



A Room with a View

BLANKET BAY LODGE

Nick Coates recently returned from an Audley research trip to New Zealand where he made some delightful discoveries.

Rarely had I been more excited, sat on an Air New Zealand flight about to touch down in Auckland airport. I knew exactly what to expect, I lived in New Zealand in my youth and have been back on several more occasions, always drawn back to a country I appear to be engaged in a life-long love affair with. Little did I know that this 'work' trip was about to reveal yet another facet of this remote island nation.

Now New Zealand is not a secret. The British public share my love affair with this South Pacific backwater, despite the fact that there is nowhere

on the planet further away, it remains one of our favourite destinations. Its easy to see why: the most dramatic and picturesque scenery you are ever likely to come across – which plays home to a diverse indigenous wildlife (no – its not just sheep!), the most wonderful and hospitable climate, a fascinating cultural mix – all united by genuine Kiwi hospitality - and then there's the wine! It appears that now I have to add another aspect to this already full to bursting list – the hotels.

Now, let's put this in context. When I say these are the best hotels I have ever

stayed in, this is not necessarily an empty boast. I have been lucky enough with Audley to have travelled extensively over the past seven years, checking out hotels is essentially what I do for a living. I have stayed in magnificent accommodation all over Asia and many other continents, much of it regarded as the best in the world. But what I saw in New Zealand quite simply took my breath away!

Let's take a snapshot – Queenstown, deep in the Alps on New Zealand's South Island. I have been many times before, so know what to expect – the

THE DAIRY GUESTHOUSE



prettiest of towns set against the shores of the beautiful Lake Wakatipu, framed by the outstanding backdrop of the Remarkables mountains. Put simply, there is no more picturesque town in the world. What I did not previously know was that this town played host to Blanket Bay Lodge and Eichardt's Private Hotel. Boy, was I missing out!

Blanket Bay is actually in Glenochy, a half hour drive out of town along the remote shores of the lake, deep in to the mountainous countryside. The location is simply stunning, which is what first takes your breath away – and continues to take you breath away whenever you look out from the lodge or your guest cottage. That's if you can drag yourself away from the sumptuous interiors, the fine gourmet dining and ever attentive (though discreet) service or simply get out of what was the most comfortable king size bed I have ever slept in.

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Blanket Bay Lodge was easily the best hotel I have ever stayed in...for one whole day. Then I checked in to Eichardt's for the next night. I was about to describe Eichardt's as being IN the centre of Queenstown, but in reflection I think would better describe it as being THE centre of Queenstown – on the shores of the lake, looking over the jetty, but still quiet and low key. With only five guest rooms, it embodies the definition of opulence, with each room being beyond superlatives. I promised I would never try describe it, quite simply because you can't. There is not enough room to go through every aspect of the oversize bathrooms, the full contents of the walk-in wardrobes, and that's before we get to the bedrooms and separate sitting rooms with panoramic views and real fires.

These are the best two hotels I have ever stayed in – I think I have made that clear now. But, of course, such luxury comes at a price and they are certainly not cheap. However, with Queenstown often serving as a grand finalé to a trip around New Zealand, many may want to push the boat out for a couple of nights, its worth every penny.

However, that's not to say that the alternative is a dull motel on the outskirts. During my stay I unearthed two wonderful hotels, both within walking distance of the town centre, which offer



VIEW FROM ROOM AT BROWNS BOUTIQUE HOTEL

considerable comfort, great character and genuine hospitality, both for around £35 a night. The Diary is a converted 'general stores', bursting with the atmosphere of a by-gone era. Just up the road is Browns Boutique Hotel, this time assimilating the Mediterranean charm of a Tuscan villa with wonderful views overlooking the town and the lake. Both properties deliver great value and will become part of your Queenstown experience.

Now take all of what I have said in



EICHARDT'S

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this article and multiply it across the rest of New Zealand – the same mix from opulent lodges, through boutique bed and breakfasts, to simple farmstays and homesteads is available in every centre. Between Peter, Patrick, Craig and myself I think we have covered every corner of New Zealand in the last six months, putting the brochure together. It is intended to be able to meet most budgets, accommodate all the various forms of transport that can take you around and, put simply, be able to put together touring itineraries that suit YOUR tastes and preferences. Its not all about accommodation – indeed, far from it – the accommodation tends to get lost in all the other things New Zealand has to offer. Having said that, go on...stay in Eichardt's or Blanket Bay for at least a night, you won't regret it!

Travel File

To discuss any aspect of travel to New Zealand, please call our New Zealand specialists on 01869 276 222.