day 2

Christchurch to Dunedin (5h)

The road south has plenty to break up the trip. Ashburton offers visitors an aviation museum, beautiful public parks and gardens, a vintage railway, and great restaurants and cafes.

The road then cuts through Timaru. Stop here for a break, an excellent lunch, a visit to craft brewery or a wander through the Botanic Gardens. For some local culture, visit the Te Ana Rock Art Centre, to see local Maori tribe, Ngai Tahu's rock art.

Oamaru boasts some of New Zealand's best 19th century limestone architecture including the Opera House, Forrester Gallery and Victorian Precinct. Riverstone Kitchen and The Whitestone Cheese Factory are just two places to stop for a bite, and there are wine tours to join and a whiskey factory as well. More recently, Oamaru has become something of a Steampunk headquarters and these futuristic fans of Victoriana can often be seen wandering about town in full costume. There are many bike tracks and bike rentals in town, and more penguins at the Blue Penguin Colony, one of the best eco-tourism attractions around.

The Moeraki Boulders, on the beach by Moeraki, are one of New Zealand's natural wonders; it looks as though giants once used giant rocks as playthings and left them strewn around the beach. There are also seal and penguin colonies along the way, especially at Moeraki Lighthouse, and many pristine beaches.



Recommended accommodation options:

Campground Option	Free Parking Option	NZMCA Option
Dunedin Holiday Park 41 Victoria Rd, Dunedin www.dunedinholidaypark.co.nz	Puddle Alley Puddle Alley, Mosgiel	Woodhaugh Park 7 Woodhaugh St, Woodhaugh, Dunedin

Day 3

Spend the day in [Dunedin](#)

Dunedin is a university town, and full of interesting restaurants, pubs, and a laid-back feel amongst the grandeur of beautiful buildings. It is famous for being an early gold mining town and its historic riches are still evident in the wealth of Victorian and Edwardian architecture. The town founders filled their streets with impressive civic and commercial buildings, which still take pride of place today alongside more modern museums, galleries and entertainment venues.

The Otago Peninsula is a wonder, and worth heading out to, to visit its albatross colony and its excellent visitors' centre, as well as refuges for penguins, and its fur seal colonies.

Dunedin has a rich and proud Scottish heritage, and the name itself comes from the Scottish Gaelic for Edinburgh. Its founders' love of the old country is evident in the architecture, the Robbie Burns statue in the main square, even a bit of the accent you can catch in the city's old timers. One of its early wealthier citizens built a Scottish sort of home for his family, Larnach Castle, which is well worth a visit. For those interested in older homes, visit the historic homestead of Olveston. The city also has a great collection of boutique fashion stores, along with excellent cafes and restaurants. Take a boat tour around the harbour, or just park by one of the beaches to watch the surfers take on the waves.



Recommended accommodation options:

Campground Option	Free Parking Option	NZMCA Option
Dunedin Holiday Park 41 Victoria Rd, Dunedin www.dunedinholidaypark.co.nz	Puddle Alley Puddle Alley, Mosgiel	Woodhaugh Park 7 Woodhaugh St, Woodhaugh, Dunedin

Day 4

Dunedin to Invercargill (2.5h) (Stewart Island)

Drive south to Lake Waihola, and stop for a picnic by the lake before heading through Milton, a quaint historic town. Soon after, you will be in the Catlins. The area is known for the sea life that lives off its wild shores. Take out the binoculars to try to spot sealions, seals, dolphins, penguins, and seabirds. Nearby is the petrified forest. In Invercargill, try the local seafood, especially its Bluff Oysters in season, and consider a trip out to the rugged shores of New Zealand's third island, Stewart Island/Rakiura. Ferry trips and flights are available. This is the best place in New Zealand to get away from it all, literally and figuratively, and one of the best places to spot kiwi in the wild.

Stewart Island has a fascinating history and an important future as a conservation area. There is accommodation in Oban, the town, if you'd prefer to leave the caravan behind. Much of the area is conservation land, and tours are available to learn more about the ecology of the area and ongoing preservation.



Recommended accommodation options:

Campground Option	Free Parking Option	NZMCA Option
Otatara Beach Road Motor Camp 375 Dunns Rd, Invercargill www.beachroadholidaypark.co.nz	Seaward Downs Scenic Reserve Tramway Rd West, Seaward Downs	POP Whitehouse Hotel 39 Wallacetown – Lorneville Hwy Invercargill

Day 5

([Stewart Island](#)) [Invercargill](#)- [Te Anau](#) (2h)

Travel from Stewart Island back to the mainland, and on to Te Anau. Consider taking the route that goes via Riverton, one of the South Island's oldest settlements, and visit spectacular Lake Manapouri before you arrive in Te Anau, on the shores of the lake of the same name. Fiordland National Park, New Zealand's largest national park, (due to the twists and turns of its bays and inlets) can be accessed here, including the start of the Milford Track. Visit the Te Anau Glowworm Caves or take one of the many tours on the lake.



Recommended accommodation options:

Campground Option	Free Parking Option	NZMCA Option
Te Anau Lakeview Kiwi Holiday Park 77 Manapouri-Te Anau Hwy, Te Anau teanauholidaypark.co.nz	Hillside Manapouri Road Bridge Hillside Manapouri Rd, Manapouri	NZMCA Alpine Park 15 Alpine Dr, Te Anau

Day 6

Te Anau to Milford Sound (2h)

This far-flung part of the country offers views of the High Country, where settlers conquered the rugged scenery in the early days. Rivers full of trout meander through the countryside and you will be spoiled for choice of picnic spots.

The road to Milford is one of New Zealand's most scenic and it is worth coming this far south just to be a part of it. Stop for photos and try to spot the "Disappearing Mountain", near the Mirror Lakes. You'll see Mitre Peak on a clear day after venturing through the Homer Tunnel.

From here, it's worth taking the time for a cruise on the Milford Sounds; a once in a lifetime experience. There are day cruises, but you won't regret taking the time for an overnight jaunt amongst the fjords and waterfalls. There is just no place like these Sounds and you will want to make the most of the opportunity to experience as much of it as you can.



Recommended accommodation options:

Campground Option	Free Parking Option	NZMCA Option
Gunn's Camp 801 Lower Hollyford Rd, Fiordland National Park, Te Anau www.gunnscamp.org.nz	No closer option than Hillside Manapouri Road Bridge Hillside Manapouri Rd, Manapouri	No closer option than NZMCA Alpine Park 15 Alpine Dr, Te Anau

Day 7

Milford Sound to Queenstown (4h)

It's quite a backtracking and roundabout trip to Queenstown, but the beauty of the lake will keep you entertained as you wind your way north.



Recommended accommodation options:

Campground Option	Free Parking Option	NZMCA Option
Queenstown Lakeview Holiday Park 4 Cemetery Rd, Queenstown http://holidaypark.net.nz	Shotover River Shotover Delta Rd, Queenstown	POP option Glenorchy Hotel and Backpackers Ltd 42 Mull St Glenorchy

Day 8

Spend the day in Queenstown

The alpine resort of Queenstown is unlike anywhere else in New Zealand, as its tourist numbers in high seasons will attest. However, in your luxury accommodation on wheels, the town is yours to explore without the bother of advance bookings. Tourists young and old flock to Queenstown to soak in its atmosphere, literally soak in luxury spas, partake of its many award-winning restaurants and cafes, and shop at upmarket boutiques. It's also the place to be if adventure tourism is your thing: bungy jumping, jet boating, river rafting, river surfing, horse trekking, skiing, snowboarding, sky diving...all are available here, and all are provided to the highest standards. Some quieter adventures also await, from high tea at the end of Lake Wakatipu after a leisurely ride on the SS Earnslaw, to world class golf, to wine tastings – Queenstown has got you covered. There are also numerous Lord of the Rings locations here. Source a guidebook to help you find them.



Recommended accommodation options:

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Queenstown Lakeview Holiday Park 4 Cemetery Rd, Queenstown http://holidaypark.net.nz	Shotover River Shotover Delta Rd, Queenstown	POP option Glenorchy Hotel and Backpackers Ltd 42 Mull St Glenorchy

Day 9

Queenstown – Wanaka (1.25h)

Be sure to divert to Arrowtown on your way to Wanaka. This small settlement is a contradiction of sorts, with humble old mining cottages hugging tree-lined roads which lead to a quaint town centre that boasts luxury spas, designer shops and gourmet restaurants. Visit the historic mining huts along the river, sample local fudges, ice creams, and confections and stop in at a local winery before continuing onto Wanaka. The shortest route to Wanaka is over the Crown Range Road, a challenging drive, but the views are amazing. A more moderate driving route runs beside the Shotover River, Lake Dunstan, and the Clutha River.

Wanaka can provide you with an appealing mix of fine living, family fun, and adventure. It has a high concentration of cafes, restaurants, and interesting shops. There are some unique attractions, like the 3D maze and the ‘warbird’ air show, which is held every two years. Wanaka’s lake is the main attraction in the warmer months, and is a boatie’s delight, in the winter, the local cafes and restaurants cater to the skiing set. You’re sure to find a warm welcome in town at any time of year.



Recommended accommodation options:

Campground Option	Free Parking Option	NZMCA Option
Wanaka Kiwi Holiday Park 263 Studholme Rd North, Wanaka www.wanakakiwiholidaypark.nz	Wanaka Cardrona Rd Cardrona Valley Rd, Cardrona	Rotary Glen NZMCA Park Partridge Road, Cromwell

Day 10

Wanaka to Fox Glacier (3.5h) to Franz Josef (.75h)

Enjoy the views along the shores of Lake Hawea as you head north, and stop for lunch at Makarora before hitting the Haast pass. The scenery here changes dramatically as you enter the rainforest. The settlement of Haast is a town with a touch of the wild west, and another good place to stretch the legs and have a look around. Just north of Haast is Lake Moeraki, a peaceful forest lake with good fishing. From here, a 40-minute walk takes you to the penguin colony at Monro Beach.

Then, drive on to Fox Glacier. Fox Glacier, at 13km long, is fed by four alpine glaciers and makes its way downward 2,600m on its way toward the coast. It is unusual in that it ends in rainforest, nearly at sea level, unlike most glaciers, which prefer to stay at higher altitudes. There are numerous walking tracks at different grades of difficulty, as well as professional tours, on foot and by helicopter, available for visitors.

Franz Josef Glacier is just a short 45-minute drive north. You can walk to the terminal of the glacier in about 10 minutes; alternatively arrange a heli-hike to get on top of the glacier and explore its ice caves. Franz Josef township has a good range of eating establishments, as well as hot pools filled with heated glacial water.



Recommended accommodation options:

Campground Option	Free Parking Option	NZMCA Option
Rainforest Holiday Park 46 Cron St, Franz Josef www.rainforestholidaypark.co.nz	Forks-Okarito Road Rest Area Forks-Okarito Rd, Okarito	Franz Josef NZMCA Park Douglas Dr, Franz Josef

Day 11

Franz Josef to Greymouth (2.5h)

From Franz Josef, make your way up the rugged West Coast, through the old gold mining settlement of Hokitika. Stop here for supplies, a wander through town, and the highly recommended short and easy walk into the Hokitika Gorge for photo opportunities of this beautiful forest and the bright blue waters of the river. Nearby at West Coast Treetops Walk, you can wander through the forest canopy on purpose-built boardwalks. In Greymouth, visit Shantytown for your own gold mining experience, walk the beautiful Pt Elizabeth Walkway by the coast or try some cave rafting.



Recommended accommodation options:

Campground Option	Free Parking Option	NZMCA Option
Greymouth Kiwi Holiday Park 318 Main South Rd, Greymouth www.greymouthkiwi.co.nz	Jellyman Park Beachfront Area Hill Quay, Greymouth	NZMCA Southside Park 80B Ruatapu Rd SH6 Hokitika

Day 12

Greymouth to Marahau (4.5h)

Before leaving the coast, make the time to head out to Punakaiki, otherwise known as The Pancake Rocks. These unusual rock formations on the beach are stunning, and the visitors' centre and walkway are especially well done. Head north toward Buller Gorge and through Westport with its handsome period architecture, reminiscent of the gold mining era. Check out the gold mining museum, which is an excellent example of its type and will give visitors

a real feel for the life of a miner.

Take the road north to Marahau, which skirts the edges of three National Parks. There are plenty of picnic, walking, and photo opportunities along the way. Marahau is the starting blocks for many visitors to the Abel Tasman, one of the most scenic and enjoyable Great Walks in New Zealand. Spend some time here enjoying the beaches, take a water taxi out exploring, or have lunch and an afternoon walk.



Recommended accommodation options:

Campground Option	Free Parking Option	NZMCA Option
Marahau Beach Camp Franklin St, Waterfront, Marahau www.abeltasmancentre.co.nz	Uruwhenua Reserve Cnr SH60 & East Takaka Rd, Takaka	Port Taranaki NZMCA Park Abel Tasman Dr, Port Taranaki, Takaka

Day 13

Marahau to Nelson (1.5h)

On your way to Nelson, stop at Kaiteriteri, with its gorgeous white sand beaches and very popular camp ground. Nelson prides itself on having the most sunshine hours in all of New Zealand, and this must make for happy, artsy, alternative people, which you'll find plenty of in this community. Nelson has an almost subtropical feel compared to the rest of the South Island, with its pretty white sand beaches, palm trees, and brightly coloured buildings. The streets of Nelson are full of cafes, interesting art and craft shops, restaurants, a large number of galleries and historic attractions. It is also home to many a fine brewery to while away an afternoon in. Beyond town are beautiful forests and beaches to visit and get a taste of the splendour of this corner of the country.



Recommended accommodation options:

Campground Option	Free Parking Option	NZMCA Option
Nelson City TOP 10 Holiday Park 230 Vanguard St, Nelson www.nelsonholidaypark.co.nz	Collins Memorial Reserve Cnr of SH1 & Freeths Rd, Koromiko www.marlborough.govt.nz	POP The Honest Lawyer Country Pub and Hotel 1 Point Road Monaco Nelson

Day 14

Nelson to Blenheim (1.75h)

Stop at Pelorus Bridge Scenic Reserve for a day walk or picnic. Blenheim is in the middle of world famous wine country, and there are scores of vineyards and wineries to stop in for lunch and a sample of local wines, notably the Sauvignon Blancs. Alternatively, rent some bikes and meander through the vines. LOTR fans, and aviation enthusiasts, should visit Omaka and its war plane museum, owned by Sir Peter Jackson, director of the LOTR trilogy. It's full of props from the movies as well as an impressive collection of planes.



Recommended accommodation options:

Campground Option	Free Parking Option	NZMCA Option
Blenheim TOP 10 Holiday Park 78 Grove Rd, Mayfield, Blenheim www.blenheimtop10.co.nz	Taylor Dam Reserve Taylor Pass Rd, Blenheim	POP Blenheim Bowling Club 65E Weld St, Blenheim

Day 15

Blenheim to Kaikoura (2.5h)

Enjoy the trip south through the breath-taking Awatere Valley and on along the vistas of the Pacific Coast.

Kaikoura translates into English as a good place to eat kai (crayfish) koura and indeed it is! Don't miss the chance to sample some of the freshest shellfish and crustaceans around. Venture onto the coastal walkway and you could see sperm whales, dusky dolphins, fur seals and albatross play in the waters off shore. Alternatively, join them in their own environment and take one of the many oceanic tours on offer. Kaikoura experienced major earthquakes in 2016, which disrupted their roads and some attractions. Check <http://www.journeys.nzta.govt.nz/traffic/regions/11> for live updates to be sure your road trip will be a safe and enjoyable one.



Recommended accommodation options:

Campground Option	Free Parking Option	NZMCA Option
Peketa Beach Holiday Park 665 Main South Rd/SH1, Kaikoura www.kaikourapeketabeach.co.nz	Cribb Creek Inland Kaikoura Rd, Kaikoura www.kaikoura.govt.nz	NZMCA Park Kaikoura Trotting Club South Bay Pde, Kaikoura

Day 16

[Kaikoura](#) to [Christchurch](#) (2.5h) and [Akaroa](#) (1.5h)

Along this southern road, there are numerous vineyards in the Waipara area where you can stop and stretch your legs, taste some local vino, and have a long lunch. Enjoy the views along the coastline and take a moment to pull over for scenery and a few photo opportunities. Just before Christchurch are many towns with long stretches of quiet surf beaches.

Back in Christchurch, head for the places you didn't have time for on the first day here, or consider a day or overnight trip out to Akaroa on Banks Peninsula (1.5h). Akaroa has a surprisingly French history (The French tried to colonise New Zealand, but were a little bit too late. The first settlers sent over to claim the place stayed, and their French traditions, and street names, have remained). In Akaroa, start the day with a traditional croissant and coffee at one of the French-inspired delis or bakeries before taking in the spectacular harbour or swimming with dolphins with one of the touring companies.

The main street of town, which winds along the beach, has dozens of interesting boutiques, cafes, restaurants, galleries, and attractions and was recently voted favourite port by the cruise ships which now dock here almost year-round. A Must Do is to head up the hill to The Giant's House where terraced gardens with sculptures and mosaics are a creative feast and

wonderful experience. This really is unique, and a not to be missed, excursion. Plan to take lots of photos!

Further over the hill are lovely little out of the way bays and inlets. If you can manage the caravan over the slightly hair raising hills and turns, you'll find perfect camping spots. Find your way to the Okains Bay museum, to see one of the best collections of Maori art and artefacts in New Zealand, presented in a humble but respectful environment. The main road back to Christchurch, Highway 75, will take you through Little River, a charming town with a small art gallery and cafes.



Recommended accommodation options:

Campground Option	Free Parking Option	NZMCA Option
North South 530 Sawyers Arms Rd, Christchurch Holiday Park www.northsouth.co.nz	Waimakariri River West Harris Rd, Kaiapoi	NZMCA Weedons Park 286 Jones Road, Weedons Christchurch South

Recommended accommodation options:

Campground Option	Free Parking Option	NZMCA Option
Akaroa TOP 10 Holiday Park 96 Morgans Rd, Akaroa www.akaroa-holidaypark.co.nz	Akaroa Boat Ramp 1 Rue Balguerie, Akaroa	Graeme's POP 4 Kotlowski Rd, Takamatua, Akaroa