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New Zealand's Remote Kapiti Island: What You Need to Know

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If you're looking for that only-in-New-Zealand experience, staying overnight on [Kapiti Island](#) is it.

The predator-free nature reserve is well known as a [sanctuary for rare native birds](#) like the nocturnal kiwi, but even many locals don't realize that it's possible to stay overnight on the island at a family-run lodge. With nothing but birdsong and rustling leaves as accompaniment, it'll often seem like you're alone on the island's footpaths — and you may very well be. The lodge owners and their extended family, plus a maximum of 20

guests, are the only human occupants on the island at any given time. And where else can you be lulled to sleep by the sound of chirping baby penguins, with endless stars glittering above your cabin?

Should you decide to go for it, here's what you need to know:



1. Getting there: Ferries to the island depart from [Paraparaumu Beach](#), an hour outside of Wellington; from there it's roughly 20 minutes to Waiorua. If the waves are too rough, however, rides can be delayed or cancelled. It's crucial to call the morning of your booking to confirm your sailing — and have some flexibility to accommodate modified sailing times or postponed stays. If conditions allow, an overnight guest might first take a ferry to the middle of the island (Rangatira) for a morning hike, then transfer by boat to the north end (Waiorua, where the lodge is located) for an afternoon wildlife lesson and more hiking. After evening drinks and dinner, take the signature kiwi-spotting walk.



2. Preparing for the hikes: While Rangitara hikes are recommended for moderately active visitors, Waiorua has several paths that are suitable for all fitness levels. The easiest is a seasonal sea-level route that circles the tip of the island and is fairly flat. The most popular loop to the mountain peak follows a gentle incline, with a steeper leg at the very top. Either way, sturdy shoes are a must; some portions of the path are pebble-lined or have a few spots where tree roots protrude. And keep in mind that while the paths are well-maintained, the island is a preserve and not a perfectly manicured playground, so rainy days might mean muddy roads.



3. Planning your time: The hike up to the peak and back to the lodge takes roughly two hours. But you'll want to allocate more time than that, particularly if you want to take a moment to absorb the views, love snapping lots of photos, or simply want to go at a more leisurely pace.



4. Making yourself comfortable: The lodge encompasses a main building, communal showers, and a few surrounding cabins. When you're not out and about, you'll be spending most of your time in the lodge's main building, where the afternoon briefing and all meals are held. Between the main building and a small handful of sleeping cabins around it, there are two standalone bathrooms, each with a toilet, sink, and shower.



5. Grabbing a seat at the table: Dinner and breakfast are included with overnight bookings, and dinner includes options for soup, vegetables, meat, and dessert. The dishes are simple but satisfying and are often made with the country's fresh produce. During our visit, we especially loved the sesame broccoli and the secret-recipe beef. The complimentary local wine and cheese that came with it didn't hurt, either.



6. Electricity and water are at a premium. The concept of sustainability is all-important on Kapiti Island, which runs on solar and generator power. While there are a few power outlets in the main lodge that you can use for a limited amount of time, there aren't any in the cabins. Pack a power bank for your gadgets if you're concerned about running out of juice. Due to the limited sources of natural fresh water, the lodge suggests a two-minute limit for showers; we opted to save ours for when we got back to the mainland.



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7. You'll be well taken care of by your hosts. The lodge is run by the Barretts, who are Maori — New Zealand's indigenous people of Polynesian descent — and whose roots on the island go back to the 1800s. In addition to providing an overview of the island's wild inhabitants and taking you on the much-anticipated kiwi tours, your hosts will sit down with you for pre-dinner drinks as well as for dinner and breakfast. The Barretts' hospitality is a big highlight of the homestay, and you're welcome to ask them about anything, from New Zealand wildlife to history to Maori culture.



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8. Packing your layers: Nights on the island can be chilly, and the cabins don't have electric heating. Also, you'll be advised against bringing nylon clothing. Windbreakers and other noisy, rustle-y garments can disturb the very sensitive kiwis — and discourage them from venturing out.



9. There's more to see than just the birds. You'll come across many birds on the island, and you'll see some of them from up close. From the melodious tui to the curious weka, these creatures have adapted to their predator-free environment and can be quite bold. Besides the aforementioned penguins, you'll also see geckos and even seals.



10. Knowing what you're spending: For all of that, you'll pay \$355 NZD (\$233 USD) for one of the two-person cabins or stay in a "luxury tent." Spend \$405 NZD (\$264 USD) for the two-bedroom bungalow, which has its own bathroom. In our eyes, this is a bargain, especially considering the two mornings you get on the island. Of course, there's flexibility to arrive later and depart earlier if you're on a tight schedule, but we're willing to bet that you'll want to stay as long as possible.



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