



Southern Lakes & Mountains Explorer South Island: Christchurch to Christchurch 14 days

This tour covers the mid and southern region of the South Island. It encompasses the stunning natural beauty of five of our National Parks - Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park, Fiordland National Park, Westland Tai Poutini National Park, Rakiura/ Stewart Island National Park and Arthur's Pass National Park. The South West region of New Zealand is also a World Heritage site recognised internationally for its outstanding natural features taking us back millions of years to the ice age and our links with Gondwanaland, the ancient super continent. We visit the historic and beautiful central Otago region, exploring the landscapes of Clyde and Alexandra, Queenstown and Arrowtown. Also included in our itinerary is the relatively un-explored but beautiful Catlins region in the south west.

This tour is designed to allow you to experience the best features of these regions with their great variation in terrain and vegetation. We enjoy a range of hikes along the way, which immerse you in the landscapes giving you a real feel for the unique features of each region. We include some extra activities which we feel will enhance your experience, including an over-night cruise on Milford Sound, a night kiwi spotting adventure on Stewart Island, and a jet-boat trip on a remote river in South Westland. We try to keep the trip flexible, so there are many other optional activities that you may be interested in such as a scenic flight or a guided walk on the ice at Fox Glacier. The Southern Lakes and Mountains is an excellent trip, showcasing the grandeur of much of the South Island.

Day 1 Christchurch – Aoraki/Mt Cook

We depart Christchurch and head south over the Canterbury Plains to Lake Tekapo. This surreal lake is a terrific aqua blue colour due to the presence of glacial rock flour in the water, and is most striking against the yellow and brown hues of the surrounding hills of the Mackenzie Basin. We enjoy this stunning vista with a gentle hike [3hrs; Grade 2] up to a viewpoint providing a tremendous 360 degree view of the lake and Alps beyond. Our drive continues along the scenic canal system to Lake Pukaki where the imposing peak of Aoraki/Mt Cook can be seen in the distance. We spend the next two evenings in a B&B lodge on a high country station, with a million dollar view of Aoraki/Mt Cook. (L/D)

Day 2 Aoraki/Mt Cook

Spend the day in the awe inspiring Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park. Hike up to the Sealy Tarns [3.5hrs; Grade 3+] for mind-boggling views of the surrounding mountains, or alternatively do a gentle hike up the Hooker Valley to a glacial lake [4hrs; Grade 2]. Options for the remainder of the day include visiting the newly opened Sir Edmund Hillary Alpine Centre Museum; a boat tour on the glacier lake at the foot of the Tasman Glacier; horse riding in the high country terrain; or if you're up for it, take a stunning scenic helicopter flight round the many peaks of the park. (B/L/D)

Day 3 Aoraki/Mt Cook - Clyde

We make our way over the Lindis Pass and into the dry region of Central Otago. Walk along a gentle ridgeline that takes us through alpine herb fields, great schist rock tors and gold mining relics that afford magnificent views of the basin below [3hrs; Grade 2]. Alternatively walk beside the Clutha River under the restful willow trees where, during the 1860's, gold rush miners would have abounded [3hrs; Grade 1]. We stay at a beautifully restored historic hotel in the old gold mining precinct of Clyde, and eat out at a local restaurant. (B/L)

Day 4 Clyde - The Catlins

Travel down the Clutha River valley into the remote Catlins area, at the southern tip of the island. The Catlins is a special place with its beautiful forests, waterfalls and wildlife, yet it remains largely 'non-touristy'. First up, we visit a seal colony on a battered rocky point with

Tour Map



Grade



Tour Details

Tour Price: \$4,250
Single supplement: \$900*

Deposit: \$500

What's included? See bottom of page.
*Single supplement does not include Milford Sound overnight cruise.

Departure Dates:

Nov 5 – 18 2010
Jan 18 – 31 2011
Feb 15 – 28 2011
Mar 18 – 31 2011

Tours outside these dates are run on demand for groups of 8+ people and can be customised to suit your requirements.

great views of the South Pacific Ocean and beyond. Explore the picture-perfect waterfalls nestled amongst the lush virgin native podocarp forest, the vast sweeping white beaches, and hidden lakes with several shorter walks [Grade 1]. We make our way to our accommodation near Curio Bay, home of an incredible petrified forest that is visible at low tide - the original floor of the Jurassic forest, dating back some 160 million years. The very rare Yellow Eyed Penguins are resident in this bay, and we may be lucky enough to see the birds arriving back from a days fishing at sea in the late afternoon. Hector's dolphins, one of the smallest dolphin's in the world, are also resident in the bay. (B/L/D)

Day 5 The Catlins – Stewart Island

We head down the coast to the port town of Bluff where we catch the ferry over to Stewart Island, arriving on the island for lunch. Stewart Island lies 30km south of the South Island. It has a population of around 400 people, and only 20km of roads. It is our newest National Park, covering 157,000 hectares, or around 85% of the island. The quaint and friendly village of Oban is our base as we explore the island. In the afternoon your guides take you on a guided walk through the village and along a lovely coastal track with great views into Patterson's Inlet [3hrs; Grade 2]. Our giant forest parrot, the Kaka, abounds in this area. Then at twilight we take a locally guided tour out to an area where our rare and endangered kiwi are known to feed in the evening – this is a once in a lifetime opportunity to see kiwi in the natural habitat – something that most New Zealanders have never seen. (B/L/D)

Day 6 Stewart Island

Today we have left the options open to you to fill in as you please – venture off on one of the many walks in the area; take a tour to a wildlife sanctuary island; fly to the remote western side of the island and do a challenging 5-6 hour walk back; go sea kayaking or out on a boat fishing. In the evening we will catch up on the day's adventures at one of the local restaurants. (B)

Day 7 Stewart Island – Te Anau

We take the ferry back to the mainland and drive inland to Fiordland and Lake Manapouri, one of the prettiest and deepest lakes in the country, flanked by high mountain ranges and fringed with native beech forest. After a picnic lunch by the lake, we do a superb hike through the cool cover of the beech forest with springy leaf litter underfoot on the Kepler Track, one of our country's 'Great Walks' [2hrs; Grade 2]. We continue a short distance to our accommodation in the sleepy town of Te Anau. (B/L/D)

Day 8 Te Anau – Milford Sound

Today we take the time to explore the amazing Milford Road on the way into Milford Sound, stopping to admire the many small lakes and viewpoints along the way. We do a remarkable hike [4hrs; Grade 3] up through moss covered goblin-like beech trees to a great viewpoint of a hanging lake high in the mountains, or alternative a lovely walk into a river valley [3hrs; Grade 1]. In the evening when most of the tourists have departed for the day, we board our vessel which takes us out into the sound. Seals, penguins, dolphins and an array of birds are commonly seen as dusk falls, as we spend the evening on board the vessel. There is the option of sea kayaking in the sound to appreciate the nature at a closer level. (B/L/D)

Day 9 Milford Sound – Arrowtown

Disembarking from our overnight cruise, we make our way to the lovely quiet village of Arrowtown, via the famous Kawarau Suspension Bridge to view Queenstown's most famous pursuit – the bungee jump, where any adventure vacation junkies are invited to make a jump! We spend the next two evenings in a lovely cottage a stones throw from Arrowtown's restaurants and cafes. (B/D)

Day 10 Arrowtown/Queenstown

Today you can explore the area at your own pace. Arrowtown is a mere 20 minutes from Queenstown and there is the option of visiting the hustle and bustle of the 'adrenaline capital of the world' for the day. There are many adventure activities at hand to invigorate the body and soul such as mountain biking, horse riding, and paragliding to name but a few. Alternatively you can relax in idyllic Arrowtown where there are plenty of cafes and shops to keep you occupied, or even some pleasant hiking trails. (B)

Day 11 Arrowtown – Haast

We tackle the spectacular Crown Range road and head into the beautiful lakeside town of Wanaka. After a quick chance to explore and a latte, we continue to the mystical Haast Pass where you can stretch your legs and walk the final few kilometres to the top on the old bridle path [1hr; Grade 2]. This trail follows a gentle stream through mountain beech forest, and there are many of our native birds singing out along the way. We continue in the bus on to one of the country's most remote towns, Haast, nestled by the roaring sea in the World Heritage Park. In the afternoon we experience one of New Zealand's greatest inventions, a jet boat ride. This exhilarating ride takes us up a remote and beautiful river as our guide provides us with excellent information about the local area whilst negotiating rapids and submerged logs. (B/L/D)

Testimonials

"The scenery of your country is spectacular. Milford Sound, Fox Glacier and the fields of wild thyme to mention a few. I will certainly be recommending NZ as a tour destination to my friends and relatives. Thank you."
Pat Fountain, Australia, Dec 08

"The past two weeks have been a hugely enjoyable experience; essentially in being introduced to such a diverse and beautiful country but specifically in the manner this has been done - tramping in the care of dedicated, knowledgeable and friendly guides Heather & Robin. Thank you Pure Trails."

Peter Davidson Smith, UK, Dec 08

"It's hard to write about how wonderful everything was when we are all feeling a bit sad that it is over. What a wonderful experience in every respect... well maybe excluding the sandflies. And Robin & Heather were superb!"

Eileen & Max Listgarten, USA, Feb 08

"What a fabulous trip - the beauty and glory of New Zealand; the wonderful walks, jet boat ride, kayaking, Fox glacier heli-hike and so much more. Comfortable beds and great food (actually too great – the web site is right - you don't lose weight on this trip!) And fair does not describe the weather - it was perfect! What a way to celebrate ones 68th birthday. To Heather and Robin - the best and most gracious guides ever - a huge, enormous thank you."

Ralph Fine, USA, Dec 07

"This trip was a breath of fresh air - literally and figuratively. The variety of landscapes made each day a wonderful surprise. Having two guides so that different levels of difficulty can be accommodated is an excellent idea. Sue and Jim were warm, patient and very informative with scientific facts and local lore. We felt like a small happy family. We also appreciated the fresh healthy food. I look forward to more PureTrails trips."

Bette Lawler, USA, Nov 07

"The trip has lived up to all our expectations, and a wonderful opportunity to see NZ from a different perspective. All helped by Robin & Heathers super guiding and excellent food/good driving. We will be back again - Cheers."

Jan & David, UK, Feb 08

"The perfect trip - a view of Mt Cook from all sides with no clouds – not a drop of rain and wonderful travel companions. Thanks for this perfect experience."

Lucy Jervois, Canada, Dec 07

Day 12 Haast – Franz Josef

We do a short walk [Grade 1] to explore a rugged driftwood strewn beach at the forest edge on our way up the coast to the mighty glaciers. At Fox Glacier, remarkable in that it snakes right down into a temperate rain forest, you can opt to do the additional activities of a guided walk on the ice [Grade 3], or perhaps a heli-hike where you explore the upper reaches of the glacier after first viewing the river of ice from a helicopter. Alternatively, we can take you on another hike to a hidden viewpoint of the glacier [2hrs; Grade 3], or around a forest fringed lake offering unparalleled photo opportunities on a clear day [1.5hrs; Grade 1]. We stay in the alpine village of Franz Josef. (B/L/D)

Day 13 Franz Josef – Hokitika

We visit a tiny seaside settlement of Okarito. Here we do a boat tour that takes us deep into the Okarito Lagoon, a huge unmodified wetland full of birds including the elusive Kotuku or White Heron, where we learn about the amazing history of the area and appreciate the large variety of wading birds. On clear days the view of the Southern Alps from the across the lagoon are second to none. In the afternoon we enjoy a walk [3hrs; Grade 2] in the hills behind the village, featuring more great views. We then head up the coast to our final stopover of Hokitika. Eat out at a local restaurant. (B/L)

Day 14 Hokitika – Christchurch

We explore the town of Hokitika and visit a pounamu (greenstone) workshop where we learn about the history and significance of pounamu to Maori from this region and indeed the whole of the country. Then we drive over the spectacular Arthur's Pass, stopping for a short walk through mountain beech forest [1hr; Grade 2] to stretch our legs on the way back to Christchurch and the end of the tour. We will be back in Christchurch by approximately 5 pm. (B/L)

Included in the tour package:

All prices are in New Zealand dollars and include GST of 12.5%. The fare includes just about everything including: 13 nights accommodation; 9 evening meals, 11 lunches, 13 breakfasts and plenty of healthy snacks in between [as indicated on the itinerary]; 2 fantastic friendly guides; a Milford Sound overnight cruise and kayak; a twilight kiwi watching tour on Stewart Island; a West Coast jetboat ride; an Okarito Lagoon boat tour; and all transport and guided hikes.

Not included in the tour price are 4 evening meals; 3 lunches, wine and beer [you are welcome to BYO], and any other adventure activities you would like to do along the way. We have indicated just some of the options in the itinerary, but the possibilities are endless! Prices quoted are approximate. If you choose not to participate in any optional activities we will always have walking options available so you don't need to spend a lot of money to have a great experience.

Level of Difficulty:



Grade 1

Walks on well formed walking trails or beaches with a mostly even surface, possibly with some slopes or steps. Distances walked average 5 - 10km, with a 50-150m altitude gain. For this grade we recommend an average level of fitness.



Grade 2

Walks on well formed walking trails with some slopes or steps. There may be muddy patches, tree roots and rocks to negotiate. Distances walked average 5 - 12km, with a 150-400m altitude gain. For this grade we recommend an average level of fitness.



Grade 3

Walks on walking trails with some steep slopes or steps. There may be muddy patches, tree roots, minor stream crossings and rocks to negotiate. Distances walked average 5 - 12km, with a 300-650m altitude gain. For this grade we recommend an above average level of fitness.