

7-Day West Coast Wonders: From Picton to Queenstown via Wānaka & Haast

Discover the rugged beauty of the West Coast on this unforgettable 7-day road trip from Waitohi – Picton to Tāhuna – Queenstown.

This journey takes you through wild coastlines, ancient rainforests, glacier country, and over alpine passes into Central Otago. It's perfect for those who want a true taste of Te Waipounamu's raw landscapes and small-town charm — all doable by car or campervan.

Quick Overview

- **Duration:** 7 days
 - **Start Point:** Waitohi – Picton
 - **End Point:** Tāhuna – Queenstown
 - **Best Time:** October to April
 - **Total Drive Time:** Approx. 17–19 hours
 - **Highlights:** West Coast beaches, glaciers, Haast Pass waterfalls, lakeside Wānaka, alpine Queenstown
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Day-by-Day Itinerary

Day 1: Picton → Westport

Start your journey with coastal views and winding roads along the Buller Gorge.

What to Do:

- Stretch your legs at **Pelorus Bridge Scenic Reserve**
- Stop for a break in **Murchison** (great pies!)
- Scenic lookout: **Buller Gorge Swingbridge**

Where to Stay:

- **Westport Kiwi Holiday Park**
 - **Carters Beach TOP 10**
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Day 2: Westport → Punakaiki → Hokitika

Drive the spectacular coastline and explore one of the West Coast's most iconic landmarks.

What to Do:

- Visit **Cape Foulwind** (short walk to a seal colony)
- Marvel at **Punakaiki Pancake Rocks & Blowholes**
- Sunset stroll along **Hokitika Beach**

Where to Stay:

- **Hokitika Holiday Park**
 - **Seaview Lodge & Camping Ground**
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Day 3: Hokitika → Franz Josef

Today brings you deep into glacier country.

What to Do:

- Visit **Hokitika Gorge** (bright turquoise river)
- Stop at **Lake Matheson** (reflection of Aoraki on a clear day)
- Short walk to **Franz Josef Glacier Lookout**

Where to Stay:

- **Rainforest Retreat (Franz Josef)**
 - **DOC Campsite at Otto/MacDonalds**
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Day 4: Franz Josef → Haast

This drive takes you through some of the most untouched rainforest in the country.

What to Do:

- Detour to **Fox Glacier** or **Lake Gault Track**
- Stop at **Knights Point Lookout**
- Walk to **Ship Creek** (dunes and kahikatea swamp)

Where to Stay:

- **Haast River Motels & Holiday Park**
 - **DOC Pleasant Flat Campsite**
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Day 5: Haast → Wānaka

Cross the scenic **Haast Pass**, a highlight of the trip with waterfalls and alpine views.

What to Do:

- Stop at **Thunder Creek Falls** and **Blue Pools Walk**
- Picnic at **Lake Hawea Lookout**
- Explore **Wānaka town** or relax by the lake

Where to Stay:

- **Wānaka TOP 10**
 - **Lake Outlet Holiday Park**
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Day 6: Wānaka → Queenstown

Take the Crown Range Road (if weather permits) for one of Aotearoa's most scenic drives.

What to Do:

- Visit **Cardrona Hotel** (iconic pub stop)
- Enjoy views from **Crown Range Summit**
- Arrive in Queenstown — your alpine adventure base

Where to Stay:

- **Queenstown Lakeview Holiday Park**
 - **Driftaway Queenstown (for a premium camper stay)**
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Day 7: Explore Queenstown

Round off your trip with a relaxing or adrenaline-filled day — your choice!

What to Do:

- Walk the **Queenstown Gardens**
 - Ride the **Gondola + Luge**
 - Take a cruise on **Lake Wakatipu**
 - Treat yourself to dinner at **Fergburger** or **Flame Bar & Grill**
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What to Pack

- Warm layers and waterproof gear (especially for the West Coast)
 - Sturdy walking shoes
 - Insect repellent (sandflies love the Coast)
 - Camera and spare battery
 - Swimmers and towel
 - Daypack for walks
 - Reusable water bottle and snacks
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Local Travel Tips

- Fill up on fuel before Haast — it's remote
 - Drive cautiously on one-lane bridges and winding roads
 - Download maps before Franz Josef — reception can be patchy
 - DOC camps are often first-come, first-served
 - Sandflies are worst near water and forest — cover up or use spray
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Must-Try Local Flavours

- **Murchison:** Lamb pies at the **Murchison Tearooms**
 - **Westport:** Crayfish or whitebait (seasonal)
 - **Hokitika:** Hokey Pokey ice cream or a fresh seafood platter
 - **Franz Josef:** Pizza and pints at **SnakeBite Brewery**
 - **Wānaka:** **Big Fig** for slow-cooked local meals
 - **Queenstown:** Famous **Fergburger** and local wine tastings
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Need to Know

- West Coast weather can change fast — be flexible
- Don't attempt glacier walks without a guide
- Haast Pass has limited services — plan breaks
- Rubbish bins are rare on scenic roads — pack it out

- DOC sites may not have toilets with paper — bring your own

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