

# TIAKI IN WAITOMO

## Spellbound

### Guardians of Waitomo's glowworm galaxy

One of the true champions of sustainable tourism in Waitomo is Spellbound Glowworm Cave Tours, who have embarked on native plantings, pest management and a raft of other environmental protection efforts to safeguard the subterranean world it operates in.

Spellbound's care for the caves means visitors will be able to enjoy the magical Milky Way spectacle for many years to come, reliving the enchantment Sir David Attenborough must have felt when he ventured into the very same caverns to film a documentary in 2005.

Tour guide Kieran Chandler says sustainability has long been at the heart of Spellbound's ethos and the company is deeply committed to embracing the values of the New Zealand tourism industry's Tiaki Promise.

**"Nothing's more important than caring about this sacred place for generations to come."**



Kieran says the Spellbound team puts a lot of effort into looking after the above ground environment using possum and rat traps to keep the forest in good health, which in turn has a beneficial effect on the cave system below.

"Since we've started doing that the forest has regenerated really nicely and now there's more little invertebrates flying around the forest and accidentally flying into the cave to feed the glowworms. So now there's more glowworms in the cave than there ever were before - it's pretty cool."

Visitors often experience a sense of connection to the unique local environment after the tour experience Kieran says.

"We're not guiding people through the Tiaki Promise experience, we are letting them have that experience for themselves with the environment. It's just a matter of letting them have the time to relax and leave behind the stress of their daily lives and become one with the place down there."

"They have this quiet, peaceful, immersive experience under the glowworms, and then they come outside into the daylight again and its often quite transformational."

Spellbound owner Peter Chandler says the Tiaki Promise is very important to what they do, underpinning the approach to educating their visitors to stay on the pathways designed to protect the caves and not touch or take anything. These guidelines ensure the caves can remain in their naturally beautiful state.



**The Mighty  
Waikato**  
Where magic runs deep

To learn more about Tiaki in Waitomo visit:

[waikatoz.com/tiaki](http://waikatoz.com/tiaki)



Part of Spellbound's recipe for success is smaller tour group sizes, typically 12 people, which Peter says gives more of a personalised experience.

The tour also includes a walk through the area above ground surrounding the caves, which gives visitors a sense of the unique geography of the area. This differs from some other tours where the entire experience takes place underground.

Spellbound's aim is to cater for people looking for an authentic, non-commercialised glowworm cave experience, Peter says.

"We get visitors to turn all lights off so their eyes can adapt to night vision, which makes a huge difference to how they appreciate the glowworms."

**Environmental initiatives above ground are key to safeguard the cave environment and Spellbound has done plenty of planting over the years to expand the fringes of the forest surrounding the caves, Peter says.**

"The biggest single planting project was last year, when we planted 750 mānuka seedlings in one go."

Supportive local farmers have fenced off waterways to prevent sheep from falling into cave entrances and to stop contaminating the water flowing into the caves from upstream. Regular water quality checks are also undertaken to monitor nitrate levels and establish a benchmark for any changes which might affect the cave's delicate natural environment, he says.

Spellbound uses solar panels to run their lighting, fridge and phone, and Peter says he would like to update the visitor shuttle to an electric van and boost his solar panel array to charge it in future.

Spellbound has a warm relationship with local iwi Ngāti Kinohaku, who contributed a pou whenua (traditional way marker) to mark the cave's location and wrote a waiata (song) about all the place names in the area. One of Peter's current projects is incorporating more of the iwi's cultural stories into the Spellbound tour experience.

Peter has previously received a New Zealand Order of Merit for his contribution to New Zealand tourism, and a New Zealand Walking Access Award for his contribution to improving and caring for the Waitomo section of the national 3,000 km Te Araroa trail, which runs the length of the Aotearoa.



**The Mighty  
Waikato**  
Where magic runs deep

To learn more about Tiaki in Waitomo visit:

[waikatoz.com/tiaki](https://www.waikatoz.com/tiaki)