Chapter 35: New Zealand: a diverse array of geotourism resources
Ross Dowling

Abstract

New Zealand is a geotourist's paradise and rivals Iceland for its range of diverse landforms and geological attractions. Central to both countries is their living geology with active volcanoes, frequent earthquakes and geothermal regions shaking the earth and showcasing the ‘processes’ of geology which ‘form’ or shape the land. The two main islands are the North Island (42% of NZ's land area) and the South Island (56%). Both islands have a large number of geotourism attractions. These include geothermal areas, caves, geysers, active volcanoes, natural springs, blowholes, unusual rock formations, glaciers, fiords. Geotourism is an emerging multi-million dollar industry in New Zealand and once this vision has been captured, and the risks mitigated, then no doubt a host of geotourism activities will be marketed and geoparks established so that New Zealand can capitalize on its unique geological base to foster sustainable tourism development.
The North Island of New Zealand has a 'spine' of mountain ranges running through the middle, with gentle rolling farmland on both sides. The central North Island is dominated by the Volcanic Plateau, an active volcanic and thermal area. The massive Southern Alps form the backbone of the South Island. How it began. New Zealand's oldest rocks are over 500 million years old, and were once part of Gondwanaland. This massive super-continent started to split up about 160 million years ago, and New Zealand separated from it about 85 million years ago. New Zealand sits on two tectonic plates - the Pacific and the Australian. Fifteen of these gigantic moving chunks of crust make up the Earth's surface. The best landmarks of New Zealand are volcanoes and geothermal fields, magnificent kauri forests, some of world's most impressive fjords and waterfalls. An array of diverse, unusual monuments has been created by volcanic activity on North Island. Among the most impressive are: Craters of the Moon – Waikato. Area with several hydrothermal eruption craters (up to 20 m deep) with bright colored ground and numerous steam vents. Craters formed after the construction of nearby Wairakei Power station in the 1950ies. Emerald Lakes of Tongariro – Manawutu-Wanganui. Three light blue-green lakes in the crater of Tongariro volcano.