



Wellington, photo by Ian Trafford

Stepping onto the airplane at Los Angeles' LAX, I felt like I was entering a swanky lounge – not something you usually associate with flying. The purple mood lighting, the gift pouch (with everything from hand lotion and lip balm, to socks and sleeping mask) and pod seating, all make for an enjoyable flight. The premium economy spaceseats slide forward – just like your favourite armchair – satisfying your own needs, while also keeping the person behind you happy. The 12-hour flight went by fast – dozing through most of it, and Air New Zealand does everything they can to make that restful-sleep happen. Next thing I knew, we were descending into Auckland, NZ.

WOWed by New Zealand

Wearable art, celebrity encounters, waterfront walks and helicopter rides – *Viva's* Jessica Uniac discovers that there's tons to do in New Zealand's off-season.

BY JESSICA UNIAC

WONDERFUL, WINDY WELLINGTON

Catching a quick flight, I touched down in Wellington, the country's 'coolest little capital,' ready to explore the city and looking forward to attending the Brancott Estate World of WearableArt show (WOW) that night. With 160 jaw-dropping garments featured by designers from all over the world, the show has grown to become a cornerstone in Wellington's event calendar. After a brisk and windy walk in the sunshine along the Wellington Harbour – surrounded by stunning views with perfectly blue water, sailboats and a backdrop of homes running up the sides of mountainous hills – I was picked up to attend WOW. After meeting the Prime Minister of New Zealand, John Key, who stopped by our table to say hello, and rubbing elbows with the likes of actors Orlando Bloom, Stephen Fry and producer Peter Jackson, sitting two tables over, the lights dimmed and the show started.



Air New Zealand

WOWED BY WEARABLEART

The show opened with children's 'food' costumes, followed by an illumination section, where the garments glowed in the dark and the models were invisible. 'Under the microscope' – the category a Canadian artist entered – took a look at the unknown microscopic universe. Marjolin Dallinga from Quebec, who designs for Cirque du Soleil, submitted her first WOW piece called 'Skin'. Every garment had a specific way of being showcased, from a stomping runway walk, to a choreographed dance routine, while Dallinga's 'Skin' demonstrated an understated, simplistic beauty, enhanced by the costume floating and slowly spinning around the stage.



Top: 2011 Brancott Estate WOW® Awards Show; 'Pretzella', Sean Purucker, United States; Winner Children's Section

Right: 2011 Brancott Estate WOW® Awards Show; 'Skin', Marjolin Dallinga, Canada; Runner Up Booker Spalding First Time Entrant Award & Commended Gen-i Creative Excellence Section. Photos by World of WearableArt™ Ltd



NELSON'S SUNNY DISPOSITION

WOW founder Suzie Moncrieff says she continues to be amazed by how the show, which originated in Nelson, just west of Wellington, progresses every year. "It is amazing to think I held my first show back in 1987 in a tent in Nelson during a torrential rainstorm." Having the pleasure of experiencing the small city for myself, the trip ended on a sunny day with a breathtaking helicopter ride through the mountains and boating through the nearby Abel Tasman National Park.



Abel Tasman National Park, photo by Ian Trafford

SURPRISES BY THE SECOND

The second half of WOW featured ballerinas from the Royal New Zealand Ballet, as well as opera duets. 'Man unleashed' was a huge crowd pleaser, with the re-invented grooms rockin' and thrusting across the stage. The grooms outshone the brides, who were dancing in their '80s poufy sleeves and white blown-out gowns in the background. The show ended with 'Kiwi Icons,' featuring heritage-inspired New Zealand garments. The grand finale starred singer John Rowles; the crowd roared – having no clue who he was, it was obvious I wasn't a Kiwi. Described to me as "New Zealand's Elvis," he shook his hips, dancing and singing with the entire WOW cast. After the show, Stephen Fry tweeted, "Wow, in every sense. Just attended one of the greatest evenings of my life. Kiwis should be so proud. Simply fantastic!"

OH, CANADA!

Dallinga's main goal was to just be selected. She invested a lot of time and energy into her design and she wanted to see if 'Skin' was interesting enough to be placed on stage. "The total time it took me was three to four weeks to make it. All those points are handmade and hand-dyed. It's all felted with New Zealand wool." On her inspiration for the piece, she says, "I tried to paint a portrait of what's between people... not about me or you, it's about what happens between us." The multipurpose piece is more than just a coat. "You can hang it on a wall or lay it on your bed. It's designed to be versatile." Due to a prior commitment, Dallinga was unable to attend the show in person, yet her piece 'Skin' won third prize in the Gen-i Creative Excellence Section: Under The Microscope and second place in the Booker Spalding First Time Entrant Award. "I am planning to apply again. I want to do it with more costumes, so it's a relational thing," Dallinga says. Hopefully she will have another chance to go next year and compete for a prize pool of close to \$150,000.

THREE TRIP TIPS FOR NZ:

1. Air New Zealand offers direct non-stop flights from Vancouver, San Francisco and Los Angeles to Auckland.
2. Premium Economy Seats are the way to go.
3. For information on New Zealand travel, check out www.NewZealand.com