

# GET GOING



**INTENSITY** THE TOUGH PART IS GETTING INTO THE PLANES (LITERALLY IN THE CASE OF THE MOTH'S TINY CABIN). ONCE YOU TAKE YOUR SEAT, THE SPECTACULAR FLIGHTS MAKE YOU FORGET ALL YOUR FEARS.

**EASY** MODERATE DEMANDING

**136** **THE JOY OF FLIGHT**  
The thrills of flying a World War II aircraft over Wanaka

**140** **GERMANY'S GREEN HEART**  
A bird's-eye view from a treetop walkway in an ancient beech forest

Flying above Lake Wanaka in the Tiger Moth has the two-fold thrill of a stunning sight and the undiluted sensation of flight.



Peter Hendricks, the pilot, hands me vintage flying gear (jacket, helmet, and goggles) from the 1940s and I climb into the front cockpit of the plane. It is snug. The joystick sits between my knees and my feet rest on the rudder pedals.

Peter gives the propeller a hearty spin and I get to pull on the throttle as the engine coughs, belches, spits white smoke, and angrily roars to life. It is the throaty burble of a potent petrol engine. He jumps into the cockpit behind me and his voice crackles over the radio through my headphones. These too are from the 1940s and I have previously seen them only in WWII movies.

We rush down the grassy airfield and before we're even doing 80 kmph, the 74-year-old contraption of wood, metal, and fabric daintily lifts off into the air. After a few minutes of vertical climb, the necessity of all the heavy flying gear is apparent. It is bracingly cold at 2,000 feet, and when I peek out of the cockpit into the slipstream, my face practically flash-freezes.

Below me is a visual feast of gold, green, and blue. We fly over deep sapphire Lake Wanaka, farmlands glowing with ripening grain, and lush vineyards. I already know that Wanaka is beautiful, but from the air it is stunning.

The plane moves so slowly that it feels as if we are standing still in the sky. Peter tells me he's going to do a gentle loop and pushes down on the joystick. The Tiger Moth nose-dives towards the lake. He pulls back and the plane goes wheels up. I glance up to see the lake above me and realise with a start that we are flying upside down.

Its simple design notwithstanding, the Tiger Moth is quite the acrobat. During the Second World War, it

**HU-512**

The number of an identical de Havilland Tiger Moth (albeit yellow) that is one of the oldest aircraft in the Indian Airforce's fleet. It was also manufactured in 1942, and last flew from Delhi to Baroda in January 2013.

The Moth has a hand-made six-foot propeller that takes the plane forward (top left); Small planes are agile and the pilots will dip the wings a few degrees upon request so you can get a clear photograph of a glacial lake (top right); A cruise (bottom) on Milford Sound provides a different angle of the immense scale of the glaciers and the path carved by them.



was used as a trainer for future Spitfire pilots and lent itself very well to practicing loops, dives, spins, and turns in the sky to gain the upper hand in dogfights.

The next morning, at another airport in Queenstown, 70 kilometres from Wanaka, I am with six other people and a fresh-faced youth named Mackenzie Gardyne. He is so boyish that when he says he is our pilot, we glance at each other unconvinced.

We board a little seven-seater, single-engine Cessna, which has less room than a Toyota Innova. This shoebox-sized machine takes us up and away over

ADVENTURE

## THE JOY OF FLIGHT

SMALL PLANES OFFER BIG ADVENTURES IN NEW ZEALAND  
TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHS BY RISHAD SAAM MEHTA

**T**he little red Tiger Moth parked in front of me epitomises the romance of flight. Lit by the warm rays of the morning sun washing over the mountain-ringed airfield of Wanaka, on New Zealand's South Island, it's even more enchanting.

Big commercial airplanes seem magical because I still cannot bend my brain around the fact that thousands of tonnes just lift off into the sky. But this little red propeller plane feels like a school science project. I can easily understand how the handcrafted wooden prop sucks in air to create forward motion. And how the shape of the fabric-covered wings puts Bernoulli's Principle into play—meaning the unequal pressure generated above and below the wing allows the aircraft to lift.



Looking down from the Cessna (left), Milford Sound looks like a map. Sights like this and the convenience of a 35-minute flight as opposed to a 3-hour drive, have made the fly-cruise option popular; Visitors can take jetboat rides (right) on the Kowhai and Shotover Rivers, which add excitement to a day of exploration from above.

the Southern Alps towards the Milford Sound fjord. During the 35-minute flight, we sail over several craggy snow-capped peaks, which are so close that at times I feel the wheels will certainly graze the mountaintops. Because the plane is so light, it bobs over turbulence like a car with no suspension on a bumpy road. In fact the Cessna's shell is made of aluminium, the same stuff that chocolates are wrapped in! But Harry Potter at the controls assures us that he has flown through much worse, and that this aircraft is well suited to handle the many moods of mountain air.

As we fly, the pilot keeps up his commentary, heard through headsets each passenger is wearing. He points out lakes, like little blue dimples in the huge glaciers, and various peaks, telling us whether they've been summited or not.

From the sky, Milford Sound looks like the pretty green paw of a giant dinosaur placed in the blue green waters of the Tasman Sea. To give passengers on both sides equally stunning views, our pilot flies a little distance out over the sea, banks left and then right, finally lining up to approach the runway at the very end of the outcrop. The dazzling white of the Southern Alps is a gorgeous contrast to the indigo water, bright blue sky and green land, broken by streaks of white—the Sound's abundant waterfalls.

Technically, Milford is a fjord, but was erroneously marked as a "sound" by Captain John Grono, who



ATLAS  
WANAKA,  
NEW ZEALAND

When Rudyard Kipling visited Milford Sound, he was so stunned he declared it "the eighth wonder of the world".

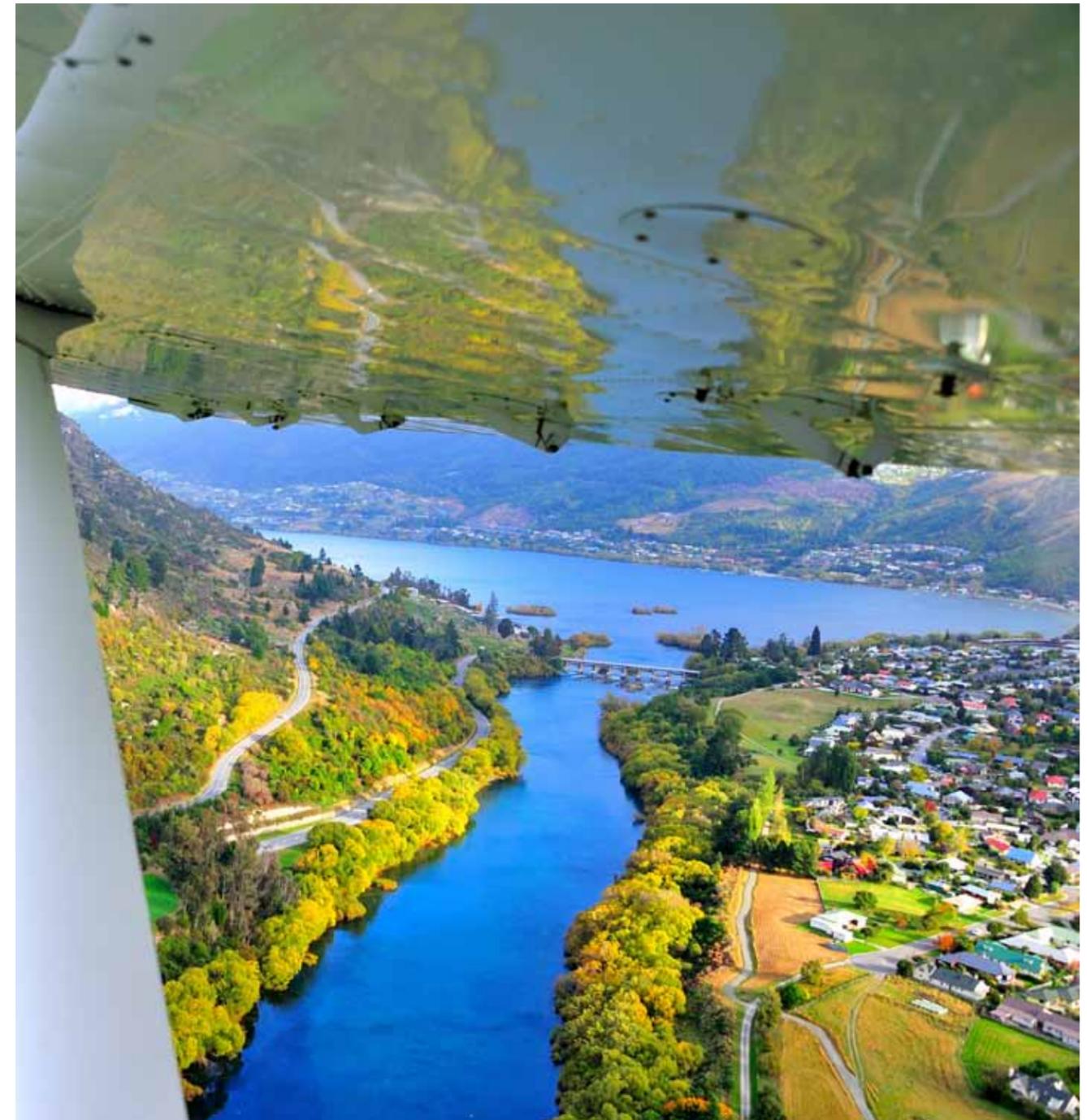
named it after Milford Haven in Wales. To fly into that fjord felt like something out of *633 Squadron*, a 1964 film about an Allied Squadron tasked with destroying a Nazi V2 rocket fuel plant at the head of a similar fjord in Norway. The Nazis knew about the attack, and the entire fjord was lined with anti-aircraft guns. So the squadron had to fly into the fjord amidst a hail of bullets, bomb the plant, and fly out again. As we landed, I couldn't help thinking that this little modern Cessna, built primarily for passengers, wouldn't stand a chance, while that 74-year-old lady in Wanaka might actually be able to manoeuvre nimbly enough to come out unscathed. After landing, we explore the Sound from a different angle, aboard the *Lady Bowen* on a two-hour boat cruise that takes in stunning water vistas, wondrous rainbow-tinged waterfalls, and a very friendly albatross.

Flying on a commercial airliner is quite a sterile experience as far as the feeling of flight goes; other than the rush down the runway to take off or land, it feels like being in a giant tube. But these little flying machines, especially the Tiger Moth, give a taste of the wonder that aviators of the past must have felt. To be up there in the cold, rarefied air, with no canopy or computers for protection or prediction; to feel the wind on your face, put your trust in a simple carburetted petrol engine and a hand-built contraption—it is more than magical. ●

## The Vitals

**Southern Discoveries'** Glenorchy Air Fly/Cruise/Fly Milford Sound package includes the 35-min flight from Queenstown to Milford Sound and back with a 2-hour cruise on the *Lady Bowen*, and an option of kayaking at Harrison's Cove in between. They also offer other fly, cruise, and kayak packages (NZ\$485/ ₹22,150 per person; [www.southerndiscoveries.co.nz](http://www.southerndiscoveries.co.nz)).

**Classic Flights Wanaka** offers 30-min Tiger Moth scenic flights at Spitfire Lane, Wanaka Airport. Passengers must weigh under 100 kg (NZ\$289/ ₹13,200; [www.classicflights.co.nz](http://www.classicflights.co.nz)).



As the Cessna takes off, the vibrant colours of the countryside around Queenstown are reflected in the plane's polished aluminium wings.