

10 top Kiwi weekends

Summer's on its way, so what better time to start planning some great weekend getaways. Here's a selection from Renee Lang's new book *101 Must-Do Weekends*.

Coromandel goldmines

If you think your local watering hole gets a tad crowded on occasion, spare a thought for what it must have been like towards the end of the 19th century in Coromandel's Thames, on the southern shores of the Hauraki Gulf. Back then it was New Zealand's largest population centre, with 18,000 inhabitants, most of whom were regulars in the town's more than 100 hotels. It's a bit different now that only 7000 people live there. And not surprisingly the number of pubs has dropped accordingly.

The reason for the rise and fall of this – what is by today's standards – small town can be summed up in one word: gold.

The precious metal was first discovered in 1867 and led to the establishment of the Shotover Mine, which yielded in its time \$845 million worth of gold (at current metal prices).

Waihi went through a similar experience when the Martha vein was discovered in 1878 (the mine is still worked today as an open pit and is the largest known hard-rock mineral deposit in New Zealand).

Today you can try your hand at getting rich quick through official channels, such as at the Goldmine Experience in Thames, where a tour takes you through an operational 19th-century stamper battery (an early form of ore crusher consisting of many heavy stamper heads that are raised by water power and fall under gravity into a rotary bowl containing rock to be crushed) and into one of the richest goldmines of the era where you can try your luck at gold panning.

There's also plenty of scope for DIY activity on Rocky's Goldmine Trail, a three-hour walk through regenerating bush with refreshing swimming holes along the way plus vantage points overlooking many gorgeous views.

Further up the road, the town of Waihi promotes itself as having a heart of gold.

There are regular tours of the open pit goldmine and the town positively bristles with evidence of its golden past in the form of statues and monuments. And when you want to wash off the gold dust, you're not that far from some fabulous beaches.

Nearby you can head off to the Karangahake Gorge

where you'll find not only lots of goldmining history, but some beautiful natural surroundings, too. Much of it is accessible through a variety of walks including a former rail tunnel, complete with "windows", which must have witnessed plenty of comings and goings back when goldmining was in its heyday.



Above: The TranzAlpine en route between Christchurch and Greymouth. Left: Gold-mining relics in the Karangahake Gorge, Waihi.

and be rewarded at the end with a breathtaking view from the lookout at the top of the pit's north wall.

A walk upstream along the replanted banks of the Ohinemuri River and then up a track to the summit of Black Hill makes for another pleasant outing. Once again, a fabulous view awaits.

When you're ready to head out of town, the Orokawa and Homunga Walkway will lead you from the northern end of Waihi Beach to beautiful, secluded Orokawa Bay, taking in spectacular views of the Pacific Ocean and Waihi Beach. It takes about half an hour, and once you're there you can extend your walk by following the marker posts along a slightly tougher 1.5km bush track to the 28m high William Wright Falls.

It's also worth exploring the Karangahake Gorge via the Windows Walk, with its old mining tunnels, ore-roasting kilns and tramways. From the Karangahake Reserve, put your best foot forward on a swing bridge across the river. Once on the other side, take some time to absorb the spectacular scenery as well as a fascinating array of goldrush remnants.

Another excellent trip takes you up through Scotsmans Gully on to Karangahake mountain, where the No. 7 level track offers amazing views into the gorge. Follow the Dubbo 96 Track down to Dickey Flat, and from there follow the Waitawheta River back to the reserve. A five-hour round trip will take walkers to the top of the mountain for panoramic views over the surrounding countryside.

■ An edited extract from *101 Must-Do Weekends*, Renee Lang, published by Random House, available Friday. For more great weekend ideas, see www.aatravel.co.nz/101

Waihi

As we all know, it takes a bunch of motivated people to get things done. And they're definitely not short of motivation in the Bay of Plenty town of Waihi, which must be why they have such a splendid network of walking tracks that make this corner of the country a great place to spend a weekend.

You can choose between a gentle stroll or a more energetic experience – or perhaps both, depending on how much time and energy you have to spend. Given you're likely to be staying in or around the town, however, why not start off with an investigation of the Martha goldmine's Pit Rim Walkway? You'll learn lots about the mine's workings