

Wild at heart

TATLER PROMOTION

Vast empty beaches, spectacular rural scenery, small fishing villages, boutique wineries and remote luxury hideaways: venture off the tourist trail and experience the real New Zealand

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hen it comes to long-haul travel, New Zealand is a hot favourite. Unusually remote for such a hip destination, there's something quirkily cool going on. Maybe it's the multi-cultural urban energy, a cutting-edge food and wine scene, the local surf culture, the boutique hotels and design-led beach houses. Whatever it is, we can certainly put our finger on one thing: the powerful lure of its natural beauty.

From the top of the North Island through the South Island to Stewart Island, New Zealand's natural beauty is intensely evocative. Penetrate its immense landscape and you find a majestic wilderness that brings a new

lease of life to even the most jaded. Empty roads cut through vast valleys dotted with hamlets, rural settlements and isolated farmhouses; bumpy tracks wind up mountains through low-lying cloud past jet-black lakes, dense forests, torrential rivers and blue-tinged glaciers. Head into the empty low-lying plains and journey down rivers flanked by pristine countryside, pull on the tramping boots and stumble upon local farms and award-winning vineyards. And that's without even touching on New Zealand's coastal solitude: the wide open beaches and local surf scene of the North Island; and the little coves of the South Island where lone oyster catchers step gingerly

round resting sea lions, seals play in the breaks, penguins plop off rocks for a day's fishing and pods of dolphins dip and dive in the distance.

This is the New Zealand that the locals know and love, sometimes rough around the edges but integral to the country's charm. And it is this back-to-nature approach that is the philosophy behind UK-based travel company The Turquoise Holiday Company. In-depth knowledge of New Zealand and fantastic local connections means that those travelling with Turquoise are guaranteed the real kiwi experience. Its portfolio of small properties, more-often-than-not in 'untouristy' locations, is perfect for the independent

discerning traveller. There are more than 50 beach houses (known locally as baches) on its books, and with these small privately owned properties come the locals who own them. Laid-back and charming in that refreshing, no nonsense kind of way, these are the people who live and breathe the land, and those best qualified to point you off the beaten track. Quirky cheese shops, the best local fish restaurant, a boutique winery, fishing trips, cycling routes, wildlife habitats and mountain picnic spots, there's always somewhere nearby not in the guidebooks. And more often-than-not, you'll be taken under a friendly and enthusiastic wing.

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COASTAL COOL

South of Christchurch, another overlooked corner of New Zealand is the **Banks Peninsula**. Formed by two volcanic eruptions, this sleepy part of the world is breathtakingly beautiful. Greener than green, its hilly terrain is dotted with old farmhouses and the peninsula is edged by warm sheltered bays interspersed with remote, wild beaches, home to a number of seal and penguin colonies.

Te Rangi is a magical place, tucked away in the 20-acre Kahikatea country retreat, just above the charming town of Akaroa with its cafés, craft shops and relaxed harbour ambience. Kahikatea is a working farm where seclusion and escapism are part and parcel of life. Once the summer home of Californian writer Armistead Maupin, his sister Jane now runs the cottage from her nearby 1860's homestead. A private idyll, animals graze in the paddock, a stream winds its way through beautiful gardens and views reach out over shimmering waters. Inside, the cottage is decked out with hardwood floors, oriental rugs, antiques and original paintings. Refreshingly understated, the bathtub for two adds a romantic twist. Te Rangi is undoubtedly one of the South Island's most enchanting getaways: Ian McKellen escaped here during the filming of *The Lord of the Rings* and if it's good enough for Gandalf, it's good enough for us.

From £67 per person per night. Visit www.newzealand.com/turquoise



For further information on any of the featured properties and others in The Turquoise Holiday Company's New Zealand portfolio, call 01494 678400 or visit www.turquoiseholidays.co.uk. For information on New Zealand visit www.newzealand.com