

New Lonely Planet guide gives Godzone a dose of personality

Lonely Planet's new edition New Zealand guidebook, released today, says New Zealand's most attractive feature is not only its "outlandishly beautiful scenery", but its people.

According to Errol Hunt, the Commissioning Editor for the new guide, "the fascinating mix of Maori, Polynesian, and Pakeha culture, as well as the nation's quirky eccentricity and genuine community vibe, is the recipe that makes New Zealand's personality so attractive."

As the guide says, "In recent years, New Zealand has been punching well above its weight and demanding to be noticed. Its movies, music, wine, progressive politics and clean green image have been kicking goals around the world, and people have been paying attention in ways the country never dreamed possible." (p.4)

While New Zealand's natural wonders rightly receive high praise throughout the guide, the book also notes that, "... a pretty backdrop is not all NZ has going for it. Genuine friendly locals go out of their way to ensure visitors feel welcome. There is a vibrant Maori culture too, for this is a country that recognises and respects its indigenous people." (p.4)

The guidebook features an increased focus on Maori tourism, with regional Maori 'highlights' sections offering information on how travellers can respect and immerse themselves in Maori culture.

"New Zealand's strong indigenous culture – both traditional and contemporary – is something very unique about this country. With this guide we've tried to show travellers how to seek out and experience the multi-faceted, 'living' culture of Maori New Zealand, rather than see it as ancient history," said Errol Hunt.

Eccentric New Zealand is also fully embraced in the guidebook. Bizarre, tacky, or just downright strange tourist attractions include Stratford's Shakespeare-spouting Glockenspiel (p. 270), the big L&P bottles in Paeroa (p. 226), Owlcatraz in Shannon, Palmerston North (p. 289), Ohakune's Big Carrot (p. 322), and Auckland's Sky Screamer: "Should you hurl, rest assured, you can get a video of it." (p. 116) Charmingly eccentric personalities such as Napier's Art Deco ambassador, the unfailingly debonair Bertie, also feature (p. 369).

"When they think of New Zealand, most potential visitors think: landscape, sport and the haka. But until they go there, they often don't realise how incredibly quirky New Zealanders are, with a wicked sense of humour. At the same time, Kiwis are also increasing their reputation for being stylish and modern," said Hunt.

"Hip, energetic city" Wellington gets a great rap for "its thriving café and entertainment scene, and serious dedication to the arts" (p.402). Auckland's blend of the social, the natural, the cultural, and edible – along with great local fashion designers – personify the city's cool (p. 140). While Christchurch is described as a "thoroughly modern NZ city" behind its picturesque Englishness (p. 527).

The new edition of the guidebook doesn't pull any punches and contains the trademark honesty and opinion Lonely Planet is renowned for. But praise is also lavished when due. For example on "bright, attractive" Nelson as "one of NZ's most liveable cities", Queenstown's "atmospheric restaurants, laid-back cafes and excellent boutiques" combined with "spellbinding views" (p. 622), and Dunedin, an "increasingly cosmopolitan city" (p. 589). Other destinations don't fare so well, such as Kaitaia, "the highlight of no-one's trip to NZ" (p. 177), and "shabby little Bluff" (p. 679).

For the latest edition of New Zealand, Lonely Planet's team of five expert authors spent a total of 26 weeks on the road, or about 1,820 hours of research – a third more than the previous edition. During that time, the authors personally visited thousands of hotels, restaurants, cafes, bars, galleries and more. Lonely Planet authors are independent, and never take freebies in exchange for positive coverage.

The new guide also includes contributions from expert Kiwis such as author and television maker Professor James Belich on history, prolific journalist Russell Brown on culture, food writer Julie Biuso on food and drink, ex-All Black Josh Kronfeld on surfing, and dreadlocked Greens MP Nandor Tanczos on the environment. And Gandalf himself – Sir Ian McKellen – writes on the perils of sandflies.

CONTINUES OVER ...

NOTE TO EDITORS: Commissioning Editor Errol Hunt, and the Authors of the guide, are available for interview.



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WHAT LONELY PLANET SAYS ABOUT YOUR REGION ...

MARLBOROUGH & NELSON

"The top of the South Island is stunning – and sometimes overlooked by travellers in their haste to head further south to fiords, lakes and ski fields. But the mild climate, magnificent coastline, superb national parks and laid-back seaside towns are definitely worth some hefty time on your itinerary – indeed, sunny Nelson and its surrounds is one of the top summertime holiday spots for Kiwis themselves. As clichéd as it sounds, there is something for everyone here – from the outdoorsy and active to the gourmands and alternative-lifestylers." (p. 436)

PICTON

"A pretty port at the head of Queen Charlotte Sound, Picton is the marine gateway to the South Island and also the best base from which to explore the Marlborough Sounds, particularly Queen Charlotte Track. Picton is a small town that is a hive of activity when the ferry docks and during the peak of summer, but slow and sleepy any other time." (p. 438)

HAVELOCK

Tiny Havelock's thriving small-boat harbour and claim to fame as the 'green-shelled mussel capital of the world' pretty much sums it up. (p. 447)

KAIKOURA

Kaikoura is a stunning town with a superb setting, backed by the steeply rising foot - hills of the Seaward Kaikouras (snowcapped in winter) . . . it's a Mecca for wildlife enthusiasts. Kaikoura was once just a sleepy little fishing town noted mainly for its crayfish, until Nature Watch Charters began whale-watching trips in 1987. The tours' fame escalated, putting Kaikoura on the tourist map." (p. 454)

NELSON REGION

The Nelson region is one of the top destinations for travellers to NZ – and for the locals too. It boasts an equable climate (more sunshine than any other part of NZ), top beaches, and some of the most popular national parks (Kahurangi, Nelson Lakes and Abel Tasman) in the country. It's also the home of an enthusiastic and progressive community of artists, craftspeople, winemakers and entrepreneurs. (p. 461)

NELSON

One of NZ's most liveable cities, Nelson is a bright, active place and an obvious starting point for exploring the western coastal region. It's noted for its fruit-growing, wineries and breweries and its energetic arts and crafts community; there's no shortage of activities (sedate and thrilling) to keep you busy. (p. 461)

TAKAKA

One of the most relaxed towns in NZ, Takaka is the centre for the Golden Bay area and the last town of any size as you head towards the northwestern corner of the South Island. It's a bustling place in summer, with a local community of 'Woodstock children' and artistic types. (p. 483)

ENDS

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FACTS AND STATS

- **New Zealand is one of Lonely Planet's highest-selling guidebooks globally. Now in its lucky 13th edition, Lonely Planet has been publishing this definitive guide to Godzone for 29 years.**
- **Lonely Planet receives over 600 letters and emails about New Zealand from travellers per year. A dedicated feedback team reads and responds to them all.**

For more information please contact Lonely Planet Publications Australia

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