

Southern North Island

Trampers often overlook the southern half of the North Island, because it lies between the stunning volcanoes of Tongariro National Park and the sunshine and beaches of Abel Tasman and the Marlborough Sounds, but New Zealand can trace its tramping roots here. Climbing Mt Taranaki was so popular at the turn of the 20th century that the Egmont National Park was established in 1900, while the country's first tramping club was formed in Wellington in 1919.

Today the region offers a variety of tramps, from alpine to bush, of which the vast majority are lightly used. This is where you can find your solitude as a trumper, avoiding crowded huts such as those on the Routeburn Track. In the southwest, you can hike around a near perfect volcanic cone, dipping in and out of the alpine zone along the Mt Taranaki High-Level Circuit. Or you can reach alpine country along the Pouakai Track in Egmont National Park, and watch New Plymouth fall asleep at night from a lofty perch.

In nearby Whanganui National Park, you can skip the mountains and stay entirely in the forest along the Matemateaonga Track until it ends on the banks of the Whanganui River – New Zealand's longest navigable river. Further south, you can climb to an alpine hut in the Ruahines for an evening, or enjoy an easy low-elevation tramp in the rugged Tararua just north of Wellington.

The tramps described are just a few of those available in the region – the Rimutaka and Haurangi Forest Parks, for example, contain fascinating tramping routes.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Taking in the many waterfalls along the **Mt Taranaki High-Level Circuit** (p102)
- Watching the sunset and then the city lights of New Plymouth emerge from the veranda of **Pouakai Hut** (p109)
- Combining a wilderness tramp on the **Matemateaonga Track** (p111) with a jetboat ride on the Whanganui River
- Spending a day on alpine ridges along the **Mt Holdsworth Circuit** (p121)

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CLIMATE

The weather in the southern half of the North Island varies greatly, but one common trait is the possibility of strong winds and sudden storms. In the high-altitude areas of Mt Taranaki, the Ruahines and the Tararuas, trampers can be exposed to quick changes in weather, with winds, storms or squalls replacing clear skies in a matter of hours.

INFORMATION

Books

There are a number of tramping guides to many areas in this region. *Top Walking Tracks of the Wellington Region*, by Geoffrey Churchman, is a slim volume that covers 17 tramps around the capital city, while

Day Walks of Greater Wellington by Marios Gavalas covers 69 walks from Hutt Valley to the Rimutaka Range. Gavalas also wrote *Day Walks of Wanganui, Manawatu & Horowhenua*, outlining 50 tracks from Whanganui National Park to Ruahine Forest Park.

GATEWAY Wellington

☎ 04 / pop 205,500

The major city in the southern half of the North Island is Wellington, the country's capital. Hemmed in by a magnificent harbour, windy Wellington prides itself as a centre for culture and arts, but it is also a major travel crossroads, serving as the junction between the North and South Islands.

