

Canterbury

HIGHLIGHTS

- The vibrant mini-metropolis of **Christchurch** (p207)
- The delightful, French-influenced village of **Akaroa** (p205)
- Fantastic off-road riding and decadent thermal pools in **Hanmer Springs** (p174)
- Hanging out with whales and scoffing scrummy seafood in **Kaikoura** (p168)

TERRAIN

The east coast is predominantly flat with a few hills to contend with. As you head into the central interior the Southern Alps rear up and the roads can get spirit-crushingly steep. Still, what goes up, must come down – right?

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The good people of Canterbury are probably only half-joking when they say it would be good if the South Island were a separate country, but when you consider the region surrounding them you can understand their parochial pride and confidence. Christchurch is undoubtedly one of New Zealand's most liveable cities, combining an easy-going provincial charm with the energy and verve of a metropolis. Modern bars and restaurants complement Gothic architecture, and locals know how lucky they are to blend all the attractions of a city with the relaxed ambience of a small town. To the east the volcanically uplifted hills of Banks Peninsula conceal a wealth of hidden bays and isolated beaches, forming a backdrop for great cycling with the added bonus of the Francophile attractions of Akaroa. To the north is the take-it-easy spa town of Hanmer Springs, and westwards builds quickly from the well-ordered farms of the Canterbury Plains to the rough-and-tumble wilderness of the Southern Alps. The country's tallest peak stands sentinel over Canterbury, and indeed all the South Island – fly over it or cycle around it, but you'll never forget your first view of Aoraki/Mt Cook.

This region seems made for bike touring – the terrain is varied enough that even on the shorter excursions you'll find visual variety.



HISTORY

Prior to European settlement, waves of Polynesian immigration brought a Maori population of anywhere from 6000 to 10,000 to the South Island. The dominant tribe was the Ngai Tahu.

The first Europeans to spend time on the South Island were sealing gangs that

plundered the seal colonies from 1792 to supply the fashion markets of the northern hemisphere. Whalers followed including the Frenchman Jean Langlois, commanding the *Cachalot*. He saw potential for a French colony on the Banks Peninsula and in 1838 made a deed of purchase with some Ngai Tahu living at

