



Queenstown & Wanaka

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Why Go?

With a cinematic background of mountains and lakes, and a 'what can we think of next?' array of adventure activities, it's little wonder Queenstown tops the itineraries of many travellers.

Slow down slightly in Wanaka – Queenstown's less flashy cousin – which also has good restaurants, bars and outdoor adventures on tap. With Mt Aspiring National Park nearby, you're only a short drive from true NZ wilderness.

Slow down even more in Glenorchy, an improbably scenic reminder of what Queenstown and Wanaka were like before the adventure groupies moved in. Negotiate the Greenstone and Routeburn Tracks for extended outdoor thrills, or kayak the upper reaches of Lake Wakatipu.

Across in historic Arrowtown, consider the town's gold-mining past over a chilled wine or dinner in a cosy bistro. The following day there'll be plenty more opportunities to dive back into Queenstown's action-packed whirlwind.

When to Go

➤ The fine and settled summer weather from January to March is the perfect backdrop to Queenstown's active menu of adventure sports and outdoor exploration. March also brings the Gibbston Wine & Food Festival to Queenstown Gardens.

➤ Mid- to late March sees an inundation of mountain bikers for the Queenstown Bike Festival.

➤ In late June the Queenstown Winter Festival celebrates the coming of the ski season. From June to August, the slopes surrounding Queenstown and Wanaka are flush with an international crew of ski and snowboard fans.

➤ The Wanaka Fest heralds the spring thaw in October.

1 Getting There & Away

Domestic flights head to Queenstown from Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch, with smaller planes servicing Dunedin, Nelson and Hamilton. International flights head to Queenstown from Australian destinations including Brisbane, the Gold Coast, Sydney and Melbourne. Queenstown is the main bus hub for the region, with services radiating out to the West Coast (via Wanaka and Haast Pass), Christchurch, Dunedin (via Central Otago), Invercargill and Te Anau. Wanaka also has services to Christchurch and Dunedin.

QUEENSTOWN

POP 12,500

Surrounded by the soaring indigo heights of the Remarkables and framed by the meandering coves of Lake Wakatipu, Queenstown is a right show-off. Looking like a small town, but displaying the energy of a small city, it wears its 'Global Adventure Capital' badge proudly, and most visitors take the time to do crazy things that they've never done before. No-one's ever visited and said, 'I'm bored'.

Then there's the other Queenstown. The one with the cosmopolitan restaurant and arts scene, excellent vineyards and five international-standard golf courses. Go ahead and jump off a bridge or out of a plane, but take time to slow down and experience Queenstown without the adrenaline. At the very least, find a lakeside bench at dusk and immerse yourself in one of NZ's most beautiful views.

Queenstown is well used to visitors with international accents, so expect great tourist facilities but also big crowds, especially in summer and winter. Autumn (March to May) and spring (October to November) are slightly quieter, but Queenstown is a true year-round destination.

The town's bars are regularly packed with a mainly young crowd that really know how to holiday. If you're a more private soul, drop in to see what all the fuss is about, but then get out and explore the sublime wilderness further up the lake at Glenorchy.

History

The region was deserted when the first British people arrived in the mid-1850s, although there is evidence of previous Māori settlement. Sheep farmers came first, but after two shearers discovered gold on the banks of the Shotover River in 1862, a deluge of prospectors followed.



Queenstown & Wanaka Highlights

- 1 Queenstown** (p215) Doing things you've only dreamed about in the adrenaline-rush capital of NZ.
- 2 Wanaka** (p240) Soaking up the sophisticated small-town vibe and sublime lake views.
- 3 Arrowtown** (p236) Relaxing and dining after a day's mountain biking and gold panning.
- 4 Routeburn Track** (p233) Walking this peaceful and diverse alpine trail, arguably the best of NZ's Great Walks.
- 5 Glenorchy** (p233) Exploring the upper reaches of Lake Wakatipu by horseback, kayak or jetboat.
- 6 Rob Roy Glacier Track** (p243) Restraining the urge to yodel as you stroll through the sublime Matukituki Valley before climbing to the glacier.
- 7 Queenstown bar-hopping** (p230) Partying until the early hours among a multitude of accents in cosmopolitan Queenstown.