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ROBBIE WILLIAMS

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MISS VANJIE EXCLUSIVE

**Celebrating her birthday
at Palmy Drag Fest**



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While Winter Pride may be on hiatus, there is still plenty happening in our adventure capital next month, from queer parties to award-winning restaurants. Check out our essential guide



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FROM THE EDITOR



The Show Must Go On

Few stars understand the power of a grand entrance quite like Robbie Williams, and our August cover captures him at his boldest, cheekiest and most gloriously theatrical.

That spirit runs throughout this issue. It is filled with people turning vulnerability into strength, fear into creativity and community into something worth celebrating. From performers commanding stages to whānau returning to sport after decades away, these pages remind us that confidence can be rediscovered at any age, and belonging can be built in all kinds of places.

We also head south to Queenstown, where the snow may be cold but the welcome remains warm, and get excited for Palmy Drag Fest in Palmerston North and the Rainbow Games in Auckland, both coming up in October.

Robbie has survived the chaos of fame, spoken honestly about his struggles and kept audiences singing with him for more than three decades. His return to Aotearoa feels like the perfect excuse to celebrate resilience, reinvention and the joy of putting on a show.

Olly & Matt xx



COVER | ROBBIE WILLIAMS

YOUR ex

UNAPOLOGETICALLY QUEER

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YOUR EX's TALENTS



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pivoted into travel writing after a lengthy stint in gay publishing. Over the last 20 years, he has co-authored over 100 books for Lonely Planet and had his work published in major international newspapers and magazines.



DR MATARORIA LYNDON

is the Co-Founder and Director of Population Health & Equity at Tend. He's also a public health doctor and senior lecturer, championing inclusive healthcare for our rainbow whānau.



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JASMIN SHEIKH

our Auckland scene photographer, specialises in event photography for all occasions while splitting her time between managing finances for a large real estate firm and taking care of her family.



JESSIE LEWTHWAITE

works in rainbow inclusion and awareness and likes to joke that she is gay for pay. She splits her spare time between co-chairing the Rainbow NZ Charitable Trust, being an exec for Rainbow Auckland and playing video games.



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G.J. Gardner. HOMES

A full-page photograph of Vanessa Vanjie Mateo. She is wearing a vibrant red, off-the-shoulder, floor-length gown with long white gloves. She has bright red hair styled in a classic 1950s-inspired bouffant. A large, colorful tattoo of a butterfly is visible on her upper chest. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. In the background, there is a large black and white photograph of several drag queens in dramatic outfits, including one in a black corset and another in a black dress with a wide-brimmed hat. The setting appears to be an indoor space with a tiled floor and a potted plant.

MISS VANJIE

TALKS *DRAG RACE* DRAMA AND HER NEW ZEALAND DEBUT

ARTICLE | **OLIVER HALL**
PHOTOS | **MARCO OVANDO**

The Drag Race fan favourite opens up about backstage drama, touring chaos and her long-awaited Palmy Drag Fest debut

Vanessa Vanjie Mateo needed only one episode of *RuPaul's Drag Race* to become unforgettable. Her backwards Season 10 exit became a global meme and earned her a return for Season 11.

She has since toured the world and returned for *All Stars 9*. Now, Vanjie is heading to Palmerston North for *Palmy Drag Fest*. She tells **YOUR EX** about life after *Drag Race* and the trouble that follows her on tour.

WHEN DID DRAG BEGIN FEELING LIKE IT WAS A PROPER CAREER FOR YOU?

The first time I saw drag as something you could live off was when I met Alexis Mateo. She was maintaining a life, travelling around and entertaining people through drag. I was like, "Oh, people actually do this."

Before that, I saw drag queens in nightclubs, but I didn't know whether they worked during the daytime. I thought they lived their whole lives like that, just running around in drag!

Alexis became my drag mother. I would dance backup for her as a boy. Then she took me under her wing, and all hell broke loose.

HOW QUICKLY DID YOU REALISE YOUR SEASON 10 EXIT HAD BECOME A PHENOMENON?

Before the episode aired, Asia O'Hara told me RuPaul kept talking about me and laughing after I left. I thought, "That's good, but it probably won't make the edit."

I was at Southern Nights in Orlando when it aired, and I didn't want to go to the gig because I was embarrassed. Then the memes started appearing almost instantly. RuPaul was tweeting about it the next day.

The big difference was that it continued beyond that episode. Every week, they kept mentioning me. I was like, "Oh, we might have something here."

CAN DRAG RACE STILL CHANGE A QUEEN'S LIFE IN THE SAME WAY?

Back around Season 10, almost every girl got to work nearly every night. We all got booked really well.

Now, clubs pick and choose because there are so many overlapping seasons.

Regardless, you can still make a career out of it. Look at Kori King. She went home early, but then started doing Cameos and creating different characters.

PALMY DRAG FEST

Girls can find different ways to make it work. You can use TikTok and other platforms to create a little business.

PALMY DRAG FEST WILL BE YOUR FIRST NEW ZEALAND APPEARANCE. WHAT HAS TAKEN YOU SO LONG?

I don't know! I can't believe it. I thought I had already been there.

Sometimes you get on the bus with all these Werq the World tours, and the places start blending together.

I'm so excited. It's also going to be my birthday while I'm there, so I might bring my mum for a few extra days and really celebrate.

WHAT HAVE YOU HEARD ABOUT NEW ZEALAND DRAG?

Australian and New Zealand drag is really camp. It reminds me a little bit of UK drag.

I'm excited to see it for myself, but Spankie is what I immediately think about. She is a character.

WHAT CAN AUDIENCES EXPECT FROM YOUR SHOW AT PALMY DRAG FEST?

I definitely want to hang out with the girls. I don't want a separate dressing room. I want to be with the girls, carrying on, having little shots and bringing the good vibes.

It's going to feel like a family function to me.

WHAT IS THE MOST CHAOTIC THING THAT HAS HAPPENED AT A MEET-AND-GREET?

There was a girl who came to a meet-and-greet, and her mum was fully trying to hit on me.



The daughter was so embarrassed, but the mother was not catching the hint. I was in drag. I was like, "Girl, what are you doing?"

Clearly, it scarred me because I'm still thinking about it now.

SO THE MUM DID NOT RETURN TO YOUR HOTEL?

Hell no! What were we about to do—have milk and cookies? No, ma'am. No mamas.

WHAT IS THE WILDEST RUMOUR YOU HAVE HEARD ABOUT YOURSELF?

Because I've had relationships on the show and I'm always flirting with the girls, people ask, "What about this one? What about that one?"

Mik and I are really close, but we didn't date. We're like Paris and Nicole, or two little evil twins running around being chaotic and messy.

When we did the Vegas live show, Kameron and I went on a few dates. When we get bored and we're travelling together, we start looking at each other like, "Well, maybe this could work."

SO "SISTER DICK WILL MAKE YOU SICK" IS NOT TRUE?

Sister dick won't make you sick. But when you're both from *Drag Race* and both trying to be Beyoncé, that probably will. There is only room for one star!

Although maybe it can work. Look at Lydia and Kori. If you're just home making Cameos, it's easier to maintain a relationship!

I'm joking. Kori works a lot. I'm just being messy.

WHAT HAPPENED WHEN YOU AND YVIE ODDLY FOUGHT DURING SEASON 11?

They separated us into different vans backstage. They thought we were about to kill each other.

Silky, A'Keria and I ended up in one van, and all the other girls were in another.

Maybe they wanted to stop us continuing to cuss each other out, or perhaps they didn't want us making up the next day.

We felt fabulous, though. We were like, "Oh, we really turned that, didn't we?" We were in our own separate van.

WHICH QUEEN STARTS DRAMA AND THEN PRETENDS SHE HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH IT?

Mistress Isabelle Brooks does both.

She does it backstage too, with no cameras. She gets bored. Her routine was to order Uber Eats and then start some drama.

WHAT WAS YOUR BIGGEST DIVA MOMENT ON ALL STARS?

We were supposed to learn the Rusical one day



and perform it the next. We banded together and said, "We're not doing it. We need the weekend off."

And we got it!

When I did the Rusical on Season 11, we learnt it on a Friday, rehearsed over the weekend and performed it on Monday. I don't know what they were thinking on All Stars.

When are the confessionals filmed?

Every morning. You wake up and put on that little outfit. Production keeps it, including the jewellery.

If somebody wears a wig for their confessionals that they don't normally wear, production keeps that too.

What is the best advice RuPaul gave you?

Probably telling me that I already have what I need.

I would say, "Sometimes I wish I could speak more fluently."

Ru told me, "We love you because of the way you are. There are a whole bunch of people who look at you and see themselves."

Ru told me not to compare myself with other people. Ever since then, I've just been yapping.

FINISH THIS SENTENCE: THE REAL TEA ABOUT MISS VANJIE IS...

When I get to New Zealand, we are going to turn up. I can't wait to see everybody.

It's going to be my birthday, so we're going to celebrate.

Miss Vanjie joins fellow *Drag Race* alumni Vybe (AUS), Kita Mean, Anita Wigl'it, Elektra Shock, Rita Menu and many more in the Palmy Drag Fest main show hosted by Rhubarb Rouge & RubyDax. Get your tickets now from palmydrag.com and Ticketek



ROBBIE WILLIAMS:

THE ALLY. THE SURVIVOR. THE SHOWMAN.

*An early ally to queer fans, a candid survivor of addiction and anxiety, and one of pop's greatest live showmen, **Robbie Williams** has earned his return, this November, to Aotearoa's biggest stages*

THE ALLY

When Robbie Williams began breaking away from Take That in the late 1990s, male pop stars were rarely encouraged to embrace gay audiences. Female icons could be openly supportive, but men were expected to guard their masculinity carefully.

Williams never seemed interested in those rules. Take That had cut their teeth performing in gay clubs, frequently dressed in leather and Lycra, and Williams remembered those rooms as places of humour, freedom and safety. Recalling how nights out in his home town could feel shadowed by violence, he told the Guardian that entering the gay scene brought "total acceptance, humour and abandon".

Williams, who joined Take That when he was just 16, added that the gay clubs had been "an incredibly safe place for me to grow up".

As his solo fame exploded, he kept that uninhibited energy. He played gleefully with camp fashion and treated questions about his sexuality as opportunities for mischief rather than panic. In 2013, he explained to The Daily Star that his love of musical theatre made him feel connected to the gay community. At a time when being mistaken for gay could still threaten a male star's carefully managed image, Robbie refused to present gayness as an insult.

Discussing persistent speculation around his sexuality with The Guardian, he said: "You want to be an ally while at the same time protecting

your own authenticity and your own life."

That balance explains why queer audiences have stayed loyal. Robbie has never claimed an identity that is not his, but he has consistently shown affection for the people who welcomed him before the mainstream did.

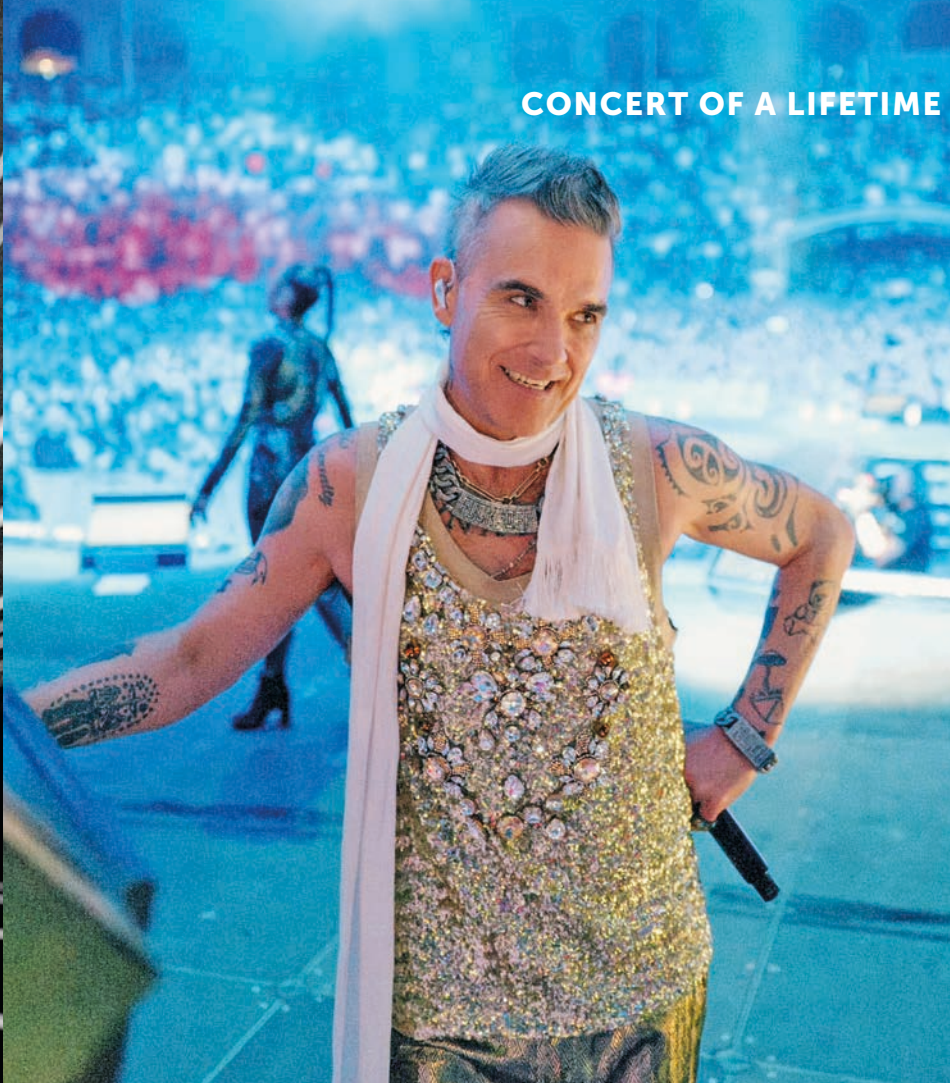
THE SURVIVOR

Robbie's swagger has always been accompanied by a darker counterweight. Behind the winks, pelvic thrusts and stadium-sized confidence sat somebody battling depression, addiction, body dysmorphia, agoraphobia and crippling anxiety.

The four-part Netflix documentary Robbie Williams forced him to watch decades of private footage charting his ascent and deterioration. He described the process as witnessing mental illness, breakdowns, alcoholism and depression in slow motion. The film *Better Man* went further, turning his life into an audacious musical biopic in which he appears as a CGI chimpanzee, reflecting the "performing monkey" he felt fame required him to become.

Neither project sanitised his decline. The film depicts drug use, self-harm and suicidal despair, while the documentary shows how success intensified rather than cured his feelings of worthlessness. Williams entered rehab for drug and alcohol abuse in 1997 and returned to treatment for dependency on prescription medication in 2007.

CONCERT OF A LIFETIME



His survival story feels inspiring because it avoids the fantasy of a permanent cure. In 2025, he admitted that social interactions can still fill him with panic and that, in 2006, his anxiety had got so bad that he struggled to leave the house for three years.

That honesty has been valuable for people living with depression, anxiety or addiction. A man who once struggled to leave the house can once again step before tens of thousands of people and command every corner of a stadium. That's inspiring.

THE SHOWMAN

Plenty of singers can deliver hits. Robbie Williams builds communal events around them.

His three Knebworth concerts in 2003 drew around 375,000 people, creating one of British music's defining live spectacles. Three years later, his Close Encounters Tour sold more than 1.6 million tickets in a single day, earning a Guinness World Record. Those figures reflect more than nostalgia. Robbie understands the golden rule of stadium pop: the audience wants to feel part of something enormous, and to make that happen, he has to assure every person that they are part of the show and the night depends on them.

The staging has frequently matched the scale of his ego, knowingly and spectacularly. His Take the Crown shows featured a monumental sculpted head bearing his own face. On The

Heavy Entertainment Show Tour, he entered like a boxer to a mock national anthem, then soared above audiences on a giant rotating boxing glove. The European leg of The BRITPOP World Tour, which lands here in November, features a daredevil aerial stunt involving Williams standing atop an enormous rocket as it takes off!

Aotearoa has signed up for that showmanship repeatedly. Robbie first toured here in 2001, while The Heavy Entertainment Show reached Auckland and Dunedin in 2018. In 2023, he sold all 25,000 tickets to his Mission Estate concert in under an hour, prompting the addition of a second show.

The BRITPOP World Tour reaches Auckland's Eden Park before Williams becomes the first international artist to perform at Christchurch's new One New Zealand Stadium. It will also be his first performance in the city for 25 years. For an entertainer whose career has survived excess, collapse and reinvention, there could be no more fitting finale to the tour than opening a brand-new stage and proving, once again, that nobody entertains quite like Robbie Williams.

Robbie Williams' BRITPOP World Tour plays Eden Park, Auckland, on Tuesday 24 November and One New Zealand Stadium, Christchurch, on Saturday 28 November. Drax Project and Lottery Winners support. Buy tickets at frontiertouring.co.nz

5 ROBBIE WILLIAMS SONGS WE CANNOT WAIT TO HEAR LIVE

LET ME ENTERTAIN YOU

The theatrical bravado and instantly shoutable wild chorus turn a vast stadium into Robbie's personal cabaret. Deployed early in the setlist, it is a promise that the spectacle has officially started.

ROCK DJ

Few pop videos have announced a star's willingness to expose himself more literally. Live, its elastic groove and infectious energy will have everyone on their feet.

MY WAY

As a point of reflection on his truly massive career and roller-coaster life, Williams covers Frank Sinatra's classic for a stadium-sized karaoke session.

BETTER MAN

Already one of his most affecting ballads, the song now carries the additional weight of his biopic. Its plea for patience and growth feels like a message sent by the chaotic young Williams to the survivor standing onstage.

ANGELS

Williams may sing it, but by the final chorus the audience has usually taken ownership. 'Angels' transforms tens of thousands of strangers into one enormous choir and remains the emotional release every Robbie show demands. Expect tears and hugs.



POWERHOUSE PERFORMER LEATHER LUNGS COMES HOME TO WOW



From Adele to Bizarre Bras: Leather Lungs discusses his preparation for returning to the World of WearableArt for its new show GLO!

Nearly 20 years after the World of WearableArt helped launch his career, Jason Chasland is preparing to return to the Wellington spectacular, this time bringing the full, fabulous force of his alter ego, Leather Lungs.

The acclaimed cabaret performer will appear throughout GLO!, the 2026 WOW Show running at TSB Arena from 17 September to 4 October.

For Chasland, the season represents much more than another major performance credit. It is a homecoming almost two decades in the making.

"I have truly wanted to come home to WOW for almost 20 years," he says. "This is beyond special. It's meant to be."

Chasland first performed in WOW while attending drama school in 2004, returning for further seasons between 2007 and 2009.



Jason Chasland as Leather Lungs

Although he has since taken his voice, comedy and solo shows around the world, WOW has retained a special place in his story.

"This feels like an evolution of the show, my career and me as a person," he says. "We have all started from humble beginnings and become these internationally acclaimed beasts."

His return began taking shape three years ago, when WOW show director Malia Johnston approached him about becoming involved. Chasland was touring in the United

Kingdom and the timing did not work, but the conversation was far from over.

"When she came back to me last year with this year's concept, we both felt it was the perfect fit for my vibe," he says.

That vibe will be evident from the moment audiences arrive. While Chasland is keeping many of the production's surprises under wraps, he reveals that Leather Lungs will welcome guests and immediately set the evening's mischievous tone.

"You'll find me throughout the show and ultimately returning to where it all began for me, with the iconic Bizarre Bra section," he says, describing the crowd favourite as "a downright delightful riot" that will close this year's production.

Audiences can expect Leather Lungs' signature mix of powerhouse singing, extravagant glamour, uninhibited comedy and proudly queer energy.

"I will definitely be bringing mine in all my queer, neuro-spicy, balls-to-the-wall, chaotic, charming, celebratory magic!"

The confidence Leather Lungs projects on stage provides armour for a performer who describes himself as an "extroverted introvert".

The persona was created while Chasland was working on music in an art gallery café in Bahrain. He found himself thinking about his need to celebrate who he was and to create a character capable of doing things Jason might be too shy or frightened to attempt.

"At its core, it's clowning," he explains. "It allows me to create absurd beauty, chaotic comedy, challenge conversation and make magic."

Performance had been part of Chasland's life long before Leather Lungs appeared. More than 20 years into his career, he admits that he can still feel as though he is "faking it", despite having performed on some of the world's most famous stages.

"I've done this since I can remember walking or talking. It was never really not an option for me," he says.

His parents and nanas encouraged the creative child to dream, providing the support that would eventually carry him from drama school to international festivals, Hollywood and Glastonbury.

"Performing at Glastonbury was pretty insane," he says. "Belting my face off to tens of thousands of people was unreal. I can't wait to go back."

Another attention-grabbing credit was performing as a vocalist during Adele's 2017 New Zealand tour, although Chasland admits the reality was less glamorous than people might imagine.

"To be honest, while amazing, the Adele event wasn't as fun as it sounds, as we weren't able to talk to her!"

Touring his own creations has provided some of the more rewarding moments.

"Touring my solo shows around

the world is always trippy," he says. "Like, holy shit, I made this thing and people want to come!"

WOW now offers the perfect meeting point between the young performer who first appeared in the show in 2004 and the unapologetically queer artist he has become.

Chasland believes the production's celebration of creative freedom makes it a natural home for artists and audiences who have felt restricted by conventional expectations around fashion, gender or performance.

"WOW really nurtures and gives space for queer humans, people of colour and so much more to be seen and celebrated," he says.

"For me, it has always felt like coming home to community. Queer artists are loved, embraced and put into the spotlight in the WOW whānau. I can be authentically myself and have the most incredible time doing it."

When the final curtain falls, Chasland hopes to leave with new creative relationships, personal goals achieved and memories made alongside some of the artists he most admires.

Before then, however, Leather Lungs plans to ensure every audience receives a suitably outrageous welcome.

"There is literally nothing like this anywhere in the world. And it's from Aotearoa! That's some amazing mahi that deserves all the aroha," he says before assuring us, "and the audience will be gagging!"

The 2026 WOW Show GLO! will run from Thursday 17 September to Sunday 4 October. Tickets and further info are available from worldofwearableart.com



GIVEAWAYS

Win 2 tickets to **Dita Von Teese's Nocturnelle Tour**

The Queen of Burlesque brings her most ambitious production yet to Aotearoa.

Nocturnelle blends old-Hollywood glamour, theatrical illusion and Dita Von Teese's spectacular signature striptease,

supported by *Drag Race UK* winner Lawrence Chaney. We're giving away a double pass to experience the lavish magic at Kiri Te Kanawa Theatre on Sunday 23 August.



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Win 1 x **Steve Lacy's Oh yeah? on vinyl**

Grammy winner Steve Lacy returns with his most vulnerable and fully realised album yet. Exploring yearning, loss, clarity and the challenge of finding yourself in a dopamine-filled world, *Oh yeah?* includes the singles "the feeling" and "is it cool?" featuring SZA.

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ASHNIKKO:

QUEER POP'S BEAUTIFUL MONSTER

Blue-haired, genderfluid and gloriously unfiltered, Ashnikko turns feminine rage, queer desire and fantasy spectacle into some of pop's most thrillingly strange music

Ashnikko has built a career from the emotions women and queer people are often encouraged to hide. Her songs revel in anger, lust, heartbreak, revenge, silliness and bodily autonomy, delivered through a collision of bubblegum pop, rap, industrial electronics and horror-movie theatrics.

The American artist uses she/they pronouns and has described herself as pansexual and genderfluid. Her queerness runs through her lyrics, visual worlds and understanding of community. Songs including the sapphic fantasy "Slumber Party" and the deeply personal "Miss Nectarine" give same-sex attraction space to be explicit, playful and complicated.

That honesty carries particular weight because Ashnikko grew up without visible queer role models. She has recalled reaching adulthood before meeting an openly queer person and spending years treating her identity as a "huge, shameful secret."

"That stuff still lives with you through adulthood," she told *The Forty-Five*. "It takes

active unpicking to dismantle those ideas in your head."

Her concern for younger LGBTQ+ people is equally direct. Discussing political attacks on trans communities in the United States, she said: "My heart really hurts, especially for queer kids and trans kids in small towns like where I'm from."

Fantasy gives those experiences spectacular new forms. For 2023's *WEEDKILLER*, Ashnikko created a dystopian story about a fairy warrior fighting machines that consume the natural world. The character's torn wings, reconstructed body and battles for survival became symbols of violated boundaries, environmental destruction and the struggle to reclaim power. At its centre was a theme Ashnikko described as "finding yourself amidst being beaten down".

Her 2025 album, *Smoochies*, brings the focus closer to Ashnikko's life. Its world is messy, funny, sexual and defiantly playful, with songs exploring heartbreak, self-expression, modern romance and desire freed from the male gaze. Ashnikko told *EUPHORIA* that she enjoys

placing "messy and serious and silly and sexy" ideas within the same song.

Her work offers audiences permission to take up space in every form: glamorous, grotesque, wounded, furious, tender and horny. Femininity becomes a source of invention. Gender becomes something to play with. Pain can become a creature, a chorus or an entire parallel universe.

Aotearoa audiences will enter that universe when Ashnikko opens the Australasian leg of her *Smoochies* Tour in Auckland. She has developed the show as musical theatre filled with choreography, performance art and dramatic interludes, promising fans an immersive journey through a feverish parallel dimension.

For an artist who once had to unpick shame in private, creating a room where thousands of queer fans can become loud, strange and free feels powerfully full circle.

Ashnikko plays Auckland Town Hall on Wednesday 16 September. Tickets from frontiertouring.co.nz

ASHHOLE & MOOCHIES TOUR

2026



Final tickets

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WHAT MY RUGBY COACH TAUGHT ME ABOUT STAYING 'SAFE' IN WOMEN'S BATHROOMS

Jessie Lewthwaite says bathroom panic is not new. Only the target has changed

My high school girls' rugby team was very bad at the sport. We were from a poor school; most of our players had to drive over an hour to get to practice, and for two years our coach was also the music teacher, who knew basically nothing about rugby; she was just one of the few women on staff who lived close enough to the school to watch us at practice. However, in my last year at school, they finally hired a female PE teacher. She knew how to play; she was passionate and motivational; she actually taught us the game at practice and even hired a bus so we could get to games. We still lost every game that season, but that wasn't her fault.

However, no matter what happened, she never came into our locker room. A massive fight breaks out? Too bad; the strong will survive. A kid is throwing up? The team captain had better have a strong stomach. It was only after I left school and was training to be a teacher myself that I learnt that she had been a lesbian. Experience had taught her that it was better for one of us to die in that locker room than for a lesbian teacher to be caught setting foot

in there. I took this learning with me into my own teaching career.

Here's the thing that gets me every time this bathroom nonsense cycles back around in the news and politics: history repeats itself. Long before anyone was debating which stall a trans woman should use, lesbians were the ones cast as the lurking danger in women's spaces. Lesbian teachers copped it especially hard. The logic went: a woman who doesn't want men has clearly gone wrong somewhere, and wherever women and girls undress or use the toilet unsupervised, she must be lurking with intent. We have already seen this bathroom hysteria impact cis women who look gender-nonconforming, but people only seem to care when it is a cis woman who is impacted.

So when I hear "we've never had to worry about this before; it's a new problem", I want to hand people a history textbook. The bathroom panic is a rerun. Black women were once barred from white women's toilets on the same 'protection' logic during segregation. Gay men were entrapped by police in public toilets in the 1950s and '60s under obscenity laws. Lesbians got flagged as classroom predators near girls'

bathrooms and changing rooms. Now it's trans people. The target rotates. The tactic doesn't.

So why is it always bathrooms with these people? Basically, toilets are one of the last spaces still legally sorted by sex, so it's an easy lever to pull if you want to make an entire group of people sound dangerous without any actual evidence. Every study done on this 'bathroom predator' claim has found the same thing: nothing. There has been no spike in assaults and no bogeyman waiting behind the cubicle door. What they have found is that, for decades, the fear of sexual violence has been used as a weapon against whichever minority is politically convenient at the time.

Each time a new bathroom monster is announced, they are villainised, and we are told the concerns are 'reasonable'. Well, it wasn't reasonable when Black women were the monsters; it wasn't reasonable when lesbians were the monsters; and it isn't reasonable now.

The moral of this story, which my coach taught me when I was 16, is clear: it is always claimed to be about 'safety', but in truth, it's about scapegoating and control.

BIG SCREEN ENERGY

Hollywood spent decades treating video-game adaptations like a cursed side quest. Thankfully, the pixels have finally fought back. These four PS5 titles prove the best fictional worlds can thrive on every screen.



THE LAST OF US PART II REMASTERED

Beautiful, brutal and emotionally exhausting, Ellie and Abby's intertwined revenge story remains gaming's prestige-drama benchmark. PS5 upgrades sharpen its ruined America, while No Return mode adds addictive combat challenges. HBO's adaptation makes its world feel even richer, but playing as queer heroine Ellie gives every impossible choice extra weight.

MORTAL KOMBAT 1

A timeline reboot lets Fire God Liu Kang reshuffle familiar fighters, relationships and



rivalries with gleefully chaotic results. Combat feels fast, polished and gloriously disgusting, while Kameo partners bring strategic sparkle. Decades of films, animation and iconic catchphrases ("Finish Him!") have made this universe bigger than gaming. Mileena and Tanya's romance gives it heart beneath the fatalities.

CYBERPUNK 2077: ULTIMATE EDITION

After a notoriously messy launch, *Cyberpunk 2077* has completed the ultimate redemption arc. Night City now feels intoxicatingly alive, packed with stylish violence, political intrigue and queer romance options. *Phantom Liberty* adds a gripping spy thriller, while Netflix anime *Edgerunners* transforms the city itself into the franchise's true star. Neon never looked so dangerous.



INDIANA JONES AND THE GREAT CIRCLE

This whip-cracking adventure understands that Indy is an archaeologist before he is an action hero. Exploration, stealth and satisfyingly tactile puzzles make it feel like starring in a lost film between *Raiders* and *The Last Crusade*. The result is cinematic without becoming an endless cutscene, delivering globe-trotting escapism worthy of the hat.

Explore these screen-crossing worlds at **JB Hi-Fi**. jbhifi.co.nz

COME OUT WITH YOUR EX

Events that deserve a place in your diary

MOTAT: 40 YEARS OF PRIDE

Mark four decades since Homosexual Law Reform with a whānau-friendly celebration at MOTAT on Saturday 8 August. Watch Ingrid Anderson screen-print commemorative designs, collect a free bookmark and hear Navy veteran Brad Poulter read from and sign his memoir, *Built for This*, at 2pm. Activities run from 10am to 4pm.



Brad Poulter at MOTAT

AT THE WAKE

Victor Rodger's *At the Wake* brings buried family tensions, dark humour and zinging one-liners to The Court Theatre in Christchurch until Saturday 15 August. Robert, a gay half-Samoan expatriate, accompanies his palagi grandmother to his mother's funeral, where Susan Brady



Yvette Parsons stars in *Mum, I'm Alien Pregnant*

delivers a brilliantly winning performance as the formidable, unforgettable Joan.

MUM, I'M ALIEN PREGNANT

Yvette Parsons commands THUNDERLIPS' gloriously gooey body-horror film *Mum, I'm Alien Pregnant* as an overbearing mother whose daughter faces an extraterrestrial pregnancy. Amid monstrous transformations and whip-smart commentary on bodily autonomy, Parsons' performance is irresistible. Catch its New Zealand premiere at Auckland's Civic on Friday 7 August at 8.45pm.



Father's Day at Auckland Zoo

CELEBRATE FATHER'S DAY AT THE ZOO

Give the dads in your whānau a memorable Father's Day at Auckland Zoo's Old Elephant House café. Dining packages cater to meat lovers, vegetarians, vegan and gluten-free guests, with plenty for tamariki. Available Saturday 5 and Sunday 6 September, each booking includes Zoo entry for a wander on the wild side.

MARTINBOROUGH MUSIC FESTIVAL

Martinborough Music Festival celebrates its tenth birthday with four chamber concerts at Martinborough Town Hall from Friday 25 to Sunday 27 September. Beethoven, Liszt, Vivaldi and bold contemporary works fill the programme, alongside virtuoso guitar, piano and double bass performances. Sunday's finale includes a world premiere by composer Victoria Kelly.



HISTORY & HEDONISM IN WASHINGTON DC

*From lie-flat luxury over the Pacific to gay nightlife beneath the streets of America's capital, **Matt Fistonich** discovers a Washington DC shaped by political history, hospitality and an unmistakably queer energy*

Travelling from Auckland to Washington DC clocks up some substantial flying miles, but flying United Polaris Business Class transforms the journey into part of the holiday itself.

The experience began at Auckland International Airport, where the Air New Zealand Koru lounge provides a relaxing start. I have left the confused-looking crowds adorned in neck pillows and sweatpants and arrived in a calming retreat where the patrons around me are happy and confident about travelling. Most are unwinding with a glass of wine and some cheese and crackers, flicking through magazines before their departure is called.

Once aboard, United Polaris elevated the experience further, with a great wine list, a tempting food menu and lie-flat Business Class

seats that actually offer the comfort and privacy needed to sleep properly. I only make it halfway through *The Devil Wears Prada 2* before I'm snoozing, but arrive in America feeling refreshed, with no need to sacrifice the first days of the trip to jet lag.

Connecting through San Francisco's impressive airport gives you access to one of the world's best business-class airport lounges, United's Polaris Lounge.

Stylishly designed, it includes access to beautiful shower suites, an à la carte restaurant, a large buffet if you're short on time and an impressive full bar for those who feel like socialising over a drink.

By the time I arrived in Washington DC, I felt ready to explore.



A CITY MADE FOR THE BIG SCREEN

Washington DC has an extraordinary sense of scale. Its grand avenues, vast monuments and imposing government buildings are constant reminders that this is a city shaped by political power and significant world history.

The most important attractions are also free to visit, including the breathtaking monuments and the Smithsonian museums that surround the National Mall. The National Air & Space Museum is my favourite and has to be seen to be believed. Each of the Smithsonian museums offers free highlights tours each day with knowledgeable guides, which are well worth joining.

The city's monuments feel even more impressive in person. Standing beneath the Lincoln Memorial or looking across the Reflecting Pool towards the Washington Monument feels familiar after seeing these locations in countless films, yet the experience remains unexpectedly

TRAVEL



YOTEL Washington DC's Rooftop Pool

moving, as your mind reflects on history—both America's and your own journey—and where the world stands in 2026.

Washington's queer history and the culture of activism that helped win gay people many freedoms is on display at the National Museum of American History. Streets around the White House mark the sites of the first gay rights protests, and the central suburb of Dupont Circle still stands as one of the US's oldest gaybourhoods.

WHERE TO STAY:

YOTEL Washington DC offers a convenient base near Capitol Hill, well positioned for exploring on foot, with numerous central landmarks and sightseeing routes nearby.

Inside, YOTEL has a funky, contemporary style, with thoughtfully designed rooms that are big on comfort and functionality, with no space wasted.

This is the second time I have stayed there and, while I am a big fan of the comfort, design and location, if I had to sum up what keeps drawing me back in two words, it would be: rooftop pool. DC can have some scorching summer days, and YOTEL's cabana-lined pool was a joy to hang out at.

Grab a drink from the rooftop bar, recline on a sun lounger, put your headphones in and stick your head in a book if you need some alone time, or, if you fancy meeting some locals and fellow travellers, jump in the pool for a splash! People will speak to you, and the diversity of the crowd is fascinating, ranging from proud lesbian immigrants to Texas natives who 'don't think Trump's such a bad guy'. It was nice to see everyone getting along and having a good time in the heady sunshine. Just don't talk politics!

To book a YOTEL room, visit [hotel.com](https://www.hotel.com)

WASHINGTON AFTER DARK

Washington's gay nightlife reflects the city itself: it is professional and polished but knows how to let loose!

The neighbourhoods surrounding Logan Circle, Shaw, 14th Street and the U Street corridor provide a natural starting point.

Most queer venues are located within easy walking distance of one another, allowing

visitors to begin with a relaxed drink where you can catch up before following the crowd somewhere louder and sweatier.

There is a strong sense of chosen family within DC's gay bars. The locals are friendly and keen to share their city with international guests, creating an atmosphere that feels social rather than anonymous. Guys I get talking to invite me to join them as they move on to the next venue, and that happens multiple times on nights out in DC.

MY FAVOURITE DC GAY BAR

Crush became my favourite gay bar in Washington, DC somewhere between my first dangerously easy-to-drink cocktail and the moment the DJ dropped Madonna into a packed Fourth of July dance floor.

Set across multiple levels on 14th Street NW, it lets you choose your own adventure. Downstairs is all flashing lights and dance-pop classics. Upstairs, the lounge gives you room to regroup, compare drinks and decide whether you are ready for another round. Then there is the outdoor patio, perfect for cooling off in the thick Washington summer heat without leaving the party behind.

The bar also has personality beyond weekends. There are bear happy hours, open mic nights and the gloriously chaotic drag bingo.



Smiling faces at Bunker



Handsome friends at Crush

For first-time visitors to Washington, Crush provides an accessible introduction to the city's LGBTQ+ nightlife. You can arrive without knowing anyone and quickly feel part of what is happening around you.

MY FAVOURITE DC GAY NIGHTCLUB

Just around the corner, *Bunker* takes the evening in a darker, sweatier direction.

Opened in 2023, Bunker has quickly established itself as the city's leading queer dance destination.

While Crush gently eases you into the evening, Bunker ups the ante when you're ready to party hard.

The subterranean venue pulses with energy. Lights cut through the haze, bass moves through the floor, and a tightly packed crowd carries the party into the early hours.

Above ground, Washington can feel formal, surrounded by government institutions and constant reminders of decisions being made behind closed doors. Descending into Bunker allows that world to disappear.

Photographing these venues showed me another side of the city: the uninhibited energy of a crowd enjoying their hard-fought freedoms to be loud, visible and unapologetically queer.

Washington DC may be best known as the centre of American political power, but its personality extends beyond. It is a city of world-class museums, world-famous monuments and neighbourhoods filled with history and character.

Flying United Polaris business class made the journey home feel genuinely luxurious. And I finally finished *The Devil Wears Prada* 2!

For more information about Washington DC, visit [washington.org](https://www.washington.org). Explore flights and the United Polaris experience with United Airlines.

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◀ 66 Taylors Mistake Road, Scarborough, Christchurch

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▼ Queenstown-Lakes

Occupying two levels within a complex of only three residences, this 635sqm Queenstown penthouse pairs serious privacy with spectacular views. Three ensuite bedrooms, multiple living areas, a media room, wine cellar, internal lift and 267sqm of tiled decks overlook Lake Wakatipu and the Remarkables, just five minutes from central Queenstown.

▼ 127 Flyer View Lane, Kingston, Queenstown-Lakes

Set beneath a towering alpine mountain on 2.59 private acres, this one-bedroom Kingston cabin makes disappearing remarkably luxurious. A gym, cedar sauna, wood-fired hot tub, cold plunge, fire pit and 80sqm yoga deck create a secluded wellness playground, with Southern Lights, Milky Way stargazing and minimal light pollution overhead.





◀ 19 Kaitawa Road, York Bay, Eastbourne, Wellington

Hidden among York Bay bush, this sun-soaked retreat offers harbour views, abundant birdlife and the glorious feeling of being tucked away from everyone. Four bedrooms, three living spaces, an office, ducted heating and sheltered decking provide flexible family comfort, while a double garage and potential future dwelling add possibilities below.

▼ 8A Huka Road, Birkenhead, Auckland

Perched at the end of its row, this substantial Birkenhead townhouse delivers extra privacy, abundant natural light and elevated harbour and city views. Four double bedrooms, multiple living areas, a modern central kitchen, double garaging and off-street parking, all within an easy walk of Birkenhead Point.



▲ 6C/118 Gladstone Road, Parnell, Auckland

Floating above Auckland's waterfront with nothing looking in, this reimagined 440sqm penthouse feels more private estate than apartment. Four ensuite bedrooms, expansive living, an office, wine room, gas fires, five-car garaging and uninterrupted harbour views deliver rare seclusion, while Parnell, Britomart and the ferry terminal remain conveniently close.



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REMEMBERING AUGUST MILESTONES

*Gareth Watkins looks back
at August events in Aotearoa's
queer history*



Carmen Rupe

16 August 1919

The Evening Post reported the arrest in Auckland of a young person who had been living under the name Ada Reeve – the name of a well-known English comedian who had performed in New Zealand the previous year. Under the headline “Accomplished rascal in girl’s clothes”, the newspaper described how police became suspicious of a youth “clothed in well-made female attire”, whose belongings included jewellery resembling items stolen from nearby houses. The teenager was later identified as having previously been arrested for thefts at Weraroa Training Farm, a state institution for boys near Levin, and as having escaped from custody in Wellington. During the court appearance, officials suggested that “a good birching” might cure the youth’s “romantic ideas”. The magistrate declined, but warned that such punishment would follow if they appeared before the court again.

26 August 1985

Television news reported that a Homosexuals Anonymous group had been established in Auckland to try to convert homosexual people to heterosexuality. Founded in the United States in 1980, Homosexuals Anonymous was a Christian conversion ministry that offered a multi-step programme intended to “heal” homosexuality through faith. During

the parliamentary debate on homosexual law reform, MP Graeme Lee praised what he described as “the formation of internationally acclaimed bodies such as Homosexuals Anonymous and the Exodus Organisation that will help the homosexuals of this country”. One Aucklander, who tried several conversion practices, later reflected that the experiences helped him realise that “being gay is just who you are. It’s not something you can get rid of. It’s not something you can find healing from. It’s just part of your essence of who you are”. In 2022, conversion practices intended to change or suppress a person’s sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression became unlawful in New Zealand.

8 August 2016

The late Carmen Rupe was honoured by Wellington City Council through the installation of green pedestrian crossing lights bearing her silhouette at four intersections along Cuba Street. At the launch event, Mayor Celia Wade-Brown described Carmen as “larger than life and never to be forgotten”. She recalled the progressive platform Carmen promoted when she stood for mayor of Wellington in 1977, which included sex education in schools and the decriminalisation of abortion, homosexuality and sex work – all forward-thinking policies for the time. Carmen’s friend Dana de Milo reminded

those gathered not to sanitise her history. Sex work, she said, was central to how Carmen built her businesses and public identity. Dana imagined Carmen joking that she should have been depicted as “the red light girl”. Wellington Central MP Grant Robertson said the pedestrian lights celebrated Carmen’s spirit of inclusion, while warning that transgender people continued to face barriers involving safety and access to healthcare.

Heritage Spotlight

Papers Past is the National Library of New Zealand’s free online research website. It contains millions of digitised pages from New Zealand and the Pacific, including newspapers, magazines and journals, letters and diaries, parliamentary papers and books. For anyone researching rainbow histories, Papers Past can be an extraordinary starting point. Its newspaper section includes nearly 200 titles and reveals how sexuality and gender diversity have been reported, debated, sensationalised and, increasingly, celebrated over time. The Press is especially notable, with more than nine million articles online and digitised issues spanning from 1861 to 1995. Its coverage includes early attempts at law reform, the emergence of AIDS, homosexual law reform and the campaign to include sexual orientation in the Human Rights Act. Explore the collections at paperspast.natlib.govt.nz

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'Great Sex pamphlet,' NZ AIDS Foundation

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OUT & ABOUT

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PHOTOS | JASMIN SHEIKH



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A HUMBLE HERO

*Former Express (Your Ex) managing editor
Peter Dragicevich reflects on the legacy of Father
Michael Bancroft for gay Catholics*

There can't be too many people who have had their passing acknowledged with such warmth by groups as disparate as the Burnett Foundation, Hato Hone St John and Urge Events, and who then go on to have a funeral concelebrated by three Catholic bishops. Then again, Father Michael Bancroft was anything but ordinary.

I first met Father Mike in the late 1980s while he was still a parish priest. His parishioners adored him, even though they may not have realised at the time that they were sharing their pastor with another flock. During the height of the AIDS epidemic in New Zealand, Father Mike was a familiar face at the bedsides of the dying, providing comfort and consolation at

a time of much stigma and fear. He sat with dozens upon dozens of gay men in their last days, irrespective of their faith or lack of it. He then went on to celebrate funerals for many of them, affording each person a dignified farewell. Along with the late Sister Paula Brett Kelly in Wellington, he was one of the humble heroes of that era.

Some people may be surprised to learn that a Catholic priest and nun were at the forefront of the AIDS response in this country. But Father Mike and Sister Paula were simply following the example of a long list of saints who have provided similar ministries throughout the centuries to equally marginalised groups.

Life can be complex for gay Catholics and even more so for gay Catholic priests. As the worst years of the pandemic passed and Mike started to explore his own sexuality more openly, he was unable to continue his public ministry within the Church. But he never stopped being a priest, and he never stopped serving people in need. He would go on to become the chaplain to the Order of St. John and to take charge of important grassroots programmes with them focussed on caring for the sick. He was also the final guardian of the New Zealand AIDS Memorial Quilt before it was transferred to Te Papa Tongarewa.

As a gay Catholic, I take heart from the fact that Mike never abandoned the Church and the Church never abandoned him. For the years leading up to his death, he lived in accommodation set aside for retired clergy in Hillsborough. During that time, I'd bump into him at both gay events and at Sunday Masses. Mike showed by example that being gay and being Christian needn't be an either/or proposition.

While it can be difficult being gay in the Catholic world, the reverse is also true. Yet Mike found a way to walk in both worlds authentically and with considerable mana.

The high regard in which he was held by many within the Church was clearly demonstrated by the three bishops and dozens of priests and Marist brothers who attended his Requiem. They were joined by a large contingent from Hato Hone St John and many familiar faces from Urge parties and gay community groups. During the Mass, prayers explicitly acknowledged Mike's ministry to the Rainbow community. He was buried with his purple stole on his casket, as a priest.

Things change slowly in the Catholic Church, but change does happen. The difference in tone we've noticed under Pope Francis and Pope Leo hasn't come about in a vacuum. It reflects the witness of Father Mike and thousands of others like him within the Church, holding true to both their faith and their authentic selves.



PHOTO | GARETH WATKINS

TEND × YOUR EX

GAY MEN & PROSTATE HEALTH

Dr Mataroria Lyndon
answers your health-
related questions

I'M 45, AND MY FATHER WAS DIAGNOSED WITH PROSTATE CANCER IN HIS 60S. WHEN SHOULD I BEGIN SCREENING, AND DOES BEING GAY CHANGE ANYTHING ABOUT HOW PROSTATE HEALTH SHOULD BE DISCUSSED OR MANAGED? AND AS A SEXUALLY ACTIVE GAY MAN, AM I ANY MORE SUSCEPTIBLE TO THE LIKES OF COLON, BOWEL OR ANY OTHER SPECIFIC CANCERS?



Having a father who has had prostate cancer does increase your own risk, so at 45, this is a good time to talk with your GP about prostate cancer testing.

In Aotearoa, it's recommended that men with a family history of prostate cancer start discussing screening from age 40, rather than waiting until 50. Screening typically involves both a PSA (prostate-specific antigen) blood test and, where appropriate, a digital rectal examination, depending on your symptoms, history and preferences.

Being gay, bisexual or having anal sex is not known to increase your risk of developing prostate cancer. However, it is relevant when preparing for a PSA test. Current guidance recommends avoiding ejaculation, receptive anal sex and heavy exercise for 48 hours beforehand, as these can temporarily raise your PSA level.

Being a sexually active gay man does not, by itself, increase your risk of bowel or colon cancer. The main risk factors include increasing age, family history, smoking, alcohol, excess weight and aspects of diet.

Anal cancer is different from bowel cancer. Gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men have a higher risk of anal cancer because of greater exposure to certain strains of HPV, with the risk particularly increased in people living with HIV. HPV vaccination can reduce this risk, and condoms can reduce, but not completely prevent, HPV transmission.

At age 45, it is worth asking your GP about vaccination if you have not previously received it; in New Zealand, it is registered through age 45, although it is generally not funded after age 26. Routine anal-cancer screening is not currently available for most asymptomatic people in Aotearoa, but persistent anal symptoms should always be discussed with a clinician.

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Got a health-related question for Dr Mataroria Lyndon to answer?

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HOW VIOLET BAIR TURNED POLITICAL FEAR INTO A DEFIANTLY QUEER VIDEO GAME

*Christchurch developer Violet Bair talks to **Oliver Hall** about turning her dreams into reality and creating a new world for queer gamers*

After four and a half years of late nights, multiple jobs and periods of financial uncertainty, Christchurch-based American developer Violet Bair has released a video game that is unmistakably her own.

Indigo's Dreams is a fast-paced, mixed-media platforming adventure in which players travel through forests, abandoned beaches and a town above the clouds, encountering strange mutants and collecting costumes along the way. Its dream worlds combine claymation, puppetry, stop-motion, pixel art, collage, painting and photography.

For Bair, bringing so many art forms together was a natural progression.

"I'm an artist, creative director and audio engineer," she says. "Gaming has been a lifelong passion of mine, since it combines so many art forms — music, animation and storytelling — into one."

Her creative journey began when she was seven, building fan games on the online platform Scratch using characters from worlds including Sonic, Mario and Scott Pilgrim. As she grew older, Bair taught herself more programming languages and began creating text-based adventures in HTML.

Those childhood experiments eventually developed into a professional career. After beginning work on Indigo's Dreams in 2022, Bair was spotted by a recruiter through a game-development Discord community and entered the quality-assurance industry.

She went on to perform QA engineering work on Meta projects including Asgard's Wrath II and Horizon Worlds. Her days belonged to other companies' virtual worlds, but her

evenings were reserved for building her own.

"After my days working as a QA engineer, I'd spend my nights as the creative director for Indigo's Dreams," she says.

The game was not the only major new chapter taking shape. While developing it, Bair was also preparing to leave the United States and begin a new life in Aotearoa.

As a transgender woman, she says the increasingly hostile political climate left her concerned for both her rights and her personal safety. She spent her final period in America involved in political advocacy and began seeking a visa for New Zealand, a country she had long dreamt of calling home.

Her fears were far from isolated. A survey of 302 transgender and gender-diverse people conducted after the 2024 US election found 93 per cent were concerned about what another Trump presidency could mean for trans people. Eighty-three per cent reported increased concern for their mental health, while 80 per cent were more worried about becoming the victim of a hate crime. Other trans Americans have also spoken publicly about preparing to move overseas because of policies affecting healthcare, identity documents and legal protections.

For Bair, a disturbing dream became the catalyst for turning an aspiration to relocate into a definite plan.

"In January, I had a nightmare where I dreamt that a crowd of people were chanting 'Heil Trump' in front of the White House," she says.

The following day, Elon Musk made a straight-arm gesture during celebrations following Donald Trump's January 2025 inauguration. The gesture was compared by many observers with a Nazi salute, although Musk and others rejected that interpretation. For Bair, the timing felt chillingly prophetic.

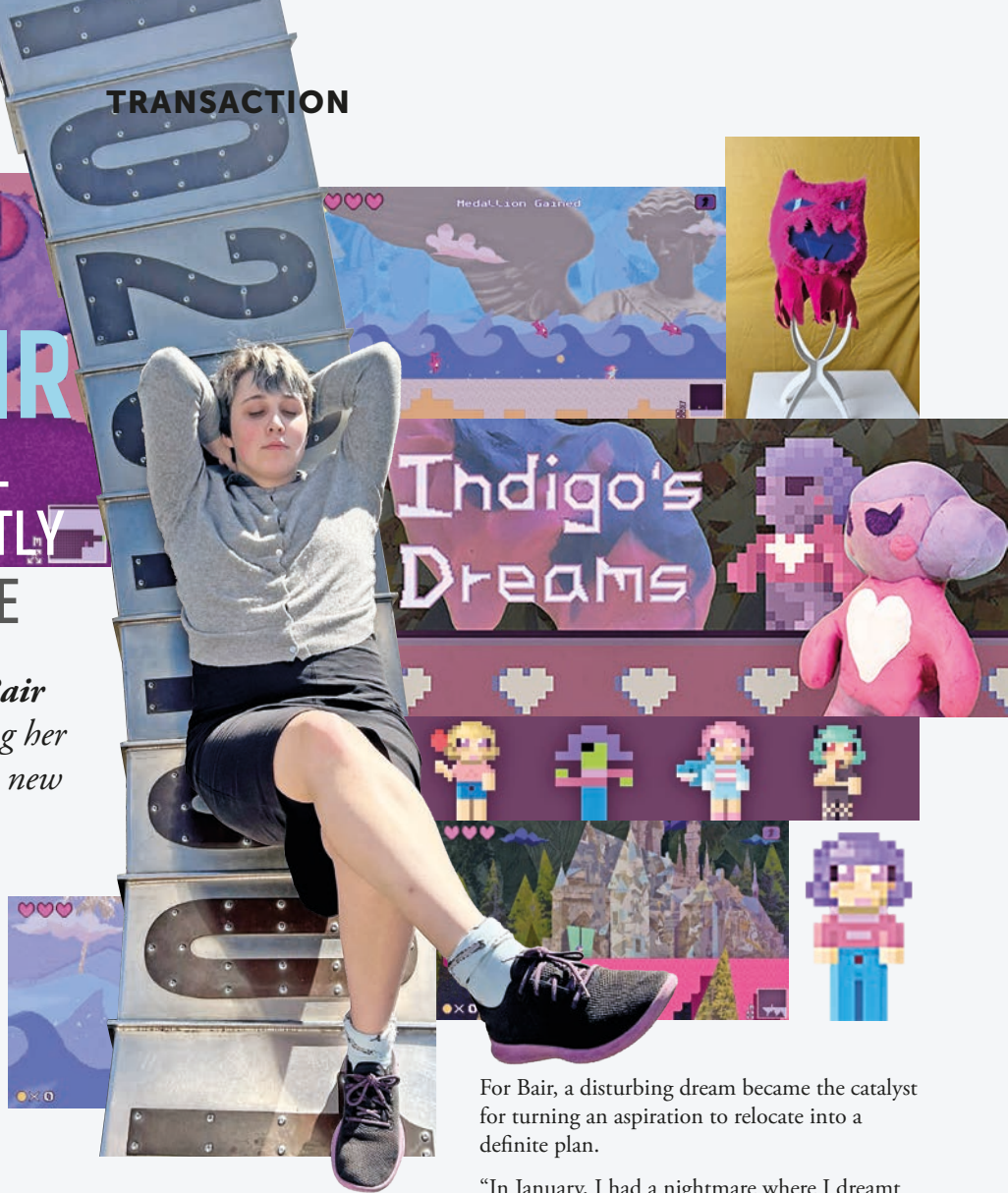
"Understanding the dangers I faced and believing my dream may have been prophetic, as woo-woo as that may sound, I decided I would be leaving for New Zealand by year's end."

In Christchurch, Bair found not only a new home but a creative community that became part of Indigo's Dreams.

Through the Christchurch Game Developer Association, she met two local performers who joined the project. Dash Fletcher voices Shuvnol, while Lily Keenan made her voice-acting debut as Alice.

Queerness, however, reaches far beyond the people listed in the credits.

One side quest asks players to reunite a man with his husband, who has been transformed into a cloud. Players can also dress Indigo



TRANSACTION



in a costume inspired by the transgender pride flag.

"As a transgender woman, it was important to me that the team working on the game was diverse," Bair says. "Almost everyone credited in the title's end credits is a member of the LGBTQ community."

"I want to make sure that when people play Indigo's Dreams, they're confident that the team behind the title celebrates queerness."

That community spirit also helped carry the game through its final stages. A Kickstarter campaign reached its funding goal in fewer than eight days and eventually raised US\$2,579 from 60 backers — 128 per cent of its target.

"What made it possible is word of mouth from the people who've been supporting me and Indigo's Dreams the longest," Bair says. "My friends, colleagues and family all blasted the Kickstarter

page everywhere, and I'm deeply grateful."

She is now developing additional content alongside the extra difficulty mode promised to supporters, extending a project that has already demanded extraordinary persistence.

At different points during development, Bair was working three jobs with almost no spare time. At others, she was unemployed, stressed and without a reliable income. She continued building the game regardless — an experience that informs her message for young queer and transgender creators who fear the gaming industry has no place for them.

"When we think of gaming, we often think of straight men and boys," she says. "But gaming is art, and if anyone knows how to make art, it's the mistreated, the under-represented, the bullied, the marginalised and the forgotten."

"It might not look like there's space for you, but you can always build your own room."

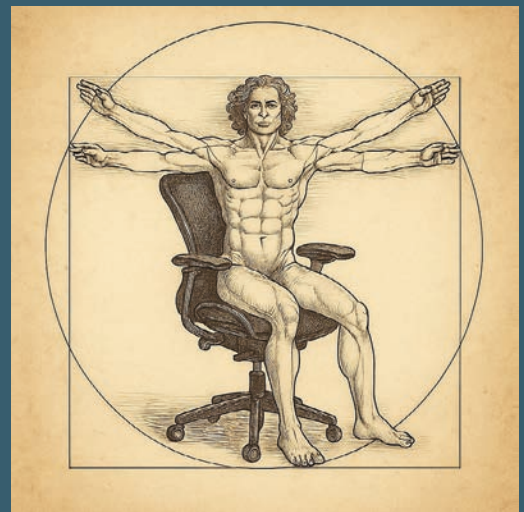
For Bair, Indigo's Dreams is that room: handmade, defiantly queer and filled with the strange beauty of a dream she refused to abandon.

"I just kept chipping at it, and I made my mark on the industry," she says. "Nobody can take that away from me."

To find out more, visit indigosdreams.com



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MOANA VĀ BRINGS PACIFIC PRIDE TO RAINBOW GAMES

As Moana Vā prepares to deliver netball at Rainbow Games 2026, its team promises Pacific leadership, family-centred inclusion and, most importantly, “vibes!”



Andy, Tonia & Lana by Lia Fouillard

When Lana Shields stepped onto the netball court at the last Rainbow Games, 43 years had passed since she had played the sport.

Like many people returning after a long absence, she had doubts. Would she remember the rules? Would she embarrass herself? Could she keep up?

“But I had a go, and absolutely loved it,” she says.

As General Manager of Moana Vā, the organisation delivering netball at Rainbow Games 2026, Shields has a simple message for anyone considering registering but worrying they are too old, too inexperienced, not athletic enough or missing a team.

“Come anyway!”

For Shields, community sport has always represented far more than competition. It is where friendships form, confidence grows and communities gather. Netball, in particular, has long held a special place within Pacific families, making Moana Vā’s partnership with Rainbow Games feel like a natural extension of its work.

Moana Vā, meaning Navigators of Pacific Pride, was founded in Ōtautahi Christchurch to support Pacific Rainbow+ and MVPFAFF+ people, alongside their families, communities and allies.

Shields says the organisation was created because Pacific Rainbow+ people were too often forced to choose between different parts of themselves.

“They could find Rainbow spaces that didn’t always understand Pacific cultures, or Pacific spaces where they didn’t always feel safe being their authentic selves,” she explains.

“What was missing was a space where nobody had to leave part of themselves at the door.”

Moana Vā seeks to bridge that divide by creating culturally safe, family-centred spaces in which people are supported to belong exactly as they are. Through mentoring, advocacy, wellbeing initiatives, talanoa and practical support, the organisation works to reduce isolation and strengthen the relationships surrounding Pacific Rainbow+ people.

Its approach recognises that, within Pacific cultures, identity and wellbeing extend far beyond the individual.

“Our wellbeing is deeply connected to our family, our aiga, our churches, our villages and our communities,” Shields says. “When one person is struggling, the whole family often feels it. Likewise, when a family grows in understanding and acceptance, everyone benefits.”

Rather than seeing families as something Rainbow+ people must distance themselves from, Moana Vā invites them into the conversation.

“We see them as part of the solution,” Shields says.

“Many parents simply haven’t had safe opportunities to ask questions or learn. By walking alongside entire families with compassion rather than judgement, we’ve seen relationships heal and people remain connected to those they love.”

As Moana Vā often puts it, supporting one person can mean supporting an entire village.

That same philosophy will be brought onto the netball court when Rainbow Games takes place in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland this October.

Shields says becoming a delivery partner is both a privilege and an important milestone for an organisation that began with a small group of volunteers trying to create safer spaces in Christchurch.

“It shows how far we’ve come in just a few years and sends an important message that smaller community organisations can lead nationally when they’re trusted to do so,” she says.

Joining Shields in coordinating the tournament are Moana Vā volunteers Tonia Fasi and Andy Lee.

Fasi works in the family violence sector and describes aiga and community as central to who she is and how she approaches every kaupapa she supports. Within Moana Vā, she sees her role as providing practical support while ensuring Pacific Rainbow+ voices remain at the centre.

“Often the best thing we can do as allies is open the door and then get out of the way and let our Pacific Rainbow+ whānau shine,” she says.

RAINBOW GAMES

"I try to keep myself in check by regularly asking, 'Whose voice is missing?' and actively removing barriers to participation for our whānau who are often underrepresented."

Fasi believes netball offers an especially effective pathway into Rainbow community spaces because it is already familiar and celebrated across Pacific communities.

"We have made this sport our own, with some of New Zealand's best men's, mixed and women's players identifying as Pacific Rainbow+," she says.

"There is safety and familiarity for many of our aiga on the netball court, and we are excited to bring that vibe to the Rainbow Games this year."

Lee works as a te reo Māori kaiako and sports club coordinator. Her involvement in netball stretches back decades, although she now spends much of her time coaching, organising tournaments and supporting the sporting lives of her five daughters.

Lee says Moana Vā's management team will bring plenty of netball knowledge to the Games, but its most important contribution will be something less easily measured.

"The vibes, baby!"

She tells us players can expect loud music, colour, cheering and spot prizes celebrating everything from the best-dressed team to the most "divatastic" intercept.

These playful awards reflect Moana Vā's desire to create a tournament where people can compete without feeling that they must tone themselves down or conform to a traditional sporting

environment. However, beneath the music and flamboyance sits a deeper purpose.

"We aim to create spaces and environments where we honour the vā, the sacred space where connection with each other is at the fore," Lee says.

For Moana Vā, inclusion means more than allowing people into an existing structure. It means trusting communities to lead, shape decisions and define what wellbeing and belonging look like for themselves.

Lee hopes that spirit will endure long after the final whistle, with players and supporters carrying new relationships, confidence and community connections home with them.

Success, therefore, will not be measured only in goals, medals or tournament results. It will be seen in the people who arrive feeling nervous and leave feeling part of something larger.

Shields knows how intimidating that first step can feel. Her return to netball after 43 years reminded her that walking through the door is often the hardest part.

"Once you're there, you realise everyone is there for the same reason," she says. "To have fun, make connections and be part of something bigger than themselves."

So, whether you are an experienced player, a complete beginner or someone who has not touched a netball in four decades, Moana Vā's message remains the same: Come anyway.

Register for the Rainbow Games at rainbowgames.co.nz



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STILL STRIKING GOLD AT 80

*Fresh from winning ten-pin bowling gold at the Gay Games in Valencia, **John Williams** is preparing to roll again at Auckland's Rainbow Games this October and wants bowlers of every age and ability to join him*

At 80, John Williams is not interested in slowing down. When he is not competing in ten-pin bowling, he is travelling the world, pursuing his passion for riding motorcycles. Soon after returning from Valencia, he was preparing to leave again for Bolivia with a packed itinerary of full-day rides.

That appetite for life has been accompanied by 34 years of bowling. Williams began playing after moving to Auckland and joined the Sail City Bowling League, where he found far more than just a weekly sporting commitment.

"I found like-minded friends who, over the years, have become like family," he says. "We still meet and bowl every Sunday."

Two years after joining the league, Williams travelled with fellow Sail City bowlers to the 1994 Gay Games in New York, where he won gold medals. The experience gave him a lasting goal: every four years, he would return to test himself and challenge for another medal.

His latest victory in Valencia proves that ambition has never faded. Next, Williams will compete at the Rainbow Games, taking place in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland from 29 October to 1 November. He hopes his story will encourage others to register for ten-pin bowling, whether they are experienced league players or have never thrown a ball before.

"If you can hold a bowling ball and push it down the lane, you will enjoy the excitement of seeing it knock down the pins," he says. "No athletic skill is needed to have fun."

For Williams, bowling's accessibility is one of its greatest strengths. Its handicap system allows newcomers to compete alongside more experienced players, while practice brings the same rewards and challenges found in any sport. At the Rainbow Games, social and competitive divisions ensure participants can choose the experience that suits them.



Team New Zealand at the Gay Games



John Williams

"Every competition is a new challenge to be the best you can be on the day," he says. "The extra dimension of bowling at the Games always provides a high level of fun and competition through the diversity of the players."

That combination of competition and connection has shaped Williams' life. Growing up on a farm in a conservative town during the 1950s and '60s, team sports provided an important social outlet. Travel later opened his

world, sparking his interest in photography and introducing him to cultures and communities he continues to revisit decades later.

Williams has never felt the need to let sexuality define or limit him. Instead, he hopes the confidence with which he moves through the world offers something valuable to younger LGBTQ+ people.

"I would hope I am an inspiration to the younger generation to find like-minded friends and family, grow confident in themselves and live life with passion," he says.

He credits his own health and energy to doing exactly that: building a life around work, sport and hobbies he genuinely loves.

"Life has been very good to me," he says. "I have been able to live every day passionately."

For anyone worried they may be too old, too inexperienced or too nervous to enter the Rainbow Games alone, Williams' message is simple: register.

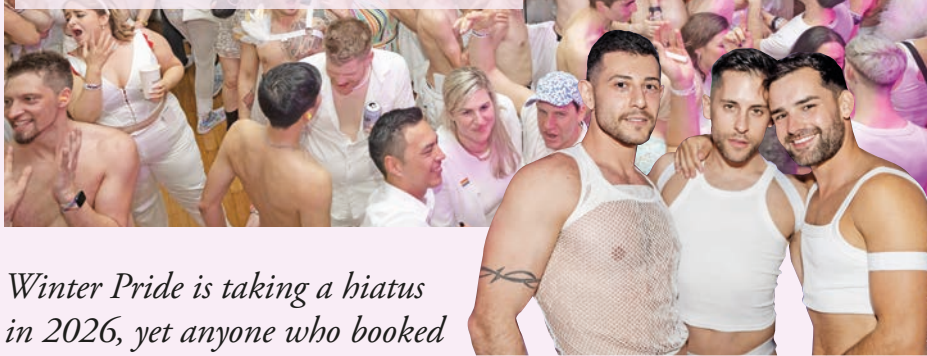
"Bowling lanes are always a very social environment, and even more so when an event like the Rainbow Games is happening," he says. "Anyone at any level should not hesitate to register and take part in this fun and friendly sport."

Rainbow Games ten-pin bowling takes place at PINS Henderson on Saturday 31 October, with singles, doubles and trios competitions. Participants can enter individually and be matched with others. Registrations close 16 October.

To register, visit rainbowgames.co.nz
Follow John's adventures at [@jowkiwi](https://www.instagram.com/jowkiwi)

PARTY

QUEENSTOWN'S BIG QUEER PARTY WEEKEND



Winter Pride is taking a hiatus in 2026, yet anyone who booked flights, accommodation and annual leave before the festival was cancelled still has plenty to pack for

From Friday 4 to Sunday 6 September, Queenstown will host six independently produced rainbow events, filling the weekend with drinks, drag, underwear, sportswear and dance floors.

Frisky, produced by the Wellington Party Boys, is responsible for three events under its Big Chill Weekend banner. It begins with free Come Together Drinks at The Ballarat pub from 6.30pm on Friday, giving early arrivals a chance to reconnect after a day on the slopes.

"We wanted to keep it a fun, low-key weekend for all of our friends and community who were keen to come to Queenstown this winter!" the Wellington Party Boys tell *YOUR EX*.

Friday then gets considerably less dressed. From 9pm, Rehab and He-Skyn take over The London for *I'm Not Gay (This Year) But \$20 Is \$20*, an R18 underwear party for men attracted to men. Guests are invited to wear as much or as little as they feel comfortable in, with several spaces available for dancing, socialising or finding a cosy corner.



I'm Not Gay

Saturday starts at SODA, where Frisky's Devil's Long Lunch runs from 1pm to 3pm. The centrally located two-course lunch promises local cuisine and wine, drag queen hosts and prizes from local sponsors.

Saturday night brings two dance-floor options. Rehab's inclusive *Nooks & Crannies* begins at Queenstown Wharf Bar at 9pm, welcoming people of every gender and



Nooks & Crannies



sexual identity for DJs, conversation and dancing. At 10pm, Frisky's headline Winter Olympics Sportswear Party takes over Rhino's until 4am.

Expect wrestling singlets, rugby shorts, netball skirts, harnesses and uplifting house music packed with huge vocals and hands-in-the-air moments.

"The Winter Olympics party will be a classic *FRISKY* dance party that locals and those travelling will LOVE!" its producers say.



Frisky Events

The weekend finishes with the Winter Pride-produced Sunday Session from 3pm until midnight at a venue still to be announced. Open to everyone, the free gathering invites the community to trade stories from the weekend, enjoy DJs and look ahead to Winter Pride's planned 2027 return.



Sunday Session



FRISKY

BIG GAY CHILL WEEKEND

QUEENSTOWN

4 - 6 SEPTEMBER



COME Together
DRINKS



FRI 4th SEPTEMBER

DEVIL'S Long Lunch



SAT 5th SEPTEMBER

WINTER Olympics
SPORTSWEAR PARTY



SAT 5th SEPTEMBER

FRISKY HALLOWEEN

CHRISTCHURCH

SAT 3 OCTOBER

FRISKY HALLOWEEN

WELLINGTON

SUN 25 OCTOBER

FRISKY Frills Auckland

A Priscilla themed Pride Party

SAT 20 FEBRUARY

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OUR GUIDE TO THE PERFECT QUEENSTOWN TRIP

Cross Hill Lodge & Domes

The long weekend of proud parties at the start of September is just one of the many reasons to visit Queenstown and its surrounding serenity. Queenstown boasts some of New Zealand's most luxurious hospitality, stunning scenery and once-in-a-lifetime outdoor adventures. Here is our guide to a glorious stay.

STAY LAKESIDE

The Rees Hotel feels slick from the moment we arrive. Check-in is effortless, the staff have a nothing-is-too-much attitude and EV charging parks are plentiful. Then we open the door to our Executive King Room and find lake and mountain views that resemble an oil painting brought to life.

The spacious room's muted palette wisely lets that majestic outlook do the talking. Its clever layout means the television can be watched from the generous couch and ottoman, king-size bed or spa bath, complete with jets galore.

Laziness wins the next morning. Breakfast in bed costs only an additional \$5 tray charge. Minibar prices are similarly reasonable and both showcase New Zealand produce, while the ethical toiletries support Forest & Bird.

A 24-hour gym, bar, in-house massage service and hourly shuttle into town complete the

offering. Our favourite option, however, is the lakeside walk into central Queenstown, with the path due to reopen in November. (therees.co.nz)

For a more economical lakeside stay, **The Oaks Queenstown Lake Shores Resort** delivers immaculate, modern rooms with small balconies and pretty views. Upgrading to a one-bedroom apartment brings considerably more space, plus an outlook towards the Remarkables.

Its restaurant pairs polished international service with local wines, cocktails and four- or five-course menus. Highlights include perfectly cooked eye fillet, subtly seared tuna tartare and a jewel-like dessert. With further extensions about to open, there's good reason this resort is only getting bigger. (oakshotels.com)

UP ON THE PEAKS

Thirty minutes from town, **Coronet Peak** offers ski and snowboard runs for every ability. First Tracks begins at 8am, while Night Ski on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays extends the fun into the evening until the end of August. This season, a state-of-the-art new snow machine can produce reliable powder coverage on the lower learner slopes and children's Snow Play zone, whatever the temperature! (coronetpeak.co.nz)

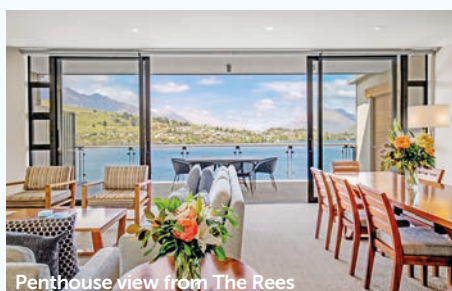
ON THE FLAT AND FOOTHILLS

For a gentler workout, try the peaceful Kelvin Heights Peninsula Loop, ten minutes from town, or Arrowtown's Tobin's Track, where the views become more rewarding with every uphill step.

STAY IN STYLE IN THE CENTRE

When romance is part of your Queenstown plan, stay at **Hulbert House**.

Refined maximalism fills this historic Victorian villa, creating the feeling of a secluded resort in the heart of town. Our Archerfield Room is dressed in dark gold and royal blue, with an ornate king bed and a gloriously opulent bathroom. A deep bathtub sits beneath an enormous rain shower, while proper brass taps make even washing your hands feel pleasingly old-fashioned.



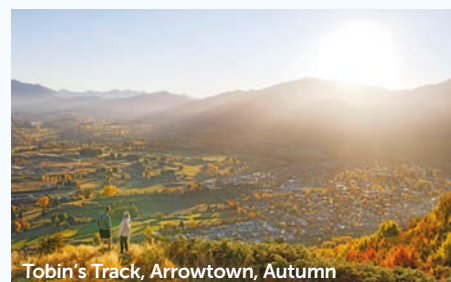
Penthouse view from The Rees



Dessert at The Oaks



Coronet Peak Sightseeing



Tobin's Track, Arrowtown, Autumn

AFTER THE PARTY

Service is just as memorable. Reserve one of the two outdoor hot tubs, and towels and bottled water await beside the spotlessly clean tub overlooking the lake and mountains. Returning from the slopes with muscles you had forgotten existed? Call ahead and the team will draw your bath.

At 5pm, guests gather beside the open log fire for local wine and canapés. The pours are generous, the quality exceptional and, after two hours, everyone in the lounge feels like an old friend. Beautifully restored by New Zealand designer Neil McLachlan, Hulbert House offers just six distinctive suites, so get booking now! (hulberthouse.co.nz)

EXHILARATING

Thunder Jet The combines high-speed spins with a longer journey across Lake Wakatipu and the Kawarau River. Its 60-minute, 47km return trip reaches remote river landscapes, historic gold-mining country and scenery accessible only by water. It is classic Queenstown adrenaline with time to appreciate the surroundings. (thunderjet.co.nz)

RELAXING

Queenstown Marina catches our eye, now bustling with boats and promising an easy lakeside afternoon. We begin with melt-in-the-mouth beef cheek at **Fino Wine Bar**, then stroll to **Wet Jacket** for wine tasting while Lake Wakatipu reflects the mountains back at us. (finowinebar.co.nz; wetjacket.nz)

TASTE BEFORE YOU TOUR

With so many Central Otago vineyards, choosing where to start can feel overwhelming. **The Winery** solves that delicious problem by bringing more than 100 local wines together under one roof.

Secure a seat beside the fireplace, load a prepaid tasting card and explore the wall of dispensers. We begin cautiously with a taste of Boneline



Hulbert House



Southern Alps Air



Crosshill Domes

Shiraz, graduate to Sam Neill's Two Paddocks, then lose track of time while gossiping with friends over mulled wine and hot buttered rum.

That is The Winery's magic. You wander in for one sip and stay all evening. Whisky, dessert wines and tasty tapas add to the temptation. Its spacious Queenstown venue has a lively soundtrack, while the Arrowtown branch brings the same idea to a more picturesque setting. (thewinery.co.nz)

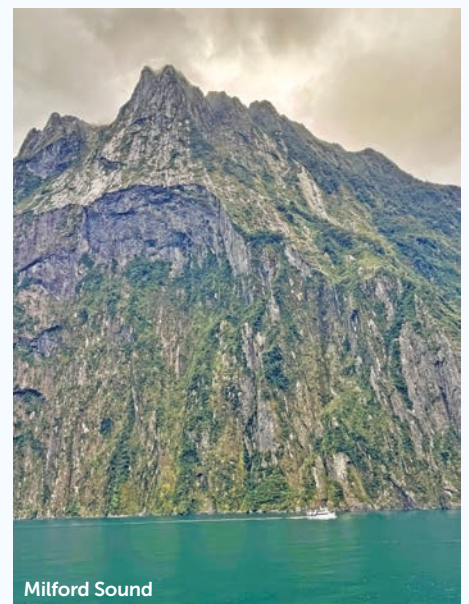
BACK TO NATURE

After Frisky's Big Chill Weekend, **Cross Hill Lodge & Domes** will offer the perfect change of pace. Set amid the park-like grounds of The Camp at Lake Hāwea, its huge canvas domes contain some of the smartest glamping designs we have encountered.

A hotel-style bathroom forms the centre, surrounded by a luxurious bedroom that looks out on the lush green bush in the day and out at the stars at night, a kitchenette, a private changing area and luggage storage. An automatic fireplace keeps everything toasty, while two Cape Cod chairs invite morning coffee on a private deck filled with birdsong. The lake is a minute away, and friendly staff serve a cooked breakfast at the lodge before your next adventure. (crosshill.co.nz)

THE ULTIMATE ADVENTURE

If you choose one major excursion, make it Southern Alps Air's Fly, Cruise, Fly and Glaciers trip to Milford Sound.



Milford Sound

Departing from quiet, convenient Wānaka Airport, our six-seat plane climbs above Lake Wānaka, Mount Aspiring and Fiordland National Parks. During nearly 90 spectacular minutes, more than 100 glaciers pass beneath us before we descend dramatically into Milford Sound.

While bus passengers recover from the winding journey from Queenstown, we step straight onto a cruise and travel the full 16km of this epic waterway. Waterfalls tumble from sheer cliffs, mountains rise from dark water and every turn produces another photograph.

Then comes the real luxury: a swift 25-minute flight through the mountains back to Wānaka, gliding past snow-capped peaks at eye level. It is a genuine bucket-list experience, and watching visitors reboard their buses only confirms that we chose wisely. (southernalpsair.co.nz)

Destination Queenstown and Lake Wānaka Tourism supported this trip. Visit queenstownNZ.nz and wanaka.co.nz to plan your next visit

OUR FAVOURITE DINING IN QUEENSTOWN LAKES

From an old favourite to wood-fired indulgence and world-class views, these restaurants showcase the region's irresistible dining scene



The Bunker

THE BUNKER

Any long-time *YOUR EX* reader knows The Bunker is my favourite restaurant in the world. After months spent eating around Europe in my twenties, my first meal here blew every dish from that trip out of the water. Years later, its emerald-green, mahogany-and-leather dining room remains irresistible. Chef Marius' new menu, developed with Ngāi Tahu and focused on sustainable, ethical sourcing, delivers kingfish in sesame and pear broth, pork belly, venison, lamb and blue cod, followed by the extraordinary Banana Box, a crisp banana fortress filled with mousses and dreamy creams. thebunker.co.nz

AYRBURN

Ayrburn has become one of Queenstown's biggest talking points: a sprawling food-and-wine playground built across historic farmland



Ayrburn

near Arrowtown, with restaurants, bars, a bakery, gelateria, pub and deli. At its bistro, The Woolshed, familiar dishes arrive with clever, sophisticated twists. Scallops are soft, pillowy and gloriously moreish, while the octopus brings meaty texture and a perfectly judged fiery kick. The standout, however, is an Aotearoa take on prawn toast, combining prawn, pāua, coriander and tamarind on rēwena bread. All the while, you are surrounded by lavish, spectacular interior design, which is worth the trip alone. ayrburn.com



True South Dining Room

TRUE SOUTH DINING ROOM

True South Dining Room may have Queenstown's most spectacular restaurant view, with Lake Wakatipu appearing close enough to touch. The food matches the setting. A rich brioche toastie is packed with crayfish and aioli, while the mushroom pâté makes an irresistible case for vegetarian dining. Ika mata arrives with coconut cream foam, savoury hop syrup and roasted yuzu, creating a creamy, complex



Sunfire

mouthful that changes with every bite. Venison sings with liquorice, cherry and beetroot, and Wagyu beef arrives on a crisp beef-marrow cracker. It is a credit to Waikato-born chef Trent Watson. therees.co.nz

SUNFIRE

Sitting just feet from the harbour, Sunfire pairs Queenstown's passing bustle with a classic rhythm and blues soundtrack, a generous patio and roaring heat lamps. Its Jospo oven lends beautiful smokiness to ribs, salmon and steaks, but the famous seafood tower is the headline act: oysters, garlic-butter crayfish, squid, two kinds of prawns, battered snapper, salmon tacos and green-lipped mussels. Less greedy diners should order the fall-apart ribs or Mozambique prawns in peri-peri cream, then finish with chocolate fondant, white-chocolate mousse and pumpkin-seed sorbet. Heavenly. sunfire.co.nz



Francesca, Wānaka

FRANCESCA, WĀNAKA

There is a warm, lively buzz at Francesca, where soaring ceilings, low-hanging jar lights, natural timber and living plants create a modern Italian dining room. Begin with comforting pork-shoulder croquettes and snapper crudo sharpened by lime, mandarin, kiwifruit and chilli. The beef-cheek gnocchi is the sort of dish that inspires repeat visits: handmade, feather-light pillows coated in a deeply satisfying sauce. Wood-fired pizzas remain the signature. We chose the indulgent funghi and added black truffle picked in nearby Bannockburn that very day. No regrets. francescawanaka.co.nz

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 RELIAB PRESENTS
Nooks & Crannies
SAT, 5 SEP, 9PM - SUN, 6 SEP, 2AM
 @ Queenstown Wharf Bar




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OUT & ABOUT

WHERE K' ROAD COMES TOGETHER

Eagle Bar brought its friendly energy to another lively night on Karangahape Road. Regulars and newcomers packed the cosy neighbourhood favourite for drinks, laughter and camera-ready smiles, proving this welcoming Auckland institution knows how to make everyone feel at home



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*Undetectable means reducing the HIV in your blood to very low levels (<200 copies/mL for >6 months) with ART, which helps prevent sexual transmission of HIV.^{3,6}

†Based on data from the GEMINI 1 & 2 studies (patients new to treatment) and TANGO study (patients replacing their current HIV treatment). DTG + 3TC was compared with a regimen containing either 3 or 4 medicines, measuring either the percentage of patients with a viral load of <50 copies per mL or the percentage of patients with a viral load of ≥50 copies per mL.^{4,5}

Abbreviations: HIV, human immunodeficiency virus; ART, antiretroviral therapy; DTG, dolutegravir; 3TC, lamivudine.

References: 1. GlaxoSmithKline NZ, DOVATO Consumer Medicine Information, 2025. Available at: www.medsafe.govt.nz/consumers/cmi/d/dovato.pdf (accessed Feb 2026). 2. PHARMAC, Pharmaceutical Schedule, Antiretrovirals. April 2026;v33:1-352. 3. Department of Health and Human Services. Guidelines for the use of antiretroviral agents in adults and adolescents with HIV (updated Sept 2025). 4. Cahn P, et al. *AIDS* 2022;36(1):39-48. 5. Osileyemi O, et al. *Clin Infect Dis* 2022;75(6):975-986. 6. EACS (European AIDS Clinical Society) Guidelines, version 13.0. Available at <https://eacs.sanfordguide.com/en/eacs-hiv/paediatric-hiv-treatment/art-initiation-and-initial-regimen> (accessed March 2026).

Dovato is a film coated tablet containing 50 mg of dolutegravir (as dolutegravir sodium) and 300 mg of lamivudine, which is used for the treatment of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV-1) infection in adults and adolescents (from 12 years of age weighing at least 40 kg) who have no known or suspected resistance to either antiretroviral component. **Dovato is a Prescription Medicine. Dovato has risks and benefits and should be initiated by a doctor experienced in treating HIV. Dovato is a funded medicine; Special Authority criteria apply. Ask your doctor if Dovato is right for you.** Use strictly as directed. If you have concerns, or side effects, see your doctor, pharmacist or healthcare professional. Normal doctor's consultation fees apply. For more information, you can view the Dovato Consumer Medicine Information at www.medsafe.govt.nz. Trademarks are owned by or licensed to the GSK group of companies. ©2026 GSK group of companies or its licensor. Marketed on behalf of ViiV Healthcare by GlaxoSmithKline NZ Limited, Auckland. **Adverse events involving GlaxoSmithKline products should be reported to GSK Medical Information on 0800 808 500.** Date of Approval: **May 2026** | Date of Expiry: **May 2028** | TAPS-NP24164 | PM-NZ-DLL-ADVR-240001

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