

# The Thermal Plateau

Mongst its tranquil lakes and bush-clad hills, New Zealand's Thermal Plateau hides a Dante-esque world of bubbling mud pools and gushing geysers; this is a region rich with the geothermal energy of the earth's molten core. A rift valley 250 kilometres long runs from Mount Ruapehu in the south, through Rotorua and north to the country's most active volcano, White Island, in the Bay of Plenty. This geothermal activity not only

shaped the landscape but also the culture of the region, with many geographical features delineating tribal boundaries and perceived as areas of great sacredness. The region is rich in natural wonders, including cave formations where glow-worms scatter like constellations among the stalactites, crystal-clear rivers that spill into dramatic waterfalls and pristine trout-filled lakes, and snow-capped peaks that rise above dense native forests, making it is

easy to understand its spiritual importance.
The region is one of the best to experience
Maori culture and the ideal place to sample a
traditional hangi (feast) or attend an
energetic kapa haka (song and dance display).
One of the country's greatest touring routes,
the Thermal Discovery Highway, links the
geothermal and cultural highlights of a
fascinating, ever-changing landscape and
offers something enticing around every corner.

#### Rotorua

At the heart of New Zealand's geothermal activity and a major focus for Maori culture, Rotorua is situated on the southern shore of Lake Rotorua. Throughout and around the town steamy mineral lakes, bursting geysers and bubbling mud pools release a pungent smell as hydrogen gas pours out of countless bores and ground fissures. With examples of striking Tudor-style architecture, parts of this busy town are very attractive, and the Rotorua Bath House, an architectural icon, now houses a museum that reveals the mythology, history and geology of the area. People have been bathing in the hot springs for centuries, believing the mineral-rich waters have health-giving properties, and a soak in one of the many spa complexes is highly recommended. The town also has a large Maori population, whose cultural activities are among the most interesting and accessible in all New Zealand. The deep-rooted concept of 'manaakitanga' - the responsibility of a host to give the best of themselves, their time and their history – is hugely evident here.

#### THE SPRINGS, ROTORUA

Built in 1998 but recreating an authentic 1930's bungalow, this four room bed & breakfast in the heart of Rotorua exudes an individual charm and elegance. The guest wing is to the rear, ensuring a quiet stay, and each room opens out into the private gardens. The Springs is noted for its warm welcome and hospitality; guests are spoilt with stunning breakfast dishes, and are often greeted with a glass of wine on return from a day out.



Geothermal activity, Rotorua



## Accolades Boutique Hotel, Rotorua

A luxurious, contemporary design, combined with stunning lake views, makes Accolades an ideal place to rest after a day amidst Rotorua's natural wonders and cultural highlights. Your hosts have many years' experience operating award-winning properties and make sure that every little luxury is included, from sumptuous hand-picked furnishings to the indulgent guest sauna. Every room is spacious and light, with an expansive guest lounge, billiard room and library providing ample opportunities for quiet relaxation or conversations with your hosts.



The Springs, Rotorua



Accolades Boutique Hotel, Rotorua

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Mount Tarawera crater

## Mitai Maori Cultural Experience

This educational and entertaining display performed by a talented local cast offers a wonderful insight into Maori tradition. The formal welcome (powhiri), traditional dances (kapa haka) and Maori weaponry display are followed by a traditionally cooked Maori feast (hangi) - an impressive, delicious spread consisting of lamb, chicken, kumara and potato cooked in an underground earth oven. A bush walk leads to the famous Rainbow Springs, a sacred area wreathed in myth and legend, where the flora has distinctive medicinal uses, . The local Maori tribe are proud of their heritage and eager to share it with you.

#### ROURA LODGE, ROTORUA

Just a few minutes away from the busy town centre, but infinitely more laid-back in feel, lies the pretty suburb of Kawaha Point. At the heart of the community spread along the lake front, Koura Lodge takes advantage of one of the finest locations in the area. All the guest rooms enjoy idyllic views across the lawns to the lake beyond, and are tastefully decorated in muted colours. The cosy guest lounges, as well as the hot tub tucked away in the garden by the shores of the lake, provide touches of luxury best appreciated after active days.



Koura Lodge, Rotorua

### Mount Tarawera 4WD Adventure

As the highest peak in the area and the sacred mountain of the local Maori tribe, Mount Tarawera plays a key role in Maori legend. It became particularly infamous in 1886 when it last erupted, destroying the picturesque Pink and White Terraces which had been formed over centuries by crystallising silica. Trips to the mountain take you through spectacular scenery where it is possible to walk to the rim of the crater, experience the scree slide, or hike to the summit. Local guides provide insight into Maori legend and volcanology, adding unexpected depth to the experience. An incredible helicopter flight back along the 17 kilometre rift gives you a bird'seye view of this dramatic landscape.







Huka Lodge, near Taupo



Lake Taupo Lodge

## Lake Taupo

The largest lake in New Zealand, Lake Taupo lies at the heart of the North Island, and was formed by one of most violent volcanic explosions of all time. Apart from being known for its abundant trout, it is also a treasure-trove of Maori rock carvings and has impressive views of the volcanic Tongariro National Park. It is the source of New Zealand's longest river, the Waikato, famed for its white-water rafting, jet boat rides and the stunning Huka Falls. Known as the trout fishing capital of the Southern Hemisphere, Lake Taupo is a haven of rocky coves, white pumice beaches and sheltered inlets that can only be reached by boat. This is a serene sanctuary surrounded by active thermal areas, unspoiled forests and excellent tramping trails.

### LAKE TAUPO LODGE, TAUPO

Nestled on the shores of Lake Taupo, this small deluxe lodge exudes a warm homeliness that guarantees a relaxing stay. The resident chef ensures that guests dine well from sunrise to sunset, against a stunning backdrop of the lake and mountains. The seven guest suites are among the most luxurious in the area, and include private outdoor patio areas letting you relax and enjoy your surroundings.

#### THE LOFT, TAUPO

Set within beautiful Acacia Bay, this small, unassuming bed and breakfast is located within easy reach of Lake Taupo and Tongariro National Park. Your friendly hosts are well known figures in the local area and can provide information about the best excursions and restaurants on their doorstep. The communal areas and three comfortable suites are beautifully decorated in a traditional country style and the garden provides a tranquil spot in which to relax over a glass of wine before dinner.

#### HUKA LODGE, NR. TAUPO

Inspired by New Zealand's early pioneers and updated with the latest luxuries of the present age, this historic lodge has received countless international awards. Each of the 20 spacious, tasteful suites is set amongst mature native trees, a few paces upstream from Taupo's famous Huka Falls. Your time here can be spent exploring the local area or as the falls are home to some of the finest trout you could accept the challenge of landing one with the assistance of one of the fishing guides. Huka Lodge is consistently ranked as one of the world's most luxurious retreats, but the luxury is understated and the relaxing atmosphere takes you back to when life seemed much simpler.

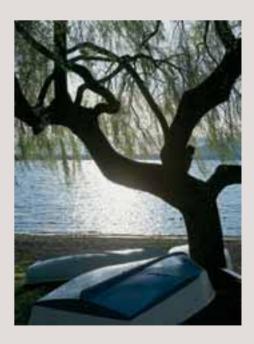
# Thermal Explorer Highway

Beginning in Auckland this easily-driven and waymarked self-drive route follows the road south to the Thermal Plateau and the towns of Rotorua and Lake Taupo, ending in Hawke's Bay amongst some of New Zealand's best wine country. En route you explore a selection of the country's finest natural wonders.

- **Day I**Depart from Auckland and head to Waitomo to visit the glow-worm caves. Continue on to Rotorua.
- **Day 2** A full day in Rotorua to visit the thermal springs and geysers, and to immerse yourself in some of the region's powerful Maori culture.
- Day 3 Drive on to Taupo and then spend the afternoon on New Zealand's largest lake, enjoying a cruise to the giant Maori rock carvings.
- Day 4 Spend the morning on the shores of Lake Taupo exploring the beautiful countryside and then head to Napier and Hawke's Bay in the afternoon.
- Day 5 A full day exploring the wineries of Hawke's Bay on an escorted tour, giving you the benefit of a knowledgeable local guide.

#### **EXTENSIONS**

New Zealand's volcanic landscape is fascinating to behold, and the geothermal activity in this region is ever-present. Here you can enhance your stay with a spectacular helicopter flight out to White Island, New Zealand's most active volcano, and take a guided walk around its steaming crater. Alternatively, tramping in Tongariro National Park also provides access to some of the country's most remarkable, vivid volcanic landscapes.



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View over Tongariro National Park

## Lake Taupo Scenic Cruise

A cruise across majestic Lake Taupo takes visitors to the impressive Maori rock carvings at Mine Bay, as well as visiting other points of scenic and historical interest around the lake shores. On a clear day, the views across the deep blue waters to the impressive volcanoes of Ruapehu, Tongariro and Ngauruhoe are unsurpassable. Full commentary is provided on board, and drinks and snacks are available. On Sundays, the Sunday Brunch Cruise includes a full English breakfast which is enjoyed on the calm waters in one of the many scenic bays.

#### TAUHARA SUNRISE, TAUPO

This contemporary lodge makes the most of its elevated setting above Lake Taupo with floor-toceiling windows and expansive decking areas. For the ultimate in privacy, the two light and spacious guest suites are separated by cosy communal kitchen and lounge areas, and all enjoy uninterrupted lake and mountain views. The thoughtful design includes a luxurious hot tub, ideal for soothing aching limbs, with views of the town lights reflecting in the lake-waters below.



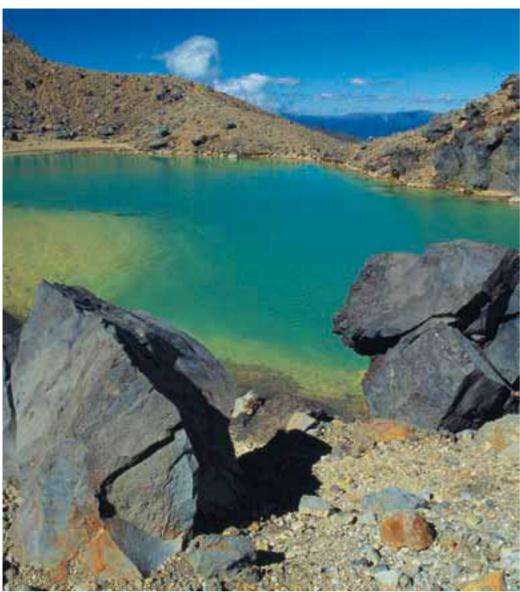
Waterfall along the Tongariro Northern Circuit

## Tongariro National Park

At the southern end of Lake Taupo, the three active volcanic mountains of Ruapehu, Tongariro and Ngauruhoe are protected as a National Park. In the winter the area is a playground for skiers and in summer a wilderness for walking. Dotted with emerald lakes and criss-crossed with lava flows, this is some of New Zealand's most varied and remarkable terrain. The best way to explore is by tramping, but other activities including scenic flights, kayaking, rafting and mountain biking are on offer in the small local townships.

## The Tongariro Crossing

Often billed as the finest one-day walk in New Zealand, the Tongariro Crossing is a superb introduction to the region's scenic beauty. The track itself takes seven to eight hours to complete, with shuttles available to and from the start and end points. It crosses alpine scrubland and moonscape craters, skirts emerald lakes and passes hot springs before descending through dense podocarp forest to the Ketatahi Hut. Optional side trips climb the summits of Mount Ngaurohoe and Mount Tongariro for panoramic views over the Thermal Plateau.



Emerald Lakes, Tongariro Crossing

#### MHARE ORA, OHAKUNE

At the southern end of the Tongariro National Park is the sleepy, farming community of Ohakune, which emerges as a busy après-ski capital during the winter. Whare Ora, meaning 'place of well-being', provides cosy accommodation in just two guest suites, set in beautiful landscaped gardens with the spectacular mountains as a back-drop. Petanque and croquet are available in the grounds, and private dinners can be arranged for quiet, relaxed evenings.

## RUAPEHU GOLF & COUNTRY LODGE, OHAKUNE

Anyone looking to combine their exploration of New Zealand's great outdoors with a couple of rounds of golf will no doubt enjoy a stay at the Ruapehu Country Lodge. The accommodation itself features four guest rooms, decorated in the style of a French country retreat – tasteful, with elegant luxury. The adjoining golf course waives green fees for lodge guests and your host, Geoff, is more than happy to offer anything from a few helpful pointers to a complete golf tuition package.

## Scenic Flights

The true magnificence of this colourful, dynamic region can best be appreciated from above. Mountain Air are a specialist company offering a variety of scenic flight options over the Tongariro National Park, together with informed commentary about both the geological and Maori history of the region. You will view scenes of past and present volcanic activity as you fly over the volcanoes, the crater lakes, the central desert, native forests and tussock country, and will be rewarded with some outstanding photo opportunities. The majority of flights are by twin-engine aircraft, but helicopter trips are



Ruapehu Golf & Country Lodge, Ohakune

#### New Zealand Gems

When time is short this tour packs some of the highlights of both the North and South Islands into a few exhilarating days, making use of rail travel, helicopter flights, internal flights and cruises to really maximise the experience.

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Day I	Arrive in Auckland and enjoy a day exploring this vibrant city.
Day 2	Drive to Rotorua and soak in a hot pool, before enjoying a Maori hangi (feast) in the evening.
Day 3	Take a detour to Waitomo for a trip underground to see the glow-worms, and then drive to Taupo for an afternoon cruise on the lake.
Day 4	Fly from Taupo to Blenheim on the South Island, and stop for lunch at one of the wineries before continuing on to Kaikoura.
Day 5	Head out onto the bay for an early morning whale watching trip, then drive south to Christchurch for an afternoon in the 'garden city'.
Day 6	Board the scenic TranzAlpine train over Arthur's Pass to Greymouth, and journey down to the glaciers.
Day 7	Take a spectacular early morning helicopter flight over the glaciers, then cross the mighty Haast Pass to Queenstown.
Day 8	A full day at leisure to experience all that Queenstown has on offer.
Day 9	Journey south to Fiordland for a cruise on either Milford or Doubtful

#### **EXTENSIONS**

Day 10

This is a lot to fit into such a short space of time, and any part of the itinerary can be extended, with extra days for relaxation or exploration. Another option is to add a few days at the end perhaps in Queenstown, the Bay of Islands or one of the islands off the coast of Auckland where you can sit back and take in all that you have experienced.

Fly from Queenstown back to

Auckland for your onward flight.

#### TAILOR-MADE TRAVEL

Our tailor-made journeys offer complete freedom of choice. The itineraries and accommodation shown are designed to give you a flavour of what is possible and can be tailored to suit your preferences. Prices vary according to selected accommodation and season, please telephone us to discuss your individual requirements.

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