

# Fishing Nelson

## Catching on very quickly

The brown trout are plentiful in the stunning northwest of New Zealand's South Island, writes **Christina Pfeiffer**

OUR afternoon fishing trip has all the signs of turning into a disaster.

Anyone acquainted with fly fishing will know that catching brown trout is a challenge at the best of times. Brown trout are big and smart, and they are capable of eluding even the most experienced fly-fishing enthusiasts.

The brown trout in the rivers of New Zealand's Nelson area are usually wary and, when hooked, put up a good fight by heading for rocks, logs or anything that will help them get away.

During the fly-fishing season, from October to April, the northwest of New Zealand's South Island is a fantastic destination for brown trout fishing. The sun shines more hours there than anywhere else in the country, the rivers have crystal-clear waters and the scenery is nothing short of spectacular.

But I'm visiting in winter when fishing is not allowed in most rivers.

And beyond knowing which end of the fishing rod to hold, I haven't the first idea of what needs to happen to catch a cunning brown trout.

So it's a fair call that when we set off on our afternoon of fly-fishing along the lower Motueka River, my fishing guide, Steve Greaney, and the owner of the fishing lodge, John Kerr, both have low expectations of a good result.

The water is not as clear as Greaney had hoped and sighting the trout proves challenging. So we wade into the river – wearing waders, boots and Polaroid sunglasses – to his best guess of where the trout could be lurking.

Greaney whisks the fly into the air in a smooth movement and drops it into the water, then strips in the line to imitate an insect moving across the water. It looks simple. But I've never done this type of fishing before and my first attempt at casting is embarrassing. I hook some weed and the line ends up in a tangle around my rod.



**SO ALLURING:** Fish like this decent-sized brown trout lure anglers to Nelson.

Greaney is patient and encouraging. He has me practising casting the fly into the water, then stripping it in.

About 30 minutes later, a tug on the line breaks my casting and stripping trance. "I think I've got one," I yelp.

The look on Greaney's face spells "impossible". Seconds later, the fish

jumps out of the water and the look of astonishment on his face is worth a photo.

"What do I do?" I shout. "Keep your hands off the reel," he says.

I follow his instructions and let the line run, reeling in the fish a bit at a time. The secret is not to reel while the

fish is trying to get away or the line might break. When I'm not reeling, Greaney has me walking along the riverbank with the rod tip held high. Reel, lift, walk, reel, lift, walk.

My arms are aching by the time Greaney scoops the 3.5-pound brown trout, a respectable size, into his net. Fly-fishing language in New Zealand hasn't made the transition to the metric system but that's 1.6kg.

"Ten is the prized number – it's difficult to hook a fish that weighs 10 kilos but a 10-pound trout isn't impossible," Greaney says.

I lower the trout gently into the river and let it swim away. Encouraged by the catch, Greaney heads further along the river and spots a large brown trout sitting in a shallow pool.

We sneak along the riverbank, stooping to stay low so that the fish doesn't spot us. Crouching near the pool, Greaney throws in the fly. A big brown trout can take up to 20 minutes to reel in and this one puts up a struggle. It's a jack (male fish) that has just spawned.

When we put it back into the river, the jack doesn't swim away immediately like the one I caught but hangs around floating in the shallows, daring us to try catching it again. But we've had enough for one day.

Greaney drives me around the countryside, pointing out favourite fishing spots at the Baton River and the Pierce River, where the water is so clear you can count the pebbles on the riverbed. The scenery is peaceful and immensely beautiful. We drive through valleys past farms with fallow deer, goats and jersey cows.

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Our destination is Stonefly Lodge, nestled in a picture-postcard landscape of rugged mountainous country on the banks of the Motueka River, 70km from Nelson.

Australian owners John and Kate Kerr, who previously managed the Cape Don Fishing Lodge in the Northern Territory, built Stonefly Lodge to cater for fly-fishing enthusiasts. But after their first season, in late 2009, they realised that the region has a much broader appeal.

Near three national parks – Abel Tasman, Nelson Lakes and Kahurangi national parks – the lodge is a base for hiking, kayaking and nature cruises. During my stay, a helicopter picks me up from the lodge's back lawn and drops me off in Kahurangi National Park, where I hike through wilderness.

For those seeking less active pursuits, there are 23 boutique, family-owned wineries around the region. And you could easily spend days visiting the hundreds of local artists.

Stonefly Lodge is built from natural stone and timber acquired from the property. It has an open-plan design centred on an enormous double-sided stone fireplace. Upstairs are four guestrooms with ensuite bathrooms and balconies that have views of mountains and the Motueka River.

By the time we arrive for afternoon tea, Greaney and I have become firm fishing buddies.

"To see you catch a fish within half an hour at this time of the year was unbelievable," he says.

But fishing aside, the region's wild beauty and welcoming people have me well and truly hooked.



**COMFY SPOT:** Stonefly Lodge's lounge.

**GO2 NELSON**

### Getting there

Air New Zealand flies from Melbourne to Auckland, with connections to Nelson. Call 132 476 or visit [www.airnewzealand.com.au](http://www.airnewzealand.com.au)

### Staying there

Stonefly Lodge, 3256 Motueka Valley Highway, RD2 Wakefield, ph +643 522 4479 or visit [www.stoneflylodge.co.nz](http://www.stoneflylodge.co.nz). Rates from \$NZ420 (\$A325) a person a night, twin share (until April 30), and \$290 (May 1 to August 31), include accommodation, breakfast, pre-dinner canapes and a three-course dinner. Guided fishing for two people costs \$NZ725 a day.

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