FOODIE HOTSPOTS IN HAMILTON & WAIKATO

DISCOVER THE ABUNDANCE IN THE HAMILTON & WAIKATO REGION

The Hamilton & Waikato region covers a vast area of the North Island of New Zealand. It stretches from Pokeno and Tuakau in the north through to the forested ends of the South Waikato; and the rugged West coast beaches of Raglan and Kawhia to the Kaimai Ranges in the east.

With a mild climate and regular rainfall, there is little wonder the Waikato has such lush green land, making it one of the world’s richest dairying centres. World-class cheese is created here, with many of the country’s finest artisan producers also calling this region home.

With its central location, the Waikato is seen not only as a wonderful place to live but also a great spot to do business. The region is a hub of industry, many with a food focus – from ice creams to cheese, bread makers and brewers, to succulent berries and fruit, it all can be found here.

Spend a little time in the region, dine at some of the many award-winning restaurants and cafes, and discover for yourself the abundance our region has to offer.

For more information, please visit hamiltonwaikato.com
1. Mercer Cheese

Waikato, the centre of New Zealand’s dairy industry, is home to some of the best cheesemakers in the country! In eight out of the past nine National Cheese Awards, locals Meyer and Mercer Cheese have won the top cheesemaking prizes.

These award-winning cheesemakers hail from Holland but have found a home and success in New Zealand. Veer off State Highway 1 at Mercer and stop at the quaint little shop of Albert Alferink to taste what the fuss is all about.

Mercer Cheese Shop is packed full of Dutch delicacies and great cheese accompaniments but it is the award-winning cheeses, and there are a few, that are the main attraction. Albert makes 30 tonnes of cheese a year with varieties made from cow, goat and sheep milk.

MUST TRY
Sample the award-winning gouda cheese, including the extra mature gouda

His little shop in this small Waikato town of Mercer has been open for 35 years. There is no website or Facebook page, instead a loyal following of true cheese lovers who go out of their way to visit the Mercer Cheese Shop. The large wheels of traditional gouda are cut before your eyes and you won’t be able to leave without a few wedges neatly wrapped for you to take away.

2. Peplers

Pepler’s began nearly 30 years ago when June and Colin Pepler were looking for a way to sell the fruit from their seven-acre orchard.

June started making jams using the stone fruit and berries, and this proved a successful formula leading to the birth of Pepler’s Fine Foods.

Soon their cottage industry had outgrown their home and orchard, prompting a move to new premises on the main street of Te Kauwhata, where it remains today.

On any given day, if you step off Te Kauwhata’s main street and into Pepler’s store you will be greeted with the smells of fruit bubbling away as it is transformed into good old-fashioned jam. Or perhaps it’ll be onions, spices and tamarillos being made into a savoury chutney perfect for tarting up those plain old sausages or leftover meat.

With more than 80 products on their shelves, including black doris plum jam like grandma made, ras-el-hanout dressing, their famous black raspberry vinaigrette, and a gorgeous sauvignon-blanc jelly; there really is something to suit all tastes.

MUST TRY
The famous Black Raspberry Vinaigrette

CONTACT:
5c Main Street, Te Kauwhata
07 826 3838
peplers.co.nz
Open Mon-Fri 9am-5pm
Sat 9am-1pm

3. Raglan Fish

The main attraction at the Raglan Wharf has to be the fish. Bring a line and try your hand at a spot of fishing with the locals or simply find a good spot and watch the action, from the sprats being pulled in by the kids to the boats coming and going.

This is a working wharf with fishing boats bringing in their haul, so it stands to reason this is the best spot for beautiful fresh fish. Pop into Raglan Fish and see the day’s catch be filleted there in front of you.

Choose from a selection of fresh or smoked fish to take away and cook your way, or do what the hordes of locals do and get yours dipped in batter and served with a scoop of chips, wrapped in a newsprint package.

From the wharf, with your fresh fish ‘n’ chips and the sound of hungry seagulls you also have a wonderful vantage point for one of Raglan’s famous sunsets.

Raglan fish can be found at a number of markets around the Waikato, making it easy for everyone to access their fresh fish.

MUST TRY
Fish ‘n’ chips on the wharf at sunset

CONTACT:
92 Wallis Street, Raglan
07 825 7544
RaglanFishShop
Open 9am-7pm
7 days a week
It all started when Vincent Chan discovered camellias flourished in the Waikato. What grew from this discovery is Zealong Tea Estate, 48 hectares and over a million tea plants (Camellia sinensis) flourishing just 15 minutes from central Hamilton.

Tea at its finest! As New Zealand’s only tea plantation, Zealong has a reputation for its beautiful organic tea, grown right here in the Waikato. Tea enthusiasts can join the two-hour tour where they will learn about the history of tea as well as Zealong’s unique journey, this is a chance to get up close and personal with real tea growing. The tour culminates in a traditional tea ceremony allowing you to taste the Zealong difference.

Visitors can also enjoy a culinary experience with Zealong’s signature High Tea; a thoughtfully-crafted selection of savouries, sandwiches and sweets all incorporating or designed to complement the tea or opt for one of the lunch à la carte options. These can all be enjoyed on the deck of the Tea House with stunning panoramic views of the estate. Time it right and you may even see the tea pickers in action.

A belief that good beer shouldn’t be bland, boring and full of chemicals led to a group of friends to create Good George. The idea and subsequently the name came to fruition when the former Saint George Church, in the industrial heart of Frankton, became available. A complete transformation saw this house of God become the house of beer.

With seven regular brews (from Amber Ale to IPA as well as their runaway success Black Doris Plum Cider) the brewers at Good George don’t stand still crafting a range of special and limited edition brews.

They are often collaborating with other fabulous Waikato foodies to create interesting combinations like their Blueberry Sour, Rocket Coffee IPA or Donovan’s Chocolate Rocky Road Stouts.

Take the tour to hear how Good George beers are made, taste the brews and get a Good George glass to take home.

What began in one of Hamilton’s award-winning restaurants quickly captured the heart (and tastebuds) of the dairy-loving locals and visitors alike.

Using only organic milk and free-range eggs, Duck Island Ice Cream focuses on creating innovative – and sometimes daring – combinations with a focus on seasonal ingredients.

At any one time, there are around 18 flavours to choose from, including a couple of dairy-free vegan options. Think Crab Apple Crumble in Autumn or Candied Banana and Ginger Caramel; Salted Caramel and Cacao Nib is a popular choice along with Blackberry and Sage. Or perhaps the Jam and Toast or Black Sticky Rice Cream will have you intrigued.

Everything is lovingly made on site in small batches, so although you can pick up a tub of Duck Island Ice Cream from a growing number of retailers around New Zealand the best place to see and taste the range and the latest flavour is at their ice cream parlour. Find them on the corner of Grey and Cook Sts in Hamilton East and indulge your senses.
7. VOLARE BAKERY

In their own words Volare began with little more than an old oven, a tired mixer and a clapped out old van. That was 2009 and Volare are now the Waikato and Bay of Plenty’s premier artisan bakery, distributing to cafes, restaurants and good food stores across the region.

They also have a growing number of retail outlets (Garden Place, Hamilton; Empire Street, Cambridge; and Alexandra Street, Te Awamutu) where you can grab a loaf of their delicious breads, pastries and baked goods as well as a sandwich, soup in winter or salad along with a coffee.

For a real treat though, visit their bakery on Kahikatea Drive, Hamilton where you will be intoxicated by the smell of baking bread. Home of the very best in handcrafted sourdough breads, Volare’s bread takes time to make.

As well as bread, indulge in a sweet treat – a cronut, white chocolate brownies or if you are visiting at Easter, try one of New Zealand’s best Hot X Buns as judged in 2016.

8. MANUKA BROTHERS’ COFFEE

Manuka is a special tree for New Zealanders. Its tiny white blossoms attract honey bees who produce the world-famous Manuka Honey. Its wood is also treasured for its slow-burning properties, imparting a unique flavour making it a favourite for barbecues and smokehouses.

As the name may suggest Manuka Brothers’ Coffee use manuka to roast their coffee beans giving it a uniquely New Zealand flavour. Graeme Rogerson, one half of Manuka Brothers, compares their beans to listening to vinyl rather than digital – “there’s a lot more depth to the flavour, more depth to the roast.”

Having successfully mastered the art of roasting beans over the embers of manuka, Graeme and brother in law Tyson Downing have steadily grown their business, with their coffee beans now available at the Waikato and Cambridge Farmers Markets each weekend.

They have a new headquarters in Frankton too open during the week. Visit and check out the machine they designed and built themselves, named Black Betty, which takes pride of place in the café, and produces coffee beans with a distinctive warm, sweet and complex flavour.

9. VILAGRADS

Sunday lunch at Vilagrads is a ‘must do’ in the Waikato. Experience true hospitality from the Nooyen family and discover why many of life’s special moments are celebrated by locals at Vilagrads – whether it’s a wedding, christening or a special birthday.

Grapes were first planted by Ivan Milicich snr in the early 1900s after he had immigrated from Croatia. Five generations later, the wine is award-winning, and its restaurant is run by two of Ivan’s great grandsons.

In 2015, a devastating fire ripped through the historical winery. The overwhelming response from the community illustrated just how dear Vilagrads and the family are to the local community, with hundreds of people coming to help with the clean-up. Within three months, their doors were open again.

Make the most of a trip to the winery by tasting their speciality wines and ports at their cellar door, and enjoying a delicious lunch.

CONTACT:
236 Kahikatea Drive, Frankton
volarebread.com

CONTACT:
129c Norton Road, Frankton, Hamilton
021 646 508 Manuka Brothers’ Coffee

CONTACT:
702 Rukuhia Road, Ohaupo
07 825 2893 vilagrads.co.nz

Open Monday-Friday 9am-3pm,
Sunday 12-4pm

MUST TRY
A crusty loaf of San Francisco Sourdough

MUST TRY
Coffee of any description from a latte to a short black - taste the difference

MUST TRY
The silver medal Charminer with a flavoursome mix of melon, peach and citrus characters
10. MONAVALE BLUEBERRIES

The largest Bio-Gro certified organic blueberry orchard in New Zealand, Monavale has over 50 acres of blueberries flourishing in the heart of the Waikato.

Paul and Mieke de Groot, and their two children, immigrated to New Zealand from Holland in 1980. They started with a 10-acre block that was covered in gorse, blackberry and tea tree transforming this into a productive market garden, growing everything from tomatoes and zucchini to feijoas and boysenberries.

They discovered blueberries did well in the peat soil and slowly planted more and more.

Pop into their Café Irresistiblue, nestled within the orchard and offering customers the chance to try the range of organic blueberry products on offer, including juices, jams, chutneys and more. Enjoy an organic coffee and a blueberry-inspired dish like the venison and blueberry pie, or blueberry tart with vanilla ice cream. Their range of products and berries can also be found at local farmers’ markets around the Waikato.

Tours run during the blueberry season from October through to March. Learn about the principles of organic blueberry growing see blueberry bushes up close and learn how blueberries get from the bush to the market. Tour takes 45 minutes; bookings are essential.

PYO also available in February & March.

11. OVER THE MOON DAIRY

Set in the heart of the dairy capital of New Zealand, Over the Moon Dairy makes a wide range of specialty cheeses from locally sourced cow, goat, sheep and buffalo milk.

Since opening their boutique factory in 2007 they have clocked up more than 75 medals and a dozen trophies from around the world. You can see, smell and taste the award-winning cheeses while also watching the cheese making in action at their small factory and shop in Putaruru.

The factory shop, and their deli shop in Cambridge, sell the complete range of Over The Moon cheese from their award-winning Galactic Gold washed rind cheese, to their renowned Black Truffle Brie. If you prefer a rich blue cheese, you can choose from a selection here – even a goat’s blue.

Keen to get hands on and learn to make your own cheese? Over The Moon is the place for you having trained hundreds of cheese enthusiasts, chefs and cheesemakers.

Tastings are available instore from 9.30am-4.30pm weekdays and 10am-3.30pm weekends in Putaruru, and 9am-4.30pm weekdays and 9.30am-3.30pm weekends in Cambridge. The best time to watch cheesemaking is between 10am and 12noon Monday-Thursday in Putaruru.

12. FARMERS MARKETS

Join Waikato locals each weekend as they stock up on fresh local produce, freshly baked bread, meat, free range eggs, honey and more.

The Cambridge Farmers Market is held every Saturday morning from 8am to 12pm in Victoria Square. Tastebuds get excited here, with lush produce, fresh berries, sweet treats (including Waikato’s famous Mamas Donuts) and great coffee.

The Hamilton Farmers Market is held each Sunday from 8am to 12pm in a renovated barn at Claudelands Events Centre. The central, all-weather venue makes the market the perfect spot for a relaxed Sunday morning outing. Grab a coffee or fresh smoothie and wander around the stalls meeting the growers and producers first-hand.

Make sure you pick up a treat from Mavis & Co along with a jar of Waikato nectar from Sweetree Honey, some authentic oak cakes from Celtic Cuisine or perhaps some fresh nut better.

CONTACT: Corner Turkington & Wallace Roads (156 Turkington Road), Monavale, Cambridge 0800 423 774 monavaleblueberries.co.nz

CONTACT: Putaruru Factory and Deli 33 Tirau Street, Putaruru
            Cambridge Deli 70b Victoria St, Cambridge
            overthemoondairy.co.nz

Putaruru Deli
Mon-Fri 9.30am-5pm
Sat-Sun 10am-4pm
Cambridge Deli
Mon-Fri 9am-5.30pm
Sat-Sun 9.30am-4pm

MUST TRY
Fresh fruit icecream, made on site with blueberries from the orchard

MUST TRY
Their award-winning Gouda-style Tomme made from cow and goat milk

MUST TRY
Get there early enough to snap up a Raglan Pie before they sell out