

The Motor Caravanner



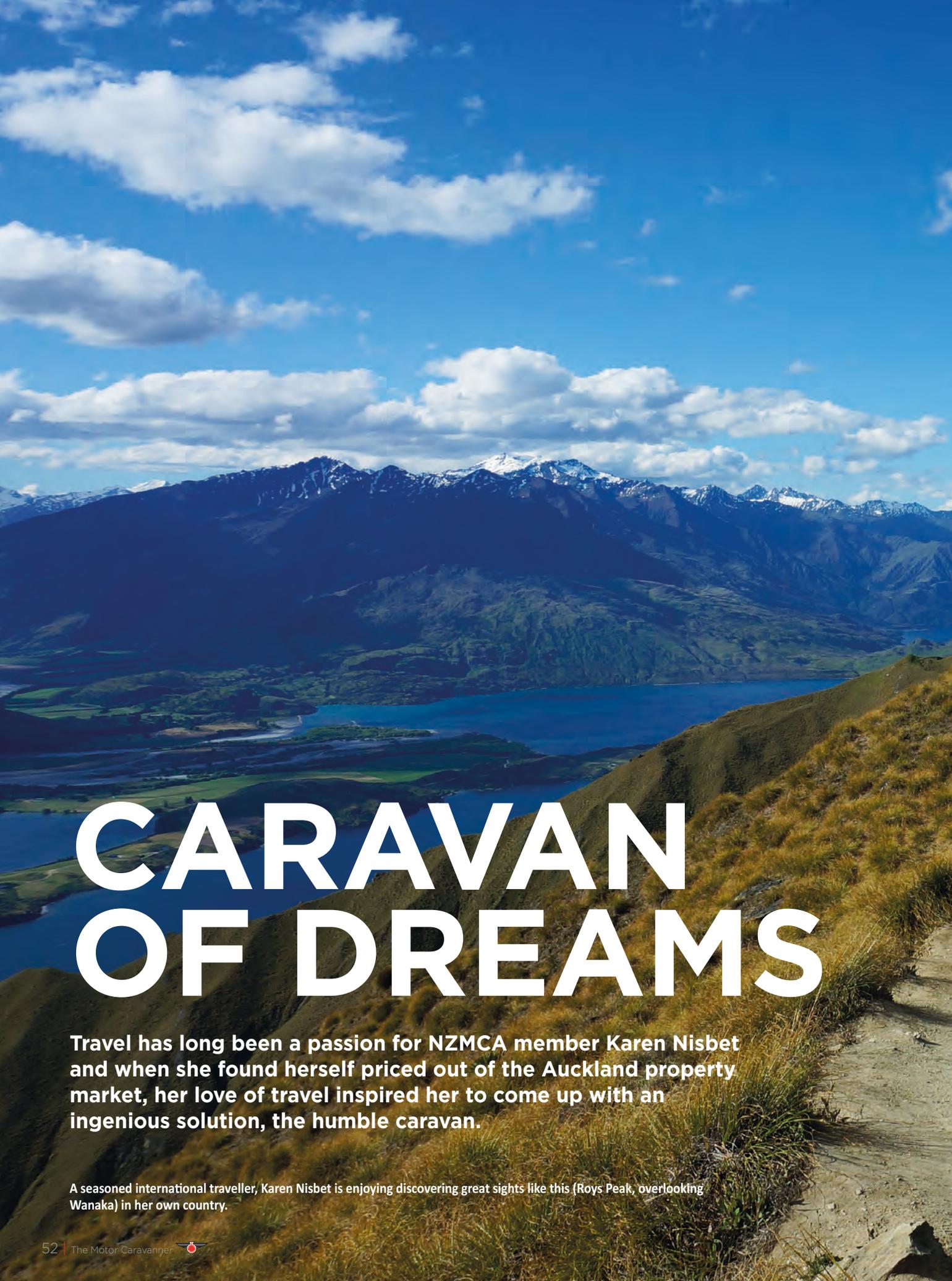
THE NEW ZEALAND MOTOR CARAVAN ASSOCIATION (INC) MAGAZINE

**MEET THE LADY
BEHIND THE LENS**

**NZ'S GREAT WALKS
IT'S ALMOST LIKE
BEING THERE**

**CARAVAN
OF DREAMS
YOUNG MEMBER LOVES
THE CARAVAN LIFESTYLE**

GREAT RESPONSE TO MEMBER SURVEY



CARAVAN OF DREAMS

Travel has long been a passion for NZMCA member Karen Nisbet and when she found herself priced out of the Auckland property market, her love of travel inspired her to come up with an ingenious solution, the humble caravan.

A seasoned international traveller, Karen Nisbet is enjoying discovering great sights like this (Roys Peak, overlooking Wanaka) in her own country.





First-time caravan owner Karen Nisbet remembers thinking ‘what have I done’ as she drove off for the first time with her caravan – but soon became comfortable towing it behind her 4x4 Nissan Terrano.

Her love for travel began some years before, when six months into her first job as a graphic designer, Karen asked herself the question that many of us ask ourselves at different stages of our lives: ‘Is this it?’

“It probably didn’t help that my first job was with a knitting company so it didn’t exactly fire me up,” explains Karen. “Still I couldn’t help wondering: Do I spend the rest of my life doing this?”

A move to the fast-paced world of advertising failed to cure Karen of her workday blues but it did help her save enough money for her first overseas experience to London.

“I’d never left New Zealand but before I decided to go to London I’d been watching a lot of arthouse movies and they were really inspiring. They gave me a hankering to go travelling and because lots of the movies were set in Europe, that’s where I headed first.

“I loved the movie *Lost in Translation* so I stopped off in Tokyo on my way to London. Another influential movie was *Pot Luck*, a story about a French university student living in Barcelona. When I first got to London I lived in a chaotic, multicultural apartment that reminded me of the movie and that inspired me even more.”

Karen’s first big trip was a Top Deck tour where she visited something like 13 countries in 21 days: “After that I visited Scotland, Ireland, Russia, Norway, Italy, Croatia, Spain, Morocco, Egypt, Iran, Turkmenistan and Turkey. It’s fair to say I made the most of my time in London.”

After four years Karen moved to Melbourne to be closer to home.

“I managed to travel up the west coast of Australia and to Vietnam so I didn’t give up on my travel dreams. I spent a couple of years in Melbourne and then my Dad got sick so I decided to come home to be with him. Thankfully he got better and soon after that I got itchy feet again.”

Nine months in South America and the UK was enough to convince Karen it was time to come back home, this time with plans to settle down.

“Nine months living out of a backpack was exhausting and I was ready to put down roots. I got a permanent job and started saving money but quickly realised a house in Auckland was out of my reach.

“Once I accepted that I couldn’t afford to buy a house in Auckland I realised I didn’t actually want to live in Auckland. I liked the idea of being able to move around and travelling the country to find a place I wanted to call home. So I came up with the idea of living in a caravan and having a home on wheels.

“Some people suggested I could live in a boat. Other people suggested I should get a motorhome but anything with a motor was well over my budget. I initially was hoping to get a caravan for \$20,000 but that soon increased to \$30k when I learnt a bit more about what I wanted. For example, I wanted a fixed bed rather than having to make up my bed every night.”

Karen visited almost every dealer in and around Auckland and asked lots of questions. She scoured Trade Me as well and most of the caravans she really wanted to see were in the South Island. So she bought a Nissan Terrano 4x4 and set off on a road trip to the South Island at the start of October. She found what she was looking for in Nelson.

"I liked the look of the caravan," says Karen. "It was a Sterling Europa and it didn't look too dated. I thought it was completely out of my price range. It was priced at \$35k but the dealer was great. He let me have a look around and asked me to talk to him before I went. I showed him the one I liked and he asked me what I was willing to pay. He agreed to sell it to me for \$30,000.

"I went away to sleep on it but I didn't sleep very well. I wasn't sure I was making the right decision but I woke up in the morning and I decided to go for it. I filled in the paperwork, the dealer fixed a few things on the caravan and I drove to a campground just down the road. While I was trying to figure out what everything did I remember asking myself: 'What am I doing?'

"I was a complete newbie. I had to figure out how to empty the toilet and the grey water tank. The very first night there was torrential rain and I was terrified I'd discover a leak but thankfully it was in great nick."

Karen's first trip was to Motueka to get her self containment certificate and sort out her NZMCA membership: "That was a baptism of fire because it's a really windy road but I made it."

After that Karen continued her road trip of the South Island.

"The first few times towing it were nerve wracking. I thought I was going to sideswipe all these cars as I went around corners. I went down the east coast and managed to miss the earthquake in Kaikoura by a few days. I went to Dunedin and across to Gore and Milford Sound. Waking up in Milford Sound and looking out the caravan window at the stunning snow-covered mountains behind me was a very special moment. I picked up a friend in Queenstown and we travelled up the west coast until I ran out of money and came back to Auckland."

Karen has been living in the caravan in Auckland for the last few months but she has a hankering to hit the road again.

"I'm obsessed with the South Island but it's a question of figuring out how to earn enough money down there to make it work. My plan is to earn enough money to get out of Auckland and then head south again.

"I'm still learning a lot. I've never thought about water so much. Do I have enough? Do I need to empty the tanks? Where am I getting my next water from? I usually run out of water when it's lashing rain outside.

"But for all the downsides there are so many upsides. I've always flatted with other people so I absolutely love being able to use my kitchen anytime I want to without having to compete with other people for space or wash other people's dishes before using them.

"I bought a Wireless Nation modem through the NZMCA and that's fantastic. I have a laptop and I'm slightly addicted to YouTube. I like reading, hiking and photography as well while updating the blog on my website keeps me busy.

"I've been contracting for the last couple of months but long-term I want to be able to freelance on the road as a graphic designer and work from the caravan. That would be the ideal. It might take a bit more time and quite a bit of hustle but that's the dream."

To read more about Karen's caravan adventures visit www.travellingk.com



FROM TOP: Karen Nisbet found herself the centre of attention while travelling in Iran; close to nature in the Hokitika Gorge; and Karen is loving the freedom her caravan home gives her.