

# THE DREAMWEAVER

If a client wants a pink elephant, says Jacqui Spice, “you say, ‘what shade?’” As the founder of Touch of Spice, a luxury tourism and experiences company based in Queenstown, she deals with elephant-sized demands on a daily basis. A request for the finest lodgings in the country for a visiting film star. A chopper to the top of a mountain for a massage. A professional table tennis player to spar against — a real request Spice met by flying one over from Australia, and hiring an events centre so her Latvian client could ping-pong to his heart’s content.

It’s her job to make things happen. Wild, expensive things, but also small, outrageous things. The Latvian also required his bathwater to be warmed to a specific temperature — and complained the room was cold after he left the doors open in winter.

“He wasn’t very nice.”

That’s about the most dirt you’ll get out of Spice, who is polished in the flesh, and in the professional sense. She has the country’s top chefs, fashion designers and airport managers on her phone but isn’t the type to name names. That goes for the celebrities and wealthy investors she’s hosted, too. But let’s just say, if a pop star is in town and wants to visit Queenstown (getting there as *swiftly* as possible) there’s a pretty good chance Spice has hooked her up.

Elsewhere, her job is a combination of marketing, logistics and real estate: promoting luxury New Zealand properties and activities to investors, at trade shows, or through private members’ clubs around the globe (Auckland’s Seafarers is among her clients). Figuring out exactly how many pieces of luggage will fit in the Bentley picking up her clients from their private jet. And most impressive of all, getting hold of a plumber at 9pm on a Saturday to deal with a dripping tap.

After 10 years in the business, she now has a team of 11, including one who speaks fluent Chinese. Holidaymakers staying in one of Spice’s bevy of private villas can expect to fork out between \$500 and \$30,000 a night — top dollar will nab you an architecturally designed, lakefront property with pools, tennis court, media room, heli-pad, private chef, butler and a “mindblowing and very expensive” art collection. Her clientele are “top net-worth” folk from China, the United Arab Emirates,

Looking for a one-of-a-kind luxury experience in Queenstown? You’ll want Jacqui Spice on speed dial, writes Rebecca Barry Hill



Picture / Brett Phibbs

## LUXURY QUEENSTOWN

Jacqui Spice recommends:

- **Whare Kea Lodge & Chalet:** “High up in the mountains. An amazing place with incredible views. You can go for lunch, and heli-ski from there, or stay the night.” (Approx. \$3000 for two people for the lunch option).
- **Oxbow Lodge:** A luxury home where you can hunt, go fishing, try claybird shooting, knife-throwing and jetboat driving. “The chef is from Wild Earth and he steam-cooks all the food in a barrel. It’s a really iconic South Island experience.” (Approx. \$1000 per head).
- **An Over the Top Golf:** experience flying by chopper to a golf tee and aiming for a hole-in-one on the top of a mountain. “It’s awesome fun, closer to the \$400-\$500 mark.”
- Indulge your inner speed demon at **Highlands Motorsport Park.** “Book the racetrack and bring in your own team of private chefs.” (POA).

Saudi Arabia, Australia and North America, who are here to do business, or just relax.

“These are just busy people who need somebody to say what’s available, we’ve whittled it down and these are the best options for you.”

Spending just a few minutes in Spice’s company, it’s obvious that diplomacy, and facilitating others’ comfort is her calling. To say she is businesslike is an understatement — she’s on call 24 hours a day.

Not bad for someone who left school at 16. Her aptitude for organising came in handy when she worked as a secretary, and later on super yachts, where she travelled the world for 10 years, eventually as chief stewardess, a role that involved “planning every minute of every day”. Around the time she started thinking about returning to New Zealand, wealthy contacts asked if she would rent their luxury Queenstown homes out on their behalf.

“They said to me, the biggest problem with Queenstown is that everybody shuts down at 5pm on Friday, and nobody will call you back.”

It got her thinking, and in late 2005 the former Aucklander moved to the place she calls “the affluent playground of New Zealand” to launch a personal concierge company.

“It was just going to be me, looking after 5-6 people. Clients would book me to get their houses ready for when they arrived. I’d book the restaurants, arrange activities, host their friends. It snowballed from there.”

Now she’ll help with everything from weddings, to corporate events, to hosting large groups. It’s a multi-faceted role that sucks up 100 hours a week, no matter the time zone. Naturally, that has meant making sacrifices.

“My first marriage suffered a bit to the business and I have a young son who had a nanny from the day he was born, which is not what I wanted.” Newly remarried with a blended family of three children, she concedes she’s not able to be involved in their schooling, but says she aims for quality time over quantity.

“There’s definitely some challenges, personally and professionally. But I love that when I open my laptop or turn my phone on, I don’t know what somebody’s going to be asking. We’ve had a lot of fun, we’ve hosted a lot of VIPs and celebrities. I get to meet lots of interesting people.”

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