

Bay of Islands YOU BEAUTY!

Sebastian van der Zwan explores the scenic jewel of the winterless north

STAY ON THE BAY

The site of our first capital is dripping in history and no trip to Kororāreka/Russell is complete without a visit to The Duke of Marlborough (theduke.co.nz), New Zealand's first licensed hotel, which boasts that it's been "refreshing rascals and reprobates since 1827". A charming blend of classy and casual, the waterfront restaurant (right) is always full of characters and proved the perfect place to kick off my relaxing long weekend. While tasting local wines and watching the sun go down, I feasted on oysters, hāpuka

ceviche and crayfish ravioli, before spending the night in one of the hotel's beautifully decorated guest rooms.

For something just as luxurious, but more off the beaten track, sleep over at the heritage-listed Paheke Bed and Breakfast (paheke.co.nz), 20 minutes out of Paihia, which dates back to 1862. The kauri building is full of antique furniture, but boasts all the mod cons and a gorgeous garden, however, the highlight has to be the home-cooking host Juen Duxfield serves in the atmospheric dining room – I still dream about her hot-smoked salmon salad!



Seb gets the Duke treatment.

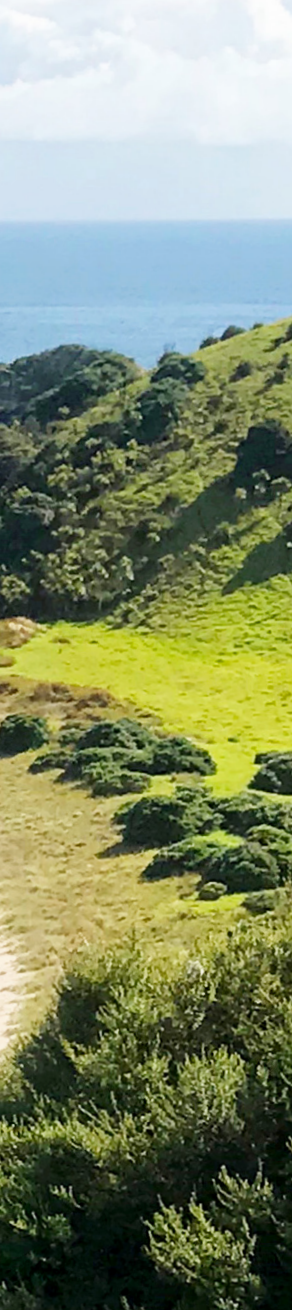


ON YOUR BIKE!

The Pou Herenga Tai Twin Coast Cycle Trail (twincoastcycletrail.kiwi.nz) is an 87km stretch between the Bay of Islands on the east coast and the Hokianga Harbour on the west. If you're super-fit, you can smash it out in a day, but I'd advise taking your time and stopping off at the various attractions along the way.

I picked up my wheels at Twin Coast Mountain & Ebike Hire (twincoastcycle

Pictures: Dan MacKinnon, Ruth Lawton Photography.



BIRTHPLACE OF A NATION

Shamefully, despite several past visits to the bay, I'd never stopped in at the Waitangi Treaty Grounds (waitangi.org.nz), where Te Tiriti was of course signed – and I'm so glad I finally made a visit. The guided tour provided a lively commentary on Māori and Pākehā relations, teaching me more in an hour than I learnt in so many years at school, and the various museums are full of even more insight and interesting artefacts.



The grounds are stunning – teeming with tūi and with a spectacular sea view – but the highlight was an electric concert from performing arts group Te Pitowhenua. Also, don't miss the temporary He Kaupapa Waka exhibition, where photographer Te Rawihitiroa Bosch has captured incredible images of the fleets of canoes that arrived on Waitangi Day in 2020.



Waka (above) and waiata.

ROCK THE BOAT

Did you even see the Bay of Islands if you didn't get out on the water? I hit the high seas on The Rock Adventure Cruise (rocktheboat.co.nz), where an hilarious crew cooked up kai while showing off the best the area has to offer on an overnight tour. After parking up in a sheltered inlet, we swam around the boat at sunset, then grabbed fishing rods to contribute to a delicious dinner of snapper and trevally. Before bed, we kayaked under the Milky Way, stirring up beautiful bioluminescence that made it seem as if there were stars both above and below us.

The next day, we snorkelled through a kelp forest and collected kina, then kayaked out to idyllic Waewaetorea Island (left) for a stroll along the softest white-sand beach and a swim in the incredibly clear sea. You may have seen the boat on *The Bachelor NZ*, but I can assure you this 24-hour trip is so much more exciting than anything you saw on the show. (If you don't have a whole day to spare, at least take a trip to the iconic Hole in the Rock – the Explore Group runs a 90-minute Adventure Cruise.)

A trip on the water yielded a Kiwi delicacy (below).



transport.co.nz), then cycled through mangrove swamp and farmland to quirky Kawakawa, where I spent a penny at the famous Hundertwasser Toilets, before learning more about the architect and artist at the beautifully tiled Te Hononga: Hundertwasser Memorial Park Centre next door.

From there, the road runs past historic churches and cemeteries, zigzags through paddocks filled with turkeys and peafowl, and passes through pristine native bush. To give your backside a

break, I recommend stopping at the Te Waiariki Ngawha Hot Springs for a soak, the Kiwi Kai café in Ōkaihau for marvellous mussel fritters and the Wairere Boulders for a scenic bush walk. The historic Māngungu Mission House makes for a delightful final stop and photo op.



Don't push yourself and take in the sights.



Seb travelled with assistance from the Bay of Islands Marketing Group. Go to visitboi.co.nz for more info.