

New Zealand from Above (Episode 4)

Southern North Island and Volcanic Plateau

In coproduction with Making Movies (New Zealand), Bearcage (Australia) and ZDF/ARTE

200 CE the volcano Taupo erupted. 20.000 square kilometers of ash and lava were blown out and poured over the island. The crater lake, which had been created thousand of years ago, widened extremely. Historical sources say as a result even the sky over Rome and China turned deep red. Though the whole island is located on the rim of fire, the centre of the North Island has the largest volcanoes in New Zealand. This is evidence for the incredible forces, which shaped and still shape the landscape. It is not surprising that this wild and slightly uncanny region became backdrop for the Land of Shadow in the trilogy "Lord of the Rings".

The volcanic plateau is home to still active volcanoes like Taupo Volcano, Mount Tongariro, Mount Ngauruhoe and Mount Ruapehu. Another volcano located a bit isolated further west, Mount Taranaki. Because of its' symmetric peak it is the most beautiful of the region. The isolated location is the foundation for one of the most amazing Maori legends: A long time ago Mount Taranaki lived with the other volcanoes in the centre of the island. He fell in love with the beautiful mountain lady Pihanga, but Tongariro got jealous. A violent battle broke out between him and Mount Taranaki. Their violent fight turned the skies pitch black and the earth shook. At the end Pihanga stood close to Tongariro and the upset Taranaki, wrenched his roots from the ground and left, leaving behind a big wide gorge, which filled with water. Today it is known as the Whanganui River. Tongariro stayed with Pihanga and the other volcanoes. Taranaki withdrew to the west coast, where it is still found today. Constantly threatening to return for his revenge and warned of by the distant angry rumbling of Tongariro.

Further in the north is lake Rotorua, another crater lake. At the shore hot steam escapes the surface and vapour arises over the lake. During our journey we pass by surreal looking jade green Sulfate lakes. The whole landscape seems to fume and boil, the smell of sulphur is everywhere and geysers blow water towards the sky, creating impressive fountains. This impressive landscape is home to Nanny Christina Gardiner, member of the tribe of the Te Arawa. She introduces visitors to their costumes and shows them typical handcraft. For generations the Maori have adapted to geothermal landscape. The hot springs are used as cooking pots: After being dipped in the boiling water for seconds the food is ready to eat.