NEXTRIP

West Coast Highlights: South Island Self-Drive

NEW ZEALAND · CHRISTCHURCH · QUEENSTOWN

7D 6N | 25–30 PAX | STARTS CHRISTCHURCH | NOT INCLUDED

Drive New Zealand's dramatic western South Island from Christchurch to Queenstown over seven days without retracing your route. Cross Arthur's Pass to the West Coast, spend time around Franz Josef and Fox glaciers, continue through Haast Pass and Wānaka, then finish in Queenstown with Skyline Gondola and a full-day Milford Sound journey. Included experiences also cover Christchurch's International Antarctic Centre, Puzzling World and a fiord cruise with lunch. Six nights' accommodation and rental car hire with reduced or zero excess liability provide freedom while keeping the route organised. This journey suits independent travellers who want the South Island's coast, glaciers, mountain passes and Fiordland explored at their own pace rather than through a fixed group timetable.

DAY

01

CHRISTCHURCH · OVERNIGHT 1 OF 1

Arrive Christchurch — collect rental car

Collect your rental car at Christchurch Airport and drive to your accommodation in the city. The car is included for 6 days with zero or reduced excess liability — confirm the specific excess terms at collection. Christchurch Airport is 10 kilometres from the city centre; the drive in takes 20–25 minutes.

International Antarctic Centre — Included. Adjacent to the airport terminal, this is a substantive museum covering Antarctic exploration from Christchurch's role as a southern gateway city since the Heroic Era expeditions. The live penguin encounter, the Hagglund all-terrain vehicle ride, and the storm simulation room are the three main experiences. Use the admission today on arrival or tomorrow morning before heading west. Allow at least 2 hours.

Christchurch City Centre — The Botanic Gardens and Avon River precinct are within easy reach of most central accommodation. The post-earthquake rebuild has produced some architecturally interesting structures alongside the restored heritage buildings.

OVERNIGHT

Christchurch

DAY

02

FRANZ JOSEF · OVERNIGHT 1 OF 2

Christchurch to the Glacier Region — via Arthur's Pass

The drive from Christchurch to the Glacier Region is 240–380 kilometres depending on your route — allow 3.5 to 5 hours. The direct inland route via Arthur's Pass is 310 kilometres; the coastal route via Greymouth is longer but follows the West Coast once you cross the divide.

Arthur's Pass National Park — The main divide crossing on SH73 reaches 920 metres at the pass. The drive through the Waimakariri Gorge before the climb is one of the more dramatic sections of the Canterbury approach. Arthur's Pass village is the last substantial stop before the West Coast; the kea (alpine parrot) in the carpark are reliable. The Otira Tunnel on the western descent is 8.5 kilometres.

West Coast — The narrow coastal strip between the Tasman Sea and the Southern Alps is one of the wettest inhabited regions in New Zealand — up to 5,000 millimetres of rainfall per year in some areas. The result is dense temperate rainforest right to the glacier's edge.

Optional: West Coast Treetop Walkway near Hokitika — an elevated walkway through the native forest canopy (own expense).

OVERNIGHT

Glacier Region

DAY

03

FRANZ JOSEF · OVERNIGHT 2 OF 2

Glacier Region — Franz Josef and Fox Glacier

A full day in glacier country. Franz Josef and Fox Glacier are 25 kilometres apart on the same road; both are accessible as day visits from either township. The glaciers descend from the Main Divide at around 2,700 metres to near sea level — a function of the West Coast's extreme rainfall feeding the accumulation zones and the steep valleys accelerating the flow.

Franz Josef Glacier Valley Walk — The road into the Franz Josef Glacier valley ends at a carpark from which a self-guided walk leads to the current glacier viewpoint. The guide boards in the valley mark where the glacier face stood in previous decades; the retreat is well documented. Allow 1.5–2 hours return.

Fox Glacier — 25 kilometres south of Franz Josef. A similar valley walk leads toward the Fox Glacier terminal face. The two glaciers are fed by the same neve on the Main Divide; Fox is slightly longer and lower.

Optional: Franz Josef Glacier Heli-Hike — helicopter access to the current ice face with a guided walk on crampons, weather dependent (own expense); Fox Glacier Valley E-Bike and Hike — a guided electric bike and walking combination in the lower valley (own expense).

OVERNIGHT

Glacier Region

DAY

04

QUEENSTOWN · OVERNIGHT 1 OF 3

Glacier Region to Queenstown — via Haast Pass and Wānaka

The drive from the Glacier Region to Queenstown is 350 kilometres — approximately 4 hours 45 minutes including stops. The route runs south through Fox Glacier township, over the Haast Pass, through the Makarora valley, and into Central Otago. This is the South Island's most geographically diverse single day of driving: temperate rainforest, the main divide crossing, the dry eastern ranges, and the schist landscape of Central Otago all within one day.

Haast Pass (563 metres) — The lowest crossing of the Southern Alps, running through the Haast Pass / Tioripatea UNESCO World Heritage Area. The transition from West Coast rainforest to the drier eastern landscape happens within a few kilometres either side of the summit. The Haast River gorge on the approach from the west is worth slowing down for.

Makarora Blue Pools — A short walk from the Makarora carpark leads to a series of pools on the Makarora River, fed by glacial meltwater from the Main Divide. The water is clear and intensely cold. Allow 40 minutes return.

Puzzling World, Wānaka — Included. An attraction on the outskirts of Wānaka built around optical illusions, a leaning tower, a tilted room, and a large outdoor maze. Allow 1–1.5 hours.

OVERNIGHT

Queenstown

DAY

05

QUEENSTOWN · OVERNIGHT 2 OF 3

Queenstown — Skyline Gondola and free afternoon

A day in Queenstown anchored by the included Skyline Gondola, with the afternoon free for optional activities or independent exploration of the town and its surroundings by car.

Skyline Gondola — Included. A cable car from the town centre to Bob's Peak at 450 metres, with views across Lake Wakatipu and the Remarkables range. The luge track at the top is own expense; three luge rides can be added for a fixed price. The restaurant at the summit is the best elevated dining option in Queenstown. Allow 1–2 hours.

Afternoon free. Options accessible by car: Glenorchy (45 minutes north along the lake — one of the most scenic short drives in the South Island); Arrowtown (20 minutes, gold rush streetscape and Chinese settlement precinct); the Gibbston Valley wine gorge east of town.

Optional: Glenorchy Lord of the Rings 4WD Safari (own expense); Walter Peak BBQ Lunch by Vintage Steamship on the TSS Earnslaw (own expense); Shotover Jetboat (own expense); Original Onsen private hot pools (own expense).

OVERNIGHT

Queenstown

DAY

06

QUEENSTOWN · OVERNIGHT 3 OF 3

Queenstown — Milford Sound day trip

The Milford Sound day is approximately 12 hours when self-driving from Queenstown — 287 kilometres each way through Fiordland National Park. Leave by 7:00am to reach the fiord in time for a midday cruise.

Driving notes: the road through Fiordland from Te Anau is sealed throughout. The Homer Tunnel is single-lane with traffic managed by lights; wait times up to 15 minutes. In wet weather the waterfalls above the road and down the valley walls are at their most dramatic; Fiordland receives some of the highest rainfall in the world and wet days are not uncommon. Check road conditions at nzta.govt.nz the evening before.

Mirror Lakes — Small tarns off the Te Anau–Milford road that reflect the Earl Mountains on calm mornings. A 10-minute stop.

Homer Tunnel — 1.2 kilometres through the Darran Mountains, opened in 1954. The hanging valley above the portal is one of the more memorable road moments on the South Island.

Milford Sound Fiord Cruise — Included. The fiord is 15 kilometres long with granite walls 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.

Return to Queenstown by your own vehicle, arriving evening.

MEALS

Lunch

OVERNIGHT

Queenstown

DAY

07

QUEENSTOWN

Depart Queenstown — return rental car

Return the rental car to Queenstown Airport and check in for your international departure. Queenstown Airport (ZQN) handles international departures directly; allow at least three hours before your flight for car return, check-in, and immigration.

Rental car return notes: the car is due back on a 24-hour hire basis from the collection time in Christchurch on Day 1. Early international arrivals or late departures may require an additional hire day — confirm the exact return deadline and any one-way inter-island fees at collection.

Queenstown town centre — If time permits before the flight, the waterfront and central Queenstown are 10 minutes from the airport. Arrowtown is 25 minutes and worth a morning visit if you have not already been.

YOUR TRIP AT A GLANCE

What's Included

DEPARTS FROM	FLIGHTS	GROUP SIZE
Christchurch	**Not included**	**25–30 pax**

INCLUDED

- check 6-day rental car hire with zero or reduced excess liability (collected Christchurch, returned Queenstown)
- check 6 nights accommodation
- check International Antarctic Centre admission, Christchurch
- check Puzzling World admission, Wānaka
- check Skyline Gondola ride, Queenstown
- check Milford Sound cruise with lunch

NOT INCLUDED

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