

# TOAST OF THE TOWNS

Raise a glass to Havelock, Picton and Blenheim, three charming Marlborough destinations with wining, dining and outdoor adventure opportunities aplenty.

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WATER AND WINE – they’re the threads that link three of Marlborough’s main towns. From Blenheim’s cellar doors, to Havelock’s pellucid Pelorus River and Picton’s spectacular Queen Charlotte Sound, this is a province best enjoyed in a boat or with a glass of sauvignon blanc in hand. In some cases, both at the same time.

TASTE OF THE SEA

It was gold that gave rise to Havelock, the village at the head of Pelorus Sound, but it is the place’s marine riches that draw visitors today. The town dubbed the “green-lipped mussel capital of the world” has hosted a seafood festival every March for the past 14 years, while one of its longest-running eateries is dedicated to the succulent mollusc.

The best way to enjoy seafood is always at the source. The Greenshell Mussel Cruise ([marlboroughnz.com/listings/greenshell-mussel-cruise](http://marlboroughnz.com/listings/greenshell-mussel-cruise)) takes in the Pelorus and Kenepuru sounds, culminating in a visit to a mussel farm and a tasting of the freshly steamed shellfish – paired, naturally, with a Marlborough sauvignon blanc.

If you’re not a seafood fan, you might want to experience the sounds on board the Pelorus Mail Boat ([themailboat.co.nz](http://themailboat.co.nz)), which has been delivering to isolated



From top: Lunch is served by Tracy Cacciamani of the Mussel Pot in Havelock; the Havelock Museum; Greenshell Mussel Cruise with skipper/guide Matty Pigou (right) and a guest. Previous pages: Cloudy Bay Vineyards.



homesteads for more than a century. Speaking of history, the Havelock Museum is full of artefacts from Havelock’s seminal moments, including the Wakamarina gold rush of 1864 and the subsequent period of milling, during which millions of metres of native timber were shipped from Pelorus Sound.

Thankfully, some trees were left standing. As a result, the Pelorus River, which could qualify as one of New Zealand’s most beautiful for the sheer quality of its water, flows through a landscape of stunning podocarp and beech forest.

You can experience a taste of this at the Pelorus Bridge Scenic Reserve, the setting for the barrel-riding scene in *The Hobbit: the Desolation of Smaug*. But even better is kayaking a section of the river with Pelorus Eco Adventures ([kayak-newzealand.com](http://kayak-newzealand.com)), based out of Havelock’s Bluemoon Lodge.

Owner Shane Mckay, who with wife Asha founded the operation seven years ago, says they were drawn to the Pelorus River because of the podocarp forest. But the waterway is also “purpose-built” for a safe, family-friendly kayaking operation, with limpid pools, gentle flow and the odd rapid for excitement.

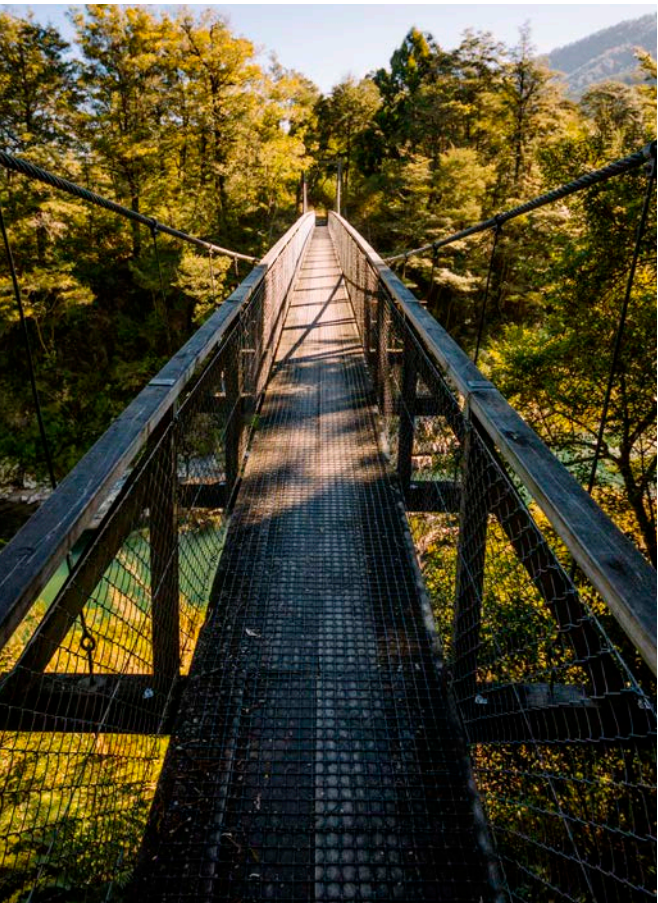
“We get a lot of people coming with us who have never paddled – even some who can’t swim,” says Mckay, who offers a premium private tour and a *Hobbit*-themed one, both of which are guided and use beginner-friendly inflatable two-person Sevylor kayaks.

Drifting down the Pelorus, against a backdrop of mātai, kahikatea, rimu and beech forest, you can see why Sir Peter Jackson’s scouts latched onto this location.

WILD AT HEART

From Havelock, take Queen Charlotte Drive to Picton. A stunning scenic alternative to the state highway, the 40-odd-kilometre route twists through bush-clad hills above Pelorus Sound and through Linkwater. Take it slowly and savour the views.

Clockwise from above: The Pelorus Mail Boat; bridge over the Pelorus River; dolphins on an E-Ko Tours trip; an Interislander ferry passes during an E-Ko Tours excursion; a Pelorus Eco Adventures kayaking expedition.







Picton was once regarded as the place you passed through to board the Cook Strait ferry or after you disembarked. But with the growing popularity of the Queen Charlotte Track and the emergence of several eco-tourism operations, as well as the recent redevelopment of the marina area, Picton is now a bona fide destination, and the main gateway to the sounds.

There are several Picton-based boat operators who will take you to your bay of choice on Queen Charlotte Sound (and can also transfer your luggage if you're walking the track). Ship Cove is the starting point for the track and was said to be Captain Cook's favourite New Zealand anchorage. It's a beautiful spot for a picnic, or you might want to tramp a section of the track and get picked up by the return boat.

Dedicated nature lovers should sign on for E-Ko Tours' Wildlife Island Sanctuary and Dolphin Cruise ([e-ko.nz](http://e-ko.nz)), a four-hour round-trip on a supremely comfortable catamaran to predator-free Motuara Island.

The tagline "Adventures for the soul" nicely captures this experience: we hadn't even cleared Picton harbour before we encountered a pod of playful dolphins, and that was followed by sightings of fur seals, mollymawks and a New Zealand king shag.

At Motuara Island, you'll spot tīeke/saddlebacks, kākārīki, kererū, tūi, piwakawaka/fantails and korimako/bellbirds – and if you don't see them, you'll hear them.

OPEN-DOOR POLICY

It's the engine room of the New Zealand wine industry, and so in Blenheim all roads lead eventually to a cellar door, typically one in the neighbourhood of Rapaura Road. Dubbed the "golden mile" – in reality it's a fair bit longer than that – this slice of the Wairau Plains is home to some of Marlborough's biggest wine names, with at least half a dozen more highly regarded



Clockwise from top left: Marlborough Lodge; Harvest Restaurant; Picton War Memorial; early morning in the Queen Charlotte Sound; Edwin Fox Maritime Museum.



wineries within striking range, which makes a pedal-powered tasting tour a great option.

Explore Marlborough ([exploremarlborough.co.nz](http://exploremarlborough.co.nz)) offers guided cycle tours and self-guided bike-hire options from a container base next to the Vines Village ([thevinesvillage.co.nz](http://thevinesvillage.co.nz)) on Rapaura Road. From there, you can shoot along the Wairau River stopbank before connecting with a gravel bike trail, or choose from a handful of alternative loop routes. On a quiet afternoon, it's an appealing way to navigate Marlborough wine country, pedalling between Cloudy Bay ([cloudybay.co.nz](http://cloudybay.co.nz)) and Giesen ([giesen.co.nz](http://giesen.co.nz)) and Nautilus ([nautilusestate.com](http://nautilusestate.com)), filling your basket as you go.

Marlborough's reputation as a "gourmet province" isn't solely built on wine, however. Many wineries offer platters, while others such as Wairau River do a full lunch service, with the emphasis on seasonal local produce.

And then there are the food and wine events, of which Marlborough is justifiably proud. The big one is the Marlborough Wine & Food Festival ([wine-marlborough-festival.co.nz](http://wine-marlborough-festival.co.nz)), hosted in February by Brancott Vineyard. The 2018 festival was attended by 8000 people. Expect 2019 to be just as big. [marlboroughnz.com](http://marlboroughnz.com)

Clockwise from above: Cloudy Bay Vineyards tasting room; cycles can be hired from Explore Marlborough, Blenheim; waitress Becca Fougere and chef Vik Sehrawat at Wairau River Wines.







## Play

### OMAKA AVIATION HERITAGE CENTRE

Even if you have only a passing interest in aviation or war history, the Omas Aviation Heritage Centre is a must-see when you're in Blenheim. Opened in 2006, the main hangar houses Sir Peter Jackson's World War I collection, which includes such gems as a Balkenkreuz cross cut from the fuselage of the Red Baron's Fokker triplane. More recently, the museum has opened a hangar devoted entirely to World War II. Titled *Dangerous Skies*, the exhibition continues the Omas experience of combining restored and replica vintage aircraft with theatrical – and realistic – staged scenes, courtesy of Weta Workshop. [omaka.org.nz](http://omaka.org.nz)

### EDWIN FOX MARITIME MUSEUM

Picton's Edwin Fox Maritime Museum is based around one very large exhibit: the 48m-long timber hull of the Edwin Fox, reportedly one of the world's oldest surviving merchant ships. Built in Calcutta in 1853, the Edwin Fox went around the world many times, carrying troops to the Crimean war, Chinese labourers to the West Indies, convicts to Australia and settlers to New Zealand, before she was refitted in the 1880s to export frozen meat. Stand inside a piece of history. [edwinfoxsociety.com](http://edwinfoxsociety.com)

## Eat

### HARVEST RESTAURANT

Harvest is aptly named, given its emphasis on showcasing the best of Marlborough's gourmet produce on its regularly changing menu. Located in an understated dining room in the historic Marlborough Lodge, and open to the public for lunch and dinner from Wednesday to Sunday, Harvest's theme is "simple, fresh, local and seasonal", which it delivers with finesse. [harvestrestaurant.co.nz](http://harvestrestaurant.co.nz)



### OXLEY'S BAR & KITCHEN

Dining doesn't come any better located than Oxley's Bar & Kitchen, right across the road from the Picton waterfront, and behind a heritage-listed, Italian palazzo-style facade. This is a family-friendly gastro pub, serving classic comfort food such as ribs, steak, freshly caught fish and the like. Wash it down with something from the hand-picked selection of Marlborough and Nelson wines. [oxleys.co.nz](http://oxleys.co.nz)

### THE MUSSEL POT

In Havelock's main street, check out The Mussel Pot for green-lipped mussels served grilled on the half-shell or steamed in your choice of delicious broth. [themusselpot.co.nz](http://themusselpot.co.nz)

### SLIP INN

If you want to get close to the water, head down to the Slip Inn at Havelock Marina which, among many other options, serves excellent seafood to go with the marine views. [www.slipinn.co.nz](http://www.slipinn.co.nz)

## Sleep

### THE MARLBOROUGH LODGE

Luxury accommodation in a former Victorian convent, set in park-like grounds and surrounded by

grapevines on Marlborough wine country's "golden mile". Built in 1901 for the Sisters of Mercy, the building has been artfully restored and reconfigured to offer 10 suites, some retaining original features such as stained-glass windows and vaulted timber ceilings. The tone is nurturing and relaxed, with attentive but never intrusive service. A haven. [themarkloughlodge.co.nz](http://themarkloughlodge.co.nz)

### ESCAPE TO PICTON

A boutique luxury hotel, bar and restaurant in the heart of Picton, in the historic Fifth Bank building and across the road from the marina. There are three accommodation options: the serene Sea Room, with a grand bay-window and timeless decor; the three-room, light-filled Modern Suite, with a gas fireplace, spa bath and view of the sound; and the wonderful Formal Suite, with Victorian-inspired decor and a free-standing French slipper tub. To cap it off, your host is an accomplished head chef with an impressive resume. [escapetopicton.com](http://escapetopicton.com)

Clockwise from above: Lauren Cunningham (left) and Letitia Leonard from Oxley's Bar & Kitchen; two of Marlborough's finest offerings, wine and mussels; Blenheim wine country.

## Getting there

**MARLBOROUGH**

Air New Zealand operates daily non-stop flights to Blenheim from Auckland and Wellington with connections across the domestic network.

- Contact Centre  
0800 737 000
- Holidays Travel Brokers  
0800 737 767
- [airnewzealand.co.nz](http://airnewzealand.co.nz)

**AIR NEW ZEALAND**

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