

Kiwi town going to extremes

Adventures of a lifetime are everyday occurrences in Queenstown, writes **Mary Bolling**

FROM above, Queenstown looks like most picturesque snow-towns-on-a-lake. From the top of 700m high Bob's Peak, you'll be amazed as you gaze across at the stunning Remarkables.

As you run towards the edge of the peak and launch yourself off, the forest scenery below is breathtaking.

And during the eight-minute gentle glide down, you can do a lap over shining Lake Wakatipu, and look into the cute lodges, snug pubs and plentiful bars.

But as you, your tandem paraglider instructor and metres of colourful parachute land on the local primary-school oval, prep kids out for recess don't even bat an eyelid.

Queenstown is definitely not a normal town. Billed as the adventure capital of New Zealand, Queenstown is an all-year thrillseeker's destination. And for locals, adrenalin-chasing is part of life.

The birthplace of commercial bungee jumping at the A.J. Hackett Kawarau Bungy Centre, Queenstown also caters for snowsports, jet-boating, white-water rafting, skydiving, yachting, canyon swinging, quadbiking and 4WD safaris.

At the Bungy Centre, operations manager Graham Whorskey has done more than 1000 jumps having worked for more than 10 years at the site.

Only 30,000 of the annual 300,000 visitors to the centre ac-



Fun: quadcycles on the charge.

tually jump. Whorskey maintains that leaping off the 43m bridge without harm is a safer bet than snow in July.

Information in the 20-minute Secrets of Bungy tour backs up his story.

The tour gives wavering adventure-seekers an interactive explanation of why it's safe.

"We know it's safe, but once people see how the rope is made and how secure they are, it does change a lot of minds," he says.

Once they've paid their \$140 and got out on to the bridge, less than 1 per cent fail to jump, and most are smiling afterwards.

The Nomad Safaris adventure tour gives groups a chance to get on quad bikes and take on tough mountain terrain for three hours.

And when the hills are alive with screams of jet-boat passengers being thrown around on Lake Wakatipu, don't fret.

The driver may look maniacal as



Beautiful but common: high above Queenstown and Lake Wakatipu on a tandem paraglider.

he heads for the sand at top speed, but he assures us that crashes are rare. Comforting indeed.

If extreme action sounds extremely unappealing, the view of Queenstown is much more comfortable from any local bar or restaurant.

Staying at the new Crowne Plaza Hotel, the least intrepid traveller won't have too many worries heading downstairs to the decadent inhouse restaurant threesixty.

THE sophisticated but snug dining room has amazing views across the lake and cute floating fireplaces.

And if you take on the 15-course local and Eastern-inspired menu, you won't be able to leave.

Bluff oysters, lamb, cheese and the feijoa fruit are all delicious features of local menus.

For a serious food experience, The Spire features a 10-course degustation menu matched with local and international wines.

Get through it and you'll think you never want to eat again.

But a Central Otago winery tour may help get the stomach — and palate — back in order.

Though pinot noir makes names such as Peregrine, Gibbston Valley and Amisfield Cellars famous, the tour's hidden benefit is the talking.

Living in Queenstown means living for story-telling, and everywhere you go there's a new tale.

Want to know which local school teachers played orcs when the epic *Lord of the Rings* was filmed in the nearby mountains? Why US country singer Shania Twain fought the local council to buy land and build a house in the area? Or how local celebrity Sam Neill came to name 2004 produce from his Two Paddocks vineyard "Socialist Chardonnay"?

If you do one thing in Queenstown, listen to the stories. Even better, do it over a glass of pinot.

It may not be extreme, but you won't regret it.

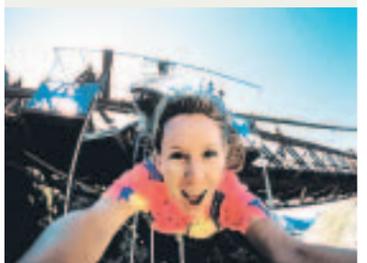
Mary Bolling visited Queenstown as a guest of Crowne Plaza Queenstown, courtesy of Air New Zealand.

THE DEAL

➔ **Getting there:** Air New Zealand has January fares from Melbourne to Queenstown for about \$540 plus taxes. www.airnewzealand.com.au

➔ **Staying:** Crowne Plaza's Summer Treat Packages start from \$NZ230 a night. Ph: 13 83 88 or visit www.crowneplaza.com.au/summer

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