

Notes from Interview with Donna Brook

19 June 2020

Introduction:

Donna, along with her husband Chris, is the owner of Sunlover Retreat in Tairua. Donna has a background hotel, sales and marketing management – knowledge which she freely shares with the Association and its members. Donna joined the Association in 2015, was elected to the Board in 2016, appointed Vice President in 2019 and President in 2020.

Can you tell us a bit about yourself and your family?

I'm a mum of 3, and together with Chris, we have 6 children and 8 grandchildren living here in NZ and in Australia. We also have Rover, the dog, plus chickens and sheep. We live on a block in Tairua which we share with our guests.

How long you have owned your B&B for and why did you decide to get into the B&B industry?

We've owned it for about 7-8 years. Once we had built the property we decided we wanted to live in it instead of coming down from Auckland. It started quietly with Chris working Auckland and coming home in the weekend. We started the B&B as we wanted an income while living at the beach; we felt we had something good to share living on the coast; and to get to know people from around the world. We absolutely love meeting people and sharing stories.

What prompted you to join the Association?

I see a lot of value in belonging to professional organisations. When I joined I had a background in hotel sales and marketing but I didn't know this particular part of the accommodation industry. I'm a real researcher. I visited a lot of other B&Bs and people are very kind and shared their experiences and how I should set it up. That's why I love to share now - people were really good to me and that got me started.

B&B hosts – we're all about hosting. What do you enjoy most about hosting particularly after having met all these hosts?

It is the social side but also the learning and it keeps me connected with the tourism industry as a whole, which keeps me relevant. I think as we get older we get complacent and this keeps me relevant. It's really important to keep up to date and the Association provides a lot of relevant information.

With the latest developments, what things are you going to change about your business operation?

We are closed over winter – and so I'm doing more research and talking to people about what they are doing at this time when we're in the middle of the Corona Virus. We are going to make changes. We will create a more self-contained area for guests. I don't want them to be nervous about coming into our home. They will have a choice to interact with us or be completely separate. We will put in a little sink downstairs to fill up the kettle, we have a bbq they can cook on and that might make it more attractive to the NZ guests that don't want to interact with us, I think, at the same level as international guests. I want to take away any perception that this won't be a safe place for them to stay and make it seem welcoming and safe.

Will you have single party bookings or two rooms for two different parties?

I'm going to create a "double couples bubble". Friends can stay but there will only be one party - a party of two or a party of four. I'm open to feedback. I'm talking to everybody to see how they are going.

What is the one feature / item of your property that guests always talk about?

It is the view. We are on a hill and it is really hard to capture it with photos. Guests arrive and say the website didn't show what you have. Is that a bad thing? Maybe not as we're exceeding expectations with the actual view.

And, this is the same with all B&Bs and trip advisor reviews, it us that they talk about. Guests always talk about their hosts because that is what they love about their interaction. Of course, Rover, the dog, is the most photographed thing in our B&B.

What you would change about your property / garden if you could?

The biggest challenge is our steep driveway. We head that off by letting people know about it. "Don't panic we can drive your car down." We have an upstairs / downstairs property with the entrance coming into our main living area and we have made it so people can access the house from either side of the property without coming into our living area, so they have their own access.

If we built again – I'd change the smallest room out of my two rooms. It is not a small room but I'd make it just that little bit bigger to take into account that international travellers are travelling with great big bags and there's only just enough room in there.

A final comment from Donna:

I want to hear from members. Please contact me. I want to hear stories. I want to hear about improvements we can make as an Association and I want to hear about what you are enjoy being part of the Association. I love to hear from people.

Members are welcome to contact Donna via email on – president@bandbassociation.co.nz.

Fiona Rollings & Donna Brooke
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