



## COMMUNITY BENEFIT AWARD WINNER 2010

Whale Watch Kaikoura Ltd (WWK), New Zealand's only year-round whale-watching operator, is an outstanding example of how sustainable tourism development can enable economic rejuvenation and cultural self-determination at the local level.

# CASE STUDY

Kaikoura, a small community located on the mountainous coast of South Island, New Zealand, once profited from booming rail, fishing and whaling industries. With the closure of railyards, the decline of the fishing industry and the suspension of whaling, Kaikoura and its Maori residents were thrust into poverty.

In 1987 four Maori families started WWK in an effort to harness a unique and rare tourist attraction – the Sperm Whale. WWK was founded with the deliberate goal of creating a stable and self-sustaining economic base for the Maori tribe. Direct revenue is generated through whale-watching ticket sales, an income base which has steadily increased since incorporation. Income has allowed WWK to purchase the Kaikoura peninsula, a culturally significant land mass for the Maori people. As part of Maori cultural preservation, WWK notes that “it was important this land wasn't sold to anyone outside of Kaikoura.”



WWK itself employs some 70 local Maori, but the company's benefit to the community far exceeds direct employment and company gains. The success of the whale-watching enterprise has spawned significant development in the areas of accommodation, dining, tour operations and transport services. The number of accommodation and dining venues in Kaikoura has increased by 150% since 1987, and the number of tour operators has increased by over 700%. Recent growth rates remain high - since the year 2000, total guestnights have increased by 73%. WWK remains the largest employer in the community.

In addition to community benefits, WWK is committed to providing professional development for its employees. The company engenders a strong sense of corporate loyalty, with many of its employees staying with WWK for more than a decade. Every Skipper and Guide must complete an extensive training programme. As many have already worked with the company for several years, they maintain an integral knowledge of WWK's culture, the unique Kaikoura environment, and its diverse marine life. WWK's ethos is visible in the achievement of Kauahi Ngapora, who began with WWK 17 years ago at its most junior level of employment. Working through many roles, he rose through the ranks to eventually become COO.

## CASE STUDY



WWK has been praised for fostering community spirit and local involvement. To ensure continuous education on the importance of sustainable tourism, WWK offers free whale-watch tours to Kaikoura residents, free annual excursions for all Year 4 school children, support for the annual Seafest Festival, and regular presentations at local schools.

It has set up a fund to aid underprivileged children, and financially assists the Kaikoura Coastguard, Ambulance Service, and Fire Brigade. WWK is the major contributor for research on the long-term environmental impacts of whale-watching and marine based tourism.

WWK continues to be a pillar of the Kaikoura community and Maori tribe. It is 100% Maori owned and represents an outstanding example of how carefully managed tourism can foster long-term economic opportunities, and allow an indigenous community to achieve self-determination and cultural preservation. In addition to being a 2010 Tourism for Tomorrow Community Benefit Award Winner, it is also a Qualmark EnviroGold accredited operation - the highest level of sustainable tourism given in New Zealand.

