

Cynthia's State Highway 12 Highlights

State Highway 12 takes you west of SH1 to explore a quieter cruiser side of Northland. Coming from the south, the turn-off is at "the Brynderwyns" a few minutes north of Kaiwaka.

From the north you exit SH1 at Ohaewai or can jump off earlier just past Okaihau and travel on SH15 around Lake Omapere to Kaikohe. If you're in Kerikeri (SH10) just head west and follow the signs to Kaikohe!

FROM SOUTH to NORTH: for reverse direction, turn page upside down.

PAPAROA: Here you will find a small village with an historic stream-side landing for the smaller boats that worked the Kaipara Harbour in the early days. There is a great 50s style hotel with Crown Lynn crockery and White's Aviation prints on the walls. Good meals and coffee, accommodation too. Turn off here for a 7km detour to **PAHI:** A nice winding tar-seal drive takes you to a lovely harbour-side setting. Check out the wharf and historic hotel building, and a massive Moreton Bay Fig tree that has to be seen to be believed.

MATAKOHE: You will cross two fabulous new bridges here. There are walkways and interpretive panels at the sites of the old bridges. Locals sure don't miss the old rickety wooden one-way constructions. The Kauri Museum is the star attraction. It is extensive and engrossing with huge displays featuring mannequins modelled on locals and a working saw-mill. Get an idea of the size of the kauri that existed before the time of the saw and axe. There is machinery and equipment, lots of photos and an incredible display of kauri gum. There's a café across the road. Gift shop and gallery attached.

RUAWAI: You are on the flats here, kumara and cows are the money spinners. The wharf looks out on to the meeting of the "two waters", the Kaipara harbour and the Northern Wairoa river.

DARGAVILLE: This bustling little service town has everything the locals need and none of the hassle or chain stores of a bigger town! There's a funky café, BLAH BLAH BLAH, the Good Life Store is full of locally produced olive oils, cheese, soaps, vege and other deli style treats, there's even an in-store florist. Fashion boutiques and op-shops cover the range of tastes. Check out the Boating Club Marina, walk the river-side pathway, have a concert at the band rotunda then head up the hill to the museum. Here you will find the Rainbow Warrior masts. Kaipara Harbour history and the Dalmatian gum diggers are a feature. Great views from up here too.

BAYLYS BEACH: A short detour to the coast just north of Dargaville. This is the gate-way to New Zealand's longest driveable beach...Ripiro Beach is longer than 90Mile beach! Wind down through the cliffs on the tar-seal through the baches and suddenly you are on the beach. Although it is home to the famed toheroa, they're not on the menu...A 4WD and the right tides can see you doing a trek south to Poutu and the lighthouse at the Heads.

KAI IWI LAKES: Incredibly beautiful dune lakes on the west coast. Crystal clear water with white sandy beaches make this a very popular camping spot in summer.

KAIHU: An old mill and railway town, much quieter now, you'll be lucky to find the pub open but Nelson's Kaihu Kauri probably will be. Nelson Parker is a champion axe-man of days gone by, he now retrieves swamp kauri. He has an incredible collection of kauri slabs, stunning furniture and wooden ware for sale and just to drool over...

WAIPOUA FOREST: State Highway 12 through this incredible forest is hand-trimmed by two guys with a slasher. The forest comes right up to the non-existent fog-line! Huge trees fill your windscreen and side windows. It is windy and slow, but you don't want to speed through this wonder. Stop and visit Tane Mahuta, there is plenty of parking, toilets and guides (free). It's a very easy 10 min walk, just clean your shoes at the gate to help stop the spread of kauri die-back.

WAIMAMAKU: Stop at the G.A.S. station. Owner Bruce Sim has a Model A collection as well as some cool hand-operated and belt-driven workshop machinery in the original building beside the petrol pumps.

OMAPERE: Hokianga Heads lookout. Walk to the site of the signal station and marvel not only at the sand dunes opposite, but that anyone ever gets in the harbour entrance safely! Rest your weary backside from the bumpy northland roads.

OPONONI: The friendly dolphin may be long gone but the harbour-side pub is still pretty welcoming! Manea Footprints of Kupe, a new attraction, features the story of Kupe's discovery of Aotearoa and explores tribal histories.

RAWENE: A short detour to the village of Rawene takes you to the harbour ferry, a harbour side loop through the cottages and a tiny shopping area. The historic wooden hospital on the hill is still in use and was originally funded by gambling evenings run by the first doctor in the 1910s.

KAIKOHE: Ngawha hot springs are the place for a soak. Have a coffee in the safe at Mint Café in the old bank, or Café Malaahi at the Mobil is highly recommended. The Pioneer Village will take you back to another time. Another step back in time is the tea room at the stock sale...if you are in town on a Wednesday follow a stock truck down Mangakahia Road (SH15) to the saleyards, classic cuppa tea, sandwich and cakes will help the funds of the gardening club.

STATE HIGHWAY 15 DETOUR: There are a couple of interesting stops on this highway which takes you "through the middle". **TWIN BRIDGES:** What does this mean? Well, it is a bridge with another bridge coming off it at a right angle halfway across. You really just have to see it! It crosses the Mangakahia River, which can be a pretty stony bottomed thing or a frightening torrent covering swathes of farmland. **PARAKAO STORE:** First opened 1929, re-opened a few years ago by petrol-head's Gavin & Jodie. Plenty to see, eat and drink. **PACKARD MUSEUM:** In the old dairy factory at Maungatapere, on the corner of SH 15 & 14. Huge collection of Packards, earthmoving machinery, old Pommy cars and heaps of bikes. Café and boutique shopping here too.

