



Win a green getaway

Luxury Otago eco-lodge **Kaimata Retreat**, pictured, is offering the chance to win a winter eco-escape getaway weekend.

The prize includes:

- Two nights' exclusive retreat accommodation for two people
- Three-course dinner on arrival night with bottle of Central Otago wine

■ Freshly prepared continental breakfasts

■ Three-hour eco-expedition including transfers

This package is to the value of \$1640. Giveaway must be taken by October 31, 2008. Email escape@star-times.co.nz with "Kaimata Retreat" in the subject line by Friday, August 1.

Win a winter eco-escape getaway weekend at **Magic Cottages** at Takou River. The prize includes a weekend retreat for two

people in one of their boutique cottages, to include a choice of either their "Bed, Bath & Bubbles" or "Gourmet Organic Retreat" packages. The retreat must be taken before October 20, 2008.

Email escape@star-times.co.nz with "Magic Cottage" in the subject line by Friday, August 1.

Prizes do not include airfares or travel costs.

Morning, and the hybrid car is heading to Kerikeri.

At the Bay of Islands farmers' market, I try to buy a single tomato and lime and are given them gratis.

The guitar box in front of the buskers contains loose change – and two bags of potatoes.

Eventually, beef from the Takou River property will be sold here.

The organically certified 60ha farm that used to grow citrus now runs 22 breeding Herefords.

I get up close, later in the afternoon, on a tour of the property.

Anna points out plantings, begun three years ago, that are now over her head. She estimates 10,000 new trees have been established on the property.

A small wetland is a work in progress, and there is a pest-control programme in place.

The couple – who fell in love with New Zealand after six years commuting between London, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan – looked

everywhere for somewhere to buy.

"Nelson, Napier, Wanaka, all the usual places, but we couldn't find land with character, that inspired us, that hadn't been subdivided. We weren't in the Shania Twain league, but we didn't want a 4ha lifestyle thing either," says Anna.

Adding accommodation to the site was a way of sharing an environmental ethos.

"We believed we could build a beautiful property and be grid-free and show people that you can do that without feeling like you've got to live in the Dark Ages with a long-drop toilet."

Dusk is settling as we drag kayaks out of the boat house and take to the Takou River.

You can paddle all the way to the beach, but the tide is coming in and I let the ocean do the work. The air is perfectly still. I rest my oar and drift. I am, literally, going with the flow. And it feels good.

GREEN GETAWAYS

Eco-friendly accommodation in beautiful surroundings can be found nationwide, ranging from hotels to backpacker hostels.

Northland

Orongo Bay Homestead, Russell
Situated by the crystal clear waters of Russell, this 150-year-old building has been lovingly restored into a luxury homestead. From \$400, single, a night. thehomestead.co.nz

Waikato

Maungatautari Lodge, Lake Karapiro
Nestled next to Lake Karapiro, this five-star country house features home-grown produce and a protected island reserve to appreciate. From \$300. malodge.com

Bay of Plenty

Ruatuna, Opotiki

Experience what it's like to live in a truly eco-home. This straw-bale self-contained unit is modern sustainable living at its best. From \$200. www.ruatuna.com

Taranaki

Kaitake Lodge, New Plymouth
Situated in native bush with views of the ocean, this solar and wind powered eco-lodge also features a range of in-house therapies. From \$220. kaitakelodge.co.nz

Lower North Island

The Lodge at the French Village, Carterton
Surrounded by native bush with plenty to do, this hydro-powered bunk accommodation is great for travellers. From \$10. frenchvillage.co.nz

Marlborough

Tui Nature Reserve, Marlborough Sounds

Family-run conservation project with a native reptile breeding programme. From \$75. tuinaturereserve.co.nz



West Coast

Bird's Ferry Lodge, above, Westport
Situated in 13ha of natural rural environment, and serving local organic food, the lodge's list of environmentally friendly features is impressive. From \$200. birdsferrylodge.co.nz

Canterbury

greenSpace, Christchurch
An entirely ecologically

designed house that aims to be energy efficient and environmentally friendly. From \$85. greenspace.co.nz

Otago

Kaimata Retreat, Dunedin
In a waterside location with sweeping views over Papanui Inlet on the Otago Peninsula, Kaimata Retreat offers sophisticated relaxation. From \$265. kaimataretreat.com

Southland

Takaro Lodge, Te Anau
Luxury self-styled rejuvenation centre is a peaceful retreat nestled in a remote river valley. Features organic food from their gardens, massage and a range of outdoor activities. From \$250. takarolodge.com

■ For more great eco places to stay see www.organicexplorer.co.nz www.tourism.net.nz/accommodation/eco-and-nature

Short, chubby & cute under a dim light Grant Smithies has written extensively on music, travel and popular culture for the past 15 years.

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