

welcome to New Zealand



The New 'Big Easy'

Forget New Orleans... New Zealand can rightly claim the 'Big Easy' crown for the sheer ease of travel here. It isn't a place where you encounter many on-the-road frustrations: buses and trains run on time; roads are in good nick; ATMs proliferate; pickpockets, scam merchants and bedbug-ridden hostels are few and far between; and the food is unlikely to send you running for the nearest public toilets (which are usually clean and stocked with the requisite paper). And there are no snakes, and only one poisonous spider – the rare katipo – sightings of which are considered lucky. This decent nation is a place where

you can relax and enjoy (rather than endure) your holiday.

Walk on the Wild Side

There are just 4.36 million New Zealanders, scattered across 268,680 sq km: bigger than the UK with one-fourteenth the population. Filling in the gaps are the sublime forests, mountains, lakes, beaches and fiords that have made NZ one of the best hiking (locals call it 'tramping') destinations on the planet. Tackle one of nine epic 'Great Walks' – you've probably heard of the Heaphy and Milford Tracks – or just spend a few dreamy hours wandering through some easily accessible wilderness.

Plucked straight from a film set or a coffee-table book of picture-perfect scenery, New Zealand is jaw-droppingly gorgeous. ‘Wow!’ will escape from your lips at least once a day.



(left) Runner along ridge near the summit of Roy's Peak (p597), Wanaka.
(below) Detail of Maori carving, Tongariro National Park (p275), Central Plateau.



Food, Wine & Beer

Kiwi food was once a bland echo of a British Sunday dinner, but these days NZ chefs find inspiration in new-world culinary oceans, especially the Pacific with its abundant seafood and encircling cuisines. And don't go home without trying some Maori faves: paua (abalone), kina (sea urchin) and kumara (sweet potato) make regular menu appearances. Thirsty? NZ's cool-climate wineries have been collecting wine-award trophies for decades now, but the country's booming craft-beer scene also deserves your serious scrutiny. And with coffee culture firmly entrenched, you can usually slake your craving for a decent double-shot.

Maori Culture

If you're even remotely interested in rugby, you'll have heard of the all-conquering All Blacks, NZ's national team, who would never have become world-beaters without their awesome Maori players. But this is just one example of how Maori culture impresses itself on contemporary Kiwi life: across NZ you can hear Maori language, watch Maori TV, see main-street *marae* (meeting houses), join in a *hangi* (Maori feast) or catch a cultural performance with traditional Maori song, dance and usually a blood-curdling *haka* (war dance). And don't let us stop you from considering *ta moko*, traditional Maori tattooing (often applied to the face).