

Canterbury

Canterbury is the hub of the South Island, and contains its largest and most interesting city – Christchurch. The region begins with the volcanically uplifted hills of the Banks Peninsula and climaxes with the famous, snow-covered peaks of the Southern Alps. In between are the Canterbury Plains, an expanse of dead-flat farming land where pastures full of grazing sheep are often framed by New Zealand's mountainous skyline.

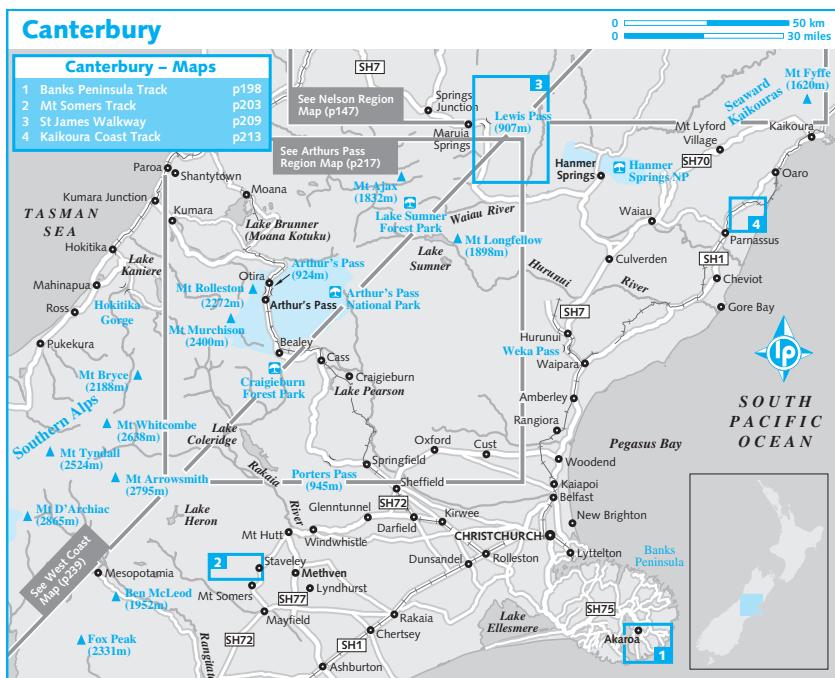
There is such a wealth of tramping opportunities in Canterbury that the region is covered here in two chapters; Arthur's Pass National Park lies actually in Canterbury, but is so popular among trampers looking for alpine adventures and pass-hopping climbs that it has its own chapter (p216).

This chapter covers two of New Zealand's best private tracks. The Banks Peninsula Track is a four-day walk along a dramatic coastline, and offers the possibility of spotting a variety of marine wildlife, including penguins. Kaikoura Coast Track is a three-day walk that includes climbing Mt Wilson and spending a morning on Pacific Ocean beaches. The accommodation along both walks is a refreshing departure from DOC huts.

Also covered in this chapter are a pair of subalpine tramps: the two-day Mt Somers Track and the five-day St James Walkway. While these tramps don't achieve the lofty heights of those in Arthur's Pass, they do include easy climbs to low passes, as well as remnant forests, waterfalls, spectacular canyons and an opportunity to soak in the hot springs of a thermal resort after you've dropped the pack for the last time.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Sighting yellow-eyed penguins, fur seals and Hector's dolphins along the **Banks Peninsula Track** (p196)
- Recovering from a hot day's tramping beneath a waterfall at **Spa Pool** (p204) along Mt Somers Track
- Seeing the historic huts (if not spending the night in them) along the **St James Walkway** (p205)
- Enjoying a cup of tea and the fine view at **Skull Peak Shelter** (p214) along the Kaikoura Coast Track



CLIMATE

This is one of the driest and flattest areas of New Zealand. The moisture-laden westerlies from the Tasman Sea hit the Southern Alps and dump their rainfall on the west coast before reaching Canterbury, which has an annual rainfall of only 750mm compared with 5000mm on the west coast.

GATEWAY Christchurch

☎ 03 / pop 331,400

Famous for its gardens and English heritage, Christchurch is a modern and thriving city that has happily strayed somewhat from the vision of its Puritan founders.

INFORMATION

Christchurch and Canterbury visitor information centre (☎ 379 9629; www.christchurchnz.net; Old Chief Post Office Bldg, Cathedral Sq; ☎ 8.30am-4pm) Book transport and accommodation here, and purchase DOC hut passes or obtain general DOC information.

DOC Christchurch Conservation Information Centre (☎ 371 3706; 133 Victoria St) For maps, brochures and information on South Island parks and tracks.

SUPPLIES & EQUIPMENT

The city has several stores that sell tramping gear, including **Bivouac Outdoor** (☎ 336 3197; cnr Colombo & Lichfield Sts; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Thu, to 8pm Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun), **Kathmandu** (☎ 366 7148; 40 Lichfield St; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Thu, to 7pm Fri, to 5pm Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) and **Snowgum** (☎ 365 4336; 637 Colombo St; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Thu, to 8pm Fri, 10am-5pm Sat, 10am-4pm Sun).

For maps of anywhere in the South Island, head to **Map World** (☎ 374 5399; www.mapworld.co.nz; 173 Gloucester St; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Thu, to 8pm Fri, 9am-5pm Sat & Sun).

Large supermarkets include **Countdown** (☎ 348 3754; cnr Hansons Lake & Riccarton Rds; ☎ 24hr) and **Pak'nSave** (☎ 377 1000; 297 Moorhouse Ave). There is also a **Bin Inn** (☎ 381 5199; 341 Stanmore Rd, Richmond).

SLEEPING & EATING

Stonehurst (☎ 0508-786 633, 379 4620; www.stonehurst.co.nz; 241 Gloucester St; dm/s/d \$26/60/70; ☎, ☎) is Christchurch's outstanding accommodation option, with more than 90 rooms ranging from dorms to three-bedroom apartments. There's every amenity a weary