



Seasonal Sensation: South Island in Autumn and Winter

NEW ZEALAND · CHRISTCHURCH · QUEENSTOWN

9D 8N

25-30 PAX

STARTS CHRISTCHURCH

NOT INCLUDED

See New Zealand's South Island in its quieter autumn and winter character, when the Mackenzie Basin turns pale gold, Arrowtown glows with seasonal colour and snow gathers across Queenstown's surrounding ranges. This nine-day route travels from Christchurch through Lake Tekapo and Aoraki Mt Cook to three nights in Queenstown. Included excursions cover Glenorchy and Paradise, plus Arrowtown and Wānaka, while free days create space for weather-dependent options such as the TranzAlpine, Kaikoura whale watching or skiing at Cardrona. Eight nights' accommodation, airport transfers and guided coach touring are included. Operating from May to September only, this journey is designed for travellers who want the South Island's celebrated landscapes in their most atmospheric season.

01

Arrive Christchurch

Your arrival in Christchurch is met with a private transfer to your hotel. The city sits between the Pacific Ocean and the foothills of the Southern Alps — a position that becomes more significant in winter when the Alps carry snow and the air coming off the Canterbury Plains is noticeably colder than Auckland.

Christchurch City Centre — The post-earthquake rebuild has produced some genuinely interesting architecture alongside the restored heritage buildings. The Avon River precinct and the Botanic Gardens are within easy walking distance of most central accommodation and are worth an evening walk if you arrive with daylight to spare.

OVERNIGHT

Christchurch

02

Christchurch — free day

A free day in Christchurch before the itinerary moves inland. The optional activities available from here make good use of the season — the TranzAlpine is one of the better scenic train journeys in New Zealand at any time of year, but the section through Arthur's Pass in snow is particular.

TranzAlpine Scenic Train — A 224-kilometre rail journey from Christchurch to Greymouth through the Canterbury Plains and the Southern Alps. The Waimakariri Gorge and the viaducts near Arthur's Pass are the visual highlights. Day return available. Own expense.

Hanmer Springs — A thermal resort town 90 minutes north of Christchurch in the Hurunui district. The Hanmer Springs Thermal Pools complex has a range of outdoor pools heated by natural geothermal water; in winter the combination of cold air and warm water is the point. Day tour available, own expense.

Kaikoura Whale Watch — A boat-based whale watching operation out of Kaikoura, approximately 2 hours north of Christchurch. Sperm whales are present year-round due to the submarine canyon geography. Day tour available, own expense.

Antarctic Centre — Adjacent to Christchurch Airport, a substantive museum covering Antarctic exploration with a live penguin encounter and a storm simulation room. Own expense.

OVERNIGHT

Christchurch

03

Christchurch to Aoraki Mt Cook — via Lake Tekapo

The drive inland from Christchurch crosses the Canterbury Plains before the road climbs through the Mackenzie Basin. In autumn the tussock turns gold and the sky above the basin is a particular shade of blue that photographers come back for. In winter, snow on the Ben Ohau Range changes the whole register.

Church of the Good Shepherd, Lake Tekapo — A small stone chapel built in 1935 on the lakeshore, with a plain glass window behind the altar framing the lake and mountains. The lake's turquoise colour — glacial rock flour suspended in the water — shifts slightly in winter light. Allow 20 minutes.

Lake Tekapo Dark Sky Reserve — The Mackenzie Basin holds one of the world's few certified International Dark Sky Reserve designations. The absence of light pollution and the altitude make the night sky here something that warrants staying up for. Stargazing tours are available independently in the evening.

Aoraki Mt Cook — New Zealand's highest peak at 3,724 metres. The approach road runs alongside Lake Pukaki, whose colour deepens against the snow on the surrounding ranges in winter. The Hooker Valley Track from the village takes you toward the terminal lake below the Hooker Glacier; allow 90 minutes.

OVERNIGHT

Mt Cook region

04

Aoraki Mt Cook to Queenstown

The morning is free at Mt Cook Village before the coach heads south to Queenstown. The free time is worth using: the Hooker Valley Track, the Governors Bush walk, and the Mt Cook Alpine Village visitor centre all work well in the morning before departure. In clear winter conditions, the views from the village toward the main divide are at their most defined.

Alpine Vista Scenic Helicopter Flight — A 20-minute scenic flight over the glacier and the main divide, available as an optional extra. Weather dependent; book through your accommodation or guide the evening before. Own expense.

Drive to Queenstown — The route runs south alongside Lake Pukaki, through the Mackenzie basin and Cromwell, and into Queenstown through the Kawarau Gorge. Approximately 3.5 hours.

OVERNIGHT

Queenstown

05

Queenstown — Glenorchy and Paradise

The road north from Queenstown to Glenorchy runs along the western shore of Lake Wakatipu for 45 kilometres — one of the more consistently dramatic stretches of road in the South Island, with the lake on the right and the Humboldt and Richardson ranges rising on the left. In autumn the willows and poplars along the lake edge turn yellow and gold; in winter the ranges above the tree line hold snow.

Glenorchy and Paradise Explorer Tour — Included. The tour runs to Glenorchy township at the head of the lake, then continues into the Dart River valley toward Paradise — the river flat and beech forest location used for several Lord of the Rings exterior scenes including the approach to Lothlórien. The guide covers both the landscape geography and the film history. Allow 4–5 hours.

Glenorchy Township — A small settlement with a population under 300, a classic New Zealand country pub, and unobstructed views down the lake toward the Remarkables. The scale of the landscape at this end of the lake is different from the town end.

Optional: Original Onsen Exclusive Indoor Pool — a private outdoor hot pool facility overlooking the Shotover River canyon, 10 minutes from Queenstown (own expense).

OVERNIGHT

Queenstown

06

Queenstown — Arrowtown and Wānaka

Arrowtown is 20 minutes from Queenstown on the Arrow River, a gold rush settlement that retained enough of its original streetscape to become one of the most visited heritage towns in the South Island. In autumn, the poplars and willows along the riverbank are the main draw; the Chinese settlement precinct behind the main street is worth an hour regardless of season.

Arrowtown and Wānaka Highlights Tour — Included. The tour covers Arrowtown's heritage streetscape and the Chinese settlement, then crosses the Crown Range to Wānaka. The Crown Range at 1,076 metres is the highest sealed road in New Zealand; the descent to the Wānaka basin gives one of the better panoramic views on the itinerary. Wānaka township sits on the lake's southern shore with the Southern Alps behind it. Allow a full day.

Crown Range — The sealed road between Arrowtown and Wānaka reaches 1,076 metres; snow chains may be required in winter. The summit plateau gives views across the Arrow Basin and, on clear days, toward the Remarkables and Coronet Peak.

Optional: Skyline Gondola Ride with Buffet Dinner — the cable car to Bob's Peak and dinner at the summit restaurant (own expense).

OVERNIGHT

Queenstown

07

Queenstown — free day

A second free day in Queenstown structured around the winter optional activities. Note that snow-dependent options require checking conditions the evening before — the guide or hotel concierge can advise on which ski fields are operating and whether road access to the mountain is clear.

First Timer Ski Package — A beginner ski or snowboard lesson at one of the Queenstown-area ski fields (Coronet Peak, The Remarkables, or Cardrona). Own expense. The Remarkables is the closest to Queenstown; Cardrona is larger and better suited to beginners.

Cardrona Sightseeing Gondola — A cable car on the Cardrona ski field that runs year-round for non-skiers, giving access to the alpine zone above 1,670 metres. Own expense.

Heli-Snowmobiling — A helicopter into the backcountry followed by a guided snowmobile session on a high-altitude snowfield. Weather and snow-dependent. Own expense.

Minus 5 Ice Bar — An indoor ice bar in central Queenstown with everything from the bar to the glasses carved from ice. The mocktail entry package is the relevant option. Own expense.

All optional activities bookable through your hotel or guide. Snow conditions vary; check the evening before.

OVERNIGHT

Queenstown

08

Queenstown to Christchurch — through the Lindis Pass

The return to Christchurch runs through the Kawarau Gorge, across the Cromwell basin, and up through the Lindis Pass before descending into the Mackenzie district and on to the Canterbury Plains. In winter, the Lindis Pass frequently carries snow on the verges and the tussock on both sides takes on a pale frost colour in the morning light.

Kawarau Gorge — The Kawarau River gorge on the eastern approach to Queenstown, with the original AJ Hackett bungy site visible from the road. The schist rock in the gorge walls is characteristic of Central Otago's geological structure.

Lindis Pass (971 metres) — The main divide between Otago and the Mackenzie Basin. One of the more photogenic stretches of the South Island's state highway network, particularly under snow or with frost on the tussock.

Mackenzie Basin and Canterbury Plains — The route follows the same broad plain back to Christchurch, passing the turnoff to Lake Tekapo and crossing the braided rivers of the Canterbury lowlands before the city.

Optional: Christchurch Tram Dinner on arrival (own expense).

OVERNIGHT

Christchurch

Depart Christchurch

The tour concludes with a departure transfer to Christchurch Airport. Your guide confirms pick-up timing the evening before based on your flight schedule.

Christchurch Airport (CHC) — International departures from CHC. Allow at least three hours for international check-in and immigration.

Optional: If your flight departs in the afternoon, the International Antarctic Centre adjacent to the airport is worth two hours — a substantive museum covering Antarctic exploration with a live penguin encounter and a storm simulation room (own expense, also available on Day 2 if you prefer).

What's Included

DEPARTS FROM
Christchurch

FLIGHTS
Not included

GROUP SIZE
25–30 pax

INCLUDED

check Meet and greet arrival transfer in Christchurch

check 8 nights accommodation

check Christchurch to Lake Tekapo and Aoraki Mt Cook guided coach tour

check Mt Cook to Queenstown guided coach transfer

check Glenorchy and Paradise Explorer Tour

check Arrowtown and Wānaka Highlights Tour

check Queenstown to Christchurch coach transfer

check Departure transfer to Christchurch Airport

NOT INCLUDED

– International flights

– Travel insurance

– Meals not specified in the itinerary

– Optional activities and entrance fees

– Personal expenses, laundry and minibar