

Island tracks

Circuit of island 75 min

Wharf to Visitor Centre 15 min

Visitor Centre to gun emplacements/summit 25 min

Key

- Caretakers Cottage
- Whare Mahana
- Education House
- Forest and Bird House
- Maximum Security Quarantine Station
- Picnic tables
- Landing area, private dinghies and kayaks



Visitor Centre

Safe assembly area



Visitor information

Matiu/Somes Island is a great place to spend the day. A gentle walking track takes you around the 24.8-hectare island.

- The island and Visitor Centre are open daily between 8.30 a.m. and 5.00 p.m.
- Toilets are situated near the main wharf and behind the visitor centre.
- There are no catering facilities. Bring your own food and water, and please remove your rubbish.
- Everything on the island is protected. Take only photographs, stay on tracks, leave only footprints.
- On busy days, visitor numbers are limited to protect the island.

Take care visiting Matiu/Somes

Matiu/Somes is a predator-free island. Check your bags, clothes, footwear and boat or kayak for pests before leaving the mainland. Ensure food is in sealed containers. If you find a pest on the island, tell your tour guide or island ranger immediately.



Due to fire hazards and limited water supply, smoking and fires are not allowed.

The island may be closed to visitors at times of extreme fire danger.

If you discover a fire, dial 111 and go immediately to the main wharf.

Pets and bicycles are not permitted on the islands.

If you think there is a safety hazard in a conservation area, call DOC HOTline or the nearest DOC office.

DOC HOTline
0800 362 468
Report any safety hazards or conservation emergencies
For Fire and Search and Rescue Call 111

Further information

DOC Wellington Visitor Centre
Conservation House, 18-32
Manners St,
P.O. Box 10-420, Wellington 6143
Telephone: (04) 384 7770
Fax: (04) 384 7773
E-mail: wellingtonvc@doc.govt.nz
Website: www.doc.govt.nz

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New Zealand Government

Matiu/Somes Island

Scientific Reserve and
Historic Reserve

Wellington Harbour



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai



Kia ora / Welcome...

Located in Te Whanganui-a-Tara/Wellington Harbour, Matiu/Somes Island is owned by local Māori, Taranaki Whānui ki Te Upoko o Te Ika, and offers a tranquil retreat for visitors and wildlife.

For centuries, successive Māori tribes have occupied Matiu/Somes as an island sanctuary, establishing pā sites and maintaining their mana whenua role ever since.

In more recent times, Matiu/Somes Island has served as a human and animal quarantine station, an internment camp and a military defence position. Thanks to the dedication of many, including the Lower Hutt Branch of Forest and Bird, Matiu/Somes Island Charitable Trust, Friends of Matiu/Somes, Eastbourne Forest Rangers and Taranaki Whānui, Matiu/Somes Island once again represents a refuge, this time for wildlife and our cultural heritage.

The island opened to the public as a Department of Conservation (DOC) scientific and historic reserve in 1995. In 2009, land ownership of the three harbour islands (Matiu/Somes, Mākaro/Ward and Mokopuna) was vested in the Trustees of the Port Nicholson Block Settlement Trust as part of cultural redress to settle the historical Treaty claims of Taranaki Whānui ki Te Upoko o Te Ika.

This marked the beginning of a new era for mana whenua presence on and participation in managing the harbour islands. The Harbour Islands Kaitiaki Board, an Iwi-Crown partnership, manages the island today and strives to work cooperatively to strengthen the mouri (essential life force or energy that sustains life) of all the harbour islands.¹

Tihei mouri ora!

Guests gather for the waharoa – 'Tane Te Waiora' - unveiling on Matiu/Somes Island in 2017.
¹In the dialect of Taranaki iwi, 'mauri' is more often pronounced as 'mouri'.

What's in a name?

In many Māori traditions, it was the demigod Māui who pulled New Zealand from the depths of the sea, but it was the daring Polynesian explorer Kupe who brought names to numerous places in Aotearoa.

Matiu and nearby Mākaro islands were named by Kupe in honour of two of his daughters.

In 1839, Matiu Island was assumed by the New Zealand Company, along with much of greater Wellington. The island was renamed Somes, after Joseph Somes, the company's deputy-governor and financier at the time. Somes remained the island's name for the next 150 years.

In 1997, the New Zealand Geographic Board assigned the official bilingual name of Matiu/Somes Island in acknowledgement of the island's remarkable Māori and European history.

The lighthouse

"The lighthouse lamp shines forth from far to guide their course aright.

Tis like the eye of Providence that sheds its glorious ray
And now the weary mariners no longer feel dismay.

The Port of safety is in view – the winds and ocean roar
As if in rage to lose their prey that hums to the shore.

But soon the Harbour's mouth is gained – all dangers at an end."

William Lyall, the island's first lighthouse keeper

The lighthouse that stands on Matiu/Somes Island today was constructed in 1900 and later automated. This replaced the original lighthouse that was built in 1866, and was the first harbour light in the country.

How to get to Matiu / Somes Island

East by West Ferries provides a regular service from both central Wellington and Days Bay.

For ferry timetables, group bookings and information, see eastbywest.co.nz.

The island is also accessible to recreational boats. You may only land at the main wharf and the nearby beach on the north-east point of the island.

NO LANDING is permitted at any time along other parts of the shoreline.

NO LANDING is permitted at any time on Mokopuna Island Scientific Reserve.

! CHECK YOU ARE PEST-FREE

Where to stay on Matiu/Somes Island

Staying overnight offers a unique way to explore the island with fewer visitors, and a chance to see nocturnal wildlife such as tuatara, giant wētā and little penguins.

A scenic campsite offers 12 tent sites, including sheltered cooking facilities. Two sole-occupancy houses on the island offer lodge-style accommodation for groups or families. They sleep 8 and 10 people each.

All accommodation on the island must be booked before arrival via www.doc.govt.nz.



An island apart

Māori history

For generations, Māori continued to use Matiu/Somes as a strategic pā in Te Whanganui-a-Tara (Wellington Harbour).

Since the island was accessible only by waka, it was easy to secure and defend.

By the end of the 18th century, tribal groupings such as Ngāti Ira, Ngāi Tara and Ngāti Kahungunu had occupied various parts of Te Whanganui-a-Tara.

A grouping of Taranaki hapū (sub-tribes) and iwi (tribes), Ngāti Mutunga, Ngāti Tama and Te Atiawa, moved into the region in the 1820s and 30s and assumed mana whenua (primary authority over the land).

Te Atiawa has maintained kaitiakitanga (guardianship) of the island and manawhenua of the region to the present day.



Flying the yellow flag

From the early 1870s until 1920, Matiu/Somes Island was frequently used as a human quarantine station.

The quarantine facility was erected on the island in 1872, shortly after the immigrant ship *England* came into Wellington Harbour flying the yellow quarantine flag.

A monument stands on the island to those who lost their lives while confined on Matiu/Somes.

Animal quarantine station

For over 100 years, beginning in the early 1880s, Matiu/Somes served as an animal quarantine station.

Dogs, cattle, sheep, red deer, llama and other livestock arrived from all over the world. The animals were kept on the island until given a clean bill of health.

Many of the buildings on the island were built to accommodate this large-scale quarantine operation.



A world at war

For such a small island, Matiu/Somes played a large role in New Zealand's defence and security strategies for both world wars.

In World War I and much of World War II, the island was a camp for enemy alien internees who were considered a security threat.

On the summit of the island, you can see five concrete structures that remain from a World War II heavy anti-aircraft artillery position. The gun emplacements were built in 1942, but never had to be used in war.

The eastern shore of Matiu/Somes Island was home to a degaussing station during WWII. Operated by WRENs, this facility helped protect allied shipping from magnetic mines.



Volunteers in action

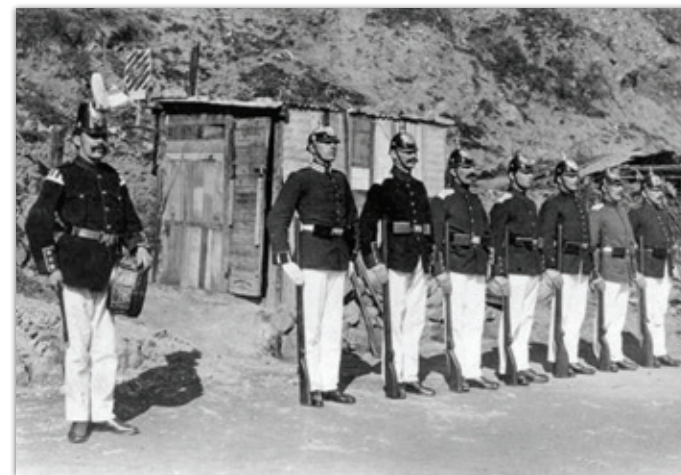
The revegetation effort, initiated by the Lower Hutt branch of Forest and Bird and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries in 1981, has fostered the regeneration of native plant and wildlife species on the island.

Thousands of volunteers have toiled since 1981 to return the island's landscape from livestock paddocks to native vegetation that existed on the island prior to the arrival of European settlers.

Initially, pioneering species, such as taupata, ngaio and harakeke were planted on the island. As they became established, secondary species, including totara, rata and kahikatea, were added to the planting scheme. Long-term plans include reintroductions of threatened local native plant species.



Volunteers at work in one of the native plant nurseries located on Matiu/Somes Island
Photo: Annabel Riley.



German internees on Matiu/Somes Island celebrate the Kaiser's birthday during World War I (1914–1918).

Photo: R. Hart collection, Alexander Turnbull Library.

Wildlife on Mātū / Somes Island

Rat-free island

Ship rats and other pests were eradicated from the island in the late 1980s.

Since that time, the island has become a sanctuary for native plants, birds, reptiles and invertebrates. For this reason, it is important that all visitors check bags at the Whare Kioere upon their arrival, to help keep Mātū / Somes free of pests.

Birds on the island

'Kīta, kīta, kīta, kīta'

With their successful reintroduction, the sounds of the red-crowned parakeet / kākārīki can again be heard on the island. These birds used to be quite common across mainland New Zealand but they are now found only in isolated populations.

As well as kākārīki, other native forest bird populations include fantail, kingfisher and silvereye. Introduced species, such as the chaffinch and dunnock, also occur on Mātū / Somes.

The island is inhabited by a variety of seabirds, such as southern black-backed gull, spotted shag, variable oystercatcher and fluttering shearwater.

Ask the ranger about the latest wildlife reintroductions.



Red-crowned parakeet.



Variable oystercatcher.

Refuge for the world's smallest penguin

Mātū / Somes provides critical habitat for the world's smallest penguin—little penguin / korōra.

Without the threat of cars and predators, namely ferrets, stoats, weasels and dogs, on the island, the penguins nest and raise their young in relative safety.

The protection that the island affords little penguins during nesting season is also vital when they moult each summer. Moulting lasts about two weeks, during which time the penguins do not eat or swim.



Little penguin / korōra. Photo: Richard Nester.

Amazing wētā

There are 500 species of invertebrates on Mātū / Somes and Mokopuna islands, including several species of wētā.

The Cook Strait giant wētā and Wellington tree wētā were reintroduced to the island in the late 1990s.



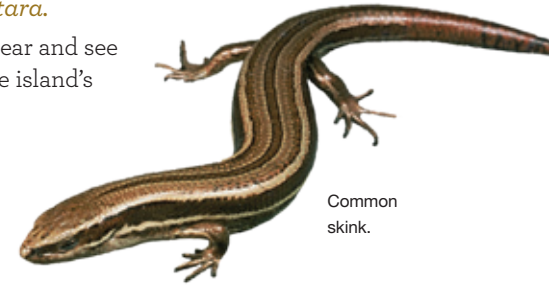
Above: Female Cook Strait giant wētā. Photo: Greg Sherley.

Left: Female Wellington tree wētā. Photo: LEARNZ.

Skinks, geckos and tuatara

Eight species of reptiles, found only in New Zealand, occur on Mātū / Somes: common skink, copper skink, ornate skink, spotted skink, common gecko, forest gecko, Wellington green gecko and tuatara.

Visitors often hear and see skinks along the island's tracks.



Common skink.



Common gecko.

The nocturnal common gecko and tuatara are less frequently seen, but sightings do occur, so keep your eyes peeled.

Tuatara belong to an ancient order of reptiles, and have no other living relatives. Mātū / Somes Island's original tuatara population was wiped out by the mid-1800s. However, in 1998, more than 50 tuatara were successfully introduced from The Brothers islands (Ngā Whatu Kaipōnu).



Tuatara. Photo: Brett Robertson.