

# Course Description

## Semester in New Zealand

### Features Of This Course:

- A semester in the spectacular South Island of New Zealand
- Backpacking in the Southern Alps
- A choice of skill types including sea kayaking, canoeing, mountaineering and sailing
- 1-day cultural section with local Maori iwi
- Strong natural/cultural history emphasis
- Course length: 77 days
- Minimum age: 18 years
- Maximum group size: 10 students / 2 to 3 instructors

### The Expedition

Welcome to the NOLS New Zealand Semester, an exciting course in a remarkable country. You'll learn diverse skills in varied environments and be part of an expedition you'll never forget. You'll see amazing landscapes, beautiful and rugged coastal areas, spectacular mountains, and plants and animals found nowhere else on earth. Come prepared for adventure, hard work, and fun.

The semester in New Zealand entails 77 days in the spectacular South Island of New Zealand. During this time, you will be hiking, sea kayaking, sailing, canoeing or mountaineering and learning about the region's natural history and culture. (See the NOLS catalog or web site for specific skill section combinations, dates and photos.) You'll get a thorough introduction to the varied landscapes of the South Island, which include rugged hills and mountains cut with broad valleys and threaded with braided gravel rivers, alpine grasslands, snowfields, rainforests, coastlines and spectacular river gorges.

Along the way, you'll learn wilderness living and travel skills, hazard identification, risk management, first aid, cooking and stove use, sanitation and hygiene, off trail navigation and route finding, and leadership skills. You'll also spend time with local Maori, who will teach you about their history, culture, and connection to the land. Maori are the original inhabitants of New Zealand. You'll visit a local marae (meeting house) of the Ngati Kuri people, a community of Maori. This visit will occur at the start of the course, a welcoming to the land and its people.

New Zealand's forests, called the "bush," contain ancient remnants of Gondwana Land, the prehistoric continent, so the flora here has developed in isolation from other continents. Here you'll find unique birds and plants found nowhere else in the world, like the mischievous Kea, the world's only mountain parrot. Bird life includes tui, bellbird, kaka, parakeets, bush robins, mountain falcons, and morepork owls, whose haunting call can be heard most nights in the bush. You may also see unique coastal wildlife, including dolphins, cormorants, penguins, seals, and sea lions.

There will be opportunities to fish on the sea kayaking and sailing sections. Freshwater fishing opportunities on hiking, canoeing and mountaineering sections are limited and fishing is not typically taught on these sections. Successful freshwater angling in New Zealand requires a higher degree of skill than can be taught on most courses as well as requiring the purchase of an expensive license. Past student feedback suggests it is not worth buying a license. Those who are keen freshwater anglers and wish to bring their own equipment and purchase a license to fish are welcome, provided it fits in with the course schedule and other students needs. When bringing any outdoor equipment, please be aware of New Zealand's strict biosecurity procedures. More information can be found at [www.biosecurity.govt.nz](http://www.biosecurity.govt.nz).



## **Backpacking Section**

- Trip duration: 24 – 36 days
- Average pack weight: 40% body weight i.e. 55lbs
- Hiking route: 50 – 100 miles
- Lots of uphill and downhill hiking

The backpacking (tramping) section will explore New Zealand's high country and allow you to develop backcountry camping and traveling skills. This section is set in Arthurs Pass, Nelson Lakes, Kahurangi, or Ahuriri National Park. These are steep and challenging areas. The mountains start at 1,000-2,000 feet and rise to 6,000 feet in elevation. They are thickly forested but eventually open to alpine grasslands, rock faces and snowfields at higher elevations. These areas are also home to a variety of introduced mammals such as European red deer, Austrian chamois, and Australian brush-tailed possum, and native birds like tuis, bellbirds and mountain parrots, or Kea.

On this section, you'll learn the ins and outs of camping and traveling in this temperate rainforest/alpine environment. The route will follow a series of ridges and valleys along the alpine backbone of the South Island. At times you'll climb high on rocky ridges of shingle and boulders. You may also travel through snow, grasslands, thick forest, and along rivers. Some travel will be on marked tracks in the valley bottoms. Some hiking routes are exploratory in nature, no other NOLS course having been there before. There can be significant elevation gain and loss in the same day (over 3000 feet). On other days there may be none. A day hiking in New Zealand mountain terrain is hard work. You will need to be in excellent physical shape.

In the beginning, instruction will focus on basic outdoor living skills. Campsite selection, cooking and baking with stoves and fires, minimum impact ("leave no trace") camping, and traveling techniques will be emphasized. You'll build on these basic skills with classes on map reading, compass use, route finding, outdoor hygiene and sanitation methods, expedition behavior, and outdoor leadership. As the course progresses you'll have classes and discussions on first aid skills, emergency procedures, location-specific hazard evaluation, conflict resolution techniques, communication styles, group evaluation techniques, local flora and fauna, natural phenomenon, and environmental issues.

The New Zealand backcountry has a network of public huts and tracks. In and near these places we may have the opportunity to interact with other mountain travelers including backpackers, farmers, hunters, and conservation workers. As your course moves away from tracks and huts the country is very wild and you are unlikely to see other people.

During your course you'll stay in a tent and cook with two or three other students in a "cook group". These small groups help disperse the impacts on the land and enable you to master the art of backcountry cooking and living. You'll also travel in small groups, usually of five students and one instructor, again to disperse impact and to enhance learning.

## **Independent Student Group Travel**

An emphasis of this course is the development of skills that will permit you to be self-sufficient in remote backcountry areas. Our teaching progression for accomplishing this is carefully planned and executed. Initial travel groups, usually of four to six students, will include an instructor who will teach travel skills and leadership. Gradually, as you gain proficiency, the instructor will allow you to take on more responsibility and make more of the decisions. When you have demonstrated the necessary competency to the instructors, you may travel in student-led groups without instructors for a day at a time as you hike from camp to camp. We call this daily independent student travel and it is an effective educational tool. It allows you to practice travel skills and leadership and gives you responsibility for outcomes while still having indirect supervision by instructors and the benefit of NOLS support systems.

This course may culminate in a student expedition. After successful practice with daily independent student travel and if your instructors think your group is ready, the instructors will help you divide into student expedition groups (usually four to five students each). With instructor oversight, each group will then select a leader and carefully plan and execute a multi-day independent student led expedition. This part of the course builds on the skills you've learned and practiced and allows you to travel without instructors for three-six days. Students are aware of where the instructors and the other student groups are planning to travel and camp. Each Student Expedition group will carry an emergency locator beacon that when activated in the event of a serious emergency will initiate a response from local search and rescue agencies. The instructors with a satellite phone may be up to 24 hours away from the students. Our students often say the student expedition was the highlight of their course.



The occasional group may have an opportunity to participate in a 'solo'. These activities, if deemed appropriate, will be carefully managed and optional. Solos are when you spend a day and night alone. There would be no hiking during the solo.

### **Cultural Section**

- Trip duration: 1 day
- An opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of New Zealand culture and history
- Presentations and activities hosted by local Maori iwi
- Stay overnight at a Maori meeting house (marae)

During your semester, you'll visit a local marae (meeting house) for a one-day cultural section with the Ngati Kuri people, a community of Maori. Maori are the original inhabitants of New Zealand. During these two days you'll learn about the traditions, art and mythology of a very warlike people with a deep and sacred connection to the land. You'll learn how they have adapted to and overcome the challenges of European colonization. And you'll learn what the land means to the Maori. The cultural section is an educational experience that will enrich your understanding of New Zealand's cultural and natural history.

### **Sea Kayaking Section**

- Trip duration: 12-28 days
- Classes on practical sea kayaking techniques
- Sea kayak travel: 50 – 150 miles
- Rural coastal environment
- Single and double closed deck kayaks

On this section (not available on all semester dates), you venture to the Marlborough Sounds for a 12-28 day sea kayaking section. Marlborough Sounds is a partially submerged mountain range at the northern end of the South Island. It has numerous small bays and beaches and a patchwork of forest reserves, farms and small summer home settlements. The sea kayaking section will begin with an introduction to the sea kayak and basic maneuvering, with additional classes on paddling techniques including bracing and Eskimo rolling. You'll also have classes on kayak navigation, tides and currents, marine weather and communications, and other aspects of kayak "seamanship". Marlborough Sounds is a remote rural area, not a wilderness area. You will see farms, forestry plantations, roads as well as forest reserves. While you will see signs of other people, this area does offer excellent opportunities to learn and refine all around sea kayak skills as well as interact with locals and learn about local history and land use. Sea kayak sections in the Marlborough Sounds will involve travel most days on fairly protected waters, however the area is well known for strong winds and tidal currents that will influence your overall travel plan. The maritime weather in New Zealand is particularly dynamic and variable so it is impossible to predict how far or in what conditions your course will paddle.

### **Canoeing Section**

- Trip duration: 12 - 22 days
- Combination of flat water and whitewater
- Travel by tandem open canoe
- Possible service project on a high country remote station

On this section (not available on all semester dates), you'll canoe along the Clarence River or some combination of other South Island rivers such as the Hurunui, Waiau or Waimakariri from their headwaters near the mountains out onto the coastal plains. These rivers wind their way through some of New Zealand's most classic hill country passing remote sheep stations (ranches), forested gorges, farmland and settlements. On this section you will learn the essentials of whitewater canoe expeditioning. You will learn how to pack and maneuver a canoe on easier sections of flat-water before moving into progressively more challenging sections of river, stopping to scout rapids before traversing them and perhaps practicing on the same rapid several times to refine techniques. Other rapids, that are too difficult to paddle, you may need to line or portage to effectively negotiate. Some groups on this section participate in a service project on a high country remote station. If you're lucky you may have the opportunity to see a sheep shearing demonstration.



## Mountaineering Skills Section

- Trip duration: 14-22 days
- Introduction to basic rock and snow mountaineering
- Exploratory courses
- Courses in Arthurs Pass, Arrowsmith, Hopkins River or Rangitata/Whitcombe River areas of the Southern Alps

New Zealand has an extensive history of mountaineering and this section (not available on all semester dates), will take you exploring some of the less commonly frequented mountaineering areas in the Southern Alps. Your course will focus on mountaineering basics: moving in steep rocky or snow covered terrain, creating anchors, using ice axes and avalanche beacons, care and use of mountaineering ropes, placing rock and snow protection and climbing peaks. Some mountaineering sections hike in to an alpine basin and base camp for several days working on skills and climbing specific routes while other courses may involve a lot more traveling, teaching skills along the way. Basic glacier travel techniques may be taught. All travel is weather dependent. Plans may be disrupted by high rivers, strong winds, avalanche conditions, or the absence of snow in some areas. On some mountaineering routes, the most challenging part of the course may be approaching the climbing area through rugged and poorly tracked river valleys.

## Sailing Section

- Trip duration: 10 days
- Hands on sailing skills
- Sailing Marlborough Sound, Queen Charlotte Sound, Pelorus Sound, Cook Strait
- 38 foot keelboats

On this section (not available on all semester dates), you will keelboat sail in the outer Marlborough Sounds/Cook Strait on two 30-45 foot keelboats. The focus of this section is on sailing skills and seamanship. A comprehensive yacht coastal cruising curriculum will be covered, which includes: nautical terminology, sail theory, boat handling under power and sail, docking and anchoring theory and practice, tides, currents and weather, rigging, knots, charts and coastal navigation, rules of the road, aids to navigation and crew over board drills.

## General Information for your Semester

### Student Independence

On all NOLS courses students will be independent (unaccompanied by instructors) at various times. This will include time in and around camp such as while cooking or performing camp chores. Instructors may allow students to travel away from camp. Students have independent unsupervised time, usually in town, before their course starts or between sections of semesters.

### Weather and Other Challenges

Located between 40 and 45 degrees south of the equator, the South Island lies within the "roaring forties" of westerlies in the South Pacific. Temperatures can range between 70 or 80 degrees F on a good day to 25 degrees F with strong winds, rain, or snow at higher elevations. Average temperatures are around 45-55 degrees.

**IMPORTANT:** *The South Island of New Zealand is a cool temperate environment NOT a subtropical environment. Because we are on an island in a large ocean, weather patterns are quite variable and unpredictable. Generally courses that run before December have colder wetter conditions than those after December. Students should expect to encounter heavy rain and possibly snow, as well as hot, sunny or humid conditions during their semester.*

Hiking conditions can be tough, especially during inclement weather. Specific challenges include off-trail travel with a heavy pack over steep, loose, rocky and snow covered mountainsides. Thick and slippery vegetation is often encountered on steep slopes. You will encounter flooded rivers that may need to be crossed. Ground nesting wasps, which can be aggressive toward humans, will be found on some routes and stings are common. During warm humid weather blackflies (sandflies) can be particularly thick and annoying in forested or coastal areas and if allowed to bite can leave numerous itchy welts. A typical hiking day may involve carrying a pack (weighing up to 40-45% of your body weight) up or down 3,000 feet or more of elevation over 3 to 6 miles of rough off-trail travel. Come prepared to work hard. Your hiking group will consist of people of varying fitness and ability, some may be fitter, some may be less fit. This fact often requires patience and compromise.



Mountaineering skill sections offer all the challenges of hiking with heavier packs. They also involve traveling in steeper terrain where the consequences of a fall could be very serious. Another major hazard of Southern Alps mountaineering is the threat of rock fall, which will be something our risk management will focus on a great deal. Other mountaineering specific hazards include sudden weather changes, avalanche, icefalls and the threat of having your tent or other gear destroyed by the mischievous New Zealand mountain parrot, the Kea!

Sea kayaking involves paddling loaded kayaks for multiple hours per day. The weather for the sea kayaking section can be quite variable. Poor weather or storms may prohibit paddling for a number of days. Understanding and identifying hazardous weather, tide and sea conditions and deciding when to be on or off the water will be an important part of your education. Some courses may get to experience sea kayaking in surf. Surf is a dynamic and powerful environment; hazards include injuries caused by surf pounding on boats, contact with submerged rocks as well as hazards presented by rip currents.

The rivers we run at NOLS New Zealand are some of the more technically challenging rivers that NOLS paddles. Conditions on the rivers vary significantly depending on seasonal and weather induced river levels. It is not unusual for participants to be tipped out of their boats by rapids while canoeing downriver. Boats are packed to ensure that no gear is lost and each rapid is assessed to manage the risks of an unintended swim. The risks present on this section include large crashing waves, shallow water, rocks, hypothermia, sun-exposure, re-circulating water holes, fallen trees (strainers) and strong currents. Learning about river hazards and picking responsible "lines" through rapids will form a major part of your learning on this section.

During the sailing section, conditions on board will be cramped but comfortable. The main inconveniences will be due to seasickness. This can be managed to some extent by medication, diet and hydration, but in sustained rough seas we may have to look for shelter in protected bays to obtain some relief. Dealing with seasickness is a reality of any ocean adventure. In rough sea conditions, students may not be permitted on the open deck of the boat. Other sailing hazards include the possibility of falling on the boat or overboard, or being injured by moving equipment on board the boat.

Each student should expect to work hard every day, wet or dry. There are times when you may be wet, cold, or tired. There will be times when you are hot and thirsty. An objective of the course is to learn to manage these situations responsibly and with a minimum of discomfort. You should expect to get into camp tired every day, but with enough energy to participate in classes/activities. Depending on weather and route, some travel days may be longer than others. A typical travel day may last 6 or 7 hours. Arriving in good physical condition and mentally prepared will enhance your ability to capitalize on learning opportunities. We suggest a daily exercise and stretching routine that builds endurance, flexibility, coordination and strength.

The changeable weather, rugged terrain and variable sea conditions combined with remote backcountry locations means emergency help may take several days to arrive. Because of this we will be teaching all students to maintain a very high standard of personal and group well-being. Identifying and managing hazards- whether rock fall, stormy weather, animals/insects, moving water, or steep terrain- will be a consistent theme in our instruction. Managing risks and assuming responsibility for yourself and your peers will help make your expedition in these wild and beautiful places healthy and fun.

### **Behavior on the Expedition**

Each person's values, beliefs and actions affect those of the rest of the group. Balancing these is an important part of "expedition behavior". We want you to have a positive learning environment, therefore we expect all students to respect the values and beliefs of other members of the course. The best expedition members have positive attitudes, apply new skills and ideas at the first opportunity, and come motivated to work hard with people they have never met before. They care about others, put the welfare of the group before their own, and understand that an expedition succeeds when all its members work together. NOLS will not tolerate harassment or the use of drugs, alcohol or tobacco on any course. If you feel your values, or beliefs, are not being respected by NOLS staff or students, it is essential that you speak up so the issues are addressed.

### **Personal Electronics**

A key element to a NOLS education is time spent in wilderness. The benefits of this include being closer to nature, time away from society and civilization, and being in an environment where natural forces predominate and students have the opportunity to develop good judgment and practice self-reliance. NOLS does not permit students to use personal cell or satellite phones or other communication devices including personal tracking devices (e.g. SPOT), while in the field. Additionally, students are not permitted to take personal music players (iPods, MP3 players, CD players, etc). Instructors will be carrying sufficient communication equipment (usually a satellite phone) to handle any emergencies that may arise.



## **Course Objectives**

As a result of this course we expect each student to become an independent wilderness traveler and leader. You should leave with the skills and habits to oversee the well-being and ethics of yourself, your peers, and potential clients. Each course is unique due to variables such as route, group dynamics, fitness levels, environmental conditions, and logistics. Working within this context, it is our intent to accomplish the following objectives in four core skill areas and five technical skill areas (not all technical areas available on all semester dates).

### **Core Skills:**

#### **Risk Management**

NOLS teaches wilderness visitors to practice responsible habits that promote the health and well being of self and others. Each student is expected to:

- Consistently demonstrate an awareness of personal limits in a mountainous environment, with particular consideration for the remoteness of the expedition.
- Demonstrate knowledge of the hazards encountered by the expedition, including, but not limited to, loose rock, high rivers, bad weather and hypothermia.
- Consistently perform specific techniques to reduce and avoid hazards.
- Describe an emergency plan for a remote expedition.
- Demonstrate the ability to perform basic emergency procedures to support a patient until help arrives.
- Use experience and judgment to implement sound decisions, and follow them through to completion.

#### **Leadership Curriculum**

Students are exposed to the theory and practice of outdoor leadership, teamwork, and expedition behavior. At NOLS, expedition behavior involves commitment to the group, acceptance of others, and cooperation to achieve goals. Each student is expected to:

##### **Expedition Behavior**

- Demonstrate sound expedition behavior.

##### **Vision and Action**

- Be able to craft a travel plan for a multi-day small group expedition.

##### **Communication**

- Effectively communicate on an interpersonal and group level.

##### **Competence**

- Master the wilderness living and travel skills required during the course.

##### **Judgment and Decision Making**

- Demonstrate good judgment and decision-making skills.

##### **Self-Awareness**

- Understand personal tendencies, strengths and weaknesses as a leader.

#### **Tolerance for Adversity**

Learning to endure, even enjoy, hard work and challenging situations is a skill. At NOLS you will need to turn challenging situations into opportunity, using humor to keep things in perspective, often making focused decisions under stress. Each student is expected to:

- Demonstrate a positive attitude and tolerance for adversity and uncertainty.

#### **Environmental and Cultural Awareness**

An integral part of every NOLS course is to raise students' awareness of their impact on the natural world. Additionally, this expedition offers an opportunity to experience New Zealand natural heritage and culture through classes, discussions, written exercises and activities. We expect each student to:

- Demonstrate an understanding and respect for the course environment.
- Show an active interest in learning about New Zealand ecosystems, and local flora and fauna.
- Display a basic knowledge of New Zealand culture and history.
- Discuss the history, facts, and potential solutions to pertinent environmental issues.
- Reflect upon the transference of wilderness ethics and practices into daily personal and professional life.



## Technical Skills:

### Backpacking

NOLS students learn to live and travel in the wilderness while focusing on personal, group, equipment and environment care.

By the end of the course each student is expected to:

- Consistently practice *Leave No Trace* camping and traveling skills.
- Be punctual and organized.
- Do their share of camp chores.
- Cook nutritious meals and exhibit good hygiene.
- Learn to travel and navigate competently using map and compass.
- Dress appropriately for the conditions.
- Participate in the logistical preparation and cleanup necessary for an extended expedition.
- Demonstrate effective river crossing skills.

### Sea Kayaking

At NOLS we emphasize the skills necessary to execute your own sea kayak expedition. We expect students to:

- Maneuver and paddle a sea kayak using forward, sweep and back paddle strokes.
- Understand sea kayaking hazards and be able to identify responsible paddling conditions.
- Demonstrate sea kayak rescue methods.
- Navigate using a marine chart and compass.
- Be able to plan sea kayak travel while anticipating the effects of weather, tide, seabed bathymetry, and coastline geography.
- Attempt or practice advanced paddling techniques including braces, surfing and rolls.

### Whitewater Canoeing

Objectives include the ability to:

- Understand the design, use, outfitting and care of canoes and related equipment.
- Show competency with canoe rigging techniques.
- Demonstrate canoeing skills in Class II water.
- Demonstrate basic rescue skills: self-rescue, throw ropes, and swimmer rescue.

### Mountaineering

Objectives include the ability to:

- Use an ice axe for self belay and self arrest.
- Climbing rope care and basic knots.
- Build basic anchors in snow and rock and able to rappel using self belays.
- Move efficiently over steep snow, rock or vegetation covered terrain.
- Navigate in alpine areas using a map and compass.

### Keelboat Sailing

Objectives include the ability to:

- Understand and use sail theory to propel a boat on all points of sail.
- Understand and be capable of maneuvering a boat under power.
- Maintain a steady helm both on and off the wind, under power or sail.
- Navigate effectively using charts, compass and GPS to minimize hazards.
- Understand the principles of good docking and anchoring.
- Understand the use of marine radio.
- Understand and use the basic living and mechanical systems on board a cruising sailboat.

### College Credit

A student can earn up to 16 credit hours through the University of Utah for successfully completing this semester. Please see college credit paperwork enclosed in your enrollment packet. Although there will be many classes during your semester, credit is granted for a mixture of experiential learning, journal writing, and class work.

**If you have questions, please call the NOLS admission office at 800-710-NOLS.**

