

Destination

New Zealand • Paris • Namibia • Caribbean



Is there really such a thing as healthy indulgence? Traditionally, a wholesome lifestyle demands deprivation: a diet deficient in the key food groups of alcohol, caffeine and chocolate, starvation-size portions and without much in the way of spices, herbs and, oh yes, taste.

But a new luxury resort perched high up on a cliff face overlooking New Zealand's beach-fringed Abel Tasman National Park was set up on the premise that certain types of fabulous food – and lots of it – can actually contribute to good health and longevity. And if the proof is in the pudding, then Split Apple Retreat makes a winning case for healthy indulgence.

NATURAL HIGHS

A boutique resort in New Zealand believes good health starts with good food, and plenty of it.

The boutique three-room retreat in the Nelson region on the northern tip of the country's South Island is the project of retired American doctor Lee Nelson and his Thai wife, gourmet cook Pen. Stylish comfort was their first priority for the secluded complex that spills over three levels on the side of a forested cliff. Next came their dedication to healthy food and researching, preparing and serving delicious meals that would improve their guests' health, help combat stress and contain a number of anti-ageing ingredients.

"I think a lot of people are now becoming much more health-conscious," says Wilson, who migrated to New Zealand 16 years ago.

"But while people have long associated healthy food with being boring and dull and giving up things, our food isn't like that at all. It's about adding to the experience of staying in a beautiful place."

Indeed, the meals are so uniformly delicious and full of flavour – red wine, dark chocolate and moderate amounts of coffee are even encouraged – it's actually hard to believe they're good for you. But even on three big meals a day, starting with a big bowl of organic fresh fruit with a seed paste and yoghurt, then a vegetable-filled egg-white omelette for

breakfast, followed by a Thai-style salad and cake for lunch and, finally, four-course dinners, including a pan-fried wild salmon dish and a dessert of feather-light blueberry soufflé, I still ended up 2kg lighter after a three-day stay.

Quite apart from the delectable meals – and the only similar functional food-driven retreat anywhere in the world that comes close is the Canyon Ranch Resort in Arizona – Split Apple is all about personalised service, comfort, a Japanese-inspired understated elegance and a stunning site on the Tasman Cape, with a private walkway to its own beach.

There's also a heated saltwater infinity pool, sauna, steam room, spa and a masseuse with a range of treatments. There's a private theatre with projector for all the latest movies and global television. For those keen on the health aspects, there's a yoga teacher, a hi-tech-assisted form of meditation and an individual wellness evaluation is offered.

Nearby, the sister property the Split Apple Hideaway is a four-level, four-bedroom lodge for exclusive hire, either with staff or the option of complete privacy.

A short drive or helicopter ride from both is the other lure of the area, New Zealand's most





The Split Apple Retreat on the northern tip of New Zealand's South Island combines nutritious, satisfying meals with zen-like decor, a spa, heated pool, yoga and meditation and a private beach.



popular national park, with a variety of trails for hiking and a slick system for escorted sea-kayaking to little islands inhabited only by seals, secluded beaches for picnics and watching dolphins frolic close by.

The region is the country's sunniest and there's a wide array of outdoor sports on offer, including 4WD safaris, bike hire and sky-diving.

Seventy-five minutes east by road sits the city of Nelson, a slow-paced, picturesque little place with some excellent restaurants on the waterfront, great shopping and fine wineries. But as for Split Apple itself, I'm a complete convert to the concept of healthy indulgence. Mornings after never felt this good.

SUE WILLIAMS



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Decked out: Relax at Split Apple Retreat, on the northern tip of New Zealand's South Island.



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Cover photograph: Surfing the break at Nihiwatu on Sumba Island in Indonesia's far east.

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