



Andrew Harper's Hideaway Report®

A connoisseur's worldwide guide to peaceful and unspoiled places

New Zealand: Recent Finds and Longtime Favorites

ALTHOUGH A RELATIVELY small and thinly populated country, New Zealand is a constant source of surprise and delight. Its two narrow islands contain breathtaking coastal and mountain scenery, and it is simply amazing that a nation with fewer than four million inhabitants should boast so many exceptional places in which to stay. Sophisticated lodges continue to open in glorious surroundings, adding to a list that now contains some of the finest hideaways in the world.

We still love to visit old favorites like The Lodge at Kauri Cliffs, Wharekauhau and Blanket Bay, but on our recent trip we were impressed to find several remarkable new properties. Kiwi hospitality may have had rustic origins, but today's lodges and resorts provide attentive service, imaginative cuisine and outstanding wines. And

as the wine industry has grown, so have the number of wineries that welcome visitors.

New Zealand is peaceful, picturesque and informal. Although the country's innocence is being replaced to some extent by a more cosmopolitan mind-set, the hospitality remains as warm and sincere as ever. In a troubled world, New Zealand seems blessedly detached. The Kiwis are justifiably proud of their land and neglect no opportunity to enjoy it. Outdoor activities are a national obsession. And of course, this is arguably the world's best place in which to fly-fish, with streams and lakes overflowing with magnificent brown and rainbow trout.

Our recommended properties are spread throughout the country. In many cases, they are within comfortable driving distance of each other. The roads are well maintained and clearly signed, and this is the best way to encounter the spellbinding landscapes that are central to the New Zealand experience. A leisurely motoring itinerary would ideally be of three weeks' duration, with the best time to visit being from October 15 (mid-spring) to April 15 (mid-autumn). Expert trip-planning assistance is available from Andrew Harper Travel, Tel. (800) 375-4685 and an exclusive two-week Signature Tour will depart in February 2008 (see Page 5).

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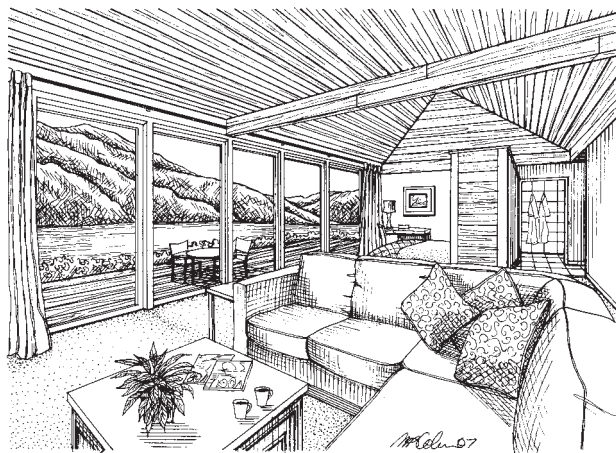
Lord Howe Island's Capella Lodge is located in a setting of scarcely believable beauty

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ALTHOUGH LOCATED JUST FIVE MINUTES from the center of Queenstown, **AZUR LODGE** feels far more remote. At this dramatic new property, nine enchanting villas have been terraced into a steep hillside that affords breathtaking views of Lake Wakatipu and some of the most spectacular mountain scenery in New Zealand. The exterior of the main lodge looks appropriately rustic, with red wooden siding and a gray corrugated metal roof. Inside, however, the design is clean and contemporary, with white walls, stone floors and peaked ceilings of honey-colored wood. Two stunning living areas, both with stone fireplaces, boast panoramic picture windows overlooking the lake.

The villas are situated below the lodge (with golf carts always available to ferry you back uphill). Their stylish and sophisticated interiors reflect the pedigree of the



Singapore-based design firm LTW, which has lately been responsible for the renovations of the Mandarin Oriental in Hong Kong and The Oriental in Bangkok.

The exceptionally spacious accommodations come with super king-size beds, dramatic expanses of silver beechwood and local stone, and state-of-the-art gas fires. Baths feature black tile walls, walk-in showers and huge oval whirlpool tubs set against stunning picture windows. Amenities include a swivel-mounted flat-screen 32-inch television and CD/DVD players. Wireless Internet access is provided, but the service seems to be unreliable.

Because Azur is so close to the many excellent restaurants in Queenstown, the hotel offers only breakfast. Obliging staff members are pleased to make necessary reservations and to arrange a complimentary Land Cruiser shuttle. Several local restaurants also offer delivery service. Villa for two, \$735-\$955, depending on time of year, breakfast, evening cocktails and canapés, transfers to/from town and airport included. Tel. (64) 3-409-0588 or Fax (64) 3-409-0388. Email: rsvns@azur.co.nz

Longtime Harper Favorites

THE SIX PROPERTIES mentioned below have all been recipients of our coveted "Hideaways of the Year" award and should definitely be added to the itinerary of any sophisticated traveler visiting this wonderful country.

Auckland is a relatively uninteresting city, but fortunately, it possesses a charming small hotel. **Mollies** (www.mollies.co.nz) contains just 12 suites housed within a Victorian mansion. Owned by two opera buffs, the interior features a blend of antiques, contemporary furniture and music memorabilia. A small restaurant provides delicious New Zealand cuisine. Facilities include a spa treatment room.

The Lodge at Kauri Cliffs (www.kauricliffs.com) is located in the spectacular Bay of Islands region on a 6,000-acre estate overlooking the Pacific and a magnificent world-class championship golf course. Twenty-two cottages provide separate sitting areas with gas fires, lavish baths and private verandahs. The main lodge contains a splendid glass-enclosed dining room specializing in Pacific Rim cuisine. Facilities include an infinity pool and superb spa.

Wharekauhau Country Estate (www.wharekauhau.co.nz) at the southern tip of North Island is set on a 5,000-acre working sheep station, amid spectacularly pristine coastal surroundings. Twelve cottage suites offer king-sized beds, fireplaces, generous sitting areas and luxurious baths. The main house contains grandly appointed public areas. A seasonal menu features New Zealand classic cuisine, accompanied by local wines. Facilities include a 65-foot indoor pool and spa treatment room.

Ninety minutes west of Christchurch, **Grasmere Lodge** (www.grasmere.co.nz), is a high-country retreat set on a working 13,000-acre ranch. Thirteen handsome guest quarters provide king beds and baths with whirlpool tubs. Timbered public spaces include an elegant dining room, where the menu offers the finest farm-raised venison, lamb and beef. A spa provides an extensive range of treatments, while activities include guided hiking and trout fishing.

The stylish sanctuary of **Blanket Bay** (www.blanketbay.com) is located beside stunning Lake Wakatipu. The three Lodge Suites and four Chalets boast stone fireplaces, steam showers, soaking tubs and private terraces. The stunning *Lake View Dining Room* offers delicious contemporary New Zealand cuisine accompanied by fine regional wines. Activities include jet boating and trout fishing.

Eichardt's Private Hotel (www.eichardtshotel.co.nz) in Queenstown is a five-suite lakeside property housed within a historic residence in the waterfront shopping and restaurant district. The stylish accommodations feature separate living rooms with gas fireplaces and sumptuous baths. *The House Bar* serves drinks and light lunches.