

BEN'S SOUTH ISLAND ITINERARY:

DAY ONE

Land in Christchurch, grab a SIM card at the airport, pick up your camper-van and shop for groceries, drive to Lake Tekapo, view Church of the Good Sheppard late at night to see the stars. The [Mackenzie Region](#) is an International Dark Sky Reserve.

DAY TWO

Catch the Sunrise at Lake Tekapo, drive to Mt Cook Village, check out [Tasman Lake](#) and do the [Hooker Valley Trail](#) then sleep at Whitehorse Hill Campground.

DAY THREE

Walk up the [Sealy Tarns to Mueller Hut](#) either stay the night or do a long return day walk (4 hours or less each way). You'll need to book if you're staying the night at Mueller, over summer it's packed. I've only been to the region in Spring and Autumn. Put an intentions form in at the Department of Conservation (DOC) Centre.

Drive to Lake Pukaki for a free campsite or stay another night at Whitehorse Hill campground if not at Mueller Hut.

DAY FOUR

Catch the sunrise at [Lake Pukaki](#) or Tasman Lake depending on where you stayed. Drive to Wanaka and stop along the way at Lindi's Pass and hike to the Peak, it's short and steep, catch the sunset at [Lake Wanaka](#). Camp out toward West Wanaka there are both holiday parks and freedom camping areas. All options are nice. [Glendhu Bay Motor Camp](#) is nice or you can stay at [Diamond Lake](#) Car park for free.

DAY FIVE

Do the [Rob Roy Track](#) in Mt Aspiring National Park it's 3-4 hours return, the whole area is beautiful, don't rush here you can enjoy parts of the Matukituki River and have a picnic or swim. Stay in Glendhu Bay or closer to Wanaka. We use freedom camping zones a majority of the time unless they were in an inconvenient place. Again, use the Camper-mate App everywhere.

DAY SIX

Drive to Queenstown via the Crown Range unless it's snowed (which you can [check here](#)), in that case; use the Cromwell Road. You could walk the [Ben Lomond Track](#), it's an all-day walk, you may want to do something easier like walk up [Queenstown Hill](#). Stay on the road to Glenorchy.

DAY SEVEN

Check out Glenorchy and Kinloch, the drive is great but there isn't a heap to do. Call it a rest day, I'm sure you'd be tired from all the walking and early starts. Beware of the sand-flies in Kinloch though. Shop in Queenstown and drive to [Fiordland](#). Stay at one of the last DOC campsites e.g. Cascade Creek. Keep in mind Sound has no shops, there's very little there other than a petrol pump, accommodation, cruise terminal and an Airport. Shop in Te Anau or Queenstown.

DAY EIGHT

Walk to Key Summit for Sunrise (leave ninety minutes prior to sunrise), then continue to Falls and Return to the Divide or for a really long day, walk to Lake Mackenzie and back to the Divide car park. Keep in mind its more than twenty-five kilometres return trip to Mackenzie via Key Summit back to the Divide Car Park. Catch the sunset at Milford Sound and stay at the Milford Lodge. Milford lodge is great, beautiful facilities and a great spot to wash all your clothes etc.

DAY NINE

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View the lookouts around Milford, head to the Chasm, cruise Milford Sound, enjoy another sunset in Milford and then sleep at a DOC site or Milford Lodge again. We managed to get a cruise through Jucy Rentals for super cheap as the driver goes free. You definitely need to see Milford from the air on or a boat to enjoy it all. You only see a small amount of it from the 'township'.

DAY TEN

Walk to [Lake Marian](#), it's 20 minutes to Marian Falls and 3 hours return to Lake Marian, it's easily one of the best short walks I've done! Catch the Sunset in Te Anau and stay a few kilometres out of Kingston on Kingston Rd.

DAY ELEVEN

Catch the sunrise over Lake Wakatipu, park at the [Remarkables Ski Area](#) and walk up past Lake Alta to Single Cone Peak for incredible views. Keep in mind it is difficult walking from Lake Alta to Single Cone, I wouldn't recommend it in snowy/icy conditions. Stay at one of two sites near the Lower Shot Over River Bridge. Queenstown has many good places to eat; my favourites based on value for money are Pub on Wharf, Atlas Beer Cafe, Devilburger and Fergburger.

DAY TWELVE

Enjoy Queenstown or head over to Wanaka and hang out. This was a nothing day for us as the weather was quite wet. Allow a couple of days to spare for weather. Typically New Zealand will get a fair bit of rain. Aotearoa is commonly given as the Māori name for New Zealand, which can be translated as Land of the Long White Cloud. Stay near Glendhu Bay again or head out past Lake Hawea for freedom camping.

DAY THIRTEEN

Relax out off West Wanaka Road, there's a nice secluded bay. However, it's private farmland so respect the land, don't give them a reason to prevent public access. Hike up to the top of Mt Roy via the popular Roys Peak Trail. Enjoy the sunset and camp the night if you want the sunrise too. For sunrise, we woke to fog and mist, definitely mist the views. The weather is definitely isn't going to be perfect, NZ rains a lot, just work around it. Remember to leave no trace and respect the land.

DAY FOURTEEN

Enjoy one of the most spectacular sunrises the island has to offer. Chill out in Wanaka for the remainder of the day. Stay near Glendhu Bay again or head out past Lake Hawea for freedom camping. There's a bunch of DOC operated sites between Haast Pass and Lake Hawea.

DAY FIFTEEN

Head to the West Coast via Haast Pass, stop at all the beautiful waterfalls along the way, Blue Pools are the main tourist hotspot as they are so easy to access. However, there are many hidden gems along Haast Pass. If you're brave enough you can jump in from the bridge or top right of the image below, I can tell you personally it's cold. Camp at Lake Paringa DOC Site.

DAY SIXTEEN

Sunrise at Lake Matheson, it's the best time of day for this location as the sun rises behind the mountains and wind is generally most calm at dawn. Check out Fox Glacier. Then head to Franz Joseph village, there's a glow-worm tunnel that is a bit of fun. It's nothing amazing but a mini-adventure. Stay at one of the Caravan Parks. No camping seems free around this region.

DAY SEVENTEEN

Check out the Franz Joseph Glacier and Peters Pool Walk, I don't rate Fox and Franz Joseph walks too highly due to my Mountaineering experience. Possibly book a Glacier Heli Hike if you can afford to. Always fill the chopper seats to save money. That way you get a real taste of the glaciers. All New Zealand's Glaciers are retreating significantly due to Global Warming so visit them while you can. Drive to Hokitika for the sunset and visit the Glow Worm Dell. When around Glow Worms keep your torchlight off them and be quiet, when disturbed their lights will fade, infrared lights (red) don't affect them.

DAY EIGHTEEN

Drive to Hokitika Gorge, the countryside is beautiful and the Gorge is great. Then head to Punakaiki Pancake Rocks and Blowhole for sunset. There's a free campsite under a bridge next to a river on the way into town.

DAY NINETEEN

Do the [Fox River Cave Walk](#), check out the Upper Cave if it's open, the Lower Caves are deemed unsafe there's also a walk to Ballroom Overhang that may be nice, I didn't do it. Truman Walk is a nice walk to the beach near Punakaiki. Stay the night in the same spot as the night before.

DAY TWENTY

Do the Poorari River Walk as far as you want to, then drive to Greymouth, swim at the beach, do some grocery shopping, as there are no shops until Christchurch. Drive to Arthurs Pass. Camp at one of the free sites. Be careful of Mice! We had to bail to the DOC site the second night as mice ran around the frames of the Van.

DAY TWENTY ONE

Do the [Temple Basin Walk](#) and Bealy River Chasm walk. Avalanche Peak is another option but it requires quite a bit of fitness, skill and knowledge to stay safe up there. Temple Basin was good enough for us and I was able to continue up higher by myself whilst Amy waited at the Ski Huts.

DAY TWENTY-TWO

Go to the Devil's Punchbowl Waterfalls, it's stunning, then stop at Castle Hill and pack for your flight home or squeeze in the [Cave Stream walk](#), we didn't cause we didn't want wet gear for the flight home and we were short on time!

HERE'S WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFORE YOU GO:

Firstly, download the 'Campermate' Application for your smartphone. It has literally everything from places to stay, things to do, toilets, petrol stations etc. It's got you covered. It also works without reception, so it is basically a navigation system too as it shows your position on the map at all times.

You don't really need a Navigation System, as the South Island is very easy to drive around. Most Roads are one lane. Which also means you either do a lot of overtaking large motor-homes or drive incredibly slowly everywhere.

Be careful driving, tourists that are used to driving on the other side of the road are everywhere and there are far too many tragic accidents, I had cars come onto the wrong side and I personally know people who've passed away from this.

Auxiliary Cord for some tunes, you'll be driving a lot and the radio in New Zealand is horrendous for signal and there is few stations too.

Keep in mind it's hard to dry and clothes if you're on the road all the time. So, pack some clothes that will dry quickly. If you're not too soft, you'll be swimming in freezing water for the daily wash. Some Eco-friendly soap and a quick dry towel are essential.

Don't bring suitcases; use hiking packs for obvious reasons.

Bring two pairs of shoes you can walk in. Shoes with a waterproof outer are awesome, but when they get wet inside they are hard to dry. So, some thongs/ jandals are essential.

Being a photographer, I have a solar powered battery set up from Goal Zero to charge everything. You can buy something small to keep your phone charged no matter where you are. Disconnection from social media and the zombie phone life is the plan but you'll want to research places along the way. So, a phone is definitely useful.

Buy an NZ sim card; it's only 30 dollars for a couple gigs of data.

Book ahead if you want to do anything that is popular for example the ['Great Walks'](#) like the Milford, Routeburn and Kepler Track all require bookings for huts and campsites. However, there are many amazing walks that are far less popular that don't require bookings.

New Zealand has strict Freedom Camping Laws having a 'self-contained' vehicle allows you to stay in particular areas for free. If I didn't have a van on the road trip I wouldn't have been able to do half the stuff I wanted to do. I photographed stars at Three AM; I tried to catch every sunrise and sunset. I wanted to fit in as much as possible. There's never enough time for a New Zealand trip. I could drive late at night, park, sleep and wake up early go again. There's no point paying for accommodation if you are barely staying the night. That said, I didn't hire a van for the North Island, as it was cheaper stay in cabins and camp.

Read up on Didymo [here](#), it's a type of Algae commonly spread by hikers, it chokes streams and creeks affecting ecosystems. Don't ignore shoe-cleaning stations when signposted.

Be prepared for Sand-flies/ Midges, they can be horrendous. They are mostly along the West Coast and in Fiordland. Milford Sound was the worst for them. Cover up everywhere, or enjoy! Don't scratch the bites either.

Allow extra time/days for bad weather. It's very likely the weather will alter your plans. Don't be afraid to get wet though, beats sitting around!

Please don't poop everywhere; tourists are causing dramas with this [issue](#) particularly in the Mt Cook Region. Bury it minimum 15cm below the surface if the soil is fertile, if the environment is a fragile e.g. alpine tarns then take it with you.