

OUT AND ABOUT

How good is New Zealand really?

By Craig Wilson

TNZ tells us that 91 percent of our international visitors are highly satisfied with their experience of New Zealand.

That means that one in 11 international visitors have not been impressed to the point of being highly satisfied.

The reality is that people need to be more than just satisfied; they need to be delighted before they'll pick up a laptop and write something positive to friends family, www.tripadvisor.com etc.

There are really two issues here, one is that satisfaction is not the right thing to measure anymore, and the other is that we have to constantly seek to improve the quality of what we offer visitors as their expectations have a habit of continually increasing.

The good news, though, is that 97 percent of New Zealand's international visitors would recommend the destination to others. The bad news is that we don't have comparable figures for other destinations - particularly Australia.

So it's hard to put our hands on our hearts and say we're leading the world in offering fantastic experiences to happy visitors.

Value not Volume

Changing tourism market dynamics mean that we need to increasingly focus on adding value to the experiences we offer visitors in order to grow business revenue - volume growth is sooo 2006!

But we have a problem in times of a slowdown, namely not enough money to refurbish the things we need to refurbish. This presents an interesting challenge when we're only two years away from the Rugby World Cup (RWC 2011).

Our house

So what can we do...let's just boil things down to a meaningful size.... it's like tidying the house before guests arrive for dinner. We can make sure everything's in order in the relevant guest areas while ensuring visitors do not visit parts of our house that we feel are not up to scratch.

If we took the results of our latest Regional Visitor Monitor at face value that would mean encouraging international visitors to stay in private homes (with a satisfaction rating of 8.9 on a 10 point scale where 1 = poor and 10 = excellent), then hotels (7.9) then serviced apartments (7.8) and so on. But under no circumstances would we want visitors to try to park their campervan where satisfaction averages a mere 5.9!

Working Smarter

The RWC 2011 is a huge incentive to get our house in order. The problem though is that we don't own all the parts of the house that need to be tidied up in order to impress our visitors. So it's time for some clever thinking.



We have two years to place a renewed focus on quality so that New Zealand is more likely to delight visitors with world-class experiences than ever before. What do we need?

1) Big Help: there are some very capital intensive items that need attention e.g. significant hotels including many owned by overseas investors, major ferry terminals and even a train system that could use some big help.

Why don't we put together a special project team looking at influencing overseas owners of key infrastructure so that we get refurbishments before the RWC rather than after it? We'll need to pull out all the stops - perhaps even asking our Minister of Tourism to lead a delegation to foreign hotel and other infrastructure owners asking them to bring forward refurbishment plans.

2) Broad Help: we have a tourism strategy in place that seems to be bringing things together nicely from a work skills perspective for staff in the industry.

But for tourism business owners we still need new tools and support particularly in areas such as planning, online marketing (including dynamic pricing) and business financing.

3) Self Help: tourism business owners are very self reliant. However, it's time for each business to work with its peers to review the quality of the offering and the value they provide visitors because things are changing so quickly around us. Everyone in tourism needs to start benchmarking more broadly. If it's good enough for the developers of our major stadia to look around the world to understand international best practice then perhaps it's time for all tourism operators to look further afield.

Even just to another NZ region rather than another country, to ensure we're offering all the value we can to visitors. Remembering that some of the added value we can deliver will not cost any more to offer but it could significantly increase the quality of the experience enjoyed by visitors. The collective result: a higher proportion of visitors "delighted" with their NZ experience as well as being "highly satisfied."

* Mr Wilson is MD of consulting, training and mentoring company, Quality Tourism Development Ltd. Visit: www.qualitytourism.co.nz.