

# Wellington

A GUIDE TO THE KIWI CAPITAL

*by Natasha Dragun;  
photographs by Natasha Dragun  
or courtesy of Positively Wellington*



Wellington may be overshadowed by big sister Auckland, further up the North Island, but New Zealand's capital offers plenty of reasons to linger, including seriously hip hotels, forward-thinking restaurants and one of the prettiest harbours you'll come across.

There's something immediately likable about Wellington. Framed by a wide harbour on the southwest tip of the North Island, the petite city of 400,000 enjoys pleasant weather – despite the moniker “Windy City” – with sunny days for more than half the year. It also boasts exceptional produce and even better wines. The Wairarapa, one of the country's most talked-about wine regions, is just over the eastern Rimutaka Range. All this, not to mention a progressive design and arts community, makes Wellington one of the more enjoyable destinations in the country. Here's a guide to getting the most out of your visit.

**Main pic:** Overlooking Wellington from the top of Mount Victoria. **Below from Top:** Valve tower at Zealandia; Wellington Harbour at dusk.



## What to Do

Gain your bearings with a cable-car ride to the top of Mount Victoria, the city's highest peak, affording views over the city and the bay. The summit, home to the leafy **Botanic Gardens**, is a pleasant place for a picnic; when you're done wandering past beds of roses and towering conifers, head to the recently opened planetarium at the **Carter Observatory**.

It's easy to while away an entire day at the **Te Papa** museum, set in a dramatic harbour-front building. In addition to high-profile exhibitions, dozens of thoughtfully curated galleries showcase Maori culture and art. If you have a spare hour, take the "Taste of Treasures" guided tour of the museum, which concludes with a platter of traditional tucker in the on-site café.

A different kind of tradition is on display at **Zealandia**, an impressive "urban wildlife sanctuary" designed to showcase New Zealand's natural bounty, past and present. Learn about the country's wild history before strolling among lush forests of silver fern, lemonwood and tree fuchsias where you may just spot endemic fauna including the kaka, weta and tuatara.



*From top: Cable Car Lane; Zealandia; Wellington Bay boatsheds*





*From left: Suite at Ohotel;  
breakfast at Ohotel;  
Boulcott Street Bistro*

## Where to Sleep

For a city of its size, Wellington punches well above its weight when it comes to designer lodgings.

One of the smallest hotels in town is also one of the most stylish. **Ohotel's** 10 suites are kitted out with mid-century furnishings from the likes of Arne Jacobsen and Borge Mogensen, hand-picked from the hotel owner's private collection. Rooms are individually designed and colour-themed and some come with patios looking out to Waitangi Park. The bathrooms, with deep tubs, organic amenities and rain showers, are among the largest in town.

With newly renovated rooms, the **Amora Hotel Wellington** has transformed itself from a staid city hotel into one of Wellington's most comfortable. Spacious bathrooms, an earthy colour palette and funky furniture all make the Amora a good overnight choice, as does the property's location – a street back from the water and within walking distance of dozens of restaurants and bars.

Just up the road, the **Museum Hotel** sits opposite and takes its design cues from Te Papa, the national museum. The hotel's 165 rooms are sleek and seductive with velvet this and gilded that throughout; some have the added bonus of fully equipped kitchenettes complete with washer-dryer units. Download a handy online art guide from the hotel website, and drool over the extensive collection of paintings and sculptures in the lobby before enjoying a meal at the hotel's equally bohemian restaurant, Hippopotamus.

## Where to Eat

**Hippopotamus** is more akin in design to a boudoir than a dining room – plush armchairs and mismatched tables are just a few of the quirks. The menu is equally exciting, with standout dishes such as chilled rockmelon soup and seared ostrich with bitter-chocolate ganache prepared by rising culinary star Laurent Loudeac. The French-influenced menu also features high tea with all the trimmings.

In Cuba Street, Wellington's central "eat street," **Matterhorn** not only mixes a mean cocktail – try the curaçao caipirinha with char-grilled pineapple – but also has one of the most interesting menus in the country. Talented chef David Verheul prepares beautiful plates that are as palatable as they are presentable. Twice-baked Gorgonzola soufflé with sugared walnuts and apple vinaigrette is just one highlight.

Set in a handsome colonial building, **Boulcott Street Bistro** is all about local produce. Chef Rex Morgan and his team take classic New Zealand ingredients and recipes and give them a modern, bistro twist. The braised lamb shank with minted peas and lentil sauce is like spring on a plate.

Perched on a waterside, **Martin Bosley's** has earned its reputation as one of the city's top restaurants. Specialising in seafood, it dishes up seasonal fare such as a snapper-and-smoked-eel terrine with dashi jelly and a delightful spanner crab risotto with hot coconut panna cotta. Be warned – the price tags are almost as dazzling as the water views.

For a seafood feast at a more reasonable price, **Ortega Fish Shack** is a good bet. Local ingredients star in many of the dishes, including Marlborough salmon in puff pastry. The dining room is a fun mix of *objets* and antiques, from old Japanese fishing floats to colourful Egyptian floor tiles.

## Where to Drink

Unsurprisingly, the décor at **The Library** lounge bar adopts an academic tone, albeit one where rowdy chatter and sloshing of drinks is positively encouraged. The New Zealand-focused wine list features drops from Waiheke Island to Waipara, while cocktails are inventive and potent; order the rum-based “drunken pirates’ tropical grog” and you’ll be given a nightly limit of three beverages. Soak up all the booze with bar snacks such as a platter of Manuka-honey-smoked salmon or coconut-coated haloumi.

Modelled on a 1920s gentleman’s club, **Hawthorn Lounge** lures you in with dimly lit nooks and crannies where nattily clad waiters shake cocktails and pour whisky over chipped ice. Sink into a leather sofa, order a Sazerac and tap your toes to upbeat jazz or big-band classics.

## Getting There

Singapore Airlines and Qantas offer flights from Singapore to Wellington via Sydney or Melbourne. 

*Below from top: Matterhorn in Cuba Street; Hawthorn Lounge*



## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Sights

#### Cable Car

[www.wellingtoncablecar.co.nz](http://www.wellingtoncablecar.co.nz)

#### Te Papa

[www.tepapa.govt.nz](http://www.tepapa.govt.nz)

#### Zealandia

[www.visitzealandia.com](http://www.visitzealandia.com)

### Hotels

#### Amora Hotel Wellington

[www.wellington.amorahotels.com](http://www.wellington.amorahotels.com)

#### Museum Hotel Wellington

[www.museumhotel.co.nz](http://www.museumhotel.co.nz)

#### Ohotel

[www.ohtel.com](http://www.ohtel.com)

### Restaurants

#### Boulcott Street Bistro

[www.boulcottstreetbistro.co.nz](http://www.boulcottstreetbistro.co.nz)

#### Hippopotamus

[www.hippopotamus.co.nz](http://www.hippopotamus.co.nz)

#### Martin Bosley's

[www.martin-bosley.com](http://www.martin-bosley.com)

#### Matterhorn

[www.matterhorn.co.nz](http://www.matterhorn.co.nz)

#### Ortega Fish Shack

[www.ortega.co.nz](http://www.ortega.co.nz)

### Bars

#### Hawthorn Lounge

[www.hawthornlounge.co.nz](http://www.hawthornlounge.co.nz)

#### The Library

[www.thelibrary.co.nz](http://www.thelibrary.co.nz)