



Secret South Safari



Tour Summary

Tour name: Secret South Safari

Days: 11

Tour Highlights

Hike into the rugged mountains of Fiordland NP to beautiful alpine lakes with stunning mountain views. Kayak beneath massive sea cliffs in Milford Sound while watching out for basking seals and leaping dolphins. Explore the spectacular Catlins coast, with beautiful beaches, luxuriant rain forest, fossilized trees, and rare species of sea lions, dolphins and penguins. Hike up the rocky slopes of the Ohau range and look down on turquoise glacial lakes. Gaze in awe at the contorted forms of glaciers and the snow capped peaks of Mt Cook. Explore the remarkable volcanic topography of Mt Somers with its waterfalls and narrow canyons.

Hiking and Fitness

Grade: Medium

No previous hiking experience is required, but you need to be reasonably fit and enthusiastic.

Hiking per day up to 7 hours - average 4-5 hours

Pack weight up to 12 kg

Altitude gain per day up to 700 metres - normally 200 metres

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

Tour Itinerary

Day 1. Join tour in Queenstown - 6km/3 hours hiking

We meet at the Queenstown Visitor's centre at 8.00am and after a short briefing by our guide, head south into Fiordland National Park. This spectacular World Heritage Site is the largest national park in the country and one of the largest in the world. The huge glacial lakes of Te Anau and Manapouri border the dramatic inland coastline that is Fiordland. The area is dominated by water, either in the form of lakes or as falling rain, which has enabled the establishment of temperate rainforest. We prepare for our first hike to Key Summit on the renowned Routeburn track – a fantastic hike of around 3 hours. From here there are fantastic views across to the Darren Mountains. We return to the vehicle and make our way to our camp in the Hollyford Valley.

Day 2. Milford Sound - 8km/4 hours kayaking

We rise early and drive through the Homer Tunnel and down to Milford Sound itself. Here we hire kayaks (\$82 – optional) and kayak out into the fiord with its cascading waterfalls and views of Mitre Peak (1722 metres straight out of the sea). Fiordland Crested Penguins and New Zealand fur seals often play near our kayaks. After lots of stops for pictures and feeds of Rosco's famous scroggen, we head back to shore and drive back through the divide to our camp at lake Monowai.

Day 3. Fiordland National Park - 12km/7 hours hiking

This morning we drive to Borland Saddle (1000 metres) in Fiordland National Park where we have lunch and organise food for our first overnight hike. The visual impact of this park is stunning – during the Ice Age, the glaciers gouged the fiords and lakes, hollowed out the rounded valleys, and shaped the granite mountain peaks. There are different forest types all over the park; on the eastern side red, silver and mountain beech fill the valleys, and in the northern sections, podocarp forests of matai, rimu, and totara can be found. From Borland Saddle we climb above the bush line onto the Hunter Range with great views into the Park. We traverse along these tops to Mt Burns (1634 metres – optional climb) and descend to Green Lake to camp.

Day 4. Catlins Coast - 7km/3 hours hiking

A leisurely breakfast in this most idyllic site, before hiking out through beech forest and across tussock basins to the road. Have lunch and then drive through to Invercargill for a food shop. This is the southernmost city in New Zealand and its roots, as reflected by its name, are from Scottish settlers who came here in the late 1800's. Many of the cities tree-lined streets bear the names of Scottish rivers. We carry on to Curio Bay in the Catlins, an unspoiled scenic region of coast, rivers and podocarp forest – once an area inhabited by the giant moa (largest bird in the world - now extinct). We relax here and stay in a cosy crib (a New Zealand summerhouse). There is a chance to enjoy a swim in the sea and then a hot shower to complete our day.

Day 5. Cannibal Bay - 6km/2 hours hiking

This morning we explore Curio Bay and often see Hector's dolphins, which sometimes surf on the waves. We walk to a nearby tidal platform that contains tree stumps from a fossilised forest 180 million years old – it is one of the most extensive fossil forests in the world. The platforms are a palaeontologist's dream. The fossils are evidence of New Zealand's location in the ancient Gondwanaland; plant species identified here are similar to those found in South America. We drive along the coast and reach our next destination of Cannibal Bay. The bay takes its name from human bones discovered here last century that were part of a Maori feast. We have a chance to see New Zealand sea-lions and yellow-eyed penguins, the rarest breeds of sea-lions and penguins in the world. We camp near the beach and prepare a hangi feast (Maori earth oven).

Day 6. Central Otago – Rest Day/Optional Cycling

Today is a optional rest day in the picturesque town of Alexandra in the heart of Central Otago. We arrive in Alexandra late morning. If you are feeling energetic, you can join a cycle tour (\$90) on the historic rail trail that winds its way through the vast and mountainous landscape of Central Otago through tunnels and across many viaducts. Alternatively you can relax in Alexandra, visit the local cafes or vineyards. We take a night off cooking tonight, as there are some excellent local restaurants to choose from.

Day 7. Ohau Range - 7km/3 hours hiking

After a leisurely breakfast we continue our drive through the high country. This part of the South Island is home to some of New Zealand's largest sheep stations, many measuring many tens of thousands of hectares. After crossing Lindis Pass into the Mackenzie country we arrive at Lake Ohau. Time to relax and have a swim at this spectacular setting before packing for our next overnight hike. We head up through beech forest to a camp beside Freehold Creek, just below the bush line.

Day 8. Ohau Range - 14km/7 hours hiking

Up early, we leave our camp and head off with day-packs to explore a beautiful basin filled with tarns (small alpine lakes). The basin contains an incredible variety of alpine plants, including Spaniards (prickly), and the world's largest buttercup, named Mt Cook Lily (*Ranunculus lyalli*), because of its large round lily-like leaves. The fit can climb up onto the Ohau range (1915 metres) to enjoy the views of the Southern Alps, including Mt Cook, and the Mackenzie Basin. We return to pack up our camp, and hike back to the vehicle. Tonight we stay at "Buscot Station" a high country sheep station. There is the option of camping or staying in the homestead.

Day 9. Mt Cook National Park - 8km/5 hours hiking

It is just a short drive on to the village of Mt Cook, where we set off early with day packs to hike up to Sealy Tarns and Mueller Hut. Amazing views of the Hooker and Mueller glaciers, Mt Sefton icefall, and awe inspiring views of New Zealand's highest peak, Aoraki/Mt Cook – 3754 metres (the Maori name translates to 'Cloud Piercer'). On our walk we'll learn about glaciers, mountain building and the New Zealand climate. We descend back down to our vehicle and drive to the bottom end of Lake Pukaki – artificially raised 30 metres for hydroelectric power generation. This lake is a beautiful turquoise colour caused by the fine glacial silt suspended in the water. We camp on its shores, with beautiful views across to our highest peaks.

Day 10. Mt Somers - 5km/4 hours hiking

Continuing through the Mackenzie Basin, an area named after a legendary sheep rustler, we pass Lake Tekapo before reaching our destination, Mt Somers. We rock-hop up a river canyon and climb out to Trig Point with great views into the Rakia Basin. There are several altitudinal plant sequences during our hike, along with regenerating beech forest. We frequently see the New Zealand falcon flying in this area. Tonight we stay in a trampers hut.

Day 11. Tour ends in Christchurch - 5km/4 hours hiking

We spend our final day together exploring water caves (you get a bit wet!), Tri-falls stream and swims in Emerald Pool or under a pounding waterfall known as the 'Spa'. Before leaving this beautiful park we'll have lunch and then hike back along the canyon rim to an abandoned coal mine to explore some relics. It's then a short drop back to the carpark. After cleaning up the vehicle and sorting our gear we drive across the Canterbury Plains to Christchurch. We arrive in the early evening.