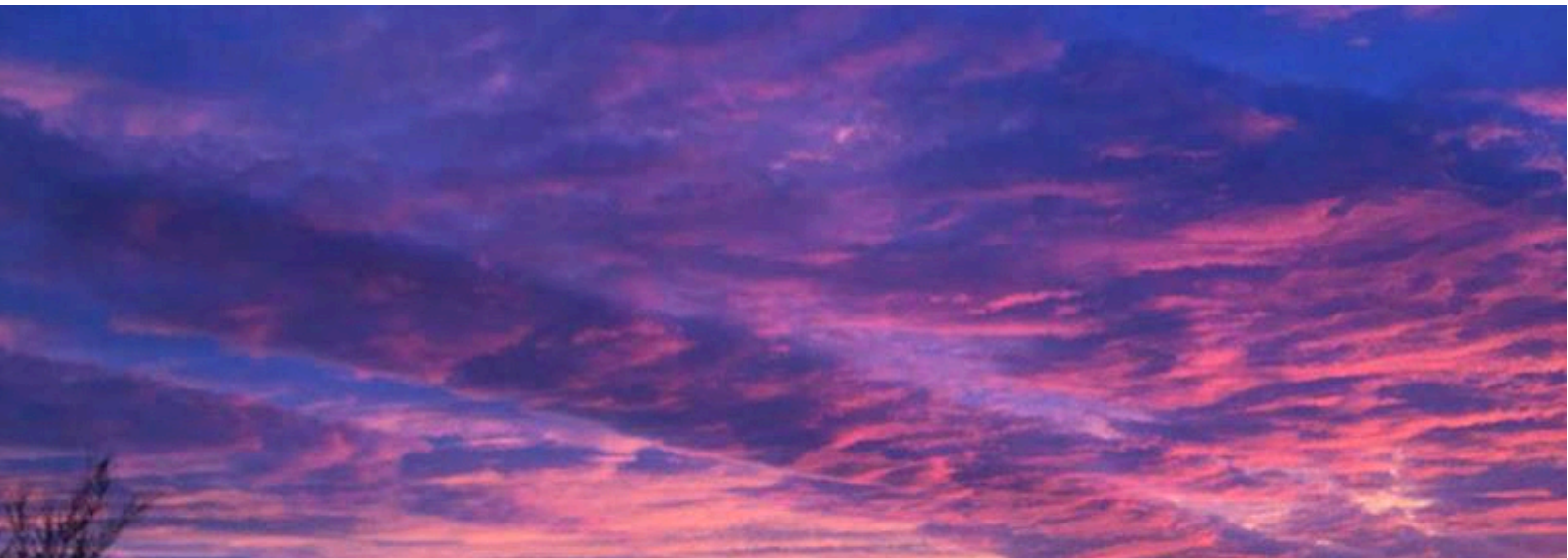


Secrets from a Local: A Guide to Dunedin's Best Kept Spots

14 March 2024, Scarlett Rogers

Growing up 30-40 minutes drive from the city had its perks. Rather than memorising streets, alleyways, and mall layouts, I had shortcuts through paddocks, tunnels, and caves to get to my next adventure. I grew up in a rural coastal town north of Ōtepoti, Aotearoa (Dunedin, New Zealand), one of the country's best-kept secrets (in my opinion).

The idyllic coastal towns of Waitati, Pūrākauni, Long Beach, and Aramoana are all worth a visit when in Ōtepoti; if you enjoy morning beach walks on rugged coastlines, strolls through native forest, cold plunges in the crystal clear ocean, and striking sunrises and sunsets. This strip of coastline is the perfect base for adventure seekers and those searching for an accessible escape close to the city.



About the Area

With its laid-back atmosphere and soundtrack of native birds and rolling waves, this coastline effortlessly whisks you away to another state of mind.

The area has its fair share of 'dunner-stunners' but is known locally as 'Te Pari Rehu' (The Misty Cliffs). This name comes from the sea fog that rolls over the surrounding hills, a spectacle that always creates a mystical ambience.

The climate in the area ranges from 16 to 11 degrees in summer and drops to 10 to 6 degrees in winter. But these are just the averages! The coast often reaches 20 degrees in summer, with February being the warmest month. The weather along the coast is frequently opposite to that in the city. If you can't decide what to do for the day, no problem, let the weather decide for you.



Hot Tip: Be wary of driving in low-visibility conditions.

Aside from the jaw-dropping vistas, the area also has a rich history. There are many significant historic sites, some accessible, others not. Māpoutahi pā (also known as Goat Island), Pūrākaunui Railway Station, the manager's house of the 1830s whaling

station, an old cheese factory, Whareakeake (Murdering) Beach, and Aramoana Spit are all sites worth a visit if you are a history geek like myself.

The people from South Island iwi Waitaha are known to have been some of the first people in the area. European settlers began to occupy the area in the early 1800's. However, the population grew in the 1870s when settlers constructed the railway.

Must See

Orokonui Ecosanctuary is the perfect place to visit if you want to immerse yourself among native birds and forests. The sanctuary offers guided tours and allows you to meander through the 307 hectares at your own pace.

Doctors Point Caves are a spectacle well worth visiting. You can reach the caves by a short beach walk from Waitati or Pūrākaunui Beach. Just make sure you go at low tide! For a shorter walk, opt for the Waitati Beach access point.

Aramoana is a unique strip of coastline situated right at the mouth of Otago Harbour. Walk along the 'Spit' or take a boogie board with you to slide down the dunes on the beach.

Places to Eat

Horopito Café is within Orokonui Ecosanctuary, so it is the perfect place to grab a coffee or a bite to eat after a walk within the sanctuary. It is also a great place to stop if journeying between Waitati and the other coastal towns.

Have you spent the day in Waitati? Or are you heading in or out of Dunedin?

Blueskin Nursery Cafe is a beautiful spot to sit and breathe in the coastal air. You might even grab a plant or two while you are there.

Port Chalmers is a fantastic place to stop on your way to or from Aramoana. Union Co. Café is a sweet cafe with great coffee and delicious scrolls.

Carey's Bay Hotel is also on the road to Aramoana and is a stunning place for a drink or a pub meal.

Places to Stay

The only freedom camping site in the area is Warrington Beach, a 6-minute drive north of Waitati. The site has bathroom and shower amenities and fresh drinking water, making it a top-tier freedom camping site.

The iconic Historic Seaside Cottage 'As You Like It' is nestled within the native forest on the edge of Pūrākaunui Inlet. I have always dreamed of renting this place out for a weekend. Its charm and location are unmatched.

Want to be based in the city? Aurora on George is at the city's north end, a 30-minute car drive from the coast. The motel is clean, modern, and has excellent staff.

Top Day Walks

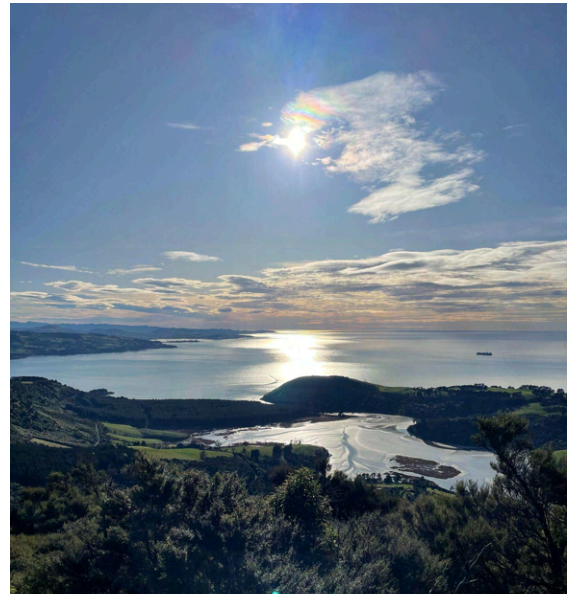
Orokonui to Pūrākaunui

Distance: 11.3km

Time: 3.44 minutes

Difficulty: Moderate

It is only a 25-minute drive from the city to reach this stunning day walk. From native forests, historical ruins, and rural landscapes to ocean views and tidal inlet swims, what more could you want?



The hike begins on the south-facing side of Moponui Mountain and ends at Potato Point. The first section takes you through the native forest until you reach the railway at the corner of Osborne and Pūrākaunui School Road, where the quaint but now derelict Pūrākaunui train station stands. On the descent, keep your eyes peeled for old stone walls and the ruins of old dwellings.

The journey continues down Station Road, which winds through the rural township of Osborne and connects with Osborne Road. Take the road to the right and follow the inlet until you reach the corner of Osborne and Pūrākaunui School Road.

The 'Purakaunui Estuary Track' begins here and is a tranquil stroll through tunnels of native forest and roads that edge the inlet until you reach Potato Point. About 10km into the hike is the Pūrākaunui Domain, a fantastic spot to have lunch, take a dip, and collect cockles to cook up for a feast later.

The track continues to follow the inlet until you reach Potato Point (approximately 30 minutes from the domain). If you walk another 300m up Hill Street past the endpoint on 'All Trails', there is a path to your left. This is where the inlet meets the ocean, a beautiful place to swim or sit on the bench and soak up the scenery.

Trail Map: [Orokonui to Pūrākaunui | AllTrails](#)

Hot Tip: If you are looking for a shorter walk, cut the first section of the hike and opt for the 'Purakaunui Estuary Track' (2.8km).



Heyward Point

Distance: 6.6km

Time: 2 hours 25 minutes

Difficulty: Moderate

This spectacular day hike showcases Aotearoa's rugged coastline. If you get lucky, you may see the infamous Albatross gliding above.

The track begins at the end of Heyward Point Road. The first section takes you along a four-wheel drive track through farmland until you reach a fork in the track. The path to the left follows the coast edge until you meet a band of native forest.

The track then descends through the block of native forest and opens up to the exposed and windswept Heyward Point. To be rewarded with panoramic views of Long Beach, Aramoana, and Taiaroa Head.

Trail Map: [Heyward Point | AllTrails](#)



Hot Tip: If you're looking for more of a challenge and want to get to Aramoana on foot, turn right at the fork for a 20-minute descent down to Aramoana Beach.



The Best Beach in Town

There are over six beaches along the coastline, all stunning options for a day trip. But I would only be giving you the authentic local guide if I shared my favourite beach (of all time).

Canoe Beach is a jewel between Waitati Beach and the eastern side of Māpoutahi pā. This little bay is a haven for sitting back and relaxing, and at low tide, you can explore the rock pools that appear around the base of Māpoutahi.



Other Activities in the Area

Fishing: The 'gut' on the western side of Māpoutahi is the spot for butterfish.

Climbing: Long Beach has some of the best climbing rocks in the area.

Surfing: Potato Point and Whareakeake Beach both have excellent surf breaks.

Kayaking: Blueskin Bay or Pūrākaunui Inlet are the go-to places for a paddle.