

GOURMET TRAVELLER
AUCKLAND



The citizens of this New Zealand city and its environs, seen by many as a land apart, preside

Planet AUCKLAND





over a Pacific outpost of cool with a creative food scene to match. Michael Raffael joins them

PHOTOGRAPHY BY EWEN BELL

Above, left to right:
 night lights in
 downtown; the
 landmark Sky Tower;
 its Sugar Club
 restaurant; The
 Oyster Inn's
 namesake dish;
 prepping the fare;
 Ponsonby Road;
 contemporary dining
 on Waiheke Island;
 ferry terminal. Below:
 heading out to
 Waiheke Island



Travel INFORMATION

Auckland is home to more than 1 million people, and is New Zealand's largest city. It has one of the largest concentrations of Polynesian people in the world. Journey time from the UK is about 26 hours. Time is 13 hours ahead of GMT. Currency is the New Zealand dollar. Weather in January is warm, with average highs of 24°C and average lows of 16°C.

GETTING THERE

Air New Zealand flies daily from London Heathrow to Auckland via Los Angeles. airnewzealand.co.uk

Qantas also operates flights daily from London Heathrow to Auckland, travelling via Sydney. qantas.com.au

RESOURCES

New Zealand Tourism is the official tourism website, featuring travel, accommodation and numerous activity ideas. newzealand.com

Auckland Tourism features itineraries, maps, events and more – all essential in planning your trip to the city. aucklandnz.com

FURTHER READING

A Land of Two Halves: An Accidental Tour of New Zealand by Joe Bennett (Scribner, £9.59). Taking a hitchhiking journey around North and South Islands, an otherwise restless traveller sets out to discover why New Zealand has kept him – and so many others – captive for so long.

CARBON COUNTING

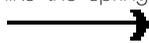
Return flights from London Heathrow to Auckland produce 6.2 tonnes of CO₂. To offset the emissions, visit climatecare.org. The cost for this trip is £46.45 and donations go towards supporting environmental projects around the world, from clean-energy schemes to rainforest restoration.

Below, left to right:
Mudbrick Vineyard serves up a sensational sorbet;
Hallertau brew bar; light dining and fine tipples at Brick Bay Wines.
Opposite, clockwise from top: Blue Breeze Inn's warm welcome; Ponsonby Road Bistro; The Sugar Club's wine wall

Once upon a time there was a town mouse and a country mouse – both with their different ways of living. In this version of the fictional tale, there was also a mouse on a little island. All three lived in a super-city that stretched for 147km, a crumpled ribbon on the northern edge of New Zealand's North Island. Though even without any mythical mice, Auckland could be considered a land apart.

Aucklanders have their own approach to most things. You notice this at the traffic lights on downtown Queen Street. They turn green-amber-red for traffic, the usual scenario; then switch to red in both directions. A pedestrian melee surges across, vertically, horizontally and diagonally. It's eccentric, possibly unique in the annals of town planning. So is there an urban sprawl à la LA? No way. A waterfront skyline to rival Hong Kong, perhaps? Hardly. Ninety-something per cent of Aucklanders live within half an hour's drive of the totemic Sky Tower. The rest are scattered across a crazy Monopoly board of bays, beaches, townships, farmland and a Regional Park. City Hall and its one mayor run the whole region – a project started only a few years ago and known as 'SuperCity'.

Nothing is quite what it seems from the outside. Guidebooks tell you that Waiheke Island, a Fullers ferry ride from the city's port, means 'cascading waters'. Maoris have another reading. They say it was the place where a chief, caught short, peed over the side of his *waka* (canoe). In either event the original native name was Te Motu-arai-roa ('Long Sheltering Island').

The same confusion applies to the term 'Jafa'. It can be a Kiwi form of abuse: 'Just Another F-ing Aucklander'. The rest of the country sometimes resents its citizens' prosperity. Bowdlerised, the f-word can stand for 'friendly'. It's changeable like the spring weather: glorious sunshine one second followed by 



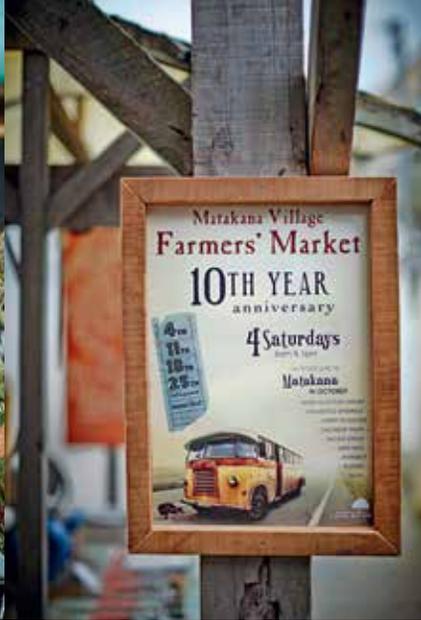


'A century ago, Ponsonby Road enjoyed an evil reputation for its 'six o'clock swill'. Working men hit the bars there after knocking off work. Nowadays it's an almost uninterrupted street of eateries. In cafés like Dizengoff or Clear Water Peak people watch people over a flat white'

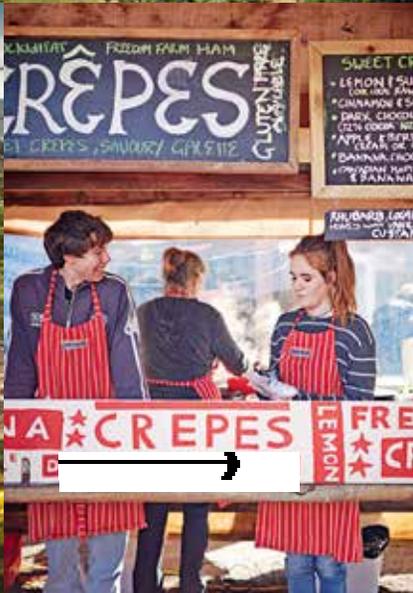


We love & em
all that comes
cosy time of year
time of year
be merry time
filled with divin
from pots bubbling
oven - filled with
casseroles and
Open our wine list
selection of rich
What are our cur
311 since





Hobsonville Point Farmers Market sets out its stalls in an old seaplane hangar... it has a dog deli.



Opposite, clockwise from top left: spotting silvereys; pies at Matakana market; its fresh greens; nearby coast; food to go; garden inspiration at The Boatshed, Waiheke; heirloom carrots; on the road. This page, left to right: Crescent Dairy Goats cheese; its kids; Kumeu River Wines; food at Mudbrick



Bone Appétit, manuka-smoked eels, ginger beer and Maori-inspired spice mixes and pâtés

Where TO EAT

squalls the next. What you see depends on when you see it. Piha Beach on the fringes of Waitakere Ranges park, dominated by Lion Rock, is by turns menacing and a surfer's paradise. At high tide, Whangateau Harbour is a sheet of blue water. At low tide it's a mud flat where foragers harvest cockles. Dominion Road is a dusty rat run to the city by day. After dark it morphs into Chinatown, dotted with restaurants like Love A Duck or Eden Noodles that dishes up Chengdu specials like hot Sichuan pepper-flavoured soup.

At weekends, Hobsonville Point Farmers Market, off the Upper Harbour motorway, sets out its stalls in an old seaplane hangar. Pure serendipity, it has a dog deli, 'Bone Appétit', manuka-smoked eels, hand-brewed ginger beer and Tamati Norman's Maori-inspired spice mixes and pâtés. They include one made from muttonbird flavoured with Ti-toki Liqueur. 'We call it the anchovy paste of the South Pacific,' he boasts. Are the birds an endangered species? 'We're only allowed to harvest them once a year. To catch them, it's hand down hole... and you need to wear gloves.'

More accessible is his *kawakawa*, the herb – a kind of pepper that grows on a low-slung tree as lush pairs of leaves separated by a flower spike – added to seaweed and sea salt to create a seasoning. It manages to be spicy, fragrant and mouth-numbing at the same time. 'Everything we're doing,' he says 'is about a fusion of cultures, bringing together traditional knowledge and a modern context.'

Maori elder, waka sailor and wilderness guide, John Panoho, seasons barbecued fish with it. He explains that Kiwis of every complexion love messing about in boats; and routinely catch their own fish rather than visiting a fishmonger. 'They feel it's their birthright and I'm not just talking about Maori families. Your father taught you and you taught your children. Everyone has a boat or knows somebody who has. In communities outside the city people are like hunter-gatherers going out more than just once a week.'

This explains why they cook all kinds of fish so well. Snapper (like an outside bream) is the go-to species. It isn't short of rivals. *The New Zealand Herald* voted the fish 'n' chips (£3.50) at Oceanz Seafood in Wynyard Quarter the city's best. It prefers firm and meaty trevally – Japanese chefs love it for sashimi. Ponsonby Road Bistro, a Pacific Rim stalwart, dishes up 'pan-roasted gurnard, Indian-spiced chick peas, parsnip and cucumber raita'. Sawmill Café in Leigh bakes its wood-fired Gratuitous Pizza with shrimps and *tarakahi*, a bottom-feeder that thrives on a crustacean diet.

Leigh's Goat Island, a brisk swim from the shore was New Zealand's first Marine Reserve. It underscores a national commitment to conservation. Omaha Cove is on the other side

Giapo It's an 'haute' ice cream parlour that calls itself a restaurant, but it's a world-beater. There are new creations every day that use many of the tricks of molecular cuisine, but the bottom line is the great taste. Try organic stracciatella, classic hokey-pokey or an apple and cinnamon sorbet. From £3.50. 279 Queen Street, 00 64 9 550 3677, giapo.com

Ortolana An all-day café-bar in the Britomart precinct, above the coach station, with a great vibe and even better food. Its sister, Milse, in the same complex is a patisserie and dessert restaurant whose combinations wouldn't be out of place in a three-star. Drop by for a single course, or for a cake. From £5. 31 Tyler Street, 00 64 9 368 9487, britomart.org

Ponsonby Central A one-stop shop for all that the Auckland eating scene is about. Everything is fresh, young and ambitious. El Sizzling Chorizo does great Argentinean barbecues. The Blue Breeze Inn melds crafted cocktails to a chinese noodle bar. Izakaya-style Tokyo Club serves great sake. 4 Brown Street, 00 64 9 376 8300, ponsonbycentral.co.nz

Ponsonby Road Bistro Nice Pacific Rim cooking and global bistro fare that's fresh and imaginative. £86 for two. 165 Ponsonby Road, 00 64 9 360 1611, ponsonbyroadbistro.co.nz

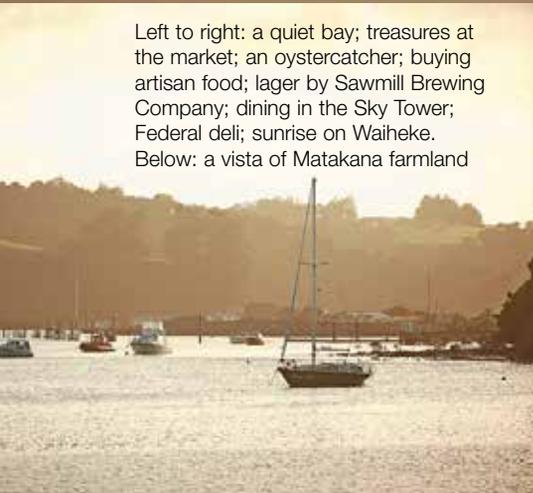
The Leigh Sawmill Café Its simple cooking, good service, and location next to a brewery make it a great place to hang out. The wood-fired pizzas washed down with a 'real' beer are delicious. Pizza, £13. 142 Pakiri Road, Leigh, 00 64 9 422 6019, sawmillcafe.co.nz

The Oyster Inn Oyster bar, fish 'n' chips and seafood restaurant with meat dishes too, in Waiheke's Oneroa village. Shades of New England and a British chef who's a buddy of Mark Hix. £49 for two. 124 Ocean View Road, Waiheke Island, 00 64 9 372 2222, theoysterinn.co.nz

The Sugar Club Peter Gordon's flagship at the top of the Sky Tower has a reputation to match the view. Select some 'small plates' to share. From £98 for two. Corner of Federal and Victoria Streets, 00 64 9 363 6365, skycityauckland.co.nz



Left to right: a quiet bay; treasures at the market; an oystercatcher; buying artisan food; lager by Sawmill Brewing Company; dining in the Sky Tower; Federal deli; sunrise on Waiheke. Below: a vista of Matakana farmland



'Jan and John Walter's farm is among the vineyards of Kumeu. It makes semi-hard cheese

of the peninsula. The miniature bay of eau de nil water provides a haven for the rock lobster catchers. Here they land the crayfish, by the tonne. Only a tiny fraction makes it to Auckland dinner tables. The rest jets off, boxed and alive, to the dinner tables of Shanghai plutocrats. To taste one, you have to ride the Sky Tower elevator to the panoramic restaurant and sample 'spiny crayfish and Otago saffron linguine' in the iconic Sugar Club.

It's high dining in more than one sense. For dessert there's the option of a bungee jump 200m back to ground level. Chef-patron Peter Gordon converted a once-conservative Auckland public to fusion food. His discreet influence has permeated every layer of eating culture. When Tamati Norman describes his kawakawa mixed with 'beetroot, carrot, *kumara* [sweet potato] grilled with a little virgin coconut oil, pine nuts, a bit of feta cheese and quinoa' he's dancing to the Pacific Rim beat. Nibble a Nutella cookie at Moustache or lick any Giapo 'Haute ice cream' (the finest molecular-inspired gelateria) and a little Gordon stardust has rubbed off.

A century ago, Ponsonby Road enjoyed an evil reputation for its 'six o'clock swill'. Working men hit the bars there after knocking off

work. Nowadays it's an almost uninterrupted street of eateries. In cafés like Dizengoff or Clear Water Peak people watch people over a flat white. Peckish they may tuck into a lamington: a sponge, coated in chocolate and desiccated coconut filled with whipped cream and jam. Hungrier, they may stop by Boy & Bird for chicken, marinated in a citrus brine, rubbed with spice and spit roasted.

In the converted concrete warehouse of Ponsonby Central, coddled eggs, parillas and teppanyaki jostle for custom. 'Ricotta pancakes with whipped salted caramel butter' at Toru compete with the toast-your-own sourdough of Little Bread & Butter. Snug between the bistros and brasseries is The Dairy, a shop that covers the bases of New Zealand's artisan cheese-makers.

One of its cherished suppliers, Crescent Dairy Goats, is only half an hour from the city centre. Jan and John Walter's farm is among the strawberry fields and vineyards of Kumeu. It makes semi-hard cheese layered with nettles or flavoured with sweet fenugreek, and a Dirty Devil washed in brandy. Best though, is its cone-shaped Flat White, named after the coffee. Decorated with a *koru*, the symbolic New Zealand fern, it's delicately flavoured and almost mousse-like.





layered with nettles or flavoured with sweet fenugreek and a Dirty Devil washed in brandy'

Kumeu River Wines on State Highway 16 is its near-neighbour. Its Y-shaped chardonnay vines almost encroach on the main road. The exterior may not look impressive but the wines are. Maté's Vineyard, a wine named after Croatian founder Maté Brajkovich, who established the business 70 years ago, consistently figures in the *Wine Spectator* Top 100 list of the world's best. Auckland has a sprinkling of vineyards. Those around Matakana have developed into a small, but feisty region punching above its weight. Brick Bay's owners, Richard and Christine Didsbury, can take much of the credit for this. Its Glass House building in a scalloped valley overlooks vines and a sculpture park. New World wines are fresh and the food in their restaurant is simple yet tasty.

It alone would have guaranteed them success, but the couple also founded Matakana Village Farmers' Market. It's exclusive to local producers, vetted by a manager who rejects more applicants than he accepts. According to Christine it's more than an initiative to sell artisan produce. 'It isn't just about buying fresh and local, but also about fostering a sense of community of belonging.'

Not that there's anything hokey about what's on offer. Lorraine

North's Windfall chutneys, made in domestic quantities, are as good as it gets. I Love Pies bakes imaginative packed pastries that melt in the mouth. Buffalo cheese, fresh fruit juice blends, free range bacon and egg rolls, smoked garlic, organic breads, verjus from Heron's Flight Vineyard, a cider maker, and authentic *cannoli* crafted by a Sicilian lady emanate from a parish of about 9,000 souls.

If there are any grumbles from these traders, it's about the petty regulations imposed by a city council, that hasn't quite grasped the difference between rural and urban environments. Does it really matter, they say, what kind of egg box is used to sell eggs?

It's a point of view shared by poultry fanciers on Waiheke. The SuperCity council decreed that cocks mustn't crow in built-up areas. So any islander who owned one took it to a prearranged spot in the countryside and released it. Now cocks of all shapes, colours and breeds congregate there, a kind of gay pride poultry collective. When anybody requires a male to tread his hens, he collects a bird takes it home to do the business then returns it to the wild. It's the kind of subversive solution that appeals to residents. Waiheke has long been a Greenpeace stronghold. Crew 



GOURMET TRAVELLER AUCKLAND



Top to bottom:
rugged coastline of
Waiheke; fine seafood
dining at Mudbrick;
the view at Mudbrick;
The Boatshed

Where TO SHOP

Hobsonville Point Farmers Market Open Saturday and Sunday mornings, it's a characterful spot near some gem producers. *The Landing, Hobsonville Point ferry terminal, hobsonvillepointfarmersmarket.co.nz*

Matakana Village Farmers' Market More than a market, it's a social event that brings visitors from all over Auckland. The goodies on sale are irreproachable. Its location close to the wineries and beautiful coastline make it an ideal stop for a planned day out. Open Saturday mornings. *Matakana Square, 2 Matakana Valley Road, Matakana, visitmatakana.co.nz*

Rangihoua Waiheke's olive grower has won awards for its oils in Italy and its Koroneiki and Picual olives are among the best in the country. *1 Gordons Road, Rocky Bay, Waiheke Island, 00 64 9 372 6214, rangihoua.co.nz*

The Dairy Excellent cheese shop in Ponsonby Central. *2 The Lane, Ponsonby Central, 00 64 9 972 2642, the-dairy.co.nz*

Three Beans Located at City Works Depot (industrial chic), it's a café-shop that's passionate and knowledgeable about coffee. *Shed 6A, 90 Wellesley Street, 00 64 21 158 8006, threebeans.co.nz*

members of the ill-fated *Rainbow Warrior* sunk by the French secret service in Auckland harbour in 1985 still live here.

Jonathan Scott used to visit the island as a boy at the time. His family owned a 'bach'. 'It was,' he recalls, 'a small fibre-board hut that you had everything in, your bed, your kitchen and your bath, with a long-drop outside, a hole in the ground. We would fly in on a seaplane that landed on the beach.'

That shack is now The Boatshed, a whitewashed hideaway hotel that hugs a hillside overlooking Oneroa Bay. It has five suites, but when his designer father started building it, locals feared it would stand out as being too large. Since then the dirt roads have vanished and the bachs have become holiday homes. Waiheke though is still unspoilt. It remains unashamedly parochial: B&Bs, vineyards, a micro-brewery and an olive oil producer.

Jonathan, an ex-manager of Selfridges Foodhall, often cooks for guests, drawing on the vegetables grown on a terraced potager almost as elegant as his papa's interiors. For dinner he may rustle up a lamb and sorrel tzatziki snack, or a kahawai fish pâté with tiny hulled broad beans. At breakfast, it could be ricotta hotcakes with maple syrup and poached eggs.

Being part of SuperCity may seem unwieldy if you are trying to trap a possum raiding your grapefruit. It may seem irrelevant if you cull sheep straying onto your property and consign them to the freezer. It does though have its upsides. Ortolana, an all-day café-bar at Britomart, the public transport hub of Auckland's business district, garners most of its fruit and veggies from the owners' farm in Kumeu. The result is spectacular proof that the town mouse and the country mouse can and do come to terms with each other. □

Michael Raffael and Ewen Bell travelled courtesy of Tourism New Zealand. For more details, visit newzealand.com



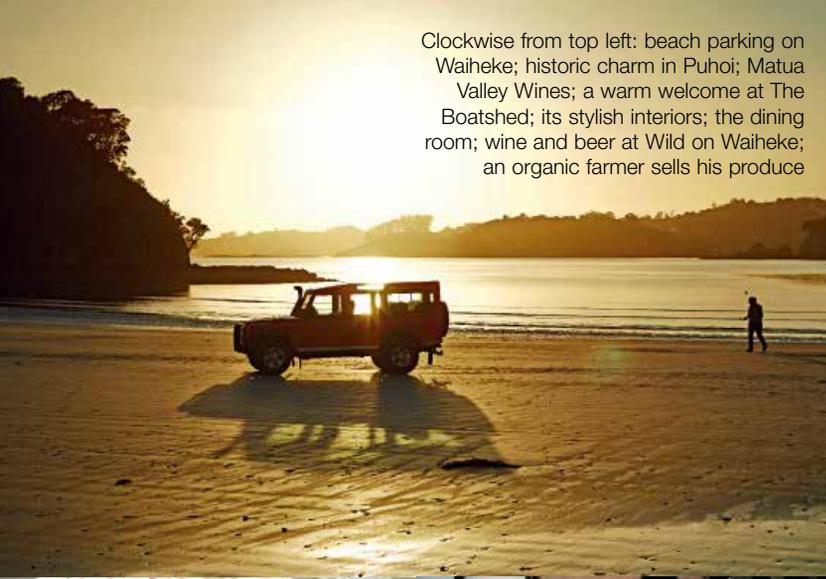
Left to right: salmon smoked with Maori herbs; wilderness guide John Panoho; Waiheke stop; green-lipped mussels



Below, left to right: boats in the yard; fresh fare from Mudbrick; Jonathan Scott of The Boatshed; Mudbrick is the place to relax and soak up the beauty of Waiheke



Clockwise from top left: beach parking on Waiheke; historic charm in Puhoi; Matua Valley Wines; a warm welcome at The Boatshed; its stylish interiors; the dining room; wine and beer at Wild on Waiheke; an organic farmer sells his produce



Where TO STAY

Hotel DeBrett Downtown Auckland boutique hotel in the fashion district, recently revamped with cool modern furnishings, deco-meets-pop and large duplex suites. The atrium breakfast-dining room connects to a laid-back lounge with a large open fire. Doubles from £148. 2 High Street, 00 64 9 925 9000, hoteldebrett.com

Matakana Country Lodge More than a B&B in a fabulous rural location at the end of a winding farm track. Owners Susan and Garth are a mine of information on everything from possums to super yachts. They'll sit down with guests every evening and offer wine and scrumptious snacks making you feel right at home. Doubles from £110. 149 Anderson Road, Matakana, 00 64 09 422 3553, matakanacountry.co.nz

Sofitel Auckland Viaduct Harbour A luxury option located in modern Viaduct Harbour, a complex of restaurants and chic residential apartments, set around Auckland's marina. Rooms with floor-to-ceiling windows and Juliet balconies are large and airy. It has a distinctive personality and the breakfasts are arguably the best on North Island. Doubles from £148. 21 Viaduct Harbour Avenue, 00 64 9 909 9000, sofitel.com

The Boatshed Calm, privacy, comfort, great views and a veggie garden to die for at this Waiheke Island designer hotel. It's regularly in the world's top ten maritime places to stay. It's not just the location and architecture that make it special though, but every detail helps to enhance the guest experience. Not least the warm and unaffected welcome. Doubles from £399 a night. Cnr Tawa and Huia Street, Little Oneroa, Waiheke Island, 00 64 9 372 3242, boatshed.co.nz

'Jonathan Scott used to visit the island as a boy, when his family owned a "bach". "It was a small fibre-board hut that you had everything in - your bed, your kitchen and your bath. We would fly in on a seaplane that landed on the beach," he recalls'

