

Itinerary – Christchurch to Mt Cook Lakeside Retreat

Nestled in the heart of New Zealand's South Island, the Mackenzie District is a treasure trove of natural beauty, adventure, and starry skies. From the tranquil shores of Lake Tekapo to the towering peaks of Aoraki / Mount Cook, this four-day itinerary will guide you through an unforgettable journey filled with local flavours, outdoor activities, legendary high-country hospitality, and epic scenery. With its tranquil surroundings and awe-inspiring landscapes, Mackenzie stands as a paradise for those seeking a profound connection with nature.

Day 1 – Christchurch to Mt Cook Lakeside Retreat

Driving to the Mackenzie District in New Zealand offers stunning landscapes and a choice between two scenic routes, depending on whether you want to take the inland option via Methven or continue on State Highway 1 via Ashburton.

Option 1: Inland Scenic Route via Methven (3 hours to Fairlie)

Starting from Christchurch, you would head west on State Highway 73 towards Darfield, before turning south onto State Highway 77. This route will take you through the charming town of Methven, known for its proximity to Mt Hutt ski area.

Morning: Ōpuke Thermal Pools and Spa or Geraldine

Methven has the [Ōpuke Thermal Pools and Spa](#) which provides a unique experience where you can relax while soaking in the southern alpine views. Pre-bookings are recommended to avoid disappointment.

After Methven, continue on SH77, passing through the small towns of Mount Somers and Staveley, until you reach Geraldine. From Geraldine, you'll connect to State Highway 79 and continue on towards Fairlie. Geraldine is the ideal place to stretch your legs and have a look at the shops. There are many lovely places to stop for a coffee or lunch however Barker's is always a great option with plenty of choices and indoor and outdoor seating. [Barker's Foodstore & Eatery](#)

Option 2: State Highway 1 via Ashburton (2.5 to 3 hours to Fairlie)

The second option is to stay on the main highway, State Highway 1, which is a more straightforward route. Departing Christchurch, you'll drive south on SH1, passing through the bustling town of Ashburton, which offers various amenities and is a good spot to stop for a break.

From Ashburton, continue south until you reach the town of Rangitata, where you can turn west onto State Highway 79. From here, the drive goes through Geraldine (you may still want to explore this town) and becomes increasingly scenic as you approach the Mackenzie Region. The vast landscapes, with distant views of the Southern Alps, become more prominent as you continue towards Fairlie, the gateway to the Mackenzie.

Morning: Fairlie Bakehouse and Shopping at Bobby Square

Begin your adventure with a scenic drive from Christchurch to [Fairlie](#), where you will find the famous [Fairlie Bakehouse](#). Renowned for its mouthwatering pies and pastries, it's the perfect place to fuel up before exploring. While in Fairlie, take a stroll through [Bobby Square](#), where you'll find charming shops filled with local crafts and unique souvenirs.

Midday: Explore Three Creeks

Continue your journey to [Three Creeks](#), a quirky shop in the historic township of [Burkes Pass](#) that offers a delightful mix of vintage Americana collectibles, art, retro coffee caravan and a touch of rural New Zealand charm. It's a great place to stretch your legs and soak in the creativity of the region.

Make your way to Mt Cook Lakeside Retreat. Explore the 66-hectare property or relax in your own private hot tub.

Evening: Dinner at Mt Cook Lakeside Retreat

Enjoy a delicious dinner at Mt Cook Lakeside Retreat, either in The Moraine restaurant or in the privacy of your own villa. Experience fresh seasonal cuisine using our garden to plate philosophy.

Day 2 – Lake Tekapo

Morning: Breakfast at Mt Cook Lakeside Retreat

Start the day with a gourmet breakfast. This will be delivered to your villa at your preferred time.

Morning: Fish Tekapo

Enjoy a peaceful morning fishing with [Fish Tekapo](#). Whether you're a seasoned angler or a novice, the clear waters and stunning backdrop make for a perfect start to the day.

Midday: Whisky Hut Experience

After your fishing expedition, take to the skies with [Mackenzie Helicopters](#) or [Air Safaris](#) and visit the Whisky Hut. Perched at 2,000 metres above sea level on top of a mountain this humble hut sits on the more than 100-year-old [Glenmore Station](#), a 19,000-hectare merino, deer and cattle station bordering Lake Tekapo and Aoraki / Mount Cook National Park. This unique experience combines stunning aerial views with a carefully curated selection of fine whiskies – perfect for a midday treat.

Afternoon: Relax at Tekapo Springs

If you fancy relaxing, Tekapo Hot Pools is the perfect place to do so. [Tekapo Springs - Hot Pools in Lake Tekapo](#). The hot pools here offer breathtaking views of the lake and mountains, making it the ideal spot to relax and recharge.

OR

Morning: 4WD Adventure in Lake Tekapo

Get ready for some off-road excitement with [Tekapo Adventures](#) or [4WD Tekapo](#). A 4WD tour will take you deep into the rugged mountain valleys surrounding the lake, offering stunning views and a taste of adventure in the high country.

Afternoon: Relax at Tekapo Springs

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Evening: Dinner at Mt Cook Lakeside Retreat

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Evening: Stargazing Tour

As night falls, prepare for an unforgettable stargazing experience at Mt Cook Lakeside Retreat's Pukaki Cellar Observatory. Mt Cook Lakeside Retreat is part of the [Aoraki Mackenzie International Dark Sky Reserve](#), making it one of the best places in the world to view the night sky. Your experienced astronomer will guide you through the constellations and the wonders of the universe.

Day 3 – Aoraki / Mount Cook

Morning: Breakfast at Mt Cook Lakeside Retreat

Start the day with a gourmet breakfast. This will be delivered to your villa at your preferred time.

Morning: Drive to Aoraki / Mount Cook

Set off early for a scenic drive to [Aoraki / Mount Cook](#), New Zealand's highest peak. Along the way, stop at lookout points to capture the breathtaking views of the Southern Alps and the vibrant, turquoise-coloured waters of Lake Pukaki. This is a 40-minute drive from Mt Cook Lakeside Retreat.

Just 5 minutes from the Retreat, stop at [New Zealand Alpine Lavender](#) (only open from December to March). Explore the largest certified organic lavender farm in the Southern Hemisphere. Walk through the vibrant lavender fields, take photos, and visit their on-site shop.

Midday: Glacier Explorers

Once at Aoraki / Mount Cook, embark on a [Glacier Explorers](#) tour, New Zealand's only glacial boat tour. This unique experience takes you out onto the glacial lake, where you'll witness towering icebergs and the majestic [Haupapa/Tasman Glacier](#) up close. This is a relaxing boat ride filled with discovery.

Afternoon: Hooker Valley Nature Walk and DOC Visitor Centre

After your glacier adventure, explore the [Hooker Valley Track](#), a stunning walk that offers panoramic views of Aoraki / Mount Cook and its surrounding glaciers. Don't miss a visit to the [DOC Visitor Centre](#), where you can learn more about the area's natural history, mountaineering stories and conservation efforts.

OR, if you prefer a little more adventure:

Morning: Glentanner Heli-Hike

Fly up and hike down! This tour begins with an exhilarating helicopter flight to a high point on [Glentanner Station](#). Take in dramatic views of Lake Pukaki, the Tasman River Valley and Aoraki / Mount Cook. After leaving the helicopter the tour continues on foot with an easy walk down a picturesque farm track. Your guide will share stories of the station's history, geological features, flora, fauna and present-day operations.

Afternoon: Alps 2 Ocean Cycle Trail

Enjoy a cycling adventure on the [Alps 2 Ocean Cycle Trail](#) with [Cycle Journeys](#) or [Lakeland Explorer](#). The route offers some of the most spectacular views in the region.

Evening: Dinner at Mt Cook Lakeside Retreat

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Day 4 – Depart to Christchurch

Morning: Breakfast at Mt Cook Lakeside Retreat

Start the day with a gourmet breakfast. This will be delivered to your villa at your preferred time.

Morning: Mt Cook Alpine Salmon

As you make your way to Christchurch, stop at [Mt Cook Alpine Salmon](#) and pick up some delicious salmon for the road. It's the perfect way to end your Mackenzie Region adventure on a high note.

From here, you may wish to explore Tekapo further or visit some of the sites you may not have had a chance to do on the way to the Retreat.

Morning: Explore Three Creeks

Head East on State Highway 8, passing through Lake Tekapo to [Three Creeks](#), a quirky shop in the historic township of [Burkes Pass](#) that offers a delightful mix of vintage Americana collectibles, art, retro coffee caravan and a touch of rural New Zealand charm. It's a great place to stretch your legs and soak in the creativity of the region.

Midday: Fairlie Bakehouse and Shopping at Bobby Square

Stop at the famous [Fairlie Bakehouse](#). Renowned for its mouthwatering pies and pastries, it's the perfect place to fuel up on your return journey. While in Fairlie, take a stroll through [Bobby Square](#), where you'll find charming shops filled with local crafts and unique souvenirs.

Afternoon: Geraldine or Ōpuke Thermal Pools and Spa

From Fairlie, you'll connect to State Highway 79 and continue on towards Geraldine, this is the ideal place to stretch your legs and have a look at the shops. There are many lovely places to stop for a coffee or lunch however Barker's is always a great option with plenty of choices and indoor and outdoor seating. [Barker's Foodstore & Eatery](#)

Option 1: Inland Scenic Route via Methven (3 hours to Christchurch)

After Geraldine, take inland scenic route 72, passing through the small towns of Mount Somers and Staveley and connect with state highway 77 to Methven. Methven has the [Ōpuke Thermal Pools and Spa](#) which provides a unique experience where you can relax while soaking in the southern alpine views. Pre-bookings are recommended to avoid disappointment.

Leaving Methven, head North on State Highway 77 towards Darfield, continue East from Darfield on State Highway 73 to Christchurch.

Option 2: State Highway 1 via Ashburton (2.5 to 3 hours to Christchurch)

The second option is to take the main highway, State Highway 1, which is a more straightforward route. Departing Geraldine, continue North and then East on State Highway 79 to Rangitata, where you can turn North onto State Highway 1, passing through the bustling town of Ashburton, which offers various amenities and is a good spot to stop for a break.

From Ashburton, continue North until you reach Christchurch.

Other activities that can be added to your itinerary:

- Skydiving
- Heli-tours / heli-hike / Picnic on the Peaks
- Scenic flights
- Gliding
- Yoga and massages
- Ride the best of the A20 (Alps 2 Ocean) – bespoke tour and / or cycle hire
- Guided local fishing tours
- Clay cliffs