

Land of the long WEEKEND

Rob McFarland hits the road – and skies – of Wellington.

When I first suggested to a mate that we head to Wellington for a lads' long weekend, this wasn't exactly what I had in mind. I'd envisaged a *Sideways*-style sojourn through the nearby vineyards of Martinborough and Marlborough. Maybe check out some of Wellington's bars. A spot of golf. Perhaps a massage.

Instead I'm hurtling towards the ground in a 1930s Tiger Moth with a man named Gary. We're in the middle of a stall turn – a manoeuvre where after flying vertically upwards, he kills the power until the plane slows almost to a stop. A quick flick of the stick and we're racing back towards the ground before he pulls up and the G-force sends my stomach crashing into my boots. It's both terrifying and enormously exhilarating.

Located in the small town of Masterton, one-and-a-half hours' drive north-east of Wellington, Hood Aerodrome is an aviation enthusiast's dream. Not only can you organise a joy flight in a Tiger Moth through the NZ Sport and Vintage Aviation Society, but it's also home to an impressive collection of World War I and II aircraft and is the venue for Wings Over Wairarapa, a long-running aviation festival featuring more than 70 planes (the next one is in January 2011).

From my aerial vantage point, I can clearly see the sprawling patchwork of vineyards that has transformed this region from a sleepy agricultural backwater into an increasingly popular tourist drawcard.

In the late '70s, scientists analysed the soil in the area and found it was remarkably similar to that of Burgundy, France. Vines were planted and 30 years later there are now more than 30 vineyards around Masterton, Martinborough and Greytown producing some excellent pinots, rieslings and pinot gris.

That afternoon we enlist the help of Sue from Zest Food Tours to show us around. She's one of an increasing number of Wellingtonians who have been lured over the Tararua mountain range by the prospect of living among the vines.

We start at Coney Wines, a typical example of the many boutique, family-run vineyards in the area. Founded in 1999, it's making a name for itself with its pinots and is one of the few vineyards in the district to be experimenting with syrah. We meet entertaining founder Tim Coney and enjoy a tasting in the sun-drenched courtyard with some excellent tapas-style Portuguese piripiri prawns.

Next stop is Vynfields, the only certified organic and biodynamic vineyard in the region, where we get stuck into some more pinots and a mysterious drop made from an as yet unidentified grape varietal that they've called Mad Rooster.

Accommodation for the night is a self-contained villa in Parehua Country Estate, a stylish property set in two hectares of parkland and within walking distance of Martinborough. Renowned NZ chef Kent Baddeley recently took over as CEO and his prowess in the kitchen is evident in the impressive six-course food and wine extravaganza served that night.

After a leisurely start the next day we head back to Wellington to check out its now famous bar scene. Over the last five years the city has morphed from a windy backwater into arguably New Zealand's coolest metropolis, with an award-winning selection of bars, pubs and restaurants.

To warm up for the night we book ourselves onto a boutique beer tasting tour with knowledgeable local beer critic Neil Miller. Inside Mac's Brewery we work our way through a tasting platter of Mac's boutique beers matched with different foods.

Suitably limbered up, we head for one of Wellington's newest venues, the Library. Hidden away on Courtenay Place, it's a gem of a spot that describes itself as

Contacts

NZ Sport and Vintage Aviation Society:
www.svas.org.nz
Wings over Wairarapa:
www.wings.org.nz
Zest Food Tours:
www.zestfoodtours.co.nz
Parehua Country Estate:
www.parehua.co.nz
Boutique Beer Tasting Tour:
www.wildaboutwellington.co.nz
Vintners Retreat Resort:
www.vintnersretreat.co.nz
Ohtel: www.ohtel.com



GETTING THERE

Air New Zealand flies daily from Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane to Wellington. For fares and bookings see www.airnewzealand.com.au





1. Wellington cable car.
2. Highfields Estate in Marlborough. 3. Bike hire and kayaks on Wellington waterfront.

a lounge bar, reading room and dessert venue all in one. In its intimate, book-lined interior we discover a sophisticated crowd, table service and an impressive cocktail list.

From here it's a short stumble to Motel, another refined establishment that was recently named as one of the world's top 100 bars. After a couple of Tyburn Neck-Stretchers from its Smugglers and Highwayman themed cocktail list, things are getting a little blurry so we order a Motel Club Sandwich, an inventive concoction of blue cheese, apple & fresh basil. It's well-timed because 10 minutes later I'm drinking a potent mix of vanilla vodka, maraschino liqueur and elderflower

tea poured from a teapot. Tucked away at the end of a dodgy-looking alleyway, Alice is the sort of bar you'd expect to find in Melbourne.

From here on in things get murky as we duck into a handful of other bars, including the leather-couched refinery of Hawthorn Gentleman's Club and locals' favourite Matterhorn.

We're staying in Ohtel, a quirky 10-room boutique property from the "don't try this at home" school of interior design. Owner Alan Blundell trawled Melbourne's antique shops for authentic '60s Danish-style furniture and has combined it with modern fittings to create an intriguing blend of nostalgic luxury.

We have one final instalment in our lads' weekend away: a hop over the Cook Strait to check out the big daddy of NZ wine production: Marlborough. I've long been a fan of Marlborough's sav-blancs and it would be hard to think of a better way to spend an afternoon than flitting between the cellar doors of household names such as Montana and Wither Hills alongside smaller producers such as Saint Clair and Seresin.

On our last night we sit outside our villa at Vintners Retreat Resort, crack open a bottle of Villa Maria and slowly put the world to rights. Now this is more what I had in mind. +

Rob McFarland was a guest of Air New Zealand and Positively Wellington.

A Classic Of The Vintage

On paper the Omaka Aviation Heritage Centre in the Marlborough region sounds about as interesting as a shower curtain conference: an historical display of vintage World War I aircraft and memorabilia...yawn. Inside, it's a revelation. The museum



houses director Peter Jackson's private collection of World War I aircraft, arranged into a series of dramatic displays by the production team behind the *Lord of the Rings*.

It's the true-life stories that make the place so compelling: the re-enactment of Kiwi pilot Keith Caldwell stabilising

his crippled plane by jumping out of the cockpit and flying it from the wing; the footage of Germans hand dropping bombs from their cockpits; and the haunting photo of a 23-year-old German pilot taken two weeks before his death. You'll go in for 10 minutes and emerge two hours later. www.omaka.org.nz