

# LUXE NZ

New Zealand has radically improved its offering for the premium traveller. Jonathan Arnold sampled some of the best in the country





For any traveller arriving in New Zealand from Europe, whether or not they have come by private jet or availed themselves of First Class airline service, the first thing one needs is the perfect place to rest and recuperate.

The rigours of super long haul travel and 12-hour-plus time differences certainly take their toll. Fortunately, New Zealand has upped its game when it comes to luxury offerings. Indeed on both the north and south islands one can find an impressive array of upscale hotels, bespoke private lodges, top notch restaurants and, of course, sights that take one's breath away. It wasn't always like this. New Zealand seemed to be a magnet only for backpackers and retirees, the latter group spending their days driving camper vans up and down the islands. But things have changed.

Most travellers disembark at Auckland International Airport located on the north island. It's a short taxi ride into the city – or you can take a private helicopter to one of the adjoining islands such as Waiheke (to follow).

In Auckland city the recently opened St Marys Residence located in St Marys Bay, one of the city's most exclusive heritage suburbs provides the perfect haven after a long flight. This private residence has two exquisite suites and is the ideal alternative to the often impersonal style of a deluxe hotel, not that Auckland has a great deal to offer in that regard. Instead, declare owners Michael Coutts and Manjit Kaur, you can "surrender to the perfect alternative of your own bespoke personal concierge and the unpretentious style of this discreet, romantic and elegant Auckland private luxury retreat". St Marys has spectacular harbour views and

because you rent the residence in its entirety you really do recreate that very welcome sense of home away from home.

Once you've come to terms with the jet lag, Auckland has a great deal to offer. The newly created Britomart Precinct down by the waterfront is a revitalised area of lovingly restored heritage buildings housing restaurants, bars and some of New Zealand's top fashion designers. However, go off-piste and head for High Street and its much edgier fashion boutiques such as Workshop, Ruby, tkStore, Moochi and men's tailoring at Crane Brothers and Nicholas Jermyn. Ponsonby district also has some fine individual designer stores such as The Cupboard and Lonely, the latter with its spare retail look.

One of the best places to eat in Auckland is The Sugar Club on level 53 of the Sky Tower. Like most big cities, Auckland also has its tall, pointy thing and eating at this elevated height complete with spectacular views, is not to be missed. Less formal is the much lauded French Café. This chic restaurant regularly garners top awards (and not just from within New Zealand) for its inventive cuisine. The current (autumn) menu includes such delights as smoked venison with juniper, blackcurrant, walnut, wood sorrel and beetroot; butter poached crayfish with braised oxtail, pickled carrots, chervil and orange; and duck breast with caramelised figs, goat's cheese, parsnip, kale and black olives.

No stay in Auckland is complete without a short trip across to Waiheke Island. It's simply paradise. Here you can stay at Marino Ridge – a stunning private residence complete with infinity pool, to-die-for views over the bay

and space for a helicopter to take you right to its front door from Auckland airport. Alternatively Greek-American artist Gabriella Lewenz has a lovely property on the island where you can stay in her delightful guest apartment. It's beautifully appointed and the views are similarly spectacular. Lewenz is a charming host and because the suite adjoins her airy studio the mix of art and a peaceful retreat – what she calls 'Artstay' – are worth trying.

Waiheke also gives the traveller a first taste of the terrific wine and olive oil made in New Zealand. For example, Man O' War vineyards has garnered rave reviews for its Valhalla 2013 Chardonnay and Bellerophon 2012, Syrah-Viognier. Its Extra Virgin Olive Oil is pretty good, too.

After Auckland both the north and south islands offer enough variety to last a six-month vacation. To begin I would suggest heading north to the inventively named Northlands and a stay at The Lodge at Kauri Cliffs. If you have time try and schedule in a trip to New Plymouth (about a three-hour flight south west of Auckland) to visit the extraordinary Len Lye Centre – he's New Zealand's most lauded artist. You will find it well worth the effort. The mirrored building that houses his work is on a par with some of the world's great modern architectural feats.

Kauri Cliffs, sister property to Matakauri Lodge on the south island where William and Kate stayed, is set on 6,000 acres near Matakauri Bay with 180° views of the Pacific Ocean and a championship golf course that hugs the coastline. Kauri Cliffs offers superb levels of quality, cuisine and service but it's the Owner's Cottage that stands out. A large (4,200 square foot)

Previous page:  
The quite breathtaking 'Seascape' residence, part of the Annandale Collection, close to Christchurch on New Zealand's south island

- 1 View from the roof terrace of St Marys Residence, Auckland
- 2 Lonely fashion store in Ponsonby, Auckland
- 3 Gabriella Lewenz's Artstay on Waiheke Island, close to Auckland
- 4 Upscale fashion shopping at Britomart in Auckland
- 5 Private chefs on hand at St Marys Residence
- 6 The ground-breaking Len Lye Centre in New Plymouth



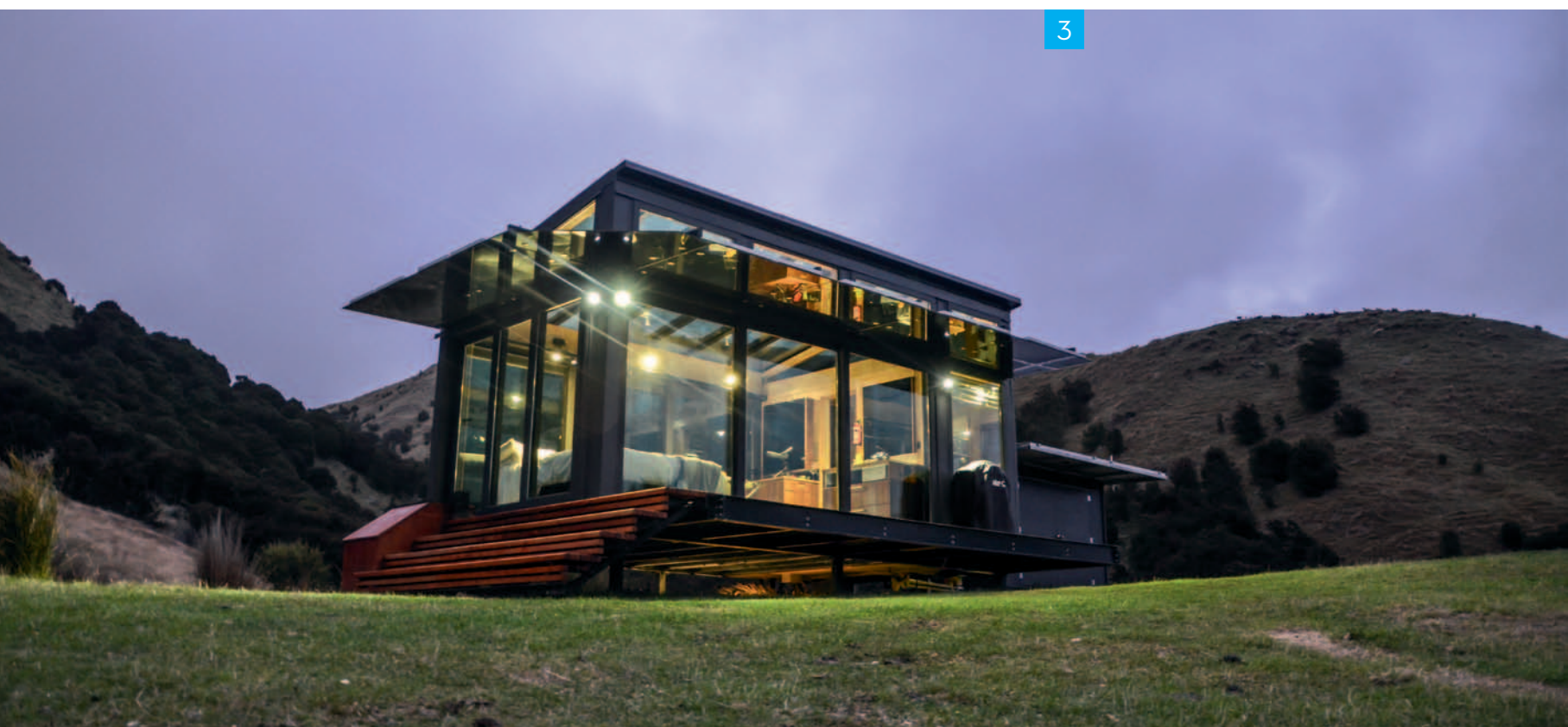




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two suite home with a spacious main living and dining area, the Owner's Cottage at Kauri Cliffs is ideal for families or groups of friends. The private infinity pool and outdoor Jacuzzi add to the air of privacy as does the availability of a lodge chef to handle individual culinary needs.

If you can tear yourself away from Kauri Cliffs then spend a few hours at the nearby Waitangi Treaty Grounds, New Zealand's most important historical site where the country's founding document was signed on 6 February 1840 – the day is still a national holiday. Or you can avail yourself of Kauri Cliffs' own six-seater Eurocopter 130 - B4 for tours of the spectacular coast and beaches – or back to Auckland, where you can catch a connecting flight to Canterbury on the south island.

Since the devastating earthquake in 2011, when some 80 per cent of Canterbury's structures were destroyed or damaged – and 185 people died – the city has valiantly tried to reinvent itself. One of the most touching examples is the so-called Re:START temporary shopping mall built from shipping containers. It's a little oasis in an otherwise eerie central Canterbury where properties are beginning to be built or rebuilt but where the cordoned off site of Canterbury's cathedral remains as a reminder of what was. No one seems to know what to do with the cathedral – restore it, retain what one can and build new, or remove what's left and start again.

There are some great independent boutiques in Re:START and a fair sprinkling of cafés and restaurants. Just outside Canterbury is the award-winning Roots restaurant, named New Zealand's best in 2015. Whether or not this was in part a sympathy vote I cannot

say. But the food I had in this Latin American-inspired restaurant was in parts terrific, in others less so.

About an hour's drive from Christchurch is the quite special Annandale luxury villa collection. With its restored five-bedroom homestead complete with magnificent gardens, infinity pool and tennis court and three other secluded villas each with its own distinctive character, Annandale exemplifies the new approach to luxury in New Zealand. I stayed in the superb 'Seascape' modernist villa which juts out onto your own secluded private bay and is totally isolated. This is pure escapism combined with ultra modern architecture and high service levels. You can choose from the private chef service or opt for the stocked pantry.

An even more unusual choice is Pure Pod described as "your own private slice of Kiwi paradise". Well it's certainly that. Set in completely isolated landscape – apart from the ubiquitous sheep and the occasional inquisitive possum – Pure Pod is where you really know you are away from absolutely everything. Park your 4x4 about half an hour away, walk along the marked path through the bush and there it is: a glass box that allows you to lie in bed and watch the stars or look at the flora underfoot. I wasn't sure about being left in this isolated spot (it's meant for a couple) but it didn't detract from what was one of the highlights of the trip – a back-to-nature experience that is unlike anything else. And although small it's about as luxurious as it gets for this type of offbeat experience with Egyptian cotton linens and a well stocked fridge.

Another short flight from Canterbury to Queenstown gives

you easy access to one of New Zealand's geographical marvels: Fiordland. Charter a private helicopter from Over the Top Tours and they'll take you to these stunning glaciers where, New Zealand Tourism delights in telling us, "waterfalls cascade hundreds of metres into deep black fiords and where ancient rainforest untouched by man clings to mountains and where shimmering lakes and granite peaks look as they did a thousand years ago". Nearby Milford Sound was described by Rudyard Kipling as the Eighth Wonder of the World. It's easy to see why.

Queenstown is set on Lake Wakatipu with the southern alps providing a dramatic backdrop. You can either stay in town at the historic Eichardts Private Hotel or just outside at Matakauri Lodge, where the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge stayed in 2014. The royals availed themselves of Matakauri's Owner's Cottage which offers uninterrupted lake and mountain views and includes four large bedrooms, a spacious main lounge, study, kitchen, dining room and the inevitable private chef.

Matakauri Lodge also reflects the owner's taste for modern art, with Picasso tapestries and pottery and Miro paintings liberally distributed. It's simply superb and must rank as the prime luxury accommodation in the country.

Travelling to New Zealand certainly repays the effort. And anyone concerned about the availability of top notch accommodation and superb quality food and wine can rest assured: New Zealand may be small, and it may be at the edge of the world, but for the premium traveller it is simply unique.

- 1 Matakauri Lodge's Owner's Cottage, where the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge stayed in 2014
- 2 View from Eichardt's Hotel in Queenstown
- 3 Luxury in the wild: Pure Pods' glass sanctuary close to the town of Little River, about one hour from Christchurch
- 4 Re:START shopping precinct in Christchurch created using shipping containers
- 5 Infinity pool at the spectacular Marino Ridge residence on Waiheke Island

TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT LUXE NZ GO TO:

- [newzealand.com](http://newzealand.com)
- [stmarysresidence.co.nz](http://stmarysresidence.co.nz)
- [skycityauckland.co.nz](http://skycityauckland.co.nz)
- [britomart.com](http://britomart.com)
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