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# VOYAGING SOUTH

Embrace slow travel and the joy of leisurely scenic cruising from Australia to New Zealand

WORDS **FIONA HARPER**













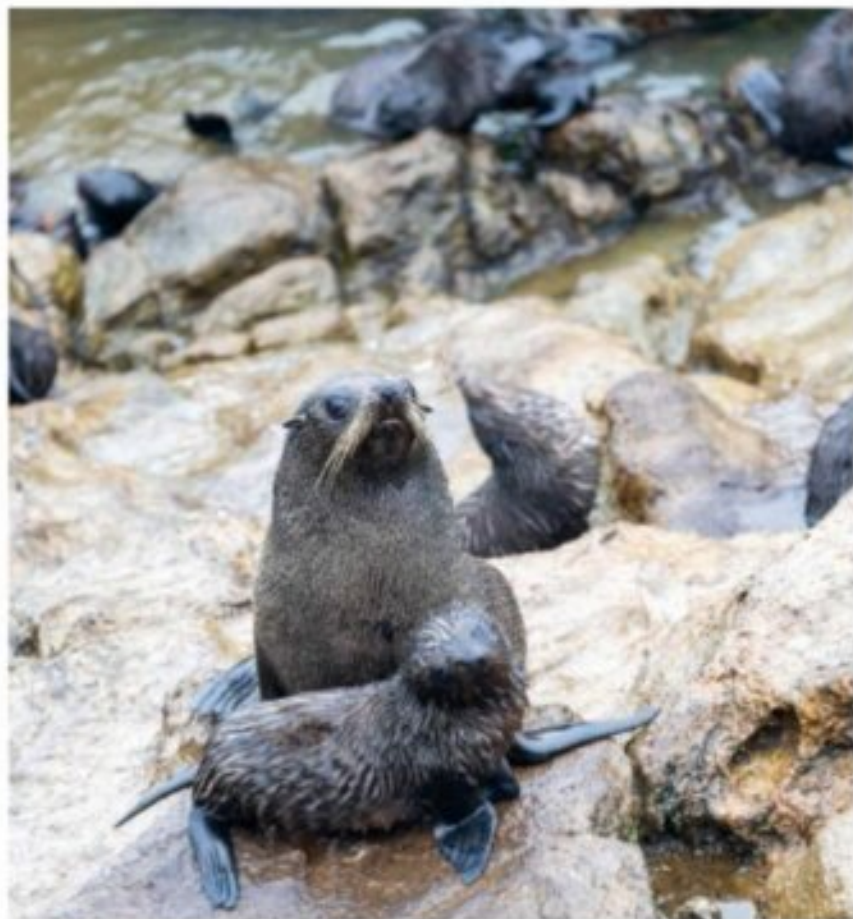
It's whale-breeding season so we're restricted to cruising at no more than ten knots," announces Captain Johannes Tysse one afternoon as our ship *Azamara Quest* heads towards Auckland.

It's a fair-weather day on the east coast of New Zealand's North Island and I've spent the past few hours sitting on my balcony absorbed in a book. The captain's announcement brings me out of my reverie as he goes on to explain that we're ahead of schedule and are essentially 'killing time in order to arrive in Auckland on schedule at 7.30pm.'

Despite being engrossed in the story of an endurance cyclist in Alaska, I found my attention constantly drawn to the sparkling cobalt sea beyond the pages. Now, I gaze out to sea with renewed anticipation. As I cast my gaze from left to right across the watery horizon, I subconsciously wish for the tell-tale spray from a whale's blowhole to break the surface.

Humpback whales migrate through these waters each year as they move between summer feeding grounds in Antarctica and winter calving and breeding grounds in near-tropical waters.

Entanglement in fishing gear and collisions with ships are just one threat to the Oceanic population of humpback whales, which were classified as endangered in 2008. By limiting ships' speed,



## Humpback whales migrate through these waters each year as they move from summer in Antarctica to breeding grounds in near-tropical waters

New Zealand's Department of Conservation aims to reduce the threat to marine mammals which were once hunted to near extinction in these waters.

I don't see whales, but there was much joy earlier when a friend who was lounging on a sun bed on the pool deck texted me excitedly to say that she'd seen a large pod of dolphins 'porpoising' through the swell.

During our 17-night Australia & New Zealand Intensive Voyage, there has been ample time to savour these simple pleasures, such as gazing out to the ever-changing ocean and watching the colours change as the sun travels through its arc.

As we cross the Tasman Sea and venture downwards – beyond 45 degrees south – to round the South Island's southernmost tip where eroded cliffs plummet dramatically into the ocean swell, sea birds glide gracefully beyond our stern.

The aft-facing alfresco Sunset Deck at Windows restaurant provides a mesmerising view of the swirling waters in our wake and becomes a favourite haunt, whether while lingering over breakfast or catching up with friends for sundowner cocktails. Or even when doing little more than gazing out to sea, enjoying the pleasure of ignoring my phone, silencing the inner chatter in my head and savouring the serenity of slowly voyaging across the gently rolling tides. ▶

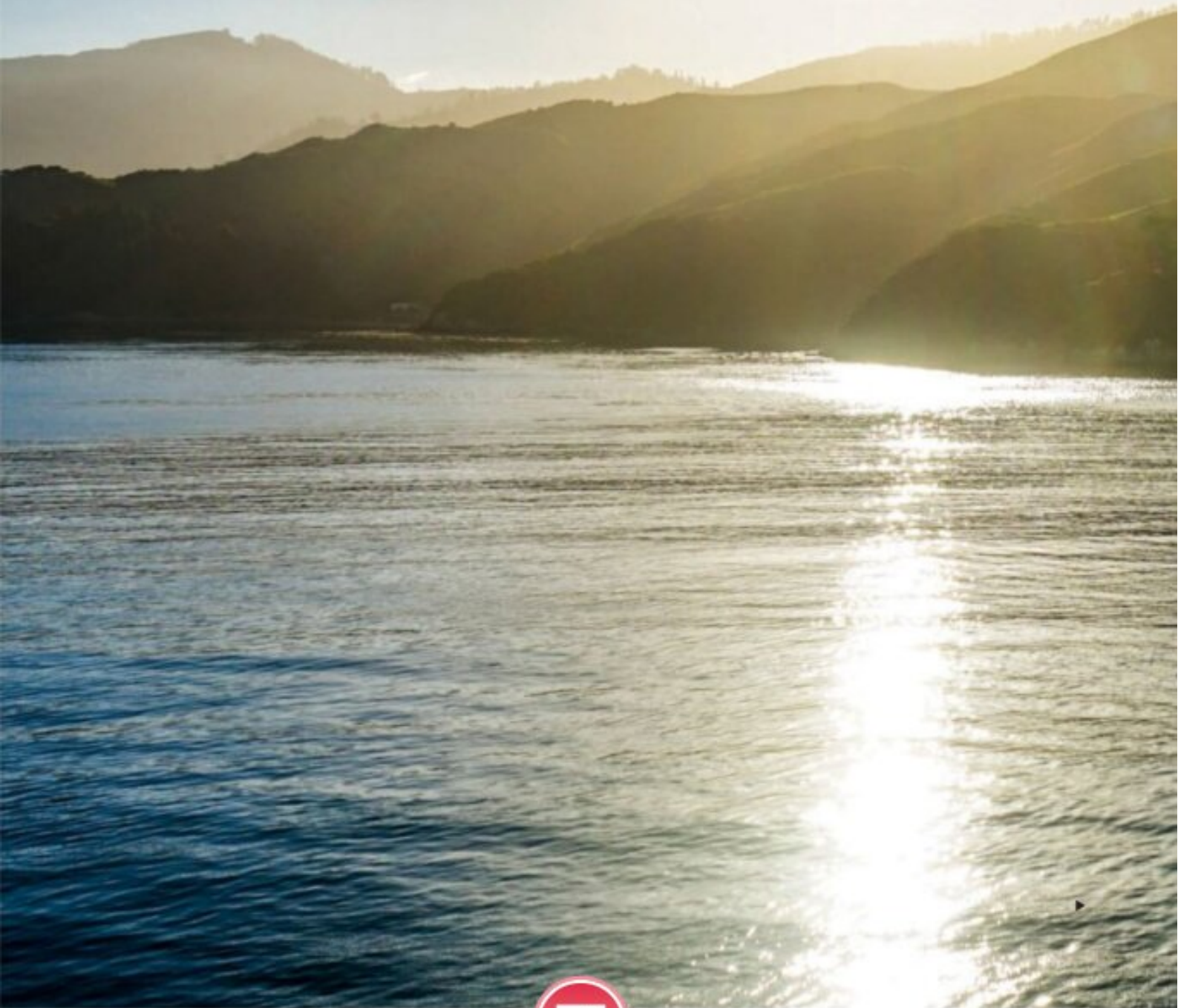


**Clockwise from left:** A humpback whale's tail emerging from the waters; getting up close to the local wildlife in Dunedin; guests soaking up the New Zealand sunset onboard *Azamara Quest*





Voyaging across seas to ports beyond the horizon, cruising really is the quintessential means of slow travel





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But truthfully, it's the gentle voyaging across the sea which really speaks to me and soothes my soul. Being rocked gently to sleep each night. Awakening at dawn and watching the mesmerising ocean from my bed. Decadently sipping tea in bed and tucking into freshly-baked croissants or waffles drizzled in maple syrup, delivered by an ever-smiling cabin steward who lays out crisp linen and wishes me a wonderful day before discretely departing. Hospitality is exquisite and service levels are exceptional. Each morning that I order breakfast, I receive a phone call from Rachael to check that my breakfast was exactly as requested. After a week of these sociable calls we're on friendly first-name terms and when I finally meet Rachael face to face in

**Clockwise from left:** Marlborough Sounds in New Zealand offers breath-taking vistas; you can enjoy an outdoor hot pool in Rotorua





## REVIEW

### HIGHLIGHTS OF DAILY LIFE ONBOARD AZAMARA QUEST

On some days I have conflicting interests and can't decide whether to attend jewellery making or watercolour-painting classes, learn the secrets of making a smoky martini



espresso (it's all in the charred smoke, it turns out), bump, grind and laugh my way through a dance **FITNESS CLASS** or tackle the turbulence in the swimming pool during an aqua aerobics class. And that's all before I sit down to eat. Which comes with its own delicious dilemmas, given the choice of dining options across **SIX RESTAURANTS** along with (complimentary) in-room dining too. Then there's daily themed trivia, which is



surprisingly competitive, and hosted bridge and chess tournaments. Plus an eclectic library to work my way through, massage treatments in the spa, destination-enrichment lectures, nightly **CABARET SHOWS** and dancing into the wee small hours in the Living Room, with its floor-to-ceiling windows framing a full moon, which casts a blue hue across the dancefloor.



In New Zealand, we venture inland to soak in hot springs, ogle at mud pools, or hike in glorious Marlborough Sounds

Aqualina restaurant one evening it's like greeting an old friend after a long absence. With a crew of 400 and a little more than 500 passengers on our voyage, the crew have time to ensure guests receive their full attention at every opportunity.

The slow-travel movement was gaining momentum long before the pandemic gave us cause to pause. The interest in travel as an entry into worlds, cultures and peoples unfamiliar to our home environment is what has driven some of the greatest explorers for millennia.

For most of us, travel has never been merely a shopping list, ticking off countries visited as though they were little more than things we must purchase. Cruisers have long known this. Voyaging across seas to ports beyond the horizon, cruising is the quintessential means of slow travel. Indeed, ships often travel at little more than walking pace. Author Penny Watson's delightful book *Slow Travel: A Movement* encourages readers to 'allow yourself time to embrace the ebb and flow of travel as a more thoughtful and philosophical way of journeying'. Taking her own advice, Penny moved her family to Bali during the pandemic and says that 'slow travel has become about how I live my life. It's about being naturally more immersive and mindful, with cultural

**Clockwise from top left:** Culinary delights on Azamara Quest; a shore excursion to Abel Tasman National Park on the South Island; the view across Marlborough Wineries' vineyard in Picton, New Zealand









TIPS FROM OUR WRITER  
FIONA HARPER

**DRESS CODES** On each voyage, Azamara has a White Night Party, where guests are encouraged to wear a white outfit. Plus there's a signature AzAmazing event, which offers an opportunity to dress up in your finery. Otherwise the dress code onboard is mostly smart casual.

**THE RIGHT SHOES** Hiking is known as 'tramping' in New Zealand – pack your hiking shoes if you want to join a shore excursion to explore spectacular national parks.



During this 17-night voyage there's ample time to savour the simple pleasures, such as gazing out to the ocean and its ever-changing colours.



**This page, clockwise from top:** An azure panorama from South Island to Stewart Island; Auckland's skyline, featuring the Sky Tower

Azamara, too, has taken a considered approach to cultural immersion, offering extended time in ports, and our New Zealand voyage is no exception. Departing from Melbourne and ending in Auckland 18 days later, *Azamara Quest* stays overnight in both Sydney and Tauranga, and departs well after dark at Dunedin, Wellington and Nelson in order to maximise our time ashore. With a last-minute schedule change due to inclement weather earlier in our voyage, we now have an additional night in Auckland too. If only those whales we've slowed down for to allow them safe passage would make an appearance. **31**

✚ For more destination inspiration, go to [cruiseandtravel.co.uk](http://cruiseandtravel.co.uk)

A 17-night Australia/New Zealand Voyage, sailing from Melbourne to Auckland, including calls at Sydney, Eden, Milford Sound, Dunedin, Akaroa, Wellington, Nelson, Picton, Napier, Tauranga and Bay of Islands, departs on January 4, 2024, on sister ship *Azamara Journey*. It costs from £2,405 per person. Flights are extra. [azamara.com](http://azamara.com)

