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SOUTH OF THE EQUATOR

Three Unforgettable Destinations

*Fall Getaway: A Culinary Journey on
New York's Finger Lakes Region*

New Zealand: Journey to Health

ROTORUA, NEW ZEALAND

By Anna Thomas

For nearly 200 years, tourists have been flocking to the small city of Rotorua, an easy three-hour drive from Auckland. It sits within a volcanic caldera, in a region aptly named the Bay of Plenty. With the largest remaining concentration of geysers in New Zealand, Rotorua has been attracting health seekers to bathe in its medicinal, geothermal waters since the 1800's.

The first thing that strikes you when you arrive in Rotorua is the strong smell of sulphur and the plumes of steam bellowing from hundreds of vents scattered around the city. Once your olfactory senses adjust it is easy to be transformed by the beauty; there are boiling mud and steam pools, brightly colored red and green lakes and a 'moonscape like' topography which is mesmerizing. There are also 18 picturesque lakes dotted around the region, of which Lake Rotorua is the largest.

Rotorua is arguably the heart of Māori culture, and it is home to the only two living Māori villages in New Zealand. Ngati Whakaue people of Ohinemutu and Whakarewarewa still use boiling pools and steam to cook, bathe and wash clothes and many continue to

practice the ancient traditions and customs of the Māori people.

As New Zealand became colonized in the 1800s, word soon spread about Rotorua's therapeutic geothermal waters. A Catholic priest in search of treatment for his crippling arthritis travelled to the settlement and after bathing in the acidic spring claimed he was cured. He is said to have *walked* the 40 miles back to his village. From that moment on, Rotorua became the birthplace of New Zealand's tourism.

Priest Spring is now the focal point of historically significant Polynesian Spa. The facility was built in 1972 on the site of the spring. The complex now has 28 pools which draw on the Priest Spring's slightly acidic water. This water has been proven to treat aches and pains with the natural minerals helping inflammation. After a morning hike I can confirm a two-hour soak was hugely restorative.

Also feeding the multiple pools are the alkaline waters from nearby Rachel Spring. The antiseptic action of the sodium silicate helps nourish the skin and skin irritations. Polynesian Spa Marketing Manager Richard Allen says the pools are an icon and hugely significant to all New Zealanders. "The waters are known as Waiariki, itself a term of high honor. It means water of the gods although it is interpreted as hot spring. These waters are also regarded by Māori as treasures."

Geothermal waters are but a small part of Rongoā Māori (Māori medicine). Illness was viewed as a symptom of disharmony with nature; if a person was sick, the Tohunga (health practitioner) would first determine what imbalance had occurred, before the illness could then be treated both spiritually and physically. Herbal remedies, physical therapies and spiritual healing all play a large part on the journey to wellness.

Wikitoria Oman, is one such healer. She is a descendent of the Ngati Whakaue people and an afternoon with her can only be described as a 'deeply spiritual'. Treatment includes plant remedies from native flora (Rongoā rākau), massage (romiromi) and prayer (karakia). "I look at energy centers that are blocked and closed, and bring the body back into balance. Afterwards some people can feel very strange." A note of caution; a massage session is not for the faint hearted. It goes very deep with the use of her elbows and feet, but I can guarantee at the end of it, you will feel some sort of shift.

It is hard to imagine a journey to New Zealand without taking the time to delve into the country's rich and unique indigenous culture; this region of Rotorua is but a small soupçon, a tiny taster, of something so much bigger. The Maori culture is an integral part of New Zealand's identity and the fact it is embraced and incorporated within daily life adds to the country's undeniable charm.

Travellers Notebook: Where to Stay

Treetops Lodge & Estate

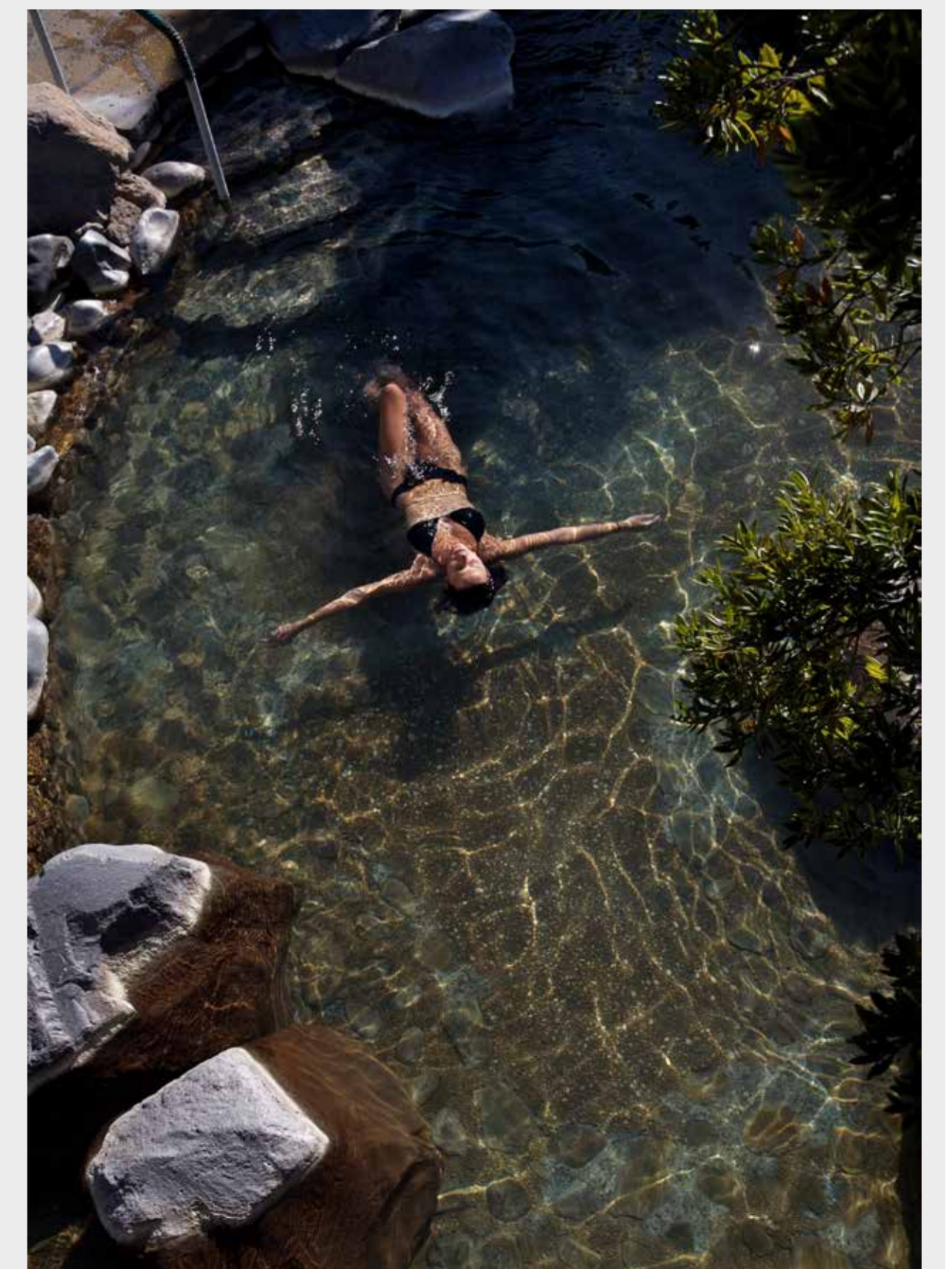
Up a tree lined, winding road and set amongst 2500 hectares of virgin forest is a truly sustainable luxury lodge which epitomizes the spirit of 'Manaakitanga', hospitality, kindness and generosity. The beautifully designed lodge is built using native trees felled and milled on site. It features expansive wetlands, a vast array of flora and fauna, and its cuisine follows the "Estate to Plate" philosophy, where almost everything eaten is grown or raised on the estate including buffalo and deer.

Once there, don't forget to...

- Enjoy the work of Chefs Isabel and Felipe as they exquisitely present entries that are carefully prepared with lots of flavor and paired with premium New Zealand wines.
- Play golf at Kinloch Club, the only Jack Nicklaus' Signature Course in New Zealand.



- Take time out and have a relaxing stroll through the native trails that wind throughout the unspoiled forests. Come back refreshed and immersed in nature.
- Take a helicopter tour so see the sights from above
- And, of course, head to Rotorua and explore the geothermal features.



OUR EDITORS



ANNA THOMAS

It would be difficult to find a Kiwi who has a better knowledge of New Zealand than Anna Thomas. As a journalist, film director and media specialist for Tourism New Zealand, Anna has travelled to every corner of the country. She is passionate and proud of the land she calls home, showcasing New Zealand’s unique and diverse landscapes, Maori culture, food and wine to millions of people around the globe.



JEN MURPHY

Journalist Jen Murphy splits her time between Boulder, Colorado and Maui. She is the former travel editor at *Food & Wine* magazine and served as deputy editor of *Afar*. She writes a weekly fitness column, What’s Your Workout, for the *Wall Street Journal* and contributes to publications including *Outside*, *Men’s Journal*, *Men’s Health*, *Departures*, and *Condé Nast Traveler*. She is an avid surfer, kiteboarder, snowboarder, runner, and yogi.



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Tracy is a lifestyle writer based between Cape Town and Mexico City. Having worked in South Africa’s design industry for a number of years, she is passionate about the continent’s creative talent, having witnessed first hand the magic that happens when designers and makers are given opportunities to explore their greatest aspirations.



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