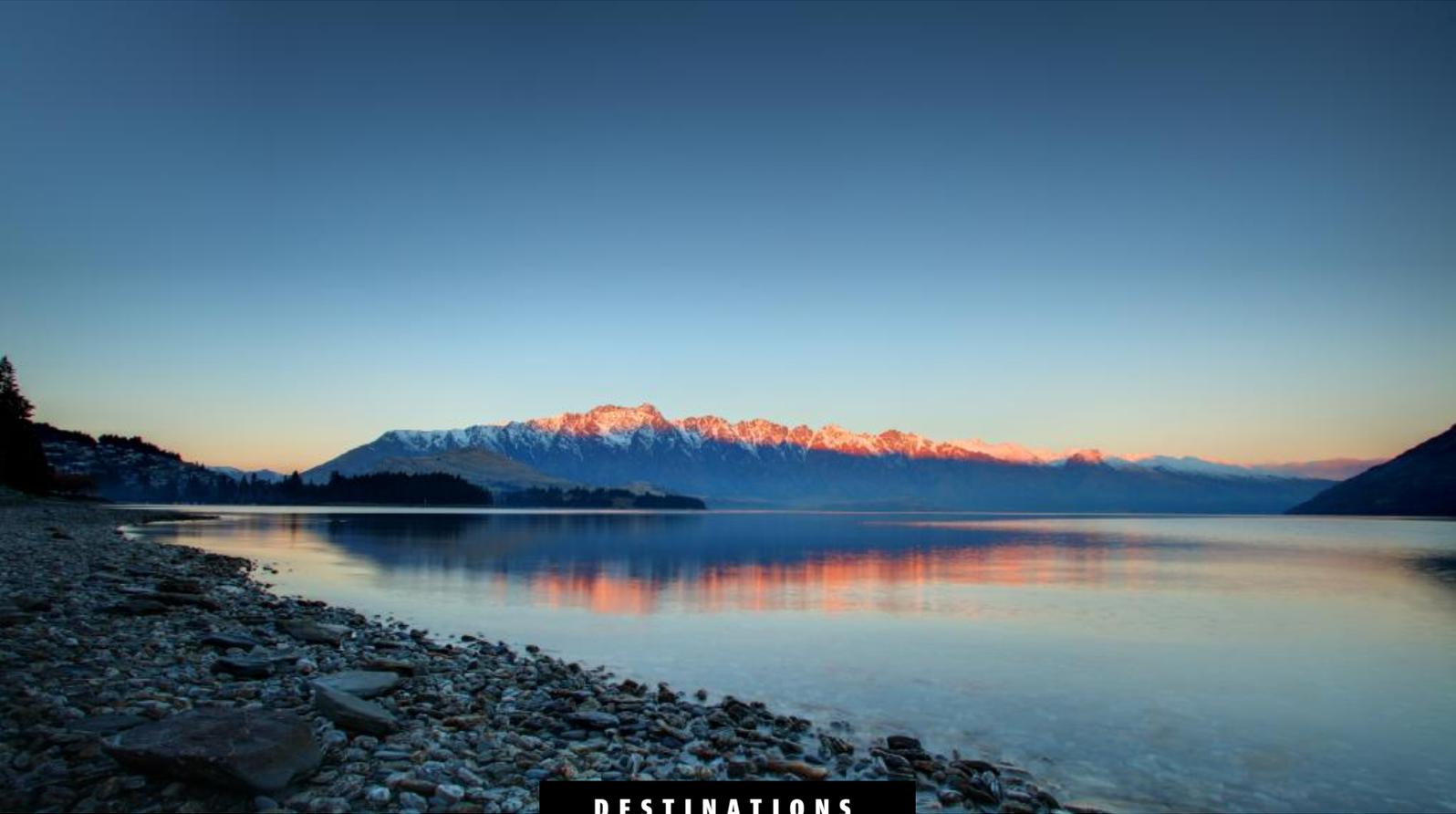




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ESCAPE



DESTINATIONS

FORGET EXTREME SPORTS, QUEENSTOWN IS ALL ABOUT EXTREME LUXURY

SUSAN BREDOW, ESCAPE

March 21, 2017 4:00pm

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No matter how many times you visit Queenstown you never tire of its gobsmacking beauty.

Wakatipu and up to the top of the giant peaks surrounding the town.

While it is known as an extreme adventure capital, the old gold mining centre has a rich vein of luxurious accommodation, eating, drinking, leisure activities and transport to match its magnificent natural surrounds.

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📷 A suite at the Matakauri Lodge in Queenstown, New Zealand.

STAY ROYALLY

There is little competition when it comes to choosing an outstanding place to unpack.

When the young royals Will and Kate were in Queenstown last, they stayed at Matakauri Lodge. Over pre-dinner drinks, the manager enjoys speculating that Princess Charlotte may have been conceived there.

I ponder this as I slide between what feels like million thread count sheets. I'm not in the same bed though. Their royal highnesses stayed in the Manager's Cottage, a lovely four-bedroom, five-bathroom self-contained house along the garden path to one end of the estate.

As expected in true Kiwi style, Matakauri is elegant, tasteful and understated.

It combines a beautiful lakeside bush setting with furnishings by New Zealand's queen of interior design, Virginia Fisher. She's chosen the earthy colours of the local schist rock and soil to create a natural scheme warmed with hints of ochre.

My suite is like a small, private semi-detached house. It's easy to feel at home here except I don't get to enjoy underfloor heating every day, nor a walk-in robe and dressing room.

There's a little courtyard garden on the lakeside where in the spring sun I sit to watch a ferry make its way along Lake Wakatipu. Against the vast mountain backdrop, the ferry looks like a bathtub toy you could reach out and pick up.



📷 Over the Top Helicopter Company flights and golf at Cecil Peak.

HELICOPTER TO THE TOP

Queenstown is a hiker's paradise, but with limited time and perhaps energy, the quickest way up is by helicopter. We fly from a farmer's paddock just up the road from Matakauri Lodge across the lake to the top of Cecil Peak.

At 2000m, Cecil Peak is one of the most prominent mountains in the district and a favourite destination for people wanting to get married against a stunning backdrop.

We play golf on the one par three-hole course, driving biodegradable balls off an elevated tee to the snow covered green below. Despite a gale force wind, the balls generally fly in the right direction although it is unlikely we could manage a hole-in-one.

On a good day, Cecil Peak is the ultimate spot for a picnic with one of the best views in the world. If you want to venture further, Milford Sound is 20 minutes

from Queenstown by chopper. By road, it's six hours each way.

Our sleek black chopper sweeps off one mountain and on to another to land us on the slopes of the Coronet Peak snowfield.

The Over the Top Helicopter Company offers flights to the Cecil Peak golf hole with a chance to smack five balls for \$460 a person.



📷 Over the Top Helicopter Company flights and golf at Cecil Peak.

REGIONAL GRAZING

When Gordon Ramsay wanted to open a restaurant in Australia, he chose New Zealander Josh Emmett to head the kitchen. Now Josh is back in New Zealand and chef supreme at Rata Dining in Queenstown. The name, Rata, is taken from a native tree which grows up to 25m.

Once you've driven out along the lakeside road and into the native bush around Glenorchy, you'll understand the decor at Rata. It is evocative of that forest

right down to the moss-green colours in the bathrooms.

Emett's menu reflects local produce such as wild venison, high-country lamb, seafood and plenty of good vegetarian dishes. He salutes the cheese toastie, a favourite of Southlanders but turns it gourmet with bitter leaves, pickled swede, hazelnuts and pear. It is a must-try on Rata's starters menu.

For a fabulous lunch, it is hard to drive past the Amisfield winery a few kilometres out of town on the shores of Lake Hayes. Start at the cellar door for a tasting of some of the best wines produced in this Otago region. They're not inexpensive but Amisfield offers free shipping to Australia for orders of 12 or more bottles.



📷 Rata Dining, Queenstown.

Along with the label's famous pinot noir, we tried a good fume sauvignon blanc with a slightly coconut taste and low sugar content.

If you're not intending to eat again for a while, go for Trust the Chef. A tasting menu might start with prosciutto and acorn shavings on crispy pig skin, then cured salmon from Akaroa with beetroot and horseradish snow.

Executive chef, Vaughan Mabee's smoked eel and duck pate with mustard and greens is lovely but his signature dish is Paua pie, a superb concoction of the local abalone.

At Matakauri Lodge, head chef Jonathan Rogers is using local products too although he will cater for any request whether it's snapper sashimi or a beef burger.

His tasting menus make stunning meals of intricate detail. One delicious appetiser no bigger than a serving spoon contains 20 ingredients and includes

cucumber three ways, compressed, pickled and charred.

Since Rogers joined the kitchen, the standard of the food at Matakauri helped it win *The Australian's* Wish Magazine award for Best Luxury Lodge. For a great breakfast out, try the Chop House at Arrowtown. The eclectic industrial decor reflects the building's former life as a garage.



📷 The Remarkables Ski Resort, Queenstown. Pic: NZSki

SKI HIGH

Within a short distance of downtown Queenstown are two snow resorts. The Remarkables, named for the mountain range it is in, and Coronet Peak.

The Remarkables is one of New Zealand's highest ski resorts so the quality of the snow stays good for longer into the season.

The terrain park is big and fantastic fun and, while The Remarkables is especially suited to beginners and intermediate level riders, there is plenty here

to challenge advanced skiers and boarders.

A private company is seeking approval to run a gondola lift from near Queenstown Airport to The Remarkables, which will mean greater access.

Coronet Peak with its long and varied terrain slopes is an easy 20-minute drive from Queenstown. The resort offers a long snow season. The main run, the M1 is 2.1km from top to bottom.

— ADVERTISEMENT —



L'ORÉAL
PARIS

SEE THE PROOF



nzski.com

The writer was a guest of Matakauri Lodge and Virgin Australia.



📷 New Zealand's exclusive Matakauri Lodge, set on the magnificent Lake Wakatipu.

ESCAPE ROUTE

Recognising the attraction of Queenstown to luxury travellers, Virgin Australia has added a Business Class to its flights from Sydney and Brisbane.

Flying this way comes with a baggage allowance of more than 60kg and more if

you are a member of Virgin's frequent flyer program which means there is no need to worry packing light, especially if you're taking ski gear.

virginaustralia.com

GETTING AROUND

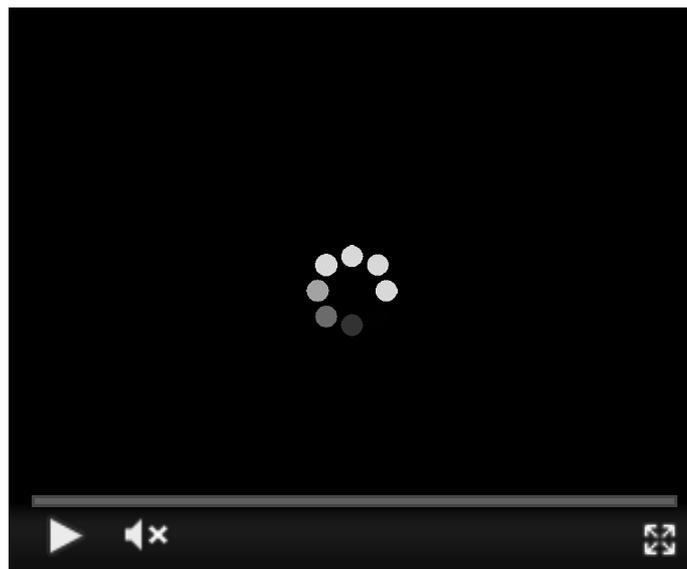
The classiest transport in Queenstown is Black which can arrange anything from airport pick-ups and transfers to bespoke tours of the area's wine, art and historical sites and high country region among many others. blackzqn.co.nz

STAYING THERE

Rooms at Matakauri Lodge start at \$665 a night per person plus GST of 15 per cent and include breakfast, pre-dinner drinks and canapés and dinner. From May 1 to September 30, pay for three nights, but stay for four.

matakaurilodge.com

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