



The Remote New Zealand Paradise Where Billionaires Are Prepping for the End of the World

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Helena Bay Lodge on the coast

Photo: Courtesy of Helena Bay



In these uncertain times, it's no wonder that more than half of Silicon Valley's billionaires have reportedly begun various stages of "doomsday prep." For us normals, apocalypse planning might involve spare batteries and a back-up water supply. But for the world's .01 percent, it increasingly means dual citizenship in New Zealand and multi-thousand-acre lots in the remote country's stunning North Island.

Home to rolling emerald hills, sweeping sea views, farm-to-table food, and crisp Sauvignon Blanc, it's no wonder that billionaire Americans like Peter Thiel, James Cameron, and Julian Robertson have honed in on New Zealand's sprawling North Island farms as an end-of-the-world paradise. For Cameron, it's an organic farm in Wairarapa; Thiel owns two properties, including an oceanfront glass home in the Bay of Islands and another on the South Island outside Queenstown; hedge-fund owner Robertson has three of the country's most exclusive five-star luxury lodges in places like Hawke's Bay and Northland.

In these quintessentially Kiwi spots on the island where New Zealand was born as a nation, the air is fresher, the pace is slower, the food is fresher (meats are often procured same-day on-property), and it's impossible not to fall in love with the beauty of the land itself. But for those who can't build a billion-dollar bolt-hole, a stay at one of the luxury lodges sprinkled throughout the North Island's most stunning locales—Northland, Taupo, Hawke's Bay, and Palliser Bay—is perhaps the next best thing.

Northland

Considered New Zealand's spiritual home, the tip of the North Island is known as Northland. This remote area—New Zealand's least urbanized—holds a special place in the country's heart. Not only is it where the legendary Polynesian seafarer Kupe made landfall and discovered Aotearoa—as the country's name is known in Maori—but it's also where the founding treaty between the indigenous Māori and the British crown was signed in 1840, in the community of Waitangi. (Maori heritage is proudly visible in this part of the country, and no visit to New Zealand is complete without a trip to the Waitangi Treaty Grounds and Kororipo Heritage Park.)



Kauri Cliffs golf course with the Cavalli Islands in the background
Photo: Courtesy of Kauri Cliffs



The pool at Kauri Cliffs
Photo: Courtesy of Kauri Cliffs

While there is a surfeit of jaw-dropping scenery in Northland—including along surf-and-sunset paradise Ninety Mile Beach—the spectacular kauri and totara forests, sweeping sea views, unspoiled beaches, and rolling emerald hills of the Bay of Islands offer a particular embarrassment of riches. For the full experience, stay at Kauri Cliffs, a five-star Relais & Chateaux property nestled on 6,000 acres of farmland and boasting one of the world's greatest (and most gorgeous) golf courses, designed by David Harman and overlooking the Cavalli Islands dotting the Pacific Ocean. The colonial-style lodge—owned by American billionaire Julian Robertson—features two tennis courts; an infinity pool; activities like quad biking, game fishing, scuba diving, and boar hunting; a destination spa, and three private beaches (including Pink Beach, made of pink shells). Guests can stay in one of the cottage suites, each with fireplaces and ocean views, or rent the Owner's Cottage: a 4,200-square-foot Virginia Fisher-designed home with a private infinity pool and Jacuzzi, and outdoor barbecue complete with lodge chef services.

About 70 miles down the coast is Helena Bay, another spectacular five-star lodge owned by yet another spectacularly wealthy man: Russian billionaire Alexander Abramov. Situated on 750 acres and including four private beaches, the brand-new resort accommodates just 10 guests in five villa suites and is already gathering buzz as being among the world's finest. The child-free mandate only adds to the sense of tranquility and serenity on the property.



The Landing

Photo: Courtesy of The Landing

Yet another property with American ties, The Landing is the passion project of New Zealander philanthropist Peter Cooper, who spends half his time in California. Home to coastal residences available for purchase, The Landing also features 350 acres of ecological reserves held in perpetuity in a charitable trust, a vineyard and eponymous wine label, and multiple properties available to stay at—all with heavenly views.



The Landing

Photo: Courtesy of The Landing



The Landing

Photo: Courtesy of The Landing

Avid golfers, meanwhile, have a new course to obsess over in the area. New Zealand boasts the most golf courses per-capita after Scotland, thanks in part to Americans like Los Angeles-based financier Ric Kayne, whose new Tara Iti golf course is the country's first private golf club. Located in Mangawhai, the course was designed by Tom Doak, and is so exclusive that details such as membership and fees are kept under lock and key. Reportedly, there are no golf carts allowed, members must stay the night on-property, and there are a series of hoops to be jumped through—background checks, interviews, references—before gaining prized admission.

Taupo

Bang in the center of the North Island sits Australasia's largest freshwater lake: Lake Taupo. About 3.5 hours from Auckland and 4.5 hours from Wellington (a much quicker nip, of course, should you make the journey by helicopter or private plane), the scenery leading to Taupo is New Zealand at its finest: undulating verdant hills against a backdrop of snow-capped volcanoes.



The pavilion at Huka Lodge Jetty
Photo: Courtesy of Huka Lodge

While New Zealand is now chockablock with luxury lodges, for years, there was only Huka Lodge. Located on the banks of the Waikato River mere feet from mighty Huka Falls, the 17-acre property was founded in 1924 and has long been known as the ne plus ultra of luxury in New Zealand. (Its most famous guest: Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth.) While it began as a fishing lodge—the hotel is renowned for both fly-fishing and harling, its adjacent river abundantly stocked with rainbow and brown trout—Huka’s humble origins are offset by the hotel’s commitment to casual elegance: The 18 junior lodge suites, single lodge suite, and two grand cottages offer wood trimmings, French doors flung open onto private terraces, heated floors, and generously sized walk-in closets. The hotel also features a helipad, tennis courts, swimming pool, and offers in-room massages and spa treatments.

Close by is another secluded retreat tailor-made for those seeking to go off the grid in style: The Lodge at Kinloch. Opened last year and nestled within the grounds of The Kinloch Club, New Zealand’s only Jack Nicklaus Signature golf course, The Lodge was designed by Virginia Fisher—the legendary talent behind Huka Lodge’s facelift, as well as Kauri Cliffs, Wharekauhau, and Queentown’s Eichardt’s—and features tennis courts, a soon-to-be-completed infinity pool, sports massage treatments, and one- and two-bedroom villas with peaceful views.



A lake view from the Great Room at Kinloch Club
Photo: Courtesy of The Kinloch Club



The Grand Room at Kinloch Club
Photo: Courtesy of The Kinloch Club



A Kinloch Club Villa Den
Photo: Courtesy of The Kinloch Club

Hawke's Bay

Further down the coast, in the southeastern center of the island, lies Hawke's Bay. Home to the charming city of Napier—which was frozen in the 1930s following an earthquake that caused the entire city to be rebuilt in an Art Deco style—Hawke's Bay's rolling hills and dry, temperate climate make it an ideal spot for wine, with some of New Zealand's most famous vineyards located here.



The garden path to the Hilltop suites at Cape Kidnappers
Photo: Courtesy of Cape Kidnappers

The area's premiere accommodation is The Farm at Cape Kidnappers: a rustic name that belies its overwhelmingly luxurious atmosphere. (It's another stunner owned by billionaire Julian Robertson, who knows his luxury lodges; his South Island property Matakauri Lodge is one of the best in Queenstown.) Located on 6,000 acres, The Farm at Cape Kidnappers is a working sheep and cattle farm with a vegetable garden and commitment to making everything from pastries to jams on-site: resulting in mouthwatering farm-to-table cuisine in the lodge's formal dining room, where jackets are required for cocktails and dinner. Guests can stay

in one of the 22 cottage suites or rent the four-bedroom Owner's Cottage, and activities on-site include helicopter rides over Hawke's Bay, hot-air ballooning, jet boating, trout fishing, and wine tours of the property's vineyard, Te Awa.



The main lounge at Cape Kidnappers
Photo: Courtesy of Cape Kidnappers



The main lounge at Cape Kidnappers
Photo: Courtesy of Cape Kidnappers

Speaking of wine—you can't come to New Zealand without drowning in the delicious stuff—Hawke's Bay is both New Zealand's oldest wine producing region and its second largest. (The largest is Marlborough, at the tip of the South Island, with its crisp Sauvignon Blancs.) Hawke's Bay's abundant sun helps feed the soil, resulting in particularly mouthwatering Merlot and Cabernet, although the Syrah and Chardonnay from here is also tops. Established in 1896, New Zealand's oldest winery, Te Mata, is a must-visit for sustainable reds that only get better over time. Another icon of the region just down the road, Craggy Range, has received much acclaim for its rich and complex wines, such as Sophia and Block 127, made in French oak casks. Boutique winery Esk Valley, meanwhile, offers award-winning Chardonnays, and is known for its rare vintages of a Malbec, Merlot, and Cab France blend: The Terraces.

Palliser Bay

At the bottom of the North Island lies Palliser Bay. Only 90 minutes away from charming capital city Wellington—boasting a thriving restaurant and cocktail scene, and which both James Cameron and Sir Peter Jackson call home—Palliser Bay curves along the North Island’s southernmost point, affording stunning views and acting as a gateway to the Martinborough wine region.

In nearby Martinborough, which specializes in Pinot Noir, most of the wineries are family-owned and many are walking distance from each other. Visitors seeking the full Martinborough wine-trail experience can stop by wineries like Ara Rangi, one of the area’s pioneers; Dry River, another Julian Robertson gem; Tirohana Estate, which features a tasting room and fine-dining restaurant; Te Kairanga, owned by Wharekauhau’s Foley; or Poppies Martinborough, a photogenic, family-owned spot specializing in small-batch wines and known for exceptional Pinot Gris.

When Prince William and Duchess Kate visited New Zealand in 2014, charming the world with countless images of Prince “Cheeks” George, the Cambridge family stayed at Palliser Bay’s Edwardian-style Wharekauhau Lodge, which was founded in the 1880s and offers the best of rustic, remote luxury spread over 5,500 acres in South Wairarapa, and is now owned by American billionaire Bill Foley.



The lounge at Wharekauhau
Photo: Courtesy of Wharekauhau

Wharekauhau features 13 cottage suites, each with heated marble floors and gorgeous bay views. (With views like these—Wharekauhau is tucked between the ocean and mountains, with the Rimutaka ranges on one side and the Pacific on the other—it’s not hard to imagine even William and Kate wanting to stay forever.) The property hearkens to a bygone era, with antique furniture, elegant dining spaces, croquet and pétanque fields, and cocktail hour.



Wharekahu

Photo: Courtesy of Wharekahu

For guests coming from nearby Wellington—normally a 90-minute drive—Wharekahu can arrange helicopter transport, and will also coordinate private jet transfer. Naturally, there's an on-property airstrip—especially fortunate for those who wish to explore the adventurous South Island, a quick puddle jump over the Cook Strait to Marlborough and beyond.