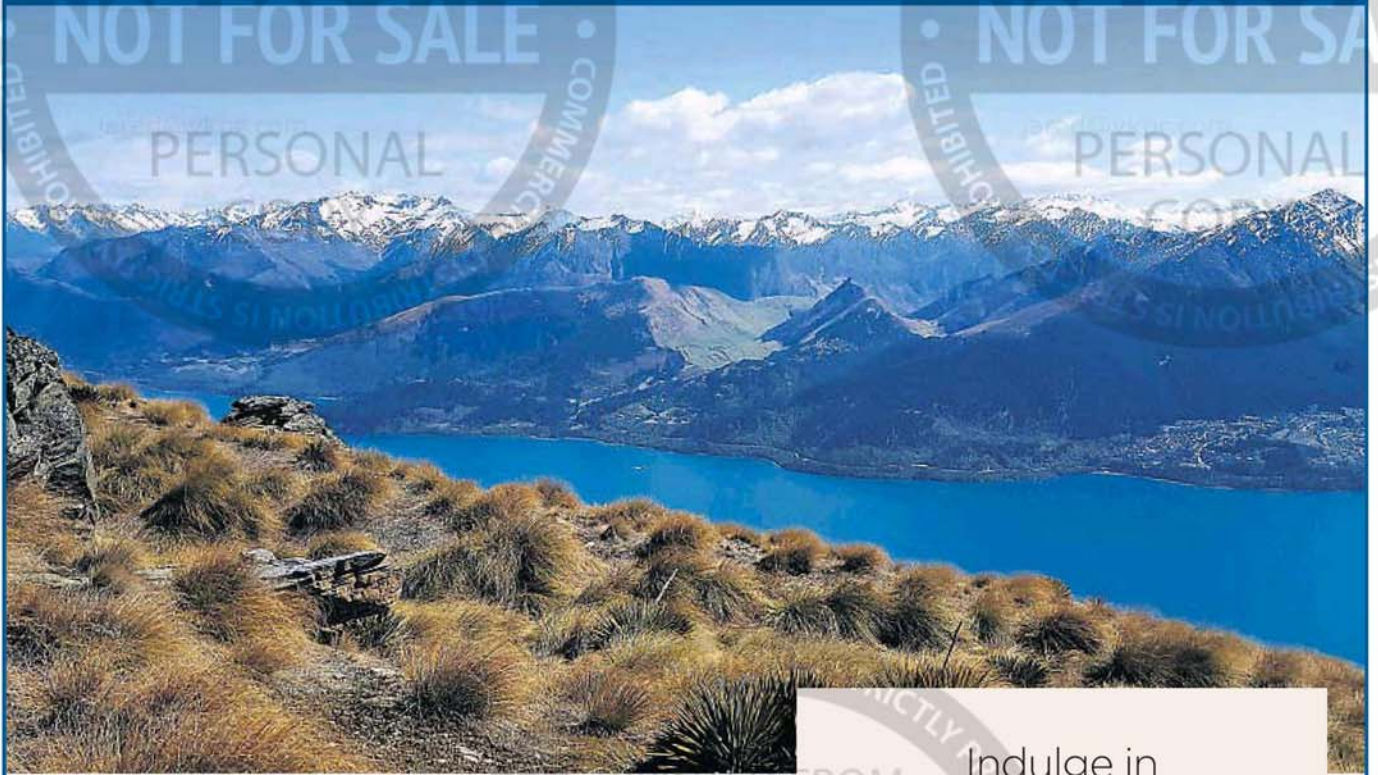




LUXURY TRAVEL



Down Under *and* slightly over

Indulge in top-notch resorts during an activity-laden visit to New Zealand

By SHANNON MELNYK
Special Contributor

There are many who long to see the land of the long white cloud. New Zealand, mythical in nature, geographically isolated — albeit cliché, it's unequivocally a destination-before-you-die kind of venture.

I received some simple but very good advice: Spread yourself over the twin islands as best you can, and preferably in grand style. And so I set out to be one with the majestic forests, rolling emerald meadows and dramatic fjords while staying at some of the finest lodges in New Zealand. From north to south, it was an immersion in Maori-dipped expressions, outdoor adventures and friendly, exotic Kiwi fare fit for the foodiest of foodies.

The Lodge at Kauri Cliffs: Matauri Bay, North Island

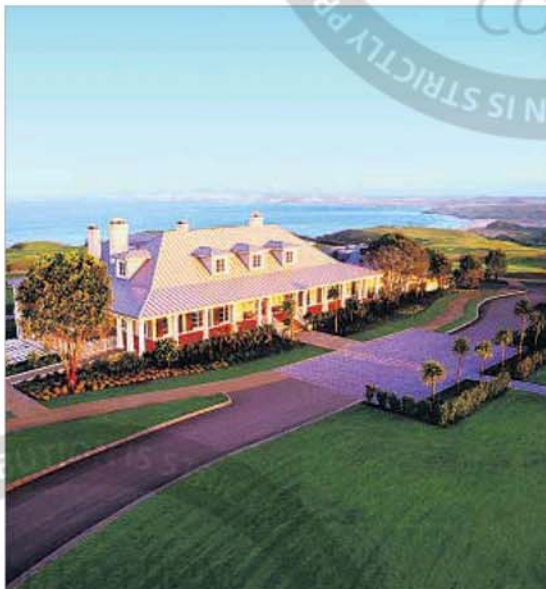
A 45-minute flight from Auckland and a short drive in the scenic subtropical Bay of Islands brought me not far from where the British and the Maoris signed the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi. Sitting on the edge of 6,000 acres, the picturesque Lodge at Kauri Cliffs basks in the views of Cape Brett, the Cavalli Islands and a native totara forest.

The main lodge? Think Martha's Vineyard, but even more luxuriously appointed. Longtime fixture John Lewis is a consummate and engaging host: happy to give property tours, introduce like-minded guests or arrange sunset canapés and champagne at Kauri's Pink Beach. It's aptly named, given the shore is composed not of sand but entirely of iridescent Paua (Maori for abalone or sea opal) and other shells, giving the beach its bluish hue.

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Top: Guests of Matakauri Lodge can take in an aerial view of mountains, glaciers and Milford Sound via helicopter and get dropped off steps away from their cottage.

Right: The Lodge at Kauri Cliffs overlooks Cape Brett, the Cavalli Islands and a forest of native totara trees.



Kauri Cliffs

Shannon Melnyk/Special Contributor



Kauri Cliffs

Relaxed hospitality is the ambience in the main lodge at Kauri Cliffs.

See New Zealand from luxe home base

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Lewis and his team pay exceptional attention to customizing your experience. Upon arriving at my spacious cottage, I was touched by the scrumptious selection of gluten- and sugar-free brownies along with other treats made specially by the chef.

Many come here for the golf. The par-72 championship course at Kauri is highly rated and the holes that are played alongside seaside cliffs make for an unforgettable day on the green. It's worth taking a cart to just see it and then ambling over to the spa if it's a lazy day. Surfing, tennis, biking and fishing are all on the menu, as are many off-site adventures.

A personal highlight was time spent at Kauri Station. The 6,000 acres is put to good use as a working farm with Black Angus, Friesian bulls and about 3,500 sheep roaming the hills. Station manager Jono Zaloumis gave me a little Herding 101 with his trusty dogs in tow; it's both comical and exhilarating to see this tag team in action. Animal fans might want to take care to time their visit for shearing in December or June, or in my case the lambing season in October. Babies were everywhere, and I delighted in cuddling an orphan lamb named Martha, and a 5-day-old herding puppy.

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, be it loin of lamb with Swede fondant or perhaps tempura rock oysters with vanilla mash. kauricliffs.com.

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

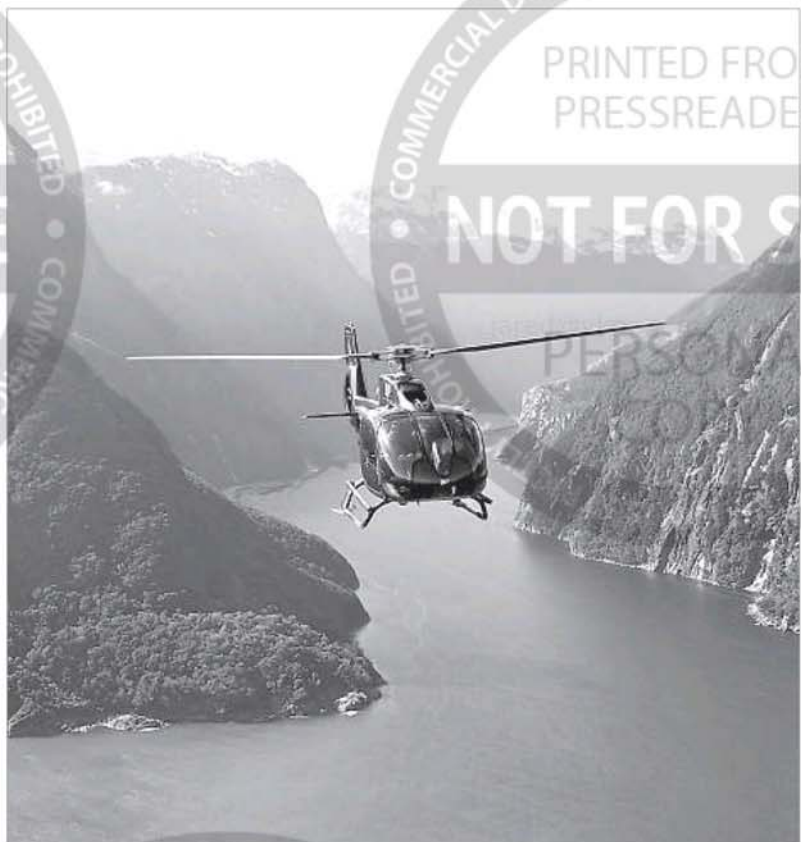
Another flight, another 6,000 acres to behold. The Farm at Cape

Kidnappers is also a working farm-slash-luxury-property, but this time in the south of the North Island near Hawke's Bay, New Zealand's 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 and rebuilt.

Napier sits on the coast and is dotted by funky shops and eateries; conveniently, it's on the way to the Farm, so you can take advantage of wine-tasting tours that might have you sampling an aromatic Elephant Hill Reserve chardonnay or lunching at one of the world's highest-rated winery restaurants at Craggy Range's Terroir. Other pursuits might include a stop at the Origin Earth dairy, where I noshed on both cow and sheep cheeses, including Takenga Gold cheddar and camembert. Nearby at Rush Munro's, those with a sweet tooth can try ice creams in native New Zealand flavors: maybe a Hokey Pokey (honeycomb toffee), feijoa (a green fruit that tastes like guava laced with strawberries) or the famous manuka honey.

After all that noshing, a long-winding forest road eventually brought me to the Farm at Cape Kidnappers. The brochures don't do justice to the views of pastures and Pacific Ocean, and the stunning design of the lodge is best described as a modern farm-luxe. A late dinner spotlighted many of the discoveries down in Hawke's Bay.

Once I was up there, though, I didn't want to leave, and I didn't have to. You can also do a farm tour here, clay-pigeon shooting, picnics on the bluff, quad or mountain biking, hiking, or a day at the spa or pool. I thought the standouts, however, were ambulating along the sprawling property on horseback. Special discoveries are around every corner on the Farm, and I marveled at the fact that the largest gannet colony in the world hangs out



Over the Top Helicopter Co.

At Matakauri Lodge on New Zealand's South Island, have a helicopter drop you off on a mountaintop golf green and drive a biodegradable ball over Lake Wakatipu.

here. The sight of thousands of these birds nesting within feet of me was astounding, especially when I moved closer. The albatross-like stunners are far from shy, so it's a birder's or photographer's dream.

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 fuzzy, 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 on the green at the Farm are no less shocking. Not having a round on this par-71 course, currently ranked 22nd in the world by *Golf Digest* magazine, would be considered a huge mistake. capekidnappers.com.

Matakauri Lodge: Queenstown, South Island

Changing gears for a taste of the South Island, I discovered a more modern, vibrant lodge life on the banks of Lake Wakatipu. Matakauri Lodge has an enviable view of the glacial aqua waters nestled by its surrounding mountains — so much so, I was hardly able to leave the bathtub. Perhaps this was the case when royals Will and Kate stayed here.

Once I dried off, however, I was introduced to New Zealand's largest outdoor playground: Queenstown and its surrounding area. This is not an exaggeration. Tourism New Zealand once boasted that a new activity



Matakauri Lodge

Prince William and Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge, stayed at Matakauri Lodge's Owners Cottage, with a view of Lake Wakatipu.

every day for a year could be done in this region. They can no longer run this campaign, however, as it's now well over 400, including bungee jumping off the historic Kawarau Bridge, skiing the slopes, white-water rafting, hiking Fiordland National Park. While kicking around the resort town looking for Possum socks, I witnessed the "Hydro Attack" — a watercraft that resembles an 18-foot shark and which dives, jumps 18 feet out of the water, and does doughnuts and side rolls.

I also headed to Paradise, the site of many scenes from Wolverine and Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* and *Hobbit* movies. In the forest is an

enormous chair that screams "selfie," and made me look as if I had been shrunk by a sorceress. Paradise also sits on the Dart River, where I went on a hair-raising jet-boat safari.

But the activity that won a permanent place in the best-day-ever category was hopping a helicopter with my trusty pilot, Brad Collier of Over the Top helicopter tours. He took me over mountains, glaciers and the iconic Milford Sound. I was electrified about landing on a glacier, but the second landing proved to be even more exhilarating: I found myself high up on Cecil Peak on a golf green driving a biodegradable ball high over Lake Wakatipu. matakaurilodge.com.



Shannon Melnyk/Special Contributor

Visitors can walk right up to what's touted as the world's largest gannet colony at the Farm at Cape Kidnappers.

The 13th hole offers just one of the stunning views golfers enjoy at the Farm at Cape Kidnappers.