



KIWIANA country

Mike Yardley



WENDING your way through the soothing bucolic embrace of tranquil rolling hills, the mighty Waikato is tailor-made for quick and easy roadies.

With an embarrassing spoil of characterful towns and villages pepper-potting the countryside, the biggest conundrum is sizing up where to spend your time.

From the Kiwiana frivolity of Otorohanga to the horsey-town sensibilities of prim and proper Cambridge or manicured Matamata, Waikato's appealing platter of towns and villages exude their own sense of place and personality. These are towns that you no longer drive through, but drive to.

I plumped for a quick foray with a few choice specimens including Tirau, the "Corrugated-Iron Capital of the World".

Much of that can be sheeted home to Steven Clothier, better known as the Tin Man of Tirau, who continues creating daring installations from corrugated iron. Starting with a pair of tin snips and hand riveter, Steven made "The Dog" in Tirau in 1998, which houses the local i-Site and public toilets.

A giant sheep was later added to keep the dog company and last year a ginormous ram's head hunkered down next to them, completing this holy trinity of corrugated sculpture.

Steven and his design-savvy wife, Sheryn, have gone global, regularly commissioned to create public and private installations across New Zealand and the world. One hundred and eighty years ago, corrugated iron was invented to produce cheap roofs and water tanks for the colonies. Steven's Kiwi-can-do zeal has transformed the possibilities.

Another quirky novelty in town is the Castle Pamela, Tirau's crenelated answer to the Taj Mahal.

Kelvin Baker built this castle in homage of his wife, Pamela, 17 years ago.

It's home to Australasia's largest toy collection and includes a plethora of rare gems from the 19th century, along with dolls and train collections.

Located 9km out of town, Te Waihou Walkway is a stunning

4.7km trail through farmland, flanked by crystal clear streams. Taking three hours return, it's the source of the famously gorgeous Blue Spring, which supplies roughly 70 per cent of our bottled water.

If you were ever in need of a crash course in all things Kiwiana, Otorohanga is calling.

Step out on the Ed Hillary Walkway, which leads you through 26 beautifully crafted exhibits, showcasing all manner of aspects of popular Kiwi culture. From Bonus Bonds and Aunt Daisy to Kiwi Slang and No 8 Wire, the displays are enthralling.

Add to that the street murals and the 14 iconic Kiwiana cut-outs that festoon the main street's lamp posts, like the Buzzy Bee, Jandals, Paua and Pavlova. Plus there's more Steven Clothier corrugated creations to admire — including a giant Kiwi and a pukeko, in the heart of town.

TOP TIPS

Booking.com offers a diverse range of properties, with 627 available in Waikato alone, spanning hotels to homestays. You don't have to pay until you stay, it's effortless to change reservations and there's a free 24-hour cancellation policy. With my recent travels, Booking.com offered first-rate customer service and responded super quickly to my questions.

www.booking.com

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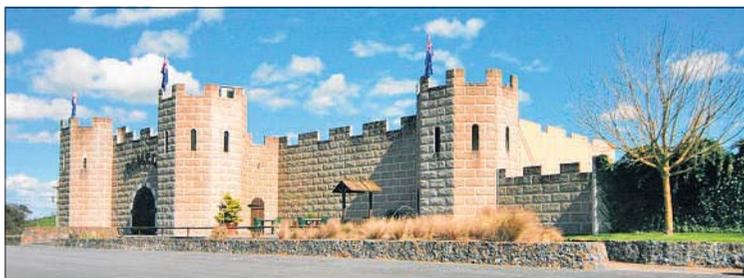


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FROM ABOVE: Tirau's 'The Dog' artwork; Pamela Castle; Otorohanga lamp post.

