

Bridging the gap between two lands



Photo Caption: Mikkeline's highlight was to Kapiti guided by Rochelle Hopping (Ngāti Raukawa) of Kapiti Island Nature Tours. Rochelle included a tour of a Raukawa grove not far from Tuteremoana.

Australia is the home for many Māori and for some there is a deep desire to reconnect to their tūrangawaewae. Mikkeline Olsen is a clear example and she recently returned home to fulfil that “deep wairua connection”.

She lives in Brisbane and calls three countries home. She was born in Denmark to a Danish father, lives in Australia and is of Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Toa and Ngāi Tahu descent through her Māori mother. Her family are the Perawiti's from Kikopiri and Hikitanga. Over the years Mikkeline has made several trips.

“The call home to my Māori cultural heritage has increased and the journey has certainly been an interesting one with many ups and downs.”

“I am continually reminded of who I am and who my tūpuna were. My drive is to reconnect with my whakapapa, tūrangawaewae and with Māoridom. My journey has been guided by wairua.”

Part of her re-connection has been learning about the Treaty of Waitangi and she has a very good grasp of the issues.

“Unfortunately, it didn't work out in favour for Māori. The English and Māori versions were markedly different with the Māori version having no mention of handing over sovereignty, yet the British one did.”

“I know many promises of protection and self-determination were never kept and this is the basis for many of the grievances. Māori have fought hard to be heard and to be compensated for these broken promises and have made some wins.”

Mikkeline compares the situation with Indigenous Australians who never had a treaty. She says this has made arguing their case for any rights very difficult.

“There are still many grievances to be dealt with, at least there is a founding document that enables Māori to uphold their rights albeit through a Pākehā framework. Understandably this takes its toll through requiring a lot of time, energy and resources.”

Mikkeline’s heard Raukawa’s treaty claims will be held over the next two years. She is keen to learn more about this, the history of Raukawa, culture and other stories. When asked how those in Australia should be involved Mikkeline says first they need to be informed. In the past this has been difficult for her personally.

“With registering with the iwi, it took me a several years of attempting to make contact even though I had my whakapapa verified by Iwi Nicholson. This made it difficult to stay connected and informed. It would be great to have a really well organised process for registering and regular pānui (say monthly) through email etc would be wonderful.”

She says if there are wānanga or hui, they could be recorded (audio and/or visual) as a resource for whānau that live away. This can also serve as a reference for the iwi.

“For those overseas whānau or living away from the rohe, it is important they know what is going on and why. If they are interested, they should also be informed on how they can contribute and be a part of their hapū and iwi. Our migration as people continues today as it did in the past from the islands from which we came to Aotearoa, yet that doesn’t mean our cultural taonga should be lost. In terms of a post-treaty settlement future Mikkeline says she would like to see the iwi be more independent and self-sufficient.

“Security through smart investments that will help our people thrive and prosper for the next generations to come. To uphold the responsibility to be kaitiaki for our environment, to have access to a Māori-centred education and approach in life.”

Ultimately, she thinks there should be a “peaceful co-existence for all New Zealanders.” Mikkeline lives in Brisbane and works for the Good Start preventative health program run by and designed for Māori and Pacific Islander communities in Queensland. She works within the Maternal health pillar specifically with mums and tamariki. She is also a yoga teacher and facilitates workshops and retreats and feels a natural inclination to integrate her knowledge and experience with her passion for her our culture.

“I hope to continue giving back to our people. I have dreams of working between both shores in the future but for now my life is in Te Whenua Moemoea and I will continue to work hard to bridge the gap between our two lands.”