



Quest for success

An historic Napier building has been given a new lease of life as New Zealand's newest Quest Serviced Apartments, and its franchisees are finding a new lease of life in Napier.

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When you are climbing the ladder in the international hospitality industry, there comes a time to pause and take stock of what you want for your future. For professional hoteliers Ruben and Fiona Simon, Sulawesi in Indonesia was the latest step in a long and varied career, but they increasingly felt the need to take their own stake in this demanding but satisfying industry. At the same time, they had to consider the needs of their two young sons, who had reached an age where education, family life and sport were top priority.

Dutch-born Ruben had already spent several years in New Zealand, meeting and marrying Fiona while they were both working at the boutique Hotel du Vin at Mangatawhiri, south of Auckland. A couple of stints in Asia to further their careers in premium international hotels followed, but the intention had always been to settle their family back in New Zealand.

A random internet surf led them to the website of Quest Serviced Apartments and their interest was piqued. Further research revealed that the Quest brand was a runaway success story in Australasia. With some 102 serviced apartment properties across Australia, New Zealand and Fiji, Quest had carved a formidable niche in the accommodation sector, providing both business and leisure travellers with a flexible alternative to traditional hotel stays. As Ruben explains, "Quest is a well known brand with a highly developed business model. This gives us an extremely sound platform for operating our own successful business - so why wouldn't we go for it?"

Certainly for Ruben and Fiona the opportunity to become Quest franchisees ticked all the boxes and the idea of starting

Left: The stunning Spanish Mission style entrance way.

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Accommodation Quest Serviced Apartments

> out fresh in Napier did not faze them at all. “Although we are new to the Napier area, like many returning Kiwis it was the big picture that mattered - we didn’t feel any real need to return to where I had grown up”, Fiona explains. “We spent hours investigating all we could about Napier over the internet but the key factors were the climate (and after a long spell in the tropics, this is a major issue!), a good-sized town with a progressive infrastructure and, of course, a reputation for good schools”.

Transformation

Once they had entered into a serious dialogue with Quest, they began to learn more about the apartment development which was underway in Dickens Street. “We were expecting the usual modern and architecturally bland building, but were delighted to learn that a beautiful 1920s character building was being transformed for us”, says Fiona. “With the classic façade and original front section, this property was perfect for creating stylish inner city boutique apartments.”

The charming Spanish Mission building was designed by Napier architect D.B Frame and constructed in 1919 as the Ancient Order of Foresters District Building. Its concrete reinforced construction withstood the 1931 earthquake and in the aftermath proved to be an invaluable key-point of the temporary business area. The building has also served as a community hall, the Napier RSA and an inner-city church. It has a category 2 historic places trust listing.

Lovingly restored, the original front section features high ceilings and matai flooring. The rear section was demolished to make way for the new apartments and two levels of car



*Above: The Simon family take in the city views from the apartment balcony.
Left: Modern apartment living. The original Spanish Mission façade withstood the 1931 Napier earthquake.*



parking, complete with Napier's very first car lift. Up-to-date furnishings throughout the building successfully marry the old and new flavour. The apartments have been fitted out with all the modern amenities and conveniences that today's travellers demand. "The Quest brand is well known for offering high-end facilities and stylish décor at value-for-money rates," reiterates Ruben.

Ruben and Fiona see the building as a key factor in the great response they received since opening the doors in March this year. "We've been amazed at how many guests arrive intending to spend one night but end up staying for two or three," explains Fiona. "I think this is a reflection of how comfortable they feel here - plus they discover that Napier has so much more to see and do than they had expected!"

Quest Napier offers a choice of studio and one bedroom apartments for short and long term accommodation. A number of the one bedroom apartments interconnect to offer a larger option for families or a small group. From its great

central location in Dickens Street, Quest is in close walking distance to an array of restaurants, shops, entertainment, business and conference venues.

As the first of its kind in Napier, Ruben says there have been a few challenges in marketing the serviced apartment concept. "Many people think we only provide longer term accommodation, when in fact we welcome guests for anything from one night to one year! Actually the majority would be three days or less, but that just demonstrates what a wide range of options we can cover."

After a few short but hectically busy months the Simon family has hardly had time to stop and take stock. As Fiona laughingly reflects, "we definitely hit the ground running and I don't see that changing anytime soon. From both a business and family perspective, we certainly seem to have found a great niche here."

Above: Napier's first serviced apartments concept.

www.questnapier.co.nz