



Golden days

New Zealand's adventure capital is the perfect setting for a little autumn R&R >>

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Autumn colours in Queenstown, the wine caves at Gibbston Valley Winery, Coalfire Restaurant, Woo Beer on tap at Madam Woos, workers' cottages in Arrowtown, roti at Madam Woo. CENTRE: Tobins Track leading out from Arrowtown. OPPOSITE PAGE: Arrowtown in autumn.

World-renowned pinot noir





A favourite with the snow set in winter and adrenaline junkies in summer, Queenstown moves at a more relaxed pace in autumn. Crisp mornings give way to sunny afternoons, perfect for vineyard-hopping or a stroll through autumn leaves. As the evening chill moves in, roaring fires and fine local dining beckons. Looking for all the world like a Swiss alpine village transplanted to the far side of the globe, Queenstown and its surrounds offers ample opportunity for a little indulgence and a lot of relaxation, all delivered with a wholesome dose of fresh mountain air.

Soothe the soul

Hit the ground feet first at Spring Spa in downtown Queenstown. The signature foot massage, an aromatic foot soak followed by a light exfoliation and leg massage, is the best way to shake off travel fatigue.

Fully revived, soak up your surroundings on Queenstown's pebbly beach and watch the iconic steamship *TSS Earnslaw* shuttle into harbour. Nestled in the embrace of the Southern Alps with views over Lake Wakatipu, Queenstown's idyllic setting is a balm to the soul. Wander through the leafy Queenstown



Botanical Gardens out to the headland for views back over town.

If more intensive relaxation is called for, make your way to the Spa at Nugget Point. Overlooking the milky twists of the Shotover River at Arthurs Point, the spa is modelled on Roman baths, complete with a domed ceiling soaring over a mosaic-tiled pool and ornate carved pillars. After a full-body massage in the private treatment room, with an optional aromatherapy soak, while away any lingering worries in a lazy circuit between the sauna, steam room and pool.

Complete your transformation at Nadi Wellness Centre, a welcoming studio overlooking Queenstown's Village Green where trainers versed in traditional techniques guide practitioners of all skill levels, focusing as much on the mental stretching as the physical.

Feed the body

Thanks to Queenstown's



Sandi Murphy, instructor and owner of Nadi Wellness Centre.
TOP: The Spa at Nugget Point.

year-round popularity, staying well fed isn't a problem. For a casual meal, burger fans are hard pressed to avoid the cult sensation that is Fergburger, with queues spilling out onto the street day and night. Taco Medic, an erstwhile pop-up that's now permanent, distributes fresh soft-shell tacos from a small counter off Searle Lane. Vudu Café is a local favourite for coffee, baked goods and breakfast.

But come nighttime, autumn dinners demand nothing less than a

cockle-warming feast in inviting surrounds. Inspired by Malaysian hawker cuisine, the Queenstown arm of Auckland favourite Madame Woo buzzes with young diners sipping cocktails over share-friendly dishes. Pair a piquant rendang curry with the Woo Brew by craft brewery Hallertau.

Pier 19 on the Steamer Wharf transitions from daytime café to intimate restaurant, dishing up a contemporary menu with a helping of local seafood. If the weather permits, »



head outside (there's blankets and heaters) to admire Queenstown's lights reflected on the water. The best spot in the house at Coalfire Barbecue Bar is in front of the fireplace, for flame-fuelled comfort food plated up "From the Pit" or "From the Coal Oven".

Wine away the hours

A scenic patchwork of vineyards threading between mountains, the Gibbston Valley is a mere thirty-minute's drive from Queenstown. A sub-region of Central Otago, the world's southernmost wine region, Gibbston is known for cold-climate wines, particularly world-renowned pinot noir.

Discover the vineyard that started it all at Gibbston Valley Winery. Until the 1980s, Otago was considered too cold, too high-altitude and too far south for wine cultivation. But perceiving similarities between Central Otago and Bordeaux in France, Irish journalist Alan Brady secured a patch of arid, sloping land and started planting in 1981, producing his first commercial vintage in 1987 and opening a cellar door in 1990. The area has since boomed, and Alan's gamble was vindicated in 2001 when Gibbston Valley's reserve pinot became the first non-French pinot noir to win a gold medal at the London International Wine Challenge. The cellar door now



Garden views at Kinross on the Gibbston Highway. INSET: Coalfire Barbecue Bar, Queenstown.

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The best spot in the house at Coalfire Barbecue Bar is in front of the fireplace, for flame-fuelled comfort food

encompasses a cheese shop, restaurant, bike-hire centre and New Zealand's biggest wine cave.

Further along the Gibbston Highway, the tasting room at Kinross offers a great snapshot of local winemaking with drops poured from five boutique vineyards – Coal Pit, Domaine Thompson, Hawkshead, Valli and Wild Irishman (the latter the latest venture from pioneering Alan). With an onsite general store, café and boutique accommodation thrown in, you can happily linger. Guarded by two diminutive vineyard dogs, Mt Rosa sits high against the backdrop of a snowy mountain at the outer

verges of Gibbston. A former sheep station, the owners discovered the soil that made bad grazing for their flock was excellent for grape growing. In the cellar door, formerly the woolshed, the friendly team walk visitors through their sauvignon

blanc, pinot gris, rosé and pinot noir. If it's chilly, try the warming mulled wine.

On the way back to Queenstown, stop by Amisfield's striking schist rock cellar door. One of the region's largest single vineyard estates, Amisfield specialises in pinot noir and aromatic whites such as riesling and sauvignon blanc (of the 30 hectares of sauvignon blanc in Central Otago, Amisfield has 10). After a tasting, indulge in the light-filled bistro or take up a game of petanque on the terrace.

Queenstown Wine Trail (queenstownwinetrail.co.nz) includes all of these vineyards on its daily tour and offers customised »



itineraries (add the helicopter and wine tour to your bucketlist).

Get a gold rush

Picturesque gold rush village Arrowtown, 20-minutes' drive from Queenstown, is a must-do daytrip in autumn, when the surrounding wooded hills blaze with russet reds and gold. Tourists drift between the gift stores and quaint cafés in heritage wood and stone worker's cottages, or sun themselves on the manicured village greens. For a reminder of the town's more humble origins, drop past the Arrowtown Chinese Settlement, where 19th-century miners lived in schist hovels crowded around mine shafts.

These days, Arrowtown is more concerned with leisure than labour. The laid-back atmosphere and community feel has attracted many Queenstown migrants, including Pete Gawron and Melanie Hill. The husband and wife team had left Sydney to open Jazz Bar in Queenstown, when they jumped on the opportunity to buy a disused car park on Arrowtown's main street and build their own restaurant.

With Pete in the kitchen and Mel front-of-house, Saffron has become an Otago icon. Adelaide-born Pete combines fine-dining training and Asian influences with stellar local produce. Tender Southland lamb may



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Treat yourself to a few hours of postcard views on nearby Lake Hayes

feature in a trio of curries, wild boar in a hearty pie, or Mt Cook Salmon with rice noodles at lunch.

Mel and Pete have also transformed the narrow alley running alongside into a mini hospitality precinct. Tucked in behind Saffron, Agave dishes up Mexican classics in a more informal setting, while across the way, atmospheric The Blue Door is the ideal setting for cocktails in front of the fire (with acoustic jam sessions on Wednesdays).

Follow a long lunch at Saffron with an afternoon strolling one of the many walking trails leading out from Arrowtown. Or treat yourself to a few hours of postcard views on nearby Lake Hayes. Yellow-tinted willows and poplars dangle their fronds in



TOP: The Lake Hayes Circuit. ABOVE: Tastings at Amisfield cellar door. INSET: Views of the mountains and Lake Wakatipu from Peppers Beacon.

the glassy water, disturbing the mirror image of the encircling Remarkables and Crown mountain ranges. Follow the two- to three-hour, 8km Lake Hayes Circuit along the lake's edge, through wetlands and past the multi-million dollar homes on the eastern shore. ✈

Krysia Bonkowski was a guest of Destination Queenstown



Stay

PEPPERS BEACON

The views of Lake Wakatipu and the Remarkables from the lakeside Peppers Beacon are so good you won't want to pull the blinds. Heated bathroom floors and a fresh loaf waiting in a bread maker on arrival make you feel right at home, and the spacious penthouse suites include large open fireplaces and expansive private balconies with sweeping outlooks. peppers.co.nz/beacon

Travel info

Jetstar has great low fares to Queenstown from across the network.

To book, visit JETSTAR.COM