

For a weekend of sheer relaxation head for this retreat on the banks of Lake Tongariro where, if you're lucky, you'll catch your own dinner.



turangi RIVER BIRCHES

RIVER BIRCHES IS the perfect place to practise your hunter/gatherer skills. Magnificently sited on the banks of the world-famous Tongariro River, it's a magnet for fly-fishing enthusiasts who can amble down to one of the river's most famous pools, the Major Jones, to try their luck, or have the lodge organise a guided expedition.

As first timers we went for the guided option, which proved wise. Fly-fishing guru Bryce possessed a wealth of local knowledge and apparently limitless patience when it came to sorting out the tangled lines and lost flies that are the hallmark of the newbie. He also knew where to find the fish within 30 seconds of casting my line into the swirling current I had my first strike and, with a lot of help from Bryce, I landed my first rainbow trout.

Hunting and fishing is a major focus at River Birches but the lodge is also all about comfort and luxury. There are three

beautifully appointed guest rooms named after famous local fishing pools, each with its own deck, king-size bed and large, luxurious ensuite. The Admiral's Room, where we stayed, also features an outdoor cedar hot tub, a very welcome sight at the end of a long day's fishing.

Pleasantly relaxed and as hungry as, well, hunters, we ventured into the drawing room for pre-dinner canapés, the centrepiece of which was none other than my freshly caught trout which had been expertly smoked by lodge manager Marilyn Wright's husband Chris. He assured us that he has converted quite a few guests to the acquired

taste of trout with his secret recipe, served with a glass of crisp New Zealand sauvignon blanc. It wasn't hard to understand why.

Marilyn is a qualified chef and the meal was a testament to her skills. Locally grown organic produce is used whenever possible and she is happy to prepare your freshly caught fish or game – if you feel like sharing with other guests, that is. Dessert was a highlight, chocolate ginger pot with coconut lime ice cream, finished off with a smooth Nga Waka Riesling dessert wine.

We woke the next morning to the glorious sound of birdsong and the muffled roar of the river, and after breakfast (lovely), headed home happy and content, with a story to tell about a fish that didn't get away.

Air New Zealand has direct flights from Auckland and Wellington to Taupo. Turangi is a 40-minute drive from Taupo.

CONTACT

River Birches,
19 Koura Street, Turangi.
Phone (07) 386 0445.
Visit www.riverbirches.co.nz



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