

Destination Queenstown and Lake Wānaka Tourism

Kia Ora South China Report **(Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Hong Kong)**

June 2025

1. Overview

Kia Ora South (KOS) is a collaborative international marketing initiative led by Christchurch International Airport Limited (CIAL). The program aims to promote premium South Island travel experiences to key international markets with direct airline connectivity to Christchurch.

The 2025 KOS roadshow in China took place from June 23 to June 30, visiting Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, and Hong Kong. There are seasonal flights directly connect Christchurch to Guangzhou & Hong Kong. Destination Queenstown (DQ) and Lake Wānaka Tourism (LWT) joined forces with CIAL, Tourism New Zealand (TNZ), and airline partners to promote high-value tourism experiences and strengthen industry relationships. Across the four cities, the team trained over 270 trade partners, engaged with media, and hosted Matariki gala dinners to celebrate Māori New Year and deepen cultural engagement.

This initiative aligns with DQ and LWT's strategic goal to drive four-season visitation from China from key Tier 1 cities.

2. Market Background

- China's 2025 Economic Outlook: Despite continued macroeconomic challenges, China's economy grew steadily at 4.9% YoY in Q1 2025. While manufacturing and exports remain robust, domestic consumption and the property market are still in recovery. (Source: China Economic Monitor, July 2025)
- Travel Trends: Chinese outbound tourism is rapidly rebounding, especially from Tier 1 cities. While total volume to New Zealand hasn't yet returned to 2019 levels, Chinese tourists remain the world's highest spenders on international travel, even if until recently most of this revenue was spent on trips within Asia. (UN Tourism Dashboard, June 2025)
- New Zealand-China ties strengthened by PM Luxon's visit: one week before KOS China started, Prime Minister Chris Luxon made his first official trip to China, meeting with President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang. As a key tourism initiative, Luxon announced streamlined transit procedures: from November 2025, a 12-month visa waiver trial for Chinese visitors arriving from Australia will be implemented and supported by expanded flight services. These measures reflect strong government-level backing, through MBIE, NZTE, and Immigration NZ, for increasing Chinese visitor numbers and strengthening tourism ties between the two countries.

3. Event Objectives

- Reconnect with leading Chinese travel sellers and airline partners.
- Position the South Island as premium, year-round destinations.
- Showcase immersive experiences, Māori culture, and the unique natural scenery

4. Attendance/Attendees

- Presenters:

Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen: The Rees Hotel Queenstown, Ngāi Tahu Tourism, Southern Discoveries, RealNZ, Totally Tourism (The Helicopter Line/ Alpine HeliSki), Trojan Holdings (KJet, NZski, Hermitage Hotels), NZONE Skydiving/Skydive Wānaka, Kaikoura Whale Watch, Distinction Hotels, Entrade Group, THL Holdings, Fliggy, ChristchurchNZ, Kaikoura, Hurunui, Development West Coast, Destination Queenstown and Lake Wānaka Tourism

Hong Kong: The Rees Hotel Queenstown, Ngāi Tahu Tourism, Southern Discoveries, RealNZ, Totally Tourism (The Helicopter Line/ Alpine HeliSki), Trojan Holdings (KJet, NZski, Hermitage Hotels), NZONE Skydiving/Skydive Wānaka, Kaikoura Whale Watch, Distinction Hotels, Fliggy, ChristchurchNZ, Kaikoura, Hurunui, Development West Coast, Destination Queenstown and Lake Wānaka Tourism

Travel industry sellers:

Beijing: 65; Chengdu: 89, Guangzhou:58; Shenzhen: 66

TNZ:

Cindy Chen, Berlin bai, Emma Zhou, Sandy He

Event format: roadshow – on stage presentation and networking dinner events

5. Market Insights/Trends

- Visitor Recovery: Total Chinese arrivals to New Zealand in the year ending June 2025 reached 272,480—approximately 65% of 2019 levels. Recovery was strongest during Chinese New Year (84%) and Golden Week. (Source: Stats NZ)
- Spending Power: Chinese holidaymakers spent \$1.2 billion in New Zealand in the year ending March 2025, with an average spend of \$5,723 per trip, increasing to \$6,890 for holiday visitors. (Source: MBIE IVS)
- Travel Behaviours:
 - Strong demand for unique and immersive experiences: Many Chinese travellers are seeking “once-in-a-lifetime” activities, often allocating a third of their travel budget to memorable and immersive experiences.
 - Natural scenery remains a key motivator: Nearly 80% of Chinese holiday visitors cite New Zealand’s landscapes as a core reason for travel. Queenstown and Wānaka are considered must-visit destinations, known for their clean air, dramatic mountains, lakes, and national parks. The region’s safe and uncrowded environment further enhances its appeal.
 - Growing preference for smaller group tours and FIT (Free Independent Travel): Travellers increasingly value flexibility, personalised experiences, and control over their itineraries, moving away from large, commercial tour formats.
 - Digital-first travel planning: Chinese travellers are highly digital, relying on social platforms for research and making bookings closer to departure. While platforms like Xiaohongshu, Douyin, and Ctrip are popular across age groups, their roles vary across different stages of the travel journey.

- Seasonality: Approximately 60% of Chinese visits to New Zealand occur during the off-peak seasons, supporting year-round tourism businesses, and align with sustainability objectives. Interest in autumn travel is also growing, creating further opportunities to distribute demand more evenly.
- Winter Tourism Potential: China’s booming ice and snow tourism sector—driven by a national goal to reach 50 million participants by 2025—presents a significant opportunity. The rapid growth of indoor ski resorts has made winter sports a year-round activity in China. This trend positions New Zealand’s South Island as an attractive destination for beginner skiers and snow sports enthusiasts.

Airline Updates/ Recovery

- Current Capacity: Approx. 45 direct flights/week between China and New Zealand (as of July 2025), including services by: Air New Zealand, Air China, China Eastern, China Southern, Hainan Airlines, Shenzhen Airlines, Sichuan Airlines (pause for winter season, TBC for summer), and Cathay Pacific.
- To South Island:
 - China Southern’s Guangzhou–Christchurch service is returning this summer from 1 November, initially with five flights per week, before ramping up to a daily service from 18 December to 3 March 2026. With a 26% boost in capacity and a longer operating window that includes the Chinese New Year.
 - From 3 November 2025, Cathay Pacific will operate three flights a week between Christchurch and Hong Kong, increasing to four weekly services at the peak of the summer season between December and February. Traditionally starting in December, the earlier launch reflects growing demand for travel to and from our region.

6. Summary

- The 2025 Kia Ora South (KOS) roadshow successfully re-established Queenstown’s presence in key Chinese outbound markets, fostering trade engagement, promoting four-season travel, and showcasing the region’s premium offerings.
- For the first time since the pandemic, Lake Wānaka Tourism returned to the China market as part of the delegation. Known for its stunning natural beauty and tranquil charm, Wānaka holds strong appeal among Chinese travellers. Its renewed presence aims to bridge relationships between the Chinese sales industry and local Wānaka operators, strengthening trade connections and creating new visitor opportunities.
- The partnership with Christchurch International Airport (CIAL) plays a critical role in connecting Queenstown and Wānaka with the Chinese market. As a key South Island gateway, CIAL enhances accessibility and supports the development of new routes and more efficient connectivity between China and the lower South Island.
- Mainland China’s Tier 1 cities remain a core source of high-value FIT and winter travellers. Hong Kong continues to serve as a regional hub, offering strong opportunities in the short-lead and family segments.
- Digital storytelling and platform localisation—particularly through channels such as Xiaohongshu and OTAs—are vital to engaging and providing seamless booking experience for the next generation of Chinese travellers.

- Queenstown’s adventure, winter, and nature-based products are well aligned with current demand trends, especially among the growing number of independent travellers and beginner-to-intermediate ski enthusiasts.

7. Related Content/Event Images



Training Workshop in Shenzhen(around 100 attendees)



Yangzi presenting Queenstown and Wānaka



Scott Callaway (CIAL) making speech during Matariki Celebration Dinner



TNZ, China Southern, Zuzuche(OTA) and CIAL launched marketing campaign



Queenstown operators



Media interview