

# EAT, DRINK AND BE MERRY

Auckland's Waiheke island, with its stellar wineries, is fast catching the attention of international travellers. **BY TAN KENG YAO**



Anti-clockwise from above, left: Mudbrick is a favourite spot for weddings and other high-key celebrations; Mudbrick Vineyard at Waiheke Island; The Boatshed is one of the most stylish lodges in Waiheke.

**W**AIHEKE, a small island just off the coast of Auckland, is fast catching the attention of international travellers. This is in part thanks to *Travel + Leisure* magazine, whose World's Best Awards 2016 named Waiheke the fourth best island in the world and top island in Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific. Waiheke was also named the fourth best island in the world by *Condé Nast Traveler* for 2016.

But New Zealanders have long known about this gem set in Hauraki Gulf. City dwellers flock to the island in summer, drawn by the pretty beaches, the laid-back vibes, the food that's farm-fresh and the island's proximity (it's only a 35-minute ferry ride from downtown Auckland).

And then, there is the wine. Waiheke is also known as the Island of Wine, which should give you an idea of what to expect from the place.

The island is home to about 30 boutique wineries and vineyards and, thanks to its rich clay-like soil and micro-climate, varieties of grapes such as syrah do very well here.

A vineyard here that is among New Zealand's most acclaimed is Stonyridge ([www.stonyridge.co.nz](http://www.stonyridge.co.nz)). It produces one of the top Bordeaux-style reds in the world – the Larose, which has won over critics with its complexity and richness. At NZ\$290 (S\$284) a bottle, it is one of New Zealand's most expensive wine, and even if you are willing to shell out that amount, you can't just walk into the winery and expect to walk out with a bottle tucked under your arm. You have to show that you are serious about it – the best way to buy Larose is through the winery's Larose VIP Club subscription service, which commits you to a minimum of six bottles a year.

However, you may be able to get a taste of the Larose at the winery's Ver-

anda Cafe if it's available, but if it's not, console yourself with a glass of its other red wines, which are really good too.

Another stellar island winery to check out is Obsidian ([www.obsidian.co.nz](http://www.obsidian.co.nz)), which some say is one of the island's best producers of syrah. And while its wine is top-notch, its surroundings are unpretentious; wine tastings often take place al fresco under a pergola set among the vines.

Want to kick back and let someone else plan a winery tour for you? Waiheke Island Wine Tours' ([www.waihekeislandwinetours.co.nz](http://www.waihekeislandwinetours.co.nz)) Platinum Private Tours is just the thing. It provides a private wine tasting experience for a minimum of two, and maximum of four people. Because it's your tour, an itinerary will be designed to suit your needs. Do note that couple tours are not available during the peak season between December and February and are available only at selected times outside the peak period. Check its website for more details.

## FOR THE FOODIES

For those whose inclination is more towards food, the cuisine on Wine Island will not disappoint either.

The restaurant belonging to the family-owned and operated Mudbrick vineyard ([www.mudbrick.co.nz](http://www.mudbrick.co.nz)) is a favourite spot for weddings and other high-key celebrations and it is easy to see why. The restaurant, sitting on a ridge, overlooks the sparkling waters of the Hauraki Gulf all the way to Auckland city. Its pretty gardens don't hurt either. The restaurant, whose focus is on seafood and red meat, also offers an impressive tasting menu with wine pairing. Do book your table in advance though.

Or, if you happen to be in Waiheke



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on a Sunday and are prepared to set aside your afternoon eating, Poderi Crisci vineyard's ([www.podericrisci.co.nz](http://www.podericrisci.co.nz)) restaurant is the place to be. Besides its great reputation for classic Italian fare, its four-hour lunches on Sundays are legendary too, during which you progress at a leisurely pace through multiple courses, ending with dessert.

Menus change daily depending on what's fresh that day. Bookings are essential.

You really don't want to make your Waiheke restaurant and winery tour a whirlwind one, so plan to stay for a few days.

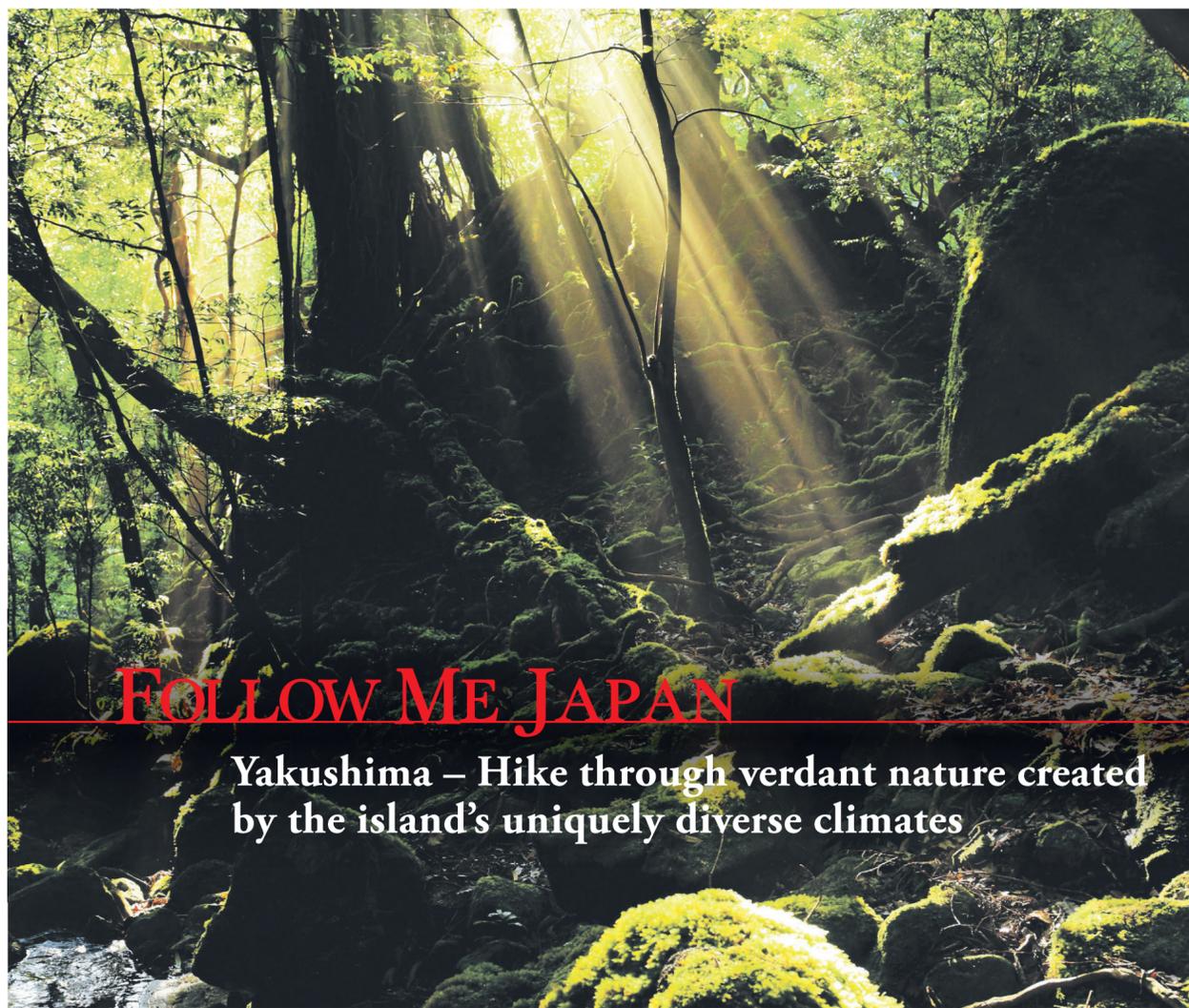
In line with the chilled vibe of this island, there are no big impersonal chain hotels here; most of the accommodation come in the form of elegant inns, upmarket B&Bs or private home rentals. Advanced reservation is a must.

For a place to rest your weary body after an intensive day of eating and drinking, try The Boatshed ([www.boatshed.co.nz](http://www.boatshed.co.nz)), one of the most stylish lodges in Waiheke.

Its five guest suites and two bungalows may be nautical-themed, but they are no beach shacks. Its Lighthouse suite, for example, consists of three storeys connected by a spiral staircase. The top level, an open deck, looks out to Oneroa Bay where, if you get lucky, you may spot dolphins and orcas frolicking in the water. The room is also equipped with a service lift for in-meal dining; order breakfast, or a romantic dinner for two, and you will soon be having a meal tete-a-tete in your room or sun deck.

Another lodging option is luxury guesthouse Enclosure Bay ([enclosurebay.co.nz](http://enclosurebay.co.nz)), on the northern coastline of the island. An intimate accommodation, it has only three rooms – two one-bedroom suites and one deluxe room – and all come with private decks from which you can soak in some sun or take in the view of Hauraki Gulf, Great Barrier Island and the Coromandel Peninsula. And the service provided by the guesthouse owners is unparalleled, and everyone will agree, the level of service is what makes or breaks an experience.

So, if you want to be able to say that you were there at Waiheke before the masses hit its shores, what are you waiting for?



## FOLLOW ME JAPAN

Yakushima – Hike through verdant nature created by the island's uniquely diverse climates

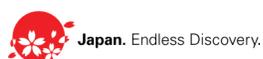


To the south of Kyushu lies Yakushima, which rises dramatically out of the Pacific Ocean like an emerald green castle. Due to its unique formation, Yakushima's climate ranges from subtropical to subarctic. This is akin to experiencing the weather of Kyushu to Hokkaido but all within this 500 square-kilometre island! Designated as Japan's first UNESCO World Heritage Site, Yakushima is home to some of the world's oldest cedar trees like the Jomon Sugi which is estimated to even pre-date the Roman Empire. Endangered loggerhead turtles make their nests on Yakushima's pristine beaches in the summer months and lush forests attract nature lovers from all over, with hiking trails to suit people of all abilities.

This is the place to get away from the hustle of city life; to hike through verdant rainforests, full of fairytale-like trees with twisted moss-covered roots. Get the best out of your holiday with an unparalleled stay at Sankara Hotel & Spa Yakushima, where eco-luxury is at its finest, and where your every need will be taken care of by personable staff with impeccable service.

If you are looking for a well-deserved break in the unspoilt paradise of Yakushima, please feel free to contact Follow Me Japan. Private, bespoke travel arrangements can also be made for small groups. Please call us at 6507 3900 to find out more.

For enquiries and bookings, please call 6507 3900 or visit [www.followmejapan.com.sg](http://www.followmejapan.com.sg)  
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