

# Little Blue Penguins (Kororā): Where and When to See Blue Penguins in New Zealand

This guide focuses specifically on little blue penguins (kororā) and seasonal opportunities to see them during their breeding and nesting period. Other marine wildlife and natural phenomena in New Zealand are covered in separate guides.



*Photo: Oamaru Penguin Colony; Credit: Miles Holden*

## Little Blue Penguins in New Zealand: At a Glance

- **Phenomenon:** Little blue penguins (kororā) — the world’s smallest penguin species, returning to shore at dusk during breeding season
- **Best months:** August – March, with peak activity and reliability November – December
- **Best locations:** Ōamaru Blue Penguin Colony (Waitaki), Pōhatu Penguins (Akaroa), Tairaroa Head / Pukekura (Ōtepoti Dunedin)
- **Why New Zealand:** New Zealand offers some of the world’s most accessible and conservation-led opportunities to observe wild little blue penguins returning ashore without disturbing their natural behaviour

## Why Visit New Zealand to See Little Blue Penguins

Little blue penguins — kororā — are the world's smallest penguin, just ~30 cm tall with distinctive slate blue plumage. At dusk, they surf ashore in small groups after a day at sea, then waddle to their burrows to feed chicks or switch parenting duties. It's one of Aotearoa's most endearing wildlife rituals and can be viewed from responsibly managed platforms and conservation tours.

### When little blue penguins are most active

- Breeding and nesting season: August to March
- Peak activity: November–December (with the most reliable evening returns and frequent feeding trips)
- Best viewing is just after sunset

## Where to See Little Blue Penguins in New Zealand

### Ōamaru Blue Penguin Colony, Waitaki

New Zealand's best known kororā experience, with guided evening viewing and strong conservation credentials.

### Pōhatu Penguins, Akaroa

Conservation led tours in a protected bay, offering intimate, ethical encounters.

### Pukekura (Taiaroa Head), Ōtepoti Dunedin

Part of a broader wildlife reserve that also hosts royal albatross; kororā return nightly to protected shoreline habitats.

## Best Time to See Little Blue Penguins

- **August to March**, with peak reliability November–December, at dusk.

## Expert insight on little blue penguins

### Dr Philippa Agnew, Science & Environmental Manager, Ōamaru Penguins

*What makes Ōamaru one of the world's most extraordinary places to witness little blue penguins, and how does this colony differ from others found across New Zealand?*

- Ōamaru is one of the few places you can sit and watch wild penguins return from the ocean, every evening, only 5 minutes from town. It's not a zoo or a staged experience, it's completely natural. What makes it truly special is that this happens within a protected, carefully managed environment. While most penguin colonies in New Zealand are remote or penguins are only

seen during chance encounters, Ōamaru offers a front-row seat to their daily lives, without compromising their welfare. It's a rare combination of accessibility, authenticity, and conservation. The recent development of the new Discovery Centre enhances the facility by providing visitors with an interactive and engaging experience as they learn about the penguins.

*Little blue penguins face a range of modern environmental pressures—what adaptations or behaviours have helped them thrive, and what surprising traits do people tend to learn only when seeing them up close in Ōamaru?*

- Despite being the world's smallest penguin, they're incredibly tough. They can dive deep, travel long distances, and adapt their feeding to changing ocean conditions. What really surprises people is their personality. They're noisy, social, and full of character, some are bold, others cautious, and you can see those differences as they come ashore. And they're far more athletic than people expect. Watching them ride waves in, then climb the rocks to their nests, completely changes how you see them.

*As the seasons change, how does penguin behaviour shift in Ōamaru, and what moments or natural cycles during the year create the most memorable experiences for visitors and conservationists alike?*

- The penguins follow a strong seasonal/annual cycle, and each phase offers something different. Spring and summer are the busiest, with mating, nesting building, chick feeding, and lots of other nightly activity. What's especially unique in Ōamaru is that visitors can also see penguins and their chicks up close during the day, inside some specially designed nests, something that's almost impossible to experience in the wild elsewhere. Autumn brings the moult, a critical period when penguins stay ashore to replace their feathers. Winter is quieter, offering a more intimate experience. But no matter the season, the highlight is always the same: that first group of penguins appearing at dusk and making their way home. It's a simple moment, but for many visitors, it's unforgettable.

## Food and Beverage Experiences Near Penguin Viewing Sites

- [Riverstone Kitchen](#) Ōamaru for Garden-to-plate dining in a rural setting
- [Cucina](#) for Italian Inspired Cuisine using local produce and meat
- [Whitestone Cheese](#) for a guided tour to get a behind the scenes look at the cheese making process