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YHA Applauds New Tourism Strategy

YHA New Zealand welcomes the newly released New Zealand Tourism Strategy 2015, believing that the strategy recognises not only the challenges associated with quality and sustainable tourism, but also the opportunities.

With a network of more than 50 hostels nationwide, CEO Mark Wells says YHA New Zealand is already a successful working example of a 'strong, environmentally responsible tourism business', as described by the new strategy. "We implemented an Environmental Charter in 1992, an initiative spearheaded by our global organisation, the International Youth Hostelling Federation (IYHF). The Charter commits all YHA hostels to operating as 'sustainable living centres' and aims to minimise the impact that YHA has on people and the planet," says Mark Wells.

He says sustainability isn't just an add-on for YHA, "We 'walk the talk' every day – sustainability is integral to what we do. Over 80% of our guests are international travellers and we have always maintained that our success is inextricably linked to our clean green image. We are constantly looking for ways to reduce the ecological footprint of our operations, from comprehensive recycling systems to the development of green buildings."

As evidence of this he points to YHA Wellington City hostel which last month won top honours in the NZI National Sustainable Business Awards, not for profit category. YHA also operates the Green Foot Print Project out of Christchurch, which provides travellers the

opportunity to offset their impact on the environment by purchasing native plants which are planted locally.

Nationally, all YHA hostels are committed to reducing energy use and waste water, implementing recycling and re-use initiatives, sponsoring community projects, choosing environmentally-responsible products and suppliers, and providing subtle education for international visitors on how to reduce waste as they travel. YHA New Zealand now has embedded systems for data collection on a range of environmental parameters and in the coming year, aims to end all food waste to landfill from YHA-owned hostels.

“Our own experience suggests that there is even the opportunity for New Zealand to develop sustainable tourism to the extent that visiting this country from overseas can improve rather than impact the planet,” says Mark Wells. “That certainly requires a sector-wide commitment to embrace and commit to the key elements of sustainable tourism as outlined by the Tourism Strategy.”

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