

NORTHLAND'S HARBOURSIDE

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Mangōnui Harbour has transcended its early-settler past and is now known for its kaimoana.

ON THE EDGE OF PICTURESQUE DOUBTLESS Bay in Northland, 36 kilometres north-east of Kaitiāia, lies the small seaside township of Mangōnui.

It's more than just a dot on the road map off State Highway 10 and while perhaps best-known now for its fish and chips, this compact coastal settlement was once a bustling port town.

Mangōnui was associated with whaling from the early-1800s, evolved as a trading port for Kauri, and by the 1860s was the administrative centre for the Far North with government offices, hotels, a hospital, and coastal shipping links with Auckland.

Gum digging, farming and flax milling also prospered, but when many of the town's services were eventually moved to larger centres, Mangōnui assumed a more laid-back persona with a small local population that swells over the summer months as visitors pass through and holidaymakers flock to the sub-tropical north.

Jutting out over the harbour is the Mangōnui Fish Shop which has traded from the prominent site since the 1950s, and where you can see sting rays, John Dory, and kingfish swimming under the shop along with pods of orca or local bronze whaler sharks out in the harbour.

Dine-in or take-out, the shop is now synonymous with the town, dishing up the quintessential Kiwi favourite fish and chips and other seafood delicacies to hungry hordes seven days a week.

Arguably best-eaten at the beach with toes in the sand and jealous seagulls squawking to join in, fish and chips are an enduring part of New Zealand's fibre with homesick expats united in claiming it's one of the things they miss most about this country.

If your "feed" is cooked a mere 100 metres from the wharf where the line-caught fish is landed, even better and that's just one of the drawcards of the time-honoured Mangōnui Fish Shop which is a non-negotiable destination for Northland's summer road trippers.

Current owners and trained chefs Lee Graham and Nina Quarrington, have manned the fryers since 2008 and love the vibe that comes with living and working in a thriving fishing village.

The well-travelled couple had spent time on the United States' northeast coast where little villages like Montauk Hamlet, New York sparked their interest in coastal living and they realised they could get the same way of life in Mangōnui.

"During summer these coastal villages briefly host many thousands of tourists and then as summertime ends, they return to the normal ebb and flow of living by the sea," says Lee.

"On our return to New Zealand we found an old Kauri villa under flowering Pōhutukawa in Mangōnui, sold up in Auckland, bought the fish shop and we've





nitrogen and trace elements back to the soil. “This holistic approach to utilising every last scrap of fresh fish is common practice amongst our community and a great way of showing our appreciation for this precious kaimoana.”

Lee says there are several fish species that he encourages people to try as an alternative to the ever-popular snapper, tarakihi, hāpuku, gurnard and his personal favourite – the prized bluenose.

“If you’re looking to incorporate more fish into your diet or wanting to sample something other than your standard order, try trevally, blue warehou or monkfish.

“They’re all great eating fish and comparatively good value, too.”

In the 1940s, Mangōnui had a smokehouse at the other end of the village and this was later moved to its current site adjoining the Mangōnui Fish Shop.

Through the smoking process, Lee and the

team add value to parts of the fish that are generally discarded by most commercial fish processors.

“Any chef will tell you that most fish tastes best when cooked and served whole with the bone in,” says Lee.

“Fish bones hold so much untapped flavour and can also provide usable meat even after the filleting process is complete.

“We hot-smoke the fish frames over smouldering Mānuka logs which imparts a unique taste and flavour to the fish.

“These make a tasty snack, or when removed from the bones, smoked fish is a great flavour booster in fish cakes or soups.”

As custodians of one of New Zealand’s best-loved fish shops, Lee and Nina believe they can contribute to its legacy by continuing to do what they do, well.

“If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it are wise words to live by when it comes to the core food

items that the Mangōnui Fish Shop is famous for,” he explains.

“Line-caught fish landed at Mangōnui Wharf, battered and fried using a batter recipe that has been handed down over generations, and served simply.

“As chefs, we are always introducing new side lines to the menu and our pāua fritters, chunky seafood chowder, raw fish salad and freshly prepared mussel fritters have been a hit.”

Lee says they will not compromise on ingredients or cooking methods, adamant that the fresh fish will always be the hero.

“In this age of ultra-processed food, we feel that it is important to create authentic flavour and texture by not taking short cuts when it comes to ingredients and preparation.

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LEE GRAHAM AND
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OWNERS MANGŌNUI FISH SHOP



been living the Kiwi dream ever since with a simpler life where we walk to work, and watch orca frolicking in the harbour.”

Lee says fish and chips are baked into our collective DNA and even though it’s not exactly a “cheap as chips” meal anymore and there are myriad convenience food options available, it remains a hugely popular choice and rates high on sentimentality.

“Māori legend says Ruakarama, one of the great voyaging canoes used in the migrations that settled New Zealand, was guided into the harbour by a shark with the chief, Moehuri, naming the harbour Mangōnui or ‘large shark’”.

“I clearly remember as a youngster spending my pocket money every Friday night on a comic book, hot chips and a potato fritter down at the local fish and chip shop in Onehunga,” he says.

“Waiting in the queue, studying the iconic New Zealand fish species laminated poster, the unmistakable smell of frying chips wafting in the air ready to be bundled up in paper, and adding a good squeeze of tomato sauce – those were good days.”

Mangōnui Fish Shop is a licensed fish receiver and as such, only sources fish caught through the New Zealand government-managed fisheries’ Quota Management system which supports sustainable fishing practices by limiting the number of fish allowed to be caught by commercial operators.

“It is important to us that we play our part in the sustainability equation by using line-caught fish and using every part of the fish – from the fillets in our fish and chip meals to the bones and heads that get sold as-is or are smoked.

“Even the fish innards are used, with locals digging the waste into their gardens to return



Raw Fish Salad

One of the Mangōnui Fish Shop’s bestsellers, this fish salad is both easy to make and healthy to eat – a rare combination!

Ingredients

- 500g fresh boneless fish fillets, such as bluenose, hāpuku, snapper, or tarakihi cut into bite-sized chunks
- 300ml lemon juice
- 200ml coconut cream
- 100g finely chopped celery
- 100g peeled telegraph cucumber, finely chopped
- 100g deseeded tomatoes with the skin left on, finely chopped
- Sea salt
- Ground black pepper
- Chopped parsley

Method

- Mix the fish pieces and lemon juice together thoroughly.
- Cover and place into the refrigerator for at least four hours.
- Stir the fish and lemon juice occasionally during this time so that the fish can be thoroughly “cooked” or denatured.
- After marinating the fish for 4-plus hours, drain the fish from the lemon juice.
- Add coconut cream, celery, cucumber and tomato.
- Combine gently.
- Add sea salt, ground black pepper and chopped parsley to taste.
- Serve – and enjoy!

Mangōnui Fish Shop, 137 Waterfront Drive, Mangōnui | mangonuifishshop.com