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Auckland: For Art & Design Lovers

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Before you run off to see New Zealand's ancient rock formations and dramatic waterways, set aside a few days to explore Auckland. Surrounded by a backdrop of dormant volcanoes and blue ocean, New Zealand's largest city is also its art and design hub. Whether you're interested in local contemporary art or learning about the country's indigenous Māori population, read on for a few of our favorite places to get a taste of Auckland's art and design scene.

The Auckland Art Gallery



The exterior of the recently remodeled [Auckland Art Gallery](#) is reason enough for a visit. The soaring new structure is made from local kauri wood and is meant to evoke a tree-like canopy. The Heritage Gallery highlights the Māori and New Zealand's history. Don't miss the striking 19th-century portraits of tattooed Māoris by Charles Goldie. The main building has works from Picasso, Cézanne, and Gauguin while the New Gallery focuses on contemporary Kiwi artists.

The Britomart



The [Britomart](#) is arguably central Auckland's most stylish neighborhood. Once a derelict port, this area is amid a revival, with a mix of restored historic buildings and new development projects. Visitors will find boutiques from local designers, such as [Karen Walker](#), and the elegant farm-to-table eatery [Ortolana](#); but art is a major component of the area's appeal. Te Ara Tāhuhu, the area's main walking street, is dotted with 10 cone-shaped lightwells that symbolize Auckland's major volcanoes. Look into them to peer into the Britomart train station below. The area is also home to [Britomart Project Space](#), a rotating exhibition space showcasing local and international artists.

Ponsonby



This stylish neighborhood is just a 10-minute Uber ride from downtown Auckland. Start at Ponsonby Central, an old printing warehouse that was converted into a retail space for shops and restaurants. Fuel up with a flat white and pain au chocolat at [Bread & Butter](#), and explore the pop-up shops selling homewares and jewelry. Nearby, don't miss the [Poi Room](#), a gallery that showcases art from New Zealand artists. Pop into [Coast](#) for handmade canvas bags, or [Taylor Road](#) for distinct housewares, such as enamel tea pots and ceramic serving bowls, in a serene, white-washed setting. And at [Annex](#), owner Anne Wilson creates paper dresses made from vintage maps.

The Auckland War Memorial Museum



Located on a dormant volcano high above downtown Auckland, the [Auckland War Memorial Museum](#) is housed in a neo-classical building that is impossible to miss. Come here to glimpse the world's largest collection of Māori and Polynesian artifacts. Highlights include Hotunui, an ornately carved Māori meeting house and a 19th century war canoe. If you prefer decorative arts, don't miss the ceramics and furniture. Families should head to the "Wild Child" area which features Rajah, a stuffed elephant.

The New Zealand Maritime Museum



New Zealand's history is closely tied with the sea, and the [New Zealand Maritime Museum](#) explores its maritime links through artifacts and art. Exhibits include antique maps as well as a replica of a New Zealand "bach" or beach house. Sailing fans should snap a photo in front of the NZL32, which won the 1995 America's Cup. A current exhibit showcases conceptual drawings of Auckland's waterfront by local architecture students.