

Otago & Southland

HIGHLIGHTS

- The adventure capital of the world, **Queenstown** (p253) and it's quieter sibling, **Wanaka** (p256)
- The art, the culture, the architecture and the utter debauchery of **Dunedin** (p248)
- Waves, wind and solitude on the **Catlins Coast** (p227)

TERRAIN

This region is large enough that you'll find just about everything here. Vast open stretches of grassy hinterland in Central Otago, the mountains of the Southern Alps and the windy coastline of the east, south and west coasts.

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While much of New Zealand is home to diversity of landscape, it is perhaps this region that truly defines that 'new landscape around every corner' reputation. While it's near on impossible to characterise this region in one brushstroke, the words that come to mind are scenic, stunning and solitary.

The landscape tells the history of this region. The Central Otago Hills brought goldminers seeking their fortune a century ago. Most left just as poor as they arrived. Those who stayed became the forefathers to the settlements that remain – Wanaka, Queenstown, Cromwell and a hundred other small communities owe their conception to this long-gone gold boom.

A new boom is in full swing; where once it was gold and grass for grazing, it's now the hard earned cash of would-be bungy jumpers that's the pot at the end of the rainbow. Tourism is king in these towns, and the clientele comes from around the globe.

To the east, the Otago coast is home to Dunedin, the largest city in Southland, chock-a-block with university students, steep streets and impressive Victorian and Edwardian architecture.

For the cyclist there is much to discover here. Around the Southern Lakes you'll find challenging tours linking Wanaka to Queenstown – and plenty of quality mountain biking. The Otago Peninsula sports one of the best one-day rides in the country and the Otago Rail Trail is a traffic-free classic. The Catlins Coast has awesome sea views and if you make it all the way around to Te Anau and Milford Sound, you've really done the south justice.



HISTORY

The region's early Maori history was particularly bloody, with a three-way feud between Otago Peninsula tribes at the end of the 18th century. Disease raged after European sealers and whalers began operating until, by 1848, the Maori population had fallen to a very low level. European settlers arrived at Port Chalmers in March 1848 to found a Presbyterian settlement.

Gold rushes, which began with discoveries about 120km inland in 1861, shaped the early European history of Otago. It became the richest province in the colony and the powerhouse of its economy. Gold wealth produced splendid public buildings in Dunedin, now one of the best preserved

Victorian and Edwardian cities in the southern hemisphere. The University of Otago, NZ's first, was established in Dunedin in 1869.

Bluff, south of Invercargill, claims the title of oldest European town in NZ, having been settled since 1824.

ENVIRONMENT

Geographically the area is dominated by the Southern Alps in the interior of the island and the rough seashore on the coast. The Otago Peninsula and the Catlins are all renowned wildlife areas featuring little blue penguins, yellow-eyed penguins, albatross and seal colonies, and dolphin populations. White-fronted terns can also

OTAGO & SOUTHLAND

