

Riverside Mangawhai Heads

Respite Holiday Home

Established in 2005 with funding from the ASB Trust and Pub Charities Inc.



The soggy tents are hanging in the garage and I've just dosed the kids with antibiotics for bronchitis. Some summer! Then Michelle from KIDS phones me, and offers me a week in the KIDS Summer bach in Mangawhai. It takes me all of 20 seconds to say "yes, please" and 3 days later we're off up North in search of summer.

The bach is at the Riverside campsite, which is beautifully kept and run by Lorraine who is just dynamite. It's on the estuary which offers safe, shallow swimming at high tide and a small sandy beach at low tide. We'd only been there an hour and the kids were already in the water!

The bach is really a "house for a mouse", it's tiny but incredibly well designed, ample storage space, adorably decorated and, well, just perfect! Every time I thought "if only there was a ...", there'd be one - this place has EVERYTHING! Microwave, electric toaster, jug, electric frying pan, all kitchen tools, towels, bedding, vacuum cleaner - the works. Imagine our surprise when we find a shower bigger than the shower at home, with a removable handset so you can shower sandy, salty children easily. There's a stereo with CD player, and even a television.

Best of all, Michelle and Janet had equipped the bach with games, and we played "Pass the Pigs" amidst gales of laughter, and chess, draughts, pick up sticks, ludo - you get the picture!

The kiddies rooms are small with great timber bunk beds - you can actually sit up on the bottom bunk - with massive storage drawers for toys and clothes underneath. The bedspreads caused great delight - dinosaurs in one room and Snazzy Sister covers in the other!

The weather took pity on us, and the sun came out for our entire week. The kids' chests cleared, their faces took on a rosy sheen and their teeth gleamed in permanent smiles.

Mangawhai offers massive variety of summer activities. We went to the surf beach, where you can swim between the flags and boogie board, or if you go to the left you can boogie board down the enormous sand dunes, which the kids infinitely prefer!

Then there's the estuary at the campsite for swimming, which offers a rope swing to the left of the beach; at high tide the kids swung right out and dropped into the water. They also held boogie boards for each other and "water skied" while holding on to the rope!

Down at the estuary proper there's another beach with lovely swimming, which is also great for floating sticks when the tide is running, you can have some exciting competitions.

A short drive from the bach is Te Arai point, a must visit during your stay. There's a white sand surf beach to the left, and a deep, protected swimming lagoon to the right. A short walk over the headland (only 20 feet high) takes you to a shell collecting beach with the most interesting rock pools in New Zealand. Take a bucket and a net...

From the back of the campsite is a mangrove walk, which goes for 2 hours to a wildlife reserve stocked full of oyster catchers and other birds. And there's an inland salt water pool which is awesome to swim in. Wear shoes and watch out for oyster shells in the entire estuary.

The campsite rents kayaks and lifejackets, so the kids explored the estuary - right out under the bridge and into the mangroves, and it's never more than 6 feet deep even 400 metres out!

When we weren't at the beach - or eating ice creams - the kiddies were on the trampoline next to the bach, a massive hexagonal one (and there's another one for kids 10 and over near the beach), or playing in the enormous grassy play area right next to the bach.

A week later the kids are healthy, happy and relaxed, and so am I. We can't express our gratitude to KIDS for such a fabulous week - you made our summer holidays. Thank you.



Mangawhai's sand dunes are a dominant feature of the harbour. Administered by the Department of Conservation, they are home to the rare fairy and Caspian tern, variable oystercatcher and the New Zealand dotterel.

With 5 beaches within a 15 minute drive you are spoiled for choice, whether it is sailing, fishing, surfing or just lazing on the golden expanses of sand. Experience the real magic of Mangawhai on the many coastal and bush walks. Feast your eyes on the panoramic gulf views from the Whangarei Heads to Pakiri.

