

# Destinations

**M**ention to Aucklanders you've just enjoyed a fantastic weekend in Waihi and most people look askance. Most Jafas have driven through the mining town, but few have stayed overnight. They may have stopped for coffee or walked to the 1904 Pumphouse to look down into the huge open-cast pit of Martha's Mine before jumping back in the car to go to east coast beaches.

But the town is changing fast. As Martha Mine nears its completion date, resources are being channelled into other ventures to provide employment for residents. The growing crowd cycling the Hauraki Rail Trail has been a god-send. Cafes and accommodation providers love the numbers of tourist cyclists coming through.

We were there to check out the tourism spin-offs of mining, past and present. Mining is never without contention because of its impact on the environment.

It should be no surprise that factions in the town differ on the topic: the miners working for the Denver-owned company, the greenies, the hippies, the rednecks, but 90 per cent of the time they manage to all get along harmoniously.

The more we talk to people, the more we learn of everything there is to do here. A weekend just isn't long enough for all the museums, walks, train rides, fishing, cycling, cafes...

## Gold Discovery Centre

Starting with Waihi's mining-related activities, we visit the brand spanking new Gold Discovery Centre. We reckon the true test of this "mine of information" is our 15-year-old's opinion, since he's in the target audience.

Rather than reading wall info panels like us, he heads straight to the oral histories and the interactive displays to learn the history – but he does read out the interesting/gory stuff. That's how we learned that the compo payouts for losing a thumb were enough to buy a house.

We are all keen to get our hands on the interactive displays and endeavour to try them all. The simulated explosions, hands-on compressed air drill and 3D hologram-style theatre of a bittersweet love affair are informative and fun, especially the interactive screen inviting you to gamble on Two-Up, only to find out you can never win as the gnarly streetwise dealer always has the last word.

But we just can't get near the screen on which to custom-design jewellery. Your glittering master-

# Weekend in Waihi



Martha Mine pit is a monster (top); mining history comes alive in a practical sense (above); 'There you go, gold, freshly dug up' (left).

Sure, there's gold in 'them thar hills' but there's far more to do in the mining town than a weekend is time for, finds **Donna McIntyre** and her family

piece is emailed to you. The screen is commandeered by a vanload of gold-dazzled pensioners who spend a good 30 minutes negotiating the technology.

So, instead, we flip open the tops of display boxes to guess which seam of rock holds real gold and not the all-that-glitters-is-not-gold fool's gold.

The staff call the displays edutainment, and that's an apt description. There's plenty to interest littlies, teens and adults, plus the

spacious layout lets you avoid "traffic jams" by skipping ahead to a less busy section then doubling back to displays once they are less populated.

[golddiscoverycentre.co.nz](http://golddiscoverycentre.co.nz)

## Waihi Gold Mine Tours

While stopped in the town, we had to do this tour, which takes you behind Martha Mine's fences. You wear fluoro safety vests and hard hats, and get explanations for the procedures you see. It's amazing to

watch this working mine in the midst of a town. Obviously, our guide is pro-mining, but realistic with it. He points out the pros and cons of the impact on the town, along with environmental rehabilitation measures that include water treatment and plans for a landscaped lake to fill the mine pit.

When he lets us hold an ounce of gold, I ask if anyone has been tempted to swallow the \$1500-plus tab of metal. (That would be a yes.) [www.waihigoldminetours.co.nz](http://www.waihigoldminetours.co.nz)

## Walk This Way

There are so many walkways in the Waihi environs, it was lucky we were there for a whole weekend.

There's the Martha Mine Pit Rim Walkway and nearby Gilmour Lake, Black Hill and Mill Stream Walkway. Or head in the direction of Waihi Beach for coastal walks such as the scenic route to Orakawa Bay.

## The Gorge

This picturesque stretch of road between Waihi and Paeroa is a pleasure to drive through, but you can also follow Karangahake Gorge's tracks on foot or by bike.

But be sure to stop for the riverside walkways where you are immersed in gold mining history. The Gorge is also home to two terrific food places – the Falls Retreat/Bistro and Ohinemuri Estate Res-

## Need to Know

### Eating Out

Families especially will love the extensive menus at Banana Pepper Cafe (try the caramelised rhubarb and wildberry tarts), Quartz Cafe (mouthwatering banana cake) and Ti Tree Cafe (stand-out salads and teenage-appetite-sized big breakfasts). If you want to splash out, Waitete Orchard Restaurant is a great place for fine dining. The meals are exceptional and German chef Roland is happy to share his passion for food. Plus parking in Waihi is free... not a meter in sight.

**Stay:** With log cabins, campsites, a trampoline, playground, a duck pond... and lots of space for the kids to run about in, the Waihi Motor Camp is ideal for all ages. [www.waihimotorcamp.co.nz](http://www.waihimotorcamp.co.nz)

taurant and Winery. Both have delightful rural settings, a welcoming ambience and fantastic food, unexpected pleasures on a road trip.

## Go Fish

Bularangi provides licences, transport and know-how if you want to try your hand at fly fishing for brown and rainbow trout near Waihi.

As our family are all fishing novices, we didn't net anything but we did catch the bug for this activity. It's almost meditative, out on Dickey Flat, wading clear streams and getting the hang of casting.

Bularangi also offers Harley Davidson tours if you want some vroom after finding your inner peace on the waterways.

[www.bularangi.com](http://www.bularangi.com)

● **Donna and her family were guests of Destination Coromandel.**

# 4 of the best Coromandel outings

While you're in the region explore

**1 Paeroa**  
Once you've taken your photo by the big L & P bottle, head to the other end of town for a fabulous feed at the L&P Cafe. It has its own smaller bottle, plenty of parking for your bikes (Paeroa is a hub of the Hauraki Rail Trail) and the best home baking. Allow plenty of time for antiquing, there's always a treasure with your name on it.

**2 Orakawa Bay**  
If you want to head away from Waihi Beach, check out this track that winds along the coastal ridge, with stunning ocean views and tunnels of native bush. The beach is classic

Coromandel — golden sand, pohutukawa trees (although it's safer to leave the swims to Waihi Beach as it is a dumpy surf and not patrolled). Parts of the track may be inaccessible at high tide.

**3 Thames**  
For more gold mining history, head back to the west for great historic walks in a series of Goldfield Era routes around historic buildings, reserves, natural beauty spots and cemeteries. Download the brochures from [thecoromandel.com](http://thecoromandel.com) or pick up at an I-site. And don't miss some great cafes on the main drag, or fresh fish and



chips at the wharf on the way into town.

**4 Waihi Beach**  
Worth the trip over for the fantastic Waihi Beach Hotel, last summer's

addition to the Hip Group's impeccable stable of eateries. Or join the summer playground at the beach with 9km of sweeping white sand and surf. There are summer surf schools, boogie boarding or kayaking.