

One hour from town

A Wairarapa retreat and city boutique hotel offer Wellingtonians accessible escapes

Briarwood

Where's the year going? In January we hit the ground running—plunging into the working year, the kids into a packed school term and all of us into the usual round of late summer social activities. As the autumn months whirl past, our summer camping holiday becomes a distant memory.

At Anzac weekend we seize the chance to steal away to catch up with each other and our plans for the year. Just 24 hours, minus the children—long enough to be enjoyable for us, the children and the babysitters!

But where to go just an hour from the city? Passing up Martinborough—a place we've already enjoyed numerous times—we hit on Greytown.

Less than an hour's scenic drive over the Rimutaka Ranges are historic Greytown's rows of beautifully restored period buildings, and delightfully presented shops full of clothes, homewares, toys and antiques.

The Briarwood, at 21 Main St, is our chosen retreat, and a treat it is. Arriving in the early afternoon we're warmly welcomed by Briarwood's charming owner Liz. Liz and her husband have been in the hospitality industry for years. Drawing on her husband's creative talents from a previous career as a Weta designer, Liz has turned Briarwood into a

special place to stay. Built around 1867, this listed double-storey colonial townhouse was lovingly restored and re-opened in 2005 as a boutique bed and breakfast. There are three apartment-style suites that can be either shut off from each other or opened up to make a house of three double bedrooms with en suites. There's a wonderful balance between old and new, with rich fabrics, beautiful Egyptian cotton linen and goose-down duvets all conveying a delicious indulgence—and that's before we discover the decadently-large claw-foot bath. From our suite we have access to a dining area and private lounge where we can enjoy a drink, flick through a magazine or catch a glimpse of weekend footy.

We take a five-minute stroll from Briarwood to the White Swan for dinner. Our choice of Stone Grill Menu means our meat and seafood arrives at our table raw—along with vegetables, salads and a stone grill heated to 400 degrees. It's an entertaining and tasty dining affair.

The beauty of Briarwood is that it offers the bed and breakfast experience without the obligation of mixing with other guests.

After breakfast in our private lounge we can't help wandering back into town for another look at the shops and a coffee and pastry at the

French Bakery. Finally, heading out of town we're compelled to make one more stop—for some unforgettable chocolate tasting at the wonderful chocolate shop Schoc.

We turn back towards the Rimutakas in a completely different frame of mind to the day before. Only 24 hours, but plenty of time to relax, talk and enjoy the vibe of what is clearly a very special town.

— Petra Otte is an owner operator with House of Travel

Ohtel overnight

I've been dreaming of breakfast in bed for around five years now. Funnily enough, that's the age of my oldest child. So the chance of a night away—alone—in Wellington's newest and greenest hotel is too good to turn down. I pack my bags and head for the door, grabbing the novel started last summer as I leave.

Boutique hotels are about as chic an urban experience as you can get. The original, the Chateau Marmont in LA, is legendary for its famous guests and rock star antics. The Marmont in New York is considered by many to be the best hotel in the world. The Ohtel, on the edge of Wellington's CBD, is vying for a similar reputation. And from first impressions it's on track.

The small reception is a mixture

of retro furniture and contemporary Kiwi design. The ten upstairs rooms are individually decorated with bright coloured tikis and natural fibres. My room at the front provides me with a bonus visual diary of life down on Oriental Parade.

After a luxurious night of uninterrupted sleep I place my breakfast order. In my rush I'd forgotten to pack PJs so take receipt of my breakfast in my underwear, trying to avoid eye contact with the tray bearer. Later I go downstairs to interview Ohtel's architect and manager, Alan Blundell, and I am mortified to discover it is the same man who earlier brought me my eggs! "I tend to fulfil all roles round here," he explains.

The more personal approach is what makes a Ohtel stay different. That and their sustainable approach. A rooftop of solar panels heats the water and recycling bins are placed in every room. The salt and sugar containers are Crown Lynn classics which, along with the dressers, tables and chairs, have been sourced over the years from auctions. All food is from local markets. In all, the experience is classy but with a very New Zealand feel. I come away refreshed, satiated ... and just a little embarrassed.

— Francesca Price is the editor of Good magazine



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