



Taranaki, Whanganui & Around Wellington

Includes ➔

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Why Go?

Trampers often overlook the southern half of the North Island. This may be because its most dramatic feature – the near-perfect cone of Mt Taranaki – is well off the beaten track, as is the largely impenetrable Whanganui National Park. Another highlight, the Tararua, have a reputation for being wet and challenging. In these places, however, lie the roots of New Zealand tramping. Egmont National Park was NZ's second national park, created in 1900, and the country's first tramping club was formed in Wellington in 1919.

The tracks across these regions are well established and diverse, from alpine, lowland, wetland and forest. Most are also lightly used, which means solitude is pretty much guaranteed.

In this chapter we present just a few of the region's tramps, in the most high-profile locations. Other worthy wilderness areas to explore include Rimutaka and Aorangi Forest Parks, and amazing Kapiti Island, where you can enjoy day tramps among prolific bird life.

When to Go

The weather in the southern half of the North Island varies greatly, but one common trait across the region is the possibility of ugly weather. In the high-altitude areas of Egmont National Park, the Ruahines and the Tararua the weather can change in a matter of hours, with blue skies obliterated by raging storms that can bring white-outs and freezing temperatures. If you want to explore the peaks, aim to visit between November and April, although be prepared for bad weather at any time of year.

Whanganui National Park has a mild climate with few extremes, and an occasional dusting of frost and snow on high ridges in winter. It can therefore be tramped at any time of year.

Best Huts

- ➔ Pouakai Hut (p117)
- ➔ Syme Hut (p120)
- ➔ Rangiwahia Hut (p131)
- ➔ Jumbo Hut (p135)

Best Views

- ➔ Mt Taranaki Summit (p121)
- ➔ Pouakai Tarns (p117)
- ➔ Mangapurua Trig (p127)
- ➔ Mt Holdsworth (p135)

Background Reading

In *Ask That Mountain*, author Dick Scott vividly captures a seminal period in early Maori–Pakeha relations. From the mid-1860s Parihaka, a small Maori settlement at the foot of Mt Taranaki, became the centre of a peaceful resistance movement. In response to the surveying of confiscated tribal lands, Maori – led by Te Whiti-o-Rongomai and Tohu Kakahi and wearing the movement's iconic white feather in their hair – obstructed development by ploughing troughs across roads, erecting random fences and pulling survey pegs. Despite many Maori being arrested and held without trial, the protests continued and intensified. Finally, in November 1881 the government sent a force of more than 1500 troops to Parihaka in a quest to quash the resistance.

DON'T MISS

Sitting at a lofty altitude of 946m, North Egmont Visitor Centre is the highest national park visitor centre in New Zealand. Here's your chance to get a considerable way up the side of a volcano without running out of puff.

The centre is a pleasant 35-minute drive (29km) from downtown New Plymouth. The Egmont Rd section is particularly picturesque as it passes through farmland before winding up the mountain's lower slopes, covered with dense podocarp/broadleaf rainforest. Large rimu and rata trees can be seen. As it climbs higher it passes through wetter and cooler montane forest with kamahi, mosses, liverworts and ferns.

Located at the road's end, the centre dispenses all the usual DOC (Department of Conservation) information and has displays on the natural and human history of the park. It also has a small cafe and souvenir shop.

Nearby is a viewing platform offering stunning views of Mt Taranaki, the surrounding countryside, the Taranaki coast and the volcanic mountain peaks of the central North Island. There are also plenty of short walks should your itinerary allow.

GATEWAY TOWNS

- ➔ New Plymouth (p139)
- ➔ Stratford (p140)
- ➔ Whanganui (p140)
- ➔ Palmerston North (p141)
- ➔ Masterton (p142)
- ➔ Wellington (p142)

Fast Facts

- ➔ The Whanganui is NZ's longest navigable river, meandering for 290km from Mt Tongariro to the Tasman Sea.
- ➔ At 2518m, Mt Taranaki is the North Island's second-highest mountain.
- ➔ Tararua Forest Park is the largest DOC-managed conservation park on the North Island, covering a whopping 1165 sq km.

Top Tip

This region has some rugged, wild and weather-beaten tracks. It is essential to obtain current forecasts and updates on conditions. If the weather looks dicey, delay your tramp.

DOC Offices

- ➔ **DOC Dawson Falls Visitor Centre** (☎ 443 0248; www.doc.govt.nz; Manaia Rd, Kaponga; ☀ 9am–4pm Thu–Sun, daily during school holidays)
- ➔ **DOC New Plymouth Area Office** (☎ 759 0350; www.doc.govt.nz; 55a Rimu St; ☀ 8am–4.30pm Mon–Fri)
- ➔ **DOC North Egmont Visitor Centre** (☎ 06-756 0990; www.doc.govt.nz; Egmont Rd, Inglewood; ☀ 8am–4.30pm)
- ➔ **DOC Wairarapa Area Office** (p133)
- ➔ **DOC Wellington Visitor Centre** (p133)
- ➔ **DOC Whanganui Area Office** (☎ 06-349 2100; www.doc.govt.nz; 34–36 Taupo Quay; ☀ 8am–4.30pm Mon–Fri)

Resources

- ➔ www.taranaki.co.nz
- ➔ www.whanganuinz.com
- ➔ www.manawatunz.co.nz
- ➔ www.wairarapanz.com
- ➔ www.wellingtonnz.com