



The Ultimate Travel Guide To
New Zealand
The South Island

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New Zealand: The South Island

Introduction

New Zealand is perfect if you're looking for an amazing adventure in a country that not only speaks English, but is also extremely safe. The stunning landscapes and friendly locals are closer than you think. Wake up in a new place with new adventures every day. New Zealand is the perfect place to explore the outdoors with a range from coastal beauty to towering mountains and year-round glaciers.

Tips for Travelling in New Zealand

Currency: The New Zealand Dollar

Language: English

Safety: Very safe

Internet, Phone, and Electricity: If you're looking to stay connected to the internet and phone services everywhere you go, it's recommended that you purchase a plan from one of New Zealand's main networks, depending on your time attending the country. Note that mobile coverage is not available in some rural and wilderness areas. Free WiFi hotspots are generally found in main cities only and can be sporadic throughout the rest of the country. New Zealand's electricity supply runs at 230/240 volts, and we use angled two or three pin plugs (the same as Australia and parts of Asia). Be sure to buy converters before you come!

Accommodations: From wilderness campsites to luxury lodges, use our accommodation finder to find places to stay anywhere in New Zealand.

Visas: If you're a United States citizen, there is no visa requirement to enter the country if you are staying less than three months on your vacation.

Transportation:

The best way to get around in New Zealand is by renting a car. Within the bigger cities, there is public transportation, but it isn't unanimous throughout the Island, or on both islands. Your best bet is to rent a car to go to all of the places listed below, that are more off the beaten path. You can also rent a campervan if you're planning on camping out wherever you go! Just be sure to remember that you drive on the other side of the road!

Domestic Flights: It is easy to get from city to city and inter island with domestic flights that are no longer that two hours to and from any location. The best budget flights we found was on Jetstar.

Common Grocery Stores: New World, Countdown, and Pak n Save

New world is a great grocery store in terms of quality and selection followed by countdown (a little cheaper, but a little less fancy) and finally pak n save (think of it like a costco).

Helpful Booking Sites:

Booking.com, Hostelworld, and Airbnb are great for finding hostels and cheap accomodations across both islands.

Rentalcars.com/nz is a great resource for cheap rental cars to get away. We found that Go Rentals and Ezi Rentals were the best quality, easiest, and most trusted for the cheapest overall price. You only need to be 21+ to rent cars in New Zealand

Start Exploring:

Christchurch

Sites and Locations: The Christchurch urban area lies on the South Island's east coast, just north of Banks Peninsula.

- Botanical gardens
- Taylors Mistake
- Lyttelton
- Cashmere Hill Lookout
- Sumner Beach
- Downtown Christchurch
- Riccarton Bush

Activites:

- Shopping
- Surfing
- Site seeing

Food and Drinks:

- Little High Eatery
- Hachi Hachi
- Foo San
- Velvet Burger

- Thai Orchard
- Wholefoods: Market and health store
- Coffee culture
- DeJaVu Club

Where to stay: There are many different hostels and Airbnbs in town, central to the sites in Christchurch.

Kaikoura

Sites and Locations: Kaikoura is known for the natural wildlife and beautiful Peninsula. Visit this coastal town, walk past Seals and penguins (if you're lucky), and hike the mountains behind.

- Kaikoura Peninsula
- Coastal Town Shopping
- Mt. Fyfe

Activities:

- Walk the Peninsula Track, with seals
- Whale watching
- Site seeing
- Hike Mt. Fyfe: Stay overnight in the Summit and wake up to climb above the clouds to the most incredible sunrise.

Food and Drinks:

- Kaikoura Seafood Truck
- Cooper's Catch, cheap fish and chips Takeaway

Where to Stay: There are many hostels and Bnbs in the town. I recommend staying at the Dusky Lodge and Backpackers, a cute little hostel with a fully equipped kitchen central to you activities! If you walk the Peninsula track, you will only need to spend one night in Kaikoura. However, if you hike Mt. Fyfe, you will need one night in the summit hut and one night in the town to see the Peninsula.

Nelson

Sites and Location: The best way to describe Nelson is a 'lifestyle'. It is situated at the top north-west of the South Island, it is the sunniest region in New Zealand.

- Golden Bay

- Wharariki Beach Hike
- Pillar Point Track
- Kahurangi National Park: Hawkes Lookout
- Abel Tasman National Park
- Cable bay and Pepin's private island
- Queen Charlotte Sound Area
- Nelson Lakes National Park: Lake Rotoiti

Activites:

- Shopping
- Site seeing
- Beaches
- Drive around the cute towns
- Hike Wharariki Beach and Pillar Point Track
- Hike Through Abel Tasman National Park
- Walk to Hawkes Lookout
- Hike around in Nelson Lakes National Park

Food and Drinks:

- Burger Culture
- Stefano's Pizzeria

Where to Stay: There are numerous hotels and Airbnbs in Nelson town. We stayed in a cute little roadside Airbnb house in town, "[Log Cabin in the City](#)".

Punakaiki

Sites and Locations: Punakaiki is located on the West coast of the South Island of New Zealand. This beautiful coastal town is not one to miss, even in the winter time.

- Pancake Rock
- Secret Cove
- Te Miko

Activites:

- Sightseeing
- Walks
- Beaches
- Drive the coastal side, stopping at the different beaches along the way!

Food and Drinks:

PLEASE NOTE: There are no grocery stores here and very few restaurants, so make sure to bring your own food (stop at a grocery store in the previous town).

- Pancake Rocks Cafe

Where to Stay: There are several hostels and hotels in Punakaiki. If you are interested in experience the native, laid back vibe of Punakaiki, stay at Te Nakai Retreat, a hippy hostel set in the trees. Take their secret route to a private beach and experience some of the most beautiful sunsets! You will only need to spend one night here. This also allows you a fully equipped kitchen to cook since there aren't many other locations.

Wanaka

Sites and Locations: Wanaka is known for its crystal clear lakes and beautiful wineries.

- Roy's Peak
- Isthmus Peak Track
- Lake Wanaka
- Mount Aspiring National Park
- Wanaka Tree

Activities:

- Shopping
- Hiking:
 - Roys Peak
 - Isthmus Peak Track
 - Mount Aspiring National Park
- Site seeing
- Kayak in Wanaka (if you're there in the summer)

Food and Drinks

- Rippon Vineyard
- Kika

Where to Stay: There are plenty of accommodations in Wanaka for every budget. Search for luxury hotels, hostels, AirBnbs, Bed and Breakfasts, motels, and campgrounds.

Queenstown

Sites and Locations: Queenstown is one of New Zealand's top visitor destinations and if you go there you'll understand why. It is a must-see when you visit the south island.

- Skyline Queenstown
- Queenstown center
- Hiking and Walks
- Lakefront

Activites:

- Shopping
- Sightseeing: Take the Gondola up to see the sky!
- Bungee Jumping
- Bungee Swing
- Downhill Go Karting
- Hiking - Ben Lomond Track, Lake Wakatipu
- Bus to Milford
- Ice Bar
- Mountain biking
- Jet Boating

Food and Drinks:

- Fergburger
- Mrs. Ferg
- Taj Indian Kitchen
- Below Zero Ice Bar
- Pog Mahones Irish Pub/Bar
- Coffee and Drinks boat
- Rhino's Bar

Where to Stay: There are many different stay options for Queenstown from luxury living to budget backpackers accommodation. We stayed at Absoloot Backpackers Accommodation and it was a great place with a fully equipped kitchen and was right in the heart of town.

Lake Tekapo

Sites and Locations: Lake Tekapo is picturesque in the day and dazzling at night; making it the perfect spot for stargazing.

- Mt. John Observatory
- Church of the Good Shepherd
- Dog Monument
- Lake Tekapo

Activites:

- Stargazing: some of the most incredible in the country.
- Site seeing
- Outdoor Ice skating
- Lake Tekapo Hot springs

Food and Drinks:

- Run 76 coffee shop
- Recommend saving money by cooking in the hostel.

Where to Stay: Depending on your budget, Lake Tekapo has a place for you. We stayed at the TaylorMade Backpackers central to the town and activities, with a quant Kiwi vibe.

Fiordlands and Milford Sound

Sites and Locations: Milford Sound is a fusion of spectacular natural features with amazing visual cues around every corner. The Fiordlands encompass Te Anau, Manapouri, Milford and Doubtful Sound as well as other beautiful hikes in this area.

- Milford Sound
- Key Summit
- Doubtful Sound
- Te Anau Downs
- Lake Gunn
- Coastal Drive to Milford Sound Cruise
- Manapouri

Activites:

- Cruise the Milford Sound
- Cruise the Doubtful Sound
- Guided Kayak tours through Doubtful Sound
- Site seeing
- Hiking:
 - Milford Track
 - Key Summit and Observatory
 - Lake Gunn Nature Walk
- Manapouri lakeside town
- Manapouri lakeside walks

Where to Eat: There is only one restaurant in Milford Sound. Important to note that Milford sound is not a town, it is just an area for ships to dock for the cruises. You will drive from Te Anau through to the Milford Sound Docks. Hiking spots are all along this drive from Te

Anau. There are restaurants and cafes in the town in Te Anau as well as the neighboring town of Manapouri.

Where to Stay: There are no hostels or hotels in Milford Sound. If you want to stay in Milford sound, there are designated camping areas. If not, the closest place to drive to are the hostels in the town of Te Anau. There are many backpacker and Bnb accommodations in Te Anau. For something a little different, stay at the family owned [Freestone Backpacker](#) cabins, a real Kiwi experience.

Arthur's Pass

Sites and Locations: Arthur's Pass National Park is in the Canterbury region, and the highest peak in the Southern Alps.

- Castle Hill
- Arthur's Pass National Park

Activites:

- Hiking Arthurs Pass:
 - Bealey Spur
 - Mt Aiken
- Site seeing

Where to Eat: Pack a lunch as you drive from your previous location to see the hikes and on to the next destination.

Where to Stay: You do not need to stay overnight in Arthur's Pass. This is a day trip activity in between overnight destinations.

Mt. Cook

Sites and Locations: Aoraki Mount Cook National Park is home of the highest mountains and the longest glaciers. It is alpine in the purest sense - with skyscraping peaks, glaciers and permanent snow fields, all set under a star-studded sky.

- Aoraki Mount Cook National Park
 - Mountains, valley, and glaciers

Activites

- Site seeing
- Hiking: There are 10 short hikes and walks beginning from the Village. The most popular include:

- Hooker Valley Track
- The Red Tarns Track
- Kea Point
- Swimming

Food and Drinks: There is a restaurant in the lobby areas of the accommodations in the village. The hostels have fully equipped kitchen for cooking on your own, however, be sure to go grocery shopping beforehand as there is grocery store in the small village.

PLEASE NOTE: There are no grocery stores here and very few restaurants, so make sure to bring your own food (stop at a grocery store in the previous town).

Where to Stay: There are a few different lodges and hostel accommodations within the village. The lodge and hostels are combined due to the small village. Find them by looking up Mt. Cook accommodation. You only need to stay here over 1 night to do these hikes and see the village.

Akaroa

Sites and Locations: Akaroa is an easy drive south-east of Christchurch in the Canterbury region. The town has historic buildings, beautiful waterfront, and delicious eats.

- Waterfront
- Onuku Farm

Activities:

- Shopping
- Swimming
- Swimming with dolphins
- Site seeing
- Hiking
- Stargazing

Where to Eat: There is a strip on the harbor full of cafes and restaurants. I recommend Bully Hayes as one of your stops to eat. As well, the hostel has a fully equipped kitchen for your budget convenience.

Where to Stay: If you're staying overnight in Akaroa, you must stay at Onuku Farms. This beautiful location has a giant property of its own with access to private hikes and beautiful lookouts that can only be done from the property. The hostel has a main area surrounded by several stargazer huts. These huts had an open ceiling to be able to see the stars while falling asleep. Not to mention, the location has lambs and horses in the back, as well as hammocks and a bbq for visitors to use.

Hanmer Springs

Sites and Locations: The Hanmer town is surrounded by mountains and beautiful forests, and is most commonly known for the relaxing thermal hot springs.

- The springs

Activities:

- Shopping
- Hot springs
- Site seeing
- Hiking

Food and Drinks:

- Mr. Yunan - Take away Thai
- Other cafes and restaurants in town

Where to Stay: You do not need to stay overnight in Hanmer. Instead, enjoy the springs for the day on the way to the next location.

Oamaru - Moeraki

Sites and Locations: Penguins are the main reason people come to visit Oamaru. At sunset, little blue and yellow-eyed penguins can sometimes be seen coming ashore to get comfortable for the night.

- Moeraki boulders
- Katiki Point Lighthouse
- Shag point scenic reserve

Activities:

- Shopping
- Look for Penguins
- Hiking around the Moeraki Boulders
- Walking to the Katiki Point Lighthouse
- The Shag Point Scenic Reserve
- Site seeing

Food and Drinks:

- Fat Sally's Pub and Restaurant

Where to Stay: There are several hostel and backpacker accommodations and motels in town. You only need to spend one night here if you visit.

And, Much More

The South Island is full of adventures that all of them can't be reached. We hope you enjoy all that New Zealand has to offer from our list and so much more. Unfortunately there are a few main places that we were unable to visit including Invercargill to Stewart island, Abel Tasman National Park (Great Walk), and some of the Southern end of Fiordlands.