



off shore
NEW ZEALAND

Milford Sound Utopia Beckons

Like sugar-dusted brownies, there's something comfortingly delicious about the snow-tipped, swarthy peaks of the Southern Alps. Slow down, whispers Lake Wakatipu seductively, caressing the edges of a flawlessly laid-out alpine resort, Queenstown. Slow down, echoes the heart and the mind.

words // Punita Malhotra



The jewel of New Zealand's secluded South Island is the kick-off point for something contrastingly serene. It's the gateway to heaven for seekers of communion with unspoilt nature. Revealing detox destination Milford Sound, a fiord 12-km long and up to 320 metres deep, which Rudyard Kipling branded as the 'eighth wonder of the world'. Lovingly encased in 1.2 million hectares of a protected wilderness wonderland lies the Fiordland National Park.

NATURE FOR COMPANY
Travelling from Queenstown through lush rural farmland speckled with fluffy lambs, along magnificent cloud-ringed mountain ranges aptly named Remarkables, one arrives at the picturesque lakeside town of Te Anau for what has been immortalised in literature as 'the finest walk in the world'— a 52-kilometre, four-day long hike through Fiordland. Unwinding in the company of wildflowers, golden grasslands, suspension bridges, enchanting red beech

forests, magical boardwalks, pristine lakes, sky-scraping peaks, vast valley views, misty waterfalls, secluded rain-forests and even a daunting mountain pass.

For the hiking-averse, the choice is no less divine. The 4-hour long drive to Milford Sound is a glorious expedition in itself and the drama of the raw landscape intensifies with every mile. Every pitstop is an exercise in breathlessness. From the 2-km wide green Eglinton Valley to the glassy waters of the Mirror Lake,



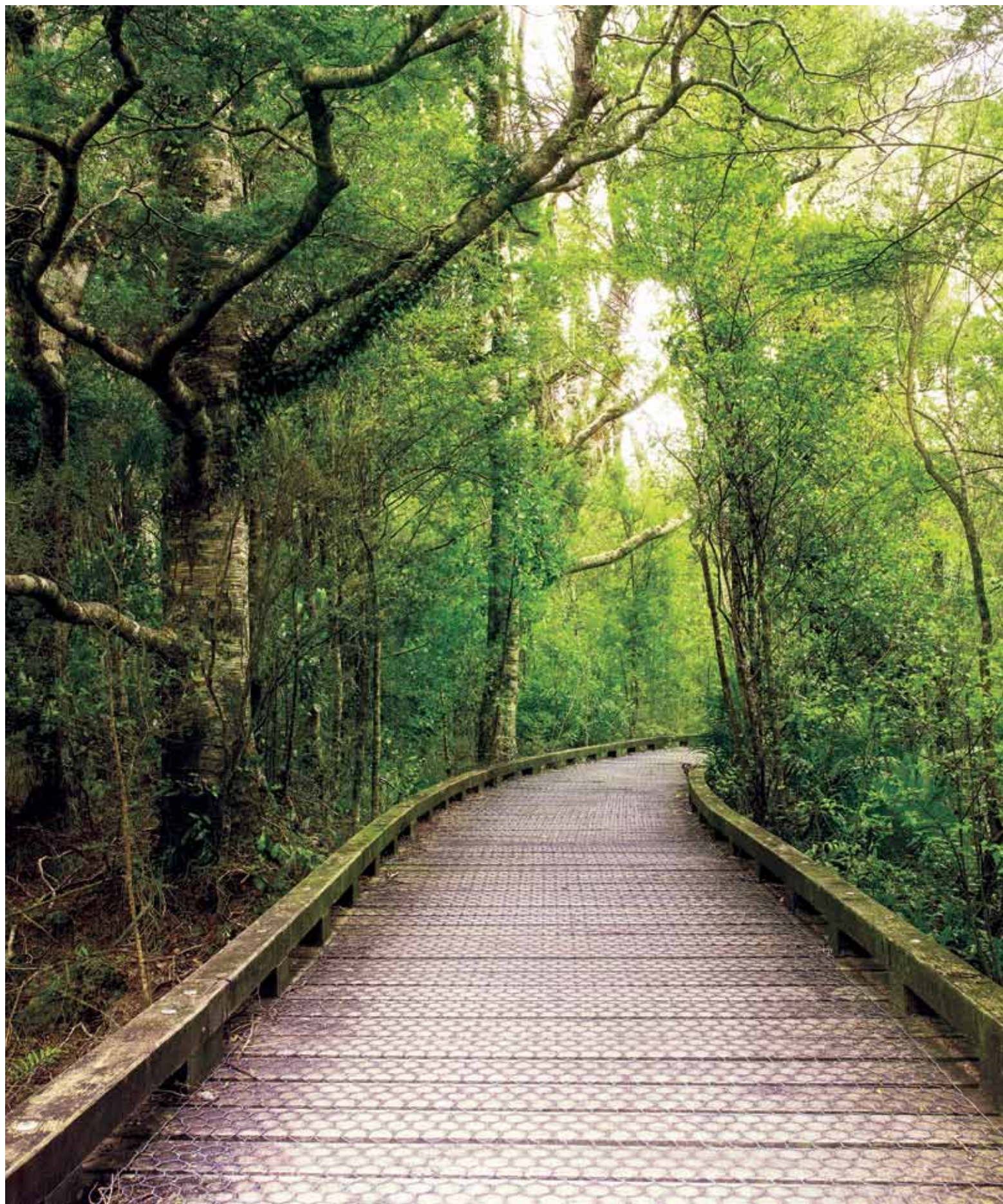
ESSENTIALS

COUNTRY
New Zealand

LANGUAGES
English, NZ Sign
Language and Māori

CURRENCY
New Zealand
Dollar

TEMPERATURE
17°C (max), 12°C (min)





An easy 400-metre nature trail through the dense rainforest, scattered with footbridges and waterfalls leads to the Chasm, a series of rough rocks and potholes shaped over thousands of years.

reflecting the upside down Earl Mountains, to the Monkey Creek, a glacier-fed spring, where one can drink pristine glacial water straight from the source...nature is at its purest. The world's only alpine parrots tease camera-snapping tourists and peck at parked vehicles. Mother Nature keeps eyes hooked unblinkingly with its lofty soaring mountains, free-flowing glistening streams and abundant tumbling waterfalls.

The loveliest halt comes after crossing the 1.2-km long Homer Tunnel through solid granite rock. An easy 400-metre nature trail through the dense rainforest, scattered with footbridges and waterfalls leads to the Chasm, a series of rough rocks and potholes shaped over thousands of years by the turbulent Cleddau River rushing into a dark, narrow gorge. The brief, but deep dive into unhurried tranquility is supremely refreshing.

SOUNDLESS IN THE SOUND

The quiet grandeur of the landscape from Milford Sound Wharf is overwhelming. In this wettest inhabited place in New Zealand, receiving an average of 6 metres of rainfall or 182 wet days a year, dry skies are never guaranteed. Jaw-

dropping spectacles, on the other hand, are a given. All 365 days.

Drifting silently over the inky black surface, hemmed in by towering peaks blanketed in native rainforest, it is easy to dissolve into insignificance. Visualising the imposing rock walls plunging hundreds of metres beneath the Tasman Sea into the floor of the fiord adds to the hypnotic enchantment of the scene. Life goals, deadlines, challenges... everything fades into oblivion. All that remains is fur seals sunning themselves on rocks. And an elusive shadow of a dolphin, rare crested penguins or a shark, perhaps? The disconnect is complete. And the connect is all-embracing. This quietude, here and now. No past, no future.

An enveloping calm fills the soul at Mitre Peak standing sentinel overhead at 1683m from the fiord floor. The shroud of timelessness is palpable under the 1 million year-old Mount Pembroke (2000m). Complementing the symphony of this continuing stillness are the hundreds of waterfalls rushing softly down to kiss the fiord. Basking in the 'liquid sunshine' of the 161m high Bowen Falls (source of



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Airlines and interline
partners Emirates
and Malaysian
Airlines.



hydro-electricity and water supply for all of Milford Sound), one inevitably bows down to the omnipotence of nature. Stirling Falls, the second tallest waterfall (155m), draping a steep cliff face offers a rejuvenating 'glacial facial' free of charge. And the showcase of the quadruplets, the Four Sisters, is a dream come true. Simple pleasures served right. Distractions of the scale and

league that push every phone and WiFi into a pit of redundancy.

The sight of the deep blue infinity of the Tasman Sea where it enters Milford Sound near Dale Point and Anita Bay is profoundly uplifting. Added to the knowledge that the rocks making up Milford Sound and the surrounding Fiordland region were once part of the mega-continent of Gondwanaland.

Reshaped by erosion and tectonic plate movement, ice-age glaciers carved out a sheer, narrow valley (fiord). As they retreated, they left behind huge deposits of rock and debris, the Tasman Sea filled the gap, and a 'sound' was born. The 'sill' at the mouth of Milford Sound, left the fiord floor just 27m deep (compared to over 300m deep inside and out). A natural barrier to keep the 'sound' waters calm.



Eons ago, generations of native Māori wandered the region to gather precious jade-coloured greenstone and food, referring to it as Piopiotahi or Place of the Singing Thrush. It stayed a secret spot till the early 1800s, when European explorers realised that the bay was actually a gateway to the fiord. Millennia later, fascination for the most famous of the 14 fiords continues, unbridled. Everyday, nature stages a brand new, unrehearsed show, leaving indelible images stamped on the pages of memories of millions of gaping visitors. A famous quote of Pico Iyer comes to mind – “We travel, initially, to lose ourselves; and we travel, next to find ourselves.” Milford Sound is one such remote, secluded, unadulterated utopia, where self-discoveries are destined to happen. ✨

Local INSIGHTS

MILFORD SOUND CRUISE

An enchanting way to explore the Fiord in all its glory is by going on a cruise. Tour companies give two options: daylight and overnight cruises. They take visitors around the fiord, exploring the topography, touching all the nooks and corners while floating through the inky black waters that reflect the surrounding towering peaks.



UNDERWATER OBSERVATORY

Milford Sound is home to New Zealand's only underwater observatory, basically a glass encased room floating about 10metres below water. Here you can see the colourful sea life and multiple species of corals without getting wet. Advisable to book in advance.