



With vistas like this, it's no wonder Peter Jackson used his homeland as the filming location for his *Lord of the Rings* trilogy.

# TRAVEL

Where to stay when you visit the best places on earth. Edited by **Nick Smith.**



NEW ZEALAND LUXURY LODGING

## Making it to the lodge

Want a holiday that combines spectacular scenery, exciting outdoor activities and exquisite comfort? New Zealand's got it all.



I'd never seriously considered **New Zealand** as a holiday destination. It was always way down the list on my must-sees. Too close to bother with, too adventure-focused for my urban sensibilities and surely too far behind Australia as far as luxury accommodation goes. They say ignorance is bliss, but in this case, ignorance was just, well, plain ignorance. For years I'd been ignoring a destination that has long been attracting the most discerning international travellers, a neighbouring country that I could have reached within a few hours for not much more than I spend on a big night out.

As is well-known, New Zealand's unique selling point is the great outdoors, in particular the diversity of landscapes and activities — fly-fishing, skiing, hiking, hunting, climbing — to be experienced as you travel around. Travellers often follow a predetermined route, staying in homely lodges along the way. The boom in experiential luxury travel over the past decade has seen an explosion of local and international investors picking up heritage sites or plots of land and developing them into what ▶

Condé Nast Traveller has christened the 'Super Lodge circuit'. And here is where we enter an entirely incredible world of travel.

For many, Otahuna Lodge is the last stop on the Super Lodge circuit and, I'd venture, the most impressive of them all. After experiencing all the lodges that cater for more strenuous activities (see breakout box, below right), it's nice to check in safe in the knowledge that I won't have to deal with anything more demanding than getting through the five-course degustation dinner then strolling through the heritage garden and orchards that surround the property.

Otahuna is one of New Zealand's largest historic residences, a legacy of Sir Heaton

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Rhodes, a New Zealand parliamentarian, military officer and stock-breeder who built the homestead in 1895 and lived there for some 60 years. Saved from a derelict state in 2005 by Manhattanites Miles Refo and Hall Cannon, the residence has been converted into seven individual suites, each

enchanting in their own way. GQ was put up in the Garret suite, an elegant eyrie situated under the gables of the lodge's roof. With its timber-clad walls (decorated with fishing and hunting memorabilia) and writer's nook, there has never been a better place to kick back in your Ralph Lauren gear. There's a full-sized tub in the



A garret you definitely won't starve in: locally produced fine food is one of Otahuna Lodge's many attractions.



bathroom, which is the perfect place for a deeply relaxing soak before heading down to pre-dinner drinks.

At dinner, the grandeur of the homestead — made up of a stunning collection of sitting, dining, study and breakfast rooms — is fully on display and you'll want to dress up as dining is a communal affair. This can be disconcerting at first, but the fine wine and superb food soon get guests opening up to each other, despite differences in age, background or nationality.

The lodge's friendly staff help the process along, going out of their way to make people feel at ease. The only time the conversation died down the night I was there was when the chef

emerged from the kitchen to introduce each of the five courses and offer advice on what wine provided the best match. It's not quite there yet, but Otahuna is moving towards being fully self sufficient, harvesting organic vegetables and raising livestock on its grounds. It's a special treat to see the lodge's own prosciutto curing in the cool room. With these sorts of ingredients readily at hand, the lodge's menu changes day to day, and is never less than exquisite.

If you can tear yourself away from the dining table, estate manager Dave Kilday and head gardener Steve Marcham are only too pleased to take you on a tour of the 110-year-old grounds surrounding the homestead, which are classified

as 'A Garden of National Significance' by the New Zealand Gardens Trust. As you amble along, they'll explain the history of the home and its various incarnations over the years, as well as their ambitious plans for further development of the orchards and garden, and point out where you can play croquet and pentanque. If that's all too Martha Stewart for you, take a road trip down to Akaroa, a sleepy seaside town where you can watch dolphins frolicking, or ask one of the staff to book you in for a round of golf, horse ride or hike in the local vicinity.

Otahuna Lodge, 224 Rhodes Road, Tai Tapu, Christchurch. 00 64 3 329 6333; otahuna.co.nz. Rates from \$450 per person per night.