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You've Never Experienced New Zealand Like This



Chris McLennan Photography

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Helena Bay, the country's first beachside property, is finally giving

travelers a reason to skip adventure-filled South Island for the milder North Island.

By Valentina Valentini on November 09, 2016

On November 1, the \$50 million Helena Bay opened as the first oceanfront lodge in New Zealand—a much-anticipated addition considering the country boasts the tenth longest coastline in the world, and one of the most unspoiled. While 33 luxury lodges dot the country in all, only three sit on North Island’s forested region of Northland: the golf-centered Relais & Chateaux Lodge at Kauri Cliffs, the wellness-focused Eagles Nest overlooking Bay of Islands, and now, Helena Bay Lodge, located on two miles of private beach along the island’s northeast corner.

Approaching by helicopter (45 minutes from Auckland airport) gives a sense of the scale and seclusion of the 800-acre property, where soft, rolling hills meet calm, clear bay waters filled with sea life (it’s not uncommon to spot dolphins and orca in the cove). With only three junior suites and two villa suites, the property sleeps up to ten people, making it feel like your own private lodge. (Its size also makes it a great takeover option for medium-sized groups.)



Courtesy Helena Bay Lodge

While the decor reflects the polished aesthetic of the owner, Russian steel magnate Alexander Abromov, who derived his inspiration for the design from his love of superyachts, the suites still exude a homey ambience with dramatic, high ceilings; neutral tones; and glass doors that open onto waterfront balconies. These qualities extend to the service, too, which, at five staff to every guest, seeks to anticipate every need—a mention to a friend about exploring the nine-miles of surrounding trails during dinner meant waking up to an electric Haibike parked outside my suite the next morning.

For the cuisine, Abromov tapped Michele Martino of Michelin-starred Ristorante Don Alfonso 1890, a centuries-old institution located in the village of Sant Agata on the Amalfi Coast (and one of his favorite restaurants), to helm the property's kitchen. With no other nearby dining options, Martino, plus an onsite farmer and gardener, keeps things interesting for guests with an ever-changing menu that blends local produce and Italian technique. (Try the classically prepared linguine of Cloudy Bay clams and zucchini, grown on property.)

This, along with on-site amenities like a library, spa, fitness center, tennis court, and outdoor heated lap pool, means you never have to step foot off the property during your stay—not that you're likely to want to. In a land of microclimates and drastically varying landscapes, usually seen from a distance, Helena Bay Lodge is more than a beach hotel: It's a way for travelers to relate to their surroundings in a way no one has yet experienced—until now.



Courtesy Helena Bay Lodge

Rooms, from \$1,750; 1948 Russell Rd., Helena Bay, North Island, New Zealand; 64-09/433-6006; helenabay.com.