

Driving to Blenheim, via the West Coast

Turn left out the Grasmere gate and stay on State Highway 73 to Kumara Junction, where you'll turn to the right to go north on SH 6.

At Greymouth, we suggest going over the bridge and north along the coast to Punakaiki for some spectacular scenery and the nikau palms of the Paparoa National Park. The 20-minute walk out around the unique Punakaiki 'Pancake' Rocks is worth it, and there is a good craft shop and some cafés here.

Option-

Continue north on SH6, and if you're feeling hungry, turn off to the left just after Addisons, following signs for the seal colony and Cape Foulwind. The road takes you to Tauranga Bay, where you will find the seals on the northern side of the bay after a five-minute walk, and a lovely little café, the Bay House, on the southern side.

If you don't want to go to Tauranga Bay, just stay on SH 6.

From there follow the signs for Westport back onto SH 67 and turn right, avoiding the town of Westport itself, to get back onto SH 6. You will go up the Buller Gorge to Kawatiri Junction, where you will turn right onto SH 63 and carry on down the Wairau River valley to Blenheim, about 130 km from Kawatiri Junction. You may need to fill your petrol tank at St Arnaud, the gateway to the Nelson Lakes area.

To Blenheim, via the East Coast

Turn right out the Grasmere gate, and stay on State Highway 73 to Waddington, on the far side of Sheffield. Turn left and follow the SH 72 signs for the Waimakariri Gorge, Oxford and Rangiora, and then continue on through Rangiora to SH 1, where you'll turn left and head north.

Amberley's Norwester Café (on the right) is a good spot for a cup of coffee or something more substantial. Waipara, another 10 km north, is becoming known as a region of fine pinot noir, and several vineyards are open for tasting. Pegasus Bay and Canterbury House are nice places to lunch, although Blenheim is still 260 km to the north.

Be careful on the winding road through the hills just north of Cheviot.

If you want to try the whale watching at Kaikoura, be aware the whale trip takes about two hours, if the whale boats are running, and should be pre-booked.

An alternative is a flight over the whale area, which would be shorter but not as close to the whales, if they're there. The airstrip is at the southern entrance to the town.

Just at the top of the hill entering Kaikoura, you may like to turn to the right, towards the reservoir, for a wonderful view of how close mountains can come to the sea.

About an hour north of Kaikoura, The Store at Kekerengu is well-placed for a late lunch or a pick-me-up cuppa and plenty of character.

Further north you'll pass shallow Lake Grasmere, where natural evaporation produces salt annually for domestic and export use.

Either way, it's about a 4-5 hour drive from Grasmere Lodge to Blenheim. The directions sound pretty complicated but it's straightforward when you're actually driving it and have a map in front of you.

Picton is another 40 minutes north of Blenheim, on SH1.