

GRAZIA
WELL
TRAVELLED

SPLIT INFINITY

Dreamily set overlooking a pristine national park, this luxist New Zealand lodge offers an out-of-body experience, writes Susie Burge

“A private bush track takes you to Split Apple Rock. It’s easy to see how it got its name — wow!”

Spot leaping dolphins from your deck



Raising the bar
for infinity pools
everywhere



SPLIT Apple Retreat, an architecturally-awarded, zen-luxe mansion perched on a cliff at the top of New Zealand's South Island, would be equally at home in a James Bond movie or a glam arthouse thriller.

Plate-glass windows and sliding doors lead to decks that look way out over the beautiful blue sea and sky, the leafy bays and beaches of the renowned Abel Tasman National Park going all fuzzy and golden in the long twilight.

A glass of fine Marlborough boutique-vineyard sauv blanc and it's too easy to forget the rest of the world even exists. Guess that's the point...

Split Apple is not your typical luxury lodge (not that there's anything typical, really, about any of the high-end NZ lodges that have sprung up over the past few years), but it's not your average five-star resort or

health retreat either. It's that rare creature: something unique.

There are just three generous rooms, each with extravagant views, serene Asian-inspired interiors and two large private decks for lounging. The timeless styling is fabulously combined with of-the-moment technology, allowing remote access to hundreds of movies and an enormous music library.

Meals are designed around organic, sustainable ingredients rich in essential fatty acids or antioxidants, such as wild salmon, blueberries and pomegranates, following the retreat's "thoughtful food" philosophy.

A few days here can be life changing. If that doesn't happen at least in some small way, I'd lay odds on owner Lee Nelson being (just quietly) a touch disappointed. The world-class poker player and US doctor specialising in nutritional medicine created the ►

Strap on a backpack for a full-day trek, or book a sleepover at one of the park's huts

Travel notes

ON A BUDGET There's a thriving B&B culture that allows you to explore the region in quirky style. Try Shelbourne Villa in Nelson (www.shelbournevilla.co.nz). Or choose a more adventurous option – the laidback campground on the beach at Kaiteriteri is summertastic and the huts in the park offer rustic comfort on the coastal walking trails (www.kaiteriteribeach.co.nz).

EAT, SEE, DO Go for dinner at Boat Shed – a gorgeous old converted boathouse looking over the bay at pretty Nelson (www.boatshedcafe.co.nz). Visit the World of Wearable Art & Classic Cars Museum (www.wowcars.co.nz) for cool wheels and amazing creations pushing the boundaries between cars, costumes and art. Walk through the scenic Abel Tasman National Park (www.abeltasman.co.nz), book a day tour to more remote parts of the park, explore the beaches and bays by sea kayak, or simply jump on and off the regular water taxis for an experience of the great outdoors that's too easy.

HOW TO GET THERE Fly in to Nelson (via Auckland, Wellington or Christchurch). Hire a car and explore the area. More: www.nelsonnz.com



Japanese elements add to the zen luxe



retreat from the ground up with his wife Pen, a trained chef, and they continue to craft every detail.

The gardens are filled with roses chosen especially for their fragrance, health-giving herbs and organic vegetables; interior spaces are hung with valuable Chinese scrolls, antique paintings from Kyoto and flat-screen TVs that cantilever out from the wall at the touch of a button.

Pen cooks the delicious meals, and Lee will lead you through a meditation session of "brain entertainment" in the plush media room.

The crux of the retreat is wellness, and resident yogi and masseuse Stephanie (over from the French Riviera for the season) gives wonderful, expert treatments. The baths are Japanese Onsen in style and there's a state-of-the-art detox box in the spa, as well as a blissful outdoor pool staring over the ocean.

The retreat may be an exotic entity in itself, but it's umbilically connected to the region, particularly the Abel Tasman National Park, which has the most sunny days per year of anywhere in the country.

Travellers come from all corners of the globe to walk through the rainforest and swim in the clear waters, to see huge pods of dolphins and baby seals and penguins (there's a colony that visits the retreat itself, surprising and delighting visitors).

A private bush track takes you to the beach at Split Apple Rock (it's easy to see how it got its name – wow!). From there, jump on one of the water taxis to the park and explore its atmospheric walking trails and pristine golden-sand beaches.

A few days just isn't enough. Add to wishlist – one return trip to Split Apple and the stunning part of NZ known as "Top of the South". ■

www.splitappleretreat.com