

Muriwai is a great looking course that is basically a wilderness with many rugged features

Visitors driving to Muriwai (*moo-ree-wai*) on the west coast of New Zealand's North Island sense something special is coming as the smell of the surf and the fresh air of the forested coastline hits them as they approach the small seaside village.

In summer, the bright morning sunshine of this temperate location just 45 minutes drive from Auckland, New Zealand's largest city, creates dramatic light from the black sand beach located on the seaward side of this 6,186m-long, par 72, 18-hole championship course. While these sands contain valuable iron, the beachfront and dunes along the 40km stretch north

of Muriwai are protected. Most know New Zealand's East Coast for white sands and wonderful beaches but many along the West Coast comprise black volcanic sands that are continuously sculptured by prevailing winds and choppy seas. However, these beaches are visually impressive and provide the course with links-like qualities and a golfing experience markedly different to what most Malaysian golfers are used to.

ONE OF THE BEST

Muriwai is rated by *Golf Digest Australia* as New Zealand's 16th best course and its second best links course. It is

widely regarded as one of the best courses in the Auckland metropolitan area.

"Players of all ability are satisfied with a round here but winds mostly from the southwest come into play on most holes. When the winds swing around to the northeast, it's a completely different course," says course General Manager, Mark Stuart.

He also remarks that, being a sand course, it can be played in all weather as there is good drainage. From the clubhouse window, golfers notice that Muriwai is a great looking course that is basically a wilderness with many rugged features. Between all the carefully manicured fairways lined by majestic Norfolk

Island pines, radiate 387 pines, fir trees, native tea tree shrubs (the famous Manuka) and ground cover of hardy spinifex.

Its fairways are forgiving but the real rough dominated by spinifex creates problems for wayward balls. Kikuyu grass fairways provide world-class fairway conditions while the black sand bunkers (there are 50 on the course) are unique but also best avoided.

The signature hole is the par-3 8th at 153m off the black tee that plays towards the Tasman Sea. A five or six iron off the tee is preferred but where the wind needs to be carefully judged and if it's a really strong southerly wind, a driver should be used. The toughest holes are all

par fours that play into the wind and include the fourth (409m), fifth (386m) and 18th (387m).

In summer, the temperature can reach 25°C on a hot day but there's always a tempering sea breeze. There are occasional frosts in winter but even then it's rarely wet under foot although a good wind jacket and thermal vest are recommended.

Clubhouse facilities are excellent with a pro shop and restaurant/bar. Visitors can hire clubs, equipment, electric carts (24) and pull carts. Muriwai is a walking course with few designated cart paths but it's an easy walk as it's quite flat. Walking enable golfers to get close to nature, to hear the surf, see pheasants

and other native birds and, the occasional seal along the beach.

A DAY BY THE COAST

Muriwai is a popular course and seen as a great day out for many Auckland-based golfers. There's a fully equipped restaurant in the elevated clubhouse serving some excellent meals and local beers including flavoursome craft beers as well as local wines from West Auckland. The restaurant is open from Tuesday to Sunday, 7.30am to 4pm while the bar opens from 11.30am to at least 6pm.

Golfers also have the option of visiting the gannet colony on a bluff overlooking

the golf course or travelling back to Auckland via Kumeu to visit wineries such as Kumeu River and Soljans. NZ Winepro is a company to consider as they can arrange a small group, customised tours that takes in all the main attractions.

The wines of Kumeu River Wines are highly recommended with their Chardonnay made by winemaker Michael Brajkovich (MW) considered one of New Zealand's benchmark white wines. Michael is also a member of Muriwai Golf Links and a great point contact for both wine and golf. Nearby, Soljans Estate Winery has a popular restaurant overlooking the vines and a cellar door where it's possible to purchase

one of New Zealand's few tawny ports.

Another winery to visit, on the way back home to Malaysia as it is conveniently located near the airport is Villa Maria. Its cellar door experience of wine tasting, associated wine products and restaurant are world class and the perfect location to stock up on premium Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir styles.

Muriwai also hosts several championships with the Muriwai Open being contested in early April. 

TRAVEL TIPS

GETTING THERE

1 AirAsia X (www.airasia.com) offers great value-for-money fares to Auckland via the Gold Coast in Queensland. This is an excellent route for those who not only want to visit and play this course in New Zealand but also combine their holiday with the numerous courses on the Gold Coast.



GETTING ABOUT

2 While Muriwai is less than an hour from downtown Auckland, it's best to hire a rental vehicle or engage the services of rental car or NZ Winepro (www.nzwinepro.co.nz) who can arrange a full day charter to play golf, visit wineries and see the gannet colony.

WHERE TO STAY

3 Accommodation in Muriwai is limited to a few B & Bs and it's best to stay in Auckland with a full range of options from the luxurious accommodation and adjoining casino at SKYCITY Auckland (www.skycityauckland.co.nz) to a heritage room in the deluxe Heritage Auckland (www.heritagehotels.co.nz).

CONTACTS

4 Muriwai Golf Links, 101 Coast Road, Waitakere, Muriwai, New Zealand, www.muriwaigolfclub.co.nz

Muriwai on New Zealand's Wild West Coast

Stunning golf course vistas on one of NZ's best links courses is well worth the visit.

