

SOME

LIKE

IT

From rustic geothermal delights hidden deep in the bush to high-tech aquatic wonderlands, Aotearoa has a plethora of hot springs, mineral pools and bubbling spas.

STORY CATH BENNETT

HOT

WAIRAKEI TERRACES, TAUPŌ

Here you can appreciate the majesty of nature – and use its magic for a little self-improvement – Wairakei Terraces is all about immersion in geothermal wonder. You might be surrounded by steam near a gushing geyser, but serenity rules as you glide between cornflower-blue pools and silica terraces buried deep in native bush. This is an adults-only experience, with only native birdsong disturbing the peace. Wander along Te Kiri o Hinekai stream, where an oversized stone “staircase” created by a constant cascade of silica-laden water from the geyser, is reminiscent of the famed Pink and White Terraces, lost in the 1886 eruption of Mt Tarawera. wairakeiterraces.co.nz



THE LOST SPRING, WHITIANGA
The Lost Spring delivers an Aladdin's cave of delight, complete with caverns heavy with stalactites and studded with crystals, veils of greenery, and cocktails at your beck and call. This is a true escape, somewhere that echoes the raw beauty of its 16,000-year-old water, which bubbles up from a depth of 667m through a crack in the bedrock. It was created by Alan Hopping, who having heard legends about the lost healing waters under Whitianga, pledged to find them and create an Eden where they could be enjoyed – a quest that took him 20 years. Now there's a restaurant overlooking the lagoons and waterfalls, as well as a recently expanded



treetop spa where the song of native birds in the forest canopy lulls you into a state of deep relaxation. thelostspring.co.nz

LAKE ROTOITI HOT POOLS, ROTORUA

You know a place is a bit special when it's accessible only by boat or aircraft. The picturesque journey across Lake Rotoiti just adds to the delight of this secluded destination that features eight hot pools of differing temperatures, all heated by the thermal springs of Manupirua Bay. A haven for locals since before 1849, it was commercialised in 1914, and while in no way a relic, it does feel like a throwback to a more relaxed time. This is a spot where you don't need bells and whistles, just native bush, stunning views and restorative waters. For visitors who need to cool down after gently simmering in the naturally

1. A hidden treasure, the Lost Spring in Whitianga. 2. Only accessible by boat or plane, Lake Rotoiti Hot Springs. 3. Natural mineral bathing at Polynesian Spa, situated on the shores of Lake Rotorua. 4. Natural thermal bathing complex, Waikite Valley Thermal Pools. 5. Lake Taupo Holiday Resort features a swim-up bar.



replenished waters, shoot down the slide into "New Zealand's largest plunge pool" – otherwise known as the lake. lakerotoitihotpools.co.nz

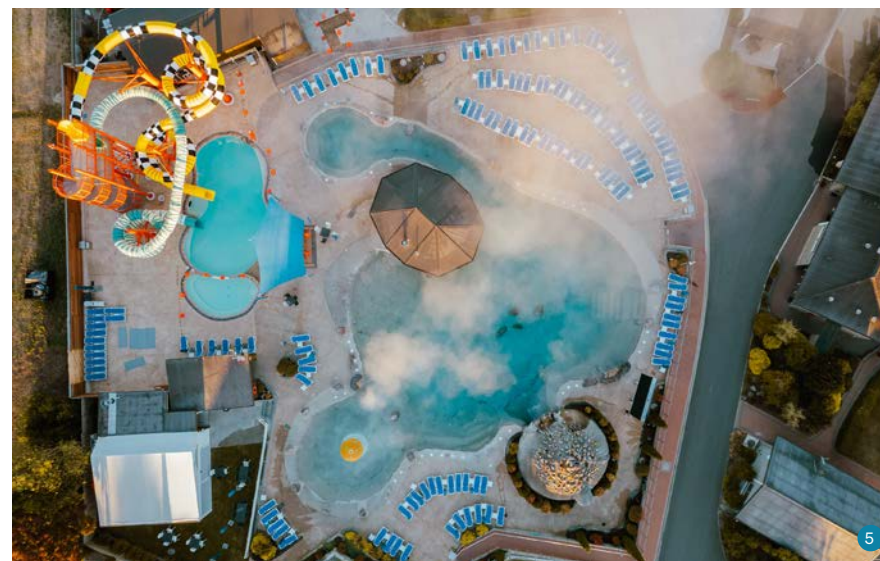
POLYNESIAN SPA, ROTORUA

When you can lounge on a seat warmed by geothermal steam before putting on a robe dried by heat rising from the earth, it's clear you're somewhere fully utilising nature's bounty. Not that you would want to spend much time waterside when there are 28 pools waiting; a mix of the acidic and the alkaline, public and private, hot and icy

cold. All harness the healing powers of hot spring water, which, with its traces of dissolved minerals including sodium bicarbonate and calcium, is said to treat everything from skin problems to poor circulation. And if you're keen to experience the famed geothermal mud without doing too much wallowing, the on-site spa's numerous offerings include masks packed with the minerals found in the region's volcanic soil. The complex marks its 50th anniversary this year, and while it continues to evolve, it retains elements of its historical charm. polynesianspa.co.nz

WAIKITE VALLEY THERMAL POOLS, ROTORUA

Kiwi ingenuity led to the creation of these pools south of Rotorua, in a complex built by volunteers from the Waikite Valley community and completed in 1972. This is a place that hasn't deviated from its roots as a family friendly, affordable geothermal spot in a natural setting. There are six different bathing options, ranging between 35 and 40°C, from the original Settlers' Pool to private spas, many of which enjoy views down to the Otamakokore Stream. All are daily refilled with the soft, mineral-rich waters of Te Manaroa Spring. hotpools.co.nz



LAKE TAUPŌ HOLIDAY RESORT, TAUPŌ

Lagoon pool with a big screen, swim-up bar serving Pina Colodas, a grotto which appears to be lit by glow-worms... it might sound like some sort of Balinese resort, but this little oasis is not far from the snow. Rather than being warmed by the sun, the pool water in Lake Taupō Holiday Resort is thermally heated. This is the ultimate family retreat – the kids can exhaust themselves on the newly opened hydro slides and go diving for treasure in the cave, while you settle in at the bar and watch a movie. Although the pool is mainly for resort guests, there is some availability for day visits. laketauporesort.co.nz



6. Hanmer Springs has 22 thermal pools. 7. Maruia Hot Springs. 8. Tekapo Springs is in the heart of Mackenzie Country. 9. Ōpuke Thermal Pools & Spa. 10. Hot Tubs Omarama.



MARUIA HOT SPRINGS, WEST COAST

Deep among the snow-capped mountains of the Lewis Pass National Park, is a wellness retreat that feels gloriously off grid, and indeed it is hydro powered, with no cellphone reception. Here you're forgiven for wandering around in a blissed-out stupor, so soporific is the combination of the soothing waters and dramatic surroundings. Water from below the Southern Alps flows up the sulphur spring, which has healed weary travellers and warriors alike for centuries. There is nothing artificial about Maruia Hot Springs – right down to the fact the pools change colour from clear to milky grey, and often feature black algae – which when rubbed into the skin delivers vitamins, antioxidants and essential fatty acids. maruiahotsprings.nz

HANMER SPRINGS THERMAL POOLS & SPA, HANMER SPRINGS

If there's a place that has it nailed when it comes to the complete experience centred around geothermal pools, it's Hanmer Springs. While known as the ultimate destination for families, thanks to watery play areas and hydro slides (including the country's largest and steepest, Conical Thrill) the aquatic excitement is juxtaposed with more serene offerings. Among the 22 outdoor thermal pools, all utilising rainwater from almost 175 years ago which collected in a reservoir kilometres beneath the Hanmer Plains, is a trio focused on aqua therapy. These use a combination of cascading waterfalls and jets of varying intensity to massage bathers. Move from these to the sulphur pools, where you can



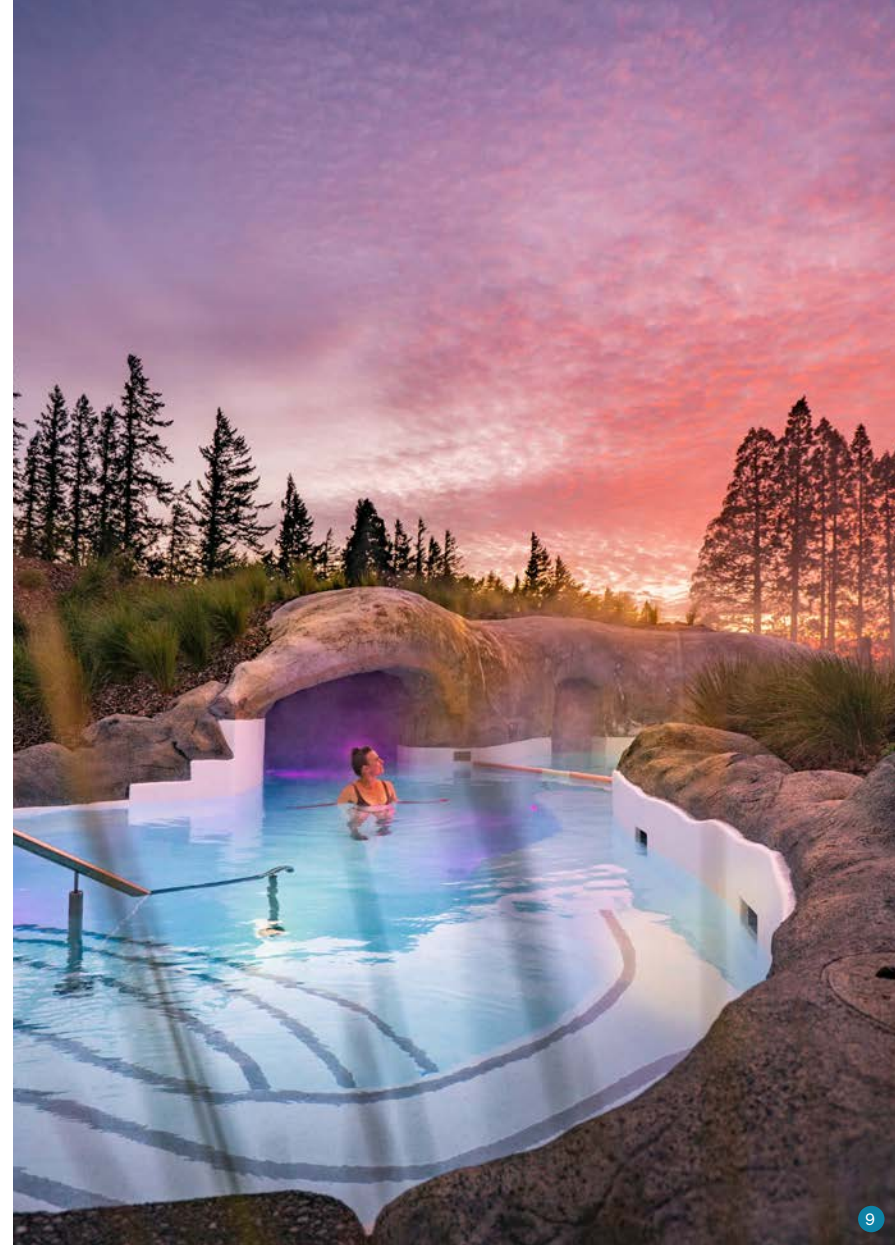
laze in water temperatures of up to 42°C, reduced from 52°C at ground level, before heading into the spa for a massage. hanmersprings.co.nz

ŌPUKE THERMAL POOLS AND SPA, METHVEN

Methven is known for skiing, but the opening of a solar-powered aqua wonderland gives visitors a new reason to visit. And if you're planning to swap ski suit for togs, there are few better places to do it than in these stunning pools filled with purified water from the Rangitata River. This \$20million facility has sustainability at its core – from the insulated holding tanks it uses to maintain water temperature, to reincorporating into its design the redwood trees felled to create the site. There is interplay between wellness and indulgence: enjoy the healing of the tranquility pools, Rasul steam room and dry-flotation treatments, then indulge in pate and cheese washed down with a beer at the swim-up bar. There is also a crazy river and starlit caves to entertain the kids. opuke.nz

TEKAPO SPRINGS, LAKE TAKAPŌ

When it comes to a holistic encounter with the Aoraki Mackenzie International Dark Sky Reserve, Tekapo Springs delivers. The mesmerising scene is enhanced by the fact you won't confuse stars with Mars, thanks to the knowledgeable guides, who will point out everything from gas giants to galaxies. This experience is all about what lies above, but while the silky soft alpine water isn't geothermally heated, it's sourced from a



nearby underground spring. Great thought clearly went into the warming process as, ironically, it is brought up to temperature using heat generated by the refrigeration process used for the on-site ice rink. tekapostargazing.co.nz

HOT TUBS OMARAMA, TWIZEL

Hot tubs are better in the snow, and when the fresh water you're soaking in has melted from nearby glaciers (and been heated, of course) so much the better. Deep in the heart of the South Island, this collection of 10 hot tubs, overlooked by the majestic beauty of the Benmore Range, delivers a magical experience. The private tubs, made from red cedar, can fit up to eight people, and you can easily adjust the temperature to suit your preference. Combine the experience with a sauna, or simply order a drink and platter of food from the bar, sink back and soak up the incredible surroundings. hottubsomarama.co.nz



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ONSEN, QUEENSTOWN

It's acknowledged that the best way to soothe aching limbs after a day on the mountains is in a hot tub, and Onsen Hot Pools has nailed intimate apres-ski relaxation. It has adopted the Japanese word for hot spring, but this tranquil spa retreat perched on a Queenstown bluff has a Kiwi feel, with stunning views over the Shotover River and pool rooms with retractable roofs, to a sustainable approach to heating the constantly refreshed pure mountain water in the spas. While you're invited to simply enjoy the hot bubbles with a glass of fizz, it's worth upsizing the experience with a soak in one of the new oval tubs set on a private deck, before indulging in a treatment at the day spa. onsen.co.nz

- 11. Views over the Shotover River at Onsen Hot Pools.
- 12. Hot Water Beach, Te Rātā Bay.
- 13. Cow Stream Hot Springs.
- 14. Dig your own spa bath at Kāwhia Hot Water Beach, aka as Ocean Beach.

Naturally free

Take a soak on the wild side in these untamed hot pools where no entry ticket is required.

Kaitoke Hot Springs, Great Barrier Island: a 45-minute buggy-friendly walk through lovely native forest and wetland leads you to a fork in the Kaitoke Creek and an inviting spot where a warm water soak awaits you.

Kāwhia Hot Water Beach, Waitomo: a tranquil sweep of coast where at low tide you can dig your own spa, then sit back and revel in the gorgeous, rugged beach views.

Hot Water Beach, Te Rātā Bay, Lake Tarawera: you don't need a spade at this picturesque hideaway, as the waters on the southern shore of Lake Tarawera are heated by a hot spring.

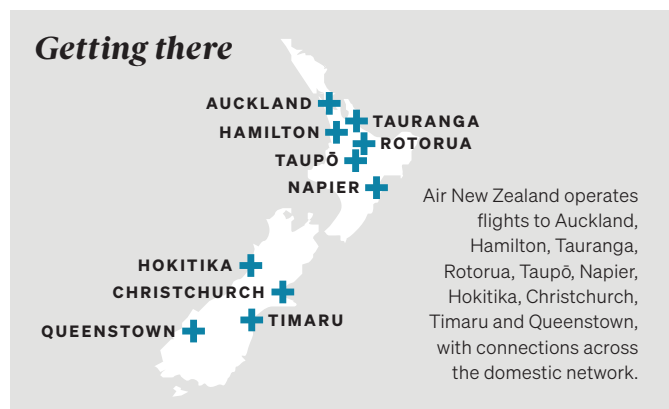
Otumuheke Stream, Taupō: one of the more developed of the natural options, these pools and mini waterfalls on the edge of Spa Thermal Park come complete with changing rooms and toilets.

Mangatainoka Hot Springs, Kaweka Forest Park, Hawke's Bay: this popular attraction on the Te Puia Hut track had a makeover last year and the three pools, sunk into a terrace, enjoy great views down to the Mohaka River.

Welcome Flat Hot Pools, Westland: it's a long trek along the Copland Track to these four pools of varying temperatures, where you can sink into the mud and enjoy stunning views of snow-topped mountains.

Cow Stream Hot Springs, Hurunui: a treat for anyone hitting the St James Cycle Trail, these natural pools, formed of grey stone and concrete, are tucked deep in a secluded valley. 📍

Getting there



- 📞 Contact Centre
0800 737 000
- 📞 Holidays Travel Brokers
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- 🌐 airnewzealand.co.nz

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A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER

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