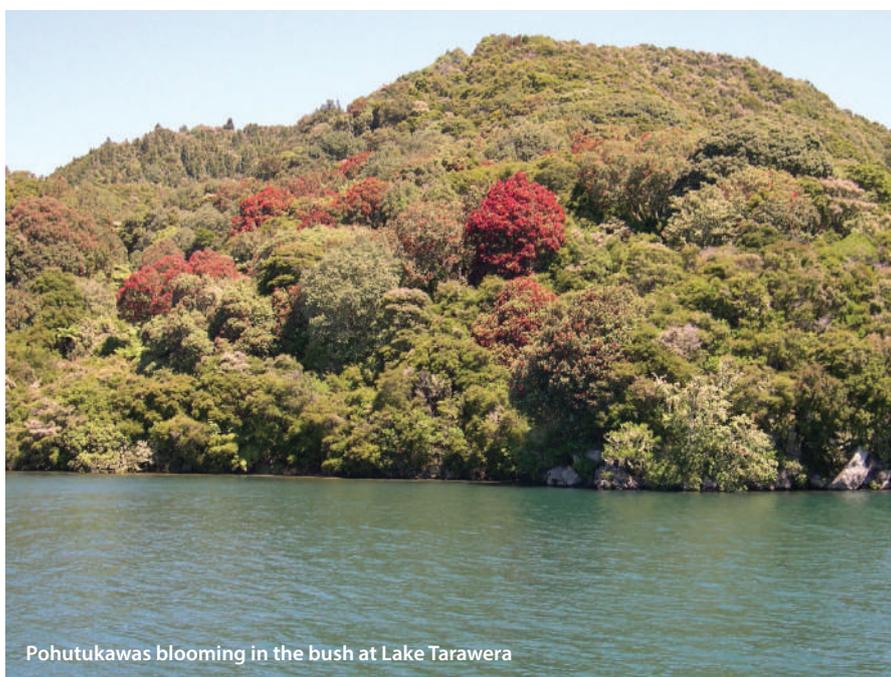


The pohutukawa stands you'll discover here in the Rotorua Lakes district are rather special. They are unique in that they are the only truly inland stands of this traditional coastal species.

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'.



Pohutukawas blooming in the bush at Lake Tarawera

Pohutukawa 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.



Pohūtukawa (*Metrosideros excelsa*)

Metrosideros is the Greek word for ironwood, which reflects the hard nature of the timber. The species name *excelsa* is derived from the Latin word meaning "raised" or "exalted". A former name, *Metrosideros tomentosa*, described the felt of white hairs (*tomentum* in Latin) which covers young stems, buds and undersides of the leaves.

Found throughout the North Island, particularly north of New Plymouth and Gisborne. Pohutukawa grows best in warm, drier areas close to the sea.

Grows to 20 metres high by 35 metres wide.



Northern rata (*Metrosideros robusta*)

Found from Hokitika northwards. It usually begins life as an epiphyte (perching plant) high in the forest's canopy. The largest trees are found in warm moist areas such as northwest Nelson and Northland. Northern rata grows from the coast to a maximum of 900 metres above sea level.

One of New Zealand's tallest flowering trees. Grows to 25 metre or more high with a trunk up to 2.5 metres in diameter.



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.

Rotorua's Crimson Trail

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. 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 you descend from the last lookout you'll see another massive northern rata stump on the left. A little further on more stumps and large fallen trees are testimony to the impact of the possums.

3. Lake Okataina, Eastern Okataina walkway

Drive to the road-end car park at the Okataina lakefront. The track, which rises and falls along the eastern shore of Lake Okataina, is sign-posted near the lake edge on your left. This walk can actually be continued through to the Tarawera Outlet track and to do both walkways allow a full day.

Pohutukawa abound along the eastern edge of Lake Okataina, and some of the district's last northern rata stands struggle against possums on the Makatiti Dome above. Ten minutes up the Eastern Okataina walkway take the side track down to Te Koutu Bay. Looking up Lake Okataina you can see both pohutukawa and northern rata along the shoreline with notable groups of pohutukawa across the water at Kaiwaka Bay.



Rotorua's Crimson Trail (continued)

4. Eastern Okataina walkway, just beyond Kaiwaka Bay

A further 25 minutes along the Eastern Okataina walkway and a little beyond Kaiwaka Bay, the track enters a fine stand of lake-edge pohutukawa. The trees extend above and below the track, and their tall upright form suggests a degree of hybridisation with northern rata.

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 Kawerau Information Centre on Plunket Street.

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.

The Rotorua Crimson Trail is one of a series of Project Crimons' Crimson Trails throughout New Zealand. Each Crimson Trail is unique to its region. 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 beneath.

Crimson Trails can be explored in the following areas:

- Auckland
- Golden Bay
- Coromandel
- Canterbury
- Mount
- West Coast
- Maunganui
- Otago/Southland
- Rotorua
- Wellington

Brochures for each Crimson Trail can be downloaded from www.projectcrimson.org.nz

Renewing our pohutukawa and rātā

For over 25 years Project Crimson has been working with communities around New Zealand to renew and restore our precious ecosystems, with a particular focus on our iconic pohutukawa and rātā trees. All New Zealanders can be part of our work by joining our planting days, making a donation to the Trust or buying our products.

Join us in our mission to protect and enhance New Zealand's natural environment. Visit: www.projectcrimson.org.nz

