

# Weekend in HURUNUI

While away a few days in North Canterbury, where adventure and rugged landscape meets vineyard and cellar door.

STORY CAT MCGREGOR

Greystone vineyard, Waipara.

## FRIDAY MORNING

From Christchurch, it's an easy 40-minute drive to the small and surprising town at the gateway to North Canterbury's wine region. In Amberley, alongside the usual rural suppliers, a coterie of food and drink establishments have sprung up to serve locals, Christchurch day trippers, and the growing number of former city dwellers who now call the town home. In a sun-dappled wooden cottage on Markham Street, next to design and gift store Ruby Six, Little Vintage Espresso does superb home baking accompanied by Christchurch-roasted Switch coffee. They're closed on weekends, so be sure to take the opportunity to visit during the week. Further along the street is an Amberley icon, craft brewery Brew Moon. Twenty-one years since it first opened its doors, it remains family run and as pioneering as ever; its beer the creation of the all-women brew team. Sharing space with the brewery is the popular taproom and kitchen, where the wood-fired pizzas are legend, and you must grab a six-pack of Amberley Pale Ale.

Over on the main drag, the venerable Amberley Hotel has had a facelift and gained a new lease on life. A relatively recent addition to the hotel's offering is the Crown & Pantry, an off-licence and food store selling fine wine and artisan edibles from the local area. Some of those gourmet treats make their way into the hotel's picnic basket, tailor-made to be enjoyed 15 minutes away on a bluff overlooking the Waipara River. That's the location of Iron Ridge Quarry, a remarkable sculpture park and native garden created by local artist Raymond Herber. He bought this former lime works in the mid-90s and spent four months filling in the abandoned quarry with around 350 truckloads of soil; 25 years later it's a dramatically beautiful setting for his graceful steel sculptures – and also a picnic spot par excellence.



**FRIDAY AFTERNOON**

Heading north on State Highway One takes you into the heart of Waipara wine country. The area boasts some of New Zealand's most-lauded names in wine, and any number of cellar doors at which to taste it. Among the best is the tasting room at Pegasus Bay, the trailblazing winery that continues to win international plaudits for its earthy, full-bodied pinot noir and popular acclaim for its best-selling Main Divide riesling. There's no restaurant here, but the Mini Deli offers a cornucopia of artisan products, many of them North Canterbury-made. Grab a wine box, fill it from the deli shelves – don't forget a bottle of the winery's finest – and head outdoors to enjoy your selection in the magnificent gardens, or climb the stairs to a cosy dining area and lounge, where a roaring fireplace keeps things toasty on colder days.

A bit further along the highway and a turn towards the coast brings you to Tawanui Farm, where sheep- and cattle-raising goes hand-in-hand with more surprising activities, including glamping, jet boating and guided farm tours. Even if you aren't staying the night in one of the farm's private

geodesic domes, Tawanui is worth a detour. Accompanied by farmer Tim, the fifth-generation of the Loughnan family to grow up here, you'll hop on an ATV – sheepdogs Silk, Mist and Patch on the back – and go out exploring. Between sheep-herding demos and llama feeding, Tim tells the story of Tawanui and how it's using regenerative, low-chemical agriculture to encourage biodiversity and protect this precious land.

**FRIDAY EVENING**

Your bed for the night is at Tipapa Estate, an elegant venue and accommodation owned by charming Aussie expats Jane and Stewart Whiteside. Once part of a 4047ha sheep station stretching across the Greta Valley, the estate is now both a luxury bed and breakfast and one of Canterbury's most lovely wedding venues. From the converted 1890s woolshed – where many couples say their vows – to the 1920s California-style homestead and the sweeping gardens beyond, Tipapa Estate's blend of heritage, hospitality and understated luxury make it a jewel in Hurunui's crown. They provide a home-cooked dinner on request, and guests are welcome to use their spacious, open-plan kitchen by arrangement.

If you have itchy feet and a hankering for a good pub meal, the Greta Valley Tavern is just a couple of minutes' drive away. Hearty dishes like pork belly, steak burgers and beer-battered fish and chips are to be expected at a country tavern like this. What's a little more unusual is the wine list, almost all of it from local Waipara wineries – and keenly priced to boot.

**Head into the heart of Waipara wine country. The area boasts some of New Zealand's most lauded names in wine.**



- 1. Iron Ridge Quarry sculpture park.
- 2. Greta Valley Tavern.
- 3. Amberley Hotel.
- 4. Hanmer Springs Hotel.
- 5. Try the beef or lamb at Restaurant 31.
- 6. Forest Amble Walk, Hanmer Springs Forest.
- 7. Hanmer Springs Thermal Pools & Spa.



**SATURDAY MORNING**

With the sun streaming in through the conservatory windows, Tipapa's breakfast table is a sight to behold. Though the freshly baked bread, homemade preserves, juice, coffee and more will see you through to lunchtime, you might want to stop at the Fossil Point Cafe, next door to the tavern, for a mid-morning coffee and cake to fortify you on your journey. It's an hour's drive to Hanmer Springs, taking you through the Weka Pass – home to some well-preserved examples of early Māori rock art – and across the stunning North Canterbury landscapes that inspired artists including Colin McCahon and Rita Angus.

At Hanmer Springs, there's one place that's hard to miss: the world-famous-in-New Zealand Thermal Pools & Spa, powered by the mineral-rich waters from which the resort town gets its name. Hanmer's first public bathing facilities opened here in the 1880s; today the aqualand boasts hot pools for all ages, plus a lazy river and multiple hydro slides including Conical Thrill, the largest in the country.

**SATURDAY AFTERNOON**

The Spa at Hanmer Springs, part of the same complex, beckons. Bathing in the thermal waters is recommended as the ideal preparation for a spa treatment. Services include facials, pedicures, body treatments and massages so relaxing you'll find it hard to get up and leave. But leave you must, and there are few better ways to extend your moment of zen than a walk in the woods. Just out of town, the Forest Amble Walk has easy, well-marked paths and a little something extra: a series of quirky wooden sculptures, including a giant tree-climbing possum (complete with helmet and arborist ropes), a nervous-looking giant, and a delicately carved fantail marking the end of the trail. All were created by Christchurch sculptor Andrew Lyons from a redwood tree that had to be removed from the thermal pools site a few years back.

In town, stop into the Hanmer Springs Hotel and briefly go back in time to the town's glamorous yesteryears. Opened in the early 1930s, the Spanish Mission-style building – complete with colonnades, arches and a bell tower straight out of Vertigo – backs onto a lovely garden, tennis court and solar-heated swimming pool. Don't miss the *Christchurch Star's* spectacularly florid 1932 review, blown up and framed on the lobby wall: "Turning in the moonlight and looking back, one dreams again the old romantic half-forgotten dreams of the courts of Alhambra at Granada. This is Eastern magic."

**SATURDAY EVENING**

It's getting late – time to stroll along the main street to No. 31 Restaurant & Bar, a casual restaurant serving excellent New Zealand cuisine. Chef Dean Robinson has won multiple awards for his beef and lamb dishes, so it makes sense that his menu has a focus on red meat. Locals rave about his locally sourced Hurunui beef eye-fillet with truffle potato mash, but if you have a willing dining partner you really can't go past the melt-in-your-mouth whole lamb shoulder for two.



**SUNDAY MORNING**

Hanmer’s best coffee is to be found at the Powerhouse Cafe, in a building that originally housed a hydroelectric turbine back in the late 1920s. As the sign on the wall says, the Powerhouse is still generating good energy today. Chef-owner Mary Holloway, North Canterbury born and bred, creates dishes that reflect her slow food philosophy, incorporating respect for local suppliers and the seasonal ingredients they grow.

Sustained, it’s time to inject some adrenaline into the long weekend. Set beside the 19th-century Waiiau Ferry Bridge, on the highway out of town, Hanmer Springs Attractions is a one-stop-shop for adventure activities, from quad biking to bungee jumping and rafting. If you’re looking for all the thrills without the hard work, join a jet-boating excursion on the Waiiau River. The only physical exertion required is holding on tight when the driver signals they’re about to throw the boat into a rush-inducing 360-degree spin.

**SUNDAY AFTERNOON**

Back on State Highway 1, and it’s time for lunch. Cameron Woodhouse, late of Central Otago’s Amisfield and Christchurch’s acclaimed Inati, is the chef behind Greystone Wines’ famous “long lunch”, an ever-changing four-course menu with optional wine pairings. The menu doesn’t have to be a total surprise – the dishes are posted on Greystone’s website each week – but it’s possibly more fun to go in blind. Woodhouse’s unexpected way with seasonal produce is delightful, and so is what’s in your glass. Greystone’s wine is organic and



more than 60 percent of its vines are pinot noir, a variety that responds beautifully to the limestone bedrock from which the winery takes its name.

If you’re in North Canterbury it makes sense to want to visit as many wineries as possible. But with limited time, make the final stop a good one. Black Estate, a few minutes away, produces organic, biodynamic wine and has one of the best restaurants in the area. Take a seat and raise a glass. Here’s to Hurunui. [visithurunui.co.nz](http://visithurunui.co.nz)



**8.** Greystone vineyard. **9.** Hanmer Springs Attractions jet boating, Waiiau River. **10.** Truffle finishing touch, Black Estate.

**Getting there**

CHRISTCHURCH

Huruni is a 45-minute drive from Christchurch. Air New Zealand operates non-stop flights to Christchurch from Auckland, Wellington, Queenstown and Dunedin, with connections across the domestic network.

- Contact Centre  
0800 737 000
- Holidays Travel Brokers  
0800 737 767
- [airnewzealand.co.nz](http://airnewzealand.co.nz)



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