



19 AUG, 2022

Bohemian bubble

Horowhenua Chronicle, Horowhenua/Kapiti



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The marina Fremantle Fishing Boat Harbour is a more recent addition to the historical suburb. Photo / Tourism Western Australia

Fremantle pays homage to its convict past but Mike Yardley finds there is so much more to dine out on

FIERCELY INDEPENDENT and undeniably proud of its distinct sense of place and personality, Perth's little brother Fremantle exists within its own bohemian bubble.

I was eager to scratch beneath the surface of Fremantle's spirited skin. Enter Michael Deller, a born and bred local who is the powerhouse behind Fremantle Tours. Whether it's history, culture or the hottest foodie spots you're after, Michael is the consummate insider, plugged into Freo's

eclectic pulse with commanding up-to-the-minute knowledge.

Strolling the evocative streets of town, virtually every second passer-by greeted Michael, as he whisked me around the heritage trail's premium draws, starting with the World Heritage-listed limestone fortress of Fremantle Prison, built by convicts in the 1850s. It remains the most intact convict establishment in the Southern Hemisphere. Remarkably, this austere facility remained operating as a maximum security prison until 1991.

Another legendary experience is a jaunt through the flavourful

Fremantle Markets, that have been hustling with trading bustle since 1897. Covid slammed the brakes on the market bustle, but they roared back into life in July. Top stops? Try a crème brulee coffee from Coffee Connection, accompanied with a European-style doughnut from Levi's. For lunch, head to Fluffy Lamb for mouth-watering Indonesian fare, and finish up with a waffle cone from Muffle. Trust me, it's worth the calorie count.

Then it was on to the sublime preservation sweep of colonial architecture flanking High Street, Western Australia's oldest street. It's a movie-set-perfect streetscape of richly embellished heritage buildings now ornate iron railings, brimming with independent retailers, fashion designers, artists and inviting venues. Enjoy a thirst-quencher and the convivial post-work ambience of the





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National Hotel, a grand old watering hole ambitiously revived, at a cost of \$7 million 10 years ago, after falling victim to multiple fires. A staggering trove of 150 buildings enjoy heritage protection. Throughout the city, the insatiable passion for heritage preservation is inescapable.

Great eats? One of Michael's favourites is Bread in Common, with a menu inspired by locally sourced, seasonal produce based all around – you know it – bread. But it's not just garden variety bread, but wood-fired, preservative-free bread. With long communal tables and an open kitchen, it's a seductive venue. Michael confessed he often goes there just to nosh on their bread and sip coffee, while catching up on work emails.

Like Perth, liquor law changes a decade ago have powered the proliferation of the small-bar scene; intimate, speak-easies now

speckling Fremantle. Strange Company opened back in 2015 and quickly established itself as one of Fremantle's best bars. The interior is an architectural dream – a glass-encased bamboo garden lines the bar area and the rest of the industrial space is studded with eye-catching design feature. Head here to sip on a Rum Side Car or familiarise yourself with their extensive wine list and tasty bites, including a lip-smacking tapas menu.

Jungle Bird in Fremantle has brought laid back, beachy vibes to the west end. They specialise in Caribbean delights like jerk chicken with Jamaican rice alongside boutique rums, whiskeys and dark spirits, as well as kick-ass cocktails, craft beers and a few wines. This High Street haunt is just what the Fremantle doctor ordered.

Down at Fishing Boat Harbour, head to Little Creatures, the craft beer king that led the micro-brewery charge over 25 years ago. Stroll over to Bathers Beach House, a fiendishly popular diner specialising in seafood and share plates. The wood-fired pizzas are hard to pass up. If you can, tuck into a salivating platter, stacked with whole reef fish, mussels, marinated octopus, oysters and garlic prawns, and wash it down with an Eagle Bay ale. Grab a spot under an umbrella and watch the sun sink into the Indian Ocean, leaving in its wake a streaky crimson trail.

Down at the port, Gage Roads is giving Little Creatures a run for its money, opening up a massive portside venue in repurposed warehouse. Grab a pint or a tasting paddle and whistle up a Fremantle lobster roll.

Hungrier? Larger plate options include Rottnest Island swordfish schnitzel with caviar bearnaise, Harvey beef striploin or Single Fin battered local fish and chips. Boasting a variety of seating areas it's an effervescent new venue that is absolutely making a splash.

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From left, the National Hotel was restored 10 years ago at a cost of \$7 million; the infamous Fremantle Prison was built by convicts.

Photos / Visit Fremantle



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The bustling Fremantle Markets have been trading since the 19th Century; my amazing tour guide Michael Deller; the La Sosta Italian restaurant; popular diner Bathers Beach House; the High Street is packed with heritage buildings.

Photos / Fremantle Tours, Tourism Western Australia, Visit Fremantle, Mike Yardley

