

PLANNER:

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NEW ZEALAND: GOOD ON YA!

Astonishing food, wine & scenery make this a new “It” destination for incentive programs



Waiheke Island

Sherrie Chelini, VP, incentives division with Par Avion Meetings & Incentives, created a travel reward program in New Zealand for 20 couples in April. She booked the **Sofitel Queenstown** in the South Island and **Hilton Auckland** in the North, where groups can rest after the **Air New Zealand** flight.

“It’s a long flight, but Air New Zealand was great to work with,” says Chelini. “As they say there, ‘Good on ya!’”

The modern 165-room Hilton crowns Auckland’s waterfront with airy indoor/outdoor spaces and panoramic views of the bay. Next door, there are numerous restaurants and boat charters that cater to groups. The group had lunch at the nearby Harbourside Seafood Grill. Then everyone gathered for an opening dinner at the Hilton while watching the sun set over the water.

Chelini says, “The Hilton had a great catering menu, and the hotel itself is beautiful. You really feel in touch with the city, the boats, the water and nature.”

The next day the group took the ferry over to Waiheke for olive and wine tasting before lunch at Mudbrick.

“Waiheke is kind of like heaven, it’s just so quaint and beautiful,” Chelini says. “Mudbrick Winery is outstanding and the food was gourmet, just fabulous. It’s great to have the city, the water and the winery so close. It’s just so different. Lunch was almost dreamlike and it really wowed the group.”

Later that night, couples teamed up to visit with a local family for a home-cooked meal. Having time to talk with the locals over a great dinner is the ultimate insider experience.

“Celeste Jones at **IDNZ DMC** helped me plan the dinner with the lady who started the program, and the group was totally

5 WAYS TO TRAVEL LIKE A KIWI

- Sip awesome local wine where it’s produced.
- Say “Good on ya” to compliment someone.
- Ride a jetboat in Queenstown. Extra points for bungy.
- Race America’s Cup sailboats in Auckland Harbour
- “Farm-to-fork” is confusing here. What else is there?

taken by surprise,” says Chelini. “It’s like being in touch with the true culture, I mean, it was just phenomenal. Celeste lights up about it because everyone tells her it was their best night ever.”

QUEENSTOWN LUXURY & ADVENTURE

A 1-hour flight south of Auckland, the small town of Queenstown is the adventure sports capital of New Zealand, surrounded by towering mountain ranges and small vineyards.

The signature experience for groups is screaming across shallow rivers aboard Dart River Safaris’ jetboats. You’re surrounded on both sides by the same staggering scenery where *The Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings* were filmed.

“It’s such a unique experience when you’re in an inch of water and flying around, but it’s a thrilling New Zealand experience,” says Chelini. “It’s very lush and green and dramatic. The group was just taken back by everything.”

One “truly exquisite” dinner took place at the 12-acre **Stoneridge Estate**, which works a lot with corporate planners for upscale events celebrating the local food and wine. Chelini says the group really appreciated that they could sample wine from the local area, just a 15-minute drive from Queenstown.

The group booked the 82-room Sofitel Queenstown, because it’s the most luxurious group-friendly hotel in the region, located in the heart of the city just a block back from the water.

“It was in a great place, there were excellent restaurants, a burger bar, a chocolate place and a bike shop,” says Chelini. “They took great care of our guests, and I love the fact that we could walk or bike around Queenstown.”

And what was the final feedback from the group?

“At the end, one of the people said that New Zealand was never on their bucket list, but it’s been an experience of a lifetime,” explains Chelini. “I think that really summed it up. It needs to be on everyone’s bucket list.”

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