There's no denying it, Auckland is a feast of great food. From authentic Mexican and fresh Japanese cuisine and exotic Brazilian tapas and drinks, we are spoilt for choice in the City of Sails. The rest of the country is no different, with mouth-watering authentic restaurants seemingly opening up everywhere.

Part of the reason Auckland has a plethora of great eateries is simple - immigration. New Zealand is a nation built on immigration with most New Zealanders easily able to trace their ancestry back to Asia, Europe or elsewhere. Immigrants bring with them a diverse language, background and of course, food.

Stuart Deeks is known for bringing the successful coffee business, Esquires, to New Zealand. Then, along with his partner Ina Feimi, they launched the first Proper Pizza in Auckland, bringing the ultimate in European pizza to New Zealanders.

Stuart met Ina during the very end of his time at Esquires. She was the CEO of her family’s business interests which included those in the hospitality industry and they immediately became friends.

"After selling the business we fell in love and travelled together," explains Stuart.

"During this time she introduced me to Proper Pizza, which in Kosovo and her native Albania is the number one pizza brand. I loved it and would go so far as to say is the best pizza I ever tried!"

It’s obvious to see the genuine confidence that both Stuart and Ina have in their product. Not only have both of them been incredibly involved in the operational side but also the cooking preparation involved them experimenting with recipes and ingredients. The result is clear from the first bite - delicious, thin-crust pizza.

After a long discussion, they acquired the rights to New Zealand and Australia and now the company has opened its first store outside of Europe in Auckland.

"We had the opportunity to choose international brands that are already well-known in the New Zealand market," explains Ina.

"But after traveling around the world for two years, trying amazing dishes, seeing so many different concepts of cuisine, our hearts never forgot the joy we had when we tried Proper Pizza for the first time - and in the end that’s the road we chose to follow."

Annabelle’s restaurant in St Heliers is truly an icon of great food and flavours. A family-owned restaurant, it opened its doors 20 years ago in 1998. Owner Susan Cho and her husband with their young son moved from South Korea and grew the restaurant from just 20 seats to 75, with Susan also receiving a master chef qualification from AUT.

"I first came to New Zealand to gain a doctorate degree in horticulture. While already having a complete master’s qualification, it was only going to be a two-year study exchange," explains Susan.

"Instead, my husband and I decided to immigrate to New Zealand as we fell in love with the natural beauty of this place. It was the beginning of our life in New Zealand and we decided to open a restaurant because New Zealand truly has the best food in the world."

While the food in New Zealand may be the best, it’s the people who make it possible. From the chefs to the waiters, each and every person plays a crucial role in creating the unique and diverse food scene that New Zealand is known for.
but never in our wildest dreams did we think we would be owning a restaurant!”

Growing up in South Korea, food always meant family time. For Susan, every dinner was suddenly transformed into quality time with the family. This was very different to how people spend their time dining nowadays where most people tend to eat by themselves or eat while looking at their phones or television, she explains. With shared meals and different side dishes, every moment involving food was transformed into a sharing moment.

Susan’s husband Cho is an architect, and has been highly involved in the development of the interior design of the restaurant as is her son Sang, especially with the business development.

“The waterfront inspired us to serve fresh seafood. Some of our dishes are classics and we are really well known for them with our changing seasonal menu. Our menu has mostly western food, always with a little Asian touch and also some fully Korean dishes,” says Susan.

Ofir notes how his two sets of grandparents had weekly gatherings of the families, with everyone sitting all day and eating from midday till night time. One set was Israeli food and the other set was Russian-European influences.

“For us it is very important to represent our culture, traditions and gastronomy in the best possible way to New Zealanders,” says Luis.

“We are proud of our origins and maintaining our culture is in our business keeps us motivated and passionate about what we do. We come from a warm and friendly part of the world and we enjoy sharing that warmth and love with our customers.”

Since then, New Zealand has continued to experience a range of food and styles of eating from this region. Durello’s Marcelo Menoita and his wife Barbara, moved to New Zealand 10 years ago to give themselves and their children a better environment to call home.

“I was born in Brazil and learned from an early age that food is one of the best ways of bringing people together,” says Marcelo.

Marcelo explains that in Brazil, everything important happens around food. From family gatherings to business meetings to kids parties, if you want to please someone, you share a meal with them. So food is not only what you eat, but it’s a huge part of what you are as a person, regardless if you’re 8 years old or 80.

“Everything I’ve learnt in the kitchen was with my mum, Neide Durello. Mum who is of Italian origins was born and raised in the countryside of Brazil. She was one of nine children, which made her soon realise that love and affection combined with good food were essential ingredients for shared moments of happiness within the family,” adds Marcelo.

Almost 60 years and four generations later, Marcelo is bringing some of his Brazilian delicacies to New Zealanders, with the same passion and dedication his family has been doing for decades.

Their Brazilian tapas bar will be the first of its kind in New Zealand. It will bring people a taste of the Brazilian culture, in a relaxed and yet sophisticated manner. Amazing tapas, surprising drinks, exciting music all in a happy tropical atmosphere.

“Barbara and I have travelled, either for business or pleasure to more than 45 nations, so we did have a few options,” says Marcelo.

“Canada, Portugal and the US were on the list, but as soon as we started looking into New Zealand, we knew that this was it. We want to raise our grandchildren here, New Zealand is home for us.”

We invite you to try these restaurants, and other places, that share a piece of their culture and rich food history with us. There’s no doubt, that behind New Zealand’s thriving food scene are hard-working immigrants with a common story: a love for their culture and a desire to share this with New Zealanders, in the place they now call home.

Cecilia supports several charity organizations in Latin America and also tirelessly promotes the Latin American culture to kiwis through different events such as the popular “NPH - Latin American Market”. Rather than slowing down, the duo has a new restaurant opening in Wynyard Quarter in 2019.

Luis explains the importance of food in Mexico, with both he and Cecilia hailing from very large families where an average Sunday lunch could easily have no less than 20 people! Latin American is known for a great variety of recipes, techniques and flavours.

“We arrived [in New Zealand] in 2009 with the intention of moving to Sydney, Australia where I had a job offer. Things quickly changed when I had the opportunity to work as the Sous Chef at Non Solo Pizza in Parnell and had the honour to work with Head Chef Antonio Crisci. Through Non Solo Pizza we got a work visa and decided to stay longer than planned,” explains Luis.

“Award a couple of years working with them, we saw the lack of authentic Mexican restaurants in New Zealand.”

Eight years later, Besos Latinos opened its doors, the first Mexican/Latin-American gourmet restaurant in New Zealand. Luis has cooked for All Blacks, rock stars, TV personalities, and even President Obama. Along with managing the restaurant,