



Luxury can be the freedom to do what you like and eat what you like in your own city, writes **Leonie Freeman**

It's 12km into our walk from one coast of Auckland city to the other and I'm standing on Mt Eden summit in the pouring rain in a \$2 poncho I just bought in Onehunga (some idiot forgot her raincoat, but packed four really excellent going out outfits) and I'm wondering . . . is this really what I had in mind for my lush weekend break?

I'm on holiday in my own city but I'm trying to do things that I may not always do and get a fresh perspective on places I go all the time. Because, unusually, this weekend I have no kids, a luxurious hotel room and nowhere I have to be.

Auckland can be a tricky city for visitors. We

all hope tourists here make it to the amazing natural wonders of the west coast beaches and Rangitoto and Waiheke, but all too often I suspect they don't get out of the central city.

So I play tourist and show myself a great time in the middle of Auckland City.

I book at the **Grand Windsor** at the bottom of Queen St. We get a room upgrade as a result of being the first in after renovations and the room is lovely. My partner hasn't finished at work yet so I go for a walk up to the university and down to the waterfront, to *The Lighthouse* by Michael Parekowhai — the artwork of a state house on the end of Queens Wharf. It's fun walking by the back streets — you see all the



little paths, alleyways, shops, bars and cafes you otherwise miss.

I am a traveller deeply motivated by food and Auckland is a very fine place to indulge that hobby. My privileged concern for this weekend is squeezing in all the food I want to eat, so I suggest delicious dumplings and cocktails at the vibrant but cosy Xuxu Dumpling Bar in Britomart for a pre-dinner snack. It's Friday night so the streets and bars are humming.

Next, it's dinner at **Amano**, which is still full at 10 and we have a truly excellent dinner of burrata, pate, tortellini, oysters and beetroot,

and, weirdly, a charred lettuce dish is my favourite. It's a gorgeous restaurant with a beautiful vibe and after a few Hallertau ales for me and pinots for him it's time to hit the amazing bed (which is roughly the size of our bedroom at home) back at the hotel.

The next morning we're up early and see the grim side of life in Auckland without resources and the horrid juxtaposition of homeless people lying in the doorways of Gucci and Louis Vuitton.

I feel sad and helpless thinking about the bed we have been in and how the rough sleepers' realities are so utterly different from ours.

We take the train to Onehunga to start the Coast to Coast walk — a 16km hike across a narrow part of the Auckland isthmus — between the Manukau and Waitemata harbours. There are signs to follow, but you'll need the map from the Auckland Council's website or you can make up your own route. We gather strength at **Onehunga Cafe** — one of quite a few in the

main strip of shops — and I decide the walk justifies (I'll do that a lot this weekend) having the fried chicken waffles with fried egg and chilli maple syrup with my coffee. Fortified, we buy my fetching blue poncho, touch the water at the Onehunga Bay Reserve (my partner insists that we have to follow the Coast to Coast track properly, with no cheating) and set off.

The walk takes you through Onehunga, up Maungakiekie One Tree Hill and down through Cornwall Park, through Epsom then up Maungawhau Mt Eden and down through the

Auckland Domain to the waterfront. There's a mix of suburban streets, parks and main thoroughfares. It's a fantastic way to see the city and appreciate the beauty of it, and though there are a few maunga uphill, that also means magnificent views.

It takes us about three and a half hours without stopping for breaks but you could do it far more leisurely and take the day, stopping for lunch, or even bike it with a few modifications.

It's an interesting walk in a geological and



The newly renovated Grand Windsor hotel.



historical sense also — is it a crater pit or a rua kumara on the side of that volcano?

We finish the walk at the very end of Queens Wharf (no cheating) then have an emergency milkshake and fries at Better Burger in Britomart.

We rest, shower and head out for well-earned pints and views at **Dr Rudi's** on the Viaduct — now we've finished walking, the sun has come out and the outdoor tables are filling up.

It's nearly dinner time and we've decided we want to incorporate a boat trip on the harbour in our weekend of playing tourist. This should be easier than it is but unless we want to do a dinner cruise there aren't really any options, so we decide to take a ferry to Northcote Point and eat at **The Engine Room** — a very popular bistro that's something of an institution on the North Shore.

I know some Aucklanders have the ferry as their everyday transport but this is somewhere I've never been and going under the harbour bridge is really special — it looms large and noisy above the tiny ferry.

An early evening sunset paints the cliffs a golden hue, striking against the grey-blue of the water. On our walk to the restaurant we duck down to reserves and little beaches along the cliffs — it is high tide and the

water lapping at the edges of the cliffs in the sunset is stunning.

Back at the wharf waiting for the ferry, the city lights sparkling on the water are lovely. We're meeting a friend at a bar and pass a line of very excited young people queuing for a DJ upstairs as we head underground to the excellent **Caretaker** in Roukai Lane — they limit the occupants to the number of chairs and tables available and bring you delicious cocktails based on your taste. Unfortunately, my taste is too many delicious cocktails and another late night is had.

However, we're up early again to hire e-bikes for the morning. I'm not sure if the ones we get are typical (their tyres are as thick as motorbike tyres) but they make cycling zero work and we woosh along the waterfront, head up and over Parnell Pools and through the Rose Gardens. We have breakfast at **Winona Forever** — an outrageously popular new cafe in Parnell with highly Instagrammable dishes — but

we've forgotten it's Father's Day (and the kids are at the grandparents — oops) so the wait is longer than usual, but when our meals arrive they're beautiful and very tasty.

Then it's an easy cruise through the Domain across Grafton Bridge to K Rd.

Lowdown

Grand Windsor: 58-60 Queen St, Auckland. hotelgrandwindsor.com

Amano: 66-68 Tyler St, Britomart. amano.nz

Northcote Pt. engineroom.net.nz

Caretaker: Roukai Lane, Britomart. caretaker.net.nz

Winona Forever: 100 Parnell Rd, Parnell. winonaforever.co.nz

Cross Street Market: Cross St, Auckland.

Xuxu Dumpling Bar: cnr Galway St and Commerce St, Britomart. xuxu.co.nz

Onehunga Cafe: 259 Onehunga Mall. onehungacafe.co.nz

Dr Rudi's: Level 2, 204 Quay St, Viaduct. drrudis.co.nz

The Engine Room: 115 Queen St,



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We go **Cross Street**

Market — a monthly market of makers and sellers and food.

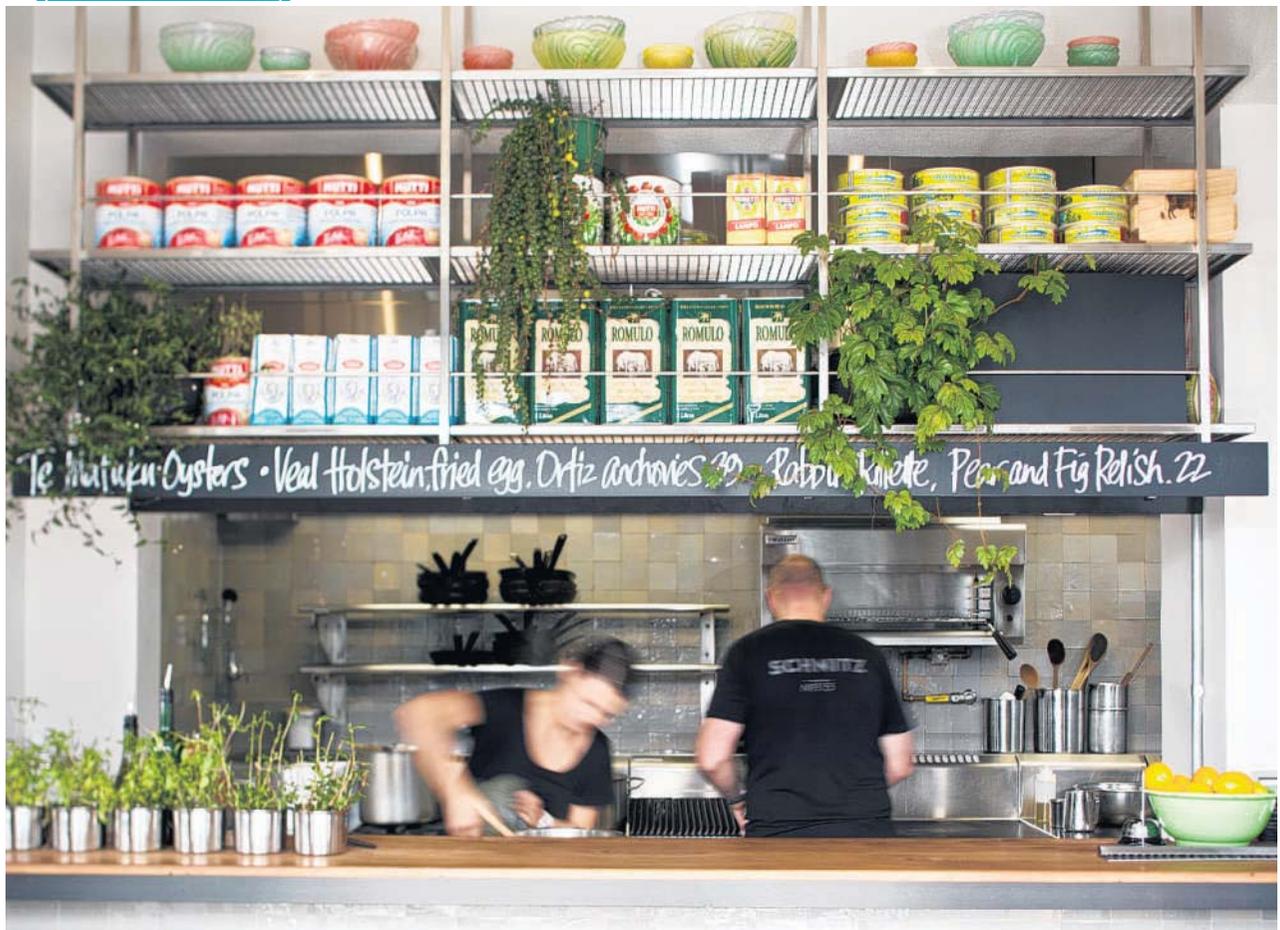
It's nearly time to get back to

reality so we have one final burst of

gluttony — a cream-filled doughnut and a coffee from a stall before e-biking back via the bright pink Lightpath for checkout and heading home.

Lowdown

Booking.com has 6018 properties in New Zealand, and 1170 in the Auckland region alone, so you'll find something in the level of accommodation you are after.





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From top: The Engine Room; Onehunga Cafe; inset, dumplings at Xuxu Britomart.

