

Ways to go, where to stay

Test-driving cars is a tough job. But you might as well take the scenic route when you do it. **Sandy Myhre** reports on New Zealand's most spectacular roads and accommodation.



PANORAMIC: Acacia Lodge beautifully combines nature and modernity with million-dollar views over Lake Taupo.

OVER THE past year judges in the women's car of the year awards have driven over some spectacular roads in New Zealand and have stayed in some wonderful hotels and lodges.

The passion that some owners bring to their tourist establishments is infectious and inspirational and well worth mentioning.

So *One Lady Owner* decided to hand out awards to those places we felt best-catered to women and to recognise some of the best drives in the country.

Best accommodation award finalists

- **Acacia Cliffs Lodge:** Nature and modernity combine in Taupo
- **Bethells Beach Cottages:** Wondrous escape from the city
- **Kourawhero Lodge:** Luxury retreat in Warkworth
- **Langham Hotel, Auckland:** Exemplary service
- **Albergo Hanmer Lodge and Alpine Villa, Hanmer Springs:** South Island's hot pool and massage mecca.
- WINNER:** Acacia Cliffs Lodge, Taupo

Twitters and Technology

It is nigh-on dusk. The drive leading to the night's accommodation is covered by an umbrella of trees and already the orchestra and dance troupe of birds is busy rehearsing overhead.

This purely New Zealand rustic stage offers no indication that tonight one will be wined, dined and accommodated in luxurious, state-of-the-art surroundings.

Where else in the world can you stand inside a pole house of steel, glass and wood, marvel at a million-dollar view of Lake Taupo and listen to a tui chorus led by twittering fantails?

Such ambience is by design, both natural and man-made. The Lodge owners, Rick and Linda Whitlock, have enough personal and professional experience from an international peripatetic lifestyle to know what they wanted should they be guests themselves and set about creating that in New Zealand.

It took a year to find the right cliff-top section, six months to obtain resource consent and another 11 months to get to the foundations stage. Finally, in June this year, they were able to open their boutique



DESTINATION: The road to Kaikoura is one of the most spectacular drives in the country.

establishment to guests.

The dichotomy of a high-tech structure set in natural bush is replicated in the hosts' dual approach of an old-fashioned welcome coupled with modern service ideals. Sitting at the kitchen bench watching Rick prepare a five-star breakfast while Linda lays the glass-top table sets the rules for true home-style comfort.

Even the pampered pooch downstairs lumbers up for a chin tickle, which is hardly surprising since

during one of their many sojourns offshore Rick and Linda spent time as "Animal Aunts" in the UK.

Each guest suite enjoys its own private, furnished deck. The beds boast feather and down covers and fine linen while the towels in the ensuite are as fluffy as the dog downstairs. On offer is a complimentary range of specialist Harney teas and coffee.

Merely thinking of the alliterative bubbly in bed is worth the languid

effort, while bush bike-riding, kayaking, Petanque and teasing fish from a fly are some of the day-time choices for the less soporific.

There will be no debate about the welcome.

Best drives award finalists

- The road from Picton to Kaikoura: A cruising road par excellence.
- The Dunstan Trail from Clarks Junction to Clyde: Central Otago purity.
- Via Cambridge to the back roads around Mangakino and Mokai: Simply stunning scenery.
- West Coast Rd between Westport and Haast: Wild seas on one side, glacial mountain ranges on the other.

WINNER: West Coast Rd between Westport and Haast because of the variety of roads, the scenery, bridges which cross aqua-blue mountain rivers, very little traffic (bar camper vans), no trucks and nary a speed camera.

RUNNER UP: The Dunstan Trail: Gravel roads, rock formations and the golden, rolling hills made famous by Grahame Sydney.