

North Island – From East to West, a Heartland Journey - itinerary

DAY ONE

D

This morning we'll enjoy the beautiful countryside as we make our way to the East Coast of Hawkes Bay. Stopping for lunch and a few scenic vistas we know of along the way. At the Scenic Hotel Te Pania, you are right on the doorstep of Napier's Art Deco CBD and a stone's throw to the new and controversial Pier 'To Nowhere'. With the longer daylight hours, after dinner, take a stroll along the waterfront and take the time to enjoy the lovely Sunken Gardens as well as the multi-coloured water fountain.

DAY TWO

B, D

We meet our guide and bus with breakfast behind us to travel to the iconic Cape Kidnappers, visiting the world's largest mainland Gannet colony. In an air-conditioned 4 x 4 coach, you will travel in comfort through Cape Kidnappers Station and its International Golf Course. You will traverse riverbeds, broad rolling pastures and breathtaking inclines. During the drive, you will stop at a spectacular cliff top with panoramic views across Hawkes Bay. Having also passed through native forest and predator-proof fencing, you will arrive within a few metres of this massive colony. Our Driver/Guide will return us for lunch in Havelock and time to explore the village following your Gannet viewing adventure.

DAY THREE

B, MT, D

This morning Annie is calling!! We head to the hills. The drive through the Kaweka Range is now one of the great scenic drives, recently sealed. This delightful road winds its way through rugged farmland, forested mountains and tussock-covered pastures. We will stop to breathe in the mountain air, have a comfort stop and enjoy some morning tea at the Springvale Suspension Bridge. We cross over the glistening Ngaruroro River and then ascend the "Annie". We descend past Erewhon and turn south, heading into the remote Moawhango Valley, and then into

Taihape for lunch. From Taihape, our journey continues to Taumaranui - our destination for the night.

DAY FOUR

B, MT, L, D

Awake to find yourself nestled deep within the hidden valleys of King Country's "Forgotten World" region. After breakfast, we will get away a little earlier. The Rail Carting journey is like no other. Travelling on long ago closed lines between Taumarunui and Whangamomona, we'll experience this remote area from the comfort of rail-carts which have been cleverly adapted to be self-driven along the tracks. Journey over bridges and rivers, through tunnels and townships that time has forgotten. There'll be plenty of photo opportunities as we're guided through ever-changing vistas. Once reunited with the coach at Whangamomona, we will continue through the rugged hills to Stratford and then on to our accommodation for the next couple of nights in New Plymouth.

DAY FIVE

B, D

Today we take a relaxed drive to Hawera, visiting the one and only Tawhiti Museum, a truly unique enterprise. The creation of artist Nigel Ogle, its attention to detail is simply stunning and ever-changing. Widely acclaimed as the country's best private museum, the museum uses life-size exhibits and scale models to present our heritage in a series of super realistic and engaging displays. We will enjoy the new Traders and Whalers experience, incorporating a fun boat ride through the chapters of New Zealand's history. After lunch, we head to a little gem hidden in the hills. Lake Rotokare is a stunning 230-hectare forested hill-country catchment, with extensive wetlands and a 17.8-hectare natural lake, mature Tawa, Rewarewa and Mahoe-dominated forest. We will enjoy a talk on this fantastic community project before heading back to New Plymouth. This evening is extra special. After dinner, we don our warm jackets and head out into the summer night to the Festival of Lights located at Pukekura Park.

DAY SIX

B, D

After a leisurely breakfast, we travel to Mount Taranaki's lower slopes at the

marvellous Pukeiti Gardens. This vast Council-owned garden estate is known as a "Garden of International Significance". Pukeiti is now one of the country's top rhododendron gardens. After a 4.7-million-dollar refurbishment, Puketiti now sports a 360-hectare collection of plants and regional rainforest and offers a covered walk-through tropical rhododendron species, a new car park, new tracks, an aerial walkway, a protected Kokopu treehouse and the transformation of the former gatehouse into a rainforest centre and cafe. We will enjoy a tour through the gardens on their mobility vehicle and lunch in the Café before heading back to New Plymouth for a lazy afternoon, with city centre or waterfront wandering as an option available. Perhaps at the Len Lye and Govett Brewster Art Gallery if time permits (optional). Batteries re-charged, for those that are keen, we will head out for another evening stroll through Pukekura Park.

DAY SEVEN

B

This morning, we head for home, stopping at Mokau for morning tea and maybe a sneaky whitebait fritter or two. We then continue through the Awakino Gorge counting the numerous whitebait stands along the way and over the scenic Mount Messenger. We'll stop for lunch and a comfort stop before arriving back home early afternoon.