

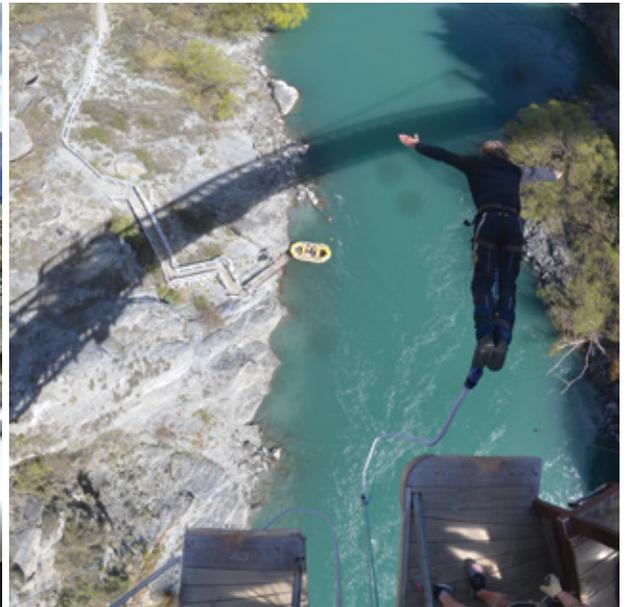
Adventure of a Lifetime

MOTORCYCLING ACROSS NEW ZEALAND'S SOUTH ISLAND

BY TARA HITCHCOCK

I was convinced Robert Redford had been to New Zealand many times. After all, the Oscar winner has a career that spans five decades; certainly his passport (which resembles the ink work on Ozzy Osbourne's chest) includes at least one stamp from the "Land of the Loud White Cloud." But I was wrong. Redford's first trip to New Zealand was only a year or so ago. The acting legend spent a few months there shooting *Pete's Dragon*, and during his time there, he fell in love with the place. When I interview him about the film (out on DVD now), I tell him I am headed there for a motorcycle trip with my husband Kenn, he gets excited. "Are you going to ride?" he asks. "Nope," I reply. "That's my husband's job. I'm on the back."





Kenn and I decide to focus our trip on New Zealand's picturesque South Island. After spending our first night in Christchurch, we head to South Pacific Motorcycles to pick up our BMW K-1600. "Did we just rent a Grand Torino minus two wheels?" Kenn asks upon seeing the bike (affectionately named "Fiona"). A 6-cylinder behemoth, Fiona was by far the largest motorcycle we had ever rented, and she introduces herself with a roar as we slowly make our way out of the driveway and towards the "Adventure Capital" of New Zealand, Queenstown.

The Road to Mt. Cook hugs the edge of Lake Pukaki, and after taking the trip in and back out, we decide to spend the night near Twizel at a luxury B&B called the Matuka Luxury Lodge. Matuka's proprietors, Peter and Jo, are prototypical Kiwis, and they go out of their way to make us feel right at home. The next day, our trek through fields of yellow and gold tussock, farmland, and vineyards brings us to Queenstown. Roughly 11,000 people call this picturesque city home, but that number swells significantly each year as over a million tourists come to visit, many of them hoping to do things that defy all common sense, like free-falling 140 feet from a narrow bridge overlooking the Kawarau river (which Kenn did).

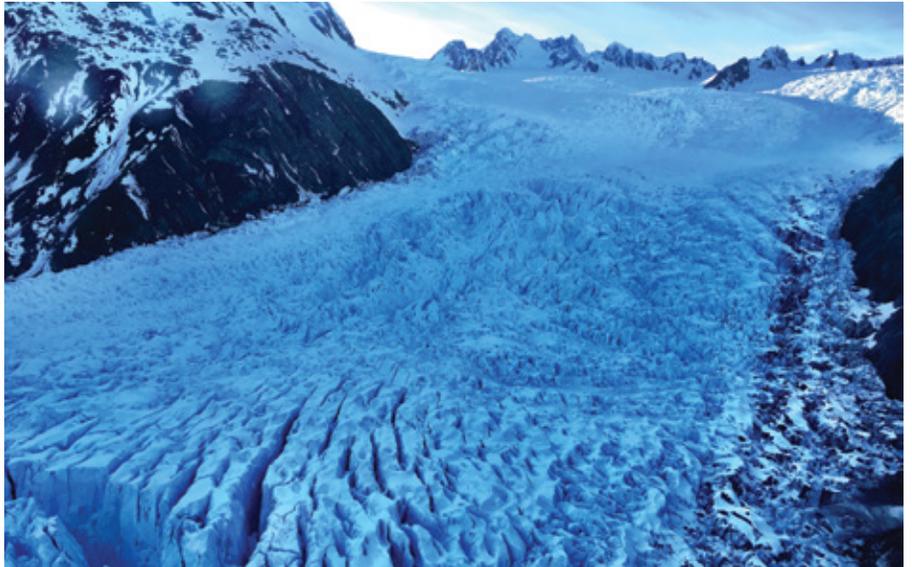
When Redford was filming *Pete's Dragon* in the small fishing town of Tapanui, he treated his family to a Queenstown getaway,

choosing luxury villa Wyuna House as his base. Glacier Southern Lakes Helicopters shuttled the actor to the villa in the town of Paradise, and the Redfords dined across the street at the five-star Blanket Bay Luxury Lodge. We opted for the Stoneridge Estate, a small lodge surrounded by twelve acres of lush gardens and vineyards with incredible views of Lake Hayes. Stoneridge is just a stone's throw from one of New Zealand's top-rated dining spots, Amisfield Winery, and was a location on Season 13 of *The Bachelor*.

We spend the next day on the Milford Sound Road, and one of the world's great drives does not disappoint. We follow the road through Te Anau, passing Lake Te Anau and the densely forested Murchison Mountains before heading toward the engineering marvel known as the Homer Tunnel. It takes a moment for your eyes to adjust, but when you reach the other side of the tunnel, it's like you've entered Middle Earth and expect to see Gandalf any moment. There are an array of fjord boat tours to pick from once you get to the Sound, so you can spend as much time as you'd like on the water. Or if time is an issue, you can shave off some hours by helicoptering back to Queenstown.

The most scenic way to "The Coast" is through the Crown Range toward Wanaka. No trip west is complete without a stop at the historic Cardrona Hotel, one of the only remaining buildings from the





“New Zealand is a country with a smile on its face.” - Robert Redford

area’s gold rush. After that, we head the Wanaka way and over the Haast Pass toward the Tasman Sea. It’s rainforest country, and there’s no shortage of waterfalls and jaw-dropping photo ops. Our goal is to make it to Franz Josef and the Te Waonui Forest Retreat, another five-star eco retreat, and one of a few luxury options in the area. After checking in and soaking in the local hot pools, we wait for the skies to clear so we can get up close and personal with the glacier.

The Franz Josef and Fox glaciers are just a few highlights of the Westland National Park. You can walk in and get close to the mouth of the glacier or you can opt to land directly on one. We of course choose the latter. Our Glacier Helicopters pilot snakes his way through the craggy peaks and touches down on the Fox Glacier just as the sun is moving overhead making the ice look like jewels. The next day we

arrive at our final South Island stop, the Arthur’s Pass Wilderness Lodge, to take part in their evening “sheep demonstration.” After a delightful three-course meal of venison and New Zealand wine, it’s off to bed, as our bike trip comes to an end the next day in Christchurch.

As we ride back down across the gorgeous countryside, I try to take a moment to savor the vast expanse of unfettered beauty that engulfs me. If you have never been, I simply can’t urge you enough. As Redford told me after his own South Island adventure, “New Zealand is a country with a smile on its face.” I couldn’t think of a more apt description. Yes, it’s a long ways away, but there is something so unique and exuberant and enchanting about this place that you are destined to remember it for the rest of your life. I know Kenn and I will. And I am pretty sure The Sundance Kid will too. ✈

To read more about Tara’s incredible adventure in New Zealand, including bungee jumping and more dining recommendations, visit JetsetMag.com for the exclusive, extended article. She also frequently appears on Good Morning Arizona with her “At the Movies” celebrity segment and is the host of Harkins Theaters’ Behind the Screens (HarkinsTheaters.com/BehindTheScreens).

