



Lodge is the retreat for all four seasons

This isolated spot is the perfect place to snuggle up, says **Anita Quigley**.

A SCENIC 30-minute drive along the Otago Peninsula from the university town of Dunedin takes you to one of the most eastern points of New Zealand and, more important, to Kaimata Lodge, a luxury eco-retreat with panoramic views over Papanui Inlet and the back dunes of Victory Beach at Cape Saunders.

Picturesque rural hamlets litter one side of the road with the vast Otago Harbour — as tranquil as a lake — on the other.

The narrow, rugged peninsula is also home to many species of wildlife, notably seals, penguins and albatross — and is a great spot to base yourself, with ecotourism an increasingly important part of its economy.

We head out to Kaimata late in the afternoon, leaving the twinkling lights of Dunedin to fade behind us.

About 20 minutes along the Southern Scenic Route brings us to the quaint habourside one-pub village of Portobello, where we turn off on to unsealed roads for the final 12km to Cape Saunders past estuaries rich in birdlife, flounder and white bait.

A brief winding climb up a hill and we are at the boundary of Kaimata, set on five acres of coastal property.

As we make our steep descent down the driveway we really have to focus on what we're doing. Not so much because the road is overly treacherous, but the view in front of us of Papanui Inlet is so captivating it's hard to keep your eyes on the job at hand.

Duck hunting season had only begun the day before and, as the inlet is a no-go zone for shooters, thousands of ducks are bobbing away on the calm crystal clear waters below, having cleverly sought refuge from the nearby, more dangerous, estuaries.

Also below us, nestled halfway down the side of the hill, is the retreat itself, but such is the perspective it seems suspended over the edge and the inlet.

First impressions often count for a great deal and this one, it must be said, is most impressive.

Next to the beautiful view, the appeal of Kaimata must be its isolation, even though our down-to-earth Kiwi hosts and owners, Kyle and Rachel, live just a little further up the driveway.

Aside from the odd farmhouse in the distance, there is nothing but uninterrupted vistas of the inlet and surrounding hills.

The clean design of the lodge means it fits both snugly and unobtrusively into the landscape.

It was built just over a year ago from timber milled from trees on the site by Kyle, who is a logger by trade, and finished with local volcanic stonework sourced from the peninsula.

Their eco-friendly ethos means the macrocarpa timbers have not been chemically treated and the exterior weatherboard cladding has been left to weather.

The retreat has also been designed to maximise passive solar energy, with use of large eaves and double-glazing.

Inside, the neutral modern interior blends well with the understated exterior design and spacious timber decking, with no expense spared on the warm furnishings and fittings.

Kaimata consists of two separate sleeping quarters and a third bedroom adjoining the communal kitchen/living and dining rooms.

Each of the bedrooms has their own ensuite and, while two of the bedrooms are a tad on the small side, they all have been well designed to capture the most of the view — and there's nothing like waking up to something breathtaking.

Guests have the choice of either self-catering or being hosted with meals prepared by a local chef, so it's up to you whether you'd like to use the deluxe kitchen, which boasts top-of-the-range cooking facilities, or watch someone else potter around in it.

Adjoining the kitchen is a dining area that consists of a big square timber table that comfortably seats eight.



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While we relish the good luck of having the run of the place, we agree it would be fabulous to book all three rooms and share it with friends and/or family. Ideally, it would be perfect for a long weekend or to celebrate a special occasion, such as a birthday.

The only downside of Kaimata for us was that the underfloor heating had yet to be connected (we were a week too early) meaning we thin-skinned Sydney-siders found even the late autumn nights and mornings a little too chilly and the open fire not enough. However, that has since been rectified.

Kaimata is certainly a four-season retreat: perfect to snuggle up in, in front of the large open fire with a glass of Central Otago's finest pinot noir and a good book or just as comfortable on a long summer's night with a crisp pinot gris on the deck, taking in the view until 10pm, when the sun eventually sets.

And, unlike some retreats that pride themselves on being completely out of touch with the world, there is a TV, but we only turned it on when the night's darkness swallowed the wonderful surrounding flora and fauna.

One night really isn't enough either, with the colours of the inlet changing over the course of the day

in much the same way as the spectacular rock, Uluru.

In the morning for instance, as we ate breakfast, it was drenched in the bright orange morning sunlight but by pre-dinner drinks it was more a soft pink glow.

Just a few minutes' drive and a short stroll across a farmer's paddock takes you to Allans Beach.

We rugged up and paid a visit on a very chilly late afternoon and it was definitely a highlight of our stay. Almost feeling like we had walked on to the set of the film *The Piano*, we also strolled by within feet of yellow-eyed penguins and fur seals.

Even better, we were the only people on the beach.



Spectacular: The view from Kaimata Retreat's Kotare Room



Kaimata Retreat

Getting there: Air New Zealand flies from Sydney to Dunedin. Kaimata Retreat is about a 30-minute drive along the Otago Peninsula from Dunedin, on New Zealand's south island.

Stay: Rates at Kaimata Retreat (www.kaimataz.com) range from \$NZ 265 to \$350 a night per room (self-catering) or NZ\$640-\$850 for the entire retreat.





Tranquil: The boatshed at Kaimata Retreat and the beautiful Kaimata Lodge (top)



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Green scene: Kaimata Retreat, on the Otago Pensisula