



The view from the Mackinnon Pass is a breathtaking one that leaves you speechless.

Picture: CILLA COLE

# STEP INTO A WORLD OF ITS OWN

## MILFORD TRACK IS A WALK YOU'LL NEVER FORGET

Cilla Cole

"OVER the next few days, we'll all get to know each other really well, eh?" our guide Stu says in his thick New Zealand accent at our pre-walk briefing in Queenstown.

I look around the room with disinterest. I'm not here to meet new people. I'm here for a girls' week away to have a break from daily routines, from worrying about who needs to be at what activity when and what to cook for dinner.

And, by the by, I'm here to walk the Milford Track.

New Zealand's most famous guided walk has been popular since Quinton MacKinnon made a path across the pass from Lake Te Anau to Sutherland Falls 127 years ago.

To me a guided walk is the perfect mums' retreat.

There is enough exercise to give a sense of achievement; plenty of opportunity to either chat along the way or drop back for some rare solo time and best of all, every arrangement is taken care of.

We are free to socialise and be concerned only about ourselves – a taste of what my teenage children experience every day.

"Any dietary requirements?" The booking form had asked. "Gin and tonic?" was my friend Sheridan's only request.

As we introduce ourselves it seems that most of our group of 50 (some of whom have come from the US, the UK and Japan) is here to tick the Milford Track off their bucket list.

I wonder what can make this



The water in streams found across the Milford Track is often so clear, it is hard to tell it is there. Picture: CILLA COLE

walk so special for it to be "the finest walk in the world". Of course, it doesn't take me long to find out.

We start by following the gentle tow path alongside the jade green Clinton River where delicate ferns hang overhead and micro moss forests line the track.

This is pretty enough but by the afternoon the cloud burns away and the red beech tree canopy opens to a spectacular glacial valley.

Towering waterfalls, dramatic granite cliffs and snow-capped peaks surround us.

We cross streams with water so clear it is hard to tell it is there.

The zigzag path up to the pass is carpeted with alpine wildflowers and the panoramic views from the top render even my group of friends speechless.

Along the way we learn of the rich history of the track and I am

humbled by stories of early expeditions: of intrepid women trekking for weeks, hut bound for days due to blizzards and floods.

By contrast at the end of each day we relax in the comfort of the lodges, sinking into deep couches with a drink while waiting for our three-course dinner to be served

The writer travelled at her own expense

### THE BASICS

#### WALKING THERE

Ultimate Hikes 54km guided walk from \$NZ1930. [ultimatehikes.co.nz](http://ultimatehikes.co.nz)

#### FLYING THERE

Jetstar, Virgin, Air New Zealand and Qantas fly direct Sydney to Queenstown from \$279 one way

#### STAYING THERE

Novotel Queenstown Lakeside rooms from \$211 per night, twin share. [novotel.com](http://novotel.com)