

Classic South Island Adventure ★ 4.63 539 Reviews

Classic South Island Adventure

8 Days

14 People Max



Discover the depths of New Zealand's backcountry via hiking, biking and kayaking on our Classic South Island Adventure.

Get ready for an adventure of a lifetime, exploring New Zealand's most iconic and remote wilderness, with every detail carefully planned on our 8-day Classic South Island Adventure. You'll be truly mind-blown by the array of activities and landscapes you can experience in just eight days. From flying into Siberia Valley, hiking up the valley in Mt Aspiring National Park and jet boating out the same day. Each day brings a unique challenge, a new adventure and a chance to see the South Island in ways very few experience. If you're ready to take in the wilderness of the West Coast, hike part of the Routeburn Track and spend a day in the charming mountain town of Queenstown, look no further than our Classic South Island Adventure.

Trip Highlights

Hiking - Routeburn Track

Hiking - Mt Aspiring National Park

Hiking - Franz Josef Glacier

Biking - Queenstown Trail

Kayaking - Okarito Lagoon

Plus ... - Cruise Milford Sound

Plus ... - Scenic mountain flight to Siberia Hut

Plus ... - Jet boat in Mt Aspiring National Park

Plus ... - Explore Queenstown

Plus ... - Cross the Haast Pass

Our Active Adventures Assurance

We value loyalty, and appreciate that it goes both ways. So when you book with us we'll make a few assurances to you so you can book with complete confidence, no matter what's happening in your life (or the world).



COVID-Ready Certified: Safe Travel for our Guests Travelling Overseas

Active Adventures has received the World Travel and Tourism Council's Safe Travels stamp, which guarantees you that we'll follow all ATTA and WTTC health and safety guidelines on all our trips. See how our small group, off-the-beaten-track adventures are perfect to start exploring again.

Classic South Island Adventure ~ Itinerary

DAY 1

Arrive, hike in Arthur's Pass

Most people leave the Northern Hemisphere on a Friday evening, arriving in Auckland early Sunday morning. You'll lose a day crossing the dateline – but you get it back on the way home! It's a short flight from Auckland to Christchurch on the South Island where we'll meet you. We'll then travel into the Southern Alps to hike Devil's Punchbowl in Arthur's Pass. The walk will take you through native beech forest to an awesome 131 meter (430 feet) waterfall, so make sure you have your camera handy! From there, we'll head down the coast to Franz Josef where we'll stay the night. Nestled in the rainforest-clad foothills of the Southern Alps, Franz Josef is the heart of New Zealand's glacier country.

Rainforest Retreat, Franz Josef (Lunch, Dinner)

Hiking: 2 kilometers (1.2 miles), 0.5-1 hour, elevation +/- 100 meters (330 feet)

DAY 2

Kayak Okarito Lagoon and Hike near Franz Josef Glacier

This morning we'll take a short journey over to Okarito, a little-known beach community on the coast. We'll take to the water in sea kayaks and glide along a picturesque lagoon, set against a stunning backdrop of snow-capped peaks. Okarito is home to the only native white heron colony in New Zealand, as well as a host of other interesting birds. After our activities this morning we'll regroup back in Franz Josef for some lunch before heading off to check out the glacier! With some 140 glaciers making their way down from the Southern Alps, this area is fittingly known as glacier country. Few sights equal the spectacle of two of these giant frozen rivers (Franz Josef and Fox Glaciers) imperceptibly grinding their way down through the temperate rainforest to just 250 meters (820 feet) above sea level. After lunch we go for a short walk out to a viewpoint of the Franz Josef Glacier. This afternoon we'll travel down the coast along the Tasman Sea with a chance to walk the beach before heading over the divide of the island into Mount Aspiring National Park, ending our day in Makarora.

Wonderland Lodge, Makarora (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)

Kayaking: 2-21/2 hours OR Heli-Hike on Franz Josef Glacier

Hiking: 1.5 kilometers (1 mile), 30 minutes, elevation +/- 20 meters (66 feet)

DAY 3

Scenic flight, hike Siberia Valley, jet boat Wilkin River

You'll head out for a mind-blowing scenic flight into Mount Aspiring National Park, with a bird's eye view of the lower Southern Alps, landing in the remote Siberia Valley. After crossing the Wilkin River you can choose to have some downtime at the Siberia Hut or a walk upstream past a waterfall and amazing views of the mountains. After lunch, you'll hike downstream along the Wilkin River, through beautiful silver beech (*Nothofagus menziesii*) forests to a jet boat rendezvous. Then it's a thrilling ride back to Makarora for dinner and perhaps a well-earned drink at the local pub.

Wonderland Lodge, Makarora (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)

Hiking: 6.6 kilometers or 10.5 kilometers (4.1 or 6.5 miles), 2-3 hours, elevation +140 meters (460 feet) / - 320 meters (1,050 feet)

DAY 4

Hike Haast Pass Lookout and Blue Pools, bike Queenstown Trail

This morning we'll head back toward the West Coast and stop off at the top of Haast Pass to walk up to the Haast Pass Lookout. The trail has a steady incline and doesn't let off until you reached the top, though the views from above the tree line are well worth the climb! On our way back to Makarora, we'll check out the iconic Blue Pools, nestled among mature beech and podocarp forest, these pools of deep, clear water flowing into the Makarora River offer a moment of tranquillity. Alternatively, you can have a relaxing sleep in and spend your morning soaking up the mountain views. We'll have a picnic lunch before taking a beautiful drive through spectacular glacier-carved valleys. The landscape changes rapidly from dense beech forests to semi-arid mountainous terrain. We'll take a quick stop in Wanaka before a short but dramatic journey over the Cardrona Saddle to Arrowtown, a small historic gold mining village established in the 1800s. We'll hop on bikes to ride a portion of the Queenstown Bike Trail. The trail is well packed and winds along beside the Arrow River, and we'll follow the Arrow Bridges Trail through to Morven Ferry Carpark or the famous Kawarau Bungy Bridge, depending on the group's ability. After our ride, we'll head on to Queenstown and Lake Wakatipu where you'll sleep sweetly tonight in this alpine town.

Heritage Hotel, Queenstown (Breakfast, Lunch)

Hiking: Haast Pass Hike: 3.5 kilometers (2.2 miles), 1 hour return, elevation +/- 107 meters (351 feet)

Hiking: Blue Pools Hike: 1.5 kilometers (0.9 miles), 1 hour return, elevation +/- 54 meters (177 feet)

Biking: 7.5-13 kilometers (4.6-8.1 miles), 1-2 hour, elevation +/- 127 meters (416 feet)

DAY 5

Gondola ride, hike Ben Lomond or free day in Queenstown

Today you have two options - a full day hike or a free day to yourself. For those keen for an alpine hike, you'll meet your guide at reception at 9am, ready to head up the Ben Lomond Track. To save our legs a little, we'll take a short gondola ride up to Bob's Peak, which is 450 meters (1476 feet) above Queenstown. From there, we'll head out along the trail through alpine tussock-land towards the summit of Ben Lomond. From this vantage point, you'll find yourself immersed in amazing views over Queenstown and Lake Wakatipu, which are themselves dwarfed by the surrounding mountains including Mt. Aspiring. As an alternative, you can have a free day to explore on your own. Queenstown is the adventure capital of New Zealand (if not the world!) and all the comforts of civilisation are packed into this tiny resort town: restaurants galore, sidewalk cafés, stylish lounge bars, day spas, and boutiques. You'll also find incredible optional activities here including horse trekking, kayaking, fishing, winery tours, hang gliding, mountain biking, bungy jumping, jet boating and skydiving. Or you can just soak up the atmosphere or lounge about reading a book. Your guides will happily share their favourite haunts and point you in the right direction if you choose to have a free day today.

Heritage Hotel, Queenstown

Hiking: 8 kilometers (5 miles), 4-5 hours, elevation +/- 978 meters (3,208 feet)

DAY 6

Hike Kepler Track

This morning we'll make our way around Lake Wakatipu, leaving behind the towering Remarkables and head west to the small town of Te Anau, the gateway to Milford Sound. This afternoon we'll take a hike on the famous Kepler Track, one of New Zealand's Great Walks - we follow the track through mountain beech forest and along the Waiau River. It's an awesome hike with spectacular views! Tonight we'll stay on the edge of Lake Te Anau, enjoying the scenery and the delicious local fare.

Matai Lodge or Distinction Luxmore Hotel, Te Anau (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)

Hiking: 9.5 kilometers (6 miles), 2-3 hours, elevation +/- 50 meters (165 feet)

DAY 7

Milford Sound Cruise, Hike Routeburn Track

It's an early start this morning as we set off for our largest and perhaps most spectacular national park, Fiordland. We'll take a short drive through the Homer Tunnel and emerge at the top of a spectacular glacier-carved valley for a memorable descent to the shore of Milford Sound. Rudyard Kipling rated this fiord as the eighth natural wonder of the world and it is truly breathtaking, with steep granite walls plunging over a thousand meters to the Tasman Sea and waterfalls cascading into the deep inky water. We'll jump on board the first boat cruise of the day, where we'll have the water to ourselves, as we gaze in wonder at the waterfalls tumbling down enormous vertical rock faces all around and journey right out to the entrance of the fiord. We may be lucky enough to encounter the friendly fur seals and dolphins that are sometimes in the area. Afterwards, we'll explore the Fiordland wilderness on foot again, with a hike to Key Summit on the famous Routeburn Track. The panoramic views are incredible from this vantage point and you'll probably get to meet New Zealand's notoriously cheeky and intelligent alpine parrot, the kea (*Nestor notabilis*). After our hike, we'll continue heading out of Milford Sound to return for our last night on the shores of Lake Te Anau. Tonight we'll enjoy a celebratory dinner for our last night.

Matai Lodge or Distinction Luxmore Hotel, Te Anau (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)

Hiking: 6.8 kilometers (4.2 miles), 3-4 hours, elevation +/-470meters (1540 feet)

DAY 8

Depart for home

After breakfast, we'll return to Queenstown. This is the end of your trip and you'll have had an exhilarating week. We'll leave you buzzing with excitement, but feeling relaxed and refreshed as well! If you're keen to extend your trip and see what the North Island has to offer (Maori culture, pristine beaches, and geothermal areas) check out our 11-day Ultimate North Island Adventure (5-day options also available).

No Accommodation (Breakfast)

Useful Info

Is tipping expected in New Zealand?

Tipping is neither required nor routinely expected in New Zealand, but it is appropriate for very good service. In New Zealand you don't usually tip in restaurants, or if you take a taxi, or get a haircut. Many of our guests do choose to tip our guides and we recommend USD\$20 per day, per guest, per guide. You are welcome to tip an equivalent amount in the local currency. There are plenty of ATM's and banks in the larger towns of New Zealand.

What additional activities are on offer in New Zealand?

You'll be participating in loads of amazing activities during your tour, however, you may be wondering what other cool stuff you can do before or after your trip to make the most of your time in New Zealand.

We've teamed up with the good folk at Everything Travel and you're welcome to book any pre or post-trip 'things to do' directly with them.

For trips starting and/or ending in the South Island, check out things to do before and/or after your trip [here](#).

For trips starting and/or ending in North Island, check out things to do before and/or after your trip [here](#).

Make sure any activities you book are before or after your trip only as your tour itself is already filled to the brim with the adventures we offer!

Where does the trip start?

On the first morning of the trip, our two pick-up locations are [Rydges Latimer Square Hotel](#) at 9:30am or the Christchurch airport (CHC) in front of the Help Desk (near door 7) at 10am. You are welcome to book your pre-trip stay at this hotel directly or any other hotel in Christchurch, though you must make your own way to one of the two pick-up points at the pre-designated times.

Where does the trip end?

Your trip ends with a drop-off at either the Queenstown Airport (ZQN) in time for flights below or anywhere in Queenstown around lunch time.

What flights would you recommend?

Arrival: We recommend arriving in Christchurch before 9am. Many guests like to arrive a day or two early to accommodate potential flight delays and/or explore the city prior to your trip start.

Departure: Flying out on the last day of the trip, we recommend departing from Queenstown after 12pm. Earlier flight times will require a separate transfer booked at your own expense.

How fit do I need to be?

As an [Activity Level 3-4](#) trip, you'll need a good level of fitness for this trip as it's one of our more adventurous trips. Typically, hikes range between three and six hours to complete, more, or less hiking is available depending on your multi-day option. Please head to our [Fitness Guide](#) for great tips on how to prepare along with a workout plan!

What accommodations do we stay at on this trip?

We have selected the accommodation on your trip for the stunning settings, unique character or adventuresome feel - this trip is not designed to be tour of the fanciest hotels in New Zealand. We prefer to stay in quaint, comfortable B&Bs, lodges and apartments, some of which have private bathrooms and some shared bathrooms.

While there are laundry facilities at most locations, they may not be convenient or there may only be one machine to service your entire group. We recommend bringing enough clothing to only have to do laundry once during your trip, if at all. The best time will be during our two night stay in Queenstown (during your free day).

Will we encounter snow on this trip?

During bumper snow years the snow may stay on the mountains into October and November. If so, the New Zealand Department of Conservation (equivalent of the USA's National Park Service) will not allow us to travel over heavily snowed terrain for safety reasons and we heed their warnings. As a result, we may not be able to access some higher elevation hikes such as Mueller Ridge in Aoraki Mt. Cook National Park and Robert's Ridge in Nelson Lakes National Park - both at 1,500 metres (4500 feet) in our itinerary. Luckily, New Zealand is full of stunning hikes so we'll select an alternative hike that allows you to enjoy the snowcapped peaks from a safe distance.

How much luggage can I bring on this trip?

You are allowed one piece of luggage on your trip, plus a daypack. Your main piece of luggage should not exceed 50 pounds (23 kilograms) and can be anything from a duffle bag to a sports bag with wheels or a suitcase. You'll also want a good quality backpack sized 25-30 liters (2000 cubic inches) to use throughout the days.

How do rooming arrangements work?

Trip prices are based on shared arrangements (typically two guests per room), unless otherwise stated. For solo travelers, we'll pair you with another person of the same gender to share rooms and if there's no one suitable to share with, there's no forced single supplement. However, if you specifically request your own rooms, you can opt to pay the single supplement. Solo travelers who book within 90 days of departure, where there are no other solo travelers willing to share, will be required to pay the single supplement.

For Family Vacation bookings, families consisting of four guests traveling with children aged 17 and under will be automatically assigned one shared room. However, the following alternative rooming allocations are available:

Families consisting of four guests with all children aged 13 and above are welcome to opt for additional rooms as per advertised double occupancy adult rates.

Families consisting of four guests with at least one child aged 12 and under are automatically assigned a shared room. However, families can opt to pay the adult rates for all guests in their family to have an additional room.

The same principles apply for families consisting of more than four guests.

Rooming preferences are subject to availability and must be communicated in writing at time of booking. Automatic assignments as per this policy will be applied in the absence of any specification provided by guests. Any request for additional rooms during trips will be at guests' own expense and subject to rates made available by the accommodation provider at the time. All minors (guests aged 17 and under) must be accompanied by at least one adult.

What is not included?

Flights to and from trip start/end points

15% NZ Goods and Services Tax (GST)

Pre/Post Accommodation

Optional extra activities

Travel insurance

Gratuities for your guides

Trekking packs and sleeping bags (if applicable)

General Trip Information

You can find details on recommended flights and fitness, as well as trip start and end in the 'Useful Information' section above.

Accommodation

You'll love the interesting places we've discovered over the years. You'll visit really spectacular and off-the-beaten-track locations and stay in comfortable bed and breakfasts, lodges, apartments and hotels for the most part. Keep in mind the most remote locations have limited accommodation options, but 5-star scenery!

Included

- Our own highly experienced guides, driver, and cook, with you from start to finish
- Industry-leading Guest-to-Guide ratio (averaging 6:1)
- Your own 'Travel Wallet', an online space with everything required for your adventure
- Our knowledgeable Customer Service Team to answer your queries - just a phone call, email or chat away
- Customer Service pre-trip phone calls to ensure you're 'trip ready'
- All accommodations for the duration of your trip
- All meals except where indicated in the itinerary
- Unlimited snacks to keep you fueled
- All activities outlined in the itinerary
- All necessary equipment (well-maintained and safe) for activities, including Hiking Poles
- All park and other entry fees
- Transportation in our air-conditioned vans - safe, clean, modern, and comfortable!

Itinerary Updates

We update our itineraries regularly, so please check our website for the most up-to-date itineraries and pricing. We make every effort to ensure itineraries are updated as necessary, though changes may occur without prior notice due to unforeseen circumstances.

Transportation

Since New Zealand isn't quite small enough to simply walk everywhere and still see all the highlights in a limited amount of time, we travel in fuel-efficient 20-seat Toyota Coasters and our guides make the journey enjoyable. They'll introduce you to some local tunes as well as provide interesting commentary, and we pass the time on the road in a fun, social way, with New Zealand's ever-changing scenery providing a feast for the eyes. Our focus, as always, is getting you out of the vehicle and into the scenery.

Excluded

- International/Domestic Flights to and from the meeting point
- 15% NZ Goods and Services Tax (GST)
- Optional extra activities
- Travel insurance
- Alcoholic beverages
- Gear on packing list (optional to rent some equipment)
- Gratuities for your guides at the end of your fabulous trip

Outdoor Experience

Our trips allow you to make the most of the New Zealand backcountry, whether you're relatively new to hiking or a seasoned trekker. Our highly trained and experienced guides will be at your side, safely guiding you to magnificent places that you wouldn't get to on your own. The challenges are there, if you're looking for them. All we ask is that you're energetic and in reasonable shape and we guarantee you'll have an incredible time. You don't need to have kayaked before to enjoy paddling on the water and you don't need to be a serious cyclist to enjoy most of the rides we do. In fact, we have so many options available that you don't need to paddle or ride at all if you'd rather hike or just laze around!

We hold all relevant government licenses and permits, have an impeccable safety record, and are certified by [OutdoorsMark](#), New Zealand's leading outdoor safety auditors. So, with all the research, logistics, safety and hospitality taken care of, you can focus on the most important thing - making the most of your adventure!