



Destinations INTERNATIONAL

SPA-CROSSED LOVERS

In the lead-up to next year's Rugby World Cup, New Zealand's premier spa destinations are undergoing a little pampering of their own. Soak up the luxury.

WORDS RENATE RUGE

CRYSTAL-CLEAR LAKES, breathtaking coastlines, pristine beaches, piping-hot waterfalls, spectacular mountain ranges and sparkling lakes – that's Aotearoa. Geothermal landscapes spout hot springs, making it one of the best places in the world to bathe in steamy pools. From the beauty of the North Island, with its dramatic Ninety Mile Beach,

glistening Bay of Islands and Auckland's sophisticated spa scene, to the snow-capped scenery of the South Island, where waterfalls cascade deep into fjords and translucent glaciers melt into serene lakes, this country is famous for its pure, natural attributes. And things don't get much purer than "taking the waters". These are some of New Zealand's top spa retreats. >

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DESTINATIONS INTERNATIONAL ✦ **Athens** A modern European capital rises from the ruins
✦ **London** What's great on British plates ✦ **Languedoc** France's southern star ✦ **Borneo** The scars of military history
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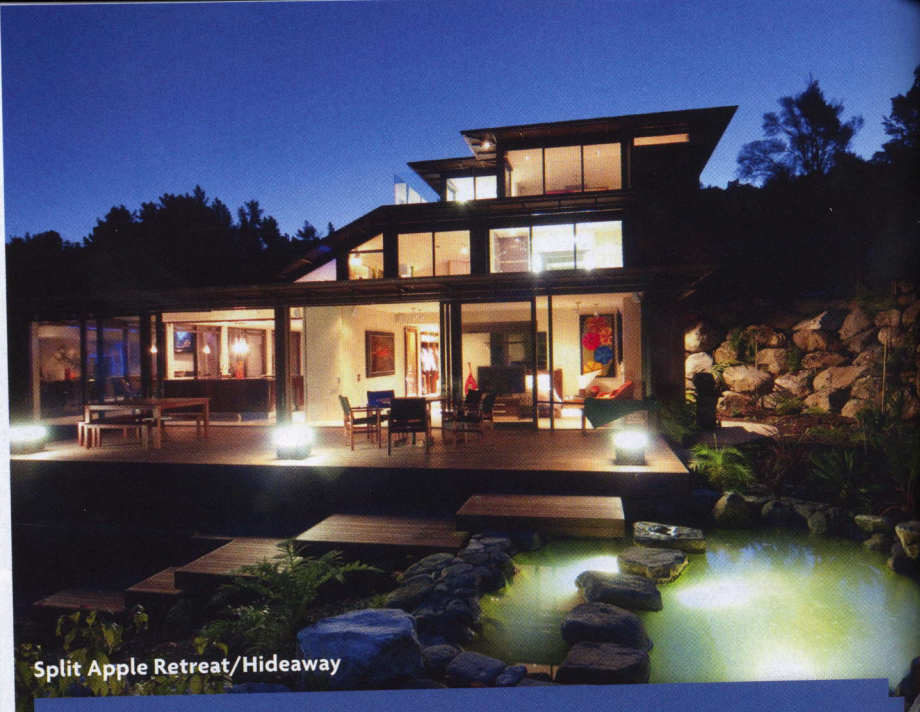
Split Apple Retreat/Hideaway

LEBUA LAKE OKAREKA LODGE

103 Acacia Road, Lake Okareka.
(07) 362 8026. [www.lebua.com/en/
lake-okareka-lodge/](http://www.lebua.com/en/lake-okareka-lodge/)

This luxury retreat is perched on the tip of a secluded peninsula overlooking the transparent waters of Lake Okareka. Pass the sapphire-hued Blue Lake and stop for a Kodak moment en route to this new super-deluxe hideaway of polished granite, glass, wood and steel. The lodge has just three suites, each providing privacy and ultimate luxury – and exclusively restricted to one party of visitors. The serious price tag secures a long list of top-drawer inclusions such as the private helipad, gourmet meals whipped up by your own award-winning Kiwi chef, blissing out in a private spa treatment room with therapists on speed dial – plus a small but high-tech gym with lake views.

Signature attraction: A floatplane or helicopter flight over frothy turquoise pools and geysers shooting out super-heated steam, to land amid the picture-postcard beauty. You can check in with Volcanic Air Safaris (www.volcanicair.co.nz). From \$NZ3180 (\$2462) per night.



Split Apple Retreat/Hideaway

SPLIT APPLE RETREAT/HIDEAWAY

195 Tokongawa Drive, Tasman. (03) 527 8377/526 6733. www.splitapple.co.nz

Featuring Asian-style architecture with water features that include an infinity pool, this retreat concentrates on “wellness”. Water therapy is very much a part of that. The plush cliff-top sanctuary in New Zealand’s sunniest area, Kaiteiteri, is furnished with antiques from a Japanese temple, and an extensive art collection adds cultural nourishment. Named after a local rock formation, the resort is shoe-free. Guests can sample acupuncture and aromatherapy spa treats, and a qualified Japanese masseuse. There’s also a heated pool, outdoor onsen, sauna, steam room and yoga and meditation in the home theatre. Add to that low-GI

foods and organically grown produce, including vegetables and berries grown in the retreat garden, and Japanese teas. Wine lovers are only 20 minutes away from Nelson’s vineyards, so won’t be deprived. A glass or two a night fits right in with the retreat’s healthy dietary regime.

Signature attractions: The choice of BMW car or Ducati sports bike provided with the luxury villa; the private beach; watching whales from a sun lounge on the poolside deck; swimming with seals. From \$NZ800 (\$619) per person per night at Split Apple Retreat; private villa from \$NZ6000 (\$4644) for up to six people per night.



Kauri Cliffs

KAURI CLIFFS

Matauri Bay, Bay Of Islands, Northland.
(09) 407 0010. www.kauricliffs.com

Dive into an infinity pool and look out to the shimmering blue Pacific and the dramatic coast and inlets of New Zealand’s Bay of Islands, before switching temperatures and relaxing back into the swirling waters of the hot tub at Kauri Cliffs. Wooden white tongue-and-groove Hamptons-style coastal cottages are airy and bright, and lightly scented with fresh lilies on the armoire. Small verandahs with wooden decks overlooking Cape Brett and native rainforest have just enough room for two loungers. It’s an idyllic setting for peaceful moments with a morning coffee. Three hours north of Auckland, the retreat effortlessly blends Kiwi home comforts with pure class.

Signature attractions: Thermal water therapies, from shell and ocean therapy massage – top of the list, the “waterfall” massage, which feels like being drenched in warm rain; “secret” waterfalls and the pink-shelled private beach. From \$NZ620 (\$480) per night.