

# Summer Detours

Travel, food, books, lifestyle

January 30, 2011

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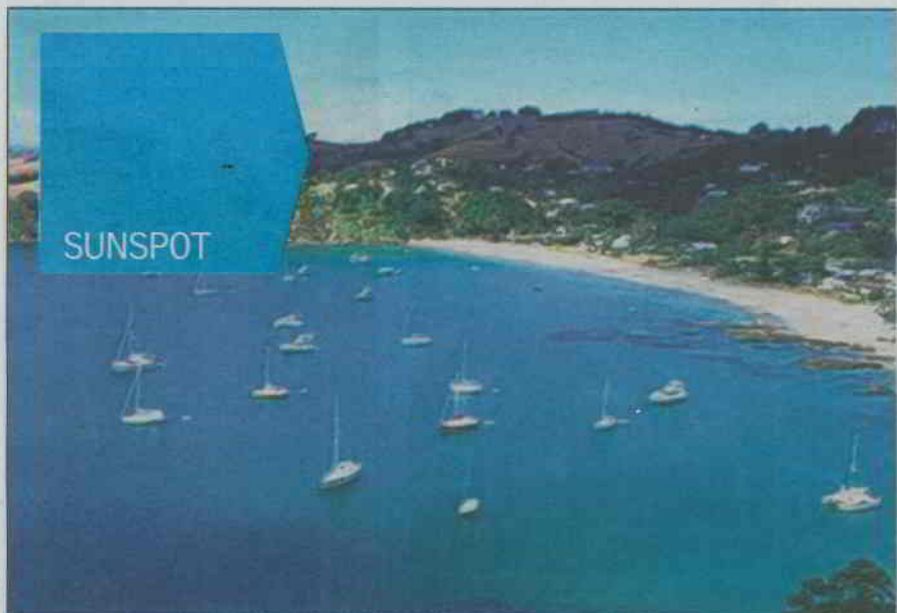
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Spectacular Palm Beach.



Anyone for tennis at the Waiheke Island Resort?

# Backyard wonder

Never mind Europe's easy weekend haunts, we have Waiheke Island, writes **Kerri Jackson**.

**B**IRTHDAYS ENDING in a zero can be confronting. Best then to confront them somewhere exotic where you are plied nigh-on constantly with delicious food and wine, hopefully with a soupçon of sunshine.

When first I began planning how to eclipse turning 40, I imagined a private beach in Tahiti, or a Tuscan village, with maybe 100 of my closest friends

— you know, nothing fancy.

In the intervening months, thanks to the global financial crisis, the general availability of friends and, well, reality, that was scaled back to a weekend with six friends on the sun-soaked shores of Waiheke.

And thank goodness. No messing about with passports, only a small amount of jostling for position in the queue for the Friday night ferry,



followed by a celebratory 40-minute cruise across the harbour, and you're there.

Once customs have been cleared (the flurry for taxis, buses and rental cars outside the Matiatia ferry ter-

terminal), our first stop is the Waiheke Island Resort. Bags are ditched and the view from the apartment balcony, down the tree-filled valley to the turquoise waters of Palm Beach, much admired.

The resort, long something of a favourite with visitors from the mainland, is back in the hands of former owner and Waiheke identity Brent Gibson. And with this change has come a major refurbishment.

All 51 units have had a facelift and sitting on the top level of the deck, gazing past the swimming pool to the sea with a birthday bubbly in hand, the effect is a little like being on a stylish, if immobile, cruise ship.

But there's business to attend to, and though breakfast is still being digested, it's time to make the trek (by

Waiheke standards) inland to Awaararoa for lunch.

It's 11am by the time we have been driven through the farmland and outer suburbs of the island to the Tuscan-esque haven of Poderi Crisci.

This boutique vineyard-cum-restaurant sits tucked among the merlot vine-lined hills. It's the baby of chef Antonio Crisci, the man behind Toto and Parnell's Non Solo Pizza.

Thanks to the logistics of organising transportation to what amounts to Waiheke's "wop-wops", we are an hour early for our booking and the first guests of the day, but that is no hurdle for the staff at Poderi.

More bubbly appears, glasses are filled and we spend a pleasant hour wandering the vege gardens and

*Continued p7*

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IF YOU GO

Where to stay

Waiheke Island Resort's fully refurbished units range from one- or two-bedroom units to a five-bedroom lodge, making it perfect for families, couples or groups. All have basic cooking facilities and balconies to admire the views. There's also a pool, three sun decks, tennis court, spa, restaurant, conference facilities and a bar. It's a five-minute walk down the hill to Palm Beach and a 10-minute taxi ride from the Matiatia ferry terminal.

The resort also runs the Dunes function venue right on the beach front at Onetangi — popular for weddings, conferences and parties.

Visit Waiheke has a huge range of holiday homes for rent, from small apartments to luxury homes. They can also organise your rental car, restaurant reservations, fishing charters and wine

tours. If you're with a group the lovely Casamatta — not too far from Palm Beach — is recommended: fantastic indoor-outdoor living and the house can sleep up to 11 people. The Visit Waiheke website — [www.visitwaiheke.co.nz](http://www.visitwaiheke.co.nz) — also has great ideas on things to do and places to see.

Where to eat

Poderi Crisci is a must-do for either a meal or wine tasting. The food and service are excellent, in a unique setting.

Delight Cafe in Oneroa is a small, recently opened, Turkish restaurant. It serves excellent Turkish/Middle Eastern food with a hint of Greek thrown in. It also does takeaways.

Casita Miro, Onetangi. If the stunning all-glass restaurant building and accompanying view doesn't take your

breath away, the food, a range of tapas-style dishes, will. Match it to the Miro wines. [www.mirovineyard.co.nz](http://www.mirovineyard.co.nz)

How to unwind

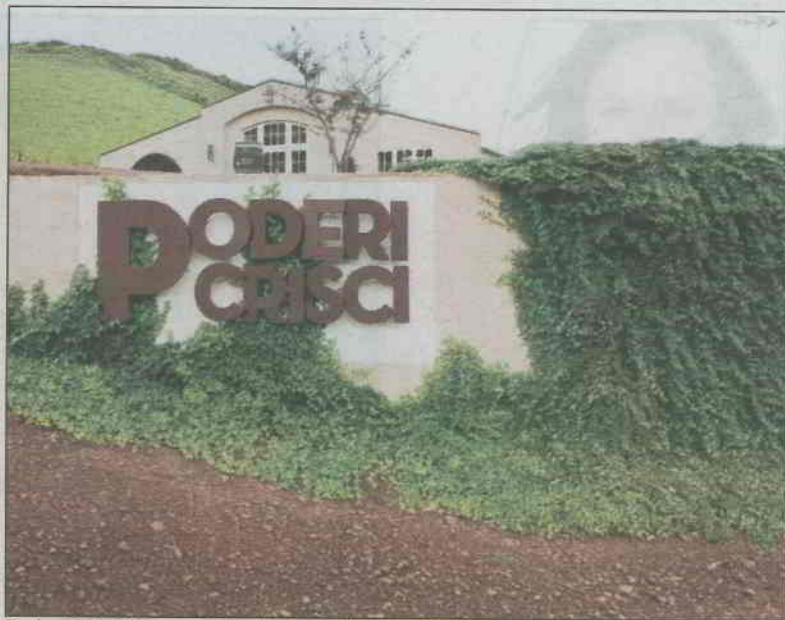
If you're keen on a massage to help you along, try Waiheke Magic Massage at Palm Beach — the treatment room feels like a treehouse above the water.

Getting there

Fullers Ferries makes regular daily runs between Auckland city and Matiatia wharf, sometimes via Devonport. Or take your car over on the Sealink ferry from Half Moon Bay.

Getting around

Rent a car. Otherwise getting around is all about taxis and buses. Waiheke Island Executive Transport offers a range of transfer, taxi and tours services. [www.waiheketransport.co.nz](http://www.waiheketransport.co.nz)



Poderi Crisci is a perfect place to wile away a day.



"We must come here more" — a phrase uttered often on the ferry's return trip.

From p6

exploring the underground wine cellar (which can also be booked for dining).

By the time we are sitting around a table inside near the floor-to-ceiling windows, swapping superlatives about the location, delicious food is beginning to sashay out from the kitchen; the start of what will be an Italian-style long lunch.

Over the next three hours a steady parade of dishes exits the kitchen, perfectly timed and proportioned so just when you think you might be ready for a little something else, the next dish appears, accompanied by a Poderi Crisci wine.

We glance up occasionally from our table to find the buzz of the place steadily building with a mix of locals, visitors and celebrities.

We leave, reluctantly, but well and truly sated, to collapse gratefully into the air-conditioned taxi, bags gently clinking with more Poderi wines.

Day two, then, is all about recovery. We take a stroll down the hill to the white sands of Palm Beach, where bobbing about in the crisp, incredibly clear water is the perfect cure for groggy, post-indulgence heads.

After crepes from the beachside stand and a restorative coffee from the Palm Beach store, it's time to mosey back to the ferry and consider

rejoining the rat race.

This two-day stay has stretched out into what feels like weeks and that takes the sting out of going home.

The ferry is teeming with mainlanders all raving about their own sun-soaked weekends away from the city and you overhear "no traffic", "just 40-minutes away" and "we must come here more" peppered through their conversations.

Remember the tinge of bitterness you feel toward your Europe-based friends who can country-hop in their weekends thanks to short, cheap flights and fast trains?

Pity them that they don't have a Waiheke on their doorstep.

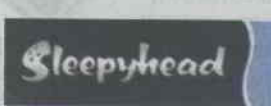
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