



8 Day Southern Scenic Route

The Journey

Few New Zealand road trips rival the Southern Scenic Route for diversity. Sure, it takes in Queenstown, Milford Sound and other landmark attractions on its wiggly 'U' through the deep south, but it also travels to quieter corners, with hidden gems just as likely to wow you.

The Southern Scenic Route website paints a comprehensive picture, but read on for a hit-list of our favourite stops (often involving home-baking).



Highlights of the trip

Queenstown

Te Anau

Milford & Doubtful Sounds

Bluff

Day 1 Queenstown

Frequently lauded as one of the world's best mountain resorts, Queenstown lives up to the hype with a buzzy centre and beautiful lakeside setting. It also offers a bamboozling array of activities within easy reach including hiking and cycling trails, golf courses, wineries, and iconic must-do's such as the TSS Earnslaw lake cruise and Skyline Gondola. It's also campervan heaven, with plenty of holiday parks and reserves near the town centre.

Day 2 Queenstown to Te Anau

SH6 skirts Lake Wakatipu and meets SH94 to Te Anau. Sitting prettily beside the South Island's largest lake and boasting seasoned visitor facilities including three top-notch holiday parks, Te Anau is a great base for Fiordland adventures such as world-famous Great Walks and Milford Sound. Attractions close to town include the other-worldly Glowworm Caves, and the conservation-focused Wildlife Centre, accessible by foot or hire-bike along the view-filled Lakeside Track. Reward yourself with a Miles Better Pie. Yum.

SIDE TRIP - Milford Sound

Pies aside, we'll eat our hats if you're not totally wowed by this spectacular drive through the beautiful Eglinton Valley (campsites, sandflies) and rocky narrows around Homer Tunnel. You'll need to board a cruise for the full Milford Sound reveal – sheer mountainsides cloaked in thick greenery, waterfalls cascading into a mysterious sea. Accessed from Manapouri, south of Te Anau, Doubtful Sound is more remote, arguably more beautiful, and best

Day 3 Te Anau to Colac Bay



Distance:

138km



Driving Time:

2.25 hours

Tracking south to the coast, the Southern Scenic Route serves up an engaging mix of rural and mountain scenery dotted with diversions such as historic Clifden Suspension Bridge. Allow an hour bring a healthy appetite for charming Yesteryear's Museum Cafe in Tuatapere.

At the coast, pull off the highway to crawl over Monkey Island before you reach Colac Bay, a sleepy seaside settlement where a friendly tavern serves up fish & chips and simple camping, five minutes' walk from the quiet but wild beach.

Day 4 Colac Bay to Invercargill



Distance:

50km



Driving Time:

1 hours

Just around the corner from Colac Bay, Riverton is a salty little town spanning a picturesque estuary. The local museum – Te Hikoi – is absolutely terrific, and should prolong your visit long enough to justify refreshment at the Beach House or Mrs Clark's Cafe. (Is Southland home to New Zealand's best bakers?) SH99 ends at Invercargill, a workaday but appealing wee city with wide streets lined with low-rise old buildings, exuding a bygone-era atmosphere. Make a beeline for Southland Museum & Art Gallery, within pretty Queens Park, for wide-ranging exhibits and a tuatara house.

SIDE TRIP - Bluff

You've come too far to miss Bluff, just 28km from Invercargill and commonly – albeit erroneously – considered the mainland's southernmost point. Play your part in this deception by snapping some portraits at Stirling Point, where a walkway leads to (the even more southern) Lookout Point.

Day 5 Invercargill to Curio Bay



Distance:

81km



Driving Time:

1.5 hours

SH92 meanders east around the Catlins – a remote corner where wild coast meets rolling pasture meets forested ranges, making for a memorable scenic drive. Get into the groove at Waipapa Point (lighthouse, seals, tales of a shipwreck) and even lonelier Slope Point – the mainland’s true southernmost edge.

At Curio Bay, see a fossilised forest and precious yellow-eyed penguins, staying at the flax-sheltered headland campground. Adjacent Porpoise Bay is famous for the Hector’s dolphins that frolic alongside hypothermic swimmers and students of Catlins Surfing School.

Day 6 Curio Bay to McLean Falls



Distance:

34km



Driving Time:

0.75 hours

Stretch out this scenic day by visiting Waikawa Museum and lingering in the garden of Niagara Falls Cafe. Save space for more cake at the Whistling Frog Cafe at Catlins Kiwi Holiday Park, a welcoming place to wait for the Cathedral Caves gate to open. If you hit the right tide time and can handle a short but steep walk, go! The holiday park is also handy to McLean Falls, just one of many cascades hidden along the Catlins highway.

Day 7 McLean Falls to Surat Bay



Distance:

43km

At Papatowai, stop in at Lost Gypsy Gallery to see the power of imagination propelled with endless energy, then take the loop detour to three-tiered Purakaunui Falls. The main highway carries on to Owaka, the Catlin's biggest village and gateway to Pounaweia and Surat Bay, two settlements on a stunning estuary.

For a chance to see elephantine Hooker's sea lions, stroll along Surat Bay, simply divine in the early morning or evening light. On the estuary, Newhaven and Pounaweia holiday parks are both small, pleasant spots to park up and watch the birds.



Driving Time:

1 hours

Day 8 Owaka to Dunedin



Distance:

130km

Ten minutes' beyond Owaka, detour to Nugget Point, one of New Zealand's most dramatic headlands. A short walk leads to a lighthouse overlooking rocky islets wearing skirts of swirling kelp, topped with blubbery seals.

From there it's a relatively pedestrian rural drive to Dunedin, a heritage-filled city adjacent to the Otago Peninsula – a haven for seals, sea lions, and special sea birds such as albatrosses and penguins. Dunedin and Portobello holiday parks are both handy bases for the peninsula's attractions.



Driving Time:

2.25 hours