South Island Family Escape

Your South Island adventure begins in the vibrant "Garden City" of Christchurch before whisking you away to the turquoise shores of Lake Tekapo. Spend your evenings soaking in alpine hot pools under a pristine, star-studded sky. From there, head to Queenstown for a nostalgic cruise aboard the historic TSS Earnslaw, followed by a journey into the breathtaking heart of Milford Sound. Your loop continues up the coast to the ancient ice of Franz Josef Glacier, culminating in a spectacular finale: a trip across the Southern Alps on the world-renowned TranzAlpine train back to Christchurch.

Starts in:	Christchurch
Finishes in:	Christchurch
Length:	8days / 7nights
Accommodation:	Motels
Can be customised:	Yes

This itinerary can be customised to suit you perfectly. We can add more days, remove days, change accommodations, mix it up, add activities to suit your interests or simply design and create something from scratch. Call us today to get your custom New Zealand itinerary underway.

Inclusions:

Includes: Late model rental cars

Includes: Unlimited kms

Included activity: The Visitor Promise - Cultural Learning Course

Includes: Fully inclusive rental car insurance (excess may apply)

Includes: Afterhours emergency support while touring

Included activity: Private Transfer Christchurch International Airport to Christchurch Accommodation

plus much more...

Day 1

Private Transfer Christchurch International Airport to Christchurch Accommodation

On arrival, you will be met by a private driver and transferred to your Christchurch accommodation.

Welcome to Ōtautahi / Christchurch

Kia ora and welcome to Aotearoa, New Zealand. After checking into your accommodation, the rest of the day is yours to explore at your leisure. Christchurch, known in Māori as Ōtautahi, is the largest city on the South Island. Often referred to as the Garden City it boasts one of the largest public parks in the country and the city centre is full of very impressive stone buildings reminiscent of the English university towns. The inner city has almost been completely rebuilt following earthquakes in 2010 and 2011. Explore the city and see how the old mixes with New Zealand's "newest" city.

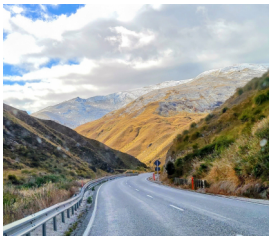
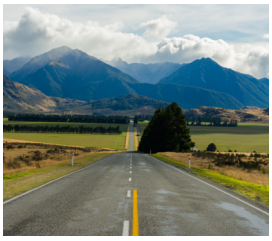
SUGGESTED ACTIVITY - Christchurch Triple Pass - Tram, Punting and Gondola

Experience three of Christchurch's iconic attractions in one day: the Christchurch Tram, Christchurch Gondola, and Punting on the Avon River. The historic tram is a delightful way to explore the evolving inner city, taking in the various sights with the hop-on hop-off pass and learning about the city from the live commentary. You'll also enjoy a bird's eye view of Christchurch and the Canterbury region including the distant peaks of the Southern Alps when you ride the gondola cableway to the top of the Port Hills in Heathcote Valley. Punting on the Avon River takes you through the city's green belt: a relaxing way to explore what is affectionately known as the 'Garden City'.

Your accommodation: Terra Vive Luxury Suites and Apartments

Terra Vive Luxury Suites and Apartments offer luxury accommodation in the heart of Christchurch City. Situated within the beautiful tree-lined street of Bealey Avenue, Terra Vive is ideally located in close proximity to the shops, restaurants and cafes.

Day 2

Private transfer accommodation to airport to collect rental car

A private transfer will meet you at your accommodation and transfer you to Christchurch Airport to collect your rental car.

Collect Rental Car

This tour's from price includes an intermediate-sized vehicle, setting you up for comfortable travels. Yet, we understand every adventure is unique! Feel free to select the perfect wheels from our incredible collection of rental cars, spanning from economy hatchbacks to premium SUVs.

Christchurch to Lake Tekapo

Today you head into the heart of the South Island. After crossing the vast Canterbury Plains, you will reach the township of Geraldine, which offers an ideal refreshment stop before you head into Mackenzie Country.
Passing through places such as Beautiful Valley it's not hard to understand where the names originate. Ascending Burkes Pass and onto the high country plateau and the picturesque town of Lake Tekapo, the first of the large Southern Lakes. It's a great place to take a scenic flight, enjoy a guided horse trek, a boat trip on the pristine lake or just enjoy the magnificent views.

Lake Tekapo

Tekapo is New Zealand's highest lake, and it is renowned for its astonishing turquoise waters. This vibrant hue is due to fine rock particles suspended in the glacier-fed lake, reflecting light. A highlight for visitors is the iconic Church of the Good Shepherd, a stone building dedicated in 1935, which incorporates timber from the old Tekapo bridge. Nearby, a bronze sheepdog statue honors the vital role of these animals in the local farming community. For breathtaking panoramic views, drive up or walk up Mt John to the Canterbury University Observatory. A short distance away, Lake Alexandrina offers a peaceful retreat as a wildlife reserve with no motorized crafts allowed. For an unforgettable perspective, consider a scenic flight over Mt Cook National Park and Tasman Glacier.

Dark Sky Project Summit Experience

Experience the cosmos like never before with the Summit Experience at Lake Takapō (Tekapo), one of the best places on Earth for stargazing. Located on the summit of Mount John within the Aoraki Mackenzie International Dark Sky Reserve, this is your exclusive opportunity to explore the night sky from New Zealand’s only professional research observatory. Guided by passionate astronomy experts, you'll delve deep into the universe using powerful telescopes, including a 16” telescope within a private dome. Discover distant galaxies, constellations, planets, and star clusters while gaining a richer understanding of both Māori and Western knowledge systems. You'll leave with a new perspective on the stars, all while surrounded by the stunning landscape and the clearest, darkest skies in the Southern Hemisphere.

Your accommodation: Grand Suites Lake Tekapo

Tekapo is located in the centre of the South Island, famous for its crystal-clear lake and mountain backdrops. Grand Suites Lake Tekapo provides luxury accommodation within the Mackenzie Basin. Containing large, practical, self-contained units with the upstairs units accessible via lift.

Day 3

Tekapo Springs Hot Pools

Tekapo Springs offers three adjoining main Hot Pools for you to sit back, relax and enjoy yourself while looking out to the beautiful Two Thumb range and stunning Lake Tekapo. Pool temperatures range from forty degrees celsius to thirty-six degrees celsius and each pool offers something different - massage jets to assist in taking away any aches and pains and fountains to splash under.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY - The Grand Traverse Scenic Flight with Air Safaris

The flight of a lifetime, the "Grand Traverse" is a spectacular scenic flight seeing experience allowing you to explore the Mount Cook and Westland National Parks. This magnificent flight encompasses two World Heritage National Parks and 200 km of New Zealand's most memorable and spectacular scenery. The contrast of colours is beautiful with the turquoise glacial lake against the tussock covered sheep stations. Your journey will bring you over Aoraki Mt Cook National park where you view New Zealand's longest glacier, The Tasman. From there you cross the main divide into the Westland National Park encompassing the Fox and Franz Josef Glaciers which spill down to the rainforests of the west coast. Their large and varied fleet especially selected for New Zealand air tour sightseeing ensures that every passenger has a window seat and all aircraft have wings-above to ensure optimum viewing below. Pilots provide a full and informative commentary with multi language commentary brochures supplied.

Your accommodation: Grand Suites Lake Tekapo

Tekapo is located in the centre of the South Island, famous for its crystal-clear lake and mountain backdrops. Grand Suites Lake Tekapo provides luxury accommodation within the Mackenzie Basin. Containing large, practical, self-contained units with the upstairs units accessible via lift.

Day 4

Lake Tekapo to Queenstown

Lake Pukaki is just another 30 minutes drive from Lake Tekapo and as you approach the lake you are often rewarded with spectacular views the full length of the lake and into Aoraki Mount Cook National Park. At 3754 metres Aoraki Mount Cook is New Zealand highest mountain and the peak can often be seen from the visitor centre at the southern end of Lake Pukaki. Twizel, just south of Mount Cook was the location of many Lord of the Rings movie scenes and a little further on is Omarama, the gliding capital of New Zealand. Wrinkly Rams is a local café with great coffee and fresh homemade food. The Lindis Pass is one of New Zealand's highest roads with the summit reaching 971 metres. The tussock covered hills offer an unusual contrast as you pass from the Mackenzie Basin and into Central Otago.
Bendigo, just off the main highway, was one of Otago's original gold mining settlements and well marked paths will guide you to explore the remains of stone cottages and other buildings from this bygone era.
Cromwell sits at the head of the Kawarau Gorge. Cromwell old town has restored buildings from before the valley was flooded to create Lake Dunstan for the hydro systems. The sheer cliffs of the Kawarau Gorge guide you towards Queenstown and Gibbston - one of New Zealand's premier wine growing regions. At the famous historic Kawarau Bridge you can take a bungy jump or just watch others if you would rather. Approaching Queenstown the impressive Remarkables mountain range come into view and then beautiful Lake Wakatipu as you head towards the alpine resort town of Queenstown, the adventure and activity capital of New Zealand.

Queenstown

Queenstown known in Māori as Tāhuna, is home to many adrenaline-inducing activities. Nestled on the shores of Lake Wakatipu, this alpine town has very distinct seasons, and most adrenaline-filled activities can be accessed year-round. Queenstown is home to jet boating, bungy jumping, rafting, skydiving, paragliding, and even indoor thrills. If you want that rush - head out on the Shotover Jet, dive off the Nevis Bungy, freefall on the Canyon Swing, or Zip line the Gondola. While arguably the brightest gem in New Zealand’s crown, Queenstown offers far more than an action-packed getaway. If you’re looking for a slightly slower pace, there are plenty of recreational activities, including hiking and biking trails to explore, guided tours, boat cruises, scenic flights, or spa and wellness options to help you get away. Head to the lakefront, eat at one of the al fresco eateries, and soak up the local vibes; catch a ride on the iconic 100-year-old steamship the TSS Earnslaw; or take the Skyline Gondola and enjoy bird's-eye views of the Remarkables mountain ranges and Lake Wakatipu. Pack a picnic and go for a hike, only 20 minutes from Central Queenstown, Coronet Peak opens for summer sightseeing. You can ride the Peak Gondola to the top for panoramic views and hike the trails, or go for a bike ride on many excellent biking trails. In winter, Queenstown becomes a world-class winter resort, with four ski areas and a range of activities, bars, restaurants, and ways to relax and unwind.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY - Shotover Jet Canyon Jet Boat Ride

Shotover Jet is the only company permitted to operate in the Shotover River Canyons. It's a thrilling ride! Skim past rocky outcrops at close range in your Shotover Jet 'Big Red', as you twist and turn through the narrow canyons at breathtaking speeds. And a major highlight - hold tight for the world-famous Shotover Jet full 360-degree spins! It is important you read and understand the risks associated with this activity. For more information please see here.

TSS Earnslaw Cruise and Walter Peak Gourmet BBQ Dinner

Enjoy a quintessential Kiwi experience, a delicious gourmet BBQ buffet meal, and a farm demonstration in a stunning lakeside setting. Take in the stunning views of Lake Wakatipu and its surroundings as you cruise across the lake to the historic Walter Peak high country farm aboard the TSS Earnslaw Steamship. Enjoy the ambiance of the heart of the stately homestead while your Colonel’s Homestead Restaurant chef prepares a gourmet BBQ dinner. Your seasonal menu includes an extensive selection of local New Zealand produce, including succulent meats and a selection of delicious vegetables and salads. Complete your meal with your choice of delicious desserts, or New Zealand cheeses. After dinner, watch the farm dogs in action with a sheep-herding demonstration and say hello to the other farm animals. Finally, cruise home under the southern stars and enjoy the fresh night air as the lights of Queenstown draw ever closer.

Your accommodation: Blue Peaks Lodge

Blue Peaks Lodge offers well equipped self contained rooms with a fantastic location overlooking Queenstown and is just an easy five minutes walk to the Queenstown lakefront.

Meals included: Speciality Dinner

Day 5

Milford Sound Cruise and Coach Tour from Queenstown with RealNZ - Lunch Included

Departing from Queenstown sit back and relax aboard a luxury glass-roofed coach to enjoy a relaxing trip along the shores of Lake Wakatipu and through the rolling countryside to Te Anau. The coach driver provides an informative commentary and plenty of photo opportunities. After a morning tea break in Te Anau, the coach continues along the spectacular Milford Road. On reaching Piopiotahi-Milford Sound, board your vessel for a leisurely cruise in the fiord. The cruise provides excellent viewing opportunities and plenty of time is available to enjoy waterfalls, rainforests, mountains and wildlife. Rain or shine, every day in Piopiotahi-Milford Sound will leave you in awe. It is important you read and understand the risks associated with this activity. For more information, see here.

Your accommodation: Blue Peaks Lodge

Blue Peaks Lodge offers well equipped self contained rooms with a fantastic location overlooking Queenstown and is just an easy five minutes walk to the Queenstown lakefront.

Meals included: Lunch

Day 6

Queenstown to Franz Josef Glacier via Wānaka

From Queenstown you'll cross the Crown Range, the highest sealed road in New Zealand to arrive in the Alpine town of Wānaka, gateway to Mt Aspiring National Park. Skirting the shores of both Lake Wanaka and Hawea, you will enter the small town of Makarora. Stop at Blue Pools for a 1-hour return walk through the native beech forest to a glacier-fed swimming hole. Continue on through the remote seaside settlement of Haast before heading up the wild West Coast highway you pass through ancient temperate rainforests while getting sneak peeks of the wild coast beaches occasionally. Keep heading North and be sure to enjoy the view of the ever-changing towering snowcapped Southern Alps Mountain Range. Fox Glacier welcomes you first, then comes your destination for the night Franz Josef township.

Explore Franz Josef

Franz Josef is a small yet lively town in the heart of New Zealand’s West Coast, best known for its spectacular 12 km-long glacier. The township is surrounded by lush, rainforest-clad mountains and has a vibrant atmosphere with plenty to explore. A variety of scenic walking trails offer incredible views of the glacier, but for a truly up-close experience, a licensed helicopter tour is the only way to set foot on the ice. Beyond the glacier, unwind in the rejuvenating Hot Pools or visit the West Coast Wildlife Centre to spot rare kiwi birds. If you’re in the mood for a more relaxed day, the township is home to charming souvenir and gift shops, as well as great dining spots like SnakeBite Brewery and King Tiger. Whether you're chasing adventure or relaxation, Franz Josef is a stunning blend of wild beauty and welcoming hospitality.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY - West Coast Wildlife Centre

Meet and discover New Zealand's rarest kiwi, the Rowi at the West Coast Wildlife Centre. This is a unique and interactive experience that brings together nature, conservation, and wildlife all under one roof. This all-weather attraction is fun for all ages to explore and takes place against the stunning backdrop of the Franz Josef Glacier.

Your accommodation: Aspen Court Franz Josef

Aspen Court Franz Josef is set amongst native bush providing a very peaceful ambience. Internally the motel units are large, practical and modern with all containing quality furnishings and fittings.

Day 7

Franz Josef to Greymouth Train Station (Return Rental Car)

Head north along the mighty West Coast highway you pass through ancient temperate rainforests while getting sneak peeks of the wild coast beach occasionally. Whataroa is the next town where you can see one of the world's rarest birds, the Kōtuku - White Heron. The Kōtuku nest at the Waitangi Roto Nature Reserve, only accessible with a guided tour from October to March. The next town is Ross which is the site of an old gold mining settlement where the local information centre offers you the chance to pan for gold. Hokitika is a great place to explore craft and gift stores and head to the coast and take in the endless sea views. The Pounamu-Greenstone on offer in Hokitika is probably some of the best you will see in the country. Continue on to Greymouth, the largest town on the West Coast and the starting point for the next leg of your journey the TranzAlpine Scenic Train. Drop your rental car at the Greymouth Train Station depot located at the train station building before boarding your train to Christchurch.

TranzAlpine Scenic Train: Greymouth to Christchurch

Considered one of the world's great train journeys, the TranzAlpine Scenic Train takes you from Greymouth to Christchurch. Travel across the South Island from the west to the east coast through Arthur's Pass National Park. From the comfort of your carriage see lush beech forest, deep river valleys and the spectacular peaks of the Southern Alps. Descend to the windswept Canterbury Plains before arriving in the city of Christchurch.

Shared Transfer from Christchurch Train Station to Christchurch CBD Accommodation with Christchurch Touring Company

On arrival at the Christchurch railway station, you will be met by a driver and transferred to your Christchurch accommodation.

Your accommodation: Terra Vive Luxury Suites and Apartments

Terra Vive Luxury Suites and Apartments offer luxury accommodation in the heart of Christchurch City. Situated within the beautiful tree-lined street of Bealey Avenue, Terra Vive is ideally located in close proximity to the shops, restaurants and cafes.

Day 8

Private Transfer from Accommodation to Airport with Christchurch Touring Company

Enjoy a seamless, private transfer from your Christchurch city accommodation directly to the Christchurch Airport in time for your departing flight.

Farewell from Aotearoa / New Zealand

Bid farewell to Aotearoa / New Zealand, taking with you unforgettable memories of its breathtaking landscapes and incredible adventures. In Māori, it is said mā te wā, which is not goodbye, it is see you soon!

Tour details

Departures:	Daily
Tour type:	South Island Self Drive
Starts:	Christchurch
Finishes:	Christchurch
Tour length:	8
Accomodation:	Motels
Car/transport type:	

Accommodation summary

Day 1	Terra Vive Luxury Suites and Apartments
Day 2	Grand Suites Lake Tekapo
Day 3	Grand Suites Lake Tekapo
Day 4	Blue Peaks Lodge
Day 5	Blue Peaks Lodge
Day 6	Aspen Court Franz Josef
Day 7	Terra Vive Luxury Suites and Apartments