



Splendid South: New Zealand's South Island Circuit

NEW ZEALAND · CHRISTCHURCH · QUEENSTOWN

7D 6N

25-30 PAX

STARTS CHRISTCHURCH

NOT INCLUDED

Travel through the South Island's defining landscapes on a seven-day guided circuit from Christchurch. Cross the Canterbury Plains into the Mackenzie Basin, where the glacial colours of Lake Tekapo and Lake Pukaki lead toward Aoraki Mt Cook. Continue to Queenstown for two nights, including free time for optional adventures, before the full-day journey through Fiordland to Milford Sound and its dramatic granite walls and waterfalls. Return to Christchurch by coach after a route that balances major scenery with manageable stops. Six nights' accommodation, airport transfers, guided transport and a Milford Sound cruise with lunch are included. This itinerary suits travellers who want the South Island's essential arc without driving or coordinating the long regional connections themselves.

01

Arrive Christchurch

Your arrival in Christchurch is a private transfer from the airport to your hotel — a straightforward start that gives you the afternoon to orientate yourself. Christchurch sits between the Pacific Ocean and the Southern Alps, and its city centre has been substantially rebuilt since the 2011 earthquake. The result is a city that feels newer than most New Zealand cities, with a riverside walkway along the Avon and inner-city gardens that have survived intact.

Christchurch City Centre — The post-earthquake rebuild has produced some genuinely interesting architecture alongside the restored heritage buildings. The central botanic gardens and the Avon River precinct are within easy walking distance of most accommodation.

Optional: Christchurch Tram Tour — a heritage tram circuit of the central city with commentary; Punting on the Avon River — a 30-minute pole-punt along the tree-lined river through the botanic gardens (own expense, bookable at the hotel).

OVERNIGHT

Christchurch

02

Christchurch to Aoraki Mt Cook — via Lake Tekapo

The drive inland from Christchurch crosses the Canterbury Plains — wide, flat farmland that gives little warning of what comes next. Lake Tekapo is the turn in the road. The colour of the water is caused by rock flour suspended in glacial meltwater; the effect is more vivid in person than in photographs. The Church of the Good Shepherd on the lakeshore is the standard stop and worth the queue.

Church of the Good Shepherd — A small stone chapel built in 1935 on the lakeshore at Tekapo, with a window behind the altar framing the lake and mountains. One of the most photographed sites in New Zealand. Allow 20 minutes.

Lake Tekapo Dark Sky Reserve — The Mackenzie Basin is one of the world's few certified International Dark Sky Reserves. Stargazing options are available independently in the evening if you choose to stay overnight locally.

Aoraki Mt Cook — New Zealand's highest peak at 3,724 metres. The approach road runs alongside Lake Pukaki, whose colour shifts between blue and green depending on the light and season. The Hooker Valley Track from the village is the recommended short walk if time permits.

OVERNIGHT

Mt Cook region

03

Aoraki Mt Cook to Queenstown — through the high country

The drive from Mt Cook Village to Queenstown is around three hours and covers some of the most varied terrain on this itinerary. You leave alongside Lake Pukaki heading south, then climb into the tussock high country through the Mackenzie Basin before descending through the Kawarau Gorge. Cromwell's fruit orchards and the vine-covered slopes of Central Otago mark the final approach to Queenstown.

Lake Pukaki — The road follows the western shore for the first 30 minutes out of Mt Cook. The water is the same suspended-glacial colour as Tekapo but at significantly larger scale. Early morning light is best.

Cromwell — A small Central Otago town in a valley carved by the Clutha River, now partially flooded by Lake Dunstan. The old town remains partially submerged; the new Cromwell Heritage Precinct sits on the waterfront. Stone fruit and cherries are the region's principal produce.

Kawarau Gorge — The gorge cut by the Kawarau River on the approach to Queenstown, with the original AJ Hackett bungy jump bridge visible from the road.

OVERNIGHT

Queenstown

04

Queenstown — free day

Queenstown operates at a different register from the rest of the South Island. It is a compact lakeside town ringed by mountains that has built an entire industry around using that landscape as an activity venue. Today is unscheduled: the itinerary provides the base, the time, and the location — what you do with it is yours to decide. The activity options range from bungy jumping and white-water rafting to a slow afternoon on the TSS Earnslaw steamship.

Skyline Gondola — A cable car from the town centre to Bob's Peak at 450 metres, with views across Lake Wakatipu and the Remarkables range. Restaurant at the top; luge track available.

Shotover Jetboat — High-speed jet boat through the narrow Shotover River canyon; widely considered one of the better versions of a jet boat ride in New Zealand.

TSS Earnslaw Steamship to Walter Peak Farm — A 1912 coal-fired steamship crossing Lake Wakatipu to a high-country farm. Farm show and high tea included in the optional excursion.

Dart River Wilderness Jet — A jet boat into the head of the Dart River valley in the Mt Aspiring National Park, through braided glacial channels and beech forest.

All optional activities are own expense, bookable through the hotel or your guide.

OVERNIGHT

Queenstown

05

Milford Sound — Fiordland's granite walls and year-round waterfalls

The Milford Sound day is the longest on this itinerary — approximately 12 hours door to door — and worth knowing that before you start. The drive through Fiordland National Park covers 120 kilometres of progressively more remote terrain, passing mirror lakes, the Homer Tunnel, and a landscape that has received minimal human modification since the glaciers retreated. The fiord itself is the destination.

Mirror Lakes — A series of small tarns off the main road that reflect the Earl Mountains on calm mornings. A 10-minute stop en route.

Homer Tunnel — A single-lane tunnel 1.2 kilometres long through the Darran Mountains, opened in 1954. The approach through the hanging valley is one of the more dramatic road moments on the drive.

Milford Sound Fiord Cruise — The fiord is 15 kilometres long and bordered by walls of granite and gneiss rising 1,200 metres out of the water. Mitre Peak at 1,692 metres is the most photographed point. Stirling Falls and Lady Bowen Falls run year-round. Lunch is included on board.

The return drive covers the same route in reverse, arriving back in Queenstown by evening.

MEALS

Lunch

OVERNIGHT

Queenstown

06

Queenstown to Christchurch — through the Lindis Pass

The return to Christchurch takes a different route north — through the Kawarau Gorge, across the Cromwell basin, and up through the Lindis Pass before descending into the Mackenzie district again. The landscape shifts from the golden tussock of Central Otago to the wide blue-grey rivers of the Canterbury Plains as you approach Christchurch. Allow the full day; this is a long transfer.

Lindis Pass — The main divide between Otago and the Mackenzie, at 971 metres. Tussock country on both sides; one of the more desolate and beautiful stretches of road in the South Island.

Lake Dunstan — The reservoir formed by the Clyde Dam on the Clutha River, visible along the route through Cromwell.

Note: Kiwiway suggests considering a Queenstown-to-Christchurch domestic flight as an alternative to this road return, which can be added to international flights independently. Your guide or hotel can advise on availability.

Optional: Christchurch Tram Dinner on arrival.

OVERNIGHT

Christchurch

Depart Christchurch

The tour concludes with a departure transfer to Christchurch Airport. Timing depends on your flight schedule; your guide will confirm the pick-up time the evening before.

Christchurch Airport — International departures from CHC. Check-in times vary by airline; allow at least three hours for international flights.

Optional: If you have time before the transfer, the International Antarctic Centre adjacent to the airport is worth two hours — a well-produced museum covering the history and science of Antarctic exploration, with a live penguin encounter and a storm simulation room (own expense).

What's Included

DEPARTS FROM
Christchurch

FLIGHTS
Not included

GROUP SIZE
25–30 pax

INCLUDED

- ✓ Meet and greet arrival transfer in Christchurch
- ✓ 6 nights accommodation
- ✓ Christchurch to Lake Tekapo and Aoraki Mt Cook guided tour
- ✓ Mt Cook to Queenstown guided transfer
- ✓ Milford Sound day tour with fiord cruise and lunch
- ✓ Queenstown to Christchurch coach transfer
- ✓ Departure transfer to Christchurch Airport

NOT INCLUDED

- International and domestic flights
- Travel insurance
- Meals not specified in the itinerary
- Optional activities and entrance fees
- Personal expenses, laundry and minibar