

Welcome to the South Island

Welcome to one of the world's ultimate outdoor playgrounds, bursting with opportunities for adventure amid diverse and inspiring landscapes.

Walk on the Wild Side

With just a million people scattered across 151,215 sq km, the South Island has a population density even lower than Tasmania in Australia. Filling the gaps are the sublime forests, mountains, lakes, beaches and fiords that have made New Zealand's 'Mainland' one of the best hiking destinations on the planet. Tackle one of the South Island's six Great Walks, such as the world-famous Heaphy, Routeburn or Milford Tracks, or choose from one of countless other options ranging from 15-minute nature trails to multiday, backcountry epics. The Department of Conservation's track and hut network makes it easy to find a way in.

Action Aplenty

Hiking (known as 'tramping' here) may be the South Island's classic adventure, but there are far racier ways to immerse yourself in its landscapes. Raft down the tumbling Buller or Rangitata Rivers, or kayak around the coves of the Marlborough Sounds, Abel Tasman National Park or Fiordland. Scare yourself silly with Queenstown's gravity-defying menu of bungee, paragliding or skydiving, or mount a mountain bike to wheel through the stunning scenery along the Alps 2 Ocean Cycle Trail. During winter, go snow crazy on the ski fields around Wanaka, Queenstown or Mt Hutt.

Food, Wine & Beer

Travellers with an appetite for great food and drink are in for a treat. A seasonal parade of produce includes luscious Nelson berries and Central Otago stone fruit, Canterbury asparagus and Southland's earthy root vegetables. Roadside kiosks sell everything from farm eggs to grandma's tomato relish; local seafood, game and other meats are easy to find, as are artisan dairy foods from cheese to ice cream. This can be washed down with some of the world's best cool-climate wines, such as Otago's superb pinot noir. Nelson's hop farms fuel exciting craft breweries from Nelson to Invercargill.

Meet the Locals

Prepare to meet the South Island's idiosyncratic wildlife: whales, fur seals, dolphins and penguins all frequent the coastal waters around Kaikoura, partnered by an armada of pelagic bird species including petrels and albatrosses. Endangered Hector's dolphins cavort in Akaroa Harbour and the Catlins, while the Otago Peninsula has penguins, royal albatrosses and sea lions. Further south, remote and wild Stewart Island boasts a healthy population of NZ's iconic but shy kiwi. The kaka and the kea parrots are unmistakable, with the latter inclined to chew car aerials and unattended hiking boots.



Why I Love the South Island

By Sarah Bennett, Writer

My childhood was spent at the top of the South Island, but with most holidays featuring a sandfly-infested awning and a gold pan for fun, the beauty of my home island was somewhat lost on me. Not so now. Obsessed with all things outdoors including hiking, mountain biking and wildlife-watching, I now realise that New Zealand's South Island is a truly special place to be. Its coastline, mountain ranges, valleys and plains present endless adventure regardless of your interests or ability, enriched by unique natural history and colourful stories from both Māori and colonial times.

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