

NEW ZEALAND'S

MARCH/APRIL 2025

meeting newz

● The Meeting, Incentive, Conference & Events Magazine

Taranaki

Tropical North
Queensland

AIME 2025

Incentive Travel



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 Mossman, North Queensland.
 Photo: Tourism Tropical North Queensland

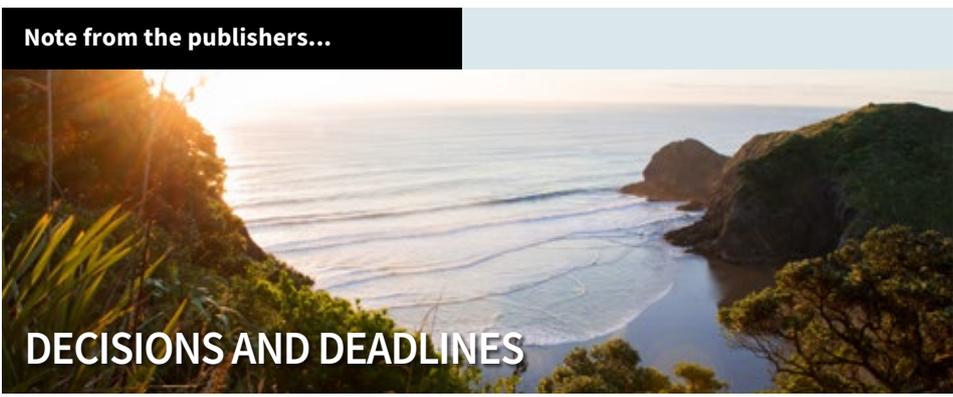
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Auckland Council will have delivered a decision by the time this magazine has gone to press on whether an upgraded Eden Park or a new stadium will be our national stadium. It's a massive decision and will shape the sporting landscape of not only Auckland but New Zealand. The council won't put money into either option but its support will go a long way towards confirming the preferred option ensuring it becomes a reality.

Having just visited Christchurch on a business events famil, I witnessed the progress of that city's new stadium. All under the cover of one roof, the complex is due to open in April 2026 and will be a game changer for the city. Being a short five to 10 minute walk from all the city's restaurants and bars makes everything easily accessible.

Meantime, the Government's decision to invest more funding into the Conference Assistance Programme, managed by Tourism New Zealand has been welcomed by the industry. The additional funding aims to secure business events for New Zealand that will deliver more than \$30 million in incremental spend to the economy.

We are pleased playing our part as we launch exhibitor registrations for the Business Events Expo. Being held in Auckland on 25 November, again at the Viaduct Events Centre, this is the third iteration and brings both national and international business events solutions under one roof for the day. Exhibitors come from all around New Zealand, Australia, the Pacific, Asia and further afield. Organisations interested in exhibiting can find further details on pages 22 and 23.

In this edition of Meeting Newz we take a look at Taranaki, we also reveal more about Tourism Tropical North Queensland and we have a review of AIME and the Samoa Tourism Exchange.

As always, we keep you informed and connected with the latest industry news, events, social scene and people on the move. You can also read about the latest happenings from our key partners BEIA & NZEA.

Put the coffee on and enjoy the read!
Best wishes, Paul, Terry and Gary



Meeting Newz Magazine features 2025/2026

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <p>May June 2025</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manawatu/Palmerston North Queenstown & Southern Lakes Australia MEETINGS 2025 MAGAZINE | <p>November December 2025</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rotorua, Tauranga & BOP Taupō Whanganui Australia - AIME 2026 Preview The Business Events Expo | <p>March April 2026</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taranaki & New Plymouth Australia - AIME 25 Review, Melbourne Incentive travel & events Venues with a difference PACIFIC BUSINESS EVENTS MAGAZINE |
| <p>July August 2025</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central Otago Dunedin Northland & Whangarei Waikato & Hamilton | <p>January February 2026</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Christchurch & Canterbury Marlborough Nelson/Tasman PCOA 25 Review Business Events Expo Review | <p><i>Features subject to change</i></p> |



For any enquiries regarding the upcoming features please contact
Terry: terry@meetingnewz.co.nz
Paul: paul@meetingnewz.co.nz

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Business Events Expo exhibitor regos open

Exhibitor registrations have opened for the third Business Events Expo being held on 25 November at Viaduct Events Centre, Auckland.

With last year's event selling out, exhibitors are encouraged to register early to avoid disappointment and make use of the early bird special which finishes on 31 May.

Prices for Pop Ups and Stands have remained the same

The format will again provide flexibility for buyers who can book pre-scheduled appointments via the expo APP and /or walk the floor for free flowing meeting and networking opportunities

The expo will run from 9.30am to 4.30pm with buyers able attend at their convenience throughout the day.

Tourism Media Group will again be working with supporting partners Event Solutions, Coast Group, Collective, The Production Agency, Auckland Convention Bureau, TRAVELinc Memo, Tourism Marketing Solutions and Auckland Conventions Venues & Events.

View the exhibitor prospectus on page 22 and 23 of this edition or go to www.businesseventsexpo.co.nz Exhibitors can book their space by visiting: au.entegy.events/bee25-standbooking View the video from the 2024 event by visiting: vimeo.com/1056578654



New Zealand International Convention Centre

NZICC to open in February 2026

The long-awaited New Zealand International Convention Centre (NZICC) will open for conferences and events in February 2026.

Over a decade in the making, NZICC has faced numerous delays, including a major fire in 2019, that pushed its original completion date out.

NZICC general manager Prue Daly says it's an exciting time for Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland and Aotearoa New Zealand.

"The NZICC is a transformational project, and we are thrilled to name the month we will open our doors. New Zealanders and

visitors worldwide will be blown away by the innovation and thought that's gone into every detail of the building – it's configured for anything from a meeting for 20 people all the way up to an international conference for 3,000 delegates.

"Following the contractor's delivery of the completed building, we expect to commence commissioning and operational readiness activities in the second half of 2025. It's a complex undertaking to get ready to open, including scaling up our number of employees and associated training to provide the ultimate customer experience," says Daly.

Luxury chef's table dining comes to Wellington



Joe Costelloe, executive chef

Jardin Grill's new Chef's Table experience at Sofitel Wellington offers an intimate and thoughtfully curated dining affair. Helmed by recently appointed executive chef Joe Costelloe, it provides a front-row seat, for just six guests per evening, to a gastronomic journey where every plate tells a story.

Costelloe, who has spent over five years in Sofitel Wellington, presents a degustation-style bespoke menu that's curated weekly using seasonal local ingredients complemented by expert wine pairings.

Central to the experience is Jardin Grill's applewood fire grill, a signature element that infuses each dish with depth and richness. An example is the Lumina Lamb Shank on a silky smooth kumara puree, mixed mushroom medley, punchy hibachi smoked gremolata, finished with a rich red wine jus.

But beyond technique and craftsmanship, Costelloe's approach to dining is rooted in emotion.

"Every dish should tell a story and evoke an emotion," he says.

His commitment to creating meaningful culinary moments is evident in every detail, from carefully selected ingredients to the seamless orchestration of taste and texture on the plate.

For an immersive dining experience, the Chef's Table at Jardin Grill offers something more than just a meal—it's an invitation to slow down, engage the senses, and revel in the beauty of contemporary gastronomy.

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TE WAKA new coaches

TEWAKA Fiji invests in new coaches

Fijian owned tourism transport operator, TEWAKA has added four new luxury coaches to their fleet.

Managing director, James Sowane says that TEWAKA is positioning itself to have the fleet capacity to service its growing meetings, incentive, conference and special events (MICE) business.

The F\$1.1 million investment includes two 53-seat and two 20-seat Yutong coaches that were purpose-built to Australian Design Rule (ADR) standards.

“It has been 10 months of planning,

designing, negotiations and site visits, and with the support of BRED Bank, we are very proud and delighted with the superior quality and comfort of the four coaches that we received recently,” says Sowane.

“The Euro 6 Cummins engine ensures that our emissions are cleaner and offers fuel efficiency. The adjustable passenger seats are very comfortable, fitted with chargers in usb and usc ports and customers will enjoy the two 19-inch TV screens for on-board movies in comfort.”

Legacy project delivers wins for Wellington

Business Events Wellington (BEW) has celebrated the first year of its Legacy Programme with 12 conferences delivering new career pathways, new regulations and new investment opportunities for Wellington and New Zealand in the past 12 months.

BEW manager, Irette Ferreira says the aim of the Legacy Programme is to achieve both the host organisation’s strategic objectives and to drive positive change through conferences. This is done through supporting

conference organisers to plan and leverage specific activities in the event programme to tackle the challenges they face or to address a local need.

“By facilitating, measuring and documenting these actions, we can see the wider positive impacts these conferences have generated beyond the benefits to Wellington’s visitor economy.”

Key objectives across the participating conferences included building better



Debra Dufty, Karla Connor

Event Revolution: A new player in events

There’s a new name in the events industry – Event Revolution. Led by owner Debra Dufty, who brings years of experience delivering conferences, activations and corporate events across Australasia, Event Revolution is set to do things differently.

“We believe in pushing creative boundaries, challenging the status quo, and delivering seamless, high-impact experiences. While we might be a boutique agency, we’re built on strong industry relationships and a reputation for making awesome happen,” says Dufty.

“We’re excited to be part of this ever-evolving industry, collaborating with the best suppliers, venues and partners to create next-level events. Here’s to working together, sharing ideas, and continuing to redefine what’s possible in the world of events.

connections, attracting more investment, growing diversity, improving government support, and increasing public awareness of career opportunities within their industry.

Tākina recognised at architecture awards

Tākina Wellington Convention & Exhibition Centre has been internationally recognised with a highly respectable runner-up spot in the World Architects 'Building of the Year' awards.

From 40 buildings from dozens of countries around the world, Tākina, the only building in New Zealand to make the shortlist, received 21% of the over 3,500 public votes to take out second place.

Designed by Studio Pacific Architecture, Tākina was built in a way that reduces negative impacts on the environment. The iconic design draws inspiration from Tākina’s maritime location and Wellington’s dramatic weather patterns and landforms. Te Upoko o Te Ika – the head of the great fish of Maui – is also represented within the architecture.

Studio Pacific Architecture project lead, Daryl Calder says they are immensely proud

to see Tākina recognised on an international stage in the World-Architects Building of the Year poll.

“This recognition highlights the innovative design and the collaborative effort that brought Tākina to life, creating a landmark building that reflects Wellington’s creative spirit, forward-thinking vision, and the deep connection to place enriched by the cultural narratives and guidance of mana whenua.”

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New caterers for Rotorua Venues



Energy Events Centre

RotoruaNZ has selected Montana Group as the new caterer for the Energy Events Centre (EEC) and Rotorua International Stadium.

RotoruaNZ is now responsible for the city's major event venues management, and chief executive Andrew Wilson says that after careful consideration, Montana Group was determined to be the ideal fit due to its extensive expertise and innovation.

"Rotorua is home to first-rate event venues and the appointment of Montana Group will only build on this legacy," Wilson says.

"Our partnership will bring a variety of high-quality, nutritious and delicious food and beverage options to those enjoying events at Rotorua's Energy Events Centre and International Stadium.

"This is an exciting opportunity to bring a renewed vision and fresh ideas to the catering for some of Rotorua's most renowned events.

"Beyond elevating the culinary offering, this new partnership is a key step in modernising the EEC brand, ensuring it remains a dynamic and sought-after venue that reflects contemporary event trends and expectations."

TRENZ 2025, the largest tourism trade event in New Zealand, will be the first Rotorua event to be delivered by Montana.

"Montana Group has more than 20 years' experience catering large-scale events and we are confident its catering and service will reinforce Rotorua's reputation as a warm, welcoming, and hospitable host city," Wilson says.

Montana Group chief executive Lizzi Pearson says the team is thrilled to continue building Montana's connections with Rotorua, Te Arawa, and the wider Bay of Plenty.

"Our delivery of some of the country's

largest events, such as the New Zealand Tennis Open, the ITM Taupō Super 440, and Synthoni in the Domain, have helped entrench us as leading experts in this space.

"We have already made connections with Te Arawa through our recent purchase of Maketū Pies and we look forward to nurturing this relationship through new endeavours."

Pearson says Montana Group combines the expertise and resources of a large business with a deep, personal connection to the regions it serves.

"We believe in the power of local knowledge and intimate connections to deliver exceptional experiences, and we look forward to using both our expertise and understanding of the regions to add to Rotorua's premium events."

Montana Group will officially take over the contract in April, adding to its proven delivery of events support in Auckland and the Waikato.



Sudima Kaikōura

Sudima Kaikōura awarded Gold Rating

Sudima Kaikōura has been awarded a 5-star hotel rating and a Gold Award under Qualmark sustainable tourism business criteria.

Qualmark is New Zealand tourism's official quality assurance organisation. Sudima Kaikōura opened as a 4.5-star hotel in late 2022; its upgrade by Qualmark to the 5-star rating has come over a short period.

The Qualmark star grade for accommodation providers is based on the quality of facilities and services, while businesses are awarded Bronze, Silver or Gold against the Sustainable Tourism Business criteria. A Gold Award recognises the best sustainable tourism businesses in New Zealand, with the delivery of exceptional customer experiences an integral part of everything the hotel does.

Another world first for Te Pae Christchurch

Te Pae Christchurch Convention Centre has marked another year of significant achievements, with strong event demand as well as industry-leading sustainability and standards contributing to a major economic, environmental and social impact for the region.

Te Pae attracted over 80,000 visitors to attend more than 220 events in the 2024-year, with a strong pipeline of bookings for 2025, 2026 and beyond. The convention centre is also making a broad contribution to the city and wider region – from promoting local businesses to increasing awareness of New Zealand as a destination. According to the organisation's delegate surveys, over 80% of international convention attendees intend to return to New Zealand for a holiday over the next five years.

Te Pae Christchurch Convention Centre



Te Pae Christchurch Convention Centre

general manager Ross Steele says the organisation takes the investment the community has made in developing the purpose-built convention centre very seriously.

"We recognise how significant our role is, both as a showcase for the region and as a driver of economic development," says Steele. "We also see it as our responsibility to provide an international-standard platform for local businesses and organisations – from agri-tech to space exploration, and health sciences to education – to reach a national and international audience."



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EXPLORATION:

TARANAKI

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With sun-filled days and a unique array of venues, set against a spectacular backdrop and the iconic Taranaki Maunga, it's no surprise that Taranaki is attracting increasing interest as a business events destination, with growing enquiries and interest from a range of organisers as well as those who are looking to host large-scale events.

Brylee Flutey, GM Destination, Te Puna Umanga Venture Taranaki, says professional conference organisers (PCOs) are actively exploring options to bring their conferences outside of the larger city centres and into the regions.

“Taranaki offers a fresh experience for delegates, where they can experience a change of pace without compromising on high-quality facilities or accessibility,” Flutey says.

Taranaki has a wide array of venues, ranging from full-package conference spaces with adjoining accommodation, to special locations such as the iconic Len Lye Centre, or Bowl of Brooklands stage which seats 350 people theatre style and overlooks a stunning outdoor amphitheatre.

From an access point of view there are daily flights to Christchurch, Auckland and Wellington. The region is easy to reach by road, and simple to get around and explore.



BEIA Bowl of Brooklands gala dinner

“We are gaining fast recognition as a dynamic location with the perfect mix of exceptional venues, accessibility, high-quality support services and catering options, and of course, our unbeatable landscapes and striking maunga – Taranaki, who is a real highlight for domestic and international delegates alike.”

The confidence comes as Taranaki emerges from a strong 2024, following the success of hosting the 2024 Business Events Industry Aotearoa (BEIA) Conference and AGM.

“Hosting BEIA was a highlight for Taranaki as we welcomed over 160 delegates, including a range of PCOs to the

region, showcasing our appeal, and ability to host large-scale events.”

“We gained some incredible feedback,” added Flutey.

The 2024 BEIA Conference was held at The Devon Hotel and Conference Centre, with delegates also enjoying a taste of the region’s diverse venues and experiences.

“We embraced delegates with our famous Taranaki manaakitanga, from a relaxed opening function at the New Plymouth Surfriders Club to a themed dinner on the iconic Bowl of Brooklands stage, and a chance to connect with our rich history during a guided cultural hikoi led by

mana whenua, Ngāti Te Whiti hapū.”

Beyond BEIA, Taranaki has also recently welcomed a number of other large business events further growing its recognition as a premier business events destination.

These include the New Zealand Orthopaedic Association Conference, Nui te Kōrero (Creative New Zealand’s biennial conference), Australasian College for Emergency Medicine Conference, Resource Management Law Association Conference (RMLA), and NZ Dairy Women’s Network Conference.

This momentum is set to continue, with Te Puna Umanga Venture Taranaki



Pouakai Tarn



Juno Gin, New Plymouth

committed to connecting with events and event organisers who are looking for something unique and memorable for their delegates.

“From hosting of famils, like our most recent March PCO famil that tagged onto WOMAD Aotearoa, to our attendance at MEETINGS and the NZ Business Events Expo, we are busy showcasing our region, our venues, and all we have to offer, and we encourage anyone interested in exploring and understanding more about what we have to offer to get in touch.”

As the Regional Development Agency and Convention Bureau for Taranaki, Te Puna Umanga Venture Taranaki provides free assistance to organisations who are considering the region as their next conference destination.

This includes venue and accommodation recommendations, connecting with local operators, support with partner programmes and free-time itineraries, destination familiarisations, and access to regional imagery and guides to promote Taranaki events.

When it comes to delivering seamless conferences and events that leave delegates inspired and impressed,



Len Lye Centre
Photo: Pip Guthrie

Taranaki doesn't disappoint.

“Our big message to conference organisers is – let us surprise and delight you with what the region has to offer, a range of high-quality venues, excellent accommodation options within walking distance of the main conference location, and memorable experiences for delegates and accompanying

partners,” Flutey adds.

For those wanting to connect and to find out more, Melissa Devine, visitor and events advisor at Te Puna Umanga Venture Taranaki will be representing Taranaki at both MEETINGS and the NZ Business Events Expo.

Email: Melissa.devine@venture.org.nz.



Bowl of Brooklands

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A summer of success and what's next

We have been spoilt this summer – great weather and extraordinary events across New Zealand. Festivals, concerts, and sporting events drew record-breaking crowds. Electric Avenue and Te Matatini each saw over 70,000 attendees, while Auckland FC packed Go Media Stadium with their largest crowd ever. Art Deco Festival welcomed 40,000 visitors to Napier, and Moana Festival wrapped up in Auckland with Six60 and the Manu Champs final. Down south, Challenge Wanaka attracted over 2,500 athletes and 10,000 spectators. These events only scratch the surface, a huge congratulations to all organisers! To keep up with more, check out our event calendar: www.nzea.co/eventcalendar.

On the advocacy front, NZEA had a productive meeting with Tourism and

Hospitality Minister Louise Upston to discuss strengthening the events sector. And it is great to see \$3million allocated to business events in the recent announcements.

Looking ahead, we're thrilled to confirm that Eventing the Future 2025 will take place at Claudelands, Hamilton, from 1-3 September. Our NZEA New Zealand Event Awards gala dinner is set for 2 September, and award entries are open until 27 April, so start preparing your submissions! www.nzea.co/awards

Our Sustainable Events Hub saw a 400% spike in traffic, highlighting the demand for eco-friendly suppliers. We're now calling for new submissions, if your business fits the criteria, get involved.

Until next time.

Elaine Linnell, GM, NZEA



By Elaine Linnell

general manager
New Zealand Events
Association (NZEA)

James Brehaut, Thea Farrant Adam,
Stephen Noble, Jan Tonkin, Blair Glubb



Uno Loco Group acquires The Conference Company

Two market leaders in the business events industry are joining forces: Uno Loco Group is acquiring The Conference Company.

Uno Loco and The Conference Company have a collective six decades of experience and bringing both teams together will strengthen the offering for clients or industry partners hosting business events, conferences, exhibitions, awards and celebrations and creative brand experiences.

“The Uno Loco team bring specialist capability spanning marketing, data and digital expertise that will help enhance client outcomes and create a strong future for The Conference Company, our clients and the talented team we have grown,” says

managing director and founder Jan Tonkin.

The Conference Company, founded by Tonkin in 1990, has more than three decades of experience in organising business events, national and international conferences, exhibitions and awards programmes.

With a 28-year track record, Uno Loco Group is a creative agency group made up of two sister studios – Uno Loco specialising in business events and experiences, and Hula helping build brands, stories, content and communications for leading local and international brands.

“We've worked alongside The Conference Company for many years, and have a huge amount of respect and admiration for Jan and

her team and the business they have grown,” says Uno Loco CEO Blair Glubb.

“Our vision is for growth in New Zealand, Australia and globally and this acquisition backs our belief that bringing people together through events and experiences is a growth industry,” says Glubb.

Glubb says the agreement will see The Conference Company team continuing to operate as before, including key senior management roles, with Stephen Noble remaining in his role as manager Asia Pacific and James Brehaut as general manager.

“Our focus is to drive the ongoing success of The Conference Company alongside the TCC team. We're also delighted to be working with Jan over the next six months to ensure a successful transition, and to be able to access her expertise on an advisory basis after that.”

Uno Loco's Group head commercial Thea Farrant Adam will work closely with Tonkin and her team through this transition period, and will take on the role of CEO for The Conference Company from 1 April.

Farrant Adam brings extensive experience in management, marketing and communications, having previously held senior agency and client-side roles in Australia and New Zealand.

“I'm looking forward to continuing The Conference Company's legacy and reputation as a market-leader in the business events industry, and to amplify our offering for clients and industry partners through our combined capabilities,” says Adam.

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Tonia Timmins, Bon Voyage Travel;
Cecilia Frost, Samoa Holidays and Events



Vanessa Williams, Edventuretours Travel; Krystle Meleisea, Return to Paradise Resort & Spa



Charlotte Chan Mow-Brunt, The Orator Hotel;
Kalena Finlayson, Momento Group/ The Travel Brokers

SAMOA TOURISM EXCHANGE 2025

The annual Samoa Tourism Exchange 2025 (STE2025) was held in early March in Apia. The theme, “Resilient Tourism–Sustainable Growth” underscored the need for a tourism sector that not only minimises environmental impacts but also remains resilient in the face of challenges such as natural disasters and economic fluctuations.

The official exchange took place over two days at the Fifa Complex building, Apia Park with pre-scheduled business-to-business meetings. The format provided meaningful negotiations and collaboration aimed at strengthening Samoa’s tourism sector.

Sonny Rivers, New Zealand representative for Samoa Tourism Authority travelled with 13 New Zealand buyers and media and says that face to face meetings are crucial for Samoan suppliers.

“A larger venue this year and an enhanced floor layout was well received by buyers and suppliers. We will again listen to feedback we receive and continue to improve for 2026. The opening function at STA Cultural Village and the closing function at The Orator Hotel were also highlights and another opportunity for networking in a more relaxed setting,” he says.

Familiarisation trips held prior to the exchange provided international buyers from New Zealand, Australia, UK, France,

Switzerland, USA, Canada, China and American Samoa with a first-hand experience of Samoa’s diverse attractions. Delegates explored the island’s tourism sites, accommodation, local cuisine and cultural arts. This immersive experience aimed to deepen connections and understanding of Samoa’s appeal.

Samoa Tourism Authority’s acting chief executive officer Niumata Kitonia Pogi emphasised the significance of this event.

“The Samoa Tourism Exchange aligns seamlessly with our ongoing initiatives throughout the year, aimed at enhancing Samoa’s visibility in international markets and attracting more travellers to our beautiful islands.”

The Samoa Tourism Exchange is made possible through the support of the Government of Samoa, along with financial assistance from the Government of New Zealand via the Samoa Tourism Resilient and Recovery (STRR) Program.



Melissa Horner, Expedia NZ, Kalova Koroitamana, Sheraton Samoa Beach Resort

SPONSORS

Notable sponsors included Fiji Airways and Air New Zealand, the main sponsors, and various associate sponsors included Taumeasina Island Resort, Orator Hotel, Sheraton Samoa Beach Resort, Sinalei Resort, Coconuts Beach Fales, Amoa Resort, LAVA Hotel, Le Lagoto Beach Resort, Return to Paradise Resort and Spa, Tanoa Tusitala Hotel, Insel Fehmarn, Seabreeze Resort, Football Federation Samoa, Sheraton Samoa Aggie Grey’s Hotel & Bungalows, Samoana Rental, Survivor Samoa Beach Resort, and Taula Beverage.

New Zealand is now playable in global game phenomenon Minecraft



To celebrate the upcoming release of “A MINECRAFT MOVIE”, filmed in New Zealand, Tourism New Zealand has partnered with Warner Bros. Pictures and Mojang Studios to create a world-first destination DLC (downloadable content) for Minecraft, inviting its users worldwide to ‘play’ New Zealand in game mode.

With more than 300 million copies sold globally, Minecraft is the best-selling video game of all time. “This innovative approach to destination marketing offers millions of Minecraft fans the unique opportunity to

virtually explore and create in a range of iconic New Zealand locations,” says Tourism New Zealand chief executive René de Monchy.

The collaboration also shines a spotlight on New Zealand’s strong film production, game development, and Indigenous creative industries - areas that offer unique appeal for the business events sector.

“The project creatively combines technology, gaming, culture, New Zealand’s otherworldly places, Māori culture, and people to present New Zealand to the vast Minecraft universe in an innovative way,”

de Monchy says.

Tourism New Zealand worked with Piki Studios, an official Minecraft Partner and award-winning Māori game design studio, to build the DLC. Chief business operator, Whetu Paitai led the development, working with Tourism New Zealand, the wider tourism industry and mana whenua (local Māori) from the regions depicted to create an authentic and fun experience.

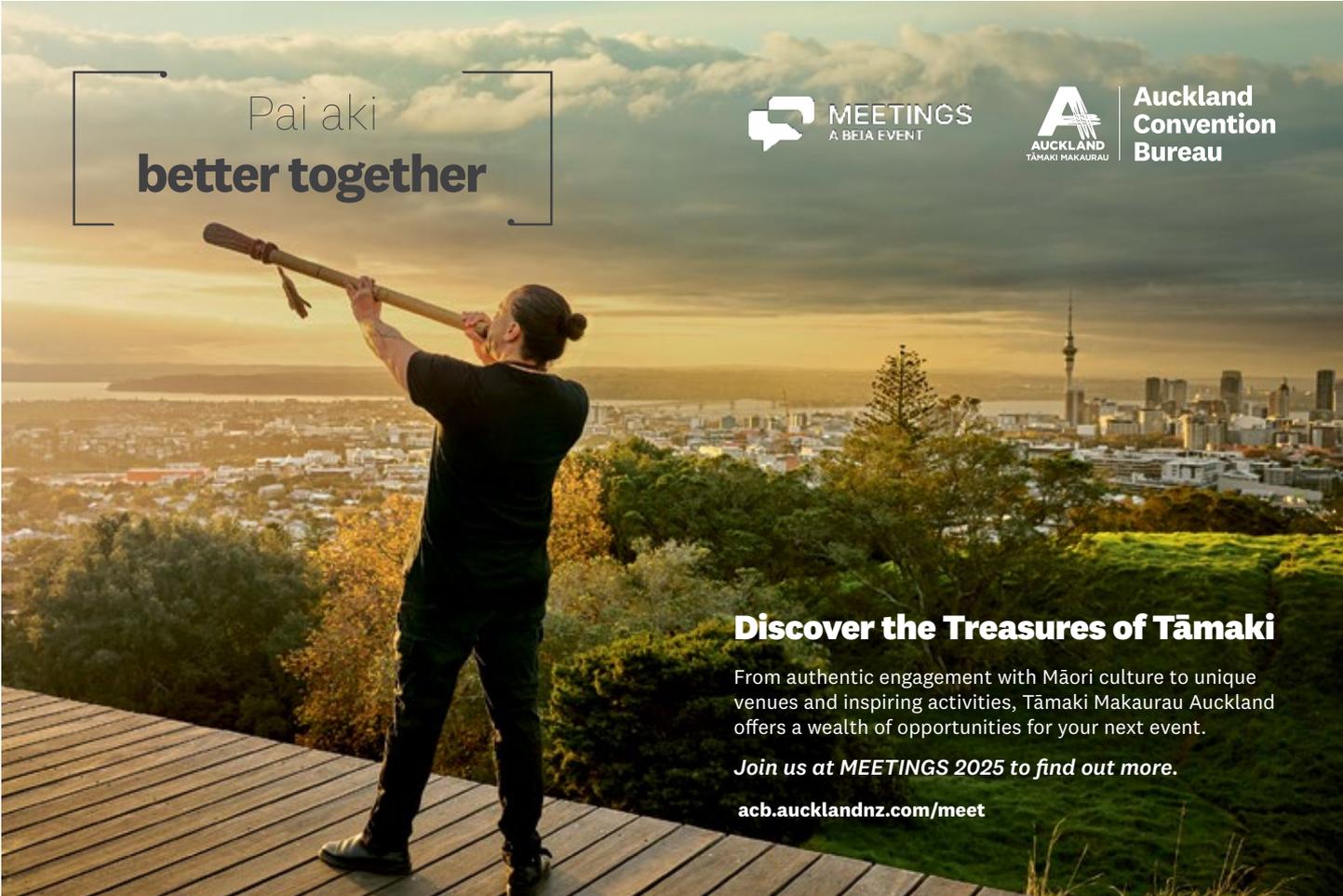
Paitai says, “Working with Mojang on such an iconic game has been an incredible experience, filled with both excitement and responsibility. Developing the first ever Minecraft game for a destination, especially a place as close to my heart as New Zealand, feels immensely rewarding. However, it also comes with its own set of challenges.

“One of these was ensuring that the rich Whāraiki (interconnected tapestry of stories, traditions, and cultural heritage) of our land and people was accurately and respectfully represented. We have been able to work with Mojang in a way that is very collaborative and respectful.

The DLC will launch alongside the release of Warner Bros. Pictures’ “A MINECRAFT MOVIE,” starring Jason Momoa and Jack Black, which was filmed in New Zealand and is set to premiere around the world in April 2025.

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DMS Connect at S/O Hotel Auckland

The Destination Marketing Services Connect Roadshow visited Auckland in February with 26 exhibitors from around the world meeting with more than 40 buyers from the incentive, business travel and high-end touring community.



Jeff Ward, The Shackman Group (USA) with Alex Mitchell and Jackie Coyne, S2N Events



Kolora Mason, TEWAKA; Melissa Natawake, Tom Svensen, Tourism Fiji



Angela Morgan, PPG Events; Michael Kater, Compass Tours, Germany; Peter Manase, Manase Travel Studio

ACVE celebrate reopening of Aviation Hall at MOTAT

A special evening to celebrate the reopening of the Aviation Hall as a premier business events venue took place last Wednesday night where guests got to experience what the venue has to offer.



Amelia Lowe, Event Dynamics; Michelle Geale, Stacey McGregor, Scenic Hotel Group



Ken Pereira, Auckland Convention Bureau, Vikas Yadav JW Marriott Auckland



Annie Lister, Coast Group; Jaime Beetson, Icon Conference & Event Management



Tracey Rowe, Lauren Beatty, Team Up Events

Being A Force for Good

The 2025 edition of A Force for Good was held mid-March. The event is a social enterprise that has succeeded in helping advance women leaders in the tourism, travel and hospitality industries at all levels. Today's event is a sell-out and will involve more than 20 leaders from New Zealand and around the world sharing their personal stories to help others grow. The day conference was held at Crowne Plaza Auckland.



Alice Ager, Uniworld Boutique Cruises (centre) with Darren Karshagen and Angela Page, both Expedia



Geoff Manchester, Intrepid Travel; Wendy Wu, Paul Dymond, both Wendy Wu Tours



Angela Webber, Globus family of brands; Helene Taylor, A Force for Good; Victoria Courtney, Flight Centre NZ

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Terry Holt, terry@tourismmedia.co.nz
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ICCA and AIME form new partnership

The International Congress and Conference Association (ICCA) have a new industry partnership with the Asia Pacific Incentives and Meetings Event (AIME). The partnership is focused on the continued commitment to bringing extended business opportunities to ICCA members in Australia, New Zealand, Asia, and other global regions.

AIME will serve as a partner in advocacy, amplifying the voice of the international business events industry for destination enhancement. AIME is owned by the Melbourne Convention Bureau and is managed by Talk2 Media & Events.

ICCA CEO Senthil Gopinath signed the agreement with AIME representative Matt Pearce, director of Talk2 Media & Events, and Julia Swanson, CEO of the Melbourne Convention Bureau, during AIME 2025 which was held from 10 to 12 February in Melbourne, Australia.

The partnership between AIME and ICCA underscores the commitment of both parties to expanding opportunity, growth and development for members of the business events community in the region.

Gopinath heralded the new partnership.

“ICCA’s partnership with AIME signifies our

commitment to supporting the growth of the Asia Pacific meetings industry, which has experienced incredible growth over the past few years and continues to figure prominently on the world stage,” he says.

“We’re looking forward to working with APAC members to support development of meetings and events professionals in the region, including ICCASkills, business exchange workshops, advocacy and more.”

Pearce says the new partnership would drive growth for the business events industry across the region.

“The AIME team has worked closely with Senthil, Waikin Wong (ICCA Asia Pacific Regional Director) and the whole ICCA team for several years and we are pleased to formalise this with an industry partnership,” he says.

“We look forward to driving business events growth and prosperity in APAC with ongoing personal and professional development opportunities through AIME and ICCA in the coming years as AIME cements its position as the leading business events exhibition and learning platform.”

This year, the Australian Business Events Association (ABEA) and ICCA collaborated for a second time on the Emerging Leaders



ICCA CEO Senthil Gopinath, Melbourne Convention Bureau CEO Julia Swanson, Talk2 Media & Events director Matt Pearce

Challenge. This program invited emerging leaders to share their thought-provoking ideas on the future of the business events industry. The winner of the Emerging Leaders Challenge joined the interactive ABEA and ICCA session, held at the AIME Knowledge Program on 10 February, where discussion focused on the future growth opportunities in the sector.

ICCA also presented at the AIME Leaders Forum hosted by ABEA, which was held following AIME 2025 on 13 February. This impactful and interactive discussion focussed on advocacy and how the industry can lead and support advocacy initiatives globally and regionally.



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- The BNZ Theatre can host up to 690 guests for ceremonies or live performances, and accommodate 320 guests for a gala dinner.
- The Sir Noel Robinson Conference Centre offers a total of 1,200 sqm, which can be subdivided into six separate spaces.
- The Sir Woolf Fisher Arena can seat 1,400 guests in banquet style and accommodate up to 3,000 people for concerts.
- Meeting rooms can accommodate between 120-150 people in a theatre-style and can be divided into three smaller rooms. The boardroom, which can host up to 20 guests, features floor-to-ceiling windows that flood the space with natural light.

Enjoy custom catering by Collective, and finish the day with team building at the nearby Vector Wero Whitewater Park.



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770 Great South Road, Manukau 2104

Email: info@wakapacific.org.nz

Business events industry welcomes Government boost

New funding to attract international business events is excellent news for the sector and for the country, Business Events Industry Aotearoa (BEIA) says.

New Zealand's business events industry body, BEIA says the announcement that the Government is investing an additional \$3 million from the International Visitor Conservation and Tourism Levy will bring valuable international conference and incentive business to the country.

The additional activity aims to secure business events for New Zealand that will deliver more than \$30 million in incremental spend to the economy.

New Zealand's Minister of Tourism and Hospitality, Louise Upston made the announcement at Tākina Wellington Convention and Exhibition Centre.

"To boost conference visitor numbers, it makes sense to supercharge the Conference Assistance Programme work that is already happening in Tourism New Zealand," Minister Upston says.

BEIA chief executive, Lisa Hopkins says this is an exceptional day for our sector of the visitor economy as it demonstrates confidence that business events are a source for growth.

"It signals that New Zealand is actively recognising the importance of business events, and this new funding helps level the playing field with our main competitor, Australia.

"This is a high-spend, high-value sector. The global business events industry is valued at US\$1.6 trillion.

"New Zealand's business events industry has come of age with investment in world-class infrastructure with new conventions centres, Te Pae Christchurch and Tākina in Wellington, and the New Zealand International Convention Centre in Auckland opening early next year," Hopkins says.

"The three new convention centres are expected to create 1400 new jobs, over 300,000 room nights annually and direct spend in excess of \$150m. This excludes downstream economic contribution or when the international delegate stays on as a tourist and visits other parts of the country.

"Our industry association has been seeking support for the sector for two decades.

"We know that we have brilliant infrastructure and the downstream financial effects are proven. Te Pae Christchurch Convention Centre, for example, is making a significant impact on the national economy."

According to recent Infometrics analysis, Te Pae contributed \$77 million to New Zealand's GDP and supported 693 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs across the country for the year to November 2024.

"Business events are much more than economic contributors, they also heavily influence positive outcomes for society, communities, and create long-term legacies, and they lift New Zealand on the world stage," Hopkins says.

"Business events visitors meet at off-peak times, boosting the visitor spend during the week and throughout winter and shoulder seasons. They stay longer, and spend more than leisure visitors.

"This is a collaborative effort with Tourism New Zealand, regional convention bureaux, professional conference organisers, venues and hotels, and raft of businesses across a broad range of sectors including hospitality, technology, and creative services all working together to create success."

The funding is available to any organisation, including universities, to bid to host an international conference in New Zealand. Support is also available to attract high-value incentive business to New Zealand.

This funding is part of the Tourism Boost



Louise Upston, Minister of Tourism and Hospitality

package, developed by the Government in partnership with industry to support immediate growth in visitor numbers, drive export activity and deliver economic growth.

Remembering John Duncan



John Duncan

The Business events industry is saddened by the passing of former independent chair John Duncan in late February.

John served as chair of Conventions & Incentives New Zealand (CINZ), now BEIA, from 2004 to 2016. He was instrumental in engaging with the John Key government, championing the importance of convention centres as critical infrastructure.

Former CEO Alan Trotter of Conventions & Incentives New Zealand says, "Without John's high level political contacts it is doubtful that the ICC project would have eventuated and his unstinting efforts in getting senior political buy-in to support the project was a huge factor in the subsequent decision to proceed with the ICC project.

"In my opinion John's unwavering commitment to CINZ and the industry at large will serve as his enduring legacy. Condolences to his family and RIP John and it was a pleasure to have known and worked with you for so long."



Justine Allen

New at SkyCity Hamilton

Justine Allen is the new conference and events sales manager at SkyCity Hamilton after working as maternity cover for the events manager from May to Aug 2024.

Allen brings over 10 years of experience in business events as well as visitor experiences and community relations (with previous roles at Hamilton City Council within the Office of the Mayor, Hamilton Zoo and Visitor Destinations).



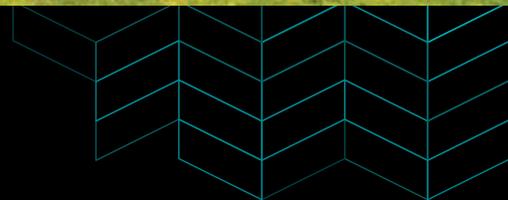
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The Business Events Expo (BEE) will take place at the Viaduct Events Centre (VEC) on Tuesday, 25 November 2025, filling a specific need in the market and complementing existing events in the conference, incentive and business travel sectors.

THE EVENT

Once again The Business Events Expo will promote both national and international business events solutions under one roof in one day.

Exhibitors will include regional, national and international business events and tourism offices (NTOs and RTOs), event venues, accommodation, conference and exhibition services, destination management companies (DMCs), transport providers, entertainment, team building, catering, niche and boutique operators.

Tourism Media Group, working with industry partners The Coast Group, The Production Agency, Tourism Marketing Solutions, Event Solutions, Collective, Auckland Convention Bureau, and TRAVELinc Memo will deliver a mix of pre-booked and free flow meetings along with educational and networking opportunities.

THE VENUE

The Viaduct Events Centre is located in Auckland's CBD within easy walking distance for many business organisations, accommodation, transport and parking options.

The Business Events Expo will be held in the Waiheke main floor, level 1, with additional space in the Rangitoto Room on level 2.

The VEC has easy pack-in and pack-out access for exhibitors.

THE FORMAT

The event will run from 9.30am to 4.30pm. There will be networking opportunities for guests to catch up, connect and build relationships with event suppliers.

EXHIBITOR COSTS

Pop-up leaner and two stools

\$1250+GST if booked before 31st May 2025

\$1550+GST if booked after 31st May 2025

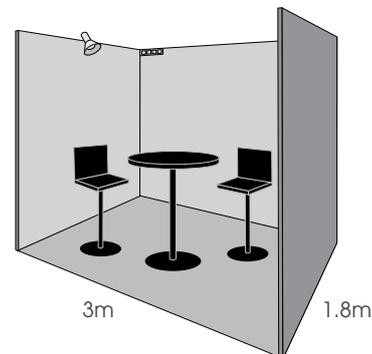
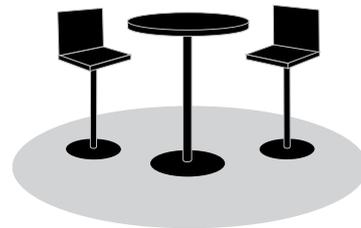
This is for one delegate with the opportunity to secure pre-booked meetings.

Additional delegate \$350+GST.

No power or lighting. Includes catering.

No pull up banners/signage allowed.

Table top signage will be provided.



Booth 3m x 1.8m

\$3050+GST if booked before 31st May 2025

\$3350+GST if booked after 31st May 2025

This is for two delegates with the opportunity to secure pre-booked meetings.

Additional Delegate \$350+GST.

Power and lighting on the stand. Includes catering.

THINK YOU KNOW CAIRNS THINK AGAIN



CAIRNS & GREAT BARRIER REEF
BUSINESS EVENTS

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU WERE IN CAIRNS?

If it was pre that global hiccup, you may have memories of pubs pouring 4X Gold and takeaway bolt holes on the Esplanade. Think again. All that downtime gave Cairns time to undergo a make-over worthy of any Hollywood A-lister.

Peel back the top layer our region is known for - gateway to two World Heritage icons, the Great

Barrier Reef and the ancient Wet Tropics Rainforest, and prepare to be wowed.

Today, Cairns seamlessly blends business sophistication with a laid-back, welcoming atmosphere. The addition of three five-star resorts by the Crystalbrook Collection added 800 rooms to the city's inventory. These newcomers inspired a renaissance with many of the region's hotels refurbishing, plus the redevelopment of the Esplanade Dining Precinct as a vibrant, walkable green space.

WHAT ABOUT OFFSITE EVENTS? I DON'T WANT A BALLROOM.

Cairns has the edge when it comes to offsite venues, with many just 10-minutes from the city centre. With a nod to regeneration, historical spaces have been repurposed into exciting canvases for events to remember. The history of Cairns comes alive in unexpected spaces, including a World War II oil tank nestled in the lush botanic gardens, and a waterfront timber wharf shed. The Cairns renaissance features innovative restaurants, laneway and rooftop bars, repurposed event spaces, and a pace that

fosters genuine delegate connections to nature, culture and each other.

SNORKELLING IS FUN - BUT HAVE YOU BEEN A CITIZEN SCIENTIST?

You could visit the Great Barrier Reef daily and see something different, but participating in a citizen science program will open a delegate's eyes. Help build a coral nursery and learn how new reefs are grown.

Wrap it all up in Australia's most comprehensive sustainability story, and you will see why you really don't know Cairns - and why you need to change that.



AIME 2025 BUSINESS EVENTS MATTER!

By Terry Holt

AIMalfi FESTA was held at il Mercato Centrale Melbourne

The Asia Pacific Incentives and Meetings Event – AIME – is Asia Pacific’s largest and longest running business events exhibition and learning platform. It connects a global community of business event professionals with industry suppliers through a seamless blend of human expertise and cutting-edge artificial intelligence.

Record event

The 2025 event has broken records for its size, numbers of hosted buyers, exhibitors and attendees. Over three days more than 640 hosted buyers from around the world joined 675 exhibitors and 4500 attendees from various business events sectors from around Asia Pacific and beyond.

This year’s expo saw growth of 100 exhibiting companies, including the largest ever contingent from New Zealand and two new international pavilions for Singapore and Thailand, who joined 33 countries and territories represented at the event.

There were 170 hosted international

buyers from New Zealand, Europe, UK, South-East Asia, North Asia, India, South America, USA, and Canada and more than 470 domestic buyers – with three out of four hosted buyers attending AIME for the first time.

Nearly 20,000 meetings were held across AIME – including more than 15,000 meetings pre-scheduled between buyers exhibitors.

At the official press conference which launched AIME 2025, Talk2 Media & Events CEO Matt Pearce announced that AIME 2025 was the largest show the team has produced, building upon AIME 2024 that was the largest in a decade.

Pearce also said the Knowledge Program had experienced five-fold growth over the past years – from a programme with just a few hundred participants pre-covid to more than 1500 people at AIME 2025.

Melbourne Convention Bureau’s (MCB’s) CEO Julia Swanson launched the organisation’s ‘The Positive Impact of Business Events Report’, which highlights the immense value that business events deliver to Victoria. The report features case studies from business events in Melbourne over the past decade, demonstrating the many ways in which these events have contributed to the Victorian economy as well as having far



reaching impacts in terms of technological advancements, community involvement and lasting legacies of change.

The Knowledge Program

The theme for 2025, ‘We Matter!’ sought to highlight and celebrate the global business events industry as a powerful catalyst for economic growth.

Curated by BEAMexperience founder El Kwang in conjunction with an eight-member Advisory Committee of leading industry experts from across Asia Pacific, the Knowledge Program delivered impactful keynote presentations and insightful breakout sessions, equipping delegates with fresh perspectives and actionable strategies for success in a rapidly evolving landscape.

Attendees were able to choose from 20 breakout presentations across two 60-minute sessions, tailored to develop skills in four key categories: Upskilling, Workplace Management, Industry Matters, and Self-Leadership.

Topics ranged from the importance of emerging talent in shaping the future of the industry and the impact of consumer experience on event outcomes, to maximising AI-Human synergy and safeguarding creativity in the digital era.

Across formats including workshops, panel discussions and presentations, more than 30 leading industry figures, including Melissa Brown (CEO Australian Business Events Association), Sheila Vijayarasa (The Brave Leader), Toni Brearley (CEO Australasian Society of Association Executives) and Brooke Byrne (IBM APAC Signature Events) hosted the breakout sessions.

Beforehand, two feature keynote speakers, Gus Balbontin and Dr Kristy Goodwin, opened the day, exploring adaptability, performance and well-being as

crucial elements in industry resilience.

Drawing from his experience as CTO at Lonely Planet, Balbontin delivered his keynote ‘ADAPT’, presented by ICMI, sharing practical insights on how businesses can stay agile and innovative amid the relentless pace of change.

Dr Goodwin, supported by Ovations!, presented her keynote, ‘Powered-Up Performers: The Neuroscience of Sustainable Peak-Performance in a Digital Age’, featuring science-backed strategies to optimise productivity, manage stress, and sustain energy in the high-pressure world of business events and incentives.

AIME event director Silke Calder says the Knowledge Program has gone from strength to strength.

“We are thrilled to have had such inspirational and exciting industry leaders sharing their incredible insights and expertise across a full day of education and professional growth opportunities for attendees,” she says.

“Congratulations to El Kwang and his

team at BEAMexperience and this year’s content advisory committee, who together curated an unmissable programme of workshops, presentations and discussions.”

New Zealand at AIME

Tourism New Zealand coordinated the New Zealand stand on behalf of 36 industry partners, and made a big impact with the footprint of the stand, an activation from Hobbiton™, along with a cultural performance ahead of the NZICC sponsored lunch.

Penelope Ryan, Tourism New Zealand global manager business events, says the event was very positive for New Zealand.

“AIME 2025 was an extremely successful show for New Zealand. Having our largest-ever contingent of New Zealand exhibitors – 36 different business events venues and operators from across the country – meant New Zealand had a dominant presence on the show floor,” she says.

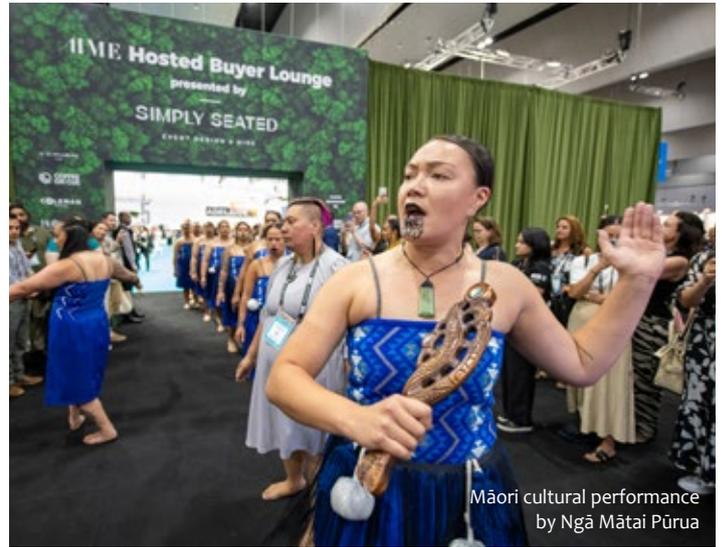
“Activations including Hobbiton™ Movie Set’s amazing real-life Hobbit Hole, the



The New Zealand stand



Robert Cullen,
Executive Chef, NZICC



Māori cultural performance
by Ngā Mātai Pūrua

NZICC’s delicious lunch for hosted buyers, and the show-stopping Māori cultural performance by Ngā Mātai Pūrua increased New Zealand’s engagement with attendees and showcased the diversity and quality of our events offering.

“The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, and our New Zealand partners are now actively pursuing business opportunities

identified with an economic value of more than \$11.5m.”

The New Zealand International Convention Centre (NZICC) offered a first taste of its food offerings, providing an exclusive glimpse into the innovative and sustainable dining experience ahead of the official opening in 2026.

Executive chef Robert Cullen oversees NZICC’s culinary operations, bringing with him a career that spans the globe and includes royal appointments. Michelin-trained, Cullen has gained extensive experience from his work across the United Kingdom, Russia and Southeast Asia. Most recently, he provided his culinary expertise for King Abdullah II at the Royal Hashemite Palace in Jordan.

The Middlehurst lamb, one of the signature dishes on the lunch menu, exemplifies this ethos. “This isn’t just lamb; it’s merino lamb, raised in the rugged beauty of the Awarere Valley,” Cullen shares.

“This is how sheep and lamb should be raised – no fences, no stress, just wilderness. Paired with butternut purée and pāua XO, the dish tells a story of our land – a

symphony of flavours that takes you on an unforgettable journey.”

A plant-based creation was also available to taste, reflecting NZICC’s innovative spirit. “Take something as humble as celeriac,” Cullen shares. “We charred it, shaved it, seasoned it with a remoulade, and paired it with a smoked tomato ragù and macadamia. It’s simple and elegant but relies on experience, technique and passion with soul to balance the flavours and textures. This dish pays homage to the farmer who nurtured this vegetable for six months before it was cultivated.

“It is an honour to represent the efforts of New Zealand’s producers, hunters, and artisans. These unsung heroes work tirelessly through wind, rain, blood and sweat to deliver the exceptional quality of produce that every New Zealander can be proud of,” says Cullen.

Cullen also catered afternoon tea at the New Zealand stand during the show. The menu featured iconic Kiwi canapés, including Southland’s world-famous cheese rolls and the ever-debated lamington – did they originate in New Zealand, or Australia?

AIME 25 – THE FACTS

- The AIME trade exhibition took place on Tuesday 11 and Wednesday 12 February, with extended opening hours to allow hosted buyers and visitors more time to meet with exhibitors.
- Over three days more than 640 hosted buyers from around the world joined, 675 exhibitors and 4500 attendees and from various business events sectors from around Asia Pacific and the world.
- The International Association of Convention Centres held AIPC @ AIME 2025, a half-day summit for convention and exhibition centre executives, at MCEC on the final day of AIME, Wednesday 12 February.
- The AIME Leaders Forum hosted by the Australian Business Events Association also took place on the morning following AIME, Thursday 13 February.
- In 2025, for the first time, the global exhibitions association UFI co-located its 2025 Asia-Pacific Conference in Melbourne, holding it at MCEC following AIME on 13-14 February.
- The next edition of AIME will be held at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre on Monday 9 to Wednesday 11 February 2026.

AIME 2025 team



INCENTIVE SECTOR MORE BUOYANT THAN EVER

By Brad Foster

Whitsunday Islands inspired event in Sydney; ID Events

The incentive market in Australia and New Zealand is more buoyant than it has been in years according to some of the leading practitioners.

The much discussed ‘covid hangover’ doesn’t exist in the incentive travel reward sector any longer with the market buoyant and only looking stronger.

And the good news for Asia Pacific venue operators and individuals who promote destinations is that the strength of the incentive market currently can equate to more heads in beds and significant local spend.

Australian-based director of destination management at Ovation DMC, Sonja Söderbom, says 2025 has started off with a bang, with the company’s first quarter being stronger than 2024.

“We have had a combination of

conferences and incentives in Australia, New Zealand and the Asia Pacific and while we came into 2025 thinking it may have been a softer year, short lead business is coming in the door and creating a strong pipeline for the year ahead and into 2026, which could be a stand-out year,” she says.

“February was an epic month with two large programs into Auckland – a 400-delegate pharmaceutical program and a 700-delegate construction incentive from the US that started in Sydney, chartered a cruise liner throughout the South Pacific and finished in Auckland.

“In addition to this our team has been busy managing programs in Singapore, Sydney, Adelaide and Melbourne for automotive, tech, and pharmaceutical industries, just to name a few.”

Söderbom says they are certainly seeing a lot of interest into New Zealand locally, with Japan and Vietnam standing out in Asia, and Barcelona and Portugal creating strong interest in Europe.

Sydney-based executive director of sales at ID Events Karen Livermore, says business has definitely been improving year-on-year post-covid.

“Tourism Australia has been doing a great job of facilitating broad interest with its communications and of course we have been active in western markets with our partners to champion Australia as a dream destination to visit for incentives,” she says.

In Australia groups have generally been doing the tried and tested programs – starting in Sydney or Melbourne and travelling north to the Whitsundays and Cairns and Port Douglas region.

“We are seeing most of our incentive business book from the United States and Europe/UK,” she says.

“Numbers are steady and in fact, we have been seeing some large numbers (1000+) returning which is positive. IT/tech, motor, insurance, DSA, and food industries are all very strong incentive buyers.”

Principal of Managing Australian



Reef management incentive;
Managing Australian Destinations

Destinations, Byron Kurth, says 2023 and 2024 were among the best financial years the company has had.

“Most of our business is Queensland based however we have run a number of programs in Tasmania and Western Australia,” he says.

“At the moment, the majority of our international arrivals are series groups out of the US of around 80 people. We did a couple of large New Zealand conferences, and a couple of smaller Asia groups out of Singapore. Most of the corporates we handle are domestic now.

“Tasmania is getting a lot of interest deservedly, and warmer destinations are still desirable during the winter months.”

Director of sales and product at Sydney-based DIRECTIONS Conference and Incentive Management, Michael Walker, reports business for the company has started off exceptionally well in 2025.

“January was primarily focused on pre-planning, but from February through to June, we have back-to-back and overlapping programs, marking one of the busiest periods

in the company's 25-year history,” he says.

“The landscape has shifted significantly during this time. Traditionally, most programs and events are scheduled for the latter part of the calendar year, but now they are increasingly taking place at the beginning.

“There has also been a noticeable increase in inquiries this year, and more for hospitality and sporting events.”

Walker says business in 2025 is both domestic and international.

“Recently in February we managed an event in Queenstown for over 100 participants as part of an annual state conference for an FMCG client. Looking ahead to April, another is going ahead in Bali with approximately 100 attendees from a similar FMCG background, and we have a small incentive group heading to Phuket with around 80 participants.”

He says there are currently two events potentially travelling to Japan later this year.

“South Africa is re-emerging as a destination after being absent for some time. DIRECTIONS hosted a program in

South Africa at the beginning of March and we are currently working on three programs over the next year.”

Walker says the style of incentive travel rewards does not seem drastically changed post-covid, however, there is certainly a greater emphasis on their benefits now than before.

“Face-to-face networking opportunities provided by incentive travel have gained renewed importance since covid-19 restrictions eased. This trend suggests that more incentive travel will likely emerge over the next five years.”

Similarly, MAD's Byron Kurth doesn't see a lot has changed in terms of incentive programs post-covid other than budgets being a little tighter.

“CSR projects are certainly the flavour of the month, and we have had a bit of traction with nature-based programs - Great Barrier Reef research, rainforest tree planting, and assisting with volunteer animal shelters and the like.

“There is a focus on trying to make programs more sustainably conscious, but there seems to be a lot of green washing around, just ticking a box, rather than any real meaningful outcomes.”

New Zealand general manager of events at 212f, Adam Leslie, who runs programs in New Zealand and internationally, says business remains strong locally and could be even stronger.

“New Zealand should be a popular destination because our dollar is weak and the quality of product that we have is high. The inbound programs that we run are extremely high quality,” he says.

Leslie's most recent group out of Australia into the South Island included five-star accommodation options and a program with all the bells and whistles.

“And what was interesting to me in this group, who were from all around Australia, less than a quarter of participants had been to New Zealand before.

“I find that very common. There are so many Aussies who have never been to New Zealand before, far more than Kiwis who have been to Australia. I don't know a single Kiwi who has never been to Australia.”

He believes that bodes well for the New Zealand sector generally, with the necessity of incentive travel programs that are held annually to be held in different and new locations.

“There's a lot more that New Zealand can do to attract Australians to New Zealand. I know there's a big campaign to draw more business out of Australia and the rest of the world, but I just don't know if we're doing it



Beachside welcome event;
ID Events

as well as we could be.”

Conversely, Leslie believes that Australia’s attractiveness for New Zealand groups remains high, however challenges, particularly relating to access and perceptions about certain regions, remain.

“I had a very good conversation with some operators from Darwin at AIME. This destination has some incredible product, but they don’t have any direct flights from New Zealand.”

He says that for New Zealand travellers to get to Darwin they are looking at 10 hours with flying times, flight changes and airport waiting.

“We can get to Bali in 10 hours so until you get direct flights to Darwin then they simply aren’t going to have New Zealand incentive groups there.

“There are other [Australian] destinations with direct routes. I’ve been fortunate to be to Tasmania and Perth and all-around Australia and I still think, even for our clients, it’s an underrated destination.

“What works against us is that because so many Kiwis have been to Australia they think that they’ve seen everything and generally they haven’t.”

Sustainable focus

Söderbom says that covid is a thing of the past, with corporates now focused on rewarding and recognising their employees and clients.

“Several insights that we are seeing from our clients are the importance of creating unique experiences and immersing participants in the local culture and traditions as well as leaving a positive impact on the community and destination,” she explains.

“Sustainable tourism is also a major focus, with companies prioritising eco-friendly practices and choosing destinations, hotels, venues and experiences based on this.

“As a side note, we have had a few corporates requesting post-event reporting to include data such as dollar spend or percentage of budget that went to companies engaged on the incentive program that were sustainable companies, monies raised for charitable organisations, indigenous companies engaged, etcetera, so it will be interesting to see if this is something that is requested more in the future.”

Karen Livermore agrees that companies are looking to see ROI in more tangible ways.

“The supply chain, from procurement through to marketing and eventual operations, is much more nuanced and sophisticated than it was pre-covid,” she says.

Also imperative today to complete a sale, she says, is being able to inform the client on



Tropical North Queensland sustainability incentive; Managing Australian Destinations

the very latest on offer.

“We are always being asked what’s new – hotel developments, resort upgrades – anchors to underpin the ‘why’ about a destination. Australia has had varied success with this in post-covid years – I think we could do with some more good news stories about future developments to facilitate interest in regions that struggle to sell for incentives.”

212f’s Adam Leslie says his company is seeing a trend with incentive programs that include an educational component.

“It’s certainly not all clients but it is a trend we’re seeing, and it really safeguards incentives for the future with real ROI evident,” he says.

Some programs 212f has run in recent times includes having a group attending an international trade show or visiting a car manufacturing plant – related to the company – as part of their incentive.

“It’s usually just a day and there remains the classic incentive features of the program,” he says.

“Doing this feels a bit more balanced and rounded when there is an educational element to the program. A lot of people who go on these incentives are usually the business owners and having an education element really justifies them taking the time to go on these trips.

“We had more of these last year and we certainly have more of them this year.”

Leslie stresses that incentives are all about bespoke experiences and destination marketers have to really think about what makes their regions stand out from the rest.

“I’ve done three incentives to Western Australia and within the program the attendees have swum with whale sharks.



Karen Livermore, ID Events



Sonja Soderbom, Ovations DMC

“That’s one of my top incentive experiences globally. And I remember years ago Perth [Convention Bureau] said to me do I want to bring some clients over to Perth to see what was available and I said sure and then they sent me a draft program and it was all about Perth and nothing else like swimming with whale sharks.

“I said I can’t let my clients sit on a plane for seven hours and bring them to just another Aussie city. I said you’ve got whale sharks, just a two hour flight from Perth. You’ve got such unique experiences. That’s what my clients want.”

SUSTAINABLE MELBOURNE

By Terry Holt

Melbourne City

A recent visit to Melbourne highlighted the city's progressive approach to creating meaningful social and environmental impacts. The Melbourne Convention Bureau (MCB) provided an opportunity for delegates to explore sustainable suppliers, innovative experiences, and responsible dining, all within the heart of Melbourne's CBD.

Global Destination Sustainability (GDS) Index

Melbourne is in the GDS-Index global Top 40 and is ranked number one in Australia for sustainability contributions to environment, supplier, social, and destination management.

The city's sophisticated tram network is 100% powered by renewable energy generated by two solar farms. The trams are free for delegates to use across the city centre.

Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre (MCEC) was the first convention

centre in the world to be awarded a 6 Green Star environmental rating, and has been EarthCheck certified since 2009, achieving Platinum status since 2023.

MCB's strategy aims to deliver greater "Beyond Tourism" outcomes for stakeholders with a focus on legacy, sustainability and supporting Melbourne's First Peoples communities.

Climate and biodiversity

City of Melbourne declared a climate and biodiversity emergency in 2019. In doing

so, joined around 2,300 jurisdictions across 40 countries – a local and international movement recognising that climate change poses serious risks to the people of Melbourne and Australia.

The city has a strong record of reducing emissions and restoring and conserving biodiversity. Actions that have been taken include being certified carbon neutral for operations every year since 2012; cutting emissions from council operations by 53 per cent between 2013 and 2019; purchasing 100 per cent renewable energy through the Melbourne Renewable Energy Project; switching major events such as Melbourne Fashion Week, Melbourne Music Week and Melbourne Knowledge Week to be certified carbon neutral; planting 3000 trees a year to grow the urban forest, with over 22,000 trees planted since 2012; investing \$40 million in stormwater harvesting and water sensitive urban design, capturing and reusing around 180,000 kilolitres of water per year; increasing biodiversity with 16,000sqm of new understorey vegetation planted in Melbourne since 2018, providing habitat for wildlife; and revegetating the banks of the Yarra River to improve the health and wellbeing of the river.

To assist event planners in the efforts to combat climate change and create a sustainable business event in Melbourne, MCB offers a range of helpful tips, tools, and templates along with tailored advice.



1 Hotel Melbourne

The new 1 Hotel Melbourne

The mission-driven sustainable, luxury 1 Hotel Melbourne is preparing for its Australian debut. The property will be a celebration of sustainable, biophilic design, featuring a 1,000sqm events space, five meeting suites, 277 guest rooms and 114 hotel-branded residences, as well as several dining options. Throughout the hotel more than 2,000 living plants create the feeling of bringing the 'outside-in', with each room and suite lush with plantlife and sunlight, due the location offering river and city views.

Event spaces: With floor-to-ceiling windows across three-sides overlooking, and with access to, the river and 3,500sqm native-planted park, the function and events centre will be housed on the ground floor allowing direct vehicle access for guests and VIPs. This is further complemented by first floor gathering suites, with access to a private bar.

Location: The hotel occupies a low-density position on the banks of the Yarra River, conveniently located on the CBD free tram line in the revitalised Northbank precinct

of the city. With 220 meters of absolute riverfront, guests will enjoy fabulous views of the river, a native-planted parkland and cityscape, as well as access to Melbourne's thriving cultural, art and sporting landmarks.

Wellness: Amenities include Bamford Wellness Spa to nurture the mind, body and spirit with a holistic approach based around a mindful connection with nature, and a dedicated wellness area on the first floor allowing guests to work out with leading gym equipment and trainers in an uplifting space.

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

Jessica Mo

has been promoted to director of wholesale and inbound sales at JetPark Group. With over 20 years in the hotel industry, Mo brings a wealth of knowledge on tourism trends and challenges. Throughout her 20 year hotel career, she has worked with Millennium Hotels and Resorts, Distinction Hotels and Sudima Hotels.

**Marcel Leydesdorff**

has joined Collective Hospitality as business manager. With 28 years' experience in catering and hospitality, Leydesdorff's journey began as a chef, quickly evolving into owning several event-related businesses, including a successful contemporary catering brand.

**Beatrice Giorgi**

has been promoted to conference manager at Conferences & Events Limited. During her four-year tenure, Giorgi has helped in delivering numerous national and international conferences throughout New Zealand and online.

**Raniera Liddell**

has been appointed as hotel operations manager at Sudima Auckland Airport. Liddell brings extensive operational experience from his six years in previous positions at Sudima Lake Rotorua.

**James Niu**

has joined Capstone Hotel Management as cluster sales manager. Niu joins the Capstone team with extensive hospitality experience ranging from hotel operations to sales in London, Amsterdam and New Zealand.

**Lisa Tully**

has joined Hind Management as sales manager – corporate, representing Sudima Hotels. With extensive experience in corporate sales, Lisa previously served as business development manager – corporate at CPG Hotels for two years and spent a decade at Millennium and Copthorne Hotels in a similar role.



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MEMBER OF **All**

By Lisa Hopkins

chief executive
Business Events Industry
Aotearoa (BEIA)



A MOMENT IN TIME

Five years ago, almost to the day, New Zealand found itself in an unprecedented moment—our first COVID-19 lockdown. The skies were eerily quiet, birdsong filled the air, and queuing for the supermarket became an unexpected novelty. That two-month period left an indelible mark on our industry, and while its echoes remain, it's our patience, planning, and resilience that propel us forward.

2019 was an exceptional year, a precursor to what was promising to be an exceptional 2020. As such, there has been much discussion comparing what was and what could have been, the number of events, delegate attendance and international arrivals. But perhaps it's time to shift our focus. Constantly looking backward risks keeping us in a state of woe; instead, we need to lean into the opportunities ahead.

The numbers tell a story

But let's take a moment to look at 2024's data, which reveals some hard truths.

International arrivals for business events sat at just 3% compared to 2023. Given the global economic landscape—a recession and widespread uncertainty—it's hardly surprising that 2024 didn't deliver the "rock star" recovery we had once hoped for.

Domestically, spending declined, particularly from the government—a significant 55% drop in the number of business events from the government sector compared to 2023. The impact of cost-cutting measures was felt across the board, but the signs of a shift are emerging. There are early indications that the purse strings may be loosening, and government engagement in business events is showing promising momentum.

A prime example of this was the Prime Minister's Investment Summit, a gathering of government, ministries, and private sector leaders to explore investment opportunities. The event placed New Zealand's potential squarely in front of key stakeholders, including a focus on hotel infrastructure investment within the tourism sector. The full prospectus can be found at www.nzte.govt.nz.

Using a business event as a platform to showcase investment opportunities was a smart move. There is no other format which delivers on connections, networking and sharing information. The guest list was impressive, and while the long-term economic outcomes remain to be seen, the level of engagement was strong. One can only hope that some of these high-profile attendees took the opportunity to explore New Zealand beyond the conference room.

Government engagement and India's potential

There is fresh energy in the government's approach to business events. Hon. Louise Upston, the newly appointed Minister for Tourism and Hospitality, has hit the ground running, with Business Events already benefiting from her focus. At the time of writing, the Minister is part of the Prime Minister's delegation to India, a trip that holds enormous potential for our sector.

The Indian incentive travel market is a goldmine of opportunity. However, unlocking its full potential will require strategic shifts—particularly in air connectivity. Direct routes from Mumbai and Delhi are critical,

and would be game-changing. Air New Zealand's announcement that it will team up with Air India to explore a direct route to New Zealand, likely to start in 2028, will significantly enhance New Zealand's appeal in this high-value market.

Investment in understanding the unique drivers of the Indian market is also key. Incentive travel from India is built on scale, experience, and exclusivity—three factors that, when aligned correctly, place New Zealand as a top-tier destination.

Business Events Boost: A game-changer

Closer to home, the Business Events Boost initiative is already yielding tangible results. It has opened doors for critical conversations and, more importantly, conversions. The increased flexibility within the Conference Assistance Programme, managed by Tourism New Zealand means that New Zealand can now compete more effectively with Australia—something that has not gone unnoticed across the Tasman. Hearing direct feedback that this initiative is making a real impact is a confidence boost for everyone involved.

Conversations with the Minister continue to be constructive, and it's clear that she understands the power of business events—not just as an economic driver but as a catalyst for innovation, trade, and engagement.

The road to MEETINGS 2025

As we look ahead, MEETINGS 2025 is fast approaching, and Auckland is gearing up to host this incredible industry gathering. There's something uniquely powerful about bringing our sector together—ideas are exchanged, partnerships are formed, and the momentum we generate at this event carries us forward long after the final appointment wraps up.

I, for one, cannot wait. MEETINGS is more than an event—it's a statement of intent, a showcase of our strength, and a reminder of why business events matter. If you haven't already, mark your calendar, this is one event you won't want to miss.

Nga mihi nui,
Lisa Hopkins



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