

NEW ZEALAND



Thoughtful Food Cookbook, can be purchased on the premises or online at the hotel's website.

The next day, we were picked up by Reid Helicopters (www.helicoptersnelson.co.nz) for a personal flight to Marlborough's idyllic vineyards, where we sampled their exquisite bottlings. We continued on to gorgeous Marlborough Sounds along with a special guest, Michelin-trained chef Matt Bouterey. We touched down on a huge rock to fish for fresh seafood that Bouterey turned into a sumptuous feast at a remote beach nearby. Should you find the gastronomical options too sinful, you could do what we did and explore Abel Tasman National Park on kayaks with experienced guides from bespoke adventure company Simply Wild Journeys (simplywild.co.nz).

Our last stop was the romantic Otahuna Lodge (www.otahuna.co.nz). Situated at the head of a secluded valley in the Canterbury region, the lodge is a 25-minute drive from Christchurch International Airport. It was built in 1895 and served for 60 years as the primary residence of New Zealand politician Sir Heaton Rhodes. In 2006, two young and enterprising Americans, Hall Cannon and Miles Refo, purchased Otahuna and turned it into a seven-suite lodge. The style is so seemingly upper-class British that I was half expecting Maggie Smith in her *Downton Abbey* role as Dowager Countess of Grantham, to descend the stairs any minute.

We were especially fond of the opulent kitchen where we enjoyed our breakfasts. It too had that *Downton Abbey* feeling, except that instead of butlers and maids, there was us and other lucky travellers around the breakfast table, praising the lodge and its owners. Almost all the food comes from the property's eight hectares of gardens. Fruits are picked from the adjoining orchard and eggs are gathered each morning from Otahuna's chicken coop.

The seven guest suites are sprawled across three levels. We had the privilege of staying in The Rhodes Suite, once the master bedroom of Sir Heaton. Every evening, guests are served a fine five-course dinner accompanied by the finest New Zealand wines. These opulent meals were created under the sound supervision of Otahuna's award-winning chef, Jimmy McIntyre.

Truly, there is hardly another country that manages to bring together bespoke gastronomy journeys and luxurious accommodation options alongside the best views found in the Pacific as beautifully as New Zealand. Perhaps it's time to head further down under after all.



OTAHUNA LODGE

The dining room (above) at the lodge, which is protected by a Category One listing from the New Zealand Historic Places Trust.