

supplier profile

ECOSTORE

Putting eco at the heart of the guest experience

Ecostore founder Malcolm Rands talks about why sustainability is such an important part of the accommodation business.

Tell us about yourself and your story since founding ecostore

My wife Melanie and I were part of a group that founded New Zealand's first permaculture ecovillage in Northland in the 1980s, and I had a track record in the arts/not for profit scene before starting ecostore with Melanie in 1993. Alongside ecostore we co-founded the Fairground Foundation, a new social enterprise designed to tackle projects to create a better world, freely sharing our ideas for others to follow.

Ecostore began by sourcing eco cleaning and body care products. It now has its own manufacturing facility and exports to Australia and Asia. In recent years I've been honoured with the Ministry for the Environment's Green Ribbon Award and ecostore has twice been named New Zealand Sustainable Business of the Year. I was also made a member of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to business, conservation and philanthropy.

What do you look for when you travel?

I love getting away on adventure tours among small groups – often these trips are a chance to see spots that are hidden away and usually only experienced by the locals. On this type of trip I rough it a bit, but sometimes I'm after a bit more luxury – I love it when someone makes my bed and cleans up after me (cleaners definitely aren't acknowledged as much as they should be!) Regardless of the type of holiday, I like to support providers doing their bit to lessen their impact on the planet.

One of the best ways to see if this is happening is accreditation, and Qualmark is a well recognised quality assurance scheme. It awards

businesses for meeting environmental and social standards and they can earn gold, silver and bronze levels. By displaying the Qualmark or its star rating, you know the place you're staying is doing things like recycling, reducing waste, cutting energy and water consumption and supporting the local community in some way.

What are the benefits of running a sustainable accommodation business?

With popular holiday destinations becoming crowded, it's even more important to keep pristine spots unspoiled. I think that's a big part of why visitors to New Zealand, and Kiwi tourists alike, want accommodation providers to be environmentally responsible. If they know the place they're staying has the systems in place to tread more lightly on the planet, they can just enjoy their holiday and know they're doing good at the same time. That has long term benefits for the accommodation business – it means satisfied guests, good word of mouth, higher occupancy rates and the ability to charge according to the value provided. Effective sustainability practices also save money through things like lower power and water costs, less food waste and labour practices that retain and develop staff.

Do you have any tips for New Zealand accommodation providers who want to be more sustainable?

I recommend many of the things we do at ecostore that make continual improvement in our sustainability, no matter how small. We're always looking for ways to reduce our water, energy, fuel and material use, and we try to increase the amount of recycled and recyclable materials we use.

Installing solar panels is one way to cut energy use in the long term, and re-using rainwater and greywater (waste water that comes from the laundry or bathroom) cuts down on water use. You might also want to support community schemes and events. As well, you can also make sustainable choices with the food you offer guests, by supporting local producers, choosing ethically and sustainably sourced meat and produce, and choosing to provide organic options.

If you're adding rooms to the premises or refurbishing existing ones, try to choose sustainable materials like paint and furnishings that don't emit high levels of volatile organic compounds, and reclaimed wood.

Guest amenities are another important area of sustainability – choosing healthier options like ecostore's amenities range means you're reducing the amount of potentially harmful chemicals people put on their skin and in their hair – and down the drain - during their stay. ▲



Malcolm Rands

