

Adventures in Nature New Zealand: Adventures in Nature

Sam McKinney

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New Zealand Maori legend says the earth was formed when Rangi, the sky, united with Papa, the earth. Then the demigod, Maui, fished up a cluster of islands from the sea and named them Aotearoa (Ao-TayA-RoA)-Land of the Long White Cloud. Nowadays the locals refer to their homeland as GodZone and with good reason.

About the size of Colorado, New Zealand is a compact country with a complex topography. In New Zealand McKinney is on a mission to uncover the natural dimension of this remarkable land down-under. In addition to providing in-depth background for the traveler seeking to keep well off the beaten track, McKinney's emphasizes responsible, low impact travel. Special attention is paid to restaurants, accommodations and outfitters that are particularly eco-friendly-those that strive to operate in ways that protect the natural environment or support local ecotourism efforts.

Eco-travel is about expanding horizons-about reaching beyond one's own comfort and self-interest. Says McKinney, "Unlike a guidebook researched in a high-rise office, the information (here) comes from a stack of notebooks, the pages ruffled by winds, the scribbled ink notations blurred by rain." So along with the traditional information on climate, holidays and currency, New Zealand provides background on less familiar fare: how to properly conduct oneself in a seal colony; adequate caging when swimming with Mako sharks; appreciating a full day's tramp (hike) in pouring rain through examination of the hydrological cycle; etiquette on the disposition of biowaste while on the trail; what tour operators to use, despite costs, because they're good and are eco-friendly. "I try to provide you with background," says McKinney "so you can appreciate what you see, offer practical help in planning your trip, and encourage you to tread lightly...wherever you go." New Zealand probes some of the best nature experiences available, and shows the traveler how to get in amongst the real New Zealand, to find the out-of-the-way places that most tourists miss. The author's Top Dozen Picks chapter of what to see would make a native Kiwi adventurer proud. In addition, the local Kiwi "slanguage" lessons are helpful.

CRAIG J. O'CONNOR (January / February 2000)

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