

HERALD on SUNDAY

# Sunday Detours

Travel, food, books, lifestyle

September 23, 2007

## Wading in luxury

*Turangi's secret haven, p6*



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### FIJI

5 NIGHTS FROM

**\$799\***

**INCLUDES** Return airfares on Air Pacific, 5 nights accommodation at West's Motor Inn & return airport transfers per person.



\*Conditions: **Price:** Prices are correct as at 20 Sep 07 & are subject to change without notice. Airport departure fees are additional. Prices are per person from Auckland in economy class & are subject to availability. Stopovers & alternative routes may incur additional costs. All prices are based on payment by cash or EFTPOS only. **Availability:** Sale period: 22 Sep until 28 Sep 07 unless sold out earlier. Blackout dates & seasonal surcharges may apply depending on date of travel. Capacity is limited & will not be available on all flights. **Accommodation:** If included, all accommodation is based on twin share unless stated otherwise. Accommodation star rating is based on Flight Centre ratings & is a guide only to the overall quality of the property. Full terms & conditions are available at [www.flightcentre.co.nz/bookingterms](http://www.flightcentre.co.nz/bookingterms) \*Based on New Zealand registered businesses & websites for travel departing within New Zealand. Quote must be presented at time of booking.

### Sonaisali Island Resort

★★★★★

4 NIGHTS FROM

**\$999\***

**INCLUDES** Return airfares on Air Pacific & 4 nights accommodation per person. **BONUS** Full breakfast daily, a welcome cocktail & **FREE** Jungle Cruise per person.

### Shangri-La Fijian Resort

★★★★★

6 NIGHTS FROM

**\$1299\***

**INCLUDES** Return airfares on Air Pacific, 6 nights accommodation & return airport transfer. **BONUS** American breakfast daily for adults. Kids (2-11 yrs) **PLAY FREE** at Kids Club & **EAT FREE** (max 2 kids per room, additional cost for 3rd child).

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## HOT DEALS

**Middle east**

If you're travelling via Dubai take the opportunity to discover untouched Oman. You can experience breathtaking sand dunes and rugged mountains, stunning oases and waterfalls in the middle of the desert, plus 1700km of pristine coastline. A four-day/three-night tour starts from \$1299 per person twin share ex Muscat. Contact House of Travel on 0800 838 747.

**Reef cruises**

The Great Barrier Reef is a must-visit and there's no better way to see it than by cruise ship. Flight Centre has three-night cruises from Cairns to the Great Barrier Reef on the MV *Reef Endeavour* from \$949 per person, twin share. The cruise explores the reef, islands and shallow bays, offering snorkelling and rainforest walks. Be quick though, the sale ends tomorrow for travel before March 31 and excludes airfares. For details and bookings contact Flight Centre on 0800 35 44 48.

**Musical Sydney**

Enjoy the musical version of the film, *Billy Elliot*, with a Holiday Shoppe package, including return airfares to Sydney, two nights' accommodation and show tickets, starting from \$1146 per person share twin.

**Cruise specials**

The best way to get a deal on a cruise is by booking an early bird special. United Travel has a Princess Cruise around Alaska from \$1275 per person share twin (airfares not included). The Voyage of the Glaciers cruise is a seven-night affair along Alaska's coastline. Contact your local United Travel shop.

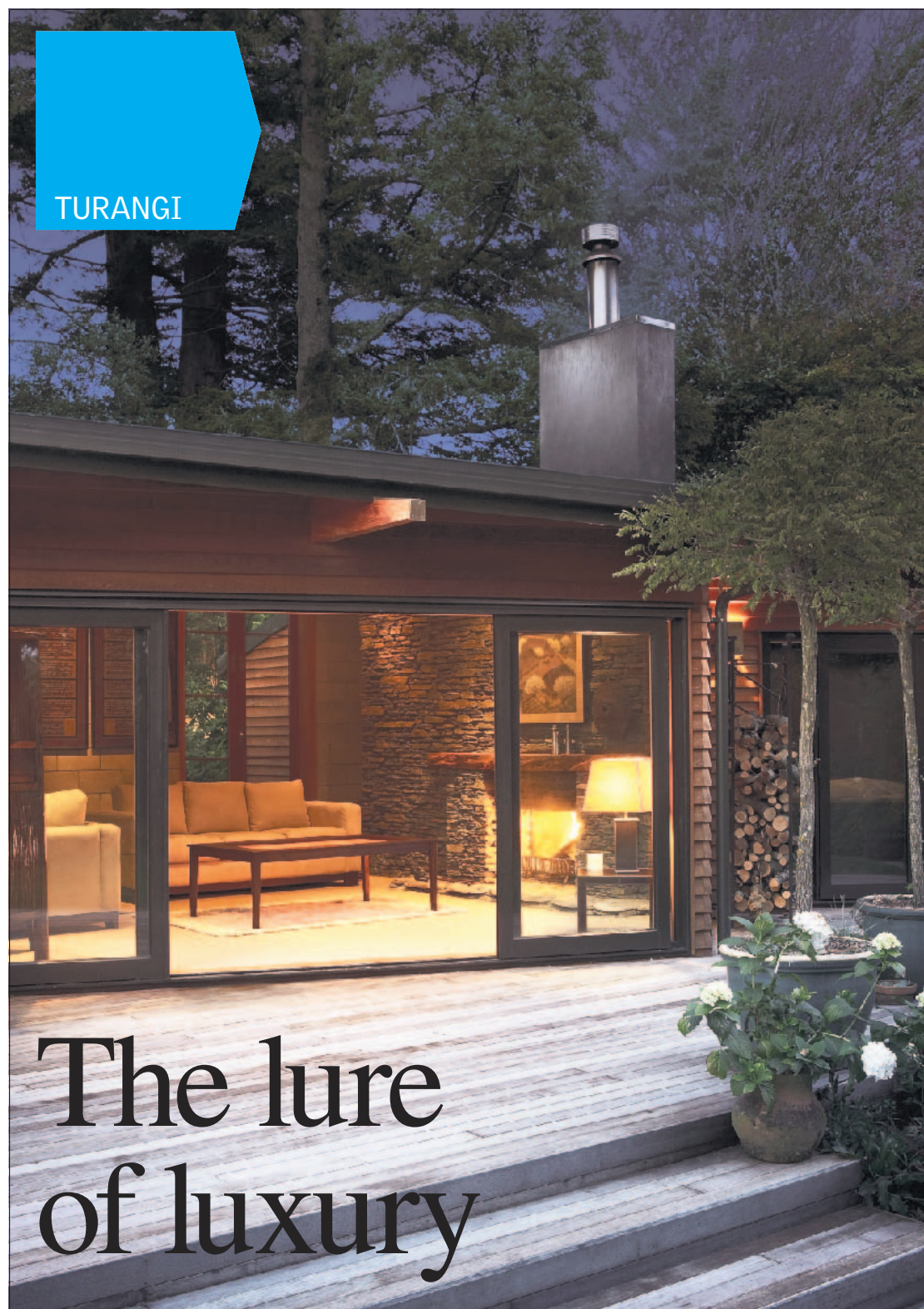
**In the diary**

November 3: Awhitu Peninsula celebrates its bountiful treasures with an annual Food, Wine & Arts Festival. The event includes live music, free children's arts workshops, short films, sculptures, arts symposium, arts exhibition, scrumptious food, Awhitu wines and much more. Held at the Awhitu Regional Park, Brooks Rd, Awhitu, the day's celebration is a great family getaway.

**Green tip**

Qantas is the latest airline offering a carbon emissions offset programme. Every time you travel with Qantas, you can now choose to offset your share of emissions with small monetary contributions via [www.qantas.com.au](http://www.qantas.com.au) website. Under the new programme, the airline will also offset all emissions generated by its staff business travel and ground transport operations.

## TURANGI



It's cold outside but there's always a warm welcome at River Birches.

**Kerri Jackson** reflects on a dream destination — and finds herself in plenty of hot water.

**I** THINK IT was the hot tub that did it. As I eased my creaky, ski-rusty limbs into the steaming water, out in the chilly mountain air, with the faint rushing sounds of the Tongariro River in the background and a glass of bubbles at my fingertips, I realised I must have been switched at birth.

This weekend of pampering and luxury at Turangi's River Birches Lodge was the lifestyle I was meant to lead and going home to the reality of a cold and draughty Auckland bungalow seemed impossible.

River Birches Lodge, perched right on the banks of the Tongariro River, is Turangi's hidden secret — a secluded haven perfect for simply hiding out, or as a base while you embrace the region's world-class skiing, tramping and trout fishing.

The lodge, set back from the road and nestled among the trees that gave it its name, started life in the 1980s as a private home.

Then, a couple of years ago a



People come from the other side of the world to fish the rivers of Turangi.

keen fisherman, American Jason Bleibtreu, bought the property and transformed it into a luxury three-bedroom fishing lodge. The walls are all cedar and schist, the rooms plush and stylish, the gardens extensive and the deck perfect for summer-evening drinks. And in winter guests can't resist the lure of the huge fireplace.

If you're so inclined there's a gym, with the reward of a post-workout soak in the tub.

Bleibtreu visits the lodge several

times a year to fish and in his absence the property is managed by hosts Marilyn and Chris Wright.

And in Marilyn's care you want for nothing. As well as preparing delicious breakfasts and an incredible three-course dinner, she will also help you plan and book as many — or as few — activities as you fancy.

The options are plentiful. But as it was mid-winter and we were in the shadow of Mt Ruapehu, there was really only one choice — skiing.

## FACTFILE

■ A stay at River Birches Lodge starts at \$295 a night (including breakfast) for the Duchess' and Major's rooms. The Admiral's Room, which comes with its own private hot tub, starts at \$325 a night. You can book the whole lodge for a single group for \$800. For more information visit [www.riverbirches.co.nz](http://www.riverbirches.co.nz)

■ Andrew Blake offers a range of guided fishing trips and packages, starting from \$500 for a day. See [www.newzealandfishing.com](http://www.newzealandfishing.com) for more information.

■ Adventure Headquarters, located on SH47, offers ski equipment for rental as well as guided trips up the mountain and through Tongariro National Park. [www.adventureheadquarters.co.nz](http://www.adventureheadquarters.co.nz)

With an eye on the suspect weather, we headed for Whakapapa under the guidance of Paul Ratlidge of Adventure Headquarters. Ratlidge has turned a lifetime spent in and around Tongariro National Park — including a few years as a ski patroller then a few more as head guide at Whakapapa — into a successful business. As well as providing ski gear hire, Adventure Headquarters offers guided mountain trips for skiers eager to get away from the crowds and off the beaten track.

Ratlidge also guides hikers up to Ruapehu's crater lake or across the famous Tongariro Crossing.

For me, the day was all about staying upright on Whakapapa's intermediate slopes — fairly unsuccessfully, it has to be said.

Off the mountain, now freezing cold and soaking wet thanks to many tumbles, my thoughts drifted to that hot tub at River Birches. It would have to wait — but just until the masseuse Marilyn Wright had booked could work her magic.

A convenient touch of "skier's knee" was enough to convince me not to venture too far from the hot

Off the mountain, and freezing cold and soaking wet because of many tumbles, my thoughts drifted to that tempting hot tub at River Birches.

water the next day.

Then again, it's almost a crime to be staying this close to some of the best trout in the world without trying to catch some.

If you don't know your way to the best places, the River Birches team can book you a fishing guide to lead the way and get you to some of the secret spots away from the crowds.

Guide Andrew Blake provides all the gear you may need and ensures the trip suits your level of fitness. Because he's out on the rivers almost every day, he knows just where to go and when.

And he'll offer as much or as little advice as you want on improving technique.

Once you return there's only one place to sit and reflect on those battles out on the river — the hot tub at River Birches.

It's the perfect reason to delay that trip back to reality as long as possible.