

GoldenDays

PAT BARRETT TAKES HIS FAMILY OVER THE HILL TO EXPERIENCE
THE PERFECT GOLDEN DAYS IN GOLDEN BAY.

PICTURES: PAT BARRETT



Opposite: Family picnic at Wainui Bay, Abel Tasman National Park.

Right: The Tasman Sea pounds the cliffs of Cape Farewell, Tasman.



IT'S THE HILL THAT DOES IT – TAKAKA HILL. THIS MASSIVE BARRIER of limestone and marble standing between Motueka and Golden Bay acts a bit like a filter, dissuading many travellers from entering the secluded haven of the Bay, despite the fact that State Highway 60 cuts across the hilltop with relative ease.

Our three little girls aren't enamoured with it either and at the end of an eight-hour stint from Christchurch they are done. And so are we. Yet from the summit, where the first snapshot of the bay is revealed, there is a tangible sense that this is a special slice of New Zealand.

Cutting between the forested hinterland of Kahurangi National Park to the west, and tiny world-renowned Abel Tasman National Park to the east, Golden Bay curls out into the Tasman Sea, its unique northern boundary formed by the 'kiwi-beak' barrier of Farewell Spit. Descending from the hill we cruise into Takaka, the Bay's principal town, collect some groceries and head north to Collingwood, the end of SH60 and the start of our holiday adventure.

We are booked into Tessa Gillooly's beach house which sits on the strip running south of the Aorere River mouth. From here the flash of the lighthouse on the end of Farewell Spit can be seen each evening across the mostly calm waters of the Bay. Warm afternoon sunlight floods Collingwood as we arrive, the river estuary is brim-full, edged with tawny reeds, and backed by the shimmering forested hills of the Burnett Range.

The beach and sandbars beyond the road are irresistible to road-wearing travellers. They stretch for almost a kilometre offshore at low tide and with a low river offer wonderful fossicking, wading, and bird-watching. Numerous birds from the Farewell Spit colonies feed here including gannet which plummet, missile-like, into the sea with an audible plop.

A dinner-call is the only prompt that returns the trio of wanderers to base. It's a la fresca at one of the picnic tables in the grassy domain behind the dunes. The gulls join us and as we bask in the last light of day the winding road trip over the hill fades to memory.

Spending every day on the beach can be exhausting so we augment beach-days with walk-days or canoe-days. Distances are not far as Collingwood is juxtaposed between the inner and outer bay attractions and makes a convenient jump-off point.

Wharaiki Beach, located west of Farewell Spit on the Tasman Sea, is a stunner. Raw energy, huge sand dunes, and massive sea stacks complement this hidden cove at the interface of ocean and beach. The Westland Current powers into the bay shedding quarry loads of sand and building up the spit in the process. Sea caves and seals, including pups, are often seen along this stretch of coast. We wander down the expansive beach, the children running in the shallow water. We imbibe its beauty and bookmark it for a re-run, perhaps at sunset.

The Farewell Spit region, Puponga as it is known locally, has a large menu of possibilities when it comes to outdoor activities and we sample some of the best once we leave Wharaiki. Foremost is the Farewell Spit Safari which actually runs out of Collingwood with two companies offering 5-6 hour excursions along the 35km length of the giant sandbar. Paddy Gillooly and his Farewell Spit Safaris are icons of the outer Bay area having operated here since the days of mail delivery to the lighthouse keeper. Now he runs a daily tour, at low tide, along the outer beach to the lighthouse and an extended tour to the gannet colony, another three kilometres farther out. It's magic and we revel in the sea, sand, and sheer isolation of this far flung corner of the island. We even climb the lighthouse and check out the light we see each night from Collingwood.

Back on terra firma we set out on another couple of excursions before returning to the beaches – Pupu Springs and adjacent Pupu Walkway. These walks near Takaka are distinctly different and both can be visited in the course of a day. The freshwater springs are New Zealand's largest, ranked 90th in volume on a world scale. They contain a curious mix of artesian, karstic, and sea water. Easy trails allow us to explore and provide excellent views of the creeks which flow swiftly from the outflows, measuring 7-21 cubic metres per second. The main spring has a platform with an underwater reflector allowing viewing into the stunning underwater gardens. No didymo here, thankfully – DoC closely monitors the streams and prohibits all swimming.

Pupu Walkway, a little farther up the valley road, is an exciting option for the family though special care is required on the narrow airy gantry suspended in the forest above the streambed.

The raceway and fluming were constructed in 1901 to provide water >



Above clockwise from top left: Tidal outlet at Totaranui, Abel Tasman National Park. The Archway Islands watch over azure blue tidal pools, North Westland. Collingwood wharf, Tasman. Child at Aorere Rivermouth, Collingwood, Tasman. Passengers disembark from a watertaxi at Totaranui. A dinghy floats peacefully at Collingwood. Opposite page: Evening over Wainui Inlet near Taupo Point, Abel Tasman National Park. The peaceful vista of Wainui Bay from the beach, Abel Tasman National Park.

pressure for sluicing work on the goldfields. Now it is operated by the Golden Bay Hydro Society and is regarded as an engineering masterpiece. The girls love the twisting catwalk, and spotting koura (native crayfish) in the raceway waters.

More warm days send us packing for the beaches; there are many sandy gems here. Pakawau, Pohara, and Ligar Bay with their gentle profiles and shallow, warm water are ideal for small children. Tata and Totaranui are havens for swimmers, boaties, and kayakers with deep water and magnificent limestone islands to land on.

With few days remaining till we head back over the hill we treat the family to a memorable day at Wainui Inlet on the edge of Abel Tasman National Park. A two kilometre wide clip of golden sand fills the bay together with hectares of shallow sandbars, rock sculptures, shell banks, and water like a warm bath. On dusk I visit again, cutting barefoot across the sands and scrambling along the rocky coastline to Taupo Point, the site of an ancient Maori pa.

I perch on one of the massive granite blocks that are common here to catch the amber glow of sunset over the bay, under starlight and a crescent moon. Perfect, golden days. ■

Above: Pupu Springs, Golden Bay. A sea cave makes a dramatic window near Taupo Point.
Below: The limpid waters of the Pupu Springs, Golden Bay.



FACT FILE: GOLDEN BAY

WHERE TO STAY

Golden Bay has a huge range of holiday accommodation from motor camps to B&B or lodge style. Look in the latest editions of the AA South Island Accommodation book and Baches and Holiday Homes to Rent book which is also available on-line www.holidayhomes.co.nz. You could also visit www.rentabach.co.nz



Pohara Beach Top 10 Holiday Park & Motels Tent space from \$30 through to two-bdrm units at \$110-\$150. (03) 5259500, email pohara@extra.co.nz

Tessa Gillooly's Two Cottages in Collingwood Sleep up to seven people. \$90 two people per night, extra people \$15 per night. (03) 524 8648.

Totaranui Camping DOC Totaranui (03) 5288083, email totaranui@doc.govt.nz

WHERE TO EAT

Bencarri Farm Park Enjoy lunch outside or a dinner barbeque. Plus feed the eels, llamas, rabbits, and farm animals. Just minutes south of Takaka on SH60. Adults \$12, children \$6. (03) 525 8261, email leithal@extra.co.nz

The Penguin A café-restaurant on the main road in Pohara. (03) 525 6126.

The Mussel Inn The best seafood in the bay on SH60, Onekaka. (03) 525 9241, email haveabeer@musselinn.co.nz

Paddle Crab Kitchen Part of the Farewell Spit Visitor Centre at Puponga with fantastic views and very tasty fare. (03) 525 6059.

TOP TRIPS IN THE BAY

Tata Islands Sea Kayaking Email info@goldenbaykayaks.co.nz, www.goldenbaykayaks.co.nz

Wharariki Beach Walk 30 minutes to the beach, longer options for return.

Abel Tasman Aqua Taxi For drop-off and pick-up along the Abel Tasman Coastal Track. 0800 2782 82, email www.aquataxi.co.nz

Wainui Inlet & Taupo Point Accessed along McShanes Road, off Totaranui Road, East of Pohara. (Takes one-two hours from the carpark.)

Pupu Walkway & Springs Walkway three hours return. Springs one hour.

Farewell Spit Birdwatching & Nature Safaris Farewell Spit Eco Tours 0800 808 257, www.farewellspit.co.nz and Farewell Spit Nature Experience 0800 250 500, www.farewell-spit.co.nz

Puponga horse treks (03) 524 8031, email fun@horsetreksnz.com, www.horsetreksnz.com

Kaituna Walkway & Naked Possum Restaurant Walkway two-three hours return. (03) 524 8433, email cafe@thenakedpossum.co.nz, www.nakedpossum.com

Aorere Goldfields Mountain Biking Tracks and caves two-three hour trips.

Maps for all walks and trips are available from Abel Tasman National Park and Kahurangi National Park.

