

TRAVEL NEW ZEALAND



High and mighty

The team at Lodge Lorien has made it their mission to offer a series of top-drawer adventures that show off the majestic landscape in all its diversity, writes Paul Bailey.

A sojourn at Lodge Lorien on New Zealand's South Island is not your run-of-the-mill skiing or hiking adventure. I realise this on the second day of my visit, as our helicopter comes in to land on a glacier on Mount Tutoko, high up in Fiordland National Park. On one side of us is a magnificent ring of snow-capped mountains; on the other, the Tasman Sea stretches away into the distance. There can be few places in the world with such a spectacular outlook.

As we wander the top of the glacier, our pilot Louisa "Choppy" Patterson, of Over the Top Helicopters, suggests we chip off some ice for the drinks we'll have later at lunch.

This is the second stop on our five-hour, \$NZ15,500 chopper ride (about \$14,385 for the whole helicopter). From Queenstown, we've flown over the soaring peaks and deep valleys of Fiordland, and up through Milford Sound, where annual rainfall of seven metres feeds a dense forest dominated by silver and mountain beech, the native conifer rimu and white pine trees. Our first stop, Madagascar Beach on the west coast, was all black sand and a boiling sea. Now we fly back across mountains dotted with mirror-surfaced, glacier-fed lakes to the Alpine Kitchen for lunch.

Sitting in a pretty little valley, this is the smallest high-country station in the country, accessible only by helicopter. It's utterly remote, and yet it's just a six-minute flight as the crow flies back to Queenstown.

The station has an 1860s goldminer's farmhouse and a historical saloon named the Dirty Nugget. A lunch of barbecued rack of lamb and sausages is served outdoors with salad and local wines.

The glacial ice? That gets popped into glasses of whisky from a local distillery.

Since exclusive-use Lodge Lorien opened for bookings on the shores of Lake Wakatipu just a year ago, its management team has made it their mission to offer a series of top-shelf adventures like this one, tailored to make the most of a ruggedly beautiful part of the world.

Lorien itself is a contemporary take on a traditional mountain lodge, set in 1100 square metres in the gated Wyuna Preserve (originally a sheep and cattle station). It feels totally secluded, and yet it is only 45 minutes' drive or a 15-minute chopper flight from Queenstown.

The lodge sleeps up to eight guests in airy, spacious rooms, each named after the mountains on show through its floor-to-ceiling windows. It's an exceptional setting, with the Humboldt Range soaring beyond the lake, and Pig (Mātau) and Pigeon (Wāwāhi Waka) islands in the frame. There's an expansive, landscaped outdoor area, with the distinctive golden tussock of the region.

The lodge was designed by New Zealand architects Mason & Wales, from Dunedin,



Go to Lorien if you need solitude to put yourself back together.
Sheona Devin, lodge owner

and features local timbers and 'schist' stone quarried from the site. Decked out with a billiard table, a games area, a cinema room, and gym and spa facilities, it's ideal for families or groups of friends. Wi-Fi, an office and plenty of gathering places mean it's also good for small corporate groups.

Lorien's concierge service can arrange any number of high- and low-octane experiences and activities from heli-skiing and high-country horse riding to fly-fishing in pristine rivers or kayaking on Wakatipu. Helicopter pilots can collect skiers from the doorstep of Lorien, and drop them into



they are so close and a lot more manageable than, say, the Canadian mountains or the Alps – places that are amazing but it's a bit of a schlep to get there.

"You can go [to Lodge Lorien] with a big party of friends, or a small group or family, or alone if you need that solitude to put yourself back together and deal with all the stuff you have to deal with when you're running a business or doing those kinds of executive roles."

The difference between Lorien and some other lodges, she says, is you have the whole property to yourself. "It's hugely private and that's a major drawcard for me."

While Lorien guests can cater for themselves if they choose, chef Jo Keppel from A Divine Dish, a boutique fine-food company in Invercargill, has come to cook dinner during my stay. She plates up seared tuna with pickled fennel, fish escabeche, Fiordland venison and a chocolate Persian love torte. She also returns in the morning to prepare salmon on the smoker for breakfast.

The nearest town to Lodge Lorien is Glenorchy, a few minutes down the road. It was a summer camp for Maori who collected greenstone from the Dart River and later, in the 1860s, was settled by European farmers, loggers and schelite miners. Parts of Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy were filmed in the lush forests nearby.

American philanthropists Debbi and Paul Brainerd have built a small eco lodge in Glenorchy made entirely from found and recycled materials, billing it as a showcase for regenerative design. Paul founded the Aldus Corporation and is credited with coining the term "desktop publishing". Run as a not-for-profit, the lodge pumps its profits into a local community trust.

Lorien is also within easy driving distance (the lodge provides a car) of other villages founded in the 1860s Otago gold rush, including Arrowtown and Cardrona, with their distinctive timber houses and shops. The first grapes were planted in the area around the same time as the gold rush, and the Otago region, with more than 100 vineyards, is, of course, one of the country's premium winemaking regions. It's unlikely you'll come home thirsty.

The lodge's concierge service organises a private lunch and tasting at the wonderfully named Wet Jacket Wines in Lake Hayes, run by Greg Hays. Its simply stated mission is to make "seriously good" wine, and it's very much a matter of quality over quantity. "Work like a captain, play like a pirate" is the winery's motto.

The vineyard is named after Wet Jacket Arm, a bay in the southwest named by Captain James Cook in 1773 on his second voyage to New Zealand on the Resolution, to chart Dusky Sound.

Wet Jacket Wines is housed in an historical woodshed, where Hays serves a lunch he has cooked himself of lightly fried

whitebait and then the finely sliced delicacy Paua (sea snails) with chilli. Something of a veteran of the local winemaking scene, he now produces a small selection of pinot noir, pinot gris and rosé. Tastings here are by appointment only. But Wet Jacket is more than a winery,

with its team involved in significant conservation efforts to preserve the habitat of native bird species threatened by predators such as rat and stoats.

Producing pinot noir is where the competitive action is among the Otago vigneron, and further down the road

into Gibbston Valley is another producer, Rockburn Wines, with a bigger tasting room.

Rockburn recently won a Platinum award for The Chosen Hillside Pinot Noir (2021) and silver awards for four other pinot noirs from the same year at the

Global warming's impact

A major concern on a visit to New Zealand's Fiordland is the effect of climate change on this beautiful landscape. From the air, the decline in the blue ice is dramatic to witness.

Louisa "Choppy" Patterson of Over the Top Helicopters has been flying the country's southwest for 40 years and is an expert. She shows us where she marked the level of the snow in paint on the side of a mountain decades ago.

"See how the snow level has dropped since then," she says, shaking her head and pointing to the ice way below.

New Zealand's glaciers are estimated to have lost 30 per cent of their ice volume because of rising temperatures over the past 40 years or so.

Over the Top Helicopters says it offsets the carbon footprint of its flights. You can also explore the subject further by touring the area with a glaciologist. **LA**

PAUL BAILEY

Decanter World Wine Awards in London.

It's a short drive back into Queenstown, where hotels and apartments cling to the edge of the hills to catch a glimpse of Lake Wakatipu and the signature Remarkables dominating the skyline.

The town is bursting with backpackers, and every adventure brand you can think of has set up shop among luxury brands, including Louis Vuitton, Burberry and Breitling.

When it comes time to leave, it's just a two-and-a-half-hour trip home to Sydney from Queenstown on a flight that tracks over the majestic terrain for one last stunning view of the mountains and a parting salute. **BA**

The writer was a guest of Lodge Lorien.

Over The Top Helicopters chief pilot Louisa "Choppy" Patterson, left; and a snow landing on Mount Tutoko glacier with Mount Tutoko in the background, below left.

Need to know

Lodge Lorien Twin Peak View, Glenorchy. Rates from \$NZ13,000 (about \$12,000) a night. The use of a Land Rover Defender is included. Tel: +64 21 861 541

Over The Top Premium helicopter company in a town with many chopper operators. Offers a range of adventures, such as the Fiordland Explorer to Doubtful Sound (includes an additional choice of Milford or Dusky Sound); a six-hour tour from \$NZ12,000 for the Squirrel helicopter (holds five to six passengers) and \$NZ14,800 for the Eurocopter (six passengers). Prices valid until September 30. Tel: +64 3 442 2233

Sydney Boat Show Auction



Saturday 5 August, 11am – Jones Bay Wharf, Sydney



2010 Sunseeker 30m (98ft) Superyacht "Chaos"

- Full refit completed in 2020
- Ideal for personal or commercial use (36 guests cruising, 10 guests overnight)
- Immaculately maintained with full-time crew, twin C32 Engines with upgraded navigation and display systems (2020)

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2021 Axopar 37 Sun Top - "Cheeky"

- In full commercial survey for 10 passengers + 2 crew in 2D
- Twin 300 Mercury Verados, with low hours and full service history
- Joystick Piloting for (JPO) and Bow Thruster, along with Simrad radar, VHF radio, AIS, and FUSION audio system

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1990 Benetti 46m "Mistress"

- 2022 refit, restored to showroom condition
- 4,200 nautical mile range for extended journeys
- Onboard luxuries such as a full sauna, gymnasium, and jacuzzi
- Comes complete with a tender and two jet skis for added adventure and exploration

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2020 Pardo 43 "Trouble"

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- Includes bow thruster for enhanced maneuverability, complete with upgraded navigation and sound

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2017 Gulf Craft Majesty 100 "Legacy"

- Five comfortable guest cabins, accommodating up to 12 guests
- Custom-made premium marble countertops and white oak flooring in the Saloon and Dining Area
- Beach Club with an expandable diving platform and spacious bow for ultimate relaxation

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