

Homestay business makes its mark

From humble beginnings, Rotorua business 'Look After Me' has grown to become New Zealand's largest, fastest growing homestay network.

It's an online marketplace where homeowners offer short-term accommodation for paying guests in guest wings, self-contained units and spare rooms. 'Look After Me' provides accommodation on 18 of New Zealand's 23 cycle trails and supports major events like Art Deco in Napier and Womad in New Plymouth.

Founded by entrepreneur Dr Julia Charity, 'Look After Me' launched ahead of the Rugby World Cup in 2011. Its homestays attract guests from overseas (46 percent) with the remainder domestic guests, mainly Baby Boomers, cyclists and business people wanting alternatives to commercial accommodation. 'Look After Me' was a finalist in the 2013 Rotorua Emerging Business Awards and won the inaugural People's Choice and Judge's Choice Runner Up category at the 2014 Rotorua X Entrepreneurs Pitch night. It was also the only homestay business supporting the filming of Chinese reality TV show, 'Daddy, where are we Going'? Filmed in Rotorua, this attracted an estimated 1.4



billion viewers as well as establishing a world record of 20 billion mentions on Weibo – the Chinese version of Facebook (full story in March 2015 NZBusiness).

"Tourism New Zealand has told us to get ready," says Charity. "Even if only 0.1 percent of the 1.4 billion global 'Daddy, where are we going?' viewers came to New Zealand, the additional 1,400,000 visitors could bring an unprecedented interest in homestay accommodation."

'Look After Me' is currently seeking investment and business expertise to scale the business.