



Conference Review

Delegate feedback from our 2010 regional tourism conference has been really great. Every year several people tell us "this was great, better than last year", so it seems reasonable to deduce that we are hitting the mark for industry pretty well with this event. Our presenters all commented on what a great event it was and how worthwhile they found it.

The day saw a very full programme laid out with the opening address from Associate Minister of Tourism Dr Jonathan Coleman, which was well researched and relevant to the audience. This speech is available online at www.beehive.govt.nz/speech and select Hawkes Bay Regional Tourism Conference.

The annual Mayor's welcome included a Napier focus from Barbara Arnott as host Mayor and some hard-hitting regional position facts and suggestions from HDC's Lawrence Yule. It is really supportive that the Mayors take up this opportunity each year and we thank them sincerely.

A highlight of the day was the morning's Key Note Speaker Ngahihi o te ra Bidois, who enlightened, entertained and encouraged the audience with a powerful, well-pitched and relevant presentation about making the most of personal and business opportunities through optimism and attitude. It was fantastic to have Ngahi stay on for the morning and lunch breaks and return for the cocktail function to mingle and network with delegates. More about Ngahi at www.ngahibidois.com.

Tim Keeling, from Tourism NZ was able to give some insights into international activity and dig a bit deeper into his specialty area, Australian market trends and opportunities.

Statistics are a necessary evil for many of us and Robyn Henderson from the Ministry of Economic Development's Tourism Strategy Group, was able to use them to paint a picture of domestic visitor categories, launched by the Ministry in mid-2010, to enable the industry to improve on the value of tourism.

With local government elections looming it was timely that Evan Freshwater from the national Tourism Industry Association (TIANZ) spoke about the need to engage in robust debate with candidates and ensure these Territorial Authorities take this industry as seriously as it deserves. Evan also presented some findings from the recent review of the adventure and outdoor commercial sectors in New Zealand around the importance of a positive safety culture for the tourism industry.

The Port of Napier sponsored afternoon Key Note Speaker, Dr Ian Yeoman, from Victoria University in Wellington. Dr Yeoman is the world's only tourism futurologist, or in his words "crystal ball-gazer". His presentation discussed what the world might be like in 2050, and what changes we will have to consider around resources, technology, economics and the Net Generation – no longer is it Gen X or Y. Dr Yeoman proposes Net Gen will bring a whole new range of norm's. All in all a thought provoking and very interesting peek into future opportunities.

Venture Hawke's Bay's Michael Bassett-Foss told the audience of the Hawke's Bay Cycleway Water Trail progress and latest funding grant for the Landscapes Trail. Michael Wan then gave a brief regional marketing and promotion update, profiling the NZTRI research initiative, Australia's Today Show crew visit and No.1 Queen Street promotion along with a broad outline for summer and 2011 shoulder season marketing.

The workshops on Cruise (Monica Armesto, Tourism NZ), Free Ink (Stephanie Neppi, Tourism NZ) and GST Changes & Tax Update (Michelle Simkin & Chris Guillemot, WHK) were all very well received by attendees and proved the value of including this type of session at the conference.

Following Afternoon Tea, Eldad Collins, from the Rotorua Sustainable Tourism Charter, encouraged operators to consider sustainability as a grassroots activity and explained how the STAR programme can help, by encouraging changes to the way we think about it to really help us in times of economic pressure. There is money and a planet to be saved!

Rod Drury, a Hawke's Bay convert, is proof of how, in these days of new and dynamic technologies, a successful global business can be run from a region like ours.

Rod has some big ideas for the digital space and really got people fired up about the opportunities for individual operators and greater Hawke's Bay with his suggestion to implement a free Wi-Fi access service for all visitors on arrival. We need to get with the programme people!

In the last session of the day George Hickton, former CEO of Tourism NZ, set the scene for a new era for Hawke's Bay tourism based on the 100% Pure New Zealand brand experience and a comparative review of Hawke's Bay's recent past performance. George's wealth of knowledge, and willingness to share the benefit of it with us going forward, is an invaluable asset.

HBWCTA Chairman Sam Orton then followed up with a strong call for the region's operators to reunite, reinvest and revitalise the Hawke's Bay proposition and Wine Country brand to enable the region to take up new opportunities with renewed vigour and success. There has been a considerable amount of pressure for changes to the way the region is marketed and promoted and how ratepayer funds are being utilised in this regard. Sam told the audience that with a mandate from industry, HBWCTA is prepared to put a formal proposal to the Hawke's Bay Regional Council for greater industry input into a structure and strategies that will benefit the whole region, but it will require a considerable degree of support, including some funding, from within the industry.

In closing, HBWCTA Chairman Sam Orton thanked delegates for their ongoing commitment to the visitor industry and urged everyone to get on board with the proposal for a new RTO structure for Hawke's Bay, in the form of a financial pledge, to enable real progress to be made on their behalf.

We look forward to seeing you at the Conference next year!

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