

10 GREAT REASONS TO VISIT...

Matakana@ coast

*You and a horse and miles of white sand. You browsing sculpture, a pinot in hand. You in a movie house that featured in Vogue. Do you still need the seven other reasons, asks **Kylie Bailey**?*

ROOM WITH A VIEW

1 There are a huge number of top-quality bed and breakfast-style home stays in the area, but make the most of the stunning vistas by choosing a room with a view. Climbing the Pakiri hill from Leigh, the horizon stretches lazily from Whangarei Heads to Great Barrier and all the way down to the Coromandel Peninsula. And there's no better place to take it all in than at the exclusive Pakiri Point Boutique Lodge. Exposed at the top of the ridge overlooking the expanse of Pakiri beach, the award-winning home has been a labour of love for owners Billy and Evelyn Chong and Rae Ah Chee.

Opening just over a year ago, the world-class luxury lodge is a hideaway from the hustle and bustle that, despite its luxe, manages to cleverly encapsulate the comfortable feeling of being at home.

Indulge in Rae's hearty home-cooked meals, the friendly hosts' colourful patter and a library with every good holiday book you can think of.

There are only three rooms, so it's perfect for those seeking absolute peace.

At this window-to-the-world property, sunrise and sunset are a must-see. The ultimate romantic couple's weekend. For more information, go to www.pakiripoint.com.



Windmills by Leon van den Eijkel at the Brick Bay sculpture trail.

FRESHEN UP

2 Everywhere you stop in this area it's fresh, fresh, fresh. Be it the homegrown produce from the small roadside vendors at their farm gates or the Farmers Markets that proliferate throughout the area. Rae's leek soup with sautéed mushrooms at the lodge was a great example of the melding of local tastes and flavours. And the next day, we wanted to buy our own. For access to all the local artisan growers and producers, head to the Matakana Farmers Market. Held every Saturday until midday, the markets have become a Matakana icon. Fruit and veges aside, indulge in a handmade mallow puff or buy raspberry vinaigrette from Windfall Foods, made from fruit that's fallen from the tree. In summer, there's also a twilight market on a Wednesday evening. For details see www.matakanavillage.co.nz/farmers_market.php

SIP AND SUP

3 One of the fastest growing wine regions in New Zealand, this area specialises in small boutique wineries, which makes a Saturday afternoon wine tasting trail a must-do. Signature drops of the region include pinot gris and its Bordeaux-style blended reds, featuring combinations of merlot, malbec, cab sav and cab franc. A glass (or two) of pinot gris in Brick Bay's iconic Glass House tasting room, created by award-winning



Pakiri Point Boutique Lodge: The ultimate retreat for couples.

architect Noel Lane, is a great way to kick off your vino fact-finding mission, and their platter of local cheeses, breads and pickles helps to fill the belly. For more on tastings and bookings, go to www.brickbay.co.nz.

At Heron's Flight Vineyard a delightful Italian sangiovese while looking out over the rolling countryside, completes the day. See www.heronflight.co.nz.

PIZZA PICNIC BY THE SEA

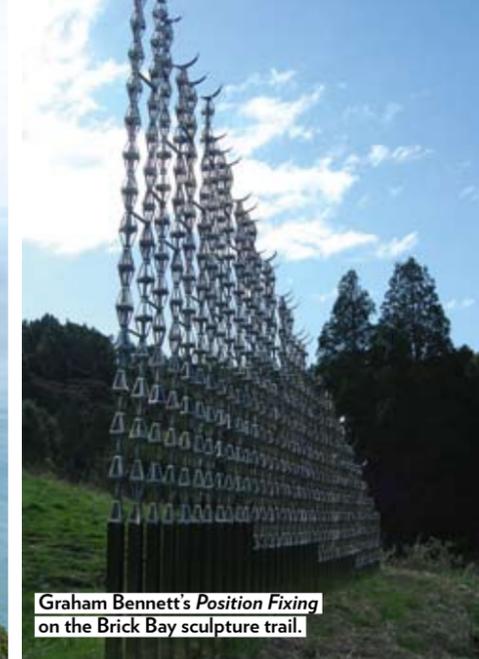
4 Pick up a pizza at the Rusty Pelican before the sun sets and head down into one of the many picturesque bays that line the roads between Matakana and Leigh. Pull up at grassy spot, lay down a blanket and watch the sun slowly melt into the horizon (as the sticky mozzarella melts in your mouth). The pizza is one of the best we've ever eaten in New Zealand, and the Pelican is so popular, it pays to ring ahead with your order. Why not also pop a bottle of the locally made plonk you bought at the vineyard that day? For restaurant bookings and takeaways, phone (09) 422 9102.

SCULPTURE TRAIL

5 Richard and Christine Didsbury first purchased their stunning Brick Bay property overlooking Snells Beach 20 years ago and began producing their award-winning wines four years later. But it is the art lovers'



Windfall Foods' range of lemon curds, jams and relishes.



Graham Bennett's Position Fixing on the Brick Bay sculpture trail.



Brick Bay's Glass House tasting room.

creation of the incredible sculpture trail on their property that has proved truly visionary. The easy 2km trail takes an hour to walk and guests can take their wine glasses from the Glass House tasting room as they meander through the stunning outdoor gallery.

Currently featuring work from 45 artists, the trail is run by the Brick Bay Sculpture Trust, which funds artists to create their often very expensive works on the property. All works are available to the public to buy.

The trail costs \$10 to walk and proceeds go to help upkeep the trail and foster the trust. We love it so much we've invited all of our friends for a midsummer afternoon's wander. For more information, phone (09) 425 4690 or go to www.brickbaysculpture.co.nz.



The Matakana Farmers Market is sustainable and eco-friendly.



Kylie and her hubby Gareth saddle up for a horse ride.



Morris & James Pottery is iconically Matakana.



The buffalos of Whangaripo Cheese.

MATAKANA CINEMAS AND THE VINTRY

6 If Matakana is boutique, the cinemas are at the heart of its chic revolution. Their second-to-none artistic interiors have even seen them featured in international style bible *Vogue Travel + Entertaining*. Each of the three cinemas is individually dressed – the most stunning being the roof of the second cinema which is filled with silk flowers. The functioning theatres screen the latest releases, which you can enjoy with a drop of local wine and an ice cream. After the movie, head next door to wine bar The Vintry, which showcases all of the best wines from the Matakana coast area alongside a selection of Spanish tapas. Go to www.matakanacinemas.co.nz or www.thevintry.co.nz.

PAKIRI HORSE RIDES

7 Imagine the wind in your hair, salt air on your lips and galloping (or in our case trotting slowly) down a pristine, white sand beach. Sounds like the definition of bliss? That's exactly what Pakiri Beach Horse Rides is. Their one or two-hour rides make for a perfect Sunday morning escape, and the guides are complete professionals. Having ridden a horse only twice in the past 10 years, it was surprisingly easy to pick up and the ride takes you along the picturesque sand beach before winding up into giant sand dunes. The well-cut trails through the forest behind the dunes are fun and even a little challenging and it's easy to see why one travel tome named this one of the top 100 things to do before you die. Bookings are essential. Phone (09) 422 6275 or go to www.horseride-nz.co.nz.

MORRIS & JAMES POTTERY

8 When Anthony Morris and his family returned to New Zealand from Britain in 1977, they pitched up in Matakana and their pottery business is now the cornerstone of its thriving artistic community. Their Labour Weekend sale in October has become the stuff of legend, with avid collectors travelling from all over the country to bag a Morris & James bargain. There's also a café/restaurant onsite if you want to stop and dine while enjoying the gardens and surroundings. A Morris & James piece is the best souvenir to take home from your travels. Go to www.morrisandjames.co.nz for details.

LEIGH SAWMILL BEER-TASTING

9 The Leigh Sawmill Café has become as well-known for its natural beers as it is for the fabulous gig nights it holds. Established in 2004, by owner-operators Peter and Decima Freckleton, the brewery is a labour of love and you can taste it in every unfiltered, unpasteurised drop of their brew. Tastings are available if you are purchasing or you can book a tour of the working brewery for larger groups. For more information go to www.sawmillbrewery.co.nz.

WHANGARIPO BUFFALO CHEESE

10 Phil and Annie Armstrong are the kind of couple that epitomise the passionate artisans of the Pakiri area. In 2008 the husband and wife duo imported their herd of water buffalos from overseas and brought them to their new home in the sprawling fields of the Whangaripo Valley, behind Pakiri. Phil juggles his herd (one of only a few in New Zealand) with his day job as a builder, every night heading to the farm to milk "his girls". The cheeses and yoghurts they create from the milk are divine and can be purchased from the Matakana Farmers Market. For more information contact Phil on 0274 337 358.

