

Day 1: Dunedin, New Zealand

Our New Zealand nature adventure starts in Dunedin. Dunedin boomed during a series of gold rushes in the 19th century and today remains one of New Zealand's most important commercial centers. Those who arrive early may wish to join our Expedition Leader for an optional tour of the Otago Peninsula, which will include Penguin Place, a private conservation reserve and rehabilitation center for endangered yellow-eyed penguins. The reserve was founded in 1985 when just eight breeding pairs inhabited the property. This penguin species, found only in New Zealand, is one of the rarest in the world, with fewer than 4,000 remaining. This evening, we gather for a welcome dinner at Larnach Castle, built in 1871.

Day 2: Dunedin / Invercargill / Stewart Island

This morning we set off through the little-visited Catlins, a rugged coastal region that is one of the most sparsely populated areas of New Zealand. Hemmed by a rockbound shoreline, this windswept region holds lush woodlands, a petrified forest, hidden lakes and cascading waterfalls. Large tracts of rain forest are filled with native flora including tree ferns, rata, kahikatea, miro, kamaha and silver beech, while the coastline is defined by stark cliffs, sea caves, rock stacks and sandy bays. Wildlife is plentiful—keep an eye out for seabirds and forest-dwelling birds including tui, bellbird, fantail, native pigeon and the rare mohua, plus New Zealand sea lions, fur seals and Hector's dolphins offshore.

Reaching Invercargill, New Zealand's southernmost city, we board a short flight this afternoon to idyllic Stewart Island, 19 miles offshore, where we spend two nights. Much of this rugged granite island lies within Rakiura National Park, whose Maori name means "Land of Glowing Skies." Its rain forests shelter many native plants, which we discover on nature walks through the unique habitat. The island is a haven for birds, and we listen for the songs of parakeets and bellbirds. And of course we'll hope to spy the elusive brown kiwi on a guided night walk—Stewart Island is one of the best places in New Zealand to seek them. And if we're very lucky, we might catch a glimpse of the aurora australis in the southern sky.

Day 3: Stewart Island / Ulva Island

On a private boat cruise off Stewart Island this morning, view the multitudes of pelagic seabirds that live and breed in these coastal waters. We expect to see a great variety at close range—albatrosses, shearwaters, prions and several penguin species including yellow-eyed, blue and Fiordland crested. Take an intimate nature walk with a local naturalist who works closely with Stewart Island native and birder extraordinaire Ulva Goodwillie, the namesake of the Ulva Island sanctuary. On Ulva, just a short boat ride away from neighboring Stewart Island, explore pristine trails and beaches, observing rare bird species that no longer exist on the main islands, such as saddleback and yellowhead. Ulva has been carefully managed to be free of invasive predators and pests since 1997, allowing native wildlife to flourish as it did prior to the arrival of introduced species. The small island has also never been logged, offering visitors an immersion in an untouched rain forest that provides shelter for Ulva's healthy bird population.

Days 4: Te Anau / Fiordland National Park

After a short flight back to the mainland, continue this morning to Te Anau, following the Southern Scenic Route that connects the rugged south coast with the eastern edge of Fiordland National Park. Te Anau is a picturesque village on Lake Te Anau, the largest of New Zealand's southern glacial lakes, and the gateway to the national park. Backdropped by the Kepler and Murchison ranges, most of Lake Te Anau lies within the boundaries of Fiordland National Park and the Te Wahipounamu World Heritage Site. This afternoon we visit Te Anau Bird Sanctuary to see the rare flightless takahe, an endemic bird with blue-black and olive-green plumage and a large red bill. The sanctuary is one of two that have been integral to the success of New Zealand's Takahe Recovery Program, which has pioneered conservation techniques to bring this endangered bird back from the very brink of extinction. As of 2021, about 445 were in existence. The sanctuary is also home to indigenous weka, parakeets, tui, kea, kaka and wood pigeons.

Day 5: Fiordland / Milford Sound Private Cruise / Wanaka

This morning, one of the world's most scenic drives awaits: follow the winding Milford Road as we travel through Fiordland National Park to the sea. It's no wonder this mythical-looking land of pointed peaks and sheer rock walls, high waterfalls and drifting mists was chosen as one of the main settings for the film adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Once we reach the head of the fjord that is Milford Sound, we board a private chartered boat for a scenic cruise around this glacier-carved wonderland, with lunch served aboard. As we ply the steep-walled inlets that wind beneath a perpetual cap of snow and ice, watch ribbons of water plummet from above, and look for fur seals, crested penguins and bottlenose dolphins. If we're lucky, the mists will clear enough to reveal pyramid-shaped Mitre Peak rising two-thirds of a mile straight out of the sea. Our naturalist Expedition Leader, an expert on New Zealand wildlife and geography, interprets all we see.

Leaving Milford Sound, we head back up the spectacular Milford Road bound for Wanaka. And though our afternoon drive is a lengthy one, the scenic drama never ends as we skirt Lake Wakatipu and climb the Crown Range Road, New Zealand's highest paved highway. As we pass the historic hamlet of Cardrona, site of the Central Otago Gold Rush of the 1860s, a panorama of the aptly named Remarkables Range unfolds. Soon, the vast blue expanse of Lake Wanaka comes into view, portal to Mount Aspiring National Park. The basin filled by Lake Wanaka was gouged out by the Wanaka Glacier, born high in the ice fields that crown the jagged peaks in the distance. In the Maori language, Wanaka means "renewal of the soul"—exactly what our time here offers as we spend the next two nights on the shore of the lake.

Day 6: Lake Wanaka—Private Boat Tour to Mou Waho Island

Our day begins with a short hike to explore the area on foot—or choose to relax this morning or explore town on your own before our 3-hour private boat excursion on Lake Wanaka. Cruising into the sparkling waters, we quickly leave any sign of civilization behind, surrounded only by tawny hills rising on all sides,

with higher peaks beyond. Step ashore on remote Mou Waho Island, a predator-free nature reserve that's home to the rare flightless buff weka—a curious, amiable bird that has been extinct on the mainland since 1920. A guided bush walk to the top of the island reveals a hidden lake on the summit, a photogenic spot where we'll enjoy a cup of afternoon tea with the panorama of the Southern Alps on display before us. Our tour of the island reveals an impressive conservation success story, as we find out how invasive species—including the weasel-like stoat—were eradicated to preserve the buff weka as well as the mountain stone weta, a prehistoric insect as big as a person's thumb. After nightfall, step outside, wander down to the lakeshore, and look up: the Wanaka region has some of the darkest, starriest night skies on Earth.

Day 7: Haast Pass / Lake Moeraki

Leaving Wanaka's golden mountains behind, traverse moss-draped beech forest as we cross Haast Pass this afternoon into the heart of the West Coast glacier country. We stop to take in the view at the top of the pass, which is one of three main passages across the Southern Alps and was once an important Maori trading route. The lush scenery is glorious, and trails lead from the road's edge along turquoise streams into the rain forest to dramatic waterfalls, including Thunder Falls where we stop for a nature walk to view Haast River. Paralleling the river as we descend the pass, we ultimately reach the ocean, where we stop to walk through Ships Creek Ancient Forest. Among windswept sand dunes, we get a real taste of the wild West Coast and another opportunity to view the Hector dolphin, the world's smallest marine dolphin endemic to New Zealand. Turning north, we follow the dramatic coastal route before cutting inland to Lake Moeraki for a two-night stay at a secluded wilderness lodge in this exceptionally scenic region, which remains lightly visited.

Day 8: Exploring Lake Moeraki & Monro Beach

Lake Moeraki lies at the heart of a natural paradise in the Te Wahipounamu—South West New Zealand World Heritage Area. Virtually unchanged since the Polynesians discovered New Zealand, this dramatic landscape has been shaped by successive glaciations into fjords, rocky coastlines, sheer cliffs, waterfalls, lakes, rivers, ancient forests and volcanic sand beaches. From our lodge base, explore the natural environs on locally guided excursions, including kayaking on Lake Moeraki and a walk among head-high ferns to wild Monro Beach. Look for the kea, the world's only endangered alpine parrot, often seen in this area.

Located far from urban light pollution, we take advantage of Lake Moeraki's cover of darkness on a guided night walk. A star talk is included, as well as a chance to look for glowworms, whose bioluminescent pearl strands dangle from the trees. Our October and November departures include a private outing to see rare Tawaki penguins, found only on the southwest coast of New Zealand. Also called Fiordland crested penguins, these are the only penguins that live in the rain forest. About 2,000 pairs remain, with 10% of the population found along the shores of Lake Moeraki. At other times of the

year, we take a rain forest hike to discover thousand-year-old trees, myriad ferns and orchids, and to search for birdlife in the protected natural environs.

Day 9: Westland Tai Poutini National Park / Arthur's Pass

More of New Zealand's magnificent scenery unfolds as we travel along the west coast into glacier country. Two World Heritage Site national parks, Aoraki Mount Cook and Westland Tai Poutini, encompass many of New Zealand's highest mountains, turquoise lakes, braided rivers and massive glaciers, including the Tasman, Franz Josef and Fox. Our Expedition Leader leads a walk to an overlook where the ice fields of the Southern Alps spawn glaciers that wind down like frozen highways into primeval rain forest, almost reaching the ocean. In this unusual mix of habitats, keep an eye out for kea, the alpine parrot endemic to this part of New Zealand.

We stop at Hokitika, a historic river port born out of the 1860 gold rush. Today, the laid-back small town is known for an indigenous greenstone called pounamu, or New Zealand jade, prized by the Maori for its strength, durability and beauty, and used for weapons, tools and personal ornaments. Walk along the sandy beach where plentiful driftwood is formed into imaginative sculptures before continuing to Westland Tai Poutini National Park. Heading inland toward the icebound heights of the Southern Alps, our route traverses the Craigieburn Range, where we find endemic scree plants, giant weta insects and dramatic views of Castle Hill Basin. Our destination is Arthur's Pass Wilderness Lodge, a deluxe ecolodge set amid mountain beech forest and surrounding Arthur's Pass National Park.

Days 10 & 11: Arthur's Pass—Hiking & Kayaking / Christchurch

Our lodge lies at the heart of a working sheep station, where some 3,000 sheep are raised for fine merino wool. During a full day of exploration, learn about sheep farming and enjoy a private kayaking excursion on Lake Pearson, a placid high-country lake tucked between steep mountainsides. There are also several options to hike trails around the lodge with a local naturalist. On our final morning, take a last leisurely nature walk before departing for Christchurch. En route, we stop at a local winery for lunch. This afternoon we reach Christchurch, New Zealand's oldest city, noted for its British character and Victorian architecture, although much of the latter was lost in the devastating 2010 and 2011 Canterbury earthquakes. A brief city tour includes a stop at Quake City, an exhibit about the natural and human dimensions of the disaster, from which the city is still recovering. This evening, enjoy a farewell dinner together.

Day 12: Christchurch / Depart

Our New Zealand adventure draws to a close as we transfer to the airport for flights home.