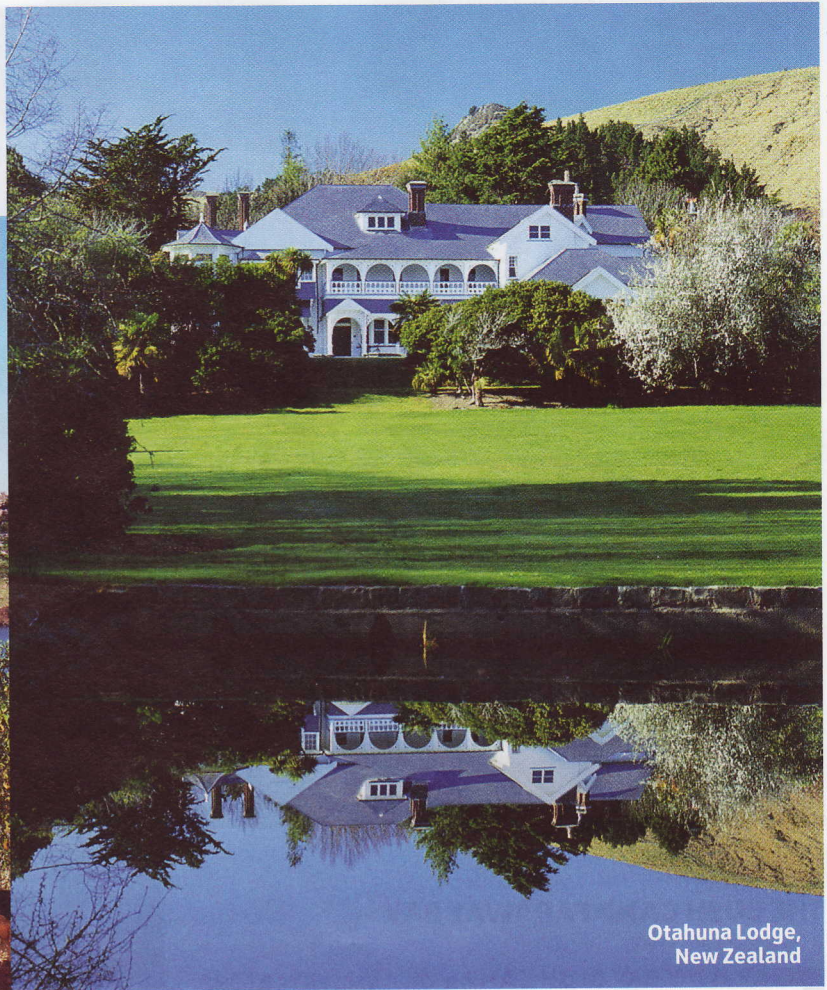


## SHORT BREAKS

The Bush Camp  
Faraway Bay



Otahuna Lodge,  
New Zealand

## Its autumn dress is gold and dazzling, and on a clear day you can see through to the Southern Alps

An aquatic fauna survey of nearby Gumboot Bay (proposed as a landing site for diamond explorers Striker Resources not so long ago, a project presently halted) uncovered an isopod considered a living fossil and “new to science” as well as rare populations of exquisite rainbowfish (*Melanotaemia exquisita*) and two potentially new species of glassfish and catfish.

The camp, open from April to October each year, is owned by Bruce and Robyn Ellison who built it in 1996 – and again in 2005 after it was flattened by Cyclone Ingrid. They juggle the transfers to and from an airstrip 4km away, and the permutations of guest activities. The Ellisons are invaluable guides, as is the bushman staffer Steve McIntosh who returns to the bush camp year after year and is involved in a variety of fieldwork for Australian universities, identifying sharks and their distribution patterns in the north-west, and spending years discovering Aboriginal rock art in the region. He has bush skills to burn.

A three-day/three-night package starts at \$3460 and includes pick-up from your Kununurra accommodation, air transfers, accommodation at Faraway Bay, guided activities, boat charter, meals, soft drinks, wine and beer.

**70 minutes' flight from Kununurra, Western Australia.**  
**(08) 9169 1214. [www.farawaybay.com.au](http://www.farawaybay.com.au)**

### OTAHUNA LODGE

**T**HERE'S SOMETHING QUITE intoxicating about pioneering history – especially absorbing it from five-star comfort made possible by the endeavours of ancestors for whom roughing it was a way of life.

Otahuna Lodge, about 30 minutes' drive from Christchurch, abounds in history. Completed in 1895, it was the estate of the knighted parliamentarian and gentleman farmer Heaton Rhodes, whose father, Robert Heaton Rhodes, and uncles were energetic British pioneers who became wealthy from whaling, cattle droving, banking and land speculation in the 19th century.

Like a setting for an upper-crust TV drama, understated grandeur is Otahuna's byword. It's reflected in the wood panelling of the reception and drawing rooms; in the original pressed and gilded wallpaper of the dining room; the carved inglenooks; the 9m balcony of the Verandah Suite; and a lawn that erupts with daffodils in early September between the entrance drive and a lake.

The property, which has had several incarnations since its owner/builder died in 1956, was bought in 2006 by Americans Hall Cannon and Miles Refo, who were looking for a quieter life after the hurly-burly of Manhattan. By the following May it had been refurbished by >



Otahuna Lodge  
reception hall



Otahuna Lodge fresh tuna  
(below); exterior (bottom)



Auckland interior designer Stephen Cashmore, incorporated big, new, glammed-up bathrooms, and taken delivery of a truckload of art commissioned from New Zealand painters.

While Cannon says he is yet to sight the ghost of Sir Heaton, the past is evident in the wealth of historical black-and-white family and period photos that adorn the walls and evoked by the four-chamber Rhodes Suite, which was the master bedroom.

The 1895 mansion has seven suites with individual themes and furnishings. Tariffs range from \$1000 to \$2000 per night, depending on the season and the size of the suite (there are two master suites – but the smaller, cosier Garrett among the gables and rafters is just as enchanting). The tariff includes board, breakfasts cooked to order, pre-dinner cocktails and canapés, five-course dinner with matched NZ wines, post-dinner nightcap if desired, laundry, mountain bikes, and a jar of home-baked cookies replenished daily.

New Zealand's Canterbury region is a luxury landscape, too. Otahuna is positioned on a small hill at the base of the Banks Peninsula – and today a far cry from what head gardener John Joyce recalled in 1926 as having been "a wilderness of scotch thistles" when he first arrived. Its autumn dress is gold and dazzling, and on a clear day you can see through to the Southern Alps. Daytrips to places such as Akaroa, a little French port an hour or so away, deliver the sort of countryside you move countries for (ask Cannon and Refo).

Set on 12ha, the grounds are stroller central. Among woodlands of majestic oak trees is a Dutch garden, named for its windmill design, as well as cutting, potager and rose gardens, and many pretty walks. Otahuna Lodge is working towards becoming as self-sufficient as possible. At last count the produce garden had 93 varieties of vegetables; an orchard of apples, pears, quinces, plums, walnuts; and a herb garden with 22 options. Head gardener Steve Marcham is using an old apple storehouse to grow oyster mushrooms, and is experimenting with shiitake mushrooms. A hothouse was recently constructed for more exotic fruits. In season, guests can pick mushrooms in the woods. From personal experience: some mushrooms are not what



they seem and trying to provision the kitchen with an undesirable toadstool doesn't earn brownie points.

Chef Jimmy McIntyre peruses his garden every day before he plans his knockout five-course dinner menu. Guests – from as far afield as the Netherlands, the US and the UK – appear to be almost nonplussed by the excellence of what they are eating – food that inspires a quite reverential silence.

**224 Rhodes Road, Tai Tapu, Christchurch, New Zealand.**  
**+64 (3) 329 6333. [www.otahuna.co.nz](http://www.otahuna.co.nz)**

## PRETTY BEACH HOUSE

**A**T A ROCK STAR RETREAT you'd expect groupies, yes? Eric is first to arrive. Eric is an Australian water dragon (*Physignathus lesueurii*) with a water dragon's version of a mullet – a long thin strip of colour from crown to tail. Inquisitive, a little pushy and needs a pedicure. Next, with all the stealth and heft of a celebrity stalker, comes the bush turkey with catwalk insouciance. Totally shameless is the kookaburra – let's call it Papparazzi – ➤