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Profile of Success

MARY'S CAT VILLA

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By Kathy Hosler

Nestled within the picturesque countryside of Peka Peka on the Kapiti Coast of New Zealand is Mary's Cat Villa, an exclusive boarding facility catering to only cats.

The owners, Mary Bossley and her husband, Frank Simon, have been animal lovers for their entire lives. In fact, cats brought them together.

Mary had pets of all kinds when she was growing up, and became a member of a cat rescue group in Northern California in 2010. She also started her own pet sitting/dog walking business the same year.

In 1996 Frank founded an internet software company in Germany. He established a subsidiary in California and one in New Zealand as well. He brought his cats with him when he moved to California. When he went on business trips, he needed a pet sitter and that's when he and Mary met.

They became friends and that friendship blossomed into a loving relationship. In 2015 Frank needed to go New Zealand to manage a project, and his fiancé, Mary, went with him. They found a house with plenty of room and a fair amount of land. Mary and Frank decided to expand on their love of animals by opening a boarding facility for cats.

In New Zealand, there are no governmental regulations in regards to



Photos provided by Mary's CatVilla



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running a cattery. The local council does require that you have a consent to run a business. It took only thirty days for them to get the consent permit. Once they had their location, they had to find a carpenter and work with him to draft the condo designs. They wanted to start small, with just sixteen private cat condos, a semi-community area, and an indoor/outdoor play space. But, they also planned ahead so that they would have the capabilities to expand in the future.

“In the United States it is easy to find someone who can design a purpose-built structure,” says Frank. “And, it’s easy to find a supplier for the cat condos—but not in New Zealand. The only way is to find a carpenter who can custom build everything for you.”

In New Zealand, there is a company called AsureQuality that inspects and





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Although an average stay at Cat Villa is usually one to two weeks,

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approves catteries and kennels. It is not mandatory and less than 10% of facilities go through the rigorous process, but Mary and Frank wanted their facility to have this certification—and now, they do.

The AsureQuality Pet Approval Programme inspects facilities to determine if they meet pre-determined standards of care and cleanliness, and then audits them annually. Things that they

check for include: adequate space for each cat; facility temperature control; food storage and preparation; check-in and check-out protocols; and much more. Everything was completed in a short two and a half months, and Mary's Cat Villa opened for business in December 2016.

"After we launched our website, www.catvilla.co.nz, and did some Google and Facebook advertising, all of our condos were fully booked in less than a week. We are already completely booked for next Christmas," shares Mary. "We normally have a 30 to 70 percent occupancy rate throughout the year."

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"We brought some Petzi Webcams with us when we came to New Zealand, and we have placed them in our condos," says Frank. "That way, pet owners can talk to and see their cats and give them treats via Smart phone. It has been very popular,



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In New Zealand it is quite common for catteries to

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especially for the Kiwis (the name New Zealanders give themselves) who have a cat that is staying long-term.”

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“We find that because the semi-community area is a neutral territory, you rarely have issues with cats fighting or

becoming aggressive,” Mary says. “Some cats are a bit shyer than others at first and prefer to mostly stay in their condos, but once they settle in and get used to their new environment, they enjoy coming out and socializing with others.”

At Cat Villa, the spacious private condos are 40”x48”x48”. And, in addition to the semi-community area, they also have an outdoor enclosure for their feline guests. They find that the cats really love being able to interact with each other, and also enjoy the sunshine, fresh air, and birds.

The most recent addition to the Villa is their new isolation area. As its name implies, it is separate from the main cattery and serves two primary functions; 1) if a cat comes in without its proof of vaccinations, it is placed in the isolation area until the documentation is received or, 2) if a cat should become ill while staying at the Villa, it will be moved into isolation.

“Some catteries offer individual rooms where a cat can have a 4’x4’ kitty condo with an attached private



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Between 60 and 70% of their booking requests come via the online system or by email. The other 25% are made through telephone calls and about 5% are booked through text.

outdoor enclosure," says Mary. "We like that approach very much and we plan to extend our cattery. Our Phase 2 plans include erecting a building to house these individual accommodations."

"Our website and the Facebook page are the most important channel to reach new customers," Frank adds. "The website is a unique sales point for us. The potential customers can see that we run a clean and animal-friendly place."

Between 60 and 70% of their booking requests come via the online system or by email. The other 25% are made through telephone calls and about 5% are booked through text. Frank's 20 year experience with online marketing and e-commerce systems has been important to the success of their business.

Mary's Cat Villa has been a joint venture for Mary and Frank, but they each have their special talents. "I take care of most of the day-to-day operations of the cattery," says Mary. "That includes check-in/check-out, caring for all the cats, and managing the bookings."

"I am busy with my internet software company," Frank says. "But I still find time to take care of the Cat Villa website, keep on top of our social media and handle the bookkeeping duties."

This special couple who were brought together by their love of cats have been able to expand that love by allowing the felines of New Zealand to experience purr-fection when they vacation at Mary's Cat Villa. ■