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New Zealand New Zealand is a wine-producing country that is best known for its fresh, vibrant Sauvignon Blanc, a style that has inspired winemakers in many other wine regions. However, its reputation for making premium-quality Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Syrah and Bordeaux-style blends means that there is far more to New Zealand than one grape variety.

CLIMATE AND GRAPE GROWING

New Zealand's isolated location in the Pacific Ocean (1900 kilometres from Australia, the nearest land mass) means that it experiences a maritime climate overall. The South Island's climate is cool, whereas that of the North Island is a little warmer. The combination of long sunshine hours, nights cooled by sea breezes and a long ripening period allows grapes to reach high levels of sugar and flavour ripeness while retaining acidity. The vineyards of the South Island tend to be located on the east side, protected from rain-bearing westerly winds by mountains in the centre of the island; however, many of the vineyard areas still experience plentiful rainfall, which can be problematic during ripening. Fortunately the soils tend to be free draining, and so do not experience waterlogging; however, those on flat land

can be overly fertile, leading to excessive shoot and leaf growth. Due to their problems with vine vigour New Zealand viticulturists have become experts in trellising and other canopy management techniques.

The New Zealand wine industry is strongly committed to reducing the environmental impact of their vineyard management and winery practices. Sustainable Winegrowing New Zealand is an initiative that sets winery standards to help growers achieve these aims.

GRAPE VARIETIES AND WINEMAKING

White Varieties

Since the early 1990s, **Sauvignon Blanc** has been firmly established as New Zealand's flagship grape and it accounts for the majority of wine production. Its pungent aromas, intense flavours of elderflower and passion fruit, and high acidity have set a benchmark for Sauvignon Blanc producers around the world. There are subtle differences between the styles of the North and South Islands; the warmer North produces Sauvignon Blanc with more tropical flavours and the South creates wines with higher acidity and flavours of green bell pepper and gooseberry. It is most frequently fermented in inert vessels at cool temperatures to retain fruity flavours and aromas, but some producers also make oak-matured styles as a point of difference.






Chardonnay is also widely planted. Similar to many other countries producing wines from this variety, a number of different winemaking techniques may be explored and thus there can be great diversity between wines. However, the general style tends to be led by concentrated citrus and tropical fruits with subtle hints of toast and sweet spice from new French oak.

Over recent years New Zealand's producers have been exploring the country's enormous potential for the aromatic varieties **Riesling** and Gewurztraminer, and the semi-aromatic **Pinot Gris**. Dry autumns and cool night temperatures ensure aromatic compounds have plenty of time to develop before the grapes are harvested. The wines range from dry to sweet, however off-dry tends to be the most prevalent style.

Black Varieties

Pinot Noir is the second most planted grape variety in New Zealand after Sauvignon Blanc. It is widely grown throughout the South Island and within a few selected sites in the North Island. While the overall profile of New Zealand Pinot Noir is one of vibrant fruit, fine ripe

KEY

	2000 m+
	1000–2000 m
	500–1000 m
	200–500 m
	0–200 m



tannins, soft texture and often quite high levels of alcohol, distinct regional styles have also emerged.

Although its plantings are very limited compared with those of Pinot Noir, **Merlot** is the red variety with the second greatest volume. **Cabernet Sauvignon** is often blended to add tannin and notes of cassis, making up a Bordeaux-style blend. Like all the wines from New Zealand these blends are noted for the purity of their fruit flavours. Production of these varieties is strongly concentrated in the North Island, where the warmer temperatures help to ripen black grapes. **Syrah** is another grape variety that performs best in warmer sites and produces elegant wines that are closer in style to those of the Rhône rather than those made in the hotter climates of Australia. Its plantings are small but increasing.

REGIONS AND WINES: NORTH ISLAND

Auckland

The wine industry in New Zealand started off in the north of North Island around Auckland and there are many large wineries still based there processing grapes from all over the country. Auckland is warm and the wettest part of New Zealand and fungal diseases are an issue. Chardonnay, Merlot and Syrah are the most planted varieties. Waiheke Island immediately to the east has a growing reputation for top quality wines, particularly reds.

Gisborne

The vineyards are located on the east coast in the broad estuary plain close to the town of Gisborne itself. Rainfall is high but so too are the temperatures and sunshine hours in the growing season. Over half of the vines planted here are Chardonnay, which displays distinct ripe tropical fruit flavours. A small amount of high-quality Gewurztraminer is also made here, as well as some full-bodied Pinot Gris.

Hawke's Bay

This vineyard area, located close to the twin towns of Hastings and Napier, is also situated on the east coast of North Island in an estuary plain. It is the warmest of the main grape growing areas and has the longest sunshine hours. This area, which is second only to Marlborough in the extent of its plantings, is particularly diverse with regard to its soils and the aspect and altitude of the plantings. Consequently wine styles can vary. One area in particular, Gimblett Gravels, which is a parcel of well-drained heat-absorbing gravel soil on the valley floor, has developed a particularly high reputation for black varieties. Although the region built its fame on Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon in Bordeaux-style blends, premium Syrah is also produced.

Wairarapa

Wairarapa is made up of a number of small vineyard areas spread over a wide area at the southern tip of the North Island. The most important area is around the small town of **Martinborough**, which has built a global



reputation for Pinot Noir. Summer temperatures can be high but a wide diurnal range makes it suitable for this grape variety. The wines are medium- to full-bodied and ripe with hints of dark plum and spice.

Summer pruning taking place in Gimblett Gravels. The stony soil and well-exposed fruit are clear to see.

REGIONS AND WINES: SOUTH ISLAND

Marlborough

This is the major centre for grape growing in New Zealand, and Sauvignon Blanc makes up the majority of the plantings here. Most of the vineyards lie in two adjacent estuary valleys: Wairau, which is by far the largest, and Awatere. The climate in the Wairau Valley is very similar to Martinborough with long sunny days, but this large valley is far from uniform. In particular there are a number of side valleys on the southern side of Wairau Valley that give producers a range of aspects and altitudes to work with. The Awatere Valley is drier, cooler and windier. As a result, the Sauvignon Blancs from here have a higher acidity with a pronounced herbaceous character, and lack the tropical fruit flavours that can be found in some of the wines from the Wairau Valley. Chardonnay and Pinot Noir are also widely planted and both are used for still and sparkling wine production. The still Pinot Noir wines are often medium-bodied with fine tannins and flavours of cherry and cranberry, and as more producers start to pay attention to this variety, increasingly impressive wines are made. Riesling and Pinot Gris also perform well here.

Nelson

Located to the north-west of the Wairau Valley on the north coast of South Island, Nelson is cooler and wetter than Marlborough. Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris dominate plantings.

Canterbury

Canterbury has two main centres of viticulture: one in the plain immediately to the west of the town of Christchurch and a larger one, Waipara Valley, to the

Vineyards in Marlborough
planted on the valley floor.



north. The plain area is particularly exposed to the cooling influence of the Pacific although there is a slight warming effect from north-westerly winds. The impact of these warm winds is more marked in Waipara, which is less exposed to the ocean due to a range of hills. Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir are the most planted varieties, but Waipara is also noted for the high quality of its Riesling.

Central Otago

Central Otago is located inland in the foothills of the Southern New Zealand Alps. The vineyard area itself is spread over a wide area incorporating a number of

different valleys with different aspects, soils and altitudes. In contrast to the rest of New Zealand, the climate here is continental and frost damage is a real risk both in spring and autumn. Summers can be warm but, importantly for grape quality, the diurnal range in the growing season is large. The intensity of sunlight is very high, which accounts for the high levels of alcohol that are often encountered in the wines from here. Pinot Noir accounts for the vast majority of the plantings in Central Otago, and these wines tend to be full-bodied, juicy and vibrant with concentrated ripe red fruit flavours. The other important varieties are Pinot Gris, Riesling and Chardonnay.