



ULTIMATE NORTH ISLAND

ITINERARY



Venture off the beaten path to actively take in the varied natural wonders of the North Island. Start with a wonderful lakeside day-hike near Rotorua, before experiencing an overnight hike into a remote river-side hut in the middle of the Jurassic-like rainforest of the Whirinaki.

Travel into the volcanic heart of the island to explore otherworldly geothermal features near Rotorua, and go on to discover the surreal volcanic wonderland of Tongariro National Park, staying high above the world in alpine huts. Finish your tour in Wellington - a cool harbourside capital city where you're sure to find a great coffee and much to entertain.

The Ultimate North Island has short hikes, as well as two overnight hikes in Whirinaki Conservation Park and Tongariro National Park with stays at backcountry huts as well as the opportunity to relax in lodges in beautiful locations.

Day 1 to 8 of the Ultimate New Zealand tour, it is the ideal choice for those who have a little less time but still want an unforgettable immersive experience.

LENGTH	8 days
GRADE	D - River crossings, some uneven terrain, you need to be reasonably fit and enthusiastic
START	Auckland – 7:00am, pick up zone outside Sky City, 20m from Sky Tower base, corner Victoria and Federal Streets (Rotorua pickup by arrangement)
FINISH	Wellington – 3:30pm (approx.). Option to bus or train to Auckland from National Park (not included).
ACCOMMODATION	Cabins, camping and backcountry huts
INCLUDED ACTIVITIES	Wai-o-tapu Thermal Wonderland
DEPARTURES	2025 Nov: 12, 26 2026 Jan: 7, 21 Feb: 4, 25 Mar: 21
PRICE	NZ\$3,950.00 per person

“REAL OUTDOOR ADVENTURE”

I enjoyed an unforgettable amazing and well organised week with Hiking New Zealand. Our guide Grace did a brilliant job in bringing us New Zealand's nature and practical tips for this outdoor adventure closer. In a small group of 6 we discovered remote, stunning places which you might not visit on your own, cooked tasty meals and had lots of fun. Recommendable from A to Z!

~ N.Emmenegger, Switzerland, November, **Trip Advisor**

“WOW. WHAT A TRIP!”

The Ultimate North tour shows the best spots of the North Island. It combines beautiful places with the must-sees of the Northern Island. Climbing the red crater was one of the highlights. The guide Justin was very nice and had an incredible knowledge and was well organised. I can definitely recommend this tour!

~ S.Schmidt, Germany, February, **Trip Advisor**

ITINERARY

DAY 1 AUCKLAND - TARAWERA

Up to 10 km (6.2 miles), 3 hours hiking, elevation +480 m (15 ft) -380 m (1,200 ft)

We meet at 7am at the Sky Tower in downtown Auckland before heading south to Rotorua, with a café stop on route to fortify those who missed breakfast. Rotorua is renowned for its steaming thermal vents, bubbling mud-pools and stunning lakes. The area is also rich in Māori and early European history, including the violent 1886 Mt Tarawera eruption that buried a Māori village.

We continue to Lake Tarawera, where we catch the noon water taxi to access the trail's midsection. Here, we start a hike alongside the clear waters of Lake Tarawera, enjoying the shade that towering tree ferns and ignimbrite cliffs offer. Along the way, you can take a dip in the lake at one of the small pumice beaches. The trail offers glimpses of the expansive wilderness of forests, lakes, and volcanoes in the distance.

We spend the night at our accommodation in our authentic open-plan log cabin full of charm and character where we come together to prepare a meal. It's an opportunity to get to know your fellow travellers and chat. Tonight, or in the morning, we'll also organise our gear and pack our backpacks for the upcoming hike into the rainforest, ready for the next leg of our journey. *Includes lunch and dinner.*

DAY 2 TARAWERA - WHIRINAKI

Up to 8.5 km (5.3 miles), 3.5 hours hiking, elevation +450 m (1,400 ft) -750 m (2,450 ft)

A leisurely start after packing all our kit and driving east, into the rugged forest ranges of Te Urewera. This is the traditional home of the Tūhoe (Māori tribe) and one of the last places to have been reached by European settlers.

After about 2 hours of driving (picnic lunch on the way) minimum, we reach the Whirinaki Forest trail. This is a preserved remnant of the vast forests believed to have covered the supercontinent of Gondwanaland more than 150 million years ago. Our first hike is an easy one, on a descending track through native beech forest, to a simple forest hut beside the stunning Whirinaki River. We cook up our meal together and either stay in the hut or camp nearby with an evening campfire and time to relax and enjoy the surroundings. *Includes breakfast, lunch and dinner.*

DAY 3 WHIRINAKI

15 km (9.3 miles), 5 hours hiking, elevation +430 m (1,400 ft) -650 m (2,100 ft)

This morning, our journey continues down the valley track. This wilderness is a hidden gem, far from the tourist crowds, so encounters with others are rare. Instead, we often have the privilege of spotting elusive blue ducks, robins, and hearing the distinctive call of the kaka, a large bush parrot.

As we descend further into the valley, our path leads us beneath towering tree ferns and through some of New Zealand's most magnificent podocarp rainforest trees. For those who seek a little extra adventure, there's an opportunity to explore a side track leading to an area of ancient rata forest.

A 20-minute drive takes us to a cabins on a nearby rural property. Here you can enjoy a warm shower and unwind by the fire pit, sipping on a beer or wine. *Includes breakfast, lunch and dinner.*



DAY 4 WHIRINAKI - WHAKAPAPA

Up to 3 km (2 miles), 1.5 hours hiking +/-55 m (180 ft)

We start the day with a drive to the Volcanic Plateau and its myriad natural wonders. Explore an extraordinary thermal park, bathe in a natural hot river and view the impressive Huka Falls. Feel the spray here as the mighty Waikato River, New Zealand's longest, plunges 11 metres into a stadium-like pool.

Later we arrive at Lake Taupō, the largest lake in New Zealand. Incredibly, this 600 square kilometre crater lake was formed in 186AD by the most powerful volcanic explosion in recorded history.

At Taupō, we grab our takeaway food and head to a lovely lake-side spot. Here we can relax on the unusual pumice beach and in summer enjoy an evening swim before continuing to our lodge accommodation near Whakapapa Village, Tongariro National Park. *Includes breakfast and lunch.*



DAY 5 WHAKAPAPA - WAIHOHONU HUT

Up to 15 km (9.5 miles), 6 hours hiking +/-300 m (1,000 ft)

Tongariro National Park is the oldest National Park in New Zealand and the fourth oldest in the world. In 1993, the park became a UNESCO mixed cultural and natural World Heritage Site. Although many hikers walk the busy one-day Tongariro Alpine Crossing, few explore the more remote and drier east side of this volcanic range. Enjoy our secret side trips and short cuts but rest assured we will hike the famous Tongariro Alpine Crossing, considered one of the world's finest day walks, but at a less busy time of the day whenever possible.

We sort out gear and pack our backpacks ready for our two nights away. In the late morning, hike out of Whakapapa through tussock-grasslands and over the low saddle that cuts between the volcanoes Ruapehu and Ngāuruhoe. Late afternoon we arrive at the simple but modern Waihoihonu Hut among patches of mountain beech forest beside a quiet stream. There are great mountain-views from the spacious common room. *Includes breakfast, lunch and dinner.*



DAY 6 WAIHOHONU HUT - OTURERE HUT

8.5 km (5 miles), 3 hours hiking +650 m (2,100 ft) -350 m (1,150 ft)

The trail to the next hut takes just 3 hours, so we have the morning to explore. Either amble (about an hour) to the splendid Ohineopango Springs and visit a historic hut and then return to the hut for lunch, or we can negotiate an adventurous off-trail route over ash-moraine ridges and skirt lava cliffs to reach a viewpoint high above a remote lake. After lunch continue on, traversing stony desert to an alpine hut at 1400m situated on the edge of an old lava flow.

We stop to enjoy fantastic views of the park's three main peaks: Ruapehu, Tongariro and Ngāuruhoe. The latter starred as Mount Doom in Peter Jackson's Lord of the Rings films. It's an extraordinary landscape of active volcanoes and lava valleys. Evening provides an opportunity to share the hut with hikers from all over the world. Oturere 'sardine tin' Hut is small, quite busy, but still our favourite spot. We usually sleep in the hut, but sometimes we camp. *Includes breakfast, lunch and dinner.*





DAY 7 OTURERE HUT - WHAKAPAPA

Up to 12 km (7.5 miles), 1 hour hiking, elevation +500 (1,600 ft) -800 m (2,600 ft)

We hike through a moon-like valley of lava flows and ash fields before climbing steeply to the remarkable Emerald Lakes, which have graced the covers of many guidebooks. From here we join the spectacular Tongariro Alpine Crossing.

The next few hours of hiking takes us through an unforgettable wonderland of lava valleys, steaming craters and brooding volcanoes before our descent through bonsai-like alpine foliage and alongside mineral-infused streams. In good conditions, we have the option of climbing high on the volcanic peaks.

An evening drive takes us back to our lodge in the heart of the National Park – the perfect place to relax with a beer and enjoy million-dollar volcanic views before dining in the alpine village. *Includes breakfast and lunch.*

DAY 8 WHAKAPAPA - WELLINGTON

Driving south, we leave the volcanoes to descend through the beautiful river valleys of the Rangitikei and along the coast to Wellington, where we arrive mid-afternoon after a café break.

Wellington is so much more than just New Zealand's capital. It is also the nation's stylish hub for arts, culture, cafés and politics. Enclosed by hills and a harbour, this compact city has many attractions within easy walking distance.

Options include enjoying the National Museum of New Zealand (Te Papa) or watching the political shenanigans of the 'Beehive' (Parliament House). Many visitors immerse themselves in the vibrant café scene and the accessible downtown area. *Includes breakfast.*

"MOST LIKELY THE BEST THING TO BOOK IN NZ"

When I booked this trip, I expected to have a guided experience of some great places in NZ and a fun time with a nice group. While this was true, this trip exceeded all the expectations I had. We had an amazing diverse group and our guide Malcolm was absolutely amazing. You could always feel his passion and knowledge of the outdoors. This is not a trip where you get served everything on a silver plate. You will need to work with everybody, cook, clean, maybe set up a tent. But you'll have an amazing time doing it while bonding with the people you're with. Hiking NZ will provide the expertise and itinerary for you to see some of New Zealand's most beautiful places. Accommodations are a mix of Camping, Huts and Hostels. Hiking NZ is possible offering an experience here that you won't find anywhere else. There is no question that I'd do it again. The only negative thing is that you might become friends and saying goodbye will be hard ;)

~ Andreas F, April, **Trip Advisor**

"FANTASTIC EXPERIENCE"

We had a great experience hiking the northern loop in Tongariro National Park, despite bad weather conditions. The scenery was spectacular, the hikes challenging enough but not crazy and with definitely less crowd than the Alpine crossing. Because of bad weather conditions, we were able to experience both the camping and the Hut accommodations, which was a treat. Our guide was well experienced, making sure to meet our needs but always leaning towards safety when appropriate. The packing list was right, as we had warm weather, cold weather and lots of rain. The return at the end of the storm was memorable and we admired many single and double rainbows set on the Tongariro park background. I will work with this company again for my trip to the Southern Island.

~ Agnes R, January, **Trip Advisor**

LIFE ON THE TRAIL

This is a facilitated adventure - we believe great trips/ adventures are a team effort. So we will need your help from time to time when it comes to cooking meals, sharing the load on hikes, and washing up - many hands make light work.

GRADE D

- Average of 4-5 hours physical activity per day, up to 8-9 hours on longer days.
- Pack weights of 10-12kgs* on some days (1, 2, 5, 6 and 7).
- Altitude gains of up to 800m.
- Some uneven track surfaces and river crossings.
- No multi-day hiking experience necessary.
- You need to be reasonably fit and enthusiastic and have good agility.
- Some tracks may be slippery or rough and there will be some off-track hiking and river crossings.

*Will vary depending on the weight of personal discretionary items.



GUIDES AND SAFETY

An excellent guide can make the difference between a trip of a lifetime and just an ordinary trip. Our handpicked professionals come from a range of backgrounds. Each has extensive outdoor and hiking experience and a passion for New Zealand's wild and beautiful backcountry. The guides will ensure that your trip is truly inspiring, a huge amount of fun and safe.

FOOD

As well as being the time to rest, refuel and recharge, meal times are also a great time to get to know your fellow travellers better, sit back and enjoy the amazing surroundings and enjoy some great food! Everybody has a turn with the preparation and cooking of meals: barbecues, salads, pancakes, curries, pasta, stir-fries, hangi...

Vegetarian meals are no problem. On the "wild nights" the group will usually eat pasta and rice meals (special "secret" recipes used). There is always a lot of hiking food - chocolate, nuts, raisins, biscuits. The vehicles carry a full range of cooking equipment including gas burners, woks, frying pans and billies (cooking pot). When you go on an overnight hike the group will carry a portable stove.



TRANSPORT

The average driving time per day varies, some times you are in the wilderness and won't see the vehicle for 2 or 3 days! On other days you might be in the vehicle for 2-3 hours or occasionally more. The driving time is a chance to rest and enjoy the fantastic scenery which is forever changing. You will travel in a 12 seat minibus towing a lockable trailer with camp equipment and your luggage. There will be a range of roads - sealed and unsealed. The guide will often stop the vehicle if there is a great photo opportunity or primo ice cream shop!



ACCOMMODATION

"Wild nights" vs nights in civilisation: Wild nights are the nights where you are truly in the wilderness, staying in backcountry huts or camping in locations that may be several hours walk from the nearest road or populated area, versus nights in civilisation where you may stay in cabins, lodges or camp by the vehicle at Department of Conservation campsites.

Some of these locations may still be relatively remote and in the wilderness but they can be reached by the vehicle.

*Accommodation is subject to availability, and an equivalent style of property could be used if the advertised property is no longer available.

Camping - You will camp in a range of campsites. On the "wild nights" you may camp under natural rock shelters, on remote beaches or even sleep out under the stars! On the non-"wild nights" you will occasionally camp near the vehicle in Department of Conservation or private campsites. If the weather is not great for camping, eg very wet, stormy or very cold conditions, your guide will seek out alternative accommodation, eg lodge, cabin or crib.

LIFE ON THE TRAIL



Huts - New Zealand has an excellent network of backcountry huts and you will stay in huts on several nights. They are equipped with mattresses, running water and an outside toilet. Cooking is done on a portable stove. Huts are only accessible on foot and shared with other hikers. You also have the option of camping near the hut if that is your preference.



Lodges - You will stay in lodge type accommodation on some of the nights. The lodges are often conveniently located near the start or end of a hike and have multi-share and sometimes twin/double rooms.



Bathroom facilities - on the wild nights there will be long drop (pit) toilets. There will be rivers or lakes nearby for a swim, and sometimes there are even natural hot pools! The Kiwi-style Hiking trips are set up so after a couple of nights of "roughing it" in the wilderness, you will stay somewhere where you can enjoy a shower and a few home comforts (including laundry facilities) before the next foray into the wild!

A very outdoor toilet - don't worry, just an actor!



ADDITIONAL COSTS

Meals

Meals that are not included in the trip price are detailed at the bottom of each day's itinerary.

Travel Insurance

It is suggested that clients take out comprehensive travel insurance.

ELEVATIONS

Track distances and elevations are approximate only. Advertised hiking routes may be amended by the guide for any reason (usually due to weather, or track conditions). The guide will notify clients in advance of day-to-day routes.

PACKING LIST

Items shown in bold can be hired from us (see the rate table below).
Please arrange hire at least one week prior to your departure date.

CLOTHING - one set for walking, one set for evenings

WALKING CLOTHES: Several layers of wool, polypropylene and/or polar fleece will ensure you remain a comfortable temperature regardless of the weather. **No cotton shirts hiking/kayaking in the wet please!** Cotton gets cold when wet and is difficult to dry.

- ☐ Waterproof raincoat
- ☐ Thermal underwear (top and bottom, wool or polypropylene)
- ☐ Hiking boots or good hiking shoes
- ☐ Spare lightweight shoes or sandals
- ☐ Shorts or lightweight trousers (preferably quick-dry)
- ☐ Short-sleeved shirt x 2 (quick-dry, polypropylene or wool)
- ☐ Warm fleece/wool jersey (not cotton) x 2
- ☐ Socks (we suggest 3 pairs)
- ☐ Warm hat or balaclava
- ☐ Sunhat
- ☐ Gloves or mittens (wool or fleece)
- ☐ Togs (swimming costume)
- ☐ Towel (lightweight travel towels are great)

SPARE CLOTHING: Extra socks and polypropylene layers are always handy - ensure you have enough warm items. Comfortable clothes for non hiking days. Spare clothing can be left in the secure trailer when we are away on the hikes, so don't worry about the extra weight - ensure you have enough warm items. Note: there are only limited opportunities to do laundry during a tour, so quick drying clothing is an advantage. Weather can change rapidly in the locations we hike so layers of clothing is ideal.

EQUIPMENT

- ☐ **Backpack** (50 litres is adequate)
- ☐ **Sleeping bag** (that keeps you comfortable at 0°C (32°F), preferably down, lightweight, between 1-1.5kg)
- ☐ Flashlight/headlamp
- ☐ Drink bottle or camel back - 1 litre
- ☐ Small day pack
- ☐ Sunscreen and sunglasses
- ☐ Insect repellent (sandflies like foreign blood)
- ☐ Personal toiletries, medication and first aid
- ☐ **Walking Poles** (optional)
- ☐ Gaiters (optional)

HOW TO PACK

We recommend that you bring two bags on your trip, a hiking backpack with an internal frame (50 litres is adequate) for the overnight hikes, and a smaller day pack for the day hikes. We supply kit bags for the stowage of your gear in the trailer when you are away on a multi day hike.

WE SUPPLY

- Pack-liner to keep things dry inside your backpack
- Kit bag to hold your spare gear when you're out hiking
- Emergency first aid kit
- Thermarests
- Plates, cutlery, mugs, pots, etc.
- Tents

Hire gear (NZ\$)	5-7 days trip	8-11 days trip	12+ days trip
Backpack (approx 50 litres)	\$50	\$60	\$80
Sleeping bag and liner	\$50	\$60	\$80
Walking pole (per one pole)	\$20	\$20	\$20

It's not always easy packing - feel free to drop us a line if you have any questions.

IMPORTANT INFO

Here is a kickstart on a few things you need to know...

WHEN HIKING

- Stay together. If you get separated, stop and wait until your guide finds you.
- Wait at all track junctions, huts and hazards, as well as river crossings, for the rest of the group to catch up.
- Tell someone if you are heading off the track to use "the bathroom" in case you get lost! It happens! If lost - shout or whistle!
- Watch out for sunburn. Remember, NZ sun burns fast, wear a hat and sun block at all times until you are familiar with its strength.
- Drink plenty of water, it is safe to drink from most of the rivers and streams in the wilderness without treating the water, but do ask.
- Help and look out for each other on river crossings, bush bashing and rock scrambling.
- Ensure you have correct clothing - see 'packing' list.
- Snow slopes are extremely dangerous - guide leads on snow. No fooling around unless guide gives the OK.
- Wasps - be observant (especially in beech forests). If you see a nest back off SLOWLY, unless they start to sting you - then move like greased lightning.

CROSSING RIVERS

- River crossing accidents are a major cause of fatalities in the NZ wilderness so learning correct techniques from your guide is imperative.
- If wearing a rain-coat turn up and tuck under hip belt so pockets don't fill with water.
- You must wear boots when crossing rivers!
- To prevent the spread of Didymo (an invasive algae) boots, gaiters, socks etc. must be washed and treated before entering another waterway.

KAYAKING

- Always attend the safety briefing.
- Always take spare warm clothing in case the weather turns bad.
- Go to the toilet before you get into the kayak!
- Wrap valuables and cameras securely in bags or dry bags and close PROPERLY. Put adsorbent cloth/t-shirt with camera.
- Always stay together.
- Sun protection - the reflection off water doubles the intensity!

CYCLING & MOUNTAIN BIKING

- Always attend the safety briefing, know the meet times and 'back up' plans.
- High visibility clothes if there are road sections.
- Be aware if you are in the front or back of group (otherwise you might be chasing imaginary people).
- Stop to smell the roses - you might be wearing yellow, but it's not the Tour de France!
- Helmets are compulsory in NZ.
- In NZ front and rear brakes are opposite to US and Europe.

SWIMMING & BEACHES

Many NZ beaches are too dangerous for swimming, in particular the West Coast beaches.

Where conditions are suitable...

- Talk to your guide before you go swimming and don't swim alone.
- Respect the sea - never turn your back on the sea and watch out for freak waves & rips.
- If you get into difficulty while swimming - raise one of your hands up above your head - stay calm.
- Be careful entering the sea or body surfing, there may be rocks below the water.

- For rescues, things that float are - sleeping mats, spare tyre, empty water bottles (jerry cans), thermarests and dry bags stuffed with clothing.
- Look for jellyfish and stingrays (check along water edge and don't swim if there are lots about).

HOT POOLS (NATURAL)

- Keep head above water at all times - water may contain amoebic meningitis.
- Watch out for boiling water/mud around and in the pool.
- Remove jewellery as it tends to turn green or black.

FIRES

- Observe all fire bans. Keep fires small, use only dead wood and completely put out with water before leaving and at night (includes wood burners in huts).
- Always have a bucket of water near fire to extinguish it and for burns (or stream/river nearby).
- Be careful when wearing synthetic clothing around fires. Sparks put holes in Gore-Tex and tents.
- Do not use axe without guide's okay - wear boots.

HYGIENE & TOILETS

- You'll get to a shower generally every 1-2 days, otherwise there are rivers to swim in and freshwater to wash with.
- Keep streams, lakes and rivers clean - when cleaning and washing, take water and wash well away from the water source (drain used water into soil to allow it to be filtered) - all soaps/detergents are harmful to water-life.
- Always use toilets when they are provided even though long-drops may be a bit rustic.
- In situations where there is no toilet, bury toilet waste. No 1's (pee) off the track - No 2's (poop) in 5-10 cm deep hole 50-100m from any water (lake, river or stream), bury toilet paper, cover up hole with soil/leaf litter. Please do not burn toilet paper.
- Sanitary pads/tampons are treated as rubbish - carried out by user.

ENVIRONMENTAL CARE

- Remove rubbish - pack it in, pack it out. Please help guide to separate rubbish, recycling and compost.
- Keep to the track where there is one - protect native plants and animals.
- Respect cultural heritage.
- Enjoy your visit - camp carefully and leave no trace of your visit. Will the next visitor know you have been there?

OTHER IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER...

- Laundry facilities are limited while on trips (every 2-3 days).
- Hypothermia - make sure you have the correct clothing! Be prepared for any weather!
- Hire gear - use the supplied liner with sleeping bags, carry all hire gear in pack not tied to outside. Please don't overextend walking poles - they will snap! Please tell us if any repairs are required.
- Equipment - it is so easy to lose stuff in shared huts. Help us keep an eye on gear, thanks.
- Roads - remember kiwis drive on the left, look carefully when crossing the street for an ice-cream.
- Tipping - it is not expected in NZ to tip for service, but if you feel your guide has done an excellent job, tips will be accepted graciously.
- Wild food & berries - always ask before you eat, many are poisonous to us.

Thank you for reading. Have a wonderful trip.

Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm. ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson