

Peter Tait's *CoroGuide*

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Waihi Beach



Awesome sunsets



Cathedral Cove



Hahei Explorer



Art and Gifts at Moko



Orokawa Bay walk



Colonial Thames



Pepper Tree seafood



Kayaking at Hahei



Success Cafe at Coro



Waiau Waterworks



Driving Creek Railway

Get ready for a holiday with a difference!

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Coro's Keltic Fair



Hahei Beach



Coffee at Nina's



Clean and green

The Coromandel Holiday

Long ago the Coromandel Peninsula was a range of volcanoes, today it's a pleasant mix of small towns, farmland and bush-covered hills with a meandering coastline and awesome, ever changing scenery and beaches. All just perfect for a memorable holiday! There's plenty to see and do for both New Zealanders and tourists. If you are visiting from overseas don't rush around trying to see the whole of the North Island, slow up, relax and spend your time just enjoying the Coromandel – it's an awesome region!

Peter Tait, the writer of this guide knows the Coromandel well. He has worked around the region publishing holiday brochures since 1991 and has looked on with interest as the region has grown from a 'bit of a social and economic backwater' to become one of New Zealand's top holiday destinations. Peter says *"It's a region like no other - craggy hills and meandering coastline, historic towns with interesting locals and startlingly lovely beaches. All with a unique local culture and scenery that's even beautiful in the rain - I love it!"*

The CoromandelFun website (www.coromandelfun.co.nz) which offers this CoroGuide download is the home of the Tait's Fun Maps of the Coromandel. Holidaymakers should use the maps in conjunction with the website for information on accommodation, activities, where to go and what to see etc.

The Itineraries

These itineraries are intended as a guide for visitors from overseas and first time Coromandel holidaymakers. Those who think they already know the Coromandel will still find them helpful - tourist regions are forever coming up with new forms of entertainment and places to stay.

'Stay-a-While' Itinerary (7 Nights)

Auckland International Airport – Coromandel Peninsula and return.

Overnight Stays: Thames (1 night), Coromandel (2 nights), Whitianga (2 nights), Hahei (1 night), plus one spare night, your choice.

'Linger-Longer' Itinerary (10 Nights)

Auckland Airport – Coromandel Peninsula and return.

Thames (1 night), Coromandel Town (2 nights), Kuaotunu Coast (1 night), Whitianga (2 nights), Hahei (1 night), Whangamata 1 night), Waihi (1 night) plus 1 spare night.



Sunrise over the Coromandel Peninsula from the Hauraki Gulf

Other Itinerary options:

Auckland - Coromandel ferry service.

Another itinerary option is becoming available as a new ferry service gets established between Downtown Auckland and Coromandel Town. The ferry takes you through the most scenic part of Auckland's famous Hauraki Gulf, a perfect start for your Coromandel holiday. This opens up the following itinerary for visitors from overseas: Auckland Airport – Auckland City (2 nights), ferry to Coromandel Town hire some wheels and continue with one of the itineraries above and returning to Auckland International Airport by road. This tour can return to Auckland by ferry or be reversed to perhaps suit ferry sailings better and can also be modified to include a night or two on popular Waiheke Island.

Great Cycling Holiday

This ferry trip also gives awesome opportunities for cycling holidays - the northern part of the peninsula is a great bike ride, take a tent and stay at the DOC campsites. A cycle path links the western coastal road to Stony Bay on the west side - refer the maps page. You could also take one of the big ferries from Auckland to Matiatia on Waiheke Island and spend some time on the island before picking up the Coromandel ferry at Orapiu (at the far eastern end of the island) and continuing to Coromandel. Bikes travel free on some ferries.

NOTE RE FERRY SERVICES: The above plans are subject to convenient ferry sailings to Coromandel Town, (enquire www.360discovery.co.nz.) There are regular large ferries servicing the Auckland - Waiheke Island route but the Auckland - Waiheke - Coromandel service does not run every day and can be subject to weather.

A bus meets the ferry at the wharf and delivers passengers to Coromandel Town and vice versa. For hire vehicles and transport information try Fury's Creek Rentals ph 09 866 8736 or NZ Rent a Car, (whitianga@nzrentacar.co.nz). You can also enquire at the i-SITE Information Centres in Coromandel Town (coroinfo@ihug.co.nz) or Whitianga (enquiry@whitianga.co.nz).

Finding your way around

Most of the Coromandel is covered by the unique Tait's Fun Maps which give the information required for a great stay. Download the maps from this website or pick up copies at the i-SITE Information Centres where you can also make bookings. Note that the Fun Maps are not to scale. Anything marked ** shouldn't be missed.



Rapaura Watergardens



Thames Town



Kauaranga Valley



Family beaches

Auckland to Thames

For those travelling by road from Auckland: Check the road map on the Coromandelfun website, Map Page - the less direct **Seabird Coast** route is an option at a slower pace and well suited to cyclists. The **Miranda Hot Springs** are on this road if you fancy a soak in a hot pool!

By car it takes 1½ hours from Auckland City to Thames, 1¼ from Auckland Airport to Thames. On the way there are several good cafes on the Hauraki Plains should you need a bite or a caffeine fix - try the **Corogate cafe** for something different!

Thames

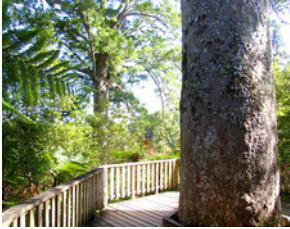
For the visitor Thames is 'Full of Surprises' but not so many as in the old colonial gold rush days when it had more boozers and brothels than even Auckland. The stamper battery noise was non-stop and the ground shook day and night! The **Museums** and the **Gold Mine and Stamper Battery Tours** will give you a taste of those olde golden days.

With a population of 7500, Thames is the largest town on the Peninsula. The mile long Pollen Street, the main shopping street, has all varieties of shops, some excellent for unusual gifts, art and cafes too, especially at the Grahamstown (north) end. The nearby Goldfields Mall in Mary Street has most of the big chain stores and a good supermarket. You can hire a fully equipped touring bike at the Paki Paki Bike Shop or a fishing boat at Local Hire. The **Butterfly and Orchid Garden** in the grounds of the Dickson Holiday Park, just north of the town is worth a visit. For more information on activities and places to stay refer to the Fun Map or Coromandelfun website. The Information Centre at 206 Pollen Street (thames@i-site.org) will be pleased to provide bookings, bus timetables or any additional information you may require. See the accommodation pages for places to stay - all recommended.

The nearby **Kauaranga Valley** has top scenery, walking tracks, camping by the river and at the top of the hills you can stay at the 80 bunk Pinnacles Hut. Drive to the head of the valley where the walks start or shuttle buses will take you there. The valley is administered by the Department of Conservation (DOC).

It's a pleasant drive on SH25 up the coast which has a series of safe family beaches and small settlements. At Tapu you can take a side trip up the scenic **Tapu Valley**. A few kilometers up the valley are the the Mahara Sculpture Park and Working Pottery and the famous **Rapaura Watergardens** with café and accommodation. Just beyond Rapaura is the Square Kauri Tree, a giant tree with a freak square trunk - a saw miller's delight!

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Waiiau Kauri Grove



Success Cafe



Mussel barge fishing



Driving Creek Railway

Coromandel Town

Continue heading north.. Coro' as it's affectionately called is a 'treat in store'! It still retains a hint of it's pioneering character from the early days when it was a boat trip to the outside world and ingenuity was king. Here you become part of a friendly community and there will always be a warm welcome and a helping hand should the need arise. The main street has good cafes, old 'boozers', art and other interesting shops. Art and pottery is special here as some of NZ's top artists live in the town. The annual Art Trail (mid autumn) and associated exhibitions is a treat for all those interested in art.

Accommodation of all types is available. Once again refer to the Coromandel Fun Map or website for the details. All the advertisers on the Fun Map come with a recommendation and the I-SITE Information Centre will oblige if you don't already have a copy or need bookings, coroinfo@ihug.co.nz.

Local specialties and entertainments include the ****recommended Driving Creek Railway** a narrow gauge railway which winds tortuously up the hillside through tunnels and over bridges to the 'Eyefull Terminus' for the awesome hilltop view. The railway station (a work of art in itself) is also a working pottery with an art and book shop. DCR is sometimes rated as one of New Zealand's visitor highlights.

The charter boat fishing is big on this coast – try the recommended ****Mussell Barge Snapper Safaries** or the water taxi at ****Anglers Lodge**. You can even be dropped off on a small island with bunks in a cave for an overnight or a few hours rock fishing.

Just South of Coro' Town, a short way up the 309 Road, don't miss the recommended ****Waiiau Waterworks**, several acres of whimsical water wizardry in a garden setting. Just a short distance further along the 309 is one of the Peninsula's best short walks taking you to the recommended ****Waiiau Kauri Grove**. The Waiiau Falls are also nearby as is the climb up Castle Rock for more awesome views.

Coromandel Town boasts the largest Summer Festival on the Peninsula, the Keltic Fair, every year on the 2nd of January for stalls, food, entertainments and music.

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Coastal Pohutukawas



Matarangi Beach



Coro' Town sunset



Otama Beach

North of Coromandel Town and Back

Further north is Colville with the famous Colville Co-op Store which is a hippy HQ from the 70's and still the place to enquire regarding local alternative community activities. The Mahamudra Retreat Centre offers accommodation for spiritual travellers. The road north hugs the coast up to the Cape and is extremely scenic with amazing old Pohutukawa trees but take care it is also narrow, winding and unsealed. If you are not familiar with gravel roads or your rental vehicle is not allowed on such roads, then take the recommended **Strongmans Bus Tour from Coromandel Town. This tour can include the popular Coromandel Walkway where the bus picks you up on request at the other end of the walking track at Stony Bay on the east coast. There are several **DOC Campsites in this area, some right on the beach, others in valleys with chuckling streams and sea views. Waikawau Bay on the east coast is just the best!

Coromandel Town to Whitianga

Get back on to SH25 and head up over the big hill. Check out the view from the summit then cruise on down towards the east coast. The pine plantations (with a few straggly Eucalyptus especially planted to make Aussie visitors feel at home) gives way to prime farmland. The Castle Rock Winery is accommodation, café and fruit winery all in one, take a few bottles with you.

Beaches! Beaches!

Whangapoua Beach is mostly holiday homes, but with a well stocked shop and a top walk from the north end to ****New Chum's Beach**. Further on, **Matarangi** has a nice long beach, again the community is largely holiday homes but this time with a small shopping centre, top golf club, motel and café.

Further along SH25 is **Kuaotunu Beach**, long and picturesque. Good B&B and Lodge accommodation is available in this area. The nearby beaches Rings, Otama, Opito are all long, pristine, and north facing for all day sun. And for most of the year, they're all yours on your own!

Continue on SH25, over some more hills and down to Simpsons Beach, Buffalo Beach and into Whitianga.

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Buffalo Beach



Whitianga Town



Diving



Mill Creek Bird Park

Whitianga

Whitianga is the largest commercial centre on this coast. Facilities include: all types of accommodation, good shopping, golf, top cafes and bars, recommended are **Ninas Café and **Smitty's. There are plenty of activities here including: diving, art and gift shopping, and all types of trips on the water - scenic tours, adventure trips, sailing and fishing.

The **Harbour Ferry** ride across the small harbour entrance lands at Ferry Landing, just a 5 minute trip. There are several good walks in this area, see the Fun Map for details. The nearest one goes to the top of Whitianga Rock, scene of an early intertribal Maori massacre so nasty that the water in nearby Back Bay went red with blood as a marauding tribe, newly armed with the white man's muskets, picked off the fleeing locals. There's a beach store with petrol, the Cook Cafe just up the road is great and Eggsentric Café at **Flaxmill Bay** with art and music is worth the walk. The recommended **Purangi Shuttles from the Winery does local pick-ups and tours on request - ph 07 866 3724

Ferry Timetable:

The Ferry runs continuously from 7.30am – 6.30pm, 7.30pm – 8.30pm and 9.30pm – 10.30pm. From Dec 26 to 31 Jan the service is continuous 7.30am – 1.30am the next day. It's passengers and bikes only ie no cars and it's cheap!

Once again in this area for services and accommodation the Fun Map and Coromandelfun website provide additional information. For bookings and specialist visitor information contact the Whitianga Information Centre at 66 Albert Street Whitianga. Phone 07 866 5555 or email them at info@whitianga.co.nz

Whitianga to Hahei and Hot Water Beach

Get back on SH25 which is now heading south, past the other end of the 309 Road and on. Activities in this area include Combat Zone and High Zone in the Kaimarama Valley. Then in Mill Creek Road check out Mill Creek Lavender Cafe and the **Bird Park which has accommodation and a large number of birds on show - if you like birds this is a must. Rumour has it they will be breeding Kiwis there soon! The Whiti Farm Park has all types of animals in a valley setting then on to Coroglen, a small settlement dating back to early colonial days. The pub is a classic old friendly country 'boozer' with backpackers and regular big name music nights. Holiday park accommodation is available just a few kilometers up the Coroglen-Tapu Road at RiverGlen alongside the picturesque Waiwawa River. Go horse riding at the **Rangihau Ranch for the best ride on the Coromandel then not far along SH25 on the right is the interesting Alan Rhodes Pottery - a working pottery and shop established in the 70s.



Cathedral Cove



Natural spa baths at famous Hot Water Beach



Kayaks at Hahei

Pull out the Tait's Fun Map again and take next left at Dalmeny Corner and along a meandering little road which services several of the most popular destinations on the Coromandel: Hot Water Beach, Hahei, Cooks Beach and Flaxmill Bay.

Hot Water Beach is where you can dig a natural hot water spa pool in the sand. It's a great place on the right day but note that - it's at low water only, is subject to sand conditions, is sometimes too hot and you risk getting hot sand up your bum, but it's very popular! Relax in the recommended ****Hot Waves Cafe** if you're a bit early. For accommodation the old campground is now closed but the Hot Water Beach B&B and Aunty Dawn's are both ****recommended**. For top art call in to ****Moko** opposite the shop.

WARNING: Don't swim in the surf unless you are a strong swimmer as there can be a strong rip adjacent to the rock near the hot water springs.

Hahei Beach

Next is Hahei, the Coromandel's most enjoyed beach. And you can see why, - white, white sand and sparkling turquoise waters. Hahei has a commercial centre with the popular Luna Café and top Beach Store, petrol too. Top accommodation at Tatahi Lodge and The Church, B&Bs too, see the Fun Map. Local activities include the popular walk to **Cathedral Cove**, the much photographed cave through the white headland. If you're not into walking you could join the ****Cathedral Cove Kayaks** and go by sea! Or take a dive or a snorkel in the Marine reserve with ****Cathedral Cove Dive**. If you fancy a romantic hideaway, try the Purangi Garden Homestay on a large reserve at the end of Lees Road, just along the beach from where Captain Cook filled his water barrels and first raised England's flag in New Zealand.

On to **Cooks Beach** a safe family beach with a commercial centre, top takeaways, friendly beach store and if you would like to buy a house see Phil at Richardsons Real Estate. Further on is Flaxmill Bay, Front Beach and the Ferry Landing! You have come in a loop - just 5 mins by passenger ferry is Whitianga! There's a short cut back to SH25, go straight on past the Hahei turnoff then right and SH25's not far along at Dalmeny Corner. This corner is a bus stop so if the kids are playing up or being a pain, put them out to wait for the next bus home!

Take a left turn and the recommended ****Colenso Café** not far along on the right is a nice refreshment stop in a garden setting, sells art too.



Pauanui Beach



Tairua Beach



Whangamata Beach

Hahei to Tairua

On over the next lot of hills is Tairua. If you have not seen the big Kauri Trees anywhere so far, stop and look at the Twin Kauris on the roadside as you head down into town. Tairua has a long ocean beach, a harbour and the hills behind the town have wide sea views. The township has good shops, petrol, accommodation and cafes. Recommendation: try the blueberry muffins at the **Out of the Blue Café and check out the old steam ferry making out like a restaurant around by Paku, the big knobby hill near the harbour entrance.

Tairua to Pauanui

Keep going, you are still on SH25 (navigation isn't a problem in these parts, just the one ring road!) awesome hills to the right side and Pauanui turnoff to the left at Hikuai. Pauanui is a holiday home beach resort on a long white and lovely sandy beach and sharing the harbour that Tairua is on. A ferry links the two centres. Pauanui has accommodation, shops and good cafes too.

Pauanui to Whangamata

Back on to SH25 and there is a choice at the next intersection not far along – left continues the tour of the Peninsula and right goes directly back to Thames. So it's turn right and on up the big hill for those on the 7 day 'Stay-a-While' Itinerary.

Whangamata

Whangamata is over the next set of hills and through a large pine forest. It's a commercial centre with a harbour, and estuary and yes, yet another long white and lovely, white sandy beach! This one is great for swimming and surfing and all beach fun. Whangamata boasts the largest young persons festival on the peninsula – the 'Whanga Beach Hop', three days of Rock'n'Roll, Rods and Rubber on the Road.

Again there is plenty of good accommodation, try the recommended **Breakers Motel, cafes and shopping and a top golf club. Call at the i-SITE Information Centre in Port Road for the latest visitor information.

Oputere, Onemana and Whiritoa

These adjacent beaches are pleasant holiday beaches. Onemana and Whiritoa have friendly beach stores and accommodation. Whiritoa has a pleasant short walk to Waimama Bay from the lagoon at the north end of the beach. Oputere is a long beach and estuary with peace and quiet and unique bird life.



Waihi Beach



Orokawa Beach walk



Karangahake Gorge



Miranda Hot Pools

Whangamata to Waihi

Back on the road and over another set of hills to Waihi, a town dating back to the gold rush colonial days and still with a very large open cast gold mine just behind the town, it's worth a look! The town is commercial centre for the region with good shops, cafes, art studios and shops and accommodation. A popular train ride (some days with an antique steam loco) runs from the station to the nearby Karangahake Gorge.

Waihi Beach is a few kilometers from Waihi Town. Again it's white, sandy and this time very long, extending all the way to Bowentown and the entrance to the Tauranga harbour! A beautiful coastal walk from the north end of the beach to the pristine **Orokawa Bay is one of the best on the Peninsula.

Waihi to Paeroa

If you are now heading home via Auckland go towards Paeroa via the Karangahake Gorge. The countryside steepens up as the old gold mining gorge area approaches. Relics and debris from the mining era can be seen near the many walks in the Karangahake Gorge area. Several cafes do good trade nearby and the Bulls Wool Farm Park is worth a visit. The town of Paeroa services the surrounding farming area with good shopping, cafes and most services.

Head north west across the Hauraki Plains, on SH2 or SH25. On the way there's plenty at Ngatea (see the Thames Fun Map) where you can visit the gemstone shop, Wilderness Gems and the Ngatea Water Gardens.

There are some choices here either continue northwest to SH1 and back to Auckland Airport or if you have time in hand the Seabird coast route is a pleasant back road with beach shops, holiday park accommodation, a friendly pub with accommodation and more. Remember the recommended **Miranda Hot Springs and adjacent **Miranda Holiday Park. Both have king size natural hot pools and they're only there to be enjoyed! Friendly staff, all facilities, big pools, small hotter pools, don't miss it!

Your Comments and Experiences

Your comments are welcome and I'm interested to hear about your holiday experiences, both good and bad. Please email me: pete@coromandelfun.co.nz

And REMEMBER just one other thing - Enjoy but always respect the environment and all things that live there!

DISCLAIMER: Whilst all care has been taken in the preparation of this brochure, Peter Tait and TAIT Publications apologises for but accepts no responsibility for any error or omission which may have occurred.

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