

THE ARTFUL LODGER

It's not easy to identify what New Zealand's luxury lodges have in common, since at this top end of the market, each is doing its damndest to establish a point of difference. But aside from idyllic rural locations, the best among them share excellent food offerings, much of it drawn from the surrounding estates. Hollywood film stars and Texan oil billionaires fly halfway round the world in search of privacy and seclusion, yet because these lodges are all screened well away from public view, the average New Zealander scarcely realises they exist. **DAVID BURTON** uncovers six of the best.

ALPINE LAKE: JASON LAW/PNZ

NEW ZEALAND

MATAKAURI LODGE

Perched on a bluff over Lake Wakatipu, Matakauri Lodge offers breathtaking views of Mt Cedric, especially in winter.

Each of the eight outlying cottages along the lakeside is subtly positioned for privacy, but all have big picture windows to catch The Remarkables at sunset. The huge beds are positioned high for the lake view.

Breakfast is delivered on a tray, but dinnertime sees a five-course performance by chef Jonathan Rogers in the lodge dining room.

The dining room is open to the public, but the prices are high – \$95 a head for lunch and \$195 at dinner (excluding wine).

So that guests will never have to eat the same dish twice during their stay, Rogers changes the menu every day.

About 95 per cent of Matakauri's summer clientele are Americans, so the kitchen must meet their expectations for New Zealand lamb, oysters, mussels and paua. These are supplemented with luxuries such as quail breast and confit leg, served with nectarine, pickled walnuts, ginger and a jus flavoured with locally foraged wild thyme.

A kitchen garden yields unusual herbs such as purslane and miner's cress, along with zucchinis grown mostly for their flowers.
matakaurilodge.com

LOCHMARA LODGE

Nestled in among the bush in an idyllic Marlborough Sounds inlet, Lochmara Lodge appeals to nature children of all ages.

There's a wounded animal hospital and toy chicken/pig farms for the kids. Adults have sculpture to enjoy, while the whole family will be taken with kakariki, or native green parrots, which Lochmara is breeding for release into the wild.

From the dining room, guests look out over the same waters that have yielded their evening dinner.

Mussels, salmon and blue cod, the Sounds' holy trinity, are cooked misleadingly simply by Kiwi-Liverpudlian chef Jon Monaghan, who trained at The Ritz both in London and in Paris, then cooked at Awaroa Lodge and Botswana Butchery in Queenstown.

A former backpackers, Lochmara Lodge is now upgraded to units and chalets, each with a view from a balcony.

The old backpackers' bunks can still be seen strung together up a bank with chains into an artwork titled *Dodgy Corporate Ladder*, which the public is forbidden to climb.

But after a nightcap, you are permitted to ascend sideways up the Dodgy Staircase to a private little hillock owned by Lochmara, there to lounge in a cluster of giant hammocks and gaze at the stars. lochmara.co.nz

OTAHUNA LODGE

Otahuna is a 40-room country house, perhaps the grandest and most famous in Canterbury, built in 1895 by Heaton Rhodes, a gentleman farmer and former minister of defence.

Bought in a rundown condition by current owners Hall Cannon and Miles Refo back in 2006, it was painstakingly restored and reopened as a luxury lodge the following year. En-suite bathrooms have been installed, but the original ceiling colours have been reinstated and antique wallpapers preserved, along with the extensive kauri and rimu joinery. The house was bought empty, but has since been filled with antiques and an art collection.

Otahuna originated as a working, self-sustaining rural estate and in many ways it still is: the walled kitchen garden and 100-year-old orchard provide more than 30 types of fruit, vegetables and nuts, while the restored melon house yields four different types of melon. The former apple house is now given over to mushroom cultivation, while the old game cellar now doubles as a wine cellar and a curing room for home-made prosciutto, coppa, bacon, sausages, speck and lardo. Chef Jimmy McIntyre is thus able to serve a dish such as melon wedges wrapped in prosciutto with rocket, assembled entirely from estate-raised produce. otahuna.co.nz





OPPOSITE: Roasted scallops with potatoes, pickled leeks and horseradish at Matakauri Lodge **THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** Otahuna Lodge; salmon cornettos at Otahuna Lodge; Lochmara Lodge; Matakauri Lodge; Queen Charlotte Sound, home to Lochmara Lodge

