

PALMYTM PROUD

ISSUE 20







He Toka Tu Moana
Palmy artists Rewiti Arapere
and Erena Arapere (Baker)
(2022) Sydney Biennale

Story on page 6

PALMY PROUD

ISSUE 20

Palmy Proud is produced twice a year and is a brag book of the best of Palmerston North.

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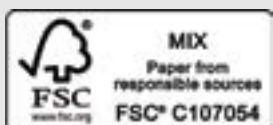
Cover:

Aly Viliamu on He Ara Kotahi

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Reweti Arapere

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Kia ora tātou,

As we head into the busy summer and autumn months, there is so much to see and do in our great city.

These two seasons are the best time for making the most of family, food, music and entertainment, outdoor recreation and enjoying the events, scenery, and activities that our wonderful city and Manawatū offer. This edition of Palmy Proud is all about getting out and about, and exploring and encouraging friends and family to the city for an adventure.

If you do have out of town visitors or loved ones visiting, our isite staff have a wealth of knowledge and itineraries to suit everyone's needs. You don't have to be a tourist either – they love sharing great spots with Palmy locals too.

We've made a point of highlighting free activities and events in this edition – including a feature on our premier and nationally rated park and gardens, Victoria Esplanade. We're also highlighting the wonderful new digital tourism initiative Hei Ara Kōrero, from Rangitāne Iwi, which allows you to explore the history of our river while you're out and about.

Don't forget we also have a bustling events season with Christmas events, New Year, Waitangi, Esplanade Day, and our iconic Festival of Cultures weekend, all free for our community. There are also some great paid events at our Central Energy Trust Arena, such as speedway, cricket at Fitzherbert Park and horseracing at Awapuni, motorsport at Manfeild and a range of events at The Regent Theatre, Centrepont Theatre and The Globe too. Keep an eye on the council website and Facebook page to stay up to date with these. This edition also highlights some great new businesses to visit and highlights some innovative initiatives that we're very proud of too.

Please share a copy of this with your visitors and loved ones and help show what a great city Palmerston North is to live, and visit. You can give them hard copies or send them a link from our council website. Wishing you all a safe and happy summer season with your loved ones, and a happy 2025.

Ngā mihi nui,

Mayor Grant Smith JP
Palmerston North City

Inside
this issue

| | | | |
|---------------------------------------|----|--------------------------------------|----|
| Together in art | 6 | Cream of the crop | 24 |
| Victoria Esplanade... We love you! | 10 | Cocktails, comfort and city views | 28 |
| Acting up | 12 | Jumping into life | 30 |
| Stepping towards our history | 16 | isite has the scoop! | 34 |
| Where beauty blooms | 20 | George Street gets its groove on | 36 |





Together in art

Palmy Māori visual arts couple
infuse whānau and collaboration.

Stepping behind the garden wall into the inner-city sanctuary of Erena and Reweti Arapere, it is clear art is the heart of this whānau.

Their character home is an easel that expresses who they are. Art hangs or sits in every available space, some of it their own, some acquired over years. In their studio, whānau is central. It's the school holidays when we catch up and Baby Shark, a notable juxtaposition, rings out from the children's lounge area and blends with Erena (Baker) and Reweti's creative spaces.

Māori art that features in Palmy, nationally and internationally is shaped here. Reweti primarily works on commercial projects, an example of which is the legend of Haunui-a-Nanaia showcased at Palmerston North Airport. The illustrations depict Hau and his journeys that named rivers throughout Whanganui, Rangitikei, Manawatū and Wairarapa. He's made laser-cut steel public sculptures for Bulls, just finished a graphic novel, and is working on a digital mural for the new Massey vet school with a narrative about the huia bird and its history in the Ruahine and Tararua ranges.

"I'm a bit of a mixed-media artist," Reweti says. "I studied as a painter, doing camouflage-kowhaiwhai styles. I did my Masters around the painted representation of carved figures, which led to my current practice. I usually have some element of using the metaphoric human form, use of tiki and carved poupou and I take aspects of cultural narratives."

Erena's solo work is lens-based. "It's work that talks about the importance of photography for Māori. So why portraiture holds such a strong presence in the whare tupuna and serves as a powerful medium for remembrance."



She's also a member of the Mataaho Collective, whose four wāhine Māori practitioners produce large-scale fibre-based installations nationally and internationally, notably winning the prestigious Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale 2024 for Takapau 2022.

Day jobs support their creative aspirations. Reweti (Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Tuwharetoa) is a pou tikanga (cultural advisor) for the Māori Health Directorate at Palmerston North Hospital. Erena (Te Atiawa ki Whakarongotai, Ngāti Toa Rangātira) is a lecturer at Massey's Māori Visual Arts programme Toioho ki Āpiti.

Growing together

This creative love story started with two teenagers being introduced through a cousin. But it is art that drew them together. "We were both working on our year 13 panels that you do in art, we just really became friends because of the art that we like," Erena says. Together, they completed Massey's Toioho ki Āpiti programme.

Now they have three children, Taupounamu, 10, Parekōhatu, 7, and Unaiki, 3. Only te reo Māori is spoken in the home and the kids are in total immersion kura kaupapa Māori, like their father experienced before them. "I like our kura, Mana Tamariki, it's one of the most prestigious. There are awesome artworks all around it," Reweti says.

Are the kids artistic too? "Yeah they all are, but what kids aren't," Erena says. "I think all kids are creative, but sometimes, as they get older, they start to believe they are not."

Reweti adds that creativity comes out of the whānau structure. Referring to a piece he exhibited at the Dowse Art Museum in Lower Hutt about Rangimatua, the Sky Father: "My first artwork as a father was a 5-metre high cardboard tiki. I wanted there to be an arch, a strong form, so the sculpture is roughly based on the size of my son and the size of a house. He could walk between the legs, kids could interact with the art. I was responding to being a dad. My son was learning how to walk as it was being built.

"I like to say you can't have Māori art without Māori, and Māori without family and collaboration."

And collaborate they do, combining Reweti's drawing practice and Erena's portraiture. "Then we decided to learn a new skill, the silk screenprint, to kind of step away from what we already knew," Erena says.

How do they work together? "Pretty good, but we are husband and wife, so there's some tension at times, but mainly a lot of support," Erena says. "It works a lot better when we aren't working on a big project at the same time."

"I like to say you can't have Māori art without Māori, and Māori without family and collaboration."
– Rewiti Arapere

Wahine doing big things together

Erena's practice with the Mata Aho Collective (Sarah Hudson, Bridget Reweti and Terri Te Tau) is fibre-based installations on a huge scale. We're talking room-filling size that involves heavy machinery to help install quite delicate results. "We make works that someone couldn't in individual practice. It requires working together. So it's quite a big practice in size and the commitment it takes.

"It's a wananga-based practice, so that means we get together for intensive periods and make the work. That allows us, when we're home, to concentrate on our family and when we're working, we're working."

Moments that make you proud

Winning at Venice is up there for Erena, but "there are little proud moments that happen all the time when you finish a project and that kind of feels better."

Family again is also important. "The work that I do with the collective happens overseas or in distant main centres. The installation we had last year at Te Papa was the first time that a lot of our family got to see the work that we make. Because it's installation work, it happens only in that space."

Reweti jokes, "When I agreed to do the Palmerston North Airport artworks, I would have done that for nothing, just to make Mum proud. I didn't realise at the time the impact it would have – welcoming and farewelling family and friends to Palmy, sometimes arriving from overseas. Many have told me it's become a special part of those moments."

Inspired by Palmy

Erena values her role at Massey as it allows her to have an impact through teaching Māori art in this community. In return, Toioho ki Āpiti has led to a supportive local Māori visual arts community.

"A lot of prestigious artists have lived here, people who have influenced and taught us.

"Māori visual arts is a small group, so we know most of those artists. They are impacting the main centres and the world through frequent exhibitions. We're hoping there will be more exhibiting here."

The couple believes Palmy's a great place to live. "Most people are living a nice life here, but keeping it under the surface, not shouting about it. We're a little bit humble.

"I know from being a child here and having children here that it's a great place to raise kids," Erena says. "There are cool parks, lots of places to ride your bike. It's an easy commute for most to mahi, and to run and pick them up and take them to swimming and here and there. We spend a lot of time at Himatangi Beach."

Coming up

Erena's Toioho ki Āpiti students' works will be on show at Te Manawa Art Gallery through to March 2025.

The Mata Aho Collective is in residence at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery over the 2024-25 summer. There are international works on the cards too, but "they have NDA", Erena says.

Reweti is in a similar situation – he can neither confirm nor deny he has an artwork that's out of this world ... we'll just have to watch this space. ♡





“Most people are living a nice life here, but keeping it under the surface, not shouting about it. We’re a little bit humble.”
– Erena Arapere (Baker)





Victoria Esplanade...

We love you!

Why don't you come for a walk? Kids in tow?

Cool, we'll start at the playground. Head to the grand old trees, give them a hug and then let the kids loose. Spinners, slides, swings – stuff to jump on, hoon around, leap from and climb. It's top-notch and a great place for little people to burn some energy.



Kids have whooped and hollered in this space since 1897 when the Victoria Esplanade was opened.

Why the name? Well in 1897 Queen Victoria was celebrating her sixtieth year on the throne. The Esplanade was fairly basic when it opened but, with much work put into it over the decades, the playground area is now seriously epic. It even boasts a separate space for the tiddlers and there's a junior road safety park where kids can ride their bikes or scooters and learn some road smarts.

Ok what next? Time to say "kia ora" to the mighty Manawatū River. The river pathway is a snaking 3.5km rope of walkways – a neat place to get into the native bush while catching glimpses of the awa. Let's add a dog into our imaginary walk because, yes, they are welcome (although not in the playground). Back in the day, the area was forested in kahikatea, rimu and tawa and so the ngahere (bush) that we now enjoy is a nod to those wilder times. It is one of the few remaining areas in the region, so it really is a living taonga.

As we step away from the river, pat the dog and round up the kids, we enter a more formal area of the Esplanade. A fernery bridges the gap between the ngahere and the manicured annual and perennial beds. Mature, arching trees beckon us in. In 1909, Peter Black was made the Esplanade's curator and he set forth to formalise the garden spaces. The Esplanade's conservatory is named after him, housing a collection of subtropical plants. The kids can put on their best David Attenborough voices as they read about orchids and exotics. And when it feels like time to smell the roses, well, there are 5,000 to sniff in the rose gardens. Lie in the grass for as long as the kids let you or until they hear the whistle of the Esplanade Scenic Railway.

Squeeze your adult-sized legs in a mini carriage and plonk a kid on your lap. This cute-as-a-button Thomas the Tank Engine wannabe is a must-do. Run by enthusiastic volunteers, the train will take you back through the ngahere, past the café where you'll be dragged at some point to get an ice cream, and through the epic playground.

The railway was established in 1969 and the original train was a small-scale replica of NZ Rail's DA Locomotive. Built by Berry Engineering, it was paid for with a loan from the Palmerston North City Council. The railway was such a hit that the loan was all squared up within the year.

The kids are hot now. Paddling pool ahoy! Grab some shade under the historic palm trees and let the kids have a splash. These giant palms have been adding some glamour to the Esplanade since the mid-1930s and the paddling pool was presented to the children of Palmerston North by the local Returned and Services' Association (RSA) branch in 1937. It was built in the shape of an RSA badge and is an absolute Palmy icon.

It might be time for this walkabout to scoot home for a feet-up cup of tea but next time there's a whole other list of stuff to do. There's the Central Energy Trust Wildbase Recovery Centre where you might just catch a glimpse of one of Aotearoa's endangered birds. There's the Lido Aquatic Centre, Palmy's biggest swimming complex and there is even mini golf. But for now, this love letter is signing off ... it's time to put the jug on. ♡



Acting up

What started as a small theatre initiative has since grown into a well-respected and thriving community, built on passion, creativity, and an unshakeable dedication to the arts.



As Palmerston North evolved in the early 1900s, so did its appetite for local live entertainment and performances that brought theatre lovers together. Enter groups such as the Palmerston North Operatic Society, now known as Act Three Productions.

Like the shows it stages, the society has a story to tell. In the late 1980s, it had a metamorphosis into Abbey Musical Theatre, a name that resonated through the community for many years. It also ran the Children's Abbey Theatre School and a costume hire business.

Low intakes meant the children's school dropped its final curtain in the early 2000s, which was followed in 2017 by the closure of the costume hire business. The costumes were sold to local enthusiasts who set up Groovylicious Costumes, allowing a piece of the society's legacy to live on.

As Abbey Musical Theatre, the society performed more than 120 plays, musicals and revues. Most of these were at the beloved Abbey Theatre building, a former church on Church Street, before it was sold in 2016 and the society relocated to the Wallace Development Company Theatre in Hokowhitu.

The move sparked a rebrand. Following feedback from members, the name Act Three Productions was chosen. This symbolises the unseen efforts behind each production, the hard work, dedication and passion that volunteers pour into every show. Along with the new name came a new tagline, He Whānau Tuatinitini – a family of many strands.

Family experience

For Act Three Productions, family is a lived experience. Whether on stage or behind the scenes, volunteers come together with one goal in mind – to create something special. This is a theatre family built on inclusivity, community and support, where every individual, no matter their role, contributes to the magic of live theatre.

Society president Allan Nagy knows this well, saying the time and effort volunteers invest is staggering. For example, the 2009 production of Miss Saigon required more than 50,000 volunteer hours from concept to performance.

It takes about two years of preparation to put on a show, with volunteers contributing in all areas, from sound and lighting design to set construction and stage management. "It's not just the effort for the cast and crew but the effort on the families and partners of those involved and we want to acknowledge that," he says.

The current membership of about 200 is an intergenerational mix of talent. The average age of the crew is around 21, but there are also members in their 40s, 50s, and 60s, which creates a strong environment for learning and collaboration. The society works closely with local schools, offering students theatre experiences and fostering the next generation of talent. "It's incredibly rewarding to see the younger generation bringing fresh energy into our productions," Allan says.

Shooting for the stars

Act Three Productions has never been one to shy away from ambitious productions – Miss Saigon is a case in point. "Casting was a significant challenge, as the production required performers of Asian descent for key roles," Allan says.

The society collaborated with Palmy's International Pacific College and even managed to secure Melinda Chua, a Broadway actress, to play the lead role. A week before opening night, the lead for the role of John suffered an injury. Fortunately, they were able to bring in a last-minute replacement, showcasing the resilience and determination of the team.

The production was a resounding success, earning the society a regional service award and further solidifying its reputation for delivering world-class performances.

"It's incredibly rewarding to see the younger generation bringing fresh energy into our productions" – Allan Nagy

Pandemic pushes pause

One of the society's most testing recent moments was in producing *We Will Rock You*. The show, like many others during the Covid-19 pandemic, faced multiple cancellations. Allan describes it as a tragedy. "I didn't want a thing to do with theatre for about four hours," he jokes. "I will never forget the tears that were shed."

By the time they reached the fourth attempt to stage the production, the society was left with only \$397.50 available in its \$30,000 overdraft. When the show was cancelled for a fourth time, he delivered the news and everyone just hung their heads with tears. At that moment, they decided to quickly organise a rehearsal performance for family and friends. Even though they performed without a full set or costumes, the experience was incredibly moving, Allan says. "It's been one of the most emotional shows I've ever been involved in. I know for me and the rest of the team, we had felt like we'd failed, even though it was nothing on us, we worked our guts out."

Act Three Productions found innovative ways to keep moving forward. When *We Will Rock You* was postponed, they pivoted to stage *Sister Act*. Allan worked out how he could divide the Regent on Broadway's theatre layout into four separate zones to comply with government regulations. This was a success and the approach set a precedent for other theatre groups in New Zealand.

Talent and technology

Though the costs of production continue to rise, Allan remains optimistic about the future of local theatre. He believes Palmy's talent is on par with performers from larger cities and that the technical level of the shows rivals that of any production in New Zealand.

The society's upcoming shows, *School of Rock* in April and *Come From Away* in September, promise to deliver the high-quality performances that audiences have come to expect. "We're really lucky here in Palmerston North. We've got a fantastic base of people to draw on."

Allan reflects on how much expectations have changed as the theatre has evolved. When he first started, the technical quality was much lower. The sound was poor and if a performer wanted to be heard over the orchestra, they simply had to project their voice. Lighting was clunky, involving large fixtures with coloured gels, which created uncomfortable heat on stage, getting up to 40 degrees at times. Nowadays, shows like the most recent *Kinky Boots*, benefit from state-of-the-art technology, including a 128-channel sound desk, 32 radio microphones and computer-controlled LED lights that can change colour on demand. For *Kinky Boots*, Allan and his team programmed 350 lighting cues in just 47 hours – something that would have taken weeks in the past.

"The level of production we put on is right up there with some of the best in the world. The only difference between what you'll see here in Palmerston North and productions in London or on Broadway is the budget for sets and costumes. But that's where Kiwi ingenuity comes into play."

A testament to resourcefulness is the successful performance of *Phantom of the Opera*, where they were the only society in New Zealand to successfully swing the chandelier on stage – an ambitious feat no other society even attempted.

Allan expresses gratitude for the Regent on Broadway theatre. "It's a fantastic venue and one of the top regional theatres in New Zealand, right up there with the bigger ones."

Audience rewards

"The best part for me," Allan shares, "is talking to people after a show and seeing their smiles. It's fulfilling to know we've put on a performance that matches anything else in New Zealand and is comparable to productions worldwide. Our audience feels they've received good value for their money and had the chance to experience musical theatre."

Ultimately, Act Three Productions transcends the definition of a theatre company. It is a community that has flourished over decades, nurturing creativity, collaboration, and a sense of belonging among its members.

One of the core beliefs of the Act Three Productions board is that everyone should experience at least one musical theatre performance to discover if they enjoy it.

"Theatre isn't for everyone, and not every show will resonate with everyone," Allan acknowledges. "But I challenge everyone to attend one performance and see for themselves. Many times, I've spoken with people who ended up loving it after their first experience."

As Act Three Productions continues to evolve, their story remains one of resilience, creativity, and the unwavering spirit of a community united by their love for the arts. ♡



Photo credit Brendan Lodge



Photo credit Brendan Lodge



Photo credit Ben Pryor



Photo credit Ben Pryor

Stepping towards our history

He Ara Kotahi, Hei Ara Kōrero is a digital platform telling authentic ancestral stories from Rangitāne o Manawatū. This multi-dimensional project encompasses a website, video, audio, 360-degree augmented reality scenes, graphic novels, interactive maps, photos, waiata, learning resources, and short written stories.

Below Te Motu o Poutoa Pā, the Manawatū River is flowing strongly with currents swirling. Rain has been abundant and the scrub-edged banks are lush.

Across the awa is Hokowhitu, the city of Papaioea and, behind the pā are the Ruahine and Tararua mountain ranges. Layers of land folded with pūrākau that now, with the creation of He Ara Kotahi, Hei Ara Kōrero, can be held in the palm of your hand.

A collaboration between Rangitāne o Manawatū and the Central Economic Development Agency (CEDA), this epic and vast creation, nearly three years in the making, can all come to life through your phone. Stand at six sites along the awa, click on the mobile platform and listen to iwi voices sharing their mātauranga. Funded by the Ministry for Culture and Heritage through its Te Urungi innovation fund, this is history in real time with the mighty Manawatū River as its soundtrack.

Chris Whaiapu from Rangitāne o Manawatū is one of the project leads. He is a natural-born storyteller whose kōrero tells the stories of his ancestors and what life was like as far back as the 1500s. He says the reason for creating a website with an interactive map is to encourage the community to connect, learn and engage with the Manawatū River and the rich tapestry of history that weaves its way in and around our region.

“Its purpose is to inspire our whānau, kura and hapori with Te Awa o Manawatū – the Manawatū River – now and into the future, while also providing kaitiakitanga of pūrākau for iwi by iwi to access and build on.”

He Ara Kotahi means the coming together of one pathway and Hei Ara Kōrero means to share the oral histories of Rangitāne.

Tainui Woodmass, CEDA's Māori Relationship Manager, says one of the important parts of the project, that is reflected in the name, was bringing together all the stories in one place.

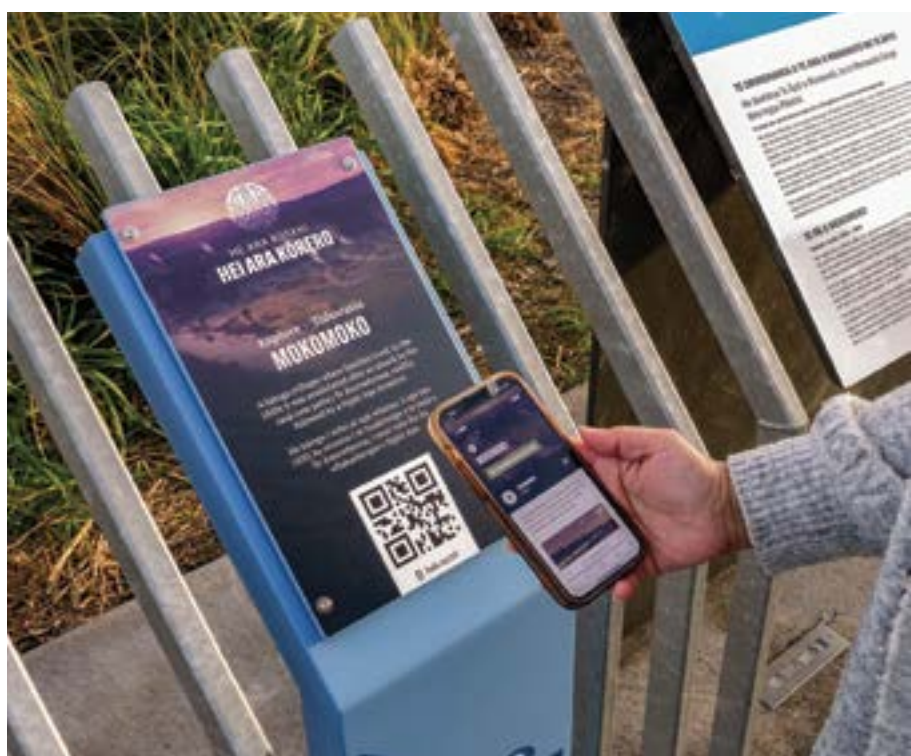
“The stories here are from kaumātua and kuia who have given their time to share them. That's really special. These are authentic stories right from the source.”

One of the stories heard on the Hei ara Kōrero website tells of Whakarongo, a strong aristocratic woman of rank. She is said to have been an outgoing and feisty character who unusually took part in warfare.



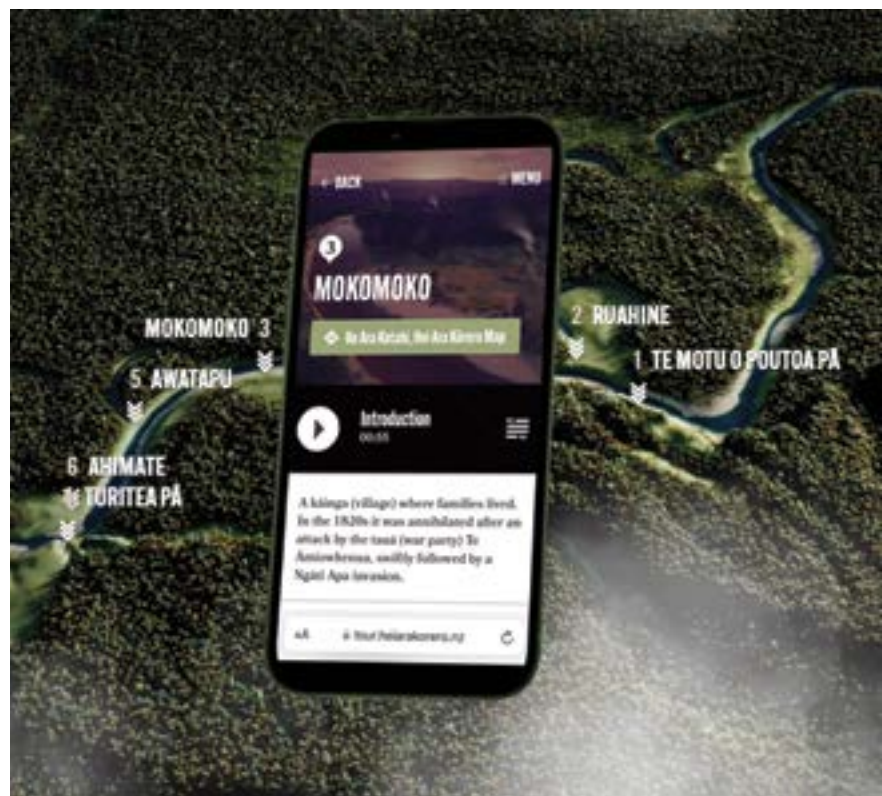
It's cool to learn new things

| | |
|---------------|--|
| Awa | river |
| Hapori | kinship group, community |
| Kai | food |
| Kainga | homes, village |
| Kaitiakitanga | guardianship, stewardship |
| Kaumātua | elder man, a person with whānau status |
| Kōrero | conversation, discussion |
| Kuia | elder woman |
| Kura | school |
| Mana whenua | the indigenous people with historic and territorial rights over the land |
| Mātauranga | knowledge |
| Ngahere | bush, forest |
| Pā | village or settlement |
| Papaioea | Palmerston North |
| Pūrākau | myths, legends, stories |
| Te ao Māori | Māori holistic worldview |
| Waiata | song |
| Waka | canoe |
| Whānau | family |





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download the app





Stories of a time when the ngahere was lush and flourishing and kainga nestled into the landscape with waka and kai gathering sites a stone's throw away on the awa. In a video about Ruahine Pā, Chris describes what the site would have looked like pre-colonisation.

"This was a majestic site, it had the sweeping, giant tōtara trees, it had the kahikatea, stands of kānuka plentiful in karaka trees and lots of open green grassy areas. Gardens everywhere for as far as the eye could see. Ruahine were essentially the gardens of Rangitāne, soil was fertile and perfect for kūmara, kamokamo and a range of kai."

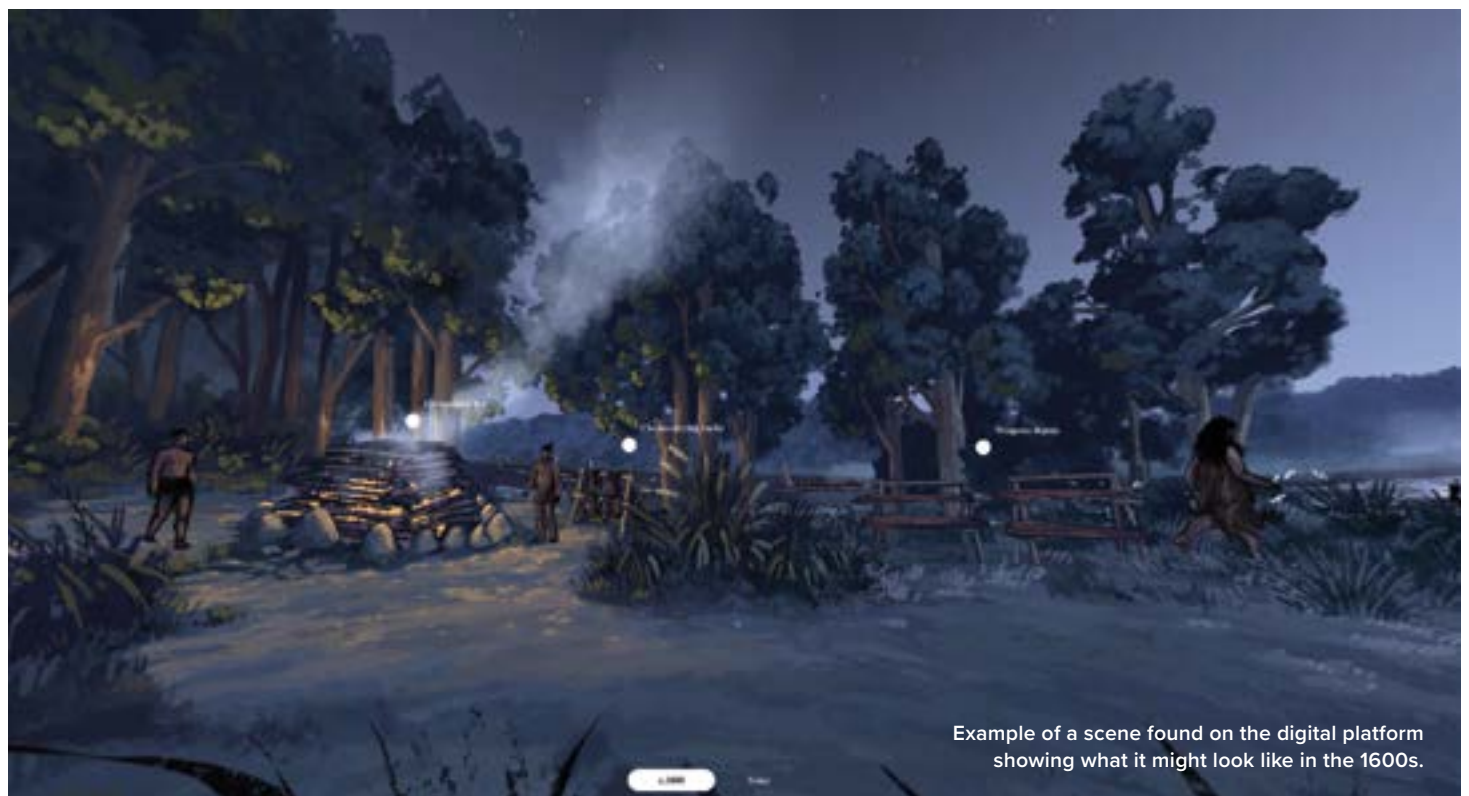
The past starts to step forward and take its rightful place as mana whenua speak and the understanding of place deepens. CEDA Marketing and Communications Manager Janet Reynolds says it's been an almost three-year journey to get the project to this stage.

"There has been so much detail and care taken. There have even been waiata especially written for this project. There has been such a positive shift towards people learning about Te ao Māori and our cultural heritage and this is providing a really engaging and easy way to do it."

Six pou mark the key sites along the river, with QR codes making the digital platform available for all. Behind all of this sits a unique, digital private repository of pūrākau managed and only accessible by Rangitāne o Manawatū. A digital place of growth that Chris says will evolve, while also remaining as a place to protect mātauranga for future generations.

"It ensures that the wisdom and knowledge of their storytellers is preserved without fear of it being lost".

Go to: heiarakorero.nz to explore and pncc.govt.nz for more information on the Manawatū River shared pathway. 🌿



Example of a scene found on the digital platform showing what it might look like in the 1600s.





Where beauty blooms

Grower, entrepreneur and mum Gemma McDougall talks about her and husband Ben's experience in diversifying their Manawatū farming practice.

Tell us how you came to call Manawatū home

Originally from Taihape, I went to boarding school in Napier before moving to Dunedin to study. I followed up my degree by completing my graduate nursing year in Melbourne. From here I've travelled and lived in Auckland, New Plymouth, London and Wellington before meeting my now husband, Ben, and moving back to Marton where he was farming for his parents. In 2015, we sold the property in Marton and bought one in Kimbolton. Now we live and farm here with our young family. We love the lifestyle the region offers. I know farming and family will always keep us in Manawatū.

What is it that you love most about living in Manawatū?

We love living in this safe and happy community. We love the rural and down-to-earth feel plus there are lots of fun activities and sporting opportunities for the children. There are heaps of yummy food experiences to try, which I think people would be surprised to learn! From a farming perspective, the diversification opportunities across agriculture and horticulture in Manawatū are second to none.

Speaking of farming, how did you get into the flower business?

I've always harboured a flower-growing dream, but it was in 2019 that Ben and I were able to bring this vision to life as Ataahua Blooms. I could see the benefit of using our rich loamy soil to further diversify the farming operation. We wanted to make the most of land not being actively utilised, which the flower farm does in so many ways.

Turning the land to flowers was an easy decision as it was an area unsuitable for farming – a little wee paddock that wasn't getting used for anything. A woolshed, now an amazingly colourful drying area, provided the ideal place to dry flowers and foliage in an undisturbed, natural environment.



For someone who's not heard about Ataahua Blooms, what is it and what do you guys do?

Ataahua Blooms is a small boutique flower farm growing slightly wild and unique blooms. About 80% of all our sales are wholesale, so direct to florists, floral stylists or wedding stylists. The other 20% is direct to consumers, either through our website or at the two retail stands we have, in the Cheltenham General Store and Rosebowl Cafe and Bakery, in Feilding. Our focus and tasks shift with the seasons. Our general day-to-day includes tending the flower farm, planting, weeding and cutting. It's a great job. Flowers bring so much joy to people and can evoke different memories or feelings, especially some of the unique ones they don't grow themselves. It's very rewarding.

Ataahua Blooms is growing from strength to strength. Have you had any challenges or setbacks along the way?

We've been lucky to have had amazing support and demand for the product we grow and have been able to expand the operation significantly over the year. I've also started using the woolshed space as a studio where we welcome workshop attendees throughout the year. That's not to say it isn't without its challenges.

We are 420 metres above sea level, we have the Ruahine Ranges right behind us and I can see the Manawatū windmills ... so this should give a sense of some of the challenges I can encounter over the seasons! Yes, we have frosts, sometimes snow, and we have wind and rain, but we have an amazing soil profile and base to start with. We work around the elements we encounter and grow what is suited to the land and the environment in which we farm.

Flower farming must be quite a niche industry, how do you find working with others in the sector?

I enjoy working closely with other flower farmers based in Manawatū. Together with a fellow grower, we set up the Flower Collective Manawatū group to allow us to work together to bring products to the market to sell directly to florists and also to the public.

The Flower Collective Manawatū Market is open every Thursday 8am to 9am, Milson Scout Hall, 165 John F Kennedy Drive, Palmerston North.

The future of flower farming in Manawatū is healthy and is being well supported by florists both locally and further afield. Out in the community, my flower stands are popular with so much positive feedback from customers, so the possibilities are endless.

What would you say to someone considering moving to Manawatū?

There are so many benefits to calling this place home. There are a wide variety of jobs, heaps of outdoor experiences, walks, tramps and things to see and do, and lots of different community and sporting groups to join. Manawatū is also central to the rest of the North Island, which gives so many opportunities to explore the country, driving or flying to the destination you wish to go.

The work-life balance that you can find in Manawatū is great. Of course, we have peak seasons that are quite demanding and take a bit of juggling, but we are used to that. At the end of the day though, the children get to have the best of all opportunities on offer.

I would say to any farmer thinking of diversifying their land, Manawatū is a perfect place to diversify. Our agri-sector is so much more than dairy and beef thanks to our exceptional soils and climate. Come and see! ♡

You can buy from Ataahua Blooms Flower Farm, Rosebowl Café & Bakery in Feilding, Cheltenham General Store, or order online at ataahuablooms.com/shop.

Flower Collective Manawatū: [@flowercollectivemanawatu](https://www.instagram.com/flowercollectivemanawatu) on Instagram

Thanks to ManawatuNZ for the story and images.





Cream of the crop

A creative appetite for food innovation has led to a new product to fill a gap in the plant-based milk market.

Dairy cream has fresh competition, with a new lentil-based alternative that's set to shake up the food industry – and it's been created right here in Palmy.

This nutritious, tastier and more functional alternative has been a few years in the making, with Dr Arup Nag and his team at Massey University's Riddett Institute starting their research and development in mid-2021.

While soy, oat, almond, coconut and rice-based milk were growing in popularity, Dr Nag identified two things that were lacking in the products. One was protein. The other was versatility – the ability to turn one base product into many different ones. This sparked the idea of making a new lentil-based milk.

"Dairy products are notoriously difficult to replace due to their unique nutritional qualities, but lentils offer a compelling alternative. They are highly nutritious and environmentally friendly, yet have remained underutilised in dairy alternatives due to the challenges of creating dairy-like products from them," Dr Nag explains.

Having grown up in India where lentils are widely consumed, Dr Nag knew he was onto a good thing.

"Drawing on my experience with the nutritional potential of lentils, including their whiteness, foaming ability and high protein content, I saw exciting possibilities. However, I also recognised the challenge of their distinct, strong taste and flavour profiles. I realised that if we could develop a processing technique to overcome these hurdles, we could open the door to a groundbreaking innovation with tremendous commercial potential."

Four years on, Dr Nag and his team have cracked it. A flagship whipping cream is now in production and start-up company Andfoods is ready to take it to the market.





“We are starting with a cream product, but this is just the beginning. We have a full product portfolio in the pipeline.”

– Dr Arup Nag

Excellence recognised

Dr Nag and Andfoods were named as finalists in the Kiwinet Research Commercialisation Awards 2024.

Held in October, the awards recognise people and companies who are transforming scientific discoveries into new technologies, businesses and real-world solutions. Dr Nag was a finalist in the Sprout Agritech Breakthrough Innovator of the Year Award.

The event also provided an opportunity to showcase Andfoods' dairy-free whipped cream, which featured in three dessert dishes at the event dinner.

The science

So how on earth do you transform lentils into delicious and functional milk and cream alternatives?

The team at Andfoods sources lentils from growers and suppliers across the globe.

The seeds are processed and split into “liquid gold” and solids. The liquid then goes through Andfood’s patented novel fermentation process. This removes the grassy taste and increases the nutritional value of the liquid. Fermenting also gives it more dairy-like properties. The liquid forms a base for dairy-free milk, which can then be turned into cream.

“To our knowledge, no other company in the world is making similar lentil-based fermented products,” Dr Nag says.

“Our product is unique. We are starting with a cream product, but this is just the beginning. We have a full product portfolio in the pipeline. From one milk we can produce cream, powder, ice cream and yoghurt. That’s why our product is different to other existing plant-based milk products.”

Sensory testing

Taste testers gave their honest feedback about the product to Dr Arup and his team through sensory studies in the lab and cafes.

“Nothing is perfect on day one. It takes time to reach a point where you offer a nearly perfect product to the consumers,” Dr Nag says.

There’s been plenty of tweaking, but comments have been overwhelmingly positive. “Some people couldn’t tell the difference between dairy cream and lentil cream on a blind taste test.”

The powders and milk can be used as dairy-free substitutes in a wide range of recipes and contain more protein than other products currently on the market.

You won’t find Andfoods products on the supermarket shelf though. Rather than selling directly to consumers, they’ll supply their product to some of the world’s largest food companies to be used as an ingredient and also to the food service industry, including bakeries, cafés, caterers and airlines.

The aim is to grow the market across the globe. Australia is first on the list. The company then plans to expand into Asia, Europe and America, with New Zealand also on the cards.

A bright future

With 25 years in the food and dairy industry, Dr Nag is still just as excited about it as he was on day one. “My job is never routine, never monotonous.”

With a growing number of people seeking out dairy-free alternative products, Dr Nag has plenty of work ahead of him.

“Every day at Andfoods, we welcome challenges associated with product quality and stability and we enjoy overcoming them, so the journey is always very exciting.”

Dr Nag says being based in Palmy has been key to his success and he values the nurturing environment.

“Palmerston North is a vibrant hub for science and innovation, home to some of New Zealand’s leading research institutions like Massey University, Plant & Food Research, AgResearch, and Fonterra’s R&D centre.

“The strong collaborative environment fostered by FoodHQ, along with the support of Massey Ventures Limited, has played a pivotal role in encouraging creative thinking, innovation and the commercialisation of research. The local community’s deep respect for the scientific community has also made this a rewarding place to work.”

He’ll continue to lead his team on their mission to improve the food system. They’re committed to producing high-quality, nutritious dairy alternatives, and making them available to other companies to use in their products.

Dr Nag is excited about the environmental benefits of the company’s products too. Reduced dependence on dairy consumption means less impact on the environment.

“The lentil we are using is very good for the soil health. Instead of leaching nutrition from the soil, it actually nourishes the soil. So, I believe we are doing something good for the planet and something good for the people as well.” ♡

Cocktails, comfort and city views

Your after-dinner delight awaits you at Teacher Teacher.

Palmy's nightlife just got a serious upgrade with the arrival of Teacher Teacher, a rooftop bar that's quite literally taking the local scene to new heights.

Perched above The Cobb and Speedway Garage bars, this stylish new spot offers expertly crafted cocktails and a laid-back vibe that suits any occasion, from casual after-dinner drinks to memorable nights out.

"We wanted to create a space that feels like Palmy's best-kept secret," owner Ricky Quirk says. "Somewhere you can go after a great meal to relax and let the night unfold. We're right in the heart of the city, surrounded by amazing restaurants – it's the perfect place to come for drinks once you've wrapped up dinner."

Teacher Teacher's central location makes it a breeze to drop in for a spontaneous catch-up with friends or continue the night in style after enjoying some of the city's top dining spots. And let's not forget – it just might be Palmy's ultimate date destination. Picture yourself cosying up under the stars, cocktail in hand, with some good music in the background. What's not to love?

For those craving a party, Teacher Teacher also features live DJs that keep the energy high all night long. Entry is 21+, promising a crowd that's here for a good time but knows how to keep it classy.

"There's something magical about this place, especially as the sun sets – it's the perfect spot to relax and enjoy the city," Ricky says.

And whether it's rainy, windy, or a perfect summer evening, Teacher Teacher has you covered, literally. With a brand-new roof, heaters and snug blankets, this rooftop gem is ready to serve up comfort and cocktails, no matter the weather.

"It's the kind of spot that makes you want to stay a little longer and savour that one last drink," a satisfied patron says. ♡





Teacher Teacher's Pina Colada

Keen to try Teacher Teacher's twist on a classic cocktail? Here's how you can bring a little of their rooftop charm home with their signature Pina Colada recipe:

Ingredients

60ml coconut cream
60ml coconut rum
60ml pineapple juice
30ml lime juice

Method

Add all ingredients to a shaker.
Shake with ice.
Pour into a cocktail glass and enjoy!



Jumping into life

Aly Viliamu's skipping is showcasing Palmy and inspiring audiences.

When you think of jump rope, it may bring memories of a schoolyard pastime or a way to add variety to a workout routine.

For Aly Viliamu, a personal trainer with a love for creativity and fitness, jump rope is so much more. It's not only a way to stay active but also a form of self-expression, therapy and connection. Her passion for skipping started as a simple injury recovery tool but has since evolved into a popular social media presence and a unique way of life.

Now, after moving to Palmerston North, Aly is bringing her skipping skills and inspiring energy to a new audience, showcasing her tricks in iconic local spots. Her social media presence has become a way to not only showcase her tricks but also inspire others to get involved.

From injured ankle to skipping superstar

Aly began jumping rope three years ago when she was forced to take a break from running because of an ankle injury. "I hated cardio and never liked exercising on stationary bikes, so when I found jump rope, I really enjoyed it," Aly recalls. What started as a few minutes of skipping each day quickly snowballed into a full-blown hobby. "I'd be skipping for an hour without even realising it." The workout wasn't just a means to stay fit – it became something she loved.

Aly's dedication has paid off in more ways than one. Her ankle, once a cause for concern, is now perfectly healthy, thanks to the benefits of jump rope. Jump rope has an unfair reputation for being bad for your knees and joints, but Aly says the opposite is true and that it helps with bone density. "I almost needed surgery on my ankle, but now it's fine – no physio or ongoing issues anymore at all."

Finding flow and mastering the mic release

For Aly, jump rope is more than cardio; it's about mastery, repetition, and creativity. "When I get into something, I want to be the best at it. It's all about repetition until it becomes subconscious."

One of her favourite tricks is the "mic release," where she releases the handle during a side swing, allowing the rope to spin next to her body before catching it again. "You spin it left and right, making an infinity symbol. You can jump through it or catch it – it's a challenging move."

Her background as a gymnast also plays a huge role in her unique style. "I was a gymnast for 10 years, so I get a lot of inspiration from that, as well as from dance trends I see on Instagram."

"When I get into something, I want to be the best at it. It's all about repetition until it becomes subconscious."

– Aly Viliamu

Scan this QR code to check out a video of Aly showcasing her skills









Moving to Palmy: New city, new skipping spots

In her short time in Palmerston North, Aly is already scoping out the best spots for jump rope routines. You might spot her at Ahimate Reserve or on the bridge at Central Energy Trust Arena, often with her little Pomeranian, Mr George, by her side. “He acts like a grumpy old man,” she laughs, describing her nine-year-old furry friend.

“I always try to find places where I can bring Mr George. When I’m learning a new routine, I like going to secluded spots because I’m shy,” she admits with a smile.

Skipping for fun and fitness

As a personal trainer, Aly is all about encouraging people to find exercise they enjoy. Jump rope ticks all the boxes. “Jump rope is a full-body workout – you’re coordinating all parts of the body, including your mind. You can burn as many calories in 10 minutes skipping as you can in 30 minutes of running.” It’s clear that Aly’s enthusiasm for skipping isn’t just about her own fitness – it’s also about showing others how accessible and fun it can be.

“I’m a big believer that everyone needs to find the right type of exercise for them to help them be consistent and see results. Jump rope looks hard, but any movement is good movement, and it’s a fun way of exercising.”

Building the jump rope community, online and off

Despite her busy life, Aly has built a strong community through her jump rope journey. There’s a Skipping NZ page on social media, and there are five jump ropers who post their tricks on social media who stay in touch and sometimes collaborate.

Aly’s social media following continues to grow, and while she’s thinking about doing tutorials or even offering classes in Palmerston North, she’s taking things one step at a time.

“I’d love to start tutorials on social media but it’s quite a commitment to post consistently. I wish someone had helped me along the way, so I’m always happy for people to reach out,” she adds.

Out of her comfort zone – and loving it

Aly is a big advocate of people stepping outside their comfort zone and she is never afraid to challenge herself. A few years ago, she competed in Season 2 of Australian Spartan, an obstacle course competition. “I’m quite shy, so competing on television was a bit scary,” she says. “We came third as a team, which was an amazing experience.”

A willingness to try new things is something Aly encourages in others as well. “I used to hate cardio, but now jump rope is something I love. It’s all about finding the type of exercise that makes you want to keep going.”

What’s next?

Aly’s jump rope journey is far from over. She’s constantly learning new tricks – one per week – and continues to hone her skills. “I’m always trying to master something new,” she says. Her love for jump rope and her dedication to inspiring others are sure to keep her skipping forward. And who knows, maybe you’ll catch her at a park in Palmerston North, rope in hand, creating her next viral move.

In Aly’s words, “I started in the same position as anyone else, with a bung ankle and no experience. So, if I can do it, anyone can!”

You can find Aly on Instagram at @activaly 

The isite has the scoop!

Urban strolls



Eat – 7 am

Café Cuba

236 Cuba Street,
Palmerston North Central

Fuel up for the day with a bang and a brew at one of Palmy's legendary spots.



Explore – 11.30 am

Turitea Pā / He Ara Kotahi

129 Dittmer Drive, Awapuni,
Palmerston North

Hop on an e-bike from Fiore Bike Hire and roll over to one of Palmy's cultural hot spots.

Pro tip

Don't speed by! Make a pit stop at the Urban Eels platform on Turitea Stream – those slippery guys are worth a peek.



Eat – 1 pm

Artisan Kitchen Café

613 Fitzherbert East Road,
Palmerston North

Uncover a slice of country goodness in a rustic barn-style setting.



Pro tip

After a delicious bite, wander over to the Design and Desire boutique and let the garden vibes soak in.

Shop – 3 pm

Fashion fix? Check!

Find everything from quirky to chic at Palmy's best boutique strip, including George Street, Cuba Street and Coleman Mall.



Eat – 6.30 pm

Brew Union Brewing Company

41 Broadway Avenue,
Palmerston North Central

Round out your day with a pint of freshly brewed beer and a slice of wood-fired pizza that's got your name on it.

Pro tip

Not a beer fan? Their craft cocktails are a must-try!



Looking for things to do in Manawatū?

isite's got your back! Whether you're into urban strolls or you're more of an adventurous soul, the friendly team at isite in Te Marae o Hine – The Square will help you plan the perfect day out.



Adventurous souls



Explore and eat – 10 am

Orlando Country Café and Bar

748 Rangitikei Line, Newbury,
Palmerston North

Swing into your morning with brunch, a barista brew, and a stunning country view.

Smack a few golf balls at the driving range while you're there.

Explore – 9 am

Makoura Lodge

736 Makoura
Road, Feilding

From archery to axe throwing, it's all on target for a day of fun.



Explore – 11 am

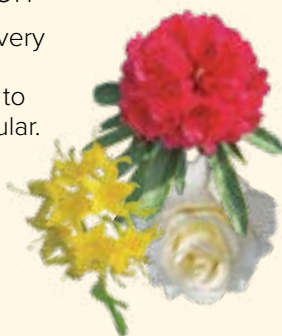
Cross Hills Gardens

339 Rangiwhia Road, Kimbolton

With something beautiful to discover in every season, immerse yourself in a display of blooming brilliance, from rhododendrons to azaleas that are nothing short of spectacular.

Pro tip

Time your visit with the Cross Hills Fair in spring for a bonus treat!



Eat – 1 pm

Āpiti Tavern and Eatery

755 Oroua Valley Road, Āpiti

Local flavours, pub classics and a cosy atmosphere – this hidden gem serves up a menu you'll want to devour.



Explore – 2.30 pm

Awastone

143 Ruahine Road, Mangaweka

Up for some adventure? Hit the river with a kayak or raft – nature's rollercoaster is calling your name.

Pro tip

Don't forget a change of clothes. Getting wet is half the fun! ♻





"Listening to a record has a richness and warmth that other mediums lack."



George Street gets its groove on

Vinyl Room opens up a world of tangible turntable music experiences.

Palmy's beloved George Street has recently become even cooler, with the opening of a dedicated record store offering hard-to-find rarities, vintage classics and fresh album releases straight off the press.

The cozy, inviting Vinyl Room also boasts an epic collection of full-scale posters, perfect to liven up any dull wall space with mint-condition prints of some of the world's greatest artists and bands.

Owner Ron Fisher has big plans for the small space, saying records aren't just items of nostalgia, they're an integral part of today's music scene.

"Vinyl is really relevant in today's fast-paced world. Listening to an album on vinyl encourages us to slow down and truly engage with the music. It's a great way to unwind and nourish the spirit."

A former educator with a background in exploring nature, the developing brain, and the wonders of the cosmos, Ron once travelled the country with his portable planetarium, the Cosmodome.

He found himself gravitating back to vinyl during the Covid-19 pandemic, through which listening to his records offered a therapeutic escape, helping him feel grounded.

"To me, the difference between streaming music and listening to a record is like cooking with an oven or over a campfire. The oven is convenient but detached – you can walk away and hardly think about it. In contrast, putting on a record or cooking over a campfire is a more tangible experience.

"Listening to a record has a richness and warmth that other mediums lack, much like how food cooked over an open fire has a unique depth of flavour. You even get the same type of soothing crackle from each of them. It's something to savour."

He wants the Vinyl Room to be a welcoming space where people can take their time, browsing, chatting, or exploring a variety of artists at the shop's listening post. He says that while vinyl is back in fashion, he has no interest in trying to influence what people buy.

"I'm not about snobbery or trends because music's not like that. Music is personal, everyone has things they like and there's always so much more to learn about."

As far as the perfect manager for such a venture, you couldn't get much better than a former local radio celebrity, who's spent the last 20 years travelling with his own massive record collection.



Darrin Searancke grew up in Palmy and got his start in radio after boldly turning up at Radio Massey as a high school student and convincing them to let him do a show for college kids. He then moved to commercial radio doing the evening shift at 92.2XS FM.

No stranger to spinning a tune, Darrin spent the early 90s finishing up radio night shifts then legging it to the local nightclubs including The London Park Club, Exchequers and Chantelle's to play his DJ set until 3am.

After spending 20 years in Canada and a few in the upper North Island, he recently returned to Palmy and describes his new role as manager of the Vinyl Room as a remarkable stroke of serendipity.

"I was having a coffee with a couple of old friends who'd seen the job advertised and said, 'It'd be just perfect for you,' and it was."

As the owner of around 2,000 records of his own, his credentials hit the mark and Darrin says he's excited by the opportunity to share his fascination with music.

"I know I have a great knowledge of music but there's still so much to learn. Someone said to me once 'Music is my currency, it's the thing I really love to share with people and what people share with me' and that's exactly how I feel too."

He's been stoked with the community's response to the store.

"Heaps of people have come in and said it's great to have a dedicated record shop, especially on George Street, it's a perfect fit with the vibe," Darrin says.

"It's been nice to see people of all ages coming in, even mums and dads with their teenagers. Whereas young people may not have known much about vinyl a few years ago, now they definitely know and respect the medium. Seeing them pick out The Offspring, Led Zeppelin or Fleetwood Mac has been really cool. I mean we've only been open two weeks and we've already sold two albums by the Dead Kennedys and I'm like really?! They even know about punk!"

Ron says the opening of the shop is just the beginning of his vision for the Vinyl Room.

"I'm thinking of setting up a Vinyl Club, maybe once a month where people could turn up have a drink, look around and select something to put in the playlist crate. Everyone could spend time talking about what the songs or artists they've chosen mean to them and, of course, if they want it, it'll be available to buy too."

Vinyl Room can be found at 49 George Street in Palmy's city centre. ♡



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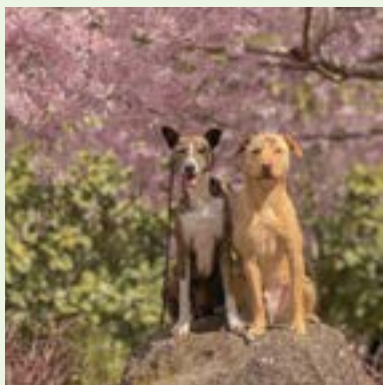
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We will select and showcase some of the best photos from social media in our next issue of Palmy Proud.
To be considered, use **#PalmyProud**



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