

Teresa Holt



## AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND

### NEW ZEALAND

**Location:** Down under.

**What's so special?** Some of the most varied and spectacular landscapes on the planet are crammed into the series of islands that make up New Zealand. Snow-capped mountains surround glacial valleys, rainforests contrast with volcanic plateaus. Isolated from other continents longer than any land mass outside the polar regions, New Zealand's ecosystem is distinct. None of its indigenous mammals, amphibians, or reptiles can be found elsewhere in the world. Kiwis' appreciation of their natural assets have served them well: one third of the country is protected by parks and reserves, and many visitors are drawn to this part of the world because of its natural beauty.

**Pressures:** Conservation-mindedness here stems not just from Kiwis' appreciation of their natural surroundings but also their incredible vulnerability. Introduced species—both animals or plants—can wreak havoc with the ecological balance. Problem species, like the Australian possum, have caused widespread damage to the natural environment. Today, the New Zealand Department of Biosecurity greets every arriving visitor to inspect the state of their boots and the contents of their luggage, in an attempt to safeguard against future eco-invasions.

**Get involved:** Global Volunteer Network ([www.volunteer.org.nz](http://www.volunteer.org.nz)) offers hands-on programmes ranging from 2 to 12 weeks in the Wellington region; projects include working in wildlife reserves, forests, coastlines, and offshore islands. Pacific Discovery ([www.pacificdiscovery.org](http://www.pacificdiscovery.org)) offers four-week programmes that combine conservation work with educational travel.

**While you're there:** Fiordland, a region on the southwest corner of the South Island, is a must see. Hike or kayak amidst jaw-dropping scenery in this dramatic national park. Mount Cook, New Zealand's highest mountain in the Southern Alps, is an idyllic place for hikers or climbers.