

# TOURISM TAKES OFF

**David Hammond** calls for councils to dig deeper into destination management as tourism numbers reach unprecedented levels.

For many communities around New Zealand the summer of 2015/16 represented peak tourism. Many communities were overwhelmed with tourists in unprecedented numbers. There was outrage at rubbish and other deposits left across the country for councils to clean up and for which service ratepayers had to foot the bill. Will it be any different this summer? And how well have councils prepared?

Tourism Industry Aotearoa CE Chris Roberts recently noted that as our country ranks 107th in the world for visitor density, peak tourism remains many decades away. “As long as we put the infrastructure in place, New Zealand could manage 20 million visitors a year,” he said. “Austria gets 25 million visitors a year and has less than a quarter of our land mass.”

In that case, what would a golden age of New Zealand tourism look like? To some businesses it may be about getting 20 million tourists to New Zealand. And to communities it may be about the quality of the experience for both residents and visitors alike. I believe it is more about quality, not quantity, and councils’ ability to provide strong destination management will prove critical.

Recently I visited Wairoa District Council to discuss sustainable ratepayer funding of tourism. CEO Fergus Power is excited about the potential of rocket tourism in Wairoa after the consenting of the new rocket launch site in Mahia in the northern Hawkes Bay. Combined with the potential of a ‘Space Coast Cycleway’ this is an injection that Wairoa needs.



Wairoa demonstrates the value of a linked-up council where regulation is an enabling function of economic development.

Wairoa is on the beginning of its tourism journey, so the notion of destination management or peak tourism seems a long way off. Yet the model that Wairoa or any council puts in now to manage destination pressure – including pay-for-tourism infrastructure – will determine the future sustainability for communities.

New Zealand ratepayers are rightly concerned about the cost of tourism, and the good news is that there is now the knowledge in the sector to do better than in the past.

By 2022, New Zealand is projected to have a 1.4 million increase in visitor numbers, which represents a 33 percent increase on the boom figures for that 2015 crazy summer. That is hardly peak tourism.

Yet, for communities already straining to manage the number of visitors they now have – and with infrastructure gaps in visitor toilets, car parks, refuse facilities and dump stations – many in these areas would argue that peak tourism has already arrived.

What is welcomed news for Wairoa may be of concern to Westland and Mackenzie when they look at their tourism infrastructure gaps and who is going to pay. Destination management is not just about controlling freedom camping. It is about sustainability.

Destination management involves making sure that projects such as cycle ways and walkways protect future ratepayers from the costs of capital and ongoing maintenance, return enough ROI, and at the same time reduce congestion at those locations. **LG**

• David Hammond is the director of local and central government consultancy Hammond Robertson. david@hammondrobotson.co.nz

Growth of international visitor numbers			
	2015 (Base Year)	2018 (+16%)	2022 (+33%)
Auckland Council	1,465,555	1,700,044	1,949,188
Far North District	235,756	273,477	313,555
Gisborne City	235,755	273,476	313,554
Hastings City	16,873	19,573	22,441
Mackenzie District	237,730	275,767	316,181
Napier City	188,662	218,848	250,920
Nelson City	216,915	251,621	288,497
Thames-Coromandel District	182,390	211,572	242,579
Wairoa District	6,869	7,968	9,136
Westland District	390,154	452,579	518,905

Source: Statistics New Zealand.