



GRAND CENTRAL

There are countless ways to enjoy Central Otago's wine, produce and stunning natural beauty. New Zealand may seem a world away, but this tour of just some of its highlights should have you planning a trip there in no time.

WORDS **SIMONE MADDEN-GREY**

WHEN IT COMES to travel in New Zealand, the biggest challenge is trying to decide which beautiful place to visit. Fortunately, the effortless beauty of Central Otago makes that decision easy. This South Island spot is a visual smorgasbord of delights that takes your breath away. Magnificent mountains hewn from millennia of volcanic activity soar above glistening lakes as glacial rivers twist and turn. Whether you're getting around by foot or on wheels, seeking adrenaline highs or lounging lakeside, Central Otago has it all. And for further delights, the region's wine and food will have you planning your next visit before you leave.

A short drive east of Queenstown, past picture-perfect Lake Hayes, is the Gibbston Valley and Wet Jacket Wines cellar door, The Woolshed. Offering a glimpse of farming life from a bygone era, the historic building began life as a stone croft in the mid-1800s with shearing quarters and the quintessential corrugated iron cladding added in the 1950s. Walk past a gourmet deli and the old shearing quarters to find an elegant tasting room in the stacked stone of its legacy and a roaring fire in winter. In summer, the Weekend Sessions feature a rolling schedule of food trucks, so come prepared with a picnic blanket. 🧺

This page (clockwise): Stay among the vines at Kinross, and sample wines from five local producers at the Kinross tasting room; Quartz Reef vineyards and cellar door.



Further along the Gibbston Highway is one of the newest arrivals to the valley. If relaxing in a hot tub after a day of tasting is for you, surrounded by vines and awe-inspiring mountains, book a stay in one of the studio cottages at Kinross. The tasting room, bistro and Wine Garden, complete with outdoor fire and woodfired pizza oven, are the shortest of walks away, making it the perfect base while exploring the area. The tasting room offers some of the finest wines in the region, such as Hawkshead, Valli, Coal Pit, Wild Irishman and Kinross. Expect to find live music every Sunday in the Wine Garden. And if you are planning to visit in May, check out the program for the Kinross Harvest Celebration. A few doors down, the new Mt Rosa cellar door encapsulates the estate’s sheep station heritage. Visitors to the woolshed-inspired building are greeted by two large driftwood sculptures of sheep and large oxidised iron spheres incorporating the colours of the surrounding landscape. In winter, the roaring fire and mulled wine produced here are a winning combination. In summer, grab a platter and a spot outside at the foothills of the magnificent Nevis Bluff. Drive through the Kawarau Gorge over to Bannockburn and stop in at Quartz Reef in Cromwell. Housed in an industrial site, the cellar door offers a glimpse of its next-door winery activities. Winemaker



THE NATURAL BEAUTY OF CENTRAL OTAGO COMMANDS ATTENTION, SO IF YOU WANT TO HAND OVER THE REINS TO SOMEONE ELSE, BOOK A SPOT ON THE HOP ON, HOP OFF BUS FOR A DAY OF WINE TASTING.

Rudi Bauer, the New Zealand Winegrowers Fellow 2020, is widely acknowledged as one of the region’s pioneers in organic and biodynamic wine production. The bubbles will become your house sparkling, the whites are suited to all tastes and the pinot noir – well, you’ll just have to visit to discover just how delicious it is. In Bannockburn at Carrick, several projects herald a new chapter for this winery, including a pizza trailer service offered to those cycling the new Lake Dunstan trail. For a more relaxed approach, book in to the restaurant for a meal or, better yet, stay in one of the two new accommodations among the vines. The Towan and Arthur’s houses are suitable for up to 12 and six guests respectively, with each named to reflect the history of the region and estate. Both are within walking distance of the winery, restaurant and cycle trail. A tasting will take you through the organically produced wines. Winemaker Rosie Menzies has added her delicious signature

This page (clockwise): Take a break from cycling the Lake Dunstan Trail at Carrick; Broken Heart Gin distillery; the outlook at Manata Estate; soak up the views at Carrick.



to the portfolio with a series of natural wines that embody the word ambrosial. Next up, head to Te Kano Estate. A short drive through the vines will take you to the recently completed cellar door, cantilevered over the Kawarau river. Its sleek industrial exterior blends into the surrounding landscape with a stylish interior that showcases views as remarkable as the wine. The natural beauty of Central Otago commands attention, so if you want to hand over the reins to someone else, book a spot on the Hop On, Hop Off bus for a day of wine tasting. If you’re after a more personalised tour, get in touch with Alpine Valley Tours for a bespoke itinerary or their progressive lunch and dinner tours. If two wheels is more your style, there are several bike trails that take you through the wineries of Gibbston Valley, with a range of packages on offer that include tastings, dining, bike hire and shuttle services from Queenstown. The newest addition to the Central Otago cycle network is the Lake Dunstan cycle trail along the Cromwell Gorge. It is spectacular, with parts of the 55km trail from Cromwell to Clyde hanging off the sides of the gorge out over the dazzling turquoise waters below. There is even a floating burger bar and coffee spot along the way. If you’re cycling in summer, be sure to take sufficient hydration, start early to avoid



the heat and wear plenty of sunscreen – the sun can be brutal here. There are toilets along the way and a stop at Carrick’s pizza trailer will be a welcome boost of energy. There are also plenty of events happening across the region. In March, the RIPE food and wine festival will take place after a sell-out inaugural event, the New Zealand Golf Open is on at Millbrook Resort, and the Gibbston Valley Wines Summer Concert is also slated. Weekend markets are worth a wander, held in both Remarkables and Arrowtown until April. Festivities abound at distillery Broken Heart Gin, which is celebrating its 10th anniversary and recently opened its Gin Garden in Arthur’s Point. With an outdoor space for summer and fire in winter, this spot is not far from Queenstown and even closer to the base of Coronet Peak. Lunch, dinner and grazing menus are available, as are tastings through a selection of the 12 local gins. Also keep an eye out for the first release in the Pyramid Valley Botanical Collection from Manata Estate in Lowburn. Named for the Māori creation story of Lake Wakatipu, Manata Estate is a new property in the Pyramid Valley portfolio; the first release is expected from the 2021 vintage. The ideal spot to find it, along with an excellent selection of local and international wines, is The Winery, which has shops in both Queenstown and Arrowtown. ●