

BIG SOUTH (Previously Ron)

Start: Christchurch*

Finish: Christchurch*

Minimum Days: 15-17

Recommended: 3+ weeks

**This pass can start/finish anywhere on this route, however most people start/finish in Christchurch.*

Christchurch to Kaikoura

Haere mai (welcome)! Your Stray adventure kicks off in the South Island's largest city, Christchurch. We depart early this morning for a beautiful drive up the coast to Kaikoura. Arriving in Kaikoura around midday, you will have the afternoon free for activities to discover the incredible marine world just off shore. Get out on the water and experience one of Kaikoura's famous dolphin and whale spotting tours, see seals sitting right beside the road at Goose Bay or wander around the peninsula and check out the breathtaking views from the lookout.

Accommodation: Warm modern hostel

Optional paid activities: Whale watching by boat or by plane, swimming with dolphins, guided fishing trip

Free activities: Walk around the peninsula and up to the lookout

Kaikoura to Picton

Leaving Kaikoura in the morning we wind our way up the rugged coastal roads towards the top of the South Island and the tiny port town of Picton. There are plenty of short walks to enjoy around the township and waterfront, such as the Queen Charlotte Sound view walk. You can take advantage of free fishing gear and bicycles offered by the accommodation, and don't miss out on a chance to unwind in the spa pool this evening.

Accommodation: Cosy villa in Picton

Free activities: Queen Charlotte Sound view walk, fishing, biking around town, relax in the accommodation's spa pool

Picton to Marahau (Abel Tasman)

Enjoy a leisurely morning further exploring charming Picton. You'll meet your Stray

group at the accommodation at midday. Once on the bus, we'll cruise through the world-famous Marlborough vineyard area. Depending on the group's interest, we may stop for a wine tasting to sample the region's specialty Sauvignon Blanc before heading to the coastal town of Nelson. We will stock up on supplies for the next couple days in Motueka and then make our way to our amazing overnight destination Marahau, right on the edge of the spectacular Abel Tasman National Park.

Accommodation: Unique Stray accommodation on the edge of the national park

Optional paid activities: Wine tasting, skydiving

Free activities: Walks, mussel tasting around the fire, stargazing

Marahau (Abel Tasman)

With a full day at your leisure, don't miss out on the opportunity to explore this stunning, coastal national park on foot, by sea or from the air. Abel Tasman is famous for being one of the sunniest spots in New Zealand and, as home to one of NZ's Great Walks, is a popular place to hop off for hiking enthusiasts. Even those short on time can still use this free day to hike, kayak, sail or take a water taxi to get a taste of the park's natural golden sand beaches and brilliant blue waters.

Accommodation: Unique Stray accommodation on the edge of the national park

Optional paid activities: Full day sailing trip, kayaking, skydiving, water taxi, canyoning

Free activities: Walk in the national park, relax on one of the golden sand beaches, go for a swim

Marahau (Abel Tasman) to Franz Josef

Buckle up for an awesome day driving down the incredibly scenic 'wild' West Coast, an area known for its untamed beaches and spectacular rainforest. Today takes us through Buller Gorge and down a stretch of road that was labelled one of the top drives in the world by Lonely Planet. We'll stop at the Punakaiki Pancake Rocks and blowholes to walk around these unique geological wonders. Our next stop is the historic gold mining town of Greymouth to collect passengers connecting from Christchurch. From here we'll make one last stop via Hokitika (the best place to buy 'Pounamu', a native greenstone) before continuing on to the quaint township of Franz Josef, home of the famous Franz Josef Glacier and our base for the next two nights.

Accommodation: Lodge in the middle of the rainforest

Free activities: Buller Gorge, Pancake Rocks and blowholes, Hokitika greenstone store

Franz Josef

Enjoy a free day to get out and experience the Franz Josef Glacier, an iconic

highlight of the West Coast. The best way to navigate the maze of ice on the Franz Josef Glacier is with a guided tour, which consistently ranks as a favourite activity amongst Stray travellers. The most popular trip features a short heli-hop onto the glacier with a guided educational tour on the ice and includes entry to the local hot pools afterwards. Other options include kayaking, visiting the glacial terminal face for spectacular photos or doing one of the many excellent bush hikes in the region.

Accommodation: Lodge in the middle of the rainforest

Optional paid activities: Glacier heli-hike (entry to hot pools included), kayaking, skydiving

Free activities: Many excellent bush hikes, relax in one of NZ's largest spa pools at your accommodation

Franz Josef (via Fox Glacier) to Wanaka

It's time to leave the West Coast behind. We stop in the morning for pick-ups at Fox Glacier before heading to the amazing mirror-like Lake Matheson to stretch our legs with a short walk. Then, we'll travel inland through the mountainous Haast Pass and Makarora towards Wanaka. This is another superbly scenic drive and we'll stop for plenty of photo ops along the way as we drive from rainforests to mountains, through beech forest and past great lakes. We'll pass by the beautiful Lake Hawea and arrive in Wanaka late-afternoon in time to enjoy this picturesque lakeside town.

Accommodation: Central Wanaka hostel

Free activities: Lake Matheson walk, Ship Creek walk, Blue Pools walk, Thunder Creek Falls walk

Wanaka to Queenstown

Kick start your day with a brisk walk up Mt Iron, an early morning skydive or learn to fly a stunt plane over Wanaka. At mid-morning we'll pack up and make our way to Queenstown, known in New Zealand as the 'Adventure Capital of the World' and the spiritual home of bungee jumping. We stop on our way into town at Kawarau Bridge, the first commercial bungee jumping site in the world, for your chance to take the big leap of faith. Queenstown offers an optional big (make that huge!) night out with heaps of restaurants, pubs and live music to check out.

Accommodation: Central hostel close to all the action

Optional paid activities: Puzzling World, skydiving, mountain biking, pilot your own stunt plane or learn to fly and take a friend for free, bungee jumping

Free activities: Walk Mt Iron, watch people jumping off a bridge!

Queenstown

You need at least one free day in Queenstown to make the most of the wide range of activities on offer. With a buzzy night life, beautiful mountain scenery and an exciting outdoor lifestyle, it's easy to understand why Stray passengers often hop off

here to spend extra time exploring. Options include: bungy or swing, zipline tours, canyoning, jet boating, skiing (in winter), skydiving, local bush walks, or just spend a day relaxing and enjoying the stunning scenery.

Accommodation: Central hostel close to all the action

Optional paid activities: Any adventure activity that we mad Kiwis can dream up (bungy, swing, jet boating, skydiving, mountain biking, zipline, horse riding...)

Free activities: Fabulous walks, take in beautiful views surrounding this cool resort town

Queenstown (via Milford Sound) to Gunn's Camp

Today you are in for a treat. It's an early start as make our way to Milford Sound, one of NZ's most famous destinations, sometimes called the 'Eighth Wonder of the World'. You won't want to nap on this leg of the journey as we drive past Lake Wakatipu and watch the landscape change from farmland to mountains, glacier-carved valleys and fiords. There is time to do an afternoon boat cruise around Milford Sound to soak up this untouched world, where it's likely you'll spot a few wild dolphins, seals and penguins. Next, we head for our unique Stray overnight stop, Gunn's Camp, located in the solitude of Hollyford Valley.

Accommodation: Historic camp in the heart of Fiordland National Park

Optional paid activities: Milford Sound cruise (ask the driver about the special Milford Sound + Stewart Island combo)

Free activities: Stunning views, visit the historic museum or take in the incredible surroundings at Gunn's Camp, Chasm walk

See More moment: Stay in a historic camp in the Hollyford Valley, created for the hardy men who built the roads here. Enjoy an evening under the stars, spot glowworms in the bush and listen for kiwi bird calls in the night.

Gunn's Camp to Invercargill/Stewart Island

We start the morning with a short riverside stroll through beech forest on the Viewing Gantry walk. Fiordland is part of the UNESCO World Heritage site Te Wahipounamu (which incorporates four national parks: Mt Cook, Mt Aspiring, Westland and Fiordland) and you'll understand why as you marvel at the other worldly surrounding landscape. This afternoon we travel further south via Te Anau to Invercargill and on to Bluff, where you can catch a ferry to Stewart Island. NZ's third largest island, Stewart Island, has an abundance of activities for the outdoor enthusiast, such as fishing, bird watching and tramping tracks. Those not going to Stewart Island will spend the night in Invercargill.

Accommodation: Stewart Island backpackers or central hostel in Invercargill

Optional paid activities: Te Anau Wildlife Centre, catch the ferry to Stewart Island

(ask the driver about the special Milford Sound + Stewart Island combo)

Free activities: Humboldt Falls walk, Viewing Gantry walk

See More moment: When the solar winds are right, between March – September, you might be lucky enough to see the Aurora Australis, better known as the Southern Lights!

Invercargill/Stewart Island to Queenstown

For those who stayed overnight on Stewart Island, this morning is free for you to explore, meet the locals, go fishing or enjoy some of the walks before catching an afternoon ferry back to the mainland. Those in Invercargill will have the option to visit Demolition World (a world entirely constructed from demolished buildings and recycled items), race your bus mates around a go-karting track or walk up to the Bluff Hill lookout before reuniting with the island-goers for an express journey back to Queenstown.

Accommodation: Central hostel close to all the action

Optional paid activities: Stewart Island: fishing, Village & Bays tour, a visit to Ulva Island.

Invercargill: Go-karting, Demolition World

Free activities: Stewart Island: explore the island and discover amazing birdlife

Invercargill: Bluff Hill walk

Queenstown to Aoraki/Mt Cook

Today we head over the Lindis Pass through the beautiful Mackenzie region and past picturesque Lake Pukaki on the way to our amazing stop at the base of New Zealand's highest mountain, Aoraki/Mt Cook. We arrive in the early afternoon with time to do a 4WD & Argo Tour, check out the Sir Edmund Hillary Alpine Centre or do one of the many great short walks in the park. If it's a clear night, make sure you head outside to experience one of the best stargazing spots in the country. There are some incredible longer walks to do if you want to hop off the bus for a few days (we'd recommend you leave climbing Mt Cook to the experienced mountaineers though).

Accommodation: Stunning alpine lodge

Optional paid activities: Alpine Argo tour, visit the Sir Edmund Hillary Alpine Centre

Free activities: Take photos of awe-inspiring scenery, do one of the many great short walks to the Hooker glacial lake (weather dependent), stargazing

Mt Cook (via Tekapo) to Rangitata

Leaving Mt Cook, we make our way through a landscape made famous in the 'Lord of the Rings' films. We'll stop to admire the turquoise waters of Lake Tekapo and the Church of the Good Shepherd, a famous photo stop. Relax in the Tekapo hot pools, go snow tubing or ice skating (winter only) or hike up to the Mt John

Observatory where you'll witness stunning views of the lake from above. After lunch, we will continue to our overnight stop in Rangitata Peel Forest. Tonight, we'll stay in a cosy lodge at one of Canterbury's original sheep stations.

Accommodation: Lodge on a Canterbury sheep station

Optional paid activities: Tekapo Hot Springs, ice skating (April-Sept), snow tubing (June-Sept), stargazing (must hop off in Tekapo)

Free activities: Visit Lake Tekapo, Church of the Good Shepherd, Mt John Observatory walk, Rangitata forest walks

Rangitata to Christchurch

This morning, you can sign up for top-notch grade 5 white water rafting on the Rangitata River at the foot of the Southern Alps or choose to explore the stunning Peel Forest scenery on horseback. Tonight, we'll stay in Christchurch, a city where old meets new, as the rebuild continues following the devastating 2011 earthquake. You will find New Zealand's most modern architecture nestled next to some of the country's oldest buildings. Spend your afternoon wandering the city streets and laneways to discover creative street art intended to bring cheer and colour to a city once buried in rubble. We hope you had a blast on your Stray adventure!

Optional paid activities: White water rafting (summer only), horse trekking

Free activities: Explore Christchurch by foot, check out the Cardboard Cathedral and inner-city street art.

This itinerary is a guide. Given the spontaneous nature of our trips and lack of control over New Zealand's weather(!), what we do each day might occasionally vary.