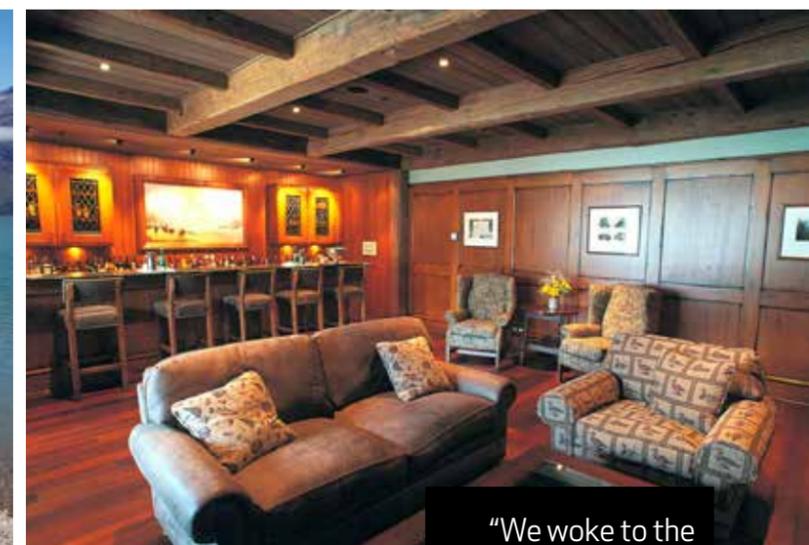




THE

# bliss central

If you can tear your eyes away from the scenery, you'll notice Blanket Bay Lodge offers luxury just as arresting.



"We woke to the **magical** sight of the early morning sun stealing along the tops of the **mountains**."



No matter which way you approach Blanket Bay Lodge in Glenorchy, Central Otago, you'll be impressed. If you drive up from Queenstown, you enter the 4000ha property through a pair of rustic farm gates and follow a meandering driveway down the hill past grazing sheep; in such a bucolic setting it comes as something of a surprise to discover a grand luxury lodge ensconced at the edge of Lake Wakatipu, its gabled roof silhouetted against the mountains in the late afternoon sun.

Arrive from the opposite direction by jetboat and you appreciate just how spectacular the location is – the Dart River, which snakes its way up through the rural district of Paradise (*The Lord of the Rings* territory), is just a minute away, and two of New Zealand's national parks, Mt Aspiring and Fiordland, are right on the doorstep. You alight at the private jetty, and walk up through beautifully landscaped grounds, the roar of the retreating jetboat soon replaced by a lovely silence that emphasises the absolute splendour of the surroundings.

But for the biggest wow factor, if you have the chance, arrive by helicopter: as you skim towards the lodge over the deep blue lake, you're treated to a bird's-eye view of the entire property, which is nothing short of magnificent. The chopper

lands neatly on the helipad on the front lawn, and you can be inside sipping a gin and tonic within minutes.

The Blanket Bay story began back in 1972 when then-Levi Strauss & Co president Tom Tusher and his wife, Pauline, bought the remote Glenorchy property on a whim, thinking they would do something with it "one day". As access to the region improved, their original plans for a lakeside hut, where Tom could indulge his love of fishing, morphed into ideas for a retirement home they could enjoy with family, and eventually grew to become the boutique luxury lodge it is today.

Named after the bay it occupies – early runholders brought their sheep to be shorn here under a rudimentary shelter comprising a frame of saplings with blankets stretched over it – the lodge is an excellent showcase of New Zealand craftsmanship, from its schist and timber exterior to its beautiful, charmingly rustic interior.

Designed by US architect Jim McLaughlin, and built by local contractor Ewan Edgerton, Blanket Bay offers luxury accommodation in five guest rooms and eight suites within the main lodge, as well as three stand-alone chalets.

The suites are large, lavishly appointed, and immensely comfortable, with generously proportioned bathrooms and

ensuite dressing rooms. And views. Ours was at the northern end of the building, a stone's throw from the aforementioned jetty, with the Humboldt mountains forming a craggy backdrop. Both days we woke to the magical sight of the early morning sun stealing along the tops of the mountains, colouring the snow with a soft pink blush that slowly turned gold, and then milky white as the sun rose in the sky, and another day began.

The guest rooms link to the main entertaining areas via long hallways with highly polished wooden floors scattered with *kilim* rugs. At the heart of the lodge is the main lounge, known as the Great Room; it's an apt descriptor for what is a vast, high-ceilinged space furnished with plush couches and antique tables piled with magazines and books, a massive stone fireplace, and windows that frame the view. A pair of chandeliers crafted from deer antlers collected from the Tushers' neighbouring property, Wyuna Station, add to the "hunting-shooting-fishing lodge" style of the place, as do the mounted deer heads and stuffed Paradise ducks on the wall.

At the far end of the Great Room is the Den, a cosy bar where guests gather in the evening for drinks in front of a

Clockwise from left: A lodge suite; the Humboldt mountains provide a stunning backdrop; the lodge on its sprawling grounds; the Den; the jetty, one of three ways to arrive at Blanket Bay Lodge.

The Dart River, which feeds into Lake Wakatipu at Glenorchy, winds through some of the most gorgeous alpine scenery in New Zealand, and a Dart River Jetboat Wilderness Safari is the best way to see it. It starts with a minibus tour that takes you up the Dart River Valley into Mt Aspiring National Park, followed



by a guided walk through ancient beech forest, and finishes with an exhilarating jetboat ride back down the braided, glacier-fed river to base at Glenorchy. Blanket Bay guests are delivered back to the jetty at the lodge. The trick is to disembark gracefully. [dartriver.co.nz](http://dartriver.co.nz)

To experience that bird's-eye view of Blanket Bay, we thoroughly recommend a scenic flight with Glacier Southern Lakes Helicopters, which has been operating in Queenstown since the 80s, and really knows its stuff. The company offers a wide range of options for sightseeing in the area, including an unforgettable scenic flight to Milford Sound, with a beach landing on the wild West Coast and a snow landing on the Humbolt mountains included. The chopper picks up and returns to Blanket Bay. You won't stop raving about it for a week. [glaciersouthernlakes.co.nz](http://glaciersouthernlakes.co.nz)



roaring log fire in winter, before adjourning for dinner in the Lake View Dining Room. Dinner here is a highlight; we had heard great things about executive chef Corey Hume and his team who have won many an award for excellence, so we went with high expectations, and were not disappointed.

Downstairs we found Blanket Bay's games room, which is equipped with all the paraphernalia needed for the classic winter-afternoon games of darts, snooker, chess, checkers, noughts and crosses and so on. We could easily have dallied here for several hours, but I had a prior appointment with the legendary Yumi at the lodge's lovely spa where I happily succumbed to 90 minutes of massage and reflexology in a spa treatment entitled Ultimate Bliss. It was.

Adjacent to the games room is a wine cellar and wine cave, where meals can be served for small private parties.

The lodge's interior was designed by the owners, with

assistance from Auckland decorator Jane Low. A lot of the furniture is antique, and the collection is enhanced with handsome reproduction pieces custom-made for Blanket Bay by timber craftsman Sefton Powrie. The artworks are from the Tushers' private collection or from Arrowtown artists Peter Beadle and Thomas Brown, while the bronze sculptures in and around the lodge are the work of Pauline Tusher.

The overall effect is one of timeless elegance, but what gives Blanket Bay its point of difference is the extensive use of demolition timber, both inside and out. All rooms feature large rustic-looking fireplace surrounds, door lintels and overhead beams built of recycled timber from demolished railway bridges, wharves and woolsheds around New Zealand and Australia. The timber was prepared for use in the construction of the building by Glenorchy local Carl Livingston, who water-blasted and wire-brushed the old beams to remove 100 years of grime and dirt, getting them to a uniform colour. The lodge's magnificent polished floors are heart matai sourced from local wool stores and the Whakatu Freezing Works in Napier, while the overhead rafters in the Great Room came from the dismantled Brisbane Wharf.

Blanket Bay has been a mainstay in New Zealand's impressive portfolio of privately owned and operated luxury lodges since it opened in 1998, and has consistently won international accolades for its overall excellence. It frequently stars in *Condé Nast Traveler's* "world's best" lists, which is a reflection of the commitment to excellence of its general manager, Philip Jenkins, who has worked with the Tushers since the inception of the building project. Jenkins and his team at Blanket Bay combine seemingly effortless professionalism in all areas of hospitality with a level of personal service that makes guests feel truly special. It felt a lot like Paradise.

STORY **JENNY FARRELL**

**Contact** [blanketbay.com](http://blanketbay.com)

**Air New Zealand offers direct flights to Queenstown from Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch with connections available from across the domestic network.**



[airnewzealand.co.nz](http://airnewzealand.co.nz)

0600 787 787

Air New Zealand Holidays Store

AIR NEW ZEALAND  
**holidays**