

MEDIA RELEASE
October 2010

Waitomo Glowworm Caves Visitor Centre rises from the ashes

The doors are now open at the stunning new Waitomo Glowworm Caves Visitor Centre marking a new beginning for this iconic Kiwi destination.

The original centre was devastated in a fire in 2005 and since then **thl**, the Ruapuha Uekaha Hapu Trust (the Hapu) and the Department of Conservation (DOC) have worked together to create a centre that reflects the local culture and the environment.

thl CEO Grant Webster says, "We are very excited to have the Waitomo Glowworm Caves Visitor Centre open to the public and for visitors in the area to be able to enjoy this spectacular new building.

"We hope this multi-million dollar complex will become an iconic New Zealand tourist attraction in its own right. The Waitomo Glowworm Caves provides a uniquely New Zealand experience and we believe this complex will greatly enhance visitors' experience at Waitomo.

"**thl** has invested significantly into this iconic tourism centre which will be the first of its kind on this side of the globe, and promises to deliver an even more exceptional experience to our customers."

The design reflects the weaved shape of a 'hinake' (eel catcher) and the association that the local people have with eeling near the caves. The Hapu has been strongly involved in the design of the building and descendants of Tanetinoarau, the Maori Chief who first explored the Caves in 1887, still guide visitors through the Caves today.

A Maori Poupou, which was first carved in 1987, now stands renewed at the entrance to the Waitomo Glowworm Caves Visitor Centre. It depicts Tane Mahuta, the God of the forest, guardian of the caves and their inhabitants.

The Waitomo Glowworm Caves Visitor Centre has been designed to create a minimal intervention environmental building that provides a lightweight canopy. The top structure canopy follows the curve of the Waitomo stream while the base of the building reflects the contours of the land.

Christopher Kelly, Architecture Workshop says, "The canopy gridshell of the Waitomo Glowworm Caves Visitor Centre follows the curve of the Waitomo stream. It reinforces the idea for this project of a simple lightweight 'sky shell' to contrast the subterranean cave space that is moulded out of the ground. The innovative use of New Zealand Radiata pine for the grid shell structure in combination with the transparent cladding of the canopy is internationally significant."

The new building offers a variety of facilities and experiences to Waitomo visitors. A restaurant spanning two levels seats up to 250 customers and includes exclusive dining area for groups. There is also a 50 seat café. Added extras include an Exhibition space, which is currently exhibiting "Building an Icon" around the creation of this new Visitor Centre and a Theatre where viewers are taken on an emotionally connecting journey with a wonderful introduction to the people of Waitomo through a short film created by thedownlowconcept. A Gift Shop offers a large variety of high quality gifts and souvenirs including a Kiwi gallery featuring local artists.



The complex serves as a fabulous access point to the stunning Waitomo Glowworm Caves experience – including the boat ride under a starry sky of glowworms and a tour through limestone caves that have been created over millions of years. Waitomo offers other exciting attractions in the area – the spectacular and unique Ruakuri Cave with its innovative spiral entrance and glowworms up close and Aranui Cave with its stunning cave formations makes for an exceptional experience. For the more adventurous, The Legendary Black Water Rafting Company offers the Black Abyss, the ultimate adrenalin pumping caving adventure and the original subterranean adventure with Black Labyrinth.

The Waitomo Glowworm Caves Visitor Centre has just recently won its first accolades at the NZ Wood Timber Design Awards 2010.

The Waitomo Glowworm Caves Visitor Centre won three of the top awards at the ceremony on 12 October – the start of many more awards to come.

- Commercial Architectural Excellence: For innovative use of timber resulting in a distinctive visual impact of a commercial, industrial, or public building environment
- Commercial Engineering Excellence: For innovative use of timber resulting in a distinctive technical/structural impact on a commercial, industrial, or public building environment
- Clever Wood Solution Award: For innovative solutions to technical structural or performance based challenges

“We look forward to sharing the new centre with Kiwis and international visitors alike and encourage those in the area to come and experience all that Waitomo Glowworm Caves now has to offer,” says Grant Webster

Ends

About thl and Waitomo Glowworm Caves

thl is one of Australasia's premier tourism companies. **thl** owns and operates Waitomo Glowworm Caves, The Legendary Blackwater Rafting Co., Ruakuri Cave, Aranui Cave, Maui, Britz, Backpacker, Explore More Campervan and Car Rentals, Kiwi Experience and CI Munro.

Waitomo is only two and a half hours from the tourism gateway of Auckland and home of some of New Zealand's most unforgettable attractions. Waitomo's unique underground limestone formations stand as one of New Zealand's most inspiring natural wonders and a must see destination for every visitor to New Zealand.

The 'Waitomo Glowworm Caves' is operated by Tourism Holdings Ltd (**thl**). **thl** is a public company listed on the New Zealand Stock Exchange. **thl** operations include car and motorhome rentals in Australia and New Zealand, a specialist caravan and motorhome manufacturing company in Hamilton, backpacker bus transport operations in New Zealand, along with activities in Waitomo which include The Legendary Blackwater Rafting Co., Waitomo Glowworm Caves, Ruakuri Cave and Aranui Cave.

For more information please contact:
Julia George, Mango Communications
+64 9 306 0963
+64 21 042 7617
juliag@thisismango.co.nz
