

*Plan and prepare*

# TONGARIRO NORTHERN CIRCUIT



Duration: 3–4 days  
Distance: 44.9 km (loop)



Great Walks season:  
late October – 30 April



Department of  
Conservation  
*Te Papa Atawhai*



Te Kāwanatanga  
o Aotearoa  
New Zealand Government

# TONGARIRO NORTHERN CIRCUIT

This World Heritage site is a landscape of stark contrasts. You'll pass alpine vegetation, lush forest, tranquil lakes and desert-like plateaux, with amazing views at every turn.

As the circuit winds past Mount Tongariro and Mount Ngāuruhoe, you will be dazzled by dramatic volcanic landscapes and New Zealand's rich geological and ancestral past.

The Tongariro Northern Circuit can be hiked in either direction. The track is well marked and signposted, but some sections may be steep, rough or muddy. This brochure describes a 4-day clockwise alpine hike for independent, non-guided walkers, starting and finishing at Whakapapa Village, during the Great Walks season (late October – 30 April).

Information about parking restrictions is available from the Tongariro National Park Visitor Centre or the website at [www.doc.govt.nz/tongarironortherncircuit-gettingthere](http://www.doc.govt.nz/tongarironortherncircuit-gettingthere).



Outside the Great Walks season (May to October) walking conditions are more hazardous – see the safety information.

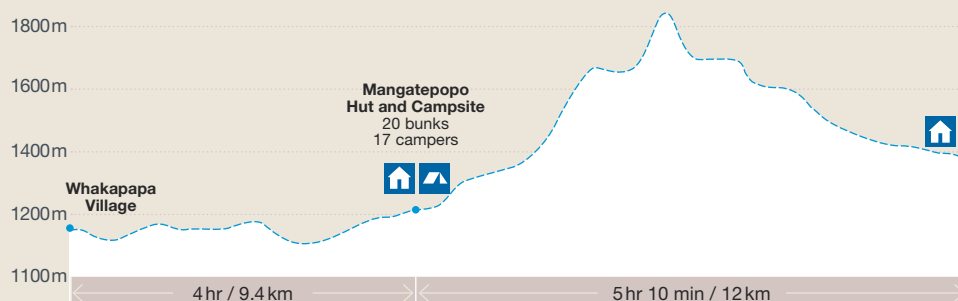


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## Elevation profile & track guide



**Day 1: Whakapapa Village to Mangatepopo Hut**

### 4 hours, 9.4 km

Your journey begins by making your way across the eroded plains of the Tongariro volcanic complex, a series of explosion craters and volcanic cones and peaks. Venturing through a landscape carved out by ancient lava flows and stream beds, you'll be dwarfed by the massive cone of Mount Ngāuruhoe on your right. For the final hour the track leads you around Pukekaikiore, one of Tongariro's older steam vents, before reaching Mangatepopo Hut.



**Day 2: Mangatepopo Hut to Oturere Hut**

### 5 hours 10 min, 12 km

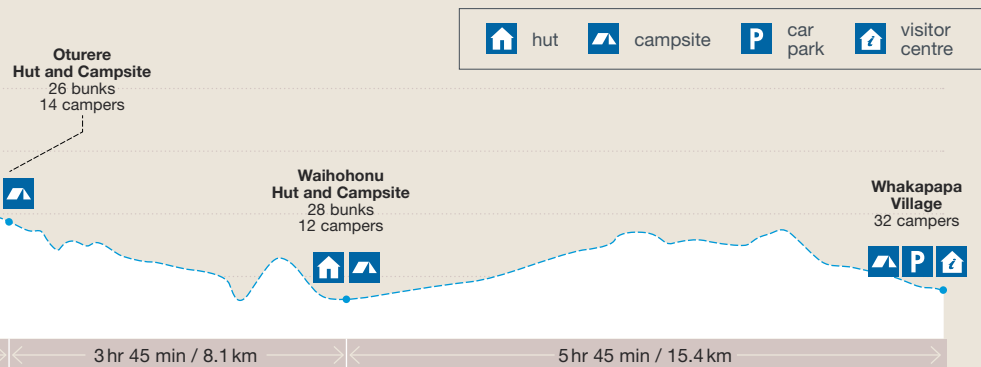
You join the popular Tongariro Alpine Crossing on the second day, crossing remnants of lava flows and climbing steeply up to the top of Red Crater. Here you'll be dazzled by Emerald Lakes (Ngā Rotopounamu), and a side trip (30-minute return) will take you to the equally amazing Blue Lake (Te Wai Whakaata o te Rangihīroa). These lakes are tapu, or sacred, to Ngāti Tuwharetoa. Please do not touch the water. You'll then leave the Alpine Crossing track and descend into Oturere valley. Along this track, you'll pass through a landscape of other-worldly lava forms before reaching Oturere Hut.

COVER: Emerald Lakes, *Daniel Deans*

ABOVE LEFT TO RIGHT: Mangatepopo Hut, *©Luc Betbeder*;  
Emerald Lakes, *DOC/90 Seconds*; Waihothonu Hut, *Janette Asche*;  
Tramping under a rainbow, *Janette Asche*

RIGHT: Mount Tongariro, *Bubs Smith*; Pare (artwork), *Hayz Isherwood*

MAIN PHOTO: View to Mount Ngāuruhoe, *Brendan Bombaci (www.kairologic.com)*



**Day 3: Oturere Hut to Waihohonu Hut**

**3 hours 45 min, 8.1 km**

On day three the circuit continues through this unique environment. After crossing stream valleys and open gravel fields, the track descends into a beech-forested valley and crosses a branch of the Waihohonu Stream. A steep climb takes you to the top of the ridge where you'll spot tonight's stay at Waihohonu Hut.



**Day 4: Waihohonu Hut to Whakapapa Village**

**5 hours 45 min, 15.4 km**

On your final day, you'll head west towards Tama Saddle. On reaching the Tama Saddle, a detour will take you to the beautiful Tama lakes (Ngā Puna a Tama) – empty craters now filled with azure blue water. From here, you'll pass the tumbling Taranaki Falls before returning to your starting point at Whakapapa Village.

*Tongariro*, shrouded in alpine mists, its gnarled and battle-scarred majesty reaching to the sky. Ancient stories of epic bygone battles, thunder and lightning relive the time when the Great Mountains fought for the hand of the beautiful Pihanga. Tongariro emerged victorious. A story of love and devotion that has spanned millennia, from before the ancient mists of time, from a time where the mountains ruled upon the land.

This is the world of Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro. These are the stories of Ngāti Tuwharetoa and, more importantly, these are memories of our mountains, of our Gods and of our tribal history and identity. They are carried on each mountain breath, every facet of the landscape reflects this epic past, each shadow holds a story, each breeze carries the whispers of yesterday. Tongariro the spring of passion, Tongariro the devoted lover, Tongariro the source of life-giving waters, Tongariro the Warrior Mountain, Tongariro the soul of Tuwharetoa.

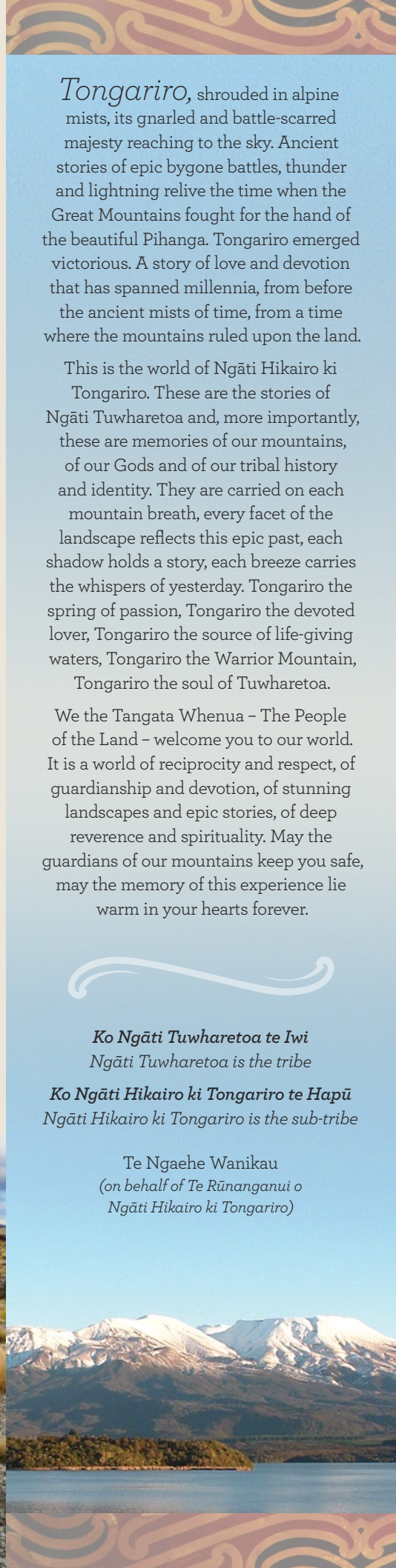
We the Tangata Whenua – The People of the Land – welcome you to our world. It is a world of reciprocity and respect, of guardianship and devotion, of stunning landscapes and epic stories, of deep reverence and spirituality. May the guardians of our mountains keep you safe, may the memory of this experience lie warm in your hearts forever.

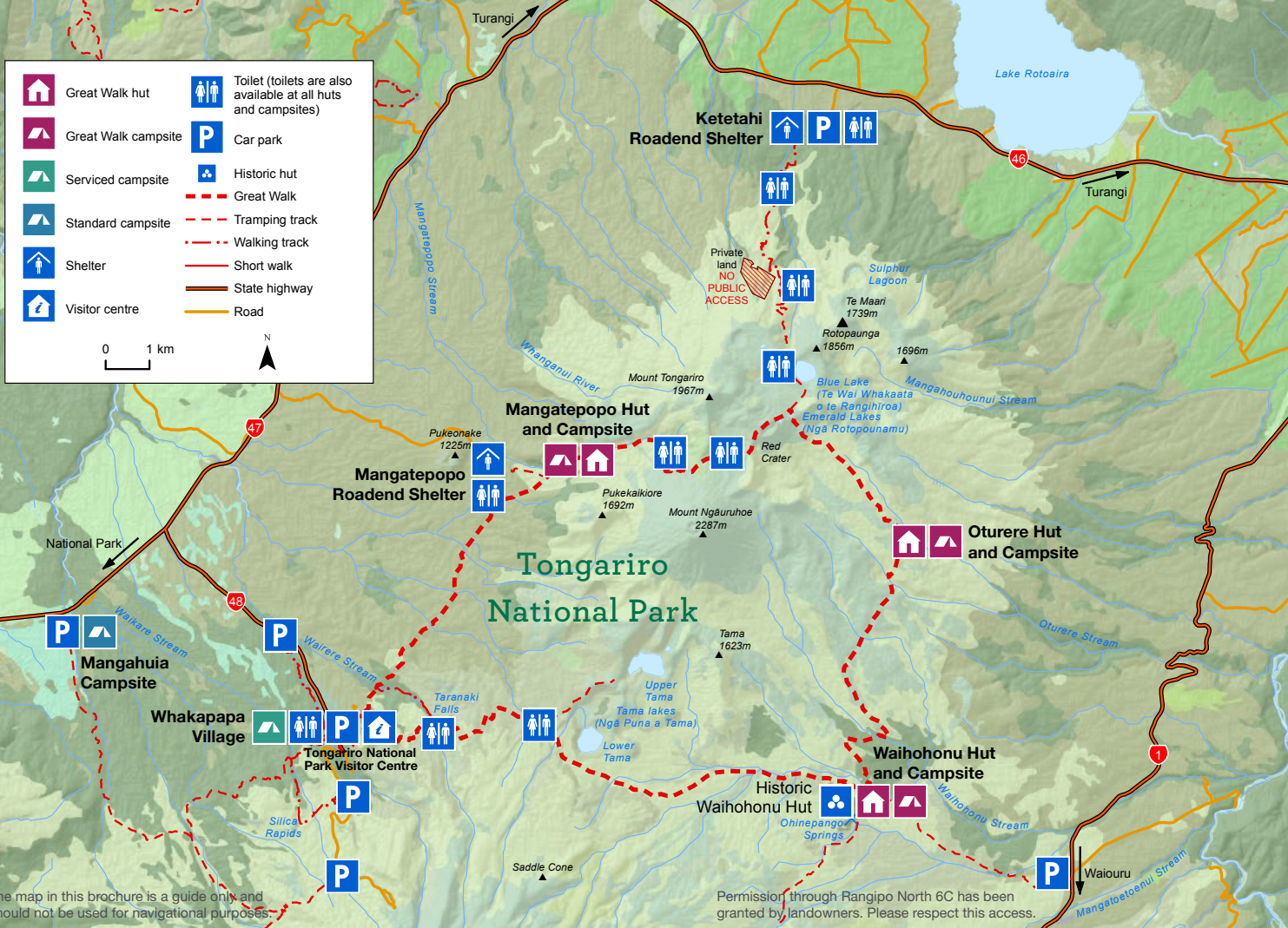


*Ko Ngāti Tuwharetoa te Iwi*  
Ngāti Tuwharetoa is the tribe

*Ko Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro te Hapū*  
Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro is the sub-tribe

Te Ngaehe Wanikau  
(on behalf of Te Rūnanganui o  
Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro)





## Places to stay

DOC operates 3 huts with campsites nearby along the Tongariro Northern Circuit, which **must be booked in advance during the Great Walks season** (late October – 30 April). Whakapapa Holiday Park is a Serviced campsite. See [www.doc.govt.nz/](http://www.doc.govt.nz/) campsites for details.

**Great Walks huts**  
Visit [www.doc.govt.nz/tongarionortherncircuit](http://www.doc.govt.nz/tongarionortherncircuit) for prices.

During the Great Walks season the huts have bunks, mattresses, heating, toilets, basic gas cooking facilities, solar-powered lighting and cold running water. A DOC ranger is in residence. The huts do not provide food, cooking utensils or showers.

Outside the Great Walks season facilities are greatly reduced and there are no DOC rangers. Bookings are not required, huts and campsites are first come, first served and fees are reduced. See the DOC website for details.



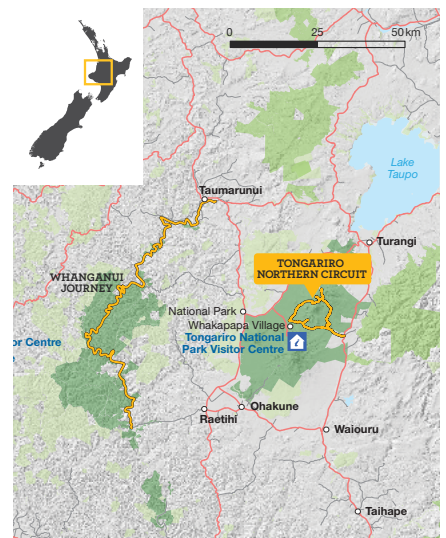
Photo: Janette Asche

**Great Walks campsites**  
Visit [www.doc.govt.nz/tongarionortherncircuit](http://www.doc.govt.nz/tongarionortherncircuit) for prices.  
The campsites offer basic facilities including toilets, sinks and a water supply. Some also have picnic tables. Campers may use hut facilities, though not the beds.

## Getting there

The Tongariro Northern Circuit can be accessed from the following locations:

- Whakapapa Village (SH48)
- Mangatepopo Road (off SH47)
- Ketetahi Road (SH46)
- Desert Road (SH1, 35 km south of Turangi)



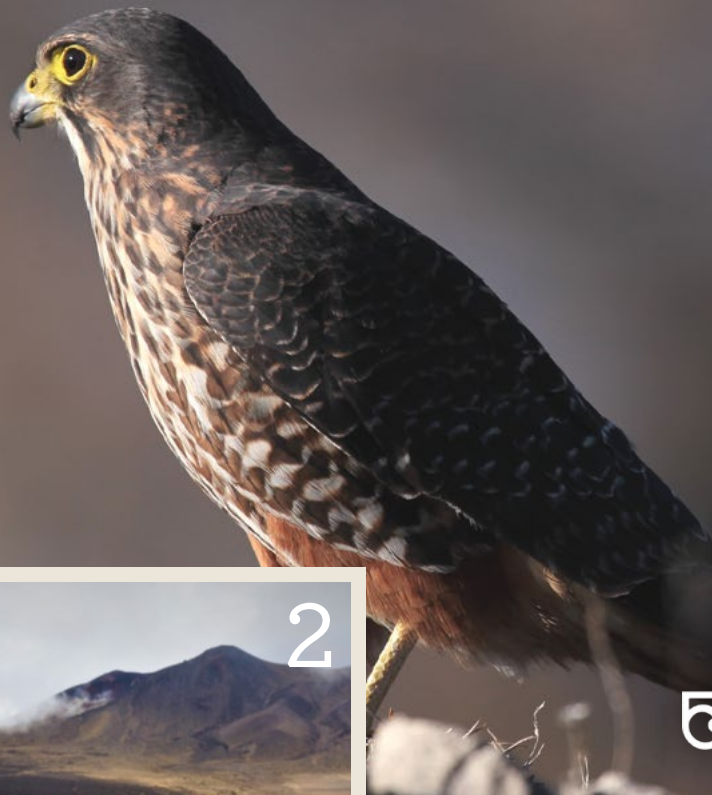


Photo: Peter Langlands

Air New Zealand partners with the Department of Conservation to bring birdsong back to our Great Walks.



2

Photo: Pauline Sallet



Photo: Kathrin and Stefan Marks



Photo: Janette Asche



5


Photo: Tony Fernandez

- 1 Look for the **New Zealand falcon/kārearea**, capable of flying at speeds over 100 km/h and catching prey up to 6 times their body weight.
- 2 Brush up on your **botanical** knowledge – the plants in the area vary considerably: alpine herbs, tussocks, flaxes, low-growing shrubs, dense beech forests and, during summer, beautiful and unique alpine flowers.
- 3 Take in **Taranaki Falls**. Tumbling over the edge of a large lava flow that erupted from Ruapehu 15,000 years ago, the falls plunge 20 metres into a boulder-ringed pool.
- 4 Drop into the historic **Waihohonu Hut**, the oldest existing mountain hut in New Zealand. It was the first hut built in Tongariro National Park in 1904, and the base for the first recreational skiing in the park. It was used for over 60 years.

**5 Side trip to Tama lakes (Ngā Puna a Tama) (1,314 m)**

From the junction: 20 min return to Lower Tama; 1 hr 30 min return to Upper Tama.

Two in-filled explosion craters are named after Tamatea, the high chief of the Tākitimu canoe, who explored the area six centuries ago. At Lower Tama, volcanic debris is slowly washing in and filling the crater.

 Beware of strong crosswinds on the ridgelines up to the Upper Tama lake lookout.

## What do I do next?



Start off at [www.doc.govt.nz/tongarironortherncircuit](http://www.doc.govt.nz/tongarironortherncircuit) for more information.



**Book your huts and campsites** online at [bookings.doc.govt.nz](http://bookings.doc.govt.nz).



**Book your transport** to and from the track with approved DOC shuttle operators: contact the Whakapapa i-SITE on +64 7 892 3075.



Buy your food and **pack your bags** – go to 'What to take' on the webpage for a list and make sure you have everything you need for a 4-day independent unguided walk.



Read up on **safety** and make sure you're well prepared for your journey and changeable weather at [www.doc.govt.nz/tongarironortherncircuit](http://www.doc.govt.nz/tongarironortherncircuit).



Check the weather at [weather.niwa.co.nz/parks](http://weather.niwa.co.nz/parks) and make sure you've downloaded and printed your **ticket and official track guide**. You can also get a track guide and the latest weather updates from the Tongariro National Park Visitor Centre.



**All set!** Lace up your boots and get hiking. Don't forget to share your experience on [facebook.com/docgovtnz](https://www.facebook.com/docgovtnz).

### For in-depth local knowledge, visit:

Tongariro National Park Visitor Centre  
Phone: +64 7 892 3729  
Email: [tongarirove@doc.govt.nz](mailto:tongarirove@doc.govt.nz)  
[www.doc.govt.nz/great-walks](http://www.doc.govt.nz/great-walks)

This information was accurate at the time of printing. For the latest information on DOC's policies and facilities, visit [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz).

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This publication is produced using paper sourced from well-managed, renewable and legally logged forests.

## Safety on the Tongariro Northern Circuit

- Go to [www.doc.govt.nz/tongarironortherncircuit](http://www.doc.govt.nz/tongarironortherncircuit) for detailed safety and planning information.
- This track is not recommended for children under the age of 10.
- The Tongariro Northern Circuit is difficult terrain – most of it is open, exposed and on uneven track surfaces.
- The weather can change suddenly, from warm and sunny to cold and wet with strong winds of more than 60km/hr. Walkers should come well equipped and prepared for all weather conditions. **Check [weather.niwa.co.nz/parks](http://weather.niwa.co.nz/parks)** for the most up-to-date forecast.
- Check [www.doc.govt.nz/tongarironortherncircuit](http://www.doc.govt.nz/tongarironortherncircuit) or the DOC Visitor Centre in Tongariro National Park for track conditions and weather warnings before your walk.

### Your safety is your responsibility

 You are strongly recommended **NOT to attempt this track** between early May and late October (outside the Great Walks season). The winter environment in Tongariro National Park is very cold and wet, with ice, snow, avalanches and short daylight hours. DOC is unable to manage any hazards outside the Great Walks season. Bridges are removed, as floods and avalanches occur on these tracks during winter.

## Volcanic risk

The Tongariro Northern Circuit passes through volcanic hazard zones – even when the track is open, risks are present. Volcanic monitoring systems monitor activity and mitigate volcanic risk but won't ensure your personal safety. If you are uncomfortable with volcanic risk, choose a different track. Both Red Crater and Ngāuruhoe vents have been active within the last 100 years.

**Before you go**, know the volcanic risks and what to do in an eruption, and check volcanic activity information on the Geonet website ([geonet.org.nz](http://geonet.org.nz)).

## Geothermal hazards

There is geothermal activity near Ngā Rotopounamu Emerald Lakes. Steam vents (fumaroles) should not be approached – steam is very hot, the ground can be unstable, and severe burns are possible. Stay on the marked track at all times.

To attempt the track in winter conditions, you need to be very experienced in backcountry winter navigation, have river crossing expertise and the appropriate alpine skills and equipment.

**Hut facilities are greatly reduced** – with no cooking gas, limited water and no hut wardens or emergency hut radios.

For more information, see 'Outside the Great Walks season' at [www.doc.govt.nz/tongarironortherncircuit](http://www.doc.govt.nz/tongarironortherncircuit).

## Care for the Tongariro Northern Circuit



### Protect nature

Keep your distance and don't feed wildlife. Feeding wildlife is harmful to them. Follow any rules restricting fires, vehicles or boats. No dogs or unpermitted drones allowed.



### Keep New Zealand clean

Take all rubbish with you. Use toilets where provided. You can find them at all huts, campsites and shelters.



### Be prepared

Stay safe in the outdoors by following the Land Safety Code.

- ▶ Choose the right trip for you.
- ▶ Understand the weather.
- ▶ Pack warm clothes and extra food.
- ▶ Share your plans and take ways to get help.
- ▶ Take care of yourself and each other.



### Show respect

Respect others, respect culture. Do not climb Mount Ngāuruhoe and Mount Tongariro – this breaches Ngāti Tuwharetoa's tuku of the sacred peaks. Do not touch the waters of Ngā Rotopounamu Emerald Lakes. Respect others by keeping common areas in the hut and around the campsites clean and tidy. Minimise noise when others are sleeping. Book and pay for your accommodation to help maintain the track and facilities.

