Visiting Kapiti Marine Reserve

By land
The marine reserve's only point of contact with the mainland is one kilometre of beach at the Waikanae River mouth, adjacent to the Waikanae Estuary Scientific Reserve. Foot access is from Waikanae Beach or Paraparaumu Beach.

By sea
The nearest boat launching sites are at the Waikanae and Kapiti boat clubs. Please follow our 'safety first' guidelines.

Permits and reservations
If you would like to visit Kapiti Island or wish to snorkel from its shores, you need to travel to the island with one of the authorised boat services and ensure you have a valid day visit permit. For more information and to book visit our website www.doc.govt.nz/kapitivisits or contact us at our Wellington Visitor Centre. (see reverse of this brochure).

How you can help
The Department of Conservation (DOC) is responsible for managing Kapiti Marine Reserve. You can help:

• Call the DOC emergency hotline if you see people conducting illegal activities in the reserve

• Call Greater Wellington Regional Council’s environment hotline if you spot any pollution, oil spills or navigation hazards

• Take photographs of environmental incidents and illegal activities (try to capture vessel/vehicle names and a natural feature that identifies location). Remember to always keep your distance—safety first.

• Pick up any litter you find and dispose of it in bins.

Further information
Contact DOC at:
DOC Wellington Visitor Centre
18 Manners Street,
Wellington
Ph: 04 384 7770
E-mail: wellingtonvc@doc.govt.nz
Web: www.doc.govt.nz

Orca are regular visitors to the marine reserve. Photo: Colin Miskelly.
What is a marine reserve?

Marine reserves are areas of the sea, seabed and foreshore in which all natural features, including marine life, are legally protected. They provide a place for scientific research and for the recovery of marine life by reducing or eliminating the threats associated with human activities.

The New Zealand government is working towards establishing a network of marine protected areas, including marine reserves, around the country to help retain our full variety of marine species and ecosystems for the future.

Why is Kapiti Marine Reserve special?

Kapiti Marine Reserve—the fourth marine reserve established in New Zealand—was implemented in 1992 to protect nationally significant recreation, education, ecological and scientific resources, including some of the finest underwater scenery in the Wellington region.

Two major sea currents converge at Kapiti—the cold, clear Southland current meets the warm, turbid and saltier d’Urville current. The zone where these two meet swells north and south as one current dominates the other, resulting in fascinating overlaps of marine plants and animals from seals and penguins to sub-tropical fish and sharks. Kapiti Marine Reserve also connects Kapiti Island Nature Reserve and Waikanae Estuary Scientific Reserve, forming a very rare continuum of protected land, sea and estuary habitats.
**Eastern Marine Reserve**

The eastern side of Kapiti Island is more sheltered than the western side, but still experiences strong currents offshore. The reef is narrower and shallower, with much of the reef extending to only to 5-10 metres. Waters close to the island are dotted with narrow boulder-rock reefs with patches of sand. Offshore and connecting with the mainland, the seafloor comprises silt, sand and gravel to depths of 80 metres. A particularly special feature in the Eastern part of the reserve is the beds of “rhodoliths”, which are free-living red seaweeds. They have a calcium carbonate skeleton and form fascinating coral-like structures that provide important habitat for a variety of other plants and animals, such as juvenile fish. The eastern side of the island also has beds of horse mussels, not known to be present on the exposed western side.

**Western Marine Reserve**

The western side of Kapiti Island is more exposed than the eastern side to the prevailing winds and swells, with strong currents off the headlands. The reef extends to beyond 25 metres depth and is dotted with spectacular underwater rock formations. The water is generally very clear supporting luxuriant seaweed cover. Kina are common and larger on the western side and fish are more abundant and diverse. The seabed supports a dazzling array of encrusting life, including carpets of jewel anemones and other invertebrates. The local seal colony also provides some added entertainment. Top dive spots include the Hole-in-the-Wall, a remarkable underwater archway with stunning light and ‘living’ walls.

![Western boundary](image)

![Eastern boundary](image)
**Things to remember**

Kapiti Marine Reserve is a special place for everyone to enjoy. In all marine reserves you can swim, sail, dive, snorkel, go boating, take photographs and kayak. In fact the only major difference between the marine reserve and other waters is that everything within the marine reserve is protected.

To help protect Kapiti’s marine life inside the reserve please remember:

- No fishing of any kind, either from a boat or from shore.
- No damage to or taking of natural things, including shellfish, seaweed and shells.
- No littering, polluting or discharge of toxic substances.
- No interference with marine life (e.g. feeding fish). This disrupts natural behaviour.

Penalties for failure to comply under the Marine Reserves Act 1971 include; confiscation of equipment, vessels or vehicles, fines and imprisonment.

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**Safety first**

Kapiti Island and its surrounding waters are noted for changeable weather—sea conditions can quickly become treacherous. Make sure that before departure you:

- Get an up-to-date marine forecast
- Check the tides
- Use VHF
- Use the local maritime chart (NZ4631)
- Notify responsible persons of your intentions, including destination and intended time of return.

VHF radio users should note that transmission is often difficult from the western side of Kapiti Island.