

Rebecca Recommends

Hotels and Services with Personality



Stuart Rigg of Southern Crossings greets Rebecca Slater at Uluru.

Rebecca Recommends Is Thrilled To Announce Southern Crossings As Our Newest Client

I am happy to announce that [Southern Crossings](#), the leading bespoke destination management company for New Zealand, Australia and the South Pacific, has selected Rebecca Recommends to represent it in North America. Founded in 1986, it was the first company in its region to create tailor-made itineraries to New Zealand, Australia and the South Pacific.

This year Southern Crossings celebrates 30 years of excellence in designing and creating bespoke arrangements for the discerning traveler. Southern Crossings was the original New Zealand Virtuoso OnSite, and has been a success because of its high levels of experience, knowledge and expertise. In June, team members from the Auckland and Sydney offices celebrated at the Owners Cottage of Matakauri Lodge, Queenstown.



My philosophy is to represent independently-owned hotels, resorts and destination management companies that are "the best of the best." Southern Crossings meets my high standards, delivering impeccable levels of service and exceeding the expectations of even the most exacting clients. It is also known for creativity, access, attention to detail and beautiful pace and flow in its itineraries.

Lessons From My Fact-Finding Trip in May

I spent a full two weeks traveling in Australia and New Zealand, meeting with [the Southern Crossings team](#) and learning about the range of people, properties and experiences they can provide travel advisors and their clients. My top recommendation is to visit these destinations separately. When clients combine Australia and New Zealand in one trip, they are truly just skimming the surface of what each country has to offer.

However, if clients want to integrate the two countries or add on a trip to the South Pacific islands, no one can plan it better than Southern Crossings. It is the only DMC in the region to work in all three areas, making for a seamless experience.



Field of Light, Uluru, Bruce Munro 2016. Photo by: Mark Pickthall

My trip began with a warm welcome from Southern Crossings' owner Stuart Rigg, who showed me "The Red Heart of Australia." Rising nearly 1,150 feet high from the desert plains, Uluru is

Australia's most recognizable natural icon, a 500 million year-old sandstone formation that is sacred to the Anangu, the Aboriginal people.

Uluru was a magnificent place to start because of the palpable sense of spirituality in the land, the fabled light and the vastness of the views. The black night skies were so brilliant with stars I felt I could reach out and touch them.

A Reason To Go To Uluru In The Next Nine Months

Another stroke of luck: the Field of Light art installation by Bruce Munro had just opened at Uluru. At night the landscape is lit by more than 50,000 slender stems topped with frosted-glass spheres in various hues. If clients are planning a trip to Australia before Field of Light closes at the end of March 2017, I highly recommend this magical experience.

While there, the best place to stay is [Longitude 131°](#), an eco-sensitive wilderness camp with 15 luxurious tents facing the World Heritage-listed Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park and its fabled sunrises and sunsets. The view is incredible, and I couldn't help but take a selfie from my deck.



Longitude 131° offers so many ways to explore the landscape and delve into the foundations of Anangu culture, but one of my favorites is the Bush Tucker Tour. An Aboriginal host leads a walk through the countryside to identify bush foods, then guests prepare ingredients in the traditional manner. The Aboriginal people have such respect for the land, and provide an inspiring example of how we can restore our relationship to Mother Earth.

Dinner is a four-course menu that changes daily and showcases the riches of Australian food and wine, be it under the canopy of the central Dune House or a billion stars at Table 131°. Later, an astronomer is your guide to the heavens. Staying in this luxury tented camp was a true highlight of my trip.



From Uluru I flew north to the tropical rainforest in Queensland, where relaxation, wilderness, luxury, adventure, wildlife and Aboriginal culture all converge. Travelers can cruise with the crocs on the mighty Daintree River, tour the world's oldest rainforest and snorkel the Great Barrier Reef, a 1240-mile collection of colourful coral reefs along the Queensland seaboard that makes for some of the most spectacular diving imaginable.

I was particularly taken with [Lizard Island Resort](#), set on a 2,500-acre National Park with 24 sandy

beaches and a lagoon. It offers incredible access to diving, snorkeling right from the beach, inner and outer reef fishing and private beach picnics, along with all the luxury resort amenities you expect. Every time I looked up, I couldn't believe the beauty of this place.



Then it was down to vibrant, sunny Sydney, the capital of New South Wales. On past trips to Australia I had already enjoyed iconic experiences such as the Sydney Harbor Bridge climb, Sydney Opera House, Taronga Zoo, The Royal Botanic Garden and Bondi Beach. I had toured the wineries clustered in New South Wales and even traveled the Great Ocean Road, so Southern Crossings paired me with a local guide from My Detour who uncovered the hidden secrets of Sydney.

Another Side of Sydney

My Detour is highly creative, offering themed tours that focus on food, music, Aboriginal spirituality and other areas of interest. I chose a custom tour that took me into Redfern, a culturally significant neighborhood that is the heart of Sydney's indigneous community. Gentrification has brought great coffee, restaurants and shops to the area. I discovered a treasure-filled boutique owned by Brian, the New Zealander pictured above, and purchased a silk scarf and some beautiful china.



The Growing Market For New Zealand

Tourism to Australia and New Zealand is growing because they are among the safest countries to travel. New Zealand is the stunning landscape where "The Lord of the Rings" was filmed, and attracts ever more adventurers who want a place that is uncrowded, unspoiled and safe.

Most Americans fly into Auckland on North Island and make their way south. Direct flights have recently expanded: American Airlines started its non-stop service from LAX in June, and United Airlines launched its non-stop service from SFO on July 1, 2016. Air New Zealand flies non-stop to Auckland from Los Angeles, San Francisco, Houston and Honolulu.

Since I was coming from Australia, I flew into Queenstown on South Island and traveled north. My first stop was [Blanket Bay Lodge](#), a luxury alpine lodge represented by Rebecca Recommends. Set on the northeastern corner of Lake Wakatipu and ringed by mountains, Blanket Bay is known for its stunning views. The combination of sky, mountain and lake is unlike anywhere else in the country, so I consider Blanket Bay a must for any trip to the South Island.



Though it seems remote, I traveled less than an hour from the airport to reach Blanket Bay (a quick helicopter ride is just ten minutes) and was delighted to be welcomed by [Tom Butler, Blanket Bay's new general manager](#). Even though winter was coming (the seasons are reversed), we dined under the stars while a great fire roared, gazing at the still lake and ring of mountains. The five-course degustation menu changes nightly and features wines from nearby Central Otago.

While staying at Blanket Bay I made time for horseback riding, but there are so many activities nearby, including golfing, fly-fishing, heli-skiing, hiking, jet-boating, kayaking, 4WD tours, art trails, winery tours and flight-seeing over the World Heritage Fiordland National Park and Milford Sound. It is truly the perfect home base for an adventurous holiday.



From Queenstown I took a quick flight to Christchurch, an absolutely charming city that is rich in historic architecture, art galleries, parks and gardens, with the River Avon meandering through its heart. I stayed at [Otahuna Lodge](#), an historic Victorian home transformed into a beautiful inn with seven luxurious suites.

Otahuna Lodge is also known for its cuisine, and guests dine communally in an opulent formal Victorian dining room. During the winter months (now through September), executive chef Jimmy McIntyre offers [a three-hour class](#) that includes a harvesting visit to Otahuna's organic gardens, menu planning, hands-on cooking class, and a four-course meal.

Travel + Leisure Praises New Zealand Cuisine

In the July issue, Travel + Leisure published [a story on the distinctive national cuisine](#) of New Zealand that featured Otahuna Lodge, [Annandale](#) and wineries which keep their very finest releases for the home market. Author Kevin West commented:

"What I most relished about my gastro-tour of the South Island was that I got to eat food and drink wine that, in fact, I couldn't get at home, which was a startling notion, because I thought you could get anything in Los Angeles. The idea of inaccessibility was heartening, akin to the notion that if you want to see the best Velázquez paintings, you have to go to Madrid."



From Christchurch I flew to North Island, where Hawke's Bay is renowned as one of New Zealand's richest agricultural areas. I stayed at [The Farm at Cape Kidnappers](#), made time for another ride

along the bay and enjoyed the area's wineries, shopping and beautiful landscape.

My next stop was Lake Taupo, the trout fishing capital of New Zealand. Its vast and beautiful waters drain into Huka Falls, which is New Zealand's most-visited natural attraction. There I enjoyed the iconic and legendary [Huka Lodge](#), where my parents stayed some years ago.



Nearby, at the newly opened [Lodge at Kinloch](#), I was delighted to meet up with Southern Crossings owners Sarah Farag and Trevor Thomas. If you haven't had the pleasure of working with Sarah, Trevor or Stuart, I would love to introduce you! We also plan to offer familiarization trips to Australia and New Zealand in the future.

Please feel free to contact me about Southern Crossings, Blanket Bay Lodge, or anything else that I might be able to help you with. I would love to hear from you!

Very best wishes,

Rebecca

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