

INTERNATIONAL Traveller

FOR MODERN EXPLORE

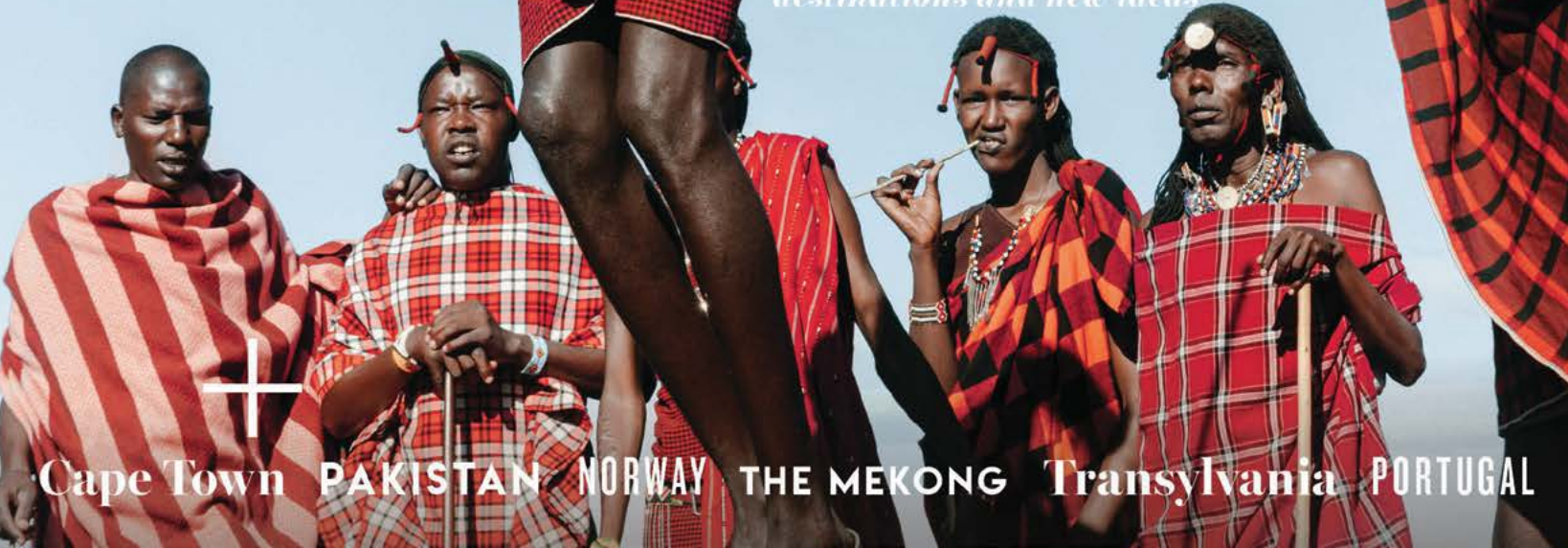
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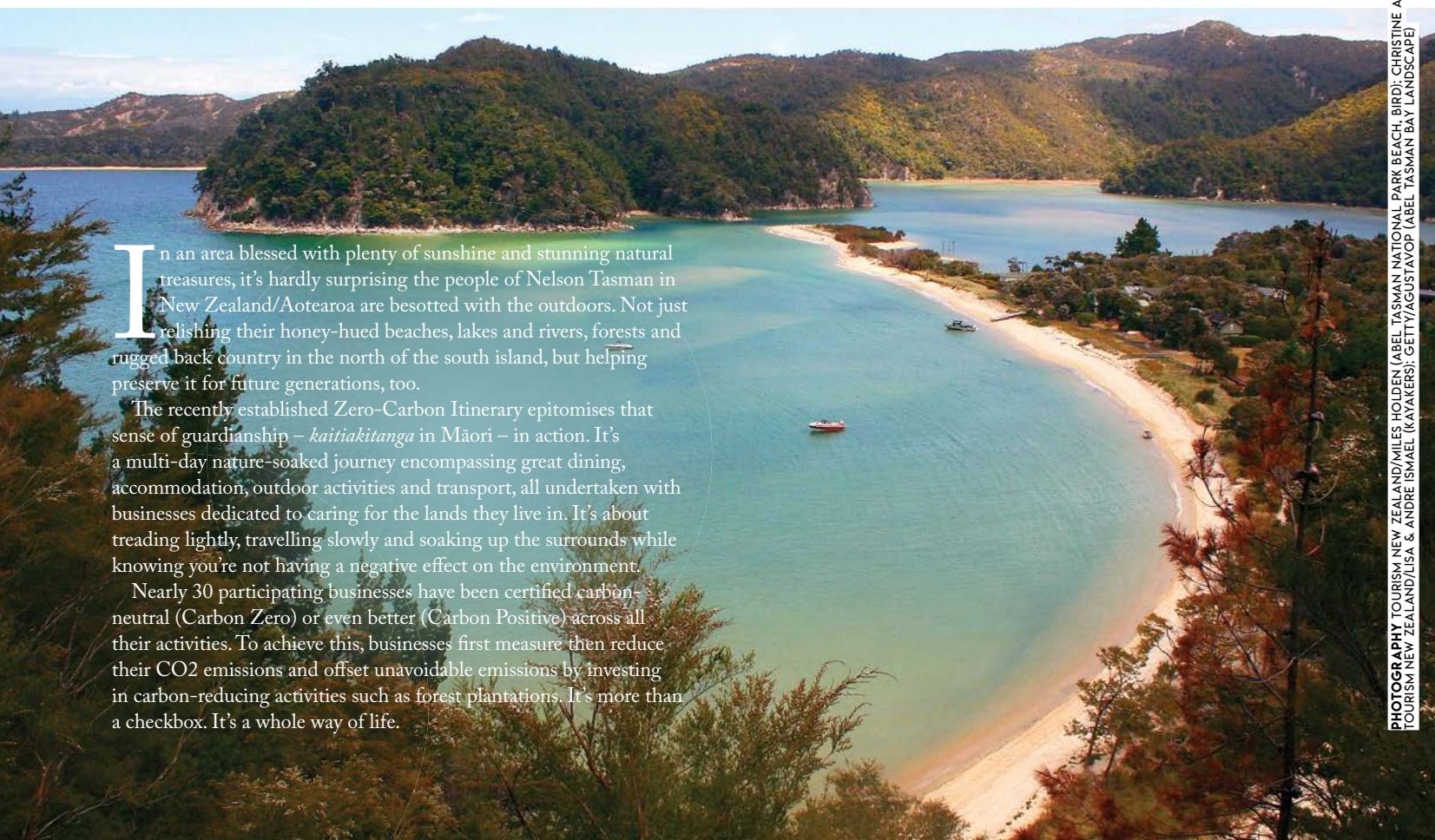


CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT:
 Lush rainforest in Abel Tasman National Park;
 Bird life around Nelson; The national park is
 home to golden-sand beaches; Secluded Awaroa
 Lodge; The modern lodge is all about nature;
 The Free House pub; Marahau Sea Kayaks;
 The turquoise waters of Abel Tasman Bay.

Grass Routes

NELSON TASMAN

NEW ZEALAND'S FIRST ZERO-CARBON TRAVEL ITINERARY CELEBRATES NATURAL BOUNTIES AND PUTS THE ENVIRONMENT FIRST, WRITES **CHRISTINE ALDRED**.



In an area blessed with plenty of sunshine and stunning natural treasures, it's hardly surprising the people of Nelson Tasman in New Zealand/Aotearoa are besotted with the outdoors. Not just relishing their honey-hued beaches, lakes and rivers, forests and rugged back country in the north of the south island, but helping preserve it for future generations, too.

The recently established Zero-Carbon Itinerary epitomises that sense of guardianship – *kaitiakitanga* in Māori – in action. It's a multi-day nature-soaked journey encompassing great dining, accommodation, outdoor activities and transport, all undertaken with businesses dedicated to caring for the lands they live in. It's about treading lightly, travelling slowly and soaking up the surrounds while knowing you're not having a negative effect on the environment.

Nearly 30 participating businesses have been certified carbon-neutral (Carbon Zero) or even better (Carbon Positive) across all their activities. To achieve this, businesses first measure then reduce their CO2 emissions and offset unavoidable emissions by investing in carbon-reducing activities such as forest plantations. It's more than a checkbox. It's a whole way of life.

PHOTOGRAPHY TOURISM NEW ZEALAND/MILES HOLDEN (ABEL TASMAN NATIONAL PARK BEACH, BIRDS); CHRISTINE ALDRED (RAINFOREST); TOURISM NEW ZEALAND/LISA & ANDRE ISMAEL (KAYAKERS); GETTY/AGUSTAVOP (ABEL TASMAN BAY LANDSCAPE)

A taste of Nelson

An excellent way to discover the region at close range is astride a bike. THE GENTLE CYCLING COMPANY has riders covered with bike hire, maps and suggested itineraries. A self-guided cycle around the Nelson shorelines and boardwalks uncovers local treasures: craft breweries, coffee stops, artisan cheeses and deli delights, picnic spots and beaches. It's just a snippet of the GREAT TASTE TRAIL, a 200-kilometre cycling trail taking in hills, beaches and a feast of foodie stops around the Nelson Tasman region.

Owners Chris and Bernie Whitaker moved to Nelson to spend more time outdoors so it makes sense they're keen to look after it, too. As well as being certified Carbon Zero, they're involved in rewilding nearby forests, pest eradication and clean-ups.

It's a common theme. Zane Kennedy of WINE, ART & WILDERNESS is similarly enamoured with this place he knows like the back of his hand, and which he proudly shares with visitors on small group and private tours. He extols some highlights while we dine on fresh fish and local green-lipped mussels at seaside MAPUA.

"There's so much going on here from boutique wineries to amazing fresh produce, world-renowned hops, a whole community of artists and of course wild, open spaces – so we tailor itineraries for individual preferences," says Zane. And for each guest, a tree is planted locally on their behalf.

In town, THE FREE HOUSE – a bustling pub in a converted timber church where dogs and takeaways are welcome – is a place for people to gather and converse, and then it's about drinks. That includes ever-changing craft beers from across New Zealand and its own nano-brewery, local wines and traditional apple cider from Upper Moutere. It's the first pub in New Zealand to gain Climate Positive status, thanks in part to some innovative energy and carbon-saving engineering initiatives.



Discovering the Abel Tasman

The ABEL TASMAN NATIONAL PARK, one of three in the region, is renowned for its spectacular waterways and islands. Skipper Martin Holmes, of ABEL TASMAN SAILING ADVENTURES, knows them intimately. Martin shares stories about the area's history and points out wildlife you'd otherwise miss while on a sailing catamaran, with the sails flapping above. He also tells of community efforts to protect the lands. Awaroa Beach is a prime example. Purchased from freehold by crowdfunding with the support of 40,000 community members, this seven-hectare site is now a national park, ensuring its ongoing protection.

Taking to the waters with MARAHAU SEA KAYAKS is an even more intimate way to experience the landscape. See glistening fur seals lounging on rocky isles or spot a stingray, and test out your fitness at the same time. Choose between self-guided or guided, half-day or multi-day adventures. And if all that exercise gets too much, you can always grab a water taxi for all or part of the journey.



Bedding down

Don't expect to drive into AWAROA LODGE, a convivial lodge located amid Abel Tasman National Park and open over the summer season. Surrounded by pristine waterways and native forests, walking in or arriving by boat are the most popular options to get there. Staying here is all about being immersed in nature: walking, kayaking and swimming, with great food on the side.

Back in Nelson, luxury PIHOPA RETREAT reveals sustainable thinking in accommodation isn't restricted to the wilderness. Starting life as a Bishop's residence in 1862, it now boasts six superb self-contained units, canapés by the pool, croquet on the lawns and breakfast in the chapel. Owner Sarah Mallor sees herself as Pihopa's current guardian, looking after its two hectares of grounds, heritage trees and historic buildings. This is reflected in many ways from using organic teas, local fare and fruit from their own orchard to assisting with local environmental projects.

As Sarah says, "When we came here, we committed to making sure this property was as beautiful as it can be for the people of the future."

It's a theme that keeps repeating on this eco-minded itinerary. **IT**