



# The West Coast

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## 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 NZ'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, and Franz Josef and Fox Glaciers, but sights such as Oparara Basin, Okarito Lagoon and the Coast's many lakes will amaze in equal measure.

## Best Short Walks

- ➔ Scotts Beach (p433)
- ➔ Charming Creek Walkway (p431)
- ➔ Lake Matheson (p451)
- ➔ Ship Creek (p455)

## Best Places to Sleep

- ➔ Old Slaughterhouse (p432)
- ➔ Breakers (p437)
- ➔ Drifting Sands (p444)
- ➔ Okarito Campground (p446)

## When to Go

- ➔ December through February is peak season, so book accommodation ahead during this period.
- ➔ The shoulder months of October/November and March/April are increasingly busy, particularly around Punakaiki, Hokitika and the Glaciers.
- ➔ 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.
- ➔ No matter what time of year, backcountry trampers should check conditions with local DOC office staff. Rivers can prove seriously treacherous.

# West Coast Highlights

- 1 Oparara Basin**  
(p434) Exploring the limestone forms and forest.
- 2 Buller River**  
(p427) Getting wet 'n' wild on this mighty river.
- 3 Reefton**  
(p428) Delving into the West Coast's glittering past.
- 4 Punakaiki**  
(p436) Marvelling at nature's beautiful fury at the 'Pancake Rocks'.
- 5 West Coast Wilderness Trail**  
(p439) Getting back to nature by bike or on foot.
- 6 Hokitika**  
(p441) Hunting out authentic local greenstone in working studios.
- 7 Hokitika Gorge**  
(p442) Admiring surreal turquoise waters from a lofty swing bridge.
- 8 Okarito** (p446)  
Kayaking through bird-filled, rainforest channels.
- 9 Fox Glacier**  
(p451) & **Franz Josef Glacier**  
(p447) Flying high over the ice, up into the Southern Alps.
- 10 Waitototo River**  
(p456) Jetboating deep into Haast's World Heritage wilderness.

