



Waikato & the King Country

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Best Outdoors

- » Surfing at Manu Bay (p188)
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Best Places to Stay

- » Raglan Backpackers (p186)
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- » Aroha Mountain Lodge (p194)
- » Abseil Inn (p200)

Why Go?

If the colour green had a homeland, this would be it. Here, verdant fields and rolling hills line New Zealand's mightiest river, the Waikato. Visitors from 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'.

But this veneer disguises another reality: this is Tainui country. In the 1850s this powerful tribal coalition elected a king to resist the loss of land and sovereignty. The fertile Waikato was forcibly taken from them, but they retained control of the limestone crags and forests of the King Country to within a whisper of the 20th century.

These days visitors can experience first-hand the region's genteel/wild dichotomy. Adrenaline junkies can hurl themselves into Raglan's legendary surf, or into extreme underground pursuits in the extraordinary Waitomo Caves. Others will warm to the more sedate delights of Te Aroha's Edwardian thermal complex or Hamilton's gardens.

When to Go

The southern area around Taumarunui is wetter and colder than the rest of this region, which can suffer summer droughts. But either way, you're guaranteed to see a lot of green, green grass. Crowd-wise, if you avoid summer you'll avoid any accommodation shortfalls, but without the extra people around this region can seem a just a bit *too* agricultural. Raglan's surf breaks are always busy, regardless of the season (they didn't call the surf movie *The Endless Summer* for nothing).

Waikato & the King Country Highlights

- 1** Seeking subterranean stimulation in the **Waitomo Caves** (p198) (this is your chance to try black-water rafting)
- 2** Hitting the surf (and then the pub) in unhurried **Raglan** (p185)
- 3** Discovering your own bush-framed black-sand beach on the rugged **West Coast** (p202)
- 4** Soaking up 'the love' in the thermal waters of **Te Aroha** (p194), an utterly seductive little town
- 5** Plotting a pub crawl around Hood and Victoria Sts in surprisingly buzzy **Hamilton** (p179)
- 6** Tramping through an inland

