

Travel Tips from SIO to NZO

So, you've got a bit of time to kill after the SIO and you don't want to spend it all training for the NZO! Here are a few options for those travelling by road.

There are three main routes to get from Nelson to Christchurch - all are nice, quite varied and with different features and advantages.

Option One: Nelson – Murchison – Lewis Pass – Hanmer Springs – Waipara – Christchurch

This is the quickest route and cuts through the middle of the island – the trip takes approximately 5 hours. It has great mountain, forest and river valley scenery, – with a good contrast from the west to east coast.

Things to do on the way:

1. **Maruia Falls** – definitely worth a quick stop and look, especially if there's been rain. It's pretty well signposted and is about 125 km past Murchison, basically right on the highway.
2. **Sylvia Flats hot pools** – small natural non-commercial pools on the side of the river just through the Lewis Pass (details: <http://www.nzhotpools.co.nz/hot-pools/sylvia-flats-hot-springs>). Worth a look but take repellent.
3. **Hanmer Springs** – great for a night stopover – it's an alpine village with a large thermal pool complex, restaurants/bars, golf course, walks and mt bike tracks, etc – it's only 1.5 hours from to Christchurch. About 10km off the main highway.
4. Check out the various **Waipara wineries** about ½ way between Hanmer Springs and Christchurch.

Tips:

1. Fill up in Murchison if you are towing or have a gas guzzler - petrol is expensive at Springs Junction and the food is not good either.
2. Best places for food are Murchison, Hanmer Springs or Culverden.

Option Two: Nelson – Blenheim – Kaikoura - Christchurch

This takes less than ½ an hour longer than the Lewis Pass route (about 5.5 hours) and heads through the top of the SI and then down the Kaikoura Coast to Canterbury. The real highlight of this route is the spectacular Kaikoura coastline.

Things to do on the way:

1. Take a detour from Havelock via **Queen Charlotte Drive** and Picton to Blenheim. This adds about half an hour to the trip and is a very scenic coastline. Options also to stay a night in Picton or Blenheim – the Blenheim region has many wineries.
2. **Ohau stream walk** (<http://www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/tracks-and-walks/marlborough/south-marlborough/ohau-stream-walk/>) . There's a seal colony on the coast and a short walk will take you to waterfall pools where mother seals leave their pups to play whilst they go out to gather food – but it may be a bit late in the year for that. This is located 27km's north of Kaikoura or 57km south of Ward.
3. There's also various other **seal colonies** down the Kaikoura Coast that are well worth a quick stop for.
4. **Kaikoura** – has transformed from a quiet fishing village to a busy seaside tourist town, with a large whale watch industry, as well as dolphins – it's worth booking a boat trip to see them. There are also lots of bars and cafes around the town, and it could also be a good overnighter.
5. **Waipara wineries** – see, you can get this whether you take route options 1 or 2!

Tips:

1. Alternatively, you could do these things on the way back home to Picton.

2. The crayfish for sale on the side of the road are tourist traps – but please buy some and bring down for your Canterbury mates!

Option Three: Nelson – Murchison – Inangahu Junction – Cape Fowlwind – Greymouth – Arthurs Pass - Christchurch

This trip takes about 7.0 hours if you drive straight through – but you wouldn't want to, as there's a heap to do and see. If you go this way, it'd definitely be worth having at least one night stopover – probably at Punakaiki, Greymouth or Hokitika....or possibly two nights. This route has great mountain, forest and river valley scenery, spectacular rugged Westland coastland, the magnificent Arthurs Pass and Otira Gorge viaduct, historical mining sites, etc. Do it if you can – the Coast is like nowhere else in NZ .

Things to do on the way:

1. **Cape Fowlwind** – there's a good walkway and a large seal colony that you can look right over. You could also **blokart** on the beaches between Cape Fowlwind and Greymouth!
2. **Charleston** – pop down to the bay cove. This was once a major mining centre and the treacherous bay brought the ruin of many a ship.
3. **Punakaiki (Pancake Rocks)** – a really nice area and spectacular if there's a sea running (time it for high tide). It's also a good place to stay, with quite a few accommodation places and a few pubs close.
4. **Greymouth** – the largest town on the Coast, with many old pubs if you fancy a pint. A good spot to base yourself and explore other place. Whilst there, you could visit Shanty Town and pan for gold. Greymouth is about 3 hours from Christchurch.
5. On the way through **Arthurs Pass** visit the viewing points for the **Otira Gorge viaduct**, a major engineering feat and spectacular scenery.
6. **Arthurs Pass National Park** (<http://www.arthurspass.com/>) – there are heaps of short and long walks here, as there are through much of the West Coast.

Tips:

1. Wet weather can be a real bummer on this side of the island. If Canterbury is getting strong Nor Westers, then it's pouring on the West Coast – but that means that you can go to a local West Coast pub – another charm of its own!
2. **Hokitika** - an alternative extension would be to continue from Arthurs Pass to Kumara and Hokitika (½ an hour). Hokitika is the main (low key) tourist town on the Coast and is probably nicer than Greymouth.
3. If holidaying on your way back up North, consider going south from Christchurch via the Otago coastline, Central Otago (Queenstown/Wanaka), Haast Pass, Franz Joseph & Fox Glaciers, Hokitika, Punakaiki.....Nelson, Picton. That would be the ultimate!

These are three main ways to travel and this provides a few morsels only – try them, you might like them!

While in Christchurch:

1. A very good place to find things to do is Be there at <http://bethere.co.nz/>
2. Check out the Air Force Museum at <http://airforcemuseum.co.nz/> Open from 10am to 5pm, admission is free and it's right by the track.