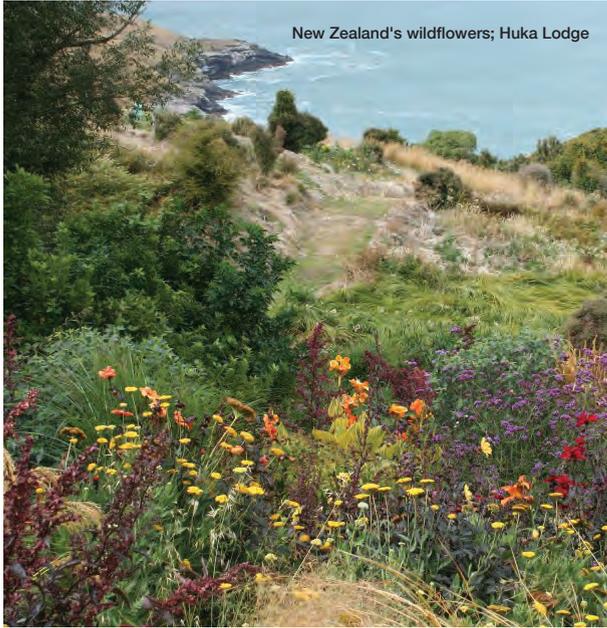


just back from...

Unforgettable New Zealand

For most of us, getting to New Zealand requires extensive—and exhausting—travel. But you'll quickly determine the trip was well worth it, says **Eliza Scott Harris**.



In the bird sanctuary at the Farm at Cape Kidnappers, I tracked an endangered baby kiwi through a forest of white pines with a biologist. When we found it hiding in the thick forest duff, I held the delicate bird in my hand. Later, I explored the undulating hills of the 6,000-acre property on a quad bike and was blessed by a singing Maori tribeswoman. The next morning in Taupo, I had breakfast by a crackling fire at Huka Lodge, then waded up a river in the morning light with a fly rod and guide and landed my first-ever rainbow trout. Another unforgettable day in New Zealand.

The Kiwis' respect for their land finds a natural extension in their cuisine. It is a true locavore culture. At Otahuna Lodge, near Christchurch, the owners grow more than 120 varieties of vegetables, fruits, herbs and nuts in their gardens, including heirloom green zebra tomatoes, hazelnuts, passion fruit, Kaffir limes and wasabi root. During my stay, brilliant chef Jimmy McIntyre and his team delighted in baking us a daily array of fresh breads: breakfast scones served with house-cured prosciutto, rosemary focaccia, flaky butter rolls. Every ingredient had a story. The porcini

were foraged from oak roots out front, the eggs came from the Araucana hens in back, the buffalo milk yogurt from a nearby farm.

If the foodie culture was one happy surprise, another was the overall sense of wholesomeness. In some ways, the trip felt like going back to a more innocent time. There's no airport security when you fly domestically. You arrive fifteen minutes before your flight, check in and walk right onto the plane. Over ten days, I never once locked the door to my room. The water was so pure, our guide encouraged us to drink right from the river.

There are no dangerous snakes or spiders. There's no pollution and very little ambient light, so the stars are incredible.

But the biggest thing we all remarked on was the local generosity of spirit. When I was curious about a working sheep station, my guide made a quick call, and ten minutes later, her fiancé had interrupted his day to show me around his family farm. When I tried to tip my fishing guide, he just grinned broadly and shook his head no.

I know what you are thinking: you are only going to go to New Zealand once; you want to hit everything; it's so far away; you need two weeks. You don't. You need nine or ten days. Three nights at three lodges. North and South Islands. Mountains and water. You'll lose a day on the way over, but you'll gain it coming back. Just go. I promise that you will be back for more.

Stay: North Island

For Golfing... Kauri Cliffs

When financier Julian Robertson Jr. first saw the 4,000-acre farm above Matauri Bay, he thought it cried out for a golf course. The now-top-rated course opened in 2000, and its namesake lodge a year later. Cottages feature cozy fireplaces and private porches looking over the Pacific. Beyond golf,

activities include sailing, deep-sea fishing, snorkeling and sea kayaking in the Bay of Islands.

For Fishing... Huka Lodge

On the banks of Taupo's Waikato River, the intimate Huka is decorated in a bold, dark style that evokes a British men's club. Service is impeccable, and the cuisine is lavish, with superb five-course dinners. A string of well-appointed cottages holds the twenty-five guest rooms, each with a private terrace leading down to the river.

For Water Sports... The Farm at Cape Kidnappers

Situated on a stunning sheep and cattle farm in Hawke's Bay, one of the country's top wine regions, the Farm at Cape Kidnappers has an unspoiled natural beauty. Its twenty-four suites are each graced with a private deck and sweeping views. Active adventures include sailing, surfing, paragliding and hiking.

Stay: South Island

For Foodies... Otahuna

Set in the rolling hills outside Christchurch, Otahuna is an elegant, Victorian country house retreat. With only seven unique suites, it feels very much like a private home. The lodge's extraordinary chef,

Jimmy McIntyre and his team spend their days dreaming up new delights using ingredients from the property's gardens.

For the Romantics... Matakauri

This comfortable property manages to strike the perfect balance between location (a six-minute drive from Queenstown) and view (of Lake Wakatipu). Its bright, chic interiors feature floor-to-ceiling windows looking onto the lake. With just ten rooms, the lodge's warm and welcoming staff makes each guest feel exceedingly welcome.

For Landscape... Blanket Bay

A 45-minute drive from Queenstown, this lodge sits on the shore of Lake Wakatipu, facing the Humboldt Mountains. The decor channels the American West, complete with antler chandeliers. The downstairs "excursion" room allows guests to plot the following day's activities on the wall's giant map. Satisfying adrenaline-fueled adventurous urges seems easy when you know that wine cellar offerings and a beautiful spa await.

Read Indagare's New Zealand destination report, including reviews on all the hotels listed above. And contact Indagare for help planning a trip to New Zealand.