

AMG Column

Raising the bar with local government

By Tim Cossar, Chief Executive, Tourism Industry Association

TIA is seeking to raise the bar with local government this year, given the critical role it plays in the visitor industry.

In late August we launched *Local Government + the Visitor Industry: A Powerful Partnership*, inviting local government to enter into a much closer relationship with tourism businesses in order to ramp up the economic contribution visitors make to communities throughout New Zealand.

Produced by TIA and Regional Tourism Organisations of New Zealand, a copy of the document was sent to every candidate contesting the October 2010 elections and key council employees. We want to ensure the successful candidates have a better understanding of the importance of the visitor industry to the regions. The document also highlights the industry's commitment to work more closely with local government to maximise the benefits an active and positive partnership will deliver.

The visitor industry generates \$59 million daily in communities throughout New Zealand on accommodation, transports, activities and attractions. That increases significantly when we count the indirect visitor spend in places like petrol stations, supermarkets, shops, cafes and bars. *A Powerful Partnership's* message is that there is the potential for visitors to contribute much more to New Zealand communities if we can build a strong tourism/local government partnership.

Councils are arguably tourism's most important partner. They play a huge role in determining the level and quality of visitor services and infrastructure available, the events that take place and the public money that is invested in destination promotion. This activity helps attract visitors, influences how long they stay, how much they spend and whether they recommend the region to others.

Priorities for Action

We are asking all successful candidates in the October local government elections to work with the visitor industry to take action on five priorities:

1. Engagement

Central government recognised the importance of the visitor industry, we're now seeking a closer working relationship with councils, underpinned by a shared appreciation of the industry's value and the opportunities it presents for regional economic growth.

2. Investment

We seek to partner with councils on investment decisions that will maximise community benefits and enhance the quality of the visitor experience. This includes investment in people, infrastructure and broadband.

3. Environment

We seek to work more closely with councils to enhance environmental management in the regions and deliver on the environmental promise that is so important for visitors and other industries. This priority calls for action in areas like accessible recycling facilities and the development of clear guidelines for camping.

4. Regional Profile

We endorse council investment in regional promotion and want to engage in joint initiatives that will maximise the return from promotional efforts. Regional Tourism Organisations, i-SITE Visitor Centres, festivals and events are all great examples of council investment that delivers benefits to their communities.

5. Regulatory Environment

We seek to partner with councils to ease the compliance burden on businesses of all types and sizes and to foster a business-friendly regulatory environment for high quality operators. New Zealand's tourism industry is dominated by small-to-medium sized enterprises and overly-bureaucratic compliance requirements – from RMA consents to food hygiene guidelines – can stymie business growth.

The visitor experience is the sum total of how business, local and central government and communities welcome and understand visitor needs and improve the visitor experience.

If local authorities can play a lead role in facilitating that, then communities and tourism businesses will reap the benefits that visitors offer.

Visit our website www.tianz.org.nz to read *Local Government + the Visitor Industry: A Powerful Partnership*.