



## **Destination Queenstown**

# **Kia Ora South & North America Sales Visit**

San Francisco, Los Angeles, Vancouver, Toronto, Chicago and Boston

September 2024

## 1. Overview

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Christchurch Airport is New Zealand's second largest airport, with regular services to 15 destinations around the country and more than 140 international arrivals and departures every week. As the international gateway to the South Island, we supported Christchurch International Airport (CIAL) with the new United Airlines (UA) direct service from San Francisco to Christchurch, operating seasonally from Dec 24 – Mar 25.

This is the second season of operation for this service and Destination Queenstown was invited to participate in sharing SOUTH with agents in three locations – Walnut Creek, San Jose and downtown San Francisco, engaging with just over 100 agents.

Participants/Operators also included: Christchurch NZ (RTO), Destination Queenstown (RTO), United Airlines, Air New Zealand and operators – Whale Watch Kaikoura, Marlborough Tour Company, Distinction Hotels, Ngai Tahu Tourism, RealNZ, The Helicopter Line, The Rees Hotel, and ANZCRO (supporting conversion partner).

In addition to the invite to join the above activity, Christchurch NZ and Destination Queenstown were joined by Rotorua NZ and Wellington NZ to do joint sales visits for training and education in a series of targeted cities.

This came about due to the lack of engagement from Tourism New Zealand in the North American market with a Kiwi Link or alternative event. Cities visited included – Los Angeles, Vancouver, Toronto, Chicago and Boston.

## 2. Market Background

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In respect of the support for the Kia Ora South event there are over 900K people in the San Francisco metropolitan area, with 7.5 million in the wider Bay Area. From the first summer season of operation the United Airlines SFO-CHC service (Dec 23 – Mar 24) 36% of tickets purchased were from the Bay Area.

There is also a great synergy of outdoor enthusiasts with the surrounding landscape such as Yosemite, wine country (Napa/Sanoma), Tahoe area for ski and a great span of coastline that makes New Zealand an enticing proposition for the active considerer, of which we know nature, landscape and outdoor adventure are big drawcards.

In addition, the connectivity from North America to New Zealand has never been greater coupled with the favourable exchange rate that sets New Zealand as being a highly attractive proposition to this market as a visitor destination.

Further to attending the Kia Ora South event, the decision to stay on for an additional week to maximise the opportunity of being in market and to do sales visits with three other Regional Tourism Offices became an attractive proposition for travel trade partners in the US and Canada.

### 3. Event Objectives & Benefits

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Objectives for this planned activity was to deepen relationships, build confidence in advisors selling our region to their clients, while sharing our tourism update - product, community, supportive tools and marketing assets.

The typical event format in supporting Tourism New Zealand's in-market activity as the Regional Tourism Office is usually one-to-one appointments or small group training with limited time to present (7-10 mins). Or as per the last Kiwi Link presenting the regions of New Zealand over group dining periods. Less than ideal.

The benefit of this personalised sales activity enabled a vastly more comprehensive training session with key partners and advisors that provided a level of depth that you don't get from a Tourism New Zealand event.

The benefit of not only personalising training to be specific to the travel trade partner, while also covering our regional differences as a collective allowed us to also support those newer to the industry with a comprehensive overview of what makes our regions unique, while also sharing key updates from our community and subsequent travel trade product. I believe our collective RTO representation was an attractive proposition to our trade partners for both time efficiency and depth of overview from multiple regions in one sitting.

This opportunity also enabled building a closer relationship to not only make follow-up with greater depth but also foster more support for future endeavours - famils, webinar, in-person training and connecting operators and relevant product (directly and through their inbound partners). This in turn supports the many operators that don't have the budget to be in market or dedicated sales managers. Our neutrality as the RTO spans all inventory from across the region, while also sharing marketing assets and storytelling that support their own activity across website, socials/brochures.

Future proofing engagement and building relationships is key in respect of our conventional RTO output and our community's aspiration regarding our DMP. Sharing our destination knowledge, our community story and developments and most importantly the broad scope of tourism offering in our portfolio.

### 4. Cities/Attendance/Format

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San Francisco –

Kia Ora South Event with Christchurch Airport and select operators. Three events in three locations.

Air New Zealand, Ben Evers-Swindell and Joel Arroyo – discussion on support of emerging markets, how an RTO works and the support and assistance we can offer, including support of campaign via digital channels for NAM market.

Los Angeles –

Tourism New Zealand office 15 advisors and key wholesale partners trained.

Including Tourism New Zealand meeting for discussion around Kiwi Link proposal in events calendar, investment and criteria for operator selection earmarked for September 2025 (proposal is due for circulation before end of 2024).

Air New Zealand, Sabine Engelbrecht

Vancouver –

Fiji Airways, Soran Prasad, Account Manager Western Canada

Downunder Travel training – Jane Osborne and team

Forbes Travel advisors

Kiwi Connect catch up with 12 advisors and Air New Zealand (Mason Spencer)

Toronto –

Goway training - webinar 80 advisors and podcast recording

Kensington Tours 25 agents trained

Chicago –

Southern World – Pete and Aidan Askin

Down Under Endeavours 25th birthday celebration

Boston –

Shared social space with 15 advisors providing update from the Four Corners (Rotorua, Wellington, Christchurch and Queenstown).

## 5. Summary

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This was a successful mission to North America with the entry event being Kia Ora South.

My recommendation looking forward would be to build out another opportunity to the United States and Canada in the new financial year (FY 25-26) again in conjunction with a collective of RTO partners, or small group of operators from the region.

However, a determining factor in that opportunity will be dependent on the activity that Tourism New Zealand have planned for their Kiwi Link event in September of 2025 and how RTO's features in their programme, as without one-to-one appointments, I would favour a collective sales visit with key industry contacts and good appointment time for training/update in the schedule over a Kiwi Link event.

The alternative is to explore additional opportunity outside of Tourism New Zealand events and alongside other key partners (Air New Zealand/wholesale partner) where their involvement in other industry events in the US/Canada/Mexico opens new opportunity for engaging with travel sellers.

## 6. Related Content / Event Images



Kia Ora South – San Francisco (San Jose)

Joel Arroyo, Air NZ – Sandy Everett, United Airlines – Scott Callaway, Christchurch Airport – Leanne Cheesman, United Airlines – Geraldine McMillan, RealNZ and Linda McIntosh, Destination Queenstown



Kia Ora South – San Francisco (Walnut Creek)  
Operators and Advisors



Abba Kahu, Whalewatch Kaikoura - Sandy Everett, United Airlines - Gerladine McMillan, RealNZ – Jolanda Cave, Ngai Tahu Tourism – Linda McIntosh, Destination Queenstown – Krissy Griggs, ChristchurchNZ – Leanne Cheesman, United Airlines – Brad Patterson, Totally Tourism



Training from Tourism New Zealand office, Los Angeles  
Linda McIntosh, Destination Queenstown – Krissy Griggs, ChristchurchNZ – Lou Baddiley, RotoruaNZ – Di Reid, WellingtonNZ



Tourism New Zealand Training – four RTO's and advisors, including Air New Zealand Sabine Engelbrecht