



## Regional and District Tourism Plans

### Description

Tourism strategies are a common form of non-statutory strategic planning. They may be developed and implemented at any scale, from local to national or even supra-national. In New Zealand, tourism strategies sit outside but complement statutory [Resource Management Act \(RMA\) framework](#) planning. Tourism strategies can extend beyond sustainable management of the natural environment and, together with RMA or other mechanisms, can facilitate development that is socially, economically and environmentally sustainable and in turn gain community support and provide diverse benefits to the community. Such benefits include recognition and protection of natural and cultural components within the landscape, recognition of capacity and up-skilling needs of local community, employment and economic opportunities, and enhancement of local infrastructure.

### How and when the tool is used

Many New Zealand districts and regions have produced tourism strategies. Review of tourism strategies published in New Zealand from the mid 1990s onwards indicates that there appears to be no standard model used by the authors of the strategies. This is perhaps appropriate, given the geographic, social and economic differences between regions. These differences include size and population of the region, current level of development and significance of the tourism industry; the nature of tourism areas and products; current status of infrastructure; and number and range of stakeholders.

In general, very little information is provided in the strategies themselves about how they were developed, or the background information used to develop them. Despite these differences and shortcomings, most strategies do contain some common elements, both in the methods by which they were developed, and in the attention paid to particular contextual elements. These are listed below. The emphasis of these strategies tends to focus on economic development of a region through the development of the tourism industry.

More recent strategies (especially those developed since the time of the New Zealand Tourism Strategy 2010) emphasise tourism sustainability. They may explicitly address environmental, economic or social sustainability, but more often, detailed consideration of sustainability requirements is absent.

Tourism strategies often do not strongly focus on public conservation land, even in regions or districts where many of the key tourism sites are on public lands. These lands are covered by Conservation Management Strategies prepared under the [Conservation Act framework](#) processes. Tourism content in these latter strategies is often confined to management of visitor impacts on conservation land. It has thus proved difficult to achieve integration between strategic planning for public and private land, even though this is potentially a strong advantage of non-statutory strategic planning. Some strategies consider marine areas adjacent to a region or District and can therefore be linked to statutory or non-statutory [marine planning](#) tools.

The following steps are generally common to strategy development processes.

1. *Establish a Steering/Management Group:* A range of agencies have co-ordinated, sponsored or developed tourism strategies, including regional and local councils, economic development agencies and Regional Tourism Organisations (RTOs). Some early strategies were commissioned by the New Zealand Tourism Board. The steering group usually has representatives from a range of key players, e.g. RTOs, tourism businesses, tangata whenua, territorial authorities and Department of Conservation. This steering group advises the planners by identifying and discussing issues to be investigated. It also reviews drafts on an ongoing basis, approves the final strategy and may be used informally for networking.
2. *Consultation and initial scoping:* Scoping is usually done by telephone or face-to-face interviews with key members of the community, representative individuals from key tourism providers or individuals from territorial authorities. Public or stakeholder meetings or focus groups may be held, which include community members or community organisations, and tourism providers. Scoping should be preceded by [stakeholder analysis](#).



These meetings are used to determine community aspirations, concerns, preferred kinds of tourism and tourists, etc. These considerations can be integrated into an overall framework of high level objectives, to be used as a benchmark against which the strategy is tested against. They are also used to identify key issues in terms of infrastructure, funding etc.


3. *Consider contextual issues by reviewing secondary data:* Sources range widely. Census data, Ministry of Tourism and Tourism NZ statistics are commonly used (e.g. International Visitor Survey, Domestic Travel Survey, Accommodation Monitor); also territorial government plans, tourism marketing plans, accommodation guides, and a wide range of other research or information reports. Factors commonly considered include geography, climate, history; infrastructure (issues such as housing, sewerage, waste management, water, roads, recreation facilities and public roads, airports); information about local communities; information about tourists: trends, characteristics, market segmentation; inventory of local and regional tourism sector.
4. *Consider contextual issues through research:* For example for the strategies produced as part of the regional tourism research conducted by the Tourism Recreation Research and Education Centre (Lincoln University) (Westland, Rotorua, Kaikoura) and by the University of Otago towards a tourism strategy for the Catlins district. Research included: information about tourists: characteristics, market segmentation; importance of tourism to the economy; information about local communities; participation of Maori in tourism; and information about local government involvement.

Other consideration of general contextual issues includes: identified partnership and relationships that need to be developed, identification of potential tourism products; capacity issues; SWOT analysis.

5. *Implementation and recommendations:* Implementation detail varies in specificity according to issue. Generally there is some kind of Action Plan. Recommendations most commonly focused on include: coordination of tourism industry - partnerships and relationships; professionalism and Service Standards; product development; infrastructure requirements: marketing, or 'positioning' (both international and domestic); site-specific actions required.
6. *Draft Strategy Released and Reviewed:* A draft outlining contextual issues, plus recommendations for implementation is made available for review to community members, tourism operators, and other parties. This can take the form of public meetings. Responses can also be in the form of written submissions. The draft strategy is modified if necessary.
7. *Strategy is Finalised:* It is authorised and released by Steering Group. For most of the strategies, it is noted that there is no statutory obligation for enforcement. The responsibility for carrying out different aspects of the strategy is placed on key players in the tourism industry or community.

### Our evaluation

Whilst some commonalities do exist between strategies, there is considerable variation in the way in which stakeholders views are incorporated into the strategy, the emphasis given to different contextual issues, and the level and specificity of recommendations.

Adequate attention is rarely paid to the full range of contextual issues, both in the analytical phases and provision of recommendations/action strategies. For example: areas of economic/cultural/social/recreational conflict; characteristics of communities; research or information about tourism impacts in the region, especially social or environmental. Finally, the processes by which strategies were developed could be made a lot more transparent. Most strategies have lacked adequate means of implementation. This is accentuated by their non-statutory status. In future, [long-term council community plans](#)  may provide powerful additional linkages into a range of statutory and non-statutory implementation mechanisms available to councils.