



Te Urewera National Park

Misty stronghold of the Tuhoe

Remote, rugged, immense, Te Urewera contains the largest forested wilderness remaining in the North Island. It is famous for its lakes and forested beauty as well as its stormy history. Lake Waikaremoana, a scenic gem, is on the south eastern boundary of the park. Te Urewera is the home of the Tuhoe people, who live in harmony with the dense native forest and the harsh conditions, and retain a strong tribal identity in the area.



Getting there

Te Urewera National Park lies between the Bay of Plenty and Hawke's Bay in the North Island. The nearest towns are Whakatane and Taneatua to the north, Murupara and Ruatahuna to the west, and Wairoa to the east.

State Highway 38, between Wairoa and the central North Island, passes Lake Waikaremoana and the visitor centre at Aniwaniwa. It has a gravel surface between Murupara and Aniwaniwa (about a two-hour drive).

A shuttle bus and a shuttle boat operate from the campground to the Waikaremoana Track road-ends on demand.

Natural highlights

In the southern part of the park lie two of the park's treasures, Lakes Waikaremoana and the smaller Lake Waikareiti. Waikaremoana was formed 2200 years ago by a huge landslide. Water backed up behind this landslide to form a lake up to 248 metres deep. In 1946 a hydroelectric development lowered the lake level by 5 metres.

The land left exposed when the lake was lowered is slowly regenerating while all around the lake, misty mountains stretch off into the distance, cloaked in ancient podocarp and beech forests. There are more than 650 species of native plant present in the park.

Five plant species reach their limits of distribution in the park and eight species are regarded as nationally rare.

The vegetation pattern is not static; over the years, volcanic activity, fire and storms have all left their mark, as have introduced possums and deer.

Much of the park is remote and not easily accessible, which has helped to protect some of the park's native wildlife. Birds found here include the North Island kōkako, blue duck/whio, North Island fernbird/mātātā, yellow-crowned parakeets/kākāriki, New Zealand scaup/pāpango, North Island brown kiwi, New Zealand falcon/karearea, and North Island kākā.

Both types of bat/pekapeka (long-tailed and short-tailed) are present; the park may even be a stronghold for the vulnerable short-tailed bat. Invertebrates found here include the bush dragonfly *Antipodochlora braueri*, the Raukumara tusked weta *Motuweta riparia* and the unusual velvet worm *Peripatooides novaezelandiae*, which likes to live in rotting logs.

Culture and history

For centuries Te Urewera has been home to the Tuhoe people or the 'Children of the Mist'; the offspring of Hine-puhoku-rangi – the celestial mist maiden. Tuhoe traditions are strong and their links with this land run deep. Traces of past settlement can be found in the earthworks of many former pā (fortified villages) in the park.



C. Rudge



Did you know?

Lake Waikaremoana was formed 2200 years ago by a huge landslide, which blocked a narrow gorge along the Waikaretaheke River. Water backed up behind this landslide to form a lake up to 248 metres deep. In some places below the lake surface, you can still see the original forest trees that were drowned when the lake was formed.

Early European contact came with the missionaries in the 1840s. The Rev. William Williams is believed to have been the first European to have sighted and crossed Lake Waikaremoana.

Missionary visits by several denominations continued to the area until the rise of the Hauhau influence in 1865.

In an attempt to stem the spread of Hauhauism in the 1860s, an Armed Constabulary outpost was established at Onepoto, on the south-eastern shore of the lake. Remains of two redoubt, including Onepoto, and a sunken boat in Lake Waikaremoana are enduring reminders of the New Zealand Wars. Following his defeat at Ngatapa in 1868, Te Kooti fled to the dense Urewera forest and the Tuhoe people. Te Kooti eventually retreated to the King Country to live in exile until pardoned in 1883.

The Māori prophet, Rua Kenana also influenced development in the region and is remembered as the first Māori leader to bring prosperity to the valleys of the Urewera.

Tourism started early in the area, with the first lodging house built about 1874

Facilities

A Department of Conservation visitor centre and museum is located at the small settlement of Aniwanui, near the shores of Lake Waikaremoana. On the lake shore there is a fully serviced DOC motor camp with motels, cabins, tent-sites, petrol and a store. There are several other unserviced campsites near the lake.

A variety of accommodation is available in the towns surrounding the park.

There are numerous backcountry huts in the park ranging from basic to those with more facilities, on the Lake Waikaremoana Great Walk. Prior bookings are required for the use of the Great Walk huts and campsites. For more information on booking systems and fees, visit the Department of Conservation website at www.doc.govt.nz.

The top few things to do

Visit the Aniwanui Museum

The Aniwanui Museum in the heart of Te Urewera National Park, managed by the Department of Conservation, offers insights into local cultural and natural history.

Walking

The park has an extensive track system but perhaps the best known and the best developed is the Lake Waikaremoana Track, one of New Zealand's Great Walks. Most of the huts along the 46-kilometre track can also be accessed by boat.

Shorter walks are also available including the Hinerau Track (half-hour loop) which starts from the Visitor Centre; or a gradual climb up to the idyllic Lake Waikareiti (two hours return).

There are areas of private Māori land within the park. In most cases you are welcome to pass through, but please stay on the marked tracks.

Boating and fishing

Water-based activities are popular on Lake Waikaremoana and most craft (with the exception of jet skis, house boats and float planes) are permitted.

Brown and rainbow trout are found in Waikaremoana. Fishing licenses can be bought from the campground store. Kayaks can be hired.

Hunting

Introduced animals such as deer and pigs are found in the park and hunting is encouraged; permits are available from the Aniwanui Visitor Centre.

Park safety

To the north there is a mild humid climate, while in the south it is generally cooler and wetter.

If you are going to be using the track system in the park for overnight trips make sure you are properly equipped and well prepared – the weather in this region can change rapidly.

Please check at the Department of Conservation visitor centre for up-to-date information on weather and track conditions. Leave details of your trip with a responsible person, and don't forget to check in when you get back. Trip intention forms are available from DOC visitor centres or the New Zealand Mountain Safety Council www.mountainsafety.org.nz

Further information

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Photos: C. Rudge



Lake Waikaremoana

