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Photograph by Patrick Reynolds

The Perfect 10: Flight Plans

JANUARY 01, 2009

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What » Outdoor adventure and cultural immersion on a helicopter trip through New Zealand.

When Jean-Michel Jefferson was an aviation strategist before he launched New Zealand-based Abicore Luxury Travel, he built a brief of clients' interests, tastes, and aspirations. "This forms the basis of the style of accommodations, menus, and activities, and the pace throughout the experience." Jefferson specializes in creating journeys that help foreigners form a "connection with the country," he says. "We use the beauty in New Zealand to de-stress our clients, and most people tell us it was their best trip ever."

The Trip » Jefferson recommends arriving in Auckland and heading straight to Cavalli Island Retreat and Spa, just north of the country's Bay of Islands. At Cavalli, a private-island villa resort reserved for one group of guests at a time, the travelers can spend a few days adjusting to the time change, enjoying treatments in the spa, cruising on the property's 72-foot motor yacht, and playing golf at the nearby Kauri Cliffs resort.

From Cavalli, the guests will fly by helicopter to the center of North Island and check into Huka Lodge on the banks of the Waikato River. "We strongly recommend helicopters in New Zealand," says Jefferson. "Our roads are small and winding, and flight restrictions are almost nonexistent."

Jefferson can arrange helicopter transfers and tours throughout the trip, including heli-hiking on South Island with Lydia Bradey, the first woman to summit Everest without additional oxygen. Bradey will lead the guests to her favorite spots around Milford Sound. "Lydia can tailor the walking to range from easy stumbles to full-on mountaineering," says Jefferson.

For cultural experiences, Jefferson connects his clients with Maori artists, healers, and performers. "We have produced royal artifacts at a week's notice for clients," he says. "We have launched *waka* [canoe] invasions of beaches and have held spiritual healings." Clients who explore a deserted bush track could be the target of an ambush by Maori warriors. "We follow the ambush with the presentation of a peace offering, a gift of indigenous art by a master craftsman," he says. "This is an unforgettable experience."

For a trip of 15 days, Jefferson recommends stops at Glen Aros (a six-bedroom villa in Hawke's Bay) and at the Claremont Country Estate and Nature Reserve in Christchurch. From Christchurch the party will fly to Queenstown, where Jefferson suggests staying at Eichardt's ("top quality in the center of town"), Punatapu ("just outside town; funky artwork"), or Silverpine ("halfway up a mountain, with views of Lake Hawea"). He will arrange a tour with vintner Grant Taylor, who, Jefferson says, "put this area on the map with Gibbston Valley Wines. He is now with his own super-exclusive label."

Wherever his clients go in New Zealand, Jefferson believes that the best way for them to make a connection with the country is to adopt the native mindset: a willingness to try new things. Jefferson once accompanied two clients on a surprise visit to a private safari park near Whangarei that is home to rare white lions and white tigers. "They bottle-fed a white lion cub," he recalls. "Both the husband and wife were in tears."

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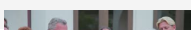
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The Exclusive » Jefferson can arrange a private regatta with America's Cup yachts and sailors. Through his aviation expertise, he helped transport the New Zealand team's yachts on a freighter aircraft to Valencia, Spain, for the 2008 race. "Their logistics manager is a personal friend," says Jefferson.

Price » From about \$20,000 per person without helicopters to about \$100,000 per couple with helicopters.

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— Jennifer Hall

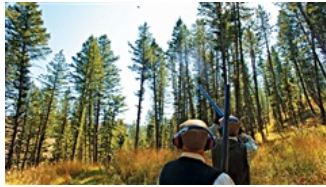
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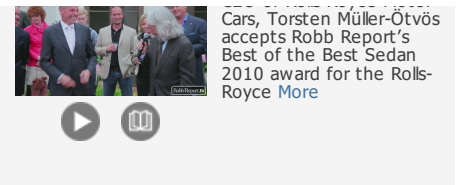


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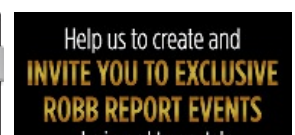
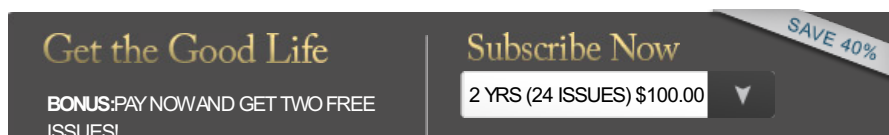
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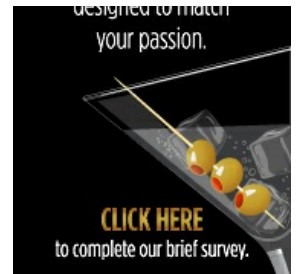
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