

Food Producers on the Coromandel Peninsula

The Coromandel is known for its bush to beach beauty, but across the region there's a growing family of artisan food and drink producers who are adding to what the Coromandel is known for - they are making a splash both nationally and internationally. The Coromandel Peninsula is a full plaza of people, from its million-dollar, beach front bachers to the quirky, beautiful, rustic and off-grid lifestylers. What we all have in common is a love for the Coromandel and it is this blending of people from around the globe in idyllic, generous, natural settings that has led to our distinctive food culture.

To get an insider's view of the very best that Coromandel has to offer, we enlisted the help of a local to help navigate the well-known and not so well-known Coromandel cuisine highlights.

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BY PERRY CORNISH

For many, the Kopu bridge signals the natural starting point for any Coromandel holiday. A stone's throw from the bridge, and next to the Kopu Pub, is Blackbeards Smokehouse. With a wealth of kai moana being easily accessed across the region, it is logical that the Coromandel should have a stand-out smokery. New owner, Jessica Jones, has moved the business from Whitianga to Kopu. The new purpose-built shop and smokery is already gaining a dedicated fan base. Blackbeards has re-imagined smoked mussels with the divine smoked chilli and lime flavored mussels, but you'll also find fresh smoked fish and chowders and dips.

There's something nostalgic about Thames. It's possibly home to one of the most eclectic main streets in New Zealand. Hidden down a newly renovated alley at the northern end of town is the Coromandel Distilling Company run by Daniela Suess and Paul Schneider. Paul is a master distiller and makes Awildian Gin. This multi-award winning gin is fast becoming a classic for sundowners across the peninsula. Recently, the gin has been recognized internationally as the World's Best Classic Gin at the 2022 World Gin awards.

A little further up the peninsula you'll see the mussel barges and farms doing their thing but what you possibly don't know is that entrepreneur Lucas Evans is currently harvesting the invasive species caulepa, also known as wakame, and one of the most widely eaten seaweeds worldwide. Think Japan or Malaysia. Whilst it can be difficult to get your hands on this seaweed, you will see it popping up on menus, as all production is exported or goes into food service. Definitely ask for it!

If you're heading north from Thames to Coromandel, then you have to stop in at Coromandel Oyster Company. The oysters are farmed right outside the door. There always seems to be a good stock of fresh Coromandel mussels and Anne Loudon's plump oysters ready to go. But don't leave without trying the fish burger. In my opinion, it is the best fish burger in the country.

If you head out of Coromandel town and are going towards the Coromandel coastal walkway, then Herford and Pickle in Colville is the place to stop for coffee and to enjoy the well-stocked farm shop, full of meat and other homemade preserves and treats. True advocates of the farm to plate movement, all their meat comes from the home farm.

My next stop is in Te Rerenga to savour Castle Rock Fine Foods. With ingredients sourced from their abundant garden and local producers, this family-run business has been a perennial favourite for chutneys, relishes and dressings across the Coromandel and the Waikato. You can also visit the store on site in Te Rerenga. My personal favorite is Chili Lime Chutney.

A little further round the Coast is

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Kāoatunu. There's definitely something going on here. With little more than a pizza restaurant, café, general store and fire station, why is 'K-town', as some locals call it, such a foodie mecca? As the hordes of people queuing to get into 'Luke's Kitchen' will attest, there's nothing like munching a smoky woodfired pizza with a cold beer or wine after a day on the beach. But Kāoatunu has so much more going on! You can make that cold beer a "Salty Sea Dog" from local, Adam Coleman-Smith, and his fantastic Blue Fridge microbrewery. Grab the largest icecream in New Zealand or some local produce at the mini foodie mecca, the Kāoatunu store.

Another in this food fraternity is Kyle Dunkle, owner and expert chilli smoker, who makes one of New Zealand's finest ranges of chilli sauces - Uncle Dunkles. A short hop over the Black Jack Road and you'll get to Opito Bay, home to the eponymously named Opito Bay Salt Company. The clear pristine water of this remote beach helps create the multi-award-winning sea salt that's a Coromandel favourite and is also being used in some of New Zealand's top restaurants.

There are a lot of food choices happening in Whitianga. The French Fig Cafe and Blue Ginger restaurant are two particularly must-go places for the dedicated foodie. There's a new boutique gin distillery in Whitianga, 'Old Mate', for online sales. Heading South, there's some great off the beaten track places worth a visit. Wilderland Trust, located on the Tairua-Whitianga Road, has a store on the road where you'll find seasonal vegetables, herbal teas and all manner of organic and ethical products made in the community. Wilderland trust is an organic farm embracing the principals of earth care, people care and fair share.

If you're heading out to Cooks Beach, Hahei or Cathedral Cove, then there's a couple of places you'll definitely want to check out. Cathedral Cove Macadamias has a shop you can visit. Jillian and Doug farm 16 acres of macadamias in a pristine setting. The question is whether you opt for 'au naturel' or chocolate macadamias? Jillian also has great dukkas and rubs and crumb mix.

Mercury Bay Estate perched up on the hill overlooking Cooks Beach has to be one of the best places for lunch or dinner. The view across the vines, with Cooks Beach in the distance, is sublime. Try 'Lola' (sparkling rose), the favourite of Simon and Veronica Ward (owners).

Coroglen Farmers Market on Sunday mornings is a good way to check in on much that's happening foodie-wise. If you get an opportunity whilst at the market try some of Carmen Delights kasundi! It's magic. Carmen makes all her preserves and chutneys from the fruit and vegetables from her abundant garden.

Another must at the farmers market is Lihī Shaky's sour dough bread. But you'll have to be quick as she invariably sells out every time she's at a market. Originally from Israel, Lihī is known for her quirky Bread-mobile, a renovated caravan which you'll also find at the Whitianga Saturday market.

Still thirsty? New owners of the Hot water Beach brewing company have upgraded the facilities and are now brewing a range of very interesting beers.

My favorite is Kauri Falls Pale Ale.



Perry Cornish of Opito Salt Co.

I have mentioned that Coromandel is famous for its beaches, the other thing Coromandel is famous for, is its bush. With the kind of vegetation that we have naturally on the Coromandel, it's logical that we have a number of dedicated honey producers all making honey in different styles and flavour profiles. Sue of 309 Honey, Irma from Jacobs Well Honey or Deb from Old Coach Road all make honey that's distinctive and reflective of the Coromandel - high quality, pure honey.

Heading further south, two of my favorite food producers are based near Matatoki. Matatoki Cheese Company makes amazing gold-medal-winning cheeses. I'm a particular fan of the goudas. Visit the Cheese shop and café - it's worth the short detour. A little south of Matatoki is another award-winning food producer, Omaha Valley Citrus. With the title "World's Best Classic Marmalade" from United Kingdom International Marmalade Awards, you know Simon and Caroline take their product seriously.

About the Author:

Perry Cornish is a salt farmer and chief salt maker at Opito Bay Salt Company. Perry and partner, Erin Mone, make a 100% Natural artisan sea salt using traditional methods. Their range of sea salts has been awarded numerous gold medals at both the 2022 NZ Artisan Food Producer Awards and the Outstanding NZ Food Producer Awards. Perry and Erin are active members of the Coromandel Food Producer Group whose aims are to boost food tourism across the Coromandel and to promote Coromandel's unique food producing community.

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PERRY'S TOP PICKS:

- Bread: The Bread-mobile*
- Fresh oysters and mussels: Coromandel Oyster Company*
- Market: Coroglen Farmers Market*
- Smoked mussels: Blackbeard's Chili Lime*
- Fresh fish: Wharf Road Fish Supplies, Thames*
- Pub: Star and Garter, Coromandel Town*
- Restaurant: Tairua Beach Club, Tairua*
- Dark chocolate macadamias: Cathedral Cove Macadamias*
- Gin: Awildan Coromandel Distilling Thames*
- Chilli sauce: Uncle Dunkles Medium Chilli BBQ Sauce*
- Honey: They are all great*
- Marmalade: Omaha Valley Citrus - Lime marmalade*
- Cheese: Matatoki Cheese Barn - Camin Gouda*
- Sea Salt: Opito Bay Salt Co - Smoked Chili Sea Salt*

Castle Rock Fine Foods

Get to know this exquisite small family business called Castle Rock Fine Foods. It is small in terms of the key creators and staff - Andy, Shelley and Margaret, but not in terms of the range of quality tasting products ready for use in every kitchen. Castle Rock Fine Foods began in 2012 as a café. Andy is a chef with over 20 years experience and has always had a passion for creating recipes and enhancing the taste of basic products that people could use a lot in their cooking and as a relish with prepared food.

However, a drastic event changed the direction of their business. Andy had a car accident which rendered him a quadriplegic. His ability to plan and create recipes and new tastes was not inhibited in any way, but managing and being the chef in his café/restaurant was no longer possible, so the café closed. The family business transformed into something quite different - a focus on the preparation and production of their own special unique tastes; Andy coming up with the ideas and recipes, Margaret producing the packaging and labels for their products, and Shelley assisting with preparation of the recipes and operations.

Andy has gradually added to the range of dressings and chutneys that they first started producing in their café for diners. "Our customers would ask us where we purchased the chutneys used on our burgers, and the dressings we used on our salads. When they found out we made them ourselves from local produce, they wanted to buy them," says Andy. "That's when we started the production of chutneys for sale. We have now gone on to include a range of fruit dressings that are vinegar based and not produced anywhere else in New Zealand.

Shelley adds with pride, "None of our dressings are finished with any type of oil and that is our point of difference and flavour. All of our products



are gluten free, plant based, preservative free and are celiac and vegan friendly. Our chutneys are sensational as a pizza or burger topping and our dressings can be used on salads, as marinades, on vegetables, meats or seafood, or even over ice cream. It tastes just like the label says!"

The Cheese Barn

The Cheese Barn is situated in a picturesque area between Thames and Paeroa, only five kilometres from Kopu.

The Hauraki Rail Trail is 30 metres down the road at the back of the farm, so plenty of cyclists call in for coffee, cheese boards, pizza and ice cream. They make their own gelato and sorbet ice cream using the same organic milk and cream from which the cheese is made. The café is open seven days a week and is BYO licensed, so you can enjoy your favourite wine with a cheese board under the trees.

The Cheese Barn prides itself on its use of fully BioGro certified organic milk for its boutique cheeses, ranging from traditional dutch gouda, camembert, brie, blue, feta, halloumi, and mozzarella, plus a range of yoghurt, quark, cottage cheese, sour cream and ghee. Cheese maker Kelvin Haigh has been making the cheese for nearly 25 years and has an impressive array of awards on the wall.

Cheese tasting and talks for groups and clubs can be arranged with Cathy, Kelvin's wife who runs the café. The range of animals attract attention from kids and adults alike and can be hand-fed with pellets sold in the café. There are goats, guinea pigs, rabbits, chickens and birds, and there are often baby animals to be seen.

The shop sells a range of local gourmet foods like chutneys, pickles, olives, salami, and oils to compliment the cheeses, as well as a great range of cheese knives, slicers, boards and other cheesy related items. The quirky signs in the gift area always attract attention and the gift baskets and boxes are popular for the foodies in your





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lives. These make a good gift at Christmas time, as let's face it, who doesn't like cheese and all the goodies that go with it?

Cathedral Cove Macadamias



A warm welcome awaits visitors to Cathedral Cove Macadamias.

The 1000 organic macadamia nut tree orchard, planted on 6.7 hectares, just outside of Hāhei in the 1980's, is a well established property which also encompasses a wide variety of native and sub tropical trees in a park like setting.

The macadamia nuts are hand picked in the winter months (with nets being laid on the ground and the nuts raked off the trees). The green outer husk is removed before the nuts are put into drying bins with the final drying stage being carried out in a heat and humidity controlled room.

Once the nuts are dry (below two per cent moisture content), they are cracked and put through a colour-sorting machine. This machine distinguishes the cream colour of the nut kernel from the brown of the shell and sorts the nuts into different bins, although every nut is still hand-sorted for size and quality.

Then, the nuts are made into different products in the onsite commercial kitchen. Visitors can enjoy sampling the raw and roasted nuts along with the macadamia crumb mixes when visiting the orchard shop. Macadamia butter is a firm favourite along with the brittle biscuit made using the nut in a toffee mix.

Walkers along the Lees Road walking track are welcome to refill their bottles at the water fountain. With the orchard being the half way point between the Purangi River crossing and Cathedral Cove track entrance on Lees Road, it makes a nice stopping place to rest weary legs. Visitors are most welcome to wander around the orchard. There are even pet goats, and chickens, who happily receive pats.



Coromandel Oyster Co.

John and Anne Loudon have owned and managed the Coromandel Oyster Co. since February 2007, so this summer will be 16 years of operation.

You can purchase fresh Pacific oysters from their retail shop and Farm Gate Oysters, at 'Farm Gate Prices'. Their oysters have been wild caught and naturally grown in the pristine waters that are at the back of the retail shop.

You can also buy locally grown Coromandel greenlip mussels direct from the barge, fresh or steamed from their kitchen, to enjoy by the sea on their old working barges that are now a place to sit and eat fresh fish and chips, gourmet burgers or indulge in their world-famous GF chowders.

Coromandel Oyster Co. is also a part of the Coromandel Food Producers Group (@corofood), a group of likeminded local artisan producers, working together and supporting each other, so you can expect to sample and purchase Opito Bay Salt on the fish 'n' chips here; Castle Rock Fine Foods' sauces on the steamed mussels; 309 Honey and Uncle Dunkles BBQ sauce is available in the retail shop.

Their chicken burgers use Waitoa free-range chicken tenders, the steak burgers use grass-fed, Waitoa-grown scotch and the hamburgers include the Angel Bay gourmet beef patties. All the burgers use locally grown organic Pakaraka salad. The fish is freshly caught - NZ Gumard and Snapper - and locally grown Agria potatoes make the chips.

Do yourself a favour and make sure this summer you get to the Coromandel Oyster Co. for lunch!

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Join us in a beautiful setting of macadamias and native trees and sample free tastings of our macadamia produce. Self-guided and organised tours available.

OPENING HOURS
02 Jan 23 to 28 Feb 23
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Open by appointment while we harvest

Rest of the year -
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www.cathedralcovemacadamias.co.nz



WHITIANGA BUTCHERY

Your Summer Drink - Old Mate Gin!



Inspired by the Coromandel landscape and the region's culture, Chris and Sharee Green wanted to create gins which embodied the surroundings.

What started off distilling on the kitchen bench during the Covid lockdown, turned into online courses in the art of distilling gin. This came with a lot of experimenting, along with rigorous taste testing as the couple were not going to settle for a second rate gin. Distilling soon moved from the kitchen bench, to the garage, and then to the investment of copper alembic stills imported from Portugal, and to the couple's ice-making factory in Whitianga.

Old Mate's significant signature point of difference is Chris and Sharee's commitment to using fresh, local, Coromandel produce. Items are grown right here on the Coromandel, not only including citrus products - lemons, limes, grapefruit, and oranges, but also seaweed, pohutakawa, clover, pine, kanuka, manuka and honey from local hives. Old Mate Gin is produced using water from a local spring, and this is what Chris and Sharee agree creates the unique, distinctive flavour, a true product of the land.

Old Mate Gin hit the market in August 2022, with the launch of three blends, Signature Dry, Out the Gate - Citrus and The Captains Table - Navy Strength. It was distributed within several local bottle shops and located on the shelves of a number of the Coromandel's best eateries and bars.

Today, Old Mate Gin has received, not one, but three silver awards for its iconic Coromandel gin in the Australian Gin Awards, with plans to introduce new and exciting award-winning flavours for 2023.

Paired with East Imperial tonic and an Old Mate Garnish, you'll taste the Coromandel, your new favourite summer drink. Grab yourself an Old Mate and share some quality time.




BEST GIN
2022

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