

THE INLAND SCENIC HIGHWAY

The Inland Scenic Route 72 showcases some of the best of what Canterbury has to offer. Taking in the South Island's largest city, Christchurch and many of Canterbury's loveliest towns, this itinerary is a great way to discover the Canterbury region.

Day 1: Christchurch to Amberley



Begin this journey with a short drive from Christchurch to Amberley in North Canterbury.

The relaxed rural town of Amberley is primarily a service centre for local farms and wine growers, but it's also home to some of the area's best cafes and craft shops.

There are mountain views to the north and south, with Amberley Beach just a minute down the road. The beach has a seemingly endless coastline and is an excellent place for a stroll.

Visitors also enjoy Amberley for its country pursuits, which include horse riding, wine tasting, surfcasting, fly fishing, farm visits and garden tours. The Amberley Beach golf course delivers sweeping views of the sea.

Highlights: Craft shops and cafes, Fly-fishing and surfcasting, Farm visits

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Day 2: Amberley to Oxford



Oxford is a charming farming town located at the inland edge of the Canterbury Plains.

Originally settled as a logging town, Oxford has an interesting history. The sidewall of a butcher's shop depicts the era with a beautifully painted mural.

Once Oxford was served by the railway and had two stations, East Oxford and West Oxford. In 1959, the line closed but some remnants of the old railway can still be seen along Oxford Road on the way to Rangiora.

Around the country town of Oxford, there are farm stays and horse-riding opportunities. Staying on a farm is the ultimate way to appreciate country life - you can help with daily tasks and enjoy the generous, farmhouse-kitchen hospitality of a local family.

Oxford Forest is a popular spot for walks and picnics and the Ryde Falls Walk is an easy excursion.

Highlights: Horse riding in Oxford, Farm stays, Oxford Forest walking trails

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Day 3: Oxford to Darfield



Darfield, which is the main town between Christchurch and the West Coast, is often called 'The township under the Nor' West Arch.' This is a reference to the characteristic weather phenomenon which often displays a flat arch of cloud layered above clear sky and mountains to the west of the township.

With splendid views of the Mount Hutt and Torlesse Ranges of the Southern Alps, Darfield serves the Malvern district's arable and pastoral farming area. Whilst it is a gateway to the scenic attractions of the Waimakariri and Rakaia Rivers and the alpine splendour of the Southern Alps, Darfield is also a popular lift-off place for hot-air balloons.

The town is home to the Selwyn Gallery - a showcase for the district's arts - and its cafés make it a pleasant destination for a Sunday drive.

Highlights: McHugh walk, stunning alpine views, gorgeous spring-time blossom

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Day 4: Darfield to Methven



Your journey into the Southern Alps will depend on the time of the year that you're here.

In winter and spring, Mount Hutt ski field has some of the most reliable snow conditions in New Zealand and the nearby town of Methven, which fairly fizzes with après ski activities. Once snow levels recede, hiking and biking begin. Make it your mission to complete the Mount Somers Walkway - a ten-hour return trip that takes you to historic coal mines, impressive volcanic formations, and a deep river canyon. Climb to the top for spectacular views.

Experience the new adrenalin-fuelled package called "Get High, Get Wet, Get Dirty"

- Get high on a majestic hot air balloon flight over Methven and Mt Hutt with Adventure Balloons
- Get Wet with an adrenalin rush of a ride on the Rakaia River with Discovery Jet, the famous jetboating company.
- Get dirty with the new Dirt Bandits UTV experience, DIRT Bandits is New Zealand's premier UTV Motorsport Experience. Utilising our purpose-built UTV Circuit on the banks of the Rakaia River, a DIRT Bandits experience is raw, dirty and adrenalin fuelled.

Or try Whitewater rafting on the Rangitata River.

Highlights: Ski on Mt Hutt, Mt Somers Walkway, Walk-up Mt Sunday (A lord of the rings film location), Ballooning, Whitewater rafting, mountain biking and more

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Day 5: Methven to Geraldine



A short drive from Methven is the charming town of Geraldine, which offers clear mountain views, beautiful walks and a vibrant boutique-shopping village. If you're here in winter, Geraldine is a great base for accessing the region's ski fields with eight located within two hours' drive.

Things to do around the town include the Geraldine Historical Society Museum and the highly regarded vintage car and machinery museum. Geraldine is also the start of the Starlight Highway which runs through to Lake Tekapo and the International Dark Sky Reserve. Geraldine is home to one of New Zealand's best privately run observatories.

Highlights: Boutique shopping, Ski fields, Arts and crafts and home to the famous Barkers produce

From Geraldine, you have a choice to continue South via Farlie, Lake Tekapo and on to Queenstown, Wanaka, and Central Otago, or you can return to Christchurch via Ashburton on the State highway one as per the suggested itinerary below.

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Day 6: Geraldine to Ashburton



Today you'll make your way to Ashburton, a large town that serves the surrounding farming district. Ashburton sits between two major rivers, so fly-fishing is the local obsession. Both nearby rivers are known for salmon and sea-run trout. The average salmon catch is 6 to 8 kilograms, but 15 kilograms isn't out of the question.

If you're a lover of museums, you'll find plenty to do here, Ashburton boasts a total of six museums, including a vintage railway museum, aviation museum and car museum. There are also plenty of local art and craft galleries to browse. Some of Canterbury's favourite restaurants such as Formosa, The Lake House are in Ashburton also.

Highlights: Art and craft galleries, interactive Museums, Trout and salmon fishing, delicious locally produced cuisine

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Day 7: Ashburton to Akaroa



Travel north from Ashburton to the charming seaside town of Akaroa.

The most French town in New Zealand, Akaroa will have you entranced with its historic buildings, magnificent harbour, and passion for fine food. Visit local restaurants with their focus on French cuisine and take a self-guided walk to see historic cottages. Be sure to visit the museum - it tells the story of Akaroa with displays and an audio-visual presentation.

If you have time, take a harbour cruise to view dolphins, rare penguins, and fur seals.

Highlights: French cuisine & historic buildings, Penguin colony, Swim with dolphins

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Day 8: Akaroa to Christchurch



Once back in Christchurch, take the time to find out what makes this ever-evolving city unique. Christchurch is brimming with innovativeness and creativity. The city boasts a wide selection of diverse restaurants, cafes, bars, and nightclubs.

And of course, Christchurch's iconic activities are still a favourite, showing off its old-English charm. Visit the stunning botanic gardens, enjoy a relaxing punt on the Avon River, ride the historic tram or challenge yourself with an adrenalin fuelled Zipline adventure at the Christchurch Adventure Park.

Highlights: Cardboard cathedral, Punting on the Avon River, Botanical gardens, Zip Lining