

NEW ZEALAND

FLYING VISIT

# Weekend adventure

For action and adventure—with a touch of luxury—in one of our country's most spectacular and rugged regions, **Victoria Bartle** goes wild in Nelson

**M**y socks are heavy with melted snow. My cycling helmet is spattered with mud, sand is crunching inside my sneakers and my hair is salt-encrusted madness.

In less than 34 hours I've careened down mountain-bike trails, sailed and sea-kayaked, hiked through native forest and stomped about in snow at an altitude of almost 6,000 feet.

Seasoned travellers might maintain that you can't see a destination in a couple of days, but that doesn't wash with Nelson-based experiential tourism company *Simply Wild*. Hand over two days of your travel itinerary to *Simply Wild* and by the end of them you'll wonder how you could have experienced so much and reached such far-flung places in such an impossibly short time.

But no matter how action-packed the journey, there's no feeling of being rushed from one adventure to the next. By car, helicopter, mountain-bike, yacht and kayak, I'm taken to the mountainous ranges behind Nelson city, out into Tasman Bay, onto beaches, into tranquil lagoons where rivers meet the sea, along native bush paths and swept to mountains to the west with deep snowy carpets and stunning views.

Although we were advised to dress warmly for some fast-paced adventures in wintry climes, my two-day Journeys at the Edge sport adventure starts off surprisingly gently. Rob Douglas, our tour director and guide, whisks us to the warmth of Broccoli Row cafe for coffee and fresh baking.

Broccoli Row owner Sue McNulty, who is Rob's wife, is to become our chef for two days, leaving the running of the kitchen to her capable staff. She's London-trained, and well-known to locals for her seafood and vegetarian fare.

Fifteen minutes after draining the dregs of our coffees, we're trying out mountain-bikes for size, surrounded by the forests and towering ranges of the Maitai Valley. The bikes are scooped up by a helicopter and flown to Third House, a lofty shelter on Dun Mountain. Later we'll retrieve them for a fifteen-kilometre downhill cycle.

But first, a hike. As Rob is giving us safety tips, our own helicopter—a surprisingly compact, glass-bubbled version—appears on the horizon and heads straight for us. Pilot Noel Boyd carries us smoothly over the valleys and craggy hilltops to a rocky spot 900 metres up.

With the songs of bellbirds and fantails all around us, we walk



native tree-lined paths while Rob recounts Dun Mountain's history. In the mid-1800s, people lived in this wild and woolly place, mined for minerals and built the now-disused railway line down to Nelson (today a favourite route of avid mountain-bikers, hikers and runners).

When we reach Coppermine Saddle, Noel is waiting to fly us to Third House hut, and we're off mountain-biking. Rob and our second guide Tim Wanklyn are quick to sense the pace each of us feels comfortable with—some a little crazier than others.

We leave the mountains behind and head for the sea, riding alongside the Maitai River on the city's edge to the Nelson marina where *Simply Wild*, a 50-foot Beneteau yacht, and her owner and skipper Milo, are waiting for us. Sue is aboard, too, creating a lunch that sends mouth-watering smells wafting from the galley.

We cruise Tasman Bay and head to Abel Tasman National Park, where we dine on deck while seabirds work schools of fish for their own lunch.

*Simply Wild* is our home for the night, each of us allocated a cosy cabin. Moored in a bay known as The Anchorage, we dine in the warmth of the main cabin and talk into the night.

Next morning, our kayaks arrive as we finish a leisurely breakfast. On the beach, we're given thorough safety instructions before leaving for Onetahuti Bay. We paddle past little beaches with enchanting names, and lunch in Mosquito Bay where nary a mosquito is seen.

The final leg of our journey is an adrenaline-rush flight in a six-million-dollar helicopter, complete with seven leather armchair-style seats. Shaun Rolls flies us over Separation Point where Tasman Bay meets Golden Bay, over beachside holiday playgrounds, then inland to the breathtaking mountains of the Kahurangi National Park.

We land at Boulder Lake and discover a postcard-perfect waterfall before Shaun lowers us onto a mountain-top where we stomp about laughing, sinking knee-deep in the pristine snow. ◉

*Simply Wild's Journeys at the Edge* are two- to four-day experiential travel adventures. Each is custom-designed to meet clients' needs while fulfilling their ultimate dream holiday in the Nelson region



PREVIOUS PAGE: Kayaking in Abel Tasman National Park. OPPOSITE: Mountain-biking on Dun Mountain. THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: A chopper over Dun Mountain; atop the snowcapped peaks; aboard the *Simply Wild*; preparing to board the helicopter; hiking on the Heaphy track

#### NEED TO KNOW >>

Expert advice from Mitch Taylor, New Zealand Specialist, House of Travel



**WHEN TO GO:** Given that all activities are outdoor-based, the warmer season can mean greater enjoyment. However with the colder weather also comes stunning vistas of the snow-capped mountains and crisp clear days. Therefore, as long as you are dressed for the conditions, these wonderful adventures can be enjoyed at any time of the year.

**GETTING THERE:** There are regular scheduled flights into Nelson or alternatively the ferry from Wellington to Picton can be beautiful on a nice day. From Picton you can either take a shuttle or hire a car to get to Nelson.

For more, visit [inspiremagazine.co.nz/11/simplywild](http://inspiremagazine.co.nz/11/simplywild) or phone House of Travel on 0800 838 747

