



Jewel of the coast

Tony Wall finds plenty of reason to celebrate when he discovers Waihi Beach.

Friday, 2pm: It's our fifth wedding anniversary and we are heading to Waihi Beach for a weekend getaway, our first since the arrival of our newest addition, who we are calling by her American Indian name, Little One Tooth. We are hoping to relax, but also to dry out after weeks of depressing rain in Auckland, a city that feels as if it's inhabited by a million drowned rats. As we come over the hill from Waihi township, the clouds miraculously part and the sun comes out. Locals tell us that Waihi Beach enjoys its own micro-climate. It can be precipitating down in Waihi but glorious at the beach, they reckon.

2.30pm: We settle into our accommodation, the Waihi Beach Lodge, and are greeted by owners

Greg and Ali, who have kindly left a bottle of bubbles for us to celebrate our anniversary. Lovely touch. Our room, based on a nautical theme, is huge and has an inter-connecting door to the next room, where the mother-in-law will be joining us the following day to help look after One Tooth. We travel between Auckland and Tauranga a lot but have never taken the SH2 turnoff to this beach, so we know very little about it. Turns out, it's a gem. It's also home, apparently, to Helen Clark's parents and Ed Hillary's family has a bach here, as does John Kirwan. The best thing is that the property developers haven't got their greedy hands on the place – there are still dozens of old-style baches on primo sites. Visiting in winter is great, because you avoid the crowds of summer.

3pm: You may think me mad, but I am in my running gear jogging the couple of hundred metres from the lodge to the beach. I know, I should be halfway through the bubbles by now but I haven't done any exercise for a while and it seems like a good time to start. I come out of the sand dunes on to the beach and

am blown away. It's one of the best I've seen – 9km long from north to south – with beautiful white sand and a gentle surf. I am running along with Mayor Island to my left, Matakana Island straight ahead, Mt Maunganui in the distance, a cold, stiff breeze in my face and hard sand underfoot. I can't think of better running conditions – and I totally overdo it, ending up at the southern end of the beach at Bowentown. I end up having to walk-stammer back to the lodge.

4pm: We are at the Athenree Hot Springs and Holiday Park, the perfect place to soothe the aches from my run. Management kindly supplies a pair of swim nappies for One Tooth and she enjoys her first ever swim in the main swimming pool while the wife relaxes in the hot pool.

5pm: The wife goes to The Deli, a little gourmet food shop in the main block of shops, for tonight's meal. She comes back with pate straight out of the blender, brie, olives, bread, and some cold meat. Greg adds the finishing touches with some of his homemade chutney. We eat in and have an early night.

Saturday, 8am: Greg and Ali have put on a great spread – orange juice, tea, coffee, cereal, toast and muffins straight from the oven. I also order from their cooked menu: hotcakes and maple syrup.

This should set me up for the day. **10am:** I am flying solo on a Waihi gold mine tour, while the wife relaxes back at the lodge. The Martha mine, a vast open-pit mine – 960m long, 650m across

