

HOT DEALS

Johannesburg

United Travel has packages to Johannesburg from \$2785 each, including three nights at City Lodge, Katherine St, return airfares to Johannesburg, private airport transfers and breakfast daily. Available until September 30 for travel March 1 to May 31. Contact United Travel on 0800 46 86 48 or www.unitedtravel.co.nz

**Formula One, Wellington**

House of Travel has packages including one night's accommodation at the five-star Bolton Hotel, cooked breakfast, late checkout to 1pm and tickets to Te Papa's Formula One exhibition from \$109 each. For sales and travel before November 1. Airfares additional. Contact House of Travel on 0800 838 747 or www.houseoftravel.co.nz

Cruise

Cruise your way from Dubai to Barcelona with 14 nights on board the Brilliance of the Seas departing Dubai and taking in Muscat (Oman), Safaga (Luxor), Sharm el-Sheikh (Egypt), Suez Canal, Alexandria (Egypt), and Barcelona (Spain), including all main meals and entertainment on board from \$2969 each, twin-share. Available until September 17 for Dubai cruise departure April 16 next year. Airfares additional. Contact Flight Centre on 0800 427 555 or visit www.flightcentre.co.nz

Vanuatu

Our Pacific has return Air Vanuatu airfares Auckland to Port Vila, four nights at Le Meridien Port Vila Resort & Casino from \$1199 each, including transfers in Port Vila and buffet breakfasts. Available until September 30 for travel to March 31. Contact Our Pacific on 0800 500 598 or www.ourpacific.co.nz

Canada

House of Travel has an eight-night Canadian ski package from \$1499 each, including return coach transfers from Vancouver airport to Whistler, a seven-day lift pass and accommodation at the Delta Whistler Village Suites. Airfares additional. Available until September 25 for travel November 26 to December 14. Contact House of Travel on 0800 838 747 or www.houseoftravel.co.nz

**Flight Centre Top Five**

Sydney	one way	\$129
Samoa	return	\$385*
Hawaii	return	\$1329*
Singapore	return	\$1399
London	return	\$1889

Prices are for one adult leaving from Auckland. Subject to change without notice. Airport departure fees additional. Date and travel restrictions apply. *Samoa sale ends today, Hawaii sale ends Sept 16. Full terms and conditions at www.flightcentre.co.nz/bookingterms.

INSIDE NZ

Endless summer, rain or shine

Kerri Jackson sings Nelson's praises, even when it's pouring down.

NELSON IS, if you bypass perennial arguments with Blenheim and Gisborne, the sunniest city in New Zealand.

How then to while away your time there when it coincides with one of the wettest days of the year, a day when waves threaten to wash over the meandering waterside road linking the town with Tahunanui Beach, and when the beautiful views over the harbour and marina are marred by horizontal rain and gusting winds?

The answer — as it is to so many otherwise unanswerable questions — is wine.

Or, to be more accurate, wine, food and art. If one or all of those things interest you this is the place to be, no matter what the weather.

Noel Kennedy has cleverly drawn on his experiences in the New Zealand natural environment and its wine to set up a variety of excellent tours through the Nelson and Marlborough regions.

Now he has added Nelson's thriving arts community to the mix, with a tour designed to introduce visitors to the things that make this small seaside city special.

Kennedy's Wine Exposed art/wine tour starts with a pause at a hilltop lookout to admire the view over the poetically named The Haven and the boulder bank which has created this pretty harbour.

The bank is a rare geological feature — one of only three in the world, created by tidal currents. It stretches for 13km across the Nelson waterfront, and the sandbar, where the lighthouse still stands picturesquely against the sea, is still dotted with a few baches, the work of lucky folk who built years ago, before such things were banned.

From there it's on to lunch, prepared by Kennedy and eaten in the home of well-known local artist Anna Leary. Before lunch, Leary walks us through her home and studio, with its epic views over the harbour and valley, talking about the art on display and of her inspirations, which so often come from her Nelson environment.

On the balcony, Leary points out the homes belonging to different artists that are dotted around the valley. It's a neat physical representation of this tight-knit but still open artistic community.



The idea of dropping into an artist's house or home studio may be a little strange for many visitors and in a lot of towns, but in Nelson it just seems to work that way. "It would be weird if it wasn't like that," Leary says.

That kind of attitude also makes the Nelson region an excellent place to explore independently. Take a tour like this to get your bearings, then hop in a rental car and explore on your own. It's a follow-your-nose kind of place. Back roads and main highways are dotted with signs advertising art, olives, wine, cheese and plenty more.

In most instances, visitors are welcome to roll up and admire or buy.

But for now, Kennedy is navigating his Mercedes people-mover down Nelson's narrow winding alleyways, some dating back to the town's settlement.

Then it's out through Tahunanui and Richmond to the wine country that sits between Nelson and the summer beach meccas of Golden Bay, Kaiteriteri, Abel Tasman National Park and Farewell Spit.

Kennedy keeps up a fascinating commentary on the wine region's social history (settled by the Germans) and geographic make-up (surrounded by forests and national parks that — except for today — keep the storms at bay, providing its famously stable weather) until we arrive at Neudorf Winery in Upper Moutere.

The rain is still driving down but owner Tim Finn (no, not that one) dusts off the gas heater and we sit admiring our surroundings.

Here again, art is never far from the wine, and sculpture is dotted through the winery's public areas.

It feels more personal seeing this place on a wet but calm late winter's



Top from left, hot-smoked salmon served for food and wine matching at Neudorf row, from left, the Heritage Rutherford Hotel; sunny Trafalgar St; the bustling Collectible Car Museum; Anna Leary's sculptural art on Tahunanui Beach, the

"Wine, food and art. If one or all of those things interest you this is the place to be, no matter what the weather."

day rather than with the summer crowds.

Kennedy fires up the gas cooker to prepare delicious hot smoked salmon as we settle in for a lesson in food and wine matching. The rule is there aren't any rules... except for all the rules.

Everything I think tastes good together seems to give everyone else some sort of sour-cat expression — except for the Marlborough mussels with the Neudorf pinot gris, which everyone agrees is a triumph.

Food matches aside, I've fallen in love with Neudorf's famous chardonnay. Anybody who insists chardonnay is yesterday's grape has never tasted this.

Hours, possibly weeks, could be whiled away like this but we have a pressing date with Kina Beach winery, a short drive up the road, towards the coast.

Kina Beach owner Dave Birt, formerly an oil company executive, spent 10 years looking for the right spot to settle his vineyard — he had a

list of 10 criteria and waited until he found them all before buying.

Crucial on that list was a coastal breeze to cool down the fruit come summer and slow the ripening process.

And it's hard to argue with his choice, the wine is excellent — particularly the pinot noir — and the idyllic location is even better.

Birt has also made over an old schoolhouse on the property into an exclusive, reclusive B&B. It's the perfect romantic hidey-hole.

Although within easy reach of beaches, wineries and gorgeous places to eat, it's hard to imagine why you would tear yourself away from the gorgeous cottage with its beautiful views from the master bedroom.

The wintry day is getting short so we head back towards Nelson via the coastal enclave of Mapua.

Here among the wharfside cafes is the Coolstore gallery — yes, in what was once a coolstore — which exhibits a range of fantastic paintings, sculptures, ceramics and jewellery.

And it has an excellent opening-hours note on the door which reads something along the lines of "open from 11ish" — life here is, apparently, one endless summer, rain or shine.

— Kerri Jackson was a guest of Heritage Hotels and Air NZ