



THREE FOR TEA: Taranaki King Country MP Barbara Kuriger, Prime Minister John Key and Waitomo mayor Brian Hanna chat in the tea hut while their kawakawka tea is prepared.



TEA TREE: Nine-year-old Jada Barnes, whose family own Cave World, helps Prime Minister John Key plant a kawakawka bush near the tea hut.

PM drops in for a 'cuppa'

BY **ROBBIE KAY**

PRIME Minister John Key dropped into Waitomo for a cup of tea yesterday.

And... it wasn't just any old brew. He took time out from his busy schedule to sip a refreshing cup of kawakawka tea in a ponga hut tea ceremony in the bush near Waitomo Village.

Mr Key was flown by helicopter to Waitomo Village to open Cave World's kawakawka tea hut, a new venture launched by Kyle Barnes, his partner Trieste Henry and their extended family that operate Foot-whistle glowworm cave tours in the

Te Anaroa cave system.

Mr Barnes says they developed the bush tea ceremony concept as a point of difference to appeal to tourists seeking a unique small group experience.

Visitors stop off for a cup of tea after touring the caves.

"The Prime Minister's visit here is wonderful recognition for all the people who have so hard to make it happen," he says.

"We are grateful to our local Member of Parliament Barbara Kuriger for bringing Mr Key to Waitomo to share this special day with us."

TO P2

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PM drops in for a cuppa

FROM P1

He said the country's clear focus on the high end Asian tourism market had helped his company develop a product which would appeal to that market.

"In the near future we will be packaging our kawakawa tea for sale as souvenirs.

"And, because there is such a strong tea culture throughout China and Japan we are looking at inviting visitors to plant a kawakawa bush which we could then harvest twice a year and send them their own special tea leaves."

He says the company is a very small family business, with 9500 tourists a year on the Cave World glowworm tour and 8000 doing the blackwater rafting experience.

Also sitting down for tea with the PM were Waitomo mayor Brian Hanna, National's Taranaki King Country electorate chairman Leveson Gower and Destination Waitomo co-chairman Nick Andreef.

And did the kawakawa tea pass the taste test? After three cups, Mr Key declared it a winner.

Mr Barnes boiled the water for the tea – it comes from the natural spring which feeds the caves – on a quaint coal range in the hut and made a brew using dried kawakawa leaves harvested from around the mouth of the glowworm cave.

TRADITIONAL USES

He says the tea was traditionally used by Maori to treat a range of conditions and as a health tonic for general wellbeing.

The tea leaves are harvested twice a year from five-year-old plants.

Following the ceremony, Mr Key planted a kawakawa bush beside the hut.

Mr Andreef says: "It's very cool that our Prime Minister is opening this wonderful new venture at Cave World.

"Waitomo tourism has enormous scope for growth and we are lucky to have entrepreneurs like Kyle Barnes, promoting ventures which tap into a whole new class of tourists.

"They are appealing to the high end market, customers who are discerning and will stay longer, do more and spend more.

"That's certainly what we want – quality tourism."

Mr Andreef was delighted the Prime Minister was also going to speak to North King Country tourism leaders.

"He's been tourism minister since he came to power and the tourism industry appreciates his support, both at a local and regional level," he says.



THIRSTY WORK: Prime Minister John Key refills his cup of kawakawa tea after declaring it a tasty drop.



BREW'S READY: Waitomo business operator Kyle Barnes was thrilled that Prime Minister John Key officially opened Cave World's kawakawa tea hut yesterday. Taranaki King Country MP Barbara Kuriger accompanied Mr Key.

Somewhere in...

In 2015 – the year we will mark the 100th anniversary of Gallipoli – we are seeking letters, postcards, diaries and journals from those men and women who served New Zealand in all wars overseas.

Thanks to the censors, particularly in World War I & II, those here at home often received letters from loved ones labelled. . . *Somewhere in . . .*

Just where that was . . . was never said.

Regardless of where your loved ones served or for how long, we'd like to include their words, experiences and thoughts in our 2015 *In Our Defence ANZAC* feature.

To contribute please contact the editor via email editor@waitomonews.co.nz, phone 07 878 1188 or call into our Te Kuiti office.

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WAITOMONews 2015 Anzac Feature