

## **Inside Tourism Column**

### **Tim Cossar, Chief Executive, Tourism Industry Association**

The past 12 months have been among the most challenging experienced by the tourism industry in decades, but it has also been a year of 'wins' for the industry, with the Government taking action on most of the top six priorities raised in our 2008 Tourism Industry Election Manifesto.

#### **1. Recognising tourism as a bedrock of New Zealand's economy**

We asked for a high ranking Cabinet Minister to take on the tourism portfolio and we got the Prime Minister! This was an early indication this Government saw tourism as one of the country's most important industries. John Key has been a highly visible and engaged tourism minister, including attending TRENZ and the TIA Tourism Leaders Symposium, launching the KiaOraMai Essential Service Skills programme and allocating \$50 million to a national cycleway.

John Key recently said, "Tourism is a substantial and dynamic industry sitting at the forefront of our economy. Its performance ultimately affects the wellbeing of all New Zealanders. A strong tourism brand enhances New Zealand's profile and benefits other exporters."

#### **2. Marketing Destination New Zealand**

On top of the extra spending in Australia earlier this year (which proved a roaring success), the early November announcement that an extra \$20 million would go into marketing destination New Zealand internationally this year was fantastic news. We are particularly pleased that \$5 million has been earmarked for joint venture marketing with the private sector and Regional Tourism Operators.

#### **3. Investing in vital infrastructure**

We chalked up a win with the inclusion of Queenstown and Greymouth in the initial roll out of the Government's \$1.5 billion ultra fast broadband initiative after they were initially excluded because they didn't meet the population-based criteria. We're continuing our push to get other tourism regions included.

We've had some progress on a much needed national convention centre, with \$250,000 to part-fund a feasibility study into the development of a 4000-seat facility in Auckland. Improved cruise ship port facilities also got a step closer with the central/local government purchase of Queens Wharf in Auckland to develop it into a public venue for Rugby World Cup 2011 and a premier cruise ship terminal.

#### **4. Improving New Zealand's environmental performance**

The detail is yet to come, but the government says the new Emissions Trading Scheme will position New Zealand well in the global challenge of tackling climate change and will also ensure the economy and jobs aren't put at risk.

TIA's efforts are paying off and we are seeing increasing recognition from DOC of the tourism industry and a strengthening of our relationship with the government agency. Action is also underway to address Resource Management Act issues around timeliness and cost.

#### **5. Investing in training and work skills initiatives**

The big gain was Government funding for the new KiaOraMai Essential Service Skills programme. Spearheaded by TIA working together with six ITOs, this new training programme will lift service standards across the tourism and wider service sector for Rugby World Cup 2011 and beyond.

#### **6. Boosting the return from major events**

The Government sees Rugby World Cup 2011 as an unprecedented opportunity to showcase Destination New Zealand. Their efforts to ensure we maximise the economic return from this major event include

establishing a New Zealand 2011 office to coordinate the national festival, develop the host and volunteer programmes, and implement a business leveraging programme.

### **Maximising our successes**

Despite it being a tough 12 months, we've enjoyed some great successes across the wider industry. These include being picked by Lonely Planet as one of the Top 10 Countries to visit in 2010; voted favourite long-haul country by readers of the *Guardian*, the *Observer* and guardian.co.uk; and Whale Watch Kaikoura being named overall winner at the prestigious Virgin Holidays Responsible Tourism Awards. High profile international recognition like this will ensure New Zealand is well positioned as the world really starts travelling again.