Tongariro Alpine Crossing

★★★☆☆

Walking

Difficulties
Medium , Hard

Length
19.4 km

Journey Time
7 - 8 hours one way (allow full day)

Region
Manawatu/Whanganui

Sub-Region
Ruapehu

Part of Collections
Te Araroa - New Zealand's Trail , Te Araroa highlights , Te Araroa - North Island , Department of Conservation Day Hikes

The Tongariro Alpine Crossing track passes over varied and spectacular volcanic terrain. Trek across a volcanic alpine landscape of dramatic contrasts – steaming vents, glacial valleys, ancient lava flows, alpine vegetation and vivid crater lakes, all with stunning views. Be prepared for a long and challenging day out.

Tongariro Crossing is now open SOBO as far as Mangatepopo Hut. The Mangatepopo Track from Mangatepopo Hut to Whakapapa Village is closed. Wakers are not permitted on Mangatepopo Road, but at certain times it may be possible to get a ride from the road end 1 km below Mangatepopo Hut to SH47 with a shuttle driver.

Fore 2026-27 there is a new route for Te Araroa walkers, using the northern part of the Tongariro Crossing as far as the Emerald Lakes, km 1,145, the eastern part of the Northern Circuit to Waihohonu Hut, and the Waihohonu and Tama Lakes tracks to Whakapapa Village. This route was previously described as the **Northern Circuit detour**

There is an optional longer mountain route for Te Araroa walkers after Waihohonu Hut, using the eastern and southern parts of the Round the Mountain Track to exit through the Mangahuia Track to SH47. This route is covered in more detail in the **Round the Mountain detour** Alert

Tongariro National Park is a UNESCO dual World Heritage Area and was the first in the world to receive cultural World Heritage Status.

- Description
- Know before you go
- Winter tramping

All waterways including the lakes on Tongariro and his peaks Ngāuruhoe and Ruapehu are sacred to local iwi, Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro. Kaumātua Te Ngaehe Wanikau asks visitors to the area to respect the sanctity of the maunga tapu (sacred mountains) by not touching or entering any of the waterways including the alpine lakes. Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro places extreme importance on their guardian role in protecting Tongariro and his peaks.

Essential gear list

- Consider a compass and map (in poor visibility)
- Waterproof raincoat and over-trousers
- Warm woollen or polypropylene clothing
- Woollen hat and mittens
- Sturdy boots (sports trainers/running shoes and sandals are not suitable)
- Food and drink
- First aid kit
- Sunscreen, sunhat and sunglasses

Note: Te Araroa track descriptions work from North to South whereas the Department of Conservation encourages trampers to walk the Tongariro Alpine Crossing in the other direction – from South to North. So be aware, the crossing is a very popular tramp and in following these instructions, you will be going against the flow.

Route from North to South - Te Araroa southbound - Ketetahi to Mangatepopo - 18km

From the Ketetahi Road end, the track goes through a cool podocarp-hardwood forest which is a relaxed contrast to the coming long ascent to the old Ketetahi Shelter site. The track travels alongside a stream polluted with minerals from Ketetahi Springs and, at two points, passes over the tongue of a lava flow from Te Maari Crater.

From the forest bush line, the track winds its way up and up and up, through tussock slopes past the Ketetahi Springs to the old Ketetahi Shelter site.

- Note: The Ketetahi Springs are on private land. The Ketetahi Trust, representing the landowners, has permitted trekkers to cross part of their land but this does not include access to Ketetahi Springs. Please respect this restraint and follow the poled route.

From the old Ketetahi Shelter site, the track ascends further before sidling down around the flanks of North Crater to the Blue Lake and over the Mars-like Central Crater. Then it's past the three water-filled explosion craters called the Emerald Lakes; their brilliant greenish colour is caused by minerals which have leached from the adjoining thermal area. The Tongariro Northern Circuit track to Oturere Hut branches off to the left at the lowest lake.

Taking care on the loose stones and gravel on the track as you ascend steeply to the summit of Red Crater (1886m), the highest point on the Tongariro Alpine Crossing. You can also smell the sulphur, evidence that Red Crater is still active.

The Mangatepopo Track from Mangatepopo Hut to Whakapapa Village is closed due to fire damage. See the **Mangatepopo to National Park** notes for a suggested alternative starting from the Emerald Lakes at km 1,151.8

The carpark at Mangatepopo Road is 1km (15 minutes) from the Mangatepopo Track turnoff.

Mangatepopo Hut is free from 1st May to 20th October. From 21st October it is classed as a Great Walk and requires booking. Backcountry Hut passes are not useable.

Winter Conditions

You need to be skilled and prepared to complete the Tongariro Alpine Crossing, especially during winter. An ice axe and crampons are essential, as is competency using them.

What to bring

- Ice axe and crampons (and know how to use them)
- Snow gaiters
- Avalanche probe/snow shovel in winter
- Avalanche transceiver

How to tramp the Tongariro Alpine Crossing in winter

Conditions

You will need to be skilled and prepared to complete the Tongariro Alpine Crossing, Northern Circuit and Round the Mountain tracks in winter. An ice axe and crampons are essential, as is competency using them.

Potential hazards

- Always check the weather forecast and take local advice as weather can change quickly and drastically
- Always carry extra warm, wind-proof clothing, safety and navigational equipment
- Pole route markers may be difficult to see in foggy conditions.
- Water from the upper Mangatepopo stream, Emerald Lakes and Ketetahi Springs is not suitable for drinking due to the high mineral content. Treat ALL water in the park.
- Winter tramping: Be fully equipped with ice axe, crampons, avalanche probe/snow shovel/transceiver.
- From the beginning of 26 October (Labour Day weekend) to 30 April, parking restrictions (4 hour maximum) are in place at the road-ends - book a shuttle.
- Over winter, additional hazards are present:
    - Snow and ice
    - Avalanche risk
    - Sub-zero temperatures.

Tongariro Alpine Crossing (Red Crater) weather - NIWA

NIWA 3-day forecast

No dogs, horses, guns or bikes. No drones.

How to tramp in winter: Tongariro Alpine Crossing | Tongariro Northern Circuit | Round the Mountain Track

How to get here

The nearest towns are:

- Whakapapa (10.4 km)
- National Park (13.5 km)
- Turangi (36.7 km)
- Raetihi (47.6 km)
- Ohakune (48 km)
- Taumarunui (61.5 km)
- Taupō (86.5 km)

There is very limited parking near the access points to the track. From the beginning of 26 October (Labour Day weekend) to 30 April, parking restrictions (4 hour maximum) are in place at the road-ends.

Excellent shuttle services run from all local towns - arrange through the following i-SITEs:

- Whakapapa i-SITE 07 892 3075, State Highway 48, Whakapapa Village
- Turangi i-SITE 0800 288 726, Ngawaka Place, Turangi
- Ohakune i-SITE 0800 647 483, 54 Clyde Street, Ohakune
- Taumarunui i-Site 07 895 7494, Railway Station, Taumarunui
- Taupo i-SITE 0800 525 382, 30 Tongariro Street, Taupo

Getting to/from the start

The Whanganui region starts at the carpark at the northern end of the Tongariro Alpine Crossing, 1km off SH 46, Tongariro National Park.

- InterCity - P: 09 583 5780 - E: info@intercity.co.nz
- Kiwi Experience - P: 09 336 4288 - Hop-on, Hop-off bus tours

Getting back from the end

Southern access road : Mangatepopo Track turnoff, SH47, Tongariro National Park. Te Aroroa does not exit here, it continue on the track to Whakapapa

Transport

There are several shuttle companies providing morning pick-ups from nearby towns and delivery to the track start, such as National Park, Ōhakune, Tūrangi and Taupō. They include:

- Ruapehu Alpine Shuttles - Ōwhango - P: 020 4111 4648 - E: ruapehushuttle@gmail.com
- Tongariro Expeditions - Shuttle service to the Tongariro Crossing - P: 07 377 0435 - E: info@tongariroexpeditions.com (to/from Taupō, Tūrangi, Ketetahi, Whakapapa) - Multiple return times from the Northern end of the track (6 km from the Holiday Park).
- Dempsey Buses - 25 Seddon Street, Raetihi 4632 - P: 06 385 4022 - Info@dempseybuses.co.nz

We recommend booking a shuttle as there is a 4-hour parking restriction at both Mangatepopo and Ketetahi Road ends.

Accommodation

Trail Pass

Mangatepopo Hut - km 1,158.9 - 20% discount on hut stay with The Trail Pass (Bookings required)

Mangatepopo Campsite - km 1,158.92 - Camping next to hut included in The Trail Pass (Bookings required)

Waihohonu Hut - Northern Circuit - 20% discount on hut stay with The Trail Pass (Bookings required)

Waihohonu Campsite - Northern Circuit - Camping next to hut included in The Trail Pass (Bookings required)

Before starting the Tongariro Alpine Crossing

- Tongariro Family Holiday Park - State Highway 47, Tongariro - P: 07 386 8062 - Camping, cabins and units. Highly recommended spot to rest up and recoup between 42 Traverse and Tongariro Alpine Crossing. Halfway point between Taumarunui and National Park
- Cross X Roads camping at 2010 Rotoaira Road, Tongariro Forest, on SH47 just north of the intersection at km 1,134.1 where Te Araroa turns right onto SH46 (Lake Rotoaira Road) towards the northern end of the Tongariro Crossing. TA hikers $10 per night. Campsite has a composting toilet, fresh water, amazing mountain views and very wide open space. If we are running transport for the Crossing on any given day that we may have TA hikers staying, we are happy to drop them at Ketetahi carpark entrance at no cost as we are going there to pick up customers anyway. Hosts Ma 021 0272 2828 and Shane 021 053 8882. Walkers please phone, no need to book through the website

Other Accommodation

- Old Ketetahi Shelter site - due to extensive damage in the 2012 eruption this is no longer a hut. Toilets are available but there is no longer a water supply and no accommodation.
- Department of Conservation Mangatepopo Hut - needs to be booked online or by visiting/phoning any Department of Conservation Visitor Centre. 20 bunks, heating and gas in peak season. Topo50 map sheet BH36, E1824389, N5663908
- Ōhakune Station Lodge, 60 Thames St, Ōhakune - P: 06 385 8797 E: ohakune@yha.co.nz

For those taking a modified route, YHA Ōhakune Station Lodge is a 1906 historical villa located in the beautiful alpine town of Ōhakune, adjacent to the world-renowned Tongariro National Park. Guests enjoy the use of extensive facilities including shared and private rooms, full kitchen amenities and two lounges. During the brilliant Central Plateau summers, the outdoor woodfire pizza oven is fired up. Guests can enjoy friendly games of cricket or simply relax on the verandas overlooking the peaceful native gardens while taking in the views of Mt Ruapehu

Please note that freedom camping at Ketetahi Road and Mangatepopo Road ends is not allowed.

Food And Supply

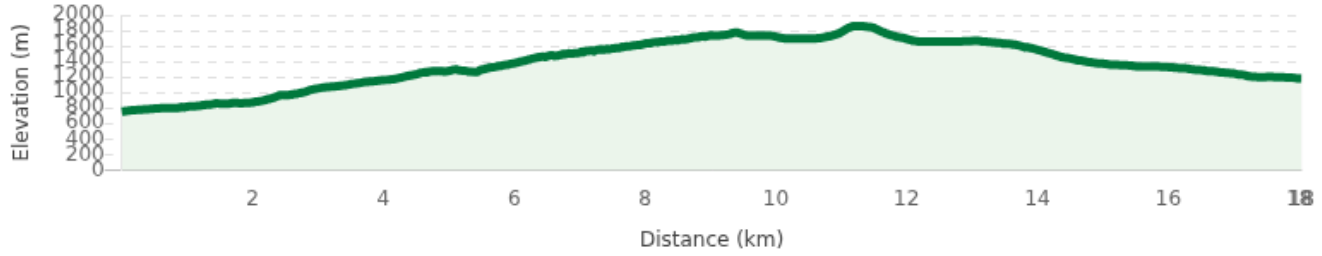
Before Tongariro Crossing

Tongariro Holiday Park on SH 47 at km 1,114 does not stock groceries for hiker re-supply. They will accept hiker supply boxes but it is essential to phone first and arrange as their mail is collected approximately weekly from Turangi. P: 07 386 8062 E: info@thp.co.nz

Water

Water from the upper Mangatepopo stream, Emerald Lakes and Ketetahi Springs is not suitable for drinking due to high mineral content. There is no drinkable water available between the head of the Mangatepopo Valley and Mangatepopo Hut. Respect the water supply at Mangatepopo Hut, as this is limited and is the supply for those staying at the Hut. Treat all water in the park.

Track Elevation and Map



More information

Before starting Te Araroa either as a through-walker of the whole country or a section walker, please register on Te Araroa website. Please also visit the website or download the app for detailed maps, trail alerts and other relevant information.

This track is part of the Herenga ā Nuku Aotearoa track database. Herenga ā Nuku has maps and advice about public access to the outdoors.

We encourage you to continue gaining the skills and knowledge required for a safe trip. The NZ Mountain Safety Council has lots of free resources and information you can use. These can be accessed via www.mountainsafety.org.nz.

We recommend trying these online learning tools:

- Trip Planning
- Tramping/field Skills
- Basic Navigation
- River Safety

Additionally, check out the range of helpful videos available from the NZ Mountain Safety Council YouTube channel.

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