



The pohutukawa stands you'll discover here in the Rotorua Lakes district are rather special. They are unique in that they are the only truly inland stands of this traditional coastal species.

They are also unusual in that 'pure' pohutukawa grow along side pohutukawa and northern rata that have hybridised. It is not surprising therefore to find pohutukawa in this district that are often more upright in form, with flowers that range from typically crimson to 'pinkish-orange'.

Discover these special trees for yourself. Take a Crimson Trail through New Zealand's very own 'lakes district'.

### The Pohutukawa

It is frequently referred to as the 'New Zealand Christmas Tree' and, for many New Zealanders, the pohutukawa dominates favourite landscapes and childhood memories.

There are two native pohutukawa (mainland and Kermadec) and they belong to the genus *Metrosideros*, the iron hearted myrtles, which is a reference to its hard, very heavy, dark red heartwood.

### Growing

The pohutukawa has a massive spreading crown. It's wider than it is tall. Roots form out of trunks and branches and the roots are able to grow in air over surfaces as they search for crevices, pockets of soil and moisture.

### Living

Dormant leaf and floral buds are protected against damage from cold, salt and abrasion by bud scales. Leaves are hairy when young, but once mature the hair on the upper surface is replaced with a tough, shiny coat of wax, protecting leaves against drought and salt. Pohutukawa trees turn our coastlines crimson between November and January, but here in the Rotorua Lakes region things are a little unusual.

### In the Rotorua Lakes Region

As pohutukawa and northern rata are known to hybridise freely where they occur together the result we see today around the Rotorua Lakes is often referred to as 'hybrid swarm'. Looking at trees you will see individuals that look more like a northern rata through to trees that bear a very close resemblance to pohutukawa.

Consequently, in the Rotorua Lakes region local trees do not always conform to the crimson flowering umbrella shaped trees we are all so familiar with. Flowers are often pinkish-orange and the tree form is more upright. If you look closely you will also notice the notch in the leaf tip on many plants which is characteristic of northern rata.

Northern rata was originally a common emergent tree species along with podocarps in the tawa-dominated forests of the district. During the 20th century northern rata almost disappeared as a result of intensive possum browsing, fire, logging and firewood collection. Today, northern rata are scarce – only scattered trees are present in some areas. Occasionally you may still find live northern rata vines winding around host trees.

In contrast, pohutukawa in the Rotorua Lakes region have always been restricted to the lake margins. This is probably because the often rocky, bluffy habitat provides for ideal regeneration and these sites are sheltered from frosts.

### Making the most of the Lakes

Another unique aspect of 'trailing' in this region is that you can view the best of the blooms from a kayak. Locals will tell you how special the kayak trip around Mokoia Island can be as you drift under some beautiful trees hearing the tui and bellbirds in the branches and watching the saddlebacks in the distance on the Island. Another 'offshore' option for 'seeing red' is from Lake Okataina. If you choose either of these options make sure you've talked to local kayakers about levels of experience required and know the weather patterns and forecast.

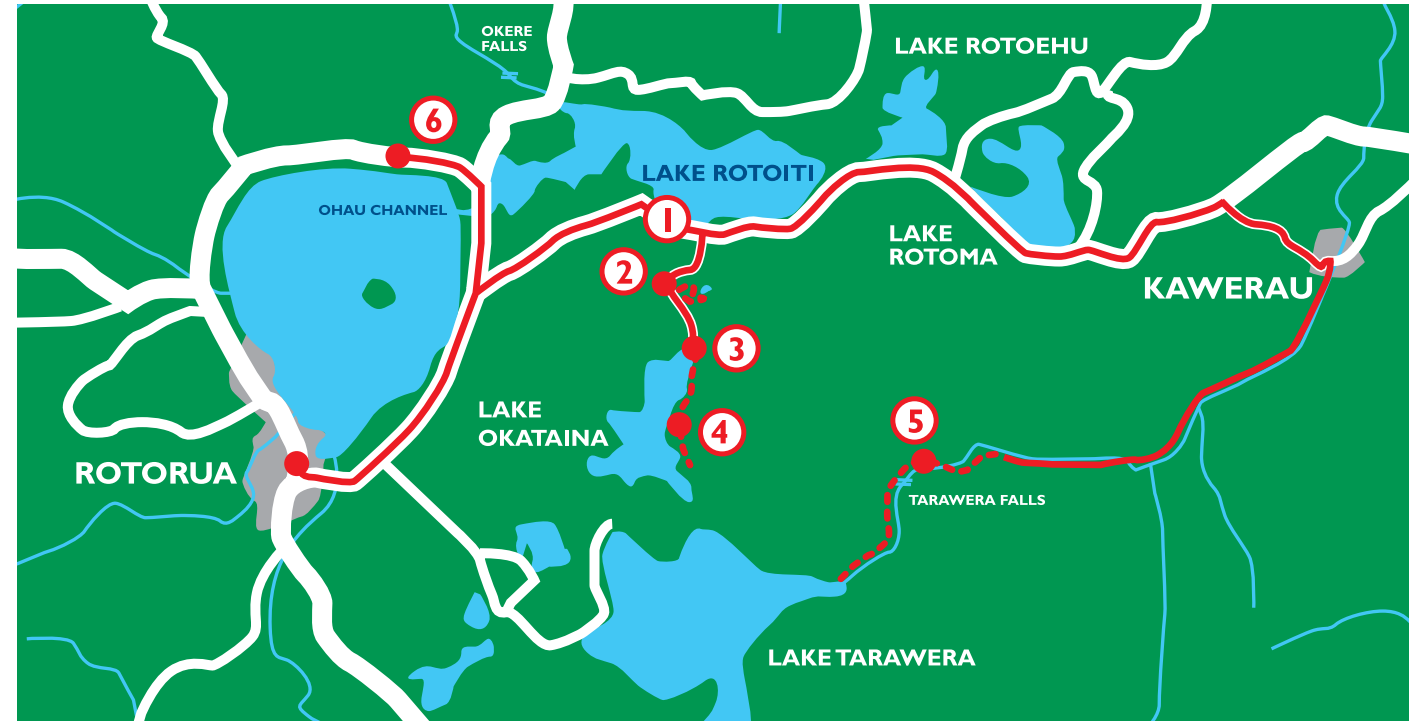
## 1 Lake Rotoiti, SH30 between Hauparu and Ruato Bays

Drive along SH30 and here, along the lake edge, you can see a discontinuous fringe of pohutukawa below the road. Above the road, you can see the young regenerating pohutukawa taking their place among our native rewarewa, kamahi, and five finger. Opposite an area of timber retaining wall on the hill side of the road is a large rewarewa. Behind this rewarewa is a fine example of a pohutukawa/northern rata hybrid. Note especially the smaller hairless leaves and the finer textured denser crown. There are also several large northern rata trees easily visible from the road on the lake edge in this section, amongst the more sprawling pohutukawa which are less visible from the road.

## 2 Lake Okataina Road, to Lake Rotoatua and Lake Rotongata

This leisurely 45-minute track of gentle gradient is one of the finest short walks in the Rotorua area.

### Let's explore ...



It starts opposite the Outdoor Education Centre and takes you to the Lakes Rotoatua and Rotongata. Here you'll find live northern rata as vines, some as thick as your arm, wound around their hosts – the tawa trees.

Here too, you'll see evidence of the past importance of northern rata in these forests before being largely eliminated by possums. A few metres up the track is a massive fallen trunk, almost certainly northern rata.

Continue to zigzag up the small hill and look below to see a huge ten metre high northern rata stump. As the second fenced lookout comes into sight, look to your right for the light brown flaky bark of a moderately large recently dead rata. And, as you descend from the last lookout you'll see a massive northern rata stump on the left.

A little further on more stumps and large fallen trees are testimony to the impact of the furry Australian possums.

### 5 Tarawera Outlet to Falls track

From Kawerau Town centre go right onto Onslow Street, left onto Fenton Street, right onto River Road, left onto Waterhouse Street and then you're onto the gravel forestry roads. Follow the signs for 'Tarawera Lake'.

Please note: you need to get an entry permit to go to this forestry area – available from Fletcher Challenge Forest's Redwood Grove Visitor Centre in Whakarewarewa Forest on Long Mile Road in Rotorua, or Kawerau Information Centre (no charge).

From Tarawera Outlet, the track enters pohutukawa forest directly after the foot-bridge over the Tarawera River. At the bridge, look up at the pohutukawa forest rising to the base of the bluffs. The track from the bridge to Tarawera Falls passes through continuous forest where hybrid trees are common along with pohutukawa. The trees are tall and often single-stemmed.

If you follow the forestry road signs for 'Tarawera Falls' you will reach a carpark and a short, 20 minute track to the Falls. You can still see pohutukawa and hybrids, especially around the Falls, but it is not as obvious as walking the track downstream from the Outlet to the Falls.

Although the foliage on the trees at the Falls is very pohutukawa-like, many of these trees are hybrids. Regenerating trees can be seen amongst the boulders below the waterfalls. Notice how pohutukawa and hybrid trees dominate from the bottom of the valley to the top of the bluff on both sides of the Falls.

Most of the vegetation here is relatively young, given that much of the area was devastated by the Mt Tarawera eruption of 1886. The vegetation you see has developed since then. The warm, open, rocky habitat around the Tarawera Outlet and the Falls provided ideal ground for pohutukawa and hybrids to regenerate and colonise.

### 6 Hamurana Road at Mourea

Follow SH 30 north from Rotorua City towards Okere Falls. Turn left into Hamurana Road which is the first left hand turn after you have crossed the Ohau Channel bridge heading north. Follow this road until it reaches the edge of Lake Rotorua. Follow the road for several hundred metres and turn off onto the lake-side parking area which goes off to the left as the road leaves the lake and begins to climb. Return the way you came.

Along this short section of just a few hundred metres the road dissects a small section of pohutukawa forest with good specimen trees present on the road edge. This is one of the few areas of naturally occurring pohutukawa forest around Lake Rotorua.

From this lake-side parking area you can see Mokoia Island (binoculars are handy). Mokoia Island, which is almost in the middle of Lake Rotorua is surrounded by pohutukawa forest which fringes its shores and bays, particularly on the northern side. The Island is a sanctuary for threatened flora and fauna and is free of all introduced animal pests.

### Why Project Crimson

The introduction of the Australian brush tail possum, together with human development not only destroyed many of New Zealand's pohutukawa and rata forests but also, by late last century threatened the species.

Both pohutukawa and rata belong to the genus *Metrosideros*. While there are a number of different species of these trees, Project Crimson focuses only on the mainland pohutukawa (*M. excelsa*), and three tree rata, northern (*M. robusta*) southern (*M. umbellata*) and Bartlett's (*M. bartlettii*) because these species are considered to be the most threatened among *Metrosideros*.

Through a wide range of programmes to educate and inform, through community partnerships, widespread planting and possum eradication programmes, Project Crimson has made remarkable progress in its mission to enable pohutukawa and rata to flourish in their natural habitat.

Find out more about rata and pohutukawa at [www.projectcrimson.org.nz](http://www.projectcrimson.org.nz)

Carter Holt Harvey is proud to have been associated with protection of New Zealand's most loved trees since the inception of Project Crimson in 1990. The real proof is the good work the Trust, the Department of Conservation, councils and communities are doing all over the country. Take a Crimson Trail and see this national icon for yourself.

This Crimson Trail is one of a series of Crimson Trails to be identified by Project Crimson throughout Aotearoa New Zealand – one that allows you to readily see this national icon for yourself.

Each Crimson Trail is unique to its region, presenting either pohutukawa or rata (northern and southern) or both, depending on location within New Zealand. What the Crimson Trails share is that special time of the year when glorious crimson blooms cloak the trees and the wind blown stamens carpet the ground all around.

Crimson trails can be explored in the following areas:

#### North Island (Te Ika a Maui)

Auckland  
Mount Maunganui  
Rotorua Lakes  
Wellington

#### South Island (Te Waipounamu)

Golden Bay  
West Coast  
Otago Southland



Brochures for each Crimson Trail are available from Department of Conservation offices and local information bureau. They can also be downloaded from Project Crimson's web site.

For further information about Project Crimson and the Crimson Trails:

[www.projectcrimson.org.nz](http://www.projectcrimson.org.nz)

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