

OTAGO PENINSULA DAYOUT

A dayout on the Otago Peninsula offers unique treats. It's the only place you can tour a castle in New Zealand, and the only place in the world you can visit a mainland breeding colony of any albatross species. You have to pay entry fees, but we think such special attractions are worth the money.

If you're prepared to walk a little, you can also see wildlife for free and enjoy stunning coastal scenery and beautiful silver sand beaches.

Heritage sites are well worth a visit, too, and even if you're not scientifically inclined, you'll find the New Zealand Marine Studies Centre at Portobello very interesting.

It's possible to see the main attractions of the Peninsula in one dayout, but for a relaxing visit, we recommend at least two days. For those with time to spend in Dunedin, it's a great area for picnics, and no distance at all from the city.

Take the high road (Highcliff Road) one way. It has wonderful views of the Pacific Ocean and of farmland divided up by lovely dry-stone walls, built by early settlers. The low road winds alongside the harbour past boat sheds and clusters of houses and, as it nears Taiaroa Head, typical old-style Kiwi cribs.

HERITAGE

The area, known to the early moa hunters, was settled by Ngati Mamoe and Ngai Tahu who became the dominant tribe.

The name Otago comes from early European whalers' interpretation of the name of Otakau, the Ngai Tahu village on the Peninsula.

Otakau Marae

Turn right off Harrington Point Road into Tamatea Road.

Tourists are not encouraged to visit the marae, but it is worth driving along the road to look at the entrance and the buildings on the hill.

Three notable chiefs are buried in the cemetery behind the church:

Te Matenga Taiaroa who led warriors against Te Rauparaha, later sold land to Johnny Jones and the Government. His signing of the Treaty of Waitangi is alluded to on his tombstone where it is inscribed that "His direction of his people was eminently good and his attachment to the Queen's rule was great."

Ngatata Te Rangi, a Te Ati Awa chief, died in 1854 while visiting Otago. He, too, signed the Treaty of Waitangi.

Karetai, a Ngati Mamoe and Ngai Tahu chief, also signed the sale of land at Waikouaiti to Johnny Jones.

Sealers and Whalers

In the early 1800s sealers and whalers started using the harbour as a safe anchorage on a dangerous coast, and in 1832 Weller Brothers of Sydney established a whaling station at Otakau. The Europeans brought with them diseases unknown to Maori, such as measles. Epidemics swept through the native population and in 1848, when the settlers arrived in Dunedin, only about 100 Maori were living at Otakau.

Architectural Heritage

- Larnach Castle

Camp Road

Open 9am - 5pm daily. Entry fees: Garden, \$6; Castle, \$12

When you enter the castle, you are given a brochure for a self-

guided tour that starts with the history of William Larnach, his family and his castle. And what a history! Marriage to a wealthy heiress, a dream fulfilled, two more wives, unhappy stepchildren, a successful financial and political career, a son's betrayal, financial collapse and death by suicide in Parliament Buildings. It all reads like something out of the most lurid tabloid newspaper.

After Larnach's death, his son sold the castle which fell into a state of disrepair for many years. Fortunately, its outstanding features are now being preserved. Although the exterior design is considered a rather strange mix of colonial architecture (the verandahs) and Scottish baronial, nobody questions the magnificence of the stone and wood carving inside. Louis Godfrey whose carvings enhance other important Dunedin buildings, spent 12 years here carving stone work. The wood carvings are equally stunning. The ceiling of the main foyer alone took three people six and a half years to complete.

No expense was spared bringing materials from around the world: Welsh slate, French iron, ceramics and 20 tons of glass, Belgian mosaics, Venetian glass, Marseille tiles and timber from the USA and Australia. It all had to be shipped to Port Chalmers, punted across the harbour and brought up the hill by ox-drawn sled.

The site was undoubtedly difficult for building, but Larnach could not have chosen a better view for 'The Camp', as he called it. Make sure you go to the top of the tower for a stunning view over the Peninsula.

The Gardens

The gardens also offer splendid views. You can have a picnic there or play pétanque, if you want some gentle exercise. There is a variety of gardens - in spring the azaleas are lovely - and some fine specimen trees.

- **Fletcher House - 1909**

Broad Bay . Open daily 11am - 4pm from Christmas to Easter, otherwise weekends and public holidays.

This Victorian villa built of heart rimu has a verandah on two sides. A classic colonial design, it has two bedrooms, a sitting room and living room opening off the central hallway which has a dado of pressed zinc panels.

The house was built by James Fletcher and his partner Albert Morris. They gained more work as a result and Fletcher went on to establish Fletcher Construction in 1919, a company which eventually became Fletcher Challenge, one of New Zealand's largest companies.

Sandymount Lime Kilns -1865

Going north, turn right off Highcliff Road into Sandymount Road. A short walk through a paddock below the road takes you to the best example of the kilns.

Limestone was burnt inside the tower and made into mortar used in brick and stone buildings, as cement is used today. Walk around the base of the tower to see the fireplaces and then go down to the bottom of the kiln to see where the burnt lime was extracted.

Fort Tairaroa - 1885-1945

At Tairaroa Head at the end of the harbour. Reserve a guided tour through the Royal Albatross Centre.

Reservation@albatrosses.com

The fort was built on the headland at the entrance to the harbour to protect Dunedin when a Russian invasion was feared. The tour through underground tunnels gives you an insight into the history of early Maori here, shows you the fully restored Victorian Armstrong Disappearing Gun and tells you how fortifications developed up to the time of World War 2.

ECOTOURS

Royal Albatross Centre at Taiaroa Head

A unique opportunity for visitors to see the only mainland breeding colony of any albatross species in the world.

A donation gains you entry into the Centre which has extensive displays and information on the area's penguins, sea lions, fur seals, sea birds, and, of course, the Northern royal albatross which breeds here.

Breeding records for the albatross colony date back more than 60 years, and daily observation records have been kept since 1968.

The Department of Conservation manages the reserves and as it is responsible for protection of the albatrosses, numbers of visitors have to be restricted. Reservations are essential for tours of the colony.

Tours



Guided tours to the observatory at the edge of the colony allow you to see chicks and adult albatrosses in their natural environment; they also provide fascinating information about the lives of these very

beautiful birds that can glide for hours over the ocean, sometimes travelling as far as 1000 km in a day.

Tour Information:

Royal Albatross - available 24 November - 16 September, daily except for Tuesday mornings.

Fort Taiaroa tours operate all year except for Tuesday mornings.

A combined Royal Albatross and Fort Taiaroa tour costs \$25 (\$65 a family). Cheaper winter rates, when you are less likely to see adult birds.

www.albatross.org.nz

Free sightings for the lucky

One lovely summer evening we drove to Taiaroa Head and wandered down the path to the edge of the cliff where we sat enjoying the view. An adult albatross flew along the cliff close to us, seemed to give us the once-over, and then circled and flew past us five times. It was a magical experience - we were sure it even dipped its wings on the fly-by!

You may not have our luck, but walk down to the cliffs to see the seals and the sea birds. Binoculars are an asset.

WALKS

There are numerous tracks giving access to special areas of coastline, historic sites and interesting areas. For those with limited time, we recommend walking to Sandfly Bay to see the wildlife. The Dunedin City Council publishes a brochure of all the Peninsula tracks for walkers with more time to explore.

ECOTOUR/ WALK

- Sandfly Bay - 1 hour return

Turn right off Highcliff Road onto unsealed Seal Point Road.

A great opportunity to see penguins, seals and sea lions on one beach.

Late afternoon is the best time to see the hoiho (yellow-eyed penguins).

Before you hit the beach, you have to negotiate a huge sand hill. It's fun whether you choose a sedate lollop or an exhilarating gallop. You might be entertained here by some local lads who have converted snowboards into sandboards to launch themselves down the slope.

Walk to the far end of the beach for the penguin-viewing hide. As you wander along there, you're likely to see some sea lions, and there are usually several seals basking on the rocks.

- **New Zealand Marine Studies Centre at Portobello**

Open daily 12 noon - 4.30pm. Entry fee.

An interesting, worthwhile visit for both adults and children; if you go on Saturdays and Wednesdays, you can help feed the aquarium residents.

The chance to see live marine plants, invertebrates and fish found in New Zealand's southern coastal waters. Special shallow tanks allow really close viewing of some species.

- **Commercial Ecotours**

The Dunedin Visitors' Centre has information on a variety of Peninsula tours. Two which have gained NZ Tourism Awards are:

Monarch Wildlife Cruises and Tours

www.wildlife.co.nz

Yellow- Eyed Penguin Conservation Reserve

www.penguin-place.co.nz

BEACHES/PICNICS

Allans Beach - 5 minute walk to beach

Turnoff main road north of Portobello.

The drive to this lovely, sandy beach on the ocean side of the Peninsula is a pleasure on its own. You pass Hoopers Inlet Wildlife Sanctuary, a vast wetland home to many birds such as oystercatchers, stilts, terns, herons and the ubiquitous gulls.

Te Rauone Beach

A sandy harbourside beach with a large reserve for picnics. Its peaceful setting gives no hint of the slaughter that took place here in the late 18th Century when the Ngati Mamoe took revenge on Ngai Tahu for an earlier conflict.

Pilots Beach

A harbourside beach at the end of the Peninsula. It was here ships took on a pilot to guide them up the tricky harbour channel to their berths at Port Chalmers or Dunedin.

You can often see fur seals on the rocks, and the beach is also visited by little blue penguins.

GARDEN

Glenfalloch Woodland Garden

Portobello Road, 9km from city. Open daily, dawn to dusk. Entry by donation. Restaurant (restricted hours in winter).

The garden abounds in azaleas and rhododendrons and is particularly stunning in spring.

Mature European trees form a backdrop to flowering plants and shrubs, and maples and silver birches are colourful in autumn.

There's an historic house for added interest and a pottery studio.