

Northland & the Bay of Islands



For many New Zealanders, the phrase 'up north' conjures up sepia-toned images of family fun in the sun, pohutukawa in bloom and dolphins frolicking in pretty bays. It's uttered in almost hallowed tones, as if describing a mythical place. From school playgrounds to work cafeterias, owning a bach (holiday house) 'up north' is a passport to popularity.

Beaches are the main drawcard and they're present in profusion. Take your pick from surfy or sheltered, massive or minuscule, fashionable or forgotten, and from sand that's golden, grey, pink or blindingly white. There are beaches suited to all sorts of aquatic pursuits imaginable, including splashing about in the nuddy. Visitors from more crowded countries are flummoxed to wander onto beaches without a scrap of development or another human being in sight.

Northland's reserves shelter the most spectacular remnants of the ancient kauri forests that once blanketed the top of the country. The remaining giant trees are an awe-inspiring sight and one of the nation's treasures.

It's not just natural attractions that are on offer: history hangs heavily here as well. The country was colonised from the top down by successive migrations from Polynesia and a strong Maori presence remains to this day, adding an extra dimension to any visit. The Bay of Islands was also the site of the first permanent European settlement, as well as the signing of the Declaration of the Independence of New Zealand by local chiefs in 1835 and the Treaty of Waitangi five years later. Northland is unquestionably the birthplace of the nation.

NORTHLAND & THE BAY OF ISLANDS

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HIGHLIGHTS

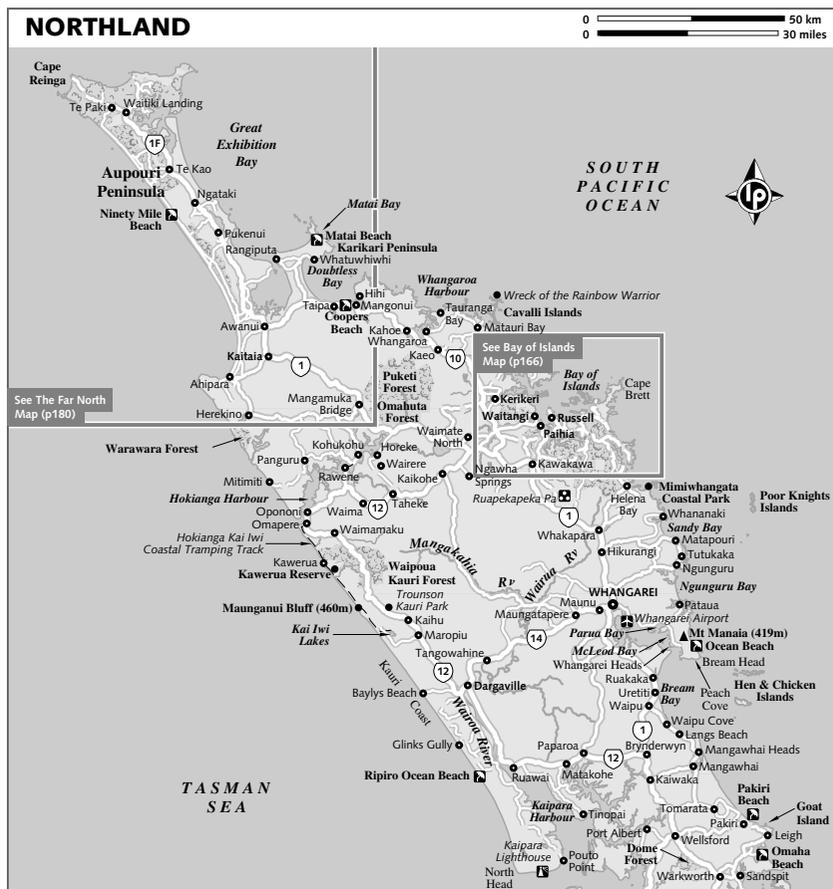
- Being the first to leave footprints on the sand at any of Northland's numerous beaches
- Watching oceans collide while souls depart at **Cape Reinga** (p183)
- Paying homage to the ancient giants of the **Waipoua Kauri Forest** (p190)
- Diving at one of the world's top spots, the **Poor Knights Islands** (p163)
- Claiming your own island paradise among the many in the **Bay of Islands** (p165)
- Surfing the sand dunes at **Ninety Mile Beach** (p183) or the Hokianga's **North Head** (p189)
- Delving into history and culture at the **Waitangi Treaty Grounds** (p172)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 09

■ www.northlandnz.com

■ www.nrc.govt.nz



Climate

The 'winterless north' averages seven rainy days per month in summer but 16 in winter. Temperatures are often a degree or two warmer than Auckland, especially on the east coast.

Getting There & Around

There are two main routes heading north: SH1 on the east coast, and SH12, which branches off at Brynderwyn and follows the west coast to the Hokianga before rejoining SH1 near Kaikohe. This chapter roughly follows an anticlockwise loop, starting with the east coast, but you should choose your direction based on your interests and the prevailing weather.

Whangarei, Kerikeri and Kaitiāia all have domestic airports, connecting through Auckland to international flights. Northland has no passenger train service, but **InterCity** (☎ 09-623 1503; www.intercity.co.nz) and associated buses ply SH1 from Auckland to Kaitiāia. Other areas are poorly served, with only **Main Coachline** (☎ 09-278 8070; www.maincoachline.co.nz) heading from Auckland along SH12 as far as Dargaville (six services per week).

Only tourist buses head to Cape Reinga, the Hokianga and Waipoua Kauri Forest. The **Magic Travellers Network** (☎ 09-358 5600; www.magicbus.co.nz) has a useful service from Paihia to Auckland (in that direction only) via the Hokianga and Kauri Coast on SH12. The fixed fare (\$55, four buses weekly) allows you to

MAORI NZ: NORTHLAND & THE BAY OF ISLANDS

The Northland region, known to Maori as Te Tai Tokerau, has a long and proud Maori history and today has one of the country's highest percentages of Maori people. Along with the East Coast, it's a place where you might hear Maori being spoken. In mythology the region is known as the tail of the fish of Maui (see the boxed text, p56).

Maori sites of particular significance include the Waitangi Treaty Grounds (p172), Cape Reinga (p183) and Tane Mahuta (p191).

Highly recommended Maori cultural experiences are offered by Footprints Waipoua (p189), Crossings Hokianga (p190), Waka Tai-a-Mai (p172) and Culture North (p172). Many businesses catering to travellers are owned or run by Maori individuals or *hapu* (subtribal) groups. **Tai Tokerau Tourism** (www.taitokerau.co.nz) lists dozens of them on its website, and many of them are reviewed in this chapter.

stop anywhere along the route, as often as you like.

See the end of each town section for detailed bus options. For details on backpacker discounts, passes and hop-on, hop-off tourist services, see p714.

WHANGAREI DISTRICT

To truly experience this area you have to be prepared to get wet. Beach after clear-watered beach offers munificent opportunities for swimming, surfing or just splashing about. Consequently the hot spots heave with Kiwi holidaymakers at peak times, but even then it's possible to find isolated stretches of sand where your footprints are the only ones.

If you're reading this and you're a diving fanatic, drop everything and head to Tutukaka immediately. The neighbouring Poor Knights Islands are considered one of the world's top diving spots.

MANGAWHAI

Pop 1200

Magical Mangawhai – that's what the official road sign says, and such signs don't tend to lie. Leaving SH1 at Kaiwaka, a 13km drive east (there's no bus) will take you to snug Mangawhai Village at the base of a horse-shoe harbour. But it's at Mangawhai Heads, 5km further on, that the enchantment really takes hold.

A narrow spit of powdery white sand stretches for kilometres to form the south head, sheltering a seabird sanctuary. Across the water sits an uncomplicated holiday town with a surf beach at its northern tip. Life-savers patrol on weekends in summer and daily during school holidays, but despite the rollers it's not espe-

cially dangerous. The **Mangawhai Cliffs Walkway** (three hours return) starts here, affording extensive views of sea and land.

Various Maori tribes inhabited the area before the 1660s, when Ngati Whatua became dominant. In 1807 Ngati Whatua defeated Ngapuhi from the north in a major battle, letting the survivors escape. One of them was Hongi Hika, who in 1825 returned, armed with muskets obtained from Europeans. The ensuing bloodbath all but annihilated Ngati Whatua and the district became *tapu* (sacred, taboo). British squatters moved in and were rewarded with land titles by the government in the 1850s. Ceremonies were only performed to lift the *tapu* in the 1990s.

Mangawhai Heads has a part-time **information centre** (www.mangawhai.co.nz; Molesworth Dr; ☎ 2-5pm Fri, 10am-4pm Sat, 10am-1pm Sun) in a prefab shed next to full-time information panels.

NORTHLAND & THE BAY OF ISLANDS FACTS

Eat Kumara, Dargaville's knobbly purple claim to fame (p192)

Drink Orange juice, Kerikeri's signature squeeze (p176)

Read *The House of Strife* (1993), Maurice Shadbolt's novel set during the Northland War

Listen to *Treaty* (1998) by Moana & the Moahunters

Watch *The Endless Summer* (1966), the surf classic that put Ahipara on the map

Swim at The Mermaid Pool, Matapouri (p163)

Festival Waitangi Day (p171)

Tackiest tourist attraction Ancient Kauri Kingdom (p184)

Go green Sing to the trees with Footprints Waipoua (p189)

In Mangawhai Village, the **Mangawhai District Museum** (Moir St; adult/child \$2/1; ☎ 10.30am-1pm Sat) has a tiny display of settler and Maori artefacts. Combine it with a trip to the **farmer's market** (☎ 9am-1pm Sat), next door in the library hall, and stock up on local organic produce including wine and olive oil.

Smashed Pipi Café, Bar, Restaurant & Gallery (☎ 09-431 4849; www.smashedpipi.co.nz; 40 Moir St; mains \$9-17; ☎ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Thu-Sun) is a funky combo on the village, with occasional live music in the bar (open 10am till late), vibrant ceramics and glassware in the gallery (open 9am to 5.30pm), and delicious deli food in the café.

Mangawhai Heads is where you'll want to stay. **Coastal Cow Backpackers** (☎ 09-431 5444; www.mangawhaibackpackers.com; 299 Molesworth Dr; dm/d/tw \$23/56/56; (P)) is a homely hostel with cow-themed decorative touches. The rooms are clean and simple.

Milestone Cottages (☎ 09-431 4018; www.milestonecottages.co.nz; 27 Moir Pt Rd; cottages \$120-225; (P) (A)) conjure a Pasifika paradise with their lush tropical gardens and self-contained cottages (sleeping up to four). Free videos, kayaks, croquet and *pétanque* are available.

The boutique **Mangawhai Lodge B&B** (☎ 09-431 5311; www.seaviewlodge.co.nz; 4 Heather St; s/d \$150/175; (P) (A)) has a commanding position and great views. The very comfortable, smartly furnished rooms have access to the picture-perfect wraparound veranda.

Sail Rock Café (☎ 09-431 4051; 12a Wood St; brunch \$12-27, dinner \$19-30; ☎ 9am-late) is a wonderful eatery that takes justified pride in its salt-and-pepper squid, a dish that provokes an almost-religious experience in many a diner. At the tail end of a day's surfing this is the place to chat about the break that got away over an ice-cold beer.

On Sundays it's the Heads' turn for the **farmers market** (Wood St; ☎ 10am-2pm).

WAIPU & BREAM BAY

pop 1980

Generations of Kiwi kids have giggled over the name 'Waipu'; the makers of Imodium missed a golden opportunity by failing to adopt it as their product's brand name for the NZ market. Be that as it may, **Waipu** and neighbouring **Waipu Cove** are bonny wee places.

The original 940 British settlers came from Scotland via Nova Scotia (Canada) between 1853 and 1860. These dour Scots

at least had the good sense to eschew frigid Otago, where so many of their kindred settled, for sunnier northern climes. Their story comes to life through holograms, a short film and interactive displays at the **Waipu Museum** (☎ 09-432 0746; 36 The Centre; adult/child \$8/3; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm). Only 10% of current residents are direct descendants, but there's a big get-together on 1 January every year, when the **Highland Games** (☎ 09-432 1514; www.highlandgames.co.nz; adult/child \$15/5), established in 1871, take place in Caledonian Park.

Bream Bay has miles of blissfully deserted beach, blighted only slightly by a giant oil refinery at the north end. At **Uretiti**, a stretch of beach near a super **Department of Conservation (DOC) campsite** (SH1; adult/child \$7/3.50) is officially designated as 'clothing optional'. New Year's Eve celebrations here are a blast, with the crowd evenly split between regular Kiwi families, hardcore European nudists and the gay party crowd.

Sleeping

Stonehouse (☎ 09-432 0432; www.stonehousewaipu.co.nz; 641 Cove Rd; dm/s/d/tr/q \$20/110/120/150/180; (P)) On the main road between Waipu Cove and Waipu is this unique Cornish-style house built of huge stone slabs. Guests are accommodated in separate units and can use a kayak or rowing boat to cross the saltwater lagoon and get to the ocean beach. The backpackers loft is a cutesy attic, but you'll have to brave an outhouse toilet.

Waipu Wanderers Backpackers (☎ 09-432 0532; www.wanderers@xtra.co.nz; 25 St Marys Rd; dm/s/d/tw \$23/45/60/60; (P)) There are only three rooms at this bright and friendly backpackers in Waipu township – a real home away from home – with free fruit in season.

Camp Waipu Cove (☎ 09-432 0410; www.campwaipucove.com; St Anne Rd; campsites \$28, cabins \$50-200; (P)) Taking up a fair chunk of beach, this is a large and comfortable camping ground with spotless facilities.

our pick **Waihoihoi Lodge** (☎ 09-432 1234; www.waihoihoi.co.nz; 239 Massey Rd; s \$75-140, d & tw \$105-160; (P) (A)) A wonderful women-only retreat with a rural ambience, 3km inland from Waipu, Waihoihoi has superb views over Bream Bay, stylish furnishings and an ebullient host who raids her extensive organic gardens to create breakfast or other meals by arrangement.

Eating

Cove Café (☎ 09-432 0323; Cove Rd, Waipu Cove; mains \$6-17; ☎ 11am-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-8.30pm Sat & Sun) Fish and chips, fresh seafood platters, sandwiches made to order and beach views add up to a 'sweet as' proposition, as the surfer dude behind the counter is prone to say.

Waipu Café/Deli (☎ 09-432 0990; 29 The Centre, Waipu; mains \$10-14; ☎ 8am-4pm Tue-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat & Sun) Self-caterers and coffee hounds should check out this cute little deli with 'serious fudge brownies'.

Pizza Barn (☎ 09-432 1011; 2 Cove Rd, Waipu; mains \$14-22; ☎ 11.30am-late Wed-Sun Apr-Nov, daily Dec-Mar) In Waipu even the pizza place has a tartan logo. It also has popular platters, light fare and hunger-assuaging pizzas that go well with cold beer as this cool place morphs into a bar.

Getting There & Away

Waipu Cove can be reached by a particularly scenic route heading from Mangawhai Heads through Langs Beach. Otherwise SH1 heads through Waipu, 38km south of Whangarei.

InterCity (☎ 09-623 1503; www.intercity.co.nz) and associated daily buses stop here on the way from Auckland (\$34, 2¼ hours) to Whangarei (\$21, 30 minutes) via Warkworth (\$22, 1½ hours). **Pavlovich Express** (☎ 0800 759 999; www.pavlovichexpress.co.nz) heads daily between Auckland (\$27, two hours) and Whangarei (\$24, 35 minutes) via Warkworth (\$24, one hour). Budget operator **Naked Bus** (www.naked-bus.com) has advance fares starting from \$1 on daily trips to Auckland and Whangarei.

WHANGAREI

pop 45,800

On the pretty-to-ugly continuum Whangarei sits somewhere in the middle. But beauty is never far away and there are plenty of attractive natural and artistic things to keep you distracted in Northland's gateway. You may be pleasantly surprised by the interesting choice of eateries and the general 'going off-ness' of the bars on a Saturday night. The city centre has an inordinate number of hairdressers and parking lots – although the standard of coiffure or car isn't noticeably different from the Kiwi average.

Information

Automobile Association (AA; ☎ 09-438 4848; 17 James St; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri)

DOC visitor centre (☎ 09-430 2470; www.doc.govt.nz; 149 Bank St; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri)

Post Office (16-20 Rathbone St)

Quay Info (☎ 09-438 3993; Town Basin; ☎ 9am-5pm) Housed in Clapham's Clocks; internet access is \$4 per hour.

Whangarei i-SITE (☎ 09-438 1079; www.whangareinz.com; 92 Otaika Rd/SH1; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-4.30pm Sat & Sun) Information, café, toilets and internet access (\$5 per hour).

Sights & Activities

The budget traveller's answer to Waitomo, **Abbey Caves** (Abbey Caves Rd; admission free) is an undeveloped network of three caverns full of glowworms and limestone formations, 4km east of town. Grab a torch, strong shoes and a mate (you wouldn't want to be stuck down here alone if things go pear-shaped) and prepare to get wet. The surrounding reserve is a forest of crazily shaped rock extrusions. If you're staying at neighbouring Little Earth Lodge (p161) you can borrow helmets and hire head torches (\$3).

The 26m-high **Whangarei Falls** (Ngunguru Rd) are the Paris Hilton of NZ waterfalls – not the most impressive but reputedly the most photographed. Short walks provide views of the water cascading over the edge of an old basalt lava flow. The falls can be reached on the Tikipunga bus (\$2, Monday to Saturday only), leaving from Rose St in the city.

The free **Whangarei Walks** brochure, available from the i-SITE, has maps and detailed descriptions of some excellent local tracks. The **Hatea River Walk** follows the river from the Town Basin to the falls (three hours return). Along the way you'll pass the **AH Reed Kauri Park**, where you can take a 35-minute detour that includes a cleverly designed boardwalk high up in the treetops.

Longer tracks head through **Parihaka Reserve**, encompassing the remnants of a volcanic cone (241m) and a major *pa* (fortified village) site. The city is spread out for inspection from the lookout at the top, which is equally accessible by car.

Southeast of Whangarei, the **Waimahanga Walkway** in Onerahi is an easy trek along an old railway embankment. It takes 1½ hours and passes through mangrove swamps and over a 300m-long timber truss bridge.

Other tracks head through **Coronation Scenic Reserve**, an expanse of bush just west of the centre that includes two *pa* sites and abandoned quarries that have been converted into

WHANGAREI

DRINKING

Brauhaus Frings	21	C2
Butter Factory	22	B2
Danger! Danger!	23	B2
McMorrissey's	24	B2

ENTERTAINMENT

Sky City Cinemas	25	B2
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SHOPPING

Classics	26	B2
Kathmandu	27	B2
Tuatara	28	B2

TRANSPORT

Northland Coach & Travel Centre	29	B3
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INFORMATION

Automobile Association (AA)	1	B2
DOC Visitor Centre	2	B1
Post Office	3	B2
Quay Info	(see 4)	

SLEEPING

Punga Lodge B&B	10	D2
YHA Manaakitanga	11	D2

EATING

Bob	12	B2
Caffeine	13	B2
Deluca Café	14	B2
Fresh	15	B2
Havana Cubana	16	B2
Nectar	17	B2
Pak N Save	18	C2
Salut Bar & Brasserie	19	B2
Vinyl	20	C2

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Clapham's Clocks	4	C2
Community Arts Centre	5	B2
Margie Maddren Fernery & Conservatory	6	A2
Pou	7	B2
Quarry Arts Centre	8	A1
Whangarei Art Museum	9	A2

DRINKING

SLEEPING

EATING

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

INFORMATION

ENTERTAINMENT

SHOPPING

TRANSPORT

TO MUSEUM & KIWI HOUSE (5km); NATIVE BIRD RECOVERY CENTRE (5km); DARGAVILLE (56km)

TO BUNKDOWN LODGE (700m); WHANGAREI I-SITE (700m)

inspiring community projects. Green-fingered volunteers have transformed **Quarry Gardens** (☎ 09-437 7210; www.whangareiquarrygardens.org.nz; Russell Rd; admission by donation; ☎ 8am-5pm) into a blissful park with a lake, waterfalls, pungent floral aromas, wild bits, orderly bits and lots of positive energy. On the other side of the reserve, the **Quarry Arts Centre** (☎ 09-437 1215; www.thequarry.co.nz; 21 Selwyn Ave; admission free; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm) is an eccentric village of artists' studios and co-operative galleries.

The **Community Arts Centre** (☎ 03-430 6432; www.apt.org.nz; 7 Rust Ave; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri) exhibits local artists in a wonderful Art Deco building. Between this and the library, the **Pou** uses a traditional Maori form to create an intriguing sculpture formed from 10 large poles

carved with Maori, Polynesian, Celtic and Korean motifs. Grab an interpretive pamphlet from the library. The newest addition is a brightly painted Croatian gumdigger with a gum-seeking stake in one hand and his heart on fire for his woman back home – portrayed upside down and balanced on his head (see the boxed text, p186).

The **Whangarei Art Museum** (☎ 09-430 4240; www.whangareiarthemuseum.co.nz; admission by donation; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Fri, noon-4pm Sat & Sun) is an interesting little gallery with changing displays in delightful little **Caffer Park**, which spans Waiarohia Stream.

Nearby, the **Margie Maddren Fernery & Conservatory** (☎ 09-430 4200; First Ave; admission free; ☎ 10am-4pm) displays native ferns, tropical

plants and cacti, although the 'restful' music might have you murderously agitated.

Clapham's Clocks (☎ 09-438 3993; Town Basin; adult/child \$8/4; ☎ 9am-5pm) is far more interesting than it sounds. This mind-boggling collection of 1400 ticking, gonging and cuckooing timepieces constitutes the National Clock Museum.

West of Whangarei, 5km out on the road to Dargaville at Maunu, is the **Museum & Kiwi House** (☎ 09-438 9630; www.whangareimuseum.co.nz; 4 SH14; adult/child \$10/5; ☎ 10am-4pm). The complex includes a chance to see North Island brown kiwi, a veritable village of 19th-century buildings and an impressive collection of Maori artefacts, including superb feather cloaks.

Beside the museum is the **Native Bird Recovery Centre** (☎ 09-438 1457; www.whangareinativebirdrecovery.org.nz; admission by donation; ☎ 10.30am-4.30pm Tue-Thu, noon-4.30pm Mon & Fri), which nurses sick and injured birds back to health. Say hi to Woof Woof, the talking tui.

Sleeping BUDGET

Whangarei Top 10 Holiday Park (☎ 09-437 6856; www.whangareitop10.co.nz; 24 Mair St; sites per person \$15, units \$50-110; ☎ P) This holiday park has friendly owners, a better-than-average set of units and super-shiny stainless-steel surfaces.

Bunkdown Lodge (☎ 09-438 8886; www.bunkdownlodge.co.nz; 23 Otaika Rd; dm \$20-22, s/tw/d \$45/48/50; ☎ P) There's a slightly worn but homely atmosphere in this lovely old villa with an aviary and Kiwiana garden. Big lounges and board games aid socialising.

YHA Manaakitanga (☎ 09-438 8954; www.yha.co.nz; 52 Punga Grove Ave; dm/d/tw \$24/60/60; ☎ P) This small, easy-going hostel has only a handful of rooms on a quiet hillside overlooking the river. There's a nice covered deck and barbecue area, and a short walk leads through the bush to glowworms.

our pick Little Earth Lodge (☎ 09-430 6562; www.littleearthlodge.co.nz; 85 Abbey Caves Rd; dm/s/d/tw/tr \$26/49/58/58/78; ☎ P) One of the very best hostels, Little Earth might spoil you for all the rest. Set on a farm 4km from town and right next to Abbey Caves (p159), the place is brimming with interesting art and Balinese furnishings. Forget dorm rooms crammed with nasty spongy bunks: settle down in a proper cosy bed with nice linen, comfy pillows and a maximum of two roommates. Resident critters include miniature horses Tom and

Jerry, and the lovable pooch Muttley. Help yourself to herbs from the garden or order a fair-trade organic espresso (\$2.50) from the charming Kiwi/Japanese hosts.

Punga Lodge B&B (☎ 09-438 3879; 9 Punga Grove Ave; s/d \$55/75; ☎ P) Just down from the YHA, this well-kept B&B is a regular suburban home with a sense of privacy and space.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Chelsea House (☎ 09-437 7115; www.chelsea-house.co.nz; 83 Hatea Dr; d & tw \$75-115; ☎ P) You can forgive some floral frippery in a Victorian villa as cute as this. The three rooms include one that's fully self-contained and a cheaper option with a private but not en-suite bathroom. Both the hosts and the price are very nice indeed.

Pohutukawa Lodge (☎ 09-430 8634; www.pohutukawalodge.co.nz; 362 Western Hills Dr; units \$110-190; ☎ P) Just west of town, this straightforward, nicely furnished place has 14 units with well-kept facilities and ample parking.

Pilgrim Planet (☎ 09-459 1099; www.pilgrimplanet.co.nz; 63 Hatea Dr; units \$130; ☎ P) Upmarket rooms open onto a shared kitchen and lounge, giving this smart place the sociability of a hostel but without the German teenagers living off rice and canned corn (not that there's anything wrong with that!). Foodies will love the simultaneously ultramodern and antique-looking gas oven.

Lodge Bordeaux (☎ 09-438 0404; www.lodgebordeaux.co.nz; 361 Western Hills Dr; units \$185-300; ☎ P) Sitting somewhere between a super-schmick motel and an apartment hotel, Lodge Bordeaux has tasteful units with stellar kitchens and bathrooms, private balconies and excellent wines available.

Eating RESTAURANTS

Havana Cubana (☎ 09-430 8500; 7 Rust Ave; mains \$13-19; ☎ 11am-9.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-9.30pm Sat) The staff may wear silly hats and say 'hola' but the food is genuinely Cuban. Try the delicious *chillies rellenas*, a cold entrée of chilli stuffed with cheese (\$8).

Salut Bar & Brasserie (☎ 09-430 8080; 69 Bank St; brunch \$15-25, dinner \$23-32; ☎ lunch & dinner) A grand setting for a boozy lunch. Grab one of the booths scooped out of dark chocolate leather and settle in for some delicious fresh dishes such as tuna *carpaccio* salad (\$18).

our pick à Deco (☎ 09-459 4957; 70 Kamo Rd, Kensington; meals \$28-34; ☎ dinner Tue-Sat) Northland's

best restaurant, with an inventive menu that prominently features local produce: Northland scallops, Tutukaka tuna, Waimate mushrooms, Kaipara flounder, Dargaville kumara (sweet potato) and the native flavours of horopito and manuka. Art Deco fans will adore the setting – a wonderfully curvaceous marine-style villa with original fixtures.

CAFÉS

Bob (☎ 09-438 0881; 29 Bank St; breakfast \$6-16, lunch \$15-17; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Hey Bob, nice coffee. How would you describe yourself? Deli? Café? All that fancy produce spices up the standards – like the Kransky sausages in the big breakfast. Nice one, Bob.

Caffeine (☎ 09-438 6925; 4 Water St; meals \$6-17; ☎ 7am-2.30pm Mon-Fri, 7am-1.30pm Sat & Sun) There's no prize for guessing what the regular junkies are here for. Nice brekkies and café snacks too.

Deluca Café (☎ 09-438 7154; 6 Rust Ave; mains \$6-17; ☎ 7.45am-6.30pm Mon-Sat) Sink into one of the moulded white-plastic chairs at this stylish, yet relatively reasonably priced, café and order something delectable from the cabinet.

Nectar (☎ 09-438 8084; 88 Bank St; meals \$6-18; ☎ 7am-3pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm Sat) Oozing boho cool, Nectar has strong fair-trade coffee, hip tattooed staff, chilled-out grooves and urban views from the back of a fabulous old building. Breakfast couldn't be sweeter than the blackberry and lemon hotcake stack (\$14).

Fresh (☎ 09-438 2921; 12 James St; meals \$8-20; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm Sat) Fresh as a daisy with white walls and supersized flower photography, this chic café dishes up great coffee and interesting breakfasts. Try the French-toasted brioche with poached pear and vanilla mascarpone (\$16).

Vinyl (☎ 09-438 8105; cnr Riverside Dr & Vale Rd; brunch \$10-19, dinner \$26-34; ☎ 5.30pm-late Tue-Thu, 11.30am-late Fri, 9am-late Sat & Sun) For those old or hip enough to remember them, the menus are delivered on the back of old LPs at this quirky café/bar. Dishes are well presented and accompanied by live music on Thursdays.

QUICK EATS & SELF-CATERING

Stumpy's (☎ 09-438 1775; 121 Riverside Dr; meals \$3-8; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Thu, 10am-8pm Fri-Sun) A legendary chippie with a seafood basket (\$8) that could sink a ship.

Pak N Save (☎ 09-438 1488; Carruth St; ☎ 8am-9pm Mon-Fri, 8am-8pm Sat & Sun) The big Kiwi-owned budget supermarket.

Drinking & Entertainment

Brauhaus Frings (☎ 09-438 4664; 104 Dent St; ☎ 10am-late) This popular microbrewery has a range of great chemical-free beers, a beer garden and board games for patrons to play.

McMorrissey's (☎ 09-430 8081; 7 Vine St; ☎ noon-late) A better-than-average Irish pub with cosy old-world décor. It's the home of BALLS (Beer & Lager Lovers Society), quiz nights and live music (trad Irish, rock and jam sessions).

Butter Factory (☎ 09-430 0044; 8 Butter Factory Lane; ☎ 4pm-late Wed-Sat) Tucked away in a back lane, this atmospheric wine bar has old stone walls, exposed beams and so-cool-it-hurts staff. As the hours dissolve, DJs kick in and the crowd spills outside.

Danger! Danger! (☎ 09-459 7461; 37 Vine St; ☎ 10.30am-very late) Be very afraid: you may find yourself screaming along as the covers band belts out 'Living on a Prayer' to the packed-out scrum of booze hags and hogs at this popular and populist wood-clad barn. Expect to queue in the wee hours of Sunday morning.

Sky City Cinemas (☎ 09-470 1940; 18 James St; admission \$7-13; ☎ 10.30am-9pm) Screens the latest blockbusters.

Shopping

Kathmandu (☎ 09-438 7193; www.kathmandu.co.nz; 22 James St; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat, 10am-3pm Sun) A branch of the excellent outdoor and travel supplies chain, selling everything from tents to plug adapters.

Tuatara (☎ 09-430 0121; 29 Bank St) A primo spot for funky Maori and Pasifika design, art and craft. Drop in and watch the artist in residence.

Classics (☎ 09-430 8867; 41 Bank St) Interesting eclectic, from Rubik's cubes to literature.

Getting There & Around

AIR

Whangarei Airport (☎ 09-436 0047; www.whangareiairport.co.nz; Handforth St) is at Onerahi, 6km east of the centre. Taxis or shuttles into town both cost around \$17. A public bus route skirts the airport, heading into the city (\$2, 11 buses on weekdays, six on Saturdays).

Air New Zealand (☎ 0800 737 000; www.airnz.co.nz) Flies to Auckland (35 minutes, seven to nine daily); check website for fares and special offers.

Great Barrier Airlines (☎ 0800 900 600; www.greatbarrierairlines.co.nz) Flies to Claris, Great Barrier Island (\$109, twice weekly).

Sunair Aviation Ltd (☎ 07-575 7799; www.sunair.co.nz) Direct flights on weekdays to Hamilton (\$290, one hour).

BUS

Buses stop outside the **Northland Coach & Travel Centre** (☎ 09-438 3206; 3 Bank St; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-2.30pm Sat & Sun). There's a left-luggage service here.

InterCity (☎ 09-623 1503; www.intercity.co.nz) and associated daily buses stop here on the way from Auckland (\$38, 2½ hours) to Paihia (\$25, 70 minutes) via Waipu (\$21, 30 minutes). **Pavlovich Express** (☎ 0800 759 999; www.pavlovichexpress.co.nz) heads daily to Auckland (\$27, 3¼ hours) via Waipu (\$24, 35 minutes). Budget operator **Naked Bus** (www.nakedbus.com) has advance fares starting from \$1 on daily trips to Auckland (three hours) via Waipu (one hour).

A private operator runs a **Whangarei-to-Dargaville Shuttle** (☎ 021 380 187; one way/return \$10/16) on weekdays.

Local buses leave from across the square on Rose St. Useful routes head to Whangarei Falls (p159) and the airport. In summer there are special services to Ocean Beach and Waipu Cove (enquire at the i-SITE).

TAXI

A1 Cabs (☎ 0800 438 3377)

Kiwi Carlton Cabs (☎ 09-470 2299)

Phoenix Cabs (☎ 0800 438 9933)

WHANGAREI HEADS

Whangarei Heads Rd winds 35km along the northern reaches of the harbour to its entrance, passing mangroves and picturesque pohutukawa-lined bays. Holiday homes, B&Bs and galleries are dotted around the water-hugging small settlements.

There are great views from the top of **Mt Manaia** (419m), a sheer rock outcrop above McLeod Bay, but prepare for a lung- and leg-busting 1½-hour climb.

Bream Head caps off the finger of land. A five-hour one-way walking track from Urquharts Bay to Ocean Beach passes through the **Bream Head Scenic Reserve** and lovely **Smugglers Bay** and **Peach Cove**. DOC's *Whangarei District Walks* brochure (\$1) gives options to break this into smaller legs.

Magnificent **Ocean Beach** stretches for miles on the other side of the peninsula. There's decent surfing to be had and lifeguards patrol the beach in summer. A detour from Parua

Bay takes you to glorious **Pataua**, a small settlement that lies on a shallow inlet linked to a surf beach by a footbridge.

At McLeod Bay, take the long leafy drive down to **Breakaway Retreat** (☎ 09-434 0711; www.breakawayretreat.co.nz; 1856 Whangarei Heads Rd; house \$290-380; (P)), a semidetached two-bedroom house where the lawn terminates at a secluded slice of beachfront paradise. There are warmly wooden interiors, a spa bath and free kayaks.

A magical spot on a summer's day, **Parua Bay Tavern** (☎ 09-436 5856; 1034 Whangarei Heads Rd; mains \$14-25; ☎ 11.30am-late) is a friendly pub set on a thumb-shaped peninsula, with a sole pohutukawa blazing red against the green water. Grab a seat on the deck, a cold beverage and a decent pub meal.

Whangarei's public transport doesn't venture beyond Onerahi, so you'll need a car.

TUTUKAKA COAST & THE POOR KNIGHTS ISLANDS

If Goat Island Marine Reserve (p153) whetted your appetite, diving at the Poor Knights is the feast followed by a wafer-thin mint that might cause your stomach to explode. Apart from the natural underwater scenery (see the boxed text, p164), two decommissioned navy ships have been sunk nearby for divers to explore.

Following the road northeast of Whangarei for 26km, you'll first come to the sweet village of **Ngunguru** near the mouth of a broad river. **Tutukaka** is a kilometre further on, its marina bustling with yachts, dive crews and game-fishing boats.

From Tutukaka the road heads slightly inland, popping out 10km later at the golden sands of **Matapouri**. At the beach's north end a sign points through the long grass to the magnificent **Mermaid Pool**, a deep natural rock pool with crystal-clear water flushed out by the tide. It's an effort to reach but well worth it; follow the track through an unlikely looking hole in the rock, turn right and clamber along the rocks for about 10 minutes.

Continuing north from Matapouri, the sublime wide expanse of **Sandy Bay**, one of Northland's premiere surf beaches, comes into view. Long-boarding competitions are held here in summer. The road then loops back to join SH1 at Hikurangi. A branch leading off from this road doubles back north to the coast at **Whananaki**, where there are more glorious beaches and the Otamure Bay **DOC campsite** (adult/child \$7/3.50).

MARINE RICHES AT THE POOR KNIGHTS

Established in 1981, this marine reserve is rated as one of the world's top 10 diving spots. The islands are bathed in a subtropical current from the Coral Sea, so varieties of tropical and subtropical fish not seen in other coastal waters are observed here. The waters are clear, with no sediment or pollution problems. The 40m to 60m underwater cliffs drop steeply to the sandy bottom, and are a labyrinth of archways, caves, tunnels and fissures that attract a wide variety of sponges and colourful underwater vegetation. Manta rays are common.

The two main volcanic islands, Tawhiti Rahi and Aorangi, were home to the Ngai Wai tribe, but since a raiding-party massacre in the early 1800s the islands have been *tapu* (forbidden). Even today the public is banned from the islands, in order to protect their pristine environment. Not only do tuatara and Butler's shearwater breed there, but there are unique species of fauna and flora, such as the Poor Knights red lily.

Activities

Dive trips leave from Tutukaka and cater for first-timers and experts.

Dive! Tutukaka (☎ 0800 288 882; www.diving.co.nz; Marina Rd; ☎ 7am-5pm) is deservedly the main operator, winning a huge array of tourism, business and environmental awards. It offers a variety of dive courses and excursions, including a five-day PADI open-water course (\$595). Perhaps the jewel in its crown is the much-raved-about **Perfect Day Ocean Cruise**, (\$119) which includes a commentary, lunch and snacks, snorkelling from a platform in the middle of the marine reserve, kayaking through limestone caves and arches, and close encounters with dolphins and rare seabirds (usually), and occasionally whales, orcas and fur seals. Cruises depart at 11am, returning at 4.15pm.

Another experienced operator is **Pacific Hideaway Charters** (☎ 09-434 3762; www.divenz.co.nz; day trip with 2 dives & equipment \$190), which runs a large catamaran.

Oceanblue Adventures (☎ 027 488 0459; www.oceanblue.co.nz; trips incl equipment \$199-1279) specialises in overnight trips (one to three nights, maximum of six people) for experienced divers, including night dives.

Yukon Dive (☎ 021 261 7779; www.yukon.co.nz; trips \$90-150) is a small operator that takes groups of four to eight.

Sleeping

Tutukaka Holiday Park (☎ 09-434 3938; www.tutukaka-holidaypark.co.nz; Matapouri Rd, Tutukaka; sites per adult/child \$14/6, dm \$25, cabins \$50-100; ☎) Look for the giant marlin at the gate of this well-kept complex, not far from the marina. Facilities are clean and bright, and communal areas are in good condition.

Bellmain House (☎ 09-434 3898; www.bellmainhouse.co.nz; 2049 Ngunguru Rd, Ngunguru; s \$60, d & tw \$110-120, cottage \$120-160; ☎) Share this homely house with the welcoming hosts or nab the self-contained cottage at the back of the garden (sleeps four).

Bluewater Cottages (☎ 09-434 3423; www.bluewatercottages.co.nz; Matapouri Rd; cottages \$180-320; ☎) These attractive, self-contained, open-plan cottages can sleep six. They enjoy sea views from an evergreen hillside between Tutukaka and Matapouri.

Eating & Drinking

A choice of eateries can be found on the marina at Tutukaka.

Schnappa Rock (☎ 09-434 3774; breakfast \$6-15, lunch \$15-24, dinner \$22-33; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Filled with expectant divers in the morning and those capping off their Perfect Days in the evening, this café/restaurant/bar is often buzzing – not least because of the excellent coffee. Top NZ bands play on summer weekends.

Whangarei Deep Sea Anglers Club (☎ 09-434 3249; mains \$9-19; ☎ 4-8pm Sun-Wed, 4-10pm Thu-Sat) This venue plays host to the nicely named Moocha's, where standard eats (burgers, fish and chips, ham steaks) and a good children's menu mingle with mounted fish and garrulous locals.

Marina Pizzeria (☎ 09-434 3166; pizzas \$13-23; ☎ 10am-8pm Thu-Sun) Everything is homemade at this excellent takeaway and restaurant – the bread, the pasta, the pizza and the ice cream. The pizzas have perfect thin crusts and plenty of topping options.

Getting There & Away

In summer there are buses from Whangarei (enquire at the i-SITE, p159). Dive! Tutukaka

has free daily shuttles from Whangarei for its customers, charging \$35 return for everyone else.

RUSSELL ROAD

The quickest route to Russell takes SH1 to the Bay of Islands and then crosses by ferry. The old Russell Rd is a snaking scenic route that adds about half an hour to the trip.

The turn-off is easy to miss, 6km north of Hikurangi at Whakapara. It's worth a stop after 14km at the **Gallery & Café** (☎ 09-433 9616; breakfast \$6-15, lunch \$9-22; ☎ 10am-5pm) high above Helena Bay for excellent organic fair-trade coffee, scrummy cake, amazing views and a gander at some interesting Kiwiana art and craft. Is there anything that corrugated iron can't do?

At **Helena Bay** an unsealed detour leads 8km to **Mimiwhangata Coastal Park**, a gorgeous part of the coastline with sand dunes, pohutukawa trees, jutting headlands and picturesque beaches. **DOC** (☎ 09-433 6554; cmoretto@doc.govt.nz) manages a range of accommodation in the reserve, including a well-appointed lodge (\$500 to \$2000 per week), and a simpler but comfortable cottage and beachhouse (\$350 to \$1500 per week); both sleep eight people. Basic camping (per adult/child \$8/4) is available at secluded Waikahoa Bay.

Further north, another sideroad leads to the **Whangaruru North Head Scenic Reserve**, which has beaches, another **DOC campsite** (☎ 09-433 6160; per adult/child \$7/3.50), walks and fine coastal scenery.

Continuing north you'll reach the turn-off to isolated **Rawhiti**, a small Ngapuhi settlement where life still revolves around the *marae*. Rawhiti is the starting point for the trek to **Cape Brett**, a hard 7½-hour, 20km walk to the top of the peninsula, where overnight stays are possible in **DOC's Cape Brett Hut** (adult/child \$12/6). **Cape Brett Walkways** (☎ 09-403 8823; www.capebrettwalks.co.nz) charges a fee for crossing the private land (adult/child \$30/15), which you pay along with your hut fees at the DOC visitor centre in Russell (p168). Another option is to take the Cape Brett Walkways boat service via the Hole in the Rock to Cape Brett lighthouse from Russell/Paihia (\$110) or Rawhiti (\$80) and walk back. Prices include the land access fee.

Closer to the Rawhiti turn-off, a shorter one-hour walk leads through Maori land and the **Whangamumu Scenic Reserve** to

Whangamumu Harbour. There are more than 40 ancient Maori sites on the peninsula and the remains of an unusual whaling station. A net fastened between the mainland and Net Rock was used to ensnare or slow down whales so the harpooners could get an easy shot in.

Continuing south along Russell Rd there's access to the **Ngaioitonga Scenic Reserve**, which conserves the mixed forest that once prevailed throughout Northland. There are two short walks – the 20-minute **Kauri Grove Nature Walk** and the 10-minute **Twin Bole Kauri Walk**.

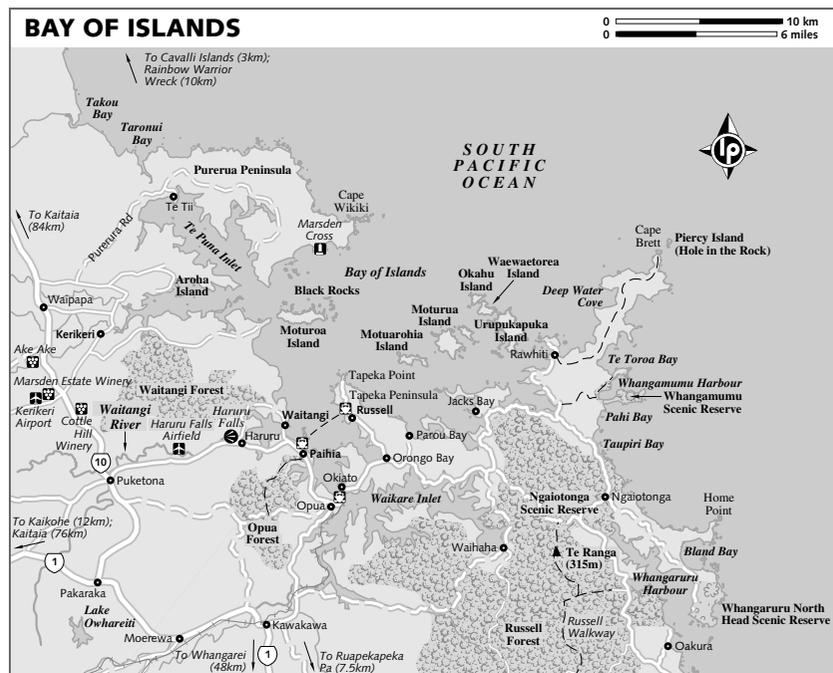
A succession of idyllic tiny bays follows and houses start to sprout up. At Jacks Bay, **Russell B&B** (☎ 09-403 7887; www.fernzecotours.co.nz; 24 Kingfisher Rd; d \$125-135, bach \$140) has a quiet bush location overlooking the water. Choose between a room in the house and a self-contained bach (sleeping four). From here it's a further 16km to Russell.

BAY OF ISLANDS

Undeniably pretty, the Bay of Islands ranks as one of NZ's top tourist drawcards. The footage that made you want to come to NZ in the first place no doubt featured lingering shots of lazy, sun-filled days on a yacht floating atop these turquoise waters punctuated by around 150 undeveloped islands. The reality is that NZ has many beautiful spots and this bay, while wonderful, could be a teensy bit overhyped.

What sets it apart from the rest is its fascinating history and substantial tourist infrastructure. Paihia has one of the best selections of budget accommodation of anywhere in the country. After that the budget goes out the window as a bewildering array of boat trips clamour to wrestle money out of your wallet. There's no point coming here if you don't head out on the water, so be prepared to fork out.

The Bay of Islands is a place of enormous historical significance. Maori knew it as Pewhairangi and settled here early in their migrations. As the site of NZ's first permanent English settlement (at Russell), it is the birthplace of European colonisation. It was here that the Treaty of Waitangi was drawn up and first signed in 1840; the treaty remains the linchpin of race relations in NZ today (see p34).



Activities & Tours

Where do you start? First by praying for good weather, as torrential rain or choppy seas could literally put a dampener on things. The information centres at Paihia and Russell are extremely helpful and can book tours. Some of the hostels can arrange cheap deals and several of the main operators offer back-packer specials. Boats leave from either Paihia or Russell, calling into the other town as their first stop.

At the time of research the two big players, **Fullers** (☎ 0800 653 339; www.fboi.co.nz) and **Kings** (☎ 0800 222 979; www.kings-tours.co.nz), had just announced a merger. No-one is quite sure what this will mean for the future, but we've been assured that all of their usual tour products will continue and the phone numbers and websites will remain active. Don't be surprised if some tours are combined or the names change during the lifetime of this book.

CRUISING

You can't leave the Bay of Islands without taking some sort of cruise and there are plenty of vessels keen to get you on board,

including sailing boats, jetboats and large launches. Sometimes the trip is combined with swimming with dolphins. Fullers runs full- (adult/child \$82/41) and half-day (\$77/39) tours, taking in the Hole in the Rock off Cape Brett (and passing through it if conditions are right) and stopping for an hour on Urupukapuka Island.

OVERNIGHT CRUISES

The cheapest way to spend a possibly romantic night on the water is aboard the **Rock** (☎ 0800 762 527; www.rocktheboat.co.nz; 22hr cruises \$168), a former vehicle ferry that's now a comfortable floating hostel, with four-bed dorms, twin and double rooms, and (of course) a bar. A private room costs an extra \$20 per person. The cruise departs at about 5pm and includes an excellent barbecue and seafood dinner with live music, then a full day spent island-hopping, fishing, kayaking, snorkelling and swimming.

Ecocruz (☎ 0800 432 627; www.ecocruz.co.nz; cruises dm/d \$495/1150) is a highly recommended three-day/two-night sailing cruise aboard the 72ft ocean-going yacht *Manawanui*, with an emphasis on the marine environment. Prices

include accommodation, awesome food, fishing, kayaking and snorkelling.

SAILING

The best way to explore the bay is under sail. In most cases you can either help crew the boat (no experience required), or just spend the afternoon island-hopping, sunbathing, swimming, snorkelling, kayaking and fishing. Recommended boats offering day trips:

Carino (☎ 09-402 8040; www.sailingdolphins.co.nz; adult/child \$85/45) A 50ft catamaran offering swimming with dolphins and a barbecue lunch.

Gungha II (☎ 0800 478 900; www.bayofislandsailing.co.nz; trips \$85) A beautiful 65ft ocean yacht with a friendly crew offering freshly made sandwiches.

On the Edge (☎ 0800 397 567; www.explorenz.co.nz; adult/child \$115/79) NZ's fastest commercial catamaran, capable of speeds over 30 knots. It also has a licensed bar.

Phantom (☎ 0800 224 421; www.yachtphantom.com; adult/child \$99/50) A fast 50ft racing sloop, known for its wonderful food (10 people maximum, BYO allowed).

R Tucker Thompson (☎ 0800 882 537; www.tucker.co.nz; adult/child \$120/60) A majestic tall ship with daily tours that include a barbecue lunch. Run by a charitable trust with an education focus, it partners with the Historic Places Trust and DOC for special sailings during the year.

She's a Lady (☎ 0800 724 584; www.bay-of-islands.com; trips \$90) Allows you to try your hand at kneeboarding, tubing or paddling about in a see-through-bottomed kayak.

JETBOATING

Fasten your seatbelt for a high-speed Hole in the Rock trip on board a jetboat – good fun and handy if you're short on time. **Mack Attack** (☎ 0800 622 528; www.mackattack.co.nz; adult/child \$75/38) and Fuller's **Excitor** (☎ 09-402 7020; www.excitor.co.nz; adult/child \$77/39) have daily 1½-hour trips.

DOLPHIN SWIMMING

These trips operate all year and you get to cruise around the islands as well as watch or swim with the dolphins. They have a high success rate and operators generally offer a free trip if dolphins are not sighted. Dolphin swims are subject to weather and sea conditions, with restrictions if the dolphins have young. As well as encountering bottlenose

and common dolphins, you may see whales, orcas and penguins. With all operators a portion of the cost goes towards marine research, via DOC.

Dolphin Discoveries (☎ 09-402 8234; www.dolphin.nz; adult/child \$79/39) was the first to do dolphin-swimming trips in the bay. The price includes a four-hour trip, with an additional \$30 payable if you choose to swim.

Fullers and Kings (opposite) both run trips (\$115, 5½ hours). Fullers stops at Urupukapuka Island, while Kings includes boom netting (for humans to be dragged in, not dolphins).

SEA KAYAKING

There are plenty of opportunities for kayaking around the bay, either on a guided tour or by renting a kayak and going it alone.

Coastal Kayakers (Map p173; ☎ 09-402 8105; www.coastalkayakers.co.nz; Te Karuwha Pde, Paihia) Runs guided tours (half-/full-/two-day tours \$55/75/130); minimum two people. Kayaks can also be rented (half-/full day \$30/40).

Island Kayaks (Map p173; ☎ 09-402 6078; www.baybeachhire.co.nz; Marsden Rd, Paihia; half-/full-day tour \$55/90) Operates from Bay Beach Hire.

SCUBA DIVING

The Bay of Islands offers some fine subtropical diving, made even better by the recent sinking of the 113m navy frigate HMNZS *Canterbury* in Deep Water Cove near Cape Brett. The top of it sits 10m below the surface and is visible to snorkellers. Local operators also head to the wreck of the *Rainbow Warrior* off the Cavalli Islands, about an hour from Paihia by boat.

Dive HQ (Map p173; ☎ 09-402 7551; www.divenz.com; Williams Rd, Paihia) offers combined *Rainbow Warrior* and reef dive trips (\$205) or two dives at the *Canterbury* for the same price. Various PADI courses are available and gear can be hired.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Bay Beach Hire (Map p173; ☎ 09-402 6078; www.baybeachhire.co.nz; Marsden Rd, Paihia; ☎ 9am-5.30pm) Hires just about everything: kayaks (from \$10 per hour), small sailing catamarans (\$50 per hour), mountain bikes (\$20 per day), boogie boards, fishing rods, wet suits and snorkelling gear.

Flying Kiwi Parasail (☎ 0800 359 691; www.parasail-nz.co.nz) Organises one-hour parasailing trips (\$75 to \$85), leaving from Paihia's wharf hourly during summer.

NZ Skydive (☎ 0800 427 593; www.nzskydive.com) Operates from Haruru Falls Airfield, offering 12,000ft tandem skydives (\$295).

Salt Air (☎ 09-402 8338; www.saltair.co.nz) Has scenic flights ranging from a one-hour discovery tour of the Bay of Islands (\$195) to a five-hour flight-and-4WD tour to Cape Reinga and Ninety Mile Beach (\$375). Helicopter flights out to the Hole in the Rock cost \$190.

CAPE REINGA TOURS

It's cheaper and quicker to do trips to Cape Reinga from Ahipara, Kaitiāia or Doubtless Bay (see p184). But if you're short on time, several operators offer long day trips (10 to 12 hours) from the Bay of Islands. They're all pretty similar, driving one way along Ninety Mile Beach, with visits to Puketū Forest and sandboarding on the dunes, but check the stops and whether lunch is included.

Fullers and Kings (p166) run both regular bus tours and backpacker-oriented versions. Fullers' is **Awesome Adventures** (Map p173; ☎ 0800 653 339; www.awesomenz.co.nz; Maritime Bldg, Paihia; trips \$105), with sandboarding on the 85m dunes, swimming at Tapotupotu Bay and a visit to Puketū Forest. Kings' version is **Northern Exposure** (☎ 0800 573 875; www.northernexposure.co.nz; trips \$95). It's possible these may merge or change in the future.

Dune-Rider 4X4 (☎ 0800 494 868; www.dunerider.co.nz; adult/child \$105/55) takes smaller groups (20-seater buses) and makes plenty of stops for sandboarding and swimming.

HOKIANGA & WAIPOUA FOREST TOURS

Transport options to these west-coast destinations are limited, so a day trip makes sense if you don't have your own car or if you're time starved. Kings' **Crossings Hokianga** (☎ 0800 222 979; www.dolphincruises.co.nz/crossings-hokianga; adult/child \$105/53) leaves Paihia at 8am and heads to the forest for a one-hour tour with a Footprints Waipoua guide (p189). Then it's back to Opononi, where there's a choice of a crayfish lunch (\$65) or a harbour cruise (p190; \$16 for optional picnic lunch). Rawene and Kohukohu follow, then it's back to Paihia by 4pm. At the time of research this was a new service and was scheduled according to demand, with the hope that it will eventually run daily. If it does it will be possible to stop off overnight and pick up the rest of the tour at a later date.

Festivals & Events

Tall Ship Race Held in Russell on the first Saturday of January.

Waitangi Day Various ceremonial events at Waitangi on 6 February.

Country Rock Festival (www.country-rock.co.nz)

Second weekend in May.

Russell Birdman Where a bunch of lunatics with flying contraptions jump off the wharf into the frigid (July) waters to the amusement of all.

Jazz & Blues Festival (www.jazz-blues.co.nz) Second weekend in August.

Weekend Coastal Classic (www.coastalclassic.co.nz) NZ's largest yacht race, from Auckland to the Bay of Islands, held on Labour Weekend in October.

RUSSELL

pop 1140

Although it was once known prosaically as 'the hellhole of the Pacific', those coming to Russell for debauchery will be sadly disappointed: they've missed the orgies on the beach by 170 years. Instead they'll find a sweetly historic town that is a bastion of cafés, gift shops and B&Bs.

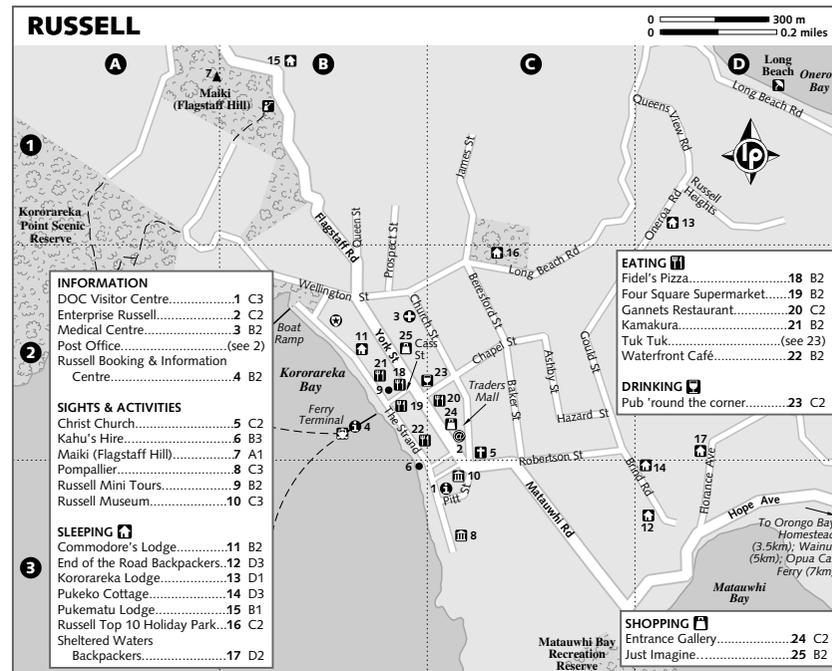
Before it was known as a hellhole, or even as Russell, it was Kororareka (Sweet Penguin), a fortified Ngāpuhi village. In the early 19th century the tribe permitted it to become Aotearoa's first European settlement. It quickly became a magnet for rough elements such as fleeing convicts, whalers and drunken sailors. By the 1830s dozens of whaling ships at a time were anchored in the harbour. Charles Darwin described it in 1835 as full of 'the refuse of society'.

In 1830 the settlement was the scene of the so-called Girls' War, when two pairs of Maori women were vying for the attention of a whaling captain called Brind. A chance meeting between the rivals on the beach led to verbal abuse and fighting. This minor conflict quickly escalated as family members rallied around to avenge the insult and harm done to their respective relatives. Hundreds were killed and injured over a two-week period before missionaries managed to broker a peace agreement.

After the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840, Okiato (where the car ferry now leaves from) was the residence of the governor and the temporary capital. The capital was officially moved to Auckland in 1841 and Okiato, which was by then known as Russell, was eventually abandoned. The name Russell ultimately passed to Kororareka – a marginally better choice than Bruce or Barry.

Information

DOC visitor centre (☎ 09-403 9005; www.doc.govt.nz; The Strand; ☎ 9am-5pm) Excellent displays on the 40 separate areas they manage in the Bay of Islands.



Enterprise Russell (☎ 09-403 8843; Traders Mall; 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat, 1-4pm Sun) Internet access.

Medical Centre (☎ 09-403 7690; Church St)

Post Office (Traders Mall)

Russell Booking & Information Centre (☎ 09-403 8020; www.russell-information.co.nz; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Apr-Sep, 8am-8pm Oct-Mar) On the pier.

Sights & Activities

The small but modern **Russell Museum** (☎ 09-403 7701; 2 York St; adult/child \$5/free; ☎ 10am-4pm) has a well-presented Maori section, a large 1:5-scale model of Captain Cook's *Endeavour* and a 10-minute video on the town's history.

Russell lays claim to some of NZ's oldest buildings, including **Christ Church** (1836), the country's oldest church. Charles Darwin made a donation towards the cost of its construction. It's scarred with musket and cannonball holes from the 1845 battle. The biggest memorial in the fascinating graveyard is to Waka Nene, a powerful Ngāpuhi chief from the Hokianga who sided against Hone Heke in the Northland War.

Pompallier (☎ 09-403 9015; The Strand; tours adult/child \$7.50/free; ☎ 10am-4pm) was a rammed-earth construction built in 1842 to house the Roman Catholic mission's printing press, which printed a staggering 40,000 books in Maori (take the brilliant guided tour to discover just why this figure is so mind-boggling). In the 1870s it was converted into a private home but it has been restored to its original state. It's the last remaining building of the Catholic mission in the Western Pacific.

Overlooking Russell is **Maiki** (Flagstaff Hill; Flagstaff Rd), where Hone Heke chopped down the flagpole four times. The view is well worth the climb. Take the track west from the boat ramp along the beach at low tide, or up Wellington St at high tide.

In summer, weather permitting, **Kahu's Hire** (The Strand) rents kayaks or dinghies for around \$12 an hour.

About 1.5km behind Russell and an easy walk or cycle is **Long Beach** (Oneroa Bay Beach). Turn left (facing the sea) to visit Donkey Bay, a small cove that is an unofficial nudist beach.

HONE HEKE & THE NORTHLAND WAR

Just five years after he had been the first signatory to the treaty, Ngapuhi chief Hone Heke was so disaffected that he was planning to chop down Kororareka's flagstaff, a symbol of British authority, for the fourth time. Governor FitzRoy was determined not to let that happen and garrisoned the town with soldiers and marines.

On 11 March 1845 the Ngapuhi staged a diversionary siege of the town. It was a great tactical success, with Chief Kawiti attacking from the south and another party attacking from Long Beach. While the troops rushed off to protect the township, Hone Heke felled the Union Jack on Maiki (Flagstaff Hill) for the fourth and final time. The British were forced to evacuate to ships lying at anchor. The captain of the HMS *Hazard* was wounded severely in the battle and his replacement ordered the ships' cannons to be fired on the town; most of the buildings were razed. The first of the New Zealand Wars had begun.

In the months that followed, British troops (united with Hokianga Ngapuhi) fought Heke and Kawiti in several battles. During this time the modern *pa* was born, effectively the world's first sophisticated system of trench warfare. It's worth stopping at the Ruapekapeka *pa* battlesite, off SH1 south of Kawakawa, to see how impressive these fortifications were. Eventually Heke, Kawiti and George Grey (the new governor) made their peace, with no side the clear winner.

Tours

Russell Mini Tours (☎ 09-403 7866; adult/child \$20/10) depart from the Fullers office, which fronts Russell Wharf, six times daily on the hour from 10am (not at noon) and visit local sites of interest.

See p166 for other tours around the bay.

Sleeping

Being a tourist trap, decent midrange options are scarce. There are several tiny budget lodges, but you'll need to book ahead at busy times. If budget's not a consideration, Russell does luxury very well.

BUDGET

Our pick Wainui (☎ 09-403 8278; www.bay-of-islands.pelnet.org; 92d Te Wahapu Rd; dm/d \$23/56; Ⓟ) Hard to find but well worth the effort, this modern bush retreat has only two rooms sharing a pleasant communal space. It's 5km from Russell on the way to the car ferry. Take Te Wahapu Rd and then turn right into Waiaruhe Way.

Pukeko Cottage (☎ 09-403 8498; www.pukeko.cottagebackpackers.co.nz; 14 Brind Rd; s/d/tw \$25/50/50) More like staying at a mate's place than a hostel, there are just two bedrooms for rent in this homely house and a caravan in the back garden. It's certainly not dirty, but the cleanliness is bloke-standard. Barry, the artist owner, is always up for a chat – in between taking pot shots at pesky mynah birds in the back garden.

Sheltered Waters Backpackers (☎ 09-403 8818; www.russellbackpackers.co.nz; 18 Florance Ave; dm \$25, d \$65-75; Ⓟ) The large dorm (12 beds) is a good fall-back if the microhostels are full. It's a bit grungy but there's a friendly communal vibe that would suit unfussy dudes. Treats include a spa pool, a verdant garden and some en-suite double rooms.

End of the Road Backpackers (☎ 09-403 8827; 13 Brind Rd; dm/d/tw \$30/60/60; Ⓟ) Another tiddler, this basic bach sleeps only four people in two bedrooms (a double and a twin). It's a quiet spot with views over the marina.

Russell Top 10 Holiday Park (☎ 09-403 7826; www.russelltop10.co.nz; Long Beach Rd; campsites \$40, cabins \$95-110, units \$150-230; Ⓟ) This leafy park has a small store, good facilities, wonderful hydrangeas, tidy cabins and nice units. Showers are clean, but metered.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Kororareka Lodge (☎ 09-403 8494; www.kororareka-lodge.co.nz; 22 Oneroa Rd; units \$140-175; Ⓟ) A solid, clean option, this lodge sits on the hilltop between the township and the beach. The front rooms have views, while the cheaper ones at the back only have small windows and share bathrooms. A nice communal lounge and deck compensate.

Commodore's Lodge (☎ 09-403 7899; www.commodoreslodgemotel.co.nz; 28 The Strand; units \$150-650; Ⓟ) Being the envy of every passer-by makes up for the lack of privacy in the front apartments facing the waterfront promenade. Spacious, nicely presented units are the order

of the day here, along with a really nice pool and free kayaks, dinghies and bikes.

Pukematu Lodge (☎ 09-403 8500; www.pukematu-lodge.co.nz; Flagstaff Rd; r \$395) Pukematu sits at the top end, both literally and figuratively, high on the hill opposite the famous flagstaff. Maori culture is at the forefront, from the carvings at the gate to the warm hospitality.

Orongo Bay Homestead (☎ 09-403 7527; www.thehomestead.co.nz; Aucks Rd; s/d \$400/650; Ⓟ) This beautiful wooden homestead (c 1860) was NZ's first American consulate, located a discreet 4km from Russell's rabble. It now contains four stylishly plush rooms, two in the house and two in the converted barn facing a chocolate-box lake. When one of the charming hosts is an acclaimed food critic, you can be assured that the breakfast will be memorable (dinners by arrangement).

Eating & Drinking

For a country so hooked on café culture and a town so touristy, it's disappointing that Russell doesn't have more on offer.

Fidel's Pizza (☎ 09-403 8869; Cass St; medium pizza \$6-18; ☎ 8am-3pm) There are a couple of tables, but you're better off grabbing one of the gourmet wood-fired pizzas and battling the seagulls at the beach.

Waterfront Café (☎ 09-403 7589; 23d The Strand; mains \$12-18; ☎ noon-late Tue-Sun) It's a sausage-roll-and-custard-square kind of place, but it's Russell's best breakfast option.

Tuk Tuk (☎ 09-403 7111; 19 York St; mains \$15-24; ☎ 10am-11pm; ☎) Thai fabrics adorn the tables and Thai favourites fill the menu. In clement weather grab a table out front and watch Russell's little world go by.

Gannets Restaurant (☎ 09-403 7990; cnr York & Chapel Sts; mains \$27-33; ☎ dinner Tue-Sun) This funky eatery has an emphasis on seafood that would put a smile on any gannet's beak.

Our pick Kamakura (☎ 09-402 7771; The Strand; lunch \$14-21, dinner \$28-35; ☎ dinner Mon-Tue, lunch & dinner Thu-Sun) The flashiest option in Russell by a long way, this restaurant has a bright and breezy beachhouse feel. The Pacific Rim menu gainfully plunders Asian styles to produce beautifully presented and delicious meals.

Pub 'round the corner (☎ 09-403 7831; 19 York St; ☎ 11am-10pm Sun-Mon, 11am-midnight Tue-Sat) A cool, cosy tavern with a beer garden and pool tables, in the same complex as Tuk Tuk.

There's a **Four Square supermarket** (The Strand) in town.

Shopping

Entrance Gallery (☎ 09-403 7716; 13 York St) A genuinely local gallery, where Russell's artists have been selling their wares for over 20 years.

Just Imagine... (☎ 09-403 8360; 25 York St) Full of gorgeous glassware and paintings, this gallery also offers art junkies a caffeine fix.

Getting There & Away

The quickest way to reach Russell by car is via the **car ferry** (car & driver \$10, motorcycle & rider \$5, passenger adult/child \$1/50c), which runs every 10 minutes from Opua (5km from Paihia) to Okiato (8km from Russell), between 6.50am and 10pm. Buy your tickets on board. If you're travelling from the south, a scenic alternative is Russell Rd (p165).

On foot, the quickest and easiest way to reach Russell is on the regular **passenger ferry** (adult/child one way \$6/3, return \$10/5) from Paihia. It runs from 7am to 7pm (until 10.30pm October to May), generally every 20 minutes but hourly in the evenings. Buy your tickets on board.

PAIHIA & WAITANGI

pop 7250

The birthplace of NZ (as opposed to Aotearoa), Waitangi inhabits a special, somewhat complex place in the national psyche – aptly demonstrated by the mixture of celebration, commemoration, protest and apathy that accompanies the nation's birthday (Waitangi Day, 6 February).

It was here that the long-neglected and much-contested Treaty of Waitangi was first signed between Maori chiefs and the British Crown, establishing British sovereignty or something a bit like it, depending on whether you're reading the English or Maori version of the document. If you're interested in coming to grips with NZ's history and race relations, this is the place to start.

Joined to Waitangi by a bridge, Paihia would be a fairly nondescript coastal town if it wasn't the main entry point to the Bay of Islands.

Information

Bay of Islands i-SITE (☎ 09-402 7345; www.northlandnz.com; Marsden Rd; ☎ 8am-5pm Apr-Oct, 8am-8pm Nov-Mar) Information and internet access (\$4 per hour).

Maritime Building (Marsden Rd) Tour operators and internet access (\$6 per hour); buses stop outside.

Medical Services ☎ 09-402 8407; Selwyn Rd;
☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon & Wed-Fri, 8.30am-12.30pm Tue
Post Office (2 Williams Rd)

Sights & Activities

WAITANGI TREATY GROUNDS

A visit to the **Waitangi Treaty Grounds** (☎ 09-402 7437; www.waitangi.net.nz; 1 Tau Henare Dr; admission \$12; ☎ 9am-6pm) is a must for every itinerary. It's full of cultural icons – the colonial-style Treaty House with its manicured garden and lawns, the surrounding bush full of native birds, the spiritual *whare* and the warlike *waka*, the three flags (UK, NZ and Maori), and the hill-side views of a still-beautiful land.

The **Treaty House** has special significance in NZ's history. Built in 1832 as the four-room home of British resident James Busby, eight years later it was the setting for the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi. The house, with its gardens and beautiful lawn running down to the bay, was restored in 1989 and is preserved as a memorial and museum. Inside are photographs and displays, including a facsimile copy of the treaty.

Just across the lawn, the magnificently detailed **whare runanga** (meeting house) was completed in 1940 to mark the centenary of the treaty. The fine carvings represent the major Maori tribes; a 15-minute audiovisual presentation uses legends, songs and stories to explain the carvings and summon up a world of all-powerful chiefs and gods.

Near the cove is the 35m **waka taua** (war canoe) *Ngatokimatawhaoua*. It too was built

for the centenary, and a photographic exhibit details how it was fashioned from gigantic kauri logs.

A 30-minute **cultural performance** (adult/child \$12/6; ☎ 10.30am, 11.30am, 12.30pm & 1.30pm Oct-Apr) demonstrates traditional Maori song and dance, including *poi* (a women's formation dance that involves manipulating a ball of woven flax) and *haka* (war dance). Maori guides lead **tours** (adult/child \$10/5; ☎ 9.15am, 10.30am, 1.30pm & 3pm Oct-Apr) of the grounds. The **Ultimate Waitangi Experience** (adult/child \$30/10) is a combined ticket including entry, a tour and a performance. Between May and November it pays to call ahead to check tour and performance times.

Finally, the two-hour **Culture North Night Show** (☎ 09-402 5990; www.culturenorth.co.nz; admission \$55; ☎ 7.30pm Mon, Wed, Thu & Sat Oct-Apr) is a wonderful dramatisation of Maori history held in the *whare runanga*. It begins with a traditional Maori welcome and heads into an atmospheric theatrical performance accompanied by a sound-and-light show. Free transfers from Paihia are included in the price.

In October 2008 it is planned to make access to the Treaty Grounds free for all New Zealanders; if you're a Kiwi, bring your passport. Prices for overseas visitors are likely to rise.

HARURU FALLS

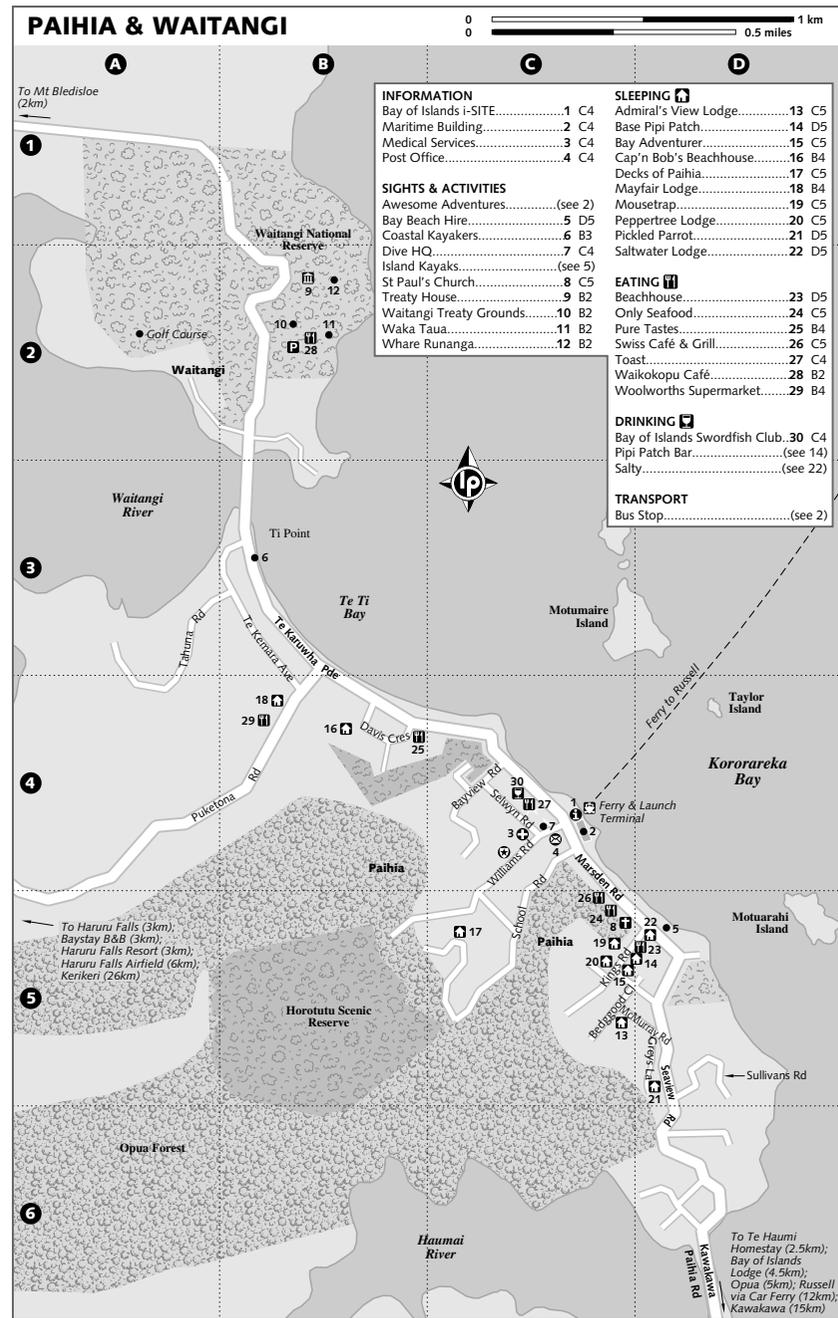
A few kilometres upstream from Waitangi are the attractive horseshoe Haruru Falls, which are lit up at night. In 2007 severe flooding destroyed a walkway that led between here and the Treaty Grounds. Enquire at the i-SITE as to whether it's been reopened.

WAKA JOURNEY

For a hands-on experience of Maori culture, **Waka Tai-a-Mai** (☎ 09-405 9990; www.taiamaitours.co.nz; 2hr trip \$75; ☎ 10am & 1pm Oct-Apr) gives you the opportunity to paddle a traditional 50ft carved *waka* (canoe). Leaving from the Waitangi bridge, the journey heads up to the Haruru Falls before visiting a replica Maori village. The Ngapuhi hosts wear traditional garb and perform the proper *karakia* (incantations), as well as some excellent storytelling.

ST PAUL'S CHURCH

Paihia's **St Paul's Church** (Marsden Rd) isn't particularly old (1925), but it stands on the site of NZ's first church – a simple raupo (bulrush)



HUNDERTWASSER'S LOO

Kawakawa is just an ordinary Kiwi town, located on SH1 south of Paihia, but the public toilets (60 Gillies St) were designed by Austrian-born artist and ecoarchitect Friedensreich Hundertwasser. He lived near Kawakawa in an isolated house without electricity from 1973 until his death in 2000.

The most photographed toilets in NZ are typical Hundertwasser – lots of wavy lines decorated with ceramic mosaics and brightly coloured bottles, and with grass and plants on the roof. Other examples of his work can be seen in cities as far apart as Vienna and Osaka. The café opposite the toilets was another of his designs, and inside are books and photographs of his work.

hut constructed in 1823. It's an altogether charming building, built from Kawakawa stone. Spot the native birds in the stained glass above the altar – the kotare (kingfisher) represents Jesus (the king plus 'fisher of men'), while the tui (parson bird) and kereru (wood pigeon) portray the personalities of the Williams brothers (one scholarly, one forceful) who set up the mission station here.

WALKING

Just behind Paihia is **Opua Forest**, a regenerating forest with a small stand of kauri and walking trails ranging from 10 minutes to five hours. There are lookouts up graded tracks from the access roads, and a few large trees have escaped axe and fire, including some big kauri. If you walk up from School Rd for about 20 minutes, you'll find a couple of good lookouts. Pamphlets with details on all the Opua Forest walks (\$1) are available from DOC offices and i-SITES. You can drive into the forest by taking Oromahoe Rd west from Opua.

Sleeping BUDGET

What makes Paihia a desirable base for backpackers is the high standard and great choice of hostels. Kings Rd is the main 'backpackers' row', although there are gems scattered around elsewhere. All of the following are excellent.

Mousetrap (☎ 09-402 8182; www.mousetrap.co.nz; 11 Kings Rd; dm \$22-24, d & tw \$60; (P) (Q)) There are plenty of small chill-out areas in this friendly nautical-themed (which is much better than being rodent-themed) hostel. It has a variety of nice rooms, plus bikes, barbecues and *boules* out the front.

Mayfair Lodge (☎ 09-402 7471; www.mayfairlodge.co.nz; 7 Puketona Rd; sites per person \$14, dm \$23-25, s/tw/d \$52/60/62; (P) (Q)) Set apart from the rest but handy for the supermarket, this well-run place has colourful fish on the walls and resin toilet-seats inset with shellfish.

Pickled Parrot (☎ 09-402 6222; www.pickledparrot.co.nz; Greys Lane; sites per person \$16, dm \$23-26, r \$60; (P) (Q)) Surrounded by tropical plants, this friendly, well-maintained backpackers' stalwart has cute cabins, free bikes and a good vibe. The parrot nips.

Peppertree Lodge (☎ 09-402 6122; www.peppertree.co.nz; 15 Kings Rd; dm \$23-26, r \$65-75; (P) (Q)) Simple, tidy rooms with high ceilings are on offer, plus there's a stash of bikes, racquets, kayaks and

two barbecues for guests' use, making this a sociable choice.

Saltwater Lodge (☎ 09-402 7075; www.saltwaterlodge.co.nz; 14 Kings Rd; dm \$24-27, d & tw \$110-130; (P) (Q)) Even the dorms at this excellent, large, purpose-built backpackers have en suites, bedding and lockers. Cow-print and red-leather couches make for a cool communal lounge. There are large balconies, a bar (opposite), and free bicycles, movies and racquets. There's no free set of steak-knives, but there is a gym.

Cap'n Bob's Beachhouse (☎ 09-402 8668; www.capnbobs.co.nz; 44 Davis Cres; dm/s/d \$25/47/58; (P) (Q)) This small but stylish backpackers is a spotless home-away-from-home with hard-working owners, sea views from the veranda and more than a touch of charm. It's ridiculously popular, so book ahead.

Bay Adventurer (☎ 09-402 5162; www.bayadventurer.co.nz; 28 Kings Rd; dm/r \$25/85, apt \$125-225; (P) (Q) (R)) The Bay Adventurer's 'and that's not all' features include a wonderful pool and spa area, tennis, kayaks and bikes. The smart cedar blocks have comfy rooms opening on to a tropical central garden. Self-contained studios or bigger apartments are available.

Base Pipi Patch (☎ 09-402 7111; www.stayatbase.com; 18 Kings Rd; dm \$26, r \$67-85; (P) (Q) (R)) The party dude of the pack, this backpackers has eight-bed dorms, a spa and the world's tiniest swimming pool. If the little kitchen and lounge get crammed you can always hang out in the bar (opposite).

MIDRANGE

Haruru Falls Resort (☎ 09-402 7525; www.harurufalls.co.nz; Old Wharf Rd; sites per adult/child \$18/9, units \$130-150; (P) (Q) (R)) Facing the falls, this family-friendly resort has reasonable and varied accommodation options. Flooding in 2007 has resulted in swanky new carpets and furnishings. There's also a bar and restaurant.

Admiral's View Lodge (☎ 09-402 6236; www.admiralsviewlodge.co.nz; 2 McMurray Rd; apt \$110-275; (P) (Q)) This hillside lodge offers natty units with balconies just begging for a sunset gin-and-tonic. Some have spa baths and bay views.

Our pick Te Haumi Homestay (☎ 09-402 6818; joshlef@xtra.co.nz; 41b Te Haumi Dr; s/d \$125/140; (P)) A proper homestay, at Te Haumi you'll join the hospitable hosts for breakfast in the morning and wine and nibbles in the evening – yet once you're in your comfy downstairs room you'll have all the privacy you'll need. The

house backs on to a nature reserve and has bay views. Listen for kiwi at night.

Baystay B&B (☎ 09-402 7511; www.baystay.co.nz; 93a Yorke Rd, Haruru Falls; r \$145; (P)) Probably the only accommodation in NZ to have a Johnny Mnemonic pinball machine in the lounge room, this isn't your average B&B. Enjoy valley views from the spa pool of this slick, gay-friendly establishment.

TOP END

Decks of Paihia (☎ 09-402 6146; www.decksofpaihia.com; 69 School Rd; d \$220; (P) (Q) (R)) Architecturally impressive, this place offers light, modern bedrooms, granite bathrooms and a big deck with bay views. The elegant pool, set between house and bush, is irresistible.

Bay of Islands Lodge (☎ 09-402 6075; www.bayofislandslodge.co.nz; SH11, Port Opua; d \$580; (P) (Q)) This luxurious, private retreat affords glorious views and has a chic little pool with an infinity lip. A smart wheelchair-accessible room is also available.

Eating

RESTAURANTS

Swiss Café & Grill (☎ 09-402 6701; 48 Marsden Rd; mains \$19-30; (M) dinner) Unpretentious but excellent, this waterfront restaurant has indoor and outdoor seating options, and candles add a romantic touch. The wide-ranging and eclectic menu includes vegetable curry, nicely prepared fish dishes and wonderful Swiss comfort food such as homemade strudel.

Only Seafood (☎ 09-402 6066; 40 Marsden Rd; mains \$25-30; (M) dinner) An excellent place for local seafood, with dishes ranging from the simple (catch-of-the-day with lemon and parsley) to all manner of creamy, spicy concoctions. The fat Pacific oysters served with soy, wasabi and pickled ginger are sublime.

Pure Tastes (☎ 09-402 0003; 116 Marsden Rd; mains \$31-33; (M) breakfast, lunch & dinner) Occupying a small canvas-and-glass corner of the Paihia Beach Resort, this first-rate restaurant serves interesting, beautifully presented Pacific fusion food using mainly Northland ingredients. Try the signature dish – black lacquer duck balanced with green banana, lime and chilli.

CAFÉS & QUICK EATS

Beachhouse (☎ 09-402 7479; 16 Kings Rd; mains \$6-12; (M) 8am-midnight) This lively place decorated with leis and a trippy surfer/Pasifika-fantasy mural has lovely fresh juices, all-day breakfasts and

gourmet burgers. There's live music Thursday through Sunday nights.

Waikokopu Café (☎ 09-402 6275; Waitangi Treaty Grounds; mains \$7-19; (M) 9am-5pm) The sublime setting is a cracking start – by a pond, backed by bush and overlooking the Treaty Grounds. The locale is matched by Kiwi icons on the menu – the ever popular 'fush and chups' and flat-white coffees served with mini chocolate fish.

Toast (☎ 09-402 8684; Selwyn Mall; mains \$8-24; (M) noon-late Tue-Sat) It's toast as in 'cheers', rather than bits of dry bread, at this petite wine and cocktail bar. The thin-crust pizzas are excellent.

Self-caterers can buy supplies at **Woolworths supermarket** (6 Puketona Rd; (M) 7am-10pm).

Drinking & Entertainment

God bless backpackers: they certainly keep the bars buzzing. There are plenty of places along Kings Rd and in the town centre to explore, so don't feel hemmed in by our list. See also Beachhouse (left) and Toast (above).

Bay of Islands Swordfish Club (☎ 09-402 7773; Marsden Rd; (M) 4-9pm Sun-Thu, 4-10pm Fri & Sat) There are great views, cold beer and tall tales at this club bar that welcomes visitors and feeds them at very sensible prices.

Pipi Patch Bar (☎ 09-402 7111; 18 Kings Rd; (M) 5pm-late) The party hostel has the party bar, a funky spot with large video screens and a decent terrace. You'll be shuffled inside at midnight to keep the neighbours happy – although most of them are backpackers who'll be here anyway.

Salty (☎ 09-402 7783; 14 Kings Rd; (M) 4.30pm-1am) Attached to Saltwater Lodge, this bar serves OK pizzas and has karaoke, games and quizzes.

Getting There & Around

All buses serving Paihia arrive at and depart from the Maritime Building by the wharf.

InterCity (☎ 09-623 1503; www.intercity.co.nz) and associated buses head daily to Auckland (\$50, four hours), Whangarei (\$25, 70 minutes) and Kerikeri (\$16, 25 minutes).

Various daily tours head to Cape Reinga (see p168), and **Kings** (☎ 0800 222 979; www.kings-tours.co.nz) has an 8am bus to Opononi (\$45, 1½ hours) when its Crossings Hokianga tour (p168) is running. Another Opononi option is to purchase the Paihia–Auckland leg of the **Magic Travellers Network** (☎ 09-358 5600;

www.magicbus.co.nz) hop-on, hop-off service. The fare (\$55, four buses weekly) includes unlimited stops and pick-ups anywhere along the route, including the Waipoua Forest and Dargaville.

Ferries depart regularly for Russell (see p171) and Urupukapuka Island (see below). If you've more money to spend and less time to wait, **Ocean Blue Water Taxis** (☎ 021 273 1655; fishcatcher@xtra.co.nz) and **Paihia Island Shuttle** (☎ 0800 387 892; www.islandshuttle.co.nz) will take you anywhere.

For bikes, visit **Bay Beach Hire** (☎ 09-402 6078; www.baybeachhire.co.nz; Marsden Rd; ☎ 9am-5.30pm).

URUPUKAPUKA ISLAND

The largest of the bay islands, Urupukapuka is the only one with a regular ferry service and a choice of accommodation. The **Urupukapuka Island Archaeological Walk** takes five hours and visits Ngare Raumatī *pa* sites dating back to the 16th century – a pamphlet (\$1) is available from DOC. Ngare Raumatī were defeated by Ngapuhi in 1829.

There are **DOC campsites** (adult/child \$8/2) at Cable and Urupukapuka Bays. They have water supplies, cold showers and composting toilets; bring food, a stove and fuel.

It's hard to imagine a more idyllic setting than **Zane Grey's Restaurant & Bar** (☎ 0800 400 430; www.zanegrey.co.nz; Otehei Bay; mains \$15-20; ☎ lunch & dinner), which also provides **accommodation** (sites per adult/child \$15/10, dm/d/cottage \$30/85/125). There's a small store, and kayaks and pedal boats can be hired (single/double \$15/20 per hour).

Fullers' **Urupukapuka Island Adventure** (☎ 0800 744 487; adult/child \$39/23) is a ferry service departing from Paihia and Russell (three daily October to December, five daily January to April).

KERIKERI

pop 5000

Kerikeri means 'dig dig', which might imply that the town's a hole. That's not the case, although a lot of digging goes on in the surrounding fertile farmland. Famous for its oranges, Kerikeri also produces plenty of kiwifruit (don't call them kiwis unless you want to offend Kiwis), vegetables and, increasingly, wine. If you're looking for some back-breaking, poorly paid work that Kiwis (the people, as opposed to kiwifruit) aren't keen to do, your working holiday starts here.

Information

DOC visitor centre (☎ 09-407 0300; 34 Landing Rd; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri)

Kerikeri visitor information centre (☎ 09-407 9297; www.kerikeri.co.nz; Cobham Rd; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat, 9am-1pm Sun) The library has information available and internet access (\$7.50 per hour).

Post Office (6 Hobson Ave)

Sights & Activities

HISTORICAL SITES

The **Stone Store** (☎ 09-407 9236; adult/child \$5/free, incl Mission House \$7.50/free; ☎ 10am-5pm Nov-Apr, 10am-4pm May-Oct), near the Kerikeri River, is the oldest stone building (1836) in NZ. It's full of the type of goods that used to be bartered in the store, including muskets and blankets, as well as diaries and other missionary relics. At one time a blanket was worth a pig but a musket cost eight pigs. The role of missionaries in arming Ngapuhi remains controversial.

Adjacent, the **Mission House** (adult/child \$5/free, incl Stone Store \$7.50/free; ☎ 10am-4pm) is even older (1822). It's the country's oldest wooden building and contains some original fittings and chattels. There's an ongoing campaign to have the area including the store, house and neighbouring *pa* recognised as a Unesco World Heritage Site.

Just across the river, **Rewa's Village** (☎ 09-407 6454; adult/child \$5/1; ☎ 10am-4pm) is a mock-up of a pre-European Maori village.

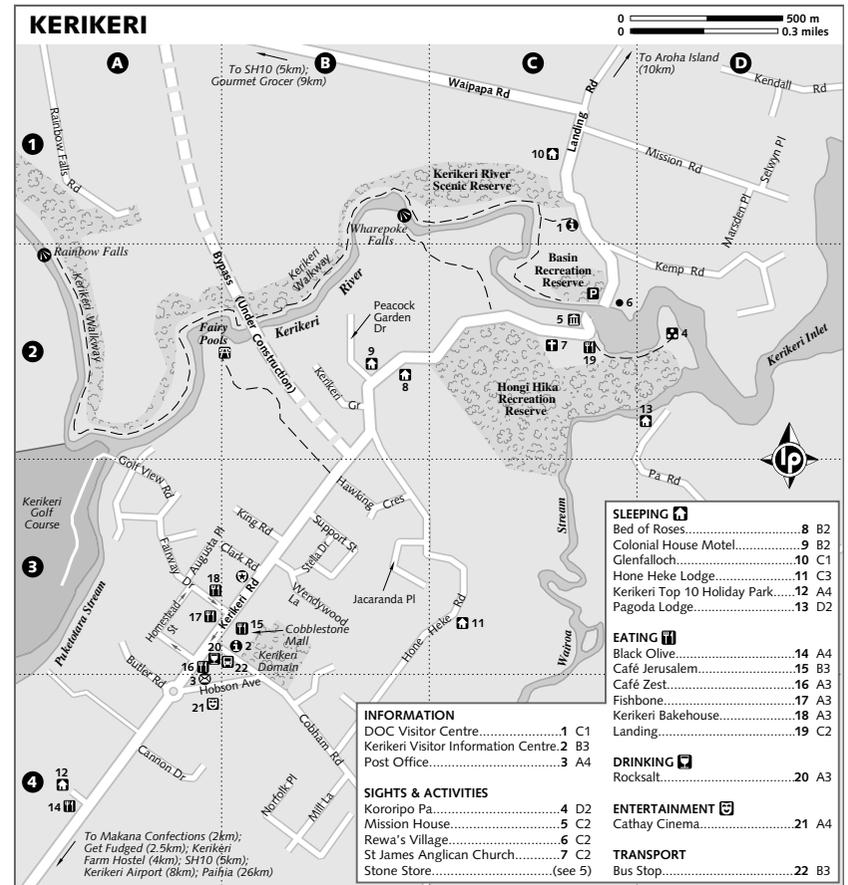
WALKING

Just up the hill behind the Stone Store is a marked historical walk, which takes about 10 minutes and leads to **Kororipo Pa**, the fortress of famous Ngapuhi chief Hongi Hika. Huge war parties led by Hika once departed from here, terrorising much of the North Island and slaughtering thousands during the Musket Wars (see p33). The walk emerges near the cute wooden **St James Anglican Church** (1878).

Across the river is a scenic reserve with several marked tracks. The 4km Kerikeri Walkway leads to the 27m **Rainbow Falls**, passing by the Wharepoke Falls and the Fairy Pools. Alternatively, you can reach the Rainbow Falls from Waipapa Rd, in which case it's only a 10-minute walk.

FOOD & WINE

Everyone in Kerikeri seems to be involved in some cottage industry or other, as the



bombardment of craft shops on the way into town attests.

While Northland isn't known for its wine, three vineyards near Kerikeri are doing their best to change that. The little-known red grape Chambourcin has proved particularly suited to the subtropical humidity, along with Pinotage and Syrah. **Ake Ake** (Map p166; ☎ 09-407 8230; www.akeakevineyard.co.nz; 165 Waimate North Rd; ☎ 10am-6pm Wed-Sun) has a swanky restaurant (mains \$28) and a *pétanque* court, and offers free vineyard tours (11.30am) and tastings. **Cottle Hill Winery** (Map p166; ☎ 09-407 5203; www.cottlehill.co.nz; SH10; ☎ 10am-5pm Wed-Sun) has a café that sells lunch platters. **Marsden Estate Winery** (Map p166; ☎ 09-407 9398; www.marsdenestate.co.nz; Wiroa Rd; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Sun) offers

a range of meals and platters on its deck. The **Kerikeri Wine Trail** (☎ 09-407 9515; www.kerikeritaxis.co.nz; 4hr tour \$40; ☎ tours 11am & noon) takes in all three vineyards, picking up from the Kerikeri township.

If you're a recovering sugar junkie, you may need to drive into town with your eyes closed to avoid the boutique chocolate factory **Makana Confections** (☎ 09-407 6800; www.makana.co.nz; 504 Kerikeri Rd; ☎ 9am-5.30pm) and **Get Fudged** (☎ 09-407 1111; www.getfudged.co.nz; 560 Kerikeri Rd; ☎ 8.30am-5pm).

It's 7km from Kerikeri, but self-catering foodies should make the drive to Waipapa to visit the **Gourmet Grocer** (☎ 09-407 1122; www.thegourmetgrocer.co.nz; SH10; ☎ 8am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun).

AROHA ISLAND

Aroha Island Ecological Centre (☎ 09-407 5243; www.aroha.net.nz; Rangitane Rd; admission free; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Thu-Tue Sep-May) is located on a tiny 5-hectare island (Map p166), 10km northeast of Kerikeri, reached via a permanent causeway through mangrove bushes. The island provides a haven for the North Island brown kiwi and other native birds, as well as an excellent picnic spot for their nonfeathered admirers. There's an interesting visitor centre and kayaks can be rented (\$25 for two hours).

Sleeping BUDGET

Kerikeri Top 10 Holiday Park (☎ 09-407 9326; www.kerikeritop10.co.nz; Aranga Dr; sites per adult/child \$16/12, units \$75-160) This large, attractive, riverside camping ground with good facilities is within walking distance of the town centre. Avoid the joyless attached backpackers.

Hone Heke Lodge (☎ 09-407 8170; www.honeheke.co.nz; 65 Hone Heke Rd; dm \$23, s \$35-55, d & tw \$50-70; ☎) Hone Heke has a line of single-storey units that cater mainly to those working in local orchards. Weekly rates are available and recreation areas (volleyball, pool tables, ping pong, barbecues) are good, although some of the living areas are a bit ropey.

Kerikeri Farm Hostel (☎ 09-407 6989; kcfarmhostel@xtra.co.nz; 1579 SH10; dm/s/d/tw \$23/38/56/56; ☎) Less a farm, more an orange grove, this spot 4km out of town features a quiet rural cottage that sleeps only 12. It's a homely place, with a sole chandelier adding a bit of bling to the cosy lounge.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Glenfalloch (☎ 09-407 5471; gfenfall@ihug.co.nz; 48 Landing Rd; s/d \$90/115; ☎) Down a long lush driveway, this relaxing B&B has a beautiful garden and a tennis court. Rooms have en suite or private facilities and the hosts go out of their way to please.

Pagoda Lodge (☎ 09-407 8617; www.pagoda.co.nz; 81 Pa Rd; 4-person tent \$95, d/q \$150/200; ☎) Built in the 1930s by an oddball Scotsman with an Asian fetish, this lodge features pagoda-shaped roofs grafted onto weatherboard cottages. The property descends to the river and is dotted with Buddhas and seven three-'room' tents. The Jade House – built to hold a collection that now resides in the British Museum – is a smartly decorated studio cottage.

Colonial House Motel (☎ 09-407 9106; www.colonialhousemotel.co.nz; 178 Kerikeri Rd; units \$125-195; ☎) The Colonial is a friendly, well-run joint, with good rooms opening onto a tropical garden. It may be getting on a bit, but it's freshened itself up with wi-fi and DVD players.

Bed of Roses (☎ 09-407 4666; www.bedofroses.co.nz; 165 Kerikeri Rd; d \$225-295; ☎) Much more comfortable than an actual bed of roses, this stylish B&B is furnished with French antiques, luxe linens and comfy beds. The interesting building has an Art Deco ambience and awesome views.

Eating

Kerikeri Bakehouse (☎ 09-407 7266; Fairway Dr; mains \$3,40-6; ☎ 6am-5pm) Nab a table in the window and munch out on an excellent pie and coffee.

Café Zest (☎ 09-407 7164; 73 Kerikeri Rd; mains \$4-14; ☎) 7.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 7.30am-2pm Sat & Sun; ☎) Bathed in Kerikeri's orange glow, cute little Zest serves up a tempting array of vegetarian, organic and free-range treats.

Fishbone (☎ 09-407 6065; 88 Kerikeri Rd; meals \$7-20; ☎) breakfast & lunch) Stylish Fishbone does a great coffee and serves imaginative food with an Italian/Kiwi twist. Dr Seuss fans should try the green (pesto) eggs and ham.

Black Olive (☎ 09-407 9693; 308 Kerikeri Rd; meals \$11-27; ☎) 11am-10pm Wed-Sun; ☎) This place serves up popular pasta and pizza takeaways, or you can sit down and eat in the back if you need to escape your accommodation.

Landing (☎ 09-407 8479; Stone Store Basin; lunch \$14-17, dinner \$27-30; ☎) lunch & dinner) Lovely views of the basin from this homestead are the main reason for coming here, although the meat meals are perfectly good too.

Café Jerusalem (☎ 09-407 1001; Cobblestone Mall, Kerikeri Rd; mains \$16-19; ☎) 11am-late) Northland's best falafels, served with a smile and a social vibe.

See Food & Wine, p176, for some self-catering options.

Drinking & Entertainment

Rocksalt (☎ 09-407 1050; Kerikeri Rd; ☎) 11am-9pm Mon-Tue, 11am-11pm Wed-Thu, 11am-2am Fri & Sat) The most popular nightspot in town, this smart bar has a decent beer garden and an orange-neon radiance.

Cathay Cinema (☎ 09-407 9121; Hobson Ave; ☎) 3pm-late Mon-Sat) Treat yourself to a movie at this cute local cinema. There are dinner deals available.

Getting There & Away

Kerikeri Airport (Map p166; ☎ 09-407 7147; www.kerikeri-airport.co.nz; Wiroa Rd) is 8km southwest of town. **Air New Zealand** (☎ 0800 737 000; www.airnz.co.nz) operates about four flights daily from Auckland (40 minutes). See its website for prices and discounts.

InterCity (☎ 09-623 1503; www.intercity.co.nz) buses leave from a stop on Cobham Rd, opposite the library. Daily services head to Auckland (\$52, 4½ hours), Paihia (\$16, 25 minutes) and Mangonui (\$23, 80 minutes).

THE FAR NORTH

If it sounds remote, that's because it is. The far-flung Far North is always playing second fiddle to the Bay of Islands for attention and funding, yet the subtropical tip of the North Island has more breathtaking coastline per square kilometre than anywhere but the offshore islands. Parts of the Far North are noticeably economically depressed and in places could best be described as gritty. While the 'winterless north' may be a popular misnomer (it was bucketing down when we visited), summers here are long and leisurely. Here's your chance to get off the beaten track, although that often means unsealed roads.

MATAURI & TAURANGA BAYS

It's a short detour from SH10, but the loop route leading inland to these awesome beaches is a world away from the glitzy face presented for tourists in the Bay of Islands. In some communities the poverty is palpable, with dwellings little more than shacks or caravans.

Matauri Bay is 18km off SH10, with the last few kilometres unsealed. It's a long sandy surf beach with the 17 Cavalli Islands scattered offshore. The campsite at the north end of the beach has a shop with an off-licence and petrol station. On top of the far headland is a monument to the *Rainbow Warrior* (see the boxed text, p181); the Greenpeace ship's underwater resting place among the Cavalli Islands is a popular dive site (see p167).

DOC maintains a 12-person **hut** (☎ 09-407 8474; dm \$12, exclusive use \$120) on Motukawanui Island, but you'll need a boat or kayak to reach it and you'll need to book ahead. Only

water, mattresses and a composting toilet are provided; bring everything else.

Back on the main road the route heads west, passing through pleasant Te Ngairi village and a succession of little bays before the turn-off to **Tauranga Bay**, a smaller beach where the sand is a peachy pink colour.

Tauranga Bay Holiday Park (☎ 09-405 0436; www.taurangabay.co.nz; sites per person \$12, cabins \$50-70; ☎) has well-maintained accommodation on the picturesque beachfront, but it lacks trees and bears the brunt of the weather. In January there's a minimum \$45 charge per night for campsites and a seven-night minimum stay.

Down a private road leading from Tauranga Bay, **Northland Sea Kayaking** (☎ 09-405 0381; www.northlandseakayaking.co.nz; tours \$85) offers kayak tours to explore this magical coastline of coves, sea caves and islands. Accommodation is available in conjunction with tours for \$20 extra per person.

There's no public transport to these parts or to neighbouring Whangaroa.

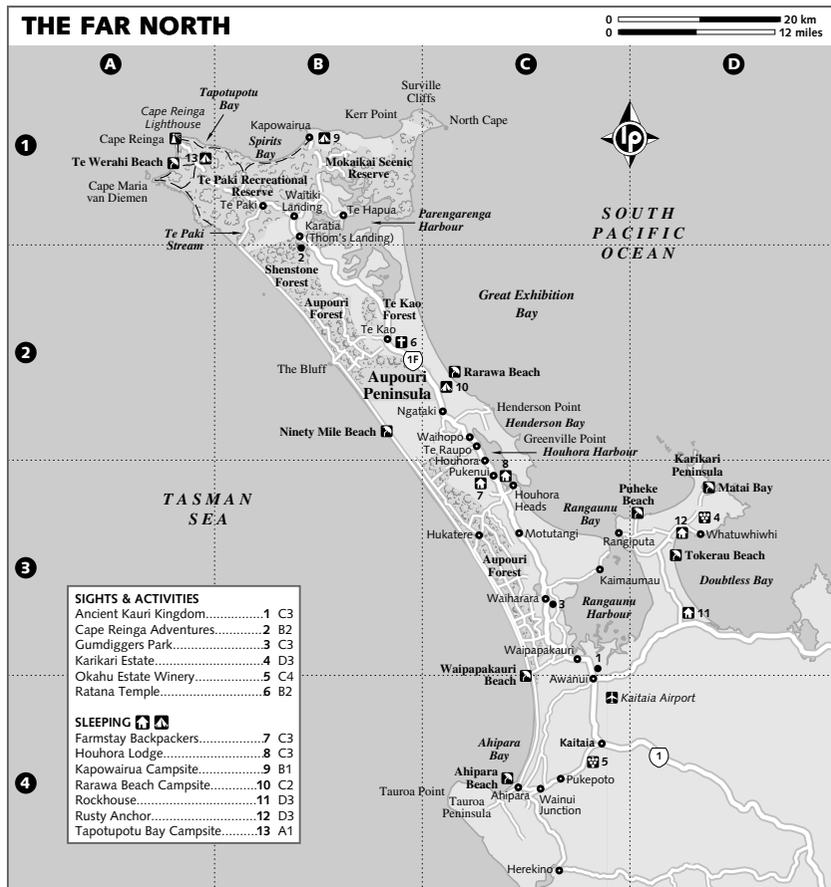
WHANGAROA HARBOUR

Just around the headland from Tauranga Bay is the narrow entrance to Whangaroa Harbour. The small fishing village of Whangaroa is 6km from SH10 and calls itself the 'Marlin Capital of NZ', meaning it's a popular place to dislocate your shoulder while trying to land a Lee Marvin-sized monster. **Boyd Gallery** (☎ 09-405 0230; Whangaroa Rd; ☎) 8am-7pm) is the general store but also acts as a tourist information office.

There are plenty of charter boats for **game-fishing** (December to April). Prices start at around \$1200 a day. If you're planning to hook a marlin, insist on it being released once caught – striped marlin is one of NZ's least-sustainable species (see the boxed text, p182).

Snow Cloud (☎ 09-405 1663; www.snowcloud.co.nz; per person \$85, \$180 minimum), an 11m yacht, makes day trips to the Cavalli Islands, where there are excellent beaches, diving spots, snorkelling opportunities and walks. Longer charters can also be arranged. The 15m **Sea Eagle** (☎ 09-405 1963; www.seaeaglecharters.com; per person \$90, minimum 2) runs a similar service.

An excellent 30-minute hike starts from the car park at the end of Old Hospital Rd and goes up **St Paul's Rock** (213m), which dominates the village. At the top you have to use a wire cable to pull yourself up, but the views make it worth the effort.



The Wairakau track north to Pekapeka Bay begins near the church hall on Campbell Rd in Totara North on the other side of the bay. The two-hour hike passes through farmland, hills and shoreline before arriving at DOC's **Lane Cove Cottage** (☎ 09-407 8474; dm \$12), which has 16 beds, cold showers and composting toilets. Bring everything else and book ahead.

Sleeping & Eating

Sunseeker Lodge (☎ 09-405 0496; www.sunseekerlodge.co.nz; Old Hospital Rd; sites per person \$14, dm/s/tr \$22/50/75, d \$50-60, units \$100-250; P) Up the hill in Whangaroa, this friendly lodge has a sublime spa with a jaw-dropping view, hires out kayaks and will pick you up from Kaero on SH10.

Kahoe Farms Hostel (☎ 09-405 1804; www.kahoe-farms.co.nz; dm/s \$25/47, d & tw \$60-80) On SH10, 10km north of the turn-off to Whangaroa, this hostel has a great reputation, serves up excellent homemade Italian food and has kayaks (\$40 per day).

Marlin (☎ 09-405 0347; Whangaroa Rd; lunch \$12-16, dinner \$15-27; ☎ lunch & dinner) A friendly local pub with good honest tucker served from its bistro.

DOUBTLESS BAY pop 6030

The bay gets its unusual name from an entry in Cook's logbook, where he wrote that the body of water was 'doubtless a bay'. No shit, Cap'n. It's a bloody big bay at that, with a

string of pretty swimming beaches heading towards the Karikari Peninsula.

The main centre, **Mangonui** (meaning 'Big Shark'), retains a fishing-port feel, despite cafés and gift shops now infesting its well-labelled line of historical waterfront buildings. They were constructed in the days when Mangonui was a centre of the whaling industry (1792-1850) and exported flax, kauri wood and gum.

The popular holiday settlements of **Coopers Beach**, **Cable Bay** and **Taipā** are restful pockets of beachside gentrification.

Information

Doubtless Bay visitor information centre (☎ 09-406 2046; www.doubtlessbay.co.nz; 118 Waterfront Rd, Mangonui; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun) Internet access for \$2 per 20 minutes.

Post Office (Beach Rd, Mangonui)

Sights & Activities

Grab the free **Heritage Trail** brochure from the information centre for a 3km self-guided walk taking in 22 historic sites. Other walks lead to attractive **Mill Bay**, west of Mangonui,

and **Rangikapiti Pa Historic Reserve**, with ancient Maori terracing and a spectacular view of Doubtless Bay. A walkway runs from Mill Bay to the top of the pa.

At Hihi, 15km northeast of Mangonui, is **Butler Point**, where you can take a guided tour around the small **Whaling Museum** (☎ 09-406 0006; www.butlerpoint.co.nz; Marchant Rd; adult/child \$12/2; ☎ by appointment), housed in a Victorian homestead (1843) with lovely gardens. Its first owner, Captain Butler, left Dorset when he was 14 and at 24 was captain of a whaling ship. He settled here in 1839, had 13 children and became a trader, farmer, magistrate and Member of Parliament.

Dolphin Rendezvous (☎ 0800 732 432; www.dolphinrendezvous.co.nz; Mangonui Wharf; 4hr/full-day trip \$90/145) sets you up for a watery tryst with our streamlined cousins.

Teddy Bear Sailing Charters (☎ 09-406 1554; www.sailingchartersnz.co.nz; Mill Bay; per person \$75-100) offers six-hour sails on the 13m yacht *Mr Roosevelt*, or overnight cruises further afield for \$150 per person (minimum charge \$600).

Paradise Connexion (☎ 0800 494 392; www.paradisenz.co.nz) has 4WD bus tours up Ninety Mile

THE BOMBING OF THE RAINBOW WARRIOR

On the morning of 10 July 1985, New Zealanders awoke to news that a terrorist attack had killed a man in Auckland Harbour. The Greenpeace flagship *Rainbow Warrior* had been anchored at Marsden Wharf, preparing to sail to Moruroa Atoll near Tahiti to protest against French nuclear testing. French secret service officers, in the employ of the French government, attached explosives to the side of the ship and sank her, killing activist Fernando Pereira.

It took some time to find out exactly what had happened, but two of the terrorists were captured, tried and found guilty. The others have never been brought to justice.

The incident caused an uproar in France – not because the French government had conducted a deliberate and lethal act of terrorism on the soil of a nation that had fought for them in two world wars, but because the agents had been caught and imprisoned. The French used all their political and economic might (including boycotts of NZ goods) to force NZ to repatriate the two terrorists, and in a farcical turn of events the agents were imprisoned on a French Pacific island as if they had won a trip to Club Med. Within two years, and well before the end of their sentence, they returned to France to receive a hero's welcome.

Northland was the staging point for this deadly mission. Explosives for the sabotage were delivered by a yacht (which had picked them up from a submarine) from Parengarenga Harbour in the Far North. They were driven to Auckland in a Kombi van by French agents posing as tourists. Bang! – an innocent man dead, a boat sunk and international outrage.

The skeletal remains of the *Rainbow Warrior* were taken to the waters of Northland's beautiful Cavalli Islands, where they can now be explored by divers. The masts of this oceanic crusader were bought by the Dargaville Museum, where they are proudly displayed. The memory of the murdered campaigner endures in a peaceful bird hide in Thames. A haunting memorial to the once-proud boat sits atop a Maori pa site at Matauri Bay, north of the Bay of Islands.

French nuclear testing at Moruroa ceased for good in 1996. You can find out more about the story at www.rainbow-warrior.org.nz.

FISH FOR THE FUTURE

While NZ's fisheries are more tightly controlled than most, conservation groups are quick to point out that most fishing is still unsustainable at present levels. The **Royal Forest & Bird Protection Society** (☎ 0800 200 064; www.forestandbird.org.nz) publishes an annual *Best Fish Guide*, which is downloadable from its website. The following are the best and worst choices if you're hankering for a seafood chow-down.

- **Ten best** Kina, anchovy, pilchard, blue mackerel, skipjack tuna, garfish, yellow-eyed mullet, cockles, kahawai, rock lobster/crayfish
- **Ten worst** Orange roughy, bluefin tuna, oreos, shark, hoki, snapper, swordfish, rig/lemonfish, striped marlin, scampi

Beach to Cape Reinga (see p184). Otherwise you can customise a 4WD tour to your interests, whether they be sightseeing, wine or golf.

Sleeping

There's plenty of accommodation around the bay but most is horribly overpriced in summer – the following recommendations being noble exceptions. Outside of the peak months things settle down considerably.

BUDGET

Old Oak Inn (☎ 09-406 0665; 66 Waterfront Rd, Mangonui; dm \$30-35, s \$40, d \$80-100) This atmospheric 1861 kauri inn has a backpacker section and worn private rooms (some with en suites) up a narrow flight of stairs. The café and bar downstairs offers bistro meals (\$15 to \$18), and the building is reputedly haunted, which adds to its rough charm.

ourpick Puketiti Lodge (☎ 09-406 0369; www.puketitilodge.co.nz; 10 Puketiti Dr, Mangonui; dm/s/d/tw \$40/90/130/130; ☎) If this is what they mean by flash-packing, bring it on. For \$40 you get a comfy bunk in a spacious six-person dorm opening on to a large deck with awesome views, a locker big enough for the burliest backpacker and, most surprisingly, breakfast. The private en-suite rooms are much more luxurious than the price implies. Turn inland at Midgley Rd, 6km south of Mangonui village, just after the Hihi turn-off.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Rosie's (☎ 09-406 1443; rosieharris310@hotmail.com; 136 SH10; r \$80; ☎) Informal Rosie's offers two unremarkable but reasonably priced en-suite rooms in a Coopers Beach house. Try for the upstairs one; it's small but has a balcony with sea views.

Doubtless Bay Lodge (☎ 09-406 1661; www.doubtlessbaylodge.co.nz; 33 Cable Bay Block Rd; s/d \$80/110; ☎) A 10-minute walk from Coopers Beach, this hillside lodge offers motel-style privacy coupled with B&B-style friendliness and food. Rooms have cable TV and facilities for making a nice cuppa.

Bayside Studio (☎ 09-406 1410; baysidestudio@gmail.com; 3 Bayside Dr; r \$125; ☎) It may be small but this self-contained apartment has style – and its own private barbecue area. You'll find it in a new enclave of upmarket homes backing on to Coopers Beach.

Waterfront Apartments (☎ 09-406 0347; www.mangonuiwaterfront.co.nz; Waterfront Rd; apt \$160-280; ☎) Sleeping two to eight people, these gaily painted historic apartments on the Mangonui waterfront have loads of character, each one different. Try to book Tahī or Rua – they have terrific harbour-admiring balconies.

Eating

There are a few cafés, takeaways and stores scattered around the other beaches, but Mangonui has the best eating options – and they're actually pretty great.

Mangonui Fish Shop (☎ 09-406 0478; Waterfront Rd; meals \$5-25; ☎ 8.30am-8.30pm) You can eat outdoors over the water in this licensed and de-servedly famous fish-and-chip shop, which also sells smoked fish and seafood salads. Grab a crayfish salad and a cold beer, and all will be right with the world.

ourpick Waterfront Café & Bar (☎ 09-406 0850; Waterfront Rd; brunch \$7-20, dinner \$24-29; ☎ 7.30am-9.30pm) The best café in the Far North, Waterfront has an inventive menu, water views, friendly service and old-world charm. For breakfast try the market fish on spinach with citrus hollandaise (\$17).

Galley (☎ 09-406 1233; 118 Waterfront Rd; brunch \$10-19, dinner \$19-30; ☎ 8.30am-1am) This lovely-looking restaurant and bar serves decent dishes in an elegantly rustic atmosphere. The service is friendly but sometimes haphazard.

There's a **Four Square supermarket** (Waterfront Rd) next to the post office.

Entertainment

Swamp Palace Cinema (☎ 09-408 7040; Oruru Rd) This tiny cinema is quite the experience, with a verbal prelude to the screenings. It's 7km inland from Taipa.

Getting There & Away

InterCity (☎ 09-623 1503; www.intercity.co.nz) buses stop at the BP service station on Waterfront Rd in Mangonui, travelling to Kaitaia (\$20, 40 minutes) and Kerikeri (\$23, 80 minutes). The same services also stop outside the wholesalers in Coopers Beach, opposite the shop in Cable Bay and outside the Shell station in Taipa.

KARIKARI PENINSULA

The oddly shaped Karikari Peninsula bends into a near-perfect right angle. The result is beaches facing north, south, east and west in close proximity; if the wind's annoying you or you want to catch some surf, a sunrise or a sunset, just swap beaches. Despite its natural assets, the peninsula's blissfully undeveloped, with farmers well outnumbering tourist operators. There's no public transport and you won't find a lot of shops or eateries either.

Tokerau Beach is the long, lovely stretch forming the western edge of Doubtless Bay. Neighbouring **Whatuwhiwhi** is smaller and more built-up, facing back across the bay. **Matai Bay**, with its tiny twin coves, is the loveliest of them all, at the lonely end of the peninsula down an unsealed road. It's a great spot for swimming – sheltered enough for the kids but with enough swell to body surf.

A close second-best beach, **Rangiputa** faces west at the elbow of the peninsula. The pure white sand and crystal-clear sheltered waters come straight from a Pacific Island daydream. A turn-off on the road to Rangiputa takes you to remote **Puheke Beach**, a long, windswept stretch of snow-white sand dunes forming Karikari's northern edge.

This unique setup makes Karikari Peninsula one of the world's premium spots for kiteboarding, or at least that's the opinion of the experienced crew at **Doubtless Bay Kitesurf School** (☎ 021 202 7949; lessons@kitesurfnz.com; 1-/2-day course \$150/275). You can chase the wind around the peninsula; learners get to hone their skills on flat water before heading to the surf.

An ominous sign of creeping gentrification is the luxury golf club and winery on the way to Matai Bay. Impressive **Karikari Estate** (Map p180; ☎ 09-408 7222; www.karikariestate.co.nz; Matai Bay

Rd; tastings \$10; ☎ 11am-5pm) produces acclaimed red wines and has a café attached.

Sleeping & Eating

DOC campsite (☎ 09-408 6014; Matai Bay; adult/child \$8/4; ☎) A large camping ground with chemical toilets and cold water.

Rusty Anchor (Map p180; ☎ 09-406 7141; www.rustyanchor.co.nz; 1 Tokerau Beach Rd; sites per person \$14, dm \$30, d & tw \$90-110, tr \$120-140, q \$150-170; ☎) At the time of research this place was still being hammered together. It looks set to become a one-stop backpackers' haven, with a visitor information centre, bar, café, takeaways and laundromat as part of the complex.

Rockhouse (Map p180; ☎ 09-406 7151; rochousian@clear.net.nz; Inland Rd; dm \$25; ☎) Fred Flintstone meets Hundertwasser at this guesthouse, just 1km off SH10, which has unusual but very comfortable en-suite accommodation and a laid-back, friendly host.

Whatuwhiwhi Top 10 Holiday Park (☎ 09-408 7202; www.whatuwhiwhitop10.co.nz; Whatuwhiwhi Rd; sites \$40, units \$70-300; ☎) This park has a great location, sheltered by hills and overlooking the beach. The facilities are good, the management is efficient and there are kayaks for hire.

White Sands Motor Lodge (☎ 09-408 7080; fax 09-408 7580; Rangiputa Beach; units \$165-225; ☎) Seventies style imbues these comfortable wooden units. Is that nearly a shagpile? There's a shop downstairs and within a few steps your feet will find the white sand.

CAPE REINGA & NINETY MILE BEACH

Maori consider Cape Reinga (Te Rerenga Wairua) the jumping-off point for souls as they depart on the journey to their spiritual homeland. That makes the Aupouri Peninsula a giant diving board, and it certainly resembles one – long and thin, it reaches 108km to form NZ's northern extremity. On its west coast Ninety Mile Beach (Ninety Kilometre Beach would be more accurate) is a continuous stretch lined with high sand dunes, flanked by the Aupouri Forest.

Sights

Standing at windswept **Cape Reinga lighthouse** and looking out over the endless ocean gives a real end-of-the-world feeling. This is where the waters of the Tasman Sea and Pacific Ocean meet, breaking together into waves up to 10m high in stormy weather. At the very

tip of the cape is a spiritually significant 800-year-old **pohutukawa tree**; souls are believed to slide down its roots. Out of respect to the most sacred site in Maoridom, don't go near the tree and refrain from eating or drinking anywhere in the area. Posting a letter from what must surely be NZ's most remote mailbox is OK though.

Contrary to expectation, Cape Reinga isn't actually the northernmost point of the country; that honour belongs to Surville Cliffs further to the east. A walk along Te Werahi Beach to **Cape Maria van Diemen** (five hours loop) takes you to the westernmost point. Beautiful **Tapotupotu Bay** is a two-hour walk east of Cape Reinga, via Sandy Bay and the cliffs. From Tapotupotu Bay it's an eight-hour walk to **Kapowairua** at the eastern end of **Spirits Bay**. Both bays are also accessible by road.

A large chunk of the land around Cape Reinga is part of the **Te Paki Recreation Reserve** managed by DOC. It's public land with free access; leave the gates as you found them and don't disturb the animals. There are 7 sq km of giant sand dunes on either side of the mouth of Te Paki Stream. Clamber up to take flying leaps off the dunes or toboggan down them. For more details on walks in the area pick up DOC's *Cape Reinga & Te Paki Walks* brochure (\$1).

On the east coast, **Great Exhibition Bay** has dazzling snow-white silica dunes. There's no public road access, but some tours pay a *koha* (donation) to cross Maori farmland or approach the sand by kayak from Parengarenga Harbour.

Beside the highway at Te Kao, 46km south of Cape Reinga, stands **Ratana temple** (Map p180; 6576 Far North Rd), known as Nga-Tapuwa-e-Ote-Mangai (the Sacred Steps of the Mouthpiece). Ratana is a Maori Christian sect with more than 50,000 adherents, formed in 1925 by Tahupotiki Wiremu Ratana, who was known as 'the mouthpiece of God'. This temple is built on land where Ratana once stood. It resembles a mosque, with its two domed towers (Arepa and Omeka, alpha and omega) and the Ratana emblem of the star and crescent moon.

Kauri forests covered this area for over 100,000 years, leaving ancient logs and the much-prized gum (used for making varnish and linoleum) buried beneath. **Gumdiggers park** (Map p180; ☎ 09-406 7166; www.gumdiggerspark.co.nz; Heath Rd, Waiharara; adult/child \$10/5; 🕒 9am-4pm)

covers a major gum-digging site – the region's main industry from the 1870s to the 1920s. In 1900, some 7000 gumdiggers (wearing gumboots – the NZ name for Wellingtons) were digging holes all over Northland. Start with the 15-minute video telling the story of the trees, their mysterious destruction and the gum industry. Rope paths head through the bush, leading past reproductions of gumdiggers' huts, ancient kauri stumps and holes left by the diggers. It was a hard life for the workers, who used jute sacks for their tents, bedding and clothing.

It's tacky and overpriced, but **Ancient Kauri Kingdom** (Map p180; ☎ 09-406 7172; 229 Far North Rd, Awanui; 🕒 8.30am-5pm) is still worth a stop. Here 50,000-year-old kauri stumps, dragged up from swamps, are fashioned into furniture, woodcraft products and a fair bit of tourist tat. The large complex includes a café, gift shop and workshop. A huge kauri log has a spiral staircase carved into it that takes you to the mezzanine level.

Tours

Bus tours go to Cape Reinga from Kaitia, Ahipara, Mangonui and the Bay of Islands (see p168). There's no other public transport up here and many car-rental companies prohibit driving on the sands of Ninety Mile Beach or the unsealed road north of Waitiki Landing. **Ahipara Safari Adventures** (☎ 0800 287 868; gumdiggersafari@slingshot.co.nz; Gumdiggers Café, Ahipara Rd; adult/child \$55/28) Small buses take in the entire length of Ninety Mile Beach, starting at Ahipara. Personalised 4WD tours are available (\$350). Prices include lunch.

Cape Reinga Adventures (Map p180; ☎ 09-409 8445; www.caperingaadventures.co.nz; Far North Rd, Thom's Landing; half-/full-day 4WD trips \$85/135) Real action men who offer 4WD tours, fishing, kayaking, hiking, snorkelling, horse trekking, quad biking and dune-surfing as day or overnight trips (\$150 to \$220). They also hire kayaks (\$80 for 24 hours) and sandboards (\$20).

Far North Outback Adventure (☎ 09-408 0927; www.farnorthtours.co.nz) Flexible, day-long tours from Kaitia for \$550 (up to six people), including lunch. You can visit remote areas such as Great Exhibition Bay (\$10 per person access fee).

Harrison's Cape Runner (☎ 0800 227 373; 123 North Rd, Kaitia; adult/child \$45/25) Day bus trips that include sand tobogganing and a picnic lunch.

Paradise Connexion (☎ 0800 494 392; www.paradise.nz.co.nz; adult/child \$69/39) Operates 4WD bus tours from Mangonui up Ninety Mile Beach to Cape Reinga, departing at 8.30am and returning at 5.30pm.

Sand Safaris (☎ 0800 869 090; www.sandsafaris.co.nz; 221 Commerce St, Kaitia; adult/child \$65/35) A family-owned operation running coach trips, including a picnic lunch and a guided tour of Gumdiggers Park.

Festivals & Events

In March **Te Houtaewa Challenge & Waka Ama** (www.newzealand-marathon.co.nz), a marathon and surf-canoe competition, takes place along Ninety Mile Beach. Its origin is the story of Te Houtaewa, a great runner who ran the length of the beach from Te Kao to Ahipara to steal kumara from the Te Rarawa people, returning with two full baskets after being angrily pursued.

Sleeping & Eating

Unless you're a happy camper you won't find much decent accommodation north of Pukenui. Literally 'Big Stomach', it's also the best place to fill yours; there's a decent café, takeaways and superette. The only other options are unremarkable eateries at Ancient Kauri Kingdom (opposite), Houhora Heads and Waitiki Landing.

DOC campsites (Map p180; adult/child \$7/3.50) There are stunningly positioned sites at Kapowairua, Tapotupotu Bay and Rarawa Beach. Only water and toilet facilities are provided. Bring a cooker, as fires are not allowed, and plenty of repellent to ward off the evil mosquitoes and sandflies.

Farmstay Backpackers (Map p180; ☎ 09-409 7863; farmbackpackers@extra.co.nz; Lamb Rd, Pukenui; dm/r \$20/56; 📍) Just 2km down a mostly unsealed road is this simple wooden house with a sunset-worshipping veranda and three guest rooms. You can even indulge your milkmaid fantasies – within reason.

Pukenui Holiday Park (☎ 09-409 8803; www.northland-camping.co.nz; 34 Lamb Rd, Pukenui; sites per adult/child \$12/6, cabins \$55-75; 📍) Relax among the sheltered bushland at this welcoming, good-value camping ground with the kind of facilities that DOC doesn't spring for.

Pukenui Lodge Motel (☎ 09-409 8837; www.pukenuilodge.co.nz; cnr SH1 & Wharf Rd, Pukenui; dm/r \$23/60, units \$114-124; 📍) This clean, welcoming backpackers occupies a historic villa (1891) filled with mismatched furniture and an ancient TV. It's a more charming prospect than the decent but standard motel units.

Houhora Lodge (Map p180; ☎ 09-409 7884; www.topstay.co.nz; 3994 SH1; r \$180; 📍) Rooms in this stylish architect-designed home are airy and

attractive. It makes an ideal spot for a quiet escape, with a deck that's begging for someone to kick back on it after making good use of the wood-fired pizza oven. You'll find the lodge situated 2km south of Pukenui on the main road.

Getting There & Around

Apart from numerous tours (see opposite), there's no public transport. Far North Rd (SH1F) is sealed as far as Waitiki Landing. The final 21km are currently being sealed, starting from Cape Reinga and heading backwards. This project isn't expected to be completed until 2012; prepare for delays. At the end of the road there's a 1km walk from the car park to the lighthouse.

The other major route is Ninety Mile Beach itself, suited to rugged vehicles. Cars have been known to hit soft sand and be swallowed by the tides – look out for unfortunate vehicles poking through the sands. Check tide times before setting out; avoid it 2½ hours either side of high tide. Watch out for 'quicksand' at Te Paki Stream – keep moving. If you get stuck, your hire-car insurance won't cover you. Enquire at Tuatua Tours (p186) about 4WD hire.

Fill up with petrol before hitting the Aupouri Peninsula. The petrol station at Waitiki Landing has been known to run out.

KAITIA

pop 5630

Nobody comes to the Far North to hang out in this provincial town, but it's a handy stop if you're after a supermarket, post office or ATM. It's also a jumping-off point for tours to Cape Reinga and Ninety Mile Beach (see opposite).

The **Far North i-SITE** (☎ 09-408 0879; www.topofnz.co.nz; Jaycee Park, South Rd; 🕒 8.30am-5pm) has internet access and information on the region. Nearby, the **Far North Regional Museum** (☎ 09-408 1403; 6 South Rd; admission \$4; 🕒 10am-4pm) has an eclectic mix of exhibits focusing on local history, including a massive 1769 anchor.

Just south of Kaitia, **Okahu Estate Winery** (Map p180; ☎ 09-408 2066; www.okahuestate.co.nz; cnr Okahu & Awaroa Rds; 🕒 noon-4pm Mon-Fri) offers free tastings.

Maori carvings abound at **Mainstreet Lodge** (☎ 09-408 1275; www.mainstreetlodge.co.nz; 235 Commerce St; dm \$26, s \$50-60, d & tw \$56-64; 📍), a groovy old yellow-and-purple-trimmed cottage with

NGATI TARARA

As you're travelling around the north you might notice the preponderance of road names ending in '-ich'. *Haere mai, dobro došli* and welcome (as the sign leading into Kaitaia proclaims) to one of the more peculiar ethnic conjunctions in the country.

From the end of the 19th century, men from the Dalmatian coast of Croatia started arriving in NZ looking for work. Many ended up in Northland's gum fields. Pakeha society wasn't particularly welcoming to the new immigrants, particularly during WWI – they were considered Austrians. Not so in the small Maori communities of the north. Here they found an echo of Dalmatian village life, with its emphasis on extended family and hospitality, not to mention a shared history of injustice at the hands of colonial powers.

The Maori jokingly named them Tarara, as their rapid conversation in Serbo-Croat sounded like 'ta-ra-ra-ra-ra' to Maori ears. Many Croatian men married local *wahine* (women), founding clans that have left several of today's famous Maori with Croatian surnames, like singer Margaret Urlich and former All Black Frano Botica. You'll find large Tarara communities in the Far North, Dargaville and West Auckland.

a modern wing facing the rear courtyard. The friendly owners know the area inside-out.

Beachcomber (☎ 09-408 2010; 222 Commerce St; mains \$16-30; ☺ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) is easily the best place to eat in town, with delightful service, a wide-ranging menu and a well-stocked salad bar.

Air New Zealand (☎ 0800 737 000; www.airnz.co.nz) has daily flights (45 minutes, check website for prices) between Kaitaia and Auckland. The airport is 6km north of Kaitaia. **InterCity** (☎ 09-623 1503; www.intercity.co.nz) buses stop at the i-SITE, travelling to Mangonui (\$20, 40 minutes) and Kerikeri (\$31, one hour and 40 minutes).

AHIPARA

pop 1000

All good things must come to an end, and Ninety Mile Beach does it at this spunky beach town. A few holiday mansions have snuck in, but mostly it's just the locals keeping it real, rubbing shoulders with visiting surfers. The area is known for its mountainous sand dunes and massive gum field, where 2000 people once worked. Sand tobogganing, beach safaris and quad-bike rides are popular activities on the dunes above Ahipara and further around the Tauroa Peninsula.

Ahipara isn't served by public transport.

Activities

Ahipara Adventure Centre (☎ 09-409 2055; www.ahipara.co.nz/adventurecenter; 15 Takahe St; ☺ 9.30am-5pm) hires out sand- and surfboards, mountain bikes (\$10 per hour), kayaks (\$10 per hour), blokarts for sand yachting (\$50 per hour) and quad bikes (\$60 per hour).

Tuatua Tours (☎ 09-409 4875; www.tuatuatours.co.nz; Ahipara Rd; 2hr ride \$125) gets great word-of-mouth for its reef- and dune-rider tours and gum-field safaris (cheaper for two). There are plans to provide 4WD hire (\$250 per day) so that visitors can explore Ninety Mile Beach without risking the wrath of regular hire companies.

See also Ahipara Safari Adventures, p184.

Sleeping

Ahipara Backpackers & Motor Camp (☎ 09-409 4864; www.ahiparamotorcamp.co.nz; 170 Takahe St; sites per person \$14, caravans \$20-90, dm \$26, s \$46-50, d & tw \$56-60, cabins \$30-205; ☑ ☒) There's a large range of accommodation on offer at this well-run holiday park, including onsite caravans and a worn but perfectly presentable backpackers lodge. The communal hall has an open fire and colourful murals.

our pick **Endless Summer Lodge** (☎ 09-409 4181; www.endlesssummer.co.nz; 245 Foreshore Rd; dm \$25, d & tw \$60-66; ☑ ☒) Across from the beach, this superb kauri villa (1880) has been beautifully restored and converted into Northland's best hostel. There's no TV, encouraging bonding around the long table on the vine-covered back terrace. Free boogie boards and sandboards are available, and surfboards can be hired (\$20). Book ahead or be very sorry.

Beach Abode (☎ 09-409 4070; www.beachabode.co.nz; 11 Korora St; apt \$140-210; ☑) Wander through the subtropical garden to the beachfront from your self-contained studio or two-bedroom apartment, or just lie in bed and lose yourself in the view.

Beachfront (☎ 09-409 4007; www.beachfront.net.nz; 14 Kotare St; apt \$175-300; ☑) Who cares if it's a bit bourgeois for Ahipara? These two upmarket, self-contained apartments have stunning views and there's direct access to the beach. Both sleep up to four people.

Eating

Bidz Takeaways (☎ 09-409 4727; Takahe St; meals \$5-10; ☺ 7.30am-late) You'll need a flip-top head to fit Bidz' seafood burger (\$10) into your mouth – it's jam-packed with battered oysters, scallops, mussels and fish. There's a store attached.

Gumdiggers Café (☎ 09-409 2012; Ahipara Rd; meals \$6-16; ☺ 7am-5pm) Good coffee and tasty treats are the hallmarks of this funky new café. It's also the headquarters of Ahipara Safari Adventures (p184).

HOKIANGA

The Hokianga Harbour stretches out its skinny tentacles to become the fourth-biggest in the country. Its ruggedly beautiful landscape is painted in every shade of green and brown. The water itself is rendered the colour of ginger ale from the bush streams that feed it.

Of all the remote parts of Northland, this is the pocket that feels the most removed from the mainstream. Pretension has no place here. Isolated, predominantly Maori communities nestle around the harbour's many inlets as they have done for centuries. Discovered by legendary explorer Kupe, it's been settled by Ngapuhi since the 14th century. Hippies settled in the late 1960s and their legacy is a thriving little artistic scene.

Many of the roads remain unsealed and in poor repair after decades of neglect from government bodies. Tourism dollars are channelled eastward to the Bay of Islands, leaving this truly fascinating corner of the country remarkably undeveloped, which is the way many of the locals like it.

**EASTERN HOKIANGA
Puketi & Omahuta Forests**

Inland from the eastern reaches of the harbour, the Puketi and Omahuta Forests form a continuous expanse of native bush. Logging in Puketi was stopped in 1951 to

protect not only the remaining kauri but also the endangered kokako bird. Keep an eye out for this rare charmer (grey with a blue wattle) on your wanders.

The forests are reached by several entrances and contain a network of walking tracks varying in length from 15 minutes (the wheelchair-accessible Manginangina kauri walk) to two days (the challenging Waipapa River track). A pamphlet (\$1) detailing the tracks is available from DOC. There's a **DOC campsite** (☎ 09-407 0300; Waiare Rd; adult/child \$7/3.50) and 18-bunk **hut** (adult/child \$9/4.50, exclusive use \$60) at Puketi Recreation Area on the forests' eastern fringe. The hut has hot showers, a kitchen and composting toilets.

Horeke

Tiny Horeke was NZ's second European settlement after Russell. A Wesleyan mission operated here from 1828 to 1855. In 1840, 3000 Ngapuhi gathered here for what was the single biggest signing of the Treaty of Waitangi.

Completed in 1839, **Mangungu Mission House** (☎ 09-401 9640; www.historic.org.nz; Motukiore Rd; adult/child \$3/1; ☺ noon-4pm Sat & Sun) is a sweet wooden cottage with relics of the missionaries and Horeke's shipbuilding past. In the grounds there's a large stone cross and a simple wooden church. You'll find it 1km down the unsealed road leading along the harbour from Horeke village.

Wairere Boulders Nature Park (☎ 09-401 9935; www.wairereboulders.co.nz; McDonnell Rd; adult/child \$10/5; ☺ 8am-7pm summer, 9am-5pm rest of year) resembles a Jurassic Zen garden. Paths lead around and over massive basalt rock formations that have been eroded into odd fluted shapes by the acidity of ancient kauri forests. The main loop takes about 40 minutes and follows a burbling Coca-Cola-coloured stream. It's a good path, but wear sensible shoes and expect a few ducks and climbs. An additional hour leads through rainforest to a platform at the end of the boulder valley. The park is signposted from SH1 and Horeke; the last 3km are unsealed.

You'll feel like lord of the manor in **Riverhead Guest House** (☎ 09-401 9610; www.hokianga.co.nz/riverheadguesthouse; Main Rd; r \$95-110), a grand 1871 kauri villa with old-world furnishings literally looking down on Horeke. The cheaper

NGAWHA SPRINGS

Near Kaikohe, these hot springs have been used by Ngapuhi for their curative powers since the 17th century. Hone Heke brought his injured warriors here during the Northland War.

Unlike many of NZ's thermal resorts, there are no hydrolides or big pools for the kids to splash about in. There aren't even any showers. Here it's all about stewing in the murky water in small pools of varying temperatures. Ngawha has two complexes next to each other, the better of which is **Ngawha Springs Pools** (☎ 09-405 2245; adult/child \$4/2; ☎ 9am-9pm).

upstairs rooms share a bathroom but the harbour views more than compensate.

NORTHERN HOKIANGA

Kohukohu

pop 220

Quick, someone slap a preservation order on Kohukohu before it's too late. There can be few places in NZ where a Victorian village full of interesting kauri buildings has been so completely preserved with nary a modern monstrosity to be seen. During the height of the kauri industry it was a busy town with a sawmill, shipyard, two newspapers and banks. These days it's a very quiet backwater on the north side of Hokianga Harbour, 4km from the car ferry (opposite).

The **Tree House** (☎ 09-405 5855; www.treehouse.co.nz; sites per person \$16, dm \$27-29, s/d/tw \$50/66/66) is a fantastic place with helpful hosts and brightly painted little cottages set among exotic fruit and nut trees. This quiet retreat is 2km from the ferry terminus (turn sharp left as you come off the ferry). You can sleep in an old school bus (\$48), play volleyball in the macadamia orchard or just sink into beanbags in the communal lounge.

Waterline Café (☎ 09-405 5552; meals \$7-18; ☎ 8am-5pm Sun-Thu, 8am-8pm Fri & Sat) serves wicked coffee overlooking the waterfront. The chairs look like they've been raided from an old school, and newspaper clippings about the town are imbedded in the tables. The food is superb, with kedgeree on the breakfast menu and interesting pizzas and burgers.

There are no regular bus services, but you can arrange to jump on **Kings'** (☎ 0800 222 979;

www.kings-tours.co.nz) Crossings Hokianga tour bus at 2.20pm as it heads back to Paihia (\$45, one hour and 40 minutes). Call to arrange.

Mitimiti

The tiny community at Mitimiti, which consists of only 30 families and not even a shop, has the ruggedly beautiful 20km stretch of coast between the Hokianga and Whangape Harbours all to itself. The 40km drive from Kohukohu via Panguru (14km of it unsealed), is quite an experience: prepare to dodge cows, pigs, potholes and burnt-out car wrecks.

About halfway along, it's worth a short detour to visit **St Mary's Church** (Motuti Rd), where NZ's first Catholic bishop is buried beneath the altar. Jean Baptiste Pompallier arrived in the Hokianga in 1838, celebrating NZ's first mass at Totara Point. He was interred here in 2002 after an emotional 14-week pilgrimage full of Maori ceremony brought his remains back from France.

Mitimiti Beach House (☎ 09-409 5347; www.beach-house.co.nz; West Coast Rd; d \$130; (P) (Q)) is a self-contained three-bedroom bach, sleeping up to eight (\$25 per additional person). It's a comfortable base for exploring the often-deserted beach.

RAWENE

pop 515

Founded shortly after Horeke, Rawene was NZ's third European settlement. There is still a surprising number of historic buildings (including six churches) from a time when the harbour was considerably busier than it is now. There aren't any ATMs or banks, but you can get petrol here.

A heritage trail complete with information boards tours the main sights. **Clendon House** (☎ 09-405 7874; www.historic.org.nz; Clendon Esplanade; adult/child \$5/2.50; ☎ 10am-4pm Sat-Mon Nov-Apr, 10am-4pm Mon & Tue May-Oct) was built in the bustling 1860s by James Clendon, a trader, shipowner and magistrate. After his death, his 34-year-old half-Maori widow Jane was left with a brood of kids and a whopping £5000 debt. She managed to clear the debt and her descendants remained in the house until 1972, when it passed to the Historic Places Trust.

Hokianga Blue (☎ 09-405 7675; www.hokianga.blue.co.nz; 49 Parnell St) runs kayak tours (half-day tour \$65, minimum two people) and hires out kayaks (half-/full day \$30/45). It also

rents out a studio apartment with harbour views and a kitchenette (\$110).

Quirky **Outpost Hokianga** (☎ 09-405 7423; 5 Parnell St; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm) stocks local art, crafts, clothing, music, and both second-hand and new books.

Sleeping

Rawene Motor Camp (☎ 09-405 7720; bobsnow@internet.co.nz; 1 Marmon St; sites per person \$12, cabins \$48-88; (P) (Q) (R)) Sheltered tent sites hide in the bush at this nicely managed caravan park. The cabins are simple but supertidy.

Postmaster's Lodgings (☎ 09-405 7676; www.rawene.co.nz/postmasters; 3 Parnell St; r \$85-125) Comfortable high-ceilinged rooms, four-poster beds, rolled-end leather couches and a wraparound veranda are all part of the old-world charm offered in this lovely kauri villa.

Old Lane's Store Homestay (☎ 09-405 7554; 9 Clendon Esplanade; r \$120) Right by the harbour, accommodation is offered in a self-contained apartment behind the historic store. If you're after a glam cocktail dress, check out the owner's workshop downstairs.

Waima Lodge (☎ 09-405 3808; www.waimalodge.co.nz; 2465 SH12; s/d \$310/340; (P)) In a sleepy valley 23km southeast of Rawene, this luxury B&B has fine linen and a riverside swimming hole nearby. The owners are enthusiastic cooks and musicians who will deliver a sumptuous three-course dinner (\$70) or a song on request. Room prices are much more palatable in the off-season.

Eating & Drinking

Boatshed Café (☎ 09-405 7728; 8 Clendon Esplanade; mains \$5-15; ☎ 8am-4pm; (V)) You can eat overlooking the water at this excellent café, a cute place with heart-warming food and service.

Masonic Hotel (☎ 09-405 7822; 8 Parnell St) The local pub, with occasional live country-and-western music.

Budding cooks should stock up on mainly organic fruit, vegetables and meat at **Wardy's** (☎ 09-405 7717; 12 Parnell St; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm).

Getting There & Away

The **car ferry** (☎ 09-405 2602; car & driver one way/return \$14/19, passenger \$2/4; ☎ 7.30am-8pm) heads to northern Hokianga, docking near Kohukohu at least hourly. You can buy your ticket for this 15-minute ride on board. It usually leaves Rawene on the half-hour and the north side on the hour. There are no regular bus services.

OPONONI & OMAPERE

pop 630

These tranquil settlements near the south head of Hokianga Harbour more or less run into one another. The water's much clearer here and good for swimming. Views are dominated by the mountainous sand dunes across the water at **North Head**.

The **Hokianga i-SITE** (☎ 09-405 8869; hokianga.info@xtra.co.nz; SH12, Omapere; ☎ 8.30am-5pm) has internet access and a tiny local museum upstairs.

Activities

The **Hokianga Kai Iwi Coastal Tramping Track** leads south along the coast from the **Arai-Te-Uru Recreation Reserve** (Signal Station Rd), on the South Head of Hokianga Harbour. It's three hours to Kaikai Beach, six hours to Kawerua and 12 hours to the Kerr Rd exit, or you can tramp the entire 15 hours (allow about three days) to Kai Iwi Lakes. Hikers must carry all their own water and food, and cross the major rivers within two hours either side of low tide. It's usually possible to camp on the beach. DOC advises that you check with them before setting out, particularly to discuss the river crossings.

From Cemetery Rd on the eastern outskirts of Opononi, a half-hour climb leads up **Mt Whiria**, a *pa* site with a splendid view of the harbour.

Two kilometres east of Opononi, Waitotemarama Gorge Rd turns south for 6km to the **Waitotemarama bush track**, which climbs Mt Hauturu (679m). It's a four-hour walk to the summit (six hours return), but there's a shorter two-hour loop starting from the same place, passing kauri and a picturesque waterfall.

The **Six Foot Track** at the end of Mountain Rd (near Okopako Lodge Farm Hostel) gives access to many Waima Forest walks.

Tours

Hokianga Express (☎ 09-405 8872; adult/child \$20/10) is a fast boat that leaves from Opononi Jetty and takes you across the harbour to the large golden sand dunes, where you can sandboard down a 30m slope and skim over the water. Trips leave hourly.

Footprints Waipoua (☎ 0800 687 836; www.footprints.waipoua.co.nz; adult/child \$75/25) is a four-hour twilight tour led by Maori guides into Waipoua Kauri Forest (p190). As an introduction to Maori culture, it's fantastic. Tribal history and stories are shared, and mesmerising *karakia* recited before the giant trees.

The same crowd runs the **Crossings Hokianga Harbour Cruises** (☎ 0800 687 836; www.crossingshokianga.co.nz). The morning tour (adult/child \$55/45, 2¾ hours, departs 8.30am) visits Rawene (p188) and includes a tour of the Mangungu Mission House (p187). The afternoon tour (adult/child \$65/35, 3½ hours, departs 11.45am) adds on Kohukohu (p188) and the sand dunes.

Sleeping & Eating

Each of these neighbouring villages has its own superette and takeaways.

OPONONI

Okopako Lodge Farm Hostel (☎/fax 09-405 8815; 140 Mountain Rd; sites per adult/child \$13/7, dm/s/d/tw \$24/40/58/58; Ⓟ) High up in the bush 5km east of Opononi and 1.5km down a gravel road, this simple hostel is quiet and suited to hikers (the Six Foot Track starts here).

Opononi Lighthouse Motel (☎ 09-405 8824; www.lighthousemotel.co.nz; SH12; units \$140-235; Ⓟ) Scrupulously clean, this refurbished motel has very comfortable harbourside units, plus a great communal barbecue, spa pool, and a cutesy lighthouse and waterfall in the front garden.

Opononi Hotel (☎ 09-405 8858; www.opononihotel.co.nz; SH12; r \$150; Ⓟ) Despite being here since the beginning of time, the Opononi Hotel has reinvented itself as a very elegant set of simple accommodation. The rooms aren't huge, but the white-paint and blond-wood makeover has left them quietly stylish. Try to grab one of the front two – they're a bit bigger and have the best views. Otherwise aim for those facing away from the very cool pub (open 9am till late), which also happens to be the best spot to eat down this end (meals less than \$20).

OMAPERE

Globe Trekkers Backpackers' Lodge (☎ 09-405 8183; globetrekterslodge@hotmail.com; SH12; dm/d/tw \$23/56/56; Ⓟ) This considerate, home-style lodge with a particularly silly dog is ideally placed to put you in touch with myriad local activities, or you can just relax and unwind in casual style.

Ti Kouka B&B (☎ 09-405 8622; tikouka@xtra.co.nz; 68 Signal Station Rd; s/d \$80/90; Ⓟ) Look forward to nights in pink satin (bedding) in this hilltop house with views straight through the heads. The room opens on to a beautiful garden at the bottom of the house.

Copthorne Hotel & Resort (☎ 09-405 8737; www.omapere.co.nz; SH12; units \$140-155; Ⓟ) Despite

the original grand Victorian villa being isolated by aluminium joinery, this waterside complex remains an attractive spot for a summer's drink or bistro meal (\$12 to \$22). A modern wing has smart units; the more expensive have terraces and water views.

Hokianga Haven (☎ 09-405 8285; www.hokianga-haven.co.nz; 226 SH12; r \$160; Ⓟ) This modern house with original Kiwi art on the walls offers exceptional accommodation on the harbour's edge and glorious views of the sand dunes. There's a spa and alternative healing therapies can be arranged.

Getting There & Away

There's no regular public transport to Opononi. **Kings** (☎ 0800 222 979; www.kings-tours.co.nz) has a bus from Paihia (\$45, 1½ hours, 8am) when its Crossings Hokianga tour (p168) is running. A better option is to purchase the Paihia–Auckland leg of the **Magic Travellers Network** (☎ 09-358 5600; www.magicbus.co.nz) hop-on, hop-off service. The fare (\$55, four buses weekly) includes unlimited stops and pickups anywhere along the route, including the Waipoua Kauri Forest and Dargaville.

KAURI COAST

Apart from the odd bluff and river, this coast is basically unbroken and undeveloped for the 110km between the Hokianga and Kaipara harbours. The main reason for coming here is to marvel at the magnificent kauri forests, one of the great natural highlights of NZ. This is one for the chubby chasers of the tree-hugging fraternity – you'd need 8m arms to get them around some of the big boys here.

HOKIANGA TO DARGAVILLE

Here's where most of the action lies. If you're planning to stay overnight, bring your own food as there are few stores or restaurants between Opononi and Dargaville, and no ATMs. Trampers should consider grabbing a copy of DOC's *Waipoua & Trounson Kauri Forests* brochure (\$1).

Waipoua Kauri Forest

The highlight of Northland's west coast, this superb forest sanctuary – proclaimed in 1952 after much public pressure – is the largest remnant of the once-extensive kauri forests of northern NZ. The road through forest

stretches for 18km and passes some huge trees – a fully grown kauri can reach 60m in height and have a trunk 5m in diameter.

At the time of research, plans were afoot to return control of the forest to the Te Roroa *iwi* (tribe) as part of a settlement for Crown breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi. The *iwi* is likely to continue running the visitor centre near the south end of the park, but the DOC office will move to Dargaville. The future of DOC's camping ground near the visitor centre is unknown. Before you set out, enquire at any DOC office or at the Hokianga or Dargaville i-SITES.

Near the north end of the park, not far from the road, stands mighty **Tane Mahuta**, named for the Maori forest god. At 51m, with a 13.8m girth and wood mass of 244.5 cubic metres, he's the largest kauri alive. You don't so much look at Tane Mahuta; it's as if you're granted an audience to his hushed presence. He's been holding court here for somewhere between 1200 and 2000 years.

A little further south a short road leads to the Kauri Walks car park. Theft from cars has been a problem and the car park is now guarded (\$2 donation suggested).

From here, a 20-minute walk leads to **Te Matua Ngahere** (the Father of the Forest). Even the most ardent tree-hugger wouldn't consider rushing forward to throw their arms around him and call him 'Daddy', even if there wasn't a fence. At 30m he's shorter than Tane Mahuta, but he has the same noble presence, reinforced by his substantial girth – at 16.4m he's the widest living kauri. He presides over a clearing surrounded by mature trees that look like matchsticks in comparison.

Close by are the **Four Sisters**, a graceful stand of four tall trees that have fused together at the base. A 40-minute walk leads to **Yakas**, the seventh-largest kauri.

Near the very south end of the park there's a turn-off to a **forest lookout** that offers spectacular views. The 10-minute **Toatoa viewpoint** walk is 1km further on.

SLEEPING & EATING

Waipoua Lodge B&B (☎ 09-439 0422; www.waipoua-lodge.co.nz; SH12; r \$540-570; Ⓟ) This fine old villa at the southern edge of the forest has four luxurious, spacious suites, which were originally the stables, the woolshed and the calf-rearing pen! Prices include breakfast, and decadent dinners (\$90) are available.

Morrell's Café (☎ 09-405 4545; 7235 SH12, Waimamaku; mains \$8-14; ☎ 9am-4pm; ♻) Perhaps this is where Hokianga's hippies ended up. Certainly the music's pretty good. This bright-yellow café and craft shop serves up tasty snacks in a former cheese factory near the north end of the forest.

Trounson Kauri Park

The 450-hectare Trounson Kauri Park has an easy half-hour loop walk leading from the picnic area by the road. It passes through a beautiful forest with streams, some fine kauri stands, a couple of fallen trees and another Four Sisters – two pairs of trees with conjoined trunks.

Guided night-time **nature walks** (adult/child \$20/12), run by the Top 10 Holiday Park, explain the flora and nocturnal wildlife that thrives here. This is a rare chance to see a kiwi in the wild. Trounson has a predator-eradication programme and has become a mainland refuge for threatened native bird species, so you should at least hear a morepork (a native owl) or a brown kiwi.

DOC operates a **campsite** (adult/child \$10/5) at the edge of the park, which has a communal kitchen and hot showers.

Kaihu Farm Hostel (☎ 09-439 4004; www.kaihufarm.co.nz; 3344 SH12; sites per person \$18, dm/s/d/tw \$28/48/66/66), a cosy and well-kept farm-based hostel 2km north of the Trounson turn-off, has farm produce for sale and a bush walk with glow-worms. The hosts can provide low-cost meals and transport to local attractions (for a fee).

Just 2km from SH12, **Kauri Coast Top 10 Holiday Park** (☎ 09-439 0621; www.kauricoasttop10.co.nz; Trounson Park Rd; sites \$32, units \$85-180; Ⓟ) is an attractive riverside camping ground with good facilities and a small shop. It also organises nocturnal nature walks.

If you're approaching from the north it's easier to take the second turn-off to the park, near Kaihu, which avoids a rough unsealed road.

Kai Iwi Lakes

These three trout-filled freshwater lakes nestle near the coast, 12km off SH12. The largest, Taharoa, has blue water fringed with sandy patches and pine trees. Lake Waikere is popular with water-skiers, while Lake Kai Iwi is relatively untouched. A half-hour walk leads from the lakes to the coast and it's another two hours to reach the base of Maunganui Bluff.

Camping (☎ 09-439 8360; adult/child \$13/8) is permitted among the pines at the side of Lake Taharoa; cold showers, gas barbecues, drinking water and flush toilets are provided.

Baylys Beach

A village of brightly coloured baches and a few new holiday mansions, Baylys Beach is 12km from Dargaville, off SH12. It lies on 100km-long Ripiro Ocean Beach, a surf-pounded stretch of coast that has been the site of many shipwrecks. The beach is a gazetted highway: you can drive along its hard sand at low tide, although it is primarily for 4WDs. Despite being NZ's longest drivable beach, it's less well known and hence less travelled than Ninety Mile Beach. Ask locals about conditions and check your hire-car agreement before venturing onto the sand.

Quad bikes can be hired at the holiday park. Ride north along the beach to view volcanic Maunganui Bluff (460m); the hike up and down it takes five hours.

It's pretty kooky, but **Skydome Observatory** (☎ 09-439 1856; www.skydome.org.nz; 28 Seaview Rd; stargazing \$40) is a massive, technologically advanced telescope and it's located on the front lawn of someone's house. Call ahead for bookings.

A taxi to Baylys Beach from Dargaville should cost around \$25.

SLEEPING & EATING

Baylys Beach Holiday Park (☎ 09-439 6349; www.baylysbeach.co.nz; 24 Seaview Rd; sites per adult/child \$13/6, cabins \$40-65, units \$85-110; (P) (Q)) This place has good management and facilities, and quad bikes for hire (\$60 per hour). It also runs 4WD van tours (\$45 to \$85 per person).

Sunset View Lodge (☎ 09-439 4342; www.sunsetviewlodge.co.nz; Alcemene Lane; r \$150-179; (P) (Q)) If gin-in-hand sunset-gazing is your thing, this large, modern, brand-spanking-new B&B fits the bill. All the rooms have sea views and there's a self-service bar with an honesty box in the guest lounge.

Sharky's (☎ 09-439 4549; 1 Seaview Rd; meals \$5-18; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Quick snacks and all-day breakfasts are the order of the day at this handy bottle shop-cum-general store-cum-bar-cum-takeaway.

Funky Fish (☎ 09-439 8883; 34 Seaview Rd; lunch \$9-15, dinner \$14-28; ☎ 5pm-late Mon, 11am-late Tue-Sun) Brightly decorated with murals and mosaics, this highly popular restaurant, café and bar has a wide-ranging menu, although the fish

dishes are the standouts. Bookings are advisable in summer.

DARGAVILLE

pop 4530

When a town proclaims itself the 'kumara capital of NZ' (it produces two-thirds of the country's sweet potatoes) you should know not to expect too much. Founded in 1872 by timber merchant Joseph Dargaville, this once-important river port thrived on the export of kauri timber and gum. As the forests were decimated, it declined and today is a quiet backwater servicing the agricultural Northern Wairoa area.

Information

Dargaville i-SITE (☎ 09-439 8360; www.kauricoast.co.nz; 69 Normanby St; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun) Has internet access and local walk pamphlets.

Post Office (80 Victoria St)

Sights

Perched on top of a hill, the **Dargaville Museum** (☎ 09-439 7555; www.dargavillemuseum.co.nz; adult/child \$10/2; ☎ 9am-4pm) is more interesting than most. There's a large gum-digging display, plus maritime, Maori and musical-instrument sections and a neat model railway. Outside, the masts of the *Rainbow Warrior* (see the boxed text, p181) are mounted at a lookout near a *pa* site.

In the centre of town, **Taha Awa Riverside Gardens** has cool stuff for the kids, including a playground shaped like a tall ship and a whale jawbone. There's also a fernery, and scented, swamp and coastal gardens. A 40-minute walk leads from here, passing some interesting buildings before joining the **Memorial Park Bush Walk**.

Sleeping & Eating

Greenhouse Backpackers (☎ 09-439 6342; greenhousebackpackers@ihug.co.nz; 13 Portland St; dm/d/tw \$21/50/50; (P) (Q)) This converted 1921 schoolhouse has classrooms partitioned into large dorms, cosy units in the back garden and colourful, school-like murals.

Mcleans B&B (☎ 09-439 5915; mcleans@igrin.co.nz; 136 Hokianga Rd; s/d/tw \$50/90/90) Guests share a large lounge in this spacious 1934 house, originally built for the mayor. The affable hosts provide breakfast, tea-making facilities and yummy biscuits.

Blah, Blah, Blah... (☎ 09-439 6300; 101 Victoria St; breakfast \$6-15, lunch \$7-24, dinner \$20-28; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon, 9am-1am Tue-Sat, 9am-3.30pm Sun) The number-

one pick in Dargaville (admittedly that's not saying much) has a garden area, hip music, deli-style snacks, a global menu (cannelloni, burritos, steak) and cocktails.

Self-caterers should head to **Woolworths supermarket** (129 Victoria St; ☎ 7am-9pm). Pop into the **Central Hotel** (☎ 09-439 8034; cnr Victoria & Edward Sts) if you feel like a handle of something cold in a refreshingly honest NZ pub.

Getting There & Away

The main bus stop is in Kapia St. **Main Coachline** (☎ 09-278 8070; www.maincoachline.co.nz) runs six buses per week to and from Auckland (\$45, three hours) via Matakoho (\$18, 35 minutes). A private operator runs a **Whangarei-to-Dargaville Shuttle** (☎ 021 380 187; one way/return \$10/16) on weekdays. The Paihia-Auckland leg of the **Magic Travellers Network** (☎ 09-358 5600; www.magicbus.co.nz) has a fixed fare (\$55, four buses weekly) hop-on, hop-off service that includes unlimited stops and pick-ups along the route, including Opononi and Matakoho.

POUTO POINT

A narrow spit descends south of Dargaville, bordered by the Tasman Sea and Wairoa River, and comes to an abrupt halt at the entrance of Kaipara Harbour, NZ's biggest. It's an incredibly remote headland, punctuated by dozens of petite dune lakes and the lonely **Kaipara Lighthouse** (built from kauri in 1884). Less than 10km separates Kaipara Harbour's north and south heads, but if you were to drive between the two you'd cover 267km.

A 4WD can be put to its proper use on the 71km stretch of beach to **Pouto Point**. DOC's *Pouto Hidden Treasures* pamphlet has a helpful guide for motorists, with tips for protecting both your car and the fragile ecosystem. The inland road is a similar distance but it's winding and partly unsealed.

Lighthouse Lodge B&B (☎ 09-439 5150; www.light-house-lodge.co.nz; 6577 Pouto Rd; d \$250, ste \$350-450; (P) (Q)) is a contemporary building in a remote spot, with bright, stylish rooms with verandas and sea views. There's Sky TV, a bar and a dining room. Meals and tours can be arranged on request.

MATAKOHE

pop 400

Matakoho's a sweet village on one of the Kaipara's many inlets. Apart from its rural charms, the reason for visiting is the superb **Kauri Museum** (☎ 09-431 7417; www.kaurimuseum.com;

Church Rd; adult/child \$15/3; ☎ 8.30am-5pm). The giant cross-sections of trees are astounding in themselves, but the entire industry is brought to light through life-sized reproductions of a pioneer sawmill, boarding house, gum-digger's hut and Victorian home – along with photos, artefacts, and fabulous furniture and marquetry. The Gum Room holds a weird and wonderful collection of kauri gum, the amber substance that can be carved, sculpted and polished to a jewel-like quality. The museum shop stocks mementos crafted from kauri wood and gum.

Facing the museum is the tiny kauri-built **Matakoho Pioneer Church** (1867), which served both Methodists and Anglicans, and acted as the community's hall and school.

Sleeping & Eating

Matakoho Top 10 Holiday Park (☎ 09-431 6431; www.matakohetop10.co.nz; Church Rd; sites \$32, cabins/units \$60/98; (P) (Q)) With perhaps the cosiest lounge you'll find in a camping ground, this very friendly little park has modern amenities, plenty of space and good views of Kaipara Harbour, and is only 350m from the museum.

Matakoho House (☎ 09-431 7091; mathouse@extra.co.nz; 24 Church Rd; s \$60, d \$135-145; (P) (Q)) A short walk from the museum, this B&B occupies a pretty villa with a café attached (mains \$25 to \$29). The simply furnished rooms open out onto a veranda and offer winning touches like complementary port and chocolates.

Petite Provence (☎ 09-431 7552; www.petiteprovence.co.nz; 703c Tinopai Rd; s/d \$100/145; (P)) This attractive, French-influenced B&B is a popular weekend for Aucklanders, so it pays to book ahead. Excellent dinners can be arranged for a bargain \$40 per person.

Sahara (☎ 09-431 6833; cnr Franklin & Paparua Valley Rds, Paparua; brunch \$8-18, dinner \$22-27; ☎ dinner Thu, brunch & dinner Fri-Sun) Nothing about the cuisine or fit-out screams North African desert, but the incongruity of the name is nothing on the surprise of finding such a stylish restaurant in little Paparua, 6km east of Matakoho. Housed in a lovingly restored bank building, Sahara offers a small but stellar menu with a focus on local produce. Book ahead.

Getting There & Away

Main Coachline (☎ 09-278 8070; www.maincoachline.co.nz) runs six buses per week to/from Auckland (\$40, 2½ hours) and Dargaville (\$18, 35 minutes). See left for details of the Magic Travellers Network service.

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