



# SEAFOOD BLESSINGS ABOUND



Heaps of Aussie prawns



Top oil from Paul Holmes



Mussel fritters on the griddle

Seafood lovers who usually settle for a pan-fried snapper or raw oysters had their taste buds well and truly tempted at the fifth Auckland Seafood Festival from January 29-31.

The festival had previously been held on the other side of the Viaduct Basin on the Sanford site alongside the Seafood School, but the venue was a bit wind-blown and short on atmosphere compared with its new setting. It is now the largest seafood festival in New Zealand, with an estimated 100,000 people gathering on Te Wero Island at Auckland's Viaduct Harbour over the three days to feast on seafood delicacies prepared in novel ways.

There were squid rings coated in wild pepper and seaweed seasoning, chilli chocolate prawns, baby mussels marinated in Spanish onion and red wine vinaigrette, and salmon galettes with a smoked salmon-egg-cream and dill filling. Pak 'n Save baskets of battered or cooked mussels for \$2 were probably the bargain of the festival.

Adventurous cooks could sit in on cooking demonstrations and see how to make authentic paella, panko mussels filled with chorizo and mozzarella, or grilled fresh fish fillets with spicy harissa.

For those with slightly deeper pockets, four of Auckland's leading restaurants – Sails, Kermadec, Two Fifteen and Café Hanoi – presented their signature seafood dishes. Turmeric fried gurnard with galangal and snake beans; sautéed barbecued prawns with Asian green tea noodle salad; and pan-seared john dory with preserved lemon and herb risotto had tongues hanging out like dogs in a desert.

Having filled up our plates, there was plenty of liquid refreshment close by. The other hand was free to hold a glass of wine, a beer or a cider, grab a seat in the shade and enjoy some live music.

Entertainment on four stages included The Nairobi Trio, Greg Johnson, a fish filleting competition and an oyster eating



Moana's mermaid



Busker at large

competition. Just outside the entrance, buskers kept the crowds entertained as part of an international buskers festival which was taking place in downtown Auckland at the same time.

The popular American singer and songwriter Jimmy Buffett, of *Margaritaville* fame, was set to perform one concert as the lead festival act, but unfortunately he fell off the stage during one of his Australian shows and headed home to recuperate.

There were few such mishaps at the show, with everyone being in a summery mood to match the weather. Just beyond the Viaduct, street performers ensured the good mood continued. 