

LODGE A WIN FOR LOCAL COMMUNITY

An award-winning fly fishing lodge benefits locals as well as visitors

It's fair to say Felix Borenstein is slightly obsessed with brown trout.

Not only did the introduced species lure Felix from his home in Melbourne to the South Island 21 times in five years, it also led him to sell his IT recruitment company to establish New Zealand's most highly accredited fly fishing luxury lodge.

Murchison based Owen River Lodge flung open its doors for business in 2003, offering guided brown trout catch-and-release fishing to mainly international guests. It's a five star, accredited luxury lodge which began life as a run-down farmhouse.

Its 6.5 hectares now feature six contemporary guest rooms, a main lodge building and landscaped gardens. But the real attraction at this award winning lodge is the location – smack-bang in the middle of the Murchison/Nelson Lakes region of the South Island, an area recognised as having the world's best brown trout fishing on the planet.

"Guests have access to an enormous choice and variety of rivers, streams and lakes to fish, including more than 29 rivers and streams accessible within a 90 minute drive," says Felix.

"Our position on the boundary of Kahurangi National Park also opens up another dozen or so stunning wilderness streams."

It's this "unique Kiwi fishing experience" that brings guests from North America, Australia and the UK, with around 41 per cent being repeat visitors.

Bookings are also up 60 per cent over the last four years for the season which runs from October until April and includes Christmas Day. "We have around 12 people staying this Christmas," says Felix.

But it's not just the global visitors that win. Felix has always been keen on giving back to the local community, employing local tradespeople to build the elegant rooms and modern facilities as well as local fishing guides, chefs and cleaning staff.

"We have two fulltime, internationally trained chefs, as well as six full time fishing guides, including the only female member of the New Zealand Fishing Guides Association and New Zealand's only certified female casting instructor. We also purchase all our produce locally, so we're doing our bit to bring real economic benefits to the community."

Sustainability is also something that's close to Felix's heart, with Owen River Lodge committed to practices such as bottling and carbonating their own sparkling water pumped from the property, giving guests stainless steel instead of plastic water bottles and donating opened toiletries to a charity that re-uses them. And, of course, all the fishing is of the catch-and-release variety, ensuring fish stocks aren't depleted.



It also includes hosting around 12 breast cancer sufferers for an annual retreat. "We work with Casting for Recovery, a national not-for-profit group that supports women of all ages and stages of breast cancer to provide a free three day retreat where the women can learn fly fishing to promote mental and physical healing, as well as having wellness treatments and relaxing in our beautiful surroundings," says Felix who was prompted to get involved with the group after losing one of his neighbours to breast cancer.

"We believe in treading as lightly as possible on this beautiful country."

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