



BY AMIE LARTER



Old World Charm

ONE CANNOT HELP BUT BE MESMERISED BY THE GRANDEUR OF THIS QUEEN ANNE STYLE RESIDENCE-TURNED-LUXURY LODGE. HIDDEN IN NEW ZEALAND'S CANTERBURY REGION IN THE LITTLE TOWN OF TAI TAPU, IT IS HARD TO BELIEVE THIS ENCHANTING ESTATE IS ONLY 25 MINUTES FROM THE HEART OF CHRISTCHURCH.

Our suite – the original master bedroom, aptly named the Rhodes – boasts a magnificent Victorian fireplace, stained glass windows, a separate seating area, and a veranda with views of the glorious gardens and the alps off in the far distance.

The suites offer a haven to relax and take in the majestic nature of the lodge. Couple this with delicious home-baked cookies replenished daily, the perfectly lit room, sheep-skin rug that appears at turn-down, and you have the recipe for a perfect mini escape.

The subtle attention to detail carries on into the kitchen in the most sumptuous fashion. Seated in the formal dining room, guests are sent on a culinary journey inspired by Executive Chef Jimmy McIntyre. For those that desire, a five-course degustation menu is offered nightly, married perfectly with a variety of New Zealand's finest wines. The Otahuna lamb rack and braised shoulder served with rosemary gnocchi, spring vegetables, and tapenade jus was certainly a favourite on the first night of our visit.

It is not until you have passed through the stylish gates of this luxe manor that you catch your first glimpse of the charming Otahuna Lodge. It is quickly hidden again, concealed by gardens perfectly placed by original owner Sir Heaton Rhodes, and only comes into view again when you are arriving at the lodge's steps.

This three-storey manor was built for Rhodes and his Australian wife, Jessie, over 116 years ago as one of the largest residences in New Zealand. By building in an exclusive and private location, Rhodes made sure that his 'little hill among hills' (popular translation for Otahuna) was a hidden treasure – an element which very much resides at the lodge today.

Captivated by its beauty and potential, current owners Milo Refo and Hall Cannon bought this intimate lodge in 2007 after leaving Manhattan in search of a place to create a luxurious retreat – a spectacular experience for even the most cultured of travellers.

And it certainly lives up to its name. Boasting seven lavish suites, the lodge combines original nineteenth-century architecture and grace, with all that you would expect from a luxury retreat. Each suite is distinctive in its own right, draped in historical richness as well as exclusive interiors.



Rhodes suite

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Garret suite



The wine cellar



Breakfast is also an affair, one that definitely can't go without mentioning. What better way to start the day, then, with a chef at hand to deliver whatever your taste buds desire. A variety of freshly baked bread and pastries, freshly picked fruit, and cereals greet you on arrival – and it only takes a couple of moments for the ever-smiling Jimmy, or one of his capable chefs, to whip up a hot breakfast or fresh juice that leaves you feeling very satisfied for the day ahead.

The lodge is perfect for a bit of R&R: play some tennis, read a book, or explore the surroundings of the lodge. Take a walk through the beautiful daffodil fields and orchard, or borrow one of the lodge's bicycles and discover nearby Tai Tapu. Be sure to stop at the local café for a great coffee, and visit the Longueville Gallery if you are riding past.

While relaxation and exploration of the lodge and its surroundings are quite enough to fill any mini break, if you want to take in a little more of the New Zealand culture then there is plenty to choose from. For the wine connoisseurs, visit one of the surrounding vineyards for lunch and a wine-tasting tour.

For a more scenic adventure, visit the little town of Akaroa. My suggestion would be to hire a car and take the tourist drive into this small, picturesque 'French' seaside town. The one-hour drive from Otahuna's gates takes you over the crater of an extinct volcano, with spectacular views of the harbour and farms below.



Daffodil fields



Sign to Akaroa



Akaroa harbour



Tourist Drive to Akaroa

Once in Akaroa, you will not be bored. The town is full of beautiful art boutiques, cafés and homeware stores – plenty to do. The harbour is home to the world's smallest dolphins (Hector's dolphins), which can be experienced on one of the day cruises. You will also likely see seals, penguins, and marine salmon, as well as a variety of seabirds. All tours can be arranged by the Otahuna team, and they have plenty of suggestions for places to go – just ask!

No matter what way you choose to spend your day, make sure you are back to enjoy pre-dinner drinks and canapés served in the lounge. It is the perfect chance to catch up with other guests. And if you desire, your host may treat you to a tale or two about the history of the lodge – all the more special with the blazing fireplace in the background!

Home to beautiful architecture, art, exemplary service, and the unforgettable dining experiences, Otahuna Lodge is simply New Zealand at its finest. A unique and opulent encounter with history, coupled with luxury even the most discerning traveller would appreciate – add Otahuna Lodge to your list of must-visit destinations.

You will not be disappointed. •



The lounge

GETTING THERE

To really complete this mini-escape in style, fly with Emirates, the epitome of luxury and comfort. You cannot beat this airline's premium fares. The in-flight entertainment, exquisite food menu, to-die-for wine list, and impeccable service will certainly make your journey to the lodge a flight to remember.

Emirates operates 28 flights per week to New Zealand – daily to Christchurch from Sydney, and daily to Auckland from Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. Return business class fares across the Tasman to Auckland from Sydney are from \$1,509 and from \$775 one way; from \$1,085 one way in first class, and from \$2,129 return.

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