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It's time for a road trip around the New Zealand's Top Of The South.



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New Zealand/Aotearoa is renowned for its captivating nature, culinary delights, and cultural treasures. A road trip around the top of the South Island reveals why.

Let's give New Zealand its due credit; it does road trip scenery incredibly well. Blessed with three National Parks, the top section of the south island has no shortage of jaw-dropping scenes. But the rugged mountains, verdant forests and stunning coastlines are just the start of its charms. Add unique stays, sublime eating, vineyards, a warm Maori *haere mai* (welcome) and a reverence for the land, and the Top Of The South is a picture-perfect place to hit the road.

Day 1: Christchurch to West Coast

Fly into re-imagined Christchurch to start your South Island adventure and pick up a car at the airport. As you head into the wilds of the West Coast—home to jagged mountains, deep valleys and untamed wilderness—you'll immediately feel a change of pace. This is a road trip on steroids.

Reconnect with nature on your first night with a unique stay at Te Aka Treehouse, one of the country's newest off-grid retreats combining eco-consciousness with luxury. Sleep among the tree canopy, gaze at stars overhead and wake to birdsong.



Start your adventure with glimpses of the stunning Southern Alps. (Image: Getty/Prime Images)

If taking in the dramatic landscapes from the road isn't striking enough (it actually is), try not to gape at their scale and grandeur when walking above them. Take the West Coast Treetop Walkway and Zipline above the ancient Rimu and Kamahi rainforests, catching glimpses of beautiful Lake Mahinapua and the majestic snow-capped Southern Alps through the canopy.

In the afternoon, take to the lakes with a cruise aboard West Coast Scenic Waterways' Eco Adventurer cruise. Listen to birds calling, and spot Mt Cook along the way. Take a self-guided kayak tour (or be led by local historian Gavin Hopper) to learn more about the local area.



See the rainforests from a whole new perspective. (Image: Miles Holden)

Day 2: Nelson Tasman

Outdoor activities are rife in the Nelson Tasman region. At the gateway to the Abel Tasman National Park, beachside Kaiteriteri is the perfect launch pad to explore the golden sands (coloured gold from the iron in the surrounding granite), clear waters and forests of the country's most popular national park. Sample the best of it with a Great Day Out, Cruise & Walk with Wilsons Abel Tasman. Cruise into a marine reserve, explore remote beaches, wander rainforest and waterfall trails and view lounging seals from close range.



Explore the golden sands of Abel Tasman. (Image: Miles Holden)

The less active can head to the charming waterfront village of Mapua Wharf to feast on local treats. Take in the water views from the ample deck of Jelly Fish and dine on tantalising dishes any time of the day, or sample fresh seafood and more at The Apple Shed, originally a fruit storage shed, and maybe a local cider too. After, explore the boutiques and galleries and leave room for a ‘real fruit ice cream’, made with – you guessed it – real fruit, a Nelson invention.

Stay in the comfort of premium beachfront Kaiteriteri Recreation Reserve Apartments in the heart of these natural wonders. Ocean views or park views, comfy apartments or family-friendly cabins: it’s your choice. With options for all seasons, more action awaits with walking, sailing, kayaking, mountain biking and boat trips on tap, or mix in good food with your exercise by cycling the Tasman’s Great Taste Trail. The onsite restaurant offers summer sun or winter fires, and spectacular views.



Embark on an adventure while you mountain bike. (Image: Virginia Woolf)

Day 3: Marlborough

Sauvignon blanc put Marlborough on the map. Discover why with a private [Cloudy Bay Sip & Sail experience](#). You’ll start with an educational tour of the vineyard followed by an exclusive tasting of award-winning wines. Then be zipped to Picton, gateway to the Marlborough Sounds, where you’ll experience first-hand the beauty of this stunning sailing spot from a 54-foot luxury yacht.



Savour the breathtaking views from a 54-foot luxury yacht at this stunning sailing spot.

A scenic helicopter flight offers another stunning perspective of this maze of waterways and densely forested islands. With [Helicopters Nelson](#), take in the majesty of the Richmond Ranges then fly over the Pelorus, Kenepuru and Queen Charlotte Sounds. Top it off with a romantic picnic on a private beach or atop a mountain.

Stay in the relaxed elegance of [The Marlborough boutique luxury hotel](#) in the heart of vineyards, your temporary country estate for the night surrounded by a sea of green. Originally built in 1901 and relocated, this Victorian Convent has been beautifully and carefully preserved. Slip next door to Harvest Restaurant for a gastronomic feast of local flavours and wines. Sit inside the light-filled restaurant, take in the garden views from the sunny deck or find a private spot in the expansive gardens.



Relax in the comfort of the Marlborough Boutique Luxury Hotel.

Day 4: Kaikōura

Unlike migrating whales, giant sperm whales—the world’s largest toothed predator—live in the waters around Kaikōura all year round and they’re the star attraction on a boat tour with Whale Watch Kaikōura. You may also spot other whales—humpbacks, blue, pilot or southern right whales, or even Orcas in summer. In fact, there’s a 95 per cent chance of spotting a whale, or 80 per cent of your money back if you don’t. Fur seals, dolphins or the endangered wandering albatross are also on the watch list.



Spot whales with the stunning mountains as your backdrop. (Image: Miles Holden)

Between the Kaikoura mountains and the Pacific Ocean, [Hapuku Kitchen](#) celebrates nature’s larder and takes inspiration from the wild landscape, giving guests a deeper understanding of the food on their plate and a culinary adventure. Half-day and full-day experiences include harvesting and foraging from the gardens, hands-on cooking and of course, eating the delicious results.



Enjoy garden-to-table meals. (Image: Miles Holden)

On a working deer farm at the base of a mountain, [Hapuku Lodge & Tree Houses](#) offer luxurious 5-star digs on Kaikoura's coastline. It's a place to relax in its intimate indoor/outdoor setting and from which to explore the maritime landscape of Kaikōura. Eat up: a stay here includes an exquisite three-course dinner and à la carte breakfast, and birdwatching, hiking, fishing or surfing is just a stroll away.



Enjoy an intimate stay surrounded by the majestic mountains. (Image: Miles Holden)

Day 5: Hurunui

Last stop is Hurunui, a place of endless rugged coastlines, lush forests and rolling hills and with a long history in wellness. Visitors can unwind with indulgent spa treatments, vineyard stops and award-winning dining. The area is studded with thermal pools to soak in, walking tracks to explore and waters to go jetboating on.

At Greystone Wines in North Canterbury, grapes are grown organically and regeneratively to work in harmony with the land. The result is fine wines that provide a snapshot of time and place. Pop into the cellar door for a taste or settle in for a long lunch with perfect wine pairings, perhaps one of their world-famous Vineyard Ferment Pinot Noir or a flagship Chardonnay.



Level up your luxury at Matai Peak.

Level up your luxury at Matai Peak, once a shepherd's hut, now a unique hideaway. Completely secluded, it's accessible only by 4WD or helicopter. Sip champagne on arrival and marvel at clear views of the Milky Way from your outdoor spa. It even comes with a personal chef creating meals straight from the farm.

Before you head back to Christchurch, refresh mind and body at Hanmer Springs Thermal Pools & Spa, one of New Zealand's premier day spas in a charming alpine village. Expect indulgent pampering and luxurious massages as well as intimate private pools and sauna and steam rooms. Replay your holiday over in your mind. There's been a lot to take in.



Cap off your trip with a long lunch and ideal wine pairings at Greystones Vineyard.

Start planning the road trip of a lifetime by visiting topofthesouthnz.com.

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