

YOUR ULTIMATE GUIDE TO TRAVELLING

MILFORD SOUND & FIORDLAND

INTRODUCING THE TEAM BEHIND THE GUIDE

WHO ARE WE?



Kia ora and welcome! We're Katelyn and Toby - Te Anau locals, proud Southlanders, and founders of Luxe Tours, a family-owned company born from our deep love for Fiordland and the magic of Milford Sound.

Having explored these breathtaking landscapes all our lives, we've carefully designed our tours to showcase not only the famous Fiordland highlights, but also the hidden gems and secret spots that most travellers miss.

Since launching Luxe Tours in 2023, we've helped thousands of guests experience this spectacular part of the world - and along the way, we've answered countless questions about how to plan the perfect trip.

That's what inspired us to create this e-guide, as we wanted to share our local knowledge to help you make the most of your time here. You'll find practical travel tips, insider advice and local recommendations to make your journey through Fiordland and the surrounding areas as easy, seamless and unforgettable as possible.



LUXE TOURS



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SOUTH ISLAND, NEW ZEALAND

This guide will focus on the areas of New Zealand that is our backyard. Southland - home to Te Anau, Milford Sound and Fiordland National Park - and Otago - home to Queenstown and Walter Peak.



FIORDLAND NATIONAL PARK & MILFORD SOUND



Fiordland lies in the remote southwest corner of New Zealand's South Island. Milford Sound, located in the heart of Fiordland National Park, is one of New Zealand's most popular visitor destinations, famous for its towering cliffs, lush rainforest, and untouched wilderness.

QUEENSTOWN



Queenstown, with its international airport and status as New Zealand's adventure capital, is the natural starting point for most visitors to Fiordland and Milford Sound, with approximately 90% of visitors beginning their journey here.

TE ANAU



Te Anau is the gateway to Fiordland National Park and it is the closest town with facilities nearest to Milford Sound. This is a popular 'halfway' point for guests starting in Queenstown and travelling to Milford Sound. We highly recommend staying a few nights here as there is lots to see.

GETTING TO MILFORD SOUND



Although Queenstown and Milford Sound are only around 70 kilometres (43 miles) apart geographically, there's no direct road between the two destinations. By road, Milford Sound is roughly 290 kilometres (180 miles) from Queenstown, requiring 5-6 hours of driving through mountain passes and scenic valleys.

A photograph of a dense, mossy forest. In the foreground, a wooden walkway with metal railings leads into the woods. The trees are tall and covered in green moss, creating a vibrant, prehistoric atmosphere. Sunlight filters through the canopy in the background.

FIORDLAND NATIONAL PARK

Fiordland National Park is one of New Zealand's most spectacular and remote wilderness areas - a vast expanse of towering mountains, deep fiords and lush temperate rainforest. Covering over 1.2 million hectares, it's the largest national park in New Zealand.

The climate here is famously wet, with rainfall among the highest in the world - but it's that constant moisture that gives Fiordland its enchanting character. Mosses, ferns, and ancient beech forests thrive, creating a dense green canopy that feels almost prehistoric.

Wildlife flourishes in this unique ecosystem. You might spot rare native birds like the kea (the world's only alpine parrot), takahē, or the cheeky weka, as well as seals, dolphins, and penguins along the rugged coastline. The park's highlights are world-famous — from the breathtaking Milford Sound and serene Doubtful Sound to the iconic Milford Track, Kepler Track, and Routeburn Track.

QUEENSTOWN

THE ADVENTURE CAPITAL

Queenstown is a vibrant lakeside resort town known as the adventure capital of New Zealand. Set on the shores of Lake Wakatipu and surrounded by dramatic alpine peaks, it's a place where breathtaking scenery meets non-stop energy. Chances are, your holiday in the South Island of New Zealand is going to include a stop here - and for good reason. From world-class skiing and adrenaline activities to wineries, scenic hikes, and laid-back lakeside moments, Queenstown acts as the perfect base for exploring the wider South Island region.

GETTING TO QUEENSTOWN

Most international flights don't fly directly to Queenstown. You'll typically connect through New Zealand's major airports in Auckland or Christchurch, or from select Australian cities.

TRAVELLING FROM AUSTRALIA

Direct flights are between 3-4 hours when travelling from Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and the Gold Coast. For other Australian cities, you'll need to connect through one of these direct flight hubs.

TRAVELLING FROM NORTH AMERICA

The main departure cities are Los Angeles, San Francisco, Houston, New York and Vancouver, and typically you'll need to transfer in either Auckland or Christchurch before flying to Queenstown.

TRAVELLING FROM THE UK

The main departure cities are London, Manchester or Birmingham, and you'll typically have to transfer in Asia (Dubai, Doha, Singapore), Australia (Melbourne, Sydney) or Auckland before flying to Queenstown.

TRAVELLING FROM ASIA

Flights operate from all over Asia, but you'll typically need to transfer in Australia (Melbourne, Sydney) or Auckland before flying to Queenstown.

TRAVELLING FROM EUROPE

The main departure cities are Frankfurt, Paris, Amsterdam, Zurich and Munich, and you'll typically have to transfer in Asia (Dubai, Doha, Singapore), Australia (Melbourne, Sydney) or Auckland before flying to Queenstown.

TRAVELLING FROM ELSEWHERE IN NEW ZEALAND

Internal flights are typically available from most airports, with Auckland and Christchurch being the most common connections.

RENTAL CAR OR NOT?

You'll need to decide whether to hire a rental car or rely on other transport options once you get to Queenstown.

WITH A RENTAL CAR:

- ✓ Freedom to stay in different locations around Queenstown and Fiordland
- ✓ Flexibility to explore at your own pace
- ✓ Ability to self-drive to attractions and viewpoints

WITHOUT A RENTAL CAR:

- ✓ Must plan around public transport schedules
- ✓ Limited to accommodation on bus routes or within walking distance
- ✓ Reliant on tours for attractions outside Queenstown

The top rated rental companies that we recommend are; GO Rentals, Omega Rental Cars and Ezi Car Rental.

OTHER TRANSPORT OPTIONS

There is an excellent public bus network available in Queenstown, that has wide coverage across the region and with fares at \$2 per journey when you get a Bee Card (available to purchase at Queenstown Airport). There is also taxi and uber available in Queenstown.

TOP TIP: PARKING IN QUEENSTOWN

If you plan to hire a car, keep parking in mind. Central Queenstown can be tricky and expensive to park in, with rates usually between \$20 and \$80 per day. Free parking is rare near the centre.

If you're continuing your journey to Te Anau, parking there is free and much easier to find.

Both regions are very safe, and it's common to leave vehicles parked on the street without concern.

WHERE TO STAY IN QUEENSTOWN

Queenstown is made up of several suburbs, each with its own character and practical considerations. The map below shows the main places visitors typically base themselves.

FERNHILL

Scenic hillside setting in an elevated residential area with stunning views

DISTANCE: 2.8km from central Queenstown (15-40 minute walk, 5-10 minute drive)

ACCOMMODATION TYPES: Apartments, vacation homes, Airbnbs

TYPICAL PRICE RANGE: \$\$

TRANSPORT: Regular bus service, steep uphill walk from bus stop

FOOD OPTIONS: Limited - small store, fish & chip shop, 3 restaurants

NOTE: This area gets limited sun in winter, so it can be cold and dark June-August.

BEST FOR: View seekers, those with rental cars

QUEENSTOWN HILL

Elevated residential area with spectacular panoramic views

DISTANCE: 15-20 minute walk to central Queenstown (800m with 200m elevation gain)

ACCOMMODATION TYPES: Primarily Airbnbs, holiday homes, a few luxury resorts

TYPICAL PRICE RANGE: \$\$\$

TRANSPORT: Car strongly recommended, steep uphill walk from town. Most tours require guests to walk down from the hill to central pickup points.

FOOD OPTIONS: Very limited restaurant and pub food options, no shops

BEST FOR: View seekers with rental cars, active travellers

ARTHURS POINT

Beautiful natural mountain surroundings near Shotover River

DISTANCE: 5.8km from central Queenstown (10-minute drive)

ACCOMMODATION TYPES: Holiday park and campground, resorts, vacation homes, Airbnbs, and apartments

TYPICAL PRICE RANGE: \$\$

TRANSPORT: Car recommended, limited public transport

FOOD OPTIONS: Limited restaurant and pub food options, no shops

BEST FOR: Those with a rental car, skiers (closest area to Coronet Peak), outdoor enthusiasts, those seeking quiet

FRANKTON

Convenient airport-adjacent area with amenities, with upscale accommodation prices generally lower than central Queenstown upscale options

DISTANCE: 10-15 minutes / 8km drive from central Queenstown

ACCOMMODATION TYPES: Apartments, motels, and holiday homes

TYPICAL PRICE RANGE: \$\$

TRANSPORT: Regular bus service to Queenstown, tour pickups from main road only

FOOD OPTIONS: Several shopping centers with restaurants, cafes, and supermarkets

BEST FOR: Visitors with cars, early flights, access to Remarkables ski field

CENTRAL QUEENSTOWN

Our recommendation for most visitors as you're within easy walking access to restaurants, supermarkets, shops, and activities

DISTANCE: You're right in the heart of town

ACCOMMODATION TYPES: Wide range of hotels, luxury lodges, hostels, apartments, motels, and Airbnbs

TYPICAL PRICE RANGE: \$\$\$

BEST FOR: First-time visitors, those without cars, nightlife enthusiasts

QUEENSTOWN HILL



TO MILFORD SOUND
& TE ANAU

QUEENSTOWN

TE ANAU



SHOULD I BASE MYSELF IN QUEENSTOWN OR TE ANAU?

Choosing between Queenstown and Te Anau comes down to your travel style, schedule, and what kind of experience you want from your visit. Both locations offer access to Fiordland National Park and Milford Sound, but will appeal to different types of travellers.

BEST SUITED TO:

- Travellers short on time who want to fit in multiple activities from a single base
- Those who enjoy lively dining, nightlife, and a variety of shops and restaurants
- Visitors wanting to combine Fiordland with a variety of adrenaline activities, such as bungee jumping, skydiving, or jet boating
- Travellers relying on public transport or not renting a car

CONSIDERATIONS:

- Accommodation and dining prices are higher than in Te Anau, especially near the lakefront
- Parking in central Queenstown can be hard to find and is often paid (\$20–\$80 per day)
- Longer travel distance to Milford Sound (around 5-6 hours each way) means early starts and late returns on day trips and tours

BEST SUITED TO:

- Travellers seeking a peaceful, nature-focused base close to Fiordland National Park
- Those looking for affordable accommodation close to the lakefront
- Those wanting to spend more time exploring Milford Road and nearby walking tracks
- Families with young children who want a shorter travel time to reach Milford Sound (around 2-4 hours each way, depending on stops)
- Visitors who prefer staying in a small, walkable town where everything is nearby

CONSIDERATIONS:

- Smaller town with limited nightlife and less restaurant variety
- Fewer adventure or thrill-based activities compared with Queenstown
- While most accommodation is within walking distance to the lakefront and shops, you may still need a short drive for tours or dining, depending on where you stay

TE ANAU

THE GATEWAY TO FIORDLAND NATIONAL PARK

Te Anau is a peaceful lakeside town that provides a common base for exploring Fiordland National Park and Milford Sound. Located about 170 kilometres (105 miles) southwest of Queenstown and 120 kilometres (75 miles) from Milford Sound, it serves as the gateway to Fiordland's wilderness. With its relaxed pace, beautiful setting, and easy access to the park's walking tracks and tours, it's ideal for travellers wanting to slow down and connect with nature.

GETTING TO TE ANAU

- By road: About 2 hours' drive south of Queenstown via State Highways 6 and 94 through Mossburn.
- By bus: InterCity bus provides daily services from Queenstown to Te Anau
- No airport: Te Anau is accessible only by road.

GETTING AROUND

- The town is relatively compact and flat, with shops, restaurants, and the lakefront within a short walk from most accommodation options.
- There are no taxis or rideshare services like Uber, so having a rental car gives you more freedom to explore nearby areas like Manapouri or local walking tracks.

WHERE TO STAY

- Most accommodation options are within a short walk of the town centre and lakefront.
- The variety of options includes hotels, motels, self-contained apartments, backpackers, campgrounds, Airbnbs.
- Most accommodation is close to the lakefront and more affordable than equivalent Queenstown options.
- Some Airbnbs sit slightly further out and require a 10-15 minute walk to the town centre.

WHERE TO EAT

- Te Anau offers a good range of cafés, takeaway options, and restaurants, from casual to fine dining, though fewer in number than Queenstown.
- Booking ahead is recommended, especially during summer or on weekends, as popular restaurants can fill quickly.
- For our top local dining picks, see our article: [Te Anau Cafes & Restaurants: Our Top Local Picks](#)

DISCOVERING PIOPIOTAH- MILFORD SOUND

Milford Sound lies within Fiordland National Park, one of the most remote and scenic areas of New Zealand. Carved by glaciers over millions of years, it's renowned for its towering cliffs, cascading waterfalls and rainforest-covered valleys.

The only road access to Milford Sound is the Milford Road (State Highway 94), which begins in Te Anau. All travellers, whether self-driving or on a guided tour, must pass through Te Anau to reach Fiordland National Park and Milford Sound. The journey itself is part of the experience, with countless viewpoints, short walks and scenic photo stops.

WHAT IT IS

Despite its name, Milford Sound is not actually a sound, but a fiord, a deep, narrow inlet carved by glaciers during the last Ice Age. When the glaciers retreated about 14,000 years ago, the sea flooded the valley, creating the spectacular landscape seen today.

MĀORI NAME

Known to Māori as Piopiotahi, meaning "a single piopio," it commemorates a legendary bird (now extinct) mourning the death of the demigod Māui. The name reflects both natural beauty and deep cultural meaning.

EUROPEAN NAME

Welsh sealer John Grono named the fiord "Milford Haven" in 1809 after his hometown in Wales. Later, "Sound" was added, though geologically incorrect, and the name has endured.

POPULATION

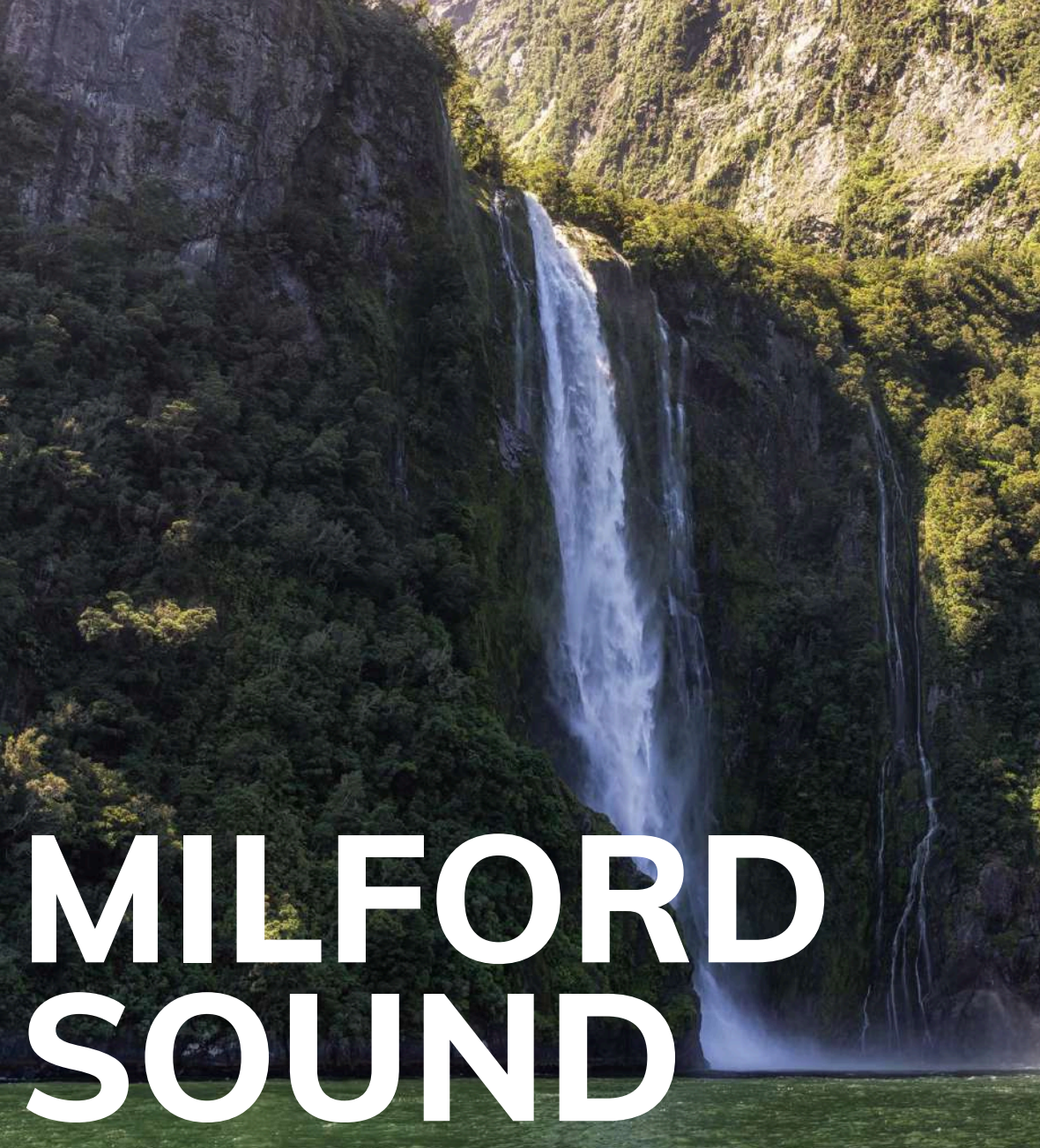
Approximately 20 permanent residents live here year-round, mainly consisting of tourism and conservation staff.

CONNECTIVITY

Mobile and Wi-Fi coverage is patchy, offering a rare chance to disconnect and enjoy the natural environment.

WHY SO SMALL?

Milford Sound's remoteness and World Heritage protection status mean development is highly restricted. The area is managed for conservation rather than expansion. Its wild, untouched character is part of what makes visiting so special.



MILFORD SOUND

WEATHER IN MILFORD SOUND

Milford Sound's weather is famously unpredictable, with conditions that can change quickly in any season. Rain is frequent year-round, adding to the dramatic waterfalls and lush rainforest scenery.

SUMMER (DEC – FEB)

- Warm, sometimes humid, and often wet. Short, heavy rainstorms are common but pass quickly.
- Long daylight hours and many sunny spells make this a popular time to visit.
- Highs: 17–19°C / Lows: 7–8°C

AUTUMN (MAR – MAY)

- Mild temperatures and more settled weather.
- Visitor numbers begin to drop, offering a quieter experience with balanced conditions.
- Highs: 10–18°C / Lows: 1–4°C, occasionally reaching 0°C at night

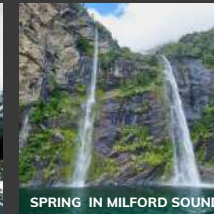
WINTER (JUN – AUG)

- The coldest but most settled time of year, with snow on the ground and surrounding peaks, and fewer visitors.
- Crisp air and clear skies create stunning photographic conditions.
- Highs: 9–11°C / Lows: 1–2°C, sometimes below freezing overnight

SPRING (SEP – NOV)

- The most turbulent weather of the year, bringing everything from sunshine to sudden downpours.
- Snowfall is still common, often creating avalanches, and road closures are frequent due to safety risks
- Snowmelt feeds the waterfalls, creating dramatic cascades
- Highs: 10–18°C / Lows: 4–7°C

WINTER IN MILFORD SOUND



SPRING IN MILFORD SOUND

OUR RECOMMENDATION

If your travel dates are flexible, March – May (Autumn) offers the best combination of mild weather, lower visitor numbers, and long daylight hours, making it ideal for exploring Fiordland and Milford Sound at a peaceful, relaxed pace.



EAT: RESTAURANT OR CAFE

Despite being one of New Zealand's most visited destinations, Milford Sound has only two places to buy food. Plan ahead, especially during peak season.

DISCOVER MILFORD SOUND INFORMATION CENTRE & CAFÉ

Located in the main Milford Sound township, at the Milford Sound Visitor Centre

PIO PIO RESTAURANT (MILFORD SOUND LODGE)

Located at the Milford Sound Lodge, just before reaching the main Milford Sound township.



STAY: MILFORD SOUND LODGE

The Milford Sound Lodge is the only place to stay in Milford Sound itself. It is located just before you reach the main Milford Sound township and cruise terminal. There are powered campervan sites, chalets and rooms available, as well as shared facilities for the campsite and an on-site restaurant (Pio Pio).

The lodge typically books out months in advance, so early booking is strongly recommended!

FACILITIES IN MILFORD SOUND



ONE PAID CAR PARK



TOILET FACILITIES



LIMITED FOOD OPTIONS



ONE HOTEL/ LODGE



SMALL AIRPORT (SCENIC FLIGHTS ONLY)



FUEL PUMP (BUT EXPENSIVE & UNRELIABLE!)



NO TAXIS OR PUBLIC TRANSPORT



NO SHOPPING FACILITIES



LIMITED WIFI/PHONE COVERAGE

MILFORD ROAD

The Milford Road (State Highway 94) isn't just the route to Milford Sound, but a major part of the experience itself. Stretching from Te Anau to Milford Sound, this 120 km alpine highway winds through mountains, valleys, and native forests.

This drive is described as one of the most scenic drives in New Zealand, and once you're on the road, it's easy to see why. The road's viewpoints and short walking tracks showcase Fiordland's wild beauty, making the journey as memorable as the destination.



EGLINTON VALLEY

- Vast glacier-carved valley surrounded by steep mountains.
- One of the first major photo stops after entering the National Park.



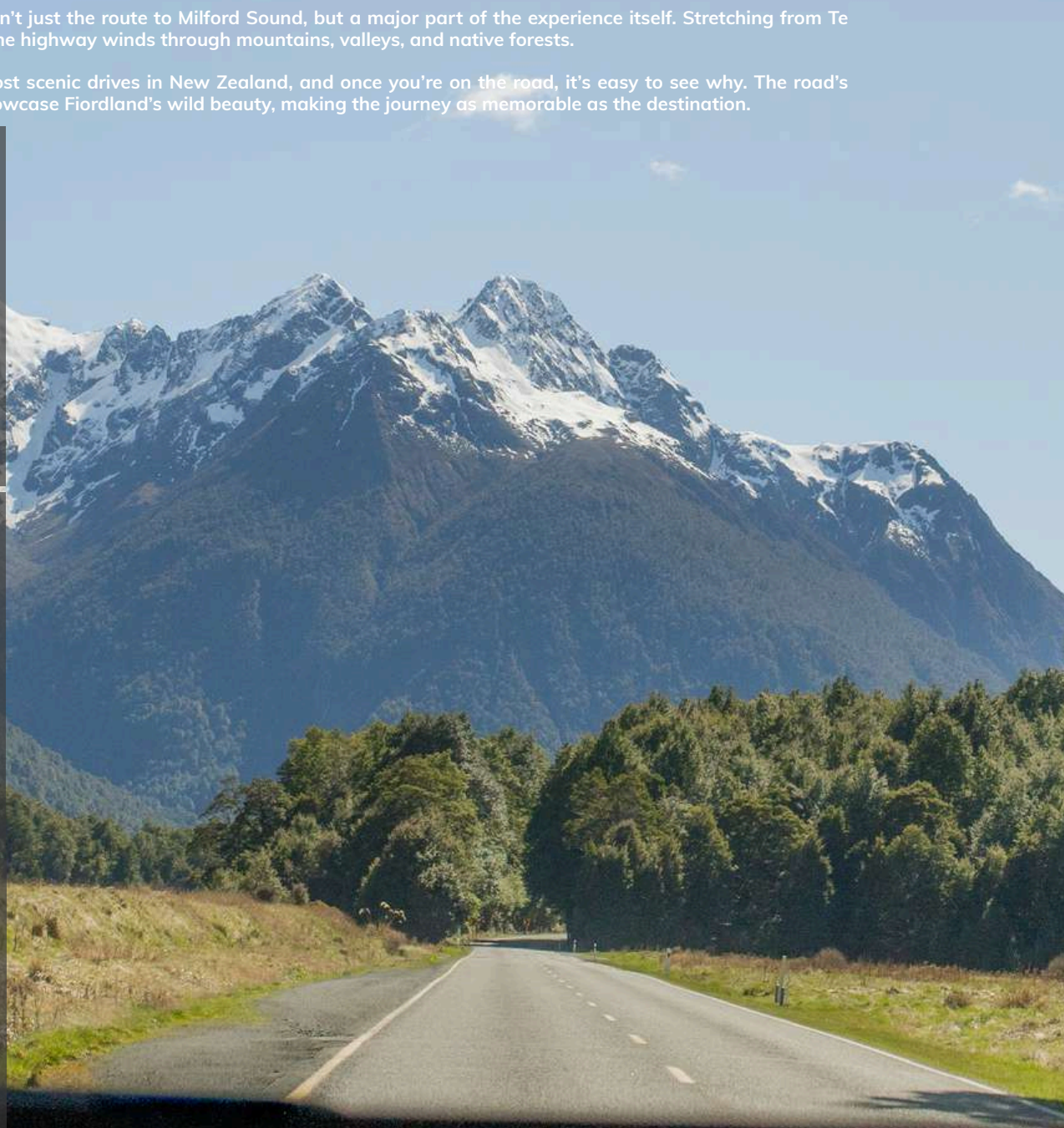
MONKEY CREEK

- Crystal-clear glacier-fed stream known for its pure drinking water.
- Opportunity to spot the rare whio (blue duck) and cheeky kea.



POP'S VIEW / HOLLYFORD LOOKOUT

- Elevated lookout with sweeping views of the Hollyford Valley.
- Excellent photo stop showing the transition from valley floor to alpine terrain.



MIRROR LAKES

- Small ponds beside the highway, with a boardwalk loop track.
- Famous for mirror-like reflections of the Earl Mountains on calm days.



KNOBS FLAT

- The last flushing toilets before Milford Sound (a practical but essential stop!)



HOMER TUNNEL

- One-way 1.2km-long tunnel operated by traffic lights
- The tunnel took almost 20 years to build between 1930s-1950s and was built mostly by hand!
- Cheeky Kea often hang around at each entrance



WHICH IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

The journey to Milford Sound forms a significant part of your trip. Whether you choose to drive yourself or join a guided tour depends on your comfort level, schedule, and travel style.

SELF-DRIVING TO MILFORD SOUND

Many visitors enjoy the freedom of self-driving, allowing full control over pace and stops.

ADVANTAGES

- Set your own schedule and spend as long as you like at each stop.
- Ideal for photographers and travellers who enjoy spontaneous detours.
- Option to stay in campgrounds along the Milford Road or at the Milford Sound Lodge.

CONSIDERATIONS

- Fill up your fuel tank in Te Anau, as Milford's small station is costly and unreliable.
- Bring food and water; facilities are limited at Milford Sound.
- Paid parking operates at the Milford Sound car park (NZ \$10/hour, allow 2–3 hours parking for a cruise).
- Expect slippery or icy roads in winter and heavy traffic during summer.
- The driver will miss some scenery; plan scenic stops often.
- Driving from Queenstown to Milford Sound and back in one day is not recommended, as fatigue is a serious safety risk. Stay a night in Te Anau if you plan to self-drive.

JOINING A TOUR

For those who'd rather relax and take in the scenery, guided tours remove the stress of driving and logistics.

ADVANTAGES

- Sit back and enjoy the journey, with transport, timing, and cruise bookings handled for you.
- Knowledgeable guides share stories, geology, and local insights.
- Includes rest breaks, photo stops, and sometimes guided nature walks.
- Pick-up and drop-off options
- Ideal during winter, when road conditions can be icy.

CONSIDERATIONS

- Fixed departure and return times, with less flexibility than self-driving.
- Larger tours may have limited time at key viewpoints.
- Some tours (especially day trips from Queenstown) omit nature walks due to time constraints.
- You'll need to plan around the set tour schedule for meals and breaks.
- Tours can vary in group size and comfort

PARKING AT MILFORD SOUND

Parking at Milford Sound is limited, with two parking areas. One is paid and one is free, and both can fill quickly, especially around midday when most cruises depart. Plan ahead, and allow plenty of time before your cruise.

MAIN CAR PARK

- Located in Milford Sound beside the visitor centre, about a 10 minute walk to the cruise terminal.
- Costs \$10 per hour before 3 pm or \$5 per hour after 3 pm.
- Card-only payment: Enter your vehicle's licence plate number at one of the pay machines (inside the visitor centre or at the carpark entrances).
- Pay for 3 hours: Even if your cruise is only 2 hours, paying for at least 3 hours allows for check-in time (20 minutes before departure) and possible delays, preventing automatic fines for overstaying.
- Mobility spaces: Four are available close to the visitor centre, charged at standard rates.

DEEPWATER BASIN FREE PARKING

- Located just before the Milford Sound township. Turn left at the Deepwater Basin sign.
- Free to use but first-come, first-served and can fill quickly in busy periods.
- Roughly a 30-minute walk to the cruise terminal via a safe pedestrian track through native bush (don't walk along the main road).
- A free shuttle runs every 15 minutes between Deepwater Basin and the Visitor Centre, though delays can occur during peak times.

USEFUL TIPS

- Arrive early: Plan to reach Milford Sound at least one hour before your cruise to find a park, pay, and walk to the terminal.
- Public toilets are at the Visitor Centre and cruise terminal, but there are none at Deepwater Basin.

YOUR GUIDED TOUR OPTIONS

TOURS FROM TE ANAU

Te Anau is the closest township to Milford Sound, located approximately 121 km (75 miles) away.

Tours from Te Anau offer more time to explore Fiordland and its famous Milford Road without such a long travel day.

KEY POINTS

- Shorter overall day (around 9 hours including the cruise)
- Later departure and earlier return times
- More scenic and photo stops along Milford Road
- Often include nature walks such as Lake Gunn or Marian Falls

CONSIDERATIONS

- You'll need to travel to Te Anau and arrange accommodation there.
- Fewer restaurants and nightlife options than Queenstown.

BEST SUITED FOR

Travellers happy to stay in Te Anau and want a more relaxed experience, with plenty of opportunities for scenic stops and less time on the road.

TOURS FROM QUEENSTOWN

Queenstown is located approximately approx 288 km / (179 miles) away from Milford Sound, requiring around 4 hours' drive time one way non-stop.

KEY POINTS

- Full-day experience (around 12 hours)
- Convenient if you're basing yourself in Queenstown and want to see Milford Sound in a day
- Includes main highlights and scenic stops along the journey
- Professional guides handle logistics and driving

CONSIDERATIONS

- Early morning departure (around 6:30–7 am) and evening return
- Fewer sightseeing stops due to travel distance
- Can feel like a long day, especially for families with small children

BEST SUITED FOR

Travellers based in Queenstown who want to experience Milford Sound directly from Queenstown without changing locations, or those with limited time in their trip.

MILFORD SOUND DAY TOURS

Here's a list of the most popular Milford Sound day tour operators, alongside their departure location (Te Anau or Queenstown) and group size.

COMPANY	LARGE/ SMALL	QUEENSTOWN OR TE ANAU
REAL NZ	LARGE	BOTH
SOUTHERN DISCOVERIES	LARGE	BOTH
PURE MILFORD	LARGE	BOTH
GREAT SIGHTS	LARGE	BOTH
CHEEKY KIWI	SMALL	BOTH
LUXE TOURS	SMALL	BOTH
ALTITUDE TOURS	SMALL	BOTH
FIORDLAND TOURS	SMALL	TE ANAU
TRIPS & TRAMPS	SMALL	TE ANAU

SMALL GROUP TOURS

Small-group tours generally focus on comfort, flexibility, and personal connection. Vans usually carry up to 17 guests, allowing guides flexibility to tailor the experience to the group. It's also a less crowded experience than a large group tour.

They are typically at a slightly higher price point than large group tours, and are likely to sell out quicker - so make sure to book in advance!

BEST SUITED FOR

Couples, families, or anyone who values a relaxed pace, personal attention, and a deeper connection with the landscape.

LARGE GROUP TOURS

Large-group coach tours are ideal for budget-conscious travellers and social sightseers who don't mind a faster-paced experience.

There is however less flexibility for photo and rest stops, and can be crowded.

BEST SUITED FOR

Budget-minded travellers or those prioritising the destination over the journey, and are comfortable in a large group with a faster schedule.



PICTURED: LUXE TOURS AT EGLINTON VALLEY

BOOKING A MILFORD SOUND CRUISE

We would argue that a trip to Milford Sound is not complete without a cruise through this world-famous fiord. You'll get up close to towering cliffs, cascading waterfalls, playful wildlife and the sheer scale of the landscape that makes Milford Sound so iconic. It's the perfect way to understand just how extraordinary this place truly is.

There are two main ways to book a Milford Sound cruise:

As part of a guided tour: Tour operators include a cruise with their tour package, each with a specific cruise partner.

Independently: If you're driving yourself, you can book directly through your chosen cruise company's website or via a third-party booking platform.



CRUISE OPTIONS

REAL NZ

- Large boat cruises (300-400 capacity, capped at 120-180 for more onboard space)
 - Boat options:
 - Haven (cabinet food options + full bar on board) — 2hrs
 - Monarch & Sovereign (Buffet option on board) — 1hr 40 mins
- Small boat premium option aboard the Sinbad (price includes champagne and canapés) - 2 hrs

SOUTHERN DISCOVERIES

- Large boat cruises
- Boat options:
 - Pride of Milford & Lady Bown (Buffet lunch and bar options on board) — 1 hr 45 minutes
 - Discover more cruise on Pride of Milford & Lady Bown (preurchased picnic lunch option available) - 2 hrs 15 minutes

CRUISE MILFORD

- Small boat cruise on Milford Explorer or Milford Adventurer (price includes tea/coffee & biscuits) - 1 hr 45 minutes

MITRE PEAK CRUISES

- Small boat cruise on M.V Mitre Peak or M.V Mitre Peak II (price includes tea/coffee) - 2 hrs

PURE MILFORD

- Large boat cruises on Maiden of Milford or Gem of the Sound (price includes tea/coffee, cabinet food options also available on board) - 1 hr 45 minutes

FIORDLAND DISCOVERY

- Small boat luxury cruise on Fiordland Jewel (price includes 2-course gourmet plated lunch) - 2 hrs

PICTURED: MILFORD HAVEN AT MILFORD SOUND

TAKE A TOUR TO MILFORD SOUND

LUXE TOURS EXAMPLE ITINERARY

Many visitors choose to take a guided tour to Milford Sound for the convenience, safety, and comfort it provides. If you think that a guided tour might be for you, below is an overview of a Luxe Tours Milford Sound tour itinerary from both Te Anau and Queenstown so travellers can understand what a typical day looks like.

TE ANAU TO MILFORD SOUND DAY TOUR

- Duration: 9 hours
- Pick-up: 8:30am from Te Anau accommodation
- Group size: Max 13 guests
- Morning tea included: Large café muffin + tea/coffee
- Option to add on hot meal for the cruise at time of booking

What the day looks like:

- Pick-up from your Te Anau accommodation
- Scenic stops along the Milford Road, such as:
 - Te Anau Downs
 - Eglinton Valley
 - Mirror Lakes
 - Hollyford Valley Lookout
 - Monkey Creek
 - Short guided nature walk (Marian Falls)
- 2-hour Milford Sound Cruise
- Return to Te Anau by 5:30pm

QUEENSTOWN TO MILFORD SOUND DAY TOUR

- Duration: 12 hours
- Pick-up: 7:00–7:30am from Queenstown accommodation or convenient central location
- Group size: Max 13 guests
- Afternoon snack included: Large café muffin
- Option to add on hot meal for the cruise at time of booking

What the day looks like:

- Pick-up from Queenstown accommodation or central location
- Scenic drive via Lake Wakatipu to Te Anau
- 30-minute break in Te Anau (stretch legs, café stop, bathrooms)

Continue to Milford Sound with the following key stops:

- Eglinton Valley
- Mirror Lakes
- Hollyford Valley Lookout
- Monkey Creek
- 2-hour Milford Sound Cruise
- Return to Queenstown by 7:30pm

OPTIONAL ADD-ONS

Depending on which tour you take, you can add a helicopter or plane flight to shorten the return journey and see Fiordland from above.

If touring from Te Anau:

- Milford Helicopters 30-min Scenic Flight with glacier landing
- Milford Helicopters Fly Back to Te Anau

If touring from Queenstown:

- Milford Helicopters Fly Back to Queenstown
- Air Milford Return to Queenstown by Plane



WALKS & HIKES ALONG THE MILFORD ROAD

The Milford Road is home to some of Fiordland's best short walks and day hikes. Below is an overview of popular options that can fit into a visit to Milford Sound. This is not an exhaustive list, but a selection of the best-known and most accessible tracks.

SHORT & EASY NATURE WALKS

LAKE MISTLETOE TRACK:

- Distance: 1.3 km return
- Location: Opposite the accommodation complex at Te Anau Downs, 27 km (30 min) north of Te Anau on SH94

A gentle forest walk leading to a quiet lake where you may spot scaup (NZ diving ducks) and other wetland wildlife. The track sits opposite Te Anau Downs and makes for an easy family-friendly stop.

LAKE GUNN NATURE WALK:

- Distance: 1.4 km loop
- Location: Starts at Cascade Creek Campsite, 78 km from Te Anau on SH94

An easy loop through tranquil beech forest beginning near Cascade Creek Campsite. Expect moss-covered trees, birdlife (tomtits, robins, riflemen), and optional shoreline views of Lake Gunn.

MARIAN FALLS NATURE WALK:

- Distance: 720 m return
- Location: Lake Marian Car Park, 1 km along Hollyford Road, which turns off SH94 at Marian Corner (87 km from Te Anau)

A short walk beginning at the Lake Marian car park. Cross a swing bridge and follow the track to a beautiful series of waterfalls. This walk is suitable for all ages and fitness levels.

MILFORD SOUND FORESHORE WALK:

- Distance: 400 m loop
- Location: Begins near the Milford Sound Visitor Centre in the main township

A flat, easy walk at the Milford Sound waterfront. Offers excellent views of Mitre Peak and interpretation panels about the area's natural history.

LONGER DAY HIKES

MILFORD TRACK DAY WALK TO GIANT GATE FALLS:

- Distance: 11km return (from Sandfly Point)
- Time: 3 hours
- Location: Begins at Sandfly Point, accessed via water taxi from Deepwater Basin (free parking area just before the Milford Sound township)

A taster of New Zealand's most famous Great Walk. After a short water taxi ride from Deepwater Basin, the track to Giant Gate Falls is a mostly flat, forested trail suitable for most fitness levels. Features a swing bridge with outstanding waterfall views.

- Water Taxi Information:
 - Operated by Fiordland Outdoors
 - Runs daily (Oct–May) between 8:30 am and 4 pm
 - Return fare is approx. \$75 adult / \$25 child
 - Tickets must be booked in advance

ROUTEBURN TRACK HIKE TO KEY SUMMIT:

- Distance: 6.8 km return
- Time: 3 hours
- Location: Trail begins at The Divide Car Park, 85 km from Te Anau on SH94

A rewarding alpine walk beginning at The Divide. The climb to Key Summit offers impressive panoramas over the Humboldt and Darran Mountains. Suitable for those with moderate fitness.

LAKE MARIAN TRACK:

- Distance: 6.2 km return
- Time: 3 hours
- Location: Lake Marian Car Park, 1 km down Hollyford Road (turn off SH94 at Marian Corner, 87 km from Te Anau)

A more challenging tramping track from the Lake Marian car park. After Marian Falls, the trail becomes steep, rocky, and often muddy, eventually opening up to a stunning alpine lake in a hanging valley. Suitable for more experienced hikers with a good level of fitness.

WALKS INCLUDED ON TOURS:

Some tour companies include one or two short nature walks, although participation is always optional, and you can remain with the vehicle if you prefer.

LUXE TOURS (TE ANAU):

- Marian Falls Nature Walk

FIORDLAND TOURS (TE ANAU):

- May include Marian Falls or Lake Gunn Nature Walk

TRIPS & TRAMPS (TE ANAU):

- Typically includes a selection such as:
 - Lake Mistletoe Walk
 - Lake Gunn Nature Walk
 - Marian Falls Nature Walk
 - Milford Foreshore Walk

- Private Tour Option:
 - Optional 2.5-hour guided walk to Key Summit (Routeburn Track)

Note: Opting for a longer walk means fewer scenic stops along the Milford Road.

PICTURED: KEY SUMMIT

THE GREAT WALKS OF FIORDLAND

Fiordland is home to three of New Zealand's Great Walks: the Milford Track, Routeburn Track, and Kepler track. These multi-day hikes take you through some of the most beautiful alpine and forest landscapes in Aotearoa.

TIMINGS

- **Great Walks Season (late Oct–Apr):** Best time to hike. Tracks are fully serviced and safer, with huts/campsites requiring bookings through the Department of Conservation.
- **Outside the Season (May–Oct):** Winter conditions make tracks challenging (snow, ice, river hazards). Facilities are reduced, and only experienced, well-equipped hikers should attempt great hikes during this time.

MILFORD TRACK

Often described as “the finest walk in the world,” the Milford Track takes you through glacier-carved valleys, ancient Fiordland rainforest, suspension bridges, alpine passes, and dramatic waterfalls.

Distance: 53.5 km one way
Duration: 4 days / 3 nights
Difficulty: Intermediate during Great Walks season; Advanced–Expert outside the season

ACCESS:

- Start: Boat from Te Anau Downs across Lake Te Anau to Glade Wharf.
- Finish: Sandfly Point → 20-min boat transfer to Milford Sound, then bus transport back to Te Anau/Queenstown.

TRACK DETAILS:

- The track can only be walked in one direction.
- Walkers must stay in the three DOC huts, booked well in advance (no camping allowed).

ROUTEBURN TRACK

The Routeburn Track moves between valleys and mountaintops, weaving through beech forest, open meadows, and reflective alpine tarns. The reward is sweeping views over the Humboldt and Darren Mountain ranges.

Distance: 33 km one way
Duration: 2–4 days
Difficulty: Intermediate during Great Walks season; Advanced–Expert outside the season

ACCESS POINTS:

- Routeburn Shelter – 25 km from Glenorchy
- The Divide Shelter – 85 km from Te Anau

TRACK DETAILS:

- Can be walked in either direction
- Most walkers complete it in 3 days / 2 nights
- Huts and campsites must be booked well in advance during the Great Walks season
- Huts include bunks, mattresses, heating, toilets, and cold water (no showers, food, or cooking utensils)
- Campsites offer basic toilet and water facilities, plus picnic tables and cooking shelters

KEPLER TRACK

The Kepler Track is a purpose-built Great Walk showcasing Fiordland's landscape variety, from lakeside beech forests to high alpine ridgelines with views over Lakes Te Anau and Manapouri.

Distance: 60 km loop track
Duration: 3–4 days
Difficulty: Intermediate during Great Walks season; Advanced–Expert outside the season

ACCESS POINTS:

- Kepler Track Car Park – 5 km from Te Anau
- Fiordland National Park Visitor Centre – 50-minute lakeside walk to the track start
- Rainbow Reach Car Park – 12 km from Te Anau
- Shuttle buses run daily during the Great Walks season, and a water taxi operates to Brod Bay for those wanting to shorten the first section.

TRACK DETAILS:

- Most walkers complete the loop in 4 days / 3 nights
- Three huts and two campsites (bookings essential in season)
- Huts have bunks, mattresses, heating, toilets, and cold water (no showers, food, or cooking utensils)
- Campsites offer basic toilets and water; some have picnic tables/shelters

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES IN FIORDLAND



TE ANAU GLOWWORM CAVES

- Scenic cruise across Lake Te Anau plus a guided walk through underground caves
- Duration: 2.5 hours
- Good to know: Cool inside (8–12°C), includes steps and some bending, not recommended for children under 5. Bookings essential.



LAKE2LAKE BIKE TRAIL

- Scenic bike ride between Lake Te Anau and Lake Manapouri, follows the Waiau River
- Distance: 28.5 km, Grade 2 (easy-moderate)
- Duration: Around 2-2.5 hrs each way
- Bike and e-bike hire available in Te Anau



FIORDLAND JET PURE WILDERNESS TOUR

- Jet boat adventure on the Waiau River
- High-speed sections + quiet scenic moments, includes a short guided walk
- Duration: 2 hours (including transfers)
- Check-in location: 84 Lakefront Drive, Te Anau



SCENIC HELICOPTER FLIGHTS

- Helicopter flights over Fiordland's mountains, lakes, and valleys with Te Anau Helicopter Services
- Multiple options available; some include alpine landings
- Weather dependent, and pre-booking recommended



WATER & WINGS SEAPLANE FLIGHTS

- Scenic seaplane flights with water take-off and landing
- Panoramic lake and mountain views
- Range of options, including Doubtful Sound flights or mystery destinations
- Informative commentary throughout



THE FAITH HISTORIC CRUISES

Day Cruise + Guided Nature Walk

- Lake Te Anau cruise aboard a restored 1935 wooden motor sailer
- Duration: 3 hours (9am or 2pm departures)
- Includes guided walk, personalised commentary, canapés

Evening Champagne Cruise

- Duration: 1.5 hours (6pm departure)
- Scenic evening cruise with champagne and canapés



PĀTEA/DOUBTFUL SOUND CRUISES

Doubtful Sound Day Cruise

- Wilderness experience in NZ's deepest and most remote fiord
- Includes: Lake Manapouri cruise + Wilmot Pass coach + 2.5-hour Doubtful Sound cruise
- Incredible wildlife viewing (dolphins, seals, penguins)
- Available as independent booking or as two-day package with the Luxe Milford Sound Day Tour from Te Anau

Doubtful Sound Overnight Cruise

- 1-2 night overnight cruise
- Includes all meals, cabins (private or shared), expert nature guide, activities

PICTURED: DOUBTFUL SOUND

FIORDLAND WILDLIFE

Fiordland National Park is a protected environment where native species thrive. Here are a few of the locals you may encounter during your visit.



KEA

- World's only alpine parrot
- Very intelligent, curious, and mischievous
- Often hop in our tour vans to explore
- Most often seen near the Homer Tunnel



WHIO (BLUE DUCK)

- Rare native duck found only in New Zealand
- Ducklings can navigate white-water rapids as soon as they hatch
- Most often spotted in the Hollyford Valley at Monkey Creek



SOUTH ISLAND ROBIN

- Friendly, inquisitive forest bird
- Often hops right up to visitors, even onto their shoes
- Commonly seen at Mirror Lakes and Lake Gunn



KĀKĀ

- Forest-dwelling relative of the kea
- Cheeky, boisterous personality
- Enjoys dropping things out of trees
- Frequently seen flying over the canopy in the Eglinton Valley



NEW ZEALAND FUR SEALS

- Usually spotted year-round basking on Seal Rock in Milford Sound
- Deepest-diving seal species in the world (up to 200m, holding breath for 11 minutes)
- Alternate between multi-day foraging trips and resting on rocky shores



BOTTLENOSE DOLPHINS

- A resident pod of around 60 dolphins lives between Milford and Doubtful Sound
- Often ride the waves beside cruise boats
- Visit Milford Sound for the abundant food, working together to herd schools of fish.



CONSERVATION PROJECTS WE SUPPORT:



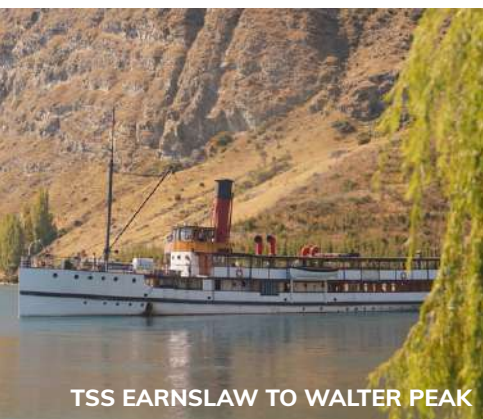
- Kea are especially meaningful to our team at Luxe Tours, and spotting one is a highlight for both guides and guests. But kea are endangered, facing threats from introduced predators and habitat loss. To support their future, \$3 from every Luxe Tours ticket is donated to the [Kea Conservation Trust](#), funding an education programme in Fiordland primary schools that teaches children about kea and how to protect them.
- We also partner with [Trees for Survival](#), an organisation planting native trees across Aotearoa and supplying schools with seedlings for hands-on conservation learning. We donate one native tree for every tour van operating each day, which is around 120 trees per month in peak season.
- These efforts reflect our commitment to caring for our own backyard and helping safeguard Fiordland for future generations. [Read more about our conservation efforts here.](#)

PICTURED: KEA PARROT

MILFORD SOUND VIA WALTER PEAK

OUR 3-DAY IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE

A slow-paced backcountry alternative to the standard Milford Sound day trip. Operated exclusively by Luxe Tours, our expert local guides take you off-the-beaten-path on a route that few visitors to New Zealand experience!



TSS EARNSLAW TO WALTER PEAK

WHO THIS TOUR IS FOR:

- Travellers with 2–3 days who want a more relaxed, in-depth experience
- People wanting small-group travel (max 10 guests)
- Visitors interested in backcountry areas not seen on standard tours
- Anyone wanting a variety of landscapes and multiple days to explore

INCLUSIONS:

- Return travel on the TSS Earnslaw (Queenstown ↔ Walter Peak)
- BBQ lunch & farm demonstration at Walter Peak
- Premium Mercedes vehicle with wide leather seats & extra legroom
- Scenic backcountry access through Walter Peak Station, Mt Nicholas Station & the Von Valley
- Full Milford Sound Day Tour
- Two nights in lakefront accommodation in Te Anau
- 2 x Buffet breakfasts
- Chilled water, tea, coffee, and snacks during tour
- Guided by our expert, local guides

DAY ONE

- Famous TSS Earnslaw Steamship from Queenstown to Walter Peak
- Buffet BBQ lunch & sheep show at Walter Peak
- Premium Mercedes Van tour through Walter Peak Station, Mount Nicholas Station and Von Valley, on route to Te Anau

DAY TWO

- Premium Milford Sound Day Tour
- Unlimited chilled water, tea, coffee and cafe morning snack provided
- Up to 10 scenic, unique nature & photo stops
- 2-hour Milford Sound Cruise at an earlier, quieter cruise time

DAY THREE

- Return from Te Anau to Walter Peak via Backcountry Road
- TSS Earnslaw Steamship back to Queenstown



MT. NICHOLAS STATION

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

MILFORD SOUND: GENERAL QUESTIONS

HOW OFTEN DOES IT RAIN IN MILFORD SOUND?

Milford Sound receives rain on roughly 182 days per year. Rainy days are often considered the best days to visit, as the fiord comes alive with hundreds of temporary waterfalls.

CAN IT GET HOT IN MILFORD SOUND?

Yes. Summer temperatures average 19°C, but can reach 30°C+. UV levels are strong in New Zealand, and there are limited places to fill up your water bottle in Milford Sound. Always bring sunscreen and plenty of water.

ARE THERE FUEL STATIONS ON THE MILFORD ROAD?

No. Te Anau is the last place to fuel up before Milford Sound. There is limited supply and no guaranteed payment options in Milford Sound. There is also very limited cell coverage, so always fill up in Te Anau.

TE ANAU: GENERAL QUESTIONS

WHERE SHOULD I STAY IN TE ANAU?

Te Anau has a range of hotels, motels, B&Bs and holiday parks. Below are a few places we like. Check out the links for in-depth reviews of each one:

- Annie's on Milford – Self-contained units
- Radfords on the Lake – Hotel
- Distinction Hotel & Villas – Hotel
- Blue Ridge Studios – Bed & Breakfast

WHERE CAN I EAT IN TE ANAU?

Te Anau has a range of options from takeaways to upscale dining. Some local favourites include:

- Ditto – Asian fusion
- La Toscana – Pizza & desserts
- Redcliff Bar & Restaurant – Cosy dining using local ingredients.

For a more detailed list, see our guide: [Te Anau Cafes & Restaurants: Our Top Local Picks](#).

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO DRIVE FROM QUEENSTOWN TO TE ANAU?

Allow 2.5 hours in normal conditions. In winter, snow and ice can extend this to 3-4 hours.

IS TE ANAU A GOOD BASE FOR FIORDLAND?

Yes. Te Anau offers easy access to Fiordland National Park, a calm lakeside setting, and convenient tour departures. It's the best place to stay if you want a shorter drive to Milford Sound.

LUXE TOURS: TOUR QUESTIONS

WHAT SHOULD I PACK FOR MY MILFORD SOUND TOUR?

Bring:

- Insect repellent
- Sunscreen
- Water bottle
- Comfortable walking shoes with good tread
- Warm, waterproof jacket
- Camera

HOW FAR AHEAD SHOULD I BOOK?

Tours often fill quickly, especially in summer.

- October–May: Ideally book at least 2 months ahead
- June–September: Booking 1–2 months ahead is usually fine

DO YOUR TOURS INCLUDE A CRUISE?

Yes. All Luxe tours include a 2-hour Milford Haven cruise with RealNZ.

WHAT IS YOUR CANCELLATION POLICY?

- Day tours: Fully refundable up to 24 hours before departure
- 3-day tour: Fully refundable up to 72 hours before departure

WHAT FOOD IS INCLUDED ON YOUR TOURS?

- Day tours: Unlimited chilled water, tea/coffee, lollies, and a large café muffin. Optional hot meal add-on for the cruise.
- 3-day tour: BBQ buffet lunch (Day 1), buffet breakfasts (Days 2–3), café muffin + tea/coffee (Day 2), snack platter (Day 3).

HOW LONG ARE THE TOURS?

- Te Anau → Milford Sound Day Tour: 9 hours
- Queenstown → Milford Sound Day Tour: 12 hours
- 3-Day Walter Peak Tour: Three days total (returning to Queenstown at 2:30pm on Day 3)

HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE ON EACH TOUR?

All Luxe tours are small group tours:

- Day tours: max 13 guests
- 3-day tour: max 10 guests

ARE YOUR TOURS SUITABLE FOR CHILDREN?

Yes, we welcome children on all Luxe Tours. For families with very young children (under 4 years old), we recommend the Te Anau departure, as it has less driving time and more opportunities to get out and explore.

HELPFUL RESOURCES (LINKS)

- [DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION GREAT WALKS INFORMATION](#)
- [MILFORD ROAD STATUS PAGE](#)
- [CAMPER MATE CAMPSITE PLANNER](#)
- [FIORDLAND OUTDOORS TRACK TRANSPORT](#)
- [LUXE TOURS BLOG](#)

PICTURED: EGLINTON RIVER



THANKS FOR READING
WE HOPE THIS HAS BEEN HELPFUL IN PLANNING
YOUR TRIP TO MILFORD SOUND & FIORDLAND



MORE HELPFUL RESOURCES:

CONTACT US

WWW.LUXETOURS.CO.NZ

HELLO@LUXETOURS.CO.NZ

BOOK A TOUR WITH US

TE ANAU TO MILFORD SOUND DAY TOUR - [BOOK HERE](#)

QUEENSTOWN TO MILFORD SOUND DAY TOUR - [BOOK HERE](#)

3-DAY MILFORD SOUND TOUR VIA WALTER PEAK - [BOOK HERE](#)

READ OUR BLOG

[HELPFUL ARTICLES ON OUR BLOG](#)

[HELPFUL VIDEO CONTENT](#)