

Waikato & the King Country



If the colour green had a homeland this would be it. Verdant fields give way to rolling hills in the countryside around New Zealand's mightiest river, the Waikato. Visitors from southern England might wonder why they bothered leaving home, especially in quaint towns like Cambridge where every effort has been made to replicate the 'mother country'. It's little wonder that Peter Jackson chose the Waikato as the bucolic Shire in his movie adaptation of *Lord of the Rings*.

But this veneer of conspicuous Englishness only partly disguises another reality. Move over hobbits, this is Tainui country. This powerful coalition of related tribes joined with others to elect a king in the 1850s to resist the loss of their land and sovereignty. Although the fertile Waikato was taken from them by war, they retained control of the limestone crags and forests of what became known as the King Country to within a whisper of the 20th century. The back roads along the coast still contain tiny outposts of Maoridom, echoes of an earlier era.

Today's visitors can experience first-hand the area's genteel/free-wheeling dichotomy. Adrenaline junkies will be drawn to the wild surf of Raglan or rough-and-tumble underground pursuits in the extraordinary Waitomo Caves, while others will warm to the more sedate delights of Te Aroha's Edwardian thermal complex or Hamilton's gardens.

It's the Waikato River that symbolises this best – in places idyllic lakes have been created by harnessing it to hydroelectric projects while elsewhere its *mauri* (life force) flows fast and free.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Seeking subterranean thrills in the **Waitomo Caves** (p236)
- Hanging with the bronzed crowd while hanging-ten at **Raglan** (p223)
- Discovering your own bush-framed black-sand beach on the rugged **west coast** (p240)
- Pigging out on Maori culture at the **Kawhia Kai Festival** (p235)
- Soaking in 'the love' and thermal waters of **Te Aroha** (p233)
- Plotting a pub crawl in surprisingly buzzy **Hamilton** (p222)
- Tramping through an inland island paradise at **Maungatautari** (p229)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 07

■ www.waikatonz.co.nz

■ www.kingcountry.co.nz

Climate

The southern area around Taumarunui is wetter and colder than the rest of the region, which can suffer summer droughts.

Getting There & Around

Hamilton is the transport hub, with its airport (p223) servicing some international and extensive domestic routes. Buses link the city to everywhere in the North Island. Most inland towns are also well connected on bus routes, but the remote coastal communities (apart from Mokau on SH3) are less well served.

Trains are another option but they are infrequent and surprisingly expensive on short legs. The main trunk-line between Auckland and Wellington stops at Hamilton, Otorohanga, Te Kuiti and Taumarunui.

WAIKATO

History

By the time Europeans started to arrive, this region – stretching as far north as Auckland's Manukau Harbour – had long been the homeland of the Waikato tribes, descended from the Tainui migration (p218). In settling this land they displaced or absorbed tribes from earlier migrations.

Initially European contact was on Maori terms and to the advantage of the local people. Their fertile land, which was already cultivated with kumara and other crops, was well suited to the introduction of new fruits and vegetables. By the 1840s the Waikato economy was booming, with bulk quantities of

produce exported to the settlers in Auckland and beyond. Rangiaowhia, near Te Awamutu, became a prosperous farming town – much to the envy of the new arrivals, who coveted the flat fecund Waikato plains.

Relations between the two cultures soured during the 1850s, largely due to the colonists' pressure to purchase Maori land. In response, a confederation of tribes united to elect a king to safeguard their interests, forming what became known as the 'King Movement' (see p219).

In July 1863 Governor Grey sent a huge force to invade the Waikato and exert colonial control. After almost a year of fighting, known as the Waikato War, the Kingites retreated south to what became branded the King Country. Europeans didn't dare to venture there for several decades.

The war resulted in the confiscation of 360,000 hectares of land, much of which was given to colonial soldiers to farm and defend. In 1995 the Waikato tribes received a full Crown apology for the wrongful invasion and confiscation of their lands, as well as a \$170 million package, including the return of land that the Crown still held.

NORTH OF HAMILTON

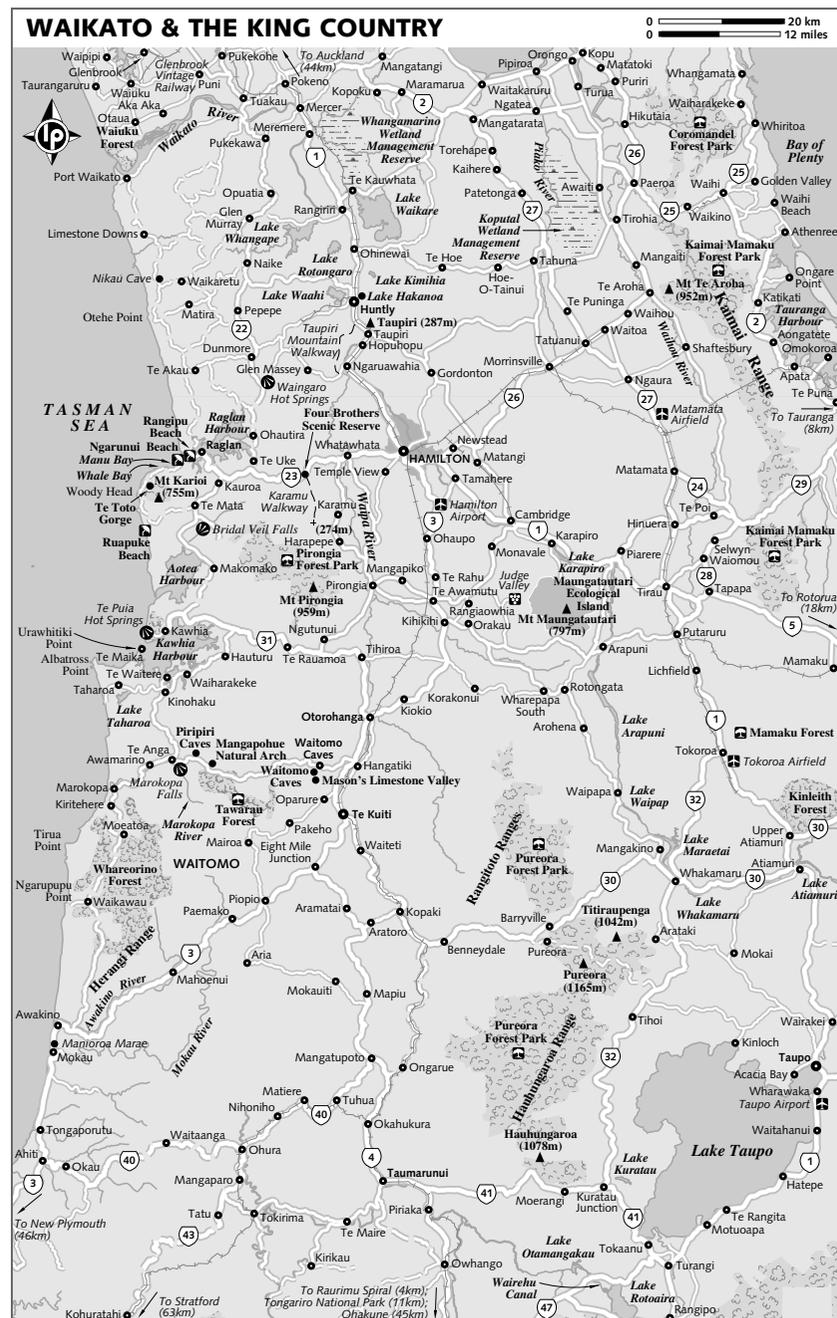
Most people blast along SH1 between Auckland and Hamilton in about 90 minutes, but if you're in the mood to meander, the upper Waikato has some interesting diversions.

Port Waikato

While the name might conjure up images of heavy industry and crusty seadogs, that's far from the reality of this petite village at the mouth of the mighty river. There's little here apart from an old-fashioned collection of baches (holiday homes), a couple of *marae*, a store, takeaways and a beautiful but treacherous surf beach. Lifeguards are on duty in summer, but only between 10am and 6pm on weekends and school holidays; strong rips render it unsafe for swimming at other times.

Waikatoa Surf Lodge (☎ 09-232 9961; www.sunsetbeach.co.nz; 8 Centreway Rd; dm/s/d \$25/38/60, tw \$50-75) spoils visiting surfers with smart rooms, nice linen and a volleyball net.

To get here, turn off SH1 at Pokeno, 50km south of central Auckland, and head towards Tuakau (which has some decent cafés) until you see the Port Waikato signs. It's a pleasant



WAIKATO & THE KING COUNTRY FACTS

Eat Rotten corn at Kawhia's Kai Festival (p235)

Drink Gut-cleansing soda water in Te Aroha (p233)

Read *Potiki* (1986) by Patricia Grace

Listen to The sacred sounds of Te Awamutu (p227): Crowded House's *Mean to Me*, Split Enz' *Kia Kaha, Haul Away*

Watch *Black Sheep* (2006) – those Te Kuiti shearers should be very afraid

Swim at Raglan (p224)

Festival Running of the Sheep, Te Kuiti (p241)

Tackiest tourist attraction The Big Shearer, Te Kuiti (p241)

Go green Off-the-grid tepees at Solscape (p226)

35km drive following the ever-widening river with its abundant bird life. Hobbit-hoppers can continue on the coastal road south past Port Waikato for a further 10km, where the limestone bluffs formed Weathertop – NZ's northernmost *Lord of the Rings* location.

Keep on this road and turn inland on SH22 to reach **Nikau Cave** (☎ 09-233 3199; www.nikaucave.co.nz; 1779 Waikaretu Rd, Waikaretu; adult/child \$30/15; ☒ by appointment), where a tour (minimum two people) will take you through tight wet squeezes to glowworms, limestone formations and subterranean streams.

Rangiriri

As you follow SH1 south you're retracing the route of the colonial army in the spectacular land grab that was the Waikato War. On 20 November 1863, 1500 British troops, backed by gunboats and artillery, attacked the substantial fortifications erected by the Maori king's warriors at Rangiriri. They were repulsed a number of times and lost 60 men, but overnight many of the 500 Maori defenders retreated; the remaining 180 were taken prisoner the next day after the British gained entry to the *pa* by conveniently misunderstanding a flag of truce. It's worth stopping at the **Rangiriri Battle Site Heritage Centre** (☎ 07-826 3663; Rangiriri St; ☒ 9am-3pm) for an interesting short documentary (20 minutes, \$2) about the battle, and a thoroughly British cream scene. Across the road the **cemetery** houses the soldiers' graves and a mound covering the mass grave of 36 Maori warriors.

Next to the heritage centre is the historic **Rangiriri Hotel** (☎ 07-826 3467; Rangiriri St; ☒ 11am-

11pm), a pleasant spot for an afternoon bevvie at the outdoor tables.

Ngaruawahia & Around

From Rangiriri the road follows the Waikato River all the way to Hamilton. Along the way is **Huntly**, an unattractive coal-mining town with a large power station. The friendly **Huntly i-SITE** (☎ 07-828 6406; SH1; ☒ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat & Sun) is a good source of information about visiting Taupiri and Ngaruawahia.

The sacred mountain of the Tainui people, **Taupiri** (287m), is a further 8km south on SH1. You'll recognise it by the cemetery on its slopes and the honking of passing car horns – locals saying hi to their loved ones and their mountain as they pass by. In August 2006 tens of thousands gathered here as the much-loved Maori Queen, Dame Te Atairangikaahu, was transported upriver by *waka* (canoe) to her final resting place in an unmarked grave among her ancestors at the top of the mountain. Tourists aren't welcome, but those genuinely wishing to pay their respects may enter as long as they follow the correct protocol (no eating, stick to the paths, wash your hands afterwards to remove the *tapu* – see p59).

If you're fit, the **Taupiri Mountain Walkway** (80 minutes return) offers excellent views. It doesn't actually take you on the sacred mountain but treks through part of the **Hakarimata Scenic Reserve**. The Huntly i-SITE has maps and information.

A little further south, **Ngaruawahia**, 19km north of Hamilton on SH1, is the headquarters of the Maori King movement (see opposite). The impressive fences of **Turangawaewae Marae**

KINGITANGA

The concept of a Maori people is a relatively new one. Until the mid-19th century, NZ was effectively comprised of many independent tribal nations, operating in tandem with the British from 1840.

In 1856, faced with a flood of Brits, the Kingitanga movement formed to unite the tribes to better resist further loss of land and possible cultural annihilation. A gathering of leaders elected Waikato chief Potatau Te Wherowhero as the first Maori king, hoping that his increased *mana* (prestige) could achieve the cohesiveness that the British had under their queen.

Despite the huge losses of the Waikato War (p216) and the eventual opening up of the King Country (p234), the Kingitanga survived – although it has no formal constitutional role. A measure of the strength of the movement was the huge outpouring of grief when Te Arikiniui Dame Atairangikaahu, Potatau's great-great-granddaughter, died in 2006 after 40 years at the helm. Although it's not a hereditary monarchy (leaders of various tribes vote on a successor), Potatau's line continues to the present day with King Tuheitia Paki.

(☎ 07-824 5189; River Rd) maintain the privacy of this important place, but twice a year visitors are welcomed. **Regatta Day** is held in mid March, with *waka* races and all manner of Maori cultural activities. For a week from 15 August the *marae* is open to celebrate **Koroneihana**, the anniversary of the coronation of the current king, Tuheitia. Call ahead to find out about the opening day's flag-raising ceremony and history tours.

Twenty-three kilometres west of Ngaruawahia, the slightly shabby **Waingaro Hot Springs** (☎ 07-825 4761; www.waingarohotsprings.co.nz; adult/child \$10/5; ☒ 9am-9.30pm) are hugely popular with local kids. There are three thermal pools, private spa pools, water slides, children's play areas and barbecues.

HAMILTON

pop 132,000

Landlocked cities in an island nation are never going to have the glamorous appeal of their coastal sisters. Rotorua compensates with boiling mud while Taupo has its lake – but Hamilton and Palmerston North, despite their majestic rivers, are left clutching the short straws.

However something strange has happened in Hamilton recently. Perhaps it's a sign of the rising fortunes of Waikato farmers that the city's main street has sprouted a sophisticated and vibrant stretch of bars and eateries that – on the weekend at least – leave Auckland's Viaduct Harbour for dead in the boozy fun stakes. You're probably not going to be tempted to stay a week, but there are enough interesting sights to fill up a couple of days.

Information

Browsers (☎ 07-839 1919; www.hardtofind.co.nz; 221 Victoria St; ☒ 9.30am-9.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-9.30pm Sat & Sun) A wonderfully musty secondhand bookshop with a good NZ section.

Department of Conservation (DOC; ☎ 07-858 1000; www.doc.govt.nz; 73 Rostrevor St; ☒ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri)

Hamilton i-SITE (☎ 07-839 3580; www.visitahamilton.co.nz; cnr Bryce & Anglesea Sts; ☒ 7.15am-5.30pm Mon-Thu, 7.15am-6.45pm Fri, 9am-4.45pm Sat, 9.30am-4.45pm Sun)

Post office (36 Bryce St)

Waikato Hospital (☎ 07-839 8899; Pembroke St) South of the centre.

Sights

Stretching over 50 hectares of riverbank southeast of the centre, **Hamilton Gardens** (☎ 07-838 6782; www.hamiltongardens.co.nz; Cobham Dr; admission free; enclosed section ☒ 7.30am-sunset) incorporates a large park as well as extravagantly themed enclosed gardens. The Paradise Garden Collection has separate Italian Renaissance, Chinese, Japanese, English, American and Indian gardens complete with colonnades, pagodas, dovescotes, raked sand and a mini Taj Mahal. Equally interesting is the Productive Garden Collection with its model family-sized sustainable garden, a fragrant herb garden and a precolonisation Maori garden. Look out for the stunning *Nga Uri O Hinetuparimaunga* (Earth Blanket) sculpture at the main roadside gates.

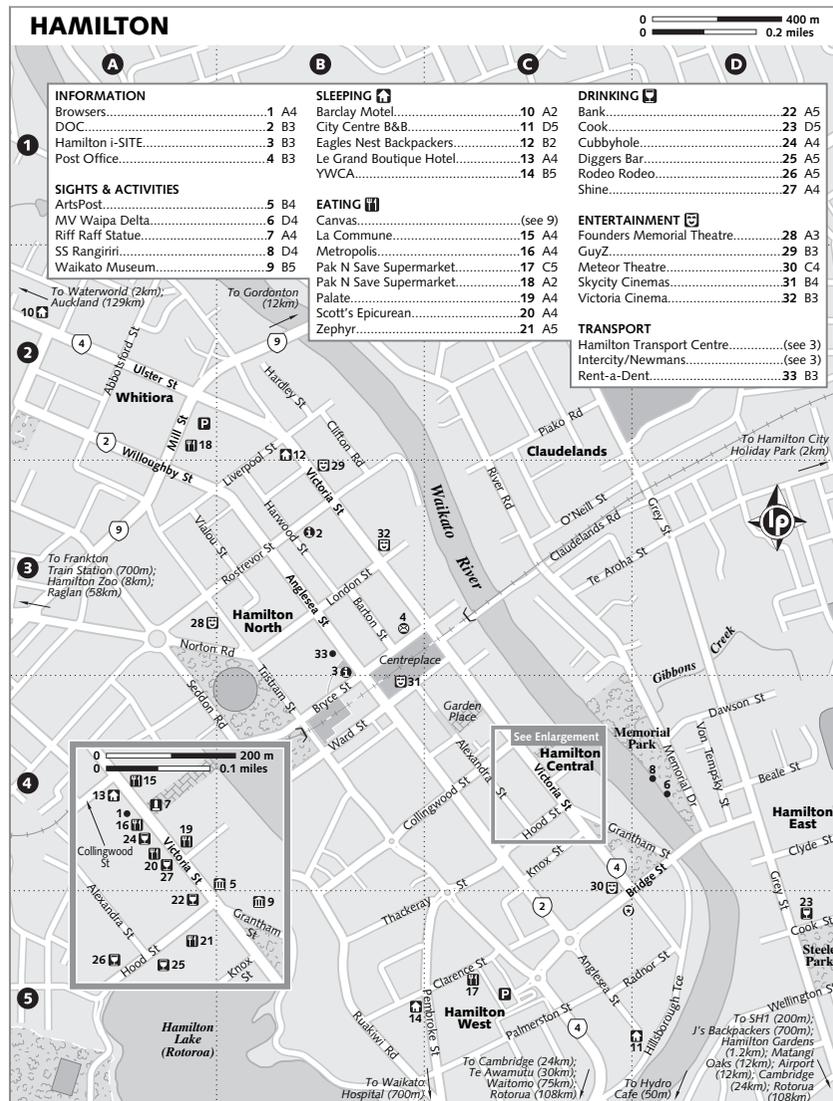
Waikato Museum (☎ 07-838 6606; www.waikatomuseum.co.nz; 1 Grantham St; admission by donation; ☒ 10am-4.30pm) has an excellent collection of Tainui Maori treasures on display, including the

MAORI NZ: WAIKATO & THE KING COUNTRY

Despite or perhaps because of its turbulent history (see p216), this area remains one of the strongest pockets of Maori influence in the country. This is the heartland of the Tainui tribes, descended from those who disembarked from the *Tainui waka* (canoe) in Kawhia in the 14th century. Split into four main tribal divisions (Waikato, Hauraki, Ngati Maniapoto and Ngati Raukawa), Tainui are inextricably linked with the Kingitanga (King Movement, opposite), which has its base in Ngaruawahia.

The best opportunities to interact with Maori culture are the Kawhia Kai Festival (p235), and Ngaruawahia's Regatta Day and Koroneihana celebrations (opposite). Interesting *taonga* (treasures) are displayed at museums in Hamilton (opposite) and Te Awamutu (p227). Reminders of the Waikato Land War can be found at Rangiriri (above), Rangiaowhia (p228) and Orakau (p228).

Dozens of *marae* (meeting house) complexes are dotted around the countryside – including Maketu (p234), where the *Tainui waka* is buried. You won't be able to visit these without permission but you can often get a decent view from the gates. Some tours include an element of Maori culture, including Ruakuri Cave (p237) and Kawhia Harbour Cruises (p234).



magnificently carved *waka taua* (war canoe) *Te Winika*. Taking pride of place in the lobby is a 30-million-year-old fossil of a nearly human-sized penguin discovered by schoolchildren in 2006.

ArtsPost (☎ 07-838 6928; 120 Victoria St; admission free; ☎ 10am-4.30pm), near the museum, is a contemporary gallery and gift shop housed

in the grand former Post Office. It mainly focuses on local artists.

Hamilton Zoo (☎ 07-838 6720; www.hamiltonzoo.co.nz; Brymer Rd; adult/child \$12/6; ☎ 9am-5pm, last entry 3.30pm) houses 400-plus species and takes part in conservation breeding projects. The rotating 'Meet the Keeper' programme provides interesting information from the critters'

caregivers. The zoo is 8km from the city centre; take Norton Rd then SH23 west towards Raglan, turn right at Newcastle Rd and then left onto Brymer Rd.

One of Hamilton's more unusual public artworks is a life-size statue of *Rocky Horror Picture Show* writer Richard O'Brien in the guise of **Riff Raff** (Victoria St), the time-warping alien from the planet Transsexual. It looks over a small park on the site of the Embassy Theatre where O'Brien worked as a hairdresser. The Embassy's 'late-night double-feature picture shows' found a place in the ultimate cult classic – although it's hard to imagine 1960s Hamilton inspired the tale of bisexual alien decadence.

Activities

MV Waipa Delta (☎ 07-854 7813; www.waipadelta.co.nz; Memorial Park Jetty) is a replica of an 1876 paddle steamer, running popular river cruises with a guided commentary. There are 1½-hour lunch cruises (\$45 to \$49), one-hour coffee cruises (\$20) and two- to three-hour dinner cruises with live entertainment (\$59 to \$69). Children are half-price.

A more active watery option is the **City Bridges River Tour** (☎ 07-847 5565; adult/child \$50/30), a two-hour guided kayak ride through the city.

Bush-covered riverside walkways run along both sides of the Waikato River and provide the city's green belt. **Memorial Park** has the remains of **SS Rangiriri** – an iron-clad, steam-powered gunboat from the Waikato War – embedded in the riverbank. You can join the joggers on the boardwalk circling **Lake Rotoroa**, to the west of the centre.

Waterworld (☎ 07-958 5860; Garnett Ave; adult/child \$4/2; ☎ 6am-9pm Mon-Fri, 7am-9pm Sat, 9am-9pm Sun) has indoor and outdoor pools, water slides, a gym, spa and crèche.

Kiwi Balloon Company (☎ 021 623 595; www.kiwi-ballooncompany.co.nz; per person \$290) provides the best vehicle for gazing down on the lush countryside. The hot-air trips take about four hours and include a champagne breakfast and an hour's flying time.

Festivals & Events

In April both rev-heads and airheads flock to town for the **Hamilton 400 V8 Supercars streetrace** (www.v8supercar.co.nz) and the **hot-air balloon festival** (www.balloonsoverwaikato.co.nz).

Sleeping BUDGET

Eagles Nest Backpackers (☎ 07-838 2704; www.eaglesbackpackers.co.nz; 937 Victoria St; dm/s/d \$23/50/58; ☎) This 1st-floor eyrie has windowless internal rooms but they're clean and mercifully quiet given the hostel's position on Hamilton's main drag. The communal lounge might be trying for nursing-home chic but there's a decent terrace looking over the street.

YWCA (☎ 07-838 2219; www.ywcahamilton.org.nz; cnr Pembroke & Clarence Sts; s/d/tw \$25/50/50; ☎) You don't have to be young or female to stay at this four-storey apartment block of a hostel. The rooms are cell-like but they're spotless, cheap and private. Each floor has shared bathroom facilities, a kitchen and TV lounge.

J's Backpackers (☎ 07-856 8934; www.jsbackpackers.co.nz; 8 Grey St; dm/d/tw/tr \$25/60/60/75; ☎) A homely hostel occupying a characterful house near Hamilton Gardens, J's offers good security, a smallish kitchen and comfy rooms.

Hamilton City Holiday Park (☎ 07-855 8255; www.hamiltoncityholidaypark.co.nz; 14 Ruakura Rd; sites \$25, cabins \$38-48, tourist flats \$60-90; ☎) Good simple cabins and well-maintained communal facilities are the rule at this shady park, 2km east of town.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

The road into town from Auckland is lined with dozens of midrange motels, many of them much of a muchness, but perfectly adequate.

City Centre B&B (☎ 07-838 1671; www.citycentrebnb.co.nz; 3 Anglesea St; d/tr \$95/105; ☎) A more attractive prospect than a SH1 motel, this sparkling self-contained apartment opens on to a swimming pool at the quiet riverside end of a central city street.

Barclay Motel (☎ 07-838 2475; www.barclay.co.nz; 280 Ulster St; d \$135-145, units \$145-320; ☎) Nicely maintained roomy accommodation and professional service earn this place a good reputation with business travellers. Large groups should seek out the three-bedroom unit which sleeps up to 10 people.

Le Grand Boutique Hotel (☎ 07-839 1994; www.legrandhotel.com; 237 Victoria St; r from \$230; ☎) This 38-room boutique hotel in a heritage building had new managers and was being upgraded when we visited, with the addition of double glazing and, hopefully, a general freshen up. Prices are often negotiable.

Eating

Revitalised Hamilton has no shortage of decent eateries, ranging from quick eats at the Centreplace food court to slap-up meals in the buzzy Victoria/Hood St precinct. Self-caterers can head for the large Pak N Save supermarkets on Clarence St or Mill St.

RESTAURANTS

Canvas (☎ 07-839 2535; 1 Grantham St; mains \$27-32; ☺ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) The restaurant in the Waikato Museum offers classy dining with a lovely outlook. If you're just taking a sight-seeing break, the light meal options (\$16 to \$18) are delicious – try the pumpkin ravioli.

Palate (☎ 07-834 2921; 170 Victoria St; mains \$28-32; ☺ dinner Tue-Sat) Given this restaurant's deserved status as the best in the central North Island, it's surprisingly reasonably priced. Chef/owner Matt McLean delivers an innovative mod-NZ menu and free tasters between courses.

CAFÉS

Hydro Café (☎ 07-859 0020; 33 Jellicoe Dr; mains \$6-19; ☺ 8am-4pm) Hydro has converted an old block of neighbourhood shops into a fun café with tables spilling on to the pavement. It's great for brunch and light meals with novel taste combinations. It's on the east side of the river, just south of the centre.

Scott's Epicurean (☎ 07-839 6680; 181 Victoria St; mains \$9-15; ☺ breakfast & lunch) This gorgeous joint features swanky leather banquettes, pressed-tin ceilings, great coffee and an interesting and affordable menu (try the sweet orange breakfast couscous or the ever popular *spaghetti aglio e olio*). Service is friendly, it's fully licensed, and a charming outdoor area beckons in the warmer months.

our pick **La Commune** (☎ 07-839 6448; 244 Victoria St; mains \$10-16; ☺ 8am-5pm Mon-Wed, 8am-late Thu-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun; ▼) Vegetarians and ecowarriors rejoice! Not only does this bohemian place

deliver fresh, well-presented meals, it has a selection of vegan wines, good magazines, funky 1950s furniture and a commitment to recycling and ecofriendly products. Special treats are the Thursday buffet (\$10) and live music on the weekends.

Zephyr (☎ 07-839 2697; 15 Hood St; mains \$13-17; ☺ 8am-4pm Sun-Wed, to 10pm Thu, to 11pm Fri & Sat; ▼) With Che Guevara's noble face gazing from the wall you can expect great Cuban coffee. Settle in for tasty counter food (\$6 to \$8) or a mix of Cuban, South American and Mexican dishes.

Metropolis (☎ 07-834 2081; 211 Victoria St; brunch \$9-16, mains \$18-26; ☺ 9am-midnight) A global and varied menu is offered at this casual and popular café, which covers all the bases and has a chirpy atmosphere.

Drinking

The blocks around Victoria and Hood Streets offer a decent bar hop, with lots of live music and DJs on the weekend.

Diggers Bar (☎ 07-834 2228; 17b Hood St; ☺ 3pm-late Tue-Sun) This friendly, funky bar has a wealth of liquid bread on tap and nightly live music. Wednesday night's \$25 'pizza, fries and two drinks' is a damn good deal.

Cook (☎ 07-856 6088; 7 Cook St; ☺ 10am-late Mon-Wed, 9am-late Thu-Sun) The historic surrounds (1874) add atmosphere to this café-bar that dishes up good pub grub (mains \$10-21), live music, comedy and quiz nights.

Cubbyhole (☎ 07-838 3700; 195 Victoria St; ☺ 8pm-3am Wed-Sat) Watch the parade of boyracers on the street below with a cocktail in hand from the 1st-floor balcony. It attracts an older party crowd with its classic grooves.

Bank (☎ 07-839 4740; cnr Victoria & Hood Sts; ☺ 11am-midnight Sun-Thu, to 3am Fri & Sat) Inside this 1878 heritage building are plenty of beers on tap, a good wine selection and lots of screens to catch the big games.

GAY & LESBIAN HAMILTON

Until recently Hamilton's gay venues were closeted away near the railway tracks in a grim corner of Frankton. It's a measure of Hamilton's increasing sophistication that its main venue is now visible to Victoria St's passing parade.

Shine (☎ 839 3173; www.shinenightclub.co.nz; 161 Victoria St; ☺ 8pm-3am Thu-Sat) is a slicker-looking venue than its Auckland sisters, with a dance floor at the back and a beer garden in front. Given the track record of attractive gay bars in this part of the world we only hope it's still open when this book is published. Further down the street, **GuyZ** (☎ 07-839 5222; 856a Victoria St; admission \$20; ☺ 4pm-midnight Tue-Sun) is a clean place to get dirty.

Rodeo Rodeo (☎ 07-838 1911; 20 Hood St; ☺ 4pm-midnight Sun-Wed, 1pm-3am Thu-Sat) This cheesy bar goes off on the weekend, with its free pink cowboy hats and Neil Diamond/Glen Campbell soundtrack.

Entertainment

Skycity Cinemas (☎ 07-835 0088; Centreplace Mall; adult \$9.50-14.50, child \$7-8.50) A seven-screen multiplex.

Victoria Cinema (☎ 07-838 3036; 690 Victoria St; adult \$14-17, child \$10) Watch art-house films while sipping on alcoholic beverages.

Live theatre and concerts can be enjoyed at the **Meteor Theatre** (☎ 07-838 6603; 1 Victoria St) and **Founders Memorial Theatre** (☎ 07-838 6600; 221 Tristram St).

Getting There & Away

AIR

Air New Zealand (☎ 0800 737 000; www.airnz.co.nz) has direct flights from Hamilton Airport to Sydney (3½ hours), Brisbane (3½ hours) and the Gold Coast (3½ hours) as well as Auckland (30 minutes), Palmerston North (45 minutes), Wellington (65 minutes), Nelson (70 minutes) and Christchurch (1¼ hours). Check its website for fares and special offers.

Sunair Aviation Ltd (☎ 07-575 7799; www.sunair.co.nz; one-way \$290) offers direct flights on weekdays to Kerikeri (1¼ hours), Whangarei (one hour), Gisborne (75 minutes) and Napier (one hour).

BUS

All buses arrive and depart from the **Hamilton Transport Centre** (☎ 07-834 3457; cnr Anglesea & Bryce Sts).

Environment Waikato's **Busit!** (☎ 0800 428 7546; www.busit.co.nz) has numerous services throughout the region, including Ngaruawahia (\$3.70, 25 minutes), Te Aroha (\$7.80, one hour), Cambridge (\$6, 40 minutes), Te Awamutu (\$6, 30 minutes) and Raglan (\$7.70, one hour).

InterCity/Newmans (☎ 07-834 3457; www.intercity.co.nz; cnr Anglesea & Bryce Sts) services numerous destinations including Auckland (\$30, two hours), Ngaruawahia (\$20, 20 minutes), Te Aroha (\$10, one hour), Matamata (\$24, 54 minutes), Cambridge (\$15 to \$23, 24 minutes), Te Awamutu (\$20, 29 minutes), Rotorua (\$10 to \$40, two hours) and Wellington (\$84, four hours).

Budget operators **Naked Bus** (www.nakedbus.com) have advance fares starting from \$1 on trips

to Auckland (2½ hours), Ngaruawahia (30 minutes), Matamata (one hour), Cambridge (30 minutes), Rotorua (90 minutes) and Wellington (10 hours).

Dalroy Express (☎ 0508 465 622; www.dalroytours.co.nz) operates a daily service between Auckland (\$19, two hours) and New Plymouth (\$36, 3¼ hours), stopping at most towns, including Ngaruawahia (\$10, 20 minutes) and Te Awamutu (\$9, 25 minutes).

Go Kiwi (☎ 0800 446 549; www.go-kiwi.co.nz) has daily shuttles to/from Auckland (\$21, 2¼ hours), Cambridge (\$8, 30 minutes) and Tauranga (\$21, two hours).

TRAIN

Hamilton is on the **Overlander** (☎ 0800 872 467; www.transzscenic.co.nz; daily Dec-Apr, Fri-Sun May-Nov) route between Auckland (\$49, 2½ hours) and Wellington (\$109, 9½ hours) via Otorohanga (\$49, 35 minutes). Trains stop at Hamilton's **Frankton Train Station** (☎ 07-846 8353; Queens Ave), located 1km west of the city centre.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Hamilton Airport (☎ 07-848 9027; www.hamiltonairport.co.nz) is 12km south of the city. International departure tax is \$25 (for those 12 years and over). The **Super Shuttle** (☎ 07-843 7778; www.super shuttle.co.nz; fare \$17) offers a door-to-door service into the city. A taxi costs around \$40.

BUS

Hamilton's city bus system, **Busit!** (☎ 0800 428 7546; www.busit.co.nz; adult/child \$2.60/1.20), operates Monday to Saturday from around 7am to 7.30pm (later on Friday). All buses pass through Hamilton Transport Centre.

CAR

Budget Rent-A-Car (☎ 07-838 3585; www.budget.co.nz; Hamilton Airport)

Rent-a-Dent (☎ 07-839 1049; www.rentadent.co.nz; 383 Anglesea St)

TAXI

Hamilton Taxis (☎ 07-8477 477)

Red Cabs (☎ 07-839 0500)

RAGLAN

pop 2700

Raglan may well be NZ's perfect surfing town. It's small enough to have escaped mass development – perhaps due to a mainstream Kiwi

preference for the safer white-sand east-coast beaches – yet it's big enough for a bit of bustle. There are several good eateries and a bar that attracts big-name bands in summer.

Nestled near the south head of the Raglan Harbour (Whaingaroa), the nearby ocean bays are internationally famous for their breaks and attract surfers from around the world. Bruce Brown's classic 1964 wave-chasing film *The Endless Summer* features Manu Bay. The harbour is excellent for kayaking, fishing and swimming. This all serves to attract fit guys and girls from all over the world; Raglan may also be NZ's best-looking town.

It's exactly the sort of laid-back, charming place that sees you shuffle your itinerary to extend your stay.

Information

Post office (39 Bow St)

Raglan Video (☎ 07-825 0008; 9a Bow St; per hr \$5; ☎ 10am-8.30pm) Has internet access.

Visitor Information Centre (☎ 07-825 0556; www.raglan.org.nz; 4 Wallis St; ☎ 9.30am-3.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun) Will eventually be moving to the museum (13 Wainui Rd).

West Coast Health Clinic (☎ 07-825 0114; 12 Wallis St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 11pm Sat)

Sights & Activities MUSEUM & GALLERY

The small **pioneer museum** (13 Wainui Rd; admission by donation; ☎ 1-3.30pm Sat & Sun) explores the stories of local Maori and Pakeha pioneers through artefacts, photos and newspapers. Make note of the meagre opening hours, but don't kick yourself if you miss them.

A community hub, the **Old Arts School Centre** (☎ 07-825 0023; Stewart St; admission free; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri) has changing exhibitions and workshops, including weaving and carving.

BEACHES

Te Kopua Recreational Reserve, over the footbridge by the holiday park, is a safe, calm harbour beach popular with families. Other handy beaches are at **Cox Bay**, which is reached by a walkway from Government Rd, and at **Puriri Park**, towards the end of Wallis St, at high tide. See p226 for details of the surf beaches.

SURFING

Raglan Surf School (☎ 07-825 7873; www.raglansurfing.school.co.nz; 5b Whaanga Rd, Whale Bay; 3hr lesson \$89) uses soft surfboards that make it easier to stand up

and stay up. Instructors pride themselves on getting 95% of first-timers standing during their first lesson. If you're already experienced you can rent surfboards (from \$15 per hour), boogie boards (\$5 per hour) and wet suits (\$5 per hour). The lessons start from Karioi Lodge, Whale Bay (p226) before hitting the water at Ngarunui Beach.

Solscape (☎ 07-825 8268; www.solscape.co.nz; 611 Wainui Rd, Manu Bay; lessons \$85) offers 2½-hour lessons, as well as board and wetsuit hire (half/full day \$35/45).

Skyrider (☎ 07-825 7453; lessons \$100) takes two-hour, one-on-one kite-surfing lessons at Wainamu Beach.

KAYAKING

Raglan Harbour is great for kayaking. The gentle Oporu River is good for learning basic skills, but before too long you'll be wanting to investigate the nooks and crannies of the pancake rocks on the harbour's north edge.

Raglan Backpackers (below) has single (half-day \$25) or double (half-day \$35) ocean kayaks for hire.

Raglan Kayaks (☎ 07-825 8862; www.raglankayak.co.nz; hire hr/half-day/full day \$15/35/45) also has kayaks for hire and regular expeditions such as a two-hour kayak n' coffee tour (\$50) and a 3½-hour limestone excursion (\$65), both including coffee and snacks.

Tours

Raglan Scenic Tours (☎ 07-825 0908; www.raglanscenictours.co.nz) runs good-value, small-group tours. They include an hour tour around Raglan for \$15/10 per adult/child and the popular three-hour Round the Mountain tour (\$45/30), which includes Te Toto Gorge, Ruapuke Beach and the Bridal Veil Falls.

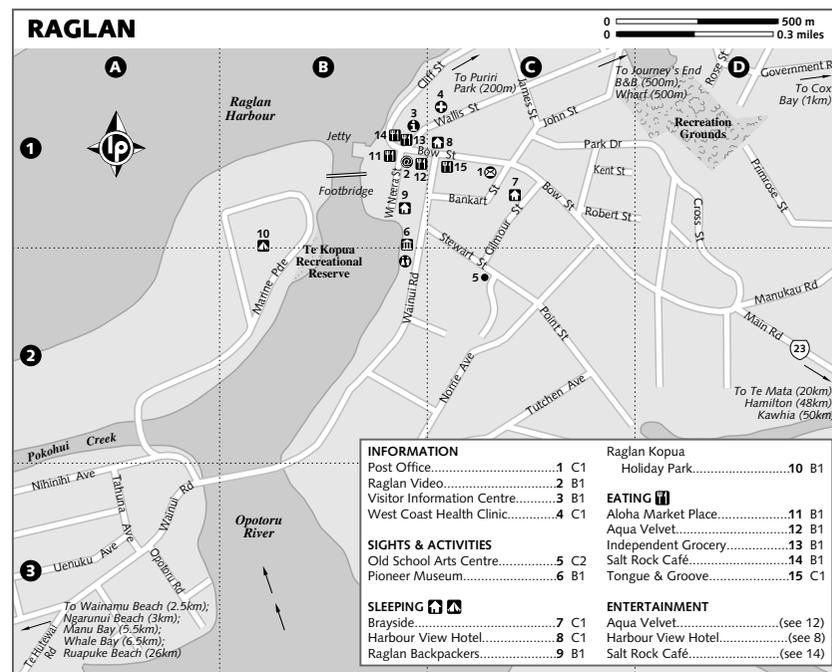
Sleeping

It would pay to book ahead, especially in peak season. See p226 for options at the neighbouring surf beaches.

BUDGET

Raglan Kopua Holiday Park (☎ 07-825 8283; www.raglanholidaypark.co.nz; Marine Pde; sites per adult/child \$12/6, dm/cabins \$20/60, unit \$65-90; ☎) A nicely maintained facility on the spit of land across the inlet from town. It has loads of room to play, making it an ideal spot for families.

ourpick Raglan Backpackers (☎ 07-825 0515; www.raglanbackpackers.co.nz; 6 Wi Neera St; dm \$23-25, s \$52, d &



tw \$58-66; ☎) This excellent, purpose-built hostel delivers one of the warmest welcomes you'll receive and has a delightfully laid-back holiday-house feel. It's on the water's edge, with sea views from some rooms and the rest arranged around a garden courtyard. Basic kayaks, bikes, golf clubs and fishing gear are free, or you can hire a board and wetsuit (\$25 per half-day). If that's too strenuous, then it's hard to beat lying about in a hammock making new friends. This is one of those places where you'll find yourself asking if it's possible to stay another night.

Brayside (☎ 07-825 8974; 7a Gilmour St; s/tw \$44/66; ☎) Quite the bargain, this one. A lovely owner rents the spacious self-contained apartment below her house on a quiet street – and throws in breakfast to boot.

MIDRANGE

Harbour View Hotel (☎ 07-825 8010; harbourviewhotel@xtra.co.nz; 14 Bow St; s/d/tw \$60/80/80, f \$95-110) If you think that going to bed before the party finishes is for the weak then this two-storey heritage pub (licensed to 1am) with sunny verandas and kauri trimmings is for you. The

rooms are clean although the beds are saggy and you'll be sharing bathrooms.

Journey's End B&B (☎ 07-825 6727; www.raglanaccommodation.co.nz; 49 Lily St; s/d/tr/q \$90/140/180/180) No it's not Mt Doom; quite the opposite, in fact. These two attractive en-suite rooms share a central modern lounge with a kitchenette and a deck overlooking the wharf and harbour.

Eating

Aloha Market Place (☎ 07-825 7440; 5 Bow St; meals \$9-12; ☎ 11am-5pm Thu-Fri & Sun, to 7pm Sat) It's take-aways without the grease, Japanese surfer-style. Grab some delicious rolled-to-order sushi or udon noodles and enjoy them by the water.

Salt Rock Café (☎ 07-825 8022; 2 Wallis St; meals \$9-15; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Thu, 8am-late Fri & Sat) A day started at Salt Rock's window seat, looking over the water, with a breakfast quesadilla and a superb coffee can't be all bad. Come back in the evening for fish and chips and live music.

Aqua Velvet (☎ 07-825 8588; 17 Bow St; meals \$9-16; ☎ 7.30am-4pm) This airy 'kitchen and ballroom', open to the road and rafters, serves up generous brunches in a bustling atmosphere.

Tongue & Groove (☎ 07-825 0027; 19 Bow St; mains \$12-28; ☎ 8.30am-8.30pm; ♻) There are plenty of streetside seats and comfy couches for wine sipping in this funky corner café with 1950s furniture and lots of local art. The delicious vegetarian roti is a bargain (\$13).

Self-caterers should try **Independent Grocery** (☎ 07-825 6533; 2a Wallis St; 9am-5.30pm Tue-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun; ♻) for organics, bulk wholefood, fresh bread and imported treats.

Entertainment

Aqua Velvet, Salt Rock Café and the Harbour View Hotel all host live music, especially on the weekends in summer when the Harbour View attracts the crème de Kiwi rock.

Getting There & Around

From Hamilton, Raglan is 48km west along SH23. Unsealed back roads connect Raglan to Kawhia, 50km south. They're slow, winding and prone to rockslides but scenic and certainly off the beaten track. Head back towards Hamilton for 7km and take the Te Mata/Kawhia turn-off and follow the signs; allow at least an hour.

Environment Waikato's **Busit!** (☎ 0800 428 7546; www.busit.co.nz, adult/child \$7.70/4.30) heads between Hamilton and Raglan (one hour) three times daily on weekdays and daily on weekends.

Bike2Bay (☎ 07-825 0309; www.bike2bay.com; hire half-/full day \$22/33; ☎ 9.30am-5pm) mountain bikes can be collected from the Visitor Information Centre.

SOUTH OF RAGLAN Wainamu Beach

Just 4km southwest of Raglan, down Riria Kereopa Memorial Dr, this beach at the mouth of the harbour is popular with windsurfers and kite surfers but strong currents make it extremely treacherous for swimmers.

Ngarunui Beach

Less than a kilometre further south, this is a great beach for grommets learning to surf. On the clifftop is the club for the volunteer lifeguards who patrol part of the beach from late October until April. This is the only beach with lifeguards and the best ocean beach for swimming.

Manu Bay

Another 2.5km journey will bring you to this rocky but famous surfing spot, said to

have the longest left-hand break in the world. The elongated uniform waves are created by the angle at which the ocean swell from the Tasman Sea meets the coastline.

Solscape (☎ 07-825 8268; www.solscape.co.nz; 611 Wainui Rd; sites per person \$15, cabooses dm/s/d/tr \$20/43/58/69, tepees s/d/tw \$50/68/68, cottages \$110/145; ♻) has backpacker accommodation in recycled train carriages with a homely communal lounge/kitchen. The ultimate greenie experience could well be chilling in a surprisingly comfortable tepee, surrounded by native bush, knowing that you're completely 'off the grid' – while not sacrificing hot showers (solar) and decent toilets (composting). Self-contained sea-view cottages, surf lessons (p224) and massage therapy (\$65 per hour) complete the bewildering array of services.

Whale Bay

This renowned surfing spot is a kilometre further west of Manu Bay, but you'll have to be prepared to clamber 600m over the rocks to get here.

Deep in native bush, **Karioi Lodge** (☎ 07-825 7873; 5b Whaanga Rd; www.kariolodge.co.nz; dm/d \$27/69; ♻) offers basketball, a flying fox, mountain bikes, bush walks and the Raglan Surf School (p224). There are no en suites but the rooms are clean and cosy. Good cheap meals (\$12) are available. These friendly folks also run **Sleeping Lady Lodging** (☎ 07-825 7873; www.sleepinglady.co.nz; lodges \$120-220), a collection of luxury self-contained lodges nearby. They range from the Sweet As studio apartment to the Lava Lounge, which has a private spa, ocean views and can sleep up to 12.

Indicators Beach House (☎ 07-825 7889; www.indicators.co.nz; d \$200; ♻) is a wonderful, large and fully equipped house with a deck that overlooks the beach (those views!). Wood-lined, with every modern need met and sleeping up to seven (add \$25 per extra person), you'll want to move in.

Mt Karioi

In legend, Karioi (756m), the Sleeping Lady (check out that profile), is the sister to Mt Pirongia (opposite). At its base the **Te Toto Gorge** is a steep cleft in the mountainside. Starting from the Te Toto Gorge car park south of Whale Bay, a strenuous but scenic track goes up the western slope. It takes 2½ hours to reach a lookout point, followed by an easier hour up to the summit. From the east

side, the Wairake Track is a steeper 2½-hour climb to the summit, where it meets the Te Toto Track.

Ruapuke Beach

Whale Bay marks the end of the sealed road, but a gravel road continues to Ruapuke Beach, 28km from Raglan, which is dangerous for swimmers but popular with surf-casting fisherfolk. **Ruapuke Beach Motor Camp** (☎ 07-825 6800; sites per person \$10-12, cabins \$35) is near the beach and has an end-of-the-world feel. The gravel road continues on round Mt Karioi and rejoins the inland road at Te Mata.

Bridal Veil Falls

Just past Te Mata is the turn-off to the 55m **Bridal Veil Falls**, 4km from the main road. From the car park, it's an easy 10-minute walk through mossy native bush to the top of the falls. It's a magical place, the effect compounded by the dancing rainbows swirling around the khaki-coloured pool far below. A further 10-minute walk leads to the bottom, where it's possible to swim once you've admired the view. Theft from cars is a problem here.

Four Brothers Scenic Reserve

Halfway between Hamilton and Raglan on SH23, the **Karamu Walkway** wanders through this reserve. A 15-minute hike up a gully covered in native bush leads to a hilltop where cows and sheep enjoy panoramic views.

Pirongia Forest Park

The main attraction of this park is **Mt Pirongia**, its 959m summit clearly visible from much of the Waikato. The mountain is usually climbed from Corcoran Rd (three to five

hours one way). There's a DOC hut near the summit if you need to spend the night. Maps and information are available from DOC in Hamilton (p219).

TE AWAMUTU pop 9340

Te Awamutu (which means 'The River Cut Short'; the Waikato beyond this point was unsuitable for large canoes) is a service town for dairy farmers. It's got a pleasant main street and a decent museum, but unless you're a Finn fan (see boxed text, below) you'll probably be content to stop here on your way somewhere else. It does, reputedly, have the best toilets in NZ.

Information

G.net Café (☎ 07-870 3060; 59a Bank St; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Internet access.

Te Awamutu i-SITE (☎ 07-871 3259; www.teawamutu.co.nz; 1 Gorst Ave; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3.30pm Sat & Sun)

Sights & Activities

Te Awamutu Museum (☎ 07-872 0085; www.tamuseum.org.nz; 135 Roche St; admission by donation; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat, 1-4pm Sun), 'where history never repeats', has a **True Colours**—painted shrine to local heroes Tim and Neil Finn. There are gold records, original lyrics and oddities such as Neil's form-two exercise book. There's also a fine collection of Maori *taonga* (treasures) and an excellent display on the Waikato War.

The **Rose Garden** is next to the i-SITE and has 2000 bushes and 51 varieties with fabulously fruity names like Big Daddy, Disco Dancer, Lady Gay and Sexy Rexy. They usually bloom from November to April.

TE AWAMUTU'S SACRED SOUND

In the opening lines of Crowded House's first single ('Mean to Me'), Neil Finn single-handedly raised his sleepy hometown, Te Awamutu, to international attention. It wasn't the first time it had provided inspiration – Split Enz songs *Haul Away* and *Kia Kaha*, with older brother Tim, include similar references.

Despite NZ's brilliant song-writing brothers being far from the height of their fame, Finn devotees continue to make Te Awamutu pilgrimages – just ask the staff at the i-SITE. They do a brisk trade in Finn T-shirts, Finn stamps and walking-tour brochures of sites from Finn history (their childhood home at 588 Teasdale St, their school, even Neil's piano tutor's house). It's NZ's version of Graceland.

If you're hoping for a close encounter with greatness, it's unlikely. The boys skipped town decades ago and Finn Senior now lives in Cambridge.

St John's Anglican Church (1854), constructed of matai and rimu, is across the road from the i-SITE (where the key is kept). The sanctuary's stained-glass window is one of the oldest in the country. Memorials relating to the Waikato War can be seen here.

The **Events Centre** (☎ 07-871 2080; cnr Mahoe & Selwyn Sts; pool adult/child \$3.50/2; ☎ 6am-9pm Mon-Fri, 8am-7pm Sat & Sun) has a large indoor pool, hydroslide (\$3), gym (\$8), spas and saunas.

Festivals & Events

The annual **Rose & Cultural Festival** (www.teawamu.co.nz) is held in early February, featuring live music, exhibitions, the Miss Rosetown Pageant, Rosetown Idol and a film festival.

Sleeping

Rosetown Motel (☎ 07-871 5779; www.teawamutumotel.co.nz; 844 Kihikihi Rd; d \$90-150; (P) ♿) The comfortable units at Rosetown have kitchens, Sky TV and share a spa, making them a solid choice if you're hankering for straight-up small-town sleeps.

Cloverdale House (☎ 07-872 1702; cloverdale@xtra.co.nz; 141 Long Rd; d/q \$110/200; (P)) Indulge your farmer fantasies at this smart new place in the dairy heartland, 8km east of Cambridge Rd. Two double rooms with en suites share a common lounge and kitchen (breakfast ingredients provided).

Eating & Drinking

Indian Aroma (☎ 07-871 5555; 23 Arawata St; mains \$12-17; ☎ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner daily; (V)) Brightening up the town with a bright yellow glow, this attractive restaurant serves all the fragrant favourites.

Redoubt Bar & Eatery (☎ 07-871 4768; cnr Rewi & Alexandra Sts; mains \$14-25) A relaxed little place to eat or drink, with cheap but potent cocktails, old photos on the walls and a decent menu stretching from pasta to curry.

Entertainment

Regent 3 Cinema (☎ 07-871 6678; Alexandra St; tickets \$14) Built in 1932, this Art Deco cinema has four screens and fabulous movie memorabilia in the foyer.

Getting There & Away

Te Awamutu is on SH3, halfway between Hamilton and Otorohanga (29km either way). The regional bus service **Busit!** (☎ 0800 428 7546; www.busit.co.nz) is the cheapest option

for Hamilton (adult/child \$6/4, 30 minutes, five daily).

Three daily **InterCity** (☎ 07-834 3457; www.intercity.co.nz) services stop outside Stewart Law Motors in Mahoe St. Destinations include Auckland (\$27 to \$40, 2½ hours), Hamilton (\$20, 29 minutes) and Otorohanga (\$20, 24 minutes).

Dalroy (☎ 0508 465 622; www.dalroytours.co.nz) runs buses daily between Auckland (\$24, two hours) and New Plymouth (\$35, 3¼ hours), leaving from outside the visitor information centre. Stops include Hamilton (\$9, 25 minutes) and Otorohanga (\$8, 20 minutes).

AROUND TE AWAMUTU Battle Sites

Before the Waikato invasion, **Rangiaowhia** (5km east of Te Awamutu) was a thriving Maori farming town – with thousands of inhabitants, two churches, a flour mill and a racecourse – exporting wheat, maize, potatoes and fruit to as far afield as Australia. In many ways it was the perfect model of what NZ under the Maori version of Treaty of Waitangi had desired – two sovereign peoples interacting to mutual advantage.

In February 1864 the settlement was left undefended while King Tawhiao's warriors held fortified positions further north. In a key tactical move, General Cameron outflanked them and took the town, killing women, children and the elderly in the process. This was a turning point in the campaign, demoralising the Maori and drawing the warriors out of their near impregnable *pa* fortifications.

Sadly, all that remains is the cute Anglican **St Paul's Church** (1854) and the Catholic mission's **cemetery**, standing in the midst of rich farming land – confiscated from the Maori and distributed to colonial soldiers.

The war ended further south at **Orakau**, where a roadside obelisk marks the site where 300 Maori led by Rewi Maniapoto repulsed three days of attacks against an unfinished *pa* by 1500 troops, before breaking out and retreating to what is now known as the King Country (losing 70 warriors). Rewi's defiant cry '*Ka whawhai tonu ahau ki a koe, ake, ake, ake*' (We shall fight on forever and ever and ever) is a rallying call for Maori activists to this day. There's a **memorial to Rewi Maniapoto**, who was well respected by both sides, in nearby Kihikihi, 4km south of Te Awamutu on SH3.

Maungatautari

Can a landlocked volcano become an island paradise? Inspired by the success of pest eradication and native species reintroduction in the Hauraki Gulf, a community trust has erected 47km of pest-proof fence around the triple peaks of Maungatautari (797m) to create the impressive **Maungatautari Ecological Island**. This atoll of rainforest dominates the skyline between Te Awamutu and Karapiro and is now home to its first kiwi chicks in 100 years. The shortest route to the peak (100 minutes) is from the northern side while the entire north-south walk will take around six hours. Take Maungatautari Rd then Hicks Rd if coming from Karapiro, or Arapuni Rd then Tari Rd from Te Awamutu.

Out In The Styx (☎ 07-872 4505; www.styx.co.nz; 2117 Arapuni Rd, Pukeatua; dm \$85, s \$125-150, d \$250-300; (P)), near the south end, provides a drop-off service to the northern entrance for guests (\$10 per person). The three luxuriously furnished themed rooms (Polynesian, African or Maori) are especially nice and there's a spa for soothing weary legs. Prices include a four-course dinner and breakfast.

West of the mountain, **Judge Valley** (Map p217; ☎ 07-872 1821; www.judgevalley.com; 178 Judge Rd, Puhue) makes the most of a frost-free microclimate to produce award-winning red wines. Tastings are provided on an informal basis; try between 9am and 4pm weekdays. Their simple, self-contained Cabernet Chalet (\$150 for two) has a spa and includes complementary bubbles and breakfast provisions. It's well signposted from the Te Awamutu-Cambridge Rd.

Wharepapa South

A surreal landscape of craggy limestone provides some of the best rock climbing in the North Island. This isn't the best place for wannabe Spideermen (or women) to don their lycra bodysuits for the first time, but if you have the basic skills get ready to let your inner superhero shine.

Bryce's Rockclimbing (☎ 07-872 2533; www.rockclimb.co.nz; 1424 Owairaka Valley Rd; dm/d \$20/52) is suited to the serious climber. There's a well-stocked shop that sells and hires out a full range of climbing gear, an indoor bouldering cave (free to those staying on site) and a licensed café. A day's instruction costs \$365 for one or two people.

Castle Rock Adventure (☎ 07-872 2509; www.castlerockadventure.co.nz; 1250 Owairaka Valley Rd) provides a range of rugged activities which get progressively cheaper per head depending on how many comrades you can muster up. For a solitary adventurer a half-day's rock climbing will set you back \$150 (full day \$225) while two-and-a-half hours of abseiling is \$90. A half-day combo involving rock climbing, abseiling and mountain biking starts at \$175 (full day \$250).

CAMBRIDGE

pop 11,300

The name says it all. Despite the rambunctious Waikato River looking nothing like the Cam, the good burghers of Cambridge have done all they can to assume an air of English gentility. There are village greens, avenues lined with magnificent exotic trees and an indecent number of faux-Tudor houses. Even the Superloo looks like a Victorian cottage.

Famous for the breeding and training of thoroughbred horses, you can almost smell the wealth of the area in its charming main street, dotted with fine Edwardian and Art Deco buildings. Equine references are rife in public sculpture, and plaques boast of Melbourne Cup winners. It's an altogether pleasant place to work on your 'rah-rah' voice and while away a day or two.

Information

The **Cambridge i-SITE** (☎ 07-823 3456; www.cambridgeinfo.co.nz; cnr Victoria & Queen Sts; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun) has free heritage trail and town maps.

Sights & Activities

HERITAGE

Whether you're hip to history or tantalised by trees, the two **heritage trails** cover all the sights, including the **Waikato River** and leafy little **Te Ko Utu Lake**. Don't miss the interior of **St Andrew's Anglican Church** (☎ 07-827 6751; 85 Hamilton Rd); look for the Gallipoli and Le Quesnoy window.

Apart from its Spanish Mission **town clock**, **Jubilee Gardens** (Victoria St) is a tribute to the 'mother country'. A British lion guards the **cenotaph**, with a plaque that reads 'Tell Britain ye who mark this monument faithful to her we fell and rest content'. It's hard to tell whether it's the sentiment or the grammar that has put such a confused look on the face of the handsome bare-chested soldier statue.

The delightfully musty **Cambridge Museum** (☎ 07-827 3319; Victoria St; admission by donation; 🕒 10am-4pm Mon-Sat, to 2pm Sun), housed in the former courthouse, has the usual pioneer relics and a scale model of the local Te Totara Pa before it was wiped out.

Cambridge Country Store (☎ 07-827 8715; 92 Victoria St; 🕒 8.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 9am-5pm Sun; 📺), housed in a wooden Gothic church, has a wide range of mainly Kiwi-made gifts and interesting souvenirs.

HORSEY

Cambridge Thoroughbred Lodge (☎ 07-827 8118; www.cambridgethoroughbredlodge.co.nz; tours adult/child \$8/5, shows adult/child \$12/5; 🕒 9am-3pm), 6km south of town on SH1, is a top-notch horse stud. Book ahead for hour-long tours or 'NZ Horse Magic' shows which take place several times a week.

Stud Tours (☎ 027 497 5346; www.barrylee.co.nz; tours \$120) offers visits to local stud farms by a bloodstock expert. Prices are for up to four people, which makes this a reasonably priced and unique tour. Booking is essential, especially in January.

Cambridge Raceway (☎ 07-827 5506; www.cambridgeraceway.co.nz; Taylor St; admission \$5) is the venue for harness and greyhound racing three times a month. Check the website for dates and times.

LAKE KARAPIRO

Eight kilometres southwest of Cambridge, Karapiro is the furthest downstream of a chain of eight hydroelectric power stations on the Waikato River. It's an impressive sight, especially when driving across the top of the 1947 dam. The 21km-long lake is popular for all kinds of aquatic sports, especially rowing. The World Rowing Championships will be held here in September 2010; book ahead if you want to get anywhere near the place.

The popular **Boatshed Café** (☎ 07-827 8286; www.theboatshed.net.nz; 21 Amber Lane; mains \$12-15; 🕒 lunch Wed-Sun) on the lakeside (take Gorton Rd from SH1) sells mainly homemade food, some of which is gluten- and dairy-free. The rowing boat of Olympian Rob Waddell is part of the décor – he used to practise here. Basic kayaks can be hired for \$20/40 per half-/full day or better ones for \$25/50. You can paddle to a couple of waterfalls in around an hour.

Camjet (☎ 0800 226 538; www.camjet.co.nz; adult/child \$60/35) can help adrenaline junkies shake off

the Cambridge cobwebs with a 45-minute spin to Karapiro on a jetboat (minimum two people).

Sleeping

Most of the best options are in the surrounding farmland. Decent budget digs are thin on the ground but there's no shortage of mid-range motels and quaint B&Bs.

BUDGET

Lake Karapiro Camping & Pursuits Centre (☎ 07-827 4178; www.lakekarapiro.co.nz; 601 Maungatautari Rd; sites per adult/child \$9/6, chalets d/tr/q \$50/60/80; 📺) Geared for rowing events, this lakeside complex is serenely peaceful outside of the big fixtures. The trim wooden chalets have bunk beds, en suites, fridges and communal kitchen facilities.

Cambridge Motor Park (☎ 07-827 5649; http://cambridge.kiwiholidayparks.com; 32 Scott St; sites per person \$13, cabins s \$35-55, d \$45-60, unit \$85; 📺) A quiet, well-maintained campground with lots of green, green grass. You'll find it over the bridge from Cambridge town centre.

MIDRANGE

Lofthouse (☎ 07-827 3693; www.lofthouse.co.nz; 17 Dunning Rd; apt \$130; 📺) If you're travelling with friends, this self-contained rural retreat is an absolute steal – sleeping four people for the price. Jump in the spa and enjoy the awesome views. It's 3km off SH1, near the top of Karapiro, and 11km from Cambridge.

Birches (☎ 07-827 6556; www.birches.co.nz; 263 Maungatautari Rd; d \$140; 📺) You can make use of the farmhouse's pool, spa and tennis court if you're staying in this charming self-contained country cottage, in farmland immediately southeast of Cambridge on the back road to Karapiro.

Cambridge Mews (☎ 07-827 7166; www.cambridge-mews.co.nz; 20 Hamilton Rd; units \$140-240) All the spacious units in this motel have double spa baths, kitchens, Sky TV and are immaculately maintained. The architect did a great job but the interior decorator less so.

Park House (☎ 07-827 6368; www.parkhouse.co.nz; 70 Queen St; s/d/tw \$130/160/160; 📺) Try to avoid the word 'charming' when describing this centrally located Tudor impostor full of antiques, quilts and period features. Experienced hosts serve an ample breakfast in the formal dining room and add their touch of old-world charm.

TOP END

Houseboat Holidays (☎ 07-827 2195; www.houseboat-escape.co.nz; 2 nights \$600) Humming 'Proud Mary' is acceptable as it is technically still a river, but you're more likely to be relaxing than rolling on tranquil Lake Karapiro. Load up this smart houseboat (sleeping seven) with kayaks or fishing gear for a peaceful retreat.

Emanuel's (☎ 07-823 7414; www.emanuels.co.nz; SH1; d/ste \$400/750; 📺) Call it rustic grandeur. This modern house with commanding views of Lake Karapiro has high ceilings, moulded cornices and leadlights. If you think the standard rooms are luxurious, check out the sumptuous Versace bathroom (gold fittings) in the mammoth 'prestige' suite. It's located 20km from Cambridge, near the Matamata turn-off.

Eating

Courtyard Sushi (☎ 07-827 4478; 7 Empire St; per piece \$1-2; 🕒 9.30am-3pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) A great little place for an authentically Japanese sushi fix.

Deli on the Corner (☎ 07-827 5370; 48 Victoria St; meals \$9-16; 🕒 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9-4pm Sat, 10am-3pm Sun) With a milk bar attached, this triangular deli-café has character, gourmet home cooking and tasty supplies.

ourpick! Red Cherry (☎ 07-823 1515; cnr SH1 & Forrest Rd; mains \$9-17; 🕒 9am-3pm) Whoever's driving the cherry red espresso machine would qualify for the Formula 1. The beans are roasted on-site and accompanied by scrummy counter food and cooked breakfasts. It's Cambridge's best café by a country mile; it's actually a country 4km out of Cambridge on the way to Hamilton.

Rata (☎ 07-823 0999; 64c Victoria St; mains \$12-19; 🕒 8.30am-4pm) Sit in either the funky old shop-front or the courtyard garden for excellent coffee and food.

Café Oasis (☎ 07-827 8004; 35 Duke St; mains \$14-30; 🕒 11am-late Mon-Fri, 9.30am-late Sat & Sun; 📺) It's a strange combo – from the name you'd expect felafels but instead you get a menu that's half authentic Thai, half classic European. Fusion be damned.

Getting There & Away

Being on SH1, 22km southeast of Hamilton, Cambridge is well connected by bus.

Environment Waikato's **Busit!** (☎ 0800 428 7546; www.busit.co.nz) heads to Hamilton (\$6, 40 minutes) three times each weekday.

InterCity/Newmans (☎ 07-834 3457; www.intercity.co.nz; cnr Anglesea & Bryce Sts) stops include

Auckland (\$35 to \$47, 2½ hours), Hamilton (\$15 to \$23, 24 minutes), Matamata (\$19, 30 minutes), Rotorua (\$15 to \$36, 70 minutes) and Wellington (\$70 to \$87, 8½ hours).

Pavlovich Express (☎ 0800 759 999; www.pavlovich-express.co.nz) has daily services to Auckland (\$19, 2¼ hours), Hamilton (\$5, 25 minutes) and Rotorua (\$10, one hour).

Budget operators **Naked Bus** (www.nakedbus.com) have advance fares starting from \$1 on trips to Auckland (2¼ hours), Hamilton (30 minutes), Matamata (30 minutes), Rotorua (one hour) and Wellington (9½ hours).

Go Kiwi (☎ 0800 446 549; www.go-kiwi.co.nz) has daily shuttles to/from Auckland (\$23, three hours), Hamilton (\$8, 30 minutes), Matamata (\$9, 20 minutes) and Tauranga (\$15, 85 minutes).

TIRAU pop 720

Cambridge's cosy Anglophilia seems even more exaggerated when you reach the next stop on SH1. Tirau has fallen head-over-heels in love with corrugated iron. The **Tirau i-SITE** (☎ 07-883 1202; www.tirauinfo.co.nz; SH1; 🕒 9am-5pm) is housed in a giant corrugated dog, while every other building has a similarly crinkly oversized sculpture. Only in NZ could such a humorously ironic testimony to Kiwi practicality and egalitarianism be adopted by a small town with such obvious delight.

Just off SH27, 5km north of Tirau, **Oraka Deer Park** (☎ 07-883 1382; www.oraka-deer.co.nz; 71 Bayly Rd; d \$90, cottage \$200-260; 📺) offers a self-contained cottage (easily sleeping five) or an en-suite room in the house. Kids will love the deer, not to mention the pool, spa and tennis court.

The corrugated-iron virus has also infected Putaruru, a bigger town 8km further along SH1. **Putaruru Bakehouse & Café** (☎ 07-883 7794; 44 Tirau St; mains \$5-17; 🕒 5am-8.30pm Sun-Tue, 5.30am-9pm Wed-Sat) has a truck-stop ambience but does an award-winning mince-and-gravy pie (\$2.30) and cheap cooked meals.

MATAMATA pop 7800

Not as well-heeled as Cambridge but just as horsey, Matamata was one of those pleasant country towns you drove through until Peter Jackson's epic film trilogy *Lord of the Rings* put it on the map. The residents seem to have adjusted to life in Hobbiton with wry bemusement:

'Strewth mate, all that elf nonsense doesn't really rattle my chains but it was nice to see the old Kaimais on the silver screen'.

During the filming Matamata was a great place to live if you were short and chubby-cheeked – 300 locals got work as extras (hairy feet weren't a prerequisite).

Truth be told, there's not a lot of point visiting Matamata unless you're a hobbit-botherer, but it does have a great café, beautiful avenues of mature trees, and its undulating green hills are pleasantly Shire-like. If your souvenir checklist includes a thoroughbred racehorse, this is the place to come.

Information

Matamata i-SITE (☎ 07-888 7260; www.matamatanz.co.nz; 45 Broadway; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat & Sun) has free town maps and all the guff on local attractions. There's an internet café across the road.

Sights & Activities

Hobbiton Movie Set & Farm Tours (☎ 07-888 6838; www.hobbitontours.com; 501 Buckland Rd; adult/10-14yr/under 10 \$50/25/free; ☎ tours 9.00am, 11.05am, 12.20pm, 1.35pm, 2.50pm) is the country's top attraction for Ring-ites. Due to copyright, all of the intricately constructed movie sets around the country had to be destroyed, but Hobbiton's owners successfully negotiated to keep the hobbit holes, albeit without their wonderful exteriors. If you're not a massive fan, don't bother coming: it is, after all, just a sheep farm with a lake, large tree and some plain white boards set into the hill. But for the devotee (of which there are many) it's an opportunity to let your imagination fly. A good Kiwi farmer (or hobbit) never lets an opportunity go by, so you can complete your tour with the hands-on **Sheep Farm Experience** (adult/child \$10/5). Free transfers leave from the Matamata i-SITE 20 minutes prior to each tour. Otherwise, head towards Cambridge and turn right into Puketutu Rd and then left into Buckland Rd, stopping at the Shire's Rest café.

Pick up the pamphlet from the i-SITE for a 5.3km **heritage trail**, taking in Matamata's best buildings.

Skydive Waikato (☎ 07-888 8763; www.freefall.co.nz; 7500-15,000ft tandem \$185-290) and **Dropzone** (☎ 027 494 2537; www.dropzone.co.nz; 9000ft tandem \$220) both offer thrilling gravity-powered plummeters from Matamata Airfield, 10km north of Matamata on SH27.

Firth Tower (☎ 07-888 8369; Tower Rd; adult/child \$5/1; ☎ 10am-4pm Thu-Sun) was built by Auckland businessman Josiah Firth after acquiring 56,000 acres from his friend Wiremu Tamihana, chief of Ngati Haua. The 18m concrete tower (1882) was a fashionable status symbol rather than for defensive purposes. It's filled with Maori and pioneer artefacts and around it are 10 other historic buildings including a school-room, church and jail. It's 3km from town.

Opal Hot Springs (☎ 07-888 8198; www.opalhot springs.co.nz; 257 Okauia Springs Rd; adult/child \$6/3, 30min private spas \$8/4; ☎ 9am-9pm) isn't nearly as glamorous as it sounds but it does have three large thermal pools. Turn off just north of Firth Tower and follow the road for 2km.

Carry on past Opal Pools and then follow the Kaimai Ranges north for 9km to visit the spectacular 150m-high **Wairere Falls**. From the car park it's a 45-minute walk through native bush to the lookout or a steep 90-minute climb to the summit.

Sleeping

Broadway Motel & Miro Court Villas (☎ 07-888 8482; www.broadwaymatamata.co.nz, www.mirocourt.co.nz; 128 Broadway; s \$70-125, d \$80-145, tr \$95-140; (P) (E)) This sprawling motel complex has spread from a well-maintained older-style block to progressively newer and flashier blocks set back from the street. The nicest are the chic apartment-style Miro Court villas. There's a fun kids' play area in the centre.

Southern Belle (☎ 07-888 5518; www.southernbelle.co.nz; 101 Firth St; s/d/tr/q \$80/120/150/180; (P)) Taking over the top floor of a grand old house, this self-contained suite has three elegant bedrooms, a comfortable lounge and a kitchenette.

Eating

Ourpick Workman's Café Bar (☎ 07-888 5498; 52 Broadway; lunch \$15-16, dinner \$23-29; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Truly eccentric (one wall is lined with Art Deco mirrors while another holds an impressive collection of transistor radios), this funky eatery has built itself a reputation that extends beyond Matamata. The poached salmon Benedict is quite possibly the best in the country.

Thai Royal Restaurant (☎ 07-888 5615; 2 Tainui St; mains \$17-25; ☎ lunch & dinner; (V)) It can't be easy to find fresh strands of green peppercorns in Matamata, but this colourful place (perhaps literally) goes the extra mile to deliver a genuine, fragrant Thai experience.

Getting There & Away

Matamata is on SH27, 20km north of Tirau.

InterCity (☎ 07-834 3457; www.intercity.co.nz) runs daily buses to Cambridge (\$19, 30 minutes), Hamilton (\$24, 54 minutes), Tauranga (\$20, one hour) and Rotorua (\$24, one hour).

Budget operators **Naked Bus** (www.nakedbus.com) have advance fares starting from \$1 on daily trips to Auckland (3½ hours), Hamilton (one hour), Cambridge (30 minutes) and Tauranga (45 minutes).

Go Kiwi (☎ 0800 446 549; www.go-kiwi.co.nz) has daily shuttles to/from Auckland (\$27, 3¼ hours), Cambridge (\$9, 20 minutes) and Tauranga (\$14, one hour).

TE AROHA

pop 3800

Te Aroha has a good vibe. You could even say that it's got 'the love', which is the literal meaning of the name. Nestled at the foot of bush-clad 952m-high Mt Te Aroha, it's a good base for bushwalking or 'taking the waters' in the therapeutic hot springs.

Information

Post office (170 Whitaker St)

Te Aroha i-SITE (☎ 07-884 8052; www.tearohanz.com; 102 Whitaker St; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat & Sun)

Sights & Activities

The thermal area is in the quaint Edwardian domain, behind the i-SITE, split into separate facilities for soakers and splashers. **The Mineral Spa Bath House** (☎ 07-884 8717; www.tearohapools.co.nz; 30min session 1-4 people \$15-50; ☎ 10am-10pm) offers relaxing private tubs and aromatherapy. Near the entrance a **drinking fountain** allows you to try the warm soda water – an acquired taste but reputedly good for constipation. Nearby, the temperamental **Mokena Geyser** – the world's only known soda geyser – blows its top every 40 minutes or so, shooting water 3m into the air.

Lower down the domain, the **Leisure Pools** (☎ 07-884 4498; adult/child \$5/3; ☎ 10am-5.45pm Mon-Fri, to 6.45pm Sat & Sun) have outdoor heated freshwater pools for splashing about in. Within the same complex, the natural spa waters of the historic indoor **No 2 Bathhouse** (adult/child \$12.50/7.50; ☎ weekends only) provide relief from rheumatism and arthritis.

Just down the hill, the **museum** (☎ 07-884 4427; www.tearoha-museum.com; adult/child \$3/1; ☎ 11am-4pm Dec-Mar, 11am-4pm Mon-Thu, 1-4pm Fri-Sun Apr-Nov) is in

the ornate former thermal sanatorium. More interesting than most, the displays include souvenir ceramics.

Hiking trails up Mt Te Aroha start at the top of the domain. It takes 45 minutes to climb up to the **Bald Spur/Whakapipi Lookout** (350m). Then it's another 2.7km (two hours) climbing to the summit.

Bird-lovers should try the easier one-hour hike (4km but flat) around the **Howarth Wetlands Reserve**, reached from the southern part of the town. There's also a 23-building **heritage trail** around town; pick up the pamphlet from the i-SITE (\$1).

Sleeping BUDGET

Te Aroha Holiday Park (☎ 07-884 9567; www.tearoha-info.co.nz/HolidayPark/; 217 Stanley Rd; sites per person \$9, dm \$15, cabins \$25-40, units \$50-80; (P) (E)) Wake up to a bird orchestra among the large oaks at this site, equipped with tennis court, gym and hot pool, 3km southwest of town. The Love Holiday Park owners also speak German and Japanese.

Ourpick Te Aroha YHA (☎ 07-884 8739; www.yha.co.nz; Miro St; dm/d \$21/50) The Love YHA is a cosy, TV-free, three-bedroom cottage with a homely atmosphere, welcoming management and a well-stocked herb rack. Free mountain bikes are available; a 10km mountain-bike track starts at the back door.

MIDRANGE

Te Aroha Motel (☎ 07-884 9417; tearohamotel@extra.co.nz; 108 Whitaker St; s/d/tw/tr/q \$75/85/100/115/130) Welcome to The Love Motel. This collection of old-fashioned, reasonably priced, tidy units with kitchenettes puts you in the centre of town, and the owners leave lollies on your pillows.

Aroha Mountain Lodge (☎ 07-884 8134; www.arohamountainlodge.co.nz; 5 Boundary St; s/d/ste/cottage \$115/125/145/250; (P)) Spread over two *aroha*-ly Edwardian villas, Love Mountain Lodge offers affordable luxury and optional breakfasts (\$20 per head). The self-contained Gold Miner's Cottage sleeps up to six.

Eating & Drinking

Lovetown's main drag, Whitaker St, has a far better range of decent eateries than you'd expect for its size.

Pearls Café & Bar (☎ 07-884 7574; 174 Whitaker St; brunch \$8-14, dinner \$18-27; ☎ 9am-4pm Sun-Tue, to

late Wed-Sat) Housed in a big, red former bank building, this friendly spot does decent grub and morphs into a bar in the evenings.

Berlusconi Wine Bar (☎ 07-884 9307; 149 Whitaker St; brunch \$8-17, pizza \$20-22; 🕒 4.30pm-late Tue-Thu, 10.30am-late Fri-Sun) We know the former Italian PM has fingers in many pies but surely they don't extend to this upmarket wine, tapas and pizza bar in Te Aroha. Mind you, it is suave enough.

Self-caterers should try the **Organic Health Shop** (☎ 07-884 9696; 9 Lawrence Ave; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) for fresh produce, dairy products, cereals and yummy baking.

Getting There & Away

Te Aroha is on SH26, 21km south of Paeroa and 55km northeast of Hamilton. Environment Waikato's **Busit!** (☎ 0800 428 7546; www.busit.co.nz) has three services on weekdays to Hamilton (\$7.80, one hour) and Paeroa (\$1.40, 20 minutes).

THE KING COUNTRY

Holding good claim to the title of NZ's rural heartland, this is the kind of no-nonsense place that raises cattle and All Blacks. A bastion of independent Maoridom, it was never conquered in the war against the King Movement (see p219). The story goes that King Tawhiao placed his hat on a large map of NZ and declared that all the land it covered would remain under his *mana* (authority), and the region was effectively off limits to Europeans until 1883.

At this stage it was still largely covered by *Te Nehe-nehe-nui* (the big forest) and home to Ngati Maniapoto, descended from the Tainui migration. After allowing railway surveyors to assess the land, Maori control was gradually chipped away. An example is the Waitomo Caves, which were taken by the Crown in 1906 and only returned to its rightful owners in 1989.

The caves are the area's major drawcard. An incredible natural phenomenon in themselves, they've been sexed up even more with a smorgasbord of adrenaline-inducing activities on offer.

KAWHIA

pop 670
Along with resisting cultural annihilation this fishing village has avoided large-scale development, retaining its sleepy feel despite its

considerable natural attractions. It's basically Raglan (p223) and Hot Water Beach (p208) rolled into one, but without the tourists. There's not much here except for the general store/post office, a couple of takeaways and a petrol station. Even Captain Cook blinked and missed the narrow entrance to the large harbour when he sailed past in 1770.

It was in Kawhia that the *Tainui waka* – one of the ancestral canoes that arrived during the 14th century – made its final landing. The two leaders of the expedition – Hoturoa, the chief/captain, and Rakataura, the *tohunga* (priest) – knew that their new home was destined to be on the west coast, searching until they finally recognised the prophesied place. When they landed, they tied the *waka* to a pohutukawa tree on the shore, naming the tree Tangi te Korowhiti. The unlabelled tree still stands on the shoreline between the wharf and Maketu Marae. At the end of its long, epic voyage, the *waka* was dragged up onto a hill and buried. Sacred stones were placed at either end to mark its resting place.

Famed Ngati Toa warrior chief Te Rauparaha, composer of the famous *haka 'Ka Mate'*, was born nearby in the 1760s.

Sights & Activities

Kawhia Museum (☎ 07-871 0161; admission free; 🕒 11am-4pm Wed-Sun) is a modest but cute affair near the wharf, and serves as the information centre.

Kayaks can be hired on the incoming tide from Kawhia Beachside S-Cape (opposite) for \$7.50/15 per hour per single/double. The skipper of **Kawhia Harbour Cruises** (☎ 07-871 0149; cruises 2hr/3hr \$30/40) is well placed to provide a cultural and historical commentary as his family have resided in Kawhia since the arrival of the *Tainui waka*. For fishing trips contact **Dove Charters** (☎ 07-871 5854; full day \$100).

Six kilometres west of Kawhia is Ocean Beach and its high, black-sand dunes. Swimming can be dangerous, but one to two hours either side of low tide you can find the **Te Puia Hot Springs** in the sand – dig a hole for your own natural hot pool. You can walk from the car park or there's a drivable track over the dunes.

From the wharf, a pleasant walk extends along the coast to **Maketu Marae**, which has an impressively carved meeting house, Auaukiterangi. Through the *marae* grounds and behind the wooden fence, two stones (Hani and Puna) mark the burial place of the

Tainui canoe (see opposite). This *marae* is private property – don't enter without permission from an elder. Unfortunately you can't see a lot from the road.

Festivals & Events

Maori culture comes to the fore during the annual **Kai Festival** (www.kawhiaharbour.co.nz/maori_kai_festival.php). Held in early February, over 10,000 people descend to enjoy traditional *kai* (food) and catch up with *whanau* (relations). Once you've filled up on seafood, *rewana* bread and rotten corn you can settle in to watch the bands and rousing *kapa haka* performances.

Sleeping & Eating

Kawhia Beachside S-Cape (☎ 07-871 0727; www.kawhiabeachsideescape.co.nz; 225 Pouewe St; sites \$30, cabins dm/s/d \$25/40/50, cottages \$120-160) Perfectly positioned on the water's edge at the entrance to Kawhia, this camping ground has comfortable new cottages. While the backpackers block looks rudimentary, it's kept clean.

Kawhia Motel (☎ 07-871 0865, kawhiamotel@xtra.co.nz; cnr Jervois & Tainui Sts; s \$99, d \$115-145, tr \$135-165, q \$155-185) Six perkily painted, well-kept, old-school motel units right next to the shops.

Annie's Café & Restaurant (☎ 07-871 0198; 146 Jervois St; meals \$5-19; 🕒 9.30am-4pm, closed Mon & Tue in winter) An old-fashioned licensed eatery in the main street, serving espresso, sandwiches and local specialities such as flounder and white-bait. There's also an internet terminal.

Getting There & Away

This remote outpost doesn't have a bus service. Take SH31 from Otorohanga or explore the scenic but rough unsealed road to Raglan (see p226).

OTOROHANGA

pop 2700
One of several nondescript North Island towns to adopt a gimmick (we're looking at you Tirau, Paeroa, Katikati, Bulls and Hobbiton, sorry, Matamata), Otorohanga (Oto to his mates) has a main street lined with cherished icons of Kiwiana. You'll learn about sheep, gumboots, jandals, No 8 wire, All Blacks, the beloved Buzzy Bee children's toy and – bravely risking fisticuffs with the Australian Country Women's Association – the pavlova (a creamy meringue dessert). Gimmicks aside, the Kiwi House is well worth a visit.

Information

Otorohanga i-SITE (☎ 07-873 8951; www.otorohanga.co.nz; 21 Maniapoto St; 🕒 10am-3pm, longer in summer) Internet access and information.
Post office (39 Maniapoto St)

Sights

The **Kiwi House Native Bird Park** (☎ 07-873 7391; www.kiwihouse.org.nz; 20 Alex Telfer Dr; adult/child \$15/4; 🕒 9am-5pm) has a nocturnal enclosure where you can see active kiwi energetically digging with their long beaks, searching for food. Other native birds, such as kaka, kea, falcon, morepork and weka, are well displayed.

The small **museum** (☎ 07-873 8849; Kakamutu Rd; admission free; 🕒 2-4pm Sun) covers local history and has a collection of historic buildings, including a church and a lock-up.

As well as the Kiwiana displays, **Maniapoto St** has festive hanging flower baskets and two modern carved *pou* (posts) featuring key ancestors of the Ngati Maniapoto tribe.

If you're keen to buy a Buzzy Bee or a Maori carving actually made by a Maori, **Kiwiana Crafts** (☎ 07-873 7183; 43 Maniapoto St; 🕒 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) has some authentic gems hidden among the usual souvenir tat.

Sleeping

Otorohanga Holiday Park (☎ 07-873 7253; www.kiwhiholidaypark.co.nz; 20 Huiputea Dr; sites per person \$15, cabins \$50-54, units \$68-95; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) It's not the most attractive locale, backing on to the train tracks, but the park's tidy facilities include a fitness centre and sauna.

Hilltin Homestay B&B (☎ 07-873 8600; www.hilltin-homestay.co.nz; 30 Honikini Rd; dm \$30, d \$60-80; 🕒 10am-10pm) It is indeed made of tin (well, corrugated iron) and on a hill, in farmland 2km from town off SH31. This new house has incredible views, a flash four-bed dorm and two private doubles, one with an en suite.

Eating & Drinking

Thirsty Weta (☎ 07-873 6699; 57 Maniapoto St; meals \$7-15; 🕒 10am-1am) The top pick in town, with hearty snacks (of the pizza, pasta, quesadilla variety) and the promise of things kicking off after dinner when the wine-bar vibe takes over and the musos plug in.

Origin Coffee Station (☎ 07-873 8550; 7 Wahanui Cres; 🕒 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) It's a long way from Malawi to the old Otorohanga railway station, but the beans don't seem to mind. The folks at Origin are dead serious about coffee, sourcing,

importing and roasting it themselves and then delivering it to your table, strong and perfectly formed, and possibly with a slice of cake.

Getting There & Away

InterCity/Newmans (☎ 0508 353 947; www.intercity.co.nz) buses arrive and depart from the i-SITE, which sells tickets. There are daily buses to Auckland (\$48, three hours), Te Awamutu (\$20, 24 minutes), Te Kuiti (\$19, 15 minutes) and Rotorua (\$49, two hours).

The **Waitomo Shuttle** (☎ 0800 808 279) heads to the caves (\$10, 15 minutes, booking necessary) five times daily, coordinating with bus and train arrivals.

Dalroy (☎ 0508 465 622; www.dalroytours.co.nz) runs buses daily between Auckland (\$32, three hours) and New Plymouth (\$30, 2½ hours). Stops include Te Awamutu (\$8, 20 minutes) and Te Kuiti (\$8, 15 minutes).

Otorohanga is on the **Overlander** (☎ 0800 872 467; www.transscenic.co.nz; daily Dec-Apr, Fri-Sun May-Nov) train route between Auckland (\$49, three hours) and Wellington (\$109, 9 hours) via Hamilton (\$49, 35 minutes) and Te Kuiti (\$49, 15 minutes).

WAITOMO CAVES

Even if damp, dark tunnels sound like your idea of hell, take a chill pill and head to Waitomo anyway. These limestone caves with accompanying geological formations and glowing bugs are deservedly one of the premier attractions of the North Island.

Your Waitomo experience can be as claustrophobe-friendly as the electrically lit, cathedral-like and extremely beautiful Glow-worm Cave. But if it's adrenaline-pumping, gut-wrenching, soaking-wet, pitch-black, squeezing, plummeting excitement you're after, Waitomo can take care of that too.

The name Waitomo comes from *wai* (water) and *tomu* (hole or shaft); dotted throughout the countryside are numerous shafts dropping abruptly into underground cave systems and streams. There are more than 300 mapped caves in the Waitomo area. The three main caves – the Glow-worm Cave, Ruakuri and Aranui – have been bewitching visitors for over 100 years.

History

Ruakuri Cave was discovered by Maori 400 to 500 years ago when a hunter travelling in a war party with Kawhia chief Tane Tinorau was

attacked by a pack of dogs living in the cave entrance. The dogs were caught and eaten but the name Ruakuri (Den of Dogs) stuck. Shortly after, Tinorau moved his people into the area and the cave became a *wahi tapu* (sacred site), used for burials and for storing important *taonga*. By the 20th century the land had passed into the hands of the Holden family, who own it to this day.

The Glow-worm Cave had long been known to local Maori but they had no desire to explore it. That changed in December 1887 when the local chief, another Tane Tinorau, headed into the cave system, taking English surveyor Fred Mace with him. Mace prepared an account of the expedition, a map was made, photographs given to the government, and before long Tane Tinorau was operating tours of the cave. The tours must have made an impression as the government nationalised the land 19 years later – depriving the local *hapu* (subtribe) of a nice little earner. In 1989 this injustice was corrected and the *hapu* now owns and leases back the land, gets a slice of admission charges and provides much of the workforce.

Information

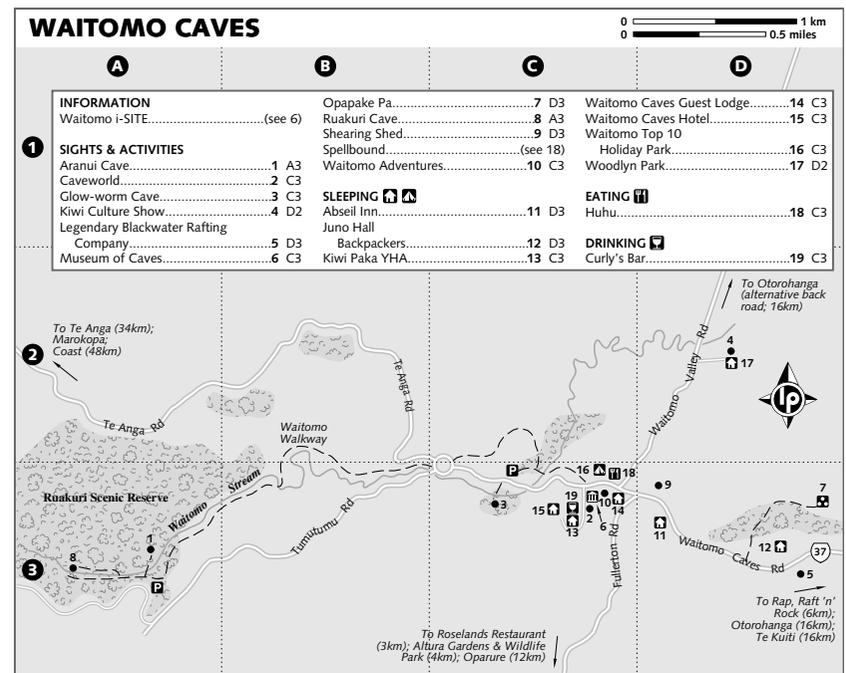
Waitomo i-SITE (☎ 07-878 7640; www.waitomocaves.com; 21 Waitomo Caves Rd; ☎ 8am-8pm Jan & Feb, to 5pm Mar-Dec) has internet access and a gift shop, and acts as a post office and booking agent.

Sights

WAITOMO CAVES

The big-three caves are all operated by the same company, so combo deals are available, including the **'3 of the best' Cave Pass** (☎ 0800 782 5874; www.waitomo.com; adult/child \$93/39). Try to avoid the large tour groups, most of which arrive between 10.30am and 2.30pm.

The 45-minute guided tour of the **Glow-worm Cave** (☎ 0800 456 922; Waitomo Caves Rd; adult/child \$35/15; ☎ tours every half hr 9am-5pm) leads past impressive stalactites and stalagmites into a large cavern known as the Cathedral. The acoustics are so good that Dame Kiri Te Kanawa and the Vienna Boys Choir have given concerts here. The highlight comes at the tour's end when you board a boat and swing off onto the river. As your eyes grow accustomed to the dark you'll see a Milky Way of little lights surrounding you – these are the glowworms. You can see them in lots of other places in NZ, but the ones in this cave



are something special. Conditions for their growth are just about perfect so there are a remarkable number of them.

Three kilometres west from the Glow-worm Cave is **Aranui Cave** (☎ 0800 456 922; Tumutumu Rd; adult/child \$32/15; ☎ tours 10am, 11am, 1pm, 2pm, 3pm). This cave is dry (hence no glowworms) but compensates with an incredible array of limestone formations. Thousands of tiny 'straw' stalactites hang from the ceiling. It's an hour's walk to the caves or the ticket office can arrange transport.

Culturally significant **Ruakuri Cave** (☎ 0800 782 5874; Tumutumu Rd; adult/child \$49/18; ☎ tours hourly 9am-10am & 11.30am-3.30pm) has recently reopened with an impressive 15m-high spiral staircase, removing the need to trample through the Maori burial site (see History, opposite) at the cave entrance (as tourists did for 84 years). The two-hour tours lead through 1.6km of the 7.5km system, taking in vast caverns with glowworms, subterranean streams and waterfalls, and intricate limestone structures. For as long as this cave has been open to the public, people have described it as spiritual – some claim it's haunted. It's customary to wash your

hands when leaving to remove the *tapu* (see p59). Tours depart from The Legendary Black Water Rafting Company (p238).

MUSEUM OF CAVES

This **museum** (☎ 07-878 7640; www.waitomo-museum.co.nz; 21 Waitomo Caves Rd; adult/child \$5/3; ☎ 8am-8pm Jan & Feb, to 5pm Mar-Dec) has excellent exhibits explaining how caves are formed, the flora and fauna that thrive in them and the history of Waitomo's caves and cave exploration. Displays include a cave model, fossils of extinct birds and animals that have been discovered in caves, and a cave crawl. Free entry is included with various activities.

ALTURA GARDENS & WILDLIFE PARK

Pat a blue-tongue lizard, chat with a cockatoo or try to outstare the moreporks in this five-acre privately run **park** (☎ 07-878 5278; www.alturapark.co.nz; 477 Fullerton Rd; adult/child \$12/5; ☎ 9am-5pm) featuring 85 species of birds and animals. It's not a zoo – expect llamas and sheep rather than lions and giraffes. It also runs leisurely **horse treks** (www.alturaparktorks.co.nz; 30/90 min \$50/80).

GLLOWWORM MAGIC

Glowworms are the larvae of the fungus gnat, which looks much like a large mosquito without mouth parts. The larva glowworms have luminescent organs that produce a soft, greenish light. Living in a sort of hammock suspended from an overhang, they weave sticky threads that trail down and catch unwary insects attracted by their lights. When an insect flies towards the light it gets stuck in the threads – the glowworm just has to reel it in for a feed.

The larval stage lasts for six to nine months, depending on how much food the glowworm gets. When it has grown to about the size of a matchstick, it goes into a pupa stage, much like a cocoon. The adult fungus gnat emerges about two weeks later.

The adult insect doesn't live very long because it doesn't have a mouth. It emerges, mates, lays eggs and dies, all within about two or three days. The sticky eggs, laid in groups of 40 or 50, hatch in about three weeks to become larval glowworms.

Glowworms thrive in moist, dark caves but they can survive anywhere if they have the requisites of moisture, an overhang to suspend from and insects to eat. Waitomo is famous for its glowworms but you can see them in many other places around NZ, both in caves and outdoors.

When you come upon glowworms, don't touch their hammocks or hanging threads, try not to make loud noises and don't shine a light right on them. All of these things will cause them to dim their lights. It takes them a few hours to become bright again, during which time the grub will go hungry. The glowworms that shine most brightly are the hungriest.

SHEARING SHED

The **Shearing Shed** (☎ 07-878 8371; Waitomo Caves Rd; admission free; ☎ 9am-4pm) is where big, fluffy, surprisingly sociable Angora rabbits are sheared for an audience (12.45pm daily). It's SPCA-approved and the rabbits really don't seem to mind the racklike device they're strapped into. The store has a variety of Angora products.

Activities

The array of underground adventures available is overwhelming, with most operators offering a combination of experiences. Stock up with brochures at the i-SITE or ask to borrow their helpful folder outlining all that's on offer. Call ahead for times, bookings and meeting places.

UNDERGROUND

Legendary Black Water Rafting Company (☎ 0800 228 464; 585 Waitomo Caves Rd; www.blackwater rafting.co.nz) can afford to skite as they invented black-water rafting. Black Labyrinth (three hours, \$95) involves floating in a wetsuit on an inner tube down a river that flows through Ruakuri Cave. The highlight is leaping off a small waterfall and then floating through a long, glowworm-covered passage. The trip ends with showers, soup and bagels in the café. Black Abyss (five hours, \$185) is more adventurous and includes a 30m abseil into Ruakuri Cave and more glowworms, tubing and cave climbing.

Rap, Raft 'n' Rock (☎ 0800 228 372; www.caveraft.com; 95 Waitomo Caves Rd; trips \$125) generates rave reports from its five-hour small-group expeditions. It starts with abseil training, followed by a 27m descent into a natural cave, and then floating along a subterranean river on an inner tube. How fast you float will depend on the season and the recent rainfall, but there are always plenty of glowworms. After some caving (with optional squeezes) a belayed rock climb up a 20m cliff brings you to the surface.

Spellbound (☎ 0800 773 552; www.glowworm.co.nz; Waitomo Caves Rd; adult/child \$55) is a good option if you don't want to get wet and want to avoid the big groups in the main caves. This three-hour tour and raft-ride departs from the village (10am and 2pm) and goes through parts of the glowworm-filled Mangawhitiakau cave system, 12km south of Waitomo.

Waitomo Adventures (☎ 0800 924 866; www.waitomo.co.nz; Waitomo Caves Rd) offers five different cave adventures, with discounts for various combos. The Lost World (four-/seven-hour trip \$245/395) trip starts with a 100m abseil down into the cave then – by a combination of walking, climbing, spider-walking, inching along narrow rock ledges, wading and swimming through a river – you take a three-hour journey through a 30m-high cave to get back out, passing glowworms, amazing rock formations, waterfalls and more. The price includes lunch (underground) and dinner. The shorter version skips the wet stuff and the meals.

Haggas Honking Holes (four hours, \$195) includes professional abseiling instruction followed by three abseils, rock climbing and travelling along a subterranean river with waterfalls. Along the way you see glowworms and a variety of cave formations, including stalactites, stalagmites, columns, flowstone (calcite deposited by a thin sheet of flowing water) and cave coral. It's a good way to get real caving action, using caving equipment and going through caverns of various sizes, from squeezing through tight, narrow passageways to traversing huge caverns. The adventure's name derives from a local farmer (Haggas) and characters in a Dr Seuss story (honking holers).

TumuTumu Toobing (four hours, \$125) is a walking, wading, swimming and tubing trip. **St Benedict's Cavern** (three hours, \$145) includes abseiling and a subterranean flying fox in an attractive cave with straw stalagmites.

Caveworld (☎ 0800 228 396; www.caveworld.co.nz; Waitomo Caves Rd) runs the **Black Magic** (2½ hours, \$99) black-water rafting trip through glowworm-filled Te Anaroa. **Skinny Joe's Hole** (two hours, \$95) is a dry expedition in the same cave. You've also got the choice of a day or (glowworm-illuminated) night abseil down a 45m crevice called **The Canyon** (two hours, night/day \$120/160). Various combo discounts apply.

Indiana Jones-types will opt for one of the **Absolute Adventure** (☎ 0800 787 323; www.absoluteadventure.co.nz) endurance-testing caving experiences, with hard-man names like **The Mission** (four hours, \$125), **The Expedition** (six hours, \$185) and **The Journey** (24 hours, \$380, minimum three people, accommodation and meals provided). Expect to ache all over after an exhausting, wet and muddy adventure through tight squeezes, up cliffs and down canyons. As the brochure points out 'you might even break a nail'.

WALKING

The i-SITE has free pamphlets on walks in the area. The walk from the Aranui Cave to the Ruakuri Cave is an excellent short path. From the Glow-worm Cave ticket office, there's a 10-minute walk to a lookout. Also from here, the 5km, three-hour-return **Waitomo Walkway** takes off through farmland, following Waitomo Stream to the **Ruakuri Scenic Reserve**, where a 30-minute return walk passes by a natural limestone tunnel. There

are glowworms here at night – drive to the car park and bring a torch to find your way. Near Juno Hall Backpackers a steep 20-minute walk leads through bush then along farmland to the abandoned **Opapake Pa**, where terraces and kumara pits are visible.

The privately run **Dundle Hill Walk** (☎ 0800 924 866; www.waitomowalk.com; adult/child \$60/25) is a 27km, two-day loop walk through bush and farmland, including overnight bunkhouse accommodation high up in the bush.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Kiwi Culture Show (☎ 07-878 6666; www.woodlynpark.co.nz; 1177 Waitomo Valley Rd; adult/child \$22/12; ☎ shows 1.30pm) is a rustic theatre where local blokes put on a one-hour farm show that combines history, broad humour, local critters and audience participation.

Big Red (☎ 07-878 8393; www.waitomobigred.co.nz; 2hr trips \$105) takes knockabout self-drive, quad-bike trips over hill and dale. Expect to get very muddy.

Caving company **Rap, Raft 'n' Rock** (☎ 0800 228 372; www.caveraft.com) has a high-ropes course (\$45), 9m above the ground.

Sleeping

For a little place there's a good choice of places to rest your head, with particularly solid options for the budget traveller.

BUDGET

Juno Hall Backpackers (☎ 07-878 7649; www.juno waitomo.co.nz; 600 Waitomo Caves Rd; sites per person \$15, dm \$25, d & tw \$60-70, tr \$75-90, q \$120; ☎ ☎) A slick purpose-built hostel a kilometre from the village with a warm welcome and an outdoor pool and tennis court.

Waitomo Top 10 Holiday Park (☎ 07-878 7639; www.waitomopark.co.nz; sites per adult/child \$18/9, cabins \$50-58, units \$100-115; ☎ ☎ ☎) This superb camping ground in the heart of the village has spotless facilities and plenty of outdoor action to keep the kids busy (including a pool, spa and playground).

Rap, Raft 'n' Rock Backpackers (☎ 07-873 9149; www.caveraft.com; 95 Waitomo Caves Rd; dm/d/tw \$23/51/51; ☎ ☎) The homeliest of Waitomo's hostels, it occupies a farm cottage 7km from the village. The brightly painted walls may burn your retinas after a day spent underground.

Kiwi Paka YHA (☎ 07-878 3395; www.kiwipaka-yha.co.nz; School Rd; dm/s/d/tw/tr \$27/60/62/62/81, chalets tw/d/q \$85/95/160; ☎ ☎) It's too big to be social

but this purpose-built, Alpine-style hostel has four-bed dorms, peak-roofed chalets, a popular restaurant and tidy facilities.

MIDRANGE

Waitomo Caves Guest Lodge (☎ 07-878 7641; www.waitomocavesguestlodge.co.nz; 7 Waitomo Caves Rd; s/d/tw/tr \$70/90/90/110, all incl breakfast) Bags your own cosy little cabin at this central lodge with a sweet garden setting. The top ones have valley views.

our pick Woodlyn Park (☎ 07-878 6666; www.woodlynpark.co.nz; 1177 Waitomo Valley Rd; d \$115-175, tr \$127-187, q \$139-199; P) Boasting the world's only hobbit motel (set into the ground with round windows and doors), Woodlyn Park's other sleeping options include the cockpit of a combat plane, train carriages and the 'Waitanic' – a converted WWII patrol boat fitted with chandeliers, moulded ceilings and shiny brass portholes. It's extremely well done and the kids will love you for it.

Abseil Inn (☎ 07-878 7815; www.abseilinn.co.nz; 709 Waitomo Caves Rd; s \$120-150, d \$130-160; P) A steep driveway takes you to this delightful B&B with three themed rooms, great breakfasts and witty hosts. The biggest room has a double spa bath and valley views.

Waitomo Caves Hotel (☎ 07-878 8204; www.waitomocaveshotel.co.nz; School Rd; d \$120-180; P) If the hotel from *The Shining* and the Bates Motel had a bastard son, it would be this grand old place. It's creepy even in the daylight, despite the best efforts of the friendly staff (was that portrait of Mace and Tinorau in Reception staring at me?). Recent renovations haven't made a dent in the shabby floral vs frill décor but the rooms have generous old-world proportions and the place certainly has character – just not one you'd want to meet in a dark alley.

Eating & Drinking

It's a small village so don't expect a lot of options. Staff in some of the busy spots give the impression they'd rather be abseiling down a waterfall than serving coffee to another bloody tourist.

our pick Huhu (☎ 07-878 6674; 10 Waitomo Caves Rd; tapas \$7-15, brunch \$11-18, dinner \$17-28; ☎ 8.30am-9pm) Easily the best choice, you won't be disappointed if you come here for every meal. Slick and modern with charming service, it has great views from the afternoon-tipple-friendly terrace. The food is sublime; graze from a tapas menu on Maori specialities such as re-

wana bread and beetroot-coloured *urenika* potatoes. Huhu grubs (edible beetle larvae) are sadly missing.

Roselands Restaurant (☎ 07-878 7611; Fullerton Rd; meals \$26; ☎ 11am-2pm) Don't let the genteel garden setting discourage you from pigging out with the middle-aged tour-bus punters at this decent barbecue buffet 3km from Waitomo.

Curly's Bar (☎ 07-878 8448; School Rd; ☎ 11am-late) A decent tavern with lots of beers on tap, good-value pub grub, chunky wooden tables and occasional live music.

Getting There & Away

The informative **Waitomo Shuttle** (☎ 0800 808 279) heads between the caves and Otorohanga (\$10, 15 minutes, five daily, booking necessary), coordinating with bus and train arrivals.

InterCity/Newmans (☎ 0508 353 947; www.intercity.co.nz) runs a daily bus service from Auckland (\$75, 3¼ hours) and Rotorua (\$75, 2¾ hours), as well as the Waitomo Caves Explorer day-tour service with return trips from Auckland (adult/child \$165/115), Rotorua (adult/child \$109/75) or between the two.

Waitomo Wanderer (☎ 0508 926 337; www.waitomotours.co.nz) operates a daily service from Rotorua with an open return option, allowing you to stay overnight (one way/return \$40/68).

WAITOMO TO AWAKINO

This obscure route, heading west of Waitomo on Te Anka Rd, is the definition of off-the-beaten-track. It's a slow but fascinating alternative to SH3 if Taranaki's your goal. Only 25km of the 111km route remains unsealed, but it's nearly all winding and narrow. Allow over 2½ hours (not including stops) and fill up with petrol.

Walks in the **Tawarau Forest**, 20km west of the caves, are outlined in DOC's *West of Waitomo* pamphlet (\$1), including a one-hour track to the Tawarau Falls from the end of Appletree Rd.

The **Mangapohue Natural Bridge Scenic Reserve**, 26km west of Waitomo, is a 5.5-hectare reserve with a giant natural limestone arch. It's a 20-minute round-trip walk to the arch on a wheelchair-accessible pathway. On the far side, big rocks full of oyster fossils jut up from the grass, and at night you'll see glowworms.

About 4km further west is **Piripiri Caves Scenic Reserve**, where a five-minute walk leads to a large cave containing fossils of

giant oysters. Bring a torch and be prepared to get muddy after heavy rain.

The impressive three-tier **Marokopa Falls** are located 32km west of Waitomo. A short track (10 minutes return) from the road leads to the bottom of the falls.

The falls are near Te Anka, where you can stop for a drink or fried food at friendly **Te Anka Tavern** (☎ 07-876 7815; Te Anka Rd; ☎ 11am-1am Tue-Sun), but be sure to keep your wits about you for the demanding road ahead. Just past Te Anka you can turn north to Kawhia, 53km away, or continue southwest to **Marokopa**, a small village on the coast. The whole Te Anka/Marokopa area is riddled with caves.

Marokopa Campground (☎ 07-876 7444; Rauparaha St; sites per adult/child \$10/8, dm \$15) isn't flash but it's in a nice spot, close to the coast. There's a small shop that will cover the catering basics, as well as a tennis court and volleyball net.

The road heads south to Kiritehere where it follows a bubbling stream through idyllic farmland to Moeatoa where it turns right (south) into Mangatua Rd. Now you're in serious back-country, heading into the dense **Whareorino Forest**. It would pay not to watch the movie *Deliverance* before tramping in this spectacularly remote tract of native bush. DOC-run **Leitch's Hut** (www.doc.govt.nz) has a toilet, water and a wood stove; pick up a fact sheet from the DOC office in Hamilton or Te Kuiti.

At Waikawau it's worth taking the 5km detour along the unsealed road to the coast near **Ngarupupu Point**, where a 300m walk through a dank tunnel opens out on an exquisitely isolated stretch of black-sand beach. Think twice about swimming here; if you get caught in a rip you'll be halfway to Melbourne before your friends can reach help.

The road then continues through another twisty 28km of breathtaking bush before joining SH3 east of Awakino (p242).

TE KUITI

pop 4540

Cute little Te Kuiti nestles in a valley between picturesque hills. It doesn't so much have a gimmick as an odd claim to fame: welcome to the shearing capital of the world! You won't have any doubt as to the veracity of that statement if you're here for the Great New Zealand Muster (late March/early April) and its legendary Running of the Sheep. Pamplona's got nothing on the sight of over

2000 woolly demons stampeding down the main street. The festival includes sheep-shearing championships, a parade, Maori cultural performances, live music, barbecues, *hangi* (feast from an oven in the ground) and lots of market stalls.

Information

DOC (☎ 07-878 1050; 78 Taupiri St; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri)

i-SITE (☎ 07-878 8077; Rora St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun) Internet access and visitor information.

Post office (123 Rora St)

Sights & Activities

The most prominent landmark in town is the 7m, 7½-tonne **Big Shearer** statue at the south end of the Rora St shopping strip. Diagonally opposite is the magnificently carved **Te Tokanganui-a-noho Marae**. This was guerrilla leader Te Kooti's grateful gift to his hosts, Ngati Maniapoto, who sheltered him before his pardon in 1883 (see p369). You can't enter without permission, but you can get a good view from the gate.

Taking up the other corners of this intersection are a **Japanese garden** and **Redwood Park**, which is full of dwarf conifers.

Further down Rora St, **Te Kuititanga-O-Nga-Whakaaro** (The Gathering of Thoughts and Ideas) is a beautiful pavilion of etched-glass, *tukutuku* (woven flax panels) and wooden carvings that celebrates the town's history.

On the northwestern boundary of Te Kuiti, the attractive **Brook Park** (Te Kumi Rd) has a 40-minute walk leading up a hill to the site of historic Motakiora Pa, constructed in the 17th century.

The Mangaokewa Stream winds through the town, with a pleasant walkway along it. Beside the stream, the **Mangaokewa Scenic Reserve** (SH30), 3km south of town, has picnic and barbecue areas and a safe waterhole. **Te Kuiti Lookout** (Awakino Rd), as the road climbs out of town heading south, provides a great view over the town.

Sleeping

Casara Mesa Backpackers (☎ 07-878 6697; casara@xtra.co.nz; Mangarino Rd; dm/tw \$25/55, d with/without bathroom \$60/55; P) Feel the stress ease away as you're collected from town and whisked up the hill to this clean and comfortable farmstay with a sublime vista from its quiet veranda.

Simply the Best B&B (☎ 07-878 8191; www.simplythebestbnb.co.nz; 129 Gadsby Rd; s/d \$45/90; P) It's hard to argue with the immodest name when the prices are this reasonable and the hosts this charming. Warning: the spectacular views may illicit involuntary choruses of the Tina Turner anthem.

Eating & Drinking

Bosco Café (☎ 07-878 3633; 57 Te Kumi Rd; mains \$9-14; ☺ breakfast & lunch) It's not damming it with faint praise to say that Bosco is the coolest place in Te Kuiti. This excellent industrial-chic café offers great coffee, tempting food and sweet service. It comes into its own on a sunny afternoon when the doors swing open onto Brook Park.

Riverside Lodge (☎ 07-878 8027; 1 Riverside La; mains \$18-30; ☺ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) On the riverbank just off Sheridan St, this family-friendly bar and bistro serves excellent shellfish, substantial meals or minipizzas for a filling snack (\$8).

Getting There & Away

InterCity (☎ 0508 353 947; www.intercity.co.nz) buses depart from the south end of Rora St. There are three buses daily to Auckland (\$46 to \$52, 3½ hours) via Otorohanga (\$19, 15 minutes), to New Plymouth (\$28, 2¼ hours) via Mokau (\$28, one hour), and to Taumarunui (\$26, one hour).

Dalroy (☎ 0508 465 622; www.dalroytours.co.nz) runs buses daily between Auckland (\$34, 3½ hours) and New Plymouth (\$25, two hours). Stops include Otorohanga (\$8, 15 minutes) and Mokau (\$14, one hour).

Overlander (☎ 0800 872 467; www.transcenic.co.nz; daily Dec-Apr, Fri-Sun May-Nov) trains stop in Te Kuiti (Rora St) heading between Auckland (\$49, 3½ hours) and Wellington (\$109, 8¾ hours) via Otorohanga (\$49, 15 minutes) and Taumarunui (\$49, 1¼ hours).

TE KUITI TO MOKAU

☎ 06

From Te Kuiti, SH3 runs southwest to the coast before following the rugged shoreline to New Plymouth. Along this scenic route the sheep stations sprout peculiar limestone formations before giving way to lush native bush as the highway winds along the course of the Awakino River.

The river spills into the Tasman at **Awakino**, a small settlement where boats shelter in the estuary while locals find refuge at the down-to-earth **Awakino Hotel** (☎ 06-752 9815; SH3).

A little further south the impressive **Maniaroa Marae** dominates the cliff above the highway. This important complex houses the anchor stone of the *Tainui* canoe, which brought this region's original people from their Polynesian homeland. Note the palisade tower and the impressively carved meeting house, Te Kohaarua. You can get a good view from outside the fence – don't cross into the *marae* unless someone invites you.

Five kilometres further south, as elegant Mt Taranaki starts to drift into view, is the village of **Mokau**. It offers a fine stretch of black-sand beach and good surfing and fishing. From August to November the Mokau River spawns some of the best whitebait in the North Island – and subsequently swarms of fiercely territorial whitebaiters.

The town's **Tainui Museum** (☎ 06-752 9072; SH3; admission by donation; ☺ 10am-4pm) has an interesting collection of old photographs and artefacts from the time when this once-isolated outpost was a coal and lumber shipping port for settlements along the river.

Mokau River Cruises (☎ 06-752 9775; adult/child \$40/15) operates a three-hour tour with a commentary in the historic *Cygnets*. Reservations are essential.

Just north of Mokau, **Seaview Holiday Park** (☎ /fax 06-752 9708; SH3; unpowered/powerd sites per person \$10/12, cabins d \$45-55, tourist flats d/tr/q \$75/90/105) is basic but it's right on the beach and the cottages have a dinky pastel paint scheme.

On the hill above the village the friendly **Mokau Motel** (☎ 06-752 9725; laurel.murray@extra.co.nz; SH3; s/d/tr \$75/90/100) offers no-nonsense self-contained units.

The **River Run Café** (☎ 06-752 9859; SH3; mains \$6-20; ☺ 7am-7pm) has whitebait on the menu during the season, as well as everything from burgers, pies and cooked meals to ice cream and homemade cakes.

TAUMARUNUI

pop 4500

Maybe Taumarunui should get a gimmick, as this little town can feel a bit grim. The main reason to stay here is to kayak on the Whanganui River (see p279) or as a cheaper base for skiing in Tongariro National Park.

Information

DOC (☎ 07-895 8201; Cherry Grove Domain; ☺ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri)

Post office (47 Miriama St)

Taumarunui i-SITE (☎ 07-895 7494; www.visitruapehu.com; Hakiha St; ☺ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun) Visitor information and internet access.

Sights & Activities

The main drag, Hakiha St, has a few items of interest. At the east end is **Hauaroa Whare**, a beautifully carved house. **Te Rohe Potae** memorialises King Tawhiao's assertion of his *mana* over the King Country in a sculpture of a bowler hat on a large rock (see p234). At the end of Marae St, **Ngapuwaitaha Marae** has interesting carvings and two historic river *waka* visible from the street. Don't enter the complex without permission.

There's a decent walk along the Whanganui River starting from Cherry Grove Domain. A shorter walk goes through native bush in the Domain and up the incline, which provides great views. Te Peka Lookout, across the Ongarue River on the western edge of town, is another good vantage point.

The **Raurimu Spiral**, 30km south, is a unique feat of railway engineering that was completed in 1908 after 10 years' work. Rail buffs can experience the spiral by taking the train (below) to National Park township (return \$98).

For details on the Stratford-Taumarunui **heritage trail** see p257.

Sleeping & Eating

Taumarunui Holiday Park (☎ 07-895 9345; www.taumarunuiholidaypark.co.nz; SH4; sites per person \$11, cabins/tourist flats \$40/60; P) On the banks of the Whanganui River, 3km east of town, this shady camping ground offers safe river swimming and clean facilities.

Twin Rivers Motel (☎ 07-895 8063; twinriversmotel@extra.co.nz; 23 Marae St; units \$75-165; P) Spick and span and constantly being upgraded. Some of the bigger units sleep up to seven.

Flax (☎ 07-895 6611; 1 Hakiha St; brunch \$10-16, dinner \$22-28; ☺ 9am-3pm Tue, to late Wed-Sun) This very attractive eatery has stylish décor and an inventive, modern menu. It's certainly the only place in Taumarunui where you'll find a haloumi and semidried tomato tart.

Entertainment

Regent Cinema (☎ 07-896 6827; Hakiha St; adult \$13; ☺ Thu-Sun) Shows the latest releases. Check out the Art Deco interior.

Getting There & Away

Taumarunui is on SH4, 81km south of Te Kuiti and 41km north of National Park township.

InterCity (☎ 0508 353 947; www.intercity.co.nz) buses depart daily from the i-SITE, heading to Auckland (\$55, five hours) via Te Kuiti (\$26, one hour), and Palmerston North (\$49, 4¾ hours) via National Park (\$20, 30 minutes).

Overlander (☎ 0800 872 467; www.transcenic.co.nz; daily Dec-Apr, Fri-Sun May-Nov) trains head between Auckland (\$89, 4¾ hours) and Wellington (\$109, 7½ hours) via Te Kuiti (\$49, 1¼ hours) and National Park (\$49, 50 minutes).

OWHANGO

pop 280

A pint-sized village where all the street names start with 'O', Owango makes a cosy base for walkers, mountain bikers (the 42 Traverse ends here; see p314) and skiers who can't afford to stay closer to the slopes. Take Omaki Rd for a two-hour loop walk through virgin forest in Ohinetonga Scenic Reserve.

Sleeping

Forest Lodge (☎ 07-895 4773; forest.lodge@extra.co.nz; 13 Omaki Rd; dm/d/unit \$25/50/65; P) An excellent, snug backpackers with comfortable, clean rooms and good communal spaces. For privacy junkies there's a separate self-contained unit next door.

Fernleaf B&B (☎ 07-895 4847; fernleaf.farm@extra.co.nz; 58 Tunanui Rd, Owango; s/d \$75/120; P) This characterful villa on a third-generation cattle-and-sheep farm has just had en suites installed in some of the rooms. The kind hostess enjoys cooking so the generous breakfast and dinners (by arrangement) are labours of love. It's just off SH4, 7km north of the township.

Eating & Drinking

Ourpick Out Of The Fog Café (☎ 07-895 4800; SH4; brunch \$7-15; ☺ breakfast & lunch Wed-Mon) Transport this uber-stylish café into any major city and it would get by just fine. The food's delicious and reasonably priced, the coffee's excellent and the electric fire will make you want to linger on cold days.

Owango Hotel (☎ 07-895 4854; SH4; mains \$15-22; ☺ 9am-late) The country pub doubles as the local store, and dishes up solid fare like lamb shanks and vegetarian pasta.

Getting There & Away

Owango is 14km south of Taumarunui on SH4. All the **InterCity** (☎ 0508 353 947; www.intercity.co.nz) buses that stop in Taumarunui also stop here.

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