

Inside Nigel Coventry Tourism

PO Box 100, Taumarunui, New Zealand.

Tel/Fax 64-7-8957-737.

nigel@insidetourism.com

www.insidetourism.com

Member: PATA, TIANZ, SKAL.



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Major destination of the future - Taupo

TAUPO has a positive future for at least the next 10 years. And THL MD Dennis Pickup told the 174 attending the district's tourism forum that his company considers it a major destination of the future. Research five years ago confirmed that Taupo was a hot destination "and one that we as a tourism operator thought that significant resources should be focused on..."

In a wide-ranging talk Mr Pickup said the biggest drivers to overseas arrivals are airline capacity and pricing. "Tourism is again back in vogue."

Mr Pickup said Taupo's greatest potential lies in the domestic market, which is already 78 percent of total. "The international market always goes up and down but the domestic is more steady."

He added: "By doing your Taupo plan you should be looking at Rotorua, Hawke's Bay and Waitomo, and ways to be complementary and not seeing them as threats...work for a greater regional approach rather than thinking you have to go head to head with Rotorua."

Mayor calls for collective approach

TAUPO is dependent on three industries, which pay medium to low wages. And a property building boom - described as a train without brakes - is making it increasingly difficult for tourism staff to either rent or buy. Mayor Clayton Stent added that forestry, farming and tourism businesses find it difficult to attract workers. Yet Taupo district has a sound future and there will be solutions.

The forum is a step towards ensuring the health, sustainability and prosperity of the visitor industry, he told attendees.

Destination Lake Taupo CEO Scott Lee said the district had its share of backpackers who arrived and stayed as cheaply as possible yet pulled out their gold cards to pay for activities. Taupo has become the skydiving capital of New Zealand.

Dave Bamford of Tourism Resource Consultants asked if the forum wanted "tourism for Taupo or Taupo for tourism..."

He added: "How much say do you want to have in your

own future?" When similar meetings are held elsewhere the outcome is a clear vision out of which arise actions and objectives.

Scourge of the regions

SEASONALITY must be met head on by regions, Fullers Bay of Islands CEO Kit Nixon told the Taupo forum. It is a scourge of the regions.

Quality means success or failure and there is never enough accommodation. "There is good accommodation in all regions but is it of the style that attracts more visitors? Funding is always an issue for RTOs, he advised - as is skills development.

Agents offshore will increasingly want to know how operators approach sustainability. It could eventually be the difference between whether an overseas agent will work with a company or not. "It will be a critical sales tool."

Pickup slams DoC

ALL major political parties have DoC in their sights, reckons THL MD Dennis Pickup. Even Labour, he told Taupo delegates. The department is the biggest tourism operator in the country, only it doesn't realise it. "It sees commercial operators as a threat. We are the biggest opportunity DoC has ever had. We want to partner with them as we have with Maori, but they are so green..."

Staff quality a concern, says King

DO we want high volume, low yield tourism Select Tours director Guy King asked the forum in Taupo. "Taupo is no exception. There are too many operators and a major problem is the quality of staff. This will become increasingly significant because the dollar will remain high for some time. Guests tell us they don't mind paying...New Zealand is becoming expensive...but they are not getting the value for what they are paying. It's a lack of service and training.

Focus on domestic - Thorp and Pickup

CONSULTANT Kim Thorp reminded the Taupo forum that Taupo's budget of \$638,000 included overheads and

salaries. So the district should concentrate on the domestic market.

Added THL MD Dennis Pickup: "You don't have the budget for international and never will...the biggest problem is your market goes around in a triangle (Auckland-Waitomo-Rotorua). You have to come up with something to break that triangle."

Rather than wasting time by asking government or the council for financial help, Mr Pickup suggested that operators add \$1 to their prices calling it a "Taupo tourism levy" and for this money to be kept in trust and spent on only marketing.

None of it should go on infrastructure. "Then you will have a \$1 million annual fund. But it needs full co-operation from everyone."

Where success will come from...

SUCCESS comes from simple things, Fullers Bay of Islands CEO Kit Kixon said at the Taupo tourism forum. Such as being clear on strengths, good distribution, quality operators and working with neighbours when it suits all parties.

Industry in need of higher standards

THE visitor industry in Taupo is seen as fragmented, tired and in need of higher standards, Tourism Resource Consultant Dave Bamford said at Taupo.

"If you take the fishing industry, there is a perception of a whole lot of tired old fishermen running guiding operations..."

Nats' election promises...

NATIONAL, if it forms a government after this election, will remove caps and restraints that Labour has imposed on workplace training and skill development in the industry.

Party tourism spokesman Lockwood Smith told an industry seminar on Wednesday that National would invest more in infrastructure, particularly roading, needed to underpin the industry.

It would also amend employment laws to encourage employment and cut compliance costs for SMEs. It would require DoC to better support recreational and tourism activity.

Research is never boring!

GOOD research is anything but boring, just like good results, says TNZ chairman Wally Stone in the latest *Tourism Leading Indicators Monitor*.

He says research is important to him as chairman of Whale Watch Kaikoura. "It provides insights and can substantiate our broad understanding."

Teenagers made judge feel ashamed

AS a New Zealander, Judge Noel Walsh said he felt embarrassed and ashamed by the actions of three teenagers towards innocent peace-loving visitors.

Langley heartened by consistent message

NEW Zealand Hotel Council CEO Jennie Langley says

she was heartened to read in *IT546* how consistent the messages from tourism leaders are in that we cannot take the growth for granted, that we need to keep up with the trends and respond quickly to changes.

Record number of Kiwi Specialists here

THE biggest group of North American travel agents to ever visit us was here last week after winning a competition to gain first-hand experience of our country.

Manukau's cultural tourism has much to offer, says Minister

VISITOR arrivals to Manukau increased 16.2 percent in the last February year, Tourism Minister Mark Burton told an industry gathering in the city last week.

He said that cultural tourism is an area where Manukau has much to offer. The city hosts the largest Polynesian festival in the world every year and houses the tallest Maori/Pacific carving at the new TelstraClear Pacific Events Centre. This, and the new Villa Maria winery in Mangere, will enhance the overall cultural products and services.

Maori council plans first conference

THE inaugural New Zealand Maori Tourism Council Conference is planned for the Waipuna Hotel and Conference Centre, Auckland, on July 14/15.

Macau Sky Jump will raise our profile

THE opening of the Macau Sky Jump in July (*IT544*) will help raise the global profile of the original, Auckland's own Sky Jump.

Driver leaves Koreans stranded

A busload of South Korean visitors was left stranded in the Lindis Pass on Friday when their driver stormed off after being stopped by a police officer for speeding.

Skyline noted for training

SKYLINE Skyrides has received three nominations in the 2005 HSI Excellence in Training Awards. Kim Ibberson and Haley Murray are among five hopefuls nominated for the Registered Workplace Assessor of the Year - and the company is vying for the top spot in the Excellence in Training by a Workplace category.

TNZ gets extra \$8.9M in Budget

TNZ received an extra \$8.9 million in last week's Budget to continue promoting this country in the US, Britain and Japan.

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