



○ Lake Wanaka
● QUEENSTOWN



THE POWDER CLAUSE

When the sun is shining and the powder is perfect, there's nowhere better for snow thrills than laid-back Lake Wanaka

WORDS CARRIE MILLER



The sunlight is slow reaching Helwick Street in the morning. First it has to climb over the snow-capped mountains that rise with authority from the horizon of Lake Wanaka, often blurred with steam in the chilly dawn air.

The street looks straight down to the lake in Roys Bay. Wanaka's four thoroughfares (each running perpendicular to the bay) create a concentrated square of eateries, real estate offices, outdoor clothing and equipment shops just a street back from the lakefront. The residential areas, a mix of 1970s houses and multi-million dollar mansions, fan out on either side of Roys Bay, but not very far. Most of Wanaka is wide open land, a vast playground of water and rock.

My only company as I walk past the shops on Helwick Street with their locally quarried stone façades is a snowboarder crossing the street in colourful winter garb, board tucked under one arm, a cup of coffee in his other hand. This is my first winter season in Wanaka as a local. Like so many others, I came here as a visitor then found my way back to stay.

Wanaka's 6500 residents are a mix of big-city retirees, young families and sports junkies. The population swells with tourists and seasonal workers in winter and summer, and draws a deep breath in the quiet of spring and autumn. Wanaka has a small-town feel, but it's busy: all-year round, people are hiking, biking, boating – anything that will take them outdoors.

“Winter here turns into a completely different adventure >>



playground than other seasons,” says local Suze Kelly, the general manager of Adventure Consultants, a Wanaka-based (big) mountain guiding company. “We start looking forward to bad weather because it brings snow, and the town is simmering with excitement.”

As my first winter in Wanaka approached, I felt that excitement. The town started to hum with activity, early-bird passes were snatched up, skis were waxed and sharpened, and I heard the term “powder clause” for the first time.

“A lot of locals joke they have a powder clause in their contract, which means they can ski before work, come in a little late, stay a little late, or they take some time off in the middle of the day to do a few runs,” explains Hamish Acland, founder and director of Mons Royale, a Wanaka-based outdoor clothing company. “People make a choice about how they want to live and that’s the cool thing about Wanaka: it attracts people who want to get more out of life, rather than less. They’ve hacked the lifestyle, and I think that’s inspiring.”

Perfect peaks

Wanaka has three ski areas within 45 minutes of town: Cardrona, Treble Cone and Snow Farm. (Snow Farm often gets overlooked because it’s a cross-country skiing mountain, the only place in New Zealand where Nordic skiing is available.)

Cardrona, halfway between Wanaka and Queenstown in the Cardrona Valley, is known as a family mountain, with plenty of varied terrain to improve your skills. But don’t let its laid-back reputation fool you. Half of



Cardrona’s slopes are classified advanced/expert, and it has the biggest and best terrain park and pipe facilities in the southern hemisphere, playing host to the Audi Quattro Winter Games every second year.

Snow Farm is set high on the Pisa Range, almost directly across the valley from Cardrona, offering 55km of cross-country skiing and snow-shoeing trails, for something a little different to downhill. Along with fat-biking and dog-sledding (through Underdog New Zealand), Snow Farm also organises overnight hut stays: visitors can arrange to cross-country ski or snowshoe out to one of two back-country huts – Meadow Hut (4km) and Bob Lee Hut (8km); Snow Farm will transport the gear, so all visitors need to do is enjoy the journey.

Big-mountain

In the other direction from the Cardrona Valley, up the west side of the lake, is Wanaka’s other mountain, Treble Cone. TC (as it’s called in local-speak) is known as a skier’s mountain: it’s genuine big-mountain terrain, with seemingly endless off-piste skiing and 700m of vertical. Like Cardrona, the mountain is more than it seems, with plenty of groomed slopes to



LEFT TO RIGHT: A snow-coated Wanaka seen from above; find your thrills off the slopes with jet boating tours; the scenic alps as seen by the snow set; the historic Cardrona Hotel.

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keep beginners entertained and jaw-dropping views over the lake from its snowy summit.

Powder clauses aren't just for snow sports: in Wanaka, since there's rarely snow on the ground, people simply rug up and get outside, mountain biking the 750km of local tracks, ice-skating on Diamond Lake, walking up Mount Iron, and paddle-boarding or jet-boating on Lake Wanaka.

Après ski

At the end of the day, everyone returns to Wanaka. The town simmers with an energy that's contented rather than anticipatory. At the iconic Cardrona Hotel, people queue patiently for the famous mulled wine, watching kids toast marshmallows over the beer garden's outdoor fire. Others enjoy a quiet drink at Pembroke Wines and Spirits, or grab takeaways from Red Star Burger Bar and head down to the lake for dinner with an unbeatable view. Bistro Gentil and White House serve exquisite meals, while many head to Francesca's pizza trailer before walking across the road to Cinema Paradiso for a movie (and to rest tired legs).





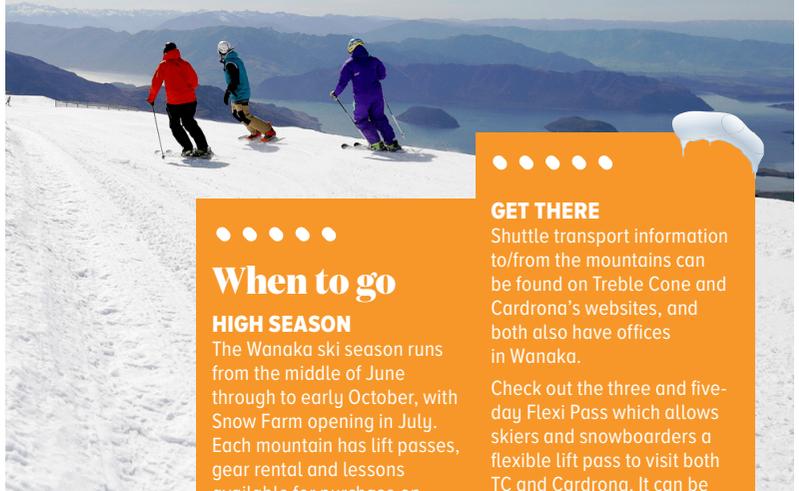
Winter warmth

Back on Helwick Street, I'm off to café and bar Kai Whakapai (rough translation: "putting love into whatever you make"). The communal tables are crowded and loud with laughter. Visitors and locals trade stories and drink cold craft beer, wrapped up warm in colourful jackets and knitted hats. "We don't manufacture the hype, it just happens," shrugs Kai's owner Roger North. "This is an actual 'reality café': turn off your phone, join one of the tables, and before you know it, you've made a friend for the next few days. Kai is a local hangout, but it's the first place locals invite visitors to share a table. Introductions sometimes start with a stiff handshake, but they usually end with a hug."

I love Wanaka for that: it made me feel like a local when I was a visitor; now that I'm a local, I'm still a giddy tourist. "Wanaka is like Hotel California: you can check out, but you can never leave," Roger laughs. "I came here in 2001 to paraglide and never left. Nearly everybody has incredible stories of the things they've done with their day. That's the usual. Wanaka attracts ordinary people who dream big. Almost everyone here was a visitor once. Some of us just stayed, is all." ✈️



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ABOVE: Treble Cone.
BELOW: The main drag leading down to Lake Wanaka.



When to go

HIGH SEASON

The Wanaka ski season runs from the middle of June through to early October, with Snow Farm opening in July. Each mountain has lift passes, gear rental and lessons available for purchase on their websites:

cardrona.com
treblecone.com
snowfarmnz.com

GEAR UP

For gear rental in town, Racers Edge has a large variety and offers multi-day discounts.

racersedge.co.nz

WISE UP

Accommodation, activities and restaurant information can be found on Lake Wanaka Tourism's website or stop by the Wanaka i-SITE Visitor Information Centre on Ardmore Street.

lakewanaka.co.nz



GET THERE

Shuttle transport information to/from the mountains can be found on Treble Cone and Cardrona's websites, and both also have offices in Wanaka.

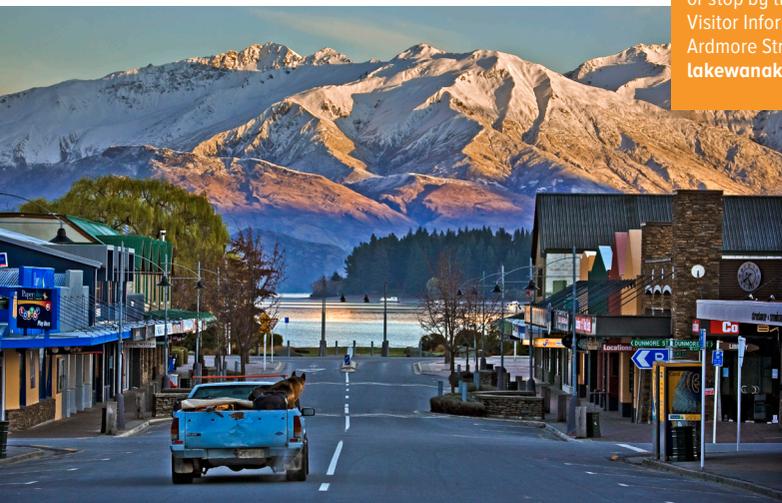
Check out the three and five-day Flexi Pass which allows skiers and snowboarders a flexible lift pass to visit both TC and Cardrona. It can be used on consecutive or non-consecutive days, and also offers additional discounts on activities in town.

lakewanaka.co.nz/new-zealand/Flexi-Pass

GO OFF-PISTE

For something special: check out Adventure Consultants' back-country ski courses and take your skiing skills to the next level in the stunning remote terrain around Wanaka.

adventureconsultants.com



Travel info

Jetstar has great low fares to Queenstown from Melbourne, Gold Coast, Sydney and Auckland.

To book, visit JETSTAR.COM




CARDRONA
FLEXI
PASS
TREBLE CONE

2 Ski Areas
1 Flexi Pass

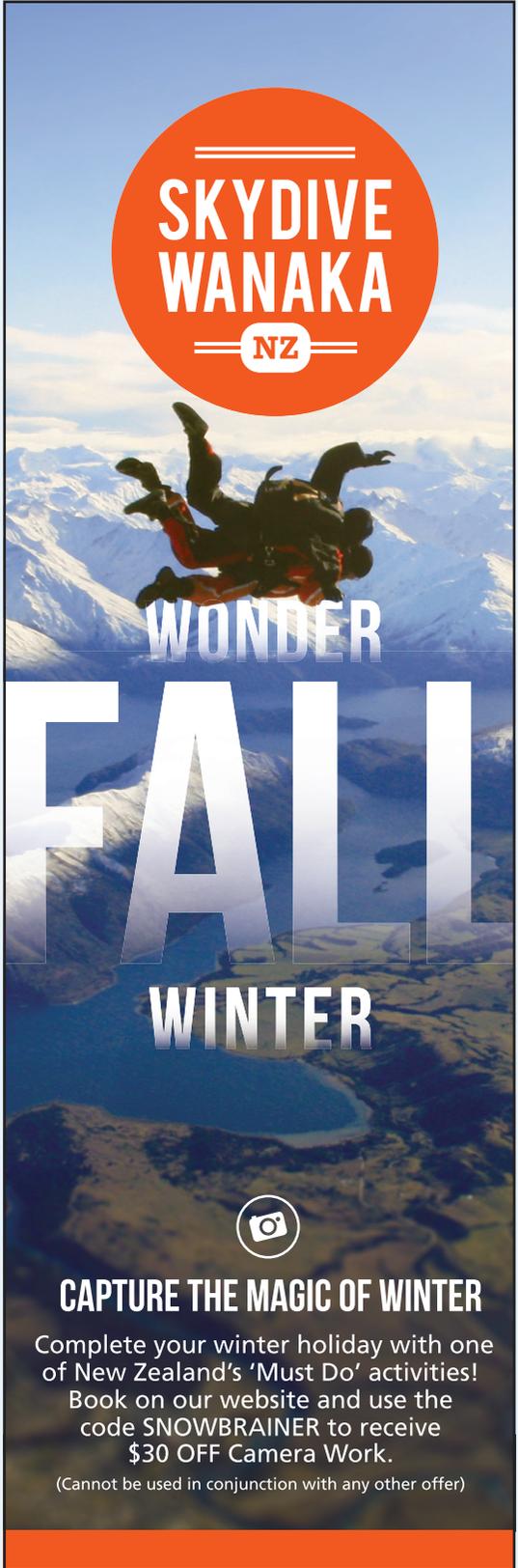


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www.flexipass.ski



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