

TRAVEL
INSIDER

100% PURE
NEW ZEALAND

From the heart

Find off-grid islands hidden in plain sight of a buzzing city. Drink off the tourist trail in the home of craft beer. Discover small wonders beyond the epic peaks. When it's the real New Zealand you seek, you ask the locals...



Seek big moments



◆ Auckland

“This city does food like nowhere else.”

– Elle Armon-Jones from *The Big Foody Food Tours* (thebigfoody.com).

“I moved here from London nearly 20 years ago and think the food scene is as exciting as any of the bigger cities. Partly because the volcanic soil creates incredible produce but also because Aucklanders will give anything a go.

I love Culprit restaurant on Wyndham Street for its quirky, fun approach. Chef and co-owner Kyle Street can rethink anything: there’s an ‘Ugly Carrot’ dish made with carrot from the stock he uses to make a delicious duck tortellini. It’s spectacular. And his wine bar on the corner, Little Culprit, is a real hidden gem.

On my tours I’ll always take people to Miller’s Coffee roastery on Cross Street. Craig Miller only does one roast but he does it right.

There’s a whole new side of the city in the Commercial Bay precinct that’s opened up. You’ve got Britomart’s hip vibe, street art, the waterfront and an eclectic range of eateries like Miann, [with its] chocolate and artisan desserts. It’s a feast for the senses.”



Ugly Carrot dish at Culprit, Auckland

◆ Rotorua

“Bike through giant trees to soak in nature’s hot tub.”

– Takurua Mutu from *Mountain Bike Rotorua* (mtbrotorua.co.nz).

“My favourite place to take people has to be the Whakarewarewa Forest (Redwoods Forest), which has some of the best mountain bike trails on the planet. Combined with the strong Māori culture, it’s a pretty special experience.

I’d start with a mountain bike ride in the forest, using private 4WD shuttles to take you to the top of the tracks and pick you up from the bottom so you don’t have to pedal up the big hills. A 15-minute drive away from here you can raft the epic Okere River.

No day is complete in Rotorua without a soak in natural hot pools – we have a heap in the region. A beer and a soak at Secret Spot Hot Tubs is a great way to chill after a ride. Hire a private tub with friends – drinks are delivered to you.

Eastwood café is a fave for families. It has a beautiful setting in amongst the redwoods and awesome woodfired pizzas and fried chicken. Back in town, hit either Atticus Finch or Poco for tapas and cocktails or The Fainting Goat for huge shared platters and a cheeky gin or two.”

Cover: Scott Howes



Waipoua Forest, Northland

◆ Waipoua Forest

“Some people have never heard silence like it.”

– Billy Boy Thompson from *Footprints Waipoua* (footprintswaipoua.co.nz)

“During our twilight tours of the Waipoua Forest, the best part is just watching people stand in the presence of te matua ngahere [‘father of the forest’] and tāne mahuta [‘lord of the forest’]. It’s a very special part of my job. The sheer size of these trees often renders visitors speechless – and sometimes brings them to tears.

Some of the trees are more than 2000 years old. I grew up here learning the legends of the atua [forest Gods] and being taught the rongoā [traditional Māori medicine] that can be tapped from the kauri [tree]. It’s why every story I get to share comes from a personal place, passed down from my elders and those before them.

After a tour I tell people to taste the flavours of the region at Opononi Beach Takeaways – some of the best fish and chips around – or grab a drink with harbour views at the Opononi Hotel. It’s the perfect place to slide back into modern life after forest-bathing.”

◆ Great Barrier Island

“Everything here is off the grid. No streetlights. That’s the joy of it.”

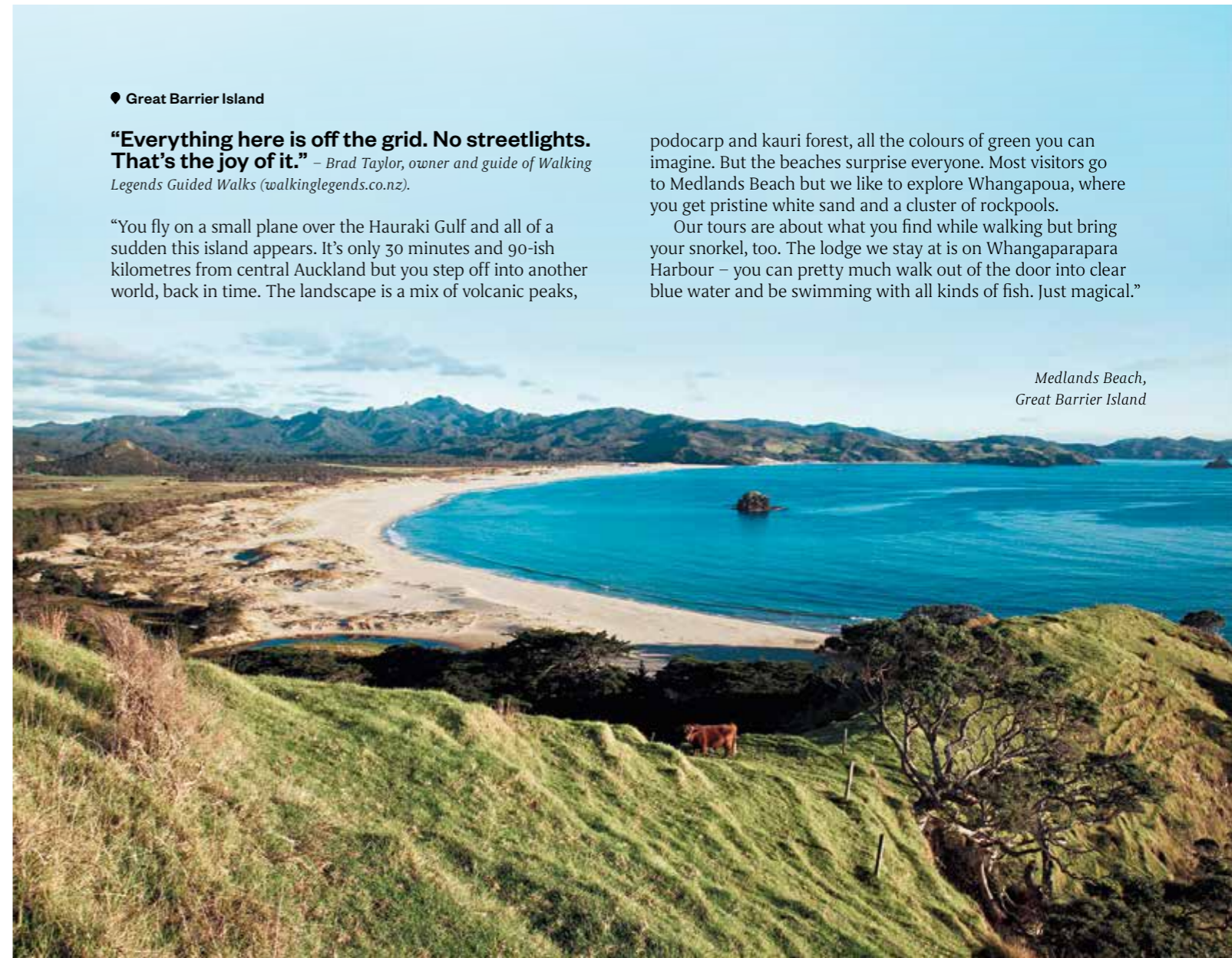
– Brad Taylor, owner and guide of *Walking Legends Guided Walks* (walkinglegends.co.nz).

“You fly on a small plane over the Hauraki Gulf and all of a sudden this island appears. It’s only 30 minutes and 90-ish kilometres from central Auckland but you step off into another world, back in time. The landscape is a mix of volcanic peaks,

podocarp and kauri forest, all the colours of green you can imagine. But the beaches surprise everyone. Most visitors go to Medlands Beach but we like to explore Whangapoua, where you get pristine white sand and a cluster of rockpools.

Our tours are about what you find while walking but bring your snorkel, too. The lodge we stay at is on Whangaparapara Harbour – you can pretty much walk out of the door into clear blue water and be swimming with all kinds of fish. Just magical.”

Medlands Beach, Great Barrier Island





Craggy Range,
Hawke's Bay



Seek local secrets

◆ Hawke's Bay

“Craggy Range is one of my favourite wineries on the coast.” – COO Arsel Aslam from Air Napier (airnapier.co.nz).

“They’ve got this perfect fireplace inside a plush luxury lodge where you can sip on the unbelievably delicious Sophia red. It’s this perfect blend of New Zealand beauty with European flair. We can fly you out there from Napier Airport for the most scenic winery lunch you’ll ever experience.

Autumn is an incredible time to visit, when the leaves are turning. Or come during the Art Deco Festival in summertime; it’s a themed week of about 100 different events hosted by wineries and restaurants, with many staff dressed in 1930s attire. Touring around in a classic car is an epic way to experience the region.”

◆ Kapiti Island

“There’s a whole world that only opens up after dark.” – Manaaki Barrett, environmental manager and guide at Kapiti Island Nature Tours (kapitiisland.com).

“The kiwi is really not at all like a bird. It has this stealthy and elusive existence – often it looks like nothing more than a fuzzy little shadow on the forest floor. But our guides are attuned to every little sound they make. Sometimes we find them just from

a little sniff or snuffle, almost like a hedgehog. Although we’re there to find kiwi, people also really enjoy the chance to be quiet and conscious of the world going on around them.

It’s quite humbling, to put yourself into a night-time forest environment as an almost invisible observer. It’s a true sensory experience – especially if you spend the night in our luxury glamping tents where you’ll fall asleep to the sounds of the kiwi, kaka and ruru birds.”



◆ Wellington

“Wellington has some of the best beer in the country.”

– Mike Henderson from Craft Beer Tours NZ (craftbeertoursnz.co.nz).

“My top three? Pernicious Weed is a double IPA by Garage Project. It has a tropical rich malt base and two flavourful New Zealand hops – Rakau and Nelson Sauvín. We visit their Wild Workshop in the centre of Wellington on our tours – they give us exclusive access to their crazy open fermentation and barrelling areas. Then there’s the Mā Is White by Fork & Brewer, which has two native spices – horopito and kawakawa – as well as fresh New Zealand navel orange. And finally, Van Da Tsar from Baylands Brewery, which is like Tia Maria meets beer – it’s so sweet and creamy.

You won’t get better beer snacks than the barbecue brisket burger from Boneface Brewing or the T-rex toastie from Heyday Beer Co. The waffle chips at Fork & Brewer are delicious – buy a bowl for the table and it will be gone in about six seconds.”



Wāhine Toa at Hiakai, Wellington

◆ Wellington

“Hiakai isn’t like simply going somewhere for dinner.” – Katie Monteith, general manager of the three-hatted restaurant (hiakai.co.nz).

“First, you enter this old building that many people don’t even know is a restaurant. We have no signs, just a light at night. Then they have no idea what they’re going to eat. We specialise in Māori cuisine but our menu is not available anywhere, which is so different to how most of us live day to day, with every bit of information at our fingertips.

Our food follows a story, a Māori myth, legend or even

a contemporary tale. One of our menus was based on a famous children’s book by the incredible Māori writer Patricia Grace. There was a dessert called Wāhine Toa, which means ‘warrior women’, made from rhubarb, hibiscus, apple and kawakawa in the shape of a flower. People gasped when they saw it.

For some, Hiakai is a journey of nostalgia. For others it’s about firsts, things they’ve never tried before. But for everyone, we want it to be a playful experience, not overly earnest. We want to take people out of their ordinary world and look after them. In Māori culture that’s called manaakitanga and it’s the heartbeat of what we do.”



Seek wild surprises

◆ Christchurch-Greymouth

“The best discovery is in the middle of nowhere.” – Natallia Mitchell from *The Great Journeys of New Zealand* (greatjourneysofnz.co.nz).

“On the TranzAlpine Railway journey between Christchurch and Greymouth, people know to expect miles of native beech forest and panoramic views across the Southern Alps. But there are secrets along the way, too.

Cass Station is blink-and-you’ll-miss-it with a population of one but is among the most fascinating stations along the route. It was made famous by New Zealand artist Rita Angus, who painted the modest train station in 1936. The work was voted the country’s greatest painting and is currently part of the Christchurch Art Gallery collection.

My other highlight comes just before you reach Arthur’s Pass, approximately halfway through the trip, when the train passes close to the Main Divide of the Southern Alps. The highest peak is Aoraki/Mt Cook – it used to be 3,754 metres high until 20-odd years ago when a bit fell off the top but the peak is still comfortably the highest in New Zealand. Otira Tunnel is also a big experience – at more than eight kilometres, it used to be the longest rail tunnel in the world and takes 13 minutes to get through.”

Cass, Canterbury



Lake Tekapo, Mackenzie

◆ Lake Tekapo

“Hot pool stargazing has a way of making you feel very small but very special.”

– Astronomy guide Sam Blair from *Tekapo Star Gazing* (tekapostargazing.co.nz).

“It’s a very humbling experience. It’s like having your soul recharged as you stare up and spot the great constellations, such as Scorpius, also known as ‘Maui’s fishhook’, which has deep

spiritual significance to the Māori people.

The record for the most shooting stars I’ve seen in one night is 26 and if you’re very, very lucky you might see the incredibly rare auroras. From May to August, the Milky Way is directly above us and its core is especially bright. And during the warmer months, the spectacular constellation of Orion is starting to rise in the sky. It’s at its highest during December and January.”

◆ Marlborough Sounds

“Havelock is the green shell mussel capital of the world.”

– Maegen Blom, operations manager from *Mills Bay Mussels* (millsbaymussels.co.nz).

“We eat them a little bit differently around here. We shuck the mussels raw, like an oyster, and then cook them for only a couple of minutes. That way they just melt and taste so juicy and tender.

In our tasting room at the marina we serve them six or seven different ways; grilled on the half shell with garlic butter or a coconut curry sauce, beer-battered, crumbed or rolled into a Dutch croquette – and a few other surprises depending on the day.

If you’re staying nearby I suggest you buy some fresh mussels, put them in a big pot and steam them with Marlborough white wine and garlic. Delicious. Then sit back and enjoy them with whatever wine is leftover.”

◆ Kaikōura

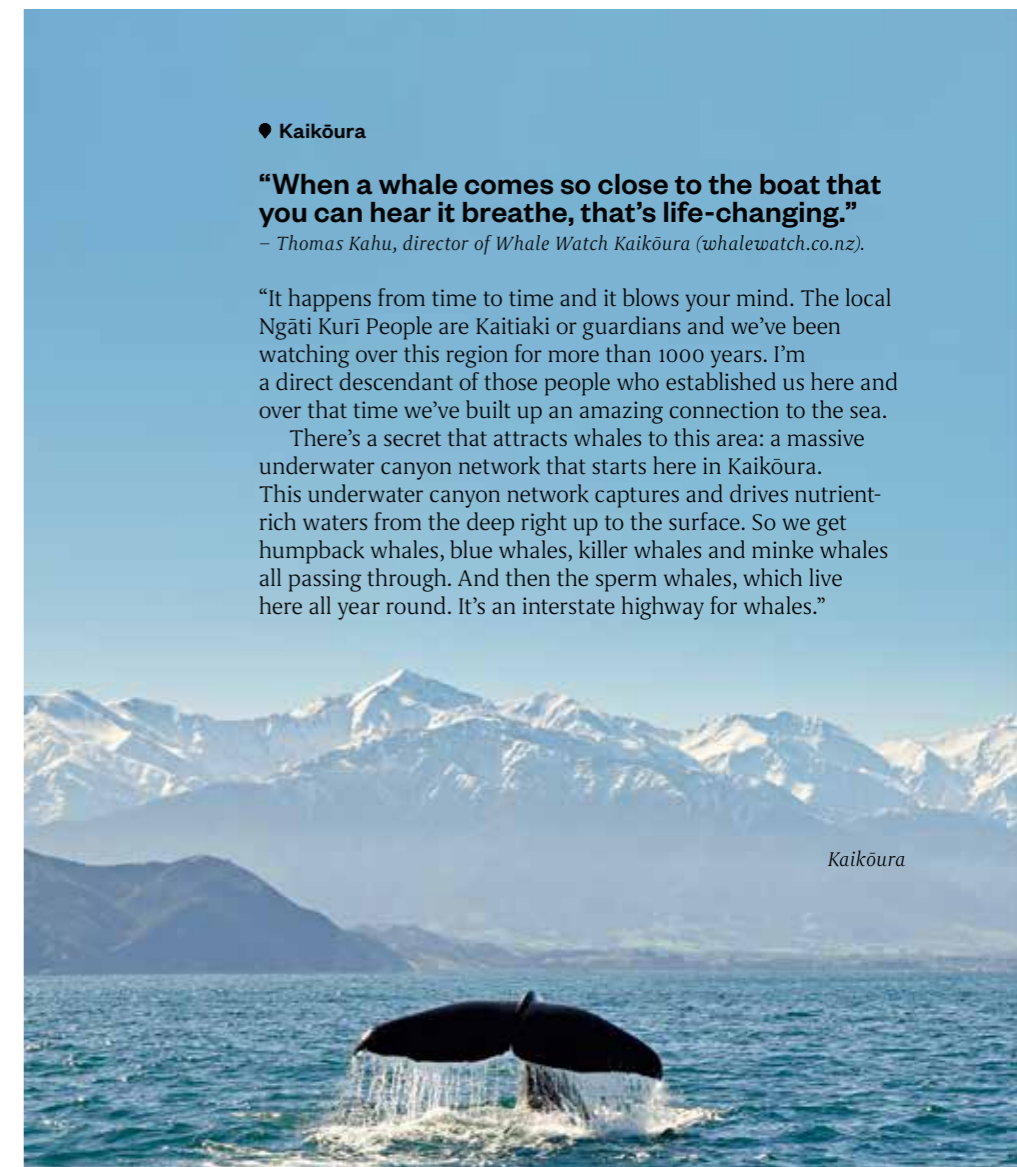
“When a whale comes so close to the boat that you can hear it breathe, that’s life-changing.”

– Thomas Kahu, director of *Whale Watch Kaikōura* (whalewatch.co.nz).

“It happens from time to time and it blows your mind. The local Ngāti Kuri People are Kaitiaki or guardians and we’ve been watching over this region for more than 1000 years. I’m a direct descendant of those people who established us here and over that time we’ve built up an amazing connection to the sea.

There’s a secret that attracts whales to this area: a massive underwater canyon network that starts here in Kaikōura. This underwater canyon network captures and drives nutrient-rich waters from the deep right up to the surface. So we get humpback whales, blue whales, killer whales and minke whales all passing through. And then the sperm whales, which live here all year round. It’s an interstate highway for whales.”

Kaikōura





Wānaka

◆ Wānaka

“We start our tours with the hongi, a traditional Māori greeting. Then it’s on to the wine.”

– Joe Waide, owner and guide from WanaHaka Wine Tours & Māori Culture (wanahaka.co.nz).

“With the hongi, we take time to exchange each other’s mana or spirit by gently touching noses. As we journey between the vineyards, I share the Māori footprint of the region – it connects with the wineries through respect for the land and for each other.

There are more than 128 varieties of pinot noir to be enjoyed from wineries in the Wānaka, Tarras, Cromwell and Queenstown regions and the winemakers are more than happy to talk you through what makes them unique.

My favourites? The Māori Point riesling. I also love the Aitken’s Folly rosé with salmon from the barbecue or the Rippon pinot noir with a slow-cooked lamb shoulder. And you can’t go past a glass of bubbles from Maude because every day’s festive when you live in Wānaka.”

◆ Ulva Island

“There’s untouched and then there’s Ulva Island, New Zealand’s most protected bird sanctuary and secret escape.” – Nature guide

Nicky Johnstone from Real NZ (realnz.com).

“Ulva Island is the lesser-known neighbour of Stewart Island, which sits in the Southern Ocean off New Zealand’s southernmost tip. Here, the birds are fearless – zero predators will do that! – and often start appearing before we even reach

the island. Albatross think we’re a fishing boat and tend to do some fairly dramatic fly-bys. Then we reach Ulva Island and that’s when people are really amazed.

Occasionally we have sea lions coming up on the beach, sometimes we see little blue penguins and, very rarely, the yellow-eyed penguin and the Fiordland crested penguin – two of the rarest species of penguin in the world. It doesn’t happen often but every so often you’ll be out on the boat and pop, a little head will come up and it’s always absolutely amazing.”

Fiordland National Park



▼
Seek natural beauty

◆ Te Anau

“It’s more than just your average rainforests, thundering waterfalls and massive glaciers.”

– Andy Cunningham from Fiordland Lodge (fiordlandlodge.co.nz).

“The lodge is in Te Anau, the gateway to the Fiordland National Park. Book one of our private guides and take the scenic alpine drive up to Milford Sound, stopping at any of the 30 or 40 stops along the way to walk to waterfalls and cascades. Cruise Milford Sound with a specialist nature guide or take a helicopter flight to Tūtoko Glacier.

You’ll return to the lodge in time for a soak in the hot tub, canapés in front of the roaring fire and a dinner of local venison with Central Otago pinot noir as you take in views across to the Kepler Mountains and Lake Te Anau. Sounds like the ultimate day out to me.”

◆ Wānaka

“Go off track and you’ll discover scenery that 99 per cent of locals haven’t even seen.”

– Mark Orbell from Ridgeline (ridgelinez.com).

“In this case, you take the backroads and trails of one of Wānaka’s most historic farms,

West Wānaka Station, which is closed to the public but we’re lucky to be able to hike into. We’re all about walking deserted trails far from the crowds.

This is proper high country: 1000 metres above sea level. What can you see from up here? The Southern Alps, glaciers and snow-capped peaks, sparkling lakes, wild rivers, rolling alpine

meadows and raw natural beauty, all in one six- or seven-hour journey.

We stop for lunch on a mountain top, what we call the finest alpine café in the world – everyone gets a window seat and there’s free air-conditioning. There’s no café, of course – just a bit of Kiwi humour! – but it’s certainly the finest view you’ll ever see and we enjoy delicious treats from a local café.”



Wānaka