



The West Coast

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Best Short Walks

- ➔ Scotts Beach (p432)
- ➔ Charming Creek Walkway (p431)
- ➔ Denniston Plateau (p428)
- ➔ Lake Matheson (p452)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Old Slaughterhouse (p431)
- ➔ Beaconstone Eco Lodge (p433)
- ➔ Theatre Royal Hotel (p440)
- ➔ Okarito Campground (p445)

Why Go?

Hemmed in by the wild Tasman Sea and the Southern Alps, the West Coast is like nowhere else in New Zealand.

The far extremities of the coast have a remote, end-of-the-road feel, from sleepy Karamea surrounded by farms butting up against Kahurangi National Park, to the southern end of State Hwy 6, gateway to New Zealand's World Heritage areas. In between is an alluring combination of wild coastline, rich wilderness, and history in spades.

Built on the wavering fortunes of gold, coal and timber, the stories of Coast settlers are hair-raising. A hardy and individual breed, they make up less than 1% of NZ's population, scattered around almost 9% of its land area.

Travellers tend to tick off the 'must see' sights of 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.

When to Go

- ➔ During summer the coast road gets relatively busy, particularly with campervan traffic.
- ➔ May to September can be warm and clear, with fewer crowds and cheaper accommodation.
- ➔ The West Coast has serious rainfall (around 5m annually) but still sees as much sunshine as Christchurch.
- ➔ That said, there's little point trying to dodge the drops on a visit to the Coast – just bring a raincoat and keep your fingers crossed.
- ➔ No matter what time of year, backcountry trampers should check conditions with local Department of Conservation (DOC) office staff. Rivers can prove seriously treacherous.

The West Coast Highlights

1 Exploring the limestone forms and forest of the **Oparara Basin** (p432)

2 Getting wet 'n' wild on the mighty **Buller River** (p425)

3 Delving into the golden past around **Reefton** (p426)

4 Marvelling at nature's beautiful fury at **Punakaiki's** (p434) Pancake Rocks

5 Having a wheely good time on the **West Coast Wilderness Trail** (p439)

6 Hunting out authentic local greenstone in the galleries of **Hokitika** (p440)

7 Admiring the turquoise waters of **Hokitika Gorge** (p440)

8 Kayaking through the bird-filled channels of **Okarito Lagoon** (p444)

9 Flying high into the Southern Alps via **Franz Josef** (p446) and **Fox Glaciers** (p450)

10 Reaching the end of the line on the scenic and historical highway from **Haast** to **Jackson Bay** (p454)

