

New Zealand

The local goes international

Rachael Oakes-Ash checks out the new multimillion-dollar facilities at Coronet Peak.



They call it the locals' mountain. Coronet Peak is the mountain of choice for Queenstown's 17,000 population and not simply because it's a mere 20-minute drive from town. The next closest ski area is The Remarkables, which is, on a good day, 45 minutes up an untarred access road that has turned many a head of hair white.

But enough of driving. I'm here to ski and to check out the new \$NZ20 million (\$16.5 million) base lodge. It would appear the locals' mountain is going international and year-round.

"I challenge you to find a base lodge with all of these facilities in any other ski resort around the world," says James Coddington, the chief executive of NZSki. We leave that challenge alone as the resort has cost his

company a good slice of cash. And on top of that there's the \$NZ10 million that has been spent on upgrading the snowmaking system to a fully automated 205 guns to ensure snow whatever the conditions.

The facilities certainly are world standard and a considerable improvement on the lodge it replaced. The mammoth outdoor deck is now fully heated, meaning less ice, less chance of injury and more room to relax in the sun after a thigh-burning run. The floor-to-ceiling glass takes in the valley view of Lake Wakatipu and the impressive Southern Alps across the way – a view blocked by a wall in years gone by.

Local architect Michael Wyatt has split Queenstowners with his streamlined design. Some refer to the lodge as an airport terminal; others applaud Wyatt's innovative use of space to create a highly functional building.

Gone are the cramped ski school and lift-ticket areas, replaced by a large expanse of organised space directing visitors to a place to purchase lift tickets, a new ski school information desk, a state-of-the-art locker system and a staff area. Catering is carried out by one central kitchen that pumps out cuisine for four different dining outlets, from a serve-yourself bistro to a cafe and bar.

With its 1200-seat dining options, the company is hoping for the conference market. Did we mention the new creche and child-care facilities? It would appear Coronet Peak has all bases covered.



The plan is to foolproof this tourist destination and secure consistent revenue. Clearly, the snow making is a big part of that and the conference facilities for summer activities another. But we all know weather plays a large factor no matter how much you mitigate that risk. The owners of NZSki experienced this on the opening weekend when rain and wind washed away the early snow covers. Thankfully, the season has since delivered the goods and Coronet Peak has experienced record numbers.

Aussie skiers see Queenstown as a winter playground but it is a year-round resort; the town actually hits its peak in summer.

Thanks to the tourist and real-estate boom of the past decade, the town is now home to a plethora of property moguls and tourism millionaires. Coronet Peak has catered for the town's inner clique with an invitation-only members' club known as The Peak.

For \$NZ7000, 30 locals and their guests enjoy access to the members-only lounge, with its complimentary drinks, food and ski locker. It's a lot of money to ensure you don't breathe the same air as the masses.

Now Coronet Peak is complete, there is talk of new terrain and new lifts at NZSki's The Remarkables ski field across the valley.

Either way, there's still time for spring skiing; Coronet Peak closes on October 5, The Remarkables on October 12 and Mount Hutt near Christchurch on October 19 – although they might remain open until October 27 if the snow base is higher than three metres.

The writer was a guest of NZSki Marketing Network.

> TRIP NOTES

■ **Getting there** Air New Zealand fly direct from Sydney to Queenstown. See www.airnewzealand.com.au

■ **Staying there** Big spenders with style will love Azur, luxury retreat, individual villas for \$NZ1000 (\$825) per night, see www.azur.co.nz.

Design aficionados head to uber cool The Spire Hotel, \$NZ895 per night, see www.thespirehotels.com.

■ **Further information** see www.nzski.com.