

travel  
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## New Zealand - Bach to the future

Kicking back in a bach at the beach or the country side is part of the Kiwi lifestyle. David Fickling samples a series of thoroughly modern rustic retreats

For the past three years, New Zealand has enjoyed an annual publicity blitz courtesy of the Lord Of The Rings trilogy. But beyond the scenery and the adrenalin delights of bungy-jumping, whitewater rafting and sea kayaking, there's always been a more laid-back side to the country.

Crowded beaches are unheard of, and the lush landscape is perfect for unwinding. Even close to the tourist centres, you feel very much off the beaten track. Added to which, the country has all the fine wines, adventurous food and dazzling landscapes of neighbouring Australia, but on a more manageable, European scale.

Holidaying in the countryside is part of New Zealand's culture. It started off with the bach - a cheap and basic lodge traditionally used by young bachelors out hunting or walking. Many of these have enjoyed high-class makeovers in recent years, and there now are some seriously fancy homestays and hire cottages scattered around.

## Villa Toscana Lodge, Coromandel Peninsula

A short drive up the coast from Tairua, Villa Toscana overlooks Mercury Bay, so named because it was the place chosen by Captain Cook to observe the passage of the planet across the sun in 1769.

The owners, Giorgio and Margherita Allemano, moved here in the late 1990s, along with 13 tons of terracotta tiles, granite and marble slabs, and a full-sized terracotta pizza oven.

It's an ideal of modern luxury that may at times be a bit vivid for British tastes - lace, antiques, and glass bricks abound - but the view down the rugged coastline, especially from the outdoor Jacuzzi, is breathtaking.

Giorgio and Margherita are charming hosts who are as happy to share a drink with guests as they are to leave them to their own devices. You can cater for yourself, but their cooking is a highlight: our meal featured Giorgio's home-made Piedmontese toma cheese, tagliatelle with baby clams, and enormous rock lobsters that Giorgio had fished from the ocean that afternoon, all paired with well-chosen Italian wines.

Visitors can borrow the villa's 32ft boat for the game fishing for which Whitianga is famed. For a more relaxing day, head for some of the Coromandel's more isolated beaches. Cathedral Cove, just a few miles north of Hot Water Beach, is a white-sand beach surrounded by cliffs; Otama Beach, north of Whitianga, is less visited and equally stunning.

**How much?** From £71pp per night B&B; or £233 for the whole house (sleeping four).

### Way to go

**Getting there:** Air New Zealand (0800 0284149, [airnz.co.uk](http://airnz.co.uk)) flies daily Heathrow-Wellington from £644 inc taxes.

**Further information:** Tourism New Zealand, 09069 101010 (£1 a minute), [purenz.com](http://purenz.com). Country code: 00 64. Flight time London-Wellington: 24hrs. Time difference: -11hrs. £1 = 2.59 New Zealand dollars.