



Waterfront Playground, Tauranga Bay of Plenty, New Zealand

Partners

Client: Tauranga City Council
Landscape Architect: LandLAB
Street Furniture: Urban Effects

Location

Bay of Plenty, New Zealand

Markets

Councils, Landscape Architects

Awards

Recreation Aotearoa Parks Awards
Playspace of the Year 2025

Tauranga's award winning destination playground

The Waterfront Playground in Tauranga City Centre is a bold celebration of culture, creativity, and community. More than just a place to play, it is a statement of connection – between land and sea, past and future, people and place. One part of Tauranga City Council's waterfront transformation, this extraordinary play space weaves together the city's rich heritage, Māori culture, and cutting-edge playground design to create a destination like no other.

Blending Māori culture, heritage and nature-inspired play elements with contemporary, inclusive play principles, the playground invites everyone to experience the waterfront in new and exciting ways. But beyond the fun, this space plays an important role in enhancing Tauranga's liveability and driving economic growth by drawing locals and visitors alike to the transformed city centre waterfront.

Collaboration and community: bringing the vision to life

The success of the Waterfront Playground is deeply rooted in a placemaking approach that prioritised storytelling and collaboration. We were privileged to be part of an expert team assembled by Tauranga City Council, which included one of the leading New Zealand engineering and design company LandLAB.

Tasked with designing, planning, manufacturing and installing the playground, we ensured that every detail aligned with the vision for a safe, engaging and inclusive place for the community to play. This was supported by multiple stakeholder interviews, our methodical 'safety in design' approach, and realistic renders used during the community engagement process undertaken by Council.

Children from Tauranga Special School, Greerton Village School, and Bethlehem School played an active role in shaping the playground design. Their ideas, gathered through interactive workshops, directly influenced key play elements, ensuring the space truly resonates with its young users.



Accessibility and inclusivity were also paramount, with educators and parents from Tauranga Special School contributing feedback to refine inclusive design elements such as the incorporation of a quiet space for sensory-sensitive users.

Telling Tauranga's story in the playground design

Tauranga holds importance in Māori cultural heritage as a site of historical significance, where ancestral traditions, stories and connections to the land are preserved and celebrated by the local community. This has been honoured in the playground design, which reflects the spirit of exploration that has shaped the harbourside city.

At its heart stands the Waka Tower, a striking tribute to the arrival of the Tākitimu waka (canoe) in Tauranga moana (harbour) which, according to legend, landed near the site of the playground after the long journey from Hawaiki. Inspired by the celestial navigation techniques used by early Māori explorers and European settlers, the playground incorporates Matariki star constellations etched amongst the Milky Way stars on the elevated walkway, symbolising the guiding lights that led explorers to the shores of Tauranga.

By weaving history into play, the playground celebrates Tauranga's rich cultural heritage and invites new generations to explore, learn, and create their own stories.

Igniting the imagination, inspiring play

Our specialist expertise in playground design and manufacturing of play equipment brought this

ambitious vision to life, creating a bespoke destination playground featuring four play zones:

- **The Waka Tower** – A unique eight-metre-tall adventure tower inspired by the significance of waka to this site, has multiple access and exit points – including bridges, climbing ropes and walls, an elevated pathway and slides. The tower shape features waka elements and offers stunning views of the moana to Mauao (Mount Maunganui), a significant landmark for navigation in both historic and modern times.
- **Elevated Pathway** – An elevated walkway provides an accessible route to the Waka Tower and this vantage point gives spectacular views of the moana, city, port and Mauao. Children also have a shaded area to play on equipment underneath and on the walkway with a slide, tunnel and climbing features at various points.
- **Nature Play Zone** – Designed to encourage balance, agility, and imaginative play, this space integrates timber stepping logs and balance beams and other nature-inspired elements.
- **Water Play Zone** – A dynamic sensory play area featuring playground equipment and natural elements such as water dispenser, water wheel, and dump bucket, fostering hands-on exploration and social interaction.
- **Additional Play Elements** – The playground also features musical instruments, classic swings and slides, a quiet zone for sensory-sensitive users, to appeal to a diverse range of ages and abilities.



Adding a touch of magic to this play space in the evening, LED lighting illuminates different play elements, including the Waka Tower and Milky Way elevated pathway. This not only creates a striking after-dark aesthetic but introduces the opportunity for play into the evening for local and visiting families.

We also partnered with *Urban Effects* to enhance the 'stay and play' experience, strategically positioning seating and tables throughout the play space. This included items from the *FUNiture* collection, our collaboration that combines play equipment such as crawl-through tunnels into functional seating.

More than a playground

The waterfront playground is more than just a play space – it is a catalyst for wide-ranging community and cultural benefits.

- **Enhanced liveability** – By providing an engaging, accessible, and family-friendly destination, the playground helps to support community wellbeing by fostering an active lifestyle.
- **Increased tourism & economic growth** – The revitalised waterfront attracts visitors, benefitting city centre businesses and boosting Tauranga's profile as a popular coastal holiday destination.
- **Social inclusion & connection** – Thoughtful design ensures that children of all abilities and ages can play, interact, and connect, strengthening the community's social fabric.
- **Sustainability & safety** – All the equipment was designed and built for longevity, with high-quality hardwood timber and hot-dip galvanised steel, stainless steel and powder-coated finishes for extra durability in the coastal environment.

Playground equipment supplied

Custom / bespoke equipment:



Bespoke Waka Tower with Bridge and Slides



Nature Trail Tighrope Walk

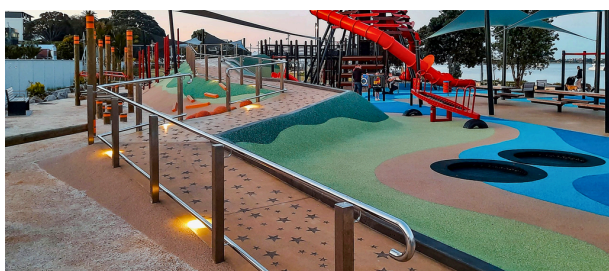


Water Play Zone



Playground equipment supplied

Custom / bespoke equipment:



Elevated Pathway



Quiet Zone Module



Climbing Rails Stainless Steel (Set of 4)



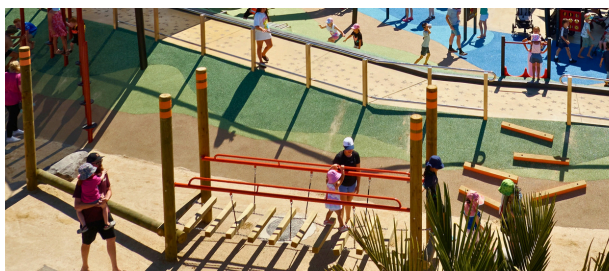
Seesaw Mokihi Waka



Climbing Stairs



Custom Climbing Mound with Half Rubber Spheres



Nature Trail Bridge

New Zealand
0800 805 256 | Tel +646 348 9054 | 230 Guyton St Wanganui 4540

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Playground equipment supplied

Standard Equipment



Sandplay Module 235- Metal



Inclusive Carousel Cyclone



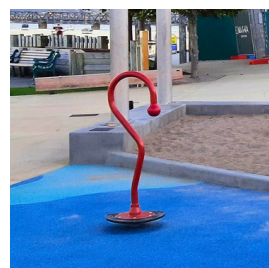
6 Bay Urban Swing



Soprano Quartet Ensemble



Sand Digger



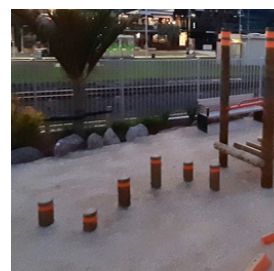
Gyro Spinner



Inclusive Stainless Steel Slide



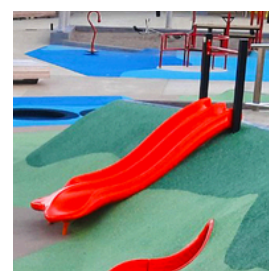
Interactive Play Panels



Stepping Logs Fitness Station



Zig Zag Walk Fitness Station



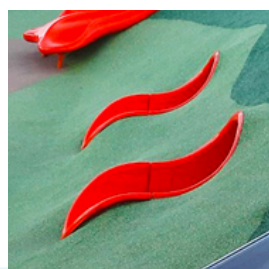
SC396 - 1200 Embankment Slide



Talking Tube



Trampoline Pi - Double



Tunnel Through Mound



3m Ninja Climbing Wall

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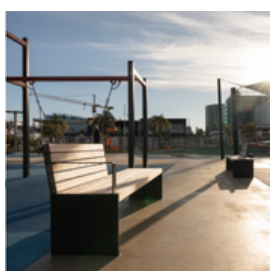
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Furniture

In collaboration with Urban Effects



Heaphy Timber Half Seats



Chatterbox Seats



Parkvale Plus Pedestal Picnic Table Setting



FUNiture

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