

ROTORUA

NEW ZEALAND



Nature's Spa of the South Pacific

ROT@RUA
feel the spirit
Manaakitanga

Thermal history

Thermal activity in Rotorua all started with Lake Rotorua, nestled in the heart of the city.

It may be beautiful and peaceful today, but this lake has a violent history. One of several large volcanoes in the Rotorua region, its underlying magma chamber collapsed after a massive eruption around 200,000 years ago. The collapse created a circular caldera about 16km wide, which filled with water to form the North Island's second largest lake.



This thermal activity was discovered by Europeans in the 1880s, and still very much in evidence today. It is one of the region's biggest draw cards. The aroma of sulphur wafts past visitors' noses as clouds of steam snake lazily across the sky.

Lake Rotorua's water has a high sulphur content, particularly noticeable at Sulphur Point (pictured left), on the eastern side of the lake. An active geothermal area lies directly beneath the water, colouring the lake a milky white.

Further round the point there are bubbling mud pools and sulphur vents. The earth's crust is thin in places so visitors should stick to the pathway at all times.

Mokoia Island (pictured below), in the centre of Lake Rotorua, is a rhyolite dome formed by slowly oozing lava.

Rotorua and the region's other 15 lakes in the region are all connected with the Rotorua caldera and nearby dormant volcano Mt Tarawera.



A volcanic past



Mt Tarawera looms moodily over Lakes Rotomahana and Tarawera to Rotorua's southeast. The Pink and White Terraces, considered the eighth wonder of the world, lay at the foot of the mountain. These terraces attracted Rotorua's – and New Zealand's – first visitors, earning Rotorua its reputation as a town built on tourism.

The white terrace (te tarata - the tattooed rock) was the larger of the two silica terraces. It covered seven acres, was 30m high and 240m wide. The pink terrace (otukapuarangi - fountain of the clouded sky) was 1.5km away and was smaller and lower. Steps in both terraces led down to the crater platform, where 3m-deep basins were filled with warm water, making superb bathing places.

Visitors came from around the world to see the terraces and bathe in the thermal water. People came overland from Tauranga via a bridle track to Ohinemutu on the shore of Lake Rotorua. From there a coach took them to Te Wairoa, where a two-hour canoe journey and a walk over the narrow isthmus separating the swampy shores of Lake Rotomahana from Lake Tarawera ended at the foot of the fabled terraces.

This all ended on June 10, 1886.

In the early hours of that day, the people at Te Wairoa were woken by earthquakes and continuous rumblings. Moments later Mt Tarawera erupted, blasting boiling mud, red hot boulders and huge clouds of black ash hundreds of metres into the sky. By 2.30am its three peaks had erupted.



Basalt magma mixed with the hydro-thermal system under Lake Rotomahana, and the lake bed exploded, burying Moura and Te Ariki villages under a deep layer of mud, stones and ash, killing more than 150 people – and destroying the Pink and White Terraces.

Visitors to Rotorua today may not be able to see the Pink and White Terraces but they can be guided to the top of Tarawera, relive the eruption at Rotorua Museum and the excavated site of Te Wairoa (now known as the Buried Village), and meet the descendants of the survivors at Whakarewarewa Thermal Village.

Thermal activity today

Approaching Rotorua, steam billows overhead and the sulphur smell the city is famous for makes itself known; a pungent introduction to a region that has captivated visitors for more than 160 years. Bubbling mud, steaming geysers and the rumbling of the earth underfoot comprise Rotorua's unique landscape. There are four main thermal areas in the region.

Whakarewarewa is one of Rotorua's most active geothermal areas, and home to the powerful Pohutu Geyser, which erupts up to 20 times a day. Boiling mud pools, hot springs, a Maori pa and the chance to see traditional craftsmen at work at Te Puia makes Whakarewarewa a popular attraction.

The inferno crater is a highlight of Waimangu Volcanic Valley, with bright blue steaming water and sheer crater falls. Waimangu's thermal pools were formed when the Mt Tarawera eruption caused a series of explosions along the fissure the mountain sits on, creating 10 craters.

Further down the road is Wai-o-Tapu Thermal Wonderland, which features the stunning Champagne Pool and huge steaming craters. Time a visit for 10.15am to see the Lady Knox Geyser erupt.

At Hells Gate visitors soak away your worries in geothermal spa pools or mud baths surrounded in native manuka trees.

With all this on offer, Rotorua is a volcanic paradise, and a great place to see nature at its most powerful.



Taking the cure...

In the 19th century, when people came to Rotorua to see the Pink and White Terraces, they also wanted to bathe in the natural thermal pools nestled among pumice, sulphur and manuka on the shore of Lake Rotorua.

As a result, the potential value of Rotorua's thermal springs as a source of revenue was recognised.

In 1878 Catholic priest and arthritis sufferer Father Mahoney, of Tauranga, was carried to Rotorua to bathe in the small spring known as Te Pupunitanga. After soaking in its acidic waters he was able to walk back to Tauranga. The pool became known as the Priest's Bath.

In 1882 the Pavilion Bath, the first building of the new Government township of Rotorua, was built on the site of the Priest's Bath. It fell down two years later. In 1885 the first Blue Baths were opened, and in 1895 the highly acidic Postmaster Baths were finished. In 1901 The Duchess Bath opened where the renowned Polynesian Spa now stands; this was replaced by the Ward Baths in 1930. Elements of the Ward Baths are integrated into Polynesian Spa when it was constructed.

In 1908 Rotorua's Bath House, now home to the city's museum, opened as a therapeutic spa centre named the Great South Seas Spa. One of Rotorua's first colonial buildings, it was purpose-built as a therapy centre; a place for people to visit to ease their aches and pains.

People from all over the world did just that.

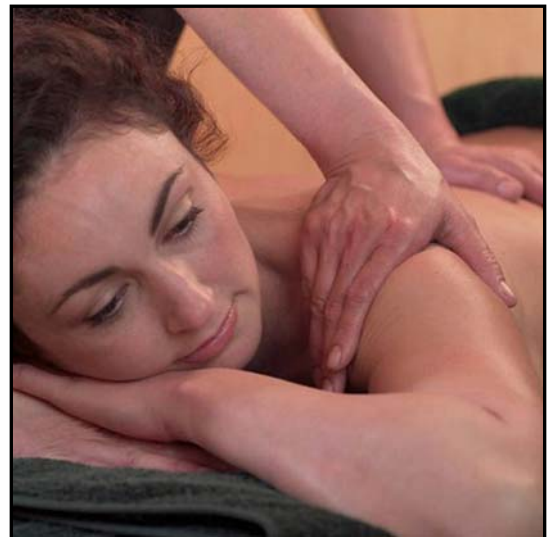
Water from nearby thermal springs was piped to massage rooms and private bathrooms. There were also several deep pools where chronic disorders were treated. Male patients were treated in the north wing, women in the south.

Today, the Bath House is the only surviving building from these early days 45 years of the Rotorua spa.

The Taking the Cure installation explains the building's history and is located in the north-east corner of the Bath House, where remnants of baths remain. There is little left of once up-to-date treatment equipment; most was destroyed when the baths closed in 1966.

The Bath House is New Zealand's most photographed building and an architectural icon.

Healing spa therapies...



You step out of a hot pool, wrap yourself in a cosy robe and wander barefoot into a soothing lounge, where you're greeted by a friendly massage therapist ready to give you the experience of a lifetime. As her fingers start their work, you feel yourself relaxing; all your troubles melting away.

This is the least you can expect from a Rotorua visit.

People are always looking for ways to escape the monotony of everyday life and Rotorua, with its abundance of spa treatment centres, is the ideal place in which to do so.

Known as Nature's Spa of the South Pacific, this is a region that knows how to spoil its visitors. Soak in the healing waters of a hot spring, unwind with a therapeutic spa or massage, or ease aches and pains with a mud wrap. The mud used in these therapies is sourced from Rotorua's thermal parks and allows local spa therapy centres and therapeutic thermal pools to provide a unique service.

Come, stay a while. Rejuvenate your spirit. It'll do you the world of good.

Massage treatments

The range of massage therapies offered in Rotorua is extensive, offering something for everyone whatever their requirements.

Aix massage treatments are popular. Introduced to Rotorua from France in the early 1900s and named after the French spa town of Aix-les-Bains, the treatment incorporates the essence of Rotorua, combining massage with jets of thermal water for a truly relaxing experience.

Visitors can also try exciting contemporary treatments, such as Lithos and Watsu therapies.

Lithos is Greek for rock, and this therapy uses heated and chilled rocks as therapeutic instruments to enhance and prolong the benefits of massage. The rocks are strategically placed on the body to prepare the muscles and tissues for treatment – providing a balancing or calming effect.

Watsu is a gentle form of body therapy performed in warm water, combining elements of massage, joint mobilisation, shiatsu, muscle stretching and dance. Watsu aids relaxation and can be effective for health conditions including injury, stress, chronic fatigue, anxiety, arthritis and headaches.

Wax for hands and feet is a wonderful treatment for arthritis sufferers. The wax moulds to the joints, retaining heat. When peeled off, the rehydrated skin is revealed, with joints that are free and mobile and less painful.

Come to Rotorua and enjoy a unique healing experience.



Mud therapies



The main thermal belt in Rotorua runs northeast from the three volcanic peaks in the central North Island to White Island, an active volcano off the Bay of Plenty coast. The heat and springs this belt generates is used in unique spa treatments such as mud therapies, sulphur baths, and hydro massages.

Rotorua's history as a spa centre began more than 160 years ago when the first Maori people used the boiling water for cooking and medicinal purposes. The therapeutic use of these waters has continued; hot mineral springs can help ease ailments and provide relief for rheumatic sufferers.

Volcanic mud high in silica is mixed with a liquid with alkaline thermal water from a natural spring to compose nourishing mud baths. The heat retention of the minerals transmits internal warmth to help people unwind, while also stimulating the circulatory

system and nourishing the skin. The heat of a mud bath provides a sedating, relaxing effect. Localised mud pack therapies are also available.

Mud therapies are so relaxing that a short break in Rotorua is better than therapy. Where else can you sit in naturally heated baths of mineral-enriched mud, smear it all over your body and emerge feeling revitalised?

Soothing mineral waters



Rotorua is a hot spot for mineral springs.

The Maori people who settled in the region used the hot waters for cooking and bathing, and they soon discovered that several pools helped heal skin diseases, arthritic pains, kidney complaints and back pain.

European settlers also established a bathing culture, and specific locations were developed to enhance this experience.

Natural thermal pools are dotted throughout the region. These include Kerosene Creek, nestled in the bush south of Rotorua, Hot Water Beach, in the western corner of Lake Tarawera, and Hinemoa's Pool on Mokoia Island in Lake Rotorua.