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## Eat, Play, Stay: Best of Nelson, New Zealand

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**Known as the Sunshine Capital of New Zealand, Nelson is the South Island's shining star. Fiona Harper road tests the region's outdoor adventures, finding some delicious reasons to pay the region a visit.**

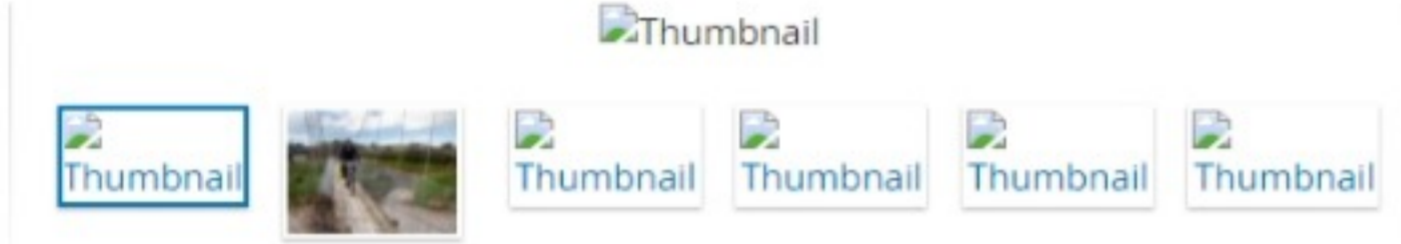
### Eat

If you can't find something delicious to eat (or drink) in the Nelson region, well, you're really not paying attention. Sun-drenched and lying on a fertile coastal plain, there's an abundance of fresh produce utilised by creative chefs to satisfy salivating senses. Boysenberries, pears and apples are in abundance, so too fresh raw milk (topped with rich cream - yum!), seafood, and of course lamb makes ubiquitous appearances.

Boatshed Café in Nelson, housed in a classic boatshed overhanging the sea, has a terrific alfresco balcony that encourages long lazy lunches. Or Jellyfish Café and Bar at Mapua in a converted apple shed is enticing any time of the day, whether outdoors in summer or cosily by the fire in winter.

Conveniently for beer drinkers, Nelson has over 20 boutique breweries and beer bars serving up some of the region's best. In fact there's more craft breweries per head of population than anywhere else in NZ. Wine lovers are spoilt for choice too thanks to a perfect combination of rich-soiled Moutere Hills rolling gently into river garden plains and climatic conditions (lots of sun, little rain) producing exquisite Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Riesling and Pinot Noir.

Try Neudorf Vineyard or Waimea Estate for vineyard lunches and Blackenbrook Vineyard for cellar door tastings. Grape Escape is like a co-op containing the best of the region in food, wine, gifts and artworks.



Photos: All images courtesy of Fiona Harper

### Play

The Great Taste Trail is a new purpose-built cycleway centred on the regional city of Nelson. Covering 175 km in total, the trail can be easily ridden in small sections or in its entirety over a week or more. The Gentle Cycling Company has made it easy by providing an all-inclusive cycling adventure. They take care of all the pesky details like bike hire (and maintenance too if you happen to get a puncture), maps, luggage portage and accommodation bookings. They'll even pick you and your bike up at the end of your adventure, returning to their Nelson base. The only decision you need make is how far you're going to ride each day.

The real fun of the Great Taste Trail is in the exciting enticements along the way. Beaches, galleries and art studios, cafes, vineyards, breweries and apple orchards are some of the diversions. Westwards from Nelson the trail winds along a flat coastal route passing sun-drenched beaches across the causeway to Rabbit Island. Board the Mapua Ferry for the short trip across the river to Mapua Wharf where waterfront apple sheds have been converted into restaurants and boutique stores. During summer the precinct buzzes with markets, live music and al fresco dining.

The Coastal Trail section winds through gently rolling hills into the coastal town of Kaiteriteri, the logical jumping off point to explore Abel Tasman National Park. Wilsons Abel Tasman pick up where the Gentle Cycling Company drops off, taking over all logistics for hikers.

They've been guiding hikers and welcoming visitors since the 1840's so they know their stuff. With two lodges within the park, guided walks over 3 or 5 days can be as energetic or relaxing as you like. The best way to enjoy the park is to walk from north to south, with most days comprising no more than 17 km or walking. The trail hugs the coastline with sections along golden beaches or across wetlands boardwalks. Terrain is undulating, graded mostly easy to moderate so anyone with average fitness could enjoy one of New Zealand's best loved parks. Sea kayaking in sheltered waters amongst sea lion colonies and penguin, dolphin and whale habitat adds some wildlife adventure into the mix

### Stay

Along the Great Taste Trail Pine Hill Lodge is a swanky new B&B; overlooking the vines. Architecturally designed to take full advantage of its hilltop location, sheep graze amongst rows of the vines that run down the hill to a tranquil pond with valley views. Other options along the Great Taste Trail include Nautilus Lodge in the town of Motueka and Kimiora Eco Retreat at Keriteriteri. Back in Nelson, plan your adventures from a waterfront base at the Grand Monaco Mercure Nelson

Within Abel Tasman National Park hikers bunker down in the two Wilsons beachfront lodges. Meadowbank Homestead has tendrils reaching back into the 1880's. The luxury cliff top lodge has since been completely rebuilt with 13 ensuite rooms, a few choice ones with sea views overlooking Tasman Bay. Torrent Bay Lodge is more like a relaxed family beach home thanks to its origins as a simple family bach (the NZ term for holiday house). A partial glass roof captures the sunlight in a communal lounge with French doors opening onto a beachfront deck. Linger here as long as you can to soak up the region's natural beauty.

For more information go to - [www.nelsonnz.com](http://www.nelsonnz.com)

Fiona Harper is a travel writer specialising in cruising, active and soft adventures. Follow her at [www.travelboatinglifestyle.com](http://www.travelboatinglifestyle.com)

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