

# Cruise & Travel

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## Oceans

**T**ravel has always been about expecting the unexpected. The lure of the unknown is part of the joy of exploring the world, of seeing life through another's eyes. Cruising is no exception. Perhaps even more so, given the waterway limitations in which cruise ships operate. So, when Captain Tysse announces the changes one hour before departing Sydney, most passengers simply shrug their shoulders, raise a glass of Champagne as we cruise past the Sydney Opera House and philosophically accept the changes. For many, it's enough to be cruising again post-pandemic.

"I am ashamed to say I publicly scoffed when I learned that Timaru was a replacement destination," said one Auckland-based passenger upon learning about changes to our upcoming New Zealand voyage. "There's nothing to see there!" she exclaimed contemptuously. The majestic forest-clad fjords and towering mountains of Milford Sound had been taken off the itinerary. So too the colonial French architecture and the world's



*Expect the unexpected*

*Fiona Harper* cruised to New Zealand from Australia on board *Azamara Quest* and discovered that despite the best-laid travel plans, cruising is all about being flexible.





rarest dolphins in Akaroa. Gone. Caput. Cancelled. We won't visit any of the 144 islands in the Bay of Islands.

Instead, announces Captain Tysse, we'll visit Timaru, a small city midway between Dunedin and Christchurch which few on board have heard of, and even fewer have visited. Christchurch and the nearby Port of Lyttelton are late inclusions too. We'll also gain an extra sea day before disembarking in Auckland – an unexpected bonus for those of us who relish the chance to relax into the soothing rhythm of the sea. Though not all on board share my enthusiasm. Shore excursions, land-based explorations and simply wandering around a never-visited place are key attractions for cruisers and the nature-based experiences were a significant lure for this New Zealand voyage.

As we cruise towards the heads and the Tasman Sea beyond, Captain Tysse explains that New Zealand's strict biosecurity laws now require incoming vessels to undertake hull cleaning prior to visiting pristine marine park waters. The regulations leave him with little choice and he makes the best call to ensure maximum opportunity for passengers to explore New Zealand – literally a 'captain's pick'.

Later, after exploring Timaru with her teenage daughter, that same passenger 'forgives' Timaru, making up for her initial scepticism with vocal praise, confessing that her criticism was unfair given that she'd never actually visited Timaru.



#### All white on the night

*This page: The fun, glamour and entertainment of White Night on board Azamara Quest. Opposite page, from top: Cultural show on board the ship; in port at Tauranga in the Bay of Plenty.*

#### Top tips

- Bring your own reusable 'keep cup' if you like a large cup of tea or coffee or tea (those on board are generally on the smaller side).
- Pack something white to wear on White Night, a poolside party with an extravagant feast followed by dancing beneath the stars. The dress code across Quest is mostly smart resort-style, with the option of dressing up for special dinners and the AzAmazing Evening.
- Sign up early for shore excursions as they fill up fast.
- Book a table at specialty restaurants Aqualina or Prime C at least once during your voyage (additional charge applies).



## Oceans



AZAMARA IN NEW ZEALAND

"After a quick exploration of this pretty town and a wonderful excursion to see ancient Māori rock art at Pleasant Point, my view of Timaru has completely changed," she enthused.

With art galleries and a museum showcased by friendly locals along with striking Edwardian and Victorian bluestone architecture within easy walking distance from the port where *Azamara Quest* is docked, it's easy to appreciate the city's appeal. A colony of adorable little penguins – at just 40 centimetres tall they are the world's smallest – whose nearby Caroline Bay rookery may have had something to do with laying on the Timaru charm.

Azamara is known for curating voyages strong on destination immersion which allows for extended shore time. On this 17-night Australia & New Zealand Intensive Voyage, *Quest* stays overnight in both Sydney and Tauranga, and departs well after dark at Dunedin, Wellington and Nelson to maximise passengers' time ashore. With the last-minute schedule change, we now have an additional night in Auckland, too.

With a full program of daily activities ranging from trivia, jewellery making, watercolour painting, destination lectures, a spa and beauty salon, gymnasium, yoga, Pilates and water-aerobics sessions, a steam room, swimming pool, two hot tubs, a nightly variety show of song and dance plus a late-night DJ, sleeping feels like cheating with so many things to do. But, I'm also keen to take time out to relax, and can admit to spending an inordinate amount of time poolside

working my way through the cocktail menu. Not to mention dining in the six restaurants with their ever-changing menus that tantalise my taste buds.

Another highlight of cruising with Azamara are the signature (complimentary) AzAmazing Evenings which are designed to connect travellers with a unique aspect of local culture. On the previous cruise, an extended stopover in Adelaide featured guitarist extraordinaire James Morrison and his jazz ensemble which performed to an enraptured audience at Adelaide Oval followed by an extravagant sound and light

show. In Wellington, we're treated to an Evening Symphony by the Sea. This gala event is held at the lavish 100-year-old Opera House, a cultural icon complete with ancient timber floorboards that creak beneath my feet, a grand marble staircase, an intricate hand-painted domed ceiling and a striking proscenium arch that frames the stage. Led by distinguished conductor Marc Taddei, Orchestra Wellington and Signature Choir combine for an evening of much-loved operatic overtures with traditional and popular songs from the South Pacific. Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* "Overture" melds seamlessly with Polynesian mythology, legends and stories told through song by the Samoan-influenced choir. It's a passionate, touching performance that brings tears to my eyes and the audience to its feet calling enthusiastically for an encore.

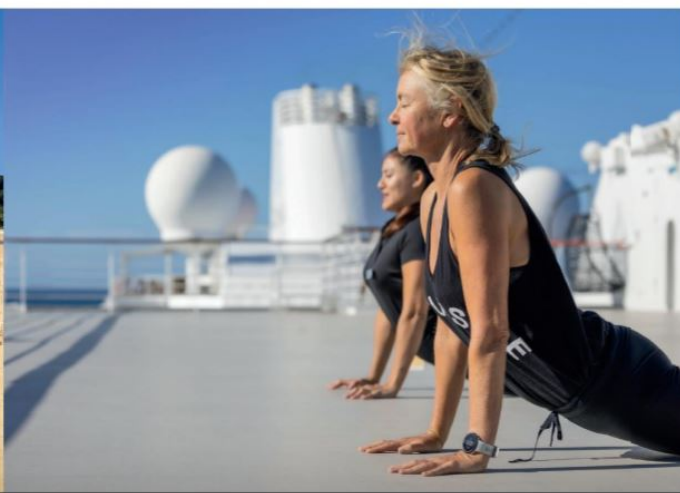
New Zealand's Polynesian connections are showcased throughout our Azamara voyage. One night, while docked in Tauranga, the cultural group Te Whanau a Apanui perform traditional Māori dances and ceremonial songs in the Cabaret Lounge. Passengers are invited on stage to participate good-naturedly alongside Māori warriors before the troupe performs a ceremonial haka with all the ferocious foot-stamping, thigh-slapping and chanting that has made this traditional war cry both feared and revered.

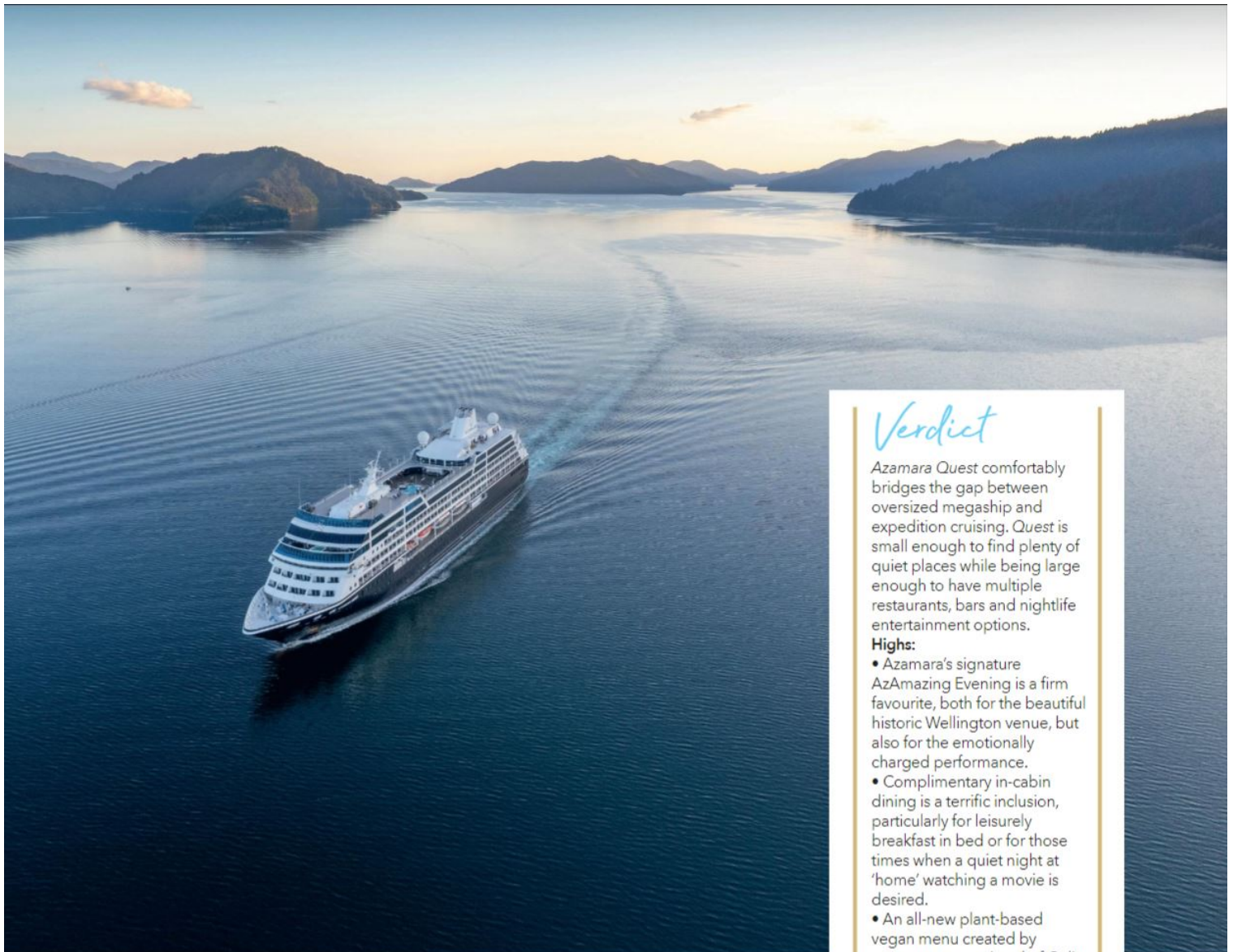
Later, on a pre-booked shore excursion I visit Rotorua's geothermal region which has deep connections with indigenous Māori people. At Te Puia in the sacred Te Whakarewarewa Valley, a 60-hectare geothermal basin dotted with gurgling geysers and bubbling mud pools, our group learns of native Māori lore and tales of feisty fire goddesses. We watch in anticipation as Pohutu Geyser, the largest in the Southern Hemisphere, spits and splutters before spewing a violent gush of boisterous steam skywards.



### Sights of the Sounds

*Clockwise, from above: Marlborough Sounds; plant-based dining at Prime C; morning salutations; landing at Abel Tasman National Park; Dunedin wildlife excursion.*





Nearby, Rotowhio Marae's interior is intricately adorned with traditional wood carvings inlaid with lustrous paua shell. At the Māori Arts & Crafts Institute, students weave flax into intricate costumes while carvers are tutored by master craftsmen whose exquisite artworks are on display at the adjacent New Zealand Māori Arts and Crafts Institute.

The final stop on our Rotorua excursion is the Polynesian Lake Spa Retreat where 28 mineral pools are fed by geothermal springs overlooking a natural lake. From the acidic Priest Spring (so named after a Catholic priest who was 'cured' of crippling arthritis after bathing in the pool in 1878) to the alkaline-rich Rachel Spring, I alternate between luxuriating in various hot pools, dunking myself like a teabag into the icy cold plunge pool in between.

Though I'm reluctant to leave the thermal pools, the enticing lure of my spacious Club Veranda Stateroom on board *Quest* awaits my return. With a wall of floor-to-ceiling glass bathing the room in natural light, my favourite moments come from the simple pleasure of awakening to an ever-changing land and seascape, whether viewed from my bed, the sofa or from the balcony. It matters little whether we're sailing into a busy port like Lyttelton or along the tranquil fjords of Marlborough Sounds, I never tire of the view. Cruising is well and truly back, and my fellow guests and I couldn't be happier. **CT**



*“New Zealand’s Polynesian connections are showcased throughout our Azamara voyage.”*

## Verdict

*Azamara Quest* comfortably bridges the gap between oversized megaship and expedition cruising. *Quest* is small enough to find plenty of quiet places while being large enough to have multiple restaurants, bars and nightlife entertainment options.

### Highs:

- *Azamara*'s signature AzAmazing Evening is a firm favourite, both for the beautiful historic Wellington venue, but also for the emotionally charged performance.
- Complimentary in-cabin dining is a terrific inclusion, particularly for leisurely breakfast in bed or for those times when a quiet night at 'home' watching a movie is desired.
- An all-new plant-based vegan menu created by corporate executive chef Colin Jones is exceptional - don't miss the Sicilian-style grilled watermelon tuna steak or tangy miso soup.

### Lows:

- Don't count on fast internet access - onboard Wi-Fi packages are available for purchase (for use on one device per package) but connectivity is slow and may be unreliable.

## Book it

**Itinerary:** The 17-night Australia & New Zealand Intensive Voyage, from Melbourne to Auckland.

**Cabin type:** Club Veranda Stateroom (20.1 sq m).

**Fare:** From \$16,416 per stateroom for two guests (\$15,444 for one guest) including gratuities. Taxes, fees and port expenses are at an additional cost (approximately \$970).

**See:** [azamara.com/en-au](http://azamara.com/en-au)