

### **Directions down the West Coast from Grasmere**

Heading for the glaciers, turn left out the Grasmere drive onto State Highway 73. Thirty km on, you will go through the village of Arthur's Pass, then over the summit of the pass itself, and down through the Otira Gorge.

At Kumara Junction, seven km past the village of Kumara, turn left onto State Highway 6, and drive 23 km to Hokitika. The Arahura River, just north of the town, is where greenstone (jade) is found in New Zealand, and Hokitika is a good place to buy some. Often you can watch the craftspeople working the stone. Rex and Gemma at Tectonic Jade, on Revell St, have some wonderful pieces. Also check out Tracie Piercey, Goldsmith, in Tancred St, opposite the Visitors Centre, for fantastic blue pearls from the native paua, or abalone.

Continue south through Ross. About 30 km on, just before Lake Ianthe (said to be the prettiest lake on the West Coast), is the Bushman's Centre on the right, with a very large mosquito on the wall. This has a not bad little café, with NZ possum skin seats and good venison pies, as well as an interesting display on the West Coast timber industry and deer farming. Keep an eye open for the large live pig, one of the descendants of the hogs released by Captain Cook when he visited in the 1700s. A sign outside the centre says the staff are okay, but the boss is a pig – you can see why he's the boss.

Further on, the little village of Whataroa is the base for visits to the white heron sanctuary. The nearby Okarito lagoon is the only place in New Zealand where these large egrets nest, and trips by jet boat are available during the summer months. A bird-watching hide has been erected across the little stream from where the herons and royal spoonbills nest, at the right height to see the young. Binoculars and insect repellent are provided. The trip takes two hours, and it is a good idea to book it in advance, because the Department of Conservation limits how many people a day can visit.

The village of Franz Josef is about four hours' drive from Grasmere, and 30 km past Whataroa, and Fox about another half an hour past that. Both have operators offering helicopter and fixed-wing flights onto or around the glaciers, so weather permitting, you should be able to go up at short notice, and on a good day the views are worth it. If the weather is right when you arrive, try to do the flight then rather than leaving it to the next day, in case the weather changes. The operators won't fly if the weather is no good, and the West Coast is well known for its rain, which produces the beautiful rainforests.

- Westwood Lodge is on the left just before you enter Franz Josef, and you're assured of a warm West Coast welcome from Bill, Janet and their staff.
- Lake Moeraki Wilderness Lodge is 400 km from Grasmere, at least five hours' drive, and about 80 km past Fox Glacier.