

# Tourism New Zealand changes its tune and accepts agents play 'important role'

TOURISM New Zealand has changed its tune about travel agents.

Two years ago Tourism New Zealand made no secret that it was shifting its focus away from travel agents and embracing new technology, particularly the internet, to get its message across in the Australian market.

This year, by contrast, Tourism New Zealand's regional manager for Australia, Barry Eddington, is saying travel agents are "a very important part of the business" for New Zealand where complicated itineraries are not unusual.

At TRENZ in 2008, Tourism New Zealand was dismantling its KEA (Kiwi Expert Agent) program for retail travel agents and shifting its familiarisation program opportunities away from agents to senior product buyers.

Justifying the approach, Tourism New Zealand's then chief executive George Hickton asked: "How many people in New Zealand would go to a travel agent to book a flight to Sydney? Not many."

But this year, Eddington told *travelBulletin*: "The trade is very important to us. About 60 per cent of Australians travelling to New Zealand have an engagement with a travel agent."

He said Australian consumers' contacts with travel agents range from information gathering and seeking advice to making bookings.

"It is a really important part of the business into New Zealand because itineraries can be complicated," he said, adding that coach touring and the cruise market are two areas in which a high percentage of business is done through agents.

About 44,000 Australians took cruises visiting New Zealand in the past year – an increase of 25 per cent on the previous year.

Eddington reported that Tourism New Zealand is now working closely with agents and has upgraded its trade website to include new product, new training modules and a webinar program for agent training.

"Webinars are a cost-effective way of training, and we are including a range of themes during the year to cover the various regions," he said.

"We will also be running two famlil trips next year for product managers to update them on new types of product."

He said Tourism New Zealand's increased focus on digital and social marketing will work in conjunction with traditional media such as cinema advertising and billboards in Australia, but will allow better targeting and measuring of results than in the past.

"Anything done through social media will still have an offer attached to it that can be booked through travel agents in Australia," he assured.



Abseiling near Queenstown ... Young affluent Australian adventure travellers are a key demographic targeted by Tourism New Zealand marketing. (credit: Chris McLennan)

## 'Reinvented' TRENZ set for Queenstown in 2011

TOURISM New Zealand faced a dilemma with the timing of next year's TRENZ because of the unexpected Tourism Australia announcement that the 2011 Australian Tourism Exchange ATEA will be held in April.

With one exception, Tourism New Zealand has in the past lined TRENZ to either precede or follow ATE, enabling buyers from overseas markets to combine the two events in one trip Down Under.

Faced with the Australian move away from the traditional May timing for ATE (caused by a lack of capacity in that city, Sydney, at that time according to Tourism Australia officials), New Zealand has decided to stick with the usual May timing for TRENZ.

But it will "reinvent" the annual international trade show, holding it in the Southern Lakes region of the South Island for the first time.

In 2011 TRENZ will start on May 23 and will

be held at a number of venues in and around Queenstown.

Tourism Industry Association (TIA) New Zealand chief executive Tim Cossar said the move enabled the whole event to be revamped.

TRENZ is New Zealand's largest international tourism trade event, held over four days.

Although Cossar described the Southern Lakes region as having "a highly developed tourism infrastructure", TRENZ has traditionally been held in Auckland and Christchurch – and in more recent years Rotorua – as these were the only centres with the facilities for most such a big event.

TRENZ usually attracts about 1500 buyers, exhibitors and international media.

Cossar told delegates at this year's TRENZ the announcement that ATE would next year be held in early April put New Zealand in a difficult position.

"After consultation with major stakeholders, we concluded that this timing would not work for the New Zealand tourism industry, as many operators and airlines are still busy with late peak season business," he said.

"Taking TRENZ to a new host region gives us the opportunity to completely revamp the event. We aim to make TRENZ 2011 a break from tradition and set a benchmark for future events."

Cossar said TRENZ would also move away from the traditional booth set-up and offer "even more informal but valuable networking opportunities", similar to a number of trade marketing events overseas.

"This will be an unparalleled opportunity to show off some of our best tourism experiences to the international travel trade," he said.

The Southern Lakes region (lakes in Queenstown, Lake Wanaka and Fiordland

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