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## Close encounters on New Zealand's North Island

The Farm at Cape Kidnappers offers stunning views, new experiences.

By Becca Hensley - Special to the American-Statesman

Secretive. Nocturnal. Fearful. Curmudgeonly.

That doesn't sound like anybody I want to meet. And, yet, early one morning in dense woods along the headland known as Cape Kidnappers, on New Zealand's North Island, I find myself looking to hook up with an elusive date. It isn't going to be easy to find him, but I'm up for the challenge. That's why I don a sci-fi flick-worthy GPS device that beeps and murmurs as I draw closer to the mysterious rendezvous location. I stumble down steep hills and crash through undergrowth. I sink into mulchy layers of leaves. There's no prescribed path through this forest — and, wearing my red hood, I might as well be in a fairy tale. Suddenly, the beeping grows insistent. I stop, nervously, and slowly let it screech, its echoes reverberating through the trees. I've found him. Here, somewhere. What's next?

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At the Farm at Cape Kidnappers, guests can walk the resort's vast animal reserve with a scientist on a safari to ... [Read More](#)

Luckily, I'm not alone. A scientist removes the GPS device from my grip and puts a finger to his lips. "Shh," he says. As usual, I'm tittering. I do that when nervous. He bends down, pointing to my date's hiding place. "He's just here," he says, removing a layer of leaves from the edge of a tree trunk. Suddenly, a tiny head with a terrible mussed hairdo pops up. His aquiline nose extends for miles — or so it seems. His curious eyes gaze warily. Maybe he doesn't want to make my acquaintance after all, but by now I am smitten. The scientist scoops him up gingerly and gently thrusts him my way. I try not to giggle with glee. I've never done anything like this before. I stroke his Brunette halo of hair. It feels like furry feathers. He's dense and robust, though just a young man. I want to smother him with kisses. But instead I'll feed him a grub or two. And then I will help the

scientist weigh and measure him before my new fellow returns to his nest. I've just met my first kiwi bird. It was love at first sight.

A diminishing species, the kiwi bird reigns as the national bird of New Zealand. Yet most locals have never seen one outside of captivity. Evasive, unable to fly, rather anachronistic, the kiwi bird is the last of an ancient line of flightless birds (such as the moa) who evolved to fill a mammal-centric niche in mammal-free, remote New Zealand. As explorers brought predators with them on boats, the bird populations declined. It is said that dogs alone could extinguish the entire kiwi population if not kept in check. Decades ago kiwis were left to survive without help, which wasn't easy. But the scientific climate has their back at last. A number of protected habitats have been formed across the island nation to keep kiwi birds safe and ensure the re-emergence of their population. I meet my beloved kiwi at one of them — the reserve run by The Farm at Cape Kidnappers, a five-star Relais Chateaux resort which spreads across 6000 acres. Also a working sheep and cattle ranch, the resort protects around 40 kiwi birds, ranging in age from 1 to 12, allowing them to be monitored, but live freely, in their natural habitat.

A perk to guests staying at this storied, cliffside resort, the Kiwi Discovery Walk undisputedly highlights my trip to the Hawke's Bay region of New Zealand. Though sated (possibly for life), I nevertheless take part in a number of additional transforming activities on my trip. I join a jeep safari to observe the world's largest and most accessible gannet colony. Part of The Farm at Cape Kidnappers' vast, windswept landscape, I know it by the "fowl" perfume it emanates. But within minutes I stop holding my nose and let the beauty of these birds awe me. Sized between a seagull and an albatross, gannets have gleaming butter-colored crowns and bluish feet. They honk like tentative horns in traffic. Awkward and obstreperous on land, in flight they look like well-muscled fighter jets performing trickery at an air show. Blessed by a day of uber-birding, I toast my time with a wine tasting tour of the region — a verdant area, known as the food bowl of New Zealand, partly because it holds more than 100 vineyards and 80 wineries. I only make it to a few. My favorite, Elephant Hill, does a splendid Bordeaux-style red.

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Rated as one of the world's top golf courses, the Farm at Cape Kidnappers' design was conceived by Tom Doak to ... [Read More](#)

Set on otherworldly terrain that rims the Pacific Ocean, the Farm at Cape Kidnappers rolls and tumbles all the way to a jagged coastline and an unbridled sea. It soars with cliffs and undulates with an emerald-intoned patchwork of purple stone, red dirt, plump lambs, grassy carpets and ruminating cows. Wedged into rock faces, beaches, one with tutu-pink sand, provide picnic havens. Amid that, faintly evoking a sheep farmer's hut, the upscale hotel stands. Its rough-hewn wood and gray stone buildings meld into the territory. Its golf course, considered one of the best in the world, was designed by Tom Doak, lauded for his ability to incorporate nature into his vision. With cliff-tilting greens, ponderous ravines and treacherous cliff-to-cliff drives, it dazzles even the duffer in me. "Hit a ball over the edge," says a fellow golfer. "Then count. It takes 10 seconds to watch the ball drop 800 feet, all the way to the way to the sea." I don't try it, but I do enjoy the forgiving nature of the course's vast greens.

Accuracy seems moot amid such nature.



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With cliffs, gullies and plummeting drops, this renowned course at the Farm at Cape Kidnappers occupies a sprawling headland on New ... [Read More](#)

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The Farm at Cape Kidnappers, a Relais Chateaux property, occupies 6,000 acres in the Hawke's Bay region of New Zealand, on ... [Read More](#)

## IF YOU GO

Travel: Consider a flight with Fiji Airways, which allows for a stopover in Fiji en route: [fijiairways.com](http://fijiairways.com)

Hotel: The Farm at Cape Kidnappers: [capekidnappers.com](http://capekidnappers.com)

Tip: The hotel has a complimentary cocktail hour with canapes daily, encouraging a clubby feel among guests.

Wine: Visit Elephant Hill: [elephanthill.co.nz](http://elephanthill.co.nz)