



# Tongariro, Urewera & Central North Island

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## Best Sights

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## Best Huts

- ➔ Old Waihohonu Hut (p93)
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- ➔ Panekire Hut (p99)

## Why Go

From the spare, volcanic landscape of Tongariro National Park to the dense, mountainous forests of Te Urewera, the central region of the North Island contains diverse and rewarding tramping terrain.

Relatively close as the crow flies, two national parks and two forest parks offer visitors an opportunity to tick off many classic New Zealand wilderness experiences: summit a bald, volcanic peak rent with steaming vents, then stride down a scree slope; visit a historic tramping hut, now converted into a mini-museum; traverse an open ridge with nonstop views, then loop back through a valley following an ever-changing river bed; spend several days skirting a bluff-lined lakeshore, deep in an untouched wilderness; row a boat across a pristine lake, to a hut where you can spend the night; explore ancient forest, internationally recognised for its unique ecological make-up; and see the landscape through the eyes of both Maori and Pakeha, whose stories are retold along the way.

## When to Go

With plenty of mountains in their midst, the tramping areas in the North Island's centre-east are prone to unpredictable weather patterns. What is predictable, however, is heavy rain appearing at some point or another, which often renders river crossings impassable. Alpine areas may also be snowbound as late as the start of summer. Strong winds on peaks and ridges are an added hazard.

The substantial alpine sections of Tongariro's Northern Circuit and Alpine Crossing mean they are best attempted November to March. This is also the most pleasant time to complete other tracks in this region, although they can be completed at any time of year in favourable conditions.

## Background Reading

NZ's oldest backcountry hut, Old Waihohehu, can be found in Tongariro National Park. Built in 1904 and now a listed heritage building, it is but one of many splendid examples in NZ's unparalleled hut network. A deserved winner in the 2013 NZ book awards, *Shelter from the Storm* is a handsome illustrated history of the huts and the people who built them, written by long-time tramping writers Shaun Barnett, Rob Brown and Geoff Spearpoint. 'On one level, huts are simple structures that provide shelter in a country with a tempestuous climate; but on another level they act as repositories of our backcountry history, with many fascinating stories invariably surrounding them.'

### DON'T MISS

A road trip between Tongariro and Te Urewera National Parks will most likely require you to pass through Taupo and Rotorua, two lakeside tourist towns with some very steamy attractions. We're talking about volcanic activity here – an eye-popping collection of bubbling mud pools, shooting geysers and multicoloured silica pans, along with a strong smell of sulphur in the air.

In Taupo, get an introduction at the **Volcanic Activity Centre** ([www.volcanoes.co.nz](http://www.volcanoes.co.nz); Karetoto Rd; adult/child \$10/6; ☀ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun), which has displays on the region's geothermal and volcanic activity, including a live seismograph and earthquake simulator. Nearby is the **Craters of the Moon** ([www.cratersofthemoon.co.nz](http://www.cratersofthemoon.co.nz); Karapiti Rd; adult/child \$8/4; ☀ 8.30am-5.30pm), a geothermal area where you can get close to the action along a 45-minute perimeter loop walk.

Between Taupo and Rotorua, **Orakei Korako** (☎ 07-378 3131; [www.orakeikorako.co.nz](http://www.orakeikorako.co.nz); adult/child \$36/15; ☀ 8am-5pm) is arguably the best thermal area left in NZ, with a boardwalk around colourful silica terraces, geysers, and a cave complete with deep green pool.

Rotorua is even steamier still, with numerous geothermal attractions including **Te Whakarewarewa**, the town's main drawcard famous for Maori cultural performances and displays, more than 500 springs, and a couple of very dramatic geysers.

## DOC Offices

- **DOC Tongariro National Park Visitor Centre** (☎ 07-892 3729; [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz); Whakapapa Village; ☀ 8am-5pm)
- **Turangi i-SITE** (☎ 07-386 8999; [www.greatlaketapu.com](http://www.greatlaketapu.com); Ngawaka Pt; ☀ 8.30am-5pm)
- **DOC Te Urewera National Park Visitor Centre** (☎ 06-837 3803; [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz); Aniwanuiwa; ☀ 8am-4.45pm)
- **DOC Murupara Visitor Centre** (☎ 07-366 1080; [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz); SH38; ☀ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri)

## GATEWAY TOWNS

- Whakapapa Village (p107)
- National Park (p107)
- Turangi (p108)
- Murupara (p108)
- Wairoa (p109)

## Fast Facts

- Tongariro National Park was the country's first national park, founded in 1887.
- The largest active volcano in NZ, Ruapehu is also considered one of the world's most active.
- The Tongariro Alpine Crossing is NZ's most popular day walk, completed by more than 60,000 trampers each year.
- Te Urewera contains the largest untouched native forest on the North Island.

## Top Tip

Tramping in Tongariro National Park is not a winter activity. If you want to see it blanketed in snow, don skis and hit the slopes, or hire an experienced guide to take you on the Alpine Crossing.

## Resources

- [www.greatlaketapu.com](http://www.greatlaketapu.com)
- [www.nationalpark.co.nz](http://www.nationalpark.co.nz)
- [www.teurewera.co.nz](http://www.teurewera.co.nz)
- [www.visitwairoa.co.nz](http://www.visitwairoa.co.nz)