TOURISM BAY OF PLENTY

Tourism with Purpose
A Plan for Regenerative Tourism
“PURPOSEFUL TOURISM ACTIVITY SPARKS REGENERATION IN THE BAY OF PLENTY AND ACROSS THE WORLD.”
Everyone is a part of the environment, and they must respect it. This idea, embraced by the Māori, signals a holistic approach to life and travel that is gaining popularity around the world. In the Bay of Plenty, where mountains, beaches, volcanoes and trees feel larger than life, visitors gain a true sense of connection to the earth. However, tourism must be carefully balanced.

To find balance, Tāpoi Te Moananui ā Toi / Tourism Bay of Plenty plans for the future with a realistic view. For example, Tāpoi Te Moananui ā Toi / Tourism Bay of Plenty takes climate projections into account and considers what they truly mean for this destination over the long term. Support for tourism is still strong among New Zealand residents, as Tourism Industry Aotearoa and Tourism New Zealand reported in the Mood of the Nation survey. However, the research also shows that the Bay of Plenty residents are growing concerned about visitor pressure. As visitor numbers increase, attitudes towards tourism among residents here are more negative than the norm across New Zealand.

What’s better than a visitor? A responsible visitor. Over the past decade, many places on Earth have begun to support responsible, sustainable forms of tourism. The next step is to move toward the even larger concept of regenerative tourism. This means not only preserving and sustaining this region’s natural beauty, but more importantly, embracing the challenge of restoring and healing everything that has suffered and regenerating all that has been depleted or threatened.

How can Tāpoi Te Moananui ā Toi / Tourism Bay of Plenty, the tourism industry in general and individuals at large support this noble, global cause? This plan provides an answer. It articulates the inspiration and the higher purpose for all tourism actions in the Bay of Plenty. It also outlines a framework for that purpose. Tāpoi Te Moananui ā Toi / Tourism Bay of Plenty invites you to participate in the Bay of Plenty’s plan for regenerative, purposeful tourism.
WHAT IS REGENERATIVE TOURISM?

Regeneration requires a healthy relationship with the environment and, often, a new point of view. Consider the words people use to talk about nature. Wilderness is a negative word that commonly describes uncultivated land — a place where nature is unspoiled by human settlement.

However, some people believe that humanity has an inherently positive relationship with nature — or that people and nature are interrelated. Native Americans from the Ute tribe in Colorado believe that when humans are absent from an area for long enough, they lose the practical knowledge needed to interact with the environment. Soon afterward, animals and plants retreat from the earth or hide. People and nature can flourish together.

The knowledge that the indigenous peoples hold is vast, important and underappreciated. Without intimate interaction with the environment, cultures lose the continuity of knowledge that is normally passed down through generations.

The broken parts of this planet need to be fixed. The Māori tangata whenua suggest that, among other things, a sense of identity and belonging can grow from a positive relationship with the natural environment. Likewise, degrading the environment risks weakening identity and belonging. A poor relationship with nature triggers consequences that impact everyone’s wellbeing. Destination development must work to understand the land as well as protect and promote its vital resources.

Ecological challenges are, in many ways, design problems. Too often, the biosphere cannot sustain human activity; towns, cruise ships, cars, the food supply chain, the way the tourism economy is organised and new technologies strain the limits. Ecological design requires the ability to understand how separate parts work together within the larger pattern of nature. The regenerative way of thinking acknowledges that humans are a part of nature — part of the ecology. It also says that there is greater evolutionary potential when humans maintain a state of intentional interrelationship with nature. People have a positive role to play. For sustained ecological health, humans must evolve a conscious and integral interrelationship with nature — one that is mutually beneficial, that creates space for being and becoming and that is always aware of evolutionary potential. It is a fully conscious awareness that the health of an ecosystem is dependent on human health while human health is dependent on the health of the whole ecology. Regeneration is co-evolutionary.

Regenerative tourism is the challenge of the future: a process of partnership with nature in resonance with indigenous wisdom.
VISION

SHARING OUR LOVE FOR THE BAY OF PLENTY WITH THE WORLD

Tourism helps our region flourish. It regenerates (not extracts) to help make our region a better place over time. Visitors are welcomed on our terms and the experience transforms them, as they respectfully share our place as we know it to authentically be. That unique visitor experience transforms their souls, and they take with them a piece of Te Moananui ā Toi’s / the Coastal Bay of Plenty’s history and culture, as well as indelible impression of our people and place.
Tāpoi Te Moananui ā Toi / Tourism Bay of Plenty (TBOP) has coordinated community-driven research into this region’s identity, or Place DNA™. The word “DNA” was chosen to illustrate the fact that regenerative tourism requires people to think of a place as a living system.

The DNA research project contains a thorough assessment of site and place, including systems of culture, economy, geography, climate, humanity and ecology. This in-depth research laid the foundation for this plan and many other tourism strategies in the Bay of Plenty. It describes how people (including both visitors and residents) perceive this place and where there are gaps in understanding. By filling the gaps, the region and its people can evolve together.

Tāpoi Te Moananui ā Toi / Tourism Bay of Plenty also co-developed a storytelling framework, together with resident input from workshops throughout the region and the help of big data analysis. The framework uses the power of storytelling to articulate the essence of this place, how it fits in the world and what the role of those who inhabit it can be as they collaborate in its evolution. Māori culture, horticultural production, ocean and beaches, unique flora and fauna, conservation efforts and historical events provide the opportunity to inject messaging with qualities that are distinct to the Bay of Plenty. This is one way to shift the perception of the region.
After completing the research, Tāpoi Te Moananui ā Toi / Tourism Bay of Plenty (TBOP) created a systemic and integrated destination development plan called Te Hā Tāpoi / The Love of Tourism. The plan outlines new design and development processes that aim to bring visitors into harmony with the Bay of Plenty’s larger pattern and identity.

Harmony between visitation and place increases tourism’s value. When residents and visitors act in cooperation with the land and ecosystems, they lower the environmental costs of tourism while maintaining or even improving ecosystem health. To encourage the most valuable type of tourism, TBOP re-evaluated its visitation goals. Instead of attracting as many visitors as possible, TBOP designed a process to attract the right visitors — those who add economic, environmental, social and symbolic value to this community. Their experiences in Te Moananui ā Toi / the Coastal Bay of Plenty will transform their relationship with planet Earth and all forms of life. When it comes to attracting the right kind of visitors, inspiring them is more effective than targeting people with unwanted ads. This approach demands a new way of segmentation: the passionate interests of the people come first.

Research into these passions (called passionography) revealed the attitudes, behaviour, needs and desires of potential visitors. TBOP then measured the quality of the visitor experience, which helped to define the main themes that act as guiding stars for development and to improve communication that aligns with this region’s core truths.

To provide truly transformational visitor experiences, the Bay of Plenty cannot be represented by a single place. Instead, the entire region benefits by uniting through its common stories.
Regenerative tourism requires a culture of co-evolution — a holistic approach that involves much more than a revenue model. For example, the destination experience needs to connect with Māori cultural values in order to flourish. Tāpoi Te Moananui ā Toi / Tourism Bay of Plenty has created a new role within the organisation called Kaihautū — Māori Economy.

It is an economic development position that works in partnership with the Māori community. The holistic approach also led to selecting niche audiences who love nature and respect local culture and traditions. The chosen niches are Outdoor Adventurers, Cultural Explorers and Surf and Beach Lovers. Eco-Travellers is the fourth, overarching niche that explicitly addresses the environment and a desire for nature to flourish.

People across the region continue to co-evolve. That is why TBOP has co-created and shared its development strategy with local residents. The next steps are to develop niches by establishing and leading working groups with locals, to deliver transformational and memorable experiences with the help of stakeholders, to monitor and prioritise residents’ attitudes towards tourism and to advocate for a more sustainable kind of tourism.

As a result, the development of the overall tourism experience will happen in collaboration with tourism operators and passionate locals. TBOP has conducted additional research and created a plan to help connect with residents. The plan contains a list of tangible actions that need to be done for both vertical development (building out the niche experience for passionate communities) and horizontal development (building out the overall experience with the local community).

TBOP will also take symbolic actions that express the region’s identity. The actions will be designed as tangible expressions of the love and pride that residents feel, and they will resonate with visitors. The community will need to use its collective communication expertise to bridge the gaps between what residents know about this place and what the world (does not) know(s).
OUR PURPOSE

The Seventh Generation Principle originates from indigenous peoples in North America. Essentially, it states that every decision and action needs to account for the impact on people and the environment seven generations from now. At Tāpoi Te Moananui ā Toi / Tourism Bay of Plenty, we adopt that principle as our higher purpose.

We want to be a responsible tourism organisation and act with deep care, commitment and connection to this place. In this way we can make the necessary changes that will allow us to act by the Seventh Generation Principle — that will allow us to continually evolve. As the mythical voyager Kupe used Te Pae Māhutonga (the Southern Cross Star Constellation) to guide him through the seas, our organisation navigates by four principles to help us stay true to our purpose: community inclusivity, unique culture and Place DNA™, transformational visitor experiences and environmental regeneration.

Places and organisations that follow a higher purpose enjoy more meaningful engagement with people and a stronger presence in the community. They are likely to find greater success. But that is not our primary reason for doing this. We chose purpose-built, regenerative tourism because it is in our nature. We have embedded our purpose into this organisation’s vision, planning and operations. The following “tourism with purpose” framework will ensure that we stay on course.
TOURISM WITH PURPOSE: FRAMEWORK FOR THE BAY OF PLENTY

This framework guides regenerative tourism in the Bay of Plenty. It applies and integrates a blend of ancient and modern technologies into the design, management and continuing evolution of purpose built tourism. The goal is to achieve positive ecological and social results. This framework ensures that all tourism activities are purpose built and designed. Its Six C’s Model is both the compass and the measuring stick; it is meant to aid in planning and evaluation.
TOURISM PURPOSE - THE SIX C’S MODEL

COCREATION — FACILITATING AND EXCHANGING IDEAS
Example: Co-developing the Bay of Plenty experiences with passionate residents throughout the region

COLLABORATION — CREATING AND SHARING VALUE FOR RESIDENTS AND VISITORS
Example: Gathering feedback about this plan from residents through roadshows and public hearings

CONSISTENCY — DELIVERING A BETTER EXPERIENCE THROUGH DATA AND TECHNOLOGY
Example: Netnographic research has provided a study of passionate communities that are relevant to the Bay of Plenty

COMMUNICATION — SHARING SYMBOLIC ACTIONS AND STORYTELLING
Example: Highlighting meaningful stories from the Bay of Plenty community that match selected themes

CONGRUENCE — COMMUNICATING THE APPROACH TO STAKEHOLDERS AND SOCIETY AT LARGE
Example: Re-evaluating the region’s goals and reminding stakeholders that the value produced by tourism should be more than financial

CONTINUITY — RESPECTING HERITAGE, CULTURE AND IDENTITY
Examples: Place DNA™ research that describes the elements of the Bay of Plenty’s identity, which includes geography, economy, culture, history, climate and people
TOURISM WITH PURPOSE: NEXT STEPS

FIVE SHORT-TERM PRIORITIES

1. LEAD BY EXAMPLE.

The Bay of Plenty needs to walk its talk. This region is quintessentially New Zealand, yet it delivers a unique experience and needs to fulfill its particular promises. The Tiaki Promise is one example. Communication about the pledge must become more compelling and actions more strict to support the values that it represents. Tiaki should be a critical aspect of touchpoints like airports, entry points and accommodations.

2. ACT LOCALLY AND THINK GLOBALLY.

This is about more than regenerative tourism and giving back to the local community. It also means giving visitors from around the world unique experiences that might transform them. Consider the right visitors for the Bay of Plenty. Are they the ones who rarely step out of their hotel rooms except to visit Starbucks or another international chain? Instead of these, the region needs to draw tourists who will visit local businesses and taste authentic food cooked with ingredients from nearby farmers. The right visitors for the Bay of Plenty will explore local shops, support local trade and buy locally made crafts.

3. MINIMISE THE USE OF PLASTIC.

Last year, more than nine million tons of plastic ended up in the oceans. All that trash will not easily disappear. Growing more eco-friendly and smarter about the use of plastic is crucial. The Bay of Plenty should promote products that can be reused, such as steel water bottles, tote bags for shopping and bamboo straws. The tourism industry can also reinvent the familiarisation tour. Bring residents, local councillors and staff on a trip to get them thinking about how rubbish contributes to (or detracts from) the tourism experience.

4. CONNECT VISITORS WITH RESPONSIBLE TOURISM OPERATORS.

Help people make informed choices by choosing and rewarding responsible operators — those who contribute to regenerative tourism. Select organisations that protect and preserve nature, wildlife and cultural heritage, as well as those that collaborate with indigenous people. Support businesses that prioritise sustainability and invest in local guides that observe regional laws and customs. Give money to environment-friendly establishments that work not only towards sustainability but, more importantly, towards regeneration and restoration.

5. COMMUNICATE YOUR INTENTIONS.

It will be important to make your purpose for tourism visible in physical spaces where tourists visit. Items like road and trail signage or restaurant placemats and menus could be useful communication tools. Staff members must also support these stated intentions through their actions and attitudes.
10 INTENTIONS FOR THE MEDIUM TERM

1. REDUCE THE CARBON FOOTPRINT OF TOURISM AND EVENTS.
   Reducing pollutants will require a low-carbon market strategy that identifies opportunities across tourism supply chains and business ecosystems. For example, the Bay of Plenty needs to rethink how to mitigate, reduce or eliminate the devastating pollution emitted by cruise ships. The city of Gothenburg, Sweden shows a world-leading approach to sustainability. By communicating its position and sustainable actions, the city adds value to its reputation.

2. INTEGRATE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS.
   The United Nations has set out 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to improve the quality of life for people and the health of the environment. Some SDGs are more urgent for the Bay of Plenty than others. The region can work toward the most relevant goals while communicating its relative strengths. Clean water, clean energy and gender equality are not to be taken for granted by visitors.

3. CONSIDER RECOVERY TAX.
   A growing number of people want to protect and restore ecosystems as they travel, and they are becoming more conscious of environmental sensitivities and resilience. Raise awareness among visitors of the importance and contribution of restorative work in the region. Make sure visitors know exactly where their tourism taxes are invested in supporting restoration.

4. SOURCE SUSTAINABLE SOUVENIRS.
   Souvenirs are part of any travel experience, but people need to know what they buy and where it comes from. Traceability becomes just as important as how attractive the items appear to be.

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6. ENGAGE THE NEXT GENERATION.
   Involve young people in the process whenever possible. Their perspectives can spark new ways of doing business and can help the region communicate and develop better experiences. For example, hospitality students already know so much about locally produced food. Young adults are becoming global citizens and can often teach older generations about food security, mobility and sustainability, rather than the other way around. These are just the kind of people who are needed to help the Bay of Plenty navigate the future.

7. RETHINK TOURISM EXPERIENCES.
   Focus on the unique qualities of place and expand the definition of “experience” beyond stereotypes like swimming pools, cocktails, party life and big entertainment events. The Bay of Plenty can take inspiration from Scandinavian countries that protect and value resources that contribute to incredible experiences: clean air, starry nights, silence, natural healing, biophilia, connection to trees and so on. If these fragile attributes are damaged they will be difficult to restore.
ENCOURAGE TEMPORARY LOCALHOOD.
Consider slow tourists who may work and live remotely. Think about what they can offer to make the Bay of Plenty a better place for all. This includes businesspeople, house swappers, people visiting friends and relatives and others that come here to explore their ancestry. Growth in international students has prompted some destinations to tap into student markets. These long-stay visitors are likely to spend money that stays in the community, goes deeper and extends further while the investment generates a smaller carbon footprint.

REDEFINE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES IN TOURISM.
The global economic system is undergoing a paradigm shift. The nature of work is changing, as are the quantity and quality of available jobs. The Bay of Plenty residents can define the types of tourism jobs they want in the destination. These may include new and lucrative opportunities like the Free Tour movement, garden-to-plate concepts, niche travel, immersive tourism and travel with subject experts. Local businesses benefit from these ideas.

HELP VISITORS CHOOSE REGENERATIVE ACTIVITIES.
Look for enjoyable activities that do not pollute or use energy. Locals can encourage visitors to join activities — such as tree planting, ocean cleanups and arts and culture festivals — that have immediate restorative and regenerative effects.

BE COUNTERINTUITIVE.
When Wonderful Copenhagen wrote its four-year destination strategy called *The End of Tourism as We Know It*, the goal was to create harmony between residents and visitors. It also was a cunning PR stunt that signalled the time to stop and take a moment to reposition tourism. The strategy changed the tone of the conversation, brought new stakeholders to the table and bought the destination time to develop a new direction.
CASE STUDIES

EXAMPLES FROM NEW ZEALAND AND THE BAY OF PLENTY
Kaikoura Kayaks has become New Zealand’s first operator certified by Friend of the Sea, earning the designation of “sustainable dolphin and whale watching.”

The company’s kayak and paddleboard tours follow principles of conduct that minimise the impact on marine life. These principles include keeping a minimum approach distance, assisting with scientific data collection and banning single-use plastics on board.

Image source: kaikourakayaks.nz

Whirinaki Te Pua-a-Tāne Conservation Park was protected from logging following a campaign by conservation groups in the 1970s and 80s.

Today, the park continues to preserve this significant Māori spiritual site that is also a thriving habitat for local wildlife. Maintained by community rangers, the park is starting to welcome more tourism into the area, which includes the development of a 16 km mountain biking trail. Values of New Zealanders are shifting in favour of parks like this one. Another notable example is the North Island’s Whanganui River, which, in a world-first announcement, was granted the legal rights of a human being in 2017.

Image credit: Neil Hutton

Whakatāne residents have developed a new tourism experience called the Kiwi Wandering Trail.

Neil Hutton and Whakatāne Kiwi Trust, a local conversation group that has succeeded in regenerating the area’s kiwi bird population, led the effort to provide something new for people visiting “The Kiwi Capital of the World.” The Wandering Trail features ten life-size bronze kiwi statues. The trail leads people on a walk through the centre of town. This community-led project supports both conservation and tourism objectives while providing something for both tourists and residents to enjoy.

Image credit: Neil Hutton
CASE STUDIES

EXAMPLES FROM THE WORLD
Gijón, a coastal city in northern Spain, is a leading example of how cities can coordinate tourism planning with the needs of residents to create a sustainable future.

Many European cities face overcrowding as a result of mass tourism and unchecked growth. City leaders in Gijón, meanwhile, recognized the need to plan proactively for a sustainable model for tourism.

The City of Gijón’s Responsible Tourism Policy is the guiding document for “a model of sustainable development favourable to the environment, cultural diversity and social responsibility.” Gijón’s leaders have identified the risks that unmanaged growth poses to local quality of life and they see that tourism is part of the holistic picture of the city. The policy acknowledges that tourism has positive and negative consequences. Equally important, it explicitly seeks a balance between “the integration of visitors and respect for and coexistence alongside the city’s residents.”

The approach that Gijón takes is in contrast to business as usual among tourism planners, which primarily focuses on growth in visitor numbers and revenue. Instead, the city has shown its commitment to the flourishing of the environment, local culture and society. A marketing campaign publicized the city’s commitment to responsible tourism, but the proof is in the experiences on the ground and the high local quality of life.

In 2013, UNESCO and the Responsible Tourism Institute (RTI) gave Gijón the designation of “Biosphere World Urban Destination” in recognition of the city’s efforts.
GERMANY’S TREEHOUSE HOTELS

Treehouse hotel operators help travellers reconnect with nature through meaningful tourism experiences.

Tourism can improve the physical and mental well-being of people who seek a break from urban life. Some city dwellers use their vacations to reconnect with the natural environment.

Research shows the health benefits of proximity to natural landscapes and trees. One study from Japan shows that a walk in the forest (a practice called forest bathing or shinrin-yoku) can reduce blood pressure, heart rates, cortisol levels and other measures related to stress. Evidence also shows that people recover from mental fatigue faster in the presence of natural elements than in a constructed environment.

Travellers who see the benefits of nature-based retreats and experiences are creating a perfect opportunity for eco-friendly tourism operations. In Germany, for example, there are about 17 treehouse hotels, according to a survey by the International University of Applied Sciences. These hotels are built as single units attached to sturdy trees or as larger buildings surrounded by the forest. This isn’t camping, though — the hotels have luxury amenities. Structures are made of local wood and other materials and meet high sustainability standards.

Tree hotel operators are clearly passionate about trees and forests. However, their inexperience with business, hospitality and construction proved to be a major obstacle, which makes their success all the more impressive. Overall, Germany’s treehouse hotels have a higher-than-average occupancy rate. Guests report positive, refreshing experiences. They return to the city with a renewed sense of connection to nature and, potentially, a better understanding of their role as stewards of the environment.
Tourism objectives blend with ecological and community goals in Montana.

The caretakers of Montana American Prairie Reserve (APR) have a mission to “create the largest nature reserve in the continental United States, a refuge for people and wildlife preserved forever as part of America’s heritage.” They seek to connect a series of public lands through the strategic purchase of private lands to create a habitat large enough to support a fully functioning ecosystem for all species that live there. The reserve needs about 5,000 square miles (about 8,000 square kilometres) to reach that goal.

APR’s long-term conservation plans are ambitious. The organisation says that prairies are one of the world’s most threatened biomes. Staff members manage the land and its restoration. They also provide opportunities for people to get involved as volunteers. People donate their time and money towards restoring the prairie habitat and removing unneeded infrastructure.

APR also welcomes visitors who are looking for a vacation. The organisation helps people plan trips using many tools typically provided by destination marketing organisations, including maps and lists of recommended accommodations. Specific activities like night sky viewing, driving tours and hunting emphasize a connection with the land and the environment.

Like many organisations, the reserve reports on its positive economic impact, but it also measures success by its partnerships. For example, its Wild Sky program collaborates with local ranchers who are willing to allow wildlife to roam through their lands alongside cattle. APR also nurtures relationships with local Native American communities to find common ecological goals.