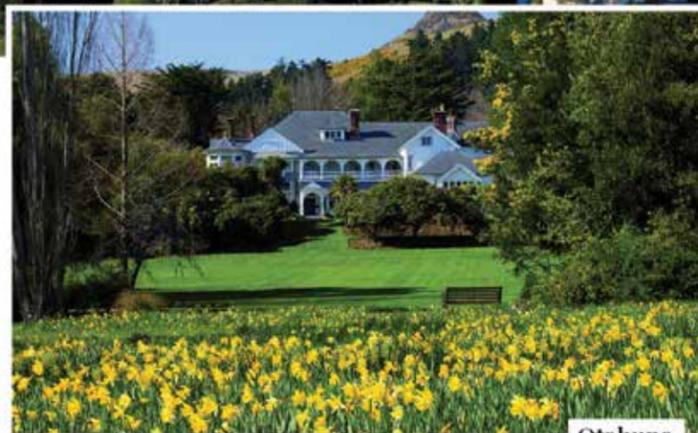




Land of the Lodge

To travel through New Zealand's stunning South Island via its luxury lodges is to truly understand the Old meets New World hospitality of the Land of the Long White Cloud.

Text by Nick Walton | **Photos by** Nick Walton and courtesy of each property



Otahuna

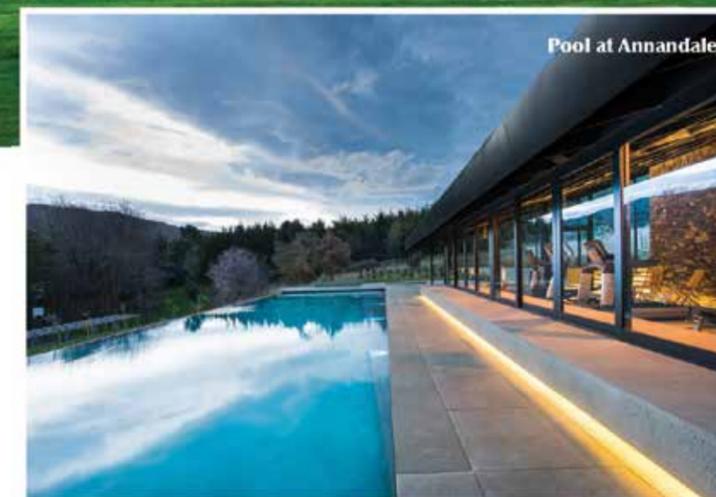


Staying at New Zealand's luxury lodges is slow travel at its very best. At each fascinating property, guests delve into the personalities and histories of the properties and their hosts, kick their heels up amidst lavish accommodation, sample the best of local produce, and do so against some of the country's most stunning landscapes. It's an increasingly popular way to travel for a new generation of jet set who want to look beneath the skin of one of the world's most sought-after destinations, especially in the cooler months of May to October when the South Island, decked out in the vibrant colours of fall, offers a brilliant respite from the heat of Southeast Asia.

Our driving holiday starts at **Otahuna Lodge**, on the outskirts of Christchurch, the largest city on the South Island. A historic Queen Anne-style home lovingly reborn, wreathed by 30 acres of stunning gardens, and staffed by hospitality innovators, Americans Hall Cannon and Miles Refo bought Otahuna in 2007 and revived the property. With the help of Kiwi manager and



Annandale Homestead



Pool at Annandale

executive chef Jimmy McIntyre, they have created a property that welcomes visitors from across the globe. Its five sumptuous guestrooms, including the magnificent Rhodes Suite, are decked out in ancient woods, bespoke furnishings and subtle yet cutting-edge technology.

Chef McIntyre is renowned for his simplistic yet elegant approach to fine dining, a philosophy that places locally sourced ingredients, including 130 varieties of vegetables, fruit and nuts grown in the lodge's own gardens, front and centre. Each evening his fare is showcased with canapés in the leather-clad lounge, followed by a delectable five-course dinner in the main dining room, a space filled with an imposing dark timber dining table that looks like it should be in a castle. Signature dishes include chipotle prawns with tomato and roasted pepper soup; locally caught monk fish with lemon, vanilla and a saffron risotto; and Canterbury duck breast with quince jus, kumara puree and autumn vegetables, all from the Otahuna gardens or from within 100 kilometres of the property.

In remote Pigeon Bay on the Banks Peninsula, we visit New Zealand's newest luxury accommodation concept, **Annandale**, a collection of four unique houses, each vastly different from the next, and each spaced a good 30-minute drive across a working farm from the

other, ensuring the ultimate in privacy. We arrive at Seascope, one of the most remote of the four homes, after a 45-minute drive by farm 4x4 along spectacular clifftops that plummet to the mussel beds of Pigeon Bay, the farm's Black Angus cattle watching our progress. A simple farm track leads steeply down to a remote bay wreathed by a stony beach and rocky headlands. Nestled into the hillside, Seascope is stunning from first glance, a spacious, unashamedly modern villa with a glass façade that makes the most of its stunning surroundings.

While there is plenty to do at Annandale, from hiking and biking to cooking classes, most guests come here for the luxurious solitude and the novel "we create, you serve" approach of executive chef Paul Jobin, which means a gourmet dinner and breakfast is cooked, vacuum packed and delivered before check-in, needing just minimal



Pen-y-bryn



preparation. In our case it's marinated green lip mussels from a farm across the bay; Cantervalley black lacquer dug leg with banana lychee relish and a scallion pancake; and lemon passionfruit curd and honey macadamia wafers with the farm's own raspberries. Everything either comes from Annandale's farm or from producers within 50 kilometres of the property. After dinner my wife, Maggie, and I curl up on a pair of daybeds beside the outdoor fireplace and Jacuzzi, the waters of the bay before us cast in the lingering light of a startling canopy of stars. It's nothing short of magical.

Many travellers visit Oamaru, on the east coast of the South Island, for its colonies of seals and blue and yellow-eyed penguins, but instead we head for the hills, to Pen-y-bryn, a category one historic home nestled in meticulously landscaped gardens overlooking the township. Built in 1889, Pen-y-bryn was bought by Americans James Glucksman and James Boussy in 2010. The historic Victorian home boasts five rather cosy guestrooms, three of which will become suites in September. Like something out of a C.S. Lewis novel, **Pen-y-bryn** features a near-endless line of beautifully preserved living rooms, dens, lounges and snugs (including one featuring a full-sized billiards table commissioned by the

New Zealand houses of parliament). Filled with beautiful objects d'art from the owners' many years spent in Asia, Pen-y-bryn is a more traditional lodge, where the lines between private home and accommodation option are blissfully fuzzy, and where the Old World hospitality of the owners, married with fantastic local fare, is the major drawing card.

A highlight of any stay is dinner, which commences with communal cocktails and canapés by the fire, followed by a five-course dinner in the grand old dining hall. Slow food lover James Glucksman is an Officier Maître Hôte in the Confrérie de la Chaîne des Rôtisseurs, the Paris-based gourmet society, and serves up dishes that are not only inventive and delicious but are almost entirely sourced from the lodge's own gardens, home-made in its kitchens or bought from local suppliers. Combined with the fascinating décor of this historic home, Pen-y-bryn offers a homely inn open to travellers the world over.

We travel southwest to Glenorchy and **Blanket Bay**, the Grand Dame of New Zealand's modern luxury lodge era, having opened in 1999. Unlike Otahuna or Pen-y-bryn, Blanket Bay was built as a luxury lodge, one designed to attract the



Blanket Bay



Blanket Bay



well-heeled from the United States and Europe, although today you're as likely to hear Arabic or Chinese spoken in its timber-clad Great Room as English or French. The lodge, flanked by the expanses of Lake Wakatipu on one side and by imposing peaks on the other, is a destination in itself. Designed by US architect Jim McLaughlin and built using locally sourced schist rock and recycled timber, Blanket Bay boasts just 12 luxurious guestrooms and suites, including four luxuriously appointed standalone Chalet Suites. In addition, there are great living rooms with double-height picture windows and towering fire places, intimate bars and snugs, a modern game room, wine caves (plural), its own spa and fitness centre, an outdoor pool and an indoor spa that looks through French windows to the western tip of the lake.

The lodge is the perfect jumping-off point for travellers looking to explore Milford Sound

and Fiordland National Park, and when guests return to the lodge, dinner cooked by executive chef Corey Hume is waiting in the elegant Lake View Dining Room. His culinary creations range from Canterbury quail with celeriac puree and chorizo through to Port Nicholson crayfish tail with coral and miso emulsion, seared scallop and roasted vegetables from the lodge gardens. As always the focus is on simplistic fine dining that lets the ingredients – and the awe-inspiring surrounds – speak for themselves.

The last stop on our itinerary is located closer to Queenstown and is fittingly more modern. **Matakauri** is the five-year-old sibling of acclaimed North Island golf destination lodges Kauri Cliffs and Cape Kidnappers, and brings a much more contemporary feel to the South Island scene. Positioned overlooking Lake Wakatipu and the towering Tooth Peaks that form the border with the province of Southland, Matakauri features just 12 guestrooms, four classically located within the main lodge building, the rest standalone apartments with stunning views and clean, modern décor that takes its cues from autumn in Otago. The Owner's Cottage, the lodge's penthouse, accommodates eight in absolute luxury.



Matakauri



The warm colours of the suites are continued in the main lodge building, where breakfast and dinner is served in the intimate dining room, on the outdoor patio or in the private library. Head chef Jonathan Roger's menus are inspired by the produce of New Zealand's southern provinces and his à la carte menus change daily but include the likes of roasted scallops with black pudding and beurre noisette, deep sea terakihi with mussels and dill, and smoked Otago duck with beetroot, goat's curd and blood orange. Matched with wines from Central Otago, it's a fantastic way to finish our New Zealand gastronomic journey through the South Island's top luxury retreats. 

TRAVEL ESSENTIALS

Air New Zealand (www.airnz.co.nz) has flights from Denpasar to Auckland and on to the South Island. Learn more about these stunning lodges through Luxury Lodges of New Zealand. www.lodgesofnz.co.nz

To book a bespoke itinerary that takes in the best luxury lodges as well as helicopter transfers, world-class meals and a host of special activities, contact Stephen White of luxury New Zealand specialists the Exclusive Travel Group at stephen@exclusivetravelgroup.com www.exclusivetravelgroup.com