



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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North Island

ROTORUA LIES JUST OVER THREE HOURS' DRIVE southeast of Auckland, at the heart of an adventure playground famous for its therapeutic thermal springs and the extraordinary quality of its trout fishing. **TREETOPS** is set on a pristine 2,500-acre estate that boasts seven crystalline spring-fed streams and four lakes, as well as magnificent 800-year-old forests threaded by nearly 50 miles of hiking and riding trails.

The lodge itself is a striking building of timber and stone, constructed in an architectural style derived from the country's pioneering past. You enter a magnificent Great Room that boasts a soaring cathedral ceiling, polished stone floors and a massive fireplace. Tall windows and glass doors allow light to flood in, as well as affording stunning views across a wooded valley to the mountains beyond. The lodge's other public rooms are equally congenial and include a dark-paneled library and a games room with a full-sized billiards table.

One wing of the lodge offers four double suites (with their own lounge and full kitchen), which can be configured in a variety of ways and are therefore ideal for families. Overall, however, the four handsome outlying villas are more desirable choices. Each encloses two suites that boast spacious living rooms (with wood-burning fireplaces) and bedrooms affording unforgettable panoramic views. The furniture is simple, but is in keeping with the décor, which comes in understated neutral tones. Outside, a lovely partially covered patio runs the length of the building. Baths are generous, with large walk-in showers, whirlpool tubs and heated towel racks. Amenities include Internet service and satellite television.

Back at the lodge, a state-of-the-art kitchen opens onto a sunny breakfast conservatory, which in turn leads into the splendid formal dining room. Dinner is a convivial and communal affair, with introductory cocktails beforehand in the Great Room. The health-conscious cuisine employs fine seasonal ingredients including organic lamb and grain-fed aged eye fillet, as well as Akaroa salmon from South Island and a range of superb Pacific seafood. An extensive wine list concentrates on New Zealand varieties and features the best from each producing region.

Activities on the estate include guided trout fishing, horseback riding, a 4WD "safari," bird-watching, lake cruises and helicopter tours. Lodge Suite for two, \$870-\$1,240, depending on time of year, breakfast, dinner and some activities included. Villa Suite for two, \$1,010-\$1,460. Tel. (64) 7-333-2066 or Fax (64) 7-333-2065. Email: info@treetops.co.nz.

SURROUNDED BY CLOSE-CUT LAWNS and set along the willow-draped banks of the Waikato River (near Lake Taupo, an hour south of Rotorua), **HUKA LODGE** is a more formal European-style enclave. Perhaps no other New Zealand property enjoys such consistent acclaim from *Hideaway Report* readers. On the basis of our recent visit, such applause is entirely justified. The public areas of the main house chiefly comprise a wonderfully inviting living room, a library with a log fireplace and a candlelit dining room. Portraits of horses and hunting dogs adorn the walls, while a splendid tartan carpet runs through many of the principal rooms. Twenty junior suites sweep along the riverbank under a sheltering canopy of redwoods. Their bedrooms are spacious and airy, with white-paneled walls and glass doors overlooking the river. Skylights add to the brightness of the bedroom, the adjoining dressing room and the spectacular baths. The latter has a high peaked ceiling, a walk-in shower and a theatrical mullioned window above a deep soaking tub. Metallic tiles add a dramatic touch and provide a striking counterpoint to the more traditional materials used elsewhere. (Accommodations possess neither phones nor TVs. Internet access is available at the main lodge.)

Each evening a house-party mood prevails. After cocktails, guests can opt to eat separately or communally (a choice that is discreetly choreographed by the staff beforehand). Dinner always consists of five courses, but dishes change constantly to reflect what is currently in the market. In general, menus make imaginative use of the region's fresh produce, game and seafood. The impressive wine list (drawing on a cellar of more than

The Farm at Cape Kidnappers

IN NOVEMBER 2007, the renowned Lodge at Kauri Cliffs resort will open a sister property in Hawke's Bay, on the North Island's east coast. **The Farm at Cape Kidnappers** will be ideally located for those who wish to take advantage of the sensational Cape Kidnappers golf course (laid out beside the Pacific), as well as the wineries and myriad activities to be found in the area. Set on a 6,000-acre ranch, it will offer gourmet dining, a library (which can be used for private meetings) and a wine-cellar tasting room. Guests will stay in 22 cottage suites boasting extra-spacious baths and private balconies with spectacular 180-degree views. Facilities will include a 50-foot heated pool, a lavish fitness center and a luxurious spa. Suite for two, \$1,250-\$1,455, depending on time of year. Tel. (64) 6-875-1900 or Fax (64) 6-875-1901. Email: reservations@capekidnappers.com

20,000 bottles) provides a showcase for the finest of New Zealand's wines.

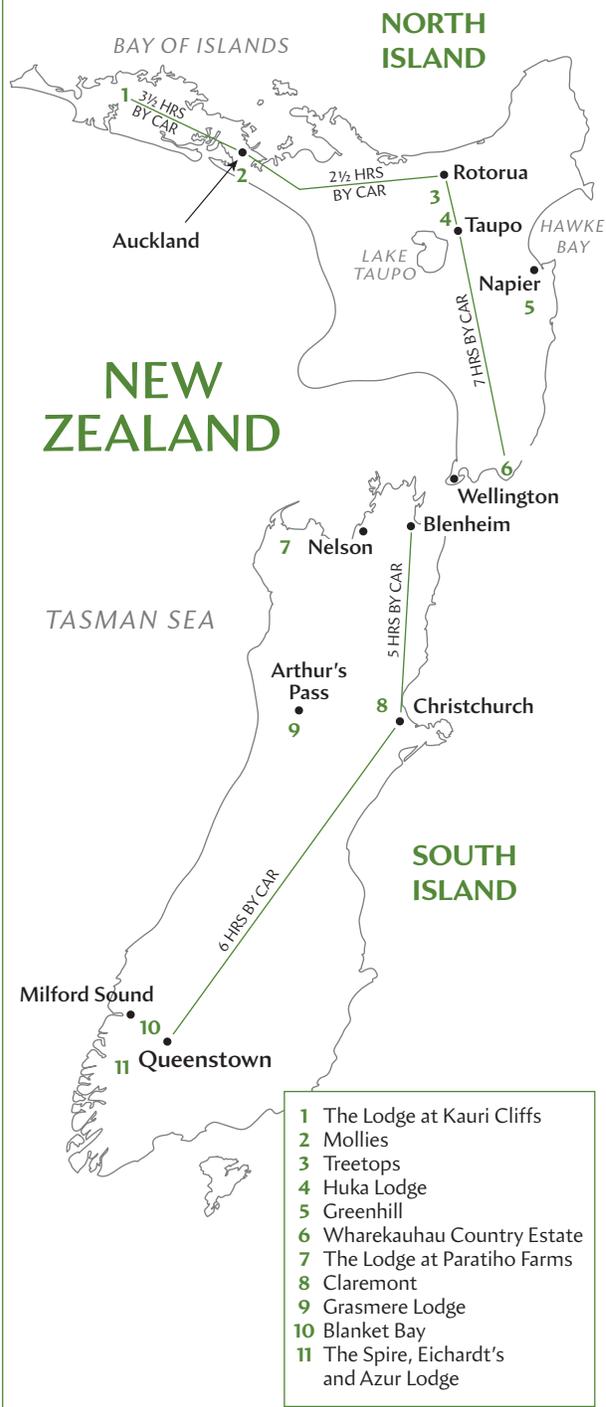
Amenities at Huka include a new swimming pool, two whirlpool tubs and an all-weather tennis court. However, the lodge is particularly renowned for its trout fishing. This can be arranged on no fewer than 23 nearby rivers and streams. Helicopters and four-wheel-drive vehicles also transfer guests to wilderness areas where the fish are less wary. Lodge Room for two, \$1,020-\$1,750, depending on time of year, breakfast, dinner and the use of all lodge facilities included. Tel. (64) 7-378-5791 or Fax (64) 7-378-0427. Email: reservations@hukalodge.com

HALFWAY DOWN NORTH ISLAND'S east coast (two hours' drive from Taupo), Hawke's Bay is rapidly emerging as one of New Zealand's premier wine-producing areas. **GREENHILL** provides a lovely base from which to explore the region's more than 40 wineries. Originally built in the late 1800s, the striking main house is set amid 30 acres of parklike grounds. In 1958, the property hosted England's Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, so that she could experience a homestead representative of New Zealand's pioneering days. From that high point, the house went into gradual decline until 2001, when it was purchased by new owners. After meticulous restoration, it finally reopened to guests in 2003.

A steep and winding driveway hides the house from view until the last moment, when it appears dramatically above an immaculately trimmed lawn. A striking High Victorian structure, it boasts gingerbread trim, white walls, a bright red roof and an idiosyncratic three-story observation tower that commands a panoramic view of Hawke's Bay. Inside, 14-foot ceilings contribute to a luxurious feeling of space. The grand main hallway boasts superb wood paneling, handsome moldings and stained-glass windows, while the adjoining guest sitting room has a huge log fire for chilly days.

The main house contains two suites and three rooms. The air-conditioned McClean Suite, for example, offers a king bed, a separate sitting area with access to a scenic verandah, a writing desk, log fireplace and a well-appointed marble bath with under-floor heating. The most desirable accommodations, however, are to be found in a separate building called the Villa Suite. Located a brief stroll from the main house, the air-conditioned Villa is an appealing one-story building with two bedrooms. The first is a master suite with a king-size bed, an en suite bath and a private deck (where a fully functional claw-foot bathtub provides a wonderful whimsical touch). The second offers two single beds and has an adjoining bath. The

FLIGHT TIMES	
Auckland - Rotorua	40 MIN
Auckland - Wellington	1 HR
Auckland - Nelson/Blenheim	80 MIN
Auckland - Christchurch	80 MIN
Rotorua - Wellington	80 MIN
Taupo - Wellington	1 HR
Wellington - Christchurch	45 MIN
Nelson/Blenheim - Christchurch	50 MIN
Christchurch - Queenstown	1 HR



Villa's living room possesses a handsome fireplace made from local river stone, and floor-to-ceiling windows. An adjacent kitchen and dining area opens onto a deck that commands sweeping views of the surrounding farmland. In common with accommodations in the main house, amenities include flat-screen TVs and CD/DVD players. Wireless Internet is available throughout the property.

Guests congregate in the sitting room for drinks and canapés before dinner and the owners are invariably on hand to join in the conversation. Dinner is served communally in an elegantly proportioned dining room that boasts wonderfully restored woodwork and architectural detailing. The four-course menu varies with the seasons, but emphasis is given to superb local meat and seafood. (The beef tenderloin we enjoyed one night was as good as we've ever eaten.) Breakfast is served in the dining room or outdoors in good weather. Facilities include a swimming pool and a fully equipped gymnasium. Villa Suite for two, \$795–\$1,105, depending on time of year, breakfast, dinner and greens fees at the nearby Hastings Golf Club included. Tel. (64) 6-879-9944 or Fax (64) 6-879-9940. Email: enquiries@greenhill.co.nz.

South Island

LOCATED TWO HOURS NORTHWEST of Blenheim, **THE LODGE AT PARATIHO FARMS** is a contemporary country house retreat close to both the Abel Tasman National Park (famous for its sea kayaking and hikes along a celebrated coastal path) and the marvelous provincial town of Nelson, renowned for its artists' studios and craft shops. The lodge itself is a 20-acre oasis of manicured lawns and gardens in the middle of a working farm with 10,000 sheep, 800 cattle and often as many as 700 deer. Its grounds are filled with an impressive array of contemporary outdoor sculptures, a foretaste of the incredible displays of original art and artifacts (an eclectic mix of Asian objects and modern art in a variety of media) that await you inside.

Six spacious suites are housed within three duplex cottages situated a short walk from the lodge. Large bedrooms adjoin ample seating areas with gas fires, while impressive baths provide black marble walls in the walk-in shower, huge mirrors, a freestanding claw-foot soaking tub and a small Japanese courtyard garden.

Chef Angela Bone presents superb cuisine, her nightly five-course menu employing only the finest seasonal ingredients. (It will be a long time before we forget the anise-marinated pork belly.) Breakfast is served in a sunny

New Zealand Wineries

NOT LONG AGO, the term "fine New Zealand wine" might have been considered an oxymoron. No longer. New Zealand is now a powerhouse in terms of both quality and variety. As was the case in other New World countries, the initial impulse was to try to compete in the Cabernet and Chardonnay markets. However, it has since become clear that specific areas are more conducive to particular varietals. Nowadays, individual vineyards and even smaller divisions are being tagged as the best for, say, Pinot Noir or Merlot. Here are some of the most enjoyable regions to visit and the wineries (and wines) to look out for.

AUCKLAND — This is where the New Zealand wine industry began, thanks to immigrants from Croatia.

Kumeu River Wines is a family-run operation famous for its Burgundy-style Chardonnays. The premier bottling is the *Mate's Vineyard Chardonnay*. **Soljans Estate** produces a wide variety of wines, and among the best are the Riesling and the Tawny Port. A superb café serves Mediterranean cuisine with a New Zealand twist. **Villa Maria** is the third-largest producer in New Zealand and makes notable Gewürztraminers and Sauvignon Blancs.

HAWKE'S BAY — This is one of the most exciting and sophisticated gastronomic regions in the country.

Clearview is best known for its outstanding *Reserve Chardonnay*, *Reserve Sauvignon Blanc* and an intriguing red Bordeaux-style blend, *Enigma*. An award-winning restaurant serves exceptional seasonal cuisine. **Craggy Range** is a spectacular showplace winery that also makes great wines such as *The Quarry*, a Cabernet blend, and the *Gimblett Gravels Block 14* Syrah. The lovely *Terroir* restaurant serves New Zealand cuisine with French country influences, and specializes in rotisserie and wood-fired oven cooking.

WAIPARA — An hour outside Christchurch, this is an emerging area just beginning to distinguish itself.

Pegasus Bay makes very good Pinot Noirs, an excellent late-harvest Riesling and a delicious Sauvignon Blanc. A fine restaurant serves uncomplicated cuisine in a dining room decorated with works by leading contemporary artists. **Waipara Hills** produces Pinot Noirs, Pinot Gris and Gewürztraminers. The excellent restaurant serves seasonal cuisine in a garden courtyard overlooking the vineyards.

CENTRAL OTAGO — This is a spectacular mountainous region renowned for its Pinot Noirs.

Mount Difficulty makes top-ranked Pinots, but also turns out very good Rieslings. An outstanding restaurant serves stylish yet uncomplicated cuisine in a splendid setting. **Peregrine** makes a range of fine Pinot Noirs at different price levels, all of which are worth considering.

space next to the open kitchen, and the cooking staff loves to have people drift by, ask questions and make requests. It is an attitude of generous hospitality displayed by every member of the staff.

Paratiho offers an impressive range of facilities, including a sumptuous spa, an outdoor infinity pool, croquet lawn and putting green. Suite for two, \$1,260-\$1,635, depending on time of year, all meals, wines, daily laundry service and all recreational facilities (except the spa) included. Tel. (64) 3-528-2100 or Fax (64) 3-528-2101. Email: lodge@paratiho.co.nz.

THE SOUTH ISLAND'S PRINCIPAL CITY of Christchurch does not possess a true five-star hotel, and **CLAREMONT**, an hour's drive away at Waipara, provides a splendid country alternative. Set on a 2,400-acre working livestock farm surrounded by rugged hills, ancient forests and meandering streams, the estate is a wonderfully civilized enclave of lush lawns, stately trees and cheerful flower gardens. The house itself, built in 1866 and restored and modernized in 1999-2000, is a handsome two-story rough-hewn limestone structure with wide verandahs and an appealing side terrace.

Walking through the front door, you instantly receive an impression of refined but homey comfort. Guests have the use of two delightful living rooms, both filled with paintings and family photographs, along with a well-stocked library. Glass doors open onto shady vine-clad verandahs and sunny walled courtyards.

Each of the five suites is named for a different flower and decorated in a traditional style with antique furniture, Oriental rugs and lovely floral fabrics. Large tiled baths offer walk-in showers and deep soaking tubs. We particularly recommend the upper-floor suites, as they afford wonderful views of the property.

Each evening, guests gather with owners Richard and Rosie Goord for drinks and canapés. Dinner is served at a big oak refectory table (though those who wish to dine privately may do so in the conservatory). Lamb and venison from the estate are accompanied by local Waipara wines. Our rack of lamb served with garden zucchini and mushroom risotto was superb.

Many activities are within an easy drive. The local wineries are well worth visiting, and at Kaikoura there is whale-watching year-round. The options for trout and salmon fishing are innumerable. Suite for two, \$585-\$730, depending on time of year, all meals, afternoon tea, beverages and the use of all lodge facilities included. Tel. (64) 3-314-7559 or Fax (64) 3-314-7065. Email: relax@claremont-estate.com

QUEENSTOWN IS THE ACTION-ADVENTURE capital of New Zealand. In winter it is a haven for skiers, and in summer the bright sails of paragliders dot the sky above the town. **THE SPIRE** is a new contemporary hotel tucked away on a side street just a block from Lake Wakatipu. The property provides a sleek environment that is elegant without being cold. However, it is only suitable for those at ease with modern design.

Of the 10 accommodations, those to be requested are the third-floor rear-facing rooms, which offer partial views of the surrounding mountains and lake (with #9 being the most desirable of all). Bedrooms are large and bright with floor-to-ceiling windows and a lively mix of contrasting colors and materials. A wall of white stone frames the large flat-screen television; Eames chairs and Starck lamps provide striking accent pieces; and the king bed is draped by luxurious possum-fur throws. Facilities include a wireless up-to-the-nanosecond entertainment and Internet system. Sand-colored marble baths offer double vanities, walk-in showers and deep soaking tubs. The lighting is effective and atmospheric, enhancing the drama of the overall design.

At *Inspire* restaurant, star chef Rex Morgan's menu features signature dishes like salmon confit with horseradish and cauliflower cream, and lamb shank seasoned with porcini mushrooms and served with lamb shank tortellini. The wine list has good selections by the glass, so you can experiment, as well a fine range of bottles from all over the world.

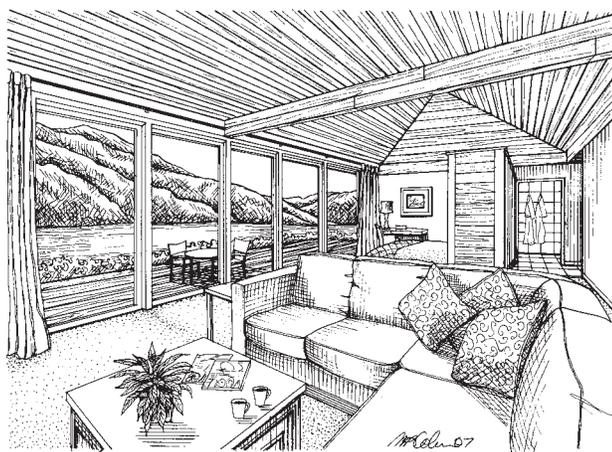
The amiable and highly competent staff provides one of the principal pleasures of a stay here. If you haven't already planned the outdoor activities you want to pursue while in Queenstown (surely it's time you gave bungee jumping a go?), the front desk is a fountain of ideas and will make all the necessary arrangements. Double Room, \$650, breakfast included. Tel. (64) 3-441-0004 or Fax (64) 3-441-0003. Email: queenstown@thespirehotels.com.

New Zealand Luxury Tour

BASED ON OUR RECENT JOURNEY we have created an exclusive custom tour, "New Zealand - A Rendezvous in Paradise," on which guests will travel the length of the country in incomparable style. The tour will feature expert guides and transportation by privately chartered jets and helicopters. Limited to just 20 Andrew Harper members, the two-week trip begins in February 2008. For details, contact a Signature Tour representative at (800) 375-4685. Email: signaturetours@andrewharpertravel.com

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.

Lord Howe Island: Paradise Off the East Coast of Australia

JUST TWO HOURS BY PLANE northeast of Sydney, this tiny South Pacific jewel is so little known that even many Australians have never heard of it. The approach by air provides a stunning overview of the island's scarcely believable natural beauty.

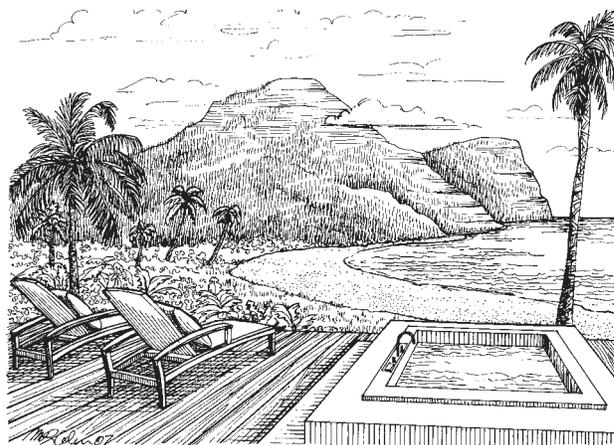
A crescent of land approximately six miles long by one mile wide, Lord Howe is covered by a rain forest of ferns, mosses and orchids that extends to a shoreline ringed by white-sand beaches. Offshore, an extraordinary lagoon displays every color of a peacock's tail. And at its southern tip, the island rears upward in the twin spires, Mount Lidgbird and Mount Gower (2,870 feet).

A trip to Lord Howe is a kind of time travel. The one-street village contains general stores for the 350 permanent residents. There are few cars (the speed limit is 15 miles per hour), and bicycles are the best way to get around. Cell phones remain silent and Internet access is slow. Designated a World Heritage Site in 1982, the island has a unique ecosystem with many plant and animal species found nowhere else in the world. (One endemic avian subspecies rejoices in the name "Lord Howe Currawong.") To preserve its unique character, the island restricts the number of visitors to 400 at any one time.

CAPELLA LODGE is perfectly situated, with a view of Mount Gower to leave even the worldliest traveler gasping. After a \$2 million refurbishment at the end of 2004, it now offers a chic and sophisticated beach-house ambience. (The property's renewal was supervised by James Baillie, who was previously responsible for the

dramatic upgrades of Lizard and Bedarra islands, the two premier resorts on the Great Barrier Reef.) Bleached timbers, white shutters, wicker loungers, polished floors and splashy cushions all help to create an appealing contemporary style.

A seductive infinity-edge plunge pool is set into the deck right off the dining room. There, imaginative three-course dinners feature island produce and fish from



the surrounding waters. (A meat alternative is always provided.) The wine list is short but excellent.

Capella has nine accommodations, of which the Lidgbird Suite provides the most opulent environment, with a spacious wrap-around deck, hot tub and spellbinding 270-degree view. We also enthusiastically recommend the duplex Lagoon Suites (especially #2). Downstairs, a comfortable living room features bleached tongue-and-groove paneling complemented by accents of slate, aqua and navy blue. Amenities include DVD/CD players. Outside, an expansive deck is appointed with inviting daybeds. Upstairs, a bright and airy loft bedroom provides a king-size bed and stunning views. Baths are functional, with single vanities and walk-in monsoon showers.

At the resort itself, the principal facility is a charming spa, which offers a menu based on native flora and local basalt rocks. Otherwise, you can be as active or as indolent as you wish. Some people make the eight-hour climb to the top of Mount Gower, while others content themselves with a little snorkeling. The ideal time for a visit is December through February, which corresponds to summer in Sydney. Lodge Suite for two, \$1,085, breakfast, dinner and selected wines and airport transfers included. Lidgbird Suite, \$1,250. Tel. (61) 02-9918-4355 or Fax (61) 02-9918-4381. Email: capella@lordhowe.com



What's Hot, What's Not

THIS REGULAR COLUMN summarizes the firsthand observations of readers and does not necessarily reflect the viewpoint of your editor. Based on the hundreds of timely letters, emails and critique cards sent us each month, the following hotels and resorts received the most positive and/or negative comments (as indicated by the representative quotes)—

- ↑ **Planters Inn (Charleston)** — A “super staff” and “outstanding restaurant” define this “little gem” that’s “right in the heart of the historic district.” “I give it a 10!”
- ↑ **The Little Nell (Aspen)** — “It’s always a pleasure” to stay at this “friendly” and “stylish luxury hotel.” “What’s not to like?”
- ↑ **Inn of the Five Graces (Santa Fe)** — A “charming,” “magical” and “uniquely appointed” inn enhanced by an “amiable staff.”
- ↑ **Esperanza (Baja)** — A “terrific staff” adds to the enjoyment of this “wonderful” and “breathtaking” resort that is “Cabo’s best by far!”
- ↑ **Casa Palopo (Guatemala)** — A “spectacularly scenic charmer” in “a quaint cultural setting” where “time has stood still.” “What a great hideaway!” (See Mar 06 HR)
- ↑ **Cavas Wine Lodge (Argentina)** — “Wonderful!” “Pure luxe!” “The views!” “The design!” “Perfection!” “We loved it!” (See Dec 06 HR)
- ↑ **Meridian Club (Turks & Caicos)** — “An unpretentious, non-glitzy Caribbean oasis” with a “warm staff,” “fine new managers” and “the most fabulous deserted beach!”
- ↑ **Rajvilas (Jaipur, India)** — “Felt like a maharajah!” “Why would you stay anywhere else?”
- ↔ **Arizona Biltmore (Phoenix)** — Has “too much convention trade” diminished the luster of this “distinctive landmark resort?”
- ↔ **Cap Juluca (Anguilla)** — Still a favorite of many, though a rising chorus of complaints about “dated rooms,” “uneven service” and “average food” raises questions. *Editor’s Note: A new GM has now been hired, though the resort is currently up for sale with two prospects vying for ownership.*
- ↔ **Jumby Bay (Antigua)** — Mixed bag, from “two thumbs up” to “ten fingers down,” with some guests citing “lax maintenance,” “poor service” and “mediocre food.”
- ↔ **Peter Island (BVI)** — Many enjoyed their stays, but others noted “tired rooms” and “disappointing food.”
- ↔ **Little Dix Bay (BVI)** — For some, “inconsistent,” “monotonous food” and “so-so service” mar this otherwise “awesome” and “beautiful” Caribbean classic.

The selection of hotels and resorts for inclusion in this newsletter is made on a completely independent basis with the Harpers traveling incognito and paying full rate for all lodgings and related travel expenses.

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What's So Hot About Hip Hotels?

I AM PUZZLED by today’s travel magazines. In their desperation to find the Next Best Thing, they seem to blithely declare any newly opened contemporary hotel as the “hip” place to stay. What is a “hip” hotel, anyway? Admittedly, it often revolves around a “cool visionary designer” I never heard of.

One magazine recently touted a Parisian lodging created by some “nightlife impresario” named André. Mono-monikered artistes are the rage these days, with the reviewer dubbing André’s masterpiece a “hip bobo flophouse.” Wow, that sure makes me want to forget Four Seasons George V, especially if I can snag Flophouse Room 105 with its “bubble gum-pink carpeting and purple-tiled bathroom.”

From my limited experience, many “hip” hotels are aesthetically goofy contrivances staffed by indifferent young mods whose idea of personal service is to wait on themselves. “Boldly eclectic” and “minimalist-chic” room décors usually translate to a futon platform bed, a white beanbag chair and a smattering of retro garage-sale accents.

Another key ingredient, of course, is a “happening bar scene” where second-rate celebs and fashionistas hang out, much to the delight of guests. Sort of reminds me of the study cited in Jake Halpern’s “Fame Junkies,” in which rhesus monkeys were only too happy to give up their basic comforts for the privilege of staring at a dominant monkey.

Maybe my problem is that I prefer classic “hip” hotels — the ones featuring sumptuous beds, comfy furnishings, tasteful appointments and caring staffs that anticipate my every need. Sorry, André.

— Andrew Harper