

FACES OF ROTORUA

in the kawa."

Mita sees this as a necessary change, not a radical move.

"If they don't allow it, our old people realise that customs could be lost," he explains.

"But the people are not at the marae, not like before," says Mita.

They've moved to the city, and families have left their land to be closer to the town, he says.

Mita is hopeful this will change. "Perhaps with the relaxing of the zoning regulations, more of our people will come home again."

He's already had some inquiries from family living in the city as to how they can build near the marae.

But speaking English on the Marae is "starting to creep in" says Mita.

Hopefully with the kohanga reo concept it will be called to a halt, he says.

"Kohanga can only be good for our young people."

Mita's answer to the problems facing Maori is simple. Move back to their marae.

"Those who are wandering round lost in the cities will be able to find their identity if they return to their marae," he says.

"The younger people will have a sense of progressing. They will be more confident of themselves and know who they are and realise that it is good to be a Maori."

"The young people of Rotorua have more confidence than those I have seen in the cities," says Mita.

He believes different races need to have a better understanding of each other's differences before true appreciation can be brought about.

"People are different and we've got to accept this," he says.

Mita sees Rotorua as an area with much wealth.

"They are so rich in this area, particularly with its history. Everything seems to be here," he says.

He includes tourism in his list of Rotorua's assets.

"The tourist industry has an important place in the Maori culture as far as being able to do action songs and poi. If we didn't have this, our Maori culture would be lost."

Criticism of Maori culture being bastardized is unfounded, says Mita.

"I heard this criticism in Christchurch but when I came back here I saw that it was a good thing," says Mita.

Other tribes who point the finger at Te Arawa are also guilty, says Mita. They criticise and take "sly digs" at Te Arawa.

But they're here too, he says.

Tourism is achieving positive things for the Maori says Mita.

"Young people just wouldn't have the confidence for such things as the Polynesian festivals. We had four teams from Rotorua taking part this year, out of 27 teams that were involved."

And there are spin offs from being in a cultural group says Mita.

Young people can earn money to help pay for books at school or varsity says Mita.

His own daughter put herself through teachers training college with the money she earned in one of the cultural groups.

There is also a noticeable increase in the number of tourists visiting marae, says Mita.

"It never happened when I was growing up."

But now, he says, tourists are asking to go on to marae. They want to meet the Maori people and some of the visitors are so moved that they've cried as they've left says Mita.

He is convinced that tourists visiting the marae is a good thing.

"We are making the world aware of how the Maori live and conduct themselves on the marae. After all the tourists come from all over the world".

But not all marae have opened their doors to tourists.

"Perhaps they feel that it is too sacred," says Mita.

Tourists provide income for the marae says Mita.

"There are necessary payments that a marae has to make."

Education is being seen in a new light says Mita.

"Parents of my generation now realise the importance of education for their children to get them somewhere in the world," he says.

"Maybe a lot aren't making it, but they're trying and that's what counts."

He went as far as the fifth form but he used to take off from school to go bush — pig hunting or driving a bullock team.

"My mother thought I was lost and would call the cops," laughs Mita.

Rotorua is not without its social problems says Mita.

Specifically alcohol, housing and unemployment.

"When I go to the hotels I see many of our people there. And it's always the same ones," he says.

"I don't know how we're going to stop it. But children must be missing out on a lot."

Mita did a personal survey of how much one family spent at the hotels a year.

"As much as \$80,000". "That money could've been channelled into buying a

house for the family," he says.

Parents have even left their children outside while they've gone into hotels to drink, says Mita.

There's not much you can do about it except talk to them he says.

"There are a lot of pressures from society on these people," says Mita.

Unemployment figures for Maori in the area is as high as 70%, says Mita.

"Families on the dole sometimes have nowhere to go. They don't even have enough to buy a house, let alone pay the rent."

But there are some who use racial discrimination as an excuse for not getting the things they want says Mita.

"They say 'it's because I'm a Maori that I can't get things'," he says.

But Mita feels they can, with a little direction, especially where commercial business is concerned.

"More and more Maori in this area are moving into business ventures. They've become more business oriented."

And it's no longer businesses close to the culture like carving. They are actually moving out further to more commercial areas says Mita.

All they need is a little expertise he says.

"Businesses have gone bankrupt in the past because they haven't had the know how," he says.

But Maori people taking the initiative now can only be a good thing says Mita.

Eventually it will lead to other levels of decision making he says.

He grew up at Awahou, just out of Rotorua and moved to the South Island when he was 18 years old.

He married and raised a family before returning to Rotorua in 1979. He held down several jobs as an engine driver, hotel bouncer, coal miner and was a Maori warden before he became a community officer for Maori Affairs in Christchurch.

Promotion to senior community officer after only six years gave him the opportunity to return to Rotorua.

Mita is determined to retain his maoritanga and help others hold it too.

For example, in the school holidays he runs a wananga on Mokoia Island for Maori youngsters.

He immerses them in maoritanga. He schools them in a range of Maori weaponry skills.

And above all he teaches them what his father taught him. He teaches them the wero.