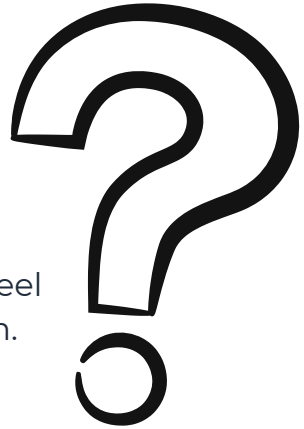
Did You Know?



The Meaning Behind Awhitu
The name ‘Awhitu’ comes from Māori and translates to ‘A Longing to Return.’ It’s easy to see why, as many visitors feel the pull to come back once they’ve experienced its charm.

Geography and Unique Features
Awhitu Peninsula is a long sand peninsula, stretching roughly 35 km and ending at the historic Manukau Heads and Lighthouse. It’s interesting to note that there’s no natural rock on the peninsula; what might look like rock is actually sandstone, which is relatively soft. You’ll even find rod holders drilled into the sandstone on some of the headlands for keen fishers.

Tidal Flows and Safety
The Manukau Harbour has three distinct tidal flows: one towards Onehunga, another towards Manurewa, and the third past Waiuku towards Clarks Beach. Near the Manukau Heads, the tides can reach speeds of up to 8 knots. If you’re swimming, kayaking, or boating, please be cautious, especially near Orua Bay and Wattle Bay, as the current can be very strong. The infamous Manukau Bar is known for its shifting sands, making it a challenging and sometimes dangerous area to navigate — as history reminds us with the tragic sinking of HMS Orpheus in 1863, resulting in 189 lives lost.

Sand Mining History
In the early 20th century, sand mining was a significant industry here, with 663,000 tons of sand taken from Awhitu’s beaches and barged back to Auckland for use in various infrastructure projects. This reshaped the coastline and left a lasting impact on the area.

Experience it

Hamilton’s Gap: The Perfectly Imperfect Wild West Coast
For a true taste of the rugged West Coast, head to Hamilton’s Gap. Take Hamilton Road down to the car park, but make sure you visit when the tide is going out and there’s minimal wind. The black sands here are rich in iron, sparkling in the sunlight with mineral glints. These sands, carried by the tide, often separate from the lighter white sands, giving the inner harbour beaches a different appearance.

Iron Sands and Steel Making
The black iron sands further up the coast near Port Waikato are mined and transported to the Glenbrook Steel Mill. If you look closely during a beach walk at Hamilton’s Gap, you might spot small iron stones — perfect souvenirs or to use in your own mini Zen garden.