



Priscilla Pilon

 / TRAVEL / CULINARY VACATIONS

New Zealand's Best Food, Wine & Beer Scenes for 2017

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Where to eat, drink, and party in Auckland, Wellington, and Hawke's Bay & Napier

The North Island of New Zealand is known for its volcanic activity, national parks and cosmopolitan cities, but did you know this hotbed island also has the coolest coffee, food, wine and beer scenes too?

I scoured the harbors, islands, cities and farmlands to discover why international foodie fans are flocking to New Zealand's North Island. After an exhaustive week (literally and figuratively) eating and drinking the reasons why became clear. The plethora of fresh products grown locally, the commitment of the native islanders who support a food culture that respects the land, combined with a strong nationalistic push to compete on a world stage has led to its success.

AUCKLAND

Food

The Big Foody Tour – I spent the day with docent Ellie tasting Auckland's best sweets, savories and coffees off the beaten path. The aromas of freshly roasted java by local quirky proprietor Craig Miller of **Millers Coffee Ltd** were intoxicating. He demonstrated how to roast beans to the peak of perfection – if you see a shiny bean it means it was cooked so long that the sugar is on the outside and it loses its flavor. After a caffeine boost we headed to **Sabato** specialty shop featuring unique European items from mostly small family businesses using traditional methods of production. They also carry many native New Zealand products. Of note, their cheese monger Calum Hodgson stocks the highly addictive Sheep Shagger Blue.



Sabato's Sheep Shagger Blue

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Cocktails

The Sugar Club boasts spectacular views of the harbor and islands from the 53rd floor of the famous Sky Tower. To the East lies the Hauraki Gulf that joins the Pacific Ocean and to the West you'll find the Tasman Sea. Almost as good as the views, their signature cocktails are delightful. My favorite was the Maiden's Tower - gin, raspberry, Chambord, Grand Marnier, and lemon with a crushed frozen raspberry floating on top with a flower.

Wine Tasting

Waiheke Island, former hippy and artist colony, is a short but beautiful ferry ride from downtown Auckland through the Hauraki Gulf. I landed in Matiatia Bay and began The Afternoon Artisan tour with **Ananda Tours** where I visited four distinct vineyards.

Peacock Sky Vineyards has the only free degustation on the island. 100% of the grapes are grown on the island - premiere degustation tastings are tailored to guests' interests in food and wine.

Stonyridge Vineyards offers wine tasting flights while dining *en plein air* amongst the vines. Of particular note was the pairing of raw oysters with the 2015 Larose Cabernet blend.

Thomas's Bach at Batch is located on one of the highest hills on Waiheke Island. Their Riesling is the only dedicated Prosecco wine in New Zealand.

Mudbrick Vineyards is the most romantic spot on the island for a satiable bistro meal and wine tasting on the panoramic terrace.

WELLINGTON

Food

People flock to **Shepherd**, a restaurant co-created by Sean Golding and Chef Sean Elliott. The concept is simple, meals meant to be shared, in an atmosphere of casual camaraderie. It's a veggie centric open concept kitchen without being vegetarian. Produce comes from small farms so the menu changes often based upon availability of fresh, seasonal options. My favorite dishes included the Oyster Chardonnay with vinegar, shallots and cream, a soup of pork broth, egg, Nori, pickled Shitake mushrooms and noodles and lastly the Kale fried rice with Kimchi, fried egg and sesame. I love that 100% of the proteins are sourced in New Zealand.

Beer

The Garage Project began as a group of mates brewing innovative beers out of, literally, a garage. Brewmaster Pete Gillespie perfects everything from the neo-classical Artful Dodger, an English Pale Ale with UK hops to the absurd Texas Tea, a quirky but tasty version with Habanero and prickly pear (cactus) foam. My favorite was the Mutiny on the Bounty, a dark like molasses colored beer with a vanilla syrup taste. Another cool combo was the Death from Above, a funky orange colored brew with mango and Vietnamese mint and chilies. Oh so good! Bring your own reusable flagon to fill up while keeping the trash out of the landfills or purchase one in their store onsite – it's good for the environment and the taste buds.



The Garage Project

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Cocktails

Tucked away off eccentric Tory Street, Hawthorn Lounge at first looks like a stuffy gentlemen's riding club with the overstuffed leather chairs and old fireplace, but looks can be deceiving. Welcoming barmen serve innovative bespoke cocktails while regaling visitors with stories of old fashion libations and new craft liquors. I was amongst the first to try a cool and refreshing gin cocktail topped with homemade asparagus sorbet garnished with a mint leaf – highly unusual and very amazing!

Sweets

The **Wellington Chocolate Factory** is a "Bean to Bar" facility where cocoa nuggets used in their creations originate from fair trade plantations that produce Piura Blanco "the father of all chocolate". The tastes of the chocolate bars varied as greatly as the regions the beans originated: Peru - fruity, raisin good with Champagne, Dominican Republic - nutty, savory good with Merlot, Samoa - banana good with Whisky and Bougainville in Papua New Guinea - fruit and smoke, pair with dry Port. In addition to tasting the chocolate bars, I also recommend their hot chocolate. It was out of this world!

HAWKE'S BAY & NAPIER

New Zealand Food & Wine Classis FAWC, Hawke's Bay

Five years strong, the twice yearly events have been growing in popularity each year. Last fall I attended a party held at the award winning Black Barn Vineyards where 15 local wineries and craft beer specialists showcased some amazing libations under a beautifully decorated tent to launch the event.

The Electrolux Masterclass Series featured celebrity chef, turned entrepreneur and television personality, **Nadia Lim**. The live cooking demonstration was both informative and entertaining. Her bubbly personality and natural showmanship had attendees in stitches. Known as the "Nude Cook" for her advocacy of promoting natural, unprocessed foods for healthy lifestyle cooking.

Wine

Elephant Hill Wine Estate and restaurant makes first-rate wine and serves beautiful, delectable food in a magnificent modern seaside locale adjacent to the Te Awanga coast in Hawke's Bay. Because the vines are just across the road from the sea, it helps keep the temperatures of the grapes from becoming too hot or cold. They have 59 hectares, 30% Syraz, 20% Chardonnay and the rest mixed. The Red Syraz was exceptional with a slightly peppery, full-bodied taste. It has good texture, nice viscosity and just enough bite to hold ones attention without being overpowering.



Elephant Hill

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As with all Relais & Chateaux properties, **The Farm at Cape Kidnappers** serves outstanding food and wine. It is one of only two wine cellar winners in New Zealand to earn the prestigious “Best of Award of Excellence,” from Wine Spectator Magazine in 2014. Part of fun of eating and drinking at this amazing resort is that each employee is invested in the guests having the best experience possible. Everyone from the front desk to housekeeping partake in winetasting so they can recommend wines from the 3,500-bottle cellar.

What I loved most about wining and dining there, besides the breathtaking views of the bay, was the premium wines by the glass availability. They use the Coravin system (needle insertion allowing room to pour without pulling the cork), which keeps wines longer. Therefore, I delighted in tasting more vintages, varietals and regions than ever before at another restaurant. Brilliant! My picks for an eclectic wine lover include a fun 2009 Dry River – Craighall, Martinborough Reisling, an expensive and exclusive (only 880 bottles made) 2013 Clearview – Endeavour, Hawke’s Bay Chardonnay and the about to become extinct (only 100 left in the world) 2000 Church Road – Tom, Hawke’s Bay Cabernet blend.

For more information on where to eat and drink in New Zealand, please contact the official [New Zealand Tourism](#) office.