

We've got a good thing going

By Chris Roberts

Can we have too much of a good thing?

The theme for last November's TIA's National Tourism Summit was 'The Pressures of Growth – Riding the Wave'. That industry conversation on how we manage the current tourism boom and plan for the future has now become a national conversation, with numerous media stories over the holiday period.

While headlines tended towards the dramatic (e.g. *Tourism surge – boon or burden?*) it's great the issues are being highlighted and debated.

Until now the importance of tourism to New Zealand hasn't featured greatly in the national consciousness. TIA has made a concerted effort to change that and the recent growth has demanded attention from politicians, media and the public. By the end of 2015 tourism had overtaken dairy as our number one export earner and combined with domestic visitors, is a \$30 billion a year industry with double digit growth.

We are fortunate that Tourism 2025 has provided the industry with a framework to assess and tackle the issues and in general, we agree on what the big issues are:

- Seasonality – to boost productivity and manage pressure points, we need to grow the shoulder seasons faster than the peak.
- Regional dispersal – again, to improve productivity we want people visiting every part of New Zealand. Domestic tourism has a big role to play.
- Infrastructure – there needs to be well targeted investment in the assets that support both tourism and our regional economies.
- People and skills – tourism directly and indirectly employs 1 in 8 working New Zealanders. We need to attract the right people with the right skills at the right time.
- Social licence – Manaakitanga, Kiwi hospitality, makes for a unique holiday experience. We need communities to support what tourism brings.

We're working with members and other key influencers to ensure that these issues, which are key to a sustainable tourism future, are addressed.

Are we full?

We're welcoming record international visitor arrivals this summer but are we full? Absolutely not.

I can illustrate that with a few comments from a senior industry figure who enjoyed a family campervan holiday around the South Island over the festive season:

"Roads were generally not busy... camping grounds were busy but available...we didn't book ahead. We visited many popular tourist attractions... and managed to get access to everything we wanted with almost no delay or booking ahead. While tourism is growing, it is busy in the peak and we need to keep pace with the growth, we are far from being overdone."

In the next five years international visitor arrivals could grow from 3 million to 4 million. Sounds a lot but on a world scale we have a long way to go. Take Austria. It's a third the size of New Zealand and yet it welcomes eight times the number of visitors – 25 million a year.

We're not approaching those numbers but we do have an opportunity to build on the stunning growth we are enjoying. Guided by Tourism 2025 we can have more productive and profitable tourism businesses, working with supportive local communities, delivering outstanding and safe visitor experiences.

So to answer my opening question - no, if properly managed and planned for, with tourism we cannot have too much of a good thing.