

Around New Zealand »

Elisabeth Easter discovers a town with fascinating history



Origin of name: Taneatua was the eccentric brother of Toroa – captain of the Mataatua Waka. Taneatua was also a tohunga, an adventurous explorer and a dog fancier who travelled with a big pack of kuri naming various hills, boulders and streams after his loyal companions. Taneatua is where he left one of his beloved dogs.

Population: 786 (2013 census).

Known as: The Gateway to Te Urewera.

Town mascot: Kuri, there are currently 112 dogs registered with the local council.

Good to know: In the Tuhoë dialect, they often drop the 'g' sound from 'nga' so it sounds more like 'na', and taonga (for treasure) becomes taona.

Old news: Once a bustling town, Taneatua used to have two banks, a mini mart a train station and a cheese factory down the road.

Almost famous: The Taneatua Express was the passenger train that ran between Auckland and Taneatua from 1929 to 1959.

Famous locals: Matt Te Pou, (former coach of the Maori All Blacks), Benji Marshall (league star) and Tame Iri (artist and activist).

Art attack: When Colin McCahon depicted Tuhoë in his controversial triptych, *Te Urewera*, some argued that it wasn't a true representation of Tuhoë. In 1997, a Tuhoë activist broke into the Department of Conservation Aniwaniwa Visitors Centre at Lake Waikaremoana and stole the controversial painting. It was eventually returned and is displayed in Taneatua.

Best website: ngaituhoë.iwi.nz.

Big business: Possum trapping, farming and hunting.

Proud moment: This year volunteers from the Taneatua Fire Brigade, NZ Fire Service and Lions Club installed smoke alarms in every home in the town.

Town fiestas: The Mataatua Kapa Haka regional competition will be taking place in March 2016 as will the Tuhoë Festival that includes sports, kapa haka, wearable arts, some artists' workshops and kai – with events happening from Taneatua all the way to Ruatoki.

Best reason to stop: The famed Te Kura Whare has to be seen to be believed. Home to the Tuhoë headquarters this 'living building' was constructed using methods and materials that reflect Tuhoë values of living with the land. Today it is the greenest building in this hemisphere. Te Kura Whare has set a new benchmark for sustainable homes, marae and schools, gathering all their own water, generating all their own electricity and dealing with all their own waste and the materials used are all either locally or sustainably sourced. Kind on the environment, Te Kura Whare is a joy to behold.

Best place to take the kids: Thanks to a community initiative there is now a big playground for kids on the main street. With a basketball court, barbecues and a park surrounded by shady trees, this place is tino pai for picnics.



Tame Iri (left) recently finished a mural in Taneatua, where horses roam on the roads so it pays to slow down. Picture / Supplied

Best playground: The aforementioned playground was partially funded by donations from abroad in support of the iwi's struggles as well as community grants – featuring the usual slides and swings and climbing things, it had a makeover in the past year and is better than ever.

Best view: As you drive into Taneatua you'll be able to look into the distance and see the rugged peaks of Te Urewera.

Best swim: Just five minutes out of Taneatua you'll find the Waimana Gorge, a popular bathing spot during the hot summer months with every man, woman and dog splashing there during the hot summer months. There are also some secret water bomb and manu hotspots but you have to be in the know to find them. BTW doing a 'manu' involves moving your body into a V shape then soaring like a bird.

Best museum: Te Whare Puri (part of Te Whare Kura) is home to an array of old and new Tuhoë art, literature, photography and other taona.

Cultural outings: Take a tour of Te Kura Whare and learn all about the architecture and construction of the building, the living building challenge, and the history of Tuhoë and their hopes for the future.

Best gallery: Just down the road in the centre of town is the Taneatua Art Gallery, run by local artist Tame Iri, who named the various rooms in the gallery after the dogs owned by Taneatua. Full of great works to look at and buy. If you play your cards right, Iri might even deliver the art to your door – which makes for another layer of pleasure for some lucky collectors.

Checklist TANEATUA

WHERE IS IT

In the Bay of Plenty, near the northern boundary of Te Urewera, 13km south of Whakatane, Taneatua sits at the junction of the Whakatane and Waimana Rivers.

Nice arts: Iri and Auckland-based artist Owen Dipple recently collaborated on a mural in the middle of Taneatua with the focal point being the warm, welcoming face of a prominent Tuhoë kuia.

Top shop: There is a hokohoko (second-hand) shop that opens every Thursdays. Also there's a seamstress in town who can take your pants up, among other things.

Baked: The popular Doh Boys Bake Shack in nearby Whakatane delivers freshly baked pies every morning to The Taneatua Fuel Stop. Date and cheese is one of the most popular varieties.

Best food: Moumou Kai Cafe at Te Kura Whare offers a grand selection of good value delicious food. From the Hunters All Day Breakfast (featuring the world-famous-in-New Zealand Waimana sausage) or the Gourmet Venison Burger served on a home-made rewena bun – this kai is sourced straight out of Te Urewera.

Finest coffee: Moumou Kai Cafe again, and you'll want to get a taste of their baked goods too.

Wet your whistle: Once upon a time there used to be a pub in town, until the community changed it into a health centre, for the good of all.

Safety warnings: Slow down and be aware of roaming horses. There have been a number of serious incidents in recent times, some of them fatal, because of horses wandering on the roads.

Visitors say: Far out, what is that amazing building? We so have to stop the car now.

Locals say: Na Toi raua ko Potiki te whenua Na Tuhoë te mana me te rangatiratanga The land comes from Toi and Potiki The power and prestige comes from Tuhoë.

Thanks to two wonderful local women

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