



History

MUSEUM HOTEL IS A WORK OF ART

USED to seeing fine art in hotels. But a mannequin clad in a suit 'tattooed' with sequined a rare Italian motorcycle in Wellington's Museum Hotel eclectic. The hotel boasts 150 the largest collection of New Zealand art outside an institution. And the hotel's entrepreneur, arts patron and local entrepreneur Chris Parkin – just keeps the empty corners.

The mannequin begins the moment you enter the harbourside hotel has a modern exterior and a footpath full of art sculpture. In the foyer, an Art Deco glass chandelier hangs over the reception desks. Framed originals grace the walls and Chinese ceramics sit atop the reception desks. For those interested in art, the tattooed catsuit was designed by Massimo Tamburini. The mannequin work is a series of Art Deco style pieces by local artist Jane Sibley. Upstairs, the artisanal bathrooms. One- and two-person bathtubs are decadently done in Art Deco designer flock wallpapers. Leather lounges, chocolate scones and a gleaming bathtub with oversized tub and rain shower.

There is no art in the rooms. But a large limited edition print will be hung above each king bed when refurbishment of the hotel's older section begins later this year. For those planning a longer stay, each suite has a sleek galley-style kitchenette in black marble and stainless steel complete with hideaway washer and dryer.

The hotel is a favourite of executive guests, with five meeting rooms, an impressive gym and an indoor glass-roofed lap pool. Travellers will enjoy affordable rates and walking-distance proximity to the harbour and the acclaimed Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa (Our Place). The Museum Hotel once occupied the Te Papa site. It faced demolition until Parkin bought it in 1993 and moved it – intact and on railway tracks – 120m across the road. It was big news in New Zealand at the time. Even now, bathroom products bear the emblem, Hotel de Wheels. Te Papa is well worth a visit. The museum is tasked to preserve Maori treasures and the highlight is a hand-carved *marae* (meeting place) from 1842.

I am in Wellington for Matariki – the Maori New Year and start of month-long celebrations across the country. We rise before dawn to watch Maori elders herald the Matariki star, which rises in the East each June. Afterwards, there is a breakfast

feast – native mutton bird (traditionally cooked in coals), pacific oysters, pork belly and kumara.

There is fine dining aplenty in Wellington. The emphasis, as always in New Zealand, is on local produce. At Citron, Air Zealand consultant chef Rex Morgan serves up a delightfully light degustation menu. Down the road at Logan Brown, celebrity chef Alister Brown is known for simple but elegant meals. New kid on the block is The Ambeli, which offers nouveau Mediterranean in a charming old shophouse with scarlet walls and open fires.

Museum Hotel, 90 Cable St, Te Aro, Wellington. Suites from NZ \$239 (A\$191). Details + 64 4 802 8900, info@museumhotel.co.nz, www.museumhotel.co.nz

WELLINGTON EATS:

- Citron, 270 Willis St, Wellington, +64 4 801 6263
- The Ambeli, 18 Majoribanks St, Mt Victoria, Wellington, + 64 4 385 7577, www.theambeli.co.nz
- Logan Brown, 192 Cuba St Wellington +64 4 801 5114, www.loganbrown.co.nz