

New Zealand: The South Island

VBT Vacation + Air Package

The dramatic beauty of New Zealand transcends the imagination—as you’ll see when you experience it up close as only an active vacation allows. Our carefully curated bike routes follow untamed seacoast, valleys framed by towering peaks, and woodland trails through the breathtaking South Island. On foot, you’ll explore a wildlife sanctuary, a moving glacier, the winding shores of a glittering lake, and historic gold-mining sites. You’ll also touch Kiwi history in pioneer towns and spend a day at a wilderness resort, with opportunities for kayaking, canoeing, hiking, and more. A home-cooked meal in a local town hall and exclusive visits to a working ranch and wine estate add a personal touch to this quintessential New Zealand bike and walk tour.



Cultural Highlights

- Prepare to be dazzled by the staggering beauty of the South Island’s glittering lakes, lush forests,

fertile farmlands, and alpine peaks.

- Hike up a valley carved by the retreating ice of Franz Josef Glacier.
- Spend a day at a wilderness resort, enjoying kayaking, canoeing, hiking—and perhaps strolling to a colony of glowworms.
- Experience life on a working ranch and savor a home-cooked meal during a visit to a sheep and cattle station.
- Sample local vintages during a wine tasting at a local estate.
- Enter history at the pioneering gold-rush towns of Hokitika and Arrowtown.

What to Expect

The majority of rides and all walks on this tour are on purpose-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 support vehicle is available for a head start, catch-up, or shorter option.

Tour Duration: 12 Days

Average Daily Mileage: 7 - 23

Average Cycling Time: 01:15 - 03:30

Group size: 20 max

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 10.0

DAY 1: Depart home / Fly to Christchurch

Depart home for New Zealand. The particulars of your arrival overseas are detailed with your flight itinerary.

DAY 2: In flight to Christchurch

Flying to New Zealand requires crossing the International Date Line, so this day is “lost.”

DAY 3: Arrive in Christchurch

Upon arrival at the Christchurch airport, gather your luggage at the international baggage collection area and proceed through the terminal exit Door #7. The Super Shuttle rank is located outside the International Arrivals Hall, next to the taxi rank. Look for the Super Shuttle vehicle. Give the driver your name and let them know that you are with VBT. Transfer (approximately 30 minutes) to your Christchurch hotel. If your flight is delayed, please notify Super Shuttle at 0800 748885. Once you arrive at the hotel, the rest of the day is yours to relax or explore. VBT provides you with City Information that includes recommendations on what to see and do in Christchurch during your stay.

Your hotel room may not be available until 2:00 p.m. If you are early, you may store your luggage at the reception desk. We highly recommend a walk out of the hotel and through the adjacent Hagley Park and the Botanical Gardens. The Canterbury Museum, Memorial Bridge, and the re-energized Central Business District (CBD) are on the other side of the park and are well worth a visit.

Please note: VBT transfer times and departure points are finalized in advance and cannot be modified for individual guests. If you fly in earlier than the scheduled program dates, transportation from the airport will be at your own expense.

Accommodation: Chateau on the Park, Christchurch

DAY 4: VBT Bike and Walk Vacation begins / Christchurch / Warm-up ride

Your New Zealand bike and walk tour begins with a warm-up ride in beautiful Hagley Park and continues out to iconic Sumner Beach.

Enjoy an included New Zealand breakfast.

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, Christchurch

Included Meals: Breakfast, 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 5: 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 (701 meters) 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 spin 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 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, Hokitika

Included 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 6: 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

Included 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 7: 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, Franz Josef

Included 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 8: 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, Lake Moeraki

Included 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 9: 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 complimentary 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, Lake Moeraki

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today's Ride/Walk Choices:

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

DAY 10: 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 Hotel, Wanaka

Included 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 11: 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 Hotel, Wanaka

Included 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 12: Arrowtown / VBT Bike and Walk Vacation ends / Depart for home, or begin your optional Post-Trip Extension in Queenstown

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.

Hotel: Novotel Queenstown Lakeside, Queenstown

Included Meals: Breakfast