

Alpine Guides

Aoraki/Mount Cook, New Zealand

Pre-trip Information

Valid from February 2009



Photo by Brad Jackson

Preparing for your Alpine Guides experience

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Important

Please give due attention to the sections dealing with aircraft, travel insurance & cancellation.

Leading New Zealand Guiding Since 1966

Welcome...

These notes complement the specific information pack for whatever Alpine Guides trip you are considering. Together they should provide answers to most of the questions you might have, but please do not hesitate to contact us with any queries.

Our support staff are dedicated to providing fast, accurate and detailed responses to any questions you may have. If you have any suggestions about information we can include that will make planning your trip easier, please let us know.

Our intention is to provide you with a complete experience. We operate in one of the world's great mountain regions, and our climbing, ski touring, and heliskiing activities are safe, professionally-run and, at times, challenging. The combination of the mountain environment, the guides, the weather and the other people sharing your experience make each trip unique.

While you are learning technical skills or carving turns through powder, it is the "being there" that is important. Forget about your job, globalisation and your retirement fund for a while. Take the time to appreciate the rare beauty and spectacle of this amazing mountain region.

We look forward to welcoming you on a great Alpine Guides experience!

About Alpine Guides

Alpine Guides Infrastructure

Alpine Guides is based year-round within Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park. We also operate from our Methven Heliskiing base, June-October in Methven (near Christchurch).

Our Mount Cook base and dedicated team of experienced staff offer unparalleled logistical support for our guided parties.

We have our own VHF/FM radio system that provides vital communications when working around the logistics of flight coordination and weather forecasting, and serves as backup for search and rescue.

In Mount Cook village we have sheltered rope-work practice facilities, lecture room and a rock wall. If your flight into the mountains is delayed by the weather we have plenty to keep you busy, including a multi-pitch climbing area (Sebastopol Bluffs) 2 minutes drive from our base.

Alpine Guides Office at Aoraki/Mount Cook

You will find us located in the Sir Edmund Hillary Alpine Centre, of the Hermitage Hotel. Our guiding business is complemented with a shop that sells a range of clothing, climbing equipment, fuel, stoves, and some camping supplies.

Office hours may vary seasonally. November-March & July-September we are generally open 7 days a week, 8 am to 5 p.m. Through the "shoulder" season (April, May, June and October) we may close at weekends.

Your Guides

All our guides are members of the New Zealand Mountain Guides Association, and senior guides are internationally qualified Mountain and Ski Guides through the IFMGA. They have climbed in many parts of the world and are committed to your safety and enjoyment of the Aoraki/Mount Cook region.

Our guides' training program includes workshops on effective teaching methods, aimed at passing on their extensive knowledge in the best possible way. Typically, senior guides have been skiing/boarding and climbing at Aoraki/Mount Cook for more than 10 to 12 years and guiding professionally for 5 to 8 years. Visit www.nzmgga.org.nz for information on guiding qualifications.

Gear storage at Mount Cook

Whilst on your mountain trip, your extra belongings will be stored at our office. Please label your bags carefully. Smaller items of value (wallets, passports etc) can be placed in our office safe.



Equipment & Clothing

The equipment and clothing requirements for our trips and courses can vary with each type of program. Please refer to the [specific equipment checklist at the back of the course/program info pack](#) that you are booking for. This also provides rental equipment prices.

If you are unsure on what to provide please check our “[Equipment and Clothing](#)” detailed notes. These provide specific information about individual items, to ensure that the gear you may already own is appropriate.

Pre-ordering Clothing and Equipment from Alpine Guides & Save

If you need some new gear or outdoor clothing we provide a range of equipment that we can supply at very competitive prices. [Please email us for a current price list](#)

Our shop sells gear to cover most needs, but if you want to shop for gear en-route through Christchurch, there are a number of climbing equipment shops that we recommend:

- Bivouac Christchurch, 661 Colombo Street
- McEwings Mountain Sports, 50 Wordsworth Street
- Mainland Camping and Outdoors, 54 Lichfield Street
- Mountain Designs, 656 Colombo Street

Mountaineering Boots

Having a uncomfortable pair of boots can completely ruin your mountaineering experience. Boots are the single most important piece of equipment of the mountaineer.

If you are bringing your own boots we ask that these are your own, and well worn in before your trip. If you buy new boots try to get out for a few (serious) walks in them before your mountain trip.

We appreciate that buying a new pair of boots specifically for mountaineering can be a considerable investment. If you chose to buy, purchase them from a reputable gear shop where staff can give realistic and first-hand advice. [If in doubt, rent a pair of our boots](#) - this will give you a good idea of what to look for after your trip.

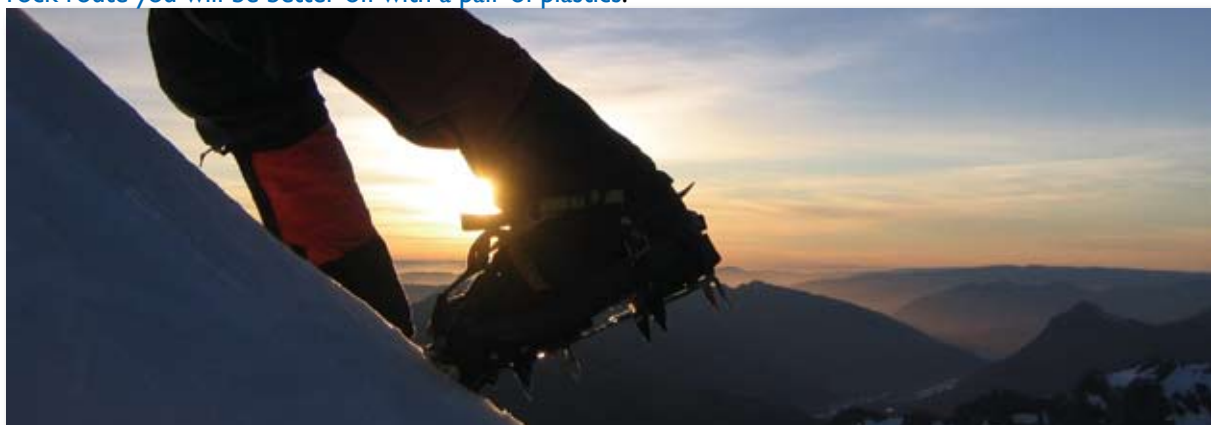
The [Mountain Experience Course](#) does not require a fully-shanked pair of boots. However your leather boots must be at least semi-rigid, (half-shanked) and well waterproofed.

Leather vs. Plastic boots

Our rental mountaineering boots are the plastic variety. We stock Scarpa and Asolo brands in various models and sizes. Plastic boots cope well with the variable nature of New Zealand snowpack, and also the rough treatment experienced on glacial moraine. They also offer better support for front-pointing, and for technical snow/ice ascents.

The latest leather mountaineering boots are increasingly popular with climbers. They will perform well in the Southern Alps during summer, when the depth of snow pack is reduced. If you are considering buying a pair, they will need to be rigid, fully shanked, and crampon compatible.

Both types of boots have their place. Our best advice is this: [if you intend to do a lot of alpine rock, alpine pass crossings and limit your climbing to the summer months, then leather boots are probably the better option. If you intend to do technical snow and ice climbing throughout the year, and the occasional alpine rock route you will be better off with a pair of plastics.](#)



Preparing for the mountain environment

Fitness

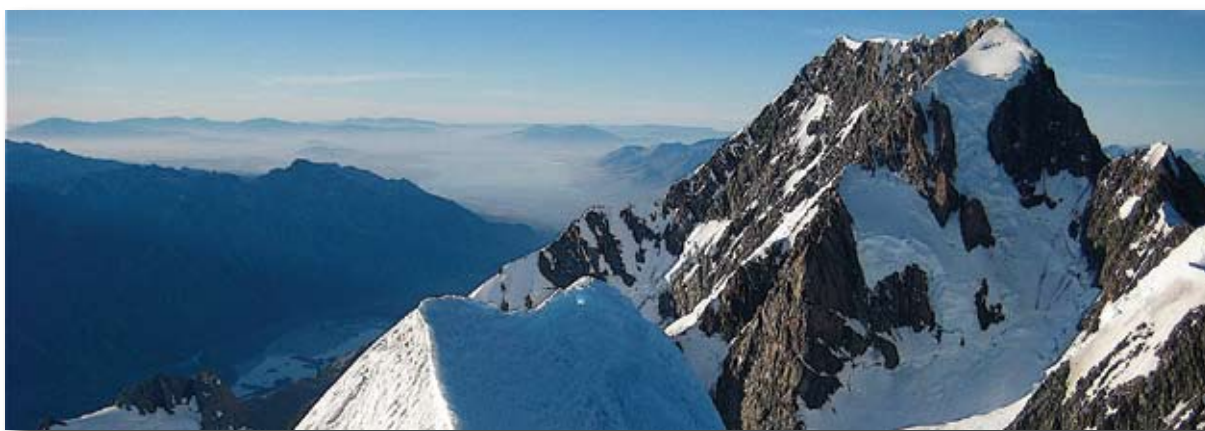
This is by far the most difficult aspect to advise on. Just how fit is “fit enough”?

Mountaineering is a demanding activity. The fitter you are the more you will enjoy your time with us. Endurance and fitness are only acquired from regular sustained aerobic exercise.

Mountaineering is primarily an aerobic activity. While strength is important for lifting a pack, it is more important to build up your aerobic fitness level and stamina, for those long climbing days. Improving your aerobic endurance is the best way to get into shape before your trip

Aerobic fitness is not developed overnight. It can only be improved over months - so start your training program now!

Providing a training regime is beyond the scope of this document. We have included a few tips below. There are many resources that you can access from libraries or the Internet. At the professional level you can consult an exercise physiologist who can help set up a conditioning program.



Training Tips

When training look for types of exercise that improve aerobic fitness: walking (with intent!), stair climbing, jogging, mountain biking, step machines, ski machines, rowing machines are all useful. Anything that uses your legs and gets your heart rate up increases stamina. Look for exercises that mostly closely replicate climbing. Hill running is effective because it is weight bearing and strengthens bones. Work primarily on low intensity - long duration exercise.

- Select activities you enjoy doing, as you are more likely to continue with your program.
- Start slowly. Build up to aerobic exercise at an intensity level where it is difficult to hold a conversation.
- Schedule a time during the day for exercise and aim for 4-5 sessions per week at 30 to 45 minutes each.

Unless you regularly bushwalk/tramp and are used to long days carrying a pack, **the most obvious weakness in many of our client's training regimes is that their exercise sessions are not long enough.** It is not unusual to experience a 15-hour day on some New Zealand peaks. As you come close to the time for your climbing trip try to use a few weekends to load up with a 7-10 kg pack and walk all day, up a hill if possible, to work on endurance.

If you try to hit your peak fitness immediately before your trip you will find that it will greatly improve your enjoyment and appreciation of the mountains. **Don't underestimate how rigorous mountaineering can be. It is better to be over-prepared.**

As a very rough gauge for a minimum level, you should be able to jog at a moderate pace for 5-8 kms without stopping and/or hike 300 metres uphill (1,000 ft.) in less than hour, with a 12 kg pack. The ability to carry a pack over an 8-10 hour day is vital.

Weather & Snow Conditions

Aoraki/Mount Cook weather is best described as “variable and vigorous”, with considerable precipitation at times.

The summer climbing period extends from [mid-November to early-April](#). [Be prepared for a wide range of conditions, from very hot to cold, snowy days.](#)

- [Daylight hours](#): 5:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., with shorter days later in the season.
- [Temperatures](#): in the high snowfields temperatures can be very high due to the enormous amount of reflection from the snow. Expect minimum overnight summer temperatures in cold/stormy periods to get as low as -5° Celsius.

During November and December conditions are colder and access on to many routes is easier, with fewer crevasses. At that time of the year you can expect some snow, and we place a much greater emphasis on avalanche awareness. It is often necessary to take the precaution of carrying avalanche transceivers. We will provide these if required and provide necessary training.

From January onwards the temperatures can typically be very warm during the day. Crevasses are larger and snowfall is less likely.

The winter mountaineering period typically extends [July to early October](#). Deep snow is common, and travel on foot can be difficult at times unless aided by skis, snowshoes, or split-snowboards. All our parties will carry avalanche transceivers and train in their use and avalanche rescue during this time.

- [Daylight hours](#): 8:00 am until 5:00 p.m.
- [Temperatures](#): can vary from 0° Celsius to -15° Celsius.

Altitude

Aoraki/Mount Cook Village is at an elevation of 760 metres (2,500 ft.) with no fewer than 29 mountains rising above 3000 metres (10,000 ft.) in the area, Aoraki/Mount Cook being the highest at 3754 metres (12,316 ft.). Acclimatisation to these altitudes has not proved necessary. However, some people may experience initial breathlessness for a few hours after landing on one of the high glacier nevés.

Mountain Huts

In the mountains we base most of our activities from mountain huts, maintained by the Department of Conservation, or NZ Alpine Club.

The huts are typically bolted down to rock outcrops above vast glaciers. They are fitted with bunks, mattresses, benches, cooking utensils and VHF radios. We provide stoves and fuel for cooking (which is carried into the mountains at the start of each trip).

Your guide will take you through “hut etiquette”. Bathroom facilities are limited to an outside toilet. There are no showers or formal washing facilities in the huts. Care must be taken with hygiene and water supply.

All participants will be expected to assist with basic cooking and hut cleaning duties.

[Personal Hygiene](#)

Clothes can be hand-washed occasionally. When washing most people use hand basins and (their own) washcloths. Use of antibacterial hand sanitizer is recommended.

[Cooking/eating utensils](#)

Plates and utensils are supplied, as is cooking equipment. It is a good idea to bring along your own plastic drinking mug.

Food & Dietary Regimes

Fuelling your body is important in this demanding environment. We cater high-quality fresh food for every trip we run. Dehydrated meals are used very infrequently, and usually only in bivouac situations. Snack/energy bars are provided on all our trips.

Your guide will organise food in advance of your trip, and will plan the preparation of tasty, enjoyable meals. [Please ensure you state your food preferences/dietary requirements when you complete your booking form.](#) We can cater for most dietary regimes, but it is very important you tell us your preferences in advance.

Medical Supplies & Toiletries

There is no pharmacy at Mount Cook (the nearest one is 70 kms away). It is your responsibility to bring sufficient quantities of any specific medication you require. Consult your doctor if necessary. Please note on your booking form any medical history relevant to the demands of the trip. There are no statutory vaccinations required for New Zealand.

Please keep the toiletries you take into the mountains to the absolute minimum.

- Good quality sunscreen (SPF 30 or higher)
- Lip cream with sunscreen
- Toothpaste, toothbrush
- Moisturising cream, and soap or sanitising gel.

These items are all available to purchase at Aoraki/Mount Cook.

You should also carry a small basic first-aid kit, for general bumps, cuts and bruises. This should include band-aids, painkillers, elasticised bandage, waterproof tape or "Second Skin" for blisters/tender skin. Your guide will carry a full kit.

Weather Disruptions

Occasionally trips can be disrupted by bad weather. This is usually because aircraft cannot fly, delaying your flight into the mountains. If possible please allow an extra day in your travel plans so that your program can be extended if necessary. If your trip is seriously affected by bad weather we can offer credit on a future program with Alpine Guides. This is solely at the company's discretion.

With all of our courses and mountaineering trips involving flights, we aim to fly into the mountains at the first opportunity. However, due to weather effects inherent in an alpine situation, we are sometimes delayed. In these cases we will make effective use of your time, working on training, theory, and rope work.

Aircraft Access and Egress

In order to make best use of the time available we fly most of our trips into the mountains. [Walking into your mountain venue could potentially use up 2 days of your trip.](#) The scale and nature of the terrain will make the logic for this obvious when you arrive.

Each set of detailed notes gives an approximate price to budget for. [The Mountain Experience Course, Local Heroes and Winter Mountain Skills course do not include any flights as part of the pricing.](#) They are designed to use venues that are achievable on foot.

None of our programs (except the winter Methven-based Arrowsmith Ski Touring and Backcountry Courses) include a flight out of the mountains in the price.

Why not?

- In order to give our clients an option to walk out, if they wish (and if safety/fitness considerations allow this). Flying out is the more popular option.
- Walking out may be beyond your fitness, especially at the end of a long trip.
- We can arrange charter flights and combine with other parties to keep costs down.

Alpine Guides charters local aircraft operators (Ski Planes and helicopters). Our base staff work to provide the best price available on the day of your flight out.

During the summer months we can often combine with other climbing parties (our own, and recreational groups) going into or out of the mountains. This reduces the relative cost per person. During the winter we can also work in with our Ski The Tasman and heliskiing operations. This provides cost-effective flight options for our clients.

The alternative would be to build in a blanket price into the overall cost of every program that would cover all possible scenarios. This would result in an increase in the overall cost of our trips...

[Please note](#) that towards the end of the summer season (mid-February and later) ski plane landing sites can be restricted due to crevasses. Helicopter transport can become the only means to fly in or out of the mountains. The charter price for helicopters can be more expensive (dependent on numbers), and may increase flight costs toward the upper end of the budget. At that time of the season there are likely to be fewer Alpine Guides parties or recreational climbers in the area, which means that load-sharing may be difficult or in some cases not possible.

Travel Insurance

Overseas visitors should read the following information carefully.

We strongly recommend personal insurance to cover you against: cancellation (air fares and course/trip fees), sickness, accident (not involving your Alpine Guides mountain trip), loss of baggage, alterations to travel plans, or possible evacuation costs due to illness.

Cover for cancellation of trip

Standard travel insurance should cover you against cancellation of your trip due to medical reasons or accident. Our refund/cancellation policies are printed on the reverse of our printed booking form, and on the Alpine Guides website. These outline the possible refunds due (or not) to you for cancellation at various times.

Should you cancel your booking with us, you may not be eligible for a refund of some, or all, of your fees. [Please ensure your travel insurance policy will cover you in the event that you must cancel your trip at late notice.](#)

Alpine Guides is an agent for Comprehensive Travel Insurance Ltd in New Zealand (www.comprehensive.co.nz), and we can arrange travel cover for you. Either visit Comprehensive's website to work out a "quick quote" or contact us directly with enquiries or to arrange cover.

Insurance for mountaineering

We are proud of our safety record. Most accidents in the mountains are minor bumps and bruises.

[Unfortunately we cannot help to arrange insurance cover specifically for mountaineering - both for visitors to New Zealand and NZ residents.](#) There are no NZ providers of insurance for mountain activities within New Zealand.

Some insurance companies can provide extensions on insurance for international visitors that include "adventure" activities. This extra cover is made entirely at your discretion. We recommend seeking cover of this type from a provider within your country of residence, as this is where you will be repatriated for any claim.

Accident Compensation (ACC)

New Zealand has an Accident Compensation system (ACC) [that covers all residents and all visitors to the country. In the event of an accident incurring evacuation and/or medical treatment and rehabilitation](#), the Accident Compensation Corporation will cover most of these costs. The ACC compensation system is based on a "no fault" principle, and there is a complete bar to legal action for damages as a result of any accident.

Please note that this system does not cover medical and evacuation costs in the case of illness. Because of the ACC system many clients opt not to take an extension on their insurance for mountaineering/adventure activities.

You can get more information about how ACC covers visitors to New Zealand by visiting their web site at: <http://www.acc.co.nz/making-a-claim/am-i-covered/index.htm>.



Travel to Aoraki/Mount Cook

Most overseas participants travel to Mount Cook via Christchurch.

Please take note of seasonal timetable variations.

Bus Transport Christchurch and Queenstown to Mount Cook Direct

Intercity Coaches run the only direct service between Christchurch/Mt Cook, and Queenstown/Mt Cook.

This is the best option for bus travel to Mount Cook during the winter months

“Great Sights” (service #9661).

Departs daily from Christchurch 07:30, arriving at Mt Cook 13:00.

A standard one way or return fare is not recommended due to the high price. However, the **15 hour “FlexiPass”** offers a more economic solution. Please visit:

www.intercitycoach.co.nz for details on their service.

Bus Transport - Christchurch or Queenstown to Mount Cook - via Twizel

Our scheduled summer courses start at 1:30 p.m. and finish at 12:00 noon in order to work around public transport arrival and departure times.

There are two services which drop off and pick up in Twizel (the nearest town to Mt Cook Village): Atomic Travel and Southern Link Shuttles. From Twizel a shuttle service runs twice daily to Mt Cook.

For travel to Mt Cook we recommend the following services:

Atomic Travel (to Twizel)

Visit: www.atomictravel.co.nz

Contact them (in Christchurch):

- Phone +64 3 349 0697, Fax +64 3 349 3868
- Email: info@atomictravel.co.nz

Price: one way NZ\$35

Departs Christchurch 07:30 a.m., arrives Twizel at 11:15 a.m.

The Cook Connection (Twizel to Mt Cook)

Visit: www.cookconnect.co.nz

Daily service operates Oct 1st to May 31st.

- Free-phone 0800 266 526 (in NZ only)
- Email: travel@cookconnect.co.nz

2 departure times each day.

Price: NZ\$22 per person or \$40 return

Departs Twizel 12:30 p.m. Arrives Mt Cook 1:30 p.m.

Southern Link Shuttles

Southern Link Shuttles also runs From Christchurch/Queenstown via Twizel.

Visit: www.southernlinkcoaches.co.nz , Phone +64 3 358 8355, Fax +64 3 358 8585

Air Travel

Unfortunately at this time there are no scheduled flight services to Mount Cook. If required we can provide details of companies who will provide a charter service.

Accommodation

In Christchurch

We recommend the Windsor Hotel. This is a quaint privately owned hotel that has had good feedback from our clients for more than 20 years. [Book ahead and let them know you are an Alpine Guides client to receive a discounted room rate.](#)

- Visit: www.windsorhotel.co.nz
- 52 Armagh St (5 minutes walk to city centre)
- Ph +64 3 366 1503, Fax +64 3 366 9796
- Free-phone (in NZ only) 0800 366 1503
- Email: reservations@windsorhotel.co.nz

More accommodation options

- Check www.christchurchnz.net
- Christchurch has a range of backpackers and YHA's try www.yha.org.nz.
- The Christchurch YMCA has good accommodation - and a climbing wall
<http://www.ymcachch.org.nz>

At Mount Cook - Unwin Lodge

Alpine Guides will provide all accommodation for the duration of your trip. At the beginning and the end of the program at Mount Cook we use Unwin Lodge for accommodation, and as a base to work from.

Unwin Lodge is operated by the NZ Alpine Club and is a focal point for alpinists coming into the Mt Cook area. It is located 3 kilometres from our office, close to the Sebastopol Bluffs rock climbing area. Bedrooms are shared, bunk style. The lodge has a huge lounge with a log fire, and excellent kitchen facilities.

You need to provide a sleeping bag and towel (we offer rental sleeping bags)

See Unwin Lodge on the NZAC website: <http://alpineclub.org.nz/default/135>

Accommodation outside of your trip dates

You are welcome to arrive earlier than your program's start date, or stay on in Aoraki/Mount Cook after your trip and make use of either Unwin Lodge or other accommodation.

Please Note: if you are on a program which finishes at **midday on the last day** accommodation for that night is **not included**. If your program finishes at 5:00 p.m. we will provide accommodation on the final night, if required.

Unwin Lodge Contact details

- Email: unwin@alpineclub.org.nz
- Ph: +64 3 4351 000 (Warden's quarters +64 3 4351 100)
- Fax: +64 3 4351 143

Prices at Unwin Lodge (outside of your trip dates)

- \$15 per person for New Zealand Alpine Club members
- Non members, \$25 per person

NZAC Membership Benefits

We encourage all our participants to consider joining the NZ Alpine Club. Apart from the great network of information, membership brings other benefits, including:

- Subscription to The Climber quarterly magazine and annual Alpine Journal
- Discounts at many outdoor retail stores in NZ and Australia
- Reduced fees at alpine huts throughout NZ, and discounts on Department of Conservation hut passes.

For full details on membership benefits and how to sign up please visit the NZAC website at: <http://alpineclub.org.nz/membership/benefits>

Other accommodation options at Mount Cook

Check these options for accommodation outside of your trip dates. Over the summer months the availability of beds in Mount Cook village can be limited. **You are advised to book in advance.**

Aoraki Mount Cook Alpine Lodge

- Ph: +64 3 4351 860
- Fax: +64 3 4351 870
- Email: aoraki@xtra.co.nz
- <http://www.aorakialpinelodge.co.nz>

Aoraki/Mount Cook YHA

- Dormitory bed: \$26, twin & double rooms: \$70, triple room \$91, non YHA members, add \$3
- Ph: +64 3 4351 820
- Fax: +64 3 4351 821
- Email: yhamtcook@yha.co.nz

Hermitage Hotel complex

A range of accommodation, from hotel rooms, motels, and “chalets”.

- Ph: +64 3 4351 809
- Fax: +64 3 4351 879
- Email reservations@hermitage.co.nz
- www.hermitage.co.nz

Other options

There is a camping ground located about 2 kms from Mount Cook village. This costs \$6 per person/night, and can be arranged through the local Visitors Centre (mtcookvc@doc.govt.nz).

Miscellaneous

Money

Check your program notes to work out the approximate cost of your equipment rental needs, or any gear you may need to purchase. Additional costs should only be for flights, if required.

MasterCard, Visa and American Express are all widely accepted throughout New Zealand and can be tendered in Aoraki/Mount Cook. Australian, Japanese, UK, and US currencies are also readily accepted.

There is no ATM machine at Aoraki/Mount Cook, and no trading bank. EFTPOS terminals are available and cash can be withdrawn by EFTPOS at various outlets. EFTPOS cards are usually invalid outside their country of issue, except at ATM's. If travelling to New Zealand you will need to ensure your card will work here. Please note that we cannot give cash advances on credit cards.

Mail

We are happy to hold mail or packages for our clients prior to arrival. Mail should be addressed to:

(Your name and arrival date)
C/- Alpine Guides Ltd
PO Box 20
Mount Cook Village 7946, New Zealand

Internet Access

Access to email and Internet is available through public terminals at the Hermitage Hotel, the YHA, and the Old Mountaineers Cafe.

Communication in the mountains

All our guides carry handheld radios, so we can communicate with them in the field. The Department of Conservation have radios installed in the mountain huts. We are able to pass on messages to climbing parties when required.

Mount Cook village has coverage for NZ Telecom and Vodafone cell phones. When in the mountains coverage is patchy (at best), so you can leave that particular burden of civilisation back at base...

