



Pure Pleasure

NEW ZEALAND

by **Joseph Pedro**





Wharariki Beach

Photo: Tony Brunt



new zealand

I'm curving along a snake-like road through New Zealand. My arms are wrapped tightly around a Hells Angels-type biker who, over the course of one hour, I've learned to trust with my life.

The vroom vroom vroom-ing of the motorcycle has now become a surprisingly soothing background noise to the endless beauty of Auckland's west coast. The wind smacks my face so hard that my cheeks beam red through the helmet's visor and they sting like I've been walking New York City blocks in a snowstorm. Rain dribbles down from the mountain-edge that we're accelerating up and the raindrops do-si-do off my field of vision. With each curvature of the road, Gaia's topography here surprises. One view reveals a sweeping landscape with a tremendous sky that is still puffed with vibrant grays. In the foreground, a vast ocean dominates the vista, where jagged rocks appear as though they are fighting for air from the blue waters. It reminds me of the Maori creation story I heard at the Auckland Museum that describes this harmony: "Soon, and yet not soon, for the time was vast, the Sky and Earth began to yield." And here, way down in the far-flung corner of the Southern Hemisphere sitting on the back of a Harley, I too begin to yield with a place that has forever changed me.

I've always dreamed of New Zealand, and when I take my first step off of the plane and am greeted by a *kia ora* chorus from Air New Zealand staff, I can't suppress my smile. The flight, for me, was an 11-hour journey from LAX, and the super-friendly staff and onboard amenities (hello on-demand Sauvignon Blanc) make the hours fly by.

I am in New Zealand to explore the country's two main islands, the South and the North, to experience the coexisting cultures that make New Zealand so unique, the creative spirit I've heard so much about, the vibrant gay and lesbian scene, and the natural and unique environment that would make Darwin swoon.

I begin my trip in the small town of **Nelson**, New Zealand, which is just a short and beautiful flight from Auckland (keep your eyes peeled for the massive volcano Mount Taranaki). Although I am a bit dazed from the journey, I am immediately taken by this quiet, artsy place where the natural environment has inspired an entire community. The city, the second oldest incorporated settlement in New Zealand, is protected by a beautiful natural harbor. Restaurants jet out onto the blue waters (like the delicious seafood restaurant **The Boat Slip**), and the vibrant city center with colorful storefronts is so picturesque you'd think it was the set for a new CW show. I quickly get into the vibe by cruising the specialty shops and galleries that contain everything from local handicrafts, oils, Wicca books, and jewelry to a wonderful assortment of art. One Nelson-based artist, who can't help but share her love and passion for the small community, is Anna Leary who says her work is greatly inspired by the Pacific. Leary tells me over a delicious mid-afternoon pick-me-up at **Morrison Street Café**. "There is something about the collective energy of Nelson that draws people here—the light, the ocean, folds of the land, the spirit of the people." After taking a sip of her flat white she adds: "Life is accessible, and it's easy to have inspiring experiences when you are surrounded by the physical beauty



Photo: WellingtonNZ.com



Auckland

Photo: Chris McLennan

“Life is accessible, and it's easy to have inspiring experiences when you are surrounded by the physical beauty of the landscape, the bay, artisans, festivals...it's open and uncomplicated.”

of the landscape, the bay, artisans, festivals...it's open and uncomplicated without being unsophisticated, and in some ways that is a catalyst for creative endeavor.”

Leary, who is wearing a fine New Zealand-wool sweater and locally made jewelry, drags me through the two weekend markets that truly highlight the city's creative energy. The bright, early afternoon sun shines down on various stalls. Dreadlocked boys sell chocolate, and there's got-to-buy Merino wool sweaters, unique jewelry, and locally made foods. The stalls' items are as varied as the people who convene here on the weekends. There are also some notable LGBT-owned businesses here including the marvelous metalwork by **Jewels Vine** (I am still kicking myself for not buying her robot pendant), and the super-hip **Robyn Reynolds** who creates clothing designs that would make any hipster envious. We then make a quick stop at an art gallery/design shop called **Cubicle**. This gay-owned store, helmed by Kim Brice and Kirati 'Gap' Thaisirisu, is the amalgamation of their travels around the world. Definitely stop by and say 'hi,' and, while you're there, pick up a present and marvel at the local artists' works that are on display.

Another place that is on most visitors' radars is the gold and silversmith store **Jens Hansen**. The tiny shop's jealousy-inducing jewelry gained

worldwide notoriety when it was chosen to create just one ring for *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. The masterful design of the “My precious” ring became so iconic that director Peter Jackson decided to use the jeweler for all of the movies, including *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*. Continuing his father's legacy, Jen Hansen's son Halfdan Hansen shows me around the store and the various rings used throughout the movies. He is also happy to show me some of their best sellers for gay couples. “We have gay couples come from around the world to get matching bands,” he tells me through his Van Dyke beard. I try a gold one on with a beautiful inscription on the inside and quickly determine that my I-know-he's-out-there-somewhere man will have to buy this for me.

The next morning, I pack-up my suitcase at the **Grand Mercure Nelson Monaco Hotel and Resort** and meet Anna down in the lobby. She has a special excursion planned for me today. As the morning fog still blurs the view, we pull up to the marina where a gorgeous 87-foot ketch is ready to take us out onto Nelson Haven for an exclusive breakfast on **Yonder Star Yacht Cruise**. Despite the chill, I eat outside and witness first-hand the inspirational nature that Anna described. As I take a bite of my eggs and fresh fruit, the morning dew



new zealand

gives way to LCD-worthy colors. A seal lazies on a jetty and fishermen are returning from their morning catch. I am already beginning to get that I-could-live-here feeling.

Leaving Nelson, I drive a little over an hour southeast through snaking, mountainous roads to the Marlborough region, an area most famous for its wines. The drive can be a bit windy and bumpy, so those whose stomach's are prone to motion sickness should pack the Dramamine. I stop at the world-famous **Brancott Estate** for a tour and lunch. After a short trip up a hill, I arrive at the thoroughly modern, glass-enclosed Brancott Estate Heritage Center where I learn about Brancott's history. It was here where the first Sauvignon Blancs were grown on the South Island—disproving a commonly held misconception that the South Island was too cold for the grape. Sitting here, sipping the gorgeous wine (a special bottle where part of the purchase price goes to help protect the New Zealand Eagle), eating a masterfully prepared buffalo mozzarella with oven-dried tomato, potatoes, basil leaves, and warm pinoli, I hear more about the importance of protecting New Zealand's environment, especially in an area with extreme dependence on agriculture. I then step outside and squint as I look at the dizzying vineyard that stretches for miles and miles, and I am greeted by Eddie a New Zealand Falcon who is used by an onsite trainer to educate locals about the importance of preserving his species.

Before I continue my journey to the North Island via ferry, I stay in

the picturesque town of **Picton** (30-minute drive). The rainy weather doesn't dampen my need to explore, and I am eager to hitch a ride on the Cougar Line to check out a super-isolated hotel. The roller coaster-like trip to **The Bay of Many Coves** is worth it. While the nighttime trip prevents me from spotting any dolphins, it allows me to experience the area in the dark, and by dark I mean pitch black. The only lights are a bobbing moon and the Southern Cross that is so bright that when I close my eyes I can still see it. As the boat wobbles on, I see lights that dot the side of a steep mountain. This, in the middle of the sound, is the five-star resort where unmatched luxury is literally encompassed by unmatched natural beauty. People can stay in several, private apartment-style rooms with private balconies that overlook the bay, and I am kicking myself for not booking a room here. I do, however, spend the evening sampling the delicious local, fresh food created by Chef Hannes Bareiter in the **Foredeck** restaurant. Here, I delight in the Marlborough wines and eagerly consume the tuna with ponzu foam and the succulent lamb with eggplant, pancetta, capsicum, and beans that I still think about. Unfortunately, after eating far too much, I have to take the bouncy Cougar back to the town.

The **Interislander Kaitaki**, a massive ferry that departs daily from the Picton Ferry Terminal, may not get points for being the most beautiful ship, but if you shell out some extra NZ dollars



Photo: Chris Sisarich



you can get a nice experience in the Kaitaki Plus class where free booze, food, and Wi-Fi are available for you to enjoy on comfy couches away from the masses. The three-hour journey across the Queen Charlotte Sound is calm and beautiful and affords plenty of time to recharge before venturing off to Wellington.

After spending so much time in more remote areas, Wellington, even though it only has a population of just over 150,000, appears massive. I check into a super-fun hotel called the **Museum Hotel Wellington** where I insist on staying in the newer, apartment-style section—my clothes could use a free wash in the in-room machines. I revel in the oversized rooms, but the real star of this boutique hotel is, appropriately enough, an impressive art collection that is strewn throughout the rooms and the lobby. The pieces are part of hotel owner Chris Parkin's private collection. If you see him around the lobby, ask him to show you around.

Just a short walk from the hotel, nestled along the harbor is New Zealand's national museum, **Te Papa**. I find my experience at the institution especially enlightening. It is here that I get my first real education about the Maori culture, the indigenous population of New Zealand. Walk into the locally carved *marae* (Maori for meeting place) room and then continue your journey through the cultural exhibit. As a tourist, it is easy to be ignorant about a place's history, but in Te Papa the story of New Zealand will help you to better understand this beautiful country and its wonderful people. Then, if you have extra time,

don't miss the natural science wing where you can see one of the only giant squids on display in the world and a stunning collection of Kiwi birds.

Afterward, take a walk through the windy streets of Wellington and discover the creative spirit that flourishes here. Unique fashion emporiums, craft shops, and art galleries line Cuba St., and visitors can enjoy art installations, like the waterfront sculpture garden and the *Hobbit* characters on top of the New Zealand Post House, as well as annual music, culture, and culinary festivals.

Wellington's creative energy has also been attracting the movie industry to the capital for quite some time, so much so that it has been given the nickname Wellywood.

It is an easy decision for me to sign up for the **Flat Earth New Zealand Experience** and check out a mix of Wellington's major tourist sites including scenes where the now iconic *Lord of the Rings* trilogy was filmed. My guide is loveable and goofy and gives in to peer pressure when I want to deviate from the itinerary. A quick drive out of the city center and up steep hills shows off just how uncanny the similarity is between Wellington and San Francisco. In fact, our tour guide tells us, lots of the older houses here were imported from San Francisco (though in later years architects in San Francisco began to import houses from Wellington!). While the tour company does half-day exclusive



Photo: Bob Suisted

Auckland



Photo: Bob McCree

“Middle Earth” tours, I get just some location highlights, including my favorite scene from the first movie “Get off the Road” when the Hobbits hide from the Black Riders. Walking through the natural landscape, you can see how easy it was for Peter Jackson to decide to film the movie in New Zealand. The lush pine forest is a stage for a fantasy without really trying. The tour also takes me to the Weta Cave part of Weta Workshop, the conceptual design and physical manufacturing facility created by Peter Jackson, Richard Taylor, Tania Rodger, and Jamie Selkirk. The kitschy attraction has loads of trinkets from Weta’s impressive repertoire. There is also a behind-the-scenes movie that captures the innovative culture that Weta instills in its workers and how that feeds into Wellington itself.

Nearby, we conclude our tour at the world-famous **The Roxy Cinema**, an old movie house that was transformed by Weta Studios into a sci-fi-meets-the-1930s complex. An impressive bar upstairs makes for a great pre-movie drink, while downstairs, diners can enjoy cuisine at the in-house restaurant **Coco** where an internationally inspired menu is meant to provide a fun, lasting experience. “We designed the menu to remind our visitors about the golden age of cinema in the 1930s, when people would go and get all dressed up, and make an entire evening out of it,” says the general manager.

At night, Wellington transforms and the leisurely daytime streets become rife with action. People eat outside, bars overflow with men and women, singles and couples, both gay and straight, walking hand-in-hand along the cobblestoned streets. It all creates an exciting scene that has me ready to take it on.

My evening begins with a meal at **Martin Bosley’s Yacht Club Restaurant**. Using nothing but fresh seafood and produce, the restaurant, located right on the water, has panoramic views of the harbor. I have the degustation menu. With each bite you can tell just how inspired Chef Bosely is by the smells and tastes of Wellington. I excitedly nosh on a duo of tartar: John Dory, chilled crab bisque, saffron milk wafer, red capsicum gélee, then tuna, trough clam, soubise, and earl grey tea powder. When I finish, I even contemplate stealing some of my dining partner’s food.

Postprandial pleasure awaits in Wellington’s significant gay scene. In addition to the annual Miss Drag Wellington contest and numerous proactive organizations, the city also has four fulltime gay bars. While I am visiting here on a Wednesday, I unsuccessfully try to experience the scene. At around midnight, I attempt to grab a drink at, what I am told, is place to get a great gin and tonic and meet some cute boys, **S&M**. But when I walk in the main door, which said that the bar was open until “late,” I am promptly told to leave because the bar is closed. Soon I ask a local girl where I can find a gay bar that is open. “Why would you want to go to a gay bar there are plenty of great places that everyone hangs out right here?” she says. I take her advice and settle in at a table at **The Black Sparrow**, a hipster-filled bar that makes you feel like you’re in the 1930s. The uniformed and mustached mixologists are drop-dead cute and easily persuade me to go with the bartender’s choice. “I like gin,” I say, and after ten minutes of him adding various liquors and potions, he hands me a lovely aromatic drink.

Of course, floating from that delicious cocktail, I enlist the help of a fel-

low gay who was in the bar with me. “I think I know a place that will be open,” he says. He leads me through the still active Cuba Street, and then we walk down quieter and emptier streets. We arrive at a black building with no name on the façade, and I feel like this could go two ways: either he’s about to kill me or he’s taking me to the most exclusive party ever. “It’s a bathhouse,” he says. And my shy American-ness is visible through the panic on my face. “Tonight it’s my friend’s party, though,” he says. His friend’s birthday party was taking place in an event space within the **Emperor’s Bathhouse** called **After5**. Event management duo Andy Harness and Cathy Sheat of Tomboi Productions wanted to create an event space for the community. The “club” is open late nights on Fridays and Saturdays and features strong drinks, bumping music, and a flirty crowd.

For the final leg of my trip, I take a quick Air New Zealand flight from the capital to the cosmopolitan city of Auckland. I check into the **Langham Hotel**, the only five-star hotel in the city, and quickly forego my ultra-posh room and head upstairs to the spa where I take a seemingly endless dip in the heated rooftop pool, the only one in the city, and go for a masterful facial at the Chuan Spa. Feeling completely recharged, I actually physically bump into American actress Eva Longoria who is also enjoying the facilities. Now, I know I’m in the best hotel in Auckland. My Zen is short lived, however, as I have booked a **SailNz experience**.

At the Viaduct Harbour I check-in for my sailing expedition where I’ll be taking an America’s Cup yacht onto Waitemata Harbour. As the wind and rain begin to pick up and more and more families and couples begin to queue, I contemplate just how good an idea this activity really was, but once we get moving and the group bonds over our more-than-stellar grinding skills it becomes a thrilling experience. It is also a brilliant way to orient yourself to the city. The two-hour tour is cold and wet, but worth the experience of being on a ship that’s usually reserved for millionaires. As the sky frames the winter-white sail and the clouds weave through the Auckland skyline, I can’t help but feel blessed.

In the morning, I am told that I am meeting a “true character” named Adam. Not entirely sure what that means, I head eagerly to the lobby to see what’s in store for me. I see a man in a red shirt and red pants, umbrella, and long black hair with aviators, and I am fairly sure this is who I am supposed to be meeting. Adam Taylor works for the **Auckland Museum** and even though it’s a work day he has decided to be my official gay tour guide. We begin with a trip to, where else, the wine producing sanctuary of **Waiheke Island**. “This is New Zealand honey,” Taylor says as we walk onto the ramp of the ferry that will take us there. “At 9:30 in the morning you most certainly can have a glass of bubbles...I’ll get it.” As we drink our morning bubbles and the water from the ferry laps onto the boat sprinkling our faces, we soon arrive on the island and are greeted by the owner of **Ananda Tours** Jenny McDonald. The short, natural-looking former-midwife is more than happy to show us around the island and take us to the various vineyards and sites. Our first stop is **Mudbrick Vineyard and Restaurant** where we sample various vintages. While the wine is beyond stellar, we can’t help but admire the stunning scenery. Rolling green hills with wild, blue flowers fall into the water, and as we stand, glasses in hand, I fake propose to Adam so, just maybe, I could be married here. As the day progresses, we tour beautiful sculpture gardens like the **Dead Dog Bay Sculpture Gardens and Momo Gallery** and more vineyards. Meanwhile, McDonald is happy to find out that I am looking for the gays on the island, and excitedly tells me about a brand-new hotel and restaurant that’s owned by gay couple Jonathan Rutherford Best and Andrew Glenn. The three-room hotel and restaur-

ant **The Oyster Inn** is still in construction when I visit and the hard hats are scrambling around the building to open the hotel within the month. As we taste four different types of French fries, Glenn insists that we give him our opinion, “number one definitely” we say in unison. With details down to the type of potatoes served, you can expect great things from this beachside attraction. Another notable gay-owned resort on the island is the **Boatshed Inn** that sits comfortably on top of a hill overlooking the “nudie beach.” The nautical-themed rooms are gorgeous and completely unique—yes they are boatsheds.

While Taylor is officially off tour-guide duty he is concerned that I didn’t get to see what “the real Auckland is like,” so he takes me out to dinner along **Ponsenby Road**, an area as famous for fine dining and shops as it is for its late-night hookers. It is still early evening so we grab a seat on the sidewalk at one of Taylor’s favorite haunts, **S.P.Q.R.** Over more bubbles, we nosh on super-fresh antipasto and I ask him what it’s like being gay in Auckland. “It’s pretty laid back actually. I mean there is always going to be those who don’t approve, but I find Auckland a very tolerant place to be gay,” he says, taking a bite out of the melt-in-your-mouth mozzarella.

That night, I am lucky to visit the **Auckland Museum** on a special occasion where most of the patrons are listening to a discussion about the state of the media in a gorgeous top-floor event space and others are chilling to the sounds of local artists in a wing of the museum. I get an exclusive walk through the museum with Taylor who is most excited about showing off his heritage. We stand barefoot in an intricately crafted maori, and he points to the various stories that are carved in the red wood. “It’s here,” he says pointing out to the museum, “where exciting stories of the Pacific, New Zealand’s people...are told within a memorial dedicated to those who have sacrificed their lives for our country.” We hear music being played in the wing as Auckland’s people walk happily around with glasses of wine in their hands, and we pass carvings, buildings, canoes and *taonga* (treasures) of the Maori. The museum then shows the cultural diffusion that occurred between the Maori and the New Zealanders of European descent. And Taylor points to a staging of a young boy’s bedroom filled with old playing cards and toys and says that he had all that stuff. After exploring, we grab a drink, and listen to some awesome local talent.

“Back to Ponsenby, it’s Thursday night Joe, something will be open,” Taylor says, and we return to the road that is now filled with Auckland’s night owls. Our destination is **Family** where we quickly claim an outdoor table and chat with some scantily dressed locals who are very curious about my experience so far in New Zealand. Soon, late-night bubbles turn to early morning tequila and unlike Wellington, things in Auckland stay open late. While the crowd is small, most Aucklanders head out on Saturdays, the intimacy allows us to quickly become friends as we take the rainbow-colored dance floor by storm. Nearby is another bar called **Urge**. It’s a leather/bear bar that is apparently quite packed for a shirtless Thursday event, but I’ve out bubbled myself, a feat I didn’t think was possible, and head home.

The next morning, I meet my leather daddy biker from **Bularangi Motorbikes New Zealand**, and I experience Auckland in a completely new way. As we ride back, I close my eyes and smell the fresh air mixed with the scent of my biker’s leather jacket, and I find myself filled with an overwhelming gratitude, an inner calm, and a feeling of connectedness. These two large islands in the Southern Hemisphere that make up New Zealand brought me on a whirlwind tour that I won’t soon forget. “Soon, and yet not soon, for the time was vast, the Sky and Earth began to yield,” I think to myself. And soon, I will be back. ■



new zealandresources

NELSON AND MARLBOROUGH EAT & DRINK

The Boatshed Café, 350 Wakefield Quay, Nelson. Tel: 03-546-9783. This ocean-to-table restaurant jets out onto the water and overlooks Nelson's gorgeous Haven. www.boatshedcafe.co.nz

Brancott Estates, 2 Vineyard Rd Blenheim, Marlborough. Tel: 03-520-6975. This vineyard is Marlborough wine country at its best with gorgeous sauvignon blanc, stunning food, and a conservation effort to boot, it's definitely worth the detour. www.brancottestates.com

Morrison Street Café, 244 Hardy St, Nelson. Tel: 03-548-8110. One of the country's most award-winning cafés, it has won the best café in Nelson nine out of ten years. Perfect spot for a lunch or coffee in the center of town. www.morrisonstreetcafe.co.nz

Yonder Star Yacht Cruise, Tel: 1-800-YONDER. Book this luxury yacht and set sail for a romantic voyage on Nelson Haven where a chef cooks up a top-notch meal. www.yonderstarcharters.co.nz

SHOP

Cubicle Nelson, 6 Nile Street West, Nelson. Tel: 02-1110-3779. This gay-owned design shop is a the perfect place to pick up some unique gifts that will surely impress someone back home. www.cubiclenelson.com

Jens Hansen, 320 Trafalgar Square Nelson. Tel: 03-548-0640. Same-sex couples come far and wide to get a wedding ring designed by the famed jewelry designer responsible for the ring in *The Lord of the Rings*. www.jenshansen.com

STAY

The Bay of Many Coves, Picton. Tel 03-5799-771. This secluded resort located in the Queen Charlotte Sound is a destination unto itself with private rooms and a stunning restaurant. Rooms from \$420. www.bayofmanycoves.co.nz

Nelson Monaco Hotel and Resort, 6 Point Rd Monaco, Nelson. Tel: 03-547-8233. This hotel that is setup like a small village and is a great place to overnight in Nelson. Each room comes with its own kitchen and living room. Rooms from \$99. www.monacoresort.co.nz

WELLINGTON EAT & DRINK

The Black Sparrow, 10 A Majoribanks, Wellington. Tel: 04-384-7657. A hipster-filled, 1930s-inspired cocktail bar where adorable mixologists craft handy cocktails to get your night in Wellington into full swing. www.theblacksparrow.co.nz

Emperor's Bathhouse, 5 Wigan St., Tel: 04-385-4212. You can take a dip in their pool or do whatever you want, but if you're looking for a late-night drink head on over to the After 5 event space. www.emperorsbathhouse.co.nz

Martin Bosley's Yacht Club Restaurant, 103 Oriental Parade, Wellington. Tel: 04-920-8302. Chef Martin Bosley's strong focus on fresh produce and seafood easily stands out with his fresh flavors and gorgeous presentations. www.martin-bosley.com

STAY

Museum Hotel Wellington, 90 Cable St., Wellington. Tel: 04-802-8900. This hotel located right near the world-famous Te Papa museum has a stunning art collection and awesome apartment-style rooms. Rooms from \$200. www.museumhotel.co.nz



Auckland

Photo: Bob McCree

EXPLORE

Flat Earth New Zealand Experience, 101 Wakefield St., Wellington. Tel: 04-977-5805. With the recent release of Peter Jackson's *The Hobbit*, tourists are sci-fi re-energized and ready to check out all the movie-set locations throughout Wellington and see the Weta Workshop. www.flatearth.co.nz

The Roxy Cinema, 5 Wigan Rd., Wellington. Tel: 04-388-5555. This beautifully restored theater housed the premiere of the latest Hobbit movie and is a treat to walk around thanks to the unique details designed by Weta Workshops. Don't miss the downstairs restaurant Coco. www.roxycinema.co.nz

Te Papa, 55 Cable St., Wellington. Tel: 04-381-7000. This world-famous museum houses an impressive collection Maori items as well as a natural history section (be sure to see the world's only displayed giant squid). www.tepapa.govt.nz

AUCKLAND EAT & DRINK

Family Bar, 270 Karangahape Rd., Auckland. Tel: 09-309-0213. This LGBT bar packs in big sound and a fun crowd. www.familybar.co.nz

Mudbrick Vineyard and Restaurant, 126 Church Bay Rd. Waiheke Island, Auckland. Tel: 09-372-9050. Stop by and experience a gorgeous wine pairing and pick up some great local gifts like Waiheke olive oil. www.mudbrick.co.nz



Nelson

Photo: Scott Verming

S.P.Q.R., 150 Ponsonby Rd., Auckland. Tel: 09-360-1710. Located on the ultra-hip and ultra-gay street of Ponsonby this Italian restaurant has the perfect sidewalk seats to take in all the sights of sound of alterna-Auckland. www.spqrnz.co.nz

Urge, 490 Karangahape Rd. Auckland. Tel: 09-307 2155. This bear/leather bar packs-in a furry crowd with special themed nights. www.urgebar.co.nz

STAY

Boatshed Inn, Cnr Tawa and Little O, Huia St., Waiheke, Auckland. Tel: 09-372-3242. This gorgeous hillside resort overlooks the majestic bay where nautical-themed rooms are in actual converted boatsheds. Rooms from \$539. www.boatshed.co.nz

Langham Hotel, 83 Symonds Street, Auckland. Tel: 09-379-5132. The only five-star hotel in Auckland that embodies luxury. Don't miss the killer breakfast and the too-good-to-be-true spa. Rooms from \$157. www.langhamhotels.co.nz

The Oyster Inn, 124 Ocean Vice Road., Waiheke, Auckland. Tel: 09-372-2222. This gay-owned three-room hotel and restaurant is a beachside oasis is a brilliant hideaway. Rooms from \$285. www.theoysterinn.co.nz

DISCOVER

Ananda Tours, Tel: 09-372-7530. See all of Waiheke Island with a personal guide who will take you to various vineyards and hotspots. www.ananda.co.nz

Auckland Museum, Museum Circuit, Auckland. Tel: 09-309-0443. This impressive museum not only houses huge collections from the Maori people and from New Zealand's colonizers, but also the natural environment. Don't miss the shows and special events that occur throughout the year. www.aucklandmuseum.com

Bularangi Motorbikes New Zealand, Tel: 07-863-6069. Hop on the back of a Harley Davidson and cruise around the outskirts of Auckland. www.motorbikesnz.co.nz

SailNz Experience, Viaduct Harbor. Auckland Tel: 09-359-5987. This once-in-a-lifetime experience aboard an America's Cup boat is a participatory sail around the Waitemata Harbour where you experience Auckland in a whole new perspective. www.explorenz.co.nz

