



NORTH WEST RODNEY VISITOR STRATEGY 2015-2020

Rodney Local Board

January 2015

**The New Zealand Tourism
Research Institute**

Table of contents:

Acknowledgements.....	iii
Introduction.....	1
Context and research insights	2
Strategy Focus.....	6
Action Areas	7
Action 1: Create an active voice to lead tourism.....	9
Action 2: Increase levels of collaboration and networking.....	10
Action 3: Build on iconic attractions.....	12
Action 4: Develop arts, cultural, and heritage experiences	16
Action 5: Develop local food experiences.....	18
Action 6: Strengthen information sharing	20
Action 7: Develop infrastructure and manage resources	23
Action 8: Use research to support future decision making	24
Moving forward.....	25

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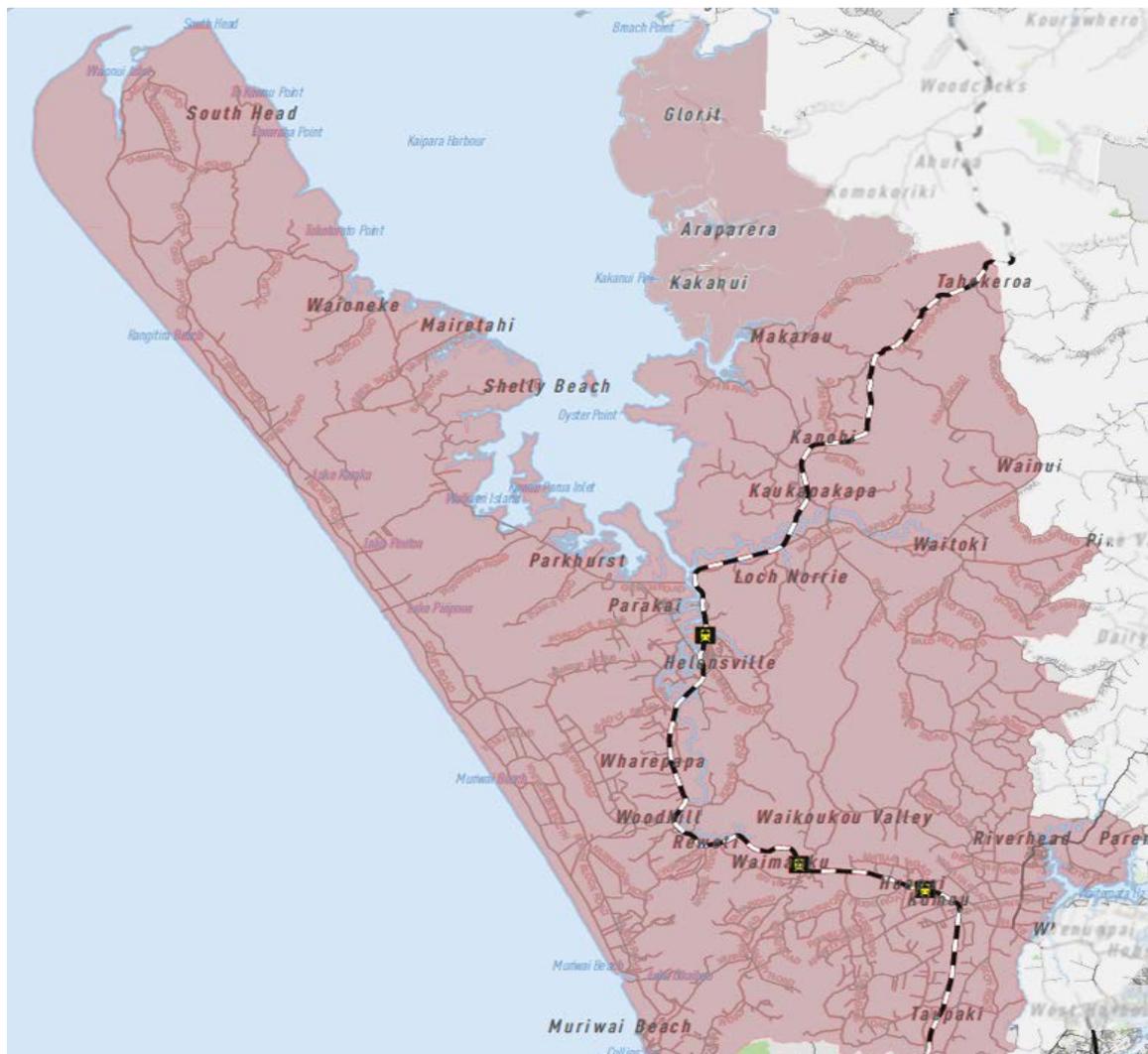
Introduction

In December 2013, Rodney Local Board (RLB), with support from Auckland Tourism Events and Economic Development (ATEED), commissioned the New Zealand Tourism Research Institute (NZTRI) at the Auckland University of Technology to develop a five-year Visitor Strategy for the north-western area of the Rodney Ward.

The focus of the *North West Rodney Visitor Strategy 2015-2020* is on improving visitor spend, raising awareness of the visitor industry for both visitor and community alike, and increasing levels of collaboration between key stakeholders in the tourism industry. Fundamental to this Strategy is the need to provide sustainable livelihoods for local residents and enhance their quality of life.

The geographic area covered by this Strategy (see Figure 1) stretches from Taupaki in the south through to Glorit in the north, and includes Muriwai, Kumeu, Riverhead, Waimauku, Huapai, Helensville, Parakai, Kaukapakapa, Shelley Beach, Makarau, and South Head.

Figure 1: Map of the North West Rodney area



The Strategy is guided by the following vision statement:

A Vision for North West Rodney Tourism

The people of North West Rodney will work together to develop a destination that celebrates our people, respects our rich history and Maori heritage, and ensures that tourism enhances our treasured quality of life. We will create opportunities for business to thrive and continue to build on the distinctive character of our towns and villages. Tourism will grow the regional economy through a strategic focus on increasing visitor yield and will also help to sustain the environmental and cultural taonga of the region.

There are eight action areas designed to achieve this vision:

1. Create an active voice to lead tourism
2. Increase levels of collaboration and networking
3. Build on iconic attractions
4. Develop arts, cultural, and heritage experiences
5. Develop local food experiences
6. Strengthen information sharing
7. Develop infrastructure and manage resources effectively
8. Use research to support decision making

The Strategy document commences with an overview of the current context for NWR, briefly examining the regional and local dynamics that are playing a role in influencing the area's development. A review of the current visitor offer is presented drawing on highlights from the NZTRI strategy research programme. The Strategy then outlines eight linked action areas designed to deliver growth in the visitor industry of NWR.

Context and research insights

The *North West Rodney Visitor Strategy* has been informed by considerable business, visitor and community participation. An extensive research and strategy formulation process was conducted by NZTRI between January and September 2014 (see www.regionalsurveys.co.nz for a full outline of the research programme and related reports).

The Strategy draws on the following sources of information:

- Findings from the 2014 North West Rodney Visitor, Resident and Business surveys
- Review of relevant reports, plans and other government materials

Rodney Ward is by far the largest Ward in the Auckland region in terms of land area however its population ranks 15th in size out of the 21 Auckland local boards. Characterised as predominantly rural, with scatterings of small townships and residential settlements, Rodney has experienced relatively high population growth in recent years with an increase of 11% between 2006 and 2013 - higher than the Auckland regional growth rate of 8 per cent over the same census period.

Employment in the tourism sector in the Rodney Ward has increased by 32% in the 10 years to 2012. In tandem with a growing tourism industry there is a focus in Rodney Local Board plans to support businesses to work together to strengthen and grow local economies, and a commitment to empower communities to plan for their own futures and progress economic initiatives themselves. Enabling and supporting the aspirations of Maori and mana whenua, and providing opportunities for iwi to contribute to the future well-being of the area is also a priority for Rodney.

The research conducted for the Strategy shows that North West Rodney is seen by visitors and residents alike as an easily accessible area to Auckland that offers the opportunity to enjoy a peaceful, rural environment while escaping the frenetic pace of the city. NWR provides visitors plenty of opportunities to participate in outdoor recreational activities with friends and family.

Residents make the most of the numerous recreational opportunities at their door step with over 90% participation rates in all four broad categories - outdoor activities, food and beverage, events and 'other' activities. While the vast majority of visitors surveyed also participate in outdoor activities, only half partake in the area's food and beverage offerings, or attend events. Visitors participate even less in 'other' activities for example, visiting arts, cultural and heritage attractions, parks and gardens, and shopping.

The research programme highlighted three distinct groups of visitors:

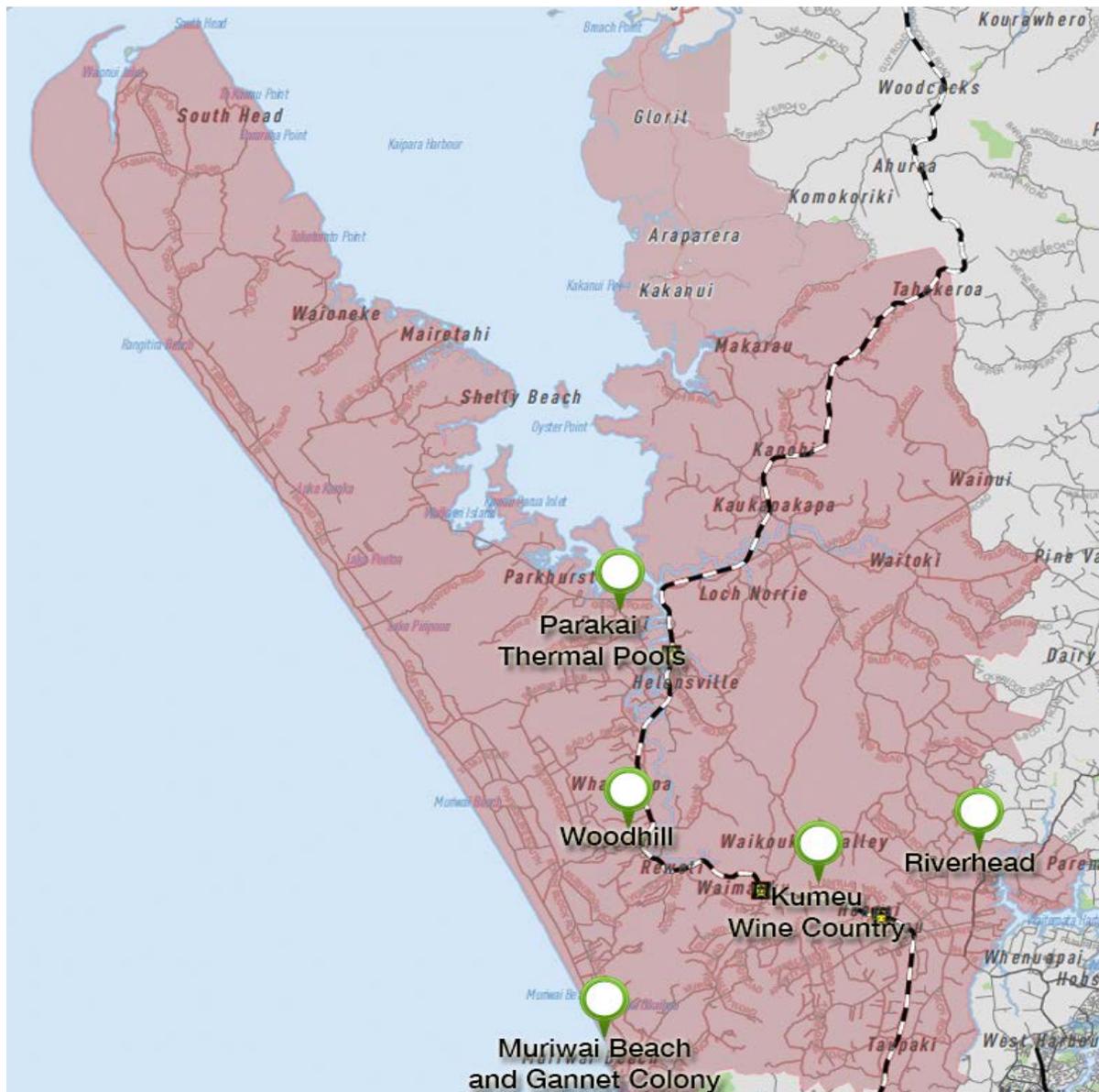
- i. Just passing through
- ii. Focused on visiting an iconic attraction
- iii. Regionally interactive

For most of the small towns and settlements of NWR many visitors are '*Just Passing Through*' on their way to one of the iconic attractions. These visitors might stop at a dairy or a petrol station en route, but are not really participating in any of the local visitor experiences on offer. Encouraging these visitors to 'slow down' and experience some of what NWR has to offer the visitor is an important way to raise yield. Every extra dollar spent by those 'passing through' is vital simply because of growing use of the SH16 option for travel to and from the North.

The largest group of visitors surveyed were engaged in a fairly focused visit to one of five 'iconic attractions' in the NWR area (see Figure 2):

- 1) Parakai (Thermal pools)
- 2) Muriwai (Gannet colony and beach)
- 3) Woodhill (outdoor activities)
- 4) Kumeu Wine Country
- 5) Riverhead (ferry services, food and beverage)

Figure 2: North West Rodney – iconic attractions



This group spend most of their time at one of these five iconic attractions. While they will travel through other areas of NWR to reach the focus of their visit, they do not always stop to participate in a broader range of other activities. The challenge here is to get these visitors to spend a little longer in the region and to add additional dimensions to their visit.

The smallest group currently in terms of numbers, but the one that has the highest potential for growth (yield/spend per visit) is the 'regionally interactive visitor'. These higher yield travellers include those who stay overnight (or longer) visiting friends and relatives and spend time and money on a range of activities and services across the NWR area. The visitor experience for this group usually includes, but is not limited to, a trip to one of the iconic attractions and they participate in a greater number of activities throughout NWR. The 'regionally interactive visitor' is the high yield segment that is most likely to be of value to more places in NWR.

Offering a greater variety of 'things to do' and 'places to visit' is critical to building visitor yield among all of the segments outlined above. To broaden the visitor experience, residents and business respondents feel that more could be made of not only the wonderful environmental resources of the region but also the rich culture and heritage of NWR including: museums, heritage, arts and gardens. Residents have significantly higher levels of participation in heritage, arts, and cultural activities than most visitors.

Visitors who are more regionally interactive and seek a deeper more immersive experience in NWR, have a higher level of interest in a Maori cultural experience than visitors who are focused on a particular iconic attraction. The majority of Business respondents also agree that a visitor experience/tourism offering based on the culture and heritage of Ngāti Whātua o Kaipara would be of benefit to NWR's economy. Residents are also interested in potential cultural tourism offerings from Ngāti Whātua o Kaipara.

The research reveals the importance of providing effective information on the experiences available in NWR to visitors and residents. Information is the lifeblood of the tourism industry and an effective use of the internet has become critical to deliver rich content and inspire people to discover new dimensions of destinations. This calls for a stronger web presence for NWR with visitor information shared across multiple online channels including national and regional portals, a broad range of websites, and social media.

Visitors bring significant economic impacts to the NWR region; every 10,000 visitors generate approximately \$240,000 per day of direct spend or 'new money' coming into the area. Residents generally support tourism and consider visitors to be good for the local economy in terms of revenue generation, business opportunities and job creation. Businesses feel there is a need to attract more day visitors (especially Aucklanders) as well as domestic and international visitors and generally agree that 'more tourism' would be good.

There is a pressing need to increase visitor spend in NWR. NZTRI's 2011 research in the north-eastern side of the Rodney Ward (the Puhoi to Pakiri area – see www.regionalsurveys.co.nz) reveals that visitors to that area spend an average of \$100, the average visitor spend in North West Rodney is \$24 per person per day. The focus here, however, must be on longer stays and increased spending and not on 'numbers' alone. This requires an approach that encourages greater interaction between the visitor and their surroundings. It is vital to attract and create more '*Regionally interactive visitors*' who spend more time and money visiting a greater number of places right across the North West Rodney area.

Respondents to all three surveys are critically aware of the need to manage the development of the visitor industry in a sustainable manner. Residents feel that there are negative factors associated with visitors coming to NWR, with traffic and congestion, pressure on already strained infrastructure and resources, and damage to the environment being the main themes highlighted. For visitors, the least appealing aspects of NWR are roads in poor condition, lack of infrastructure (public facilities, public transport, signage), and environmental issues. Visitors, residents and business respondents all highlight a need for better quality restaurants and cafes with good food, higher levels of customer service standards, longer opening hours and promotion of local produce.

Many business respondents view the growing population of the NWR area as a major opportunity for development and growth, however there are clear challenges for the visitor industry that arise from this rapid urbanisation. A loss of the 'rural feel' and 'city escape' dimensions is seen as an area of concern by both business and the broader community.

There is a strong desire for improved infrastructure in terms of roads, public transport, and facilities for cyclists. To build and develop NWR as a cohesive destination there is a need to improve links between localities; and ensure that the tourism industry is strongly represented in terms of decision-making at regional and local levels.

The research conducted to inform this 2015-2020 Strategy highlights the need to have a well-managed, cohesive and more sustainable visitor industry. One that is focused on making the most of the existing resources and assets of the area (including culture and heritage, local foods, and the natural environment) and providing a quality experience for visitors and residents alike. The goal for NWR tourism must be to develop a 'high value, low impact' visitor industry.

Strategy Focus

Sustainable development 'by and for' the residents of NWR is what underpins the *North West Rodney Visitor Strategy 2015-2020*. The emphasis of this Strategy is on enhancing yield and creating opportunities for the private sector to thrive while also sustaining the unique environmental and cultural dimensions of the region.

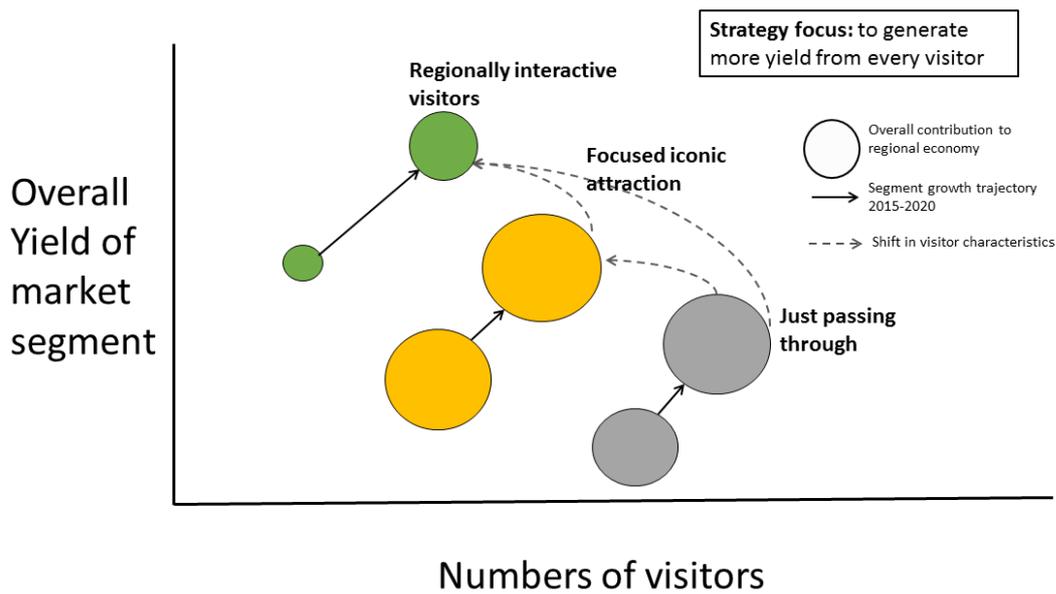
There is a need to slow the visitor down and enhance the visitor experience with opportunities to spend more time (and money) in NWR. We need to increase the yield of all visitors to NWR ranging from those who are just passing through to the more 'interactive' traveller who spends more time (and money) visiting more places throughout the region.

The focus must be on encouraging all visitor segments to participate in a few extra activities and to spend more. It is important to entice those in the '*just passing through*' segment to spend a bit more time and a few more dollars, with, for example, a short visit to have a swim in the thermal pools. There is also a chance to grow yield per visitor from those travelling to their regular iconic attraction (e.g. mountain biking). There is also potential to make more of those who visit friends and relatives, to increase overnight stays and to generally provide more options for the regionally interactive traveller.

Figure 3 shows each of these visitor segments and the relative size and yield of the market. The arrows represent the direction for growth of the industry during the strategy period. For each segment the focus is on growing yield more quickly than absolute numbers. The yield driven strategy will generate more spend from every visitor to NWR while increasing visitor satisfaction and enhancing resident quality of life.

In relative terms the segment that will have the greatest growth in its contribution to the regional economy is the regionally interactive traveller. The strategy will focus on 'converting' visitors in the passing through and iconic attraction segments into visitors that are looking for a deeper experience – whether this means staying an extra hour or an extra night does not matter – what is critical is that spend will inevitably grow and focus can shift away from a purely visitor number driven approach to regional economic growth.

Figure 3: Strategy focus: Three types of visitors



To increase spend per visitor and grow yield it is critical that NWR build networks, improve infrastructure and visitor information, and develop quality product featuring arts, culture, heritage, and local foods in addition to the undoubted environmental assets on offer. 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.

Action Areas

The strategy now outlines eight key action areas (Figure 4). The eight action areas focus on setting achievable goals with realistic outcomes. These action areas are designed to be cost-effective strategic options that make the most of existing resources and experiences. The Strategy is not reliant on the availability of large sums of money and the action items can be implemented in any order, and on an incremental basis.

Figure 4: Strategic Action Areas



There is a need for an active and connected voice for tourism in NWR. Business, residents, local government and community groups must work together to allow the visitor industry to develop in a sustainable manner. Iconic attractions are major drawcards for visitors currently and the action areas outline ways to build on these and grow yield through product development and create greater linkages between visitors and local experiences. Activities related to the arts, heritage and local food, will build a unique sense of place for the towns and villages of NWR for visitors and residents alike. In particular, experiences that share Maori tribal heritage and culture in a contemporary and authentic manner have the potential to attract high yield international visitors who exhibit a high level of participation in arts, cultural and heritage activities. To attract these visitors it is vital to strengthen information sharing across a variety of online and offline channels.

To optimise the economic contribution of the visitor industry requires local government leadership in ensuring that tourism is always factored into infrastructure, transport, employment and workforce development planning. It is vital that the future development of the industry and success of the strategy be evaluated and measured – this enables decisions to be made in the future based on a time series of data on tourism performance.

Action 1: Create an active voice to lead tourism



Create a North West Rodney Tourism Reference Group to lead tourism development in NWR and interact with the political sphere (local government and public agencies, regional and national tourism organisations etc.). This group will be the ‘mouthpiece’ to advocate for tourism and will comprise representatives from iwi, business associations, tourism and other businesses, residents and community groups, and will eventually form a more formal governance structure. Members will have clearly defined roles and responsibilities and will work to raise the profile of NWR as a destination. It is vital that the NWR Tourism Reference Group receive appropriate funding and support.

How?

- Continue to work with and develop the Visitor Strategy Group (VSG) that came together to contribute to and guide the development of this Strategy. Potential leaders have emerged from the VSG including members of the newly formed North West District Business Association and Ngati Whatua o Kaipara, as well as representatives from various tourism businesses, heritage organisations, community, special interest (e.g. local food producers, golf, equestrian) and resident groups.
- RLB and ATEED can play a valuable role by taking the first steps to initiate contact with key individuals to form this group and ensure that there is ample opportunity for a broad range of interested parties to participate. Actively encourage members of the VSG to continue as part of the NWR Tourism Reference Group and acknowledge their volunteer contributions to tourism.

Outcomes

A strong voice for tourism in North West Rodney is created

The profile of NWR as a visitor destination is raised at regional and national political scales.

KPI

- Overall effectiveness of lobbying and destination focused initiatives.
- Greater success in securing funding and associated support for tourism from public agencies and private enterprise.

Action 2: Increase levels of collaboration and networking



Create an environment for people to get involved with tourism and work together. Informal social gatherings that allow people to get to know each other are the best way to get started.

How?

- Create an NWR Tourism Forum as a vehicle for networking and hold regular events to get people together and 'talk tourism'. Use the database of tourism operators, other businesses, and community groups developed by NZTRI to disseminate information about local networking events and to recruit participation in the NWR Tourism Forum.

Develop a North West Rodney familiarisation programme with events hosted by a different local area each time. The South Kaipara Residents & Ratepayers Association 'Tiki Tours' are a good model to follow.

How?

- The NWR Tourism Reference Group will get the ball rolling by organising 'local famils' hosted by a different area/group or organisation e.g. South Kaipara Food Revolution, Muriwai Golf and local businesses, NZ Horse Recreation, Kumeu Wine Country, Ngati Whatua o Kaipara, NWDBA, Woodhill tourism operators.
- Use the 'local famils' as a networking opportunity to create interest in the broader Tourism Forum.

Construct opportunities for local 'voices' to be heard with ideas and stories represented in marketing materials. Start at a local level and focus on areas surrounding iconic attractions – Parakai (South Head, Helensville, Kaukapakapa), Woodhill Forest (Woodhill Sands), Muriwai (Waimauku), Kumeu (Huapai), Riverhead.

How?

- Hold focus groups and ask local residents to give feedback on existing collateral and promotional material designed to portray NWR as a destination.
- Develop a tourism handbook for local businesses so that staff are informed about what there is to see and do in NWR. Ask local residents for input into the handbook - providing first-hand knowledge on where to go and what to do, and increase awareness among residents of the visitor offer.

Outcomes

Business networking and community engagement with the visitor industry is intensified.

KPI

Levels of business and local community networking and cooperation are improved. The percentage of business owners/operators feeling that businesses collaborate well in NWR is increased.

Action 3: Build on iconic attractions



Build on local iconic attractions as ‘hubs’ of the NWR visitor experience. Local iconic attractions are the anchors of the NWR value proposition to residents and visitors. Extend to other attractions and tourism products as ‘tourism activity nodes’ in a network: create clusters of ‘nodes’ around the iconic attraction hubs.

How?

- Use databases created in Phase 1 to identify specific clusters of tourism activity nodes e.g. arts culture and heritage experiences, local food experiences. Visual representations of hubs and potential tourism activity nodes are given below (Figures 5-9).

Create ‘touring routes’ to link iconic attractions with multi-use trails (walk, cycle, horse), and experiences. 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 business owners/operators and 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.

How?

- The NWR Tourism Reference Group will take the lead to initiate the development of the touring routes and engage local businesses, residents and community groups as curators of local trails and experiences.
- Write concept notes for each touring route outlining the experience, points of interest, maps, actions to be taken to establish and promote the routes, and expected benefits (NZTRI can provide a template for this purpose). Suggestions for five touring routes are presented below.

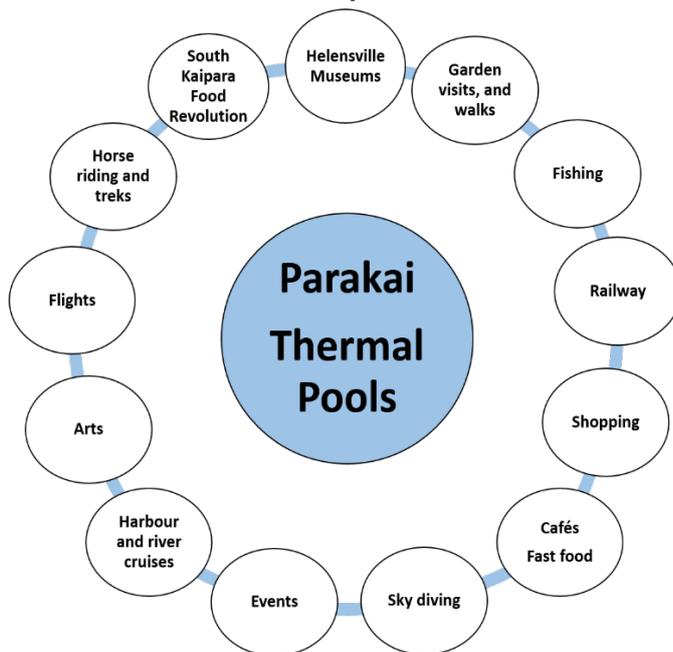
Woodhill Outdoor Explorer (Figure 5): This trail focuses on outdoor adventures and makes the most of the great variety of experiences to be had in Woodhill. It offers the large number of outdoor adventurers who come to Woodhill Forest options to participate in other activities in the area including cultural/heritage activities, horse riding, attending an equestrian event at Woodhill Sands, and beach and nature walks.

Figure 5: Iconic attraction: Woodhill (Outdoor Activities)



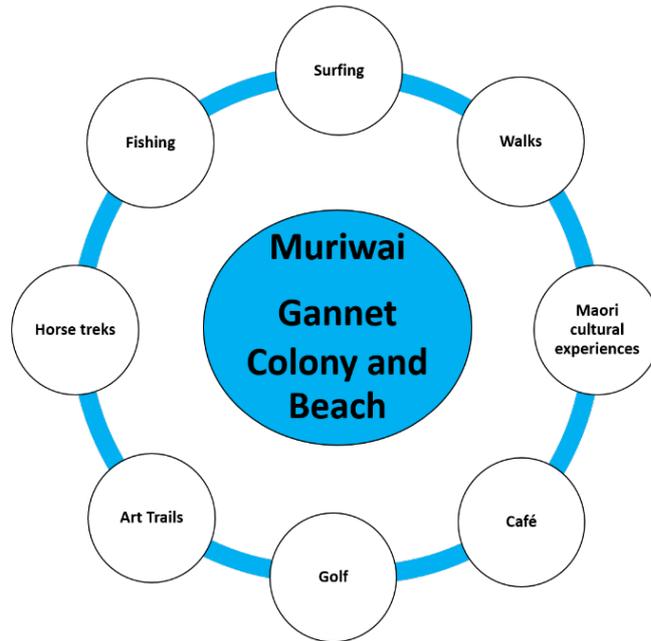
The Parakai Discovery Trail (Figure 6): offers visitors to the thermal pools opportunities to experience more of the South Kaipara and Helensville area. Foodies, railway enthusiasts, and those who are interested in cycling, museums, and the arts can also participate in a leisurely river cruise, do some shopping or engage in something a little more adventurous by going sky diving or taking a scenic flight.

Figure 6: Iconic attraction: Parakai thermal pools



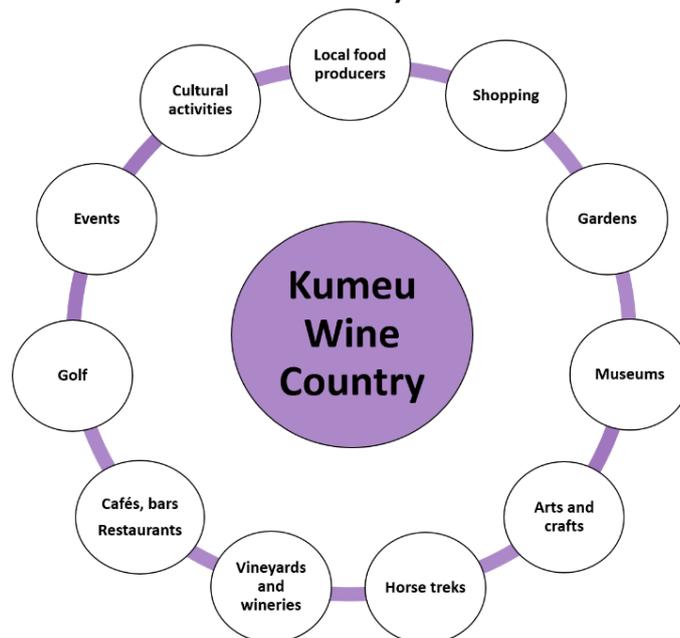
Muriwai Coastal and Cultural Trail (Figure 7): Muriwai Gannet Colony is a ‘must do’ tourism attraction for visitors to Auckland. This trail will lead the visitor to Muriwai beach to arts and cultural experiences in the area as well as horse treks, to play a game of golf and other local events and activities.

Figure 7: Iconic attraction: Muriwai Gannet Colony and beach



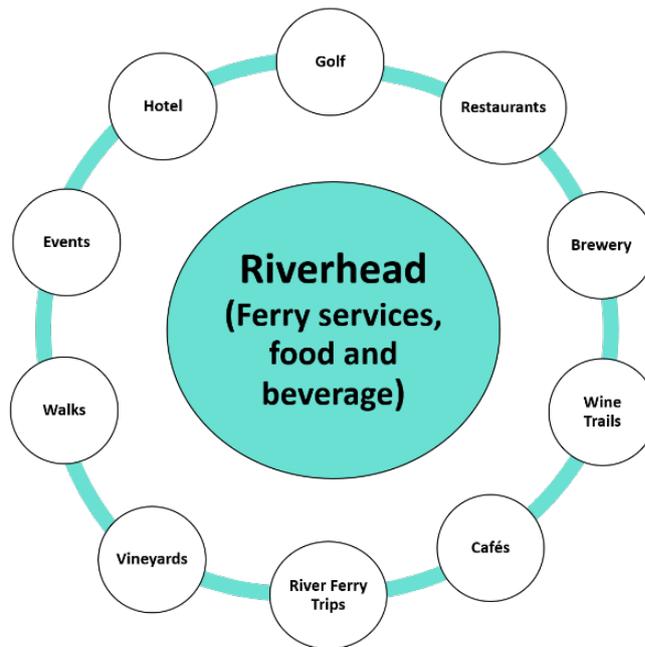
Kumeu Wine, Artists and Artisans Trail (Figure 8): Kumeu, Huapai and Waimauku are well known for the vineyards, wineries and local produce that bring thousands of visitors to the area each year. This trail will enhance the experience by offering visitors an opportunity to slow down and spend more time at local food producers, visit a local artisan or artist, or to do some shopping. More can also be made of local gardens, museums, and heritage/cultural activities in the area.

Figure 8: Iconic attraction: Kumeu Wine Country



The Riverhead Relaxer (Figure 9): Builds on interest that stems from ferry services, river trips, and popular food and beverage options in the area. This brings much needed alternative transport options to NWR and opportunities for local residents and visitors to enjoy a meal and a drink with family and friends. To entice visitors who participate in Food & Beverage activities to experience more of NWR this trail could combine river trips, walks, golf, kayaking, with wine trails and local events.

Figure 9: Iconic attraction: Riverhead (ferry services, food and beverage)



Outcomes

A network of touring routes is created that link iconic attractions to other activities and that enhance both the visitor and resident experience of North West Rodney.

Business networking and community engagement with the visitor industry is intensified.

KPI

- Five touring routes that build on iconic attractions are established and promoted.
- New ideas for touring route initiatives are developed.
- Greater visitor spend over the period of the strategy.

Action 4: Develop arts, cultural, and heritage experiences



Eke Hoiho team Woodhill

Support initiatives of Ngati Whatua o Kaipara to develop cultural experiences that share their tribal heritage and culture.

How?

- Encourage and support the new initiative of a visitor hosting/guiding/kaitiaki service at Muriwai. Ensure that visitor information on regional tourism portals highlight ways that visitors can access these services and experiences.

Weave arts, culture and heritage into the visitor experience and provide the visitor with a rich tapestry of experiences throughout the NWR area.

How?

- Create an Arts, Culture and Heritage calendar for NWR by working with a broad range of stakeholders including community groups and schools.
- Provide opportunities for locals (residents and businesses) to learn more about their own heritage and celebrate what they have in their own backyard. Provide opportunities and facilities for the community and visitors to experience and enjoy the arts, heritage and culture.
- Build on existing events and activities that involve locals (business and 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.

Outcomes

Arts, heritage and cultural experiences are linked to iconic attractions and other activity nodes to leverage North West Rodney's rich culture and heritage into the visitor experience.

Maori and mana whenua have opportunities to achieve social, economic and environmental aspirations through tourism and are supported to contribute to the future well-being of NWR.

KPI

- Improved levels of visitor satisfaction with the experience of cultural and heritage attractions.
- Greater awareness of iwi dimensions of the visitor experience.
- Greater visitor spend in the arts and culture sector.

Action 5: Develop local food experiences



Support local food producers to develop new products and visitor experiences: There are new initiatives in NWR that focus on the very best of local food and these should be supported to develop and link to the visitor industry e.g. The South Kaipara Food Revolution, cheese makers in Taupaki, and the various wineries/vineyards and taverns/breweries in Kumeu, Riverhead and throughout the region. There are also very good fast food providers, supermarkets, and farmers markets in the NWR area to highlight to visitors.

How?

- Peer-to-peer food experiences are increasing in popularity with travellers as new start-ups offer visitors' in-home meals, cooking lessons or guided food tours. Design and promote a North West Rodney Food Trail to build awareness of local foods, culture and heritage. Create opportunities for visitors to learn about and meet local food producers.
- Develop events based on seasonal produce with tastings, and cooking demonstrations. Combine this with a schedule of classes to teach people how to grow their own fruit and vegetables, make their own cheese, or brew their own beer (as examples).
- Hold 'local famils' and networking activities for members of the NWR Tourism Forum (and others) to broaden industry knowledge of additional food options in the area. Link to winegrowers/vineyards in the area.
- Make sure that local foods are featured at regional events including those with a focus on environment, heritage, culture and arts.

Create a programme of Awards for those who offer outstanding customer service in the hospitality sector. Design these Awards to provide added value and improve the visitor experience through product knowledge and better service.

How?

- Work with local hospitality providers to develop categories and a set of criteria for the Awards. The North West Rodney Hospitality Award will acknowledge outstanding customer service by a hospitality business (food & beverage, accommodation). The Awards could be extended to other sectors over time.
- Link to educational programmes in Auckland that offer hospitality courses.

Outcomes

A broader variety of food options are on offer to visitors and locals, and better customer service throughout NWR.

Food and local produce is incorporated into a wider range of visitor experiences and offerings

KPI

- Improved levels of visitor satisfaction with the quality of food on offer and related customer service.
- Greater visitor spend in the local food and produce sector

Action 6: Strengthen information sharing



Enhance online information provision about things to do and places to visit in NWR **for locals and visitors alike**. This does not necessarily require new websites to be developed; rather to enhance what exists already by adding information for visitors (and locals), and developing links to attractions, events and other visitor experiences on existing sites. Make changes gradually but over time, build the web presence of NWR and strengthen content on visitor offerings broadly across all channels.

How?

- Focus on iconic attractions to begin with: make sure websites that promote each of the five iconic attractions have visitor information about other things to do in the surrounding area (tourism activity nodes and PDF brochures of the touring routes). Information on access routes, protocols and permissions, and responsible tourism behaviour is also important.
- 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.
- Strengthen information on Wikipedia about the towns and settlements of NWR – including outdoor recreational spaces, heritage sites, and conservation areas.
- Encourage all businesses to feature information about things to do, local attractions etc. in NWR on their websites. Encourage residents to share information with friends and relatives.
- Require information about places to visit in NWR on every event website that is supported financially by local board or associated funding agencies.
- Create an informative resource accessible to all types of travellers and inform residents and visitors of available points of interest throughout NWR. Start with simple, cost-effective mapping techniques associated with the local iconic attractions, activity nodes and touring routes/trails and link these to as many sites as possible. Over time, engage local residents 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.

- Use smart phone application media and advanced mapping techniques to stimulate interest in the diverse visitor offerings of all small towns and settlements right across the NWR area.
- In the longer term there is potential to investigate use of a system/app to house maps, videos and podcasts made by local businesses, residents and community groups that highlight points of interest for visitors. The North West Rodney Visitor App would provide information and guides to the iconic attractions, surrounding 'tourism activity nodes', touring routes and trails.

Build opportunities to maintain online engagement with visitors: every visitor is a potential ambassador and social media needs to be fine-tuned to enable ongoing interaction with visitors.

How?

- Create feedback channels and opportunities for visitors to share photos, images, videos. Use social media to promote positive word of mouth and encourage local advocacy for visitors to come to NWR.

Strengthen on-site visitor information about NWR including directional signage. Make good use of printed media to promote NWR.

How?

- Create a hard copy map (brochure and PDF) of the NWR iconic attractions and touring routes and distribute this along with other brochures and travelling guides. Make sure the PDF is uploaded to as many national, regional and local sites as possible including events.
- Identify locations where printed materials could be strategically placed to divert visitors to NWR. One example is the BP service centre on Auckland's northern motorway (just before Silverdale). Currently this busy visitor service centre has brochure racks full of things to do in Northland but is right in the heart of Rodney Ward/Highway 1.
- Conduct a signage audit for the five iconic attractions to make sure they are easy to find. More signage may also be needed for cultural and heritage attractions, playgrounds, local food producers, water sports and activities.
- Five year goal: Create a common 'tourism' identity (logo, pictures, and tagline) and use it in promotional material across the region. To create a coherent tourism identity, signage should have a similar colour palette/layout but be 'recognisable' for each small town or settlement in NWR.

Outcomes

A greater range of locally specific information is available and accessible for residents and visitors, both online and offline.

A greater resident awareness is created of local experiences, and tourism more generally. This, in turn, creates better informed hosts for visiting friends and relatives.

KPI

- All sites that promote iconic attractions deliver content and visitor information related to 'things to do' in the surrounding area and across NWR.
- Wikipedia pages are upgraded with information about the places and people of NWR.
- The number of tourism businesses listed on newzealand.com and aucklandnz.com is increased.
- All events that are financially supported by RLB feature visitor information about NWR.
- Community-generated local content is available and accessible across multiple channels.
- Improved visitor access to information is reflected in increased visitor spend and length of stay.

Action 7: Develop infrastructure and manage resources

Ensure the visitor economy is considered in all aspects of local government planning and in communications to businesses and residents about local initiatives. This is specifically important in terms of local infrastructure (roads, traffic management, waste management, public transport, public facilities etc.) and intensification of urban areas (new housing developments).

How?

- RLB to provide leadership in a coordinated approach to planning that factors tourism into infrastructure, transport, employment and workforce development, housing development.
- Monitor the planning system 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.

Outcomes

Tourism and visitor industry dimensions are factored into planning processes and developments.

KPI

- Resident and visitor satisfaction with infrastructure provision strengthens during the survey period.
- Plans and developments feature consideration of visitor industry dimensions and needs.

Action 8: Use research to support future decision making

Build a simple decision support system that can provide NWR with the data required to measure the performance of the tourism industry and any related initiatives that are undertaken.

How?

- **Continue the research programme that informed the development of this Strategy** and use the set of existing surveys (Visitor, Resident, and Community) to monitor progress over time. Adopt a research barometer approach using these survey instruments to evaluate the impacts and performance of this Strategy and how they can be fine-tuned.
- **Conduct further research to uncover niche markets** and underpin marketing activities e.g. to develop products, new experiences and micro-adventures. Where possible encourage graduate student research into industry needs.
- **Use social media including review sites to get feedback from visitors** on satisfaction with the NWR experience. Specifically, identify areas of dissatisfaction and seek opportunities to increase visitor spending.

Outcomes

An ongoing research programme is in place to monitor industry performance and evaluate success in terms of increased visitor spend, and satisfaction with the visitor experience.

A decision-making support system enables the planning of future developments to target high yield markets and attract potential investment.

KPI

- A robust and cost effective decision support system is established.
- Research findings are widely disseminated and understood.
- Visitor spend (per visit) increases by 10-15% over the 5 year period of the Strategy.

Moving forward

This strategy provides a framework to guide the development of the visitor industry in North West Rodney from 2015-2020. The most important message to emerge from the strategy, and the research that underpins it, is that key stakeholders must work together and that the localities that make up NWR have great opportunities to benefit from increased levels of cooperation.

Cooperation should be focused on destination development that enhances the visitor experience of NWR as a whole – it is vital to break the cycle of simply marketing and promoting specific localities or activities in relative isolation. It is only by deepening the regional experiences of visitors that we can begin to increase yield across all market segments – whether they are people who are simply just passing through or those who are already seeking deeper interaction with what the region has to offer.

This strategy is not designed to be overly prescriptive and does not suggest that actions areas be undertaken in any particular sequence. Nevertheless there are some actions areas that are vital to address in the near future:

1. There is a need for the establishment of an active and connected voice for the visitor industry in NWR, it is critical that the momentum developed during the strategy development process is not lost.
2. It is vital to strengthen local content generation and information sharing across a variety of online and offline channels. Without good accessible information it is difficult to encourage greater visitor engagement and build yield.
3. Iconic attractions are major draw cards for visitors and these existing visitor hubs represent an effective way to initiate networks, and the development of deeper experiences. Such an approach paves the way for additional networks and trails to be created in the longer term.

The term 'branding' is conspicuous by its absence from this report. This is not the time to focus on branding the region or developing new marketing websites. Such a focus would be premature and can, in our experience, lead to diverse groups being forced further apart if they can't already see the advantages of working together. It is critical to first build the levels of cooperation and networking that enable a successful regional visitor product and profile to emerge.

This yield driven strategy is designed to generate more spend from every visitor to NWR 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.