Queenstown is a world-class destination for skiing enthusiasts, but there’s much more to this holiday hotspot. Chic lodgings fit for a duchess are scattered across Central Otago and make the perfect home base for snuggling up after a day’s wining, dining and outdoor fun in this spectacular winter wonderland.

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOANNA TOVIA

T
he light is already fading as we wind our way around the lake and up into the hills to the acclaimed Matakauri Lodge, a cozy and ultra-refined 10-room boutique lodge overlooking The Remarkables. We’re staying in the stunning four-bedroom owner’s cottage, one of three Relais & Châteaux-endorsed lodges American owner Julian Robertson has built in New Zealand after falling in love with the place. The log fire is burning, the candlelit table set for the seven-course degustation dinner to come, and an array of stemmed glasses at the ready for the matching wines.

I already feel like I’m getting the royal treatment when I learn that my room is the same one Kate and Will stayed in when they visited in 2014. The suite is definitely “royal worthy” – the grand bedroom opens onto a sitting room, glass-balustraded balcony and view beyond – and I wonder whether they slept on the same side of the bed as at Kensington Palace or if it was a race to claim the side of their choice.

Auckland-born chef Jonathan Rogers treats us to an incredible dinner of Northland snapper, Fiordland venison, Southland heart-tartare and more. Local and seasonal dishes should be a given for any chef, Rogers says, and ethical and organic, produce worth striving for. The wines are sublime, as you’d expect of New Zealand. My favourite is the Coal Pit Sauvignon Blanc 2011 from Central Otago. It smells like asparagus to me but tastes like grapefruit, passionfruit and guava, with a long and lingering finish.

A wander around Queenstown is on the cards after a breakfast of scrambled eggs, crispy bacon and excellent coffee. Queenstown’s bustling jetties of boating enthusiasts; the Lodge’s lake access courtesy of Over The Top heli-tours; Alpine views and excellent coffee. Queenstown, it’s peaceful here and the lake is completely serene.

The drive from Queenstown to Wanaka is spectacular and so are some of the wines we sample on the way. Chard Farm, which started with a self-described “fruit salad” approach to winemaking in the 1990s (in other words, a little bit of everything), now sells 45,000 cases of pinot noir a year.

“Nobody knew pinot noir would do so well in the region,” says director and winemaker Rob Hay, who describes the wines he produces as “elegant” rather than “big bruisers.” “We’re definitely at our feminine end of pinots, never the gorilla-wrestling end,” Hay says, and a “gorilla-wrestling end.”

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It’s nice to light the fire and recline on the day bed in my room to take in the view. MOUNTAIN MAGIC
Where will you settle in for a night on your next visit to New Zealand?

LUXURY LODGINGS

Lodge accommodation is unique and diverse around New Zealand. Whether you fancy a night at a historic residence, a vineyard stay or easy access to ski fields, lakes or private beaches, you are guaranteed warm Kiwi hospitality and memorable experiences. Extraordinary views are part of the course so your camera can expect a workout.

TRAVEL CENTRAL OTAGO

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OTAHUNA LODGE

New Zealand’s largest private historic residence, Otahuna Lodge in Christchurch is surrounded by 91 hectares of century-old botanic and vegetable gardens.

HELENA BAY LODGE

Forty kilometers by helicopter from Auckland, the Helena Bay Lodge features five suites, three kilometers of pristine coastline, four low-sulfite wine is on offer here, with names influenced by the gold-mining era of the 1860s to 1920s. Roaring Meg

LIME TREE LODGE

Set on a 10-acre estate outside Lake Wanaka, Lime Tree Lodge provides direct access to the region’s ski fields, as well as easy access to mountain hikes and lakeside activities.

HUKA LODGE

Set on the Waikato River in prime trout-fishing territory, the luxurious Huka Lodge in Taupo on the North Island was originally founded as a simple fishing lodge.

PLAN AHEAD

The Tried and True, and Something Newer

This exclusive four-night package includes four nights in a deluxe suite at Mahu Whenua, and an all-inclusive "glamping" experience for up to 12 people if you like, but Lange remains dedicated to the eco-sanctuary’s regeneration from its overgrazed past. Mahu Whenua means ‘healing of the land’. The next morning I rise with the dawn to sit outside and watch the sun come up. Distant peaks stand in silhouette against the orange glow slowly brightening the sky, and cloud hangs low over the lake. Coffee, blankets and cookies are brought out to me on the deck. It might just be the most beautiful view I’ve ever seen.

Next stop is Brennan Vineyards, where wild thyme and rosehip-covered mountains rise steeply from valleys patched with vineyards. We taste the 2017 trio, an unlikely blend of gewürztraminer, riesling and muscat that is said to pair well with cheese – the stinkier, the better.

Lunch is served at Mt Difficulty Winery Restaurant. Vegan-friendly, low-sulfite wine is on offer here, with names influenced by the gold-mining era of the 1860s to 1920s. Roaring Meg was a hotel dancer back in the day, none the wiser that both a stream and wines would be named after her.

Roaring Meg Pinot Noir is ripe with cherry, plum and wild thyme spice. I feel like a rock star when our Aspiring Helicopter picks us up the next morning from the front lawn of Mahu Whenua Ridgeline Homestead, the grand stone and timber lodge where we’re staying. We’re soon landing high among the peaks.

From here you can gaze out over the 55,000-hectare property now dedicated to conservation. Hardly McGregor, the farm manager, drives us back when we land, pointing out some of the millionhectare native trees that have been planted here in the past 10 years.

After a light lunch of soup and salad – the chef asked us at dinner the night before what we thought we might like – I ride out with Zara Macdonald, the equine manager, on Dusty from stables that are simply the night before what we thought we might like – I ride out with Zara Macdonald, the equine manager, on Dusty from stables that are simply

With a private ski field on the property, with a private ski field on the property.