

Maori Tours: The World of Herbal Medicine

Herbal medicines and family history combine to provide one of the great tourist ventures in Kaikoura. Maori Tours takes guests on a tour, which traces local and family history and then on for a bush walk to explore the medicinal properties of our native trees and bush.



There is no doubt that many of, or most of, the remedies possessed validity says Dr, Raymond Stark in his book *Maori Herbal Remedies* (1979.) Over the years, trial, success, and failure honed the skills to treat various illnesses along with appropriate karakia (prayers). In pre European days the Tohunga held the knowledge of the remedies, today others have that knowledge: early settlers found many worthwhile uses for Maori herbal medicines for aching joints, headaches, constipation and dysentery to name just a few.

The boutique tour is small: intimate and interactive. The first part takes in ancient pa sites, introduces guests in the protocol of going onto a marae, then through stories, Maurice Manawatu introduces us to family ancestors.

Maurice is a direct descendant of Maru Kaitatea – the common ancestor of all Ngati Kuri (the local Kaikoura tribe) and it was he and his family that took us on the tour.

We started at the old pa site of Nga Niho that was built in the 1700s and were called onto the land by one of Maurice sisters – the purpose of the karanga was explained as well as the importance of body, mind, and spirit.

We are also shown the flax plants (and simple weaving) and the value they were to Maori. These plants were of top value and were used for baskets, mats, sandals, rope, twine and the inside of the valued korowai cloaks which were then covered with feathers.



People also on the tour are from the UK and they're impressed with the tour – rating it as one the highlights of their travels. After taking in the views from the top and hearing more legends we went, via the current marae, to the site of an even older marae just south of Kaikoura at Peketa.

Apart from oral legends passed to him, Maurice also has a wonderful resource about the local and family history in a manuscript written by one of his ancestors in 1900: a real treasure and her writings ensure his tours are authentic.

Maurice, and his wife Heather started the tours to create a future for their children and a lifestyle change for themselves. 'We are people's people' Heather told me and this was evident when we stop at their home for coffee and picklets and had a chance to meet the rest of the whanau – nieces, nephews, sister, brothers in law and children.

Comments in the visitors book showed people certainly appreciated the opportunity to see New Zealanders in a different way. Even kiwis report having especially enjoyed the time with the family and learning while having fun.



Onto the Puhi Puhi Valley we walked in the bush – learning how to identify trees and shrubs (manuka, miro, totara, rimu, supplejack and kotukutuku for example) and hear about their medicinal and cultural uses.

I was pleased to learn how to differentiate between the manuka and the kanuka – until that day I had to wait until the kanuka was really tall and then I knew which it was. Not any longer – kanuka has a eucalyptus smell and peels off in long strips while the manuka is more a citrus smell and has short strips when taken from the tree.

This is a wonderful trip by people proud of their family history, and a tour both we locals and tourists value.

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