

THE PRESS

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Deluxe tours and picnics for South Island off-road adventure seekers



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Brian Lucas and Paula Sinclair, co-owners of Wild South Discovery, have started "delux-safari" tours offering picnic stops at off-road spots around the South Island.

Comfort-seeking Americans and Europeans are paying up to \$1000 a day for "super deluxe safari-style" tours including home-made picnics.

Brian Lucas and Paula Sinclair own and operate Wildsouth Discovery, an adventure company giving South Island tourists tailored 4WD tours and walks off the beaten track.

Lucas, a 20-year veteran of tour-guiding, said he wanted to offer an alternative to "sausage factory" tourism shuttling people from one major town and attraction to the next.

Bouncing along rough tracks without comfort in between stops was not everyone's idea of fun, he said.

Lucas and Sinclair use agents for bookings and pick up customers from Nelson to Dunedin and Queenstown, taking groups of up to six at a time on tours in two modified 4WD vans.

They have also bought a luxury Range Rover to take private single or couples on "day safari" tours from Christchurch.



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Paula Sinclair, left, with a customer on a "deluxi safari" tour.

The couple always toured together, one driving and topping up food and other supplies while the other took guided walks using Department of Conservation tourism concessions.

The tours were personalised and based on customers' interests and energy levels. Walks ranged from five minutes to five hours, Lucas said.

The vans, a Toyota Hiace and Mitsubishi Delica, had refrigerators and picnic gear for morning and afternoon teas and included home-made chocolate and chutney, bottled water, tissues, mints and nibbles. Longer tours usually included a picnic lunch.

Prices started at \$600 per person and \$2350 each for the multi-day tours. A 10-day tour cost about \$9990.

Destinations included Akaroa and Banks Peninsula, a loop from Christchurch to West Coast-Queenstown and Milford Sound, and a shorter run from Christchurch to Franz Josef and Fox Glaciers and Queenstown.

Customers had a choice of first class (4 star) or deluxe (5 star) accommodation, and many meals were included in the upfront tour fee.

Lucas said they had a couple in mind who would hopefully will be available in the next 12 months to guide additional tours. Meantime they were considering buying and refurbishing a 4WD bus.

Lucas ran Canterbury Trails until selling it in 2010. He and Sinclair have since been buried in earthquake repairs to their Cashmere home and only started actively promoting Wildsouth in February.

Their \$80,000 start-up costs for the business included a multi-conservancy DOC concession, buying and refurbishing the Toyota Hiace, an approved safety management plan, website and public liability insurance.

- Stuff