

hot spots Ruapehu Golf & Country Lodge

Where is it? On New Zealand's North Island, in Ohakune. Geoff Pitman and his wife, Viv, have opened the doors of their own golf paradise so wannabe Tiger Woodses can play in private ... in their rooms if necessary, which are so big they can practise their swings without destroying the furniture.

What's so special about Geoff? A former coach of both the New Zealand men's and women's golf teams, Pitman has personally tutored the PGA Tour's Michael Campbell and was the resident golf pro at the Royal Wellington Golf Club, in the capital. And he pours decent wine.

Is it a lodge or a golf club? More like Geoff and Viv's home than a guest lodging, Ruapehu sits on the edge of the region's premier golf course, the Waimarino Golf

Club. The property is Viv's creation, with a sweeping driveway, high ceilings and timber doors. The decor is French and includes open fireplaces and heated floor tiles. In a particularly homely touch, the four guest suites come with homemade biscuits in glass jars. The walls are adorned with retro golfing memorabilia, just in case you were thinking of playing tennis.

What if I don't play golf? If you don't play golf you ski on nearby Mount Ruapehu, an active volcano and the location for Mordor in *Lord of the Rings*. The ski resort of Whakapapa (the "wh" is pronounced "f") enjoys all-day sunshine and plenty of powder. The local town, Ohakune, is the carrot capital of New Zealand, as indicated by the giant carrot on the road into town.



With a population of a mere 1,400, you can meet relatives of everyone in an afternoon at the Powderkeg bar and restaurant. In summer, hike the volcano to the crater lake and hope she doesn't blow.

What if I do play golf? Then play better. Book in for two nights and play three rounds with Pitman. He'll coach you all the way while Viv deploys her culinary skills by providing breakfast, lunch and dinner. There are no queues on the course because Waimarino is still a secret. But if you prefer to queue, you may choose from a selection of other courses in the region.



What's the bottom line? Choose from the mountain-view suites, with direct access to the open courtyard, and golf course-view suites, from which you can step out onto the turf. Both start at NZ\$299 (HK\$1,522) a night, single occupancy. The price includes cooked breakfast and pre-dinner drinks. If you fancy some local carrot soup cooked on Viv's stove, then book in for a three-course dinner, starting at NZ\$55 a head. Golf packages start at NZ\$695 a person for two nights and three days. Visit www.ruapehugolfodge.co.nz or tel: 64 6 385 9594. *Rachael Oakes-Ash*

Pictures: Rachael Oakes-Ash

spree Haizhu Square, Guangzhou

Guangzhou celebrates the 2,220th anniversary of the founding of the city this year and the 100th session of the Canton Trade Fair took place here last month. Last year, the biannual fair attracted 177,000 buyers from 210 countries. These people descend on the city to stock up on the products later seen in shops and marked "Made in China" – though unless you plan to order hundreds or thousands of an item, forget the fair.

As with all things in China there is a more affordable alternative. In recent years, Haizhu Square, in the centre of Guangzhou, near the Pearl River (close to the Guangzhou Hotel, where the first fair was held in 1957), has become a hot spot for shoppers. Although intended mainly for small-store owners, here everyone can buy. Head to 39 Jiefang Nanlu (South Road), at the junction of Jiefang and Yide roads, by taxi or Metro (Haizhu Plaza station). The six floors of **Onelink International Toys and Gifts Wholesale Market** (below and right; www.onelinkplaza.com) are overflowing with something for everyone.

Grab a shopping guide at the information counter at the entrance. Although mostly in Chinese, the pictures give an idea of what's on offer even if you can't read it. Household items, clocks, arts and crafts, furniture, ceramics, bags ... the list goes on. On the ground floor, you'll find wrapping paper, toys, gifts, artificial flowers and **Kai Lai Bei Ye** (shop 1B009; tel: 86 20 6110 2190), which sells, along with a range of insulated mugs and flasks, the latest models of digital-display bathroom scales in glass and chrome for a mere 150 yuan.

But for the best take on what's on offer, ride the escalators in the centre of the building to the top floor.



If you are a golfer, look for **Guangzhou Mezuno Golf Exquisite Articles** (6/F, shop 6A051; tel: 86 20 8328 0486) for a selection of branded golf clubs, bags and other accessories, such as gloves (18 yuan to 35 yuan). Nearby is a shop selling the kind of leather-covered accessories for the home office found in all smart department stores in the west. Check out the diaries (20 yuan), waste-paper bins (45 yuan), file folders and notebooks (from 15 yuan).

Also on the sixth floor is **Leou** (shop 6A023; tel 86 20 8323 0652; www.centurybegin.com), which carries a range of camping equipment and barbecue accessories, canvas chairs, bags and travel gear. You can't beat a folding camping table for 22 yuan. If this puts you in the mood for more outdoor activities, stroll the same floor to shops selling all manner of hiking equipment. If you hanker after a new handbag (from 100 yuan), **Zi Cai Exquisite Article Line** on the fifth floor (shop 5A025; tel: 86 20 3377 0112) is the place.

Work your way back down, calling in on the third floor at **Da Yu's Crafts** (shop 3A028; tel: 86 20 6110 2289) for colourful toys and gifts, and do not forget to explore the basement, gathering more goodies at silly prices as you go.

If you still haven't shopped 'til you've dropped, there's more. Opposite the plaza is a big covered market selling the household items found in all Chinese cities, but it's fun to explore nevertheless. And don't miss the row of shops on the opposite side of Jiefang Nanlu for Christmas decorations, novelties, wrapping paper, toys and much more. *Valery Garrett*



Pictures: Valery Garrett

pack it thinking back

Active families need to look no further than the Baby Sherpa Backpack (available from www.babysherpa.com) when next planning their travels. The four-in-one, ergonomically designed backpack was created by Canadian parents who couldn't find a comfortable hands-free bag to carry the paraphernalia that accompanies a child and their own outdoor equipment.

Noting that many parents end up carrying several different bags to meet the various needs of the family, the designers set about creating the ultimate in organisation: a backpack that acts as a cooler bag, nappy store and video/camera bag, and that still has space for clothes and toys. Wide, padded shoulder and sternum straps, and a detachable hip belt balance the bag's weight close to the body's centre of gravity. This means the large leg and hip muscles do the work and even heavy weights are comfortable to carry for long periods.

The inside of the bag is divided into compartments, including a secure internal zip pouch for storing important documents and money, while the easy-to-clean exterior sports toy loops, key clips and bungee cords for water bottles or sweaters. The sensible black or navy blue colour means even fathers won't mind toting this piece. Brad Pitt has been spotted with a Baby Sherpa, assuring the bag A-list status.

Measuring 48.3cm x 30.5cm x 17.8cm and weighing 1.2kg, the Baby Sherpa meets all airline carry-on luggage requirements – and its cooler compartment is handy for carrying canned mini-meals in anticipation of delayed flights. Water resistant, the Baby Sherpa also includes a large nappy-changing pad (66cm x 43cm) and a first-aid box compartment.

Although not cheap at US\$89 (plus US\$25 shipping), the bag's multifunctional and durable design make this one backpack the whole family will continue to use well past the baby stage. *Catherine Shaw*

