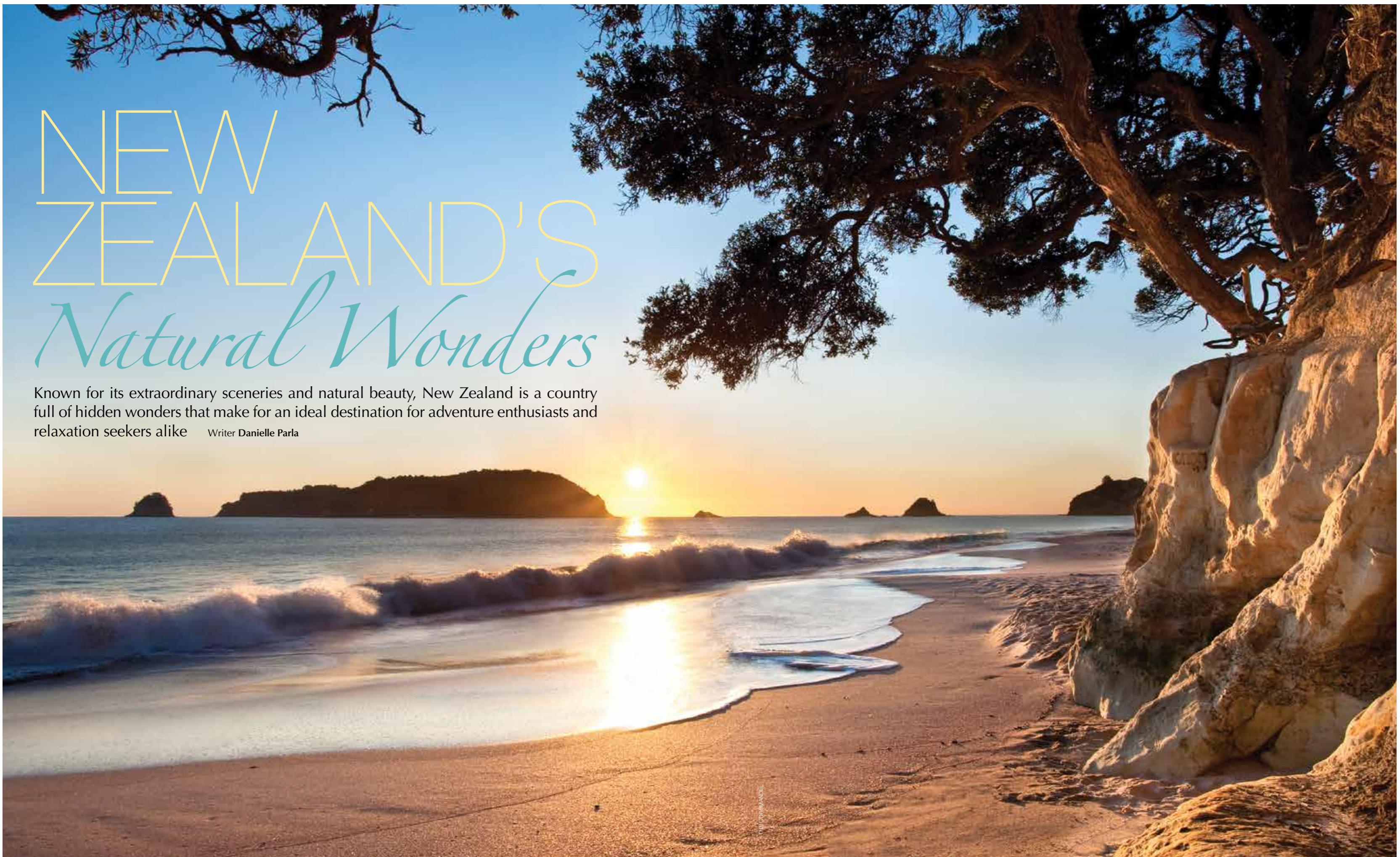


NEW ZEALAND'S *Natural Wonders*

Known for its extraordinary sceneries and natural beauty, New Zealand is a country full of hidden wonders that make for an ideal destination for adventure enthusiasts and relaxation seekers alike

Writer Danielle Parla

THE COROMANDEL





From the moment you arrive in New Zealand, you cannot help but be struck by the intensity of the luminous green countryside, sapphire blue sky and spectacular turquoise waters. New Zealand or *Aotearoa*, as the indigenous Maori call it (meaning 'land of the long white cloud'), is a modest country of 4.4 million and one that is fiercely proud of their Maori culture, cinematic triumphs, exquisite nature, friendliness and irrepressible rugby team, the All Blacks.

Plentiful in islands, the largest islands are now referred to by their English and Maori names: North Island or *Te Ika-a-Māui* ('the fish of Maui') and South Island or *Te Waipounamu* ('the waters of greenstone'). Together the islands span 1,600 km and 15,000 km of coastline that give rise to distinct geography and climates ranging



LEFT: THE LAB IMAGE LIBRARY; NORTHLAND INC TOURISM. RIGHT: THE LAB IMAGE LIBRARY

from subtropical to glacial. An undeniably fantastic destination for families and nature seekers, where travel is easy and well-maintained and uncrowded roads invite off-the-beaten-track exploring.

AUCKLAND

Most international flights land in New Zealand's largest city, Auckland, making it a natural place to start your journey. With the Hauraki Gulf as a backdrop, it is not surprising that the 'City of Sails' offers stunning coastal scenery, exceptional outdoor activities and has again been voted one of the top cities in the world for 2014.

STAY: THE LANGHAM HOTEL AUCKLAND

The Langham Hotel Auckland has three dedicated Chuan Havens spa suites to

complement the in-house Chuan Spa. The Serenity suite offers sanctuary with dark woods, low ceiling with hand-painted sakura blossoms, velvety purple interior and Japanese-inspired bathroom featuring a large infinity bath. Guests of the spa suites have access to the Langham Club Lounge where complimentary breakfast, afternoon tea and evening canapés and drinks are served. The Chuan Spa features a small outdoor pool and Jacuzzi and is accessible to all guests with Chinese five-element inspired spa treatments.

www.auckland.langhamhotels.co.nz

SAVOUR: STONYRIDGE VINEYARD

Waiheke Island's Stonyridge Vineyard is home to the award-winning Bordeaux-style Larose wine and a lovely place to restock your wine cellar and enjoy tantalising seasonal dishes and wines overlooking vineyards and olive groves.

www.stonyridge.co.nz

SEE:

Auckland Sea Kayaks offers full- and half-day tours for all levels of experience to islands in the stunning Hauraki Gulf (www.aucklandseakayaks.co.nz), while a



35-minute ferry from downtown Auckland takes you to the region's jewel – Waiheke Island. Be guided to places of interest and wine tastings at a selection of the 23 wineries (www.ananda.co.nz), and see the island from a bird's eye view with three 200-metre zipline flights over a vineyard and dense native forest for what are quite possibly the most spectacular views on the island (www.ecozipadventures.co.nz). www.aucklandnz.com

NORTHLAND

An easy 3.5-hour drive north of Auckland lies the alluring Bay of Islands, a region boasting 144 islands, numerous vineyards and rich natural and cultural history.

STAY: EAGLES NEST

The historic township of Russell is home to New Zealand's award-winning lodge, the Eagles Nest. Majestically situated on the ridgeline of Flagstaff Hill Historic Reserve, each of the five modern and private villas bears its own signature design without losing sight of the spectacular ocean views and native landscaping. Catering to single and multiple guests, each villa has state-of-the-art entertainment systems, fully



equipped gourmet kitchens and Jacuzzi, while the four larger villas have an infinity pool that merges in a seamless illusion with the turquoise Bay of Islands.

www.eaglesnest.co.nz

SAVOUR: MARSDEN ESTATE WINERY & RESTAURANT

Set amongst gardens, the charming Marsden Estate Winery & Restaurant in Kerikeri provides a wonderful chance to linger over a sumptuous lunch and sample some of the region's finest wines.

www.marsdenestate.co.nz

LIVING NATURE

One of the country's most eminent natural beauty companies, Living Nature, celebrates the abundant and healing flora of New Zealand and is BDIH-certified. Based in Kerikeri, treat yourself to a facial using the hydrating and healing properties of manuka honey and harakeke flax and visit the boutique to stock up on all your hair, skin and cosmetic needs.

www.livingnature.com

SEE:

The history of the region comes to life at

Pompallier House, where you go back in time with stories of New Zealand's first Catholic mission and printing of religious texts into Maori (www.pompallier.co.nz).

Live out a dream and be guided by experts to swim with one of New Zealand's many dolphin species in spectacular turquoise waters (www.explorengroup.co.nz). Forty minutes from Auckland is the famous Matakana Village and Farmers' Market and a chance for the whole family to experience the world's fastest growing sport stand-up paddleboarding with Matakana Beach Outfitters (www.matakanasup.co.nz).

www.northlandnz.com

COROMANDEL

If New Zealand is about anything, it's about relaxed living. Take cue from the locals and enjoy the beach life the Coromandel is famous for and walk endless beaches, explore bird life at Wharekawa Harbour and hang ten in Whangamata where the waves beckon.

STAY: GRAND MERCURE PUKA PARK RESORT

Grand Mercure Puka Park in Pauanui has 42 charming chalets nestled amongst beautiful

THIS PAGE: The 'Te Hoho' pinnacle at the Cathedral Cove in Coromandel.
OPPOSITE PAGE: The infinity pool at Eagles Nest merges in a seamless illusion with the Bay of Islands; outdoor tub at the Solitaire Lodge

native bush, giving the opportunity for guests to enjoy space and solitude. During the summer, the forest sings of cicadas and birdsong inviting you to retreat into nature beneath the canopy and enjoy relaxed living in this charming little township.

www.pukapark.co.nz

SAVOUR: FALLS RETREAT

As you drive from Auckland, do not miss stopping at the award-winning Bistro at the Falls Retreat. The delectable selection on the blackboard menu brings a paddock-to-plate approach and your warm hosts will make you feel right at home.

www.fallsretreat.co.nz

THE LOST SPRING

Driving north to Whitianga, stop off at Cathedral Cove for beach time and snorkelling. Take the water taxi from Hot Water Beach to the cove for spectacular views of the gigantic arched cavern, pohutukawa-lined beaches and the nature-sculpted 'Te Hoho' pinnacle rock. In

DANIELLE PARLA



Whitianga, relax and enjoy an antipasto plate while soaking in the mineral-rich waters of The Lost Spring thermal resort. Drawn from 667 metres below, the clear waters boast 400 different minerals and set the mood for a Fiji-inspired spa treatment that will transport you to your own island paradise. www.thelostspring.co.nz

SEE:

The 82-km Hauraki rail trail takes you through the stunning Karangahake Gorge, one of the '14 Wonders of New Zealand'. Rent a cruiser bike, have your trail itinerary and luggage transfer organised, as you follow the historical trail through pristine forests, trestles and tunnels.

www.haurakirailtrail.co.nz
www.thecoromandel.com

ROTORUA

Known for geothermal activity, Rotorua offers fun for the family, adventure seeker, nature lover and spa devotee.

STAY: SOLITAIRE LODGE

The name hints to what discerning travellers can expect from Solitaire Lodge, however it isn't until you arrive that you really understand. A mere 20 minutes' drive from Rotorua, you will pass the beautiful Green and Blue Lakes on your way to Lake Tarawera and the lodge's pristine location in untouched natural surrounds. Offering full board stays, owners Wayne and Ingrid and their friendly and knowledgeable team ensure your every need is met. Facing the lake, the suites are spacious and light, and the cuisine is quite possibly the finest in the region. Start your day with a visit to a hidden natural lakeside hot spring by private boat, be guided by an expert angler to a day of rainbow trout fishing, be collected from the helipad for a scenic excursion to White Island or Mount Tarawera, or simply sit back to the call of black swans and unimaginable views of the lake. www.solitairelodge.co.nz

SAVOUR: POLYNESIAN SPA

New Zealand's spa experiences truly capitalise on the country's natural assets of healing geothermal mineral waters and flora, such as manuka honey. Since 1878 the healing mineral waters of the historic Polynesian Spa on Lake Rotorua have welcomed bathers to soak in the acidic Priest Spring water for muscle and pain relief and the alkaline Rachel Spring for skin softening and beauty. There are defined areas for families and adults, and all offer healing mineral bathing experiences with varying temperatures and services. Tip: Book a spa therapy and enjoy the Lake Spa pools surrounded by nature.

www.polynesianspa.co.nz

SEE:

Enroute to Rotorua, Matamata is home to vast farmlands and the living set of the famed Hobbiton from the *Lord of the Rings* movie trilogy. The two-hour guided tour will take you through Bilbo Baggins' fabled Shire finishing at the Green Dragon Pub, where you can sit by the hearth with a brew (www.hobbitontours.com). Invented in Rotorua, OGO invites you to climb inside an inflated cushioned ball and roll straight or sidewinding down a grassy hill with your



THIS PAGE: Explore Lake Taupo with a thrilling jet boat ride; enjoy a healing geothermal experience at the Polynesian Spa on Lake Rotorua



laughter and squeals captured on film (www.ogo.co.nz). Rotorua's beautiful rivers can be viewed from the banks or be daring and get on the water with fun and experienced river rafting guides (www.kaitiaki.co.nz). South-east of Rotorua the Waimangu Volcanic Valley offers a fascinating two-hour walk to Lake Rotomahana past steaming fumaroles, boiling geothermal pools and flora (www.waimangu.co.nz). East of Rotorua, the Central Bay of Plenty is home to some of New Zealand's best kept secrets – the ancient rainforests of Te Urewera National Park, Te Whaiti Nui-A-Toi Canyon, Mangamate Falls, Whirinaki Forest, Rangitaiki River and the muscle-soothing Kerosene Creek – go alone or use your local experts to guide you by horse, kayak, boat or foot (www.muruparamotorcamp.co.nz). www.rotoruanz.com

GISBORNE

Famous for its beaches and surfing, Gisborne is the first city in the world to see the rising sun. Home to New Zealand's third largest wine region, wines from this region have an easy drinking style, intense fruit flavour and delectable chardonnays. Per capita, Gisborne has the highest Maori population in New Zealand and Maori art forms are well regarded in the region.

SEE:

Gisborne offers world-class beaches and the chance to get up-close to the magnificent creatures of the ocean with interactions with stingrays and shark cage diving (www.divetatapouri.com). Enjoy the walking trails through an incredible 135 hectares of exotic and native trees at the National Arboretum

Eastwood Hill and visiting vineyards like the charming Bushmere Estate or if time is short, the Gisborne Wine Centre, where all the wines of the region can be tasted.

About the size of Singapore, Lake Taupo was formed by a series of volcanic eruptions and is the largest freshwater lake in Australasia with more than 30 rivers and streams flowing in and only one outlet – the Waikato River. Sitting on the northern shore, Taupo is a popular destination to pursue cultural, nature and adrenalin-pumping activities.

STAY: HILTON LAKE TAUPō

Overlooking the lake from its hillside location, the Hilton Lake Taupo has attractive self-contained apartments that offer the perfect retreat space for families who want luxury with the ease of home.



With respect for the environment, thermal waters sourced from beside the hotel are used for heating the thermal swimming pool and hotel. The hotel was Taupo's first, and recent renovations make the original and new wings of the hotel stylish and modern. www.laketaupo.hilton.com

SAVOUR: WAIRAKEI TERRACES
The outdoor pools and Maori village at Wairakei Terraces are set amongst eucalyptus and native flora and honour the healing power of geothermal mineral waters and Maori culture beautifully. www.wairakeiterraces.co.nz

PORONUI
Poronui, a lodge retreat, offers delectable dining experiences and one-of-a-kind Kai Waho celebration of Maori food, preparation and ceremony with a Maori hangi hosted by *tangata whenua* (person

of the land), Tom Loughlin. Make the most of your suite's fully equipped kitchen and prepare a fabulous picnic where you can eat and enjoy natural hot water beaches lakeside. www.poronui.com

SEE:

Taupo is a thrill-seekers' heaven (www.greatlaketaupo.com) and there is no better way to see the lake, river feeds and geothermal activity than from the air in a scenic floatplane (www.tauposfloatplane.co.nz). The twilight 'Taste of Taupo' boat cruise takes you lakeside to the Maori carvings (www.chrisjolly.co.nz). See the Waikato River from a positively heart-racing perspective with the 47-metre Taupo Cliffhanger (www.taupobungy.co.nz) and a thrilling jet boat ride with hair-raising twists and 360-degree turns to the base of the Huka Falls (www.hukafallsjet.com). www.gisbornenz.com

WELLINGTON

Mix arts, coffee and culture and you get Wellington – the compact and accessible harbour city and capital of New Zealand.

SAVOUR: ZEST FOOD TOURS OF NEW ZEALAND

Foodies adore Wellington, and its sophisticated food scene is bursting with great cafes and restaurants and with more cafes per capita than New York City, a guided Capital Taste Tour by Zest is the perfect insiders' orientation. Be guided by foot to some of the trendiest eateries and gourmet shops by friendly and knowledgeable guides. www.zestfoodtours.co.nz

HEMA

For over 25 years Margaret Hema has approached the skin 'like beautiful fabric' and won the hearts of Hollywood celebrities

and locals with her signature facials and exquisitely handmade oils. www.hemaproducts.com

SEE:

Wellington is home to the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, Royal New Zealand Ballet, untold art galleries and the exceptional Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (www.tepapa.govt.nz). Ride in the historic cable car from town to the beautiful Botanic Garden and the 250-hectare eco-reserve Zealandia where New Zealand's rarest native fauna thrive in a sanctuary that is being restored to pre-civilisation state. Premiering *Lord of the Rings*, the beautifully restored Embassy Theatre is home to The Black Sparrow cocktail bar (www.theblacksparrow.co.nz), where guests can relax into generous leather seats with a cocktail in one hand and popcorn in the other. Movie-buffs can

see behind the scenes of *Lord of the Rings* with tours of the special effects creators, Weta Studios (www.wetanz.com), and movie tours.

One hour north of Wellington is the Wairarapa with towns Martinborough, Greytown and Featherston linked together by farmland and vineyards. Family-friendly Top 10 campground in Martinborough offers the quintessential New Zealand camping experience with the luxury of self-contained units. On-site bicycle hire is your best way to visit the regions wineries. Haythornthwaite Wines has wonderful Gewürztraminer and can be found in fine dining restaurants from Wellington to Hong Kong (www.haythornthwaite.co.nz). www.wellingtonnz.com

MARLBOROUGH SOUNDS

Leaving your car in Wellington, the voyage to the South Island port of Picton is nothing short of spectacular. During the three-hour crossing, be on the lookout for dolphins and whales as you weave through the Queen

Charlotte Sounds in the added comfort of the Interislander Ferry Prestige Lounge.

STAY: BAY OF MANY COVES RESORT

The secluded Bay of Many Coves is accessible by boat and helicopter and charms guests with individual luxury villas nestled amongst native flora and overlooking the blue green waters of the Arthurs Bay. From the comfort of your private balcony, contemplate your day's activities with the friendly guidance of resort staff. Nature sets your rhythm, as you are lulled to sleep by the call of Morepork owls and begin the day with the gentle song of bellbirds. www.bayofmanycoves.co.nz

SAVOUR: RESTAURANTS AND MIRITU SPA AT BAY OF MANY COVES RESORT

Guests of the Bay of Many Coves have several dining options during their stay, including relaxed dining at the Kumatake or Eight Cafe, as well as fine dining at the Foredock restaurant, where the region's most



THIS PAGE: Adorable houses in Wellington. OPPOSITE PAGE: New Zealand's capital at dawn



notable Sauvignon blanc are expertly paired with your meal. Although modest in size, the delightfully full treatment menu at the Miritu Spa is well worth the visit. The firm and full body Miritu Signature Massage incorporates traditional indigenous techniques at the hands of their talented therapist.
www.bayofmanycoves.co.nz

SEE:

Get picked up at the Bay of Many Coves by Dolphin Watch Nature Tours for a water/land tour, where the bird life and ecology of this remarkable reserve comes to life (www.naturetours.co.nz). For a quintessential Marlborough Sounds experience, let the experts organise your walk, kayak, bike (or a bit of each) over the famous 71 km Queen Charlotte Track (www.marlboroughsounds.co.nz). Life becomes deliciously simple as you set off from the historic Ship's Cove through native bush, with exquisite blue-green waters below. As you travel your luggage is transferred to your secluded accommodation at the pristine Furneaux Lodge, Punga Cove and Peppers Portage, before your jubilant arrival at Anakiwa. In this part of New Zealand, the water is your road and Cougar Line offers reliable water taxi services, including day trips to locations along the Queen Charlotte Track and to Motuara Island Bird Sanctuary (www.cougarline.co.nz). www.lovemarlborough.co.nz



LEFT: DANIELLE PARLA; RIGHT: NELSON TASMAN TOURISM

NELSON-TASMAN STAY: SPLIT APPLE RETREAT

According to legend, *Rangi* ('Father Sky') and *Tāne* ('God of the Forest'), solved a heated dispute by splitting an apple fairly, and the iconic Split Apple rock is a mere stone's throw from Nelson's premier wellness space, Split Apple Retreat. This intimate luxury stay has sweeping views of Abel Tasman National Park and the surrounding islands. Walk through the gates of a 200-year old shrine to a beautiful Zen-inspired garden of Asian exotic and native New Zealand flora, as you are welcomed by your hosts John and Pen. Their love of Japanese design is apparent and guests can't help but be transfixed by the exquisite collection of Asian artefacts. All three of

the state-of-the-art suites have luxurious bathrooms, ocean views and their own private outdoor deck. The in-house movie theatre, steam bath, infra-red sauna and salt water infinity pool provide plenty of opportunity to relax and recharge.
www.splitapple.com

SAVOUR: SPLIT APPLE RETREAT

The delectable cuisine creates a sensory celebration and convinces even the most die-hard foodies that healthy eating need not be deprival. Pen doesn't conceal her talent in the kitchen and guests have the opportunity to join her for cooking lessons and take her dining home in their published *Split Apple Thoughtful Food Cookbook*.
www.splitapple.com

BOAT SHED

Oceanside in Nelson township is the popular Boat Shed café, where fresh, simple and delicious cuisine is served on the deck.
www.boatshedcafe.co.nz

SEE:

With no shortage of art nor wine in Nelson, one could be convinced that one of New Zealand's sunniest cities inspires both creativity and grapes. Take time to visit local artists in their home galleries and local craft markets, including Höglund Glass Blowing Studio. The internationally acclaimed WOW (World of Wearable Art) is a must-see on your way to organic winery Woollaston for a sampling of their gravity-fed wines before a call of the wild from Abel Tasman National Park. One of three protected national parks in the region, Abel Tasman is one of New Zealand's most beautiful and popular and can only be approached by foot or by water. A paradise for kayakers who often find themselves alone at one of the golden sand beaches, day visitors will love the hidden gems that lifelong resident, Rod, of Abel Tasman Charter's shares deckside about the islands and its wildlife (www.abeltasmancharters.com).
www.nelsonnz.com

THIS PAGE: The pristine Wharariki Beach in Tasman. OPPOSITE PAGE: Queen Charlotte Track in Marlborough Sounds; relax and recharge at Split Apple Retreat