

Facing page: taking a rest at spectacular Te Mata Peak. This page: cycling at Ngatarawa Winery



# GOURMET TRAILS: *NEW ZEALAND*

Cycle some of New Zealand's most scenic food and wine trails in Hawkes Bay

WORDS Belinda Luksic

**F**or wine and food lovers, Hawkes Bay puts the romance into al fresco holidays. It's easy to see why, too. This gourmet's paradise has a network of over 180 kilometres of cycle trails that wind through countryside dotted with world class wineries, local produce and stunning coastline. Couples can explore the region at their leisure, stopping where the whim takes them and creating their own itinerary.

As one of New Zealand's premier wine and food destinations, Hawkes Bay doesn't disappoint. The region is famous for its red varieties and chardonnay and there are over 80 premium and boutique wineries peppered along its many trails. The weekend farmer's markets give couples the chance to indulge their tastebuds with plump offerings of sun-kissed tomatoes, lush berries and grapes as well as artisan breads and locally-made cheeses for a readymade picnic in the fields. There are also many casual and fine dining options.

While self-guided cycle tours are one way to discover Hawkes Bay, small, boutique guided tours take it to the next level. The Tour de Hawkes Bay Estate cycling tour is a 5-day 4-night guided experience through some of the better wineries in Hawkes Bay.

Beginning in the historic Art Deco town of Napier, the tour crosses the Ahuriri Estuary with its abundant birdlife, to Taradale, and onto Havelock North to the coast, before looping some 100 or so kilometres later back to Napier. With plenty of food and wine-tasting stops along the way, the biggest decision we'll have to make is what to order at dinner. Perfect.

Having mapped our journey the night before over a meal of slow braised lamb shanks at the Crown Hotel's Milk and Honey Restaurant, we head out on a morning of clear skies and mild 18 degree temperatures with our guide, Damian Cerini, and our small group of six.

PHOTOS: MARK DWEN/HAWKES BAY TOURISM; HAWKE'S BAY TOURISM





The flat, off-road out of Napier is easy cruising and we're shortly whizzing past the beautiful waters of Ahuriri Estuary with its community of wading birds and onto our first stop of the day, Church Road Wines. Here, Damian has arranged a special behind the scenes wine tour and food and wine tasting tutorial where we learn how to develop a nose for wine, how to smell its bouquet and describe its taste, as well as how to match wines to food. Our lunch arrives and it's overflowing with local produce and a selection of cured meats, pickled vegetables, hot and sour prawns, potted smoked fish, cheeses and dips.

Next stop on the trail is Mission Estate Winery, one of New Zealand's oldest wineries. Keen to share our newfound knowledge, we compare notes as we swirl, smell and sip each wine. With some eight wines for tasting at cellar door, it's a good thing we've already had lunch.

Tastings done, we make our way to our accommodation in Taradale, a sleepy village with a population of 17,000. For fun, we zip along the Puketapu Loop that links to Taradale, a gentle and picturesque ride through copses of trees and bush, before re-joining our group for a relaxed Thai dinner.

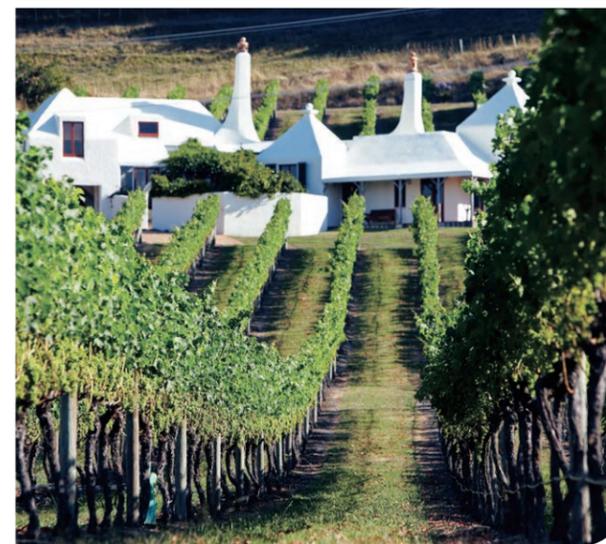
Day three and Gimblett Gravels wine district is in our sights. Internationally regarded for its big-bodied reds and distinctive Syrah variety, it's interesting to think that only 150 years ago the area was completely under water. Today, the countryside is expansive with gentle rolling hills and vineyards as far as the eye can see. Its award-winning wines are distinctly boisterous in body and flavour thanks to strict appellation controls that ensure at least 95% of the grapes come from within the region.

It's only 10am but that's the fun of holidays in wine country. At Te Awa, we sip a glass of Syrah and contemplate its peppery berry goodness while learning that Te Awa Estate comes from the Maori for Te Awa o Te Atua, or 'river of God'.

At Salvare Estate, we lunch amongst the vines on organic meats and cheeses that are bursting with flavour and organic wines that surely must be good for us. It would be very easy to doze off here after such an exceptional feast, but we shake off the cobwebs and make our way to our last two wineries for the day at Ngatarawa Estate and Abbey Cellars.

Dinner tonight is at the five-star Terrôir Restaurant at Craggy Range Winery, voted among the 20 best winery restaurants around the world. Headed by chef Leyton Ashley, the emphasis is on fresh local produce and French country flavours.

Facing page:  
Hawke's Bay wines.  
This page: plump  
local grapes create  
the region's world-  
class wines; Craggy  
Range Vineyard



PHOTOS: HAWKES BAY TOURISM

PHOTOS: HAWKES BAY TOURISM AND TOUR DE VINES

#### NEED TO KNOW

**GETTING THERE:** Qantas and Air New Zealand fly daily to Auckland with regular connecting flights to Napier through Air New Zealand.

**CYCLE TOURS:** Tour de Hawkes Bay Estates cycling tours operate in April and October each year and cost upwards of \$1,749 per person, including accommodation, meals, tastings and bike hire. They also offer self-guided cycle tours. Visit [tourdevines.com.au](http://tourdevines.com.au) for more information.

**RESTAURANTS:** Terrôir Restaurant 253 Waimarama Road, Havelock North [craggyrange.com](http://craggyrange.com)

**WINERIES:** Church Road Winery - 150 Church Road, Taradale, Hawkes Bay [churchroad.co.nz](http://churchroad.co.nz)

Mission Estate Winery - 198 Church Road, Porait, Napier [missionestate.co.nz](http://missionestate.co.nz)

Te Awa Estate - 2375 State Highway 50, Hastings [teawa.com](http://teawa.com)

Salvare Estate - 403 Ngatarawa Road, Bridge Pa [salvare.co.nz](http://salvare.co.nz)

Ngatarawa Estate - 305 Ngatarawa Road, Bridge Pa [ngatarawa.co.nz](http://ngatarawa.co.nz)

Abbey Cellars - 1769 Maraekakaho Rd, Hastings [abbeycellars.com](http://abbeycellars.com)

Clearview Estate Winery - 194 Clifton Road, Haumoana [clearviewestate.co.nz](http://clearviewestate.co.nz)

Black Barn Vineyard - Black Barn Road, Havelock North [blackbarn.com](http://blackbarn.com)

Te Mata Estate Winery - 349 Te Mata Road, Havelock North [temata.co.nz](http://temata.co.nz)

Elephant Hill - 86 Clifton Road Te Awanga [elephanthill.co.nz](http://elephanthill.co.nz)

An entrée of scampi cru arrives plump and glistening, cured by lime and coconut, the crunch of macadamia and tang of sorrel providing a subtle counterpart to the more citrusy tones. A main of lamb loin and shoulder is cooked two ways. The loin, pink and tender, while the shoulder slow-cooked to perfection so it almost melts in the mouth. We share some local cheeses and wash it all down with a full-bodied Craggy Wines Merlot as we gaze out the windows at the pretty fairy lights in the trees.

We begin day four with a scenic ride towards the coast, on our way back to Napier and the end of our cycle tour. As we travel along the coastline, we look out for the dark shape of dolphins and whales that are sometimes spotted in the blue Pacific waters but see nothing. The day is mild and fresh and the sea air tangy in our nostrils.

Our group, old friends now, laugh and chat easily as we cycle to our first vineyard. Just outside Havelock North, the boutique winery of Black Barn Vineyards sits atop a hillside that's surrounded by rows of vines. It's quite the romantic spot with spectacular views for miles and big Bordeaux-styled reds and award winning whites.

An antipasto awaits us at Clearview Estate Winery and we feast like kings as we sample wines. Tastings at Elephant Hill and Te Mata Estate Vineyards round off the day and we've already started talking about how we wish the tour would never end. As the day slips into afternoon, we make our way slowly back to Napier for a final meal together before we say our farewells the next day.