

# Catlins and Stewart Island - itinerary

## DAY ONE

D

This morning we'll board our flight to Christchurch with excitement and anticipation. Upon arrival we will have a private guided tour of the revitalised city. The tour takes us through the city, showcasing the many initiatives and architectural projects that have emerged in the wake of the devastating earthquakes of a decade ago. After the tour, we have a few hours of free time to explore some of the city's free attractions. You could visit the Riverside Markets and the trendy New Regent Street Precinct, enjoy a coffee and pastries at one of the many charming cafes, take a stroll through the picturesque Botanic Gardens and admire the stunning exhibits at the Christchurch Art Gallery, or if you fancy a bit of retail therapy, visit The Crossing, Christchurch's newest and most centrally located shopping centre, where you can indulge in some retail therapy and try some of the local delicacies. As evening falls, we catch a lift back to our hotel with the bus or opt for a relaxing stroll back to the hotel. We will be staying at Rydges Latimer Hotel which is centrally located in the city. Once here, you can take some time to freshen up before joining the group for our meal onsite at the restaurant.

## DAY TWO

B, L, D

After breakfast, we'll board the coach for our ultimate destination of Oamaru – the largest town in North Otago and home to some beautiful Victorian architecture. But first, we'll be stopping for morning tea in Ashburton before heading to gather for a sumptuous lunch in the picturesque South Canterbury foothills. The quintessential Kiwi dining experience at Harlau House Café features locally sourced food, fresh seasonal vegetables, and warm hospitality. After lunch, we are in for something extra special. Owners Dot and Neil Smith created Riverstone Castle on the outskirts of Oamaru to fulfill their dream fantasy. The castle includes a moat, a tower, and even a dungeon. One of a kind and full of surprises, this impressive fortress is unforgettable. From here, we'll head into Oamaru and get settled at our

accommodation, where we will dine before our trip out tonight to view the famous blue penguin colony. We will be witnessing the world's smallest penguin in its natural environment at a rock quarry at the head of the harbor. Watch as these aquatic, flightless birds arrive home from their day's fishing and marvel at the experience of this magical event.

## DAY THREE

B, L, D

Today is all about time travel, starting with a trip back to the 1880s and the crazy, quirky Steampunk HQ experience. Set within Oamaru's old Grain Elevator building, the museum is a surreal dive into an altered universe of gadgets, bizarre machinery, pipes & gas cylinders, skeletal sculptures, flickering lights, and even a full-scale train engine that billows smoke and spits fire. Late morning, there will be time to explore the town's Victorian Quarter before heading off to take in the Moeraki Boulders on Koekohe Beach. Large spherical concretions, these fascinating formations are said to have been growing for over 60 million years, with the largest ones reaching over 2 metres wide. We'll enjoy lunch at the Moeraki Tavern, overlooking the tranquil Moeraki Bay. Our next stop takes us to the magnificent Katiki Beach and Shag Point, where we're spellbound by the rugged beauty of the coastal scenery and the local wildlife. We then head to the Centrewood Historic Homestead, where we are given a tour of the beautiful gardens, outbuildings, and the exterior of the impressive house. The rich history of the property and its former residents is enthralling, and we leave with a newfound appreciation for the region's past. We end our day in the charming town of Port Chalmers, where we explore the eclectic shops and cafes on George Street. The vibrant community atmosphere is contagious, and we take in the sights and sounds of this unique town before retiring to our accommodation, the Distinction Hotel, the former Chief Post Office.

## DAY FOUR

B, L, D

David Attenborough has described this morning's destination as "a unique and extraordinary place" that "every visitor to Dunedin should see". The Royal Albatross Centre houses the only mainland breeding colony of Royal Albatross in the world. These graceful and majestic birds and their nesting and chick-rearing

habits have been thrilling visitors since 1983 when they opened to the public. After our very own guided tour, there's time for a cuppa at the Toroa Café and an opportunity to secure a souvenir from the gift shop to remind us of our time here. Sticking to the royal theme - straighten your crowns, folks - we're heading now to Larnach Castle & Gardens on the Otago Peninsula. With a rich history dating back to 1871 when merchant baron and politician William Larnach began building the castle, the estate is magnificently set amidst exquisite grounds ascribed a Garden of International Significance. The current owners have spent decades painstakingly restoring, conserving, and assembling collections so that visitors can appreciate the breathtaking garden spectacle and stunning craftsmanship held within this national treasure. We'll have lunch at the Larnach Ballroom Café before moving on to another unique time capsule - Olveston House. The Theomin family gifted this authentic and original historic home to Dunedin City Council in 1967, and the tour also includes the family's motor car - a 1921 Fiat 510 Tourer. We'll return to the hotel and have dinner at the Parcels Restaurant again tonight.

## DAY FIVE

B, MT, L, D

Good walking shoes are required today as our journey covers the scenic route from Dunedin to Invercargill, diverting through the famous Catlins Forest Park region to encounter arguably the most pristine coast in New Zealand. We will have a stop in Balclutha for morning tea along the way. After that, we will visit the iconic landform of Nugget Point, say hello to the lighthouse, and later marvel at the splendor of the tiered 20-metre-high Purakaunui Falls - the most photographed waterfall in the country. This region is home to many seabirds, including penguins, gannets, and royal spoonbills, and is also the habitat for a large breeding colony of fur seals. We will have a late lunch at the award-winning Whistling Frog café in Papatowai, which will be a yummy stopover in a pretty setting. From here, we will get a chance to learn more about the local history during our visit to the Waikawa Museum and Information Centre. We will also stop next to the spectacular Curio Bay to stretch our legs. Curio Bay is home to a colony of rare, yellow-eyed penguins, a pod of Hector's Dolphins, and when the tide goes out, a 180-million-year-old Jurassic fossil forest is revealed. The Waipapa Point lighthouse, first lit on

the 1st of January 1884, has been a popular location with photographers seeking the perfect shot, and it is flanked by golden beaches, often the spot for sleeping sea lions. Finally, we will head to New Zealand's southernmost city, Invercargill, for the night, and our accommodation will be at the Ascot Park Hotel.

## DAY SIX

B, D

We will take our time today and have a look around Invercargill and embark on a local tour called Discover Riverton – Heritage and Scenic Tour. We'll enjoy a personal outing to the lovely seaside town of Riverton, locally called the Riviera of the South. The tour highlights include a visit to Te Hikoi Southern Journey Museum and Heritage Centre, exploring Historic Houses, taking in the breathtaking views from Mores Scenic Reserve Lookout, and visiting Howell's Point. After a lovely lunch at a local restaurant, we will return to Invercargill for some free time to check out the local shopping scene before returning to the hotel.

## DAY SEVEN

B, D

You may want to have some sea legs medication if you suffer from motion sickness on the boat. This morning, we will make our way to Bluff for our ferry crossing to Stewart Island. Upon arrival, we will check into our accommodation, and then you will have some free time to have lunch at either the South Sea's Hotel or the quirky French Cafe. In the afternoon, we will gather to board the bus for an informative tour of the village and surrounding bays, including the unique flora and fauna of Lee Bay, the beautiful Horseshoe Bay, and Observation Rock. Keep your eyes peeled for the Rakiura Grey Ghost or even a Kiwi mooching along one of the secluded beaches. Returning to the South Seas Hotel, we will have time to relax and freshen up before dinner. Then it is time for a drink with the locals, followed by dinner onsite at the hotel.

## DAY EIGHT

B, L, D

After enjoying breakfast, you can spend some free time wandering on nearby short walk tracks or take a moment to visit the brand new Rakiura Museum located next to the DOC Information Centre. Later in the morning, we will embark on a leisurely

cruise of the beautiful Paterson Inlet and take a guided walk in the Ulva Island Wildlife Sanctuary. During the journey, our guide will share fascinating stories of early Maori history and European settlement while highlighting some of Paterson Inlet's stunning scenery with hidden coves and unspoilt beaches. They will also be passionate about the area and provide informative commentary, answering any questions you may have. Keep an eye out for fur seals and penguins as they are commonly found in the area. Our next stop is the Ulva Island Wildlife Sanctuary, home to Weka, bush robins, rare saddlebacks, yellow heads, and other native species, as well as being a protected habitat for some of New Zealand's unique plant species. A regular highlight is encountering an inquisitive Weka on the beach during our 45-minute guided walk. After the walk, relax onboard the modern catamaran, taking in the coastal scenery during the remainder of the cruise around Paterson Inlet before heading back to base.

## DAY NINE

B, MT, D

You may want to have some sea legs medication if you suffer from motion sickness on the boat. After breakfast, we board the ferry for the 1hr crossing back to Bluff. Once we land and meet our local guide, we then travel to a café for morning tea before departing on our exploration of Bluff, Invercargill, and its surroundings, taking in some of the historical points of interest of the country towns and their people. It's a full-day tour, and we will stop for lunch along the way to explore the new huge Bill Richardson Transport World. We will then return to our accommodation late afternoon to relax and meet for our last dinner together.

## DAY TEN

B

Sadly, we bid farewell to our newfound southern friends today. We will be making our way to the airport before flying back up the country to our homes.