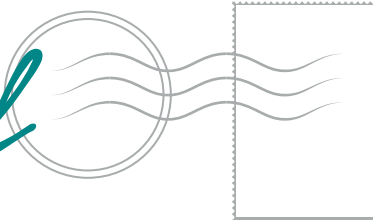


DESTINATIONS

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POSTCARD

Kapiti Island



Take a trip back in time at a wildlife sanctuary off the coast of New Zealand's North Island, writes **Claire Nelson**

The boat bumps against the pebbly shore at Rangatira, and straight away I hear birdsong ringing out from the forest. We've arrived at Kapiti Island, one of New Zealand's most valuable nature reserves, and a haven for native species – including many that no longer exist on the mainland.

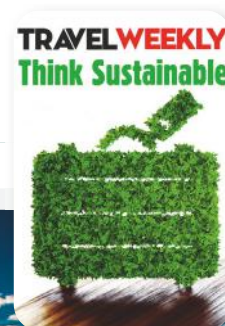
From the beach at Paraparaumu – an hour's drive north of the capital, Wellington – the boat takes 20 minutes to reach either of the island's landing points: Waiorua Bay in the north or Rangatira at its centre. The only way to visit is with Kapiti Island Nature Tours, run by the *whanau* (family) which has lived on the island for generations and remains its *kaitiaki* (guardians). Our guide gives a traditional Maori welcome, then walks us through the island's history, environment and wildlife.

It's mostly birds; before people arrived in New Zealand, the only native land mammal was a small bat, but over time, countless invasive species destroyed the natural order. Here on Kapiti Island, it took decades to eradicate them – the removal of possums alone took six years and 125 miles of trapline. Now, the island has been pest and predator-free for almost a quarter of a century, and native vegetation is flourishing thanks to biodiversity regeneration efforts.

To immerse myself in this sanctuary, I take one of the hiking tracks up to the island's 521m summit through a forest of tawa and kanuka trees. There are birds everywhere: a flightless weka (woodhen) struts across my path and a few *piwakawaka* (fantails) flit closely in my wake. I pass a feeding station for hihi, a frenzy of little yellow-chested birds taking in supplemental nectar. Only 400 of these birds still exist, almost a third of them here on Kapiti.

A day trip includes guided or self-guided exploration, or there's the option to stay overnight at Waiorua, enjoying a communal meal in the lodge and sleeping in cabins or glamping tents, with a guided night walk to spot the iconic kiwi on its nocturnal rambles.

Kapiti Island is a glimpse of New Zealand as it once was – as close to time travel as one can get. **TW**



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Audley Travel offers tailor-made itineraries to New Zealand. A 19-day trip to the North and South islands, visiting Kapiti Island, Wellington, Mount Cook and Queenstown, costs from £6,850 per person, based on two sharing. The price includes all flights, B&B accommodation, hire car and excursions. audleytravel.com/new-zealand



TOP: Kapiti Island is a 20-minute boat ride from North Island
ABOVE: The kaka parrot is endemic to New Zealand

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