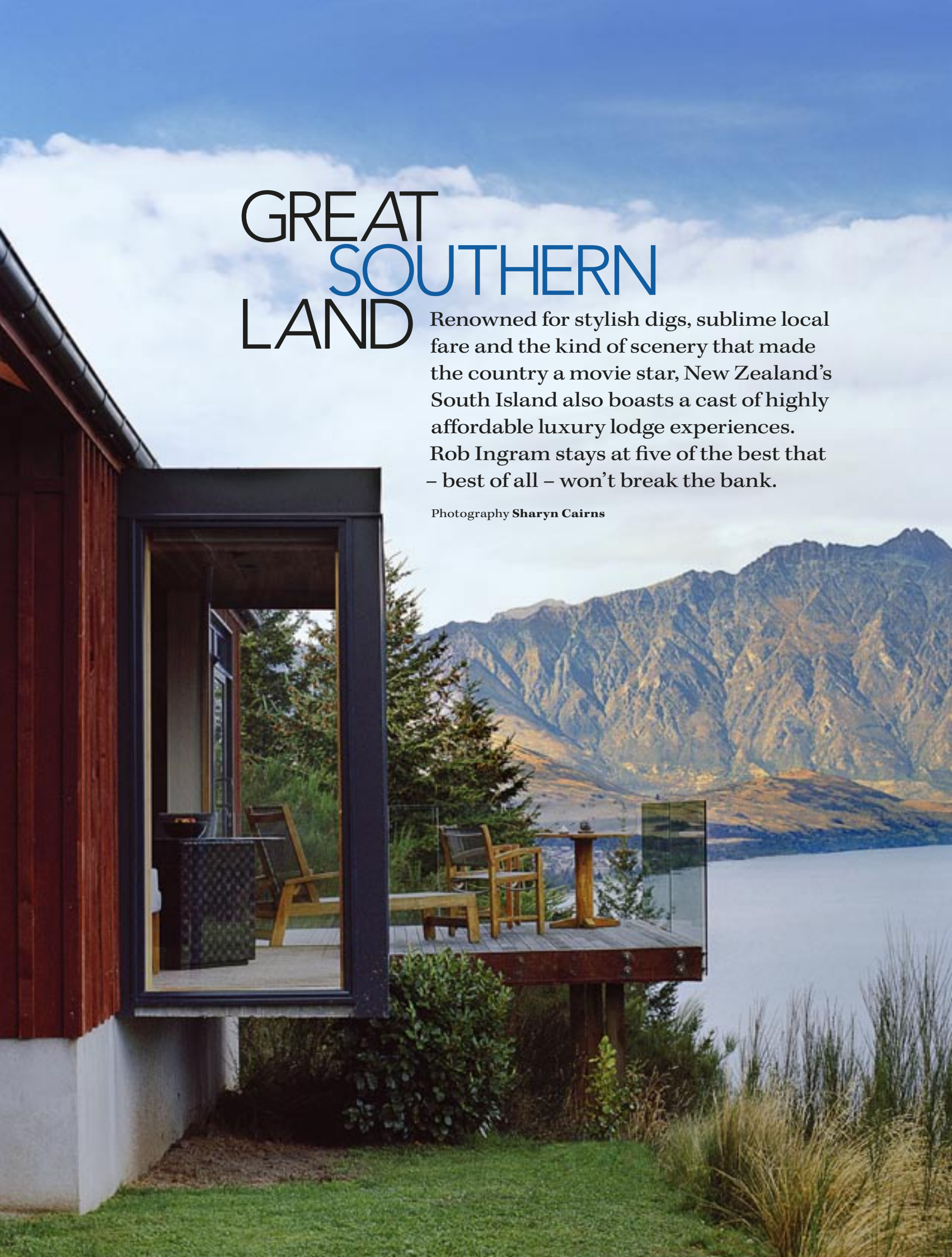


# GREAT SOUTHERN LAND

Renowned for stylish digs, sublime local fare and the kind of scenery that made the country a movie star, New Zealand's South Island also boasts a cast of highly affordable luxury lodge experiences. Rob Ingram stays at five of the best that – best of all – won't break the bank.

Photography Sharyn Cairns



Built to shine  
The formal dining room at Otahuna Lodge features rich rimu panelling and gilded wallpapers. Azur luxury retreat in Queenstown (opposite) was built to capture the spirit of its environment.

The mansion, built in 1895, virtually [blows a bugled fanfare](#) for British colonialism.



Earlier in the day it was gardener Steve Marcham carrying a box of the day's harvest from the vegetable garden. Now it's chef Jimmy McIntyre heading back along the wooded pathway between the herb garden and the homestead, scissors in one hand, a bouquet of fresh chives in the other. We see both McIntyre and the chives 30 minutes later when guests emerge from day excursions, fungi forages and veranda snoozes for pre-dinner drinks in the drawing room. A fragrant Te Whare Ra pinot gris arrives, immediately followed by McIntyre with a platter of vol-au-vents filled with prawns poached in Champagne and finely chopped chives. This is lodge living New Zealand-style and, frankly, it rates right up there with life's finer rituals.

Lodge hospitality is just another one of those things at which New Zealand excels. I guess it grew out of a long history of the rich, the royal and the respected flocking to New Zealand's pristine environment to fish for trophy trout, and leaving vestiges of their privilege on their favourite rubbing posts. However self-centred their pleasures may have been, they sowed the seeds for a handful of precious properties that today respect environment and culture and heritage. And, of course, the celestial union of the vol-au-vent and the pinot gris. Whatever – in New Zealand, there's no excuse for thinking that rustic elegance is a contradiction.

At the rarefied tip of the market – Kauri Cliffs and The Farm at Cape Kidnappers, to drop a couple of desirable names – the rates can be as breathtaking as the views. The South Island, however, offers some excellent and diverse lodge experiences at prices that constitute great value – at least until the New Zealand dollar regains its composure. In the premier division of Kiwi lodge luxury, a couple might pay \$5500 for a suite, whereas our South Island recommendations start at \$350.

The chef, the vol-au-vent and the pinot gris are merely a sub-plot of the cossetting charm of Otahuna Lodge – the largest private historic residence in New Zealand. In some ways, it is ironic that this lofty top shelf of exclusive accommodation should flourish in New Zealand. It has to be one of the most egalitarian societies in the world, and mostly because the working classes never gave a bugger (to use the local vernacular) how the other half lived.

A few (but not many, mind you) lived like parliamentarian and pastoralist Sir Heaton Rhodes, for whom Otahuna was built in 1895. It is tucked under the rocky foothills of Banks Peninsula, barely 30 minutes from Christchurch International Airport and from the city itself. The residence has the highest rating with the New Zealand Historic Places Trust and is regarded as the best example of Queen Anne architecture in New Zealand.

Otahuna has operated as a luxury lodge since 2003, and in August 2006, two former guests from New York – Hall Cannon and Miles Refo – decided that buying the property would offer them the perfect antidote for their manic Manhattan routines. There's something sublimely Wodehouse-esque about these two immaculately



presented and highly engaging young Americans rattling around in a mansion that virtually blows a bugled fanfare for British colonialism. If Gussie Fink-Nottle himself joined them around the grand piano after dinner no one would choke on their pistachio and orange-blossom petits fours.

But back to the wooded pathway and the constant arrival of fresh produce at the kitchen door. Despite the grandeur of the house, the luxury of its accommodation, and the sheer felicity of its hospitality, it's the link between kitchen and garden that provides Otahuna with its defining moments. Call it paddock-to-plate or potager-to-plate, this is the agrarian dream being lived at its highest level. Head gardener Steve Marcham is employing an organic and holistic approach to the recreation of an authentic Victorian country garden. There's a melon house and a mushroom crypt, mulberries and feijoas, companion plantings of flowers, vegetables and herbs, cardoons and Jerusalem artichokes, exotic chillies and 20 different varieties of tomatoes. There's a chicken coop for fresh eggs, and an orchard for apples, peaches, pears, quince and even walnuts and hazelnuts.

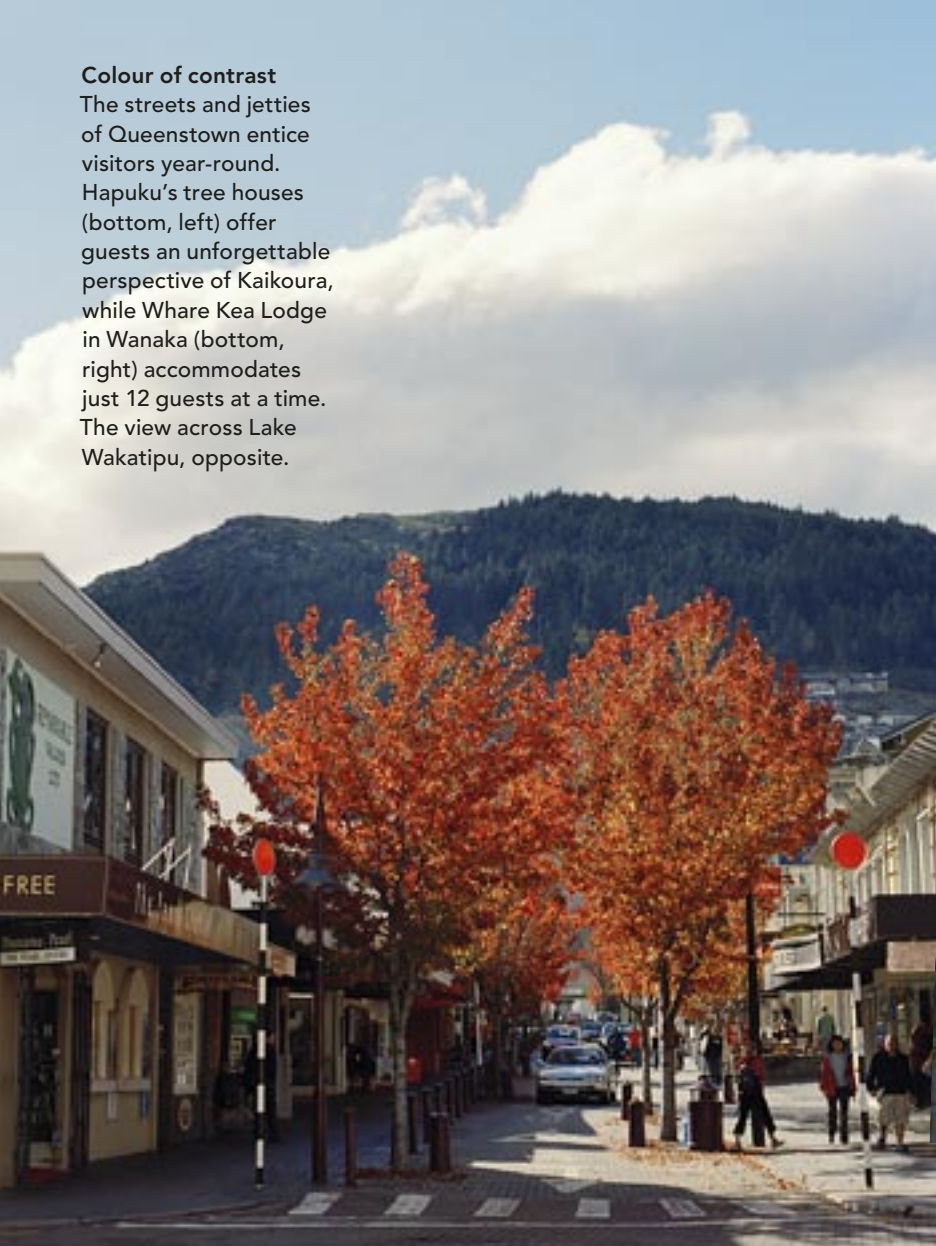
It's a broad palette from which executive chef Jimmy McIntyre and sous chef Jeremy Scheiblaue display their artistry in creating five-course dégustation menus with wine pairings each evening. The artichokes arrive as roast Jerusalem artichoke soup with truffle oil; the chillies and tomatoes as prawn- and tuna-filled Otahuna banana chilli on roast tomato sauce with guacamole; quince have become Tai Tapu duck with shallot tart and pot-roast quince; New Zealand cheeses arrive with a pear and saffron paste; and hazelnuts have been transformed into a semifreddo served with manuka honey roast figs.

Otahuna Lodge is a poor choice if you're looking for a home away from home. It's much nicer than that.>



**Oh, Otahuna**  
The Garret suite at Otahuna (top) redefines attic chic. Owners Hall Cannon and Miles Refo and chefs Jimmy McIntyre and Jeremy Scheiblaue (above, from left) in the gardens at Otahuna (right). Otahuna Lodge (opposite) offers the best example of Queen Anne architecture in New Zealand.

**Colour of contrast**  
The streets and jetties of Queenstown entice visitors year-round. Hapuku's tree houses (bottom, left) offer guests an unforgettable perspective of Kaikoura, while Whare Kea Lodge in Wanaka (bottom, right) accommodates just 12 guests at a time. The view across Lake Wakatipu, opposite.



Importance here is given to privacy and the sense of being embraced by the land's natural beauty.



If you subscribe to those lists of things to do before you die, however, it should rate very highly.

At Hapuku Lodge, 15 minutes north of Kaikoura on the east coast, the theme changes from heritage to ecology, with many guests choosing accommodation in the tree houses built in a corridor of native manuka and kowhai trees. Kaikoura was the second town in the world to earn Green Globe Benchmark status for its sustainability initiatives, and the whole stretch of Kaikoura coast radiates a warm blanket of spirituality in the locals' respect for the land and marine environment. Of the tree houses, owner Tony Wilson says, "We figured the best way to fully appreciate the beauty of Kaikoura would be to be a bird. So we gave our guests the option to live in the treetops; closer to the mountains, closer to the ocean, closer to the birds." On a 96-hectare strip of coastline on unspoiled Mangamaunu Bay, Wilson has established the lodge, a deer farm, a grove of a thousand olive trees, a fruit orchard and a vineyard. Beachfront cabins are on the drawing board.

The Wilson name is one of the most prominent in New Zealand architecture, and a bold personal aesthetic is stamped throughout the lodge, from the exterior shell to individual pieces of furniture. The passion for wood is evident everywhere. The exterior cladding

preside over a property that keeps the eyebrows permanently elevated. The beautiful heritage-listed homestead was built in 1866 from limestone quarried on the property. Linking the original building with a two-storey guest extension is a pavilion-style dining room, courtyard, breakfast conservatory and open kitchen. Décor is sumptuously English country house, a rustic textural quality permeating both the interior and exterior through the use of natural elements and lashings of rich rugs and floral prints. Guests are quickly bathed in a sense that Claremont is a sanctuary of the sort of country comfort that restricts movement to an occasional grope at the decanter or the canapé tray.

Then the topic of activities is raised, and Claremont reveals itself as a 1000-hectare sheep, cattle and deer station plus a private nature reserve studded with hundreds of massive limestone marbles containing dinosaur fossils. In the country that bills itself as the youngest on earth, here in a dramatic fold in the hills are remains of marine creatures which may be 72 million years old. The fossil site is the highlight of a fascinating Land Rover safari adventure across the spectacular estate. There is river fishing, horse trekking and, for those who prefer to exercise elbows and palates, a host of wine tasting options.

Stapley's exemplary cooking at Whare Kea is full of local delicacies and modern sensibilities.

is North American cedar and the lodge flooring and curved kitchen ceiling are Tasmanian oak. Elsewhere, a handful of selected craftsmen have produced Wilson-designed furniture in local timbers.

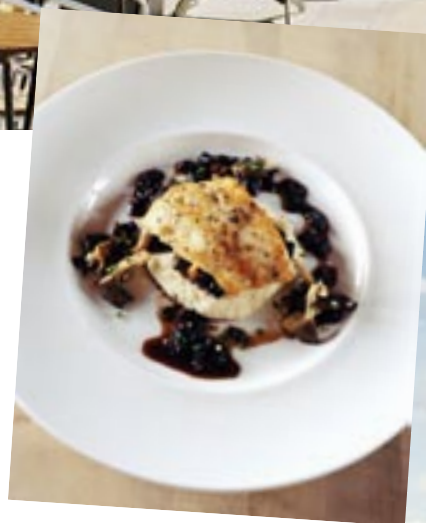
The centrepiece of the main lodge building is a contemporary dining room where chef Rich Huber struts his stuff. Huber is a product of Café 150 in Northern California, which made a name for itself using only products sourced within 150 miles. At Hapuku Lodge he probably makes do with a radius of 25 miles (40km), serving great Kaikoura lobsters which come into the kitchen live, plus local rib eye, venison, duck, lamb, salmon and mussels.

Addresses don't get much more Kiwi than 828 Ram Paddock Road, but while it may indicate the location of one of the South Island's great country estate lodges, nothing quite prepares you for Claremont. Here in North Canterbury's Waipara Gorge, Richard and Rosie Goord

Queenstown is New Zealand's number one visitor destination – a year-round alpine resort set in the magnificence of Lake Wakatipu and the peaks of the Remarkables mountain range. It didn't need to prove a thing, but then the Azur luxury retreat came along and proved a few anyway. Importance here is given to privacy and a sense of being embraced by the natural beauty of the environment, so nine 75-square-metre villas are set among native bushland high above the lake. They are constructed of cedar, silver beech and river rock and are graced with sleek interiors by Singapore-based design group LTW Design Works, whose credits include the Oriental Bangkok and the Mandarin Oriental Hong Kong.

Azur celebrates humans' ability to enhance the beauty of nature, and yet where it really scores is in the excellence of the guest experience – the positive attitude of a discreet and professional staff trained not only in "can do" but "would you like us to". The main lodge building is cleverly designed with mirrors and skylights to bring the alpine scenery inside and the kitchen staff is on hand all day producing breakfasts, snacks, teas, coffees and cakes through to pre-dinner drinks and canapés.

For dinner, guests are encouraged to experience Queenstown's food culture – international in standard and scope – which has grown up around a cosmopolitan resort and a world-famous wine producing region. The intimate V Know restaurant in Azur's Sunshine Bay neighbourhood, Bella Cucina, the legendary Botswana Butchery, Wai on the waterfront, The Bunker and Gantleys are all highly recommended. Azur staff can provide preview menus and make reservations.>

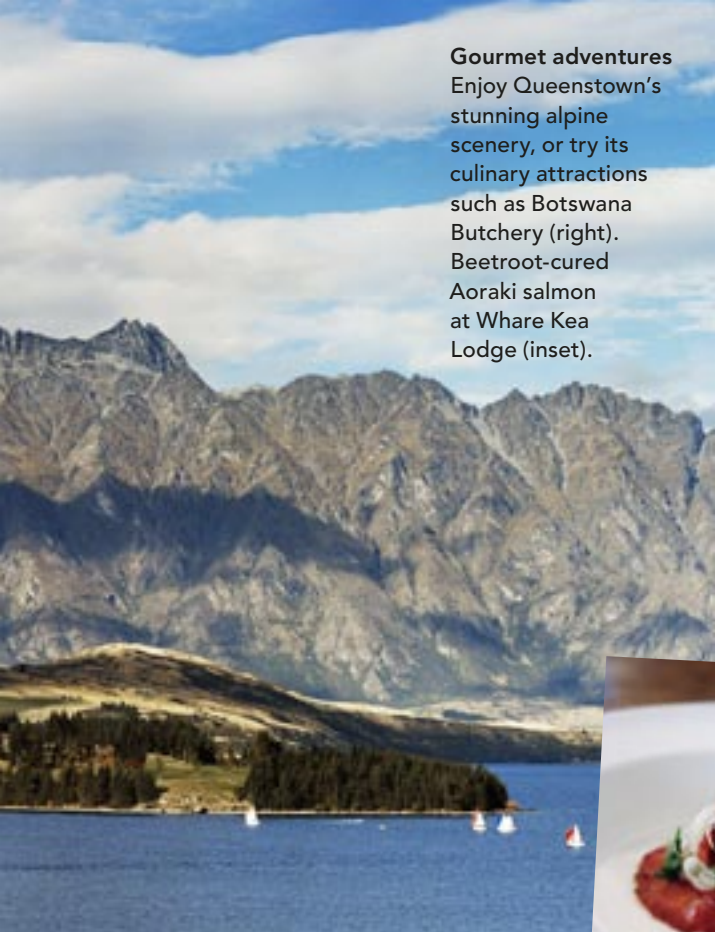


#### NZ on a plate

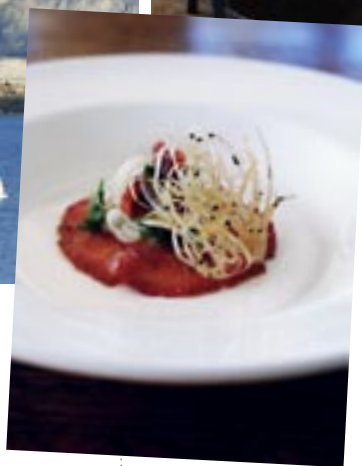
Dine out at one of Kaikoura's many cafés (top), or eat in at Hapuku Lodge, which offers local hapuku (above). At Whare Kea Lodge (right), you'll meet chef James Stapley (top right). Claremont Country Estate (centre right) dates from 1866. Inside one of Azur's villas (bottom right).

#### THE RISE OF MIDDLE EARTH

Australians are crossing the Tasman in record numbers, more than a million last year, recent figures show. "With the onset of the credit crunch, Aussies have discovered New Zealand in a big way," says Trevor Thomas, director of specialist travel company Southern Crossings (see The Fine Print, page 148). "It ticks all the boxes – it's easy access, meets the luxury standards, has great road networks with a wonderful variety of excursions and activities, including world-rated golf courses, and the sophistication of the food and wine today is incredible." The rise of affordable luxury and the "long short break" have also contributed. "The approach has been clever in that in addition to the 'super' lodges, which are absolutely five-star plus, purpose-built B & Bs and country houses have been established to enhance and complement the lodge experience but with no compromise to quality and standard. The options are a jigsaw that can be mixed and matched according to individual style and budget." EMMA VENTURA



**Gourmet adventures**  
Enjoy Queenstown's  
stunning alpine  
scenery, or try its  
culinary attractions  
such as Botswana  
Butchery (right).  
Beetroot-cured  
Aoraki salmon  
at Whare Kea  
Lodge (inset).



And just when you think you're becoming part of the textural fabric of lodge life, there's Whare Kea Lodge & Chalet. Ten minutes' drive from Wanaka, the lodge appears to levitate above the lake, providing epic water and mountain views, its geometric design reflecting the lake and valley light. And high above it, 1750 metres up in the shadows of Mount Aspiring, Whare Kea Chalet provides luxury living where you least expect to find it, among major glaciers and permanent snow.

While on a climbing holiday, Whare Kea owner Martyn Myer (of the retail dynasty) decided the euphoria of waking to a new day in a mountain hut should not only be experienced by mountaineers, and so the idea of Whare Kea Chalet was born. Guests fly in by helicopter for the overnight chalet experience or the "gourmet lunch with altitude" and enjoy a standard of accommodation consistent with that of the lodge itself.

Activities at the lodge don't get any better than the half-hour walk along the lakeside Millennium Track to Rippon, the world's most photographed vineyard, for a pinot noir and an exaltation. The track goes all the way to Wanaka, but no one's late back for pre-dinner drinks in front of the open fire and James Stapley's exemplary cooking. Beetroot-cured salmon with shaved fennel and blood orange; tea-smoked duck with persimmon, local feta and hazelnuts; maybe wild venison with roast Jerusalem artichokes and crisp pancetta; his food is a masterclass in pulling culinary elements together.

Take 10 days and not only stay at a heritage lodge, an eco-lodge, a country estate lodge, and lakeside and alpine resort lodges, but enjoy the satisfaction of knowing that, while each is distinctly individual, all respect environment, culture and heritage – the principles of sustainable tourism.\*

## THE FINE PRINT

### Getting there

**Air New Zealand** flies twice daily from Sydney to Christchurch and daily from Brisbane and Melbourne, with regular connections to 26 destinations within New Zealand. Economy class return airfares start at \$397 ex Melbourne, \$395 ex Brisbane, and \$403 ex Sydney (including all taxes and surcharges). 132 476, [airnewzealand.com.au](http://airnewzealand.com.au)

### Stay

**Azur** Less than 30 minutes from Queenstown Airport. Villas from \$1000. 23 Mackinnon Tce, Sunshine Bay, Otago, +64 3 409 0588, [azur.co.nz](http://azur.co.nz)  
**Claremont Estate** Rooms from \$405. 828 Ram Paddock Rd, RD2 Amberley, Canterbury, +64 3 314 7559, [claremont-estate.com](http://claremont-estate.com)

**Hapuku Lodge & Tree Houses** Rooms from \$355. Station Rd, RD1 Kaikoura, +64 3 319 6559, [hapukulodge.com](http://hapukulodge.com)  
**Otahuna Lodge** From \$1000 per couple. 224 Rhodes Rd, Tai Tapu, Christchurch, +64 3 329 6333, [otahuna.co.nz](http://otahuna.co.nz)  
**Whare Kea Lodge & Chalet** Less than an hour from Queenstown Airport. Rooms from \$880. 494 Mt Aspiring Rd, Wanaka, +64 3 443 1400, [wharekealodge.com](http://wharekealodge.com)

### And also...

**Corstorphine House** was built in 1863 and has the highest listing with the New Zealand Historic Places Trust. Eight individually themed guest rooms. Rooms from \$420. 23a Milburn St, Corstorphine, Dunedin, +64 3 487 1000, [corstorphine.co.nz](http://corstorphine.co.nz)  
**Eichardt's Private Hotel** is at the epicentre of Queenstown's bar and dining action and reflects contemporary provincial elegance throughout its five hotel suites and four lakefront cottage suites. Suites from \$932. Marine Pde, Queenstown, +64 3 441 0450, [eichardtshotel.co.nz](http://eichardtshotel.co.nz)  
**Grasmere Lodge**, set between Christchurch and the West Coast glaciers, is an award-winning high country retreat on a

working sheep station. From \$780 per couple. State Hwy 73, Cass, Canterbury, +64 3 318 8407, [grasmere.co.nz](http://grasmere.co.nz)

**Matakauri Lodge** offers an organic spa with an extensive menu of holistic therapies. Suites from \$1015. Glenorchy Rd, Closeburn, Queenstown, +64 3 441 1008, [matakauri.co.nz](http://matakauri.co.nz)

**Release Lake Wanaka** showcases New Zealand design and art and offers commanding views over Lake Wanaka and Mount Aspiring National Park. From \$800 for exclusive use of the retreat (up to six adults). 9 Mt Gold Place, Penrith Park, Wanaka, +64 21 762 695, [releasenz.com](http://releasenz.com)

**The Resurgence**, in Nelson's Abel Tasman National Park, is a luxury bushland retreat noted for its excellent food. Rooms from \$400. Riwaka Valley Road, RD3 Motueka, Nelson, +64 3 528 4664, [resurgence.co.nz](http://resurgence.co.nz)

**Select Braemar Lodge & Spa**, 10 minutes from the thermal resort of Hanmer Springs and 90 minutes north of Christchurch, has been transformed by a \$16 million rebuild. From \$200 room-only. 283 Medway Rd, Hanmer Springs, +64 3 315 7555, [selectbraemarlodge.com](http://selectbraemarlodge.com)  
**Wanaka Lakehouse** is an opulent, ecologically designed chalet featuring hand-carved beams, joinery and furniture. It, too, has spectacular lake and mountain views. From \$400 per couple. 27 Penrith Park Dr, Wanaka, +64 3 443 6568, [wanakalakehouse.co.nz](http://wanakalakehouse.co.nz)

### Tours

**Southern Crossings** tailor-makes travel experiences in New Zealand, Australia and the South Pacific, and has offices in Sydney and Auckland. (02) 9657 2088, +64 9 309 5912, [southern-crossings.com](http://southern-crossings.com)