



Hotel couture

Got a spare \$21,000? Book a nine-day break at Kauri Cliffs (pictured), Cape Kidnappers and Huka Lodge



Huka at sundown. Sigh...

Inside an exclusive Huka Lodge cottage

EVER WONDERED HOW THE RICH AND FAMOUS DO A NZ MINIBREAK? ANITA QUIGLEY GETS A TASTE...

SO LET me guess. Right about now you've just received your credit card bill. Geez, weren't you over-generous this Christmas? But what about you? When was the last time you treated yourself to something truly lavish? Like a wonderful few nights of pure self-indulgence at Huka Lodge.

In the height of summer, the banks of the Waikato River, on which this exclusive New Zealand lodge sits, becomes a lush helipad with choppers vying for landing space. Some are dropping off guests lucky enough to be checking in or coming

back from a day's sightseeing; others are wealthy Kiwis and tourists who fancied lunching somewhere exclusive and super-private. (Why take the car when you have a pilot on hand?)

The lodge has 7ha of manicured grounds with 18 Lodge Rooms, plus a four-suite Owner's Cottage and the two-suite Alan Pye Cottage, which are often booked out by visiting royalty, heads of state and celebrities such as Tilda Swinton, Kate Winslet and Bill Gates.

And it's not hard to see why. Most of us would think we'd won the Lotto if our homes were even half as fabulous as these two "cottages".

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Each has views up the deep-turquoise Waikato River that surges downstream to the mighty Huka Falls.

Along with two other North Island lodges – Kauri Cliffs (Northland) and Cape Kidnappers (Hawke's Bay) – until the end of March guests can stay nine nights (three at each) for \$21,100. Ahem.

If that's stretching the budget a little, Huka alone is affordable for a few nights to take in some of the beautiful scenery and local wineries. It made *Conde Nast Traveler's* 2009 Readers' Choice Awards; has just appointed Michelin-starred chef Michel Louws; and came in the Top 20 of a new Food & Wine Resort category by Andrew Harper's prestigious *Hideaway Report*.

We "slummed" it in one of the Lodge rooms where, just steps from the door, you can cast a fishing rod into the river to try your luck for rainbow trout. This will keep the bloke (should you be travelling with one) entertained while you soak in the spa bath.

But truth be told, I even got into the

fishing. We jumped at the chance to go aboard a private launch on nearby Lake Taupo, run by Chris Jolly Outdoors. While he fished, I ate lunch and cheered him on with a glass of local sauvignon blanc when he caught the much sought-after trout. Better yet, we took our catch back to the Lodge, where the chef incorporated our catch into our pre-dinner canapes and as an additional course in our three-course meal.

For the first time, I actually got that whole hunting and gathering thing. In a place like this, it's something I could sure get used to.

TRAVEL NOTES

The 3x Fabulous package is available until March 31. It includes three nights at each of the three lodges, lavish menus and activities including spa treatments and golf
www.hukalodge.co.nz
www.kauricliffs.com
www.capekidnappers.com
www.chrisjolly.co.nz

When in NZ...



Agents & Merchants

This laneway wine bar in Auckland's CBD offers 200 different drops and a top tapas menu (mmm...white-truffle risotto balls). Hit Racket next door to dance until 4am. More: www.agentsandmerchants.co.nz



Workroom

A father/daughter team in Clevedon, near Auckland, creates amazing furniture from recycled timber. Choose from their shop floor or commission a bespoke piece. More: www.workroom.net.nz



The Winery Tour

Lie amid the vines, glass of wine in hand, as New Zealand musicians Tim Finn, Bic Runga and Dave Dobbyn perform their greatest songs. At 16 wineries across the country. More: www.thewinerytour.co.nz



Art Deco Weekend

Iron your flapper dress, fluff up your fascinator and revisit the Roaring Twenties at Napier's annual Geon Art Deco Weekend from February 18-21. More: www.artdeconapier.com