Plan and prepare

RAKIURA TRACK

Duration: 3 days
Distance: 32 km (loop)

Great Walks season: All year
RAKIURA TRACK

Escape on an island adventure, and exchange the hustle and bustle of the mainland for the tranquility of the Rakiura Track.

Located in Rakiura National Park on Stewart Island/Rakiura, this is a leisurely hike suitable for anyone with a moderate level of fitness. Relax and unwind in the peaceful surroundings, with the bush, birds and beach at your side.

At night, you’ll enjoy world-class star-gazing. Stewart Island/Rakiura is the world’s fifth International Dark Sky Sanctuary. If you’re lucky, you might get to see the night sky glow red and green with the aurora australis/southern lights.

During the winter months, the island’s weather is cool yet settled, making the Rakiura Track a great winter escape! This is a journey that links the past with the present - Stewart Island/Rakiura is steeped in history.

The Rakiura Track is a circular track and can be hiked in either direction. The track is well marked and signposted, but some sections may be steep and rough and muddy. This brochure describes a 3-day easy hike starting from Lee Bay for independent, non-guided walkers.

Duration: 3 days
Distance: 32km (loop)
Great Walks season: All year

3–4 hours, 8.1 km

Step through the chain link sculpture commissioned to commemorate the forming of the Rakiura National Park to start your island adventure. Enjoy stunning coastal views as the track makes its way from Lee Bay to picturesque Little River. Rounding the tip of Peters Point brings you to Maori Beach. From here, it is a sweeping beach walk to the swing bridge, before climbing up the forested ridge and dropping down into Magnetic Beach and Port William Hut.

Cover: Keri Moyle (signsoflife.co.nz)
Above left to right: Rainbow, Jeremy Pearce; track junction, Keri Moyle (signsoflife.co.nz); Galloos Sawmill site, Keri Moyle (signsoflife.co.nz)
Main photo: Maori Beach, Keri Moyle (signsoflife.co.nz)
Day 2: Port William Hut to North Arm Hut

6 hours, 13 km
Say farewell to the east coast as you make your way through beautiful regenerating podocarp forest, as well as lush and dense virgin forest. Take a breather at the log haulers: massive machines that were used to drag forest giants from the depths of the gullies. The track descends to North Arm, an important food gathering (mahinga kai) site for early Māori, on the shore of Paterson Inlet/Whaka a Te Wera.

Day 3: North Arm Hut to Fern Gully Road end

4 hours – 4 hours 30 minutes, 11 km
A moderate and undulating hike takes you through kāmahi and rimu trees with stunning vistas across the inlet. The track then follows the coast down to secluded bays and is interspersed with historic mill sites. Sawdust Bay has tidal mudflats, making it a great spot to watch wading birds feeding at low tide. Then it is on to Kaipipi Bay, where a small grassy knoll on the water’s edge provides views across the sheltered waterway. The track ends at the Main Road/Fern Gully Road end. From here it is 2 km to Oban.
When walking the track you might be lucky enough to hear the Rakiura tokoeka/kiwi calling or see its footprints, and occasionally catch a glimpse of the iconic bird in its natural environment.

Immerse yourself in the history, from early Māori settlement sites around Maori Beach and Port William/Potirepo to sawmilling relics along the track, dating from 1861 to the 1930s.

Take a short water taxi ride from Oban to Ulva Island/Te Wharawhara. This predator-free island is home to many rare and endangered birds and species. It is a regular haul-out for the world’s rarest seals, the New Zealand sea lion/rāpoka or whakahao.

Wander through beautiful native forests. The Rakiura Track takes you through rimu and kāmahi forest with a rich diversity of tree ferns, ground ferns, perching orchids, clematis/puawānanga, and southern rātā.

Be greeted by a cacophony of birdsong. The Rakiura Track hosts a multitude of native birds, including Buller’s mollymawks/toroa, little penguins/kororā, tūi, parakeets/kākāriki, and New Zealand pigeons/kererū.
Places to stay

DOC operates 2 huts and 3 Great Walks campsites along the Rakiura Track, which must be booked in advance all year round.

Note: Fires are not permitted, except in the designated stoves inside huts.

Great Walks huts
$24 (1 October – 30 April) per adult per night; 17 years and under free (booking required).
$22 (1 May – 30 September) per adult per night; 17 years and under free (booking required).

The huts have cold running water, bunks, mattresses, heating and toilets. A DOC ranger may be present. These huts do not provide cooking facilities, cooking utensils, a gas supply, linen or showers.

Great Walks campsites
$6 per adult per night; 17 years and under free (booking required).

The campsites offer basic facilities including a water supply, toilets, sinks and cooking shelters. Great Walks campsites can only be accessed on foot.
What do I do next?

Start off at greatwalks.co.nz/rakiura for more information.

Book your huts and campsites online at bookings.doc.govt.nz.

Book your transport to and from Stewart Island/Rakiura and the track.

Buy your food and pack your bags – download the Great Walks packing list and make sure you have everything you need for a 3-day independent unguided walk.

Read up on safety and make sure you’re well prepared for your journey and changeable weather at greatwalks.co.nz/rakiura.

Visit the closest DOC Visitor Centre (Rakiura National Park Visitor Centre, Oban) to pick up your ticket and official track guide, and chat with the friendly staff for the latest weather forecast and track conditions.

All set! Lace up your boots and get hiking. Don’t forget to share your experience on facebook.com/GreatWalks.

Getting there

The Rakiura Track can be hiked in either direction. The track has two entry points:

- The official entrance to Rakiura National Park at Lee Bay, 5 km from Oban.
- The Fern Gully Road end, 2 km beyond the Rakiura National Park Visitor Centre, on Main Road in Oban.

Many people walk the track as a circuit, starting from Oban. Allow about 1 hr – 1 hr 30 min to walk to Lee Bay from Oban, and 20 – 30 min from the Fern Gully Road end to Oban. Alternatively, you can arrange transport to/from the track from Oban.

To get to Oban, the only township on Stewart Island/Rakiura, you can take a 20-minute flight from Invercargill or a 1-hour ferry trip across Foveaux Strait from the southern port of Bluff. If you are flying, check that all the equipment you plan to take (including cooking equipment) is permitted on the aeroplane.

In Oban you’ll find accommodation, supplies, equipment hire and transport.

Know before you go

It is important to plan your trip thoroughly to make sure you stay safe. Before you go, know the Outdoor Safety Code – 5 Simple rules to help you #MakeItHomeNZ.

1. Plan your trip. Choose a trip that fits your abilities. Make sure you have enough time to do your walk, plus extra time. Book accommodation, transport and transfers to the start/end of the track early.

2. Tell someone your plans. Tell someone where you are going and when you’ll be back. Ask them to call emergency services if you haven’t returned on time. Consider carrying a personal locator beacon, as there is no cellphone reception on most tracks.

3. Be aware of the weather. New Zealand weather is very changeable. Even if it’s summer or the forecast is good, you should always carry a rain jacket and warm clothing. Check metservice.com for the most up-to-date forecast.

4. Know your limits. A good level of fitness is needed to walk the track. Read about the track carefully to make sure it suits your abilities. Always follow the track markers and signposted tracks – going off-track can be hazardous, even for experienced walkers. Don’t be afraid to turn back.

5. Take sufficient supplies. Take the right gear, including extra food, clothing and equipment in case something goes wrong. You’ll have to carry everything you need, as you can’t buy food or equipment at Great Walks huts or campsites.

You can find more information on safety at www.doc.govt.nz/safety or www.adventuresmart.nz.

Safety on the Rakiura Track

- The weather changes quickly and is difficult to predict. Walkers should come well equipped and prepared for all weather conditions, as extreme weather can occur at any time of the year.
- Always keep to the main track. Off the tracks the valleys are steep-sided with very thick forest.
- The track is often muddy – wear sturdy footwear and carry spare socks.
- Go to greatwalks.co.nz/rakiura ‘Know before you go’ section for detailed safety information, and ‘What to take’ section for a full gear list.

Remember – your safety is your responsibility.