

THE INSIDERS
WANAKA, NEW ZEALAND

JAMES STAPLEY
CHEF

GO: Wanaka, on New Zealand's South Island, offers such a wealth of natural beauty, activities and experiences that it's a wonder to me more people haven't packed up their bags and relocated to this lakeside town. From hiking up Mt Roy in the warm summer months to putting on your skis and seeking a winter thrill at one of the local ski resorts, there is something here for everyone; lakewanaka.co.nz.



EAT: You don't have to wander too far to find some of Wanaka's best eateries. Francesca's Italian Kitchen is one my favourite places to sit outside with a hand-rolled, wood-fired pizza and a nice cold Peroni. If you're looking for something a little fancier, head up to Bistro Gentil, where I head up the team, and indulge in a seven-course degustation while looking out over the lake and mountains beyond; fransitalian.co.nz; bistrogentil.co.nz.

DRINK: Begin your morning with a locally roasted cup of Venus coffee; a double shot will set you up nicely. Another local artisan creation well worth searching out is Ground Up Brewing; my favourite craft beer is the Kiwi Pale Ale. If you're skipping straight to cocktails, one of New Zealand's top bartenders will create you something spectacular at LaLa Lounge Bar, upstairs on Ardmore Street; venuscoffee.co.nz; lalaland.co.nz.

BUY: Apart from an unhealthy obsession with jackets, I tend to spend more time shopping for new and exciting food products. Florence's Foodstore and Cafe is the perfect place to brunch. While you're waiting for your eggs benedict have a wander around the store for interesting finds. Every Thursday afternoon there's a farmers' market in the centre of town and the homemade pastries at Pembroke Patisserie are fantastic. Get there early; it's popular with the locals; florencesfoodstore.co.nz; pembrokepatisserie.co.nz.

EXPLORE: Jump on an Eco Wanaka cruise and head out on the lake for the day. The island of Mou Waho has special charm in that there is another lake on the island itself. If you're lucky you might encounter a native flightless weka, while having high tea. There are plenty of spots to forage wild food; Wanaka Station Park has walnuts, figs and pears, a meal in itself; ecowanaka.co.nz.

James Stapley will host a food and wine weekend with Pegasus Bay Wines at The Farm at Cape Kidnappers near Hawkes Bay, on the North Island, on June 4; capekidnappers.com.

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BEST DEALS
Southern Ocean Lodge on Kangaroo Island has a package, until September 30, with four nights for the cost of three, plus \$50 spa credit and \$50 excursion voucher; southernoceanlodge.com.au.



GREEN PIECES
Squaw Valley-Alpine Meadows at North Lake Tahoe, California, is the first US ski resort to discontinue the sale of disposable plastic water bottles; there is also free parking for skiers and riders who car pool; squawalpine.com.

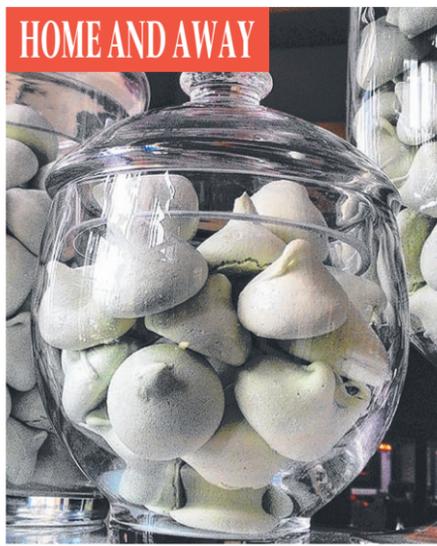


APT APP
In association with Intrepid Travel and G Adventures, Laika is an iOS aggregation app that features almost 2000 active tours and an image-based search engine; swipe pics for info on highlighted destinations; laika.co.



WEB WISE
Research by media commerce outfit Travelzoo reveals the US is the most desirable destination nominated by Australian travellers for 2016; also in the top five: New Zealand, Britain, Canada and Italy; travelzoo.com.

HOME AND AWAY



Many hotels brag about "residential" decor but few deliver the goods as well as Rosewood Beijing, a relative newcomer to the capital and the first property in China for US-born Rosewood Hotels & Resorts. The group's philosophy is "a sense of place", and attention has been paid to acknowledging the cultural heritage of the destination, including an extraordinary cargo of commissioned artwork from up-and-coming artists. Bronze and steel sculptures, handcrafted tiles, delicate scrolls and mixed-media installations can be found throughout the 283-room property, all precisely positioned as an unfolding narrative. It really does feel like being in an art collector's mansion, albeit one that soars 22 storeys over this frenetic megalopolis. And Melbourne design outfit BARstudio really has set the bar high with the feel and fittings across a mix of up-to-the-minute structural principles blended with classic touches. It feels cool but not aching trendy. There are six restaurants and lounges, three featuring Chinese food, but it's fun, too, to linger in the lounge adjacent to Bistrot B, the all-day diner. There are pomegranate and lychee martinis and big bottles of help-yourself sweets and treats, such as little pastel-coloured meringues (pictured). Guests gather here like kids in a lolly shop, feeling right at home. More: rosewoodhotels.com.

SUSAN KUROSAWA

T&I LOVES

Leaping lemurs, mischievous meerkats and a stately black rhino named Mpenzi are an entertaining introduction on a visit to Taronga Western Plains Zoo in central west NSW. But for sheer star power, nothing beats the Siamang apes. We hear them before we see them, their shrill territorial cries (audible up to 5km) amplified by their remarkable inflatable throat sacs. Today the family of three sings, swings and all but dances until eventually they slide across a rope bridge and disappear into gum trees. Located just outside Dubbo, this expansive zoo is home to 350 species plus a wildlife hospital and conservation programs. Activities include feeding sessions, keeper talks and special guests such as the Sydney Youth Orchestra slated for the Queen's Birthday long weekend (June 11-13). Take the car (there's parking at each enclosure), or hire a bike or zippy electric cart (arrive early to secure). Another star attraction is the on-site accommodation: choose cabins, tents or the luxury African-themed Zoofari Lodge overlooking fields where giraffe, eland and zebra roam. Book early for accommodation and events, and online for up to 20 per cent off family tickets. More: taronga.org.au.



SHARON FOWLER

IN THE HOME

THE APRON STUDIO CLINT MEN'S APRON, \$57

The Apron Studio specialises in quality, Australian-made cooking aprons with a range of patterns, florals and natural linens in muted shades. Culinary gents are now also catered for with a choice of styles. The Clint (pictured) is made from 100 per cent cotton indigo or black denim with a sturdy webbing waist tie and leather neck straps. More: theapronstudio.com.



ON THE ROAD

ELEVEN AUSTRALIA TRAVEL SIZE HAIR PRODUCTS, 50ML, \$5.95

There's every hair unguent imaginable in this simple-to-pack range, which also features hand and body washes and moisturising lotions with ingredients such as papaya plus jojoba and sweet almond oils. Dry locks and split ends? It's Hydrate Me Now Moisture Conditioner to the rescue. Thin and tired strands? Get a lift with I Want Body Volume shampoo and conditioner. More: elevenaustralia.com.



SUSAN KUROSAWA

Worth the hassles to book a Rottnest Island holiday

It took me years to organise a holiday to Western Australia's Rottnest Island. If you've ever tried to book a train journey through India, you'll be familiar with the system favoured by the Rottnest Island Authority.

A complex web of dates, number of people and the specific area in which you wish to stay is needed. After trying different combinations unsuccessfully, I'd throw my hands in the air in exasperation and book a house in Dunsborough. Years later I worked out there is a number you can call. These kind people are inside the booking matrix and can see what is available and when. To be fair the website has much improved recently, making it easier for first-time visitors to fathom.

It's often pointed out a holiday to Rottnest Island, 18km off the coast of Fremantle, would cost about the same as, if not more than, a trip to Bali or Phuket. But I would always choose Rottnest over a more exotic location. I love the unspoilt environment, the beauty of which never fails to astound. Every evening would see a quick roundup of the family, on to our bikes and a race down to the lighthouse to ceremoniously watch the

THE INCIDENTAL TOURIST

OLIVIA HOLMES

pink and orange sunset spread out above Pinkys Beach. There is an abundance of wildlife, the most famous and handsome being a tiny wallaby species, the quokka (pictured). Unkindly mistaken for rats by the early Dutch explorers, the island is home to a healthy population of quokkas, which are friendly and often papped by tourists with a selfie stick. There's even a #quokkaselfie on Instagram.

The absence of cars also makes the island so special. It's fun cycling in a pack with friends and family without the threat of traffic. I've even seen a child cycling with a walkie-talkie taped to his arm, presumably two-way to his parents. My kids, too young for riding on their own, have been happily towed along in a cart behind my bike, which is always a handy place to stack provisions for a few hours at the beach. But which beach to visit? There is the long white-sand Pinkys, with a crop of limestone on the eastern edge from which you can fish at dawn or dusk. My oldest child's favourite, The Basin,



so named for its shallow, smooth reef with a big hole in the middle, is perfect for swimming. There's Longreach and Georgie, both of which are used for mooring boats and can be alternated depending on wind direction. For snorkelling and diving, head south to Little Salmon Bay, another stunning white sandy beach with sparkling blue waters and coral reefs teeming with fish.

But now for a disclaimer. My father worked at Rottnest as a research scientist in the 1970s. Mum and Dad even had their honeymoon on the island. They took in an orphaned quokka and named her Flo. I now have to admit that my eldest daughter is named after a quokka.

My supposedly fail-proof plan for calling the booking line didn't cut it 18 months prior to Christmas this year, when bookings opened up. My smartphone shows I made 154 calls in less than an hour, without success.

So Yallingup it is this Christmas, with an eye on a less popular time of year for 2017. Just can't wait for another Rottnest fix.