

NEW ZEALAND'S ULTIMATE HIGHWAY



Duration
15 Days



Distance
1841 km



This is your ultimate guide through the South Island with just the right amount of adventure, action, beautiful sights and some really good kai (food). So what are you waiting for?

NAU MAI, HAERE MAI

WELCOME TO THE SOUTH



DAY 1

WELCOME TO ŌTAUTAHI CHRISTCHURCH

Head straight into town, walk in and around some of Christchurch's most beautiful buildings like the historic **Art Centre** and impressive **Christchurch Art Gallery** (the Design Store tucked inside is filled with treasures from near and far).

If you're keen for a cost-effective guided tour, get aboard the **Christchurch Tram**. Hop on and hop off all day while the drivers tell you all about Ōtautahi.

You must jump off at **Riverside Market**. Filled to the brim with top-tier eateries like **Empire Chicken** and **Ramen Ria**. If you fancy al fresco, DIY your own antipasto board from the **Mediterranean Food Co** and then park up at the river and enjoy!

Need to burn off some energy? **Holey Moley Golf Club** is a hit with kids of all ages. This fun zone features a mini golf course (you can get a photo on The Simpsons' couch),

bowling lanes, arcade games and a bar. Make sure you book activities in advance – it's one of Christchurch's hottest hot spots.

Head to **The Terrace** for some afternoon cocktails at **Kong** or **Amazonita** followed by a bowl of nachos as big as your head from **Chiwahwah**.

DAY 2

EXPLORE WHAT ŌTAUTAHI HAS TO OFFER

Start the day with a stroll around the **Botanic Gardens**. Grab your caffeine fix from **Ilex Café** and see if you can find the tree that locals hide inside (hint it's by the Canterbury Museum).

Christchurch's breakfast of champions is an American-style diner, **Drexels** – fluffy pancakes, crispy hashbrowns and bottomless coffee ... need we say more?

Once you're fuelled, whip up to **Christchurch Adventure Park** for views over the city. The park has the longest zipline in New Zealand,

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TOP TIP

Stop at one of 7 safe stopping areas along the Kaikōura coastline and explore the rich coastal history through art.



mountain biking, walks (for both the fearless and the faint-hearted) and a whole lot of pure South Island air – it doesn't get much better than that.

For the kids, hit **Willowbank Wildlife Reserve** and get up close and personal with native and exotic animals. Their award-winning Kivihouse can have you less than a metre away from the iconic flightless bird.

A meal at **5th Street** is among the South Island's best dining experiences – order the chargrilled ribeye, you won't regret it.

DAY 3

CHRISTCHURCH TO HANMER SPRINGS (133KM)

Skip brekky in Christchurch and hit the road, **Little Vintage** in Amberley is calling your name.

Amberley also has a few boutiques well worth a look, **Ruby Six**, **Out of the Bleu** and **Me, Now You Clothing**

Just down the road, it's wine time! You've arrived in **North Canterbury Wine Region** (aka the coolest little wine region in the country).

With limestone soils and a unique microclimate, the 90+ wineries in this area are famed for their award-winning Pinot Gris, Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Riesling.

The menu at organic **Greystone** winery is sensational (you must try their Pétillant Natural) while family-owned **Pegasus Bay** and **Black Estate** are also great. If you ask nicely, the staff at Peg Bay may

show you where you can feed their friendly eels.

The next stop is hot pool heaven, the alpine wonderland of **Hanmer Springs** will envelop you with tranquillity – so much so you'll find it hard to leave.

Every drop of the Hanmer Springs' mineral-filled thermal waters has been warmed by heat from the earth's core – a natural process that takes 173 years.

Indulge in a long soak, and if you really want to relax book a treatment at **The Spa** (their 90 minute Aroma Bliss massage is divine). The kids are set with some of the largest hydroslices in New Zealand – Hanmer Springs is a place for everyone.

Make dinner easy so you don't disturb your zen, **Boulder Burgers** and curry at **Spice Village** are mouth-watering options or the pizzas at **Saints Café** are always great.

DAY 4

HANMER SPRINGS TO KAIKŌURA (130KM)

Start the day off right, head up **Conical Hill** for 360-degree panoramic views of the village or head to **Hanmer Heritage Forest** for the **Forest Amble Walk** among sculptures – including a friendly giant.

You can't go past **The Powerhouse Café** for breakfast or brunch and take some time to browse in the boutiques in the village's centre.

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Just outside of the beautiful alpine village, nestled over Waiiau Gorge, the **Waiiau Ferry Bridge** is tall enough for you to throw yourself off **bungee style**. The 35-metre freefall towards the surging river is a surefire way to get your blood pumping.

On the way to **Kaikōura**, rolling hills, mountain scenery and farmlands fill your vision, take your time and enjoy the scenes.

You'll cross over the **Waiiau Uwha River**, one of the longest single-lane bridges in New Zealand. There are some passing bays on the bridge which makes for the perfect stop to catch a sunset snap.

It would be rude to come to such a stunning coastal town as Kaikōura and not enjoy some fish and chips, a New Zealand delicacy. **The Top Shop** is the place to go.

DAY 5

KAIKŌURA TO BLENHEIM (101KM)

Start the day by getting up close and personal with the sealife that's made Kaikōura an eco-tourism hotspot. It's world-famous for whales (which you can see by **boat**, **plane**, or **helicopter**) but there's more to this moana (sea) than those giant marine mammals.

Dolphin Encounter will take you to watch or swim with acrobatic dusky dolphins. You can also kayak with NZ fur seals with **Kaikōura Kayaks**. Fans of our feathered friends should grab an **Albatross Encounter** and meet nature's most extraordinary giant seabirds.

Come lunchtime, there are plenty of eateries in the township – local favourites include the character-filled **Beach House Café** (the avo toast is 10/10) and **The Slam Club**.

Kaikōura literally means 'eat (kai) crayfish (kōura)' and those who are keen to do so should head to food caravans **Nin's Bin** or **Kaikōura seafood BBQ**.

As you head out of town towards Marlborough, you might like to stop at **Ohau Point Lookout** or grab a coffee at **The Store** in Kekerengu (the halfway point between Kaikōura and Blenheim). Enjoy a dinner out in Blenheim – the much-awarded **Arbour** is great with **Gramado's Brazilian** fare also a winner.

DAY 6

BLenheim TO NELSON (175KM)

Make the most of waking in the heart of New Zealand's largest wine region with a visit to a world-acclaimed Marlborough winery or two.

You can self-drive or take a guided tour around the 30 cellar doors or, if biking's your jam consider an e-bike

Those short on time should simply head to **Fidelio Cafe & Wine Bar** featuring small Marlborough wine producers and their gourmet platters complete the experience.

The road to Nelson will take you to the charming village of **Havelock** – the departure point for many boat tours into the **Marlborough Sounds** including **Mills Bay Mussels** – it's a must do! It's where you can indulge in freshly steamed mussels and the region's famous Sauvignon Blanc.



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TOP TIP

Stop at **Rimu Wine Bar** in Māpua to sample the amazing Nelson Tasman Wines.



There's plenty of options for dinner in Nelson but the five-course tasting menu at **Hopgoods** would be a great way to round out the day. Take a stroll up The Cawthron Steps afterwards and enjoy a view of the lights over this seaside city.

Another great option is **The Boat Shed Café** which straddles with sea with breathtaking views.

DAY 7

NELSON

A morning spent strolling around Nelson's shops is a morning well-spent.

If it's the weekend, head to the legendary **Nelson Market** – from food to local designer clothing to art and homewares, it's all ripe for the picking with a relaxed and enjoyable vibe.

Nature lovers should head to 690-hectare **Brook Waimārama Sanctuary**. This very special part of New Zealand is the largest fenced sanctuary for endangered plants and creatures in the South Island.

As you head out of the city towards **Māpua**, you'll head past some local berry farms – pop in for a Real Fruit Icecream.

Make a stop at **Māpua Wharf** – this is a picturesque spot in a tidal estuary. If conditions are calm (which they mostly are) you can jump off the wharf and climb back up for seconds.

The wharf has a number of boutiques (with some incredible New Zealand art) and a famous hat shop.

Ready for dinner? Indulge in fine fare at **The Apple Shed** or **Jellyfish** or dine casually at craft brewery **The Golden Bear** (top tip: the nachos are fantastic) or grab what are undoubtedly some of the best fish 'n chips in New Zealand at **The Smokehouse**.

DAY 8

NELSON TO PUNAKAIKI (265KM)

Early birds can make the most of the day by hitting the road and heading into **Abel Tasman National Park** which is either a 40-minute drive from Māpua or you can grab a kayak or **boat tour** from Kaiteriteri. The golden beaches and aquamarine seas are well worth it.

Lunch in **Kaiteriteri** or if you're in **Marahau** hit up **The Fat Tui** for a burger you'll crave in the future.

Afterwards, head back through **Motueka** and **Moutere** – do stop and grab some of the fresh fruit that's grown here from one of the roadside stalls where you pay with an honesty box.

If you are a sweet tooth, the donuts from **The Smoking Barrel** are a must. With flavours like Ferrero Rocher, Caramilk deluxe and raspberry double chocolate, you won't be able to leave with just one.

The berries at **Tapawera** are worth loading up on and if you fancy a dip, Murchison's best-kept secret is **The Eel Hole** – a majestic swimming spot. To get there, park at the Riverview Holiday Park.

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Photo Credit: Helilanding for HeliHike

From Murchison head to Springs Junction where you'll head west to Punakaiki.

On your travels to the coastal dream town that is **Punakaiki**, don't miss a tour of the **Reefton Distilling Company** (there's a reason Little Bidy gin is so popular) and if you do decide to stay here, definitely look at **Reef Cottage Bed and Breakfast**.

Punakaiki is famous for its natural beauty, 30 million years in the making. Time your stroll through the **Punakaiki Pancake Rocks and Blowholes** for high tide so you can see them at their most powerful.

DAY 9

PUNAKAIKI TO HOKITIKA (83KM)

Wake up and smell the pancakes (see them again if you want to!) at **Pancake Rocks Café** which promises a mean pancake – quite appropriate really.

Want a keepsake you'll treasure forever? You can forge your own knife at **Barrytown Knifemaking** from red-hot steel with a native timber handle and lunch is provided (even better!).

As you travel to Hokitika, beer lovers will want to stop and enjoy the 45-minute tour of the **Monteiths Brewery Company** in Greymouth – it's a great spot for lunch too.

Hokitika is the coolest little town on the West Coast. Snap a selfie in front of its iconic driftwood sign on the beach – it's a great pic to send to the whānau (family) back home.

The **Pioneer Hotel** boasts a classic kiwi pub feed or, if you are looking

for views of Hokitika, look no further than **Ocean View Restaurant & Bar**.

A natural marvel you can't miss is the **Glow Worm Dell** just a short wander from Hokitika town. Bring a flashlight but turn it off once you get to the glow worm colonies so you can see the bugs at their brightest.

DAY 10

HOKITIKA TO FRANZ JOSEF GLACIER (134KM)

Start the morning with a glorious sandwich from the **Hokitika Sandwich Company**. Regarded as some of the best grub in Aotearoa, we promise these are worth the wait.

Head 30 minutes out of town to **Hokitika Gorge** and take the an easy one-hour walk through lush native bush to a rocky gorge with iridescent turquoise blue water. It's a real sight.

It's onwards towards the glaciers through native forests and stunning mountain views. If you feel like it, take a short detour to **Ōkārito** ... it's a coastal hideaway and hidden gem.

Half an hour south and you arrive in Glacier Country.

Franz Josef and **Fox Glaciers** are the only glaciers in the world to span all the way to sea level, with Fox Glacier stretching 13 kilometres in length.

There are so many ways to see the glaciers in all their glory, from **simple walks** to **Glacier Heli Hiking**. Whatever way you choose to see the glaciers doesn't matter, it's only important that you do.

Warm up with a hearty meal at **Alice May** or perhaps you fancy a bit of pool and pizza at the **Blue Ice Restaurant** down the road.



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TOP TIP

Get your camera ready as this is some amazing scenery!

DAY 11

FRANZ JOSEF TO QUEENSTOWN (350KM)

With a long day of travel ahead, fuel up at **SnakeBite Brewery**. On offer is a mix of kiwi classics and Asian-inspired breakfasts, the big brekky is not one to look past.

The drive further south is up to you. If you don't mind a few stops along the way, **Fantail Falls** and the **Blue Pools** are known to be one of the best sights of the south – if it's hot enough to swim, bring your togs and take a refreshing dip in the ice-cold water.

Make your next pit stop **Wānaka**, there is plenty to do in this adventure-packed town. We are talking **sky diving**, the world's **highest waterfall climb** and if you are making the trip in winter, **skiing and snowboarding galore**.

If a bite to eat is all you're after, **Francesca's Italian Kitchen** will have you drooling with their beef cheek gnocchi or try Wānaka's bustling **food truck scene**. Don't forget a stop for a bevy at the iconic **Cardrona Hotel**.

Continue on to your final destination, **Queenstown**! A pocket rocket of a little town, you have adventure, entertainment and world-class dining at your fingertips.

One of the best ways to see the surrounding landscape is a cruise across Lake Wakatipu on the iconic century-old coal-fired steamship, the **TSS Earnslaw**.

No matter what night of the week it is in Queenstown, the town will be abuzz. For drinks, all you need to know is the three B's – **Bardeaux, The Bunker** and **Barmuda**.

Dinner is the dealer's choice, brave the lines of the infamous **Fergburger** (it's absolutely worth it), maybe an upmarket experience at **Rātā** or perhaps Asian fusion with a whole lot of flare at **Blue Kanu**.

Come desert, head to **Patagonia Ice Cream** – you can't go wrong with their award-winning banana split.

DAY 12

QUEENSTOWN & MILFORD SOUND

Queenstown has some absolute bangin' brekky spots, including **Bespoke Kitchen, Vudu Café & Larder** and **Yonder**.

Now your next big decision is wine and dine or action and adventure? Maybe a bit of both? After all, Queenstown is the adventure capital of the world.

As well as jetboating, you can **bungy jump, tandem skydive, river surf** and **canyon swing**. Can't decide how to get your blood pumping? **AJ Hackett** have some ka mau te wehi (awesome) combo adventure deals.

The **Gondola and Luge** are perfect ways to inject a small dose of adventure into your day if you have kids in tow or don't quite have the stomach for a bungy.

If you are a dedicated winer and diner, book a **Queenstown Wine Trail Tour** and be guided through

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some unforgettable wineries, enjoy a perfectly paired lunch and taste why Central Otago is renowned for wine.

Prefer to go it alone? **Gibbston Valley Winery, Mt Rosa** and **Kinross** should all be on your list.

Maybe you don't want wine, dine, action or adventure and you want to see nature at its best.

About a four-hour drive from Queenstown, winding along Lake Wakatipu, deep into southern farmland, you'll find **Milford Sound** – New Zealand's best natural attraction.

On-route, stop by the biggest lake in the South Island, **Te Anau**. Grab a bite to eat at **The Fat Duck**, the Fiordland Venison Pie is everything you want and need a NZ pie to be.

Travel on through to **Mirror Lakes**, for exactly what you'd expect, very mirror-y lakes! Cast your eyes over some of the best of New Zealand wildlife, like our smallest duck pāpango.

Continue on through the **Homer Tunnel**, now you are closer to paradise than ever.

Arrive at **Milford Sound Wharf** and jump on a boat tour. Cruise around on the inky black water taking in the jagged cliffs and lush surroundings, you'll have the chance to get up close and personal with native wildlife, rushing waterfalls and the almighty Mitre Peak.

Finish your trip off right, indulge in world-class dining at **Pio Pio Restaurant** overlooking the stunning Cleddau River.

DAY 13

QUEENSTOWN TO TEKAPO (256KM)

Duck into **Arrowtown** as you hit the road. The historic mining town will have you in a trance with its cute heritage buildings and natural beauty.

The Dishery is the one for a brekky feed.

Jump in the car, stop at the hip new **Mint Folk & Co** cafe in Twizel and it's important you make a detour towards the Hooker Valley Track.

The **Hooker Valley Track** is at the base of **Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park**, a 3-hour return trip ideal for kids, those who complain about physical activities and people who like seeing stunning natural sights. The midpoint of the walk rewards those with a view of iceberg-speckled Hooker Lake looking up to the remarkable Aoraki/Mount Cook and the Southern Alps.

After a day of hard mahi (work), it's only right that you indulge in Tekapo's finest: **Ramen Tekapo**. The spicy miso ramen is the only thing that needs to be crossing your mind, maybe some fried chicken for good measure.



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DAY 14

TEKAPO

Wake up to the sun rising above the iconic **Church of the Good Shepherd**. Take a stunning lakefront walk and enjoy a coffee and a bite of breakfast from the **Greedy Cow**.

If you're up for the extraordinary, book an epic adventure with **Helicopter Line** or head off the beaten track in a 4WD with **Tekapo Adventures**.

Unwind with an afternoon soak and massage at **Tekapo Springs** – it has some of the best views in town.

Come dinner time, you're spoiled for choice ... **Kohan** offer great Japanese, dine with a view at the waterfront's **TLV Restaurant** or head to **Blue Lake Eatery and Bar** for some great Kiwi kai (food).

At night, sit back with a glass of Central Otago Pinot Noir for some self-guided stargazing.

On your drive home, stop to explore **Rakaia Gorge Walkway**. An easy 3–4 hour walk as you traverse along some of the most picturesque blue water you'll ever see.

Once you arrive in Ōtautahi, treat yourself to a massage at **O–Studio**, you can even book into their luxe wellness centre recovery space. A perfect way to decompress after seeing the sights of the South Island.

The final dinner of your trip should be at **Twenty Seven Steps** on iconic **New Regent Street** for modern European fare.

Finish off with some cocktails at the extremely cool **Gin Gin** and have a toast to your spectacular roadie across the South Island.

DAY 15

TEKAPO TO CHRISTCHURCH (214KM)

Stop off at the famous **Fairlie Bakehouse** for one of their incredible Kiwi pies (aka love wrapped in pastry). The most popular? Pork Belly and Apple hands down (probably due to the crunchy crackling baked into its lid).