Tourism operators struggling with staffing

Staffing is one of the biggest headaches for New Zealand tourism operators at present, even though their businesses continue to be impacted by the closed borders.

According to a new industry survey by Tourism Industry Aotearoa, just over half (53.23%) of the 318 respondents reduced staff numbers in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. But ahead of the usually busy summer season, 60% of respondents have sought to employ additional staff over the past three months, with 45% saying it has been difficult to find suitable candidates.

The results of the survey were released today at Tourism Summit Aotearoa, before an audience of more than 300 tourism leaders and stakeholders at Te Papa in Wellington. It is the third in a series of industry surveys carried out since April, to measure the impacts of COVID-19 on the tourism industry.

TIA Chief Executive Chris Roberts said the latest survey shows that operators have got over their initial state of shock and are now resigned to working with what business is available, with an eye to the future recovery.

"Respondents are resolutely staying in business in spite of losing their international customers. Many have been able to expand their offerings to the domestic market. There's a degree of confidence returning, tempered by the realisation that there are still tough times ahead," Mr Roberts says.

The responses to questions on staffing suggest that businesses have reached a point where employment levels have stabilised at a new level. Many are now focused on retaining key staff and hiring new people to meet demand.

"Getting the staff they need is a considerable challenge. The 'lumpy' nature of domestic tourism, with demand happening at weekends and school holidays, means many of the roles that need to be filled are part-time and temporary. Some respondents commented that New Zealanders were unwilling to take on roles that were not fulltime and permanent.

"Immigration settings are also highlighted with visas not being renewed for existing employees and no access to overseas workers."

The survey found that the most important measure needed to help the industry recover is to find ways to open our borders, although operators recognise that a high level of care will be needed and borders should only be reopened when it is safe to do so.

A targeted grants scheme for impacted tourism businesses is also seen as a way the Government can provide further support.

"Looking to the future, there is strong commitment for improvements to the post-COVID tourism industry, with high value and sustainability being seen as important," Mr Roberts says.

Click here to view the full survey report:
https://tia.org.nz/assets/3316f2d8a4/Industry-Survey-Report_Nov-2020.pdf

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KEY FACTS
Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic: - Tourism in New Zealand was a \$112 million per day industry. Tourism delivered around \$47 million in foreign exchange to the New Zealand economy each day of the year. Domestic tourism contributed another \$65 million in economic activity every day.   - Tourism was New Zealand's biggest export earner, contributing \$17.2 billion or 20.4% of New Zealand's foreign exchange earnings (year ended March 2019).   14.4% of the total number of people employed in New Zealand worked directly or indirectly in tourism. That means 393,279 people were working in the visitor economy.   - The Tourism 2025 & Beyond sustainable growth framework/Kaupapa Whakapakari Tāpoi has a vision of growing a sustainable tourism industry that benefits New Zealanders.
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