

 Nelson 

ECO - CONSCIOUS FUN

at Nelson's Stonefly Lodge

by Tony Orman



Riverside fisherman



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Stonefly Lodge, an eco-sensitive yet stylish building, overlooks a panorama of hills and a crystal clear trout river with a backdrop of high hills rising to a glimpse of an alpine mountain. Proprietors John and Kate Kerr found the site several years ago, and were enthralled.

"Kate and I just couldn't resist it, when we first saw it," smiles John Kerr. "Look at it!"

John and Kate came from a strong sport fishing background, with nine years spent running the Cape Don Fishing Lodge in northern Queensland where 21 species of saltwater fish made for a saltwater sport fishing paradise.

But nine years of tropical heat in Arnhem Land demanded a change to a cooler climate. The couple headed to New Zealand and chanced on the old forestry skid site overlooking the Motueka River.

The Motueka River is one of New Zealand's finest brown trout rivers. The local Fish and Game council says it has "very high numbers of trout." Yet while the river and its surging, swirling rapids and languid pools will make a trout fisher's pulse quicken, there's so much more in terms of outdoors and local culture to explore within a radius of a day's travel from the lodge.

The adventure and activities within easy reach was a major reason why Australians John and Kate chose the site, set in the Nelson region's Motueka valley in

the northwest corner of New Zealand's South Island.

Just 45 minutes drive away, down valley near to where the Motueka River empties into Tasman Bay, is the Abel Tasman National Park. One full day activity involves a "laid back" drive down the verdant valley to take a boat cruise, hike forest trails around golden sandy bays lapped by the stunningly clear sea, and then enjoy a sumptuous lunch with fine local wine. Another is to hire a helicopter, fly to a secluded beach, cruise aboard a catamaran, and kayak the forest fringed bays or even swim with seals.

The glimpse of the alpine ridge of Mount Arthur tantalisingly suggests a helicopter ride to a mountain top. Recently, a keen trout angler and his wife, quietly celebrating his 75th birthday, were whisked by helicopter to the top of Mt Owen where the movie 'Lord of the Rings' was filmed. On a perfect still spring day, the couple lunched in the snow and drank a toast with the lodge's "Stonefly Rising" methode champagnoise, featuring grapes from a local vineyard.

Helicopter flights are a favourite of guests. Stonefly Lodge's helipad is the closest

to the Kahurangi National Park which embraces Mounts Owen and Arthur plus other peaks. A number of trips taken are into the pristine trout rivers within the park. Trout average a healthy 2 kg



plus and sometimes nudge the weight measure to the magical "double figure" of 10lbs (4.2 kgs).

"The close proximity to Kahurangi National Park means affordability is heightened and thus so is the availability of unique experiences to more guests," says John.

Nelson Lakes National Park is another alpine playground just an hour's drive to the south. There, a water taxi can be taken



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to the head of the elongated glacial lake overlooked by forested slopes rising to towering alpine arêtes and ridges, followed by a few hours to walk a beech forest trail return.

Mt Arthur is another favourite hike for fitter guests. A 20 minute drive and then

a two to three hour gradual climb to the summit gives a stunning view of layer upon layer of mountain ridges retreating into the distance. Guides are available, and usually advisable.

Or how about white water rafting on the Buller River? Perhaps a helicopter trip to Golden Bay and then the beach drive to the South Island’s extremity of historic Farewell Spit that bid adieu to 18th century mariner-explorer Captain Cook? Or take the short walk to beautiful and intriguing Wharariki Beach, one of the region’s hidden gems and a photographer’s paradise.

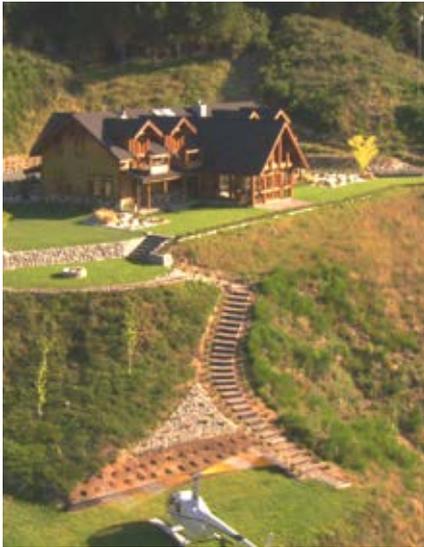
More leisurely is a drive visiting some of the 23 wineries within an hour of the lodge, or a tour of local artisans who paint,

make pottery, turn wood and blow glass. Four golf courses, mostly nine-holes, are within an hour’s drive, one being just 20 minutes away.

Those activities and adventures aside, Stonefly Lodge in its own right is a worthwhile experience, as evidenced by visitor comments. One avid trout fly fisherman from Maine USA said, “I came for the fishing, but the lodge turned out to be the real catch.”

The lodge has been designed to be self sufficient in power, with electricity supplied on site by micro-hydro generation, a wind turbine and solar panels totally independent of the national grid. “It’s a great feeling to know that the water, wind





and sun are working to keep our property functioning," says John.

Central heating is provided with a log burner. All waste water is treated on site by a multi award winning "Biolytix" system which reduces waste to a quality fit for watering the garden. Twenty four fruit trees, a bio-dynamic garden and poultry for eggs complement locally sourced venison, lamb, beef, fish and scallops.

Indeed, "Stonefly Lodge treads lightly on

the environment," says Kate.

The lodge has a warm feeling, enhanced by Kate's and John's combined welcoming personalities. One USA couple said it was, "Like staying with old friends who do everything for you!" Or as one Texan couple put it, "Service from the heart. Five star. Food and fishing over the top."

The lodge has an intimate, warm charm with just four double bedrooms, giving a cosy, friendly character and atmosphere.

The menu is a blend of international cuisines, as chef New Zealander Dean Sincock has worked in Russia, the UK, Europe and the USA. Kate says the menu has a trend to French and Kiwi.

And the fishing! The Motueka River, visible from the windows in the lounge, is rated as one of the best of New Zealand's brown trout fly fishing rivers. It is just one of several rivers nearby. A few kilometres upstream, the Wangapeka River, in its own right a very fine trout river, joins the Motueka.



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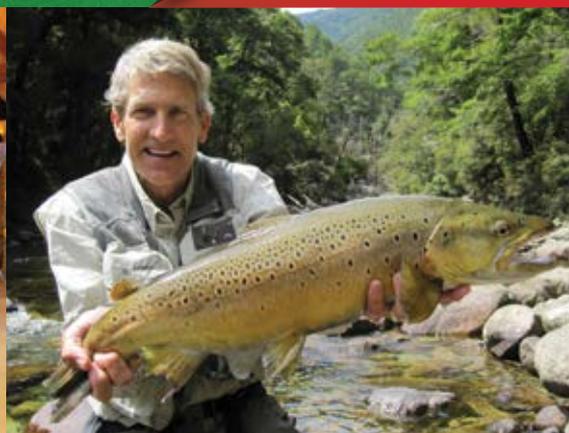
Stonefly Lodge offers the complete package for any fly fishing enthusiast, providing expert guiding and instruction for the novice or experienced fly fisherman.

The 5 star luxury Lodge on the banks of the Motueka river in the South Island, offers access to world class brown trout rivers, spectacular New Zealand scenery and wilderness activities, all within an hours drive from the Lodge.

Heli-fishing in remote pristine backcountry rivers a speciality. For the non fishing person the region offers a wide variety of spectacular tours from hiking, wine tasting, kayaking, and exploring one of New Zealand's recognised boutique arts and craft regions.

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Abel Tasman

“Stonefly Lodge is rated in the top 10 eco-lodges for Australia and New Zealand.”

And go downstream a few kilometres and the Baton River chimes in. A mere 15 to 20 minutes’ helicopter flight whisks you into the pristine, wilderness headwaters of the Karamea River and its major tributaries the Leslie and Crow.

“We’re right in the middle of some very fine trout fishing,” says John.

Nor do you have to be an accomplished and experienced fly fisher to enjoy the area’s offerings. A trout fisher’s beginner’s package of three days culminating in a day’s guided fishing caters for new chums. And success, while not guaranteed, is always a good possibility. One Australian couple caught seven big brawny brown trout on their third day of the beginner’s package.

Rates at \$550 a night per person compare exceptionally well within the luxury lodge category in New Zealand. Stonefly Lodge is rated in the top 10 eco-lodges for Australia and New Zealand and recently was accepted into the book “Luxury Lodges of New Zealand.” Incentive stays as a bonus for corporate employees also feature.

Ninety per cent of guests are international, and on average are in the 50 to 60 year bracket. Some are younger, some older. One 89 year old had the time of his life, catching five brown trout all over 5 pounds (2.3 kgs) with the biggest a hefty 7 (3.2 kgs) pounder.

Sometimes a group or family choose to have exclusive use of the lodge, particularly generations of a family where perhaps grandparents treat their children and grandchildren to a week at the lodge. “So it’s a group 70 to 7 year olds and family fun,” says Kate.

Kate and John feel they have found their niche – a place to live, to welcome guests and enjoy life. “This is about lifestyle. This is our home,” says Kate.

Footnotes:

Tony Orman is the author of over 20 outdoors books, many to do with trout fishing.

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