

Luxurious Okawa Bay Resort, Maori Initiative

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Upmarket and lavish, the Okawa Bay Lake Resort is the single largest Maori development in the tourist industry.

Six and a half million dollars is being pumped into this uncluttered complex, located on the banks of Lake Rotoiti. Owned by 189 members of the Ngati Pikiao sub-tribe, the hotel is sited on six acres of prime land. The hotel opened its doors on December 2, 1985 after three years of planning and construction.

The resort is built on a tranquil and charming curve on the very first Lake Rotoiti bay one hits after travelling 14 km east of Rotorua's front-line street.

Originally a sawmill operated on the land and beneath the waters of Okawa Bay I'm told that hundreds of kauri logs still rest, maturing nicely over a period of 50 years. For the past 20 years up until 1983, the area was used as a motor camp.

The camp gradually became decrepit and when the camp lease had expired, Logan Hall, one of the land owners and a retired Auckland businessman in the food and clothing industries, put forward the scheme to convert the land into a hotel.

Hall argued that the site was too good for just another motor camp. Initially a family-type hotel was envisaged but the final plan which followed market research, was for an upmarket hotel resort.

Hall had a hard time convincing the other 188 owners who had already formed a 438 Maori Trust a legal business entity. Eventually Okawa Bay Lake Resort Trust was set up, with a group of six people appointed to represent the owners, administer the trust and oversee the hotel.



'Time-Sharing' on part of the complex was incorporated solely to bring in ready cash. The trust employed Hall Group Ltd to develop the resort. Equity Corporation had a 49 percent interest in the Hall Group company.

With a projected four and a half million dollars expenditure, construction started in 1984 for a "five star-plus" resort consisting of 43 hotel rooms and 15 time-share condominiums (each housing up to six people). Today the resort boasts three and a half acres of grounds, a heated swimming pool, spa pools, saunas, tennis courts, a fully-equipped gym, a restaurant and bar, and the key amenity of a marina; which is the springboard for water skiing, trout fishing and pleasure boating on

the lake.

Lake Rotoiti is excellent for boating but it is a hard-fishing lake which apparently produces a very good condition-factor rainbow or brown trout. In fact the resort celebrated its opening day with someone catching a 15 pound rainbow trout. One can hire speed boats and cruiser fishing boats from a company associated with the resort.

But the Okawa Bay Lake Resort could become less attractive in the near future. There is the grave danger of Lake Rotoiti becoming heavily polluted within the next decade which will result in loss of marine life and other unsavoury aspects. This is due to the overflow of sewage pollution from Lake Rotorua. Steps are being taken to alleviate this problem but it seems a distinct possibility the situation will get much worse before any improvement will be apparent.

My wife Leigh and I were fortunate to experience two days at the resort last October. The staff was most friendly, the service good, the amenities first rate and the decor splendid.

The views from the hotel would be heaven for tired city business folk. One major distraction was the prominent hill on the opposite side of the resort had recently been cleared of gorse and entirely inappropriately, the Rotorua City Council were preparing to plant pine trees all over the hill rather than native trees, bushes and plants.

The luxuriously appointed hotel

