

# CREATIVE

## Wellington

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Images by BEN MACK & FEROZ KHALIL

Wellington is called “the coolest little capital in the world” and it’s hard to disagree. After all, there’s a reason film director Sir Peter Jackson calls the city home, as well as more creatives than just about anywhere else in Australasia.

Creativity oozes out of almost everything in Wellington. Whether it’s the lobbies of office buildings transformed into coffee shops, or spaces – such as BizDojo – where people can rent out individual desks to co-work with others, there’s a great emphasis on having a high-quality, relaxed pace of life – which may surprise some given that it’s the capital of New Zealand and home to the parliament and prime minister – housed in the descriptively-named Beehive.

A top way visitors can experience the creativity first-hand is to stop by one of the city’s innumerable cafes or restaurants. Starting out as a small coffee roaster and café in 2003, Mojo has since become one of Wellington’s most recognisable chains, with multiple locations in and around the city. One of its most famous locations is found amid the skyscrapers and leafy streets of Lambton Quay. The Beanery isn’t the largest café around, but it’s one of the most interesting, more akin to Frankenstein’s laboratory than a place to get a caffeine fix.

“We’re coffee freaks,” says barista Sarah Stephen. “We’re really into experimenting.”

Roasting all of its ethically-sourced single-origin beans on-site, the Beanery offers brewing methods such as the Steampunk and Nitro. There are also free public tasting on Tuesdays and Fridays at 11.30am, where baristas explain how it all works.

Suitably caffeinated, a stroll through Wellington’s narrow streets can do much as an additional measure against falling asleep. Aside from the postcard-perfect waterfront (which has the added benefit of never seeming to be too crowded), one of the most interesting places to walk is up Cuba Street. Filled with boutique shops, restaurants, cafes, bars, lots of interesting art and people creating art (think musicians with saxophones or guitars, mimes, and people pretending to be statues), it’s known as one of the most creative streets in all of New Zealand.



A lone sailboat anchored in windy Wellington



*Cuba Street offers an eclectic mix of art, boutique stores, restaurants and bars.*

And for those who don't normally enjoy exercise, there's a reward to be had near the end of the street: one of the Southern Hemisphere's most unique restaurants.

To say Fidel's is a Wellington institution would be an understatement. Proudly "serving the people since 1996", the eatery is themed around late Cuban leader Fidel Castro and the Cuban Revolution, with enough kitschy décor to persuade patrons they'd travelled back in time to 1959 Havana. The fact it's been around for more than 20 years surprising – according to legend, just three customers stopped by on the first day Fidel's was open, spending a total of \$20. Today the place is bustling at all hours. And why shouldn't it? With dishes like beer battered fish tacos (\$13) and 'The Cubano' (a toasted sandwich with slow-cooked pork, free range ham, Swiss cheese, pickles, mustard mayo and a towering plateful of fries, all for just \$18), the food is just as interesting as the surroundings – though maybe a bit too grand for El Comandante's tastes.

An ice cold beer could wash down such a meal, but if an adult beverage is desired it might pay to wait and head to the nearby Aro Valley neighbourhood to explore another

side of Wellington's creativity. The Garage Project has established itself as probably the most creative brewery in New Zealand in a remarkably short time. Only open since 2011, the brewery – the brainchild of Pete Gillespie, Jos Ruffell and Ian Gillespie – takes boldness to a new level with such concoctions as 'China White' containing white tea, jasmine and orris root, or a special brew made to celebrate the Royal New Zealand Ballet that combines champagne with beer. There's even a beer called 'Beer!' The brewery takes its name from the fact its beer is literally brewed in an old automobile garage and mechanic shop – but never fear, there's a cosy tasting room just across the San Francisco-lookalike street.

Wellington has more bars and restaurants per capita than New York City, meaning there's something to satisfy everyone's tastes. One of the city's newest eateries, Shepherd has already become a must-visit thanks to its emphasis on local food and seasonal flavours. A real treat is the knowledge that co-owner Shepherd Elliot and his staff are able to share while they cook your food right in front of you. Ask them anything about your food, such as what kind and where your pig in the pork with




*Breakfast at Fidel's*

apple and fennel came from (answer: a Duroc and large black cross from a farm near the town of Carterton), and they'll be able to tell you. Local ingredients are emphasised; for instance, the crushed pine needles used in many appetisers come from nearby Mount Victoria. It's also surprisingly affordable, with all but one of its mains under \$30.

Of course, there's much more to Wellington than just nice things to eat and drink. For instance, there's Te Papa, New Zealand's largest museum that's world-famous for challenging the idea of what you can do at a museum: it's very interactive, with more gizmos than an electronics store. There's Seal Coast Safari, which involves a drive around the stunning coastline to see wild fur seals. Advice: bring a jacket to deal with the often-chilling wind. And speaking of the outdoors, there is of course plenty of hiking, bicycling, camping, fishing, whale watching and some of the best windsurfing in the world – and all amongst scenery where much of the Lord of the Rings and Hobbit films were shot.

It's enough to inspire creativity in just about anyone.

 *Fiji Airways flies direct to Wellington from Nadi on Sundays and Thursdays.*



*The rocky coastline offers adventure outside the city.*