



Clockwise from left: Activity guide Ricky Ngamoki of Karitane Maori Tours leads a waka journey down the Waikouaiti River; hiking the Huriawa Peninsula with Karitane Maori Tours; the glass-roofed bedroom at Owhaoko lodge.



Blazing New Trails

In New Zealand, a wave of Indigenous-tourism experiences is opening up the history of some of the archipelago's most remote and intriguing lands. **BY BRANDON PRESSER**

IN THE 13TH CENTURY, Polynesian navigators set foot on New Zealand's North Island, an untouched world of primordial forests, gushing rivers, and exotic animals. They named the realm Aotearoa, or "land of the long white cloud," and quickly adapted their seafaring culture to the cool, misty environment.

Today, many of the Maori's ancient traditions continue to thrive and evolve on both of New Zealand's main islands. And as traveler demand for meaningful experiences grows, so does the range of Indigenous-tourism offerings, many of which have been dreamed up by a young generation of community leaders.

Founded by members of the Kāti Huirapa ki Puketeraki, of the eastern coast of the South Island, **Karitane Maori Tours** (karitanemaoritours.com) is an adventure and ecotourism company that operates waka (canoe) journeys down the Waikouaiti River, as well as walking excursions along the steep, scenic Huriawa Peninsula. The rugged headland is scattered with cultural relics like *pouwhenua* (carved pillars) that help illuminate the *pa*, or local settlement story.

Meanwhile, on the North Island, a group of Maori people recently opened **Owhaoko** (owhaoko.com; \$3,955 for two nights, all-inclusive), a sleek wood-and-glass cabin in the heart of a 16,000-acre land trust near Lake Taupo, New Zealand's largest. Accessible only via helicopter, the solar-powered lodge features a full kitchen, spacious wooden decks, and two bedrooms—one of which has a glass ceiling. During the day, guests can swim in pristine rivers and hike through alpine grasslands in search of the elusive sika deer.



In 2017, Great Barrier Island—just a 40-minute flight from Auckland—became the third place in the world to receive the new designation of International Dark Sky Sanctuary, a status conferred on public or private places with "exceptional" starry nights. Two years later, the Indigenous people of the Motairehe Marae, on the island's northwestern coast, created a first-of-its-kind stargazing tour, **Stars of Aotea** (starsofaotea.co.nz), that reframes the story of the constellations from a Maori perspective. The experience kicks off with a *powhiri* (official welcome), followed by a traditional firepit feast of pork, kumara (sweet potato), pumpkin, and other local bounty. From there, an elder leads travelers to a series of viewing platforms, pointing out the cosmic phenomena that feature in ancient stories and legends.