



The Kaueranga Valley lies within minutes of Thames and is an ideal starting point to stretch the legs a little further than just a casual stroll. With abundant camping opportunities and few other signs of the modern world the valley is an entrance point for the Coromandel Forest Park. An excellent Department of Conservation (DOC) visitors centre sits at the entrance to the valley and contains a wealth of information for you to choose a suitable walk or hike. There are a number of tracks ranging from short walks to overnight or multi day hikes and you should discuss your fitness, ability and desires with DOC staff who'll be able to assist in finding the perfect track for you. The Pinnacles Track is one example of an easy-medium hike of up to 10 hours which takes in native bush, historical artifacts such as miners tracks and kauri log dams, and which offers stunning views from the peak of the Pinnacles. Overnight accommodation can be either in the well appointed DOC hut or if you are properly equipped, camping is permitted in designated areas.

Travelling north from Thames the next township reached is peaceful Coromandel Town. Taking this northerly route you can cross to the eastern side of the peninsula to visit some of the stunning and remote golden sand beaches. Hot Water Beach should not be missed where you can dig a hole in the sand at low tide and immerse yourself in the soothing warm waters which fill the hole from natural hot springs beneath the beach.

Leaving The Coromandel from Tairua and following the coast south-east to join up with SH2 at Waihi, you'll enter the Bay of Plenty, a region notable for its sweeping, sandy beaches, excellent fishing, ocean pursuits and the abundant opportunities to escape into the tranquility of native bush surroundings. At this western end of the Bay of Plenty you should not miss the opportunity to walk one of the many historic tracks of the Kaimai Mamaku Forest Park.

As you traverse the Bay of Plenty you'll notice plenty of options for camping in campgrounds along the coastline often right on the beachfront. A range of

quality accommodation also exists within a stones throw of the beach. Further east, at Tauranga and Whakatane, are opportunities for whale watching and swimming with dolphins.

Excursions from Whakatane to White Island leave regularly by boat and helicopter. Forming the first in a chain of volcanoes that traverse the North Island, White Island is perhaps the most active volcano and also one of the most accessible. The island is constantly changing in form and colour due to the various eruptions and chemical reactions taking place regularly. With a moon-like terrain the Island offers visitors a chance to step inside an active volcano and to experience the potential power of the earth's fire. Local Maori have indelibly etched the existence and activity of White Island into their folklore with tales of fire and brimstone amongst their gods, explaining the unique creation of the landscape.

From Opotiki you are already in a region known as Eastland, one of the least visited regions in New Zealand and yet one which offers so much in the way of natural attractions.

An ideal camping stop is Whanarua Bay with its scenic beaches which offer great swimming, snorkeling and diving. Inland, there are walks along bush tracks to beautiful waterfalls and hilltops with sweeping views over the Bay of Plenty coastline. At night the river banks along these tracks come alive with the star-like light of thousands of glowworms - a show of nature not to be missed.

Leaving Whanarua Bay and rounding the East Cape, you'll be struck immediately by the lack of buildings and other signs of modern life.

The coastlines is literally dotted with bays, offering everything from bush walks, swimming and surfing to deep sea fishing and scuba diving. There are far too many to list here, but watch for signage to the best locations for the activities you want.

Pictures: Top Left
Coromandel Coast.
Below: Hackfalls
Arboretum, Gisbourne

