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# RV travel lifestyle

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# KAWERAU CARES

Lakes, the mountain, rivers and the ocean beaches nearby. Add a reasonably mild climate and incredibly cheap housing and you understand why Kawerau hit the news recently as the retirement heaven for townies who are on the run from the big city's housing rates. Could this be the start of a reversed rural exodus?





**A**uckland's rates are the table topic of the day and some small towns aren't sitting back. They gear up to respond with actions that shine a light on forgotten necks of rural woods. In a recent TV One documentary, Kawerau was used to contrast Auckland's housing trouble. A TV presenter was seen roaming the neatly organised streets of the small town, interviewing retirees who had moved there to find rural bliss. Kawerau came out of the comparison with flying colours, offering an enviable lifestyle for a fraction of the cost of living in Auckland.

Partly pressured by the outrageous housing prices in big cities, people are waking up to ponder the question 'what constitutes quality of life?' Meanwhile Kawerau is one step ahead; the quiet mill town in the Eastern Bay of Plenty - whose heydays were somewhere in the 80s, made a plan to favour freedom campers. They were one of the first motorhome friendly towns of New Zealand. A group of residents work in a concerted effort to attract mobile home owners and make them stay for a few days, because - who knows - maybe the visitors will come to feel for Kawerau as they do!

Graham Goodall explains how he sees the future. At this year's Camper Care Show in Hamilton, Graham was one of the people literally taking a stand for his town to spread enthusiasm for what he calls a piece of Kiwi paradise in the Eastern Bay of Plenty. With other passionate, semi-retired Kiwis, he is involved in KAWERAU PROUD (KP). I'd describe it as a (grey) power-movement to help rejuvenate the town. It explains why Graham is found distributing flyers at the Hamilton show, revealing the things we do not know about Kawerau.

Since moving there, Graham is busier than ever, so you may take the semi-retired label with a pinch of salt. He is an active member of NZMCA and helps coordinate its EBOP branch from his Kawerau home. He is also one of the town ambassadors and active in the earlier mentioned KP. His story sounds familiar. >



01. On the beach 02. Walks to Tarawera Falls but also Mangamate falls  
03. Town Ambassador Graham shows us the freedom camping park with dump station  
04. Motorhome friendly Kawerau 05. Camper Care Show stand





06. Cycling and walking along the plains there are surprising sights 07. Walks - Roy Weston Walk along the Tarawera River is one of many 08. Te Teko Bloom



He tells me; "I moved here 10 years ago. I have always enjoyed traveling and especially appreciate the Eastern Bay of Plenty because of the mild weather and because after a few visits here, I discovered how central the town is; close to Whakatane, Rotorua and Tauranga. Then I found out that purchasing a section and a decent home are still affordable and to make a long story short, we sold up and moved here and haven't looked back."

Helen Stewart of the Kawerau Enterprise Agency (KEA) gives the background story about KP.

"Some years back we had a café conversation group initiated by the Council and KEA. From that group several blossoms sprung, one of which is KP. We are one of the youngest towns in New Zealand, built for the paper mills in the 50s. But of course paper print has taken a dive now everything is online (huh, almost everything!

Thank goodness that RV lifestyle can still be read in hardcopy). KEA was created to find new ways for the future and our presence at the Camper Care Show is an example of how we are telling our stories. My personal story is that I am fond of the outdoors and there are plenty very interesting areas and good walks in and around Kawerau. One of our freedom camping sites is close to the FREE hot pools – those that were filmed in the TV One documentary. There is an ablation block for campers and one of the walks starts just across the bridge outside the park. The iSite has information about all the walks but The Tarawera Falls Walk is by far the most popular." When I ask Graham how he came to be one of the town ambassadors he explains:

"I've always been interested in learning many different things and I enjoy sharing my new knowledge about the local history and sights >





09. Camper Care in Kawerau at Golf & Squash 10. Camper Care several dump stations 11. Camping on the Beach, Thornton 12. Awakeri hot spring entry



**Kawerau** *You call it a holiday...*

**Proud** *...we call it everyday*



13. Awakeri hot Springs under the trees 14. Awakeri Hot Springs have a great camp ground 15. Helen Stewart CEO of KEA enjoys the outdoors 16. Dabchick photo by Brian Chudleigh

with visitors. When we first moved here we sort of drove around to discover the nooks and crannies on our own; there are plenty of green spaces and parks. These days there is freedom parking in Prideaux Park and Firmin Field as well as a few other places and little by little people discover us. I realized soon that this is a great base for day trips around the East Coast!"

I agree with Graham; Awakeri Hot Springs are only about 10 minutes' drive and the Dutch girl in me feels good in those stretched out Rangitaiki plains. The miles of flat meadow land that weaves into the dunes near Thornton and Matata are the perfect scenery for easy flat cycling from river to ocean; my cup of tea. The nearness to some big towns also appeals. If too much nature and green peace gets you down you can head to a show at the Baycourt, get your retail fix in Whakatane or paddle around the Rotorua lakes. I find out from Helen at KEA that Lake Rotoiti, which is on the way to Rotorua, is breeding ground for the New Zealand dabchick. They are a noisy lot; the Maori name is Weweia referring to its piercing wee-wee call. The sight of flocks coming in for their winter stop-over is impressive. The near extinct species has now almost vanished in the South Island and Lake Rotoiti is one of few remaining breeding places on the mainland.

In the other direction going towards the ocean are Thornton and Matata, providing completely different scenery. Nestled between the



sand dunes and long stretches of white beach are a few campsites to take your pick from; the DoC site next to the Matata wildlife reserve, the beach camping in Thornton and the holiday park next to the Awakeri Hot Springs.

So, if you are considering joining the bandwagon back to the good life, Kawerau deserves to be on your radar. **RV**



# RV

## travel lifestyle

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