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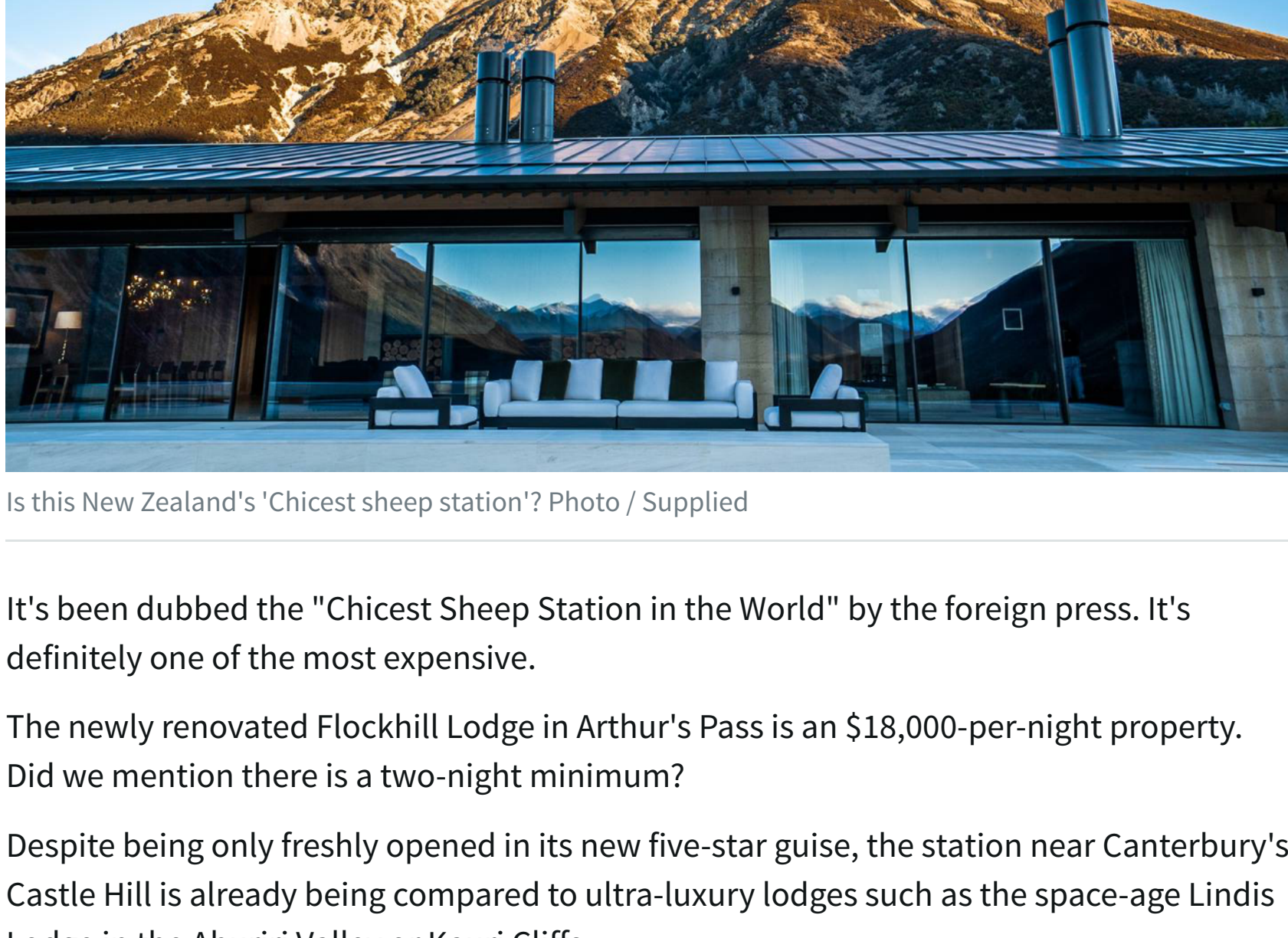
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TRAVEL

# Flockhill: New Zealand's chic, new, \$18k-a-night luxury sheep station

By **Thomas Bywater**  
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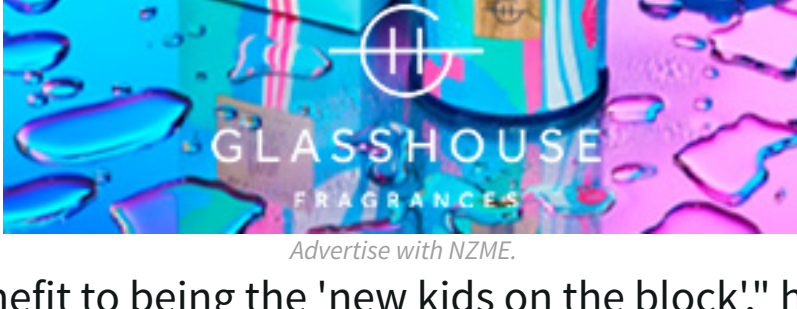
Is this New Zealand's 'Chicest sheep station'? Photo / Supplied

It's been dubbed the "Chicest Sheep Station in the World" by the foreign press. It's definitely one of the most expensive.

The newly renovated Flockhill Lodge in Arthur's Pass is an \$18,000-per-night property. Did we mention there is a two-night minimum?

Despite being only freshly opened in its new five-star guise, the station near Canterbury's Castle Hill is already being compared to ultra-luxury lodges such as the space-age Lindis Lodge in the Ahuriri Valley or Kauri Cliffs.

After returning from a travel luxury travel show in Marrakech, lodge manager Andrew Cullen says it's the one New Zealand property international travellers were anxious to know more about.



"There's certainly a benefit to being the 'new kids on the block'," he says.

Two years of closed borders has only increased interest in New Zealand's luxury accommodation. So a new property bordering the dramatic outcrops of Kura Tawhiti / Castle Hill is sure to turn heads.

Fawning reviews in the New York Times and the Financial Times have praised the "straightforward" vision of architect Jonathan Coote and shared proclamations by the Dalai Lama that this secluded part of the Craigieburn Ranges might be "the spiritual centre of the universe". They are unlikely to have known that prior to its deluxe reincarnation, Flock Hill Station was host to more modest lodgings.

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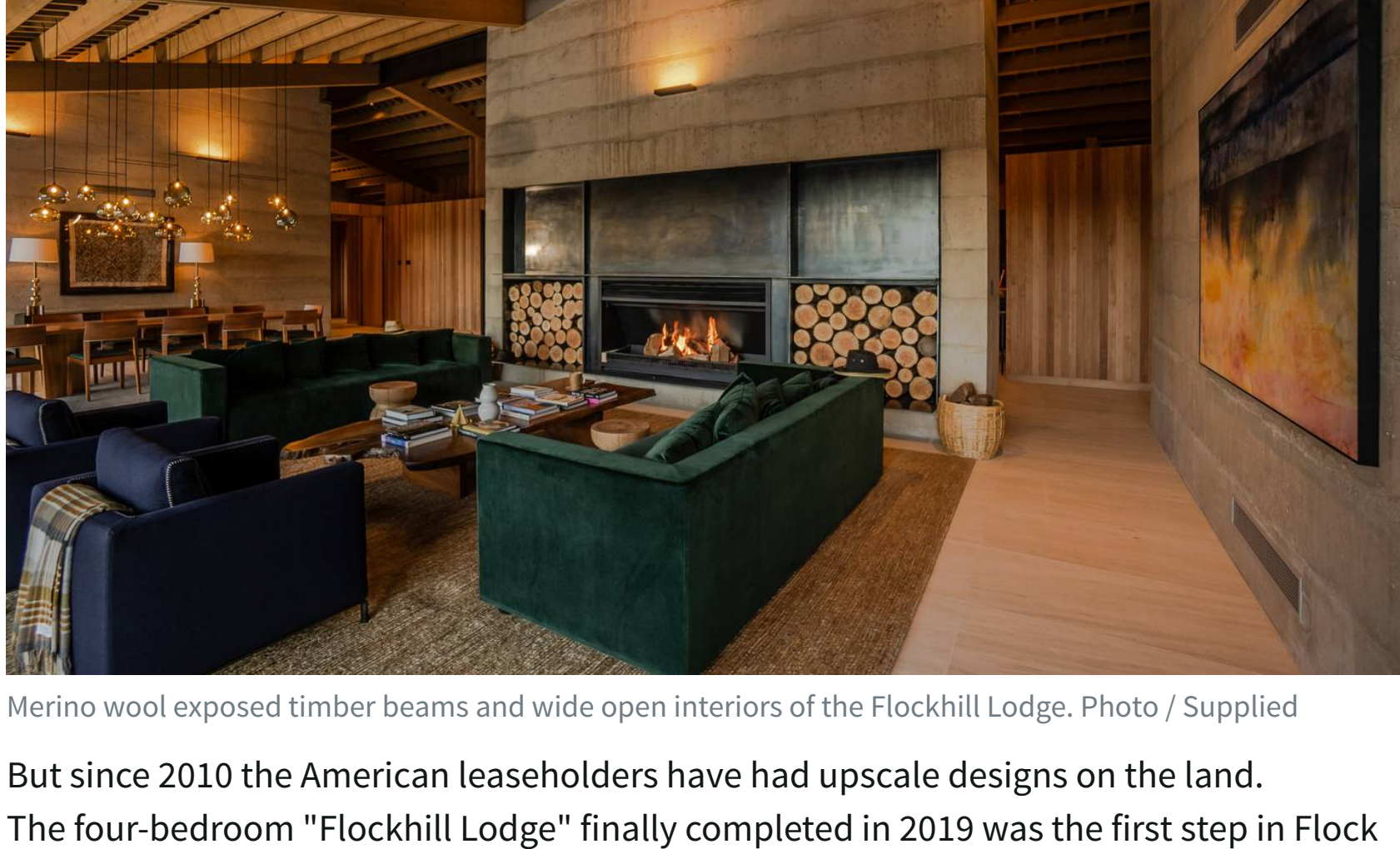
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The red-roofed cabins and campground were part of the original offering on the 1500ha sheep station. Used by the local club ski fields and hikers in summer, it was a low-profile operation on the station owned by Canterbury University. The dilapidated remains of the historic 1857 homestead are still on the site.



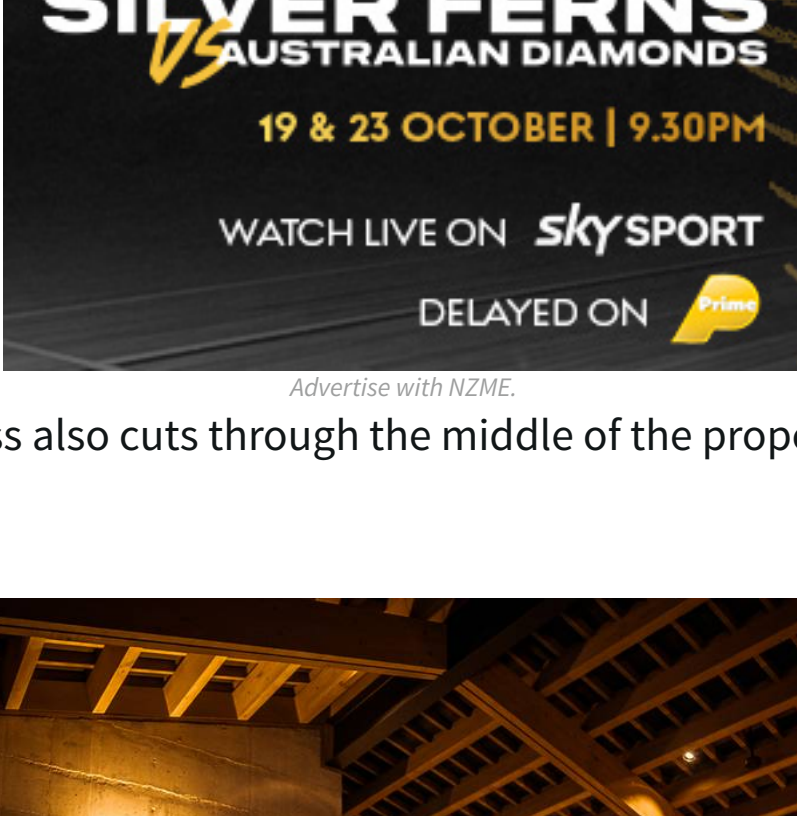
Merino wool exposed timber beams and wide open interiors of the Flockhill Lodge. Photo / Supplied

But since 2010 the American leaseholders have had upscale designs on the land. The four-bedroom "Flockhill Lodge" finally completed in 2019 was the first step in Flock Hill's transition to luxury.

It is perched high above the location of the "three-star backpacker accommodation" as Cullen describes the huts. This privileged position offers views over Lake Pearson and Arthur's Pass valley.

There are plans to build 14 new chalets on the site in place of the old cabins, along with a spa and restaurant. There are also designs for quarters for up to 28 live-in staff.

Its place on the main artery of Highway 73 from the West Coast is a great place for more casual business and a high-end food offering. Something that would be a welcome break for coast-to-coast travellers.



The TranzAlpine Express also cuts through the middle of the property.



One of the four Flockhill bedrooms. Photo / Supplied

"The plans have stayed what they were since we first got involved three-and-a-half years ago."

Cullen took over as lodge manager in 2019 along with wife Sandra. Prior to this, he had been at Treetops Lodge, Rotorua and Kinloch Manor in Taupo.

There is an appetite for New Zealand luxury travel from abroad, particularly post-pandemic.

"Luxury is something New Zealand just does better," he says.

"The appeal of New Zealand luxury accommodation is their proximity, as opposed to the vast distances between Australian properties. It appeals to US travellers who spend 10 to 12 days at a time, and want to fit a lot into that time."

For now, the lodge on the Waimakariri is the only accommodation offering, available as a whole property buyout. While full completion of these grand designs is some way off, the lodge has already had some visitors, particularly from other high-end accommodation operators.

"We cooperate with a lot of other luxury properties. We had visitors from Otahuna last weekend. We're really spoilt for choice in Canterbury by the range of accommodation."

He sees the first high season proper will be 2023/24 but there are already bookings for this summer.



The new Flockhill homestead offers views over Lake Pearson and Arthur's Pass valley. Photo / Supplied

By nature, most of the lodge's current bookings are inbound from overseas. Eighty per cent of these are from the USA.

American travellers have been emboldened by strong currency exchange and new opportunities to spend it. As a result, high-end travel is seeing a boom around the world. This summer five-star hotels in Europe have unabashedly been putting up their rates to "take advantage" of the influx.

New Zealand has been a bit slower to see some of this return.

Despite having reopened borders in April, travel agents still see there is some hesitation from inbound travel. Some cite concerns that they don't want to be trapped in another lockdown.

Cullen says that the past two years have rattled the high-value international traveller.

However, there have been some positives from the closed borders with many luxury lodges having seen an uptick in local travel.

"Everyone has been so surprised by the support of the domestic market during Covid. High-value travellers in New Zealand had been taking the opportunity to explore their backyard while borders were closed. They're still getting repeat bookings through now."

**Flockhill is available for 1 to 8 guests sole occupancy from \$18,000 per night during the summer season, with a two night minimum. There is a \$1500 per-night additional charge for bookings between 24 December and 2 January.**

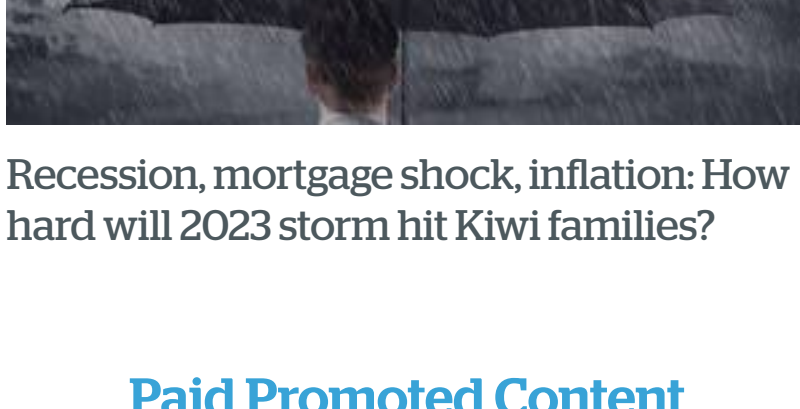
**flockhillnz.com**



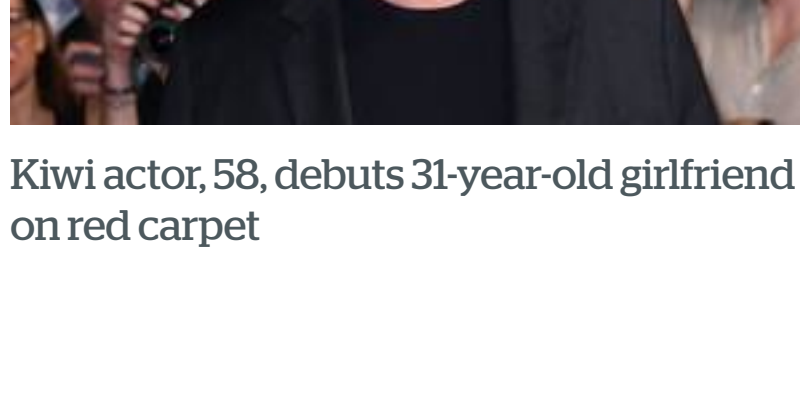
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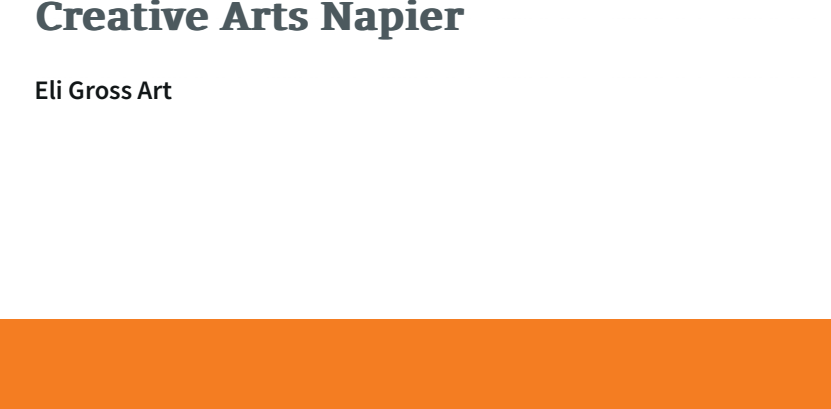


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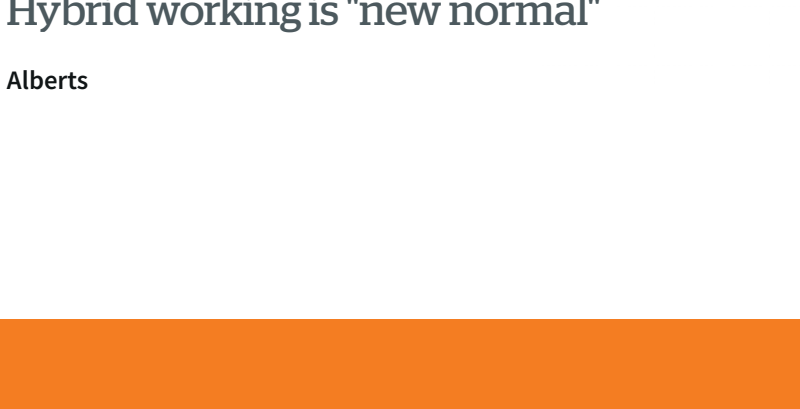
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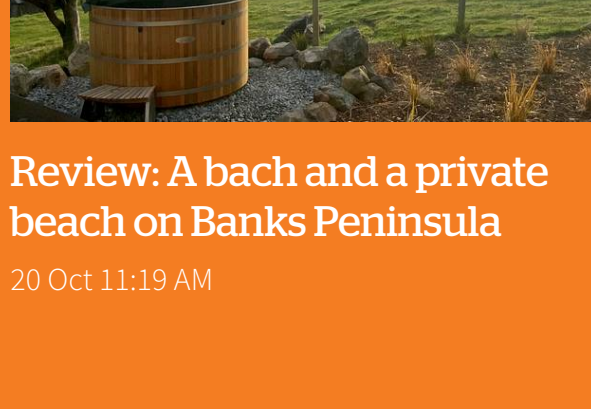
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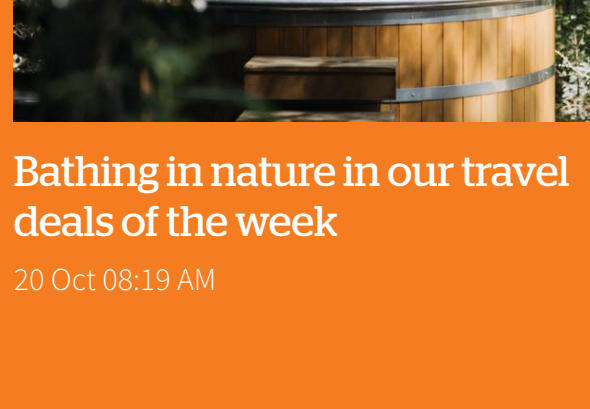
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