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Staying at the Paparoa Hotel, Kaipara

Chris Schulz – 13 Oct, 2017

Chris Schulz checks into the Paparoa Hotel, Kaipara.

Getting there:

A week ago, we'd never heard of Paparoa, but after being persuaded to check it out, we headed up for a quick weekend trip. It's a short drive — at 90 minutes, closer than most holiday destinations chosen by Aucklanders. We left home at 9am and were there by 10.30am.

Check-in experience:

Paparoa Hotel has limited accommodation options: three small rooms inside the hotel, and a two-bedroom garden flat through the garden bar and around the back. That's where we headed after grabbing the keys. There's a picnic table in the yard, fresh herb gardens and a swing attached to the tree. Room: Both bedrooms were clean and tidy, with great views.

What's so good about this place?

Not only are you within walking distance of Paparoa's main stretch of shops, you're also close to a bunch of attractions, including the Kauri Museum and Pahi beach. But we enjoyed being able to put the kids to bed then head around to the Thirsty Tui for dinner, drinks and a few games of pool with the locals.

And the bad?

We couldn't get the TV to work and the pub wasn't playing the rugby. And there were no coffee cups for our morning cuppa. They're very minor complaints.

What's in the neighbourhood?

On weekends, you won't want to miss Folk Espresso & Boulangerie, where they sell strong coffee and some of the best pastries and sourdoughs you can find anywhere in the country. On Saturdays there's a decent farmers market.

Toiletries:

The basics: soap, shampoo and conditioner. Food and drink: Limited offerings in the flat, but talk to the bar manager and they'll put together a picnic hamper full of sandwiches, drinks, quiche and cakes to take to the beach. For dinner, The Thirsty Tui's menu is extensive.

The bed:

Comfy and soft.

Bathroom:

Basic and clean, but bizarrely, it filled up with sandflies at night.

Free Wi-Fi?

Yes, but hopefully you'll put the phone away. Noise: At night, you might hear some of the bar's more rowdy punters. Your best bet is to join in.

Value for money:

After one night, we felt like we'd been away for three. That's gotta be value for money.

Exercise facilities:

Just a pool table in the bar.

Perfect for:

A long summer weekend, to take in the scenery, chill at the restaurant and escape the city.

The bottomline:

Shh! This weekend escape is Auckland's best-kept secret. Don't tell anyone about it.

STUFF – Weekender

Paparoa, on ‘Kaipara Time’

Britt Mann – Jan 05 2019

*The Landing built roughly
where early settlers landed –
months at sea behind them,
more months’ uncertainty.
They ended up in a land
they never had in mind.
I’ll be leaving by the Landing
on Kaipara time.*

So goes the second verse of Sam Hunt’s poem *Salt River Songs*, a homage to the place he calls home. Paparoa, a settlement on State Highway 12, is about 90 minutes’ drive from Auckland. It’s a destination in which to more fully appreciate life’s less tangible pleasures: good company, community vibes, and a peace imparted by tidal rhythms.

THE SETTING

Paparoa was settled in the early 1860s by Protestant immigrants known as the Albertlanders. Early industry included pottery, bricks and tiles. More broadly, the picturesque region is known for its kumara, kauri, and proximity to the Kaipara Harbour.

THE KIT

The Paparoa Hotel opened in 1956. It was taken over 15 years later by English immigrants Dave and Joan Goode, who’d swapped industrial Stoke-on-Trent for life in rural New Zealand. They ran the pub for nine years.

“Back in those days, there were no cellphones. The pub was really the heart of community, where people caught up and connected,” says their daughter Pam, who assumed the pub’s direct management almost three years ago.

“My father said that coming to New Zealand was the best thing he’d done in his life, and was very proud of the pub.”

THE SPACE

Pam, a commercial photographer, has refurbished the hotel’s bar, restaurant, and rooms, transforming Paparoa Hotel into a star local attraction, as well as tourist destination.

Outside, whitewashed picnic tables and red geraniums signal a perfect place for a pitstop. Inside, the decor is a little mid-century, a little contemporary, with polished wood floors, dark timber furniture, wine-coloured carpet and plenty of light. Walls are embellished with photos of surrounding settlements and landmarks.

On any given weekend at the pub, you’ll spot leather-clad bikers quenching their thirst, men in bush shirts who’ve popped in for a round of pints, older residents supping in lively crews, and farmers with deep roots in the region enjoying a meal with family members. They’ll be able to tell you’re not a local, but they’ll welcome you warmly.

The pub has three single rooms and a 2-bedroom flat available to book. The flat, which overlooks a century-old oak tree, a daisy-strewn lawn, and a paddock inhabited by curious cows, has queen beds, a well-stocked kitchenette, full bathroom, lounge and wood burner. It’s furnished in a clean, comfortable style. On request, the pub’s ultra hospitable staff will pack you a picnic basket for a day out, and make you a fire when you’re ready to turn in.

FOOD

The hotel restaurant – The Thirsty Tui – celebrates local ingredients while riffing on global influences. Pam, who has travelled extensively, was passionate about presenting punters with cuisine that rivals anything you might find in a city bistro.

“I think New Zealand has the best food and produce in the world, and some of the most creative chefs,” she says. “In the provinces, it isn’t always as good, and there’s no reason for that. It’s just a matter of putting in the effort and attention.”

Seafood sourced from the harbour up the road features prominently on the menu, alongside gourmet burgers and pizzas, salads, sandwiches and more. There are options for the gluten-free and the vegetarians, and a well thought out drinks list to wash it down. For dessert, a cabinet of house-made treats in the bar area will inspire you to make room in the tum.

WHILE YOU ARE THERE

Arrive in time for the farmer’s market on Saturday from 9am-12pm, held at the Village Green, where a semi-circle of gazebos offers everything from fish, eggs, sourdough bread, baking, preserves, dips, honey, hot food, succulents and greeting cards. Over the hum of live music, chatty locals will tell you the stories behind their wares, and offer suggestions for how to make the most of your weekend.

Across the road, Empire Art & Espresso is a passion project of Jillaine Murray’s, a self-taught artist who sells her own work and that of more than 40 other local artists in her bright, friendly shop, which also serves top-notch coffee.

A pilgrimage to Pahi is a must-do at dusk. Pay homage to the gargantuan fig tree, more than 150 years old and almost 30m high, and sit on the wharf to watch the boats come in and the stars come out. Beaches at Whakapirau and Tinopai are similarly good for wharf-fishing and jetty-jumping. If you’re a guest at Paparoa Hotel, they’ll cook up any fish you catch.

To stretch the legs, check out the the Kauri Bushmen’s Memorial Walk, and the Paparoa Pa Site Walkway. The former is a loop track whose beginning is marked with a log hauler used by bullocks on historical bush roads. The latter offers well-preserved insight into pre-colonial New Zealand.

ON THE WAY

The Kaiwaka Cheese Shop on the state highway announces itself by roadside sign as the “last cheese for miles”. The cheesemonger and deli sells imported Dutch delicacies, including a vast array of fromage that on any given day might include a lavender or wasabi infused gouda. “The Dutch will make cheese out of anything,” we’re told by the cheerful woman at the counter, who goes on to describe a more traditional young goat milk cheese as “solid heroin”. After piquing your appetite with samples, you can buy cheese by the gram at dangerously reasonable prices, as well as all the usual platter accoutrements. Feed your addiction when you’re back home by purchasing online.

You’ll find Piroa Falls and its eminently dippable swimming holes five minutes’ descent from the carpark in Waipu Gorge Scenic Reserve. There are a few steps and a small bridge crossing across the Ahuroa River, but it’s a child-friendly jaunt that’s particularly worth making in hot weather.

WORTH STEPPING OUT FOR

Every year, the Kauri Museum seven minutes’ drive up the road at Matakoho, draws visitors to learn about a bygone industry whose legacy – and ramifications – are felt today.

Established in 1962, the museum is entirely run by volunteers. It has about 45,000 people through its doors every year, with about 1500 attending its most recent Settlers Day, which happen annually during October school holidays.

More than 4500 sqm of undercover exhibits, including a gleaming display of kauri gum artifacts, functioning sawmill and replica boarding house, tell a story beyond the kauri trees, one of pioneering settlers, and their way of life.

Collection Manager Curator Dr Tracey Wedge explains kauri trees have been growing in New Zealand for over 100 million years, linchpins of native ecosystems that were eventually felled for their flexible, knotless timber, which was shipped around the world. Kauri gum too was prized, gathered from the ground and then actively excavated. The museum’s gum room features rare and fascinating pieces donated by the region’s long-standing families.

Other highlights include a photography exhibition depicting gum diggers at work, a fully furnished 1900s kauri house, the world’s largest collection of kauri furniture, and displays highlighting the awe-inspiring age and size of the trees. It’s a comprehensive operation with a vast amount of information to absorb. History fanatics might want to return for round two the next day. Entry costs \$25 for adults, \$8 for children aged 5-15, \$20 for seniors and students, and \$55 for a family pass.

The museum is open from 9am-5pm daily (except for Christmas Day), and has a cafe and art gallery on site.

THE VERDICT

Paparoa Hotel is a tranquil, well-catered base from which to explore the area at leisure. The village’s pace is so different to that of city life, that a few nights there will have a disproportionately restorative effect on your mind and body.

ESSENTIALS

Individual rooms, with either queen or king single beds, cost \$100 a night. The garden flat costs \$275 to rent the two bedrooms or \$150 to rent one, a night. Campervans can park up for free. The flat would be suitable for a small family with kids, a romantic getaway, or a weekend away with friends. See paparoahotel.nz and paparoa.org.nz for further information.

The writer travelled courtesy of Paparoa Hotel.

Destination - Paparoa: Yes, heaven is just 90 minutes north of Auckland

Chris Schulz – 20 Oct, 2018

In Paparoa, the sun is shining, the chocolate croissants are crispy and everyone has time to chat. Chris Schulz discovers Auckland's best kept secret is just 90 minutes away.

Saturday, 10.30am:

Today is truly a miracle. Not only was the car packed and full of kids by 9am but we didn't require a single emergency stop. In just 90 minutes, we've driven north and arrived at our destination, Paparoa, surely Auckland's best kept secret. It's a small spot that's easy to find: head north on State Highway 1, turn left at Brynderwyn and you're there. We pull up next to the farmers' market and within 10 minutes we're greeted as if we're long-lost friends. Within 20, my daughter's fallen in love with a lamb at the market stalls, forced us to buy olives and halloumi and she's found New Zealand's greatest chocolate croissants at a small cafe called Folk Espresso and Boulangerie across the road. She has a nose for these things. She could make a career out of it.

Midday:

We check into the Paparoa Hotel. It's a great set-up with three guest rooms attached to a pub and restaurant inside, all of which have been recently renovated. But they're too small for a family of four, so we're staying in the two-bedroom cottage out the back. Another great set-up: we have a private courtyard with a swing, picnic table and plenty of grass for the kids to run around on. But we can't stay too long: the pub's friendly owners have packed us a picnic and there are sights to see.

1pm:

We unpack our picnic on Pahi Beach. It's a beautiful spot that's so quiet it's hard to believe. As we nibble on sandwiches and quiches, with the sun streaming down, we see just a handful of faces – including a dad kayaking past us with his son. As we breathe in the fresh, salty air, and relax in the peace and quiet, we can't help but think we've found something pretty special. We've lived in Auckland for more than 10 years – how come we've never heard of Paparoa until now?

2pm:

Just up the road from Pahi is a popular tourist spot: The Kauri Museum. They have so much kauri and kauri gum it's ridiculous, entire rooms dedicated to slabs of the stuff. It is fascinating wandering through the halls, listening to the history of kauri felling and gum collection, checking out what must surely be the country's biggest collection of chainsaws, and finding displays of small insects stuck inside gum. Isn't that how Jurassic Park started?

3.30pm:

My daughter's managed to secure an invite to The Chapel, an olive grove and farm where the sleepy little lamb from the farmers' market lives. For the first time in her life she gets to feed one. As it guzzles greedily from the milk bottle she's holding out for it, the grin across her face says it all. She couldn't be happier. Farm life suits her. Me? There's a little too much sheep poo stuck to my white sneakers to fully embrace it.

6pm:

We're back at Paparoa Hotel to try their extensive dinner menu. The kids order their faves: chicken and fish with chips, but we're taken by a menu that showcases local suppliers, including fresh oysters and flounder from the Kaipara Harbour, and a nice range of handmade pies, burgers and pizzas. But their speciality is beef cheeks with a dark, rich sauce with hints of chocolate. We choose that one, and it's the sheer definition of hearty. When we get back to our room to put the kids to bed, the fire's already been lit. We couldn't be cosier.

10pm:

We end our night by sneaking around to the bar for a quick game of pool and a drink with a gang of locals. Everyone is friendly here, so we see out our night playing pool while chatting with everyone who comes in the door. Lovely.

Sunday, 10am:

We're back at Folk for more croissants, extremely good coffee and some of their amazing sourdough. The bakery is open only on weekends but is so good it's worth the visit just to sample their goods. We also pick up a few presents at the gift shop, which is in the same store and stocked full of interesting, unique goodies. Pretty much everyone who comes through the door stops for a chat. No one, it seems, is in a rush.

Midday:

We reluctantly have to check out of Paparoa Hotel, but before we do, we return to the restaurant during a rowdy midday service and order a round of pizzas. There are board games for the kids to enjoy while they wait, and plenty of locals tucking into plates full of burgers and chips. The vibe is fun and lively, everything you want from a friendly little local.

2pm:

We can't do it. We can't leave just yet. So we stop to let the kids enjoy a local school playground. The caretaker is there, fixing up a few things. We start talking, our kids get along great and suddenly an hour has passed by. As we say goodbye, he invites us back to stay in his guest house. We'll definitely be going. After just one night, we've decided Paparoa is a little slice of heaven, and it already feels like a second home.

Cuisine Magazine Just Hangin'

Claire McCall – May, 2020

Dream on for when you can sling a bag over your shoulder and head for the hills, the harbour and the coast.

As we went to print we were unable to travel, but there's no reason why we can't plan for when we come to the other side. Our local hospitality businesses are really going to need our support (and our dollars). Add in fewer climate change guilts, no air port queues or cattle class flights, and there will never be a better reason to holiday close to home.

Our power-house tourist spots are world famous, but we're turned our sights to some lesser-known destinations - each within striking distance of our major cities - with out writers winking out the perfect places for a short break. So, look forward to leaving the crowds behind and exploring our own special places. Note that details were correct at the time of going to print. We recommend calling ahead to check.

Out of here, Auckland, we're heading to Paparaoa

Pack the picnic blanket and skive off early on a Friday afternoon to beat the hasty retreat north (or catch the Dargaville shuttle from downtown Auckland). But don't follow the crowds. Veer off to the west coast just beyond Kaiwaka and rural roll of State Highway 12 will deposit you in the charming wee settlement of Paparaoa. There's a different ebb and flow to life here so be prepared to say hello to people you pass in the main street and dial back the energy levels to rural time.

...At day's end plan for dinner the Paparaoa Hotel, an establishment that has been in the same family for six decades. Pam Goode's mum and dad bought the 1950's building when she was seven years old and Pam learned to cook in the kitchen, watching *Hudson and Halls* for inspiration.

Today chef Stephen Harrison uses local produce including herbs straight from the garden to serve gastro grub in a dining room decorated with 1960s flower prints on Formica-topped tables that once occupied the canteen of a Henderson furniture factory.

The mood is nostalgic and the food comforting but contemporary. Kaipara oysters are served with Korean dipping sauce of black vinegar and soy; the beef cheeks are a version of a dish Pam first enjoyed at Movida, Melbourne (braised with red wine and cocoa) and a gingernut crumble dessert will transport your tastebuds back to the future.

175 Classic Pubs to visit

Peter Jensen – 2018

Gastro pub with summer and winter menus that focus on strong distinctive New Zealand flavours and seafood sourced from nearby Pahi.

Halfway between SH1 and Dargaville, the license for the Paparao Hotel came from an older pub at Pahi which closed down. Recently renovated, the Paparao is today a very stylish hotel with a successful blend of mid-century and contemporary styles. Open, light and airy, the hotel has retained and accentuated its 1950s design with polished floors, the original cream tiled fireplace and an exterior typical of the period. Alongside the pub is a welcoming garden bar. The food is definitely not the ordinary pub meals and it's complemented by an excellent wine list, but at the same time the local farmers and tradies feel right at home. This is also a place to stop for good coffee and a slice of homemade cake.

Just 6km from the superb Matakoho Kauri Museum, the hotel also has easy access to the newly established Paparao Walk. Whether you are a local, from out of town or from across the seas, you will be welcome here.