

Southern star

New Zealand's South Island offers beautiful playgrounds in winter or summer – the only difference is whether you don ski boots or hiking shoes to check out the glaciers, fjords and towns.

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A long-time favourite for Australian travellers, the land of the long white cloud serves up a combination of magnificent landscapes, cool cities, spoilt-for-choice adventure opportunities and warm Kiwi hospitality.

Rich in Maori culture, Aotearoa, or New Zealand, is steeped in tradition and an assortment of myths and legends.

GATEWAYS TO THE SOUTH

Whether you arrive at Christchurch or Queenstown, or via ferry from Wellington, you'll be gobsmacked by the stunning scenery at every turn. Rocked by a series of earthquakes in recent years, resilient Christchurch is back on its feet and open for business, more vibrant than ever. There's been a surge in new cafes, restaurants and shops opening up, dubbing Christchurch the 'pop up' city.

If you're using Canterbury as a base for further exploration, or to pick up a set of wheels to head further afield, plan to stay a couple of days in the city – there's much to discover in the region.

AN ICY HEART

Head in to the heart of the South Island, where New Zealand's highest peak, Aoraki/Mt Cook, sits at 3750m. Popular activities include tramping and cycling in the summer, and skiing one of the four main ski areas in the winter.

Intermediate and advanced boarders and skiers may want to join the experts and hit the Tasman Glacier, the longest glacier in the world. For those who want to explore by foot, the most easily accessible are the Fox and Franz Josef Glaciers that sit close to the coast.

ADVENTURE

All visitors to the South Island gravitate to Queenstown. Perched on the edge of Lake Wakatipu and surrounded by a jagged outline of peaks, the place is picture-postcard perfect. A thrill-seeker's paradise, it has a vitality that pulsates through every part of town.

There's no seasonal slowdown in Queenstown – the bungy jumping, jet boating, whitewater rafting and parasailing go on regardless. In the surrounding ski resorts of Coronet Peak and The Remarkables, trade skis for hiking boots when the snow melts.

Bungy jump fans will want to see where history was made in the 1980s when AJ Hackett launched the first commercial bungy jump in the world at Kawarau Bridge. At only 43m, it's not the highest jump, but the setting over the Kawarau River is something to see.

OUT OF TOWN

From Queenstown, Milford Sound in the pristine Fiordland National Park is a long day trip, so stay in nearby Te Anau or sign up for the four-day Milford Sound Track hike. This is one of the most popular trails in the country and is booked out months in advance, so book ahead. Take a cruise through the serene waterways or get up close and personal on a kayak tour. The rocks are littered with seals, and dolphins often play in the bow waves of the boats.

From fjords to bagpipes, Dunedin is where you'll find homesick Scots in need of a plate of haggis. Visit Larnach Castle, built in 1871, and any of the heritage buildings such as the Dunedin Railway Station. Throw on a kilt, toss a caber and dance the Highland fling at the Caledonian Society of Otago's annual Highland Games.

TASTY town

The town of Kaikoura is famous for crayfish; the Maori name Kaikoura translates to 'meal of crayfish', so expect cafes with crayfish on the menu. It is also the go-to place for dolphin and whale watching, and to get wet and frolic with dolphins and fur seals.



Campervanning and Camping

Exploring by campervan or with a car and tent offers the flexibility to experience New Zealand's hidden gems. All budgets are catered to and rental companies will get you on and off the road as seamlessly as possible.

Camping is popular, but campgrounds get packed in peak times so make sure you book or travel during off-peak periods. Kiwis are big on responsible camping, so leave no waste behind.

There are a plethora of driving routes that include the ferry ride between the North and South Island through the majestic Marlborough Sound. Tolkien fans may even want to explore Peter Jackson's blockbuster film locations.