



AMANDA CROPP IS A CHRISTCHURCH FREELANCE WRITER.

In suburban streets and along country roads, Bed & Breakfast notices and riotous red B&B flags have spread like nappy rash. AMANDA CROPP checks out our B&B boom.

Meet The People

A lovingly primped, warmly welcoming B&B oozes the sort of chintz and charm a large hotel or even upmarket motel unit can't even begin to compete with. There's something especially heart warming about friendly attentive hosts welcoming you through their own front door to be pampered and often even befriended. You have the run of a deliciously maintained home, guest rooms ooze style and character, and no two are the same. And in the morning there's a breakfast you wouldn't normally be caught dead eating, prepared by someone else's hand — so naughtily inviting.

The B&B range on offer in New Zealand now is as varied and exciting as the wine range in your average supermarket — from premium pinot to cheap and cheerful quaffers.

At the top end of the market the likes of The Master's Lodge in Napier accommodates just four guests and charges \$740 a night for a double room. The historic art deco residence was built for

legendary local tobacco magnate Johann Gerhard Husheer and memorabilia from his tenure fill the rooms along with the hosts' extensive, exquisite modern art collection. The Deco Suite has an elevated orange and green tiled bathtub and guests can order champagne and oysters (at extra charge) to sup while they soak up the spectacular sea views. For breakfast there's courgette blossom frittata and home-smoked salmon with scrambled eggs.

Down the line, at Okuti Gardens near Little River just outside Christchurch a snooze in a yurt (Mongolian tent) and a vegetarian breakfast will set you back a mere \$35. And environmentally friendly guests arriving on bike or horseback get a 10 per cent discount.

Nationally, a dozen clothing optional properties cater for "naturists" who are welcome to swan around naked. More purpose-built B&Bs are appearing, and there's a trend towards self-contained accommodation where hosts provide a hamper of goodies so guests can prepare their own breakfast.



And there are still the Ma and Pa operators who'll put you up in the spare bedroom, let you share the family bathroom, and shuffle about in their fluffy slippers as they prepare a fry-up, all for \$80.

The chance to meet "real New Zealanders" is the main reason overseas visitors give for choosing a bed and breakfast ahead of an anonymous hotel where engaging with the locals extends little beyond "have a nice day".

ANDREW SPENCER

In the nine months to March 2005, 102,441 tourists stayed at least one night in a bed and breakfast, and that group spent \$349 million while they were here. English and Australians topped the guest list, followed by Americans and Germans

But ascertaining the true size of the bed and breakfast market is tricky. Statistics New Zealand indicates only one per cent of all commercial accommodation is classed as hosted, but many small B&Bs are not GST registered so don't feature in official figures.

Industry sources suggest we have 3000 to 4000 bed and breakfast

operators if home stays, farms stays and small boutique lodges are included with stand-alone B&Bs.

Levin B&B owner Chris Lloyd thinks the higher figure is probably more accurate. The former naval officer and retired farmer builds B&B websites and publishes *The Business Of B&B*, a newsletter circulated to several hundred subscribers.

"There were about 2500 B&Bs in 1998 and there's been steady growth since and an explosion in the last three years. A lot have left the industry but for every one that goes, there seem to be two that start up."

Since beginning work for *Frommer's New Zealand Travel Guide* in 1999, writer Adrienne Rewi has noticed a distinct upturn in the number and quality of B&Bs. But when touring the country in 2005 reviewing properties for the latest edition, Rewi was amazed at the large number for sale. A lot of people entering the industry obviously have no idea of the work involved or how to market themselves, she notes.

Margaret Woodhill Bay-View Homestay, Kaikoura

At 75 Margaret Woodhill still thinks nothing of getting up at 5.30 every morning to cook breakfast for guests catching early whale-watch trips from Kaikoura.

She's lived in her Kaikoura peninsula house with its sweeping views of sea and mountains since 1934. She began taking in passing travellers 20 years ago, just before the big mammals turned the township into a tourist Mecca.

Bay-View Homestay featured in the first issue of the *New Zealand Bed & Breakfast Book* and is one of only 25 original operators still in the latest edition.

When her four children left home, opening a bed and breakfast seemed a logical use for spare bedrooms and bathrooms. Since husband Bob's death seven years ago, Woodhill says guests give her a reason to get out of bed in the morning. "I treat all my guests like family and that's why I like to call it a homestay rather than a B&B."

In her one-acre garden she grows tomatoes to go with her home-laid eggs and the breakfast bacon. She bakes her own bread — without the aid of a bread-maker and still occasionally whips up \$30-a-head dinners of crayfish entrée, corned beef with mustard sauce, and pavlova and fruit salad.

The first year Woodhill advertised she had six guests and there have been thousands since — she's stopped counting. She happily takes in children and pets but was rather taken aback when an Auckland couple insisted on sleeping in the bed with their Great Dane.

She is an inspector for *The Bed & Breakfast Book* and is hot on hosts delivering what they promise. "I had a couple through who stayed somewhere in the North Island and asked if they could use the spa that was advertised. They were told, 'It's not on at this time of year.' When the woman couldn't find the plug to have a bath, the host told her she'd use too much hot water and had to have a shower. The next morning they wanted to see the animals that were advertised and were told, 'No you'll distress them'. If you advertise something you have to provide it."

At \$85 to \$95 a double and \$55 a single, Bay-View prices are a snip. "I've always felt that if you charge a lot of money, people are a bit picky and expect the best. I have an old home, it's comfortable, but I'd sooner people left me feeling they had their money's worth.

There's one cloud on Woodhill's happy horizon: a recent Kaikoura District Council decision which means she must keep guests below five a night, or face paying commercial rates. "If I had to do that I'd close because I'd be working for nothing."



Like their guests, B&B hosts are usually in late middle age. An Otago University tourism department survey of 347 owners found the majority were women over 50, they were well educated (16 per cent had post-graduate qualifications) and running the B&B was a lifestyle choice.

Their main goal was to meet interesting people but they were also keen to make a profit, grossing on average \$5500 to \$11,000 a year. Only 19 B&Bs earned more than \$100,000, while 23 earned \$50,000 to \$100,000.

It's far from easy money. During peak season hosts in key tourist areas can go a month without a day off, and the daily round of toilet scrubbing and removing pubic hairs from the shower cubicles is not for the faint hearted.

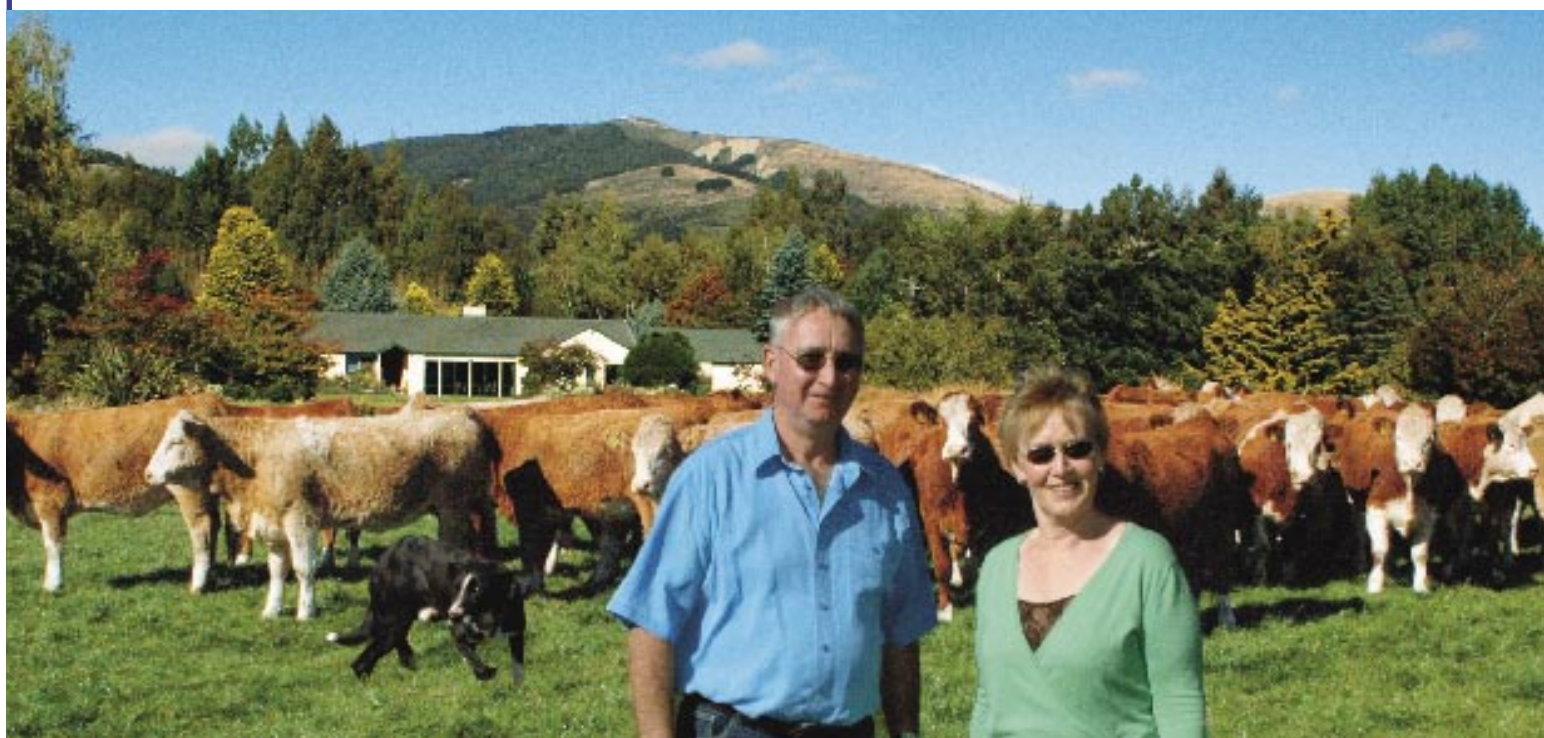
Tim Bayley of Nelson's Baywick Inn reckons running a B&B is a bit like being in the movie *Ground Hog Day*. "You end up repeating the same things over and over."

Tall, rangy and sporting an impressive moustache, New Zealand-born Bayley sounds Canadian after 20 years spent running a Toronto business restoring old houses and designing wine cellars. Eight years ago he and Canadian wife Janet Southwick renovated a two-storey villa beside the Maitai River into a B&B with three guest rooms. The lay-out includes a private living area for the couple which makes sharing their home with visitors less stressful. Well mostly.

Their "best" horror tale was of the young man in town for a seamen's conference, who brought "home" a prostitute, who stole a painting on exiting in the early hours. The police called the madam of a local brothel who returned the art work, and since then the inn has refused to accommodate single male conference-goers.

Southwick's warm personality and Canadian accent are as comforting as the maple syrup pancakes she serves for breakfast. She says working 35 hours a week in the B&B feels like easy street compared with the 12-hour days she put in at her Toronto bistro.

GRAHAM DAINTY



Joan And Ross Cockburn Mount Prospect Station, Te Anau

Fiordland farmer Ross Cockburn jokes that his days as a B&B host have turned him into a multi-skilled tour guide, wine waiter, and dish washer. And he has a "bundle of fun" hosting visitors with wife Joan on their 3400-hectare station near Te Anau. "It's really exhilarating, like having the world come to your place."

Tourists lap up life on a working farm with 15,000 sheep and 500 cattle, and Cockburn notes many have been previously disappointed by a so-called farm stay that turned out to be on a small lifestyle block.

On Mount Prospect station guests help round up sheep, watch calving, shearing, and dipping, and venture among young bulls on the Simmental stud. Ross Cockburn isn't averse to a bit of leg pulling either. "When I find a sheep that's cast, I tell them it's star gazing."

On fine days he'll drive guests to the top of 1000-metre Mount Prospect with magnificent views over Lake Te Anau and Lake Manapouri. They can fish for trout in the Whitestone River, helicopter from the homestead's front lawn over the Fiordland National Park or catch a scenic flight from the station airstrip, landing on a beach for refreshments.

City kids have a ball. A classic happy guest was an American 12-year-old, in New Zealand to visit *Lord Of The Rings* film locations. "He never left

the farm. He got on a tractor feeding out, rang his parents on the cell phone and said 'I'm not coming.' They went off to Milford on their own."

The Cockburns began hosting guests 22 years ago through a farm stay company when their eldest son went off to boarding school. In 1997, conscious of the demand for higher quality accommodation, they spent \$100,000 revamping the farm house, creating a four-bedroom private guest wing (tariff: \$335-\$385 a double).

In the early days Joan Cockburn did full-scale dinners for guests, but since a restaurant opened 10 minutes' drive away, she's cut back to preparing \$75 gourmet platters.

Ross says previously evening meals dragged on as guests revelled in the social contact. "Once they got to the table they'd never leave and you'd still be there at 11pm. They really like a good old yarn, that's what they come to this type of accommodation for."

With son Grant and daughter-in-law Rachel set to take over the farm, Ross and Joan are building a retirement home on a subdivision near Lake Te Anau, and plans for the new house include guest accommodation. "I said if Joan gets to the stage where she burns the toast, we'll have to give it up."



Len And Stephanie May The Weston House, Christchurch

Christchurch pharmacists Len and Stephanie May first stayed in a B&B in Tasmania 10 years ago and the experience inspired them to have a go themselves. In 1997 they spent \$1 million-plus buying and restoring The Weston House, creating two five-star guest suites from a flat in the former servants' quarters of the Category 1 historic place.

The Mays' purchase of the neo-Georgian house designed by Cecil Woods for prominent lawyer George Weston was carefully considered. The Park Terrace address overlooks Hagley Park and puts guest within strolling distance of the inner city and local tourist attractions.

Stephanie sold her Wairakei Road pharmacy eight years ago to run the B&B and Len finally quit his pharmacy at the end of March to join her in the business full time.

The house looks permanently ready for a glossy magazine photo shoot but Stephanie is blunt about the sheer drudgery involved in keeping it that way. Cleanliness is next to godliness when guests are paying \$360 to \$390 a night for a double room.

The smart black and white tiles in the foyer are mopped at least once daily. At the height of the season she employs a cleaner, but still personally puts in a 60-hour week. "This is a happy hunting ground for an obsessive compulsive cleaner. I'm not an obsessive compulsive personality so it's hard to live like that."

The demands of being constantly "on show" are mitigated by the parade of interesting personalities passing through. "Never under-estimate your guests. They might be wearing casual clothes but some are serious movers and shakers. We've had US state governors, senators and European members of Parliament."

Prior to that she was a restaurant chain operations manager and says a service industry background is ideal for doing bed and breakfast.

"I get really annoyed with people who say, 'I've got a spare room, I'll open a B&B'. I think, 'You were a motor mechanic, you've got no interest in talking with people, and you've got no background in the hospitality industry'. The chances of success are low because you're getting into it for the wrong reasons. If you're a doctor, lawyer or Indian chief you find it hard serving people because you're used to being the one being served. It takes a certain temperament."

Debbie Knapp and Mike Murphy quickly discovered exactly

Stephanie considers talking to guests a key part of her job and spends up to three hours a day chatting. "I love the people. We talk about everything: sex, drugs, rock and roll, politics.

"We had American guests who were Republicans and they were busy trying to persuade everyone that George Bush hadn't invaded Iraq for the oil. I just keep my mouth buttoned if I don't agree with what someone is saying. But we had two late-50s English ladies staying, both professors and published authors and incredibly bright — I googled their names, as you do. The American was a Wall Street leading light and these two women ripped into him big time. It was just great to watch, democracy in action."

Although The Weston House grosses around \$100,000 a year, May says it's no goldmine when maintenance costs \$10,000 a year, advertising \$7000 and a similar amount goes in commission to travel agents, and the power bill is \$1000 a month. "My hourly rate works out at less than the minimum wage, less than a school boy working on a BP forecourt."

That said there are tax advantages. A proportion of rates, repairs and maintenance, redecorating, mortgage repayments and insurance are tax deductible, as are entertainment expenses such as the wine shared with guests.

Some operators, says May indignantly, set up purely to claim tax on house renovations. She has no time for amateurs or tax dodgers and believes one-third of New Zealand B&Bs should be "wiped off the face of the earth" because they're not up to scratch.

When people talk about opening a B&B, she tries to talk them out of it. "The reality is it's incredibly hard work to do it properly. Knowing what I do now, I wouldn't do it again."

that after exiting long-standing counselling careers to do B&B in their big old Nelson home. Knapp hated the lack of privacy and waiting around for guests who arrived late. "If you have the right psychological make-up those irritations are not such a big deal. When we got sick of it we used to just stick up the no vacancy sign." Murphy was never comfortable living with strangers. "The house was called River Song and I became River Grump. Our bedroom was right under the best room upstairs. One night we had two singles who turned into a double overnight and that got very noisy. They were very sheepish the next morning and she put 'breath-taking' as a comment in the visitors' book."

They lasted just two years before quitting their B&B, which is



apparently quite common. Even really dedicated hosts regularly burn out after about eight years and it takes something special to last in the business as long as Bruce and Carol Hyland.

Bruce, a Canadian with a background in management consultancy and marketing, and Kiwi wife Carol, a former textile artist, are doyens of the New Zealand bed and breakfast scene and are regular speakers at B&B seminars in Australia.

In 1992 they started the stylish Peace and Plenty Inn in Auckland seaside suburb Devonport, moving to neighboring Hyland House (they ran both for a while), garnering many accolades from international media. They currently run Maison de la Mer in Akaroa.

They've hosted 13,000 guests in the interim and Bruce can think of only six they wouldn't have back. "Four of them came from Cincinnati where they had all retired from some smoke stack industry. They arrived on our doorstep at 7am pissed to the eyeballs, stumbled through the front door and said, 'Ya got a bucket of ice?' So we got them a bucket of ice for their drinks and they were drunk the whole time they were with us."

The Hylands stay in business mostly because they love people. They especially enjoy eccentric Brits, like the couple who shipped their 1935 Bentley here for a five-week tour to celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary, and a delightful septuagenarian whose neck



KATE MACHPERSON

injury required her to eat breakfast lying flat on the dining room floor.

Bruce Hyland says the close relationship that rapidly develops between hosts and guests is unique. "If you walk into a five-star hotel in Manila, Hong Kong or London, you could be anywhere in the world, there's nothing personal about it. In a B&B a lot of guests will very quickly share with you things they'd never share even with closest friends, private things that may be worrying them or upsets in life they're dealing with. I'm constantly amazed at how, within a few minutes of sitting down and having a drink with them, they'll open up about a drug problem with a child or an abuse situation. It takes your breath away."

Susan Bilbie

298 Oriental Parade, Wellington.

Despite her high-end tariffs (\$650 the double room, \$500 a single), Susan Bilbie has no difficulty attracting guests to her dress circle B&B position on Oriental Parade.

One regular, an Australian CEO, has notched up 66 nights in 18 months and is booked to return. "He has a contract here in New Zealand and stays with us because he likes to come to a family situation — my kids live here — and he likes being looked after. I do his washing and iron his shirts. It's like his home away from home."

However the Aussie has some way to go to beat Bilbie's record holders — a German family of four who took two suites for 36 nights.

Bilbie was in her early 40s when businessman husband Chris died suddenly in 1999. Sorting out his affairs took a couple of years and that was when her lawyer suggested she open an upmarket B&B in her waterfront property.

The 1928 three-storey Parisian-style townhouse had been the Japanese embassy for 30 years. The Bilbie family home since 1980, it is sumptuously decorated with crystal chandeliers and French antiques and gleaming polished wooden floors.

Bilbie converted her garden art studio into the Summer House suite, while the Forget Me Not Room is in the main house where guests have access to the library, a billiards table, three lounges, and magical city lights night-time views. Evening drinks come in Jasper Conran champagne flutes and the hors d'oeuvres nestle on Versace plates. The sea appears to be in spitting distance of a breakfast table laden with eggs Benedict, mushrooms on toast and lamb's fry and bacon.

"My first guests were *Elle* magazine from France and I was absolutely terrified. They were here to interview Peter Jackson. We've had people who have eloped, lords and ladies, movie people, the whole lot."

Bilbie runs the B&B with help from youngest son Brad (23) and his girlfriend Daniela who live in, but she does all the cleaning herself. "I'd never trust anyone else to make the beds and do all that sort of stuff. I like to be hands on."

She's more than happy to run errands for guests, drive them to restaurants, to physiotherapists, hair appointments and on impromptu "tiki tours" of Wellington.

Very few of her clientele are New Zealanders, who are usually celebrating special occasions. Her mainstays are Americans, English, Europeans and Australians. "They're hugely well travelled and generally they just want a more intimate experience, they're fed up with hotels. What a lot of people like about this house is that it's so peaceful. They're not hearing lifts all night."

Bilbie worked as a secretary in a patent attorney's office before marrying at 18 and becoming a stay-at-home Mum. She now thinks she's got the "best job in the world. It's doing what I do normally — looking after people. I'm the eldest daughter of 11 children and I feel like I'm Mum to all these guests and they let me look after them, no matter how old they are."

And Bilbie says no one has ever complained about the bill. "I know I'm doing a good job because they always say, 'Don't we owe you more than that?'"

Opening a B&B can be as easy as tarding up a spare room, hanging out a sign, slapping flyers in the local information centre and buying space in a guide book.

Most of the eight B&B guides available are advertising ventures rather than review guides, like *Frommer's* or *Lonely Planet*. Hosts pay a fee to have their properties featured, and either write their own advertising blurb or vet copy before publication. Some guides rely on guest feedback and don't do regular inspections, arguing they soon get to hear about poor operators.

John Cooper

Beatson's of Martinborough

John Cooper jokes that after seven years of running Beatson's of Martinborough, he's still awaiting the guests from hell. "I've been assured they're on their way."

So far everyone has been remarkably nice, with a 50/50 split between New Zealanders and tourists. Weekends are busiest as Wellingtonians head over the Rimutukas for some much needed R&R among the vineyards. Jaded professionals and couples needing a break from the kids gratefully settle into the two villas and garden cottage that make up the Cologne Street B&B.

"We once had a lady who'd just weaned her third and final child. She'd virtually ripped it off her breast, handed it to her husband and come to us. For two days she just sat and read magazines and drank tea. Quite a few people with small Wellington apartments regularly come every six to eight weeks to go mountain biking."

Cooper (63) established the B&B in a half-acre Mediterranean garden with former partner Karin Beatson. They'd moved an old villa from Masterton (along with a 60-year-old magnolia tree) and were renovating it when a friend suggested turning it into a B&B. They expanded into the villa next door and can cater for wedding parties and small conferences. (Prices have remained at \$150 a double since opening.)

Cooper, a former documentary maker with the National Film unit, now runs the business on his own — with some assistance from a resident menagerie. "It's a bit of a circus with a Jack Russell, three cats and two cockatiels."

On the domestic front he's a dab hand at ironing napkins (he refuses to have paper ones) and says NapiSan is a B&B host's best friend, excellent for cleaning brown stains off pillow cases when guests fall asleep on their complimentary chocolates, and for removing mascara from towels.

It's the small touches which impress guests. "We had some Hong Kong visitors with twin four-year-old boys. We got the ladder out and they climbed up the orange tree, picked some oranges, and came in and juiced them. The mother said they probably thought juice came from a Tetrapak."

"Some people who'd been in England were off to the vineyards on a not very nice day. I told them when they got back I'd have a fire going. They said, 'Oh, are we allowed back in?' In England you go to Brighton and see people sitting in bus shelters all day because they've been turfed out of their B&B."

Most of Cooper's business is happily concentrated around weekends, giving him "plenty of time to do my own thing during the week. It'd be a real drag doing it in tourist areas where you have people every night."

And he says some of his strongest competition for custom lies across the Tasman. "The biggest curse for B&Bs is cheap airfares to Queensland."

Chris Lloyd says ease of entry to the business is a concern. Before he and librarian wife Barbara Lucas opened their first B&B (they're onto their second), they did their homework. They'd had 12 years' experience hosting WOOFERS (willing workers on organic farms) and sampled many bed and breakfasts on their travels.

"We stayed in B&Bs in England and in pensions, B&Bs and small inns with no more than 10 to 12 beds all around Europe. We joined @home NEWZEALAND (the national B&B association), went to one of their conferences and picked the brains of everyone we met there. The vast majority of hosts don't join any organisation, don't get guidance, and think they know how to do it because they once stayed in a B&B. A lot haven't even done that."

Lloyd recalls paying \$90 for a double room at a B&B near Hamilton. "We were put in what was obviously the daughter's

room because her stuff, like dolls and toys, was all around. There were two single beds, the towels were so thin you could see through them, and the only shower was down concrete steps in a basement. That was 10 years ago, but it still happens."

Guests report finding wardrobes and drawers full of clothes when they try to unpack, or only discover on arrival that they have to share the family bathroom. "That's the worst thing you can do. People making a booking need to know exactly what they're buying for their dollar."

The disparate nature of the bed and breakfast industry is also a problem. Getting B&Bs to work together can be as hard as trying to part a Japanese tourist from his camera. Lloyd says many hosts have no previous business experience, see everyone else as a competitor and are reluctant to share information (for example passing on custom when they're full the way motels do). "I regularly



JOHN CASEY



point out that cooperation is the best form of mass marketing.”

In the next decade Lloyd predicts more independent travellers from China and other far eastern countries will become B&B customers. Large hotel chains now provide cultural training for staff, and he says B&B hosts need it too. “It’s very easy to offend someone unwittingly by using the wrong terminology or not being aware of particular cultural things.” Asians, for example, are not keen on dairy products and hosts should plan menus accordingly.

Sensitivity to western visitors’ needs is equally important. “You never talk religion or politics with Americans. New Zealanders have their homes on average five degrees colder than anywhere else in the world. If European or American guests say they’re cold, you do something to warm them up. Too many B&B hosts brush it off and say, ‘Oh it’s been a lovely day, it’s not cold!’”

At present B&Bs taking fewer than six guests don’t generally

need resource consent, and are usually exempt from hygiene and fire regulations governing larger accommodation providers.

European B&Bs are strictly regulated and Lloyd favours some form of registration here. He says local authorities should insist B&Bs belong to an industry body like @home NEWZEALAND, whose 700 members must meet minimum standards.

“Hosts should at least have a food safety certificate. A current first aid certificate is really important because you could easily have a guest collapse on you. We have a fire blanket that goes over the stove because it’s gas, we have three fire extinguishers, and smoke alarms throughout the house. We’d like to see that being compulsory. All it would take would be a disaster in a major tourist spot where perhaps a high-profile guest gets injured or killed in an un-Qualmarked bed and breakfast and we’d get some very bad publicity.”



Qualmark, jointly owned by the Automobile Association and Tourism New Zealand, introduced star ratings for guest and hosted accommodation in 2002. So far only 320 properties have signed up for the annual assessment which costs \$440 for a three to six-hour inspection checking everything from light fittings to fridge temperature.

@homeNEW ZEALAND president Trevor Knight says Qualmark is too expensive for many small B&Bs. His group has its own assessment system (equivalent to about three stars Qualmark) and 50 experienced hosts check basics like cleanliness and fire safety measures.

Knight says the association is all for improving standards but he's nervous about the potential impact of the Domestic Food Review being carried out by the Food Safety Authority.

Exactly how B&Bs will be affected isn't yet clear but Knight says it's been suggested local authorities may begin annual inspections of all B&B kitchens, costing \$500-plus which could force many small operators out of business.

Commercial rating is already causing pressure in Auckland. In Manukau City, B&Bs must pay a uniform annual charge of \$945 on top of their residential rates. And Bruce Hyland reports that a B&B he and Carol once owned in Devonport "is now rated commercially and the rates have gone from \$2800 to \$9000 a year. That's a lot of moolah to get back from guests."

He points out that B&Bs bring tourist dollars into an area and are a great way of preserving old homes too big for the average nuclear family. "The cash flow from the business justifies restoring

these old properties and gives them a whole new life. Councils need to look at how they can encourage people in their business rather than see them as a nice easy way to generate revenue."

Motel Association chief executive Michael Baines has no such sympathies. He's been lobbying local authorities to end preferential treatment of B&Bs saying they should pay commercial rates and abide by the same health and safety rules as other accommodation providers.

"There are a few guys in our industry that don't make much money either but still have to comply with the law. Since when has profitability been a reason for compliance? If they really like hosting people, they should do it for nothing. Once they start charging people, they should face the same issues as everyone else."

The future direction of the B&B industry, especially in relation to pricing and style of accommodation, is a sensitive issue.

Bruce Hyland says New Zealand is following the American model of small country inns offering privacy, luxury and exceptional service, rather than the British style of providing budget accommodation.

Jim Thomas, publisher of *The New Zealand Bed & Breakfast Book*, however, doesn't have much truck with the American way which he says has "buggered up" the B&B concept with "flouncy frilly way-over-the-top places" charging ridiculous prices.

Thomas began the guide book 20 years ago with 300 B&B listings. The latest edition features 1500 at the middle of the market.

CAROLYN JACKSON



Trevor And Gail Knight Hot Water Beach B&B, Coromandel

Coromandel host Gail Knight believes in going the extra mile for her guests and that includes tracking down white undies for a desperate bride.

"This couple were getting married at Cathedral Cove and the bride came to me quite upset. She had this beautiful white dress that was almost see-through and she only had black knickers. I rang a Whitianga lingerie shop, caught the ferry across, the shop owner met me at the [Whitianga] wharf with a selection of knickers and I rushed back. That's what B&B is all about, doing the extras to make people's days perfect."

Gail and husband Trevor (both 60) opened their B&B six years ago. Former tour bus driver Trevor had undergone major heart surgery and Gail's job as a sales rep for an optical company meant she travelled a lot.

They'd got to the stage where returning to their Parnell, Auckland, home after weekends at their Hot Water Beach bach got harder and harder. So they built a modern B&B around the bones of their old holiday home with wide decks perfect for alfresco dining. There's a "fleet" of available spades for guests to dig holes in the beach and soak in the famous tidal hot pools. There's a billiard table for wet days, and honesty fridge well stocked with beer and wine. Trevor is president of the local Purangi Golf Club, and happily arranges games for guests and loans them clubs.

Gail says having a large family prepared them for the demands of hosting. "People go into B&B and aren't used to having people intrude into their personal space, but we have six children and were well used to their friends coming and going."

The hours are long and Trevor says their social life suffers. "Often we're invited to family functions and can't go because we have guests booked six months in advance. We've got two children getting married this year and they've had to let us know dates well ahead."

Knight says they have deliberately stuck with a four-star rating (tariff: \$200 a double room). "If you're five star you can't make a slip up, you really have to watch your Ps and Qs. We're at the beach so I'm always in bare feet, we're casual and advertise ourselves as being laid back. We couldn't do that if we were five star. We've had guests expecting five-star treatment — they didn't fit in and we didn't enjoy them at all."

Knight says the industry is changing and astoundingly these days some B&Bs don't want to bother providing breakfast, which is by definition included in the tariff. Recently the national bed and breakfast association (which he heads) expelled Rotorua hosts who failed to serve breakfast and suggested guests go to McDonald's instead. "If you're called a B&B you can't do only one B."

Few hosts charge more than \$200 and most only earn between \$5000 and \$10,000 a year. "Even that's a generous estimate. As a hobby that's quite nice and it's more profitable than joining the local tennis club."

Thomas dislikes the snobbery creeping into the industry. He says those in the "higher echelons" now prefer to call themselves "boutique accommodation" or "lodges" and look down their noses at more modest establishments.

"We've been accused by competitors of trying to drive B&B prices down. We're just trying to offer genuine Kiwi hospitality at genuinely affordable prices. An Irish B&B owner said to me once: 'I see them not so much as guests, as pound notes walking through the door.' That's not what we're about."

Adrienne Rewi says a significant number of B&Bs are over-priced and she's staggered by what some fairly average establishments charge. "*Luxury* and *lodge* are two of the most over-used words in the New Zealand tourism industry." She won't name names but described a pleasant but unexceptional rural B&B calling itself a "luxury lodge" charging \$495 to \$557 a double for bed and breakfast.

Hosts like Janet Southwick are also uneasy about what some operators are charging. Her tariff is \$140 to \$160 a double and she has resisted industry pressure to raise prices to the \$250 to \$300 level. "To me, that would be like highway robbery. Overseas travellers are my bread and butter, why would I screw them?"

B&B devotee Ruth Morentz is proof of consumer resistance to price gouging. The San Francisco health care management

consultant, and her husband Doug Vogt, an engineer and obsessive fly fisherman, have visited New Zealand five times in 10 years and enjoy boutique accommodation where they are treated like family.

But Morentz says she and fellow wealthy American travellers expect value for money. "Many New Zealand lodges and B&Bs now charge more than comparable lodgings in the US and Europe. I've stayed in many places [in New Zealand] that are exquisite and at the time were a relative bargain. Now I wouldn't stay there at the prices they're asking."

Tariffs are also an issue for local holidaymakers. Former Auckland B&B owner Philip Brown puts together the *Jasons Selectionsnz* bed and breakfast directory and says the trigger point for New Zealanders is \$150. "Once you get above that you lose a lot of Kiwis."

He claims New Zealanders' preference for motels is partly because they don't understand the concept of a modern bed and breakfast, or because they harbour memories of sleazy British B&Bs endured on their OE.

"They haven't cottoned on to what we provide. They traditionally go to motels where they can cocoon themselves away from everyone else. It takes them a while to realise that having breakfast with other people is fun."

But attitudes are changing. B&Bs are attracting more guests in their 30s, and Brown reports growth in the local "reward" market. "People work hard for three or four weeks, think it's time for a reward and a night in a \$200, \$300 or even \$400 B&B does the trick." ■