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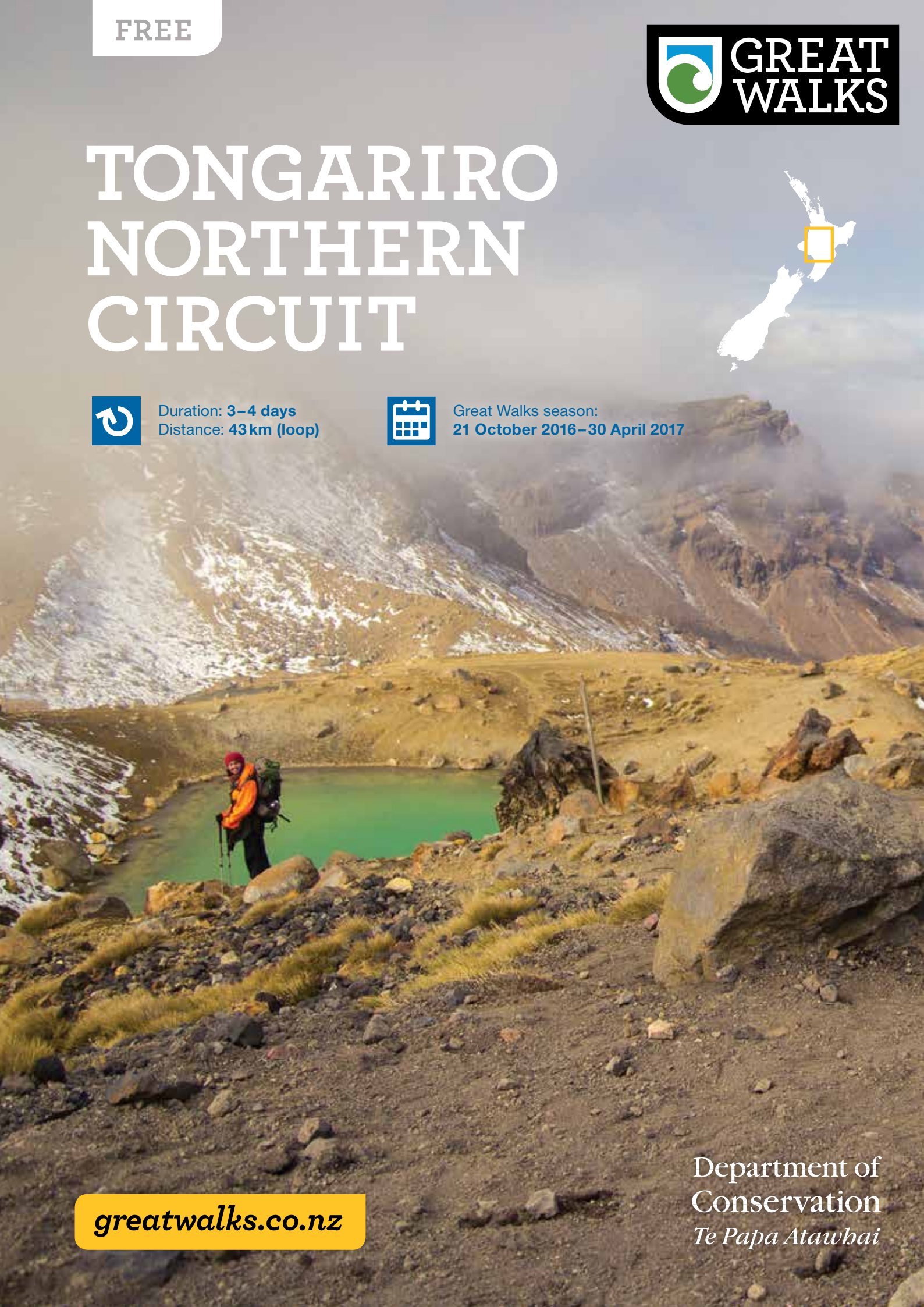
# TONGARIRO NORTHERN CIRCUIT



Duration: **3–4 days**  
Distance: **43 km (loop)**



Great Walks season:  
**21 October 2016–30 April 2017**



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Department of  
Conservation  
*Te Papa Atawhai*



# TONGARIRO NORTHERN CIRCUIT

From alpine herbfields to forests, and tranquil lakes to desert-like plateaux, you'll journey through a landscape of stark contrasts with amazing views at every turn in this dual World Heritage site. Winding its way past Mount Tongariro and Mount Ngauruhoe, you will be dazzled on this circuit by dramatic volcanic landscapes and New Zealand's rich geological and ancestral past.

To the north is Lake Taupo, to the east the rugged Kaimanawa range. On a clear day you may even catch a glimpse of Mount Taranaki on the west coast.

The Tongariro Northern Circuit can be walked in either direction. The track is well marked and signposted, but some sections may be steep, rough or muddy. This guide describes a 4-day clockwise alpine hike for independent, non-guided walkers, starting and finishing at Whakapapa Village, during the Great Walks season (21 October 2016 – 30 April 2017).



Outside the Great Walks season (May to October) walking conditions are more hazardous – see the safety information.



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## ELEVATION PROFILE & TRACK GUIDE



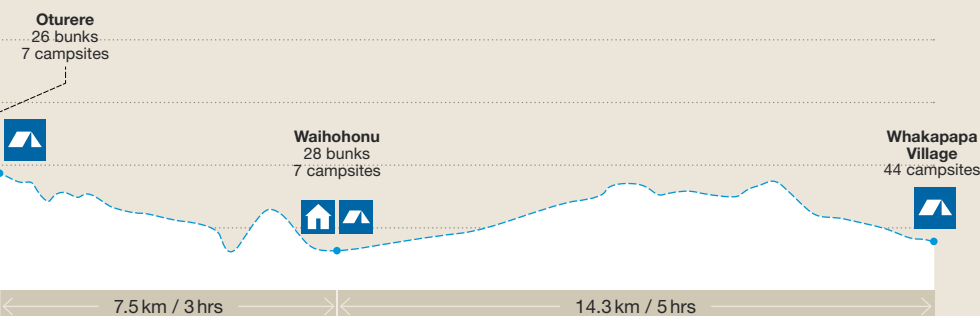
### 3–5 hours, 8.5 km

Your journey begins by making your way across the eroded plains of the Tongariro volcanic complex, a series of explosion craters and volcanic cones and peaks. Venturing through a landscape carved out by ancient lava flows and stream beds, you'll be dwarfed by the massive cone of Mount Ngauruhoe on your right (which you may recognise as Mount Doom from *The Lord of the Rings*). For the final hour the track leads you around Pukekaikiore, one of Tongariro's older steam vents, before reaching Mangatepopo Hut.

### 5 hours, 12.8km

You join the popular Tongariro Alpine Crossing on the second day, crossing remnants of lava flows and climbing steeply up the Devil's Staircase to the expansive Red Crater. Here you'll be dazzled by the aptly named Emerald Lakes, and a (30-minute return) side trip will take you to the equally amazing Blue Lake. These lakes are tapu or sacred to iwi. Please do not touch the water. Descending into Oturere valley, you'll pass through a landscape of other-worldly lava forms before reaching Oturere Hut.





**Day 3: Oturere Hut to Waihohonu Hut**



**Day 4: Waihohonu Hut to Whakapapa Village**

#### 3 hours, 7.5 km

On day 3 the circuit continues through this unique environment. After crossing stream valleys and open gravel fields, the track gradually sidles around the foothills of Ngauruhoe, before descending into a beech-forested valley and crossing a branch of the Waihohonu Stream. A steep climb takes you to the top of the ridge where you'll spot tonight's stay at Waihohonu Hut.

#### 5 hours, 14.3 km

You'll begin your final day following the Waihohonu Stream as you head west towards Tama Saddle, cradled by the towering Mount Ngauruhoe on your right and Mount Ruapehu on your left. On reaching the Tama saddle, a detour will take you to the beautiful Tama Lakes – empty craters now filled with azure blue water. From here, you'll pass the tumbling Taranaki Falls before returning to your starting point at Whakapapa Village.

*Tongariro*, shrouded in alpine mists, its gnarled and battle-scarred majesty reaching to the sky. Ancient stories of epic bygone battles, thunder and lightning relive the time when the Great Mountains fought for the hand of the beautiful Pihanga. Tongariro emerged victorious. A story of love and devotion that has spanned millennia, from before the ancient mists of time, from a time where the mountains ruled upon the land.

This is the world of Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro. These are the stories of Ngāti Tūwharetoa and, more importantly, these are memories of our mountains, of our Gods and of our tribal history and identity. They are carried on each mountain breath, every facet of the landscape reflects this epic past, each shadow holds a story, each breeze carries the whispers of yesterday. Tongariro the spring of passion, Tongariro the devoted lover, Tongariro the source of life-giving waters, Tongariro the Warrior Mountain, Tongariro the soul of Tūwharetoa.

We the Tangata Whenua – The People of the Land – welcome you to our world. It is a world of reciprocity and respect, of guardianship and devotion, of stunning landscapes and epic stories, of deep reverence and spirituality. May the guardians of our mountains keep you safe, may the memory of this experience lie warm in your hearts forever.



***Ko Ngāti Tūwharetoa te Iwi***  
*Ngāti Tūwharetoa is the tribe*

***Ko Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro te Hapū***  
*Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro is the sub-tribe*

Te Ngaehe Wanikau  
*(on behalf of Te Rūnanganui o  
Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro)*

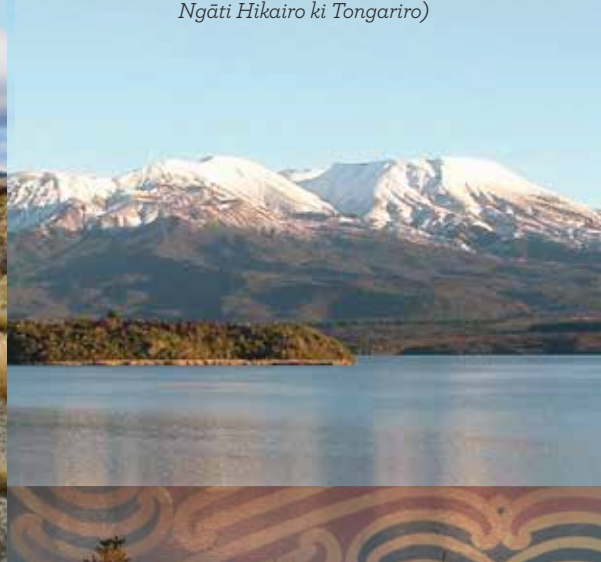


COVER: Emerald Lakes, *Daniel Deans*

ABOVE LEFT TO RIGHT: Track to Mangatepopo Hut, *John Strother*  
Emerald Lakes, *DOC/90 Seconds*; Waihohonu Hut, *Janette Asche*  
Taranaki Falls, *DOC/90 Seconds*

RIGHT: Mount Tongariro, *Bubs Smith*

MAIN PHOTO: View to Mount Ngauruhoe, *Brendan Bombaci (www.kairologic.com)*





## HIGHLIGHTS

1



Photo: Peter Langlands

Air New Zealand partners with the Department of Conservation to help bring native birds back to the beautiful Great Walks.

AIR NEW ZEALAND 



Photo: stokedforsaturday.com



Photo: Daniel Deans



Photo: Janette Asche



Photo: Jimmy Johnson

- 1 Look for the **New Zealand falcon/kārearea**, capable of flying at speeds over 230 km/hr and catching prey up to 6 times their body weight.
- 2 Brush up on your **botanical** knowledge – the plants in the area vary considerably: alpine herbs, tussocks, flaxes, low-growing shrubs, dense beech forests and, during summer, a diverse range of beautiful and unique alpine flowers.
- 3 Take in **Taranaki Falls**. Tumbling over the edge of a large lava flow that erupted from Ruapehu 15,000 years ago, the falls plunge 20 metres into a boulder-ringed pool.
- 4 Drop into the historic **Waihothonu Hut**, the oldest existing mountain hut in New Zealand. It was the first hut built in Tongariro National Park in 1904, and the base for the first recreational skiing. It was in active use for over 60 years.

### 5 Side trip to Tama Lakes (1,314 m)

From the junction: 20 min return to Lower Tama; 1 hr 30 min return to Upper Tama.

Two in-filled explosion craters are named after Tamatea, the high chief of the Tākitimu Canoe, who explored the area six centuries ago. Lower Tama's volcanic debris is slowly washing in and filling the crater. The Upper Tama lake is reputed to be very deep.

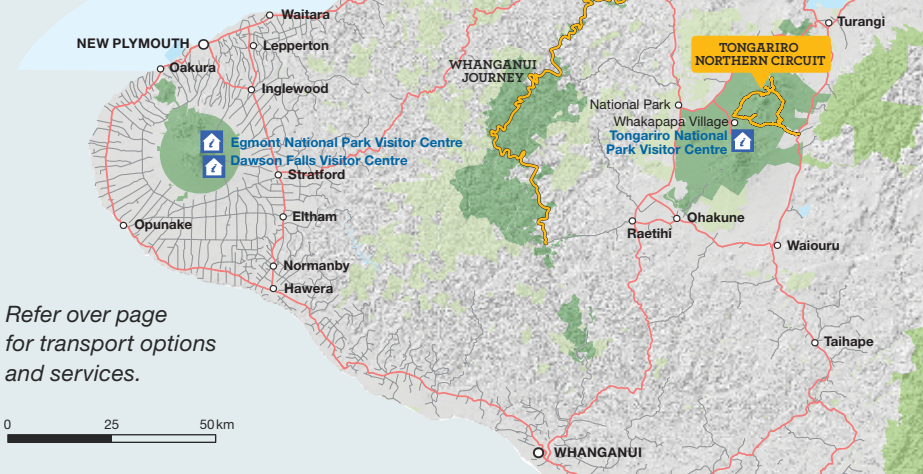


Beware of strong crosswinds on the ridgelines up to the Upper Tama Lake lookout.

## GETTING THERE

The Tongariro Northern Circuit can be accessed from the following locations:

- **Whakapapa Village** (SH48)
- **Mangatepopo Road** (SH47)
- **Ketetahi Road** (SH47)
- **Desert Road** (SH1, 35 km south of Turangi)



Refer over page for transport options and services.

## PLACES TO STAY



Photo: Janette Asche

DOC operates 3 huts with campsites nearby along the Tongariro Northern Circuit, which **must be booked in advance during the Great Walks season** (21 October 2016 – 30 April 2017). Whakapapa Holiday Park is a Serviced campsite. See [www.doc.govt.nz/campsites](http://www.doc.govt.nz/campsites) for details.



### Great Walks huts

\$32 per adult per night; 17 years and under free (bookings required).

During the Great Walks season the huts have bunks, mattresses, heating, toilets, basic gas cooking facilities, solar-powered lighting and cold running water; and a DOC ranger is in residence. The huts do not provide food, cooking utensils or showers.

Outside the Great Walks season facilities are greatly reduced and there are no wardens. Bookings are not required, huts and campsites are first come, first served and fees are reduced. See the website for details.



### Great Walks Campsites

\$14 per adult per night; 17 years and under free (bookings required).

The campsites offer basic facilities including toilets, sinks and a water supply. Some also have picnic tables and cooking shelters. Campers may use hut facilities, though not the beds.

## Sign me up! What do I do next?



- 1 Start off at [greatwalks.co.nz/tongariro](http://greatwalks.co.nz/tongariro) for more information.



- 2 Book your huts and campsites online or at a DOC Visitor Centre.



- 3 Book your transport to and from the track – operators are listed online and in this brochure.



- 4 Buy your food and **pack your bags** – download the Great Walks packing list and make sure you have everything you need for a 4-day independent unguided walk.



- 5 Read up on **safety** and make sure you're well prepared for your journey and changeable weather at [greatwalks.co.nz/tongariro](http://greatwalks.co.nz/tongariro). Make sure you have left your intentions with a trusted contact at [adventuresmart.org.nz](http://adventuresmart.org.nz).



- 6 Check the weather, and make sure you've downloaded and printed your **ticket and official track guide**. You can also get a track guide and the latest weather updates from the Tongariro National Park Visitor Centre.



- 7 **All set!** Lace up your boots and get hiking. Don't forget to share your experience on [facebook.com/GreatWalks](https://facebook.com/GreatWalks).



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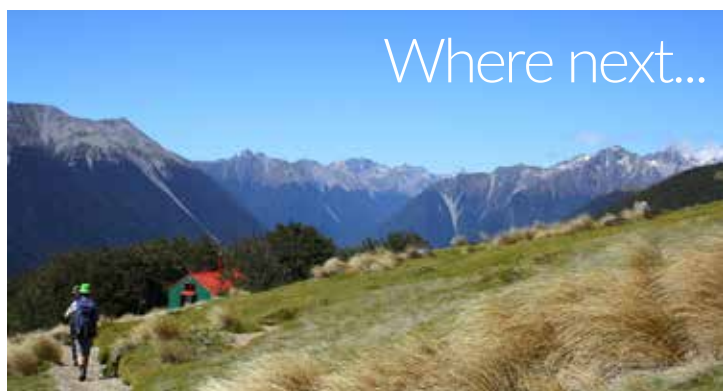
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## Know before you go

It is **important** to plan your trip thoroughly to ensure you stay safe, and have a great time. Before you go, know the **Outdoor Safety Code** – 5 Simple rules to help you #makeithome.

- 1. Plan your trip.** Travel times vary greatly in New Zealand, so carefully planning your route is essential. Seek local information about what to take, and allow enough time for the journey. Book accommodation, transport and transfers to the start/end of track early.
- 2. Tell someone your plans** – Safety is your responsibility. Leave your intentions – including your trip details and emergency contact information – with a trusted contact. It could save your life if things go wrong. Head to [adventuresmart.org.nz](http://adventuresmart.org.nz) for more information.
- 3. Be aware of the weather** – New Zealand weather is very changeable. Plan for the worst, expect the best. Check [metservice.com](http://metservice.com) for the most up to date info.
- 4. Know your limits** – Always follow the track markers and signposted tracks. Off-track navigation is not recommended for novice walkers in New Zealand. A good level of fitness is required to walk the track. You can expect to walk up to 6 hours a day depending on your fitness level. If you get into trouble don't make a bad situation worse. Think **STAR** – Stop / Think / Assess / React.
- 5. Take sufficient supplies** – With NZ's changeable conditions many hikers are frequently caught out by isolated local conditions. Carry – and expect to use – rain jackets all year round. Take an extra day's supply of food and an emergency shelter. Don't rely on cellphone signal alone for communication. Food and drinks are not available to purchase at Great Walks huts or campsites. Plan to be self-sufficient.

**Remember – your safety is your responsibility**

## Tongariro Northern Circuit safety

The information in this brochure relates to the Tongariro Northern Circuit Track in the Great Walks season (21 October 2016 – 30 April 2017).

- This track is not recommended for children under age 10, due to the exposed mountainous environment and often adverse weather conditions.
- The Tongariro Northern Circuit is considered challenging terrain – most of it is open, exposed and on uneven track surfaces.
- The weather can change suddenly, from warm and sunny to cold and wet with strong winds of over 60 km/hr that can close the track. Dress warmly as wind-chill danger is worse at these times.
- From Red Crater to Te Maari craters is an Active Volcanic Hazard Zone. There is still an increased volcanic risk following the eruption of the Te Maari Crater (near Ketetahi Shelter) in 2012. Eruptions are possible without warning. Please pay attention to signs.
- Mt Ngauruhoe is a popular climb but is not part of the main Northern Circuit or Tongariro Alpine Crossing trails. If you're planning to climb Mt Ngauruhoe, you need to be well prepared for the unique hazards and environment. Talk to the Tongariro Visitor Centre staff before taking on this climb.
- Go to [greatwalks.co.nz/tongariro](http://greatwalks.co.nz/tongariro) 'Know before you go' section for detailed safety information, and 'What to take' section for a comprehensive gear list.



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 short daylight hours. Avalanche-prone bridges across some major watercourses are removed. DOC does not manage hazards such as flooding or avalanches. Walking the Tongariro Northern Circuit at this time should **only** be attempted by people who are very well experienced in the New Zealand backcountry and have remote navigation, river crossing and alpine skills. Alpine-specific trip planning based on the Outdoor Safety Code is critical for you and your group safety. The consequences are severe if not correctly managed. In addition, **facilities are greatly reduced** – including no gas for cooking, a limited water supply, and no rangers or emergency radio facilities. For more information, see 'Outside the Great Walks season' at [greatwalks.co.nz/tongariro](http://greatwalks.co.nz/tongariro).