



# Waikato & the Coromandel Peninsula

## Includes →

Waikato .....	161
Hamilton .....	163
Raglan .....	169
Matamata .....	177
Waitomo Caves.....	181
Thames .....	191
Coromandel Town ...	194
Whitianga.....	198
Hahei .....	201
Hot Water Beach ...	203
Waihi & Waihi Beach.....	206

## Best Beaches & Outdoors

- New Chum's Beach (p198)
- Cathedral Cove (p202)
- Opito (p198)
- Manu Bay (p173)
- Waitomo Caves (p181)

## Best Places to Sleep

- Earthstead (p176)
- Hush Boutique Accommodation (p195)
- Purangi Garden Accommodation (p202)
- Hidden Valley (p170)
- Aroha Mountain Lodge (p179)

## Why Go?

Verdant rolling hills line New Zealand's mighty Waikato River, and adrenaline junkies can surf at Raglan, or undertake extreme underground pursuits in the extraordinary Waitomo Caves.

But this is also Tainui country. In the 1850s this powerful Māori 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 rugged King Country to within a whisper of the 20th century.

To the northeast, the Coromandel Peninsula juts into the Pacific, forming the Hauraki Gulf's eastern boundary. The peninsula's east coast has some of the North Island's best white-sand beaches, and the muddy wetlands and picturesque stony bays of the west coast have long been a refuge for alternative lifestylers. Down the middle, the mountains are crisscrossed with walking tracks, allowing trampers to explore large tracts of isolated bush studded with kauri trees.

## When to Go

- Beachy accommodation in Waihi, Whitianga, Whangamata and Raglan peaks during the summer holidays from Christmas until the end of January. New Year's Eve in particular can be very busy.
- Balmy February and March are much quieter around the Coromandel Peninsula with settled weather and smaller crowds. Rainfall peaks in the mountainous Coromandel region from May to September.
- The Waikato region can see summer droughts, but the southern area around Taumarunui is often wetter and colder.
- If you avoid the height of summer school holidays (Christmas to January), accommodation is plentiful in the Waikato region.
- Raglan's surf breaks are popular year-round.

## **i** Getting There & Away

Hamilton is the region's transport hub, with its airport servicing 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.

Transport options on the Coromandel Peninsula are more limited, and the beaches and coastline of the area are most rewarding with independent transport.

## 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. In settling this land, the Waikato tribes displaced or absorbed tribes from earlier migrations.

Initially European contact was on Māori 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.

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

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.

The war resulted in the confiscation of 3600 sq km 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.

## Rangiriri

Following SH1 south from Auckland you're retracing the route of the colonial army in the spectacular land grab that was the Waikato War. On 20 November 1863, around

## ESSENTIAL WAIKATO & THE COROMANDEL PENINSULA

**Eat** Coromandel bivalves – mussels, oysters and scallops are local specialties.

**Drink** Local Coromandel craft beer at Luke's Kitchen & Cafe (p198).

**Read** *The Penguin History of New Zealand* (2003) by the late Michael King, an Oputere resident.

**Listen to** Native bird life at Sanctuary Mountain Maungatautari. (p175)

**Watch** Passing schools of fish while snorkelling near Hahei (p202).

**Celebrate** At the annual Whangamata Beach Hop (p205).

**Go green** Off-the-grid tepees at Solscape (p170).

**Online** [www.thecoromandel.com](http://www.thecoromandel.com), [www.hamiltonwaikato.com](http://www.hamiltonwaikato.com), [www.kingcountry.co.nz](http://www.kingcountry.co.nz)

**Area code** ☎ 07

1500 British troops, backed by gunboats and artillery, attacked the substantial fortifications erected by the Māori king's warriors at Rangiriri. They were repulsed a number of times and lost 49 men, but overnight many of the 500 Māori defenders retreated; the remaining 183 were taken prisoner the next day after the British gained entry to the *pa* (fortified village) by conveniently misunderstanding a flag of truce.

### Sights

**Māori War & Early Settlers Cemetery** CEMETERY  
(Rangiriri Rd; ☎ 24hr) The Māori War & Early Settlers Cemetery houses the soldiers' graves and a mound covering the mass grave of 36 Māori warriors.

**Rangiriri Heritage Centre** MUSEUM  
(☎ 07-826 3667; [www.nz museums.co.nz](http://www.nz museums.co.nz); 12 Rangiriri Rd; admission \$3, free with cafe purchase; ☎ 9am-3pm) The Rangiriri Heritage Centre screens a short documentary about the battle. There's also a small museum and cafe here.

### Eating

**Rangiriri Hotel** PUB FOOD \$\$  
(☎ 07-826 3467; 8 Talbot St; mains lunch \$12-20, dinner \$17-33; ☎ 11am-11pm) Next to the Rangiriri Heritage Centre is the historic Rangiriri Hotel, a cheery spot for lunch or a beer.