

New Zealand: The South Island

VB T Vacation Only

Scenic splendor of mythic proportions characterizes the dramatic landscape of New Zealand's South Island—and you'll experience it all up close, by bicycle and on foot. Prepare to gasp in awe at staggering snowcapped peaks and deep gorges, pristine lakes, and lagoons teeming with wildlife, and marble-like glacier-carved valleys. You'll also delve into the country's pioneering past at charming gold-rush and mining villages. And lifestyle events such as a ranch visit, wine tasting, and home-cooked meal make this journey unique among New Zealand bike and walk tours.

Cultural Highlights

View dramatic gorges, river valleys, and alpine peaks on one of the world's most scenic rail journeys.

Delight in vistas of alpine peaks, lush forests, and bucolic farmlands as you ride.

Spin along a dramatic ridge overlooking the wild Tasman Sea.

Transport yourself to New Zealand's pioneer days on a stroll through an old mining area.

Learn easy kayaking - join a trained guide to paddle and explore the calm waters of Lake Moeraki and watch waterbirds, spot trout and experience the serenity.

Discover the renowned Franz Josef Glacier as you follow its retreating ice on a hike.

Join the host of your Lake Moeraki lodge on a stroll to a colony of glowworms.

Picnic on the shores of Lake Hawea, admiring stunning mountain and lake views.

Sip New Zealand wine during a tasting at a local vineyard.

Learn about the Kiwi gold-rush era on a visit to quaint Arrowtown.

Experience life on a working ranch—including a home-cooked meal.

Customize your journey with the support of two vans and three Trip Leaders.

Check your reflection—and astounding views—from the glassy surface of Lake Matheson.

What to Expect

The majority of rides and all walks on this tour are on purposefully-built trails (the Kiwis have it figured out!). Trails are packed gravel, regularly maintained, away from motorized vehicle traffic, and allow access to the beauty of the country. The roadways that we ride are secondary, quiet, and mostly paved. The VBT van support shuttle is available for a head start, catch-up or, shorter option. This tour also includes a kayaking excursion.

Tour Duration: 9 Days

Average Daily Mileage: 7 - 23

Average Cycling Time: 00:30 - 03:30

Climate Information

Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

Jan 67°/53°, Feb 68°/54°, Mar 66°/50°, Apr 62°/47°, Nov 62°/48°, Dec 64°/51°

Average Rainfall (in.)

Jan 9.6, Feb 7.8, Mar 9.1, Apr 9.2, Nov 10.4, Dec 10

DAY 1: VBT Bike and Walk Vacation begins / Christchurch / Warm-up ride

Please plan to arrive at your Christchurch hotel by 9:00 a.m. If you are unable to arrive before 9:00 a.m., please contact the hotel so the staff may advise your trip leaders.

At 9:00 a.m., meet your trip leaders at the hotel for a safety clinic and bike-fitting session. Trip leaders will be wearing VBT staff garments. This will be followed by a warm-up ride directly from the hotel, where you will enjoy the quiet trails in Hagley Park before following bike-friendly roads out to Sumner Beach on the outskirts of Christchurch. Watch for surfers and enjoy lunch in the small village before a van shuttle returns you to the hotel.

You have the afternoon free to explore 'The Garden City'. Early this evening, you will join your fellow travelers for a welcome reception, then dine with the group and toast your upcoming journey in wonderful New Zealand.

Hotel: Chateau on the Park

Meals: Dinner

Today's Ride Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 26 km (16 miles)

Morning

Hagley Park Warm-Up: 26 km (16 miles)

What to Expect: Enjoy a warm-up ride, beginning on the trails in Hagley Park, the third-largest city park in the world. Continue riding on bike-friendly roads out to the coastal seaside suburb of Sumner Beach. A van shuttle from there returns you to your hotel.

DAY 2: Cross Southern Alps by train / Cycle to the seaside / Hokitika

After breakfast, shuttle with your trip leaders to the Christchurch train station to board the 8:15 a.m. TranzAlpine for one of the world's most scenic rail journeys. Your train takes you through the vast Canterbury Plains and traverses the scenic gorges and river valleys of the Waimakariri River. The snow-capped peaks of the magnificent Southern Alps soon appear as you climb 2,300 feet toward Arthur's Pass, the South Island's highest settlement, surrounded by steep-sloped mountains.

You depart the train at Arthur's Pass, rejoining your shuttle for a short drive to Kumara for lunch in a historic pub. This afternoon's ride is toward Greymouth and the coast. Off of the busy roadway, enjoy a scenic reel through lush forests and some of New Zealand's famed dairy farms, the soaring peaks marking your progress. Be on the look-out for local bird life that includes Bellbirds, Tui, Kereru (the native pigeon), and the Kotuku, the white heron. Following the West Coast Wilderness Trail, you will gradually descend to the Tasman Sea before arriving in the region's largest town, Greymouth. At the end of your ride, hop the shuttle to the seaside town of Hokitika, a former gold-rush town once crowded with prospectors. At one time, the main street was lined with more than 80 hotels. Today there are only six.

This evening, you have free time to enjoy dinner on your own. Later, you might take a relaxing walk along the beach and look skyward for the Southern Cross, visible year-round from the Southern Hemisphere. The Southern Cross contains four stars that depict the extremities of a Latin cross. The stars are very bright and close together, making the constellation easy to spot.

Hotel: Beachfront Hotel

Alternate Hotel: Stations Inn

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Today's Ride Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 29 km (17 miles)

Afternoon

Kumara to Greymouth: 29 km (17 miles)

What to Expect: The ride is mainly downhill on unpaved trails. After reaching the coast, the trail continues north, paralleling the Tasman Sea. You will then shuttle 30 km (19 miles) to the hotel.

DAY 3: Cycle the West Coast Wilderness Trail / Dine beneath the canopy of Ancient Rimu Trees

Today, you will enjoy the best of the West Coast Wilderness Trail on an enchanting ride that leads you from the hills above Hokitika to the shores of the Tasman Sea. Begin after breakfast with a visit to the Greenstone Jade Gallery, where you can admire beautiful pieces carved from this native stone. Shuttle a short distance to Lake Kaniere and hop on the West Coast Wilderness Trail, part of the New Zealand Cycle Trail. Enjoy a gentle descent through native bush back towards Hokitika. Continue south from there, tracing the dramatic coastline of the Tasman Sea. Your ride passes wetlands, native forest, and old mill sites, and stunning views of Lake Mahinapua can be seen with a short walk from the trail. On a clear day, you will see Mt. Cook and Mt. Tasman rising inland. Stop for lunch at the West Coast Treetop Café and enjoy dining al fresco while you take in the views of the Lake Maninapua valley beneath the canopy of the ancient Rimu and Kamahi trees. An optional Tree Tops Walk allows you to explore a unique perspective of the West Coast forest.

You may decide to continue riding a short distance after lunch past the tidal Totara lagoon which leads you to the township of Ross. This seaside town is on the edge of Westland National Park, a stunning canvas of towering mountains, dramatic waterfalls, and icy, gray-blue rivers tumbling down to the Tasman Sea. The centerpiece of this stunning wilderness is the Franz Josef Glacier, one of the world's few glaciers that still exhibit a cycle of advance and retreat.

This afternoon, shuttle to your accommodation in Franz Josef. Spend free time in this lively town before an included dinner.

Hotel: Scenic Hotel Franz Josef Glacier

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 56 km (37 miles)

Morning

Lake Kaniere to Tree Tops Café: 39 km (26 miles)

Afternoon

Tree Tops Café to Ross: 17 km (11 miles)

What to Expect: The morning ride features some moderately challenging terrain through wooded trails, yet the route's gentle descent adds a welcome ease to the scenic turns. Continue past Hokitika and meander along Mahinapua Creek, past the Hokitika Golf Links, and then alongside the state highway. It's then time to turn off onto the historic Mahinapua Tramline, a super-scenic (if sometimes narrow) section

of today's trail. Pass through wetlands, native forest, and old mill sites before again crossing state highway 6 to join the trail along the beach. Stop for lunch before continuing on to Ross, where you may get a look at Mount Cook and Mount Tasman. The historic Ross rail route will take you over the Totara Bridge (built in 1908) and provide some lovely views of the tidal Totara lagoon (birdwatchers take note!). Leaving the Totara River, you'll wrap up the day's route with an easy ride to the historic goldfields of Ross.

DAY 4: Discover Franz Josef Glacier / Walk Okarito Lagoon

This is New Zealand's Glacier Country, and if the weather allows, your morning walk presents an opportunity to witness their majesty up close and learn a bit about glaciology along the way. After breakfast, walk up the valley carved by the retreating ice of the Franz Josef Glacier. At a viewing platform, marvel at the blue, marble-like sheen of the vast ice expanse. Perhaps you will see deep crevasses where ice floes have been ripped apart by the slow march of the glacier. The day's activities resume with a quick shuttle to the "wee" town of Okarito, home to just a few dozen residents. Booker Prize-winning author Keri Hulme lived here and eventually moved away when she found the town to be too big for her! Revel in a tranquil ambiance and view an abundance of birds during walk above Okarito Lagoon before lunch. Upon arrival, set out on a trail built above the shore, affording access to the lagoon's unique flora and local birds. The Okarito Lagoon, New Zealand's largest unmodified wetland, is teeming with wildlife. More than 70 species of birds make their home here, including the rare kotuku, the Eastern great egret. Savor the peace and tranquility of this special place.

For lunch, we'll gather in the town's hall to enjoy a well-deserved picnic prepared by your trip leaders.

Back in Franz Josef this afternoon you may choose to embark on a heli-hiking adventure of Franz Josef Glacier (at your own expense). You will board a helicopter and take wing over the massive ice field, landing on its white expanse for a guided walk. It's a thrilling excursion in an unspoiled setting that few travelers experience. Should you prefer a scenic helicopter or plane ride over the glacier without the glacier walk, your trip leaders will help you make a reservation once you're on tour.

Tonight, you can enjoy dinner on your own at one of the many local restaurants.

Hotel: Scenic Hotel Franz Josef Glacier

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Today's Walk Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 9 km (5 miles)

Morning

Franz Josef Valley Walk: 4 km (2 miles)

Late Morning

Okarito Trig Walk: 5 km (3 miles)

What to Expect: The Franz Josef Valley Walk is an easy walk that leads to a riverbank via the glacier, river valley, and surrounding mountains, sometimes featuring spectacular waterfalls. The route continues past Trident Falls to a lookout point with a view of the terminal face of the glacier. This part of the route is over the shingle and rock of the riverbed, and it can be quite rough underfoot. This is a beautiful yet volatile place—do not let the serene scene fool you. The glacier is constantly moving.

This super-scenic Okarito Lagoon walk winds gently uphill on a well-graded track, before reaching the Okarito Trig viewpoint. On a clear day, the view is unbeatable, overlooking Westland National Park from the snow-capped Southern Alps across extensive native forest to the lagoons and beaches of the coast.

DAY 5: Fox Village / Lake Matheson / Cycle to Gillespie's Beach

Begin the day with a short shuttle to the Fox Glacier area, where you may walk around Lake Matheson, the pristine body of water left behind during Fox's retreat millennia ago and an important food-gathering place for the Maori. The lake's excellent mirror-like reflecting properties are due to the dark brown color of the water, the result of organic matter leached from the humus of the forest floor. Walk among the ancient podocarp hardwood forest, also passing tall white pine and red pine trees. The temperate forest leads to the "View of Views" at the top end of the lake: On a clear day, the water's glassy surface reflects Mt. Cook, also known as Aoraki, New Zealand's tallest peak at 12,218 feet (3,724 meters). Then, test your mettle on a stimulating dirt road ride out to scenic Gillespie's Beach where you may watch the lapping waves of the Tasman Sea before returning to Fox for lunch.

Continue on to Lake Moeraki Wilderness Lodge. Surrounded by a thriving 1,000-year-old rainforest and a pristine seacoast, the lodge is perfectly situated for outdoor exploration and activity—or just relaxing and taking in the wonders of nature. The owner of the lodge, Dr. Gerry McSweeney, is the former president of the New Zealand Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society, the country's largest environmental organization. Accordingly, the lodge is committed to the protection of the environment.

Dinner this evening is in the lodge's dining room, which overlooks the wilderness area. Later, you may

wish to join your lodge host for a walk on the grounds to view a colony of glowworms!

Hotel: Lake Moeraki Wilderness Lodge

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Today's Ride Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 18 km (11 miles)

Afternoon

Lake Matheson to Gillespie's Beach 18 km (11 miles)

What to Expect: Begin your ride from the Lake Matheson Café and soon follow a gravel road through rainforest where undulating terrain will lead to the secluded and scenic Gillespie's Beach.

Today's Walk Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 4 km (2.5 miles)

Morning

Lake Matheson Walk: 4 km (2.5 miles)

What to Expect: The first section of the Lake Matheson Walk is to the Jetty Viewpoint. Continuing further around the lake, find another magnificent mountain reflection shrouded in native foliage at the "View of Views" at the top of the lake and again at Reflection Island.

DAY 6: Explore Lake Moeraki

Set your own pace today as you take advantage of the lodge's many outdoor activities. After breakfast, you can plan your day around your choice of several complementary 60- to 90-minute excursions. Perhaps you will join a rainforest walk, learn about the inhabitants of the Moeraki River with a naturalist guide, or enjoy canoe or kayak instruction on the waters of Lake Moeraki. Additional activities such as a wilderness seacoast walk to see the world's smallest marine dolphin, or a Moeraki Rainforest walk, kayak, and beach discovery may incur extra costs. After a rewarding day of exploration rejoin the group for dinner at the lodge.

Hotel: Lake Moeraki Wilderness Lodge

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Today's Walk Choices:

Non-Biking/Walking Day: choose from a range of optional and included excursions from the lodge today.

DAY 7: Mt. Aspiring National Park / Blue Pools / Hawea River Track / Outlet Track / Wanaka

After breakfast, board a two-hour shuttle (the longest transfer of the trip) to Hawea on the southern shore of Lake Hawea. En route, you'll stop for a short but memorable walk to witness the amazing water of the Blue Pools and stop again at a classic roadside café for lunch on your own. On reaching the very blue Lake Hawea, get on your bicycle to join the Hawea River Track, part of a purpose-built cycling and walking trail linking Hawea to Wanaka via Albert Town. As you ride, take in spectacular views along the Hawea River and of the high peaks behind Wanaka. Pedal through kanuka groves and shady woodland and along river terraces. Continue on a dedicated trail into Wanaka—gateway to Mt. Aspiring National Park—riding along the namesake lake, through the township and directly to your lakefront accommodations.

Spend two nights in charming Wanaka. Your comfortable lodging overlooks the magnificent Southern Alps.

Hotel: Edgewater

Meals: Breakfast

Today's Walk Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 3 km (2 miles)

Morning

Cameron Flat + Blue Pools: 3 km (2 miles)

What to Expect: Walk through beech/tawhero forest to a swing bridge over Makarora River. After crossing the river, follow a boardwalk to a viewing platform over the Blue Pools. Soon after, cross the Blue Pools Bridge for great views up the river gorge. Large brown and rainbow trout can often be seen feeding in the pools.

Today's Ride Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 28 km (17 miles)

Afternoon

Hawea to Wanaka: 28 km (17 miles)

What to Expect: The first half of this delightful ride is on the Hawea River Track, a well-maintained trail with a few uneven patches as it travels through kanuka groves and woodland and along river terraces. Bikes need to be carried down the steps at the southern end of the swing bridge. From Albert Town, the second half of today's ride is on the Outlet Track, following the Clutha River and Lake Wanaka into the town of Wanaka, and ending up at our resort. Note that this track can be very busy and has some rougher sections near its beginning. Don't hesitate to walk your bike where it makes sense to do so.

DAY 8: Glendhu Bay / High Country Station visit / Wine tasting

Experience the very best of Wanaka and New Zealand's famed Otago region today, marveling at sweeping wilderness views and visiting with locals at their charming ranch. After breakfast, lace up your hiking boots and walk directly from the resort following the winding shoreline of Lake Wanaka. A bird's eye perspective affords breathtaking views of the glacial-fed lake water below, while the looming snow-capped peaks extend far beyond the lake. Look for Mt. Aspiring in the distance on a clear day!

Midday, you are welcomed into the sheep and cattle station home of VBT friends Allannah and Duncan. At their sprawling ranch, they breed and raise livestock and tend to a lush garden of local vegetables and fruit. Enjoy a tour around the property, see the shepherding dogs at work, and enjoy a home-cooked meal, hearing about life on a Kiwi ranch. Later, sample more of Otago's and Wanaka's products at a local vineyard, with time to stroll on the grounds and admire vistas of the lake and mountains. Back in town, enjoy free time before gathering for your final farewell dinner this evening.

Hotel: Edgewater

Alternate Hotel: Oakridge Resort

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today's Walk Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 11 km (7 miles)

Morning

Glendhu Bay: 11 km (7 miles)

What to Expect: Pick up the Glendhu Bay track directly outside the door of the Edgewater Resort. The well-established trail hugs the shoreline of glistening Lake Wanaka from which you'll enjoy excellent views of the Pisa range, the Upper Clutha Basin, Lake Wanaka, and the Southern Alps/Ka Tiritiri o te Moana.

DAY 9: Arrowtown / VBT Bike and Walk Vacation ends

After breakfast, shuttle to nearby Arrowtown, a quaint “wild west”-style village with a rich gold-mining past. There’ll be time here to walk along the banks of the Arrow River, getting a picture of life in the days of the pioneers who settled here during the height of the Otago gold rush. Relax with a mid-morning coffee in a charming café, or look for a keepsake by which to remember your journey. Then, continue to Queenstown’s airport, arriving at around 12:00 noon.

Please note: VBT transfer times and departure points are finalized in advance and cannot be modified for individual guests. If you extend your stay beyond the scheduled program dates, return transportation to the airport will be at your own expense.

Meals: Breakfast

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

Edgewater Resort (Days: 7,8)

As its name suggests, the Edgewater Hotel lies right at the water’s edge of Lake Wanaka. It is the perfect destination to experience all that Central Otago’s seasons have to offer. Here you’ll find genuine local knowledge that complements inviting accommodations and an enticing seasonal menu. The hotel is not air conditioned but does offer WiFi throughout.

Scenic Hotel Franz Josef Glacier (Days: 3,4)

Set on the edge of tiny Franz Josef village on the South Island’s west coast, the warm and welcoming Scenic Hotel Franz Josef Glacier provides quality accommodation for visitors to the glacier, rainforest, and Westland World Heritage Park. The hotel makes the most of its alpine location and offers spa pools to soak in, wireless Internet, and two restaurants. Each room has a refrigerator and a minibar with tea- and coffee-making facilities. The hotel is not air conditioned but does offer WiFi throughout.

Lake Moeraki Wilderness Lodge (Days: 5,6)

Owned by local ecologists, this nature-lover’s riverside paradise is set amid the rainforest of South

Westland. The luxury lodge is landscaped into the rainforest with lawns flowing down to the river's edge, where there are jumping trout, water birds, and stunning reflections. View them all from the Riverside Restaurant and Lounge, where you can relax, read, enjoy a drink from the wine cellar, and savor great wilderness food. The hotel is not air conditioned but does offer WiFi throughout.

Chateau on the Park (Day: 1)

The Chateau on the Park is a resort-style hotel tucked between Hagley Park and the beautiful historic home and gardens of Mona Vale, just minutes from the center of Christchurch. Nestled in five acres (two hectares) of beautiful and tranquil gardens, the 193-room property offers a unique escape, seemingly a world away from city life. The hotel is not air conditioned but does offer WiFi throughout.

Beachfront Hotel (Day: 2)

This seaside hotel on the South Island's west coast has been in the same family for 120 years, making for a unique experience of true Kiwi hospitality. Its location in the center of a historic gold-mining town offers the best of two worlds. Charming streets are right outside your door for strolling. And since it overlooks the Tasman Sea, the beach is your backyard. Its comfortable restaurant and bar offer great ocean views. The hotel is not air conditioned but does offer WiFi throughout.