

Secret South

Length	11 days
Grade	D: River crossings, some uneven terrain, you need to be reasonably fit and enthusiastic
Start	Queenstown i-SITE Visitor Centre, Cnr. Shotover & Camp Sts, 8:00am
Finish	Christchurch – 6:00pm (approx.)

Itinerary

Day 1 Join Tour in Queenstown

6 km/3 hours hiking

Meet up with your guide and the rest of the group in downtown Queenstown before leaving the bustle behind and driving south along the eastern shore of Lake Wakatipu. This morning we pass through typical New Zealand farm scenes, including deer farms, before stopping for lunch on the shore of lake Te Anau – the largest body of fresh water in Australasia. Here we picnic on the shore and gain our first views of Fiordland National Park, New Zealand's largest, and the fifth largest in the world. After lunch we drive into the park via the expansive Eglinton Valley, before pulling over to begin an easy walk up to Key Summit, the final section of the famous Routeburn Track. On the summit, take time to learn about the vegetation and geography of the area along an informative nature walk, and soak up the views of the Darran Mountains and Hollyford Valley to the west. We return to the van after about three hours and then drive to our accommodation for the night – the famous and eccentric Gunns Camp. LD

Day 2 Milford Sound

8 km/4 hours kayaking

This morning we leave early and drive to one of New Zealand's most famous destinations – Milford Sound. Here you have the option of being guided around the sound (even though its really a fiord!) in sea kayaks, the most tranquil and natural way possible to experience this World Heritage Site. Floating just above the surface, feel at one with nature as you marvel at the size and majesty of the surrounding peaks. Penguins, seals and dolphins are common in the fiord, and often play near groups as they paddle. In the afternoon, relax in the van as we drive back through Te Anau and south toward our campsite for the evening, stopping at the stunning Lake Manapouri for a swim and afternoon tea on the way. BLD

Day 3 Fiordland National Park

12 km/7 hours hiking

We prepare for our first overnight hike at the campsite this morning, before taking the short drive up to Borland Saddle. Beech forest aligns the track before we ascend onto the gentle tussock peaks of the Hunter Range, where we gradually climb to Mt Burns. From here we navigate along the tops, enjoying striking views of the granite peaks of southern Fiordland across the dark colours of Green Lake. Tarns (small mountain lakes) are dotted along the route and wild deer are prominent in the area. Eventually we drop down into beech forest from the tops and link up with the southern shore of Green Lake, which leads us to a cosy mountain hut. Feel free to take a dip in the frigid waters of the lake before settling down in front of the hut fire for the night. BLD.

Day 4 Catlins Coast

7 km/3 hours hiking

Take it easy this morning and enjoy this remote setting before we hike back to the road through beech forest and areas of alpine tussock. Sit back this afternoon and enjoy the rolling farm country of Southland from the comfort of your seat as we drive toward the southern coast. Along the way we pull into New Zealand's southern most city, the Scottish settled Invercargill, before continuing on to the secluded coastal region known as the Catlin's. Often overlooked by tourists visiting New Zealand, the Catlins region, with its unspoiled rivers, lush podocarp forest, rolling hills and sweeping golden-sand beaches is a hidden gem of the south. We spend the night at Curio Bay, a famous surf spot and home to a resident pod of the native Hector's dolphin in the summer. Once we arrive, feel free to try and spot them with a walk along the beach or simply relax with a beer in the evening sun. BLD.

Day 5 Cannibal Bay

6 km/2 hours hiking

Take the early morning for yourself and wander the bay, have a leisurely breakfast or sleep a little longer. Curio Bay is home to one of the worlds best examples of a fossilized forest, which lies on a tidal platform at the north end of the bay and contains fossilised tree stumps and logs, destroyed in a volcanic eruption 180 million years ago. Feel free to wander up for a look this morning with your guide. We usually leave Curio Bay around mid morning and drive along the scenic coastal route, stopping to do short walks and to take in some of the sites along the way. In the afternoon your guide will drop the group off at the idyllic Surat Bay, where sea lions often bask in the sand. Walk along the bay and meet your guide at our exclusive campsite in Cannibal Bay, named after human bones where discovered in an old earth oven here over 100 years ago. Help your guide to prepare tonight's dinner – a hangi feast – before taking a short drive to view native hoiho (yellow eyed penguins) as they make their way up the beach after a hard day at sea. We then return to the campsite, light a campfire, dig up dinner and get stuck in. BLD

Day 6 Central Otago

Rest day/optional cycling

Today we drive out of the Catlins and up to the picturesque town of Alexandra in Central Otago. Once we arrive, the remainder of the day is yours to do what you wish. You may want to join a cycle tour along the popular Otago Rail Trail, an easy cycle path constructed along the old rail route built through the mountains during the New Zealand gold rush. The trail offers great views of the local landscape, crosses old viaducts and passes by newly renovated pubs. Otherwise feel free to wander the shops of Alexandra or indulge in the delicacies on offer in the local cafes and vineyards. There are some great restaurants in Alexandra, so go exploring tonight and find one that tickles your fancy. BL



Day 7 Ohau Range

7 km/3 hours hiking

After a leisurely breakfast we drive north through the high country, passing over the dramatic Lindis Pass. This is sheep rearing country, and is home to some of the countries largest sheep stations, often farming the rugged merino breed. Turning off the main road, we drive to secluded Lake Ohau, stopping to have lunch and a swim if the sun is shining. This is also where we ditch the van and head into the hills once more for an overnight adventure. It normally takes a couple of hours to hike up through beech forest beside the mountain stream of Freehold Creek, to a quiet campsite just below the tree line. Pitch a tent and take a seat around the campfire as you listen to the creeks waters rush past. BLD

Day 8 Ohau Range

14 km/7 hours hiking

Leaving most of our gear at the campsite, we ascend above the treeline this morning into a brilliant alpine basin, home to a variety of native alpine plants including the Mt. Cook Lily (*Ranunculus lyallii*), the world's largest buttercup. If you're feeling energetic, join the guide for a dash up to the ridgeline above the basin and onto the Ohau range (1915 Metres), where you get a superb vista of the surrounding Southern Alps, Mt. Cook and the Mackenzie Basin. In the afternoon we wander back down the valley and drive the short distance to Buscott Station, a high country homestead converted into a backpackers and run by the owner of the sheep station. If you're eager for more views, climb up one of the hills behind the station for the sunset. Having a wine on the lawn is nice too. BLD

Day 9 Mt Cook National Park

8 km/5 hours hiking

Enjoy the short drive to Mt. Cook Village as we venture north through the Mackenzie Country and along the shores of the mystic blue waters of Lake Pukaki. Grab your daypack and join your guide for a hike up the well formed track to Sealey Tarns and Mueller Hut. The higher you climb, the more impressive the views as you ascend above the Mueller Glacier and stare straight up the Hooker Valley to the commanding presence of Aoraki/Mt.Cook. Watch out for kea (native alpine parrot) soaring off the cliffs and observe ice and rock fall off the bulking east face of Mt.Sefton from the safe side of the valley. The section up to Mueller Hut is slightly more challenging, but the views on a clear day are worth the effort. For those more content to stay on the flats, there are a number of easier options, including a gentle hike up the Hooker Valley or a wander through the Sir Edmund Hillary Centre – located in the luxurious Hermitage Hotel. Tonight we camp in a sheltered site at the southern tip of Lake Pukaki, with regal views across the lake of the Aoraki/Mt.Cook massif. BLD

Day 10 Mt Somers

5 km/4 hours hiking

This morning we drive away from the parched lands of the Mackenzie Basin via Lake Tekapo and Burkes Pass. Observe the changing landscape as we get closer to the east coast and the extensive Canterbury Plains. The final hike of the trip begins at the base of Mt. Somers, a rhyolite dome, and quite geologically unique to the region. Spend the afternoon walking up a brilliant river canyon, lined with steep beech covered walls and filled with a clear mountain river. Eventually we climb out of the canyon and emerge onto a ridgeline offering magnificent views of the Arrowsmith Range to the west. Descending down from the ridgeline we quickly reach the newly constructed Mt. Somers Hut, grab a cup of tea and enjoy the tranquillity from the deck before dinner. BLD.

Day 11 Tour Ends in Christchurch

5 km/4 hours hiking

Before walking back to the van, spend a few hours with your guide exploring the water caves located just above the hut. More like big rocks than caves, this is a really fun time and even though you get a bit wet, everyone always loves it. Return to the hut to dry off before walking out via an easy mountain track. Make sure you keep an eye out for karearea (New Zealand falcon) if you haven't seen them from the hut already. The track descends down through various sequences of alpine vegetation and passes by an old coal mine where relics still sit in their original place. Have a quick bite of lunch and a bit of a sort out before driving across the sun drenched plains to the city of Christchurch, where your guide will drop you off at your accommodation. Get your glad rags on and head out for a group dinner in one of the city's new restaurants. BL.

Meals that are included in the trip are detailed above as B (Breakfast), L (Lunch) and D (Dinner).

Hiking & Fitness

Grade D

Average of 4-5 hours physical activity per day, up to 8-9 hours on longer days.

Pack weights of 10-12kgs on some days.

Altitude gains of up to 800m.

Some uneven track surfaces and river crossings.

No multi-day hiking experience necessary.

Agility and fitness required.

You need to be reasonably fit and enthusiastic.

Terrain mostly tracks. Some may be slippery or rough; some off-track hiking and river crossings.

Guides and Safety

An excellent guide can make the difference between a trip of a lifetime and just an ordinary trip. Our handpicked professionals come from a range of backgrounds. Each has extensive outdoor and hiking experience and a passion for New Zealand's wild and beautiful backcountry. The guides will ensure that your trip is truly inspiring, a huge amount of fun and safe. All guides are trained in Mountain Safety First Aid.



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