

Fiordland & Southland



The bottom end of the South Island has some of the country's most spectacular landscape. To the west is Fiordland National Park, with jagged misty peaks, glistening lakes and an air of forbidding remoteness. The park can be accessed via the world-famous Milford Track, one of the various trails that meander through dense forests and allow views of spectacular mountains and glacier-sculpted canyons. Fiordland is also home to Milford and Doubtful Sounds, with forested cliffs soaring almost vertically from the still, deep waters, and relatively easy to access by road, boat or kayak.

In Southland's east, a sharp left turn off the beaten track, the peaceful Catlins are an area of bird-rich native forest, luxuriantly green farmland and rugged, windswept coasts. In addition to the forest birds the area is home to penguins, seals, sea lions, dolphins and the occasional whale. Wonderful accommodation abounds along wild beaches, in the midst of forests and in tiny waterside settlements.

Southland has the kind of New Zealand scenery that travellers dream of and postcards fail to capture. More than once, you're likely to round a corner, stop in your tracks and just say 'oh, wow' before you reach for the camera.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Sea kayaking, dwarfed by the steep cliffs of **Milford Sound** (p655)
- Exploring side roads, forest waterfalls and lonely southern beaches in the peaceful, windswept **Catlins** (p669)
- Walking through forest and mountains on the stunning **Milford Track** (p655) and **Hollyford Track** (p654)
- Overnighting on the vast, remote **Doubtful Sound** (p660)
- Sharing a beach with dolphins, whales, sea lions and penguins at **Porpoise Bay** (p670) in the Catlins
- Wandering the gardens and admiring the art at Invercargill's **Anderson Park Art Gallery** (p663)
- Ducking off the congaline on the **Te Anau-Milford Hwy** (p653) to explore forest walks and still mountain lakes



Climate

Southland has a temperamental climate; even in the height of summer, downpours are not uncommon. This is something you should resign yourself to while preparing for a cruise on one of the sounds (where the average annual rainfall is 6m or more), a bush walk, road trip or any other type of activity in or through the great outdoors.

The upside is that the reverse is also true; colder months can yield crisp, sunny days. One constant is that it's generally a few degrees cooler here than areas to the north.

Getting There & Around

Air New Zealand connects Invercargill with Christchurch, while Stewart Island Flights connects Invercargill with Oban.

Major bus operators shuttle to Te Anau and Invercargill from Queenstown or Dunedin, and some also ply the Southern Scenic Route and take in Milford Sound. These include InterCity, Topline Tours, Atomic Shuttles, the Bottom Bus and Naked Bus. Companies confining themselves mostly to Southland include TrackNet and Scenic Shuttle.

FIORDLAND

Fiordland is NZ's rawest wilderness area, a jagged, mountainous, forested zone sliced by numerous deeply recessed sounds (which are technically fiords) reaching inland like crooked fingers from the Tasman Sea. Part of the Te Wahipounamu Southwest New Zealand World Heritage Area, it remains, for the most part, formidable and remote. Te Anau and Milford Sound see the bulk of the region's tourists, and small towns hold its small permanent population.

There are a number of wonderful bushwalks in the area: Milford Track may be king, but Kepler and Hollyford are worthy knights, and the Routeburn, Greenstone and Caples Tracks have one end here too, with the other at Queenstown.

TE ANAU

pop 1785

Peaceful, lakeside Te Anau township is a good base for trekkers and visitors traveling to Milford Sound, and an ideal place to recharge your batteries. The tourism industry has ensured there's always plenty to

FIORDLAND & SOUTHLAND FACTS

Eat Bluff oysters in Bluff or Tuatapere sausages in Tuatapere

Drink in the rustic front bar at Redcliffe Café & Bar (p652) in Te Anau

Read *The Gorse Blooms Pale* by Dan Davin, a collection of Southland short stories

Listen to Eagles covers in bad Invercargill drinking barns

Watch *The World's Fastest Indian* (2005), the story of Burt Munroe, Invercargill's favourite son (as played by Sir Anthony Hopkins), who broke land-speed records in the 1960s on his 1920s Indian motorcycle (664)

Swim at Porpoise Bay (p670), where dolphins frolic and penguins waddle

Festival New Zealand Gold Guitar Awards (p668) in Gore

Tackiest tourist attraction The giant trout in Gore (p668)

Go green Take ecologically focused tours by boat on Doubtful Sound (p660) or by foot in the Catlins (p670)

do here. Alternatively, on a sunny day it's a beautiful place to just sit around and do very little at all.

Lake Te Anau defines the boundary of two very different countrysides: to the east are the relatively flat, pastoral areas of central Southland, while immediately west across the lake lie the rugged forested mountains of Fiordland. NZ's second-largest lake, Te Anau was gouged out by a huge glacier, and has several arms that penetrate into the mountainous forested western shore. Its *deep* too – it's deepest point is 417m, or about twice the depth of Loch Ness, so take *that*, Nessie.

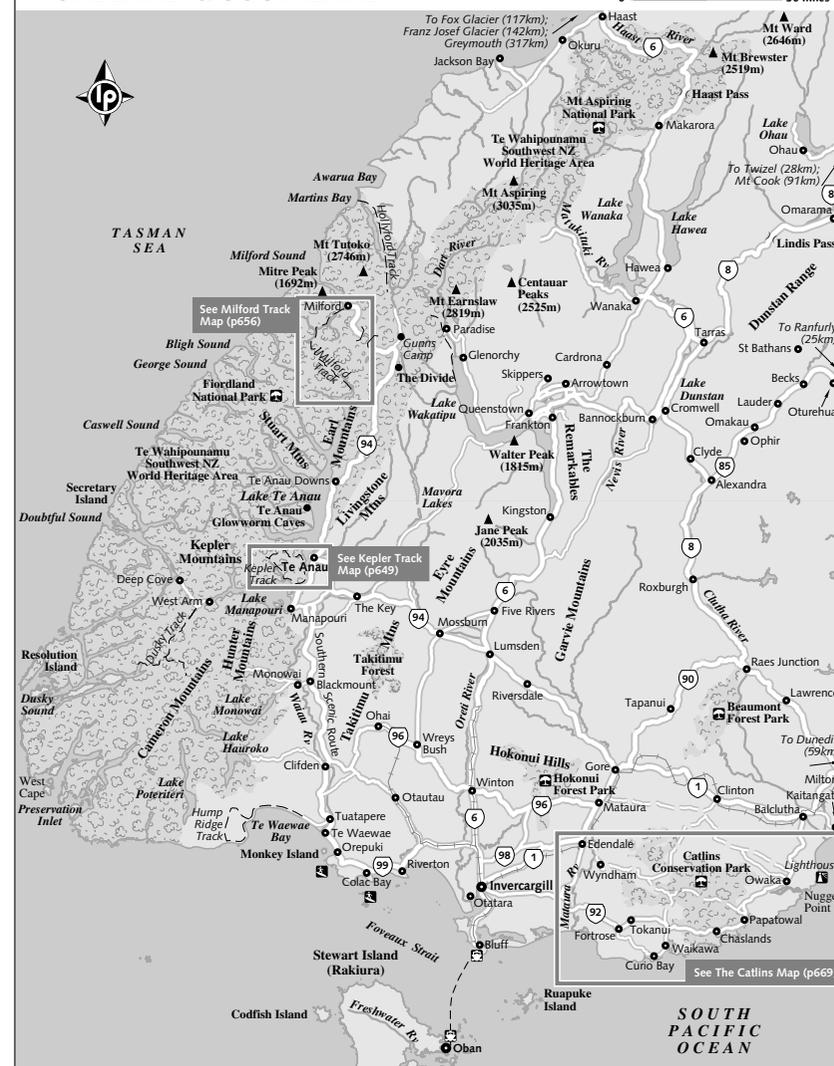
Information

The road along Te Anau's main shopping strip is generally (and confusingly) referred to as 'Town Centre', or sometimes Milford Rd.

Department of Conservation visitor information centre (DOC; ☎ 03-249 0200; www.doc.govt.nz; fiordlandvc@doc.govt.nz; cnr Lakefront Dr & Manapouri Hwy; ☎ 8.30am-6pm) An excellent resource centre for the area with interesting exhibits. Includes the **Great Walks counter** (☎ 03-249 8514; greatwalksbooking@doc.govt.nz) for bookings for the Milford, Routeburn and Kepler Tracks, track information and bookings.

Fiordland i-SITE (☎ 03-249 8900; fiordland-isite@realjourneys.co.nz; Real Journeys office, 85 Lakefront Dr; ☎ 8.30am-6pm summer, to 5pm winter) Brochures and

FIORDLAND & SOUTHLAND



info galore along with highway conditions, activities, accommodation and bus bookings.

Medical Centre (☎ 03-249 7007; Luxmore Dr; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat)

Photocentre.com (☎ 03-249 7620; 62 Town Centre; ☎) Internet terminals and gear to print out your digital pics.

Post Office (102 Town Centre) Inside the Paper Plus newsagency.

Sights

TE ANAU GLOWWORM CAVES

Once present only in Maori legends, these impressive caves on the lake's western shore were only rediscovered in 1948. Accessible only by boat, the 200m-long system of caves is a magical place with sculpted rocks, waterfalls small and large, whirlpools and a glittering

TE ANAU

INFORMATION

- DOC Visitor Information Centre...1 C4
- Fiordland i-SITE...2 B3
- Medical Centre...3 C2
- Photocentre.com... (see 29)
- Post Office...4 C2

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

- Bev's Tramping Gear...5 D3
- Fiordland Wilderness Experiences...6 C3
- Real Journeys... (see 2)
- Southern Lakes Helicopters...7 B3
- Te Anau Bike Hire...8 B2
- Te Anau Outside Sports...9 C2
- Te Anau Wildlife Centre...10 C4
- Wings & Water Te Anau...11 C3

SLEEPING

- Anchorage Motel...12 C3
- Cat's Whiskers B&B...13 C4
- Edgewater Motel...14 C3
- Keiko's B&B...15 D2
- Lakefront Lodge...16 C3
- Lakeside Motel...17 C3
- Lakeview Campsite, West Arm & Steamers Backpackers...18 D4
- Rosies Backpacker Homestay...19 D1
- Te Anau Great Lakes...20 C2
- Holiday Park...21 C3
- Te Anau Lakefront Backpackers...21 C3
- Te Anau Lodge B&B...22 D1
- Te Anau Top 10 Holiday Park...23 B2
- Te Anau YHA...24 B2

DRINKING

- Moose...33 C3
- Ranch Bar & Grill...34 C2

EATING

- Fat Duck...25 C2
- Indian Summer... (see 32)
- La Dolce Vita...26 C2
- La Toscana...27 C2
- Miles Better Pies...28 C2
- Naturally Fiordland...29 C2
- Olive Tree Cafe & Restaurant...30 C2
- Redcliffe Cafe & Bar...31 C2
- Sandfly Cafe...32 C2
- Supervalve Supermarket... (see 32)

DRINKING

- Moose...33 C3
- Ranch Bar & Grill...34 C2

ENTERTAINMENT

- Fiordland Cinema... (see 32)

TRANSPORT

- InterCity Depot... (see 2)
- Kepler Water Taxi...35 B2

Other locations:

- To Te Anau Glowworm Caves (16km)
- To Brod Bay (3km)
- To Mossburn (58km); Lumsden (72km); Invercargill (152km)
- To Kepler Track (3km); Blue Mountain Cottages (8km); Barnyard Backpackers (9km); Manapouri (20km)

glowworm grotto in its inner reaches. **Real Journeys** (☎ 0800 656 501; www.realjourneys.co.nz; tours per adult/child \$56/15) runs 2¼-hour guided tours through this mysterious place, reaching the heart of the caves by a walkway and a short underground boat ride.

TE ANAU WILDLIFE CENTRE

The DOC-run **Te Anau Wildlife Centre** (☎ 03-249 0200; Te Anau-Manapouri Rd; admission by donation; ☒ dawn-dusk) harbours a large array of native bird species, including the rare flightless takaha (this is one of only a couple of places where you can see them in the flesh), NZ pigeons, tui, kaka, weka and various waterfowl. It's a boisterous group, belting out a mixed bag of song.

Activities WALKING

If you're planning to do any tramping in the area, pick up your information and brochures and register at the DOC office (p646).

Kepler Track

This 60km circular Great Walk starts less than an hour's walk from Te Anau and heads west into the Kepler Mountains, taking in the lake, rivers, gorges, glacier-carved valleys and beech forest. The walk can be done in four days, or three if you exit at Rainbow Reach. On the first day you reach the tree line, giving panoramic views. The alpine stretch between Luxmore and Iris Burn Huts goes along a high ridge, well above the bush and offers fantastic views when

it's clear; in poor weather it can be treacherous. It's recommended that the track be done in the Luxmore-Iris Burn-Moturau direction.

Like any Fiordland track, the weather has a major impact on the walk; you should expect at least one day of rain and be prepared for some wading. The alpine sections require a good level of fitness and may be closed in winter due to bad weather conditions. Other sections are considered moderate with climbs and descents of up to 1000m and unbridged stream crossings.

During the main walking season (late October to April), advance bookings must be made by all trampers through the Te Anau DOC office. Over this period, a **Great Walks huts pass** (per night adult/child \$40/20) buys you accommodation in the track's three well-maintained huts - Luxmore, Iris Burn and Moturau - each with heating and cooking facilities. A **camping pass** (per night adult/child \$10/5) permits you to camp at the designated sites at Brod Bay and adjacent to Iris Burn Hut. Outside this main season, hut passes still need to be pre-purchased (per night adult/child \$10/5) but no heating or cooking is on offer. Off-season camping is free.

Estimated walking times:

| Day | Route | Time |
|-----|-------------------------------------|---------|
| 1 | Te Anau DOC office to control gates | 45min |
| 1 | Control gates to Brod Bay | 1½hr |
| 1 | Brod Bay to Luxmore Hut | 3½-4½hr |
| 2 | Luxmore Hut to Iris Burn Hut | 5-6hr |
| 3 | Iris Burn Hut to Moturau Hut | 5-6hr |
| 4 | Moturau Hut to Rainbow Reach | 1½-2hr |
| 4 | Rainbow Reach to control gates | 2½-3½hr |

TrackNet (☎ 0800 483 2628; www.tracknet.net) and **Topline Tours** (☎ 03-249 8059; www.toplinetours.co.nz) provide transport to and from the ends of the track for between \$6 and \$9. You can also walk to the control gates from the DOC office in about 50 minutes.

Short Walks

You can set out along the Kepler Track on free day walks. **Kepler Water Taxi** (☎ 03-249 8364; stevsaunder@xtra.co.nz; each way \$20) will scoot you over to Brod Bay from where you can walk to Mt Luxmore (seven to eight hours) or along the southern lakeshore back to Te Anau (two to three hours). There are also many short walks in the area (see p653).

During summer **Trips'n'Tramps** (☎ 03-249 7081; www.milfordtourswalks.co.nz; ☒ Oct-Apr) offers small-group, 2½-hour guided hikes on sections of the Routeburn, Kepler and Hollyford Tracks. **Real Journeys** (☎ 0800 656 501; www.realjourneys.co.nz; adult/child \$165/107; ☒ Dec-Apr) runs guided day hikes along an 11km stretch of the Milford Track.

Grab a copy of **Fiordland National Park Day Walks** (\$1 from Fiordland i-SITE) for more options.

Equipment

Make sure you're well equipped before starting out on any tracks. In particular, you need good rain gear.

Bev's Tramping Gear (☎ 03-249 7389; www.bevs-hire.co.nz; 16 Homer St; ☒ 9am-noon & 6.30-8pm) Topographical maps for sale and tramping and camping equipment for hire.

KEPLER TRACK

Other locations:

- To Milford (117km)
- To Mossburn (50km)
- To Manapouri (9km)

Te Anau Outside Sports (☎ 03-249 8195; www.sports.worldteanau.co.nz; 38 Town Centre) Lots of name-brand equipment for sale or hire.

KAYAKING & JETBOATING

Kayaking in the pristine waterways of the World Heritage Area is unbeatable. **Fiordland Wilderness Experiences** (☎ 0800 200 434; www.fiordlandseakayak.co.nz; 66 Quintin Dr) rents out kayaks (\$55 per day) for independent paddling. See p657 for their kayaking trips on Milford Sound.

Luxmore Jet (☎ 0800 253 826, 03-249 6951; www.luxmorejet.co.nz; per adult \$85) does a one-hour ride on the stunningly beautiful Waiau River which links Lakes Te Anau and Manapouri, and includes the inevitable *Lord of the Rings* locations.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

The i-SITE office provides information on the abundance of guided **trout fishing** (fly, trolling or spinning). River and stream fishing takes place roughly from October to May, while lake fishing occurs year-round. You'll need to pick up a licence from DOC.

Te Anau Bike Hire (☎ 03-249 7211; 7 Mokonui St; bike hire per hr/day from \$10/25; ☞ from 10am Sep-Apr) hires mountain bikes, quadricycles, baby capsules, kids' bikes and tandems. **High Ride Adventures** (☎ 03-249 8591; www.highride.co.nz; quad bike trips \$145, horse trips \$80) offers 3½-hour backcountry trips on quad bikes, with great views over the lakes, and 3½-hour horseback trips along Whitestone River.

Fiordland Astronomy (☎ 0508 COSMOS; per person \$35; ☞ weather permitting) takes small groups (maximum eight) to view the night sky by binoculars and 30cm telescope. Myths, stories and astronomical facts are thrown in.

Tours

AERIAL SIGHTSEEING

With blue lakes, dark forests and steep snowy mountains visible the moment you get aloft, this is one of the greatest places in NZ to take a scenic flight. **Wings & Water Te Anau** (☎ 03-249 7405; wingsandwater@teanau.co.nz; Lakefront Dr) has sea-plane flights right off Lakefront Dr with a 10-minute zip around the local area (adult/child \$75/40) and longer flights over the Kepler Track, and Doubtful and Milford Sounds (from \$175). **Air Fiordland** (☎ 03-249 7505; www.airfiordland.co.nz) offers similar deals.

Southern Lakes Helicopters (☎ 03-249 7167; www.southernlakeshelicopters.co.nz; Lakefront Dr) buzzes

over Te Anau for 25 minutes (\$170) and does longer trips over Doubtful, Dusky and Milford Sounds (from \$470) and a chopper/walk/boat option on a part of the Kepler Track (\$160).

Sleeping

Although Te Anau has many hostels, cabins, motels and hotels, all the accommodation in town can still be booked out in the middle of the peak season (late December to February). Book early if you don't want to be shunted out to Waikikamukau, Timbuktou or (gulp) Lumsden.

BUDGET

Te Anau Great Lakes Holiday Park (☎ 03-249 8538; www.teanaugreatlakes.co.nz; cnr Luxmore Dr & Milford Rd; sites per person \$15, dm \$25, cabins d \$50-65, units \$89-98; ☎ ☑) A grassy holiday park with a big modern kitchen and a bunch of cabins and units. A couple of good family options, house and two-bedroom unit, cost between \$120 and \$190.

Lakeview Campsite, West Arm & Steamers Backpackers (☎ 03-249 7457; www.teanau.info; sites per person from \$16.50, dm \$25, s \$32, d \$60-89, cabins d \$60-69, self-contained d \$115-125; ☎ ☑ ☞) This huge lake-side complex, 1.5km out of town, combines three entities: Te Anau Lakeview campsite (with tent/van sites and several types of cabins and self-contained motel units sleeping up to seven); West Arm singles accommodation (which is very basic, institutional and best avoided) and Steamers backpackers (where rooms are a little characterless but share a modern and comfortable communal kitchen and lounge space). Extra bedding, for cabins, West Arm and Steamers, costs \$5.

Te Anau Top 10 Holiday Park (☎ 0800 249 746, 03-249 7462; www.teanautop10.co.nz; 128 Te Anau Tce; sites from \$32, d \$61-160; ☎ ☑) This classic holiday park, the closest to town and the lake, has excellent facilities with small but private sites, a playground, sauna, bike hire, barbecue area and modern kitchen. There's an army of tidy cabins and units, from fancy to basic.

Bob & Maxines (☎ 03-931 3161; bob.anderson@whoosh.co.nz; 20 Paton Pl, off Oraka St; van site per person \$20, dm/tw \$30/80; ☎ ☑) Only 2.5km out of town, off the Te Anau-Milford Hwy, but feeling a million miles away, this comfortable, relaxed hostel gets rave reviews for the big mountain views from the communal lounge. Warm beside the woodburner, guests are encouraged to share stories and just chill out a while. Wheelchair friendly.

Barnyard Backpackers (Map p649; ☎ 03-249 8006; rainbowdowns@xtra.co.nz; 80 Mt York Rd, off SH95; dm/d \$26/66; ☎ ☑) On a deer farm 9km south of town toward Manapouri, this charmingly rustic communal building and its collection of log cabins sit on a hillside with a view to the Kepler Mountains. Cabins are comfortable and ensuited, and the communal area is great for playing pool or sitting around the central fireplace. A good home base for the Kepler Track.

Te Anau Lakefront Backpackers (☎ 03-249 7713; www.teanaubackpackers.co.nz; 48-50 Lakefront Dr; dm \$26-28, d \$65-75; ☎ ☑) This sprawling collection of buildings has a huge variety of rooms, some sunny and spacious, while others are poky and worn. Regardless, the staff are friendly and helpful, there's a nice communal vibe, lots of warm fires in the winter, a shady peaceful garden warbling with tui and a fantastic location right beside the lake. Backpackers are well loved, with lakeview dorms and a virtual encouragement to party, but there's everything through to quieter family options out the back. Bikes for hire.

Te Anau YHA (☎ 03-249 7847; www.yha.co.nz; yha.teanau@yha.co.nz; 29 Mokonui St; dm/s/d \$28/45/72; ☎ ☑) The most central of the backpackers in Te Anau. You'll feel immediately relaxed and at home in this exceptionally bright and modern hostel, with its great facilities and comfortable, colourful rooms. Lounge in the hammock, barbecue in the grassy backyard, or get cosy by the wood fire. The staff are great at giving the lowdown on activities.

Rosie's Backpacker Homestay (☎ 03-249 8431; backpack@paradise.net.nz; 23 Tom Plato Dr; dm/d \$32/74; ☎ ☑) You're immediately made to feel part of the family in this small and intimate homestay, with its warm, welcoming environment. It's in the 'burbs a short walk north of the town centre, but it's a small town – the walk won't kill ya. Rosie and family will also help you decide on activities and things to do around town. They're closed June and July.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

If you're here in winter it's always worth asking the larger motels about a discount on their high-season rates. See the i-SITE or www.fiordland.org.nz for many more motels and B&Bs.

Lakeside Motel (☎ 0800 246 248, 03-249 7435; www.lakesideteanau.com; 36 Lakefront Dr; d \$130-160; ☎ ☑) With most units directly facing across the grassy lawns to the lake, this motel has the greatest of

views, particularly from the first floor. Inside, there's plenty of light from the large windows and good cooking facilities. Units are \$30 cheaper in winter. Wheelchair friendly.

Cat's Whiskers B&B (☎ 03-249 8112; www.catswhiskers.co.nz; 2 Lakefront Dr; s \$130, d \$165-190; ☎ ☑) This family home features great views of the lake just across the road, four large en-suite rooms and one big fluffy cat. There's a good outside area to relax in at the back of the house. The family room sleeps four.

Te Anau Lodge B&B (☎ 03-249 7477; www.teanau.lodge.com; 52 Howden St; s \$170-320, d \$200-350; ☎ ☑) The former 1930s-built Sisters of Mercy Convent, relocated to a grand location just north of town, this is a positively decadent accommodation option. Sip your drink in a Chesterfield in front of the fire, retire to your spa before collapsing on a king-size bed, then awake to a fresh, delicious breakfast in the old chapel. Dear, oh dear. What would Mother Superior think?

Keiko's B&B (☎ 03-249 9248; www.keikos.co.nz; 228 Milford Rd; d \$185; ☎) Private self-contained cottages here are lovely, and the entirety is surrounded by an explosion of flowers and gardens. Japanese breakfast in the morning and bamboo-bordered hot tub in the evening are very worthy extras. Keiko's is closed in the dead of winter. Ask for discounts outside peak season.

Blue Mountain Cottages (Map p649; ☎ 03-249 9030; Hwy 95; cabin \$250; ☎ ☞) These two plush self-contained cabins surrounded by farmland 8km south of town can sleep up to six, so they're a good family option. Cabins are \$150 in winter.

The following are but a small selection of the local genus *motellus domesticus*:

Anchorage Motel (☎ 03-249 7256; www.teanauhotel.co.nz; 47 Quintin Dr; r \$125; ☎ ☑) Good for kids and wheelchair friendly.

Edgewater Motel (☎ 0800 433 439, 03-249 7258; www.edgewater.net.nz; 52 Lakefront Dr; d \$130-160; ☎ ☑) Light, comfortable rooms with good cooking facilities. Villa also available.

Lakefront Lodge (☎ 0800 525 337, 03-249 7728; www.lakefrontlodgeteanau.com; cnr Lakefront Dr & Mokoroa St; units \$159-240; ☎ ☑) One-bedroom units sleep up to four. Discounts in winter.

Eating

RESTAURANTS & CAFÉS

Olive Tree Café & Restaurant (☎ 03-249 8496; 52 Town Centre; snacks & burgers from \$7, mains \$20-36; ☞ 8am-9.30pm

Sep-May, 9am-8pm Jun-Aug) Tucked away at the end of an unremarkable-looking arcade, Olive Tree is warm and funky inside, with excellent outdoor areas to sip coffee in the sun or enjoy a tasty Mediterranean-flavoured meal.

La Dolce Vita (☎ 03-249 8895; 90 Town Centre; lunch mains \$8-15, dinner \$27-33; ☎ 5pm-late) Run by familia Lombardi, this very stylish, ultramodern-looking restaurant stretches beyond simple Italian fare to include Southland cuisine: fresh seafood, local lamb and big steaks. Fresh-made pasta dishes (a fairly hefty \$24 to \$26) are also popular.

La Toscana (☎ 03-249 7756; www.latoscana.co.nz; 108 Town Centre; pasta \$12-19, mains \$10-20; ☎ 5.30am-late) Buzzy, noisy and relaxed, with wooden booths and tables, this is a lively spot for a late-night snack, or a good dinner option. Partaking of a wee drop while you dine is encouraged by the multitude of empty wine bottles around the walls. Pizzas and pastas are large and great value – pasta al nonno is somewhat famous among its local fans. Takeaways and deliveries are available.

Indian Summer (☎ 03-249 9298; 5 The Lane; mains \$16-22; ☎ noon-2.30pm & 5-7pm; ♀) It's great to have a subcontinental alternative to Te Anau's plethora of Italian eateries, and this is a pleasant, mellow place for a curry. The cooking isn't going to change your life, but it's not bad for rural NZ. Takeaways available.

ourpick Redcliffe Café & Bar (☎ 03-249 7431; 12 Mokonui St; mains \$22-36; ☎ dinner) Looking and feeling like an old settler's cottage, this restaurant specialises in local foods – try the famous pork belly, wild Fiordlands venison or tender herby hare. If your table's not ready when you arrive, take the opportunity to relax in the rustic front bar, which is also the place for a quiet after-dinner drink. There's occasional live music and a permanent friendly vibe.

Fat Duck (☎ 03-249 8480; 124 Town Centre; dinner mains \$25-32; ☎ 8am-late) An uninspiring café from the outside and a large, too-tidy bar inside, the Duck nevertheless gets rave reviews from most travellers. Its dishes are tasty and hearty in proportions, and variations on basics such as crispy duck, pork belly and salmon are imaginative.

QUICK EATS & SELF-CATERING

Miles Better Pies (☎ 03-249 9044; cnr Town Centre & Mokonui St; pies \$5; ☎ 6am-4pm) The ubiquitous NZ pie has never looked better. Choose from

freshly made, gourmet venison, Thai curry or apricot. There are a few pavement tables, but sitting beside the lake is probably nicer, and the pies make a good snack for the road too.

Sandfly Café (☎ 03-249 9529; 9 The Lane; breakfast & lunch \$6-15; ☎ 8am-4.30pm; ♀) With the best coffee in Te Anau, this is a lovely chilled-out place to relax. Enjoy the music, the all-day breakfast and the yummy baking. Sandfly is closed Mondays during winter.

Naturally Fiordland (☎ 03-249 7111; 62 Town Centre; breakfast from \$7.50, pizzas from \$9.50; ☎ 9am-late) A relaxed little pizza café with a German flavour and comfortable booths inside. Outside, sunny pavement seats are a good spot to enjoy your gourmet pizza or tasty pasta. Takeaways available.

Supervalue Supermarket (1 The Lane; ☎ 8am-8pm) is the place to stock up for self catering.

Drinking & Entertainment

Redcliffe Café & Bar (left) is the most charming, atmospheric option for after-dinner drinks. If you're after something a little more ram-bunctious, try **Ranch Bar & Grill** (☎ 03-249 8801; Town Centre; ☎ noon-late), where Te Anau's youth slug beer, play pool and listen to The Eagles. Sunny outdoor tables at the Ranch are a good option for the all-day breakfast. Otherwise the cavernous lakefront **Moose** (☎ 03-249 7100; 84 Lakefront Dr) has big-screen sports and a sunny patio. They also do meals.

In between endless showings of *Ata Whenua*, which is essentially a 10-minute advertisement for Fiordland scenery, **Fiordland Cinema** (☎ 03-249 8812; www.fiordlandcinema.co.nz; 7 The Lane; \$15) shows other films too.

Getting There & Away

InterCity (☎ 03-249 7559; www.intercity.co.nz) has daily bus services between Te Anau and Queenstown (\$35, two hours), Invercargill (\$46, 2½ hours) and Dunedin (\$44, four hours). InterCity departs from outside the i-SITE. Look online for discounts.

Other bus services include:

Naked Bus (☎ 0900 625 33; www.nakedbus.com) Connects Te Anau with Queenstown (\$29), Dunedin (\$33) and Tuatapere and Invercargill (\$32).

Scenic Shuttle (☎ 0800 277 483; www.scenicshuttle.co.nz) Via the Southern Scenic Route past Manapouri and Tuatapere to Invercargill (\$45).

Topline Tours (☎ 03-249 8059; www.toplinetours.co.nz) Daily door-to-door between Te Anau and Queenstown (\$35).

TrackNet (☎ 0800 483 2628; www.tracknet.net) Connects Te Anau with Queenstown (adult \$38), Milford (\$42; 2½ hours), Invercargill (\$42) and to and from several tramping tracks (see below).

TRAMPERS' TRANSPORT

TrackNet (☎ 0800 483 2628; www.tracknet.net) has daily shuttles to the Kepler, Hollyford and Milford Tracks, and to the western end of the Routeburn, Greenstone and Caples Tracks at the Divide.

The **Kepler Water Taxi** (☎ 03-249 8364; stevensaunders@xtra.co.nz) runs regularly across the lake to Brod Bay (\$20, 10 minutes) on the Kepler Track in summer. **Wings & Water Te Anau** (☎ 03-249 7405; wingsandwater@xtra.co.nz) provides transport to Supper Cove (\$270 per person, minimum two passengers) for Dusky Sound trampers.

TE ANAU–MILFORD HIGHWAY

If you don't have the opportunity to hike into Fiordland's wilderness, the 119km road from Te Anau to Milford is the most easily accessible taste of its vastness and beauty. Even if you don't do a cruise at the other end, this is a top road trip for sheer scenic wonder – it's the kind of scenery that makes cars swerve wildly off the road as their drivers reach for the camera.

If travelling in summer, head out super-early (8am) or later in the morning (11am) to avoid the conga-line of tour-buses that clog the road heading for midday sound cruises. See p658 for important information about chains and avalanches (in winter) and petrol (always). It's a tricky road, so take care.

The trip takes two to 2½ hours if you drive straight through... but don't do that! Take time to stop and soak up the experience. This is stunning, majestic country – what a shame it would be to view it only through your windscreen wipers. Pull off the road and explore the many viewpoints and nature walks en route. A few are listed in the following section, but with a copy of *Fiordland National Park Day Walks* (\$1 from DOC or the i-SITE) you're well equipped to discover your own.

The first part of the road meanders through rolling farmland atop the lateral moraine of the glacier that once gouged out Lake Te Anau. The road passes **Te Anau Downs** (there's accommodation here at Fiordland National Park Lodge, see p654) after 29km and heads towards the entrance of Fiordland National

Park, passing patches of beech (red, silver and mountain), alluvial flats and meadows.

There are plenty of lookout points en route: just past the **McKay Creek** campsite (at 51km) are great views over Eglinton Valley with sheer mountains either side and Pyramid Peak (2295m) and Ngatimaoe Peak (2164m) ahead. The boardwalk at **Mirror Lakes** (at 58km) takes you through beech forest and wetlands, and on a calm day the lakes reflect the mountains across the valley. **Knobs Flat** (at 63km) also has accommodation (p654).

At the 77km mark is the area referred to as O Tapara, or more commonly as **Cascade Creek**. O Tapara is the original name of nearby Lake Gunn, and was a stopover historically for Maori parties heading to Anita Bay in search of *pounamu* (greenstone). A walking track (45 minutes) passes through tall red beech forest ringing with bird calls. A number of side trails lead to quiet lakeside beaches.

At 84km the vegetation changes as you pass across the **Divide**, the lowest east-west pass in the Southern Alps. There's a large roadside shelter here for walkers either finishing or starting the Routeburn, Greenstone or Caples Tracks, it's also used as a terminal for trampers' bus services (left). A walk from the shelter, initially through beech forest along the start of the Routeburn, then climbing up alpine tussockland to **Key Summit** (two hours return) offers spectacular views of the three valleys that radiate from this point.

From the Divide, the road falls into the beech forest of the **Hollyford Valley** (stop at Pop's View for a good...view) and there's a worthwhile detour to **Gunn's Camp & Museum** (p654) 8km along an unsealed road. About 9km further, at the end of that road, is a walk to the high **Humboldt Falls** (30 minutes return) and the start of the Hollyford Track (p654).

Back on the main road to Milford, the road climbs to the **Homer Tunnel**, 101km from Te Anau and framed by a spectacular, high-walled, ice-carved amphitheatre. The tunnel is one-way outside avalanche season, with the world's most alpine set of traffic lights to direct traffic. Kea, the naughty teenagers of the parrot world, hang around the eastern end of the tunnel hoping tourists stopped at the lights will be stupid enough to feed them. Dark, magnificently rough-hewn and dripping with water, the 1207m-long tunnel emerges at the other end at the head of the spectacular **Cleddau Valley**.

TE WAHIPOUNAMU SOUTHWEST NZ WORLD HERITAGE AREA

In the southwest corner of NZ, the combination of four huge national parks make up Te Wahipounamu Southwest New Zealand World Heritage Area. Te Wahipounamu (The Place of Greenstone) covers 2.6 million hectares and is recognised internationally for its cultural significance to the Ngai Tahu, as well as the area's unique fauna and wildlife. Te Wahipounamu incorporates the following national parks:

- Fiordland National Park (p646)
- Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park (p571)
- Westland Tai Poutini National Park (p510)
- Mt Aspiring National Park (p636)

About 10km before Milford, the **Chasm Walk** (20 minutes return and even accessible by wheelchair, though you might appreciate assistance on the steeper parts) is well worth a stop. The forest-cloaked Cleddau River plunges through strikingly eroded boulders in a narrow chasm, creating deep falls and a natural rock bridge. From here, watch for glimpses of **Mt Tutoko** (2746m), Fiordland's highest peak, above the beech forest just before Milford.

Hollyford Track

This dramatic track starts in the midst of lowland forest, crossing mountain streams and passing pretty waterfalls as it follows the broad Hollyford River valley all the way to the sea. The Tasman coast makes a satisfying end point, with dolphins, seals and penguins often greeting hikers on their arrival. However it does mean backtracking another four days back to your start point unless you take one of the sneaky shortcut options.

The 56km track is graded as a moderate hike, but involves some creek crossings and suffers frequent flash floods that can leave trekkers waiting it out en-route for several days until the trail becomes passable. The trickiest part of the route is the ominously named Demon Trail (10km) alongside Lake McKerrow. It's imperative that you check with DOC in Te Anau for the latest track and weather conditions and for detailed maps.

TrackNet (☎ 0800 483 2628, 03-249 7777; www.tracknet.net) has shuttles between the Hollyford Rd

turn-off and Te Anau (\$42, one hour) and Queenstown (\$80, 3¼ hours).

Options for reducing the length of the there-and-back journey include hitching a jetboat ride south with **Hollyford Track Guided Walks** (☎ 0800 832 226, 03-442 3760; www.hollyfordwilderness.com; \$110) for the length of Lake McKerrow; book in advance. If you've got a lot more cash, you can do a more-luxurious, three-day guided walk with the company for \$1655, including fancy accommodation, jetboat trips in both directions along Lake McKerrow and a flight back to Milford Sound from the coastal finish line at Martins Bay.

You can also arrange a flight between Martins Bay and civilisation with **Air Fiordland** (☎ 03-249 7505; www.airfiordland.com; to Milford/Te Anau \$490/980) for up to four people (price is per flight, so you can share the cost). Hollyford Track Guided Walks sometimes has empty seats when they fly from Milford Sound to pick up their walkers at Martin Bay, and can drop you at Martins Bay for \$175.

Sleeping

Along State Highway 94 (SH94) are many basic **DOC camping grounds** (sites \$10), the majority of them situated between 45km and 81km from Te Anau. You'll find them in *Conservation Campsites – South Island* (free from DOC in Te Anau), or search www.doc.govt.nz for Te Anau area conservation campsites.

At Te Anau Downs (29km from Te Anau) at the head of the lake, just a pack's throw from Glade Wharf where boats depart for Milford Track, **Fiordland National Park Lodge** (☎ 0800 500 805, 03-249 7811; SH94; www.teanau-milfordsound.co.nz; dm \$25, hotel d \$95-130, motel d \$120-150; ♿) is a large complex with a variety of slightly dated backpacker and hotel-motel-type units. Views of the lake and mountains are spectacular from the hotel rooms and the very 70s communal kitchen. Motel units have a less spectacular view; inside too, where's it's shades of pink and grey.

At a grassy site in the Eglinton Valley 63km from Te Anau, **Knob's Flat** (☎ 03-249 9122; www.knobsflat.co.nz; studio/motel units \$95/130; ♿) has a number of small, comfortable units aimed at people who want to fish, walk, and ponder the great outdoors. TV, mobile phones, email and general stress have no place here.

Gunn's Camp (Hollyford Rd; gunncamp@ruralinzone.net; sites per person \$10, d/tw \$20/48), also known as Hollyford Camp, is on Hollyford Rd about

halfway between SH94 (8km) and the start of the Hollyford Track (9km). The old public-works cabins are very basic (linen hire is \$5 per bed), and heating is via a coal/wood-fired stove (fuel provided). A generator supplies limited electricity, turning off at 10.30pm, and there's gas for cooking and for hot showers. There's also a small shop and a small, slightly mad **museum** (admission adult/child \$1/30c, guests free) with pioneering memorabilia.

Milford Sound Lodge (☎ 03-249 8071; www.milfordlodge.com; just off SH94; sites \$15-18, dm/d \$28/70; ♿) is spectacularly located – nestled in forest, surrounded by towering mountains and alongside the Cleddau River. This simple but very comfortable lodge has an unhurried, ends-of-the-earth air. Deliberately, there's no TV; instead, travellers and trampers relax in the large communal space to discuss their travels or tinkle away on the piano. There's a tiny shop-café-bar and a free shuttle to Milford, 12km away. Motel-style units (\$180 to \$220) sleep three.

MILFORD SOUND

pop 170

First sight of Milford Sound is stunning; still, dark waters out of which rise sheer rocky cliffs, and forests clinging to the slopes sometimes relinquish their hold, causing a 'tree avalanche' into the waters. The spectacular, photogenic 1692m-high Mitre Peak rises dead ahead. It's a vista to make you go 'ooo'. And there's more – a cruise out on the waters of Milford Sound is the most accessible of trips on any of Fiordland's famous sounds, complete with seals, dolphins and an almost guaranteed downpour of rain (an average of 7m per year!) that creates a spectacular deluge of cascading waterfalls and afterwards adds an appropriately moody mist to the scene.

One of NZ's biggest tourist attractions, Milford Sound receives about half a million visitors each year, most of them crammed into the peak months (January and February). Some 14,000 arrive by foot, via the Milford Track which ends at the sound, many more drive from Te Anau, but most arrive via the multitude of buses that pull into the cruise wharf. At peak times, the cruise terminal resembles a busy international air terminal. Nevertheless, when you get out on the water, all of this humanity seems tiny in the face of nature's vastness.

The terminal area is also regularly swarming with ferocious sandflies. Thankfully they stay behind on land.

The rest of Milford township is fairly unimpressive for such a grand location. See p658 for the modest eating options and places to rest your head. There's really not much else to town apart from the cruise terminal and the carpark, though if you take the turn off to Deep Water Basin about 1km out of town, you can explore the small fishing wharf area.

Milford Track

The famous Milford Track is a 53.5km walk often described as one of the finest in the world. The number of walkers is limited in the Great Walks season (late October to late April), and during that period you must follow a one-way, four-day set itinerary. Accommodation is only in huts (camping isn't allowed).

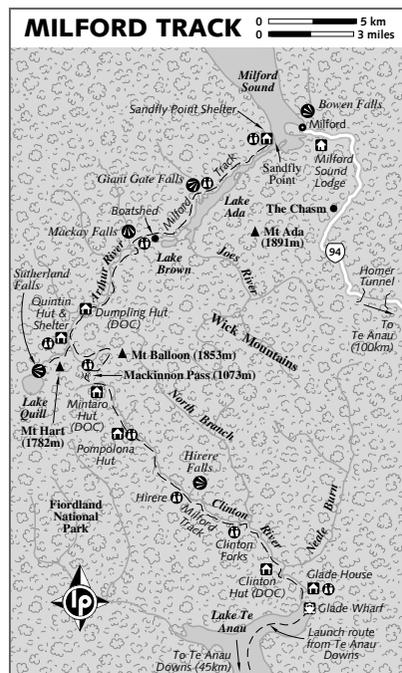
Even in summer, expect *lots* of rain, in the wake of which water will cascade everywhere and small streams will become raging torrents within minutes. Remember to bring wet-weather gear and pack belongings in an extra plastic bag or two.

In the off-season, experienced trekkers can walk the track in either direction without bookings (hut tickets must be purchased). At this time there's limited trail transport, the huts aren't staffed, some of the bridges are removed and, in the height of winter, snow and avalanches make it unwise. It's vitally important you visit DOC (p646) to check avalanche risk, as the geography of the valley makes it impossible to judge for yourself.

BOOKINGS

You can walk the track independently or with a guided tour. For independent bookings, contact DOC in Te Anau (p646) or book online. The track must be booked during the Great Walks season (October to April), and it pays to book as far ahead as possible. Bookings commence on 1 July for the following season. A Great Walks pass (adult/child \$120/60) allows you three nights in the huts. During the season the track can only be done in one direction (Lake Te Anau to Milford) and you must begin on the date specified on your DOC permit.

Ultimate Hikes (☎ 0800 659 255, 03-442 8200; www.milfordtrack.co.nz; \$1850) has five-day guided walks that include everything from packs to



snacks to raincoats and stays at much flasher accommodation, ending with a celebratory dinner at their last stay, Mitre Peak Lodge at Milford Sound.

Real Journeys (☎ 0800 656 501; www.realjourneys.co.nz; adult/child \$165/107; ☹ Nov-Apr) runs guided day hikes along an 11km stretch of the Milford Track.

WALKING THE TRACK

The trail starts at Glade House, at the northern end of Lake Te Anau, accessed by boat from Te Anau Downs or Te Anau. The track follows the flat bottom of the Clinton River Valley up to its head at Lake Mintaro, passing through rainforest and crystal-clear streams. From Mintaro you cross the dramatic **Mackinnon Pass**, which on a clear day gives spectacular views back to yesterday's Clinton Valley and forward to tomorrow's Arthur Valley. (If the pass appears clear when you arrive at Mintaro Hut, make the effort to climb it, as it may not be clear the next day.) From the pass a long, wooden staircase leads you down to Arthur River, following alongside the rapids. The trail then continues down to Quintin

and Dumpling Huts and through the valley rainforest to Milford Sound. You can leave your pack at the Quintin public shelter while you make the return walk to the graceful, 630m-high **Sutherland Falls**, NZ's tallest falls. Estimated walking times:

| Day | Route | Time |
|-----|-------------------------------|-------------|
| 1 | Wharf—Glade House | 20min |
| 1 | Glade House—Clinton Hut | 1-1½hr |
| 2 | Clinton Hut—Mintaro Hut | 6hr |
| 3 | Mintaro Hut—Dumpling Hut | 6-7hr |
| 3 | Side-trip to Sutherland Falls | 1½hr return |
| 4 | Dumpling Hut—Sandfly Point | 5½-6hr |

TRANSPORT TO GLADE WHARF

During the Great Walks season, **TrackNet** (☎ 0800 483 2628; www.tracknet.net; \$19) drive up from Te Anau to Te Anau Downs. **Real Journeys** (☎ 0800 656 501; www.realjourneys.co.nz; \$59) will then run you by boat from Te Anau Downs to Glade Wharf near the start of the track. Both of these trips can be booked at DOC in Te Anau at the same time as you book your walk. Outside the Great Walks season, talk to Tracknet about transport the whole way to Glade Wharf.

TRANSPORT FROM SANDFLY POINT

There are ferries leaving Sandfly Point at 2pm and 3.15pm for the Milford Sound cruise wharf (adult/child \$29/17). From there you can bus back to Te Anau with TrackNet (\$42, 2½ hours). These can both be booked via DOC at Te Anau.

Alternatively, if you're not too tired, you can kayak the home stretch with **Rosco's Milford Sound Sea Kayaks** (☎ 0800 476 726; www.kayakmilford.co.nz; \$30) or **Fiordland Wilderness Experiences** (☎ 0800 200 434; www.fiordlandseakayak.co.nz; \$75); off season only, \$75 includes the bus back to Te Anau.

PACKAGES

TrackNet, Rosco's Milford Sound Sea Kayaks and **Cruise Te Anau** (☎ 03-249 7593; www.cruiseteanau.co.nz) do a bus-boat combination trip (or the equivalent with kayaks instead of boat) for around \$150.

Activities

SEA KAYAKING

One of the most tremendous perspectives you can have on Milford Sound is from right down at water level. There's nothing like being on a small kayak dwarfed by cliffs that rise

vertically from the water. **Rosco's Milford Sound Sea Kayaks** (☎ 0800 476 726; www.kayakmilford.co.nz; \$105-149) has a couple of four-hour tours that take in the sound's most breathtaking sights. Transport from Te Anau is possible for the morning trip for \$30. Another option includes a 20-minute paddle to Sandfly Point and a 3½-hour walk on the Milford Track (\$69).

Fiordland Wilderness Experiences (☎ 0800 200 434; www.fiordlandseakayak.co.nz; 66 Quintin Dr, Te Anau) also runs guided day paddles on the sound; with/without return transport to Te Anau costs \$130/100.

UNDERWATER EXPLORATION

Unique environmental circumstances have allowed the sound to become home to some rarely glimpsed marine life. Heavy rainfall sluicing straight off the rocky slopes washes significant organic matter into the ocean, creating a 5m-deep permanent tannin-stained freshwater layer above the warmer sea water. This dark layer filters out much of the sunlight and, coupled with the sound's calm, protected waters, replicates deep-ocean conditions. The result is that deep-water species thrive not far below the surface. A similar situation exists at Doubtful Sound (p660).

Milford Deep Underwater Observatory (☎ 0800 264 536; www.milforddeep.co.nz; adult/child \$28/14; ☹ 9am-3.45pm) is a five-storey mostly-submerged building that dangles from a system of interlinked pontoons attached to a rock face. Here, four storeys below the surface, you can check out the resident deep-water corals, tube anemones, bottom-dwelling sea perch and other diverse critters of the deeps. The observatory visits are informative and highly recommended, though the accompanying tour groups may dilute the experience. The observatory can only be accessed by one of the sound cruises. Various operators stop here (charging around \$28/14 extra for adults/kids), but not the late-afternoon cruises.

Tawaki Adventures (☎ 03-212 7757; www.tawaki.dive.co.nz) takes scuba-dive trips on the sound. Trips include a three-hour boat cruise and two guided dives of a total of 30 minutes (\$169); it's an extra \$45 for gear hire. If you don't dive you can join the boat trip anyway – at three hours for \$99 (plus \$45 if you want to hire snorkelling gear) it's an interesting alternative to the busy mainstream boat cruises. The cost is \$30 less if you find your own way to Milford.

Tours

MILFORD SOUND CRUISES

There's a number of cruises on Milford Sound; each claims to be quieter, smaller, bigger, cheaper or in some way preferable to the rest. In the end, what really makes a difference is the timing of the cruise; most bus tours aim for 1pm sailings so if you avoid that time of day there'll be less people on the boat (and on the road!). With some companies you get a better price on cruises outside rush hour too. If you're particularly keen on wildlife, ask whether there'll be a nature guide on board. It's wise to book ahead regardless. You generally need to arrive 20 minutes before departure.

All the cruises visit the mouth of the sound, only 15km from the wharf, poking their prow into the choppy waves of the Tasman Sea. The shorter cruises visit less of the 'highlights' on the way, which include Bowen Falls, Mitre Peak (you'll recognise that one from a million different postcards), Anita Bay and Stirling Falls. You have a good chance of seeing dolphins, seals and penguins. You also have a pretty good chance of it raining (7m per year, remember?), which means you'll get to see some waterfall action. All cruises leave from the huge **cruise terminal** (☹ 8am-5.15pm Oct-Apr, 9am-4.15pm May-Sep), a 10-minute walk from the café and car park. All the cruise operators have desks at the cruise terminal.

Real Journeys (☎ 0800 656 501; www.realjourneys.co.nz) does 1¼-hr scenic cruises (adult \$60 to \$78, child \$15). If you've got your own transport, go in their smaller boat (adult \$60 to \$65), which doesn't connect to tour buses – the trip is longer (2¼ hours) and it's a more personal experience. The company also does 2½-hour nature cruises (adult \$78 to \$83, child \$15) with a nature guide for commentary and Q&A. All boats can supply preordered (tasty) meals. Transfers available from Te Anau (adult/child \$70/59) and Queenstown (\$137/93).

Mitre Peak Cruises (☎ 0800 744 633; www.mitrepeak.com) does two-hour tours (adult \$60 to \$68, child \$26) in smallish boats with a maximum capacity of 75. The 4.30pm summer cruise is an excellent choice as many of the larger boats are heading back at this time.

Red Boat Cruises (☎ 0800 264 536, 03-441 1137; www.redboats.co.nz) does 1¼-hour trips (adult/child \$65/15). The noon cruise is \$80, purely because that's when most passengers will be here: avoid! The nature cruise (adult \$75 to

\$85, child \$15) is a bit more intimate, as it doesn't connect with tour buses. It goes for 2¼ hours and focuses on where the wild things are. Meals are available on some trips.

Cruising Milford Sound (☎ 0800 500 121; www.cruisingms.co.nz) does 1½-hour trips (adult \$55 to \$65, child \$15) on a smallish, comfortable boat with lots of deck space.

OVERNIGHT CRUISES

Real Journeys (☎ 0800 656 501, 03-249 7416; www.realjourneys.co.nz) does overnight cruises on three of its boats, letting you appreciate the fiord when all other traffic has ceased. You can kayak and take nature tours in tender crafts en route. The cost includes all meals and you can tack on transport from Te Anau for an extra \$70. All depart from the Milford terminal around 4.30pm and return around 9.30am the following day. Cheaper prices apply on the cusp of the season, in April, May, September and October.

The *Milford Wanderer*, modelled on an old trading scow, accommodates 61 passengers in wee four-bunk cabins (with shared bathrooms) and costs \$210/105 per adult/child. The *MV Friendship* sleeps only 12 in a multi-share bunk cabin for \$210/105. The *Milford Mariner* sleeps 60 in more upmarket, en-suite, twin-share cabins; the cost in a twin room is \$390/195 per adult/child.

Sleeping & Eating

There's very little in the way of accommodation right here in Milford, however the excellent **Milford Sound Lodge** (p655) is only 12km back up the road toward Te Anau; they also have a small café attached. Also see above for details of floating accommodation options.

The café at **Blue Lake Café & Bar** (☎ 03-249 7931; carpark; ☞ 8.30am-late; ♻️) serves unremarkable sandwiches and buffet-type meals. At night the attached bar sees a mix of travellers, trampers and locals.

Getting There & Away

BUS

InterCity (☎ 03-249 7559; www.intercity.co.nz) runs daily bus services from Queenstown (\$70) and Te Anau (\$50). Trampers' buses also operate from Te Anau (p653) and Queenstown (p628) and will pick up at the Milford Sound Lodge. All these buses pass the Divide and the start/end of the Routeburn, Greenstone and Caples Tracks.

There's a dizzying array of bus trips that include a boat cruise on the sound in their price; most are around \$120 to \$150 from Te Anau (or from \$200 from Queenstown, but that's a very long 13-hour day). Book at any i-SITE or booking agency in those towns.

CAR

It's a magnificent drive from Te Anau to Milford (see p653). Fill up with petrol in Te Anau before setting off. Chains must be carried on avalanche-risk days from May to November (there will be signs on the road) and can be hired from most service stations.

MANAPOURI

pop 210

Strung along the beautiful Lake Manapouri, the town of the same name is largely used as jumping-off point for cruises to the sublime Doubtful Sound (p660) and as a base for walking expeditions. There's very little to the town itself – little more than a handful of hotels, with a glut of sandflies to keep you hopping.

In 1969, Manapouri was the site of NZ's first major environmental campaign. The original plan for the West Arm power station, built to provide cheap electricity for the aluminium smelter near Invercargill, included raising the level of the lake by 30m. A petition gathered a staggering 265,000 signatures (17% of voting-age New Zealanders at the time) and the issue contributed to the downfall of the government at the following election. The action was successful: the power station was built but the lake's level remains unchanged – a victory for Tanemahuta over Mammon. It was a success that spawned increasing national environmental action through the '70s and '80s. West Arm power station is NZ's largest producer of electricity: a tunnel dug through the mountain from Lake Manapouri to Doubtful Sound drops a hefty 180m from lake to sound, driving the power station's turbines.

Fiordland Ecology Holidays (☎ 0800 249 660; www.fiordland.gen.nz; 5 Waiiau St) has its office on the premises of 45 South, their wee second-hand/new/rare-books bookshop, specialising in local history, exploration and wildlife. A visit to the bookshop is encouraged whether you're a passionate booklover, interested in local ecological issues, or wanting to ask about their Doubtful Sound tours (see above for details on their ecology-focused tours).

Activities

Adventure Kayak & Cruise (☎ 0800 324 966; www.fiordlandadventure.co.nz), beside the garage in Manapouri, rents kayaks from \$45 per person per day for paddles on Lake Manapouri. **Fiordland Wilderness Experiences** (☎ 0800 200 434; www.fiordlandseakayak.co.nz; per day \$55) also rents kayaks here. (See p660 for these companies' kayak and camping trips on Doubtful Sound.)

You can rent row boats to mess about on the Waiiau River from **Manapouri Stores** (☎ 03-249 6619; per day \$20). **Fish Fiordland** (☎ 03-249 6855; www.fishfiordland.co.nz) does scenic trips on Lake Manapouri, guided nature walks, fishing trips, and operates as water taxi to local walking tracks. **Adventure Manapouri** (☎ 03-249 8070; www.adventuremanapouri.co.nz) is another option for row boat hire (\$20 per day), water taxi and fishing trips.

With some form of water transport (kayak, dinghy or water taxi), you can cross the Waiiau River for some easy low-altitude day walks, detailed in the DOC brochure *Fiordland National Park Day Walks* (\$1). A walk along the **Circle Track** (three hours return) can be extended to **Hope Arm** (five to six hours return), crossing the uninvitingly named Stinking Creek (which doesn't). Although Te Anau is the usual access point for the Kepler Track (p648), the trail touches the northern end of Lake Manapouri and part of it can be done as a day walk from Manapouri; access is via the swing bridge at Rainbow Reach, 10km north of town. From Pearl Harbour there's also a walk that doesn't require crossing the river: to **Frasers Beach** (1½ hours return), from where you can gaze across the beautiful lake.

Manapouri is also a staging point for the remote 84km **Dusky Track**, a walk that takes eight days if you tramp between Lakes Manapouri and Hauroko, with an extra two-day detour possible from Loch Maree Hut to Supper Cove on Dusky Sound. With regular tree falls, deep mud, river crossings, delaying floods and 21 three-wire bridges, this is an extremely challenging wilderness walk, suitable only for well-equipped, very experienced trampers. Contact DOC, and read Lonely Planet's *Tramping in New Zealand*, for more details.

Sleeping

ourpick Freestone Backpackers (☎ 03-249 6893; freestone@xtra.co.nz; Manapouri-Hillside Rd; dm/d \$20/50) Fantastically peaceful, these clean and comfortable, rustic-looking four-bunk cabins

nestle on a hillside with magnificent views about 3km east of town. Each cabin has a small kitchen, a potbelly stove to keep you warm and a veranda to admire the view. Toilets, showers and fridge are communal; bring a torch to find your way there at night, and don't be alarmed if the horses make scary snorty noises.

Manapouri Lakeview Chalets & Motor Park (☎ 03-249 6624; www.manapourimotels.co.nz; SH95; unpowered/powerd sites \$28/30, cabins d \$50-115; ♻️) This slightly bizarre camping ground has a fantastic collection of eclectic cabins, ranging from mock-Tudor to mock-shantytown. There's a fabulous army of old Morris Minors in various states of repair and a vintage pin-ball-machine collection to relive your youth. There's also a playground for the kids. Good communal kitchen facilities.

Possum Lodge (☎ 03-249 6623; www.possumlodge.co.nz; 13 Murrell Ave; campsites \$30, cabins d \$42-50; ♻️) A sweet, shady little campsite only a few trees away from the lakeside, this place has old-school, fairly basic cabins and slightly more modern motel-style units (\$95 for one or two people). Best bring some sandfly repellent if you want to have any blood left in your veins.

Manapouri Lakeview Motor Inn (☎ 03-249 6652; www.manapouri.com; 68 Cathedral Dr; budget rm \$80, std rm \$100-115, deluxe d \$130; ♻️) A large complex of rooms and units ranging from budget to fancypants-deluxe. All rooms face the lake and mountains, with the big windows from the budget rooms at the top having the best view. Prices are per room and most rooms (including all the budget rooms) can sleep three or more. All rooms have en-suites and some have cooking facilities, or there's a communal kitchen.

Eating & Drinking

In an old Presbyterian church, charmingly fitted out inside with native woods and stained glass windows, **Café 23** (☎ 03-249 6988; 23 Waiiau St; lunch from \$7, meals \$23; ☞ 7.30am-7.30pm) has great coffees and tasty *paninis* or gourmet sandwiches. If you're heading out on the water, grab your lunch here before you go.

The **Lakeside Café & Bar** (☎ 03-249 6652; 68 Cathedral Dr; lunch \$9-16, dinner \$18-33; ☞ 11.30am-9pm) has a nice lake view and serves unsurprising but substantial meals. The public bar attached (open till late) is a large, cheery affair, with crazy silver helicopters providing the cooling.

Getting There & Away

Naked Bus (☎ 0900 625 33; www.nakedbus.com), **Scenic Shuttle** (☎ 0800 277 483; www.scenicshuttle.co.nz) and **Topline Tours** (☎ 03-249 8059; www.toplinetours.co.nz) travel between Manapouri and Te Anau daily. Alternatively, ask **Real Journeys** (☎ 0800 656 502) if there are spare seats on coaches to Te Anau. The cost is around \$10.

DOUBTFUL SOUND

Massive, magnificent Doubtful Sound is a wilderness area of rugged peaks, dense forest and thundering post-rain waterfalls. It's one of NZ's largest sounds: three times the length and ten times the area of its better-known cousin, Milford. Doubtful is also much, *much* less trafficked – if you have the time and the money, there's no doubt (sorry) which one you should visit. Fur seals, dolphins, Fiordland crested penguins and seals are all also occasional visitors to the sound.

Until relatively recently, only the most intrepid trapper or sailor ever explored Doubtful Sound. Even Captain Cook only observed it from off the coast in 1770, saying he was 'doubtful' whether the winds in the sound would be sufficient to blow the ship back out to sea. The sound became more accessible when the road over Wilmot Pass opened in 1959 to facilitate construction of the West Arm Power Station.

Tours

Doubtful Sound is only accessible by tour. You'll cross Lake Manapouri by boat to the West Arm power station, drive by bus the winding 22km through dense rainforest to Deep Cove (permanent population: one), then head out on Doubtful on another boat. Many tours include the power station. The easiest place to base yourself is Manapouri, although many tours pick up in Te Anau and some in Queenstown.

Real Journeys (☎ 0800 656 502; www.realjourneys.co.nz; Pearl Harbour, Manapouri; day trip adult/child \$245/55) has a Wilderness Cruise, beginning with a 45-minute boat ride across Lake Manapouri to West Arm power station, followed by a bus ride over Wilmot Pass to the sound, which you explore on a three-hour cruise. The boat carries 160. There's pickup from Te Anau (adult/child \$19/10), or Queenstown (adult/child \$67/10). Picnic lunches can be preordered (\$23).

If you'd rather venture underground to admire the engineering marvels of the power station than continue over to the sound, you can do that on a separate Lake Manapouri cruise (adult/child \$61/15, October to April).

From September to May, Real Journeys also runs a Doubtful Sound overnight cruise. The *Fiordland Navigator* sleeps 70 and has twin-share, en-suite cabins (per adult/child \$565/283) and quad-share bunk rooms (\$335/168). Transport to and from Te Anau or Queenstown is available. Price includes meals and kayaking or tender-craft trip.

Fiordland Ecology Holidays (☎ 0800 249 660, 03-249 6600; www.fiordland.gen.nz; 5 Waiiau St, Manapouri) has boat tours (maximum 10 guests) of up to a week, led by people with a passion for the area's flora and fauna. The superbly equipped yacht sails into remote parts of the World Heritage Area along Doubtful and Dusky Sounds. Rates start at \$500 for an overnight trip.

Adventure Kayak & Cruise (☎ 0800 324 966; www.fiordlandadventure.co.nz; ☽ Sep-May) does Doubtful Sound day trips; cruise and kayaking is \$205 while overnight kayak camping trips on the shores of the sound are \$235. **Fiordland Wilderness Experiences** (☎ 0800 200 434; www.fiordlandseakayak.co.nz; ☽ Oct-Apr) also does overnight (\$315) and up to five-day (\$665) guided kayak trips on the sound.

Other cruising options:

Deep Cove Charters (☎ 03-249 6828; www.deepcovecharters.co.nz; overnight per person \$380) Intimate and fun overnight cruises with a maximum of 12 passengers. Includes meals, though you can also try to fish for your own dinner.

Fiordland Cruises (☎ 0800 483 262; www.fiordlandcruises.co.nz; overnight from \$440) Overnight cruise spending a total of 22 hours on the sound, including kayaking and fishing. Maximum eight passengers. Includes meals and transfers to/from Te Anau.

Fiordland Expeditions (☎ 0800 888 656; www.fiordlandexpeditions.co.nz; overnight cruises adult/child \$460/250) Overnight cruise. Ten-passenger maximum. Kayaking, diving, fishing (dinner is whatever they catch that night). Winter discount.

Fiordland Explorer Charters (☎ 0800 434 673; www.doubtfulsoundcruise.com; day cruise adult/child \$220/80) Day cruise with maximum of 20 people. Includes power-station tour and three hours on the sound. Free transfers to/from Te Anau. Winter price specials.

Sleeping

If you'd like to spend the night on the sound, it generally means joining an overnight cruise

or kayak/camping trip. The only other option is **Deep Cove Hostel**, with bunks, cooking facilities and dinghies, situated right on Doubtful Sound with a number of bush walks radiating from it. It's predominantly used by school groups, but Real Journeys can book you in here for two nights (\$295) in addition to their Wilderness Cruise.

SOUTHERN SCENIC ROUTE

The quiet, unhurried Southern Scenic Route begins in Te Anau and heads south to Tuatapere, from where it wraps itself around the coast to Riverton and Invercargill. For more detailed information, see www.southernscenicroute.co.nz and pick up *Southern Scenic Route* (free) from any visitor information centre. Public transport along the route is limited, however **Bottom Bus** (☎ 03-442 9708; www.bottombus.co.nz) and **Scenic Shuttle** (☎ 0800 277 483; reservations@scenicshuttle.com) offer regular shuttles.

From Manapouri the road follows the Waiiau River south between the forested Takitimu and Hunter Mountains, with the blue Kepler Mountains disappearing in the rear-view mirror. Just off the road near Clifden is the elegant **Clifden Suspension Bridge**, built in 1899 – take a moment to walk to the centre and admire the river. **Clifden (Waiiau) Caves** are signposted on Otautau Rd, 2km from the Clifden Rd corner. These caves offer an exhilarating underground scramble over rocks, through crawl spaces and up ladders. These are undeveloped caves, so bring a friend, a spare torch and lots of caution, and visit Tuatapere visitor information centre (right) for conditions and a map beforehand.

Just south of the suspension bridge is a turn-off to a walking track through **Dean Forest**, a reserve of ancient totara trees, including one over a thousand years old (23km off the main road). From Clifden you can also drive 30km of mostly unsealed road to **Lake Hauroko**, the deepest lake in NZ and surrounded by dark, brooding, steeply forested slopes. The area has many ancient *urupa* (burial sites) so be respectful and keep to trails. The Dusky Track (p659) also ends (or begins) here. **Lake Hauroko Tours** (☎ 03-226 6681; www.duskytrack.co.nz; tours \$100; ☽ tours Nov-Apr) has 4½-hour return tours from Tuatapere, connecting with the Scenic A free shuttle to and from Te Anau DOC's **Thicket Burn campsite** is nearby.

Tuatapere pop 740

A timber-milling town back in the days when NZ still happily cut down native trees, sleepy, little Tuatapere is now largely a farming centre. Those early woodcutters were very efficient, so only a remnant of a once large tract of native podocarp forest remains. Tuatapere is fondly referred to by Kiwis as NZ's 'sausage capital'; though it would rather be known as a base for the Hump Ridge Track. Sadly, there is no Giant Fibreglass Sausage, but you can grab some of the real deal from the butcher to cook up.

Tuatapere visitor information centre (☎ 03-226 6739; info@visitorcentre.co.nz; 31 Orawia Rd; ☽ 8.15am-6.30pm; ☒) is extremely helpful when it comes to Clifden Caves, Hump Ridge hut passes and transport, and details of local activities. The centre is open for limited hours in winter. Attached is the **Bushmans Museum** (admission by donation), which has Western Southland's second-largest collection of rusty old saws.

HUMP RIDGE TRACK

The excellent 53km Hump Ridge Track is a lollybag of different experiences. It climbs (feel that burn!) to craggy subalpine heights with views north to Fiordland and south to Stewart Island, then drops down through lush native forests of rimu and beech to the rugged coast. There's bird life aplenty, and – once down at sea level – the chance to see Hector's dolphins as you follow the lonely windswept coast back to the start point. En route the path crosses a number of towering historic wooden viaducts, including NZ's highest. Beginning and ending at Bluecliffs Beach on Te Waewae Bay, 20km from Tuatapere, the track was opened only relatively recently and takes three fairly long days to complete; estimated walking times:

| Route | Time |
|--|-------|
| Bluecliffs Beach Car Park–Okaka Hut | 6-8hr |
| Okaka Hut–Port Craig Village | 7-9hr |
| Port Craig Village–Bluecliffs Beach Car Park | 3-5hr |

It's essential to book for this track, which is administered privately rather than by DOC. Contact the **Tuatapere Hump Ridge Track Trust** (☎ 0800 486 774, 03-226 6739; www.humpridgetrack.co.nz). Summer bookings cost \$90 for two nights; winter bookings (May to October) cost \$45. There are also guided tour, jetboating and helihiking options.

JETBOATING

Jetboat rides typically cross brooding Lake Hauroko then zoom around up the rugged Wairahurahi River, the breathtaking ride lasting two or three hours. Operators include **W-Jet** (☎ 0800 376 174; www.wjet.co.nz; adult/child \$199/99) and **Humphridge Jet** (☎ 0800 270 556; www.humphridgejet.com; from \$140), which also has a jet-boat/helicopter option (\$260). **Waiau Jet Tours** (☎ 03-2226 6250) can take you from Tuatapere Bridge to Clifden Bridge (\$50, one hour) or Dean Forest (\$90, 3½ hours).

SLEEPING & EATING

Communal spaces are the highlight at **Shooters Backpackers & Motel** (☎ 03-226 6250; 73; shooters.backpackers@xtra.co.nz; Main St; unpowered site per person \$12, powered sites \$30, dm \$25, d \$60-90, motel s/d \$70/110; P, Q). There's a modern, spacious kitchen with a wood stove, a nice upstairs lounge and a big deck with a barbecue, plus spa and sauna. Self-contained motel rooms have a lovely view of the main road. Camping is on a stretch of green lawn.

Waiau Hotel (☎ 03-226 6409; www.waiauhote.com; 47 Main St; s \$35-45, d \$90-110; Q) has a number of standard pub-type rooms and en suites. The bistro (lunch \$4 to \$10, dinner \$14 to \$22) is renowned (in Tuatapere) for their blue cod, but this is also a good spot to tuck into those world-famous Tuatapere sausages. Or you can go straight to the sauce, at **Tuatapere Butchery** (☎ 03-226 6596; 75 Main St).

Yesteryears Café (☎ 03-226 6681; 3a Orawia Rd; light meals \$8-10; ☎ from 9am) has a very modest 'museum', basically a collection of household items from local families (including two great old Shacklock ovens, back to back, so you can guarantee a warm welcome). Meals are deliciously home cooked and the coffee is splendid. Rip into some of Aunt Daisy's sugar buns.

Tuatapere to Riverton

Colac Bay is a popular holiday and (as the enormous fibreglass surfer implies) a good surfing spot. Southerlies provide the best swells here, but it's pretty consistent year-round and never crowded. **Dustez Bak Pakas & Camping Ground** (☎ 03-234 8399; www.dustezbakpakas.co.nz; 15 Colac Bay Rd; sites per person \$13, dm \$24, d \$48-56) has basic rooms opening onto a covered courtyard and campsites in a grassy field surrounded by cows, chickens and garden knick-knacks. Guests can borrow surfboards. You can get dinner next door at the distinctive Colac Bay Tavern from 6.30pm – lamb shanks in a wine

sauce, yum! Down at the beach, with a view of the surf, **Pavilion Tavern** (☎ 03-234 8445; 188 Colac Foreshore Rd; ☎ 10am-late) gets visitors from as far as Invercargill hungry for its fresh fish and organic lamb, with herbs fresh from the garden.

Riverton**pop 1850**

Quiet little Riverton, only 38km short of Invercargill, is worth a lunchstop and, if near-Antarctic swimming takes your fancy, the **Riverton Rocks** area and **Taramea Bay** (don't venture past the point) are good for a dip. The town is a common overnight stop between the Catlins and Fiordland.

Riverton visitor information centre (☎ 03-234 9991; www.riverton-aparima.co.nz; 127 Palmerston St; ☎ 9am-5pm) has a helpful array of pamphlets and maps. **Te Hikoi** (☎ 03-234 8260; www.tehikoi.co.nz; adult/child \$12/4) is a magnificent stylish new museum and cultural centre, telling the story of the area's Maori and Pakeha history. A number of galleries along Palmerston St are also worth a look – grab *Western Southland Arts Trail* for more information.

SLEEPING

Globe Backpackers (☎ 03-234 8527; www.theglobe.co.nz; 144 Palmerston St; dm/d \$20/65; P) This very central backpackers and bar is well set up for travellers, with basic, comfortable rooms. A couple of attached self-contained motel units cost \$95 for two. The bar downstairs does a roaring trade in pizzas (from \$10) and other bar snacks.

Riverton Rock (☎ 03-234 8886; www.riverton.co.nz; 136 Palmerston St; s \$70, d \$95-145) An unassuming pair of doors on the main road opens onto this classy, fully-renovated 1863 guesthouse with five rooms and lots of character. A bright, cushy lounge has a wood stove, and there's a large modern kitchen for guest use.

EATING

Beach House (☎ 03-234 8274; 126 Rocks Hwy; snacks from \$10, dinner \$24-35; ☎ 10am-late; Q) This stylish, comfortable café is famous for their seafood, so if it's not yet mealtime, grab a takeaway chowder (\$10). On a sunny day with a warm breeze wafting off Foveaux Strait, the outside tables are a must; the other 90% of the time, retire inside to admire the seaview warm behind the windows. To find the café, follow signs along the coast to the lookout.

Mrs Clarks Café (☎ 03-234 8600, 108 Palmerston St; lunch \$12-14; ☎ 8am-4pm) This chic, interesting

little café, with lots of reused timbers, chilled-out music and a chilled-out cat, occupies an insanely turquoise building that has been various forms of eatery since 1891. We doubt if their espressos were quite so delicious back then.

The **South Coast Environment Centre** (☎ 03-234 8717; www.sces.org.nz; 154 Palmerston St) has a good range of organic fruit, vegies and meats, is the local wwoof agent, and organises the Riverton farmers market (Friday afternoons).

CENTRAL SOUTHLAND

Although it's home to the majority of Southland's permanent population, for travellers the central bit of the province serves mostly as a through station. It's almost at the Catlins, not far from Fiordland and the gateway to Stewart Island...so there's plenty of reasons to pass through.

INVERCARGILL**pop 49,300**

Flat and suburban, with endlessly treeless streets, Invercargill certainly isn't going to blow your senses if you came here via the Catlins or Fiordland. Nevertheless, most travellers in Southland will find themselves in Invercargill at some point – perhaps stocking up on supplies and equipment before setting off to the Catlins or Stewart Island – and it's worth taking some time to investigate the town's arty bits and the surprisingly good restaurants.

Information

Automobile Association (AA; ☎ 03-218 9033; 47 Gala St; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri)

Comzone.net (45 Dee St; ☎ 10am-10pm; Q) Get online.

DOC office (☎ 03-211 2400; 7th fl, Cue on Don, 33 Don St; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) For info on tracks around Stewart Island and Southland.

Invercargill i-SITE (☎ 03-214 6243; www.invercargill.org.nz; Gala St, Queens Park; ☎ 8am-6pm Oct-Apr, to 5pm May-Sep; Q) Handily located in the same building as the Southland Museum & Art Gallery.

Post office (51 Don St)

Sights & Activities**SOUTHLAND MUSEUM & ART GALLERY**

With it's inexplicable pyramidal roof and the Roman goddess of wisdom out front, this **museum & gallery** (☎ 03-218 9753; Gala St, Queens Park; admission by gold-coin donation; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun) might be having a slight identity

crisis, but it's worth a wander regardless. The art gallery hosts visiting exhibitions that often include contemporary Maori and other local artists, as well as international shows and pieces from the gallery's own collections.

The stars of the show, however, are the tuatara: NZ's unique lizard-like reptiles, unchanged for 220 million years and thus proclaimed 'living fossils'. (And if stately 120-year-old patriarch 'Henry' is any example, they're not planning to do much for the next 220 million years either.) You'll find Henry and his little fellows looking dignified in the tuatara enclosure at the back, and if you're there when the curator calls them over for food, you might even see them move. Outside opening hours, you can see the tuatara through the viewing windows at the rear of the pyramid.

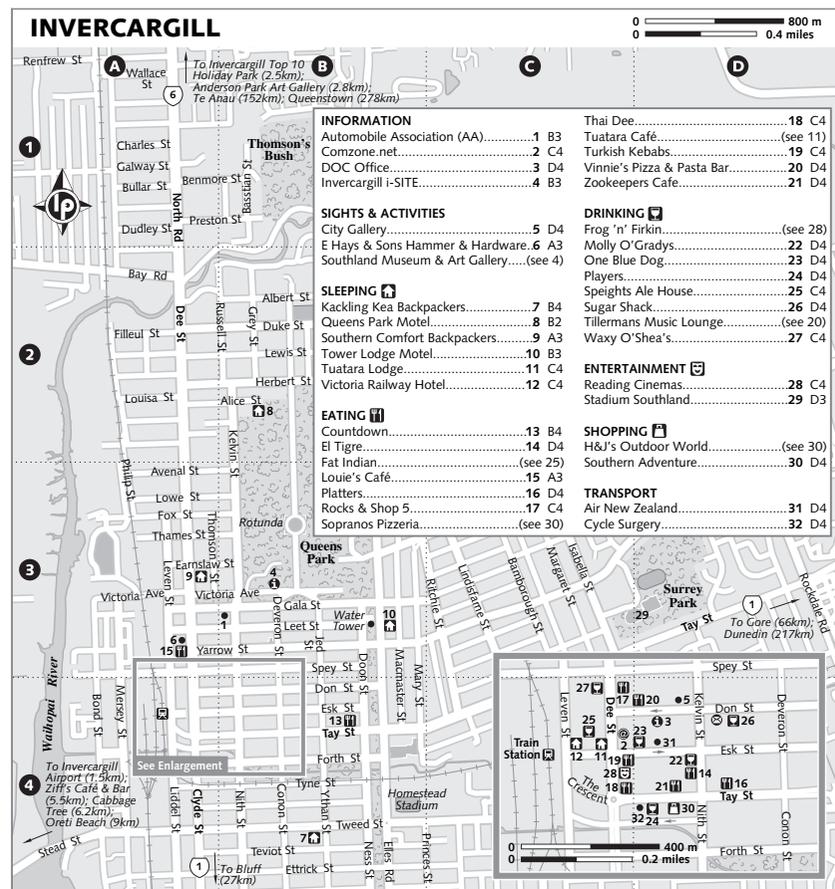
ANDERSON PARK ART GALLERY

In a grand, 1925 Georgian-style manor, this wonderful **gallery** (☎ 03-215 7432; McIvor Rd; admission by donation; ☎ gallery 10.30am-5pm, gardens 8am-dusk) contains diverse works from an array of NZ artists. There are beautiful, original antique furnishings, block prints, pottery, sculptures, grand landscapes, Greek-mythic Maori village scenes, and portraits; look for Rhonda Hazzard's tribute to Errol Flynn. You'll also find short biographies on the artists and a tearoom in which to partake of a very civilised (free) cup of tea. Outside, 24 hectares of landscaped gardens are a lovely place to linger, with trees and trails, a children's playground and a *wharepuni* (sleeping house). The gallery is 7km north of the city centre; follow North Rd then turn right into McIvor Rd.

OTHER SIGHTS

Wander around the half-wild, half-tamed **Queens Park**, with its trees, duck ponds, children's playground and Alice's castle (notoriously difficult to extract children from).

In the centre of town, **City Gallery** (☎ 03-214 1319; 28 Don St; admission free; ☎ 11am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) showcases talent from NZ's south, including sculpture, photography and paintings (most of which are for sale). If you've been travelling around this part of the South Island a bit, you'll more than likely recognise some scenes: Mitre Peak, Invercargill streets, the Alps, sea lions... Exhibits are changed every third week.



If you're a fan of motorcyclist Burt Munroe's speedy achievements, captured in *The World's Fastest Indian* (2005), you can see his **famous motorbike** among the hardware at E Hays & Sons Hammer & Hardware (172 Dee St); you'll get some funny looks from the blokes there buying hammers and power tools though. Oreti Beach (site of Burt's race against the troupe of insolent young tearaways) is 10km to the southwest and a nice spot for a swim. The Invercargill i-SITE will happily direct you to other locations relevant to Burt and the film. The Burt Munroe Challenge (www.burtmunrochallenge.southlandnz.com) is a hugely popular motorbike event held each November.

For a self-guided walk or drive, pick up the *Invercargill Heritage Trail* brochure (free)

from the i-SITE. In **Thomson's Bush**, 1km north along Queen's Dr, you can follow a one-hour loop beneath the ancient kahikatea and matai trees that once covered the now-treeless plains of Invercargill. Sigh. Well, at least they saved some of it.

Sleeping

You'll find countless midrange motels along Hwy 1 East (Tay St) and Hwy 6 North (North Rd). Many places will store luggage for guests heading to Stewart Island; ask when you make your booking.

BUDGET

Southern Comfort Backpackers (☎ 03-218 3838; 30 Thomson St; dm/s/d \$23/45/52, playhouse s/d \$23/38; ♿)

Mellow, comfortable house with a Zen lounge (hooray for no TV! Watch the fireplace instead), colourful rooms and a modern, well-equipped kitchen. Doubles are spacious, though some prefer the basic playhouse (reading by torchlight only). Lovely gardens provide fresh herbs for cooking. Cash only and bedding is extra (\$2 one-off).

Kackling Kea Backpackers (☎ 03-214 7950; www.kacklingkea.co.nz; 25 Tweed St; dm/d \$23/54; ♿ ♿) This large house south of town in a fairly insalubrious neighbourhood is light and spacious, with relaxed and modern communal areas and comfortable rooms. A good place to recover after walking the Hump Ridge Track or Stewart Island's Rakiura Track. There's a couple of good takeaway places nearby.

Tuatara Lodge (☎ 03-214 0954; www.tuataraalodge.co.nz; 30-32 Dee St; dm \$25, d \$60-80; ♿ ♿) Rooms here are fairly basic, and certainly excessively lemony in hue, but they're clean and comfortable enough. Communal facilities are good too, with cosy TV lounges and a large modern kitchen. Staff are friendly, it's the most central of all the budget accommodation, and downstairs is a nice little traveller-focused café-bar.

Invercargill Top 10 Holiday Park (☎ 0800 486 873; 03-215 9032; gumtreefarmMP@xtra.co.nz; 77 McIvor Rd; sites \$30, cabins \$65-100; ♿ ♿) Near parkland, with trees for shade and surrounded by macrocarpa hedge, this quiet little place 6.5km drive north of town has private sites and good communal facilities. Modern, comfortable studios and self-contained cabins have en suites.

MIDRANGE

Tower Lodge Motel (☎ 0800 802 180, 03-217 6729; www.towerlodgemotel.co.nz; 119 Queens Dr; d \$100-125; ♿ ♿) Across from the water tower, this motel has doubles, some with cooking facilities, and a cottage that has a bit more character and works well for families (\$125 for two, \$15 per extra). Two wheels are welcome – there's a garage to store motorbikes and mountain bikes to borrow to get around town. Wheelchair friendly.

Queens Park Motel (☎ 0800 800 504, 03-214 4504; www.queensparkmotels.co.nz; 85 Alice St; d \$115-125; ♿ ♿) On a very quiet side-street adjacent to Queens Park, these modern self-contained units are a really great deal. The playground next door will be popular with the kids, and you'll wake to tui song from the park rather than traffic noise.

Victoria Railway Hotel (☎ 0800 777 557, 03-218 1281; www.vrhotel.info; cnr Leven & Esk Sts; d \$115-160; ♿ ♿) If you want a bit of 19th-century luxury, the plush rooms and even swankier guests' areas in this grand old refurbished hotel might fit the bill. The guests' dining room (breakfast from \$9, dinner from \$20) would warm grandma's heart, and the guests' bar is positively opulent. There are a couple of very small single rooms as well (\$55).

Eating

Invercargill has a surprisingly diverse restaurant scene, with some real gems hidden among the tailings.

CAFÉS & QUICK EATS

Zookeepers Café (☎ 03-218 3373; 50 Tay St; meals \$6-25; ☺ 10am-late Mon-Sat, 11am-late Sun) Easily spotted by the giant corrugated-iron elephant on the ceiling. The zookeeping staff are famously laid-back and friendly, and the meals are good value and tasty. Tuck into a warm balsamic beef salad under the watchful eye of a cycling leopard, or sip a nice wine and poke your tongue back at the giant blue polar bear.

Platters (☎ 03-218 1847; 82 Tay St; meals \$8-17; ☺ breakfast & lunch Tue-Sun) For a taste of the Netherlands, pop into this little café-deli and munch on tasty fresh-baked cakes and desserts, or grab a meal and reminisce about the *bitterballen* and *broodje haring* that Oma used to make back home. You can also stock up on Dutch cheeses and pickles for the road.

Louie's Café (☎ 03-214 2913; 142 Dee St; tapas \$10, mains \$19-28; ☺ lunch Tue-Fri, evenings Tue-Sat) This cosy, mellow little café-bar specialises in delicious tapas-style snacks, with a game-food focus, but there's a blackboard menu too. Great spot for a late-night wine – relax fire-side, tuck yourself away in various nooks and crannies, or spread out on a comfy padded sofa and enjoy the chilled-out music.

Tuatara Café (☎ 03-214 0954; 30-32 Dee St; burgers \$10-16; ☺ 7am-2pm Mon-Wed, 7am-late Thu-Sat, 8am-2pm Sun; ♿) The café attached to this backpackers' hotel (left) is very cool in a traveller-focused, dreadlocks-and-dub kinda way. Eggs on toast (\$6.50) make a hearty good-value start to the day and burgers (\$10 to \$16) are tasty and interesting. Note that a tuatara burger does not contain actual tuataras.

Turkish Kebabs (☎ 03-218 3399; 29 Esk St; kebabs from \$11; ☺ 8am-late; ♿) With a glaringly golden ceiling and random Turkish paraphernalia

tastefully spotted about, this is an interesting, atmospheric spot for a sit-down meal, but it's equally popular for takeaways, with tasty hummusy felafuls and the namesake kebabs. It also provided the best (and strongest!) coffee of our stay in Invercargill.

Sopranos Pizzeria (☎ 03-218 3464; 33 Tay St; pizzas from \$12, burgers \$17; ☎ lunch Wed-Sun, dinner daily) Trying just a little *too* hard to cash in on the mafia shtick, this café certainly does good pizzas, and their gourmet ciabatta burgers are pretty delicious too. A seat next to the wood-fired oven is a good place to stay warm on a cold afternoon.

RESTAURANTS

Thai Dee (☎ 03-214 5112; 9 Dee St; lunch \$10, mains from \$15; ☎ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner daily) Autumnal walls with big pictures of Thailand will get you in the mood for well-spiced Thai salads, soups, noodles and curries in Southland proportions. Takeaways available.

Fat Indian (☎ 03-218 9933; Piccadilly La, off 38 Dee St; mains \$15-20; ☎ noon-2.30pm & 4.30pm-late) Tucked away down a sneaky cobblestone alleyway, this snug little restaurant is fairly basic, but famous among travellers and locals for its large, good-value vindaloo, kormas and baltis. If you just can't decide, go for the 'tandoori sampler'. Takeaways available.

Vinnie's Pizza & Pasta Bar (☎ 0800 484 664; 16 Don St; pizza \$18, pasta \$18, mains \$27-29; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Fri, dinner Sat) Rustic, stylish and mellow, with yellow light filtering through the skylight, this is a comfortable, atmospheric pizzeria. Service is relaxed and fun, and the pasta is herby, tasty and Southland-proportioned (large). A funky place for late evening wines and antipasto.

our pick El Tigre (☎ 03-214 6914; 16 Kelvin St; mains \$25-32; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Sick of small-town restaurants that all basically serve the same meal? Stop with the crazy pills and hunt out this funky little restaurant (slightly tricky to spot from the street). The menu is eclectic, with interesting touches such as ratatouille with your ostrich, or apricot sauce with your lamb backstrap. Sit near the kitchen at your peril – the smells from within can quickly drive you insane with hunger. Hip, distressed interior, lounge music, atmospheric lighting and service that cares make it our top pick in town.

Rocks & Shop 5 (☎ 03-218 7597; Courtville Pl, 101 Dee St; lunch \$16-22, dinner \$16-33; ☎ noon-2pm & 6pm-late Mon-Sat) Tucked into a trio of shops at the

end of an unpromising-looking mall, this stylish candle-lit bar and a couple of dining areas are a laid-back choice for a tasty meal. Dinners are the more interesting option; try You Fat Bastard (spiced roast pork on rice cake) or just get a platter of assorted titbits from the larder.

On the main road to the Oreti Beach at Otatara you'll find two restaurants, both specialising in *big* meals, and therefore both local favourites.

Cabbage Tree (☎ 03-213 1443; 379 Dunns Rd, Otatara; mains \$20-37; ☎ 11am-late; ☎) Huge menu, huge dishes, huge wine list, and a free courtesy bus.

Ziff's Café & Bar (☎ 03-213 0501; 143 Dunns Rd, Otatara; mains \$24-31; ☎ 10.30am-late) Fun atmosphere and a stylish interior. Transfers from town \$2.

SELF-CATERING

To cater your own culinary masterpiece, head to **Countdown** (nr Doon & Tay Sts; ☎ 8am-midnight), and stock up on cheese and tasties at **Platters** (p665).

Drinking & Entertainment

One Blue Dog (☎ 03-214 6970; 34 Esk St; cover charge \$5; ☎ 9pm-late Thu-Sat) This cool, grungy little upstairs bar has free pool tables and a few seats beside the windows – sit here early on Friday nights to watch the parade of bored, hotted-up cars on Esk St below. Late in the evening there's a DJ and much booty shakin'. The light show and mirror ball are strangely '80s, but thankfully the music's more top-40 dance than Milly Vanilli. Occasional bands.

our pick Tillermans Music Lounge (☎ 03-218 9240; www.myspace.com/tillermans; 16 Don St; cover charge \$5) Yes, Virginia, there *is* decent music in this town. Upstairs from Don St, Tillerman's is an alternative live-music/DJ venue, with live music ranging from local thrash bands to visiting rock or reggae talents, and DJs doing mostly dub and house. Decrepit black couches and a battered old dancefloor prove its credentials. Free entry Thursdays.

Players (☎ 03-214 3366; www.theglobe.net.nz; 25 Tay St; cover charge up to \$10; ☎ 11am-late) This is the nightclub that ate Invercargill – an intricate composite of nightclubs, bars, pool halls, dancefloors and flashing lights. Venture in and you may never escape. While entrapped, you might find the Gluepot live-music venue, named for the texture of the floorboards, and a dancefloor dedicated to Bacchus, god of wine coolers and debauchery.

DRINKING BARNs

With such a small population there just aren't enough drinkers to go around all of Invercargill's pubs. A random selection of the following pubs will be rockin' on Friday and Saturday nights; random others will be echoing empty. Most of these places serve meals.

Frog 'n' Firkin (31 Dee St) Riotously noisy Friday and Saturday evenings.

Kiln (7 Don St) Stylish Monteiths bar with hanging lampshades, underlit bar and Great Aunt Edith's wallpaper. Meals from 5pm.

Molly O'Gradys (nr Esk & Kelvin Sts) Drinks for suits.

Speights Ale House (38 Dee St) Innumerable TV screens in case someone somewhere takes a wicket. Enthusiastic dancing to live music (strictly of the covers variety).

Sugar Shack (77 Don St) Student pub that gets messy in the early hours.

Waxy O'Sheas (90 Dee St) Noisy Irish pub of the clan O'Bogan. Active dancefloor; particularly for The Eagles.

OTHER

Stadium Southland (☎ 03-217 1200; www.stadiumsouth.co.nz; Surrey Park, Isabella St) is home to Invercargill's extremely successful and popular Southern Sting women's netball team (www.sting.co.nz; season April to June). You can try out rock climbing here from \$6.

Reading Cinemas (☎ 03-211 1555; www.readingcinemas.co.nz; 29 Dee St; adult/child \$13/9.50) shows recent blockbusters.

Shopping

Invercargill certainly won't give shoppers a buzz. However, if you're looking to outfit yourself with gear for Southland's trails, you're in luck. Check out **Southern Adventure** (☎ 03-218 3239; 31 Tay St) and **H&J's Outdoor World** (☎ 03-214 2052; 32 Tay St), conveniently located next door to each other, and stocked with everything from maps and boots to sleeping bags and dried food.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Catch flights to Christchurch (from \$89, one hour) several times a day via **Air New Zealand** (☎ 0800 737 000, 03-215 0000; www.airnz.co.nz; 46 Esk St), with connections to other major centres. **Stewart Island Flights** (☎ 03-218 9129; www.stewartislandflights.com) flies to Oban from Invercargill (adult/child one-way \$95/55, return \$165/95; 30 minutes) three times a day.

BUS

Buses leave from the Invercargill i-SITE, where you can also book your tickets. **InterCity** (☎ 03-214 6243; www.intercity.co.nz) connects Invercargill with Dunedin (\$42, four hours), Te Anau (\$46, three hours) and Christchurch (\$68, 10 hours). Look online for discounts.

Other bus services include:

Atomic Shuttles (☎ 03-214 6243; www.atomictravel.co.nz) Dunedin (\$35) and Christchurch (\$70).

Knightrider (☎ 03-342 8055; www.knightrider.co.nz) Overnight to Dunedin (\$42) and Christchurch (\$72).

Naked Bus (☎ 0900 625 33; www.nakedbus.com) Tuatapere (\$8.50, 1¼ hours), Te Anau (\$32), Queenstown (\$45) and Dunedin (\$29).

Scenic Shuttle (☎ 0800 277 483; www.scenicshuttle.co.nz) Via the Southern Scenic Route past Tuatapere to Te Anau (\$45).

TrackNet (☎ 0800 483 2628; www.tracknet.net) Te Anau (\$42) and Queenstown (\$42).

Catlins Coaster and Bottom Bus pass through Invercargill; see p670. See p668 for buses to Bluff, and p682 for full details on Stewart Island ferries.

Getting Around

Invercargill Airport (☎ 03-218 6920; 106 Airport Ave) is 3km west of central Invercargill. The door-to-door **Airport Shuttle** (☎ 03-214 3434) costs \$10 from the city centre to the airport; more for residential pickup. By taxi it's around \$15; try **Blue Star Taxis** (☎ 03-218 6079) or **Taxi Co** (☎ 03-214 4478).

Cycle Surgery (☎ 03-218 8055; www.cyclesurgery.co.nz; 21 Tay St) rents mountain bikes for \$35 per day.

Invercargill's **Freebie bus** (☎ 03-218 7108; www.icc.govt.nz; ☎ 10am-2.30pm Mon-Sat) is a free bus service around the town centre, departing every 15 minutes. Stops include Dee, Tay, Esk, Kelvin and Gala Sts. Grab a map of the route from the i-SITE. Other **city buses** (single trip adult/child \$2/1, day pass adult/child \$4.50/2.50; ☎ 7am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat) run to the suburbs; these buses are free from 9am to 2.30pm.

BLUFF pop 2100

Unimpressive little Bluff (www.bluff.co.nz) is Invercargill's port, 27km south of the city. Really, the main reasons to come here are to catch the ferry to Stewart Island, pose for photos beside the **Stirling Point signpost** or buy some of the famous Bluff oysters straight from the wharf.

While Bluff isn't the South Island's southernmost point (that claim to fame belongs to Slope Point in the Catlins), and even though Stewart Island and other dots of rock lie even further south, the phrase 'from Cape Reinga to Bluff' is oft-quoted to signify the entire length of NZ, the Kiwi equivalent of 'Land's End to John o' Groats'. NZ's main highway, SH1, terminates south of Bluff at Stirling Point, so it really does feel like the end of the country.

Kids will enjoy the small **Bluff Maritime Museum** (☎ 03-212 7534; 241 Foreshore Rd; adult/child \$2/free; ☎ 10am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 1-5pm Sat & Sun) for the chance to clamber over a century-old oyster boat, while steam nerds will enjoy the chance to set pistons flying around convincingly on a big old 600hp steam engine.

If you've got some time to kill, tackle **Foveaux Walk** (2½ hours return, 6.6km), a walkway from the signpost around the rugged coast to Ocean Beach. Alternatively, follow that track for 1km and return through rimu and rata forest via the 1.5km **Glory Track**. Drive or walk the 3km to the observation point on top of 265m-high **Bluff Hill** (accessed off Lee St) for a great view of Stewart Island. Pick up **Bluff Walking Tracks** (free) from the Invercargill i-SITE. (Grab a map of town while you're there.)

The **Bluff Oyster & Southland Seafood Festival** celebrates Bluff's most famous, plump, delicious little exports, and is held annually in April or May. The oysters are in season from late March to late August.

Sleeping & Eating

Bluff Camping Ground (☎ 027-626 2018; 11 Gregory St; unpowered/power sites \$18/24, cabins d \$28) A row of very basic cabins sit on a wide grassy area with sites for vans and tents. The communal facilities are fine, though they cost \$5 a pop (\$5 for a shower, \$5 to use the kitchen, \$5 for the laundry). BYO linen.

Foveaux Hotel (☎ 03-212 7196; www.foveauxhotel.com; 40 Gore St; s \$45-65, d \$70-100; (P)) This funky Art Deco building has a number of clean, spacious rooms and a comfy guests' lounge/bar downstairs (with big comfy red sofas and a big comfy cat). Rooms are good value, and this is a nice spot to relax and catch your breath. Grab fish and chips next door and bring them back for dinner.

Land's End (☎ 03-212 7575; www.landsend.net.nz; Stirling Point; d \$150-160; (P)) Opposite the Stirling Point signpost, this prominent house has quite

luxurious old-fashioned rooms, some with good views of the sea. A cooked breakfast is included. There's also a restaurant downstairs (lunch from \$13, dinner from \$27), specialising in fresh seafood and open around 9.30am; closing around 8pm (earlier in winter).

Drunkens Sailor Cafe & Bar (☎ 03-212 8855; Stirling Point; mains \$17-30; ☎ 11.30am-4pm Sun-Fri, 11.30am-late Sat) Up on the hill above the signpost at Stirling Point, this nautically themed restaurant's huge curve of windows offers magnificent views of the ocean, islands beyond, and the forested curve of the bluff itself. Naturally, they specialise in seafood. Unfortunately, they're closed 'earl-eye in the morning'.

Next door to Foveaux Hotel, **Gallery Takeaway** (☎ 03-312 7391; 42 Gore St, ☎ noon-8pm Mon, 9am-8pm Tue-Sun) does some of the finest fish and chips for miles around, and has a small tribute to the sadly lamented Bluff paua-shell house. If you want to get your Bluff oysters fresher than anywhere else, get them right at the factory door, at **Fowlers Oysters** (☎ 03-212 8523; Ocean Beach Rd; ☎ 9am-5pm Mar-Aug).

Getting There & Away

Stewart Island Experience (☎ 0800 000 511, 03-212 7660; www.stewartislandexperience.co.nz) runs a shuttle between Bluff and Invercargill (adult/child \$18/9) connecting with the Stewart Island ferry. It also offers secure vehicle storage by the ferry terminal (\$5 per day).

INVERCARGILL TO DUNEDIN

Following SH1 across interior farmland is the most direct route between Invercargill and Dunedin. While the scenery is pretty in a pastoral way, it's certainly not as dramatic as the route via the Catlins (p670); if you have the time, opt for the latter.

Gore

Pop old Gore cops an unfair hammering due to its claim to be NZ's 'home of country music'. Unfair, because the annual **Gold Guitar festival** (www.goldguitars.co.nz; ☎ May/Jun), a 10-day country-music festival during which the town is booked out, is really the only time of the year that there's anything going on in Gore at all. The other 355 days of the year, there's no reason to stop other than a good lunch spot, a cool gallery and the obligatory small-town 'giant thing' (in this case a giant trout) to pose beside for pictures.

The **Gore i-SITE** (☎ 03-203 9288; www.goredc.co.nz; 16 Hokonui Dr; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-4pm Sat & Sun) has information on accommodation, transport and fishing or bushwalking distractions. A couple of **museums** share the same building, celebrating Gore's proud history of fishing, farming and illegal distilleries.

Across the road, the outstanding **Eastern Southland Gallery** (☎ 03-208 9907; 14 Hokonui Dr; admission free; ☎ 10am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 1-4pm Sat & Sun), in Gore's gorgeous century-old public library, houses a hefty collection of NZ art including a large Ralph Hotere collection. Art lovers will love it.

Croydon Aircraft Company (☎ 03-208 9755; www.croydonaircraft.com; SH94, Mandeville), 16km down the road to Queenstown, restores vintage aircraft and, for wannabe WWI flying aces, offers flights in a two-seater 1930s Tiger Moth biplane (\$75/185 for 10/30 minutes), or other wee aircraft. There's a restaurant attached.

Old Fire Station Backpackers (☎ 03-208 1925; oldfirestation@ispnz.co.nz; 19 Hokonui Dr; dm/d \$20/50) is a small hostel opposite the visitor information centre. There's a good kitchen, laundry and a pleasant patio with a barbecue and lots of potted flowers. Linen costs \$2 extra. There's also plenty of motels in town; the modern **Riverlea Motel** (☎ 03-208 3130; www.riverleamotel.co.nz; 46 Hokonui Dr; s \$95-100, d \$95-135; (P)) is a nice option. Gore i-SITE can hook you up with lots of others, plus local B&Bs or farmstays.

GreenRoomCafé (☎ 03-208 1005; 591rkSt; mains \$6-7.50; ☎ 7.30am-5pm Mon-Sat; (P)) is a sunlight-dappled café with wooden floors, old-fashioned-movie

seats and welcoming, relaxed service. The cakes are yummy, coffees are legendary and it is exceptionally child-friendly, with an area for tykes to hang out.

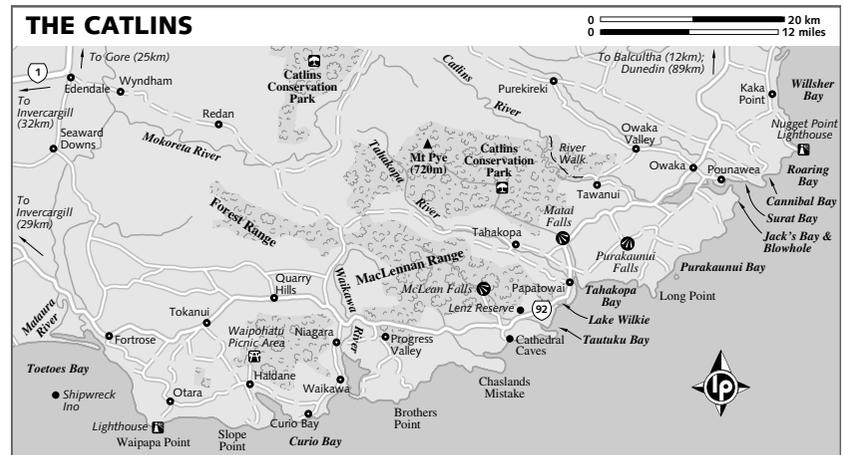
With a décor that's faux-Texan and barn-like, **Howl at the Moon** (☎ 03-208 3851; 2 Main St; dinner mains \$17-28; ☎ noon-2pm, 6-9pm; (P)) serves up predictably large, but surprisingly tasty, dinners.

If you're in town on Sunday, the **Old Post Office Bakery & Café** (☎ 03-208 9949; ☎ from 6.30am) is all that stands between you and starvation.

THE CATLINS

If you veer off SH1 and head for the coastal route between Invercargill and Dunedin (via SH92), you wind through the enchanting Catlins, a region that combines lush farmland, native forests and rugged bays. With bushwalks, wildlife-spotting opportunities and lonely beaches to explore, the Catlins is well worth a couple of days. You won't find much in the way of facilities but there is plenty of wonderful accommodation.

On a clear summer's day, surrounded by forest greens and ocean blues, there's nothing more beautiful than the Catlins coast, and everyone wants to stay an extra day or two. In the face of a grey, sleety Antarctic southerly, however, travellers tend to leave in droves. This route has many twists, turns and narrow sections; it's similar in distance but slower going than the inland route along SH1.



Flora & Fauna

The Catlins is a wonderful place for independent wildlife-watching. Fur seals and sea lions laze along the coast, while elephant seals breed at Nugget Point (p672). In spring, keep your eyes peeled for southern right whales, which are occasionally spotted offshore. Dolphins are also frequent visitors.

Unlike much of Southland, tall kahikatea, totara and rimu forests still exist in the Catlins. With such luxuriant native woods come a wealth of bird life: tui are prolific (and wonderfully noisy), while you'll see more big fat kereru (wood pigeons) here in a day than a month in the rest of NZ. There are also many other sea, estuary and forest birds, including the endangered yellow-eyed penguin and the rare mohua (yellowhead).

Information

Contact the main **Catlins information centre** (☎ 03-415 8371; info@catlins-nz.com; 20 Ryley St, Owaka; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 1.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun) in Owaka (p672). Or try the smaller **Waikawa visitors centre** (☎ 03-246 8464; waikawamuseum@hyper.net.nz; Main Rd, Waikawa; ☎ 10am-5pm; 📍).

All centres stock the free two-sided *Catlins Highway Guide* map, with comprehensive accommodation phone numbers. Both www.catlins.org.nz and www.catlins-nz.com are well-maintained websites on the region.

The Catlins has no banks, few petrol stations and limited options for eating out or grocery shopping (except Owaka). If you plan to spend some time here, stock up before you arrive.

Tours

Bottom Bus (☎ 03-437 0753; www.bottombus.co.nz) does a regular loop from Queenstown to Dunedin, south through the Catlins to Invercargill, along the Southern Scenic Route to Te Anau, then back to Queenstown. It stops at all main points of interest, and you can always hop off and catch the next bus coming through. There's lots of pass options; the Southlander pass (\$385) lets you start anywhere on the loop and includes a Milford Sound cruise.

Catlins Coaster (☎ 03-437 0753; www.catlinscoaster.co.nz; ☎ Sep-May), run by Bottom Bus, offers day tours and trips through the Catlins from Dunedin and Invercargill. Ring them or check the website for details.

Papatowai-based **Catlins Wildlife Trackers** (☎ 0800 228 5467; www.catlins-ecotours.co.nz) offers

ecocentric guided walks and tours (two nights \$340 to \$395, four nights \$690) with food, accommodation and transport (from Balclutha if necessary). These conservation gurus have been running tours here for since 1990 and also manage **Top Track**, a 26km self-guided walk through beaches and a private forest. It costs \$15 if you walk it in a day or \$35 if you do it in two, including overnighting in a converted trolley bus.

Catlins Natural Wonders (☎ 0800 304 333; www.catlinsnatural.co.nz) also has guided trips focusing on wildlife. One-day trips cost \$130/85 out of Dunedin/Balclutha, or there's an overnight trip (\$200/150, plus accommodation).

INVERCARGILL TO PAPATOWAI

Heading east and south from Invercargill, SH92 enters the Catlins region at Fortrose, from where the **Shipwreck Ino** is visible across the sandy harbour at low tide. It's worth taking the turn-off here towards Waipapa Point and taking the coastal route via Haldane, Waikawa and Niagara (where you rejoin SH92). It's a slower, but more beautiful route with much more to stop and check out along the way. The rather scruffy **Waipapa Point lighthouse** dates from 1884, three years after a terrible maritime disaster when SS *Tararua* sank and 131 people drowned.

Turn off at Tokanui and drive 13km to **Slope Point**, the South Island's most-southerly point. A 20-minute walk across farmland leads to a stubby beacon and stubbier signpost (photograph compulsory) atop an appropriately windswept, end-of-the-earth spur of rock with cliff views up and down the coast. If anyone is about, ask permission first; the track is closed in September and October for lambing.

Further east is **Curio Bay** where, for four hours either side of low tide, you can see a nest of fossilised Jurassic-age trees. From the lookout above the beach it's not all that impressive: merely a network of strangely linear shapes. Still, it's a fun spot to explore among the rock pools down at ground level where the texture of the petrified wood is quite obvious. The lookout is the place to be an hour or so before sunset, when you'll see yellow-eyed penguins waddling ashore. Just before Curio Bay itself, neighbouring **Porpoise Bay** has excellent accommodation (see Curio Bay sleeping options, opposite) and a gorgeously sandy, windswept beach that's safe for swimming. Blue penguins

nest in the dunes and in summer Hector's dolphins come here to rear their young. Whales are much rarer visitors, but bizarrely we've managed to coincide our visits with theirs for the last two editions. Fur seals and sea lions are also about – keep your eyes peeled if you're wandering around the rocks.

A 4km drive past the McLean Falls Holiday Park, the walk to **McLean Falls** (40 minutes return) passes through treeferns and rimu. Don't stop at the first falls – the real thing is a bit further on. If you're relatively nimble you can clamber up to a cool pool (take care on the climb down).

Cutting back into cliffs right on the beach, the huge, arched **Cathedral Caves** (www.cathedralcaves.co.nz; adult/child \$5/1) are only accessible for two hours either side of low tide (tide timetables are posted on the website, at the highway turn-off, at visitor information centres, and myriad other roadside signs throughout the Catlins). If you're happy to wade, you can walk in one entrance and out the other. It's pretty cool! From SH92 it's 2km to the car park, then a peaceful 15-minute forest walk down to the beach and a further 25 minutes to the caves.

An easy forest walk leads down to the dark peaty waters of **Lake Wilkie** (30 minutes return) and a cool, and educational, boardwalk alongside the lake. A turnoff soon after is worth following down to the beach at secluded **Tahakopa Bay**. In late summer the slopes are smeared crimson with flowering rata.

Further east is the cute forested village of **Papatowai**, a base for forays into the nearby forests with a handful of facilities and accommodation. There's good picnicking here down at the mouth of the Tahakopa River.

Lost Gypsy Gallery (☎ 03-415 8908; SH92, Papatowai; ☎ closed Wed) occupies a roadside house bus at Papatowai, and is almost worth a trip to the Catlins on its own. Based on found-objects and specialising on self-wound automata and things that go whirr, this is a gallery to raise a smile and make you laugh. If you don't purchase, give a donation that this gentle crazy art may live on.

Sleeping

SLOPE POINT

Surrounded by trees and farmland, **Slope Point Backpackers** (☎ 03-246 8420; www.slopepoint.co.nz; Slope Point Rd; dm/s \$18/25, d \$40-45; 📍) has rooms ranging from basic to modern. There's plenty of

grass to park a tent (\$10 per person) and it's a good opportunity to watch a farm in operation. Kids very welcome.

Next door, **Nadir Outpost** (☎ 03-246 8544; nadir.outpost@ihug.co.nz; 174 Slope Point Rd; dm/s \$20/25, d \$40-70; 📍) has a '70s-style cabin with three fairly basic rooms and a sweet little communal area, plus a couple of more-comfortable rooms in the owners' house. There's also a shop selling basic supplies and a couple of nice treesy spots to pitch a tent (\$10 per person) or park a van (\$25 for two people).

CURIO BAY

Curio Bay Camping Ground (☎ 03-246 8897; 601 Curio Bay Rd; unpowered/power sites \$15/25; 📍) Very private campsites lost in a sea of tall flax make this a really beautiful spot to camp. The camping ground nestles up to the small outcrop between Curio and Porpoise Bays, with easy walking distance to both. Guided nature walks are available.

Dolphin Lodge (☎ 03-246 8577; niagrafallscafe@xta.co.nz; 529 Curio Bay Rd; dm/d \$22/55; 📍) There's a focus on the ocean and surfing here: the rooms might be slightly worn-out, but the view from the big lounge and deck towards the surf is just fine. It's \$3 more for a duvet in dorm rooms.

Catlins Beach House (☎ 03-246 8340; catlins.beachhouse.co.nz; 499 Curio Bay Rd; dm \$25, d \$65-85; 📍) This extremely comfortable house has a cosy woodburner for heating, good kitchen and a deck that opens onto a grassy lawn sloping down to the beach. Blue penguins nest hereabouts and can be heard waddling past making cute penguin sounds at night. Aww, cute!

Curio Bay Backpackers (☎ 03-246 8797; accommodation@curiobay.com; Curio Bay Rd; dm \$27, d \$75; 📍) Right on the sand dunes above the beach, this characterful old house has a lovely laid-back, communal atmosphere.

Curio Bay Boutique Accommodation (☎ 03-246 8797; accommodation@curiobay.com; 501 Curio Bay Rd; d \$170; 📍) With big windows and an even-bigger deck, these two plush beachside units are open to awesome sea views. Recline on your giant, rustic, timber-framed bed to feel like a king.

WAIKAWA

Anchorage (☎ 03-205 8006, 03-246 8464; www.anchorage.co.nz; 52 Antrim S, Waikawa; units \$80-160; 📍) has a number of roomy units sleeping up to six.

The **Millhouse** (☎ 027-346 8892, 021-127 2585; themillhousecatlins@yahoo.com; 586 Main Rd, Waikawa d \$85; Ⓟ) is a three-bedroom rental house. Certainly not modern but easy to feel at home in.

Waikava Harbourview (☎ 246 8866; www.southcatlins.co.nz; 14 Lame St, Waikawa; d \$150; Ⓟ) is a four-bedroom house that's a good option for families or a group.

MCLEAN FALLS

Just off the main road, **McLean Falls Holiday Park** (☎ 03-415 8338; www.catlinsolidays.co.nz; SH92; sites per person \$16, d \$55-185; Ⓟ) has a number of cabins and motel units as well as sites for vans and tents. The attached Whistling Frog Café & Bar does meals (dinners from \$20), specialising in lamb grown on the owners' farm. Wheelchair friendly.

PAPATOWAI

Papatowai Motor Camp (☎ 03-415 8565; pest@es.co.nz; Main Rd; powered sites per adult/child \$8/4, cabin d \$22-32; Ⓟ) Behind the Papatowai Scenic Highway Store, this grassy field has a few trees for privacy and fairly basic cabins.

Hilltop (☎ 03-415 8028; www.hilltopbackpackers.co.nz; 77 Tahakopa Valley Rd; dm \$30, d \$70-80; Ⓟ) High on a hill 1½km out of town, with native forest at the backdoor and surrounded by sheep farm, this lovely old renovated pair of houses has the most spectacular view of hills and ocean. The en-suite double is almost too luxurious to be part of a backpackers.

The tour company **Catlins Wildlife Trackers** (☎ 0800 228 5467; www.catlins-ecotours.co.nz) rents two houses in Papatowai: a charmin' old-school crib (two people \$70) complete with portaloos, and another larger, modern, very ecofriendly house (two people \$135).

Other options in Papatowai:

Kauri Glen (☎ 03-415 8044; 13 Tahakopa Rd; d \$50;

Ⓟ) Wee cabin with sunny deck.

Papatowai Scenic Highway Motel & Store (☎ 03-415 8147; b.bevin@paradise.net.nz; Main Rd; d \$90; Ⓟ) Modern motel units behind the store.

Southern Secrets Motel (☎ 03-415 8600; http://homepages.ihug.co.nz/~aikman; Main Rd; d \$95; Ⓟ) Comfortable and modern self-contained units. Also manages Erehwon (double \$135), a three-bedroom holiday home and great family option.

Eating

Niagara Falls Café (☎ 03-246 8577; Main Rd, Niagara; meals \$13-22; ☎ 8am-10pm) Housed in a lovely old schoolhouse, half of which is given over

to local arts, this is a warm, friendly spot for a meal. Gaze out the window at the gardens and farm, or tuck into delicious, good-value meals. Home-cooked cakes and muffins, and good coffees, make it a good spot to stop for morning or afternoon playlunch too. The mighty falls themselves are nearby – debate rages whether these or their North American cousin are the most impressive.

You'll also find roadside takeaways in Waikawa and Papatowai.

PAPATOWAI TO BALCLUTHA

From Papatowai, follow the highway north to **Matai Falls** (a 30-minute return walk) on the MacLennan River, then head southeast on the signposted road to the tiered **Purakaunui Falls** (20 minutes). Both falls are reached via cool, dark forest walks through totara and tree ferns, and both falls are much more impressive after heavy rain.

You can continue along the gravel road from Purakaunui Falls to the 55m-deep **Jack's Blowhole** (☎ closed for lambing Sep & Oct). In the middle of a sheep paddock 200m from the sea but connected by a subterranean cavern, this huge cauldron was named after Chief Tuhawaiki, nicknamed Bloody Jack for his cussin'.

Owaka is the Catlins' main town (population a hefty 395), with a good information centre and DOC office (see p670), grocery store and petrol station. A museum attached to the information centre (adult/child \$5/4) has displays on local history, including the fiendishly handsome Jack McNab (Owaka's only All Black) and the splendidly moustached lucky, lucky Sergeant-Major Sergeant. There's accommodation here (opposite), but once you're stocked up and perhaps stopped for a meal (opposite), it's worth venturing off to more remote, more attractive parts of the Catlins.

Pounaweia, 4km away, is a beautiful little riverside town with some lovely places to stay (opposite); across the inlet, **Surat Bay** is even quieter and also has accommodation. Sea lions are often seen on the beach between here and **Cannibal Bay**, a 30-minute beach walk away.

Heading north from Owaka, detour off SH92 to **Nugget Point**, stopping for the short walk out to the lighthouse at the end – the last hundred metres or so, with drops to the ocean on either side, is breathtaking, and the view of wave-thrashed vertical rock formations from the end is great too. Fur seals, sea lions and elephant seals occasionally bask together on

the rocks down to your left, a rare and noisy coexistence. Yellow-eyed and blue penguins, shags and sooty shearwaters all breed here. Ten minutes' walk down from a carpark is **Roaring Bay**, where a well-placed hide allows you to see yellow-eyed penguins coming ashore (best two hours before sunset).

From Nugget Point the road loops back through the little township of **Kaka Point**, which has a sandy, quiet beach, accommodation and a nice spot for a meal. Then road continues north from here to Balclutha (p601).

Sleeping

OWAKA & PURAKAUNUI

There's **DOC camping grounds** (campsites \$6) at Purakaunui Bay and inland at Tawanui.

Walking distance from Purakaunui Falls, **Falls Backpackers** (☎ 03-415 8724; sparx@bordernet.co.nz; Purakaunui Falls Rd; dm/d \$25/62) is a comfortable old farmhouse with views from some of the windows and the deck of rolling, sheep-dotted hills. Facilities can get a bit cosy when all the rooms are full.

The beautifully renovated **Catlins Backpackers** (☎ 03-412 8111; www.catlinsbackpackers.co.nz; 24 Main Rd; dm/d \$27/62) is a handsome pair of houses sporting warm colours, characterful, comfortable rooms and spacious shared kitchens. This is probably the nicest place to stay in Owaka.

Also in Owaka:

Thomas Catlins Lodge & Holiday Park (☎ 03-415 8333; www.thomascatlins.co.nz; cnr Ryley & Clark Sts; unpowered/powerd sites per person \$8/15, dm \$25, d \$60-90; Ⓟ) Old hospital grounds converted to campsites and other accommodation. Unsurprisingly, it's all a bit institutional. Wheelchair friendly.

Split Level Backpackers (☎ 03-415 8304; 9 Waikawa Rd; thesplitlevel@xtra.co.nz; dm \$25, d \$58-65)

Owaka Lodge Motel (☎ 03-415 8728; owaka lodgemotel@xtra.co.nz; 12 Ryley St; d \$85-100; Ⓟ) Dated, but comfy and clean.

Catlins Area Motel (☎ 03-415 8821; cnr Ryley & Clark Sts; d \$105; Ⓟ) Modern, spacious self-contained units with individual decks.

POUNAWEA

Our pick **Pounaweia Motor Camp** (☎ 03-415 8483; pounaweia.moto.camp@xtra.co.nz; Park Ln; unpowered/powerd sites \$20/25, cabins per person \$25) Sitting right on the estuary (some cabins' decks face right onto the water) and surrounded by native bush ringing with birdsong, this is a gem of a place to park your tent. Others think so too, and in the frenzied post-Christmas season you'll be

sharing this beautiful spot with many Kiwi and international holidaymakers. Be prepared to talk fish in front of the fireplace at night. There's a lovely walk through the native bush from here to the lake and back.

Kiwi Crib (☎ 03-415 8411; galan@xtra.co.nz; 19 Ocean Grove; d \$100; Ⓟ) This three-bedroom house is up a quiet, cute little road surrounded by native bush.

SURAT BAY

Newhaven Holiday Park (☎ 03-415 8834; www.newhavenholiday.com; Newhaven Rd; unpowered/powerd sites \$22/26, cabin d \$55, flat d \$90; Ⓟ) Only a few minutes' walk from the beach is this sweet little camping area with modern cabins and facilities and one self-contained flat.

Surat Bay Lodge (☎ 03-415 8099; www.suratbay.co.nz; Surat Bay Rd; dm/d \$26/62; ☎) Right beside the start of the track down to the beach, and next-door neighbours with the sea lions, this hostel is a little tired out but superbly located. They'll rent you a bike or kayak to explore.

NUGGET & KAKA POINTS

Kaka Point Camping Ground (☎ 03-412 8801; kaka point@hotmail.com; 39 Tarata St, Kaka Point; unpowered/powerd sites per adult \$11/12.50, cabins per adult \$22; Ⓟ) Cabins here are fairly basic but functional, and it's a lovely grassy, hedged area to pitch a tent. There's bushwalks into the surrounding forest and it's a short, though steep, stroll downhill to the beach and town.

Fernlea Backpackers (☎ 03-412 8834; gweneth@xtra.co.nz; Moana St, Kaka Point; dm/d \$20/50) Perched atop a hill, and a leafy, zigzag path above the street below, this tiny, basic bungalow is ultrasnug with lovely sea views and basic facilities.

Nugget Lodge (☎ 03-412 8783; www.nuggetlodge.co.nz; Nugget Rd, Nugget Point; d \$150; Ⓟ) Perched above the sea on the road south to the lighthouse, this pair of self-contained units is super-comfortable and has a really spectacular view up and down the coast, particularly the upstairs pad, which has a private deck.

Eating

OWAKA

Things close pretty early in Owaka, so head out for dinner early or it'll be two-minute noodles for you. The best dining option is **Sue's Shed** (☎ 03-415 8392; 35 Main Rd; brunch from \$9, dinner \$15-22; ☎ 9am-7.30pm; ☎) which is a nice spot to relax with a sit-down meal, or grab some

takeaway sandwiches for the road. They have some interesting local artworks and also do music and poetry evenings in summer.

You can also get meals at the **Lumberjack Bar & Café** (☎ 03-415 8747; 3 Saunders St; ☞ lunch & evening Tue-Sun) which is fairly stylish inside without being too uptight about it, and the much less salubrious **Catlins Tavern** (☎ 03-415 8350; 21 Ryley St; ☞ dinner Tue-Sat).

KAKA POINT

Point Café & Bar (☎ 03-412 8800; 58 Esplanade; mains \$27-30; ☞ lunch & dinner) An interesting beach-themed bar serving up bar meals and more substantial dinners. Prop yourself at the driftwood bar for a cool beer, or grab a window seat for a sea view. Takeaways are also available at the attached store; grab a burger (\$5) for the road.