



DESTINATION MARLBOROUGH

ANNUAL PLAN 2025/2026



**MARLBOROUGH
DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Destination Marlborough: 2025/26 Focus Summary

The New Zealand tourism landscape remains dynamic, shaped by broader economic and infrastructural shifts. We finished the last financial year slightly down on the previous, predominantly due to a reduction in domestic travel influenced by inflation and rising travel costs. International markets continue to perform well, though the Australian market has softened, and the USA remains strong despite political challenges.

Connectivity

Air connectivity into Marlborough continues to be impacted by reduced capacity and Air New Zealand's engineering issues, affecting national travel. International air capacity to New Zealand remains below pre-COVID levels but is expected to improve steadily.

Ferry connectivity across Cook Strait presents another challenge. The removal of the IREX project last year and the delays in confirming replacement ferries have introduced uncertainty into travel planning, especially for agents linking Wellington and Marlborough. While the recent government announcement of long-term investment in ferries and a port upgrade is positive, we will lose capacity with the retirement of *Aratere* in August. However, Bluebridge's introduction of *Livia* will help maintain overall Cook Strait capacity. We will continue to communicate with trade to ensure Marlborough and the wider Top of the South are not bypassed in itinerary planning.

Partnerships

Marketing partnerships with neighbouring regions developing touring routes such as Top of the South and the Classic New Zealand Wine Trail remain critical. These touring routes provide people with a pre-determined itinerary which is simple to navigate, and it extends Marlborough's market reach and spend when collaborating with other regions. This past year, we have been able to host two partnership famil tours with international agents and through the Top of the South collaboration attract influencers and media to upweight Marlboroughs visibility.

Realignment

In FY2025, the Future Pathway project was completed, setting the strategic direction and structure for the RTO. Following an open survey to the tourism community and further afield, it was determined that Destination Marlborough would become a business unit of Council and shift its focus to Destination Stewardship.

Destination Marlborough

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In 2025/26, our focus is to firstly complete our transition and integration into Council as a business unit and commence the transitioning to a Destination Stewardship in the second quarter. Moving into Destination Stewardship will place a focus on balancing not just visitor demand (Marketing), but more importantly, also the supply of visitation (product development). The Destination Stewardship approach will ensure and require stronger collaboration with tourism operators, iwi, community, MDC stakeholders and develop cross department relationships with key council departments.

We will continue to evolve with changes made last year to our refreshed Trade Partnership Programme. This change enables operators to choose their level of financial involvement to engagement across DM's trade, marketing, and business events activity, extending the value and relevance of our offering. This targeted engagement will continue alongside capability building workshops across key tourism pillars.

This year a Destination Advisory Group will be established to advise on Destination Marlborough's tourism initiatives and priorities, and the upcoming review and refinement of our Destination Management Plan (DMP). The DMP review will commence once DM's team realignment is complete and Destination Advisory Group is appointed in the later part of 2025.

Nationally, the release of the Government's *Tourism Roadmap to 2030*, with a focus on doubling the value of tourism exports and shifting emphasis to 80% demand and 20% supply, will influence our strategic direction and align us with the broader national vision. The Marlborough DMP already sits well with the government objectives, with minor adjustments required to further align.

As we settle into council, part of our plan is to build the internal relationships with key departments. Understanding how each department will impact on visitation and how visitation can support the overall Destination Management Plan.

Whilst delivering on this Annual Plan, there are three simple key objectives, be visible to the whole of our visitor economy and tourism community, take action that supports the visitor economy and support new tourism development.

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DESTINATION MARLBOROUGH PROJECTS AND ACTIVITY 2025/2026

PROJECTS	DESCRIPTION	IMPACT
Domestic Destination Marketing	<p>Always On digital campaign activity to grow Christchurch, Wellington, and Auckland, with targeted 'firework' moments</p> <p>Leverage key significant events and support where applicable</p>	Increased length of stay, visitation, spending, and jobs
Media	<p>Undertake targeted domestic and international media activity in partnership with events and key stakeholders and align with campaign activity. Our International Media Programme will partner with Tourism New Zealand.</p> <p>Provide opportunities for tourism Stakeholders to buy in to domestic and international media activity.</p>	<p>Increased awareness, length of stay, visitation, spending, and jobs</p> <p>Extending the reach of marketing spend through Tourism Operator contributions (User Pay Model)</p>
Australian and International Destination Marketing	<p>Australian and International Trade and Consumer Marketing – Marketing and trade campaign leveraging key partnerships with Tourism New Zealand, Airlines, TOTS, CNZWT, Inbound Tour Operators and other relevant parties.</p>	Increased length of stay, visitation, spending, and jobs.
Trade Support and Development	<p>Work with trade-ready Marlborough-based products on development/packaging for domestic and international travel.</p> <p>Manage relationships with key trade partners, Tourism New Zealand, Christchurch International Airport, Regional Tourism Operators, Inbound Tourism Operators, airlines, and cruise operators.</p> <p>Deliver a trade engagement programme with the Trade Partnership Members that can buy into that will increase night stays and inclusions in travel seller itineraries.</p> <p>Educate international trade on the Marlborough proposition to increase knowledge of the region and confidence to sell.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tier One markets: Australia, North America, United Kingdom/Europe Tier Two market: Southeast Asia/China <p>Work with key partners and airlines to cost-effectively extend the reach and encourage the Top of the South and Classic New Zealand Wine Trail route development in travel itineraries and increased length of stay in programmes.</p>	<p>Improved visitor experience and satisfaction</p> <p>Increased length of stay, visitation, spending, and jobs</p> <p>Provide cost effective opportunities for Marlborough Operators to buy into (user pay model) to increase exposure to Domestic & international Trade</p> <p>Maintain presence in Tier One markets with key Stakeholders and where budget permits Tier two markets.</p>

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Business Event Attraction and Leverage	<p>Grow the value and volume of business events in Marlborough in off-peak and shoulder season.</p> <p>Target Marlborough's priority sectors and industry strengths, e.g., viticulture, aquaculture, forestry, technology, agritech, logistics, aviation, craft beer, award-winning distilleries, state of the art venues and tourism, to encourage industry investment, leverage bidding opportunities and facilitates knowledge transfer</p> <p>Continue key stakeholder partnerships with Business Events Industry in Aotearoa (BEIA) and Tourism New Zealand to leverage business events opportunities</p> <p>Build capability in Marlborough's Operators to support Business events, and ensures industry operates collaboratively.</p>	<p>Increased number and value of business events to grow market share.</p> <p>Increased investment in the Marlborough industry</p> <p>Develop and maintain a strong Marlborough Business Bureau to attract and bid for Business Events</p>
Visitor Information Support	<p>Operation of Blenheim and Picton isites</p> <p>Deliver professional, comprehensive visitor information and booking services</p> <p>Delivery of destination management outcomes</p> <p>Drive length of stay and encourage the high-yield regional spread</p> <p>Continued alignment to Marlborough Emergency Management</p> <p>Support Cruise Day operations</p> <p>Deliver on Tiaki Promise, sustainability, responsible camping workstreams and information provision.</p>	<p>The consistent public good of visitor and information services</p> <p>Encourage regional spread and length of stay</p> <p>Assist region to be emergency ready</p>
Online Information provision	<p>Manage and maintain the Marlboroughnz.com website and continue to improve the provision of visitor information services through digital channels – Website, Social, and AI.</p> <p>Transition our regional visitor guides to a hybrid model reducing footprint and printing costs. Creating a smaller print run and upweighting digital guides through the distribution of QR codes directing the user to the guide online.</p> <p>Upweight social activity through influencers, Media outlets and content creation and ensure integration across all parts of the business and engagement and reach of content across all social channels</p> <p>Strengthen suite of assets that business events organisers can acces to elevate "Why" Marlboroughfor business events</p>	<p>Improved online visitor experience and satisfaction with information service</p> <p>Increase the accessibility of information by transitioning away from print to digital.</p> <p>Increase exposure through partnerships utilising social influencing and media.</p>

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Destination Development	<p>Transition into Destination Stewardship supporting the Destination Management and development work previously completed</p> <p>Deliver and implement Destination Management Strategies as per the Marlborough Destination Management Plan (DMP)</p> <p>Critical Strategies lead and maintain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wine visitor strategy (In partnership with Wine Marlborough) • Cycle visitor strategy (In partnership with Marlborough Roads) • Cruise Management (In partnership with Community group of stakeholders) <p>Critical Strategies to be developed / grow</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South Marlborough tourism development (Supported by I South Marlborough Business Network) • Tourism Environment plan • Visitor experience improvement <p>Increased stakeholder and industry engagement opportunities and professional networking opportunities.</p> <p>Build product development and industry capability programme for Marlborough SME tourism businesses and subregions, such as the Top or South regions.</p>	<p>Improved visitor experience and satisfaction</p> <p>Improved operator resilience and viability</p> <p>Improve visibility of visitation through regular connection.</p> <p>Better connection and cohesion between stakeholders</p> <p>Increased capability of operators.</p>
Brand Management	<p>Manage the delivery and ownership of the consumer visitor brand identity for Marlborough.</p> <p>Maintain the VISIT/LIVE/WORK/MEET/SCREEN web platform with MDC/ Economic Development.</p> <p>Maintain and grow the Marlborough Story supporting visitation.</p> <p>Develop and strengthen content and storytelling for business events through case studies and digital assets</p>	<p>Consistency, equity, awareness, and longevity of the brand</p> <p>Enhanced reputation of Marlborough on a national and global stage</p>
Organisation Performance	<p>Foster a culture of engagement and capability building for our people</p> <p>Maintain effective management of Destination Marlborough activity and budgets</p>	<p>Have a culture and be a place where people want to work</p> <p>Best business practice</p>

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PROJECTS	MEASUREABLES 25/26
Domestic Destination Marketing	Domestic campaigns delivered with campaign KPIs met and exceeded
Australian Destination Marketing	Two JV Australia campaigns delivered with campaign KPIs
Media	A minimum of 15 media outlets visit the region.
Trade Support and Development	500 wholesale and frontline travel sellers trained 30 qualified travel sellers famil region
Business Event Attraction and Leverage	Minimum 15 business event planners hosted Minimum of 20 business event bids compiled and submitted A minimum of 55% of bids won
Visitor Information Support	Marlborough isites achieve a sales turnover of \$1.25 million isites visitor NPS satisfaction level of 80% met or exceeded
Online Information Provision	Maintain an engagement rate by views of 2% (1% -3.5% equates to Average to Good Engagement)
Brand Management	Maintain and build on the Marlborough Story with MDC Maintain the marlboroughnz.com website platform with MDC
Destination Management	Implementation of Destination Management Plan strategic priorities 3 Industry updates per year Minimum 5 Industry Capability workshops held either directly or in collaboration with industry partners Subject to additional funding support
Organisation Performance	Full intergration into council by year end.

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MEDIUM AND LONG-TERM TRACKERS

	Actuals	Actuals	Actuals	Actuals	Actuals	Actuals	Actuals	Actual	Actual
ACTIVITY	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
	External Tracking (DM has minimal influence)								
				COVID	Domestic Visitor Spend		Dom/Int		
Spend by visitors in Marlborough ¹ (YE March)	\$360m	\$387m	\$394m	\$411m	\$159m	\$177m	\$182m	\$215 m	^\$212m
	Internal Tracking (DM has influence)								
NPS score and percentage of customers satisfied with visitor information centres and services ²	-	79.03%	84%	83.6%	80%	91%	91%	91%	88%
Extending season – % growth in Spring and Autumn spending matches or exceeds the previous Summer (maintaining summer growth) ¹	-	Exceeds	Exceeds	N/A	Exceeds	Exceeds	Exceeds	Exceeds	On Par
Number of business event bids submitted or supported	17	20	20	16	18	22	20	28	24
Business event bid win/loss ratio (based on financial year)	50%	50%	55%	44%	50%	54%	70%	53%	50%
Value of business event bids won in financial year ¹	\$1.6m	\$1.7m	\$3.6m	\$1.2m	\$2.0m	\$1.29m	\$2.9m	\$2.643m	\$2.936 m

¹ Source: MBIE MRTes, TECTs, BERP

²Source: Google Net Promoter Score measure

^ Data only released up until May 2025

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