

# Limited mobility access to Waitakere Ranges Regional Park

## Waitakere Ranges Regional Park

Waitakere Ranges Regional Park includes more than 16,000 hectares of native rainforest and extensive coastline on Auckland's West Coast and Manukau Harbour. The area is known to local iwi, Te Kawerau a Maki, as Te Wao-nui-a-Tiriwā ('the great forest of Tiriwā'), after one of the tribe's earliest ancestors.

Award-winning movies like 'The Piano' and popular TV shows 'Xena' and 'Hercules', all filmed here, giving the park an international profile.

The Waitakere Ranges are renowned for their natural beauty and this fact sheet highlights key aspects of the ranges that can be enjoyed by visitors with limited mobility.

## Arataki Visitor Centre

The key attractions of the Arataki Visitor Centre are its unique balcony views of the forest canopy, water dams and Manukau Harbour from the decks, and informative displays of the area's history, flora and fauna. These can be seen by heading to the top floor using clearly marked ramps on either side of the main building. The main ramp to the left provides views of the surrounding parkland, and has a resting area halfway up.

Once inside there are interactive displays laid out to provide easy access. Hear native birdsong and get up close to live displays of wetas, stick insects, geckos found in the Waitakere Ranges. The interior has a split level floor with the lower level leading to the viewing decks. An interior ramp with handrail provides access between the two levels.

The viewing decks offering panoramic scenes of the parkland and coastline are on different levels linked by a wide ramp, except for a lower level deck which is reached by stairs. Wheelchair users can still access this lower level deck by going inside the Visitor Centre and through a secondary external door.

## Theatre

Take a virtual tour of the park by viewing the Waitakere Ranges Regional Park DVD in the theatre located on the ground floor. A concourse under the main building provides access via steps and a ramp to the theatre and toilets. The theatre is accessible to wheelchair users. Tiered seating and steps are covered in carpet.

## **Picnic Area and Education Centre**

Outside near the car park there is a picnic table that accommodates wheelchair users. There is also a sloping grass area between the Visitor Centre and the Education Centre. The Education Centre is used by school groups and has ramped access at the back of the building.

### **Tracks**

The Arataki Nature Trail is a network of metalled loop trails that begin across the road from the Visitor Centre. A tunnel under Scenic Drive provides a safe and accessible route to the entrance of the trail. The tunnel is open seven days a week from 8.30am to 5pm during September to April and 10am to 4pm from May to August.

The first looped track is the Plant Identification Trail which is an excellent introduction to the native plants of the Waitakere Ranges. This trail is accessible to some wheelchair users with assistance – this is due to slope, surface, and weather conditions. Other trails on the Arataki Nature Trail have stairs and steep slopes.

## **Important Information – Arataki Visitor Centre**

- People with limited mobility who use walking aids or are visually impaired need to exercise special care.
  - The concourse to the theatre and toilets is not well lit.
  - The theatre steps have no handrails but there are visibility markings.
  - The Visitor Centre stairs have a graspable handrail available on one side.
  - The bench seating on the decks is the same colour as the deck floor, therefore the benches may be difficult to see.
- The theatre has no device that provides hearing assistance
- A look out track beside the Visitor Centre has stairs at the top.
- If crossing the road to the Arataki Nature Trail, the barrier by the roadside is only 730mm wide. This can be avoided by using the tunnel.
- The Trail path may not provide a firm surface for those using walking aids. There is a thin layer of small loose chip on the Trail path. Wheelchair users may require assistance.

## **Facilities**

- Car parks – two mobility car parks and an accessible route to the Centre.
- Toilets – one disability access toilet is provided near the theatre

## **Other Waitakere Ranges Attractions:**

### **Historic Rose Hellaby House at Waiatarua**

A sloping path leads from the car park alongside the homestead to the lawn and onto a lookout with views back to the city. There are a few steps down to the lookout making this unsuitable for wheelchairs but it would be accessible for others with limited mobility. Views can still be afforded from the top of the stairs.

Rose Hellaby House is open on weekends and visitors can browse through the historic house and antiques and collectibles on display throughout the homestead –

some of which are available to purchase. There are three steps up to the entrance door and there is always someone available to assist when the homestead is open. However it would pay to drop by the Visitor Centre prior to heading on the house and notify your intentions. Good access through the main rooms for wheelchairs, although there is no disability access toilet on site.

### **Pukematakeo Lookout**

The most accessible lookout in the northern part of the Waitakere Ranges, this spot provides sweeping views of the Cascades area and some of the most mature kauri forest in the area. Access is signposted off Scenic Drive North and there is vehicle access to the summit where there are great views.

### **Rainforest Express run by Watercare Services (phone 09 302 8028)**

A train ride through the forest on a narrow gauge railway is a wonderful way to see the park. There is provision for collapsible wheelchairs to be carried on the train and this should be discussed at time of booking. The train depot is close to parking and a disability access toilet. When booking your trip please inform the Watercare representative if you are likely to require assistance or a wheelchair.

### **Lower Huia Reservoir**

The park is a crucial water catchment area for the Auckland region and is the most accessible of its five dams. Follow Huia Rd through Huia itself. Immediately after crossing the bridge to Little Huia, turn right and drive up to the top of the dam to see the expansive views.

### **Glen Esk – Piha**

This area has a flat picnic area close to the carpark with a flat metalled loop walk. Not suitable for wheelchairs but very popular with elderly visitors who like to enjoy a picnic at this tranquil spot with minimum effort. Toilets in the car park have disability access.

### **Getting There**

The Arataki Visitor Centre is located on Scenic Drive, 5km beyond Titirangi. Scenic Drive is 28km from downtown Auckland and extends from Titirangi to Swanson through the eastern fringe of the Waitakere Ranges.

For more information about the Waitakere Ranges Regional Park phone 09 366 2000 or visit [www.arc.govt.nz](http://www.arc.govt.nz)