

# Culture Shock

Enrich your getaway to **NEW ZEALAND'S** North Island with eccentric art, historic architecture, and first-class wine.

BY ANDREA KARR



*With its varied terrain of mountains, volcanoes, abundant forest, and Pacific Ocean coastline, it's no surprise that New Zealand has become known for its breathtaking natural beauty. But the country offers much more than magical scenery. The locals have an enterprising spirit that shines through in their unique approach to art and design, and treat every entrepreneurial project—from harvesting grapes to crafting the perfect flat white—as a new adventure worth their undivided attention. Add New Zealand's North Island to your bucket list to witness the artworks, wineries, and hotels of their creation, and hope a little of the local *joie de vivre* rubs off.*

## Auckland

Picture a busy metropolis with an unusual mix of European charm and lush tropical vegetation and you've imagined Auckland, the city with the largest Polynesian population in the world. With non-stop access from the west coast of North America, it's the perfect jumping-off point for visitors craving a dose of culture.

Start with a tour of Auckland's shopping districts such as Ponsonby and Britomart, and sift through NZ designer labels at Workshop, The Shelter, World, and Zambesi. Take a walk through the Auckland Art Gallery and book dinner at Amano, a modern Italian restaurant and bakery that boasts a 2017 Auckland Architecture Award for its busy-yet-balanced space and varied use of materials.

Plan a day trip with Matakana Tours to explore the rich arts scene located 45 minutes north of Auckland and make Brick Bay, a winery and sculpture trail, your first stop. Its idyllic restaurant, The Glass House Kitchen, is nestled amid forest, farmland, ponds, and vineyards, and a two-kilometre trail of raised boardwalks weaves through over 45 sculptures and soundworks from contemporary New Zealand artists. A recent showstopper? Olivia Webb's *Miserere Mei*, which features a forest alcove surrounded by 16 speakers, each belonging to an individual voice that contributes to a haunting choral performance.

Next, take a stroll through the nearby Sculptureum, a sculpture garden and art gallery that opened in spring 2017 with over 400 works from around the world. Lawyers

Anthony and Sandra Grant created the multi-use property (it also houses exotic birds) to inspire people to make their lives and surroundings more interesting. With everything from pink plastic snails by the Cracking Art group to a hanging blown-glass sculpture by Seattle-based artist Dale Chihuly, adults and children alike will be charmed by the Grants' flippant disregard for traditional curation and methods of art valuation.

During your stay in the region, rest your head at 25-room Hotel DeBrett in Auckland, located just minutes away from the harbour and Auckland Sky Tower. The rooms are colourful and quirky and, should you desire an early breakfast or late-night cocktail, there are three food-and-drink venues onsite.

## Napier

Napier in Hawke's Bay is the seaside city with an impressive collection of Art Deco architecture and is just a one-hour Air New Zealand flight from Auckland. After a disastrous earthquake in 1931, the entire city centre was rebuilt in a record 22 months with reinforced concrete made to withstand future tremors.



Clockwise from left: Elephant Hill winery. Sculptureum gallery. Brick Bay sculpture trail. Art Deco building in Napier. Hotel DeBrett courtyard.



Each structure was designed and decorated in Art Deco, which is known for geometric patterns, ziggurats, sunbursts, symmetry, and repetition. Take a tour through town in a vintage Packard or visit in February to see the city come alive with 1930s music and theatrics during the annual Tremains Art Deco Festival.

The region is also known for its vast array of vineyards, which crisscross the softly hilled landscape. Take a bike tour with Takaro Trails and visit Elephant Hill, a family-run winery that started as a German couple's passion project and has since been passed into the hands of their son. Stay for lunch—each artful dish will have you scrambling for your camera—and enjoy wine such as the 2016 Elephant Hill Rosé, which is a customer favourite.

Be sure to book your stay at the Art Deco Masonic Hotel, which first opened in 1861 and has slowly been remodeled since 2010 by the current owners. They maintained the structural integrity of the building, which means that each room has a unique layout, and ensured that no two rooms would have the same décor by mixing and matching a wide range of opulent wallpapers and textiles with eclectic furniture.

The hotel lies across the street from the city's waterfront promenade and the MTG Hawke's Bay, a gallery and museum with permanent exhibits on the earthquake and Māori culture (the history and art of NZ's indigenous population), as well as temporary exhibitions in seven galleries. Check out the "Pin Wall" public artwork on the exterior of the museum, which was inspired by a 19th-century pincushion and made by artists Sara Hughes and Gregor Kregar with 4,500 glazed porcelain balls.

## Wellington

Continue southwest on another one-hour flight to Wellington, once named the coolest little capital in the world by Lonely Planet for its culinary culture and vibrant arts scene. Immerse yourself in eccentricity from day one by staying at the QT Museum Wellington, a glamorous boutique hotel with a fascinating contemporary art collection that fills every nook and cranny with something to delight the eye. Take a self-guided tour before sitting down to high tea in the lavish Hippopotamus Restaurant on the second floor.



Just across the street, the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa houses local artifacts and stories of the people—especially the Māori. Compare the traditional whareniui, or meeting house, in the Mana Whenua exhibition with a contemporary version that was created by Dr. Cliff Whiting, a recently deceased Māori master carver who broke with traditional carving styles and materials to create a new meeting place for the local community. If you wish to contribute to the future of Māori artists (and to your personal art collection!) make a purchase from Kura Gallery on Allen Street, which has everything from paintings and prints to traditional weaving and carving.

Lucky enough to visit in May? Round out your stay with the 10-day LUX Light Festival, when the entire city pours into the streets to witness light sculptures and installations pop up along the waterfront and throughout various precincts in the urban core. Sip a flat white from Mojo Coffee or lick a glow-in-the-dark gelato from Gelissimo Gelato as you explore and, if you're in town on a Friday or Saturday night, grab a bite to eat from a food truck at the Wellington Night Market.