

Celebrate with food

WHAT BETTER WAY TO WISH WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND, A HAPPY ANNIVERSARY THAN BY PROMOTING ALL THINGS SWEET, SAVOURY AND SENSATIONAL? SHARON STEPHENSON REPORTS.

WORDS SHARON STEPHENSON

Be spoiled for 'sweet' choice in Wellington.

When *The Tory* sailed into Wellington in 1839, it's a fair bet the first European settlers weren't coming for the food and wine. Back then, potatoes and wild pig were about as good as it got. Fast forward and the city that celebrates 150 years as New Zealand's capital on 26 July 2015 is a land of milk, honey, world-beating pinot noir and more eateries per capita than New York.

There's no better way to join the celebrations than with eating, drinking and having a rollicking good time. But here's the dilemma: if you're not a local, how do you find the best coffee in town or sniff out the tastiest gelato this side of the Vatican?

You take a Zest Food Tour. Started in 2003 by food lover Catherine Cordwell, Zest is a culinary tourism company that provides a behind-the-scenes look at some of the best artisan producers, restaurants and wineries Wellington and the nearby Wairarapa have to offer.

I should probably nail my colours to the mast: I adore food, so the chance to spend a sunny Friday morning stuffing my face while chatting to Wellington's equally passionate foodies seems like manna from heaven.

Our four-hour Capital Tastes gastronomic ramble begins at Civic Square, skirts the waterfront and ducks into College Street, before finishing in the Capital's funky Cuba Quarter. Today it's just four of us – our guide Heather and a Canadian couple who are as greedy as I am.

Our first port of call is Mojo Coffee Central, HQ for one of New Zealand's largest coffee chains. Started in Wellington by Steve Gianoutsos in 2003, Mojo now boasts 25 cafes around New Zealand and one in Tokyo.

Based in the elegant, heritage-listed building and surrounded by sacks of glossy coffee beans from Ethiopia, Guatemala, India and Mexico, Clare demonstrates the roasting process and explains the various taste profiles, while we sip steaming lattes.

As we amble along the waterfront, knowledgeable Heather explains the reason why New Zealand's capital was transferred from Auckland to Wellington 150 years ago.

"In the 1800s, the powers that be decided the capital should be in the centre of the country," she says.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY POSITIVELY WELLINGTON.



Havana Bar began life as two 'disreputable' historic cottages. Opium dens and gambling were the main sports here in Wigan Street.

“The harbour was also part of the reason, given that back then most members of Parliament would have travelled to Wellington by sea.”

Our next stop is Gelissimo Gelato, where Graham Joe chucked in a career in IT to open Wellington’s best gelato shop. Along with the usual suspects, he plays with interesting flavours including tamarind, peanut and black sesame seed and fennel and brown sugar. We let our taste-buds roam over the dangerously addictive samples and leave with tubs overflowing with more kilojoules than advisable.

A short walk away is the mother ship for Wellington’s foodies and chefs – Moore Wilson’s, a vast gourmet market which includes a cheese room, fishmonger, charcuterie, wine store, fruit and veg market, a Chook Wagon selling free-range, French style rotisserie chicken plus an Aladdin’s Cave of every kitchen utensil and appliance you’ve ever dreamed of.

We smother hunks of fresh bread that came out of ovens across the road with Kapiti cheese and lemon saffron chutney made by caterer Ruth Pretty a few postcodes away. Elderflower cordial, also made locally, washes the whole thing down.

On our way out, we swing by the vintage Citroen food truck parked on Moore Wilson’s forecourt that offers

frozen yoghurt and ice cream smothered in berry sauce so fresh you’d swear the fruit was picked just hours before. Sarah Harrow started Berry Culture last year, using fruit from her family’s berry farm.

It’s about this stage of the tour that I commit the ultimate fashion crime: wishing I’d worn a pair of elastic-waisted trousers. But who can blame me, particularly as the feeding frenzy is about to tip into overdrive at our next stop, the Wellington Chocolate Factory.

We smell the organic, ethically-traded goodness long before we enter the former shoe factory, now chocolate HQ. Our guide Miriam talks us through every step of the chocolate making process while we watch beans sourced from Peru and the Dominican Republic being lightly roasted.

We nibble on samples and thank her for the bars of salted caramel chocolate she tucks into our bags before we head to that Wellington institution, Logan Brown, for lunch.

A food tour is the ultimate way to say Happy Anniversary to Wellington, and the most fun you can have with your clothes on – if they fit any more, that is. •

For more information on Wellington’s 150th anniversary celebrations, visit [|@| www.wellingtonnz.com](http://www.wellingtonnz.com)



Breakfast at Pretab cafe



Charlie Noble is the place to go for great seafood with a Kiwi twist.