



# From your paddock to their plate

**There is great potential for New Zealand to further stamp its mark on the global palate, says JAN WILLOUGHBY. She explains how tourism operators can maximise the opportunities to meet the needs of winegrowers, food producers and the wider tourism community.**

**N**EW Zealand is touted as the youngest country on earth and our fresh soils, maritime climate and clean oceans produce an intensity in both our wines and the flavours on our plates.

The country has long been known internationally for its quality of food exports and it is increasingly being recognised for international award winning wines across a range of regional varieties that have a unique taste of the regional soils, geography or climate or what's known by culinary tourists as 'terroir'.

In New Zealand there are more than 550 family-owned vineyards and the first taste of NZ wine is often on an Air New Zealand flight to New Zealand.

This is a huge opportunity to create greater interest among visitors for the myriad of food and wine tourism experiences that they can personally engage with during their holiday.

There's also strong evidence of a "quiet revolution" in New Zealand's culinary scene among innovative young chefs and, in turn, consumer's preferences are changing from high-end culinary experi-

ences to be balanced with "paddock to plate" as the visitor wishes to engage more fully with the producer or wine maker and understand their philosophy.

Our visitors increasingly want to know where the food has come from and under what conditions it's been farmed or grown.

Visitors are also going 'beyond the obvious' sourcing locally grown products from suppliers directly, either through farmers' markets or artisan regional food trails. And they are increasingly concerned with food miles, a lack of additives in food they eat and practices which are not sustainable or environmentally sound.

If you've recently seen the movie *Food Inc* (an *Inconvenient Truth* for food) you'll know what drives the current mindset of conscientious foodies across the planet.

There is great potential for New Zealand to further stamp our mark on the global palate and we can maximise the opportunities in a sustainable way meeting the needs of winegrowers, food producers and the wider tourism community.

So what are the major trends?

- Organics and regional farmers' markets: Sourcing of boutique local artisan food products and fresh seasonal flavours. [www.farmersmarket.org.nz/www.organicexplorer.co.nz](http://www.farmersmarket.org.nz/www.organicexplorer.co.nz)

- Building international credibility: Influential critics endorsing N.Z.'s wine tourist experience e.g. Robert Joseph ([www.Telegraph.co.uk](http://www.Telegraph.co.uk))



PHOTO NEW ZEALAND/COLLEEN TUNNICLIFF

## What others are saying about our food and wine experience

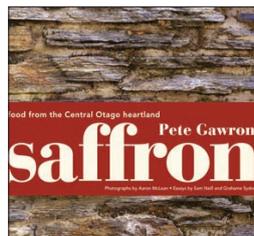
### Tastebuds will travel

*Guardian* reporter Emma Johns and friend spent a two-week culinary tour of New Zealand "exploring the local flavours before attempting to recreate them ourselves." From fine-dining in Wellington to cooking lamb fillet off a cliff in Arthur's Pass: "One great incentive to roam, on any New Zealand road trip, is the extraordinary proximity of its different landscapes. A few hours' drive can take you almost anywhere, from the coastline to the snowline; you can eat prawns for breakfast on the beach, lunch on farmed venison on the plains, and drink your sun downer atop a 3,000ft mountain." (Feb 2008)

### Paddock to plate

New Zealand chefs and consumers are increasingly embracing diverse homegrown produce, with Central Otago's Saffron restaurant at the forefront of this "quiet revolution" explains Australia's *Special Broadcasting Service*. Sourced from the restaurant's surrounding environs is an extravagant, imaginative menu featuring such delights as risotto of Dunedin coast crayfish, Queen scallops and paua from the Caitlins. In addition to sourcing from local suppliers, Saffron owner Pete Gawron hand-harvests wild produce from the nearby mountains, including snowberries, birch boletus (a fungal relative of porcini) and puffball mushrooms (considered a delicacy in Europe). (Jul 2009)

All sourced: [www.nzedge.com](http://www.nzedge.com)



### Pursuits of happiness

"Beyond the wild, raw landscapes, another New Zealand beckons: one of sophisticated restaurants, silvery olive groves, and the most lush, grape-heavy vineyards this side of Bordeaux" writes *Condé Nast* writer Chang-rae Lee, who spent two weeks travelling both islands touring wineries, playing golf and "eating [his] way across the landscape. Beginning on Waiheke Island, Lee then heads south to the Hawke's Bay and "classic maritime vineyard land" where he sips Craggy Range pinot after a round at Cape Kidnappers. Across the Strait, Lee finds his favourite wine of the entire trip in Central Otago, an '03 pinot noir from the Pisa Range Estate "whose earthy bouquet was so redolent and exquisitely layered with hints of river rock and dark cherry that I wanted to buy the new block of proposed vineyard land which the affable owners, Warwick and Jenny Hawker, had up for sale, and share a piece of the terroir myself". (Feb 2009)

### Touring the terroir

New Zealand wineries are preferable to those of France and California, for first-class tastings, scenery and cuisine, according to the *Telegraph's* wine correspondent Robert Joseph. "This is a great place for wine tourism. In fact, having recently spent a year researching my wine travel guide, I would go as far as to say that no wine-producing country does a better job of welcoming tourists. In the South Island you'll find this country's cult pinot noir vineyards - and a brilliant set-up called the Big Picture in Cromwell, where, for NZ\$20 (£8), you can sit back and watch a film that flies you across the region in a helicopter, dropping into five wineries, including the actor Sam Neill's Two Paddocks. Maybe one day the winemakers of Bordeaux and Burgundy will come up with an idea this good. Until they do, I'm going to go on telling my wine-loving friends that it's worth spending a day in a plane to get to New Zealand." (June 2008)



**There needs to be increased regional focus on value-added authentic local experiences to develop niche markets.**

- Regional food and wine trails: Differentiation/product development e.g. Coromandel Homegrown Food Trail.
- Regional varietals specialisation/ terroir "sense of place": e.g. Syrah "Gimblett Gravels".
- Indigenous foods: Hangi 'product extension' of indigenous herbs (Pikopiko, Kawakawa, Horopito), contemporary fusion cuisine incorporated into traditional hangi flavours e.g. 'Te Po' (Te Puia).
- Kai Moana food gathering experiences: Authentic and interactive visitor experiences (shellfish, diving for paua and crayfish) e.g. Long Island Tours "Journey of Providence".
- Storytelling and personalities - sustainable practices: e.g. Fleur's Place, Rippon Valley.
- NZ Culinary Ambassadors building N.Z.'s unique culinary identity: Peter Gordon (Fusion), Al Brown and Steve Logan (Wild Foods), Lauraine Jacobs (Farmers Markets), Charles Royal (Indigenous Foods) and leading chefs (Peter Thornley, Simon Gault, Geoff Scott).
- Showcasing local flavours and creating innovative events: Plenty of Flavour (Bay of Plenty), Wildfoods Festival (Hokitika), Whitestone Cheese Rolling (Waikaka).
- Seasonal events (off-peak) and building capabilities: e.g. Crayfish & Chardonnay (Gisborne)
- Social networks and blogs influence on travelling e.g. <http://www.facebook.com/GreatWineCapitals> (note: Christchurch/South Island alliance - including Marlborough, Waipara, Central Otago recently gained status as N.Z.'s "Great Wine Capital")

There needs to be increased regional focus on value-added authentic local experiences to develop niche markets. When combined with an interpretation of local culture, history and other destination experiences, quality food and wine experiences can become a strong compelling motivator in helping regions to develop. Regional varietals and spe-

**Practical tips**

So what can an operator do to enhance the visitor food experience?

1. Present regional differentiated flavours on menus and also enable visitors to identify sub-regions wine matching under regional themes E.g. Akaroa salmon and Waipara pinot gris?
2. Create more regionally differentiated 'points-of-difference' – develop stories/local food personalities. Every region has its own Al Brown!
3. Focus on "themes/taste of the place": Introduce seasonal recipes that reflect our changing food and wine experiences or seasonal packages throughout the year.
4. Bringing forward the Wine Tourism Concept: Wine tourism is not just visiting wineries; it is much more than that. Wine education, gastronomy, accommodation and scenery are all part of the bigger picture. Have you developed it enough?
5. B2B: How wineries can market their service product to tourism professionals. It is one thing to sell a great bottle of wine, but do you know how to market your service to the operators that will be selling it?
6. Improved on-line presence: Do you have new video footage that could be added to your regional and individual business promotional websites? E.g. TV programme *New Zealand on a Plate*.

cialisation give rise to a competitive edge, with wine, food and tourism partnerships.

There is a need for differentiation on the basis of a regional style or "taste of the place", quality and uniqueness will give rise to competitive advantage and a reason for wine tourists to visit a region.

As an international example there is the Napa Valley Mustard Festival which offers a full palette of food, wine, art, entertainment, and cultural activities staged throughout the world-famous grape growing region of the USA when vineyards are vibrant with wild mustard in bloom - a perfect reason to visit The Legendary Napa Valley during winter.

**Key events**

- Destination Readiness Survey – N.Z.'s benchmarking (International Culinary Tourism Association).
- Pinot Noir 2010 (Feb, Wellington).
- 5th International Wine Business Research Conference 2010 (Feb, Auckland).
- NZ Food & Wine Tourism Network, Strategy Review 2010 (Feb, Auckland).
- Season 3 "NZ on a Plate" (March, filming throughout NZ).
- AGM: Great Wine Capitals Global Network (Nov, Chch)

*Jan Willoughby is director of [www.highlypalatable.com](http://www.highlypalatable.com) a specialist NZ food & wine tourism consultancy. She has worked in areas of national and regional food and wine tourism strategies, food & wine tourism trails development, business mentoring and international projects including judging the Le Cordon Bleu World Food Media Awards. Jan has more than 20 years experience in the NZ tourism industry. <http://nz.linkedin.com/in/highlypalatable>*