



# Taupo & the Central Plateau

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## Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Lakeland House (p265)
- ➔ Storehouse (p261)
- ➔ The Bistro (p261)
- ➔ Spoon & Paddle (p261)
- ➔ Eat (p276)

## Best Places to Sleep

- ➔ Station Lodge (p275)
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- ➔ Creel Lodge (p265)
- ➔ The Lake (p260)
- ➔ Ruapehu Country Lodge (p276)

## Why Go?

From river deep to mountain high, New Zealand's geology takes centre stage in this diverse region – and boy, does it shoot for the moon. Much of the drama happens along the Taupo Volcanic Zone – a line of geothermal activity that stretches via Rotorua to Whakaari (White Island) in the Bay of Plenty. It's the commotion below the surface that has gifted the region with some of the North Island's star attractions, including the country's largest lake and the three hot-headed peaks of Tongariro National Park.

And the thrills don't stop there, for this area rivals Queenstown for outdoor escapades. How about hooning on a jetboat up to a waterfall, bouncing on a bungy over a river, skydiving or skiing fresh powder? Or maybe you'd rather take it easy, soaking in thermal baths or frittering away a day or two with some fly-fishing. If so, mark Taupo and the Central Plateau as a must-do on your North Island itinerary.

## When to Go

- ➔ Equally popular in winter and summer, there's not really a bad time to visit the centre of NZ.
- ➔ The ski season runs roughly from July to October, but storms and freezing temperatures can occur at any time on the mountains, and above 2500m there is a small permanent cap of snow.
- ➔ Due to its altitude, the Central Plateau has a generally cool climate, with average high temperatures ranging from around 3°C in winter up to around 24°C in summer.
- ➔ Lake Taupo is swamped with Kiwi holidaymakers from Christmas to late January, so it pays to book ahead for accommodation during this time.

## **i** Getting There & Away

### AIR

**Air New Zealand** (p262) has daily flights to Taupo from Auckland, and **Sounds Air** (p262) links Taupo and Wellington.

### BUS

Taupo is a hub for **InterCity** (☎ 07-348 0366; [www.intercitycoach.co.nz](http://www.intercitycoach.co.nz)) coach services, with regular services running through on direct routes to Auckland (via Rotorua and Hamilton), Tauranga (via Rotorua), Napier and Hastings, and Wellington via Turangi, Waiohuru, Taihape, Palmerston North and Kapiti Coast towns. The Palmerston North–Auckland service passes through Whanganui before skirting the western edge of Tongariro National Park via Ohakune and National Park Village before heading north via Taumarunui, Te Awamutu and Hamilton.

Naked Bus ([www.nakedbus.com](http://www.nakedbus.com)) services extend from Taupo to Auckland via Hamilton, as well as Rotorua and Tauranga, Gisborne via Rotorua, Napier and Hastings, and Wellington via Turangi, Waiohuru, Taihape, Palmerston North and Kapiti Coast towns.

Mana Bus ([www.manabus.com](http://www.manabus.com)) runs Auckland to Wellington services stopping at Hamilton, Rotorua and Taupo en route.

### TRAIN

**KiwiRail Scenic** (☎ 04-495 0775, 0800 872 467; [www.kiwirailscenic.co.nz](http://www.kiwirailscenic.co.nz)) The Northern Explorer services stop at National Park Village, Ohakune and Taihape on the Auckland–Hamilton–Palmerston North–Wellington route.

## LAKE TAUPO REGION

New Zealand's largest lake, Lake Taupo, sits in the caldera of a volcano that began erupting about 300,000 years ago. The caldera was formed by a collapse during the Oruanui eruption about 26,500 years ago, which threw out 750 cu km of ash and pumice, making Krakatoa (8 cu km) look like a pimple.

The last major cataclysm was in AD 180, shooting up enough ash into the atmosphere for the red skies to be noted by the ancient Romans and Chinese. The area is still volcanically active and, like Rotorua, has fascinating thermal hot spots.

Today the 622-sq-km lake and its surrounding waterways are serene enough to attract fishing enthusiasts from all around the world. Well positioned by the lake, both Taupo and Turangi are popular tourist centres. Taupo, in particular, has plenty of activities and facilities catering to families and independent travellers alike.

## ESSENTIAL TAUPO & THE CENTRAL PLATEAU

**Eat** Trout – but you'll have to catch it first!

**Drink** Lakeman Brewing's Taupo Pale Ale.

**Read** *Awesome Forces* by Hamish Campbell and Geoff Hicks – the geological story of NZ in explosive detail.

**Listen to** The sonorous chirruping of tui along the Tongariro River Trail.

**Watch** *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* movies, and spot Tongariro's movie-star mountains.

**Pedal** Taupo's Craters of the Moon MTB Park.

**Explore** Tongariro National Park's alpine flora and geological oddities.

**Online** [www.greatlaketaupo.com](http://www.greatlaketaupo.com), [www.visitruapehu.com](http://www.visitruapehu.com), [www.nationalpark.co.nz](http://www.nationalpark.co.nz), [www.visitohakune.co.nz](http://www.visitohakune.co.nz)

**Area code** ☎ 07, ☎ 06

## Taupo

POP 26,100

With a postcard-perfect setting on the northeastern shores of the lake, Taupo now rivals Rotorua as the North Island's premier resort town. There's an abundance of adrenaline-pumping activities on offer but for those with no appetite for white knuckles and churned stomachs, there's plenty of enjoyment to be had simply strolling by the lake and enjoying the views, which on clear days encompass the snowy peaks of Tongariro National Park. It's also a magnet for outdoor athletes and is emerging as one of NZ's greatest cycling destinations, both on- and off-road.

New Zealand's longest river, the Waikato, originates from Lake Taupo at the township, before crashing its way through the Huka Falls and Aratiatia Rapids and then settling down for a sedate ramble to the west coast, just south of Auckland.

## History

When Māori chief Tamatea-arikinui first visited this area, his footsteps reverberated, making him think the ground was hollow; he therefore dubbed the area Tapuaeharuru (Resounding Footsteps). The modern name,