



Marlborough & Nelson

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Best Places to Eat

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Best Places to Sleep

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Why Go?

For many travellers, Marlborough and Nelson will be their introduction to what South Islanders refer to as the 'Mainland'. Having left windy Wellington, and made a white-knuckled crossing of Cook Strait, folk are often surprised to find the sun shining and the temperature 10°C warmer.

These top-of-the-South neighbours have much in common beyond an amenable climate: both boast renowned coastal holiday spots, particularly the Marlborough Sounds, Abel Tasman National Park and Kaikoura. There are two other national parks (Kahurangi and Nelson Lakes) amid more mountain ranges than you can poke a Leki-stick at.

And so it follows that these two regions have an abundance of produce, from game and seafood to summer fruits, and most famously the grapes that work their way into the wine glasses of the world's finest restaurants. Keep your penknife and picnic set at the ready.

When to Go

- The forecast is good: Marlborough and Nelson soak up some of New Zealand's sunniest weather, with January and February the warmest months when daytime temperatures average 22°C.
- July is the coldest, averaging 12°C. However, the top of the South sees some wonderful winter weather, with frosty mornings often giving way to sparkingly clear skies and T-shirt temperatures.
- The rumours are true: it *is* wetter and more windswept the closer you get to the West Coast.
- From around Christmas to mid-February, the top of the South teems with Kiwi holidaymakers, so plan ahead during this time and be prepared to jostle for position with a load of jandal-wearing families.

Getting There & Away

Cook Strait can be crossed slowly and scenically on the ferries between Wellington and Picton, and swiftly on flights servicing key destinations.

InterCity is the major bus operator, but there are also local shuttles. From October to May, KiwiRail's Coastal Pacific train takes the scenic route from Picton to Christchurch, via Blenheim and Kaikoura.

Renting a car is easy, with a slew of car-hire offices in Picton and depots throughout the region.

Popular coastal areas such as the Marlborough Sounds and Abel Tasman National Park are best navigated on foot or by kayak, with water-taxi services readily available to join the dots.

MARLBOROUGH REGION

Picton is the gateway to the South Island and the launching point for Marlborough Sounds exploration. A cork's pop south of Picton is Blenheim and its world-famous wineries, and further south still is Kaikoura, the whale-watching mecca.

History

Long before Abel Tasman sheltered on the east coast of D'Urville Island in 1642 (more than 100 years before James Cook blew through in 1770), Māori knew the Marlborough area as Te Tau Ihu o Te Waka a Māui (the prow of Māui's canoe). It was Cook who named Queen Charlotte Sound; his reports made the area the best-known sheltered anchorage in the southern hemisphere. In 1827 French navigator Jules Dumont d'Urville discovered the narrow strait now known as French Pass. His officers named the island just to the north in his honour. In the same year a whaling station was established at Te Awaiti in Tory Channel, which brought about the first permanent European settlement in the district.

Getting There & Away

Air New Zealand ( 0800 747 000; www.airnewzealand.co.nz) has direct flights between Blenheim airport and Wellington, Auckland, and Christchurch, with onward connections. **Sound-sair** ( 0800 505 005, 03-520 3080; www.soundsair.co.nz; 3 Auckland St) connects Blenheim with Wellington, Paraparaumu and Napier.

KiwiRail Scenic ( 0800 872 467; www.kiwiailscenic.co.nz) runs the Coastal Pacific service daily (October to May) each way between Picton and Christchurch via Blenheim and Kaikoura.

Buses serving Picton depart from the **Inter-islander terminal** (p387) or nearby **i-SITE** (p387).

ESSENTIAL MARLBOROUGH & NELSON

Eat Doris' bratwurst at the weekend markets in Nelson and Motueka.

Drink A pint of Captain Cooker at Golden Bay's Mussel Inn (p419).

Read *How to Drink a Glass of Wine* by John Saker.

Listen to the dawn chorus in Nelson Lakes National Park.

Watch The tide roll in, and then watch it roll away again...

Festival Marlborough Wine Festival (p394)

Go Green On the Heaphy Track, a hotbed of ecological wonderment.

Online www.marlbroughnz.com, www.nelsonnz.com, www.kaikoura.co.nz

Area code  03


InterCity ( 03-365 1113; www.intercity.co.nz) runs buses between Picton and Christchurch via Blenheim and Kaikoura, with connections to Dunedin, Queenstown and Invercargill. Services also run between Nelson and Picton, with connections to Motueka and the West Coast. At least one bus daily on each of these routes connects with a Wellington ferry service. **Naked Bus** ( 0900 625 33; www.nakedbus.com) runs south to Christchurch, Dunedin and Queenstown.

Picton

POP 2950

Half asleep in winter, but hyperactive in summer (with up to eight fully laden ferry arrivals per day), boaty Picton clusters around a deep gulch at the head of Queen Charlotte Sound. It's the main traveller port for the South Island, and the best base for tackling the Marlborough Sounds and Queen Charlotte Track. Over the last few years this little town has really bloomed, and offers visitors plenty of reason to linger even after the obvious attractions are knocked off the list.

Sights

Edwin Fox Maritime Museum MUSEUM
(www.edwinfoxsociety.co.nz; Dunbar Wharf; adult/child \$15/5;  9am-5pm) Purportedly the world's ninth-oldest surviving wooden ship, the *Edwin Fox* was built near Calcutta and