



VISITOR STRATEGY

Aotea / Great Barrier Island

2018-2023

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In September 2017, Great Barrier Local Board (GBLB), with support from Auckland Tourism Events and Economic Development (ATEED), commissioned the New Zealand Tourism Research Institute at the Auckland University of Technology to develop a Visitor Strategy for Aotea / Great Barrier Island. Simon Milne, Carolyn Deuchar and Suzanne Histen prepared the Strategy with contributions from Sam Li, Michelle Hunt, Eilidh Thorburn, Florencia Moscoso, Haddy Nagujja, and Nathaniel Dobbin. In addition to the support of GBLB, ATEED and DOC, NZTRI thanks the residents, community groups and businesses who provided resources, attended meetings and participated in the strategy research programme.

Introduction

Aotea / Great Barrier Island (GBI) like many parts of New Zealand is heavily reliant on the visitor industry. To improve the economic benefits from tourism there is a need to provide an excellent visitor experience, and increase visitor spend and yield - but not at the expense of those resources that community and visitors cherish. The challenge is to gain real economic value from the industry while conserving the environment and improving the quality of life of local people.

Sustainable development 'for and by' the community of GBI underpins the Aotea / Great Barrier Island Visitor Strategy 2018-2023. Fundamental to this Strategy is a commitment to enhance the visitor experience and develop the visitor industry as a source of sustainable economic growth with minimal impact on the current natural environment and community quality of life. It is vital that the tourism industry works for community, if it does then community will be willing to work for and invest in the industry and future generations will benefit.

The Strategy will guide the development of the visitor industry over the next five years. It sets a clear collective vision of what GBI expects from its future visitor growth, and the type of visitor the island desires in the medium to longer term. A focus on enhancing visitor yield will create opportunities for the private sector to thrive while also sustaining the unique environmental and cultural dimensions of the Island.

The Strategy features five core areas that are designed to improve both the visitor and community experience of tourism.

Governance focuses on giving residents and businesses a voice in tourism planning and strengthens community engagement with tourism. Improving available information for visitors (online and on the Island) is the next strategic priority. *Shaping demand: Information and image* engages locals in storytelling and provides the visitor with a better idea of things to do based on local knowledge. Upgrades to web content will strengthen information about local communities, their stories and people and allow visitors to learn more about the heart and soul of the Island to inspire a visit or a longer stay.

Experience development focuses on product development and the co-creation of new experiences by visitors, businesses and community working together. Approaches to shaping demand will improve the current visitor mix, enhance the visitor experience, and increase visitor spend by attracting responsible travellers who spend more time (and money) visiting more places throughout the Island. The fourth strategic area looks at *Infrastructure* with a focus on transportation and the provision of key services. The final core strategy area, *Insight*, emphasises the need to generate data and information that can inform future planning and underpin indicators designed to evaluate the performance of the industry over time.

This is an evidence-based Strategy that draws on extensive consultation and research conducted by NZTRI between September 2017 and April 2018. The Strategy is informed by the following sources:

- Findings from Visitor and Community/Business surveys (November 2017-April 2018).
- A local tourism audit – online and on-site.
- Interviews and discussions with local stakeholders.
- Meetings with a tourism reference group (Visitor Strategy Group) who provided input into, and guided the development of the Strategy. The group comprised representatives from Destination Great Barrier Island, public agencies, tourism and other businesses and community.
- A review of relevant reports, plans and other materials.

The research programme and related reports can be found at: <http://nztri.org.nz/great-barrier-island>.

A vision for the future of tourism on GBI Based was developed in consultation with the Visitor Strategy Group and the Great Barrier Local Board (GLB). The following Vision Statement guides the Aotea / Great Barrier Island Visitor Strategy 2018-2023:

As proud residents of Aotea / Great Barrier Island we will work together to develop tourism in a way that strengthens and empowers our communities, enhances the quality of life of our people, stimulates our economy, and protects our environmental and cultural taonga. We will extend a warm welcome to respectful visitors and ensure we deliver a unique tourism experience in a way that celebrates our local distinctiveness.

A definition of ‘community’ was also developed in conjunction with the Local Board:

Permanent residents, non-permanent residents, those not living on the Island but considering themselves part of the GBI community, and local business operators – some of whom do not live on the Island full-time.

The Visitor Strategy commences with an overview of the current GBI context, briefly examining the regional and local dynamics that are playing a role in influencing the area’s development and outlining its current visitor industry. The focus then shifts to each of the five core strategy themes. In each case we outline a series of actions that will deliver more sustainable development outcomes for tourism on GBI. A GBI Sustainable Tourism Index (Appendix 1) provides a useful tool to facilitate future monitoring and evaluation of performance with indicators aligned to goals and targets for each strategy area. To support uptake of the Strategy, an Implementation Plan (Appendix 2) sets out priorities for the next five years with guidance on how best to activate the action items.

Context

Great Barrier Island is rugged, beautiful, and sparsely populated and offers a unique experience to visitors. With an area of 285 square kilometres, GBI is the sixth-largest island of New Zealand and the largest island off the North Island. GBI is located north of the Coromandel Peninsula, roughly 90km from downtown Auckland. Approximately 60 per cent of the Island is public land, administered by the Department of Conservation. The Island has no reticulated water, power or public transport - running own power, water, septic and drainage systems.

The Island has a population of 885 people (91% European, 18% Māori). Ngāti Rehua Ngatiwai ki Aotea are tangata whenua of Aotea, Hauturu (Little Barrier Island), the Pokohinu Islands (Mokohinau Islands), and other outlying islands. The median age of residents is 54 years - the median age in Auckland is 35 years (Demographics report card, Great Barrier Local Board area 2016, Stats NZ Census 2013). The median full time household income is \$31,100 per annum, considerably lower than the regional median of \$76,500, and lowest across Auckland's local boards (Aotea Great Barrier Local Board Plan, 2017). There are 474 occupied dwellings and 450 unoccupied dwellings (Census, 2013). With 156 businesses (2015), 260 employees work in the local board area.

Local residents generally have lower levels of formal education, when compared with other local board areas. Approximately 15% of residents aged 15 years and over hold a bachelor's degree or higher as their highest qualification, compared with 24.7 percent for Auckland as a whole (Census, 2013). As such, education and skills development are a major strategic focus of the Aotea Great Barrier Local Board Plan, 2017. GBLB are also eager to explore learning and education as an economic opportunity more generally with tourism, information sharing, interpretation and education for locals and visitors identified as a core opportunity in terms of growing a sustainable economy. The geographic area covered by this Strategy is Aotea / Great Barrier Island (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Aotea / Great Barrier Island



Source: Auckland Council, Great Barrier Island Local Board map

Tourism is the main source of economic activity on the island. Access is by ferry, by plane or by private boat. There is no public transport and private shuttles are expensive. To travel around the Island, most visitors either bring their own vehicle or rent a car. The roads are narrow and often unsealed and require careful drivers. The GBI tourism industry is based around transport providers (air, ferry, rental car, and a few private taxis/shuttles), accommodation, and tour operators (e.g. adventure, diving, fishing, and stargazing). Visitors are attracted by the Island's beautiful natural features and for water and land based recreation including DOC walks and visits to conservation areas such as Windy Hill, Glenfern and Motu Kaikoura Sanctuaries. There are also several small museums, galleries, and food and beverage outlets on the Island. Accommodation options include luxury lodges, motels, bed & breakfast through to backpacker hostels and campgrounds. In 2006, an Auckland Council report estimated 711 visitor beds on the Island. Other options not measured in commercial accommodation statistics include Airbnb and other holiday home offerings. Thus, it is difficult to get an accurate grasp on the true tourism room capacity on the Island.

Recent research to estimate visitor numbers and the origin of visitors to GBI shows that for the year ended March 2017 there were 179,600 visitor arrivals (unique visitors, Domestic, International, and from elsewhere in Auckland). In January 2017 alone there were 31,800 visitor arrivals (ATEED, Qrious data to March 2017). This is an increase in arrivals of 57% on the previous January. This would equate to 1,025 visitors arriving each day in January (or around five full 737 aircraft each day). These figures indicate a resident to visitor ratio of 1:35 for the month of January 2017, or 202 visitors to every resident on an annual basis.

While there is no single accurate method used to calculate the numbers of visitors to the Island each year, it is important to note that there is limited capacity for both visitors and residents to travel to GBI. In the high season, there are approximately 12 flights per day with up to 12 seats per flight. For those who travel by ferry, there is one sailing to the Island on most days with a capacity of 150 passengers plus vehicles. Reduced ferry services operate from May to September with only three sailings per week. There is no available recent data to estimate the number of visitor arrivals by private boat. This makes visitor arrival figures somewhat difficult to corroborate with local accommodation capacity and available moorings. We believe the accuracy of the GBI arrival figures outlined in the previous paragraph must be treated with some caution and that it is vital to obtain a more accurate picture in the future.

Visitors to GBI are predominantly from Auckland. They are older in age (45-65) and travel for a short break to get away from the city (median length of stay is four days). While visitors bring a reasonable economic impact to GBI (high season \$64.60, low season \$41.50 per person per day in on island spend) there is clearly opportunity to grow visitor spend further. Visitors participate in activities that make the most of the beautiful natural environment of the Barrier – however, tramping, birdwatching, and fishing (as examples) do not always lead to optimal opportunities to spend money on the Island.

Destination Great Barrier Island Inc. (DGBI) was established by GBLB in 2013 to support the growth of the GBI economy through tourism. DGBI focuses on promoting and increasing the profile of GBI as a tourist destination, as well as supporting collaboration between stakeholders, and the development of attractions. The organisation comprises volunteers who are mostly accommodation providers. DGBI have their own strategic plan and the target groups outlined in DGBI's Branding Brief align well to the Aotea / Great Barrier Island Visitor Strategy 2018-2023.

The last Tourism Strategy for GBI was developed in 1993 by Auckland City, Hauraki Gulf Islands Area Office. This Strategy outlines impediments to tourism development – transportation, quality of roads and services, lack of funds and capacity (accommodation, human resources), as well as attitudes of residents towards tourism – and highlights the need to manage development carefully. Approaches to increasing visitor numbers include the promotion of niche tourism (fishing, diving, events, ecotourism and Island escapes) as well as enhanced marketing and communication, and monitoring of carrying capacity and visitor numbers.

Core strategy areas

The Aotea / Great Barrier Island Visitor Strategy 2018-2023 comprises five core areas. We present each below, first outlining the research based evidence that guides decision making and then presenting the Actions that underpin the strategy. We focus on Actions that can be achieved within the five year period covered by the strategy and that can cost-effectively make use of, and sustain, existing resources and experiences.

Governance

Good tourism management practices and effective planning are key to the sustainable development of tourism. There is a need for GBI to shift focus from destination promotion to broader planning. Sustainable tourism requires strong partnerships among public agencies, private enterprise, and community to give residents and businesses a voice in visitor planning and an opportunity to get involved in the production of experiences for visitors.

Evidence

Visitor Strategy research shows that both visitors and community are critically aware of the need to manage the development of the visitor industry in a sustainable manner. Residents have a strong sense of attachment to the Island and see GBI as a beautiful, natural environment where they can participate in outdoor activities, enjoy a unique opportunity to escape the city, and be on an unspoilt remote island - 'off the grid'. Residents relish the strong sense of community that exists on the Island and appreciate the relaxed lifestyle and sense of ease and freedom being geographically isolated affords them.

Community generally support tourism and consider visitors as good for the local economy but there is a clear sense that it could do more for local income and job creation. There is a need to strengthen local ownership of the visitor industry, create opportunities for youth, and to provide much needed support for tourism coordination.

Residents and businesses feel positively about the impact of visitors on their quality of life however they also feel that there are negative factors associated with visitors coming to GBI, with pressure on already strained infrastructure and resources, damage to the environment and poor behaviour from some tourists being the main themes highlighted (especially over the high season). One resident sums up the comments of many:

“It’s just starting to tip over that point and this isn’t coming from an anti-social islander but from a very social 18 year old. If you look at Doxey’s model of the impact of tourism we are just getting to the irritation stage.”

Locals and visitors alike do not wish to see untrammelled growth of the industry. Visitors and community comment on the need to avoid overcrowding on GBI to protect the natural environment and the local distinctiveness of the Island. There is a call from community for a regulatory approach to manage tourism on GBI. Caps on visitor numbers, levies, restrictions and regulations are all suggestions. This reflects a community that is concerned that tourism

is already getting out of hand and want to see a more robust approach to the management of the industry. Unless there are concrete actions put in place to offer residents a voice in tourism management and development, it is doubtful that community will do anything to strengthen the development of the industry on 'their Island'.

Actions:

It is important to leverage residents' strong sense of ownership and ties to the Island and ensure that community be empowered to engage with tourism and have opportunities to make decisions about matters that directly affect them. The following actions will provide residents and businesses with mechanisms to participate in debates, give them a voice and opportunities for sharing ideas and issues, and enable greater involvement in, and ownership of, the management of the visitor industry on the Island.

- **Create partnerships with and fund Ngāti Rehua-Ngātiwai ki Aotea** to develop innovative ways to share knowledge and ideas with businesses and residents based on a Māori worldview. Work with iwi to draw on Mātauranga Māori (most commonly translated as Māori knowledge) especially Manaakitanga and Kaitiakitanga as two important aspects of Tikanga Māori and how these two concepts relate to tourism on the Island. Manaakitanga is behaviour that acknowledges the mana of others through the expression of aroha, hospitality, generosity and mutual respect, or the way visitors are looked after – their well-being in a holistic sense. Manaakitanga plays a key role in Māori society and inspires the New Zealand visitor experience - summing up the act of welcoming and sharing. Kaitiakitanga of Aotea requires guardianship of the land to protect the environment for future generations. Residents and visitors alike can be kaitiaki (guardians) of the land and protect the environment by developing a deep kinship between humans and the land, fauna, and sea.
- **Partner with, resource and support Destination Great Barrier Island (DGBI)** to expand their activities and create an Aotea / Great Barrier Island community tourism reference group to lead tourism development on GBI and interact with the political sphere (local government and public agencies, regional and national tourism organisations etc.). Resource and support DGBI to extend their current scope of work and membership; incorporating members of the Visitor Strategy Group that came together to contribute to and guide the development of this Strategy, and others.

To be effective, it is vital that this group works in partnership with GBLB and other public agencies to access resources and coordinate activities. The purpose of the group is to be the 'mouthpiece' to advocate for community in terms of tourism. The group will comprise representatives from iwi, hospitality, tourism and other businesses, residents and community groups, and will eventually form a more formal governance structure. It is vital that the group receive appropriate funding and resource support. It is also critical, for the success of the Strategy, that this group is not developed simply as a marketing body.

GBLB can play a valuable role by taking the first steps to initiate contact with DGBI to expand their current scope of work and ensure that there is ample opportunity for a broad

range of interested parties to participate. GBLB should regularly acknowledge these volunteer contributions to tourism.

- **Appoint and resource a GBI Community Tourism Coordinator** who would focus on Strategy implementation, with a keen eye on improving information provision to visitors, but also managing other aspects e.g. quality yield driven product development, liaison with ATEED, co-ordination and networking, and capability building. This person could be assigned to the DGBI and provide much needed 'manpower' to assist with the coordination and sustainable development of the visitor industry. It is important that this person focuses on the content of the Strategy and that this resource allocation is *not* commandeered to work purely on traditional tourism marketing activities.
- **Construct opportunities for local 'voices' to be heard.** Create an online platform as a virtual meeting place for residents and businesses to learn about future plans associated with tourism, present local ideas and initiatives, or give an opinion on tourism on GBI (e.g. via online polls, surveys and forums). This could be as simple as a Facebook group; or as a new section linked to an existing local portal; a WordPress blog/website, or more multifaceted e.g. as a purpose-built community tourism portal. The Facebook group *Great Barrier Island – Motu Aotea* could be approached as a starting point to provide an online meeting place to talk about tourism or to raise awareness about the new tourism specific community group (inviting interested people to join in).
- **Develop a regular GBI 'Meet Up' for Tourism.** A Meetup is a local community of people (residents and businesses) who get together around ideas and activities that matter to them (a common interest, goal, or cause), and involve regular, face-to-face gatherings. Attendees can suggest their own ideas for a tourism MeetUp but this would be a good way to give community direct contact with GBLB, DGBI and (on occasion) ATEED. The newly extended DGBI would lead and coordinate this initiative.
- **Ensure the visitor economy is considered in all aspects of local government planning** and in communications to businesses and residents about local infrastructure initiatives. This is specifically important in terms of local infrastructure (roads, water, traffic management, waste management, public transport, public facilities etc.). Monitor planning systems to ensure there is recognition of the diverse and unique needs of the visitor industry and ensure that appropriate access routes and infrastructure is planned and delivered to enable tourism development.
- **Develop the Aotea / Great Barrier Island Responsible Visitor Pledge:** Visitors who enjoy nature and outdoor activities usually want to travel responsibly, but often do not know what it takes. The Pledge should contain a list of behaviour that makes for a respectful visitor who is welcome on GBI (what to do and what *not* to do). It is important to work with community to develop the Pledge so that visitors to the Barrier know what is expected of them, travel responsibly and safely, and leave a minimal footprint behind. The Pledge could be an online agreement where visitors can read, sign if they choose, and promise to respect the fragile environment of the Barrier and the people who live there, conserve water, and shop 'local' to buy supplies and other items while on the Island.

On signing, the visitors could download a certificate or voucher that would enable them to collect some sort of visual recognition of their commitment upon arrival – perhaps a wristband collected from the Aotea Visitor Information Centre, or a local pub or shop. Visitors who sign the Pledge would also have the opportunity to contribute to local initiatives e.g. a \$10 donation to a school or time working on a community conservation activity.

- **Make sure visitors are incorporated in local hazard and emergency plans.** GBI is considered to have a high wildfire risk and flooding is the most frequently occurring natural hazard event that affects the Island (Civil Defence ‘Know your Hazards, 2013). Other hazards include water safety (beaches, rivers and waterfalls), and erosion, landslide and rock fall along the steep, high cliffs of the Island’s coastline. Visitors and locals can be affected by bad weather at sea or when flying. GBLB and Civil Defence have prepared a brochure “Essential Information Great Barrier Island” however; this is difficult to find online or when visiting. Review Local Board Emergency plans and ensure visitors are catered for in planning. Currently the brochure can only be found on www.greatbarrier.co.nz and a concerted effort needs to be made to ensure this brochure is readily available online, at arrival points and in accommodation.

Shaping demand: Information and Image

This Strategy places a strong emphasis on the need to **shape demand** to enhance yield. A change in the visitor mix should not be seen as simply focusing on a certain demographic or a specific sub-market (e.g. backpackers, youth travellers). The focus needs to be on attracting responsible travellers who respect the people, culture and environment of GBI; and are committed to seeing more of a destination and also shopping ‘local’. To do this visitors need better information especially in areas such as things to do, places to eat/drink, culture, heritage and ‘everyday life’. This section focuses on improving available information about what visitors can see and do on GBI.

Evidence

Local stories and knowledge about the people and communities of GBI will develop a sense of place in visitor information, creating an appeal for visitors and a reason to ‘slow down’ once they arrive. At the moment these dimensions are largely missing from marketing collateral. There is also a need to enhance information about the ‘dark sky’ dimension of the GBI experience and to leverage more effectively from this development to improve low season performance. The Web audit reveals the importance of providing effective information on the experiences available in GBI to visitors *and* residents. This calls for a stronger web presence for GBI with visitor information shared across multiple online channels including national and regional portals, a broad range of websites, and social media.

Improvements are needed in available visitor information both on island and before arrival. Issues identified with current information provision include a lack of, or poor signage to beaches and safe swimming spots, as well as inaccurate information about opening hours of

shops and restaurants. Residents and visitors call for improved access to accurate information about GBI both before and during the visit to the Island to ensure that visitors know what to expect when they arrive – and also what is expected of them. There is currently a lack of information to advise visitors what to do if they are adversely affected by weather or other local conditions.

When asked if there is a particular type of visitor that they would like to see encouraged to come to GBI consensus from community [survey] was to focus on low impact/high yield visitors who appreciate the Island's scenic attractions and outdoor activities and are also interested in exploring GBI's culture, heritage and local way of life.

While it makes sense to attract visitors who enjoy outdoor spaces, there is also a need to ensure that the Strategy does not focus on just doing 'more of the same'.

As one community member commented:

It's time to move on from the gold card visitor who wants a cheap holiday on the boat or a walk in the bush with low cost accommodation – bringing everything with them so they don't have to buy much while they're here. Is the visitor mix returning maximum value to the Barrier? I don't think so.

Actions:

Information is the lifeblood of the tourism industry and effective use of the internet has become critical to deliver rich content and inspire people to discover new dimensions of a destination. A greater resident awareness of local experiences, and tourism more generally, is also vital so that locals can be better informed hosts to visiting friends and relatives.

- **Review all current marketing collateral for the Barrier** and strengthen content (imagery, text) in ways to build yield (e.g. with images of things to do that include but not limited to tramping and bush walks) and give the visitor important information about local conditions (e.g. water, power, recycling, food and beverage costs and opening hours, transport and roads).
- **Enhance online information provision** about things to do and places to visit on GBI. This does not necessarily require new websites to be developed; rather to enhance what exists already by adding information for visitors *and* locals (especially new arrivals). Develop links to attractions, events and other visitor experiences on existing sites. Make changes gradually but over time, build the web presence of GBI and strengthen content on visitor offerings broadly across all channels. There is a particular need for more visitor information about the north of the Island with Port Fitzroy requiring particular attention. Include information on the state of the roads, local transport and travel times as the size of the Island can be deceiving. There is also a need to upgrade information related to the Dark Sky sanctuary and related experiences.

- **Enhance visitor information on national and regional portals:** Actively support tourism businesses to make use of ‘free’ opportunities to list on www.newzealand.com and www.aucklandnz.com. Information is available on both sites on how to do this however, a networking event that is specifically focused on how to do this would be valuable. ATEED and Tourism New Zealand offer support for businesses to upload their organisations on these sites. A specific focus should be placed on increasing the information on these portals about star gazing experiences and the Dark Sky Sanctuary
- **Provide information to visitors about what they *can* spend money on** in the immediate vicinity of their accommodation. Encouraging visitors to ‘shop local’ requires good information about opportunities to spend. Combine this with local level information about other local areas on the Island. This approach will ensure that visitors who are, as an example, based in Claris and have few transport options, know what they can spend money on *in* Claris. Highlight local pubs, restaurants, cafes, petrol station, general stores, pharmacy, fishing supplies, galleries, markets, the Great Barrier Island Community Heritage and Arts Village, accommodation, tours and other facets of the local economy.
- **Strengthen on-Island visitor information** about GBI including directional signage and make good use of printed media to promote GBI. Create a hard copy map (brochure and PDF) of trails and touring routes and distribute this along with other brochures and travelling guides. Include information about responsible visitor behaviour (what to do and what *not* to do), as well as directions on what to do when the weather causes problems. Make sure the PDF is uploaded to as many national, regional and local websites as possible including events and placed at strategic visitor touchpoints e.g. accommodation, air and ferry departure points. Incorporate an insert/flyer for this brochure with information that can be updated frequently to feature ‘what’s on this week’ including events, and food and beverage opening times.
- **Simplify booking processes and increase responsiveness to visitor enquiries.** This action item will require a coordinated approach to streamline the customer journey from online enquiry to booking and actual visit. Research shows that there are difficulties in peak season for visitors to coordinate bookings of transport to the Island along with accommodation and a rental car. While there are a range of technology-facilitated mechanisms and systems that could be used to maximise conversion and simplify booking processes, these are expensive and have functions beyond those needed by local operators.

Currently DGBI advise that they do not always have the resources to allocate someone to monitor the site or reply to email/phone calls in a prompt manner. The appointment of a GBI Community Tourism Coordinator would provide much needed resources to assist.

Encourage operators to bundle experiences and create packages that include flights/ferry, accommodation, rental car and activities. Call on and support experts e.g. ATEED, Aotea Visitor Information Centre, Good Heavens Dark Sky Experiences or Go Great Barrier Tourism to run workshops for businesses who would like to create inclusive packages for visitors.

- **Develop rapid response mechanisms for media and complaints:** There is a need to look carefully at how GBI might manage the impact on visitation of negative publicity, significant complaints or sudden natural disasters. It is clearly impossible to predict what problems (natural or man-made) may have a negative impact on the GBI industry. What is critical is having approaches in place to enable rapid response.

Review any complaints that come to the DGBI website or the Aotea Visitor Information Centre, via social or media more generally. Monitor and review coverage in media and press and respond quickly. Have in place a ‘rapid response’ team (voluntary) of service-minded and media savvy people who can work quickly to deal with issues that need to be highlighted or addressed.

- **Create a ‘When Things Go Wrong’ initiative** that links to the two airlines, the ferry service DOC, local emergency services, rental car services and local accommodation/hospitality providers. This initiative should be based on scenario planning to identify risks to visitors and propose solutions.

Delays or cancellations of air or ferry services mean that the visitor can be stranded overnight with little/no transport or accommodation options. It is important to offer easy access to information on what to do, places where they can get a meal, and places to stay overnight as well as how to get there. Set up a rapid response hotline for visitors to call when they are stranded and need help. A designated response person who is available by phone or can travel to the airport or ferry departure points could be identified each week.

Shortages of supplies (food, beverages, petrol etc.) on the Island can also occur and it is vital to use social media and other local sources of media (e.g. radio, newsletters) to inform people of the situation and provide some sense of when supplies will be available again.

Experience development

To develop the visitor industry in a sustainable fashion it is vital to improve the quality of the experience for both the visitor *and* the host community. Tourism is everyone’s business – linking to various economic sectors but also directly engaging with community – it is the everyday life of GBI residents that form an integral part of the visitor experience.

Evidence

Visitors view GBI as a safe destination that is distinct when compared to other parts of Auckland. They are generally very satisfied with the outdoor activities they participate in, enjoying the experience of tramping and walking, observing wildlife and birdwatching, along with boating activities and time spent with family or friends fishing, diving, swimming and surfing. Experiencing the night sky is a memorable time for many visitors who commented on the beauty and brightness of the stars, and how ‘black the sky’ was for stargazing.

‘Island time’ offers visitors an opportunity to relax and appreciate a slower pace and a simpler lifestyle with many enjoying interactions with local people they encountered. However,

visitors *and* community highlight a need for better quality restaurants and cafes with good food. There is room to increase visitor spend on Island as well as what flows to the Island from prepaid activities. In order to increase spend it will be important to look to develop products and experiences and to enhance the standard of service on offer in existing products.

Offering a greater variety of 'things to do' and 'places to visit' is critical to building visitor yield among all visitor segments. To broaden the experience, visitor, resident and business participants in the strategy research feel that more could be made of not only the wonderful environmental resources of the Island but also the rich culture and heritage of GBI.

The type of visitor experience the community would like to see developed (or further developed) on the Island includes nature based and outdoor activities, and 'stargazing' linked to the Dark Sky Sanctuary initiative on the Island.

Visitors and residents expressed concern about poor customer service on the Island having either experienced or witnessed poor service themselves. Some residents commented that they were disappointed – and in some cases ashamed – to see such behaviour towards visitors. Improving service levels alongside a number of other potential capacity building areas emerged from the research.

Actions:

To increase spend per visitor and grow yield it is critical that residents, businesses and public agencies build networks, and develop quality experiences featuring arts, culture, heritage, and local foods in addition to the undoubted environmental assets on offer. The action items incorporate the concept of storytelling with visitors and community co-creating value and new experiences that connect travel with everyday lives. Here it is useful to ask: What is the story the visitor can take home and relay to friends and relatives about their trip? What do locals love about the Barrier and what do they want to show off? Local stories told by Islanders about their everyday life will add a much needed level of local information and give the visitor a better sense of the 'spirit' of the Barrier and the people who live there.

To enhance yield and improve visitor and community experience it is also important to build capacity among the local workforce. It is essential to build skills to support residents and businesses to engage with the visitor industry.

- **Develop the GBI story, and train people to deliver the story** as a mechanism to involve community (young and old) in tourism and upgrade skills. There is a need to blend the stories and aspirations of new arrivals with the heritage information and local knowledge of long-term residents that gives GBI its sense of place. A focus on the 'Aotea / Great Barrier Island story' will also provide a point of collaboration and bring people together to 'talk tourism'. This initiative will upgrade knowledge of the Barrier as a visitor destination among locals and incorporate training in product development and marketing (with a focus on improving yield and visitor satisfaction).

GBI story development should link to environmental education and the Dark Sky Sanctuary as well as upgrade important literacy and communication skills of young locals.

Another element of this initiative will be the opportunity to support the younger generation to learn skills to develop technology-facilitated opportunities and commercialise them e.g. App development linked to storytelling and wayfinding.

- **Engage local residents, businesses and community groups in developing local content** and rich media (podcasts, videos, images) with local stories and tips for travellers to build local sense of place and enhance the visitor experience. Share these digital assets across multiple channels including websites, portals, and social media. Highlight opportunities for locals to participate in community and tourism related initiatives such as stargazing, tree planting, or upgrading information for visitors about local conditions (e.g. power, water, kauri dieback) and protocols (ways to behave as respectful visitors to the Island).

Strengthen information on local portals and websites about the settlements of GBI – including outdoor recreational spaces, heritage sites, and conservation areas. Work with Maori and DOC to place an emphasis in storytelling, learning and education about the environment (e.g. DOC communications about Kauri dieback), dark skies, culture and heritage and strengthen information provision to allow visitors to discover the quirky and little known aspects of GBI. Partner with the arts, culture and heritage sector in order to promote and curate material around GBI important sites, monuments and museums. There is also the opportunity to engage with children from local schools to tell stories about their everyday life on the Barrier.

Travellers coming to see friends and relatives on the Barrier form an important part of the visitor economy. It is important to encourage residents to share information with visiting friends and relatives. Likewise it is vital to encourage all businesses to feature information about things to do, places to eat, local attractions on GBI on their websites. This could be as simple as adding some links to surrounding enterprises.

- **Nurture the spirit of proud citizens, especially among the young.** There is an important link between support for tourism and residents who have pride in 'their place'. Proud residents will be better ambassadors for tourism on GBI. They are more helpful and friendly to visitors, show more interest and want to be involved more - and involved residents tend to perceive tourism more positively. The online platform will provide a virtual meeting place and an opportunity for residents to strengthen information that is useful for community and visitors alike (things to do, local events, environmental, cultural and heritage information), as well as storytelling.
- **Provide opportunities for locals to learn more about their own heritage and celebrate what they have in their own backyard.** By using the online platform, residents can strengthen links with each other and with local business businesses, enhance a sense of local pride, and have access to environmental, cultural and heritage information to strengthen attachment to the place where they live. This approach also converts into opportunities for tourism experience where visitors and community can co-create value and new experiences, as well as helping local sense of place.

- **Become members of the Global Greeters Network.** One way to develop further the interaction between local and visitors is to explore developing New Zealand's first greeter network. The website www.globalgreeternetwork.info offers an example of how GBI can make most of opportunities to connect visitors and locals in ways that will build the visitor experience, increase yield and heighten awareness among the community of the tourism industry. This could be aligned to another 'first' in the form of GBI being the first island in the world to receive International Dark Sky Sanctuary status.
- **Develop Astrotourism experiences:** Dark skies are becoming a scarce global resource as night lighting and atmospheric pollution increases. Astrotourism opens new opportunities of bridging science and tourism, blending starry nights, science, culture, and nature. Astrotourism consumers demand high knowledge content and excellent quality in their visits. Astrotourists are a premium market and it is important to link product development to quality hospitality. There are several opportunities to expand on current stargazing experiences for visitors (see Appendix 2) and to become a model of Astrotourism/dark skies best practice that others around the world can refer to and learn from.
- **Create itineraries or 'touring routes'** to link stargazing, art, culture and heritage into trails (walk, cycle, birdwatching) that enhance/develop visitor experiences. Develop a map of meaningful experiences on GBI that connect visitors with communities and link to the new itineraries. Create opportunities for people to get together to co-create value with visitors and design these new experiences, tell stories, and update information for visitors. Invite locals and previous visitors to share their stories about GBI, with the aim of co-creating experiences by allowing visitors to tap into local knowledge. A visitor experience/tourism offering based on the worldview, culture and heritage of Ngāti Rehua Ngatiwai ki Aotea people would strengthen understandings of cultural taonga (oral history, language, and everyday life).

The development of touring routes and trails and other networked products will enhance opportunities for 'slow tourism' and visitor interaction. The touring routes will also stimulate local engagement between mana whenua, business owners/operators, local residents, and community groups in the development phase. This will create stronger local networks of collaboration, leading to an increased understanding of the visitor economy and enhanced business performance.

- **Design a portfolio of signature events** such as garden tours, sporting, cultural/ heritage (especially in the off peak/shoulder season) and link to Dark Sky initiatives already in place. Build on existing events and activities that involve community by adding a dimension associated with the visitor economy. For example, include information on touring routes in promotional material for local heritage/arts events. Require information about places to visit in GBI on every event website that is supported financially by the local board or associated funding agencies.
- **Enhance service quality:** While it is not realistic for GBI to commence or develop its own customer service training programmes it can still undertake initiatives to raise service levels. The first initiative is to develop a small number of service related awards for local

businesses. These could be focused more specifically on service quality designed to provide added value and improve the visitor experience through product knowledge and better service.

The development of a local mentoring scheme is another approach that can work to enhance overall performance, not just of staff but also of owner operators. The scheme would take two forms – one would be the organisation of occasional seminars and presentations by experts of interest to GBI. The other would involve the ability to look for mentors within the local area and to have opportunities to learn from the best. A further award could be for the most significant individual contribution from a member of the community to the development of tourism on GBI.

- **Extend on the Tamaki Makaurau / Auckland Ambassador training programme** run by ATEED and develop a GBI-specific tourism Ambassador programme – similar to the one that led to the successful Good Heavens Dark Sky Experiences. The focus of the training should be on understanding a broad variety of ‘things to do’ on GBI including stargazing, cultural, and heritage attractions. Work with iwi to draw on Mātauranga Māori (most commonly translated as Māori knowledge) especially Manaakitanga and Kaitiakitanga as two important elements of Tikanga Māori that provide important concepts for improving hospitality on GBI, as well guardianship of Aotearoa with ways to protect the environment. Aspects of the training should also cover environmental education so that Ambassadors can learn and relay to visitors a better understanding of environmental issues and their impacts, and ways to build and stimulate visitor awareness of GBI’s environmental practices. Ambassadors should be trained in ways to build and encourage visitors to ‘shop local’ and spend more money. Ambassadors can draw on their own experiences and lifestyles and weave stories of interest to visitors.
- **Extend social media training programmes:** Build on current initiatives on GBI to strengthen social media skills for tourism. Assign and train specific ‘Social Media Ambassadors’ to drive online conversations and engage residents and visitors alike through a variety of social media channels (e.g. Instagram, SnapChat, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube). Some of these individuals could also become integral members of the global greeter network. Provide businesses with more training in the technical use of social media, key messages about the visitor experience, and ways to drive social media conversations.
- **Capacity building** – show young people that tourism can be a career (short or long term). An opportunity exists to build on existing education programmes and training initiatives on Island, and to incorporate aspects that build portable skills for new entrants to the tourism and hospitality workforce. Include a variety of short courses e.g. barista training, customer service, and/or be aligned to Skills IQ training programmes. Include tourism in the Aotearoa Education programme as a way to engage young Māori as guides to assist visitors to understand the important pre-European history of the Island and to strengthen connections to language, culture, and place. In time, graduates of short courses would be awarded ‘micro credentials’.

Infrastructure

It is important to recognise the significance of transport infrastructure as a major factor limiting the potential of GBI to develop as a destination. Improving the ability of visitors to travel around GBI is pivotal to activate this Strategy. At the same time it is vital to pay attention to the challenges emerging in the provision of water, telecommunications and other key services.

Evidence

The research that underpins this Strategy highlights visitor, community and business concerns with infrastructure and its ability to cope with the number of visitors and local users during peak periods. This is a critical issue as it causes frustration and can clearly reduce levels of overall satisfaction for host and visitor alike. For residents growing congestion is often the very thing they have tried to escape from.

Both visitors and residents highlight transportation and access to the Island as less appealing aspects about GBI. While both groups expressed dissatisfaction with other elements of local services (internet, power, water, waste management, parking at the airport), the research highlighted a need to maintain regular and cost-effective transport links and perhaps build further competition on routes to the Island. For visitors, the least appealing aspects of GBI include roads in poor condition, a lack of capacity on air services, and the lack of public transport on the Island. Community respondents also expressed concern about access to the Island and associated costs, the poor state of the roads, and the lack of regular public transport services. Community respondents would ideally like to see more transport providers servicing GBI with greater carrying capacity particularly for freight. A reintroduction of the quick ferry would also be welcomed.

Recreational boat users highlight two crucial upgrades in infrastructure requirements: easy access to fresh water and to fuel supplies. Port FitzRoy can be very busy during the summer season and a more effective system is required for refuelling boats. Boaties also commented on the lack of moorings (too many private ones) and all-tide boat ramps as well as the lack of access to land transport so that they can get around the Island if/when they come ashore.

Actions:

Clearly the realm of infrastructure cuts across a range of other sectors and agencies whose roles stretch well beyond the visitor industry. The nature of infrastructure development also involves costs and timescales that stretch beyond the focus of this strategy. Below we highlight the areas of infrastructure development that are seen to be critical for the continued sustainable development of tourism.

- **Develop and enhance public transport options around the Island** especially over the summer season. Upgrade local transport services and look at ways to increase shuttle services from Tryphena wharf and Claris to/from other parts of the Island especially. Link

improved local transport to Port Fitzroy and Whangaparapara to begin with and as demand increases to Kaiarara Bay and Kiwiriki Bay. By providing public transport/shuttles between the north and the south, private boat users would then have the opportunity to have a meal and visit museums, galleries and shops creating a better visitor experience while contributing more than they currently are to the local economy. Explore the potential of developing great access to e-bikes and other forms of transportation that fit with the broader environmental ethic of GBI.

- **Work with transport providers to increase air and ferry capacity** for passengers and freight especially over the summer season. Consider ways to prioritise locals for bookings during peak periods.
- **Prioritise improving the state of the roads** and conducting timely repairs, and sealing key metal roads. Identify and focus on hot spots where there are issues related to visibility, and road safety.
- **Enhance facilities currently available for recreational boat users:** Upgrade access to fresh water and fuel supplies for boaties with an immediate focus on Port Fitzroy. Implement a simple system for refuelling at Port Fitzroy and make sure it is clear to private boat users how this works.
- **Public waste/rubbish review.** Continue to work on ways to identify hot spots to show where public rubbish issues are at their worst during the high season. Ensure there are sufficient waste facilities in place before the 2019 summer season.
- **Improve access to fresh water** where possible and ensure visitors are aware of local practices to conserve water. Water conservation is a hot topic in tourism because generally, visitors consume much more water than local residents and contribute to putting enormous pressure on destinations, especially where water is already scarce.
- **Create a 'Save like a local' campaign** to encourage visitors to conserve water and power, especially during the summer months and dry spells/droughts. Keep messages light and inspirational and encourage visitors to develop a broader appreciation of the need to live and act with respect for and love of water.
- **Improve Internet coverage and access** with Wi-Fi hotspots and increased cell phone coverage. Improvements in connectivity will allow visitors access to information about things to do while they are on the Island and enhance their ability to spend money at local attractions, shops and petrol stations, accommodation and food and beverage outlets.
- **Upgrade the Aotea Visitor Information Centre** Upgrade the Aotea Visitor Information Centre to provide comprehensive information to visitors about a broad range of things to see and do on GBI. Look at ways to improve the current location of the Centre and improve visibility to arriving passengers at Claris airport. Consider options to develop a new building to house an Aotea Interpretation Hub and work with Ngāti Rehua Ngatiwai ki Aotea for input on design and development. Provide funding to increase hours of operation and staff to provide service (full-time), including weekends.

Insight

The success of any visitor strategy depends in large part on its ability to be reviewed and evaluated against its goals and actions. There is a need to develop a simple decision support system that can provide GBI with the evidence to measure the performance of the tourism industry.

Evidence

While there was no research conducted that focused specifically on visitor or community research needs, it is clear that the need for an accurate sense of the size of the visitor industry and how it shapes the local economy and quality of life is of real value to all key stakeholders. It is also pleasing to see the willingness of key groups to engage in the research with the response rate to the community survey being extremely high and visitors also proving to be very willing to share their experiences and thoughts around the visitor industry.

Actions:

The actions outlined here are focused on providing an evaluation framework that will support the achievement sustainable tourism on GBI. The research that underpins this strategy provides an array of 'control' data on resident, business and community attitudes and it is important that future studies evaluate performance of the industry against these variables.

- **Continue the research programme that informed the development of this Strategy** and use the set of existing surveys (Visitor, Community/Business) to monitor progress over time. Adopt a research barometer approach using these survey instruments to evaluate the impacts and performance of the industry. Refined versions of the baseline surveys should be conducted at least every two years – the seasonal focus/duration of the surveys to be decided based on budget and time availability. Tailored questions can be added (and existing questions removed) when needed, to reflect industry developments or areas of local concern. Include approaches to build capacity so that local people can run the surveys with limited assistance. Use the online platform as a virtual meeting place and encourage people to work together to refine the survey questionnaires.
- **Obtain a more accurate assessment of the number of visitor arrivals** than is currently provided. This important research should start as soon as possible with the supplier designing a methodology to suit the local circumstances of GBI. Work with ATEED, air, and sea transport providers to understand current capacity to and from the Island as well as actual passenger loads. Provide transport providers with mechanisms to submit this data in an anonymised and aggregated format to respect commercial sensitivities. As responsible participants in the tourism value chain it is vital that these organisations proactively support the people of GBI to better understand how many visitors they receive. Combine this data with approaches to get a clearer picture of the number of visitor arrivals by private boat – for example, with counts in various locations at various times throughout the year to set baseline data. Figures should be cross checked with local accommodation capacity, and available moorings.

- **Develop an outline of future research needs that can be viewed by graduate students** and tertiary Institutions who may be looking for tourism research related ideas and opportunities in the region. These projects may well not require funding from the GBI Local Board or community and would represent a ‘marketplace’ through which local needs could be met cost effectively and in a robust fashion.
- **Adopt the GBI Sustainable Tourism Index** (Appendix 1). The Index outlines achievable goals for each of the core strategy areas and presents an effective evaluation framework against which to measure performance in the future. One that meets the needs of a diverse set of stakeholders and incorporates economic, social and environmental objectives for the sustainable development of tourism in GBI. The Index cuts across several areas concerned with the environmental, social/cultural, and economic sustainability of tourism on GBI. The Index is simply a starting point and can easily be tailored to fit changing information needs and performance measures. The index can also be adapted to reflect new forms of information or data gathering.

Implementation - Looking Forward

This Visitor Strategy sets out a clear vision for GBI to develop as a sustainable visitor destination and is built on an evidence base gathered through research and significant stakeholder consultation. The Strategy can be used as the mechanism through which to engage tourism stakeholders fostering a collaborative, cohesive tourism industry.

The Implementation Plan for the Strategy (Appendix 2) focuses on required actions over the next five years. In Year 1 the emphasis is on setting up a Governance structure that provides people and resources to activate the Strategy. Attention is also placed on addressing the most immediate issues that currently negatively affect the visitor experience – transport, visitor information and service levels, as well as providing mechanisms to engage community.

In Year 2, the focus moves to experience/product development and improving yield, as well as building capacity and capability for the tourism industry. Years 3-4 have a strong emphasis on consolidation and slow growth of the industry while reviewing and reflecting on development. To monitor progress, the focus in Year 5 shifts to creating useful insights to evaluate success.

While the implementation plan outlined in this document covers a five year period it is critical that the Strategy is viewed as a stepping stone for longer term sustainable tourism development. While the Actions and Implementation Plan outlined in the document cover a broad range of ideas and issues, they all focus on a common theme – that of collaborating and working together in a manner that engages all stakeholders. It is this approach that can create a further vital dimension to an already outstanding set of visitor resources – a level of coordination and community buy-in that creates an improved level of industry performance and sustained community benefit.

It is the linking of the various regional attributes into deeper visitor experiences that is key to the success of tourism on Great Barrier Island. The strategy we have focused on for marketing

and developing the visitor industry is interwoven with the theme of sustainable community development. The approach we have outlined focuses on the most significant and cost-effective avenues for the transmission of visitor information. It also emphasises the need to add quality and depth to the visitor experience in order to build yield and industry performance. Quality and depth can be added, it is argued, through enhanced service levels, improved business networking and collaboration, and the greater involvement of community. By 'slowing' the visitor down through enabling greater visitor - community/business interaction this Strategy is designed to create sustained economic opportunities for generations to come.

This yield and community benefit driven Strategy is designed to generate more local value from every visitor to GBI and is predicated on increasing visitor satisfaction and spend while also enhancing resident quality of life. For the visitor industry to work effectively for community and regional development it is absolutely critical that all local stakeholders work together to enhance visitor experience and yield.

There is value in pursuing a yield, rather than arrivals, based approach to industry development. This means shaping demand to attract the 'right' kind of visitor to assist in reaching economic development goals and creating a sustainable industry that does not degrade the environmental and community resources upon which it depends.

Appendix 1: Aotea / Great Barrier Island Sustainable Tourism Indicators

Indicator	Definition	Baseline	Target & Goals	Data	Frequency of Report	Key Role
Community support for tourism (%)	Support for the tourism industry at a resident and business level	2017/2018	Increased % who believe tourism is good for GBI.	Community Survey (residents and business)	Every 2 years	GBLB in partnership with the community tourism reference group (DGBI)
Community involvement in tourism	Direct involvement in tourism or exposure to it	2017/2018	Employment in tourism related businesses increases and/or indirect involvement	Community Survey (residents and business)	Every 2 years	GBLB in partnership with DGBI
Community perceived impacts of tourism	Perceived impact on income, Quality of life etc.	2017/2018	Increased sense of positive impacts, reduction in negative	Community Survey (residents and business)	Every 2 years	GBLB in partnership with DGBI
Visitor behaviour towards locals	Perceived impact of summer season visitors	2017/2018	Increased sense of positive impacts, reduction in negative	Community Survey (residents and business)	Every 2 years	GBLB in partnership with DGBI
Visitor attitudes to local people	How do community and local people feature in the appealing aspects of the visit?	2017/2018	Increase in those stating local people and community dimensions were appealing aspect of visit	Visitor survey	Every 2 years	GBLB in partnership with DGBI
Visitor participation in cultural, heritage activities	Visitors report on participation in culture, heritage	2017/2018	Participation in cultural, heritage activities increases	Visitor survey	Every 2 years	GBLB in partnership with DGBI
Visitor comments on availability of food and beverage	Review trends in comments from visitors that focus on food and beverage	2017/2018	Increase in positive feedback and decrease in negative Increase in participation in F&B activities	Visitor survey	Every 2 years	GBLB in partnership with DGBI

Indicator	Definition	Baseline	Target & Goals	Data	Frequency of Report	Key Role
Visitor reports on customer service	Visitors feel welcome on GBI and customer service improves.	2017/2018	Fewer comments about poor service	Visitor survey	Every 2 years	GBLB in partnership with DGBI
Dark Skies is a major influencer of decision to visit GBI	Visitors are influenced by Dark Skies Sanctuary initiative	2017/2018	Visitor motivations to visit GBI show strengthened influence of Dark Skies	Visitor survey	Every 2 years	GBLB in partnership with DGBI
Visitor Yield	Visitor spend per person per day	2017/2018	Increase of 5% increase per annum	Visitor survey	Every 2 years	GBLB in partnership with DGBI
Visitor comments on environment (+ -)	Visitor feedback on environmental dimensions of their visit	2017/2018	To maintain and increase positive feedback on environmental quality	Visitor survey	Every 2 years	GBLB in partnership with DGBI
% of visitors using car, cycle or public transport	Percentage of visitors who make use of these transport forms.	2017/2018	Greater public transport/ zero emission transport, fewer car rentals	Visitor survey	Every 2 years	GBLB in partnership with DGBI
% of visitors signing GBI Responsible Tourism Pledge	Percentage of visitors who commit to travel responsibility	New	5% of visitors sign The Pledge in first year	Online stats	2019 then annual	DGBI
Increased air and ferry linkages	Build stronger and sustained transport links BUT only at a rate that reflects current capacity	New	Review air and ferry capacity in terms of impact on current carrying capacity for tourism.	Various	2019 then every 2 years	GBLB
Visitor arrivals	A clear approach to understand number of visitor arrivals	New	Review method of calculating arrivals. Upgrade the approach and commission research to understand arrival figures		2018 then every 2 years	GBLB and ATEED

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