



## Go fish

*If it's a fun time you are looking for then it seems like Christmas every weekend at Napier's most popular waterside restaurant bar, The Thirsty Whale.*

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We all know a whale is a pretty big fish but in terms of popularity no one is quite as big as Napier's own Thirsty Whale! This year the Ahuriri waterfront restaurant and bar has defied all the doom and gloom skeptics and continued to cater for a growing number of diners, packing in the party going crowds on a Friday and Saturday night. So what's the secret behind the Thirsty's success? The answer is quite simple, fun loving passion.

The Thirsty Whale's charismatic owner Keith 'Spongy' Price, is a larger than life character himself. When he's not down at the bar planning another seasons worth of entertainment, 'Councillor Spongy' is taking his place around the meeting table at the local Napier City Council or enthusiastically attending a ward meeting in Onekawa or Tamatea. It's hardy surprising that this energy and fervor manifests itself in the attractiveness of his bar.

During the week day and evenings a varied but sociable crowd take in the waterfront atmosphere of the relaxing front deck or enjoy a meal in the fine dining Mezza restaurant. At the weekends sometimes it's hard to find a free table at the newly refurbished mezzanine

floor restaurant. Especially those that look out onto the picturesque inner harbour complete with working fishing boats and recreational yachts. But it's nothing compared to the popularity of the nightclub atmosphere of the Harpoon Room that literally bursts into life late on Friday and Saturday nights.

"We've introduced some nationally recognised DJs into the Harpoon Room," Keith says excitedly. "Some nights there's a queue right around the block but we make sure everyone young and older, gets a chance to enjoy their time here." He's right too because when the '20 somethings' are dancing away into the early hours, out the front in the main bar there's an older age group enjoying the sounds of the 70s and 80s. "It's not unusual to see different generations mixing together throughout the night and everyone seems to get on so well together," Keith explains. "It's a safe, friendly environment which encourages family groups, conference delegates and office workers to let their hair down and give it a bit of a go." Patron safety and security is of paramount importance to ex cop Keith who has recently installed 36 cameras throughout the premises,

**Above:**  
Thirsty Whale owner Keith 'Spongy' Price (seated) with manager Michael Dickerson.  
**Right:**  
An amazing selection of beers.



one of the highest security set ups in New Zealand. It simply seems to deter the undesirable crowd from spoiling everyone else's fun and at the Thirsty Whale that's exactly what it's all about, having fun.

Nothing seems too much of a problem for Keith's staff and management. This attitude is no more personified by manager and restaurant maitre de Michael Dickerson who in Keith's opinion has undoubtedly helped make the Thirsty Whale Hawke's Bay's busiest restaurant bar. "Michael came to us last year from The County Hotel and brings a real touch of class to the place and an amazing knowledge of wine," Keith says. "He is totally focused on the customer, just ask and he'll make it happen." And that's exactly what he's done, this year he's opening the doors of the restaurant for a very special Christmas Day lunch. Locals and visitors who have booked in advance, can relax by the water, enjoy a stunning five-course meal and let Michael and his staff, get on with all the work!

Now that's true dedication to service, Thirsty style.

[www.thirstywhale.co.nz](http://www.thirstywhale.co.nz)