



PRESS RELEASE

Christmas snow wish comes true at Mt Ruapehu

MT RUAPEHU, 26 NOVEMBER 2019: Christmas came early – complete with snow – for a Tahitian group visiting Mt Ruapehu recently. It was an amazing experience for them all, in particular 13-year-old Tamahere Tihata who has distal myopathy.

Tamahere, who has a debilitating muscle disease, was unable to visit Mt Ruapehu with his school class on a recent trip due to health challenges, but thanks to the fundraising efforts of family and friends (a group called Tamahere, Rossignol de l'espoir: Tamahere, Nightingale of hope) and the kindness of sponsors, Tamahere was able to realise his wish of seeing snow.

The group's Christmas lunch was moved from the Pinnacles Restaurant at Knoll Ridge to Lorenz's Bar & Café due to the weather conditions on the day, but that didn't put a dampener on the trip. A short window opened in the weather allowing Tamahere and his family to ride in the Sky Waka up to Knoll Ridge to the snow.

"I've never seen the mountains before, it was one of my dreams. I loved the snow however it is actually FREEZING," Tamahere says.

"I was so cold that when we arrived up the top I didn't want to go out anymore, but I changed my mind because it was just so beautiful... coming here I just couldn't wait, I wanted to eat some snow, and I did, we all did, it just tastes...cold."

When Tamahere heard about the mountain's adaptive ski programme for people with physical, sensory or cognitive impairments he said he would love to come back during winter and give it a go. "It sounds like skiing on Santa Claus' sledge! I would definitely give it a go!"

Whakapapa Events & UX team leader Ros Cronk was integral in making Tamahere's wish come true.

"I contacted the group the day before their visit to explain the weather wasn't looking good, this is when I found out Tamahere was terminally ill and one of his final wishes was to simply, touch snow for the first and potentially only time!

"After this call I set about bringing snow down from the top just in case we couldn't get up there the next day. On Thursday the gondola was closed all day, so we had to move their late lunch booking to Lorenz's Bar & Café, however another member of our team Steve Manunui was as certain as me that if we had a very small weather window we would make this snow experience happen for the group.

"We had a very small weather window from 2pm – 4pm so got the group up there for an hour where they could bless Tamahere on snow and all experience it together."

Ros says that at the end of the lunch before the group left the group organiser couldn't thank her enough, saying 'Today I have made many dreams come true, especially Tamahere's' I explained it was a team effort and that we were all pleased to have helped create this experience for them."

Leydi Tihata, Tamahere's mum, says she was so happy to see her boy actually in the snow. "It's the first time I've seen snow, it's very cold. The family had a snowball fight and loved it!

"I loved the scenery on the Sky Waka. Even with limited visibility, what we could see was amazing. Passing over waterfalls, snow guns, and being over the ski trails! I wouldn't try skiing, I'm just really happy to see it - everybody was. Thank you RAL and all the team that helped to organise the visit."

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