

# UNRAVELLING THE FOOD NARRATIVES OF AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND:

## Moving on from Pavlova and Lamingtons

Elizabeth Latham

New Zealand School of Tourism

### *Abstract*

For culinary tourism to flourish, stories of the people, places and food experiences must be told. A coherent narrative about the food culture and the food stories has been missing in the New Zealand context, and to this point food culture has not been used to draw visitors to the destination. The COVID-19 crisis may, however, be a turning point. This paper draws on content analysis and semi-structured interviews with food experts to explore current narratives to examine how cohesive they are, who is driving them and how COVID-19 has impacted them. In the New Zealand food story there are reoccurring themes of the tastes of the place, the potent flavours and ingredients mixed with the impact of geographic isolation. The importance of Māori values to the food story plus the immigrant cultures to New Zealand shape the diversity of the cuisine. The provenance of the food is linked to the people who make, grow and fish for the food. COVID-19 has created the conditions for a shift towards viewing food well beyond its place in commodity export markets. Government agencies responsible for international messaging are now taking notice, and there is growing interest in developing culinary tourism in New Zealand in a post-COVID world.

### *Keywords*

Food tourism, culinary experiences, COVID, New Zealand, Aotearoa; food culture

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## Introduction

Tourism is a valued part of the New Zealand economy (Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment, 2020). The country is largely promoted as a natural wonderland, not as a culinary destination. New Zealanders have tended to see food as a commodity export, supplying ingredients to the rest of the world, yet those same ingredients are the cornerstone of New Zealand cuisine (Latham, 2020). The potential importance of culinary tourism has largely been ignored. However, its importance for destinations is described evocatively in the Second Global Report on Gastronomy Tourism by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (2017), from both economic and cultural perspectives. The report includes multiple case studies of food linked with tourism to provide a vibrant platform to promote culture through cuisine. Food tourism is seen to stimulate local, regional and national economies and contribute, for example, to agriculture and food manufacturing (Hall and Gossling, 2016). It creates opportunities for links between producers and visitors.

One of the key variables that may be missing in the New Zealand context is a coherent narrative about food culture. This is not to say that narratives do not exist. Those closest and most involved with food tell evocative stories. Some champion food and food heroes who take to the stage in the media with vibrant stories and experiences. The recent rise to fame of Monique Fiso, with her Wellington restaurant and eponymous publication *Hiakai* (2020), has illuminated Māori cuisine and ingredients. Other fine chefs create excellent food and contribute to a dynamic culinary environment. Cultural diversity is celebrated across the country in festivals and farmers markets. However, culinary tourism has not been actively celebrated as a drawcard to the country (Latham, 2021).

Worldwide, people immerse themselves in travelling for a taste of the place to get a sense of the place (World Food Travel Association, 2019), seeking destinations throughout the world for their unique gastronomy (Hjalager, 2002). This travel is known as food, culinary or gastronomic tourism (Hall

and Mitchell, 2001; Hjalager, 2002; Wolf, 2002). Food is both functional and symbolic for travellers; it satisfies hunger and is a way to experience food culture.

Local food culture is a means to express cultural identity and lifestyle (Björk et al., 2016; Lai et al., 2018). Food is often described as a cultural artefact, expressing local culture and connecting tourists with a destination's landscape and unique way of life (Bell and Neill, 2013; Ottenbacher and Harrington, 2007; Smith and Xiao, 2008). For culinary tourism to flourish, stories of people, places, and food experiences must be told. The stories become an integral part of a destination brand, enriching the visitor's experience (Getz et al., 2014; Smith, 2015). As dire as present conditions may be, the post-COVID reset presents real and immediate opportunities to tell New Zealand's food stories in more effective and generative ways.

## Narratives

Storytelling and the use of narratives describe our experiences and help make sense of our lives. They stimulate our imagination and entertain us. A narrative describes people, places, objects, events, and experiences. Stories of a place can be a powerful tool of communication that is meaningful and long-lasting (Smith, 2015). As Fuste Forne states:

*Both food production and tourism industries are deeply arrayed in New Zealand identity, culture and economy, and ... there is a huge potential to narrate the country as an outstanding food destination, with a large offer of produce and events and a robust community of food lovers that includes farmers, chefs, journalists, writers, academics and food bloggers (2020: 90).*

Narrative and storytelling in tourism are multifaced and important in a range of settings from destination marketing to destination strategy development to the stories of travellers told to other travellers. Stories are perceived as more convincing than facts, leading to more brand trust, awareness, and uniqueness (Yousseff et al, 2019). Organisations use stories internally to create a

corporate culture. Storytelling is used in management and marketing to brand and advertise. A unique story means that the concept is difficult for others to copy (Mossberg, 2008). Multiple media sources are used to communicate the narrative and the stories of a place: print, photography, video and a range of digital options where visitors construct their own narrative. Influential visitors such as bloggers and journalists extend the spread of a destination story (Smith, 2015).

Food narratives play an important part in the stories about a country, and there is a significant relationship between the food image of a place and the intention to visit. Promoting local food as an attraction requires a narrative about local food and cuisine to be created and communicated (Lai et al., 2018). The language of the narrative plays a vital role in forming a sense of place (Lichrou et al., 2008).

In 2013, Tourism Australia recognised the importance of food in destination image for those who had travelled to Australia and initiated a highly effective campaign that created a food narrative of regional Australian food as high quality and modern with fresh flavours and fresh thinking. Indigenous, colonial and immigrant societies have introduced new flavours and ingredients, fusing into modern Australian cuisine (Lai et al., 2018). This could be an exemplar for New Zealand to follow. There is huge potential to create a narrative of New Zealand as a culinary destination to drive people to experience the diversity of the New Zealand landscape, the people, and food experiences (Fuste-Forne, 2020).

## COVID-19 and the Impact on the Tourism Industry

Tourism is often described as a fragile industry. Travel demand is highly susceptible to the shocks of wars, diseases, terrorism or economic fluctuations. Despite its fragility, the dramatic growth in the scale of tourism and other human movement pre-COVID resulted in the developed world being described as hypermobile (Jenkins, 2009). Before COVID, massive scale tourism projects were common, with profit the prime objective even when there were costs to the natural environment.

Rethinking was needed as global tourism exceeded planetary thresholds (Cheer, 2020; Gossling et al., 2019; Hall, 2019).

COVID-19 has been a disaster for global tourism (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2020). Disasters expose the strengths and weaknesses of affected communities' social and environmental systems, but they can be a catalyst for change. Disaster outcomes can create opportunities for political reorganisation, solidarity and activism, and social transformation (Ateljevic, 2020).

In the last twelve months, academics have been discussing the consequences of COVID-19 for the future of tourism from various perspectives. There is the potential for transforming the world and regeneration (Ateljevic, 2020). Others see that changes to tourism will be more uneven and that the value of international tourism will most likely continue to be judged by growth in visitor numbers (Hall et al., 2020). There is also a call for tourism to be measured by the extent to which it encourages human flourishing and the betterment of communities (Cheer, 2020; Harwood, 2020).

## Research Method

COVID-19 has also resulted in a shift in the value of food, a potential re-evaluation of tourism and a potential rewriting of the food narratives. This has underpinned the key questions of this research:

1. What are the various narratives of the food/food tourism stakeholders?
2. Is there a cohesive narrative amongst the stakeholders?
3. What do the various narratives describe about the food culture?
4. What are the consequences of COVID-19 on the food narrative?

This research uses qualitative methods: a content analysis of documents and articles and interviews to find, describe and analyse narratives. The content analysis serves as a backdrop for the interviews that serve to answer the key questions of the research and to contextualise the current narratives.

## Stakeholder Groups

For the purpose of this research stakeholder groups were established. Narratives were determined to come from different contexts and would potentially provide different viewpoints. This diversity would potentially enrich the findings. Five stakeholder groups were selected for analysis who have a relationship with food:

- National and regional government organisations,
- National and regional marketing organisations
- Food organisations
- Food businesses
- Media

## Content Analysis

Content analysis classifies written or oral materials into identified categories of similar meanings (Moretti et al., 2011) using a systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes extracted from the data (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). In an inductive approach, codes, categories, or themes are directly drawn from the data.

Documents and articles analysed were all available in the public domain. The documents selected were considered to be representations for each stakeholder group. A sample of fifty documents, reports and articles were selected from the time period January 2018 to December 2020 (see Appendix 1 for details).

## Interviews

The interviewees selected were a purposeful sample from across the same stakeholder groups as used in the content analysis. The selection was based on obtaining a variety of perspectives from different vantage points. Semi-structured interviews supplemented the document analysis to gain an in-depth

understanding of participants' point of view about food narratives. A set of open-ended questions was used to guide the interview process with the opportunity to ask supplementary questions as they emerged from the dialogue (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006).

A purposive sample of twenty people was selected to access experiences and views on food narratives (see Table 1). Purposeful sampling was used to capture the outlier or unusual view not available in methods that focus on central tendencies (Young and Babchuk, 2019; Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). The sample was mainly sourced through personal contacts, work colleagues or people whose public profile aligned with the topic. Data was collected around New Zealand in the home setting of each interviewee. Confidentiality of responses was assured. The transcripts were analysed and coded, categories and themes were developed from the findings (Stroh, 2000).

To meet the ethics approval for this project, the names of the food experts have been changed to ensure their confidentiality. The general occupations identified are accurate. Organisations are also not named to ensure confidentiality.

Table 1

Role	Pseudonym	Date of interview
1. Destination management	Javier	10 September 2020
2. Government food agency	Nathan	28 September 2020
3. Business advocate	Anthea	2 October 2020
4. Chef and food writer	Richard	13 October 2020
5. Destination management	Alison	14 October 2020
6. Food producer	Alexia	15 October 2020
7. Destination management	Gillian	21 October 2020
8. Food promotor and advocate	Susan	27 October 2020
9. Chef and food writer	Mathew	28 October 2020

10. Government food agency	Adam	30 October 2020
11. Food business	Rebecca	2 November 2020
12. Food organisation	Nita	5 November 2020
13. Food producer	Roger	12 November 2020
14. Food marketing and development	Kaarito	23 November 2020
15. Food business	Prue	23 November 2020
16. Food writer and nutritionist	Stella	1 December 2020
17. Food producer	Lisa	8 December 2020
18. Government agency	Mary	10 December 2020
19. Food writer	Alastair	11 December 2020
20. Tourism organisation	Min	20 January 2021

## Findings and Results: Content Analysis

A summary is provided of the narratives of each of the stakeholder groups and the themes that emerged from the content analysis.

### Government Organisations

Food features in national and regional strategy documents linked with agriculture, horticulture and fishing. Food and wine are generally acknowledged as important to the regions but food and tourism are not linked. The exception is the MPI/ANZ Agritourism Report (2018) which clearly articulates the value of linking food and tourism and the need to tell the stories of the place.

*Connecting our two biggest export earners, food and beverage and tourism, presents an opportunity for Aotearoa New Zealand businesses both here at home and in global export markets (MPI/ANZ Agritourism Report 2018: 2).*



## Marketing Organisations

At a national level food and beverage features in marketing works but not with the brightest of spotlights. Food and drink pages of the national marketing organisation, Tourism New Zealand, identify the innovation and creativity of chefs and dedicated producers are heralded. Tourism marketing food and drink images mostly picture young people, usually European, in a vineyard sipping wine, surveying an array of pretty picnic food.

Food is also often downplayed in marketing with mundane examples. The food in this narrative is pies, fish and chips, lamingtons, pavlova, cheese rolls and jaffas.

*Are pies the national dish of New Zealand, some would say it is fush and chips. But we beg to differ. The tasty pie is widely recognised as a New Zealand culinary icon and staple. What's not to love? ...the humble meat pie has been part of New Zealand cuisine since the early British settlers...the pie is never eaten with a knife and fork... that leaves your other hand free to hold a chilled bottle of L&P to wash down the pie* (New Zealand Story, 2020).

Regional marketing in places such as the Hawkes Bay, heralded as 'food and wine country' features food at centre stage with pages on their website devoted to its promotion.<sup>1</sup>

## Food organisations and food businesses

The narrative of food businesses and organisations describe our unique culinary credentials and that we connect people to land through food with abundance. The provenance of place is linked to the richness of eating food at its source. Our productive and innovative food producers work fertile land. A passionate and innovative food industry is stocked with talented chefs who advocate for those who grow the fruit, farm the paddock and catch the fish.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.hawkesbaynz.com/eat-and-drink/eat/the-food-guide/>

*Our food tastes fresh because we are so closely connected to the land and the ocean it comes from. NZ food tastes like its geography; we have unique attributes in our UV light, our maritime climate and our young soils* (Clifford, 2020a).

Food is also seen as a powerful expression of culture. Our diverse immigrant cultures provide a rich overlay to the Anglo-Saxon heritage. Māori values of manaakitanga (the process of showing respect, generosity and care for others) and kaitiakitanga (to have guardianship of and care for the environment) provide the essential underpinning to our food culture. As family-owned Māori food and beverage producer, Kono Foods explain:

*We have embarked on a journey of great introspection to determine what being a good kaitiaki means to us. To prosper, our environment must be well and healthy, full of life and vitality. The wellness of our people is intrinsically linked to the wellbeing of our environment. Love for land and respect for the sea must be ever-present* (Kono Foods, 2020)

The impact of COVID-19 and closed borders caused hiccups in the food supply chain and food insecurity for some. This highlighted the call for a national food strategy to address the food system and food insecurity. This call has been articulated most avidly through the voice of Eat New Zealand, a not-for-profit food movement dedicated to connecting people to land through food. The group advocate a “Citizenry of Food”, rather than a Ministry of Food.

*As calls for a national food strategy grow ever louder, it's this 'people in place'-centred framing that should inspire us. At Eat New Zealand, a national food collective, we've taken to calling this idea the 'Citizenry of Food' – a bottom-up, people-powered version of the top-down, status quo notion of a 'Ministry of Food'* (Clifford, 2020b).

There is also work underway by the Aotearoa Circle, a national think tank of industry and government leaders who have spearheaded a National Food Strategy Project working with KPMG

to: “shape the way our national food systems works so we create a productive, sustainable, inclusive and resilient food system for all New Zealanders” (Aotearoa Circle 2021).

## The media

Pre-COVID, media articles describe the potential for food tourism with a new generation of travellers who seek memorable, ethical and sustainable experiences. People want immersive experiences, and it is time to tell the stories of the place that will enable visitors to access the people, places and food. Those who promote tourism need to see the value of culinary experiences and promote the regions' food, reflected in this letter to the editor of *Cuisine Magazine*:

*There is no better time for us to drive our New Zealand food story in the direction we want it to go. Who knows? We might all finally evolve from the role of unempowered food consumers to becoming fully qualified food citizens and help create a celebration of our food, restaurants and food tourism (with a little help from government policymakers) in a way that is a win-win for all of us* (Brett, 2020).

COVID-19 moved the focus in media stories. COVID turned the focus to food sustainability, food security, food sovereignty. After the first lockdown, the emphasis also changed to reimagining tourism: who we are and who we attract. Issues with over tourism were discussed and a need for coordination across industries about food.

*For 150 years NZ has steadily developed an economy focussed on the production and consumption and export of delicious food. However the dark underbelly of food insecurity was also revealed with COVID-19. While more families than ever before cried out for food parcels and assistance, food was spoiled and wasted through inadequate distribution systems* (Jacobs, 2020).

The key themes established across all stakeholder groups can be summarized as:

- COVID-19 and issues of food sustainability, food security, food sovereignty
- The provenance in the place, abundant ingredients
- Food and nostalgia, let's be humble, evoke the simple food icons

- Food and people, creative artisans, communities and culture, multicultural society
- It is time to tell the stories of the place, to enhance the visitor experience
- Food should take centre stage and food and tourism are linked

## Findings and Results: Interview Results

The key themes identified above in the content analysis are also reflected in the results of the interviews. The interview results have been also catalogued by theme. The results are inclusive of all of the stakeholder groups.

The purpose of the interviews was to explore the key questions of the research from the perspectives of each interviewee, purposively selected to represent each of the stakeholder group. The twenty interview questions covered the interviewee's views on the current narratives, how that might contribute to food tourism, the narratives and the food culture, how cohesive the narratives are, who the stakeholders are in the food story and what it all may look like in a post-COVID world.

All the interviewees across the stakeholder groups contributed to the thematic analysis that follows. Key quotes from specific individuals have been provided to exemplify the theme. Each theme is identified in italics with brief explanatory comments and rich quotes provided by the interviewees.

### Diverse contemporary food narratives

The importance of Māori in the food story is a potent theme, particularly the values of Māori as they relate to food. Min refers to:

*Mātauranga Māori, the knowledge and the stories behind that, the ancient stories, what realm the food comes from, what is our connection to that, the people who work the ingredients and how they create something that can be shared with others. It is all about sharing with others.*

Rebecca discusses the role of Māori in the food conversation:

*There are lots of conversations at different levels, Māori businesses knowing their value, how to protect and share so that we don't end up with the haka and hongi. We are starting to value our offering. There is a massive opportunity to be that food destination.*

It is important not to underestimate the impact on the food story of the diverse immigrant cultures that have made New Zealand their home and the cuisines they have brought with them. “It is not just about provenance and ingredients, it is all about cultures, we have so many cultures now making up the fabric: Māori, Pacific Island, immigrant cultures”, adds Mathew.

There is a reoccurring theme in the interviews about New Zealand ingredients, the rich flavours and the places where food is produced and those who produce it. In Susan’s words:

*It is freshness, proximity, accessibility, producers, getting to know the makers, fishers, farmers. Everything tastes better at the source. There is a story behind every product, we just need to connect the experience back to the place and the product.*

Nathan proposes to, “allow for the distinctive story telling of food producers to be brought to the surface, allow their authentic story to come through.”

Societal issues are raised. Rebecca reminds us: “if you are food poor or suffer from food insecurity, you are not going to be a participant in a culinary conversation either by offering or acceptance.” Stella also points out: “There has to be access to quality food, we have an obesity epidemic, growing poverty, growing diabetes. At the other end of the scale we have the Sabato crowd”, (Sabato is a high end grocery store). “The stories can’t be whitewashed; our practices have to be as good as the stories that we tell”, notes Gillian.

### Quest for a cohesive message and a myriad of stakeholders

There are multiple stakeholders involved with food with different stories. The experts interviewed identified a lack of connection and a siloed effect amongst the stakeholders. Susan highlights:

*There are many stakeholders, outside the 31 government departments who are involved with food. There is a lack of communication, there is not a lot of interagency discussion, there is a lack of collaboration and joining the dots.*

Roger describes the silo effect:

*There are a lot of silos going on in food production, in the regions, across food producers, siloed from hospitality. There is a lack of alignment and a lot of duplication. There are strategies being developed everywhere. It is exciting, but it runs the real risk that we could go off in different directions.*

Despite this, there is a quest for a cohesive message. There is a new shift in awareness of food narratives amongst the stakeholders and how they fit together is still emerging. “Tourism New Zealand is waking up to food and beverage and catching up”, reflects Javier. Adam suggests:

*The challenge is to find a place for each in the food story, the big players are important because they have the capability. How do we balance that with the artisan producers getting a fair crack at supply, infrastructure and domestic sales?*

Constructive action could be a challenge. “You can pull all the stakeholders together, but it is one thing for people to gather and talk it is another thing for anything to happen after that”, Kaarito observes.

### An Aotearoa New Zealand story or regional stories

Regional stories are essential. “Regional stories can differentiate one spot from another, you want the little nuggets”, Alison notes. Roger adds, “That is where the real gold is.” Richard points out:

*Regional stories are important, but you have to stop trying to make it France or Italy, we weren't a whole lot of separate states that became unified. What we need is an exploratory task force going everywhere and basically drawing a map of food. It doesn't matter if it repeats itself.*

However many regions may not have not yet identified their food stories. Alison asserts: "Regions need to know what they have got, a lot of regions don't. They don't know their suppliers or producers because they don't view them as a tourism opportunity."

There also needs to be a New Zealand narrative. Min sums it up: "We are not a homogeneous country. It is important to have an umbrella narrative but within that the intrigue and curiosity comes from the diversity of the narratives in the regions."

### The narratives and food culture

The food culture is what is active and alive now; a diverse mix of lifestyles and cultures. New Zealanders are learning to be of this place instead of continually looking elsewhere to explain what to value. Richard asserts:

*Our food culture is whatever is happening at the moment, in an anthropological sense. Everyone has a food culture. Someone's food culture may be Doritos and McDonalds. There are others who are interested in food that is ethical, sustainable and know its provenance.*

Alastair identifies that we are learning to be of this place:

*We are an agricultural nation with commodity export, but we are learning to be of this place. It is increasingly indigenous, you didn't drink kawakawa tea on Ponsonby Road ten years ago, but you do now, so we are discovering the things of this place.*

Susan highlights our cultural diversity:

*We get very tangled up in this, it comes back to the fact that New Zealand is a place of many faces from different places producing many things, it is such a diverse offering our food culture, it is a bowl of stories.*

Rebecca reminds us of the indigenous space:

*It is open and eclectic by virtue of the fact that we are a young nation but we draw our authenticity, colour, strength and our values as they pertain to food from Māori. It is a unique and beautiful indigenous space.*

The casual simplicity of the lifestyle is central to the food culture. Gillian adds “We do simple well, we don’t have to put on a black tie to make it taste good, we do casual really well.”

### Communicating the food narrative

There is not a right way or a wrong way to share the food narratives. A grassroots approach is advocated so many voices can prevail. “The citizens will drive the narrative if there is agreement about what we value”, asserts Lisa.

There could be challenges in who tells the stories. “Gotta fish where the fish are [Tourism New Zealand] has the biggest channel. There are 50–60 million people on their website every year,” points out Alison. “The regions can take responsibility for scripting their offering but you need the sophistication of [Tourism New Zealand] to pull that together and synthesise that.” Rebecca adds. Alastair suggests, “There can be many voices and channels, it is not all about handmade cheese. There are different stories for different people.” Kaarito cautions:

*Can’t deny the channel to market that [Tourism New Zealand] have but you don’t want their voice telling the story. We should build a new platform that is just about New Zealand food, if we want a unique and epic story.*



There are barriers to communicating the food narrative, partly the low-key complacency about food. If you do a website search for New Zealand food a list that includes lamingtons jaffas, pies, fish and chips, cheese rolls and pavlova will appear. “Crikey, let’s upgrade the lamingtons”, says Roger. Richard highlights “we talk about food in a brave little way, with a cultural cringe and slight embarrassment.”

Communicating the food narrative also has an educative potential for valuing food. As Prue suggests, “Some people eat poorly and are not well educated about food”. Nita stresses, “It is really important to educate. We need to get in the ear of people with authority and educate them to respect our food story more.”

### COVID and a changing food narrative.

COVID has changed the food narrative in multiple ways. As Kaarito points out, “COVID has been a blessing for the food story, the essentialness and value of food and the essentialness of the people who produce it.” It has also been an opportunity for people to look inward. Min identifies, “It has made New Zealanders look internally. There are opportunities to reset with a transition to a new visitor economy that is fit for purpose and it is more self-sufficient with a resilient food system.”

Anthea asserts, “food is now essential, and the government now cares. It wouldn’t have happened without COVID they would still be focused on bungy jumping and adventure.” Susan points out:

*In the destination management space, many have identified a focus on food and beverage; it is quite trendy now, if one does it, they all do it. It links to love local, think local, support New Zealand and New Zealand is a food producer.*

COVID has also raised issues of food insecurity. Lisa notes:

*COVID forced us back to connecting as a family; there was much more curiosity about food. The story changed because halfway through the lockdown, 1/5<sup>th</sup> of the population were food insecure, so that changed the narrative.*

## The future food narrative of New Zealand

As COVID has changed the narrative, there has been a shift in how food is viewed. Where food sits in the tourism story remains to be seen. Anthea predicts the priority of Tourism New Zealand

*will be landscapes and the beauty of New Zealand. The people and the stories are part of the second tier. Food is part of that. Our culture may have a stronger positioning and food will have more of a presence.*

Mathew comments on our need to stop apologising for who we are:

*We are not the only country that is clean and green, but no one can copy our food. We must stop apologising. What we do well is our informality, entertaining in the back yard. On the edge of the water, beer in hand on a beautiful day, eating a whitebait sandwich.*

Rebecca signifies the future role of Māori:

*People are lifting their heads up and saying we need to be a nation of story tellers. The welcoming nature of us. Māori experiences are so authentic and heartfelt, you see and feel the values and have an affinity. We have to work out the benefits that will help communities; it has to be constructed and repeatable. There needs to be a level of commercialisation; otherwise it is just a joyous experience to the users and no value to those who produce.*

However, there are potential tensions that need to be addressed. The focus on clean and green, the 100% pure marketing message and telling stories that support that ideal, whether it is real or not, is a dilemma Alastair encapsulates:

*We will trade on clean and green and that is the tension. What we will say rather than what we should say. It is not about the (singular) New Zealand food story. It's about Aotearoa's (plural) food Kaupapa. Hikoia te Korero (walk the talk). From that, a pluriverse of genuine stories will follow. Stories we can live up to.*

## Conclusions

This exploration of food narratives identifies an evolving food culture in Aotearoa New Zealand. Central to the food culture is the taste of the place, the splendour of the ingredients and the diverse places food is produced in abundance. The indigenous stories relating to food evoke values of respect and generosity, connection and care and they are essential in any discussion about food in Aotearoa. No longer stuck with the bland Anglo-Saxon diet, there are a vast array of food options. Pacifica people, Asian and European immigrants all bring their cultures with them and their tastes, creating a melting pot of culinary ideas fused into something new and original.

There are multiple stakeholders with different stories and the food narrative is seen as disconnected. Of the multiple narratives, there is not one that stands out above the rest. Barriers to communicating the food stories still exist. The impact of those who do not value food is still to be resolved to ensure a coherent narrative. The interviews showed that the agencies responsible for international promotion have recognised that they should align their narratives to be more cohesive.

Tourism New Zealand is only now exploring how the culinary landscape can become a more integral part of how this country is profiled to the world. To date, they have only provided limited food promotion in their international marketing campaigns (Latham, 2021). A decade ago, a positive picture was painted, (that did not fully come to fruition), about the potential direction of food tourism in New Zealand (Steinmetz, (2010; Thomas, 2016). Recently the hospitality industry has demanded a shift in government action to develop the country's food story (Hemmington and Neill, 2021). The mood of the food experts indicated that it should not be Tourism New Zealand that tells the stories of the place but those with the expertise to do so.

The interviews identified that regional stories are unfolding as there is a stocktake of culinary resources and conversations about what should be shared. Regional tourism organisations and economic development agencies are writing destination management plans that include food and

beverage strategies, thanks to government COVID-19 relief funding (Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment, 2021). Some regions have stronger food and beverage offerings than others and may take a lead in determining and promoting food experiences. This may encourage others to draw the food map of their region and in so doing, identifying the breadth of culinary tourism experiences. Culinary tourism development requires a considerable array of food experiences (Getz et al., 2014), both in cities where diverse dining already lures locals and visitors, as well as experiences in rural areas. This can be as simple as easy access to farmers and fishers to bring producers and consumers closer. The stocktake of assets and experiences in the regions of New Zealand, as the interviews identified, is critical to success, as are culinary tourism strategies to gain the cooperation of stakeholders, to develop, invest and promote experiences (Ottenbacher and Harrington, 2013; Getz et al., 2014).

Food narratives go well beyond tourism. There is a sense of urgency to address the issues of food insecurity that COVID-19 highlighted. Creating a national food strategy that addresses the food system may help address the tensions that exist in promoting a country as clean and green and bountiful when not everyone has access to that bounty.

### **Recommendations for a bright culinary future**

Hikoia te korero, walking the talk, is the next step in the journey to clarify the food narrative of Aotearoa New Zealand and to translate the narrative into effective planning and development. This paper proposes new knowledge relating to the impact of narratives on food tourism development. Clear and concise narratives with dynamic linking stories are needed across the range of stakeholders. The dominant narrative in the New Zealand context has been food as a commodity, apologising for the food culture and presenting the food icons as humble and basic. This has limited the overall power of the food stories. There is indeed much more to the food culture than lamingtons. The potent food narratives of place and people indicated in this research have been outweighed by the apologists, however, COVID-19 moved the dial. In this time of reflection about who we are and our aspirations for a fit society free from food insecurity, there has been a significant shift in the

importance of food beyond its value as a commodity export. The shift is to taste it here rather than there. What follows is the potential for culinary tourism in Aotearoa New Zealand in a post-COVID world. Food has assumed another level of importance, and the government agencies responsible for international messaging have sat up and taken notice.

Just as the narrative about food has shifted, so has the reflection about what sort of tourism New Zealand should have. High value rather than high volume is a solution, where tourism generates common wealth: ecologically, economically, socially and culturally, and is measured by a broader set of values than visitor arrivals (Logan, 2021; Oram, 2021). Within value-based regenerative tourism, there is a real opportunity for highlighting the cultural experiences that this place offers (Carr, 2020; Simmons, 2021; Oram, 2021) and food is arguably a central dimension in any exploration of culture in Aotearoa New Zealand (Neill, Williamson and Berno, 2015). On the path to a bright future, Māori experience will be managed by Māori people telling their stories. Iwi (tribe) and hapu (sub-tribe) will decide how they participate in culinary tourism and how their potential experiences will benefit their communities.

It is the moment to be bold and proud of the food culture. There is more possibility right now of a cohesive food narrative to drive a new relationship between food and tourism. At the heart of the narrative are the people of Aotearoa New Zealand learning to be at ease in their place. It is time to shout out what we value in our food culture. The suggestion that successful food tourism should be developed from the bottom up because that is where innovation comes from (Mossberg et al., 2014) is supported in this research with the call for a “Citizenry of Food”. The collective voices of those who create the culinary experiences: producers, chefs and makers and those who advocate for food, must be heard as they are the key drivers of the food story. In the words of Lisa, “The citizens will drive the narrative if there is agreement about what we value”. The momentum builds as the myriad of stakeholders align to build our Aotearoa New Zealand food story.

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/0965254X.2018.1464498>

## Appendix 1

### Content Analysis Documents

Stakeholder Type	Document/Article	Date of access
National and regional government organisations	<i>NZ National:</i> NZ Aotearoa Government Tourism Strategy 2019 (MBIE), Tourism 2025 and Beyond (Tourism Industry Aotearoa), MPI and ANZ: Food and Agri Tourism Report 2018 <a href="https://www.theaotearoacircle.nz/land-and-soil">https://www.theaotearoacircle.nz/land-and-soil</a> <i>Regional New Zealand:</i> Destination Auckland 2025, Hawkes Bay Regional Development Strategy 2019, Nelson Regional Development Agency Annual Plan 2019–2020	March 2020 March 2020 April 2018 December 2020  December 2019 December 2019 December 2019
National and regional marketing organisations	<a href="https://www.tourismnewzealand.com/">https://www.tourismnewzealand.com/</a> <a href="https://www.newzealand.com/int/food-and-wine">https://www.newzealand.com/int/food-and-wine</a> <a href="https://dgit.nz/domestic-traveller-segments/">https://dgit.nz/domestic-traveller-segments/</a> <a href="https://www.nzstory.govt.nz/stories/">https://www.nzstory.govt.nz/stories/</a> <a href="https://www.aucklandnz.com/visit/appetite-for-auckland">https://www.aucklandnz.com/visit/appetite-for-auckland</a> <a href="https://www.hawkesbaynz.com/eat-and-drink/eat/the-food-guide-guide/">https://www.hawkesbaynz.com/eat-and-drink/eat/the-food-guide-guide/</a> <a href="https://www.nelsontasman.nz/visit-nelson-tasman/things-to-do/food-and-drink/">https://www.nelsontasman.nz/visit-nelson-tasman/things-to-do/food-and-drink/</a>	June 2020
Food organisations	<a href="https://www.eatnewzealand.nz/">https://www.eatnewzealand.nz/</a> <a href="https://www.restaurantnz.co.nz/Hospitality%20Report">https://www.restaurantnz.co.nz/Hospitality Report</a> <a href="https://hospitality.org.nz/">https://hospitality.org.nz/</a>	June to December 2020
Food businesses	<a href="https://www.visawoap.com/">https://www.visawoap.com/</a> <a href="https://www.kono.co.nz/">https://www.kono.co.nz/</a> <a href="https://comms.anz.co.nz/businsights/article/report">https://comms.anz.co.nz/businsights/article/report</a>	December 2020
Media articles accessed online from multiple sources (30 plus articles)	<a href="https://www.cuisine.co.nz">https://www.cuisine.co.nz</a> <a href="https://www.metromag.co.nz/food">https://www.metromag.co.nz/food</a> <a href="https://www.noted.co.nz/dining">https://www.noted.co.nz/dining</a> <a href="https://media.newzealand.com">https://media.newzealand.com</a> <a href="https://www.nzherald.co.nz/">https://www.nzherald.co.nz/</a> <a href="https://www.newsroom.co.nz">https://www.newsroom.co.nz</a> <a href="https://www.stuff.co.nz">https://www.stuff.co.nz</a> <a href="https://www.tvnz.co.nz">https://www.tvnz.co.nz</a> <a href="https://www.foodwriters.org.nz">https://www.foodwriters.org.nz</a> <a href="https://dish.co.nz/interviews/">https://dish.co.nz/interviews/</a> <a href="https://www.rnz.co.nz">https://www.rnz.co.nz</a> <a href="https://www.theguardian.com">https://www.theguardian.com</a> <a href="https://www.youtube.com/">https://www.youtube.com/</a>	January 2018 to December 2020