

Llamas

by Fiona Terry



Wally the llama is very friendly. His coat is soft and thick, and he loves hugs. Wally lives with seven other llamas on a farm. People come to the farm to go on treks (long walks) with the llamas. When Fiona and her children, Jasmine and Charlie, went on a trek, they found out a lot about llamas. In this article, Fiona shares what they learnt.

When we arrived for our trek, we met Roz, our guide. Wally and two other llamas were waiting for us. They were going to carry our bags. Roz put saddles on the llamas, and then we hooked large bags (called panniers) onto the saddles.

While we were getting ready, Roz started telling us about llamas.



Where do llamas come from?

Llamas come from South America. The people in South America have kept llamas for hundreds of years. They use llamas to carry things, often over steep mountain tracks. A llama can carry about 25 kilograms and can walk about 15–20 kilometres each day. People also use llama skins for leather, their hair for clothing, their meat for food, and their manure for fuel and fertiliser.



What is special about llama feet?

Llamas have two toes on each foot and strong, leathery pads on the bottom of their feet. These are good for walking over the rough mountain tracks in South America. The pads protect their feet from the hard ground.



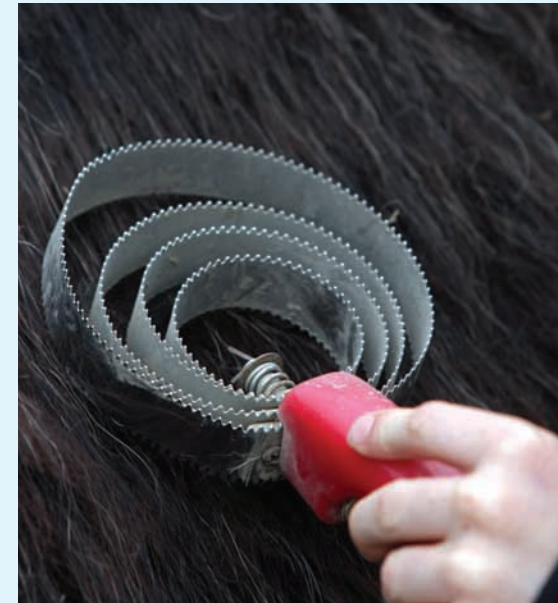
What is special about llama hair?

A llama's coat has two layers. The top layer is made of strong, thick hair. It protects the animal from the wind, rain, and cold. The bottom layer is made of fine, soft hair. It is very warm. People use the hair to make things like jerseys, bags, scarves, and hats.

Llama hair is different from sheep's wool. There is a kind of grease (called lanolin) in sheep's wool. Some people are **allergic** to lanolin, so they can't wear clothes made from sheep's wool, but they can wear clothes made from llama hair.



Charlie uses a special comb to **groom** a llama.



The comb has lots of teeth. It's good for combing out things that get stuck in the llama's hair.

Why do we have llamas in New Zealand?

Llamas were first brought to New Zealand in 1865 by a man named Barnard Rhodes. He kept a few on his farm, but until the 1980s, most llamas in New Zealand were kept in zoos. Then in 1987, about 250 llamas were brought to New Zealand by ship from Chile. The people who brought them here wanted to start their own llama farms.

There are now around 1,500 llamas in New Zealand. Many are kept on **lifestyle blocks**. Most llamas are kept as pets or for their hair. Some are kept for breeding. Others, like Wally, are used for trekking.

“People like them because they’re easy to care for,” Roz said. “They only need to be **shorn** and have their toenails cut every two years. And they’re great at keeping the grass down.”

What do llamas eat?

Like a lot of animals, llamas eat grass, but they eat many other plants as well. Llamas have a split lip, which makes eating thorns easy. They can also walk a long way without having to drink much water.



A llama's split lip



On the trek, every time we stopped to look over the valley, our llamas would have a quick meal from the side of the path. They seemed to like everything. They ate pine needles, grass, bits of bushes, and even gorse! When we finished our trek, we gave the llamas some carrots. They liked them too!

We loved our time with the llamas. We learnt that they are not only beautiful and friendly animals, but that they are very useful too.



Glossary

allergic - when a person gets sick if they eat, touch, or breathe something that is harmless to most other people

groom - to brush and clean an animal

lifestyle blocks - small farms that people have as a hobby

shorn - when an animal has its hair or wool cut off

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