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Lily & Louis

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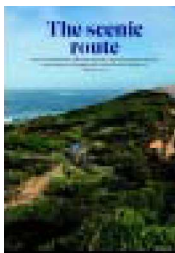
Travel Northland

The scenic route

Visitors to Northland have traditionally kept to the main coastal highways but a new tourism project is encouraging them to journey to other areas as well.

STORY PAUL LITTLE





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THERE ARE SO many ways to enjoy all that Northland has to offer the visitor, no matter how short or long your stay, that deciding where to start and finish can be the hardest part of planning your trip. But that has just got a little easier with the launch of Northland Journeys.

A promotion of Northland Inc, the regional economic development agency, the plan is to produce itineraries tourists can follow that will take them into parts of the region they might not otherwise visit. Five have already been posted online: the

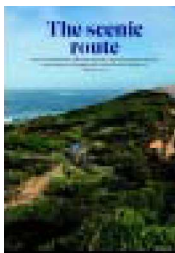
Ancient Kauri Trail (from Maungatūroto to Ōmāpere), Into the Wide Blue Yonder (from Whangārei Falls to Tutukaka and on to Hikurangi), the Secret Coast Route (from Russell to Helena Bay), Te Ara Coast to Coast (from Hokianga to Kaikohe and on to the Bay of Islands) and Where Giants Gather. The last of these stretches from Whangārei Town Basin around the enormous harbour to Whangārei Heads, showcasing giants of nature, geology and history along the way.

Get your walking shoes on before you set out because there are several great treks you

can do, ranging from under 30 minutes to a whole day. And in these environmentally conscious times, it's worth noting that walks are about as sustainable as travel gets: sure, there may be some carbon emission involved in getting to the start, but after that it's just foot power, which uses barely any resources, apart from the calories you put into it, and has all the health benefits of exercise as a bonus.

Whangārei Heads is low on statement holiday homes and big on authentic Kiwi baches. You won't find international hotel

From Ōmāpere you can take in views across the mouth of the Hokianga Harbour to the sand dunes on the other side.



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chains represented here, but you will find numerous cosy B&Bs ready to give you a warm welcome. You won't find crowds, either. But you will find a leisurely pace and holidaymakers enjoying an old-fashioned Kiwi break in camp grounds and baches.

All five Northland Journeys are worth your attention, but Where Giants Gather combines the best of town and country. The former is represented by the Whangārei Town Basin, which is a natural starting point. It's a bustling collection of both restored historic buildings, such as the Reyburn House Art Gallery (reyburnhouse.co.nz), and the purpose-built likes of the Claphams Clock Museum (claphamsclocks.com) – watch out, you can spend a lot of time here. There's also a futuristic children's playground where all the activities look like organic chemistry molecules come to giant life.

In fact, you could spend most of a day exploring the Town Basin, shopping in its pretty boutiques, eating and drinking at the excellent cafes and ogling the yachts in the marina. You could even do it on in-line skates, from Pupurangi Hire & Tour (hirentour.co.nz).

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The Town Basin will also be the site of a long-dreamed-of centre honouring the visionary Austrian-born New Zealand artist Friedensreich Hundertwasser, together with the Wairau Māori Art Gallery.

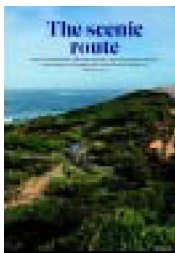
The citizens group behind the project, the Prosper Northland Trust, hit its fundraising target in the middle of 2017 and building is expected to start early this year, says chairman Barry Trass. The complex will include a Māori art research and exhibition centre as well as a space devoted to exhibiting Hundertwasser's own work, supplied on rotation from Europe.

Not far from the Town Basin is the turn-off to mighty Mount Parihaka Scenic Reserve, topped with a World War I memorial obelisk that at first glance appears to be made of that great vernacular Kiwi construction material, corrugated iron.

Signs also explain the history and significance of this site to Māori and Pākehā; over the years, it has been a scene of conflict, loss and restoration. You can look back from here across the harbour and city. The scale of the panorama may surprise you.

Continue your drive via Onerahi through tidy suburbs and past mangroves and coastal farms and you'll soon click into the waterside drive around the harbour. Summer is the best time for this trip because at many points along the way there are extensive stands of giant pōhutukawa lining the coast. In full bloom they would be like enormous blood-red ribbons undulating along the shore.

Golfers will want to stop at the Pines Golf Club (pinesgolfclub.co.nz), which could hardly have a prettier site, although that nearby harbour could be seen as one



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intimidating water hazard. There's nothing daunting about the green fees, though – time it right and you could play a round for \$5.

Not all the giants on this trip are natural. At one point the Marsden Point Oil Refinery comes into view. Across the harbour in the early-morning sunshine haze this industrial behemoth presents an almost romantic spectacle – a shimmering city floating on the sea. Later sightings will be less romantic, considerably more industrial.

The beach settlement of Pataua South marks one terminus of this journey. The delightfully ramshackle footbridge across the estuary practically demands to have its photo taken, after which you can fish from it, or jump off it when conditions are right.

On the other side of the heads are the hidden treasures of McLeod Bay. A historic cemetery lies at one end – it's accessible on foot at low tide, so best to check tides if you hope to see it. At the other end of the bay is a diminutive, no-frills, utilitarian church, originally Presbyterian but now ecumenical and hosting services for diverse faiths.

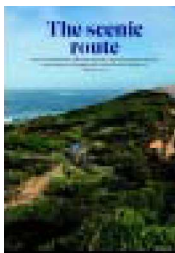
The Rev Norman McLeod led settlers from Scotland to this part of the country in 1854 and the church is said to have been built in 1858, although a later date may be more likely. If it was constructed under his direction, he appears to have had no great hopes for making large numbers of converts. It's so small that if they had weddings here the bride's and groom's sides would have had to take turns inside.

Not much further down the road is one of the route's undisputed highlights, the always impressive Mount Manaia – all 420m of it. Long ago, this mountain was part of a 50km-diameter volcano. From many points it dominates the landscape in monolithic majesty.

Legend explains the rocky outcrops atop the mountain as follows: one is the chief Manaia; two are his children; another is his

This page from above:
The Reyburn House Art Gallery in Whangārei;
Whangārei Falls;
Claphams Clock Museum; relaxing at the Whangārei Town Basin. Opposite: The wooden footbridge across the estuary at Pataua South.





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wife, Pito; and the final one is chief Hautatu – from whom Manaia stole Pito – in pursuit. Legends and legacies of Manaia are to be found throughout this area. The climb is a robust ascent on a good track but worth it for the views to be had at the top. Sculptures and pou (posts) at the entrance to the track also commemorate Manaia.

If you can spare four hours, can tolerate “lots of steps” and, to be blunt, have the recommended “high fitness” level, you will be well rewarded by doing the Te Whara Loop Walk.

For those with less time on their hands, the walk to Smugglers Bay from Urquharts Bay is recommended. This goes through farmland and bush where you’ll encounter World War II relics such as gun emplacements and a variety of fauna, notably birdlife in the form of paradise duck, pūkeko, kingfisher and others, but also a fair number of cattle who are likely to regard you with no more than diffident interest as you traverse their paddocks.

As this is not high-density tourist territory you may encounter only a few other people, and for the most part the only noise will be a background soundtrack of birdsong and waves. The further into this walk you go, the more isolated you feel, all the way to Smugglers Bay. Somebody presumably did some smuggling here at one point, but dealing in contraband is clearly a thing of the distant past.

The past makes its presence felt in many other ways throughout this area, but anyone embarking on an exploration of Whangārei Heads these days has a very bright short-term future ahead of them.

The peaks of Mount Aubrey, Mount Manaia, and Mount Lion at Whangārei Heads.

Eat

SERENITY CAFE

In the heart of the Whangārei Town Basin, this award-winning cafe is open for breakfast and lunch. You’ll find all the classics, plus enticing seafood selections such as smoked hāpuku in white sauce, and mussel chowder. serenitycafe.co.nz

PARUA BAY TAVERN

Good food, with pizzas a specialty, is just one reason to call in at this waterfront pub (it even has its own jetty). With its walls covered in photos and quirky memorabilia stretching back decades, it’s clearly a long-standing community favourite. paruabaytavern.co.nz

THE DECK CAFE

A hilltop cafe in the shadow of Mount Manaia with a hard-to-beat view and an impossible-to-beat line in fish and chips, this is a good spot to stop for lunch on your way to Ocean Beach.

Play

GET YOUR SKATES ON

Pupurangi Hire & Tour in the Town Basin can set you up with kayaks, in-line skates and many other forms of self-propulsion to get you moving around the district. hirentour.co.nz

UNDERWATER EXPLORER

Dive! Tutukaka is a marine education and dive centre which offers day cruises and diving around the Poor Knights Islands for all experience levels. diving.co.nz

JUMP OFF A CLIFF

Learn and practise abseiling at any level from this accurately named adventure tourism outfit. jumpoffacliff.co.nz

Sleep

THE GLASSHOUSE

Situated at Kauri Mountain Point Estate, this exquisitely sited retreat with its unbeatable views is the perfect romantic couples’ hideaway. theglasshouse.co.nz

WHANGĀREI HEADS YOGA RETREAT

Bed and breakfast with stretches are on offer here. You can book packages that combine accommodation with wellness activities. whyretreat.com

THE FISH AND JANDAL

A waterfront apartment located to take advantage of what Whangārei Heads has to offer. Fruit, kayak and dinghy included. fishandjandal.nz

POU HERENGA TAI TWIN COAST CYCLE TRAIL

The Far North really is a tale of two coasts – on the east the placid, Riviera-style waters of the Bay of Islands and the Pacific Ocean and, less than 100km away, the wild west coast, centred on the Hokianga Harbour, leading to the Tasman Sea. The waters of both coasts and all the bits in between are rich in history and scenic variety, and taking the recently opened cycle trail, in either direction, is a great way to enjoy them. End points are Ōpua on the east coast and Horeke on the west, and the journey takes two days. Highlights include the country’s longest curved wooden trestle bridge, on the Taumarere-Ōpua section, and spectacular examples of fluted basalt at Wairere Boulders geological park, near Horeke, according to Richard Edmondson, communications manager of the Far North District Council. He says cyclists love knowing they are riding from one ocean to another – the only coast-to-coast trail in the country. twincoastcycletail.kiwi.nz

Getting there



NORTHLAND

Air New Zealand operates daily non-stop flights from Auckland to Whangārei and to Kerikeri, with connections across the domestic network.

- Contact Centre
0800 737 000
- Holidays Travel Brokers
0800 737 767
- airnewzealand.co.nz

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