



**The Mighty  
Waikato**  
New Zealand

# Waikato's best cycle trails for families

We worked with our friends at Outdoor Kid to create this guide to get the best out of cycle trails in the Waikato for you and your family.

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# TE AWA RIVER RIDE: Ngāruawāhia to Fonterra Te Rapa

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Pedal along wide-open paths through lush countryside and towering pine trees before letting the kids loose to burn off some energy on a purpose-built sprawling bike skills park.

This 10-kilometre section of Te Awa River Ride provides a picturesque training ground for kids with its gentle gradient, and an opportunity for more experienced riders to clock-up some mileage.

There are car parks at either end of this adventure, but a good starting point for families with younger riders is beside the Horotiu Bridge Road. It's close to kid-friendly highlights, and you don't need to juggle transport at either end or bike the entire section twice.

From here, there's easy riding north through rural vistas to the dramatic 130-metre Perry Bridge that spans the Waikato River. The vibrant coloured bridge is near the site of two flax mills which operated during the late nineteenth century. Māori sold flax to the mill where it was processed to make linen and other products. You can also continue past

the Ngāruawāhia Golf Club down into the small river-side settlement of Ngāruawāhia to explore the Kingitanga Heritage Trail which starts at The Point.

Younger riders might prefer heading upstream from Horotiu Bridge Road and taking their time to read the information signs, peer under the covered bridge where schools of little fish gather and taking a quick side-trip to visit Mangaharakeke Pa.

This pā was the site of many skirmishes, abandonments and resettlements throughout history. It was one of the largest in the area and was named after flax which grew abundantly nearby. Secure your bike at the bike rack while you explore the pā.

This section ends beside the Fonterra Te Rapa Dairy Factory on Meadow View Lane.



## Perry Bike Skills Park

Along the way, there's a well-signposted detour which leads to the Perry Bike Skills Park near the Horotiu SH1 interchange. Adults will appreciate the coffee options while kids can freewheel through the dirt mountain bike area and along the raised boardwalks. Little kids learning the road code can hang out on the paved area with its mini roads and traffic signs.



This **Easy** (Grade 2) trail is mainly flat with some gentle climbs, except for one steep section if you detour to the bike skills park.



**Ngāruawāhia to Fonterra Te Rapa** allow 45 to 60 min (10 km) one-way. **Horotiu Bridge Road to Fonterra Te Rapa** allow 15 to 20 min (2.6 km) one-way. **Horotiu Bridge Road to Perry Bridge** allow 15 to 20 min (2.6 km) one-way. Add on another 45 min for the bike skills park detour.



The wide path is suitable for kids' bikes, bikes with kid-seats or tag-along style attachments and touring bikes, e-bikes and mountain bikes. Ideal for strolling with buggies too. Dogs allowed on leads.



There are toilets, petrol station, cafe, outdoor exercise equipment and a pump track near the Perry Bike Skills Park. Toilets available at Ngāruawāhia.



Grab the essentials including helmets, water bottles and a windbreaker. Slip, slop, slap and cover in summer as there is no shade at the pump track. Don't forget some loose change to grab an ice cream for the family too.



## TE AWA RIVER RIDE: Hamilton City

This urban cycleway explores hidden-gems of a bustling metropolis but feels removed from city-life with its bush shrouded boardwalks, dense stands of native trees and vantage points above the Waikato River.

Stretching between the northern suburbs of Pūkete and the award-winning Hamilton Gardens, this section of Te Awa River Ride stays close to the Waikato River as you pedal through the city.

You don't need to tackle the 11-kilometre section all in one go. Because there's so much to do along the way it might be easier choosing a few family-friendly starting points and exploring free-range.

Take in some of the city's highlights, including the Waikato Museum with its family-friendly interactive displays, or cafes brimming with tasty treats to tempt the kids.

From Hamilton East, there's a leisurely half-day adventure that includes Hamilton Gardens and Parana Park. This loop is suitable for young kids as there's nothing strenuous here.

The wide cycling path heads south to Hamilton Gardens where you can secure your bike before exploring the free themed gardens. Don't miss taking a selfie with the floating Huddleston airship, or being brave and wandering beneath towering mysterious trons in the Surrealist Garden.

Follow Cobham Drive into the city and cross Victoria Bridge to the Potter Children's Garden in Memorial Park. In summer this playground is teeming with kids cooling off in the shallow paddling pools and under the kōwhai seed water fountain. There are plenty of swings and slides for all ages. After exhausting the kids, cycle back to Hamilton East along fern shrouded paths.

For an extended adventure, park at Ann Street Park where the trail narrows slightly through Matakano Reserve as it navigates boardwalks perched high above the river. The path opens out again, and families can ride alongside each other towards Braithwaite Park in Pūkete.



### Grade:

The **Easy** (Grade 2) path includes boardwalks, small road section and concrete paths. The trail is mostly flat with some gentle climbs.



### Time:

**Braithwaite Park (Pūkete) to Hamilton Gardens** allow 60 min (11 km) one-way. **Hamilton East loop** allow a half-day to see all the sights on the six-kilometre loop.



### Accessibility:

The wide path is suitable for kids' bikes, bikes with kid-seats or tag-along style attachments and touring bikes, e-bikes and mountain bikes. Ideal for buggies too. Dogs allowed on leads.



### Facilities:

There are plenty of toilets, drinking fountains and cafes along the way.



### Gear:

Grab the essentials including helmets, water bottles and a windbreaker. Slip, slop, slap and cover in summer.



## TE AWA RIVER RIDE: Avantidrome to Cambridge

Pedal through a swathe of fertile countryside beside the Waikato River and discover remnants of a fortified village which was surrounded by sprawling kūmara and yam gardens.

This sedate short cycleway is ideal for newly minted riders wanting something a little more challenging than a bike skills park, and for older kids with a need for speed on concrete paths.

From the Avantidrome, the path drops sharply down to lush farmland dotted with pūkeko as it makes its way over small wooden bridges towards the Waikato River. The broad path is ideal for riding alongside little kids still earning their stripes on two-wheels. It's also very popular with runners, walkers and other cyclists, so keep an eye out for other folks.

A handful of picnic tables provide great perching spots to rest little legs and admire New Zealand's longest river as it flows to Port Waikato. On a fine day, there are views to Sanctuary Mountain Maungatautari. This ancient forest is home to some of the nation's rarest

creatures including frogs, bats and native birds.

In about 1600 AD, the fertile river plains attracted Māori who cultivated 18-hectares of gardens overflowing with kūmara, taro and tropical yam near Arikirua Pa. Ngāti Korokī-Kahukura and Ngāti Hauā iwi occupied the large settlement and remnants of its defensive fortification ditches can still be seen.

The trail ends in Cambridge by the Gaslight Theatre on Alpha Street. From here, pedal into the leafy township to refuel at its plethora of cafes, including the popular Paddock cafe with its outdoor seating. Handily, it's next door to GelatAmore with tasty ice creams and gelato to give the kids an energy boost to cycle home.

On the trip back, the path gradually climbs towards the Avantidrome with a short gut-busting final push back to the car park and bike skills park. Littlies will probably need to jump off and push for this section.



### Avantidrome

There's plenty to do near the Avantidrome after your adventures. If you didn't grab something to eat in Cambridge, check out cycling-themed The Bikery Café. Strong coffee and plenty of kid-friendly foods, including kiddie-lunchboxes and iceblocks, can be enjoyed sitting outside in the sunshine. Afterwards, peek inside the velodrome where you might spot some Olympic hopefuls doing laps.

### Gallagher Bike Skills Park

One of the highlights of starting near the Avantidrome is letting the kids loose on the vast pump track. Older kids can happily freewheel along the smooth concrete loop which circles a mix of curved boardwalks winding through native shrubs, with a picturesque backdrop of farmland. Nearby, little kids on balance bikes, scooters and pedal bikes can learn essential road skills by pottering along the bike skills park with its traffic lights, roundabouts and road signs.



#### Grade:

This has been graded as **Easy** (Grade 2) as the trail is mostly flat with some gentle climbs – except for one steep section by the Avantidrome.



#### Time:

From the Avantidrome to the Gaslight Theatre allow 15 to 30 minutes to cover the 3.2 kilometres one-way. Older kids will tear along but if you want to take in the sights allow more time, especially if you have brought a picnic. It's an additional one kilometre on the road to the cafes.



#### Accessibility:

The gentle gradient is suitable for kids' bikes, bikes with kid-seats or tag-along style attachments and touring bikes, e-bikes and mountain bikes. Ideal for strolling with buggies too. Dogs allowed on leads.



#### Facilities:

There are toilets, cafe, playground, water fountain, bike skills park, mountain bike trail, pump track near the Avantidrome. The only other toilet facilities are in Cambridge township.



#### Gear:

Grab the essentials including helmets, water bottles and a windbreaker. Slip, slop, slap and cover in summer as there isn't much shade on this section of the trail.



#### LOCALS' TIP: MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAIL

There's a well-hidden mountain bike trail on the southern side of the Avantidrome. Look out for the small sign on the fence opposite the toilets. A little dirt loop for young kids is near the top, while a single-trail loop for more confident riders drops through some gnarly berms and plenty of humps and bumps to exit just below the Avantidrome on the Te Awa River Ride.

# HAURAKI RAIL TRAIL: Paeroa to Te Aroha

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It doesn't get much more laid-back than this.

This leisurely cycle trail follows the route of a former railway along the flat alluvial Hauraki Plains. The railway was built when gold fever swept through the region, but it also became one of the nations' earliest tourists routes. Trains chugged through the pioneering landscape carrying thousands of tourists destined for the spa town of Te Aroha.

Paeroa is the perfect launching pad for this family-friendly adventure but before you saddle up, grab a selfie beside the iconic 'Famous in New Zealand' L&P bottle. Kiwis have been supping this soft drink made from the town's mineral waters since 1907.

The cycle trail starts near the town's flood gates before loosely following the Waihou River down the Hauraki Plains. Pedal along broad cycleways, short road sections and over cattle grids as the trail skirts farms on the fringes of the Kaimai-Mamaku Forest Park. Dozens of dairy cattle and horses turn a blind eye to peppery lycra-clad folk zipping by.

Older kids can dash ahead and burn some rubber on the long straight sections while younger kids will appreciate being able to ride alongside more experienced adults on the wide path.

pioneering history. On a fine day, admire expansive views to the mighty maunga Te Aroha 'Mountain of Love' which dominates the bush-clad Range.

Two shelters with toilets provide a shady resting spot for a quick snack and a chance to shake out the legs. These are near Tirohia Komiti Marae and Mangaiti Hall.

On the outskirts of Te Aroha, urban backyards replace the rural landscape, and you'll swiftly arrive at the former Te Aroha Railway Station for a mandatory group photo.

Pedal-weary legs will appreciate continuing a little further to the town's quaint Edwardian Domain. Here the family can soak in soothing silky mineral waters which attracted thousands of tourists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Wallow in private wooden hot tubs at Te Aroha Mineral Spas or splash about in the heated Swim Zone Te Aroha pools.

Don't miss the world's only hot soda water geyser which spurts crystal clear water three metres into the air every 40 minutes. It's tucked just behind the mineral spas.

The town is dwarfed by its towering namesake mountain, and its main street is dotted with quirky sculptures, great cafes to grab something to eat, and plenty of second-hand stores to poke around.

Just five-minutes' drive out of town is The Old Forge Kitchen which has a hearty menu to refuel everyone after their cycling adventure. Relax on the outdoor seating and soak up the rural views.

If there's still gas in the tank, the Howarth Memorial Wetlands is the perfect spot for some bird-spotting, or stroll to the pretty Tutumangao Falls. Both take one-hour to complete.



## **Grade:**

The **Easiest** (Grade 1) gravel trail is mainly wide, flat and smooth. It does include bridges, road sections and cattle grids.

## **Time:**

Allow two to three hours to complete the 23-kilometres (one-way).

## **Accessibility:**

The gentle gradient is suitable for kids' bikes, bikes with kid-seats or tag-along style attachments and touring bikes, e-bikes and mountain bikes.

Local operators can provide transport to either end of the trail if you are not keen to do it twice or wrangle cars at both ends.

## **Facilities:**

There are toilets and shelters at two points along the trail, and shops at either end.

## **Gear:**

Grab the essentials including helmets, water bottles, snacks and a windbreaker. Slip, slop, slap and cover as there is no shade along the trail as yet.



## **IMPORTANT:**

### **Be very careful on the handful of road crossings.**

Most are over cattle tracks, but some cross the busy SH26 between Paeroa and Te Aroha. No dogs allowed on the trail. Mobile phone coverage is good.



# HAURAKI RAIL TRAIL: Te Aroha to Matamata

From the picturesque Edwardian spa town of Te Aroha, cycle through a vast estate which bustled with agriculture endeavours in the late 1800s.

After passing horse studs, the North Island's tallest waterfall and the intriguing Firth Tower, the cycle trail arrives in Matamata – where you can be whisked away to the mythical world of Hobbiton™ Movie Set.

The starting point for this leisurely trail section is the Te Aroha Domain where there's plenty of parking before you clamber into the saddle and pedal south out of town.

The wide concrete cycleway is overshadowed by the towering bush-clad Kaimai Range which hides relics from the 1880s gold rush days, including the Butlers Incline at Waiorongomai Valley. This steep engineering feat disappears 400 metres into the bush at a staggering 25-degree-angle.

Te Aroha West is just down the road, and the strong coffee and hearty snacks at The Old Forge Kitchen shouldn't be missed.

Despite being the Hauraki Rail Trail's second-longest section – behind the 55-kilometre-long Kaiaua to Thames section – the kilometres quickly slip by. The flat sealed path is ideal for younger kids hitching a ride on bike trailers.

If the troops are fading as you reach the leafy village of Manawarū, pop into Café 77 to refuel. The former dairy factory lay desolate for more than 40 years but has transformed into a cheerful café and heritage centre. And if the bike needs some tweaking, they offer an air compressor and bike tool kit.

Look out for Stanley Landing which marks the northern fringes of the historic Matamata Estate. Bracken and fern covered this once scrappy landscape until entrepreneur and farmer Josiah

Firth leased the land in the 1860s. Feed crops were sown and a few well-placed dynamite sticks in the Waihou River created navigation for transporting machinery and produce. Josiah later purchased the 22,000 hectares – which also included the future site of Matamata.

Cross the East Coast Main Trunk Line as it cuts a swathe through the landscape before disappearing under the Kaimai Range through a nearly nine-kilometre-long rail tunnel. After the railway bridge, keep an eye out for Wairere Falls which plummets 153 metres off the range. On windy days the waterfall can be spotted blowing sideways across the steep escarpment. If you have time after your ride, the gorge below the waterfall with its massive boulders and staircases clinging to rock faces is an excellent family-friendly adventure.

Take a break to explore the Firth Tower Reserve with its impressive 16-metre-high reinforced concrete tower. The tower was built in the early 1880s and was the hub of the Matamata Estate. Its design reflected Josiah Firth's fascination for towers and castles – take a peek inside his sketchbooks at the museum. There is a small charge to enter the buildings but it is free to roam the grounds. Don't miss The Jail, Settler's Cottage and the Gordon School which is often open for 1900s school lessons.

From here, the path turns towards Matamata and a long straight takes you into the township where your outing ends beside the Hobbit-themed information centre. Pre-book an evening banquet tour of the Hobbiton™ Movie Set and explore the famous set by lantern, before enjoying a feast at The Green Dragon Inn.

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## Information:

Local operators can provide transport to either end of the trail if you are not keen to do it twice or juggle cars.



## Grade:

The **Easiest** (Grade 1) fine chip sealed trail is mainly wide, flat and smooth. It does include footbridges and a couple of road crossings.



## Accessibility:

The gentle gradient is suitable for kids' bikes, bikes with kid-seats or tag-along style attachments (including trailers) and touring bikes, e-bikes and mountain bikes.

Dogs allowed on leads.



## Facilities:

There are three rest areas with toilets at Te Aroha West, Manawarū and Stanley Landing on Tower Road. There are cafes in Te Aroha West and Manawarū.



## Gear:

Grab the essentials including helmets, water bottles, snacks and a windbreaker. Slip, slop, slap and cover as there is no shade along the trail.



## Time:

This 37-kilometre-long section is ideally suited as a one-way trip. It takes about three to four hours to complete (one-way) at a relaxed pace.



**IMPORTANT:** Be careful on the handful of farm and road crossings. Mobile phone coverage is good.

