

Wellington Food and Drink Tourism Strategy

Short Term Action Plan 2025-2030



Visa Wellington On a Plate Chef Collaboration – Ben Shewry at Ortega Fish Shack, 2019
Photo Credit: Jeff McEwan

Introduction

The Food and Drink Tourism Strategy, prepared after extensive hospitality industry consultation, reflects crucial feedback gathered from various stakeholders. This strategy emerges during a challenging period in Wellington's history, following the slow tourism recovery post-COVID-19. Central Government funding cuts, combined with a cost-of-living crisis, have further dampened consumer confidence. This has resulted in reduced discretionary spending on dining out which has led to the closure of a number of award-winning eateries who operated in the food and drink tourism space.

Wellington is not alone in facing these challenges, as other destinations, both domestically and internationally, experience similar issues. However, the sector has shown renewed passion and must galvanise itself to avoid falling behind in food and drink tourism product development as other regions advance.

The full strategy outlines 31 actions for implementation, shared by WellingtonNZ, Wellington City Council, and the hospitality sector. The changes detailed in the action plan aim to elevate Wellington's Food and Drink Tourism offering to a world-class level. Recognising the current economic challenges, the focus will be placed on a prioritised set of actions to get the ball rolling and build momentum to ensure success.

This plan combines content and methodology from Destination Pōneke and the Food and Drink Tourism Strategy. It should be seen as a stepping stone, not a replacement, for the comprehensive Food and Drink Tourism Strategy.

Vibrancy matters (too), to keep people interested and active in the city by day and by night and contributing to the high quality of life. This in turn keeps business thriving and confident to invest and do more...We want our neighbourhood, suburban centre, and city landmarks to deliver placemaking and storytelling of past, present and future that enables our communities to relax, feel safe, connect, participate, and belong.

Strategic framework

Vision	Wellington is Aotearoa New Zealand's most globally recognised food and drink tourism destination.
Purpose	To identify and develop a thriving Pōneke food and drink tourism network which ensures the city lives up to the title of Aotearoa New Zealand's Culinary Capital.
Goal	To develop an all-encompassing food and drink tourism strategy that is aligned, easily communicated and elevates Wellington to the status of a world-class food hub for all ages.

Strategic focus areas

Enriching Experiences	Make Wellington's food and drink tourism offering a must taste destination for locals and manuhiri.
Sharing our Stories	Celebrates our diverse and rich food tourism story.
Future Resilience	Protects and promotes the Wellington region's food offering from farm to fork.

A place of change for change

Delivering the full Action Plan detailed in the Food and Drink Tourism Strategy will seek to accomplish overall success and return Wellington to the top of the food chain in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The four priority projects outlined in the short-term action plan will directly contribute to the top line outcomes below and stimulate economic growth and increase overall wellbeing / liveability of the city.

To begin with WellingtonNZ will continue to identify and engage with a small group of food and drink tourism businesses to seek input and build confidence in the strategy.

A further targeted approach will see engagement with the relevant industry and sector Associations who operate in the Hospitality or Food and Drink Tourism space, especially Hospitality NZ, Restaurant Association and Tourism Industry Aotearoa.

The approach's aim will see WellingtonNZ "advocate to the advocates" as our city requires intervention and heightened levels of support to enable the hospitality sector to do business effectively and with greater efficiency.

Support is required by business with things such as licensing and compliance which requires 3-way collaboration between council, Association sector leads (HospitalityNZ) and key business operators.

Top line outcomes

- Identify and engage with a thriving network of food and drink tourism business exemplars.
- Support and promote the early evening (nighttime) economy, to increase spend in the city.
- Drive all round wellbeing for the city through food and drink offerings to boost connection and quality of life.
- Create opportunities to partner with local iwi to share Māori food and drink stories.
- Make it easier for the Hospitality sector to do business in Wellington.
- Recognise the vital role that events play in supporting the food and drink culture in Wellington.
- Host (Cuisine / Michelin) Awards judging panel on an annual basis to increase the number of entrants for Wellington.
- Support increased Food and Drink offerings at Wellington Venues including Sky / HENRY Stadium.
- Elevate the LoCarb sustainability program and promote sustainable and low carbon food and drink tourism experiences.

Cities that are great places to live, are great places to visit.

"The city's most important tourists are not those visitors who travel the furthest and spend the most. They are in fact its residents.

These are the people that make a city vibrant, who regularly fill its restaurants, explore its trails, visits its attractions, create its art and pack its theatres. They are the people who drive and economy, enrich a culture, create community, and have the power to drive positive change.

It's therefore essential that locals love where they live and for that enthusiasm to spread to visitors. And for each to add value to the other's experience."

Priority Projects:

<p>1. Event Hub Platform Timeline: 2025 -2026</p>	<p>Wellington is accustomed to hosting multiple events each week throughout the year, significantly boosting the visitor economy through accommodation stays and dining out. However, most hospitality operators lack visibility over the event schedule, missing out on opportunities to enhance their business.</p>	<p>ACTION: Partner with an Association sector lead to create a one-stop information hub which identifies major, business and performance events, cruise.</p>
<p>2. Wellington's Māori & Pasifika Food and Drink Story Timeline: 2025 - 2027</p>	<p>By showcasing our cultural identity and tikanga, manuhiri will experience Māori & Pasifika culture through the promotion and ethical story telling of Wellington's rich Māori & Pasifika food and drink history and manaakitanga.</p>	<p>ACTION: Collaborate through meaningful and thoughtful connection with Ahi Kā.</p> <p>The aim is to share stories of mana whenua, highlighting the cultural significance and heritage of Wellington's Māori food and drink traditions, which includes Matariki. Build in further diversity stories to the piece, celebrating the regions Pasifika and ethnic food and drink orientation.</p>
<p>3. Early Evening (Nighttime) Economy Timeline: 2026 -2027</p>	<p>Support activity that elevates food and drink experiences and builds a vibrant early evening economy in Wellington's central city.</p>	<p>ACTION: Engage with the Wellington City Council and support increased measures that encourages locals to eat out in the city.</p>
<p>4. Food and Drink Tourism Product Development Timeline: 2026 -2030</p>	<p>Increased investment is needed in the development of dedicated food and drink tourism product so that there is more on offer to travel sellers and visitors when looking to experience the Wellington food and drink story, outside of dining in restaurants. Commissionable product can also be packaged up by travel sellers and promoted by WellingtonNZ.</p>	<p>ACTION: Work with the food and drink sector to support the development of commissionable and non-commissionable food and drink product that links to Wellington's food and drink story.</p>

Sector Insight:

There is strong support within the sector for a centralised, impartial digital information source that all restaurants and hospitality can utilise to load their business. As a knowledge hub, there is an opportunity for Wellington to develop and host a progressive, innovative, and future-focused international food event that attracts international visitors to Wellington every year as the culinary capital.

Priority One: Event Hub Platform

Key action	What?	Success Metric	Due Date	Delivery	Completed Y/N
Investigate the creation of an online information platform for the food and drink tourism industry.	Communicate WellingtonNZ's marketing and communications plan and opportunities for operators to support and promote.	Provide access to the Hospitality sector through an online hub.	Dec 2026	WellingtonNZ Hospitality NZ Restaurant Association	
	Share the upcoming Tākina schedule.	200 business directly engaged per quarter.	June 2027	Business Events	
	Share Cruise Ship schedule and updates.			Cruise Association	
	Provide Event participation opportunities (not just food and drink events, but WOW etc).	Ranking on most liveable city index increases.	June 2027	WellingtonNZ Hospitality NZ	
Communicate food programmes: LoCarb, Local Food Weeks, Community Garden Projects etc.	Total number of businesses incorporated into the program	June 2027	WellingtonNZ Hospitality NZ		

Event Insight:

In defining the Wellington food and drink tourism story, the industry feedback provided indicates that there is a strong correlation between Wellington's food and drink and the role of events, our multiculturalism and products that aren't only made in Wellington, but perhaps their 'genesis' can be traced back to Wellington in the Aotearoa New Zealand context.

Wellington is very much about the people and the experience...it's about the connections that people make over food and drink with each other and the people creating it. It's also about the unique geography of Wellington itself – the city's proximity to the source – food and drink from right across the city, the region and Aotearoa New Zealand. Wellington's reputation is based on this collaborative kinship; a proud group of (many) independent business operators and chefs who want to deliver their customers the world's best ingredients with the best Wellington hospitality experience in a compact capital city.

Priority Two: Wellington's Māori food and drink story

Key action	What?	Success Metric	Due Date	Delivery	Completed Y/N
Korero with Ahi Ka and identify food stories to share.	Work in partnership with Iwi to explore options (app, AI) to share food stories with consumers.	Number of digital story telling promotions.	June 2026	WellingtonNZ Te Atiawa	
	Provide local chefs with the opportunity to learn cooking techniques, indigenous ingredients etc.	Number of chefs upskilled.	June 2026	WellingtonNZ	
	Celebrate Matariki through the sharing of Ahi Ka's Wellington food story.	Number of Matariki food related events supported.	July 2026	WellingtonNZ Hospitality NZ Restaurant Association Te Wharewaka	
	Food programmes: LoCarb, Local Food Weeks, Community Garden Projects etc.	Total number of businesses supported through this activity.	June 2026	Wellington NZ Hospitality NZ	

Hospitality operator insight:

Much like the things that help tell Wellington's story, Wellington's strengths are its compact geography, diversity, pedigree and community, ingrained culture of hospitality, established reputation for beer, coffee and cafés, and strong independent restaurant and hospitality brands. There are clear opportunities to build on these strengths by improving Wellington's attractiveness to restaurant and hospitality staff, addressing infrastructure and transport challenges and enhancing areas such as Courtenay Place. Further opportunities include responding to cost-of-living pressures, improving access to clear, impartial information about Wellington's food and hospitality offering, strengthening support from Wellington City Council, and developing a clear, coordinated plan for the food and drink tourism sector.

Priority Three: Early Evening (Nighttime) Economy

Key action	What?	Success Metric	Due Date	Delivery	Completed Y/N
Early Evening (Nighttime) Economy	Support and promote the City Safety Plan.	Pillar 3, a safe night life implemented.	June 2026	Wellington City Council and WellingtonNZ	
	Advance opportunities that promote hospitality venues and drive customer spend in the Central City.	Expenditure to the city goes up.	Immediate	Hospitality Sector	

Priority Four: Food and Drink Tourism Product Development

Key action	What?	Success Metric	Due Date	Delivery	Completed Y/N
Support the development of food and drink product and experiences/.	Engage investors to create an indoor Farmers' Market which would include and showcase a Classic NZ Wine Trail product hub.	More product Created	2030	Private Investor / Wellington City Council and WellingtonNZ	

Enhance Wellington's role in the Classic New Zealand Wine Trail by supporting food and drink operators to deliver distinctive, trade oriented, visitor-ready experiences aligned with the Trail.	Product Created	2026-2030	Wellington City Council and WellingtonNZ
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Celebrate Wellington's food community through wayfinding. Develop a "Foodie Stars Walk" to celebrate the fantastic local foodies.	Tour Created	2027	Wellington City Council and WellingtonNZ
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Graze Wine Bar, Kelburn, Wellington

A glimpse into Wellington in 2035

Wellington is Aotearoa New Zealand's most globally recognised food city. It celebrates its abundance. A city that sits alongside what Melbourne is to Australia, what Tokyo is to Japan, what Lima is to Peru. A city that truly understands its food culture and tells and shares those stories with all – to residents and to visitors. It's bright, vibrant, dynamic and the residents are its greatest ambassadors – they are proud of this place, and they love living here.

The LoCarb program is a fully integrated part of Wellington's sustainability economy. The city and its residents are committed to sourcing and celebrating locally grown food and drink and this is a real point of difference for the wider Wellington region driving better cohesion between the city and the hinterland.

As a food and drink experience, Wellington is world class. It's a seven-day city. It is safe, clean, easy to get around on a network of free inner-city transport with a strong connection between the waterfront and city precincts. The city's distinct precinct personalities are told through the food, drink and cultural offerings. Locals have access to locally grown food and drink in the central city that attracts visitors from all over the world. Wellington is *the* place to experience real Aotearoa New Zealand food and drink.

The restaurant scene is booming – both cheap eats and refined dining. Landlords work in partnership with the city to ensure that tenancies are filled with exciting food offerings that set the bar high – Wellington is the place that restaurateurs establish the restaurants that they want to eat at. There's a constant stream of international chefs visiting the city to collaborate with Wellington chefs, hosting special events or taking part in the annual Chefs Table conference which brings together top talent from all over the world in Wellington.

The inner-city population has boomed with international students leading the charge. The diversity of these inner-city dwellers has meant that the dining offering has expanded even further and there's the workforce to support it too. New restaurants continue to open in a supportive and proactive environment. The process of establishing your business in Wellington is simple and it's all online. The city knows the value of this sector to its reputation and strives to set the bar as being the easiest place in Aotearoa New Zealand to do business.

The food and drink events offering sets the benchmark for Aotearoa New Zealand, attracting visitors from around New Zealand and beyond every year. But, even if not visiting for an event, visitors don't need to look far to see the impact of the food and drink sector on Wellington. Food Tours, a self-guiding app and fabulous dining with a view position Wellington as the culinary leader in New Zealand.