

Two countries one Visa

By Chris Roberts, Chief Executive, TIA

Each year Anzac Day is a time to remember those who made sacrifices to defend our freedom. It is also a reminder of the incredibly close bonds between Australia and New Zealand. It can be argued that there are not another two countries as closely connected historically, culturally and economically.

Where we are not as closely connected as we could be with our nearest neighbours is in welcoming visitors.

Australia and New Zealand run separate systems for tourist visas. Other regions have long ago recognised the benefits of joining together to offer a single visa, to make it easier and more attractive for the traveller.

In the 'Schengen' zone of 28 European countries, a single visitor visa is required. The UK and Ireland also offer a joint visitor visa and there are other such arrangements in place in Africa, the Middle East and South America.

A temporary Trans-Tasman Visa arrangement was implemented during the ICC Cricket World Cup 2015. While it was seen as a 'cricket visa', it actually allowed all those travelling between 26 January and 5 April 2015 with a valid Australian visa to travel over to New Zealand, where a three month tourist visa was granted upon arrival.

Our Government's review of the visa arrangements during the Cricket World Cup shows that while it was in place, 7239 travellers from 77 nations entered New Zealand using the Trans-Tasman Visa.

Approximately 40% of the international visitors who used the arrangement were Chinese – a non-playing nation in the World Cup. Most of these travellers were not cricket fans but were taking advantage of the temporarily improved visa facilitation. Immigration New Zealand advises that there were no significant issues.

This analysis supports the case for a permanent Trans-Tasman Visa arrangement. Together with Australia's Tourism and Transport Forum (TTF), TIA has written to the New Zealand and Australian Governments asking them to move on this issue.

Both Governments have accepted the need to reduce the complexity involved for visitors in applying for visitor visas from rapidly growing markets like China, India and elsewhere in Asia. Each Government can pursue improvements separately but there is also a golden opportunity to do so collectively.

A report issued by TTF in 2014 estimated that developing a Trans-Tasman Visa could increase annual visitor arrivals from Asia by 141,000. A single visitor visa could be the deciding factor for an international traveller choosing to come to our part of the world rather than closer or easier destinations.

The arrangement during the Cricket World Cup largely relied on New Zealand accepting Australian visas. A true common visa would require Australia and New Zealand to harmonise entry requirements as well as establishing data sharing protocols. None of this is impossible. Where there is a will, there is a way.

A permanent joint visa would be a logical extension of the Anzac bond between Australia and New Zealand.

