



SHORT-HOP SHANGRI-LA

Secluded, staggeringly beautiful and stocked with every luxury, New Zealand's Huka Lodge generously repays the modest travel time for honeymooners, says ELIZA O'HARE

After winter's Instagram saturation of all those drawn-out, excessive and, let's face it, eye-wateringly expensive honeymoons in the Med, a short, chic post-wedding getaway suddenly seems civilised and sophisticated. Enter Huka Lodge, which started as a genteel fly-fishing establishment in 1924 and was thoroughly revamped in 1984 by local interior designer Virginia Fisher. The lodge sits on the soft-grassed banks of the Waikato River, a five-minute drive from the pretty township of Taupo (which has an airport) in the middle of the North Island of New Zealand.

New Zealand does lodges well — it's definitely their thing — and they manage to deliver a kind of quiet luxury that's hugely difficult to replicate. It's sort of practical luxury, in a way. Huka Lodge has 18 junior suites (and trust me, there's nothing diminished about them), a Lodge Suite and two breathtaking



PATRICK REYNOLDS, COURTESY OF HUKA LODGE

private cottages at either end of the property to choose from. One is the Owner's Cottage, with four bedrooms, fireplaces galore, a kitchen and an incredible riverfront situation almost atop the actual Huka Falls, just around a bend in the river. The bathrooms here are truly special — rough-hewn marble floors, panelled walls, heritage hardware and oversized baths-for-two under windows opening up to the river, which looks dreamy but is in truth deadly if you were to be caught in its current. The other is Alan Pye Cottage, a later addition, with two bedrooms, a heated infinity pool (a steamy heaven in the icy winter), a rooftop jacuzzi and roaring fireplaces. A private chef can be arranged, or you can join executive chef Paul Froggatt in the lodge's dining room or sunken wine cellar for his nightly five-course degustation menu. Froggatt knows his fine dining, after hanging around in some serious kitchens, such as France's Bernard Loiseau en Bourgogne (three Michelin stars), and he is all about sourcing locally. The day we dine with him — and keep in mind this is lunch — he serves up delicate handmade almond-flour pasta with local chestnuts and shaved truffle that is mouthfuls of the purest joy.

The lodge has worked on a refined fishing vibe, with fly-fishing apparatus on display, coir mats in mud rooms, tartan on the walls and cosy rugs at every turn. What I really adore, though, are the portraits by C F Goldie, an early European painter who specialised in proud, elegant portraiture of local Maori chiefs and dignitaries.

The other simple but gentle touch I appreciate is the tartan-wrapped hot water bottle waiting for me between the sheets of my oversized king bed. I'm not sure whether it was the warmth from the hottie, the rolling river outside my cottage, the general crazy geothermal energies of the area or the excellent New Zealand wines I drank, but my sleep at Huka is the deepest and sweetest I've had in months.

This place has earned its cultural chops. Amazingly, even though it's quite remote, everybody's been here. When you think of Huka Lodge's guest list, think of more civilised humans such as Tilda Swinton, Bill Gates, Miuccia Prada and ... Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II (who decided to take her meals exclusively in the private library, she liked it so much).

Taupo is a geothermal wonderland, so expect steaming pools by the river, and Huka Falls are a roaring magnet for mad anglers, so an afternoon spent practising on the lodge's lawn river banks is recommended. Wading into the current definitely is not.

There is stuff to do: golf, of course (this is New Zealand, after all), fly fishing out the front, horse riding, gorgeous walks and chopper rides to view the astounding landscape around the lodge. But when it comes down to it, we're happiest lolling on the chesterfield, mesmerised by the river, a glass of cold champagne in hand. Sounds like honeymoon material to me.

Huka Lodge, Taupo, North Island, New Zealand, hukalodge.co.nz.