

The East Coast



New Zealand is known for its juxtaposition of wildly divergent landscapes but in this region it's the sociological contours that are most pronounced. From the remote villages of East Cape to Havelock North's prosperous, wine-stained streets, the East Coast condenses a wide range of authentic Kiwi experiences that anyone with a passion for culture will find fascinating.

If you're the intrepid sort, you'll quickly lose the tourist hordes along the Pacific Coast Hwy, on the back roads and obscure beaches of Central Hawkes Bay, or in the mystical wilderness of Te Urewera National Park. When the feral urge wanes, a decent coffee and a slap-up meal is never far away in the urbane confines of Gisborne and Napier.

Authentic Maori culture is never more visible than on the East Coast. It's probably the only place in the country where exquisitely carved *marae* (p59) outnumber McDonalds, KFC and Starbucks outlets combined. The locals may not be wearing flax skirts and swinging *poi* (flax balls on strings) like they do for the tourists in Rotorua, but you can be assured that Maori language and *tikanga* (practices) are alive and well.

While you are guaranteed a cold beer in any of the local pubs, wine is king here. Gisborne and Hawkes Bay strain under the weight of tonnes of grapes. If the weather conspires to drive you off the beaches, lazy days can be cheerfully spent mooching around vineyards, lingering in cafés or exploring the region's museums and architecture.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Time warping to the 1930s amidst the Art-Deco delights of **Napier** (p383) and **Hastings** (p390)
- Avoiding being the designated driver as you embark on a grand winetasting tour of **Gisborne** (p372) or **Hawkes Bay** (p392) vineyards
- Meeting with Maori culture in the hidden nooks of **East Cape** (opposite) and **Te Urewera National Park** (p377)
- Beach-hopping between secluded gems such as **Maraehako Bay** (p366), **Tokomaru Bay** (p367), **Anarua Bay**, **Waimarama** (p390), **Mangakuri** and **Aramoana** (p396)
- Searching for wood nymphs amongst the magical forest paths of **Eastwoodhill Arboretum** (p371)



Climate

The East Coast basks in a warm, dry climate. Summer temperatures around Napier and Gisborne nudge 25°C, rarely dipping below 5°C in winter. The Hawkes Bay region also suns itself in mild, dry grape-growing conditions, with an average annual rainfall of 800mm. Heavy downpours sometimes wash out sections of the Pacific Coast Hwy (SH35) around the Cape.

Getting There & Around

The region's only airports are in Gisborne and Napier. Air New Zealand flies to both from Auckland and Wellington, and also to Napier from Christchurch. Sunair connects Gisborne to Hamilton, Tauranga, Rotorua and Napier, and also Napier to Hamilton.

Regular bus services ply SH2 and SH5, connecting Gisborne, Wairoa, Napier, Hastings and Waipukurau with all the main centres. Transport is much more limited around East Cape (right) and Te Urewera National Park (p380).

THE EAST COAST FACTS

Eat Macadamia and manuka honey icecream at Pacific Coast Macadamias (p366)

Read Witi Ihimaera's *Bulibasha* (1994)

Listen to An aging megastar at the annual Mission Concert (p386)

Watch *Whale Rider* (2002), then take the tour (p373)
Swim at Tokomaru Bay (p367)

Festival Art-Deco Weekend in Napier and Hastings (p386)

Tackiest tourist attraction Napier's *Pania of the Reef* statue (p383)

Go green Knapdale Eco Lodge (p374)

tured with tiny inlets that change aspect with the weather. On sunny days the sea is shimmering turquoise; at other times clouds brood on craggy slopes and everything shifts to misty green. Clear mountain rivers surge through steep gorges, while the summer seashore turns crimson with pohutukawa blooms.

Getting Around

Unless you're behind the wheel, transport around East Cape can be ponderous, especially on weekends, but couriers regularly link Opotiki with Gisborne via Hicks Bay.

Coastal View Couriers (✉ 06-864 4654) runs between Opotiki and Hicks Bay (\$40, three hours, 2pm from Opotiki, 6.30am from Hicks Bay, Monday to Friday). **Polly's Passenger Couriers** (✉ 06-864 4728) continues from here to Gisborne (\$40, 3½ hours, 6.30am from Hicks Bay, 1pm from Gisborne, Monday to Friday).

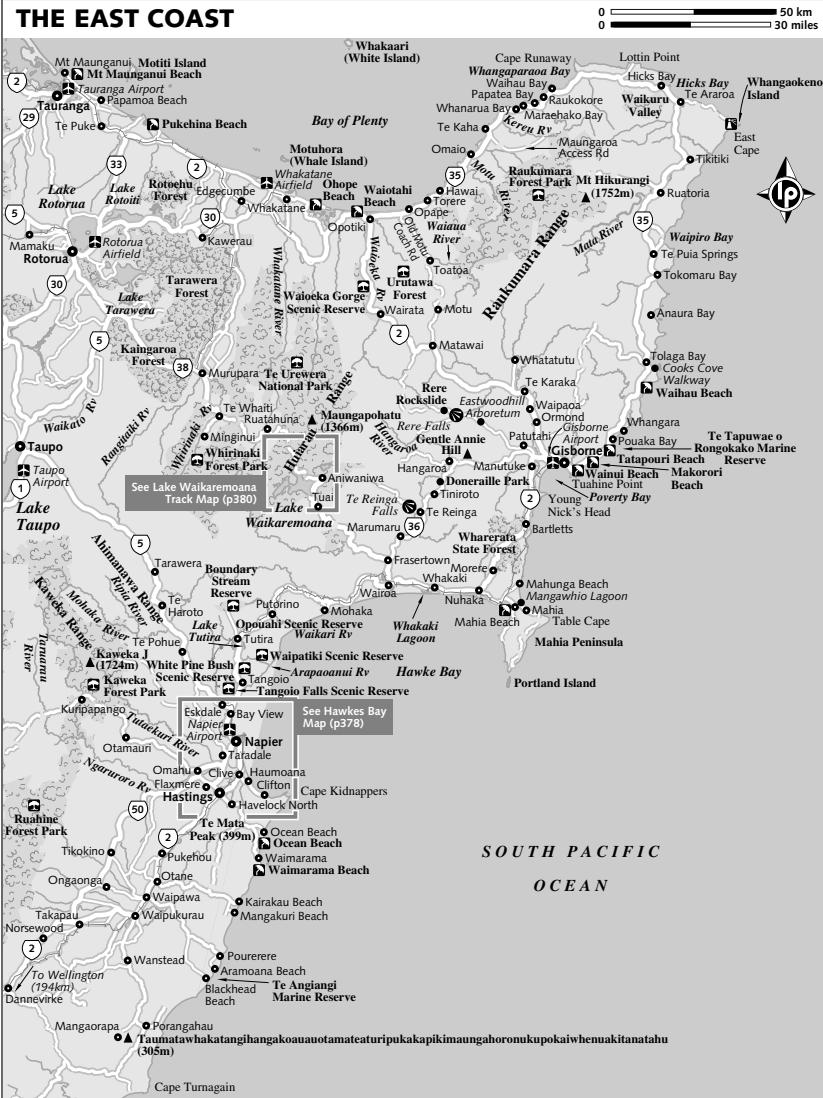
Cook's Couriers (✉ 06-864 4711) covers the same route (\$40, 3½ hours, 7.30am from Hicks Bay, 2pm from Gisborne, Monday to Saturday).

An alternative is **Kiwi Experience** (✉ 09-366 9830; www.kiwiexperience.com; \$340), which runs the four-day 'East As' backpacker bus leaving from Taupo or Rotorua.

PACIFIC COAST HWY

NZ's not short on awesome drives, but few beat the coast-hugging SH35 as it loops around the country's eastern fringe. You're not going to get anywhere quickly on this route but that's hardly the point. While it can be done in a solid six hours, you'll enjoy it more if you split up the journey and linger along the way. If you haven't got time to enjoy the entire coastal road this time around, don't despair. The shorter route between Opotiki

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and Gisborne (144km) follows SH2 through native bush along the stunning Waioeka Gorge before spilling out into picturesque orchards and vineyards.

Before you hit the road, collect the free *Pacific Coast Hwy* booklet from the Opotiki or Gisborne i-SITE. Don't forget to fill up the petrol tank and stock up on snacks and

groceries as retailers are in short supply along the way. As sleeping and eating options are so spread out, we've listed them in the order you'll find them.

Opotiki to Te Kaha

The first leg offers hazy views across to Whakaari (White Island; p357), a chain-

MAORI NZ: THE EAST COAST

The main *iwi* (tribes) in the region are Te Whanau-a-Apanui (west side of East Cape), Ngati Porou (east side of East Cape), Ngati Kahungunu (the coast from Hawkes Bay down) and Tuhoe (inland in Te Urewera).

Ngati Porou and Ngati Kahungunu are the country's second and third biggest *iwi*. In the late 19th century they produced the great leaders James Carroll (the first Maori cabinet minister) and Apirana Ngata (who was briefly acting Prime Minister). Ngata, whose face adorns the \$50 bill, worked tirelessly in Parliament to orchestrate a cultural revival within Maoridom. The region's magnificent carved meeting houses are part of his legacy.

Many opportunities exist to interact with Maori culture while you're in the region. For accommodation around East Cape with a distinctly Maori flavour, consider Te Kaha Homestead Lodge (below), Maerahako Bay Retreat (p366), Mel's Place (p366) and Fastender Backpackers (p367).

There are plenty of excellent tours offering an intimate introduction to *Maoritanga* (things Maori). Try the Ngati Porou Visitor's Centre (p367), Motu River Jet Boat Tours (below), Whale Rider Tour (p373), Tipuna Tours (p373), Hawkes Bay Maori Tourism (p383), Long Island Tours (p390) or Hikoitangi Iiti (p396). Te Aute College (p396) welcomes visitors but you'll need to call ahead.

The Urewera region has a long and proud history of resistance to colonisation: start your investigations at Aniwanika (p378) and if you have time, visit the unique communities at Ruatahuna and Maungapohatu (p377).

For a more passive brush with the culture, visit Gisborne's Tairawhiti Museum (p372), Napier's Hawkes Bay Museum (p383) and Otatara Pa (p384), and Tikitiki's St Mary's Church (p367). Throughout the text we've listed interesting *mārae* that can be admired from the street.

smoking active volcano. The desolate beaches at **Torere**, **Hawai** and **Omaio** are steeply shelved and littered with ocean detritus. Check out the magnificent *whakairo* (carving) on the Torere school gateway. Hawai marks the boundary of the Whanau-a-Apanui tribe whose *rohe* (traditional land) extends to Cape Runaway.

About 42km east of Opotiki the road crosses the broad pebbly expanse of the **Motu River**, the first river in NZ to be designated as a protected wilderness area. Action seekers head here for back-to-nature rafting and jet-boating adventures. **Wet 'n' Wild Rafting** (✉ 0800 4627238; www.wetnwildrafting.co.nz; 2-5 days \$750-\$875) offers multiple day excursions, with the longest taking you 100km down the river. The river is so remote that the two-day tour requires you to be helicoptered in, therefore costing almost as much as the five-day trip. **Motu River Jet Boat Tours** (✉ 07-325 2735; www.motujet.co.nz; 1hr trips \$85) include an ecological and historical commentary from a Maori perspective.

Twenty-five kilometres further along, the fishing town of **Te Kaha** once sounded the death knell for passing whales. There's a store here and accommodation options. At the time of research the local pub was expanding into a luxury resort with an upmarket restaurant. From the roadside you get a decent view of the sublimely carved *Tukai marae*.

SLEEPING

Te Kaha Homestead Lodge (✉ 07-325 2194; fax 07-325 2193; SH35; dm/s/tw/d \$30/40/60/80) Affable and big-hearted, this waterfront hostel perches amongst archaic pohutukawa trees with spa views to White Island. The accommodation is basic but the enthusiastic owner organises fishing trips (\$80 per hour) and bursts into choruses of 'Welcome to the Homestead at Te Kaha' (to the tune of *Hotel California*) given the slightest provocation.

Tui Lodge (✉ fax 07-325 2922; jorex@xtra.co.nz; Copenhagen Rd, Te Kaha; s/d \$125/150; ) This spacious, modern guesthouse sits on three leafy acres irresistible to tui (parson birds). Breakfast is included but dinner is by arrangement; horse trekking, fishing and diving jaunts are also on the cards.

Te Kaha Holiday Park (07-325 2894; www.tekahaholidaypark.co.nz; SH35; sites per adult/child \$12/7, dm \$20, d \$78-105;  ) From tent patches to self-contained motels, this beautifully maintained, *hapu* (subtribe)-run holiday park is all-things-to-all-visitors. Just 300m from the beach, there's a tumult of oceanic activities, an excellent café (breakfast \$5 to \$12) and a general store.