

# QUEENSTOWN



## Gets you under the skin

By Rachael Oakes-Ash



I fell in love this winter with Queenstown. It started as a fling, four days that extended to seven, each day more intense as the inevitable end drew near.

The human desire for affection drove me back two months later for ten days that extended to sixteen and ended in talks of real estate prices and entry level purchases. Some destinations do that to you, breaking your heart each time you leave.

Situated on the South Island of New Zealand, in the Central Otago district, Queenstown has a population of 12,000 and is dominated by the powerful snow-capped peaks that rise from Lake Wakatipu.

Maori legend has it that the lake was created by the tears of a sleeping giant. The inland lake now rises and falls every eight minutes and it is said this is the giant's heart still beating.

Thanks to one AJ Hackett, the king of Bungy, Queenstown first made its mark as the extreme sport capital of the world. The dramatic landscape captured by Peter Jackson in *Lord of the Rings* provides a playground for jet boating at high speeds through narrow gorges, paragliding from mountain tops, rafting the rapids and throwing yourself down a powdered mountain with a couple of planks bound to each foot.

You could say it was altitude sickness but considering Queenstown is only three hundred and thirty metres above sea level, despite its Alp surroundings, it's more likely the local Speight's Ale. A week here and you soon learn that drinking in this town is serious business and brought to you by the letter "b". Bar Up, Bardeaux, The Boiler Room, Brazz, Buffalo Club and the Bunker Bar are the A-list of the B's.

The centre of Queenstown is one square kilometre and set up like a maze with back alleys, lanes and walkways that beg to be explored. Intimate bars provide open fires and cocktails to warm the frozen toes where skiers and boarders congregate to debrief the day.

When I grew up, skiing was only for the rich kids at school who returned each September term with tanned faces and panda white eyes and the glow of the entitled.

'Lodge', 'snow plough' and 'slalom' would intermittently be dropped into lunchtime conversation until the summer months when they would be replaced with 'beach house', 'jetty' and 'sail boat', or for the really entitled 'Alps', 'Mont Blanc' and 'Klaus the pet ski instructor'.





In Queenstown, everyone is entitled. Four ski resorts sit within a few minutes drive from town providing powder play for beginners to off piste. The resorts of Coronet Peak, Cardrona, The Remarkables and Treble Cone make up the Southern Hemisphere's Vail.

It was on the slopes of Coronet Peak that I got the snow bug (twenty years behind my schoolmates but who's counting). My thanks go to a ski instructor called Brett who carried my boots, zipped my jacket, queue hopped at the lifts, poured my hot chocolate and burped me after lunch. Without him I may not have lasted my first full week. Everyone needs a Sherpa when starting out.

Five days later and I was whipping down blue runs leaving beginners in my wake. OK, so I slid rather than skied down my first black run and I never went off piste, not intentionally anyway, but I sure developed an addiction that is going to be costly to feed.

When the snow melts, there's still plenty of appeal. Mountain and fiordland treks, jet boat safaris, wine tours, lodge living. Everywhere you step you will have a view of

the Alps or lake or both, the very nature of the vista will lower your heart rate as your soul takes refuge.

Be warned, Queenstown gets under the skin. When sitting in Queenstown airport waiting to board, holidaymakers face a wall of glass behind which sits the terrain they have grown to love. Airports always make me cry. But Queenstown makes me sob. Some destinations do that to you!





**Further information:**  
 Visit the Destination Queenstown website  
 for accommodation,  
 restaurants, activities and more.  
[www.queenstownNZ.co.nz](http://www.queenstownNZ.co.nz)  
 Tourism New Zealand offers advice on  
 getting around [www.newzealand.com](http://www.newzealand.com)

## TRAVEL FACTS

### WHEN TO GO:

Queenstown is a year-round-destination. In summer it reaches mid-twenties and the twilight means 10pm sunsets. Winter is heralded by the annual Winterfest, a ten-day street party in the beginning of July.

### HOW TO GET THERE:

Air Pacific flies direct from Fiji to Christchurch. Queenstown is a six-hour drive south through the Canterbury Plains and the Southern Alps.

### WHERE TO STAY:

#### Cashed up?

Choose one of the four guest rooms at Eichardt's boutique hotel on the waterfront. Rates start at NZ\$1400.

Visit [www.eichardtshotel.co.nz](http://www.eichardtshotel.co.nz)

#### Feeling groovy?

The Spire, think hi-tech urban style, has a cool private restaurant that seats fourteen with an open kitchen. All rooms NZ\$850 including breakfast.

Visit [www.thespirehotels.com](http://www.thespirehotels.com)

#### Award style comfort

The Grand Mercure St Moritz has won the New Zealand hotel of the year for three consecutive years. Apartment

style hotel rooms from NZ\$238 (inclusive of GST) including breakfast. Visit [www.mercure.com](http://www.mercure.com)

#### New Kid on the Block

Sofitel Queenstown is the town's first five star hotel opening mid-August. All the bells and whistles. Visit [www.sofitel.com](http://www.sofitel.com)

#### HUNGRY:

- Prime for lake views and modern cuisine. + 64 3 442 5288
- Bunker bar for intimate fine dining. + 64 441 8030
- Joe's Garage for breakfast and the best coffee in town. - Camp St, beside the Post Office (no bookings).

#### THIRSTY:

- Bardeaux for cocktails in Eureka Lane
- Eichardt's House Bar for sunset on Marine Parade
- Minus Five Bar made purely out of ice on Steamer Wharf
- Boiler Room next door to Minus Five to thaw out after

#### SNOW BUNNIES:

- NZ Ski offer lift pass deals for The Remarkables and Coronet Peak - [www.nzski.com](http://www.nzski.com)
- Cardrona is pure ego skiing with wide runs and groomed velvet - [www.cardrona.com](http://www.cardrona.com)
- Treble Cone for serious skiers - [www.treblecone.com](http://www.treblecone.com)