

Welcome to the North Island

Packing in cosmopolitan cities, authentic opportunities to experience Māori culture, and the country's bubbling volcanic heart, the North Island is an exceedingly versatile destination.

Volcanic Thrills

Welcome to one of the planet's youngest countries, at least in geological terms. Ascend the volcanic cones surrounding Auckland for super city views, before heading south to Rotorua for hot mud spa treatments and helicopter journeys to the jagged volcanic summit of Mt Tarawera. Journey south to Lake Taupo, the legacy of one of the planet's biggest-ever volcanic eruptions, and now gateway to Tongariro National Park. Ski or snowboard on Mt Ruapehu's still-active slopes, or negotiate a steady path past Mt Ngauruhoe's brooding volcanic cone on the Tongariro Alpine Crossing.

Outdoor Experiences

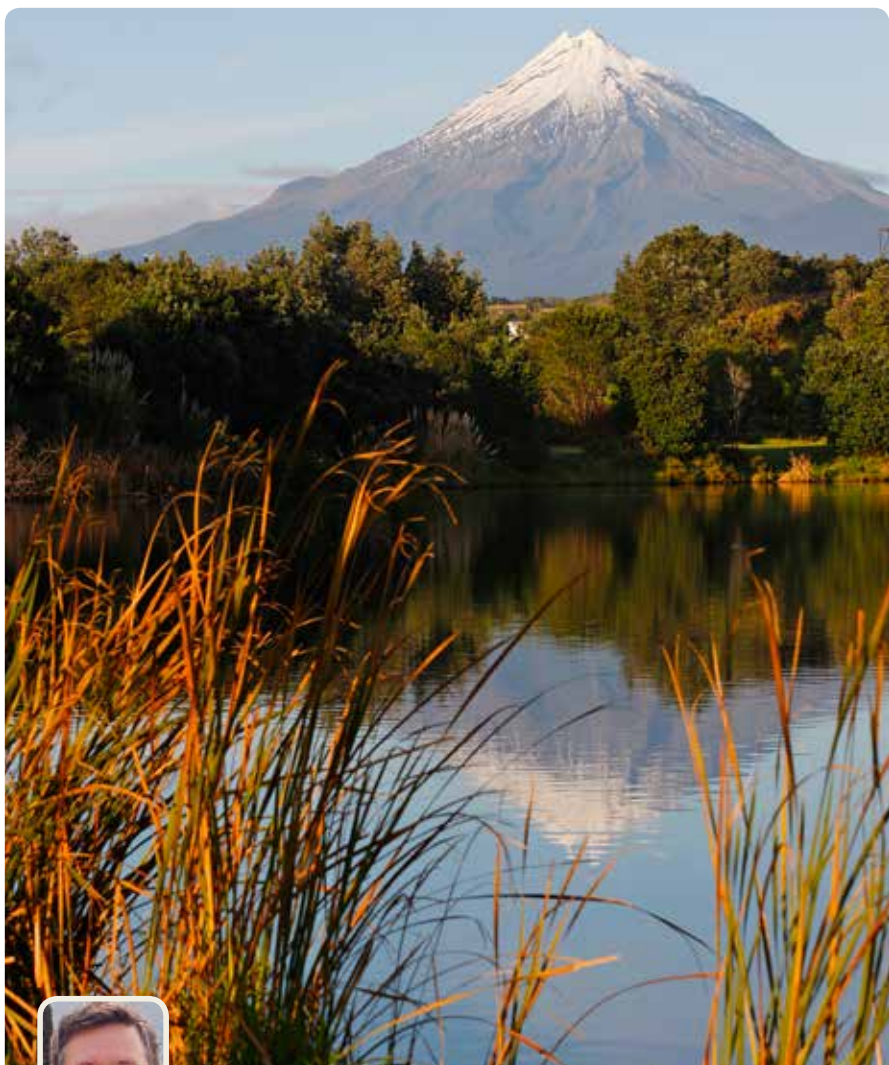
New Zealand's South Island usually steals the attention, but the oft-overlooked North Island also features a sublime combination of forests, mountains and beaches. In the latter, the North has a clear lead – particularly in subtropical Northland, the Coromandel Peninsula and the west coast, with its wild surf beaches. Tackle one of the North Island's Great Walks or spend a few hours wandering through the accessible wilderness of the Coromandel. Day trips from vibrant Auckland can include kayaking to dormant volcanoes or canyoning and abseiling down forested waterfalls.

Food, Wine & Beer

Kiwi food was once a bland echo of a British Sunday dinner, but these days NZ chefs dip into New World culinary oceans for inspiration, especially the Pacific with its abundant seafood and diverse cuisines. Don't go home without trying some Māori faves: paua (abalone), kina (sea urchin) and kumara (sweet potato). Thirsty? NZ's cool-climate wineries have been collecting trophies for decades now, and the vineyard restaurants of Hawke's Bay are seriously good. The North Island's booming craft-beer scene also deserves serious scrutiny.

Māori Culture

The influence of New Zealand's indigenous culture is more keenly felt in the North Island, where Māori make up a much higher percentage of the population. Across Te Ika-a-Māui (the island's Māori name) you're more likely to hear the Māori language being spoken, see main street *marae* (meeting houses), join in a *hangi* (Māori feast), or catch a cultural performance with traditional Māori songs, dancing and a blood-curdling *haka* (war dance). Venture to the North Island's East Cape for the most authentic Māori experiences. Northland and Rotorua are also cultural hotspots.



Why I Love the North Island

By Peter Dragicevich, Writer

New Zealand tourist images are dominated by the dramatic scenery of the South Island, but for me the north is just as beautiful and even more interesting. Many places have majestic mountains, but the North Island is loaded with attractions that are particularly 'New Zealandy' – most notably the bubblings and boilings of geothermal activity, and a highly visible Māori culture. In the big cities of Auckland and Wellington you'll see modern Kiwi life in all its diversity. And as for the beaches – come in summer and your own uncrowded slice of sandy paradise awaits.

For more about our writers, see page 447

Above: Mt Taranaki (p220), Egmont National Park