



OCTOBER 15, 2024

travel

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Character on the Kaikōura coast



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Amazing view included

Alexia Santamaria visits one of the most breathtakingly blue places in New Zealand

“**W**here the mountains meet the sea” really does sound like a marketing tagline to

romanticise a destination, but there is actually no other way to accurately describe the picturesque shoreline of Kaikōura.

It’s a top spot for whale and dolphin watching, not to mention eating crayfish, but it is also one of the most breathtaking places in the country to sit on the beach and marvel at snow-capped peaks seamlessly giving way to the deep blue of the Pacific. At the risk of sounding clichéd, this is the kind of place that makes you grateful to be alive.

This tiny South Island hamlet may only be home to a population of just under 4000, but it hits big in the tourist stakes. And it’s that combo of impressive tourist attractions and quirky small-town vibe that creates its charm. Even as whale and scenery-seeking crowds flock in the high season, the town retains its authentic character, and the sense of community is always evident.

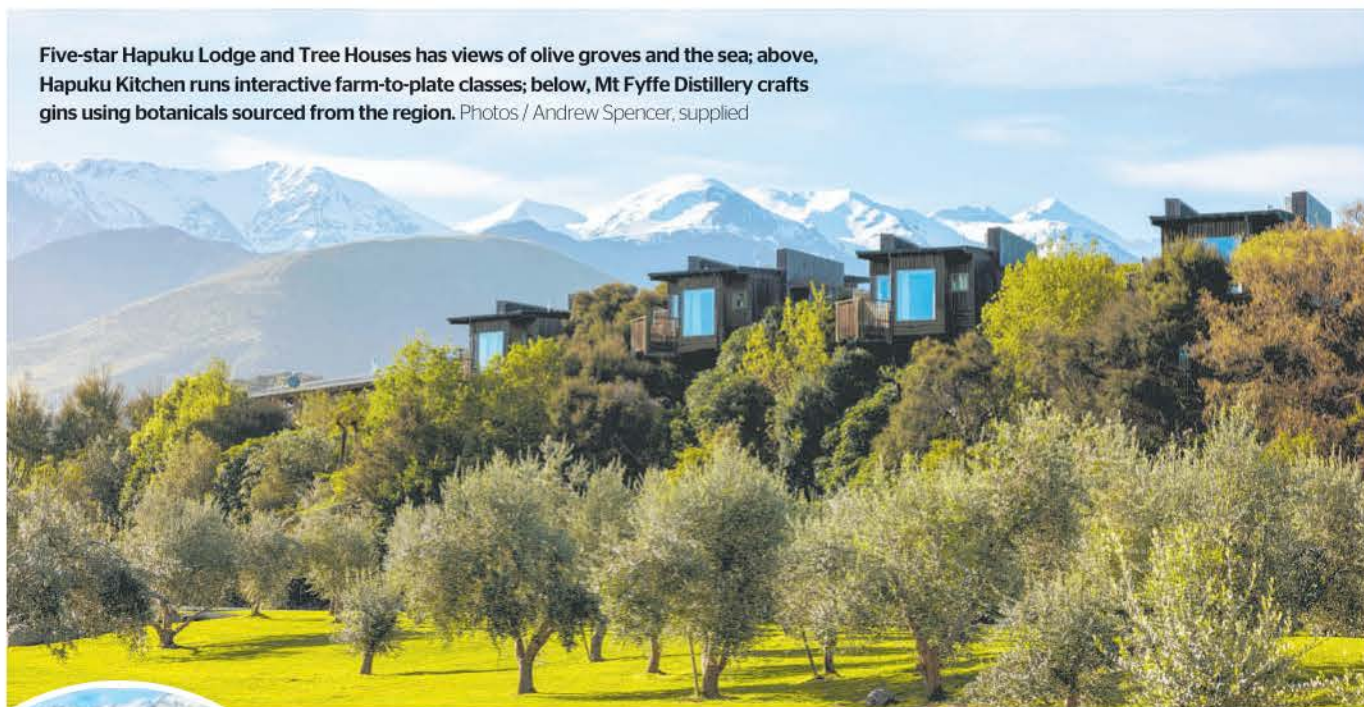
Here’s the lowdown if it’s your first visit to this captivating coastal pocket.

Stay

Kaikōura offers a wide range of accommodation options, from high-end to holiday parks. Hapuku Lodge and Tree Houses is a five-star eco-lodge with views of olive groves and the sea. Guests can unwind in one of its free-standing treehouses, lodge suites, or the beautifully appointed Olive House. The lodge also features



Five-star Hapuku Lodge and Tree Houses has views of olive groves and the sea; above, Hapuku Kitchen runs interactive farm-to-plate classes; below, Mt Fyffe Distillery crafts gins using botanicals sourced from the region. Photos / Andrew Spencer, supplied



a day spa, and a restaurant focused on sustainable, locally sourced cuisine. A short drive south, The Factory offers private luxury group stays with bespoke services tailored to guests’ interests—from fishing and heli-tours to local cuisine. Clifftop Cabins are a bit more intimate, perched on the peninsula’s edge with panoramic ocean and mountain views and outdoor baths. Sudima Kaikōura is a four-and-a-half-star hotel that opened in 2022, only a short walk from the township, also serving up views of the mountains, coastline and

sea. For families, Kaikōura TOP 10 Holiday Park and Alpine-Pacific Holiday Park are great options.

Do

The Kaikōura submarine canyon creates a special marine environment not found in many parts of the world. Its unusually deep waters and combination of nutrients make it the ultimate happy place for whales and dolphins, meaning you can see them all year round; some times of

Experience Kaikoura



Dolphin Encounter

Thinking about planning a summer break with a difference this year? How about challenging yourself to tick off a "bucket list" experience with Dolphin Encounter. Swimming with dusky dolphins in Kaikōura is described as a truly special opportunity igniting a deeper appreciation of the natural marine environment. Acrobatic and graceful yet energised, the dusky dolphins are the focus of our tours which operate daily except for Christmas Day. Along with the swimming option we also offer watching the dolphins if you prefer to stay on board. All snorkelling equipment is provided.

dolphin.co.nz



EcoZip Adventures

Located just south of Kaikōura at lovely Rakanui Station, EcoZip Adventures' new site seamlessly weaves together adventure and eco-tourism in a series of ziplines that have been described as 'the most spectacular in the Southern Hemisphere'. In a 3-hour experience, EcoZip's guests first ford the Kahutara River in a unique Unimog 4X4, before navigating the working farm. Five dual ziplines, ranging from 250m to a whopping 620m in length, await. Throughout the tour guests are accompanied by expert, local guides, who recount the history and legends of Kaikōura and explain how participation is helping to restore and protect Rakanui's native forest.

ecozipadventures.co.nz



Hapuku Kitchen

Fiona & Chris invite you into their home for a culinary adventure that celebrates the season. Whether you choose to join for a hands-on half day, full day or private cooking class ending with a fabulous farm-to-table meal, or a Catch & Cook adventure, you'll be served the very best ingredients caught, picked and gathered from the region and depart with a deeper understanding of the food on your plate. Hapuku Kitchen's experiences are best suited for adults and teenagers (12 years+) however private classes are perfect for families with young children - they're a lot of fun!

hapukukitchen.co.nz



Hapuku Lodge + Tree Houses

Hapuku Lodge + Tree Houses is a contemporary eco lodge located 12 km North of Kaikōura. The Lodge provides luxurious accommodation for guests to relax in its incredible mountain meets sea setting. Settle into one of the five lush free-standing Treehouses or in one of the 3 lodge suites or the lodge room, without forgetting splendidly adorned Olive House, perfect for families or couples travelling together. Included in the stay is an exquisite dining experience with a three-course dinner and à la carte breakfast. Onsite guests can enjoy the in-house spa, sauna, jacuzzi, solar heated lap pool and gymnasium.

hapukulodge.com



Mt Fyffe Distillery

A boutique grassroots distillery, set on the foothills of Mt Fyffe, Kaikōura. These award winning story inspired gins are created using botanics that Justine has sourced from around her farm and the local area. The silky smooth botanical Woolshed gin and the refreshingly oceanic contemporary Shearwater gin's are distilled using a traditional 40 litre copper alembic Still which showcases what true small batch bespoke gins are all about. The Distillery is open for tastings and tours so ring up and come and have a chat with Justine about all things gin and taste what Kaikōura has to offer.

mtfyffedistillery.co.nz



Sudima Kaikōura

Sudima Kaikōura is a brand-new hotel right on the Kaikōura shoreline with stunning views of the mountains, coastline and sea. As Kaikōura's only full-service hotel it has everything you need for a perfect stay including stylish well-appointed rooms, heated outdoor pool, gym and the popular restaurant and bar, Hiku. Located on the waterfront and just a short walk to the town centre makes it the perfect location to base yourself while exploring the world-renowned natural wonders of Kaikōura, or to just kick back, relax and indulge for a night or two.

sudimahotels.com

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the year are even better than others as you'll catch the migrational ones, too. Jump in a plane or helicopter or head out on a boat to spot these gentle giants—humpback, sperm, orca, and southern right whales are all seen at different times—even the odd blue. And of course, there are dolphins, which you can see from a boat or in the water with Dolphin Encounter Kaikōura.

Swimming with these “dancers of the sea” is a once-in-a-lifetime experience—some even say life-changing. They genuinely seem to delight in the human interaction as their sleek, silver bodies leap, spin and dart through the waves around you. If seabirds are more your thing, Albatross Encounter offers a chance to get up close with Kaikōura's impressive array of winged wildlife, including five species of great albatross.

Other popular water experiences include kayaking or charter fishing in the harbour (you can even get your catch cooked the same day with Top Catch Charters), but there's plenty to do on land, too. The Kaikōura Peninsula Walkway is spectacular—winding along the rugged coastline, revealing panoramic views of turquoise waters framed by the dramatic Kaikōura Seaward Range. You'll pass craggy limestone cliffs, windswept grasslands and hidden bays where seals bask on sun-warmed rocks. If you're keen for more of a challenge, the trek to the top of Mt Fyffe is an invigorating eight-hour return hike, rewarding you with sweeping views—and for those who prefer two wheels, the 48km Kaikōura Cycle Trail also offers magical vistas, while the popular mountain bike park provides thrilling trails for the more adventurous. One of the newer additions to the township is EcoZip Kaikōura, with five epic ziplines complete with spectacular sea and mountain

outlooks—yes everything comes with an amazing view in this town. Once you've had your fill of fresh air, the award-winning Kaikōura Museum is an interesting way to learn about the history of the land, people and culture of the area. Keen cooks would be wise to book in at Hapuku Kitchen—they run the most incredible interactive farm-to-plate classes that will connect you intimately with Kaikōura's local kai (you'll even get to pick some of your own ingredients). And if you're a fan of spirits, a visit to Mt Fyffe Distillery is a must. Nestled on the foothills of its namesake, this boutique distillery crafts award-winning gins using botanicals sourced from the region. Pop in for a tasting or a tour, and let the team guide you through the flavours of Kaikōura.



Swimming with the “dancers of the sea” is a once-in-a-lifetime experience; above, one of the newer additions to the township is EcoZip Kaikōura; left, Sudima Kaikōura is only a short walk from all the action.

Photos / Supplied



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