

The West Coast Wilderness Trail is a favourite for PureTrails CEO Hilary Weller



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LIVING LIFE

BIKING

# E-BIKE TOURS THE RAGE ON THE SOUTH ISLAND

The rising popularity of e-bike tours has Christchurch business PureTrails in high demand. PureTrails CEO Hilary Weller says e-bikes were a far-off dream when she set up her family-run business 15 years ago; in fact, the internet was only just starting to take off. But, now, they have more first-time cyclists and people with differing levels of ability joining their South Island cycling tours.

“So much has changed since then in terms of technology. We used to post people information packs and they would send us a cheque for payment. Everything took a lot longer and was more labour intensive.”

PureTrails’ original bike tour focused on the Otago Rail Trail. This was the main trip for the first five to six years; however, the company now offers 12 different tour options which cover most of the South Island. These include traverses of the Southern Alps, the West Coast Wilderness Trail, Queenstown Trail, Canterbury High Country Trail and a wine tasting tour of the Marlborough region.

Hilary says the government-led New Zealand Cycle Trail initiative (Nga Haerenga) which began in 2009 to provide a safe and sustainable way to explore the country, while generating environmental, economic and social benefits for local communities, has changed the way people travel.

“It’s an amazing initiative which means we can safely explore magical places throughout New Zealand. The trails also provide fantastic infrastructure in terms of food, transport and accommodation.

“Being able to use locally owned accommodation and hospitality providers is important to us and our clients. It provides a much more real experience with genuine local knowledge and hospitality.”

PureTrails’ tours are usually six days, with most tour participants in the 60+ age bracket. Sixty per cent of the company’s clients are New Zealanders, mainly from the North Island, with 35 per cent Australians and the remaining five per cent a mix of British, American

and Canadian tourists.

“We have around 70 bikes of our own and then hire about 600 bikes per season. Tours generally run from October to May to take advantage of the warmer weather.”

Advances in e-bike technology have made it easier and more accessible for people of different abilities to enjoy a cycle tour together, along with those who may not have the same level of fitness due to health issues.

“Technology is such an equaliser and I love that e-bikes allow people to continue biking for many more years than a traditional bike, even after having surgery for hips or knees. We have clients aged in their late 80s who are still going strong on their e-bikes. If you’re not a confident biker, or a couple or friends at different levels, then an e-bike can also be the perfect option to allow you to both enjoy the tour.”

Digital connectivity is also important for clients wanting to connect with friends or family during their tour and a reliable Wi-Fi connection is vital at accommodation stops along the way.

“Clients expect fast and reliable Wi-Fi so they can share their photos and videos via social media, and they are also keen to check in with friends and family. “What’s the Wi-Fi code?” is one of the first questions people ask when we get to our accommodation each night.”

Hilary says while digital connectivity has improved along some trails, other areas still have a way to go; especially in Canterbury’s back country and some parts of rural Kaikoura.

Hilary sees a bright future ahead for her business with the development of more cycle trails throughout the country backed by increased demand for more active holidays and continued growth for the e-bike market.

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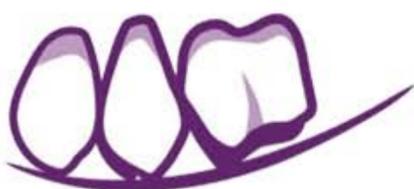
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