

Media Release

Global food stars descend on Wellington for Visa Wellington On a Plate 2026

Wellington, 10 June 2026 - One of the world's most influential burger experts and a legendary American pitmaster will descend on Wellington this August as Visa Wellington On a Plate unveils one of its biggest international line-ups yet.

[Burger Scholar George Motz](#) and [Chef's Table star Rodney Scott](#) will headline a series of exclusive, once-in-a-lifetime events during this year's festival - with Motz set to raise the stakes for Burger Wellington as the beloved competition's head judge.

Visa Wellington On a Plate Festival Director Beth Brash says the 2026 programme reflects the festival's growing international profile and appetite for globally distinctive food experiences.

"These are chefs and food storytellers who have built global reputations by preserving, evolving and sharing food culture," she says. "And now, we're opening New Zealand's rich food landscape to them."

"Whether it's George documenting America's burger history or Rodney carrying forward Southern barbecue traditions, they embody this year's festival theme - *Word of Mouth* - in completely different ways.

"To have them in Wellington for these incredibly special events is something really rare, and we are so excited to showcase the creativity and hospitality culture that makes Wellington unlike anywhere else."

Known internationally for documenting and preserving America's regional burger traditions, filmmaker, author and Burger Scholar George Motz will travel to New Zealand for the first time to host an exclusive burger masterclass at Wellington's Opera House, as well as serving as Head Judge for Burger Wellington 2026, where more than 200 burgers will be vying for the title of best burger. George is also teaming up with Wellington's Burger Liquor to serve up his famous smashburger at Beervana on Friday 21 August.

Having spent decades uncovering iconic burger institutions and forgotten burger styles across the United States, Motz says he's fascinated by how burger culture is evolving globally.

"I've only heard great things about the latest wave of high-quality burgers in New Zealand, so I need to get there ASAP," he says.

Motz says independent burger restaurants remain culturally vital at a time when hospitality businesses globally are under pressure.

"That's where the soul of food culture thrives; if all we had were big corporate food, the soul of food would die."

Chef's Table star Rodney Scott will also make his New Zealand debut during the festival, bringing his celebrated whole-hog barbecue to Wellington for an exclusive one-night-only live-fire feast at Boneface in Upper Hutt. Widely regarded as one of America's greatest pitmasters, Scott has built a global following for his traditional South Carolina-style barbecue and the communal food culture surrounding it.

"That tradition has been passed through generations in my family, and I love that Wellington On a Plate is celebrating those same ideas of storytelling, connection and community through food culture.

"I never imagined this work would one day bring me to New Zealand. I'm excited to experience the culture, meet people and cook the same way we do back home."

The New Zealand Government's Events Boost Fund is helping bring these chefs to NZ. Minister for Tourism

and Hospitality Louise Upston says events like Visa Wellington On a Plate play an important role in showcasing New Zealand internationally.

“Visa Wellington On a Plate is a fantastic example of an event that delivers vibrancy to the capital while supporting local businesses and helping showcase New Zealand as a world-class food and culture destination”.

Visa Country Manager for New Zealand and Pacific Islands, David Peacock, says Visa Wellington On a Plate highlights how shared experiences - from dining out to discovering new places - can bring people together while supporting local businesses.

“The festival plays an important role in attracting visitors to the region and showcasing Wellington’s creativity and hospitality on a global stage. Visa has supported this festival for more than 15 years, and we’re proud to continue backing an event that delivers lasting impact for local businesses and the wider economy.”

Visa Wellington On a Plate 2026 runs throughout August. The 2026 theme, Word of Mouth, explores how food traditions and stories travel across generations, cultures and communities.

The full programme for this year’s festival, featuring more than 95 ticketed events, non-ticketed events, and pop-ups, and over 200 burgers across the region, is available to view now at visawoap.com

Tickets and programme information:

- Visa pre-sale: Begins 12 pm 22 June, and runs until 24 June
- General public tickets: On sale from 12 pm, 29 June
- Full programme: visawoap.com

About Visa Wellington On a Plate

Visa Wellington On a Plate is brought to you by the Wellington Culinary Events Trust, a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to supporting our local hospitality and national brewing industries. It’s one of the southern hemisphere’s most significant and boldest food festivals. From burgers and cocktails to chef collaborations and immersive experiences, it showcases the best of the Wellington region’s producers, venues, and creative talent, and is dedicated to supporting and celebrating the capital’s hospitality industry.

Visa Wellington On a Plate is proudly supported by the New Zealand Government’s Events Boost Fund

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