

TOURISM BUSINESS COLUMN

KEEPING THE MOMENTUM GOING

Tim Cossar, Chief Executive, Tourism Industry Association

There's no substitute for putting rubber on the road, getting out to the regions and talking with tourism operators to find out what's on their minds and what needs to change to enable them to improve their bottom line and boost the industry's performance.

That's just what TIA did last month with our NZ Tourism Regional Leadership Series – 10 workshops held throughout the country where we discussed the challenges facing tourism, from an individual business, regional and national perspective, and identified potential solutions.

TIA is delivering the priorities to the Prime Minister and Minister of Tourism John Key, other Ministers and industry influencers at our Tourism Leaders Symposium in Wellington this month.

It is one year since TIA presented the Tourism Industry Election Manifesto to the incoming National Government, outlining the industry's top priorities and the action we needed government to take to help us lift our game. A lot of progress has been made in the past 12 months and these new TIA initiatives will ensure we keep that momentum going.

As I write this, we're just over half way through the 10 regional workshops, and common threads are emerging, such as lack of international and domestic demand.

Increased central government support is wanted. This is more than just additional money for Tourism New Zealand to invest in international marketing and research, and reducing the cost and complexity of compliance. Operators want all the government agencies whose actions impact on tourism to work together and have a national plan for tourism, rather than operating in silos.

Operators are asking local government to give tourism the priority it deserves, and they need a more collaborative approach between local government agencies in the same region.

Strong regional variations also emerged at the workshops. Nelson sees a convention centre as an infrastructure priority, the need for fast-speed broadband was a priority in Dunedin and Queenstown, while West Coast operators stressed the importance of environmental sustainability.

Without exception, participants at every workshop have been highly engaged and very enthusiastic. The local tourism leaders who have spoken at each event about how they are managing in the current challenging trading environment have been excellent. For our part, TIA is delighted this new initiative has been so positively received and productive.

Kia Ora Mai Essential Service Skills

The Prime Minister will launch another TIA initiative later this month, Kia Ora Mai Essential Service Skills, an entry-level training programme designed to ensure we have people who can deliver a great New Zealand visitor and customer experience.

Kia Ora Mai is for employees and employers working with visitors and customers across the tourism and service industries. Content for the programme has been developed by the Services Industries Training Alliance led by TIA with support and funding from the Ministry of Tourism and the TEC.

We want 10,000 trainees to have completed Kia Ora Mai before the Rugby World Cup 2011. It's a big ask, but it will ensure we have a pool of talented people able to deliver a world class visitor experience for this event and into the future.

Tim Cossar is Chief Executive of the Tourism Industry Association. www.tianz.org.nz, Twitter TIMatTIA.