

Gisborne

Angela Walker
flies blind but has
her eyes opened in
Eastland.

Anne McGuire can trace
her ancestry back 26
generations in the area
and every generation
seems to have found a
voice in her.



Paikea pride: The whale rider carving
on the meeting house at Whangara.

Sunday, 11.30am: Memo to self. When flying into a destination for the very first time, make sure you don't end up in a seat without a window. Gisborne, where are you and what on Earth do you look like?

11.45am: To meet me is Richard Searle, who with wife Kirsten is the new force behind legendary Gisborne winery Matawhero. The previous owner, Denis Irwin, was one of the New Zealand wine industry's true mavericks, who in the late 1970s, achieved international acclaim with his gewurztraminers and chardonnays. The Searles bought the property two years ago and, between raising three young children, renovating the house and cellar door, planting vines and running their other Gisborne winery Brunton Road, they're ready for Matawhero to make its mark again. Over a picnic lunch under a magnificent walnut tree outside the winery's cellar door, Richard and Kirsten talk me through five of their white wines: the gewurztraminer, sauvignon blanc, pinot gris, viognier and the less familiar arneis. There is no way I'm leaving here without a bottle of the viognier. Behind us in a garden bed are some buttery, golden roses. They are Matawhero Magic, the rose bred by the famous Sam McGredy in honour of Irwin's late father Bill, who established Matawhero Wines in 1968. They were bred, Kirsten tells me, to resemble the colour of a perfect gewurztraminer.

2.30pm: On the label of every bottle of Matawhero wine is a drawing of the nearby Matawhero Church, a charming little country church with a big history. In 1868, it was the only building in the area not destroyed in the infamous raid by Te Kooti and his followers that left 60 dead.

3pm: Is this one of the country's best-kept secrets? Eastwoodhill, the national arboretum, is the largest



Blooming lovely: The Matawhero Magic rose outside the winery's cellar door.
Photos: Angela Walker

collection of Northern Hemisphere trees in the Southern Hemisphere and it's celebrating its centenary this weekend. The site, 30 minutes' drive from Gisborne, was bought by Douglas Cook, an avowed nudist who often worked in only a sunhat and a pair of gumboots. The arboretum is now home to more than 15,000 trees, shrubs and climbers.

4pm: There's just enough time for a quick jaunt out to Rere Falls and the "world-famous in New Zealand" Rere Rockslide, a 60m-long naturally formed slide. The hardy souls careening down it look like they're having a blast but we're out of time. I'm just a bit relieved.

7pm: A quick drink at Soho, one of an appealing collection of bars and eateries in the Wharfside precinct, then on to Ussco, a smartly designed restaurant in the city's former Union Steamship Company building. Perfectly cooked scallops are a stand-out and prove a perfect food/wine match to a glass of Matawhero chardonnay.

Monday, 8.30am: Zest is the type of cafe you hope to find in every town: great coffee, a cabinet loaded to the gunnels with food made on-site, lots of good glossy mags to peruse and great eggs benedict.

9.30am: If you want to know how it feels to have a grumpy, pregnant, 160kg stingray try to muscle in on your space, go to Dive Tatapouri, a short drive north on SH35 from Gisborne. Our guide Shaun tries to tell us they're just being friendly,

but with friends like these, who needs enemies?

10.30am: If you want to visit Whangara, the setting for the hit film *Whale Rider*, you'll first need to find Anne McGuire – she's the only person granted permission to take visitors through the village, which is no longer sign-posted from the main road. The next few hours in her company prove to be the most rewarding time I've spent in ages. In the church, St Bartholomew's, she explains the story of the altar window – bought in Milan for £2000 in 1928. Then in the cool, quiet calm of the meeting house she explains the history and legends of the area, the stories behind the panels, weavings and carvings, the making of *Whale Rider* (and how it took three years of negotiation before 3½ months' filming could begin) and the locals' response to the film's worldwide success. McGuire can trace her ancestry back 26 generations in the area and every generation seems to have found a voice in her. We head north to Tolaga Bay for lunch at Maria's Cafe – cheap, yummy and more great home baking – and a visit to the wharf, the longest in New Zealand and a triumph of community fundraising.

3pm: Beautiful, empty countryside and alluringly perfect beaches flank our 54km drive back to Gisborne, and now I understand why everyone I know who has been to Wainui Beach goes misty-eyed at its mention.

Fact file

Where to stay:

- Portside Hotel, 2 Reads Quay, Gisborne, ph 0800 767-874. Modern apartments and rooms right at the harbour's edge. www.portsidegisborne.co.nz

What to do:

- Matawhero Wines, Riverpoint Rd, Gisborne, ph (06) 867-6140. The cellar door closes after Easter until Labour Weekend. You can find their wines at Glengarry and fine wine retailers. www.matawhero.co.nz
- Eastwoodhill, 2392 Wharekopae Rd, ph (06), 863-9003. There are 25km of tracks through the stunning scenery of this national treasure; four-wheel drive tours are also available. Open daily, 9am to 5pm. www.eastwoodhill.org.nz
- Dive Tatapouri, at Tatapouri beach 14km north of Gisborne, ph (06) 868-5153. Eco-tours, fishing trips, dive and fishing charters and stingray feeding. Also home to the smallest marae in New Zealand. www.divetatapouri.com
- Anne McGuire, Tipuna Tours: Contact Anne through the Gisborne iSite, 209 Grey St, freephone 0800 447 267. A singularly rewarding experience.



4pm: From seat 9F, I look down on the beaches and the harbour and the paddocks and the grapevines and the chalky cliffs of Young Nicks Head and I can't wait to come back.

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