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Tourism's crucial role in pulling Kiwis from the coronavirus slump

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6 - 7 minutes

Budget 2020: Tourism gets \$400m

OPINION: Strong and compassionate political leadership has meant that New Zealand is emerging from [Covid-19](#) imposed restrictions ahead of much of the world.

New Zealanders are renowned internationally for their innovation, compassion, resilience and ability to unite with each other during times of adversity.

Post Covid-19, New Zealand has an opportunity to again be an exemplar for the world through rebuilding its tourism and hospitality industries with a hopeful agenda of more responsible, sustainable and inclusive engagement with tourists.

Domestic travel will be a priority in recovery efforts and New Zealanders will have renewed opportunities to experience local attractions.

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It is likely that international travel (with the exception of Australia and potentially the Pacific Islands) will not be an option for some time to come.

As such, the tourism industry needs to reposition itself for the Kiwi market through focusing on more affordable opportunities and understanding what tourists will be seeking from their travel

experiences, balanced with local community guidance.

After so much time inside and an inability to socialise widely, Kiwis will likely be seeking to immerse themselves in nature, which will present opportunities for remote and rural areas.

Kiwis will increasingly seek opportunities for deep and meaningful experiences — opportunities to rekindle relationships and re-connect with those that they have been forced apart from.

Empowerment of local communities to manage their own agendas for tourism will allow for rich, unique and potentially untapped local stories to emerge.

While New Zealand has done incredibly well in its response to Covid-19, many Kiwis have suffered significant hardship and are facing mental health challenges. Tourism has a role here; at its best, travel builds connection between people, the land, and for some, a Higher Power.



The tourism industry needs to reposition itself for the Kiwi market through focusing on more affordable opportunities. Brook Sabin / Stuff

It creates memories that last a lifetime and allows an individual time and space to process and work through personal questions and issues that are challenging them. Restaurants, cafes, bars, pubs and clubs serve more than just food and drink; they are hubs for socialising and togetherness.

As tourists, we can prioritise spending locally and supporting jobs within

our locality; this will be critical not only for rebuilding the New Zealand economy, but also in showing the world a blueprint for sustainable tourism and transforming life to the new normal. And here is where hope lies.

There is hope in how New Zealand might lead the world in a new tourism and hospitality — like it has done previously on other social issues that have made a difference to humanity. Innovation will be key.

New Zealand has invested heavily in ultrafast broadband allowing leverage for innovation in the tourism sector — New Zealand could pioneer electric aviation for short haul routes, therefore facilitating cheap flying with no carbon guilt.

Air New Zealand is already considering electric aeroplanes amid the growing consciousness of carbon emissions. There could be further opportunities for the development of electric buses and rental cars, and smarter water management to build a greener industry.

Hospitality will look markedly different post-Covid-19. In Australia, National Cabinet has been presented with a range of recommended measures that should be implemented once restaurants open again. These include disposable or chalk menus and removal of table condiments.

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Similar measures are likely to be faced by New Zealand's hospitality industry as cafés and restaurants engage with the three 'S's' of business at Level 2 — seating all patrons, separately, and having one server per table.

Hope lies in leaders recognising that tourism and hospitality workers deserve a fairer wage — the value of frontline, essential staff has been illustrated abundantly during the Covid-19 crisis, as it will in our recovery.

Ultimately, the re-building of a more hopeful tourism industry also presents an opportunity to bring the benefits of tourism to more kiwis. VFR (Visiting Friends and Relatives) travel and domestic leisure tourism

have always been resilient forms of tourism, worth NZ\$23.7 billion per annum pre-Covid-19.

In hope, there is also an opportunity for transformation toward a more inclusive, equitable and moral tourism. There is an opportunity to ensure tourist destinations and products are accessible to all people, regardless of physical limitations, disabilities, age or social status, and inclusive of their families, whanau and carers.



The move to Alert Level 2 has given local tourism operators a boost.SUPPLIED / Stuff

The accessible tourism market is estimated to be worth EUR€80 billion (NZ\$144 Billion) in Europe alone and is growing rapidly, yet remains untapped in New Zealand.

The future for New Zealand is hopeful. It could again lead the world in tourism and hospitality excellence through social endeavour - a focus on inclusion, sustainability, manaakitanga and care for one another to ensure the new tourism is for all. He waka eke noa. We are all in this together.

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