

Waiheke Island boltholes: Luxury holiday homes sought after by coronavirus escapees

Caroline Williams 05:00, Mar 08 2020



REUTERS

Coronavirus cases top 100,000 worldwide, 21 cases found on cruise ship

Twenty-one people aboard a cruise ship that was barred from docking in San Francisco have tested positive for coronavirus, U.S. officials said on Friday, adding to the more than 100,000 cases of the fast-spreading illness across the world.

A luxury accommodation agent on Waiheke Island is receiving increased interest from people willing to pay thousands of dollars per night to escape from Asia's [coronavirus hotspots](#).

While some [businesses are struggling](#) to keep afloat due to the Covid-19 outbreak and [plunging tourism figures](#), holiday home rental agency Waiheke Unlimited has experienced the opposite.

Managing director Ed Coutts said it had received about "half a dozen or more" enquiries from people living in Hong Kong, Singapore and Thailand who are keen to escape [strict health authorities](#) and [isolation rules](#).



Waiheke Unlimited

Luxury accommodation on Waiheke Island can go for between \$6500 and \$5500 per night - the one pictured is available for \$1650 per night.

Many of those enquiries were from people who had stayed at properties advertised by Coutts before.

Three families have already arrived, while others were still considering whether it was possible with current [New Zealand travel restrictions](#).

Two of those families arrived in Auckland via private jet, as they had done previously.

Coutts said they were "higher end people who can afford to take off for months" while things settle down their home countries.



Waiheke Unlimited

Waiheke Island is seen as "a safe haven" for those fleeing coronavirus epicentres according to a local property manager.

Those who had booked or were looking to book were willing to pay between \$2000 and \$5000 per night, for sustained periods.

"They just feel it's a good idea to get out of town," he added, with Waiheke Island being an ideal hideaway given it's isolation from crowds while still being close to the city.

Asked what property owners thought about visitors hunkering down in their homes to avoid the coronavirus, Coutts said the situation was "no different" than people simply booking the properties for a holiday.

It wasn't hard to see why Waiheke Island was a desirable place to escape, he said.

"It's a pretty safe haven. If you look at the world right now, where would you run to, to be safe?"



Supplied/Waiheke Unlimited

It's not hard to see why Waiheke Island is a good place to hide away, Coutts said.

"It's not a bad place to be isolated to."

Coutts had expected more cancellations than usual due to the virus, but so far business had been good.

Auckland Property Investors Association vice president Peter Lewis said landlords were unlikely to rent their properties to anyone whose intentions were "a bit open-ended", such as those wanting to stay until "the scare has run its course".

"Most landlords don't want to rent to people who will be renting the property for a shorter period. We want to rent a property for every day of the year."

A full-time residential landlord himself, Lewis could see why high-end rentals would be popular for those wanting to escape.

"It's more a case of a specialised market and these people must be fairly affluent to be able to do this."

One Roof housing commentator Ashley Church said the "safe haven" effect could have a more general effect on the New Zealand property market if the coronavirus crisis carried on for months.

If New Zealand looked to be weathering the storm better than other countries then "absolutely if that happens I think New Zealand will be seen as a bolthole both for Kiwis returning and people coming and relocating here.

But it would take some months for that effect to trickle though and "if that happens you're talking about much larger issues than your property market; you're talking about major ramifications either positive or negative for the economy."

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