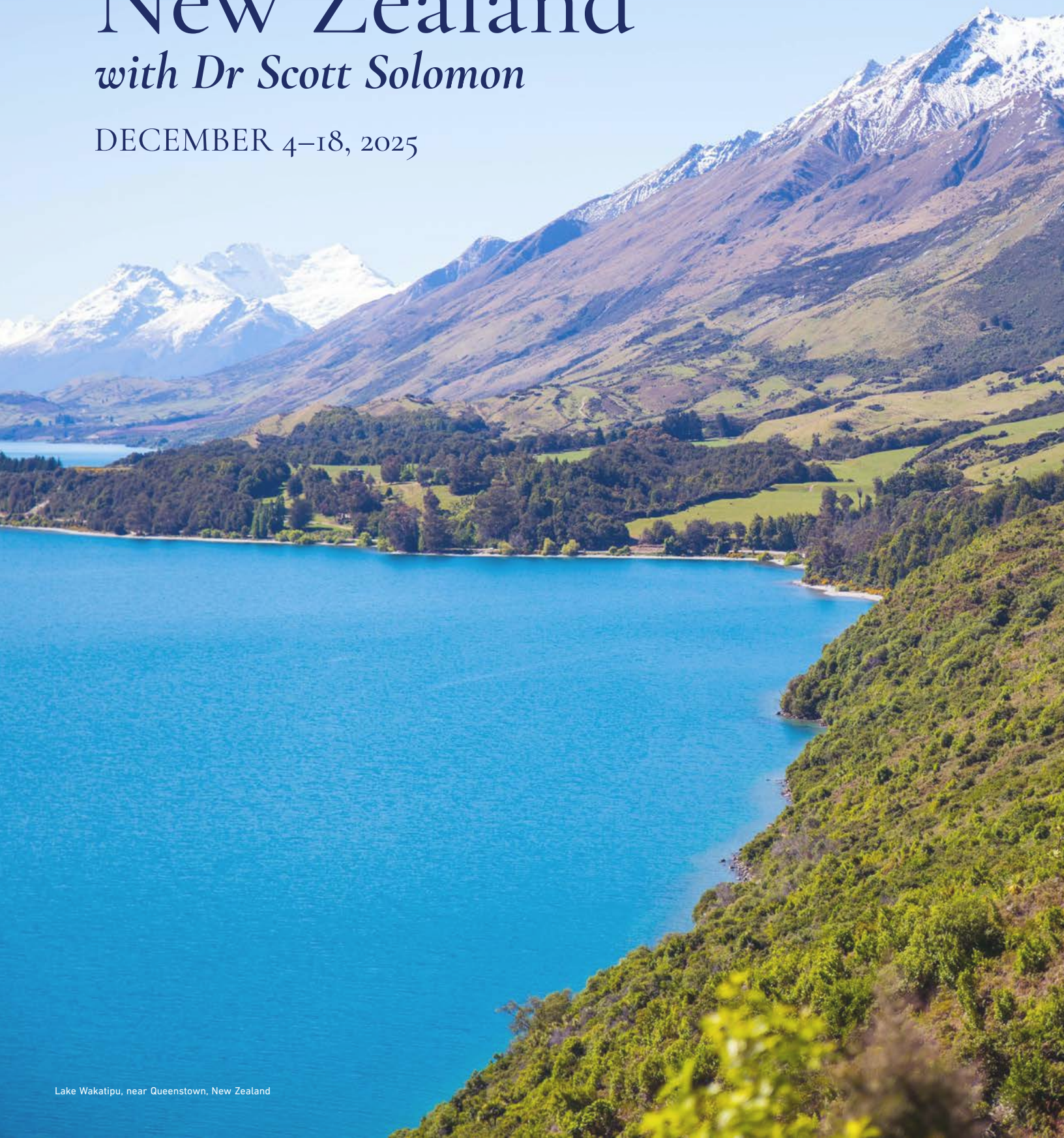




# New Zealand

*with Dr Scott Solomon*

DECEMBER 4–18, 2025





# NEW ZEALAND:

This is a land of outstanding natural beauty. Volcanoes and snow-capped Alpine mountains tower over fertile valleys and wind-swept plains. There are cave systems, unearthly rock formations, a coastline laced with endless beaches, sparkling fjords and dramatic cathedral cliffs. Isolated for millions of years, New Zealand is home to unique flora and fauna, and is a congregation point for some of the Pacific's most impressive marine life.

The Travelling Owls are delighted to invite Rice alumni and friends on a journey led by Dr. Scott Solomon to explore the remarkable country of New Zealand. Dr. Solomon will describe the landscape and biome through the lens of ecology and evolutionary biology as we discover the incredible diversity, unique species, and the charming towns and landscapes of both the North and South Islands.



## *Travel with Dr Scott Solomon*



Dr. Scott Solomon is a Teaching Professor in Rice's BioSciences department and a Research Associate at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History. He has a Ph.D. in Ecology, Evolution, and Behavior from UT-Austin where his research examined the evolutionary basis of biological diversity in the Amazon Basin. He is a Fellow of The Explorers Club, an Associate Editor of the Journal of Tropical Ecology, and a member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Sigma Xi Scientific Research Honor Society, and the Society for the Study of Evolution. He is the creator and host of the podcast *Wild World with Scott Solomon* and the author of *Future Humans: Inside the Science of Our Continuing Evolution* and a forthcoming book for MIT Press about how living in space will affect the human body and mind. His series *Why Insects Matter: Earth's Most Essential Species* and *What Darwin Didn't Know: The Modern Science of Evolution* are available through The Great Courses and his series *Becoming Martian* is available on Curiosity Stream. He has taught field biology courses in Belize, Colorado, and Tanzania and has hosted numerous Traveling Owls trips to destinations including Antarctica, Baja, Galápagos, and French Polynesia.





## HIGHLIGHTS:

Take to the skies for a bird's eye view of the spectacular South Island Fiordland, soaring over crystal blue waters and the snow-capped peaks of the Southern Alps. A full day taking in the spectacular natural environments around Milford Sound is sure to delight.

Glide silently through the dark caves of Waitomo, emerging into a hidden grotto lit by hundreds of thousands of glowworms.

Embark on the high seas over the 2 km deep Kaikoura Canyon for a chance to see whales, dolphins, fur seals and more.

Make merry for a frivolous evening in the Lord of the Rings Hobbiton Shire movie set, a cup of tea in a hobbit hole and a glass of ale in the Green Dragon Inn.

Experience (comfortably!) an Antarctic Storm at our private reception in the International Antarctic Center... complete with cocktails, huskies and little Blue penguins.

Encounter rare bird species on unique excursions to protected natural areas like Tiritiri Matangi island off Auckland and the Otago peninsula near Dunedin.

Hike the mountain landscape near Queenstown and taste some of the finest wines New Zealand has to offer from nearby vineyards.



## CUSTOM ITINERARY:

This custom itinerary has been created for Rice Alumni travelling Owls.



Auckland Skyline

**THURSDAY, DECEMBER 4 / FRIDAY, DECEMBER 5**

### *Depart USA*

Depart USA on independent flights to Auckland, New Zealand. You will cross the international dateline, resulting in the loss of one day.

**SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6**

### *A Warm Welcome to Auckland*

We begin our adventure in Auckland, on the North Island, a vibrant modern city set against a backdrop of blue seas and exceptional natural beauty. An included transfer will carry us from the airport to downtown Auckland, where we will have lunch and visit the Auckland Domain and War Memorial Museum for an introduction to New Zealand's natural and cultural history. We will meet the explorers—the early Polynesians, the Maori and the European settlers—and establish a basic understanding of the geography and geology of the islands. In the afternoon, we'll check into the five-star Mövenpick Hotel. The remainder of the afternoon is free to relax, explore independently, or join others for informal drink at the hotel.

*Mövenpick Hotel Auckland (Lunch)*

**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7**

### *Tiritiri Matangi, Meet the Native Species*

A few minutes walk to the ferry begins an all-day excursion to Tiritiri Matangi island, a world-renowned conservation project dedicated to the rehabilitation of some of New Zealand's most endangered birds. Guided by a local expert, we'll learn how New Zealand's native species evolved in isolation in an ecosystem with no mammals, only to be decimated by the introduction of predators by human settlers. Our guide will explain how the island has been carefully curated back to a pre-settler ecology to breed endangered species for relocation. You'll be treated to a gourmet picnic lunch, amid the sight and sounds of some of New Zealand's unique birds: Kiwi, Takahe, Titipounamu, Tui and the Kaku. Back in Auckland, we'll take you out to one of the city's best-known restaurants for dinner.

*Mövenpick Hotel Auckland (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)*



Tui

**MONDAY, DECEMBER 8**

### *From Ancient Caves To Hobbit Holes*

Early morning, we'll drive 2.5 hours south by private coach, to explore a remarkable cave system 30 million years in the making. We will be guided through an underground cathedral of towering stalagmites, then take a boat to glide silently in the dark into a hidden grotto, where hundreds of thousands of glowworms light the walls and ceiling. Following lunch at a local pub, we head east for a light-hearted visit to one of New Zealand's most recent 'settlements': The Hobbiton movie set from the Lord of the Rings. We'll take an evening stroll through the Shire, drop in at Bilbo Baggins' Hobbit home, and enjoy an evening meal at the Green Dragon Tavern. We return to Auckland late, for our final night on New Zealand's north Island.

*Mövenpick Hotel Auckland (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)*



Hobbiton





**TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9**

## *Christchurch, Culture & Geology*

A morning flight takes us to Christchurch on the east coast of New Zealand's South Island. This charming city with its rich history of architecture and beautiful gardens, reflects the European settlers who made this home. But it is also shaped by the dynamic geology of the country: New Zealand sits astride two tectonic plates, and in February 2011, this peaceful idyll was shattered by a series of earthquakes. On our drive from the airport, we'll pass through the 'red zones', areas of the city that were razed to the ground after the quakes, while a local guide describes how the city has rebuilt in the aftermath. Check in to our centrally located hotel and enjoy an independent lunch. Then continue with our guide for a walk through the city, featuring the prettiest architecture and gardens, juxtaposed with stops at the National Earthquake Memorial, the partly destroyed cathedral and Quake city. We'll finish the day with a special meal in one of the city's finest gastro pubs.

*Sudima Christchurch City (Breakfast, Dinner)*

**WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10**

## *Kaikoura Whale Watching*

Following the dramatic coastline of the Pacific Ocean, we drive 2.5 hours north, to the village of Kaikoura. The region is known as one of the best marine meccas in the world, featuring a congregation of whales, dolphins, fur seals, penguins and numerous species of marine birds. Here, we'll embark with the expert crew of Whale Watch Kaikoura for the opportunity of a lifetime: the chance to see sperm whales, orcas, Southern Right and Blue Whales. And while we can't schedule nature, this is one of the best places in the world to spot whales close to land, thanks to a continental shelf that plunges 2 kilometers deep just a few hundred meters from the shore. After lunch in the village, we'll take our time driving back to Christchurch, making stops to spy on fur seal colonies and penguins, to marvel at the Cathedral Cliffs of Gore Bay, and perhaps take in a glass of pinot noir at a Waipara valley winery. Dinner is independent back in Christchurch this evening.

*Sudima Christchurch City (Breakfast, Lunch)*



Whale watching at Kaikoura



Ohinetahi Historic Home and Gardens

**THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11**

## *Christchurch, City of Gardens*

We board our private coach to visit two private gardens, representing the evolution from the early European settler's desire to create the 'English country garden', into a creative love of native New Zealand fauna. First, the Ohinetahi historic homestead and gardens—one of the premier landscaped garden spaces in the country—then Broadfields Gardens, where owner and gardener, David Hobbs introduces us to the New Zealand plants he has cultivated into a horticultural paradise. We return to Christchurch for an independent afternoon for lunch and exploring. Then meet for the day's highlight: a reception and private tour of the International Antarctic center, complete with huskies and canapés. A gentle reminder, that while the English attempted to create 'little Britain' in the colonies, Zealandia is a geological breakaway from the continent of Antarctica.

*Sudima Christchurch City (Breakfast, Reception)*





Port Chalmers Anchor, Dunedin

**FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12**

## *Dunedin, Wildlife Capital Of New Zealand*

We take a morning flight south to the city of Dunedin on the Otago Peninsula. While your bags are taken to the hotel, we will take a guided walk around the city center and visit the Otago Settlers' Museum to learn more about the history of the region, from the establishment of the earliest Maori settlers to the arrival of austere Scots. And finally, how the community changed with the discovery of gold: in just a few years, the population of Otago increased 10-fold to include a large population of Chinese immigrants, and the city grew and prospered. After lunch in a local pub, check-in at our hotel, the Dunedin Distinction, then join our guide as we move on through the city and make a private visit to a time capsule of a late 19th century home. We end the day with dinner in a restaurant close to our hotel.

*Distinction Dunedin (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)*

**SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13**

## *The Otago Peninsula*

The morning is yours to explore independently, to shop the Octagon, or go swimming in the city's amazing, heated salt-water cliff pool. We'll gather for lunch in the city center, then drive east to the fierce Otago Peninsula, a finger of land formed by volcanic activity and the perpetual pounding of the Pacific Ocean. Here we visit Taiaroa Head and Lighthouse, the only mainland breeding colony of Southern Royal Albatross in the world, and invite you to visit the glassed-in observatory with a view of five or six nests. And there's a historical oddity under the colony: an underground fort built in the 1880s to counter a perceived threat from Tsarist Russia. The birds don't seem to mind. We'll drive along the rocky shore, stopping for fur seals or sea lion sightings and finally visit the OPERA (Otago Peninsula Eco Restoration Project). New Zealand has more resident penguin species than any other country in the world. In this protected area, we find the tiny Blue and the rarest of all species, the yellow eyed penguins. Best time to catch sight of them is at day's end, when they shuffle back on shore to shelter in burrows. We return to Dunedin, and the rest of the evening is for you to enjoy independently.

*Distinction Dunedin (Breakfast, Lunch)*



Royal Albatross



Kawarau River, Otago

**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14**

## *Central Otago, A World Of Difference*

Prepare for a long day of driving across Central Otago, a land of dramatic skies, pristine lakes, Alpine herb fields and big, big mountains. This is former Gold Rush country and the road is littered with quaint towns and abandoned mines. And when you get out 'in the bush' you encounter some quirky elements and characters. We'll make a stop for lunch at Ranfurly, a gold rush town that survived the downturn, but suffered a series of suspicious fires in the 1930s. The community decided to build back with style...Art Deco Style, that is. Then we'll drop in on a Cambrians man, who decided to plant a red wood forest. There's a gate, but no fences, and we're sure of a warm welcome. We'll reach the Hilton Queenstown resort late in the afternoon, relax and enjoy the lake view, then meet for dinner in the hotel restaurant.

*Hilton Queenstown Resort & Spa (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)*





**MONDAY, DECEMBER 15**

## *Queenstown, Adventure Capital Of The World*

We'll drive north into the beautiful Queenstown Lakes District for a private tour around Arrowtown, a historic mining town located on the Arrow river. Starting in the Lake District Museum, we'll time travel to the harsh lives of 1880s gold prospectors. Then we'll explore the preserved buildings: the goldfields jail, miners' cottages, the Chinese immigrant colony houses and shop. Returning to Queenstown we'll give you the option to divert to the lovely town of Glenorchy. This is a small settlement at the head of Lake Wakatipu, a paradise of lake side and mountain scenery. You can stretch your legs with a walk up to Paradise, a beautiful location on the banks of the Dart River featured in *The Lord of the Rings* and beloved by painters, movie directors and photographers. It will give you an on-the-ground perspective of the wonders you will see tomorrow. The evening is yours to explore and dine independently.

*Hilton Queenstown Resort & Spa (Breakfast)*

**TUESDAY, DECEMBER 16**

## *Milford Sound, The 8th Wonder of The World*

Today's experience will stay with you the rest of your life: an excursion into the Milford Sound, a fiord on the west coast of South Island, a sight Rudyard Kipling declared to be the 8th Wonder of the World. Leaving early, we'll drive west along Lake Whakatipu in a glass roofed coach into the Fiordland National Park. At the base of Mitre Peak, we transfer to the water to cruise. Lose yourself in this breathtaking waterway, lined with sheer, moss-covered cliffs soaring hundreds of feet above you, water falls and mountain peaks laced with cloud. We'll have lunch on the boat, if you can tear yourself away from the view. And finally, we are booked with Glenorchy Air for a private flight back to Queenstown, diverting up the rugged west coast, over glacier fed rivers, snow-covered mountains, Mt. Aspiring National Park, and back to Queensland. Dinner is independent.

*Hilton Queenstown Resort & Spa (Breakfast, Lunch)*



**WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 17**

## *Queenstown, At Your Service*

After breakfast at the hotel, you have the choice of exploring Queenstown on your own to relax, explore or go shopping... or you can sign up for a half day hike into the surrounding mountains. In the afternoon, we're headed out on a wine tour. New Zealand is famous for crisp Sauvignon Blancs, but here in Central Otago, there are several star wineries making pinot noirs in an ecosystem that rivals Tuscany. We'll arrange for private tastings as we tour the properties and some spectacular wine caves (and a cheesery). Finally, we'll enjoy a special, farewell dinner together and bring you back to the hotel, relaxed and ready for departures the following day.

*Hilton Queenstown Resort & Spa (Breakfast, Tasting, Dinner)*

**THURSDAY, DECEMBER 18**

## *Departure*

An airport transfer is included this morning to carry you to Queenstown airport for flights back to the United States. *(Breakfast)*



Wine grapes, Central Otago



# ACCOMODATIONS:

## *Mövenpick Hotel Auckland*

Located in the heart of Auckland's CBD, Mövenpick Hotel Auckland is the perfect base for exploring the city in style. Only steps away from Commercial Bay shopping precinct, a 5-minute walk from Britomart Train Station, and the Viaduct Harbour, you will find the best of the city at your doorstep.



## *Sudima Christchurch City*

Sudima Christchurch City is a 5-star boutique hotel ideally located in the Victoria precinct amidst an array of cafés, restaurants & bars. It's just a martini olive pips' throw to beautiful Hagley Park and a short walk to Christchurch's city center.



## *Distinction Dunedin Hotel*

Distinction Dunedin is a 2024 Travellers Choice Winner, ranked in the top 20 of all hotels in New Zealand on TripAdvisor. The 1937 former Chief Post Office in Dunedin has been transformed into an elegant 4 1/2 star luxury hotel, located in the rejuvenated and vibrant Warehouse Precinct in the heart of the city.



## *Hilton Queenstown Resort & Spa*

Situated on the shores of Lake Wakatipu, Hilton Queenstown Resort & Spa boasts 5-star amenities including an indoor pool, a fitness center and a day spa. A little pampering comfort for your final destination.





# NEW ZEALAND: *December 4–18, 2025*

## TOUR PRICE AND INCLUSIONS

### TOUR COST:

Land Package.....	\$10,995
Single Supplement.....	\$1,595

*Tour price is per person based on double occupancy, with a minimum of 16 paying participants.*

**ACTIVITY LEVEL:** Moderate, good overall mobility required. Elevators not available at all sites.

**DEPOSIT & FINAL PAYMENT:** A deposit of \$1,500 per registrant is required to reserve space on the tour, of which \$500 is nonrefundable for ISDI's registration and planning fee unless the tour is cancelled due to low enrollment. This deposit may be paid by check or by Visa, MasterCard, or American Express. Final balance will be invoiced and is due on August 26, 2025 and must be paid by check or wire/ACH transfer to International Seminar Design, Inc. Registrations are accepted after this date on a space-available basis with payment in full by check or bank/ACH transfer only.

**FLIGHTS:** Air tickets to Auckland at the beginning of the tour and from Queenstown at the end of the tour are not included in the tour price. Participants are responsible for all aspects of these air arrangements. Please do not purchase airline tickets until the operation of the tour is confirmed by ISDI. ISDI and the Association of Rice Alumni are not responsible for flight delays or flight rebooking in the event of air cancellation or delay. A flight from Auckland to Christchurch on 12/9/25 and from Christchurch to Dunedin on 12/12/25 are included in the tour price.

**TERMS & CONDITIONS:** Upon receipt of registration, ISDI will send registrant a Participant Tour Agreement detailing the full terms and conditions for this tour. This document must be signed and returned to ISDI before participant's registration is considered complete and any arrangements can be confirmed.

**TRAVEL INSURANCE:** Travel Insurance is not included in the tour cost, but participants are strongly encouraged to purchase a travel protection plan in conjunction with this tour, including coverage of trip cancellation, trip interruption, emergency evacuation/repatriation, medical expenses, lost or damaged baggage, and other expenses and/or losses incurred due to unexpected situations. Should a participant cancel at any time after registering for the tour, ISDI must strictly abide by the cancellation policy outlined herein. Travel insurance information will be emailed to you from the Traveling Owls upon receipt of your registration.

**TOUR INCLUSIONS:** 3 nights' accommodations at the Mövenpick Hotel Auckland, 3 nights' accommodations at the Sudima Christchurch City, 2 nights' accommodations at the Distinction Dunedin Hotel, and 4 nights' accommodations at the Hilton Queenstown Resort & Spa; breakfast daily at the hotels, 8 lunches, 6 dinners, 1 reception, 1 wine tasting; water, soft drinks, coffee and tea included at all meals, 2 glasses of wine or beer per person at dinners; land transportation by private motor coach including 1 group airport transfer upon arrival in Auckland on 12/06/25, and 1 group airport transfer upon departure from Queenstown on 12/18/25; 2 economy-class flights (Auckland to Christchurch on 12/9/25 and Christchurch to Dunedin on 12/12/25); entrance fees to sites and private visits per itinerary; leadership of Dr. Scott Solomon; services of ISDI Tour Manager; expert local guides; gratuities for guides, drivers, and restaurant staff at included group meals; bottled water on coach; portage at hotels; service charges and taxes.

**TOUR EXCLUSIONS:** International airfare into Auckland and out of Queenstown; airport portage; airport transfers upon arrival and departure for those not using the scheduled group transfers; meals other than those specified in the itinerary; gratuities for hotel housekeeping; personal items such as telephone calls, room service, valet service, à-la-carte orders, specialty wines and liquors, laundry charges, travel extensions, or tour deviations; travel insurance; any other items not specifically included in the itinerary.

**CANCELLATIONS & REFUNDS:** Cancellation by participant must be made in writing to ISDI and is effective only upon acknowledged receipt by ISDI. There is a non-refundable registration and planning fee of \$500 per person regardless of cancellation date. Written cancellation received by ISDI on or before August 26, 2025: full refund minus \$500 per person registration and planning fee. Written cancellation received by ISDI between August 27 and October 20, 2025: full refund minus \$5,550 per person cancellation fee. Written cancellation received by ISDI on or after October 21, 2025: no refund. Tour registration is non-transferable. In the case of cancellation, substitutions are not allowed. After the tour has commenced, no refunds will be issued for any reason including, but not limited to, unused portions of tour. If the tour is cancelled by ISDI or the Association of Rice Alumni due to low enrollment, active registrants will receive a full refund of all tour payments.

**FOR QUESTIONS OR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:**  
Rice Alumni Traveling Owls  
Tel: 713-34-TRIPS | Email: [travelingowls@rice.edu](mailto:travelingowls@rice.edu)



# NEW ZEALAND: *December 4–18, 2025*

## REGISTRATION FORM



Name (Registrant 1)

Name (Registrant 2)

Address

City

State

Zip

Home Phone

Cell Phone

E-mail Address (Registrant 1)

E-mail Address (Registrant 2)

### ROOMING OPTIONS: *(please select)*

- ☐ Double Occupancy; I will share a room with \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ We prefer separate beds
- ☐ Single Supplement (\$1,595)  
☐ I would like a roommate but will pay the price of the single supplement if one cannot be found.

### TOUR DOCUMENTS:

ISDI will send all documents pertaining to the tour by email to the email address(es) listed above.

☐ If you wish to receive hardcopy versions of the tour documents by post as well, please check this circle. Paper documents will not be sent to your home address unless this circle is checked.

### DEPOSIT: \$1,500 PER PERSON

\_\_\_\_\_ # of persons \_\_\_\_\_ Amount Enclosed/Authorized

☐ Visa ☐ MasterCard ☐ American Express ☐ Check (Make check payable to International Seminar Design, Inc.)

Card Number

Exp. (mm/yy)

CVV Security Code

Name as it appears on card

Billing Zip Code

### EACH REGISTRANT MUST SIGN

*By registering and paying the deposit for this tour, registrant acknowledges that he/she has carefully read and understands all information contained in the tour brochure, recognizes and accepts any risks therein, and agrees to be bound by the terms and conditions outlined above.*

Signature 1 / Date

Signature 2 / Date

### COMPLETE AND RETURN THIS FORM BY MAIL OR EMAIL TO:

International Seminar Design, Inc.  
5614 Connecticut Avenue NW, #295  
Washington, DC 20015  
Email: [info@isditravel.com](mailto:info@isditravel.com)

### TO REGISTER BY PHONE, CALL:

Mike McCartt at International Seminar Design, Inc.  
at 202-244-1448, ext 1

### FOR QUESTIONS:

Rice Alumni Traveling Owls  
(713)-34-TRIPS | Email: [travelingowls@rice.edu](mailto:travelingowls@rice.edu)