



Photo: New Zealand Tourism - [www.newzealand.com](http://www.newzealand.com)

## CASE STUDY

# WAITOMO CAVES NEW ZEALAND

Waitomo Caves are a labyrinth of caves, sinkholes and underground rivers located in the Waikato Region of New Zealand's North Island. Waitomo comes from the Maori words wai (water) and tomo (hole).

**THE WONDER OF GONDWANA**  
*A Journey into Ancient Australia*



**DESTINATION  
MARKETING  
STORE**



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Originally, the caves were owned by the New Zealand government and it was not uncommon for farmers to lose their animals to holes in the ground. They demanded the government reimburse the farmers for their lost animals. The government, not wanting to take on this extra burden, instead granted the farmers ownership of the caves. Now, the farmers rent the caves to companies like Waitomo Adventures and make a profit. Destination Waitomo is the lead tourism body.



Above 3 photos: Discover Waitomo - [www.waitomo.com](http://www.waitomo.com)



Photo: Travel Notes - [www.ttnotes.com](http://www.ttnotes.com)

## THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE

- Tour names/descriptions are concise and clearly targeted at their key markets. You know what you're getting at a quick glance!
- Clear pricing and key information. All easily booked online
- Tour offer is extensive – from the daily “standard” tours, to a range of different activity based experiences. Troll Cave also adds something for younger children
- Starting to introduce more of a sense of the Maori culture – tour guides etc. Interesting to see a tour operator offering an “authentic” private small group tours as an alternative to the “commercial” tours. This exclusivity is an attractive proposition for many market segments and should possibly be a bigger part of the mix.

## MARKETING & BRANDING

- Strong beautiful imagery (most featuring people actively participating) and increasing use of short video.
- The new Discover Waitomo website is uncluttered and easy to navigate. It leads firmly with experiences and makes the research stage extremely easy. Offers curated itineraries and provides an itinerary builder option. Accommodation and other product “listings” are all still available but are where they should be under a “Plan” main menu option AFTER Experiences & Discover options. Has the definite feel of a “tourist attraction” versus conservation/education experience.
- Despite an ongoing array of confusing Waitomo websites and social media platforms, it's possible to see the start of a consistent look & feel being introduced across the prominent tour operators' collateral and platforms. This should resolve itself as the stakeholders work through the new brand guidelines etc.
- New branding itself isn't earth shattering or unique but is visually bright and clean. Copywriting is also predictable - “discover” really doesn't cut it and inevitably can only lead to very conventional “tourism speak”.
- Brand activation appears at the moment to be limited to the visual elements and fails to tell the story of the place.
- The brand is built around the concept of “Magic Moments Magnified” – which again isn't too unique or inspiring. The marketing material to industry refers to the “deeper parts of the brand that help tell the story” – in fact this unique story is beautiful and should probably be at the forefront of their brand, not buried
- The architectural award-winning Waitomo Caves Visitor Centre has a restaurant, cafe, exhibition space, theatre, and gift store.