

Taupo & the Central Plateau



Don't think for a minute that this plateau is some boring old 'elevated flat landmass' as per the dictionary definition. For a start, it ain't flat. In the middle of the plateau, at the heart of Tongariro National Park, are three massive peaks: Tongariro, Ruapehu and Ngauruhoe. Then there's New Zealand's largest lake, Taupo: a vast, water-filled crater – the legacy of a volcanic blast that shook up the world and shattered the island more than 26,500 years ago. This is all part of the Taupo Volcanic Zone, a line of geothermal surfacings that stretches to Whakaari/White Island via Rotorua; and the area is still active, with Mt Ruapehu often having a hissy fit, the last blast occurring in 2007.

And the drama doesn't stop there, for this area now rivals Rotorua for back-to-nature activities and daredevil escapades. Perhaps you fancy fly-fishing in the world-class Tongariro River, hooning up to Huka Falls in a jetboat, or bouncing on a bungy over the Waikato River? Or this could be your chance to skydive. If rambling's your thing, there's always Tongariro Northern Circuit, one of NZ's most achievable Great Walks, or the Tongariro Alpine Crossing, touted as one of the world's top one-dayers. Then again, you could wait until winter, when the mountains are dusted with snow: there's top skiing at Turoa and Whakapapa ski fields.

From river deep to mountain high, and out on the luscious lake, New Zealand's diverse geology takes centre stage here and my-oh-my does it get its shimmy on.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Exploring a fascinating volcanic terrain while tramping the **Tongariro Alpine Crossing** (p308)
- Hurtling to earth from 15,000ft at 200km/h strapped to a complete stranger in the world's skydiving capital, **Taupo** (p291)
- Carving fresh powder at **Turoa Ski Area** or **Whakapapa Ski Area** (p309)
- Biking till your bum burns on the **42 Traverse** (p311)
- Paddling **Lake Taupo** (p292) to check out the modern Maori carvings
- Rediscovering the 'lost valley' of **Orakei Korako** (p300)
- Rocketing up the Waikato River to the base of **Huka Falls** (p298) in a jetboat
- Plunging 47m over the **Waikato River** (p292) on the end of a rubber band





Climate

Due to its altitude, the Central Plateau has a generally cool climate, with temperatures ranging from around 3°C in winter up to a maximum of around 24°C in summer. Above 2500m there is a small year-round snowfield, while July to October is the skiing season at Whakapapa and Turoa, and in some places

snow can linger on into spring. On the mountains, storms and freezing temperatures can occur at any time.

Getting There & Around

Air New Zealand (www.airnz.co.nz) has regular flights from Taupo to Auckland and Wellington. The **Tranz Scenic Overlander** (www.tranzscenic.co.nz)