



Auckland & the North

HIGHLIGHTS

- o Soak up the big smoke, **Auckland** (p39), the biggest city you'll find in New Zealand
- o Check out the beautiful and historic **Bay of Islands** (p43)
- o Feel very small under the enormous kauri trees in **Northland** (p44)

TERRAIN

Undulating farmland for the most part. Gets a bit hillier near the coasts and a wee bit flatter near Thames.

Telephone Code – 09 Auckland/Northland , 07 Coromandel

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Auckland and the north of the North Island are a paradox of city and solitude. New Zealand's largest (by far) city dominates the geographic make-up of the region. Auckland is a cosmopolitan, sprawling city. Where it is rich in culture, culinary experience and urban aesthetics, it is shockingly sordid as a cycling destination. The roads are narrow, haemorrhaging with traffic and ill-advised for even the most intrepid of two-wheel riders.

Get out of the city, and everything is different. The rolling countryside of the far north is a feast for the rubber-rimmed traveller. The scenery is jaw-droppingly tasty and the myriad micro-towns that you can call into are as friendly as the big smoke is aloof.

The north is permeated by the flavours of its Polynesian cultural base. There is a definite island feel to life here, with the pace a few notches down from the norm. There are ancient forests, sandy surf breaks and enough unspoilt coastline to enchant the beach bum that resides in us all.

To the south, the Coromandel Peninsula is a classic Kiwi destination with generations of holidaymakers making the annual pilgrimage to the sea. If you can avoid the rush you'll get to share the landscape with your only companions, the birds and the amicable and scarce local population.



HISTORY

The beautiful and bountiful north was the first region to be settled by both Maori and Europeans. The fertile land around present-day Auckland was prized by the Maori, and a tribe had settled there by 1350. Not content to let one tribe have all the pickings, however, others moved in and the area was ravaged by warfare and epidemics. The area was almost deserted by the time Europeans (who had also noted the area's good soil and fine harbour) chose it for their national capital in 1840. The population of Northland, however, still has the greatest proportion of Maori anywhere in NZ.

It was here in the north that early European sealers and whalers based themselves

and where first permanent contact with the Maori was made. Samuel Marsden, the first missionary, arrived at Mātāuri Bay near Whangaroa in 1814, soon after the kauri timber trade began. Over the next century, wholesale logging was to decimate the kauri forests covering much of Northland and the Coromandel Peninsula. Gum-digging, gold-mining (on the Coromandel Peninsula) and, of course, farming were other major industries.

Russell, in the Bay of Islands, was the nation's first administrative centre; and nearby Waitangi the site of the historic treaty signing in 1840. Auckland, declared capital in that same year, remained so for a mere 25 years before Wellington took over the title.