

TOURISM – COMMENT

Aim for outstanding

The business of tourism is big – last year it provided 9.1% of our GDP, employed 1 in 10 people and provided 16.4% of our nation's export earnings. And it is growing again after last year's recession hiccup. No wonder we have PM John Key as our Minister of Tourism, he understands tourism's significance to our economy and brand.

The industry is made up of many players, ranging from a few big ones to a multitude of small and lifestyle businesses – this is both a strength and a weakness!

It is an industry that is smart and sexy and confronts huge challenges. We all know about seasonality – flat out over Christmas and empty streets, shops and accommodation during the winter – this makes it tricky to retain staff, find investors and provide consistent quality of product. Overdrafts get maxed out in the off season, and with less staff around many owner/operators are still not getting the break they so need to face the challenges

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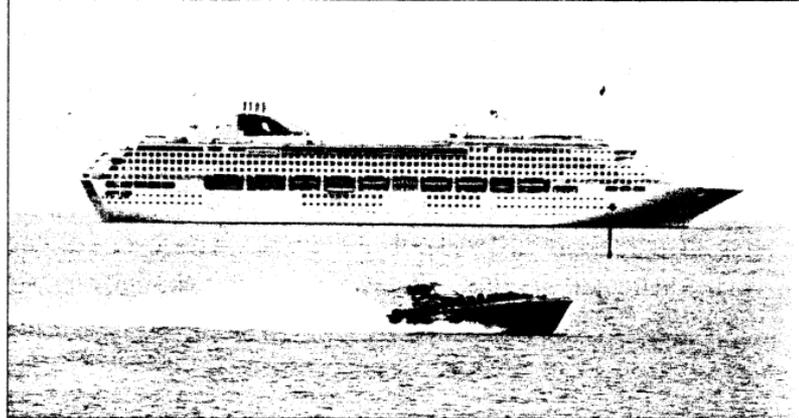
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of the next season. No wonder there is a bit of churn in certain sectors in the industry.

The answers to these predicaments are to get more visitors to Northland, and get them to spend more time and more money here. Currently only 17% of international arrivals into Auckland Airport head North, a big challenge and an opportunity.

Destination Northland (DNL) is applying a range of strategies to instigate some improvements on these numbers. Targeted marketing, branding, product awareness, media exposure and close relationships with the industry – all geared to achieve an increase in a visitor's awareness of what a wonderful Destination Northland is.

But we cannot leave this to DNL entirely; both industry and local



government have to play their part.

Once we have the visitors here we need to keep them here by giving them a truly wonderful and exciting quality experience. The times of just bums on seats have changed, our visitors want to be active, involved and experience authentic product. This is where innovation and development come in, creating a point of difference and delivering something special. If we want to grow as a destination we have to be more than average – outstanding is really the minimum we should offer. When we deliver beyond expectations our visitors will be happy to stay and spend. And again here is an opportunity for partnership between industry and local government. Infrastructure investments should be sharp and smart, serving not

just simple solutions to singular problems, but positively affecting wider and smarter social outcomes. If we ever want to catch up with Australia we have to make outstanding decisions, not just average ones because of short-term thinking. The weir option on the Hatea River Bridge is still one of those opportunities that is not yet lost, but may well be in the next few months.

Opportunities for innovations and outstanding behaviour don't come very often, and we need to be visionary to capture them. The benefits of these decisions not only trickle down to the visitor industry, but also lift educational and employment opportunities for the wider community and may just pull us out of the average statistics bracket into the outstanding. And why not?