

# DEPARTURES

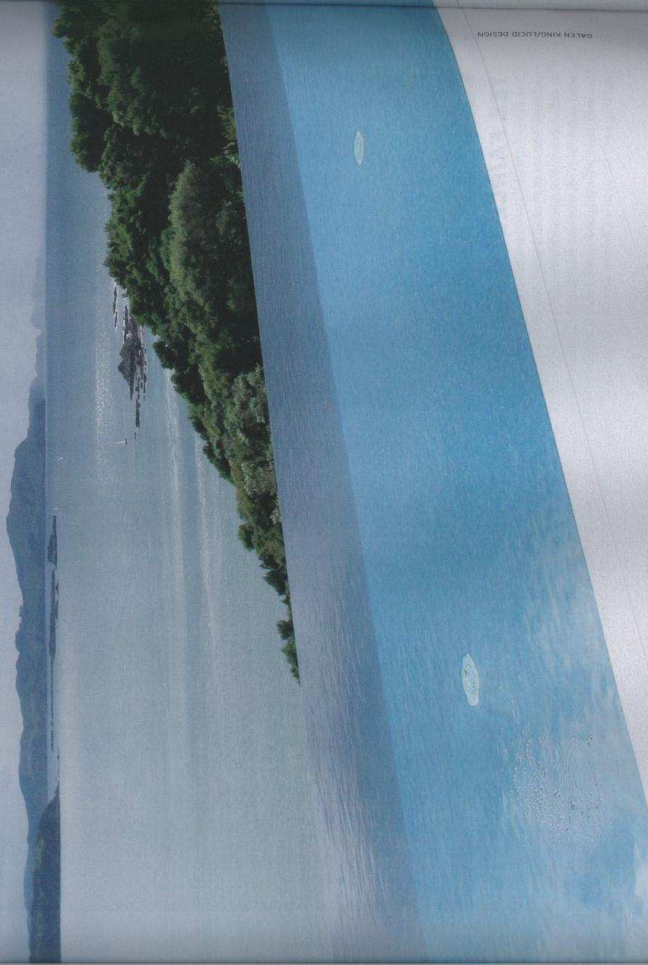
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# THE EXPLORERS ISSUE

# NEW ZEALAND

With an ultraluxe, ultramod superlodge as her base camp and an expert outfitter as



DAVEN KING/LUCID DESIGN

Rahimama's 4,500-square-foot patio and infinity lap pool disappear into long views of northern New Zealand's Bay of Islands. The location view is seen from the

# AND MOD

er guide, Cleo Glyde explores the very best in Kiwi action and adventure.



"We now have to put on a show," says Sandra Bakstad. The drama is high: this gleaming, high-spired Australian resort is that of Rāhīmama, the exceptional, moderate, vacation villa that she recently designed and built with her American partner—developer, husband, Danish, and their star architect, Simon Carrablen. Perched on a private 45-acre peninsula near the tip of

New Zealand's North Island, where it's part of the couple's Eagle Nest resort, Rāhīmama overlooks the Bay of Islands, an aquatic playground of hidden coves and azure ocean dotted with more than 150 islands. The bay is, quite simply, an urban escape's adventure paradise—just like the rest of the country.

New Zealand's otherworldly Garden of Eden quality makes it easy to believe

in elves and hobbits—which is why Peter Jackson shot his *Lord of the Rings* trilogy here. It offers everything from rugged coastline and subtropical forests to volcanic plateaus and isolated mountain ranges. But New Zealand's latest attraction transports travelers to a more futuristic, funnery world than that of middle-earth. The country's eco-savviness and penchant for cutting-edge architecture have created a sleekly modernist design vernacular, one that invites the pristine wilderness inside. And Rāhīmama is a prime example of this innovative look.

Up close the villa is all tapered lines and powerful angles. But Rāhīmama is a shape-shifter. When seen from the ground, the copper-artifact roof gives the house a magical take-flight feeling, while from the air it organically





"The house's position and the land it is on are so special, we wanted to create something that in a hundred years will still get people to think 'wow,'" says owner Daniel Biskind. The crisply minimalist master bedroom overlooks the grounds and bay, and the fireplace in the atrium is made of crushed Japanese glass.



blends with the hilltop. The four-bedroom interior is just as well integrated with the outdoors: Retractable glass walls vanish, a patio and infinity pool disappear into the horizon, and views of the bay transfix from any angle. It's as if you're perched on the edge of the world.

"People usually don't talk for the first five minutes after they walk in," says Sandra, who with Daniel had already built four smaller villas at Eagles Nest when they decided to develop Rahimoana.

The villa's design is ecodriven whenever possible, incorporating a rainwater tank and native subtropical landscaping that draws in birdlife as well as guests. Inside, the gleaming expanse showcases abstract paintings by American artist Jimi Gleason and sculptural furniture in white leather and rich jewel-tone wool. (These are meant to echo the bay's sapphire and emerald hues.) It's all very early-Bond, with sleek, touch-button everything: the infrared sauna that heats only the skin, the eight-foot-wide movie screen that glides into view, the private helipad.

There's a chauffeur and butler, too, of course, and an in-house chef who prepares gourmet feasts from local ingredients. "The Champagne is French," says Sandra. "Everything else is from here." She continues, "The house has a superyacht feeling but for those who want to stand still."

Not too still, though. There's much to explore all around. "Eagles Nest is located in a playground," says Sam Porter, founder of the Auckland-based travel outfitter Seasonz. His company represents a group of unique properties throughout New Zealand—Rahimoana is one—and acts as a concierge for guests who rent them, creating personalized adventure itineraries.

Among Porter's picks for the Bay of Islands is a chartered cruise to a barbecue on a private island, a four-wheeler ride through the Ahipara sand dunes, and golf at the picturesque Kauri Cliffs. There's also mountain biking, parasailing, high-speed jet boating, skydiving, and supervised swims with dolphins. For a bit of Hemingway, try the superb kingfishing (the region's nickname is "big-game El Dorado").

On my own last blissful day at the villa, I remove myself from a chaise longue long enough to take a helicopter down the coast to Ninety Mile Beach. The flight makes for a fantastic day-trip and reveals astonishing topography—pine forests, pillowy green peaks, and craggy rocks that King Kong could call home.

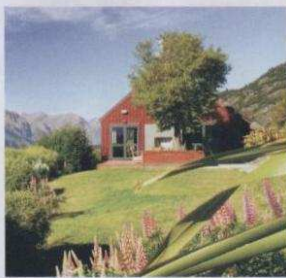
But as far as I'm concerned, Kong can keep it. I'm much happier coming back to Rahimoana. ■

*A four-hour drive from Auckland International Airport or 45 minutes from Kerikeri domestic, Rahimoana starts at \$29,500 a night, with a four-night minimum stay. Book through Eagles Nest (64-9/403-8333; eaglesnest.co.nz) or Seasonz (64-9/361-3710; seasonz.co.nz).*

**CLEO GLYDE** IS A FORMER FASHION WRITER AT AUSTRALIAN VOGUE AND STYLE EDITOR AT MARIE CLAIRE.

## Beyond Rahimoana

In New Zealand, Rahimoana is hardly alone in providing great design alongside outdoor delights. Visitors will find mod-luxe adventure retreats throughout the country, from the subtropical north down to the snows of the south. These four properties demonstrate the variety of lodges and landscapes on offer.



**AZUR: EXTREME ADVENTURE** "The large rooms here have spectacular views of the Remarkable Mountains," says Sam Porter, whose travel company Seasonz works with this South Island retreat. "And it's only five minutes from Queenstown, the adventure capital of the world." The lodge is heaven for people who jump off planes and bridges. And if you need a drink to steady your resolve, you're in luck: Azur is in Central Otago, one of the most blossoming Pinot Noir regions in the country. Since the nine one-bedroom villas don't have kitchens, guests get a chance to sample the more than a hundred restaurants and cafés in town. The architecture is local, too, incorporating silver beech wood and stone. **Activities:** jet boating, bungee jumping, skydiving, hiking, mountain biking. *Fly into Queenstown. From \$1,020; 64-3/409-0588; azur.co.nz.*



**CAVALLI ISLAND RETREAT AND SPA: COASTAL KIWI PAMPERING** This three-guest room glass-and-steel property is the only one on our list not affiliated with Porter's Seasonz, but the Bay of Islands locale and its spa recommend it nonetheless. The treatments showcase organic and indigenous elements and give guests a chance to try local Maori remedies. Earn that massage by spending a day fishing for big game from the island's prized possession: a 72-foot luxury motor

yacht. Good divers can visit the *Rainbow Warrior*, a ship made famous (and infamous) by New Zealand's ecoradicals in the eighties. Ultimately the victim of the nuclear-testing French, it now lies on the ocean floor. **Activities:** big game fishing, yachting, diving. *Fly into Kerikeri. From \$20,000 a night (three-night minimum); 64-21/107-5233; cavallilandretreat.com.*



**ORUAWHARO: TOTAL SECLUSION FOR FIVE-STAR CASTAWAYS** Thirty minutes by helicopter from the international airport in Auckland, this four-bedroom villa on Great Barrier Island includes 16 acres of rugged isolation, a private beach, and waters that teem with fresh scallops, lobsters, and prawns. There's a host and a chef on hand, too. Says Porter: "This is the spot for a family who wants a beach stop after a few weeks of touring. It's an unbelievable location—no one else is out there—and the beautiful white, sandy beaches are some of the best in the country." **Activities:** fishing, diving, surfing, hiking. *Fly into Auckland. \$940 a night; 64-9/361-3710; seasonz.co.nz.*



**WHARE KEA CHALET: THE PEAK OF THE SOUTHERN ALPS** The mountains of the South Island are New Zealand's flip side, filled with stunning glaciers, residual snowfields, and Alpine meadows. The Whare Kea property has a six-suite lodge—which can be rented out by room or, better yet, in its entirety—and also this beautiful private two-bedroom chalet in the Buchanan mountains. "We chopper you up six thousand feet," says Porter. "Once you're at the chalet, you can't see another human or building." Food and wine get delivered from the lodge, and nervous guests can cling to their very own guide. **Activities:** mountaineering, rock climbing, heli-skiing, snowboarding. *Fly into Wanaka or Queenstown. From \$4,080; 64-3/443-1400; wharekealodge.com.* —C.G.