

INTRO

Dramatic landforms, mystical lakes, majestic mountains and deep valleys...glistening snow caps on the mountains in winter, dark bush and a lake that breathes... plus the purest of air.

The beauty of this place makes your heart hurt. There's a timelessness and sense of theatre about the physical environment of *Queenstown* and *Central Otago*. Everything is writ large – exaggerated beyond belief, as if you have stepped into a Doctor Who movie.

Queenstown was so-named for its setting “fit for a Queen” - nestling on the edge of *Lake Wakatipu*, beneath the dark craggy peaks of *The Remarkables* mountains.

It's little wonder that parts of the region are known as the Gateway to Paradise ... and regularly chosen as the location of international commercials and films. Much of the *Lord of the Rings* was filmed here; other epics such as *10,000 BC* and the Scottish-based World War 2 children's film *The Water Horse* - with *Lake Wakatipu* in the role of *Loch Ness* and the major action taking place across the lake from *Queenstown* on one of the largest working high country stations in New Zealand – where you can stay (in *Mt Nicholas Lodge*) to hunt, fish, hike or play in large tracts of untouched world.

Lake Wakatipu “breathes” every five minutes – with the water level rising and falling up to 12 centimetres. Local Maori lore puts the waves down to the giant (*taniwha*) by the name of *Manau* sleeping under the lake. He was felled by *Matakauri* to rescue a beautiful woman (*wahine*) by the name of *Manata*. The name of the lake is a transliteration of the Maori *waka – tipua - wai*, meaning “the hollow of the sleeping giant.” The rhythmic rise and fall is the *taniwha*'s heart beating.

The temperature of the lake remains around 6- 10 degrees all year round, so you are unlikely to be tempted to visit the giant. *Queenstown* is 310 metres above sea level and weather conditions can change quickly

Nowadays *Queenstown* has the extra attractions of a sophisticated international resort, with luxury lodges dotting the awesome scenery and top class facilities to match.

Visitors come here for the extraordinary physical adventures – to ski, boat, walk, fish, ride, climb, golf and dive. They also come to relax; they come to explore; they come to film; and to taste the extraordinary produce of the region, particularly the remarkable wines fast making *Queenstown/Central Otago* one of the leading wine regions of the world.



QUEENSTOWN and CENTRAL OTAGO

The continental climate and rich volcanic soils of the region have fostered the development of an industry producing award-winning wines – particularly in the *Pinot Noir* and *Riesling* varieties. *Central Otago* winemakers are creating a distinct style – a signature identity now recognized to be amongst the top in the world.

As a result, *Central Otago* attracts wine buffs from around the globe. Liquid gold now grows in vineyards set amongst the rugged landscape shaped by the tailings of the 1860's goldmining boom.

This wine region is the most southerly in the world - the only wine region in New Zealand with a continental climate, rather than a maritime. This generates extreme conditions of cold winters, low rainfall and high sunshine hours.

The *Pinot Noir Celebration* held in Queenstown towards the end of January every year draws top international wine judges and commentators - gurus such as Jancis Robinson from the UK, Jeremy Oliver from Australia, Steve Tanzer of the U.S. *International Wine Cellar* magazine and leading Burgundy commentator, Allen Meadows alias *Burghound* from the U.S.- who have all pronounced *Central Otago* to be one of the most exciting regions in the world outside Burgundy, for Pinot Noir.

The *Wine Spectator's* Matt Kramer described the Pinot Noir of Central Otago as tasting like no other, "blackish garnet in colour and plumped with an opulence of black cherry and chocolate flavours along with whiffs of black currant, licorice, raspberry and cherry.... a Pinot Noir life form to celebrate and watch closely."

Like *Burgundy*, *Pinot Noir* is the predominant grape variety in the region, but it also offers superb *Riesling*, *Chardonnay*, *Pinot Gris* and *Gewurztraminer*. There's an attractive *Methode Champenoise* style made – *Quartz Ridge*, leading the sparkling wine varieties.

If you fancy lush, aromatic wines, look to this region. It's a style that thrives in this tough environment (as do tourists!)

The trail for serious wine buffs is ideally divided four ways into four sub-regions and at least as many days. That's not to say it can't be savoured at individual ports of call, but the climate and soil conditions vary considerably between the vineyards of *Queenstown/ Gibbston Valley*; *Clyde/Alexandra*; *Wanaka*, and *Cromwell/Bannockburn/Lowburn Valley*.

A series of valleys isolated by the many mountains of the terrain, the sub-regions offer distinct character contrasts and titillation to the discerning wine palate. Using the international alpine resort of *Queenstown* as a base, they can be quickly accessed by helicopter and at a more leisurely pace by car.



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The climatic differences, more than the soil, are the major influences on the wine. *Bannockburn* vineyards ripen early and show darker cherry flavour in the wine. They are several weeks ahead of *Gibbston Valley*, which shows more red fruit, floral flavour and finesse. *Alexandra* grapes ripen much later because of the cold nights, introducing a meaty texture to the wine. Vineyards in the *Cromwell Valley* are less prone to frost and *Wanaka* is less hot.

There is also a growing commitment to biodynamic winemaking in the vineyards and wineries, which aptly reflects the New Zealand identity as the Clean, Green land.

The *FC* focus in *Central Otago* is on these wine- growing regions and the areas surrounding the towns of *Queenstown; Wanaka* – an hour and a quarter's drive away; and the former goldmining town of *Arrowtown* – now a preserved contemporary gem, in between.

The perfect introduction to the wine-growing map and a chance to view the sub-regions in perspective is to arrange an hour-long perusal by helicopter. If you wish, arrangements can be made for you to be dropped off at your winery of choice. Or visit the various vineyards at your leisure, by car.

There's so much to do in and around the area that it's difficult to limit your *FC* itinerary to one week – you can take as long as you have trawling the awesome scenery, consuming the produce and breathing in the pure air. And it really is pure – you notice the difference in quality the second you arrive!

The thriving wine industry has spawned a growth of associated elite industries. *Queenstown, Wanaka* and their surrounds have become Mecca to the international jet set. The growing list of luxury lodges rivals any in the world.

The list of top-level restaurants, luxury services and products – spas, cuisine adventures and wine tasting from the expanding number of international accolade- winning vineyards, is developing as we speak.

Central Otago/Queenstown practices the 100 miles food policy to a high degree. Food grown in this region of plenty is of the highest quality, reflecting the riches of climate and soil.

Luxury experiences for gourmets include a choice of flying by helicopter for a champagne picnic on a mountain top - *Picnic on a Peak*, or driven by chauffeur to a secluded lakeside spot for a five course meal served formally by butler, with *Cuisine Adventures*.



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You can order a lunch from *Mediterranean Market* or your luxury lodge and fly by helicopter to magnificent *Milford Sound* – one of the scenic marvels of the New World.

You can immerse yourself in a hot tub – at the Japanese-style *Onsen Hot Pools* and lie back behind open windows to view the panorama of the *Shotover* river to relax after the hours of wine tasting- and contemplate dinner.....

DAY 1

THE GIBBSTON VALLEY

INTRO

This beautiful valley close to *Queenstown* was the first to be planted with vines and in a mere twenty one years has become a true valley of vines with wall-to-wall vineyards, some top wines, an architecturally state-of-the art winery - *Peregrine* and a couple of good places for lunch.

The Gibbston Valley is the coolest of the sub-regions and the vineyards are prone to frost. Many of the wine companies also have vineyards in other areas, particularly around *Lowburn/ Cromwell*.

BREAKFAST/COFFEE

Joe's Garage

Before you leave *Queenstown*, call in at *Joe's* for a look at the locals - if you're early enough, although they do pop in for meetings or a chat during the day. This café is not the most salubrious in town. It's virtually unadorned, apart from the busy atmosphere and chatty locals. The style is grunge - clean street grunge at its best, with the best coffee and honest breakfast in town... ***American Roadie meets Queenstown Hip!***

Joe's is the heart of the town – the local club – a young hip crowd, peppered by devotees of all ages. You are likely to run into a winemaker or two. In fact you can't leave *Queenstown* without visiting *Joe's* – and maybe every day – as *FC* does!

This is where you find out what's happening in town, in non-tourist terms and where the best places are to eat. It's a happy, fun, unpolished place. The laidback guys behind the counter with their back to front caps and coiled energy (they are probably waiting to get up the mountain to ski) once wrote me a list of restaurants on just a casual enquiry.

There's another, equally cool *Joe's Garage* at *Arrowtown* (and further North - of the South Island, in *Christchurch*).



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Joe's Garage is a little bit hard to find, behind *Hell's Pizza*, in the back alley of the maze of malls and lanes of the town. Enter (by screwdriver doorhandle!) from *Camp Street* or through *The Mall*.

Grab your copy of *The Mountain Scene* and *The Southland Times*, order your coffee and *Sweetie – Bacon & Egg in a toasted bun* @\$9.00, from the counter and either stay up there to be sociable or settle at one of the wooden tables of the narrow room.

Other breakfast choices include: *Toasted Muesli with Fruit, Yoghurt and Honey* @\$10.00; *Joker – Bacon, Egg & Bratwurst in a toasted bun* @\$14.00 **OR** *FC's* favourite *M1 – Mushrooms, Egg & Rocket in a toasted bun* @\$8.00 **OR** *Joe's Stack of Pikelets with Vanilla Sugar, Lemon & Honey*.

Joe's also offer excellent salads: *Roast Pumpkin & Hummus with Rocket, Feta, Pinenuts & Aioli* \$11 – + with *Chicken, Bacon or Smoked Salmon*, \$14

Open daily 7am – 4pm

Searle Lane ENTER from Camp Street, or through The Mall.

T. 442 1116

www.joes.co.nz

Heading north from *Queenstown*, turn left at *Lake Hayes* to begin the wine trail by sampling the *Pinot Noir* and *Rose* of multi-award winning *Amisfield*.

It's an impressive chateau-like winery of local stone, with tables and benches centred round a moat-like pool in a peaceful, lavender-bordered courtyard. The interior of high ceilings, huge cross beams and candelabra, long wooden tables and inviting leather chairs, spells informal grandeur and comfort.

Amisfield's handy location, attractive architecture and relaxing restaurant make it a particularly popular port of call for locals and tourists alike.

OR note this attractive winery, which *FC* recommends you return to for an early dinner and head on towards *Chard Farm* – the first commercial vineyard to be established in the valley – and the first on the route - opposite the Bungy Jumping Mecca at the historic *Kawarau Bridge*.

Chard Farm

Watch for the dramatic appearance of the *Chard Farm* vineyards, high on the hill on the old coach road between *Queenstown* and *Cromwell*.

Revisit history by travelling down the spectacular drive round the ridge to the winery, on this original coach road.



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Chard Farm was established in 1987 by “*Pinot Pioneer*” brothers Rob & Greg Hay. The only other vineyards in the district at the time had been planted on a trial basis in *Alexandra, Wanaka* and *Queenstown*.