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SOUTH ISLAND ROAD TRIP · 10 DAYS FROM CHRISTCHURCH AND BACK

New Zealand - South Island Discovery

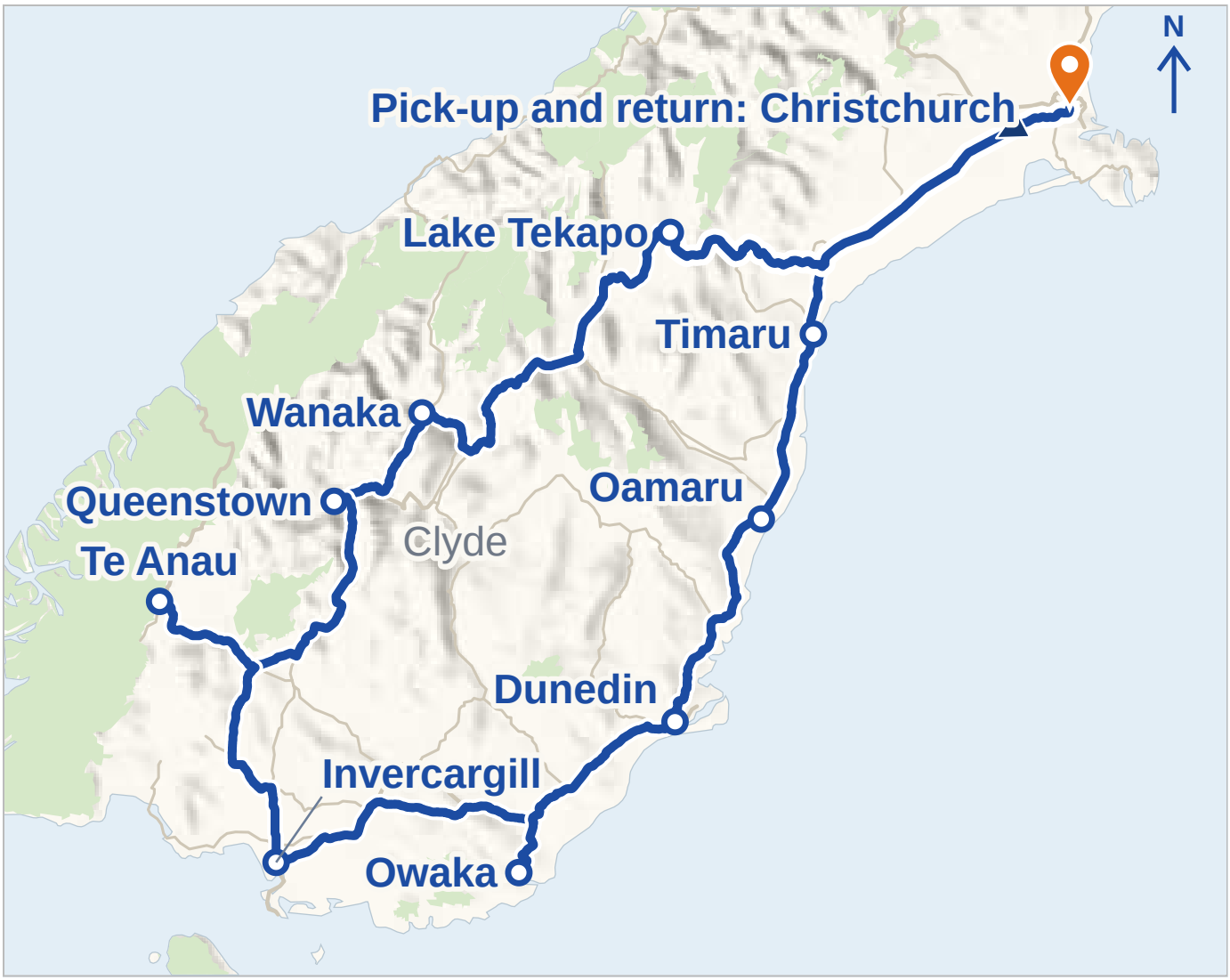
Explore the South island of New Zealand on this 10 day journey from Christchurch down to Queenstown into Fiordland National Park, then onto to Invercargill and returning up the east coast via Dunedin and Timaru.

DISTANCE	DAYS	ROUTE	DRIVING TIME
About 1,450 km	10 days, 10 drives	Round trip from Christchurch	About 24 h by campervan

LONGEST DRIVE	VEHICLE
225 km, Christchurch to Lake Tekapo	Campervan



Milford Sound, day 4 · Illustrative image



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

Picking up in Christchurch

Arrive well before the branch closes so staff have time to take you through the van. Bring a driver's licence for every driver, and a credit card in the main driver's name for the bond (a security deposit). See picking up your campervan in New Zealand and what to check at the vehicle inspection and demonstration. More on campervan hire in Christchurch.

DRIVE

225 km from Christchurch | **about 3 h 45 min** by campervan

Via **Geraldine Fairlie Highway**

DAY 1

Christchurch to Tekapo

PICK-UP

Pick up your campervan or car in Christchurch today. If you are collecting a camper, allow plenty of time at the branch so the rental company can show you how it works before you leave.

Depart this morning and take the State Highway 1 to Orai Station Road in Orai. Take the Geraldine-Fairlie Highway to State Highway 8 in Fairlie. Turn right into Tekapo.

Lake Tekapo is just one of the many stunning natural features found in New Zealand. Whether you are visiting in winter and enjoying the ski slopes, or enjoying picnics by the lake in the warmer months, Lake Tekapo is perfect year round.

For a relaxing day, visit the Tekapo Springs. Here you will find three hot pools which look out over Lake Tekapo and the mountains. Afterwards, book yourself in for a massage or spa treatment, and truly indulge yourself in a holiday away.

Stay Lakes Edge Holiday Park (formerly Lake Tekapo Motels and Holiday Park)

DRIVE

200 km from Lake Tekapo | **about 3 h** by campervan

Via **Tekapo-Twizel Road**

DAY 2

Tekapo to Wanaka

Depart this morning and head north west on State Highway 8A, and turn right following signs for Route 8/ Wanaka/ West Coast. Stay right to continue along State Highway 8A, and then turn right onto State Highway 6. Continue onto State Highway 84 until you reach Wanaka.

Pull on the hiking boots and explore Mt Aspiring National Park – Te Wahipounamu World Heritage Area. Go for a casual walk around the mountain and its surrounds, or challenge yourself to an introductory mountaineers' course with an instructor and climb higher than you have climbed before.

Lake Wanaka is another one of New Zealand's stunningly clear lakes. Take a boat ride across the waters, or even a jet boat for the thrill seekers, and see the mountains from a whole new perspective.

Stay Wanaka TOP 10 Holiday Park (formerly Wanaka Kiwi Holiday Park & Motels)

DRIVE

69 km from Wanaka | **about 1 h 30 min** by campervan

Via **Cardrona Valley Road**

DAY 3

Wanaka to Queenstown

Depart this morning and take Cardrona Valley Road, Crown Range Road and State Highway 6 to Queenstown.

Queenstown is one of the bungy-jumping capitals of the world, drawing adrenaline-seekers from every corner to bungy jump from great heights into some of the most beautiful gorges in New Zealand. Take up the challenge as it is an experience that you will definitely not forget, with nearly all places providing photographic evidence of your brave accomplishments.

For a different way of travelling around and seeing Queenstown, try an eco-friendly Segway Personal Transporter tour. Segway's are easy to use, as you buzz around Queenstown enjoying stunning views of the bays and mountains.

Stay Queenstown Holiday Park Creeksyde

DRIVE

170 km from Queenstown | **about 2 h 40 min** by campervan

Via **Te Anau Mossburn Highway**

DAY 4

Queenstown to Te Anau

Depart this morning and take State Highway 6A. Turn right onto State Highway 94, and then right onto Sandy Brown Road. Turn left onto State Highway 64 and follow until Te Anau.

Te Anau is one of the gateways to the Fiordland National Park, which is home to over 1.2 million hectares of mountains, lakes, fiords and rainforests. Go hiking throughout one of the great walking tracks through the national park, and see the hundreds of local flora and fauna species up close.

The Milford Sound is one of the most famous fiords in New Zealand, and is situated in the Fiordland National Park. Surrounded by steep cliffs and dense rainforest, hire a kayak and take in the fiord in at your own speed. Gently paddle past the natural wonders and enjoy the serenity that the fiord has to offer.

Stay Te Anau Lakeview Holiday Park & Motels (formerly Te Anau Lakeview Kiwi Holiday Park & Motels)

DRIVE

160 km from Te Anau | **about 2 h 30 min** by campervan

Via **Te Anau Mossburn Highway**

DAY 5

Te Anau to Invercargill

Head south on State Highway 94 and then turn right onto Dipton-Castlerock Road. Turn right onto State Highway 6, and at the roundabout, take the 1st exit onto State Highway 1. Turn right onto Conon Street in Invercargill.

Spend the day at Queens Park, which is no average park. From golf, to playgrounds, to animals, there is something for everyone in the family to enjoy or try. Take a picnic on a nice day, and enjoy the peace away from the hustle and bustle of the city.

Visit the E Hayes Motorworks Collection, and see the 'World's Fastest Indian' in person. Housed in a hardware store, the collection showcases vintage motorcycles, engines, equipment and memorabilia. At the centre, is the 'World's Fastest Indian', the very same motorcycle in which Burt Munro claimed his world records for his explorations and achievements in speed.

Stay Invercargill Holiday Park & Motels (formerly Invercargill Top 10 Holiday Park)

DRIVE

155 km from Invercargill | **about 2 h 30 min** by campervan

Via **Old Coach Road**

DAY 6

Invercargill to Owaka

Depart this morning and head west on Orr Road towards Kennington-Waimatua Road. Follow State Highway 1, Mataura-Clinton Road/ Old Coach Road and Clinton-Owaka Road/ Owaka Valley Road to Papatowai Highway/ Waikawa Road in Owaka.

Take a tour on a horse, and gallop along the sweeping green plains of the Catlins or along the many beaches. Tours are tailored to the individuals, to accommodate for everyone's experiences on a horse. It is a great way to get off the beaten track and see areas that cannot be accessed via the road.

The Earth Lore is one of New Zealand's only insect-themed parks, and is one not-to-miss for an educational afternoon. With everything from The Great Orlando's Magical Flea circus puppet show, to an observation hive, you may find yourself getting over that fear of bugs, and being fascinated by what you will find here.

Check first:
Horse rides in the Catlins run from about September to May, and Earthlore opens seasonally, so check both are open before you go.

Stay Thomas's Catlins Lodge & Camp Ground (closed in winter)

DRIVE

110 km from Owaka | **about 1 h 50 min** by campervan

Via **Owaka Highway**

DAY 7

Owaka to Dunedin

Depart this morning and take Main Road/ Owaka Highway. Follow to High Street and then turn right onto the State Highway 1. Follow for signs Timaru/ Route 1.

For a unique experience, visit the Dunedin Chinese Garden, which celebrates the Chinese population of Dunedin, with many families arriving in the 1860s during the gold rush. Walk around and enjoy the beautifully crafted gardens and buildings and have a go at the Chinese puzzles. Afterwards indulge in an authentic Chinese Tea Shop, where you can sample teas, dumplings and buns.

For the royal treatment, visit the Larnach Castle and Gardens. Take a tour of the magnificent castle, and learn about William Larnach, who built the castle for his wife Eliza. The gardens are also considered a Garden of International Significance, with the Lost Rock garden, the Serpentine Walk and the Laburnum Arch as particular highlights.

Stay Dunedin Holiday Park & Motels

DRIVE

110 km from Dunedin | **about 1 h 50 min** by campervan

Via **Hampden - Palmerston Road**

DAY 8

Dunedin to Oamaru

Depart this morning and head north on the State Highway 1 towards Queens Gardens. Keep left and follow signs for Route 1 until Oamaru.

The Moeraki Boulders are large spherical stones on Koekohe Beach. They are formed by the erosion caused by the ocean, which has produced a natural wonder that must be seen in person. Some of the boulders are up to three metres in diameter, and weigh several tonnes, making them both unusual but beautiful natural sculptures.

Steampunk HQ is a truly unique experience in New Zealand, celebrating the genre of science fiction combined with steam powered technology. A particular highlight is the full scale train engine that both spits fire and bellows smoke. The entire museum will transport you and teach you about this entirely different and alternative world.

Stay Oamaru Top 10 Holiday Park

DRIVE

86 km from Oamaru | **about 1 h 30 min** by campervan

Via **Waimate Highway**

DAY 9

Oamaru to Timaru

Depart this morning and return to the State Highway 1. Continue onto King Street and Stafford Street to Timaru.

Learn about the local Maori culture at the Te Ana Maori Rock Art tours, where a guide will take you through how the rock art is formed and you will see the original rock art paintings. You will hear stories about the ancestors who lived here thousands of years ago, and what they did to preserve their paintings for today.

Season Te Ana's guided tours run from November to April, or by arrangement either side of those months.

To continue this educational experience, the South Canterbury Museum has an extensive collection focussing on the heritage and people of the area. Learn about the Maori people and the European settlement, as well as the natural histories which is a must-see and learn of this area.

Check first:
The South Canterbury Museum closed on 27 October 2026 to move to its new building, Te Kura Marumaru South Canterbury Museum, which is due to open in April 2027. Check it's open before you go.

Stay Timaru Top 10 Holiday Park

DRIVE

165 km from Timaru | **about 2 h 50 min** by campervan

Via **Main South Road**

DAY 10

Timaru to Christchurch

RETURN

Depart this morning and take Stafford Street to State Highway 1. Follow to Montreal Street in Christchurch.

After a full 10-days of travelling, visit the Christchurch Botanic Gardens for a relaxing end to your journey. With conservatories, gardens and playgrounds, stroll around the vibrant park and enjoy the natural beauty of Christchurch.

Stay Amber Kiwi Holiday Park

Returning in Christchurch

When you return your campervan, allow time for the return inspection. Return it by the time on your booking, as rental companies charge for late returns.

Check your rental agreement for the fuel level and whether the toilet and waste-water tanks need emptying, as the company inspects the van before it releases your bond (returning your campervan in New Zealand). More on campervan hire in Christchurch.

Enjoy the drive around the South Island.

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