



A GRAND TIME AT
**THE
DUKE**

Russell's iconic Duke of Marlborough continues to anchor the historic Bay of Islands settlement, with its current owners bringing fresh ideas to this enduring destination.

ESTABLISHED IN 1827 AS JOHNNY Johnston's Grog Shop and later receiving a formal liquor licence in 1840 under the banner The Duke of Marlborough, it's New Zealand's oldest licensed hotel – and a whole lot more.

If only the walls could talk, but tales tall and true abound about this iconic Bay of Islands stalwart.

From its commanding position on the waterfront near the recently-restored jetty at Russell, "The Duke" as it's universally known, looks across the sea to Paihia and Waitangi.

This vista just never gets old...

Mention "Russell" to anyone who has visited the coastal village in the winterless north's Bay of Islands, and The Duke of Marlborough will pop up in the conversation. It's hard to go to Russell and not see The Duke.

It has a rollicking past and now, an assured future thanks to its current owners who have invested time, capital and energy into preserving the very best of the early settler property while future-proofing it for generations to come.

Co-owned by two couples who all met at Otago University – Riki Kinnaird and Jayne Shirley, and Bridget and Anton Haagah – The Duke's current custodians took a leap of faith back in 2010 when they embarked on a new path together.

"Riki and I were living the corporate life in London and Bridget and Anton were working in Auckland when they suggested that we should pool resources and purchase The Duke," says Jayne.

"We could all see the potential in it as a business and while without a doubt it was a very scary prospect, I think we were all ready for a change so we backed ourselves believing that with our combined skills and previous experience, we could make it work.

"Our 10th anniversary milestone was reached during New Zealand's first COVID lockdown – not how any of us expected to be celebrating such a significant event – so 2021 marks 11 years of ownership and we're all glad that we took the opportunity when The Duke came up for sale."



It hasn't been an easy ride, but the crew (along with their young families) can be justifiably proud of what they have achieved. The Duke of today is a more refined yet still familiar version of its earlier self.

It now offers fully-refurbished luxe rooms, stylish wedding and function spaces, a bar full of atmosphere and character and that ever-popular sea-facing restaurant where, at peak times, securing a coveted spot on the verandah becomes a hotly-contested sport.

There's no sweeter place to watch the sun go down, with a glass of something cold in hand.

The Duke's premium waterfront rooms open onto a balcony with expansive water views overlooking the magnificent Bay of Islands and its new superior rooms with balconies look out to the village, while guests have access to a hotel-exclusive gym, plus the use of the tennis courts next door.

The global pandemic has hit hospitality providers hard and like other parts of New Zealand, Russell has had its international tourist tap turned off.

"We've just had to remain positive despite the many ups and downs but it's still really tough not knowing what the new normal will look like," says Jayne.

"Having the four of us carrying on working through the pandemic together has meant we've always had each other for support, however, at each lockdown, our priority has been to look after our team as much as we could and reduce or control the costs.

"Then each time we've been able to open again, we've continued to drive forward and look for opportunities where we could."

Jayne says the support of the local community has been amazing, with regular patrons back as soon as they were able.

"Likewise, domestic tourism has been fantastic, although given our geographic location, it rises and falls as Auckland goes in and out of lockdown.

"New Zealanders love exploring this part of the world and we've also gained a new following with many commenting that they have always meant to get here and now was the perfect time.

"We feel incredibly fortunate to be doing business in such an amazing part of the world that people want to visit."

Jayne says they still have some major challenges ahead given the pandemic's unknown twists and turns with closed borders continuing to impact the business.

"But there's no denying that this is a very special part of the country with so many factors in its favour – and that will never change," says Jayne.

"There's the drawcard of the history and heritage, with the Waitangi Treaty Grounds experience a must-do.

"There's the amazing white sandy beaches and water activities like swimming, parasailing, fishing and sailing – coupled with a temperate climate, which is a massive advantage in itself.

"Russell has a thriving hospitality scene with a number of great restaurants and eateries, and the wider Bay of Islands is a treasure trove of walking and hiking tracks, cycle trails, mountain biking parks, and golf courses.

"It's a pretty great spot for a holiday or break away."

Back onshore in the restaurant, The Duke's menu reflects its seaside position with seafood in all its guises. This part of the business is overseen by co-owner Anton and championed by executive chef, Tama Salive.

"Kai moana is essential to the success of the Duke," says Anton emphatically.

"While originally it was difficult to get consistent high-quality supply into such a small town, our persistence in building relationships with a few Northland-based fishermen has paid dividends.

"We have even built a fish-mongering room to care for the fish in the best possible way."

Recently, legendary actor Sam Neill singled out The Duke of Marlborough as his favourite New Zealand place "for pub grub in a seaside setting", in a *Sydney Morning Herald* feature article.

The article praised The Duke's outstanding wine list and urged readers not to miss the local Waikare Inlet oysters.

Those oysters currently make a welcome appearance on The Duke's new seasonal menu – au naturel for the purists, and tempura-coated for everyone. There's also house-made fried bread with kina dip, tuatuas with a dipping sauce containing kelp, crispy calamari, Kingfish sashimi, The Duke's legendary seafood chowder, panfried New Zealand scampi and of course – locally-sourced fish and chips.

Chef Tama was trained in classic French techniques under the tutelage of well-known Auckland chef Dominic Parat, remembered for his Auckland venues Banque, GPK, Mekong Baby, and Isobar and now at Ki Māha on Waiheke.

"Tama has had vast experience in city and tourist hot spot eateries right around the country and has headed up The Duke's kitchen for the past two years, where he has been merging traditional New Zealand ingredients and flavours with classical dishes and techniques," says Anton.



"If you are going to Russell, you just must have lunch at the Duke of Marlborough Hotel – the history and atmosphere are hard to rival in New Zealand. Guest review."



Chef Tama Salive with his catch.



Recipe from The Duke of Marlborough's executive chef, Tama Salive

Fresh off The Duke's new menu, Tama puts a contemporary spin on a popular Kiwi dish, creamed pāua.

It comprises a creamy base with fine slices of pāua, topped with truffle-flavoured mascarpone and served with fried Māori bread for a nod to the dish's origins, or crusty bread and butter.

Pāua and cream (serves approximately 10 people)

Truffled mascarpone

- 200 grams mascarpone
- 2 tablespoons white truffle paste (available from specialist food stores)
- 2 tablespoons black truffle paste (available from specialist food stores)
- 1/2 heaped tablespoon flaky sea salt
- 2 tablespoons chopped chives
- Mix gently by hand in a mixing bowl, and set aside in the fridge to set.

Cream reduction

- 1 litre fresh cream
- 1.5 large onions
- 1.5 cups white wine
- 7 tablespoons of grated or finely diced fresh ginger
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Chop the onion and ginger, start cooking in a pot, add the cream, white wine, lemon juice, salt and pepper and reduce by half over medium heat.

Pāua

- 3kg pāua in the shell, cleaned (around 10 medium-sized pāua)
- Half fill a large pot with water, season with salt, place lid on pot and bring to the boil.
- Once water is boiling, place the pāua in the pot.
- Cook for three minutes.
- Then tip pāua into a large container of cold salted water to stop further cooking.
- Take pāua out of the cold water, push thumb under the flesh and remove the meat from the shell.
- Discard the hua (stomach bag), frills and the teeth, keeping the prime pāua meat.
- Cut the meat into thin slices.

To serve

- Place the sliced pāua into the cream reduction, and slowly heat.
- Serve in a shallow bowl with a quenelle (scoop) of truffled mascarpone on top, and accompany with either fried or crusty bread, with butter on the side.

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