

Inside Tourism Column

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KiaOraMai – essential skills for an essential industry

The new KiaOraMai Essential Service Skills programme launched in Wellington this morning by Prime Minister John Key will help ensure that New Zealand delivers an outstanding visitor experience – every time.

KiaOraMai is the recognisable entry standard certificate for employees working with visitors. Linked to unit standards on the National Qualifications Framework, it offers a career path for employees and can be a starting point for further training. For employers, it provides the support they need to train and retain people.

Developed by TIA and the Services Industries Training Alliance (SITA), the programme is targeted at entry-level employees working right across the tourism and service industries, including hospitality, accommodation, travel and transport, tourism events and activities, retail, hairdressing, beauty and spa.

People are our industry's greatest asset and having well trained, professional staff with the right skills and attitude is critical. KiaOraMai will establish a people legacy that will provide lasting economic benefits to the tourism industry; it will also ensure that when we host major events like the Rugby World Cup 2011, we have the right people with the right skills in place to deliver a unique and memorable experience.

TIA drove this initiative to meet the industry's call for a single entry-level standard for employees working in the visitor and customer services industries. Employers had told us they were confused by the proliferation of local qualifications, typically with no links to a national qualification. They were also concerned at the poor alignment of local courses to industry needs.

KiaOraMai has been developed with industry input and features a mix of on and off the job training. It covers a broad range of skills, such as customer service, personal presentation, managing customer complaints, knowledge of New Zealand tourism features, activities and events. It also embraces the value of manaakitanga – hospitality towards our visitors. Kia ora mai means conveying a genuine care and willingness to bring our best to how we engage with others.

We are aiming for 7000 to 10,000 trainees to go through the programme before the Rugby World Cup kicks off in Auckland in September 2011. It's an ambitious goal, but it will set our industry up for a great event no matter who takes home the cup!

A cross-industry initiative, KiaOraMai has been developed by TIA and SITA with funding from the Ministry of Tourism and Te Puni Kokiri. For more information see the KiaOraMai website – www.kiaoramai.co.nz.

Tourism Leaders Symposium

TIA's inaugural Tourism Leaders Symposium in Wellington earlier this month was a great day. Around 200 delegates attended, including tourism leaders from across the industry, the Prime Minister and Government Ministers, senior government officials, media, and our two excellent international speakers.

I presented the top priorities and solutions identified at TIA's regional workshops series, held throughout the country in September and attended by more than 500 operators.

The energy, ideas and enthusiasm that came out of this Tourism Leadership Series was fantastic. TIA is now working to keep that momentum going; establishing an industry alliance that will ensure the tourism industry speaks with one voice and a Government Accord are two of the key outcomes we are working on. Watch this space!