

Guest Information Book  
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# Kaikōura Small Group Guided Tour



**ADVENTURE**  
BY NATURE

# Welcome to Kaikōura!

A day trip to Kaikōura, where you can explore the stunning coastal scenery, optional wildlife and adventure activities

**Duration:** 11 hours

**Activities:** Scenic drive, walking, sightseeing, optional wildlife encounters, ziplining or scenic flights.

**Transport:**

- Included from Christchurch City Centre

**Food:** Picnic lunch, morning, afternoon tea and hot/cold drinks are included

**Start/Finish location:** Christchurch City

**Pick-up time:** 8:00 am

**Finish time:** 7:00 pm

## Overview:

Discover the magic of Kaikōura, one of New Zealand's most extraordinary coastal destinations, on a relaxed small-group tour designed to showcase the region's dramatic scenery and world-class wildlife. Framed by rugged mountain ranges and the Pacific Ocean, Kaikōura is renowned for its rich marine environment, vibrant local culture and breathtaking natural beauty.

This tour offers the perfect balance of guided travel and personal choice. Tailor your day by selecting from a range of unforgettable optional experiences, including whale watching, dolphin or albatross encounters, eco ziplining, or a scenic Wings Over Whales flight. For those who prefer a slower pace, Kaikōura's township, coastline and viewpoints provide plenty of opportunities to unwind, explore and enjoy the seaside atmosphere.

With small group sizes, quality inclusions and time to truly experience the destination, this Kaikōura tour is ideal for travellers seeking a memorable, flexible and enriching day beyond Christchurch.



*Photographing seals on the coast.*



*Upgrade to enjoy a dolphin encounter.*

# Itinerary

Experience the best of New Zealand's Kaikoura Coast on this small-group day tour from Christchurch. Your adventure begins with hotel pick-up or a convenient city centre meeting point, followed by a scenic drive along State Highway 1, where the rugged coastline and ocean vistas set the tone for an unforgettable day. Along the way, we'll stop for morning tea before arriving in Kaikoura for a delicious lunch.

After lunch, the tour offers flexible options to suit every interest. You can explore the charming town, walk the coastal pathways, and visit the local seal colonies, or upgrade your tour to include incredible wildlife encounters and adventure activities. Choose from whale watching, dolphin or albatross tours, Wings Over Whales scenic flights, or an eco-friendly zipline adventure.

After your Kaikoura experience, relax on the return drive to Christchurch, where you'll be dropped back at your accommodation or in the city centre.

This small-group Kaikoura tour is perfect for nature lovers and adventure seekers alike, offering stunning coastal scenery, memorable wildlife encounters, and a full day of exploration without the stress of driving.



# Local Information: Christchurch – Kaikōura

## Christchurch (Ōtautahi)

Christchurch, known as Ōtautahi in te reo Māori, is New Zealand's oldest city, founded in 1850. Its origins trace back to the Canterbury Association, a colonial group established in England in 1848 with the goal of creating a planned settlement based on English social structures. The first European settlers arrived on the First Four Ships, landing in Lyttelton between December 1850 and January 1851. The city was named after Christ Church, Oxford, reflecting the heritage of its founders, particularly John Robert Godley.

Over the years, Christchurch has developed into a vibrant urban centre known for its beautiful gardens, parks, and rich cultural history. Despite facing significant challenges, such as the devastating earthquakes in 2010 and 2011, the city has shown remarkable resilience and continues to thrive as a key destination in New Zealand.

### Major Cities in New Zealand (2023):

- **Auckland:** 1,571,700
- **Christchurch:** 369,000
- **Wellington:** 202,700
- **Hamilton:** 160,900
- **Tauranga:** 136,700
- **Dunedin:** 126,300

### Formation:

The Canterbury Association was established in London in 1848 by Edward Gibbon Wakefield and John Robert Godley, among others. It aimed to create a model settlement in New Zealand based on the principles of systematic colonization.

The Association's vision was to establish a planned settlement in Canterbury, modelled on the English social structure and featuring a network of towns and rural districts. The plan aimed to attract settlers of high social standing and wealth, with an emphasis on the Anglican Church.

The Canterbury Association purchased land from the New Zealand Company in the Canterbury region, including the area around present-day Christchurch. Surveying of the land began in 1849 in preparation for the arrival of settlers.

### First Four Ships:

The Canterbury Association organized the immigration of the First Four Ships, which arrived in Lyttelton, the port for Christchurch, between December 1850 and January 1851. These ships brought the initial wave of European settlers to Canterbury.

1. **Charlotte Jane:** The Charlotte Jane was the first of the First Four Ships to arrive in Lyttelton, the port for Christchurch, on December 16, 1850. It carried approximately 150 passengers,

mostly from Scotland. The arrival of the Charlotte Jane marked the beginning of organized European settlement in Canterbury.

2. **Randolph:** The Randolph arrived in Lyttelton on December 16, 1850, just a few hours after the Charlotte Jane. It carried around 140 passengers, also primarily from Scotland.
3. **Cressy:** The Cressy arrived in Lyttelton on December 27, 1850, with approximately 240 passengers. Like the Charlotte Jane and the Randolph, most of its passengers were from Scotland.
4. **Sir George Seymour:** The Sir George Seymour was the last of the First Four Ships to arrive in Lyttelton, reaching the port on January 17, 1851. It carried around 240 passengers, primarily from England.

- Families of these first four ships are prominent in Canterbury society today.
- Christchurch and Dunedin have more social structure than other areas of New Zealand
- What High School students attend in Christchurch is of extreme importance. An interesting local quirk is asking, "What high school did you go to?" during the first meeting. This doesn't happen in other areas of NZ

**Dubbed the "Garden City," Christchurch is renowned for its abundant green spaces,** meticulously maintained parks, and botanical gardens, including the sprawling Hagley Park, which provides a tranquil retreat for outdoor recreation and leisure activities.

**The Avon River, meandering gracefully through the heart of the city,** offers opportunities for punting, kayaking, and leisurely strolls along its picturesque banks, providing residents and visitors with a serene escape amidst urban surroundings.

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## The Christchurch Cathedral

**History:** The Christchurch Cathedral, formally known as the Cathedral Church of Christ, was built between 1864 and 1904 in the heart of Christchurch, New Zealand. It is a significant example of Gothic Revival architecture and was designed by the English architect Sir George Gilbert Scott.

**Architecture:** The cathedral features a distinctive spire rising to a height of approximately 63 meters (207 feet), making it one of the tallest structures in Christchurch. Its Gothic architecture includes pointed arches, intricate stonework, and decorative elements typical of the style.

**Spiritual Centre:** The Christchurch Cathedral served as the spiritual heart of the Anglican Diocese of Christchurch and played a central role in the religious and cultural life of the city. It hosted regular worship services, special events, and community gatherings.

**Earthquakes:** The cathedral suffered significant damage during the Canterbury earthquakes of 2010 and 2011, particularly the collapse of its spire and extensive damage to its structure. These

earthquakes had a profound impact on Christchurch and its built environment, including the cathedral.

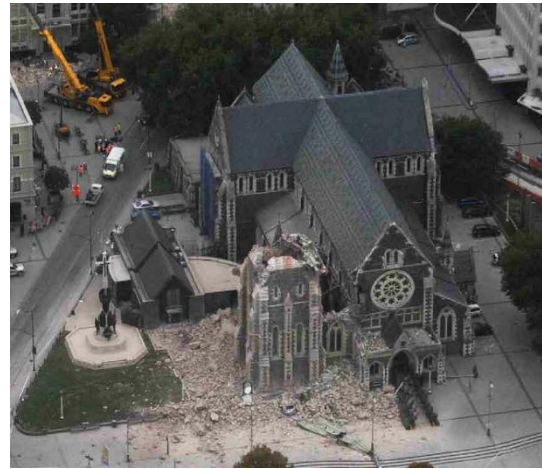
**Restoration Efforts:** Following the earthquakes, debates and discussions ensued regarding the future of the cathedral. Various proposals were put forward, including restoration, demolition, or rebuilding. The decision-making process involved considerations of heritage preservation, engineering feasibility, and financial resources.

**Construction Delays:** Construction of the cathedral began in 1864 but was interrupted several times due to funding issues, labour shortages, and the effects of the New Zealand Wars. It took 40 years to complete, with the final sections finished in 1904.

**Spire Height:** At its peak, the cathedral's spire stood approximately 63 meters (207 feet) tall, making it one of the tallest structures in Christchurch at the time.

**Bell Tower:** In addition to its spire, the cathedral also featured a bell tower with a peal of 13 bells, including a Bourdon bell weighing over 6,000 kilograms (13,000 pounds). These bells were used for various purposes, including marking the hours and special occasions.

**Current Status:** As of recent years, plans for the restoration or redevelopment of the Christchurch Cathedral have been ongoing. Following the Government's decision in 2024 not to provide further funding towards the reinstatement of the cathedral, construction is now be paused while all options are being considered.



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## Treaty of Waitangi – Te Tiriti o Waitangi (signed 6<sup>th</sup> February 1840)

The Treaty is a broad statement of principles on which the British and Māori made a political compact to found a nation state and build a government in New Zealand. The document has three articles. “In the English text, Māori leaders gave the Queen 'all the rights and powers of *sovereignty*' over their land. In the Māori text, Māori leaders gave the Queen 'te kawanatanga katoa' or the complete *government* over their land.” (<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/politics/treaty>)

It is common now to refer to the intention, spirit or principles of the Treaty. The Treaty of Waitangi is not considered part of New Zealand domestic law, except where its principles are referred to in Acts of Parliament.

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## Māori History of Ōtautahi

**The Māori name Ōtautahi translates to “The Place of Tautahi” or “The Place of Tautahi’s People.”**

Tautahi was a significant rangatira (chief) of the Ngāi Tahu iwi (tribe) who played a prominent role in the region’s early history. The name Ōtautahi honours his legacy and the ancestral connections of Ngāi Tahu to the land where Christchurch now stands.

**According to stories, Tautahi is an important figure in the migration stories of the Ngai Tahu people.** Te Waka o Aoraki is the name given to the migration story from their ancestral homeland to Te Ika-a-Māui (North Island) and then down to Te Waipounamu (South Island). This migration, known as Te Waka o Aoraki, is a foundational aspect of Ngāi Tahu people’s identity and history.

**The Māori name for the North Island of New Zealand is “Te Ika-a-Māui,”** which translates to “The Fish of Māui.” According to Māori mythology, the North Island is said to be the fish that Māui, a legendary figure in Māori culture, caught while fishing with his magical hook.

**The Māori name for the South Island of New Zealand is “Te Waipounamu,”** which translates to “The Greenstone Waters” or “The Waters of Greenstone.” This name reflects the significance of pounamu (greenstone or jade) in Māori culture and the abundance of this precious stone found in the rivers and mountains of the South Island.

**Hawaiki:** In Māori tradition, Hawaiki refers to the legendary homeland from which the ancestors of the Māori people are believed to have originated. It is considered a mythical place, often described as a distant island or land across the ocean. According to oral tradition, Māori ancestors migrated from Hawaiki to Aotearoa (New Zealand) many centuries ago in voyages by waka (canoes). While the exact location of Hawaiki remains unknown, it holds deep cultural and spiritual significance in Māori cosmology. It serves as the ancestral homeland of all Māori tribes, including Ngāi Tahu.

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## Kaikōura – New Zealand’s Marine Wildlife Capital

Kaikōura (pronounced “kai-koh-ra”) is a picturesque coastal town on the east coast of the South Island of New Zealand. Its name comes from the Māori words kai (food) and kōura (crayfish), literally meaning “meal of crayfish”, reflecting the area’s rich traditional marine food sources.

Nestled between the dramatic Seaward Kaikōura Ranges and the Pacific Ocean, Kaikōura offers a unique blend of towering mountains, deep offshore waters, and abundant wildlife — a combination that makes it an extraordinary destination for nature lovers.

## History & Culture

### Early Māori Settlement

The Kaikōura area has a long history of Māori occupation, particularly by the Ngāi Tahu iwi, who valued the region for its plentiful marine life. Traditionally, Kaikōura was a rich source of food and other marine resources, especially crayfish (kōura), which was significant in local culture and sustenance.

### European Whaling Era

In the mid-1800s, European whalers began operating from Kaikōura, establishing it as a whaling centre. Today, remnants of these early industries are preserved in local museums and heritage sites, providing insight into a period when whaling played a central role in the town’s development.

### Rise of Marine Tourism

In the 1980s, visionary local Māori families — facing economic decline — mortgaged their homes and launched one of the world’s first whale-watching businesses focused on observing sperm whales in their natural habitat. This bold move helped transform Kaikōura into the globally recognised marine ecotourism destination it is today.

### Whale Watching Kaikoura

The values of kaitiakitanga (guardianship of the environment) guided these early tour operators, ensuring that tourism would be sustainable, culturally grounded, and environmentally responsible.

### 2016 Earthquake

In the early hours of 14 November 2016, a powerful earthquake struck the Kaikōura region, measuring magnitude 7.8 and becoming one of the most complex earthquakes ever recorded. The quake ruptured multiple fault lines at once, dramatically reshaping the landscape. Large sections of the coastline were uplifted by up to two metres, exposing new rock platforms and permanently altering the shoreline. Roads, rail lines and buildings were severely damaged, temporarily isolating Kaikōura from the rest of the South Island and cutting off key transport routes. Despite the scale of the damage, no lives were lost in Kaikōura itself — a testament to quick responses and strong

community preparedness. The recovery that followed became a powerful story of resilience, with the town rebuilding its infrastructure, harbour and tourism industry while embracing its changed coastline. Today, visitors can still clearly see the raised seabed along the shore, offering a rare and visible reminder of New Zealand's dynamic geology and the strength of the Kaikōura community.

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## Kaikōura Peninsula Walkway

One of the most iconic coastal walks around Kaikōura, the Kaikōura Peninsula Walkway stretches roughly 11 km and takes around 3–4 hours at a leisurely pace. This is a free and family-friendly walk that combines stunning views, historical sites and incredible wildlife spotting — especially seals.

### Highlights:

- Clifftop ocean views of the Pacific and the dramatic Seaward Kaikōura Ranges.
- Historic cultural sites along the route, including pā (Māori fortified sites) and old whaling locations that tell the story of early settlement here.
- Interpretation signs along the track share fascinating information about the land, sea, people and wildlife.
- Wildlife viewing — seals, seabirds and even tidal pool life.

You can explore the whole loop, or pick shorter sections if you're short on time. Starting points include the town centre, South Bay or Point Kean car park.

### Tips for walkers:

- Wear good walking shoes and bring windproof clothing — coastal weather can change quickly.
- Keep on the formed track and maintain a respectful distance from wildlife.
- Parts of the walk are exposed and unfenced, so supervise children closely.



*Larger map of the Kaikōura Peninsula Walkway at the back of this book.*

## Point Kean Seal Colony Walk

For guests who want a shorter, easier walk with guaranteed seal encounters, the Point Kean Seal Colony Walk is ideal. This walk is roughly 3–4 km return and typically takes about 1 hour. It's an enjoyable stroll along the coastline with plenty of opportunities to see New Zealand fur seals in their natural habitat, as well as native birdlife and stunning coastal scenery.

### Wildlife safety notes:

- Stay at least 10 metres away from any seal — they are wild animals and can behave unpredictably.
- Do not position yourself between a seal and the water; give them space to move freely.



## Ōhau Point Seal Colony

Ōhau Point is located about 25–30 minutes north of Kaikōura along State Highway 1, heading towards Blenheim. It's one of the most accessible and impressive seal colonies on the east coast of the South Island. There is a designated car park and lookout area directly off the highway, so you can enjoy seal watching without a long walk.

### New Zealand Fur Seals (Kekeno)

This is a breeding colony of New Zealand fur seals, often referred to locally by the Māori name, kekeno. These charismatic marine mammals haul out onto the rocky shores and tidal platforms. Visitors often report seals lounging near the water, swimming in the surf, or engaging in lively behaviour — sometimes more so than at other Kaikōura seal spots due to the size and location of the colony.

### It's important to respect the seals and the protected sanctuary area:

- Do not enter the sanctuary area — seals and their pups are vulnerable to disturbance, and the area around the colony is legally protected to reduce human impact.
  - Keep a safe distance at all times — seals can be unpredictable, especially during breeding season.
  - Observe quietly and without sudden movements so you don't disturb the animals.
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## Kaikōura Museum

Kaikōura Museum offers an engaging introduction to the town's rich cultural, natural and social history. Through a mix of displays, photographs and artefacts, the museum tells the story of Kaikōura from early Māori settlement and traditional food gathering, through the European whaling era, to its transformation into a world-renowned marine wildlife destination. Visitors can also learn about the area's unique geology and marine environment, including why Kaikōura is home to such an abundance of whales, dolphins and seabirds. A dedicated section explores the impact of the 2016 earthquake and the remarkable resilience of the local community as the town rebuilt and adapted. Compact and thoughtfully presented, the museum is an easy and rewarding visit that adds valuable context to everything guests see during their time in Kaikōura.



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## Why Kaikōura Is Special

### A Unique Marine Ecosystem

Just offshore lies the Kaikōura Canyon — a submarine canyon where deep ocean waters plunge to great depths only a few kilometres from shore. This rare feature creates nutrient-rich upwellings that attract an incredible diversity of marine life, making Kaikōura one of the few places on Earth where sperm whales can be reliably seen year-round.

### Marine Wildlife Highlights

Kaikōura is famed for its variety of marine inhabitants, including:

- Sperm whales — year-round residents drawn by abundant squid deep in the canyon waters.
- Dusky dolphins — playful and acrobatic, often seen in large pods.
- Hector's dolphins — one of the world's rarest dolphin species, endemic to New Zealand.
- New Zealand fur seals — frequently spotted on rocky outcrops.
- Seabirds — including various species of albatross and petrels, making the area a birdwatcher's dream.

## Some Interesting Facts:

### Dark Skies Above Kaikōura

In 2024, the Kaikōura Dark Sky Sanctuary was accredited as an International Dark Sky Sanctuary, highlighting its exceptionally clear night skies and offering spectacular stargazing opportunities far from urban light pollution.

### Where Mountains Meet the Sea

Kaikōura's dramatic landscape — where rugged mountains rise almost vertically from the ocean — is a product of powerful geological forces known as the Kaikōura Orogeny. Over millennia, the collision of tectonic plates has pushed up the Seaward Kaikōura Ranges, creating this remarkable scenery.

### Sealing Traditional and Modern Life

Despite its global fame as a wildlife destination, Kaikōura remains a working coastal community with a rich cultural heritage, historic buildings, arts and crafts inspired by its landscapes, and a thriving local seafood scene rooted in centuries-old traditions.

## What You Might Spot Along the Way

### Livestock – Sheep Breeds

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- **Romney** – White face, sturdy build. Most popular sheep breed in New Zealand, valued for both wool and meat. Found in lowland farms and hills throughout Canterbury.
- **Merino** – Smaller frame, often horned rams. Extremely fine, soft wool used in high-end clothing. Found in high country stations.
- **Perendale** – White face, thick wool, medium build. Hardy and good for mixed terrain. Common in hill country; bred from Romney and Cheviot sheep breeds.
- **Coopworth** – Similar to Romney, slightly larger with heavy fleece. Dual-purpose for wool and meat. Find them throughout Canterbury plains.



## Livestock – Cow Breeds

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- **Friesian (Holstein-Friesian)** – Large black-and-white dairy cow. High milk production. Dominant on dairy farms.
- **Jersey** – Smaller, light brown with a gentle face. Produce rich, creamy milk (high butterfat). Found on specialist dairy farms, often mixed with Friesians.
- **Hereford** – Red body with white face and underbelly. Beef cattle. Graze on hill country farms or finishing on Canterbury Plains.
- **Angus** – All black or red, solid build. Premium beef breed. Frequently found on hill farms and in mixed livestock operations.
- **Belted Galloway** - This breed is known for its distinctive white belt that encircles the black or sometimes red body. Known for their hardiness and ability to thrive in cold and rugged environments. Produce high-quality beef.



## Other Wildlife

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- **Pūkeko (Australasian Swamphen)** – Bright blue with red beak and long red legs. Common near roadside wetlands and drains.
- **Pūtangitangi (Paradise Shelduck)** – Large, striking duck; males are black, females have a white head. Frequently seen grazing in paddocks and flying in pairs.
- **Pīwakawaka (New Zealand Fantail)** – Small, friendly bird with fanned tail. Often seen fluttering near rest areas or forest edges.



- **Kāhu (Harrier Hawk)** – Large brown bird of prey seen gliding low over fields. Commonly spotted while driving.



- **Black Swan** – Elegant with red bill, native to Australia but naturalised in New Zealand. Seen on lakes like Te Waihora/Lake Ellesmere and roadside ponds.



- **Papango (New Zealand Scaup)** – Small diving duck, black (male), or brown (female). Seen on lakes and braided rivers.



- **Karoro (Southern Black-backed Gull)** – Large gull, common along coastlines and in fields (paddocks).



### Introduced Animals Commonly Seen

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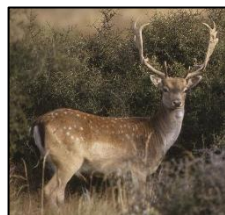
- **European Rabbits** – Often seen on roadsides, pastures, and high-country hills. Especially noticeable in dry, open areas.
- **Hedgehogs** – Nocturnal but sometimes seen in grass verges or rural gardens.
- **Deer (Farmed or Wild)** – Only Red deer are farmed in New Zealand due to the fact they grow large quickly compared to Fallow deer. Farmed deer are visible behind high fences. Both Red deer and Fallow deer are found in the wild (rare in lowlands, but possible in high country).



*Wild Rabbit*



*Hedgehog*



*Fallow Deer - Buck*

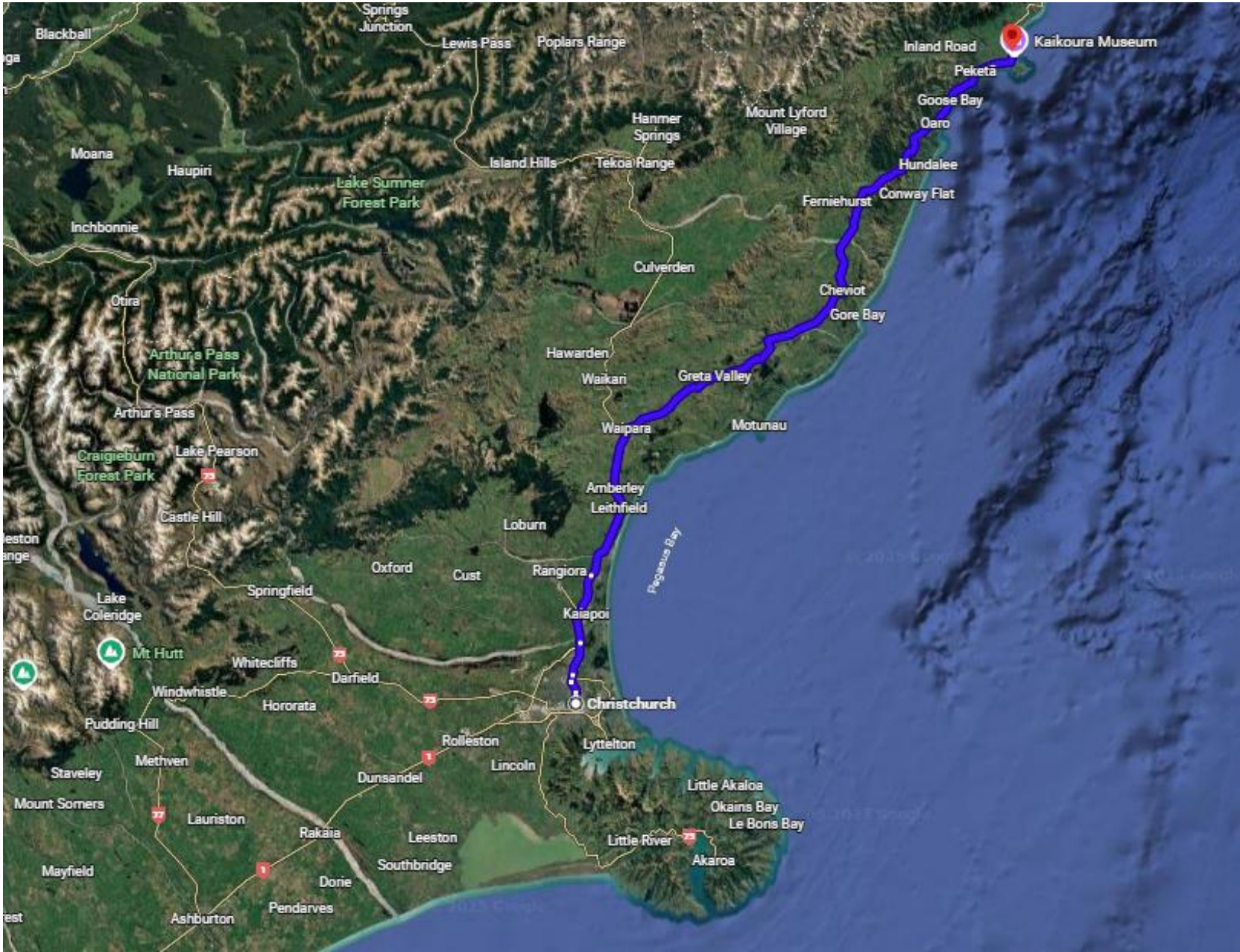


*Red Deer - Hind*

# Kaikōura Tour - Maps



Christchurch – Kaikōura.



Kaikōura Peninsula Walkway (blue line shows approximate track).

