



Take a Hike: NEW ZEALAND

Routeburn Track scenery

Sian Thomas shares her favourite New Zealand walks.

There are hundreds of opportunities for walking (or “tramping” as the Kiwis call it) in New Zealand, ranging from multi-day hiking trails amongst spectacular scenery to half-day urban heritage walks. Energetic hikers (“trampers” to the locals) can traverse mountain passes and discover glacier-carved valleys, whilst the more sedate day-walker can explore golden beaches, bush walks and sites of scenic interest. Whilst the opportunities are vast and varied there are nine walks which are recognised as particularly special. These “Great Walks” range in length from two to six days and are scattered across both islands, taking in a variety of landscapes. I have had some of my best days in New Zealand whilst out walking - these are some of my highlights.

Footprints Waipoua

Based in the towering Waipoua Kauri forest of the Northland, this is a two-hour twilight walk led by local Maori guides keen to share stories of their history in the area and their knowledge of the forest and its inhabitants. They provide an interesting and informative narrative as you wind your way through these impressive trees to Te Matua Ngahere, the “Father of the Forest”. Thought to be over 4,000 years old and with a trunk over five metres in diameter, he is a most impressive and humbling sight.

Tamaki Hikoi, Auckland

This is a unique opportunity to hear the history of the Auckland harbour area from a member of the local Ngati Whatua tribe, who have passed down their sacred history and traditions through ancient stories over countless generations. As well as learning about the past, your guide will explain why the Tamaki (Auckland) region was bitterly fought over and discuss the impact of colonisation. This three-hour downhill walk is graded “easy to moderate” and suitable for anyone of reasonable fitness.

Tongariro Northern Circuit and Tongariro Crossing

The Tongariro National Park, in the centre of the North Island, was established in 1887 and was the first in New Zealand. Within its boundaries are three volcanoes, Tongariro, Ngauruhoe and Ruapehu. The Northern Circuit is one of the Great Walks; well marked and easy to follow, this four-day walk takes you through the stark landscapes of Tongariro and Ngauruhoe. It is also possible to do the central section as a day walk (known as the Tongariro Crossing) which is widely acknowledged to be the best one-day walk in the country due to the stunning landscapes through which you pass. The volcanic craters, emerald lakes and steam-billowing thermal springs give this walk a truly moonscape quality, the likes of which I have never seen anywhere else. Tongariro is still active and last erupted in 1926.

Abel Tasman Coastal Track

The Abel Tasman track is the only Great Walk not on mountainous terrain; it undulates along the northwest coast of the South Island, taking you down along beautiful beaches and up into native bush on the slopes above. To do the entire track takes three to five days, staying overnight in good quality accommodation. One of the great things about this track, however, is that you can dip in and out of it, tailor-making a trip to suit your fitness. The water taxis that ply the route into the park drop you off at one point on the track and pick you up later the same day at a designated point further along, allowing you to experience the beauty of this area at your own pace.

Routeburn Track

This three- or four-day tramp is one of the most scenic mountain walks in New Zealand. Crossing the Main Divide between the Mount Aspiring and Fiordland National Parks you pass through beech forests, along quiet meadows and climb up steep rocky sections. The alpine scenery is beautiful and you are often presented with the most amazing views. There are guided and unguided options for the Routeburn, and transport to the start and from the end of the track is also available from Queenstown, although you do need to book ahead as there are now limits on the number of people allowed on it. Although this tramp can get quite busy in the summer months it is an experience not to be missed if walking is your passion.

Sian Thomas
New Zealand Specialist



Walking track in Queenstown



The Kauri Coast



Tongariro landscape



Walking in the Abel Tasman National Park



Hiker at Earland Falls, Routeburn Track



FACT FILE

A three week trip to New Zealand, taking in one or more of the Great Walks, costs in the region of £3,500 per person, although this will be higher if you choose to walk with a guide. For more information please call our New Zealand specialists on 01993 838 820.