

WORLD TRAVEL

MAGAZINE

*OLD MEETS NEW IN
MADRID'S
FASHION SCENE*

Family favourites in
**Europe
& Beyond**

**THE
100
LIST**
Best Hotels
in the World

Central Otago
*As close to paradise
as you can get*

Singapore S\$8
Malaysia RM 20
Thailand THB 200
Indonesia IDR 75,000
All Others US\$6



Off-the-grid destinations for **Summer**

NEW ZEALAND THROUGH THE LENSES

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY PHONG GIA NGUYEN AND KHANH QUOC DO









“If locations were awarded Oscars, **New Zealand** would scoop the lot... the strength and power of Otago’s untouched countryside is Lord of the Rings’ real star.” Albeit a few years old, I couldn’t agree more with the UK Sunday Express, as there is something rather special about this part of the world. Something that already deeply touched my heart when I first came to the **Queenstown** area almost twenty years ago. I would say it is the sheer beauty of the countryside, the amazing outdoor activities combined with the genuine warmth of the people that make this part of New Zealand so unique.

Over the years I’ve jumped out of planes over *Lake Wakatipu* and The Remarkables, ridden off-road bikes across the vast mountain ranges of *Central Otago* called Leaning Rock, Mount Pisa or Old Man Range and played golf with New Zealand’s number one Golf Pro...but this time I came to Otago on a different quest. I’m here with number one Golf Pro...but this time I came to Otago on a different quest. I’m here with ten fellow photography aficionados from Vietnam and it’s all about taking million-dollar-shots. And boy, were we able to get some amazing pics!

We are in the South Island for an entire week and could not have chosen a better place nor a better time for this unforgettable photography tour. Central Otago in autumn is nothing short of overwhelmingly beautiful. The vibrant colours make for a proper Indian Summer down in the Southern Hemisphere and combined with the stunning scenery this is quite the photographer’s dream.

Our home for the first few nights is acclaimed *Millbrook Resort*, a luxury retreat twenty minutes out of Queenstown that is often referred to as the country’s most beautiful golf resort. We certainly won’t object. Nestled in the rolling hills between historic *Arrowtown* and *Lake Hayes* and surrounded by the snow covered peaks of the *Crown Range* and *Coronet Peak* this 18 hole golf resort easily wins over the hearts of even the most experienced international travellers. Upon arrival we spend hours roaming around the immaculate grounds of Millbrook taking picture after picture of the stunning scenery and the vividly colourful autumn trees.

After a good nights sleep in the cosy warmth of our spacious villas and a hearty breakfast with freshly squeezed apple-orange-ginger juice we are ready for the first adventure of this bespoke photography tour. An exciting 4x4 off-road drive up the *Arrow River* takes us from historic Arrowtown to the ghost settlement of *Macetown*, the heart of the legendary *Otago* gold rush. At its peak in 1862, over 1500 gold miners worked in this remote alpine camp and some are said to have found quite some luck. For our group of passionate photographers, over 50 river crossings, steep climbs, deep gorges, glowing



This Page, from top. One of the last remaining houses in gold mining settlement Macetown; Snow-covered peaks behind the pristine Millbrook Resort; TSS Earnslaw on Lake Wakatipu **Opposite,** The Kiwi version of a traffic jam **Previous Page.** Conquering the Shotover River in one of New Zealand’s ingenious inventions, the jetboat





autumn colours and the vastness of this rather inaccessible part of New Zealand's South Island are just as good as gold!

Next day the focus moves from 4x4 vehicles to horsepower of a much more refined nature. We are invited to spend the day at the newly opened **Queenstown Polo Club**, what a treat! Owner and avid polo player Jonathan (Jono) Gabler had the vision of bringing the thrilling sport of polo to this part of the country and is busy setting up quite a club on his 86 hectare piece of paradise. Whilst the first tournament will be played in November this year we are able to already get a feel for the horses and the field. Our friend Quoc Trung, who is Vietnam's most famous music producer (and one of the most humble celebrities I ever met) loves the ride on his polo pony "Vancouver" (from the esteemed breeding operation 'Ellerston' in Australia) and later gets into a nice horsy chat with Jono over a glass of chilled champagne. Life could certainly be worse! To round off this eventful day, we take the cable car up to "Skyline" where we enjoy the sunset over Queenstown, Lake Wakatipu and The Remarkables, learn how to do a traditional *Haka* with some local *Maoris* and have a sumptuous dinner before heading back to Millbrook Resort.



Jetboats are one of NZ's many ingenious inventions and one of Queenstown's most popular activities so we clearly need to join the fun. The thrilling one-hour boat ride takes us all the way around the lake into the Shotover river and back. It's amazing how fast these boats can go, how crazy fast and tight they can turn and how much fun this is. But wait, there's more adrenaline to come!

Up into the air is the motto of the afternoon as we soar into the sky. Equipped with some of the latest camera models and all the right lenses we set off on a spectacular chopper trip deep into the Southern Alps. Two helicopters it is so everyone can have a window seat and we can take cracker shots of each other flying over the majestic snow capped peaks. Our first big photo stop is up on *Tyndall Glacier*...a spectacular spot for some serious show-off shots in the glittering snow. How often do you land on top of a glacier with two helicopters and picture perfect snow after all? From Tyndall we fly to *Loch Nagar*, a glooming dark alpine lake surrounded by steep, rocky peaks. We appreciate having private helicopters so we can stay until the last shot is in and we decide to move on. One final stop is the mysterious *Earnslaw Burn* where we do a shooting session right in front of a waterfall. What an experience this chopper trip has been!



From the airfield we drive straight to **Cardrona Hotel** where we spend the night after another feast of fabulous local food and some fine Otago wines. The small boutique hotel is another relic from the 1860s gold rush and probably the most photographed façade in the whole of New Zealand. But if you think this is all of our gold mining experience you are clearly wrong.

This Page, from top, Photography session at Loch Nagar; Flying our private helicopters over the majestic Southern Alps; Nga and Ngok, two keen photographers **Opposite**, Loch Nagar high up in the Southern Alps





Next stop *St. Bathans*, the legendary yet rather unknown gold mining settlement that seems to be frozen in time. The little town once hosted thousands of gold miners. It is said that over 80 tons (!!) of gold were dug out of what's now the beautiful *Blue Lake*. Today, St. Bathans is not much more than a few authentic houses, the infamous *Vulcan Hotel* and the original prison cell. Much to our delight, one of us is allowed to spend the night in prison (and yes, it can only be locked from outside!). All else sleep either in the *Vulcan Hotel* or share a little cottage down the road. This is clearly not your normal 5 star accommodation, but an experience like none before. After a very tasty meal we completely take over the bar. Jude, the lovely owner of the *Vulcan* shows Quang how to pour our own beer, our friend Trung the super musician works the old Jukebox, we play pool against the only two locals in the pub, dance, sing, look at our photos, take some more, sing some more and eventually fall into our beds. If only we knew which room was said to be the haunted one...

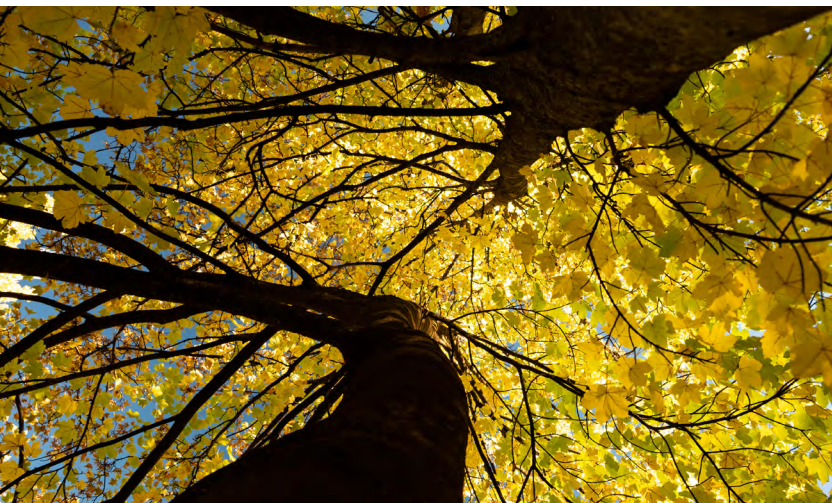
After a warm breakfast and an even warmer hug from owner Jude we leave St. Bathans with a wealth of memories. It is quite a remarkable place and one we will certainly never forget.

Back in Queenstown we check into our luxurious Villas at Millbrook Resort again. Some of us stay here to shoot some more autumn landscapes, autumn colours and autumn leaves. The rest take off to go on board Queenstown's icon, the *TSS Earnslaw*, which was built in 1912, the same year the *Titanic* was launched. It's quite an experience to cross the lake on such an old vessel, even more so as we are allowed onto the bridge where we have an interesting chat with the captain and take some pretty cool shots. Walter Peak Station across the lake is quite an interesting place where we see how sheep are shorn, how sheepdogs work and where we enjoy a lovely BBQ lunch in the farm's impressive rose garden.

Riding the *TSS Earnslaw* was nice, but photographers obviously want a lot more. That's why we have arranged a private boat that allows us to take photos of the old steamship as she crosses the lake with impressive mountains in the back. That's the beauty of a bespoke travel experience, you simply get what you personally treasure most!

After a week of unforgettable experiences, money-can't-buy-moments, hundreds of million-dollar-shots and newfound friends this bespoke photography tour in New Zealand unfortunately comes to an end. The memories however will stay. The photos will be treasured and shared. And New Zealand will be forever in our hearts.

This unique tour was designed and executed by **Sonnenkind Singapore**. The next NZ photography tour will be available towards the end of the year. The price for this exclusive 7-day experience starts from 11.000 SGD. sonnenkind.com.sg



This Page, from top, Stunning autumn colours in Arrowtown; Crossing the Arrow River during the offload excursion to Macetown; Autumn leaves, a photographer's dream **Opposite**, LA curious Alpaca on Criffel Station