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Most Americans dream of visiting New Zealand and— thanks to a new direct flight— those dreams can easily come true!

New Zealand is a commitment. The introduction of a direct flight to Auckland on Air New Zealand makes this commitment much easier for Houstonians. The flight is perfectly timed— leaving at 8:00pm. Premium Economy seating includes hearty, and surprisingly tasty food. Air New Zealand has also smartly paired their food with delicious New Zealand wines. The flight also includes New Zealand Films, entertainment, and a high-tech, in-seat console allowing you to instant message fellow passengers. With all of these great accommodations, the fourteen hour flight literally flew by (pun intended).

Kiwi Rising

Story and Photography by **Laurette Veres**



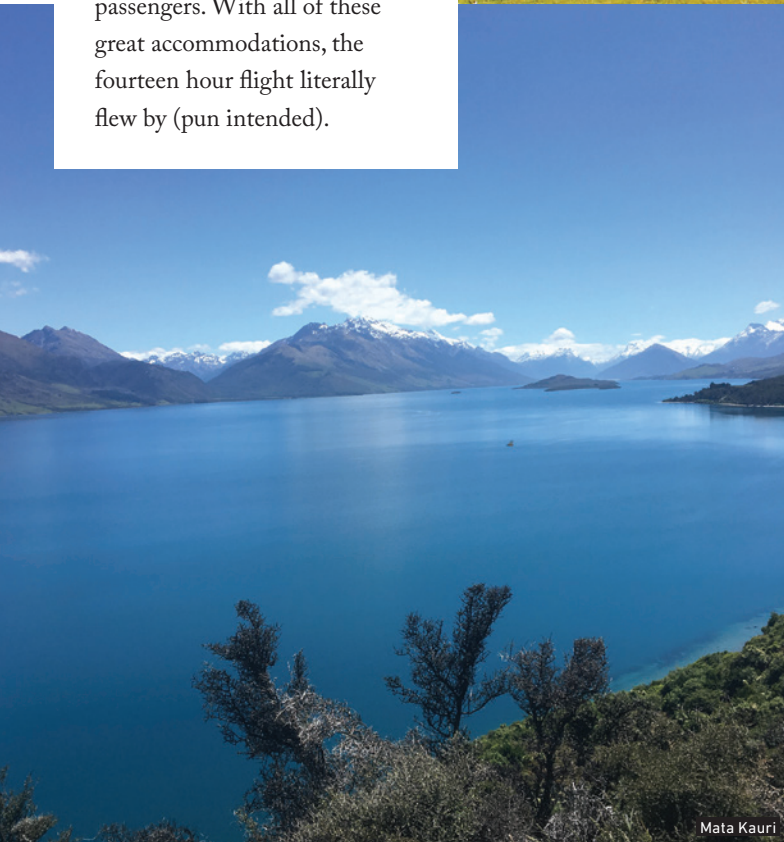
Mata Kauri

Mentally prepare for it, enjoy a movie, take a nap, and you'll be refreshed and ready to greet this beautiful country. The flight lands in Auckland, which is a great launch pad to tour this dynamic country.

The perfect start to a day in Auckland is to go up the SkyTower right in Auckland. Viewing this breathtaking city from 1,076 feet above gives you the chance to really see the expanse of the harbor and to get a look at 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.

I walked to the Langham Hotel and had time to tour the Symonds Street Cemetery. This was the first official cemetery in Auckland, which has been closed to burials since 1886. High Tea at the Langham is a great holiday tradition. Enjoy some bubbly before selecting from over 30 different tea flavors. I opted for the white blossom tea, a delightful blend of white tea handpicked from China's mountaintops.

The lodge experience in New Zealand allows travelers to traverse most of the country, and see many facets of the land all the while enjoying five-star, luxurious service. Three well-known lodges are American-owned and offer distinct New Zealand experiences. All of them also offer stunning accommodations and first class food overseen by group Executive Chef Dale Gartland.



Mata Kauri

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FLAVORS



Mata Kauri



Kauri Cliffs Bay of Islands



The Lodge at Kauri Cliffs

With their superb cuisine and an exceptional wine cellar, you'll find yourself looking forward to drinks and canapés each evening before dinner. Many guests follow similar itineraries and it's fun to see familiar faces as you compare travel stories.

The Lodge at Kauri Cliffs

Because there are no security checks or lines, inter-island flights are fast, easy, and carefree. First stop: Bay of Islands and The Lodge at Kauri Cliffs. This quaint lodge is

set into 6,000 acres of farm, forest, and beach land. The Kauri trees here are anywhere from 700 to 900 years old. This slow growing tree was previously used to build houses and repair ships. Get to know the property by taking a guided quad-bike tour. Follow Malcolm

from SeaToys around the property or 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! 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 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. Manuka honey is known for its healing qualities; so hop on over to the spa for a signature Manuka honey treatment.

Once a week a local dance troop comes to the property. While we 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 right on property and with surroundings this luxurious, you won't want to leave. However, some off-site options include Manginangina, a park where nature walks teach the story of the forest with its massive trees and lush vegetation. Here, see how the forest 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 and a charming rehearsal dinner location.

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.

FINDING
A KIWI IS NOT
GUARANTEED, BUT
IF YOU'RE LUCKY,
YOU'LL HOLD ONE
BEFORE THIS
TOUR IS OVER



Kauri Cliffs Bay of Islands



The Farm at Cape Kidnappers

The town of Napier is unique simply due to its unique architecture. It's one of the few cities featuring Art Deco architecture. The city was re-built after a storm at a time when Art Deco was popular. The land here at Hawkes Bay is extremely fertile making it perfect for ranching, farming, and growing wine grapes. It's here you'll find The Farm at Cape Kidnappers, another 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 not 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. Get up close and personal 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 this tour is over.

A great way to see the 6,000 acre property is to hitch a ride in a jeep as it traverses this 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



The Lodge at Kauri Cliffs



Kauri Cliffs Bay of Islands



Cape Kidnappers



Mata Kauri



Kauri Cliffs Bay of Islands

Matakauri Lodge

Just when you think New Zealand can't get any better, you step foot into 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 stayed here. Need we say more?

Queenstown of New Zealand is the "adventure capital" where bungee jumping was invented. It's also a cute 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 an absolute MUST. The main lodge and each of the twelve 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 pair perfectly with New Zealand wines.

If you've golfed at each stop in New Zealand, crown the trip off with an extreme golf experience like none other. Lift off 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. Why not mark it off your bucket list now and have a honeymoon for the ages?

annually. See vast terrain changes and end up at the largest, most accessible mainland colony of gannets in the world. The gannets have distinctive blue markings around their eyes and a pale gold crown. They are a slightly larger than seagulls. Visiting the colony, you'll see adults and 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 was nothing less than a National Geographic experience. Visitors to the colony will see adults and their young nesting in rows, carrying out their daily routine.

The birds can be seen from September until early May when they leave New Zealand and fly for Australia. In September, they return and build their nests, ready for the hatching of chicks during December and January. Due to the migratory nature of the birds, this activity is only available from September through May. 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. See the sights on a bike ride that starts, stops, and ends at various vineyards. Lunch at Elephant Hill winery was perfectly paired with the delectable food that they had to offer.

ESSENTIALS

www.KauriCliffs.com

SEATOYS

www.hendersonbayrentals.com

ADVENTURE PUKETI

www.forestwalks.com

www.capekidnappers.com

www.elephanthill.co.nz

TAKARO TRAILS

www.takarotrails.co.nz

www.matakaurilodge.com

OVER THE TOP

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