



Otahuna Lodge, New Zealand

On the eastern edge of the Canterbury Plains the land gently rises in the face of a rocky crag. Here sits Otahuna Lodge. The gate opens and the sweeping drive through the property reveals magnificent trees, a placid pond and a serene meadow. In the short distance sits an idyllic country estate home and as you pull into the forecourt, owners Hall Cannon and Miles Refo will likely meet you there. Not only will they welcome you to their property, they will introduce you to your home.

Otahuna Lodge is about a half-hour drive from the Christchurch International Airport on the South Island of New Zealand. This historical country estate has been restored to beyond its original grandeur by Cannon and Refo, two Americans who had been working in New York, but sought another life in another place. With a considerable commitment of passion and money, they have made Otahuna into a place that is both restful and invigorating, creating seven lush suites and renewing the public spaces. In essence, they have restored Otahuna's soul. Everything about this Queen-Anne style house, built in 1895, is classically plush—the dark woods, the fabrics, the fireplaces—but never fussy. Cannon and Refo renewed the 30 acres of grounds as well, establishing an orchard and a potager garden that provides for the excellent kitchen.

A stay at Otahuna includes breakfast and dinner as well as wines and spirits, with a wide-ranging selection of New Zealand wines. And there is one particularly gratifying perk—free laundry service.

Dining at Otahuna is what you want it to be, with no particular menu. Tell the kitchen in advance what you like and executive chef Jimmy McIntyre will make sure you will have it, and to a very high standard. He'll also give you cooking lessons. For breakfast you can pick your own eggs from the hen house, for dinner you can select your own vegetables from the garden and have lamb that comes from their own flock of sheep.

Off-site activities include a visit to Christchurch to see the city's rebuilding in the aftermath of two severe earthquakes and trips to Arthur's Pass in the Southern Alps, for fly-fishing, golf and hiking. There is no better guide service than that led by David Hiatt of Canterbury Guiding Co. He can likely arrange a visit to the historically important Mt. Somers Sheep Station, which will be a splendid afternoon with the owners as they take you around a small part of the 10,000-acre property that has 18,000 sheep and 5,000 deer.

But there is something very special, too, about just hanging around Otahuna. If this place were in the Napa Valley, there would be a year's waiting list to get in. Its utterly charming small staff, its immensely comfortable rooms, its humanly scaled grandeur, its abiding sense of soul combine to give Otahuna the magnetic pull of home. And that's what Cannon and Refo want it to be, theirs and yours.

Visit otahuna.co.nz

—Jeff Williams