

around Aoraki

by SIANTHOMAS New Zealand Specialist

Having travelled extensively in New Zealand and spent much of my time exploring the country by foot, it is only natural that some of my most memorable moments have been spent touring around one of the country's most iconic national parks and home to its highest mountain, Mount Cook. Aoraki, or Mount Cook, stands at an impressive 3,754 metres tall and lies in the Southern Alps the mountain range that breaks through the length of the South Island. It is here that many visitors to the country have caught their first glimpse of the dramatic peaks that the South Island has become so renowned for and it is here that I, like so many others, have discovered their love of the mountains and the great outdoors.



Mount Cook and the surrounding national park are considered to be historically and culturally very important to New Zealanders. The mountain was named in 1851 to honour Captain James Cook who first surveyed and circumnavigated the islands of New Zealand in 1770. The name was changed, however, in 1998 to its historic Maori name, Aoraki, which means 'cloud piercer'. The mountain is sacred to the Ngai Tahu Tribe of the South Island, and Maori legend has it that the mountain and its companion peaks were formed when a boy named Aoraki and his three brothers came down from the heavens to visit Papatuanuku (Earth Mother) in a canoe. The canoe overturned and as the brothers climbed back on the boat the south winds froze them, and they turned to stone.

Their canoe became the South Island and Aoraki, who stood the tallest of the brothers, is now seen as the magical Aoraki mountain.

As well as the country's highest peak, the national park has 19 smaller peaks standing over 3,000 metres high and 72 named glaciers which cover over 40 percent of the park's 700 square kilometres. It is therefore no surprise that the national park plays host to thousands of visitors every year, some attempting to climb many of these peaks and others who simply come to marvel at what is some of the country's finest and most dramatic mountain scenery. During my first visit to New Zealand I was lucky enough to have the opportunity to hike, or tramp as the Kiwi's call it, up to Muller hut, a demanding five

