

# Southern Starlight Trail: 8 Days of Stars, Snow and Sounds

## Quick Overview

- **Duration:** 6–8 Days
- **Start Point:** Ōtautahi – Christchurch
- **End Point:** Tāhuna – Queenstown
- **Best Time:** March – October (for optimal stargazing)
- **Driving Time:** ~12 hours total
- **Highlights:** Dark sky reserves, alpine hikes, majestic fjords

Venture into Aotearoa's southern heartlands on a journey carved by stars and snow. From stargazing in Takapō to glacier hikes and the dramatic soundscapes of Fiordland, this itinerary promises awe at every turn — all at your own pace in a campervan.

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## Days 1–2: Takapō – Lake Tekapo

### Day 1: Starry Beginnings

- Drive Christchurch to Takapō (approx. 3 hrs)
- Visit the **Church of the Good Shepherd** – iconic photo spot
- Soak in **Tekapo Springs Hot Pools** under the stars

### Day 2: Dark Sky Discovery

- Slow morning after a late night of stargazing
- Hike up **Mount John** for breathtaking 360° views
- Book a **guided Dark Sky Experience** at the observatory

### Where to Stay (Campervan Style)

- *Freedom Camp*: Lake Pukaki Reserve – stunning starlit views
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- *Campground:* Lake Tekapo Motels & Holiday Park – powered sites + lake access
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## **Days 3–4: Aoraki – Mount Cook**

### **Day 3: Alpine Glory**

- Drive to Aoraki – Mt Cook Village (1 hour)
- Hike the **Hooker Valley Track** – swing bridges & glacier lakes
- Set up for **astrophotography** under Aoraki's watchful peak

### **Day 4: Glaciers & Legends**

- Walk to the **Tasman Glacier Viewpoint**
- Explore the **Sir Edmund Hillary Alpine Centre**
- Wrap up with another clear night of star-gazing

### **Where to Stay (Campervan Style)**

- *Freedom Camp:* White Horse Hill (DOC site) – at the track start •
- *Campground:* Glentanner Park – powered sites and epic views

## **Days 5–6: Piopiotahi – Milford Sound**

### **Day 5: Road to Fiordland**

- Drive to Te Anau (4.5 hours) – peaceful lakeside base
- Explore the **Te Anau Glowworm Caves**
- Take a tranquil lakeside sunset walk

### **Day 6: Fjord Wonders**

- Cruise **Milford Sound** – waterfalls, seals, sheer cliffs
- Stop at **Mirror Lakes**, **The Chasm**, and **Monkey Creek** on your return

- Overnight back in Te Anau for a final southern sky show

### **Where to Stay (Campervan Style)**

- *Freedom Camp*: Fiordland National Park (DOC designated zones)
- *Campground*: Te Anau Kiwi Holiday Park – powered sites + amenities
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## **Days 7–8: Tāhuna – Queenstown**

### **Day 7: Welcome to Adventure**

- Drive to Tāhuna – Queenstown (2 hrs)
- Ride the **Skyline Gondola** to Bob's Peak
- Dine on the **TSS Earnslaw** for a lake cruise + buffet

### **Day 8: Chill or Thrill**

- Morning free for shopping or lakeside wandering
- Depart from Queenstown Airport

### **Where to Stay (Campervan Style)**

- *Freedom Camp*: 12 Mile Delta DOC campsite (short drive from town)
- *Campground*: Queenstown TOP 10 – well-equipped, close to centre

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## **What to Pack**

- Warm layers – even in summer
  - Camera + tripod for night photography
  - Red torch for stargazing
  - Sturdy walking shoes
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- Rain jacket – especially in Fiordland
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## Travel Tips from the South

- Check the **moon phase** for best star visibility
  - Fill your tank before leaving major towns
  - Expect limited phone signal in remote areas
  - **Book Dark Sky tours** in advance
  - Winter driving? **Carry snow chains** and check roads daily
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## Must-Try Local Food

- **Aoraki Alpine Salmon** – fresh and melt-in-your-mouth
  - **Venison stew** – hearty and warming
  - **South Island artisan cheese** – grab some at local markets
  - **High-country salmon sashimi** – served with a view
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## Top Photo Spots

Region	Iconic Spots
Takapō	Church of the Good Shepherd, Mt John views
Aoraki	Hooker Valley, Tasman Glacier, Peters Pool
Milford	Mitre Peak, The Chasm, Mirror Lakes
Queenstown	Bob's Peak, Lake Wakatipu jetty, Glenorchy

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## Optional Add-Ons

- **Glacier heli-hike** (Franz Josef or Aoraki area)
  - **Shotover Jet** ride – adrenaline in Queenstown
  - **Onsen Hot Pools** – book a sunset soak
  - **Skyline Luge** – fun for all ages
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## Final Thoughts

The **Southern Starlight Trail** is a breathtaking journey through Aotearoa's alpine south — perfect for those chasing quiet night skies, mountain majesty, and the wild edge of Fiordland. Whether it's stargazing, glacier hikes, or fjord cruising, this trail is a deep breath of fresh, star-filled air.

*TohuTravellers.com – Trust the Journey*