



14 Day Great New Zealand Steam Explorer



Tour Summary

Tour name: Great New Zealand Steam Explorer

Days: 14

Tour Includes:

- All Accommodation, All Transfers, All Breakfasts,
- 5 Dinners: Auckland, Grand Chateau, Wellington, Oamaru, and TSS Earnslaw at Queenstown
- Half Day Sightseeing Tour of Auckland
- Sightseeing Tour and Cable Car journey in Wellington
- 2 Day Tram Ticket at Christchurch
- Steam Train travel between Auckland and Wellington
- Ferry across Cook Strait between North and South Island
- Train travel Picton to Christchurch, Tranz Alpine Express and Steam Train travel Christchurch to Dunedin. Train to Middlemarch and then coach to Queenstown
- \$200 worth of catering vouchers to be used on the steam train
- 600 Excursion Points to use on various other excursions

Tour Itinerary

Sunday/Monday: Auckland

We welcome you with a special dinner on Sunday night and a half day sightseeing tour the next morning. You'll have two days to enjoy New Zealand's largest city. This subtropical multicultural city has a great deal to offer visitors and we have lots of optional activities for you to choose from:

Cruise on the Hauraki Gulf or Sail an America's Cup yacht. Take a sightseeing tour, see a Maori Cultural Experience, visit a winery or museum or if you arrive earlier you can take advantage of our overnight excursions to the beautiful Bay of Islands or the Thermal Wonderland of Rotorua.

Railfans will enjoy The Museum of Transport and Technology, and the Glenbrook Vintage Railway, considered by many to be New Zealand's premier steam railway.

In Auckland you'll stay at a centrally located hotel or keen railfans have the option to stay at the magnificent old Auckland Railway Station which has been converted into self contained student accommodation.

Tuesday: Your Steam Journey Begins: Auckland – Tongariro National Park

We'll depart from Auckland's historic old Railway station and travel south via the Auckland waterfront, through the fertile farmland of the Waikato. We'll follow the mighty Waikato River to Waitomo, where you can visit live Kiwis or tour the incredible limestone formations of the Waitomo Caves. Then we'll follow the Main Trunk Line through the King Country before travelling up one of New Zealand's most impressive engineering feats: the Raurimu Spiral. We traverse the Central Volcanic Plateau affording magnificent views of the three volcanoes used to portray Mordor and Mount Doom in the Lord of the Rings movies. We'll stay and have dinner tonight at the beautiful and historic Grand Chateau Hotel on the slopes of Mt Ruapehu.

Wednesday: Tongariro National Park to Palmerston North

This morning you could play golf, tennis or croquet or visit the excellent Department of Conservation Visitor Centre. If you start early you have time to take the chairlift right to the top of the Mt Ruapehu ski runs.

Later in the morning we'll drive to the ski town of Ohakune, or you can take the optional spectacular flight over the mountains. Once on board the train, we'll travel the many spectacular viaducts of the Rangitikei Valley before descending to the Manawatu.

Then it's on to Feilding for railfans to visit the Feilding Steam Rail home of one of New Zealand's most recently restored steam locomotives.

Home for tonight is the capital of the central North Island, Palmerston North.

Thursday: Palmerston North to Wellington via Wairarapa

Today we'll travel through the magnificent Manawatu Gorge before heading south across the Wairarapa region. It's one of the country's premier wine regions and you may choose to wander around the town of Masterton or you can take either the Martinborough Wine Trail tour or a Wairarapa Gardens Tour.

For railfans, we stop en route at the Pahiatua Railcar Museum and when we get to Masterton have an excursion to the Fell Museum home of the unique and historic locomotive that used to climb the very steep Rimutaka Incline using the "Fell" system.

Heading south, we'll pass through the Hutt Valley and finish today's journey at Wellington's grand old Railway Station.

We'll be staying for two nights right in the heart of the capital.

Friday: Wellington

Today you can choose from a wide range of excursions. We particularly recommend spending time at Te Papa, the bold and imaginative National Museum of New Zealand.

For railfans a whole day excursion is organised to include the depots of Mainline Steam, Steam Incorporated, The Wellington Tramway Museum and the Silverstream Railway.

Tonight we'll celebrate a very special dinner to farewell those leaving the North Island Steam Explorer and welcome those joining us for the South Island Steam Explorer. We will take a trip up the city's historic cable car to Kelburn and have dinner at the top of the peak where you can take in the stunning views of Wellington harbour at sunset.

Saturday: Wellington - Christchurch

We're on the water today for one of the world's most memorable ferry journeys, across Cook Strait. Watch out for the dolphins as we cruise through the magnificent Marlborough Sounds en route to the South Island. At Picton we'll join the "Tranz Coastal" diesel-electric service through the Marlborough wine country, over the double deck rail & road bridge at Awatere to the coast at Kaikoura where we may see whales offshore and seals onshore during this scenic journey.

Home for tonight is the Copthorne Hotel, Christchurch.

Sunday: Christchurch and Optional Tours

Today is free for you to enjoy at your leisure. Do your own thing, or choose from our full day or half day optional activities.

Full day options include excursions to Mt Cook and the Mackenzie Country, Swimming with Dolphins in Akaroa Harbour, Whalewatching in Kaikoura (highly recommended!) or for railfans, a tour to Ferrymead Heritage park to see their fine tramway and locomotive collections, Lyttelton Harbour and the Weka Pass Railway, a true "complete" branch railway climbing through rugged limestone outcrops.

If you prefer a leisurely breakfast then why not take a trip around Christchurch on the Christchurch Tramway. This will give you a great orientation of the central city and in the afternoon you can take a tour of historical Christchurch or visit the International Antarctic Centre.

Monday: TranzAlpine Express to Greymouth

Today we experience what is often described as one of the great railway journeys of the world. The Tranz Alpine, crosses the magnificent Southern Alps from the east coast to the west, travelling through 16 tunnels and across 5 viaducts. The diesel-electric powered train has an open deck so you can really take in the wonderful scenery, with snacks, meals and drinks available on board. You have the option to return on the train or spend the rest of the day exploring the West Coast: including the famous Punakaiki Rocks, the Monteith's Brewery and Shantytown the restored gold mining town near Greymouth. Railfans will enjoy the "bush tramway" type restored steam locomotives. If you choose the Explore the West Coast option we will be returning to Christchurch later in the evening by coach.

Tuesday: Christchurch – Ashburton, Timaru, Oamaru

Today it's back to steam and we'll travel across the flat grassland of the Canterbury Plains, to Ashburton where you can wander around the town or visit the Plains Railway at Ashburton. This is home to a fine collection of New Zealand tank locomotives, as well as the magnificent 1878 K Class locomotive. This was one of the first locomotives to be imported to New Zealand from the USA and is now fully restored to working condition - a real treat for railfans!

From Ashburton it's on to Timaru, where you can have a look around this interesting port town or visit Pleasant Point station a beautifully restored railway complex and pioneer museum.

Finally we'll head to Oamaru, one of New Zealand's most architecturally interesting and historical towns. Oamaru is full of beautiful historical limestone buildings and in keeping with this we have a walking tour organised ending with a very special Victorian themed dinner.

Come prepared for a singalong and to learn how to ride a penny-farthing!

We'll stay tonight in the historic Kingsgate Brydone hotel.

Wednesday: Oamaru - Dunedin

Our steam train takes us to the southern city of Dunedin, through more stunning coastal scenery. We'll arrive around lunchtime at the beautiful Dunedin Railway Station, said to be New Zealand's most photographed building.

This afternoon you're free to enjoy Dunedin, either on your own or on one of our optional activities. Take the afternoon tour of Dunedin's highlights concluding with the Cadbury's Chocolate factory, and in the evening either a brewery tour or the excellent wildlife tour to see the yellow eyed penguins and royal albatross colony on the Otago Peninsula. For railfans we have an afternoon visit to the Settlers Museum which has an excellent rail and road transport section, and then New Zealand's very first preserved railway, the Ocean Beach Railway.

Thursday: Dunedin – Taieri Gorge to Queenstown

Today we board the diesel - electric Taieri Gorge Limited for the first part of the journey through the rugged landscape of Central Otago. The train takes us along steep vertical ledges and through the Gorge itself. Near Middlemarch we'll transfer to a coach for the rest of the journey through the tussock and desert landscape to Queenstown. We'll pass through the Kawarau Valley and the wine country of Central Otago, stopping to see bungy jumping into the Kawarau river.

We'll arrive at Queenstown late this afternoon and check in to the Novotel Gardens hotel. Situated in a garden setting, right on the lake, this hotel is close to the heart of the action-packed adventure centre that is Queenstown. We'll stay two nights here.

Friday: Explore Queenstown Lakes Region

Today could well be the high point of your journey, no matter which of our optional activities you choose:

1. Skippers Grand Canyon Tour

Take a 4-wheel drive journey of discovery up the Skippers Canyon on a road carved out of sheer rock during the Gold Rush of the 1880's. Or take a ride in the famous Skippers Canyon Jetboat, where your skilled driver will "blast" you into the narrow confines of the "Canyon of Gold." Negotiating turbulent waters and carrying out 360 degree jet turns will all add to the excitement! Then you can pay a visit to Winky's Museum, where you'll see a remarkable array of gold rush memorabilia, see a Sluice Gun in action and have a chance to try your hand at gold panning.

2. Milford Sound Scenic Flight and Cruise

Take a flight over some of the most spectacular scenery in the world.

If you've ever wondered where much of the Lord of the Rings scenery was shot, you'll find out now, as you fly over spectacular parts of "Middle Earth". See the stunning wilderness of the Southern Alps, the Hanging Valleys, Alpine Lakes and Towering Waterfalls. Then take a cruise on the tranquil waters of Milford Sound to see the famous Mitre Peak. Today is sure to be a memory you'll always treasure.

3. Arrowtown and Central Otago Wine Tour

Central Otago is now producing some of the best Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris in the new world. Today you have the opportunity to sample some of these wonderful wines and buy them direct from the wineries. We'll visit 3 different wineries giving you a great selection of the regional varieties. You'll also have plenty of time to explore the delights of Arrowtown, with its quaint shops, the Lakes District Museum and the original Chinese Settlement.

4. Railfans Tour to Kingston Flyer

This tour will take you along the shores of scenic Lake Wakatipu to the most famous New Zealand steam locomotive: The Kingston Flyer. This steam-only line originally ran south from Kingston Wharf all the way to Invercargill. It has two exquisitely preserved tender locomotives and many historical carriages including a "birdcage" saloon. The line has The Remarkables mountain range as its scenic backdrop and the train travels along the valley floor. It really is a photographer's dream location so we've organised enough time either to take two trips along the line on the train and spend some time exploring the stations. Alternatively you can just take one trip and then the coach will take you along the line to photograph the train on its next trip.

5. Day at your leisure

We're happy to advise you on other things to do and see in the Queenstown Lakes region.

Special Farewell Dinner

Tonight we celebrate a special Farewell Gala dinner by boarding the steamship: TSS Earnslaw and steaming across Lake Wakatipu aboard this historic vessel. We will then share stories and a farewell Carvery dinner with fine New Zealand wines and sumptuous desserts at the Walter Peak sheep station, before steaming back home across the lake.

Saturday Morning:

This the "official" end of our Great Steam Journey. Breakfast is included and transfers to the airport have been arranged. However, we do encourage you to stay on a few days and fully explore the Queenstown Lakes region and would be happy to make those arrangements for you.