

Murder, mayhem and an aquatic paradise to boot!

by LIZ SWANTON

CRUISING out of Opuia Harbour, I know I would kill to have this view – but as it turns out, I would not be alone.

Our skipper Robbie Blakely takes great delight as he points out one of the first sights on our Bay of Islands cruise – the opulent waterfront mansion built by Mr Asia drug syndicate boss Terry Clark.

Known for his blood-thirsty reign of drugs, sex and murder, Clark's former home has one of the best positions on Okiato Point, the original capital of New Zealand, with panoramic views of the waterways we are about to explore.

Ironically, one of our next sights is Waitangi, where the famous peace treaty between the Maoris and the British Government was signed in 1840.

There's no doubt the Bay of Islands has a very long history of murder and mayhem, yet today the famous Treaty Grounds are just one of many beautiful spots around this aquatic paradise where peace and tranquility reign.

The area was named by Captain Cook in 1769 and the first missionaries arrived in 1814.

All that history – and a few ancient legends – come alive as Robbie gives us a running commentary while the good ship *Ipipiri* motors past settlements such as Paihia, Kerikeri and Russell, and then out towards the open sea to meander through the wider island group.

Some of the earliest Maori/European clashes occurred on some islands, including Te Pahi Island where 60 Maoris were killed in revenge after their chief was wrongly accused of being responsible for a massacre of white invaders.

History isn't all the Bay of Islands has to offer, however. With a milder climate than Auckland, 240km south, the region has become one of the country's most popular fishing, sailing and tourist destinations.

Even famous American author Zane Grey came regularly for big game fishing in the 1930s.

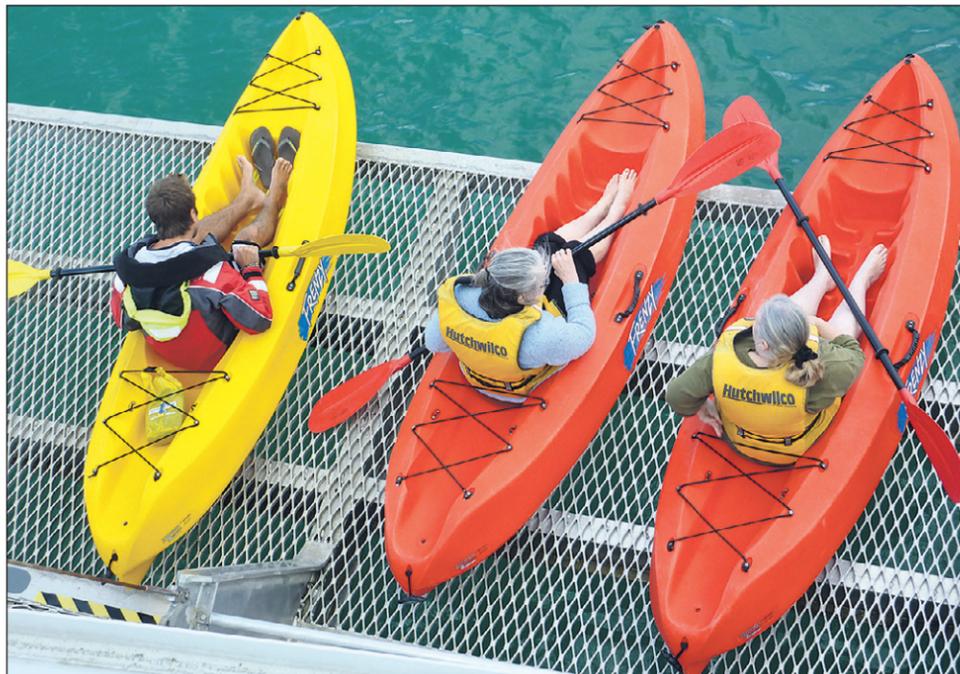
Fishing is not on our agenda though. Instead we watch as pods of dolphins make regular appearances around the boat, leaping ecstatically from the blue waters, dashing ahead of our bow wave and disappearing just as quickly.

We've barely had time to swallow the last crumbs of a sumptuous baked-on-board afternoon tea when the team announces we are going to explore pretty Motuarohia Island.

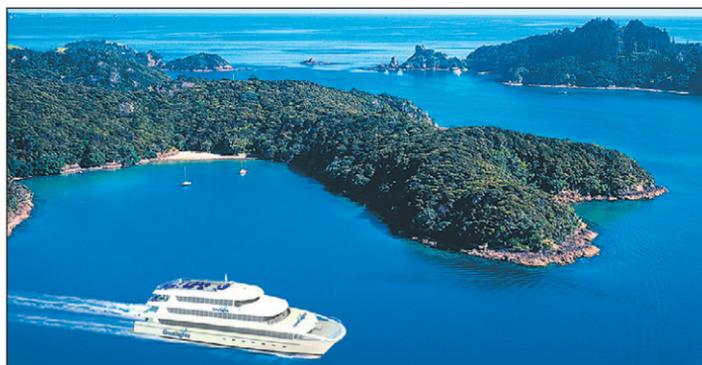
There are choices to be made: kayaking, bushwalking and snorkelling, or you can stay on board.

I'm cranky. Memo to self: Read all the information. There were no swimmers or shorts in my overnight bag!

I settle for a walk along the scrunching



ABOVE – Kayakers prepare to set off.



LEFT – The Ipipiri at sea.

A SINGLE night aboard is from NZ\$379 per person which includes deluxe cabin with ensuite, meals and complimentary snorkelling and kayaking equipment. The Ipipiri's season is from September to April. A special offer of \$299 per person applies if you book by September 1 and travel from September 1, 2013, to January 31, 2014. Two-night tours are occasionally available, from NZ\$499 per

person. The next one is scheduled for April 10-11, 2014. There is no wheelchair access on board the boat. – (64) 9-402-7421, www.overnightcruise.co.nz

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shell grit and sand of the beach, watching with envy as the kayakers paddled waters that were mirror still.

Back on board, it was time to enjoy the sunset and a final cruise to our overnight mooring, with drinks and a platter of cheese, meats and crackers on deck. An excellent wine list was on offer, courtesy of the expertise of cruise co-ordinator Chris Swannell.

Dinner was a relaxed affair: our choice of a couple of entrees followed by a buffet for main and dessert.

Wishing I had walked harder and faster while ashore, it was hard to keep the portion sizes under control. The food was delicious, much of it locally-grown, and so with

a private promise to ramp up the exercise the next day, I happily tucked into seconds.

We anchored for the night in a sheltered bay off the fabulously named Urupukapuka Island.

With clear sky and a trillion stars reflected in the glassy waters below, there was no way I was pulling down the bedroom blinds. The gentle rocking sent me quickly to sleep and I didn't stir until the sun rose the next morning.

A sumptuous breakfast on deck, a detour to see yet another pod of happy dolphins, and all too soon we were motoring back to Opuia. My heart still yearns to discover more of the islands so I will definitely return.

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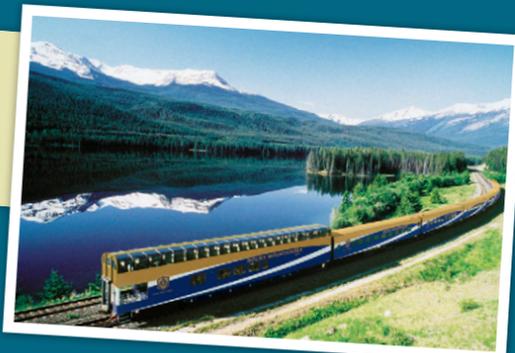
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