

An aerial photograph of a lush green valley. A wide river flows through the center, reflecting the bright sunlight. The surrounding hills are covered in vibrant green grass and scattered trees. A small town or village is visible along the riverbank, with several buildings and a road. The overall scene is peaceful and scenic, capturing the natural beauty of the region.

SUMMARY

Destination  
Management  
Plan 2022

**The Mighty  
Waikato**

**Where magic runs deep**

May 2022

# Executive Summary – *Plan on a Page*

**VISION:** The Mighty Waikato is celebrated for providing real New Zealand experiences—where kaitiaki runs deep, mana inspires and unforgettable discoveries are just around the bend.

**GOAL:** The visitor economy positively contributes to thriving Waikato communities – people, culture and the environment.

**POSITIONING:** The Mighty Waikato – Where magic runs deep.

Come with us, share our waka and feel the strength and passion. For this is a place beyond the expected, which constantly surprises with natural beauty, powerful history and out-of-this-world experiences. Always far from the ordinary, this is a magical region of villages to play, relax, connect and explore in. Here, our Kaitiaki runs deep, our mana inspires and unforgettable discoveries are just around the bend. A welcoming place where our people keep it real – and experience become unreal. This is the Might Waikato. It’s all yours to discover.

## Taiao Ora Tangata Ora

If the natural world is healthy, so too are the people

### Guiding Principles

Instilling pride through celebrating and sharing local culture	Providing connections between visitors, local residents and industry sectors	Living our brand values – surprising, magical and authentic Waikato experiences	Embracing guests – Manaakitanga	Regenerative tourism that actively contributes to the communities and the environment – Kaitiakitanga	Fostering innovation – always looking at ways to improve and adapt
--	--	---	---------------------------------	---	--

### Strategic Priorities

Collaboration, partnerships and leadership	Product and Experience: protection, enhancement and development	Visitor infrastructure and investment
Capability building	Targeted marketing	Regenerative and sustainable tourism

## Waikato is a region of diversity; an agricultural powerhouse, of awe-inspiring natural wonders including the mighty Waikato River, Waitomo caves, surf beaches, and is home to Tainui, Ngāti Maniapoto and Raukawa.

This Destination Management Plan (DMP) for the Waikato identifies a pathway towards a shared vision by, and for, local communities, iwi, visitors, tourism industry, wider business, and local and central government agencies.

This vision is that the Mighty Waikato is celebrated for providing real New Zealand experiences – **where kaitiaki runs deep, mana inspires and unforgettable discoveries are just around the bend.**

Building on the current activity of HWT, this DMP brings together all elements of destination management by guiding tourism development and marketing and improving visitor experience and infrastructure. The ultimate goal is to create positive benefits for Waikato communities and their environments using tourism as the enabler - social, cultural, environmental and economic.

To achieve the vision and goal for Waikato as a visitor destination, this DMP focuses on delivering Hamilton & Waikato's brand positioning as a visitor destination with the underlying foundation of TAIAO ORA, TANGATA ORA – if the natural world is healthy, so too are the people.

There are six priority areas with accompanying actions that work towards achieving the vision, goal, and positioning. These are guided by the values and principles identified by the community, iwi and tourism stakeholders. The priority areas focus on within-sector, cross-sector and intra-regional:

- Collaborations and partnerships;
- Product and experience development;
- Support visitor infrastructure and investment;
- Capability building within the sector;
- Targeted marketing; and
- Support regenerative and sustainable tourism

It is important this DMP remains a living document.  
As the DMP progresses and the operating environment changes, the Plan needs to be updated. Partnerships will develop and evolve, new research will come to light, new policies will be adopted, national and global events will occur, and new issues and opportunities will arise

# Destination Management Planning

Effective and sustainable Destination Management involves the management of all aspects of the destination that contribute to a visitor’s experience and enhances the liveability for local residents.

An effective DMP considers the perspectives and aspirations of residents, visitors, Māori/iwi/hapū/whanau, tourism industry, local industry businesses, local and central Government. This is an ongoing process that requires destinations to consider the social, economic, cultural and environmental risks and opportunities.

MBIE has identified 16 components of destination planning. These components are all covered in this plan, with strategic priorities identified specific to the Waikato.

This DMP does not start from scratch. In 2014, Hamilton & Waikato Tourism developed and adopted the Visitor Strategy for 2015-2025 which identified an aspiration to grow the visitor economy from \$1billion in 2014 to \$1.35billion in 2025. From there, the Hamilton & Waikato Tourism Opportunities Plan (TOP) 2016 provided a framework and direction for delivering new and improved tourism experiences (activities, attractions, and infrastructure) over the next 10 years to support the long-term growth of the sector and increase the economic value and benefits of tourism to the region.

The development of these plans involved extensive research and stakeholder engagement. Progress has been made on many of the projects identified in these plans. Due to the long term aims and implementation of these projects, many are still relevant. This DMP updates and builds on priorities identified within these plans and widens the scope to incorporate all elements of destination planning and management.

This DMP is an iterative process. Further opportunities, partnerships and collaborations will arise and evolve, and up-to-date research and data will continually inform the plan and its success measurements toward the four areas of Wellbeing. It is important that this document is a living document with frequent review and updates

**SIXTEEN COMPONENTS OF A DESTINATION MANAGEMENT PLAN:**



# Waikato Region



## The Waikato RTO Region

Hamilton & Waikato Tourism (HWT) is currently funded by six of these ten districts/city and provide destination marketing, destination management, convention bureau, industry development and major event coordination services to Hamilton City, Waikato, Waipā, Waitomo, Ōtorohanga, and Matamata-Piako Districts. These six areas account for 75% of the wider Waikato’s population.

The RTO region is referred to as “heartland Waikato” and is well known for hero visitor experiences of Hobbiton™ Movie Set, Waitomo Caves, Hamilton Gardens and Raglan surf beach. It is home to two Great Rides (Hauraki Rail Trail and The Timber Trail), the Te Awa River Ride and New Zealand’s longest river, the Waikato River, flows through the heart of the region. We have a number of unique destinations and emerging experiences such as the original spa town of the North Island, Te Aroha with natural hot soda water, and New Zealand’s only tea plantation, Zealong Tea Estate.

The Waikato RTO region has the fourth largest domestic visitor market behind Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch which makes up around 75% of visitors. Key drive markets are Northland, Auckland, Taranaki, Bay of Plenty, Rotorua, Taupo and Hawke’s Bay. Primary fly markets are Wellington and Christchurch with secondary routes from Manawatu and Nelson/Tasman.

In the international market, the region is ranked the fifth highest behind Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Queenstown. Key international markets pre-Covid in order of size from largest were Australia, UK/Europe, North America (USA and Canada) and China.

The impact of Covid-19 on visitation to the region has fluctuated during 2020 and 2021, particularly when there is an alert level change and lockdown instigated in Auckland which is our main drive market. Waikato has also been impacted three times during 2020-2021 which restricted the number of people able to safely attend events and forced the immediate closure of our tourism attractions. Our locals make-up one-third of our visitor market. However, Waikato’s geographic location proved a strategic asset as the region rebounded well each time alert levels changed and travel restrictions eased. The domestic travel market are still keen to travel and meet, however uncertainty plays a part. Corporates are not meeting face to face at present due to the rollercoaster of level changes, most have moved business to 2022.

	Councils	Population 2020	Population Projection to 2028	Standard of Living (Mean Household Income)	Economy GDP per capita
Waikato Region	1 x City 9 x Districts	496,700	514,600	\$96,724	\$56,139
Waikato RTO area	1 x City 5 x Districts	373,910	397,750	\$101,700	\$57,357

## Current visitor offering

The best-known visitor experiences in the Waikato, as shown by the perceptions research, are Waitomo Caves and Hobbiton Move Set™, in addition to the Hamilton Gardens. The region also has a wealth of nature-based experiences (walks, waterfalls, natural water springs, cycle trails, wildlife sanctuaries), many of which are on the DOC estate and council and trust land. The food and beverage offering in the region (local products and produce) is fast developing and becoming increasingly popular with visitors. Business events also feed into the Waikato's offering with the region sitting second only to Wellington with number of events held in the first two quarters of 2022.

The main iconic/anchor events that attract visitors from outside and within the Waikato region are Fieldays, Balloons over Waikato, and Rugby SEVENS. Next tier major events are the Hamilton Garden Arts Festival, and International Sports. Other popular events are the Great NZ Food Show and Feast Waikato. New events are being developed with the support of the new Thermal Explorer Regional Events fund.

Hamilton city is the heart of the Waikato RTO region. The city offers unique visitor experiences (eg: Hamilton Gardens); along with vibrant and varied hospitality offerings. A large number of commercial accommodation is offered within Hamilton city, enabling the visitor to take a 'hub-and-spoke' approach to their stay and exploration within the Waikato region. However, a large number of accommodation offerings within the city are currently used as Managed Isolation Facilities and Ministry of Social Development for emergency accommodation – this is a challenge for the immediate future.

The bulk of commercial accommodation is motels and smaller hotels/apartments. The number and capacity of quality accommodation around the region is limited, especially for larger events. The region also has a large range of Peer-to-Peer accommodation, within the region. While commercial accommodation is operating with large occupancy rates, the peer-to-peer accommodation offering is becoming more popular, recording strengthening occupancy rates. More research will be needed to inform our understanding and strategic thinking with regards to future needs/desires for accommodation in a post-covid market.

There are 64 Qualmark accredited businesses (including iSITES and local tour operators), but there is a lack of commissionable product for the travel trade to promote and sell including group dining options.

## Partners

A Destination Management Plan is a partnership approach to effectively managing the destination. Each partner has a pivotal role to play and contribute to the success of the Waikato Destination Management Plan:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hamilton &amp; Waikato Tourism</li><li>• Mana Whenua</li><li>• Te Waka</li><li>• Hamilton City Council and five District Councils of Waikato, Waipa, Otorohanga, Waitomo and Matamata Piako</li><li>• Waikato Regional Council</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency</li><li>• Department of Conservation</li><li>• Waikato Visitor Industry</li><li>• Regional Tourism Organisations</li><li>• Industry partners</li><li>• Industry</li></ul>
--	---

# Community/Stakeholder Aspirations

ACCESS

ATTITUDES

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

To capture the aspirations of the community, the strategic perspectives of community stakeholders, industry and iwi were captured. These aspirations help to identify the vision for the destination plan and articulate the priorities and opportunities that exist within the region.

<p><b>Social Wellbeing</b></p> <p>Opportunities that enabled the local communities within the Waikato region to benefit from the visitor economy was a shared aspiration from many within the community. Providing opportunities for visitors both domestic and international to engage with the local people through real and authentic engagement was identified as imperative to achieving this.</p> <p>The implication from COVID 19 is that the social licence for tourism to operate is more important than ever. Tourism needs to give back to communities and their environment, not take away.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased Employment</li> <li>Diverse Community</li> <li>Authentic Experiences with Real People</li> <li>More Events</li> <li>Diverse Experiences</li> <li>Placemaking</li> </ul>	<p><b>Environmental Wellbeing</b></p> <p>A desire for environmental wellbeing was shared throughout the consultation period. Many aspired for the relationship between people and the natural environment to be placed above anything else. At the very heart of this aspiration was the desire for locals and visitors to the region to respect the environments they are in, and to educate people on how to engage with them in the least harmful way possible (or to give back). It should be noted that this was not about limiting access to natural assets throughout the region (such as rivers, caves, wetlands, and coast), but rather enhancing the experiences available within them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Rivers are Our Lifeblood</li> <li>Utilising the Waterway Assets</li> <li>Mitigating and adapting to Climate Change</li> <li>Sustainability is Key</li> <li>Building Purpose into Brands</li> </ul>
<p><b>Cultural Wellbeing</b></p> <p>Cultural aspirations for the region came through from an engagement perspective but also in terms of visitor experiences. The Waikato region is home to a rich tapestry of cultural stories that breathe life into the histories and landscapes of the region. The ability for visitors to engage with these stories will be important to the future success of the visitor industry.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maori Tourism Experiences</li> <li>The Battle for Land</li> <li>Better Engagement with Iwi</li> <li>A multi-cultural lens</li> <li>Early European History</li> <li>Kingitanga</li> <li>Heritage, Arts and Events</li> </ul>	<p><b>Economic Wellbeing</b></p> <p>Tourism provides the opportunity to create quality secure employment for all ages and build community wealth within the region. For iwi it can also lead to bringing whanau home, a leading aspiration for iwi within the region. As with all the community well-beings, economic strength within the community can help to bolster and support the other three well-beings providing multiple positive impacts and benefits throughout the region.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Economic Benefit Derived from Natural and Cultural Assets</li> <li>Primary Production Cross Sector collaboration</li> <li>Events as Economic Enablers</li> <li>Education</li> </ul>

# Vision and Guiding Principles

DEFINE THE  
DESTINATION

DEFINE THE  
VISION

BRAND  
POSITIONING

A destination vision statement is essential for engaging stakeholders with a common direction for destination management. It's an aspirational statement that provides an agreed focus amongst stakeholders for the future state of Waikato as a visitor destination. The goal is a target set towards achieving the vision.

**Vision**      The Mighty Waikato is celebrated for providing real New Zealand experiences – where kaitiaki runs deep, mana inspires and unforgettable discoveries are just around the bend.

**Goal**        The visitor economy positively contributes to thriving Waikato communities – people, culture and the environment.

## Guiding Principles

Stakeholders, including iwi and the general community are generally positive about tourism and the opportunities it brings to the region, provided that this is undertaken in a certain manner. A number of guiding principles were crafted based on feedback from stakeholders including results from previous consultation undertaken for the development of the Hamilton & Waikato destination brand.

These principles are inherent in the Vision, they act as a guide to the formation of and implementation of the DMP for Waikato.

- Instilling pride through celebrating and sharing local culture
- Providing connections between visitors, local residents and industry sectors
- Living our brand values - surprising, magical and authentic Waikato experiences
- Embracing guests – Manaakitanga
- Regenerative tourism that actively contributes to the communities and the environment – Kaitiakitanga
- Fostering innovation; always looking at innovative ways to improve

## The Underlying Foundation: Taiao Ora, Tangata Ora – If the natural world is healthy, so too are the people.

If all aspects of the natural world are healthy, then the people who are connected to it are healthy too. The need to ensure that the natural environment is a beneficiary of the visitor economy was an expectation of many, and this was articulated through the request for more regenerative tourism opportunities for visitors and local community members to contribute to.

# Positioning the Region

ATTITUDES

MARKETING &  
PROMOTION  
(awareness)

ENVIRONMENTAL  
STEWARDSHIP

EXPERIENCE &  
PRODUCT  
DEVELOPMENT

CAPABILITY &  
DEVELOPMENT

Increasingly, aspects of a destination like its reputation, the perceived quality of life, and the brand of the region is determining tourism demand. Factors that drive businesses, talent, and visitors to choose one destination over another have begun to align.

The geographical size and the diverse nature of the communities within the Waikato region present both a challenge and an opportunity. A challenge as the region is a sum of many parts, but an opportunity because it is the diverse nature of the region that adds to its uniqueness. Combine this with the natural assets of the region, the strong cultural connections available, and the resonance of the stories the region has to offer. The potential for compelling positioning for the region then starts to emerge.

## Perceptions of Waikato

The perception and image of a place is a key variable in creating a compelling destination for visitors. These perceptions are formed through multiple layers of interaction, research and knowledge and influenced by many different factors both positive and negative, and often external to the visitor industry. The current belief within the Waikato community is that the perception of Waikato as a destination is not as positive as they would like. Descriptions used in past positioning statements, for example the word 'classic', were now seen as outdated and did not match the way the local community saw the destination.

There is also a strong feel in the community that there is a lack of general awareness of the experiences available in the destination beyond Hobbiton Movie Set™ and the Waitomo area. Consumer research identified that there is a strong association with the rural aspects of the Waikato (farming and horticulture), the Waikato River, Waitomo caves, and Hobbiton Movie Set™. The region is viewed as easy to get around and relaxing but has a comparatively low net promoter score and only eight percent of previous visitors claim the Waikato to be their favourite destination.

Additional perception work has been commissioned by HWT to refine the region's positioning and target markets. This research will strengthen and provide further details to the positioning in this DMP. This work will be completed during 2022.

## Brand Positioning

Hamilton & Waikato Tourism has developed a brand identity with comprehensive consultation; this brand identity articulates a compelling visitor destination. A desired perception, or positioning story was developed as part of this process:

### Story: The Mighty Waikato – Where magic runs deep

*Come with us, share our waka and feel the strength and passion. For this is a place beyond the expected, which constantly surprises with natural beauty, powerful history and out-of-this-world experiences.*

*Always far from the ordinary, this is a magical region of villages to play, relax, connect and explore in. Here, our Kaitiaki runs deep, our mana inspires and unforgettable discoveries are just around the bend.*

*A welcoming place where our people keep it real – and experience become unreal.  
This is the Might Waikato. It's all yours to discover.*

## Destination Positioning Pillars

The opportunity now is to bring the powerful brand and positioning to life through the delivery of on-ground experiences and journeys that will enable visitors to engage with the unique, powerful natural assets, meet the local people and learn of their stories connecting them to the land, and connect with the culture and heritage shaped by this land and its people.

Perception and Positioning work is currently being undertaken by HWT to develop pillars that profile the strengths and uniqueness of the destination, appealing to new and existing target markets.

<b>Taiao Ora Tangata Ora</b> If the natural world is healthy, so too are the people		
<p><b>Hero Experiences</b></p> <p>Current: Waitomo Caves, Hobbiton Movie Set, Hamilton Gardens</p> <p>Developing: Waikato River, food/agri tourism, cycle trails; Raglan surfing</p>	<p><b>Emerging Experiences</b></p> <p>Bush walks and sanctuaries; waterfalls and springs; events</p>	<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <p>Better access and engagement with the natural world – especially iconic assets (ie river); connection between natural and cultural assets; more Maori tourism experiences; increased story telling; collaboration and partnerships; new product development and product extensions (including agri/food tourism); supporting infrastructure; events to support positioning.</p>

# Target Markets

Stakeholder consultation identified that the ideal visitor for Waikato is one that resonates with the values held by the local communities. That is, visitors who respect, engage and want to contribute to the environment and local people, and have the time and means to explore what the region has to offer.

The move towards tourism requiring a social licence to operate within communities has become even more pronounced since the COVID19 pandemic. This makes the targeting of specific visitor segments more important than ever.

Nine domestic visitor segments have been identified within the domestic market for New Zealand. The core pillars of the Waikato visitor experience offers something to each of these segments, and there is a lot of overlap/similarities in terms of experiences sought by these segments. These segments would not be targeted individually, but grouped together, with consistent key marketing messages to develop a clear and strong positioning. The visiting friends and family segment is significant - in terms of size nationally, and especially to the Waikato.

Local residents as visitors fall within a number of these segments (e.g. family fun, sports and events, visiting friends and family, explore nature, knowledge seeking, shopping), but in some instances would require separate marketing initiatives. Local residents being proud of their region and having experienced what the region has to offer will also have positive flow on to their visiting friends and families.

Prior to Covid-19, the Waikato was a significant on-shore excursion destination for the cruise market from the Ports of Auckland and Tauranga. Popular cruise excursions in Waikato included Hobbiton Movie Set, Waitomo Caves, farm experiences and the Taste of Waikato lunch at The Red Barn. As a destination, Waikato supports NZ's future strategic approach for this market; and encourages the return of cruise ships in a sustainable and collaborative manner.

Market segments that seek the experience Waikato has to offer (or has the potential to develop). The current level of interest in Waikato as a visitor destination from the domestic leisure market segments indicates the market segments that would be easier to convert to travel.

# Risks and Mitigation

LEADERSHIP &  
STRUCTURES

RISK & CRISIS  
MANAGEMENT

MEASURING  
SUCCESS

Managing risk in tourism is vital for tour operators. However, it is just as important for destinations and the agencies that manage them. Crisis or situations that can have adverse effects on industry, community and the physical destination itself can occur when least expected, but through planning for different scenarios and mitigating identified risks, a more resilient destination can be built.

This section of the plan identifies a range of risks that have become evident throughout the consultation process for this destination management plan. These risks could have varying degrees of impact on the destination and the industry, and each will offer a range of complexities that should be understood in order to mitigate them effectively. This plan will identify some potential opportunities to do this (in the following section that looks at the priority areas for effective destination management of the Waikato region). This is not an exhaustive list, and not all potential mitigating factors are identified. Further investigation into current and future issues and potential mitigations are required on an ongoing basis.

## **RISK 1: Climate Change**

Addressed by Strategic Areas 1, 3 & 6

## **RISK 2: Walk the Talk – Regenerative Tourism**

Addressed by Strategic Areas 1 & 6

## **RISK 3: Global Travel Disruptors**

Addressed by Strategic Areas 1, 4 & 5

## **RISK 4: Iwi Stories**

Addressed by Strategic Areas 1, 2, 3 & 4

## **RISK 5: Community Impacts**

Addressed by Strategic Areas 1, 3, 5 & 6

## **RISK 6: Potential inability to adopt a region-wide Destination Management approach**

Addressed by Strategic Area 1

## **RISK 7: Lack of larger-scale commercial accommodation**

Addressed by Strategic Areas 1 & 3

## **RISK 8: Skills/labour market/training**

Addressed by Strategic Areas 1 & 4

## **RISK 9: Ageing/lack of infrastructure**

Addressed by Strategic Areas 1 & 3

## **RISK 10: Impact of potential negative reputation of Hamilton City**

Addressed by Strategic Areas 1, 2 & 4

## **RISK 11: Impact of Covid-19 on New Zealand tourism and the Waikato**

Addressed by Strategic Areas 1, 4, 5 & 6

## **Leadership Challenges**

- Sustainable Funding for RTOs
  - Sustainable Funding for Destination Management
  - Effective Destination Management, including Governance Group and organisation structure of HWT
- Addressed by Strategic Areas 1, 3, 4 & 6

# Strategic Priority Areas and Action Plan

**Vision** The Mighty Waikato is celebrated for providing real New Zealand experiences – where kaitiaki runs deep, mana inspires and unforgettable discoveries are just around the bend.

**Goal** The visitor economy positively contributes to thriving Waikato communities – people, culture and the environment.

## Strategic Priority Areas

Six priority areas have been identified to achieve the vision for Waikato as a visitor destination.

- 1 Collaboration, Partnerships and Leadership
- 2 Product and Experience: protection, enhancement and development
- 3 Visitor Infrastructure and investment
- 4 Capability Building
- 5 Targeted Marketing
- 6 Regenerative and Sustainable Tourism

Within each of these priority areas are a number of actions that provide direction for stakeholders and partners of tourism in Waikato to assist in achieving the vision and goal. Measures of success for these actions are based on the four Wellbeings (social, economic, environmental and cultural) of the Local Government Act and the targets of the Waikato Wellbeing Project.

Data for these measures will come from a variety of sources – for example, community sentiment measured via councils, environmental data from DOC and Waikato Regional Council, visitor data from MBIE and commissioned surveys.

# PRIORITY AREA 1:

STRATEGIC FIT

AMENITIES,  
SERVICES &  
INFRASTRUCTURE

ENVIRONMENTAL  
STEWARDSHIP

LEADERSHIP &  
STRUCTURES

MEASURING  
SUCCESS

## Collaboration, Partnerships and Leadership

The success of a sustainable destination is in the holistic management of a destination. Success of destination management involves a range of stakeholders; to manage “supply & demand” along with resource management and allocation of resources; and supply chains that satisfy customer journeys. The visitor industry is made up of many facets including core infrastructure, visitor experiences including events, supporting services and amenities, and natural and cultural resources which are owned and/or managed by a range of partners. Regional unity across sectors and resource managers, and across district, regional, and rohe boundaries, will provide a well-integrated visitor experience that builds on the unique strengths and competitive advantage of a regional visitor destination. Destination planners and managers need to understand current and future visitor desires, needs and expectation; seek data to support this and then agree on priorities, roles and responsibilities; and then have resources to implement agreed activities. For this DMP to be successful it needs to be supported and integrated into local government planning, be aligned with wider regional and national strategies (including climate change policy), supported by local tourism operators and the community in general, and have ongoing resource to continue this work into the future.

Hamilton & Waikato Tourism has established relationships with local councils, an Industry Advisory Board, existing intra-regional partnerships (Explore Central North Island), some newly established intra-regional initiatives (eg regenerative tourism programme) and tourism industry. Based on the direction of this DMP, there is scope for further collaborations and partnerships with for example, iwi, the agriculture and food production sector, Te Waka, the Department of Conservation, the arts community, Waikato Screen, surrounding regions (RTOs, Trusts, private sector), and cross sector regenerative collaborations (community and environment based) relevant to tourism.

As some of the Strategic Actions included in this plan are beyond HWTs remit, to fully activate the destination management plan, HWT will develop a Governance Group with representatives from key stakeholders – this is likely to include: representative of the funding councils, iwi, Department of Conservation, Te Waka, Waikato Wellbeing Project, Waikato Plan, Industry, and Te Waka Kotahi. The aim of the Governance Group is to ensure principles of the destination management plan is included in their own strategic plans and actions. The Governance Group would focus on building resilience to address and mitigate the identified risks.

WHY IS THIS A PRIORITY?	MEASURES OF SUCCESS	ACTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Central to a successful and sustainable destination</li> <li>• Makes the most out of our strengths and core sectors</li> <li>• Tourism can be used as a tool to profile other sectors</li> <li>• Tourism is an economic enabler and can assist with building community wealth</li> <li>• Additional residents creating scale and adding value</li> <li>• Stakeholders roles/responsibilities clarified to enhance leadership for the sector</li> <li>• Structures to support with funding to be effective</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhanced natural, cultural and heritage experiences</li> <li>• Recognition of the sector and the value/benefits provided</li> <li>• Enhanced leadership and partnership structure established</li> <li>• Tourism recognised through regional/national strategies, plans, and initiatives</li> <li>• Sustainable funding plan for the RTO</li> <li>• Robust governance structure and strategy</li> <li>• Visitor spend</li> <li>• Develop partnerships for the support and deliver of the goals (Waikato Wellbeing work in progress)</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.1 Effective leadership and management of the destination, including development of an Advisory Group</li> <li>1.2 Focus on the environmental wellbeing of natural assets</li> <li>1.3 Develop strong and mutually beneficial relationships to ensure positive impacts for the community and growth of the visitor economy for Waikato</li> <li>1.4 Iwi engagement</li> <li>1.5 Measuring progress</li> </ol>

# PRIORITY AREA 2:

BRAND  
POSITIONING

TARGET  
MARKETS

EXPERIENCE &  
PRODUCT  
DEVELOPMENT

CAPABILITY &  
DEVELOPMENT

## Product and Experience: protection, enhancement and development

There is significant scope to build on existing assets and experiences to establish Waikato's positioning as a destination: hidden gems...powerful history...villages to play...keeping it real...connections to nature...etc

The Tourism Opportunities Plan identified four key Hero Experiences that drive significant visitation to the region – Hobbiton Movie Set, Waitomo, Hamilton Gardens and Raglan. It is imperative that we protect these hero experiences to ensure recovery post Covid-19 in sustainable manner. A region needs experience capacity in order to attract visitors and extend their length of stay. A large majority of the visitor experiences that existed prior to the Covid-19 pandemic have been impacted – some have refocussed their product to attract the domestic visitor, some have downsized, some have hibernated. We will be working with these experiences as much as possible to ensure their survivability and enhancement post Covid in a sustainable manner.

Likewise, prior to Covid-19, local and central Government had invested funding in establishing and substantially rejuvenating key visitor attractions. These projects need to continue and then be elevated to ensure that the previous investment is protected, enhanced and the value is fully realised. This is particularly relevant for Te Aroha, Rangiriri and Otorohanga Kiwi House developments.

This involves the development, diversification, and improvement of places, products and experiences for visitors (and locals) across the three positioning pillars - Mighty Land, Mighty People, Mighty History.

Placemaking within communities utilises the built and natural assets of a community, and has the potential to help communities establish a unique yet complementary identity that feeds into the overall positioning of Waikato and the journeys visitors take through the region.

Developing additional paid experiences will have the benefit of being attractive to third party travel sellers which will assist in promoting the region. New products need to be aligned to customer desires, wants, needs and expectations. Important to develop resilience within tourism businesses to ensure viability, productivity, capability, sustainability, taking an active role in tackling climate change and transitioning to a regenerative tourism operating framework.

Tourism will be different post-COVID and our sector needs to transition to operating and learning to live with Covid. Domestic and international travellers will have different degrees of comfort and need to travel and experience the Waikato in a safe manner.

WHY IS THIS A PRIORITY?	MEASURES OF SUCCESS	ACTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To have product, experiences and places to establish the desired positioning for Waikato as a destination</li> <li>• To increase visitor length of stay, spend, and regional distribution of visitors/spend</li> <li>• To increase visitor satisfaction through providing deeper connections</li> <li>• To increase sense of identity and belonging amongst communities</li> <li>• Aligned to customer needs - changing world of COVID</li> <li>• Developing resilience, ensuring viability, productivity, capability, sustainability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connection with communities</li> <li>• Regional distribution of visitors and spend</li> <li>• Spend on activities, services, food and beverage</li> <li>• Quality of experience (Net Promoter Score &amp; Visitor &amp; Resident Perceptions Survey)</li> <li>• Good health and Wellbeing – live in an environment conducive to cultural, creative and artistic activities</li> <li>• Industry Innovation and Infrastructure (Waikato Wellbeing work in progress)</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.1 Protection and enhancement of current experiences and investments</li> <li>2.2 Develop product and experiences for the journeys that enhance the positioning of the region</li> <li>2.3 Identify placemaking opportunities for communities</li> <li>2.4 Develop opportunities for communities to come together in their unique spaces</li> <li>2.5 Invest in an events programme that builds on the positioning of the region</li> <li>2.6 Develop food tourism product, journeys and events</li> <li>2.7 Develop infrastructure and services to support the experiences and product being developed</li> </ol>

# PRIORITY AREA 3:

DATA, RESEARCH  
& ANALYSIS

ACCESS

AMENITIES,  
SERVICES &  
INFRASTRUCTURE

ATTITUDES

## Visitor Infrastructure and Investment

Local and central government is a significant enabler of tourism through the provision of infrastructure for both local residents and visitors. Transport connectivity is another enabler which is delivered by Council Controlled Organisations (CCOs), airlines, Te Huia rail service, Northern Explorer scenic rail journey, the Waikato Expressway and state highway network, wharves and jetties by local government and electric vehicle charging stations.

Accommodation infrastructure is a mix of national, international and independent commercial hotel, motel and apartment chains, holiday parks and camping grounds, tertiary education providers, high performance sport, boutique, non-commercial providers and Department of Conservation/tramping club huts on walking trails. We also have a network of Motorhome Friendly Towns, plus freedom camping sites provided by local councils and the Department of Conservation.

Digital infrastructure such as ultra-fast fibre and regional mobile phone coverage is just as important for visitors as they are for local residents.

The region has visitor hot spots where local infrastructure has struggled to meet local and visitor demand. Understanding patterns of visitor use at individual destinations and travel routes informs planning for infrastructure and mitigates impacts for both residents and visitors.

Attracting investment in infrastructure that supports tourism and the visitor experience will enable better utilisation of existing infrastructure. Planning and investment, with a mix of public and private investment, levers to support, enable or incentivise, plus user-pay options are also worth considering to assist in developing new visitor infrastructure.

WHY IS THIS A PRIORITY?	MEASURES OF SUCCESS	ACTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tackles the current undersupply of a range of accommodation options required for large visitor assets such as event centres, sporting stadiums, visitor attractions and in regional hot-spots</li> <li>• Enhancement of Hamilton as regional hub for major visitor infrastructure, with Cambridge as secondary hub</li> <li>• Facilitates access to and within the region (regional distribution of visitors)</li> <li>• Increases visitor satisfaction</li> <li>• Continues social licence amongst communities for tourism to operate</li> <li>• Mitigate and manage potential problem areas</li> <li>• Vital for maintaining a sustainable destination</li> <li>• Ensuring a long-term focus with alignment to regional and district plans which supports the sector's future development</li> <li>• Avoids duplication and clarifies roles of each entity in development and maintenance of visitor infrastructure</li> <li>• Development of a circular economy which aligns to sustainable and regenerative principles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Host community experience of tourism</li> <li>• Quality of experience (net promoter score)</li> <li>• Enhanced natural resource use and management</li> <li>• Environmental care, protection and restoration</li> <li>• Reduction of waste and increase of recycling and reuse</li> <li>• Increase the number of swimmable rivers and lakes in the Waikato from 30% (rivers) and 73% (lakes) in 2019 to both waterbody, types achieving more than 80% by 2030. (Waikato Wellbeing – indirect through educating visitors, visitors and operators giving back eg tree planting)</li> <li>• Improved social licence to operate within the Waikato region</li> <li>• Improved visitor and resident perceptions of the Waikato</li> <li>• Responsible visitors and engaged operators who embed, express and enact the values of the Tiaki Promise</li> <li>• Industry Innovation and Infrastructure (Waikato Wellbeing work in progress).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3.1 Identify accommodation needs throughout the region</li> <li>3.2 Invest in data insights to help inform all activity across the region</li> <li>3.3 Identify areas of constraint for the visitor economy (and local communities) within the region</li> <li>3.4 Improve connectivity within the region</li> </ul>

# PRIORITY AREA 4:

## Capability Building

STRATEGIC FIT

BRAND  
POSITIONING

EXPERIENCE &  
PRODUCT  
DEVELOPMENT

CAPABILITY &  
DEVELOPMENT

Capability building of new and established businesses includes upskilling in the areas of storytelling, environmental practices, carbon management, use of innovation and technology, quality accreditation, customer service and hosting, and an all-round sustainable business model.

HWT and partners provide access to a variety of capability building programmes and workshops. There are also a number of cross sector business support and development initiatives that tourism operators, events and venues can link into. The Thermal Explorer Regional Event Fund also run event capability programmes.

Tourism and event staff shortages are an issue New Zealand wide. Work creation schemes and career guidance are often skewed away from the tourism sector for high school students and other work seekers. We need to reset and rebuild the tourism sector to attract new and returning talent to the workforce. A core philosophy of tackling climate change in every role, in every organisation across Waikato is an aspirational target creating a purpose-led workforce. We need to be seen to act, attract, develop and retain our workforce from all levels – school leavers through to the ‘grey’ workforce who have value and experience to contribute.

WHY IS THIS A PRIORITY?	MEASURES OF SUCCESS	ACTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increases visitor satisfaction</li> <li>Feeds into regional, national and global wellbeing goals</li> <li>Increases business resilience, sustainability and profitability</li> <li>Creates a strong visitor experience ecosystem aligned to regional proposition</li> <li>Improves staff engagement and creates rewarding, fulfilling and sustainable employment</li> <li>Attracts workforce across all levels – school leavers, mid-career returnees and our ‘grey’ talent pool</li> <li>Improved awareness of the ‘Go With Tourism’ programme across Waikato schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quality of experience (net promoter score, satisfaction rating)</li> <li>Natural resource use and management</li> <li>Environment care, protection and restoration</li> <li>Improved waste management and reduction goals achieved</li> <li>Reduce carbon emissions by a minimum of 25% by 2030 (on the path to net carbon zero by 2050).</li> <li>Increase the number of businesses who reduce their waste, leading to a 50% reduction of waste to landfill by 2030</li> <li>Reduce (particularly for Māori and Pasifika*) the number of young people in the Waikato who are not in employment, education or training (reduce inequality, quality education, decent work and economic growth)</li> <li>Reduced reliance on migrant workforce to fill entry-level roles across sector</li> <li>Industry Innovation and Infrastructure (Waikato Wellbeing work in progress)</li> <li>Achievement of targets set in the NZ Tourism Sustainability Commitment</li> </ul>	<p>4.1 Ensure connectivity between destination marketing and individual operators</p> <p>4.2 Tourism and event businesses are encouraged and supported to develop their capability</p> <p>4.3 Education providers within the region providing career pathways into tourism</p>

# PRIORITY AREA 5:

## Targeted Marketing

BRAND POSITIONING

TARGET MARKETS

ATTITUDES

MARKETING & PROMOTION (awareness)

Waikato does not suffer from an awareness issue – more so a lack of awareness of what there is to see and do in the region. Residents of Waikato do not always have a strong sense of pride in their own region - when local residents should be advocates for their region. Waikato has one of the lowest net promoter scores in New Zealand (especially amongst VFRs and business visitors). A strong brand has been developed for Waikato that now needs to be supported by an equally strong experience offering in order to re-set the perception of Waikato in the minds of target segments.

Building on current activity (refer page 11 and appendix 4), marketing and communications should be focused on the positioning pillars and aligned to the identified visitor segments. Diversity of markets geographically is also important to minimise risk from travel disrupters.

WHY IS THIS A PRIORITY?	MEASURES OF SUCCESS	ACTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To establish the region’s positioning with target markets</li> <li>Encourages regional and seasonal dispersal of visitors</li> <li>Provides local residents with a sense of pride</li> <li>Enhancing the region as a premium Business Events and Major Events destination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Diversity of markets (proportion from each)</li> <li>Seasonal distribution of visitors</li> <li>Regional distribution of visitors</li> <li>Increased spend on activities, food and beverage</li> <li>Quality of experience (net promoter score)</li> <li>Increase length of stay in region</li> </ul>	<p>5.1 Develop the journey and travel routes positioning outlined within this plan</p> <p>5.2 Develop campaigns specific to the positioning pillars</p> <p>5.3 Develop higher profiles for hero and iconic experiences within the positioning pillars</p> <p>5.4 Attracting and curating value-add business events aligned to our positioning pillars</p>

# PRIORITY AREA 6: Sustainable Tourism



The pandemic has created a unique opportunity to rethink the visitor sector's purpose, the principles by which we operate and how we measure success in Waikato. The region holds a wealth of natural land, water and coastal assets that could provide benefit to the tourism industry and the community as a whole. Covid-19 has accelerated the regenerative tourism movement in New Zealand.

Opportunities were identified where visitors could be educated and encouraged to journey through the region in a sustainable manner. There was also a desire to move to the next stage of sustainability - instead of doing less damage to the environment, it is necessary to learn how one can participate with the environment by using the health of ecological systems as a basis for design. While tourism success has largely been measured in economic terms to date, we are moving into a new era of thinking. How to create value more broadly for the benefit of our people, our place, and collective prosperity.

A place-based approach is one way to achieve this understanding which is central to the regenerative tourism philosophy. By understanding how the systems of life work in each unique place, the role of stakeholders and communities is to create a whole system of mutually beneficial relationships. It moves tourism beyond sustaining the environment to one that can regenerate its health – as well as our own.

An aspiration is to achieve carbon neutral status as a visitor destination and that as travellers explore, they actively contribute to a carbon positive future.

WHY IS THIS A PRIORITY?	MEASURES OF SUCCESS	ACTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The tourism and events sector needs to tackle climate change and reduce carbon emissions</li> <li>Operators need to measure carbon emissions</li> <li>Lead the regenerative tourism movement</li> <li>The visitor sector needs improve to meet district and community Climate Action Plan aspirations</li> <li>The way visitors travel and the type of experiences they undertake will be anchored in improving the well-being of the community, the environment and culture</li> <li>Ensure alignment to Tourism Sustainability Commitment and regional strategies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The sector contributes to enhancement and protection of environment and community</li> <li>Industry adoption of the Living Wage Framework</li> <li>Positive partnerships and collaborations with the DOC, WRC and local care groups</li> <li>Embedded tikanga Maori principles and a lift in the use of Te Reo Maori</li> <li>Engaged operators living and acting on the Tiaki Promise</li> <li>Introduction of regenerative tourism principles in tourism accreditation programmes</li> <li>Development of 'good guides'</li> <li>Leverage the benefits of regenerative tourism</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6.1 Create movement of regenerative tourism pioneers within Waikato</li> <li>6.2 Develop products and experiences aligned to regenerative tourism principles</li> <li>6.3 Tackle climate change head-on for Waikato's visitor sector</li> </ol>

# APPENDIX - Current HWT Activity

## Operational activity and funding overview

Overview of 2021-2022 work programme including baseline activity and the extra STAPP/Govt funded projects

Domestic Marketing	International Mkt	Business Events	Industry Development	Major Events
<p><b>BASELINE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mighty Local campaign</li> <li>▪ It's Just Magic – domestic marketing campaign</li> <li>▪ AA campaign</li> <li>▪ Welcome Back to Waikato operator videos</li> <li>▪ Christmas Gift Guide</li> <li>▪ Digital marketing</li> <li>▪ WaikatoNZ website &amp; social</li> <li>▪ PR/media – content curation &amp; travel media hosting</li> <li>▪ Photography &amp; video</li> <li>▪ Regional Visitor Guide</li> </ul> <p><b>STAPP FUNDED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Tourism NZ 'Do Something New, NZ' campaign partner</li> <li>▪ Events promotion</li> <li>▪ Auckland JV campaign</li> <li>▪ ECNI domestic campaign – 'Get Out More NZ'</li> </ul> <p><b>RESET PLAN FUNDED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mighty Local campaign</li> <li>▪ Food tourism marketing</li> <li>▪ Event promotion</li> <li>▪ Fly &amp; drive marketing</li> <li>▪ Special interest marketing</li> <li>▪ Leverage TNZ campaigns</li> <li>▪ Upweight PR/media activity</li> </ul>	<p><b>BASELINE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Travel trade – webinars &amp; virtual famils with TNZ</li> <li>▪ Messages from New Zealand</li> <li>▪ ECNI webinars &amp; travel trade training</li> <li>▪ ECNI eXplore trade show</li> <li>▪ TRENZ trade show</li> <li>▪ RTO / ITO trade show</li> <li>▪ Tour of the North – Australia campaign with Tourism NZ</li> </ul> <p><b>RESET PLAN FUNDED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Travel trade training – all markets</li> <li>▪ Collab with ECNI partners – North America &amp; UK</li> <li>▪ JV Trail Towns Australia</li> <li>▪ TNZ media/PR – Australia</li> <li>▪ Touring routes marketing with ECNI - Australia</li> </ul>	<p><b>BASELINE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Business Events Waikato website &amp; social media</li> <li>▪ BEIA &amp; TNZ partnership</li> <li>▪ MEETINGS trade show</li> <li>▪ AuSAE trade shows</li> <li>▪ Buyer hosting &amp; famils</li> <li>▪ Hosted events &amp; sales</li> <li>▪ Christmas Corporate Event Guide</li> <li>▪ Business Events Directory</li> <li>▪ International conference bids with Tourism New Zealand</li> <li>▪ Business Events Data Programme (BEDP)</li> <li>▪ Meet-North South partnership with Dunedin</li> <li>▪ National Convention Bureaux</li> </ul> <p><b>STAPP FUNDED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Upweight Mega-Famil</li> <li>▪ Upweight Industry Showcase</li> </ul> <p><b>RESET PLAN FUNDED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Business Events campaign – NZ &amp; Australia</li> </ul>	<p><b>BASELINE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Industry Symposium</li> <li>▪ Industry training</li> <li>▪ Operator engagement</li> <li>▪ New business development</li> <li>▪ Ambassador programme – Kirikiriroa/Hamilton</li> <li>▪ Qualmark pre-assessments</li> <li>▪ Data &amp; insights – monthly</li> <li>▪ Cycle trails &amp; Great Rides</li> <li>▪ Sustainability Commitment</li> <li>▪ Accommodation Data Programme (ADP)</li> </ul> <p><b>STAPP FUNDED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Destination Management Plan development</li> <li>▪ West Coast Journey</li> <li>▪ Touring route review</li> <li>▪ Tourism Insights Dashboard</li> <li>▪ Ambassador programme rollout</li> </ul> <p><b>RESET PLAN FUNDED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Implement DMP</li> <li>▪ Food tourism development</li> <li>▪ Maori product development</li> <li>▪ Hotel investment case</li> <li>▪ Sustainability programme</li> <li>▪ Perceptions &amp; positioning</li> <li>▪ Capability building - operators &amp; HWT</li> </ul>	<p><b>BASELINE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Major Events Strategy</li> <li>▪ Coordinator Major Events &amp; Venues Forum</li> <li>▪ Bid support for major events</li> <li>▪ Regional major events calendar</li> <li>▪ Major event feasibility</li> <li>▪ Major event measurement</li> <li>▪ Stakeholder management with Major Events NZ &amp; NZ Event Association</li> </ul> <p><b>REGIONAL EVENTS FUND</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lead Entity for Thermal Explorer Regional Events Fund for Waikato, Ruapehu, Rotorua &amp; Taupo</li> </ul> <p><b>STAPP FUNDED</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Domestic Events Fund</li> <li>▪ Regional Events Fund – Lead Entity &amp; Secretariat</li> <li>▪ Event sector capability development, training &amp; workshops</li> <li>▪ Waikato River event activation</li> </ul>