



On a warm day, intrepid young divers can be seen cooling off in Wellington Harbour.

CAPITAL FUN

If you're looking to entertain the family over Easter weekend or the school holidays, make tracks for wonderful Wellington.

STORY SARAH LANG





1, 2. Youngsters will enjoy the adventure playground, sand play, water play and double flying fox at Avalon Park, Lower Hutt.
3. Space Place is a world-class facility with an interactive multimedia exhibition.

KNOWN FOR ITS coffee and cafes, compact city centre and cultural experiences, the capital is a great place for a family getaway, with a huge range of attractions and activities for the whole whānau.

One must-do is a stroll along the wide pedestrian pathway on Oriental Parade, the scenic road hugging Wellington’s harbour. Freyberg Beach, with its imported sand, is a great place to paddle or picnic, and has a playground, shady trees and gelato kiosk. Down the road is the retro-style Beach Babylon cafe, which has both a kids’ menu and a dogs’ menu (and, yes, an adults’ one too). From Oriental Bay, walk round the whole waterfront to Queens Wharf, or hire a green three- or six-seater “croc-bike” to pedal around it in the allotted time. The waterfront boulevard boasts restaurants,

public artworks, a couple of food trucks, art galleries, and a playground.

If you’re in a literary frame of mind, follow the Wellington Writers Walk along the waterfront. Concrete plaques, in sometimes unexpected places, bear quotations from 23 authors who have a connection to Wellington. If you’re feeling creative, a Literary Atlas augmented-reality app alerts you when you’re close to each plaque, plays tracks of some writers reading their poems, and lets you drag and drop certain words in order to write your own poem to Tweet, archive (or delete).

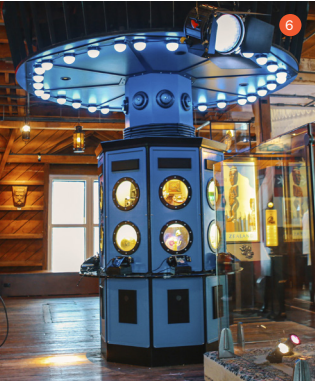
Pause at Whairepo Lagoon (whai repo means eagle ray in Māori) because, at the shallow end, you can sometimes spy eagle rays – so named because their protruding heads are eagle-like in profile. Kids will squeal



Stroll along the pedestrian pathway on Oriental Parade, the scenic road hugging Wellington’s harbour.



4. Beach Babylon on Oriental Parade is open for breakfast, lunch and dinner with a menu to suit the whole family, including four-legged friends. 5, 6. Wellington Museum on Queens Wharf is housed in a heritage building built in 1892 and was named by *The Times* as one of the world’s top 50 museums.



with delight if they get to spot some flapping their triangular wings. You can also hire a pedal boat here, next to the gelato shop.

Your last waterfront stop could be Capital E, a centre for children’s immersive creative experiences, workshops and kids’ theatre in a “Play HQ” space that transforms according to themed interactive exhibitions. There’s bottomless plunger coffee and some chairs for parents.

UP AND AT ’EM
Lambton Quay is technically Wellington’s main street, full of suits and civil servants during the week. From here you can board the Cable Car: the red funicular railway that looks like a cross between a train and a bus. It takes you up the hill to the Botanic

Garden. Expect toots and harbour views. From there, it’s a two-minute walk to the world-class Space Place. Take the kids through the interactive multimedia exhibition about space and you may learn nearly as much as they will. Definitely catch one of 12 short movies in the planetarium where, in slightly-reclined seats, you watch the screen on the domed ceiling above. *We Are Not Aliens* is highly recommended. It explains how likely aliens are to exist (very) and where (in “Goldilocks” zones where conditions for life are perfect). The kids will like the cute animated characters.

From Space Place, wander through some of the 25ha Botanic Garden. The Discovery Garden, known as the Children’s Garden, features terraced, interactive learning



spaces, each based on a different use of plants – from food and fibre to medicine and construction. There’s a good playground there too, catering to different age groups.

The best playground in greater Wellington and maybe New Zealand – up there with Christchurch’s Margaret Mahy playground – is Avalon Park in Lower Hutt. It’s huge and has something for everyone, from pre-schoolers to 12-year-olds. As well as the usual suspects, there are climbing walls, tunnels, sand-play, water-play, a flying fox, a “soundscape area” with listening tubes, and a pond with paddle boats. A miniature train runs around the park on Sundays and during most school holidays. Meanwhile, adults can read or grab an ice cream. Warning: the kids won’t want to leave.



Cruise from Oriental Bay to Kumutoto on one of the city’s croc-bikes.



7. An easy way to see the waterfront is by pedal power. 8, 9, 10. Marvel at the birdlife and reptiles on a guided tour of Zealandia.



BAY DREAMS

Everyone loves Scorching Bay, reached by a winding drive along the scenic coast. There’s a great cafe called Scorch-O-Rama, an ice-cream kiosk, and a “spiderweb” rope structure for the children to climb while you read a book in the large grassy area under a pōhutukawa. Meanwhile, Titahi Bay is an underrated beach 25 minutes’ drive from central Wellington to Porirua. With colourful boathouses at each end, it has shallow water that’s great for kids paddling and “jumping over” the last ripples of the waves.

SEAL THE DEAL

A more unusual activity that adults will love just as much as the kids is a three-hour morning or afternoon tour with Seal Coast Safari in a Mercedes Benz 4WD Sprinter suited to rugged terrain. You’ll be driven 20km through the hills and valleys of Terawhiti Station farmland (entry is otherwise restricted), home to sheep and Meridian Energy’s 62 West Wind electricity-generating turbines. Drive past Wellington’s (unused) Leaning Lighthouse and along the beach to Tongue Point where members of a male fur-seal colony can often be seen

sunning themselves on the rocks (this route is only accessible via 4WD or a long hike). Initially you may not see many seals – just craggy rocks – but as you get closer you realise they’re camouflaged, the exact colour of the rocks. It is enthralling to watch them raise their eyes and noses to the sky as though contemplating existential questions. See more wildlife at Zealandia, the world’s first fully-fenced urban ecosanctuary. It protects 40 rare native wildlife species in a 225ha area, with 32km of walking tracks. It’s definitely worth taking a guided tour on a small boat along the lake, then along bush tracks, as a guide points out birds and other wildlife. The kids will enjoy trying to spot the camouflaged, motionless tuatara. If you are lucky, takahē, who often prefer their privacy, may venture out. Take a night tour if you want to see kiwi and glow-worms.

ARTS HEART

No trip to Wellington is complete without a walk around the Cuba Precinct, made up of Cuba Street and its surrounding streets. Capturing Wellington’s quirkier side, this area has the Bucket Fountain that always enthralls young kids (watch out for the splashes), numerous cafes, buskers, and boutique clothing and gift shops. Check out revitalised pedestrian Hannahs Laneway. They sport colourful geometric patterns painted on walls and the ground, street art, planter boxes, unusual light hangings, and establishments including a peanut-butter manufacturer, a bakery-cafe, a pizzeria, and Wellington Chocolate Factory (stop here for a tasting).

As for galleries and museums, City Gallery, Te Papa, The Dowse Art Museum in Lower Hutt and Pātaka Art + Museum in Porirua are all well worth visiting, each with exhibitions that often interest children, and activities like maps and colouring-in. However, one institution that deserves more visitors is Wellington Museum (separate from Te Papa), with its collections and displays rich in the city’s spatial, social and cultural history.

Take a guided tour or wander through on your own. You enter through The Bond Store, which recreates what was once on this site: a cargo warehouse holding imported goods until taxes were paid on them. Kids can watch for the digitised “mouse” scampering over the sacks and barrels of goods. If time is limited, head to the top floor, The Attic, home to an eclectic collection of items, from a miniature model of Wellington’s topography through to a



11. Cuba Street’s kinetic sculpture, the Bucket Fountain, has been splashing passers-by for more than 50 years. 12. Fur seals blend into the scenery at Tongue Point. 13. The golden sands of Scorching Bay on the Miramar Peninsula. 14. A young explorer at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.



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Eat

ROSIE'S RED HOT CANTINA & TACO JOINT

There's something to tempt everyone here – from teenagers who demolish the gigantic plate of nachos through to picky six-year-olds for whom salad is something other people eat. It's ambient without being too noisy. High marks for the retro decor. rosiescantina.co.nz

MR GO'S

This popular eatery offers Asian hawker-style street food using seasonal local ingredients. Order a *gua bao* (a steamed bun filled with meat or tofu) and grab some small plates to share. They keep half the restaurant for bookings, and the other half for walk-ins. Plenty of families come in. mrgos.co.nz

SOUTHERN CROSS GARDEN BAR RESTAURANT

Known as Wellington's most family-friendly establishment, Southern Cross is very large, with tables and more casual booths for dining, and a big outside area with many nooks. There's a kids' menu,

board games, toys and colouring-in activities. In the weekends, they hold face painting, puppet shows or fairy-tale productions – letting grown-ups linger over the newspaper. thecross.co.nz

MARANUI CAFE; SEASHORE CABARET

Maranui in Lyall Bay and Seashore Cabaret in Petone are both nautically themed establishments overlooking the sea. They're popular for weekend brunch, and have a kids' menu and crayons. Sometimes you get straight in – sometimes you have to line up. Prince William and Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge once visited Maranui. maranucafe.co.nz

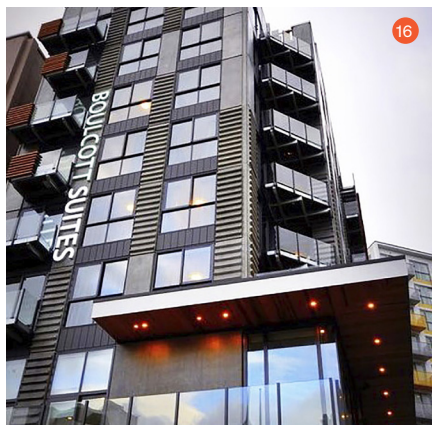
Sleep

BOULCOTT SUITES

Centrally located just off Willis Street, Boulcott Suites is a five-star apartment hotel that offers, among other rooms, two-, three- and four-bedroom suites. If you'd like to splash out and spread out a bit, you can't do better than the penthouse. There are three bedrooms (two have double beds and one has two single beds), a spacious lounge, two bathrooms, and a balcony. You can have a few drinks and play some music without keeping the kids awake. The fully equipped kitchens are good if kids need cereal first thing. villagegroup.co.nz

QUEST SERVICED APARTMENTS

Quest Wellington, Quest Atrium, Quest on Lambton, and Quest on Thorndon – all serviced apartments – are a good choice. The accommodation includes two-bedroom (and in some locations three-bedroom) apartments. questapartments.co.nz



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stuffed lion. Wellington Museum also offers a "Ship n Chip" tour. A guide gives you a tour of the museum, he or she gets you parcels of fish and chips, then farewells you at a ferry terminal before you head to Matiu/Somes Island, formerly a quarantine station, internment camp, military defence position, and leper camp (for just one unlucky man).

Matiu/Somes Island is now an historic nature reserve, with walking tracks that children can handle. En route, look out for wildlife, including kākāriki/parakeets, piwakawaka/fantails, tuatara and skinks. And, on the way back to the mainland, as the kids nod off, think about your next visit to Wellington – perhaps a weekend getaway for the grown-ups?

wellingtonnz.com

15. Rosie's Red-Hot Cantina and Taco Joint serves up Mexican-American street food.

16. Five-star Boulcott Suites offers family-friendly accommodation from stylish studios to a penthouse. **17.** Casual walk-ins are welcome at bustling Mr Go's.

Getting there

WELLINGTON



Air New Zealand operates daily non-stop flights to Wellington from Auckland, Christchurch, Queenstown and Dunedin, with connections across the domestic network.



Contact Centre
0800 737 000



Holidays Travel Brokers
0800 737 767



airnewzealand.co.nz

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