

**STANDING IN FRONT** of me is a cheery lady with healthy curves. She knows my type – people who linger at food stalls that offer free samples, planning how to get more without appearing greedy. She flashes an honest smile, leans in close, lifts up the mesh cover to reveal mounds of buffalo mozzarella and ricotta, and explains, “We won two supreme awards at the *Cuisine* cheese awards for this ricotta.” I’m hooked. Not just on the cheese – from the Clevedon Valley Buffalo Company, which has the first herd of buffalo in New Zealand – but on the quaint Clevedon market with its delectable fare.

Just out of Auckland, at the entry to the Hauraki Gulf, is where you’ll find Clevedon. Brimming with fertile pastures, it looks like your typical farming community. Until recently,

it was. But in the past few years, the place has emerged as a foodie’s haven, with vineyards and olive groves, as well as resident chefs and farmers with a real passion for the gourmet.

Clevedon’s maritime climate, protected by the Maraetai hills and the Hunua Ranges, along with its clay soils, have proven perfect for growing European-style wine – winemakers alternately compare it to Bordeaux and Verona.

At Puriri Hills, owner Judy Fowler grows classic Bordeaux grape varieties like malbec, merlot and cabernet franc. The family-run operation, she says, “produces and blends wines in the spirit of the great Right Bank Bordeaux”, eschewing modern industrial techniques for French tradition. Everything is grown, made, bottled, aged and stored on the

scenic 40-hectare property.

Fowler puts her wine foremost, but has also branched out to an accommodation package. Her homely lodge caters for up to six guests and an overnight stay includes home-cooked meals. “We use local ingredients, simply cooked, to allow the wines to show their best.”

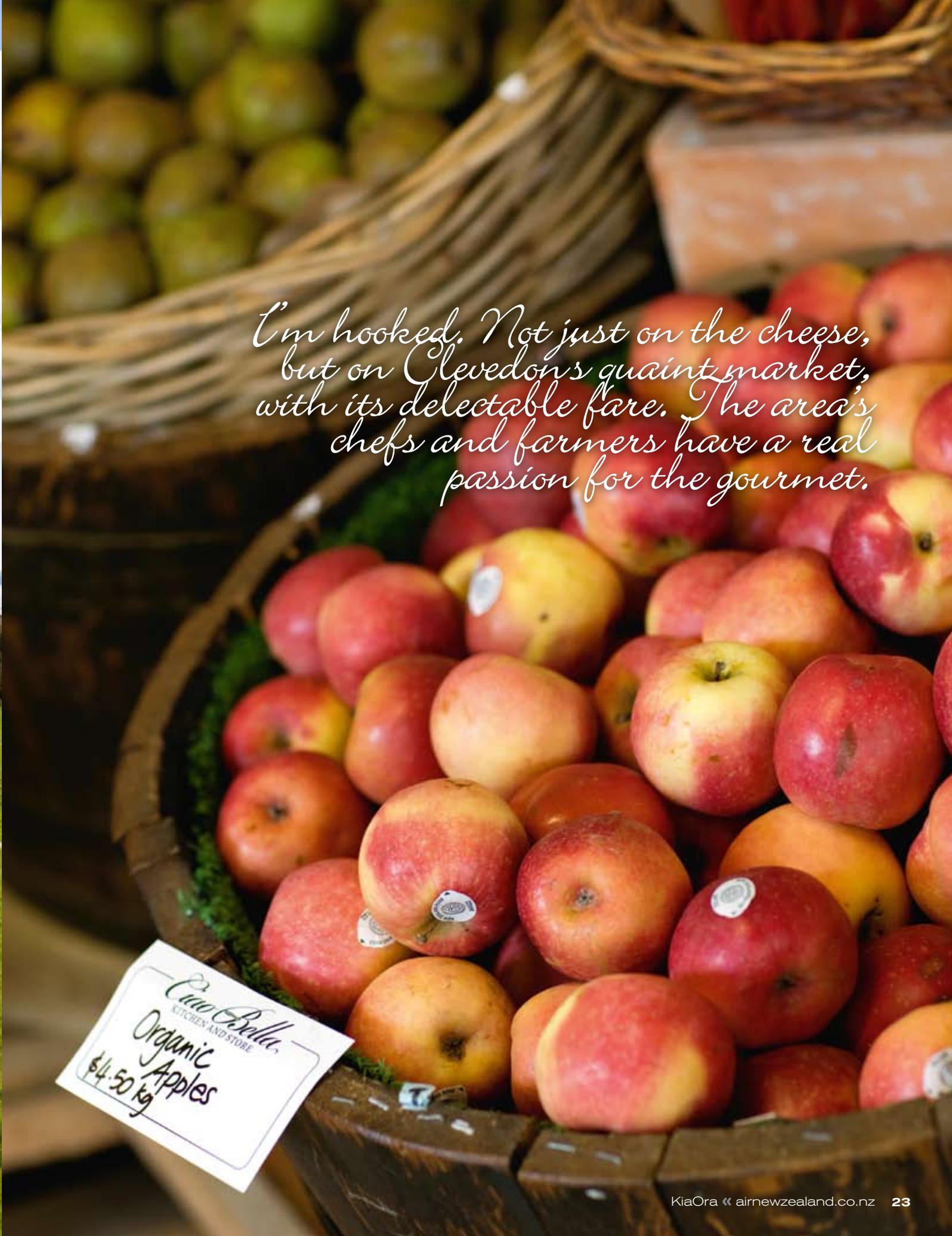
Before we departed the next day, we stocked up on a few bottles from Puriri Hills’ cellar before heading to another upscale accommodation option in the area. Trading rows of vines for native bush, Kitenga offers seclusion and expansive views. The bed and breakfast has just two double rooms, which have views out over the grazing cattle and horses to the Hauraki Gulf.

“Our children are the sixth generation of the Chamberlin family to live in this area,” owner

# Rural delivery

Less than an hour from Auckland, Clevedon makes a great escape for a weekend of long lunches, wine and market fare.

STORY KARRYN MILLER PHOTOGRAPHS TODD EYRE



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but on Clevedon's quaint market,  
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*Ciao Bella*  
KITCHEN AND STORE  
Organic  
Apples  
\$4.50 kg



Previous pages, from left: Clevedon is bucolic, with farms running down to the Hauraki Gulf; produce is sold from barrels at Ciao Bella, a cafe and store.

These pages: Whether it's at local wineries Vin Alto (top left) or Puriri Hills (far right of middle row), at the Clevedon Village Farmers Market (top right) or Ciao Bella (bottom right), good food and wine is never hard to find. The area also has some very fine accommodation options, like Kitenga (right).





## eat

Get in early at **The Log Cabin**, since the place is packed at every meal. 442 North Rd, (09) 292 8895, [www.logcabincafe.co.nz](http://www.logcabincafe.co.nz). The weekly **Clevedon Village Farmers Market** is gaining a reputation for seriously good food. Monument Rd, [www.clevedonfarmersmarket.co.nz](http://www.clevedonfarmersmarket.co.nz). Lovers of Italian cuisine should pop in to **Ciao Bella** to stock up on quality cooking essentials. 439 Papakura-Clevedon Rd, (09) 292 9229. **Vin Alto** is an authentic Italian vineyard with enoteca. 424 Creightons Rd, (09) 292 8845, [www.vinalto.com](http://www.vinalto.com)

## sleep

Wake up to a home-cooked breakfast at luxury bed and breakfast **Kitenga**, overlooking the Hauraki Gulf. 700 North Rd, (09) 292 8032, [www.kitenga.co.nz](http://www.kitenga.co.nz). **Puriri Hills'** focus is wine but they have expanded to include lodging and dining. 398 North Rd, (09) 292 9264, [www.puririhills.co.nz](http://www.puririhills.co.nz)



Nikki Chamberlin told us. Kitenga looks out over the sea to Ponui Island (also known as Chamberlin Island), which her great-great-grandfather purchased in 1853. "The land is still owned and farmed by our family."

During the summer months, Kitenga's infinity pool is the best spot to enjoy the view but with the weather a bit cooler, we decided to enjoy the vista and our welcome package – a bottle of New Zealand wine, chocolates and fresh fruit – on the deck outside our room.

The Log Cabin cafe was another must on our agenda, and proved perfect for a lengthy lunch. We opted for vegetarian ravioli – a handmade blend of pumpkin, goat's cheese and thyme, covered with a creamy parmesan sauce. The menu also ranged from fusion fare, like salmon with a sweet chilli and lime dressing resting on a blend of Asian vegetables, to char-grilled fillets of beef.

A meal of world-famous Clevedon Coast oysters with Vin Alto's limoncello sorbet is a popular choice for those looking to indulge. The oysters are exported to restaurants around the world and are on the menu at some of Auckland's top dining establishments (but you can save 25-50 percent off the restaurant price by picking some up at the nearby Clevedon Coast factory shop).

The next morning at Kitenga, home-made bread, with yoghurt and jam also made on site, waited for us, along with cereal, fruit and espresso. Before we checked out, we explored the 24-hectare property, trying to spot tui, koreru, fantail, waxeye and pukeko that have made their home in the bush – and to work up an appetite for our next destination.

Taking a stroll through the Sunday farmers' market further demonstrated the locals' zeal for good food. The Hungarian pastries *kurtos kalacs*, crispy pastries dappled with hundreds and thousands, caught my husband's eye but I was already ahead, dunking chunks of sourdough in River Estate's Frantoio olive oil, best in class at the 2009 OlivesNZ Awards.

"Organic" and "natural" feature predominantly, on everything from the highland beef to the more upscale version of a Kiwi favourite: free-range manuka-smoked bacon and egg pie with tomato relish. We decided on some Argentinean artisan pasta crafted earlier in the day, hearty loaves of ciabatta and some

## INSIDER TIP

**Sophie Martin-Welsh,**  
Air New Zealand  
Contact Centre  
Consultant,  
Auckland



I love Clevedon's rural setting and friendly people. It's only 10 minutes to a beach and 45 minutes to the city but far away enough from the hustle and bustle. It's the home of the Auckland Polo Club so come summer, there are always polo matches – they get the big-name games, which make for a good afternoon. A great place to take the dog is Clevedon Reserve, on Thorps Quarry Rd. Do the waterfall track or the whole thing, with brilliant views of Auckland from the top. Other great things to do include kayaking down the Clevedon River out to Kawakawa Bay. They've recently installed a launching ramp, which makes access a lot easier. And have a go at Red Alert Paintball. The staff are friendly and it's always fun, in the wet or dry.

white eggplants from a local farm as our take-home treats.

A short drive away was Ciao Bella, a much smaller affair than Clevedon's main weekend grocery stop. Golden pumpkins and other fine produce sat in woven baskets at the front of the bazaar and cafe. Inside were shelves stacked with fresh pasta, sauces, olive oils, and Italian treats. The cafe's display case held a selection of panini and bagels with grilled vegetables and chunks of feta.

We picked a bite-sized muffin treat and lattes before making ourselves comfortable at one of the rustic long wooden tables, streaked with the midday sun. After mulling over the Sunday news, it was time for our reservation at one final vineyard.

Enzo Bettio and his family run Vin Alto, which means "high wine" in Italian. Bettio chose this part of the world, he says, because the climate was remarkably similar to that of Verona in Italy, famous for producing valpolicella. Vin Alto's

full-bodied red wine, retico, is crafted using long-established Italian production methods. The grapes are rack-dried for a number of weeks to concentrate the flavour, resulting in a denser drink.

Spending a leisurely afternoon here is just the thing to round off a weekend of indulgence. We stopped by for some seasonal Italian cooking, each dish paired, of course, with wine. The winter menu was hearty: ravioli packed with wild mushrooms and delicately dressed with parsley and parmesan, and a fresh feta and fig roulade wrapped in flat bread with balsamic roasted onions.

We lingered, partly to let the food settle but also to enjoy the setting – olive groves and vines sprawled out before us. After a slow-paced game of *bocce* (Italy's version of petanque) we were back on the road for our brief trip back to the central city.

*Air New Zealand has flights to Auckland from across the domestic network. From Auckland, Clevedon is a 40-minute drive.*



**do**  
 Either take a walking trail through the 100 hectares of native bush at the **Clevedon Scenic Reserve** or head a little further afield to the **Hunua Ranges** for a swim at the base of the falls, kayaking or tramping in 14,000 hectares of native forest.

**Getting there with Air New Zealand**

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<b>Hamilton</b>	<b>\$24.00</b>	<b>\$7.00</b>	<b>\$61.00</b>
<b>Rotorua</b>	<b>\$19.00</b>	<b>\$5.00</b>	<b>\$62.00</b>
<b>Napier</b>	<b>\$17.00</b>	<b>\$3.00</b>	<b>\$39.00</b>
<b>Hastings</b>	<b>\$38.00</b>	<b>\$4.00</b>	<b>\$59.00</b>
<b>Palmerston North</b>	<b>\$15.00</b>	<b>\$3.00</b>	<b>\$36.00</b>
<b>Wellington</b>	<b>\$17.00</b>	<b>\$6.00</b>	<b>\$54.00</b>
<b>Nelson</b>	<b>\$15.00</b>	<b>\$3.00</b>	<b>\$42.00</b>
<b>Christchurch</b>	<b>\$17.00</b>	<b>\$4.00</b>	<b>\$55.00</b>
<b>Dunedin</b>	<b>\$33.00</b>	<b>\$8.00</b>	<b>\$98.00</b>
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