New Zealand: The South Island

Air Package Itinerary

Step out from your lodge to stargaze, and the sweep of the night sky is gloriously different. On this remote inlet accessible only by foot or boat, it's not just that the stars shine brighter. They're completely reconfigured. Stretched out before you, Awaroa Bay reflects the light of the Southern Cross in the moonlight. As you wander the legendary Abel Tasman and Queen Charlotte tracks and explore the South Island's great national parks on this hiking tour, New Zealand's most magnificent landscapes become your second home. Even better: its friendly locals—met in charming towns, trails, and even a boat cruise—will become like family. Along the way, its pristine lakes, coves, and sounds—glimmering in gorgeous shades of jade green, turquoise and topaz—will give you a lifetime of memories to reflect on.



Highlights

- Hike the Mt. Robert Circuit, an alpine trail overlooking Lake Rotoiti, in Nelson Lakes National Park, gazing up for views of the snow-capped Southern Alps.
- Explore one of New Zealand's "Great Walks," the Abel Tasman Coast Track, admiring its golden beaches, crystal-clear bays, and stunning rock formations.
- Take in panoramic views of turquoise waters and stunning coastlines at Marlborough Sounds, as you ascend the ridge-top trails of the Queen Charlotte Track.
- Enjoy iconic Greenshell mussles and local Sauvignon Blanc aboard a private cruise across Marlborough Sound, sailing past some of the most spectacular scenery on the South Island.

- Browse the charming town center of Hanmer Springs, with its colorful galleries and inviting shops before soaking in the thermal, mineral-rich pools around which the town was established.



Activity Level

This tour is one of our Guided Walking Adventures, rated easy to moderate, averaging 2-8 miles of walking per day. The walking terrain is varied, including well-worn forest paths, exposed trails with rocks and roots, and stretches of sandy beach in Abel Tasman National Park. You will cross many suspension

bridges, which are well-built and not very high. While this is not a mountain-climbing tour, there are daily ascents and descents. You travel through extremely diverse climate zones and correspondingly varied walking terrain including high alpine, temperate rainforest, and coastal paths.

FLIGHT DAY

Depart from the United States or Canada

Your vacation is about to begin! Spend your first night aloft and arrive ready for an unforgettable trip.

FLIGHT DAY

Continue your flight to Christchurch, New Zealand

Flying to New Zealand requires crossing the International Date Line, so this day is “lost.”

ARRIVAL DAY

Arrive in Christchurch, New Zealand

Start off your first day in Christchurch right by having a Country Walkers representative greet you at the airport. A complimentary car service will whisk you to your centrally located hotel. From here, you are perfectly positioned to explore this charming city at your leisure.

DAY 1

Join your New Zealand: The South Island tour

Meet in Christchurch. Conical Hill Walk; 3 miles, easy to moderate

After enjoying an included breakfast at your hotel meet your guides at the Chateau on the Park at 8:30

a.m. in the lobby. They will be wearing Country Walkers shirts. Please be dressed for walking.

Drive from Christchurch this morning to Hanmer Springs, a walker's paradise of forested hills dotted with soothing thermal baths. The small town was discovered and settled for its hot springs, which today lure those seeking curative waters in a pastoral setting. Upon arrival, set off on a short scenic walk among diverse sub-alpine flora. The iconic Conical Hill Walk features a gentle climb that zigzags through exotic varieties of trees, including Japanese cypress and giant fir. At the summit, enjoy spectacular views of the sweeping Hanmer Basin. Relax here for a while at the lookout where a plaque honors the work of Duncan Rutherford, an early settler who helped develop the area.

Later, browse the charming center of Hanmer Springs, with its colorful galleries and inviting shops and restaurants. Then it's time to indulge in the thermal pools around which the town was established. A soak in the springs' soothing, mineral-rich waters will leave you relaxed, rejuvenated, and ready for your New Zealand adventure.

Note: Please have your swimwear easily accessible in your day bag if you wish to soak in the thermal pools.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 2

Alpine Nature Walk

0.5 mile, easy, Honeydew Walk; 2 miles, easy

After breakfast you begin the northeast drive to the small alpine village of St. Arnaud. On route, enjoy a short easy walk through an alpine environment. Once you reach the Alpine Lodge, your home for the next two days, you'll have time to settle into your room before rejoining the group. Located on the northern shores of Lake Rotoiti, St. Arnaud is a favored base for New Zealand trampers exploring the picturesque contours of Nelson Lakes National Park. This 390-square-mile stretch encompasses the surrounding mountains and sparkling waters of Lake Rotoiti and Lake Rotoroa – its vistas are magnificent, as you will discover.

Head out directly from the lodge to trace a loop trail, the Honeydew Walk. This mostly flat trail provides the

perfect introduction to the plants and birdlife that call the northern mountains of the South Island home—from thick beech forests and grassy tussocks to *kākāriki* (parakeet) and *korimako* (bellbird).

This evening, join your fellow walkers and guides for a delicious dinner of locally sourced ingredients. Throughout your adventure, you'll dine on fresh foods harvested from local farms and the surrounding sea. Though much of New Zealand's cuisine is British-based, modern-day dishes have Mediterranean, Southeast Asian, and Pacific Rim influences.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 3

Mt. Robert Circuit or Brunner Peninsula

5 miles, moderate, Optional – Brunner Peninsula; 2 miles, easy

A hearty breakfast at your lodge provides fuel for today's longer walk. With a guide-prepared picnic lunch in your pack, travel to the trailhead for the Mt. Robert Circuit. There, you set out on a loop around the flank of Pourangahau, the mountain's indigenous name. These slopes were crowded with beech trees until 1887, when a fire consumed many of them. In the ensuing years, early settlers favored grass growth over tree regeneration for the grazing of sheep. Still an actively recovering forest today, it provides a fascinating glimpse of the area's natural history.

As you climb steadily toward the summit, your hike offers sweeping views of Lake Rotoiti. You can make use of the huts and shelters along the way to take a break and marvel at the dramatic scenery. As you ascend, the forest recedes, and you walk past alpine herbs and shrubs. At the mountain's open face, you pass several scree-filled gullies before crossing the ridge for your return hike. For a gentler walk, follow the Brunner Peninsula Nature Trail, a mostly flat loop path with views from Kerr Bay and West Bay across Lake Rotoiti to surrounding peaks. If you wish, enjoy the lake's beach and browse the visitor center before returning to the lodge for a relaxing afternoon or swim. In the event of rain in New Zealand's unpredictable climate, your guides provide wet-weather options.

Savor another delectable dinner at the lodge tonight, then perhaps go for a walk to search for the Southern Cross in the night sky. Visible year-round only from the Southern Hemisphere, it is among the smallest of constellations: four bright stars shining close together.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 4

St. Arnaud to Kaiteriteri

Abel Tasman Coast Track; 3 or 5 miles, easy to moderate

You leave the magnificent mountains of St. Arnaud and Nelson Lakes National Park behind this morning, traveling north to the coast. Enjoy the scenic, two-hour drive, arriving at seaside Kaiteriteri in time to enjoy lunch in the village before boarding the Sea Shuttle that will whisk you to New Zealand's acclaimed Abel Tasman National Park. As you cruise, take in the marine vistas and marvel at the famous Split Apple Rock, a massive granite boulder cleaved in half over millennia by wind and water. You also pass Adele Island, home to a colony of fur seals, and numerous pristine beaches lapped by crystalline turquoise waters.

You disembark at either Medland's Beach for a long option or Tonga Quarry to set off along the celebrated Abel Tasman Coast Track, heralded as one of New Zealand's "Great Walks" by the Department of Conservation. This magnificent trail leads past rocky outcrops, quiet sheltered coves, and golden, palm-fringed beaches. You'll arrive at your lodge late this afternoon. You may wish to head down to the beach for a swim or simply relax on your room's private deck, perhaps pausing to chat with other walkers passing through. As the day draws to a close, the day-hikers leave and a hush falls over the lodge; you are among the lucky few to experience this magical place overnight.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 5

Abel Tasman Coast Track. Independent Exploration of Awaroa Bay

6 miles, easy to moderate

The beauty of Abel Tasman is its shape-shifting character. Over millennia, tidal activity has sculpted the landscape, which has some of the largest tidal ranges in New Zealand. Park walks often involve crossing inlets, but only at low tide and when conditions allow. Rest assured that, with a flexible mindset and readiness to change course, your experience in this breathtaking region will be richly rewarding.

If you wish, you may join your guide on a four- to five-hour walk from your lodge to Totaranui. Your walk

and return shuttle are timed to work with the tides. You depart the lodge with a packed lunch and traverse the Awaroa Inlet, lush with beech, rimu, and matai forest with sweeping views of the wilderness. Descend into Totaranui, passing giant rata trees in their clifftop habitats. Upon arrival at Totaranui's National Park headquarters, peruse the informative exhibit on local ecology and walk down to the beach for a swim. After time to relax, board the Sea Shuttle back to Awaroa. This afternoon, enjoy time on the nearby beach; head out for some birdwatching in search of petrels, herons, or even penguins. Or, seek out other wildlife in the Awaroa wetlands, perhaps deer or wild goats. Regroup with your fellow travelers for dinner together in the dining room of the Lodge.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 6

Sky Track Walk and Greenshell Mussel Cruise

1 mile, moderate; Pelorus Bridge Scenic Reserve, 1 mile, easy

This morning, "have a lie-in," as the locals say, and enjoy a leisurely breakfast. Once you're ready for the day, spend an hour or so traversing the Sky Track Trail, a splendid loop walk open only to guests of the lodge. The path climbs about 300 feet above the inlet, affording breathtaking views of the surrounding hills and azure waters along the coastline.

In the late morning, walk five minutes from the lodge to the beach to catch the Sea Shuttle back to Kaiteriteri. From here, enjoy a scenic drive to Havelock, the gateway to the Marlborough Sounds. Before reaching Havelock, discover ancient rimu trees and enjoy expansive views of the Pelorus River on the Circle Loop Trail at the Pelorus Bridge Scenic Reserve. In the north of this spectacular coastal region, a vast expanse of sea-drowned valleys forms dozens of secluded bays, islands, and beaches. It's an ideal place for exploration on foot. In the south, the undulating hills are blanketed with vineyards that produce some of New Zealand's finest wines. Later, stop in for lunch at a riverside cafe and enjoy the laid-back vibration of the small, artistic community.

Later, embark on a private cruiser and set off across shimmering waters to reach your lodge on Kenepuru Sound. About an hour later, arrive at Portage Bay and your home for the next two nights, with easy access to Kenepuru Sound from a private dock. Enjoy fresh-from-the-water seafood during dinner on your own this evening.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 7

Queen Charlotte Track

7 miles, easy to moderate

The Marlborough Sounds comprise one of New Zealand's most fascinating playgrounds for outdoor lovers. And your lodge is ideally positioned for you to take full advantage of the surrounding beauty and invigorating activities. Join us for a final and unforgettable walk along portions of the 43-mile Queen Charlotte Track, one of New Zealand's most remarkable walks.

After breakfast, embark a water taxi from the lodge's dock to the start of your walk on the Queen Charlotte Track, traversing the ridgeline of hills that surround the sound. As you cruise, the captain enlightens you about greenshell mussels, a local delicacy. On foot, follow the Portage Track through native bush along rolling ascents and descents, marveling at magnificent views over the mirror-like water, reflecting the distant hills and sky. Your walk ends with a leisurely descent back to your hotel in Portage Bay, where you might hop on a paddleboard or kayak before the evening descends, both free for use by guests of the hotel.

Tonight, gather with your travel mates for dinner in the hotel's dining room.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 8

Your New Zealand: The South Island tour concludes. Travel to Nelson

After breakfast, you travel to the town of Nelson, the oldest city on the South Island, where there will be time to explore on your own or walk to the hilltop "Centre of New Zealand," what many believe to be the nation's geographic center. From the top, enjoy sweeping views of surrounding hills and the city of Nelson. You say goodbye to your guides after an included lunch downtown. The small city is yours to explore for the remainder of the day. Your luggage will be delivered to your hotel and your guides will provide walking maps so that you may return to the hotel at your leisure in the afternoon. Please note that check in may not be available until after 3:00 p.m.

The rest of the day is yours to enjoy—perhaps explore the city, rest up in the hotel, or select a local restaurant for dinner. We provide detailed city information to help you plan your day.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DEPARTURE DAY

Departure

After an included breakfast this morning, a complimentary shuttle to the Nelson Airport, about 10 minutes away, will be provided by SuperShuttle based on your departure time.

Included Meals: Breakfast

What's Included	Air Package	Tour Only
Exceptional boutique accommodations	✓	✓
21 on-tour meals: 7 breakfasts, 8 lunches, 6 dinners	✓	✓
Local guides with you throughout tour	✓	✓
Local wine and/or beer with dinner	✓	✓
Telescopic walking sticks provided on tour	✓	✓
Roundtrip airfare	✓	
One extra night in Christchurch	✓	
One extra night in Nelson	✓	
Airport car service for arrival and departure	✓	
Pre- and post-tour breakfasts	✓	
Business-class upgrades available	✓	