

HOUSTON'S TOP DOCTORS: TRUST YOUR HEALTH TO OUR CITY'S BEST



HOUSTON'S PREMIERE
LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE

PITCH ACTOR

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"I'm amazed
at how much
HOUSTON has
changed since
I was a kid. It's
so incredibly
DIVERSE."

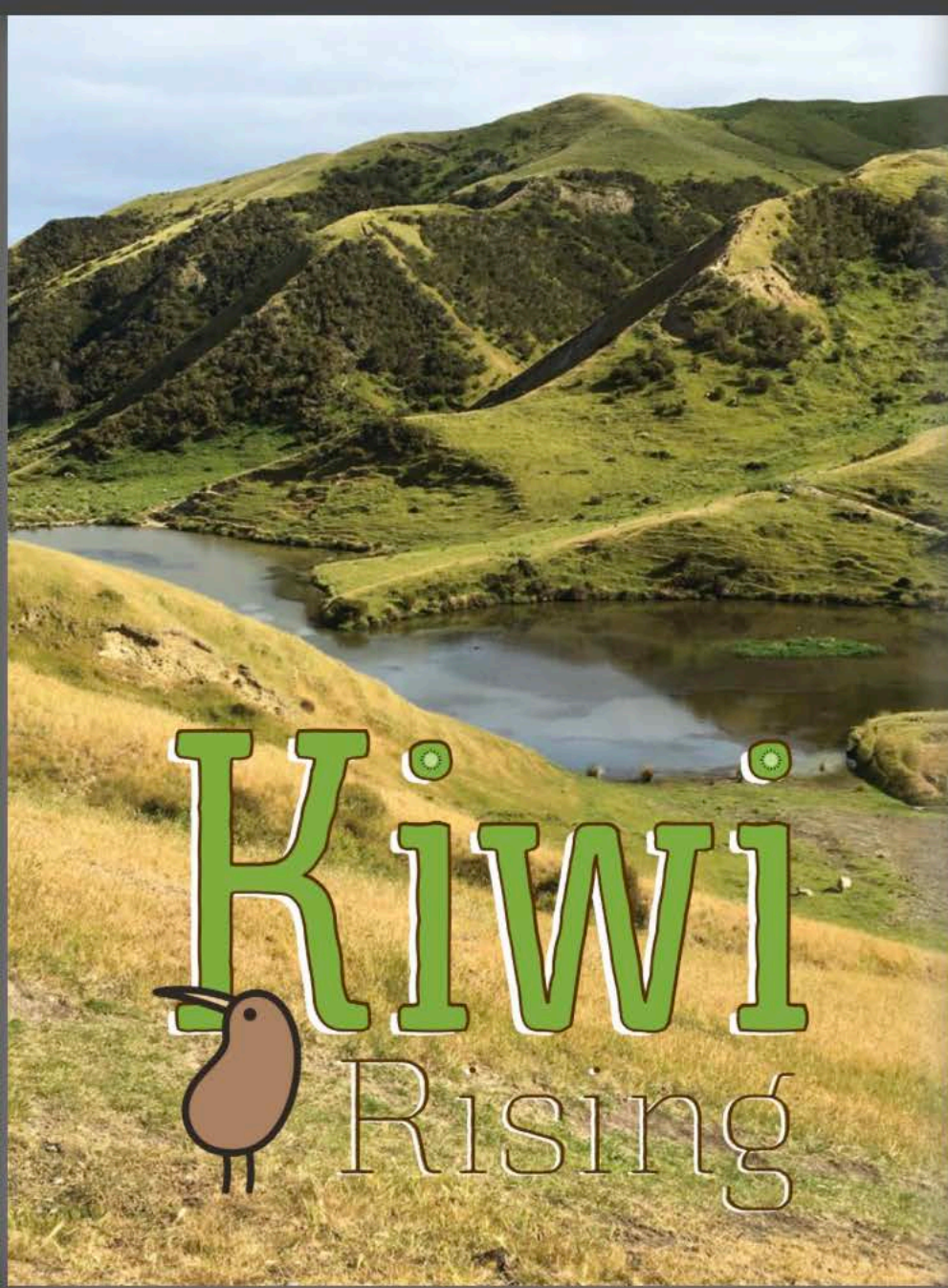
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MOST

Beautiful
Houstonians

by Warner Roberts

GET MORE
ENERGY INSTANTLY

5 THINGS
TO DO
NOW



Kiwi Rising



Most Americans dream of visiting New Zealand, and thanks to a new nonstop flight, those dreams can easily come true for Houstonians.

by Laurette M. Veres

NEW ZEALAND IS A COMMITMENT. BUT THE INTRODUCTION OF A DIRECT FLIGHT TO AUCKLAND ON AIR NEW ZEALAND MAKES GETTING THERE MUCH EASIER FOR HOUSTONIANS. For starters, the flight is perfectly timed, leaving at 8 p.m. Premium economy seating includes hearty and surprisingly tasty meals that are smartly paired with delicious New Zealand wines. The flight also includes New Zealand films, entertainment and a high-tech, in-seat console that allows you to instant-message fellow passengers. With all of these thoughtful amenities, the 14-hour flight will literally fly by (pun intended), like it did for me on a recent bucket-list visit. As long as you mentally prepare for the long journey, and enjoy a movie and take a nap while on board, you'll be refreshed and ready to greet this beautiful, dynamic country.

TOURIST TIME The perfect start to a day in Auckland is to venture up the SkyTower. Viewing the breathtaking city from 1,076 feet above gives you the chance to really see the expanse of the harbor and get a look at the interesting buildings and neighborhoods. I was there during the holidays, so the giant Santa on the side of a four-story building caught my eye.

Afterward, I stopped by the Symonds Street Cemetery, the first official cemetery in Auckland, which has been closed to burials since 1886. All that walking worked up my appetite, so the next stop was High Tea at the Langham Hotel, which is a great holiday tradition in New Zealand. You can enjoy some bubbly before selecting from more than 30 different tea flavors, like my pick, the white blossom tea, a delightful blend of white tea leaves handpicked from China mountaintops.

LODGE LIFE When you're ready to leave the city, it's time to immerse yourself in New Zealand's lodge experience, which allows travelers to see many facets of the land while enjoying five-star service. Three well-known lodges are American-owned but offer distinct New Zealand experiences. The common denominator: stunning accommodations and world-class food



OPPOSITE PAGE: CAPE KIDNAPPERS FARMLAND

ABOVE: THE SHEEP OF KAURI CLIFFS

overseen by group executive chef Dale Gartland. With their superb cuisine and exceptional wine cellar, I found myself looking forward to drinks and canapés every evening before dinner. Many guests follow similar itineraries, and it's fun to see familiar faces as you compare travel stories. As a major bonus, because there are no security checks or lines, interisland flights are fast, easy and carefree. Without further adieu, here's an inside look at the lodges.

The Lodge at Kauri Cliffs

First stop: Bay of Islands and The Lodge at Kauri Cliffs. This quaint lodge is set on 6,000 acres of farm, forest and beach land.

You'll be amazed by the Kauri trees here, which are anywhere from 700 to 900 years old. This slow-growing tree was previously used to build houses and repair ships.

You can get to know the property by taking a guided quad-bike tour. I followed Malcolm from SeaToys, and also opted to see what it's like to be a farmer with farm manager Jonathan. Although I'm from Texas, I was up close and personal with more sheep and cattle on this excursion than ever before! You can ride through the Pine Forest and livestock-filled paddocks while enjoying expansive, breathtaking views of the Cavalli Islands and Pacific Ocean.

Three private beaches and an on-property waterfall give you the opportunity for a quick swim. The pink beach is a great place for a picnic; it's also a breeding ground for the tuturiwhatu and other native New Zealand birdlife.

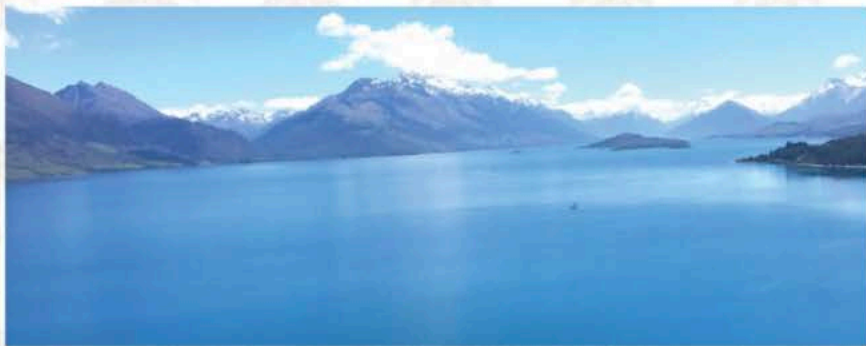
But whatever you do, don't miss the spa, featuring New Zealand manuka honey, known for its healing qualities, in many of the treatments.

Once a week, a local dance troop comes to the property. While my fellow visitors and I sip on Villa Maria Sauvignon Blanc, the Kerikeri's Kapa Haka's authentic performance offers a glimpse into the area's cultural heritage. The dancers mingle with the guests, inviting us to get involved in the performance.

Most of the fun is available on site, and with surroundings this luxurious, you won't want to leave. However, some off-property options include: Manginangina, a park where nature walks teach the story of the forest with massive trees and lush vegetation. Here, see how nature



PHOTOS BY LAURETTE M. VERES



evolved from young trees to the mature, established forest during a guided walking tour of the Puketi Forest. Barbara from Adventure Puketi can arrange a private or group tour for you. This is a great activity for team building, conferences and weddings. The Marsden Estate Winery is also a picturesque place for lunch or a charming location for a family affair.

From my balcony, which overlooked the golf course, I could see the Southern Cross constellation. It definitely made me appreciate the true wonder that is New Zealand.

The Farm at Cape Kidnappers

The town of Napier is unique, simply due to its art deco architecture, a rarity in the country. The city was rebuilt after a storm, at a time when art deco was popular. The land at Hawkes Bay is extremely fertile, making it perfect for ranching, farming and growing wine grapes. It's here that you'll find The Farm at Cape Kidnappers, the next stop on your luxury lodge tour.

The Farm at Cape Kidnappers is a working sheep and cattle ranch. It's also a nature sanctuary with fencing around the property to protect the flightless Kiwi from predators. The Kiwi is the national bird of New Zealand, yet most locals have never seen one. (How many Americans have seen a Bald Eagle?) The Kiwi Discovery Walk is an excursion unique to this property. Two full-time staffers are committed to kiwi protection, tracking 130 kiwis each day. Join one of these experienced sanctuary guides as they monitor kiwi chicks previously released on the property. You can see everything as they check the radio transmitters, and weigh and measure the birds to monitor their well-being. Finding a kiwi is not guaranteed, but if you're lucky, you'll hold one before the tour is over.

A great way to see the 6,000-acre property is to hitch a ride in a jeep as it traverses the vast terrain. You'll grab the roll bar on this real-life roller coaster ride until you make it safely to the serene beach. You can also visit the shearing barn and learn about the crew of shearers who arrive annually. See vast terrain changes and end up at the largest, most accessible mainland colony of gannets in the world. The gannets, birds slightly larger than the seagull, have distinctive blue markings around their eyes and a pale gold crown. Visiting the colony, you'll see adults and the young nesting; look closely to see eggs and chicks in various stages of development. You'll be amazed at how close you can get—it's nothing short of a National

Geographic experience. The birds can be seen from September until early May when they leave New Zealand and fly to Australia. In September, they return and build their nests, ready for the hatching of chicks during December and January.

Designed by legendary golf architect Tom Doak, the Cape Kidnappers par 71 golf course challenges golfers of all skill levels. The course is located above the ocean, providing dramatic cliff views. Avid golfer or not, this course is an absolute must.

We only left this property once, and it was in search of wine. We saw the sights on a bike ride that started, stopped and ended at various vineyards. Lunch at Elephant Hill winery was perfectly paired with the delectable food they had to offer.

Matakauri Lodge

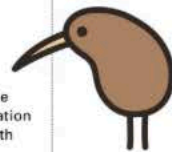
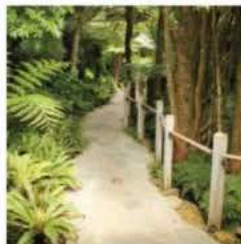
Just when you think New Zealand can't get any better, you step foot in Queenstown and the gorgeous Matakauri Lodge. This is the crowning jewel in the trifecta of luxury lodges on our journey. Prince William and the Duchess of Cambridge have been guests. Need we say more?

Queenstown is the "adventure capital," where bungee jumping was invented. It's also a quaint town with great pubs, restaurants and shopping. A few minutes from town is Matakauri—a picture-perfect location on the banks of Lake Wakatipu framed by the Remarkables mountain range and Cecil Peak. Taking advantage of the view is a must; it's a good thing the main lodge and each of the 12 separate guest suites feature a wall of windows that overlook the lake.

Speaking of the view, soaking in the tub will become a nightly ritual. For dinner, the view is spectacular: You are surrounded by so much water, it looks as though you could be on a ship. The bounty is local and plentiful with a degustation menu carefully curated to perfectly pair with local vino.

If you've golfed at each stop in New Zealand, crown the trip off with an extreme golf experience like none other. Liftoff with Over the Top Helicopters and enjoy a scenic flight over Queenstown before landing on Cecil Peak. Tee off from 4,500 feet at the world's most picturesque golf course, and enjoy a wine and cheese basket to celebrate.

New Zealand is a once-in-a-lifetime trip for many Americans. My advice: Mark it off your bucket list now and have an experience for the ages. **H**



OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: CAPE KIDNAPPERS' COLONY OF GANNETS; KAURI CLIFF'S BAY OF ISLANDS LODGE; FRESH MUSSELS, DRINKS BY THE BEACH, MATAKAURI LODGE; LAKE WAKATIPU, SHRIMP SALAD ON CAPE KIDNAPPERS

THIS PAGE: KAURI CLIFF'S FERN-LINED TRAIL