

Australasian Gannets (Tākapu): Best places to see gannets in New Zealand

This guide focuses specifically on Australasian gannets (tākapu). Other natural phenomena and wildlife experiences in New Zealand are covered in separate guides.



Photo: Gannet Safaris, Hawke's Bay; Credit: Gannet Safaris

Australasian Gannets in New Zealand: at a glance

- Phenomenon: Australasian gannets (tākapu) – one of New Zealand's most iconic seabird species, known for dramatic plunge-diving and large coastal breeding colonies
- Best months: September – March (peak colony activity November – February)
- Best locations: Muriwai (Auckland), Cape Kidnappers (Hawke's Bay)
- Why New Zealand: New Zealand is the seabird capital of the world, home to some of the largest and most accessible mainland gannet colonies, offering close-up coastal viewing during the breeding season.

Why visit New Zealand to see Australasian gannets (tākapu)

Australasian gannets (tākapu) are one of New Zealand's most dramatic sea bird encounters. With golden crowns, azure eye rings, and highspeed plunge dives, they gather by the thousands on coastal cliffs to

court, nest, and raise chicks from spring through late summer. After breeding, juveniles embark on a solo trans-Tasman journey of 2,740–3,000 km to Australia — a perilous migration with low survival rates — before returning to Aotearoa New Zealand 2–3 years later to breed. Watching an active colony offers intimate, front row viewing of courtship dances, chick rearing, and first flights.

Did you know? New Zealand is considered the [seabird capital of the world](#) with more sea bird species breeding on these shores than anywhere else in the world. More than one third of the 80 or so species of seabirds that breed in New Zealand are endemic or found nowhere else.

Australasian gannet (tākapu) migration and lifecycle

- Migration timing: Juveniles depart late summer/early autumn (February – March).
- Juvenile trans-Tasman journey: 8–14 days across the Tasman, unguided by parents.
- Age to breeding: Immatures spend 2–3 years in Australian waters; breeding begins ~3–7 years of age.
- Breeding season in New Zealand: September – March across New Zealand colonies.

Where to see gannets (tākapu) in New Zealand

Muriwai Gannet Colony, Auckland

- An iconic Westcoast colony with clifftop platforms overlooking black sand beaches and pounding surf — superb at sunset and an easy day trip from the city.
- Muriwai Gannet Colony differs to Cape Kidnappers with a dramatic view looking down on the colony.
- Book with [Auckland and Beyond](#)

Cape Kidnappers, Hawke's Bay

- The world's largest mainland gannet colony sits spectacularly on sandstone cliffs, with Gannet Safaris Overland providing the only guided 4WD access through private farmland to the nesting grounds — safe, closeup viewing among thousands of birds.
- Book with [Gannet Safaris - Overland](#)

Best time of year to see gannets (tākapu) in New Zealand

- September to March: Peak colony activity.
- November to February: Most of the action (courtship, nesting, chick feeding, and fledging).

Expert commentary of Australasian gannets (tākapu)

Dr Todd Landers, Senior Scientist at Auckland Council, specialises in animal ecology/seabirds

When to visit the Muriwai Gannet Colony:

- “There’s really no bad time to visit the Muriwai Gannet Colony. Gannets are present and active throughout the day, especially during the breeding season when one parent is always on the nest protecting an egg or chick. Late afternoon can be particularly special, with dramatic west-coast sunsets as a backdrop, while spring offers a cooler, windier experience that really showcases the rugged environment these birds thrive in.”
- “Visit in spring and you may spot an egg or tiny chick hidden beneath a parent; return in summer and you’ll see chicks in a variety of stages, from small, slightly fuzzy birds, to large, very fluffy chicks who will eventually lose their downy feathers and take on their juvenile form with mottled, dark brown and white plumage when they can outweigh their parents.”

What visitors should look out for when visiting Muriwai Gannet Colony:

- “These birds live tough lives at sea but return to land to breed, where parents take turns heading back to sea to feed themselves and bring food to their single chick. Watching that process unfold across the season is what makes them so fascinating. I’ve never seen anyone leave disappointed after visiting the colony. If you slow down and observe, you’ll see some incredible behaviour.”
- “My top tip for visitors is to bring a camera as well as binoculars to help you spot details like the gannets’ striking blue eyes, or to help spot an egg or chick hidden beneath a parent.”
- “Keep an eye out for partners greeting each other with bill fencing, bowing and head-shaking when one returns from sea to trade nesting duties. You may also be lucky enough to see a male returning to the nest carrying seaweed and presenting it to his mate. This almost romantic act is thought to help provide structure to and insulate the nest.”
- “Gannets are also tough, territorial birds, and you may see them vigorously defending their nest site with loud calls or even aggressive bill-prodding if a neighbour gets too close.”
- “Just before take-off, gannets often ‘sky-point’, lifting their heads upward and making a distinctive call before launching into flight. And if you scan the ocean, you may be lucky enough to see gannets plunge-diving for fish off the coastal shelf, hitting the water at incredible speed.”

Food and beverage experiences near Cape Kidnappers, Hawke’s Bay

Hawke’s Bay is a standout destination for food and beverage lovers thanks to its sun-soaked climate, which produces some of New Zealand’s best wines, fresh produce and artisan goods. From award-winning cellar doors to farm to table dining, it’s a region where local flavours truly shine.

- [Craggy Range Restaurant](#), Havelock North – A flagship vineyard restaurant expressing Hawke’s Bay produced through refined, estate-driven seasonal menus

- [Elephant Hill, Te Awanga](#) – A dramatic coastal winery restaurant pairing seasonal dishes with expansive views across Hawke’s Bay vineyards.
- [Black Barn Bistro](#) – A relaxed vineyard bistro showcasing garden-grown produce and estate wines in a rural Hawke’s Bay setting.
- [Mission Estate Restaurant](#), Napier – Set within New Zealand’s oldest winery, offering seasonal dining shaped by heritage buildings and estate vineyards.
- [Wallingford Homestead](#), Wallingford – A country homestead offering leisurely, multi course dining shaped by seasonal estate and regional produce.