

New Zealand

[Marion Hume](#) | April 1st, 2007

New Zealand may look tiny on the map yet it's bigger than Britain. The first choice is North Island or South Island? ***Although the North Island is gorgeous, the South Island is spectacular.***

As to where to stay, the problem is there are so many great choices, although be wary of some of the so-called lodges opened in recent years by those with a couple of spare rooms and a view and no hotel expertise. Also, if you can afford an all-five star super lodge trip, think twice about heading from north to south, unless you'll enjoy bumping into the same elderly Americans at every communal dinner table.

You could start a perfect Kiwi holiday at [Mollies](#) in Auckland where you're likely to be met at the entrance by both a porter and the sound of a robust tenor singing Puccini's "[Nessun Dorma](#)." Proprietors Frances Wilson and Stephen Fitzgerald have sidelines as a renowned singing teacher and a set designer. ***Mollies is itself a lavish set, but beyond the style of each suite lies a walk-in power shower (oh joy!) bigger than many a London kitchen. Apparently, the incredibly helpful staff will also draw your bath and fill it with rose petals.***

What to do in Auckland? As it is also known as The City of Sails, you might want Mollies to organise a harbour cruise and a picnic lunch. Or you could do nothing more taxing than take a cab into the city centre (15 minutes) to sip a "flat white" coffee in Vulcan Lane and then go shopping. Check out [Crane Brothers](#), especially the Gubb and Mackie line, which is cut to the specifications of original naval tailoring. For women's wear, [Karen Walker's](#) smallest Auckland store is a stone's throw up the same street.

For eating out, don't miss the chance to sample the fusion fare of Peter Gordon, who made his name in the UK with The Sugar Club and then The Providores and Tapa Room. Don't be put off by the fact this Kiwi's homeland restaurant is in a casino complex. Instead, enjoy the crab and tofu crusted Hapuka (a fish) on roasted red kumara, enoki mushrooms and Asian greens served at Dine at a fraction of London prices.

Next stop, Wellington. You'll know why the locals call it "Windy Wellington" as your plane tries to land. Perk up over one of the world's best cups of coffee. Kiwis, as New Zealanders call themselves, are caffeine-obsessed and Cafe L'Affaire deserves its reputation as a Wellington institution. Go for a relaxed lunch, or just to relax and sip. If you fancy a more official institution, my husband and I once popped into the national museum, [Te Papa](#), for ten minutes and came out six hours later. It's great. You'll need to eat after that.

A treat is two hours away (or ten minutes by chopper). Wharekauhau (forry-ko-ho) is a 5,000-acre

working sheep farm, but the cottages on its sprawling estate are hardly shearer's sheds. One of the most talented hotel interior designer anywhere is Virginia Fisher, whose subtle style makes these rooms seem light, airy, homely yet fabulous. The view from the bath makes the heart sing. ***Set on the black volcanic shores of Palliser Bay, this place is pure "The Piano" (although it was actually filmed much further north).*** It's definitely not the place to take a dip, however.

There are plenty of other active options. I'm still basking in the glory of thrashing my husband at clay pigeon shooting. I'd somehow never previously mentioned that my late father was a crack shot, because how would I do that without giving the wrong impression? Things evened up when we went horse riding, given my husband learned to ride at an early age and I can barely trot. We probably rated even on the delightful challenge of tasting as many beautiful wines as possible.

Onwards to Christchurch, where there's a tough choice to face: to drive an hour and a half west to Grasmere lodge, a lovely old stone ranch built in 1858 in the alpine high country or to drive just 20 minutes to a grand 1895 wooden mansion called Otahuna. Both have glorious views, fine wine cellars and fresh food gathered from the grounds or sourced from nearby organic providores. The obvious choice is to book at least a night at each.

That's certainly the right decision as we reach Queenstown because how could you choose between a really terrific "room above a pub" facing Lake Wakatipu and a luxury lodge 40 kms further along its shores that is so secluded you can lie in the Jacuzzi with a clear 180 degree view of the mountains? The pub is Eichardt's (pronounced "I-carts") and it has just five sumptuous suites designed by Virginia Fisher again, who, since you ask, is neither a relative nor a friend. I've never met her. ***As for what to do here, Queenstown is the year-round hi-activity capital of the southern hemisphere - heli-fishing, heli-skiing, helicopter trips down Milford Sound, hiking, biking, jet boat racing (don't forget the sunscreen) and even Bungee jumping - invented here - are all on offer.*** Or you could take a break and sit on the balcony watching the stately old TSS Earnslaw come into dock, while you enjoy a glass of Peregrine Pinot Noir or perhaps one from Two Paddocks, the latter helmed by local boy turned Hollywood star, ***Sam Neill***, whose family tree dates back to the 19th century Gold Rush on which this town was built. As for past riches, fashion boutique, Angel Divine, has scraps of the same wallpaper that graced the First Class dining room of the Titanic on one of its walls.

When you arrive at Blanket Bay, it could be that you are sharing your precious time in paradise (the real address - although it comes from local ducks rather than the magnificent vistas) with celebrity honeymooners. But this place is so discrete, you'll never know and the staff won't tell you.

Way down south, a ghostly castle complete with ballroom hung with chandeliers. ***The only castle in New Zealand is 20 minutes drive on from the southern city of Dunedin. Larnach Castle is apparently haunted by the unhappy ghost of the first Mrs. Larnach whose husband married her sister.*** So you'll be relieved that

guest accommodation is in the old outhouses. Built in 1871, the castle fell to ruin because of family scandal and was saved by the Barker family's mad idea 38 years ago that they could make it a going concern, even though there were sheep sleeping in the ballroom which today could accommodate up to 350 of your closest friends for a party.

North Island

Auckland

Mollies Hotel, 6 Tweed Street, St Mary's Bay. + 64 9 376 3489, F + 64 9 378 6592;

www.mollies.co.nz

To reserve this and some of the other properties listed, I recommend Small Luxury Hotels because it is stringent in culling properties that do not match its exacting standards — reservations www.slh.com/mollies/

Crane Brothers Menswear, De Bretts Building, 2-4 High Street. + 64 9 377 5333;

www.crane-brothers.com

Karen Walker, 15 O'Connell Street, Auckland City. + 64 9 3096299;

www.karenwalker.com

Dine by Peter Gordon, Level 3, Skycity Grand Hotel, 90 Federal Street. + 64 9363 7030
