

# a fresh approach to skincare

**STUART JACKSON** CRISS-CROSSES NEW ZEALAND IN HIS VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY.

Last month, we investigated the retail opportunities obtainable by sourcing New Zealand-based products. This month, join me as I relive the highlights of my whistle stop tour visiting many of New Zealand's most pro-active natural product suppliers.

It was a great mix of young and established companies all with a common desire to bring their goods to the UK retailer. Let's find out some of those that are worthy additions to our stores.

## MANUKA

So much of that which is special is built around New Zealand's Unique Manuka Factor. The country's main competitive advantage lies with its unique honey gathered from the wild growing native manuka. Manuka (*Leptospermum scoparium*) is a shrubby bush that in sheltered parts can grow to a height of six metres.

The Maori people have long used the Manuka plant for a wide range of health issues from colds to fevers and rheumatic joints to skin disorders. Over the past thousand years it was boiled, gargled, swallowed, chewed and crushed to cure and relieve any number of ailments!

In modern times, Dr. Peter Molan, Associate Professor in Biochemistry at The University of Waikato, New Zealand,

discovered that the honey collected from the flowers of the Manuka plant was different to the honey collected from other plants. All honey has antimicrobial properties due to the presence of the enzyme glucose oxidase, which, when it comes into contact with body tissue or serum, produces hydrogen peroxide, and hydrogen peroxide is antibacterial.

Some varieties of manuka honey, however, contain an additional antibacterial compound and remained antimicrobial even after the glucose oxidase component was removed. Furthermore, it was found to be highly effective against bacteria that were notoriously resistant to other forms of antibiotic. This discovery led to the term Unique Manuka Factor (UMF) to describe the additional non-glucose oxidase antimicrobial properties of Manuka Honey. The testing and grading system which permits use of the trademark UMF can only be gained through a registration process. Manuka products are now exported widely by many of the companies I visited.

## THE TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

Its distinctiveness makes the use of Manuka in skincare unsurprisingly common; brands therefore stand out from each other for other reasons. Two of the most appealing

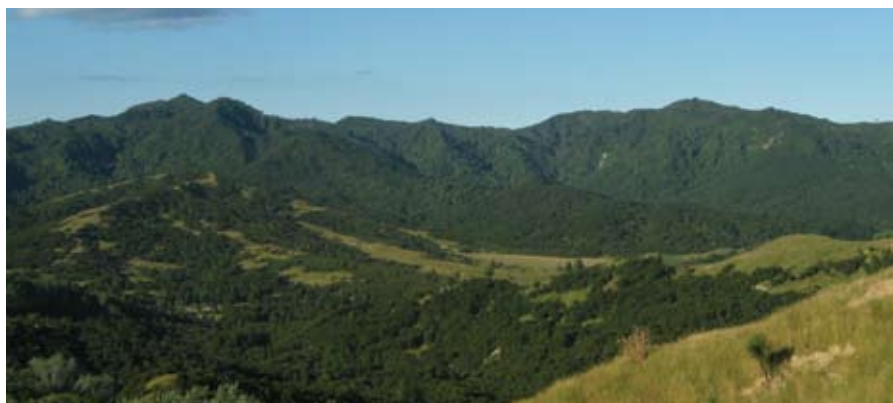


skincare ranges began and ended my time in New Zealand, "Living Nature" and "Skinfood". Chaperoned and guided by Fiona Murray, New Zealand Trade Enterprise's (NZTE) representative, we met first with Living Nature in Auckland, largest city in New Zealand and home to a striking waterfront.

Well established with over 200 attractively packaged products, it was plain to see Living Nature's commitment to quality and chemical-free production in utilising more than 80 medicinal New Zealand plants, all of which are ecologically harvested and processed. With a dedicated UK based team they are already showing keen support to UK retailers.

The freshest of all was encountered when I was tired-est of all, my last full day in New Zealand spent with Karen Murrell, the enthusiastic founder of the ingeniously named unisex brand "Skinfood". A welcome day trip to Waiheke island just off Auckland allowed me to savour Skinfood's blend of natural ingredients such as coconut palm, manuka, witch hazel and avocado oil. With stylish packaging, uniformity of design and its cross-sex appeal, it is sure to do well from its recent UK launch.

As my tour progressed, it was almost surprising to find skincare ranges that excluded Manuka! Two that struck me as having potential were located contrastingly in New Zealand's coastal capital city, Wellington, and in the open dairy lands of Hamilton. In Wellington, famous now for *The Lord of The Rings*, I met with "Trilogy" founder Sarah Gibbs. A dynamic lady with strong passion for her up-market, well packaged brand based on the nutrients and essential fatty acids abundant in organic rosehip oil.



## SUMMARY

New Zealand's pristine environment combining the forces of ingredient quality, uniqueness and history of traditional Maori medicine, creates a powerful argument for UK retailers to enthusiastically stock their brands. It's a bonus that most arrive complete with fresh stories and stylish packaging ready for our shelves. With skincare at the centre of market growth and sales harder to come by this year, New Zealand brands present a welcome chance for growth.

Meanwhile, in Hamilton, Penny Vergeest had opted for Geothermal Mud and its richness in minerals for her contribution to skincare. Smartly packaged with a strong angle, Penny's Geo Skincare range is already in the UK and with a little shake-up of the preservatives used will be a good addition to UK stores.

From Auckland I flew with exhilaration on an 18-seat prop to Gisborne, the first city in the world to see the sunrise each day. There I met with the remarkable Tracey Tangihaere who educated me on the life of the local Maoris. It was my impression that Tracey, while supportive of the economic development of traditional Maori medicine, wants to protect any potential exploitation and abuse of the Maori heritage.

Tracey taught me that from a Maori perspective, the plants and all other living forms are gods and descendants from the gods and that during the story of creation, many of the gods created everything in the garden and the sea to be food for mankind. Consequently it is of concern that Maori now own just 5% of NZ's land mass. Due to modern colonisation and legislation, it can even be difficult for Maoris to practice their own traditional healing methods. Positively, there are increasingly good relations between NZTE and the Maori population, working together to re-learn lost traditional skills and embarking on joint economic ventures.

Before leaving Gisborne, I met with Tairawhiti Pharmaceuticals who came to show their Manawa range of East Cape Manuka-based skincare products. Not yet available here, they were worth noting for the future.

Located on a stunning harbour in the Bay of Plenty where more than 70% of New Zealand's kiwifruit is grown, my next stop, Tauranga, is dominated by the volcanic cone of Mauao. Here I visited the home of Comvita, possibly best known of New Zealand's exporters and with a comprehensive visitor centre. Comvita was a revelation; the depth of their product range took me by surprise; only a handful of their 300-strong range is on sale here.

With most impressive packaging, an open-minded and approachable management team, Comvita's plans for expansion in the UK will be welcomed. I was also pleased to discover that the company has many socially responsible projects including, via NZTE, a beekeeping partnership with local Maori workers.

Leaving the Bay of Plenty before I had a chance to empty it of all its wonderful food and wine, we headed north back to Auckland. It is here where we will pick up next month for a last look at New Zealand's 'happening brands' and further commercial assessment.



If you have any questions for Talking Shop or would like further information on Stuart Jackson's consultancy service, contact him on 0131 315 0303 or email [stuart@forceofnature.co.uk](mailto:stuart@forceofnature.co.uk) or visit [www.forceofnature.co.uk](http://www.forceofnature.co.uk)