

|| THE LAST PARADISE?

WORDS: GABI STEINDL

PHOTOS: IAN TRAFFORD, SIMON RASMUSSEN,
LUCA SOULUS, GABI STEINDL

NEW ZEALAND STORY: **PART 1**



KS TRAVEL RATING: LONG HAUL CRIME FREE NATURAL ADVENTURE ZONE

Going to New Zealand is a trip that just about every kitesurfer dreams of. Rolling green hills covered in sheep, endless stretches of beach with good, juicy waves and vast inland lakes... But once you're there, where do you start? Rent a camper and just keep moving, writes Gabi Steindl in part one of our definitive guide to New Zealand.

Lake Wakatipu
Credit: Luka Soulos



*"I GOT HOOKED UP WITH THE CHRISTCHURCH GANG
AND WITHIN A FEW HOURS OF LANDING I WAS PART
OF A TWO DAY MISSION DOWN THE EAST COAST
WITH DECENT SWELL AND WIND RUNNING, SWEET!"*



Lake Wanaka
Credit: Simon Rasmussen

NZ's stunning coastline, world-famous breaks and 'outdoor-adrenalin-spirit' of the locals boosted it right to the top of my 'wish-trip-list' this year. In late March my adventure started. I was going to be there sooner, but I got held up in Western Australia by a roll of decent swells that kept hitting. Never mind, summer can be quite flat in NZ anyway and according to the Kiwis, autumn should bring 'more of everything', meaning more wind and swell, and also rain. I had been working for several weeks on proposals to campervan companies and succeeded in arranging the sweetest van for myself and all my toys through www.paradise.co.nz; I got a sick mobile home boasting a small hot shower and a super comfy bed – and all that within my rather restricted 'pro-budget', cool! Apart from the vehicle, I didn't prepare much for the trip, I usually try to go with the flow and am not too keen on planning routes, itineraries or stuff like that... and looking back, that was just the right decision. Even if I'd tried to organize a year in advance, I doubt I could have set up a truly once-in-a-lifetime-adventure like the one that I've just had.

CHRISTCHURCH AREA

New Zealand as you know consists of two main islands, the North and the South Island, split from each other by the 23km Cook straight. My campervan-joyride took me close to 11,000km, pretty much all around both islands. The country itself is not that big, however, NZ's road network is so 'special' that travelling from A to B can take its time and distance on the odometer. Aotearoa

to give it the original Maori name (translates to "Land of the Long White Cloud") has only 4 million people and a lot of room for scenery. Space enough for a chain of Alps 550 kilometres long, a crater lake the size of a small country, four active volcanoes, fourteen ice-carved fjords, around 40,000 square kilometres of native forest and a lifetime supply of perfect beaches. Massive tectonic forces have given this country the most extraordinary geography and more than a third of NZ's land area is contained within the boundaries of a park or reserve. What's best about these protected areas, they aren't just to be admired from afar; they're places to hike, kayak, abseil, raft, sail, ski, climb and of course surf and kitesurf!

It all started in Christchurch, where after a super strenuous travel, the customs officers at the airport decided to pull me out and to check every single piece of equipment for sand, grass, seeds and other unwanted bits. It took ages and more with my 50kg of excess luggage, but then I finally breathed Kiwi air for the first time. Initially I planned on fifty days out there, in the end it became nearly three months – and it was perhaps THE best time ever in my kiting career.

Once free of customs, the joyride hit off with immediate effect. Adrian Roper, shaper of Underground boards kindly picked me up and took me to the campervan rental depot where I was super stoked to take over the keys to my mobile house. He also hooked me up with the Christchurch gang and within a few hours I found myself part of a two day mission down the East coast with decent swell and wind was forecast,

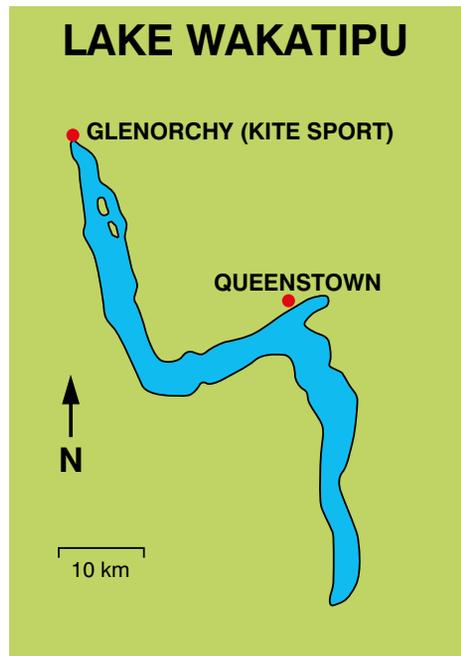
sweet! We were heading to Kakanui, where we spent two fantastic days kitesurfing different spots, camping, chillin' Kiwi style, mmmm what a perfect start to my trip! I still remember like yesterday how I felt pumping up my kite on 'All Day Bay' and entering the roaring Pacific there for the first time. It was a while since I'd been in the Pacific Ocean. Like every Ocean it has its very distinct characteristics, smell, sound... With the sun vanishing behind lush green hills, it was dreamlike going down the line in cranking Pacific waves in golden light.

After the weekend the boys went back to Christchurch and I continued my journey down South. Just before we said 'Good Bye', the Christchurch gang marked some spots map spots and contact phone numbers all around NZ. "Yeah, give those guys a call when u pass through' they'd love to help you out!" Sweet .

THE SOUTH AND QUEENSTOWN

The next week I explored Coastal Otago and the Southland and spent a few days in Dunedin surfing. We cruised along the Catlins Coast, inhaled THE best oysters at Riverton and checked several spots, however we were unlucky with the weather – but it hardly mattered. We continued to the Milford Sound and I truly enjoyed playing 'tourist' for once. Usually I'm totally focused on the beach, wind and waves, however, those stunning surroundings with incredibly strong natural energy had me laying my head down that evening almost as stoked and happy as if I'd had a great day on the water.

II THE LAST PARADISE?



Next up Queenstown, the “Adventure Capital of the World” hunkering on the banks of Lake Wakatipu. On the southeastern shore of the Lake, the Remarkables, a mountain range and ski slope lives up to its name by rising sharply and creating an impressive backdrop. When I arrived it was already late. And the guy at the petrol station suggested I drive to the DOC (Department of Conservation) campsite at ‘12 mile delta’ which took a while to find as it was so dark along the lake. I finally made it and parked up right at the waterline of the lake. WOW! When I woke up, I could not believe the truly mind-blowing scenery... the sun was just up and bright blue skies greeted me. I sat there in awe, meditating into yet again a brand-new, highly exciting day in NZ. Whilst I sat there, I noticed the wind picking up. Yeah, white caps came up fairly quickly, there was not a single cloud in the sky and I got sooo itchy to get out there! For a short moment, I almost panicked; I so wanted to get out onto the lake but had no clue where to go as frustratingly I had no knowledge of the launch areas and so on. Then I remembered my map that the Chistchurch gang had drawn on, and YES, they’d given me a contact in Queenstown. One phone call later, I was invited over to my new mate Luca’s house and shortly after that, I was cruising with Luca and his missus along Lake Wakatipu to Glenorchy at the northern end of the lake, hotly anticipating some flat water action in this stunning environment. We got sunshine all day long and about 35 knots, heh-heh, sick! I will never forget the Glenorchy Rock’n’Roll on the water, yet again a perfect day in the last paradise, full of joy, incredible new acquaintances, so much fun, true Kiwi-vibes all around. That evening I slept ‘oh-so-well’, totally happy and overwhelmed, I closed my stoked, tired eyes at ‘12 Mile Delta’ and drifted away into the sweetest dreams....I spent a few days in Queenstown, hanging out with the locals, one of

the local kites even took me paragliding; insane bird’s eye view, I loved it!

WANAKA AND MOUNT COOK

Next stop was Wanaka, where I met up with one of NZ’s most famous adrenaline-junkies, Simon Rasmussen. He’s a well known B.A.S.E. jumper and one of the first kitesurfers in NZ. We shared an unforgettable session at Makarora, at the northern end of Lake Wanaka, NZ’s fourth largest lake.

There’s something about kitesurfing on the southern alpine lakes that cannot be put into words or even captured in a picture. The true highlight of my lake-kiting was still to come, though, when I met up with local top-photographer Ian Trafford (check out www.iantraffordphotos.com) who I already had worked with successfully on my W.A. road-trip last year (published in this mag, some of you might still remember it). Ian’s plan was to kite and shoot at Lake Pukaki, close to NZ’s highest mountain ‘Mount Cook’ (or Aoraki, meaning Cloud Piercer) as the Maori’s call it.

When I arrived at Lake Pukaki, I had to pinch myself in order to make sure that I was not dreaming, the colour of the Lake was simply too unreal. The scenery of snow capped Mount Cook in the background yet again took my breath away...pinch, pinch! Lake Pukaki is one of the coldest lakes in NZ, its wind stats aren’t too great, and when we arrived it was completely still, thus Ian and me decided to give it 24 hours and looked for a nice spot along the lake to park up and inhale the overwhelming energy of this very special place. The next morning the lake was still shining like a glassy mirror. We had another few hours ‘til or allotted 24 hours we up, but we could not believe our luck when we suddenly noticed whitecaps out in the middle of the lake. I hurriedly pumped up my 7m Rebel and off I went for a ride of a lifetime!

Marc Jacobs, secret spot!
Credit: Gabi Steindle www.kitegabi.com





“WHEN I WOKE UP, I COULD NOT BELIEVE THE TRULY MIND-BLOWING SCENERY... THE SUN WAS JUST UP AND BRIGHT BLUE SKIES GREETED ME. I SAT THERE IN AWE, MEDITATING INTO ANOTHER BRAND NEW NZ DAY”

II THE LAST PARADISE?

*“DAMN, I TRULY LIVED LIKE A QUEEN:
WORLD CLASS SURF JUST OUTSIDE MY
CAMPER’S DOORSTEP, CRAYFISH AS A
PROTEIN SOURCE TO FUEL UP ENERGY
RESERVES, SNOW ON THE MOUNTAINS,
LOVELY PEOPLE IN THE WATER, AND
BONFIRES ON THE BEACH”*



Lake Wakatipu
Credit: Luka Soulos



GREYMOUTH AND KAIKOURA

Initially I only wanted to spend about two weeks on the South Island then head up to the North Island and its famed waves. But in true Kiwi style, I went with the flow and was way past that schedule so I sped the trip up a bit. Ian and I still checked out the ‘wild, wild’ West coast of the South Island, which has great potential for sick wave-riding, however, we were unlucky with the conditions here. In Kaikoura we got stuck again for a few days, not due to kitesurfing but world class surf, the incredible marine life here (whales and dolphins) as well as the suuuper yummie and cheap crayfish. I found this street-stall that had ‘2nd class crays’ (not that they were old, no way, fresh as, just with small holes in the shell of the tail and thus were sold for NZ\$10!).

Damn, I truly lived like a Queen, world class surf just outside my camper’s doorstep, crayfish as protein source to fuel up energy reserves, snow on the mountains, lovely people in the water, bonfire on the beach, celebrating the rise of the full moon on the horizon, swimming with dolphins...wow, Kaikoura yet again engraved so many unforgettable experiences and it was hard to leave.

When to go

Escaping the Northern Hemi winter is always nice, but banging swells and winds are rarer in the summer. April through to October will bring most swell, but also temperatures and rain comparable to the UK winter.

What to bring

The weather is all over the place down on the South Island, so as well as the shorts and t-shirt that you may be able to break out once during the winter, pack waterproof and warm clothing and a decent jacket. Take your 5/3 wetty and boots too.

Unexpected risks

Great Whites around the South, seals, drinking / pool tournaments with Maoris, and for those that want to venture away from the beaches, tricky access and exit from boulder strewn points. Running out of petrol in remote areas is a possibility, so plan your journeys carefully.

Lake Pukaki, Mount Cook
Credit: Ian Trafford



II THE LAST PARADISE?



THE NORTH OF THE SOUTH

Last stop on the South island was Marahau, gateway to the world famous Abel Tasman National Park at the northern end of the South Island and Ian Trafford's home town. Marahau works best with northerly winds, has sand bars, transparent water and is just awesome! Unfortunately the wind Gods were busy elsewhere, no worries though, as the sun-Gods were with us and I had great fun kayaking and exploring the park by foot before getting onto the ferry over to the North Island.

Just before jumping onto the ferry in Picton, I caught up with my North International teammate, ex-triple World Champ Cindy Mosey in Nelson. It was so good to seeing her after many years, excelling in her new 'job': being the World's best mum for her and her husband Andy's 18 month old little Baxter. My Kiwi adventure continued on Aotearoa's North Island. Photos, stories as well as all travel facts and info for your trip to the last paradise will be published in the next issue of Kitesurf – stay tuned and feel free to email me via my website with any questions or comments you might have, I'd love to hear from you!

Yours Gabi www.kitegabi.com

Handy Hints

Getting there | It's never been cheap getting to NZ, but we found return flights from Heathrow to Christchurch with Qantas, flying next March for about a grand. Another option would be to take a few more weeks and just book a round-the-world ticket and put NZ in your itinerary.

Getting in | UK citizens, free six month tourist Visa on entry. Most other countries get a three month Visa. Passport must be valid for one month after departure

Getting around | Take your Lonely Planet guide as it's uncannily accurate for NZ. If you haven't rented your wheels in advance, or can't drive, the transport network is efficient with good air, bus and train links. Hitchhiking and cycling is a good option, less so in winter down South. Pick up a cheap used car at backpackers' in Christchurch from a traveller who is leaving the country. Driving is easy, stress free and traffic is light. The AA do good maps.

Where to stay | If you don't manage to make friends the moment you land, NZ has the best hostel network on Earth. A list of the top 100 is published each year, though there are many more options that aren't listed. Book in advance if travelling in peak season, as the top places will fill up very fast. www.bbh.co.nz for a good, graded, internet list.

Eating and drinking | Four Square supermarkets will supply all your cooking needs, and small 'milk bars' are perfect for quick snacks. Naturally the wine is very good, and each region has its own special beer so drink gallons of the stuff.

Exchange rate | NZ still works out a bit cheaper day by day than the UK. There's about NZ\$2.3 to £1. Petrol works out about £0.70 a litre.

