

Places to Go: Rotorua

Contributed by Ruth Presland

ROTORUA; thermal wonderland. What a great place it is. I used to fly in there as a child and I remember it being utterly exciting, offering a city of bright lights and an exciting place quite different from anywhere else in NZ.

This area is just asking for you to take to the air and explore it. The region comprises lakes, bush and rural retreats nestled in secluded spots, as well as stunning landscape colours and extraordinary volcanic features. As soon as you fly over the hill and see Lake Rotorua laid out before you, it's obvious that there is something magical about the place.

Flying to Rotorua from most parts of NZ is simple. The people in the Tower are helpful and will let you know of unfamiliar reporting points, as pronouncing them can be a challenge for us Southerners. Christchurch Control surrounds Rotorua (RO) with a LL of 3500, so bearing in mind the ground level, there is opportunity to get quite close to RO airspace before making contact. ATIS is 128.80 and Tower 121.20. There is a MBZ to the southeast which is busy with scenic traffic so be sure to call your intentions on 120.90. The MBZ borders the RO control zone so keep an eye on your map if you have just one VHF.

GA aircraft pay a \$7.40 landing fee plus the \$3.60 Airways fee. There are no landing fees for microlights currently, but they do pay the same Airways fee. Planes can be parked for free on the grass area to the right of the control tower (between the tower and the grass runway). There are long term hangars for lease if you are a regular visitor and while there is spare space the owners are happy to rent one of the hangars for overnights (\$15/night incl. GST). Contact Brian by email: aviation@slingshot.co.nz or 021 894 753. You can find out more on www.stanleyaviation.co.nz.

Once settled, there are taxis available to take you from the airport into town - pop this number in your mobile for Rotorua Taxis; 07 348 1111.

Accommodation

Accommodation is offered by 13 hotels and more than 90 motels and motor inns, many within easy walking distance of the CBD. There is such a choice I would suggest checking out www.rotoruanz.com. You might also consider investigating the variety of family hosted accommodation through to discreet luxury

The lakes, all formed from the craters of extinct volcanoes, are a popular attraction for many water-based activities. There are opportunities to hire boats and kayaks – personally, I would be looking for a float plane ride (check out Volcanic Air Safaris on the lakefront). On that note, there is a Rotorua Lakes plate in the AIP v4 so keep an eye on that when you are doing your

own scenic flight as helicopters come and go regularly.

Rotorua city centre has over 250 shops to choose from, including specialty department stores, fashion stores, book shops, arts, crafts, and much more. Generally, city trading hours are 9am until 5pm and when dinner time comes there are more than 50 restaurants to choose from.

The Rotorua district has a multi-cultural population of approximately 70,000 people. If you haven't experienced a Hangi then this is the time to try it and you might also take in one of the many Maori Cultural shows. I would recommend either Mitai's or Tamaki Maori Village.

A trip to Rotorua wouldn't be complete without exploring the thermal areas. Geysers, mud pools and thermal springs have been attracting visitors to Rotorua since the 1800s and the living, breathing landscape never fails to amaze. Of course, a faint sulphur scent lingers in the air which is a

constant reminder of the thermal activity that is visible in pockets scattered around the region. Clouds of steam drift from Kuirau Park, home to boiling mud pools. The renowned Pohutu geyser which erupts several times a day, and geysers elsewhere in the region, are must-see attractions. The main thermal areas are Whakarewarewa, Waimangu Valley, Wai-o-Tapu and Hell's Gate. Fumaroles, geysers and silica terraces displaying amazing colours can all be found within minutes of the city centre. With this and more on offer, Rotorua is a volcanic paradise, and a great place to see nature at its most powerful. So enjoy your flight, fly safe, take your fishing rod and you'll likely discover something completely new right on your own NZ doorstep.



Clockwise from top right: 1: Cafe at Rotorua Airport. 2: Rotorua City. 3: Mt. Tarawera Crater. 4: Carpark and DOC camping ground at Lake Tarawera.

bed and breakfasts that are available. There are endless opportunities to experience Rotorua life as locals know it.

The Rotorua region is rich with sprawling farmland embraced by 16 fishable lakes packed with rainbow and brown trout. My pick would be to pick a homestay by a lake and try out your fishing skills. Some of the lakes are catch and release so be sure to check out the local rules at the sports shop on arrival.

What to do

Each year hundreds of thousands of international tourists visit just two places in New Zealand; Rotorua and Queenstown, so Rotorua is surely a place to see in NZ before you explore beyond our shores.