



Clifton Glamping in Clifton, Hawke's Bay.

# EASING THE WAY

If doing the hard yards on a camping trip is not your thing, how about glamping? **Sarah Thornton** discovers a new luxury getaway in Hawke's Bay.

Far from the hard ground, deflating airbeds and guy-rope injuries that have typified our previous camping expeditions, Clifton Glamping is a world away.

Overlooking the picturesque Maraetotara River on secluded farmland, this new "glamour camping" experience in Hawke's Bay is on Clifton Station, a family farm that has been owned by the Gordon family since 1860.

Tom Gordon is the sixth generation to live at Clifton, now running the 800ha farm with his father Angus.

It was when regularly heading off on camping jaunts to various picturesque spots around the property with wife Lucia, that the idea for Clifton Glamping was born.

"Over the past few years we have loved discovering all the beautiful places on the farm," Lucia says. "At the same time, we were reading about this thing called glamping, which was gaining popularity globally. We thought that with access to such an amazing landscape, we would investigate setting up a glamping business here."

My husband Mick and I escape to Clifton on a typical Hawke's Bay 30C December day, having farmed our 10-year-old son out for the night. Driving up the shingle road to the north-facing site set on a high ridge, we instantly know we're in for a slice of rural paradise. The location is breath-taking.

From the safari-style tent, the framed vista opens before us. Clusters of poplar trees line one side of the Maraetotara River with open rolling farmland on the other. In the distance, a glimpse of the sea at Te Awanga beach can be seen through a break in the shelter belt – perfectly positioned to ensure complete quietness and privacy from cars heading up to Cape Kidnappers' retreat and golf course.

The tent – imported from Holland and built by Tom – is permanent in the sense that huge poles are set deep in the ground, but the canvas can be taken down, which the Gordons will do for maintenance in the winter.

Huge by Kiwi camping standards, the tent still manages to feel intimate, broken into three distinct spaces: an entrance, the bedroom, and the deck and kitchen room. The doors and windows are all zipped and can be securely rolled and fastened at night. The entrance is filled

with treasures Tom and Lucia have collected or picked up on overseas travels. The main room is devoted to the king-size bed with lounging chairs, perfect to curl up in with a good book. Outside there is a large permanent deck, kitchen, herb garden and outdoor bathroom, bath and shower.

The accommodation has a breezy Balinese feel, blended with African safari and nods to the history of Clifton Station – old-world touches including framed photographs of the farm and boots handed down through Lucia's family. Many of the fittings and decor, like the rattan chandeliers and cushions, were sourced from Plowman Collective, a homeware store in Havelock North owned by Lucia's sister, Annabelle.

Although it's luxurious, we are very much aware of being isolated in nature, with the tent's rustling canvas, the boisterous birdlife and the odd unidentified agricultural noise around us.

The site is off the grid, powered by solar panels. There are plenty of power points, cellphone coverage and even a small gas-powered fridge. The large outdoor bathroom features a dehydrating eco-friendly toilet and washbasin, complete with lovely toiletries. The view from the shower is pretty spectacular, across farmland and up a valley. Bugs are kept at bay by fine-screened windows throughout the tent.

Although guests need to bring their own food, the Weber Q barbecue, gas hobs and provisions supplied by Lucia mean cooking al fresco is a joy and not limited to sausages on the barbie. We dine on an Italian spaghetti carbonara made by Mick, washed down with a Te Awa Merlot.

Although the tent sleeps only two, the Gordons have plans for another glamping site; a larger tent sleeping four to six.

"We have started planning the next site, which will overlook a river basin," Lucia says. "It will be completely private and sheltered, ideal

## WHILE YOU'RE THERE . . .

The relaxed seaside village of Te Awanga has plenty to do and see, right on its doorstep.

- Jump on Clifton Glamping's complimentary bikes and cycle some of the most stunning trails in NZ.
- A few of NZ's best wineries are down the road: Clearview Estate, Elephant Hill and Beach House for wine tasting and dining.
- Te Awanga beach has a great right-hand point, exposed reef surf break.
- Take a tractor trip to Cape Kidnappers gannet colony.
- Outfoxed, just down the road, is an adventure playground with clay target shooting, paintball and Can-Am tours.

**outfoxed.co.nz**

- For serious golfers, there's the Cape Kidnappers golf course, ranked #34 in the world by *Golf* magazine.

**capekidnappers.com/luxury-golf-course/course**

- Watch sheep dog demonstrations and shearing shows in the historic Clifton Station woolshed.

### GETTING THERE:

Air New Zealand flies direct from Auckland to Napier, with one-way Seat fares starting from \$53.

Clifton Glamping is at 462 Clifton Road in Te Awanga, approximately 15-20 minutes' drive from Napier airport.

- **cliftonglamping.co.nz**



Lucia and Tom Gordon, with daughter Frankie

for families or a group of friends. In the future I think I'll also look at hosting weddings – it's so gorgeous here."

Taking advantage of the hot day, we cool off in the water hole that has been created in the river below the tent, accessed by a stepped track. Later, we find the piece de resistance of our stay: a soothing soak under the stars in the outdoor bath. The peace is deafening, punctuated only by the sounds of nature.

We feel we've found the perfect getaway spot – ideal for honeymooners, couples, friends, and working parents in need of some post-festive season/school-year respite. It's a chance to reconnect and relax; the perfect place to unwind, read, talk and sleep. An escape indeed.