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Media release

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Tourism Industry celebrates a year of welcoming back international visitors

Valuable insights have been gained and a promising summer awaits for New Zealand's tourism industry, as the country marks the first anniversary of its borders reopening fully to all visitors.

One year ago tomorrow, on July 31 2022, New Zealand tourism operators welcomed manuhiri from all countries and a recovery process from the Covid-19 pandemic could properly begin.

Tourism Industry Aotearoa chief executive Rebecca Ingram says the year since has been a roller coaster but left tourism in a stronger and more reflective state.

"Tourism is not an island - it is connected to so many parts of our economy and our communities. The return of visitors made a difference to many New Zealanders," she said.

"What I think the last year has highlighted is the need to keep adjusting for a different kind of future."

For many operators, the recovery has been an opportunity to find new solutions and revise business plans.

Les Morgan, of Sudima Hotels, says the last year has seen greater extremes in terms of seasonality.

"It has been challenging operationally in terms of recruiting and retaining staff and balancing that against the strong seasonality of 2023 so far".

"The Covid period also gave us a chance to rethink our business strategy, to really get back to basics and understand what's important to us."

For Sudima, that has meant a greater focus on the domestic and corporate markets, "particularly with the positive effects from the openings of new convention centres in Wellington and Christchurch".

The recovery signals also gave Sudima confidence to deploy new technology. "Sudima is, for example, experimenting with robots in restaurants, and we're about to trial them in room service and housekeeping," Morgan said

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Similarly, James Dalglish of Go Rentals, says his company got “incredibly lean” but had come out the other side stronger and able to seize opportunities through mergers and acquisitions.

However, recruitment and replacing institutional knowledge lost had been a challenge.

“Probably the biggest challenge off the back the pandemic has been workforce. When you remove two thirds of your staff, and in our case many of them had been with us for 5,10 or 15 years, you lose a whole lot of IP.

“So when you come back out and you’re growing the business again ... more than half of my co-workers have been with us less than a year. So for me, that’s probably been a big reflection and I don’t think there was any way to avoid that.”

For Shayne Forrest, of the Hobbiton movie set in Waikato, the last year has been an opportunity to change things up.

“You can always enhance and improve, so rather than go back to the same old, same old, we’ve looked at opportunities to improve so we can make sure we’re giving the best experience possible for our people.

“Which has been rewarded since people are coming back much quicker than we anticipated.”

Likewise, GoRentals had found opportunity to embrace new innovations, rolling out more electric and hybrid vehicles.

“There’s a fantastic opportunity ahead in terms of moving from sustainability to regeneration,” Dalglish says.

“It’s interesting because a lot of us in the industry are still trying to work out what regeneration means and many of the smaller operators are still grappling with sustainability.

“For our company, it means a much greater portion of clean cars across both EV and hybrid options and enabling our customers to undertake greener journeys through Aotearoa.”

TIA’s Ingram says tourism is committed to rebuilding in a way that will benefit Aotearoa and New Zealanders.

“Indications are that we are in for a good second summer of recovery, but we have our eyes set on the longer term also, with much work underway to do our part to make positive impacts on the environment and communities we are part of.

“We’re proud of how the industry has held strong, with the support of Kiwis, and we want to make sure we continue to boost Aotearoa, New Zealand,” she says.

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KEY FACTS

- Tourism Industry Aotearoa is New Zealand tourism's peak industry body. We are the only independent association that represents all sectors of New Zealand's large and diverse tourism industry.
- TIA has about 1300 member businesses from across the industry, ranging from small owner/operators to large publicly listed tourism corporates and international hotel chains.
- TIA is deeply involved in discussions on recovery and what the future of tourism in New Zealand will look like.
- TIA leads implementation of the industry's **Tourism Sustainability Commitment** which aims to see every New Zealand tourism business contributing positively to our people and cultures, our environment and our economy.
- TIA delivers a comprehensive and diverse range of industry events including TRENZ, New Zealand Tourism Awards, Discussing Tourism regional events and the Tourism Summit Aotearoa.

Visit www.tia.org.nz for more information

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