

A helicopter
outing near
Queenstown



ITINERARY

DOING NEW ZEALAND RIGHT

From the top of the North Island, in Auckland, to the bottom of the South Island, in Queenstown—and everywhere in between—**DEPARTURES** uncovers all that's new in Kiwi country and revisits the classics, too.

New Zealand, east of Australia near the end of the earth, has always been known as a lush, coastal and snow-capped slice of Eden, a place where green ripples of land on the North Island give way to dramatic, rugged mountains on the South Island—as if Hawaii and Colorado clapped hands. It's an idyllic home to 4.4 million people, 30 million sheep and a bunch of hobbits (if Peter Jackson is to be believed). But these days, the tectonically active little landmass (it's a bit bigger than Oregon and straddles the Australian and Pacific plates) has something else going for it: an elevated level of polish.

“Luxury travel in New Zealand is new,” says Otahūna Lodge managing director Hall Cannon, referring to the raft of so-called super lodges that have emerged within the last decade. Dotting the country up and down, the retreats are small (the biggest has 24 suites) and special, with smart interiors, impressive farm-to-table food and local wines and warm Kiwi hospitality. Most travelers hop between four or five of them on a trip. And with the rise of the super lodge has come a network of guides (part of the pleasure of New Zealand is its people) who specialize in mind-blowing adventures. Herewith, how to do New Zealand now. —J.F. **CONTINUED»**



Hot Urban Spots

THE BIG CITY

In Auckland, where one third of Kiwis live, stay at **Hotel DeBrett** (rooms, from \$265; 2 High St.; 64-9/925-9000; hoteldebrett.com) on the edge of the fashion and business districts. It's a boutique contrast to the flashy hotels in the Viaduct Harbour nightlife hub. For views and fancy food, try **The Sugar Club** (Sky Tower; 64-9/363-6365; sky.cityauckland.co.nz) on the 53rd floor of the Sky Tower (which offers BASE jumping by wire); for casual and authentic, order the turbo sliders at **Depot** (86 Federal St.; 64-9/363-7048; eatatdepot.co.nz). Sip a flat white (two espresso shots and milk) at **Zus & Zo** (228 Jervois Rd.; 64-9/361-5060; zusandzo.net.nz). Day trip to the winery-filled Waiheke Island, reachable by a 35-minute ferry, and visit **Mudbrick Vineyard & Restaurant** (126 Church Bay Rd.; 64-9/372-9050; mudbrick.co.nz).

New Villas

BAY OF ISLANDS

A 35-minute flight north of Auckland, to Kerikeri, is the Bay of Islands, 144 subtropical islets with white-sand beaches fringed between Cape Brett and the Purerua Peninsula. It's paradise for sailing, diving and fishing. The area bucks the super-lodge trend by offering sublime villa rentals. The recently opened **The Landing** (villas, from \$2,190; 64-9/914-8431; thelanding.residences.com) has three private residences on a peninsula with six quiet beaches. **Eagles Nest** (villas, from \$1,135; 60 Tapeka Rd.; 64-9/403-8333; eaglesnest.co.nz) offers five modern houses on the coast in the historic town of Russell.

Golf

KAURI CLIFFS

One of a trio of New Zealand super lodges owned by American financier Julian Robertson, the **Lodge at Kauri Cliffs** (rooms, from \$665; 139 Tepene Tablelands Rd.; 64-9/407-0010; kauricliffs.com) is an old favorite (it opened in 2001). A 25-minute drive from Kerikeri, it's known for its world-class, David Harman-designed golf course (greens fee, from \$275).

Cultural Excursions

ROTORUA THEN AND NOW

With Huka Lodge as home base, learn about the historic traditions of the country's indigenous Maori people.

Rotorua, home to 18 lakes, geothermal hot springs and mud pools, is a 40-minute flight southeast from Auckland. It's where the Maori first began introducing visitors to their culture in the early 19th century. There are several guides to book: Charles Royal leads **Maori Food Tours** (64-7/346-3122; maorifood.com); **Elite Adventures** (64-7/347-8282; elite.adventures.co.nz) explores Maori customs; and **Mokoia Island Experiences** (64-7/349-0976; mokoiaisland.co.nz) takes travelers to Mokoia Island, which was once a Maori village.

Stay an hour south of Rotorua at the perennially popular **Huka Lodge** (rooms, from \$700; 271 Huka Falls Rd.; 64-7/378-5791; hukalodge.co.nz), where fly-fishing has always been the

thing to do, as the nearby Tongariro River is one of the world's best fly-fishing rivers. The staff can also arrange a cruise on Lake Taupo to see Maori rock carvings.

While in the area, visitors can try some of the region's other top activities, including **Volcanic Air Helicopters & Floatplanes** (64-7/348-9984; volcanicair.co.nz) heli trip to New Zealand's most active volcano, White Island; sailing on **Pure Cruise's** (64-7/362-8048; purecruise.co.nz) 53-foot catamaran on Lake Rotoiti; **Foris Eco-Tours** (64-7/542-5080; foris.co.nz) Whirinaki Forest walking tour; and anything organized by **Multi-Day Adventures** (64-7/348-4290; multidayadventures.co.nz)—rafting, mountain biking, kayaking, rock climbing, you name it.



The Owner's Cottage at Huka Lodge



THE EASE OF FLYING Helicopters are the best way to get around New Zealand. Our favorite charter service is **Alpine Helicopters** (alpineheli.co.nz), based out of Wanaka, in the Queenstown region on the South Island, but any of the top lodges can arrange choppers. It's also worth noting that domestic travel on **Air New Zealand** (airnewzealand.com) is not stress-inducing like flying is in the States. In fact, Kiwi airports run more like train stations: The gate number is posted a couple of minutes before a flight's scheduled boarding time—meaning you can get to the airport right before your plane takes off. In fact, travelers flying on a propeller plane (which is common on Air New Zealand flights between smaller cities) don't even have to go through security.

HAWKE'S BAY



The Farm at Cape Kidnappers along the Pacific

see the rare creatures on a guided walk that involves tracking the birds, which are equipped with transmitters.

Also within the sanctuary is the world's largest and most accessible gannet bird colony. Take a **Gannet Safaris Overland** (☎ 64-6/875-0888; gannetsafaris.co.nz) Range Rover tour to see it.

Once at Cape Kidnappers, it's tempting not to leave. But it would be a shame to miss nearby local gems.

In Napier, guides like the enthusiastic Tony Mairs lead **Art Deco Vintage Car Tours** (64-6/835-0022; artdeco.napier.com) around the town's Art Deco landmarks. (Napier has the most concentrated number of buildings in the style in the world.) The Hawke's Bay area is also known for its Chardonnay. Gareth Kelly is an excellent wine guide at **Odyssey New Zealand** (☎ 64-6/211-3116; odysseynz.co.nz), which organizes tours to vineyards such as **Mission Estate Winery** (198 Church Rd.; 64-6/845-9353; missionestate.co.nz), a great place for an alfresco lunch, and **Craggy Range** (253 Waimarama Rd.; 64-6/873-0141; craggyrange.com), a romantic spot for dinner. For an alternative lodging option, **Black Barn Vineyards** (☎ villas, from \$340; Black Barn Rd.; 64-6/877-7985; blackbarn.com), a winery on the way to the lookout point Te Mata Peak, does double duty by offering 16 villa rentals throughout the area; the Poplars 2 retreat was just added to the portfolio.

From Art Deco to Wildlife

NOTABLE AROUND NAPIER

The Hawke's Bay region, which encompasses the towns of Napier and Hastings, is a self-contained travel destination with a range of one-of-a-kind activities.

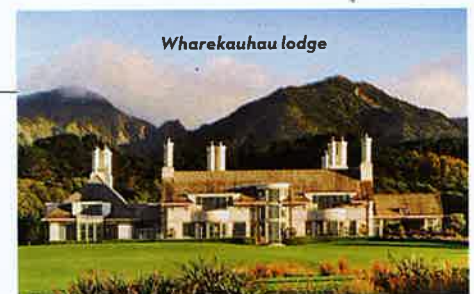
Getting to **The Farm at Cape Kidnappers** (rooms, from \$440; 446 Clifton Rd.; 64-6/875-1900; capekidnappers.com) from Auckland involves an hour flight to Hawke's Bay, followed by a drive up what is quite possibly the world's most spectacular driveway. A five-mile paved road winds through steep gullies with 150-foot-tall trees, leading up,

up, up through a 6,000-acre working farm, past trotting sheep and lazy cows, maybe even a flying pheasant, and finally there's the lodge with 24 farm-chic cottage suites. Its backyard is a Tom Doak-designed golf course (greens fee, from \$275) on the edge of 600-foot-high sandstone bluffs that drop into the Pacific.

The lodge sits within New Zealand's largest privately

funded wildlife sanctuary. A 6½-mile-long fence—it looks like a mesh version of the Great Wall of China—keeps away predators (stoats, ferrets, rodents). Thus, animals like the tiny, flightless kiwi, which most New Zealanders have never seen in the wild, thrive here (there are more than 40), thanks to a breeding program. The lodge can arrange for guests to

MODERN FARMING One of New Zealand's first super lodges, **Wharekauhau** (rooms, from \$805; Western Lake Rd.; 64-6/307-7581; wharekauhau.co.nz), is a 15-minute heli ride northeast of Wellington, at the bottom of the North Island. It's on a 5,000-acre working farm with sheep and cattle. The lodge's most popular activity is watching daily farm life in motion—like mustering sheep and shearing them—via the lodge's guided four-by-four property tour. The Wairarapa wine region is close by, and its quaint town of Martinborough is a 20-minute drive away. If spending time in Wellington before Wharekauhau, the **Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa** (55 Cable St.; tepapo.govt.nz) is a must-do.



Wharekauhau lodge



The exterior of Otahuna; Black Cat Cruises exploring Akaroa Harbor; tuna with avocado at Otahuna.

CANTERBURY



Hall Cannon and Miles Refo, set us up with guide David Hiatt, who runs **Canterbury Guiding Co.** (64-2/173-4431; canterburyguides.com).

Hiatt plans Canterbury region outings, from helicopter whale watching in Kaikoura to visiting a high-country sheep station. He leads a day trip to Akaroa, the country's only French settlement.

The town is at the bottom of a volcanic crater on the banks of Akaroa Harbor, where the world's rarest and tiniest type of dolphin, Hector's dolphin, can be spotted on a **Black Cat Cruise** (64-3/304-7641; blackcat.co.nz). Hiatt also offers tours of Christchurch, which is rebuilding itself after a devastating 2011 earthquake. (See "Our Future Utopias," page 160, for progress on the rebuild.)

It turns out that New Zealand lodge owners and guides all seem to know one another. When I tell Hiatt that my next lodge stop is Mīnaret Station, farther south in Wanaka, he says Jonathan Wallis, the brother of Matt Wallis, who runs the lodge, was the best man in his wedding. So it comes as no surprise when back at Otahuna, while at dinner with Cannon and Refo in the property's exquisite dining room, I receive a phone call from Matt. "David told me to watch out for you," he jokes. (I hope.) When I hang up, I tell my dining companions that Wallis had called to confirm he'd pick me up in a helicopter the next morning. "Give Matt a hard time when you see him," Cannon says with a laugh.



Guide to Book

BEYOND CHRISTCHURCH

Otahuna Lodge works with guide David Hiatt to plan Canterbury day trips.

On the outskirts of Christchurch, New Zealand's second-biggest metropolitan area, located one third of the way down the South Island's east coast is **Otahuna Lodge** (rooms, from \$1,050; 224 Rhodes Rd.; 64-3/329-6333; otahuna

.co.nz), an impeccably restored seven-suite Victorian mansion that DÉPARTURES wrote about last winter. It's known for its 30 acres of gardens that grow 120 types of produce for true garden-to-table meals. When we recently revisited Otahuna, the American-born owners,

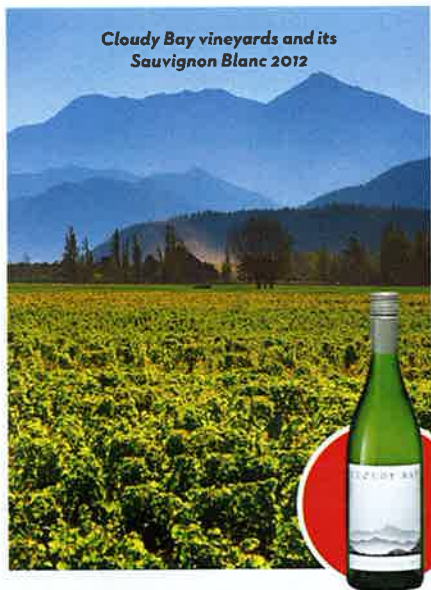
Wine Tasting

MARLBOROUGH VINEYARDS

When most Americans think of New Zealand wines, Marlborough is front of mind, thanks to its crisp Sauvignon Blancs from household names such as **Cloudy Bay** (*Jacksons Rd.; cloudybay.co.nz*) and **Kim Crawford Wines** (*kimcrawfordwines.com*). However, the trouble with wine tasting in Marlborough, located at the top of the South Island (reached via the Marlborough Airport in Blenheim), is that the lodging isn't great.

The best choice is to stay north of Blenheim, on the Marlborough Sounds (accessible only by ferry from Wellington to Picton), at either **The Sounds Retreat** (rooms, from \$460; 215 Anakiwa Rd.; 64-3/574-2965; *thesoundsretreat.co.nz*) or **Bay of Many Coves** (rooms, from \$395; Arthurs Bay; 64-3/579-9771; *bayofmanycoves.co.nz*), and do wine-tasting day trips booked through **Marlborough Travel** (64-3/577-9997; *marlboroughtravel.co.nz*).

Frankly, we recommend skipping the region altogether and instead doing wine tasting in Hawke's Bay or Queenstown, where the wines are top notch but little known outside New Zealand. But for oenophiles committed to Marlborough, put these vineyards on the must-visit list: **Brancott Estate** (180 Brancott Rd.; *brancottestate.com*), **Giesen Wines** (26 Rapaura Rd.; *giesen.co.nz*), **Forrest** (19 Blinks Rd.; *forrest.co.nz*), **Nautilus** (12 Rapaura Rd.; *nautilusestate.com*), **Seresin Estate** (85 Bedford Rd.; *seresin.co.nz*), **Villa Maria** (Cnr. Paynters and New Renwick Rds.; *villamaria.co.nz*), **Wairau River Wines** (Cnr. State Highway 6 and Rapaura Rd.; *wairauriverwines.com*) and **Yealands Estate** (Cnr. Seaview and Reserve Rds.; *yealands.co.nz*). A not-to-miss winery restaurant is the one at **Hans Herzog** (81 Jeffries Rd.; 64-3/572-8770; *herzog.co.nz*), which has a daily rotating tasting menu with wine pairings.



Cloudy Bay vineyards and its Sauvignon Blanc 2012



One of the four tented suites at Minaret Station

WANAKA

New Tented Camp

MINARET STATION

Get here fast! Near Wanaka, in a glacial valley in the heart of the Southern Alps, is New Zealand's first safari-like lodge.

Matt Wallis, a handsome, rugged young mountain man who grew up in Wanaka, is waiting at the Queenstown airport with a sign that says "Minaret Station," the name of his recently opened tented camp accessible only by helicopter. After a safety lesson, we climb into the chopper and take off on what turns out to be a full-day airborne adventure.

We fly over soaring mountains, trickling rivers and rushing waterfalls. We land near a crystal-clear blue lake hidden high up in the Alps. Then we lift off for Milford Sound and zoom over boats that appear to be the size of tiny toys, dwarfed by the towering cliffs rising out of the water below. We land on a secluded rocky beach, and Wallis pulls scuba gear out of the heli; he goes diving in the Pacific, only to emerge with one monster-sized crayfish

(actually the Kiwi word for lobster) and four big ones, along with abalone and sea urchins. Back in the air, we fly to another pristine lake, where lunch is set up with folding chairs, tables and little burners on which Wallis cooks our meal. We have a feast! Two lobster tails each and abalone cooked in ginger, soy and garlic and served with fresh ciabatta, quinoa, steamed vegetables and chocolate for dessert.

It is finally time to go to Minaret Station—but first, a quick side trip to a glacier. It's hard to believe that not ten minutes before we were eating fresh lobster and now we are zipping over a frozen, snowy abyss.

No picture could ever capture the magic of flying into Minaret Station and seeing the small camp come into focus in the middle of a golden-colored valley with hundreds of sheep roaming about. There are only four tents—

they snake together, connected by a wooden path—and a main dining room. We land on the helipad and are greeted by Shirl Rowley, who used to be the nanny for Wallis and his three brothers but now runs the guest operations along with her husband, Jerry. She takes me to my tent, which has a double bed with a possum fur blanket, sheepskin rugs and a hot tub. The bathroom has heated floors.

The stars are out and breathtaking on the walk to the dining room for dinner. I have a glass of Pinot Noir with Wallis, who tells me about his family's business. Under the Minaret Station umbrella, Toby, 38, the eldest brother, runs Alpine Helicopters (see "The Ease of Flying"), which not only services the camp but also does charters. Jonathan (JoJo), 37, handles the farm, located on 55,000 acres and home to 10,000 deer, 7,000 sheep and 500 cattle. Matt, 35, is responsible for the tourism and guiding division. And "baby Nick," 34, is the general manager of the helicopter division. The three businesses merged organically: Jonathan needs helicopters for farming (he musters sheep in a chopper); the lodge was an obvious brand extension.

Dinner is a blast; Wallis and Shirl are a riot, telling tales about family weddings, Christmases and marriage proposals. Appetizers are lobster leg, tempura shrimp and fish with soy sauce. For dinner, it's broccoli soup (with lobster), venison and sponge cake. After our last laugh, Shirl gives me a flashlight and

Minaret Station provides blissful isolation; a freshly caught lobster lunch.



I retreat to my tent—which is thoughtfully outfitted with a heated mattress pad and a hot water bottle for making coffee or tea.

In the morning, after a breakfast of scrambled eggs, I heli to the farm—a five-minute flight that would have been an hour-and-a-half drive (if there were a road)—where Jerry takes me on a tour in a red Toyota. In the stock room, we shear sheep. We drive the fields, and Jerry explains how the sheep are mustered. The education helps me appreciate the camp.

A chopper picks up me, Shirl and Jerry when it's time for the 25-minute flight to my next lodge, Blanket Bay, in Glenorchy. The farewell is bittersweet, as if my aunt and uncle were dropping me off for summer camp. Shirl gives me a big hug. "Visit us again soon!" she says. You bet I will—next time, for heli-skiing.

Tented suites start at \$1,750 a person per night, plus \$1,575 per adult for heli transfer; Lake Wanaka; 64-31443-5860; minaretstation.com.

QUEENSTOWN

Thrill Seeking

ADRENALINE INC.

At the bottom of the South Island, Queenstown is the adventure capital of the world.

As travelers make a pilgrimage from the top of New Zealand to the bottom, there's one common refrain they hear: "Just wait until you get to Queenstown." Indeed, the southern scenery is so dramatic, one is easily led to believe that filmmaker Peter Jackson doesn't even use CGI.

The activities in Queenstown are as gripping as the landscape, as the alpine village has built itself up as an adventure hub. Bungee



The Lodge Suite balcony at Blanket Bay

Visiting the Earnslaw glacier by heli from Blanket Bay



jumping was invented here, off the Kawarau Bridge, which is now the site of the state-of-the-art **AJ Hackett Bungy New Zealand** (Cnr. of Camp and Shotover Sts.; bungy.co.nz). To get some liquid courage before taking the plunge, hire guide Andy Chapman at **Black ZQN** (☎ 64-3/450-0592; blackzqn.co.nz) to organize a tour of the vineyards right outside Queenstown (and near the bungee facility), such as **Gibbston Valley Winery** (1820 Gibbston Hwy.; gibbstonvalleynz.com), known both for its Pinot Noir and for having New Zealand's largest wine cave. The iconic **Shotover Jet** (64-3/442-5577; shotoverjet.com) is another quintessentially

Queenstown operation: The boat goes 50 miles per hour on the Shotover River while doing 360-degree spins.

The lodging buzz in Queenstown is the new Owner's Cottage at **Matakauri Lodge** (rooms, from \$7,850; 569 Glenorchy Rd.; 64-3/441-1008; matakaurilodge.com), which has the advantage of being just a seven-minute drive into Queenstown while still feeling light-years away. The cottage has four bedrooms with large bathrooms, a sophisticated and comfortable living room awash in textured golds and silvers and an outdoor hot tub that overlooks Lake Wakatipu, a perfect place to watch the

mountains become tinged a beautiful rose color as the sun sets.

Farther afield, in the teeny-tiny Glenorchy, about an hour outside Queenstown, is **Blanket Bay** (rooms, from \$875; Glenorchy Rd.; 64-3/441-0115; blanketbay.com). The activity to try in this area is the **Dart River Jet** (64-3/442-4933; dartriver.co.nz) on the Dart River in Mount Aspiring National Park. (It's similar to the Shotover Jet.) If you're not helicoptered out, it's worth scheduling a tour with Louisa "Choppy" Patterson, a passionate pilot who runs the helicopter company **Over The Top** (64-3/442-2233; flynz.co.nz). ♦

THE ONE AND ONLY FERGBURGER Queenstown's **Fergburger** (42 Shotover St.; 64-3/441-1232; fergburger.com) has a cult following due to its namesake burger, made with New Zealand beef, topped with lettuce, tomato and red onions, jazzed up with aioli and tomato relish and served on a bun that's crusty on the outside but soft on the inside. Also on the 20-plus burger menu: the Little Lamby (lamb with mint jelly) and the Bun Laden (falafel with lemon yogurt and chipotle chile sauce). But Fergburger is as famous for its line as it is for its burgers. A local tip: Call in an order and skip the wait. And if by some God-given miracle you're not too full after your meal, walk to the **Cookie Time Cookie Bar** (18 Camp St.; 64-3/442-4891; cookietime.co.nz) and grab a warm, freshly baked chocolate-chip cookie for dessert.

