



# Fiordland & Stewart Island/Rakiura

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## Best Huts

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## Best Views

- ➔ Mackinnon Pass (p294)
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## Why Go?

Welcome to the deep green deep south, home to one of New Zealand's finest outdoor treasures – Fiordland National Park. At 12,607 sq km it is the country's largest national park and one of the largest in the world, and makes up half of Te Wahipounamu – South West New Zealand World Heritage Area. Stretching from Martins Bay in the north to Te Waewae Bay in the south, the park is bordered by the Tasman Sea on one side and a series of deep lakes on the other. Between lie more than 500km of tracks, with 60-odd huts dotted along them.

Across Foveaux Strait to the south is Stewart Island, NZ's 'third' island. It's relatively small, just 1722 sq km, but 85% of that area falls within Rakiura National Park, lined with 280km of tracks.

Such stats may be impressive, but the reality is almost beyond belief. The overuse of superlatives such as 'staggering', 'stunning' and 'spectacular' is almost impossible.

## When to Go

Fiordland is synonymous with waterfalls, lakes and fiords... and rain. Prevailing winds from the Tasman Sea dump up to 8000mm annually around the park's western parts, although Te Anau averages just 1200mm, sheltered by mountains. Overall, the park averages 200 rainy days annually, with lowland summer temperatures around 18°C.

Similarly, Stewart Island's rainfall has been known to wreak tramping havoc. The annual measure at Halfmoon Bay may be a relatively low 1600mm, but it occurs over 275 days of the year. At higher altitudes and along the south and west coasts, the gauge hits a lofty 5000mm. Considering the latitude, though, the overall climate is surprisingly mild, with reasonable temperatures most of the year.

## GATEWAY TOWNS

- ➔ Te Anau (p316)
- ➔ Tuatapere (p317)
- ➔ Invercargill (p317)
- ➔ Oban (p318)

## Fast Facts

- ➔ The mighty Fiordland National Park covers almost 5% of NZ's total land area.
- ➔ At 580m, the Sutherland Falls, accessible from the Milford Track, are NZ's loftiest cascade.
- ➔ With a healthy population of around 20,000, kiwi outnumber humans on Stewart Island by around 50 to one.

## Top Tip

Dodge the Kepler and Milford Track crowds and save yourself some money at the same time by tramping either side of the Great Walks season.

## Resources

- ➔ [www.fiordland.org.nz](http://www.fiordland.org.nz)
- ➔ [www.hikesouth.com](http://www.hikesouth.com)
- ➔ [www.southlandnz.com](http://www.southlandnz.com)
- ➔ [www.westernsouthland.co.nz](http://www.westernsouthland.co.nz)
- ➔ [www.visitinvercargillnz.com](http://www.visitinvercargillnz.com)
- ➔ [www.stewartisland.co.nz](http://www.stewartisland.co.nz)

## Background Reading

Take the momentous Gondwanaland bust-up and biodiversity backstory out of the equation, and you'll find Fiordland dominated by pioneer history – much of it involving isolation, deprivation and occasional insanity. Allow us to recommend two books to illustrate this point: *The Land of Doing Without: Davy Gunn of the Hollyford*, by Julia Bradshaw, brings to life the legendary backcountry hero; and *Pioneers of Martins Bay* – Alice McKenzie's memoir of growing up in a wild and remote extremity of Fiordland. For excellent illustrated regional histories, look for anything by John Hall-Jones.

## DON'T MISS

There's no getting around it: no visit to Fiordland is complete without a trip to Milford Sound, the first sight of which will likely knock your socks off (if the drive there hasn't already). Sheer rocky cliffs rise from still, dark waters, while forests clinging to the slopes sometimes relinquish their hold, causing a 'tree avalanche' into the waters. The spectacular, photogenic 1692m-high Mitre Peak rises dead ahead. A postcard will never do it justice, and a big downpour will only add to the drama. The average annual rainfall of 7m is more than enough to fuel cascading waterfalls and add a shimmering moody mist to the scene.

A cruise on Milford Sound is Fiordland's most accessible experience, complete with seals, dolphins and excellent interpretation. These cruises are incredibly popular, and you will encounter busloads of other visitors. But don't worry. Out on the water all this humanity seems tiny compared to nature's vastness.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves, because getting there is half the fun – especially if you have your own transport allowing you to stop at every DOC signpost you see. The 119km Te Anau–Milford Highway (SH94) is a veritable dot-to-dot of short nature walks and lookout points. DOC's *Fiordland National Park Day Walks* will set you on your way.

## DOC & Track Offices

- ➔ **Fiordland National Park Visitor Centre** (☎ 03-249 7924; [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz); Lakefront Dr)
- ➔ **Tuatapere Hump Ridge Track Office** (☎ 03-226 6739, 0800 486 774; [www.humpridgetrack.co.nz](http://www.humpridgetrack.co.nz); 31 Orawia Rd, Tuatapere; ☀ 7.30am-6.30pm, limited hours in winter)
- ➔ **Rakiura National Park Visitor Centre** (☎ 03-219 0009; [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz); 15 Main Rd, Oban; ☀ 8am-5pm Oct-Mar, shorter hours in winter)