

Treasure Island



New Zealand's Waiheke Island is an oasis of great wines and dining, with stunning surrounds. Better still, it's an easy trip from Auckland.

Words Simone Madden-Grey

Sitting in the Hauraki Gulf, shielded from blustery easterly and westerly winds, Waiheke Island is less than 40 minutes from downtown Auckland. Rugged hilly terrain on the island affords ample opportunity for walking and cycling, while pristine beaches beckon, and luxury accommodation and spas offer retreat and revival. Then there are the vineyards dotted across the island, providing the perfect excuse for vinous exploration. A short ferry ride across Auckland harbour is the ideal way to ease into the pace of Waiheke. Not far from the ferry terminal is the main town of Oneroa, with a number of great spots for relaxing. Join the queue at Double Shot Espresso for some of the best coffee in town, grab some fish and chips at The Local or Cove Bites & Brews, and take in the view over Oneroa Bay before stopping by the Waiheke Wine Centre to get acquainted with the wines of the island. Wineries to visit include Mudbrick, Man O'War, Stonyridge, and Tantalus Estate, to name a few. Not far from Oneroa, the highly awarded Mudbrick Vineyard and Restaurant offers the complete package with a cellar door, accommodation, a bar, bistro and fine-dining restaurant. After a tasting at the cellar door, grab a bottle of

your favourite wine, order a gourmet platter and find a chair on the terrace to take in the spectacular views across the Gulf. If getting away from it all is the goal, take the trip to Man O'War towards the eastern end of the island. Make your way along the winding gravel road to discover some of the best wines on Waiheke. The flagship range, with its battle-inspired names, is an excellent example of the quality produced here. While best known for its outstanding red wines, Man O'War's whites and Blanc de Blancs are also very good. Be sure to taste the Warspite blend of cabernet franc, merlot and malbec, which is produced from fruit grown on the sparsely populated Ponui Island just four nautical miles from Waiheke. Secluded and serene, the cellar door at Man O'War is set in bushland facing the ocean. Tastings are free, the team is friendly and knowledgeable, and there are seats along the verandah or tables on the lawn out front. It's the ideal spot to enjoy their generous tasting platters, but be warned - time has a habit of disappearing here as wine is sipped and dazzling views are committed to memory. Stonyridge in Onetangi Valley is renowned for its red wine quality, particularly the cabernet-dominant blend Larose, which did much to bring Waiheke to international attention. The Verandah Café overlooking the vines offers excellent food, with a selection of

wines from Waiheke and the other regions Stonyridge sources its fruit from. An informal cellar door allows visitors to taste at the bar or grab a seat outdoors and lounge on beanbags among the olive trees, soaking up the relaxed atmosphere at this winery. Also in Onetangi Valley, Tantalus Estate houses the winery that is home to the highly awarded merlot-dominant 2014 Évoque, as well as the Alibi Brewing Company. Upstairs in the light-filled cellar door and restaurant, visitors can book in for a fine-dining experience after a tasting or head downstairs



Waiheke Island.



Above left: Fine dining at Tantalus Estate. above: Stonyridge in the Onetangi Valley. left: Mudbrick Vineyard and restaurant.

to the cool beer lounge inspired by the Prohibition era. Here, next to the brewery, guests can enjoy a range of craft beers while tucking into wagyu beef sliders, truffle fries and Buffalo wings. While in Onetangi, be sure to book in at Casita Miro. Ask for a table overlooking the vines and settle in for an excellent meal and stunning views out towards Onetangi Bay. Light and airy, the restaurant is styled to reflect the Spanish and Mediterranean menu inspiration. Jamon hangs over the bar, and wrought-iron arches frame the view over the vines and on to the sea or out to the Gaudi-inspired mosaics in the garden. Start the experience with a glass of the house speciality, the fortified Madame Rouge. Wine tastings are also available for visitors, who can choose a tutored tasting of five Miro wines matched with food, or enjoy the wines over a meal in the restaurant.

Visit here in the warmer months and a dip in the sea is a must. The waters here are mesmerising as they sparkle under the sun. On the northern side of the island Oneroa, Palm Beach and Onetangi beaches offer great swims at all tides and the perfect goodbye before catching the ferry back to the city. ●