

Eco-Tour and Farm Visit to Help the Planet

By Donna & Stuart Hamilton, Coast to Coast Tours

Coast to Coast Tours, an Auckland-based tour company with the goal of giving visitors a blend of Nature, Culture, Conservation and Environmental aspects, started operating in 2002, and have been bringing people into their historic Homestead of Auckland, emphasizing the New Zealand lifestyle as well as the natural scenic attractions.

The company focuses on the West Auckland region, where our family has lived and farmed since 1922. We know the area, its history, and its people, very well. We have always regarded our tour quite different from the usual sightseeing tours because of the uniquely local experiences we offer.

We have noted with interest that there doesn't seem to be many organizations in New Zealand that follow the principles of ecotourism as TIES has set forth. When we took a holiday in Australia a couple of years ago and we discovered a tourist newspaper outlining the TIES descriptions of nature-based tourism and ecotourism. This gave us an indication that we were meeting these criteria, and we have been thrilled to contribute to TIES' international network as a member.



Stuart and Donna: Stuart has been a sheep farmer all of his working life, and Donna is part Ngai Tahu Maori.

We've felt that although there are a number of eco-tours in New Zealand, many focus mainly on the nature aspects of our country, and include little cultural experience - be it Maori or Pakeha (European). Recently, however, Tourism New Zealand has begun emphasizing the importance of *Manaakitanga* (sharing exceptional and natural hospitality, knowledge and beliefs, on the basis of mutual respect between host and visitor), and *Kaitiakitanga* (the guardianship and sustainable management of natural, built and cultural resources for the collective benefit of current and future generations), so it is pleasing to see such statements starting to filter through into the New Zealand tourism industry.

With the New Zealand Government signing the Kyoto Agreement regarding climate change, the country is beginning to approach sustainability and environmental issues in a large way, e.g. wind-power generation and tree planting for carbon credits.

Our tour company has decided do our own small contribution in regard to this, so along with our already eco-friendly operation, we are also offering our overseas visitors the opportunity to purchase their own New Zealand Native hardwood trees, which have been proven to be very effective in sequestering carbon.



We have established a nursery on our farm where visitors can select a tree and then plant it. They learn about global warming and how the tree will continue to grow and keep absorbing carbon for many years to come. This is a more personal and interactive way in which to 'buy' carbon credits compared to the usual over-the-counter method. (This particularly appeals to our cruise boat groups).

Their tree is numbered with a UV tag, and a certificate is issued. Later when we can be certain that the tree will not be stressed (e.g. by summer drought), it is re-planted into our forest reserve where it will be protected by covenants for perpetuity. To date, we are the only tour company in the Auckland region that is doing this type of tree planting, and we are finding it becoming more and more popular with our tourist visitors.



Native Tree certificate



Carbon credit tree tag



Part of forest reserve

About Coast to Coast Tours

We are based at our own sheep farm which has been in our family for 85 years. Today, it has been reduced to 100 acres and carries 500 sheep. During our travels as a family group, we thought how it would have been nice to interact more with "the locals" and experience their lifestyle. So, after we noted the absence of these types of tours (especially in the Auckland region!), we thought about starting an ECO-tour and formed 'Coast to Coast Tours'. We began operating in 2002, and today we have hosted people from (almost!) every part of the world; USA, Canada, Japan, Australia, New Caledonia, Hawaii, Tahiti, Papua New Guinea, China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Philippines, Indonesia, India, Saudi Arabia, Dubai, Korea, Russia, Germany, France, Switzerland, Belgium, The Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Denmark, Austria, Finland, Britain, Scotland, Wales, Ireland. (www.coast2coastnz.com)

Photos by Coast to Coast Tours

