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HEADING:

Kiwiana Cruising

When docked in Auckland and granted a few days off there are so many good options for a day or two out of town. New Zealand is a great country for road trips because it is small and lush, the scenery changes often and there are lots of interesting places for pit-stops. One great experience can be the 90km drive north of Auckland to visit Leigh, a small fishing village perched on cliffs facing east. The area and its surrounds are developing so quickly that there are exciting places, dynamic people and varieties of eating and drinking for international crew wanting a Kiwi experience.

Driving north on State Highway One the journey begins as you head over the harbor bridge away from central Auckland onto rolling hills which change from urban sprawl to lush green pastures and coastal cruising. The best thing to do is to travel thirty minutes north of Auckland and aim for Puhoi. Puhoi is a Bohemian Colonial settlement just off the highway and is known for its Art and Cheese Café, river kayaking, and its famous Pub. The Puhoi Pub is a totally classic taste of Kiwi culture. Step inside the colonial style building to get your beer and you

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enter a world of local farming memorabilia from yester year. On any given afternoon you are bound to see four wheel farm bikes, Ford Falcons and maybe even tractors parked outside the Pub while farmers sip their favorite brews wearing gumboots and woolen tank tops.

Back on the main road head north towards Warkworth then turn right into the Matakana wine region towards Leigh. This road travels past boutique wineries with cafes and cellar sales all popular with Aucklanders. One wine experience is the Ascension winery and cafe. This is on the right hand side with a Mediterranean look, complete with a line up of polished European vehicles parked outside, it is the kind of place one could imagine young professionals from Auckland swilling sparkling wine for a long Sunday lunch. More tucked away but well signposted is the Herons Flight winery and café. This place is homely and set back from the road with a relaxed rural outlook. The managing couple shares the duties of cooking and serving. The whole experience here has accents of Italy with an eccentric Kiwi twist; wines are made from Sangiovese and Dolcetto grapes and visitors can picnic amongst the vines.

The next stop is the township of Matakana, this friendly place has a lively farmers market every Saturday morning. The market is a show case of local artisan products like blueberry sorbet, organic breads, organic vegetables and home made chutneys, it is ideal for brunch by the river with background tunes supplied by local musicians. Matakana is also home to quiet craft shops and a church “opportunity shop” ideal for a Saturday morning bargain hunt. The industry that originally put Matakana on the map and well worth a visit is Morris & James Pottery, distinctive for its brightly colored chunky platters and plant pots sold from their local shop and enjoyed all over New Zealand.

Pressing on towards Leigh you wind past small bays with native Pohutakawa trees dangling over the waters edge, sleepy cottages and dinghy’s resting upside down. Then almost there - you drive up and up the hill from

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Matheson's Bay and over the saddle to see Leigh township centre stage, with a flat blue sea backdrop holding up a crocodile shaped island, Little Barrier.

Although Leigh is a small fishing village there are great adventures awaiting visitors. Daytime activities in and around Leigh are; surfing, mussel collecting and horse riding at Pakari Beach, snorkeling and diving at Goat Island, wandering around the rocks, fishing off the wharf and strolling along one of the cliff-side tracks. For a night of entertainment choose between the local pub and Sawmill Café. The Leigh Pub, rarely visited by Aucklanders but frequented by fishermen, captures the 70's with its big glass windows looking out to sea, fishing photos with clientele in local woolen clothing and mullet hairdos. Favorite pastimes here can be eating fish and chips, mullet counting, playing pool, singing karaoke, dancing with the locals, and drinking jugs of beer. The more discerning yet equally unique Saw Mill Café is a five minute stroll away. This establishment has character in its rustic theme captured by the extensive use of wooden saw-milled furniture and the eclectic menu of local wine and food, it is also a popular live music venue.

The Leigh experience is not a touristy, organized adventure but certainly can be an exciting journey in contemporary New Zealand culture and could always be topped off with an adrenaline pumping skinny dip.

ENDS

785 Words

Photos

Figure 1. Fishing Boats in Leigh Harbor

Figure 2. Matakana Market 1

Figure 3. Matakana Market 2

Figure 4. The bar in the Leigh Sawmill Café

Figure 5. Lamp shade in Sawmill Café

Figure 6. Sawmill Café entrance

Figure 7. Sawmill Café sign

Figure 8. Leigh Pub sign

Figure 9. View of Leigh Wharf and fishing boats from walking track.

Figure 10. The entrance to Leigh Harbor with Little Barrier Island in the back ground.

Figure 11. The inner Leigh Harbor looking towards fishing boats.