

# TALK OF the town

BY PAMELA WADE

*Queenstown still attracts adrenalin junkies with its outdoor activities, but when it's time to retreat indoors, the city's cuisine steals the scene.*

In and around Queenstown, New Zealand's adventure capital, there are more ways to cheat death than you can shake a fork at, so it's just as well that it's difficult to eat a meal there that you wouldn't be happy to have as your last. From backpacker basic to elegant haute cuisine, there's an enviable choice of restaurants whose common feature is their commitment to using the best of local ingredients.

From the obvious – lamb, game and wine – to the unexpected, like Bannockburn saffron, this region is blessed with premium produce: “Regional and seasonal – that’s what cooking is all about down here,” says Arrowtown chef Peter Gawron. He’ll fossick in the hills for wild mushrooms to serve up later at his acclaimed restaurant Saffron in a locally grown barley risotto. On the

menu are unusual delights like roasted quail stuffed with glazed chestnuts in a pistachio *blancmange*, and hot banana tart with mango ice-cream and passionfruit jelly, all beautifully presented and efficiently served: well worth the 20-minute drive from Queenstown.

Back towards Queenstown is the Amisfield Winery and Bistro. This attractive modern building of local schist and recycled beams has fabulous views of Lake Hayes and the surrounding hills from a sunny courtyard, and a welcoming fireplace inside to warm winter visitors. The generously-portioned *à la carte* offerings change with the seasons, but a tempting fixture is the “Trust the Chef” degustation: six to eight dishes to share, paired with some of the single-estate wines grown nearby in New Zealand’s southernmost vineyard.



Nearer town is Gantleys, in the 1860s an inn for gold miners and now a romantic country restaurant in a large garden framing mountain views. In the cosy, stone-walled dining room, chef Jared Aldridge serves up award-winning dishes, the most popular a succulent herb-crusted rack of lamb on a sage and truffle bread-and-butter pudding. For sommelier Brent Rands, pairing dishes with wines is “the fun part” and his extensive list has earned him the *New York Wine Spectator* Award of Excellence every year since 1996. The six-course degustation menu is the ideal way to appreciate his expertise, from salmon to chocolate; the Wine Library is an inviting place to end the evening with port, cheese and chess.

A short ferry ride from the town centre is the new Hilton Queenstown, where in the Wakatipu Grill’s open kitchen diners can watch Peter Thornley and his team work their magic on local ingredients such as Mt. Cook alpine salmon, Cardrona lamb and Bluff oysters – but only if they can drag their gaze from the spectacular view across the lake towards distinctive Coronet Peak. Those settling in for afternoon tea, however, will have eyes only for pastry chef Brian Campbell’s extravagant creations, particularly his moreish macarons, a sweet rainbow of delight.

The lake is the dominant decor feature, too, at True South across the water. The restaurant of the Rees Hotel is the domain of award-winning Ben Batterbury, who personally sources his ingredients from South Island suppliers, some of them very local indeed: nearby Gibbston Valley cheese is among the 10 fromage options on the menu. Sophisticated and elegant, the dishes score as highly for presentation as for taste, changing according to the seasons. There’s a degustation for the ditherers, but the chef’s status as Beef and Lamb Ambassador should direct discerning diners towards such dishes as Cardrona Merino lamb neck and shoulder and Hereford prime hanger steak: cuts chosen by one who knows where to find flavour and tenderness.

In Queenstown itself there’s a restaurant for every occasion, pocket and predilection. New in town is Rata, established by Michelin-starred chef Josh Emmett of *MasterChef* fame. Named after the red-flowered tree, the restaurant is inspired by the southern landscape, its modern stone, glass and steel building sitting well among its heritage neighbours. Inside, the atmosphere is relaxed and friendly, a place to unwind while enjoying anything from a bite – perhaps clams in seaweed butter or goat’s cheese profiteroles – to a feast. Intended to feed a whole table, this could be a roast rack of venison or a charcoal-grilled boneless Wakanui rib of beef.

Botswana Butchery announces its focus not just by its name but by its meat cleaver door-handles. Diners can choose the cut, age and size of their meat, as well as the sauces and side dishes, for chef Leungo Lippe to char-grill or pan-fry. It’s not just beef, however: pork, wild rabbit and hare, lamb, duck and fish also feature, along with seasonal treats like whitebait and oysters. There is a series of dining rooms, some of them private, all elegant and comfortable with fireplaces or lake views.

Also in Marine Parade is Eichardt’s Hotel. Established in 1867, it is a Queenstown icon and in its stylish bar, voted one of the World’s Top Ten Bars with a View by the *London Times*, cocktails and tapas are served alongside more comforting



#### LOCAL LARDER

**Clockwise from left:** True South at The Rees deserves its reputation as one of Queenstown’s finest restaurants; hand-made chocolate slabs at Patagonia; Wai does wonders with seafood; Amisfield sits on a vineyard on the outskirts of Queenstown; people queue for Fergburger’s buns; Arrowtown restaurant Saffron uses local produce in its dishes; Gantleys occupies an inn dating back to the 1860s.

**Opening spread:** Tourists, locals and seagulls flock to Aggy’s Shack for the moreish double-fried chips.



ROYAL WELCOME

From far left: High tea at the new Hilton; breathtaking views over Queenstown from the Skyline restaurant.

Behind, in narrow Cow Lane, is The Cow, 40 years in the business of serving nothing but pizza and spaghetti. They've got it down to a fine art by now and the cosy little stone bistro with its open fire is permanently busy, drawing in people with healthy appetites who know all about the perfect garlic bread and the fresh tastes of the big, hand-rolled pizzas. You're unlikely to sit down at a table straight away here, or having done so keep it to yourself, but the atmosphere is friendly and waiting at the bar with a beer is no penance.

Even busier is nearby Fergburger, crazily popular with the backpacking crowd as well as anyone else brave or hungry enough to take on one of their massive burgers. It's hip and cool, the staff young and cheerful, the decor bright. The burgers are cooked to order and the queue seems to stretch permanently out of the door. What's the attraction? Plate-sized buns, soft and chewy, enclosing quirkily-named unusual fillings like "Sweet Bambi" (Fiordland deer with Thai

*"At Patagonia chocolates, the ice-cream comes flavoured with dulce de leche caramel, there are chocolate-coated butterscotch balls and the hot-chocolate is spiked with chilli."*

dishes like seafood chowder or a warm salad of maple-roasted beets with blue cheese and walnuts.

Another historic venue on the lake shore is The Bathhouse, built a century ago as a changing kiosk for bathers. Now it's a unique place to enjoy tapas or signature dishes such as toasted Reuben on rye or Portobello mushrooms grilled with blue cheese and fig compote: simple, tasty and well done. Nearby, and equally a part of Queenstown life, is Aggy's Shack, a classic, family-run takeaway in a prime location alongside the botanical gardens and across the road from the lake's pebbly beach. Crisp and floury double-fried chips accompany not just fish, but local exotica like smoked eel, whitebait fritters, steamed mussels and even Muttonbird. Cheap, fast and good, the only downside is that the ducks and seagulls expect a share.

Along the waterfront is the perfect place for dessert afterwards: Patagonia Chocolates is run by Chilean Alejandro

Gimenez, who makes everything himself, from the super-indulgent chocolates to the cones for his award-winning sorbets and gelato. Among the more unusual offerings are ice-cream flavoured with *dulce de leche*, a South American specialty, and *tramontana* – chocolate-coated butterscotch balls; kawakawa tea and hot chocolate spiked with chilli star on the drinks menu.

On Steamer Wharf, opposite where the old faithful TSS *Earnslaw* moors, is Wai. The name means "water," and the lake views are just one of this fine-dining restaurant's attractions. Here too, everything is freshly made in Martin James' kitchen from stock to pasta to ice-cream. The knowledgeable staff are happy to assist with food and wine pairings, while the 10-stage degustation menu featuring pork loin cooked in hay saves diners the agony of having to choose. In season, however, it would be hard to go past oysters, delivered fresh daily and served with white balsamic jelly, lemon caviar and ginger-lime sorbet.



**HSTM**  
HOTEL ST MORITZ

Idyllically located in the heart of Queenstown and overlooking Lake Wakatipu to the iconic Remarkables mountain range, Hotel St Moritz provides a sense of calm and serenity. With exceptional views of a landscape that is as breathtaking as it is soothing, this hotel is an idyllic retreat. Let us enchant you

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SWEET DEAL  
Left: Poached pears at Amisfield.

plum chutney), “The Codfather” (beer-battered cod with dill tartare) and “Chief Wiggum” (roasted pork belly, hash browns and apricot mustard). The biggest challenge, literally, is the “Big Al”: a double beef patty with bacon, cheese, two fried eggs and salad.

Thirsty now? A couple of streets away is Dux de Lux, a little stone craft brewery with a range of interesting and award-winning beers including Ginger Tom, Nor’Wester Strong Ale and Hereford Bitter. Lagers, stouts, wheat beer and ales are naturally brewed on site and seven beers are permanently on tap with seasonal additions. A tasting tray gives a chance to try them all: a pleasant way to spend an hour or three. Food is served here, too, and there are regular live music nights.

For a literal overview of Queenstown’s delights, take the gondola up the hill to Bob’s Peak for dinner at the Skyline Restaurant. Here, with the town laid out far below dwarfed by the Remarkables opposite and the mountains across sparkling Lake Wakatipu, watch the sun set as you work through the extensive “Taste of New Zealand” buffet including seafood and classic roasts. Down below, among those twinkling lights, are even more restaurants waiting to be discovered. •

Photography by Pamela Wade and courtesy of respective establishments.

## travel facts

### GETTING THERE

Air New Zealand, Qantas, Jetstar and Virgin Australia fly direct between Queenstown and the main Australian cities.

- Air New Zealand. 1800-151-661; [airnewzealand.com.au](http://airnewzealand.com.au)
- Jetstar. 131-538; [jetstar.com/au](http://jetstar.com/au)
- Qantas. 131-313; [qantas.com](http://qantas.com)
- Virgin Australia. 13-67-89; [virginaustralia.com/au/en](http://virginaustralia.com/au/en)

### WHEN TO GO

Queenstown is a year-round destination. Summer is hot and dry with temperatures up to 30°C, while in winter there can be occasional snow to lake level. Spring and autumn are both beautiful.

### WHERE TO STAY

- Eichardt’s Hotel. Marine Parade, Queenstown; 64-3/441-0450; [eichardts.com](http://eichardts.com)
- Hilton Queenstown. Kawarau Village, 79 Peninsula Rd., Queenstown; 64-3/450-9400; [queenstownhilton.com](http://queenstownhilton.com)
- Hotel St Moritz Queenstown. 10/18 Brunswick St., Queenstown; 64-3/442-4990; [accorhotels.com](http://accorhotels.com)
- Rees Hotel. 377 Frankton Rd., Queenstown; 64-3/450-1100; [therees.co.nz](http://therees.co.nz)

### WHERE TO EAT

- Amisfield Winery and Bistro. 10 Lake Hayes Rd., Queenstown; 64-3/442-0556; [amisfield.co.nz](http://amisfield.co.nz)
- Botswana Butchery. 17 Marine Parade, Queenstown; 64-3/442-6994; [botswanabutchery.co.nz](http://botswanabutchery.co.nz)
- Gantleys. 172 Arthurs Point Rd.; 64-3/442-8999; [gantleys.co.nz](http://gantleys.co.nz)
- The Bathhouse. 28 Marine Parade, Queenstown; 64-3/442-5625; [bathhouse.co.nz](http://bathhouse.co.nz)
- The Cow. Cow Lane, Queenstown; 64-3/442-8588; [thecowrestaurant.co.nz](http://thecowrestaurant.co.nz)
- Dux de Lux. 14 Church St., Queenstown; 64-3/442-9688; [thedux.co.nz](http://thedux.co.nz)
- Eichardt’s Bar. Marine Parade, Queenstown; 64-3/441-0450; [eichardts.com](http://eichardts.com)
- Fergburger. 42 Shotover St., Queenstown; 64-3/441-1232; [fergburger.com](http://fergburger.com)
- Patagonia Chocolates. 50 Beach St., Queenstown; 64-3/442-9066; [patagoniachocolates.co.nz](http://patagoniachocolates.co.nz)
- Rata. 43 Ballarat St., Queenstown; 64-3/442-9393; [ratadining.co.nz](http://ratadining.co.nz)
- Saffron. 18 Buckingham St., Arrowtown; 64-3/442-0131; [saffronrestaurant.co.nz](http://saffronrestaurant.co.nz)
- Skyline. Brecon St., Queenstown; 64-3/441-0377; [skyline.co.nz](http://skyline.co.nz)
- True South, Rees Hotel. 377 Frankton Rd., Queenstown; 64-3/450-1100; [therees.co.nz](http://therees.co.nz)
- Wai. Steamer Wharf, Beach St., Queenstown; 64-3/442-5969; [wai.net.nz](http://wai.net.nz)
- Wakatipu Grill, Hilton. Kawarau Village, 79 Peninsula Rd., Queenstown; 64-3/450-9400; [queenstownhilton.com](http://queenstownhilton.com)

### FURTHER INFORMATION

Talk to Destination Queenstown for more information on travelling to the New Zealand city. [queenstownnz.co.nz](http://queenstownnz.co.nz)

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