



Game to have a go! Australian tourists learn the actions from John Hudson during their entertainment night at the Rendezvous restaurant.

Maori International On Road To Success

Maori International appears to have confounded the sceptics if its first venture into tourism is any indication of the company's future.

Opotiki was a stop-over for a bus load of Australian tourists during a three-week holiday in New Zealand, and they had a further taste of Maori hospitality at the Rendezvous restaurant on Friday night when, after the evening meal, they joined in an impromptu concert with their host, John Hudson, and his group of entertainers.

Speaking to the News through the music and laughter, Hine Pipi told us she had been engaged to put the tour package together, and was also appointed as guide for the duration of the Australians' visit.

"It seemed such a massive task that the week before the tourists were due to arrive I almost threw it all away — but I'll never have any doubts again. The whole experience has been absolutely wonderful," she said.

"The tour has been designed as a public relations exercise among other things, and has certainly achieved its aim.

"The tourists are having an in-depth look at New Zealand culture, and the togetherness of our lifestyle is what they like.

"They've spent two nights sleeping on marae out of 11 to keep a balance in their itinerary.

"Credibility, integrity and quality is what they're looking for, and this is what they have found," Hine said.

The coach driver for the tour is Tui White of Rotorua, who has been eight years on the road with guided tours.

He has taken the Australian tourists from Auckland through to the Bay of Islands, returning through the kauri forests and calling at tourist places on the way back to Hamilton, and finally to their first Maori reception at Waahi Marae.

Then it was on the road again via National Park, Taupo to Rotorua and the Tarawhai Marae for another traditional welcome.

The following day it was on to Kawerau, a tour of the Tasman Pulp and Paper Company's mill, and then on to Opotiki via Whakatane.

On their arrival in Wellington travelling on the west coast of the North Island, another Maori driver will take over from Tui for the tour through the South Island which will include Queenstown and Mount Cook.

And what of the Australian tourists themselves? We spoke with a number of them as they were enjoying Johnny's special gourmet seafood dishes.

"Unbelievable," was the word that most of them used. "We've never experienced hospitality like it."

Marae Nights

And their most memorable part of the tour to date? Without hesitation they all voted for the nights on the maraes.

To be greeted with a traditional Maori welcome, experiencing a meal in the dining room and a night in the meeting house was something they will

never forget.

Still their enjoyment goes on. One excited lady found it difficult to express all that she felt. "That cunning little kiwi coach driver told us tonight that we were going out to dinner. We had no idea it was going to turn out such a wonderful evening."

"This is the real thing, and so different from the tours where you travel on the main highways, and stay in city hotels," said Mrs Phyllis Robinson, who was mothering her Australian counterparts.

"It is not an expensive tour, and one of our people even sold an insurance policy to come here," she said.

As the evening in the Rendezvous wore on, the spontaneity of "Old McDonald Had a Farm" sung like it had never been sung before, followed by "Whakaria Mai" all the groups supported by waiatas — Maori people singing with their guests — it was all tremendous fun.

There were few dry eyes among the visitors when the evening really had to come to an end and brown hands clasped white to sing "Now is the Hour When We Must Say Goodbye".

But there will be other occasions just like it, because our visitors are going home to "tell everyone of the holiday they had."

Te Maori

Not only from across the Tasman will they come. Te Maori exhibition has created such an impression in the United States that a number of Americans are now making inquiries about coming to New Zealand to see the land from which the exhibition came and Maori International is waiting.