Embrace a multiday hiking adventure in some of the most spectacular landscapes in the world. Hike through lush native bush and ancient forests, climb rugged mountains, walk past ancient glaciers and tranquil lakes, and follow pristine rivers. A multiday hiking trip in New Zealand is one of life’s most incredible experiences. With over 950 backcountry huts and approximately 14,700 kms of tracks there’s hiking options for everyone. With some specific planning and preparation, and awareness of what’s important to know when hiking in New Zealand, you’ll make memories that’ll last a lifetime.

Choose the right trip

New Zealand track conditions can vary significantly. While there are lots of high-quality, well-maintained easy tracks, with clear orange track markers, there are just as many rugged and challenging routes with tree branches, rocks and little-to-no maintenance or markings. Before you go, make sure you’ve selected a hike that’s suitable for you and your group. A little research will go a long way to ensuring you select a trip that suits your skills and experience. Consider the length and expected time it will take, how much time you have available, your fitness level and if you’ve got the right clothing and equipment. If you’re not sure about this, then ask a local at the nearest Department of Conservation visitor centre or i-SITE (they know lots about the local area). Kiwis love to help out, so they’ll happily share their knowledge with you.

Plan your adventure

This guide provides you with some of the key things to think about as you plan your multiday hike. In addition to this information we recommend you use the following information sources to help you get the most out of your time hiking in New Zealand.

- [www.mountainsafety.org.nz](http://www.mountainsafety.org.nz) The MSC has loads of resources, information, tools and advice on staying safe while you’re out exploring. Their free ‘Plan My Trip’ tool steps you through a few simple questions (activity type, intended location, length of trip, group size) before providing you any relevant warnings and notices for the trip. The tool can give you MetService weather warnings and watches, DOC alerts on huts, campsites and tracks and, if the area coincides with a forecast area, a New Zealand Avalanche Advisory forecast. With this information it then provides hiking recommendations and provides a seasonally specific gear list, which is all provided in a downloadable and shareable PDF.

- [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz) The Department of Conservation (DOC) manages most of New Zealand’s outdoor environments, including tracks, huts, campsites and national parks. Their website has detailed information about these facilities, services and locations – it’s an essential planning information source.

- [www.metservice.com](http://www.metservice.com) For detailed weather forecasts, weather warnings and watches specific to many outdoor locations and national parks, the MetService website (also check out their fantastic apps) is an absolute must-use tool for planning your multiday hiking adventure.

Huts

New Zealand huts don’t have restaurants or staff available (unless you’re on a guided trip and staying at private lodges). Our huts can be very basic and at a minimum provide a simple shelter from the conditions. Our huts vary significantly in size, some as small as two bunks right up to 40+. If there’s a booking system make sure you use it to secure your bed, but in most cases they’re available on a first come, first served basis. Most huts require you to bring your own cooker, gas, and of course food. Toilets are provided at huts, as is water which is typically collected from the roof, so follow the signage regarding whether you need to treat it first or not.

Leave no trace

Our environment is very special and we treat it with respect. By following these suggestions, you can do your part to help keep New Zealand beautiful: please stay on the marked tracks, take all your rubbish out with you, only use designated toilets, leave the natural environment as you found it (don’t take anything away with you), respect the wildlife you encounter and avoid feeding any birds, especially the South Island’s cheeky mountain kea as it’s harmful to their health.

Lack of cell reception

Mobile phone coverage (including internet coverage) is very poor in most outdoor areas across New Zealand. In fact you shouldn’t expect to have any mobile phone coverage on your hike, and if you do it will only be temporary. In a lot of locations, you will need to travel to the nearest town before you get mobile phone coverage, and this can be several hours’ drive away in some parts of New Zealand. Always carry your phone with you just in case, but don’t rely on it to always work.
The Kiwi Essentials List

If you ask any New Zealand tramp (our term for a hiker or walker) they’ll tell you what should be in your pack for a multiday hike. Here’s a simple list of things the Mountain Safety Council recommends you take. Of course, this list will change depending on where you might be going, how long you’re going for and the weather forecast, but use this as a minimum guide for your adventure, and add to it:

- **Hiking boots**: Make sure your footwear matches the trip you intend to do. Think about the track type and surface. Many of New Zealand’s tracks are very uneven with lots of tree roots and rocks, so running shoes aren’t recommended for anything more than a short walk.

- **Backpack**: It’s tough to carry all your equipment without one, and it’ll be on your back for most of the trip. Make sure it fits well and has space for everything you need. Aim to get all your gear inside it with nothing hanging off the sides, and always waterproof the contents. A pack liner is essential and these are available from any outdoor store.

- **Clothing layers**: Layers that you can put on or take off according to the conditions are ideal. Thermal layers of fleece, polypolypropylene or merino are good for New Zealand’s often damp conditions. Leave your cotton t-shirts and jeans out, as they’re no good for keeping warm and staying dry. A waterproof jacket is a must for every trip and waterproof pants/ overtrousers are also a good idea.

- **Warm hat and gloves**: Even in summer, Kiwi trampers never leave home without these.

- **Sun safety**: New Zealand’s UV levels are very high. This means you’ll often need sunglasses, sunscreen and a hat regardless of the season.

- **Shelter/sleeping/cooking/food**: As part of your trip planning, find out what facilities are provided. If you’re using huts you’ll still need a sleeping bag but you can leave your tent behind. Not many huts have cooking facilities so bring a camping stove with fuel if you’re not sure. Bring enough food for the duration of your trip plus a little extra in case you’re delayed.

- **Other essential items**: You won’t want to set off without a head torch, first-aid kit, personal medication, a map, compass and communication device. Carry a minimum of 2 litres/half a gallon of drinking water.

How will help find you?

In New Zealand it’s expected you’ll tell someone what you’re doing, where you’re going and when you’ll be back before you go. We call it ‘leaving intentions’. This ensures someone knows where you are and what to do if you don’t return on time as planned. Because most outdoor locations are remote, have little or no mobile phone coverage and often have few people around, if something does go wrong the only way our emergency services can help you is if they know you haven’t returned.

Tell someone your plans using whatever method works for you. This could be an email, a phone call, a detailed SMS message or a written note to a trusted friend or family member. As part of this information, make sure they know what to do if they haven’t heard from you by the agreed time, and once you’re back out remember to tell them!

Ever-changing weather

New Zealand’s weather is unlike anywhere else on the planet. It’s very common to see the sun one hour, and then have heavy rain and strong winds the next. In these conditions the effects of wind chill can be substantial. In the mountains, snow is possible at any time of the year (including summer), and the weather is always changing. It’s not uncommon to experience four seasons in a single day while hiking.

New Zealand is a collection of islands in the middle of a large ocean and this means our weather changes every day. We don’t have stable weather like most continental parts of Europe, Asia, America and Australia. Most of our natural outdoor environments are close to the sea or mountains. This affects our weather and means you should plan to encounter rain, wind and cold temperatures all year round. That’s not to say New Zealand doesn’t get some great weather, it’s just that the weather will change, and that can happen very fast.

Keep in mind that summer doesn’t always mean sun and warm temperatures, and winter doesn’t always mean snow. No matter when you plan on coming to New Zealand, if you’re considering going on a multiday hike you need to plan for all possible weather conditions.

Things to do before you go out in New Zealand

1. **Plan your trip**
   - Seek local knowledge, plan the route you will take and the amount of time you can reasonably expect it to take.

2. **Tell someone your plans**
   - Tell someone your plans and leave a date for when to raise the alarm if you haven’t returned.

3. **Be aware of the weather**
   - New Zealand’s weather can be highly changeable. Check the forecast and expect weather changes.

4. **Know your limits**
   - Challenge yourself within your physical limits and experience.

5. **Take sufficient supplies**
   - Make sure you have enough food, clothing, equipment and emergency rations for the worst-case scenario. Take an appropriate means of communication.