

GO NZ: Hotels »

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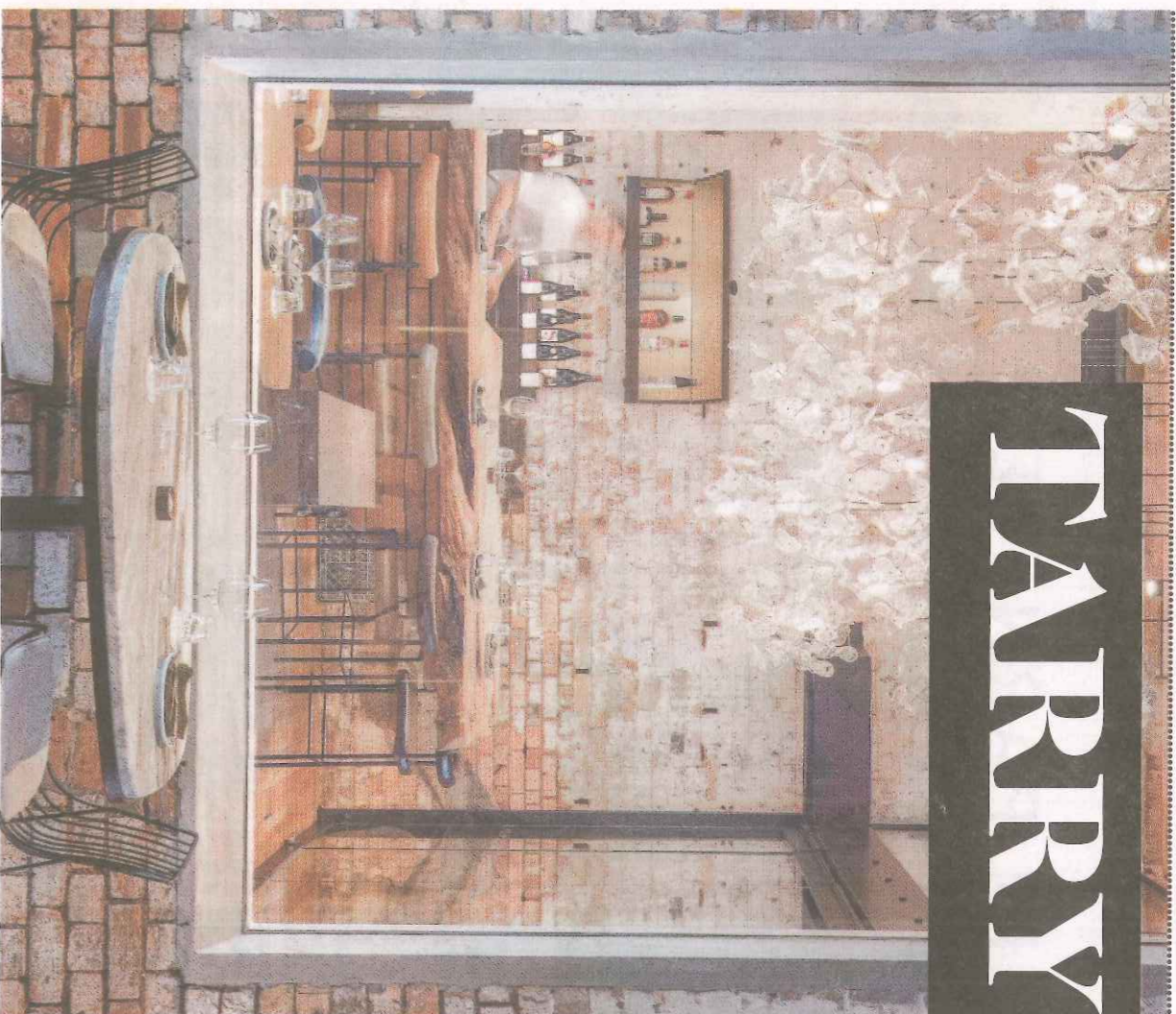
Hotels about town are more than somewhere to lay your head, writes Ewan McDonald

Our first pubs were rough 'n' ready affairs, offering guests little more than a lumpy mattress — possibly shared with passing strangers, and not in a good way — mutton stew and a bottle of home-brewed hooch for the night. Thankfully, we've moved on. And up: the country can now lay claim to a bevy of upmarket urban hotels with premier chefs in their restaurants, quirky takes on high tea, dreamy day spas or rooftop bars with magical views. Best thing about them? You don't have to stay the night. Or the weekend. Here's a selection of some beautiful urban hotels around the country that will be only too happy to see you for dinner, a Manhattan or a massage.

AUCKLAND

Escape to the Mediterranean at Esther restaurant in QT Auckland, where Sean Connolly brings flavours of the French Riviera, Morocco and Sicily to Auckland. Continue at the hotel's flop bar with classic snacks, contemporary cocktails or a never-ending wine list.

At the Park Hyatt, indulge at the signature restaurant, Onemata, where produce is locally sourced using seasonal ingredients from farmers and fishers; at the Living Room, unwind with a light meal or indulge in the afternoon tea blend of nostalgic and modern tastes. The Panty is an all-day pit stop for coffee or to unwind with a craft beer or wine; settle in for an afternoon or evening with sweeping harbour views at the



The Hotel Britomart's king restaurant. Photo/Supplied

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the city? Bersantai Day Spa at **Castaways Resort** in Kariotahi promises Balinese-style treatments — and a soak, surrounded by nature, in outdoor stone bathtubs.

WAIKATO

Canbridge's beautiful **Henley Hotel** reopened late last year with a new tennis court, dining options, chef's orchard and sustainable herb and vegetable gardens. The boutique five-star hotel has an indoor swimming pool and day spa. **Henley Social** is open for breakfast, lunch, high tea and dinner and a new dining experience, **Arbory Terrace**, will launch soon.

Formerly the **Days Hotel and Suites** by Wyndham, the **Hamilton CBD** hotel has had a significant redevelopment and has been rebranded to **Ramada Hamilton**. The restaurant, cafe and bar has been fully refurbished and renamed **Sisterfields**.

ROTORUA

Kiwis are rediscovering the lakes and geysers, culture and adventure opportunities here. The **Regent of Rotorua's** Regent Room is one of the city's best restaurants whether your taste is full-service, white-tablecloth style or dinner and a cocktail beside the pool.

Barrel & Co. brasserie at the new **Pullman Rotorua** offers all-day dining, farm-to-table cooking centred around an open kitchen.

Return to bygone eras at two of the city's finest establishments: **Peppers on the Point** is a 1930s mansion beside Lake Rotorua that is now an exclusive retreat. Treat yourself to lunch or their daily four-course dinner, accompanied by NZ wines from the lodge's cellar, in the glamorous dining room or outside overlooking the lake.

Prince's Gate Hotel is celebrating its centenary — it was originally a Waikāi tavern, dismantled and rallied to Rotorua and reopened next to the Government Gardens in 1921. **Duke's Bar & Restaurant** feels like a London gentleman's

club (without the snob factor) where Digraj Singh serves an inspired mix of modern dishes and classic favourites.

NAPIER

The art deco city's iconic **Masonic Hotel** houses Emporium, a collection of distinct spaces. The vibrant **Battery & Bar** offers menus to suit the time of day, the **Cocktail Lounge** is dressed in rich furnishings, a relaxed place for a light bite, craft cocktail or Hawke's Bay vintage, and the **Emporium Lounge** captures an era of elegance.

TARANAKI

New Plymouth's historic **White Hart Hotel** has had an... um, interesting past but it's been wonderfully restored as the heart of the West End Precinct. Inside are the **Sung Lounge**, **Public Catering** and **Ms White** eateries and drinkeries, as well as the sumptuous **King and Queen Boutique Hotel**. The **Nice Hotel** has a relaxed cocktail bar, award-winning **Table** restaurant and an expansive deck surrounded by tropical plants in summer. Top of the town is the **Good Home's** new rooftop bar with sea views.

WELLINGTON

If we can choose only one... **QT Wellington's** Hippopotamus is not only one of the country's best hotel restaurants, it's one of New Zealand's best dining experiences. Can't do justice to the decor in words, so we'll steal theirs: "The eclectic world of a fabby French grandma who knows how to drink. Pops of colour on plush textures and a bevy of bedazzled chandeliers." **Jiwon Do's** degustation menus marry French techniques to local produce; the results are extravagant and unexpected. The cocktail bar is superb but the **Copthorne Hotel's** One80 is a fine eatery and its lounge bar is just the spot to watch the sun go down on Oriental Bay.

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Captain's Bar. The Spa curates a selection of treatments.

For **Hotel Britomart**, Orphan's Kitchen founders Tom Hishon and Josh Helm have created kingi, using sustainably and locally caught seafood, amid unique decor.

Honourable mentions to more mature favourites: watching the sunset at Bellini bar in the **Hilton Auckland**, cocktail, craft beer or wine in hand; the secret corners and grown-up treats of **DeBretts'** first-floor bar, bathed in light from its glass-roofed atrium. Feel like escaping

Emporium Eatery and Bar (top) sits inside Napier's Art Deco Masonic Hotel; New Plymouth's historic White Hart Hotel (Photos/Supplied

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