

TRAVEL

4 
HOURS IN...

BAD RAGAZ, SWITZERLAND



WHERE TO STAY

Lose yourself in a private spa at the **Grand Resort Bad Ragaz**, known for its health, wellness and art, where you can also book a treatment with renowned dermatologist, Brigitte Bollinger. Visit resortragaz.ch



WHERE TO GO

Walk up to the **Tamina gorge**, where thermal water known for its healing properties pour down the narrow cracks and rocks. It supplies water to the local thermal spa, Tamina Therme. Visit taminathere.ch



WHERE TO EAT

Michelin-starred restaurant **IGNIV** is known for its impressive sweets counter and artistic dishes. Book early as it's worth every Swiss Franc you're going to splash out on the meal. Visit igniv.com



WHERE TO DRINK

Sip a cold glass of local vino at the new golf club, bar and restaurant, **Gladys**, named after the winner of the Ladies Challenge Cup, Gladys Thompson, awarded 14 Gault & Millau points. Visit golfclubragaz.ch

NEW LEASE ON NEW ZEALAND



Jack Southan returns to New Zealand many years after his backpacking days to explore the island's luxury credentials

Everyone knows what the oft-derided university gap year consists of – getting drunk at beach parties in Thailand, picking apples in Australia and bungee jumping in New Zealand. Travel tended to be on a shoestring with hostels being the accommodation of choice. According to Tourism New Zealand, backpackers aged between 18 and 24 represent 11 per cent of visitors to the country, with average trips lasting 31 days and an average spend per person of NZ\$3,700 (£1,911).

While working professionals might dismiss the country as a destination for adrenaline junkies and Lord of the Rings fans, returning to New Zealand with money offers an experience free of the stress and hardship of student travel, and the opportunity to discover outstanding restaurants, unforgettable hotels and luxury adventures you may not previously have had the budget for.

If taking a month off work is going to be a struggle, here are my top three spots across the country's two islands for those who love fine wine, great food and the superior things in life.

HAWKE'S BAY, NORTH ISLAND

Hawke's Bay isn't very high on the backpacker's bucket list, but that's because it's one of NZ's best kept secrets. Nestled on the eastern coast of the North Island, it is a region famous for its vineyards and harmonious natural beauty.

After the Air New Zealand flight from London touched down in Auckland, I took a 45-minute connecting flight to Napier, in the heart of the countryside, where I checked into Greenhill Lodge, a member of international hospitality collective Small Luxury Hotels of the World (SLH), which has over 520 hotels in its portfolio. Surrounded by green hills that roll off into the distance, bulbous and perfect, Greenhill's grounds are peppered with orange trees and fruit bushes, the smell of blossom wafting on the warm air.

Standing on the property's Victorian-style



veranda, overlooking pristine gardens, I swirled the first of many glasses of Alpha Domus Viognier '12. Locally made, the wine is deliciously tart and satisfyingly dry on the tongue – just right for a summer's evening. Wine is such a big part of life in this region that you will find yourself drinking the whole time, even if you're not a big wine buff. And that's no bad thing, considering the high-standard of wine-making here.

Napier, one of the main towns in Hawke's Bay, has some of the best examples of art deco architecture in the country and is also one of the best places to taste a plethora of local vintages. Wander the pretty streets, find yourself a lunch spot (Bistronomy on Hastings Street is a great choice) and order a few different labels.

Try the Clearview Enigma '15 for a fantastically rich Cabernet Franc/Malbec blend, paired with

the game terrine and pigeon parfait for a real treat. With a large selection of wines on offer, there will always be something to work with a menu that changes with the seasons.

If you do need to choose one vineyard to visit, however, Craggy Range Winery has to be one of the most idyllic, in view of the famous Te Mata Peak. Verdant hills give way to a lush valley, a river gurgling through its middle and a lake sparkling to one side. The peaceful winery is modern but somehow organic in its design and has an outstanding restaurant on-site that sits overlooking the lake and the vineyards – dine on whole steamed gurnard with fresh herbs, ceviche or delicate beef tartare paired with the Craggy Range Kidnappers' chardonnay. It is the perfect lunch spot for those in the know.



NEED TO KNOW

SLH has 520 five star hotels in 80 different countries worldwide. Six hotels located around New Zealand from Queenstown to Christchurch. Rates start from £166 - £544 per night in low season and increase during busy dates. www.slh.com

Air New Zealand: Flights from London Heathrow to Auckland depart twice a day with Air New Zealand's new route share with Singapore Airways via Singapore. Premium Economy prices run for around £2000pp. www.airnewzealand.co.uk



MARLBOROUGH SOUNDS, SOUTH ISLAND

Settled into another Air New Zealand plane with yet another glass of wine and head for Blenheim next. The flight is an hour well-looking out of the window watching the terrain becoming more rugged and wild. Upon landing, it's a short 30 minute drive – or for the more adventurous, a 15 minute helicopter flight – to Marlborough Sounds, a network of sea-drowned river valleys.

A place of tranquility and outstanding natural beauty, it has 1,500km of winding coastline, secret coves, waterways accessible almost exclusively by boat, secluded turquoise bays, marine reserves and island sanctuaries that play host to lots of kiwis and penguins. It's perfect for cruises and wildlife spotting. For some-

where to stay, look up the five-star Bay Of Many Coves, one of only a handful of hotels on the Sound, and a rather special property that feels isolated from the rest of the world. Rooms look out on to the water and high forested hills beyond, while its restaurants serve exquisite fresh seafood in view of magnificent sunsets.

A 50 minute drive away is Ship Cove, where explorer Captain Cook first landed on New Zealand's South Island more than 250 years ago, declaring British sovereignty over it. It is a temperate paradise, like the bountiful tropics but without fear of disease or predators. Like Hawke's Bay, this place is heaven for those who love food. And the wine? Well, if you don't know already, Marlborough has a glistening reputation in this area. This region is supposedly responsible for producing 77 per cent of

New Zealand's wine, which is an enormous amount considering how much is produced throughout the country. The most prolific grape variety is sauvignon blanc, followed closely by pinot noir and new world chardonnay.

A stay on the Sounds is a bit like a retreat – you don't have access to shops or bars but there's plenty of serenity and relaxation for burnt-out city types. Getting out on the water has to be one of the best ways to unwind and here you can do it in style. Enter Tarquin, a 20-metre luxury launch.

Settle yourself onto her upper deck to watch the mesmerising water glow a vibrant blue, as if lit from underneath. We motored into hidden bays, jumped ashore and hiked to waterfalls through vine-strung jungles. On the return journey, the dolphins played in the bow wave and the phenomenal colours passing on all sides were a marvel.

Returning to the vessel hungry, a member of crew laid a table, piling it with bowls of giant green mussels, king prawns, clams and oysters. The Cloudy Bay Sauvignon '16 is fresh and pomelo citrus heavy, the tartness clearly cutting through the umami of the seafood. It was a far cry from those backpacking days surviving on Vegemite sandwiches and waking up with hangovers from too much Speight's beer.

QUEENSTOWN, SOUTH ISLAND

One of the most famous destinations in New Zealand, attracting several million tourists every year, for most people Queenstown is a party destination and a backpacker haven. But there's a lot more to it. Nestled within the Southern Alps range of the South Island, but just a 45 minute flight via Christchurch, the pretty outpost sits on the banks of the majestic Lake Wakatipu, flanked by a ring of soaring white-capped mountains.

Spend a day or two exploring the centre, the lively bars and waterfront restaurants (Eichart's Grille and Rata are great choices) and soak up the buzz. If you aren't interested in sky-diving or bungee jumping but still like the rush of experiencing something new, head up to Milford Sound. The region is packed with fjords, as big and glorious as their distant cousins in Norway, but Milford Sound is the largest and most famous one. It's possible to get to it via road, but this journey takes upwards of five hours by bus. A better option is to charter a small four-or-eight-seater plane (Air Milford is reputable) and take a flight over the snow-covered mountains.

Above the snow line it is wild and inhospitable. Great valleys of ice and rock, glistening glacial lakes and hard grey cliffs spread out in all directions. Our aircraft was bumped and buffeted on the thermals until, after half an hour or so, we started to descend right into the heart of the fjord. The water was dark, with rock faces rising almost vertically from the rippling surface. Towering up hundreds of metres, sparsely covered with hardy trees and shrubs, these monoliths are magnificent.

Landing safely back on terra firma, I passed on the camping option in favour of a stunning lodge, Blanket Bay, the only five-star hotel right on the lake's edge in Glenorchy. Sitting alone on the stoney shoreline of the sparkling Lake Wakatipu, this luxury resort offers one of the most spectacular views in the country. I indulged in some New Zealand wagyu beef and a superb bottle of Central Otago pinot noir at the restaurant and, still riding the high of my flight over Milford Sound, contemplated trying heli-skiing or powerboat racing the next day.

Queenstown offers everything that New Zealand can be. It has epic scenery, fantastic food, incredible wine and the injection of excitement that makes this country so special.