

In the remarkably transient New Zealand tourist hub that is Queenstown, it's reasonably rare to find anyone who actually grew up there. But George Burdon did, and his upbringing – as well as the influence of his many Kiwi employees – has played a large part in the success of his luxury travel business, Dynamic Lives.

LIFE IN THE FRENCH LANE

As a child, George Burdon's mother ran a restaurant in Queenstown, while his father worked the family farm. And it is through these formative experiences, he says, that he developed his work ethic, his penchant for fresh farm produce and his passion for hotels, tourism and hospitality.

Of course, growing up in Queenstown, Burdon also spent much of the winter on the local slopes, where he developed another passion: skiing.

With a fascination for the world outside New Zealand (his family travelled together through Asia when he was young), Burdon moved overseas in 1994 after obtaining a commerce degree in marketing at Otago University.

He worked as a broker in London and then Hong Kong, but, after a short stint in the Internet market, he decided to pack up and start afresh. And with his love of skiing and a desire to provide first class service, it was a natural choice to set up shop in Chamonix and Ibiza, two of Europe's premier holiday destinations.

"My ambition was to prove that you can live and have a business in the location where you spend time on holiday," he says.

Out of this ethos grew Dynamic Lives, a company dedicated to providing luxury travel experiences with a difference.

Basically, Burdon's company rents some of the most luxurious villas and chalets in Chamonix and Ibiza, and also provides a hotel-type service (such as 24-hour resort drivers and resort hosts, top class chefs and amazing mountain guides), to well-heeled holidaymakers.

It is, he says, aimed at the top-end, so only the best hotels, restaurants and rooms will do. And with the private luxury rental market growing at 30 percent a year, primarily due to wealthy individuals "buying and developing second homes, finishing them to a high standard and renting them out to the holiday market", there is a fantastic selection of luxurious properties on offer.

"Clients want a travel experience that provides privacy and service in a luxurious but homely environment. They want to come down to breakfast in their bathrobes. But you can't do that in a hotel."

But it's not just about offering the right properties to his guests, he says. Burdon is an avowed people person and, in typical Kiwi fashion, he believes this is a key



George Burdon: "We look for staff with personality; creative professionals who think outside the box."

element to his success as a businessman. Employing the right staff, then, is essential to the experience, because service can make or break a holiday, especially when the clients' expectations are so high.

"We look for staff with personality; creative professionals who think outside the box, and with a flexible attitude to getting things done. When the guests request lunch on the terrace mid afternoon, we will always accommodate them."

“Kiwis have a naturally progressive attitude with food and wine. We are not restricted by old French traditions. New Zealand did not become one of the world's finest wine producers by sticking to the old methods”

Providing amazing cuisine is also essential to a five-star holiday experience, Burdon says.

"Kiwis have a naturally progressive attitude with food and wine. We are not restricted by old French traditions. And Kiwis have always had the freedom to push the boat out and experiment. New Zealand did not become one of the world's finest wine producers by sticking to the old methods."

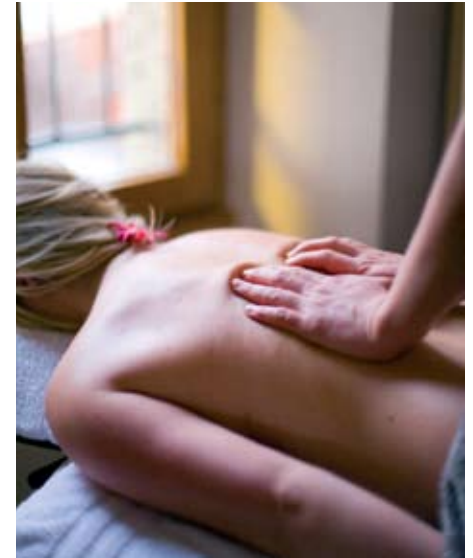
Due to the demands on his staff, Burdon says he often employs Kiwis because of their natural ability to combine professionalism and excellent service in a relaxed fashion.

They are also naturally hardworking – like himself – have a flexible attitude and are "innovative individuals with lots of personality".

"Our service style is not stiff, bow-tied, standing up straight. It's a Kiwi approach. We like to put people at ease, so our service style is professional and efficient, but also quite relaxed."

And he is always on the lookout for quality New Zealand staff.

"We have opportunities in both winter and summer. And Kiwis are eligible for a



Life of Riley: Dynamic Lives offers a combination of decadent cuisine, luxury properties and top level service.

one-year French working visa,” he says. “Working with Dynamic Lives also provides the opportunity to travel in Spain, Morocco and France, as well as the chance to work in a four and five-star tourist environment. I want to employ individuals who are as passionate about creating the ultimate travel experience as I am.”

Jonty Keightley, who is now a Resort Manager for Dynamic Lives in the ski resort town of Chamonix, fits that mould. He learnt French at high school, travelled around the country for two months and stayed with a non English-speaking family. This, he says, is where he fell in love with the culture, language and mountains.

“Having grown up in the great outdoors of rural New Zealand, France is an extension of this. And living in Chamonix, which is nestled between the Swiss and Italian alps, you’re not more than 30 minutes away from these two neighbouring countries, and the chance to experience the many diverse cultures that Europe offers is amazing. Kiwis feed off that and have always had a passion for travel. And we’re always well received in France, too, often because of rugby and the All Black-mad French people!”

While many of Keightley’s Kiwi contemporaries often end up choosing London as their European location of choice, he says working in France offers him something slightly more unique.

“I’ve been able to integrate with the locals, deal with local suppliers, and I use French every day. I’m proud to be part of a hard-working Kiwi team of professionals, providing top quality

service to our guests. And it’s exciting to be part of a European-based travel provider, which leads to dealing with all kinds of people and opens up so many other opportunities and experiences.”

While Dynamic Lives focuses primarily on rental accommodation, Burdon says the company is also developing a property portfolio of its own.

Burdon now has four properties under his belt and, with each valued at between two to three million euros, all of them are suitably luxurious. Owning and developing his own properties is a win-win situation: he can create the right environment for his guests and also capitalise on investment growth.

But it’s certainly not stopping there. “By owning our properties we get better returns, so our plan is to ultimately add to our four existing properties, taking it up to 10 properties in five different European resorts, all with the same level of Dynamic Lives style and service.”

With their attention to detail and comprehensive knowledge of the resorts, the company has also established a sterling reputation as a “corporate alpine events” provider among some of Europe’s leading investment banking and trading firms, such as Barclays Capital, Deutsche Bank, oil trading company Vitol, Nestle and even The Discovery Channel.

“Guests come on holiday with us to Chamonix and might decide to reward their clients – or impress potential clients – with a top-class ski experience. So they obviously want that same atmosphere and

level of service that was provided on their own holidays,” Burdon says.

Over the years, he has been asked to provide all kinds of corporate hospitality, from guided three day heli-skiing trips, to husky riding in Sweden, eco-weekends at a resort where guests camp out in luxury eco-pods, holidays in five-star hotels with private entry to members only clubs in top-class European ski resorts like Courchevel, Megeve, Verbier or St Anton, helicopter transfers and private jets to the Alps, or luxury chalet and ski experiences complete with hot tubs, massages and, of course, long, wine-soaked lunches.

And with a holiday history like that, Dynamic Lives seems to be a rather appropriate company moniker. ♦

FACT BOX

Fully catered and staffed chalets start at 9,000 euros per week. The luxury villa Can Jordi, in Ibiza, which sleeps 12 guests, starts at 7,000 euros per week. Or, for something even more luxurious, La Buena Sombra in Ibiza starts at 30,000 euros per week. All chalets come with private chef, host, on-call driving service, full concierge service, linen and towels and cleaning.

For reservations:

email info@dynamiclives.com

Web: www.dynamiclives.com

Tel: +44 (0) 870 757 0068