

**T**he people of Tairāwhiti take pride in their hospitality: visit a local marae and they'll be appalled if you go home hungry. It's a typical Eastland attitude; you won't leave here wanting

for much – except more time to explore. If you are a lover of the good things – culture, scenic beauty, fine food and wine, or a surf along this spectacular coast, plan your time well because you have a lot of ground to cover. And leave room in your carry bag for the wine.

Whichever way you approach Gisborne, you are in for a visual treat. Proud locals have a fine time picking out the landmarks as you fly in. The road through the Waioeka Gorge and ranges from Opotiki is sparsely trafficked, leaving you to admire the lush native forest that gives way to the rippling green of the ranges. Come in from the south on SH2 and again you'll be spoilt for scenery. Arrive by sea, as Captain James Cook did, and the dramatic white cliffs of Te Kuri o Paoa, or Young Nick's Head, reveal their majestic beauty. Gisborne, or Turanganui-a-Kiwa, as the settlement was known then, was Cook's first port of call in Aotearoa and cabin boy Nicholas Young the first to see land, hence the headland that bears his name.

Cook's welcome in 1769 wasn't as warm as you would receive today. The pa where Maori lived at the time commands spectacular views of the bay, and was a prime position to witness the explorer's arrival on the *Endeavour* – the locals didn't know if it was a floating island or a great bird with beautiful wings. There was wariness, unease and a language barrier at that first meeting of the two cultures. They clashed, both sides suffered losses and Cook retreated, changing his initial naming of Endeavour Bay to Poverty Bay, famously saying, "It afforded us no one thing we wanted". History here is very much alive and visible in the landscape – but for the Maori side, you need to know where to look, while Europeans have set the mark in stone and place names, with Cook's early endeavours especially commemorated. There's even the infamous "crook" Cook: the bronze statue was unveiled on Kaiti Hill with much pomp by the governor-general in 1969 on the bi-centenary of Cook's historic visit. It wasn't until 1983, when Prince Charles dropped by and pointed it out, that it was revealed as a fake – it was not Cook at all but an Italian naval officer. Some locals saw the humour, and the statue still stands.

Gisborne is known as a city of firsts – the first to receive Cook, the first in the world to see the sun rise each day, and maybe that's why people tend to take the initiative and do things their own way in these parts. Take the city's winemakers: Millton, the first fully certified organic winery in the country, recently celebrated its 22nd harvest – it was at it years before "organic" became a marketing buzzword; a stone's throw from Okitu beach, Amor-Bendall makes its multi-award-winning wines with high technology but minimal chemical interference (the wines are served in business class on Air New Zealand); and at TW Wines, Paul Tietjen and Geordie Witters are not averse to conducting their unique vineyard tours on the back of a tractor or having tastings in the old barn that Geordie's grandfather built.

# FIRST LIGHT

Along the idyllic stretch of east coast that a piqued Captain Cook christened "Poverty Bay" lies Gisborne, surrounded by a wealth of beaches and bays and imbued with a deep sense of history.

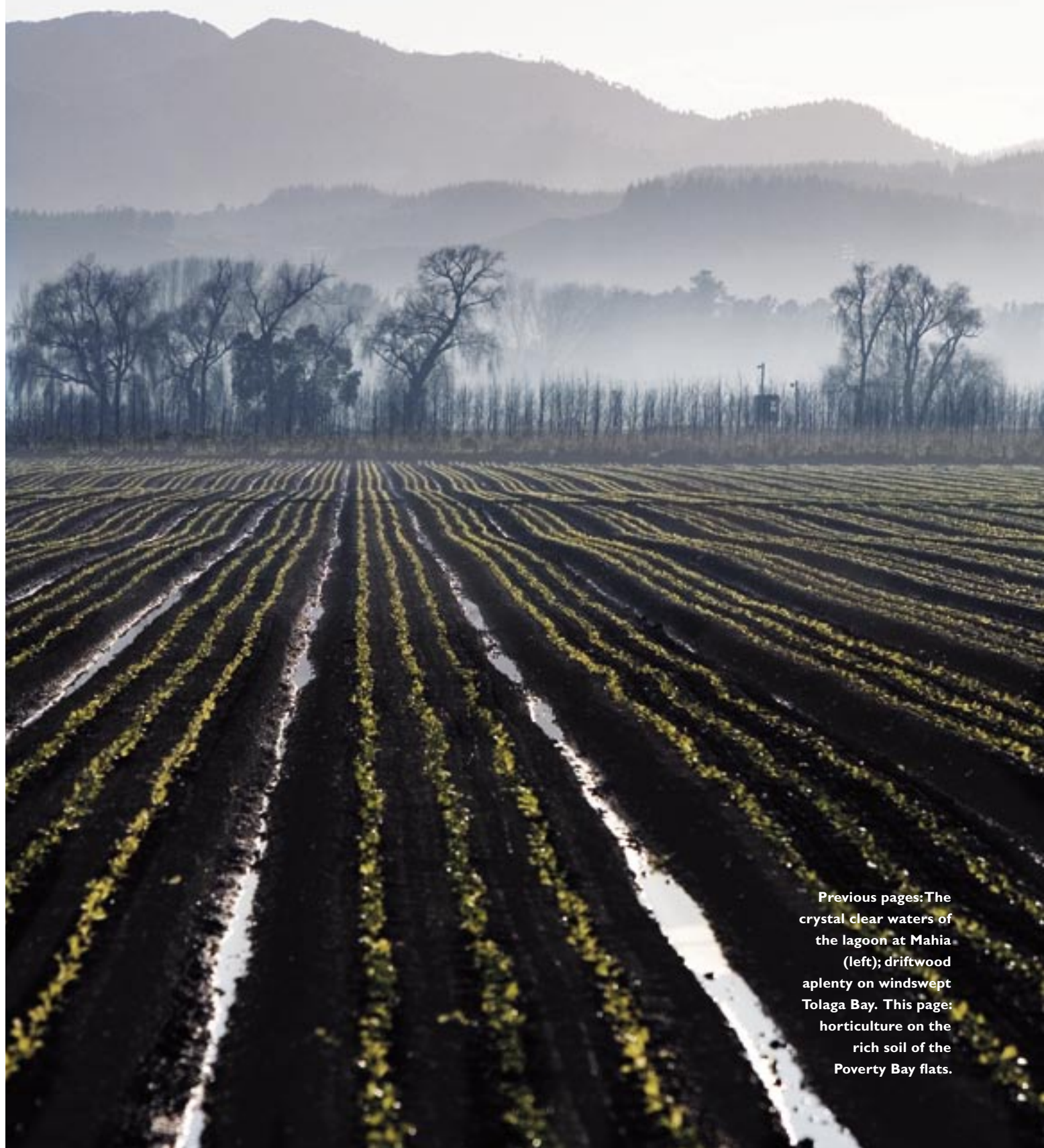
STORY **JOANNA BATES** PHOTOGRAPHS **TESSA CHRISP**



destination**gisborne**







Previous pages: The crystal clear waters of the lagoon at Mahia (left); driftwood aplenty on windswept Tolaga Bay. This page: horticulture on the rich soil of the Poverty Bay flats.





**eight essentials**  
**Clockwise from above left:**

**1.** Visit **Wyllie Cottage**, the oldest dwelling in Gisborne. **2.** Go surfing on the spectacular east coast beaches. Pictured, Wainui Beach. **3.** And, 275 Gladstone Rd, ph (06) 868 3835, has beautiful homewares and gifts that can be exquisitely wrapped. **4.** Don't leave town without saluting **Captain Cook**. **5.** **Gisborne City Vintage Rail**, ph (06) 867 0385 is the perfect stop for train enthusiasts. **6.** **TW Wines**. Call Paul, (06) 868 6499, or Geordie, (06) 868 9142, to arrange a one-off tour and tasting. **7.** **Puketawai Cultural Experience**, ph (06) 862 6611, arranges marae visits. Pictured, Ruakapanea Marae. **8.** **Tolaga Bay Cashmere**, 31 Solander St, Tolaga Bay, ph (06) 862 6746, showcases locally produced cashmere knitwear and accessories.





## Gisborne is known as a city of firsts – the first to receive Cook, the first in the world to see the sun rise.

Alongside the innovators is an abiding feeling of history. Maori are thought to have inhabited the region since the 1200s, and everywhere you look there is ancient detail and legend in the landscape – the kind not necessarily found in a guidebook. Anne Maguire, a local who is fulfilling a long-standing desire to indulge her passion of sharing the area's history with visitors, takes me into that lesser known landscape. And, in true East Coast style, she ensures you are fed and watered along the way.

Maguire believes in connecting the histories of the two cultures – Maori and European – that have been inextricably linked, for better and for worse, since Cook landed here. So she tells me the other, earlier, story of Gisborne: the arrival of the waka captained by Te Paoa and navigated by Te Kiwa. With a little imagination you can see the leader's faithful kuri (dog) stretched out and awaiting his master's return from a journey to find timber for repairing the damaged waka. The dog is the headland Te Kuri o Paoa. As the rest of the waka party awaited Te Paoa's return, they decided to settle here and their home became known as Turanganui-a-Kiwa, the standing place of Kiwa. "If we are comparing what Kiwa did – navigating his way here – and what Cook did, there was a greatness and connection between the two peoples to this place," says Maguire.

It's fair to say that *Whale Rider* has done for awareness of Maori culture what *The Lord of the Rings* did for New Zealand's celebrated scenery, and my tour with Maguire takes in Whangara (a little north of Gisborne), where *Whale Rider* was shot

**Clockwise from above:**  
First in the world – an  
east coast sunrise;  
Mahia local Mahea  
Tomoana returns from  
a fishing trip; shifting  
cattle on the road to  
Tolaga Bay; sheep in  
yards on Awapuni Road.





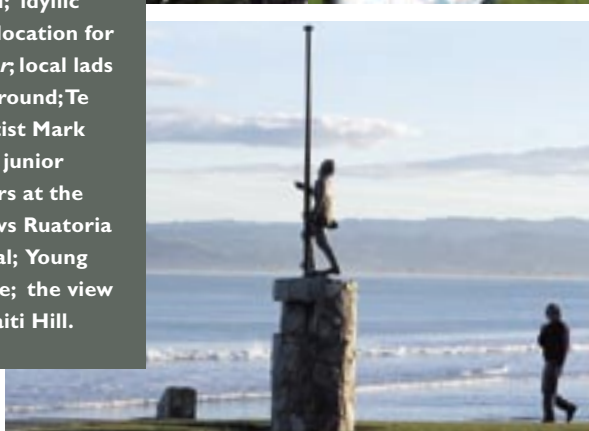


**Clockwise from above:**  
Pruning at Milton  
Vineyard; idyllic  
Whangara, location for  
*Whale Rider*; local lads  
horsing around; Te  
Moko artist Mark  
Kopua; junior  
spectators at the  
Tolaga Bay vs Ruatoria  
rugby final; Young  
Nick's statue; the view  
from Kaiti Hill.

and the legend of Paikea lives on in a setting as idyllic as the film depicts. Further north again, we reach Tolaga Bay. Maguire's hometown is a proud community of people who are likely to greet you in Te Reo (the Maori language), as they would have when Cook turned up on their doorstep after his hasty retreat from Poverty Bay. He stayed in this beautiful bay for six days for repairs and to stock up on supplies.

Cook Street – the main drag – is where you'll find the Pickled Walnut, where Tom Ngata, his brother Patene, the local GP, and his wife Ngaroma, are refining the soft, sweet flesh of the nut into butters, pestos and sauces. Tom, a lecturer in traditional Maori intellectual knowledge, has turned his hand to his other passion – traditional food. In between serving up heart-warming dishes, he has been plumbing his octogenarian father for information on the "real" hangi, and working on introducing foods such as pikopiko to the menu. Ngaroma is responsible for the eponymous pickled walnut, which she's been bottling for years, and you can enjoy it here in many different guises.

An essential while you are in Tolaga Bay is a visit to the wharf, which, at 660 metres long, is the longest in New Zealand. It was built in 1926 to reach far enough out to sea for ships to unload at all tides. While we are





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**Clockwise from above: Luxury accommodation at Opua Lodge; fine wines from Amor-Bendall; treats at the Gisborne Deli; the Poverty Bay Club, circa 1898.**

in Tolaga, Maguire takes me off the history trail to visit a transplanted Yorkshireman, Roy "The Grape" Johnson, who has chosen to produce lovingly crafted fine chardonnays at Tolaga Bay Estate.

Maguire tailors each of her guided Tipuna Tours according to preferences and keeps groups small to ensure a valuable experience. She loves to point out the interweaving of past, present and future in the culturally rich landscape. "My ancestors lived here for centuries. They walked this land. And it's that whakapapa and genealogy that gives continuity," she explains.

Further around the coast is one of Maguire's tribal marae, the Hinetamatea at Anaura Bay. Known to many as the kuia (old woman), the marae offers a living library of the tribe's history with stories told through painting, carving and a wall of photographs. For visitors new to a marae, the done thing is to remove your shoes before entering and a respectful gesture is to leave koha – a small donation for upkeep of the marae.

The next day, a drive south of Gisborne on SH2 reveals spectacular scenery and plenty more good things to soak up, including the mineral-rich Morere Hot Springs. As with the country's other thermal areas, the Ngati Kahungunu people were well aware of the spring's healing properties and named it Morere (roughly "other-worldly water"). The pool's setting is unique – in lush native bushland of a scenic reserve, which is home to one of the region's few pieces of lowland rainforest.

Just south of Morere, the area's beauty is hard to resist and Mahia, on a final finger of land that dangles off the peninsula, is under the developers' hammer. For a taste of what the area has to offer, pick a fine day and stop in at the Mahia pub, Sunset Point – named for the view from the balcony at a certain time of day. The


seafood on Arthur and Diana Symes' menu is stocked from Arthur's catch as a commercial cray fisherman.

"By cutting out the middle man everyone can have a taste of New Zealand," says Diana, who cooks these sweet delicacies with care. "Keep it simple and the less handling the better" is her secret. During the summer months the pub menu is usually under the influence of a chef from Europe. The couple believes in keeping the food interesting here and chefs, usually with a penchant for surfing, seem drawn here by a sixth sense for a blissful sojourn.

But it would be a foodie faux pas to omit mention of the culinary expertise waiting back in Gisborne. You'll need several days to get through all the good things on offer. The city has a wealth of historic buildings in which many cafes and restaurants are housed, such as Ruba, for excellent contemporary breakfast and lunch fare, and The Works at the wharf, where it's worth sticking around for dessert. If you are a renaissance kind of person, the converted gentleman's domain, the Poverty Bay Club, circa 1898, takes the cake for charm.

Gleaming glass door handles open the door to wood panelled walls, stained glass domes and the original squishy leather sofas that go on for miles. The restaurant offers a satisfying menu and generous bar food is perfectly accompanied by local wine. An excellent dinner choice is Vellagio, a Gisborne favourite, and during the day you can while away hours at the cafe in Muirs Bookshop, or grab a delicious bite at the Gisborne Deli. A short drive out of town, Robin Pearson prepares excellent food at the Bushmere Arms.

But, as I said, there's a lot of ground to cover in these parts and only room for a

glimpse here. There are miles of bush walks, heritage trails, horse treks, fishing and diving charters, golf courses, a working harbour to explore, a vintage railway and a coastline that offers some of the best surfing in the country. There is also Te Urewera National Park, the largest untouched native forest in the North Island and home to Lake Waikaremoana. The legendary "Children of the Mist", the Tuhoe people, call the Urewera region home. But, if you can't fit it all, you can always visit this city of firsts a second time. 

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**Senator Motor Inn** 2 Childers Rd, ph (06) 868 8877. Spacious, inviting, modern rooms. Visit [www.senatormotorinn.co.nz](http://www.senatormotorinn.co.nz)

**Cedar House** 4 Clifford St, ph (06) 868 1902. An historic home built with kauri, rimu and mahogany.

**Chalet Surf** 62 Moana Rd, Wainui, ph (06) 868 9612. At Okitu beach, this is the ideal spot for surfers, who can go posh upstairs or muck in downstairs. Visit [www.chaletsurf.co.nz](http://www.chaletsurf.co.nz)

**Opu Country Lodge** Manutuke, ph (06) 862 8732 or 025 209 6431. Opu provides charming hosted luxury accommodation and foodie haven.

### placesto eat

**Ruba** 14 Childers Rd, ph (06) 868 6516. Contemporary lunch and breakfast fare by David Whitfield.

**Muir's Bookshop & Cafe** 62 Gladstone Road, (06) 869 0651. A wide selection of cafe food, delicious cakes and sweets.

**Gisborne Deli** 265 Gladstone Rd, ph (06) 867 7077. Sit at the counter for a tasty lunch, take away for a picnic or stock up on homemade and imported goodies.

**Cafe Vellagio** 57 Ballance Street Gisborne, ph (06) 868 1611. Relaxed but upmarket dining in this converted villa.

**Bushmere Arms** SH2, Waerenga a hika, ph (06) 862 5820. Excellent cuisine from Robin Pearson in the dining room.

**The Works** Kaiti Beach Rd, ph (06) 863 1285. A wide selection of vegetarian meals and generous servings for carnivores.

### thingstodo

**Tairawhiti Museum** Stout St, ph (06) 867 3832 is a must. Fine collection of taonga, predominantly whalebone, plus

a moving tribute to C Company, 28th Battalion, which comprised men from the region's tribes who fought in WWII.

**Moreere Hot Springs** ph (06) 837 8856. Heal your body in a lovely bushland setting.

**The Cidery** 91 Customhouse St, ph (06) 868 8300. Try a tippie at this well-appointed cidery.

Visit [www.harvestcider.co.nz](http://www.harvestcider.co.nz)

**The Flea Market** Alfred Cox Park, is held every Saturday morning and features the area's excellent produce.

**Tipuna Tours** ph (06) 867 6558 or 027 240 4493, are happy to tailor tours to your individual wishes.

**East Cape Manuka Company** SH35, Te Araroa, ph (06) 864 4826. Check out the homegrown healing power of manuka oil. Visit [www.manukaproducts.co.nz](http://www.manukaproducts.co.nz)

**Pencil Gallery** Cnr Gladstone Rd & Grey St, ph (06) 867 9721. A large top-floor gallery has frequently changing exhibits of excellent contemporary New Zealand art. Visit [www.thepencilgallery.co.nz](http://www.thepencilgallery.co.nz)

**Toihoukura Gallery** Tairawhiti Polytechnic, Cobden St. Visit [www.tairawhiti.ac.nz](http://www.tairawhiti.ac.nz) Contemporary Maori visual arts with major exhibitions throughout the year.

**House of Wines** 64 Customhouse St, ph (06) 863 2794, has many of Gisborne's best wines and you can taste and buy in the gallery-style setting.

**The Boardroom** Wainui Beach, ph (06) 867 1684. Buy one off the shelf or have a board tailor-made from The Boardroom. Visit [www.surfboards.net.nz](http://www.surfboards.net.nz)

### contactdetails

Gisborne Information Centre, 209 Grey St, ph (06) 868 6139, has all the information you need to plan a self-guided historical tour, or just pick up the map of the area's wineries and prepare to indulge.