



LEFT: AN AERIAL VIEW OF THE CATHEDRAL COVE COASTLINE. ABOVE: THE GLASS-BOTTOM BOAT.

Coromandel

On Auckland's doorstep is a natural wonderland where even the most stressed-out will relax.

At just over an hour's drive from Auckland, with golden beaches and beautiful scenery, Coromandel's the perfect place for a spur-of-the-moment getaway.

While most people head to the peninsula in summer, there are plenty of spring attractions that don't involve braving the waves too early in the season, although you'll probably survive if you do.

A great place to start is the Lost Spring Thermal Pools in Whitianga. Relax in sculpted thermal pools amid waterfalls and a smoking volcano on a huge site in the centre of town.

"It's almost like a South Sea island," says Tourism Coromandel chief executive Jim Archibald.

"It's an amazing complex."

Stay all day at the Lost Spring and enjoy healthy, fusion-style food at the on-site restaurant and indulge in one of the day spa's beauty treatments, which

will revitalise tired winter bodies (thelostspring.co.nz, ph 07 886-0456).

Or for something a little different, potter Barry Brickell's Driving Creek Railway just outside Coromandel town is the place for family fun that won't break the bank.

Check out the pottery and glass-blowing and then sit back to take in the sights on an hour-long train trip through replanted native kauri forest, tunnels and viaducts. (Check the timetable at drivingcreekrailway.co.nz, ph 07 866-8703.)

Archibald says the attraction of the Coromandel is that it's not overdeveloped. You can still enjoy a quiet walk on the beach or discover places you've never been. "It's a little like old New Zealand, and people love it because it doesn't change," he says.

"You don't have to tick the boxes to say you've been there, done that. The charm is more about finding a place that you like."

DON'T MISS THIS!

THE WHANGAMATA JAZZ, ART AND BLUES FESTIVAL, NOVEMBER 20-22 (WHANGAMATAJAZZFESTIVAL.COM).

A TRIP ON **THE GLASS BOTTOM BOAT** IS A MUST FOR THOSE WHO LIKE TO STAY DRY IN THE WATER. TRIPS DEPART DAILY FROM WHITIANGA WHARF (GLASSBOTTOMBOATWHITIANGA.CO.NZ, PH 07 867-1962).

THE ORGANIC ORANGE JUICE AT **THE COLENZO CAFE AND COUNTRY SHOP** (SH 25, JUST BEFORE WHENUAKITE IF YOU'RE COMING FROM TAIRUA, PH 07 866-3725).