

WORDS SUE WHITE
PHOTOGRAPHY PHOTOLIBRARY

Mountain moments

On and off the slopes, there's never a dull moment in Queenstown

1 Hit the slopes

Just a snowball's throw from Queenstown lie arguably the best skiing and snowboarding in the southern hemisphere. Find your ski legs at **The Remarkables** (40-minute drive), where snow time comes complete with spectacular views of the rugged Remarkables ranges. Even closer to town, snow is virtually guaranteed at **Coronet Peak**, where upgraded snowmaking facilities will see more than 203 snow guns cranking out the good stuff June to October. Savvy snow bunnies will invest in an NZ Superpass, allowing skiing at both resorts plus a plethora of off-slope activities: use it towards bungee jumping, jetboating or touring wineries. Think twice about rental cars: shuttles from town are cheap (**Coronet Peak**) or free (**The Remarkables**) with your ski pass. www.nzsuperpass.com; www.nzski.com.

2 Cruise for the views

If you simply need a day to relax, a historic ride across **Lake Wakatipu** can be just the trick. Steamship aficionados will love the TSS Earnslaw, complete with bird's-eye view of engineers and stokers working the engine room as you travel. The 90-minute return ride is scenic and serene, but if you fancy a longer excursion, jump off at Walter Peak's working farm, where the homemade scones come with an enviable view and kids will be entertained by sheep dogs in action. (Expect kids galore if you travel in NZ school holidays, when all children travel free.)

Multiple daily departures from Steamer Wharf; NZ\$45 boat only, NZ\$65 farm excursion. www.realjourneys.co.nz.

3 Some like it hot

Sinking into a private hot tub at **Onsen Hot Pools**, it's hard not to fall in love with Queenstown. Perched high on a cliff overlooking the Shotover River, the six cedar-lined bathing rooms are the ideal spot to unwind. A booking (about NZ\$30 per person) provides you and up to three companions an hour in a private pool, complete with mountain scenery and a bird's-eye view of the river below. Passing jetboats don't detract from the serenity: with a retractable roof and front wall on your private spa, you'll be too entranced by your pool-with-a-view to care. Bookings essential.

Daily 11am–10pm; free shuttle from Queenstown (10 mins drive); 160 Arthurs Point Road; 03 442 5707; www.onsen.co.nz.



Main photograph: The stunning Lake Wakatipu near Queenstown. Above: Onsen Hot Pools.



4 Snow-shoe

Finally, a winter sport for the unco-ordinated. If you can walk, you can snowshoe. It's a superb alternative to skiing and great for families, who are in safe hands with Peter Hitchman from Guided Nature Walks **Snowshoeing**: he's an outdoor enthusiast with energy oozing from every pore. Popular walks start with a trip up the Skyline Gondola, before walkers "float along the snow" thanks to their strap-on shoes. While the views over the Shotover River are a hit, you'll

also leave knowing more about snow than you thought possible, as Hitchman is a big fan of nature education.

Trips on demand 9am-4pm; NZ\$170 per adult, NZ\$100 per kid under 14; www.nzwalks.com



5 Skier's body massage

For bodies crying out after a hard day's skiing, the masseuses at **Hush Spa** have just the solution. Their tension relief massage for skiers and boarders comes complete with generous amounts of hot oil, heated wheat packs and "antiflamme" cream. Not only will the professional therapists knead your aches and pains away, they'll even throw in a tub of the cream to take with you. *60 minutes, NZ\$140, The Junction, Corner Gorge & Robin Roads; 03 409 0901; www.hushspa.co.nz.*

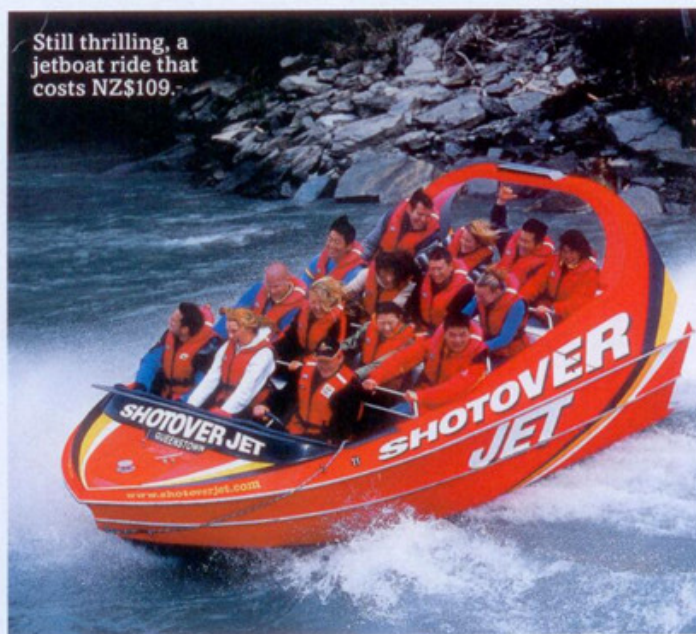
6 Heli rafting

Still on the water, **Queenstown Rafting** takes you heli rafting during winter. A short chopper ride allows you to bypass a precarious mountain drive before being deposited in a remote spot to begin rafting. As you navigate the Shotover's rapids and marvel at the snow line (it drops right down to the water line), it's likely you'll also be praying your boat doesn't come a cropper: these waters are freezing at the best of times. *NZ\$249 (half-day); 03 442 9792; www.rafting.co.nz.*



7 Eat well

With more than 100 restaurants in a small village atmosphere, you'll never go hungry in Queenstown. Make like a local and start your day with coffee at **Joe's Garage** (Searle Lane) and hit **Vudu Cafe** (Beach Street) if you're hanging around at lunchtime. For regional cuisine, go all out for dinner at **Saffron** in nearby Arrowtown; this multi-award-winning restaurant is often described as one of the South Island's best (18 Buckingham Street, Arrowtown; www.saffronrestaurant.co.nz).



Still thrilling, a jetboat ride that costs NZ\$109.

8 Jetboating

Winter temperatures don't stop adventure operators from providing the infamous Queenstown thrills. Jetboating the stunning **Shotover River** is awesome any time of year. Serious adventure lovers will choose the trips starting out in the canyon (NZ\$109; www.shotoverjet.com), while the more tentative may prefer the Kawarau River option, departing village wharf (NZ\$95; www.kjet.co.nz).

9 Find a good bed

Ironically, given it offers so many activities that visitors hardly have time to sleep, Queenstown is bursting with accommodation. There are numerous youth hostels for those tight on cash, while **Alta Apartments** is just one of dozens of self-catering options, boasting lake and mountain views. If your budget allows, the **Remarkables Lodge**, a few kilometres from the skifields entrance, is entirely memorable. This cosy, upmarket lodge wins the hearts of its guests at every turn: breakfasts feature jams from homegrown fruit; dinners resemble a cosy meal with friends with good wine and a private chef; and the backyard, fronting onto the mountains, has its own helipad. *Alta Apartments, 2-bedroom NZ\$250-\$400 a night, depending on the season (other sizes, including studios, available). Remarkables Lodge, from NZ\$650 per room per night, including breakfast and dinner; www.remarkables.co.nz.*

10 Drink and be merry

This seemingly innocent village offers plenty of action to destroy your skiing form after hours. Dozens of bars pack the town's compact centre, with a vibe to suit all tastes. **Barmuda** (Searle Lane) has an enticing outdoor fire and is perfect for apres ski; **Whisky Room** (above Red Rock Bar and Cafe, Camp Street) is great for socialising as it's so tiny it's impossible to ignore the other patrons; and wine bar **Bardeaux** (off The Mall) has a list of Pinots that will keep you there till 5am. Out of town, **Blue Door bar** (down a cobbled alley, next to Saffron) is a local favourite and a definite pick if you're in Arrowtown. If you're planning a night in, purchase a tasting card at **Wine Tastes** (Beach Street), so you can sample the local wines before you buy.