

Pīhopa Retreat, Nelson, New Zealand

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Pīhopa in Brief

1. New Zealand's #1 Hotel - Two Years Running

Pīhopa Retreat has been named #1 Hotel in New Zealand by Condé Nast Traveller UK and #2 Hotel in New Zealand by Condé Nast Traveler US - both as part of the prestigious Readers' Choice Awards 2026 for the second consecutive year, drawn from more than 900,000 reader votes across both editions. This recognition places Pīhopa firmly on the global stage, alongside the world's great luxury hotels and lodges.

2. Flawless by Every Measure

A perfect 10/10 on Booking.com - sustained across three consecutive years of verified guest reviews - TripAdvisor's Best of the Best (top 1% of hotels internationally), Qualmark 5-Star and Gold Tier ratings, UK Condé Nast Traveller #1 and USA Condé Nast Traveler #2 - both for the second consecutive year. Pīhopa Retreat holds the full suite of travel's most coveted accolades.

3. Intimate Luxury, Unrivalled Personalisation

With just six private suites set within 5.5 acres of heritage gardens on a historic estate, Pīhopa Retreat offers something the world's grand hotels cannot: genuine, unhurried attention to every guest. Host Sarah and her team anticipate every need - from restaurant reservations and complimentary taxis to freshly baked afternoon treats and pre-dinner drinks and canapés.

4. A Historic Setting Like No Other

Established on part of the original Nelson Diocese estate dating back to 1859, Pīhopa Retreat is steeped in New Zealand history. Guests take breakfast in a beautifully preserved 19th-century chapel, walk among 100-year-old heritage trees, and sleep in beautiful suites that carry the grace of another era.

5. A Quiet Corner of an Extraordinary Region

Tucked away in a tranquil pocket just minutes from Nelson's city centre, Pīhopa Retreat feels a world apart - yet places guests perfectly for exploring three of New Zealand's most spectacular National Parks: Abel Tasman, Kahurangi, and Nelson Lakes. World-class food, wine, and coastal scenery are all within easy reach.

6. Sustainable Luxury with Purpose

Pīhopa Retreat is carbon positive certified, a Kaitiaki member of the Brook Waimārama Sanctuary, a signatory of the Tiaki Promise, and holds Qualmark 5-Star and Gold Tier Sustainable Tourism accreditation, independently benchmarked

against Global Sustainable Tourism Council standards. Luxury here leaves the lightest possible footprint.

7. Growing Quietly, Building on Success

Pīhopa Retreat's reputation has grown organically, year on year, earning the loyalty of guests who return season after season and attracting new visitors from across the globe. That momentum is reflected in near-full occupancy through the summer months. The new Wellness Centre - incorporating massage, reformer Pilates, sauna and ice bath - opened in Winter 2026, and 3,000 native trees have been planted on the property this winter, reflecting the team's constant desire to refine and elevate the guest experience.

Pīhopa in Under 200 Words

Pīhopa Retreat, Nelson, New Zealand

Tucked away in a tranquil pocket just minutes from Nelson's city centre, Pīhopa Retreat is New Zealand's most acclaimed small luxury hotel. With just six private suites set amid 5.5 acres of heritage gardens on a historic estate, this is a place where impeccable service feels entirely personal. Guests wake to birdsong, dine in a storied 19th-century chapel, and are attended to at every turn by host Sarah and her team - from complimentary canapés at dusk to restaurant reservations and chauffeur taxis. Voted #1 Hotel in New Zealand by Condé Nast Traveller UK Readers' Choice Awards for the second consecutive year, and holding a perfect 10/10 on Booking.com, TripAdvisor's Best of the Best (top 1% of hotels internationally) and Qualmark 5-Star and Gold Tier rating, Pīhopa Retreat is, simply, the finest small hotel in the country.

The Accolades - What Each One Means

Condé Nast Traveller Readers' Choice Awards - USA & UK

Now in its 39th year, the Condé Nast Traveller Readers' Choice Awards are among the most prestigious and long-running accolades in global travel, drawing votes from more than 900,000 readers of the world's most authoritative luxury travel titles. In 2026, for the second consecutive year, Pīhopa Retreat was named #1 Hotel in New Zealand by the UK edition and #2 Hotel in New Zealand by the US edition. Condé Nast ranks hotels by region: Pīhopa was the highest-placed New Zealand property in the UK Australasia list and the second-highest in the US Australia & New Zealand list. An independently owned six-suite retreat, it ranks alongside international names including Ritz-Carlton, Capella, The Fullerton and The Langham.

- *UK: #1 Hotel in New Zealand (second consecutive year) - #9 in Australasia / nearly 200,000 reader votes*
- *US: #2 Hotel in New Zealand (second consecutive year) - #6 in Australia & New Zealand / 750,000+ reader votes*

TripAdvisor Travellers' Choice - Best of the Best

TripAdvisor's Best of the Best is the platform's highest honour, reserved for properties that place in the top 1% of more than 1.6 million hotel listings worldwide. Unlike editorial awards, it is determined entirely by the volume and quality of verified traveller reviews over a 12-month period - making it one of the most credible accolades in the industry, a direct reflection of the experience guests receive from the moment they arrive to the moment they leave.

Qualmark 5-Star & Gold Tier - Sustainable Tourism

Qualmark is New Zealand's official quality assurance mark for tourism, and the only accreditation in the country whose sustainability criteria has been formally recognised by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC). Pīhopa holds both 5-Star status, recognising the highest standard of guest experience and quality, and the Gold Tier Sustainable Tourism Business award - independently verifying the retreat's commitment to protecting the natural environment, strengthening community connections, and delivering a safe, high-quality experience for all visitors.

Booking.com Traveller Review Awards 2026 - Perfect 10/10

Powered by more than 370 million verified guest reviews across 221 countries, the Booking.com Traveller Review Awards are determined solely by guests who have stayed at a property. Pīhopa Retreat achieved a perfect 10/10, calculated from every verified guest review published on the platform over three years from December 2022 to November 2025 - a score that reflects sustained, flawless consistency across hundreds of stays. The award threshold for 2026 was set at 8.0 or above, making Pīhopa's perfect 10 a mark of the highest distinction.

Our Story - Sarah & Sam Mellor

Pīhopa Retreat was born from a love of travel, beautiful places, and the kind of hospitality that makes people feel genuinely cared for.

Before creating Pīhopa, Sarah and Sam spent many years travelling extensively - staying in everything from small family-run boutique hotels to some of the world's most celebrated luxury properties. Along the way, they discovered that the places they remembered most were the ones that made them feel something: warmth, calm, generosity, and a true sense of connection to the place and the people hosting them. Hospitality was not originally their professional background - but perhaps that became one of their greatest strengths. They approached Pīhopa first and foremost as guests themselves, thinking deeply about how people want to feel

when they travel, what details matter, and how to create an experience that feels effortless, personal, and quietly special.

The People Behind Pīhopa

Sarah and Sam left New Zealand in 2000 for what was supposed to be a two-year OE in London. Those two years became twenty. They had four children within five and a half years - Ariana, Jack, Kian and Tait. Travel became an absolute passion of Sarah's - the family spent those years exploring as much of the world as they could, and somewhere along the way Sarah started keeping notes on her favourite things about the places they stayed. By the time they eventually came home, she had visited 99 countries. Every summer she would pack up the car and drive into Europe with the four children - summers in Spain, Italy, France, and Eastern Europe, and one unforgettable five-week backpacking trip through Vietnam with four children aged five to ten.

Finding Pīhopa

When the family finally made the decision to come home, they chose Nelson. They spent several years searching for the right property, and in 2015 found Pīhopa - being sold by the bank in a mortgagee sale. They sent friends to look at it first. The verdict was definitive: don't do it, it needs far too much work. It was too late. They were already sold.

What drew them was impossible to ignore - the historic chapel dating back to 1877, the established gardens shaped over generations by the nine bishops and their families, and the extraordinary sense of privacy just minutes from the city centre. No-one knows this place exists. Tradespeople who have lived in Nelson their whole lives have arrived to work on the property and never known it was there.

The Journey

The family moved in March 2021, returning from London with four children and a great deal of optimism. What greeted them was a house needing significant work and a garden buried under seedlings and ivy. Renovations touched every inch of the property and lasted two and a half years. Sam continued working between the UK, Australia, and the United States. Sarah focused on building Pīhopa Retreat, opening in November 2021 as a small, quiet bed and breakfast. The second year brought a chef, canapés at the poolhouse, and the move into the luxury market. Building work was still in full swing - guests would arrive to find skips and builders' trucks on the driveway. That they came through that year with 100% happy guests remains something of a miracle. The year after, breakfast moved to the chapel - and something clicked into place.

Our Vision

We want guests to arrive and feel completely at home - to have everything they could ever think they needed, without having to ask. With only six suites, we are able to genuinely host our guests rather than simply accommodate them. Whether it is helping plan a special day in the region, sharing a glass of wine at dusk, or simply noticing the small details that make someone's stay more comfortable - those thoughtful touches are what people remember most.

"At its heart, Pīhopa is simply a reflection of what we love ourselves - beautiful surroundings, meaningful hospitality, and creating experiences people will remember long after they leave."

- Sarah Mellor, Owner & Host

New This Season

In July 2025 a storm brought down a heritage tree on the property, causing significant damage. The rebuild became an opportunity - and the new Wellness Centre, incorporating a massage studio, reformer Pilates, sauna and ice bath, opened in Winter 2026. 3,000 native trees have been planted on the property this winter, with a new walking trail and information boards. The suites have received fresh paint, new curtains and furnishings for the new season. There is always something on the horizon at Pīhopa - and that, Sarah would say, is exactly how it should be.

The History of Pīhopa Retreat

Pīhopa is the te reo Māori word for bishop - and it is from this rich history that the retreat takes both its name and its character. The estate has been a focal point of Nelson life for more than 160 years, shaped by generations of bishops, scholars, and now, the Mellor family.



The Beginning - 1858 to 1868

On 29 September 1858, Edmund Hobhouse was consecrated as the first Bishop of Nelson in London. He arrived in New Zealand the following year and immediately announced the need for a permanent Bishop's residence. In 1862, he purchased 158 acres of land in South Nelson - four parcels of land he named Bishopdale. In June 1866, Hobhouse gifted the Bishopdale Estate to the Nelson Diocese, and the first residence was opened in September 1868.

Bishopdale Theological College

Plans for a theological college began in 1867, driven by a practical need: clergy were being sourced from England, their supply was unreliable, and they struggled to connect with the independent spirit of colonial New Zealand. Construction began on the Bishopdale site in 1868, and in 1869 students moved in to live with incoming Bishop Andrew Suter and his wife. By 1876 the college was fully developed, and in 1877 it became affiliated with the University of New Zealand - allowing students to complete their full Licentiate qualification (LTh) entirely at Bishopdale.

The Chapel of Holy Evangelists - 1877

The chapel at Bishopdale was built in 1877, primarily for the students of the Theological College. Designed by noted architect Maxwell Bury - who also designed the main building of Otago University and the former Provincial Council Chambers in Nelson - the chapel is a beautiful example of simple ecclesiastical architecture. Its apsidal chancel, board and batten exterior, and slate roof remain intact, and the interior is noteworthy for its adornments including an unusual full immersion font in the Baptistry. It is where Pihopa guests take breakfast every morning.

The Main House - 1925 to Today

During the early 1920s, a commission reviewed the Bishopdale Estate. The original first residence was in poor repair and too large. At a cost of £5,267, a new residence designed by William Houlker was opened in 1925 - the graceful house at the heart of Pihopa Retreat today. In 1976, approximately 5 acres of the remaining estate were sold to the city as a permanent reserve - now the Bishopdale Reserve, which borders the property. The Synod voted to sell in October 1997; Sarah and Sam Mellor purchased the property in November 2015 and returned to make it their home and Pihopa Retreat in 2021.

For historic images and the full history of the estate, visit:

www.pihoparetreat.nz/history/

Sustainability at Pihopa Retreat

Sustainability at Pīhopa is not a policy - it is a practice, woven into every decision the team makes. From the food on the breakfast table to the packaging in the suites, from the composting worm farm to the 3,000 native trees planted on the property this winter, every aspect of how Pīhopa operates reflects a genuine and long-standing commitment to the environment, community, and the visitors of the future.

Pīhopa Retreat is located in Bishopdale and has for 170 years been a focal point of Nelson life. As the current guardians of this special location, Sarah and Sam Mellor are committed to ensuring it is looked after for its guardians of the future. Their environmental journey began when they established Pīhopa Retreat - and within six months of opening, they achieved Qualmark 5-Star Gold Tier accreditation, a rare achievement that reflects how deeply sustainability was embedded from the very beginning.

Mission

Pīhopa's commitment to sustainability underpins the way it hosts, grows, and operates. The team strives to reduce impact, champion local businesses, and foster a culture of wellbeing - for guests, the team, and the environment. Pīhopa works towards all 12 Tourism Sustainability Commitments and has a formal sustainability plan with goals across each.

Accreditations & Certifications

- Carbon Positive certified
- Qualmark 5-Star & Gold Tier Sustainable Tourism - independently benchmarked against Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) standards
- Kaitiaki member of the Brook Waimārama Sanctuary - actively supporting native wildlife restoration in the Nelson region
- Signatory of the Tiaki Promise - New Zealand's commitment to care for the land, sea, and community
- Member of Keep New Zealand Beautiful

Food, Drink & the Kitchen

Food and sustainability are inseparable at Pīhopa. Every item on the breakfast table is locally produced - sourced from Nelson Tasman suppliers or made on-site, including honey from the retreat's own bees and seasonal spray-free fruit from the kitchen garden. Excess food is distributed to local community centres rather than discarded. Fruit and vegetable waste is composted in an on-site worm farm. Breakfast food storage uses reusable, washable containers and beeswax wraps in place of single-use plastics. Locally roasted coffee is served alongside Zealong - New Zealand's only home-grown tea - with biodegradable bags, recyclable paper tags, and fairly and sustainably sourced organic herbs.

Waste & Recycling

- Comprehensive recycling programme across all suites and the main house: aluminium, plastics, food waste, paper, cardboard, and glass
- Biodegradable bin liners and bags throughout

- Nespresso recycling process for all guest coffee pods
- Suites equipped with cutlery, dishware, and glassware - no disposable single-use items
- Paper use reduced through electronic documentation, double-sided printing, and recycled paper
- Actively avoids purchasing items that cannot be recycled

Cleaning & Laundry

All cleaning is carried out using EcoStore biodegradable chemicals, purchased in bulk to reduce packaging. All laundry is washed on-site and sun-dried to conserve energy. Guests have the option to reuse towels, reducing water use and chemical detergents.

Toiletries & Amenities

Suite toiletries are supplied by Ashley & Co. - a natural, plant-based range that is toxin and chemical free. Products are purchased in bulk and containers are returned and refilled, eliminating single-use packaging. The toiletry packaging itself is made from Rockstock - an innovative material comprising 80% calcium carbonate from quarry waste, requiring no trees and significantly reducing deforestation. Amenities include sustainable bamboo toothbrushes, timber combs, recycled timber-shafted cotton buds, PLA compostable shower caps, and a wheatstraw compostable razor handle.

Gardens & Planting

- Nearly 4,000 plants and trees planted at Pihopa since January 2021 - including 3,000 native trees planted in Winter 2026, with a new walking trail and information boards throughout
- A native tree is planted for every guest who stays
- 14 protected heritage landscape trees over 100 years old actively maintained
- The 2.4-hectare Bishopdale Reserve borders the property, preserved in perpetuity

A full account of Pihopa Retreat's sustainability practices, initiatives, and performance is available in the Sustainability Report 2025.

[View Sustainability Page - www.pihoparetreat.nz/sustainability/](http://www.pihoparetreat.nz/sustainability/)
[Download Sustainability Report 2025 \(PDF\)](#)

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