

West Coast Beaches ★★★★★

West

including Muriwai, Bethells Beach, Anawhata, Piha and Karekare



Auckland's west coast is all deserted black sand beaches, crashing surf and steep bush-clad hillsides. This is a place for contemplation, rejuvenation and inspiration. Its soulful, severe beauty attracts artists, potters and art directors from Auckland's adland. Karekare was the sullen, windswept backdrop for the 1993 movie *The Piano* and *Xena* has had many a sword and sandals moment here. It's an environmentally sensitive area, with advocates constantly lobbying for the protection of the easily-trampled dunes in Piha, the coastline, native bush and rainforest. Piha is the most exclusive of the neighbourhoods and the only one with a road running alongside the beach. Muriwai appeals mainly because of its relative accessibility to Auckland. For others the stark, mystical remoteness of Bethells Beach, Anawhata and Karekare is a bonus, not a drawback.



For colour key, see page 230

Population Profile

Population	7,170
% Aged Under 15 Years	23.43
% Aged Over 65 Years	5.61
% European	78.58
% Maori	9.08
% Pacific Peoples	2.55
% Asian	1.97

Who Lives There?

The West Coast beaches are not for the faint hearted – the drive to Piha alone needs to be undertaken with respect for the terrain, and a good gearbox. It's also not the place for faux lifestylers who think they can transplant their city designs on the landscape. As one real estate agent put so eloquently: "Start talking like that at a party out here and the music would stop all on its own."

An increasing number of city-siders are choosing to relocate here and commute, replacing bling with bare feet. The middle-aged affluent want to revisit the surfer haunts of their teenage years with their own kids.

Migrants, including many English, add to the rich character of the area.

Despite the arduous peak traffic commute, Muriwai has its share of return surfies, too. All of the beaches have populations that swell in summer, and while the ratio of permanent residents continues to climb, there are still those with the spare cash to afford a holiday home... and the props to enjoy their entertainment and their water sports.

Typical Homes

It's a heartening sight to see rustic baches tucked into the bush alongside stylish modern homes. The original houses – board-and-batten, 1930s Art Deco and the post-war bach – are mostly getting the makeover treatment. New houses are usually sympathetically designed for the surroundings. This is given bureaucratic weight by the ever tightening regulations regarding subdividing land (you virtually can't do it) and the removal of trees (only enough to make space for the dwelling). City considerations just don't cut it here. As one resident put it: "It'd be an insult to build a big fence out here."

These settlements are small. Piha has some 700 titles; Anawhata has only about 30 houses, some relying on solar and wind power. Karekare has comparatively few properties with sea views. Up the coast, Muriwai has a colourful diversity of houses from baches to mansions and with every price tag imaginable.

Amenities

Schools ★

Primary, intermediate and secondary schools are a bus ride away from the west coast beach communities, although there is a thriving local pre-school at Piha. It was recently extended to cope with an increase in young families living in the neighbourhood and the latest ERO report described the school as a "warm" and "welcoming" environment.

For primary and intermediate schooling, Piha kids go to Oratia, and then to Henderson for secondary school. From Muriwai, children bus to Waimauku. The Lone Kauri Community School at Karekare is officially part of Oratia Primary School. For a full list, see page 270.

Shops ★

The general store is what these communities are all about, selling all sorts of household wares and foodstuffs, freshly baked cakes (at Piha's store) and displaying notices about local services. Supermarkets are at the nearest major suburb. For those at Muriwai Beach it is Kumeu; for those in Piha, it's Henderson.

Leisure ★★★★★

Rolling surf, stunning beaches, rocks to fish from, freshwater lakes, waterfalls, hills to hang-glide from and miles of bush walks – if the outdoors is your thing, this is heaven.



Both Piha and Muriwai have surf clubs and there are golf courses nearby – Waitakere Golf Club and the excellent Muriwai Golf Club. Muriwai has an off-road motorcycle track and Woodhill Forest is close for all its outdoor activities.

Piha has a saltwater lagoon and Bethells has freshwater lakes set in the sand dunes.

Piha and Muriwai both have community libraries.

Posh nosh means a trip towards town. Both the Piha RSA and the Piha Surf Club put on good meals throughout the year and there are deli foods and German-style pastries available at the Piha Store and good take-aways and take-home meals at the Muriwai Lodge Store. The Sand Dunz Beach Café at Muriwai is practically on the beach and its hearty and affordable café-style meals are deservedly popular.

Real Estate

Trends

Don't tell anyone who lives in Muriwai, but Piha is probably the most popular of the West Coast beaches, because of the consistently good surf and easy access to the beach (it's the only one with a road running alongside). Two- to three-bedroom homes sell from \$500,000 to \$650,000. A cool \$1million (or a little more) will get you a two-bedroom bach close to the beach or a newer, bigger three or four-bedroom home further away.

Rustic baches have become an endangered species here, eagerly sought after for their sites rather than their dwellings. Views fetch big bucks out here; a great one will add a premium of up to \$200,000 on a property's price. Muriwai's first time buyers can find baches from \$300,000 (without a view) to \$500,000. Architecturally-designed gems carry a \$1million+ price tag. Most new houses in these beach communities are made from steel beams, concrete, and lots and lots of glass – a dry "fish bowl" from which to stare out at a heaving ocean.

Best Streets

Oaia Rd and Ngatira Rd at Muriwai Beach; Marine Pde and Garden Rd at Piha; Tasman View Rd at Bethells Beach.

At a Glance...

House Prices

Piha bach

Bedrooms  
Price \$750,000 - \$910,000

By the beach

Price \$1,250,000+

Muriwai/Bethells/Karekare bach

Bedrooms  
Price \$550,000 - \$750,000

With views

Price \$750,000 - \$1,000,000

Designer house

Bedrooms    
Price \$1,200,000 - \$1,500,000+

Average Rents

Piha / Muriwai bach

Bedrooms  or  
Price \$400/wk

House

Bedrooms house   
Price \$480/wk

Bedrooms    
Price \$580/wk

Travel Times

From Piha:

CBD peak 70 min
off-peak 45 min

Henderson Centre 30 min

From Muriwai

CBD off peak 45 min

Public transport is non-existent in Piha and Muriwai; it's either yours or the neighbour's car or the bike. Then again this is the sort of place where locals will happily stop and offer you a lift.