

COVER STORY



NOUVELLE ZEALAND CUISINE

Sam Neill wants to invite you to dinner across the ditch, and he's not the only one. New Zealand's chefs and winemakers are throwing out the black and white welcome mat for Australians, whenever and wherever the temperamental trans-Tasman bubble allows.

"They've been without visitors for far too long, they're all ripping to go," says the actor, star of such films as *Jurassic Park*, *The Piano* and *My Brilliant Career*. He is also a winemaker, and one of the most popular and high-profile Kiwis among Australians.

Plenty of excellent dining experiences can be found in New Zealand, not only in the bigger cities like Auckland and Wellington, but right across the North and South, says Neill, who owns Two Paddocks, a winery in the pinot noir-rich Central Otago region, about 75 minutes' south-east of Queenstown.

"New Zealand's food scene has never been more vibrant ... it's going through something of a revolution," he says. "A lot of the best chefs are using distinctively New Zealand products to produce Pacific food that could only be imagined here. It's some of the most interesting food in the world at the moment."

We asked Neill to share some of his favourite Kiwi food and wine destinations with us. From casual pubs and laidback wineries to fine diners, you will find his complete hit list below.

Oh, and while Two Paddocks winery doesn't have a cellar door from which to greet visitors, do pencil in a trip across the ditch for early 2022.

Actor and winemaker Sam Neill has asked us all over for dinner, writes Ute Junker.

"We've done a pop-up cellar door before, and we're looking at doing it again in January or February," he says. "It will be somewhere in Central Otago, a casual lunch in a paddock somewhere. They're always great fun."

FAVOURITE NEW RESTAURANT DISCOVERY AHI, AUCKLAND, NORTH ISLAND
SAM SAYS "I was in quarantine in Auckland for a while and was fortunate enough to be able to order in from Ahi, Ben Bayly's new restaurant. I strongly recommend it. I also like Kika in Wanaka and, more casually, Depot Eatery by Al Brown in Auckland."
TRAVELLER SAYS If you want a crash course in Indigenous ingredients in New Zealand, Ahi is the place to go. In his latest restaurant, Bayly – one of New Zealand's most-awarded chefs – applies his refined techniques to dishes such as charcoaled crayfish with lemon-sorrel salad or wild deer with parsnip and brussels sprouts.
DON'T MISS The award for the most eye-catching dish has to go to Bayly's butterflyfish wrapped in bull kelp, looking like a carefully carved piece of pounamu or greenstone.
ESSENTIALS ahirestaurant.co.nz; depoteatery.co.nz

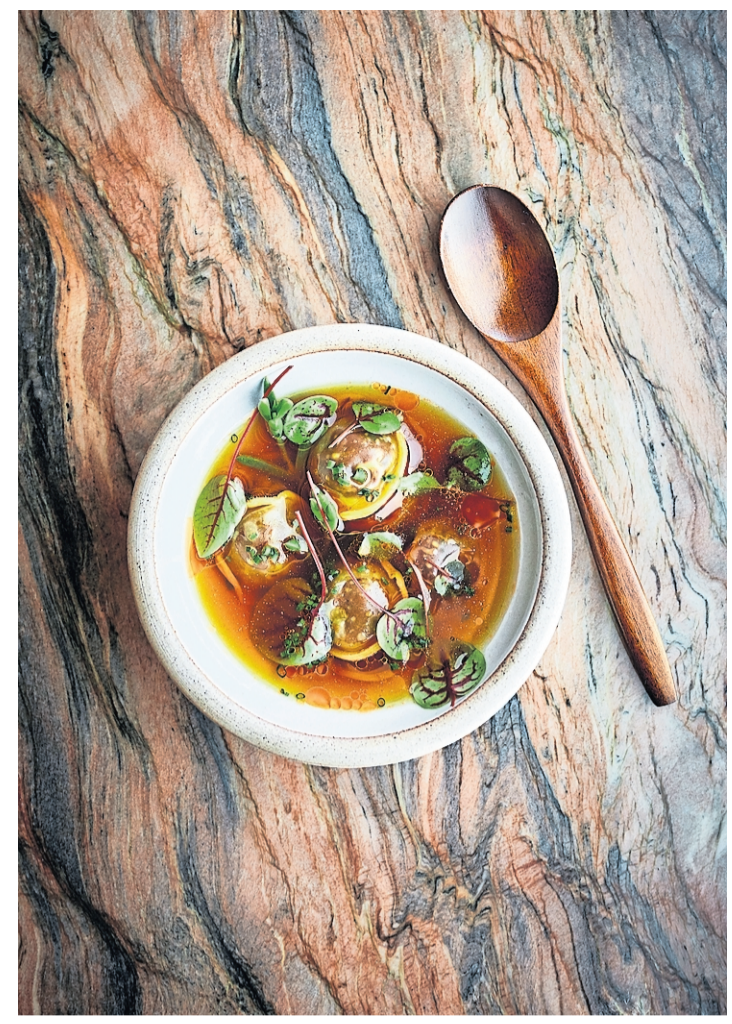
FAVOURITE CLASSIC WINERY RESTAURANT AMISFIELD BISTRO, QUEENSTOWN, SOUTH ISLAND
SAM SAYS "This is a lovely place for lunch. The food is very impressive. Vaughan Mabee is a serious chef."
TRAVELLER SAYS In summer, take a seat in the courtyard. In winter, cosy up in front of the fire. Whatever the season, Mabee's menu of small plates, and especially his degustation meals, make for a memorable experience. Mabee, who works closely with local hunters, foragers and fishers, is acknowledged as one of the country's best chefs; last year, he was crowned *Cuisine* magazine's chef of the year.
DON'T MISS The menu changes with the seasons but if it's on the menu, don't go past the paua (abalone) pie. While here, pick up some bottles of Amisfield's pinot noir.
ESSENTIALS amisfield.co.nz

FAVOURITE FINE DINING RESTAURANT RATA, QUEENSTOWN, SOUTH ISLAND
SAM SAYS "I don't like fine dining that much, but there are certain restaurants I have great enthusiasm for. Rata never disappoints."
TRAVELLER SAYS Founded by star chef Josh Emmett, Rata was envisaged as a love

letter to New Zealand. A sense of place shines through in every detail, from the urban forest that surrounds the restaurant to the rough-sawn timber ceiling to the restaurant's name, inspired by a native tree known for its crimson flowers. And it's there in the ingredients on your plate, from crayfish to native plants such as kawakawa.

DON'T MISS Rata's menus are updated regularly but two dishes that seem to have won a permanent place are the Cloudy Bay clams with seaweed butter and chives and the goats cheese profiteroles with honey.
ESSENTIALS ratadining.co.nz

FAVOURITE LUXURY LODGE CUISINE MINARET STATION, WANAKA, SOUTH ISLAND
SAM SAYS "New Zealand has some amazing luxury lodges with amazing food. Minaret Station is accessible only by helicopter [via heliports in Queenstown or Wanaka]; this is glamping with the emphasis on 'glam'. To have a meal up there among the peaks is really special."
TRAVELLER SAYS Given that the only way to reach this Southern Alps lodge, set at an altitude of 915 metres, is via helicopter, any stay here starts big. The food lives up to the rest of the experience, with seasonal dishes ranging from blue cod ceviche with coriander, lime, coconut and chilli to Te Mana lamb with eggplant and masala paste. Even the breakfasts make an impression, thanks to dishes such as creamy mushrooms with truffle, porchetta, sourdough and rocket.
DON'T MISS Let one of the lodge



Clockwise from main: A 'Kiwi Lamington' from the winter menu at Amisfield, Queenstown; Sam Neill, actor and winemaker; crayfish soup from Ahi, Auckland; Minaret Station, Wanaka; venison at Minaret Station; Urban Winery at Ahuriri, Napier, Hawke's Bay; and Rata's Kiwi dip Southland cheese roll.

helicopters drop you at a scenic spot for the ultimate South Island alpine picnic.
ESSENTIALS minaretstation.com

FAVOURITE SEASONAL KIWI MUST-TRY DELICACY BLUFF OYSTERS, SOUTH ISLANDS
SAM SAYS "In my view, they are the greatest oysters in the world. They are only in season for a couple of months of the year, but at that time any good restaurant will have them on the menu."
WE SAY These deep water oysters grow naturally in the Foveaux Strait, which separates the South Island and, sitting below it, Stewart Island, New Zealand's third biggest land mass. Bluff oysters are known for their succulence and their distinctive flavour with crayfish, paua, scallops, salmon, blue cod and whitebait also abundant here.
DON'T MISS The oysters' eponymous port town, Bluff, which is about half-an-hour south of Invercargill, the South Island's southernmost city, hosts an oyster festival each year. The Bluff Oyster and Food Festival 2022 festival is set to take place on May 21.
ESSENTIALS bluffoysterfest.co.nz

FAVOURITE PUB GRUB IN A SEASIDE SETTING DUKE OF MARLBOROUGH HOTEL, RUSSELL, BAY OF ISLANDS
SAM SAYS "This upscale North Island pub makes a great stop if you are visiting the nearby Waitangi Treaty Grounds [where New Zealand's founding document, the

Treaty of Waitangi, was signed in 1840]."
TRAVELLER SAYS This elegant and historic waterfront pub started life as a grog shop in the 1820s, when the charming village of Russell was the biggest whaling port in the southern hemisphere. It was later issued the nation's first liquor licence.
DON'T MISS The local Waikare Inlet oysters are a highlight, as is the slow-roasted lamb shoulder. The Duke of Marlborough wine list is outstanding.
ESSENTIALS waitangi.org.nz; theduke.co.nz

FAVOURITE MUST-VISIT SOUTH ISLAND WINERY FELTON ROAD, CENTRAL OTAGO
SAM SAYS "For my favourite South Island winery, I'm going to say Felton Road, our neighbours here at Two Paddocks. They're friends of ours and make terrific wines."
TRAVELLER SAYS Felton Road Wines has some of the oldest vines in the Central Otago region, and makes its wines using grapes that are farmed biodynamically on its three vineyards. Winemaker Blair Walter uses minimal intervention methods, avoiding fining and filtration and using only wild yeast. The cellar door is open by appointment only.
DON'T MISS Felton Road Pinot Noir Block 3; Felton Road Pinot Noir Block 5.
ESSENTIALS feltonroad.com; twopaddocks.com

FAVOURITE 'ON MY MUST-VISIT LIST' NORTH ISLAND WINERY URBAN WINERY, NAPIER

SAM SAYS "I get to Hawke's Bay at least once a year and always enjoy finding a new winery. The one that's on my list to visit is Urban Winery in Napier – I haven't been there yet but I'm interested to take a look."
TRAVELLER SAYS Housed in the National Tobacco Company, one of Napier's beautiful art deco buildings, Tony Bish's Urban Winery is known for doing things differently. Bish, formerly the winemaker for Sacred Hill Wines, focuses solely on chardonnays, and guests to his sleek cellar door can admire his egg-shaped fermenters made of concrete and French oak, as well as tasting his wines.
DON'T MISS The Zen chardonnay has rich layers of flavour over a citrus core.
ESSENTIALS theurbanwinery.co.nz

FAVOURITE CASUAL DINING SPOT AMANO BAKERY, AUCKLAND, NORTH ISLAND
SAM SAYS "You can really put on a few pounds here – I could quite happily eat my way through their range of cakes. Just try saying no to their chocolate tart – you'll never manage it."
TRAVELLER SAYS Occupying the ground floor of a heritage building in the fashionable Britomart precinct of Auckland's central business district, this bakery-restaurant is packed with atmosphere and amazing sweet treats. Whether you opt for something slightly unusual like the Basque cheesecake or keep it traditional with a magnificent lemon meringue pie, there's plenty to tempt you here. ▶



FIVE MORE KIWI TASTE SENSATIONS

VENISON New Zealand is the world's largest producer of farmed venison (above), and local chefs excel at preparing it.

GREEN-LIPPED MUSSELS Much bigger than Australia's blue mussels and best enjoyed steamed.

WHITEBAIT You will find whitebait fritters on almost every menu between August and November.

FEIJOAS Originally from Brazil, this Vitamin C-rich fruit is grown in many gardens.

HANGI Traditional Maori method of cooking using an underground pit.