

DAYOUT IN SOUTH WESTLAND

Any dayout in South Westland includes spectacular scenery. The main highway, SH6 takes you through luxuriant native rainforest, crosses rivers sweeping down to the sea, passes lakes reflecting the peaks of the Southern Alps and skirts a rugged and beautiful coast where waves crash in from the Tasman Sea onto wild, sandy beaches strewn with driftwood. At the heart of Westland National Park are the Franz Josef and Fox glaciers which tumble down from the Southern Alps into the rainforests, ending only a few kilometres from the sea.

The small settlements of Franz Josef, Fox and Haast offer most accommodation for visitors. Despite many campervans on the road in summer, the area is still largely remote wilderness. There are numerous clearly signposted walks, planned so the visitor can experience all the natural features of the ice-scoured landscape and forests, and can see wildlife in its various habitats. There's fishing and kayaking on rivers and lakes and guided tours if you want to walk on the glaciers. As you drive through this rugged country, spare a thought for the early Maori who travelled along the inhospitable coast in search of greenstone, and for the miners who struggled to find gold here in the late 1860s.

Between October and March we recommend a dayout kayaking on the Okarito Lagoon to see the white herons feeding, or (more expensively) a tour from Whataroa to their nesting colony. To see both the Franz Josef and Fox glaciers and to do some of the short walks nearby, notably the Lake Matheson walk on a clear morning, you need two days. If you've time for only one glacier, we suggest you visit Franz Josef glacier which is generally considered to be the more scenic.

Another dayout takes you from the glaciers to Haast and the Haast Pass. Allow time to visit the World Heritage Visitor Centre at Haast and to do the short walks off SH6. If you have plenty of time to holiday in the area, trips away from the main highway to Gillespies Beach and Jackson Bay are interesting.

Rainforests are a large part of the beauty of South Westland, sometimes known as the Wet Coast. To enjoy the area fully, you might have to step out in the rain. Be prepared with a waterproof anorak and sturdy footwear!

WHATAROA

A small settlement 30km north of Franz Joseph, it offers tours to the white heron nesting colony.

WHATAROA - ECOTOUR

From late October to March, you can take a guided tour to the Waitangirotu Nature Reserve to view white herons, royal spoonbills and other birds. The tour includes a scenic jetboat ride, a short walk and 30-40 minutes in a viewing hide.

www.whiteherontours.co.nz

OKARITO

A small village 13 km off SH6 on a sealed road. It owes its existence to the discovery of gold in the beach sands in the 1860s. Now it's the birdlife on the lagoon that attracts visitors.

OKARITO - ECOTOUR

A Dayout in Okarito demands a canoe. If you don't own one, hire one and go for a paddle on the lagoon - it's a



birdwatcher's paradise. You'll see many different species here, but the beautiful kotuku or white heron and the royal spoonbill are the special attractions for most people. White herons start to arrive in August and September at the breeding colony further north at Waitangiroto, and in early November the first chicks appear. You can watch the birds stalking food as you glide over the lagoon in your canoe and

can enjoy exploring creeks edged by rainforest. On a clear day the views from the lagoon of the Southern Alps are spectacular.

Canoe/Kayak Hire

Email: kayaks@okarito.co.nz

OKARITO - WALK

Okarito Trig Walk - 1.25 hours return

The climb up to the trig is worth the effort on a clear day: there's a superb panoramic view of mountains, forest, lagoons and the coast.

