true north

The picturesque North Island of NEW ZEALAND is brimming with natural beauty and spectacular accommodation just waiting to be discovered by EMILY TAYLOR

There are numerous reasons why New Zealand is one of our top holiday destinations: its handy proximity to Australia makes travel a breeze, a laidback vibe delivers a sense of calm as soon as you step off the plane and the breathtaking topography is like something straight from a film set. Yet when it comes to choosing a vacation location, it’s often the adventure-packed South Island that gets all the attention. If you’re partial to more relaxed pursuits, though, look north. Capital city Auckland is a hive of new hotels, buzzy restaurants and sweeping harbour views. You can even jump across to local favourite Waiheke Island on a 40-minute ferry ride for wine tasting, walking trails and white-sand beaches. But to really get away and immerse yourself in New Zealand’s world-famous lodge culture, drive north to the beautiful Bay of Islands or circle down to Hawke’s Bay. Here you can enjoy a break from reality via Robertson Lodges’ spectacular North Island icons, The Lodge at Kauri Cliffs and The Farm at Cape Kidnappers. The family-owned properties of financier and philanthropist Julian Robertson deliver unique experiences alongside warm local hospitality with a side order of easy luxury. Honeymooners, take note.
If you’re more coast than country, journey north from the capital to the Bay of Islands and check into this award-winning accommodation, which has been lauded as one of the best in Australia and New Zealand. Experienced golfing types will likely have added a game at The Lodge’s on-site course to their bucket list—and for good reason. The championship 18-holes boast gasp-inducing vistas over the Cavalli Islands that will have even non-players begging for a seat in the cart. Not a golfer? Book an appointment at the onsite spa, where stylish treatment rooms open out onto the forest. There’s also fishing, surfing and heritage walks nearby, if you can tear yourself away from your suite with its oversized king bed, deep bath and open fireplace. While away an afternoon on your private balcony, marvelling at the beauty of the country’s Far North coast, before strolling to a four-course feast in the Hamptons-inspired main lodge. Here, the relaxed mood and thoughtfully furnished spaces, complete with roaring fires, board games, telescope and even a grand piano, evoke a feeling of staying with (very stylish) friends.

GETTING THERE
Kauri Cliffs is a four-hour drive or 40-minute flight from Auckland airport, while Cape Kidnappers is a six-hour road journey or 55 minutes by plane from the capital. To travel between lodges, allow nine hours to drive or splash out on a scenic helicopter charter that takes about three hours.

THE COST
Low-season prices start from $786 plus 15 per cent tax per person per night for double occupancy in a suite, with breakfast, pre-dinner drinks and dinner. Visit robertsonlodges.com

THE FARM AT CAPE KIDNAPPERS
About six hours’ drive south-east of Auckland lies a farm—but not as you know it. Nestled high on a working sheep and cattle station and set back from the rugged chalky cliffs that drop vertically into Hawke’s Bay, this luxe rural lodge boasts one of the North Island’s most spectacular outlooks. The main building and its pretty pool area conjure images of a country chateau, and comparisons to the French way of life don’t stop there. Set within New Zealand’s oldest and second-largest wine region, great local tipples are plentiful and accompany locally grown and responsibly sourced food, to be expected of a Relais & Châteaux property.

One of the major drawcards for keen golfers is The Farm’s access to the world-famous Cape Kidnappers course. With point-blank views of the Pacific, a round here will be memorable for beginners and pro players alike. And whether you’re having a hit or taking a hike along the property’s rambling trails, keep your eyes peeled for rare New Zealand birds: the entire location is situated within a wildlife sanctuary, so local fauna is plentiful. Guests even have the opportunity to meet the kōtuku in its natural habitat as part of a program to monitor and preserve this endangered species.

THE LODGE AT KAURI CLIFFS
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THE FARM AT CAPE KIDNAPPERS
The Farm’s picturesque pool, ideal for a dip after a day in nature

THE LODGE AT KAURI CLIFFS
Views to the Cavalli Islands from The Lodge’s famous golf course

WHILE YOU’RE IN THE AREA...

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VIEW FROM THE TOP
Watch the Tasman Sea collide with the Pacific Ocean from the iconic lighthouse at Cape Reinga. The north-westernmost tip of New Zealand is an important sacred site to the Māori people.

SATURDAY GOURMET
Kerikeri’s Old Packhouse Market delivers locally grown produce, handmade wines and breads plus arts and crafts within friendly surroundings every weekend. theoldpackhousemarket.co.nz

LORD OF THE FOREST
Step beneath the canopy of ancient Waipoua Forest to discover Tāne Mahuta, New Zealand’s largest and possibly oldest living kauri tree: more than 50 metres tall and thought to be as many as 2,500 years old.