

QUEENSTOWN

Tucked away in the nether regions of New Zealand's South Island, Queenstown is both a natural alpine gem and a surprising storehouse of stylish bars, restaurants, boutiques and retreats.

It only takes the one visit to Queenstown to get you hooked. Perhaps it's the flight in through the snow-capped Southern Alps that moves the soul, or the legend of a weeping giant forming Lake Wakatipu on which the town rests. Or maybe it's the powder peaks, or the eccentric characters like Scoop, the local newspaper editor, who props up the town's 120 bars with his ear out for the next story.

Thanks to one A J Hackett, the king of Bungy, Queenstown first made its mark as the extreme-sport capital of the world and thanks to Peter Jackson and *The Lord of the Rings*, Queenstown has become well known for its backdrop landscape. But hidden far from the international scene, it's the sophistication of this town that really delights.

In the new millennium, Queenstown has established itself as a millionaire's playground, casually greeting the likes of Bill Clinton, Steven Spielberg and Ralph Lauren. Some even choose to set up home here—Sam Neill is a local man and Shania Twain is among the district's new arrivals. Visitors like these expect luxury, and this once sleepy village has gone up-market with some of the country's finest vineyards, gourmet eateries, boutique hotels, spa retreats and ski villages in the vicinity.

A week here and you soon learn that drinking in this town is serious business. Bar Up, Bardeaux, The Boiler Room, Brazz, Buffalo Club and the Bunker Bar are the a-list of the Bs. The Minus Five Bar on Steamer Wharf on the Lake serves up native feijoa vodka in a bar made of

ice. Complimentary mittens and fur-lined jackets are provided, but be warned: 30 minutes at minus five sipping alcohol from ice-carved glasses and you're toast—or is that frozen bread?

Back alleys, lanes and walkways create a downtown maze reminiscent of European villages and provide access to intimate fire-lit taverns to warm your ski-leaden tootsies. If you do ski, then this is the Vail of the southern hemisphere. With four ski resorts within driving range—Coronet Peak, The Remarkables, Cardrona and Treble Cone (in order of distance)—Queenstown offers slopes to satisfy awkward beginners to off piste posers.

When the snow melts and summer twilight sets in, locals swap ski boots for trek shoes and climb them there hills. Whether it's the three-day wilderness trek of nearby Hollyford Track with its private lodges and gourmet meals, or simply the hour walk to the top of Queenstown Hill, if you can put one foot in front of the other, then you're in the right place. Refuse to break into a sweat? You can see it all by chartered helicopter or light aircraft.

There are 270 accommodation options in Queenstown—from the personal touch of The Dairy, a converted bed and breakfast to the exclusive vibe of six-star Blanket Bay Lodge, 35 minutes from town. Lodges are *de rigueur* for the style-conscious traveller in New Zealand. Bellini's is a private country retreat of international standing and architecture, Matakauri Lodge is a private retreat on the lake for intimate comfort and Punatapu Lodge has a culinary



+ QUEENSTOWN

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school to rival any of the world's best.

For award-winning quality then book into the Mecure Grand Hotel St Moritz for personal balconies with water views. For the golfers, Millbrook Resort is 20 minutes from town and features a Sir Bob Charles-designed 18-hole course, four restaurants and a health spa. If you prefer an urban spa, then book in for an exotic frangipani nourish wrap at Hush.

Fancy yourself a celebrity? Then you'll be staying at Eichardt's Private Hotel on the shore of the lake. Behind its street level House Bar, where the local real estate agents spend their property boom commissions, are five guest suites boasting personal fireplaces, possum throws and double bathrooms. Those on a budget can drop into the bar for sunset cocktails and pretend.

Your days will be filled with wine tastings in the nearby wine districts of Gibbstown and Alexandra, cruising the lake or catching a movie on a comfy old couch at Dorothy Brown's art-house cinema—and then there's eating.

Start the day with local Café L'Affare coffee at Joe's Garage—a converted garage and local favourite for its 'sweetie' bacon buns. Lunch at the historic King George V Bathhouse on the lakeside for fine game, trout and salmon. Chow-down like a president at The Boardwalk where Clinton ate when he was in town. Still hungry? Then sink your teeth into a Fergburger from the hole in the wall in the early hours of the

morning. The 'Southern Swine' features avocado and streaky bacon.

For fine dining, try Gantley's Restaurant in the hills seven kilometres from town; for pizza don't walk past the Cow restaurant in Cow Lane, an institution for pizza served in an old barn, and for wild game and local produce make the trip to Saffron in Arrowtown.

If you need to quench an appetite for shopping, Angel Devine stocks New Zealand fashion icons World, Kate Sylvester and Karen Walker, while across the road Goddess features Trelise Cooper and Sabatini. Louis Vuitton in the main street will have you salivating at the window. For quirky gifts, try In the Pink; for ski gear just walk down any of the main streets and watch out for NZ brand Icebreaker—soft merino to keep you warm up top.

For the arty, look out for local artist Minhal Al-Habib's street sculptures and paintings or check him out in the local galleries.

Be warned: Queenstown will get under your skin. You'll find yourself lingering outside real estate windows calculating how much you'd need. Within days, you'll be on first name terms with bartenders, street cleaners, local council and tour guides.

As you fly out through the Alps, you'll already be planning your return trip and, before you know it, you'll be propping up the bar with Scoop and you'll never leave.

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