



Destination
New Zealand



New Zealand Regional Dining

By Winsor Dobbin

Auckland and Wellington are both home to several world-class restaurants. In Wellington you have established stars like Logan Brown, Boulcott St Bistro, Ortega and Hippopotamus, while the Harbour City's highlights include Cassia, The Grove, The French Café and newcomer Pasture.

When Pacifica in Hawke's Bay struck gold in the most recent Good Food Awards it underlined there is a lot more to New Zealand cuisine than big city dining.

From Napier to Marlborough and Oamaru to Central Otago, travelling foodies have never had it so good.

Hawke's Bay:

Pacifica on Marine Parade in Napier, was recently named the best restaurant in the country in one of New Zealand's most prestigious restaurant awards lists. Celebrated Māori chef Jeremy Rameka combines Michelin-quality cooking with a casual New Zealand atmosphere, which you'll find in a weathered blue wooden bungalow near the water.

Think five-course degustation dinners (the menu changes regularly) and dishes like hoki ceviche marinated in coconut cream and fresh lime, spiced with tabasco; asparagus tortellinis with sauteed oyster mushrooms and shaved parmesan cheese, or perhaps pan-seared sesame crusted trevally with squid mince and green lip mussel sago.

Rameka says: "You won't find white table cloths or snooty waiters. Instead, you'll enjoy true kiwi hospitality and generosity."

Pacifica wasn't the only Hawke's Bay eatery to get a mention at the awards with local favourite Bistronomy taking out best regional restaurant.

Chef and forager James Beck says he aims to make "everyday eating a little bit extraordinary." - and locals have responded to his laid-back style and share-plate dishes. "We're one part local, one part global, and one part special sauce, infusing fresh Hawke's Bay produce with far-flung ideas to create dishes which will often surprise and always delight," Beck says.

Bistronomy's arrival has brought back to life the iconic Thorpe's building in the heart of Napier - and the prices for both food and wine remain affordable.

Pegasus Bay



Amisfield



Dusk at Arbour

offers both an à la carte menu and a 'Just Feed Me' experience of three, four or five courses. During the cooler months these experiences can be enjoyed inside the kitchen at the 'Prep Bench'.

All menus aim to showcase local producers and Marlborough stories.

"We love that Arbour is surrounded by passionate people producing exceptional wine and food," says Hornby. "We have access to world-class ingredients for our diners right on our doorstep."

During the afternoon, guests can relax outside over shared dishes and at night the menu may feature entree choices like cured Ora King salmon with japonica rice, tsukemono and misonaise, or master stock pork neck with crackling, pressed cucumber and orange.

Main courses may include sirloin of beef with roasted alliums, short-rib pithivier and black garlic emulsion or butter-poached hapuka with cauliflower cream, almonds and burnt leeks.

Desserts could feature cheesecake with speculaas crumble, rosella cherries and elderflower sorbet while cheeses are sourced from the Kaikoura Cheese Company.

Wines are available by the glass, carafe or bottle and the list features names like Greywacke, Framingham, Seresin Estate, Dog Point and Fromm.

Otago:

A less likely spot for top-notch dining is Moeraki, a tiny fishing village between Oamaru and Dunedin.



Bistronomy

Domain and Knee Deep in Margaret River, and more recently at Annandale on the Banks Peninsula – but had always wanted a gig in Marlborough.

The restaurant, a small, relaxed venue with locally sourced food,

The menu might feature "bites" like squid tagliatelle with kalamata olives, raisins and lemon, or a chicken wing with smoky crumbs and sweet chilli, or more substantial dishes like pan-fried red snapper with broth and summer vegetables or char-grilled lamb rump, witloof and smoked eel broth.

Malo, Hawke's Bay's new kid on the block, has also attracted plenty of attention along with Elephant Hill, Te Awa Winery Restaurant and Terroir, three winery eateries.

Marlborough:

Another winery restaurant that has garnered national attention is Arbour, in Marlborough. Go-ahead couple Liz Buttimore and Bradley Hornby, former manager and chef respectively of Gibb's on Godfrey restaurant, purchased the restaurant and have made a big impact.

The couple has previously attracted rave reviews at Wills

It is here that veteran restaurateur Fleur Sullivan runs Fleur's Place, where the menu is designed around whatever seafood is caught that morning by the Moeraki Bay fishing fleet that unload its catch on the wharf beside the restaurant.

This sleepy little fishing village, surrounded by water on three sides, has a rich Māori, whaling and sealing history and the restaurant itself was built on an early whaling station site.

The menu will reflect what is local and seasonal, perhaps titi (muttonbird) or blue cod, dory, moki, blue nose, gurnard, sole, flounder, groper or, for the luck few, some local crayfish. Most of the vegetables come from small organic growers around the region.

Queenstown, as a resort city, has several well-known eateries, but gourmet visitors will also be well rewarded by a trip out into the Central Otago wine region of Cromwell, where Amisfield winery has enjoyed great success with its "Trust the Chef" signature tasting menu.

Guests have to give up their right to choose and put themselves in the hands of chef Vaughan Mabee and his team, who craft a menu using the freshest local ingredients available.

"Trust the Chef" requires a minimum of two people and takes at least two hours. Each table must either "Trust the Chef" or choose from the à la carte menu.

The lunchtime "Trust the Chef" costs \$75 for three courses. Matching wines can be added for \$45 a head. Dinner costs \$140 for seven courses, including dessert. Five wines can be added for \$75.

Dishes may include the likes of Canterbury smoked eel with duck liver mousse, apple and five-seed bread; cured Akaroa salmon, brut pearls, vinegar cream and horseradish snow; Cloudy Bay clams, tua tuas, garlic, butter and chilli or crackling pork belly, pigs tails, apple juice and watercress.

Throw in the likes of other regional dining stars like Pegasus Bay winery restaurant in North Canterbury, Hopgood's in Nelson, The Bistro in Taupo and Pinocchio in Martinborough, and New Zealanders and their visitors are well served with dining options. ■



Fleur's Place



Pacifica chef Jeremy Rameka



Pinocchio noticeboard