



Canterbury, Arthur's Pass & Aoraki/Mt Cook

Includes ➔

Banks Peninsula Track	204
Mt Somers Track ...	208
St James Walkway ...	212
Avalanche Peak	218
Goat Pass Track	220
Harper Pass	222
Cass-Lagoon Saddles Track	226
Mueller Hut Route ...	230

Best Huts

- ➔ Stony Bay Cottage (p207)
- ➔ Woolshed Creek Hut (p210)
- ➔ Goat Pass Hut (p221)
- ➔ Mueller Hut (p231)

Best Views

- ➔ Mt John (p203)
- ➔ Trig GG (p206)
- ➔ Mt Somers Summit (p212)
- ➔ Ada Valley (p215)
- ➔ Avalanche Peak (p218)
- ➔ Mueller Hut (p231)

Why Go?

New Zealand's largest region, Canterbury comprises vast agricultural plains hemmed in by the Pacific Ocean on one side, and the Southern Alps on the other. As scenic as its epic coastline may be, Canterbury is all about the mountains, and the other fascinating geological landforms – such as Banks Peninsula – that fill in the big picture. And this is big-picture territory, famous for vast horizons on the plains, and bird's-eye views from the peaks of its inland parks and reserves.

The tramps in this region are dominated by the mighty Southern Alps, and they pass through them – in Arthur's Pass and Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park – or close enough to appreciate them from other angles. Between them they offer a diverse range of tramping experiences – taking in farmland, high country, regenerating and native forest, waterfalls and achievable climbs to peaks that will make you feel like you're on top of the world.

When to Go

Lowland Canterbury is one of the driest and flattest areas of NZ. The moisture-laden westerlies from the Tasman Sea hit the Southern Alps and dump their rainfall on the West Coast (an impressive annual 5000mm in places) before reaching Canterbury (which collects a dribble, only 750mm or so).

For the most part, though, you'll be tramping in the midst of the mountains which, when they're not attracting bad weather, are creating it. The Southern Alps have a volatile climate, where you can expect to encounter cold, wind and rain at any time of year. The optimum time to tramp in the South Island mountains is December through April.

Background Reading

Beyond the rural plains, it is the Southern Alps that define the Canterbury region, and within those mountains originate many of its best stories. To find them, look for books by or about NZ mountaineers Graeme Dingle, Sir Edmund Hillary and John Pascoe. A woman's perspective is brought to light in *Wind from a Distant Summit*, by leading lady mountaineer Pat Deavoll.

To navigate your way across the famously clear skies of the South Island back country, seek out astronomer Richard Hall's *How to Gaze at the Southern Stars*. This illuminating little book not only includes a foolproof method for locating the Southern Cross, it is packed with fascinating stories of the constellations, their origins and their role in the survival of humankind.

DON'T MISS

Inland SH8 between Christchurch to Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park is one of NZ's great scenic drives, the highlight of which is Lake Tekapo, an intensely turquoise lake with a backdrop of the Southern Alps. The small township is popular with passersby who stop in for a cuppa and perhaps a look at the historic lakeside church, but in doing so they miss Tekapo's best landmark: Mt John. This, we declare, is one of NZ's best lookout points.

The best way to appreciate this 1029m mountain (which is actually more of a hill) is to sidle up and around its slopes, around three hours return from the town. Conveniently located at the top is the delightful **Astro Cafe** (Mt John Observatory; coffee & cake \$4-8, snacks \$7-12; ☀ 10am-5pm), a glass-walled pavilion with 360-degree views across the entire Mackenzie Basin.

The view, however, is equally as dazzling at night. Thanks to clear skies and an absence of light pollution, the area is known as one of the finest spots on the planet to explore the heavens. To unravel the mysteries of the Southern Hemisphere sky, take a star-gazing tour with **Earth & Sky** (☎ 03-680 6960; www.earthandskynz.com; SH1; star-gazing adult/child \$105/60), based at Mt John Observatory.

GATEWAY TOWNS

- ➔ Christchurch (p232)
- ➔ Akaroa (p233)
- ➔ Methven (p234)
- ➔ Hanmer Springs (p234)
- ➔ Arthur's Pass (p235)
- ➔ Mt Cook Village (p235)

Fast Facts

- ➔ The beautiful high-country Hakatere Conservation Park, two hours south of Christchurch on the Inland Scenic Route (near Mt Somers), appeared as Edoras in the *Lord of the Rings* films.
- ➔ The quickest runners complete the 25km-Avalanche Peak Challenge in around 2½ hours. Fit trampers climb to the summit and back down again in about six hours.
- ➔ Thanks to almost half a century of possum-eradication efforts, the Otira Valley, north of Arthur's Pass, puts on possibly the South Island's best display of blooming rata every summer.

Top Tip

There's a good reason why tramping times in this chapter seem so long for such short distances. Mountainous terrain usually means gruelling climbs and knee-crunching descents. Set off early and stop often for scroggin (trail mix).

DOC Offices

- ➔ **Waimakariri Area Office** (p214)
- ➔ **DOC Arthur's Pass Visitor Centre** (p218)
- ➔ **Christchurch Visitor Centre** (p214)
- ➔ **DOC Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park Visitor Centre** (☎ 03-435 1186; www.doc.govt.nz; 1 Larch Grove; ☀ 8.30am-5pm Oct-Apr, to 4.30pm May-Sep)

Resources

- ➔ www.christchurchnz.com
- ➔ www.akaroa.com
- ➔ www.visithurunui.co.nz
- ➔ www.visithanmer springs.co.nz
- ➔ www.arthurspass.com
- ➔ www.mtcooknz.com