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New Zealanders Raised \$1.5 Million to Take Back a Private Beach

by Melissa Locker February 24, 2016



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New Zealand's Awaroa beach did something quite unexpected last year: it went on sale.

The 17-acre beach, marketed as "a remarkable seven-hectare utopia," is located in the Abel Tasman National Park on New Zealand's South Island. It had been put on the market by a local businessman, who had purchased the private beach in 2008 for \$1.92 million.

A group of friends in New Zealand vowed that the beach would not go back into private hands and now, thanks to a unique crowd-funding campaign, it won't. The group set up a Givealittle campaign that eventually raised over NZ \$2.3 million (US \$1.5 million) via pledges from 39,249 people, enough to buy the beach, according to the BBC.

Contributions came from all corners of the country, including a local classroom that donated \$20 because they believed the beach "should be for everyone to use, not just one person." The government added \$350,000 from the Nature Heritage Fund, a land trust. "It's been amazing and an incredible feeling of interest and goodwill and warm fuzzies," said Duane Major who launched the crowdfunding campaign with his friends. "There's no heroes here; we've done something together," he told Stuff NZ. "It's been a privilege to be part of it."

To secure the beach for public use, the campaign negotiated not only with the landowner, but also with local Maori groups, who argued that the beach should be handed over to them. New Zealand's Conservation Minister Maggie Barry told Stuff NZ she hoped the campaign would set a precedent for future projects. The land will now be part of a state-managed national park, Barry said.

Now that the beach has been returned to public use, beachgoers will have to figure out how to get there. Awaroa beach is hard to reach, requiring a boat, a hike, or a plane to land at the nearby airstrip. For Major, that challenge is part of the beach's allure, telling Stuff NZ that in the future "hard-to-get-to places are going to be harder to find."

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