

AMG
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How do we attract more people to work in tourism?

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Accommodation providers around the country are rolling up their sleeves in preparation for another busy summer season. And no doubt many of you are struggling to find all the staff you need to look after your guests appropriately.

At a time when tourism in New Zealand has never been bigger, we are continuing to face real challenges in attracting Kiwis into our industry.

At the end of August, I was delighted to attend the graduation of 27 people from disadvantaged backgrounds who have completed the innovative Fast Track Partnership Programme in Rotorua.

This hospitality training and education programme is led by AccorHotels and the Ministry of Social Development, with support from TIA. It provides hospitality industry training and employment opportunities for Work and Income clients 18 years and up.

The programme not only delivers skills based training, it also places emphasis on providing support, budgeting and creating bonds to ensure a more sustainable outcome. It has been incredibly successful to date, with the majority of graduates finding permanent roles within hotels.

Those of us who are already working in tourism know that it's a fantastic industry with an enormous variety of career opportunities, full of people who are passionate about what they do.

But somehow we have not succeeded in communicating that to our school leavers and those who influence their choices.

Tourism Industry Aotearoa (TIA) and Auckland Tourism, Events and Economic Development (ATEED) recently surveyed young people across New Zealand about their perceptions of careers in tourism. You've heard the negative answers before – careers in tourism are underpaid, undervalued and temporary. There are limited pathways, parents don't think it's a good career, and tourism is an easy school subject for 'dummies'.

As tourism continues to grow, we urgently need to address these misconceptions. Tourism has been more successful in marketing New Zealand to visitors than promoting itself as an exciting career opportunity to young New Zealanders. This needs to change now.

In Auckland alone, projections to 2021 forecast a 27% increase in the number of jobs in the industry, with an estimated 76,000 Aucklanders working in tourism within the next three years.

ATEED is working with regional partners and a steering group on a plan to attract Aucklanders into tourism careers, basing their strategy on the insights provided by the research into young peoples' perceptions of careers in the tourism industry.

TIA is using the research results to steer a project to attract young people across New Zealand into the industry. The research will also engage national industry stakeholders and employers to shape policies addressing tourism skill shortages.

At TIA we regularly profile young people working in the industry, posting their stories on our website. A lot of them say the same thing – they didn't know the huge range of careers they could have in tourism until they joined the industry.

Some of these young people will be sharing their stories at the Tourism Summit Aotearoa, taking place in Wellington on 8 November. This year's Summit is focusing on what we need to do to grow tourism sustainably beyond 2025, including ensuring we have the people and skills we need.

Our Young Tourism Leaders panel session will look at what attracted these young people into tourism, the barriers they faced and the opportunities they discovered.

We'll also be presenting Tourism Industry New Zealand Trust Academic Scholarships to two tourism students who are entering their final year of study in 2019. As well as financial support, we are offering this year's scholarship winners assistance with introductions and work experience with tourism operators and organisations who may become their future employers.

The Summit always offers plenty of opportunities to challenge your thinking and insights into how the industry is changing – including what today's young people are looking for. So I look forward to seeing many of you there. Registrations are open at tourismsummit.co.nz

The Youth Perceptions Research was a joint project by TIA and ATEED, with funding from the Tourism Industry New Zealand Trust. You can read more about the research findings on the TIA website tia.org.nz