



Wenches on adventures

KIERAN SCOTT

Four days in and around New Zealand's Bay of Islands included wining, dining, travelling and shopping. Liz Swanton is impressed.

Two single beds marginally wider than the boxes we anticipate occupying when we're past caring came as quite a surprise, but it provided a giggle as we flipped at regular intervals through a less than restful night.

It was the only downside in a four-day 'quickie' to New Zealand, a chance to spend quality time with an old friend and check out the beautiful Bay of Islands.

We'd dubbed ourselves 'wenches on adventures', so we had to live up to it. A little red car helped – and a commitment to the things that wenches do – wine, dine, travel, shop.

Our first tasks were officially undertaken in Auckland's Viaduct Basin with a meal at Mecca, one of a small chain of Auckland eateries that serves good food and coffee all day.

Fresh fish and a local sav blanc set the tone as we plotted our moves before hitting the sack at the Heritage Hotel, a short stroll from Waitemata Harbour and the America's Cup Village.

Setting off from this tastefully renovated Art Deco former department store that now offers all you'd expect from a big city hotel, we were soon heading for the far north-east coast, one of the most beautiful and historic parts of the country.

'It was instantly clear how tough it would be to be a teetotaller in New Zealand'

Passing herds of smug looking sheep and cattle – and why wouldn't they be in this green paradise – we arrived at the central Bay of Islands' town of Kerikeri. Driving into the 'CBD' past the orange groves, it was instantly clear how tough it would be to be a teetotaller in New Zealand – there are wineries wherever you look, and Kerikeri is no exception.

There are five wineries here and we settled on visiting Marsden Estate, partly because of its links with the father of the local wine industry

(Samuel Marsden introduced grapes to New Zealand with 100 plantings at Kerikeri in 1819) but mostly because we'd heard the food was good.

Tick that one off. The red curry with prawns, with prawn and sesame bruschetta on the side, all washed down with a stunning pinot gris was voted one of the best meals we'd ever had in our lives – a not inconsiderable period of time for either of us 'girls'.

We didn't bother with dessert because next up was Makana Confections for seriously decadent handmade chocolates, followed by Get Fudged for equally decadent you-know-what.

We did some sampling – all in the name of research, of course – before some concentrated retail therapy at Possum Trendz (that unique Kiwi combination of possum, merino and silk works just as well in Aussie winters) and Keri Blue for its gorgeous ceramics. ►

ABOVE: America's Cup Sailing Experience, Auckland



GARETH EYRES



DESTINATION NORTHLAND



ADVENTURE FILMS

◀ There's shopping of a different sort a little further down the road, at the Stone Store, New Zealand's oldest surviving commercial building. Designed by a missionary and built by an ex-convict from Australia, it still operates today, selling pieces of the past. Memories of childhood when clothes were hung with wooden pegs, mums wore aprons and filled kids' lunchboxes with homemade goodies (mmm, Edmonds ginger crunch slice).

We head for Paihia, for an overnight stop at the luxurious Waterfront Suites, complete with 180deg. views of the islands, and a visit to the Waitangi Treaty Grounds, where the treaty between the British settlers and the traditional Maori owners was signed on 6 February 1840.

Dinner that night at Swordy's, the bistro at the Bay of Islands' Swordfish Club. Billed as the second oldest game fishing club in the world, it serves up generous portions of good bistro fare and great local wine – all overseen by a cluster of stuffed game fish attached around the walls. Somewhat disconcerting when you're effectively tucking into their relatives.

Our last day on the road would

TOP: The Waitemata Harbour is Auckland city's most beautiful feature – a day sail is essential in any itinerary.

LEFT: Two of New Zealand's most significant historic buildings are situated in the Kerikeri Basin.

RIGHT: The waka 'Ngatokimatawhaorua' can be seen at Waitangi in the Bay of Islands.

be a round trip from Paihia to Ahipara on the west coast, and back again. It was cold, wet and blustery, an atmospheric way to see this wonderful wild country.

Why this cross-country trek in such conditions? We had heard tales of a beautiful lodge at the southern end of Ninety Mile Beach and a friend had phoned ahead with an introduction.

We discovered genial host Ron Adams and his idyllic hideaway with its stunning views across the water to the land the Kiwis call the 'west island'. Time constraints prevented us from laying our heads in the place once occupied by Scottish funny man, Billy Connolly, just one of many who have enjoyed the tranquillity (and Ron's famous tua tua chowder). But it's first on the list for the next trans-Tasman tour. •

TRAVEL FACTS:

✈ Getting there

Qantas, Air NZ, Jetstar and Pacific Blue fly daily from most capital cities to Auckland.

🍴 Being there

Heritage Auckland: [📍] www.heritagehotels.co.nz; Mecca: [📍] www.meccacafe.com; 85-87 Customs Street West, Viaduct Basin; Marsden Estate: [📍] www.marsdenestate.co.nz; Wiroa Road, Kerikeri; Makana Confections: [📍] www.makana.co.nz; Keri Blue: [📍] www.keriblu.co.nz; Get Fudged: www.getfudged.co.nz; both at 560 Kerikeri Road, Kerikeri. Possum Trendz: [📍] www.possumtrendz.co.nz; Stone Store: [📍] www.historicplaces.org.nz; The Waterfront Suites, Bay of Islands: [📍] www.thewaterfrontpaihia.co.nz; Waitangi Treaty Grounds: [📍] www.waitangi.net.nz; 1 Tau Henare Drive, Paihia. Taharangi Marie/Ninety Mile Beach Lodge: [📍] www.90mile.co.nz