

## Doing Number 8 or Ring around NZ part 1.

This is the best way to do the full tour in a figure 8 with only 30 odd Kms of the same road and that is on the West Coast and the weather is sure to be bad at either time so what the hell.

Take it as **Christchurch** in and out for point to point .....

KIWI ---- Aotearoa "Or the Land of the wrong white crowd"

I think you can try to fit too much in. So will try to suggest an all round trip that stops in the most active places..... this link is a map. Can go in reverse if you wish? Remember to get the masses of superb free maps/ pamphlets etc from what are the best Info Centres anywhere.....

<http://www.backpack-newzealand.com/mapofsouthisland.html>

Also check on areas in this link

<http://www.uniquelynz.com/nzguide.htm>

South Island Travelling Times. Distance are in kilometres. Travel times are in hours and minutes.

Blenheim															
321	Christchurch														
4.35															
683	361	Dunedin													
9.35	5.00														
520	408	570	Franz Josef												
8.00	6.15	10.30													
331	255	565	189	Greymouth											
5.05	4.10	9.10	3.15												
666	554	424	146	335	Haast										
10.50	9.05	7.40	2.30	5.45											
899	578	217	542	731	396	Imvercorgill									
12.45	8.10	3.10	10.40	13.55	8.10										
1092	771	410	660	849	514	280	Milford Sound								
16.10	11.35	6.35	12.45	16.00	10.15	4.45									
651	330	319	506	524	360	445	578	Mount Cook							
9.20	4.45	4.35	8.55	12.10	6.25	6.25	8.55								
117	417	799	485	296	631	1016	1145	747	Nelson						
1.45	6.20	11.20	7.50	4.35	10.20	14.30	16.10	11.10							
29	350	711	549	360	695	928	1121	680	113	Picton					
0.25	5.00	10.00	8.45	5.30	11.15	13.50	16.35	9.50	2.10						
808	487	281	365	554	219	189	307	271	850	837	Queenstown				
11.50	7.15	4.25	7.40	10.55	5.10	3.00	5.05	3.50	15.00	12.15					
971	650	289	539	728	393	159	121	426	1024	1000	166	Te Anau			
13.50	9.15	4.15	10.25	13.40	7.55	2.25	2.20	6.35	13.50	14.15	2.45				
749	428	276	294	483	148	248	366	212	779	778	71	245	Wanaka		
11.05	6.30	4.20	5.50	9.05	3.20	4.50	6.55	3.05	13.10	11.30	1.50	4.35			
265	336	670	294	105	440	836	954	629	230	294	659	823	588	Westport	
4.15	5.10	10.10	5.00	1.45	7.30	15.40	17.45	13.55	3.45	5.55	12.40	15.25	10.50		

**Christchurch** is more English than England and best Cafes are on Oxford terrace. Go to the Old Town Site Of Canterbury Uni (where yours truly became the Urbane terrorist of today sharing the soapbox with such luminaries as Sam Neil ,Winemaker "Two Paddocks" & part time actor, Author Michael Baigent "holy Blood Holy Grail")

This is now called ...I think... the Arts Centre & the Dux Delux pub with the best micro brewery imaginable is on the ground floor plus there is always some action market or show in the grounds.

<http://www.thedux.co.nz/index.cfm/index.cfm/christchurch/home>

Mundane activity is to punt the **Avon**; a bit touristy is the **Lyttleton cable Car**, walk Hagley Park or even go to the Antarctic Road show near Christchurch airport. Casino is a amateur hour but great breakfast at Vics café in Victoria st...bakes own bread and goodies.

I never miss this ....Try a Day/nighter at Akaroa( hour and a bit from Chch.) It was the French Capital of NZ & a great haven.....settled in 1840 by the French.... it still thinks it's a Froggy enclave.

<http://www.akaroa.com/fpnew/fastpage/fpengine.php/templateid/204>

Best Buy is fresh fish from the fishing boat as it comes in on main wharf..... Stop at the Little River café on way over for yet again simple but beaut home-style fare .....swim with 'flipper' or try Frenchs Farm around the bay as a lingerlonga lunchies.



Outta Chch to **Arthurs Pass** on sign post route 73 and head up the **Waimakariri River** valley into the rock strewn banks stopping to look at the strange pedestals of rock used in the lord of the rings.....this is a moonscape with the worlds rights to the colour gray saved only by the ubiquitous tussock but the odd green oasis's pop up to provide relief.

Now save the thirsty work until the **Bealey Hotel** 150 kms up the Valley only about 15kms from Arthurs Pass (food can be as good as the itinerancy of the Chef so loath to give it a rap) but beers were cold.

<http://www.bealeyhotel.co.nz>

Everyone stops at Arthurs pass but it looks ten times better in winter with snow on it. The pesky kea parrots ripped the wipers off my fathers Ford Model T (In a Vintage Car Rally) when I was a lad plus the cabin pipes all froze so I now `don't do winters'.

**Devils Punchbowl** is the place to go here and other tracks are all through the bush and all info is at the office.



It's hard to believe the trip was once the old stage coach route but they probably followed the Maori signposts as they used it for going to the West Coast to collect the Greenstone of head splitting fame.

Now the spectacular **Otira Gorge** and over the Mts avoiding rockfalls and stopping under the water viaduct.....this was gravel when I went over as a lad required a reverse traverse for gravity petrol feed. Good drive down the Valley which you can divert to **Greymouth** a pretty ordinary shitbox of a town if so desired or pop into **Lake Brunner** for a stunner.

Head down towards the glaciers.....

Continue down West Coast to into **Hokitika** again on the surface not mind sapping but looks like it may have a good café?....only went to the actual Coast at the river mouth to see where all the ships use to stack it in the early days. Want to visit the Hokitika Gorge next time and the route etc can be got from the info Centre there if you wish to do it.

Ever onward to the Glaciers and it does not matter which one **Franz Josef** or Fox but the Fox Glacier pub had humungus meals..... (3 lamb Shanks a serve & venison hot pot must have weighed 2kgs)

Must do an early morning walk at **Lake Mathieson** at **Fox Village** and go right around the lake edge pathway to see the reflection of Mt Cook in the lake...plus the Café did have half decent tucker for hungover partpistipants.



Head into the Haast area where there is a couple of good stops ..... lookout at some point, Thunder falls , Blue Pools , maybe the salmon farm? **Haast** township has nought going for it but my next trip is to Jackson bay..... prior turnoff before getting there.

Tripping on further the Haast Pass road is pretty & bush covered but the scenery changes as the lakes area comes into play and the winter playground emerges. An alternative route into **Queenstown** is to look out for the route via the Cadrona Pub (this is an oldie & worth a stopover).....whether everybody should go from here over the **Crown Range** (highest road in NZ) is not for me to speculate... but I would not miss it.

A good Queenstown area for a campervan spot try underneath the gondola as the park is in the street close by cabins were beaut \$85 with views. Go up and do the gondola and try the luge track which has great thrills & mind sapping views.....the café here was surprisingly good value and the 'dinosaur burgers' could be shared.

Go on the Earnslaw Paddle steamer over **Lake Wakatipu** to Walter Peak station the school holiday venue for young Roscoe before it became terry tourist town.... get on the honky tonk (plonk/drink) & join in the singing as the Old Dear cranks up the piano. No need to get off unless you are into 'sheepin' etc..... not for quasi kiwis.



In this area must-dos are the **Dart River** jet boat trip which combines a glorious drive round **Lake Wakatipu** with an exhilarating ride deep into the **Aspiring National Park** that is altogether different from **Milford**. You can book this trip to include the mini bus from Queenstown to enjoy the drive round the lake. Full days outing this baby.

Stay in **Arrowtown** (or maybe Wanaka) in preference to Queenstown (I reckon QTown it has won the Oscar for the worst Architecture in the most scenic place award ) as the town is friendlier and the place gets more sun and isn't as manically busy; however some of the best day trips plus some good action emanates from Queenstown.

Good eating at a tiny stone restaurant that I think was an old stable from Arrowtown's past. The area is interesting as it was an early gold mining town still in good shape with an excellent museum and forage around the Chinese miner's village at the town's edge is a blast from the past.

There is a good 4wd trip to **Skippers Canyon** that goes deep into gold country which I did once as a piccaninny..... The second time I took Eve who was whimpering and cried out to turn back so as a result not been here for some generations now. There is a tour from Queenstown but they will pick up in Arrowtown.....entry signs on the road abrogates the insurance liability of your hire company.

The Siberia Experience. You fly in to the Siberia river from a tiny settlement called **Makarora** which is on the Haast Pass road to the West Coast, land in an alpine valley (low altitude, so no snow in summer), walk out through beech forest to the Wilkin river valley which takes 3 hours with photo stops, jet boated back to Makarora..... different to Milford but with a trail of a similar standard. The river and forest are like the Dart.

Going ever onwards into the great unknown.....Towards **Lake Te Anau**

There is plenty of capacity at **Milford Sound**, particularly if you can keep a few options open as to time and date. There is less capacity on Doubtful than on Milford for the day cruises, and far less capacity on the overnight cruises. The day coaches that leave from Queenstown at 7am go on the lunch time cruises, so they are more likely to be booked out.

There is no need to pre book day tours of the Doubtful Sounds until you reach [Queenstown](#). The day cruises don't need to be booked more than a day in advance in most cases, although if you want to go on a lunch time cruise (12 or 1pm) on a specific day you should probably get in a couple of weeks ahead, and the [Doubtful Sound](#) cruise would need to be booked a few days in advance.

For overnight cruises especially from October through until the end of March, you should book well in advance; these depart at 3.30pm, and return at 9.30am the following day. The 10.30am or 11.00am cruises are the most popular for people that have stayed in Te Anau the night before.

All the cruises are the same and the cruise companies try to give passengers an incentive to go on the earlier or the later trips by lowering the prices. The best time for taking photos is in the mid afternoon, because the sun is high enough to get right into the Fiord.

The flight, either from Queenstown or Te Anau, is fantastic. The scenery is stunning, and you will get a good idea of how goddam large [Fiordland National Park](#) really is. On the down side, it is bloody expensive and very weather dependant.

The drive from Te Anau to Milford Sound is one of the world's great scenic highways. It is 100kms of breathtaking scenery, and on a good day it's sensational. Nowhere in New Zealand will you see anything even remotely like the drive to Milford. There is lots of great scenery but leaving from Queenstown you are looking at a 12 hour day, with 8 hours of driving. It's better to base yourself in Te Anau for one or two nights, tour from there, take your time and suck it in.

From Te Anau it is 2 hours driving to Milford without stops. The narrow winding road heads north so it is easier to pull over for photos etc heading into Milford & the sun is in better position as the scenery is building up ahead rather than the way out missing a lot of the good stuff. There are pull-over bays at various spots on the road but you cannot always access them heading away from Milford. Some good off road sorties are mandatory so factor in times to report for the cruise 20 minutes before departure.

If you are doing the Real Journey's overnight cruise on Milford, leaving from Queenstown, the coach leaves at 12.45pm, to catch the 4.30 departure. It is a bit dependant on the weather, but usually there will be stops at Lake Gunn, Pop's View, Falls Creek, Mirror Lakes, Monkey Flat, Homer Tunnel, and The Chasm.

These are the best spots for photos, if you decide to drive yourself you can probably park in the Coach park outside the Milford terminal. Ask at the Real Journeys desk when you check in.

The pros and cons of the three options:

- 1.tour bus option - easiest, but don't get to choose where you stop
- 2.self drive option - long day but choose your own pace and stops
- 3.flight options - most expensive option and you don't get to see the scenery on the drive Te Anau - Milford, but you get some very spectacular mountain scenery instead Winter Conditions.

In summer there is plenty of daylight (4.45 am-9.30pm) . In winter the days are short (7.30 am to 5.30pm) and the roads can be treacherous. The road is well maintained, heavily gritted, so mostly chains are not necessary but the road maybe closed a few times during winter. In the winter the last boat cruise (Mitre Peak Cruises) departs at 2.45pm and returns at about 5pm, so it's dark driving back to Te Anau or Queenstown.

Tour Companies.....

Real Journeys are the largest & best- [www.realjourneys.co.nz](http://www.realjourneys.co.nz)

Great Sights- run coaches Qtn/Milford/Qtn, using Red Boats for the cruise component.

<http://www.greatsights.co.nz/home/>

Red Boats- <http://www.redboats.co.nz/home/>

Trips n' Tramps are a very good company which run smaller coaches from Te Anau to Milford, 12 people max on each coach..... recommended as an alternative to driving.

<http://www.milfordtourswalks.co.nz/>

## **Te Anau**

Te Anau is two hours from Queenstown. It's an easy drive on good roads. Te Anau's main claim to fame is as the service centre for Fiordland National Park. As such, most activities involve leaving Te Anau, and going into the park, Milford Sound, Doubtful Sound, or some of the myriad of walking tracks.

There is plenty of good accommodation, two supermarkets, and numerous "Tourist Traps", as well as a good variety of other shops which cater mostly for the locals, but also tourists. The must do is the theatre which screens the Ata Whenua or Shadowland (the fiordland movie in a 52 seat cinema and a bar....whew another drinkathon

<http://www.fiordlandcinema.co.nz/>

Milford or Doubtful Sound....which will I do over?

Milford Sound is the better known, with its iconic Mitre Peak; more dramatic, sheer cliffs rising over a mile above your boat. It is also the better known and easier to get to, , if you have to choose just one, go with Milford.

All of the launch companies that operate in Milford Sound offer a full cruise of the fiord and a visit to the Milford Deep Underwater Observatory as part of their product range but it is important to ask for a Milford Deep cruise as not all cruises necessarily stop there Observatory

<http://www.milforddeep.co.nz/>

The fiord contains the Piopiotahi Marine Reserve a unique and beautiful underwater environment situated in Milford Underwater Observatory .....black coral , sea stars, anemones, snakestars Spotted and banded perch, triplefins tube worms and such

oddities as the scarlet wrasse that changes sex when needed!.... now that's a worthwhile attribute. But wait there is more....how about the Brachiopod a shellfish which exists in much the same form as they did 600 million years ago!

Usually on a boat to see the observatory as part of a cruise however the observatory also has its own boat, and it is possible to have them take you from the terminal to the observatory and return. The problem with this is that you can not then do the cruise on the sound unless you take a later one. It's either/or. Mostly they use their boat to shuttle people dropped off the cruises then back to the terminal.

**Doubtful Sound**, is much larger, scenery is absolutely stunning & a choice between the overnight tours would have to be Doubtful Sound ( you will not be disappointed with either). Milford has higher tourist numbers than Doubtful because Doubtful is harder to get to .....a boat trip across Lake Manapouri (1hr) .... jump on a bus to cross the Wilmot Pass (3/4hr) to get to Doubtful Sound and also the giant West Arm power station. Even if you are not into muscular power stations this is a ball tearer.

A huge chamber deep in the bowels 700 feet below Lake Manapouri is driven into by bus down a spiral tunnel. The advantage of Doubtful Sound is that the Real Journeys boat ( 40 or so on the boat) is the only boat allowed on the sound overnight so no tyre kickers here. Milford is closer to Queenstown as the crow flies – driving to Manapouri where the Doubtful Sound trip departs from is closer. It is 2 hrs from Queenstown to Manapouri, but 4 hours to Milford.

### **Te Anau Glow Worm Caves**

This is a fascinating caves system on a scenic cruise across Lake Te Anau to Cavern House on the western shore of Lake Te Anau & is an underground adventure. A talk about the life cycle of the glow worms....scintillating stuff... the history of the caves, their development and operation.

A guide takes you by path and small boat on an exploration of the caves in rushing water past rock formations silently in the dark to the glow-worm grotto with thousands of glow-worms....tripping? <http://www.realjourneys.co.nz/Main/GlowwormCaves/>

### **Milford Track**

There are only two operators on the Milford Track and you will have to pre-book for both these options, sometimes months in advance.

<http://www.ultimatehikes.co.nz>

This is the all inclusive guided walk in well equipped lodges, with hot showers sav blancs and drying rooms. All meals are provided. Need to carry a day pack with personal gear. They also provide packs and wet weather gear if required. Cost is around NZ\$1500 per person.

[www.doc.govt.nz/Explore/002~Tracks-and-Walks/ Great-Walks/Milford-Track/index.asp](http://www.doc.govt.nz/Explore/002~Tracks-and-Walks/ Great-Walks/Milford-Track/index.asp)  
This is the "Freedom Walking" option. You stay in Department of Conservation huts. Well equipped, but no showers, and communal living. Carry all your own gear and cook your own food. Cost about NZ\$450 per person.

The drive from Queenstown to Christchurch is one of the most stunning in the country & is all about Looking for Aoraki ( Mt Cook 12,316') through what is known as the McKenzie Country. From Queenstown you leave on route 6 and pass through the Kawarau Gorge a ripper drive to the location of the original AJ Hackett bungy jump.

Stop and watch the loose-brains fall off the old bridge and then go up the Gibbston Valley the Otago area's top wine producing country. Pinot Noir heaven but need a bank loan for some bottles.

Down the road from the Gorge you come to **Lake Dunstan** and cross the bridge to the town of Cromwell which has the old town right on the lake edge that was re-built in its present location after the damming of the river ..... some good cafes.



Try to go into Clyde which is not far from here and would be a ripper to stay. Go see Clare in the Post Office café ....makes a good coffee and A1 home baked goodies as she showed us into the Hyde Hotel and a perky stone double unit mini backpackers in the main drag.... Will stay here next trip.

Take route 8 north along Lake Dunstan on your left and the Dunstan Mountains on the right you experience some of the top sheep shaggers country the along the Lindis River to Lindis pass. This is one of the most awesome drives with the stark beauty of the area overwhelming..... lunar, lineal and luminescent

The town of **Omarama**, glider capital of the world...how exciting can it get, over the Ahuriri River one of the top ten trout streams in NZ, onto route 8 crossing the Ohau River and a smattering of small lakes until reaching Twizel.

A side road trip that comes out up the road is to the Pukaki Canal and a salmon farm as well as the one you will spot on the way from Twizel.

Next is the turn off on route 80 to the Mt. Cook region driving along Lake Pukaki a 1/2 hour trip with plenty of photo opps. The road ends at Mt. Cook and the Heritage Hotel.

You can also take the Tasman Valley Road a very short distance to the Tasman Glacier just before that. You are surrounded by mountains that are put in context when seeing a car along the road or a building.

Lots of activities up here also such as boating on a glacier..... The Hooker Valley walk is the best out and back tramp with perched lakes and alpine views





Back to the main route 8 and continue the trip through the McKenzie Country until the next stop just before Lake Tekapo on the left is the Godley Peaks Road up to the top of Mt. John to see one of the most spectacular views in the country.

An observatory is there plus a small glass enclosed cafe with a view you won't believe.... Now back down the mountain and on to Lake Tekapo with a brand new outside hot tub, pool area along the lake which will be the hit of the place especially in the winter.

The opaque turquoise blue of the glacial waters that fill the lakes is spectacular to see. Grab a Vino and some cheese to be by the lake to sit and ponder at the iconic Church of the Good Shepherd ..... just a beautiful spot to be. See there is so much more than "just Mt Cook"..... to experience as the scenic drive alone will be a supreme highlight of any trip.

The McKenzie Country named after the sheep rustler that used this route to spirit his flock heads toward Christchurch along route 79 through the valleys and along the mountain sides through tussock country.

Head up the inland Scenic route 72 toward Methven and the Rakaia gorge..... Passing the Rakaia Gorge is a sign to Terrace Downs resort/Golf course looking up to Mt Hutt .... I have yet to see a golfer play here & area is called 'Windwhistle' which explains why... iconic good views, a good stop for a Toddy or two.

At this stage we are avoiding Christchurch and heading North along the route to Darfield..... just flat boring farmland.

Govt Warning ..... do not weigh yourself before travelling to New Zealand  
Second Story following is if you get to the Waipara area and Punakaiki

Heading North up the Canterbury Plains plains .... at the 30kms mark place for a good side of the roader el cheapo stop is "Pukeko Junction'..... try the savoury scone at \$4.50 and good wine selection.

A bit further on is another great café the Nor' Wester in Amberley which has World Series bread made by some Sheila (buggar forgotten her name but its good...ask)

<http://www.norwestercafe.co.nz/>

Vine yards near Waipara are a good stop but best and fairest is to turn off highway at sign to Pegasus Bay Winery (5 kms up side road) touted as brilliant food but the best NZ Riesling.... got a touch 5% to 7% botrytis in it to sweeten up the epiglottis.  
<http://www.pegasusbay.com/>

Just after the West Coast turnoff is Waipara Springs Winery which has a good pinot gris plus a less floral Sav Blanc worth noting ..... But this can be visited either way....has good Blue borage honey which is collected once a year from the Hurunui valley.

The plains are just that until you get to the Hanmer Springs turnoff and take a side trip to this semi Alpine village about 15 kms up the river.....The hot mineral springs are the go here plus the golf course is a good country track.

Back up the road through to the Lewis Pass which can sometimes have snow on it and down to Springs Junction....the hot pools looking out over a snowy river are one memory in an ordinary 'resort' that was a poor replacement for the burnt down original.

Go on the route to Reefton ....which has a history of being the first town in the Sth hemisphere to be fully electrified....you may ask why.... but the pub lunch is OK. Ever onwards towards Punakaiki where there is a pub to get a good coldie.

Take a walk to the Pancake Rocks but go on a high tide only as this is when it goes off.....bigger and badder the weather the better. Tide times are as follows so you can organise arriving or get an early optic nerve.

<http://ofu.co.nz/graph/tides.php?TideGraphPort=Westport>

Also another good walk to the edge of the cliffs at a sign posted some kilometres north of the Rocks... called Truman track. This site sets it out.

<http://www.punakaiki.co.nz/walks.htm>

Go from here heading into Westport "the home of lace curtains and interbreeding".... Not bad to divert to Cape Foulwind (nothing to do with smells). A sensational café is at Carters Beach not far from here and have dined on a blustery day with good Sav-Bonks.