

Super-size my tandoori chicken



Amy Kelley

This week I had my first encounter with deep-fried sushi.

There it sat, a brick of crispy crumb-encased seafood staring back at me from the self-serve counter, threatening all my beliefs about sushi being a healthier lunch option than hot chips.

But as I slid swiftly onto the next offering, a seaweed-encased roll of cream cheese and pineapple, it struck me that sushi as the Japanese might know it has come a long way since becoming a fad food here.

Considering all the fuss over Japanese being healthy, "deep-fried sushi" seemed an oxymoron.

How often do we see Japanese folk lined up at the St Pierre's counter? Very rarely.

Because they retreat to the "real" sushi bars: pokey places off dingy alleyways where dishes like marinated mongoose and castrated catfish parade on circular con-

veyor belts. No double-avocado vego option there.

But places like these are difficult to seek out.

In the mainstream, Japanese has been given a Western-makeover; as have other foreign cuisines of which Kiwis claim to be connoisseurs.

Even basic Italian food has taken on a completely new form on our side of the globe.

I remember travelling to la bella Italia as an exchange student four years ago and being shocked to find that "real" pizza was nothing more than a thin-crust base with a smear of tomato paste, a dusting of cheese and a basil leaf or two.

But the freshness of those few ingredients equalled full flavour. There was simply no need for triple cheese layered crust or a "Meatosaurus" topping option.

And what about Indian? It should come as no surprise that the ever-popular butter chicken – Kiwis' most commonly ordered Indian dish – was actually developed by the English, for a stodgy English palate.

And apologies to sweet and sour pork eaters who consider themselves Chinese cuisine's biggest fans – the dish

is not authentic in the least.

Spanish tapas have also taken off here in the last few years. They were the inspiration for several newish metropolitan establishments, none of which have done particularly well.

Perhaps this is because anyone who has actually been to Spain knows that tapas are supposed to be robust little dishettes like puntillitas (battered baby squid) and chorizo al vino (wine-stewed sausage); not half a dozen vinegar-soaked olives and glamorised aioli on toast.

Neither are tapas supposed to come at a cost of \$11-16 per dish. In fact in Spain, they're free with the drinks.

So the next time we hold an Auckland Food Show and rant and rave about how international Kiwi tastes have become, or celebrate the fact that Peter Gordon's latest menu embraces the authentic flavours of the East, let us also take a look at how foreign food is being consumed on a street level.

Because there seems to be an attitude that we have the right to change anything to suit our tastes. That if a food is really so unpalatable, we can always deep fry it.

Peters' Teflon suits almost bulletproof



Daniel Pilkington

I must admit it, I like my politics best dressed in a punk rock suit.

I like it when boring old policy and legislation are tossed off the agenda in favour of a socially caustic cocktail of power-hungry attitudes that intoxicate with opinion, rather than fact.

I like it when my politicians' personalities are as distinctive as Marmite, not bland like Cruskits.

Which is why I love Winston Peters.

Whether he's nailing bottles of chardonnay and chain-smoking Winfield Reds over extended (free) lunches, or just attacking the media scoundrels scurrying at his feet, NZ First's lynchpin always manages to do it with gusto.

You could almost think he was New Zealand politics' answer to John Wayne.

Like UK rocker Pete Doherty, Peters has a special gift for generating the foul smell of bad publicity. Be it sitting on poisonous spiders in Kuala Lumpur (while lunching of course), or shaking the conspiracy stick with a wine box full of documents under his wing, old Pete's antics are always guaranteed to get some ink.

But unlike Kate Moss' notorious ex-beau, Peters always manages to stay afloat during the bad weather.

He just has the knack for coming out of even the worse predicaments like a Cheshire cat with a fresh bowl of milk.

Last year's general election was the perfect example. Having been soundly defeated in his once-prized

Tauranga electorate by a distinctly uncharismatic, pear-shaped ex-builder, Peters managed to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat.

In battering a ministerial role out of thin air from an obviously desperate Helen Clark, Peters proved there was life in the boy yet.

Amazingly, this feat wasn't even on par with his best work, the hijacking of the inaugural MMP election in 1995.

This drama saw the cunning old fox playing the country's major parties off against each other, securing himself the deputy prime minister's job in a National-led government in the process.

Coincidentally, Peters, an ex-National MP, had previously sworn he'd never work with National. Ever. Now that's what I call punk rock.

And while most politicians will get away with only one major blunder in their career, Peters is one of the very prestigious few who seem to tip-toe from one mistake to the next with the refined air of a ballet dancer.

How on earth does he do it? Personally, I believe it has something to do with the man's supreme fashion-sense.

Peters is always suave, looking his charismatic best in a range of stunning suits.

And whereas the grim-looking attire worn by most MPs during their worst hours always seems to give off the aura of a convicted paedophile in the dock awaiting sentencing, Peters' pin-striped masterpieces just gush with innocence.

For this reason, it is my firm belief his tailor fashions his clothing from only the finest Teflon.



Whangarei: it's north of Auckland...



Jocelyn Rein

On my last trip to Whangarei, I drove past a car with an advert on its side.

The background of the sign was an eye-catching backdrop of some of the region's beaches.

Pohutakawa overhanging the myriad of inlets voted some of the world's most beautiful.

The designer scrawl on the side of the car boasted: "Whangarei? It's a great place."

Having spent several weeks in the city, I feel more qualified to comment than your average parochial jafa.

There is a blinding untruth in this promotional slogan – the word "great."

As a visitor to the city who was bitterly disappointed on several occasions, I feel it is my responsibility to suggest a few more accurate slogans for the city.

Actually "city" is not quite the right word. Whangarei's population is just under 50,000, making it almost a city. But not quite.

When I asked a Whangareite about one of the many things that perturbed me about the town, I was met with a pre-packaged counter-attack including: "The nightlife's actually pretty good", "The beaches are beautiful", "Just wait for summer, it's a different city!"

Such defence mechanisms can only have manifested

themselves in the minds of a population who KNOW they're not quite a city.

Slogan suggestion number one: Whangarei? It's almost a city!

As you drive into Whangarei, signs starting about 8km out of town advertise the "Town Basin", Whangarei's answer to the Viaduct.

Maybe it was just the jafa in me, but after a week of boredom, sometimes all I want is a little Sunday R&R and an overpriced brunch at a café.

So you can imagine my despair when, upon heading down to the basin just after 2.30pm, I found all kitchens closed and the entire area empty of any fellow brunchers. In fact empty of anyone at all.

After further exploration, I realised that no, it wasn't a public holiday. Places simply seemed to be closed for no good reason other than it was Sunday.

Slogan suggestion number two: Whangarei – it's a great place (until 2.30pm).

Ask anyone what there is to do in Whangarei and they'll wax lyrical about their beaches.

But do not be fooled. Indeed the beaches on the Tutukaka coast are beautiful on a sunny day.

Pity the coast is half an hour's drive away, ruling out a casual stroll to the beach.

And don't get me started on the cultural attractions. The Millenium sculpture... The waka and wave – which has only just been completed – is something of an eyesore

and cost a whopping \$500,000. And where have the Whangareites chosen to put their beloved sculpture? At the end of a deserted paddock out the back of the town's industrial sector. Not exactly a picturesque tourist mecca.

For most New Zealand towns, small or large, the equation of All Black test match win against the Aussies + a clear Saturday evening = a busier-than-usual night in town.

But upon leaving a main street pub after the game, we were dismayed to find not a single other soul in sight, let alone a town centre buzzing with victory fever.

After searching high and low for any sign of life in the town, slogan suggestion number three dawned terrifyingly on me: Whangarei? We support Australia.

To be fair, it's not Whangarei's fault it's not right on the shoreline. And it's not Whangarei's fault that everyone who leaves school heads straight for Auckland.

Maybe it's not the town's fault either that the demographics left behind don't want to, or simply can't afford to get out. And it's not Whangarei's fault that it lives in the shadow of the biggest city in the country.

My gripe lies simply in the advertising. When a town is so bereft of any decent social atmosphere, there comes a point when it is impossible to ignore the fact that it is most definitely not a great place.

I suggest strongly that the poor bastards stuck with the job of promoting the city's image just stick to:

Whangarei? It's a place.