New Zealand: The South Island

Tour-Only Itinerary

Tramping – that's Kiwi for "taking long walks" – is a beloved pastime in this corner of the world. Join us for a walking tour of New Zealand's South Island and discover scenic mountain landscapes, secluded coastal beaches, and delectable local cuisine. Breathe in fresh alpine air as you trek the verdant hills of Nelson Lakes National Park. Follow in the footsteps of the nation's earliest settlers, traversing ridgeline trails with views of lush, forested islands. Delight in hiking one of New Zealand's "Great Walks" and absorb the dramatic coastal beauty of Abel Tasman National Park. At the end of the day, unwind in the natural beauty that surrounds your comfortable accommodations. On this tramping adventure through New Zealand, you'll create memories to cherish for a lifetime.



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.



Activity Level

This tour is one of our Guided - Full 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. 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. Two days may prove challenging for those who suffer from severe vertigo. There are multiple water taxi transfers while visiting Abel Tasman National Park and Marlborough Sounds. Although the water we cross is relatively sheltered, the sea conditions can vary. If you are prone to sea sickness we recommend

bringing medication along. The trip both in and out of Abel Tasman National Park is 1 â€“ 1.5 hours; the other boat trips are only roughly 10-20 minutes.

DAY 1

Fly from USA to Christchurch, New Zealand

Begin your adventure by departing from a convenient gateway city in the United States or Canada. Spend the first night aloft.

DAY 2

Continue your flight to Christchurch, New Zealand

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

DAY 3

Arrive in Christchurch, New Zealand

Upon arrival at Christchurch Airport, gather your luggage and exit baggage claim to look for a representative holding a Country Walkers sign. Enjoy a complimentary shuttle transfer to the Chateau on the Park, about 15-20 minutes away. The shuttle is provided by SuperShuttle. Please note that your hotel room may not be available until 2:00 p.m.; however, you may store your luggage at the reception desk while you explore the city. The remainder of the day is at your leisure. Meals are on your own.

Accommodation: Chateau on the Park, Christchurch, New Zealand

DAY 4

Join your *New Zealand: The South Island* tour

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

Breakfast is included at your hotel. Your guide(s) meet you at the Chateau on the Park at 8:30 a.m. in the lobby. Your guide(s) will be wearing a Country Walkers shirt. Please be dressed for walking.

Transfer from Christchurch this morning to Hanmer Springs, a walker's paradise of forested hills and 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 zig-zags 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 you 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.

Accommodation: Select Braemar Lodge & Spa, Hanmer Springs

DAY 5

Alpine Nature Walk

.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 .5 mile 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 plant and bird life that call the northern mountains of the South Island home. From thick beech forests and grassy tussocks, to *kakariki* (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 from the surrounding sea. Though much of New Zealand's cuisine is British-based, modern-day dishes have been influenced by the Mediterranean, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Rim.

Accommodation: Alpine Lodge, St. Arnaud

DAY 6

Mt. Robert Circuit or Brunner Peninsula

5 miles, easy to 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, transfer 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, but only from the Southern Hemisphere, it is among the smallest of constellations: four bright stars shining close together.

Accommodation: Alpine Lodge, St. Arnaud

DAY 7

St. Arnaud to Kaiteriteri

Abel Tasman Coast Track; 3 miles, easy to moderate

You leave the magnificent mountains of St. Arnaud and Nelson Lakes National Park behind this morning, transferring north to the coast. Enjoy the scenic, two-hour drive, arriving at seaside Kaiteriteri in time to enjoy lunch in the village before embarking 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 Tonga Island, home to a colony of fur seals, and numerous pristine beaches kissed 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 you past rocky outcrops, quiet sheltered coves and golden, palm-fringed beaches. You arrive at the 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.

Accommodation: Awaroa Lodge, Abel Tasman National Park

DAY 8

Abel Tasman Coast Track

7 miles, easy to moderate

Spend today amidst the wild and pristine beauty of Abel Tasman National Park, its long peninsula reaching into the sea, threaded with inlets and sculpted with scallop-shaped bays. Your lodge's location at the center of the park, combined with a three-day sea shuttle Pass, allows for numerous opportunities to join your Country Walkers guides for planned walks to explore the protected coastline.

The beauty of Abel Tasman is its shape-shifting character. Over millennia, tidal activity has sculpted the

landscape with 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 cliff-top 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, embark your 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 travel-mates for dinner together in the dining room of the Lodge.

Accommodation: Awaroa Lodge, Abel Tasman National Park

DAY 9

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 fueled up 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 the azure 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, 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 celebrated coastal region, a vast expanse of sea-drowned valleys forms dozens of secluded bays, islands and beaches — ideal opportunities for exploration on foot. In the south, an undulating vista is blanketed with vineyards that produce some of New Zealand’s finest wines.

For lunch, you stop in the vibrant town of Mapua, known for its artistic community and lively café culture.

Later, embark a private cruiser and set off across shimmering waters to reach your lodge on Kenepuru Sound. As you cruise, the captain enlightens you about greenshell mussels, a local delicacy. As you sail past some of the most spectacular scenery on the South Island, sample some of this beloved shellfish with a glass of award-winning Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc. 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.

Accommodation: The Portage, Marlborough Sounds

DAY 10

Queen Charlotte Track

7 miles, easy to moderate

The Marlborough Sounds comprise one of New Zealand's iconic 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 spectacular walks.

After breakfast, embark a water taxi from the lodge's dock for a 10-minute transfer to the start of your walk on the Queen Charlotte Track, traversing the ridgeline of hills that surround the sound. 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.

Tonight, gather in the hotel's dining room for your farewell dinner and toast to the week's adventures.

Accommodation: The Portage, Marlborough Sounds

DAY 11

Your *New Zealand: The South Island* tour concludes

Optional – Centre of New Zealand Walk; 1 mile, easy

After breakfast, you transfer 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,” that many believe is the nation’s geographic center. From the top, enjoy sweeping views of surrounding hills and the city of Nelson. After lunch at one of the restaurants in town, you will be transferred to the airport, arriving at approximately 12:30 p.m.

What's Included

	Tour Only
Exceptional boutique accommodations	✓
All on-tour meals except 1 dinner	✓
Local guides with you throughout tour	✓
Local wine and/or beer with dinner	✓
Emergency travel assistance hotline available 24/7	✓