

Factsheet – Access Charging

The Government wants to deliver the best possible experiences for New Zealanders on conservation land and achieve better outcomes for conservation.

The Government is introducing a visitor fee for international tourists to access popular sites so everyone can continue to enjoy world-class experiences in nature while contributing to long-term protection.

We will be investigating a visitor fee at up to 10 locations, starting with four popular sites – Piopiotahi / Milford Sound, Aoraki / Mount Cook, Mautohe / Cathedral Cove and the Tongariro Alpine Crossing. Other sites will be explored in the future, based on learnings from the initial sites. Access charges will not be appropriate at all locations on public land.

With the new visitor fee, international visitors who visit these places, whether that be for sightseeing, a short walk or an overnight tramp, will be charged. This fee will mean we can provide world-class experiences while protecting our natural places. Charging visitors to national parks and conservation areas is standard practice in countries like Australia, Canada and the USA.

New Zealand's nature is a taonga for everyone

DOC manages nearly a third of the land in New Zealand and protects some of the world's most iconic landscapes, but it is up against significant financial and environmental challenges. More than 4000 of our species are at risk and many of our special places need help.

Every year, around 80% of Kiwis visit public conservation land. International visitors also love our nature – 65% go walking or tramping, and 45% visit a national park while in New Zealand. People come to see the natural environment at these iconic places, so we need to invest in activity to ensure that the natural environment is thriving.

International visitors consistently tell us they would be happy to pay for the experiences they currently get for free.

A fairer way to share the costs

Right now, only some visitors contribute directly to the upkeep of our huts, tracks, toilets, and biodiversity – mainly those who stay overnight or use services from concessionaires.

Short walks and hikes are increasingly popular, but those visitors do not directly contribute to the costs of maintaining these experiences. New Zealanders help fund conservation through taxes. International visitors do not, other than those who pay the International Visitor Conservation and Tourism Levy (IVL). This creates an imbalance. The visitor fee is a fairer way to ensure international visitors contribute to the places they enjoy.

The Government is conscious of the increasing costs for international visitors travelling to New Zealand

The Government is aware of the need to strike the right balance between covering the costs visitors generate and ensuring New Zealand remains affordable for domestic and international visitors alike. The Government will ensure the charge is reasonable and will consult with local communities and businesses on the specific rate at a later date. It is anticipated that it will be in the range of \$20 – \$40.

The fee will be different from the IVL currently paid by most tourists at the border, which contributes to tourism and conservation priorities at the national level. The visitor fee will be focused on popular conservation locations, creating a more sustainable way for international visitors to directly help fund the maintenance and improvement of the visitor experience at these sites. The visitor fee will apply to all international visitors, even those which are exempt from the IVL (e.g. Australians).

How much money will it raise and what will it be used for?

Charging international visitors at just four sites could raise an estimated \$62 million a year. This funding will be ringfenced for conservation work. Funding will be prioritised towards helping maintain and improve tracks, visitor facilities, and the natural environment at the locations where visitors are charged.

Access charging locations and annual visitor numbers

Sites	Annual visitor numbers	Percentage who are international visitors
Aoraki / Mt Cook	1 million	88%
Piopiotahi / Milford Sound	1.1 million	90%
Mautohe / Cathedral Cove	250,000	75%
Tongariro Alpine Crossing	100,000	80%

Next steps

A Bill is now being drafted to give effect to these decisions. The Government plans to pass these changes into law before the end of the current parliamentary term in mid-2026. Access charges will be in place by summer 2027 at the earliest.