Welcome to the Tongariro Northern Circuit Track, one of ten unforgettable journeys.

From alpine herbfields to forests, tranquil lakes to desert plateaux, journey through a landscape of stark contrasts with amazing views in this dual World Heritage site. Winding past Mount Tongariro and Mount Ngāuruhoe, you will be dazzled by dramatic volcanic landscapes and New Zealand’s rich geological and ancestral past.

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 and the risk of avalanche, as well as short daylight hours. Alpine-specific trip planning is critical for your safety. For more information, see ‘Outside the Great Walks season’ at www.doc.govt.nz/tongarironortherncircuit.

Plants and wildlife

Plants in the area vary considerably, from alpine herbs to thick swathes of tussocks and flax; from the hardy, low-growing shrubs of the Rangipo Desert to dense beech forests. In spring and summer, you’ll enjoy stunning alpine flowers.

North Island robin/toutouwai are sparrow-sized birds found only in New Zealand. Males have dark grey plumage while the female is dark grey-brown. They are inquisitive, friendly and trusting, often coming to within a couple of metres of people. If they do approach you, don’t feed them.

New Zealand falcon/kārearea can fly at speeds of more than 100km/h and catch prey up to 6 times their body weight. The falcon does not build a nest. Rather, it makes a scrape on the ground under a rocky outcrop or in a forest tree into which it lays its eggs.

Blue duck/whio live only in clean, fast-flowing streams in forested upper river catchments. Nesting along the riverbanks, they are at high risk of attack from stoats and rats. You might see them on Waihohonu Stream or Ohinepango Stream near Waihohonu Hut.

Rifleman/tītitipounamu are New Zealand’s smallest bird. They are constantly in motion, producing a characteristic high-pitched cheep and ‘wing-flicking’ movement while foraging up and down tree trunks. The rifleman belongs to one of the most ancient bird lineages in this country, the New Zealand wren family.

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.
- **Show respect** Do not climb Mt Ngāuruhoe and Mt Tongariro. Do not touch the waters of Ngāi Rotopounamu Emerald Lakes. Minimise noise when others are sleeping.
- **Be prepared** Stay safe in the outdoors by planning and preparing for your trip. Share your plans and take a distress beacon.
- **Keep New Zealand clean** Take all rubbish with you. Use toilets where provided. You can find them at all huts, campsites and shelters.
- **Rifleman/tītitipounamu** are New Zealand’s smallest bird. They are constantly in motion, producing a characteristic high-pitched cheep and ‘wing-flicking’ movement while foraging up and down tree trunks. The rifleman belongs to one of the most ancient bird lineages in this country, the New Zealand wren family.

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

For in-depth local knowledge, visit:
Tongariro National Park Visitor Centre
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Phone: +64 7 892 3729
Email: tongarirovc@doc.govt.nz
www.doc.govt.nz/great-walks

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**TRACK GUIDE**

**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. See the Safety section for more information about how to stay safe on this hike.

You are strongly recommended NOT to walk the track outside the Great Walks season (May to October), as harsh winter weather makes the track dangerous.

Walking times are approximate and will vary according to your fitness, direction of travel and the weather. Always allow extra time.

**Whakapapa Village to Mangatepopo Hut**

4hr, 9.4 km  
Begin behind the Chateau Tongariro at Ngāuruhoe Place and go along the lower Taranaki Falls Track. After about 20 min the Mangatepopo Track branches off from the Taranaki Falls Track.

Heavily eroded in places, the track crosses many stream beds. It can be boggy and challenging in wet weather and stream levels may become impassable and unsafe.

Ahead and to the right is Puakeaikorei, thought to be one of the older vents of the Tongariro complex. To the left is Pukeonake, a low scoria cone. Both Puakeaikorei and Pukeonake witnessed the last ice age when glaciers from Tongariro carved down through Mangatepopo valley. The giant cone of Ngāuruhoe and the flatter form of Tongariro are visible ahead. Ngāuruhoe is a younger cone on the side of Tongariro.

For the last hour the track skirts around Puakeaikorei until it reaches the Mangatepopo Track. The Mangatepopo Hut is 5 min off the main track.

**Mangatepopo Hut to Emerald Lakes**

3hr 30min, 8 km

The track joins the popular Tongariro Alpine Crossing Track up the valley, climbing into an alpine environment over a succession of old lava flows from Ngāuruhoe. The youngest, very black, lava flows erupted from Ngāuruhoe in 1949 and 1954.

The steep climb known as Te Arawhata, required according to your fitness, direction of travel and the weather. Always allow extra time.

**Emerald Lakes (Ngā Rotopounamu) to Oturere Hut**

1hr 30min, 4 km

From Ngā Rotopounamu the track descends steeply into the Oturere valley with views of the valley, the Kaimanawa range and the Rangipo Desert. The track weaves through an endless variety of unusual lava forms from early eruptions from Red Crater, which filled the Oturere valley.

This is a magical place to visit, especially on a clear day. Oturere Hut is nestled on the eastern edge of these flows. There is a pretty waterfall over the ridge from the hut.

**Oturere Hut to Waihohonu Hut**

3hr, 8.1 km

After leaving Oturere Hut the track undulates through a number of stream valleys and open gravel fields.

Plant life here has been constantly repressed by volcanic eruptions, altitude and climate.

The track gradually sidles around the foothills of Mount Ngāuruhoe, descending into a valley and crossing a branch of the Waihohonu Stream. Continue through a beech-clad valley before climbing towards the ridge top. Waihohonu Hut is in the next valley.

**Waihohonu Hut to Whakapapa Village**

5hr 45min, 15.4 km

The track follows the Waihohonu Stream and gradually climbs to Tama saddle (1,300 m).

This area can be very windy as wind is channelled between the mountains.

Whakapapa Village is about 2 hours from the Tama lakes (Ngā Puna a Tama) junction. After the first hour the track meets the Taranaki Falls loop walk. Follow the lower section of the track down the steps and along the Wairere Stream back to the village. Alternatively take the upper section of track through open tussock and shrubland back to the village.

The alpine lakes and summits of the mountains are sacred to the local Māori tribe Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro. Respectfully, they ask that summits are not climbed and waterways are not touched.

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**Elevation profile**

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History

Ngatoroirangi, the founding ancestor of Ngāti Tuwharetoa, the local iwi (Māori tribe), ascended the great mountains of the Central Plateau 30 generations ago. It was then that he named Tongariro and the many features of the surrounding landscape, declaring this area as home for his descendants. It is from these beginnings that Ngāti Tuwharetoa maintains its intrinsic responsibility to protect the mountainous area to which they belong.

The generosity and foresight of Ngāti Tuwharetoa saw the heart of the mountainous area made sacrosanct in 1887, with the intent that the Crown would stand alongside Ngāti Tuwharetoa to ensure the continued protection of Tongariro. This led to the establishment of the Tongariro National Park in 1894, a first for New Zealand, and fourth in the world.

In 1993, Tongariro became the first area to be inscribed on the World Heritage List under the revised criteria describing cultural landscapes. The mountains at the heart of the park have cultural and spiritual significance to Ngāti Tuwharetoa and symbolise the spiritual links between this community and its environment. The park has active and extinct volcanoes, a diverse range of ecosystems and some remarkable landscapes.

The continued occupation by Ngāti Tuwharetoa in this environment ensures the cultural, spiritual and environmental values are protected and shared with all those who encounter this dynamic landscape.

Safety on the Tongariro Northern Circuit

STAY ON THE MARKED TRACKS

- The track is well marked but if you become lost you should stop, find shelter and stay calm. Put on extra clothing to keep warm and assist rescuers should you hear them searching for you.
- Pay attention to signs in the Active Volcanic Hazard Zone.
- Streams on the track may rise rapidly and become hazards. Walkers should not attempt to cross any stream in flood.
- Mount Ngaruhoe is sacred to Ngāti Tuwharetoa. Climbing Mount Ngaruhoe is discouraged because of its unique volcanic hazards and alpine environment. Talk to Tongariro Visitor Centre staff for more information.

BE PREPARED FOR ALL CONDITIONS

Volcanic eruptions in Active Volcanic Hazard Zone

There are several active volcanic vents along the Tongariro Northern Circuit: Mount Ngaruhoe, Red Crater and Te Maari. Volcanic hazard zones surround these vents. If you are in one of these zones when an eruption happens, you may be in danger. Volcanic risk exists at all times, including when the track is open. If you are uncomfortable with this risk, we recommend selecting an alternative track.

Strong winds

In alpine areas or exposed areas, you can be caught in strong and/or gusty winds. Winds over 65 km/h may knock you off your feet. Dress warmly as wind-chill danger is worse at these times.

Hypothermia (too cold)

Hypothermia (a drop in core body temperature) can become a serious problem.

- Prevention: wear warm and weatherproof clothing. Eat and drink regularly during your walk.
- Watch for symptoms: people may shiver, be clumsy, confused, have slurred speech, and deny they have a problem.
- Treatment: immediately make or find shelter; get the person into warm, dry clothing, put them into a sleeping bag, give them warm, sweet drinks, monitor them and seek immediate medical help.

Heat exhaustion

- Prevention: carry and drink water regularly throughout your walk.
- Watch for symptoms: headaches, thirst, weakness, dizziness, nausea or vomiting.
- Treatment: move to a cool shaded area to rest, remove excess clothing and give water to drink.