



WAIHEKE ISLAND - PARADISE ON AUCKLAND'S DOORSTEP

White beaches, native flax, red flowering Pohutakawa trees, bush, birds, olives, artists, wines ... The first time I visited Waiheke, I was still talking about it the next day.

"I've fallen in love," I gushed to a couple of Americans who offered to share their taxi in the queue exiting the Pacific Islanders *Pasfika* Festival in Auckland.

"So did we – a year ago," they responded, "And we bought a place there!"

That's the effect Waiheke – the Maori name for Cascading Waters, has on you – love at first sight, commitment for life.

Greenwich Village artist Gabrielle Lewenz, is another visitor from the United States to answer the Waiheke call. That was 9 years ago. Her hacienda-style studio and home can be visited by appointment. You can stay overnight in one of the inviting white décor bedrooms in the orange-mudbrick, sunny Spanish mission-style mansion with its gothic cross design, in its perfect position in Church Bay, overlooking the sea. (ArtStay)

Waiheke Island is a commuter's Paradise - just 35 minutes across the harbour from Auckland. At 92 square kms, it is one of the biggest of the 200 islands in the Hauraki Gulf. The landscape was originally covered with forest and Maori fortified villages (Pa). Today it is a picturesque blend of hilly farmland, forest, private beaches and boutique businesses, vineyards, olive groves and friendly people – 7,500 of them, who live there permanently. The Maori history of the island has left traces of archeological sites scattered over the hills and headlands.

Our group of mainly Asian writers was so besotted with the first beach stop at Oneroa that they had to be prised away from photographing an obliging lone artist and easel.

Stonybridge Winery is one of the several small wineries producing small quantities of Bordeaux-style quality red wines in an organic vineyard – Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, crushed with a Basket press, plus the lesser-know variety of Petit Vardot.

They also produce a Sauvignon Blanc, which is very popular in the United Kingdom.

The unique climate and Manganese red coloured soil produce consistently excellent wines across the island.

You can linger longer here with the flavours of the Stonybridge *Fallen Angel* hanging in your mouth, under the slogan, "Heaven-sent wines for the Angels amongst us." You can stay for lunch at the restaurant in the ivy-covered winery with its wine barrels and magnolia tree at the front door.

Or tear yourself away, on to other wineries – Te Whau, with its 360-degree views, stunning architecture and award winning winelist (Wine Spectator & Wine International, London 2004).

Or Mudbrick Winery, for lunch at the restaurant overlooking the vineyard, bush and Auckland city over the water. Seafood, fresh meat, fish and other locally-grown produce feature in dishes such as Mudbrick Seafood bisque – with Wasabi, aparagus & a mango mint salsa, Manuka (native bush) honey & gin- cured venison carpaccio, Pan-seared Hapuka (New Zealand fish), New Zealand Pure Black Angus Eye fillet.



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The island seems to work its magic on the local art scene - Waiheke artists and craftspeople are credited with producing some of the country's most respected work in recent years. On alternate odd-numbered years, Waiheke holds an prestigious, sculpture exhibition, *Sculpture on the Gulf* magnificently exhibited on the scenic Matiatia/Church Bay Walkway – now recognized as a showcase for New Zealand's top talent. Contemporary New Zealand culture on the headlands where their Maori predecessors edifices used to be.

Light, colour, peace – to bathe in Waiheke's abundance, deserves more than one day.