

Golden times on their way

DESTINATION Waitomo co-chairman Nick Andreef is predicting a "golden period" of business for North King Country tourism operators following a surge in visitor numbers to the region.

In a report released yesterday, Hamilton and Waikato Tourism's (HWT) statistics show for the year ending June 2014 commercial guest nights in the Waikato region were up 9.3% compared to 5.4% nationally and guest arrivals were up 13.3% compared to the previous 12 months.

Domestic nights also increased, rising 10.6% across the year.

SEVEN COUNCILS

HWT is a Regional Tourism Organisation (RTO) funded through a Service Level Agreement from the region's seven local authorities – Hamilton City, Waikato, Matamata-Piako, Waipa, Otorohanga, Waitomo and South Waikato district councils.

Mr Andreef, who is also the founder of Waitomo Adventures, credits the increase to a recovery from the 2007/2008 global financial crisis, HWT advertising and interest in the region following the release of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* movies.

Destination Waitomo Inc administers the official travel and tourism website for the Waitomo and Otorohanga districts

by offering information about tourist attractions, accommodation options, restaurant ideas and adventure activities from Kawhia to Mokau.

MORE TOURISTS

"Every month since April, visitor numbers at Waitomo Adventures have been up on the same time last year," says Mr Andreef.

"That growth has varied anywhere between eight to 40 percent per month and it only seems to be getting stronger. But we're not the only ones. Many other business operators I speak with are recording very strong numbers as well.

"I think it is because the world is getting over the global recession, and various markets are recovering.

"But also because the 100% Middle Earth campaign is working, especially on Americans, by making Waikato and the North King Country a must stop destination on their itinerary."

EMPLOYMENT

Figures released last week by the Tourism Industry Association of New Zealand (TIA) showed 11.4% of jobs held by Otorohanga residents are supported by tourism with 9.3% in Waitomo.

For the entire Waikato the figure is 16.6% (or one in six) placing the region

among one of the most reliant on tourism employment in the country.

Mr Andreef says the increase in tourist numbers is not just financially beneficial to local business operators but it provides employment and business opportunities as well.

"We (Waitomo Adventures) are employing new guides as fast as we can and we'll be hard put to have enough guides for summer.

"The flow-on benefits from that are all these people will live and work in the area and spend their pay here.

"So all the signs are that the next two or three years are going to be a little golden period for tourism in the North King Country."

He says The Timber Trail in Pureora and Hairy Feet Waitomo in Piopio have only added to the district's appeal and together with HWT, everything is being done to capitalise on increasing visitor numbers.

"The RTO message that this region is a one stop destination for all tourists has been going out internationally for about three years now and if we can all keep singing the same song from the councils down to the individual operators then I'm sure the local tourism industry will only continue to grow.

"And so far it is working great."



HOT SPOT: Destination Waitomo co-chairman Nick Andreef predicts tourist numbers in the North King Country to continue rising for the next few years. PHOTO SUPPLIED

Candidates here for MFVIN debate

FROM P1

"I'm hoping for a big turnout because this is a big problem affecting a lot of people in our community."

MFVIN co-ordinator Caren Campbell says she hopes next week's debate will draw attention to the problem and the need for action.

"The debate will draw people's attention to the concerns many of us have and make sure our local politicians are mindful of what women and children are facing in many homes.

"Our politicians must listen to the people working on the frontline and understand the realities of what they are dealing with.

"It will be great for the politicians to hear people's concerns and give direct answers. We need to know what the parties have to offer."

Waitomo Waipa Women's Refuge manager Wendy Valler says she is pleased to see the candidates "lining up on the issue" and looks forward to hearing how they plan to reduce family violence.

"It is a huge social problem in the Maniapoto region and we need government intervention because the problem is too big for us to solve on our own.

"Family violence needs to be discussed in public – it's been kept behind closed doors for too long."

Ms Campbell is inviting the public to email her their questions prior to the debate which will be held at 7pm on Tuesday, September 16 at Te Kuiti High School's pavilion. Entry is free.

Email your questions to – mfvin@www.refuge.co.nz

CALLOUTS




VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES TE KUITI

AN ELECTRICIAN working at Fabia on King St East accidentally set off the building's fire alarm on Monday at 8.30am. Firefighters responded but no action was required.


WESTPAC RESCUE HELICOPTER

EMERGENCY services personnel

retrieved a one-year-old boy from a Taharoa home on Monday morning after he fell and hit his head. He was flown to Waikato Hospital for treatment. The youngster sustained a blow to the head two weeks ago and was non-responsive after injuring himself again. He was discharged from hospital on Tuesday.



PRE-ENROLMENT INFORMATION EVENING WITH SENIOR MANAGEMENT
Wednesday, September 17, 2014
School Library from 5.30pm-7pm



Success is about a relevant curriculum supported by quality teaching and learning.

Te Kuiti High School, Hospital Road, Te Kuiti
P 07 878 6292 E principal@tkhs.school.nz

If you are unable to attend this evening, you are most welcome to make an appointment with a member of the senior management team.