

# Hawkes Bay, New Zealand – 6 Things Not to Miss!

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Mission Estate is New Zealand’s oldest winery, founded by French missionaries.

Mother Nature practiced her own brand of “tough love” on Hawke’s Bay, but this fishhook-shaped stretch of land along the east coast of New Zealand’s North Island is all the better for it.

First, she changed the course of a river leaving gravel beds behind. But the stony surface proved beneficial for growing grapes, forcing the vines to send their roots deep into the earth to seek nutrients. That gave the wine produced from them extra character. Hawke’s Bay became New Zealand’s oldest wine region, now yielding 70 percent of the nation’s red wine.

Then in 1931 she sent a 7.8 magnitude earthquake unleashing death and destruction. But in the 40 seconds the quake shook, 8,500 acres of land rose from the bay and stayed above water, a fertile tract of new real estate locals call “The Gift.” The quake flattened the nearby city of Napier, but residents rallied to quickly rebuild in the style of the day. Napier now proclaims itself “The Art Deco Capital of the World.”

Don’t be mad at Mother Nature. She blesses Hawke’s Bay with a mild Mediterranean climate and ample sunshine, so you’ll find plenty to do in any season. Don’t miss:

**Wine:** The Hawke’s Bay region boasts 170 vineyards and more than 70 wineries, 40 of them with cellar doors for tastings. You won’t find many of these wines outside New Zealand, so your only chance to sip them might be right at the winery.

Mission Estate, New Zealand’s oldest winery, was established in 1851 by pioneering French missionaries in the Gimblett Gravels wine-growing district. It still employs winemaking techniques brought from Bordeaux. At Church Road Winery try for a hard-to-get taste of its famous Tom McDonald reds, named for the father of New Zealand’s red wines. Afterward, visit the Tom McDonald Cellar, the nation’s only wine museum. Twilight is the best time to visit Craggy Range winery

because the view of rosy light on Te Mata Peak from a table on the patio is one you won't soon forget. See Elephant Hill Winery in broad daylight when the light green contemporary building mirrors the Pacific Ocean across the road.

**Art Deco:** Art Deco is not unusual, but an entire town of Art Deco is unique. Napier has 140 original Art Deco buildings as well as many in the 1930s Spanish mission, stripped classical and jazz-age styles.

Make your way to the Art Deco Shop to buy a brochure for a self-guided tour or join one of the daily guided walks of one or two hours given by the Art Deco Trust, formed in the 1980s to preserve these buildings. The Trust also has hop-on, hop-off bus tours and vintage car tours if you want to tool around town in a Packard. Among the most notable buildings are the National Tobacco Co., a mixture of Art Deco and Art Nouveau, and the Dome with copper cupola and clock tower above a former insurance company building that's been converted into four luxury apartments you can book for overnight stays.

On the third weekend in February, modern vehicles are banned on the main streets and nearly everyone dresses in 1930s attire for an Art Deco Weekend of parades, music and dancing.

**Cape Kidnappers:** When Captain Cook landed off the cape in 1769, the local Maori tribe thought his Tahitian cabin boy was one of their own and snatched him. The kidnapped lad escaped and made it back to the ship, but not before forever giving the cape its name.



The gannet colony on Cape Kidnappers is the largest mainland gannet colony in the world and the most accessible.

A 6,000-acre sheep and cattle station operates on the cape on Hawke's Bay, but its most famous animals are the 20,000 gannets who spend October to April gathered in 100-bird clusters of noisy nesting pairs. Not only is this the largest mainland colony of these rare birds, but the most accessible. Gannet Safaris takes you within a few feet of the white birds—related to the booby family—for a close-up view of their black eye markings and toasted marshmallow crowns.

If you prefer fairways to feathers, the Cape Kidnappers Golf Course perches atop the cape with ocean waves crashing on the rocks far below—now that's a water hazard. Designed by Tom Doak, it ranks in the top 50 golf courses in the world and is part of the five-star resort, The Farm at Cape Kidnappers. Don't be fooled by the resort's exterior, resembling a

cluster of farm buildings. Doors open to plush rooms and stellar cuisine. Guys, you'll need a jacket for cocktails and dinner here.

**Food:** The Fruit Bowl of New Zealand, Hawke's Bay grows an abundance of stone fruits, olives and vegetables. You'll see them on display on weekends in New Zealand's oldest farmers market along with yummy baked goods, flavored mustards, giant crayfish in the seafood case and mugs of craft-brewed beer. Free samples! The Hawke's Bay Farmers Market is the place to socialize with the Kiwis who come for breakfast and stay through the morning gathering around tables on the grass and listening to music from a live band.

Or you can rub elbows with the locals at the communal table inside The Kitchen Table, a breakfast and lunch spot in Napier. Walls and tables adorned with kitschy items from childhood—school lunch boxes, storybooks, toys—give you something to talk about.



New Zealand's lamb dishes are famous, especially the short loin at Black Barn Bistro.

For serious dining, restaurants in the wineries stand out. At the Black Barn Vineyard, take time for lunch in the bistro, especially if you can get a table in the courtyard screened by a trellis of trailing vines. You can't go wrong with the lamb short loin or the kingfish carpaccio. Terroir, the French country fine-dining restaurant at Craggy Range, sources Hawke's Bay's best produce, seafood and meats, especially First Light Foods' venison and grass-fed Wagyu beef, also prized by chefs at top restaurants in the U.S.

**Biking:** Choose from more than 110 miles of bike paths in the Hawke's Bay region, most of them dedicated off-road trails.



Watch out for frisky cows on the bike paths.

Takaro Trails Cycle Tours has several self-guided day tours that include bike and helmet hire and transfers. Itineraries may lead you along the coast or follow river tracks stopping at a string of wineries for a day of sipping and cycling. You'll chuckle at signs on livestock gates with a cartoon graphic warning bikers not to get too close to "frisky" cows.

**Maori experience:** Rub noses with a Maori as you are welcomed to their sacred site, settled after these first peoples arrived in New Zealand from Polynesia in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Waimarama Maori Tours allows outsiders onto their spiritual grounds, but only after answering a challenge from a fierce-looking bare-chested man carrying a spear. Once inside the palisades, you'll learn a few words of Maori songs, listen to music played on traditional flutes and watch warriors go at it with sticks and clubs. Then it's time to eat. Sit down to a feast of Maori dishes made from local seafood and produce. Sea urchin, anyone? You'll also find eel and seaweed on the buffet along with paua (abalone), fry bread and a luscious pavlova made of meringue, kiwi and whipped cream.

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