

Wellington Region



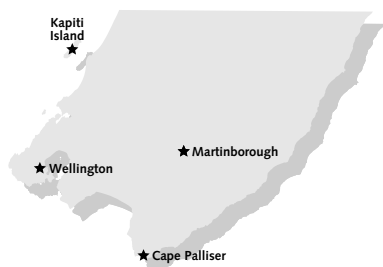
When you're flying into Wellington en route to the South Island, prepare yourself for some big-city sophistication and stay a few nights before kicking on further south. Art-house cinema, designer boutiques, hip bars, live music venues and late-night coffee shops – it's all here. Wellingtonians are geographically isolated and look inwards for inspiration, a habit that fosters a red-hot arts scene. Everyone seems to be in a band and looks a tad depleted, like they smoke and drink too much and spend their time molesting canvasses and scribbling poetry – except for the politicians of course. NZ's capital city manages to strike a balance between creative exuberance and an institutional mindset crucial to the day-to-day running of the country.

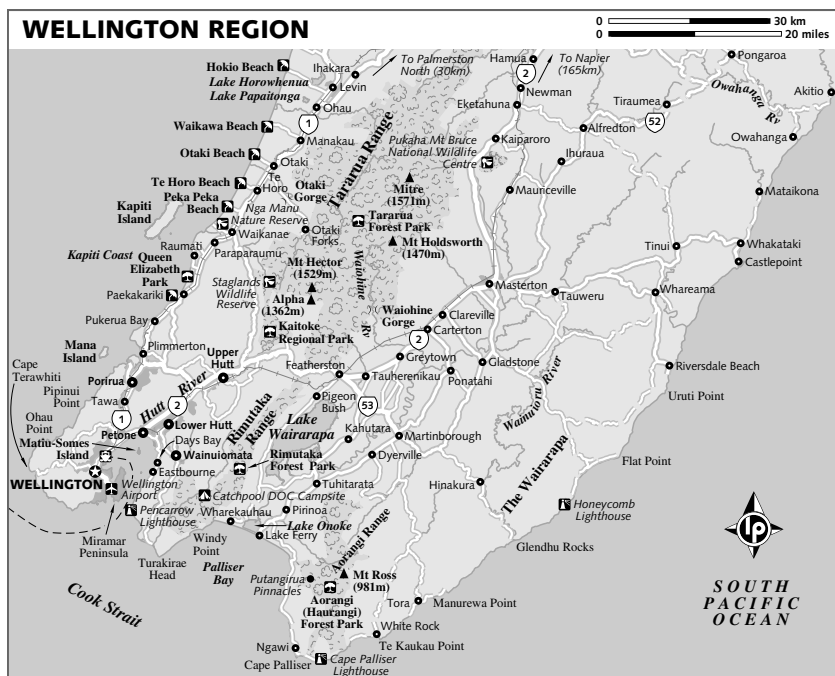
Wellington is also a major travel hub, full of visitors catching the ferries across Cook Strait to the South Island. Travellers file through the city, giving it a free-moving, energetic vibe. Steep hills lined with Victorian houses ascend from the harbour to spectacular view points. Wellington punches well above its weight – plan on spending a few days in the ring.

If city trappings are something you're trying to forget, there are great outdoor destinations less than an hour away. Cruise the Kapiti Coast or head over the Rimutaka Range into the Wairarapa, where the delicate flavours of pinot noir (the local grape) are apt reward for a day spent exploring the wild coast.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Getting interactive at NZ's finest museum, Wellington's **Te Papa** (p97)
- Scaling the lighthouse steps on wild and remote **Cape Palliser** (p120)
- Sampling the great coffee and quality beer that Wellingtonians demand at the city's slick **bars** (p106) and bohemian **cafes** (p105)
- Exploring **Kapiti Island** (p115) and saying hi to the takahe, one of NZ's rarest birds
- Maintaining a straight line on your bicycle as you tour the picturesque **Martinborough wineries** (p118)
- Riding the ratchety **cable car** (p96) from Lambton Quay to the leafy **Wellington Botanic Gardens** (p95)
- Ripping up the trails at **Makara Peak Mountain Bike Park** (p98)





Climate

When Wellington's weather turns bad, it can be *truly* foul: lacerating winds and sheets of freezing rain coming in sideways. It ain't called 'Windy Wellington' for nothing...

November to April are the warmer months and the best time to visit, with average maximums hovering around 20°C. From May to August it's colder and wetter – daily temperatures lurk around 12°C.

Getting There & Around

Wellington is a major transport hub, being the North Island port for the interisland ferries. Wellington airport is serviced by international and domestic airlines.

Easy train and bus connections make commuting into Wellington a viable option – many people travel to work (or to party) in Wellington from the hinterland. Approaching the city from the north, you'll pass through either the Kapiti Coast to the west via State Highway 1 (SH1), or the Wairarapa and heavily populated Hutt Valley to the east via State Highway 2 (SH2).

InterCity (www.intercity.co.nz) is the main North Island bus company, travelling just

about everywhere. Commuter trains run from Wellington to the Kapiti Coast and the Wairarapa; long-distance **Tranz Scenic** (www.tranzscenic.co.nz) trains run from Wellington to Auckland via Palmerston North. See p109 for details on getting to/from Wellington.

WELLINGTON

pop 164,000 (city), 424,000 (region)

A small city with a relatively big reputation, Wellington is most famous for being NZ's capital. It is *infamous* for its weather, particularly the gale-force winds wont to barrel through, wrecking umbrellas and obliterating hairdos. It also lies on a major fault line. And the inner-city one-way system is like the Krypton Factor on acid.

But don't be deterred. 'Welly' is a brilliant city, as those who spend any more than a couple of days there will attest. For a starter it's lovely to look at, scattered around bushy hillsides encircling a magnificent harbour. There are super lookouts on hilltops, golden sand on the prom, and spectacular craggy shores along the South Coast. Downtown,