

LUXURY

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ADVENTURE

ROAM

If You Want To

by JENNIFER ASHTON RYAN

Circumnavigate the globe this winter to discover the dramatic overlooks, surreal landscapes, and verdant valleys reached on these eight virtually snow-free hiking destinations. »

South Island, New Zealand



NORTH and SOUTH ISLANDS, New Zealand

During North America's winter, New Zealand's summer is in full swing, making it the best time of year to avoid the more famous (crowded) hikes and enjoy lesser-known trails across the North and South Islands.

TERRAIN: The country's varied terrain changes from the temperate, hilly north to the extreme, mountainous south. Diverse northern coastlines boast pink-sand beaches and the Bay of Islands. Sparkling lakes at the base of jagged mountain ranges are more characteristic of the South Island.

HIKE: Experiential travel specialist **Ahipara** (from \$750 per couple, per day, all-inclusive, ahipara.com) carefully listens to clients' requests and goes above and beyond to create innovative experiences for them. Among less-traveled North Island hiking routes, director Jean-Michel Jefferson recommends the 3.5-hour Mount Zion Track overlooking the country's west coast beaches. Hiking on Tiritiri Matangi Island yields glimpses of endangered species and regenerating forests. Near Taupo, through a preferred





guide who is a Maori tracker, hunter, and chef, clients are able to hike through sacred Maori forestland. On the South Island, Ahipara can helicopter clients into a remote valley in Mount Aspiring National Park, lead them up to glaciers, and jetboat them out by dinnertime.

ADVENTURE: Luxury travel company **Abercrombie & Kent** offers custom itineraries to over 100 countries through its Tailor Made program (from about \$1,500 per person, per day, all-inclusive, abercrombiekent.com). Don't miss the Tongariro Alpine Crossing, when summer is best for navigating steep climbs over lava flows up to volcanic peaks; The South Island's Heli Hike Franz Josef traverses over snow and ice on the Franz Josef Glacier; and the moderately difficult 20-mile Routeburn Track sees 130-million-year-old ferns, mosses, lichens, and beech forest among snow-capped peaks and alpine meadows.

REST: Auckland's boutique 10-suite hotel **Mollies** (from about \$450, mollies.co.nz) works as a home base for taking the Mount Zion track. Around Taupo, the 25-room resort **Huka Lodge** (from about \$540 per person, including breakfast and dinner, hukalodge.co.nz) specializes in fly-fishing and fine dining. Convenient to Mount Aspiring National Park, the South Island's family-run **Silverpine** (from about \$475, including breakfast and dinner, silverpine.co.nz) bed-and-breakfast overlooks lakes Wanaka and Hawea from its hillside perch among flocks of grazing sheep. >