



96 hours to live (it up!) in QUEENSTOWN

EVER NOTICED HOW AS OUR LIVES GET LONGER 'LIFE' GETS SHORTER?

Yes, all work and no play is the new Aussie way. So if you ski and time is short what do you do? Look for the ultimate short break, that's what — we sent **Rachael Oakes-Ashe** on a mission to Queenstown to find out just how much you can do with only 96 hours to live (it up) . . .

A four day ski trip to Queenstown is all about quality – impressive on and off piste terrain to schuss down, funky cocktails to slam down, rivers to jet boat down and luxe restaurants to chow down.

Work hard, play hard, live hard, that's today's modern life motto. As our lives get longer 'life' seems to get shorter. Enter the 'mini break', the return of the longer weekend. Chuck a sickie or take two days out of your annual leave, whatever it takes, four days away can make the world of difference in winter time when the snow is falling and you can hear the sound of helicopter blades across the Tasman.

Ninety six hours, that's all I had to complete a marathon of resort skiing, heli skiing, dining, wining and dancing in the adventure capital of New Zealand. I've never been one to do things by halves, it's all or nothing and I took to this challenge with vigour, throwing myself into the alpine resort's plethora of activities from the serene to the extreme.

The flight in to Queenstown's International airport is an adventure activity of its own, dodging the impressive Southern Alps that thrust themselves from the shores of Lake Wakatipu, making the tarmac more hallowed when one steps from the plane.

It never fails to impress, that first view of the snow laden Remarkables Range creating an amphitheatre of mountains with Queenstown at its base.

Day one and it's game on. Straight to the slopes of Coronet Peak for some early turns. Kiwi snow sits above the tree line so it's open bowls with two hundred and eighty hectares of steeps and deeps, mogul fields and groomers. »

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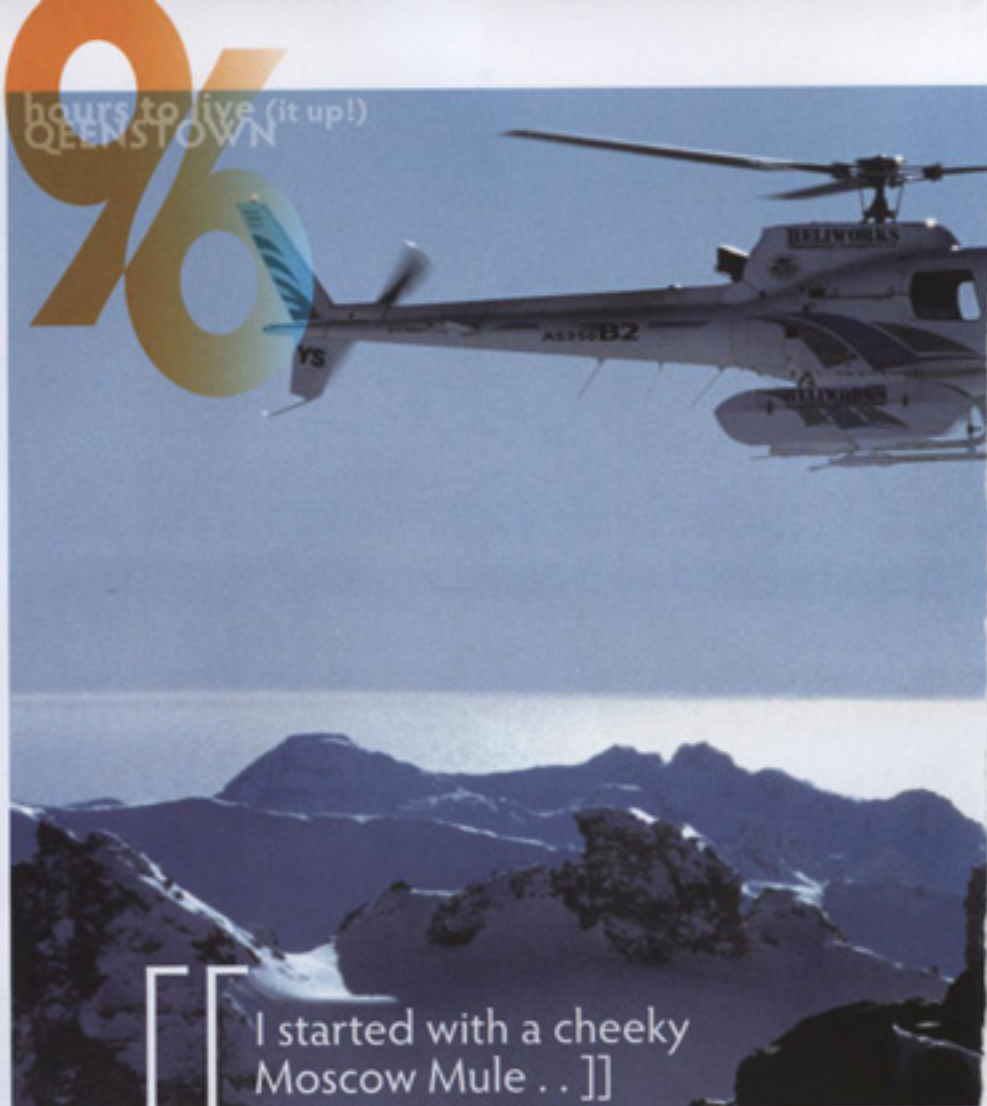
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I started with a cheeky
Moscow Mule . . .]]

This is where the US Ski Team come to train each year, attracted by an impressive snow making set up designed to keep the mountain white. We ski right through till the lifts close, invigorated by the fresh alpine air.

Queenstown has one hundred and twenty licensed establishments in one square kilometre, not that I'm counting. Those same establishments are filled with local legends who need only one name, like Scoop, the old school newshound who gets his best stories in the bars after dark.

In a country obsessed by hobbits, the back alley ways and cobbled laneways that connect a series of intimate drinking holes designed to bring people closer together are reminiscent of The Shire. It's within the town's swanky bars that the fun begins.

I started with a cheeky Moscow Mule fireside at the institution that is Bardeaux, the lane side deck offers prime people purging real estate. Frodo the bar manager may be challenged by the height of the bar, but what he lacks in stature he makes up for with a wicked way with a muddle as he pounds and pummels my limes with palm sugar. It's considered sacrilege in this town to not drink cocktails, it's a religion

followed by many. Easily converted, one led to another and the bar became my dance floor come midnight, thank god there wasn't a pole or things could have got ugly. A step across the lane to the world's smallest drinking institution, Minibar and the night was complete. Every town has its place where those in the know pick up coffee to go. That place in Queenstown is Joe's Garage, a retro inspired food and coffee hall that serves up bacon rolls and smoothies to bleary eyed folk in ski gear preparing for the day ahead.

It's here I start day two, I need some caffeine to get me down the legendary Alta Chutes at The Remarkables ski area. If you're prepared to hike ten minutes you can get to the good stuff, narrow steep rocky chutes leading down to the frozen Lake Alta. Take your pick from Escalator or Elevator, aptly named as you'll need one or the other after these thigh burners.

Just because I didn't get enough the first time I make the drive back to Coronet for night skiing. Hardly a soul around, fanging it out on the hill under clear star lit skies and the lights of Queenstown below. It's only a twenty minute drive back to town where it's early to bed after pizza at The Cow, another local

[[This is total rock star skiing ..]]



institution. Tomorrow is heli ski day and I want to look my best.

Heli skiing is the ultimate rush for powder fiends sniffing out the good stuff. Once you've experienced the rush of fresh tracks on mountains far from nowhere it's hard to step back on a groomed trail.

This is total rock star skiing and the boys from Southern Lakes Heli throw on a super show. Fresh snow has fallen overnight and the air is crisp and dry. There's something about the sound of helicopter rotors that just do it for me. That first ride in, lifting up over the peaks in the Harris Mountain Range, the first sighting of the endless powder bowls just begging for some action. It's magic.

The turns are fresh, powder mid calf and higher and the group of four skiers and our guide eat it up.

New Zealand takes on a whole new skiing aspect when the chopper gets involved. It's big mountain terrain for all standards of skier from intermediate rolling dunes of snow to steeper, longer, tighter faces of powder.

It simply doesn't get better than this on a bluebird day, chomping on gourmet cuisine laid out on a snow table after four runs and another four to go. »

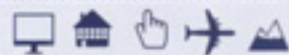


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hours to live (it up!)
QUEENSTOWN

Harry's Pool Bar is filled with others that share the glow. It's the watering hole for the heli guides who meet up to sup beers and compare notes at the end of the day. Thankfully it's close to Fergburger, another institution in Queenstown for its mammoth burgers served up from a hole in the wall. Perfect for hungry heli skiers looking to replace the lost calories.

Day four and it's time off the slopes. Pumped up by my Bond and Electra style antics on the heli slopes I have convinced myself to jump off a bridge.

It's rude not to bungy jump in Queenstown, the birthplace of AJ Hackett's tourism phenomenon. The jump is all over within seconds but thankfully the high lasts a lot longer.

Lunch is spent supping Amisfield's finest at their wine cellar restaurant in Lake Hayes, dining on the unique chef's plates of food to share before a spot of jet boat blasting through the Shotover River, head banging walls of rock inches from the side of the boat.

All good things must come to an end and the last night we dine at The Bunker, chomping on New Zealand's finest lamb in an intimate restaurant that seats only 16 with a rooftop terrace for apres dinner cocktails.

It's best to finish Queenstown in style. ✈

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