

## Waiheke Island: Escape Before The Christmas Rush

by Rosie Walford

Avoid the pre-Christmas madness and invest in some healthy healing time for yourself. Rosie Walford heads to Waiheke Island for a day of alternative pampering.

Worldwide, the most authentic healers are not to be found in glamorous marbled spas. The best tend to have loyal followings, and practice their magic from secluded simple treatment rooms. People search them out. And so it is on Waiheke. The island, famous for its natural beauty and restorative powers, hides some remarkable yoga teachers and masseurs among its rolling hills.

The hidden healers we've mentioned here are mature practitioners who have integrated multiple modalities of massage, natural medicine and energy work over the years. Their reputations are such that you won't even see a sign at their door. But book yourself a half-day in advance, cruise 35 minutes across to quirky Waiheke, and they will tailor you a multilayered treatment which takes you far beyond your ordinary realms. Of course the mere act of leaving the city starts to rebalance the soul. As the Skytower shrinks to the size of a safety pin, and seabirds dive in the ferry's wake, a sense of proportion returns. You need just a short, traffic-free taxi ride through Waiheke greenery to be delivered – already feeling better – into expert pampering hands.

### NEAL GHOSHAL: Individual Yoga Followed By Thai Massage

A gravel road winds above the main village and overlooks Blackpool Bay. In a simple glassy cabin, Neal Ghoshal welcomes me with a beam. This willowy and radiant anglo-Indian has been teaching yoga and massaging for 13 years; his past as a banker in the city of London is long forgotten.

I've practiced yoga for some time but have a niggling back. I have been told to visit Neal because I want to resolve it, long-term. Neal initially watches my movements and energy levels, and observes that I override stiffness to reach certain postures. Apparently, I could valiantly practice yoga like this for years and never help my spine. Inspired by his yoga teacher Donna Farhi and informed by anatomical Thai massage training, Neal leads some simple stretches, urging me to feel my body from the inside. With a light hand on my sacrum, he shows me how I can release a habitual tilt of the pelvis and find an amazing sense of alignment up and down my spine from that point, in every pose. I learn resting positions that further support my posture and abdominal lifts that will help me stay aligned. He's teaching me how to look after my ageing body for myself, with kindness and caring attention. It feels great.

As I lie in shavasana, the blissful stillness at the end of a yoga session, my massage begins. I'm still in my loose yoga clothes, and Neal starts by drawing my legs away from my hips. He progresses up my body, lifting, twisting, and loosening me at every joint. He uses his long limbs and the gravity of my bodyweight to achieve deep passive stretches. By the time he's finished with acupressure on my scalp, I'm straightened out and everything feels as though it's in the optimal place. I float off feeling encouraged, unusually graceful, and aware enough to keep myself in good shape.

Three weeks later I have enduring body-memory of the session and a subtle felt-sense of true alignment that feels extremely healthy and beneficial to my back as I practice at home.

Neal's extended individual yoga and thai massage session is up to 2.5 hours and costs \$100 per hour. Neal also teaches yoga regularly and offers, periodically, The Big Relax – a deeply relaxing half-day of restorative yoga on Waiheke. He also offers profoundly restorative yoga retreats across New Zealand.

Contact: Neal Ghoshal – [www.sacredmoves.com](http://www.sacredmoves.com) or ph (09) 372 7650.

Follow with: A walk along Blackpool beach, over a steep hill and down to the Matiatia ferry. Or visit to Fenice cafe in Oneroa, and a walk on Oneroa beach.