

hot spots Lime Tree Lodge, New Zealand

What is it? New Zealand is big on “hosted accommodation”: intimate four- or five-bedroom lodges run by “hosts” who act as your butler, cleaner, chef and tourist board. Lime Tree Lodge in alpine Wanaka on New Zealand’s South Island would be luxurious enough without hosts Rebecca Butts and Sally Cawardine. Add them and Lime Tree goes from being swanky lodge to home from home – or rather the home you wish you had.

Who are they? Cawardine comes from an arty background, having worked in marketing for the Auckland Museum. Her style and attention to detail can be seen throughout Lime Tree in the monogrammed cotton sheets and artwork from the country’s best. Butts worked on the gardens of Auckland’s elite in her landscaping business and her talents are well utilised in the spectacular gardens of the lodge. She is also the foodie, obsessed with natural herbs and spices, and the queen of the mammoth kitchen.

What about the ambience? There are four spacious rooms and two suites. Book into the Linden Suite for

warmed tiles in the en suite bathroom, a super-king-sized bed, plasma television screen and open-plan lounge area opening onto the garden, swimming pool and hot tub. Turn-down time brings fresh sprigs of lavender or lime chocolates. The communal lounge is worthy of *Vogue*, with giant sofas and a schist stone open fireplace; canapés and wine are served every afternoon at five.

What’s on the menu? It’s all about the food at Lime Tree. Breakfasts of your choosing are cooked before your eyes and might include freshly baked banana bread, macaroons, biscuits and, for the health-conscious, stone fruit picked in the property’s orchard. Butts’ olive grove and herb garden provide the basis for many meals and dinner is an event unto itself. Handmade pâtés, local cheeses and salmon canapés come first, perhaps followed by roast New Zealand lamb or beef, trout, duck casserole or the Lime Tree barbecue for an alfresco treat.

Anything else we should know? Feel free to bring your chopper: there is a helipad on the property but be careful



you don’t spook Rosie, the domesticated sheep. Practise your swing on the five-hole pitch-and-putt golf course or drive to Treble Cone ski field, the town of Wanaka or Mount Aspiring National Park. The lodge sits on four hectares and is surrounded by alps. Lime trees stand side by side with roses, camellias, peonies and perennials and the lawn is dotted with firs, oaks and beech.

What’s the bottom line? The Linden Suite costs from NZ\$450 (HK\$2,400) a night, including breakfast, complimentary aperitifs, home baking, transfers and full use of all facilities.

Lime Tree Lodge is at Ballantyne Road, Wanaka, New Zealand, tel: 64 3 443 7305; www.limetreelodge.co.nz. *Rachael Oakes-Ash*

spree Vientiane

Laos’ sleepy capital takes its name from the Indochina era, although the city has been important to the area since at least the 14th century. Those who go to this once sleepy city along the Mekong River will find a mini-construction boom, which is good for Laos no doubt but inconvenient for tourists and shoppers unaccustomed to leaping over newly poured concrete en route to find sumptuous silks.

Despite its name, the **Morning Market** (off Rue Mahosot) is open all day. Its rows of woven silk treasures are enough to make even an aficionado dizzy. Vintage textile bags look far more chic than their asking price (US\$6), but haggle anyway. There are inexpensive cotton checked sarongs (US\$2), textile teddy bears (US\$5) and hill-tribe baby slings (US\$25), with intricate, colourful stitchwork.

The undisputed queen of Vientiane weaving is American Carol Cassidy, who, along with her African husband, has turned **Lao Textiles** (above right; Ban Mixay, tel: 856 21 212 123) into the city’s must-stop shop. Located in a 1900s mansion near the Mekong, this is almost a museum of warp and weft. Inexpensive collectables fill the lower floor, such as love pillows (US\$45), monochrome farm scarves (US\$20) and simple brocade runners (US\$55) featuring the mythical Siho, a half-lion, half-elephant revered by locals as a symbol of fertility. Upstairs is a world-class collection of unique wall hangings.



Pictures: Carol Cassidy

Vientiane’s fashion fix can be found just down the street at **Satri Lao** (Ban Mixay, tel: 856 21 244 384). The Lao owner scours Southeast Asia’s markets for sequined frocks and unusual lacquerware. Hollowed coconut bowls lacquered pink (US\$6) turn the simple shape into something fun while indigenous-textile boxer shorts (US\$7) make practical souvenirs. There is no beach nearby, but the cowry shell bikinis (US\$30) will make a stylish accessory on future travels.

Pop into **Mixay Boutique** (53/55 Nokeokoummane Street, Ban Mixay, tel: 856 21 216 592) for adorable stuffed elephants and monkeys covered in day-glo antique textiles that little ones will love, plus silk sleeping bags that make the perfect gift for the adventurous traveller who still likes a little luxury.

Next door at **Lao Silk Store** (Ban Mixay, tel: 856 21 223 496), consider the polished rosewood bowls (from US\$10) and carved dragon hangers (US\$5), then head towards the Mekong to **Camacrafts** (Nokeokoummane

Street, Ban Mixay, tel: 856 21 241 217). The founder, Kommaly Chanthavong, was nominated for the 2005 Nobel Peace Prize for creating silk-weaving jobs in this struggling country, but Camacrafts’ high-quality items would be worth buying even without this tender tale. Homewares abound, from simple pot-holders (US\$3) to festive holiday ornaments shaped like candy canes (US\$2), but the most appealing items are baby bibs (US\$3) in the shape of elephants, penguins and rabbits.

Sophisticated sorts will be surprised to find wearable designs in Laos, but the selection at **Tamarind** (Ban Xiengneune, tel: 856 21 243 564) has clearly been influenced by a more global aesthetic. Three-quarter-length silk coats (US\$95), wrap-around blouses (US\$45) and business jackets (US\$45), in neutrals and black, are all office-worthy. Those with bohemian flair should consider the Kashmir-inspired flower brocade skirt (US\$65), perhaps teamed with an ethnic hill-tribe silver choker (US\$100). *Cynthia Rosenfeld*

review

You Can Get Arrested for That
by Rich Smith
(Bantam)

In the US state of Georgia, it is illegal to tie your giraffe to a telephone pole. In Arizona, if you want to protect yourself from an intruder, you can use only the same weapon as the trespasser wields. “I pitied the man who decided to leave a nine-iron under his bed for protection, only to find that his would-be burglar chose to break in with a putter,” writes Rich Smith.

In this comedic memoir the author attempts to break as many stupid laws as possible, choosing 25 still theoretically current in the “Land of the Free”. With his friend Luke Bateman in tow, Smith covers everywhere from San Francisco to Salt Lake City, and the results are good – especially considering Smith was at the time a humble journalism undergraduate student from Cornwall in southwest England.

Neatly, his birthplace lands him and Bateman in the biggest scrape of the journey. On the fringes of Chicago, three cops in bulletproof vests pull the pair over. “Show me your hands!” an officer yells at Bateman. Only when they reveal they are English, and produce a Chicago sightseeing guide, is the tension diffused. Later, at an Irish bar, Smith and Bateman discover the real reason the police stopped them: the Cornish flag displayed proudly in their rear window. “Our Cornish flag, a white cross on a black background, was similar to the emblem of the Black Gangster Disciples, one of the biggest and most violent gangs in Chicago,” reveals Smith. The realisation sums up and compounds the absurdity of this unusually daring, droll travel tale.

You Can Get Arrested for That is available at Paddyfield.com for HK\$109. *David Wilson*

