

Land of the long, slow train

Chris Wilson shares his passion for viewing New Zealand's landscapes from a train.



TranzCoastal from Picton to Christchurch

FACT FILE

A 14-day journey on the Great New Zealand Steam Explorer costs from £2,900 per person. For details of this or any of these other journeys, please contact our New Zealand specialists on 01869 276 245.



TranzAlpine

The TranzAlpine is one of the world's great rail journeys. It traverses the South Island's Southern Alps from the Pacific Ocean in the east to the Tasman Sea in the west, past varied and breathtaking scenery. When completed in 1908 the rail line was for many years the only route to the west coast once bad weather cut off the roads. After Christchurch, the train crosses the Canterbury Plains, one of New Zealand's driest and richest arable areas, before reaching the foot of the Alps where it ascends via a series of tunnels and three large viaducts on a section known as the 'Staircase'. The views down into the chasms reveal winding rivers turquoise with alluvium before the train emerges into the broad Bealey and Waimakariri valleys. On a clear day the views are fabulous. The train stops at the small Arthurs Pass village for a break where passengers can stretch their legs, or even better, disembark to spend a night or two at either the luxurious Grasmere Lodge or the wildlife focused Wilderness Lodge. Continuing from the village, the train enters the 5.3-mile Otira tunnel to emerge on the other side of the Alps. Here, you will be thunderstruck by the change in flora, with temperate podocarp rainforest resulting from the vast amount of rain that the west coast receives. The descent through the lush valleys passes Lake Brunner before arriving in Greymouth at lunchtime.

Kingston Flyer

The Kingston Flyer on the South Island is a must for fans of old steam trains. The original line ran from Invercargill to Kingston and first opened in 1878 to serve the Wakitipu goldfields, and the train was still running until the 1950s when the line was decommissioned. However, the section running from Kingston to Fairlight has been maintained to give passengers a taste of history on an 18-mile round trip journey.

Steam Train Tours

For steam fans keen enough to dedicate their entire holiday to riding on New Zealand's classic steam trains, the Great New Zealand Steam Explorer tour departs in October 2006 (please



contact our specialists for 2007 dates). This 14-day journey is designed by rail enthusiasts for rail enthusiasts and will incorporate nine steam train journeys as well as the centenary celebrations at Dunedin railway station involving cavalcades of steam and diesel locomotives. Passengers will have a rare chance to travel on stretches of line and on trains that are not generally open to the public, while also travelling through some of the most unspoilt parts of New Zealand.

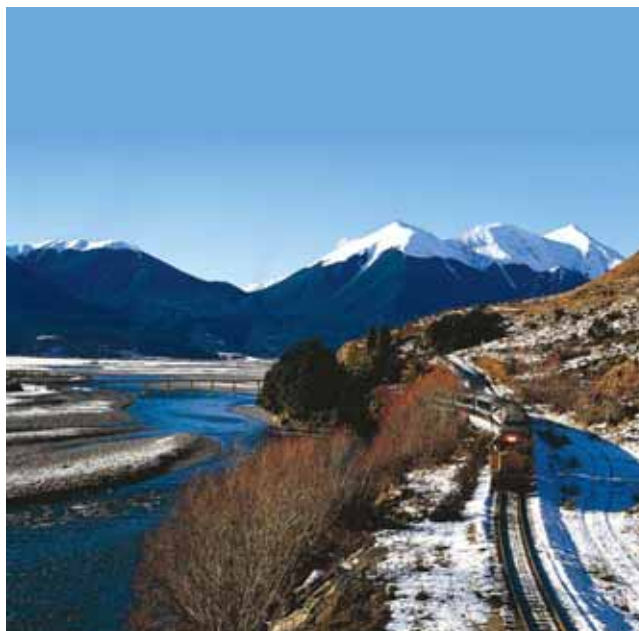
TranzCoastal

The TranzCoastal train runs from Picton to Blenheim and Kaikoura before arriving in Christchurch. The journey lasts for five and a half hours, passing through 22 tunnels and over 175 bridges in quintessential New Zealand countryside, including the beautiful Marlborough



Sounds, the grand Kaikoura mountain ranges and stunning sea views. Better still, take your time and stop to enjoy waterfront accommodation on the Marlborough Sounds, the famous 'Queen Charlotte Track' and winery tours in Blenheim. Kaikoura is historically renowned for its delicious crayfish and its terrific marine life. Sperm whales, Hector's dolphin (the smallest and rarest of dolphins), dusky dolphins, orcas, pilot whales, blue penguins and albatrosses are just some of the animals you can encounter on the trips run by the local Maori community. The TranzCoastal, like the TranzAlpine, has an open air viewing carriage where you can enjoy the views with the wind rushing through your hair.

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TranzAlpine



Whale watching at Kaikoura bay