

THE LAND OF THE LONG WHITE CLOUD

With New Zealand finally opening its borders to the world, travellers are making plans to reconnect with friends and family. Travel writer Jared Ruttenberg was one of the first back into the country and shares four of his favourite getaways. **BY JARED RUTTENBERG**



ADVENTURE PLAYGROUND IN QUEENSTOWN

Welcome to Queenstown, widely considered New Zealand's gateway to adventure – and rightfully so – with a startling array of thrilling activities to suit every adrenaline level. Choose from tandem skydiving to river surfing, canyon swinging, jet boats, or New Zealand's highest bungee jump.

The town is easily explored on foot. Just ensure to brave the queues for a Fergburger (an inventive and delicious burger, from a local restaurant, Fergburger) as it is certainly worth the wait. The Skyline is a gondola-style cable car that lifts you 450m high to the Stratosfare Restaurant & Bar and offers unsurpassed city views. Queenstown is only a few hours' drive from some of the country's most dramatic scenery; hire a car and drive to Milford Sound to explore the iconic fjord or north to the formidable Mount Cook, the country's highest peak.

For a unique home base, consider The Sherwood just outside the town. Their commitment to sustainability and supporting the local community is profoundly evident. A truly authentic alternative to bigger hotels, where you'll feel at home from the minute you arrive.

sherwoodqueenstown.nz

WINE RETREAT IN MARTINBOROUGH

There's no shortage of enticing wine regions spread across the country, but perhaps none as charming as Martinborough. This small town is a convenient one-hour drive from Wellington and is surrounded by boutique wineries. What's more, most of them are within walking or cycling distance from the town centre. It hardly gets more convenient.

Begin the tastings at Palliser's chic tasting room, making sure to sip the Brut MCC – or Méthode Traditionnelle as referred to locally – and then the naturally fermented Chardonnay. Next, set the GPS for Luna Estate Winery, where the Eclipse Restaurant is sure to tempt you for lunch after your tasting. Lastly, a few steps away is Moy Hall; its casual outdoor dining area is set within the vineyards. While the wooded Pinot Gris is an



appealing option, the show-stopper is the flagship Terrace Pinot Noir, spending an impressive 30 months in oak before bottling.

Once you've had your fill, retire to the Martinborough Hotel, New Zealand's oldest continuously operated hotel, which proudly overlooks the town square. Ask for a room on the top storey of the heritage building as they spill onto the wraparound balcony and boast Insta-worthy black and white chequered bathrooms. The downstairs Union Square Bistro serves up tasty breakfasts to be paired with a Mimosa, of course, and I suggest completing the day with a meal at the neighbouring Crouching Tiger for the finest Asian infused-cuisine.

martinboroughhotel.co.nz





ROMANTIC HIDEAWAY IN KAPITI

The Kapiti Coast has long been a destination for Wellingtonians seeking a country escape. The coastline is dotted with small towns and no shortage of holiday homes (known locally as a bach) for rental. You'll easily spot the towering Kapiti Island from the beach, which, if you're up for a thrill, can be admired on a scenic chopper flight.

Begin exploring with a visit to Waikanae's Salt and Wood BQ. Not only can you get acquainted with their infamous 'dirty fries' – pulled pork, cheese, pork rub and gravy – but

also a selection of craft beers produced on site.

When it's time for that romantic escape from it all, head for the nearby hills and cosy in at the beautiful Cottage 103 - where you'll discover an extraordinary blend of country character and classy charm. Cottage 103 is a luxurious escape just over an hour's drive north of Wellington, set in countless acres of farmlands. So much so that the closest neighbours who may come to the fence to visit are donkeys and horses. And with a wooden spa bath that stares out over the valley, what more do you need?

sudbury.co.nz



URBAN ESCAPE IN AUCKLAND

Although not the capital, Auckland is New Zealand's biggest and busiest city. Its sprawling suburbs, flanked by over 50 volcanoes and waterways, are best admired from above. At a staggering 328m, Skytower is the highest structure in the southern hemisphere, and for those not afraid of heights, the 51-storey journey to the top is bound to provide a thrill. Daredevils can also bungy off the tower or try the external SkyWalk.

To stay terra firma, head to the Silo Park, reminiscent of Cape Town's Silo District; the



structures once used for storing concrete now serve up entertainment. Silo 6 is used as an art and exhibition space, and the Silo Park's cinema is projected against the walls of Silo 7.

For the avid day-trippers, there are many islands and beaches to explore; oenophiles will salivate on an excursion to the nearby Waiheke Island, home to over 30 wineries.

When it's time to rest your head, look no further than the Sofitel Auckland Viaduct Harbour. Celebrating the pillars of fashion,



design and intuitive hospitality, the hotel is possibly Auckland's most elegant accommodation offering in one of its prime positions. The pièce de résistance is the Luxury Marina View Rooms, where guests can languish over vistas of both harbour and skyline. Consider adding the signature Club Millésime Access, which includes private check-in, executive breakfast, Le Gôûter afternoon tea, Apéro chic with hor d'oeuvres, wines and cocktails and more.

sofitel-auckland.com



FUN FACTS

1 VOLCANO LAND
New Zealand is situated on what's known as the Pacific Ring of Fire. A few of these volcanoes are still active, including Mt Ruapehu, known as Mt Doom from *The Lord of the Rings*. Auckland itself sits on a large volcanic field of approximately 53 volcanoes.

2 WANNA PLAY GOLF?
New Zealand has over 400 golf courses, second highest per capital globally.

3 THE CLEAREST OF THEM ALL
Found in the Tasman region of New Zealand's South Island, Nelson's Blue Lake is the clearest in the world, with up to 80 metres of visibility.

4 HUMANS VS ANIMALS
Of all population in the country, only 5% is human. The rest are animals.

5 KIWI FRUIT OR BIRD?
Kiwi fruit is from China. The Kiwi bird is a bird native to New Zealand that cannot fly.

