

Bountiful Bay

The Bay of Islands has been feeding and watering travellers since the early 19th century. Now, as well as being the adventure capital of the north, it's growing some top-notch restaurants and eateries.

The impossibly beautiful Bay of Islands has always been a hotspot for holidaymakers, but its popularity has, at times, been the very thing that kept it off its rightful perch as the perfect summer destination. If that's your memory, you might be surprised by the revamped restaurants, accommodation and wide range of excellent activities, from cultural to adrenalin-pumping. Even in the tourist hub of Paihia, there's an elegance to the military precision with which the multiple nautical activities are coordinated at the wharf.

This fresh spirit of excellence is exemplified by



This page: Approaching the famous Hole in the Rock is a thrilling experience (above); Russell (below), once known as Kororareka, has a long and occasionally violent history. Opposite: the monument to the *Rainbow Warrior*, which was laid to rest just off Matakauri Bay.



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the rebirth of The Duke of Marlborough Hotel in Russell. The historic beachside hotel (it held New Zealand’s first liquor licence) had never really lived up to its potential in years gone by – but new owners have grand plans to transform it into a top-notch hotel, restaurant and function venue.

So far, the restaurant has been completely renovated, while the building has been reroofed and painted, with seven redesigned waterfront rooms. The new menu concentrates on fresh produce and seafood; the wine list now includes 100 choices as well as 30 New Zealand beers.

After summer’s busy season, the renovation will continue. “We are doing our best to make sure we bring the Duke back to something we and Russell can be proud of,” says co-owner Jayne Shirley. They are also bringing a touch of cool irreverence to the institution – its tagline is “Refreshing rascals and reprobates since 1827”.

Continuing the theme of superior tastes is the Bay of Islands Farmers’ Market, held in a parking lot in Kerikeri and bursting with the freshness of



Do

Flying Kiwi Parasail,
Paihia wharf.
www.parasail-nz.co.nz

Darryl’s Dinner Cruise, Paihia wharf.
www.dinnercruise.co.nz

Living Nature Skin & Body Therapy Clinic, Bulls Gorge, SH10, Kerikeri,
Ph (09) 407-0113.

Eat
Food at Wharepuke,
190 Kerikeri Road.
www.foodatwharepuke.co.nz

Pure Tastes,
116 Marsden Road,
Paihia.
www.paihiabeach.co.nz

Ake Ake Vineyard,
165 Waimate North Rd, Kerikeri.
www.akeakevineyard.co.nz

Stay
Duke of Marlborough Hotel,
35 The Strand,
Russell
www.theduke.co.nz

Paihia Beach Resort, 116 Marsden Road, Paihia.
www.paihiabeach.co.nz

Eagle’s Nest,
60 Tapeka Road,
Russell.
www.eaglesnest.co.nz



TRAVEL

“Parasailing is adrenalin sport ‘lite’ – no skills are required and the ride can be taken by anyone. Yet the rush is fantastic and you couldn’t find better views.”



This page: Our intrepid writer (top) gets a fine view of the bay; music at the Bay of Islands farmers’ market. Opposite: Thrills of a more old-fashioned sort – swimming off a wharf.

the country. Plump blueberries, artisan breads and manuka-smoked seafood are just a sampling of the treats on offer – all “grown, pickled, baked, reared, caught, brewed or processed by the vendor” as per the market policy.

The most recommended restaurant in the area is invariably Food at Wharepuke, in a subtropical garden where the micro greens are grown on site and the cuisine is a mix of European and Thai.

With its upmarket resort-style atmosphere, the poolside dining at Pure Tastes, Paihia Beach Resort, is also very good. For food and wine lovers, there are various winery tours on offer – Kerikeri’s Ake Ake vineyard is standout.

But the star of the show here is the water, the islands, and the glorious expanse where shimmering sea meets sky, punctuated only by green hills and cruising boats. Much of the tourist market is geared towards nautical excursions, with options for all types of sea legs.

Highly recommended is Flying Kiwi Parasail, which offers the country’s highest parasailing experience. (It’s good to know they are also champions of an industry-specific safety code, too.) The opposite of a bungee or parachute jump, because you are let up, not down, parasailing really is adrenalin sport “lite” – no skills are required and the ride can be taken by anyone from (accompanied) toddlers to 97-year-olds to the disabled. Yet the rush is fantastic and you couldn’t find better views.

Thrill junkies are well catered for with various Hole in the Rock expeditions; *Excitor* boasts about being the fastest, though the well-established *Mack Attack* is certainly swift enough for most. For a more leisurely experience, Darryl’s Lunch and Dinner Cruises is a smooth operation that takes diners to the Waitangi River and Haruru Falls (for dinner) and Opua, Okiato and Russell (for lunch). The food and wine is great and the boat lends itself to a comfortable and convivial atmosphere.

Capitalising on visitors who make a short stay but want to experience the Bay of Islands from the sea, Fullers GreatSights recently introduced the *Ipipiri* overnight cruise – to instant popularity. It’s ideal for those wanting a first taste of a cruise, without committing to several days at sea.

Back on solid ground, the Bay of Islands offers many excellent nature walks and is rich with history – most visitors tour the Waitangi grounds and visit the Stone Store, at a minimum. For a



whistle-stop visit, there is a one-hour bus tour of Russell's historic landmarks, which synchronises perfectly with the Paihia-Russell ferry schedule.

After these exertions, minor or major, a fitting place to end a visit is at the Living Nature Skin & Body Therapy Clinic, at the company's headquarters in Kerikeri. Founded in 1987, this trailblazing natural skincare brand can now be considered part of local history. The signature treatment is the Warm Honey Facial, a perfect blend of pure nature and modern luxury – just like this heavenly setting itself.


STORY **MELISSA WILLIAMS-KING**



A waka (Maori war canoe) waits for its crew at Wairoa Bay, Waitangi.

Contact

Northland Tourism, www.northlandnz.com



BAY OF ISLANDS

Air New Zealand operates daily services to Kerikeri from Auckland with connections from across the network.



Wheels of fortune

Consider taking a camper van on your Bay of Islands holiday – not only does the location make for gorgeous scenic drives, but you're spoilt for choice with an abundance of attractive and well-equipped places to park and stay overnight:

TWIN PINES TOURIST PARK Another option near Haruru Falls, this tree-studded spot will have you waking up to the sound of birdsong.

www.twinpines.co.nz

AROHA ISLAND This eco park is owned by the Queen Elizabeth II National Trust and run by a mix of staff and volunteers. There are night walks to see Kiwi and wildlife tours.

www.arohaisland.co.nz

WAGON TRAIN RV HOLIDAY PARK

Opened in 2004, this purpose-built RV park has a private landscaped setting where horses graze.

www.rvparknz.com

MATAURI BAY HOLIDAY PARK

Stay beside one of the country's most beautiful beaches.

www.matauribay.co.nz/camp.html

PUKETI RECREATION AREA

This DOC campsite is about 20 minutes north of Kerikeri.

www.doc.govt.nz

Overnight parking is also available (with permission) at such choice spots as Ake Ake Vineyard, opposite the Mahoe Cheese Factory, or in a paddock next to Kaikohe's Adventure Puketi. If you wish to head farther off the beaten track, remember that new rules apply to freedom camping – unless you have built-in toilet and waste disposal facilities, it's strictly not allowed.

Another option is to buy a membership to the Native Parks network of private "motorhome heavens".

www.nativeparks.co.nz

KERIKERI TOP 10 HOLIDAY PARK

A peaceful riverside setting and 32 powered sites. There is also wireless internet, canoeing and swimming in the river.

www.kerikeritop10.co.nz

BAY OF ISLANDS HOLIDAY PARK

Next to the Waitangi River, and 10 minutes from Waitangi and Paihia.

www.bayofislandsholidaypark.co.nz

BEACHSIDE HOLIDAY PARK

This Qualmark 4-star park has a boat ramp and kids' adventure playground.

www.beachsideholiday.co.nz

RUSSELL TOP 10 HOLIDAY PARK

Great for families, this is close to the beach, Russell wharf and cafes.

www.russelltop10.co.nz

ORONGO BAY HOLIDAY PARK

Well equipped for fishermen, with a boat ramp, fish cleaning area and a smokehouse.

www.russellaccommodation.co.nz

WAITANGI HOLIDAY PARK

Just a few minutes' walk from the treaty house, this campground has trampolines for the kids, plus a laundry and two communal kitchens.

www.waitangiholidaypark.co.nz

FALLS MOTEL AND WATERFRONT CAMPGROUND

Fancy a bed overlooking a waterfall? Park here and you'll enjoy direct views of Haruru Falls, plus there's a swimming pool and private beach.

www.falls.co.nz

GIBBY'S PLACE This private tourist park on Kerikeri Road has a garden setting, a swimming pool and you can even bring your dog.

www.gibbysplace.co.nz

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