



## POSH LODGING

*New Zealand's Otahuna Lodge offers honeymooners personalized luxury in a stunning setting by Emma Sloyley*

IMAGINE, IF YOU WILL, being invited to spend the weekend at a grand country estate surrounded by immaculate 30-acre grounds. Then imagine that the hosts of this estate are two of your most worldly, dapper and entertaining friends. And finally, imagine that you're waited on hand and foot by expert staff, plied with revelatory dishes courtesy of chef Jimmy McIntyre, and never expected to make your own bed. This scenario pretty much describes Otahuna Lodge, just outside of Christchurch, New Zealand. Though the hosts in question, Hall Cannon and Miles Refo, aren't really your friends, you'll feel like they are by the end of your stay. Even taking into account New Zealand's high standard of accommodations, thanks to its many luxury lodges, Otahuna is a standout.

On arrival, our car sweeps down the long driveway, lined with stately oak trees, and up to the 1895 Queen Anne mansion, where our hosts greet us, looking every bit the English country gentlemen—in spite of both being American transplants. I'm shown to my room, one of seven elegantly decorated suites that each pay homage in their own way to the original

owners, the Rhodes family, who really rewrote the book on fine living for New Zealand's landed gentry. My windows overlook the front lawns and the rocky peak of Mount Sugarloaf, which changes mood constantly, from mist-shrouded to dark and mysterious.

When Cannon and Refo took over the lodge in 2006, they retained the best original features, like the grand staircase, hand-painted ceilings and antique wood detailing, while gently bringing the estate into the 21st century with a commercial kitchen, capacious, en suite bathrooms, a 1,100-bottle wine cellar and a Wega coffee machine that dispenses perfect espresso every time. They also filled the house with contemporary artworks, all by New Zealand artists, which act as a refreshingly modern counterpoint to



**THE ROYAL TREATMENT** Each one of Otahuna's spacious suites feature 19th-century antiques, luxe fabrics and views of the estate's lawns and tranquil gardens.

the traditional late-Victorian decor.

Each night is a study in how to host a sublime evening. All the guests gather for cocktails in front of a crackling fire in the lounge, then repair to the romantic dining room (the home's most formal space) for a five-course degustation meal, played out by candlelight that flickers on the antique gilded wallpaper. Days can be briskly active—Otahuna can arrange helicopter tours of the region's many outstanding wineries or any number of other activities such as bungee jumping, hiking or heli-skiing—or pleasantly sedentary. The estate has an abundance of cozy corners and nooks for reading or wandering. I spent an afternoon exploring the gardens and orchards with one of the gardeners, who pointed out wonders such as mushrooms growing at the foot of an oak, a pear tree laden with surreally large fruit and a secluded little clearing where Heaton Rhodes used to sit and contemplate life. I even got to meet the bossy, boisterous flock of free-range hens that provide the lodge's eggs.

Otahuna is one of those places where you get the sense that no request would be too much to arrange. Guests can observe cooking demonstrations in the homey, country-style kitchen, its shelves lined with glass jars of preserves, or arrange a first-day massage in the tiny spa to work out any jet-lag kinks. If having a romantic dinner for two in the outdoor wine cellar (which was once a gamehouse where the owners would hang venison to dry) strikes your fancy, just say the word. From the most decadent indulgences—the helicopter landing on the hotel's front lawn to take me on a winery tour was certainly a highlight—to quiet time by the fire with a glass of New Zealand's finest pinot noir, every moment here is a perfect snapshot of the good life.

Rooms from \$1,065, includes breakfast and dinner with wine pairings. For more information, visit [otahuna.co.nz](http://otahuna.co.nz).