



## Travel

Travel Editor Sarah-Kate Lynch

# 5 reasons to visit HUKA LODGE

*The luxury riverside digs are everything I imagined*

**F**or decades, I've dreamed about staying at New Zealand's most iconic luxury lodge and finally, for a blissful 24 hours, my dream came true.

### 1 The lodge

Irish fisherman Alan Pye built the original lodge on the banks of the mighty Waikato River just outside Taupo in the 1920s. It's a somewhat more lavish proposition now, but one of the loveliest surprises is that it's not dead posh. Luxurious, yes, but precious? No. The décor is cosy and stylish, with pockets of perfection spread throughout the main building and the 23 suites, which are strung along the riverbank like pearls. The Queen sticks to the library when she comes to stay, so I'm told, but there are seven hectares outside to explore, and many a lovely inside nook and cranny.

### 2 The river

It's not 'til you get here that you realise the biggest drawcard is not anything that's been added – it's the Waikato. The water, close to its source, Lake Taupo, is so clear, you can see to the bottom and it flows past the lawn outside every

lodge room. I could watch it all day and indeed spent an hour or so sitting on the chaise in our suite, just staring out at all that beautiful greenery. In the morning, a low mist hangs over it and from the main lodge, you can see the white water that marks the top of the Huka Falls. This is New Zealand's natural beauty at its most stunning.

### 3 The dining

As you may expect, every mouthful's a pleasure at a place with a reputation like this one. We managed to squeeze four meals into our brief stay – breakfast by the fire, lunch in the unseasonal sunshine on the deck, a five-course meal outside by a roaring fire and our final breakfast down on the jetty, complete with mohair rugs and outdoor heaters. I can die happy now that I have heard the invitation to "meet for drinks under the Goldie" in the evening. There are 21 different private spots to enjoy the superb offerings and guess what? You don't have to stay here to do so. If the lodge isn't full, bookings are taken for lunch and dinner, but only a day or two in advance. Still ...

### 4 What to do

The list of activities is mind-boggling – horse-riding,

quad adventures, skydiving, rafting, bungy-jumping, jet boating, hunting, golfing and, of course, fly fishing can all be arranged mostly within spitting distance. Me, I didn't want to go anywhere. However, we did walk from Spa Thermal Park in Taupo back along the other side of the river so I could see our room from a different angle – oh, and the hot springs along the way and the mighty falls – but all I could think of was getting back to my dream home. The Ginger and I did hit the lodge tennis court, though. We've been together 27 years and it's the first time. Probably the last. We might try croquet or petanque next visit.

### 5 When to go

Obviously, this is special-treat territory and as I kept telling the Ginger, my next wedding will be at Huka Lodge. In fact, it's just been voted best honeymoon destination in Asia Pacific by the world's biggest bridal magazine. You can hire the whole place or there are two beautifully designed separate cottages – one with two bedrooms and one with four – that would suit a more intimate event. Actually, I might do that next time I turn 40. Yes, Huka Lodge was better than I'd even dreamed.



Some people actually leave the property, but it's so gorgeous I barely strayed.



The cat who got the cream laps up all this iconic lodge has to offer. About time!



The lodge is tailor-made perfection, but the nearby falls provide natural wow.

PICTURES: SARAH-KATE LYNCH.