



# The West Coast

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## Why Go?

What a difference a mountain range makes. Hemmed in by the wild Tasman Sea and the Southern Alps, the West Coast (aka Westland) is like nowhere else in New Zealand.

Both ends of the coast have a remote end-of-the-road feel. In the north the surf-battered highway leads to sleepy Karamea, surrounded by farms and home to alternative lifestylers drawn by its isolation and surprisingly mild climate. The southern end of spectacular State Hwy 6 continues to Haast, gateway to a magnificent pass and Central Otago beyond.

Built on the wavering fortunes of gold, coal and timber, the stories of Coast settlers are hair-raising. Today just 32,000 reside here, typically a hardy and individual breed: they make up less than 1% of NZ's population, scattered amid almost 9% of the country's area.

During summer a phalanx of campervans and tourist buses tick off the 'must see' Punakaiki Rocks and Franz Josef and Fox Glaciers. Deviate from the trail even a short way, however, and be awed by the spectacles that await you alone.

## Best Outdoors

- » Heaphy Track (p453)
- » Hokitika Gorge (p465)
- » Charming Creek Walkway (p453)
- » Denniston Plateau (p452)

## Best Places to Stay

- » Fox Glacier Holiday Park (p476)
- » Lantern Court Motels (p458)
- » Okarito Campground (p469)
- » Beaconstone Eco Lodge (p455)

## When to Go

During summer the coast road gets relatively busy. May to September can be warm and clear, with fewer crowds and cheaper accommodation. The West Coast has serious rainfall (around 5m annually) but Westland sees as much sunshine as Christchurch. When it's pouring in the east it's just as likely to be fine here.

## The West Coast Highlights

- 1 Getting wet 'n' wild on the mighty **Buller River** (p448)
- 2 Kayaking through the bird-filled channels of **Okarito Lagoon** (p468)
- 3 Delving into the golden past around **Reefton** (p457)
- 4 Marvelling at nature's beautiful fury at the Pancake Rocks at **Punakaiki** (p455)
- 5 Exploring the limestone landscape of the **Oparara Basin** (p453)
- 6 Hunting out authentic local greenstone in the galleries of **Hokitika** (p463)
- 7 Flying high into the Southern Alps via **Franz Josef** (p469) and **Fox Glaciers** (p474)
- 8 Reaching the end of the line on the scenic and historical highway from **Haast** to **Jackson Bay** (p478)

