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SPORTS



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 The Natural History Museum opens a new exhibit rare selections from its millions of fossils. **F2**



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What's the Deal? We scope out the week's best travel bargains for you. **F5**

CHAT We answer reader questions Monday at 2 p.m. at live.washingtonpost.com.

ESCAPES

New toques in town
 Outside chefs are moving in and spicing up the Philadelphia food scene. **F6**



HER COUNTRY HOME

Beyond hee-haw and honky-tonk, the creator of 'Nashville' shows off the town she loves

BY ANDREA SACHS



THEIR TOWN
 Nashville

At Peter Nappi Studio in Nashville, Callie Khouri walked into the former meat-packing plant and hooked a hard left to the wall of hand-crafted Italian leather shoes. From beneath a curtain of false eyelashes, she scanned the styles on the shelves, then pointed out the ones now residing in her closet.

"I have those and those," she said, directing my attention to a pair of roughed-up laced boots and Oxfords, to which she added, "I wear them without the shoelaces, like that." As a visual aid, the store had displayed a model of the shoes sans laces, the strips of leather open like a mouth paused mid-sentence.

Peter Nappi, named after a 19th-century Italian immigrant shoemaker, doesn't sell cowboy boots, despite its hometown address in Music City. And what a coinci-



Music city: Callie Khouri, the woman behind ABC's hit show "Nashville," at the Ryman Auditorium, former home of the Grand Ole Opry radio show. Top, Rachael Hester performs at Robert's Western World.

dence: The creator and executive producer of the TV show "Nashville," which plumbs the country music scene, doesn't wear the trademark footwear, either.

"I went through that phase," she said. "I'm over it."

Callie's boots of choice — 15-year-old Ann Demeulemeesters — shatter the stereotype of bee-law Nashville, as does her preferred form of chew (toothpicks, not tobacco or straw). She also steers her show, which debuted on ABC last fall and returned to its Wednesday night spot on Jan. 9, away from the clichéd dirt track — although some of the characters do sport sequins and cowboy boots. Therefore, it was of little surprise that on a recent tour of Nashville, with Callie calling the shots, the Academy-Award-winning screenwriter ("Thelma and Louise") flipped Music City over, revealing its rare B side.

"I just, *love*, Nashville. There's something about this place," she said. "The music, well, it's not just that. This town

NASHVILLE CONTINUED ON F3

The thrilling art of Queenstown

A couch potato's adventures in the adrenaline capital of New Zealand

BY MICHAEL KAMINER
 Special to The Washington Post

The jetboat shot through Lake Wakatipu at 55 miles an hour; the pilot stoically bob-dodging around trees and rocks. Every few minutes, he'd rotate an index finger — a signal that we were about to whirl around at whiplash speed. My stomach lurched with every spin as I clutched the safety bar and clenched my teeth.

I was in Queenstown, the adventure capital of New Zealand. Visitors schlep to this South Island town to zipline, kayak, skydive, bungee and bike through scenery as otherworldly as it looks in such movies as "The Hobbit," which was filmed here.

For a traveler like me, whose idea of thrill-seeking involves a new book and a double espresso, this is not an asset. So it was painfully ironic that a planning mix-up dropped me here for five days in November, at the expense of time in bigger cities that I'd wanted to explore.

I tried a few "when-in-Rome" activities that challenged gravity, vertigo from the twirling jetboat finally made me swear to keep both feet on the ground. That's a challenging prospect in a place whose entire economy seems engineered to serve adrenaline junkies. But then the manager at my hotel, who listened patiently as I vented about my lack of options, made an intriguing suggestion.

An hour later, Alice Blackley pulled up in a black Volkswagen passenger van. "Art Adventures," the name of her year-old business, was splashed on the side; the company logo was emblazoned on her crisp blue blazer. And we embarked on a day-long tour of local galleries and studios, the first stop of which couldn't have surprised me more if it had been an audience with an actual hobbit.

QUEENSTOWN CONTINUED ON F5



Display of creativity: Milford Galleries features contempo

NASHVILLE CONTINUED ON F3

Tapping into New Zealand's creative side



State of the art: Sue Wademan, second from left, shown with gallerist Alice Blackley, second from right, is New Zealand's leading textile artist.

QUEENSTOWN FROM FI

A happening scene
A short drive took us to a small, bright gallery just outside downtown Queenstown, where pop-goth canvases by Damien Hirst — yes, he of megawatt art-world fame — shared the walls with clover-shaped abstractions by Max Gimblett, a legendary Kiwi artist now based in New York.

Nadene Milne Gallery, as I learned, is one of Hirst's global representatives. And the exhibit, tantalizingly titled "The Beauty and Brutality of Fact," provided my first glimpse of a Queenstown that rarely makes the radar of adventure-craving tourists — a happening, heterogeneous art scene that's uniquely New Zealand in its blend of hip and homey.

"There's a misconception that Queenstown is all about the adrenaline-seeking thrill," Blackley told me as we bounced along to our next destination, the tidy gallery of Tim Wilson, whose hyper-realistic fantasy landscapes got snapped up by "The Hobbit" cast members during their long shoot here. "People are surprised how art is evolving here. There's a lot of wealth in the region and a lot of generous patronage. And there are some very big private art collections here of a reputable international standard."

Wilson, whose paintings can fetch six figures, agreed. "Art and culture does seem sometimes to take a back seat while the outdoor-thrill-seeker scenario is pushed, sometimes to the extreme," he told me by e-mail after my visit. "But I've lived in big cities around the world, and Queenstown's incredibly nurturing. The landscape's unlike anywhere on earth, the light's unique and the atmosphere transcendent."

Wilson's intricate, painstaking work reflects those characteristics. With an Old Masters-inspired technique that he developed himself, he applies as many as 30 layers of glazes so that canvases seem to glow with the ambient light of their surroundings. The effect is entrancing. And although Wilson's no Hirst, his Web site depicts him hanging out with Jeff Koons and Robert R. Kennedy Jr. at a New York gallery; the latter enlisted him to donate work for a charity auction that also included Chuck Close, Roy Lichtenstein and Jasper Johns.

A cultural awakening

Back on Earl Street in Queenstown's tourist-clogged downtown core, Blackley led me to the city's highest Milford Galleries, where we were the only visitors at a just-opened exhibit by one of New Zealand's

great living artists. Dick Frizzell is a one-time commercial illustrator who mashes pop art, comics and traditional painting into unrecognizable work that bridges tradition and sedition. The exhibit I saw, titled "Grand Central," included deceptively stark landscapes, portraits of rural shops and views of abandoned storefronts. Considering the weight of the show, I was surprised to see almost no publicity for it during my five nights in Queenstown.

Same with a dazzling show around the corner. Blackley took me to Kapa, a quirky gallery above a souvenir shop where Frizzell's son Ollie, an emerging star himself, was having his own opening. The space had just premiered "Recent History," an exhibit of prints by Weston Frizzell, the

living here. So there's an increasing audience for a more sophisticated cultural conversation," Milne told me. It's what enables her to maintain a "serious dealer gallery" in what she calls "a provincial setting."

Blackley, an artist herself who last month complemented Art Adventures with a small gallery to showcase local talent, was even more emphatic. Queenstown "was empty culturally a decade ago," she said.

Rabbit holes and textiles

The next stop on our tour took us to a tin-roofed but a few miles outside downtown Queenstown, where Spike Wademan was adding the final touches to one of his photorealistic marine paintings. A former commercial illustrator based in London and Sydney, Wademan settled in Queenstown 18 years ago for "a lifestyle change." His fanatically detailed oil portraits of battleships and warplanes have earned him fans such as "The Hobbit" director Peter Jackson, an obsessive collector of World War I memorabilia. Wademan receives visitors by appointment only; it's worth booking Blackley's tour just to gain access to his memento-packed rabbit hole of a studio.

A workshop belonging to Wademan's wife was just as fascinating. Sue Wademan is New Zealand's leading textile artist; in a converted schoolhouse near downtown Queenstown, she maintains a fabric-strewn studio and art academy.

The day of our visit, she interrupted a class of rap students to share new work with us. I watched, mesmerized, as she arranged a seemingly random handful of ribbons into a graceful, painterly landscape.

"The landscape is why Spike and I chose Queenstown," said Sue, whose work can command as much as \$20,000. "And it's very much become the art hub of the area. We have a lot of part-time residents who appreciate the kind of work that Spike and I do. That kind of population gave us an audience and helped us grow."

Visitors, she told me, discover her work "by accident." Then "they fall in love and say, 'I'd like one of those.'"

I wasn't able to take home one of Sue Wademan's beautiful pieces. But thanks to Blackley, I did leave Queenstown with a new perspective on a destination I'd pretty much written off.

And for me, that's the best kind of travel adventure you can have.

travel@washpost.com

Kaminer is a writer based in New York.

DETAILS

GETTING THERE

Air: New Zealand provides connecting flights from Washington Dulles to Queenstown.

WHERE TO STAY

The Dairy
Broom and Iole Streets
011-64-3-442-5164
www.thedairy.co.nz

Perched above Queenstown's main streets, this 13-room luxury property feels like a plush but not country manor. Tea on the deck is a highlight. Rooms from \$390.

Crowne Plaza Queenstown

Beach Street
888-233-0368
crowneplaza.com

Efficiently run and well priced, boasting an unbeatable lakeside location with views of the Remarkables mountain range. Rooms from \$120.

WHERE TO EAT

Saffron

18 Buckingham St.
011-64-3-442-0131
saffronrestaurant.co.nz

Entrees \$30-\$58.

Post Office Cafe

41 Ballarat St.
011-64-3-442-8238
postofficecafe.co.nz

Bright, laid-back cafe that's a cool spot for strong coffee (\$2.50) and well-prepared breakfast items such as eggs on toast with smoked salmon (\$12).

Mediterranean Market

53 Robins Rd.
011-64-3-442-4161
mediterranean.co.nz

Smart and well-priced local hangout with a terrific selection of prepared foods and a comfy cafe area. Small plates \$4-\$13.

WHAT TO DO

Art Adventures

011-64-3-442-3678
www.artadventures.co.nz

Alice Blackley offers half-day (\$125) and full-day (\$295) tours of artists' studios and galleries. The company also arranges outdoor sketching workshops for all skill levels with local instructors (from \$260).

GreenBrown Gallery

2 Lower Stewart St.
011-64-3-442-3678
greenbrowngallery.co.nz

Blackley's new gallery showcases Queenstown-area artists.

Kapa Design Gallery

29 Rees St.
011-64-3-442-4041
kapa.co.nz

Milford Galleries

9A Earl St.
011-64-3-442-6896
www.milfordgalleries.co.nz

Nadene Milne Gallery

16 Buckingham St., Arrowtown
011-64-3-442-0467
nadenemilnegallery.com

INFORMATION

www.queenstownnz.co.nz

—MK

WHAT'S THE DEAL

This week's best travel deals around the globe.

LAND

● With Geringer Glob couples save \$600 on **Luxury Adventure and India Journey**. Book by and pay from \$8,825 per double for travel thru Oct. 31 or from \$9,390 Oct. The land-only trip visit destinations as Delhi, Ranthambore, Jaipur and includes luxury accommodations, entr all transport services, 1 tours, some meals, cull activities and more. In 877-255-7438, www.geringerglobtravel.com

● Save 20 percent on tickets between Washi Union Station and sele destinations, including Pittsburgh, Atlanta an Travel through April 18 blackout dates of Feb. 1 March 28, March 29 at Fares vary. For exampl coach seat from Washi Atlanta is \$180 round including taxes, a savi Three-day advance pu required. Book by Feb. 800-872-7245, www.an.com.

● Vail Cascade Resort diamond sk-in/sk-out percent off two-night between Feb. 24 and A Rates start at \$119 per 10 percent tax and \$27 fee. For example, in la two nights in a resort: \$425, including taxes; fee. Book by Jan. 31; u code vesprng1. The nondiscounted rate st a night. Info: 800-282- www.vailcasade.com.

SEA

● Holland America is savings of up to 50 pe free or reduced fares and fourth guests in a 4: free or reduced p Cruise hotel stays. Th Save promotion applt sailings around the glary. For example, the Canada & New Enzlar cruise, which sails fro Quebec City on May 4, \$3,422 per person for people sharing a delu suite; the third and fo passengers pay only \$ each, for a total savin The cruise also includ night for two at the Fa Chateau Frontenac in (worth \$600) and tra from Quebec City to M valued at \$138. Info: 8 www.hollandamerica.com

● Save up to \$2,000 or \$1,600 per person t March departures of Dalmatian Coast & Cr tour. On the March 31 couples pay from \$5,9 (single pay \$8,940) and singles pi \$4,990 (vs. \$5,990). O two cruises pay from \$9,540 and singles pi \$4,090 (vs. \$5,690). T cruise departs from A ends in Zagreb, Croati visits such as Co Saranda, Albania; Kot Montenegro; and Spli Price includes over the Athens and three nig 10-night cruise; 37 mi wine at dinner; 13 tor and more. Book by F Code: TAAA 689. Inf 800-221-2610, www.g

AIR

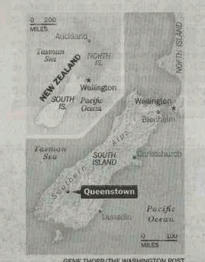
● Aer Lingus is offeri for spring travel to De Shannon. With taxes, connecting round-trip Washington Dulles (d York's JFK) start at \$: April 1-30; fare on oth starts at about \$914. I June 15 start at \$744; 1 fare on other airlines about \$1,034. For che fly Monday through T some dates are sold on www.aerlingus.com b

PACKAGE

● Porter Escapes is o package deals to citi throughout eastern C example, a three-nigh Toronto over Preside weekend (Feb. 15-18); per person double, in round-trip airfare on Airlines from Washing three nights at the De hotel in downtown U taxes. Priced separate package would cost al per person double. In 855-372-1100, www.porteresapes.co

— Carol Sottiti

Submit travel deals to w@washpost.com. Prices we press time Thursday after sell out and availability is 1 Some restrictions may ap



"high-performance art partnership" Frizzell runs with Auckland scenester Mike Weston. Their work consisted of a series of metaphorical middle fingers. One print mocked a classic logo that Frizzell's father had created for a New Zealand grocery chain; another savagely satirized an Auckland civic-pride campaign. It wasn't what I expected to see in a city whose year-round population tops out at around 9,000.

And until recently, it wasn't what you'd find here, according to gallerist Nadene Milne, whose roster includes such stars as photographer Fiona Pardington and abstractionist Stephen Bambury. "Over the past decade, the Queenstown demographic has changed considerably, with many internationals and New Zealanders who have lived internationally now



Out of the ordinary: Artist Lewis Gardiner's work is displayed in the foreground at the quirky Kapa Design Gallery.