

NEW ZEALAND SOUTH ISLAND

Above: Cloud shrouds the hills of Fiordland National Park.
Left: Red dahlia anemone on a ledge in Fiordland.
Opposite: A sea pen standing up from the sand about 20cm;
Pair of Jason nudibranchs in the branches of a hydroid colony.

: TONY & JENNY ENDERBY

> MORE THAN 700 PEOPLE, INCLUDING 327 AUSTRALIAN TOURISTS, WERE RESCUED OFF THE RUSSIAN CRUISE LINER, *MIKHAIL LERMONTOV* IN FEBRUARY 1986. AS THE SHIP PASSED BETWEEN CAPE JACKSON AND ITS OFFSHORE LIGHTHOUSE, SHE HIT SUBMERGED ROCKS, TEARING A GAPING HOLE IN HER HULL. THE SHIP CONTINUED INTO THE CALM WATERS OF PORT GORE WHERE A DRAMATIC RESCUE TOOK PLACE BEFORE SHE SANK. TODAY THE *MIKHAIL LERMONTOV* IS ONE OF THE LARGEST DIVEABLE SHIPWRECKS IN THE WORLD.

Marine reserves at Tonga and Long Islands have good dive sites amongst a variety of marine life that is recovering since total protection. A little further south Kaikoura, best known for its marine mammals, has crayfish and a good chance of a New Zealand fur seal encounter.

Otago Harbour near Dunedin may not be on everyone's list of places to dive, but has numerous shipwrecks to explore. Further south, Stewart Island has clear water and dives can include sealion encounters.

Milford Sound has the easiest access in Fiordland but the southern fiords are special places to visit on liveaboard trips. The steep walls under the shallow fresh water layer have interesting invertebrates like black and red coral colonies.

Although the water temperature is colder around these southern dive sites than the north, there are a variety of options for divers. Add encounters with fur seals, sealions, dolphins, whales and penguins and there's something for everyone. Here we highlight twelve of the best.





Above: Large jewel anemones hang beneath a ledge; A large octopus out hunting for a feed; The bar stools protrude sideways inside the Mikhail Lermontov; Sea perch are also called Jock Stewart in the south.



MIKHAIL LERMONTOV

Marlborough Sounds The ship lies on its side in over 30 metres in Port Gore but the top is just 12 metres down. Sponges, anemones and ascidians colonise the decks and tarakihi, spotties, scarlet and banded wrasses swim over her. Doorways loom wide open making entry easy. The ballroom extends the width of the hull – chandeliers protrude horizontally from the ceiling and bar stools extend sideways from the floor. The ship's two propellers are at 27 and 32 metres. On the upper deck the indoor swimming pool has signs "No diving please" and "Caution the pool is empty today" somewhere under the silt. In late spring, blue oceanic water flows in from Cook Strait and visibility reaches 30 metres.

TONGA ISLAND MARINE RESERVE

Nelson Fur seals lolling on the rocks around Tonga Island often check out divers. Huge granite boulders, smoothed by a million years of wave action, sit on coarse, golden brown sand at six metres. Large Wellington nudibranchs up to 15 centimetres long graze on the boulders. Gaps are home to small crayfish and surveys show their numbers are increasing, though few have been recorded outside the marine reserve. There's very little seaweed but plenty of fish with spotties the most common. Blue moki, tarakihi and banded wrasse live around the boulders. Friendly blue cod are becoming more

common and will move in close to check out divers.

LONG ISLAND MARINE RESERVE

Marlborough Sounds Dozens of large blue cod quickly surround divers and are good photographic subjects. Brown, green and red seaweeds cover most of the shallow rocks but vanish at eight metres. Above the weed, spotties, wrasses, blue moki and tarakihi are in good numbers. The rocks are covered in worm tubes, each with a bright orange fan. Juvenile spotties hang around patches of weed and large banded wrasse chase each other. Triplefins sit on every rock. Spiny, biscuit, and cushion stars are scattered around while the snake-like arms of large brittle stars wave. Green-lipped mussels, very big and plentiful, are attached to the rocks. Large paua (abalone) cling to the rocks, small paua hide underneath.

KAIKOURA

New Zealand's marine mammal capital has whales and dolphins, but NZ fur seals add excitement to the diving. Rocky reefs are covered in a forest of red, brown and green seaweeds of all shapes and sizes. Banded and scarlet wrasses make their presence known and the rocky walls are covered with a mix of anemones, sea tulips and sponges. Triplefins dart around, never stopping for more than a few seconds. Spotties, leatherjackets and baitfish swim around the rock walls and

sea perch sit on ledges glaring at divers. *Kai* means food and *koura* means crayfish, and this is a good place to collect some.

FLEA BAY MARINE RESERVE

Banks Peninsula Cliffs around the bay rise several hundred metres giving shelter, except in a southerly. The current brings nutrient-rich water into the bay, often giving better visibility than the surrounding coast. Amongst the rocks are paua and colourful anemones. Butterflyfish and banded wrasse move among the weed and large crayfish lurk in deep volcanic cracks. Sponges, sea tulips and sea squirts are prolific. Leatherjackets feed on the encrusting life, and the occasional octopus wanders under the kelp forest. Blue moki, tarakihi, spotties and blue cod are common. NZ fur seals and Hector's dolphins may drop in. White-flipped and yellow-eyed penguins add to the wildlife experience.

THE MOLE

Otago Harbour Over 70 years ago numerous ships were purpose-sunk at the long breakwater known as the Mole to protect the Otago Harbour entrance. There are five diveable wrecks plus the gate or *caisson* of the old dry dock. The ships' remains are covered in red, brown and green seaweeds and giant kelp extends to the surface. Blue moki and tarakihi schools cruise past and spotties, banded and scarlet wrasses congregate over the plates. Colourful sponges mixed with sea tulips and ascidians cover almost everything. Nudibranchs have adopted the wrecks – New Zealand's largest, the Wellington nudibranch and the gold-lined nudibranch most common.

MILFORD SOUND

Diving here is on steep walls, where deep-dwelling marine species like red and black corals start from just eight metres. In the shallows seven-armed seastars feed on blue mussels. Tube anemones stand up amongst the shells, tentacles flowing in the current, catching passing food. Around the kelp holdfasts are circular saw shells, tiger shells and horse mussels. Jason nudibranchs add a patch of pink against white hydroids. Large black coral colonies stand at right angles to the cliffs, glowing white. They host snake stars wound tightly around their branches with sponges, zoanths and brachiopods at their base. Around them are butterfly perch, leatherjackets and scarlet wrasse with

tarakihi, blue moki and trumpeter out near the edge of the visibility.

BREAKSEA ISLAND

Doubtful Sound Sitting at the entrance to Breaksea Sound, this site has everything. Blue cod and other fish species abound while occasional visits from blue sharks can make it a real adrenaline dive. On the protected side the sand hides species like stargazers waiting for a passing meal. The wealth of invertebrate life on the rocks include red and black coral colonies. Sponges, sea tulips, hydroids and anemones all abound here. The kelp forests have butterflyfish, banded, girdled and scarlet wrasses plus leatherjackets and spotties. A fur seal colony nearby almost guarantees a visit from one or more of these playful creatures.

WAIKARE WRECK

Dusky Sound Kelp swaying above the wreck has made her part of the reef system. The 3000-ton passenger ship *Waikare* hit an uncharted rock in 1910 before beaching on Stop Island. Salvage divers blasted her wide open to recover brass and lead but today this site is protected. The pipes point like flowers from the steel sections but portholes and other trophies have vanished. Butterfly perch hover over the twisted plates like their terrestrial namesakes. Tarakihi and blue moki join them above the hull plates which hide a few crayfish and conger eels. Brightly-coloured anemones cover shallower sections among the kelp holdfasts and tiny sea spiders crawl across the kelp fronds.

LONG SOUND MARINE RESERVE

Preservation Inlet At 12 metres dozens of large scallops sit amongst grains of granite rock. Blue cod are friendly and approach divers. The branches of small red coral colonies spread out like tiny sculptures on rocks. A little deeper the orange fronds of seapens extend vertically from the gravel sea floor, resembling the Victorian quill pen they were named for. Schools of tarakihi and butterfly perch hover in the open while telescope fish swirl above. Small black coral colonies grow on the walls beside glowing white sea anemones. Tiger shells graze on sponges and huge trumpet shells sit in cracks.

ULVA ISLAND MARINE RESERVE

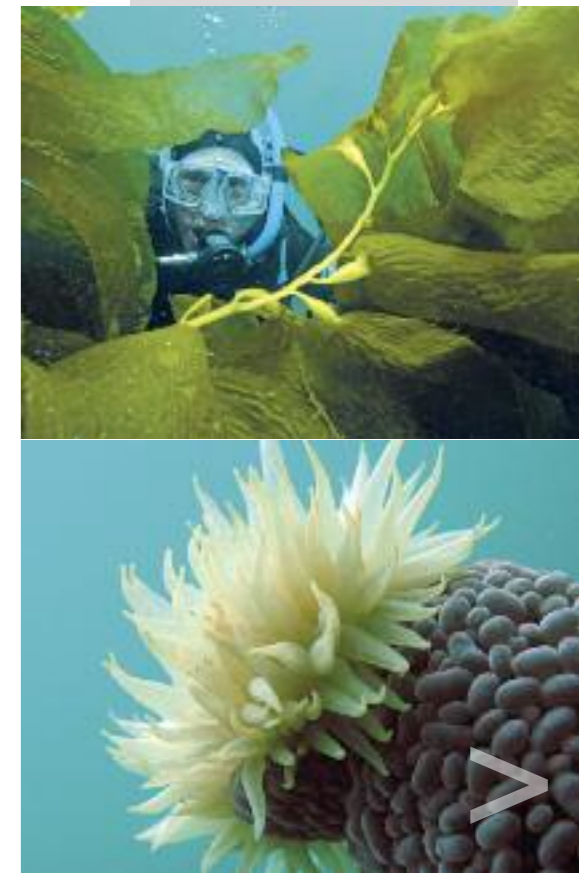
Stewart Island The island is a bird sanctuary with part of its coast a marine reserve. Underwater it is renowned for

millions of brachiopods, red bivalve-like invertebrates that date back 500 million years. Since complete protection, the fish life has improved and blue cod dominate. They harass divers, pulling at straps, peering in masks and head-butting the fish they see reflected. Strange southern pigfish are often camouflaged amongst green sea lettuce. New Zealand paua cling to the rocks among red crayfish and colourful sponges. At any time a fur seal or sealion can visit, adding adrenaline boost.

PORT ADVENTURE

Stewart Island Only accessible by charter boat, this harbour is a brilliant dive amongst seaweed forests and schools of blue cod, blue moki, butterflyfish and tarakihi. The cracks and crannies in the rocks are home to large numbers of crayfish. Around their nests are colourful invertebrates including nudibranchs, sponges, seapens, hydroids and sea shells. Divers can look for a feed and also take photographs. Seals and sealions are regular visitors and will interact with divers. On the trip along the coast, albatrosses glide above or alongside the boat and penguins are often seen in the water.

Below: A diver peers through giant kelp fronds; The strange wandering sea anemone.





Above: A giant stargazer moves out of its haven in the sand; Tarakihi are one of the common southern fish.

SOUTH ISLAND TRAVEL FACTS

New Zealand is roughly a four hour flight from Australia. The South Island is the larger of the two main islands, but less densely populated.

Christchurch, known as 'the Garden City', is the largest city in the South Island.

The South Island has temperate weather with four distinct seasons. The temperature ranges between 10-30°C from winter to summer, but can change very quickly.

All visitors to New Zealand must carry a valid passport. If you intend to stay for longer than three months you may need a visa. New Zealand has a great visitor information system in place, i-Sites are located around the country for all your needs.

> LINKS:

www.newzealand.com

www.i-site.org.nz

www.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Island



Silent Killers



HOLLY LOHUIS

The **Northwestern Hawaiian Islands** is one of the most remote places on Earth and largely uninhabited. Here, thousands of miles from any continent, an incredible array of all the deadly tokens of human manufacturing capabilities was discovered and recorded in 2003.

Due to an ocean gyre that sweeps across the Pacific along a path that leads to these islands, millions of toothbrushes, children's toys, cigarette lighters, glass bottles, golf balls, rubber items, and even whole computer monitors wash ashore. Many of these items, such as plastic that becomes encrusted with fish eggs, are swallowed by albatross adults seeking food for their fledglings. This deadly combination is then regurgitated into the hungry mouths of their young. The young birds simply cannot digest plastic materials and the accumulation over the first six months of their lives is deadly.

Jean-Michel Cousteau's report and some astounding images are on www.oceanfutures.org



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