View of Tasman Bay and Abel Tasman National Park coastline from Okoro.

TOP *of the* SOUTH

Deep comfort, wild beauty and warm hospitality, Nelson Tasman style.

STORY **SHARON STEPHENSON**

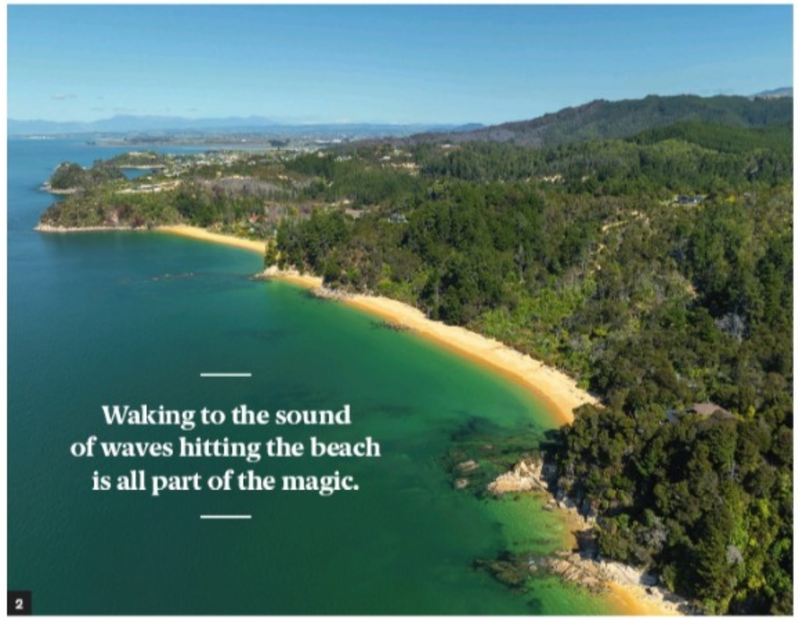
AT THE TOP of the South Island, where the sun lingers longer, there's ample opportunity to be immersed in nature. It's here that a cluster of lodges encourages visitors to switch off from the stresses of life – and proves there's nothing wrong with paving the road to wellness with a dash of luxury.

LODGE BY THE BEACH

Scientists believe that when we're near water, our minds enter a restorative, subtly meditative state. That could explain why a visit to Michelin-selected Lodge by the Beach feels so relaxing. Overlooking the ocean, not far from famous Split Apple Rock, the lodge sits so lightly in the landscape it's barely visible from the water.

1. Soaking tub, Lodge by the Beach. **2.** Enjoy access to a private beach. **3.** The luxury lodge. **4.** Mt Cook salmon, Korean spices and orange at the lodge.





Waking to the sound of waves hitting the beach is all part of the magic.





Originally built as a private corporate retreat, a year ago the owners, American expat Alan Trent and his partner Luba Petrushina, opened it as a luxury lodge. Waking to the sound of waves hitting the beach is all part of the magic, with the four suites arranged across four levels, taking advantage of the stonking views.

Inside, modern design meets cosy comforts, with enormous gas fires and fluffy slippers that guests can take home. Days are spent lying on the golden sand, or if you're feeling more energetic, kayaks and paddleboards are available. But it's also perfectly understandable if you'd prefer to sit on the deck, or in the hot tub, counting how many shades of blue there are in the ocean.

Guests will want to rouse themselves for breakfast and the four-course dinners, cooked by private chef Tony Robson-Burrell, who worked in Michelin-starred restaurants in his native England. His Asian fishcakes with tuna tataki and beetroot cream are one of the most delicious things on any menu in Aotearoa. Before you leave, make sure to fill up your drink bottle with the lodge's natural spring water.
lodgebythebeach.com

PĪHOPA RETREAT

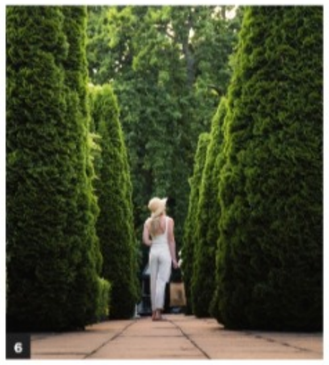
Eating breakfast in a 150-year-old chapel isn't a bad way to start the day. At award-winning Pīhopa Retreat, in the Nelson suburb of Bishopdale, guests enjoy eggs Benedict, homemade granola and healthy elixirs (the orange, carrot and ginger juice is highly recommended) in the 19th-century chapel of the former Bishopdale Theological College, surrounded by original pews and one of the oldest full-immersion baptismal fonts in New Zealand.

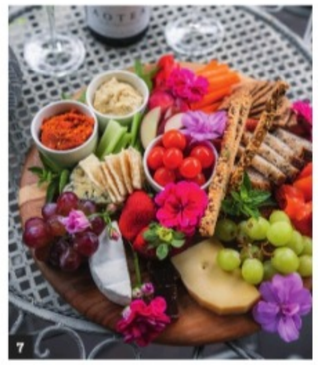
Owners Sarah and Sam Mellor have long understood the art of hospitality, having lived in London for 20 years and travelled extensively. They bought the 2.2ha property in 2015 and set about the tricky task of making the five-star accommodation feel fresh and modern without sacrificing its historic charm. The result is six one-bedroom villas that feature generous bedrooms, separate living spaces with squishy sofas, marble bathrooms with deep soaking tubs, and a restful palette of creams, browns and golds. If these walls could talk, they'd no doubt say, "I like what you've done with the place."

Although only a 10-minute drive from Nelson city, thick heritage woodland gives the impression of total solitude. Should cherries on top be needed, there's a gym, heated pool, sauna and cold plunge, basketball court, croquet lawn and an enormous chess set.

Only breakfast is served in the chapel; Sarah arranges reservations and transport for guests at local restaurants each night. Before heading out, stop at the pool house for delicious pre-dinner canapes and drinks.
pihoparetreat.nz











5. Pīhopa Retreat pool. **6.** Park-like gardens border Bishopdale Reserve. **7.** Drinks and a cheeseboard by the pool. **8.** The repurposed chapel. **9.** Bedroom, The Hilliard Suite.



10. Private villa, Maruia River Retreat. **11.** Bar and lounge area. **12.** Cristina Holopainen leads a yoga lesson. **13.** Pad Thai lunch. **14.** Fresh local mussels with a zingy vinaigrette, Okoro. **15.** Heated infinity pool. **16.** Perfect spot to catch a golden sunset. **17.** Guest suite, Okoro.







MARUIA RIVER RETREAT

It takes a lot to stay focused at Maruia River Retreat's yoga classes. Not because they're easy, but because of the yoga studio's mesmerising views across 180ha of ancient forest deep in the Shenandoah Valley. Built on the banks of its namesake river, about a two-hour drive south of Nelson (there's also a landing strip), the secluded property opened in 1989 as a fly-fishing lodge. But seven years ago, Cristina and Lasse Holopainen, who swapped corporate careers for yoga studios in their native Philippines, found this slice of paradise to realise their dream of an eco-friendly wellness centre.

Seven villas host up to 12 guests at any one time, including singles, couples and small groups. Cleverly dotted around the property to give the impression of total solitude, the one-bedroom villas have been renovated to encompass a laid-back luxury. Each gets the colour wheel right with a muted palette that keeps your gaze on life outside the glass. There's a comfy sofa from which to admire the river and forest views, a dining table and reading chair (if you've forgotten to pack a book, there's a library in the wellness studio), as well as a spacious marble bathroom and walk-in wardrobe. There are no TVs and wifi is available only in the main lodge/studio, which allows guests to truly escape.



Even the smallest detail feels intentional and you'll leave with your chakras realigned.

When it comes to wellness, nature does the heavy lifting, with forest bathing and guided forest walks to a favourite fly-fishing spot and swimming hole. There are daily morning yoga classes and massage/beauty treatments, as well as a pool, two hot tubs, a Finnish sauna and an infrared sauna deep in the forest.

But this isn't boot camp, so before dinner, drinks are served in the main lodge next to the fire. Lasse, who cooks breakfast and indulgent three-course dinners, has never met an ingredient he couldn't turn into something tasty. That might include a menu such as seafood tagine, butternut pumpkin soup with medjool dates and ube cotton cake. Veggies and honey are produced on-site, eggs are from the farm next door, and the water is from the same springs that power the mini-hydro plant. Even the smallest detail feels intentional and you'll leave with your chakras realigned and a deep sense of calm. *maruia.co.nz*





OKORO

There's a transformative moment when you wind up the long driveway to Okoro – the moment you see the view across the Tasman Sea to the peaks of Kahurangi National Park, and feel stress drop away.

It's only a 20-minute drive from Nelson Airport, but you'll feel as though you're in your own private oasis. Surrounded by thick native bush, the 50ha property features three suites, which can be booked as an exclusive residence for up to eight guests, as well as non-exclusive bookings for two guests, in the Okoro Premium Suite or the Okoro Treehouse.

All suites look as though they were beamed in from Scandinavia – light-filled spaces dotted with natural textures, warm woods, clean lines and highly covetable furniture and art. No matter where you stay, there are glorious sea and tree views for days.

Irish-born owner Beryl McKean knows a thing or two about luxury accommodation, having lived in the Middle East with her Kiwi husband Howard for years before buying the property in 2011. Three years ago they opened it to guests.

There's a serious temptation to come to Okoro and do little more than stare at the view, which is both allowed and encouraged.



But there's also a heated pool, sauna, hot tub and cold plunge. Lace up your walking shoes to explore the tracks that criss-cross the surrounding hills and, if the weather turns, snuggle into the home theatre.

All that fresh air will work up an appetite, but the resident private chef's got you. Included dinner features produce from Okoro's garden, plated up into innovative iterations, such as beetroot tart tartin with stracchino and hazelnuts.

For breakfast, the chef will whip up sauteed mushrooms and kawakawa ricotta on a kūmara waffle. As part of the owners' commitment to sustainability, a native tree is planted for each guest. *okoro.co.nz*

MOTUEKA RIVER LODGE

Great location, delicious food, friendly staff – six words that tell you all you need to know about Motueka River Lodge. What began as a fishing lodge in the 80s has morphed into five-star accommodation overlooking the Motueka River, and backgrounded by the snow-dusted Kahurangi mountains.

Owners Roz Buick and Graham Timms spent 20 years splitting their time between Christchurch and the US where Buick's work took them. But they always intended to find a base in Aotearoa they could share with guests. The couple bought the lodge in 2017 and spent four years extensively renovating the main house, which contains three suites, as well as a self-contained cottage. Each room is well-versed in space and comfort, embracing tradition while also celebrating modern colours and stylish soft furnishings.

Being so close to three national parks means guests are spoiled for choice on how to fill their days. The fly fishing is also good, but if you'd prefer to stay close to the lodge, there's a hot tub, Finnish sauna, gym and massages on offer. A recent addition, the cantilevered deck, is the perfect place for a downward dog or two. There are also numerous private walking trails and spaces where you can fully exhale.

After working up an appetite, settle into the main lodge for a five-course dinner prepared by private chef Alistair Forster who goes for a stroll in the extensive veggie garden when he runs out of produce to see what's ready. That might be goat cheese mousse with asparagus and black garlic, strawberry and elderflower sorbet and chocolate coconut panna cotta served with honey from the property's hives. Enjoy with a glass of chardonnay, made by local winemaker Abel with grapes from the lodge's 30-year-old vineyard.

motuekaaccommodation.com



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18. Motueka River Lodge. **19.** Outdoor dining area. **20.** The Crusader deluxe king bathroom. **21.** Self-serve freshly baked croissants, bread and fruit. **22.** The Crusader deluxe king bedroom.

Getting there



Air New Zealand operates daily non-stop flights to Nelson from Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch, with connections across the domestic network.

Contact Centre
0800 737 000
airnewzealand.co.nz

AIR NEW ZEALAND
STAR ALLIANCE

PHOTOGRAPHY LODGE BY THE BEACH, PIHOPA RETREAT, AIMEE JULES, OKORO VILLA, INLIGHT.NZ