

Pakihi Toitū o Kāpiti - Sustainable Businesses Case Study

Aston Road Villa

1. Tell us a little bit about your sustainability journey as a business? What led Aston Road Villa to building a product and brand around sustainable thinking?

We purchased a section/paddock in Waikanae Downs in 2004, which had a small stream on the south side of the property, coming down the hill with no trees.

In 2012, a friend of ours told us he had been protecting his stream with the assistance of the Riparian Trust. We decided to investigate and contacted Rob Cross, the Biodiversity Advisor, Te Kairerenga Koiora at Kāpiti Coast District Council.

Funding was available for fencing the strip of land alongside our stream, which was permanently retired as part of a Memorandum of Understanding.

This was the start of our sustainability journey. We planted 3,000 native trees, especially varieties to attract native birds and provide nectar sources for bees. Planting began in winter 2013. We contracted Sweeney Environments to plant 1,000 each year to spread the cost. We completed the stream planting in 2015.

We love this quote from Tress That Count, which sums up our own planting - , *“Planting native trees is one of the most powerful actions we can take to combat climate change, protect our beautiful landscapes, waterways and forests for future generations.”*

2. Explain your process as a business, how did you research, explore and make decisions about the sustainability initiatives that you could implement?

In 2016, we decided to design and build a new home which incorporated a designated guest wing where we can host and share travel experiences with fellow travellers. In February 2018, we shifted in. The business Aston Road Villa Bed and Breakfast began with a logo and a website, and our first guests stayed in August 2018.

Right from the start we had a commitment to sustainability – protecting and caring for the environment we live in is important to us. Sustainability is part of our strategic and operational plan. Sustainability is one of our core values and we’re committed to sustainable tourism in all economic, visitor, host community and environment areas. Kaitikaitanga, the concept of guardianship for the sky, sea and land, is included in the process and practices of protecting and looking after our environment.

We have a sustainability section on our website and have the sustainable practices to minimise our impact on the environment listed.

Living rurally, we are on septic tanks and have to be careful with our water use. Our guests need to be aware of this. Setting up the business, we made sure our cleaning products, laundry detergents, soaps, and shampoo were biodegradable and eco-friendly. Recycling is encouraged, reusing Oeko-Tex towels and air-dried laundry are important. We have good Energy Star-rated appliances and a wrapped hot water cylinder for efficiency.

“We grow organic vegetables, have established an on-site orchard, compost our fruit and vegetable waste, and have continued planting on the property. We only use organic sprays, and keep bees, chickens and sheep.

More information can be found on our website.

We’ve also committed to the Tiake promise, with information available in our compendium.

We have belonged to the NZ Bed and Breakfast Association since May 2018. It has a quality assurance programme that includes the establishment of an environmental and sustainability policy. It is helpful to view other member's websites to see what they are doing on this journey. In July 2022, we achieved a Qualmark 4 star Plus Bed and Breakfast grading and a Silver Sustainable Tourism Award.

3. Why is sustainability important to you as a business? Why do you think it is important for Kāpiti?

Sustainability is a valuable point of difference in a business. Our focus is on the overseas tourist market. Many guests are now concerned that accommodation providers are making the smallest carbon footprint possible with their operation and are treating their environment in an eco-friendly way.

4. Do you have a formal business sustainability policy? If yes tell us about how you established that?

In February 2020, we signed up to the NZ Sustainability Commitment, which includes working towards a light environmental footprint and quality visitor experiences through actions such as restoring nature, eliminating waste. We have an action plan that we're implementing over the next three years. It's a work in progress. The template provided is excellent and worth researching.

5. What was your biggest challenge in working through more sustainable ways of operating?

Ongoing and instigating more ways to be sustainable, ensuring we are doing what we can. Regularly reviewing our three-year plan to work towards and make changes. It's a journey not a destination. It is ongoing, requires upskilling, researching, networking...

6. What is your key area of focus for improving your environmental sustainability?

Leave our environment (our land/property) in a better place for future generations.

7. Which sustainability initiatives are you most proud of and why?

Planting our stream to protect it was the catalyst for our sustainability journey. When we started our planting plan, we had not thought about starting a business or even building a new home. It's a good feeling to know we are doing our utmost to minimise damage to our environment.

8. What are the benefits to your business of pursuing more sustainable operations? Tell us about some of the advantages?

We attract guests who have the same sustainable focus as we do. When we travel we actively seek accommodation that is sustainable. It is often the reason our accommodation is booked ahead of others. For example, booking.com now have sustainable property measures that includes some of the policies in place regarding waste, water, energy, community and nature.

Our OTAs are informed by the measures we have in place. We have shared our journey with one Netherlands company via Zoom - they are actively sharing sustainability with their clients.

9. What are the biggest costs to your business of doing sustainability work?

Our costs are not huge now. We are investigating carbon neutral options and zero waste which are long term goals (within the next 3 years). Our business is reasonably small, so we do not have huge budgets available.

- In a practical sense, we purchased recycling bins for our guests use.
- We donate three trees monthly to Trees That Count at \$30 per month.
- We give our guests honey from our own on-site hives and encourage tree planting.
- We support local business for our sustainable supply chains, purchasing goods for our guests from places such as Kāpiti chocolates, Ōtaki Bakehouse, and Kāpiti candies.
- We've established an on-site orchard, vegetable gardens and continue planting on the property.
- We only use organic sprays.
- We give time to our community, including supporting Community Fruit Wellington with harvesting and making jams to donate to charities such as Kaibosh. Louise is part of the Accredited Visitor Service and volunteers by visiting a local each week. Dean is an active bee club past president and is involved with the local poultry club.
- Networking has many benefits - Louise organises seasonal get togethers with other B&B association members and attends a 50+ entrepreneurs group in Kāpiti.

10. Share some of the best business sustainability resources that you have come across?

The NZ Tourism Sustainability Commitment is a great resource. Also, the [Tiake promise](#) fits well with our business – respecting our environment and encouraging guests to actively care for the environment as they travel through NZ. Look at similar businesses to yours and see what they are doing. Talk to different types of businesses as well, as they are often following the same sort of journey you are. I spoke to Millstream Gardens, a skincare business in Hawke's Bay who have a huge focus on sustainability. Also, the new initiative by Council of Pakihi Toitū o Kāpiti is great to be part of – it's especially valuable to see what others are doing in the sustainability space.

11. If you had one piece of advice for another business owner about trying to be more sustainable what would it be?

Have a detailed look at what you are doing now – you are probably doing more towards sustainability than you think. Sign up to the New Zealand Tourism Sustainability Commitment, it provides a great framework that you can work on. Align with others on this sustainability journey.