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There are places that require help, where you want your trip to be arranged by locals who know what they're doing—Africa and extreme elevations come to mind—but New Zealand generally isn't one of them. It's an incredibly user-friendly country, where no one locks their doors, everyone speaks English, and it's hard to imagine anything going wrong. And yet a New Zealand sojourn planned by Seasonz Travel proved that notion entirely wrong. Information is a commodity these days; what these guys offer is far more valuable: knowledge and introductions.

“Our guests want to connect with Kiwis,” says Seasonz codirector Matt Lines, who honed his travel-planning skills lining up VIP events for the Olympics and the World Cup. “They want to get behind the scenes and meet real people.” Lines and Seasonz founder Sam Porter, a veteran of Abercrombie & Kent, make sure clients do just that: They've arranged lunches with rugby stars and races with America's Cup skippers, and have cultivated relationships with the country's top guides, particularly for fishing and adventure travel, as well as with the mangers of its first-class lodges.

When Seasonz organized my trip to the Southern Alps (I was their guest), my local host in Queenstown had lived in that city for 20 years and knew absolutely everyone. After the adventure sports, I visited Otago Valley wineries with Mount Edward owner Duncan Forsyth, one of the region's first winemakers, who skipped touristy tasting rooms and took me to see his friends at work, poke my arms into vats of just-harvested grapes, barrel-taste young wines, and share a staff meal with his crew.

On a return visit to Queenstown, I told my driver about my Seasonz trip. “Those are the best guides in town,” he remarked. And he didn't even know Duncan, who's not involved in tourism and, like many people Seasonz guests meet, only available to the company's clients.

Seasonz guests might speak with their account manager 20 times before an itinerary is finalized. Once there, they're usually met by that manager at the

Auckland airport (no small thing when many U.S. flights land at 5am), and are loaned a Seasonz cell phone programmed with his or her number (very useful when New Zealand's wildly variable weather prompts a quick change of plans). But I never had to use mine—everything was orchestrated perfectly, and they were conducting it all without my even knowing they were doing it.