



Taranaki & Whanganui

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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Tomato Cafe (p241)
- ➔ Yellow House Café (p230)
- ➔ Cafe Lahar (p225)
- ➔ Federal Store (p217)
- ➔ Arborio (p218)

Best Places to Sleep

- ➔ One Burgess Hill (p217)
- ➔ Ahu Ahu Beach Villas (p224)
- ➔ Anndion Lodge (p229)
- ➔ King & Queen Hotel Suites (p217)
- ➔ 151 on London (p230)

Why Go?

Halfway between Auckland and Wellington, Taranaki (aka 'the 'Naki') is the Texas of New Zealand: oil and gas stream in from offshore rigs, plumping the region with enviable affluence. New Plymouth is the regional hub, home to two excellent art galleries, a provincial museum, and enough decent espresso joints to keep you humming.

Behind the city, the moody volcanic cone of Mt Taranaki demands to be visited. Taranaki also has a glut of black-sand beaches: surfers and holidaymakers swell summer numbers.

Further east the history-rich Whanganui River curls its way through Whanganui National Park down to Whanganui city, a 19th-century river port that's ageing with artful grace.

Palmerston North, the Manawatu region's main city, is a town of two peoples: tough-talkin' country fast-foodies in hotted-up cars, and caffeinated Massey University literati. Beyond the city the region blends rural grace with yesterday's pace: you might even find time for a little laziness!

When to Go

- ➔ Mt Taranaki is one of NZ's wettest spots, and frequently cops snowfalls, even in summer: weather on the mountain can be extremely changeable.
- ➔ Conversely, just below Mt Taranaki, New Plymouth frequently tops the North Island's most-sunshine-hours list. Expect warm summers and cool winters.
- ➔ Over in Whanganui the winters are milder, but they're chillier on the Palmerston North plains. Sunshine is also abundant hereabouts – around 2000 hours per year!

Getting There & Away

In Taranaki, Air New Zealand (p219) has domestic flights to/from New Plymouth. Naked Bus (www.nakedbus.com) and InterCity (www.intercity.co.nz) buses also service New Plymouth. Shuttle services run between Mt Taranaki itself and New Plymouth.

Whanganui and Palmerston North airports are also serviced by Air New Zealand, and both cities are on the radar for InterCity and Naked Bus services. KiwiRail Scenic Journeys (p242) trains stop in Palmerston North, too, travelling between Auckland and Wellington.

New Plymouth

POP 56,300

Dominated (in the best possible way) by Mt Taranaki and surrounded by lush farmland, New Plymouth is the only international deep-water port in this part of NZ. Like all port towns, the world washes in and out on the tide, leaving the locals buzzing with a global outlook. The city has a bubbling arts scene (with two superb galleries), some fab cafes and a rootsy, outdoorsy focus. Surf beaches and Mt Taranaki (Egmont National Park) are just a short hop away.

History

Local Māori *iwi* (tribes) have long contested Taranaki lands. In the 1820s they fled to the Cook Strait region to escape Waikato tribes, who eventually took hold of the area in 1832. Only a small group remained, at Okoki Pa (in today's New Plymouth). When European settlers arrived in 1841, the coast of Taranaki seemed deserted and there was little opposition to land claims. The New Zealand Company bought extensive tracts from the remaining Māori.

When other members of local tribes returned after years of exile, they fiercely objected to the land sale. Their claims were upheld by Governor FitzRoy, but the Crown gradually acquired more land from Māori, and European settlers sought these fertile lands. The settlers forced the government to abandon negotiations with Māori, and war erupted in 1860. By 1870 over 500 hectares of Māori land had been confiscated.

Ensuing economic growth was largely founded on dairy farming. The 1959 discoveries of natural gas and oil in the South Taranaki Bight have kept the province economically healthy in recent times.

ESSENTIAL TARANAKI & WHANGANUI

Eat In one of Palmerston North's hip George St eateries.

Drink A bottle of Mike's Pale Ale from Mike's organic brewery (p219).

Read The *Wanganui Chronicle*, NZ's oldest newspaper.

Listen to The rockin' album *Back to the Burning Wreck* by Whanganui riff-monsters the Have.

Watch *The Last Samurai*, co-starring Tom Cruise (Mt Taranaki gets top billing).

Go Green Paddle a stretch of the Whanganui River, an awe-inspiring slice of NZ wilderness.

Online www.visit.taranaki.info, www.whanganuinz.com, www.manawatu.nz.co.nz

Area code 06

Sights

★ Len Lye Centre

GALLERY

(06-759 6060; www.lenlyefoundation.com; 42 Queen St; ☎10am-6pm Mon, Wed & Fri-Sun, to 9pm Thu; 🆓) **FREE** 'Great art goes 50-50 with great architecture'. So said Len Lye, the world-beating NZ artist (1901-80) to whom this super new art gallery is dedicated. And indeed, the architecture is amazing: an interlocking facade of tall, mirror-clad concrete flutes, inside of which is a series of galleries linked by ramps, housing Lye's works – kinetic, noisy and surprising. There's also a cinema, kids' art sessions and the broader Govett-Brewster Art Gallery (p214) next door. Don't miss it!

★ Puke Ariki

MUSEUM

(06-759 6060; www.pukeariki.com; 1 Ariki St; ☎9am-6pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, to 9pm Wed, to 5pm Sat & Sun) **FREE** Translating as 'Hill of Chiefs', Puke Ariki is home to the i-SITE (p219), a museum, a library, a cafe and the fabulous Arborio (p218) restaurant. The excellent museum has an extensive collection of Māori artefacts, plus colonial, mountain geology and wildlife exhibits (...we hope the shark suspended above the lobby isn't life-size).