



An Afternoon Artisan Tour of Waiheke Island in New Zealand

Priscilla Pilon August 7, 2017 Destinations, Travel

Traveling through [New Zealand](#) is always pure bliss – especially when taking the time to learn about the culture and the people of the many great islands and other destinations. *Waiheke Island* is home to 8,500 residents year round, and in the summer the population swells to 30,000 plus. There are 25 vineyards and 36 restaurants to explore. The island used to be a hippie and artists hangout (often compared to early San Francisco) until high the high-speed ferry came along in 1986.

Where to Stay

The [Sofitel Auckland Viaduct Harbour Hotel](#) is a short walk (5-10 minutes depending upon your gait) from the your door to the ferry to Waiheke. A modern hotel notched amongst the canal docks, it has nice amenities (refrigerator, mini-bar, Nespresso coffee maker, and a chic bathroom with killer soft towels). Their Lava restaurant sommelier has curated an outstanding inventory of New Zealand wines. The Executive Chef uses locally sourced produce and cooks to order for dietary restrictions. Given the hotel's premium water location, make sure you request a balcony room facing the peaceful waterway.



How to Get There

The [Fuller's Ferry](#) from downtown Auckland leaves from Pier 2, 99 Quay Street, Auckland Ferry Terminal and finishes at Matiatia Bay where there are plenty of taxi and vehicle hire options available. The boat ride takes you through the scenic Hauraki Gulf and by Rangitoto and Motutapu Islands.

Recommended Tour

Ananda Tours "The Afternoon Artisan" – Experienced tour guides familiar with the history and culture of the quirky island paradise are wine enthusiasts eager to share local knowledge of the best wine makers. Custom itineraries are easily arranged, and pairing vineyard tours with great restaurants is their specialty.

When it comes to tasting crisp, unique New Zealand wines, Waiheke Island is a one-stop-shopping extravaganza like no other. I opted to visit four distinct vineyards, each with its own charm.

Peacock Sky

Smack in the middle of Waiheke, a grape farm turned customer friendly vineyard produces bubbles (sparkling wine), white and red wines. Aptly named for the 50 wild peacocks roaming the 23 acres, Peacock Sky is the only vineyard to offer a free degustation style tasting. Their bubbly is best paired with a meaty appetizer.

Co-owner Connie Festa says their Chardonnay is made for the ABC crowd – "Anything but Chardonnay". I am not the biggest fan of Chardonnay and agree their appellation was soft, buttery and not all oaky. The Rosé was perfectly paired with an Asian sweet and sour dish. Their Pure Merlot, paired with meatballs and red sauce was similar to an Italian Chianti – very robust.

The vineyard's philosophy is one of great hospitality. Chef inspired dishes enhances their wines and the goal is to increase customers' appreciation of the intimate relationship between food and wine. Gluten-free, vegan and vegetarian options are available.



Stonyridge Vineyard

Owner, Chief Winemaker Stephen White is responsible for the 25-year history of Stonyridge's accredited sustainable wine growing designation. The seven hectares of Waitemata clay soil produce a hefty crop of grapes leading to 30,000 bottles of exceptional wines each year.

Of note, the Larose 2015 is a remarkable blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Petit Verdot, Malbec, Merlot and Cabernet Franc grapes. Head Chef Connie Aldao Worker rightly pairs this fruity wine with raw oysters and a strong cocktail sauce.

My favorite part of visiting Stonyridge was sampling their colorful, tasty charcuterie appetizer surrounded by vines. It was a casual but decadent afternoon dining and wine flight tasting. Head Chef Connie Aldao Worker makes sure the platter is as well balanced as the wines to enhance the experience. I would repeat weekly if I lived in Auckland.



Batch Winery

Thomas's Batch Vineyard (batch sounds similar to "bach" that is a New Zealand word referring to the Waiheke relaxed beach holiday lifestyle), has a restaurant and tasting cellar — all with spectacular panoramic views of the island.

The Thomas's Bach Riesling is the only dedicated Prosecco wine in New Zealand. The vineyards sit atop the highest spot on the island so Pinot Gris grapes grow well in this location. The sparkling wines are meant to be consumed "soon-ish" while the Cabernet varietals are good for another five to eight years.

Good things come in small sizes. Batch Winery sits on 3 ½ hectares of vines and only yield 1,549 to 2,600 bottles per year. The wines are organic, vegan and gluten-free.

Chardonnay begins its life at Batch from Gisborne wine cuttings soaked in seaweed and molasses before planting. Planting begins in the spring starting on the "Super Moon" to make sure new roots drawn into the earth.



Mudbrick

One of the more luxurious vineyards on the island, Mudbrick, offers options of flights of white, red, or premium wines for your tastings all the while enjoying breathtaking views of the Hauraki Gulf from the gorgeous garden terrace.

A challenge to my palette, but pleasantly so, I opted to “mix and match” my reds and whites. The Viognier 2016 was a bit young, but I could tell that paired with a fresh bowl of Bouillabaisse it would be outstanding. The Rosé reminded me of cotton candy without the sweetness. It was an intense girly pink color – love it! The Noble Riesling doesn’t finish on sugar, it was quite smooth with orange marmalade notes – very refreshing and I would recommend you pair it with piece (or two) of biscotti.



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