



# 36 hours in the bay of islands

**Miriyana Alexander** heads to a top tourist spot and falls for the place hook, line and sinker

**Friday 4pm** Leaving Auckland, the bloke is in a state of high anticipation. It is rumoured that should angling be your thing you can fish off the deck of the luxury pad we'll be calling home this weekend. He's muttering about weights and hooks and tension on the line ...

**7pm** Welcome to The Boathouse at Opua. You'll know it – it's the blue building that juts out over the water near where you catch the Russell car ferry. We check in. It's all gorgeous floor-to-ceiling glass, sunset kissing the water. He can have the deck, I'll take the sofa.

**8pm** We eat fish and chips, slurp a bottle of local pinot gris and invent lives and steamy rendezvous for the people coming and going on the car ferry. I'm barely finished when the chips are whisked away to become surprisingly effective bait. A few small fish are caught and thrown back (okay, one's kept for more bait).

**Saturday 8am** I stumble out of bed for a cuppa and find the bloke ... on the deck. He is in angler's heaven, quickly landing a decent sized kahawai. For dinner, he promises. I gotta get him out of there. For my sake.

**9am** Anyone who's anyone is at the Firemen's Fundraising Fair at Paihia. Bargains come in the form of 50-cent magazines, a \$10 sun lamp and there's even haggling over a decrepit black and white TV set. We spend a couple of hours in the sunshine wandering around the glorious Waitangi treaty grounds before catching a water taxi to Russell for lunch. The 'Romantic Russell' sign on the wharf prompts much reminiscing, for this is where the boy proposed. Sippy sods.

**1pm** It's time to swim with the dolphins. Well, we would have, but we didn't see any. Assured it's been weeks since the creatures have done a no-show, we award the Dolphin Discoveries people major brownie points for offering everyone on board a free repeat trip. Instead we go island-hopping (there are dozens of privately owned islands in the bay) and it's true lifestyles of the rich and famous – all secret tunnels, private beaches and multimillion-dollar properties. We hoon out to Cape Brett and the Hole in the Rock, and get quite a buzz sailing through it.

**5pm** We're barely back on dry land

when a rival hotelier lands on our doorstep, desperate to entice us to her eco-retreat. Cor blimey, it's a competitive lark this tourism business. I decline, thinking it's not really the done thing. We while away the early evening reading and downing a bottle of bubbly. Before we know it we're watching the sun set and barbecuing on the deck, eating the angler's handiwork. (I'm pleased there's a barbie as the mod-con kitchen is so off-putting I don't want to dirty it. And there's the small matter of not being able to figure out how to work the oven, even with instructions.)

**Sunday 9.30am** Hmm, a water theme is developing. I decide that if you can't beat 'em you might as well join 'em – it's time for some proper fishing. Darren from Spot-X has kindly given up a round of golf to take us hunting and gathering. We head out into the Pacific Ocean dreaming of giant marlin and kingfish and whatever else is lurking in the 60m depths, with Darren providing inspiration by way of tales of giant fish that didn't get away. We drift for a bit, Darren staring intensely at the screen of his fish finder (deep down,

I know this is cheating). Then they start biting. Richard gets a snapper, I get a hapuka (bigger, of course), then Richard gets another snapper and something known as a pig fish (too small, thrown back). We return to land happy with our haul, especially when the lovely Darren does the dirty work and guts our fish. What a guy.  
**1.30pm** Before we hit the road there's time for a little bit of luxury at the Paihia Beach Resort and Spa, voted one of the top 10 spas in Australasia by UK mag *Condé Nast Traveller*. I learn I have headache-causing tension in my neck and so a Balinese head massage is recommended. Cocooned in warm towels while chamomile and lavender oils are rubbed into my head, this is bliss. And even better, there's not a fish in sight.



## NEED TO KNOW

### The Boathouse

Beechy St, Opua, ph 0800 683 722, or visit [www.theboathouseopua.com](http://www.theboathouseopua.com). \$265-500 a night, depending on the time of year and how many nights you stay.

**Dolphin Discoveries** From the Paihia wharf, ph (09) 402 7900, or see [www.dolphinz.co.nz](http://www.dolphinz.co.nz). \$99 for adults; \$59 for five to 15-year-olds; under five years free.

**Spot X Fishing** From the Paihia wharf. Ph (09) 402 7123, or see [www.fish-spot-x.co.nz](http://www.fish-spot-x.co.nz). \$85 per person including bait and tackle.

**Paihia Beach Resort & Spa** 116 Marsden Rd, Paihia, ph (09) 402 6140; visit [www.paihiabeach.co.nz](http://www.paihiabeach.co.nz).