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CAR ROAD TRIP · 10 DAYS FROM CHRISTCHURCH AND BACK

South Island by car: 10 days from Christchurch

Drive from Christchurch through Lake Tekapo, Wānaka and Queenstown, then return via Fiordland, Invercargill, the Catlins and the east coast. This plan uses rooms, apartments and motel units for nine overnight stops.

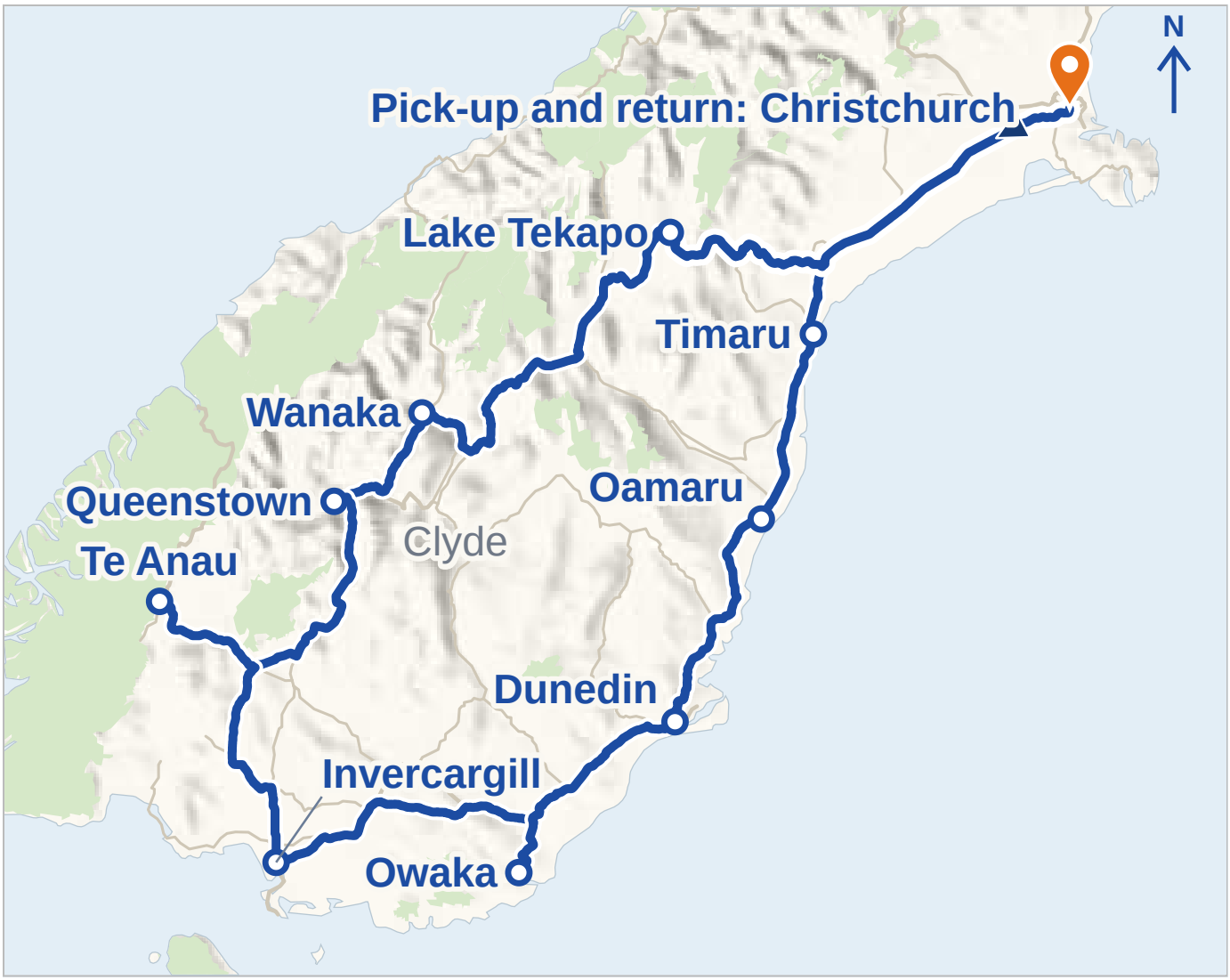
DISTANCE	DAYS	ROUTE	DRIVING TIME
About 1,450 km	10 days, 10 drives	Round trip from Christchurch	About 20 h by car

LONGEST DRIVE	VEHICLE
225 km, Christchurch to Lake Tekapo	Car

This journey explores Te Waipounamu, the South Island. Learn about its people and history from Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu (https://ngaitahu.iwi.nz/).



Milford Sound, an optional extra day from Te Anau · Illustrative image



Planning overview, not navigation. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors · coastline Natural Earth · relief Terrain Tiles (LINZ, SRTM).

BEFORE YOU BOOK

Hiring a car for this trip

Compare car hire in Christchurch and choose the actual airport or city branch you want. Check every driver's licence and translation requirements, the payment card and bond, a security deposit, luggage space, kilometres, road restrictions and any winter equipment in the rental conditions before you book.

The map covers the main town-to-town routes. Car driving times exclude breaks, traffic, sightseeing and local access to your accommodation or rental branch. Check road and weather conditions each day, especially on the Lindis Pass, Crown Range Road and any optional alpine outings.

WHERE TO STAY

Book rooms for your overnight stops

Book built accommodation for each night. The places below are examples, not reserved rooms or promises of availability. At a holiday park, select a motel unit, apartment or suitable cabin with beds, rather than a campsite. Check room facilities, bedding, parking, cancellation terms, minimum stays and check-in times.

The map links overnight towns rather than individual hotel driveways. Local access and sightseeing detours add distance and time. If you change the overnight base, recalculate the route. Milford Sound needs extra time beyond

this 10-day loop.

Picking up your car in Christchurch

Choose the branch shown in your quote. Airport pickups can be at a terminal desk or involve a shuttle to an off-airport branch, so follow the instructions in your booking confirmation. Allow time for the paperwork, photograph existing marks and confirm fuel, road and return conditions.

If you arrive after a long-haul flight, allow at least eight hours of rest before starting the road trip. A Christchurch night before day 1 gives you time to recover without rushing the drive to Lake Tekapo.

DRIVE

225 km from Christchurch | **about 3 h** by car |

Via **Geraldine Fairlie Highway**

DAY 1

Christchurch to Lake Tekapo

After a good rest and collecting your car, the mapped route takes you through the Canterbury countryside towards Geraldine, Fairlie and Lake Tekapo. Leave time for the rental paperwork and a break before the longer part of the drive.

Spend the afternoon beside the lake, or visit Tekapo Springs if its opening times fit your plans. Choose activities around the time you actually arrive rather than trying to fit everything into the first driving day.

Stay

Lakes Edge Holiday Park (https://lakesedgeholidaypark.co.nz/holiday-park-accommodation/) has motel units and cabins. Book built accommodation with beds, rather than a campsite, and check whether your chosen room has private or shared facilities.

DRIVE

200 km from Lake Tekapo | **about 2 h 30 min** by car |

Via **Tekapo-Twizel Road**

DAY 2

Lake Tekapo to Wānaka

Continue through the Mackenzie Basin and over the Lindis Pass towards Wānaka. Use signed stopping places for lake and mountain views, and check the weather before the pass.

Leave the afternoon for a lakeside walk or a booked activity in Wānaka. Longer outings into Mount Aspiring National Park need their own access and weather planning, and are additional to the mapped

transfer.

Stay — Edgewater (https://www.edgewater.co.nz/) in Wānaka offers hotel rooms, suites and apartments. Check the room configuration and parking arrangements for your group.

DRIVE

69 km from Wanaka | **about 1 h 20 min** by car | Via **Cardrona Valley Road**

DAY 3

Wānaka to Queenstown

The map follows Cardrona Valley Road and the Crown Range Road to Queenstown. Check your car rental conditions before taking this route. Your rental agreement still needs to allow this road.

Check the Queenstown Lakes road reports (https://www.qldc.govt.nz/services/transport-and-parking/winter-road-reports), especially in winter, and confirm any chain requirements with the rental company. If the Crown Range is closed or unsuitable for your booking, use a permitted alternative through Cromwell and recalculate the day's distance and time.

Once in Queenstown, leave the car at your accommodation if you can and explore the lakefront on foot. Book any adventure activity separately and check its meeting point.

Stay — Queenstown Holiday Park Creeksyde (https://www.camp.co.nz/accommodation/self-contained-units) offers self-contained apartments. Choose a built unit with the beds and facilities you need, and check parking and minimum stays.

DRIVE

170 km from Queenstown | **about 2 h 20 min** by car

Via **Te Anau Mossburn Highway**

DAY 4

Queenstown to Te Anau

Head south beside Lake Wakatipu and continue to Te Anau. Settle into your accommodation, explore the lakefront and plan your Fiordland activities around the weather.

Milford Sound / Piopiotahi is an optional extension, not part of this mapped transfer or its driving figures. DOC's Milford Road advice (https://www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/fiordland/places/fiordland-national-park/places-to-go/milford-sound-piopiotahi-area/milford-road-journey-tips/) allows about 2½ hours each way from Te Anau before stops, with extra time for traffic, weather, parking and walking to a cruise. Add another night in Te Anau and a separate day if Milford Sound is a priority, or arrange a coach outing. That extends this 10-day plan.

Stay — [Te Anau Lakeview Holiday Park & Motels](https://teanauholidaypark.co.nz/) offers self-contained motels and apartments. Select built accommodation and check the facilities included in your room.

DRIVE

160 km from Te Anau | **about 2 h 10 min** by car

Via **Te Anau Mossburn Highway**

DAY 5

Te Anau to Invercargill

Leave Te Anau for Invercargill on the mapped inland route. This is a transfer day, so allow time for a break and for any local drive from the route's town-centre endpoint to your accommodation.

Queens Park is an option for a gentle afternoon. If you want to visit the E Hayes Motorworks Collection, check current visitor information and opening hours before making it part of your day.

Stay — [Ascot Park Hotel](https://www.ascotparkhotel.co.nz/) in Invercargill offers hotel rooms, apartments and motel units. Choose the room type that suits your group and confirm parking and check-in.

DRIVE

155 km from Invercargill | **about 2 h 10 min** by car | Via **Old Coach Road**

DAY 6

Invercargill to Owaka

Follow the mapped inland route through Clinton to Owaka. This map does not trace the whole Catlins coast, so coastal lookouts, beaches and short walks add driving and time.

Owaka is your overnight base, with time for one or two outings. Check access, tides, weather and your rental company's road restrictions before choosing them. Sightseeing access roads are additional to the mapped drive.

Stay — [Owaka Lodge Motel](https://www.owakalodgemotel.co.nz/accommodation-owaka.html) offers units with beds, bathrooms and cooking facilities. Check the unit size and arrival arrangements before booking.

DRIVE

110 km from Owaka | **about 1 h 30 min** by car | Via **Owaka Highway**

DAY 7

Owaka to Dunedin

Travel out of the Catlins towards Balclutha and continue north to Dunedin. Stop for a proper break, then check into your room before exploring the city.

The Dunedin Chinese Garden is one possible city visit. Larnach Castle and other Otago Peninsula outings involve extra local driving beyond today's mapped transfer. Check opening times and allow time to get back to your accommodation.

Stay

Dunedin Holiday Park & Motels (https://dunedinholidaypark.co.nz/) offers motel accommodation. Check your selected room facilities and parking before booking.

DRIVE

110 km from Dunedin | **about 1 h 40 min** by car

Via **Hampden - Palmerston Road**

DAY 8

Dunedin to Oamaru

Continue north along State Highway 1 to Oamaru. A stop at the Moeraki Boulders can fit along the way, subject to safe beach access, tides and weather. Allow time beyond the direct town-to-town drive.

In Oamaru, explore the historic streets or check current visiting information for Steampunk HQ. Leave the evening flexible rather than committing to several timed activities on a driving day.

Stay

Oamaru TOP 10 Holiday Park (https://top10.co.nz/park/otago/oamaru-top-10-holiday-park/) offers motels and units as well as campsites. Book a room or unit with the facilities you need, and check late-arrival arrangements.

DRIVE

86 km from Oamaru | **about 1 h 10 min** by car | Via **Waimate Highway**

DAY 9

Oamaru to Timaru

Follow State Highway 1 north to Timaru. The relatively short transfer leaves time for a walk around Caroline Bay or another local stop before checking in.

If Te Ana Māori Rock Art is on your list, check the current visitor information and book any guided tour in advance. Tour availability and access depend on the date, so match a booked departure to your arrival time.

Stay

Timaru TOP 10 Holiday Park (https://timaruholidaypark.co.nz/accommodation/motels) has two-bedroom motel units with kitchen and bathroom facilities. Check the bedding layout, minimum stay and arrival arrangements.

DRIVE

165 km from Timaru | **about 2 h 20 min** by car | Via **Main South Road**

DAY 10

Timaru to Christchurch

Return north to Christchurch, leaving enough time for refuelling, the vehicle inspection and the trip from your return branch to your onward transport. The map ends in Christchurch, not at every rental company's airport or city branch.

If your return time allows, finish with a walk in the Botanic Gardens. For an early flight, book another Christchurch night and return the car at a time that avoids rushing.

Returning your car in Christchurch

Your booking gives the return branch, date and time. Allow time for refuelling under the agreed policy and an inspection, then retain your fuel and return receipts and take return photos. If you are running late, call the branch; any after-hours arrangements need confirming in advance.

Check Christchurch car hire for your branch options. Airport access and onward transport are additional to the mapped city endpoint.

Compare Christchurch car hire and choose the pickup and return branches that suit your trip. Search your dates to see the cars and rental conditions available.

About this car itinerary

If you prefer to travel with your accommodation, see the camper itinerary.

DriveNow Disclaimer

DriveNow's suggested itineraries help you plan your own trip. Distances and times are from mapped routes and are a guide only. Driving times are mapped car times. Allow extra time for stops, traffic, accommodation access and optional outings. Road conditions, closures, opening hours and prices change, so check them before you travel. Any reliance on this itinerary is at your own discretion.

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