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TRAVEL

Luxury Lava

Annandale, an authentic and historic working farm in New Zealand, is where rugged beauty and ultimate luxury rub shoulders.

by Mei Anne Foo

LYNDSAY JOBIN NAVIGATES THE four-wheel drive effortlessly, through a narrow and twisting pathway by the fringes of the peninsula. Winding down the windows, despite light showers, we take in unhampered views of headlands dipping down to the dazzling blue Pigeon Bay. Bundles of wool are seen running and taking shelter amid patches of tussock grass, while a bunch of Black Angus cattle pose and stare at us without a care. “They look angry but it’s plain funny with their fuzzy faces, huh?” Jobin teases.

The general manager overseeing our luxury coastal farm stay continues the line of playful banter by making sport of the region’s peculiar shape. Millions of years ago, ancient lava apparently touched the Pacific Ocean with an outstretched hand (fingers and all) to form the Banks Peninsula. It now sticks out like a volcanic sore thumb on the east coast of New Zealand’s South Island. And on one of the peninsula’s tinier ‘lava fingers’, pointing north, Annandale rests in pastured grandeur.

At a little more than an hour’s drive, or 15-minute helicopter ride from Christchurch airport, the 4,000-acre working farm accommodates 7,000 sheep, 500 cows, and

four surprisingly isolated villas. When fully occupied, there will only be 30 guests spread across the lush countryside. In a nation where sheep already outnumber people at a ratio of six to one, the probability of bumping into another person here is now much closer to none.

We are whisked away further into the farmland and left to settle alone at Seascape, a modern hideaway overlooking its own private bay. Niftily etched into a hillside, the discreet concrete-and-glass building blends with its natural surroundings despite its well-defined architectural lines.

Inside, a king-size bed lays upon a dais, slightly raised from the sitting area and a modern fireplace. Almost every step taken within the building lands us to a breathtaking view of the bay and beyond; the sea clearly dominating the seamless indoor-outdoor living space. Seascape is the last stop on Annandale’s farm track — traversing the original Homestead; the cosier rustic retreat of Shepherd’s Cottage; and the sumptuous Scrubby Bay, a cedar-clad beach house perfect for a family gathering of up to 14 people.

Annandale may have all the luxuries and comforts imaginable on the inside but the bits on the outside are what really sets the sanctuary apart.



SCRUBBY BAY BEACH HOUSE





In line with providing complete privacy, Annandale offers gourmet meals already stocked in each remote villa's kitchen and refrigerators before the arrival of guests. Easy-to-follow instructions allow for a self-served farm-to-table culinary experience of restaurant quality, without the intrusion of any staff members.

"We have established a locavore ethos by drawing menu inspiration from the farm and coastal area of Pigeon Bay itself," says Paul Jobin, executive chef of Annandale. "We regularly take a mountain bike and forage around the bay area for ingredients such as wild cress, wild parsley, chickweed, pea flowers, kelp and wakame. Desired cuts are likewise sourced from the farm's Angus beef and Romney sheep." Annandale also boasts a garden grown on a succession plan so not all produce is harvested at once.

A total of 85 percent of guests opt for this flexible food fare but the desire for company and someone to cook and clean is something a few have requested, especially during the holiday season of December to January. With rates starting at NZ\$518, guests can hire a private chef for a special meal or for their entire stay.

Annandale may have all the luxuries and comforts imaginable on the inside but the bits on the outside are what really sets the sanctuary apart. Mere metres from the shoreline, we take our complimentary mountain bikes for a ride over cliff-top trails to unravel the vastness of the territory. Further down, the calm waters of Pigeon Bay call out to be cruised and kayaked on. Shifting our prolonged gaze at the surface of the ocean, we focus instead on the ridged hills and valleys. The topography is fascinating and unusual, with a cool and salubrious climate.

True to magical form, we even catch sight of nature's greatest and most vibrant forms. The rainbow unfolds during the final hour of our farm exploration, perfectly arched with both ends clearly rooted into the meadow. A closer look reveals the honest truth of what actually lies at the end of a rainbow. Contrary to popular belief, it wasn't a leprechaun and a pot of gold. We were presented with a big Angus bull, between red and violet, fuzzy face and all. It was funny indeed. ◇

www.annandale.com



SEASCAPE FARM