

**R**ecently, the Web site The Daily Beast calculated which countries ranked as the world's laziest, based on daily consumption of calories, amount of time spent watching television, and aversion to physical activity. Out of 24 countries, the United States was rated the most slothful. New Zealand, at number 22, barely made the list.

That it ranked among the laziest at all is a bit of a shocker. After all, New Zealand is the birthplace of black-water rafting (whooshing through underground caves), jet boats (designed to speed over the country's fast-moving, shallow rivers), and commercial bungee jumping.

And then there's sport: rugby, mountain biking, surfing, hang gliding, heli-skiing, free-fall photography, and tandem parapenting (don't ask).

Lazy they're not.

But I am. So on a recent visit to New Zealand, I was determined to experience it on my terms. There would be no hiking, biking, leaping, spelunking, sheep shearing, or scrimmaging. Instead, I planned a leisurely round of dining, drinking, napping, and a little bit of gentle strolling. I would visit farmers' markets, wineries, spas, and restaurants, and cap it all off each night with at least nine hours in a very comfortable bed. How did I achieve all this in a country that is hell-bent on courting death on a daily basis? Actually, it was remarkably easy.

1/ pour a glass of wine and watch the sun set

#### THE BAY OF ISLANDS

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For the lazy person, there is probably no better place to begin a trip to New Zealand than in the Bay of Islands, 150 miles or so north of Auckland. Because of its subtropical climate, it is warm, brilliantly green, and peaceful, with gentle hills that roll down to the sea. Plus, it is steeped in history—this is where the English and native Maori signed a land rights treaty in 1840 that is still being debated, somewhat testily, to this day. So if you feel you really should sightsee, there are plenty of worthy places to visit.

On the way up from Auckland, I stopped at the Matakana Village Farmers' Market and picked up some salad greens, berries, prosciutto, wine, and cheese, just enough to last for a few days. Friends had booked me into the Avalon Resort in the town of Kerikeri, an idyllic complex of four cottages (complete with kitchens) owned by Willem de Jong and Betty Ras, who moved to New Zealand from Holland in 2003. They've created a magical place that looks like something out of Middle Earth, and they share it with a

menagerie of friendly creatures—two hairy little pigs (one with a ring in its nose), a few rusty red hens, some goats, and a dog or two. I can't imagine a more perfect moment than my first evening, sitting on the deck of my cottage, watching my daughter play with the pigs, and sipping a glass of Riverstone Pinot Gris. The ducks swam placidly in the pond while the sun set, all pink and apricot and violet.

My next day was a little more rigorous. I had scheduled a massage and facial at the ultra-luxe Lodge at Kauri Cliffs in nearby Matauri Bay while friends played 18 holes on the lodge's championship course. We dined together, a very civilized affair of locally sourced foods: cauliflower truffle soup, grilled gurnard with a basil and tomato dressing, rack of lamb with cumin polenta and red onion jam, and an oozy and delicious chocolate fondant cake with crème anglaise.

2/ have a three-hour lunch

#### HAWKE'S BAY WINE COUNTRY

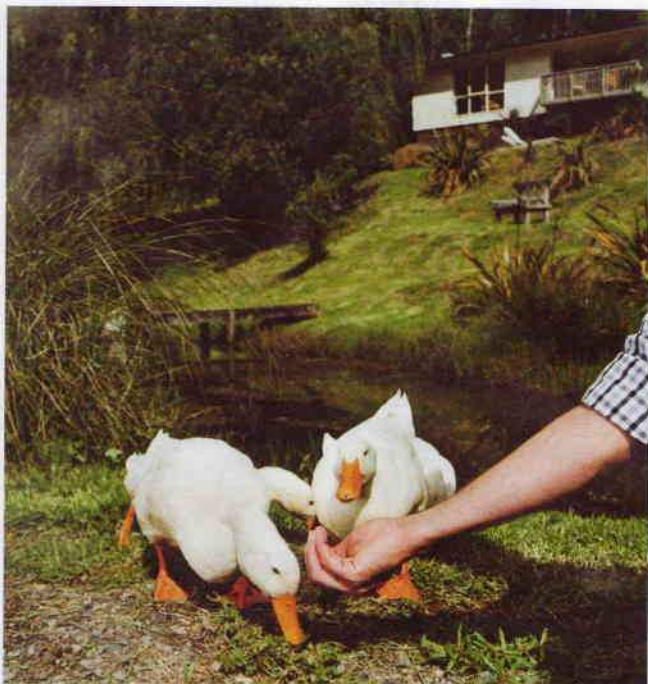
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I had broken my no-hiking rule at Kauri Cliffs and ambled down to the resort's pink sand beach, just out of curiosity. Astonishingly beautiful, it was worth the 40-minute vertical climb back to the car. But it meant that when I got to my next destination, I was in serious need of a drink.

Thankfully, I was in the right place. Hawke's Bay is probably New Zealand's most famous wine region, specializing in elegant Chardonnays and Claret-style reds, although you'll find some good Sauvignon Blancs and Syrahs, too. I was staying in one of the ridiculously cushy rooms at The Farm at Cape Kidnappers (a sister property to Kauri Cliffs), which is located near several of the best vineyards. I started by checking in with the sommelier, who not only gave me his list of favorite wineries, but also threw in a few cheese shops and olive oil tasting rooms for good measure. Top of the list was Craggy Range Winery, which produces superlative wines and offers charming vineyard cottages for rent—and it's home to Terrôir, one of the best restaurants in the country.

Terrôir is an interesting place to find in the middle of a vineyard thousands of miles away from London or San Francisco, two cities where it could easily be located. My lunch was ambitious, up-to-the-moment, and extremely well executed. I started with house-cured hot-smoked salmon with pickled cauliflower, arugula, and curry mayonnaise, followed by

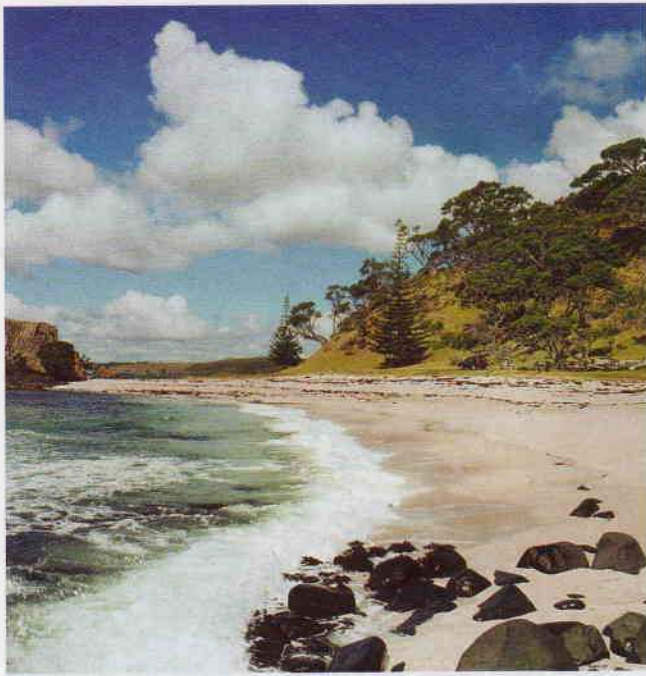
*I had broken my no-hiking rule and ambled down to the resort's pink sand beach, but there was a 40-minute vertical climb back to the car. It meant that when I got to my next destination, I was in serious need of a drink.*



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT A vanilla bean cheesecake tartlet with roasted rhubarb at Otahuna Lodge (see recipe on page 111); ducks are part of the menagerie at the Avalon Resort in Kerikeri on the

North Island; this seafood barbecue stand in the town of Kaikoura on the South Island sells superlative seafood fritters; executive chef Jimmy McIntyre examines the corn crop in Otahuna's walled kitchen garden;

Otahuna Lodge is a Christchurch landmark built from a restored 19th-century estate house.



FROM LEFT Near the uppermost tip of the North Island, undeveloped land rolls down to secluded beaches like this one near The Lodge at Kauri Cliffs; olive oil from

The Village Press in Hawke's Bay is labeled with its varietal olives, which include smooth Manzanillo, peppery Barnea, and more.

a confit of stuffed rabbit leg with pancetta and pearl barley risotto. The breads were homemade, the olive oil made from the vineyard's own crop, the organic vegetables harvested from the restaurant's garden.

Thanks to its temperate climate, Hawke's Bay has long been known as the fruit bowl of New Zealand, and a visit to the Hawke's Bay Farmers' Market was the perfect way to end a few days of wine tasting. Packed full of every imaginable fresh fruit, vegetable, and herb, as well as local honeys, olive and avocado oils, pickles, preserves, and jams, it's also a great insight into the high art of Kiwi baking, both sweet and savory. I left with a large Wagyu beef pie (frozen for easy transportation) to take to friends in the South Island, the next stop on my slacker's trail.

### 3/ sit by the beach and listen to the waves KAIKOURA, NORTH CANTERBURY

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New Zealand possesses almost 10,000 miles of coastline, which has resulted in a couple of things: There are lots of good beaches and the seafood is incredible. One of the best places to experience both is Kaikoura, a small town on the east coast of the South Island.

*Kaikoura* is a Maori word that means "to eat crayfish," the big spiny lobsters that are plentiful in the area. And while there are many places to eat crayfish in Kaikoura, my favorite by far is The Original Kaikoura Seafood BBQ, which consists of a table, a sign, a grill, and a cooler filled with soft drinks.

The location is perfect: just outside town on a quiet

road right by the beach. The waves crash on the shore, and the sea and sky are a deep, intense blue. If you're lucky, a big fat New Zealand fur seal might be lolling on the beach. Sheep occasionally wander by. You can get grilled scallops, mussels, and fish here, as well as seafood chowder, but the real draw is the fritters, made of whitebait, *paua* (abalone), or crayfish. They are served fresh off the grill on a melamine plate with a side salad and choice of rice or buttered bread. There are tables and plastic chairs set up nearby, so you can sit and eat and contemplate the ocean for as long as you like. You can contemplate many other beautiful things at Hapuku Lodge & Tree Houses, eight miles north of Kaikoura. Located on a deer farm and overlooking an olive orchard, the lodge has five whimsical and luxurious "tree houses" built 30 feet high in a native manuka grove. The structures have nearly 360-degree views of the surrounding mountains and coastline and some of the most comfortable beds you will ever sleep in, designed by the architect owners.

Those comfortable beds prepare you well for what may be your most strenuous activity at Hapuku: conquering the breakfast buffet.

Located on a deer farm and overlooking an orchard, the lodge has five whimsical "tree houses" built 30 feet high in a native manuka grove. They have nearly 360-degree views of the mountains.

## kiwi's big adventure

7 things to do with zeal in New Zealand



### SAVOR EXOTIC FRUIT

Feijoa is the sourest fruit you'll ever love, and it's used to make jam, ice cream, and even vodka here. And feast on the makeover hit of the produce world, the Chinese gooseberry, which in 1959 was renamed in honor of the flightless bird that is the national symbol of New Zealand—the kiwi.



### SCREW IT

Believed to produce the best Sauvignon Blancs in the world, New Zealand vintners were early adopters of screw-top bottling. Toast this innovation with one of the vibrant whites from Cloudy Bay, a member of a Kiwi consortium who proudly crow, "We've screwed 'em!" [cloudybay.co.nz](http://cloudybay.co.nz)



### PULL THE WOOL

Icebreaker-brand performance clothing often is made from 100 percent wool, from curly-horned Merino sheep. It's lighter than traditional wool, as soft as cotton, and (since no petroleum is used in its production) the green choice for sporty clothing. [icebreaker.com](http://icebreaker.com)



### FORAGE FOR MAORI HERBS

Former Auckland chef Charles Royal leads foraging tours in which guests harvest edible weeds, then prepare a picnic. Green fern fronds (*pikopiko*), the Maori bush pepper, and the healing spice *kawakawa* are just some of the ingredients. [maorifood.com](http://maorifood.com)



### CHOKE DOWN SOME GRUBS

In March, the West Coast of the South Island is home to the Wild Food Festival—think South Beach Wine & Food Festival on acid. Local and wild delicacies particular to the region range from the tasty (Pukeko bird, described as tasting like a cross between wild pork and venison) to the bizarre (roasted huhu beetle grubs that—wait for it—taste like chicken). [wildfoods.co.nz](http://wildfoods.co.nz)



### BATHE IN MUD

In the North Island town of Rotorua, geothermal activity has been drawing sybarites to natural thermal pools and mud baths for more than 100 years. [hellsgate.co.nz](http://hellsgate.co.nz)



### CRUISE FOR MUSSELS

Unique to New Zealand, green-lipped mussels are known for their plumpness and purportedly arthritis-lessening fatty acid. See their long-line aquaculture (cribbed from the Japanese) on an afternoon Greenshell Mussel Cruise. [marlboroughtravel.co.nz](http://marlboroughtravel.co.nz)

But first things first. Coffee culture has hit New Zealand hard, so a "flat white" (a shot of espresso with just the right amount of foamy steamed milk) is the perfect eye-opener—creamy and strong, light years ahead of the average latte. As for breakfast, I used a two-pronged approach, starting with homemade muesli, fresh fruit, and a smoked salmon scone from the buffet, and then finishing up with the Lodge Country Breakfast: eggs and toast with herb-roasted potatoes, slow-roasted tomatoes, and house-made *merguez* sausage. It was enough fuel to get me on my way south to my final stop, Christchurch.

#### 4/ stroll through a kitchen garden OTAHUNA LODGE, CHRISTCHURCH

The largest city on the South Island, Christchurch has long had a reputation for being more English than the English. But those days might be over: Now, for example, the city's most popular restaurant serves Burmese food. Even so, I craved a little colonial coddling, so I drove to Otahuna Lodge, a 19th-century estate that has been transformed into the quintessential country-house hotel. Hall Cannon and Miles Refo, who moved to New Zealand from New York in 2006, renovated the lodge to a state of historical perfection—and then had to do it all over again late last year after serious damage from a major earthquake. The pair even created a Victorian walled kitchen garden, where you almost expect Peter Rabbit to come scampering through the neat rows of veggies. Astonishingly prolific, the half-acre tract yields dozens of heirloom fruit and vegetable

varieties (including about ten kinds of tomatoes), some original to the 1895 property, along with porcini, shiitake, and oyster mushrooms. Pigs are kept here, too, so that executive chef Jimmy McIntyre can make his own *lardo*, *coppa*, prosciutto, and pancetta. And he doesn't keep his expertise to himself—for guests, he runs cooking classes that pull their inspiration from the garden and McIntyre's own culinary philosophy: fresh, simple, and comforting.

On the other hand, if you're feeling less ambitious, you can skip the cooking and just admire the garden. In fact, after a stroll through the grounds and past the massive oak trees that surround the house, it's delightful to collapse into one of the pillow couches in front of the fire in the sitting room, admire the collection of New Zealand art, sip a nice glass of wine, and wait, very happily, for dinner. Whatever you do, just don't break a sweat.

*New York-based executive editor Victoria von Biel writes frequently about food and travel.*

*Otahuna Lodge chef Jimmy McIntyre doesn't keep his expertise to himself—for guests, he runs cooking classes that pull their inspiration from the garden and his culinary philosophy: fresh, simple, and comforting.*



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP  
Lamb with tapenade  
jus and onion jam  
from The Lodge  
at Kauri Cliffs (see  
recipe on opposite  
page); a picnic  
of fresh crayfish

from The Original  
Kaikoura Seafood  
BBC; Beth Moon  
and Matthew Lee,  
guests of the Craggy  
Range Winery, enjoy  
an alfresco lunch on  
the lakefront.

## RACK OF LAMB WITH TAPENADE JUS AND ONION JAM

PREP 2 hours TOTAL 4 hours 15 minutes  
(includes cooling and chilling time)

8 SERVINGS This dish from The Lodge at Kauri Cliffs proves that New Zealanders know their lamb. Serve with polenta.

### tapenade

- 3 tablespoons finely chopped pitted Kalamata olives
- 1 tablespoon minced shallot
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh Italian parsley
- 1 anchovy fillet, finely chopped
- 1 teaspoon extra-virgin olive oil

### lamb

- 2 1½-pound racks of lamb, excess fat and sinew trimmed
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- ¼ cup dry red wine
- 1¼ cups low-salt chicken broth
- 1¼ cups beef broth
- 1 large fresh thyme sprig
- Onion Jam (see recipe)

**TAPENADE** Mix all ingredients in small bowl. Season to taste with salt and pepper. **DO AHEAD** Can be made 1 day ahead. Cover and chill.

**LAMB** Preheat oven to 450°F. Rub each rack of lamb all over with 1 tablespoon olive oil; sprinkle with salt and pepper. Heat heavy large skillet over medium-high heat. Add 1 lamb rack at a time to skillet and cook until browned, about 4 minutes per side. Transfer lamb to rimmed baking sheet; reserve skillet.

Place lamb in oven and roast until instant-read thermometer inserted into center registers 125°F, about 15 minutes. Remove from oven; tent with foil and let rest 10 to 15 minutes. Add wine, then both broths and thyme sprig to reserved skillet; boil until reduced to generous 1 cup, 8 to 10 minutes. Stir in tapenade. Season jus to taste with salt and pepper.

Cut lamb between bones into individual chops; divide among 8 plates. Spoon onion jam alongside. Drizzle tapenade jus over and serve.

## Onion Jam

PREP 1 hour TOTAL 1 hour 30 minutes  
(includes cooling time)

MAKES ABOUT 1½ CUPS

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 pounds red onions, halved, thinly sliced
- 8 fresh thyme sprigs
- 4 garlic cloves, pressed
- 1 cup ruby Port
- ½ cup dry red wine
- ½ cup grenadine
- ¼ cup balsamic vinegar
- ¼ cup sugar

Heat oil in heavy medium pot over medium-high heat. Add onions, thyme, and garlic; sauté until onions are slightly softened, about 10 minutes. Add 1¼ cups water and all remaining ingredients and bring to boil. Reduce heat to medium and continue to boil gently until onions are soft, liquid is reduced, and mixture thickens to jam consistency, stirring often and adding more water by ¼ cupfuls to prevent sticking, 30 to 40 minutes. Remove from heat. **DO AHEAD** Can be made 1 day ahead. Cool slightly. Cover and refrigerate. Before serving, rewarm onion jam just until heated through, stirring frequently.

## VANILLA BEAN CHEESECAKE TARTLETS WITH ROASTED RHUBARB

PREP 1 hour TOTAL 7 hours 30 minutes  
(includes chilling time)

MAKES 8 Serve these tartlets from Otahuna Lodge with the sorbet of your choice—raspberry, strawberry, orange, or lemon would work well. For the best results, choose rhubarb stalks that are deep red in color.

### crust

- 8 ounces imported sweet tea biscuit cookies (such as Lu; from two 7.06-ounce packages), finely ground in processor (about 2½ cups)
- 1 cup natural unsalted pistachios, lightly toasted, cooled
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- ¾ cup (1½ sticks) unsalted butter, melted

### filling

- 1 8-ounce package Philadelphia-brand cream cheese (do not use reduced-fat or fat-free), room temperature, or 8 ounces soft fresh goat cheese
- ½ cup plus 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1 vanilla bean, split lengthwise
- 1 cup chilled heavy whipping cream
- ½ cup chilled crème fraîche or sour cream

### roasted rhubarb

- 1½ pounds fresh rhubarb, trimmed, cut crosswise into 2-inch-long pieces
- ¾ cup sugar
- ½ cup fresh orange juice
- 1 tablespoon finely grated orange peel
- 1½ tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into ¼-inch cubes

### special equipment

- 8 4½-inch tartlet pans with ¾-inch-high sides and removable bottoms

**CRUST** Preheat oven to 400°F. Combine ground cookies, pistachios, and sugar in processor and process until finely ground. Add melted butter and large pinch of salt and process until crumbs are evenly moistened. Divide mixture among eight 4½-inch tartlet pans with removable bottoms (generous ½ cup for each) and press firmly and evenly onto bottom and up sides of pans. Bake until crust is golden, about 10 minutes. Cool completely on rack.

**FILLING** Combine cream cheese and sugar in medium bowl; scrape in seeds from vanilla bean. Using electric mixer, beat mixture until well blended. Beat cream and crème fraîche in another medium bowl until firm peaks form. Fold cream mixture into cream cheese mixture until smooth. Divide filling among baked crusts (scant ½ cup for each). Chill until filling firms up slightly, at least 6 hours. **DO AHEAD** Can be made 1 day ahead. Cover and keep chilled.

**ROASTED RHUBARB** Preheat oven to 350°F. Combine rhubarb, sugar, orange juice, and orange peel in 11x7x2-inch glass baking dish; toss gently to coat. Dot with butter. Roast until rhubarb is tender but still retains its shape, about 35 minutes. Cool slightly. **DO AHEAD** Can be made 4 hours ahead. Let stand at room temperature.

Place 1 tartlet on each of 8 plates. Top with roasted rhubarb and serve.

FOR COMPLETE **NUTRITIONAL INFO**  
FOR ALL OF THE RECIPES IN THIS ISSUE, GO  
TO [bonappetit.com/recipes](http://bonappetit.com/recipes)



### Otahuna Lodge South Island, New Zealand

There's something of Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* about this 120-year-old lodge in 30 acres of formal gardens, woodland and lawns, its lake and meadows brilliant with golden daffodils in spring. Surrounded by farmland and just 25 minutes' drive from Christchurch, New Zealand's largest privately owned, heritage-listed house is back to its beautiful old self after the February 2011 earthquake. It's a wood-panelled country pile built in Queen Anne style at the end of a long, winding driveway shaded by oaks, with seven lavish suites, hushed corridors and roaring fires, secret nooks hung with serious artwork and stout doors that occasionally, mysteriously, lead nowhere. In the evenings, staff glide around fielding trays of Aoraki salmon canapés and Pegasus Bay Pinot Noir in the silk-carpeted, wallpapered sitting room with its baby grand, high-back armchairs and deep chesterfields. After which there's chef Jimmy McIntyre's five-course tasting menu, which makes the most of the hotel's vast kitchen gardens and tip-top local suppliers (rack and shoulder of lamb with black-olive salsa; rhubarb vacherin with lemon curd, strawberries and raspberry sorbet), matched with superb wines from the Marlborough, Gladstone and Gisborne regions, among others. The whole experience is utterly world-class. 00 64 3 329 6333; [www.otahuna.co.nz](http://www.otahuna.co.nz). Doubles from NZ\$1,553 (about £800)

### Hambleton Hall Rutland, England

Of all the smart British country-house hotels to have opened in the past half century, just one, Hambleton Hall, has remained impervious to fortune and is as fresh and magical as the day owners Tim and Stefa Hart first welcomed guests, more than 30 years ago. Contented but never complacent, it has sophisticated yet deeply comfortable classic English interiors, brilliant seasonal cooking in chef Aaron Patterson's Michelin-starred restaurant (salad of Cornish crab with brown-meat ice cream; loin of fallow venison with caramelised endive and a cocoa-flavoured sauce) and a joyous wine list from revered sommelier Dominique Baduel. There's a swimming pool, a tennis court, a fine kitchen garden, and views across Hambleton's south-facing terrace and gardens that take your breath away – but no flashy extras. 'Why would we want a spa when we've got Rutland Waters?' says Tim. The late-Victorian house surveys the largest man-made lake in Western Europe, wonderful for boating, fishing or cycling around its perimeter. After an afternoon in the fresh air, Hambleton's many aficionados return to their haven, where the chef, sommelier and restaurant director have notched up 60 years of service between them, and which continues to purr along, a healing sanctuary from the stresses of life. 01572 756991; [www.hambletonhall.com](http://www.hambletonhall.com). Doubles from £255



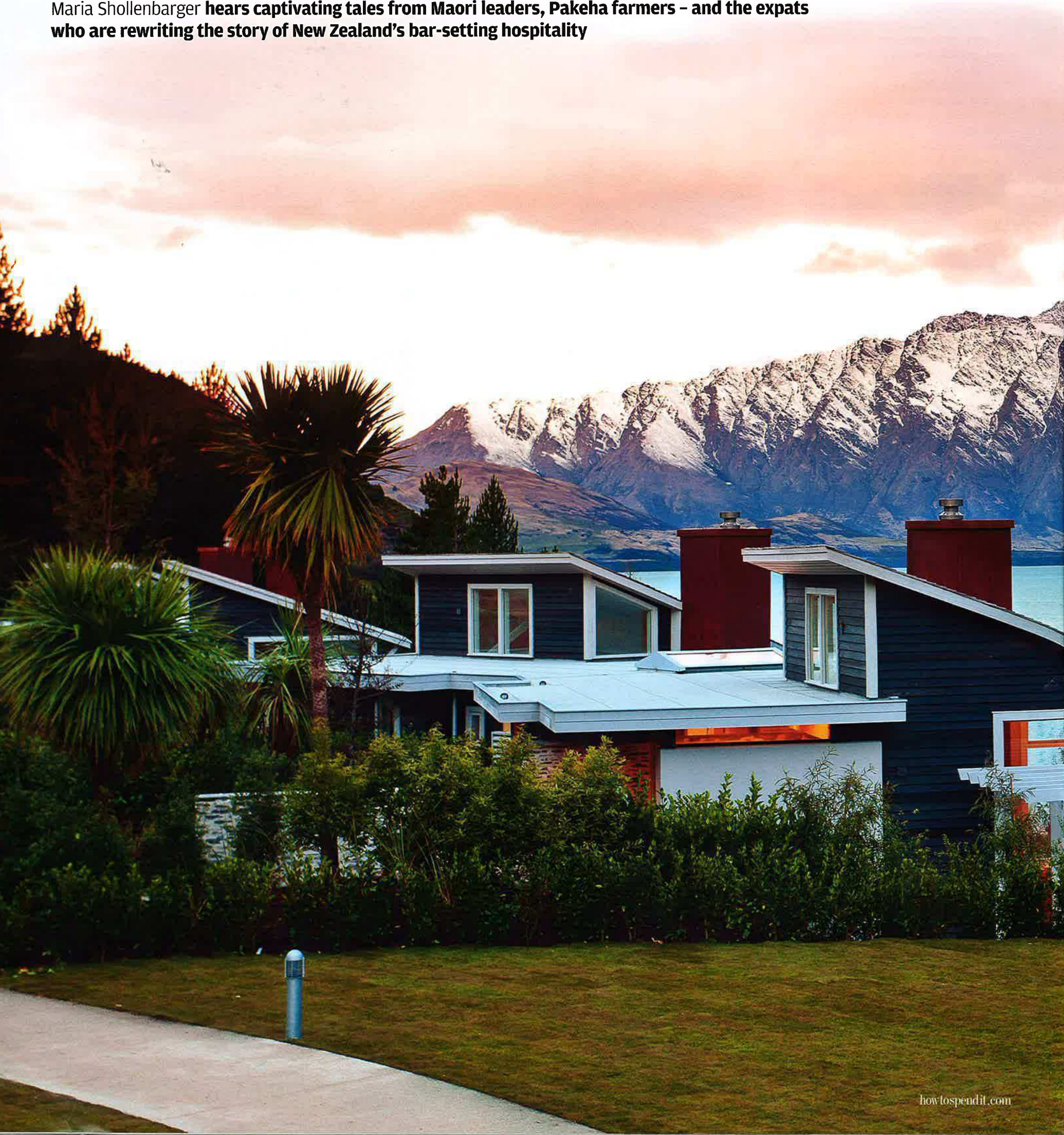
### Miyamasou Kyoto Prefecture Japan

One of those rare, otherworldly places that both relax and inspire, this small, four-room ryokan is high up in the misty Japanese cedar forests, an hour's drive from Kyoto. The only neighbour is a Shinto monk along a mountain path. From the moment your English-speaking personal assistant greets you at the low wooden door, you are immersed in the gentle ritual of Japanese hospitality. Shoes are shed, magnolia tea and sweetmeats offered, and guidance is given about etiquette, such as the pleasurable custom of taking several piping-hot dips in the communal cypress bath. It overlooks a mossy, bubbling stream and is filled for your chosen bathing time before dinner,

after dinner and before breakfast. Once scrubbed and wrapped in a cotton yukata (light kimono), you can linger in your traditional tatami-matted room. There's no TV or Wi-Fi, only the simple Zen aesthetics of delicate painting and an exquisite view of wild maple and lichen-clad cherry trees. A sublime Michelin-starred *kaiseki* meal awaits you across the courtyard. The rustle of your assistant's kimono and the slide of the screen door herald the arrival of each jewel-like course (delicate dumplings and salt-baked bamboo shoots). Later, snuggle down in a freshly laid-out, fluffy futon in your perfect room. 00 81 75 746 0231; [www.miyamasou.jp](http://www.miyamasou.jp). Doubles from ¥84,000 (about £665)

# RENEWED ZEAL

**The land of the long white cloud holds more than legendary landscapes and world-class wines. Maria Shollenbarger hears captivating tales from Maori leaders, Pakeha farmers – and the expats who are rewriting the story of New Zealand’s bar-setting hospitality**





**W**hat is the story of New Zealand? There are many more than just one; it is a country comprised of two main islands and an infinite number of narratives. Some are familiar to us: the story of its staggering natural beauty, for instance (latterly – almost inescapably – immortalised by the geniuses at Weta Digital in the Tolkien trilogies); or its bountiful natural resources and unique flora and fauna – from kauris to kiwis. And, of course, the more prosaic (and cannily plied) ones of its fine food, even finer wines, and high adventure quotient.

But there are also contemporary, individual tales. They come from Maori *rangatira* – descendants of chiefly families, some with the light eyes, freckles or surnames of Anglo-Saxon ancestors, who honour their traditions in roles as various as luxury tourism, winemaking and fund management. Or from Pakeha (European-origin) farmers, the great-grandsons of Scottish immigrants who still wrest livings out of the magnificent Southern Alps. And some also come from a handful of expatriates who are

increasingly helping to write the story of the country's bar-setting luxury hospitality.

Among these is Jean-Michel Jefferson, who owns and operates Ahipara, a Central Otago outfitter of bespoke travel experiences. Half-French, half-English and raised in north Africa and the Middle East before attending Rugby and Exeter, Jefferson's own New Zealand story is a love-at-first-sight trope: he moved here a few years after his first visit, leaving a lucrative career in aviation strategy and never looking back. He proposes a more profound than usual approach to the country – a slightly different set of stories.

Jefferson collects me in Auckland, whose early-summer viridescence is undiminished by overcast skies. We head for the Bay of Islands, in the balmy, near-tropical far north of the island. It is home to the Waitangi Treaty grounds, where, depending on one's perspective, a simple trade agreement or a full-fledged sovereignty accord was signed in 1840 between the Crown and a complement of about 540 Maori chiefs. (It has been an issue of contention since its 150-year term came up for review in 1990, with the consequent cash settlements paid to Maori tribes a regular parliamentary agenda item.) We're here to meet Hone Mihaka, who creates private Maori rituals for Ahipara clients – traditional

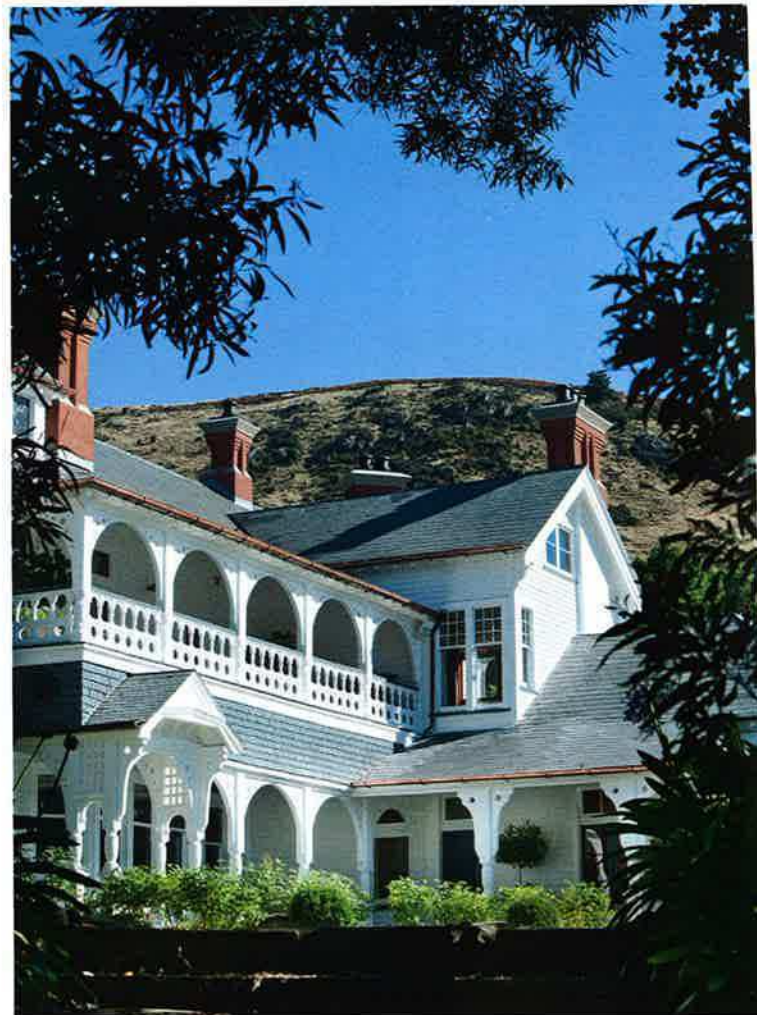
challenges and ambushes sprung upon delighted (if sometimes unnerved) fund managers and chief executives, in which Mihaka and 15 or so of his cohort breach opulent beachside dinners in massive war canoes or hurtle, shrieking, from deep forests into the midst of nature strolls, resplendent in full martial regalia.

Mihaka represents his tribe, the Nga Puhi, in government negotiations and is a recognised authority on Maori tradition on the North Island. He radiates *mana* – the word connoting personal power – whether invoking both our ancestors in a traditional welcome, braying with laughter at his own joke or welling up, as he does when describing the yawning chasm between the rich relationship with tradition his grandfathers cultivated and his own generation's far more disaffected one. He discourses with authority on Maoris' overrepresentation in prisons and domestic- and substance-abuse issues, but also about their preeminence in the arts, finance and politics, his own growing tourism business and his high hopes that his grandson will embrace his heritage. Mihaka's sitting room is being renovated when I visit his home, not far from Waitangi. On the temporary fibreboard panelling, his entire *whakapapa* – his ancestry – going back hundreds of years is extemporaneously chronicled, in a cramped scrawl.



This page: Matakauri Lodge by Lake Wakatipu

*We ride into the birch forest. The bizarre call of the tui – half dulcet melody, half gear-grind – occasionally breaks the stillness*



**Clockwise from top: red deer hinds on Charlie Ewing's farm in Matukituki Valley. Otahuna Lodge, on the outskirts of Christchurch. The infinity pool at Split Apple Retreat, near to Abel Tasman National Park**

How did he track them all down, I ask. Looking patiently amused, he tells me that he can recite from memory the lineage of over a hundred of them.

The higher country and chillier surrounds of Lake Taupo, though just over 300 miles to the south, are another world entirely. Vast eucalyptus and birch forests are separated by plains on which poplars stand sentinel. Our base here is Poronui, a lodge acquired in 2007 by the US Westervelt Company, which has augmented its sporting and luxury bona fides in equal measure. The stables hold – along with fine horses – a full-service gym, spa treatment rooms and a wine cellar with a dining table seating 24, where celebrity guest chefs routinely host tasting dinners. The most recently added accommodation, and the one to book, is Blake House, the five-bedroom former owner's cottage set on a plateau several miles from the lodge.

Poronui sits amid 16,000 acres, adjacent to a tract of 5,500 administered by Tom Loughlin, a Tuwharetoa Maori who leads bespoke cultural programmes here. His tuition in ancient modes of sustenance and spirituality has enlightened oligarchs, Bear Grylls and the odd English aristocrat, as well as local at-risk Maori youth. Loughlin has amber eyes and a demeanour that skips between pensive and playful as quickly as the clouds above us consolidate and disperse on the breeze during the day we spend together. As we hack across river ravines carpeted in spiky *harakeke* (flax), he describes how Maori weavers fashioned the plant into ceremonial capes and baskets as watertight as stone vessels.

We reach his cabin, 900m above sea level, in the early afternoon. Presiding over its patioed terrace are fierce

carved dieties: Tangaroa (the sea), Tane Mahuta (the forest) and Tane-rore (the air). On the patio is a *hangi* earth oven, for the Maori feast that's equal parts backyard roast and ritual of earth's plenty. In the kitchen we roll pork loin around chopped apricots; Loughlin preps an alarmingly pungent mutton bird – "Tastes like anchovy. You'll love it," he deadpans – while I wash *pikopiko* fern heads and slice *kumara*, the indigenous yams (apparently genetically linked to sweet potatoes in Chile – likely putting the lie to claims that the first peoples only arrived here from the Pacific islands in the past 1,200-odd years, Loughlin tells me). Everything is wrapped in *harakeke*, placed in an aluminium basin and lowered into the pit, which is lined with hot coals.

It will take hours to cook, so we ride up the spine of the mountain behind the cabin and into hushed, close birch forest. The bizarre call of the tui – half dulcet melody, half gear-grind – occasionally breaks the stillness; we pass a lean-to of branches, where Loughlin teaches a centuries-old bird-trapping technique. After a climb that leaves the horses glistening with sweat, we crest a bare ridge to find another cabin. We sit on its deck with icy beers in hand and consider the precisely etched landscape: sharp puce buttes, gently furrowed

hills, all shades of slate, alpine green and silver-grey. Tiny but utterly clear on the horizon is a cratered mountain. Hikurangi, says Loughlin. Or Mount Gisborne. How far, I ask. We consult a map: almost 70 miles.

Back at the cabin, the light is fading and the *hangi* is done. Steam billows up as we remove the baskets; a Hawke's Bay merlot is unscrewed. The pork is succulent, the *pikopiko* crisp and tart; my facial contortions upon sampling the mutton bird elicit roars of laughter.

We lope back to the gates and drive into Taupo under tangerine skies, heading to The Point, with its pair of private villas on the lake. The day before, Jefferson and I had spent the afternoon at nearby Huka Lodge, still considered the *ne plus ultra* of New Zealand luxury; its recently introduced Alan Pye cottage (pictured overleaf), a two-bedroom villa appointed to perfection by local design doyenne Virginia Fisher, is as chic as any hotel space I've ever seen. But The Point is where Jefferson puts guests seeking genuine off-the-radar status. There's little time to enjoy the infinity pool and dramatic lakeside situation, though; our flight to Queenstown leaves early the next morning.

The Central Otago landscape into which we descend is at once otherworldly and *déjà-vu* familiar: glacier-fed

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Above: inside the Alan Pye  
cottage at Huka Lodge

lakes in improbable shades of chalcedony and periwinkle, valleys rich with flowering hebe and dracophyllum, and snowcapped monoliths that glow in the sun. Queenstown itself has acquired the burnish of conspicuous prosperity; it now sequesters a large Louis Vuitton boutique, a handful of design-conscious restaurants (including the fantastic Rata, manned by former Gordon Ramsay second-in-command Josh Emett) and Matakauri Lodge (pictured on opening pages), which is itself a reinvention along luxury lines.

Set on the shore of Lake Wakatipu just outside town, Matakauri was a mid-level adventurers' favourite for years before it was purchased in 2010 by US fund manager Julian Robertson (who also owns the five-star Kauri Cliffs and The Farm at Cape Kidnappers, on the North Island). He enlisted Virginia Fisher – she of Huka Lodge fame – who reimaged it as an airy, slightly exotic redoubt, its white wainscoting and pine floors layered in opulent textiles and rare wood finishes. Matakauri is small, just 11 suites, and can boast what are, without any hyperbole, some of the most breathtaking views in the country (not for nothing are the peaks it faces known as The Remarkables). The Robertsons are currently building a four-suite private villa on the estate, which will kick the already estimable indulgence factor up another notch later this year.

From here it's an hour due west to Charlie Ewing's farm (pictured on previous page) in the Matukituki Valley, at the base of the Southern Alps. Ewing and his family keep about 10,000 deer there, as well as cattle and sheep. In the past 15 years, tenure reviews by the government cut deep in these parts (the reviews, in simplified terms, saw high country grazing land under long-term leasehold from the Crown either converted to freehold at often controversial prices, or transferred to the Department of Conservation). Ewing, for his part, started Aspiring Helicopters, a now thriving heli-tour and -ski business he runs with his daughter Alex and son-in-law James. James is powering up one of the fleet when we arrive; we were due a quick jaunt over to Milford Sound, but the weather has closed in, so we tool around at lower altitude, riding ridge thermals, chasing chamois down a tawny hill and stopping in a foot of snow to skip stones on a glacial pond, before returning to early summertime down at the farm.

Many Ahipara clients with the lovely region of Canterbury on their agenda would opt to arrive by helicopter, but we load up Jefferson's Range Rover to savour the route across Mackenzie Country – famously among New Zealand's most striking. It doesn't disappoint; the Lindis Pass winds through treeless hills that look like giant beasts fallen irrevocably into slumber, their flanks blurred with spring grass and lupins. On the central plain, mountains the colour of wheat disappear into tablecloth clouds, dense as cashmere, for as far as the eye can see. The world is rinsed clean in the hard light.

Eventually, we descend into forested hills, then the manicured environs of Christchurch, Canterbury's largest city. Otahuna Lodge (pictured on previous page), set on its outskirts, was built by the stockbreeder/horticulturalist/parliamentarian Sir Heaton Rhodes in 1895. Conceived to

dazzle his new wife, it hewed to the most *au courant* trends of the day. In 2006 it was bought by Americans Hall Cannon and Miles Refo, who renovated it along precise historic lines and opened it as a seven-suite luxury lodge. The tragic earthquake of February 2011 undid a significant part of their work, but perseverance and creativity saw the property remade by the end of that year, and its Category I-listed gardens are now a destination in themselves. I tour the 30-odd acres of lush woodlands, daffodil fields and a "Dutch" garden redolent with bay, lemonwood and orange blossom. The kitchen garden – where over 100 varieties flourish – keeps the lodge supplied with produce. Otahuna is at once a devoutly maintained monument and a vibrant example of perfect 21st-century hospitality – the former influencing the latter, making it a self-contained microcosm of the country's more contemplative pursuits.

No such heritage connects New Zealand to Split Apple Retreat (pictured on previous page), located across the island at the base of Abel Tasman National Park. Also owned by expatriates (US doctor and nutritionist Lee Nelson and his Thai wife, culinary artist Pen Lee), the retreat is an entirely different proposition: an ultra-private wellness centre with Oriental design flourishes and culinary offerings that take their cues from the Mediterranean and Southeast Asia.

Nelson is a cancer survivor who attributes his current health in great part to diet; the retreat proposes exquisite cuisine that is also carefully calibrated against glycaemic indexes. Massage, acupuncture and private meditation are available, as are kayak and private yacht excursions in Tasman Bay, and hikes in the national park. There are just three suites, which leverage Zen simplicity; each has multiple terraces and Japanese baths with floor-to-ceiling windows.

Guests wear yukata from Japan, sip pomegranate juice from California and sleep under painted silk panels that date from the Song Dynasty – but the country, in its singular, ineffable beauty, surrounds and penetrates the place. The ease, generosity and openness with which guests are received owes as much to the national ethos of good living as it does to any putative Thai or US warmth. In short, Split Apple Retreat, though not in any way conspicuously or expectedly, fits right in here. It seems as appropriate – as authentically New Zealand – a place as any other to conclude this particular story. ♦

## FANTASY ISLANDS

Maria Shollenbarger travelled as a guest of **Ahipara** (+643-447 3558; [www.ahipara.com](http://www.ahipara.com)), which offers bespoke itineraries from £5,000, and of **Tourism New Zealand** ([www.newzealand.com](http://www.newzealand.com)). The itinerary described above costs £13,290. **Aspiring Helicopters**, +643-443 7152; [www.aspiringhelicopters.co.nz](http://www.aspiringhelicopters.co.nz). **Huka Lodge**, +647-378 5791; [www.hukalodge.co.nz](http://www.hukalodge.co.nz), from £1,005. **Matakauri Lodge**, +643-441 1008; [www.matakauri.co.nz](http://www.matakauri.co.nz), from £840. **Otahuna Lodge**, +643-329 6333; [www.otahunalodge.co.nz](http://www.otahunalodge.co.nz), from £605 full board. **The Point Villas**, +647-377 8002; [www.thepointvillas.co.nz](http://www.thepointvillas.co.nz), from £610. **Poronui**, +647-384-2080; [www.poronui.com](http://www.poronui.com); Blake House from £700. **Split Apple Retreat**, +643-527 8377; [www.splitapple.com](http://www.splitapple.com), from £745 full board.