

## Thunder Down Under: V-8 Trike Tours in New Zealand

By Uli Cloesen - July 26, 2024



Mark Fincher offers V-8 trike tours in New Zealand for a one-of-a-kind experience of the beautiful Bay of Islands. Photos by the author.

What do novelist Zane Grey, a Chevy V-8-powered trike, and the South Pacific nation of New Zealand have to do with each other? More than you might expect.



Zane Grey, author of *Riders of the Purple Sage* and other American westerns, was also an avid angler. In 1925, he was invited by the New Zealand government to visit, in the hope that he would enjoy and promote the country's fishing industry. The following year, Grey arrived with his entourage to the Bay of Islands, off the northeastern coast of New Zealand's North Island.



Author Zane Grey had a major impact on tourism in New Zealand.

Grey was blown away by the natural beauty and culture of New Zealand and chose Urupukapuka Island as a base, which put New Zealand's game fishing on the global map, an influence that still resonates in the region's tourist industry today.



In Grey's novels, the horse or the horse-drawn carriage was the main means of transport, but fast forward to the present, and the spirit of adventure that Grey epitomized finds a modern expression in Thunder Trike Tours, which provides a distinctive – and exhilarating – way for visitors to explore the scenic beauty and historical richness of the Bay of Islands.





The company, based in the North Island port town of Paihia, offers tours in massive three-wheelers powered by 260-hp V-8 engines. The trikes were built by James D, a small (and now defunct) manufacturer of three-seater and five-seater trikes, formerly based in Rangiora, New Zealand.

The Edelbrock-Chevy 5.7-liter V-8 engines in these trikes are a nod to American automotive culture. These engines, popular in muscle cars and classic restorations, serve as a bridge between American innovation and Kiwi tourism. The trikes themselves are a testament to craftsmanship and the enduring appeal of classic engine design, something that enthusiasts and casual tourists alike can appreciate.



Thunder Trike Tours also serves as a contemporary link to the past adventures of figures like Zane Grey. While Grey explored the natural world through his fishing and brought the beauty of New Zealand to readers across the globe, Thunder Trike Tours offers a visceral experience of the landscape. It's a celebration of cultural and mechanical engineering, bringing together elements from different times and places.



Mark Fincher, owner of Thunder Trike Tours, has been into motorcycles and V-8s as long as he can remember. He and his wife, Denise, spotted their first V-8-powered James D trike during a visit to Fiji. When they returned to New Zealand, Fincher found out that the trikes were made in the South Island's township of Rangiora. Two days later, he bought his first one. Now he owns three of them.



Mark Fincher (right) is the owner of Thunder Trike Tours.

When Fincher reached semi-retirement, he wanted something else to do and started Thunder Trike Tours. The company has been running eight years now and offers excursions ranging from 30 minutes to 2.5 hours. Their tours are popular with folks ranging in age from small children to an adventurous 100-year-old gentleman, including cruise ship passengers spending the day in the Bay area.





These trikes definitely give everyone the thrills during our ride outs, and we enjoy it,” said Fincher. “You don’t need to wear a helmet, because the trikes are registered as a convertible car, right down to having been fitted with a hand brake, and are fully safety equipped, with bucket seats and seat belts. These trikes handle unbelievably well and make us look good.”



Whether you’re a thrill-seeker, a nature lover, or a history enthusiast, a ride with Thunder Trike Tours promises an unforgettable adventure in one of New Zealand’s most breath-taking regions.

This connection underscores a broader narrative about cultural exchange and the evolution of tourist experiences in the Bay of Islands. From the quiet solitude of fishing in the early morning to the exhilarating roar of a V-8 engine, the region continues to offer a diverse array of attractions. These experiences not only honour the legacy of adventurers and storytellers like Grey but also highlight the innovative spirit that continues to draw people to this enchanting part of New Zealand.

For more information, visit the Thunder Trike Tours website.