**Sustainable Travel & Ecotourism in New Zealand**



New Zealand has a long-established reputation for being "clean and green," and Tourism New Zealand's 100% Pure New Zealand brand campaign has reinforced that. It goes without saying that tourism in this country is largely shaped by the uniqueness of our environment and culture, and as the major contributor to the nation's economy, it is vital that all New Zealanders have a genuine desire to ensure its future. No surprise, then, that ecotourism is now the fastest growing sector of New Zealand's tourism industry. Tourism operators and organizations are now working much more closely with central and local governments to address concerns about waste disposal associated with campers and motor homes, and tourists' accessibility to local recycling programs. In short, there has been a groundswell of interest in sustainability measures, and there is now an expectation that business operators will put their best foot forward -- especially in the tourism arena.

Leading the charge is Tourism New Zealand, with its unique approach to sustainability based on the traditional Maori principles of *manaakitanga* (hospitality) and*kaitiakitanga* (guardianship) - welcoming visitors while protecting and managing our culture and environment. Its Tourism Strategy 2015 is based on a whole New Zealand approach that will see increasing numbers of sustainability initiatives put into action over the coming few years. This includes initiatives like the New Zealand Emissions Trading Scheme, which aims to encourage all sectors of the economy, including tourism, to find smart, efficient ways to cut back their emissions. A transport strategy will focus on creating a sustainable transport network throughout the country.

Already in place is the Qualmark Responsible Tourism Operations program, a partnership between Tourism New Zealand and the New Zealand Automobile Association. While the system does have its detractors (with negativity focused on the nature of its rating system), it has gone some way toward tidying up New Zealand's accommodations sector. In terms of sustainability and ecotourism, it must be said that some rating system is better than no rating system. You'll now find many tourism providers boasting about having a Qualmark Enviro-Gold, -Silver, or -Bronze rating - so many, in fact, that it's hard not to suspect some of the motives behind this huge rush to sign on. Businesses performing at the top level of this rating system, though, will be energy efficient and will have active waste management and water conservation practices, and will be taking part in conservation initiatives and community activities. It is largely thanks to this integrated quality and environmental tourism performance assurance system - the first of its kind in the world - that New Zealand was voted Overall Winner and Best Destination in the Virgin Holidays Responsible Tourism Awards in London in 2008. The judges recognized Qualmark Green as one of New Zealand's most important achievements in responsible tourism.

New Zealand's Environmentally Sustainable Tourism Project is another worthy of attention. Jointly run by the Ministry for the Environment and the Ministry of Tourism, it established six regional tourism charters committed to the sustainable practices laid down in Tourism New Zealand's sustainable strategy which work toward improving the environmental performance of participating tourism operators.

Increasing numbers of New Zealand businesses are also becoming Green Globe Benchmarked or Green Globe Certified. Green Globe is based on Agenda 21, a comprehensive plan of action regarding sustainable development endorsed at the United Nations Earth Summit in 1992. There are currently Green Globe participants in more than 50 countries around the world. A tourism operation can only use a Green Globe logo once it has been measured to be above the benchmarking base-line performance level.

Recycling generally has taken on a new impetus in New Zealand in the last 2 years. Every major city's rubbish collection program now has separate bins for paper and recyclable goods, organic waste and nonrecyclable matter; and national parks and public areas are well-equipped with rubbish bins. Recycling within hotels (for guests) is much less common. Many hotels have instituted sustainable practices in their day to day operations and increasing numbers of chefs are sourcing organic meats and other ingredients to include in their menus.

One of the most exciting aspects of sustainability in New Zealand has been the huge growth in volunteer projects with a sustainability focus. In short, there are numerous opportunities to sign on for replanting programs, track and walkway building projects, native bird-breeding programs, pest trapping in national parks, working on organic farms, and more. This is an excellent way to give your holiday a meaningful edge that will be rewarding for both yourself and New Zealand's unique environment.

You can help even more by flying here with our national airline, **Air New Zealand.** Not only did they carry out the world's first commercial aviation test flight using a sustainable second-generation biofuel derived from the plant *Jatropha curcas,* they also have an active carbon offset program, which allows customers to make a donation to the Air New Zealand Environment Trust.