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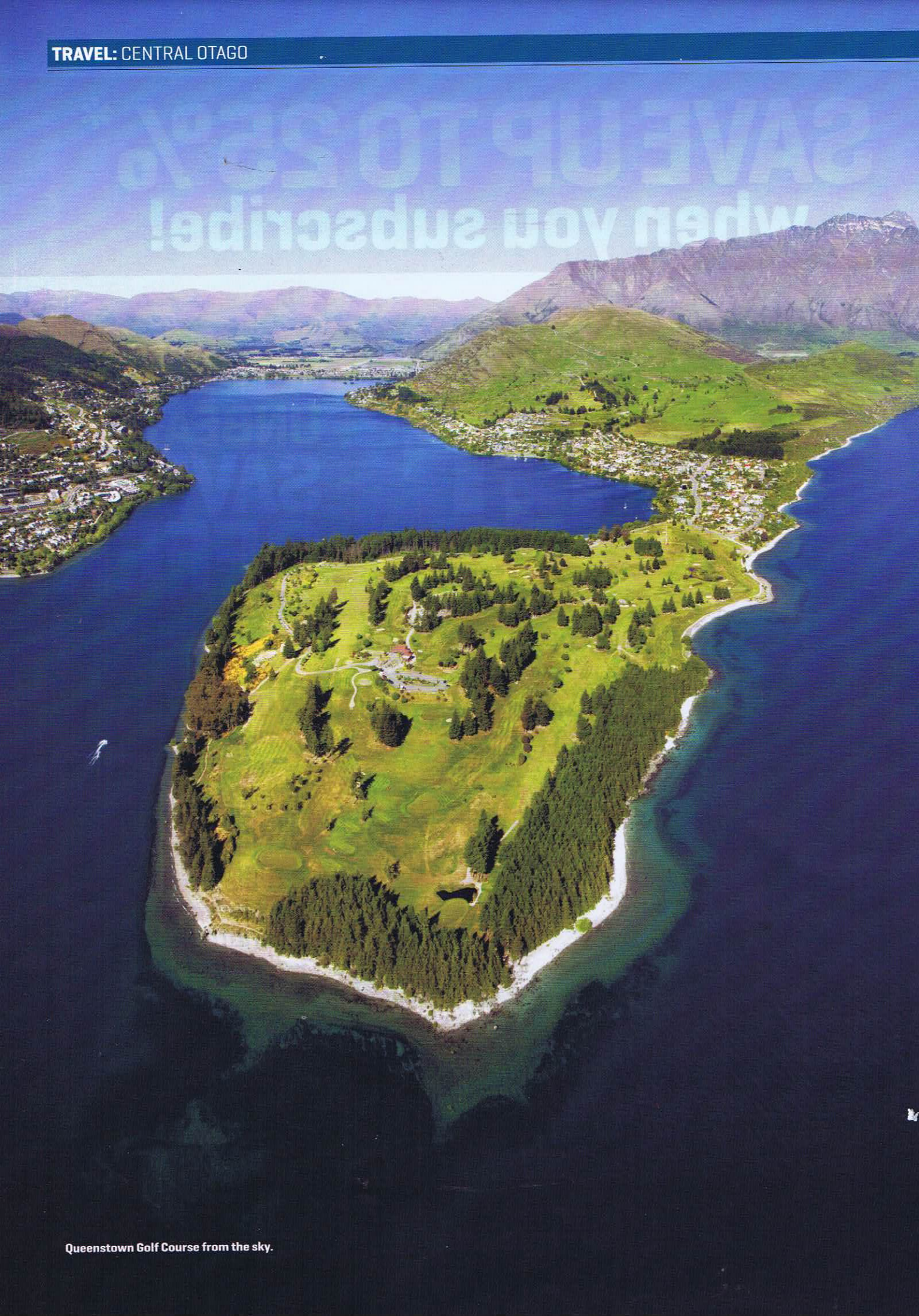
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Queenstown Golf Course from the sky.



Southern Exposure

While New Zealand's deep south is famous for matching picturesque scenery with thrill seeking pursuits, it is also home to some truly stunning golf courses.

By Winsor Dobbin

Queenstown is the undisputed adventure capital of the Southern Hemisphere. Whether you want to go bungee jumping, paragliding, white water rafting, skiing, skydiving, jet boating, kayaking or downhill mountain biking, the New Zealand outdoor playground offers thrills aplenty.

What is less well known, however, is that this pulsating fun capital is surrounded by world-class golf courses and is building a reputation for the quality and variety of its 150-odd restaurants and cafes. Central Otago is also home to some of New Zealand's best cool-climate vineyards, producing stellar pinot noirs.

While Queenstown itself is party central, within 20 minutes you can be in the middle of nowhere. The countryside is magnificent, making it ideal territory for hikers and cyclists—and younger visitors might hope to spot a Hobbit—as much of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy was filmed in the area.

For the less active, there are cruises through nearby Milford Sound, part of the Fiordland National Park World Heritage area, or on spectacular Lake Wakatipu. Taking in the views from the Skyline complex, which is reached by a gondola cableway, bush walking or trout fishing in pristine rivers are other leisure possibilities.

There are six courses within 30 minutes of downtown and most golfers will want to play what is billed as the most scenic course in New Zealand—the Queenstown Golf Club at Kelvin Heights, a par-71, 6,103-metre layout that is a natural amphitheatre below The Remarkables mountain range and surrounded on three sides by water. It is the closest course to town and offers bar and restaurant facilities.

Other choices include relative newcomer Jacks Point, a spectacular par-72, 6,388-metre layout with The Remarkables as a backdrop and overlooking Lake Wakatipu. The course features grasslands, rocky outcrops and native bush. Stone walls line the fairways and there are great views from the restaurant.

Millbrook has been voted the best resort course in Australasia. Originally designed by Sir Bob Charles and upgraded with nine new holes, the par-72, 6,446-metre course winds through rolling hills bisected by streams and wetlands.

The challenging The Hills, which has hosted three New Zealand Opens (par-72, 6,661-metres), Arrowtown Golf Club (par-70, 5,409-metres) and the nine-hole Frankton Driving Range and Golf Course. Nearby are good courses at Wanaka and Cromwell.

After a few rounds, there's time to wind down. The Central Otago wine region is home to around 75 producers. It is one of the most southerly wine-producing regions in the world and its vineyards are also among the highest in New Zealand at 200 to 400 metres above sea level.

The region is a sheltered inland area with warm, dry summers, short, cool autumns and crisp, cold winters, making it particularly suited to producing intensely flavoured pinot noir.

Names to look out for include Felton Road, Mount Difficulty, Misha's Vineyard, Mount Edward, Gibbston Valley, Rippon, Chard Farm Peregrine and Quartz Reef. The wineries are dotted throughout several sub-regions, each with their own special characteristics, including Bannockburn, Bendigo, Cromwell, Gibbston and Alexandra.

Amisfield is the closest winery to Queenstown itself and is situated next to one of New Zealand's most picturesque lakes—Lake Hayes. After sampling some wines, relax in the courtyard and enjoy the "Trust the Chef" menu, which comprises a selection of dishes prepared from the best and freshest local ingredients.

In town, Wine Tastes, New Zealand Wine Experience, offers tastings of the finest wines of the region for those who are pressed for time.

In winter, skiing at resorts Cardrona Alpine Resort, Coronet Peak, The Remarkables and Treble Cone takes centre stage, but the town is also known for its vibrant nightlife. There are two very different demographics; younger snow sports enthusiasts and an older, sophisticated crowd.

Queenstown and surrounding towns Arrowtown, Wanaka, Alexandra and Cromwell attract over one million visitors a year—and this is where AJ Hackett operated the world's first commercial bungee jumping operation.

A helicopter tour is a great way to view some of the region's most stunning natural attractions.

Set off in a chauffeur-driven limousine from Black Cars to the heliport, where pilot Louisa 'Choppy' Patterson and her Over The Top team offer a selection of options; maybe a flight over Coronet

THE FACTS

Getting there: Air New Zealand flies direct to Queenstown from major Australian capital cities and adds extra flights for the ski season. It also has a wide range of Queenstown packages.

www.airnewzealand.com.au

Staying there:

The Rees Hotel and Apartments features affordable luxury and top-notch service at 377 Frankton Road, Queenstown.

+64 3 450 1100.

www.therees.co.nz

Having fun:

Over the Top: Extraordinary Excursions offers helicopter trips from Queenstown to Milford Sound and the fiords of southern New Zealand, alpine glaciers and remote lakes for gourmet picnics, hiking, boating, extreme golfing, wine tours, fly fishing or skiing.

See www.flynz.co.nz



Peak, the Skippers Canyon gold mining sites and the Shotover River, or a flight over some of the finest pinot noir vineyards in the world, stopping in for tastings at wineries like Mount Edward and Felton Road.

You can 'drop in' and pick up a winemaker to be your guide for the Wine by Invitation tour (Duncan Forsyth from Mount Edward if you are lucky) and then learn about the history, soil, wines, climate and the grapes as you 'copter to a selection of local vineyards—and travel as far as your budget stretches.

Most visitors also take a cruise across Lake Wakatipu on the historic steamship the TSS *Earnslaw*, which was built in 1912 and is the only remaining passenger-carrying coal-fired steamship in the Southern Hemisphere.

Known as 'The Lady of the Lake', the *Earnslaw* makes several trips each day from Queenstown to Walter Peak High Country Farm, where visitors can enjoy

dramatic scenery, farm tours, horse treks and heritage tours.

Those looking for a more active afternoon can opt for a Shotover Jet ride on wild, raging Shotover River, an experience that is billed as 'the world's most exciting jet boat ride'.

Fishing is also popular and you can give your catch to your hotel's chefs to create a gastronomic feast.

Food is high on the agenda here.

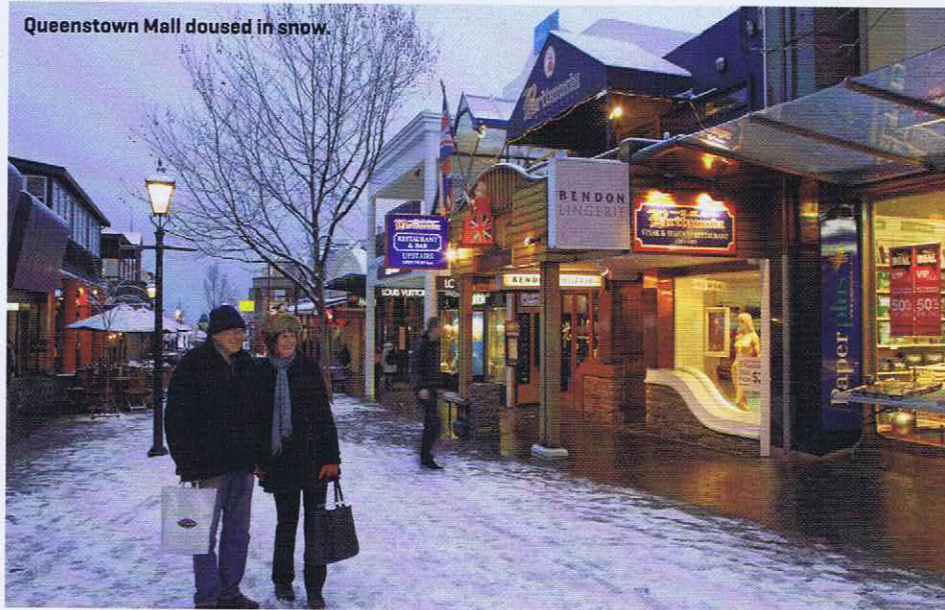
There are plenty of places at which to enjoy local produce with your wine. Several of the wineries, including Amisfield, Northburn Station (where you can lunch on lamb raised on the property), Carrick and Gibbston Valley, have vineyard restaurants while other popular choices include the Fishbone Bar and Grill for excellent seafood (and particularly good fish and chips), Kappa for Japanese food, Rata, the Jervis Steak House, and Bella Cucina.



A closer look at Queenstown Golf Course.



Queenstown Mall doused in snow.



Queenstown's Jacks Point Golf Course.



The gourmet burgers at Fergburger are legendary, although be prepared to wait for your feed.

A relative newcomer is upmarket Italian bistro Sasso, which means stone in Italian. Located in historic McNeill's Cottage, just a few steps from the shores of Lake Wakatipu, it features Italian-inspired cuisine that combines traditional and innovative elements.

The historic stone cottage has undergone a \$500,000 refurbishment that resulted in solid wood bar and marble counters sourced in Italy along with crystal light fittings while the state-of-the-art kitchen offers an open servery. There is a Mediterranean outdoor courtyard and open fire while the wine list focuses on local pinot noir—and a selection of Italian imports.

In Arrowtown, check out La Rumbra, a wine bar that serves tapas-style food and has quickly built an impressive reputation, as well as The Millhouse, the

Postmasters Residence and Saffron.

The hotel bar at Eichardt's, No.5 Church Lane in The Spire Hotel and a range of bars on Searle Lane offer drinking experiences that range from sophisticated to raucous. The Bunker and Searle Lane & Social are among the most popular and I enjoyed Bardeaux, Cru Wine Bar and Lounge and Barmuda. The coffees are excellent at Joe's Garage.

The Rees Hotel, one of Queenstown's favourite luxury hostelries, is a perfect choice for those who want peace and quiet with all the action on their doorstep.

With dramatic lake and mountain views, the five-star boutique hotel is a waterfront stroll away from Queenstown's central precinct—and also offers a regular shuttle service. The Rees has 60 hotel rooms and 90 apartments, all with private balconies.

The hotel's restaurant boasts gourmet cuisine, including an extensive wine cellar, a spa treatment room, gymnasium,

conference room, ski lockers, private jetty, mountain bikes and free wi-fi.

Award-winning True South Dining Room restaurant specialises in dishes based strongly on local produce and has a menu that changes monthly, while the Bordeau (meaning next to the water) Wine Lounge has local and imported French wines on offer, including a wide range of Bordeaux vintages. Water taxis operate from the hotel's own wharf to downtown.

Other leading accommodation choices include Matakauri Lodge, The Spire and Eichardt's Private Hotel along with a Sofitel and a Hilton.

One of the best times to visit Queenstown is for Winterfest (from June 20-29 in 2014). The quintessential winter experience is a 10-day celebration of Queenstown's unique culture and community with street parties, fireworks, international and local acts, jazz, comedy, Mardi Gras, family fun and sporting events. ■