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travel@sunprovince.com



Lodge hopping in New Zealand

Luxury adventure, Kiwi-style **Page B16**



Guests can take in the aerial view of mountains, glaciers and Milford Sound by helicopter when visiting Matakauri Lodge on New Zealand's South Island.

SHANNON MELNYK/PNG

Lodge hopping in Kiwi luxury

Mapping out the ultimate New Zealand adventure means having a hearty home base

Shannon Melnyk

The land of the long white cloud: Majestic forests, rolling emerald meadows and dramatic fiords. From north to south, New Zealand is an immersion in Maori-dipped expressions, iconic outdoor adventures and exotic Kiwi foodie fare. What to expect when you book a cross-nation sojourn via some of the finest lodges in the country:

■ The Lodge at Kauri Cliffs — Matauri Bay, North Island

A 45-minute flight north from Auckland will bring you not far from where the Brits and Maoris signed the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi. Sitting on the edge of 6,000 acres, the picturesque Lodge at Kauri Cliffs basks in the views of Cape Brett, the Cavalli Islands and a native totara forest. The main lodge? Think Martha's Vineyard, but even more luxuriously appointed. Indulge in waterfall hikes or sunset canapés and Champagne at Kauri's Pink Beach — aptly named, given the shore is comprised not of sand, but entirely of iridescent abalone (or sea opal) and other shells.

Many come here for the golf; the par-72 championship course at Kauri is played alongside cliffs that plunge to the sea.

It's worth just taking a cart to see it and then ambling over to the spa. Surfing, tennis, biking and fishing are all on the menu.

Farmland abounds in New Zealand and Kauri Station is no exception. The sprawling property is put to good use as a working farm. Take in a little herding 101 with trusty dogs in tow; a tag-team that's both comical and exhilarating to see. Animal lovers should time their visit for shearing in December or June or the lambing season in October.

Of course, if you'd rather eat lamb than cuddle them, the cuisine at Kauri Cliffs won't disappoint. Every night, the chef offers a fresh selection of fine local fare. (www.kauricliffs.com)

■ The Farm at Cape Kidnappers — Hawke's Bay, North Island

The Farm at Cape Kidnappers is also a working farm/luxury property, but this time in the south of the North Island to Hawke's Bay, New Zealand's notorious wine region.

Landing in Napier, the vibe is decidedly less folksy; it's known for its pastel Art Deco architecture after it was flattened by a 1931 earthquake.

Napier sits on the sea and is dotted by funky shops and eateries; conveniently, it's on the way to The Farm that you can take advantage of wine-tasting tours. Stop by Origin Earth dairy for both cow- and sheep-sourced cheeses or the famous manuka honey.

After all that nosing, a long-winding forest road will take you to The Farm at Cape Kidnappers and sweeping views of pastures over the Pacific Ocean.

Try clay shooting, enjoy a picnic on the bluff, quad or mountain biking, hiking, horseback riding or a day at the spa or pool. Special discoveries are around every corner on The Farm, including the largest gannet colony in the world.

Another rare opportunity is in the chance to see the endangered kiwi. The Farm is home to the country's largest kiwi sanctuary and a guide can take you through the forest to find the flightless and nocturnal

national bird — spotting one is a privilege even few New Zealanders have had in their lifetimes.

Just when I thought the golf course at Kauri Cliffs could not be outdone, the sweeping cliff views are no less than shocking.

Not having a spectacular round on this par-71 course, currently ranked 22nd in the world by Golf Digest Magazine, would be considered a huge mistake. (www.capekidnappers.com)

■ Matakauri Lodge — Queenstown, South Island

Changing gears for a taste of the South Island, a more modern, vibrant lodge life on the banks of Lake Wakatipu awaits. Matakauri Lodge was the choice of Royals Will and Kate, perhaps swayed by the enviable view of the glacial waters nestled by its surrounding mountains.

The Lodge plays host to New Zealand's largest outdoor playground, Queenstown.

There's so much to do: Bungee jumping off the historic Kawarau Bridge, skiing the slopes, whitewater rafting, hiking Fjordland Nation-

al Park, kick around the resort town to eat a famous Ferg burger or shop for possum socks. At the docks, you can jump on a "Hydro Attack" — a watercraft that's essentially an 18-foot shark that dives down into the lake, jumps 18 feet out of the water and does doughnuts and side-rolls.

Paradise makes for a good road trip destination, the site of many scenes from *Wolverine*, *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*.

But the ultimate high is to board a helicopter steps away from the lodge.

Over the Top Helicopters offers custom tours; soar over mountains, glaciers and the iconic Milford Sound.

Land on a glacier or high up on Cecil Peak awaits the most unusual opportunity to golf three holes or drive a biodegradable ball high over Lake Wakatipu. (www.matakaurilodge.com)

The writer was a guest of Tourism New Zealand, The Lodge at Kauri Cliffs and Matakauri Lodge. No one from these companies read or approved of the content before publication.