

# Cape Kidnappers: Down on the farm in beautiful Hawke's Bay

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Cape Kidnappers. Photo / Supplied



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**A special day with a special lady is celebrated in style at a remarkable resort, writes Tim Roxborough**

It took us a while to realise what they were. Sitting in front of the fire in our room, sipping on the Cloudy Bay Pelorus that had greeted us when we'd opened our door, three sculptures above the bed had caught our eye.

They were curved at the edges, had patterns of circular and rectangular holes, and all up, made for some mighty fine bedroom art.



Cape Kidnappers' Premier Lodge Suite. Photo / Supplied

Once upon a time they also would've made for some mighty fine tractor seats too.

"They're old tractor seats!" I shouted like a contestant on a game show and, mystery solved, we set about trying to appreciate every inch of what was really a remarkable hotel suite.

This was The Farm at Cape Kidnappers — among the absolute elite of New Zealand luxury lodges — and we had no intention of being blase about any of it. Even the tractor seats attached to the wall.

Wanting to take my fiancée somewhere special for her birthday, I realised it was exactly two years since the then-single version of me had done a feature on Kauri Cliffs, a sister property of Cape Kidnappers. As a travel writer, I've stayed in everything from one-star dives where I've had to plug the sinkhole to stop the cockroaches, to the kinds of properties I've almost felt guilty to be a guest at. Almost. But — cue the violins — Kauri Cliffs was the place I remember feeling greatest the pang of wanting someone to share it with.

From the architecture, the setting, the ocean views, the dining, all the way through to the level of service, Kauri Cliffs was the right kind of outrageous. Fast-forward to the present and what do you know, there's a lady who answered "yes" to a certain important question. And so the time seemed right to return to somewhere like Kauri Cliffs, only this time swapping out the Bay of Islands for Hawke's Bay.

As with Kauri Cliffs, The Farm at Cape Kidnappers is owned and created by American billionaire Julian Robertson. And also like Kauri Cliffs, The Farm at Cape Kidnappers has a smallish number of luxury suites (22), a near-palatial owner's cottage (available for guests) and a central focus around a grand lodge that's (mostly) separate from where you sleep. Both properties are about a decade old and if Kauri Cliffs recalls the mansions of North Carolina, Cape Kidnappers has echoes of exclusive North American skiing or hunting lodges.

When you combine that with unmistakably Kiwi rural landscapes, not to mention world top 100-rated golf courses, you have a winning formula. Especially when those landscapes are as striking as the rolling hills, valleys, forests and dramatic cliffs of Cape Kidnappers.

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Even the experience of arriving at the front gate gives you a sense this is going to be something beyond the usual nice hotel or resort. You buzz reception, the gates open and then you drive. And then you drive some more. And then a full 15 minutes later, you round a corner and pull up at the lodge. At almost 2500ha, this is no lifestyle block.



The incredible view to the cape after which the resort is named. Photo / Supplied

Several staff are waiting to welcome you by name, take your car somewhere discreet and your belongings to your suite. All of this while you're ushered inside the main lodge for a glass of wine as you gaze at all the stone, wood and, wait ... is that a Colin McCahon on the wall? Yes it is. Initially it's a strange feeling having handed over not just your vehicle, but everything you've brought for the holiday, but go with it.

When you later unlock your front door and see not just the bubbles on ice, but your coats hanging and the bags neatly positioned inside the walk-in wardrobe, you realise this is next-level relaxation.

Making use of the free — yes free — mini-bar (everything except wine and spirits and including daily baked cookies), we set about doing just that. The suite is in earthy tones, has high ceilings with wooden doors and beams and a balcony that overlooks farmland out towards the Pacific. The open-shuttered view from the bathtub in the late afternoon sun looked like it was from some dreamy painting.

With the bubbles, the fireplace and that view we could have stayed in the suite the rest of the night and indeed, in-room fine dining is available, but management had a surprise in store for my fiancée's birthday. One of the things setting Cape Kidnappers apart is that you can have your meals whenever you want, and with a personally

tailored menu. And if it happens to be a birthday, you may just find yourselves lucky enough to be eating with the services of a private butler in a cylindrical room known as "The Snug".

It deliberately resembles an old farm silo and with its fireplace, circular couch, woollen blankets and sweeping vantage point over the farm below, it's a perfect hideout for cold winter days with a good book in hand. Then at night, a table for two appears, with menus that take any pre-trip mentions of culinary preferences into account.

My only requirement was "no tripe!" which I'm sure included the exclamation mark in my email and harks back to a disastrous restaurant experience with a grumpy Italian chef a couple of years ago. My fiancée doesn't eat red meat (no email exclamation mark used there) and we were each handed differing menu booklets, printed especially for us.



A bathroom at The Lodge at Cape Kidnappers. Photo / Supplied

Whether the pork belly or the tarakihi, or even the fact they let me combine two dessert options into one (chocolate ganache with the homemade icecream thank you very much), the food was spectacular and was matched with a couple of glasses from a wine

list dominated by New Zealand varieties.

Early next morning I sneaked a peek through the curtains with every aim of going straight back to bed — and a lifetime of deriding sunrises in favour of more glamorous sunsets suddenly came to a halt. A sky of blood orange and pale yellow and an almost glowing blue sea had us reaching for the cameras to such an extent we had to consciously just stop and take it all in. We didn't go back to sleep.

Besides, there was too much we wanted to do. There was the theme-park fun of a can-am property tour, the stunning "Wildflower Walk" to the cliffs and, best of all, a 4WD tour to see the gannet colony. And not just any gannet colony — reportedly the largest, most accessible mainland gannet colony in the world.

In winter, much of the colony has flown to warmer climates and hearing how the young make the more than 2000km flight across the Tasman then return years later is mind-blowing.

Then it was back in the 4WD and home to our suite, the herds of sheep and cattle we passed a reminder that this is still very much a working farm. Albeit a working farm with a world-class lodge and an excellent use for decommissioned tractor seats.



Inside The Lodge at Cape Kidnappers. Photo / Supplied

## CHECKLIST

## **Getting there:**

### **Air New Zealand**

flies from Auckland to Napier. Cape Kidnappers is a 30-minute drive from Napier.

**Staying there:** The Cape Kidnappers "Lodge Life" winter special (until September 30, 2017) lets you stay for \$1650+ GST per room (two-person occupancy) and gives you a \$400 activities credit. The special also includes breakfast and dinner, as well as pre-dinner drinks and canapes.

**Further information:** See [capekidnappers.com](http://capekidnappers.com)