

Gecko ★

West Coast Adventure

NZD \$4199/pp

5 Days

14 People Max

Comfort Focused



Activity Level 2-3



Rugged beauty and jaw-dropping landscapes await on our West Coast Adventure hiking tour.

Step into a largely undiscovered world filled to the brim with temperate rainforest, towering mountains and glaciers on our 5-day West Coast Adventure hiking trip. From the picturesque Pancake Rocks and the otherworldly Tātare tunnels to the dynamic Franz Josef glacier and the wildlife-filled Okarito Lagoon, you'll discover why the West Coast is a geological marvel changing with time. Nowhere else can you experience such photogenic landscapes complete with snowcapped peaks, panoramic ocean views, beaches, towering waterfalls and interesting rock formations. Let your guides lead the way as you enjoy a moment in time on our West Coast Adventure hiking tour, and stay in some of the most stunning accommodations of the region. And what better way to finish the adventure than with a scenic flight above Milford Sound?

Highlights

Hike

West Coast beaches and rainforests
Mt Aspiring National Park
Castle Hill
Paparoa National Park
Franz Josef Glacier Terminal Face
Tatare Tunnels

Kayak

Okarito Lagoon

Explore

Pancake Rocks

Plus..

Scenic Flight

Our Active Adventures Assurance

We value loyalty, and appreciate that it goes both ways. So when you book with us we'll make a few assurances to you so you can book with complete confidence, no matter what's happening in your life (or the world).



COVID-Ready Certified: Safe Travel for our Guests Travelling Overseas
Active Adventures has received the World Travel and Tourism Council's Safe Travels stamp, which guarantees you that we'll follow all ATTA and WTTC health and safety guidelines on all our trips. See how our small group, off-the-beaten-track adventures are perfect to start exploring again.

Gecko ~ Itinerary

DAY 1

Arrive, Hike Arthur's Pass, visit Pancake Rocks

After meeting our group we'll settle into our comfortable transport and get our adventure underway, traveling into the Southern Alps via Arthur's Pass where we'll venture out on our first hike together, the Devil's Punchbowl. This walk will take you through native beech forest to an incredible 131 metre (430 feet) waterfall, so you'll want to make sure you have your camera on hand! After our hike, we'll continue on our way through Arthur's Pass - this stunning drive is surrounded by rolling hills, and winds through river valleys. We'll descend a steep and impressive highway, a feat of engineering which needs to be seen to be believed! Once we arrive in Punakaiki, we'll check out the famous Pancake Rocks and blowholes - aptly named limestone formations that have been sculpted through the relentless pounding of the Tasman Sea. The rugged coastlines and sculptured landscapes around the Pancake Rocks are simply mesmerising and now is the perfect time to slow down and really soak it all in. Keep an eye out for playful Hector's dolphins or little blue penguins playing in the surf and if we've timed it right we might be treated to the spectacular booming of the blowholes in action. After exploring the rocks we'll then settle into the comfortable and well-appointed Punakaiki resort for dinner and chat about the days to come (and, if the weather's right, hopefully catch a sunset!).

Punakaiki Resort, Punakaiki (Lunch, Dinner)

Hiking Distance: 2 kilometres, 0.5-1 hour

Elevation Gain: 100 metres

Elevation Loss: 100 metres

Pancake Rocks: 0.5-1 hour

DAY 2

Hike Pororari River Trail, kayak Okarito Lagoon

Temperate rainforest clinging to sheer limestone canyon walls sets the scene as we venture into the Paparoa National Park where we'll spend the morning hiking a portion of the Inland Pack Track, following in the footsteps of gold miners who established this trail over a century ago. Moss and ferns add to the delightful and rich tapestry of textures and colours, with impressive views up the valley and cobbled rocks dotting the river, offering the perfect opportunity to try your hand at skimming. After our hike, our next stop is Hokitika, a coastal settlement known as the "Cool Little Town", famous for its pounamu, also known as greenstone or jade. As New Zealand's pounamu capital, Hokitika is a vital stop to learn about its history, and the carving process - it's also a great place to grab a gift or two! After we stretch our legs on the beach we'll carry on to a little-known beach community on the coast, Okarito. Okarito is home to the only native white heron colony in New Zealand, as well as a host of other interesting birds like the Okarito brown kiwi! We'll take to the water in sea kayaks and glide along a picturesque lagoon, set against a stunning backdrop of snow-capped peaks. Afterwards we'll continue with a short journey to the township of Franz Josef where we'll stay for the next couple of nights. Nestled in the rainforest-clad foothills of the Southern Alps, Franz Josef is the heart of glacier country on the West Coast and we'll base ourselves here to explore the glaciers and hidden gems of the area.

Rainforest Resort, Franz Josef (All meals)

Hiking Distance: 6 kilometres, 2-3 hours

Elevation Gain: 130 metres

Elevation Loss: 130 metres

Kayaking Time: 2-3 hours

DAY 3

Hike Franz Josef Terminal Face, walk Tartare tunnels

With some 140 glaciers making their way down from the Southern Alps, this area is fittingly known as glacier country. Few sights equal the spectacle of two of these giant frozen rivers (Franz Josef and Fox Glaciers) imperceptibly grinding their way down through temperate rainforest to just 250 metres above sea level. We'll spend most of the day near Franz Josef Glacier where our hike will take us along the Waiho River bed up the valley right to the terminal face of Franz Josef Glacier.

Optional Heli-hike (extra fee applies)

An outrageously scenic alternative to today's hike is to heli-hike on Franz Josef Glacier itself. After being fitted with crampons, ice axes and so on, you'll board a turbine helicopter and fly towards the highest peaks of the Southern Alps, landing on the glacier at 1300 metres above sea level. Led by specialist glacier guides, you'll hike through the grand ice formations of the glacier, checking out its crevasses, seracs and tunnels – no previous experience is required! The constant movement of the glacier means every day is different, so your guides will cut steps in the ice to make the most of the conditions. At the end of your hike on the ice, you'll take another helicopter ride out of the mountains and back to civilisation.

After we re-group and enjoy lunch, we'll head out on our afternoon walk to the historic Tartare Tunnels where we'll search for the native glowworm! And if there's time tonight you can venture out after dark to listen to some of New Zealand's nocturnal birdlife, such as the morepork owl.

Rainforest Resort, Franz Josef (All meals)

Terminal Face Hiking Distance: 4.8 kilometres, 2-3 hours

Elevation Gain: 20 metres

Elevation Loss: 20 metres

Tatara Tunnels Hiking Distance: 4.6 kilometres, 2 hours

Elevation Gain: 120 metres

Elevation Loss: 120 metres

DAY 4

Hike Lake Matheson

Our hike this morning around Lake Matheson is nestled in ancient forest and is famous for mirror views of Aoraki Mount Cook and Mount Tasman. This stunning hike through temperate rainforest is just a short distance from Franz Josef Glacier, and provides a striking and beautiful contrast to the glacier we visited yesterday. Birdsong and peaceful tranquillity makes this a walk not to be missed and with well-placed view points and botanical explanations, you'll be an expert on the local flora and fauna with some incredible photos too.

After lunch we'll head south, taking one of the most beautiful coastal journeys in the world along the South Island's West Coast, looking out to the Tasman Sea as we wind our way towards the small township of Haast. We'll turn inland from here and cross the Haast Pass, to our final location for the night, the township of Wanaka. Whether you're skipping stones on the lake's edge or relaxing by the fire at the lodge, Wanaka is a great spot to rediscover simple pleasures. We'll enjoy our final night together with a celebratory dinner as we sit and soak in the adventures from the last few days.

Edgewater Resort, Wanaka (All meals)

Hiking Distance: 2.8 kilometres, 1.5 hours

Elevation Gain: 10 metres

Elevation Loss: 10 metres

DAY 5

Scenic Flight to Milford Sound

This morning we'll rise early and jump straight on board our scenic flight to Milford Sound! Departing from Wanaka Airport. Our flight will

take us over Lake Wanaka, then out to Mt Aspiring National Park; this stunning region is part of the World Heritage areas of Te Wahipounamu and recognised for its unspoilt beauty. We'll fly past the peak of Mt Aspiring and view glaciers, remote valleys and pristine alpine lakes over Fiordland National Park - the views as we fly into Milford Sound will stay with us forever and we'll even have views out to the Tasman Sea! The scale of Milford Sound is best appreciated from the air, with cascading waterfalls and sheer cliffs which fall into the blue waters of the Sound. We'll return via the Dart Valley and Glenorchy before heading over the Cardrona Saddle to Queenstown where we'll say our goodbyes and arrive in time for late afternoon flights.

(Breakfast, Lunch)

Flight Time: 1.5 hours

Useful Info

What's the maximum group size on this trip?

This trip has a maximum of 14 guests plus two experienced guides.

Where does the trip start?

On the first day of the trip we can either pick you up from the Merivale Manor in Christchurch at 9.30am or at Christchurch airport (CHC) in front of the Help Desk (near door 7) at 11am.

Where does the trip end?

On the last day of the trip we can drop you off at Queenstown airport (ZQN) in time for the recommended flights below, or anywhere in Queenstown after airport drop-offs around 4pm.

What flights would you recommend?

Arrival: If you're flying in on the first day of the trip, we recommend arriving in Christchurch before 8am.

Departure: Flying out on the last day of the trip, we recommend departing from Queenstown after 4pm domestic and 5pm international flight departures. If you're considering alternative flight times please check with us.

Do you charge a forced single supplement if I'm a solo traveller?

Most other travel companies charge all solo travellers a single supplement fee. We don't! When it comes to accommodation, our trip fares are based on a twin-share rate, which means we'll match you up with another person of the same gender to share a room with. If there's no one suitable to share with, there's no forced single supplement! Having said that, if you specifically request your own room, you can opt to pay the additional single supplement fee.

General Trip Information

You can find details on recommended flights and fitness, as well as trip start and end in the 'Useful Information' section above.

Availability

Once a trip is full, we'll often add a second departure that travels in a different direction (southbound or northbound, referring to your direction of travel upon departure), to ensure the highest level of service on all of our trips and to keep our group sizes small. Both trip directions include all the activities mentioned, just in a different order, and they work whichever direction you go.

Transportation

Since New Zealand isn't quite small enough to simply walk everywhere and still see all the highlights in a limited amount of time, we travel in fuel-efficient 20-seat Toyota Coasters and our guides make the journey enjoyable. They'll introduce you to some local tunes as well as provide interesting commentary, and we pass the time you do spend on the road in a fun, social way, with New Zealand's ever-changing scenery providing a feast for the eyes. Our focus, as always, is getting you out of the vehicle and into the scenery.

Included

The fare includes just about everything, specifically:

- All guiding services. We have two guides per trip, a lead guide/driver and a co-guide/chef. On our smallest trips, one of our most experienced guides will look after you.
- Comfortable accommodation for the entire period you are with us. We can also organise pre and post-trip accommodation, if you like.
- Breakfast, lunch and dinner on most days, as indicated, with many delicious meals prepared by your guides, who are adept at catering for all dietary requirements. In places like Queenstown and Auckland there's a wide variety of restaurants and we've found people prefer to check out the options on their own. Alcohol is not included, although we do spring a few drinks here and there!
- All activities described in the itineraries including hiking, kayaking, biking and rafting, except the optional extra activities that are available at additional cost.
- All transportation from trip start to end.
- The highest level of service from our guides and from our experienced team behind the scenes. We're always here for you and we always go the extra mile!

Flexibility

We're really flexible and none of our itineraries are written in stone, so if you have a particular interest you'd like to include or you need to leave a trip earlier or join later (at an altered fare), just let us know and we can almost always make it happen. Likewise, all adventure travel requires a certain amount of flexibility and we sometimes have to make minor changes to the accommodation or activities because of weather and availability, but we have plenty of options up our sleeve and the experience to keep your trip running seamlessly.

Accommodation

You'll love the interesting places we've discovered over the years. You'll visit really spectacular and off-the-beaten-track locations and stay in comfortable bed and breakfasts, lodges, apartments and hotels for the most part. Keep in mind that the most remote locations have limited accommodation options, but 5-star scenery!

Outdoor Experience

Our trips allow you to make the most of the New Zealand backcountry, whether you're relatively new to hiking or a seasoned trekker. Our highly trained and experienced guides will be at your side, safely guiding you to magnificent places that you wouldn't get to on your own. The challenges are there, if you're looking for them, and all we ask is that you be energetic and in reasonable shape and we guarantee you'll have an incredible time. You don't have to have been kayaking to enjoy paddling out on the water and you don't need to be a serious cyclist to enjoy most of the rides we do. In fact, we have so many options available that you don't need to ride or paddle at all if you'd rather hike or just laze around!

We hold all relevant government licenses and permits, have an impeccable safety record and are certified by OutdoorsMark, New Zealand's leading outdoor safety auditors. So, with all the research, logistics, safety and hospitality taken care of, you can focus on the most important thing - making the most of your vacation!

Not Included

The trip fare doesn't include flights before or after your trip, or 15% NZ government tax. This is your all-inclusive vacation and there are no hidden costs. You'll have a few meals and drinks to cover, extra activities if you choose them, and you'll probably feel like tipping your guides at the end of a fabulous trip, though you won't need to pull out your wallet every few minutes on your Active Adventures trip!

Itinerary Updates

We update our itineraries annually, so please check our website for the most up-to-date itineraries and pricing. We make every effort to ensure itinerary accuracy at the time of printing, though changes may occur without prior notice due to local circumstances.