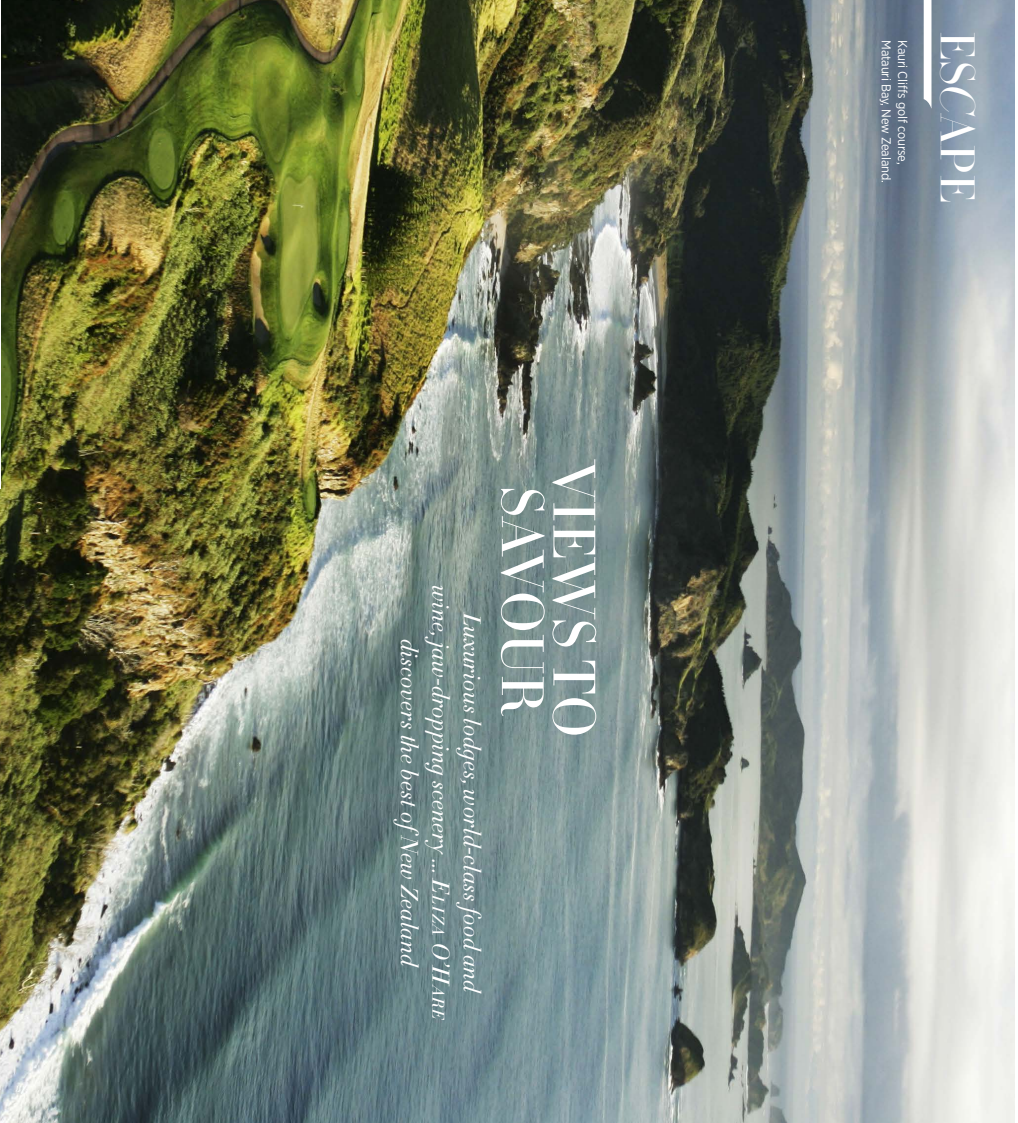


Kauri Cliffs golf course, Matakauri Bay, New Zealand.



VIEWS TO SAVOUR

Luxurious lodges, world-class food and wine, jaw-dropping scenery... ELIZA O'HARE discovers the best of New Zealand

NEW ZEALAND does lodges better than anywhere else in the world, offering a selection of get-rich establishments from which to take in the famous views and launch yourself into the surrounds.

There are only a few requirements for a top-notch abode, but they are strict: a breathtaking, remote location, subtle yet magnificent interiors, a star chef with a focus on local produce and wine, and an excellent spa. Simple.

Lodges tend to live in wintry climes, essentially making them six-star cool-weather resorts where you can cosy up by the fire at night and, by day, experience outdoor features such as top-notch golf courses, ski fields and spectacular hikes. Or sometimes even all of the above.

There's only one choice to make: will it be the North or South Island?



Kauri Cliffs.



GETTY IMAGES; INGALLS PHOTO; COURTESY OF KAURI CLIFFS

NORTH ISLAND: KAURI CLIFFS

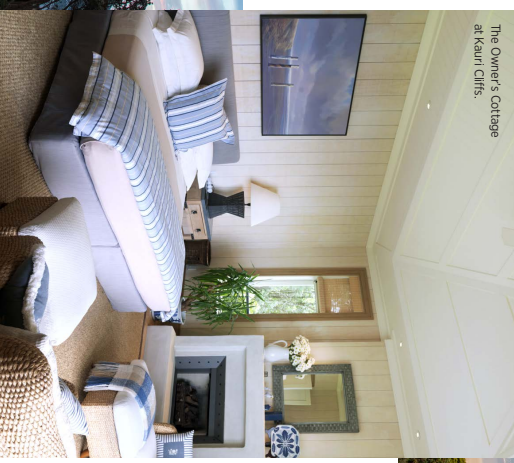
You may think an escape to a golf course isn't your cup of tea, but Kauri Cliffs is so much more. This part of New Zealand's North Island is a gentle mix of farmland and dense rainforest, and while the majestic Kauri trees that once covered the entire area are nearly all gone, there is still one lone 900-year-old tree standing proudly on the property. You can find it on a short but delectable rainforest hike that immerses you in what this place was way before European settlement. It's magnificent, especially if you have a soft spot for ferns and subtropical palms.

Kauri Cliffs is a three-hour drive from Auckland and two hours from the nearest set of traffic lights. It's remote, but that's really part of the joy of this series of lodges that sit on the edge of New Zealand's stunning Northland coast looking out over the Bay of Islands. It's home to one of the country's finest golf courses and is a magnet for golf fiends from Japan, the US and Britain. It's this jaw-dropping crowd who want to marry the incredible hikes and beaches with a couple of hours on the course.

The lodge was built in 2000 but looks and feels like an authentic 1900s plantation house. The American owner, hedge fund pioneer Julian Robertson, fell in love with the 1600-hectare property and decided he would farm cattle and build a world-class golf course. Ranked number 49 in the world (attention, non-golfers: this is a very big deal), it is an amazing feat of love and engineering.

Along with his Southern sense of style and comfort, Robinson also brought along his very Southern manners. Dressing for dinner is a requirement, with guests gathering at six for cocktails and an open bar in front of a fireplace in the main

The Owner's Cottage at Kauri Cliffs.



The lounge.

Waialea Bay, near the lodge.

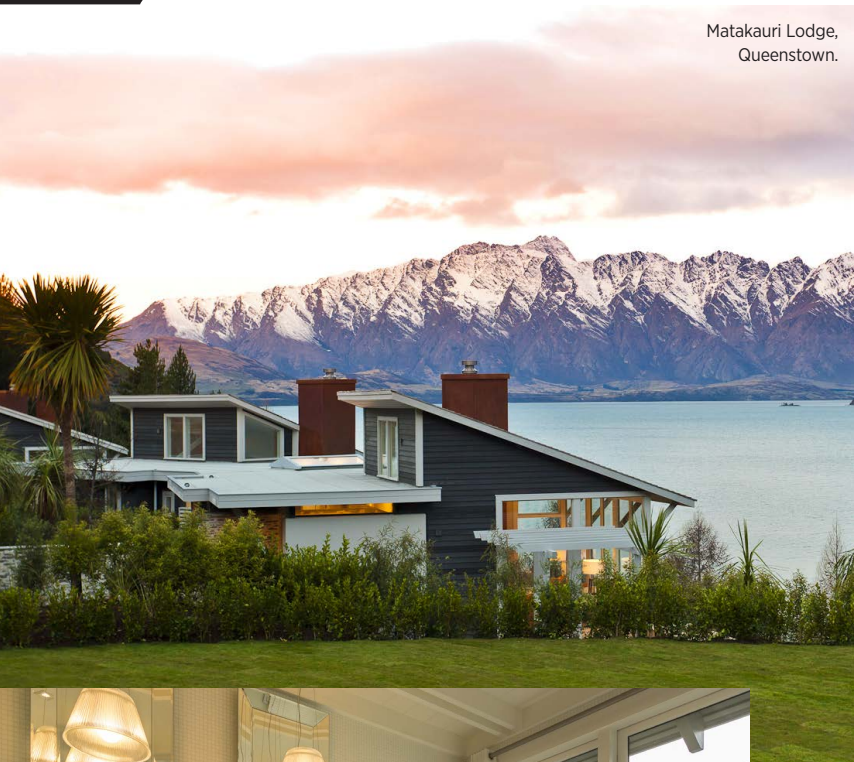


house, with expansive views out over the course and on to the furthest point of the Bay of Islands. This is the land of the long white cloud and the weather-rolling in is just as much a part of the view as the collections of tiny islands clustered along the coastline.

Our evening ritual begins with cold New Zealand chardonnays and generous canapés, including a crispy omom bhaiji with house-made chutney, and a sumptuous slice of pork belly, big enough to pass for an entrée, followed by amuse-bouche and a never-to-be-repeated daily special menu leaning heavily on local lamb, oysters and beef. There's also a grill menu, which is a simpler selection of dinner choices.

The wine list is huge and we require some matching assistance from the maître d'. Michael Vanner, a local who is brimming with intel on the degree of difficulty of nearby walks and which beaches are best in what wind conditions. There are three beaches on the property — all beautiful, all different. Our favourite is Pink Beach, with its manicured lawn sweeping down to a shore made of the most delicate pink shells, like something straight out of an Elvis ▶

Matakauri Lodge,
Queenstown.



The bathroom at the
Owner's Cottage,
Matakauri Lodge.

SOUTH ISLAND: MATAKAURI LODGE

Queenstown sits in a magical position on Lake Wakatipu, in the Central Otago region of New Zealand's South Island, overlooking the majestic Cecil Peak and Walter Peak. It's an area rich in wine and produce. There are renowned ski fields within 20 minutes of the town centre, great bars on every corner and some of the most emotion-stirring scenery you could find yourself in. And there's a Louis Vuitton store.

We arrive on one of Virgin's new business-class flights direct from Sydney to Queenstown, which has us on the tarmac in under two hours and 20 minutes after a heart-stopping approach through The Remarkables mountain range. Just a 10-minute drive from town is Matakauri Lodge, hugging the shores of Lake Wakatipu. It's a perfect example of New Zealand luxe — all those clean lines, glass, stone and timber. The interiors are simple but quietly lavish, created by local design star

Virginia Fisher. There are open fires in every available nook, and the personal art collection of the owners — which includes ceramic pieces by Picasso and works by revered local landscape artists — is on display.

Glass walls make the most of these views: the light, the colour and the low clouds. Our room has its own private courtyard, a sitting room with an instant-start fireplace and a bath situated by a window with 180-degree views over the lake.

At Matakauri, you eat where you want; choose a softly lit fire-side table in the dining area, your own suite or a private dining room. My favourite was dining in the beyond-beautiful Owner's Cottage (where William and Kate once stayed) with private staff to prepare and serve an amazing meal hosted by chef Jonathan Rogers. The menu at Matakauri is dedicated to using local produce

to create a deeply delicious experience at every meal. Our sommelier, Yann Zarlenga, recommends wine pairings, the standout being the creamy, soft 2013 Gibbston Valley China Terrace chardonnay, made locally. We make sure some of it returns home with us.

Leaving Matakauri during the day is tough — being away from this heavenly place when we're only here for three nights is stressful. But Queenstown is a short drive away, and there's a lot to see. Not that we take the car. Instead, we take the chopper. It lifts us up and over the lake to a distant snow-covered peak for the folly of slicing golf balls into a snowy abyss. Outrageous.

We are then ceremoniously delivered to the ski fields of Coronet Peak, where private lessons elevate us one whole level in two hours. Coronet Peak runs the gamut from gentle to hair-raising

runs, but none of them could hold a candle to the terror of the long, treacherous drive up to our next course at The Remarkables. Take it slow, and take chains. But who can pick between the two ski spots? We get two bluebird days, so it seems like every run is heaven.

The luxury of being able to ski all morning and still make it to the table at a superb winery in time for lunch is what makes this ▶

Presley movie. Venner suggests bringing a picnic and a golf cart to take a shortcut to the site.

Private dining is a thing here — definitely block out four hours for the private degustation with matched wines in the library. And keep an eye out for food experiences created by international gourmands. Rick Stein and Guillaume Brahimi have both been guest chefs here.

It's all about the balance between walking and eating. On our first day we walk for four hours, first to a waterfall through lamb-dotted paddocks and picturesque farms, then back down the cliffs through rainforest to emerge at a totally deserted white sand beach where we swim and Instagram like crazy before trekking back up the hills, cutting through the golf course to the lodge.

Trekking (and golfing) requires restorative measures, so the afternoon is reserved for the spa — a gorgeous retreat in the forest, with a glass-walled heated pool and reflective fern-filled spaces outside each therapy room, ideal for a post-treatment chill-out. The perfect daytime destination if 18 holes is not your thing.

kauricliffs.com.

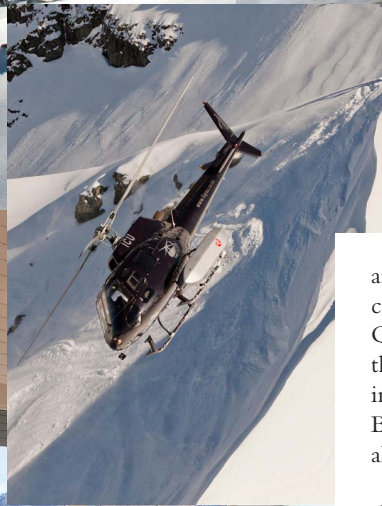
“The luxury of being able to ski all morning and still make it to the table at an incredible winery in time for lunch is what makes this area so wonderful.”

ESCAPE

Terrace dining with a view of The Remarkables at Matakauri Lodge (and right).



The Queenstown ski fields. Inset: a helicopter trip from Matakauri.



A Deluxe Suite.



area so wonderful. Everything is exceptional and everything is close, and that makes everything easy, especially if your trip to Queenstown is on the short side. You can do it all. (You may need the back-up of a driver, though; it does allow for daytime drinking in the schedule. We put ourselves in the hands of our tour company Black ZQN, which not only delivers us to our destinations, but also calls ahead to secure last-minute tables and confirm activities.)

We choose the local winery Amisfield, as we've heard good things not only about the drinks, but also the food. This place has two hats (courtesy of the *Cuisine* Good Food Awards) under its belt, so we decide on the Trust the Chef experience, a lucky-dip degustation with matched wines. The bistro is another fine example of pared-back, raw New Zealand interiors, featuring warm, natural materials. My tip: try the 2015 Amisfield Lowburn Terrace riesling.

Queenstown itself is tiny and charming in every way. Open fires abound, along with considered wine lists, crafted cocktails and food to sate a skier's appetite. Later, we eat at Rātā, chef Josh Emmett's cosy spot, for his spectacular signature beef wellington and Southland cheese roll with bitter leaves, pickled butternut, hazelnut and pear. But the truth is, I just want to be back at Matakauri in time for a massage at the spa, a bath with a view and then one last glass of pinot noir by the fire overlooking Lake Wakatipu.

matakaurilodge.com.