



AHIPARA  
LUXURY TRAVEL

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## Luxury is more than an expensive property!



One of our themes over the last few years has been flexibility. Typically, the individuals at the top end of the travel market are used to flexibility in their day to day existence. Meanwhile luxury tourism in New Zealand delivers a high quality but inflexible product.

At the lower end of the scale are the "luxury packages" with set itineraries, set activities, set lengths etc. These find their niche typically with less demanding people.

In the middle are the luxury destination managers - our competition - who provide a tailor made itinerary using established lodges and good guides. These, however, also tend to be pre-planned and fixed rather rigidly by an itinerary bounded by lodge and activity cancellation fees. To make these flexible, the client needs to be able to pay substantial cancellation fees.

We have tried to keep pushing for more flexibility for our clients and are happy to say that some lodges have been very accommodating in relaxing their cancellation policies. We're not naming them here as everyone would ask for this service as standard!! We realise that an exception was made for us as a mark of respect, and we very much respect this privilege.

However, what we wanted to share with you was how we pushed the boundaries further with a group of six young Russian VIPs. These busy people often book at the last minute and are very focussed on flexibility. Having had meaningless boundaries established by the state for so many

years, their immediate reaction to any comment of "that cannot be done" is "why?". On a couple of occasions I have stood there and thought - yes - you're right, why should that not be possible?

So, these six booked late and wanted a week at a beach resort over Christmas/New Year as well as two weeks of touring. Of course all the established lodges were booked and had been booked for quite a while. We found a top quality private house in Russell, hired a top chef from Puretastes in Paihia (thanks Paul Jobin and Tobias Wilkinson), and added a Russian-speaking travel manager (myself).

We then approached each day flexibly, with a menu of options which was usually discussed over eggs benedict. We found a charter boat at very short notice for a day's fishing, brought up a beach volleyball set from Auckland to free us from the fixed net on the local beach, took picnics all over Northland, hired water taxis to take us to private islands, found tables at top quality restaurants at short notice, an aloe vera plant for some effective sunburn treatment(!) - and all at minimum fuss. And this sort of service continued all the way down both islands. The result - very happy very relaxed clients who have only been home for 24 hours and are already talking about re-booking.

My point? That having a real travel manager, knowledgeable and client-focussed, can add a level of flexibility as well as a level of quality to a luxury vacation. The travel manager needs to be able to act as guide, qualified driver, interpreter, butler, concierge, property manager - whatever is required, as well as have a real empathy for his clients and desire to provide the best possible day for them. Day after day. We are working on bringing even more flexibility to our clients in the future...

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