

Despite Covid-19 health eatery Poké Co expands - Q&A with founder Andrew Flanagan



By [Ruth Cooper](#)

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Despite the challenges facing the food and beverage industry as a result of Covid-19, Andrew Flanagan, founder of health food restaurant Poké Co, recently opened his fourth store.

The newest addition to the Poké Co family opened in Claremont on 14 August 2020.







Flanagan's idea to open a specialised poké bar in Cape Town was first sparked while travelling in 2015.

“ I discovered that poké has all the flavours we love in sushi, rediscovered in a unique, spontaneous and convenient way. I realised that it was missing from the seafood scene in Cape Town and felt it was an opportunity that I couldn't miss out on! ”

In 2017, Flanagan opened a delivery-only kitchen and, in 2018, his first customer-facing eatery was launched.

We got in touch with Flanagan to chat about the company's recent innovations, health food trends and how Poké Co stayed afloat during the lockdown.



Andrew Flanagan

■ **Congrats on opening a fourth store. What have been some of the challenges of opening a new store during the lockdown restrictions?**

The largest challenge was all the uncertainty. Not knowing what level we would be on, which regulations would apply and if customers would feel comfortable visiting us. The uncertainty made planning difficult - from the shop fit through to the opening day. We had to adapt daily to the ever-changing climate.

■ ***How can the government and the general public help get the restaurant industry back on their feet?***

The power of word-of-mouth can calm what once was a very fear-driven environment. If you have come out and supported your local businesses, had a good experience and felt safe, tell your friends, post on social media and help spread some positivity, it will go a long way.

The same can happen from the top, if they are happy with the rules and regulation they have set and businesses comply, they should be encouraging people to get out and together we can change the course of the economy.







■ ***How has Poké Co navigated the Covid-19 crisis?****We always have a sound understanding of our financial position and a projection on future cash flows. This enabled us to plan and streamline where possible. We came up with innovative ideas to generate new revenue streams that were importantly aligned with our core offering. We refrained from looking for short-term wins but rather focused on ideas which we can still deliver on post-Covid. Namely, our own delivery and loyalty app and our at-home Poke DIY kits. We also increased our online presence and focused heavily on pleasing our delivery customers.*

■ ***What would be your advice to other local eateries trying to recover and reopen?***

I think Covid has caused everyone to refocus; identify what you do well and deliver on those core values or products.

■ ***What is the core ethos behind the Poké Co brand?***

We have a simple vision; to do good to your taste buds, your body, the community and the environment.







▣ ***What would you say are the next foodie trends?***

I think the fast-casual dining trend will continue, with a focus on healthy eating, using locally produced products and making use of all the available new technology in the restaurant space.

▣ ***What's next for Poké Co?***

In the short term, getting all the existing stores cash positive and in the medium- to long-term, we plan on opening more stores around the country.

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ABOUT RUTH COOPER

Ruth is the production manager at Bizcommunity. ruth@bizcommunity.com
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