A world of its own
Aotea Great Barrier Island is a world apart from Auckland City - or any city for that matter.

It’s the environment that most New Zealanders long for. Aotea is all about relaxation, renewal and regeneration. There’s simply no need to rush anywhere on the Barrier. You can’t help noticing this as soon as you venture out - no highways here. Just chill out and breathe.

Please take care, drive carefully, and trust the signs when they say ‘4WD only’. They mean it.

The main centres
The main areas you are likely to see while cruising the island are:

- **Claris** - the main facilities
  - The main airport and centre of most things. Claris has the police station, council offices and the health centre. It would be the capital if Aotea was a country.
  - This is where incoming aircraft passengers pick up rental cars, stock up on supplies, post a letter or take in the art gallery and museum. It’s a hub for accommodation, food and local life.
  - After that, the rest of Aotea Great Barrier Island beckons. But before you hit the road, make sure you check out the Gibb 3 site Claris Airport. They can tell you the opening times (and location) of cafes, eateries and lodges, as some places are not open all year round.

**Driving on the island**

The island roads do double duty. They are real roads to locals - that is, routes to get places effectively in a car or ute on a working day. For visitors, the roads are walkways, bike trails, resting places, viewing sites, as well as spots for a little revenge.

Aotea Great Barrier’s roads are not wide and never straight. Tear your eyes away from the view, and look out for walkers, cyclists, ducks, stock and other vehicles. In short, be careful - it’s still a road.

Campervans are welcome, but please note: you can only stay at designated campsites. Look for the campervan icons on the map to locate them.

No open fires on Aotea Great Barrier Island.

**Port FitzRoy** - bays, boats and bush

Sheltered Port FitzRoy Harbour is best explored by boat. There are kayaks for hire at the Hillary Outdoors Education Centre at Karaka Bay and at Glenfrem Sanctuary.

But there is more - a charming village where you can shop, post a letter or access the library and information centre, eat at the Boat Club (site of the world famous annual mussel fest) or set off on a walk. Tracks for all levels of fitness start from the village.

Some Port FitzRoy highlights are listed in the ‘Must Do’ activities (right).

While there, book a guided tour through Glenfrem Sanctuary, and see what a New Zealand forest should be like. It’s an inspiration, and only a distance minute’s drive from Port FitzRoy.

**Tryphena** - civilisation, Barrier style

The first port of call for many people coming by ferry. First rules: put your watch in the glove box and toss away the events diary of your otherwise hectic life. Take a deep breath. You’ve arrived.

Take it easy on the coastal road and enjoy lovely beaches, good eateries and artist studios.

- **Cape Barrow Road** leads you to some fine views. But no rush, remember. Likewise along Poitir Bay Road and Schonner Bay Road.

- **Look for seabirds, schools of fish, dolphins and Brydes whales in and around the harbour.**

**Must Do activities**

**OK, what to do when faced with so much choice? Here’s a short list:**

- **Harataonga Bay** Possibly the most beautiful campsite in the world. With lovely historic trees, and a beach to die for. There’s a 1 hour loop walk, or a longer coastal track to Okiwi.

- **Medlands Beach** The ultimate white sand surf beach, with rocks and a wee island to gaze upon. A perfect spot for a stroll, holding hands...

- **Okupu Bay and lona mine** Giant magic phutslawa trees, a picnic heaven, and a drive across historic bridges to a lovely jetty. Stop at the lona mine on the way down to Okupu.

- **Tryphena gallery with no-one around - just take your simmer in the air.** The tangata whenua (original Maungauratahangi) have had the idea - protecting the area with a number of fortified Pa. But it was a slow and peaceful place even with the trade in obsidian, a valuable commodity.

- Whaling stopped here in the 1960s, and the remains of the whaling station can be seen across Whangaparapara Bay.

- Also on that shore was a huge timber mill and wharf, connected to the forest with tramlines. Only the foundation piles are there now. The island was a source of beautiful kauri timber.

A short-lived gold rush happened, as well as copper mining. A surprising early export was honey - shipped to Europe in the 1880s.

Barrier has also had its share of famous shipwrecks.

This is just a hint at the Aotea Great Barrier’s rich history. Now the island mostly exports good memories and relaxed visitors.

**History**

On the road to, and in the quiet bay of Whangaparapara, you’ll be surprised at the scale of previous industry on the Barrier - gold mining, kauri felling and whaling. Now mere remnants remain, but tantalising tales still simmer in the air. The tangata whenua [original Maori settlers] had the right idea - protecting the area with a number of fortified Pa. But it was a slow and peaceful place even with the trade in obsidian, a valuable commodity.

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**Hikoi: Venturing out**

The best short walks must end in a reward, right? Any beach, any what is lovely - see the Must Do’s on the left.

And venturing further, try the stroll to Kaitoke Hot Springs or to Whangaparapara road.

A meander along lonely Whangapoua Beach is to experience calmness and quietude. And to reflect on the fate of those who died in the 1894 wreck of the SS Wairau. Head out to Kawa (in Katherine Bay) to see more graves from this tragedy. If you’re lucky, local Maori will tell you of their ancestors’ role in the rescue.

**Haerenga: For the fit**

If you have the time and are keen on a big adventure, consider the three day Department of Conservation (DOC) Aotea Track starting near the Kaitoke Hot Pools, through the forested heat of the island. For any serious walking on Aotea Great Barrier Island, please get the proper hiking maps produced by DOC - available at island info centres. Don’t use this map for hiking.

**Kaitiaki: Wildlife**

Animals are significant to Maori, often viewed as kaitiaki or guardians of people and places.

Aotea has the biggest population of pateke (brown teal, a rare native duck), plenty of noisy, cheeky kakariki parrots, and many other birds and lizards. We also have one of the few nesting places for takou (black petrel) - spectacular seabirds that roam as far as Australia and Ecuador.

The waters around Great Barrier abound in dolphins and Brydes whales. Great Barrier Island is fortunate not to have pest ferrets, hedgehogs, Norwegian rats, possums, stoats or weasels - but we do have a vast number of kore (Polynesian rats) ship rats and ferals cats filling the gap.

Help us protect our biodiversity. Do whatever you can not to import pests. Clean your footwear, equipment and bike tyres to stop the spread of kauri dieback disease. Stay on tracks and boardwalks and heed the signs.

**Toi: Art and culture**

Aotea Art Gallery at Claris shows the varied work of local artists, and is well worth visiting.

Elsewhere you may also find other art studios and craftspeople, and even an ‘honesty box’ gallery with no-one around - just take your painting and leave your money (Rosalie Bay Road). Only on the Barrier...

The Milk, Honey & Crains Museum just south of Claris is a charming stop, that breaks all the rules of ordinary museums - yet will leave you enchanted, entertained and informed.

For more culture, history and stories, talk to your accommodation hosts - or check with one of the information offices.

The annual Kiwiraid for Wheel running and cycling race is a popular fundraiser for Kaitoke Primary School.

![Photo: John Gargan](image-url)
Driving times from Claris
- Tryphena: 20 minutes
- Okupu: 15 minutes
- Whangaparapara: 20 minutes
- Awana: 10 minutes
- Harataonga: 30 minutes
- Okivi: 40 minutes
- Port FitzRoy: 50 minutes
- Mabey Road end: 60 minutes

This map is not suitable to use as a walking map. Please refer to the Auckland Council Discovery Maps, the Department of Conservation track brochures (available from local Information Centres) and doc.govt.nz for detailed information about local walkways and tracks.

Mountain bike trail grades
- **Easy**: Mostly flat with some gentle climbs on smooth track with easily avoidable obstacles such as rocks and potholes.
- **Intermediate**: Steep slopes and/or avoidable obstacles possibly on narrow track and/or with poor traction. There may be exposure at the track’s outside edge.
- **Advanced**: A mixture of long, steep climbs, narrow track, poor traction and difficult obstacles to avoid or jump over. Generally exposed at the track’s outside edge. Most riders will find some sections easier to walk.

Take care swimming at the eastern beaches. There are serious swells and rips all along this coast and Great Barrier has no lifeguards.

Drive safely: Great Barrier’s roads are not wide and never straight. Slow down and look out for pedestrians, cyclists and other vehicles.

Find out more: phone 09 301 0101 or visit aucklandcouncil.govt.nz