



Ferry Sushi makes mini-sushi for people to try with a small cup of miso soup

GARRY BRANDON

Weekend freedom

Feel like you can't step out the door at the weekend without losing a steady stream of cash? Amanda Leek sets out one weekend to prove there's more to Auckland than paying through your nose

Saturday

11.15am I arrive at Artspace and the New Zealand Film Archive on K Rd. Up scuffed stairs, glass doors lead to a spacious, varnished room. Seven film magazines lie on a desk in the middle. Along the left wall, there are more books on film than I have ever seen in one place before. This is the New Zealand Film Archive. Point and Click is a database of hours of films to watch for free on four computers. A helpful staff member can be seen through a slit in the cabin-like wall. The place feels secluded and peaceful.

11.45am Across the same floor is Artspace. A *Rock That Was Taught It Was a Bird* has four separate projects. The first shows a semi-circle of televisions with screens pointed upwards from the floor in a dark room. The TVs show mundane actions on repeat, speeded up and louder for a visceral experience. On one screen, the knuckle-cracking makes me wince.

Noon The next room has scraps of cardboard and foam, sawdust and chairs strewn around the floor. The construction on Artspace's

street-facing wall makes me wonder whether it is art or construction — until I see a TV screen in the middle of the room showing an artist carefully positioning objects and smashing them.

12.30pm Turning the corner to the office and reading room, a fancy espresso machine holds me in thrall. Emma Budgen, director of Artspace, welcomes me. She clears the lamp away from two velvety reclining chairs and I see the reading room: a fascinating library of art books and magazines in a small, cosy corner. "Art schools have these amazing libraries on the subject of contemporary art, and it is such a shame that access is taken away when you leave. We want to provide a place where anyone can come and peruse it all for free."

And yes, anyone can help themselves to espresso, too, although Artspace requests a koha for milk and sugar.

1.15pm The Diwali Festival of Lights has turned Queen St into the land of the long, white tents. At the first stall held by Words of Peace I am

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given a free DVD with selected excerpts by Prem Rawat. I stop to watch a 7-year-old boy dance Bollywood-style, then a sensual dance by a beauty pageant runner-up, and a Punjabi folk singer. In Aotea Square, I see spectacular dance and excitable announcements proclaim, "This show is gonna amaze you." I feel hungry surrounded by people eating succulent pastries and curries. The hot sun makes my mouth dry and I find myself gawping at a mango lassi.

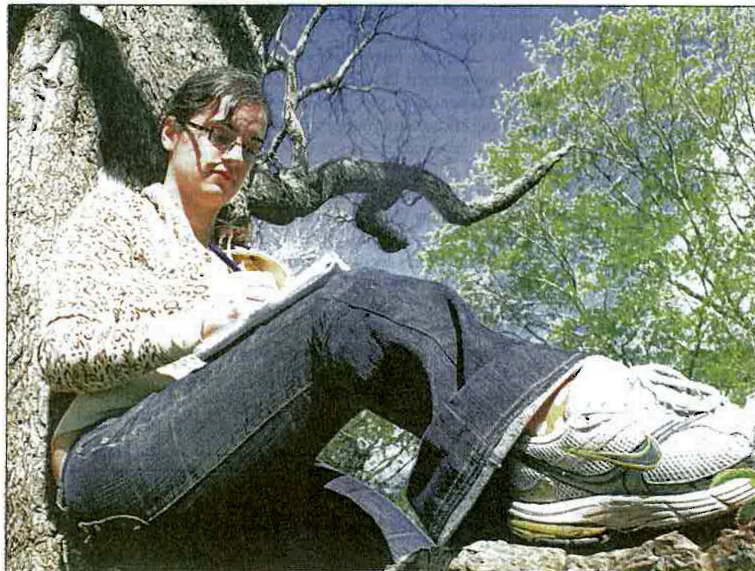
2.15pm The Giapo store on Queen St is raving. A remix of Lady Gaga is loud, the small shop is crowded, and staff are numerous. People use free Wi-Fi, write on the Facebook fan page, and spin a huge wheel to decide on toppings. I ask for a taster, strategically hover, and ask for another. It takes 20 minutes to get every flavour.

2.45pm Borders is a popular spot to browse books and magazines, the kids' floor is particularly playful, and teenagers can always be found slumped beside the graphic novel shelves.

3.15pm The Sweetest Little Chocolate Shop, Mid-City, has a taster of handmade chocolate every day.

3.30pm Central City Library is the only place that has, besides plenty of books, newspapers and magazines, free wireless without an obligation to spend money.

4.30pm Next to the Ferry Building a sign reads "free sushi". And it's true. Julia Jung is the manager of Ferry Sushi and makes mini-sushi for people to try with a small cup of miso soup. "Some people just sit here on the tables all day and keep picking the free sushi. Sometimes, when people are waiting at the traffic lights, I take the tray of mini-sushi out for them to help themselves." I arrive at closing time; there is none left. But Julia gives me a sushi sandwich to try. I sit looking out at the water and eat the heft of crispy chicken, lettuce, tomato, avocado and a pumpkin slice served in a wedge of sushi.



It's free to relax in the sun, or the shade, of the green Auckland Domain

JULIA BROUGHTON

5pm Valentino's Gelato is next door; I try new flavours. The NZ Gold Award-winner caramel flavour is flawless, but Coca-Cola and bubblegum are jarring.

5.30pm Auckland Windsurfing Association's Freeride fun day has finished, but there will be more. I'm transfixed by the sea sparkling in the sun. The Viaduct is transitioning from sophisticated cafes and restaurants into bars and clubs. The music from Degree bar is already hollering across the harbour.

6.30pm Countdown supermarket on Quay St has a disappointing lack of free tastings. The staff seem clueless. I make a note to check another day.

7.15pm I explore the Symonds St graveyard,

venturing down to take photos of crumbled and knocked-over tombstones, shady trees, and the fading twilight silhouetting spiked fences. My camera's battery dies. Coincidence? The disappearing sun leaves the cold wind to send a chill down my spine. At least, I hope it was the wind.

Saturday night

8.30pm Starbucks, K Rd, is an alternative to standing out on K Rd at night to wait for friends. It's open until 10pm and has free Wi-Fi, too.

9.30pm A huge stage in Aotea Square is holding Bollywood dance performances amid a swarming crowd of Halloween animals and monsters.

10.30pm In the Viaduct, O'Hagan's Irish Pub has no entrance fee. Over-friendly conversation is free but drinks are not forthcoming. The promotional "trick or treat" lollies are nice though. But the bar rapidly becomes crowded.

Sunday

2pm I stroll to the Domain after a sleep-in. I'm thankful now for the lack of drinks the night before. I meander around the duck pond, through the walkways, take note of Auckland War Memorial Museum, and climb a tree, before I find my favourite spot to write. I lie on my back and enjoy the smell of sweet, fresh grass. The breeze soothes the heat of the sun. Sparrows chirp and, when I am still, hop nearer and eye me. A couple of hours later, a couple sit nearby and murmur to each other. He is Spanish and strums his guitar. She is English and leaves the country tomorrow. No need to buy a novel to find a bittersweet love story.

As the sun fades, I am starving. But it is immensely satisfying to know my dinner is the first I paid for since stepping out on Saturday morning.

What did Amanda miss? Send your suggestions for free fun or fare to: letters@theauckland.co.nz

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