



A cold, stiff breeze in my face and hard sand underfoot. I can't think of better running conditions – and I totally overdo it.

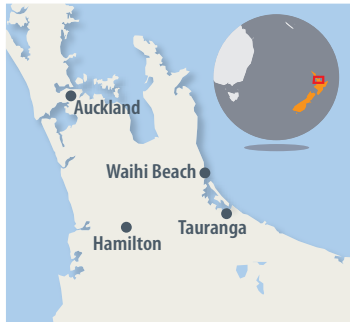


and 260m deep – looks like a huge open wound and dominates the town. Tour guide Murray Elliott is indirectly employed by the mine owner, American company Newmont, so while I feel like I'm getting a bit of a PR version, I can't help being impressed by some of what the company's done. It gives thousands of dollars to the local community every year and has planted thousands of native trees around the edges of the mine. The water in its tailings dam is clean enough that families of dotterels have even taken up residence on its banks.

12 noon: We have lunch at Flatwhite Cafe, right on the beach at the north end, where we have been joined by the mother-in-law. The seafood pizza is to die for and even in mid-winter the place is humming.

2pm: A bit of history now: we are at Athenree Homestead, built in the 1880s and lovingly restored by a local trust. The property was settled by Northern Ireland Protestants Hugh and Adela Stewart and the area became something of an outpost of the Orange Order. The dining room is dominated by an oil painting of Hugh's father, Mervyn, wearing his orange sash. Adela used to host all-night dances at the house

Far horizons: Looking towards Mayor Island. Photo: Peter Levshin



Fact file

Where to stay:
Waihi Beach Lodge, 170 Seaforth Rd, ph (07) 863-5818, www.waihibeachlodge.co.nz

Where to eat:
The Porch Kitchen and Bar, 23 Wilson Rd, (07) 863-1330. Flatwhite Cafe, 21 Shaw Rd, (07) 863-1346.

What to do:
Athenree Hot Springs, 1 Athenree Rd, ph (07) 863-5600, www.athenreehotsprings.co.nz
Bularangi Harley Davidson Tours, ph (07) 863-6069, www.bularangi.com
Waihi Gold Mine Tours, 126 Seddon St, (07) 863-9015, www.waihigoldminetours.co.nz
Athenree Homestead, 360 Athenree Rd, www.athenreehomestead.org.nz

Wide open: Waihi Beach, 9km of golden sand and gentle surf. Photo: Mike Hill

and went on to write a book about her experiences, *My Simple Life in New Zealand*. We are served Devonshire tea as we are given a run-down of the history of the place by trust member Barbara.

4pm: Back at the lodge, we relax for a few hours with glasses of bubbly, watching the light fade.

7pm: Dinner is at The Porch restaurant, famous for having last year won the Monteith's Beer and Wild Food Challenge with its wild boar dish. This year's entry is Wild Peter Rabbit – rabbit loin stuffed with prunes and wrapped in smoked bacon, and beer-braised rabbit leg on manuka honey-roasted kumara. I can attest that it goes down well with pilsner. The wife has the Angus beef fillet and is impressed and we share the speciality jelly tip icecream for dessert. This is a city-standard restaurant at a small beach – what more could you ask?

10pm: We are at the Waihi Hotel for a nightcap. Cheap beer, juke boxes and public bars are my weakness.

Sunday, 8am: Another great breakfast spread is provided by Greg and Ali, who have been perfect hosts. I am met at the lodge by Baz Howie of Bularangi Harley Tours of NZ, who has arrived astride a 1700cc Road King Classic. It is a beautiful sunny day and he takes me for a spin to the top of the hill at the Bowentown end of the beach. The view from there is breathtaking. We roar back to the other end of the beach, turning heads as we go. You can either rent your own Harley or go on chauffeured tours. It's a great way to see the country.

10am: Greg describes Waihi Beach as the "jewel in the crown" and I have to agree. It's easier to access than Coromandel beaches and is just as beautiful. It's time to head back to the city but we'll be taking the Waihi Beach turnoff again.



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