

Queen Charlotte
Sound, gateway to
Marlborough Sounds

TEXT ROSALYN PAGE | PHOTOGRAPHY KEVIN JUDD

sounds of silence

EXPERIENCE THE RARE BEAUTY AND TRANQUILLITY OF THE MARLBOROUGH SOUNDS

There's something

rare and inspiring about the peaceful beauty of the Marlborough Sounds. The sparkling cool waters and lush vegetation are only occasionally disturbed by the haunting call of a native bellbird.

At the top of New Zealand's South Island, the Marlborough Sounds are a collection of deep, sheltered bays, inlets and channels, formed when the sea flooded a network of valleys millions of years ago.

The Marlborough region attracts both local and visiting travellers, keen to experience New Zealand's finest native forests, tranquil waterways and world-renowned vineyards.

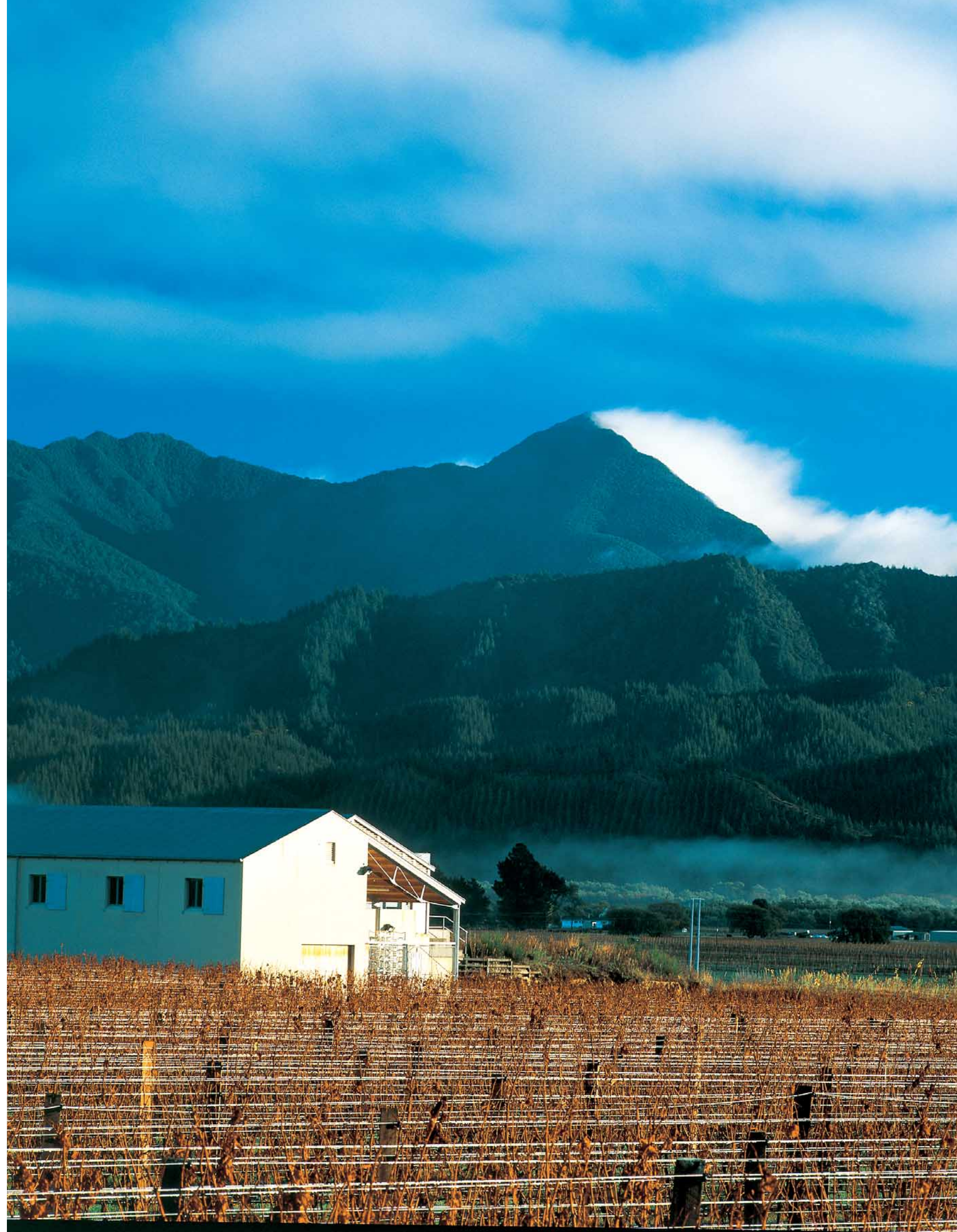
Blenheim, 28km south of Picton – where the ferry leaves for Wellington on the North Island – is Marlborough's capital and the heart of the wine-growing area. Local wineries produce some of the finest sauvignon blancs in the world – their distinctive fruitiness and crispness the result of just the right balance of warm days and cool evenings.

A few nights' stay in Blenheim is the best way to visit the wineries – including Huia Vineyards, Lawson's Dry Hills Wines, Seresin Estate, Hunter's Wines, Highfield Estate and Cloudy Bay – which are all within an easy drive of the town. Most of the wineries have cellar door tastings and sales, and Cairnbrae Vineyards, Wairau River Wines and Hunter's Wines have restaurants serving final local produce matched to the wines.

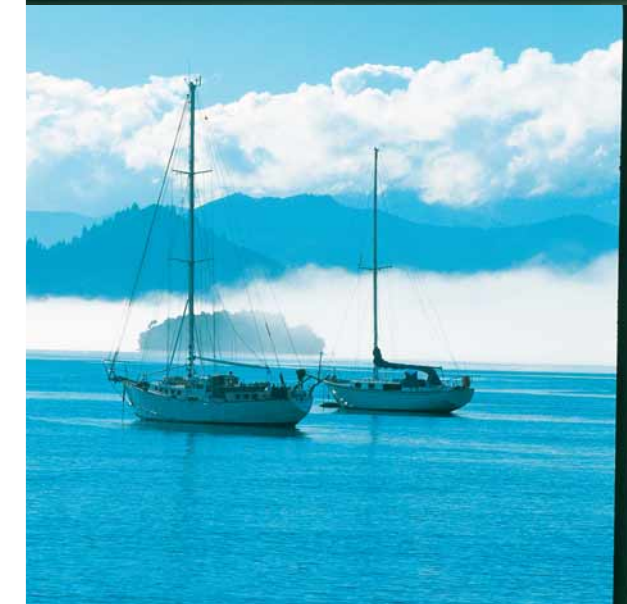
With local food and wine on board, head back to Picton and take one of the many ferry and boat services into the Sounds. Picton stands at the head of the beautiful Queen Charlotte Sound, which leads out to a maze of bays including Endeavour Inlet, Resolution Bay and Ship Cove.

The ferries make regular stops along the way, and if you've booked ahead, you can be dropped at one of the lodges, resorts or cabins dotted throughout the area. If you're walking one of the many tracks in the Sounds, boat services can also be arranged to meet you at designated points along the track or at the finish. You can arrange your water transport through the operators in Picton or with local tourist offices.

Bushwalking, known as "tramping" in the Land of the Long White Cloud, is almost a national pastime for the locals. The pristine forests and clear air attract many overseas enthusiasts as well. One of the most popular walks is the 71km Queen Charlotte Track, which takes up to four days to complete. Beginning at historic Ship Cove, it extends to Anakiwa and offers awe-inspiring views of the Queen Charlotte and Kenepuru Sounds.



Clockwise from left: Seresin Winery is just one of many in the Marlborough region; sailing on Queen Charlotte Sound; the prolific local vegetation includes spectacular native ferns; boats at anchor



Native trees, such as the manuka (tea-tree), lancewood and rimu, make up the subtropical bush spreading from the water's edge to the skyline ridges. The area was originally settled for mining and farming, but the steep hills that enclose the bays ensured that neither industry developed very far. The birdlife in this region includes native birds such as the bellbird, the grey warbler and the cheeky tui, which is known to pinch food from the hands of unsuspecting visitors. At night, those who venture out along the bush trails are delighted by the abundance of glow-worms in the underbrush. And the picturesque coves, spectacular coastal scenery and lush forests will leave you breathless, even if the walking doesn't.

Some of the other shorter segments of the Queen Charlotte Track include Camp Bay to Portage, which is about 22km; Portage to Mistletoe Bay (about 8km) and Mistletoe Bay to Anakiwa (about 13km). The walk between Ship Cove and Resolution Bay is about 4km and takes approximately two hours. Alternatively, the walk between Resolution Bay and Endeavour Inlet is 10km, but its kinder terrain means it takes an easy three hours.

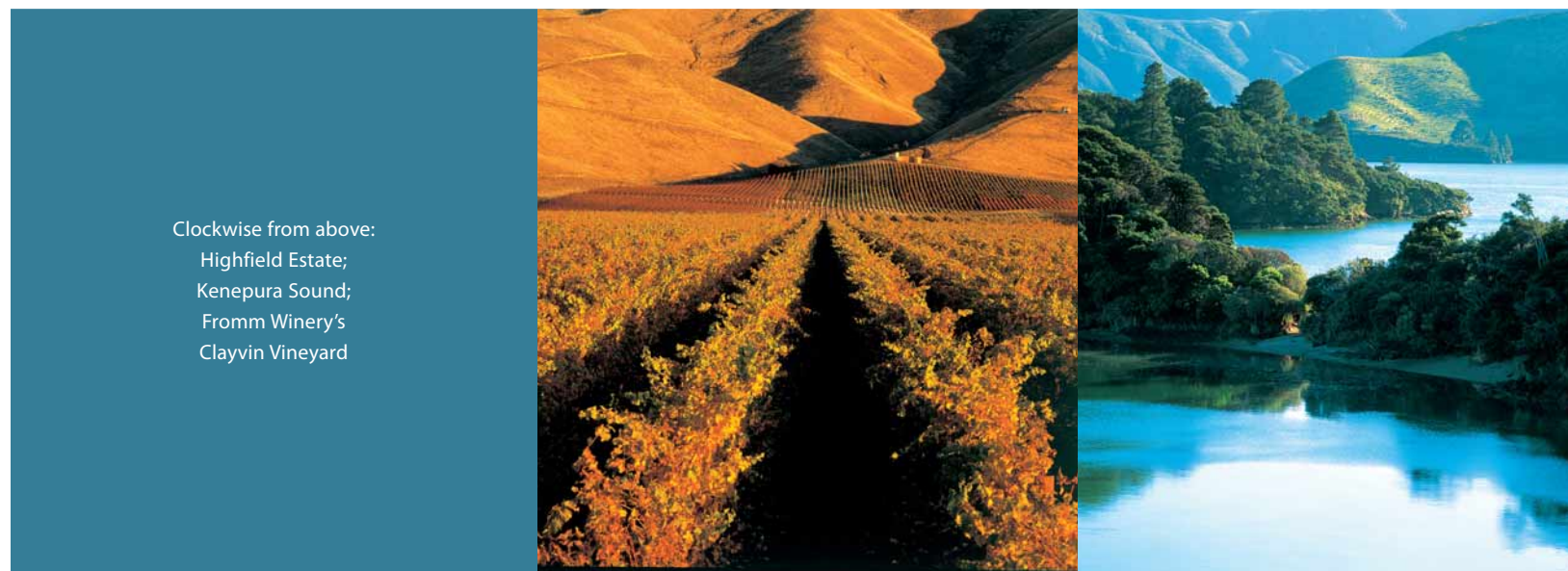
If long days of walking aren't appealing, there are a number of gentler walks – for example, between Endeavour Resort and Furneaux Lodge – so you can combine your stroll with lunch or drinks along the way. There are also tracks around the bays and coves to discover nearby rainforest or waterfalls.

The walking tracks are well serviced, with plenty of choices of accommodation, from camp sites and basic self-catering cabins to well-equipped lodges with restaurants, bars and bistros. Visitors can choose from cabins, such as those at the Endeavour Resort in Endeavour Inlet, or resorts including Furneaux Lodge and Punga Cove Resort in Camp Bay. At pretty, sheltered Resolution Bay, the Resolution Bay Cabins are among the options.

The lodges are well stocked with fresh produce, as food and other supplies are brought in on boats that make regular drop-offs. Cabins and lodges also have water and power, so you're guaranteed a hot shower and a cold drink at the end of the day. And to make your walk even easier, a cabin-to-cabin pack-ferrying service means you only have to carry what you need for the day when tramping. Most cabins only operate during the warmer months, as the mists and cool temperatures in winter keep trampers away.

If you want to venture offshore, most resorts have rowing boats and kayaks for exploring the surrounding bays and inlets. The clear water and bright skies also offer good visibility for fishing and diving and skippered boat tours are widely available. In season, the water is even warm enough for swimming.

Despite their increasing tourist appeal, the Marlborough Sounds have retained an air of serenity. For those who want to enjoy a pristine slice of New Zealand's natural wonders, there can be few better places to commune with nature. 🌿



Clockwise from above:
Highfield Estate;
Kenepura Sound;
Fromm Winery's
Clayvin Vineyard

travel details

Air New Zealand and Qantas operate frequent flights to Christchurch. For information, phone Air New Zealand on 13 24 76 or Qantas on 13 13 13.

The Coastal Pacific train travels from Christchurch to Picton via Blenheim once a day, leaving Christchurch station at 7.30am.

Water taxis, ferries and sea kayaking tours can be booked at Picton marina.

Wine tours in Marlborough can be arranged through the Marlborough Travel Centre in Blenheim, phone +64 3 577 9997 or visit www.marlboroughtravel.co.nz. For more on Marlborough, visit www.marlborough.co.nz or www.destinationmarlborough.com.

ACCOMMODATION

Endeavour Resort, Endeavour Inlet/PRB 377, Picton, phone +64 3 579 8381, email endeavourresort@extra.co.nz.

Furneaux Lodge, Endeavour Inlet/RB 381, Picton, phone +64 3 579 8259, www.furneaux.co.nz.

Punga Cove Resort, Endeavour Inlet/RB 408, Picton, phone +64 3 579 8561, www.pungacove.co.nz.

Resolution Bay Cabins, Resolution Bay/Private Bag, Picton, phone +64 3 579 9411, email reso@extra.co.nz.

VINEYARDS

Cairnbrae Vineyards, Jacksons Rd, RD3/PO Box 5024, Springlands, Blenheim, phone +64 3 572 8018, www.cairnbrae.co.nz.

Cloudy Bay, Jacksons Rd/PO Box 376, Blenheim, phone +64 3 520 9140, www.cloudybay.co.nz.

Fromm Winery, Godfrey Rd, RD2, Blenheim, phone +64 3 572 9355, www.frommwineries.com.

Highfield Estate, Brookby Rd, RD2, Blenheim, phone +64 3 572 9244, www.highfield.co.nz.

Huia Vineyards, Boyces Rd, RD3, Blenheim/PO Box 92, Renwick, phone +64 3 572 8326, www.huia.net.au.

Hunter's Wines, Rapaura Rd/PO Box 839, Blenheim, phone +64 3 572 8489, www.hunters.co.nz.

Lawson's Dry Hills Wines, Alabama Rd/PO Box 4020, Blenheim, phone +64 3 578 7674, www.lawsonsdryhills.co.nz.

Seresin Estate, Bedford Rd/PO Box 859, Blenheim, phone +64 3 572 9408, www.seresin.co.nz.

Wairau River Wines, cnr State Highway 6 and Rapaura Rd, Blenheim, phone +64 3 572 9800, www.wairauriverwines.com.