



A LOCAL IN THE CITY OF SAILS

words by BEN MACK
photos by BEN MACK & FEROUZ KHALIL

More than one-third of New Zealand's population lives in Auckland, and it's easy to see why. Who wouldn't want to live in a city that's consistently ranked among the top 10 most liveable in the world?

Liveability is something the "City of Sails" has in spades. Mosey down any tree-lined street or waterside walkway to encounter some of the friendliest people you will ever find in a big city, in a place that's also among the cleanest cities in the world.

The friendliness is one reason why Taylor Barrett chose to move to Auckland from New Zealand's South Island. A film and television actor (with roles in *Ash vs Evil Dead* and *Dear Murderer* among others), he says Auckland has no shortage of activities for all tastes and interests: "There's actually a lot to do in this city. It's great for gigs and shows."

There's certainly no lack of venues, perhaps the most famous being the Civic Theatre.

Located next to the equally famous Aotea Square in the middle of the central city, it's the largest atmospheric theatre in Australasia and one of the biggest theatres in the Southern Hemisphere. Built in 1929 to resemble a Moorish palace (with an Indian foyer), parts of the theatre were featured in Peter Jackson's 2005 *King Kong* remake. It's also open most days, so there's no need to buy a ticket to a play or opera to take a peek inside.

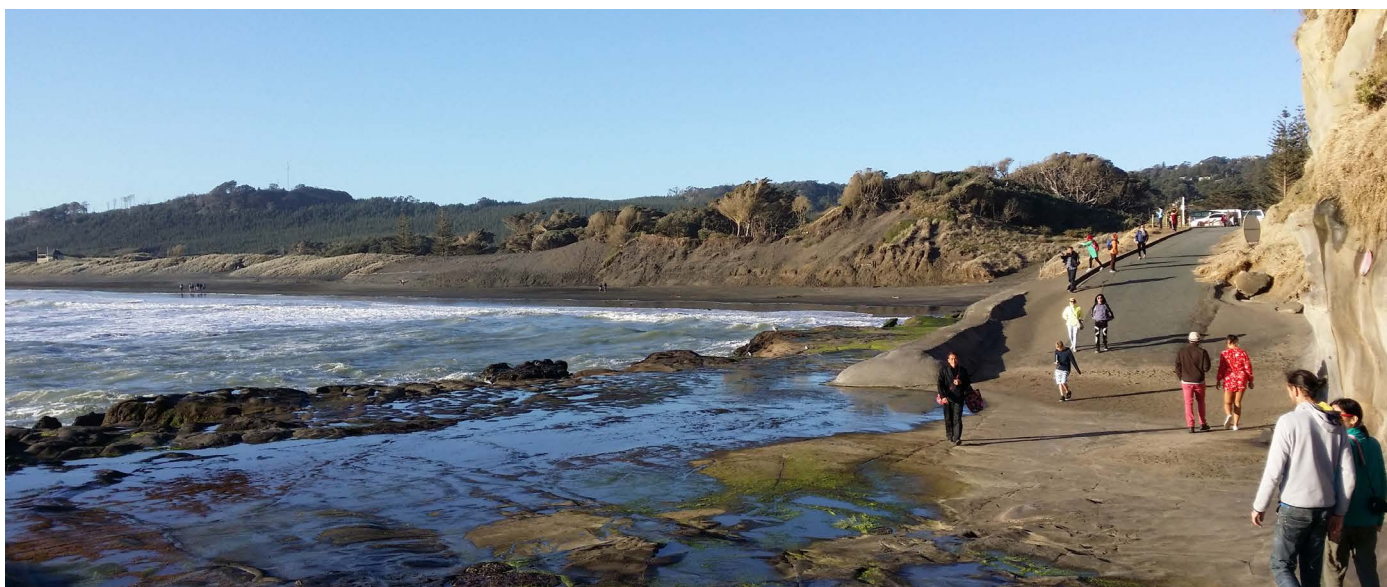
No visit to Auckland is complete without a walk through the happening Viaduct Harbour, just a few minutes from the Civic. An area along the bright blue waters of the Waitemata Harbour, the Viaduct used to be a collection of somewhat run-down industrial docks but has since been gentrified into a conglomeration of upscale shops, restaurants, hotels, bars, cafes, nightclubs and more. It also has some of the most spectacular views of the city, and more than a few of the sailboats that give Auckland its nickname.

Not far from the Viaduct is one of Barrett's favourite restaurants. There are many

Japanese eateries in Auckland, but what sets Tanuki's Cave apart is its unique setting. The best way to get inside the dark, wood-accented dining room is up a flight of metal stairs outside an old brick building and walk right through the kitchen. The food is just as unique: grilled yakitori skewers in a dizzying variety of meats, sumptuous kushiage (deep fried vegetables and meat dipped in breadcrumbs), hearty donburi (meat atop a bowl of steamed rice), and of course the ubiquitous sake to wash it all down. The chicken tenderloin with cheese yakitori are especially recommended, and at \$5.20 for two large pieces that are deceptively filling, quite a bargain. It's like a little bit of Tokyo at the bottom of the world.

As with any big city, each neighbourhood of Auckland has its own unique flavour. Barrett says his favourite is Grey Lynn, a quiet neighbourhood many artists and other creatives call home.

"Grey Lynn's got it all," he said. "My go-to café there is Occam. There's lovely staff there, and they've got the best mochas in Auckland."



Auckland's waterfront dining scene

Another Grey Lynn café is Kokako. Like Occam, its exterior doesn't look like much, but its coffee and cakes (which are made fresh on-site) are well worth the visit. It also does great brunches (with dishes such as chopped avocado on rye sandwiches with edamame, buffalo feta, pickled onion, soft-boiled egg, purple basil, and mint sherry vinegar vincotto) for under \$20 per person.

Just down the hill from Grey Lynn lies Ponsonby Road, perhaps the hippest place in all New Zealand – and quite possibly south of the Equator. Once a series of ageing bars and tattoo parlours, the street today is Auckland's answer to Portland, Berlin and Shoreditch, where bearded young urbanites in flannel mix with out-of-towners and others hoping to simply absorb all the coolness. People-watching is the name of the game here, and one of the best places to do that – and to experience what Ponsonby is all about – is at Burger Burger. The name and the décor inside the restaurant (located in a collective space known as Ponsonby Central, where artists sell their wares alongside barbers specialising in beard trims) are simple, but the

food is anything but. The lamb burger with blue cheese and fresh vegetables – washed down with an ice-cold drink such as fresh New Zealand milk – might just be the most ingenious usage of the meat that's a staple of the Kiwi diet. Straddling the Tasman Sea and the Pacific Ocean, you're never far from the water no matter where you are in Auckland. While a lot of the city's beaches are understandably packed when the weather's nice, thankfully there's a number of options for those looking to get away from the big city bustle and indulge their wild side.


One of the best options is Muriwai, a sleepy community about an hour's drive west of the city. With some of the best surfing around, its large, sandy beaches are also perfect for taking a stroll, building sand castles, or simply enjoying time with friends and family. It's also great for bird-watching (particularly gannets), and it's not uncommon to see a whale or dolphin. To boot, it also has some of the most spectacular sunsets you'll see anywhere.

"You've got some beautiful beaches at Muriwai," says Barrett. "It's stunning."

Tama Jarman is another actor (appearing in TV shows including *Westside*, *Operation Erebus* and *Hillary*) who calls Auckland home. One of the best things about it, he says, is that there's something to do for every taste and interest, no matter how specialised: "The city's collective," he explains. "It's where the work is, but it's so creative."

That creativity is seen almost everywhere, from the on-field play of the legendary All Blacks rugby team at Eden Park to the unique setting of BaristaCats, a café on Queen Street in the city centre where visitors can pet several different cats as they sip their espressos (just don't feed the cats without asking first). Auckland's name is Tāmaki Makaurau in the native language of the Māori people, which means "the maiden sought by a hundred lovers."

Perhaps they could see the future when they came up with it.

 Fiji Airways flies direct to Auckland every day from Nadi, and direct from Suva on Mondays and Fridays.