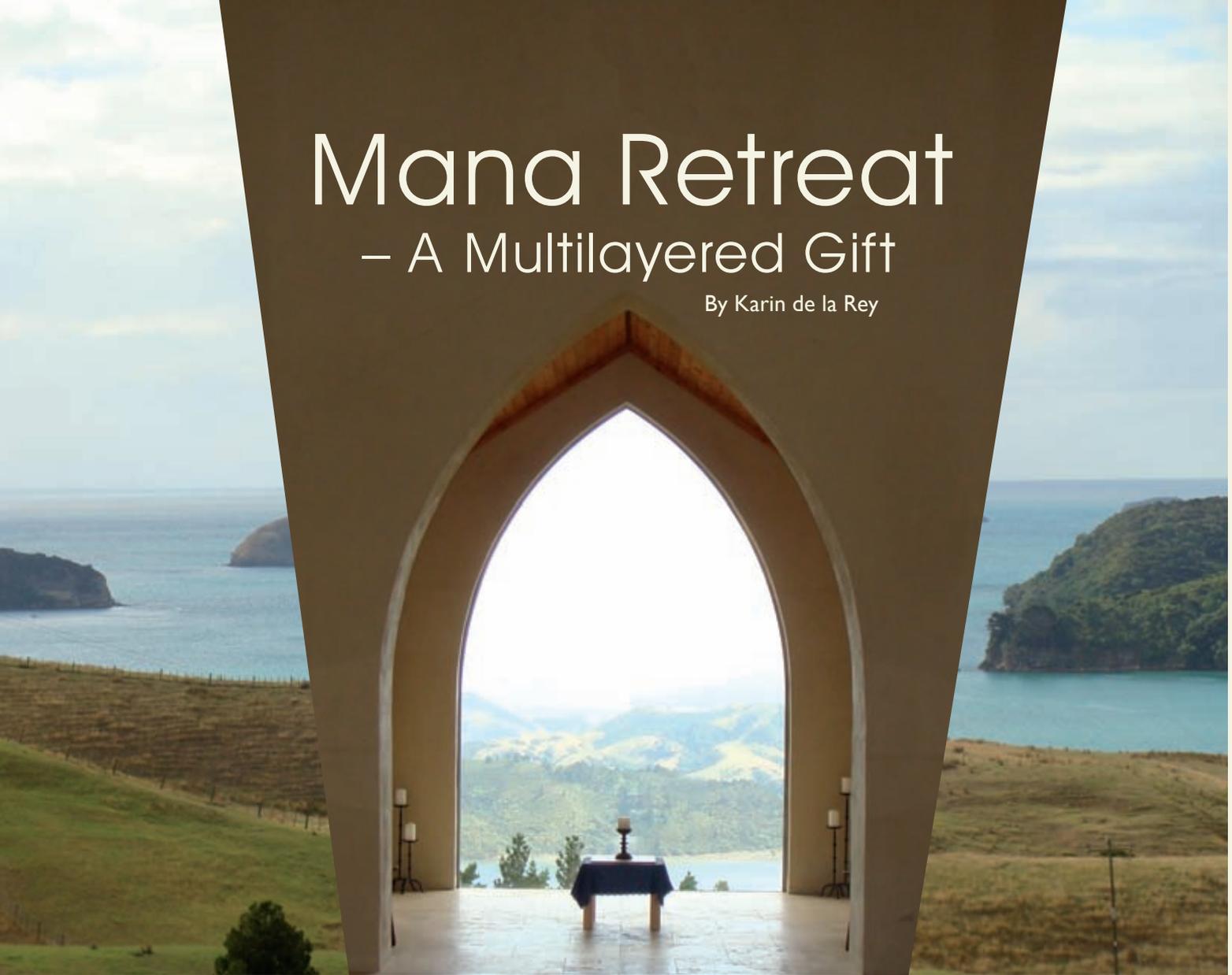


Mana Retreat

– A Multilayered Gift

By Karin de la Rey



A beautifully wrapped parcel has been given to me. The temptation is there to tear it open and to let the contents be spilled in one surprising revelation. However, my inner child wakes up from her afternoon nap, sleepily rubbing her eyes with her tiny fists. Then, noticing the jubilant wrapping paper and the eye-catching ribbon, she touches it carefully. My inner child is a playful soul and excels on surprises ... such as this one. Together she and I start to unwrap a parcel that is in real terms a gift that keeps unwrapping itself – and layer upon layer it reveals the most amazing vistas ... personal as well as scenic.

The coastal road from Thames to Mana Retreat on the Coromandel Peninsula is a windy, but scenic route. The scenery invites sneaky peeks at the clear blue water of the Hauraki Gulf that contrasts deliciously with the roughness of the Pohutukawa tree trunks that frame parts of SH 25. The slowing down at corners happens with expected repetitiveness, a subtle way to prepare me for my own slowing down process – a ritual of letting go, of embracing a time of relaxation, a time to discover myself yet again. I think I may have neglected myself over time, the emotional and spiritual part of me. Do you recognise your area of neglect

too? If you do, I invite you to walk with me through the foliage of words, to jump with the exclamation marks and take a quiet rest on the dashes, as this is written with you in mind ... while I have had the privilege of living it for an unforgettable weekend. Let's enter the Mana time zone together.

Clearly sign-posted and easy to find, I drive through the entrance to Mana late Friday afternoon, leaving the beautiful coastal scenery behind. I slowly followed the sealed driveway that meanders uphill through native bush, enjoying the smell of the bush and the chatter of birds settling in for the night before arriving at my destination. Despite the fact that I have pulled into the car park as the gong announces teatime, I am welcomed with relaxed and friendly smiles, and shown to my room.

Accommodation choices vary and there are numerous options to choose from. My private room in Moana Lodge with its queen-sized bed and en suite is exactly what I needed, and the million dollar view from the deck is a positive start to what will turn out to be one of the most enjoyable weekends. The unwrapping of my gift has started.

The ribbon has been left behind on the coastal road; it's time for the next layer to be revealed. I did not have to wait too long ...

Let's get acquainted with the exuberant and positive energy Mana radiates. Opened in 1991 and after the planting of 20,000 trees on its 1300 acre section, Mana Retreat Centre nestles comfortably in the shadow of Mt Pukewhakaratarata, one of the many volcanoes in this region. The location is noted with unsurpassable panoramic views of the Coromandel and Hunua Ranges as well as the Hauraki Golf and the Firth of Thames. The west coast scenery is typical of the Coromandel Peninsula with its indented coastline and small islands – some basking in sunlight, while others sit quietly wrapped in shadow. Every moment begs of time to stand still, to contemplate the Now, to just Be. Relaxing within oneself also means a higher degree of awareness of one's surroundings. Ironically, this awareness allows time to move at its own pace, which is not necessarily my present pace, but will soon become my Mana pace.

In the communal dining room, like-minded people from all walks of life enjoy a feast of vegetarian delights. Harvested from Mana's organic vegetable garden and other reputable produce sources, an array of wholesome cuisine fills bowls, platters and dishes. The aroma of homebaking makes for a warm and relaxed welcome at every meal. A few of the visitors are non vegetarian, but the culinary display takes everyone on a gastronomical adventure that awakens the senses and begs all to return for more.

And what is more relaxing than not having to plan meals for a whole weekend! Organic tea and coffee are there to enjoy anytime of the day; clear springwater on tap – no alcoholic beverages are allowed on the premises. The views from the dining area, whether one sits outside on the deck or inside the spacious dining room, are breathtaking. We munch and crunch on our tasteful and attractive food; we talk about

ourselves, about current national and international issues, about health, nutrition and motivation, about everything under the sun. Conversations are kept lively, intellectually and humorously, all with the greatest of respect should a different opinion be offered. Never a harsh word, never a criticism, always encouraging – the glass has to be half full or, as an energetic Canadian has pointed out, it may be wiser to keep the glass 99 per cent full. And that perfectly summarises the Mana approach – embrace the positive approach to life, keep it in your pocket and, as the song goes, never let it fade away.

Mana attracts a special kind of people, the soul kind, the caring kind, with a kindred spirit that includes both you and I. As a surprise on Valentine's Day, heart-shaped carob cupcakes were baked by an overseas visitor who jumped out of bed in the early hours of the morning because she wanted to do something special for everyone – it's the little things in life that count most.

Starting every morning with a 10-minute meditation, prepares one for the day ahead – totally optional of course. As is everything else during this Relaxation Weekend at Mana – I am in the driver seat of my life and I have to answer only to my body, my mind and my spirit. I am allowed to selfishly nurture myself. It's up to me what activities I choose to do or not to do. It's my decision to feel rejuvenated, relaxed, revitalised and healed, and to reconnect with my inner self. However, as I feel the tension leaving my body and mind, I become aware of a long-forgotten transformation finding its rightful place – the healing power that is within me, and I am empowered by the realisation. I am alive. I have uncovered the neglected song in my heart. The joy of life I used to tap into has been rekindled. This is what the energy at Mana can do for you too.

Mana with its bushwalks, the Goddess Trail where tiny figurines are hidden amongst tree trunks and undergrowth. ➤





A waterfall walk offers peace and tranquillity for the soul, while the more energetic can enjoy a steady walk up the hill, passing Tara Sanctuary to reach the summit of Mana's mountain where a beautiful crystal keeps guard over the Retreat, its inhabitants and flora. The brave amongst us may want to venture further to touch the Guardian Crystal in a symbolic gesture.

A meditation platform offers uninterrupted views of the coastline and an afternoon lazing in a hammock with one of the numerous books from the library may be a relaxing choice. There is a bush bath and a sauna amongst the trees to enjoy. For further relaxation, book a massage or bodywork session with one of Mana's qualified therapists, Val Montague, or experience the unique Watsu Aqua therapy with Sol Petersen at Waimana Spa, a few minutes bushwalk from the office.

There is something for everyone. And the best part is, one does not have to do anything or interact with anyone should that be the preferred option. One's private space is respected, no questions asked and no explanations needed.

If in need of pure stillness of the mind, Tara Sanctuary is a spiritual place dedicated to all people. Its Spanish slate roof, copper flashing and the ancient building process used by stonemasons, add to the true nature of the building and surrounding area. The Sanctuary sits comfortable above Mana Retreat against the slopes of Mt Pukewhakaratarata. The mountain is spiritual, it loans us an energy to use, Mana Founding Trustee Sol Petersen reflects. The Bell Tower houses three bells that have been cast in Germany – the small Tara bell, the middle G bell and big Aroha E bell each with individual inscriptions. It is an amazing experience to stand in the Bell Tower when the bells toll. The vibrations pass through one's body but the pure melodious sounds of the bells are still distinguishable from one another. After passing underneath the Maori carving that depicts purification, I enter the Sanctuary itself where a seven-day candle is burning continuously in front of the Guardian. A truly remarkable place of spiritual healing and awareness. A place for the uplifting of the soul, the calming down of the spirit, the time to be still or to sing your heartsong. Tara Sanctuary needs to be explored by every individual to find the true spiritual meaning it depicts at the time of the visit.

The Labyrinth situated next to the Sanctuary has been built by the stonemasons as well. I follow the pathway that leads me towards the centre of the Labyrinth, thus symbolically towards my innerself, and then continue on to complete the journey that takes me outwards again – I have found the answer to my question that lead me to the Labyrinth in the first place. My multilayered parcel has taken on a life of its own as I have unwrapped these layers one by one.

The relaxation weekend I spent at Mana Retreat left me with a song in my heart, a sparkle in my eyes, with my shoulders straight and my chin up, focused and in the driver's seat of my life. It's taken me 38 hours to unwrap my multilayered gift, and I still reap the consequences from the positive inner steps I have taken. 🍷

Text and photography by Karin de la Rey.