

The Business of Tourism

Wednesday Letter: Upbeat operators at TRENZ as “light switches on” for govt

14th May 2025 By Natasha Jojoa Burling | natasha@tourismticker.com | @tourismticker

There was a sense of energy and positivity at this year’s TRENZ and a feeling that after years of neglect the government is now engaged, writes the Ticker’s Natasha Jojoa Burling after attending the conference for the first time.



Buyers and sellers at TRENZ 2025 at Rotorua’s Energy Events Centre. Image: TIA

Attendance at the event at Rotorua’s Energy Events Centre was 20% up on last year, with 1200 buyers and sellers booked for 16,000 business meetings.

Some of the interviews I had arranged with sellers did not eventuate as each time I walked past, they were busy talking to someone else.

Looking down from the mezzanine floor, nearly all the sellers had people at their stands and were chatting pretty much all the time. I had to slip in between meetings for quick interviews until the next buyers came along.

They must have all been exhausted by the end of it.

Tourism Export Council Lynda Keene told me during a break that a “light seems to have gone on” for the government, a sentiment I have heard from many operators since the beginning of the year when Tourism and Hospitality Minister Louise Upston started announcing various funding packages to encourage growth in the industry.



Natasha Jojoa Burling

Upston was there, along with Prime Minister Christopher Luxon, who made a surprise appearance, gave a quick speech, then went around the events centre meeting tourism operators, with body guards and press staff in tow.

Luxon mentioned we welcomed over three million visitors to the country last year but noted although it was a 12% increase on the previous year, it was still below pre-Covid levels.

And Auckland Airport chief executive Carrie Hurihanganui said the country’s ability to grow inbound visitation would “increasingly be hamstrung without airline connectivity”.

Upston made one announcement during her speech, which was that **non-English speaking tourists will not have to get their translated documents certified** from 26 May this year.

That seemingly small measure drew a big round of applause from the audience, which surprised me.

However, I spoke to Lisa Li from China Travel Service at her stand and she told me it was “great news” that would help her bring more Chinese tourists to New Zealand.

Operators bringing people from China here certainly need help as visitor arrivals from that country are still only about 60% of pre-Covid, although spending has overtaken 2019 levels.

Li told me we need to make sure Chinese visitors “feel like we’re rolling out the red carpet” and thinks letting them into this country on an Australian visitor visa would also help.

Another delegate from Singapore told me the removal of the certification requirement would reduce barriers to entry for non-English speakers to New Zealand.

She said having to get certified copies added extra costs to the traveller but the translations still had to be done to ensure people were not coming to this country for reasons other than travel.

The lifting of the requirement seems to be a smart move by the government. It is a cheap but effective way to encourage more non-English speakers to come here.

When I asked Luxon and Upston after the announcement if they were concerned about fraud due to the lack of certified translations, they both responded in unison with an emphatic “No!”.

I think that remains to be seen. Removing the step of certifying documents could surely mean some people will fake them?

Other optimism [came from the likes of Dr Jason Smith](#) from the Kauri Museum in Northland, who has attended every TRENZ, this being the 31st time for him.

He booked about \$500,000 of forward business at TRENZ and was riding high on the fact that the museum just had its best summer in a decade, despite the closure of the Brynderwyns for part of it.

Also from Northland, Dive! Tutukaka owner Kate Malcolm has seen an uptick in revenue over summer and was glad to be at TRENZ to connect with other people in the industry.

Tourism New Zealand’s René de Monchy told me [he was pleased to see the optimism](#) at the Energy Events Centre, saying most people had had a good summer and were encouraged by the focus on growing tourism.

It’s been a rollercoaster for TNZ since the last TRENZ, with its budget being cut by 5% last year, restructuring, and then the government deciding to inject \$17m in the past four months.

The driving force behind TRENZ, Tourism Industry Aotearoa’s Rebecca Ingram said [she had received “amazingly positive feedback”](#) about the event after tweaking the

programme to increase the amount of networking, which included a welcome dinner at Te Puia with a spread of roast ham, prawns, oysters, paella and more.

She said TIA tracked how appointments went through ratings in the TRENZ app.

“What we can see is very high consistent feedback around the quality of those conversations that are happening, which just fills my heart with joy.”

Despite the challenges of airline connectivity and visitor arrival numbers that refuse to budge past Covid-19 numbers, tourism operators seem upbeat and energised and are giving everything they have to make their business and the sector as a whole succeed.