

Waikato Times

SUMMER **Weekend**

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THE PRICE OF PARADISE



VILLA WITH A VIEW: Margherita and Giorgio Allemano savour the views from the balcony of their villa; top, the guest accommodation.



TASTE OF PARADISE: Villa Toscana brings a slice of Italian-style luxury to the Coromandel.

PICTURES: Bruce Mercer



MILLION DOLLAR VIEWS: Margherita and Giorgio Allemano on the balcony of Villa Toscana. The Whitianga property, pictured right, provides tourists with luxurious accommodation — at a price.



PHOTOS: Bruce Mercer

Paradise found – and guests pay for it

WAIKATO is becoming a popular destination for international tourists seeking upmarket luxury accommodation, tourism bosses say.

Tourism Waikato chief executive Lynda Keene says there is a gap in the regional market for top-of-the-range bed and breakfasts and lodges that can offer seclusion and privacy to overseas guests.

Places like Villa Toscana, north of Whitianga and owned

and operated by Italian couple Giorgio and Margherita Allemano, are catering more and more to upmarket international visitors to the Greater Waikato.

Of the 500,000 visitors that stay in paid accommodation in the Waikato each year, around 10 per cent stay in luxury accommodation.

Tourism Waikato expects that figure to increase markedly in the next few years.

"There is a definite trend

nationally towards the top end of the tourist market and Waikato is part of that trend," Ms Keene says.

"We have several lodges and homestays that have already clinched a good portion of the luxury market and there is certainly room for more."

Luxury travellers are most likely to be American, English or European. They are more likely to stay in New Zealand longer than the average tourist — usually about a month —

and want personalised eco or nature tours.

"People are wanting privacy and luxury with a personalised touch. And they're prepared to pay for it," Ms Keene says.

Several visitors attached to America's Cup syndicates had stayed in the Waikato recently at private lodges.

Some had expressed an interest in the bloodstock and racehorse industry.

On page 17, we check out the price of paradise.