

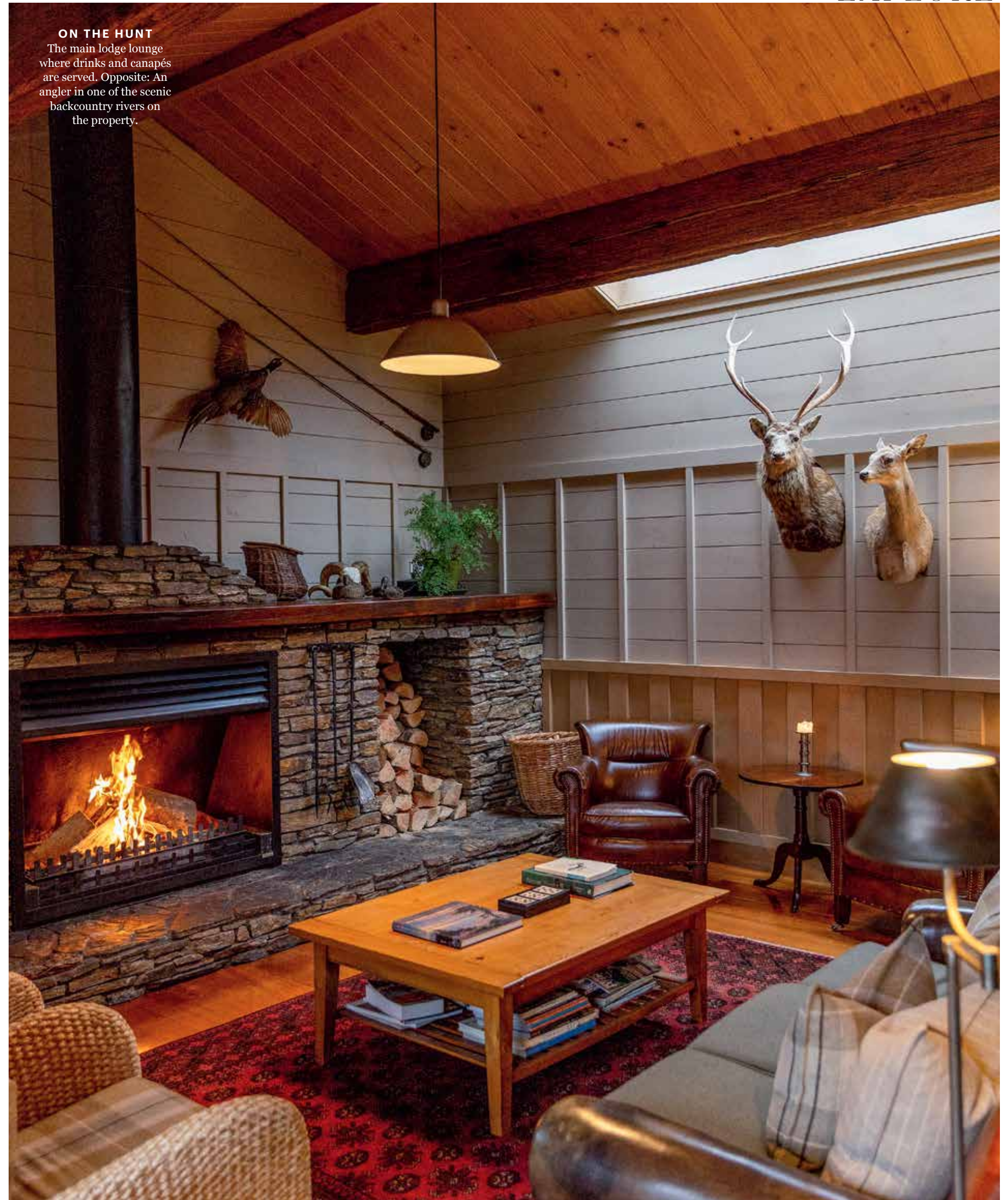


NEW ZEALAND

SPORTING CHANCE

Anglers, hunters and thrill-seekers all make a beeline for this legendary sporting lodge in the breathtaking wilderness of New Zealand's central North Island.

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ON THE HUNT
The main lodge lounge where drinks and canapés are served. Opposite: An angler in one of the scenic backcountry rivers on the property.

Blink and you might miss the sika deer sprinting into the hills, their white backsides the only clue to the untrained eye that something is on the move. Hunting deer on the grounds of a sprawling wilderness retreat in New Zealand's North Island pits hunter against prey in an adrenaline-fuelled pursuit that requires skill and patience. At Poronui, a sporting lodge set in a secluded valley, it's also a guided experience, with experts who have honed their skills over decades. With his gentle manner and in-depth knowledge, Mark McGlashan, who heads up Poronui's team of seven hunting guides, can out-stealth the flighty deer that know this property intimately.

While the South Island is revered for its snow-capped alps and pristine alpine lakes, this part of New Zealand is remarkable for its geothermal activity and rugged wilderness. A 40-minute drive from Taupō, known for its wealth of heart-racing activities, most centred around its massive crater lake, and bliss-inducing geothermal pools, Poronui is a glorious destination in itself. Acres of virgin beech forest and endless gin-clear riverways have put this lodge on the map for outdoor enthusiasts. Once you've tried your hand at deer-stalking, you can move on to fly-fishing, horse-riding, mountain-biking and clay-pigeon shooting. For non-angling types there are trails for hiking and a cooking school for culinary roaming.

With a helipad and fixed-wing access, arrival is discreet, and once you get here you can be as exclusive as you like in the sole-use ranch-style private villa, Blake House, or glamping-style safari camp on the banks of the Mohaka River, or as social as you want at hosted lodge dinners. The property is so vast that its three accommodation offerings, including the seven guest cabins at the lodge, are located between four and six kilometres apart, joined by unsealed roads and bush tracks. This is wilderness cushioned with plenty of comfort: fur throws, leather armchairs, open fires and chef-prepared meals. And with no mobile phone coverage or televisions in guest rooms, it's the place you check in to to tune out. The tranquil cascade of running water from a river is a constant soundtrack.

From its early days as a humble angler's hut, Poronui has evolved into a world-renowned fly-fishing destination. Two rivers converge here, the Taharua River, which runs through the property, and Mohaka River, which rings its southern boundary. The estate offers ideal sight-fishing conditions – where brown and rainbow trout are clearly visible from the riverbank and the hunt begins in a nature-versus-angler tussle of steely focus. Guide Dave Wood, who has been directing anglers for 26 years in New Zealand, Europe and the United States, can

detect the twitch of a trout's fin from an S-bend downriver. The diversity of fishing draws anglers for weeks-long stays as they work the rivers' 20-plus beats, casting countless lines in their meditative practice.

The property is also a working farm of highly valued Angus wagyu beef, sheep, deer and mānuka honey. Dining at Poronui is a moveable feast of options. The shared dining table at the main lodge is open to all guests – it stands under a lofty ceiling supported by exposed wharf-salvaged jarrah beams – while bespoke gourmet experiences unfold across the property. There are casual barbecues, wine-cellar dinners with prized bottles of Grange and memorable meals by acclaimed chefs, such as Tom Loughlin. Loughlin is a chef and bushman who grew up learning wilderness knowledge from his Māori father on their nearby tribal lands. He weaves ancestral stories into his hosted experience, showing guests how to set eel traps in the river and demonstrating hot-rock cooking, all of which culminates in a wine-matched hangi (the traditional earth oven) meal.

In the unlikely event you'd exhaust your options at Poronui, there's temptation beyond its perimeter. The jewel in the region's crown is Lake Taupō, the result of one of the largest volcanic eruptions in history. It's such a large body of water that it's often mistaken for the sea. A spirited day out in the Taupō region could mean boating to the contemporary rock carvings that connect Ngāti Tūwharetoa, the local tribe, to the land; cycling the free-draining pumice mountain-bike trails that ring the lake and scale its surrounding hills; or an exhilarating jet-boat ride up to Huka Falls. Racing within millimetres of riverbanks and trees, you need to submit to this activity, put complete faith in the driver's skill and say yes to the raincoat before boarding the boat.

A visit to this region should always conclude with some laid-back contemplation of its unique geothermal valley. A long, hot soak in the mineral-rich thermal springs of Wairakei – their calcified silica terraces delivering an unending supply of fresh, restorative water into numerous blue pools – is just the place to do that. Before immersing yourself in the soothing 40-degree water, take a walk along Te Kiri o Hinekai stream through steam that billows from the gushing geyser, and past carvings that speak of te ao Māori – the Māori world view. Bathing at Wairakei, enveloped in magical vapour and surrounded by native bush, connects you to the heart of the North Island. ▀

Poronui's rates start from \$1590 for up to two guests in a riverside cabin; the safari camp (exclusive use) is \$1650 per night for four adults (or up to six including children). Rates include meals, drinks and same-day laundry service. poronui.com

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PRIVATE LIVES
 Chef Phillip Blackburne serves pork fillet with a basil-olive mousse, roasted cauliflower and caper sauce. Above: Poronui's private villa Blake House. Left: A cosy corner in the main lodge.



TRAIL BLAZERS
The entrance to the main lodge on a winter's day. Above: Mountain-biking with Taupo's Four B, and deer at Poronui. Right: The rock carving on Lake Taupō by artist Matahi Brightwell. Opposite: Steamy hot springs at Wairakei Terraces and Thermal Health Spa.

