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7 Must-Do's in Auckland, NZ

by **Fiona Harper**

Must-Do's in Auckland, NZ

Situated on the Pacific Ocean's 'Ring of Fire', Auckland gives Sydney a run or her money when it comes to a waterfront city blessed with a natural harbour. Travel writer Fiona Harper found seven 'Must Do's' when visiting the City of Sails.

1. Voyager NZ Maritime Museum

An island nation influenced by the Tasman Sea and the South Pacific Ocean, to understand what makes New Zealanders tick, take a visit to Voyagers NZ Maritime Museum. Known as the 'land of the long white cloud' after clouds forming above this isolated land mass guided navigators such as Polynesian seafarer Kupe around 950AD, Abel Tasman and James Cook to pinpoint Aoteroa. Kiwi's retain this strong bond with the ocean: boats are in their blood. Nowhere is that more apparent than in the City of Sails where an estimated 25% of Auckland households own at least one boat.

The museum traces New Zealand's heritage from the first Polynesian arrivals and its intrinsic link to Maori culture through to European arrivals and migration. In more recent times the Kiwi's success in bringing home the America's Cup in 1995 then again in 2000 is displayed with a significant exhibit as well as other tributes to New Zealanders exceptional sailors. There's an emotional tribute to one of the country's finest sailors, Sir Peter Blake, who was killed while protecting his vessel from pirates on the Amazon River.

www.maritimemuseum.co.nz

2. Auckland Harbour Bridge

The well-travelled folk at Lonely Planet rate Auckland Harbour as the country's top visitor attraction so it's a pity that pedestrians are banished from its Harbour Bridge. There are however two ways that visitors can bypass that ban to enjoy a spectacular panorama from the bridge.

The most popular option is to join an escorted tour on an Auckland Bridge Climb atop the struts high above Waitemata Harbour. If you're feeling particularly daring you could also jump off the bridge with an industrial strength bungy cord carefully strapped around your ankles.

www.bungy.co.nz/auckland

The only other way pedestrians can hoof it across the 1,000 metres of asphalt is by entering the Auckland Marathon, held each year in November. In 2013 over 12,000 runners and walkers took advantage of the rare opportunity to view Auckland from the Harbour Bridge.

www.aucklandmarathon.co.nz



3. Sabrage and Champagne

There's a noble French tradition known as sabrage which is the practice of opening a bottle of champagne, not by simply popping the cork, but by rather dramatically slicing the top off the bottle with a sabre, or sword. As you do. Trust the French to apply the same beheading technique whether quashing treason (think Marie-Antoinette and her husband King Louis XVI) or celebrating success.

There are only two barmen in Auckland that should be trusted when celebrating in a similar manner. Both of them can be found, sabre in hand, behind the gilded bar at Sabrage Bar (in French styled Sofitel Hotel) on Viaduct Harbour. At NZD235 for a bottle of Perrier Jouet you wouldn't do this every night. But it's a thrilling way to celebrate a significant birthday or special anniversary that you're unlikely to forget.

4. Wynyard Quarter

In a previous life the Wynyard Quarter (or the docks, as it was then known) was a downtrodden industrial wasteland to be avoided at all costs. Times have changed though. The area flows naturally on from popular Viaduct Harbour with its swanky apartments, hotels, restaurants, cafes and bars overlooking luxury yachts bobbing gently alongside floating berths.

Much of the original infrastructure like grain silos, warehouses and wharves topped with rail lines remains, albeit with a 21st century spruce up. Harsh industry has been softened with children's playgrounds, parks with water features and striking public artworks along with a café strip with outdoor dining beneath colourful umbrellas waterside. Friday night Silo Cinema beneath the stars and on the grass is the place to be during summer with a blanket and picnic hamper as cult movies and old favourites are projected onto the exterior of Silo #7. Nearby a Superyacht docking facility offers a not so subtle decadent divide between the 'haves and have yachts'.

Future plans include a five star luxury hotel alongside apartments and no doubt a plethora of new restaurants and bars. Watch this space.

www.waterfrontauckland.co.nz/Wynyard-Quarter

5. A Day in Devonport

Dominated by twin volcanic cones of North Head and Mt Victoria, Devonport is a ten minute ferry trip across Waitemata Harbour from the Auckland CBD. Divided into small farm plots during the late 1800's, many of the timber villas constructed during that era have been carefully restored to their former glory providing charming streetscapes throughout the suburb. If you're feeling energetic take a walk to North Head and its summit for views across the harbour before calling into the Torpedo Bay Navy Museum where bunkers and tunnels that penetrate North Head can be explored. The less energetic might find Segway Tours a more relaxing mode of transport to explore Devonport village or tree-lined Windsor Reserve on the waterfront.

For lunch, it's hard to recommend just one café or restaurant - there's too many to mention. Alternatively why not pack a picnic and laze away a couple of hours at one of the parks along the water and watch the yachts sailing on the harbour. There's a heap of boutiques, gift shops, studios and galleries too if you're looking for gifts or uniquely New Zealand souvenirs. Linger after dark if you have time to take in a movie at the country's oldest cinema at the Victoria Picture Palace.

6. Views from a Volcano

Blessed with a fiery topography, there are 48 volcanic cones dotted across Auckland, many of which have significant Maori links. The city's oldest volcano, Pukekawa, is in the Auckland Domain and last erupted 150,000 years ago. Draw a circle 20 km from the CBD and it's not hard to find one nearby to tramp (as the Kiwi's say when they mean hike) to the top to enjoy elevated views. Most are free public parks and are accessible either by hiking trails or bitumen roads to the summit. Hiking across a volcano is one of those quintessential New Zealand experiences everyone should do.



Feisty Rangitoto Island juts out of the Hauraki Gulf as an iconic Auckland landmark with its wide spreading lava flow creating a classic symmetrical cone shape. Erupting a mere 600 years ago, the island is connected to Browns Island (Motukorea) and both are popular with day trippers kitted out in sturdy hiking boots. Mt Eden (Maungawhau in Maori) at 196 m is Auckland's tallest. One Tree Hill (Maungakiekie) is the city's most culturally significant as a pre-European fortification while North Head is surely the prettiest with views over Waitemata Harbour.

7. Mystic Greenstone

New Zealand Greenstone is the English name given to nephrite jade, or pounamu as Maori call it, though traditionally they knew it as the God stone. Historically it was shaped into weapons, fish hooks and tools though these days you're more likely to see it carved into sculptures or jewellery. An accidental product of nature and found only in the South Island, greenstone is revered for its durability, strength and subtle beauty. But so too for beguiling life force qualities that are said to pass through the stone. It's said that pounamu was created when a warrior named Poutini chanced upon a woman of such mesmerising beauty he snatched her from her husband. A chase ensued which resulted in Poutini turning his dazzling crush into greenstone to prevent losing her to her husband.

Make of that what you will. But it comes as no surprise to discover greenstone finding a place in spa therapy and beauty treatments. Hot stone massages are indeed one of life's real pleasures, none more so than when mystical greenstone is utilised.

Descending below sea level at SoSpa don't be discouraged by chocolate brown walls that line the steps into a cavern-like space bereft of natural light. Softly lit and smelling of subtle perfumes wafting from oil burners, white leather sofa recliners, pearly shimmering gauze curtains and plush floor rugs make the place feel like a cosy den. With warmed and oiled greenstones used in place of masseuses' hands, it's a perfect antidote to the exuberant sea level excitement of the City of Sails above.

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Posted by **Ian389** · 8w ago · Report

It's ridiculous to compare the beauty of Sydney's harbour and harbour edges with Auckland's. I first visited Auckland last year and was totally underwhelmed by both the look of the city and its harbour edge. With all I had heard about it, I was expecting something good. In comparison with Sydney, let's be frank, it's ordinary.