We sat chatting in the guest lounge for ages and it was with great delight. Out of the wind, it was relatively warm. A brisk wind was whipping along the nearby beach, white horses prancing vigorously as the gusts stripped them of their倔强。A few weeks back, I hesitantly accepted an invitation to visit. It was winter and icy cold – how would I fill a weekend in a seaside resort in this weather? I tossed an unusually large bag for a weekend trip into the boot of the car and set off on the short drive. The bag was so large as I’d packed every conceivable item of clothing I could think of for winter adventures - Ugg boots, parkas and all manner of thermal and woolen clothing. Having endured squalls of driving rain and fairly high winds on the short 2 hour drive, I was astonished to clear the Karangahake Gorge and encounter bright sunshine. Some fifteen minutes later, I turned off my ignition at Waihi Beach Lodge and that sun was warming 39 degrees. This is a real family getaway spot on the northern end of Tauranga Harbour and only a few minutes drive from Waihi Beach. Accommodation ranges from campsites and chalets to motel or studio units. There’s a communal BBQ area and well-fitted kitchen, laundry, games room, library and playground area. Showers are free and there are hairdryers! I popped into historic Athenree House which was built in 1878 – the perfect spot for a sedate afternoon tea. Run by the Athenree Homestead Trust, the homestead evokes a sense of peace and tranquility that I’m sure weren’t part of the harsh existence its original owners would have endured. No insulation, running water or flushing toilets. Whilst most of the original furnishings were sold off many years ago, the Trust has been lucky enough to have found relics here and there, topped off with kind donations. What’s seen today is a pretty damn good replica and the restoration work continues. You can support them by purchasing some of the merchandise on offer (on site and on their website) or by taking a Friend of the Homestead membership.

That night I dined at the award winning The Porch Kitchen & Bar owned and operated by Riaan and Carla Botha. It pays to book – the place was humming! My table beside the roaring fire provided a great vantage point to people watch and it didn’t take long to realise that the locals loved the owners, the staff and the atmosphere. You know a place is great when the locals frequent it! I wasn’t to be disappointed … my starter of pear, watercress and blue cheese salad was delightful, and I followed this with a憑藉我與珍妮的協助，以及她每日在現場確保她的座右銘“maximum flavour, minimum fuss”被遵循。為了廚師Peter Gordon於Wellington的Sugar Club，Nicky了解她的名聲 —— 以及她所在的地方在這裡，她被當地人簇擁而至。這個創業夫妻也提供假日住宿在兩地 —— NZ和Fiji，以及導遊飛魚在周邊水域。
WAIHI BEACH

FACTS:
Getting there:
From Auckland, drive along SH1 to the SH2 turn off at Pokeno. Follow SH2 through Waihi onto Tauranga Road; then take a left turn onto Waihi Beach Road. From Tauranga region, take SH1 (Kakariki North Road) and veer right at Athenree Road (just before Athenree Gorge).

Where to stay:
Waihi Beach Lodge, www.waihibeachlodge.co.nz
Athenree Hot Springs & Holiday Park: www.athenreesprings.co.nz

Food & Drink:
Flat White Cafe for snacks, lunch and amazing hot chocolate – www.flatwhitecafe.co.nz
Porch Cafe Kitchen & Bar for dinner and excellent coffee – www.theporch.co.nz
The Deli for the best baguettes and fabulous pastries – www.waihibeachdeli.co.nz

What to do:
Take the Windows walk through Karangahake Gorge
Take the coastal walk to Orakawa Bay – about 35 mins each way
Tour the town with Bulurangi Harley Tours, www.bularangi.com
Have afternoon tea at Athenree House – www.athenreehomestead.org.nz

the blue waters stretched out for miles and miles meeting the near cloudless sky on the distant horizon, interrupted only by a few islands … Mayor, Motiti Island, Slipper.

My last stop before the drive back to Auckland simply had to be the Karangahake Gorge. Taking about an hour to complete, this scenic walk gets started with a suspension bridge over the Ohinemuri River. Up the stairs, through abandoned buildings, along gold mining tunnels, past cliffs and you can even explore an old pump house. Take a good torch, wear sensible shoes and remember your camera!

On the drive back to Auckland, I couldn’t help wishing I’d discovered Waihi Beach a long time ago … while owning a property in this seaside haven might be out of reach of many, it’s still extremely affordable in terms of rentals and holiday accommodation. It’s a secret little gem that I’m so glad I discovered.

AUCKLAND MUSEUM

Auckland Museum is one of the finest museums in the Southern Hemisphere, renowned for its unique collection of Maori and Pacific treasures. The Museum tells the story of New Zealand; from award-winning natural history exhibits to captivating interactive galleries. It is the only place in Auckland where you can experience a daily Maori cultural performance and Maori gallery tour.

Open daily 10am to 5pm
Admission by donation.
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Charges apply for special exhibitions and events.

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