The Waikato Tourism Monitoring Observatory

Objectives and Mission

Immediate/short term

The observatory seeks to monitor the activities of tourists, the nature of those activities and the consequences for communities and environment in addition to the local tourism industry.

In the immediate short-term it will concentrate on two major tourist locations within the Waikato region, namely Raglan and Waitomo. The former is a coastal community of approximately 5,000 households, but in the summer the population effectively triples. This raises issues of capacity with reference to issues such as waste management, water supply and sewage while additionally adding to the demand on local services. By the same token however, the community gains from the expenditure by tourists, and hosts a wide range of cafes and restaurants while also providing a market for the local potters and painters who have made Raglan their home. Raglan is popular with surfers because it has what is often described as the ‘best left hand break’ in the southern hemisphere.

Waitomo lies in a limestone landscape that is honeycombed with caves, of which a small number are used for commercial tourist attractions. Foremost among these are the Waitomo Glowworm Caves currently managed by one of New Zealand’s major tourism companies, namely Tourism Holdings, which is a publicly quoted company on the New Zealand Stock Exchange. The company has operations in Australia and the USA in addition to New Zealand, and operates and manufactures camper vans in addition to managing attractions. Among other caves systems are Black Water Rafting and The Lost World. The former involves floating down an underground river and the later has a 100 metre abseil experience to enter the cave system. The village is quite small, having about xxx households, and issues exist as to how best the village might develop in the future.

The immediate purpose of the Observatory will be:

a) To assess residents’ views about the impacts of tourism, and how they would wish tourism to develop. Initially this will be completed through meetings and a formal survey.

b) To assess tourists’ demands, how the visit to these locations fit into a wider framework of visit activities, to obtain data on tourist activities, their perceptions of the locations, including what it is that appeals to them about the locations, and to further estimate levels of expenditure.

c) To establish an audit of local tourism resources in conjunction with local Chambers of Commerce and Visitor Information Centres to better understand the nature of tourism in these locations.

d) To bring about a better engagement between the university and the local industry that advantages all stakeholders including those students who are engaged in learning about the tourism industry, and to enhance their CVs for gaining employment in the industry while being imbued with conservation and environmental principles in addition to their management skills.

e) Through these initial activities to better identify research projects for the longer term.
f) In the immediate future the projects will relate to baseline issues (see clause b of UNWTO INSTO documentation) ‘local satisfaction with tourism’, ‘destination economic benefits (initially with reference to employment), tourism seasonality, and development control.

g) The other objectives will commence from about 2 years out as stated below.

h) The first specific area within the Waikato that will be assessed will be Raglan, with the second being Waitomo.

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**Long-Term Objectives**

The long-term objectives are to:

a) Establish ‘The Waikato UNWTO Tourism Monitoring Observatory’ as a key research resource for all stakeholders in the Waikato tourism industry

b) To generate research findings that inform planning on the part of the local land authorities, and to provide monitoring and research that aids the Hamilton-Waikato Regional Tourism Organisation in the planning of sustainable tourism from the economic, social and environmental perspectives

c) To act as a disseminator of good practice through the dissemination of research findings and case studies relating to sustainable practices and the develop of product for the rapidly changing patterns of demand.

d) Having solidified relations with the local industry in Raglan it is envisaged the projects will:

i) Begin considering the other base line activities starting with waste management while continuing surveys started under the short term initiatives indicated above

ii) Commence on the second location in Waitomo, and then move to other areas including Matamata and Morrisville.

iii) These additional areas will be served by a growing body of research oriented students under a revamped tourism and hospitality major in the Waikato Management School B.Bus degree which will require their participation in the programme. This will therefore extend the principles of the UNWTO-INSTO programme into the educational curriculum.