



# Mt Aspiring National Park & Around Queenstown

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## Why Go?

Mt Aspiring National Park is a fitting end to New Zealand's Southern Alps. It has wide valleys with secluded flats, more than 100 glaciers, and mountain ranges with peaks higher than 2700m – including 3033m Mt Aspiring/Tiitea, NZ's tallest mountain outside Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park.

The park stretches from the Haast River in the north to the Humboldt Mountains in the south, where it borders Fiordland National Park. The park is now part of the Te Wahipounamu – South West New Zealand World Heritage Area, which includes Aoraki/Mt Cook, Westland Tai Poutini and Fiordland National Parks.

At more than 3555 sq km, Aspiring is the country's third-largest national park, with the majority of tramping activity taking place around Glenorchy, where trailheads for the famous Routeburn, Rees–Dart and Greenstone Caples tracks can be found. The tramping territory to the north, through the Matukituki and Wilkin–Young valleys, provides more mountain solitude.

## When to Go

The weather varies greatly across Aspiring, with the mountains dictating the terms. Glenorchy is dry, notching up around 1140mm of rain each year, with the lower Rees, Matukituki and Wilkin not much wetter at around 1500mm. Head into the Route Burn and Dart valleys, and the western half of the Greenstone and Caples, and you can multiply that by around five. Snow may fall above 1000m in almost any month, and spring and early summer are high risk for avalanches.

The weather is generally settled from late December to March, with February often suggested best for tramping. However, being an alpine region you must be prepared for sudden changes in weather and unexpected storms at any time of year.

## Background Reading

Although much of the Queenstown area was originally settled in the quest for gold, this enterprise was quickly usurped by farming, with high-country stations scattered throughout the region. Many of today's tramping tracks pass through them and follow old stock droving routes along the valleys – such as the Greenstone, the Caples, and Mavora. *High Country Legacy* by Alex Hedley recalls the life and times of four generations of farmers at Mt Aspiring Station, while Iris Scott's similarly titled *High Country Woman* tells the autobiographical tale of a widow (with three children) running the 180,000-hectare Rees Valley Station near Glenorchy. Such stories retold will certainly put the odd blister and sandfly bite into perspective.

### DON'T MISS

It would be a shame to come all this way to NZ's southern lakes without actually getting out on the water. Fortunately Queenstown's 'Lady of the Lake' will happily oblige.

The stately, steam-powered **TSS Earnslaw** (☎ 0800 656 503; [www.realjourneys.co.nz](http://www.realjourneys.co.nz); Steamer Wharf, Beach St, Queenstown; tours from \$55) plies the waters of Lake Wakatipu on lake tours and excursions to the high-country Walter Peak Farm, where you can see sheep-shearing and deft dog demonstrations.

Built in 1912 (the same year as the *Titanic*), the *Earnslaw* started life transporting sheep, cargo and passengers to surrounding high-country stations, but now is one of the oldest tourist attractions in Central Otago and the only remaining passenger-carrying, coal-fired steamship in the Southern Hemisphere. Despite her age, the old girl still works 14-hour days in the summer months and cruises for 11 months of the year.

## DOC Offices

- ➔ **Queenstown Visitor Centre** (☎ 03-442 7935; [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz); 36 Shotover St; ☀ 8.30am-5.30pm)
- ➔ **DOC Mt Aspiring National Park Visitor Centre** (☎ 03-443 7660; [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz); Ardmore St, Wanaka; ☀ 8am-5pm daily Nov-Apr, 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-4pm Sat May-Oct)
- ➔ **Makarora Visitor Centre** (☎ 03-443 8365; [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz); SH6, Makarora; ☀ 8am-5pm daily Dec-Mar, 8am-5pm Mon-Fri Apr & Nov, closed May-Oct)
- ➔ **Fiordland National Park Visitor Centre** (☎ 03-249 7924; [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz); cnr Lakefront Dr & Te Anau-Manapouri Rd; ☀ 8.30am-4.30pm, to 6pm 9 Dec-16 Mar)

### GATEWAY TOWNS

- ➔ Queenstown (p282)
- ➔ Glenorchy (p283)
- ➔ Te Anau (p316)
- ➔ Wanaka (p283)

## Fast Facts

- ➔ Such is the popularity of the Queenstown area that at peak times (ski season and midsummer), visitors can outnumber locals by as many as three to one.
- ➔ The Queenstown and Wanaka townships lie on NZ's third- and fourth-largest lakes, respectively. Lake Wakatipu is 283 sq km, and Lake Wanaka is 192 sq km.
- ➔ NZ's second-most-popular Great Walk, the 32km Routeburn Track is normally walked in three days. The 2013 winner of the Routeburn Classic race completed it in a tad over three hours!

## Top Tip

If at all possible, try to schedule an extra night in one of the huts, enabling you to do day walks without a full pack, and with plenty of time to dawdle and smell the honeysuckle.

## Resources

- ➔ [www.queenstownnz.co.nz](http://www.queenstownnz.co.nz)
- ➔ [www.lakewanaka.co.nz](http://www.lakewanaka.co.nz)
- ➔ [www.glenorchy-nz.co.nz](http://www.glenorchy-nz.co.nz)
- ➔ [www.fiordland.org.nz](http://www.fiordland.org.nz)