

## Huka Lodge review: The New Zealand lodge in an extraordinary location

Lauren Quaintance



Owner's Cottage, Huka Lodge. Photo: Huka Lodge



### THE PLACE

New Zealanders talk about the country's oldest lodge in hushed, almost reverent tones. Once a humble fisherman's quarters on the banks of the Waikato River near Taupo in 1924, Huka Lodge secured its place in history when Queen Elizabeth II stayed here (twice) in the 1980s. With 20 suites and two private houses suited to family groups travelling with an entourage it's as intimate – and yet private – as you'd expect.

### THE LOCATION

With all of Huka Lodge's "mana" (meaning authority and prestige in Māori) it's easy to forget its extraordinary location. Set on the lush green banks of the Waikato River – just upstream from the short-but-dramatic Huka Falls – visitors will be transfixed by the ever-changing waterway which is at one moment lazy and deep murky green and the next swirling, urgent and icy blue. New Zealand's largest lake, Taupō, is just 15 minutes' drive away.

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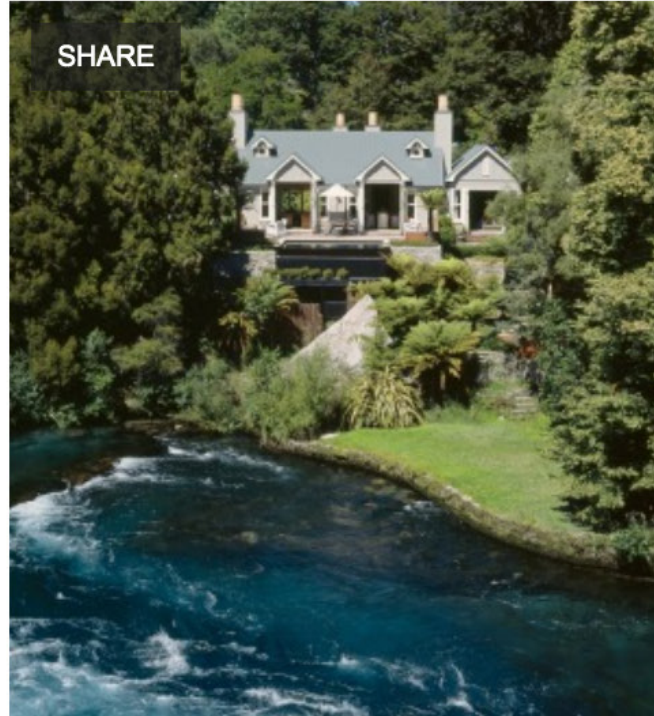
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### THE SPACE

There's something a little regal about Huka Lodge – expect antiques, silver platters and plenty of tartan. But the lodge undoubtedly has a sense of place which is partly revealed in its astonishing art collection, including portraits of Māori elders by renowned New Zealand artists such as Charles F. Goldie and Gottfried Lindauer. Outside there is almost seven hectares of garden featuring exotic and native plants, including 40 types of native tree ferns.

### THE ROOM

From the outside the 20 rooms or "lodge suites" at Huka Lodge are relatively modest buildings hunkered down on the banks of the river. Inside they are well-appointed without being flashy – plush carpets, vintage angling posters, and crisp, white linen. It is astonishingly quiet – you'll hear nothing except birds and the rush of water – and nothing competes with the view.



Tucked away and totally private: Huka Lodge. Photo: Huka Lodge

### THE FOOD

Foreign-accented waiters deliver beautifully crafted dishes from chef Paul Froggatt, who has worked in high-end restaurants everywhere from France to Singapore. Froggatt might unashamedly run a "European kitchen" but don't expect to eat truffles and foie gras. Having lived in Taupō for five years, Froggatt is passionate about using his considerable skills to create dishes using the best local produce. He's on a first-name basis with farmers who regularly drop in to see what he's doing, and goes foraging with local Māori elders on his day off.

### STEPPING OUT

This is a fishing lodge at heart but if you have no interest in luring some of the area's famous trout there is plenty more to do. The Tongariro Crossing, New Zealand's best day walk, is in a volcanically active World Heritage Park an hour's drive away. Or, if funds permit, you could book a helicopter to take you the Hawke's Bay wine region for lunch, making a detour to spot wild horses in the Kaimanawa Ranges on the way home.

### THE VERDICT

Huka Lodge could be burdened with its history but it keeps subtly evolving. The lodge manages to deliver a world-class experience without forgetting that this is a Kiwi lodge that needs to reflect its people and place. Expect an extraordinary location, reverential service and unashamedly out-of-the-ordinary food.

### ESSENTIALS

Rates start from \$NZ890 per person per night excluding GST, including pre-dinner drinks and canapés, a five-course gourmet dinner and full country breakfast. See [www.hukalodge.co.nz](http://www.hukalodge.co.nz)

### HIGHLIGHT

Quiet moments on the banks of the river watching swans pecking at the lawn and listening to the distant rumble of rapids.

### LOWLIGHT

This is the ultimate romantic destination so it was sad to visit alone. Thanks to the fact that Huka Lodge has 20 private dining spots I never had to suffer the indignity of eating solo in a large dining room full of canoodling couples.

Lauren Quaintance was a guest of Huka Lodge.