



# WELCOME TO NEW ZEALAND

Sand dunes, surf towns, and an ever-expanding circle of fast friends: **ADAM SACHS** tours the far reaches of New Zealand, where the oysters are plentiful, the road is wide open, and everyone has a story to share. **PHOTOGRAPHED BY MARK ROPER**

Black Angus sirloin on rosemary  
mashed potatoes at Elephant  
Hill Estate & Winery, in Hawke's  
Bay. Opposite: A view of the  
harbor on the way to Akaroa,  
a former French settlement on  
New Zealand's South Island.

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# “You can get tuatuas here,” Anne Moore says, brightly.

“A *tuatua*,” she adds by way of explanation, “is like a *pipi* but not as big as a *toheroa*.”

I have no idea what she’s talking about but the sound of the words makes me happy. *Tuatuas* and *pipis* and *toheroas*, Anne explains, are types of mollusks. You dig them up at the beach as snacks.

Anne points out a sign by the road that says HOT HANGI. That’s a Maori stew, she says, cooked in the ground.

“Have you ever seen a *kumara*?” Anne asks. It’s a purplish sweet potato grown around here. And where is here? I’m trying to remember.

Anne is a new friend. We met the week before, at another pal’s wedding on the island of Waiheke, near Auckland. Now she’s our guide on a road trip somewhere far north of there, driving with the sunroof open across the very top of New Zealand. From the backseat of her silver-blue BMW jalopy, I watch the dreamy place-names pass by: Opononi. Kerikeri. Pakaraka. Kawakawa. I repeat these words to myself and lose track of where we are on the map. Outside, it’s all lush greens and sparkling blues. There is a warmth, a pacific—lower- and uppercase—quality to the light in the north of the North Island.

At Russell, on the Bay of Islands, a little seagull follows us around. He waddles behind the car as we drive out of town with a look that seems to say, “What’s your rush?” Sorry, little bird. Nothing personal.

Except that in New Zealand, everything has a way of feeling personal, intimate, connected. The country’s image handlers have done a great job positioning the place as a kind of holy land for extreme-sports seekers, as well as for those who seek extreme pamperedness at grand pleasure palaces known as super lodges. But what pulls me back is something more essential, a feeling I get from the people here. They’re friendly and open, but more than that there is this sense of an entire

country where everyone seems to know one another, a sense of community you don’t get in bigger countries. Aotearoa—the country’s Maori name, meaning Land of the Long White Cloud—has an area slightly larger than the United Kingdom but one-fifteenth the population. Nearly a third of the 4.2 million Kiwis live in Auckland. Outside the city it’s a big-sky, small-world place.

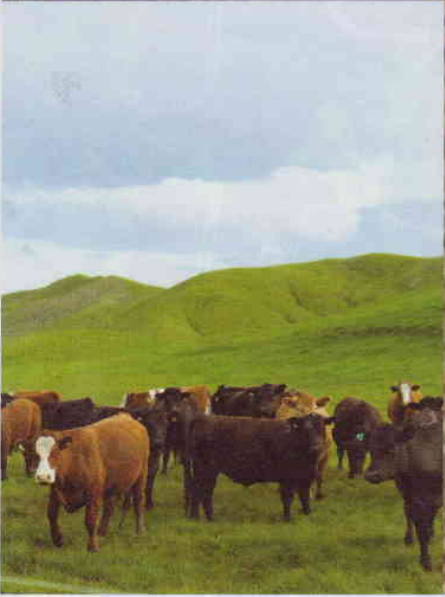
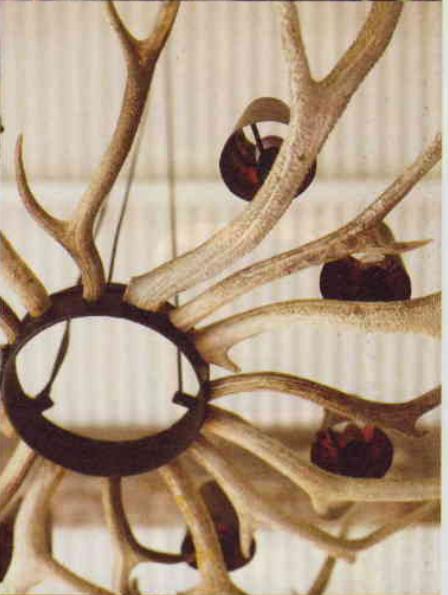
Looking to explore these connections, I devised a kind of travel challenge for myself, an experiment in serendipitous social networking. What would become of me if I arrived in Auckland knowing nobody and let myself be guided only by the introductions of people I met along the way? There would be rules: I couldn’t just ask someone to recommend a place they’d heard or read about. They had to hand me off to friends or colleagues, people they actually knew. And I would keep moving. Landing in Auckland, I’d head roughly south with every suggestion to see how far down the length of the country I could get.

To hedge my bets, I needed a traveling companion and a starter pool of Kiwis. My first bit of good luck arrived in the form of my girlfriend, Evyn, whose best friend happened to be getting married on Waiheke. The bride, Anna Weinberg, grew up on the island, a wind-slapped half-hour’s ferry ride from Auckland. She now lives in San Francisco, where she runs South, an Australia/New Zealand-themed wine bar and restaurant. One of her partners is the Australian celebrity chef Luke Mangan. Anna’s parents make wine in Hawke’s Bay. There would be guests from the New Zealand food, wine, and fashion industries. If any place was going to give us a shot at meeting people who could set us off on an interesting journey, Anna and James’s wedding promised to be it.

So after a series of flights we landed in Auckland and made our way by ferry across the emerald Hauraki Gulf to Waiheke. There we fell into the rhythm of things with the aid of great quantities of the local rosé. The island has a Nantucket-ish vibe by way of California surf-town cool. A place, as one resident put it, where “billionaires cohabit with hippies and a few of us in between.”

We sailed a catamaran around the coves. We played cricket (badly) in the surf at Oneroa Beach. By the day of the wedding ceremony at Mudbrick Vineyard, we’d acclimated to island life. Finally, it was time to cut the cord and go off on our own.

**Island Country** Clockwise from top left: A drawing of a New Zealand pigeon at Otahuna Lodge, near Christchurch; Clyde Quay Marina, in Wellington’s harbor; owners Bruce and Carol Hyland at Maison de la Mer, their inn in Akaroa; an antler chandelier at Black Barn Vineyards, in Hawke’s Bay; a guest room at Maison de la Mer; on Stone Beach, in Akaroa; cows grazing near Hawke’s Bay; St. Patrick’s Catholic church, in Akaroa. Center: Goat-cheese ravioli with pancetta and asparagus at Otahuna Lodge.







Anne Moore, an old friend of Eryn's, wanted us to see Hokianga, where she'd grown up. Anne is a quarter Maori, tall and striking, with big, dark eyes that suggest she is going to do what she wants to do. This is our first lesson in social traveling: Some people aren't willing to just point you in the right direction; they want to take you there themselves.

Which is how we end up in Anne's car driving 4½ hours north of Auckland through rolling dairy farms and *kumara* country, cowboy towns and Maori land.

Arriving at Hokianga, you climb a steep hill and come to a remarkable vista: on the left is the Tasman Sea, to the right a river winding inland, and, in front of you, rising from the mouth of the harbor, a giant golden sand dune.

Anne's friend who runs the boat-tour concession takes us across to the dunes. The full poetic name, he says, is Te Hokianga-nui-a-Kupe. "The returning place of Kupe, the Polynesian explorer who discovered New Zealand."

This is Anne's returning place, too, and it pleases her to share it. Growing up here, she'd somehow never gotten around to hiking the dune.

Over the top we find a scene new to all of us, invisible from shore and boat: rocky red canyons, hidden forests, and undisturbed white beaches far below. This feels and looks like what it is—the start of a country at the end of the world.

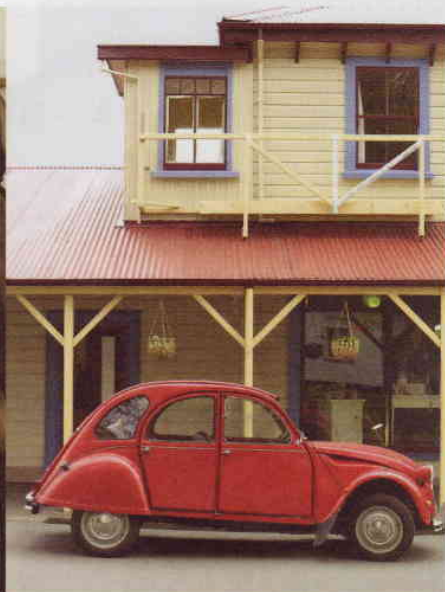
We are again on the road, heading from Hokianga back to Auckland to meet friends who will steer us to our next destination. At Orongo Bay we pull off the road at a big blue sign that reads OYSTERS OPEN and find Clive, a giant with a yellow beard like the back of an unshorn sheep. He shucks us two dozen wild-spatch oysters pulled straight from the bay, and we eat them on the hood of the car with a bottle of the local hot sauce, Kaitaia Fire.

Somewhere near Elliotts Bay a rainbow reveals itself over the ocean, so we stop again for a quick look. The hills are lime green and velvety soft. Surfers are in the water. *Pipis* and *tuatuas* are there for the digging. Behind us, on a little rise above the road, a cow is chewing grass and taking in the same view, looking as amazed as we are. The whole thing is so ridiculously pretty that we all just sort of shake our heads in the warm breeze and whistle, glad we ended up here, wherever here is.

**Small-Town Charms**

Above, from left: Artisans Gallery, on Akaroa's main street; Te Matuku oysters at Martin Bosley's Restaurant, in Wellington. Opposite: *Buxus*, *viburnum*, and Chilean cranberry plants at Otahuna Lodge.





## “We reckon we’ve got one degree of separation in New Zealand,”

Simon Woolley says.

Short-cropped gray hair, 53, fitted T-shirt, kind eyes behind artsy spectacles, Simon is an old friend of the bride’s. He’s a cofounder of one of the country’s big mineral-water brands, Antipodes. We’re back in Auckland to see off the wedding party and receive our marching orders.

One of Simon’s partners in the Antipodes water venture is his old mate, Kim Thorp, an advertising man who started a winery and villarental complex in the Hawke’s Bay wine region called Black Barn Vineyards.

Simon finds Kim on his mobile to make the introduction. We’re in luck: there’s one house available for the night.

“Rush Cottage, my favorite,” says Simon. “You’re going to love it.”

And so we do. We fall rather helplessly and immediately in love with the very English-feeling two-bedroom shepherd’s cottage beside a towering fan palm. And we fall for Kim and his wife,

Bronwynne, who is making a fragrant pot of fig chutney from *Digby Law’s Pickle & Chutney Cookbook: A New Zealand Classic* when we arrive at their contemporary art- and sculpture-filled house for a visit. And all this love brings us to the second tricky issue with this exercise in constant motion: the stubborn desire to never leave a place.

Black Barn is many things: winery, summer concert venue, modern Kiwi art gallery, restaurant, local farmers’ market, and lodging. What makes it all work is that it feels like a personal project, a kind of curated lifestyle, tastefully conceived and stylishly executed by Kim and Bronwynne and their partners. “We honestly just based things on what we like,” Kim says. The people are the brand—a slogan you might apply, without too much of a stretch, to New Zealand as a whole.

Leaving Hawke’s Bay and heading south through the North Island to Wellington, we stop for lunch at Elephant Hill Estate & Winery on the coast. “It’s the newest thing on the horizon,” Kim tells us. “It’s sort of outrageous: a bright blue-green copper shoe box owned by a German couple who have no history of wine.” The view alone is worth the detour: outdoor tables overlook a glassy pool, down past the rows of grapevines, and out to a thin ribbon of blue sea. It feels like a colorful hybrid of Thailand and Provence. Fearing we’d be left without anyone to recommend a place to stay, in the rush to make Wellington by dark, we had taken Kim’s suggestion and booked a room online at Ohtel, a self-consciously designy boutique around the corner

*(Continued on page 146; see page 146 for the Guide)*

**Kiwi Nation** Above, from left: The dining room at the Elephant Hill Estate & Winery; the entrance at Black Barn Retreat; Rue Lavaud, in the town of Akaroa. Opposite: The veranda at Otahuna Lodge.

## NEW ZEALAND



(Continued from page 101)

from Martin Bosley's Restaurant. "Go see Martin," Kim directed us. "His food's exquisite. Be sure to say you're a vegetarian and don't like fish."

### "Did Kim tell you to say that?"

Martin asks when we deliver the fake bad news about our eating habits. "Well, the answer to your next question—'What do you do for people like us?'—is, 'Drown you to put you out of your misery.'"

Martin has a goatee and a winking, genial gruffness. His restaurant occupies the glass-walled dining room of a 126-year-old yacht club. The room is tidy but unpretentious,

dominated by views of swaying sailboats and old sheds once used by the American navy. The focus, however, is on what's on the plate, which mostly comes out of the waters around New Zealand.

"So personal recommendations—just don't screw it up?" Martin says to clarify.

Amazing how pawning off decision-making responsibilities on someone else can reduce your stress. I switch from Antipodes water to a Seresin Sauvignon Blanc from Marlborough and look out at the clear sky.

"Okay, I'll go make some calls and see if we can get something happening. In the meantime, you guys need some oysters."

Bluff oysters are not like other oysters. Available only for a brief season and only from the wild, cold, violent waters around Bluff, at the very bottom of the South Island, they are gritless, pure-tasting, intensely briny. The shells look like ragged fossils, with orange and pink and gray deposits. There is, it seems, something alive on one of my shells. I poke it with my finger. The something bites back. "Hey, you've got clams living on your

oyster!" Martin says, walking by to observe the action.

It's hard to feel any stress in sunny wine country, but in Marlborough I manage it. This is where things fall apart a little and then come back together. Some of Martin's suggestions don't work out, places are booked on short notice, calls go unanswered. One of the reasons we wander is for the artificial highs and lows we feel along the way. Like Finns jumping from freezing pool to steaming sauna, we hop headlong into the good and bad, dull and delightful parts of a journey, and it makes our heart race.

From Wellington we take a ferry across to Picton, at the top of the South Island. Martin had directed us to a B&B run by a very friendly couple who give us wine when we arrive and a lovely home-cooked breakfast in the morning. There is nothing wrong with the place at all, but we have the sinking feeling we've landed in a kind of pretty nowhere, a scrubbed suburb near beautiful wine country.

Here is another lesson: Live by the recommendation, die by it, too.

## GUIDE NEW ZEALAND



**WHEN TO GO** The climate is generally mild, but you'll find some variation between the subtropical north and the glacier-dotted south. The warmest months are between January and March, and it's coolest in July.

**GETTING THERE AND AROUND** Qantas ([qantas.com](http://qantas.com)) and Air New Zealand ([airnewzealand.com](http://airnewzealand.com)) fly the approximately 13 hours from the West Coast to Auckland. With scenic shoreline drives and dramatic mountain passes, the

country is a road-tripper's dream. Highways are well marked, and getting from town to town is easy. There are short flights across the Cook Strait between the North and South Islands, and ferries operate regularly between Wellington and Picton. Keep in mind that you will have to switch rental cars when you cross the strait.

**STAY**  
**GREAT VALUE** **Black Barn Vineyards** Black Barn Rd., Havelock North; 64-6/877-7985; [blackbarn.com](http://blackbarn.com); cottages from \$250.

**Clifftops Retreat** 1452 State Hwy. 60, Ruby Bay; 64-3/540-2767; [clifftops-retreat.co.nz](http://clifftops-retreat.co.nz); cottage from \$395, all-inclusive.

**Eagles Nest** Five modern villas—most with private pools. 60 Tapeka Rd., Russell; 64-9/403-8333; [eaglesnest.co.nz](http://eaglesnest.co.nz); villas from \$1,650.

**GREAT VALUE** **Hotel d'Urville** A good base for wine-country explorations. 52 Queen St., Blenheim; 64-3/577-9945; [durville.com](http://durville.com); doubles from \$234.

**GREAT VALUE** **Maison de la Mer** 1 Rue Benoit, Akaroa; 64-3/304-8907; [maisondelamer.co.nz](http://maisondelamer.co.nz); doubles from \$239, including breakfast.

**Mollies** A 13-suite hotel in a Victorian house not far from Ponsonby. 6 Tweed St., Auckland; 64-9/376-3489; [mollies.co.nz](http://mollies.co.nz); doubles from \$440.

**Ohtel** 66 Oriental Parade, Wellington; 64-4/803-0600; [ohtel.com](http://ohtel.com); doubles from \$356.

**Otahuna Lodge** 224 Rhodes Rd., Tai Tapu; 64-3/329-6333; [otahuna.co.nz](http://otahuna.co.nz); doubles from \$1,105, all-inclusive, except lunch.

**GREAT VALUE** **Westin Auckland Lighter Quay** The hotel seems to float over the water like one of the supersleek yachts in the harbor. 21 Viaduct Harbour Ave., Auckland; 800/228-3000; [westin.com](http://westin.com); doubles from \$220.

**EAT**  
**Black Barn Bistro** Black Barn Rd., Havelock North; 64-6/877-7985; lunch for two \$85.

**Cable Bay Vineyards** A modern restaurant with sweeping vistas across the gulf. 12 Nick Johnstone Dr., Waiheke Island; 64-9/372-5889; dinner for two \$100.

**Elephant Hill Estate & Winery** 86 Clifton Rd., Te Awanga; 64-6/873-0400; lunch for two \$75.

**Herzog Estate** 81 Jeffries Rd., Blenheim; 64-3/572-8770; lunch for two \$80; dinner for two \$140.

**Martin Bosley's Restaurant** 103 Oriental Parade, Wellington; 64-4/920-8302; dinner for two \$145.

**Mudbrick Vineyard & Restaurant** Vegetables grown on-site, and a great view of the Hauraki Gulf. 126 Church Bay Rd., Waiheke Island; 64-9/372-9050; dinner for two \$120.

**Pegasus Bay** Pinot Noir wine and locally sourced food in a garden setting. 263 Stockgrove Rd., Waipara; 64-3/314-6869; lunch for two \$100.

**Terrôir** Craggy Range Winery's restaurant has a wood-fired oven turning out great roasted meats. 253 Waimarama Rd., Havelock North; 64-6/873-0143; lunch for two \$80.

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next social media experiment.

After some fumbling calls and scratched ideas, the nice couple mention that they are friendly with Therese Herzog of the Herzog Estate in Blenheim, not far away. Driving through sunny Marlborough wine country, we've got a good feeling about Therese, who doesn't even know we're headed to find her but who we hope will save our trip. And she does.

A handsome Swiss import, Therese doesn't have time for the halting, ginger politesse of her Anglo neighbors. I start my rehearsed speech about what we're looking for: not just a guidebook listing, somewhere you yourself would go...

"Okay, hold on," Therese says, leaving me mid-spiel. She returns with a postcard she appears to have been keeping for just this purpose, ready to present like a pre-baked cake on a TV cooking show.

"This is the secret sight to see," she says, musically. "This is the golden bay, the million-dollar view. This is where we go to escape."

Sold. Check, please. We call the number on Therese's postcard and, against the odds, the cottage at Clifftops Retreat is available.

So we are back on course. Over the mountain passes to Nelson, through the city and out to the little seaside hamlets and hill towns that line the road up and around to Ruby Bay village. After a few wrong turns, we find the tree-lined path to Clifftops cottage and a sign on the gate, wrapped with a bow: "Welcome Eryn and Adam. Please turn the key on your left and zoom up to the house. Looking forward to meeting you. Pebbles and Frankie might also appear to say hello—woof woof."

**Pebbles and Frankie and their** caretakers, Bob and Anne, lead Eryn and me to a pair of Adirondack chairs at the edge of the lawn. Below us is Tasman Bay and the curving coast of the South Island. We take a bottle from the well-stocked kitchen and watch the sky as it turns from pink-streaked blue to quavering purple to starry black.

The dogs are back to say hello in the morning. Stay, they say, flopping around on the lawn. Stay and pat our bellies and enjoy this place you've come so far to see. Bob is more direct. "This is craziness!" he advises us when we say we really do need to get moving. The dogs were right, of course. It was a shame to go before we took Bob's advice about the hiking trails in Abel Tasman National Park and before we could finish all the cookies Anne had stashed in the kitchen cupboard. »

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## NEW ZEALAND

But rules are rules, even self-imposed ones, so we're off, cutting southeast down the middle of the island.

New Zealand is big and varied, in its way. Sandy beaches in the subtropical north, glaciers and alpine skiing in the south. We didn't know what we'd see of it until we met the people who would send us there. We pass through rolling farmland, and in the endless interior, ominous-looking craggy ranges. The radio cuts out for miles at a stretch.

Nearing Canterbury, the rocky terrain gives way to a sweeter, softer-again English country landscape. Nearing Christchurch we turn to Tai Taupo, and just as the light is faltering find our way to Otahuna Lodge.

Full disclosure—I cheated a bit here. I wanted to spend at least a night at one of the great lodges. I could see from the map that the recently refurbished Otahuna was a day's drive south of Ruby Bay. So I dropped a hint: Did Bob and Anne by any chance know anybody at Otahuna? Wouldn't that be a fine recommendation—for variety's sake? They admitted they knew some folks there but not the owners. From Clifftops I called Otahuna preemptively and talked to Miles Refo and Hall Cannon, the American gentlemen who own and run the stately home. They agreed to let us come on shorter notice than is generally required. Rules are rules, but sometimes it's okay to bend them, especially when it means a visit to a Queen Anne mansion with a tennis court.

The lodge was built in 1895, and has since served as a monastery, commune, and hotel. We change and are served dinner in a private room off the drawing room. Prawn ceviche with a soup of green, yellow, and red tomatoes. Locally raised duck, served rare. There is an almost comic formality to it, following yesterday's dinner at an outdoor fish shack and our manic all-day road trip. But the food is good and we're happy to take our glasses of port to our plush room just up the stairs.

### After a morning of misty tennis

we join Hall for breakfast in the airy kitchen. "I've traveled the way you're traveling," Hall says. "This is an easy country to do it in." When he and Miles, formerly New York City real estate and marketing types, were looking to change their lives and find a grand project in New Zealand, they drove around the country for three months, taking advice and direction from those they met along the way.

"A lot of folks come here with intricate itineraries, with multiple flights, helicopters, and dolphin watches. The irony is that traveling on your own in New Zealand is about the safest, easiest thing you can do. I'm probably shooting myself in the foot here, but if you're coming here and you're staying only in the so-called super lodges, you might be doing yourself a bit of a disservice."

The pair have mastered the handle-anything calm of seasoned hoteliers. If someone could market this unperturbable suavity in pill form I think it would be a hit for the pharmaceutical companies. Hall and Miles are accustomed to complex guest needs, so my request barely registers as a challenge. We're in your hands for a night, I explain. Send us somewhere nice to stay with people you like.

"Akaroa," Hall says, not missing a beat. "It's the only French settlement in New Zealand. The street names are in French, little cafés, a charming bay, an amazingly scenic drive."

After an hour of hairpin turns we descend to the harbor from which the French planned to secure a colony in Australasia. The British beat them to it, leaving sweet, tiny Akaroa as a museum relic of what a Gallic New Zealand might have looked like. Apparently it would have been unspeakably cute. Imagine if the French took over Devon and transplanted it to the Pacific. Again, we find ourselves somewhere we'd never heard of the day before, buoyed along by good advice, unburdened by advance planning, never sure which New Zealand we'd see today. We're only halfway down the South Island, but we've come a long way from Anne Moore's Maori returning place at the top of the country.

From his office at Otahuna, Hall had called Carol Hyland and told her he had some friends he wanted to send over to Maison de la Mer, the bed-and-breakfast she runs with her husband, Bruce. Our room has a nautical theme. There are cookies in the cupboard and a large round window looking out over the boats in the bay. That evening, the Hylands ply us and their other guests with wine and tell stories about decades spent raising their children on a sailboat traveling the world. We excuse ourselves after a couple of glasses, as we've got one final recommendation to pursue. Akaroa is said to have one of the best fish-and-chips shops in New Zealand. You can find it if you go. Just ask around. +

*Adam Sachs is a T+L contributing editor.*

## BUYER'S GUIDE

### T+L 500

**COVER** **Tory Burch** \$295 (Tory Burch, Meatpacking District, New York City; 212/929-0125; toryburch.com); **Hat Attack** \$88 (800/982-1569; hatattack.com).

### TRENDS 2010: SHOPPING: EVERYDAY UNSOUVENIRS

**PAGE 56 Furikake** \$3 (Daimaru department store, 1-9-1 Marunouchi, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo, 81-3/3212-8011; Mitsukoshi Nihonbashi Honten, 1-4-1 Nihonbashi Muromachi, Chuo-ku, Tokyo, 81-03/3241-3311; Mitsukoshi Ginza, 4-6-16 Ginza, Chuo-ku, Tokyo, 81-03/3562-2222; Mitsukoshi Ebisu, 4-20-7 Ebisu, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo, 81-03/5423-1111); **Kaufmanns cream** \$9 (IhrPlatz, 1-7 Otto-Schmirgal-Strasse, Berlin, ihrplatz.de; Kiosk, N.Y.C., 212/226-8601, kioskkiosk.com); **gardening scythe** \$12 (Tokyu Hands department store, 21-18 Udagawacho, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo; 81-3/5489-5111); **chocolate-scented postage stamps** \$8.25 for block of 10 (post offices, France; laposte.fr); **bamboo paintbrush** \$10 (Artland, Lockhart Centre, Lockhart Rd., Wanchai, Hong Kong; artland.com.hk); **Campari Soda** \$3 (Di per Di, 119 Via del Governo Vecchio, Rome; 39-06/647-60344); **empanada makers** \$3 each (Feria, Tristán Narvaja Street Market, Montevideo, Uruguay); **Bialetti espresso maker** \$28 (Coin department stores, Rome, Florence, Milan; coin.it); **whisk** \$5 (Mercado La Merced, Mexico City; Kiosk, see above); **onion holder** \$11 (House & Kitchen, 103 Via del Plebiscito, Rome; 39-06/679-4208); **student notebook** 25 cents (Skilaventis supermarkets, Greece; skag.gr); **Wright's soap** \$1.29 (Boots, 44/845-070-8090; boots.com). **PAGE 58 Rosti spoons** \$4.50 (De Bijenkorf department store, 1012 JS Dam, Bijenkorf, Amsterdam; debijenkorf.nl); **Bliv dish soap** \$2 (ICA supermarkets, Sweden, Norway, Baltic States; 46-8/5615-0000; ica.se); **lunch tin** \$5 (Premsons Bazaar, B-63, Premsons House, 26 Bhulabhai Desai Rd., Breach Candy, Mumbai; 91-22/2363-6600); **Vellutata notebooks** \$18 for set of 6 (Ditta G. Poggi, 74-75 Via del Gesù, Rome; 39-06/679-3674; poggi1825.it).

**Travel + Leisure** (ISSN 0041-2007) is published monthly 12 times a year by American Express Publishing Corporation, 1120 Ave. of the Americas, New York, NY 10036. Subscription: 12 issues, \$45.00; in Canada, \$57.00 (publisher's suggested price). Single copies \$4.95. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and additional mailing offices. Publications Mail Commercial Sales Agreement No. 40036840 (GST #129480364RT). Publications Mail Agreement 40036840. Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to: Travel + Leisure, P.O. Box 134, Stn. Main, Markham, Ontario L3P 3J5. Printed in U.S.A. Copyright ©2010 by American Express Publishing Corporation. All rights reserved.

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