

Bay of retreat for celebrities

By Kieran Nash

4:00 AM Sunday Dec 27, 2009

If you're a multi-millionaire owner of property in the Bay of Islands, you'd have a struggle asking your neighbour to borrow a cup of sugar – they're likely to be miles away.

The area is about three hours' drive – or, more likely, a 55-minute helicopter ride – from Auckland, and the playground of numerous Rich Listers and celebrities, from our shores and abroad.

The first celebrity visitor may have been writer and keen fisherman Zane Grey.

He established a base on Urupukapuka Island, the largest of more than 140 in the bay, almost a century ago.

Famous faces to follow in his footsteps included another keen angler, opera star Dame Kiri Te Kanawa, who owns a secluded mansion on a bush-clad peninsula in Rawhiti, about 15km east of Russell.

Dame Kiri told the *Daily Telegraph* last year she tried to visit the house at least twice a year.

"When I visit, I take my boat out and spend the day fishing – usually catching tuna, marlin or snapper – and enjoying the wildlife," she said.

"Then I head back to the house to eat the fish I've just caught, often inviting over family and friends. I love nothing better than having people round for a meal."

Another high-profile singer to buy property in the area is *Phantom of the Opera* star Michael Crawford, who has a \$3 million house in Doves Bay, 10km east of Kerikeri.

Some powerful businessmen also have interests in the Bay.

Investor Peter Masfen, who helped make Montana Wines a global success story and has a fortune estimated at \$290 million on the 2009 *National Business Review* Rich List, has a property near Russell valued at more than \$23 million.

It comes complete with four dwellings, a swimming pool, extensive landscaping and a large fenced-off kiwi sanctuary.

Another investor with land in the area is Bill Birnie, whose fortune is estimated at \$100 million.

His Mataka Station property on the Purerua Peninsula, about 10km northeast of Kerikeri, is rated at \$21.1 million. It has been split into sections, all priced at more than \$1 million.

The station is home to the historic Marsden Cross, which marks the site of the first Christian sermon delivered in this country, on Christmas Day in 1814 by the Rev Samuel Marsden.

It also boasts an award-winning wine cellar and a private beachfront for members of the exclusive estate to use as they while away the summer.

For those that need a bit more isolation, there is always the option of buying property on an island.

Craig Heatley, founder of Sky Television in New Zealand turned investor with an estimated fortune of \$200 million, owns a slice of \$24.4 million Moturoa Island, with his hideaway boasting a tunnel between two bays on the island.



Sky TV co-founder Craig Heatley's Moturoa Island property has its own tunnel. Photo / Ross White

The smaller brother to 146ha Moturoa is 28ha Motukiekie Island, owned by Stephen Lockwood and Lewis Grant and valued at \$6 million.

The nearby Robertson Island has two properties for sale. One, a \$2.8 million three-bedroom house called Snapper Rock, comes with its own helipad, jetty and fishing spots on 2.6ha of land.

For those wanting something a little smaller, one-bedroom Cooks Cottage is closer to the water for \$2.5 million.

The Bay of Islands also is home to one of the world's most exclusive retreats, Eagles Nest in Russell.

The 75ha estate was the setting for part of season 13 of US reality TV show *The Bachelor* and boasts breathtaking views over more than 1km of private ocean and beachfront.

A stay in one of the five villas can cost up to \$20,000 a night.

Bayleys agent Chester Rendell said there are "some gorgeous places" in the bay, but owners and vendors tended to keep a low profile.

"Most of the people there, you wouldn't know who they are."

Rendell said there was a misconception that much of the high-end property is owned by foreigners – most was owned by Kiwis living here or abroad.

However, he acknowledged that "most places round here aren't what you'd call your typical Kiwi bach".

"You wouldn't get a property on the beachfront for anything less than \$1 million."

– HERALD ON SUNDAY

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