

active earth Adventures | HIKING New Zealand

SOUTH ISLAND GRAND HIKES

ITINERARY





From sheer granite fiords to the ice-plateaus of the Southern Alps, experience the grandeur of Aotearoa New Zealand's South Island. Join a small group journey through this primordial landscape. Our expert Kiwi guides lead the way, bringing the land to life and taking care of every detail.

Hike a mix of day walks and short trails that reveal the South Island's most beautiful and diverse wilderness. From strenuous alpine hikes to strolls along the beach, choose the activities that suit you. This trip is perfect for people who love hiking and their creature comforts. Stay in handpicked accommodation set within the landscapes you've come to see; enjoy wonderful meals that celebrate fresh local flavours. Connect with Kiwi culture and Māori tradition for a deeper sense of this place and its people.

Travel with us and experience Aotearoa's wild beauty in the company of like-minded travellers. Could this be the trip you've been looking for?

LENGTH	10 days	
GRADE	B - No outdoor experience required just reasonable fitness	
START	Nelson, Rutherford Hotel, 27 Nile Street at 4:00pm	
FINISH	Queenstown, 5:00pm (approximately)	
ACCOMMODATION	Hotels and Lodges	
INCLUDED ACTIVITIES	Abel Tasman boat cruise, Natural Flames, Glacier boat trip and Milford Sound cruise	
OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES	All activities outlined in itinerary are included in trip price.	
DEPARTURES	2026 Nov: 24 2027 Jan: 19 | Feb: 2, 16 | Mar: 2, 16	2027 Nov: 2, 23 | Dec: 14 2028 Jan: 18 | Feb: 1, 15, 29 | Mar: 14
PRICE	1 Jul 2026 - 30 Jun 2028 Adult NZD $10,800.00 Single Supplement NZD $1,800.00	

"SECOND TIME, JUST AS LUCKY!"

We were lucky from start to finish with the weather and credit our guide, Dan, with knowing which way the wind would be blowing! We found the inclines of the Southern Alps more challenging than we anticipated but eventually we found a way to catch our breath while stopping to admire the amazing scenery. Dan kept us informed with his knowledge of geological formations and tracks and entertained us with stories related directly, or tangentially to the area. Leaving the planning and logistics to Hiking New Zealand made this a true holiday for us.

~ Bytown – Canada, April, **Trip Advisor**

"EXCELLENT IN EVERY WAY!"

Luxury accommodation, meals and service with spectacular itinerary and first class guides (two per minibus). Challenging walks and exciting excursions without white knuckle experiences, and there is always an easier option if required. Every day is filled with activities or travelling and suites solos, families and groups of moderate or better walking abilities.
Worth every penny, enjoyed every minute.

~ February - **Trip Advisor**

ITINERARY











DAY 1 NELSON

Up to 3.3 km (2 miles), 1-1.5 hours hiking, elevation +/-170 m (560 ft)
Meet your guides and other walkers joining the tour in the Rutherford Hotel foyer at 4pm. There will be opportunity for a guided hike up Botanical Hill, also known as the "Centre of New Zealand" to enjoy sweeping views of Tasman Bay and Nelson City, or an alternative option to independently explore this lively town suggested by your guides. Later we celebrate the start of our South Island tour by dining together in one of Nelson's fine restaurants. *Accommodation: Rutherford Hotel, Nelson. Includes dinner*

DAY 2 NELSON - ABEL TASMAN NATIONAL PARK

Up to 12.2 km (7.6 miles), 4 hours hiking, elevation +/-700 m (2,300 ft)
After an early breakfast, we set off for Abel Tasman National Park. At the beach resort of Kaiteriteri, board a water taxi and cruise the coastline past golden sand beaches, rugged granite headlands and bush clad islands.

Step ashore at Bark Bay and follow the famed Abel Tasman Coast Track through native forests and past cascading streams. A well-formed trail leads us up and over gentle ridges to Torrent Bay, where the lovely clear fresh waters of Cleopatra's Pool may tempt you to take a dip or for those more daring - a slide down the naturally formed hydro-slide!
At Anchorage, we will meet the water taxi for a return journey to Kaiteriteri before heading back to Nelson in the late afternoon.

There is an opportunity to further explore this vibrant and arty little town this evening with the many great restaurant dining options. *Accommodation: Rutherford Hotel. Includes breakfast, lunch and dinner.*

DAY 3 NELSON - PUNAKAIKI

Up to 6 km (3.7 miles), 2 hours hiking, elevation +/-170 m (560 ft)
On the way to the West Coast we stop for a remarkable hike to marvel at natural flames which have been burning since the 1920's. We access this phenomena with a local guide through a privately-owned working deer farm. Unlike the Eternal Flames of the Chimera in Turkey these flames are surrounded by lush tree ferns and beech forest. A cup of 'billy tea' and hot cakes prepared over the flames gives this experience a distinctly 'kiwi' flavour.

Our journey resumes alongside the mighty Buller River as it cuts its way through the massive wilderness of the upper South Island to the coast at Westport. We then traverse a section of spectacular coastline and catch the sunset at Punakaiki. Take an evening stroll around the famous Pancake Rocks and blowholes – we try to time our visit with high tide so we may leave the rocks until tomorrow if tide times are more favourable. *Accommodation: Scenic Hotel Punakaiki. Includes breakfast, lunch and dinner.*

DAY 4 PUNAKAIKI TO METHVEN

Up to 9.6 km (6 miles), 3-3.5 hours hiking, elevation +/-360 m (1,180 ft)
Hike the Inland Pack Track from the Pororari to the Punakaiki River. This historic route once used by prospectors and miners to avoid immense coastal cliffs while travelling the West Coast now forms part of our newest Great Walk, the Paparoa Track. Pass through deep limestone canyons and towering rainforest with groves of tropical nikau palms. You may not be able to resist a speedy swim in one of the many deep clear pools you pass on the way!

After the hike, we travel a remarkable highway which takes us from the lush green rainforests of the West Coast and over the glaciated Southern Alps to the parched soft yellow tussock grasslands of the eastern high country. This is one of the most cleverly engineered roads in New Zealand.

East of Arthur's Pass, stretch your legs and stroll around the enchanting limestone outcrops of Kura Tawhiti (Castle Hill). This area was an important meeting place and food gathering area for early Māori people. Interestingly it was named "Spiritual Centre of the Universe" by the Dalai Lama when he visited in 2002. Today it is a haven for rock climbers who climb and boulder on the multitude of rock forms.

We then leave the highway and follow the back roads around Lake Lyndon and on to Methven, a ski town by winter and laid-back rural town the rest of the year. The Southern Alps form a spectacular backdrop. *Accommodation: Ski Time, Methven. Includes breakfast, lunch and dinner.*

DAY 5 METHVEN - AORAKI/MOUNT COOK

8.2 km (5.1 miles), 3 hours hiking, +/-380 m (1,280 ft)
We continue south, at first following the edge of the extensive Canterbury Plains then up into the intermontane Mackenzie Basin to Lake Tekapo, famous for its stunning turquoise waters and the quaint Church of the Good Shepherd, perched daintily by the lake. Hike via the lakeshore to the elevated viewing platform afforded by Mt John and revel in the expansiveness of the Patagonia-like landscape. The sweeping Mackenzie "Country" is a sparsely populated region in the rain shadow of the Southern Alps; tawny-brown drylands, braided riverbeds and startling glacial lakes extend to distant mountains.

On arrival at Mount Cook village relax in the splendour of Aoraki/Mt Cook and the surrounding alps in our accommodation, where we stay for the next two nights. *Accommodation: Hermitage Hotel, Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park. Includes breakfast, lunch and dinner.*

DAY 6 AORAKI/MT COOK

5.3 km (3.3 miles), 3 hours hiking, elevation +/-590 (1,940 ft) or
10.2 km (6.3 miles), 3 hours hiking, elevation +/-270 m (890 ft)
Climb up to Sealy Tarns and enjoy awesome views to hanging glaciers on Mt Sefton and up the Hooker Valley to Aoraki/Mt Cook. Those wanting to immerse themsleves further in this specatcular alpine landscape or take an easier alternative to the Sealy Tarns hike can explore the valley floor independently, with the walk up the Hooker Valley for views of the Mueller and Hooker Glacier terminal lakes and the towering south face of Aoraki/Mt Cook, or learn more about the wonders of the national park in the world-class visitor centre. *Accommodation: Hermitage Hotel, Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park. Includes breakfast and lunch.*

DAY 7 AORAKI/MT COOK - WĀNAKA

2.9 km (1.8 miles), 1 hour hiking, elevation +/-70 m (230 ft)
Travel up the Tasman Valley towards the Tasman Glacier, the longest glacier in New Zealand. Take a short walk through glacial moraine and board a custom-built boat for a unique spin around the terminal lake. Like most glaciers in the world the Tasman Glacier is retreating and the terminal lake increases in size every year. This dynamic environment is dotted with icebergs of all shapes and sizes from the collapsing terminal face of the glacier.







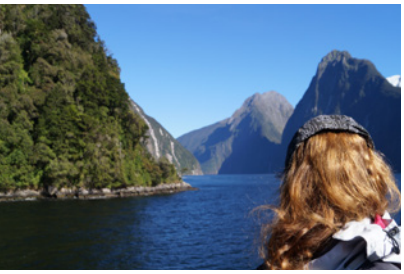


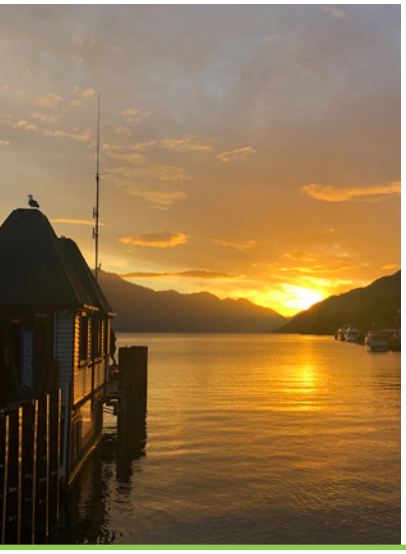












Our drive south takes us out of the Mackenzie Country and over the Lindis Pass, famous for its stunning tussock-covered landscapes and rugged hills. As we enter the southern lakes district of Central Otago, we are greeted with spectacular scenery and awe inspiring landscapes welcoming us to the lovely lake-side holiday town of Wānaka. *Accommodation: Oakridge Resort, Wānaka. Includes breakfast, lunch and dinner.*

DAY 8 WĀNAKA - TE ANAU

Up to 7.2 km (4.5 miles), 3 hours hiking, elevation +/-650 m (2,130 ft)
A beautiful drive alongside Lake Wānaka leads us toward the peaks of Aspiring National Park. We hike in the lower Matukituki Valley on the Diamond Lake walk and on up Rocky Mountain, a distinctive glacially sculpted "roche moutonnee" (rock sheep) for spectacular views over the lake, and to the Southern Alps and Mount Aspiring/Tititea. This area has several hike options, from the gentle Diamond Lake circuit to the more energetic Rocky Mountain summit climb.

After the hike and lunch we drive over the Crown Range and along the shores of Lake Wakatipu and through to Te Anau, the gateway to Fiordland National Park. Time to relax in the afternoon or take a stroll along the beautiful lakeshore with stunning view across the water of the vast Fiordland wilderness. *Accommodation: Distinction Te Anau Hotel & Villas, Te Anau. Includes breakfast, lunch and dinner.*

DAY 9 TE ANAU - MILFORD SOUND

7.2 km (4.5 miles), 3 hours hiking, elevation +/-490 m (1,610 ft)
Our day excursion takes us through the stunning Fiordland mountains to Milford Sound, one of New Zealand's most iconic visitor destinations. We stop at The Divide to walk a section of the Routeburn Track to Key Summit for panoramic views of the Humboldt and Darran Mountains. Easier short walks, and the preferred option if cloud is likely to rob Key Summit of views, are located below in the Hollyford Valley.

The topography will leave you spell bound as we continue on to Milford Sound and experience the true magnificence of the fiord, cruising between glaciated mountains under sheer cliffs which plummet hundreds of metres into deep dark waters. Enjoy wonderful views of mile-high Mitre Peak and Lady Bowen Falls as you keep an eye out for marine wildlife. You may spot dusky dolphins, New Zealand fur seals and if you're lucky the rare Fiordland crested penguin. We return to Te Anau in the afternoon. *Accommodation: Distinction Te Anau Hotel & Villas, Te Anau. Includes breakfast, lunch and dinner.*

DAY 10 TE ANAU - QUEENSTOWN

9.8 km (6.1 miles), 3 hours hiking, elevation +/-180 m (430 ft)
This morning we hike part of the famed Kepler Track onto the shores of Lake Manapouri, described as the 'loveliest of all lakes' for its array of small islands, bush fringed beaches and coves, and mountain backdrop. From here, the southern extent of our journey, we then backtrack northwards towards the lively scene of Queenstown. In the wine country, on the outskirts of Queenstown, we celebrate our adventures together with lunch out at a fine local restaurant. Enjoy some fine local food and wine before arriving in Queenstown in the late afternoon where the tour concludes. *Includes breakfast and lunch.*

*Drop off locations at the end of our trip are limited, as many Queenstown accommodations are inaccessible to our touring vehicle. Available drop-off locations are Queenstown Airport, or in central Queenstown at the Copthorne Hotel Lakefront, or iSite Visitor Centre.

LIFE ON THE TRAIL

GRADE B

- Up to 4-5 hours of physical activity per day
- At times carrying a backpack of 4-5kgs
- Tracks generally in good condition
- Altitude gains of up to 600m (2000ft) on harder days
- No hiking experience necessary

GUIDES AND SAFETY

An excellent guide can make the difference between a trip of a lifetime and just an ordinary trip. That is why we work hard to make sure we hire the best guides. Our handpicked professionals come from a range of backgrounds. Each has extensive outdoor and hiking experience and a passion for New Zealand's wild and beautiful backcountry. Our guides' energy and dedication will ensure that your time with us is truly inspiring, a huge amount of fun and safe. Structuring breaks for the guide to rest is important to keep them fresh, focused and ready to give their best. Occasionally, we engage local experts to add value to experiences which your guide may or may not join. Also, there may be nights your guide stays in alternate nearby accommodation but rest assured you will be able to reach them if needed. Please be gentle with your guide - good guides are hard to find.

All walks described in the itinerary are guided, however, the guide can suggest a number of shorter self-guided walks if you wish to do a little more or a little less walking on some of the days.

GROUP SIZE

This is a small group trip with a minimum of 2 hikers and a maximum of 15 hikers.



FOOD

Almost all of the meals are included on this tour, but when staying in the cities we let you do your own thing and try some of the excellent local restaurants (see "Additional Costs" section). There are plenty of opportunities to graze the local cafes if you would prefer to explore in the morning. Our guides usually set out lunch food for you and you simply help yourself. We provide healthy and wholesome food and include a lot of fresh produce.

Our customised trailers have a fold down table and cooking area that is perfect for preparing picnics at all those secret places we will take you. Included dinners are frequently in lodge restaurants (either set menu or a la carte), or in a restaurant in the town but occasionally somewhere out of the ordinary!

ELEVATIONS

Track distances and elevations are approximate only. Advertised hiking routes may be amended by the guide for any reason (usually due to weather, or track conditions). The guide will notify clients in advance of day-to-day routes.



TRANSPORT

The average driving time per day varies; we have some days where we hardly drive at all. On a typical day we might be in the vehicle for 2-3 hours. But some days we will drive for longer. The driving time is a chance to rest and enjoy the fantastic scenery that is forever changing. We travel in a luxury minibus towing a lockable trailer with food, equipment and your luggage. The guides are easily convinced to stop the vehicle if there is a great photo opportunity, vineyard or notable ice cream shop!



ACCOMMODATION

The South Island Grand Hikes tour uses a range of hotels and quality lodges chosen for their well appointed and wonderful locations. All rooms have ensuite bathrooms. Some lodges have units with two bedrooms per unit. Rooms are twin share or doubles. If you are travelling on your own you will be given a twin share room with a fellow traveller of the same gender. Single supplements are available on this tour. The South Island Grand Hikes tour has been created for those that appreciate a high standard of accommodation after a good day of hiking. Please note accommodation is subject to availability, and an equivalent style of property could be used if the advertised property is no longer available.

PACKING LIST

WHAT TO TAKE

New Zealand's weather is very changeable and cold weather can be experienced at any time of year, especially in the mountains. We recommend wearing lightweight and breathable fabrics while hiking. Merino or polypropylene underwear is great in cold weather and will still keep you warm when it gets wet, unlike cotton. Jeans are not suitable for hiking.



WALKING

- ☐ Hiking boots or shoes
- ☐ Daypack (25-30 litres)
- ☐ Drink bottle – 1L
- ☐ Waterproof raincoat
- ☐ Warm fleece/wool jersey (not cotton)
- ☐ Thermal underwear (top and bottom, wool or polypropylene)
- ☐ Socks (we suggest 3 pairs)
- ☐ Warm hat or balaclava
- ☐ Long sleeve shirt (for sun protection)
- ☐ Shorts for hiking (or lightweight hiking trousers)
- ☐ Gloves or mittens (wool or fleece)

GENERAL

- ☐ Spare lightweight shoes or sandals
- ☐ Insect repellent (sandflies like foreign blood)
- ☐ Casual clothing for travel and evenings
- ☐ Dry bag for clothes/valuables

RECOMMENDED ITEMS

- ☐ Sunscreen, sunhat and sunglasses
- ☐ Rain trousers
- ☐ Camera
- ☐ Togs (swimming costume)
- ☐ Towel (lightweight travel towels are great)

SUPPLIED

- ☐ First Aid kit
- ☐ Drinking water
- ☐ Safety equipment
- ☐ Maps
- ☐ Walking Poles (must request when booking tour)

LAUNDRY

Laundry facilities are available most nights, either as the hotel laundry service (additional charge) or as access to laundry facilities for hotel guests.

CHARGING DEVICES

Devices such as cameras and cellphones can be charged throughout the tour - while travelling in the vehicle (bring along a charger adaptor) and during the hotel nights.

ADDITIONAL COSTS

What is included in the price of the South Island Grand Hikes Trip?
The South Island Grand Hikes is all inclusive of accommodation, guide services, and most meals, as noted in the itinerary.

What additional costs can I expect on the South Island Grand Hikes Trip?
Just a small number of meals, giving you the opportunity to explore and try local cuisine at your own pace.

DIRECT BOOKING CONDITIONS

Payment
For bookings made four or more months prior to the departure date, a 25% deposit is required, with the remainder due 95 days before your trip. For bookings made within four months of the departure date, full payment is required at the time of booking.

Cancellations
95 days or more prior to departure date: Full refund less a $500 transferable deposit per person to a future departure.
94 to 35 days: 50% of tour price forfeited.
34 days or less: 100% of tour price forfeited.

The tour price is all-inclusive. There will be no partial refunds or credits for unused services within a tour. Any unpaid forfeited amount may be pursued as a debt.

Travel Insurance
It is suggested that clients take out comprehensive travel insurance.