



ONLY NATURAL

Just 30 minutes from an international airport will land you literally in the middle of nowhere. *Georgina Safe* enjoys time out in New Zealand's deep south.

Rachel Duell and Kyle Davidson recommend a minimum two-night stay at Kaimata, their eco-retreat on New Zealand's Otago Peninsula, and when you arrive it's easy to see why. Kaimata is a mere half-hour drive from Dunedin on the South Island's east coast, but it truly feels a million miles away. Minutes after leaving the university city, the view on one side of the road melts into verdant hills and purple-tinged mountains dotted with the obligatory sheep, while craggy cliffs and breathtaking ocean scenes grace the other.

Snaking along the seriously twisted and vertiginous coastal road toward Cape Saunders is as close as I'll ever get to the extreme sports New Zealand is renowned for. To my mind, enjoying the country's wine and cheese and admiring its natural beauty from a fireside perch are far more pleasurable pursuits – hence my road trip in search of rural luxury.

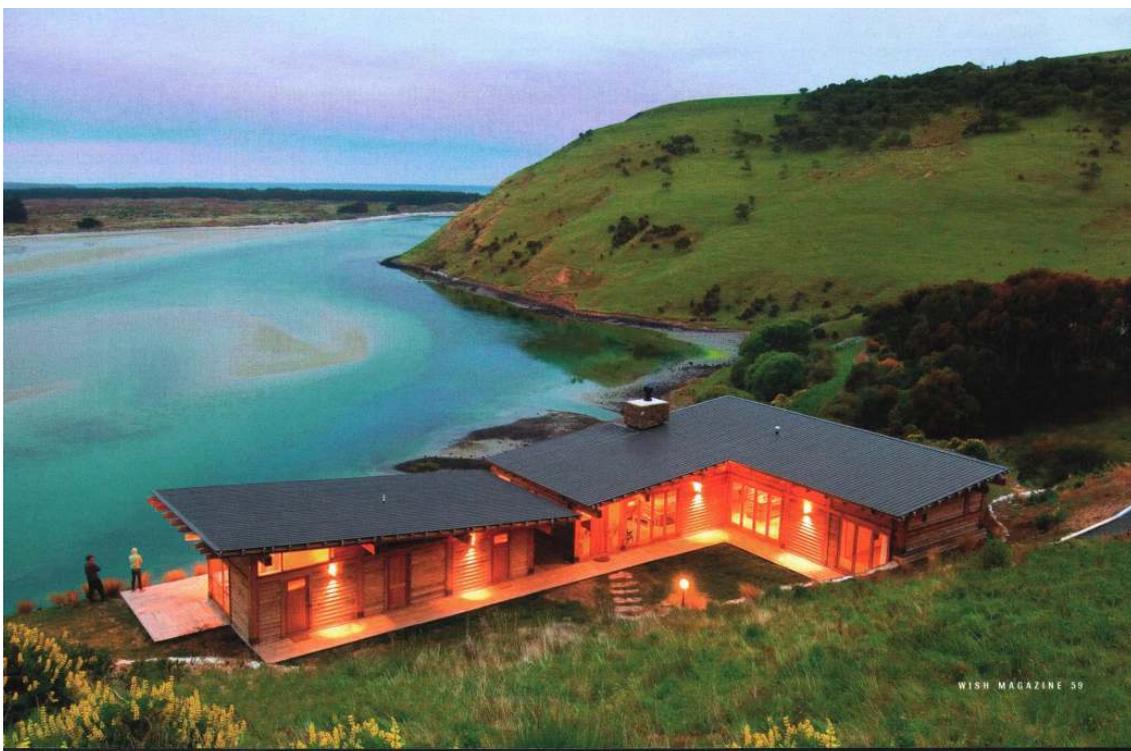
The Kaimata retreat has sweeping 180-degree views over Papanui Inlet with its unique marine birdlife. It took Duell and Davidson three years to build the lodge themselves, using golden-hued macrocarpa timber from the property and adding

touches of local volcanic stone. The post-and-beam retreat nestles comfortably into the hillside and is furnished in an understated contemporary style that defers to the mesmerising views. As the wind whistles outside, we stoke up the fire in the living room, with its floor-to-ceiling glass walls and tones of ochre, taupe and olive, and relax with a glass of New Zealand pinot.

All bedrooms are north-facing and the spacious, open-plan format includes a dining area with an eight-seater dining table and a well-equipped kitchen stocked with essentials. A personal chef is available on request but, given the house boasts a designer kitchen equipped with a Smeg oven and dishwasher, we take the self-catering option. Nearby Portobello village, just a 12-minute drive away, is perfect for supermarket visits or for dining out, but we begin our day at the Otago Farmers Market, held at Dunedin's historic railway station each Saturday, and pick up organic goodies and regional produce. We unload salmon, fresh vegetables, cheese, bread and another bottle of wine from our car boot and set about creating a culinary masterpiece.

Were we to burn the bread or lose the corkscrew, Duell and Davidson live on-site in a separate house and are »

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available 24/7 to sort out any problems. On our arrival they drop down for a welcoming glass of wine then thoughtfully leave us to our own devices – but not until they’ve handed us breakfast supplies for the next morning: eggs from their own hens, local bread and bacon and a generous fruit platter groaning with kiwifruit, pineapple and strawberries. We devour the lot the following day before driving to Portobello to admire the rare royal albatrosses at the world’s only mainland albatross colony before taking a wildlife tour of Kaimata’s surrounds. We visit the yellow-eyed penguin sanctuaries and spot a visiting pod of common dolphins, but we miss a sighting of an elusive southern right whale.

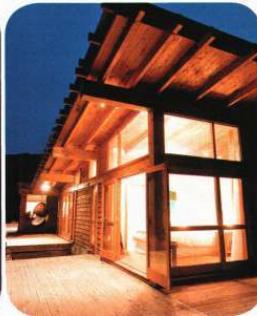
Ecology and sustainability are important at Kaimata. Duell and Davidson endeavour to use only socially responsible goods, with most of their products New Zealand-made, natural and organic. The retreat runs on solar energy and is double-glazed and wool insulated, with underfloor heating using a bio-diesel-powered coil system. Kaimata operates a recycling program, an organic garden and recently reinstated a variety of native trees, shrubs and grasses.

Strolling in the garden is a pleasurable

afternoon activity, while waterside options include kayaking in the estuary, snorkelling around the rocks at the local beach and surfing the pounding waves. Back on shore, you could take a heritage tour of New Zealand’s only castle, Lanareh, or explore Maori heritage sites at nearby Taiaroa Heads. After all that robust activity, a relaxing inhouse therapeutic massage or facial is only a phone call away, but we prefer to crack open another bottle of New Zealand chardonnay and kick back to concentrate on the view. Kaimata sits on a tidal inlet and watching the seascape constantly changing is as relaxing as yoga or pilates but not nearly as strenuous. Winds here can blow at up to 100km/h – Duell’s young daughter was once lifted off her feet – but tonight the water is as smooth as glass. The isolation takes us far from the stresses of city living.

As darkness falls, we put on a compilation of New Zealand music. The house is stocked with kiwiana CDs and DVDs and hung with works by local artists – and they’re all for sale should you desire a souvenir of your visit. (kaimata.nz.com) 

Georgina Safe was a guest of Kaimata retreat.



A world away from nearby Dunedin, where streetside cafes spill with university students, Kaimata is a natural haven where marine and bird life provide entertainment from the balcony.