

NEW ZEALAND'S HAURAKI GULF HAS SO MUCH TO OFFER, EVEN WHEN THE WEEKEND RUSH IS ON.

BY JESS LLOYD-MOSTYN

**A LARGE** part of the cruising lifestyle is the joy of exploring a place almost by accident; simply because the wind pushed you in that direction perhaps.

Like many boats from Europe or the Americas we arrived in New Zealand after sailing across the South Pacific for nine months straight.

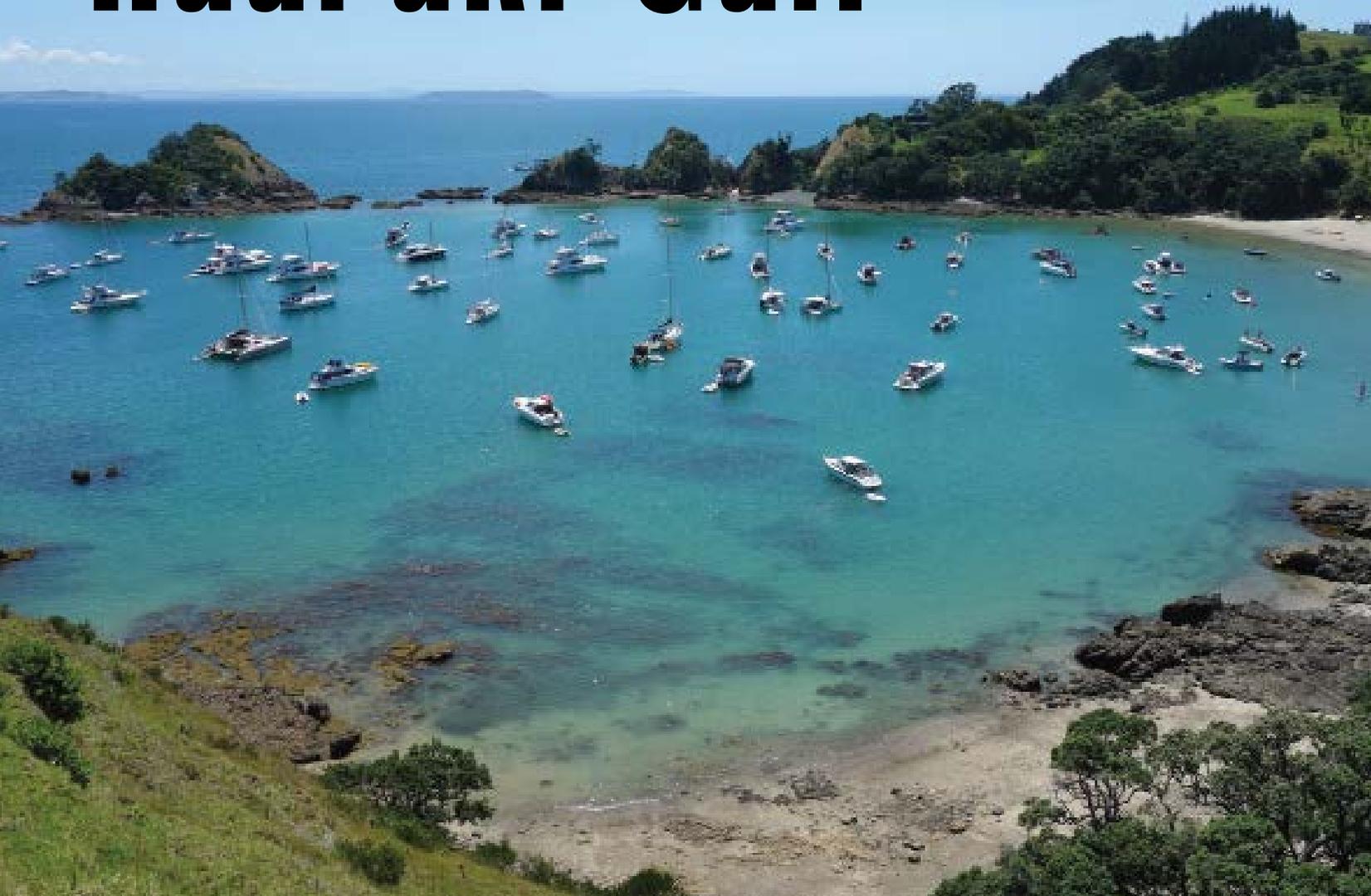
Our boat and her crew needed some R&R, by which I mean the more commonplace nautical terms of 'repairs and replacements'.

A long pause from cruising and a bit of inland travel were top of our agenda and, like so many foreign vessels in these waters, we had not actually planned to travel much in New Zealand by yacht.

However, our plans changed and we ended up extending our time here, allowing us the luxury of cruising about at our leisure.

It was then that we discovered the Hauraki Gulf, possibly New Zealand's best and easiest cruising ground, given its proximity to Auckland.

# Islands of the Hauraki Gulf





**TOP:** Motutapu Island and one of its safe anchorages.

**ABOVE:** Kawau Island with its clear turquoise water.

**PREVIOUS PAGE:** Rakino Island is popular on the weekends.

## WHAT IS THE ATTRACTION?

The Gulf lies to the east of Auckland and is bordered by the Coromandel Peninsula, which protects it for the most part from the Pacific Ocean swells. To the north is Great Barrier Island, a fantastic sailing destination in itself, which further serves to lessen the impact of the wider ocean on the sea state within the Gulf.

The area is dotted with many islands, some big and full of holiday homes and amenities, some small and privately owned. There is an anchorage for every wind direction and condition plus all the convenience of Auckland city, its marinas and chandleries right on your doorstep.

It is only really sailed in by New Zealanders, every Friday from about 3pm onwards the 'City of sails', as Auckland is known, experiences a mass exodus as people rush from their desks and onto their boats, scrambling to untie the dock lines and get out to the islands. The Hauraki Gulf is their playground and they hurry to grab the premier anchor spots.

They pile in until the anchorages look more like boat showrooms. It is not only boaters that flock here either as many of the islands are served by both passenger and car ferries as well.



metres. There are several walking tracks on the island and you can see lava caves on your way up to the summit. From the top the views of the city and the emerald islands sprinkled amid the sparkling blue water are pretty breath-taking.

There are two fair weather anchorages to the west and south of the island. A third, Islington Bay, is my preferred stop. It is only exposed to winds from the south and is nestled between Rangitoto and the neighbouring Motutapu. It's a good spot to pick up visitors as well as there is a ferry service from the city.

Motutapu island sits beside Rangitoto and is greener and older. Its interior reveals a number of World War II batteries, gun placements and observation posts, which can all be explored via the island's walking tracks.

By sea there are pretty bays and beaches that are little visited, save for an outdoor education camp

**“THEY HAVE TO RETURN TO REALITY WHEN THE WEEKEND IS OVER AND LEAVE ALL THESE ISLANDS TO THE CARE AND ENJOYMENT OF THE LIVEBOARDS.”**

However, once Sunday comes and the weekend draws to a close, they reluctantly pick up their anchor chains, untie moorings or return to the ferry terminal and slink back to the confines of the city. What this means for longterm, liveaboard cruisers is that even in the height of New Zealand summer you can still find secluded bays and isolated beaches all week long.

We even started using a great strategy of predicting which would be the most popular places for boats over the weekends and instead sail away to coves with no facilities or beaches lacking transport links in order to have a quieter anchorage on Saturdays and Sundays.

So what is so great about these islands then? Well, each has its individual character and attractions.

Sailing out from Auckland Harbour you first almost bump into two volcanoes. Browns Island is little more than a petite cone and crater of a volcano, with a walking track and a nice beach. The island is owned by the Department of Conservation and the tourist ferries do not stop here, meaning you can only visit by private boat.

The island's only anchorage is really only suitable for fair weather, but it makes a lovely little stop. More dominant is the dormant cone of Rangitoto, which stands at an impressive 260

in the converted barracks in Administration Bay. A number of anchorages provide good holding and great shelter, especially on its north side.

Across the water to its south is Motuihe island, another one owned by the Department of Conservation and popular with day-trippers. This is mainly due to its beautiful beaches, which are yours alone to stroll on early in the morning before the sun gets too hot and the visitors pile in; or just before sunset.

No matter where the winds are coming from there is somewhere to drop the hook and other hooks on board may find you landing a tasty snapper.

If fishing is top of your list for Hauraki Gulf activities and the weather gods are playing ball, then you might as well make a pit-stop at Otata island where you might dive for scallops or catch crab, trevally, kawhai and john dory as well as the more usual snapper and kingfish.

There are countless fishing hotspots in the inner Gulf but it is worth remembering that these grounds are well picked over by locals.

Otata island, part of the little group called 'the noises', is in fact privately owned by a family. They do not mind people going ashore or even cooking their catch on a campfire, so long as

they do so conscientiously; respecting fishing restrictions and managing fire and litter.

Between 'the noises' and Motutapu is the quaint and quiet Rakino. Unlike the others that I have mentioned so far, Rakino island has about 80 houses and holiday home 'baches' speckled across it. This is the island where people go to get away from the city, there are no shops, no hotels, not even a bed & breakfast or a pub interrupts its remote tranquillity. Hard to believe, a 40 minute ferry ride from Auckland.

The two most popular bays are accessible by road and track but there are three further ones that only the residents and the yachtspeople are able to get to. Time seems to stand still here, the close-knit community of inhabitants are friendly and welcoming and the fishing is easy and relaxed. Once you drop your hook in one of Rakino's bays you will have a hard time bringing yourself to pick it up again.

As luck would have it the island of Waiheke could provide just the boost that is needed. Pristine beaches, world class wines, cafés, restaurants and shops and all with the same rugged walks, sea views and wildness of the other islands too, Waiheke will definitely have something to spark your interest.

There is also a theatre, a large art gallery, a great library and a cinema, if your island time suddenly clouds over and rain spoils play.

Anchorage on the northern side of the island relate to its most popular beaches: Oneroa, Palm Beach and Onetangi. In the right conditions each of these provides a great stop and has good holding. 'Te Ara Hura', Maori for 'discover the way', is a 100 kilometre trail around the island, mostly off-road through lush native bush.

A shift in wind might see you exploring other bays: Owhanake Bay and Church Bay on the west coast both provide good shelter from an easterly. Matiatia Bay, in between the two, can even shield you from gale force winds as well as being a convenient point to pick up visitors using the ferry. Bays to the south such as Huruhi, Putiki, Rocky Bay, Woodside Bay and Awaawarua are always a lot less crowded than the anchorages to the north but have good holding and lovely views across to the Hunua ranges of the mainland.

Our preferred trick for avoiding the weekend crowd was to go for a sail along the southern coast of the island and up the Waiheke channel. This takes you past a very picturesque cluster of islands: Ponui Island, Rotoroa Island and the small but perfectly formed Pakatoa Island.



The far eastern end of Waiheke contains a bay nestled within an even larger bay, called Man o' War. Anchoring off the beach here affords you flat water in a quiet spot, as there is no village or shops ashore. However, this bay does include the island's only beach-front winery, which is only really easily accessible by boat or seaplane.

From Man o' War Bay you can see right across to the Coromandel Peninsula, only about 12 miles and an easy day sail away. Pakatoa Island, sitting in the middle of that view, is privately owned, however, its sandy beach, scallop beds, excellent fishing and great anchorage in a southerly can be enjoyed by any cruiser for free.

A stone's throw to its south lies Rotoroa Island, which was also privately owned until 2011 but now welcomes visitors under its latest manifestation as an arts, heritage and conservation park. It even has its own ferry. It has four sandy beaches, three holiday homes and two decent anchorages with good holding.

The final island in this eastern cluster is Ponui Island; also known as Chamberlain's Island as it is privately owned by the Chamberlain family. It sits between the eastern end of Tamaki Strait and the Firth of Thames at the southern end of the Waiheke Channel.

Save for the island's sheep, donkeys and the elusive kiwis, there are few others to share in this island idyll. There are lots of beautiful coves to explore and a choice of anchorages to shelter in all weathers.

It is an easy sail over to the Coromandel Peninsula with the almost landlocked harbour of Te Kouma and the beautiful coast steeped in history. Or, there is Great Barrier Island

and its neighbour Little Barrier Island, at the outer extremity of the Gulf, about 50 miles from Auckland, with a veritable maze of inlets and hidden deep-water harbours. Both these yachting destinations really deserve a write-up all to themselves.

So, instead, I will draw your attention to eleven miles northwest of Waiheke to the rather beautifully named Tiritiri Matangi Island, Maori for 'tossed by the wind'. As this title implies it is a stop best left for settled weather.

## **"THE VIEWS OF THE CITY AND THE EMERALD ISLANDS SPRINKLED AMID THE SPARKLING BLUE WATER ARE BREATHTAKING."**

Owned by the Department of Conservation the island's only inhabitants are its colonies of native birds. With no predators around to threaten them Tiritiri Matangi has become a sanctuary for species such as the brown teal, the red crowned parakeet, the fernbird, the fantail, the tui, the grey warbler, the rifleman and the little spotted kiwi to name just a handful.

There are two anchorages to the northeast and the southwest, which both offer good holding. If the weather does not quite play ball for an overnight stop here then it is a short hop over to the mainland's Whangaparaoa Peninsula where there are several good anchoring spots on both the north and south side.



**LEFT:** Busy Auckland Harbour.  
**ABOVE:** Motuihe Island

**LEFT:** Waiheke Island sunset with Auckland city off in the distance.

**OPPOSITE PAGE:** Kawau Island, Mansion House Bay



All allowing easy access to another natural beauty site, Shakespear Regional Park.

### NEED TO KNOW

While on the subject of conservation, it is important to note that the entire Hauraki Gulf is in fact a marine park and home to a number of species.

Humpback whales and Bryde's whales along with bottlenose dolphins, seals, hammerhead sharks, bronze whaler sharks and orcas are commonly seen. Sometimes you can spot them feeding on large shoals of fish as the water becomes a frenzy of splashing and the seabirds start circling above.

Another seven to eight miles on from here, a chance for a lovely little sail, brings you to yet another cluster of islands further north in the gulf. Motuora Island, Motutara Island, Motukareka Island and Motuketekete Island are pristine little clumps of green in the sea

that make excellent day stops for snorkelling in the right weather. Moturekareka even contains the wreck of the Rewa, a large four-masted steel sailing ship sunk there in 1933.

All these little gems are uninhabited and little visited but hold a number of suitable anchorages if the conditions are benign.

If the conditions are the opposite however and as long as you are not running from strong westerlies, there can be few better places to run to than Kawau Island. The long inlet of Bon

Accord Harbour almost cuts the land in two and provides a number of perfectly sheltered anchorages for the yachts which come to huddle within it. With few distractions it is the perfect place to sit out a blow.

There is the Mansion House that sits just off the bay of the same name, which was built in the 1860s and is open to the public. As well as being a fascinating and attractive piece of history to explore it also has pretty grounds and café.

The entire harbour is a safe haven from swell and there is also the Kawau Boating Club, which provides a number of services for members and visitors alike. You could choose to be in a different bay for breakfast, lunch and dinner and still fit in a great day of fishing and sailing, making the harbour a popular stop for cruisers.

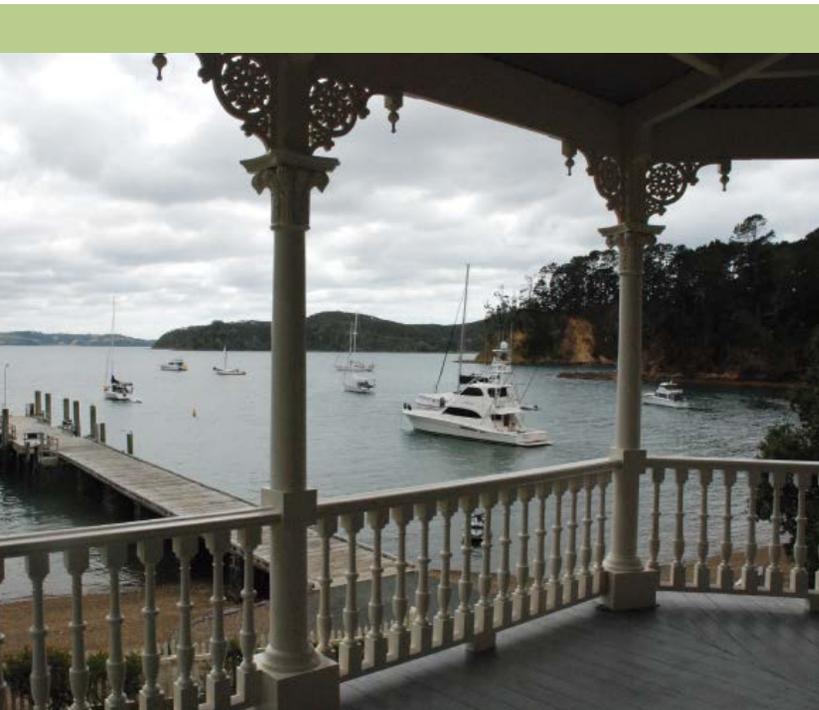
### WHY WOULD YOU NOT?

With over 200 sheltered anchorages on the inner islands alone there is great choice and flexibility when it comes to sailing the islands of the Hauraki Gulf.

We have spent time criss-crossing it with no real agenda; expecting to end up in one particular bay and finding that the wind shifted and we had a more enjoyable sail aiming for a different spot. We've ducked foul weather closing in and been able to find good shelter and calm water amid surrounding raging winds.

Yes, these islands are the playground of the Auckland sailing set. But alas they, unlike the visiting cruisers, have to return to reality when the weekend is over and leave all these islands to the care and enjoyment of the liveaboards. ≈

**"IT WAS THEN THAT WE  
DISCOVERED THE HAURAKI GULF,  
POSSIBLY NEW ZEALAND'S BEST  
AND EASIEST CRUISING GROUND."**



## FURTHER READING

The story of the Hauraki Gulf – Raewyn Peart  
 New Zealand's Hauraki Gulf – David Thatcher  
 Hauraki Gulf – Ian D. Robinson  
 Cruising New Zealand – Spot X – Mike Pignéguy and Mark Airey

## LINKS

Auckland Seaplanes: [www.aucklandseaplanes.com/scenic.php](http://www.aucklandseaplanes.com/scenic.php)  
 Auckland whale and dolphin safari: [www.awads.co.nz/](http://www.awads.co.nz/)  
 Rangitoto island: [rangitoto.co.nz/](http://rangitoto.co.nz/)  
 Waiheke island: [www.waiheke.co.nz/](http://www.waiheke.co.nz/)  
 Tiritiri Matangi Open Sanctuary: [www.tiritirimatangi.org.nz/home](http://www.tiritirimatangi.org.nz/home)  
 Kawau Boating Club: [kawauboatingclub.nz/](http://kawauboatingclub.nz/)



## JESS LLOYD-MOSTYN

Jessica Lloyd-Mostyn and James left England in 2011 aboard *Adamastor*, a Crossbow 42, intending to circumnavigate in a couple of years. Now they combine cruising with being full-time parents to daughter, Rocket, who was born en route in Mexico. They crossed the Pacific ocean with her, all the way to New Zealand, where their son, Indigo, was born. Now, more than 5 years, 18,000 miles, 32 countries and 2 babies en route since they set off you can follow their progress: [www.water-log.com](http://www.water-log.com)

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