

**GIVEAWAY**

Win a romantic weekend away for your Valentine. Maui motorhomes and the *Sunday Star-Times* are giving you the chance to win a romantic five-day getaway in your very own premium home on wheels, so you can enjoy the freedom to travel to your favourite romantic Kiwi destination in style and comfort. To enter, email escape@star-times.co.nz with "Maui getaway" in the subject line by Friday, February 4.

■ The prize must be redeemed between March 1 and June 30, 2011. Subject to availability at all times. The voucher covers Christchurch/Christchurch, Auckland/Auckland hires (Queenstown and Wellington available with location cost).

CATLINS FESTIVAL

This year's Catlins River Festival is set to be a loud one. With Woodstock Lodge as the venue for the festival on April 23 and 24, expect a unique line-up of international and local musical artists, as well as performance art, workshops and stalls. Saturday's line-up flaunts rock, hip-hop and electronic acts, headlined by The Nomad. This Otago-born, Melbourne-based artist blends reggae, dub, hip-hop and electronica, and will perform alongside legendary hip-hop artist King Kapsi as MC and Oakley Grennell on guitar. Another line-up will be announced in February with international names expected. The festival supports local projects and organisations. Tickets are \$60 for the weekend

including camping or \$40 for a day pass. Visit www.cosmic.ticketing.co.nz/event/show/831 for tickets and www.catlinsriverfestival.com for information.

BEER CHEER

If your favourite time of day is beer o'clock, get ready to wet your whistle. Next month Worsler Bay Boating Club in Wellington will be home to food and beer festival Summerfest. Special guest beer writer Neil Miller has conducted popular beer and food matching sessions with chef Martin Bosley and writes regular beer columns in numerous publications. Summerfest celebrates great beer (as well as wine, cider and Foxton Fizz) and tempting food matches accompanied by jazz, gypsy folk and blues. The family-friendly

Neil Miller talks beer.



event will be held on February 27 from 3pm-6pm. Entry is \$5 at the door (children under 12 are free) or presales can be purchased from www.worslerbay.school.nz/summerfest2011. All proceeds support Worsler Bay School.

SAVVY TRAVELS

Tech-savvy travellers keen to keep an eye out for the best deals, no matter where they are, will be pleased to hear about a new iPad app from Best Western International. The free Best Western to Go allows travellers to find deals at more than 4000 Best Western hotels worldwide, as well as creating custom-made itineraries complete with photos, favourite locations and easy navigation. The free Best Western to Go application for iPad and iPhone can be downloaded at the iTunes store.

FOOD AND WINE FESTIVAL

One thing better than a food and wine festival is a food and wine festival for a great cause. On February 5, the annual South Canterbury Food and Wine Festival will be held in the Timaru Botanical Gardens in aid of Hospice South Canterbury. New Zealand music veteran Jackie Clarke will MC the event, which features entertainment from the Dukes and The Lady Killers. There will be gourmet food, boutique wines, a celebrity bread, cheese and wine event, and children's entertainment to further the festivities. The festival runs from 11am to 7.30pm and entry is \$25, with free entry for those aged under 15. For more information visit www.sc.wineandfoodfest.co.nz

Travelbug picks of the week**The Chatham Auckland, Auckland**

The Chatham's central four-star suites combine luxury and functionality for both business and leisure travel. The 46 one and two-bedroom suites are serviced daily, have wireless internet, fully equipped kitchens and a private balcony. From \$145.

James Cook Hotel Grand Chancellor, Wellington

The James Cook is in the heart of Wellington's commercial and retail districts. Dining is available at Sojourn Cafe Bar and Whitby's Restaurant & Bar. All 260 rooms feature high speed internet, Sky TV, in-house movies and minibar and more. There is also a complimentary in-house gym. From \$126.

■ Travelbug is Trade Me's accommodation website (www.travelbug.co.nz) with deals for New Zealand and more than 12,000 accommodation reviews.

**Ask the experts**

Q. One of my all-time big ambitions is to visit Uluru and I'm thinking of planning a trip. What is the best time of year to visit? Are there any good value group tours I could book? I'm female and will be travelling on my own. Where would I need to fly to from New Zealand to meet a tour? And what else is there to do in the area?



ULURU

A. Travel to Uluru (or Ayers Rock) can be year-round. I prefer to travel there during the shoulder months (spring and autumn) as daytime temperatures are still around 30°C and evenings are very pleasant.

As a single woman travelling on your own, any of the tours would be suitable but I would recommend either a camping or a guided tour as they will give you more of an opportunity to mix and mingle with the other tour guests. Many tours stay overnight in camps or swags – so be prepared to rough it a little! The tours are well catered for so it's all in the spirit of adventure.

Uluru holds deep Aboriginal significance to the Anangu people, and they ask visitors to not climb the rock. You will learn why this is and hear many of the local stories as you are guided around the base on your tour. An Uluru base walk with a guided tour will teach you all about the geographical and cultural aspects behind the rock. The walk is approximately 9km but it is easy and flat.

You can learn even more at the Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park Cultural Centre. Dot painting workshops here teach the meanings behind the symbols in the prehistoric rock art and you can create your own masterpiece.

Many tours to Uluru start from Alice Springs and if you want to experience the surrounding region, choose one that visits some local must-sees such as Stanley Chasm, Goss Bluff and Kings Canyon.

■ Lisa Hawes, product team leader (Australia), House of Travel

■ Have a travel question? Email escape@star-times.co.nz with Expert in the subject line. House of Travel is giving away a \$100 voucher for use on houseoftravel.co.nz for the best reader's question sent in each month. Vouchers not redeemable in store.

**EXPAT TALES / the lowdown from Kiwis overseas**

SARA HASHIMOTO

Dornbirn, Austria

Why did you move there?

I moved here a year-and-a-half ago because it's my boyfriend Florian's hometown and he wanted to apply for a job here.

What do you do there?

I'm a language instructor (English and Japanese) and do a bit of Japanese to English translation to feed my belly. I blog at sasasunakku.com (food) and afaceday.com (silly faces) to feed everything else.

What do you like/dislike about it?

I like that it's close to Italy so we can do car trips to Milan and Alto Adige quite often. I don't like the lack of ethnic diversity and the small-town mentality.

How does the cost of living compare to New Zealand?

The rent is probably about the

same as New Zealand but, believe it or not, I think I pay less for food. There's a good market here on Wednesdays and Saturdays in the square.

What do you do on weekends?

I spend a lot of time cooking – I used to cook for a living – and taking photos of the results for the blog. In winter we sometimes go skiing. Florian plays the guitar and I sing. We go for a lot of walks. Rather thrilling aren't we?

What do you think of the food?

The food is pretty heavy and bland to my palate, to be honest. There are some lovely dishes; I particularly like the thinly sliced beef dish with pumpkinseed oil and vinegar, which is a specialty of Styria and the sweets are good – Austrians often eat a sweet, such as Marillenknoedel (apricot

dumplings), as a main.

What's the best way to get around the city?

By bike but everyone has a car.

What's the shopping like?

What shopping?

What's the nightlife like?

There are a few places worth visiting: Conrad Sohm, which used to be a toy factory, attracts some good acts as does the Pool Bar in Feldkirch. Having moved here straight from Tokyo it seems a little lacking though.

What is your favourite part of the city?

There's a beautiful restaurant dating back to the 15th century that used to be painted in bulls' blood, called Rotes Haus that I like.

What time of year is best to visit?

Winter if you like snowsports, summer if you prefer hiking. British sculptor Antony Gormley just did an installation in the mountains here.

What's your must-do thing for visitors?

See the Rappenlochschlucht (a gorge) and eat Kasespatzle (cheese dumplings), the region's specialty.

What are your top tips for tourists?

Hire a car; public transport doesn't serve most of the ski areas.

How easy is it for you to get back to New Zealand?

I wish it was a lot easier. It takes 40 hours, door to door . . .

■ If you know an expat who wants to share the inside knowledge on their home away from home, email escape@star-times.co.nz with Expat in the subject line.