

8–10 Day Alpine to Fiordland Journey: Picton to Queenstown via Aoraki & Christchurch

Experience a diverse cross-section of the South Island — from coastal marine life to alpine peaks and glacial lakes, ending in the adventure capital of Tāhuna — Queenstown.

This one-way road trip starts in Waitohi – Picton and weaves through the East Coast and Southern Alps. It's ideal for travellers who want to mix well-known highlights with quiet nature stops and charming towns. With options to slow down or extend to Piopiotahi – Milford Sound, it's one of the most rewarding road journeys in Aotearoa.

Quick Overview

- **Duration:** 8–10 days
- **Start Point:** Waitohi – Picton
- **End Point:** Tāhuna – Queenstown
- **Best Time:** October to April
- **Total Drive Time:** Approx. 19–22 hours (excluding Milford Sound)
- **Highlights:** Kaikōura marine life, thermal springs, alpine lakes, Aoraki views, Queenstown adventures

Day-by-Day Itinerary

Day 1: Picton → Kaikōura

Follow the coastline south with views of both sea and snow-capped peaks.

What to Do:

- Stop at **Ohau Point** to spot seals
- Optional: **Whale Watch Kaikōura** or **Albatross Encounter**

- Walk the **Kaikōura Peninsula Walkway** (2–3 hrs return)

Where to Stay:

- **Kaikōura TOP 10**
- **DOC Puhi Puhi Campsite** (basic and scenic)

Day 2: Kaikōura → Hanmer Springs

Head inland to soak in thermal waters surrounded by forested hills.

What to Do:

- Soak in **Hanmer Springs Thermal Pools**
- Short walks: **Forest Amble** or **Conical Hill Track**
- Treat yourself to a massage or spa

Where to Stay:

- **Hanmer Springs TOP 10**
- **Alpine Adventure Holiday Park**

Day 3: Hanmer Springs → Christchurch

Continue south through wine country and farmland into Ōtautahi – Christchurch.

What to Do:

- Walk the **Christchurch Botanic Gardens**
- Check out the **Riverside Market**
- Optional punting on the **Avon River**

Where to Stay:

- **North South Holiday Park**
- **Christchurch TOP 10 Holiday Park**

Day 4: Christchurch → Lake Tekapo

Start your alpine leg with a drive through the Mackenzie Basin to Takapō – Lake Tekapo.

What to Do:

- Visit the **Church of the Good Shepherd**
- Soak in **Tekapo Springs Hot Pools**
- Stargaze at the **Dark Sky Reserve**

Where to Stay:

- **Lake Tekapo Holiday Park**
- **DOC Lake McGregor Campsite** (basic)



Day 5: Lake Tekapo → Aoraki / Mount Cook Village

A short but stunning drive into the heart of the Southern Alps.

What to Do:

- Hike the **Hooker Valley Track** (3 hrs return)
- Visit the **Sir Edmund Hillary Alpine Centre**
- Scenic picnic at **Tasman Glacier Viewpoint**

Where to Stay:

- **White Horse Hill Campground (DOC)**
- **Aoraki Mt Cook Alpine Lodge** (for car travellers)



Day 6: Aoraki → Wānaka

Drive south through Twizel and over Lindis Pass to reach the lakeside town of Wānaka.

What to Do:

- Visit **That Wānaka Tree**
- Short walk: **Mount Iron Track**
- Lakeside wine at **Rippon Vineyard**

Where to Stay:

- **Wānaka TOP 10 Holiday Park**
- **Lake Outlet Holiday Park**

Day 7: Wānaka → Queenstown

Today's drive includes scenic highlights like **Cardrona Valley** and **Crown Range Road**.

What to Do:

- Stop at the **Cardrona Hotel**
- Enjoy views from **Crown Range Summit**
- Arrive in **Queenstown** – adventure awaits!

Where to Stay:

- **Queenstown Lakeview Holiday Park**
- **Driftaway Queenstown**

Day 8: Explore Queenstown

Spend the day exploring at your own pace or trying a new activity.

What to Do:

- Walk the **Queenstown Gardens**
- Try the **Gondola and Luge**
- Relax by **Lake Wakatipu** with local fish and chips

Optional Extension (2 Nights): Piopiotahi – Milford Sound

Queenstown → Te Anau (2 hrs), then Milford Sound (2.5 hrs)

What to Do:

- Cruise the **Milford Sound Fiord**
- Walk the **Lake Marian Track** or **Key Summit**

- Stay overnight in **Te Anau** or at **Milford Lodge**



What to Pack

- Layered clothing for alpine and coastal weather
- Swimsuit and towel for hot pools
- Insect repellent (especially near lakes and bush)
- Camera or smartphone
- Reusable water bottle and snacks
- Warm hat/gloves for nights (even in summer)



Local Travel Tips

- Book Hanmer Springs and Aoraki stays in advance during peak season
- Watch fuel levels between Lake Tekapo and Wānaka
- Dark Sky Reserve = no streetlights — bring a torch
- Always check alpine weather and drive conditions
- DOC campsites are scenic but basic — come prepared



Must-Try Local Flavours

- **Kaikōura:** Crayfish from a roadside BBQ stand
- **Hanmer Springs:** Craft beer at **Monteith's Brewery Bar**
- **Tekapo:** Salmon sashimi at **Lake Tekapo Tavern**
- **Wānaka:** Local lamb at **Bistro Gentil**
- **Queenstown:** Dessert from **Cookie Time Bar** or burgers at **Fergburger**



Need to Know

- Snow chains may be required in shoulder seasons
- Park considerately at popular freedom camp spots
- Cell coverage is patchy between Tekapo and Aoraki
- Use public dump stations (find via CamperMate or Rankers app)
- Respect sacred sites – follow signage and local guidance

TohuTravellers.com – Trust the Journey