

Waiheke visitors told their bed for the night is 'on the house'

Waiheke's Covid-ravaged economy is to receive a much-needed shot in the arm thanks to a scheme targeted at gifting visitors "free" accommodation and pumping what they save back into local businesses.

The innovative On The House project has been turned around in double-quick time (these marketing campaigns can usually take months) in a bid to promote it over Queen's Birthday Weekend and attract hundreds of visitors to the island on Friday 19 June and Saturday 20 June.

The idea is that the more than 80 homeowners and accommodation providers who are taking part will forego their rental fee, (less linen, cleaning and administration costs), and then refund the balance in "Waiheke Dollar" vouchers that can be spent at a wide range of businesses throughout the island.

Although it's clear that providers will take a hit on the potential income from a couple of nights' accommodation, the idea is that it will "prime the pump" for more marketing events, raise the profile of Waiheke as an ideal winter destination, and bring some cash back into an economy that lost two months' worth of a busy late summer and autumn tourism season.

The project is the brainchild of several local Waiheke residents including Kim Rae, owner of Stay Waiheke, a home rental business on the island.

"We want people to come to Waiheke and enjoy and experience what's on offer," Kim says. "They can use their Waiheke dollars for wine-tasting, zip-lining, re-

tail therapy, car rentals, e-bike rentals, green fees to play golf, eating at one of our incredible restaurants or cafes ... the list goes on. You can even book a seaplane to get here.

"It's a beautiful place to live with an incredibly caring and giving community, so it's very much 'give back to get back'. So many businesses have been hit hard by the absence of tourism, and as residents it is up to us to drive money back into the local economy."

The idea for On The House is less than a fortnight old, and long hours have gone into its execution - meaning wrinkles have had to be ironed out, explanatory emails have followed up on announcements, and a deadline for people wanting to take part has been extended - but the speed of delivery has been impressive. Already organisers are thinking that it's the sort of idea that could easily roll out in other tourism-dependant areas such as Rotorua or Queenstown.

For now, though, Waiheke businesses are firmly focused on three weeks' time when, hopefully, the visitors will spend up large with their "Waiheke Dollars".

Tracy Martin, whose Kiwi House accommodation in Blackpool is part


of the scheme, says she'd seen her visitor numbers plummet to zero during lockdown, but interest was beginning to return from the domestic market. She had nothing but praise for the Waiheke Island Tourism Forum, who kicked off their innovative and collaborative thinking last week with the digital billboards in Auckland city and who are providing the framework for the On The House promotion.

Photo Merrie Hewetson



"We went from a Zoom meeting to within days having this up and running. They've said we've got to get on and do it - and that's what's happened," Tracy says. "They've nailed it."

Tracy knows she's not going to reap huge rewards immediately from the scheme, but knows that the money will go to benefit the whole community. "For me it's one weekend where I'll take a hit - but for the good of the whole island and the exposure it should bring for Waiheke and those who take part, it should bring benefits. It's a small ask with possibly a big reward." • James Belfield







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18-24 May	Rainfall		Max Temperature		Min Temperature	
	Waiheke	Auckland	Waiheke	Auckland	Waiheke	Auckland
Monday	0.0	0.0	20.0	21.6	10.5	8.0
Tuesday	0.0	0.0	19.5	20.3	8.0	5.2
Wednesday	0.0	0.0	18.1	18.8	9.5	6.8
Thursday	0.0	0.0	19.5	19.9	9.9	7.3
Friday	0.0	0.0	19.4	20.8	8.4	6.3
Saturday	0.5	0.0	16.3	16.6	11.6	10.6
Sunday	6.0	12.0	17.1	18.1	15.7	16.8
Weekly Total	6.5	12.0				
May Total	52.0	80.5				
May Average			19.3	20.1	11.9	10.9
Weekly ave			18.6	19.4	10.5	8.7
May Hist Ave	113.6	145.8	18.5	18.4	11.8	10.8