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"A Different Light"

A Different Light - 20 June 2020 – “Accessible Tourism is a no-brainer”

“Don’t leave home ‘till you have seen the country”. Do you remember that catchphrase from the 80’s campaign to encourage Kiwis to travel domestically in NZ before haring off overseas. It’s back. Now we are into Level 1 we are being actively encouraged to support our tourism sector by travelling domestically. So, my wife and I are taking up the challenge and we are heading down to Rotorua in the school holidays with our granddaughter in tow to introduce her to kiwiana tourism.

I haven’t been down there for so long. My earliest memories of Rotorua go back 45 years to when I was 10. The smell of hard-boiled eggs, a replica Pa site and the Rainbow Trout farm are all I seem to remember. I don’t know why I can’t remember the mud pools. I’m wondering if I even went there at that time.

I have always had a strong interest in Accessible Tourism as a tourism niche market. I have always thought it is a no brainer. It covers all the global sources of tourists and has a particular focus on the older tourist. The boomers and pre boomers have more time to travel and tend to have more disposable readyies to spend on a holiday. All the tourism sector needs to do is cater for their needs and promote that information in a succinct way. However for whatever reason, it hasn’t taken off in NZ. A few months ago, tourism was booming here. I guess when there is strong demand there is little need to step outside the square and chase alternative markets. I wonder now with tourism on life support whether operators are going to be better inclined to look at such a large and potentially lucrative market.

Historically cruise ships have successfully targeted and catered well for tourists wanting an accessible experience. Their environment on board cruise ships are accessible. Of course, when you go to get off a cruise ship experiences may differ. I dare say the cruise ship business will be haemorrhaging at the moment when their ships have recently turned into giant floating incubators for the virus with 42,000 cruise ship workers still trapped at sea.

One of the key ingredients for good accessible tourism is to provide good information about the services on offer and whether they are accessible or not. I googled Accessible Rotorua and I didn’t get a lot of information back. Yes there was some information available on

accessible accommodation however I'm wondering whether the attractions are going to be okay for me. Will I be able to use the gondola? Or will I get stuck going round and round with vertigo spiralling out of control. Will I be able to use the brake on the downhill luge or will it turn into runaway carnage exceeding the speed of sound, heading towards a crowd of innocent bystanders with my granddaughter on board? Will I be able to refresh my memories of the geothermal wonders of the mud pools and geysers? Will my mobility scooter go on the walking track? Will my mobility scooter go off the walking track and into a mud pool? That would be that! Time will tell. I will let you know.

Jonny Wilkinson is the CEO of Tiaho Trust - Disability A Matter of Perception. A Whangarei based disability advocacy organisation.