



Destination Management Plan 2020 - 2030

AUGUST 2021

WHANGANUI
ALL YOU NEED (AND THEN SOME)

This report was prepared by TRC Tourism for Whanganui and Partners for the development and implementation of the Whanganui Destination Management Plan.

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Acknowledgement

Engā iwi, e ngā reo, e ngā karangaranga maha o tātou, tēnei te mihi atu ki a koutou katoa.

Etika ana hei poropororaki i a rātou mā. Me pēnei ake te kōrero, tukuna rātou kia okioki i runga te moenga roa.

Āpiti hono, tātai hono, rātou ngā mate katoa ki a rātou,
Āpiti hono tātou hono, tātou te hunga ora ki a tātou mā,
Tēnā koutou katoa

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Contents

<u>Executive Summary</u>	<u>iii</u>
<u>Destination Whanganui</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>The Visitor Economy</u>	<u>11</u>
<u>Community Aspirations</u>	<u>19</u>
<u>Experience Opportunities</u>	<u>24</u>
<u>Vision, Goal and target markets</u>	<u>30</u>
<u>Strategic Priorities</u>	<u>33</u>
<u>STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1</u>	<u>35</u>
<u>STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2</u>	<u>37</u>
<u>STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3</u>	<u>39</u>
<u>STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4</u>	<u>42</u>
<u>STRATEGIC PRIORITY 5</u>	<u>45</u>
<u>STRATEGIC PRIORITY 6</u>	<u>47</u>

<u>APPENDICES</u>	<u>50</u>
<u>Appendix A. Relevant Strategic and Policy Planning</u>	<u>51</u>
<u>Appendix B. Online Community Consultation</u>	<u>54</u>
<u>Appendix C. Whanganui Visitor Economy</u>	<u>55</u>
<u>Appendix D. Events</u>	<u>58</u>
<u>Appendix E. Accommodation</u>	<u>59</u>
<u>Appendix F. Awareness of the destination</u>	<u>60</u>
<u>Appendix G. Marketing and Brand</u>	<u>61</u>
<u>Appendix H. Port Redevelopment</u>	<u>64</u>



Executive Summary

Whanganui as a destination has significant tourism opportunity in front of it. Tourism comprises 4% of the regional GDP with visitor spend of \$126M in the year to July 2020. While there has been good growth since 2014, spend has been largely static recently. This destination management plan provides a road map for sustainable growth in the future and to realise the potential for tourism to become a larger economic, environmental, cultural and social contributor to the region.

There is a strong consensus that the focus of tourism for the Whanganui region should be to place the river at the heart of visitor experiences. This emphasis is of highest priority for the region. Recent settlement of the treaty claim and passage of the Te Awa Tupua Act provides an opportunity for co-creation and management of new tourism enterprises and assets. There needs to be new iconic experiences that can be developed to achieve international recognition that will be synonymous with Whanganui. An example could be the proposed eco – tourism hub that is being considered. In addition, investment in a range of authentic Māori cultural experiences will enhance the identity of the region. This will require a stocktake of existing experiences and development of new product that will meet identified gaps.

The destination can also continue to build on its other unique tourism assets. Heritage and Arts are the two that have high levels of recognition with existing visitors and are opportunities that present many current experiences, activities and events to work with.

Whanganui is predominantly a domestic visitor destination with the majority of visitors coming from nearby regions. Events do drive wider visitation, but overall, the regional tourism offer is not well known. As a destination, it needs to raise its awareness through increasing its marketing in all channels. Widening its reach to other regions beyond the neighbouring ones will increase the size and diversity of the potential visitor market. There has been an increase in media engagement and public relations around activities and events within the region. This should continue to be strengthened to further raise awareness and to improve the consideration of Whanganui as a destination.

To raise the profile of tourism for visitors and within the region, leadership and management needs to be enhanced with adequate resources and increased information and knowledge being used by industry. Growing the tourism experience requires additional investment within the Regional Tourism Organisation beyond the status quo, especially to support product development.

Tourism operators should make the most of opportunities to develop their capability and improve the quality of the tourism experience. Existing cooperative arrangements with neighbouring regions can be further developed to deliver these opportunities. This includes a higher level of commitment and involvement in national initiatives such as Qualmark and the Tourism Sustainability Commitment. Quality environmental performance is an attribute of tourism that is increasingly demanded by visitors and communities alike.

Whanganui is rich in built and physical assets for visitors. The most pressing need is an improvement in the quality and quantity of visitor accommodation. Complementing the physical assets with an improved array of experiences for current domestic visitors will encourage them to do more and stay longer.

Whanganui has the potential to have a strong and growing tourism economy with a unified vision and high quality experiences that establish a powerful reputation for all visitors. Successful implementation of this destination management plan will increase visitor satisfaction and spend, improve word of mouth comments and opinions, and grow pride in what Whanganui has to offer both the resident and visitor.

Destination Management Planning

Effective and sustainable Destination Management involves the management of all aspects of the destination that contributes to a visitor's experience.

In order to ensure that this is done correctly, the plan must take into account the expectations of a range of stakeholders. This includes:

- Visitors
- Māori/iwi/hapū/whanau
- Tourism industry
- The wider business community
- Local residents
- Central Government
- Local Government.

Destination Management is designed to identify a pathway forward for a destination toward a common and agreed upon vision that will achieve a range of social, cultural, environment and economic benefits for the destination as a whole.

It is intended to give greater certainty to the private sector that enables long term investment as well as indicating to the public sector what facilities and services are needed to ensure a sustainable tourism sector into the future.

The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment have identified 16 components that need to be consider when developing a destination management plan. All 16 of these have been addressed within the development of this plan.

Figure 1 represents the 16 components in a honeycomb visual. These can be group into four specific categories

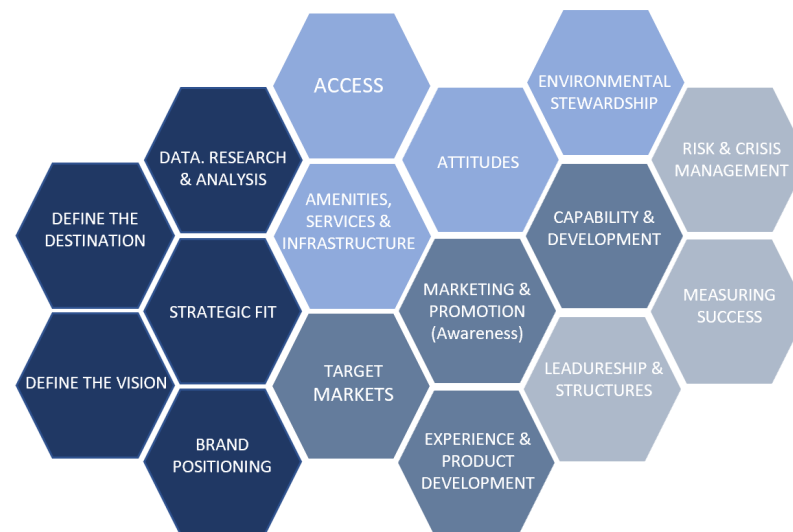
DARK BLUE: Components that help to articulate the current situation for the destination – this includes benchmarking and current positioning.

LIGHT BLUE: Components that are required for growth and effective destination management.

DARK GREY: Components that are enablers for growth and effective destination management.

LIGHT GREY: Components that will enable the destination to succeed and monitor that success into the future.

Figure 1. MBIE Destination Management Components



Implementation of this destination management plan is an ongoing process. It requires multistakeholder support, commitment and responsibilities to be carried out across a wide spectrum of issues that are needed to ensure tourism continues to deliver sustainable benefits for the region.

Destination Whanganui

Defining the Region

The Physical Region

The Whanganui region stretches between the mountains and the Tasman Sea with Mount Ruapehu dominating its northern boundary, the Matemateaonga Range to the north-west, and the Whangehu River in the east. The north-west of the region is home to New Zealand's largest remaining area of conifer-broadleaf forest within the 742 km² Whanganui National Park.

The region is defined by the Whanganui River, New Zealand longest navigable river. It bisects the district as it carves its way through the rugged landscape that has supported and sustained Māori communities for many generations. In recognition of this relationship, the Te Awa Tupua Act was passed in 2017 which gives recognition to the River and all its physical and metaphysical elements—is an indivisible, living whole, and henceforth possesses “all the rights, powers, duties, and liabilities” of a legal person. This recognition has an important bearing on the future direction of tourism in the district.

Between the mountains and the coast are significant areas of farmland that are devoted to dairying and other agricultural activities.

The coastline is rugged, but there is an active port at the mouth of the Whanganui River which provides a connection with the Tasman Sea.



Regional Population

Whanganui's population is currently estimated at 48,100,¹ and expected to continue growing, albeit at a slow rate. Most residents live in the central urban area at the mouth of the Whanganui River, or in small rural communities spread around the district. The population is generally older than the national average and comprises a higher Māori percentage and a lower Pasifika proportion than the national average.

The Regional Economy

Whanganui's core economic strengths lie in agriculture and food processing, medium-scale specialist manufacturing, logistics and tourism. The largest contributor of GDP in the district is manufacturing at over 12% of the economy as shown in Figure 1.² The tourism economy while a comparatively small economic contributor, has shown strong growth in recent years consistent with national trends of high levels of international and domestic visitor spend.

The unemployment rate is currently at 4.8 percent.³

The Region's Tourism Assets

The Whanganui region from a tourism perspective, comprises two major components. First, Whanganui City, one of New Zealand's oldest cities has strong heritage buildings, a compact CBD and a range of street art installations that highlight the region's strong arts and creative sector. With a multitude of different art galleries and museums within the region the urban environment provides visitors with a diversity of heritage and cultural experiences. In addition, there are riverboats on the Whanganui River that reflect a different time and place and provide an opportunity for visitors to engage with the river in a way that allows them to look back in time and see the river through a historic lens.

¹ Statistics New Zealand population estimated 2019

² <https://webrear.mbie.govt.nz/theme/gdp-by-industry/map/barchart/2017/wanganui>

The wider tourism context revolves around the river and the entire catchment. The second major asset, the Whanganui River, extends beyond the Whanganui region with the upper reaches of the river being in the Ruapehu District. However, the tourism experiences span the two districts and consist of the Mountain to Sea cycle trail, the Bridge to Nowhere, canoe and jet boat trips on the upper river and a wide variety of cultural and historic experiences that utilise marae and other assets around the river.

To the west is the coastal boundary of the district that offer swimming and surfing for visitors and a west coast beach experience.

Figure 2. Whanganui Regional GDP by Industry Sector⁴

Agribusiness	
GDP contribution	% of total GDP
\$149.7M	7.5%
Creative Industries	
GDP	% of total GDP
\$40.1M	2.0%
Education & Training	
GDP	% of total GDP
\$113.4M	5.7%
Logistics	
GDP	% of total GDP
\$74.2M	3.70%
Manufacturing	
GDP	% of total GDP
\$244.8M	12.3%
Tourism	
GDP	% of total GDP
\$71.3M	3.6.0%

³ Whanganui and Partners, year ending March 2020

⁴ Whanganui and Partners, year ending March 2020



Land Managers and Regulatory Agencies

Whanganui Regional Tourism

Whanganui and Partners is the economic development agency for Whanganui and is responsible for marketing the region as a destination. It works closely with Whanganui Māori Regional Tourism Organisation which advocates on behalf of the Māori tourism sector in the region and other iwi organisations to ensure the interests of mana whenua are considered on tourism matters in the region. Whanganui and Partners sits within the Whanganui District Council.

Whanganui District Council

Whanganui District Council is the regulatory and policy unit of local government with the land management and economic development responsibilities for the district.

Horizons – Regional Council

Horizons Regional Council is the regional level agency with responsibilities for the wider region that includes Whanganui District. These responsibilities include managing the region's natural resources, leading regional land transport planning, contracting passenger transport services and coordinating our region's response to natural disasters. In addition, Horizons is responsible for preparing economic development strategies for the wider region.

Nga Tangata Tiaki⁵

Nga Tangata Tiaki is kaitiaki of the Whanganui River and has a number of roles to play in the planning, management and governance of the River. It was founded in 2014 for the purpose of the settlement of the Whanganui River claims. The subsequent legislation, Te Awa Tupua (Whanganui River Claims Settlement Act) 2017 sets out the details of the settlement between the Crown and the claimants. Of particular note is the status of Ta Awa Tupua as a legal person with all the rights, powers and duties as a legal person. The Act also establishes Te Pou Tupua to be the human face of Te Awa Tupua. In addition, a strategy group is established, Te Kopuka with responsibilities to develop and strategy for Te Awa Tupua, Te Heke Ngahuru, with an objective of addressing and advancing the health and well-being of Te Awa Tupua.

Whanganui Māori Regional Tourism Organisation

The Whanganui Māori Regional Tourism organisation was founded in 2003 and was one of the first Māori Regional Tourism Organisations. It operates with a formal mandate from five iwi on the river and it has a catchment that reaches from the mountains to the sea and includes operators from the Ruapehu district. It's role is to advocate on behalf of Māori tourism operators and work with other industry partners to help grow Māori tourism industry and drive benefits back into the community.

Department of Conservation

The Department of Conservation is an important central government agency in the Whanganui district. It has management and regulatory responsibilities for the Whanganui National Park and co-management role with the Tongariro National Park (which is the headwaters of the Whanganui River). As a result, it is responsible for a major portion of the land within the district and administers visitor activity and recreational activities in this area.

⁵ <https://www.ngatangatatiaki.co.nz/> Detailed information on the history and roles and responsibilities of Nga Tangata Tiaki in the governance of the Whanganui River can be found here.

Strategic Context

National Tourism Strategic Context

Tourism 2025 and Beyond

Tourism 2025 and Beyond is the New Zealand tourism industry's growth framework. It has been created by industry, for industry and keeps the tourism industry's focus firmly on growing our value to individuals, communities, the environment, the economy and our visitors. Its development is led by Tourism Industry Aotearoa. It has a vision of 'Growing a sustainable tourism industry that benefits New Zealanders.'

Tourism 2025 *and Beyond* has four key goals – one for each of the main framework elements. The strategy takes a balanced scorecard perspective to:

- Make sure our visitors are having great experiences
- Make sure our communities are happy with and benefitting from tourism
- Make sure our environment benefits from tourism
- Bring economic success.

New Zealand-Aotearoa Government Tourism Strategy

The Government wants tourism growth to be productive, sustainable and inclusive. The goals of the New Zealand-Aotearoa Government Tourism Strategy are:

- Tourism supports thriving and sustainable regions
- Tourism sector productivity improves
- New Zealand-Aotearoa delivers exceptional visitor experiences
- Tourism protects, restores and champions New Zealand-Aotearoa's natural environment, culture and historic heritage
- New Zealanders' lives are improved by tourism.

In May 2019 Government and Tourism Industry Aotearoa have agreed to five key priorities for immediate action in the coming year. These are:

- Sustainable growth
- Improved data and insight
- Building the tourism workforce
- Destination management and planning
- Carbon and climate change.

While there has been no revision of these immediate priorities, these priorities provide clear guidance for regions on the current important issues to deliver on the national tourism strategic goals.

New Zealand Tourism Sustainability Commitment

As part of implementing the tourism strategies, Tourism Industry Aotearoa has developed the Tourism Sustainability Commitment to enable tourism operators to voluntarily work towards achieving the four pillars of sustainability.

The Tourism Sustainability Commitment has been developed by industry for industry to progress the vision of New Zealand leading the world in sustainable tourism. It comprises 12 commitments across the four pillars of environment, community, visitor, and economy that individual businesses sign up to. Over 1400 tourism businesses have already committed to this programme which is becoming an industry standard. Commitment requires:

- Having a sustainability plan with goals for all 12 Commitments
- Making measurable progress towards the goals
- Embedding sustainability into business systems, processes, and plans
- Providing an annual update on progress
- Telling communities and visitors about our sustainability efforts.

As a result, this programme enables the tourism industry and individual operators to demonstrate their performance to potential visitors as well as the community within which the industry operates.

Regional Strategies

A regional growth study was commissioned by Horizons Regional Council which identified several opportunities and key enablers to help realise economic prosperity in the wider region. Subsequently an implementation programme from this study, known as “Accelerate25” was established. This implementation plan includes a chapter on tourism and includes opportunities that are to be taken up by the respective agencies in the wider region. These are outlined in Appendix A.

Horizons Regional Council also has a Regional Land Transport Strategy 2015-2025 that recognises the importance of tourism to the regional economy and makes provision for a range of investments to support tourism development.

District Plans and Strategies

Whanganui District Council is the entity responsible for land management in the district. This includes the land use control functions under the Resource Management Act 1991, administration of the district plan and other regulatory functions related to land development.

The Council is also responsible for promoting economic development within the district and has recently completed its economic development strategy. The Leading Edge Strategy presents a vision for Whanganui as a progressive and exciting place to live, work and visit; an energised, united and thriving district offering abundant opportunities for everyone. Whanganui and Partners are responsible for the delivery of this strategy. The detailed objectives are described in Appendix A.

Other strategies relevant to tourism

- Whanganui Long Term Plan
- Whanganui Transport Activity Management Plan
- Making Whanganui Visible: Regeneration strategy for the Whanganui town centre (2016).

Access

Whanganui District is highly dependent on efficient and effective transport routes to the district. Road connections are vital as the vast majority of visitors arrive to Whanganui by road. The geographic location of Whanganui means that it is not on the “main trunk” route of State Highway 1. As such it suffers from reduced traffic and is in a similar situation to many towns in the North Island that are off the central high- volume traffic route. New Plymouth and Gisborne are examples of towns in a similar situation. EV stations are being progressively installed around the country, but as at June 2021 there are only 2 charging stations located in Whanganui. Other stations are located nearby outside the region on main roads. It is expected however that the network density will increase as demand increases. New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA) has a goal of one EV charger for every 75km of National Highway.

Aviation links support business travel but are unlikely to strengthen to provide strong tourism linkages. Events do provide an opportunity to increase services to meet specific peak demands.

Rail remains freight only and will continue to do so given the small populations and comparatively high costs of leisure rail travel.

The Whanganui region is largely a rural region with a small population outside Whanganui city and the smaller townships. This population distribution means that the internet and mobile services are limited across the region. There is fibre available in Whanganui and ADSL and other internet options in the smaller towns. Mobile phone coverage follows a similar pattern with limited coverage across large parts of the region. There still incomplete coverage along State Highway 4, with the other principal visitor traffic routes being serviced with 4G.



Whanganui connects:

- to the North with State Highway 4
- to the west Whanganui connects to Taranaki with State Highway 3
- to the south Whanganui connects to Manawatu and Wellington by State Highway 3

SH3 carries around 4500 AADT (Average Annual Daily Traffic), with SH4 carrying 2,200 AADT. To the south SH3 carries around 6000 AADT. Whereas SH1 carries around 15000 AADT.

To date, EV charging facilities are limited within the region, with Whanganui being the only location of charging facilities¹. Additional facilities are located at Marton, Waverly and Ohakune.



There are currently no sea links to Whanganui for visitors. The port is a freight and commercial port that services Whanganui and its hinterland.



Fibre and ADSL internet are available in Whanganui and regional towns. Outside the main urban population wireless and satellite internet is either available or proposed in future. Mobile coverage is incomplete with parts of State Highway 4 lacking coverage. Much of the region beyond Whanganui does not have coverage, including Whanganui National Park and much of the Whanganui River catchment.



The rail connections of Whanganui and the rest of the country are limited to freight services. Passenger connections were discontinued over 60 years ago. There is a daily freight train that connects the city and port to the main trunk line and the wider New Zealand network.



Whanganui is currently serviced by Air Chathams with connections to Auckland. It has been flying this route since the withdrawal of Air New Zealand in August 2016. The airline currently flies a Saab340 turboprop with 36 seats and an ATR72 on the route and is currently flying 26 connections a week. Prior to Covid-19 it was flying 36 flights a week between Whanganui and Auckland.

The main passenger load comprises business travel, estimated at around 70%. There is a small amount of inbound tourism traffic and a small outbound tourism traffic to meet international connections. There is very limited freight on the route and the vast majority of demand is met by passenger demand.

Events generally see a small pick-up in air traffic, but at present there is steady demand throughout the year driven by the business and economic cycles rather than tourism traffic.

The Visitor Economy

New Zealand



OVERSEAS VISITOR ARRIVALS
3.9 Million pa
PRE COVID-19

Visitor arrivals came to a standstill in March 2020 as New Zealand shut its borders to international travel due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL TO NEW ZEALAND

Looks set to remain low or some time due to the ongoing pandemic, with the most promising light on the horizon, a travel 'bubble' with Australia due to open from 19th April 2021.



KEY MARKETS YE FEBRUARY 2020



Australia
1,536,000



USA
365,000



China
408,000



United Kingdom
233,000



TOTAL SPEND

up 2.4%
to \$41.9 billion



DOMESTIC TOURISM



worth 24.4 billion pa
(up 2.7%)
pre COVID-19

GUEST NIGHTS



were on the
increase



BOOST IN POST LOCK DOWN DOMESTIC TRAVEL TO NEW ZEALAND'S REGIONS

changing alert levels on a region by region basis has ongoing effects



CURRENTLY STRONG DEMAND FOR DOMESTIC HOLIDAYS

driven by a desire to support the economy and to see more of New Zealand,

both in the long and short-term



Approximately **43%** of New Zealanders that intend to holiday within next 12 months

intend to spend more than they typically would on domestic holidays



With over half planning on a weekend trip:

- more than 60% a short or week-long trip,
- 55% visit a place they haven't been to before



Long-term outlook for the domestic travel market is encouraging, as indicated by the number of New Zealanders' intent to continue to

52%

choose domestic holidays over international



(SOURCES: Statistics New Zealand (February 2020); Statistics New Zealand, year ended March 2019; Tourism New Zealand (July 2020), Kantar Domestic Sentiment Study)

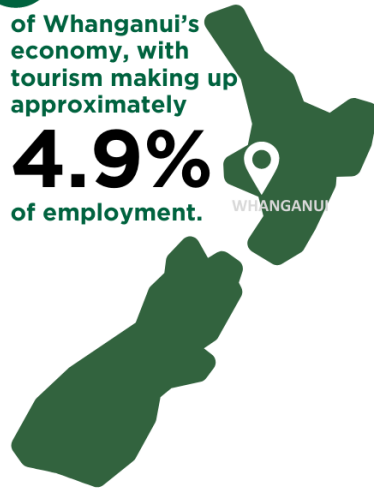
Whanganui

**TOURISM GDP
MAKES UP 3.6%**

\$ \$71.3 million

of Whanganui's
economy, with
tourism making up
approximately

4.9%
of employment.



TOTAL VISITOR SPEND

Whanganui District

YE AUGUST 2020

\$126 MILLION



**FLAT
VISITOR
SPEND**

over the past
couple of years

GROWTH in recent
times, most notably
since the relaxing of
COVID-19 alert levels.



COMMERCIAL ACCOMMODATION - GUESTS STAY

in Whanganui September 2018 to
September 2019

109,686 ↑ up 1% on the
previous year

with an average stay of 1.92 NIGHTS

COMMERCIAL ACCOMMODATION - NIGHTS



210,777 approx
up 4.6% on the previous year

↑ **UP 167,793 NIGHTS**
5.5% by domestic
visitors

42,984 NIGHTS ↑ **UP 1.4%**
by international visitors

COMMERCIAL ACCOMMODATION - DOMESTIC STAY

217,400 (June20 - May 21)

(SOURCES: Whanganui and Partners, Infometrics, year ending March 2019; MBIE Monthly Regional Tourism Estimates; Statistics New Zealand Commercial Accommodation Monitor, Year Ending September 2019 (N.b. latest reported data before the survey went on hold; Accommodation Data Programme))

Visitor Profile

Current visitor mix and perceptions

- The main visitor markets to Whanganui are the surrounding regions of Manawatu, Taranaki, and Wellington, followed by Auckland (respectively)⁶
- The top three associations New Zealanders make with Whanganui are visiting gardens, parks and reserves, history & heritage and walking & hiking. These associations are not as strong compared to other regions in New Zealand offering these experiences. The associations were much stronger for those who had recently visited. Of the New Zealanders who have heard of Whanganui but never visited (46%), 80% don't know much about what they can do in the region⁷
- Australians consider Whanganui for its Māori and Pacific culture along with a range of outdoor and cultural experiences such as scenic sightseeing, walking and hiking, history and heritage, nature, wildlife & ecotourism experiences, and gardens, parks and reserves. Similar to the domestic market, this recognition is not as strong compared to other regions in New Zealand offering these experiences. However, it was stronger for those who had recently visited. Almost half of the Australian market has never heard of Whanganui, and 42% of Australians have heard of Whanganui but have never visited. Of those who have heard about Whanganui, 79% don't know much about what to do in the region.⁸

Visitor Demand

The Domestic Growth Insight Tool⁹ identified 764,142 potential trips for visitors to Whanganui who are interested and have the means to get to Whanganui. Of those, 583,279 are overnight trips, with 180,863 being day trips. This reflects the origin of potential visitors – with Auckland as a major source, and then Wellington, followed by Manawatu and Taranaki as two source regions within ready driving distance.

The model also identified the vast majority (83%) would arrive by road, a strong skew towards older travellers (50-64 31%, 65+ 24%), couples with no kids, with an interest in shopping at farmers/ local food markets and eating at local restaurants, undertaking a short walk in the wilderness, visiting gardens or a flower show, and bathing in hot pools.

Of the overnight stayers, the majority would stay with friends and family (46%) or motel accommodation (46%). Key reasons for the trip include VFR (over 50%), to relax or escape from daily stress, to discover new things or places, and to undertake an adventure or new challenge. General gatherings and special events are also a trigger for travel. Most visitors make the decision to travel between one and three months before travel, with the region being the initial decision followed by activities being the motivator. The activities however are generally decided on before travel, implying that the reason to travel is a key step in the decision to visit Whanganui. Accommodation costs are a significant barrier to travel for around one third of potential visitors and therefore deals on accommodation are an important motivator for travel.

⁶ MBIE (2015) Regional Tourism Summary – Whanganui

⁷ Angus and Associates (2018), Visitor Insights Programme – Visitor Perceptions, Whanganui Year Ending June 2018

⁸ Angus and Associates (2018), Visitor Insights Programme – Visitor Perceptions, Whanganui Year Ending June 2018

⁹ Domestic Growth Insight Tool updated February 2021 n.b. this is based on interest levels of people who expressed an interest in Whanganui, and in the respective activity but not necessarily the respective activity undertaken in Whanganui.



In terms of specific activities potential overnight visitors to Whanganui indicated they would be interested in visiting, the New Zealand Visitor Activity Forecast Tool (modelled on 2018 data)¹⁰ indicates:

- 39,500 domestic and 37,800 international overnight visitors with an interest in visiting museums and galleries
- 36,400 domestic and 41,600 international overnight visitors with an interest in visiting a National Park
- 25,700 domestic, and 16,800 international overnight visitors with an interest to visit a garden or flower show
- 24,300 domestic and 29,000 international overnight visitors with an interest in visiting a place of significance to Māori
- Three in four New Zealanders took an overnight domestic trip within the past 12 months, of which 37 percent said their main reason for the trip was to visit friends and family. The average (median) length of trip was three nights, with two in five New Zealanders spending 1-2 nights away from home. Approximately nine percent travelled to attend an event held by someone else (e.g., a sporting event, concert or festival)¹¹
- Post Covid-19, there is evidence that New Zealanders will, at least in the short term, continue to spend more and travel more domestically than in previous years.¹² Whanganui, as a largely domestic destination has the opportunity to capitalise in these intentions to carry out more domestic travel.

¹⁰ MBIE, FreshInfo NZ Visitor Activity Forecast Tool (2019), n.b. this is based on interest levels of people who expressed an interest in Whanganui, and in the respective activity but not necessarily the respective activity undertaken in Whanganui.

¹¹ Angus and Associates (Year Ending June 2020) New Zealand Domestic Visitor Satisfaction

Resident use of recreation facilities also used for tourism

Resident surveys show that Whanganui's beaches, premier parks and the river walkway are the most used community recreation facilities also used by visitors, and the Saturday market is a popular attraction.¹³

¹² Tony Alexander (8 June 2021) Tony's View: Spending Plans Survey Results

¹³ <https://www.whanganui.govt.nz/files/assets/public/research/whanganui-district-council-cvs-final-report-2019.pdf>

Visitor Trends

Since the border closed in March 2020, research on New Zealanders travel desires by Tourism New Zealand identified kiwis are keen to discover new places where they can have fun but also relax & refresh, experience good food and visit iconic landmarks. The top things New Zealanders are looking for are very similar across various segments, with some minor differences:

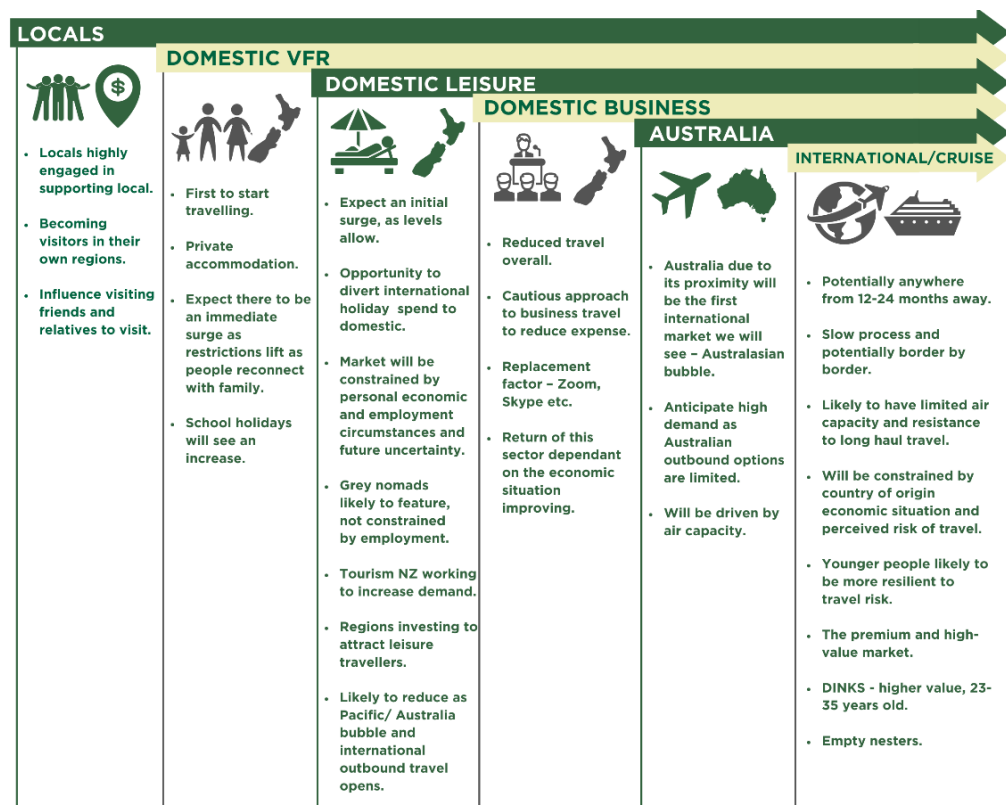
- Families have a stronger focus on activities for children and family-friendly locations
- Food & beverage experiences are more important to empty-nesters
- New migrants have a stronger interest in outdoor adventure activities and nightlife.¹⁴

The 2020 global pandemic has had an impact on future travel trends and travel decisions with more consideration for:

- a stronger desire for visitors to have more meaningful interactions with locals and their environment
- seeking out genuine engagement, to learn something and to contribute back
- a regenerative experience
- a need to feel safe and confident that their health is a priority
- the desire for smaller, more intimate experiences over large scale operations
- a longer lead time as all options and alternatives are explored
- even more swayed by the recommendation of others at the point of decision making
- travel outside of traditional seasons and destinations that are closer to home
- constrained transport options – visitors rethinking options available to them
- a more purposeful and measured approach to destination choice.

The following chart considers the potential recovery scenario for geographic visitor markets post Covid-19.

Figure 3. Scenario Planning Visitor Markets



¹⁴ Tourism New Zealand (July 2020), Kantar Domestic Sentiment Study

Visitor assets, attractions and activities

The district has a rich and long history that is reflected in the built assets that are available and used for tourism purposes.

The Whanganui council manages three venues that are available for events on behalf of the community. These are:

- Cooks Gardens, stadium, function centre and velodrome with facilities that can cater for up to 230 guests. The stadium and associated facilities host Rugby and Athletics and other sporting events
- Royal Whanganui Opera House - an historic building that can host 830 patrons for live theatre events
- Whanganui War Memorial Centre - largest of the venues in Whanganui with a capacity of 1300 for conferencing, 1600 for concerts and 600 for banquets.

All these facilities are conveniently located close to the city centre and are well connected to accommodation and other facilities. Other private conferencing and meeting facilities are also available in the City associated with accommodation providers and the Whanganui Racecourse.

Attractions in Whanganui largely draw on its long history and heritage buildings that have been established over the last century, including:

- Durie Hill Tunnel elevator
- St Pauls Church Putiki
- Bushy Park homestead and Sanctuary
- Whanganui Regional Museum
- Sarjeant Gallery.

The region itself also offers a wide range of natural environments and man-made locations that are highly attractive and on the “must-see” list for Whanganui. These include the heritage attractions above, as well as other more nature-based attractions and activities, including:

- Virginia Lake
- Castlecliff Beach
- Kai Iwi and South Beach
- Whanganui River
- Mountains to Sea Cycle Trail
- Bason Botanic Gardens
- Kowhai Park – Children’s Playground
- Winter Gardens.

There are plans currently being developed for an eco-tourism/ cultural hub on the river.

Only a few tour operators include Whanganui National Park in their itineraries.

There are only four tourism businesses in Whanganui that are Qualmark accredited. No suppliers in Whanganui are allied members of the Tourism Export Council of New Zealand (TECNZ).

Events

Whanganui has several established events based on sports and arts/culture/heritage. These are mostly held during the summer period. See Appendix D for full list. Participation at these events includes local residents, but most visitors are from outside the region – mainly Auckland and Wellington.

Accommodation

Whanganui has two hotels, 15 motels/apartments, three backpackers, and 4 holiday parks supplying commercial accommodation.¹⁵ Occupancy rates for motels averaged 80%, and backpackers 49%.¹⁶ Annual average capacity¹⁷ for hotels was 40,880, stay units, motels/apartments 110,098, backpackers 42,660, and holiday parks 145,981. Two properties have a Qualmark rating (one motel, one hotel).

Occupancy is higher during the summer season; however, the peak months for domestic and international visitors are not the same (January, February and April for domestic visitors and December, February and March for International visitors). Capacity has been reduced recently with one property sold to Whanganui Holdings Ltd for their use as international student accommodation. In addition, other accommodation properties have also changed their use from short to long term stay providers, resulting in further reductions in visitor accommodation options.

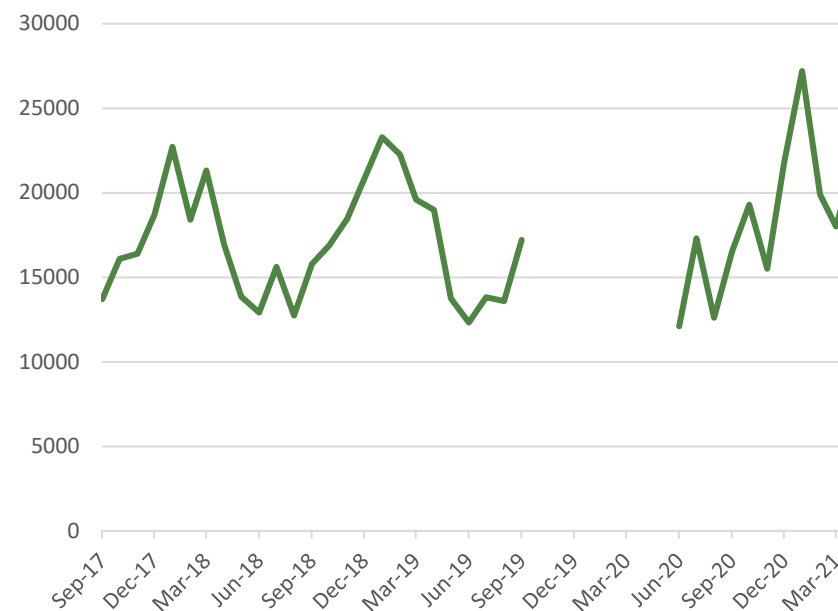
AirBnB lists 110 stays (for 2 guests), and 52 independent places for Whanganui and Bookabach list 25 properties. The peer-to-peer market has been growing significantly over recent years and is expected to continue. Guest nights for the Whanganui region have shown a consistent increase (albeit with a seasonal pattern) prior to Covid-19 affecting tourism nationally. Subsequent visitor nights in the region have shown strong growth, especially as the data in figure 4 from June 2020 solely covers domestic stays.¹⁸

¹⁵ Statistics New Zealand Commercial Accommodation Monitor, Year Ending September 2019 and Accommodation Data Programme information 2020.

¹⁶ <https://freshinfo.shinyapps.io/ADPReporting/> For the year ended June 2021.

¹⁷ Calculated as stay units multiplied by number of days

Figure 4. Accommodation Data for Whanganui Region – Whanganui total guest nights



¹⁸ Figure 4 is a combination of two data series from September 2017 to September 2019 data is sourced from Statistics New Zealand Accommodation Surveys. 2020 data is sourced from the Accommodation Data Programme and uses different methodology. The data should be treated as indicative rather than absolute values. From September 2019 to June 2020 there was no data collection of accommodation statistics.



Visitor satisfaction

Travellers ratings of Whanganui attractions, experiences and holiday houses are generally high, receiving an average rating of 4.5 out of 5 (excellent) on TripAdvisor. These included artists' studios, parks and gardens, Whanganui National Park and River, museums, historic sites, and beaches. Nearly all of the attractions rated are free of charge.¹⁹

Whanganui Brand Story and Identity

A brand story and identity for Whanganui has been developed by Whanganui and Partners in consultation with iwi and the community:²⁰

"Whanganui is a place where New Zealand's longest navigable river weaves through a diverse landscape linking mountains, rainforest, city and sea, and where community has thrived for hundreds of years. Where history is preserved in our architecture and today's stories are expressed by hundreds of local artists. Where a diverse community embraces newcomers and where a compact size and central location ensure connections are easily made and grow stronger every day. We welcome everyone to come by and discover where our freedom will take you." ²¹

Whanganui has five brand pillars:

- Te Awa - our hero
- Tutura - Incredibly real
- Aheitanga - Easily accessible
- Kanorau - Open and diverse
- Tino Auaha - Vibrantly creative.

The brand personality is based on: Authentic, Friendly, Creative, Connected & Open-minded, and a brand logo of 'Whanganui, all you need (and then some)' was developed in 2016 but has not been refreshed subsequent to the brand story development.

¹⁹ Based on minimum of 29 and up to 403 individual ratings, mostly with an average rating of 4.5/5

A style guide and templates have been developed for use by businesses to encourage use of the story, brand pillars, logos, and available hero images in their own marketing communications.

While the Brand Story is strongly connected to the physical attributes of the region and links with the community and its attitudes, this does not seem to flow through to the brand logo. A closer alignment between the Brand Story and logo would improve recognition and ownership of both marketing components. Consideration of reworking the logo and strapline is warranted based on the strong desire to place the river at the centre of the visitor proposition and the pillars that have been developed supporting the brand story

Whanganui online presence

The Discover Whanganui website is a portal that covers the wider aspects of visit, live, business, education and conference for Whanganui as a destination. It includes specific sections that are focussed on tourism and also events in the region. New Zealand.com - the major portal for tourism for New Zealand portrays the river and national park as the hero but includes limited attraction and tours listings.

Top Instagram posts for #Whanganui are arts-based images, and landscape focused images for #Whanganui River. Discoverwhanganuinz is the image library link for Discover Whanganui.

²⁰ Four workshops were held across the tourism, business, education and creative sectors combined with consultation with W&P board and staff and Whanganui Maori entities, hapū and runanga to develop the brand story for the region.

²¹ Short version

Community Aspirations

This plan considers perspectives of iwi, stakeholders, and the communities of Whanganui to ensure it reflects their aspirations and expectations for tourism and helps articulate the vision and future priorities and opportunities for the region.

Early in the consultation process, it became clear that there were strong commonalities with the aspirations many had for the Whanganui region, that are shared between stakeholders, community, and iwi.



Aspirations

The Whanganui River – the heart of the destination

Aspirations with regard to the importance of the river, and the need to ensure its preservation and protection were shared among many of those who were consulted. Many made the point that as the entity tasked with the guardianship under Te Awa Tupua, the most appropriate organisation to be tasked with this responsibility is Ngā Tangata Tiaki. It is a strong aspiration for iwi for this entity to manage many aspects of the river including access for commercial reasons. Although this falls out of the scope of this plan, it was a strong aspiration and one that should be included when implementing some of the recommendation made.

It became very clear that the community view the river as the hero experience for the region, and that it should be managed in a way that limits any negative effects from river users and tourism as possible, whilst maximising the potential to derive economic return for Māori, and strong positive community benefit.

Many visitors to the region will see the river and look for opportunities to engage with it. Providing a wider range of on water activities on the river was a shared aspiration among many, but it came with the caveat that this needed to be managed appropriately. It was also noted by some that there needed to be more rubbish bins and ablution facilities along the River Road.

Increased interpretive signage in the region and along the River Road was highlighted as an opportunity to assist with the appropriate story telling in the region. It was considered that local iwi should be involved in the development of any signage created and determining the story to be told at each point.





More Māori Tourism Experiences

Māori history and connection are integral to the destination, but visitors who choose Whanganui as a holiday destination have limited opportunities to engage with authentic Māori experiences. There is a sentiment that there was a lack of accessible Māori cultural tourism throughout the region and a common thread of aspiration through the community that resource be given to building a stronger Māori tourism proposition within the region to make the destination more compelling.

Heritage Rich Destination

Whanganui has many heritage assets within the region. The town currently celebrates its heritage buildings with a number of events, the main street has hanging flower baskets and heritage facades that make no apology for the time when they were constructed, fairy lights in the trees, beautification programmes (that have been recognised with awards), and riverboats on the Whanganui River itself.

These assets are well known in the community but there were indications that some were unsure how this unique proposition was promoted by the region, and if that message was appealing for the destination or not. The community wanted the city to be perceived as vibrant and creative and were worried that a strong heritage message detracted from that.

Art and Creative Sector

There are a number of galleries and museums within the Whanganui region celebrating the diverse creativity of the region. This sector is strong within its own right, from hobbyists to renowned artists, and there was a strong shared aspiration for this sector to form a strong part of the compelling reason for people to visit Whanganui.

A Destination for Wellbeing

The aspiration for Whanganui to be recognised as a destination that people can visit to rejuvenate and one that supports opportunities for encouraging wellbeing was a strong thread throughout the consultation. There were suggestions around this aspiration that pointed to experience opportunities and promoting outdoor experiences within the natural environment.

Inclusivity formed part of this aspiration, with some sectors in the community wanting the region to be known for its diversity and one that welcomed visitors from all walks of life to embrace the essence of the destination.

Collaboration

There was a recognition that more effort in developing collaborative relationships throughout the region would be beneficial and integral to achieving future success. There was a desire for more frequent opportunities to engage with each other, and across different sectors in the community.

Community consultation to gather resident aspirations on the future of the destination were gathered through an online survey. A reflection of the common themes was captured to inform this plan.

Resource Management

Comprehensive implementation of this destination management plan will require investment by government and industry.

Whanganui as a region will be subject to multiple natural hazards and other risks affecting tourism and visitors. It is vital that the RTO is an integral part of the planning for potential events in the region.

General risks that have occurred in the past include flooding and volcanic eruptions. The longer- term risks associated with climate change also need to be considered. In addition, there are the tourism specific issues such as accidents, road closures, pandemics and other related events.

To ensure resilience as a destination co-ordination and preparedness plans need to be in place.



Whanganui River

*“Ko au te Awa, ko
te Awa ko au”*



Experience Opportunities

For visitors to understand the essence of People, Place and Stories, they must have ways to engage and interact with all four destination pillars. Through paid and unpaid experiences, moving through the destination, meeting the people and experiencing the natural and cultural assets of Whanganui provide various opportunities for visitors to build that engagement.

Exploring what makes this region unique and defining the experiences that provide the opportunity for true, authentic engagement for visitors with people, place, and stories, we get an idea of what is possible for the visitor industry in Whanganui into the future.

There is a need for experiences within the region that provide authentic opportunities for visitors to engage with the people and the place and hear the stories and interpretation that connect the two. For Whanganui, the opportunity lies through clear positioning of the region for its core strength and the development of strong, immersive experiences that give visitors a chance to engage with local people, and cross sector collaborations that lead to stronger packaging opportunities.



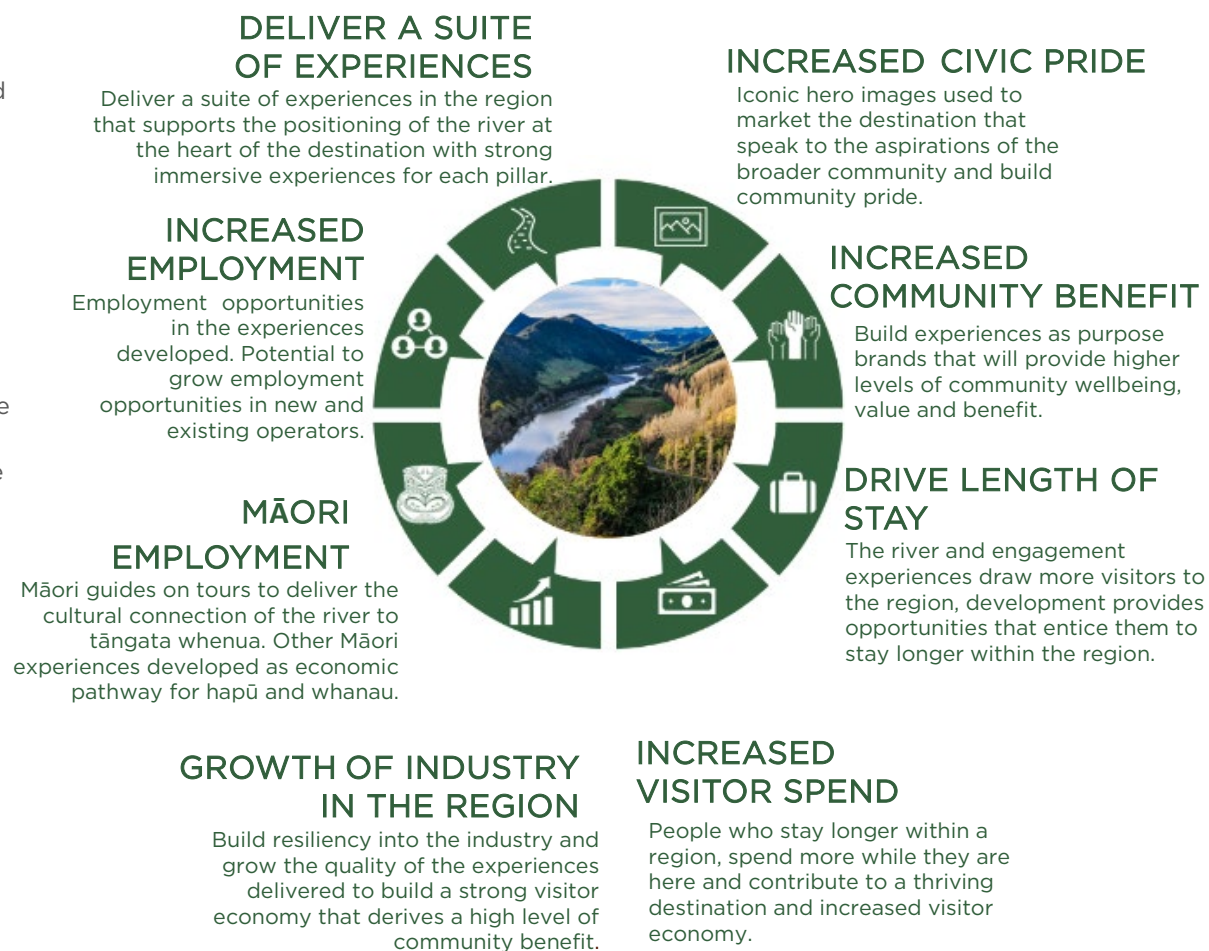
POSITIONING THE REGION

The Whanganui River

The Whanganui River defines the destination with its physical presence throughout the district and as the historical lifeblood of occupation, commerce, and tourism of the district. However, its role in a tourism context is not as strong. The story and identity of the river should sit at the heart of how the destination is represented and be acknowledged as the hero for the destination. This will be core to positioning the destination. This positioning will be underpinned by increasing the capability and capacity of current visitor activities and through linking product and new experience development. The river is acknowledged as the hero in the regional brand story, and further benefit will be seen for the destination for this brand story to be further socialised and used as a marketing tool.

The river is acknowledged by the community as the heart of the destination and should be used not only as the main marketing image to draw visitors to the region, but also to develop economic pathways forward for the local communities. Development should be planned and implemented in true partnership with iwi, and strong immersive experiences delivered that drive a range of community benefits as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5. COMMUNITY BENEFITS OF POSITIONING REGION WITH THE RIVER AT ITS HEART



Tourism pillars

With the Whanganui River underpinning growth in awareness of the destination, there are a number of core pillars for tourism that are also strengths in the available tourism offering that will support growth in the sector.

The focus on the Whanganui River in the future will build on the existing portfolio of attractions and experiences of heritage, arts and crafts and nature-based activities that have been the mainstay for tourism visitors to the region.

Immersive experiences are required that offer visitors the chance to engage in activities that showcase the unique aspects of a destination.

The following four pillars were identified through consultation and provide the base for experience development that will enable a greater connection between people and place.





On Water Tourism

While the river is at the heart of the region, there is limited visitor opportunity to experience it from the water over the entire length of the river. Creating a hero experience that defines the river will be essential. This should be a commissionable product on the river with compelling story-telling that helps visitors engage with the river in a unique way that they thoroughly enjoy and share with the world.

The most accessible and highly patronised activity currently is the Paddle Steamer Waimarie and the MV Wairua. Rowing and other recreational sporting activities are also carried out on the lower reaches of the river, but additional paid tourism activities on the lower river such as boat/kayak and standup paddleboard hire would improve connection and exposure.

Māori Tourism

There are existing opportunities to engage with local Māori through experiences on the river and through organised marae stays, however there is an opportunity to develop a stronger offering for visitors to the region both on the Whanganui River Road and in the town itself. Tourism can be an economic enabler for Māori communities, and the development of smaller more intimate immersive experiences would give visitors a deeper understanding of the destination. It would also provide employment and business development opportunities for iwi and create economic pathways for whānau.



Creative Arts

The Arts and Creative community are an increasingly important part of the identity of Whanganui. Creative industries are estimated to contribute around \$41M or 2.3% of Whanganui's GDP. It is especially recognised for galleries and glass art. There are over 30 glass artists within the district. The recent Whanganui Walls Street Art Festival and the Artists Open Studio week, generally held in March, are significant events that expose the artwork to a wide visitor audience.

Offering the chance for visitors to get to know artists in the region and undertake masterclass type experiences would offer an immersive look into a different sector of the community. There is a wide range of artists in Whanganui from renowned to hobbyists, each could have a stronger role to play for visitors to the region.

Wellbeing

The aspiration for the region to become known for its opportunity for visitors to rejuvenate and reconnect with mind, body and soul was clearly identified. There are opportunities that exist around experiences that provide visitors a chance to increase their sense of wellbeing within Whanganui. There are obvious Māori tourism connections through Rongoa and holistic natural healing therapies as well as soft adventure opportunities within the natural environment.

ENABLERS

Delivering high quality experiences that deliver on the positioning will need to be underpinned by industry and iwi working together. Two significant enablers will need to be encouraged:

Packaging Opportunities

Collaborative packaging provides the opportunity to increase length of stay and charge a premium that becomes more commission friendly. Providing visitors with a range of packaged itineraries that range from half day to multi-day options and stretch across the tourism sectors of EAT, STAY, DO and also helps visitors plan and book their visit.

Cross Sector Collaborations

Whanganui has a wide range of strengths that could be packaged together to create visitor experiences. Collaboration between tourism and the creative sector is a natural offering. Connecting the experience with an artist or gallery that could offer the opportunity for the visitor to create something within a defined period would provide an authentic immersive experience for visitors, for example.



Vision, Goal and target markets

Vision

A thriving destination with Whanganui River at its heart.

Goal

Build a visitor industry that will achieve sustainable growth and employment with strong community connections and benefits.



Target markets

The target segments for Whanganui are based on Whanganui community's input about their 'ideal' visitor (aligned with the values and wants of the community), market research insights (based on DGiT²², domestic perceptions, domestic sentiments survey (refer section 2) and TNZ international market demand insights), the current and predicted tourism environment, and the existing and potential visitor experience available in Whanganui. The domestic trends identified for Whanganui show a growing demand for nature-based experiences and local food, arts and crafts and short walk opportunities. Over time it is expected that the "Explore Nature" segment will become a more important target market for the region.

The target segments are described in the table below. There is opportunity to grow and increase length of stay from existing markets - the surrounding regions of Taranaki, Manawatu, and Wellington, in addition to Auckland. Internationally the focus is Australia, followed by the United Kingdom, Europe, and the United States.

Figure 6. Developing target market segments



²² Domestic Growth Insight Tool, updated February 2021.

Table 1. Target segments for Whanganui

SEGMENT/ DESCRIPTION	EXPERIENCE DRIVERS RELEVANT TO WHANGANUI	DEMOGRAPHICS	CURRENT INTEREST IN WHANGANUI COMPARED WITH OTHER NZ DESTINATIONS
DOMESTIC			
Explore Nature – exploring the outdoors as a way to relax	Whanganui River activities, walking/hiking, cycle trails, National Park	All ages Couples with no kids 12% of domestic market	Low
Family and Friends – going to visit friends and family (including students)	Short walks, local food, farmers markets, garden or flower show, concerts/events	50+ 20% of domestic market	Low
Shopping – travel with friends, catch up at the destination. Escape the routine of everyday lives	Shopping for local food and arts and craft, farmers market, garden visit, short walk in natural or urban area	50+ 9% of domestic market	Low
Knowledge Seeking – discover and learn about history and heritage	Whanganui River, Museums, art galleries, exhibitions, historic buildings/sites, National Park, parks and gardens, places significant to Māori, music performance, walking, special events	Couples no kids All ages 5% of domestic market	Medium
Treat Myself – indulge or reward themselves with partner, some non-strenuous activities	Local food, arts/ cultural events, river jet boating	Predominately younger couples with no kids 11% of domestic market	Low
Sports and Events – watching/participating in sport/cultural event with friends and family	Sporting, arts and cultural events	Active Boomers and Independent Professionals (couples with no kids) 3% of domestic market	Low
Family Fun – bond as a family doing things together	Whanganui currently lacks some of the key drivers for this segment but does have secondary experiences for them such as beach, parks, cycle trail, walks	Couples 30-49 with school age kids or younger 15% of domestic market	Low
Relaxation and Wellbeing – getaway and do little. A break from busy lives.	Short walks in wilderness areas, scenic trip, shopping at farmers markets	Broad age with older age predominating, no kids 15% of domestic market	Low
Wine, Food, Scenery – indulge and reward with fine food and wine with seeing amazing scenery.	Wine/food festival, shopping, scenic river cruise, farmers markets, eat at top restaurants	50+ couples with no kids 10% of domestic market	Low
INTERNATIONAL			
International Leisure travellers	Whanganui National Park and river by boat or kayak; Culture and history; Local food; hiking MTB trips – hub and spoke from a central point MTB trips – Mountains to Sea	Free and Independent travellers Aust/UK/Europe/US	Low

Strategic Priorities

One of the unifying responses during the development of this Destination Management Plan was for the river to be at the centre of the Region's positioning. This perspective was articulated by many interest groups and individuals throughout the consultation process on the future of tourism for the region.

The Te Awa Tupua legislation, that accords the Whanganui River the status and rights of a person, has yet to be carried through into many aspects of management and policy within Whanganui. Incorporating this aspiration into the destination management plan is seen as one way of giving effect to the legislation. The River, by taking its rightful place in the economic future of the region would enhance its physical and spiritual presence.

Tourism as an important component of both the economic and social fabric of Whanganui and has a vital part to play in ensuring that the region thrives and delivers on its long-term ambition. The following strategic priorities provide a roadmap to achieving the goal of:

Build toward a positive future that will inspire sustainable growth and employment with a strong sense of community benefit

To achieve this goal six strategic priorities have been identified that will provide appropriate direction to the tourism sector, regulatory agencies and others with an interest in ensuring a vibrant and connected tourism economy.



GOAL

Build a visitor industry that will achieve sustainable growth and employment with strong community connections and benefits.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

❶ Position the river at the heart of the visitor experience and identity of the region.	❷ Increase resources to strengthen tourism leadership and build management capability within the region.	❸ Strengthen the awareness of Whanganui as a visitor destination.	❹ Invest in the development of a range of Māori cultural experiences.	❺ Lift the quality of the tourism experience and incorporate sustainable tourism principles.	❻ Drive capability building with strong product development across all sectors.
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ACTIONS

Each strategy has a suite of actions identified that aim to increase leadership, visitation, average length of stay, yield, customer satisfaction, and repeat/ referral visitation throughout the year and into the future.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1

Position the river at the heart of visitor experiences and identity of the region.

For the visitor to fully engage with the region, greater emphasis is required to be placed on the river, its history, its role now and in the future and how it can be experienced as a visitor. Connection to and with the river is vital to ensure that the identity of the region aligns with the future aspiration of the community.



RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

	STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1		KEY ACTIONS	RATIONALE	SUCCESS METRIC/KPI'S
High Priority	1.1	Develop or promote iconic river experiences that are internationally known.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Either develop new experiences or support existing providers to move into the “must do” space for Whanganui. • Provide marketing and business support to establish the Whanganui River with compelling reasons to visit. • Develop a river corridor strategy in partnership with Nga Tangata Tiaki that achieves a consistent identity and brand alignment for the river experiences. • Provide support to ensure businesses align with the brand values – in delivery and promotion. • Use these hero experiences to promote the destination. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In building the river as the centre of the tourism experience there needs to be more accessible, better quality and a greater diversity of experiences that draw on the river at its core for visitors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and promote 4 products that are Qualmark accredited and meet visitor expectation by 2023. • The experiences have strong imagery that is used to market the unique value proposition of the region. • Measure growth and satisfaction of Whanganui River experiences with a 2021/2 benchmark and achieve a 20% increase by 2025
High Priority	1.2	Support Iwi playing a more defined role in the management of the river.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nga Tangata Tiaki has a legislative mandate as a result of the Treaty settlement and are the kaitiaki of the river. Their role should be integral to the future development of tourism assets that relate to the river. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visitors are seeking authentic experiences and deeper engagement – iwi are able to achieve this, either through direct delivery or sanctioning proposed experiences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iwi feel supported in their aspiration for management of the river, and can work with W&P and other key stakeholders to ensure the integrity of the river is held. • Iwi engagement satisfaction is measured with a 2022 baseline and consistent annual increases are achieved
Med Priority	1.3	Develop an urban/city hub that recognises the role of the river in the development of the region.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposed cultural hub should be focussed on connecting the city to the river – this is the scenario of ensuring that visitors and residents alike become more connected to the river on an everyday basis. • Develop an experience that is active and dynamic and engages visitors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At present one can visit the CBD or the region from the West or East via SH3 and not recognise the role of the river at all. • Strong visual wayfinding signage at the entrance to the city could address this aspect. • There needs to be an awareness for all visitors to the destination of the role of the river in the region. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a seamless connection between river and city that visitors can enjoy and feel connected both to the icon of the region, and the amenities of the city.
Low Priority	1.4	Review current initiatives to enhance linkages between the city and the river.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure current CBD developments consider the connection with the river. • New initiatives such as Drews Ave redevelopment and other connections include ways to drive visitation to the river. • New initiatives such as cultural hub, factor in the priority of connecting the river to the community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through physical developments and redevelopments factor in the aspirational objective to connect to the river as a priority. • Making the connection between city and river easy and obvious for visitors will build recognition of the value and importance of the river. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visitors recognise the connection between the CBD and the river • Visitor foot traffic on Drews Ave, Taupo Quay and Moutoa Gardens is increased. • Consumer spend in the Lower blocks of Victoria Ave and the arts precinct increases by 2% year on year

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2

Increase resources to strengthen tourism leadership and management capability within the region.

For the visitor economy to grow within the region, there needs to be strong leadership and governance within the region to help achieve the desired change. There are a diversity of models that exist in New Zealand on regional tourism destination management and marketing. Whanganui needs to determine the role that tourism will play in the social and economic future of the region and design an appropriate structure and resource it sufficiently to deliver.



RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2			KEY ACTIONS	RATIONALE	SUCCESS METRIC
High Priority	2.1	Resource Whanganui and Partners to the appropriate level and with the right structure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase the level of resource within the Visitor Industries team.• Structure the team appropriately to deliver on the management, marketing and development of the destination.• Focus on collaborative approaches within the region and between neighbouring regions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In order to ensure the RTO can function and deliver on Destination Marketing, Destination Management and Destination Development additional resources are required to go beyond maintenance mode.• Collaboration with others enables leverage of limited resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Whanganui and Partners Visitor Industries team increased by 2 FTE to deliver on the pillars of destination management and development <i>by 2023</i>
High Priority	2.2	Leadership within the tourism industry.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop an industry led Association membership that can provide coordination and support across the sector, and act as a conduit between industry and Whanganui and Partners. An association that is self-sustaining and is capable of driving initiatives to improve performance of tourism in the region.• Support the Whanganui Māori Regional Tourism Organisation (WMRTO) to play an active role in industry coordination, knowledge sharing and capability building.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There appears to be limited collaboration by industry for industry. A strong voice for the industry and an associated collaborative approach is recommended. This could be initially a collaborative communications and meeting process that could then evolve into a fully-fledged member organisation.• Marketing and destination management should be a partnership between the RTO and the industry.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• An independent industry association is created and supported broadly by industry to provide advocacy for their members and be a conduit into the industry for Whanganui and Partners.• Broad membership with strong engagement with industry led association that initiates its own events and connection with Whanganui and Partners.• 80% of tourism companies belong to the industry association by 2025• WMRTO engaged in industry association and representing Maori operators.
Med Priority	2.3	Data and information demand analysis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Subscribe to existing tourism research omnibuses or contract occasional tailored research to better understand market demand for Whanganui.• Once KPI's are developed commission data collection to monitor and report on progress.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There appears to be a lack of information about the visitor and their market demand specific to Whanganui. Quality information is important for refining target segments, matching with product development, monitoring progress and setting strategic priorities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Data, analytics and insight research is readily available and assists in the development of ongoing workstreams. Knowledge is reported to operators quarterly• Build a suite of KPI's that are informed by quality data sets.• Resident and Visitor satisfaction survey benchmarks established by 2022 and repeat surveys completed in 2024 and two yearly

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3

Strengthen the awareness of Whanganui as a visitor destination.

There is very little awareness of Whanganui as a destination outside of the immediate surrounding regions. While Whanganui is a comparatively “low visitation” destination with a high domestic proportion of visitors, it has relatively good access to key visitor source markets. The destination has a variety of assets that are in demand and are currently underutilised. With an appropriate level of focused marketing and other investments, the destination could significantly raise its profile and hence visitation.

There is significant opportunity to increase awareness and desire to visit Whanganui, and an opportunity to convert a proportion of day trippers into weekend/ short stay trips (by using events for example).



RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

	STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3	KEY ACTIONS	RATIONALE	SUCCESS METRIC
High Priority	3.1	<p>Drive destination awareness through targeted and comprehensive marketing campaigns with strong destination positioning based on the river (Priority 1).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update the Destination Marketing Strategy once the revised DGiT segments become available and develop a marketing action plan aligned to each segment. • Push the values proposition of the destination to drive greater awareness of why people should visit Whanganui. • Place a stronger focus on building awareness and promoting the icons. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is very low awareness of Whanganui as a visitor destination and there are differences between domestic and Australian perceptions. • While building awareness can be expensive, there are simpler and more targeted approaches that also deliver. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish benchmark of visitor awareness of Whanganui as a destination, • Marketing to incorporate hero images of the river linked with the destination by 2022. • Increased awareness levels recorded every two years as monitored with target markets.
High Priority	3.2	<p>Develop an active programme of media and PR engagement on all activities, events and changes where there are opportunities to place Whanganui in front of potential audiences.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build strong relationships with media outlets, print, TV, radio and social that can be used to promote stories. • Establish a “tourism lens” on all Council related activities – noting that brand awareness is not a call to action. • For long term developments, build a clear communication and events strategy for target audiences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilising traditional media and social media influencers to market the destination can help to increase awareness of the destination. • Ensure best business practice examples are used when dealing with media. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme of media, social influencer, content and PR activity is planned and deliver with strong impact and reach metrics in a financial year. • Council work with W&P to incorporate tourism aspects in PR activities
Med Priority	3.3	<p>Build community pride</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a ‘residents as ambassadors’ programme/campaign to drive VFR. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VFR is a driver across several segments as a reason to visit. Local residents, and students studying in Whanganui, can have a significant influence on getting friends and family to visit, but also in what they do. Encouraging local residents and students to get out and experience Whanganui and become ambassadors for Whanganui should be a priority. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whanganui businesses are connected with the brand, aware of the destination strengths and use the branding and messaging in their own marketing and collateral to celebrate that connection. • Ambassador’s programme established by 2022. • Community satisfaction is measured and reported every two years.
Med Priority	3.4	<p>Continue to maintain the website with current content that meets visitor needs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present a strong web presence with a call to action to drive customers from awareness through conversion. • Update images that place the intended target market in the environment. • Develop themed itineraries to assist with travel planning and encourage length of stay. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although the current website is informative and functions well, it does not create an aspirational position or inspire people to visit. • Updating the website to align with the brand and the positioning will provide a stronger selling proposition. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report performance benchmarks in 2022. • Achieve year on year growth in page views and time on site.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3			KEY ACTIONS	RATIONALE	SUCCESS METRIC
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage consumers to book direct and not through a third-party website to limit the amount of commission paid. • Maintain a current events calendar and ongoing current social presence. 		
Med Priority	3.5	Work with neighbour RTOs to promote cross regional products and experiences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue working with Ruapehu to develop and promote Mountains to Sea cycle trail. • Continue working with Venture Taranaki and Central Economic Development Agency, Manawatu, to develop and promote the coastal arts trail and other experiences that are offered across the three regions. • Joint promotion of the Coastal Arts trail across all regions • Look into the potential for touring routes through neighbouring regions that will showcase the unique immersive experiences throughout the region. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative relationships with neighbouring RTOs to drive inter-regional visits. • Develop joint collateral and itineraries for niche target audiences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing support of partner relationships and benefits recognised by stakeholders in satisfaction surveys every two years from 2022.
Low Priority	3.6	Reconfirm the relevance of the Brand Story.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reconfirm if the Brand Story is still relevant considering the recommendations made, and community aspirations identified through the DMP process. • Consider reworking the logo and strapline to better reflect the strong desire from the community to place the river at the centre of the visitor proposition and pillars that have been developed to support the brand story, • Ensure that the industry and stakeholder community groups are engaged actively. • Review and update as required the Destination Whanganui marketing proposition to better represent the Brand Story. • Educate industry on how to use the Brand Story in their own advertising to create continuity of messaging. • Support destination marketing being carried out by other operators. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A strong Brand Story can support positioning the destination and provide a compelling reason to visit. A closer alignment between the Brand Story and logo would improve recognition and ownership of both marketing components. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Brand Story is socialised and used by many to help promote their experiences and the destination as a whole. • Brand Story is recognised and used by tourism operators and other related businesses – uptake and application measured in 2022 with increases achieved by two yearly measurement.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4

Invest in the development of a range of Māori cultural experiences.

There is a distinct lack of Māori Tourism experiences within the region, and a clear aspiration from the broader community that there be more. There are strong cultural stories that can and should be told in this region, and there are many Māori in the community who can tell them. There is a desire for iwi in the region to embrace tourism as an economic enabler for their communities, but there is hesitation too.



RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

	STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4		KEY ACTIONS	RATIONALE	SUCCESS METRIC
High Priority	4.1	Assess the current Māori cultural experiences within Whanganui.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand what is currently available, its quality in order to identify the opportunities within the region - a specific product audit. A Māori experience assessment that captures the region and the entire Whanganui River Road is recommended. Develop additional eco-cultural assets consistent with WMRT0 Intergenerational Strategy 2020-2040 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The region has a strong Māori story that should be told, not just around the river but throughout the region. Visitors to Whanganui want to engage with local Māori to hear the histories. Investing in the development of local Māori to explore business opportunities in tourism would be mutually beneficial. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experience assessment framework agreed with Whanganui Maori Regional Tourism Organisation Experience assessment of all Maori cultural experiences completed by June 2022 to agreed framework.
High Priority	4.2	Engage with Te Awa Tupua about future aspirations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connect tourism opportunities with those of Te Awa Tupua through Ngā Tangata Tiaki and explore co-creation opportunities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Future product extensions or development opportunities can be explored once future aspirations for Te Awa Tupua are identified. Provides education for locals into the Māori history of the region, employment and business development opportunities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborative and mutually beneficial relationship with Ngā Tangata Tiaki is formed with regular updates and touchpoints.
Med Priority	4.3	Identify the gaps in the assessment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Once you have the gaps identified, work with local Māori who have tourism aspirations to ascertain if there are product extension opportunities to fill those gaps. Identify if there are whanau who are not currently in the tourism sector but are open to the potential for working within the sector. Provide business development opportunities to assist with start-up opportunities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing opportunities to create employment for local Māori who can deliver the stories that bring the region to life. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gap analysis completed by end 2022 and potential product extension or development opportunities identified.
Med Priority	4.4	Explore opportunities of Whanganui being a destination for wellbeing, and as a place to rejuvenate and reconnect.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore opportunities for wellbeing experiences within Whanganui 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whanganui can become known as a destination of wellbeing through experiences such as Rongoā, foraging for kai, the connection between the land and health of the people. Linkage of Māori experience, natural resources and wellness is a latent unique opportunity for the region. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A suite of wellbeing experience opportunities identified and development plans determined by 2023.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4			KEY ACTIONS	RATIONALE	SUCCESS METRIC
Med Priority	4.5	Assess the demand for Māori cultural experiences and the channels for these audiences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake customer research about the demand for cultural product, both from existing consumers (the more demand assessment) and potential visitors. • Develop a deep understanding of marketing and engagement channels for Māori cultural product. • Have product and information that residents can use in a word of mouth context. • Implement the Whanganui River Road Tourism Route (initially interpretive signage with the opportunity for other products and experiences such as marae stays, etc to be included in the future). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding the demand for Māori Tourism experiences assists with the development of experiences and identifying opportunities that exist within the sector. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research completed into the demand for Māori cultural tourism in the region and fed into the development plans for Māori tourism experiences in the region.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 5

Lift the quality of the tourism experience in Whanganui and incorporate sustainable tourism principles.

Quality tourism experiences are essential to increase the level of visitor satisfaction in the region and assist in driving yield from the visitor economy. Ensuring that experiences are meeting or exceeding the expectations of visitors is essential in achieving increased visitor satisfaction levels.

Ensuring that tourism has little to no impact on the cultural and natural assets of the area was a strong shared aspiration recognised through the consultation process of this DMP. Working with current operators to ensure they incorporate sustainable tourism principles within their current experiences, and new operators place these principles at the heart of their product development will help to achieve that aspiration and provide a sense of purpose to the industry and the destination.



Recommended actions

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 5		KEY ACTIONS	RATIONALE	SUCCESS METRICS
High Priority	5.1	Assist current operators and new experiences to undertake the Qualmark accreditation process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with operators to assist in building the number of Qualmark accredited businesses within the region. • Qualmark is one mechanism that can improve business performance and also demonstrate to visitors the quality of the offer. • Qualmark is an opportunity to increase operator presence on New Zealand.com and also a gateway to international markets and marketing. • Qualmark through the accreditation process offers business development advice – this has the potential to improve business performance as well as visitor experience. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in the number of Qualmark accredited experiences and accommodation within the region to 10% by 2023 and 25% by 2025. • Visitor survey monitoring and reporting on barriers to quality experiences within the region by 2022.
High Priority	5.2	Sustainable tourism commitment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stocktake existing commitments and facilitate increased commitment by Whanganui operators. • Build commitment to the Tiaki Promise with operators across the district. • Encourage sign up to the TIA Sustainable Tourism Commitment. • There is a strong aspiration throughout the community to ensure that the impact of tourism upon the natural and cultural assets in the region is limited. • Determining the impact of tourism on the natural assets within the region should be done in order to determine the right level of mitigation that might be needed. • Demonstrating environmental performance of the sector to the community will build a greater social licence for the sector. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25% of Whanganui tourism businesses have adopted and identified the frameworks around new Zealand's Sustainable Tourism Commitment and working toward achieving the aspirations within it by 2024. • Sustainable Tourism Commitment and Tiaki Promise sign ups by 25% of operators by 2024 and the progress is monitored and reported.
Med Priority	5.3	Enhance wayfinding and interpretation for visitors across the district.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve wayfinding for visitors to travel to the CBD from key gateway state highways. • Increase the quality and quantity of interpretation along the River Road route. • Improve overall touring route opportunities and information in all channels like the Whanganui River Road Guide. • Visitors need to be aware of the experiences on offer. Reaching the destination is vital to ensuring satisfaction. • Simple actions make visitation easy. • Greater information builds greater understanding of the destination and hence this enables higher quality of word of mouth about the destination. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increases wayfinding signage throughout the region, created in partnership with iwi. Implementation achieved by 2023 • Wayfinding is not recorded as a satisfaction issue by visitors in 2024 survey

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 6

Drive capability building with strong product development across all sectors.

Building awareness and creating compelling marketing promises to drive visitors into the region will only reap the economic and employment rewards sought if there are experiences that visitors can engage with. Driving into the region it is clear that the river is a stunning natural asset and people want to engage with it, they need to have the opportunity to meet the people, learn more about the place, and have a memorable experience while they do it. A comprehensive product development plan based on experiences that enhance the unique selling points of a destination is recommended.



RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 6			KEY ACTIONS	RATIONALE	SUCCESS METRIC
High Priority	6.1	Drive a program for product development of a range of iconic and immersive experiences within the region.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the iconic or hero experience on the river. It should include access to the people and the stories that bring the landscapes to life. Identify existing immersive experiences within the region and work with them to upscale the delivery of the experience. Immersive experiences that would provide an opportunity for greater engagement for visitors but are not currently offered should be identified. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The region needs an iconic hero experience that can be strongly marketed, and easily identifiable with the region. Immersive experiences that already have recognition, like glass blowing, should be upscaled and developed to deliver a high level of visitor satisfaction. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experiences within the region provide the opportunity to engage with locals. Future development and ongoing business support provided for top quartile of current and new operators by 2023.
High Priority	6.2	Build events capability in the district.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilise professional conference/event organisers for key events and sectors. Develop training programme for events volunteers and maintain register of skilled volunteers. Facilitate shared learning/information exchange/training for event organisers who operate within the region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To develop events a professional approach to all aspects of events is required. Increasingly risks and health and safety and traffic aspects require specialised expertise. Drive extended length of stay and spend. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A calendar of events is established by 2022 for events throughout the year that appeal to a broad range of visitors and delivered to a high standard. Events calendar widely accessible to visitors and usage increases year on year from benchmark established in 2022.
High Priority	6.3	Build business cases for new products and assets that the destination requires.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accommodation of high quality (4-5 star) is in short supply – develop the information base and business case to support private investment. Establish an investment prospectus for future private investments such as hotel accommodation opportunities. Evaluate other product development requirements. Have quality information to assist potential investors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private investment needs to be encouraged to invest in tourism in Whanganui. To achieve this quality information that enables decisions to be made is a role that Whanganui and Partners can play. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information base and business case to support private investment for high quality accommodation is completed by end of 2022.
Med Priority	6.4	Continue to work with neighbour RTOs to develop closer relationships on strategic issues and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to partner with Taranaki, Manawatu and Ruapehu to develop a calendar of skills development and share costs. Develop a process of shared information exchange at a governance level – possibly joint 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each region has a limited number of operators that are likely to participate. Shared costs enable delivery that will 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A calendar of industry development workstreams created in partnership with neighbouring RTOs.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 6			KEY ACTIONS	RATIONALE	SUCCESS METRIC
		execute joint activities at an operational level such as operator training activities.	meetings or engagement at a CEO level to other RTO governance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> meet the needs while expanding opportunities. Better understanding at a governance level will result in improved integration across regional boundaries on common issues. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scheduled annual or biannual joint governance meeting is agreed by end of 2021. First joint meeting held in 2022.
Med Priority	6.5	Establish a more active facilities promotion programme with events, arts and sports bodies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertake targeted marketing of events facilities with potential users. Undertake famil and/or hosting programme for PCO's and event organisers. Develop collateral with industry to promote Conference and Incentives opportunities within the district. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business development KPI's should be developed to ensure a greater ROI on the existing assets. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drive extended length of stay and spend. Better utilisation of facilities year-round. Benchmarks established 2022. Collateral developed in 2022 and joint participation in Meetings Conference and programme of sales calls in 2022 and annually afterwards
Med Priority	6.6	Incentivise and leverage events that deliver on overall brand positioning and aspiration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop transparent funding policy for events. Fund leverage opportunities for the destination. Support leverage and funding options with industry partners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only by incentivising changes in focus and timing will events and conferences shift their focus. Minor incentives can deliver significant economic benefits. Drive extended length of stay and spend. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funds allocated to events maximise awareness and preference of Whanganui as a visitor destination. Growth in measured visitor awareness of the destination and associated events.
Low Priority	6.7	Support the development of new quality infrastructure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide comprehensive visitor infrastructure to Upokongaro and throughout the wider Whanganui River corridor to meet increased cycling and walking demand due to the new cycling/walking bridge and associated routes. Explore visitor demand and experience improvements as a result of new infrastructure such as Drews & Victoria Avenue redevelopment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comprehensive consideration of visitor experience improvements during design of infrastructure developments and redevelopments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement with tourism sector on major infrastructure investments in the region. Growth in visitor satisfaction of infrastructure and assets of the region as measured by 2022 survey and biennially thereafter. Visitor infrastructure requirements incorporated into Long Term Plan submission every 3 years from 2024 onwards

APPENDICES

Appendix A.	Relevant Strategic and Policy Planning Frameworks
Appendix B.	Online Community Consultation
Appendix C.	Whanganui Visitor Economy
Appendix D.	Events
Appendix E.	Commercial Accommodation
Appendix F.	Awareness of the Destination
Appendix G.	Marketing and Brand
Appendix H.	Port Redevelopment

APPENDIX A. RELEVANT STRATEGIC AND POLICY PLANNING

- **Leading Edge Strategy 2018**

Vision for Whanganui as a progressive and exciting place to live, work and visit; an energised, united and thriving district offering abundant opportunities for everyone. Key areas are:

- Community
- Connectivity
- Creativity
- Environment
- Economy.

- **Whanganui Economic Development Strategy 2019 –**

Vision to Grow Whanganui: Vibrant, prosperous and rich with opportunities. Central to achieving this is to partner and connect across boundaries; make the Whanganui River central; enhance our reputation; and be more enabling. Game changing priorities include:

- A transport and freight gateway
- Training and education
- Agricultural development
- Tourism and events
- Food and innovation.

Accelerate25 – the region’s economic development programme across Manawatu-Whanganui. Sets out a series of opportunities and enablers that will help realise economic prosperity across nine elements:

1. Tourism and visitor services
2. Land use optimisation
3. Manuka honey
4. Poultry meat production
5. Quality care and lifestyle for older people
6. Business processing outsourcing: call centres
7. Business processing outsourcing: food HQ
8. Fresh vegetables
9. Realising Māori potential.

- **Refresh of Accelerate 25 –**

The report was updated to address Covid-19 impacts and set key priorities for the strategy. Eight priority projects have been identified that are of high impact and high readiness. Whanganui Port redevelopment has been recognised as one of those priorities.

- **Te Pae Tawhiti** - an intergenerational strategy for Māori economic development in the region. The 10 priorities are:

- Land utilisation
- River and seafood
- Tourism
- Honey
- Forestry and plant-based products
- Māori digital enterprise
- Whānau cooperatives
- Entrepreneurship and innovation
- Older Māori vitality
- Housing

- **Infrastructure Strategy 2018-2048**
- **Whanganui Town Centre Regeneration Strategy 2016** – aims to make Whanganui visible, strategic elements include:
 - proving for basic visitor needs in the CBD,
 - incorporating artists, events, and an iwi dimension,
 - developing visitor attractions,
 - and changes to public spaces and footpaths.
- **Whanganui Destination Marketing Strategy 2019-2022** - 3 year strategy aimed at boosting Whanganui's visitor economy by increasing visitor numbers. Focusing primarily on the domestic market but growing the international market and business event.
- **Whanganui Regional Brand Identity Guidelines draft 2020**
- **Whanganui Arts and Culture Strategic Plan 2019-2029** – creativity at the heart of Whanganui's identity. Includes 5 goals:
 - Mana whenua participation
 - Champion arts and culture
 - Connected creative communities
 - A prosperous creative economy
 - Access and engagement for all
- **DOC CMS**
- **Whanganui River legislation (Te Awa Tupua Act)**
- **Waka Kotahi Arataki Version 2 - MANAWATŪ-WHANGANUI.**

TRANSPORT ADDITIONS

The **Regional Land Transport Strategy 2015-2025** recognises the importance of tourism to the regional economy.

- Strategic Priority 6: An appropriate network of tourism routes. This is a priority as it encourages visitors to visit the Region, and therefore provides economic development opportunities, and encourages their movement through a network of clearly defined and visible tourist routes. International tourism is particularly important for the Whanganui and Ruapehu Districts, with domestic tourism being more important to Palmerston North.

The Regional Land Transport Plan anticipates the numbers of tourists in the Region to grow in the coming years so providing an appropriate network of tourism routes is important in fostering economic growth in some of the Region's smaller communities that rely on tourists. In the past few years, the Whanganui River Road and the Napier-Taihape roads have been sealed. Both roads are expected to play an increasing role as tourist routes in the Region. Freedom camping, particularly campervan users, is an increasingly popular form of tourist activity in the Region, and the sealing of these routes can only enhance the reputation of the Region as a destination for this form of tourist activity.

Other routes that could be upgraded through completion of seal extensions over the course of this Plan that could reap tourism benefits are State Highway 43 and Route 40, both of which run between Ruapehu District and the Taranaki Region.

As a result of expected increases in demand in cycle tourism from the completion of touring routes that form the New Zealand Cycle Trail, the Region should ensure that access to and from these trails is adequate to support the projected demand. A project linking the Mountains to River Cycleway from the Whanganui River Road to Whanganui City is prioritised.

Strategic Priority 6: An appropriate network of tourism routes Policy 6 Cater for the provision of clearly defined tourism routes BY:

- 6.1 Ensuring that existing transport links in rural areas are maintained, and where necessary improved, to facilitate tourism growth (Transport Agency and Territorial Authorities)
- 6.2 Promoting the role of cycling tourism and recreation in the Region (Transport Agency, Territorial Authorities and Regional Tourism Organisations)
- 6.3 Encourage the retention of the current rail network in the Region, including the retention of disused rail corridors for other transport uses, such as tourism (KiwiRail and Regional Tourism Organisations).

Measures:

1. Year on year growth in the use of the National Cycle Trail routes in the Region
2. Increased vehicle counts on the Whanganui River Road, Napier-Taihape Road and State Highway 43
3. Working with the tourism industry to raise awareness of the Regions tourist routes.

Significant Inter-regional Activities

The plan does not provide any priority activities for State Highway 4 over the period to 2025.

State highway 3 from Hawera is proposed to have some bridging upgrades and no additional upgrades to the south from Palmerston North.

The principal transport development relates to the port redevelopment and facilitating freight movement to support the use of the port as a regional freight hub.

Whanganui 2018-2048 Transportation Activity Management Plan

This plan sets out at a District Level, the rationale for investment in road transport assets. These include roads, footpaths, lighting and other services.

Common growth projections for the District have been used across many of the strategic documents. These projections indicate that resident growth is expected to be limited. The high projection would see an increase from 45,000 to 50,000 over the next 45 years. The medium projection would see essentially no growth and the low projection would see a decline in population of over 7000 residents.

APPENDIX B. ONLINE COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

In addition to the community workshops and one on one consultation, an online platform was made available to stakeholders and the wider community to share ideas and comments on the future of Whanganui tourism.

Six walls were developed to encourage discussion on:

- Aspirations - for Whanganui in general and as a visitor destination
- Values - the most important values to the Whanganui community / what key principles should guide the plan
- Uniqueness - why do residents choose to live in Whanganui and what would draw people to visit?
- Visitors - what sort of visitors would be best suited to the Whanganui region?
- Gaps and Opportunities - significant gaps and opportunities – to achieve the vision
- Barriers - what are the main barriers/challenges to achieving the vision?

To gain an understanding of priority or support there is also an option to like an idea that has already been posted.

The key themes emerging from the community consultation were:

- The awa as central to everything - Te Awa Tupua, creating unity, connections via the river, its uniqueness, health – of the river, the wider environment and the people
- The importance and integration of heritage, arts and crafts
- Partnerships and linkages – locations (coast, CBD, river), operators and sectors, regions.

Feedback on the aspirations focussed on the region being a thriving community that people love to call home and that others want to visit. Te Awa Tupua was central to the region and also heritage and environmental themes were common points made.

Values and principles expressed related to Tupua Te Kawa, or the intrinsic and physical values associated with the whole river ecosystem and its people.

Again, the unique role that the river plays in the region was seen as the unique attribute of the region that should be recognised and celebrated.

The ideal visitor for the region was considered to be one that aligned with what the region has to offer, namely recreational and cultural experiences.

Opportunities were seen in linking the tourism offer more closely together and expanding those that related to the River and issues surrounding, especially with sustainability, heritage and creative attributes. Further development of existing heritage assets was also seen as presenting important future opportunities for visitors and would generate demand.



APPENDIX C. WHANGANUI VISITOR ECONOMY

Tourism GDP makes up 4 percent (\$72.6million) of Whanganui's economy, with tourism making up approximately 4.9 percent of employment.²³

The total visitor spend in Whanganui District for the year to August 2020 was \$126million; \$106 million by New Zealanders, \$6million by Australians, \$2million by the United Kingdom and by the United States, and \$3 million by Europe.

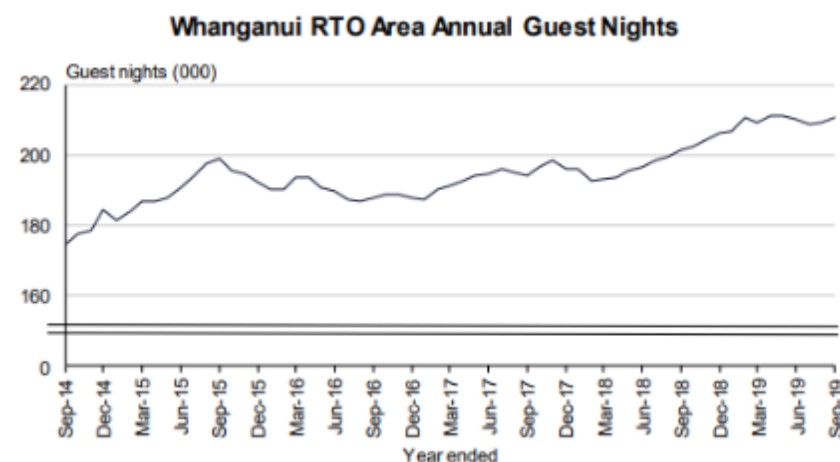
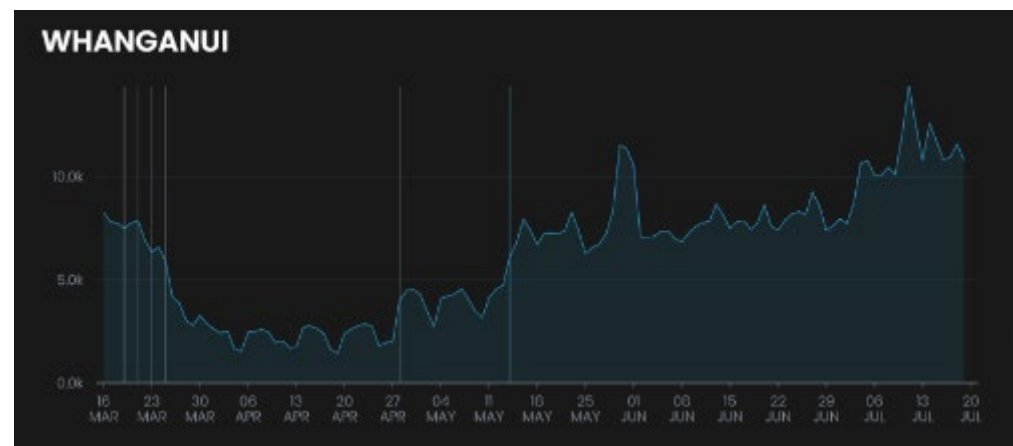
Whanganui experienced a decline in visitor spend over the past couple of years, but has seen growth, most notably since the relaxing of Covid-19 alert levels. Visitor spend in Whanganui during July (incorporating New Zealand school holidays) was up 30% on the previous July, with the vast majority of spend by domestic visitors.

Visitor numbers to Whanganui during this time reflect the increase in spend, with Whanganui up 23.3% in visitor numbers compared with winter school holidays 2019.²⁴

Trend of Whanganui visitor numbers during Covid-19 (vertical lines represent Covid-19 alert level changes)

Total guests staying in commercial accommodation²⁵ in Whanganui for the year to September 2019 was approximately 109,686 (up 1% on the previous year), with an average stay of 1.92 nights.

Total nights were approximately 210,777 (up 4.6% on the previous year); 167,793 nights by domestic visitors (up 5.5%) and 42,984 nights by international visitors (up 1.4%). It should be noted that Whanganui also includes a strong peer to peer / private accommodation offering that is not accounted for in these figures.



²³ Whanganui and Partners, Infometrics, year ending March 2019

²⁴ <https://reports.dataventures.nz/population/20200720-tourism-new-zealand-school-holidays-report-20th-july-2020.html>

²⁵ Statistics New Zealand Commercial Accommodation Monitor, Year Ending September 2019 (N.b. latest reported data before the survey went on hold)

Attractions and activities:

Principal Visitor Attractions.

Whanganui largely draws on its long history and heritage buildings that have been established over the last century for its built attractions. These include:

- **Sarjeant Gallery Te Whare o Rehua**
The Gallery contains over 8500 works of New Zealand and International art. Its collections include one of New Zealand's best photographic collections. The Gallery, which is a Category 1 heritage building is over 100 years old and occupies a prominent position within the City. It is currently undergoing a major redevelopment and extension and is expected to reopen in late 2023. The gallery attracts around 30,000 visitors annually with around one third being international or out of region in New Zealand. The redevelopment is expected to substantially increase visitation of this major regional attraction.
- **Durie Hill elevator**
The elevator is a public elevator that connects the Durie Hill suburb with the rest of the town and the river. It is the only elevator of its type in New Zealand and one of only two in the World. It has a Category 1 Historic Place. There are panoramic views across the city and to the north from the top of the elevator.
- **Whanganui Regional Museum**
The Regional Museum forms an integral part of the cultural hub at Queens Park in the centre of the city. The museum has an extensive collection of taonga from region and also a gallery of Lindauer portraits. It attracts around 40,000 visitors per year.
- **St Pauls Church Putiki**
St Pauls at Putiki is renowned for its interior carving and decoration. It is open to the public on limited days or as part of a guided tour. The current building which was consecrated in 1937 is the fifth church to occupy site since 1842.

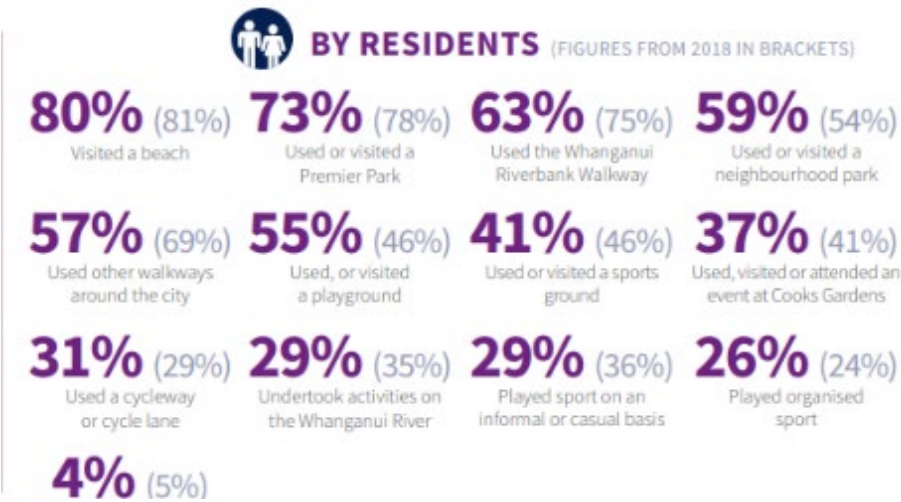
- **Bushy Park homestead and Sanctuary**
Bushy Park homestead is located 25 minutes from Whanganui and comprises a forest sanctuary and historic homestead. It was gifted to the Royal Forest and Bird Society in 1862 and is managed by a Trust and volunteers. The homestead, which is a Category 1 historic building offers five rooms as accommodation. The sanctuary also offers other accommodation options and provides educational programmes for students and visitors.

The region itself also offers a wide range of natural environments and man-made locations that are highly attractive and on the “must-see” list for Whanganui, including:

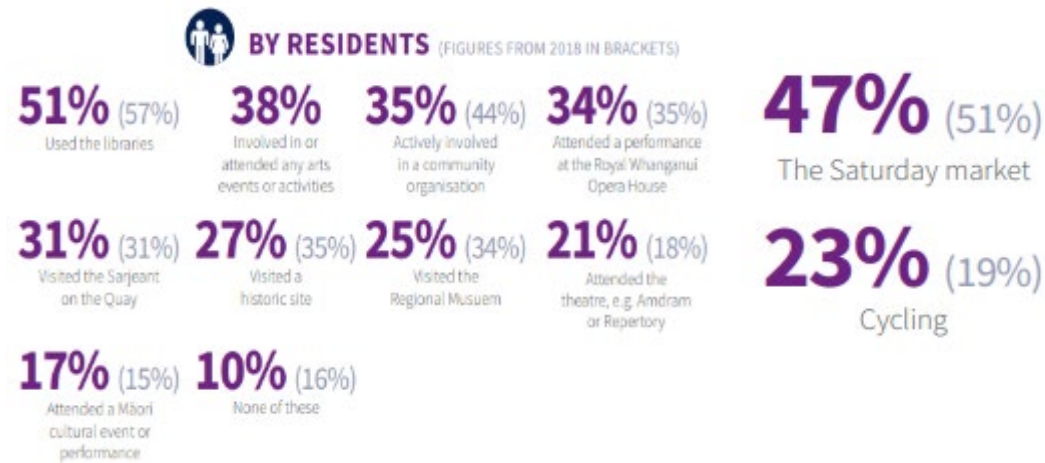
- Virginia Lake
- Castlecliff Beach
- Kai Iwi and South Beach
- Whanganui River
- Mountains to Sea Cycle Trail
- Bason Botanic Gardens
- Kowhai Park – Children's Playground
- Winter Gardens.

Resident use of recreation facilities also used for tourism.

Local resident use of recreational activities is a useful guide to the importance of these facilities for not only themselves but also what they may promote to their visiting friend and family. Beaches, premier parks and the Whanganui River walkway were the most used facilities. Use of most recreational activities appears to have declined since 2018. There has been significant decreases in residents who mentioned they used the Whanganui Riverbank Walkway (63% cf. 2018, 75%), other walkways around the city (57% cf. 2018, 69%), as well as undertaking activities on the Whanganui River (29% cf. 2018, 35%).²⁶



Visits to the local market declined over the previous year, while cycling activity increased. There's a relatively stable base of residents visiting cultural attractions and events, but a number of these have had reduced participation over the past year (e.g. regional museum, opera, historic sites).



²⁶ <https://www.whanganui.govt.nz/files/assets/public/research/whanganui-district-council-cvs-final-report-2019.pdf>

APPENDIX D. EVENTS

Events

The main events currently held in Whanganui are:

- Cemetery Circuit Street Races (motorcycle event held every boxing day)
- V8 Jetsprints (jetboats, December)
- Whanganui Vintage Weekend (3 day/night event in January)
- Billy Webb Challenge Whanganui (race for single scullers run in January)
- NZ Masters Games (a 9-day event held every second year in Jan/Feb)
- Whanganui Opera Week (January)
- Artists Open Studios (trail with over 60 studios/galleries and over 150 artists, late March)
- Whanganui Walls Street Art Festival (4 days with artists from around the world, held in March)
- Whanganui Heritage Month (Tours, seminars, exhibitions and events, Aug-Sep)
- Whanganui Literary Festival (held in September every second year)
- La Fiesta (a festival celebrating woman and community held in Feb/Mar including art, music, dance, yoga, film, cheese-making etc)
- Whanganui Pride Week (March) Participation at these events includes local residents, but most visitors are from outside the region – mainly lower North Island
- Whanganui also hosts a weekly market every Saturday- Whanganui River Traders Market which offers a wide variety of produce, foods and handcrafts from around the region.

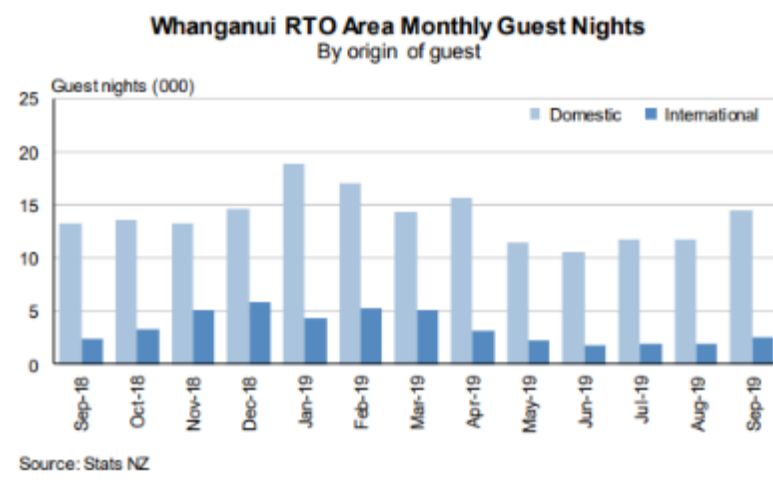
APPENDIX E – ACCOMMODATION

Commercial accommodation

As of September 2019²⁷ Whanganui had two hotels, 15 motels/apartments, three backpackers, and four holiday parks supplying commercial accommodation. Occupancy rates for motels averaged 54%, and backpackers 49%. Annual average capacity²⁸ for hotels was 40,880 stay units, motels/apartments 110,098, backpackers 42,660, and holiday parks 145,981.

Two properties have a Qualmark rating (one motel, one hotel).

Occupancy has the typical summer season peak; however, the peak months for domestic and international visitors are not the same (January, February and April for domestic visitors and December, February and March for International visitors).



Seasonal spread of commercial accommodation visitor nights in Whanganui

²⁷ Statistics New Zealand Commercial Accommodation Monitor, Year Ending September 2019

Peer to peer accommodation

As an indication of the peer to peer accommodation sector in Whanganui, AirBnB lists 110 stays (for 2 guests), and 52 independent places, and Bookabach list 25 properties. The peer to peer market has been growing significantly over recent years and is expected to continue.

²⁸ Calculated as stay units multiplied by number of days

APPENDIX F. AWARENESS OF THE DESTINATION

Origin

The main visitor markets to Whanganui are the surrounding regions of Manawatu, Taranaki, and Wellington, followed by Auckland (respectively).²⁹

The top three associations New Zealanders make with Whanganui are visiting gardens, parks and reserves, history & heritage and walking & hiking. These associations are not as strong compared to other regions in New Zealand offering these experiences. However, the associations were much stronger for those who had recently visited. Of the New Zealanders who have heard of Whanganui but never visited (46%), 80% don't know much about what they can do in the region.³⁰

The top associations Australians have with Whanganui are Māori and Pacific culture, along with a range of outdoor and cultural experiences such as scenic-sightseeing, walking and hiking, history and heritage, nature, wildlife & ecotourism experiences, and gardens, parks and reserves. Similar to the domestic market, associations are not as strong compared to other regions in New Zealand offering these experiences. However, the associations were much stronger for those who had recently visited. Almost half of the Australian market have never heard of Whanganui, and 42% of Australians have heard of Whanganui but have never visited. Of those who have heard about Whanganui, 79% don't know much about what to do in the region.³¹

Visitor rated activities and attractions

Some of the top-rated attractions in Whanganui, as rated by travellers on Tripadvisor include³²:

- Quartz Museum of Studio Ceramics (free entry/ donation)
- Kowhai Park (free, train \$2pp)
- Bason Botanic Gardens (free)
- Virginia Lake including Whanganui Winter Garden (free)
- Whanganui River
- Whanganui National Park (free and paid activities)
- Durie Hill tunnel, elevator and memorial tower (\$2pp each way)
- New Zealand Glassworks (free)
- Bushy Park Sanctuary (free entry/ donation)
- Sarjeant Gallery (free)
- Whanganui Regional Museum (free)
- Kai iwi beach (free)
- Paddle Steamer Waimarie (from \$15-\$45).

Travellers rating were generally high, with most attractions receiving an average rating of 4.5 out of 5 (excellent). There are 14 holiday houses included on Tripadvisor for Whanganui, all receiving at least 4.5/5 ratings.

²⁹ MBIE (2015) Regional Tourism Summary – Whanganui

³⁰ Angus and Associates (2018), Visitor Insights Programme – Visitor Perceptions, Whanganui Year Ending June 2018

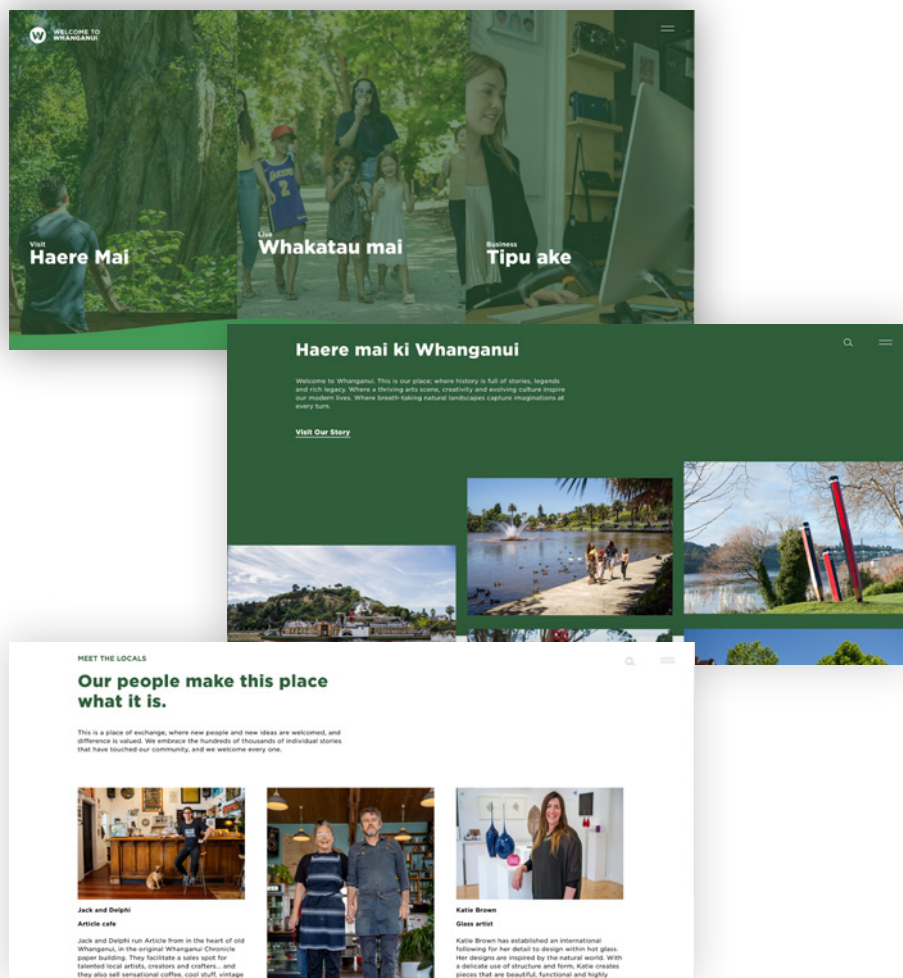
³¹ Angus and Associates (2018), Visitor Insights Programme – Visitor Perceptions, Whanganui Year Ending June 2018

³² Based on minimum of 29 and up to 403 individual ratings, mostly with an average rating of 4.5/5

APPENDIX G. MARKETING AND BRAND

Destination Whanganui/i-SITE

The Discover Whanganui website covers the wider aspects of visit, live, business, education and conference for Whanganui, while the Visit Whanganui website is tourism focused.



New Zealand.com presence of Whanganui

Whanganui has a limited presence on New Zealand.com – the major portal for tourism for New Zealand. It comprises:

- a destination page for Whanganui featuring top experiences of parks and sanctuaries, Durie hill, glassworks, river market, Whanganui River, and the beaches
- 41 Accommodation providers – comprising a mix of Whanganui and Ruapehu providers
- 27 Activities and Tours – good listings of Whanganui River experiences, but also includes Ruapehu listings. Generally rafting/canoeing/hunting etc trips related to the river
- 1 Airline
- 123 Features
- top 15 good information, but groups of experiences rather than specific features. Ruapehu attractions also included.
- 1 Online Booking service – Holiday Parks Assn
- 1 Online information service
- 14 Transport listings - comprising largely national rental car operators
- 7 Recommended trips

2 Visitor Information Centres.

Qualmark

Whanganui Tourism Operators have a very low uptake of Qualmark. Of the 1644 accredited operators nationally there are presently only 4 tourism businesses in Whanganui that are Qualmark accredited. By way of comparison Ruapehu district has 29 accredited operators:

- Kings Court Motel
- The Grand Hotel
- Whanganui I-site
- Paddle Steamer Waimarie.

This has severe limitations on the presence of Whanganui as a visitor destination and its promotion on NewZealand.com and also promotion to international markets by Tourism New Zealand.

As a matter of urgency, while the process of being accredited to Qualmark is free, operators should be encouraged to begin the process of joining Qualmark.

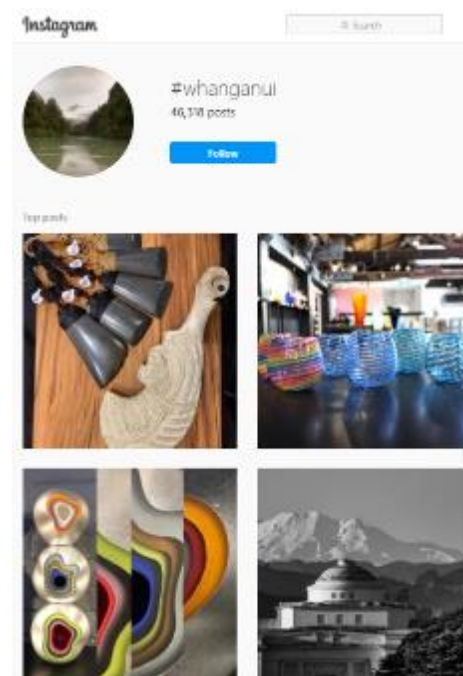
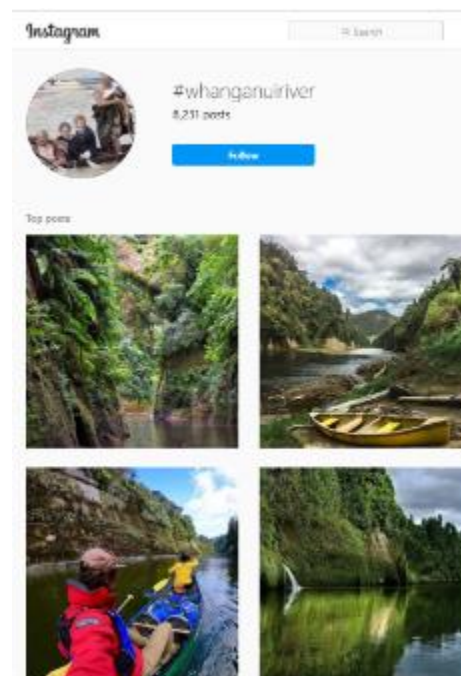
As environmental credentials become more important, then consideration should also be given to raising the environmental performance of the tourism experiences within the district. Tiaki promise is a mechanism to commit to environmental performance and operators should be encouraged to embark on this journey.

TECNZ members are required to use at least 75% of suppliers who are also Qualmark endorsed across the range of categories.

Tourism New Zealand famils are only operated with Qualmark accredited operators and therefore there is very limited ability of the district to host international famils until there is a threshold number of Qualmarked operators.

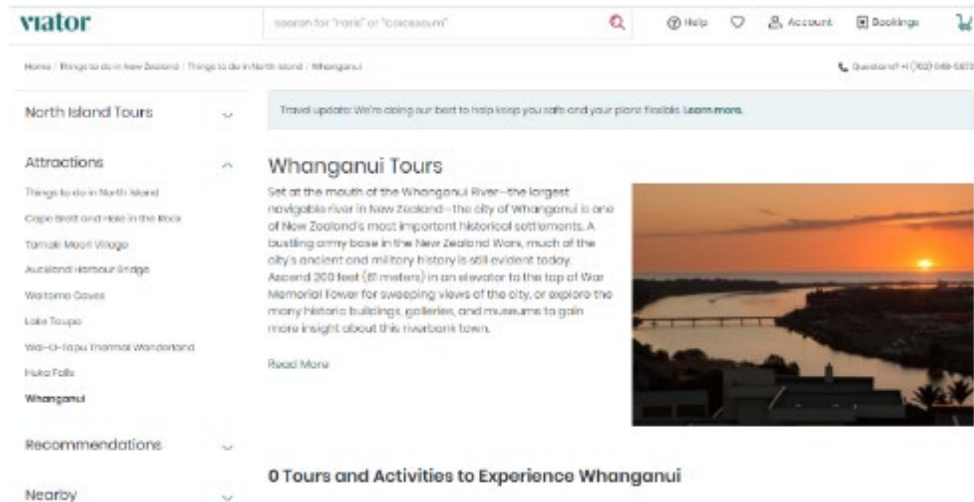
Instagram

Some of the top posts for #Whanganui #Whanganui River



Travel intermediaries - ITOs/ online platforms

No suppliers in Whanganui are allied members of the Tourism Export Council of New Zealand (TECNZ) and only a few tour companies include Whanganui activities and attractions in their itineraries. There are no tours or activities included for Whanganui on Viator.



APPENDIX H. PORT REDEVELOPMENT

The revitalisation of Whanganui's port has recently been announced by the Whanganui District Council and the Provincial Growth Fund with commitments of \$24.4M port infrastructure development. This port infrastructure development includes rebuilding of 420 linear metres of commercial port wharves. The associated development of a purpose-built Whanganui Port Marine Precinct includes the construction of boat launch infrastructure to accommodate New Zealand's second largest boat hoist with a capacity of 300 tonnes.

Deep water access to the port will be secured by the dredging of the commercial port basin, with options for the port to acquire purpose built dredging equipment to maintain depths within the port.

The proposed infrastructure will not only support current marine services and coastal shipping and freight services but provides opportunities for the marine industry to expand services in seafood harvesting and processing.

The assessment of the port redevelopment included an evaluation of a freight and passenger ferry connection to Motueka. This appraisal was predicated on significant freight volumes both ways to the South Island and offering an alternative route to visitors. The concept of a "round the South Island" touring route, while attractive would require high volumes on the ferry to be viable. In our opinion the ferry option for visitors is unlikely to proceed in the short to medium term.

The inclusion of a small marina in the port development will provide minor traffic of a recreational and visitor nature to the port. However, this is unlikely to establish the port as a major visitor drawcard.

The commercial nature of the Port redevelopment and associated industry is unlikely to result in a mixed-use development that provides for a coastal tourism experience or additional recreational opportunities.

WHANGANUI
ALL YOU NEED (AND THEN SOME)