Discovering Our Planet Together



Wild New Zealand Photo Expedition

A Full Immersion in the Scenic Drama & Rare Wildlife of the South Island

Table of Contents

Trip Overview 3

Itineraries 4

2028 Itinerary • Sept–Oct • 13 days 5

2029 Itinerary • April–May • 14 days 11

Accommodations 17

What Makes Nat Hab Different? 19

Dates, Pricing & Info 22

Extensions 25



Trip Details:

Days
14 Days / Apr, Sep–Oct

Wild New Zealand Photo Expedition

A Full Immersion in the Scenic Drama & Rare Wildlife of the South Island

Few nature destinations hold as much allure for photographers as New Zealand, with its spectacular landscapes and intriguing native wildlife. Our focus is the South Island, a land of topographic contrasts, from seaside rainforests and turquoise lakes to ice-crowned mountains and active glaciers. In Fiordland National Park, get aerial shots of peaks, gorges, fjords and waterfalls by private helicopter. Cruise Milford Sound aboard our chartered boat. Seek images of the elusive brown kiwi on Stewart Island, plus other endemic creatures including rare yellow-eyed penguins, the world's only alpine parrot, and the rare buff weka on Mou Waho Island in Lake Wanaka. At night, shoot the stars illuminating some of Earth's darkest skies. Experience the hospitality New Zealanders are renowned for, too, as we meet sheep farmers, learn about Maori culture, and find a bit of Scottish heritage in the South Pacific.

Trip Highlights

Photograph Endangered Wildlife Found Only Here

Pursue brown kiwis on Stewart Island by starlight, incredibly rare yellow-eyed penguins, and the world's only alpine parrot, the clever kea

Shoot Milford Sound by Private Boat & Helicopter

Cruise misty fjords and photograph waterfalls from our chartered boat, and get shots of Fiordland's glacier-crowned peaks by private helicopter

Capture Dark Night Skies with Astrophotography

Famous for its protected dark sky reserves, New Zealand has some of Earth's starriest skies—create wondrous images with our Expedition Leader

Ready to Book? Call an Adventure Specialist at 800-543-8917



Trip Details:

Days
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Wild New Zealand Photo Expedition Itineraries

A Full Immersion in the Scenic Drama & Rare Wildlife of the South Island



2028 Itinerary • Sept–Oct • 13 days

In 2028, our itinerary is 13 days long, transitioning to 14 days in 2029 with the addition of an extra night at Lake Wanaka. Our route includes Stewart Island, Te Anau & Milford Sound, Wanaka, Arthur's Pass and the West Coast, including Haast Pass, Lake Moeraki, Hokitika and Punakaiki Pancake Rocks.



2029 Itinerary • April–May • 14 days

Launching in 2029, this 14-day itinerary includes Stewart Island, Te Anau & Milford Sound, Wanaka, Arthur's Pass and Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park with Lake Tekapo, Lake Pukaki, Hooker Valley, Tasman Glacial Lake, Rakaia Gorge and fall colors on Porter's Pass.

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2028 Itinerary • Sept–Oct • 13 days

Wild New Zealand Photo Expedition

Itinerary at a Glance

Day 1	Photograph one of the world's rarest penguins at a private conservation reserve
Day 2	Search for elusive brown kiwi after dark on Stewart Island
Day 3	Capture images of rare birds and southern stars from island sanctuaries
Day 4	Focus your lens on endangered birds at a conservation sanctuary
Day 5	Photograph Milford Sound from the water and air on private excursions
Day 6	Explore Lake Wanaka from remote islands to dark night skies
Day 7	Photograph waterfalls and rainforest along wild Haast Pass
Day 8	Search for rare rainforest penguins on New Zealand's wild West Coast
Day 9	Photograph glaciers, kiwi and West Coast landscapes
Day 10	Capture the sculpted landscapes of New Zealand's West Coast
Days 11–12	Photograph high-country wildlife and landscapes at Arthur's Pass
Day 13	Conclude your New Zealand photo expedition in Christchurch



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Day 1

Photograph one of the world's rarest penguins at a private conservation reserve

- Visit a private rehabilitation reserve for endangered yellow-eyed penguins
- Look for northern royal albatross along the Otago Peninsula
- Gather for a welcome dinner at historic Larnach Castle

Arrive in Dunedin for the start of our New Zealand Photo Expedition. The town boomed during a series of gold rushes in the 19th century and today remains one of the country's most important commercial centers. This afternoon, meet your Expedition Leader and fellow photographers, then head to the Otago Peninsula Eco Restoration Alliance, formerly known as Penguin Place, a private conservation reserve and rehabilitation center for endangered yellow-eyed penguins. The reserve was founded in 1985 when just eight breeding pairs inhabited the property. This is a special opportunity to try to photograph this penguin species, found only in New Zealand and incredibly difficult to spot in the wild, with fewer than 300 remaining across the mainland and Stewart Island. We'll also look for a chance to photograph the northern royal albatross. This evening, gather for a welcome dinner at Larnach Castle, built in 1871.

Day 2

Search for elusive brown kiwi after dark on Stewart Island

- Photograph waterfalls, rainforest and a rugged shoreline in the little-visited Catlins
- Watch for sea lions, fur seals, Hector's dolphins and native birds along the coast
- Join a guided night walk for a chance to photograph nocturnal brown kiwi

Set off this morning through the little-visited Catlins, a rugged coastal zone that is one of the most sparsely populated areas of New Zealand. Hemmed by a rockbound shoreline, this windswept region holds photo opportunities encompassing lush woodlands, a petrified forest, hidden lakes and cascading waterfalls. Large tracts of rainforest are filled with native flora, including tree ferns, rata, kahikatea, miro, kamaha and silver beech, while the coast is defined by stark cliffs, sea caves, rock stacks and sandy bays. Wildlife is plentiful—have your long lens ready for seabirds and forest-dwelling birds including tui, bellbird, fantail and native pigeon, plus New Zealand sea lions, fur seals and Hector's dolphins offshore.

Reaching Invercargill this afternoon, New Zealand's southernmost city, we board a short flight to idyllic Stewart Island, 19 miles offshore, where we spend two nights. Much of this rugged granite island lies within Rakiura National Park, whose Maori name means "Land of Glowing Skies." Its rainforests shelter many native plants, which we photograph on nature walks through the unique habitat. The island is a haven for birds, and we listen for the songs of parakeets, bellbirds, tui and kaka. Tonight, we are on a quest for images of the elusive brown kiwi, which we seek on a guided walk after dark. Little-visited Stewart Island is one of the best places in New Zealand to find and photograph these elusive nocturnal creatures.

Day 3

Capture images of rare birds and southern stars from island sanctuaries

- Cruise by private boat for close-range photography of albatrosses, shearwaters and penguins
- Explore predator-free Ulva Island for native birds, including South Island saddlebacks
- Learn astrophotography techniques from your Photo Expedition Leader beneath dark southern skies

On a private boat excursion off Stewart Island this morning, photograph the multitudes of pelagic seabirds that live and breed in these coastal waters. We expect to see a great variety at close range—albatrosses, shearwaters, shags, skua and several penguin species including yellow-eyed, little and Fiordland crested. Take an intimate nature walk with a local naturalist who has worked closely with Stewart Island native and birder extraordinaire Ulva Goodwillie, the namesake of the Ulva Island sanctuary.

On Ulva, just a short boat ride away from neighboring Stewart Island, explore pristine trails and beaches, photographing rare bird species that no longer exist on the main islands, such as the South Island saddleback. Ulva has been carefully managed to be free of invasive predators and pests since 1997, allowing native wildlife to flourish as it did prior to the arrival of introduced species. The small island has also never been logged, offering photographers an immersion in an untouched rainforest that provides shelter for Ulva's healthy bird population. After dark, we focus on astrophotography under some of the planet's darkest skies. Our Expedition Leader is an expert coach on exposure tips to create thrilling images of the stars. And if we're very lucky, we might get to capture the aurora australis in the southern sky when it's visible.

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Day 4

Focus your lens on endangered birds at a conservation sanctuary

- Photograph rare flightless takahē at Te Anau Bird Sanctuary, along with kaka, parakeets and pateke
- Learn how New Zealand's Takahē Recovery Program helped bring the species back from the brink of extinction
- Hone your photography skills during an afternoon workshop with your Photo Expedition Leader

After a short flight back to the mainland from Stewart Island, continue this morning to Te Anau. This picturesque village on Lake Te Anau, the largest of New Zealand's southern glacial lakes, is the gateway to Fiordland National Park. Backdropped by the Kepler and Murchison ranges, most of Lake Te Anau lies within the boundaries of the park and the Te Wahipounamu World Heritage Site. This afternoon, visit Te Anau Bird Sanctuary to photograph the rare flightless takahe, an endemic bird with showy blue-black and olive-green plumage and a large red bill. The sanctuary is one of two that have been integral to the success of New Zealand's Takahe Recovery Program, which has pioneered conservation techniques to bring this endangered bird back from the very brink of extinction. As of 2023, about 500 are in existence. The sanctuary is also home to indigenous kaka (a mountain parrot species), parakeets, pateke (brown teal), tui, wood pigeon and more. Our schedule this afternoon is light, allowing time for photo editing and a workshop with our Expedition Leader.

Day 5

Photograph Milford Sound from the water and air on private excursions

- Cruise privately through Milford Sound in Fiordland National Park beneath sheer peaks and waterfalls
- Fly by chartered helicopter over the Southern Alps with three secluded landings
- Photograph a traditional haka during a private Maori cultural experience

This morning, one of the world's most spectacular drives unfolds: follow the winding Milford Road through Fiordland National Park to the sea, stopping at various scenic photo spots. It's no wonder this mythical-looking land of pointed peaks and sheer rock walls, tall waterfalls and drifting mists was chosen as one of the main settings for the film adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Once we reach the head of the fjord that is Milford Sound, board a chartered boat for a private cruise around this glacier-carved wonderland. As we ply the steep-walled inlets that wind beneath a perpetual cap of snow and ice, shoot the ribbons of water that plummet from on high. If we're lucky, the mists will clear to reveal pyramid-shaped Mitre Peak rising two-thirds of a mile straight out of the sea. Keep your eyes lower, too, to scan the sea for fur seals, crested penguins and bottlenose dolphins. Our Expedition Leader, an expert on New Zealand wildlife and geography as well as photography, interprets all we see.

Then board a chartered helicopter (weather permitting) for a stunning flight over the Southern Alps to Queenstown. As we lift off, shoot Milford Sound from the air, with multiple waterfalls pouring down the near-vertical peaks surrounding the fjord. We'll get an aerial vantage on alpine lakes, ice fields and rainforests and make three secluded landings, which may include a remote west coast beach, a glacier and a lake.

From Queenstown it's less than an hour to Wanaka, with more scenic drama around every bend in the road. En route, stop at Arrowtown, a photogenic gold-mining town tucked within a river valley surrounded by mountains. Established in 1862, its heritage buildings line the town streets, including tiny miners' cottages. From here, we climb the Crown Range Road, New Zealand's highest paved highway. Once we pass the historic hamlet of Cardrona, site of the Central Otago Gold Rush of the 1860s, the vast blue expanse of Lake Wanaka comes into view, portal to Mount Aspiring National Park. The basin filled by Lake Wanaka was gouged out by the Wanaka Glacier, born high in the ice fields that crown the jagged peaks in the distance. Once we're settled in at our lakeside hotel, a special experience is in store: a local Maori welcome featuring a traditional Haka performance we are invited to photograph. This authentic encounter is designed to connect guests on a more personal level with the Indigenous heritage and present-day Maori culture of Aotearoa (New Zealand).

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Day 6

Explore Lake Wanaka from remote islands to dark night skies

- Cruise privately to predator-free Mou Waho Island to photograph flightless buff weka
- Capture images of the famous Wanaka Tree and the surrounding landscape on foot
- Practice astrophotography with coaching from your Photo Expedition Leader

Our day opens with a three-hour private boat excursion on Lake Wanaka. Cruising into the sparkling waters, we quickly leave any sign of civilization behind, surrounded only by tawny hills rising on all sides, with higher peaks beyond. We step ashore on remote Mou Waho Island, a predator-free nature reserve that's home to the rare flightless buff weka—a curious, amiable bird that has been extinct on the mainland since 1920. A guided bush walk to the top of the island reveals a hidden lake on the summit, a photogenic spot where we'll enjoy a cup of tea with the panorama of the Southern Alps on display before us. Our tour of the island reveals an impressive conservation success story, as we find out how invasive species—including the weasel-like stoat—were eradicated to preserve the buff weka as well as the mountain stone weta, a prehistoric insect as big as a person's thumb.

This afternoon, more photo highlights await, including the famous Wanaka Tree, a lone willow standing by itself in the water that has become an icon of New Zealand. Take a short hike with our Expedition Leader to photograph more of the Wanaka environs on foot, or choose to relax or wander the town on your own before dinner. Later tonight, we head out to a very dark location away from the lights of town for night sky photography: Wanaka has some of the darkest, starriest skies on Earth.

Please note: *Beginning in September 2029, we will add one extra day in Wanaka for additional photography in the region, making our itinerary 14 days long.*

Day 7

Photograph waterfalls and rainforest along wild Haast Pass

- Follow forest trails to Thunder Creek Falls and Fantail Falls in Mount Aspiring National Park
- Capture the turquoise Blue Pools and rushing Haast River at the Gates of Haast
- Cross the Southern Alps to the windswept Tasman Sea and secluded Lake Moeraki

Leaving Wanaka's golden mountains behind, traverse moss-draped beech forest as we cross Haast Pass this afternoon into the heart of the West Coast glacier country. We spend several hours around the pass in the heart of Mt. Aspiring National Park, taking advantage of the many sublime nature subjects. The lush scenery is glorious, and trails lead from road's edge along turquoise streams into the rainforest to dramatic waterfalls, including Thunder Creek Falls and Fantail Falls. Capture the ethereal clarity of the famous Blue Pools, and photograph the Gates of Haast, a rocky gorge that funnels the rushing Haast River between steeply forested mountains. Haast Pass is one of three main passages across the Southern Alps and was once an important Maori trading route. Paralleling the river as we descend the pass, we ultimately reach the Tasman Sea and the windswept sand dunes of New Zealand's wild West Coast. Turning north, we follow the dramatic coastal route before cutting inland to Lake Moeraki for a two-night stay at a secluded wilderness lodge in this exceptionally scenic region, which remains lightly visited.

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Day 8

Search for rare rainforest penguins on New Zealand's wild West Coast

- Kayak Lake Moeraki and learn about New Zealand's endangered long-finned eels
- Walk through tree fern forest to photograph Tawaki penguins at Monro Beach
- Look for bioluminescent glowworms along forest tracks after dark

Lake Moeraki lies at the heart of a natural paradise in the Te Wahipounamu–South West New Zealand World Heritage Area. Virtually unchanged since the Polynesians discovered New Zealand, this dramatic landscape has been shaped by successive glaciations into fjords, rocky coastlines, sheer cliffs, waterfalls, lakes, rivers and ancient forests. From our lodge base, photograph highlights of our natural environs on locally guided excursions, including kayaking on Lake Moeraki. Our hosts also take us to meet New Zealand's endangered long-finned eel, a slow-growing species that swims all the way to the deep ocean trenches near Tonga to breed.

A walk on a lush trail among head-high tree ferns takes us to the wild expanse of Monro Beach, with its rock pillars and wave-sculpted driftwood. Here, we look for rare Tawaki penguins to photograph. Found only on the southwest coast and islands of New Zealand, they are also called Fiordland crested penguins and are the only penguins that live in the rainforest. About 2,000 pairs remain, with 10% of the population found along the shores of Lake Moeraki. At night, we look for glowworms, whose bioluminescence is visible in secret locations along the forest track near the lodge.

Day 9

Photograph glaciers, kiwi and West Coast landscapes

- Capture sunrise over Lake Matheson before traveling north into glacier country
- Go behind the scenes at the West Coast Wildlife Center to photograph two of the world's rarest kiwi species
- Frame Southern Alps peaks reflected in Peter's Pool near Franz Josef Glacier

Rise early this morning to photograph sunrise over Lake Matheson, a short drive from our lodge. Heading north today, more of New Zealand's magnificent scenery unfolds as we follow the west coast into glacier country. Westland Tai Poutini, one of New Zealand's two World Heritage Site national parks along with Aoraki Mount Cook, holds many of the country's highest mountains, turquoise lakes, braided rivers and massive glaciers. Spawned in the ice fields of the Southern Alps, they wind down like frozen highways into primeval rainforest, almost reaching the ocean. We stop for photos at Peter's Pool, a kettle lake left by the receding Franz Josef Glacier, which reflects the steep peaks that rise around it. In the nearby town of Franz Josef, we have a behind-the-scenes tour of the West Coast Wildlife Center for photos of highly endangered wildlife cared for here. Get close-ups of the Haast tokoeka and the rowi—the two rarest kiwi species in the world, with fewer than 650 of each remaining—plus little blue penguins (korora) and the tuatara, an ancient reptile that predates the dinosaurs.

Continue to Hokitika, a historic river port born out of the 1860 gold rush, where we spend two nights in a beachfront hotel on the Tasman Sea. Today, the laid-back small town is known for an indigenous greenstone called pounamu, or New Zealand jade, prized by the Maori for its strength, durability and beauty, and used for weapons, tools and personal ornaments. Walk along the sandy beach to photograph plentiful driftwood formed into imaginative sculptures.

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Day 10

Capture the sculpted landscapes of New Zealand's West Coast

- Photograph the blue-green Hokitika River winding through its steep-sided gorge
- Explore the layered Pancake Rocks and towering blowholes of Paparoa National Park
- Walk the Pororari River Track through a limestone gorge and subtropical forest

The dramatic geology of the West Coast is on full display today as we photograph a range of landscapes and scenic features that showcase it. Spend the morning at Hokitika Gorge, a supremely photogenic gem where the Hokitika River flows through a canyon lined by white granite and limestone walls. Walk across the swing bridge over the brilliant blue-green river, where rock pulverized by glaciers and suspended in the water creates an almost surreal color. The viewing platform offers excellent views up and down the gorge, with a clear vantage on how the water has eroded the stone.

Continue to Paparoa National Park and Punakaiki Pancake Rocks, where hard limestone and soft sandstone have been sculpted by the sea into flat, layered shapes that look like stacked pancakes. At high tide, ocean swells force water through underground tunnels amid the formations, creating blowholes that rocket more than 50 feet high. We also walk the Pororari River Track through another dramatic limestone gorge and the Truman Track through dense subtropical forest.

Before we turn inland, Irimahuwhero Lookout offers dramatic shots of the coastline, where foamy white waves meet sandy shores edged by lush forest. Our route then climbs over the Craigieburn Range, where endemic scree plants and giant weta insects thrive. Arthur's Pass Wilderness Lodge awaits, a deluxe ecolodge set among mountain beech forest and surrounded by Arthur's Pass National Park, where we spend three nights.

Days 11–12

Photograph high-country wildlife and landscapes at Arthur's Pass

- Capture working sheepdogs in action on a private 4,000-acre high-country property
- Paddle Lake Pearson for views of the surrounding high-country mountains
- Search for endangered kea and photograph native beech forest with a local naturalist

Our luxury ecolodge at Arthur's Pass lies at the heart of a spectacular 4,000-acre property where half the land is dedicated to protecting rare plants and animals and the other half is a working sheep station, where some 3,000 sheep are raised for fine merino wool. We learn about the region's natural history and agricultural heritage, gaining a firsthand look at sheep farming as we photograph agile sheepdogs at work, hand-feed tame sheep, and learn about shearing and the production of merino wool, renowned for its use in creating soft, fine-gauge garments. On a private kayaking excursion on Lake Pearson, capture mountain landscapes from this serene high-country lake. There are also several options for forest hikes with a local naturalist on trails around the lodge to capture images of moss-cloaked beech trees and unusual moa shrubs as you learn about the native ecosystem. We also have our best chance to photograph the kea, an endangered alpine parrot endemic to this part of New Zealand, that is often seen in this area.

Day 13

Conclude your New Zealand photo expedition in Christchurch

- Enjoy a final activity around Arthur's Pass Wilderness Lodge before driving to Christchurch
- Tour Christchurch briefly before transferring to the airport for homeward flights

After a last activity around the lodge this morning, depart Arthur's Pass and drive to Christchurch, New Zealand's oldest city, noted for its British character and Victorian architecture. We head directly to the airport to meet departing flights.

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Day 4	Focus your lens on endangered birds at a conservation sanctuary
Day 5	Photograph Milford Sound from the water and air on private excursions
Days 6–7	Explore Lake Wanaka from remote islands to dark night skies
Day 8	Frame Central Otago's sculpted geology beneath dark southern skies
Days 9–10	Capture Aoraki/Mount Cook from alpenglow to starlight
Day 11	Follow autumn color into the mountains of Arthur's Pass
Days 12–13	Photograph high-country wildlife and autumn landscapes at Arthur's Pass
Day 14	Conclude your New Zealand photo expedition in Christchurch



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Day 1

Photograph one of the world's rarest penguins at a private conservation reserve

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Day 2

Search for elusive brown kiwi after dark on Stewart Island

- Photograph waterfalls, rainforest and a rugged shoreline in the little-visited Catlins
- Watch for sea lions, fur seals, Hector's dolphins and native birds along the coast
- Join a guided night walk for a chance to photograph nocturnal brown kiwi

Set off this morning through the little-visited Catlins, a rugged coastal zone that is one of the most sparsely populated areas of New Zealand. Hemmed by a rockbound shoreline, this windswept region holds photo opportunities encompassing lush woodlands, a petrified forest, hidden lakes and cascading waterfalls. Large tracts of rainforest are filled with native flora, including tree ferns, rata, kahikatea, miro, kamaha and silver beech, while the coast is defined by stark cliffs, sea caves, rock stacks and sandy bays. Wildlife is plentiful—have your long lens ready for seabirds and forest-dwelling birds including tui, bellbird, fantail and native pigeon, plus New Zealand sea lions, fur seals and Hector's dolphins offshore.

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Day 3

Capture images of rare birds and southern stars from island sanctuaries

- Cruise by private boat for close-range photography of albatrosses, shearwaters and penguins
- Explore predator-free Ulva Island for rare native birds, including South Island saddlebacks
- Learn astrophotography techniques from your Photo Expedition Leader beneath dark southern skies

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- Photograph rare flightless takahē at Te Anau Bird Sanctuary, along with kaka, parakeets and pateke
- Learn how New Zealand's Takahē Recovery Program helped bring the species back from the brink of extinction
- Hone your photography skills during an afternoon workshop with your Photo Expedition Leader

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Day 5

Photograph Milford Sound from the water and air on private excursions

- Cruise privately through Milford Sound in Fiordland National Park beneath sheer peaks and waterfalls
- Fly by chartered helicopter over the Southern Alps with three secluded landings
- Photograph a traditional haka during a private Maori cultural experience

This morning, one of the world's most spectacular drives awaits: follow the winding Milford Road as we travel through Fiordland National Park to the sea, stopping at various scenic photo spots. It's no wonder this mythical-looking land of pointed peaks and sheer rock walls, tall waterfalls and drifting mists was chosen as one of the main settings for the film adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Ring.* Once we reach the head of the fjord that is Milford Sound, board a chartered boat for a private cruise around this glacier-carved wonderland. As we ply the steep-walled inlets that wind beneath a perpetual cap of snow and ice, shoot the ribbons of water that plummet from on high. If we're lucky, the mists will clear enough to reveal pyramid-shaped Mitre Peak rising two-thirds of a mile straight out of the sea. Keep your eyes lower, too, to scan the sea for fur seals, crested penguins and bottlenose dolphins. Our naturalist Expedition Leader, an expert on New Zealand wildlife and geography as well as photography, interprets all we see.

After our cruise, board a chartered helicopter (weather permitting) for a stunning flight over the Southern Alps to Queenstown. As we lift off, shoot Milford Sound from the air, with multiple waterfalls pouring down the near-vertical peaks surrounding the fjord. We'll get an aerial vantage on alpine lakes, ice fields and rainforests and make three secluded landings, which may include a remote west coast beach, a glacier and a lake.

From Queenstown it's less than an hour to Wanaka, with more scenic drama unfolding around every bend in the road. En route, we stop at Arrowtown, a photogenic gold-mining town tucked within a river valley surrounded by mountains. Established in 1862, its heritage buildings line the town streets, including tiny miners' cottages. From here, we climb the Crown Range Road, New Zealand's highest paved highway. Once we pass the historic hamlet of Cardrona, site of the Central Otago Gold Rush of the 1860s, the vast blue expanse of Lake Wanaka comes into view, portal to Mount Aspiring National Park. The basin filled by Lake Wanaka was gouged out by the Wanaka Glacier, born high in the ice fields that crown the jagged peaks in the distance.

Once we're settled in at our lakeside hotel, a very special experience is in store: a local Maori welcome featuring a traditional Haka performance that we are invited to photograph. This authentic encounter is designed to connect guests on a more personal level with the Indigenous heritage and present-day Maori culture of Aotearoa (New Zealand).

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Days 6–7

Explore Lake Wanaka from remote islands to dark night skies

- Cruise privately to predator-free Mou Waho Island to photograph rare buff weka
- Capture sunrise over Lake Wanaka and the famous willow standing in its waters
- Practice astrophotography with coaching from your Photo Expedition Leader

Over two days, photograph a wide selection of scenic subjects in the Wanaka region. On a three-hour private boat excursion on Lake Wanaka, we quickly leave any sign of civilization behind, surrounded only by tawny hills rising on all sides, with higher peaks beyond. Step ashore on remote Mou Waho Island, a predator-free nature reserve that's home to the rare flightless buff weka—a curious, amiable bird that has been extinct on the mainland since 1920. A guided bush walk to the top of the island reveals a hidden lake on the summit, a photogenic spot where we'll enjoy a cup of tea with the panorama of the Southern Alps on display before us. Our tour of the island reveals an impressive conservation success story, as we find out how invasive species—including the weasel-like stoat—were eradicated to preserve the buff weka as well as the mountain stone weta, a prehistoric insect as big as a person's thumb.

Capture sunrise over Lake Wanaka, along with other photography highlights including the famous Wanaka Tree, a lone willow standing by itself in the water that has become an icon of New Zealand. At night, we head out to remote locations away from the lights of town for night sky photography. Wanaka has some of the darkest, starriest skies on Earth, and if you're new to astrophotography, or you just want to hone your skills, our Expedition Leader will share techniques to help you get exciting images.

Day 8

Frame Central Otago's sculpted geology beneath dark southern skies

- Cross Lindis Pass through golden tussock country with views toward the Southern Alps
- Walk among the pinnacles and narrow ravines of the Omarama Clay Cliffs
- Photograph the night sky within the Aoraki Mackenzie International Dark Sky Reserve

Today's route reveals that travel is as much about the journey as the destination, as we make our way from Wanaka to Tekapo in the Central Otago region. Leaving the rocky peaks ringing Lake Wanaka behind, our drive over Lindis Pass traverses open, rolling mountains covered in golden tussock, a native grass that covers the treeless slopes. Dropping into the broad, flat Mackenzie Basin, we stop to photograph the Southern Alps stretched out along the western horizon. Just ahead, we stop to explore the Omarama Clay Cliffs, part of the wider Waitaki Whitestone UNESCO Global Geopark protecting the region's internationally significant landscapes and geology. The cliffs are made from layers of gravel, sand and silt deposited by ancient lakes and rivers millions of years ago, with uplift and erosion gradually shaping them into a dramatic series of sharp pinnacles divided by steep, narrow ravines. Walk among the canyon-like alleyways for evocative photos of the unique formations and bands of color.

Eventually we reach our destination, magnificent Lake Tekapo, surrounded by snow-crowned peaks capped with glaciers that feed the lake's turquoise waters. With three nights here, we have ample opportunities for astrophotography in one of the best places on the planet to pursue it: the region is part of the enormous Aoraki Mackenzie International Dark Sky reserve. As we focus on the stars, we gain an understanding that blends science with Maori cosmology, bringing the wonder of the universe to life.

Ready to Book? Call an Adventure Specialist at 800-543-8917

Days 9–10

Capture Aoraki/Mount Cook from alpenglow to starlight

- Photograph pink sunrise alpenglow on Aoraki/Mount Cook from Peter's Lookout
- Hike the Hooker Valley Track for views of Mount Cook and the Mueller Glacier
- Cruise privately among icebergs on Tasman Glacial Lake below New Zealand's largest glacier

Two full days in and around Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park offer countless photography adventures in this World Heritage-listed alpine region that boasts New Zealand's highest mountains and largest glaciers, with glaciers covering 40% of the park. From Peter's Lookout, we'll capture the pink alpenglow of sunrise on the icy flanks of Mount Cook. Its Maori name, Aoraki, means "cloud piercer," and at 12,218 feet, it is New Zealand's tallest peak. More dazzling lake and mountain scenes await at Lake Pukaki, another bright turquoise expanse of water offering a sublime reflection of Mount Cook when the surface is calm. Its surreal-looking color comes from "glacial flour," extremely fine rock dust that has been ground down by the glaciers that feed the Tasman River, which in turn feeds the lake. When the sun hits the water's surface, it reflects only the blue-green light off these particles.

The Hooker Valley Track offers stunning shots of Mount Cook and the Mueller Glacier, with exciting suspension bridges spanning the Hooker River. If our timing is right, we may also get to photograph the bright Mount Cook buttercup in season, along with other wildflowers. A special highlight is a private cruise on Tasman Glacial Lake for iceberg photography. Here, the Tasman Glacier — New Zealand's largest — calves chunks of ice into the meltwater, which we weave among on a boat excursion on the sparkling lake. At night, additional star photography awaits under the black heavens of the International Dark Sky Reserve.

Day 11

Follow autumn color into the mountains of Arthur's Pass

- Photograph golden beech forest around Rakaia Gorge and Porter's Pass
- Travel into the Craigieburn Range, habitat for endemic scree plants and giant weta
- Arrive at a wilderness lodge surrounded by Arthur's Pass National Park

Another spectacular drive is in store today as we travel northeast from Lake Tekapo to Arthur's Pass. We stop to explore Rakaia Gorge, where the Rakaia River cuts through the Canterbury foothills before spreading out across the Canterbury Plains. The river is sourced in the Southern Alps, carrying glacial flour that turns its water that characteristic blue-green color. On foot, we start in the forest, then climb to the historic gorse-lined ferryman's track. Continuing along glacial and river-carved terraces, we reach a dramatic lookout point on the rim of the gorge to photograph fascinating geological features, including lava flows.

Farther inland, we ascend the Great Alpine Highway to reach Porter's Pass, where a tapestry of autumn color is on display. Grasslands, shrubs and beech forests mingle in a variegated palette of gold and russet as we enter the Craigieburn Range, where endemic scree plants and giant weta insects thrive. Our destination is Arthur's Pass Wilderness Lodge, a deluxe ecolodge on a working sheep station surrounded by Arthur's Pass National Park, where we'll spend three nights.

Days 12–13

Photograph high-country wildlife and autumn landscapes at Arthur's Pass

- Capture working sheepdogs in action on a private 4,000-acre high-country property
- Paddle Lake Pearson for views of autumn foliage reflected beneath the mountains
- Search for endangered kea and photograph native beech forest with a local naturalist

Our luxury ecolodge at Arthur's Pass lies at the heart of a spectacular 4,000-acre property where half the land is dedicated to protecting rare plants and animals and the other half is a working sheep station, where some 3,000 sheep are raised for fine merino wool. We learn about the region's natural history and agricultural heritage, gaining a firsthand look at sheep farming as we photograph agile sheepdogs at work, hand-feed tame sheep, and learn about shearing and the production of merino wool, renowned for its use in creating soft, fine-gauge garments. On a private kayaking excursion on Lake Pearson, capture a tapestry of fall colors and mountain profiles from this serene high-country lake. There are also several options for forest hikes with a local naturalist on trails around the lodge—learn about the native ecosystem as we photograph moss-cloaked beech trees in their autumn splendor and unusual moa shrubs. We also have our best chance here to photograph the kea, an endangered alpine parrot endemic to this part of New Zealand, which is often seen in this area.

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Day 14

Conclude your New Zealand photo expedition in Christchurch

- Enjoy a final activity around Arthur’s Pass Wilderness Lodge before driving to Christchurch
- Tour Christchurch briefly before transferring to the airport for homeward flights

After a last activity around the lodge this morning, depart Arthur’s Pass and drive to Christchurch, New Zealand's oldest city, noted for its British character and Victorian architecture. We head directly to the airport to meet departing flights.

Ready to Book? Call an Adventure Specialist at 800-543-8917



Wild New Zealand Photo Expedition Accommodations

A Full Immersion in the Scenic Drama & Rare Wildlife of the South Island



Larnach Castle

New Zealand's 1871 castle and its award-winning gardens with sweeping sea views are a beacon on the picturesque Otago Peninsula, with a dozen lodge rooms next to the historic stables.



Stewart Island Accommodation

On Stewart Island, where brown kiwi birds outnumber people, cozy accommodations near Halfmoon Bay offer coastal views, en suite bathrooms, Wi-Fi and kitchenettes in every room.



Distinction Te Anau

Overlooking Lake Te Anau and the Fiordland ranges, this recently renovated hotel offers contemporary rooms with plenty of amenities and private balconies with views of the lake.



Edgewater Resort

The only hotel located directly on the shore of Lake Wanaka, the Edgewater features rooms with private balconies or patios with lake and mountain views...plus outdoor hot tubs for a soak under the stars.



Grand Suites Tekapo

Overlooking turquoise Lake Tekapo and the snowy Southern Alps, this contemporary retreat offers sleek studios and exceptional access to star-filled skies within an International Dark Sky Reserve.



Wilderness Lodge Lake Moeraki

At the forefront of nature conservation in this pristine region, this landmark ecolodge was created to demonstrate a sustainable alternative to logging, and today is part of a 6.7 million-acre World Heritage area of lowland rainforest.



Beachfront Hotel Hokitika

Right on Hokitika Beach, sleek Ocean View Rooms overlook the Tasman Sea and the snowy Southern Alps, just steps away from artisan shops and galleries.



Wilderness Lodge Arthur's Pass

In the heart of the Southern Alps, midway between Christchurch and the South Island's west coast, the lodge is surrounded by a 4,000-acre conservation reserve and high-country merino sheep station.

For detailed descriptions, visit nathab.com/australia-new-zealand-adventure-travel/new-zealand-nature-photography-tour/accommodations.

Here's Why This Is Your Ultimate New Zealand Photography Adventure!

Wild New Zealand Photo Expedition

1 **New Zealand's Iconic Landscapes...Plus Much More!**

Most New Zealand photo tours are heavily weighted toward classic landscapes—mountains, lakes, waterfalls and famous viewpoints. With Nat Hab, however, along with these don't-miss scenes you'll get to photograph rare wildlife, remote wilderness and rural life, creating a more varied portfolio.

2 **Two Nights on Little-Visited Stewart Island, Home to Wild Kiwis**

Few New Zealand photography tours stay on Stewart Island. We fly you to this far-flung locale off New Zealand's south coast to spend two nights, opening up photo opportunities most itineraries miss. Stewart Island is one of the best locations to find the endemic brown kiwi in the wild, and we dedicate one evening to getting photos of this iconic nocturnal species in its native habitat.

3 **Astrophotography Under Some of Earth's Darkest Skies**

We devote several nights to astrophotography in dark sky sanctuaries. Rakiura/Stewart Island is renowned for its stars—its Maori name means "Land of Glowing Skies"—with the added possibility of photographing the aurora australis when conditions align. More astrophotography opportunities are in store at Wanaka, and on April-May trips, in Aoraki/Mount Cook International Dark Sky Reserve.

4 **Photograph New Zealand's Rare Endemic Birds**

In addition to kiwis on Stewart Island, join a local bird expert on Ulva Island, a predator-free sanctuary with abundant native birdlife, to look for albatross, shearwater, shag, skua, penguins and rare endemic forest birds such as the South Island saddleback. On the Otago Peninsula, photograph albatrosses and extremely rare yellow-eyed penguins; capture images of the flightless takahe at Te Anau Bird Sanctuary; and photograph the world's only alpine parrot, the kea, at Arthur's Pass.

5 **Private Boat Trips Offer Personalized Photo Opportunities**

We shun large vessels and public sightseeing excursions in favor of chartering smaller boats for our own use, including private cruises at Stewart Island, Milford Sound and Lake Wanaka. This exclusive context creates a quieter experience with greater flexibility and more time to pursue the landscapes and wildlife shots we seek.

6 **Shoot Milford Sound & the Southern Alps by Private Boat & Helicopter**

Experience Fiordland National Park and Milford Sound from multiple perspectives: the dramatic Milford Road, a private cruise through Milford Sound, and—weather permitting—a chartered helicopter flight over Fiordland National Park. The flight offers aerial perspectives of waterfalls, alpine lakes, ice fields and rainforest, with secluded landings that may include a glacier, remote beach and alpine lake.

7 **Seasonal Itineraries Foster Deep Exploration**

We've tailored our routes to capitalize on the best subjects at the best time of year: Sept–Oct trips include an unrushed journey up the remote West Coast, including Haast Pass, Lake Moeraki, Monro Beach, Lake Matheson, Hokitika Gorge and Punakaiki Pancake Rocks, featuring many locations rarely included on a typical South Island photo tour. April–May departures concentrate on Aoraki Mount Cook National Park, the Mackenzie Basin, Lake Pukaki, Lake Tekapo, the Hooker Valley and the glacial landscapes of Tasman Lake. At night, pursue astrophotography on multiple visits to some of the world's largest and most renowned dark sky reserves.

8 **Three Nights in the Arthur's Pass High Country**

Both itineraries culminate with three nights at Arthur's Pass Wilderness Lodge for extended time in the Southern Alps, rather than just passing through by day, which is most common. Photograph the kea, the world's only alpine parrot, Lake Pearson and alpine landscapes, plus document working sheepdogs and daily life on an authentic merino sheep station. On April–May departures, fall colors are a highlight.

9 **Photography Informed by Naturalist Expertise**

This isn't simply a landscape photography workshop transplanted to New Zealand. Nat Hab's foundation in nature travel means photographers benefit from naturalist interpretation and wildlife knowledge throughout the journey—particularly valuable when photographing endemic birds, penguins, marine wildlife, rainforest ecosystems and alpine environments. Your Expedition Leader's expertise makes for a more meaningful experience!

10 **Our Small-Group Setting Enhances Access & Intimacy**

Our New Zealand Photo Expedition is limited to just nine travelers. Our small size allows flexibility to pursue the best light conditions, to linger longer when subjects warrant, and to facilitate personal coaching from our Expedition Leader, no matter a photographer's ability level. With a light impact on our environment, we can also be unobtrusive with wildlife, allowing us to capture closer images.

11 **Travel with Top Guides**

Nat Hab has earned an international reputation for employing the highest-quality Expedition Leaders in the industry. Our guides average 15 years of experience and training, with additional resources and access to WWF's top scientists. **Read our Expedition Leader bios** and traveler comments regarding the quality of our leaders.

12 **Our Quality-Value Guarantee Ensures Your Outstanding Nature Adventure**

Natural Habitat Adventures is proud to offer our exclusive guarantee that clearly states that we will meet the high expectations we set forth in our promotional materials. To our knowledge, this is the most ambitious guarantee made by any adventure travel company. **Read our important promise for yourself!**

13 **Feel Good About Your Carbon-Neutral Journey**

We care deeply about our planet, as we know you do. When you travel with us, the carbon emissions from your trip are 100% offset—including your round-trip flights from home. Natural Habitat Adventures has been the world's first carbon-neutral travel company since 2007.

Ready to Book? Call an Adventure Specialist at 800-543-8917

14

Natural Habitat Adventures is WWF's Travel Partner

Because of our commitment to environmentally friendly travel, as well as the exceptional quality of our small-group nature adventures, World Wildlife Fund, the world's leading environmental conservation organization, has named Natural Habitat Adventures its worldwide travel partner—a designation that makes us exceedingly proud!

Ready to Book? Call an Adventure Specialist at 800-543-8917



Dates & Pricing Summary:

Group Size
Limited to 9 Travelers

Wild New Zealand Photo Expedition Dates, Pricing & Info

A Full Immersion in the Scenic Drama & Rare Wildlife of the South Island

2028 Departures

Departure – Return	Pricing	Notes
Prices and dates not confirmed for 2028		
Sep 30 - Oct 12, 2028	**From $17795** +internal air	
Oct 10 - Oct 22, 2028	**From $17795** +internal air	

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2029 Departures

Departure – Return	Pricing	Notes
Prices and dates not confirmed for 2029		
Apr 13 - Apr 26, 2029	**From $15995** +internal air	
Apr 20 - May 3, 2029	**From $15995** +internal air	
Apr 25 - May 8, 2029	**From $15995** +internal air	

See https://www.nathab.com/australia-new-zealand-adventure-travel/new-zealand-nature-photography-tour/dates-fees for the latest pricing details.

Included

Accommodations, services of Nat Hab's professional Expedition Leader(s), local guides and lodge staff, all meals from dinner on Day 1 through breakfast on final day, private boat tour on Stewart Island, private boat tour in Milford Sound, private boat tour to Mou Waho Island, private boat tour on Tasman Glacial Lake (Apr-May departures), all kayaking equipment, some gratuities, airport transfers for those arriving by air on Day 1 and final day, all activities and entrance fees, all taxes, permits and service fees.

Not Included

Travel to and from the start and end point of your trip, some alcoholic beverages, some gratuities, passport and visa fees (if any), optional activities, items of a personal nature (phone calls, laundry, etc.), airline baggage fees, airport and departure taxes (if any), required medical evacuation insurance, optional travel protection insurance.

Internal air: Flights from Invercargill to Stewart Island and back to Invercargill, and private scenic helicopter flight from Milford Sound to Queenstown, including scenic glacier and alpine lake landings, plus any additional taxes and fees on these flights (this will be listed separately on our invoicing).

Important Information About This Trip

The South Island of New Zealand is vast, and we attempt to take in as much of this beautiful land as possible without rushing, from mountain passes to ocean fjords. Our comprehensive exploration covers more than 900 miles, and the trip involves a fair amount of driving. These are scenic drives that we break up with activities and short stops along the way. They're always worth the windshield time, allowing us to visit iconic nature destinations like Stewart Island, Milford Sound, Lake Wanaka and Arthur's Pass, with additional exploration of either the West Coast wilderness or the Lake Tekapo and Aoraki/Mount Cook region, depending on departure. Our Expedition Leader knows the land and its flora and fauna intimately, as well as its less-visited sites.

New Zealand's climate is quite complex and varied. Travelers should expect a cool, temperate climate on the South Island, with alpine conditions in the mountainous areas. Mountain chains extending the length of New Zealand provide a barrier for the prevailing westerly winds, dividing the country into dramatically different climate regions. The west coast of the South Island is the wettest area of New Zealand, while areas just east of the mountains are considerably drier. Conditions can vary substantially throughout the journey, so you should be prepared for chilly and wet weather.

Ready to Book? Call an Adventure Specialist at 800-543-8917

Meals on your New Zealand adventure are generally satisfying and well-prepared, with an emphasis on fresh, local ingredients. You'll enjoy a variety of dining experiences, from lodge-cooked meals and casual barbecues to regional specialties served in scenic settings. That said, it's important to note that in remote areas, such as Stewart Island and other wilderness locations, meal options can be limited due to location and access to supplies. In these settings, you can expect simple, wholesome meals that reflect what's locally available. Travel days may also include more straightforward meals like packed lunches or quick stops. While the overall quality is strong, we encourage guests to bring a flexible mindset and an appetite for variety—these meals are part of the authentic, off-the-beaten-path experience that makes this trip so memorable.

Accommodations on your New Zealand adventure are chosen not just for comfort, but for their location and connection to the surrounding environment. You'll stay in a mix of boutique hotels, historic properties and remote wilderness lodges—places that immerse you in the landscapes, wildlife and culture that make this journey so special. Because some of our destinations are intentionally remote, such as Stewart Island, amenities may be simpler. You might find that rooms are more rustic, with fewer modern conveniences, but they offer warmth, character and often a deeper connection to place. These properties are selected for their proximity to nature, and while they may be simple, they are all part of exploring New Zealand's wilder corners in a meaningful way.

Mandatory Insurance

Since the areas we travel to are remote and wild (that's why we go there!), we require that all guests have, at minimum, medical evacuation insurance for this program. This is for the safety of all guests. We require that your chosen independent insurance plan includes at least $250,000 in medical evacuation coverage.

To protect your investment and to provide peace of mind while you travel, we also strongly recommend purchasing comprehensive travel insurance. Plans may cover everything from medical treatment to trip cancellations and delays and lost luggage. Please contact our office if you would like more information about the medical evacuation and comprehensive travel insurance policies we offer by calling 800-543-8917.

Getting There & Getting Home

This trip begins in Dunedin, New Zealand, and ends in Christchurch. **We recommend that you arrive at least one day prior to Day 1** to rest from your travels and adjust to the time difference. For guests who come in early, recommended hotels will be included in your pre-departure materials. Guests participating in the North Island pre-trip extension have an included pre-trip night in Dunedin and will join the full group at the start of the tour.

If you plan to arrive on Day 1, you must arrive in Dunedin by 12 pm in order to join your group for an afternoon tour of the Otago Peninsula to view royal albatross and yellow-eyed penguins.

You may depart Christchurch any time after 1 pm on the final day.

Our Natural Habitat Adventures Travel Desk can best assist with your travel reservations, as our staff is familiar with the specific requirements of this program and can help arrange the most efficient itinerary. Please call us at 800-543-8917. While we offer the best available rates to us on airfare and additional nights' accommodations, you may occasionally find special web rates or lower fares online.

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Wild New Zealand Photo Expedition Extensions

A Full Immersion in the Scenic Drama & Rare Wildlife of the South Island



New Zealand North Island Pre-Trip Extension

The ideal complement to your South Island adventure, this sampler of North Island highlights includes Rotorua and the Coromandel Peninsula—explore mist-clad mountains, pristine beaches, waterfalls, geysers, mineral springs and Maori culture.

$3995 (+air)



Australia South: Tasmania, Kangaroo Island & the Great Ocean Road

Discover the diverse landscapes and ecology of far-south Australia as we explore four national parks and a host of private nature reserves teeming with endemic and endangered wildlife.

$16995 (+air)



Ultimate Australia Safari

A three-week nature extravaganza from Australia's tropical top to Tasmania down south, including the Great Barrier Reef and Outback. Eight national parks, seven private reserves and four World Heritage Sites!

$28495 (+air)



Southern Australia & Tasmania Photo Expedition

Photograph a wide array of unique and intriguing Australian wildlife—plus dramatic landscapes from Tasmania's mountains and sapphire lakes to the rugged Southern Ocean coast

$19495

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Natural Habitat & WWF: Discovering Our Planet Together

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