

# Taupo & the Central Plateau



TAUPO & THE CENTRAL PLATEAU

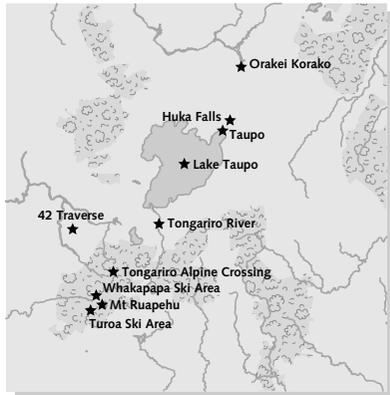
Don't think for a minute that this plateau is some boring old elevated flat landmass (which is what the dictionary will tell you), because this place rocks. For a starter, it ain't flat. In the middle of the plateau and the heart of Tongariro National Park are the three massive peaks of Tongariro, Ruapehu and Ngauruhoe, all sitting like something from another planet. Then there's New Zealand's largest lake, Taupo, a vast, water-filled crater, the legacy of a volcanic blast that shattered the island and shook up the world more than 26,500 years ago. And the area is still active, with Mt Ruapehu often having a hissy fit, the last blast in 2007. This is all part of the Taupo Volcanic Zone, a line of geothermal surfacings that stretches to White Island via Rotorua.

But the drama doesn't stop there, for this area now rivals Rotorua for spectacular back-to-nature activities and daredevil escapades. Perhaps you fancy fly-fishing in the world-class Tongariro River, hooning up to Huka Falls in a jetboat, or bouncing on a bungy over the Waikato River? Or maybe this is your chance to skydive. If rambling's your thing, there's always Tongariro Northern Circuit, one of NZ's most achievable Great Walks, or the Tongariro Alpine Crossing, touted as one of the world's top one-dayers. Then again, you could wait until winter, when the mountains are dusted with snow: there's top skiing at Turoa and Whakapapa ski fields.

From mountain high to plateau low, and out on the luscious lake, this place is gonna float your boat.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Trekking on the tops over the magnificent **Tongariro Alpine Crossing** (p309)
- Hurling to earth from 15,000ft at 200km/h strapped to a complete stranger in the world's skydiving capital, **Taupo** (p292)
- Carving fresh powder at **Turoa Ski Area** or **Whakapapa Ski Area** (p311)
- Biking till your bum hurts on the **42 Traverse** (p314)
- Bagging a monster trout on **Tongariro River** (p303)
- Paddling **Lake Taupo** (p294) to check out the modern Maori carvings
- Rediscovering the stunning 'lost valley' of **Orakei Korako** (p302)
- Rocketing up the Waikato River to the base of **Huka Falls** (p300) on a jetboat
- Plunging 47m over **Waikato River** (p292) on the end of a rubber band



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 07	■ www.laketaupo.nz	■ www.visitruapehu.com
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## Climate

Due to its altitude, the Central Plateau has a generally cool climate, with temperatures ranging from around 3°C in winter up to a maximum of around 24°C in summer. Above 2500m there is a small year-round snowfield, while July to October is the skiing season at Whakapapa and Turoa, and in some places snow can linger on into spring. On the mountains, storms and freezing temperatures can occur at any time.

## Getting There & Around

Air New Zealand has regular flights from Taupo to Auckland and Wellington. There are also charter flights linking Tongariro with any destination in the North and South Island, run by Mountain Air. The Tranz Scenic Overlander train on the Auckland-Wellington line stops at National Park and Ohakune. From Taupo, InterCity buses connect with most major destinations around NZ, while Naked Bus services most major routes. There are several private shuttle-bus services operating around Tongariro National Park, and serving the snowfields in winter.

## LAKE TAUPO REGION

NZ's largest lake, Lake Taupo, sits in the caldera of a volcano which began erupting about 300,000 years ago. The caldera was formed by a collapse during the Oruanui eruption, about 26,500 years ago, which threw out 750 cu km of ash and pumice, making Krakatoa (8 cu km) look like a pimple. (For more on volcanic activity, see p300). The surrounding area is still volcanically active and, like Rotorua, has fascinating thermal areas.

Today the 606-sq-km lake and its surrounding waterways are serene enough to be the world's trout-fishing capital. International trout-fishing tournaments are held on Lake Taupo annually on the Anzac Day long weekend (on or around 25 April), with much of the action centring around Turangi.

Well positioned by the lake, Taupo is a popular centre with visitors and has plenty of activities and facilities to cater for families and independent travellers alike.

## TAUPO

pop 21,040

The increasingly exciting town of Taupo now rivals Rotorua as the North Island's adrena-

## TAUPO & THE CENTRAL PLATEAU FACTS

**Eat** Trout, preferably smoked. But you'll have to catch it first!

**Drink** A mouthful of water from the Waikato River as you bungy over it (p292)

**Read** *Awesome Forces*, by Hamish Campbell and Geoff Hicks, which tells the fascinating geological story of NZ in explosive detail

**Listen to** A kiwi calling in the night, but only if you're camped in the right spot

**Watch** *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and see Mt Ngauruhoe (p309) star as Mt Doom

**Swim** at Lake Taupo – truly invigorating

**Festival** Ohakune's Carrot Festival, celebrating all that is orange and pointy (p318)

**Tackiest tourist attraction** Ohakune's Big Carrot (p318)

**Go green** With Whirinaki Escapes, guided ecocultural walks in Whirinaki Forest (p296)

TAUPO & THE CENTRAL PLATEAU

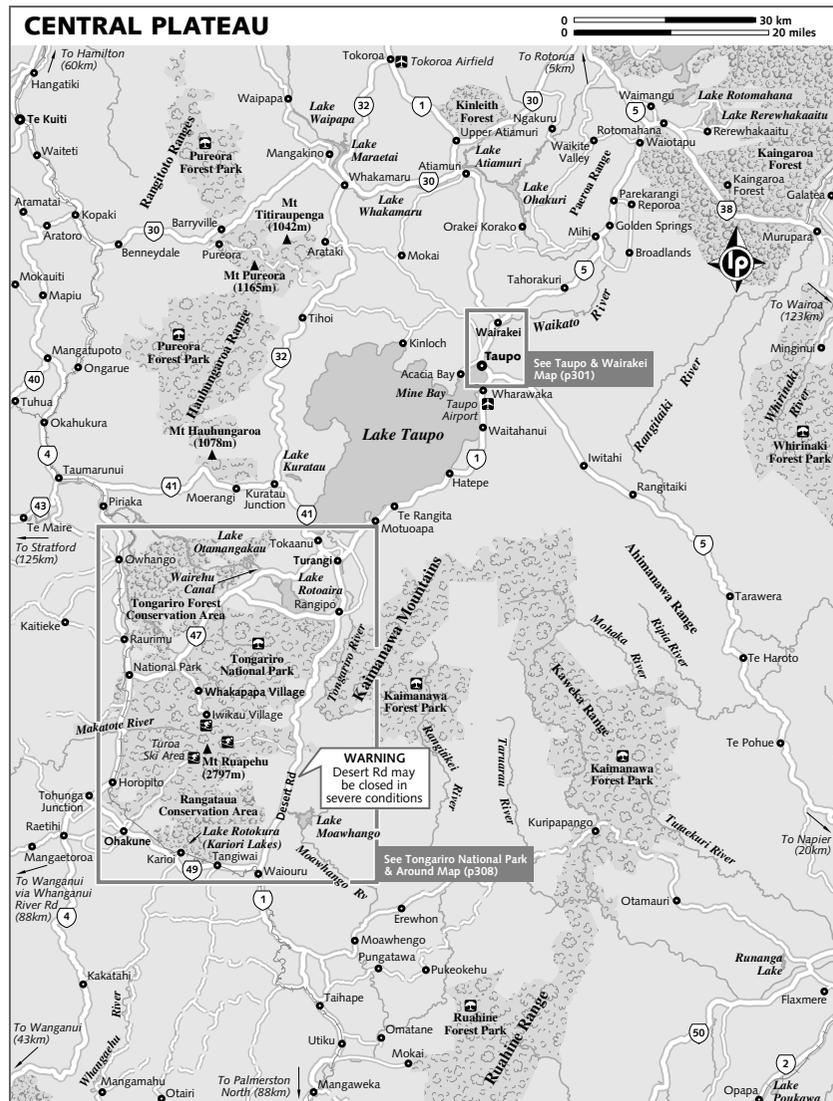
line capital, with an abundance of skydiving, jetboating and bungy jumping to get your blood pumping. There's lots of fun to be had in the town itself, more on its fringes, and still more just a little further afield, such as the lost world of Orakei Korakei, an hour's drive away.

Taupo nestles among spectacular natural wonders. It sits on the northeastern shores of the lake, enjoying unrestricted views across to the peaks of Tongariro National Park. Lake Taupo is the origin of NZ's longest river, the Waikato, which flows from the lake at the township, gate-crashing its way through the Huka Falls and Aratiatia Rapids, before settling down for a sedate ramble through the North Island and meeting its maker on the west coast just south of Auckland.

State Hwy 1 (SH1) passes through the middle of the town, making it easily accessible for travellers, and packed with transient traffic for much of the high season.

## History

When Maori chief Tamatea-arikinui first visited this area, his footsteps reverberated, making him think the ground was hollow and causing him to dub it Tapuacharuru (Resounding Footsteps). The modern name originates from the story of Tia, who discovered the lake and slept beside it, draped in his



cloak, so it became known as Taupo Nui a Tia (The Great Cloak of Tia).

Europeans settled here in force during the East Coast Land War (1868–72), when it was a strategic military base: Colonel JM Roberts built a redoubt in 1869, and a garrison of mounted police remained until the defeat of Te Kooti (see the boxed text, p369) later that year.

In the 1870s the government bought the land from Maori. In the 20th century the mass ownership of the motorcar saw Taupo grow from a lakeside village of about 750 people to a large resort town that could be driven to from most points in the North Island. Today the population still grows considerably at peak holiday times, when New Zealanders

## MAORI NZ: CENTRAL PLATEAU

The North Island's central region is home to a group of mountains that feature in several legends of lust and betrayal, ending in a few mountains fleeing to other parts of the island (for example, see Mt Taranaki's sad tale, p254).

Long after all that action was over, the chief Ngatoro-i-rangi (see the boxed text, p307), fresh off the boat from Hawaiki, explored this region and named the mountains that remained. The most sacred was Tongariro, seen as the leader of all the other mountains.

The major *iwi* (tribe) of the region is **Tuwharetoa** ([www.tuwharetoa.co.nz](http://www.tuwharetoa.co.nz)), one of the few *iwi* in NZ that has retained an undisputed *ariki* (high chief). The current *ariki* is Tumu Te Heuheu, great-great-grandson of Te Heuheu Tukino (a descendent of Ngatoro-i-rangi), who gifted the mountains of Tongariro to NZ in 1887. The Tuwharetoa *ariki* holds a similarly revered position in Maoridom as the leader of the Waikato-based King Movement (see boxed text, p219).

To discover the stories of local Maori and their ancestors, visit the meeting house at Taupo Museum (below) and carved cliff faces at Mine Bay (below), or visit Wairakei Terraces (p302). Get up close and personal with the stately mountain on the Tongariro Alpine Crossing (p309).

and international visitors alike flock to the lakeshore.

## Information

**Automobile Association** (AA; Map p292; ☎ 07-378 6000; 3 Tamamutu St; ☎ 8.30am–5pm Mon–Fri).

**Cybershed** (Map p292; ☎ 07-377 4345; 115 Tongariro St; ☎ 9am–10pm) Offers IT services, internet access and sells British treats to the homesick.

**Experience Taupo** (Map p292; ☎ 07-377 0704; [www.experiencetaupo.com](http://www.experiencetaupo.com); 57 Tongariro St; ☎ 8.30am–6.30pm Apr–Oct, to 7.30pm Nov–Mar) Books most local traveller services and has internet access.

**Global Gossip** (Map p292; 11 Tuwharetoa St; ☎ 07-376 9920) Internet access.

**House of Travel** (Map p292; ☎ 07-377 2700; 17 Heu Heu St) For plane and train tickets.

**Log On** (Map p292; ☎ 07-376 5901; 71 Tongariro St; ☎ 8.30am–9pm) Has internet access and tourist brochures; also books tours.

**Post office** (cnr Horomatangi & Ruapehu Sts) For postal services and currency exchange at the Kiwibank outlet.

**Taupo i-SITE** (Map p292; ☎ 07-376 0027; [www.lake.tauponz.com](http://www.lake.tauponz.com); Tongariro St; ☎ 8.30am–5pm) Handles bookings for all local accommodation, transport and activities; has a free town map as well as Department of Conservation (DOC) maps and information.

**Travel Smart Taupo** (Map p292; ☎ 07-378 9028; 28 Horomatangi St) Books train and plane tickets.

**Taupo Travel Centre** (Map p292; ☎ 07-378 9032; 16 Gascoigne St) Books most local traveller services including transport.

## Sights

Taupo's main attractions are the beautiful lake, mountains beyond and all the things you can do in, on and around them. The famous fa-

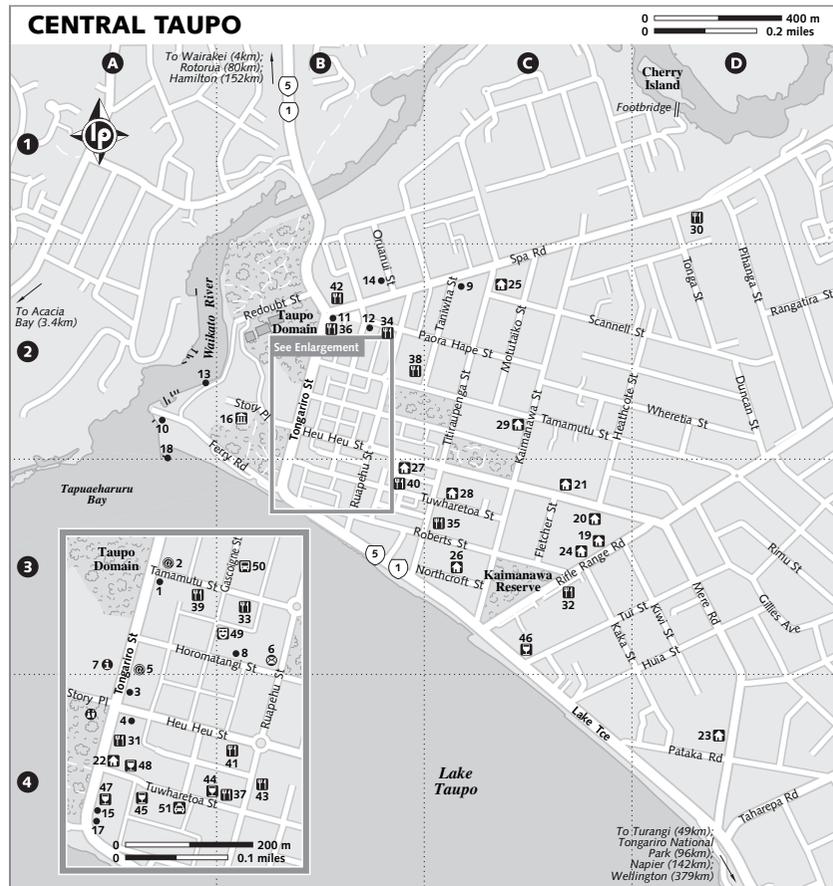
vourites, however, such as Huka Falls and the thermal regions, lie north of town on the road to Rotorua. To the west, the serene beaches of **Acacia Bay** (Map p290) lie 5km west of Taupo, perfect for a day trip on sunny days.

Behind the i-SITE, the **Taupo Museum & Art Gallery** (Map p292; ☎ 07-376 0414; [www.taupomuseum.co.nz](http://www.taupomuseum.co.nz); Story Pl; adult/child \$5/free; ☎ 10.30am–4.30pm) has local historical displays including those on the local forestry, nautical and trout-fishing industries, a mock-up of a 19th-century shop, and a moa skeleton. There are regular visiting art exhibitions, too. The centrepiece of the collection is a Maori meeting house, **Te Aroha o Rongoheikume**, adorned with elaborate carvings. A recent addition is the **Ora Garden of Wellbeing**, a re-creation of the gold medal-winning NZ entry into the 2004 Chelsea Flower Show. It's quite small, but features over 1000 native plants and a steamy lizard scene.

At the lake's Mine Bay are 10m-high **Maori carvings** (Map p290), accessible only by boat; see Fishing & Cruising, p293, and Water Sports, p294. They were carved by master carver Matahi Whakataka-Brightwell in the late 1970s, and depict Ngatoro-i-rangi, the visionary Maori navigator who guided the Tuwharetoa and Te Arawa tribes to the Taupo area over a thousand years ago. Matahi also carved two smaller figures of Celtic design, which depict the south wind and a mermaid.

## Activities

Adrenaline addicts should look out for special deals that combine several activities for a reduced price.



## SKYDIVING

At last count there were more than 30,000 jumps a year from Taupo, which makes it the skydiving capital of the world. It's certainly a terrific spot to do it. All those beautiful places you see from ground level are patchworked together in a brilliant blanket of natural colour, the highlights of which are the deep blue lake and the brilliant white of the snowcapped peaks – they suddenly look so much smaller! Three operators sit alongside each other at the airport and offer some of the best rates in NZ. All offer similar packages that can include town pick-ups, video, photos and T-shirts.

**Freefall** (☎ 0800 373 335; www.freefall.co.nz; from \$219)

**Skydive Taupo** (☎ 0800 586 766; www.skydivetaupo.co.nz; from \$220)

**Taupo Tandem Skydiving** (☎ 0800 275 934; www.tts.net.nz) from \$219

## BUNGY JUMPING

The picturesque **Taupo Bungy** (Map p301; ☎ 0800 888 408, 07-377 1135; www.taupobungy.com; solo/tandem jump \$109/218; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Apr-Sep, up to 7pm Oct-Mar) is the most popular in the North Island. It sits on a cliff edge over the mighty Waikato River, with plenty of vantage points if you're too chicken to jump. Non-chickens will be led onto a platform jutting 20m out over a cliff (the world's first cantilever jump, for engineering boffins) and will be convinced with masterly skill to throw themselves off the edge. A heart-stopping 47m hurtle and a few bounces back and it's safely into the

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boat. You can also opt for a slight dunk in the river, or strap yourself to a friend and leap off together.

## FISHING & CRUISING

Anglers are in the right place, because this region is justifiably world famous for trout. Fly-fishing is the only fishing you can do on all rivers flowing into the lake, and within a 300m radius of the river mouths. Spin fishing is allowed on the Waikato River (flowing out of the lake) and on the Tokaanu tailrace, flowing into the lake from the Tokaanu Power Station.

There are numerous fishing guides around Taupo and Turangi (see p303), most happy to negotiate price depending on the trip (\$250 for a half-day is a reasonable ballpark, and will include equipment and licence). Rates are reasonable, given that you're getting years of local knowledge and individual attention, and hopefully a fish. To help you take a punt on your own, visit www.taupo.com, a regularly updated local guide to the best spots (or maybe red herrings?).

You can arrange guided trips, or get gear and licences for independent trips at **Greenstone Fishing** (Map p292; ☎ 07-378 3714; www.greenstonefishing.co.nz; 147 Tongariro St; gear hire from \$10; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, to 4.30pm Sat & Sun), **Hunting & Fishing** (Map p292; ☎ 07-378 4449; www.huntingandfishing.co.nz; 27 Gascoigne St; gear hire from \$15; ☎ 8am-5.30pm Mon-Sun) and **Taupo Rod & Tackle** (Map p292; ☎ 07-378 5337; www.tauporodandtackle.co.nz; 7 Tongariro St; gear

hire \$20-45; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-5pm Sun). A licence is required for lake and river fishing. Make sure you always carry it with you, as there are hefty fines for violations. Licences cost \$15.50/34/81 per day/week/year and are available via the operators listed earlier, the i-SITE and launch office (below).

There are plenty of boat-charter operators offering both lake fishing trips and cruises. Most will take you to the see the Maori carvings at Mine Bay (p291). Standard boat trips take in other sights along the way and take between 1½ and 2½ hours. For something with a little more zip, take the **Cruise Cat** (Map p292; tickets \$35; ☎ 10.30am), a large, modern launch. Sunday brunch trips (\$53) are especially worthwhile.

The best place to book trips – whether fishing or cruising – is through the **launch office** (Lake Taupo Charter Office; Map p292; ☎ 07-378 3444; www.fishcruisetaupo.co.nz; ☎ 9am-5pm daily Dec-Mar, 9.30am-3pm daily Apr-Nov), located at the marina, which books for more than 20 boats, catering to individuals or groups.

## SWIMMING & BATHING

The **AC Baths** (Map p301; ☎ 07-376 0350; www.taupovenues.co.nz; AC Baths Ave; adult/child \$6.50/2.50, sauna/slide \$3/3; ☎ 6am-9pm) at the Taupo Events Centre, about 2km east of town, has a big, heated pool with a waterslide, indoor kids' pool, private mineral pools and sauna. There's also a **climbing wall** (adult/child \$10/6; ☎ 3.30-9pm Mon-Fri, 1-7pm Sun).

Twenty minutes' walk from town you'll find the Huka Falls Walkway hot springs (see right), a pleasant and well-worn spot under a bridge where you can take a dip for free, in natural surrounds.

**Taupo Hot Springs Spa** (Map p301; ☎ 07-377 6502; www.taupohotspings.com; Taupo-Napier Hwy (SH5); adult/child \$10/4, massage per hr \$89, body scrubs \$85; ♿ 7am-9.30pm) has a variety of mineral-rich indoor and outdoor thermal pools, freshwater pools and a giant dragon waterslide for the young ones. Adults can enjoy a wide choice of body treatments such as massage and body scrubs. There's a health-food café on site as well as pleasant picnic and barbecue facilities.

### WATER SPORTS

With the big lake in the middle and the Waikato and Tongariro Rivers at either end (plus the wild Rangitaiki and Wairoa Rivers not far away), there's plenty of opportunity to get wet and wild around Taupo. Kayaking is popular on the lake and rivers, and there are raft trips on both white-water rapids and gentle river sections. Locals offer rentals and tuition, so there's absolutely no excuse not to get your boat afloat.

**Canoe & Kayak** (Map p292; ☎ 0800 529 256; www.canoeandkayak.co.nz; cnr Taniwha & Spa Rds; ♿ 9am-5.30pm) Offers instruction and boat hire (from the lake's edge in high summer), as well as guided trips: a two-hour trip on the Waikato River (\$45), a half-day trip to see the Maori carvings (\$90) and a full-day white-water river trip (\$125).

**Chris Jolly Outdoors** (Map p292; ☎ 07-378 5596; www.chrisjolly.co.nz; ♿ 9am-5.30pm) Located at the marina; can sort out all sorts of water sports, including kayak hire (single/double per hour \$15/20) and self-drive boats (\$60 to \$70 per hour). It also organises helicopter tours and books other local activities.

**Kiwi River Safaris** (☎ 0800 723 8577; www.krs.co.nz) Offers two-hour white-water rafting trips on the Rangitaiki (\$99), Wairoa (\$109) and Tongariro Rivers (\$99), including free pick-up from Taupo and lunch. It also runs kayak tours down the Waikato River (adult/child \$40/25).

**Purefun** (☎ 0800 867 272; www.purefun.co.nz; ♿ summer only) Runs lake parasailing (\$89).

**Rapid Sensations/Kayaking Kiwi** (Map p301;

☎ 0800 353 435; www.rapids.co.nz, www.kayakingkiwi.com; 413 Huka Falls Rd; ♿ departs 8am & 1.30pm

Oct-Mar, noon Apr-Sep) Runs lake kayak trips to the Maori carvings (4½ hours, \$95) and a gentle paddle along the scenic Waikato River (two hours, \$45). It also runs white-water rafting trips on the Tongariro River (five hours, \$115) and a shorter trip (2½ hours, \$75) along a calmer section.

**Sailing Centre** (Map p301; ☎ 0274-967 350; www.sailingcentre.co.nz; Lake Tce; ♿ 8.30am-8.30pm) At Two Mile Bay south of Taupo; hires out kayaks (\$25), canoes (\$35), windsurfers (\$35), catamarans (\$50) and sailboats (\$60) in summer. Rates are per hour.

**Wilderness Escapes Kayaking** (☎ 07-378 3413; www.wildernessescapes.co.nz) Runs various trips from a half-day to multiple days, including the popular rock-carving trip (half-day \$85), and a sunset paddle on the lake (\$85). It also offers freedom rental (per day \$60).

### CYCLING & MOUNTAIN BIKING

Exploring Taupo on two wheels is fun and easy, with dedicated cycle lanes along Lake Tce and Heu Heu St, and shared paths elsewhere. There are blue bike racks throughout town. Lake Taupo is also the location of two of NZ's biggest annual cycling events: the 160km **Lake Taupo Cycle Challenge** (www.cyclechallenge.org.nz), held on the last Saturday in November, and October's 12-hour **Day-Night Thriller** (www.eventpromotions.co.nz), regularly attracting more than 3000 mountain bikers. The i-SITE produces a useful free leaflet, *Cycling Around Lake Taupo*, which has suggested cycling and mountain-biking routes.

There are several good mountain-bike track systems just out of town, namely Wairakei Forest, Waikato River and Pureora Forest. You can download maps for these from www.biketapo.org.nz.

**Rapid Sensations** (Map p301; ☎ 0800 353 435; www.rapids.co.nz; 413 Huka Falls Rd; guided trips \$75, bike hire half-/full day \$45/55) runs guided three-hour rides in the Wairakei Forest. Next door is **Hub Café** (☎ 07-374 8409; 415 Huka Falls Rd; meals \$6.50-17.50; ♿ breakfast & lunch) a popular hang-out for cyclists, handily located in the midst of the action. Hub serves up empowering breakfasts, and lunch along the lines of nachos and BLTs.

Rainbow Lodge Backpackers Retreat (p296) and **Life Cycles** (☎ 07-378 6117; 16 Oruanui St; ♿ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) rent bikes for around \$25 per day. For luxury road riding, **Heli-Biking** (☎ 07-384 2816; www.kaimanawahelibiking.co.nz; 4hr ride \$345) will pick you up in a helicopter and drop you on top of the highest point in the Kaimanawas, from where you bike all the way down.

### WALKING

There are some great walks in and around Taupo, ranging from sedate ambles to more gnarly all-dayers. A good place to start is DOC's leaflet *Lake Taupo - A Guide to Walks and Hikes* (\$2.50).

The **Huka Falls Walkway** is an enjoyable, easy walk from Taupo to the falls along the east bank of the Waikato River. The track follows the river, crossing a hot stream en route. The falls are about a one to 1½-hour walk from the centre of Taupo. To reach the walkway from town, head up Spa Rd, passing the Taupo Bungy site. Turn left at County Ave and continue through Spa Thermal Park till the street's end. The path heads off to the left of the end car park, up over a hill and down to the hot springs by the river.

Carrying on from the falls is the **Huka Falls to Aratiatia Rapids Walking Track**. The rapids are 7km away (another two-plus hours). There are good views of the river, Huka Falls and the power station across the river. To just walk this part, drive out to the falls car park and cross the bridge.

Another walk goes to **Mt Tauhara** (Map p301), which has magnificent views from the top. Take the Taupo-Napier Hwy (SH5) turn-off, 2km south of Taupo town centre. About 6km along SH5, turn left into Mountain Rd. The start of the track is signposted on the right-hand side. It will take about two hours to the top, walking slowly.

The pleasant **Great Lake Walkway** goes from the Taupo lakefront to Five Mile Bay. It's a flat, easy walk along public-access beaches. Heading south from Taupo, there's a hot-water beach on the way to Two Mile Bay. At Two Mile Bay the walkway connects with the Lions Walk, going from Two Mile Bay (4.2km south of Taupo) to Five Mile Bay (8km). Anywhere along here you can easily get back to SH1, the lakeside road.

Taupo can also serve as a base from which to walk the Tongariro Alpine Crossing (see p309).

### GOLF

**Taupo Golf Club** (Map p301; ☎ 07-378 6933; www.taupogolf.co.nz; 32 Centennial Dr; 9 holes \$20-35, 18 holes \$35-60) has two good 18-hole courses, one a park course and the other an inland links. Eight kilometres north of Taupo is **Wairakei Golf Course** (Map p301; ☎ 07-374 8152; www.wairakei.golfcourse.co.nz; SH1, Wairakei; 18 holes \$95-200), a challenging course set in 450 acres of beautiful countryside, rated within the top 100 courses worldwide. For those wanting a more leisurely hit, there is a nine-hole course set in similarly verdant surroundings 1km up the road at **Wairakei Resort** (Map p301; ☎ 0800 378 678; www.wairakei.co.nz; SH1, Wairakei; 9 holes adult/child \$12/\$5.50).

### HORSE TREKKING

**Moehiwa Horse Ventures** (Map p301; ☎ 07-378 3727; moehiwa@hotmail.com; 73 Poihipi Rd; 1-2hr rides \$40-70) treks over pasture, pine forest and riverbeds, while **Taupo Horse Treks** (Map p301; ☎ 07-378 0356; www.taupohorsetreks.co.nz; Karapiti Rd; 1/2hr rides \$45/80) conducts treks through some fine forest with good views over the Craters of the Moon (p302).

### SKIING

Taupo is tantalisingly close to the ski fields, being 1¼ hours drive to Whakapapa, and two hours to Turoa. There's gear hire all around and up the mountain, and also at **Pointons Ski Shop** (Map p292; ☎ 07-377 0087; 13 Tongariro St; snowboard hire \$40, skis \$40; ♿ 7am-7pm Apr-Sep, 9am-5pm Oct-Mar).

### OTHER ACTIVITIES

Thrill-seekers with petrol-head tendencies should head to the **Taupo Motorsport Park** (off Map p301; ☎ 07-376 5033; www.tauporacetrack.co.nz; Broadlands Rd). This state-of-the-art 3.5km racetrack and drag circuit was recently upgraded and has staged the A1GP. There's often something to watch here, from sidecar races to 'drifters' and on occasion the police testing their skills. You can get out on the track with **Formula Challenge** (☎ 0800 324 685; www.fcr.co.nz; 1-3 sessions of laps \$290-595), which offers packages where you drive a V8 or Formula Challenge Race Car. Super-fast rides with a pro in the driver's seat in a Porsche GT3 or GTO Monaro, and driving tuition can be organised through **Richard Lester Motorsport** (☎ 021 962 976; www.lestermotorsport.co.nz) or **Track Drive** (☎ 027 288 9037; race@trackdrive.co.nz).

Safari on quad bike with **Taupo Quad Adventures** (☎ 07-377 6404; www.4x4quads.com; SH1; 1-3hr trips \$79-189), 24km north of town opposite the turn-off to Orakei Korako, which offers fully guided off-road trips.

For a more peaceful activity, **Taupo Gliding Club** (Map p301; ☎ 07-378 5627; Centennial Dr; flights from \$100) glides daily by appointment (weather permitting) at Centennial Park.

### Tours

#### AERIAL SIGHTSEEING

The following are located at Taupo airport unless specified.

**Air Charter Taupo** (☎ 07-378 5467; www.aircharter.taupo.co.nz; flights \$70-230) Scenic flights ranging from 15 minutes to one hour, across Huka Falls, Lake Taupo, Tongariro and Mt Ruapehu.

**Clarke & Jolly** (Map p292; ☎ 07-377 8805; www.helinz.com; flights \$99-995) Specialises in heli-tours which include ground excursions such as fly fishing, vineyard visits and golf, as well as shorter scenic flights over the town, lake and volcanoes (minimum 10 minutes).

**Helistar Helicopters** (Map p301; ☎ 0800 435 478; www.helistar.co.nz; 415 Huka Falls Rd; flights \$99-599) Located about 3km northeast of town, Helistar offers a variety of scenic helicopter flights, from 20 minutes to two hours, including the wine and cheese tour taking you to Omori Estate across the lake. Combine a Helistar trip with the Huka Falls Jet in the Huka Star combo for \$189.

**Taupo Air Services** (☎ 07-378 5325; taupoair@xttra.co.nz; flights \$85-450) Runs scenic flights from the 15-minute local look to a nearly two-hour trip to White Island.

**Taupo's Floatplane** (Map p292; ☎ 07-378 7500; www.tauposfloatplane.co.nz; flights \$70-540) Located at the entrance to the marina, the floatplane does a variety of trips, including quick flights over the lake and longer ones over Mt Ruapehu and as far afield as White Island. For a full day out, it offers the Taupo Trifecta Combo (floatplane trip, followed by a jetboat trip and a walk through Orakei Korako; \$345).

**Volcanic Aeroplane Adventures** (☎ 0800 237 675; www.aeroplaneadventures.co.nz; flights \$95-450) Flights over the geothermal areas, Tongariro National Park, Mt Tarawera and White Island.

## OTHER TOURS

**Paradise Tours** (☎ 07-378 9955; www.paradisetours.co.nz; tours adult/child \$99/40) Three-hour tours to the Aratiatia Rapids, Craters of the Moon and Huka Falls. Also offers tours to Tongariro National Park, Orakei Korako, Rotorua, Hawkes Bay and Waitomo Caves.

**Taupo Tours** (☎ 07-377 0774; www.taupotours.com; tours adult/child \$5/2.50) Runs 15-minute sightseeing tours of Taupo in a refurbished 1950s British double-decker bus. Tours run holiday periods only, half-hourly from 10am to 4pm, departing near the Superloo, not far from the i-SITE.

**Whirinaki Rainforest Experiences** (☎ 07-377 2363; www.whirinakirainforest.com) Runs fascinating and educational ecotour guided walks in the Whirinaki Forest Park (one- to three-day trips \$155-745). Transport from Taupo, meals and camping necessities are included.

**Wilderness Escapes** (☎ 07-378 3413; www.wildernessescapes.co.nz) Organises a wide variety of walks (from \$85) and other outdoor activities, kayaking (from \$85), rock climbing and abseiling (from \$80), and caving (\$210).

## Sleeping

Taupo has a wide range of accommodation, lots of it lining the busy Lake Tce, and a competitive backpacker scene that includes central options.

## BUDGET

**Rainbow Lodge Backpackers Retreat** (Map p292; ☎ 07-378 5754; www.rainbowlodge.co.nz; 99 Titiraupenga St; dm from \$21, d & tw \$56-62; 📶) A solid and sociable hostel run by the affable Ross, offering clean rooms including en suite doubles. The cottage next door is secluded and homely with themed décor in the rooms (eg retro and jungle). The cottage's lounge has a large TV that hostel guests can share. Other bonuses include bike and fishing-tackle hire, as well as hairdryers and straighteners (!) in some bathrooms, plus staff can help find hospitality jobs for the cash-strapped. Ross intends to shortly revamp the promising Burke's Backpackers down the road, so watch this space.

**Go Global** (Map p292; ☎ 0800 464 562, 07-377 0044; www.go-global.co.nz; cnr Tongariro & Tuwharetoa Sts; dm \$22-25, s \$53, d \$53-58) One of the best-located hostels if you want to be smack bang in the middle of town. This is a laid-back backpackers with basic facilities, but on the button where it counts: clean, secure, and also sporting a great roof terrace for barbecues or hanging out.

**Taupo Urban Retreat** (Map p292; ☎ 07-378 6124; www.tur.co.nz; 65 Heu Heu St; dm \$22-26, d \$65) A purpose-built hostel with a pub-like hub, enjoyed by a younger crowd who fit right in with its carefree style. It's refreshingly modern in design, with a beach-house feel, although it's a busy road on your doorstep instead of the beach.

**our pick Tiki Lodge** (Map p292; ☎ 07-377 4545; www.tikilodge.co.nz; 104 Tuwharetoa St; dm from \$26, d & tw from \$75; 📶) A genuine article run by local Maori hosts who want you to feel right at home. This newish hostel has great lake and mountain views from the balcony, spacious kitchen and comfy lounges, with spa pool out back. Lots of Maori flavour including artwork on the walls and occasional cultural evenings.

**YHA Taupo** (Map p292; ☎ 07-378 3311; yha.taupo@yha.co.nz; cnr Kaimanawa & Tamamutu Sts; sites \$30, dm \$26, d from \$76; 📶) A good hostel with cosy communal areas and an internet lounge, sun-trap deck with barbecues, barrel spa pool and extensive DVD library. The kitchen space is a little limited, but they make up for it with guitar hire.

**All Seasons Holiday Park** (Map p301; ☎ 0800 777 272; www.taupoallseasons.co.nz; 16 Rangatira St; sites 2 people \$30-40, cabins from \$55, units from \$85; 📶) A pleasant holiday park five minutes' walk to town, with well-established trees and hedgerows between

sites. Playground, games room, thermal pool and good kitchen facilities.

**Great Lake Holiday Park** (off Map p301; ☎ 07-378 5159; www.greatlake.co.nz; 406 Acacia Bay Rd; sites \$32, cabins from \$65, units from \$98; 📶) Located 4km from downtown Taupo, this is a great option for those who are happy away from the hubbub and are looking for a classic Kiwi campground. A bit dusty in the summer with slightly prickly grass, the facilities are nevertheless well maintained. Motel-style units are basic but cheerful.

**Taupo DeBretts Spa Resort** (Map p301; ☎ 07-378 8559; www.taupodebretts.com; SH5; sites from \$32, d/ste from \$80/110; 📶) More of an upmarket holiday park than a flashy resort, this park is set in well-tended grounds and offers a range of accommodation, from tent sites to motel-style units, and has plenty of kid-friendly features such as a playground and trampoline. It's a five-minute drive from downtown, but is well worth the hop for its peaceful location and the indulgent Taupo Hot Springs which shares its home (see p294).

**Taupo Top 10 Holiday Resort** (Map p301; ☎ 0800 332 121; www.taupotop10.co.nz; 28 Centennial Dr; sites \$36-44, cabins from \$70, units from \$120; 📶) The slickest of the local campgrounds, this 20-acre park has all the mod cons including heated swimming pool, tennis courts and an onsite shop. It's about 2.5 km from the i-SITE.

## MIDRANGE

**Dunrovin** (Map p292; ☎ 07-378 7384; www.dunrovin.taupo.co.nz; 140 Heu Heu St; s/d from \$75/80; 📶) A chirpy old bird, recently given a fresh lick of paint. Functional units remain true to the period (originally built 1962), and are surrounded by pretty gardens with tui often about.

**Lynwood Lodge** (Map p292; ☎ 0800 887 378; 52 Rifle Range Rd; s/d from \$75/90; 📶) Taupo's first motel, built in 1952. So what you get is pebble dash and concrete, rooms as big as a small house and made up like your granny's in residence. It's all shipshape though, and homely, and a real slice of Kiwi hospitality. Slightly dodgy playground but lovely clean pool.

**Chelmswood Motel** (Map p301; ☎ 0800 238 238; www.chelmswood.co.nz; 250 Lake Tce; d/f \$90/160; 📶) This unpretentious Tudor-style manor on the south side of town has simple studios and larger family rooms, most with their own courtyard mineral pool. There's a

heated outdoor pool, sauna, and a sandpit for the littlies.

**Bella Vista** (Map p292; ☎ 0800 235 528; www.bellavistamotels.co.nz; 143 Heu Heu St; d/f \$98/180; 📶) One of the growing number of Bella Vista motels nationwide, this one keeps the bar raised being immaculate down to the last blade of grass, and offering personal service by way of owners Aaron and Tracey. It's new, so rooms are well appointed and comfortable, if a little conservative. The grassy area and barbecue are well located away from the road – good for a sundowner of an evening.

**Suncourt Motor Hotel** (Map p292; ☎ 0800 786 268; www.suncourt.co.nz; 14 Northcroft St; d/f \$100/145; 📶) You can't miss the brightly coloured Suncourt, sitting along the lakefront. This rambling complex encloses a range of comfortable units with useful facilities including spa pool and kids' playground. Larger rooms with verandas and full kitchens are ideal for families, though regular conferences can book the place out.

**Oasis Resort Taupo** (Map p301; ☎ 0800 555 378; www.oasistaupo.co.nz; 241 Lake Tce; d from \$110; 📶) One of Taupo's oldest motels, this place has been slickly refurbished ensuring good value, particularly when you take account of the big-screen TVs, pleasant courtyards and the lakeside location. Combined with a billiard area, spa and swimming pool, there's plenty to do just hanging around the motel.

**Lake** (Map p292; ☎ 07-378 4222; www.thelakeonline.co.nz; 63 Mere Rd; d \$120-195; 📶) This groovalicious pad pulls off an audacious retro manoeuvre that even Austin Powers would be proud of, with 1960s styling starring curvaceous couches and sultry lava lamps. The studio is tight, with the four other rooms a better alternatives for larger groups.

**Beechtree** (Map p292; ☎ 0800 233 248; www.beechtree.motel.co.nz; 56 Rifle Range Rd; d from \$140; 📶) One of the newest motels in town, the Beechtree offers classy rooms at a reasonable rate. The décor is fresh and modern in neutral tones, creating a feeling of light and air, as do the high ceilings, large windows, ground-floor patios and upstairs balconies. Fittings and amenities are all good quality, including flat-screen TVs.

## TOP END

**Wairakei Resort** (Map p301; ☎ 07-374 8021; www.wairakei.co.nz; Wairakei Park; d/ste from \$155/225; 📶) Roaming over 169 acres, this is a

true resort, boasting not only tennis courts, swimming and hot pools, gymnasium, bar and restaurant, but even its own nine-hole golf course. Rooms range from standard to executive, although all are executive in style. Popular for conferences and business travellers, the resort manages to retain broad appeal for anyone of the indulgent persuasion.

**Terraces Hotel** (Map p301; ☎ 07-378 7080; www.terraceshotel.co.nz; SH5; d from \$185; P) This dear old 1889er has been lovingly restored to an attractive state of old-world charm meets modern comfort. It boasts deservedly of its heritage, with historic photographs and the odd famous painting dotted about, while the 20 rooms themselves are sympathetically decorated and share a wrap-around balcony with views over the gardens and bush.

**Millennium** (Map p301; ☎ 0800 808 228; www.manuels.co.nz; 243 Lake Tce; d & tw \$190-360; P) Right on the lakefront with super views from balcony rooms, this hotel sits in one of the town's best spots. It's a plush one, with the walls adorned with NZ artwork and a snazzy outdoor pool area. Millennium is particularly well equipped for business travellers, with a business centre, wi-fi hot spots, and two in-house restaurants.

**Huka Lodge** (Map p301; ☎ 07-378 5791; www.huka.lodge.com; Huka Falls Rd; s/d/cottage from \$1045/1370/2780; P) Welcome to paradise. One of the best hotels in NZ, Huka Lodge basks in accolades and a procession of famous guests who may have included the Queen Mum. Surrounded by lush bush and delightful gardens, the main lodge has a homely feel (albeit the home of a wealthy aesthete) and features shared dining and lounge areas, and a library. Individual guest lodges are dotted along the riverside with views and privacy. Rates include five-course dinner and breakfast. The owners' cottage sits apart on the grounds, entirely self-contained and good for families.

## Eating

Taupo punches above its weight when it comes to dining, especially in the café division.

## RESTAURANTS

**Hot Plate Korean & Japanese Restaurant** (Map p292; ☎ 07-377 3344; cnr Roberts & Titiraupenga Sts; mains \$15-25; ☺ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) This place has authentic barbecue-style Korean dishes, along with Japanese specialities including tempura and sushi.

**Yama** (Map p292; ☎ 07-376 5759; 43 Ruapehu St; mains \$15-37; ☺ lunch & dinner Wed-Mon) A trendy East-West eatery serving everything from gourmet sandwiches and salads to bento-box lunches and noodles all ways. Flavoured all over and a wee bit over the top, but still a welcome pocket of piquancy in an ocean of juvs.

**Lotus Thai** (Map p292; ☎ 07-376 9497; 137 Tongariro St; mains \$16-20; ☺ lunch Wed-Fri, dinner Wed-Mon) A warm and inviting restaurant with Siamese trimmings throughout, offering standard Thai fare in plentiful portions.

**Pimentos** (Map p292; ☎ 07-377 4549; 17 Tamamutu St; mains \$21-25; ☺ dinner Wed-Mon) Such a local favourite that you may well need to book to enjoy some of the town's best food in this convivial environment. One of its claims to fame is the legendary lamb shanks and mash, but its relatively short menu offers sufficient other tasty dishes including good veggie options.

**On Tap** (Map p292; ☎ 07-378 0830; 42 Tuwharetoa St; mains \$24-34; ☺ dinner) This place packs a paunch with paté to start, steaks as big as your fist, cheese to round off and a beer bonanza throughout. Modern-man interior with beautiful wooden bar and smokers' den out front.

**Plateau** (Map p292; ☎ 07-377-2425; 64 Tuwharetoa St; mains \$25-35; ☺ lunch & dinner) One of a growing number of brewery-branded gastropubs, of which Plateau is an exemplar indeed, with its earthy fit-out and a trendy Pacifica twist. It's a great place for a drink or two (live music Thursday), but the food is the key. Predominantly modern NZ (think lamb rump and rib-eye), Plateau clearly keeps its eyes on the horizon with curry nights and other international offerings.

**Brantry** (Map p292; ☎ 07-378 0484; www.thebrantry.co.nz; 45 Rifle Range Rd; mains \$26-35; ☺ dinner) Chef Prue Campbell and sister Felicity continue to run the best and most consistent restaurant in the region at this 1950s town house, a few minutes from the town centre. Dine in intimate, unobtrusive surrounds inside, or out in the perfectly pitched canopy, or upper garden in summer. The menu makes for memorable meals of some of NZ's finest ingredients, including top-quality cuts of beef and lamb. The set menu (\$35 or \$45) is a gift.

## CAFÉS

**Fine Fettle** (Map p292; ☎ 07-378 7674; 39 Paora Hape St; light meals \$2-11; ☺ breakfast & lunch) An airy café on a quieter edge of town serving wholefoods, organic, and GE- and gluten-free options. The

healthy and satisfying offerings include big pies and fresh salads, plus juices, smoothies and iced chai.

**Classic Espresso Bakery** (Map p292; ☎ 07-378 8757; 15 Tamamutu St; light meals \$3-11; ☺ 8am-4pm) This is a budget diner's creamy dream, baking daily delights like pies and pastries, and old-school treats like lamingtons, Eccles cake and gingerbread people.

**Bodyfuel** (Map p292; ☎ 07-378 9555; 67 Tongariro St; mains \$6-16; ☺ breakfast & lunch) Conveniently located near the i-SITE and museum, this top-notch café has cabinets crammed with deli-style savoury snacks and divine cakes and biscuits, while the blackboard menu offers tasty standards and that rare beast: the quality Caesar salad.

**Replete** (Map p292; ☎ 07-378 0606; 45 Heu Heu St; mains \$10-14; ☺ breakfast & lunch) Widely regarded as one of the best in town, Replete's showcase is packed full of delicatessen delights running the gamut from sandwiches to salads to sweets. Its pastry selection is particularly commendable. A blackboard menu offers inexpensive light meals such as scrambled eggs and noodle soup, as well as a kids' hamper.

**our pick L'Arte** (☎ 07-378 2962; 255 Māpara Rd, Acacia Bay; mains \$10-25; ☺ 9am-4pm Wed-Sun, daily in Jan) A 10-minute drive from town will reward you with a fantastically artful café in an ebullient sculpture garden with a gallery alongside. Lots of mouth-watering treats are made from scratch here, including the pesto that sits on the must-have antipasto platter. The home baking is a triumph.

## SELF-CATERING

**Pak N Save** (Map p292; Taniwha St) and **Woolworths** (Map p292; Spa Rd) are both open until midnight. Pie-eaters should definitely head to **Beaut Bakery** (Map p292; Spa Rd; ☎ 07-378 8504), especially for the bacon and egg pie. Unsurpassable.

## Drinking

Things get lively in the height of summer when the town fills up with travellers. The rest of the year, it might pay to take a newspaper to read over your pint.

**Bond** (Map p292; ☎ 07-377 2434; 40 Tuwharetoa St; snacks \$4-25; ☺ Thu-Sun) Smooth, sexy and rather irresistible (a bit like 007 himself), this is Taupo's most sophisticated bar, with a stylish interior, European beers, tapas and DJs up late. The drinks may cost you a pretty Money-Penny but you may still see a Q at the bar.

**Finn MacCuhals** (Map p292; ☎ 07-378 6165; cnr Tongariro & Tuwharetoa Sts; ☺ 11am-late) With its fair share of Irish ephemera nailed to the walls and a backpackers next door, you can be sure that there will be plenty of craic here. There are soft-rock videos most nights and DJs on Saturdays.

**Groove** (Map p292; ☎ 07-378 3900; 11 Tuwharetoa St; ☺ 10am-3am) This cavernous upstairs bar has a balcony for enjoying the summer breeze, while occasional live bands and dancing spice things up a bit.

**Jolly Good Fellows** (Map p292; ☎ 07-378 0457; 76 Lake Tce; meals \$14-20; ☺ 11am-late) Corr, Guvnor! You ain't seen a pub like this since old Blighty, with lashings of cultural clichés and cheeky humour added to its pub grub, largely a bland stodge-fest but enjoyable nonetheless, especially when smothered in mustard. Old Speckled Hen, Tetleys and Bulmers cider on tap at last visit.

**Mulligans** (Map p292; ☎ 07-376 9101; 15 Tongariro St; ☺ 11am-late) A locals' hang-out, this Irish boozier offers hearty meal and drink deals and is a good spot for a quiet Guinness.

**Shed** (Map p292; ☎ 07-376 5393; 18 Tuwharetoa St; mains \$18-26; ☺ 11am-late) A lively place to sup a beer and catch the big game, sit outside and watch the world go by, or strut your stuff to DJs at the weekends. Food is punter-pleasing pub fare in man-size portions.

## Entertainment

**Great Lake Centre** (Map p292; ☎ 07-376 0340; Tongariro St) A theatre and hall hosting performances, exhibitions and conventions. Ask at the i-SITE for the current programme.

**Starlight Cinema Centre** (Map p292; ☎ 07-378 7515; Starlight Arcade, off Horomatangi St; tickets \$8) Head here to catch the latest Hollywood blockbusters.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

**Air New Zealand** (☎ 0800 737 000) has daily direct flights to Auckland and Wellington, with onward connections.

### BUS

The main bus stop is at the **Taupo Travel Centre** (Map p292; ☎ 07-378 9032; 16 Gascoigne St), where you can also make bookings for the following services.

**InterCity** (☎ 09-913 6100) runs several daily buses to Turangi (\$25, 45 minutes), Auckland (\$60, five hours), Hamilton (\$40, 2¾ hours),



restaurant where you can try prawns all ways, and nonprawn dishes if you wish.

### CRATERS OF THE MOON

This lesser-known geothermal area sprang to life as a result of the hydroelectric tinkering of the 1950s that created the power station. When underground water levels fell and pressure shifted, the **Craters of the Moon** (Map p301; adult/child \$5/2; ☀️ dawn-dusk) appeared with new steam vents and bubbling mud pools pocking the landscape. The perimeter loop walk takes about 45 minutes and affords great views down to the lake and mountains beyond. There's a kiosk at the entrance, staffed by volunteers who kindly keep an eye on the car park. Craters of the Moon is signposted on SH1, about 5km north of Taupo.

### WAIRAKEI TERRACES & THERMAL VALLEY

Known to Maori as Waiora Valley and latterly as Geyser Valley, this area was once one of the most active thermal areas in the world, with 22 geysers and 240 mud pools and springs. In 1958 the valley was significantly changed by the geothermal power project, and today it's the site of **Wairakei Terraces** (Map p301; ☎️ 07-378 0254; www.wairakeiterraces.co.nz; adult/child \$18/9; ☀️ 9am-5pm), man-made silica terraces, pools and geysers, re-creating, on a smaller scale, the famous Pink and White Terraces. The **Maori Cultural Experience** (adult/child \$79/39.50; ☀️ 6pm) here, including a concert and *hangi*, gives an insight into how Maori people revere the geothermal areas and use them in cooking.

A few hundred metres north on SH1 is a turn-off to **Wairakei Thermal Valley Walk**, an interesting walk through bush and thermal activity (one hour).

### ARATIATIA RAPIDS

Two kilometres off SH5, the Aratiatia Rapids were a spectacular part of the Waikato River until the government plonked a hydroelectric dam across the waterway, shutting off the flow. But the spectacle hasn't disappeared completely, with the floodgates opened from 1 October to 31 March at 10am, noon, 2pm and 4pm and from April to September at 10am, noon and 2pm. You can see the water crash through the dam from two good vantage points.

Get another perspective from **Rapids Jet** (Map p301; ☎️ 0800 727 437, 07-378 5828; www.rapidsjet.com; Rapids Rd, off SH5; adult/child \$85/45), a jetboat that

shoots along the lower part of the rapids. It's a sensational 35-minute ride – some say it rivals the Huka Falls trip. The boat departs from the end of the access road to the Aratiatia lookouts. Go down Rapids Rd and look for the signpost to the National Equestrian Centre.

For a less rapid ride, try **Huka Falls River Cruise** (Map p301; ☎️ 0800 278 336; Aratiatia Dam; adult/child \$30/15; ☀️ departs 10.30am, 12.30 & 2.30pm plus 4.30pm in summer), a relaxed jaunt (one hour, 25 minutes) from Aratiatia Dam to Huka Falls.

Four kilometres further north on SH1 is **Taupo Adventure Park** (off Map p301; ☎️ 0800 462 7219; www.taupoadventurepark.co.nz; activities \$5-30; ☀️ 9am-5pm Wed-Sun), a family-oriented park with minigolf, maze, laser tag, video games and an animal park. It also has a few racey kicks including BMX bikes, quad bikes and go-karts.

### Orakei Korako

A bit off the beaten track, **Orakei Korako Thermal Cave & Thermal Park** (Map p290; ☎️ 07-378 3131; www.orakeikorako.co.nz; adult/child/family \$28/10/68; ☀️ 8am-5.30pm) gets fewer visitors than other thermal areas. But, since the destruction of the Pink and White Terraces by the Tarawera eruption in 1886, it is arguably the best thermal area left in NZ. Although three-quarters of it now lies beneath the dam waters of Lake Ohakuri, the remaining quarter is pretty amazing.

A sometimes-steep walking track (allow 1½ hours) largely follows a boardwalk around the colourful silica terraces for which the park is famous, and passes geysers and **Ruatapu Cave**. This impressive natural cave has a jade green pool, thought to have been used as a mirror by Maori women who prepared for rituals here (Orakei Korako means 'the place of adorning'). The **Emerald Terrace**, which sparkles like a jewel in the early morning light, is another stunning feature. Entry includes a boat ride across Lake Ohakuri.

It's about 25 minutes to Orakei Korako from Taupo. Take SH1 towards Hamilton for 23km, and then travel for 14km from the signposted turn-off. From Rotorua the turn-off is on SH5, via Mihi. Alternatively, NZ River Jet (opposite) will zip you there along the Waikato River.

### Broadlands

This beautiful and often-forgotten stretch of the mighty Waikato River is halfway between Rotorua and Taupo, reached by turn-

ing off SH5 onto Homestead Rd, just south of Reporoa (see Map p290).

This stretch of the river can be explored in a thrilling fashion with **NZ River Jet** (☎️ 0800 748 375; www.riverjet.co.nz; Homestead Rd; 2½hr ride incl entry to Orakei Korako adult/child/family \$125/50/300), zooming you downstream through magnificent steamy gorges to Orakei Korako, which you can visit before bundling back into the boat to zoom back again.

Near the township of Reporoa is **Butcher's Pool** (admission free; ☀️ daily), a bedecked but otherwise purely natural thermal spring in the middle of a farmer's paddock that makes a soothing dip. Alongside is a small parking area and changing sheds. To get here from Reporoa, head south on Broadlands Rd for 2km and look for a row of trees lining a gravel driveway off to your left.

### Pureora Forest Park

Fringing the western edge of Lake Taupo is the huge Pureora Forest (Map p290). Logging was stopped in this forest in the 1980s after a long campaign by conservationists, and the subsequent regeneration is impressive. There are long and short tramps through the park, including tracks to the summits of Mt Pureora (1165m) and the rock pinnacle of Mt Titirapunga (1042m), all accessed off Hwy 32.

To stay overnight in the park you need to buy hut tickets from the local DOC office or i-SITE (per night \$5). Bog Inn and Waihaha Hut, located 45 minutes and three hours respectively from the road-ends, also have camping areas. Pamphlets, maps and information on the park are available from the DOC offices in Taupo and Te Kuiti.

### TURANGI

pop 3900

Once a service town for the nearby hydroelectric power station, Turangi's claim to fame nowadays is undoubtedly its fish, for which it proclaims itself 'Trout Fishing Capital of the World'. The Tongariro River, however, can be enjoyed in many other ways, including white-water rafting and swimming. The township provides ready access to the ski-fields and walking tracks of Tongariro National Park.

### Information

The **Turangi i-SITE** (☎️ 07-386 8999; www.laketaupo.nz.com; Ohuanga Rd; ☀️ 8.30am-5pm) is a good stop

for information on Tongariro National Park, Kaimanawa Forest Park, trout fishing, and snow and road conditions. It issues DOC hut tickets, ski passes, hunting and fishing licences, and can make all manner of bookings for transport, accommodation and activities. It also has internet facilities and a detailed relief model of the national park. The main bus stop is outside.

The local area **DOC Visitor Centre** (☎️ 07-386 8607; ☀️ 8am-4pm) is near the junction of SH1 and Ohuanga Rd. The post office and Kiwibank (for currency exchange) are in Naylor's Books in the town centre.

### Sights & Activities

#### TROUT FISHING

Ever since trout were introduced into Lake Taupo in 1898, there have been yarns of fish weighing more than a sack of spuds and measuring the length of a surfboard. The truth is that more than 28,000 brown and rainbow trout of legal size are bagged yearly around Taupo. A good place to learn about them is the Tongariro National Trout Centre (see p304), which regularly restocks the famous Tongariro River with fingerlings.

February and March are the best months for brown trout but rainbow fishing is good year-round on the river. This unique Taupo fishery is protected by special conditions including a bag limit of three fish, no use of bait (except flies), and a minimum size of 45cm, depending on where you fish – this is detailed on your licence, which you must carry. Licences are available from DOC or the i-SITE.

If you're not sure where to start, a fishing guide will give you some local know-how, as well as transport, gear, licence and meals by arrangement.

**Brett Cameron** (☎️ 07-378 8192; www.cpf.net.nz; half-/full day from \$280/550)

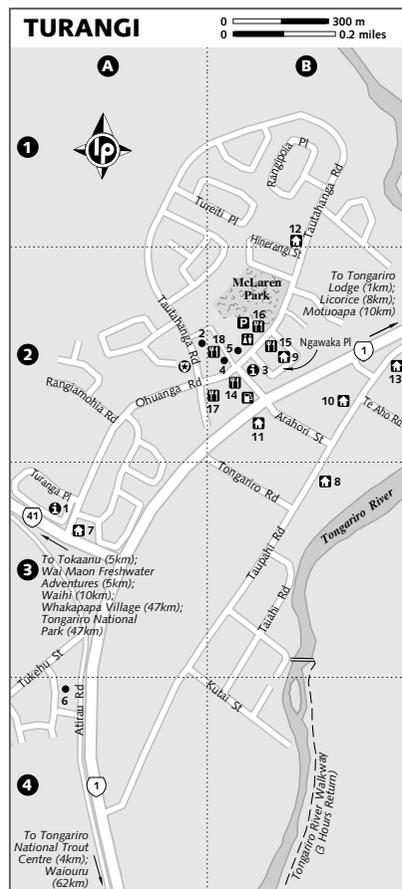
**Ian Jenkins** (☎️ 07-386 0840; www.troutfishingguides.nz.co.nz; half-/full day from \$300/550)

**John Sommervell** (☎️ 07-386 5931; www.nymphfish.com; per hr \$57)

**Tightline Charters** (☎️ 07-386 0033; pamsteve@xtra.co.nz; per hr \$85)

There are several companies in town that hire and sell gear, and handle bookings for guides and charters.

**Barry Greig's Sporting World** (☎️ 07-386 6911; www.greigssport.co.nz; 59 Town Centre; ☀️ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat).



**Creel Tackle House** (☎ 07-386 7929; creel@reap.org.nz; 183 Taupahi Rd; ⏰ 8am-5pm).

**Sporting Life** (☎ 07-386 8996; www.sportinglife-turangi.co.nz; town centre; ⏰ 8am-5.30pm) Its website is updated regularly with the latest fishing conditions.

Fishing trips can also be booked via Taupo's launch office (p293).

Ten kilometres east of Turangi at Motuoapa Bay you can hire aluminium dinghies for lake fishing from **Motuoapa Hire Boats** (☎ 07-386 7000; per hr \$35). These can be used in the bay only.

#### TONGARIRO NATIONAL TROUT CENTRE

About 4km south of Turangi on SH1 is the DOC-managed **trout hatchery** (☎ 07-386 8085; admission by donation; ⏰ 10am-4pm), which makes a

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pleasant stop even if you're not a fish fanatic. The landscaped walkway makes for a short and gentle stroll, and there are several interesting stops en route, including an underwater viewing chamber, hatchery, keeping ponds and a picnic area. The **River Walk** visitor centre, run by volunteers, has polished educational displays, a collection of rods and reels, and a theatre showing a 14-minute film about the river.

#### WALKING

There are several short walks around town. A favourite is the **Tongariro River Lookout Track** (one hour return), a riverside amble affording views of Mt Pihanga and the volcanoes. This track joins the **Tongariro River Walkway**, on which you can walk to the National Trout Centre (three hours return) and beyond.

Other good leg-stretchers include **Hinemihis Track**, near the top of Te Ponanga Saddle, 8km south of Turangi (15 minutes return); **Maunganamu Track**, 4km north of Turangi on SH41 (40 minutes return); and **Turangi-Taupo River Walk** (30 minutes), which starts at Lake Taupo, 12km north of Turangi on SH1.

Another nice lake stroll is at **Lake Rotopounamu** (Greenstone Lake, 11km southwest of Turangi on SH47), a favourite for

walkers, swimmers, twitchers and tree huggers alike. Ten Minute Beach and Long Beach are ideal for picnics (30 minutes to the lake from the car park, two hours around).

The DOC *Lake Taupo – A Guide to Walks and Hikes* (\$2.50) details most of these walks, along with many others around the district.

#### TOKAANU THERMAL POOLS

The **Tokaanu Thermal Pools** (☎ 07-386 8575; Mangaroa St; public pools adult/child \$8/4, private pools 20min \$7/3; ⏰ 10am-9pm), 5km northwest of Turangi, are an unpretentious facility with hot pools, trout stream, picnic area, displays and a shop. A 20-minute stroll along the boardwalk (wheelchair accessible) showcases the small mud pools and thermal springs.

#### OTHER ACTIVITIES

The Tongariro River has some superb grade III rapids for river rafting, as well as some grade I stretches in the lower reaches during summer, suitable for beginners. **Tongariro River Rafting** (☎ 0800 101 024; www.trr.co.nz; Aitirau Rd; \$99) can start you off with a three-hour trip on the grade II Tongariro or take you on a full day's raft fishing (summer only, price on enquiry). The company also hires out mountain bikes (two hours, \$20) and runs guided and unguided biking trips on the 42 Traverse (see p314), Tree Trunk Gorge and Fishers Tracks (two hours to full day, \$75 to \$145).

**Wai Maori Freshwater Adventures** (☎ 0800 865 226; www.raftingkayaking.com; 203 Puanga St, Tokaanu) offers river rafting and kayaking trips including the Whitewater Tongariro trip (grade III) with an optional waterfall jump (conditions permitting) topped off by a soak in a thermal pool (four hours, \$99), or the Lower Tongariro Raft over more relaxed rapids with trout-feeding (three hours, \$75). Visitors can also freedom paddle the Tokaanu stream (1½ to four hours, \$30 to \$40). There's free pick-up from Turangi.

Rapid Sensations in Taupo also runs white-water trips on the Tongariro River (see p294).

For indoor fun, head to the **Vertical Assault Climbing Wall** (☎ 07-386 6558; 26 Ngawaka Pl; adult/child \$15/11) to scale walls that challenge all skill levels.

#### Sleeping BUDGET

**Extreme Backpackers** (☎ 07-386 8949; www.extremebackpackers.co.nz; 26 Ngawaka Pl; dm \$23-25, d & tw \$56-66; ☑) Crafted from pine and corrugated iron,

this modern backpackers has the bonus of a climbing wall and café on site. Cheaper dorms have eight bunks and skip the carpet, while pricier doubles have en suites, but all rooms are clean and comfy. A lounge with an open fire, a sunny courtyard with hammocks and a barbecue make this a relaxing budget bet.

**our pick Riverstone Backpackers** (☎ 07-386 7004; www.riverstonebackpackers.co.nz; 222 Taumahanga Rd; s \$27, d \$66-78; ☑) Relatively new and looking fabulous, Rob's pad is a cleverly refitted old home reborn as a bijou backpackers. Excellent facilities including sports-gear storage, enviable kitchen and lounge, and a stylish landscaped yard (with pizza oven) of which any Kiwi homeowner would be proud. A true home away from home, although Rob is eager to help you get out of the house and into some local activities.

**Parklands Motor Lodge** (☎ 0800 456 284; www.parklandsmotorlodge.co.nz; 25 Arahori St; sites \$28, r \$94; ☑) On the main road but set back beyond an epic front lawn, this motor lodge serves campers and motel-seekers with its small but functional camping area and splay of well-presented units. There's a swimming pool and play area for the kids, while free-ranging ball sports are definitely on out front. The on-site bar and restaurant is open for dinner Monday to Saturday (meals around \$24).

**Sportsmans Lodge** (☎ 07-386 8150; 15 Taupahi Rd; www.sportsmanslodge.co.nz; d/f/cottage \$60/95/95; ☑) Backing on to the river, this motel-style spot, with a sweet garden, is a hidden bargain for trout-fishing folk. The larger family room has its own balcony and all the rooms share the well-equipped kitchen. The self-contained cottage sleeps three.

#### MIDRANGE

**Judges Pool Motel** (☎ 07-386 7892; www.judgespoolmotel.co.nz; 92 Taupahi Rd; s/d/f \$85/95/125; ☑) This older motel has tidy, spacious rooms with kitchenettes, new bathrooms and a fish-cleaning area. All one-bed rooms have outdoor decks for relaxing beers, although the nice new barbecue area is the best place to talk about the one that got away. Kindly hosts may run your flag up the pole, in honour of your arrival.

**Creel Lodge** (☎ 07-386 8081; 183 Taupahi Rd; s/d \$95/110; ☑) This heavenly hideaway, set in green and peaceful grounds, backs onto a fine stretch of the Tongariro River. All the ground-level suites have their own

kitchen facilities and a balcony overlooking attractive gardens.

**Anglers Paradise Resort Motel** (☎ 0800 500 039; www.anglersparadise.co.nz; cnr Ohuanga Rd & Raukura St; d from \$115, ste \$150-175; P) Looking like something out of Twin Peaks, this place sits in a one-hectare leafy pocket where privacy prevails. Rooms are trimmed in sumptuous dark wood and feature big televisions and superking beds. It's geared up for anglers, with guides happily arranged and a smokehouse on site. The restaurant (meals \$20 to \$30, dinner only) has a crackling fireplace and a menu of standard fare.

### TOP END

**Tongariro Lodge** (☎ 07-386 7946; www.tongarirolodge.co.nz; Grace Rd; s/d \$550/1046; P) Five minutes' drive from town on 9 hectares of parkland, this luxury complex is centred upon a handsome main lodge with idyllic deck area, surrounded by individual wooden chalets. It's a private getaway, but socialising can be had at the bar, restaurant, tennis court or in the spa. Staff will happily assist with bookings for everything from fishing guides to horse riding.

### Eating

**Ourpick Licorice** (☎ 07-386 5551; SH1 at Motuapa; meals \$4-13; ☎ 7am-5pm Mon-Sat, 9am-4pm Sun breakfast & lunch). It's worth holding off for this pit stop 8km north of Turangi for excellent coffee, cheap light meals and lovely home baking. Courtyard and ice cream.

**Grand Central Fry** (☎ 07-386 5344; 8 Ohuanga Rd; meals \$6-9; ☎ 11am-8.30pm) A local legend serving top fish and chips, plus burgers and anything else fryable.

**Thyme for Food** (☎ 07-386 0552; Town Centre; meals \$8-16; ☎ breakfast & lunch) A popular tearoom, good for fast and simple fare such as pies, all-day brekkie, burgers and milkshakes.

**Mustard Seed Café** (☎ 07-386 7377; Ohuanga Rd; mains \$8-18; ☎ breakfast & lunch Wed-Mon) This modern café with a garden area has staple breakfast offerings like eggs benedict, *panini*, sandwiches, cakes and good espresso.

**Red Crater Café** (☎ 07-386 6553; 26 Ngawaka Pl; mains \$9-16; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Bright and cheery with a loungy outdoor area, this café inside Extreme Backpackers serves snacks, breakfast, and light meals including soup and nachos.

**Four Fish Sports Bar** (☎ 07-386 6340; cnr Pihanga & Ohuanga Rds; pizzas \$17, mains \$26-33; ☎ lunch & dinner) This bottle shop and bar has a café too, with

lunches for \$15, or choices from the cabinet, while in the evening the place goes à la carte with fish, steak, hotpot-type fare. Takeaway pizzas available.

Self-caterers will enjoy the bright and shiny **New World** (☎ 07-386-8780; Ohuanga Rd; ☎ 8am-8pm).

### Getting There & Away

Both **InterCity** (☎ 09-913 6100) and **Newmans** (☎ 09-913 6200) buses arrive at and depart from the i-SITE. The Auckland-Wellington and Rotorua-Wellington buses that travel along the eastern side of the lake to and from Taupo all stop at Turangi.

**Naked Bus** (www.nakedbus.com) runs daily services to Taupo (\$7.50, one hour), Tauranga (\$39, seven hours) and Auckland (\$43, 6½ hours) via Rotorua (\$19, two hours). Going south, buses run to Wellington (\$49, 5½ hours) via all major stops including Palmerston North (\$29, 3½ hours).

**Mountain Shuttle** (☎ 0800 117 686) runs between Turangi and Whakapapa/Tongariro Alpine Crossing three times a day (\$35, 40 min).

**Tongariro Expeditions** (☎ 0800 828 763; www.tongariroexpeditions.com) runs shuttles from Turangi (\$35, 45 mins), Taupo (\$49, 1¼ hours) and Whakapapa (\$30, 15 mins) for the Tongariro Alpine Crossing and the Northern Circuit. Shuttles depart at 6.20am and 7am.

Extreme Backpackers also provides shuttles for the Tongariro Alpine Crossing (\$35 return) and Northern Circuit (\$40), and Whakapapa Ski Area in winter (\$40).

## TONGARIRO & AROUND

### TONGARIRO NATIONAL PARK

Established in 1887, Tongariro was NZ's first national park. The name Tongariro originally covered the three mountains of the park (Tongariro, Ngauruhoe and Ruapehu) and comes from *tonga* (south wind) and *riro* (carried away). The three peaks were a gift to NZ from the local *iwi* (tribe), who saw the act as the only way to preserve an area of spiritual significance.

With its towering active volcanoes, Tongariro is definitely one of NZ's most spectacular parks, best known for its cameo as Mordor in Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, filmed 2001-2003. In sum-

mer it offers excellent short walks and longer tramps, most notably the Tongariro Northern Circuit and the Tongariro Alpine Crossing. In winter it's a busy ski area.

### Information

The **DOC Visitor Centre** (☎ 07-892 3729; ☎ 8am-6pm Dec-Mar, to 5pm Apr-Nov) is in Whakapapa (pronounced 'fa-ka-pa-pa') Village, on the north-western side of the park. It has maps and info on all corners of the park, including walks, huts and current skiing, track and weather conditions. It also has interesting exhibits on the geological and human history of the area including an audiovisual display, and a small shop: the perfect place for rainy days. The detailed *Tongariro National Park* map (\$19) is worth buying before tramping. DOC produces a number of handy brochures on all walks in the park.

Other DOC centres serving the park are in Ohakune (p316) and Turangi (p303). From late December to late January DOC offers an excellent guided-walks programme in and around the park; ask at DOC centres for information, or book online (www.doc.govt.nz).

Many visitors to NZ come unstuck in the mountains. The weather can change more quickly than you expect, and rescues (and fatalities) are not uncommon. When visiting Tongariro National Park, you must be properly equipped and take all other necessary safety precautions, including leaving your intentions with a responsible person. For more on track safety, see p81.

There are plenty of transport operators willing to take you to trail heads and pick you up again (see p313). Make sure you book them in advance.

### Mt Ruapehu

The long, multi-peaked summit of Mt Ruapehu (2797m) is the highest and most active of the park's volcanoes. The upper slopes were sprayed with hot mud during the volcanic hiccups of 1969 and 1975, and in December 1988 the volcano spewed hot rocks. These were just tame precursors to the spectacular 1995 eruptions, when Ruapehu spurted volcanic rock and cloaked the area in clouds of ash and steam. From June to September the following year the mountain rumbled, groaned and thrust ash clouds high into the sky, writing off the 1996 ski season. The latest eruption, accompanied by a small earthquake,

### HOTHEADS TO THE RESCUE

Maori legend tells of the great chief Ngatoro-i-rangi, who climbed Mt Tongariro in search of more land for his tribe. While acclaimed as a warrior, Ngatoro-i-rangi was an amateur navigator and as night fell he still couldn't find his way back down. He called on the fire gods, Te Pupu and Te Hoata, for help. The gods roared underground from Hawaiki to find Ngatoro-i-rangi, but stuck their heads up firstly at Whakaari (White Island), then exploded out at Rotorua before finally bursting forth in the volcanoes of Tongariro to warm the chief.

This divine intervention explains Maori reverence for these sites, and why the pools around them are used for cooking, dyes, medicine and rituals.

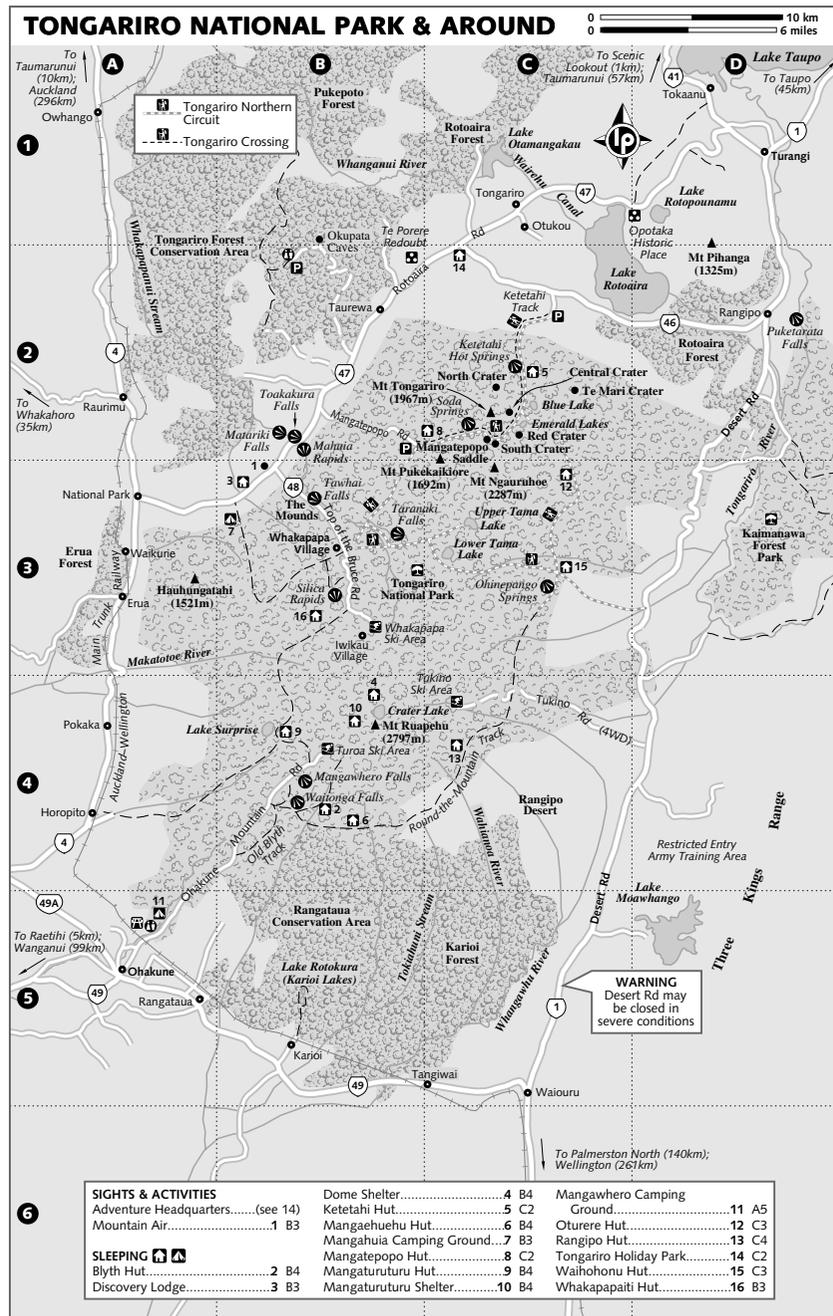
came out of the blue in September 2007, seriously injuring a climber sleeping in a hut on the mountain.

Worse events have occurred. In fact, Mt Ruapehu was the cause of one of NZ's deadliest natural disasters. From 1945 the level of Crater Lake rose dramatically as eruptions blocked the overflow. On Christmas Eve 1953 the dam burst and the flood of volcanic mud (known as a lahar) swept down the mountain and took out a railway bridge at Tangiwai (between Ohakune and Waiouru), just moments before a crowded express train arrived. The train was derailed and 153 people lost their lives.

The crater lake was blocked again, by the 1995-96 eruption. As the levels rose, it was foreseen that a major lahar could lead once again to catastrophe. Alarm systems were set up at the crater lake's edge, and in March 2007 they were triggered when a moderate lahar swept down the Whangaehu Valley. No-one was injured and there was little damage to infrastructure.

### Mt Tongariro

Another old but still active volcano is Mt Tongariro (1967m). Its Red Crater last erupted in 1926. It has a number of coloured lakes dotting its uneven summit as well as hot springs gushing out of its side at Ketetahi. The Tongariro Alpine Crossing (p309), a magnificent walk, passes beside the lakes, right



through several craters, and down through lush native forest.

**Mt Ngauruhoe**

Much younger than the other two volcanoes, Mt Ngauruhoe (2287m) is estimated to have formed in the last 2500 years. In contrast to Ruapehu and Tongariro, which have multiple vents, Ngauruhoe is a conical, single-vent volcano with perfectly symmetrical slopes – the only one of the three that looks like a volcano and the reason why it was chosen to star as Mt Doom in *Lord of the Rings*. It can be climbed in summer, but in winter (under snow) this steep climb is definitely only for experienced mountaineers.

**Tongariro Northern Circuit**

Classed as one of NZ’s Great Walks, the Northern Circuit circumnavigates Mt Ngauruhoe and affords spectacular views all around, particularly of Mt Tongariro. As a circuit, there are several start and finish points, including Whakapapa Village, Ketetahi Rd, Desert Rd and by continuing the Round the Mountain Track. Generally the walk is begun at Mangatepopo car park and concluded at Whakapapa Village, taking three to four days to complete. The walk covers the famous Tongariro Alpine Crossing.

Highlights of the circuit include tramping through several volcanic craters, including the **South Crater, Central Crater and Red Crater**; brilliantly colourful volcanic lakes including the **Emerald Lakes, Blue Lake and the Upper and Lower Tama Lakes**; the cold **Soda Springs and Ohinepango Springs**; and various other volcanic formations including cones, lava flows and glacial valleys.

There are several possibilities for side trips that take from a few hours to overnight. The most popular side trip from the main track is to Ngauruhoe’s summit (three hours), but it is also possible to climb Tongariro from Red Crater (two hours) or walk to Ohinepango Springs from Waihohonu Hut (30 minutes).

**WALKING THE TRACK**

The safest and most popular time to walk the track is from December to March. The track is served by four well-maintained huts: Mangatepopo, Ketetahi, Oturere and Waihohonu. The huts have mattresses, gas cookers in summer, toilets and water. Camping is allowed near all of the huts. Hut passes and tickets are available from DOC visitor centres.

During the summer season (from late October to early June) a **Great Walks Pass** (per night, camp sites adult/child \$15/7.50, huts \$20/10) is required and must be bought in advance, whether you stay in the huts or camp beside them. Ordinary hut tickets and the Backcountry Hut Pass cannot be used during these months.

At other times, the Backcountry Hut Pass or ordinary hut tickets (per night camp sites/huts \$5/10) should be purchased. However, this track is quite difficult in winter, when it is covered in snow, and becomes a tough alpine trek requiring ice axes and crampons. You may need to factor in significant extra walking time, or not attempt it at all.

Estimated walking times in summer:

Route	Time
Whakapapa Village to Mangatepopo Hut	3-4hr
Mangatepopo Hut to Emerald Lakes	3½hr
Emerald Lakes to Ketetahi Hut	1½hr
Ketetahi Hut to Oturere Hut	1½hr
Oturere Hut to Waihohonu Hut	3hr
Waihohonu Hut to Whakapapa Village	5½hr

**Tongariro Alpine Crossing**

Reputedly the best one-day walk in NZ, the Tongariro Alpine Crossing traverses spectacular volcanic geography, from an active crater to steaming vents and beautiful coloured lakes. And the views ain’t bad either. It covers the most spectacular features of the Tongariro Northern Circuit between the Mangatepopo and Ketetahi Huts. Trampers tackling the Northern Circuit complete this section on their second day, with the extra walk along the Ketetahi track. Because of its popularity, there are plenty of shuttle services to both ends of the track. The Tongariro Alpine Crossing can be reached from Mangatepopo Rd off SH47.

The Crossing is achievable in one day, but is exhausting and shouldn’t be taken lightly. Weather can change without warning, so make sure you are adequately equipped. If you’re not in top walking condition you may prefer to do it in two days, throwing in a few side trips to keep it interesting.

The track passes through vegetation zones ranging from alpine scrub and tussock, to places at higher altitudes where there is no vegetation at all, to the lush podocarp forest as you descend from Ketetahi Hut towards the end of the track.

TAUPO & THE CENTRAL PLATEAU

TAUPO & THE CENTRAL PLATEAU

Worthwhile side trips from the main track include ascents to the summits of Mt Ngauruhoe and Mt Tongariro. Mt Ngauruhoe can be ascended most easily from the Mangatepopo Saddle, reached near the beginning of the track after the first steep climb. The summit of Tongariro is reached by a poled route from Red Crater.

### WALKING THE TRACK

The Mangatepopo Hut, reached via Mangatepopo Rd, is near the start of the track, and the Ketetahi Hut is a couple of hours before the end. In summer, to stay at or camp beside either hut you must have a Great Walks Pass (see p309).

Ketetahi Hut is the most popular in the park. It has bunks for 24 people, but regularly has 50 to 60 people trying to stay there on Saturday nights and at the busiest times of year (summer and school holidays). As bunks are claimed on a first-come, first-served basis, it's advisable to bring camping gear, just in case. Campers can use all of the hut facilities (except for bunks), which can make the kitchen crowded, especially at peak times.

Estimated summer walking times:

Route	Time
Mangatepopo Rd end to Mangatepopo Hut	15min
Mangatepopo Hut to Mangatepopo Saddle	1½hr
Mangatepopo Saddle to Mt Ngauruhoe summit (side trip)	2hr return
Red Crater to Tongariro summit (side trip)	1½hr return
Mangatepopo Saddle to Emerald Lakes	1½-2hr
Emerald Lakes to Ketetahi Hut	1½hr
Ketetahi Hut to road end	1½hr

### Round the Mountain

This off-the-beaten-track hike is difficult – suitable for more experienced trampers – but is known as being a quieter alternative to the busy Tongariro Alpine Crossing. Looping around Mt Ruapehu, this trail takes in a diversity of country, from glacial rivers to tussocky moors to majestic mountain views.

You should allow at least four days to complete this hike, with six days a realistic estimate if you're including side trips to the remote Blyth Hut or Tama Lakes. This trail is particularly tough and not recommended for beginners or the unprepared.

### WALKING THE TRACK

You can get to the Round the Mountain trail at a number of points depending on where

you want to start and end; choose from Whakapapa Village, Waihohonu Track junction, Ohakune Mountain Rd or Whakapapa Hut. Most trampers start at Whakapapa Village and return there to finish the loop.

The track is safest from December to March when there is little or no snow, and less chance of avalanche. At other times of year, navigation and walking is made difficult by snow, and full alpine gear (ice axe, crampons and specialised clothing) is a requirement. To take on the track you should prepare thoroughly. Take sufficiently detailed maps (such as *Parkmaps No 273-04*), check on the latest conditions, and carry clothing for all climes and more than adequate food supplies. Be sure to leave your plans and intended return date with a responsible person and check in when you get back.

Sleeping in huts or camping is necessary on this multiday track, and costs \$10/5 per adult/child for a bed in a hut and \$5/2.50 camping. From the end of October to June, you'll need a Great Walks pass for part of the track (see p309).

Estimated summer walking times:

Route	Time
Whakapapa Village to Mangatepopo Hut	3-4hr
Mangatepopo Hut to Oturere Hut	5-6hr
Oturere Hut to Waihohonu Hut	2-3hr
Waihohonu Hut to Rangipo Hut	4-5hr
Rangipo Hut to Mangaehuehu Hut	5-6hr
Mangaehuehu Hut to Mangaturuturu Hut	5-6hr
Mangaturuturu Hut to Whakapapa Hut	6hr
Whakapapa Hut to Whakapapa Village	2-3hr
Tama Lakes (side trip)	1½hr
Blyth Hut (side trip)	1hr

### Other Walks

The DOC and i-SITE visitor centres at Whakapapa, Ohakune and Turangi have maps and information on interesting short and long walks in the park, as well as track and weather conditions.

The walk up to Ruapehu's **Crater Lake** (seven hours return) is a good one, allowing you to see the acidic lake up close, but this walk is strictly off limits when there's volcanic activity. This moderate-to-difficult walk begins at Iwikau Village at the Top of the Bruce Rd. You can cut three hours off it by catching the **chairlift** (adult/child \$20/10; ☎ 9am-4pm, mid-Dec–end April) from Whakapapa Ski Area. **Guided walks** (☎ reservations 07-892 3738; adult/child incl lift pass \$90/55) to Crater Lake leave daily at 9.30am from the

chairlift. Like most of the walks in Tongariro, you'll need to check conditions before heading out and don't attempt it in winter unless you're a mountaineer.

In addition to those below, several good tracks start from the road leading from Ohakune to the Turoa Ski Area (see p316).

### FROM WHAKAPAPA VILLAGE

A number of fine walks begin near the Whakapapa visitor centre and from the road leading up to it (see Map p312). *Walks in and around Tongariro National Park* (\$3), published by DOC, lists walks from the visitor centre, including the following:

**Ridge Track** A 30-minute return walk, which climbs through beech forest to alpine-shrub areas for views of Ruapehu and Ngauruhoe.

**Silica Rapids** A 2½-hour, 7km loop track to the Silica Rapids, named for the silica mineral deposits formed here by the rapids on Waikare Stream. The track passes interesting alpine features and, in the final 2.5km, passes down Top of the Bruce Rd above Whakapapa Village.

**Tama Lakes** A 17km track to the Tama Lakes (five to six hours return). On the Tama Saddle between Ruapehu and Ngauruhoe, the Tama Lakes are great for a refreshing swim. The upper lake affords fine views of Ngauruhoe and Tongariro (beware of winds on the saddle).

**Taranaki Falls** A two-hour, 6km loop track to the 20m Taranaki Falls on Wairere Stream.

**Whakapapa Nature Walk** A 15-minute loop track suitable for wheelchairs, beginning about 200m above the visitor information centre and passing through beech forest and gardens typical of the park's vegetation zones.

### NORTH OF WHAKAPAPA VILLAGE

Still more tracks take off from SH47, on the national park's north side, including the following:

**Lake Rotoaira** On the shores of Lake Rotoaira are excavations of a pre-European Maori village site.

**Mahuia Rapids** About 2km north of the turn-off leading to Whakapapa, SH47 crosses the Whakapapanui Stream just below the rapids.

**Matariki Falls** A 20-minute return track to the falls starts from SH47 about 200m from the Mahuia Rapids car park.

### Skiing

The two main ski areas are the **Whakapapa Ski Area** (1630m), above Whakapapa Village, and the **Turoa Ski Area**, to the south. The two fields offer similar skiing: around 400 hectares of field each, both taking you up to a maximum altitude of 2300m. Beginners are well catered for, with gear hire, ski school, good learner

areas and some nice easy runs. The **Tukino Ski Area**, on the eastern side of Ruapehu, is only accessible by a 4WD road. You can check conditions and current lift rates at the Mt Ruapehu website ([www.mtruapehu.com](http://www.mtruapehu.com)), which covers Whakapapa and Turoa. See also p88.

The only accommodation at the ski fields is in private lodges, so most skiers stay at Whakapapa Village, National Park township or Ohakune.

You can hire gear in Taupo, National Park, Ohakune, or at Whakapapa at **Edge to Edge** (☎ 0800 800 754; [www.edgetoedge.co.nz](http://www.edgetoedge.co.nz); Skotel Alpine Resort; 1-day full ski gear adult/child \$55/39, 1-day snowboard gear \$63/49). You can also hire skis on the mountain and organise for them to be ready when you arrive, which can be done online at [www.mtruapehu.com](http://www.mtruapehu.com).

### Sleeping

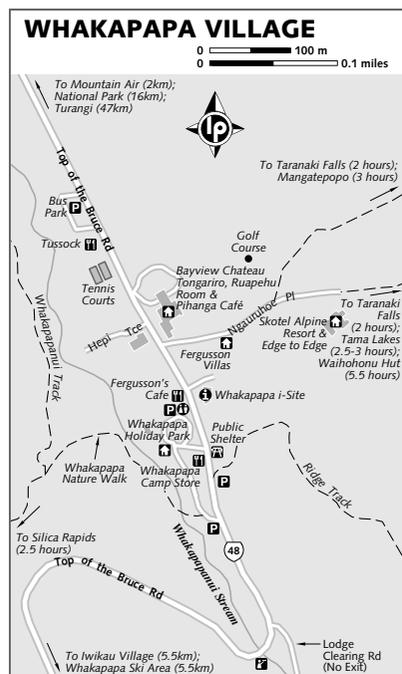
DOC runs two camping grounds within the park (near National Park and Ohakune), as well as huts, accessible only by walking tracks. Whakapapa Village has limited accommodation, and prices quoted here are for summer; rates are generally much higher during the ski season. National Park (p314), Ohakune (p318) and Turangi (p305) offer a greater range of options.

### BUDGET

**Tongariro Holiday Park** (Map p308; ☎ 07-386 8062; [www.thp.co.nz](http://www.thp.co.nz); SH47; sites \$28-30, cabin s/d \$30/50, new family cabin 4 people \$150; ♿) Handily located on SH47 halfway between Turangi and National Park (approximately 24km from either), this is an old Kiwi classic on the upswing, with ongoing renovations by keen owners. Units are basic while camping is pleasant with communal facilities more than adequate. New self-contained units are fresh and light. Café and Adventure Headquarters (ski hire) next door.

**Whakapapa Holiday Park** (Map p312; ☎ 07-892 3897; [www.whakapapa.net.nz](http://www.whakapapa.net.nz); sites \$34, dm/cabins/units \$25/70/99; ♿) This well-maintained and popular park in the village has a wide range of accommodation options, including a 32-bed backpackers lodge, camp sites perched on the edge of beautiful bushland and self-contained units for couples.

There are two basic DOC camping grounds: **Mangahuia** (Map p308; SH47; sites \$20), between National Park and the SH48 turn-off



heading to Whakapapa; and **Mangawhero** (Map p308; Ohakune Mountain Rd; sites \$20), near Ohakune. Both have cold water and pit toilets.

Scattered around the park's tramping tracks are nine huts (Map p308). Prices vary according to hut and season, but range from \$10 to \$20 per person. You can camp beside the huts for \$5 to \$15 per person. In the summer season a Great Walks pass is required for the popular four Tongariro Northern Circuit huts: Ketetahi, Mangatepopo, Waihohonu and Oturere. Backcountry Hut Pass and hut tickets are both accepted otherwise.

All park visitor information centres sell hut tickets and Great Walks passes, as does Howard's Lodge (p314) and National Park Backpackers (p315) in National Park.

#### MIDRANGE & TOP END

**Skotel Alpine Resort** (Map p312; ☎ 0800 756 835, 07-892 3719; www.skotel.co.nz; Whakapapa Village backpackers s/d \$40/\$5, chalets \$150, hotels s & d \$170; (P) (Q) (R)) There are several options available here in NZ's highest hotel: three-bed backpacker rooms, chalets and hotel. With timbered décor and a ski crowd, the complex has an alpine feel with a

few luxuries including sauna, spa pool, gym, ski shop, games room, licensed restaurant and, most importantly, bar. Edge to Edge ski hire on site.

**Fergusson Villas** (Map p312; ☎ 0800 242 832; www.chateau.co.nz; Whakapapa Village; 1-/2-bedroom chalets \$155/175; (P)) These small, self-contained chalets are good for families or small groups, with kitchens, and small decks for relaxing on. Booking and check-in is through the Bayview Chateau Tongariro.

**Bayview Chateau Tongariro** (Map p312; ☎ 0800 242 832, 07-892 3809; www.chateau.co.nz; Whakapapa Village; d from \$190, ste \$250-475; (P) (Q) (R)) The landmark of the village, the majestic 106-room Chateau harks back to a refined era with classic European mansion-house grandeur. Opened in 1929, its refurbishments have seen it retain an opulent old-world charm and dramatic snooker-room styling. The hotel boasts a cinema, restaurant, bar and café, tennis court, nine-hole public golf course and, of course, views of mountains afloat, sweeping plateau below.

#### Eating & Drinking

The Chateau has two in-house dining options: the elegant à la carte **Ruapehu Room** (mains \$25-28; ☎ dinner); and **Pihanga Café** (mains \$14-22; ☎ lunch & dinner), a consistent performer with good-value meals along the lines of soup, salads and fancier fare such as osso buco. Next to the café is the T-bar, a cosy spot for a winter warmer or a beer outside in the sunshine.

Across the road, **Fergusson's Café** (mains \$4-10; ☎ breakfast & lunch) is a casual tearoom, with good outdoor tables, proffering pies, sandwiches, cakes and coffee. **Tussock** (meals \$12-20; ☎ summer 3pm-late dinner, extended hr winter), at the foot of the village, has a beer garden, views and occasional live entertainment in winter. **Skotel Alpine Resort** (☎ 0800 756 835, 07-892 3719; www.skotel.co.nz; mains around \$15-20; ☎ breakfast & dinner) also has a licensed restaurant and bar.

The Whakapapa Camp Store, in Whakapapa Holiday Park, sells basic groceries for self-catering, though you're better off stocking up en route.

#### Getting There & Away

**InterCity** (☎ 09-913 6100) buses stop at National Park, from where you can get a shuttle to Whakapapa Village.

The **Tranz Scenic Overlander** (☎ 0800 872 467; www.tranzscenic.co.nz) trains on the Auckland-

Wellington line stop at National Park and Ohakune. The service runs in both directions from Friday to Sunday May to November, and daily December to April. It will cost up to \$100 from Auckland or Wellington.

#### Getting Around

##### BUS

There are numerous shuttle services to Whakapapa Village, the Tongariro Alpine Crossing and other key destinations from Taupo, Turangi and National Park. Transport is also available from Ohakune (see p320). In summer, tramping trips are their focus but in winter most offer ski-field shuttles. Book your bus in advance to avoid unexpected strandings. Prices following are return.

**Adrift Guided Outdoor Adventures** (☎ 0800 462 374, 07-892 2751; www.adriftnz.co.nz) Runs a Tongariro Alpine Crossing shuttle (\$25) as well as guiding one- to five-day tramps in the national park.

**Adventure Headquarters** (☎ 07-386 0969; www.adventureheadquarters.co.nz) Runs scheduled and pre-arranged Alpine Crossing transport (\$25). It also offers guided trips and gear hire.

**Howard's Lodge** (☎ 07-892 2827; www.howardslodge.co.nz) Runs shuttles from National Park to the Alpine Crossing (\$25), 42 Traverse (\$25) and Fishers Track (\$20)

**Matai Shuttles** (☎ 06-385 9169; 0800 462 824) Runs shuttles from Whakapapa Village and Ohakune to the Crossing (\$30).

**Mountain Shuttle** (☎ 0800 117 686) Runs between Turangi and Whakapapa/Alpine Crossing three times a day (\$35).

**Tongariro Expeditions** (☎ 0800 828 763; www.tongariroexpeditions.com) Runs shuttles to the Alpine Crossing, Northern Circuit and Waihohonu Traverse from Taupo, Turangi, Whakapapa and National Park (\$14 to \$49). Experienced staff will offer moral and physical support by way of on-bus gear hire and chocolate sales.

**Tongariro Volcanic Adventures** (☎ 07-892 2870; www.npbp.co.nz) Runs a shuttle service for the Alpine Crossing (\$25), 42 Traverse (\$30), Whakapapa Ski Area (\$20) and other locations by arrangement. It also hires out most necessary equipment.

#### CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Tongariro National Park is bounded by roads: SH1 (called the Desert Rd, despite being sandless) to the east, SH4 to the west, SH46 and SH47 cross the northern side and SH49 along the south. The main road up into the park is SH48, which leads to Whakapapa Village, continuing further up the mountain to the Whakapapa Ski Area. Ohakune

Mountain Rd leads up to the Turoa Ski Area from Ohakune.

For the Tongariro Alpine Crossing, access is from the end of Mangatepopo Rd off SH47, and SH46 from the end of Ketetahi Rd off National Park Rd (between SH1 and SH47). Theft from parked vehicles is a problem at both ends: don't leave valuables in the car, or keep everything out of sight.

#### NATIONAL PARK

##### pop 460

Named for nearby Tongariro National Park, this tiny outpost lies at the junction of SH4 and SH47, 15km from the hub of Whakapapa Village. In ski season the township is packed, but in summer it's sleepy – despite being a great base for activities in and around the park.

Daily shuttles leave from here to the Tongariro Alpine Crossing and Whakapapa Village in summer, and the ski area in winter. If you can't decide between two ski fields, it's only a short drive further on to Ohakune and nearby Turoa. It is also a base for other adventures, such as canoe trips on the Whanganui River.

And as you'll discover, it's railway country around here. About 20km south on SH4 at Horopito is a monument to the Last Spike, the spike that marked the completion of the Main Trunk Railway Line between Auckland and Wellington in 1908 (the train chugs on through to this day). Five kilometres north from National Park, at Raurimu, is evidence of the engineering masterpiece that is the 'spiral'. Trainspotters will marvel, while non-trainspotters will probably wonder what the hell they're looking at (it's rather not much to see).

#### Information

There's no i-SITE in National Park, so visit www.nationalpark.co.nz for info over the ether. For everything else, go to Gasoline Alley on the main road. It's got fuel, postal services, groceries, gear hire, an ATM and slightly dubious convenience food.

#### Activities

There's little to do in National Park itself, its major enticement being its proximity to other excitements such as the ski fields, national park tramps (p306) and the 42 Traverse mountain bike trail.

**MOUNTAIN BIKING**

This area is most famous for the **42 Traverse**, a three- to six-hour, 45km mountain-bike trail through the Tongariro Forest, one of the most popular one-dayers in the North Island. Under the wheels are old logging tracks, making for relatively dependable going, although there are plenty of ups and downs – more downs as long as you start from SH47.

A good base for the 42 Traverse is Owango, 24km north of National Park, which is where the ride finishes (and the start of a shorter but totally gnarly two- to four-hour loop). There you can stay at **Forest Lodge** (☎ 07-895 4773; www.forest-lodge.co.nz; 120maki Rd; s/d \$30/55; 📶), which will not only put you up in its tidy lodge but do transfers to the track start using your own vehicle (\$30) or drop offs for \$50.

The 50km **Fishers Track** is another revered ride. Starting from National Park, the track itself is mainly downhill – for about 21km – and some lightweights choose to get picked up at the nadir. Others, however, continue the loop back to National Park via a fairly gruelling grind.

From National Park, Howard's Lodge (right) provides transport and bike hire, while National Park Backpackers offers transport only (see opposite).

**OTHER ACTIVITIES**

For details on skiing Whakapapa and Turoa, see p88. Gear hire is available from **Eivins** (☎ 07-892 2843; www.nationalpark.co.nz/eivins; SH4), **Roy Turner** (☎ 07-892 2757; www.snowzone.co.nz; Buddo St) and **Ski Biz** (☎ 07-892 2717; www.skibiz.co.nz; Carroll St). Most accommodation in town offers packages for lift passes and ski hire, sparing you the steeper prices further up the mountain.

**Mountain Air** (Map p308; ☎ 0800 922 812; www.mountainair.co.nz; flights from \$95), on SH47 near the turn-off to Whakapapa, offers three standard tours, ranging from 15 to 35 minutes, and covering the volcanoes, lakes and *Lord of the Rings* sites.

Tongariro Forest Conservation Area around the little town of Owango can be explored with relatively little effort with **Quad Biking NZ** (☎ 07-378 8349; www.quadbikingnz.co.nz; half-/full-day trips \$195-295).

**Adrift Guided Outdoor Adventures** (☎ 0800 462 374, 07-892 2751; www.adriftnz.co.nz) runs guided canoe trips on the Whanganui River (one to five days \$130 to \$890) as well as freedom

canoe hire and necessary transfers. It also runs a Tongariro Alpine Crossing shuttle (\$25) and one- to five-day guided tramps in the National Park.

Also offering guided canoe trips on the Whanganui River is **Wade's Landing Outdoors** (☎ 07-895 5995, 0800 226 631; www.whanganui.co.nz; 1-6 day trips \$115-220), which also offer freedom kayak hire and transfers (including jetboat).

If you like river action, you could also consider white-water rafting out of Turangi (see p305).

For those rainy days there's an 8m-high indoor **climbing wall** (☎ 07-892 2870; www.npbp.co.nz; Finlay St; adult/child \$15/10; 🕒 9am-8pm) at National Park Backpackers, which offers 55 different climbs. Outdoor climbers with their own gear can find spots near Manataupo Valley and Whakapapa Gorge.

Forest Lodge runs **Lord of the Rings Tours** (☎ 07-895 4773; www.forest-lodge.co.nz; 3-8hr \$125-255) exploring every orc footprint and hobbit hole.

**Sleeping**

National Park is a town of budget and mid-range accommodation, with little at the luxury end. This makes sense, as you'll probably spend most of your time in the great outdoors. We list summer prices here; be warned they increase somewhat in the ski season when accommodation is tight and bookings are essential.

**BUDGET**

**Howard's Lodge** (☎ 07-892 2827; www.howardslodge.co.nz; Carroll St; dm \$22-25, d \$60-90, ste \$115-145; 📶) Howard's moved on, but he's left his legacy in this large, freshly decorated lodge with spa, two comfortable lounges with supersize TVs, and spotless, well-equipped kitchens. Dorms are relatively roomy with only three or four bunks. For outdoor action, there are plenty of skis, snowboards, tramping gear and mountain bikes for hire. Howard's also runs shuttle services around the Park (see p313). Book Intercity buses and interisland ferries here.

**Ski Haus** (☎ 07-892 2854; www.skihaus.co.nz; Carroll St; dm \$22, sites unpowered/powerd \$24/30, d \$60; 📶) An oldie but a goodie, this cosy wood-cabin lodge-cum-backpackers is friendly and sociable. A large alpine-style lounge crackles with a log fire and clinks with the sound of the pool table, while on chilly evenings the

spa pool thaws out frosty ski bunnies. In high season the casual restaurant makes cheap and cheerful meals, including roasts, while the bar cracks open.

**Adventure Lodge & Motel** (☎ 07-892 2991; www.adventurenationalpark.co.nz; Carroll St; dm \$25, d \$60-80; 📶) This place caters to Tongariro Alpine crossers, offering cosy, comfortable accommodation, transport, lunch and a T-shirt. They'll also make you dinner, which comes as part of a good value all-inclusive package (two nights, lunch, dinner and transport for \$149 to \$185). For homebodies, there are good facilities including relaxing lounge, spa pools and a barbecue. More expensive doubles come with en suites.

**National Park Backpackers** (☎ 07-892 2870; www.npbp.co.nz; Finlay St; dm \$22, sites \$28, d \$59-77; 📶) Giant kiwi and moa statues peck the grounds of this family-owned YHA hostel, which has basic rooms, many including en suite facilities and toasty purple radiators. The big attraction is the 8m-high climbing wall (see opposite; discounted use for guests), but other facilities include a barbecue, spa and indoor badminton. These folk also run shuttle services around the national park (see p313).

**Park Travellers' Lodge** (☎ 07-892 2748; www.the-park.co.nz; Millar St; dm/d/ste from \$30/70/120; 📶) There's no way you can miss this big flash-packers on the main road. Inside it's smart and comfortable, with a laid-back courtyard surrounded by 200 beds' worth of dorms, doubles and self-contained micro-apartments. Conveniences are modern and hardwearing, while the in-house Spiral café does dinner à la blackboard for \$12 to \$16. The railway-inspired house bar is a highlight (and we're not just saying that because of the beer).

**Discovery Lodge** (Map p308; ☎ 0800 122 122; www.discovery.net.nz; cabins/d/chalets from \$40/123/149; 📶) Handy for skiers, this lodge is on SH47, between National Park and Whakapapa. The spa (\$5) and restaurant both have excellent views of Ruapehu, plus there's a bar and comfy lounge. The blonde-wood lodge building has exposed rafters and a definite alpine feel. Cabins are basic, but large chalets are great getaways for up to four people.

**MIDRANGE**

**Mountain Heights Lodge** (☎ 07-892 2833; www.mountainheights.co.nz; d from \$105, d B&B from \$140; 📶) This friendly Swiss-chalet-style lodge on SH4, 2km south of National Park, has

good-quality, self-contained motel units that sleep up to six people; and B&B in comfortable en suite rooms with TVs and tea-making facilities. Other meals are available by arrangement, and there's archery and bike hire (from \$20 for two hours).

**ourpick Tongariro Crossing Lodge** (☎ 07-892 2688; www.tongarirocrossinglodge.com; 37 Carroll St; d \$139-159; 📶) As pretty as a picture in white weatherboard with baby-blue trim, and rambling blooms in summer. Rooms range from a standard double to larger self-contained rooms that include a full kitchen, although the lodge offers B&B with optional dinner (by arrangement).

**Eating & Drinking**

In the winter season when town is full, all options will be open most of the time, including the kitchens of accommodation, which will likely serve you meals. When the ski fields close, however, plan ahead: options dry up although there's undoubtedly still good food to be had.

**Schnapps** (☎ 07-892 2788; Finlay St; mains \$7-20; 🍷 dinner) This popular pub does excellent pizzas, generous burgers, and better-than-average pub fare (think lamb shanks and vegetarian dish of the day), and bands pack the place out on wintry Saturday nights.

**Eivin's Café** (☎ 07-892 2844; cnr Carroll St & SH4; mains \$8-28; 🍷 4pm-late) A dependable option year-round for tasty standards such as pasta, burgers and meaty evening meals. Children's options, too. The café also hires ski and snowboarding gear.

**Basekamp** (☎ 07-892 2872; Carroll St; mains \$9-18; 🍷 4.30pm-late winter only) Basekamp does wood-fired pizza, gourmet burgers and other tummy-filling grub for hungry ski-folk.

**National Park Hotel** (☎ 07-892 2805; 61 Carroll St; mains \$11-22; 🍷 10am-11pm) The only Kiwi boozier in town and a good old-fashioned one to boot. Pool tables, mixed grill and chicken Kiev, real live locals having a few quiet ones, and beer by the quart or jug.

**ourpick Station** (☎ 07-892 2881; cnr Station & Finlay Sts; lunch \$7-14, dinner \$23-31; 🍷 10am-11pm) Count your blessings ye who find this little railway station along the line, a lovely old dear lovingly restored and now serving eggy brunch, lunch, coffee and cakes, plus an impressive à la carte evening menu of fillet steak and crème caramel.

## Getting There & Away

### BUS

**InterCity** (☎ 09-913 6100) buses arrive at, and depart from, outside Ski Haus on Carroll St daily except Saturday. Journeys north to Auckland (\$57) via Hamilton (\$39) or south to Wellington (\$57) via Palmerston North (\$43) take about five hours. Book at Howard's Lodge (see p314).

For local shuttle services, see p313.

### TRAIN

The **Tranz Scenic Overlander** (☎ 0800 872 467; www.tranzscenic.co.nz) trains on the Auckland-Wellington line stop at National Park (and Ohakune). The service runs in both directions from Friday to Sunday May to November, and daily December to April. It will cost up to \$100 from Auckland or Wellington. Train tickets are sold from Howard's Lodge, not at the station.

## OHAKUNE

pop 1490

Expect to see carrots crop up all over Ohakune, for this is the country's carrot capital. Not only do they creep into burgers and pop up on pizzas, they litter the roadside in season. The world's largest ever carrot, in fact, grown in the area, was preserved and now sits at the entrance to town. To learn more (and you know you want to), why not visit during July's annual Carrot Festival (see the boxed text, p318)?

The irony is, they needn't even mention liver cleansing and eyesight improvement to win us over to the charms of this ripper little town. A pretty retreat in the summer offering outdoor adventure galore, the town springs to life in winter when the snow drifts down on Turoa Ski Area and the snow bunnies invade (although they no doubt love carrots, themselves).

There are two ends to the town: the commercial hub strings along the highway, but in winter the northern end around the train station, known as the Junction, is the epicentre of the action.

### Information

The **Ruapehu i-SITE** (☎ 0800 782 734, 06-385 8427; www.visitruapehu.com; 54 Clyde St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sun) can make bookings for activities, transport and accommodation. The **DOC Field Centre** (☎ 06-385 0010; Ohakune Mountain Rd; ☎ 9am-3pm) has maps,

weather reports and advice about this side of the Tongariro National Park. Out front is an information foyer open 24 hours.

During the ski season you can tune into SKI FM 96.6 for updates on the slopes or ring the **Snowphone** (☎ Turoa 083 222 180, Whakapapa 083 222 182) or you can visit www.mtruapehu.com.

There's a post office at **Take Note** (5 Goldfinch St; ☎ 7am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat). Several places in town offer internet access, including Matai Lodge (p318) and **Ohakune Corner** (☎ 06-385 8229; cnr Ayr & Goldfinch Sts; ☎ noon-8pm).

## Activities

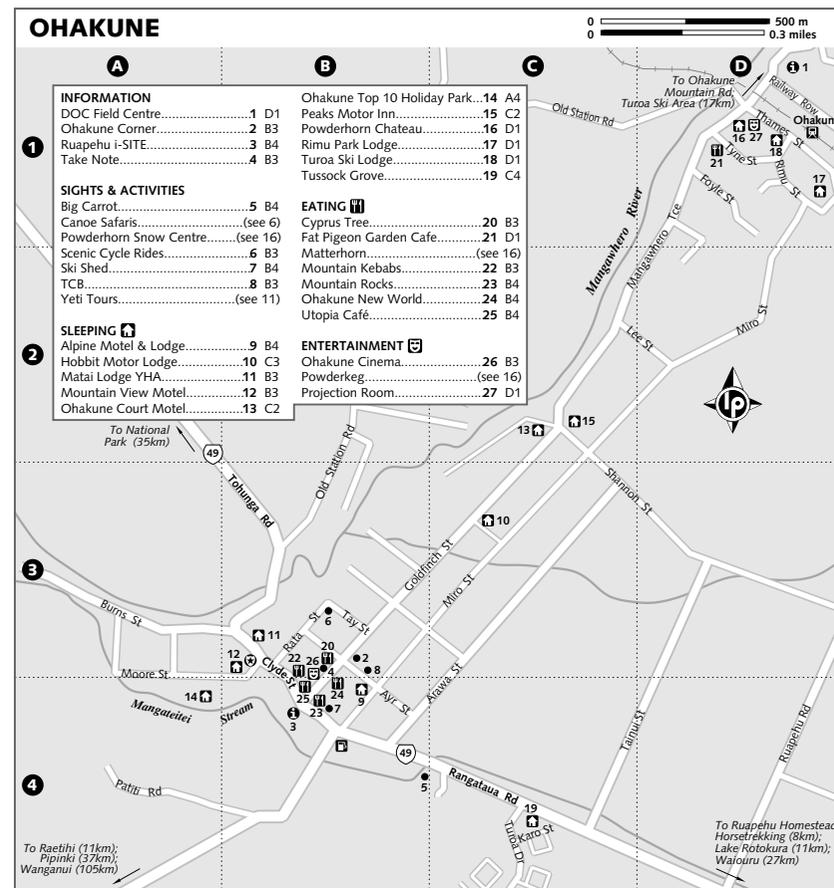
### WALKING

There are several scenic walks near the town, many starting from the Ohakune Mountain Rd, which stretches 17km from Ohakune to the Turoa Ski Area on Mt Ruapehu. The handy DOC brochure *Ohakune Walks and Mountain Road* (\$1) is a good starting point, available from the i-SITE or the DOC Field Centre.

An easy stroll starting opposite the Field Centre is the **Mangawhero Forest Walk** (one hour return, 3km). This takes in native forest and the Mangawhero River. It is well graded and suitable for wheelchairs and pushchairs. Leaving from the Ohakune Mountain Rd are popular and more challenging tracks, including **Waitonga Falls** (1½ hours return), with magnificent views of Mt Ruapehu and Tongariro's highest waterfall (39m); **Old Blyth Track** (four to five hours return), a gradual climb through forest up Ruapehu; and **Lake Surprise** (five hours return). See Map p308 for directions.

Tramps in Tongariro National Park (p306), including the Tongariro Alpine Crossing, are easily accessible from Ohakune, and shuttle services are provided by Matai Shuttles (p320). The Round the Mountain track (p310) can be accessed by continuing on the Waitonga Falls track. In favourable summer conditions, you can attempt the **Crater Lake Climb** (eight hours return), accessed from the Turoa Ski Area. This is an unmarked and challenging route; the local DOC office should be contacted for advice on conditions and the best route to follow.

By the time you read this, the first stage of the **Coach Road Walk** will be open. The walk is a community-led restoration of the original coach route from Ohakune (railway station) to Horopito. Begun in 1886, it was built largely



by hand by people who experienced great hardships, living in canvas tents and working in harsh winter conditions. It was gradually upgraded to carry passengers and goods, and used until 1909, when SH49 opened and it fell into disuse. The road has remained largely untouched ever since.

The gently graded walk promises an air of adventure, romance and mystery, with a number of unique engineering features along it including the historic Hapuawhenua Viaduct. It will also take in the Toanui Viaduct when complete – these are the only two remaining curved viaducts in the southern hemisphere. It passes through ancient forest that survived the Taupo blast, being in the lea of Ruapehu. Giant rimu and rotara can be seen.

## SKIING & SNOWBOARDING

Ohakune is all abuzz in winter when the town fills up with skiers, snowboarders, and staff to look after them. Lift passes are available at the ski fields, with equipment available from various places around town, including **Powderhorn Snow Centre** (☎ 06-385 8888; www.powderhorn.co.nz; cnr Thames St & Mangawhero Tce); **Ski Shed** (☎ 06-385 8887; www.skished.com; 71 Clyde St) and **TCB** (☎ 06-385 8433; www.tcbkiandboard.co.nz; 25 Ayr St). For more on skiing and snowboarding, see p88.

## MOUNTAIN BIKING

**Scenic Cycle Rides** (☎ 021 607 294; www.sceniccycles.co.nz; 6 Tay St) runs tours on the Ohakune Mountain Rd, 17km downhill stopping at waterfalls and pools (two hours, adult/child \$50/40), and the

**CARROT CRAZY**

No matter who you ask in NZ, the name Ohakune means carrots. In 1984 the township saluted the town's biggest vegetable crop by erecting the **Big Carrot** (Rangataua Rd), which quickly became one of NZ's most hugged 'Big Things'. Carrots were first grown in the area during the 1920s by Chinese settlers, who cleared land by hand and explosives!

Today the **Carrot Festival** is celebrated with Mardi Gras and lots of dressing up in orange as well as the odd carrot-throwing competition. The festival, usually held in July, attracts more than 5000 visitors keen for a party in the town that produces two-thirds of the North Island's carrots. Check with the i-SITE for more details on celebrations of the root vegetable.

Ruatiti downhill, 19km downhill (three hours total, adult/child \$60/50), with all necessary gear supplied. It also hires out bikes (road/mountain bike \$10/15 per hour). Note: cycling on national-park walking trails is illegal.

**CANOEOING**

You can also take Whanganui River kayaking trips from Ohakune with **Canoe Safaris** (☎ 06-385 9237, 0800 272 335; www.canoesafaris.co.nz; 6 Tay St; guided tours 2-6 days \$375-855, 2-5 day freedom hire \$185-250), which also runs guided rafting trips on the Mohaka (two to four days, \$395 to \$850), or **Yeti Tours** (☎ 06-385 8197, 0800 322 388; www.canoe.co.nz; 1 Rata St; guided tours 2-6 days \$375-855, 2-5 day freedom hire \$185-250).

**HORSETREKKING**

Five minutes out of Ohakune is **Ruapehu Homestead Horsetrekking** (☎ 06-385 8799; www.ruapehuhomestead.co.nz; Rangataua, east of Ohakune; 45min-3hr rides adult \$30-90, child \$25-75), which runs guided horse treks around its paddocks, as well as longer rides along the river and on back-country trails with views of the mountain.

**Sleeping**

In summer the Junction is a bit of a ghost town, so stay near SH49. The prices listed here are for summer (October to March); expect to pay up to 50% more in winter and book ahead. Good savings can be made on winter rates by booking midweek.

**BUDGET**

**Rimu Park Lodge** (☎ 06-385 9023; www.rimupark.co.nz; 27 Rimu St; dm/d from \$20/80, carriage \$120; (P)) This massive, rambling place is close to the Junction, with an option for every budget. The pine tree lodge sleeps up to 10 (\$160), plus there are chalets and motel-style units and a 1934 train carriage, popular with budget-conscious families.

**Hobbit Motor Lodge** (☎ 06-385 8248; www.the-hobbit.co.nz; cnr Goldfinch & Wye Sts; dm/d/f from \$22/90/140; (P)) A leafy and quiet option halfway between the town and the Junction, the Hobbit has a backpacker wing, motel units and fancier suites. The bush-setting hot tub is a real bonus. Children's play area too.

**Alpine Motel Lodge** (☎ 06-385 8758; www.alpine.motel.co.nz; 7 Miro St; dm/d from \$25/95; (P)) Right in the middle of town, the Alpine offers 40 beds in motor-lodge rooms and a four-bedroom townhouse next door, great for families or groups. The in-house restaurant is open daily for breakfast and dinner.

**Matai Lodge YHA** (☎ 0800 462 824, 06-385 9169; www.matailodge.co.nz; cnr Clyde & Rata Sts; dm/d from \$26/60; (P) (Q)) A dependable hostel run by folk who are fully plugged into the mountain scene and run a reliable shuttle service around and about.

**Ohakune Top 10 Holiday Park** (☎ 0800 825 825; www.ohakune.net.nz; 5 Moore St; sites \$34, cabins/units from \$26/95; (P) (Q)) A pleasant holiday park by the river with spacious communal facilities and several self-catering options. Nice extras include playground, petanque field, barbecue area and spa bath.

**our pick Mountain View Motel** (☎ 06-385 8675; www.mountain-viewmotel.co.nz; 2 Moore St; d \$60-90; (P)) An up-and-comer owned by enthusiasts. The comfortable rooms are all en suite, with all other necessary facilities (including spa) on the doorstep. Clean, quiet and good value.

**MIDRANGE**

**Ohakune Court Motel** (☎ 06-385 8183; www.ohakune.court.motel.co.nz; 101 Goldfinch St; s/d/f \$75/90/90; (P) (Q)) A cheap motel five minutes' walk from town and a little bit further to the Junction, this is basic but pleasant with a few larger rooms for groups up to five, some balcony views and a nice lawn.

**Turoa Ski Lodge** (☎ 06-385 8274; www.turoaskilodge.co.nz; 10 Thames St; d \$85; (P)) This is a great spot for skiers, being right in the thick of the Junction's action. Rooms range from standard doubles to

three-bedroom units with full kitchens. Ring ahead in the summer season: the lodge is not always open.

**Peaks Motor Inn** (☎ 06-385 9144; www.thepeaks.co.nz; cnr Mangawhero Tce & Shannon St; d from \$90; (P) (Q)) This quadrangular modern motel offers spartan, spacious rooms with good bathrooms. Communal facilities include basic gym, large outdoor spa and sauna.

**Tussock Grove** (☎ 06-385 8771; www.tussockgrove.co.nz; 3 Karo St; d from \$130; (P)) These small, swanky apartments are set up to look like log-style cabins, but the owners don't have a backwoods approach to facilities, with Sky TV, sauna, tennis courts, and mountain views from some rooms.

**TOP END**

**Powderhorn Chateau** (☎ 06-385 8888; www.powderhorn.co.nz; cnr Thames St & Mangawhero Tce; ste/apt \$180/750; (P) (Q) (R)) Enjoying a long-standing reputation as the hub of much activity during the ski season, the Powderhorn has a traditional Swiss-chalet-style feel with woody interiors and exposed rafters. The grotto-like indoor pool is a relaxing way to recover from the slopes before enjoying revelry in the popular inhouse Matterhorn and Powderkeg (below).

**Eating**

The Junction is active during winter with the après-ski crowd, but little is open in summer. Many hotels open their restaurants during the ski season.

**Mountain Kebabs** (☎ 06-385 9047; www.mountain.kebabs.com; 29 Clyde St; kebabs \$9-11; (☎) lunch & dinner winter only) Any old kebabsery can come up with the basic lamb, chicken or felafel varieties. However, Camembert, hummus, sprouts or olives are rolled into the mix here to make some great kebabs.

**our pick Utopia Café** (☎ 06-385 9120; 47 Clyde St; mains \$10-18; (☎) breakfast & lunch) A funky, upbeat and perennially popular destination for locals and visitors alike, with good reason. Great breakfast staples such as eggs Benedict and bacon and banana, plus a good veggie selection and fresh home-made counter food.

**Mountain Rocks** (☎ 07-385 9350; cnr Clyde & Goldfinch Sts; mains \$10-27; (☎) breakfast, lunch & dinner) A log-cabin-like space that feels more like a watering hole than an eatery. However, decent sandwiches, homemade burgers and great cakes are available to soak up the alcohol.

**Fat Pigeon Garden Café** (☎ 06-385 9423; 2 Tyne St; mains \$15-28; (☎) 9am-4pm Sat & Sun summer, 7am-11pm daily winter) Interesting breakfasts, tasty sandwiches, home-made cakes and excellent coffee. Set in a beautiful cottage and gardens, this is a great place to start your day or recharge after a walk up the hill. Terrific garden.

**Cyprus Tree** (☎ 06-385 8857; 19a Goldfinch St; mains \$20-27; (☎) breakfast, lunch & dinner Fri-Sun) Distinctly Italian food – pizza, pasta, and antipasto – served in a chic yet relaxed space. Definitely one of the town's highlights for dinner.

Inside the Powderhorn Chateau (left) are two legendary après ski hang-outs. Downstairs is the **Powderkeg** (☎ 06-385 8888; www.powderhorn.co.nz; cnr Thames St & Mangawhero Tce; mains \$10-32; (☎) dinner summer, lunch & dinner winter) offering pizzas, burgers and other bar fare. Upstairs is the swankier **Matterhorn** (mains \$26-36; (☎) lunch & dinner winter & peak summer) serving cocktails and sophisticated bar snacks as well as relaxed but chic à la carte dining. Great sunny balcony.

Self-caterers should head for **Ohakune New World** (☎ 06-385 8587; 14 Goldfinch St; (☎) 8am-8pm), which is the last chance to stock up before heading for National Park or Whakapapa.

**Entertainment**

Ohakune nights are lively in winter, quiet in summer.

**Powderkeg** (☎ 06-385 8888; www.powderhorn.co.nz; cnr Thames St & Mangawhero Tce) The party bar of the Powderhorn Chateau, with bands in winter and regular dancing on the tables.

**Projection Room** (☎ 06-385 8664; 4 Thames St; (☎) 6pm-late Wed-Sun winter) This funky little spot has occasional films and dancing to DJs.

**Ohakune Cinema** (☎ 06-385 8488; 17 Goldfinch Street; adult \$10) This small cinema shows all the new-release films.

**Getting There & Away**

**InterCity** (☎ 09-913 6100) serve Ohakune daily on their Auckland/Taumarunui/Wellington route; the bus stop is opposite the i-SITE.

The **Tranz Scenic Overlander** (☎ 0800 872 467; www.tranzscenic.co.nz) trains on the Auckland-Wellington line stop at Ohakune (and National Park). The service runs in both directions from Friday to Sunday May to November, and daily December to April. It will cost up to \$100 from Auckland or Wellington. Train tickets are sold at the Ruapehu i-SITE, not at the station.

## Getting Around

Several operators run services around the area including to and from the ski fields and the national park walks.

**Matai Shuttles** (☎ 06-385 9169; 0800 462 824) Runs Turoa ski shuttle (return \$20) and drop offs all around the volcanic plateau including to the Tongariro Alpine Crossing (return \$30).

**Snow Express** (☎ 06-385 4022; return \$15) Offers transport to Turoa.

## LAKE ROTOKURA

Rotokura Ecological Reserve is 14km south-east of Ohakune, at Karioi, just off SH49 (*karioi* means 'places to linger'). There are two lakes here. The first is Dry Lake, actually quite wet and perfect for picnicking. The furthest is Rotokura, *tapu* (sacred) to Maori, so eating, fishing and swimming are prohibited. The round-trip **walk** will take you 45 minutes; longer if you linger to admire the ancient beech trees and waterfowl such as dabchicks and paradise ducks.

## WAIOURU

pop 2600

At the junction of SH1 and SH49, 27km east of Ohakune, Waiouru is primarily an army base and a refuelling stop for the 56km-long

Desert Rd leading to Turangi. Rangipo Desert isn't actually a desert, it is in fact merely wind-swept and interesting. The road often closes in winter due to snow.

At the south end of the township in a large, concrete castle, is the **Army Museum Waiouru** (☎ 06-387 6911; www.armymuseum.co.nz; adult/child \$10/7; ☎ 9am-4.30pm), which preserves the history of the NZ army and its various campaigns, from colonial times to the present. Its moving stories are well told through displays of arms, uniforms, memorabilia and other collections.

## TAIHAPE

pop 1810

If you have a penchant for gumboots, a visit to Taihape, 20km south of Waiouru, is a must. The town has the dubious distinction of being the Gumboot Capital of the World, and holds an annual **gumboot-throwing festival** on Labour Weekend (October). It is also the access point for **Gravity Canyon** (☎ 06-387 6911; www.gravitycanyon.co.nz; flying fox/bungy/swing/combo \$99/125/110/280), 20km southeast, where adrenaline-junkies can take a 1km, 170m-high flying-fox ride at speeds of up to 160km/h, dive from NZ's highest bridge bungy (80m) or swing on the world's highest tandem swing.