

ROTORUA

NEW ZEALAND



A sustainable visit

ROTORUA
feel the spirit
Manakitanga

The charter

The Rotorua Sustainable Tourism Charter is a group of more than 60 tourism businesses committed to continually improving their sustainability. Charter member businesses include accommodation providers, attraction and activity operators, transport providers, and tourism service providers. Collectively the charter member businesses are estimated to represent up to 80 per cent of all visitor activity in the Rotorua area.



The charter requires all member businesses to commit to continual improvement in these areas:

- Community and tangata whenua support
- Natural and human environment protection
- Efficient use of natural and human resource
- Compliance with legislation
- A safe, enjoyable and informative experience for visitors

There is a sustainability assessment process that member businesses are required to complete for ongoing membership.

Preliminary sustainability assessment

Upon signing up to the charter, members complete a self-assessment checklist to identify sustainability actions already implemented at their business and possible new actions.

Site visit and assessment report

After joining and at least once every five years thereafter the charter assessor inspects the business' operations and prepares a sustainability assessment report. This report includes the current sustainability position of the member business and opportunities for improvement.

Statement of action (SOA) and review

Members implement suggested improvements from their assessment report and annually document these actions in a SOA. The charter assessor reviews the SOAs every second year by requesting evidence of the implemented actions and where necessary performs a site visit.



Charter assessor Eldad Collins (left) on a site visit.

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Sustainability stories...

Harnessing geothermal activity

Steve and Gillian Osborne of Alpin Motel and Conference Centre are looking into an energy source that has always been around, but has not been economically, environmentally or socially viable until recently. They understand the importance of preserving Rotorua's unique geothermal features, and that visitors come to Rotorua specifically to experience these features.

However, considering the energy crisis and global warming, they believe it is time to examine the possibility that Rotorua's geothermal field can be used without impacting its features.

After a period of negotiations with Environment Bay of Plenty (EBOP), a suitable experiment was agreed upon.

"We decided that a down-bore heat exchange system that takes heat but not water from the ground is the best way to go," Steve said.

The system was installed at the beginning of 2008 and results have been good.

"This is a continuing experiment and the first system we used is version one. We are now looking at a more efficient down-bore heat transfer system," Steve said.

In the meantime, EBOP is monitoring the effect of this system on the geothermal field.

The cost of this experiment is being shared equally between EBOP and Alpin Motel. Steve and Gillian believe the expense is worthwhile, considering the potential for their business and other Rotorua businesses that may be able to revert to using Rotorua's geothermal activity as an energy source.

Goodbye to plastic

Millennium Hotel Rotorua has taken a major step to reduce the number of plastic bags it throws away each day. Instead of lining the rubbish bins in guest rooms with plastic bags, the hotel now places a single paper towel at the bottom of each bin. This has resulted in 100-200 fewer plastic bags going to the Rotorua landfill daily.

Sustainability assessor Eldad Collins discussed the problem of plastic bags from hotel guest rooms going into the landfill with local supplier Packaging House. After considering various options the simple paper towel solution was presented to the Millennium's general manager Pipiana Whiston and executive housekeeper Diann Burgess and they agreed to try the idea, which fits the hotel's sustainability ethic.

"There were some difficulties initially in switching from plastic bags to paper towels as in some cases guests required plastic bags for 'messy' waste (e.g. nappies)," Diann said.



Diann Burgess (left) and Pipiana Whiston with bin and paper towel liner.

“To address this problem we provide a small number of biodegradable plastic bags in the draws and let guests know through the compendium that they can use these when necessary.

“As a founding member of the Rotorua Sustainable Tourism Charter it’s great to see Millennium Hotel Rotorua leading the way in diverting a major waste stream from the landfill.”

Being innovative with oil

Waikite Valley Thermal Pools is a gem of an attraction, but owners Mark and Lisa Bowie know that even gems need to be looked after. Waikite’s location is a challenge when it comes to recycling and other waste management activities.

One such example is disposing of used cooking oil. While there are contractors willing to remove this waste, the distance from Waikite to Rotorua makes the service unreliable and costly. In a classic example of thinking outside the square, Mark decided to refine the café’s cooking oil and use it for his diesel ute.

“I’m using it in my old ute at a ratio of 30 percent cooking oil to 70 percent diesel, with varying degrees of success,” he said.

“Every now and then the odd bit of crud gets into the fuel and the ute starts to cough and splutter a bit. However, overall it’s working well.”

Changes in berry packaging

Mamaku Blue joined the charter in June 2006 but owners Anne and Harry Frost have always been aware of the need to be sustainable. Over the years this has paid dividends even through relatively simple actions.

In 2008 Mamaku Blue addressed its packaging waste while simultaneously reducing packaging costs. Till then, the 30 tons of blueberries sold each year were delivered to the wholesaler in 10kg cardboard boxes with plastic bag liners. On receipt of the shipment, the wholesaler would repackage the blueberries into 1kg bags for on-selling. During the 2008 season Mamaku Blue introduced 250kg food and freezer grade plastic bins to replace the 10kg boxes. These were bought from an Auckland factory that was considering disposing of them in a landfill.



After repairing the bins to acceptable condition, Mamaku Blue began delivering all blueberries to the wholesaler in them. This practice avoids the use of more than 3000 cardboard boxes and plastic liner bags every year.

Reusable food and freezer-grade plastic bins replaced single-use plastic-lined cardboard box packaging.

“Sometimes you have to step back and take an ‘outside the square’ look at your business to discover what would seem an obvious solution,” Anne and Harry said.

Anne and Harry’s wholesaler now uses the same bins for other products, further reducing packaging costs and waste.

Phasing out chemicals

The Jade Factory has found micro-fibre is soft to the touch and cleans glass perfectly without any chemicals. Since it began using this product, the business has stopped using glass cleaner on its display cabinets.

"There are many ways in which we can do better," marketing manager Sabine Willemsen said.

"We're trying to reduce the use of chemicals in general. If we need to use chemicals we only use Eco-Store products, which we buy at the supermarket."

The business has changed dramatically in its recycling processes.

"In the past we were putting out at least four general rubbish bags a week. Now with recycling in place we usually put out only one and occasionally two a week," Sabine said.

Being a retail store means packaging is a major waste stream the business has to deal with.

"We've started discussing this issue with our suppliers," Sabine said.

"It's important to let them know about the company's packaging issues and to discuss possible solutions. In some cases the shop reuses packaging. For example, bubble wrap is reused for shipping products between stores and polystyrene lids are reused as work trays for the wholesale area.

The charter's sustainability assessment was prepared for the Rotorua store and factory, but many of the actions recommended are implemented in other stores around New Zealand.

"We are also considering actions each store and its staff can take to support the communities in which they operate," Sabine said.

Eco-tourism venture

Te Urewera Treks is a classic example of what eco-tourism looks like. The business provides one to three day guided walks for small groups in the Whirinaki Forest Park, Te Urewera National Park and on private Maori land. The business is owned and operated by husband-and-wife team Joe and Joanna Doherty. They live in the small community of Ngaputahi in Te Urewera. Joe was born and brought up in Te Urewera and English-born Joanna has been living in New Zealand for 20 years.

In November 2008 Te Urewera Treks and Dutch tour wholesaler TravelEssence launched a tourism initiative that is a great example of how a business can support its community through employment opportunities, increase biodiversity through rainforest restoration and offer visitors a chance to offset their carbon emissions.



Joe Doherty (right) and visitors plant a tree.

The concept involves international visitors offsetting their carbon emissions by planting native tree seedlings. In addition they make a donation to the ongoing management of the resulting forest.

"The management donation has an education element to it," Joe said.

"It's important that anyone planting trees to offset carbon emissions is aware that tree planting is not enough; the trees then need to be protected from both animal and plant pests to survive."

The new tree planting initiative is an optional half-day which is combined with the business' trekking products.

TravelEssence specialises in high quality, high-value, individually tailored tours to New Zealand with a focus on sustainability. TravelEssence expects more than 1000 of its clients to choose Te Urewera Treks' tree planting option over the next three years. Some of the job opportunities from this project include guiding, pest control and establishing a native seedling nursery.

"We believe that a business should benefit the community in which it operates and this is especially true for the region in which we operate," Joe said.

Sustainable design

Many Rotorua locals have enjoyed the exciting and wacky adventures offered by Off Road NZ since it opened in 1992. Owners Ian and Carol Tew moved the company headquarters to a new location on the Mamaku site in 2008.

"The old building is simply not suitable any more and building a new one also gives us the opportunity to incorporate sustainability elements into its design," Ian said.

As well as including double glazing, higher than standard insulation, an improved wastewater system and design that takes advantage of natural light, the new building will also collect rain water from the roof which will be used to flush toilets and wash vehicles. An added benefit of moving to the new location is its proximity to the operational driving areas which will reduce the business's carbon emissions.

"The current headquarters is about 1km from the operational driving area. This means we use around 465 litres of fuel a year to transfer visitors to the operational area. As well as saving on fuel costs we will also be reducing our carbon footprint by around 1.2 tonnes a year," Ian said.

A green spin on jet boating

Agrojet hasn't been a charter member for long, but the company is already making significant improvements to its environmental sustainability. In early 2008 it introduced the first of three new eco-friendly Indmar motors to its fleet. When all three motors are in place in late 2009, Agrojet will have reduced its carbon monoxide emissions by up to 95 percent.



"This makes Agrojet a leader in New Zealand when it comes to environmental performance of commercial jet boats," Agrojet operations and marketing manager Jason Trask said.

After a year of extensive research, Jason believes Agrojet has found what it was looking for in the latest Indmar marine engine. Developed by Indmar Marine Engines, the EXT/CAT (Extreme Tuned Exhaust with Catalyst) is the marine industry's first clean catalytic converter exhaust system for gasoline marine inboard engines. The Environmental Protection Agency has recognised the engine's ability to significantly eliminate dangerous emissions as a revolutionary step in the boating industry.

Agrojet is also the only operator in New Zealand with a purpose-built watercourse.

"This eliminates the environmental problems associated with operating on lakes and rivers," Jason said.

Agrojet is looking to offer its unique purpose-built, fully lined watercourse system to the world market.

"The purpose-built watercourse has significant advantages in places such as Europe where there are stringent restrictions on the use of waterways," Jason said.

Waste- and- carbon-neutral

Rainbow Springs Kiwi Wildlife Park has undertaken a new challenge to become waste-neutral, carbon-neutral and more sustainable in its business practices as part of its commitment to charter membership.

A large part in this process has been the 2007 purchase of Ecoverm worm farms. These farms now play a major part in the cycle of green waste in the park and can chew through one tonne of green waste a year. The vermicast (worm poo) is used as a high-nutrient soil conditioner while the lechate (worm juice) is used as liquid fertiliser on the organic vegetable garden. All waste from the staff room, café, and gardens is used either in compost, for pig food, or comes to the worm farms to be turned into high-quality fertiliser for use around the park.

This simple solution is providing Rainbow with another attraction in the park, along with tangible results in the garden. Worms are proving to be an excellent way to help children become environmentally aware and are a fascinating addition to the work done in the park. Rainbow hopes visitors to the park will be encouraged to make changes at home and build their own worm farms. In the meantime they are happy watching the worms at work and enjoying the great results in their fabulous organic garden.

Guarding the river

Kaitiaki Adventures Rotorua was founded in 1999, setting up its base adjacent to Hell's Gate and Wai Ora Spa in Tikitere. With no city wastewater service in the area and a geothermal aquifer just under the earth's crust, wastewater treatment for Kaitiaki was going to be a challenge. To solve the problem its owners installed a composting toilet and are now working on an eco-shower, which operates on a gravity fed system from a 5000 litre black rainwater tank with back up solar heating) and grey-water separator from the Bio-loo range for the shower wastewater.