

SOUTH ISLAND

Find World-Class Adventure in Marlborough

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4 MIN READ

Marlborough isn't just a place; it's a destination for world-class adventure that stands proudly on the global stage. Known internationally for its exceptional wine, Marlborough offers more than just vineyard tours and tastings. It's where outdoor adventure and natural beauty combine, from the rolling vineyards to the sheltered waterways of the Marlborough Sounds. Kayak through crystal-clear bays, dine on the water with freshly caught seafood, or hike the iconic [Queen Charlotte Track](#), a multi-day trail offering breathtaking views and a chance to immerse yourself in the region's rich flora and fauna.

For history buffs, Marlborough is home to the [Omaka Aviation Heritage Centre](#), where rare WW1 and WW2 aircraft and memorabilia are brought to life through immersive displays. It's an unforgettable step back in time that appeals to visitors of all ages.

Marlborough also plays host to unique events, from wine and food festivals to sporting races, making it a year-round destination for thrill seekers and culture lovers alike. Whether you're dining on freshly shucked mussels with your feet dangling over the jetty, cycling through vineyards, or exploring ancient pā sites along coastal trails, Marlborough offers an adventure that's uniquely New Zealand, crafted with care and designed to inspire.

1. Get Outdoors

Find beauty and adventure outdoors in every corner of Marlborough. With 1500 kilometres of coastline to explore, Marlborough offers endless opportunities for exploration. Weave through the Marlborough Sounds as you explore walking tracks, roads less travelled and undisturbed little bays. The landscape in the region is adorned with valleys of vineyards, and the native bush is a standout highlight. This scenic region is a peaceful place to walk, cycle, kayak and more.

One of Marlborough's absolute highlights is the [Queen Charlotte Track](#) – it's even considered one of the [23 Great Rides of New Zealand](#). Stretching 73.5 kilometres from Ship Cove to Anakiwa, the track winds its way along ridgelines, through lush native forest, and past secluded coves. Whether you choose to walk, cycle, or kayak sections of the track, it's an unforgettable way to experience the Marlborough Sounds up close. With plenty of places to stay along the route, you can take your time and really make an adventure of it.

[Walking tracks](#) span from the native bush to alpine peaks, with options ranging from short walks to multi-day hikes that show off the region. The [Tuta Tuta](#) is a challenging trek that encapsulates the scenery Marlborough is best known for. Expect coastal forest, sea views, and farmland. It's a great overnight trip for advanced-level trampers, taking roughly 8.5 hours one way. For a more approachable walk that suits those with just a few hours to spare, the [Snout Track](#) is a fantastic 3-hour return journey with breathtaking views of the Marlborough Sounds. With plenty of adjoining legs to venture down, you're spoilt for choice in the area. Set off on [mountain biking trails](#) from Picton, or enjoy a leisurely ride along flat roads through vineyards – an incredible sight you won't soon forget.

If you're behind the wheel, the region is a road-tripper's dream. Hit the open road, catch the long sunny days of autumn, and enjoy spontaneous stops at wineries, beaches, and lookout points along the way.

2. Explore the Sounds

Predator-free islands, [boat cruises](#) and kayaking adventures: Marlborough Sounds is a haven for water-based activities and wildlife spotting. See the results of conservation efforts in the region on [Motuara Island Bird Sanctuary](#), a predator-free island in the [Queen Charlotte Sound](#). Book a scenic guided cruise with [E-Ko Tours](#) to get to this spectacular sanctuary and other places in the Queen Charlotte Sound for unmatched nature and wildlife viewing. Learn more about the wildlife and the ongoing conservation projects in Marlborough Sounds from the knowledgeable and passionate skipper. Keep an eye out for dolphins, fur seals, and little blue penguins as you explore this incredible natural playground.

Another great way to explore the Sounds is by travelling to [Kaipipi Sanctuary](#) by water taxi. Bird lovers will enjoy this destination with plenty of bird song paired with beautiful native forest. Those with their own boat or kayak can explore Kaipipi Sanctuary and other islands with ease. No visit to Marlborough is complete without getting out on the water and exploring the breathtaking Marlborough Sounds.

3. Go Back in Time

Marlborough isn't just about natural beauty—it's also a region rich in culture and heritage, with stories that stretch back centuries. Step into the past and uncover fascinating history through family-friendly activities that bring the region's heritage to life.

A must-visit is the [Omaka Aviation Heritage Centre](#), home to a world-class collection of WW1 and WW2 aircraft and memorabilia. With dramatic displays and life-like dioramas, this immersive experience brings aviation history alive in a way that's exciting for all ages.

For those keen to learn about Marlborough's earliest visitors, head to [Ship Cove/Meritoto](#), where Captain James Cook first made landfall in New Zealand. A visit here reveals the rich cultural significance of the site to Māori and its pivotal role in New Zealand's history.

Round out your historical journey with a trip to the [Omaka Observatory](#), where you can gaze into the night sky and explore the universe from Marlborough's clear, dark skies. Whether you're tracing the footsteps of explorers or standing in awe of aviation legends, Marlborough offers countless ways to connect with its fascinating past.

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4. Food and Drink in Marlborough

Eat and drink your way around the top of the South Island, with seafood fresh from the Sounds and world-renowned wine brands straight from the source. Taste locally sourced Greenshell mussels at [The Mussel Pot](#) in Havelock, and feast outdoors at [Harvest Restaurant](#) in Blenheim. Sample local produce like hazelnuts, pinneruts, honey, olives and wild game at the [Marlborough Farmers Market](#) or the [Marlborough Artisan Market](#). For the perfect celebratory dinner destination check out [Aloof](#), a two-hatted restaurant with a calm, inviting atmosphere. Marlborough is a foodie destination worth raving about.

Enjoy and gin and tonic on tap at [The Roots Gin Shack](#). Their award-winning gin is world-class and a tasting flight at their cellar door will hit the spot. Take to the water to indulge in fresh seafood on the [Seafood Odyssey Cruise](#), an iconic way to see the Sounds and taste the food.

Looking for the ultimate adventure in Marlborough? Combine food, drink and cycling on an incredible day out in the vines. A bike and sip experience is 6km of easy trail, world-class wineries and a dash of food spots along the way. Hire some wheels from [Wine Tours by Bike](#) and embark on a self-guided tour of the cellar doors. For guided tours, check out [Explore Marlborough](#) and enjoy a local guides commentary along the way.

5. Stay in Unique Accommodation

Staying in [unique accommodation](#) in Marlborough turns an ordinary trip into an unforgettable experience. Whether it's a vineyard villa, a secluded eco-lodge overlooking the Marlborough Sounds, or a luxury glamping spot under the stars, where your stay becomes part of the adventure. These one-of-a-kind places offer more than just a bed for the night—they immerse you in the beauty of the region, with stunning views, local food and wine, and genuine hospitality. It's the perfect way to relax after a day of exploring and to wake up feeling connected to this incredible part of New Zealand.

[St Leonards Vineyard Cottages](#) are on a classic New Zealand homestead in the heart of Marlborough. This is the ideal spot for a wholesome, luxurious farm stay. For a boutique hotel experience, check out [The Marlborough](#). This impressive country estate has ten rooms, a restaurant and 16 acres of beautiful gardens. Discover the quirky side of Marlborough at [Marlborough Wine Barrel Cabins](#), where guests embrace a 'hobbit' style of living in a wine barrel cabin set amongst vineyards and olive groves.

If when you think Marlborough you think wine, a stay at [The Nineteenth](#) will bring your dreams to life. This lush home overlooks vineyards and the [Marlborough Golf Course](#), creating the perfect sun-drenched setting for evening barbeques and sipping glasses of local wine.

6. Visit Marlborough for Special Events

Marlborough's calendar is packed with incredible [events](#) that offer the perfect excuse to visit, no matter the season. From seafood feasts to action-packed airshows and scenic races through vineyards, there's always something happening that makes the trip well worth it.

For an action-packed experience, the [Veelands Classic Fighters Omaka Airshow](#) is a must. Held biennially on Easter weekend, this world-class event brings historic WW1 and WW2 aircraft to life with thrilling displays and ground re-enactments. If fitness and fun are more your style, the [Saint Clair Vineyard Half Marathon](#) offers a one-of-a-kind race through Marlborough's private vineyards. Expect wine tastings, gourmet treats, and entertainment along the way.

Marlborough is [easy to get to](#), with flights into Blenheim or scenic ferry rides from Wellington. Travel by rail on the [Coastal Pacific Train](#) for an outstanding experience along the east coast from Christchurch to Pictou. A road trip around the Marlborough region couldn't be easier, with scenic routes to take at every turn. Make the trip in Autumn when the days are long and sunny and the vineyards glow golden. Whichever event you choose, you'll find Marlborough puts on a show worth travelling for.

This article was created in paid partnership with Marlborough NZ.



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