

# Returning to NEW ZEALAND

BY IGNACIO MAZA

**W**e recently traveled to New Zealand in search of places we missed during our last trip. Instead of visiting during the country's popular summer (our winter) months, we traveled in April — less crowded, with fall colors as a bonus.

Aotearoa, the native Māori name for New Zealand, is a world apart. The country was the last major landmass to be settled by man. It is completely different from French Polynesia, where the first settlers migrated from eight hundred years ago. The South Island, where we spent most of our time, is nature's wonderland. Imagine an island the size of the State of Illinois, with fjords, sand dunes, vineyards, turquoise lakes, golden beaches, dry valleys, rainforests, and snow-capped peaks soaring 12,000 feet into the sky. Couple this natural diversity with a unique history, a rich Māori heritage, friendly residents, endemic flora and fauna (think flightless birds), and you will begin to appreciate what makes the South Island so special.

Here are memorable places, accommodations, and experiences well worth adding to your clients' travel wish list. Wherever your clients travel in New Zealand, they will find genuine Kiwi hospitality, fine dining, and heartfelt service.

## **Nelson & Pihopa Retreat**

Gateway to three National Parks and hub for artists, fine dining, and exceptional wine, Nelson is the country's capital of sunshine and easy living. The jewel in the crown: Abel Tasman National Park, New Zealand's smallest. This coastal nature reserve features sandy beaches, lush forests, clear ocean waters, and unique rock formations. We recommend an all-day sail, kayak, and hike adventure, which will give your clients an overview of this special corner of the South Island.

Stay at **Pihopa Retreat**, Nelson's only five-star resort, built on the grounds of a former bishop's residence. Owners Sarah and Sam Mellor have transformed the historic property into a hideaway with six suites, manicured gardens, a swimming pool, gym, and spa. A "must" experi-



ence: breakfast in the estate's former church — a surprising treat. Contact Ms. Mellor, general manager & founder, at [info@pihoparetreat.nz](mailto:info@pihoparetreat.nz).

### Franz Josef & Te Waionui Forest Retreat

The South Island's west coast is home to two of New Zealand's awe-inspiring natural wonders: The Franz Josef and Fox glaciers. Named after the former Austrian emperor, the Franz Josef glacier once stretched to the Tasman Sea. Today, the glacier is best seen from the air. Fly over the icefield on a helicopter and learn about crevasses and glacial flour from expert pilots. Landing next to a high turquoise lake and seeing the ice up close will leave

your clients breathless.

**Te Waionui** is a forest retreat and our first choice in the town of Franz Josef. This comfortable, eco-designed resort is surrounded by preserved native rainforest. Don't miss visiting the nearby Wildlife Center and seeing elusive kiwi in captivity. Contact Rohan Takur, resort manager, at [book@tewaonui.co.nz](mailto:book@tewaonui.co.nz).

### Lake Wanaka

Can one lodge put a destination on the map? Yes, when it's **Minaret Station**, New Zealand's premier mountain lodge. High above Lake Wanaka and accessible only by helicopter, the property is set in a wide valley within a 50,000-acre working ranch. The lodge is the dream of

**NATURE'S WONDERLAND:** Ignacio Maza is impressed by South Island's natural diversity and unique history. He is shown here at Blanket Bay luxury lodge.



**SCENIC LUXURY:** Fiordland Lodge is positioned on a rise overlooking Lake Te Anau and mountains beyond.







**A NATURAL WONDER:** The Franz Josef Glacier is named after the former Austrian emperor. Its breathtaking expanse is best seen from the air.

Tim Wallis, New Zealand's premier helicopter pilot and estate founder. Arriving at Minaret Station feels like a James Bond movie: guests board a helicopter flight to a mountaintop for glorious views of Lake Wanaka, then are whisked to a shepherd's hut for a delicious lunch prepared on the spot, followed by a scenic hike or flight to the lodge. And that is just for starters.

Minaret Station has four large chalets with splendid views, and every heli-experience you can dream of. Contact Penny Stevenson, the lodge manager, at [ps@alpinegroup.co.nz](mailto:ps@alpinegroup.co.nz).

### **Glenorchy & Blanket Bay**

New Zealand's grand luxury lodge, built with schist rock and reclaimed hardwoods, is set on the shores of Lake Wakatipu. The resort is a short drive from the town of Glenorchy. Celebrating 25 years since opening, **Blanket Bay** is a member of Relais & Chateaux. Guests enjoy cozy fireplaces, dramatic mountain views, gourmet dining, an outdoor pool, and spa services. The vision of Tom Tusher, lodge owner and former president of Levi Strauss was to "create an

alpine-style, 19th-century great lodge with 21st-century amenities." We say Tusher's dream exceeds expectations.

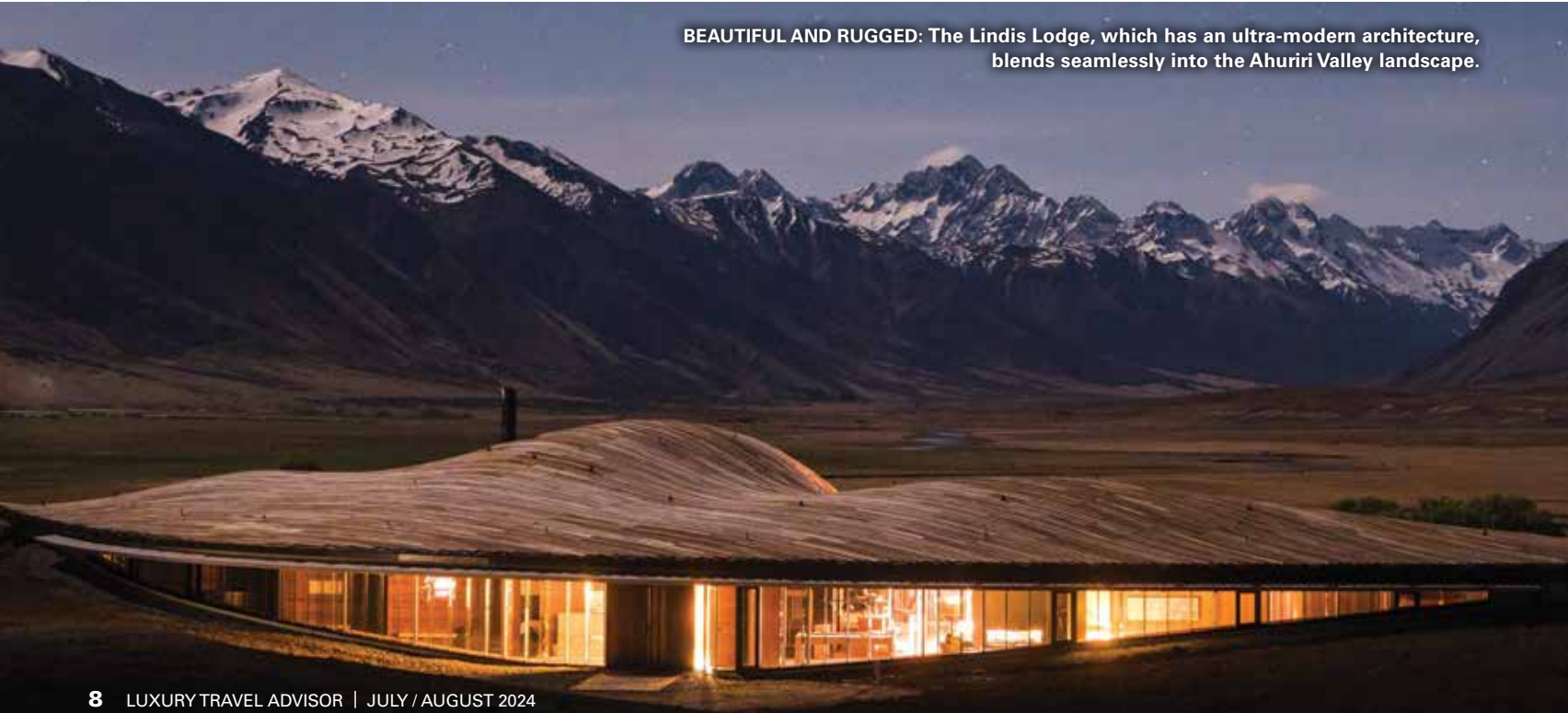
Stay in an oversized guestroom in the main lodge, a free-standing chalet, or a four-bedroom villa on a rise above the estate. Guests can experience many adventures, from heli-sightseeing, fly fishing, hiking, or the ultimate thrill: jet boating on the Dart River at speeds up to 60 mph. Contact Tom Butler, the general manager, at [tombutler@blanketbay.com](mailto:tombutler@blanketbay.com).

### **Milford Sound**

New Zealand's Eiffel Tower and top attraction is Milford Sound, a spectacular waterway of towering peaks, indigo waters, and countless waterfalls. To fully appreciate Milford, drive from Te Anau and stop at Mirror Lakes, Knobs Flat, and rivers along the way to drink in the magic of nature at its most magnificent. A cruise through Milford Sound is the quintessential New Zealand experience and bound to impress — regardless of the weather.

**Fiordland Lodge** is a perfectly positioned luxury resort on a rise overlooking Lake Te Anau and

**BEAUTIFUL AND RUGGED:** The Lindis Lodge, which has an ultra-modern architecture, blends seamlessly into the Ahuriri Valley landscape.



mountains beyond. The lodge is family-managed and offers oversized guestrooms in the main building and two separate log cabins. Accommodations feature fireplaces, terraces, views, and sunsets to remember. Contact James Cunningham, manager, at [info@fiordlandlodge.co.nz](mailto:info@fiordlandlodge.co.nz).

### Queenstown & Azur Lodge

New Zealand's undisputed adventure capital has stunning views of Lake Wakatipu and surrounding mountains coupled with endless outdoor pursuits. The city that invented Bungy Jumping and perfected Jet Boats also offers hiking, biking, rafting, and winter sports; plus, wilder pursuits like paragliding, sky diving, and canyoning. At night, Queenstown buzzes with fine dining and nightclubs.

**Azur Lodge** has nine private villas offering seclusion and dreamy views of the lake and Remarkables Range. Azur is a hilltop Shangri-La of tranquility, just a short drive to central Queenstown. Note: Soaking in a villa bathtub next to a large bay window with unobstructed vistas is a must. Contact GM Kylie Hogan at [gm@azur.co.nz](mailto:gm@azur.co.nz).



**DREAMY VIEWS:** Azur Lodge has nine private villas offering seclusion and views of Lake Wakatipu and the Remarkables Range.

### Ahuriri Valley

The Ahuriri Valley is world-class spot for trout fishing. It is also a beautiful, rugged landscape. This remote glacial valley of tussock grass, flanked by two mountain ranges, has vast sheep stations and a conservation park. Blending seamlessly into this landscape is **The Lindis Lodge**, opened in 2018. Instantly celebrated for its unique, ultra-modern architecture, the lodge follows the contours of the valley.

Stay in a large suite in the main lodge, or in a mirrored,

free-standing pod. Guests enjoy fishing, mountain biking, horse trekking, al fresco picnics, heli-adventures, and hikes on property. Do not miss the night skies — the greatest show on earth. Contact Jon Mazzucco, lodge manager, at [reservations@thelindisgroup.com](mailto:reservations@thelindisgroup.com).

### Auckland & The Park Hyatt

On the way to and from the South Island, we recommend spending a few days in Auckland, New Zealand's largest city. Discover Māori masterpieces

at Auckland Museum, take a ferry to Waiheke Island vineyards, explore the city's Volcanic Field, visit black sand beaches of Karekare and Piha, or wander around trendy Ponsonby neighborhood.

**Park Hyatt Auckland** overlooks the Waitemata yacht harbor with sea and city views from most guestrooms. Dining outlets include Onemata — our favorite restaurant in the city. Contact Rachael Brown, director of sales and marketing, at [Rachael.brown@hyatt.com](mailto:Rachael.brown@hyatt.com). ■

## ACCESS

- **Getting there:** There are more flights and options than ever before. Air New Zealand has the most frequent service, more gateways, and best service to/from Auckland, with connecting flights to 20 domestic destinations in New Zealand. Other options include United, American and Delta from the U.S. West Coast, Hawaiian via Honolulu, Fiji Airways via Nadi, and Air Tahiti Nui via Papeete.
- **Planning your itinerary:** I traveled with Southern Crossings, the specialist in end-to-end luxury journeys in New Zealand. I chose Southern Crossings for the quality of their advice, resources, and expertise designing custom-tailored itineraries. Because of Southern Crossing's longevity and position in the market, the company has access to the best guides, top providers of experiences, and contacts at luxury lodges and hotels. Contact [nzdesign@southern-crossings.com](mailto:nzdesign@southern-crossings.com) for help with your next NZ itinerary.
- **Book as far in advance as possible.** The best lodges have limited inventory and sell out fast. It's not too early to book 2025.
- **Travel in Spring or Fall.** You will find more availability, attractive offers, and fewer crowds than the peak (our winter/summer in New Zealand) season.
- **Plan for flexibility.** Many of the experiences in New Zealand (especially small aircraft and helicopters) are weather-dependent. Allow open time in key destinations so you can switch gears and make alternative plans, if necessary.
- If your clients want to visit Milford Sound, recommend staying in Te Anau (at Fiordland Lodge, if available) and visiting Milford Sound from there, as a day trip. Otherwise, take a helicopter flight from Queenstown, and allow an extra day before/after in case of inclement weather.
- **Tourism New Zealand is the best source of information for travel to New Zealand.** TNZ has the tools and content to help you create your next itinerary to Aotearoa. Find photos, videos, top experiences, helpful information, how to become a New Zealand specialist, and much more. Visit <https://traveltrade.newzealand.com/us>