

*This page: Abel Tasman Sailing
Adventures catamaran*



WALKING ON SUNSHINE

REPUTED TO HAVE MORE HOURS OF SUNSHINE THAN ANYWHERE ELSE IN NEW ZEALAND, **NELSON** IS A HOT DESTINATION IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE.

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NELSON HAS FAR MORE TO OFFER than the fact that the city is the second oldest in New Zealand: although this alone is enough to draw visitors aplenty. Within a small geographical radius a whole host of delights await; sensational beaches, world-famous walking tracks, fine vineyards and three national parks.

The city itself is a delight of lush green tree lined streets and historical shops facades. Wandering down Trafalgar Street, the main street running through the city, visitors will discover a plethora of bars, restaurants and cafés nestled between the usual suspects of high street stores.

At the top of the street the picturesque Victorian Rose Pub 'n Café beckons passers by to stop and enjoy a drop of the local brew, while on the other side of the road Hopgoods Restaurant & Bar offers a wide and tempting menu choice. At the very top of the street, looking down from its hilltop vantage point, is the pièce de résistance - Christ Church Cathedral.

Surrounded by gardens and accessed by a flight of steps, the cathedral denotes a significant part of the city's history, and the transitional architectural phases are reflected in the design. Love it or hate it, it's certainly a focal point - with its imposing

Clockwise from the right: Edenhouse - front gardens.
 Bay view. Edenhouse - side terrace. Edenhouse
 Sitting Room. Edenhouse - Dining Room. Right page
 - clockwise from top: Trampers under Nikau canopy.
 Paddling Awaroa estuary. Disembarking water taxi.

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deep grey exterior and sky scraping tower. The city museum, which documents local and national history, is centrally located and is well worth a visit. Part of the beauty of the city is its modern vibe, which sits comfortably alongside the tranquil colonial ambience. An additional draw card for this city is its setting. Beyond the hustle and bustle the rolling hills provide a stunning backdrop for the residential areas, and, just moments out of the CBD the ocean laps onto acres of sandy beach.

While the city itself is a delightful experience, equally captivating is the

surrounding countryside. I chose to stay a little way out of Nelson, at Edenhouse, a small, intimate and thoroughly fabulous lodge. Accommodating up to six guests, Peter and Bobbie Martin host visitors either in the main house or, if couples prefer a little more privacy, in a separate cottage. The house itself is an interior designer's dream. Furnished with Colefax and Fowler pieces brought over from the UK, work by New Zealand artists has been introduced into the mix: the result is a delightful blend of traditional and contemporary. The elegance of the house is perfectly framed by the magnificent gardens, which are something of a focal point of the property. Located in the Orinoco Valley, Edenhouse is ideally positioned only twenty minutes from the Abel Tasman National Park. Alternatively, should travellers prefer to locate themselves more centrally in the city, the park is an easy day trip from Nelson.

At the Abel Tasman a huge range of activities are on offer, from half a day kayaking to several days spent tramping in the park, where visitors can either camp or stay in one of the lodges. A well picked day excursion can provide a real taste of what the area is famous for - namely molten gold beaches, iridescent turquoise waters and hectares of glorious forest. One of the most popular companies that operate in the park is Wilson's Experiences. A range of different options allows visitors to choose whether they would prefer to hike, kayak or just be dropped off and picked up from different bays along the coast. I decided that kayaking - although by all accounts an amazing experience - may be a little too energetic, so opted for a guided walk instead. Catching the boat in the morning, our guide pointed out the various landmarks along the coast as we cruised along to Bark Bay, our drop off spot.

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Once here we tramped to Torrent Bay where we were due to be picked up after lunch. The walk itself was just over two hours, and actually forms a section of what could be extended to a three day hike. Although active, it was far from arduous, and the scenery was a spectacular feast of sights, enhanced by the information added by our guide as we walked.

For those that prefer a more 'hands on' water experience, Abel Tasman Sailing Adventures runs a number of superb trips which take guests out by catamaran. I joined the half day excursion, and was really impressed with the experience. A relaxed atmosphere made it popular with all ages, and the nifty boat and willing skipper seemed to allow any number of deviations from the scheduled trip. At the first sighting of dolphins we shot across to where they 'd been seen in order to pull in for a closer look; much to everyone's delight they happily frolicked alongside the boat. After attempting to spot seals we soon realised the pickings were poor, so instead headed off to another tiny isle where we pulled in to collect mussels. Arriving back on time, with bags full of freshly picked seafood and sunburnt faces, despite only having been out for a few hours. I felt that I had experienced some of the best that the Abel Tasman had to offer.

For those that prefer land based activities, the area does not disappoint. About an hour's drive from Nelson, the Marlborough wine district beckons. Here, all within a small area, can be found some of the most prestigious vineyards in the country; among them Cloudy Bay, Villa Maria, Neudorf, Wither Hills and Allan Scott. A day trip to this district is a must, and it's well worth making a decision on which wineries to visit before making the journey. Generous tastings at the cellar door mean that after four or five vineyards even the sturdiest of palettes begins to dull. For those that want to factor in a lunch stop, Allan Scott has a wonderful restaurant with a delightful outdoor eating area: idyllic on a clear sunny day. Despite such a vast array of pastimes to enjoy, I managed to squeeze as much as I could into a long weekend: while a week would have been a real treat, don't be put off making this a flying visit – it's well worth the travel. ■

*Edenhouse:
p. 03 5268174; www.edenhouse.co.nz*

*Wilson's Experiences:
p. 0800 223 582; www.abeltasman.co.nz*

*Abel Tasman Sailing Adventures:
p. 0800 46 7245 : www.sailingadventures.co.nz*

For more information visit www.nelsonnz.com