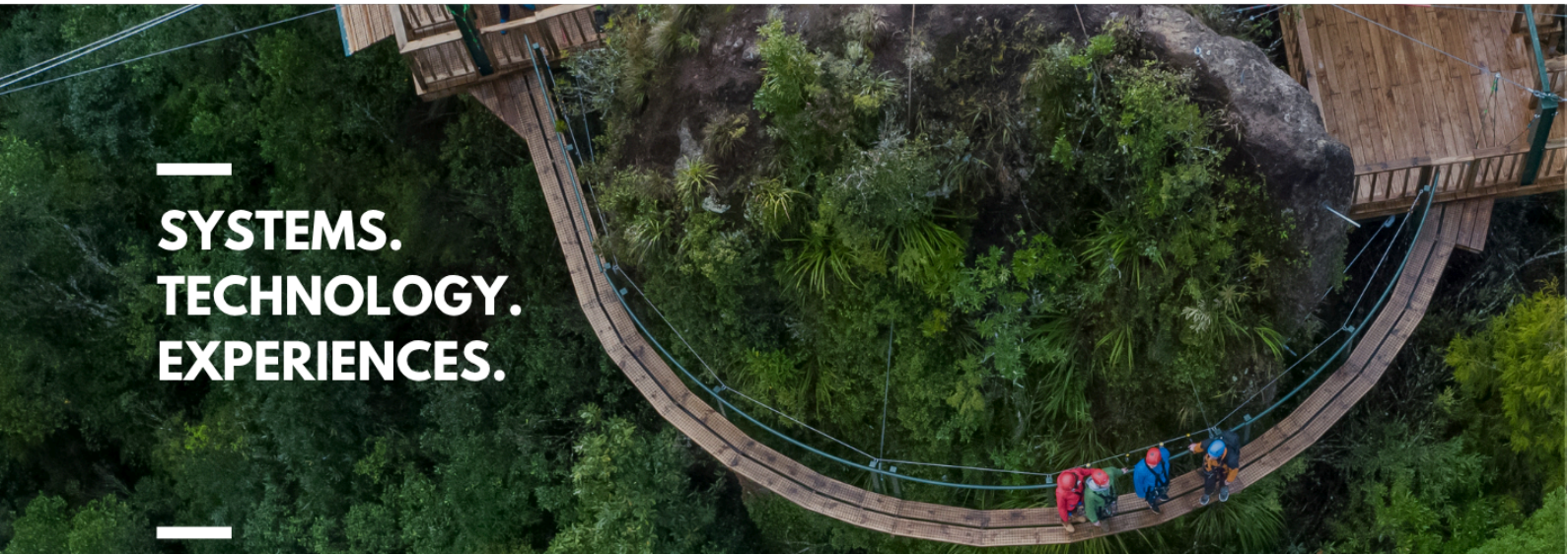
REGENERATIVE TOURISM



SYSTEMS. TECHNOLOGY. EXPERIENCES.

INSIGHTS FROM AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

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He Karapitipitinga Mariko
Immersive Regenerative Tourism Experiences in Aotearoa

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MINISTRY OF BUSINESS, INNOVATION & EMPLOYMENT
HĪKINA WHAKATUTUKI

We acknowledge the mana whenua of Aotearoa New Zealand as kaitiaki of the lands, waters, and skies to which this work relates, and their deep and ongoing relationships that have sustained life and knowledge systems across generations. This report reflects our commitment to engaging with Mātauranga Māori and recognising diverse expressions of kaitiakitanga in practice. We acknowledge the regenerative thought leadership embodied in Te Ao Māori and grounded in values of interconnection, reciprocity and reverence for life. While focused on Aotearoa, this report is informed by regenerative tourism efforts globally that draw on the wisdom, leadership, and lived relationships of Indigenous peoples across many lands. These insights have informed this report and our commitment to relational integrity between people and place through tourism, as aligned with regenerative values.

We extend our appreciation to the case study operators whose insights and practices inform this report: Paul Button and Kali Snell (Rotorua Canopy Tours); Nadine ToeToe (Kohutapu Lodge and Tribal Tours); John Barrett (Kapiti Island Nature Tours); and Matt Claridge (Te Araroa Trail). All case study materials and knowledge shared remain the intellectual property of the respective organisations. These case studies are included with permission and full recognition of the mana, autonomy and intellectual contributions of the respective case study operators.

We are grateful to Jesvier Kaur (Te Papa Atawhai Department of Conservation) and Dr. Kevin Shedlock (Te Herenga Waka | Victoria University of Wellington), for their feedback and insights on an earlier draft of this report.

Note on language used: In this report, the term *Māori* refers specifically to the tangata whenua of Aotearoa. The term *Indigenous* is used when referring to First Nations peoples more broadly and globally beyond Aotearoa. The term *culture* is used in a general sense to refer to social practices, values, and norms.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report addresses the emerging concept of *regenerative tourism* and presents insights from Aotearoa New Zealand. It synthesises and advances conceptual foundations of regenerative tourism in the Aotearoa New Zealand. While offering insights and cases that are unique to Aotearoa New Zealand, the report is intended to also inform regenerative tourism practices internationally.

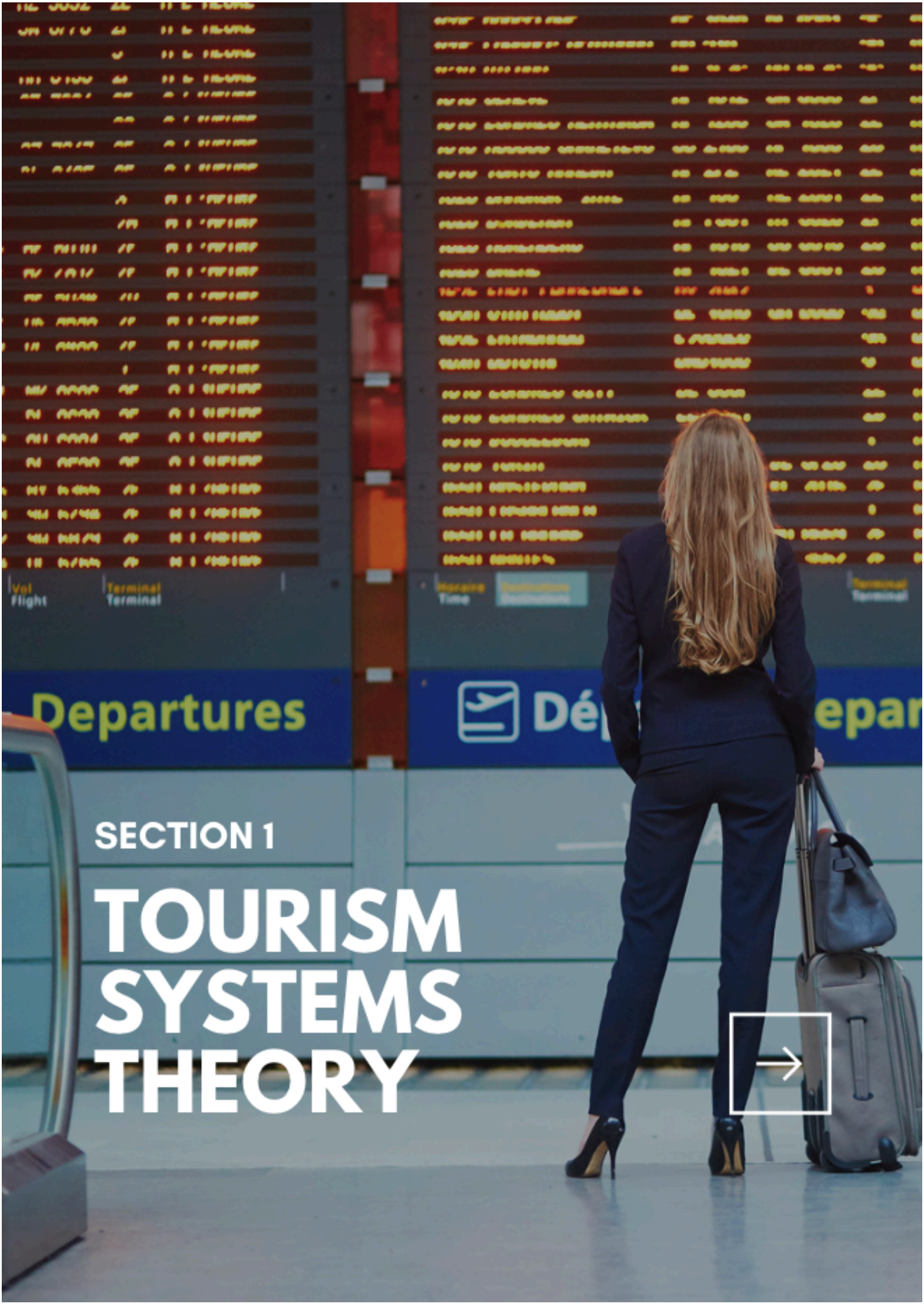
This report forms part of the MBIE Endeavour Research Programme *He Karapitipitinga Mariko: Immersive Regenerative Tourism Experiences in Aotearoa*. It is presented in four sections, each exploring a different aspect of regenerative tourism. It draws on a review of academic literature, an analysis of government and industry reports, and is illustrated with selected case studies from Aotearoa New Zealand that provide grounded and accessible insights into how regenerative tourism is being interpreted and practised by selected vanguard tourism businesses.

Section 1 outlines the current challenges facing tourism systems and why system change is required. It introduces a conceptual model that presents tourism as a connected system and explores how emerging technologies offer the potential to reshape and redefine tourism systems.

Section 2 compares and contrasts four tourism 'logics' through a series of models to distinguish regenerative tourism from established and conventional approaches to tourism. It draws on academic literature and recent government and industry reports to understand how regenerative tourism is currently being framed in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Section 3 reviews literature on virtual tourism to examine how digital technologies are shaping visitor experiences. It considers both the potential and limitations of these tools in supporting regenerative tourism. Finally, Section 4 explores current approaches to measuring regenerative tourism outcomes. It presents summary tables from recent government and industry frameworks, alongside four tourism case study businesses in Aotearoa that are developing their own ways of assessing impact.

By bringing together diverse sources and practical examples, this report aims to advance the understanding regenerative tourism in the Aotearoa New Zealand context. It is intended to inform tourism policy, strategic planning, and management decisions, supporting the transition to regenerative tourism futures in Aotearoa New Zealand (and internationally).



SECTION 1

TOURISM SYSTEMS THEORY

Tourism is at a crossroads. Around the world, tourism connects people, cultures, and economies, but the way the system has developed over recent decades has created significant stress. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, there were growing signs that tourism was causing unsustainable systemic issues, including climate change, resource depletion, declining public support and the environmental, social, and cultural impacts of tourism.[1]

As the sector begins to rebuild, there is an urgent need to rethink how tourism works, who it benefits, and how it interacts with the broader social and ecological systems it relies on. This section outlines four key aspects of this rethinking: the global crisis facing tourism, the rise of digital technologies, the role of tourism systems, and a new model that helps us understand tourism's evolution across physical and virtual spaces with implications for social, cultural and ecological systems.

1.1 Why Tourism Needs to Change

Tourism is facing a global crisis. While the pandemic severely disrupted international travel, many of the industry's deeper problems had clearly emerged long before 2020. These include heavy reliance on high carbon transportation which contributes significantly to climate change[2], especially in remote or island destinations that depend on aviation.[3]

In parallel, many popular destinations have experienced the downsides of rapid tourism growth. Local residents often face increased housing costs, traffic congestion, and pressure on public services.[4] For Indigenous communities, tourism can lead to the commodification of culture, and increasingly, of nature, especially as immersive technologies mediate and market environmental experiences. Without meaningful local consultation and/or empowerment, such development risks eroding sensitive places and cultural relationships to land.[5]

By the late 2010s, the term "overtourism" had entered mainstream discourse, highlighting the backlash in places struggling with excessive visitor numbers.[6] The pandemic further exposed the fragility of tourism economies and deepened public debates about who really benefits from tourism. These conditions have triggered growing interest in alternatives to business-as-usual models.

In response, policymakers, industry leaders, and communities are exploring how tourism can become more values driven[7] as an alternative to the long-standing extractive and exhaustive volume growth paradigm. A regenerative approach to tourism, accelerated by the pandemic, aims not just to reduce harm, but to empower local communities, actively restore ecosystems, support cultural revitalisation, and create fairer work for those in the sector.[8]

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[1] Timothy, D.J. (2019). *Handbook of globalisation and tourism*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

[2] Creutzig, F., Jochem, P., Edelenbosch, O.Y., Mattauch, L., Vuuren, D.P.V., McCollum, D., & Minx, J. (2015). Transport: A roadblock to climate change mitigation? *Science*, *350*(6263), 911-912. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aac8033.

[3] Sun, Y. Y., Faturay, F., Lenzen, M., Gössling, S., & Higham, J.E.S. (2024). Drivers of global tourism carbon emissions. *Nature Communications*, *15*(1), 1-10. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-024-54582-7.

[4] Mowforth, M., & Munt, I. (2015). *Tourism and sustainability: Development, globalisation and new tourism in the third world*. Routledge.

[5] Higgins-Desbiolles, F. (2021). Socialising tourism for social and ecological justice after COVID-19. In A. Mostafanezhad & J. Hannam (Eds.), *Global tourism and COVID-19: Impacts and implications for theory and practice* (pp. 156–169). Routledge.

[6] Peeters, P., Gössling, S., Klijs, J., Milano, C., Novelli, M., Dijkmans, C., & Postma, A. (2018). *Overtourism: Impact and possible policy responses* (Study for the TRAN Committee). European Parliament, Directorate-General for Internal Policies.

[7] Bellato, L., Frantzeskaki, N., & Nygaard, C. A. (2023). Regenerative tourism: A conceptual framework leveraging theory and practice. *Tourism Geographies*, *25*(4), 1026-1046. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2022.2044376.

[8] Becken, S., & Kaur, J. (2021). Anchoring "tourism value" within a regenerative tourism paradigm – a government perspective. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, *30*(1), 52-68. https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2021.1990305.

At the same time, new technologies are rapidly reshaping how people engage with tourism. The rise of virtual and digital experiences offers both opportunities and risks. As the industry looks for more sustainable and resilient models, understanding the role of digital transformation has become increasingly important.

1.2 Tourism and the Rise of Digital Experiences

New digital technologies are beginning to change how people experience tourism. Tools such as virtual tours, livestreamed guided experiences, and immersive digital environments now allow people to engage with destinations in real time. These experiences are becoming part of how we understand travel, time, and place.

Importantly, digital and physical tourism are not separate or competing. Many destinations now use virtual content to spark interest and help visitors preview a place before making travel decisions. Rather than replacing in-person visits, these technologies can strengthen the appeal of travel experiences and support deeper engagement with people and places.[9]

Digital experiences can also play an important role in preparing visitors. They can introduce cultural values, environmental concerns, and local stories that matter to host communities. As new types of visitor experiences emerge across physical and digital settings, there is a growing need to rethink what tourism systems are and how they can support more meaningful and sustainable outcomes.

1.3 Understanding Tourism as a System

Tourism is not just a collection of destinations and services, but a highly complex system involving many actors who interact across different places and levels of decision-making.[10] This complexity makes tourism difficult to manage and understand, especially when local, national, and global interests overlap and potentially compete.[11] Over time, researchers have used system theory to try to simplify and make sense of how tourism works.

One widely used model is Leiper's geographical model,[12] which describes the physical movement of tourists. In this model, tourism begins in the traveller's home country (the generating region), passes through transit spaces like airports or highways (the transit region), and culminates at the destination (the destination region), before returning home (**Figure 1**). This reflects the long-standing idea that temporary physical movement of tourists is central to tourism.

[9] Rahimizhian, S., Ozturen, A., & Ilkan, M. (2020). Emerging realm of 360-degree technology to promote tourism destination. *Technology in Society, 63*, 101411. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techsoc.2020.101411.
[10] Cornelissen, S. (2017). *The global tourism system: Governance, development and lessons from South Africa.* Routledge.
[11] Hall, C.M. (2005). *Tourism: Rethinking the Social Science of Mobility.* Pearson/Prentice Hall.
[12] Leiper, N. (1979). The framework of tourism: Towards a definition of tourism, tourist, and the tourist industry. *Annals of Tourism Research, 6*, 390–407. https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383(79)90003-3.

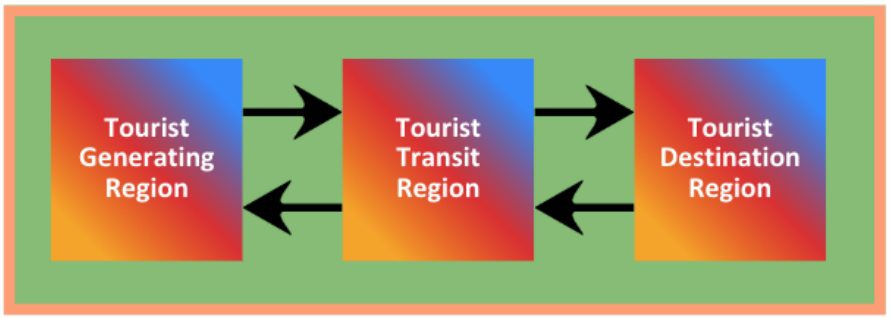

Figure 1: The global tourism system (Leiper, 1990)

A different approach, grounded in political economy, focuses on the global production side of tourism. It maps out the relationships between producers, consumers, regulators, and the cultural and environmental elements that shape tourism experiences (**Figure 2**). In recent years, this view has been challenged by communities and Indigenous groups who argue that tourism must also be accountable to local values, not just global economic flows. There is now a strong case for social, cultural and environmental values to be more central to the tourism system and therefore tourism development and management.

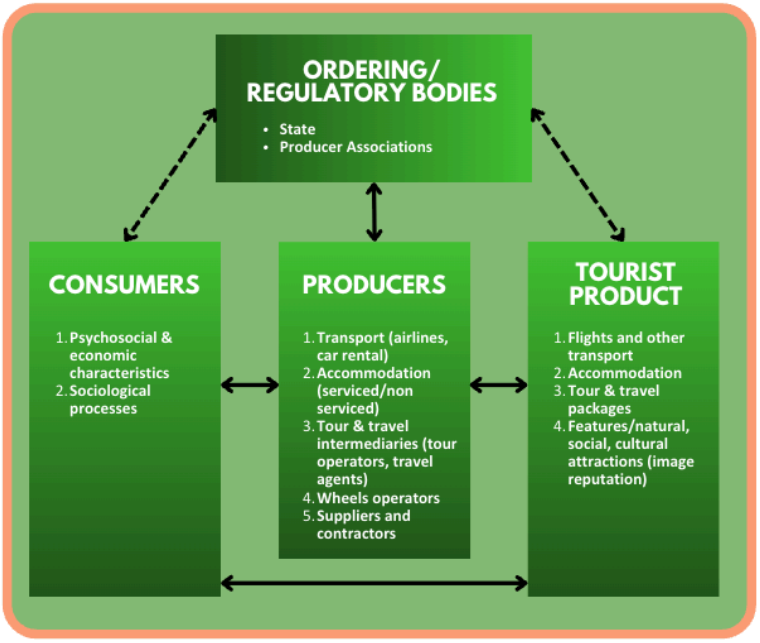

Figure 2: The global tourism production system (Cornelissen, 2017)

Until recently, both models (**Figure 1** and **Figure 2**) assumed that tourism requires physical travel. This assumption is now being drawn increasingly into question. The combined impacts of climate change, rapid technological change, and the COVID-19 pandemic have forced a deeper rethinking

of how tourism systems operate.[13] Virtual tours, remote work, and mobile platforms are reshaping how people engage with tourism, blurring the lines between travel, work, and everyday life.[14]

During lockdowns, people looked for alternative ways to explore places and connect with others. This gave rise to a wave of digital tourism and lifestyle shifts, such as the rise of "digital nomads" who live and work from different locations without needing to be tied to a specific office or city.[15] These trends are prompting deeper reflections on whether current models of tourism are still current and fit for purpose in a dynamic and rapidly evolving global environment.

However, while digital technologies offer new opportunities for accessing and imagining tourism, they have also amplified some of the sector's longstanding problems including overcrowding during peak seasons, accommodation shortages for workers and the offshoring of tourism profits. Social media has further enabled influencer behaviours that encourage shallow or extractive engagement with place. Acknowledging these risks is vital if digital tools are to support, rather than undermine the sector.

1.4 A New Model for Tourism: Bridging the Physical and Digital

New technologies such as virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and mobile platforms are changing and redefining the boundaries of tourism. These tools make it possible to blend physical and digital experiences in ways that were not previously imagined. Tourism is no longer limited to what happens at a destination. Visitor experiences can now begin before arrival, continue after departure, or even take place entirely virtually. These notions are captured in **Figure 3** which attempts to give expression to tourism between the physical and virtual worlds.

This opens up new ways to engage with the traditional tourism system. For example, immersive virtual experiences (**Figure 3-A**) can take place in the generating region, either as a form of anticipation before physical travel, or as a low-carbon alternative or when travel is restricted. These alternatives are especially relevant for travellers who face physical, financial, or ethical constraints, including concerns about emissions or "flight shame".[16] They also offer the potential for tourists to relate to travel differently: fostering a sense of connection and care for the places they engage with, even if not physically present. In this way, the traditional "transit region" which expresses the previously unquestioned need to physically travel (**Figure 2**) can be replaced by mobile or desktop-based interactions using headsets or handheld devices.

[13] Gössling, S., Scott, D., & Hall, C. M. (2020). Pandemics, tourism and global change: a rapid assessment of COVID-19. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, *29*(1), 1-20. https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2020.1758708.
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[15] Reichenberger, I. (2018). Digital nomads–a quest for holistic freedom in work and leisure. *Annals of Leisure Research*, *21*(3), 364-380. https://doi.org/10.1080/11745398.2017.1358098.
[16] Doran, R., Pallesen, S., Böhm, G., & Ogunbode, C. A. (2022). When and why do people experience flight shame? *Annals of Tourism Research*, *92*, 103254. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2021.103254.

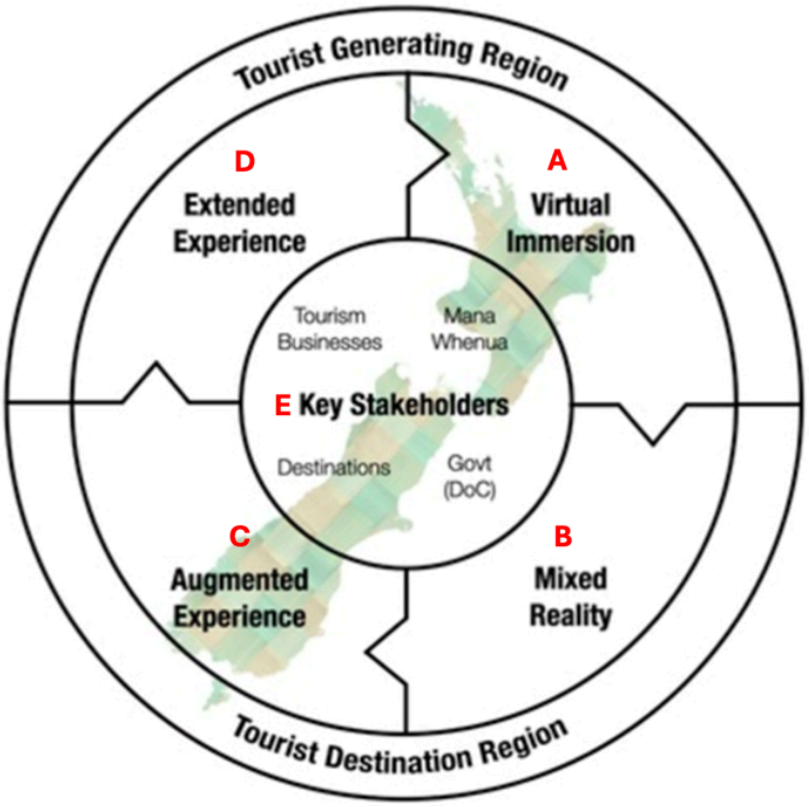


Figure 3: Tourism system re-theorisation: Tourism between worlds

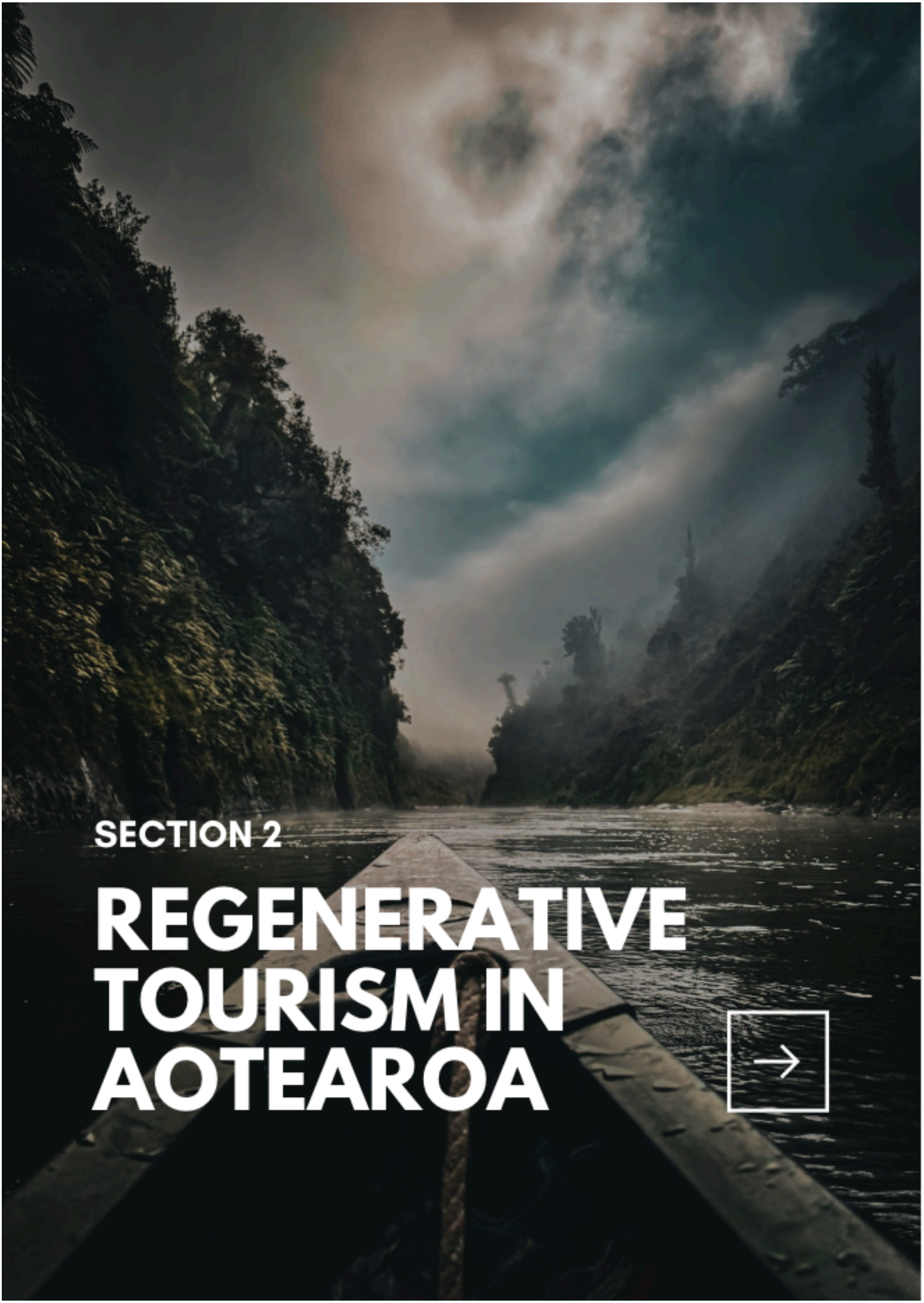
Mobile and wearable technologies are also redefining the experience at the destination itself. Visitors can engage with the site through layers of digital content, including augmented visuals, real-time interpretation, and locally designed narratives. In-person experiences can be shared in real time with remote friends and family. These forms of mixed reality (**Figure 3-B**) and augmented experiences (**Figure 3-C**) allow for deeper cultural understanding and environmental awareness. Such applications can support immersive and regenerative tourism grounded in place-based values and aspirations.

The tourism experience also no longer needs to end when visitors leave. Digital platforms now allow continued engagement long after the physical trip through virtual follow-ups, online community exchanges, digital storytelling and sharing digital experiences with friends and family (**Figure 3-D**). These extended experiences challenge the idea that tourism is temporally confined to the in-person moment of travel, and suggest a more fluid, relational model of tourism over time and space.

These shifts have major implications for tourism governance and markets. Traditional models focused on national and industry bodies are being reconsidered. While key stakeholders including regional tourism organisations, tangata whenua, local communities and tourism businesses are increasingly shaping how tourism is designed and delivered (**Figure 3-E**), their influence in Aotearoa is increasingly constrained by political and funding pressures at both local and national levels. This reflects a broader movement toward “localising” tourism in line with cultural and community-based aspirations, especially in response to the environmental and social impacts of high-volume tourism.

1.5 Summary

As physical and digital experiences become more closely connected, destinations, communities, and tourism organisations are presented with new tools. These tools raise new opportunities and new responsibilities. Blended visitor journeys offer new opportunities for engagement, but only if they are designed with care and guided by local values. This evolving model encourages a shift from passive consumption to meaningful participation, opening space for tourism that supports both people and place, both online and on the ground.



SECTION 2

REGENERATIVE TOURISM IN AOTEAROA

The idea of regenerative tourism has gained significant attention in recent years, especially in Aotearoa New Zealand where tourism intersects with unique ecological systems, Māori worldviews, and long-standing tensions over land and resource use. While the term “regeneration” is often used across government, industry, and civil society, its meaning is not always clear or consistent. What exactly makes tourism regenerative rather than simply sustainable remains an open and important question.

To better understand how regenerative tourism is being defined and applied in Aotearoa, this section begins by outlining four common ways of categorising tourism: **extractive, sustainable, restorative, and regenerative**. These categories help to map out how different tourism models relate to environmental impact, community involvement, and long-term evolutionary change.

Drawing on academic literature and key industry reports, we then explore how regenerative tourism is being framed within the New Zealand context, and how it reflects or departs from international definitions. Through this lens, we examine not just the aspirations of regeneration, but also the risks, contradictions, and opportunities that emerge when the concept is put into practice.

Tourism is often described as a single industry, but it is a disparate industry made up of many parts. Those parts include a wide range of practices that differ in how they interact with nature, local communities, and long-term environmental goals. Some forms of tourism are harmful and depletive, while others aim to restore or even give back what has been lost. To help clarify these differences, we introduce four tourism logics: **extractive, sustainable, restorative, and regenerative**.

These four logics of tourism are not just labels but also reflect different attitudes toward ecological responsibility and local participation. For those designing technology, policy, or management tools in tourism, understanding these differences is essential to avoid reinforcing outdated practices or greenwashing efforts. The figures below provide two ways to visualise the shift from extraction to regeneration in tourism.

2.1.1 A Four-Quadrant Framework of Tourism Logics

The first model uses a two-axis quadrant to differentiate between internal and external outcomes of tourism (**Figure 4**). The vertical axis reflects whether a tourism model is internally degenerative (e.g. exploitative of people or culture) or regenerative (e.g. inclusive, respectful, place-based). The horizontal axis reflects whether tourism is externally degenerative (e.g. damaging to nature) or regenerative (e.g. ecologically beneficial).

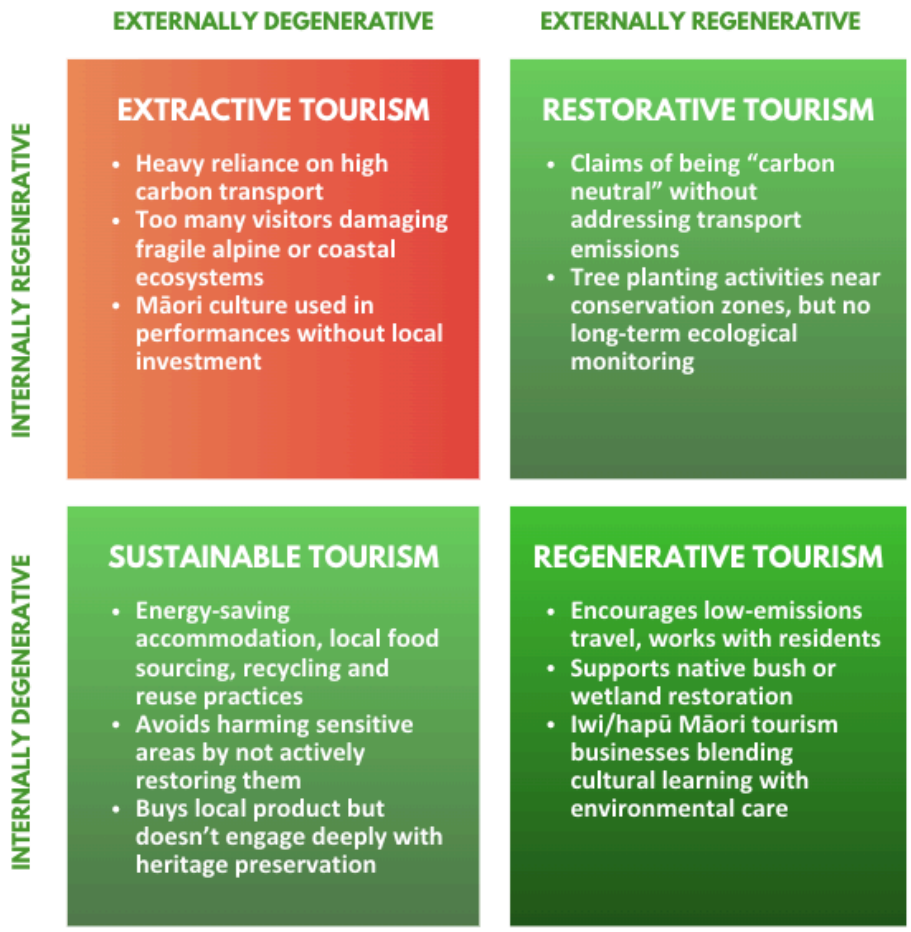


Figure 4: A Four-Quadrant Framework of Tourism Logics

In this model, tourism is treated as social-ecological systems that are internally and/or externally regenerative and/or degenerative. A fully regenerative tourism system would be both internally and externally regenerative as it requires mutual reinforcement between social participation and ecological accountability. The absence of either component would cause different outcomes. To be clear, tourism has and should continue to have an important role in the economy, but should not be developed at the expense of ecosystems, cultures or collective wellbeing.

Extractive Tourism

Extractive tourism is both **internally degenerative and externally degenerative**. It views nature and culture as resources to be consumed. Profit is the priority, and harm to land and people is managed and minimised or in some cases neglected. It undermines the ecological foundations it depends on through high carbon emissions, environmental degradation, or overuse of fragile landscapes. At the same time, it exploits people and culture from within: local labour is underpaid or seasonal, and Māori culture is used without consent. This form of tourism takes more than it gives, often leaving destinations ecologically damaged and socially disempowered.

For example, a ski resort may rely on snow making that requires large amounts of energy and water while visitors may use high carbon private transportation to drive up mountain access roads. **Externally**, this might contribute to environmental degradation by overuse of water, increasing emissions, and disturbing alpine habitats. **Internally**, resorts may employ seasonal migrant labour with little job security and excludes local iwi (tribe) from decision-making or benefit-sharing. Such

a model that depletes both ecosystems and communities is an example of extractive tourism which is **internally and externally degenerative**.

Sustainable Tourism

Sustainable tourism seeks to reduce harm by improving operations such as using eco-certified infrastructure, sourcing local food, and encouraging "leave no trace" behaviour. It seeks to minimise resource use, reuse and recycle but generally without changing established patterns of consumption. The logic is to maintain the current system while minimising negative impacts, rather than transforming tourism's relationship with place. It tends to be **internally regenerative but still externally degenerative**. Some social improvements may occur, but deeper issues of ownership, governance, or equity are rarely addressed.

For example, a family-run eco-lodge uses solar panels, sources local food, and avoids plastic packaging. **Externally**, it reduces harm through lower emissions and less waste, but it is less likely to actively contribute to changing patterns of consumption or encouraging visitor behaviours that contribute to ecological restoration or biodiversity conservation. **Internally**, it may employ local staff under fair conditions and supports small-scale suppliers, but is less likely to be co-designed with tangata whenua or local community interests. This model may reduce local environmental and social harms, but it stops short of contributing to systemic change, and therefore tends to be **internally regenerative but externally degenerative**.

Restorative Tourism

Restorative tourism is **externally regenerative but internally degenerative**. It introduces repair-oriented activities such as tree planting or beach cleanups, which can help ecological systems recover from past damage. Local communities may be engaged through volunteering and opportunities to build social and human capital. These efforts may be sustained and enduring, or temporary and symbolic. The deeper governance structures of tourism remain unchanged.

For example, an eco-camp may offer short-term conservation volunteering programs where tourists help with dune restoration. **Externally**, this contributes to habitat rehabilitation and coastal resilience. **Internally**, however, such camps may be run by outside facilitators, whereby local knowledge is rarely integrated into project design or decision-making. Tourists come and go quickly, and long-term community benefit is limited. While nature may be partially restored, social and governance structures remain unchanged. Such an example may be considered a form of **externally regenerative but internally degenerative** tourism.

Regenerative Tourism

Regenerative tourism is **both internally regenerative and externally regenerative**. It enhances ecosystems through actions like habitat recovery, carbon sequestration, and water resilience, while also reviving local knowledge, leadership, and cultural identity. Rather than being an add-on, regeneration is embedded in how tourism is designed, governed and experienced. Power is redistributed, and tourism becomes a tool for long-term flourishing ecologically, socially, and spiritually.

For example, a Māori-led wetland trail may offer visitors the opportunity to walk through restored landscapes while learning about Māori relationships with land and water. **Externally**, the project supports biodiversity through replanting, invasive species control, and ecosystem monitoring.

Internally, it is governed by iwi, reinvests in cultural learning and sharing (e.g., storytelling, Te Reo Māori) and land care, and builds capacity within the community. Because it nurtures both nature and people, this model represents tourism that is **both internally and externally regenerative**.

2.1.2 Four Levels of Tourism Logic

While the quadrant model helps distinguish four tourism logics based on their ecological and social effects, another way is to view tourism as a developmental spectrum across four levels (**Figure 5**). Rather than contrasting internal and external outcomes, the second model illustrates how tourism can evolve from extractive to regenerative through progressively deeper commitments to ecological integrity and social responsibility through business strategy alignment. While the quadrant model focuses on system conditions that shape tourism outcomes, the levels model highlights the value logics embedded in tourism practices themselves.

In this model, tourism is understood as a learning system capable of growth. Each level builds upon the previous one: extractive tourism causes harm; sustainable tourism avoids further harm; restorative tourism attempts to repair damage; and regenerative tourism works to actively revive socio-ecological systems. Importantly, regeneration is not a fixed category but an ongoing shift in logic, where the purpose of tourism is redefined from simply a form of consumption to visitor experiences that contribute to defined and measurable social, cultural and environmental outcomes.

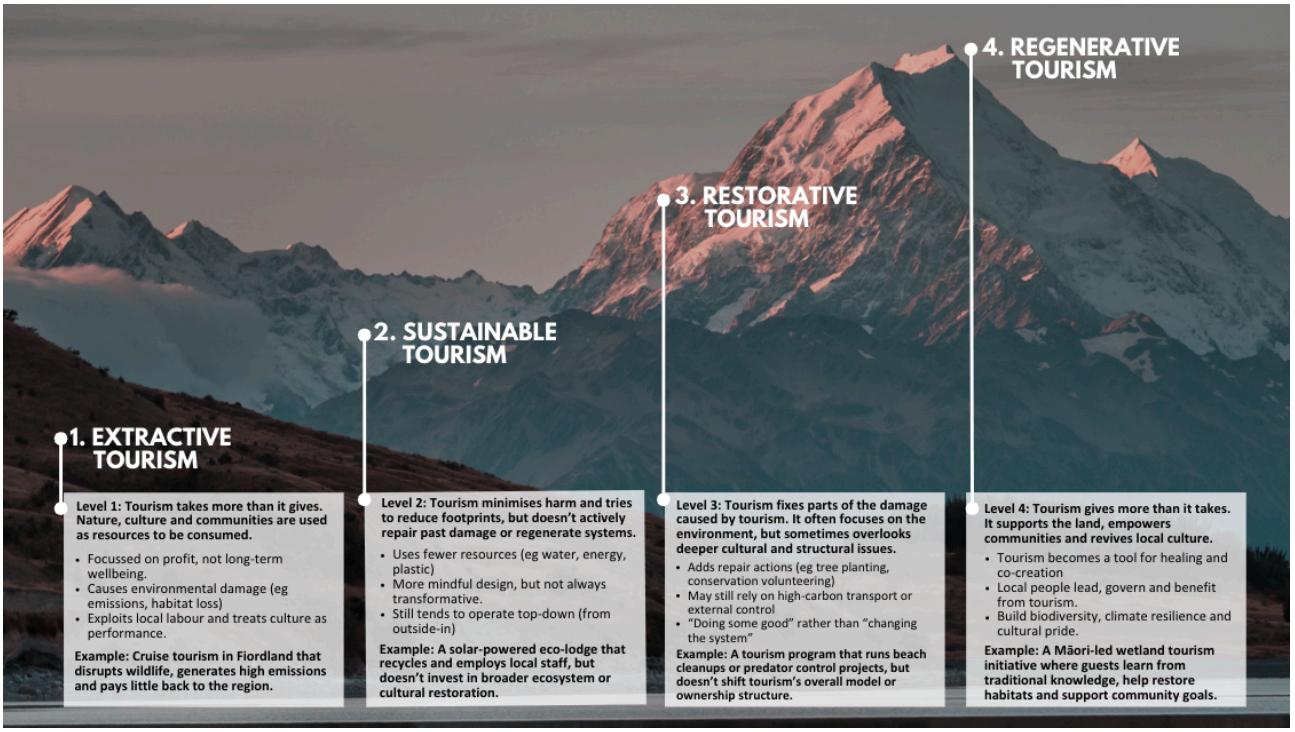


Figure 5: Levels of Tourism Logic: From Extraction to Regeneration

Level 1: Extractive Tourism

At this entry level, tourism operates through extraction. It exploits landscapes, cultures, and labour while extracting capital value and offering little in return. Environmental degradation, carbon emissions, and social disconnection are common externalities associated with extractive tourism. The logic is short-term and profit-driven at the cost of long-term environmental or social wellbeing,

with tourism treated as an industry that takes without accountability.

For example, a cruise tourism operation in Fiordland disrupts wildlife, generates high emissions, and contributes little to the region's economy. It exemplifies a tourism model that is both environmentally and socially extractive. Recognising extractive patterns is the first step. But reducing harm alone is not enough. We need to ask how tourism can move from depletion to responsibility.

Level 2: Sustainable Tourism

Here, tourism recognises the need to reduce harm. Sustainable practices such as energy efficiency, ethical sourcing, waste reduction and recycling are examples of merit worthy sustainable tourism business initiatives. However, these remain within the bounds of existing systems. Sustainability focuses on limiting damage, not reversing it. Ecological and social repair are not central; rather, the goal is to make tourism "less bad," not fundamentally different.

For example, a solar-powered eco-lodge that recycles and employs local staff reduces harm but does not invest in broader ecosystem restoration or cultural renaissance and empowerment. It focuses on doing less damage, rather than creating more benefit. Moving from harm reduction to active repair requires a shift, from maintaining the system to transforming it.

Level 3: Restorative Tourism

Tourism at this stage seeks to fix past harms. Environmental volunteering, habitat repair, and cultural learning experiences may be offered as part of the visitor experience. The logic moves beyond harm reduction toward ecological contribution. However, restoration is often fragmented and temporary and it may still depend on carbon intensive travel. Power and agency remain largely external, and efforts may not be integrated into local systems of care or governance.

For example, a tourism programme that runs beach cleanups or predator control projects may support biodiversity but fails to shift tourism's overall model or local power structures. It represents a model that restores nature but not governance. To change systems, restoration must be locally embedded and guided by those with close and enduring relationships to the land.

Level 4: Regenerative Tourism

This is a transformative model for tourism. Tourism becomes a partner in ecological restoration and cultural renewal. Projects are rooted in local knowledge and relationships, and benefits flow back to communities and ecosystems. Regenerative tourism redefines the purpose of travel, from consumption to contribution, from taking to giving back. It seeks to restore not only places, but the conditions for ongoing life and responsibility.

For example, a Māori-led wetland tourism initiative invites guests to learn from Māori knowledge, supports habitat restoration, and channels funds into community goals with a commitment to long-term intergenerational stewardship. It demonstrates regeneration across both ecological and cultural dimensions and across short and long term temporal horizons.

These four levels are not fixed, but dynamic stages in how tourism can evolve. The shift from extraction to regeneration represents a change in values, relationships, and responsibilities. Understanding where a tourism model sits on this spectrum helps clarify what kind of future it

enables and for whom.

2.1.3 Summary

Figure 4 and 5 invite us to rethink tourism as a living social-ecological system that must contribute to the long-term flourishing of all living beings. Understanding these tourism logics is critical when designing technologies that aim to support regenerative practices. Without conceptual clarity, it is easy for tools to reinforce the same extractive logic under a new name. Regenerative tourism challenges not only what we do in tourism, but why we do it, and for whom.

Critiques of tourism's focus on profit, expansion, and growth are nothing new, especially in light of concerns about overtourism. But it was the COVID-19 pandemic and the sudden halt to global travel that finally forced the industry to pause and reflect. Amid this disruption, regenerative tourism began to gain attention by posing a fundamental question: should the industry return to "business as normal" or imagine a different order in a post-COVID world?[17]

Regenerative tourism was seen to go beyond the goals of sustainability, which aim to reduce harm. Instead, it offered the opportunity to explore how tourism might actively contribute to public goods.[18] This vision marked a shift from damage mitigation to proactive contribution, appealing to both scholars and practitioners seeking deeper change.

But this ambition brings its own tensions: can an industry built on mobility and consumption really become regenerative? Or is "regeneration" just a hopeful label used to rebrand old practices? Rather than resolving this contradiction, much of the limited existing literature treats regenerative tourism as a space for ongoing critical reflection.

To understand what regeneration means and whether regenerative tourism may offer a meaningful alternative to conventional tourism models, it is helpful to first look beyond tourism and trace its intellectual origins and the metaphors that have shaped its application.

The concept draws heavily from regenerative thinking, which focuses on creating self-sustaining cycles that support the flourishing of life.[19] Regenerative agriculture offers a clear example, where the goal is not simply to boost land productivity, but to restore soil health in ways that also enhance water cycles, biodiversity and long-term crop yields.[20] In this view, a farm is not a production unit, but a living system deeply entangled with its surroundings. This ecological orientation introduces a relational understanding of value, rooted not in extraction, but in

[17] Ateljevic, I. (2020). Transforming the (tourism) world for good and (re) generating the potential 'new normal'. *Tourism Geographies*, *22*(3), 467-475. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2020.1759134.
[18] Cave, J., & Dredge, D. (2020). Regenerative tourism needs diverse economic practices. *Tourism Geographies*, *22*(3), 503–513. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2020.1768434.
[19] Buckton, S.J., Fazey, I., Sharpe, B., Om, E. S., Doherty, B., Ball, P., ... & Sinclair, M. (2023). The Regenerative Lens: A conceptual framework for regenerative social-ecological systems. *One Earth*, *6*(7), 824-842. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.oneear.2023.06.006.
[20] Rhodes, C.J. (2017). The imperative for regenerative agriculture. *Science progress*, *100*(1), 80-129. https://doi.org/10.3184/003685017X14876775256165.

reciprocal enhancement.

Translating this logic into tourism, scholars have proposed an analogy between soil and society emphasising reciprocity and care as a way to reimagine tourism as a practice that nurtures conditions for local flourishing within broader socio-ecological systems. Regenerative tourism, then, is less about imposing development and more about supporting the capacity of a place to thrive on its own terms without packaging nature or culture into spectacles for touristic consumption (e.g., haka).

This way of thinking has also significantly shaped regenerative tourism literature, where destinations are increasingly described as dynamic and living systems.[21] Rather than viewing a place as a passive backdrop for economic activity and a place of tourism production, this perspective sees tourism as part of a larger web of interactions that coevolve over time.[22]

The growing use of "living systems" metaphors has in turn created a conceptual bridge to systems thinking, making it seem natural to map destinations as adaptive and nested structures.[23] In this context, systems thinking has emerged as both a tool for analysis and a narrative device that helps legitimise complexity.

While this framing enables the visualisation of complexity, it may also risk depoliticising regeneration, reducing it to a managerial metaphor while overlooking justice and equity.[24] The same qualities that make systems thinking appealing such as its abstraction, flexibility, and perceived neutrality can also limit its capacity to engage with the relational and political depth that regeneration demands.
Precisely because systems thinking abstracts complexity into manageable frames, it can overlook the cultural, historical, and ethical dimensions of regeneration. In response, regenerative tourism literature increasingly recognises the limitations of reductionist Western scientific thinking.[25] Much of Western tourism planning has been shaped by epistemologies that privilege abstraction, universalism, separation and managerialism. These logics, even when rebranded through systems thinking or sustainability discourse, often reproduce the same extractive dynamics that they claim to overcome.

In contrast, Indigenous worldviews provide fundamentally different understandings of regeneration, grounded in cosmologies of care, reciprocity and relational responsibility. Regeneration, in this view, is not treated as an external intervention, but as an ongoing process of maintaining relationships through practice and centring place-specific ethics.

Rather than simply incorporating these perspectives into existing frameworks, a genuinely regenerative approach requires confronting the epistemological assumptions that underpin mainstream tourism. It also means recognising that alternative ontologies may already enact regeneration on their own terms.

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[21] Bellato, L., & Pollock, A. (2023). Regenerative tourism: a state-of-the-art review. *Tourism Geographies*, 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2023.2294366.

[22] Dredge, D. (2022). Regenerative tourism: Transforming mindsets, systems and practices. *Journal of Tourism Futures*, *8*(3), 269-281. https://doi.org/10.1108/JTF-01-2022-0015.

[23] Becken, S., & Coghlan, A. (2022). Knowledge alone won't "fix it": building regenerative literacy. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 1-17. https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2022.2150860.

[24] Rastegar, R. (2025). Regenerative justice and tourism: How can tourism go beyond restoration? *Annals of Tourism Research, 111*, 103896. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2025.103896.

[25] Bellato, L., Frantzeskaki, N., tebrakunna country and, Lee, E., Cheer, J.M., & Peters, A. (2024). Transformative epistemologies for regenerative tourism: towards a decolonial paradigm in science and practice? *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, *32*(6), 1161-1181. https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2023.2208310.

These epistemological insights have helped to reframe regeneration as a lived practice rather than a universal model. However, translating these ideas into practice remains an open challenge, especially for policymakers and tourism stakeholders seeking measurable outcomes.

Despite the growing conceptual interest in regenerative tourism, the field remains light on empirical grounding. Many published studies emphasise normative visions and conceptual frameworks but offer limited engagement with how regenerative tourism is practiced, experienced, or evaluated on the ground.

Where case studies do exist, they often focus on small-scale initiatives, such as small business entrepreneuring[26], coastal restoration[27], swimmable urban rivers[28], and food waste reduction in hotels[29].
Yet these examples frequently lack longitudinal evaluation or critical comparative insight, and existing tools often struggle to assess Indigenous-led tourism within Western evaluative frameworks.

Recent empirical work has begun to address this gap, including community-based case studies in Ireland and Scotland that introduce "Visitor Positive" as a distinct dimension of regenerative tourism practice[30]. While reinforcing the importance of localisation, this research adds a social enterprise perspective that foregrounds the role of visitors and calls for assessing regenerative outcomes beyond quantitative economic indicators. Consequently, the literature remains largely aspirational, with few mechanisms for assessing regenerative outcomes in context.

Moreover, much of the existing research remains descriptive, with few studies examining the structural conditions that enable or constrain regenerative outcomes. As a result, regenerative tourism risks becoming a rhetorical gesture rather than a transformative process.

Without robust empirical work, it is difficult to assess whether regeneration is occurring, for whom, and under what forms of governance. This double gap of conceptual vagueness and empirical scarcity remains a critical challenge for the field.

2.2.1 Summary

To move forward, regenerative tourism research must not only refine its conceptual clarity and expand its empirical grounding, but also confront the deeper questions that regeneration raises. Who defines what counts as regeneration, and through what knowledge systems, histories, and power relations? How can tourism engage with place-based ethics without appropriating or instrumentalising them? And what would it mean to treat regeneration not as a goal to be achieved, but as relationships to be revived, restored and maintained?

As the field continues to evolve, its critical potential lies not in offering ready-made solutions, but in unsettling inherited assumptions and creating space for plural ways of knowing and being. In this

[26] Gerke, M., Adams, M., Ooi, C. S., & Dahles, H. (2023). Entrepreneuring for regenerative tourism. Doing business differently in Tasmania's regional hospitality industry. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 1-18. https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2023.2273757.
[27] Alvarez, S. (2024). Regenerative management of coastal tourism destinations for the anthropocene. Journal of Travel Research, 63(3), 769-774. https://doi.org/10.1177/00472875231173125.
[28] Bellato, L., Frantzeskaki, N., & Nygaard, C. (2024). Towards a regenerative shift in tourism: Applying a regenerative conceptual framework toward swimmable urban rivers. *Tourism Geographies*, *26*(8), 1361-1380. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2024.2358306.
[29] McGregor, K., Becken, S., Vada, S., & Mackey, B. (2024). Enhancing compliance assessment through regenerative transformations–A food waste perspective. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 1-20. https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2024.2348118.
[30] Price, S., Taylor, S., Turnbull, K., & Stafford, M. R. (2025). A regenerative approach to tourism: Learnings from community enterprises. *Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism, 51*, 100900. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jort.2025.100900.

light, regenerative tourism is less a fixed outcome than an ongoing ethical orientation. It invites unlearning, deep listening, and the co-creation of futures rooted in care and humility.

Yet whether this vision is being meaningfully taken up in real-world practice remains unclear. To explore this, the next section turns to a review of government and industry reports. By analysing how governments and tourism actors frame regeneration, we can better understand how academic concepts are selectively or strategically being translated into operational agendas.

While academic literature on regenerative tourism is expanding, it remains unclear which governments and industry actors have adopted this language, and how they are interpreting and applying it in practice. This section reviews a small but growing number of government and industry reports to examine how regenerative tourism is framed, what is emphasised or omitted, and what these framings reveal about its implementation potential.

To provide context for the analysis, the cover pages and selected figures and/or tables of key government and industry reports are included below. These visuals not only reflect the sources and values informing regenerative tourism policy but also reveal how particular framings have influenced national and industry discourse on regenerative tourism.

2.3.1 Governmental Framings of Regenerative Tourism

Aotearoa New Zealand was among the earliest countries to formally engage with regenerative tourism, even before the concept gained global traction during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2019, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment warned that business-as-usual tourism growth would intensify environmental harm and sectoral vulnerability.[31] Rather than accepting this trade-off between economic opportunity and ecological degradation, the report proposed a forward-looking view: tourism could be regenerative, but only if governed through systems that internalise social and environmental costs.

This early framing positioned regeneration as something requiring deliberate design and institutional accountability. A year later, the Tourism Futures Taskforce Interim Report reinforced this view, observing visible regeneration of Te Taiao during lockdown.[32] It called for a dramatic reduction in the biophysical footprint of tourism, especially through decarbonisation, and highlighted the cultural importance of reconnecting people with nature through Māori values of care.

While Tourism Industry Aotearoa (TIA) does not explicitly use the term “regenerative tourism” in its core strategy documents, it articulates principles that closely align with regenerative thinking,

[31] Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment. (December 2019). *Pristine, popular… imperilled? The environmental consequences of projected tourism growth.* https://pce.parliament.nz/publications/pristine-popular-imperilled-the-environmental-consequences-of-projected-tourism-growth/.
[32] The Tourism Futures Taskforce. (December 2020). *Interim Report: We are Aotearoa.* https://www.mbie.govt.nz/assets/the-tourism-futures-taskforce-interim-report-december-2020.pdf.

including commitments to care for people and place, and to "giving effect to Te Ao Māori" through Te Whakarae Māori.[33] However, these values are framed under the broader umbrella of sustainability, creating conceptual slippage.

For instance, TIA's *Tourism Sustainability Commitment*[34] states that the goal of sustainability is not only to minimise harm but to make a positive contribution. It merges the logic of sustainability with that of regeneration, potentially diluting the transformational aspirations of regenerative tourism by casting it as an enhanced version of business-as-usual sustainability, rather than a paradigmatic shift in systems, values, and responsibilities.

Building on these foundations, the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) officially defined regenerative tourism as a model that "gives back more to people and place than it takes".[35] This framing anchors regeneration in net positivity, community wellbeing, and long-term systemic transformation, marking a significant shift beyond conventional sustainability rhetoric.

In the absence of a formal government strategy or policy document specifically dedicated to regenerative tourism, the figure provided by MBIE (**Figure 6**) has become the de facto visual reference in national discourse. However, while this figure appears under the umbrella of regenerative tourism, its content is more accurately aligned with a sustainable tourism growth model. It is likely because it overlays regenerative language onto a framework originally developed by MBIE and DOC in 2017.[36]

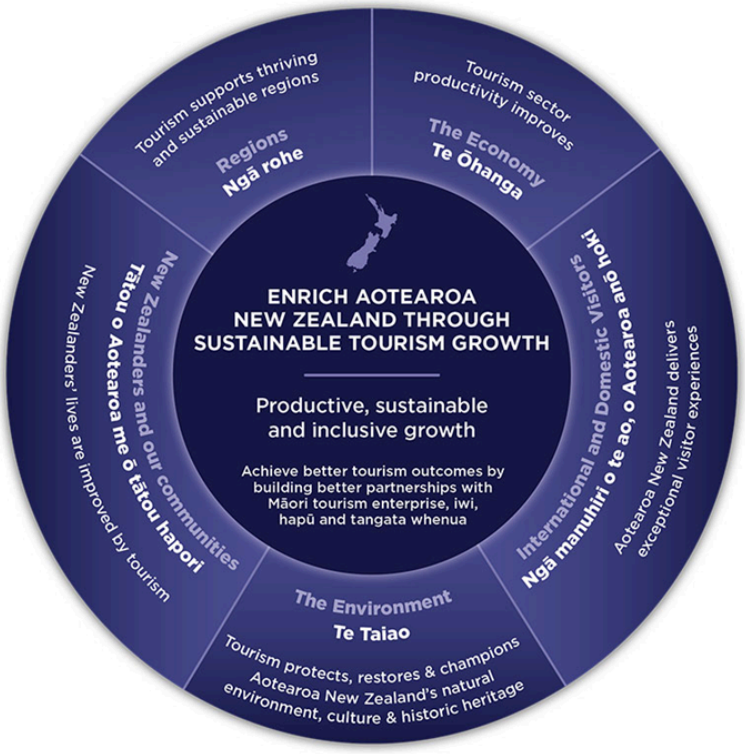


Figure 6: Transitioning to a regenerative tourism model (Source: MBIE)

[33] Tourism Industry Aotearoa. (n.d.). Embracing Te Ao Māori. https://www.tia.org.nz/advocacy/policy-positions-industry-issues/embracing-te-ao-maori.
[34] Tourism Industry Aotearoa. (2020). *Tourism Sustainability Commitment.* https://www.tia.org.nz/advocacy/strategic-projects/tourism.
[35] Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. (2023). *Transitioning to a regenerative tourism model.* https://www.mbie.govt.nz/immigration-and-tourism/tourism/tourism-projects/governments-tourism-snapshot/transitioning-to-a-regenerative-tourism-model.
[36] Tourism New Zealand. (2017). *Briefing to the Incoming Minister of Tourism.* https://www.mbie.govt.nz/dmsdocument/2631-bim-tourism-2017-pdf.

The central focus remains on productivity, regional development, and visitor satisfaction, with ecological and cultural considerations positioned as outcomes of tourism rather than foundational principles. This misalignment between MBIE's stated definition of regeneration and the priorities embedded in the visual framing raises important questions about conceptual coherence and the risk of superficial adoption of regenerative language without substantive policy transformation.

MBIE has positioned regenerative tourism within a broader economic growth agenda which reflects the Ministry's mandate to support business and employment. In contrast, the Department of Conservation (DOC), whose responsibilities centre on the nation's natural and historic heritage protection, approaches regenerative tourism from a markedly different angle.

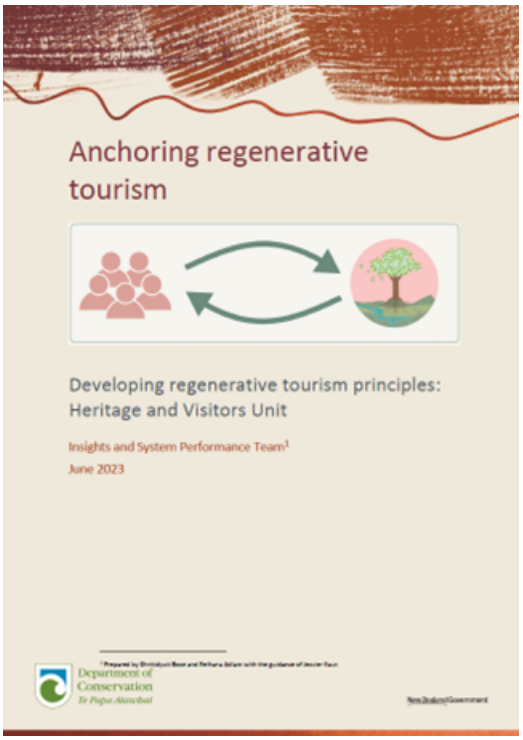


Figure 7: Cover of DOC's June 2023 Internal Report: Anchoring Regenerative Tourism (Source: DOC)

One of the earliest attempts by DOC to visualise regenerative tourism principles appears in its internal report *Anchoring Regenerative Tourism*[37] (**Figure 7**). As DOC does not have a formal policy document on regenerative tourism, this internal material produced by the Heritage and Visitors Unit offers insight into how the concept has been informally interpreted within the agency.

Figure 8 depicts regenerative tourism as a reciprocal process grounded in Māori values. It emphasises engagement with iwi, hapū, and local communities, fair contribution to the mauri of people and nature, and the strengthening of relationships with te taiao through action. Despite its relational framing, the diagram remains highly symbolic.

[37] Department of Conservation. (June 2023). *Anchoring regenerative tourism: developing regenerative tourism principles: Heritage and Visitors Unit.*

Figure 8: Regenerative tourism principles at a glance (Source: DOC's Anchoring Regenerative Tourism Report)

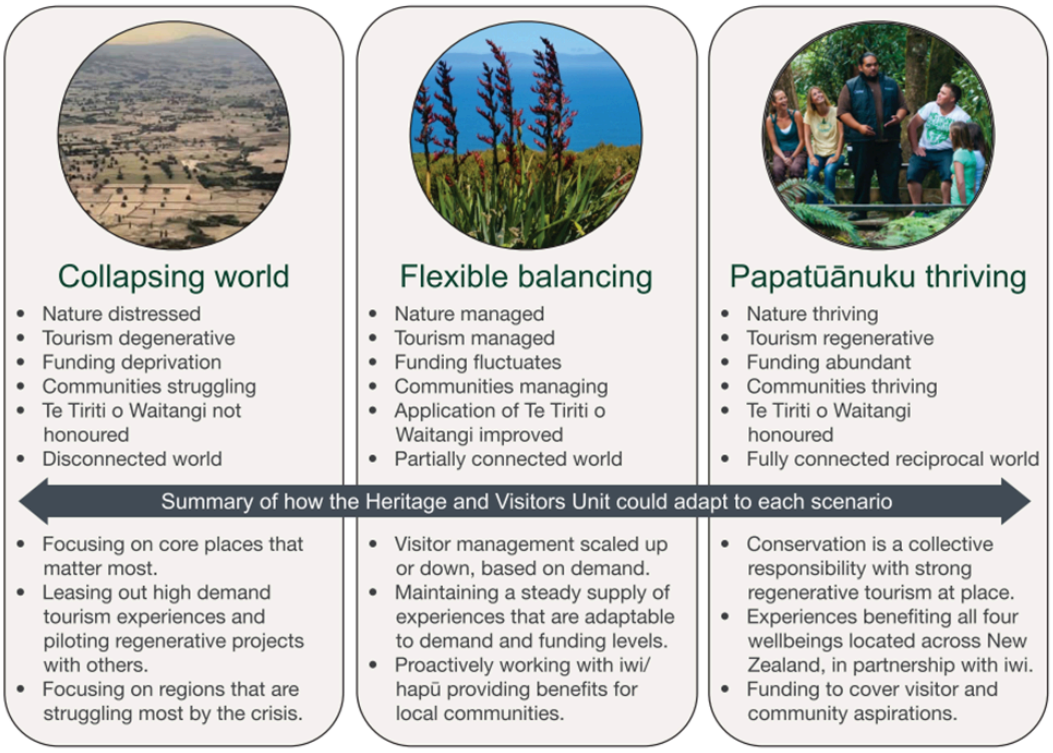


Figure 9: Summary of how the Heritage and Visitors Unit could adapt to each scenario (Source: DOC's Heritage and Visitor Futures Scenarios)

A second internal visual framework appears in the *DOC Heritage and Visitor Futures Scenarios*[38] which presents three possible futures for tourism in Aotearoa New Zealand. These scenarios (Collapsing world, Flexible balancing, and Papatūānuku thriving) outline contrasting futures across different dimensions (**Figure 9**).

While the scenario-based approach allows for some strategic flexibility, the figure lacks depth in illustrating how transitions between states might occur. The bullet-point format presents static snapshots rather than dynamic processes. As with earlier DOC visuals, the diagram leans heavily on values-based language without offering mechanisms for systemic change.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, both MBIE and DOC have used the language of regenerative tourism,

[38] Department of Conservation. (n.d.). *Heritage and visitor scenarios.*

though not always consistently – with DOC, in particular, applying the term selectively depending on context. MBIE frames regeneration as a way to support tourism growth. Tourism remains central, while environmental and cultural outcomes are treated as secondary benefits. DOC, by contrast, sees regeneration as restoring relationships between people and nature. Drawing on Māori values, it emphasises ecological health and community wellbeing.

These different interpretations reveal a deeper tension in Aotearoa New Zealand's policy approach: between governance models focused on economic growth and ecological worldviews grounded in Māori values. These ways of thinking exist side by side, but they do not align. Their disconnect reflects ongoing struggles over how institutions define regenerative tourism, honour Treaty responsibilities, and whether real transformation is possible within current government systems.

Canada offers a different but equally ambitious vision (**Figure 10**). Destination Canada's report explicitly rejects technical fixes alone, calling for a fundamental shift in worldview: from seeing tourism as a mechanistic production-oriented industry to understanding it as part of a living interdependent system.[39] Here, success is not measured by GDP or visitor volume, but by vitality, responsiveness, and wellbeing over time.

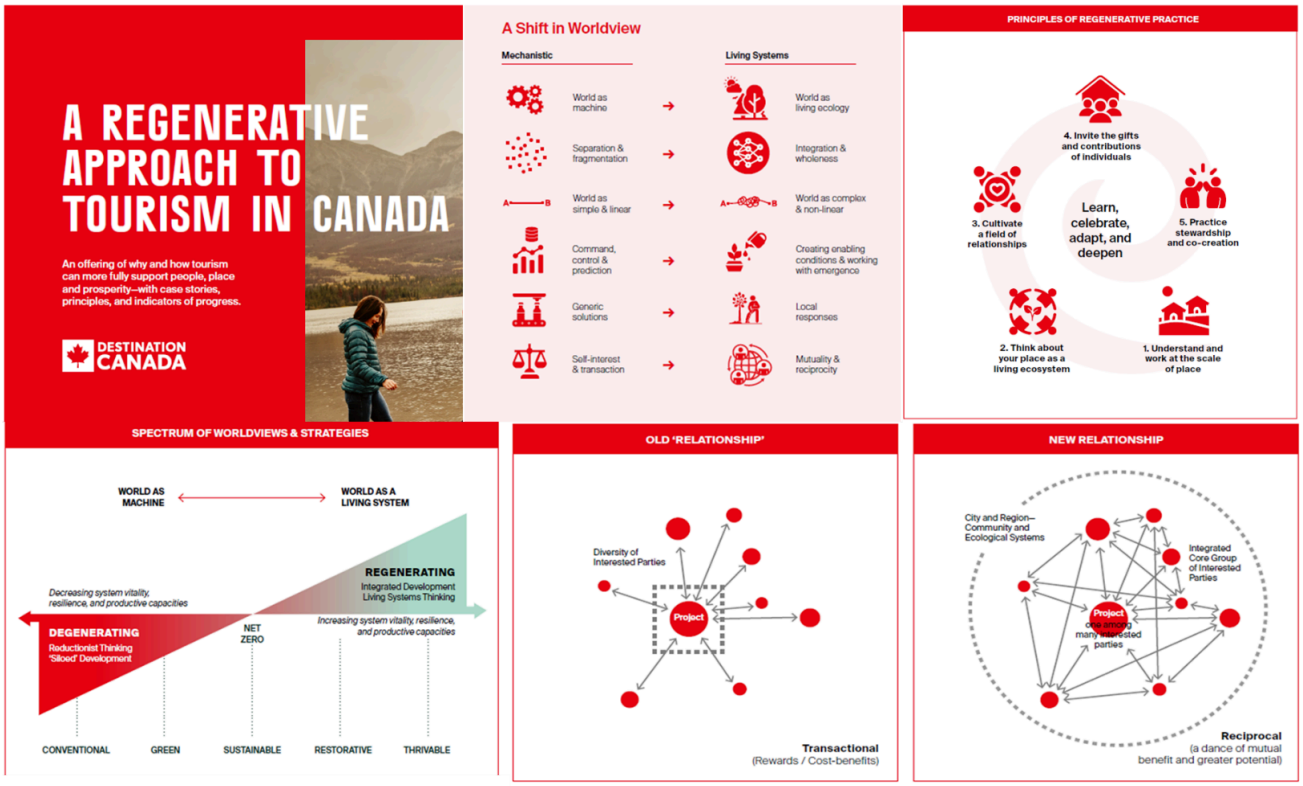


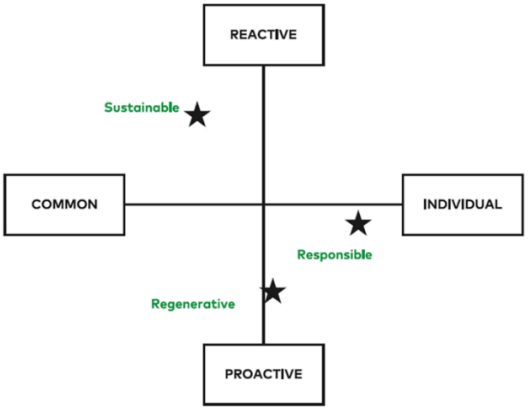
Figure 10: Destination Canada Report: Cover and Selected Key Figures (Source: Destination Canada)

In this framing, regeneration is an ethic of care, which is a practice of creating conditions for life to flourish, especially in contexts of uncertainty and change. By rooting regeneration in relational ethics rather than managerial control, Canada's approach repositions tourism as a means of healing social and ecological systems. This ontological reframing distinguishes Canada's contribution to regenerative tourism as deeply philosophical. It represents a call to reimagine how we live, host, and travel as part of the same world.

The Nordic Regenerative Tourism (NorReg) pilot project presents one of the clearest articulations

[39]Destination Canada. (n.d.) *A regenerative approach to tourism in Canada*. https://archives.destinationcanada.com/sites/default/files/archive/1872-A%20Regenerative%20Approach%20to%20Tourism%20in%20Canada/A-Regenerative-Approach-to-Tourism-in-Canada_EN.pdf.

of regenerative tourism at a regional level.[40] The report frames regeneration as a place-based and host-led process of revitalisation, where local actors define what regeneration means in their context (**Figure 11**). Rather than prescribing fixed solutions, the report advocates for adaptive, situated, and low-barrier approaches, especially tailored to small and micro-enterprises. This reflects a broader shift from individualised and reactive models of responsibility toward collective and proactive practices rooted in community wellbeing and ecological reciprocity.



	Traditional View (for want of a better term)	Regenerative View
Purpose of tourism	Generate economic wealth for a destination through job creation	Creative conditions for people and places to thrive
Nature of tourism	Extractive – takes from the place for the benefit of some	Regenerative- gives to the place for the benefit of all
Focus of tourism	Visitor is at centre	Host (community and place) are at centre.
Definition of tourism	Focus on demand	Focus on supply.
Measurement of tourism	Tourism is a stand-alone economic value	Tourism is a dynamic that is part of a wider ecosystem.
success	Visitor-numbers, visitor revenue and visitor satisfaction	Wellbeing of people, communities, and places.
Worldview	Capitalist and growth driven.	Return to the knowing and wisdom of indigenous communities

Figure 11: Nordic Council of Ministers Report: Cover and Selected Key Figure and Table (Source: Nordic Council of Ministers)

While Finland participated in the NorReg, it has also developed its own national report that aligns with regenerative tourism principles, even if the concept is not central to the report's title (**Figure 12**). Finland's tourism strategy remains primarily framed through the language of sustainability, yet the 2023 State of Sustainable Tourism in Finland report explicitly references regenerative tourism as a future-oriented development goal.[41]

[40] Atladóttir, Ó.Ý., Aquino, J., Nikolova, M., and Falter, M. (2023). *Nordic Regenerative Tourism: A Pilot Project.* Reykjavik, Iceland: Icelandic Tourism Cluster. https://www.stjornarradid.is/library/04-Raduneytin/Menningar--og-vidskiptaraduneytid/NorReg%20final%20report%202022%20formatted.pdf.

[41] Visit Finland. (2024). *State of Sustainable Tourism 2023.* https://www.visitfinland.fi/4ac26e/globalassets/visitfinland.fi/vf-julkaisut/2024/state-of-sustainable-tourism-2023.pdf.

Figure 12: Visit Finland Report: Cover and Selected Key Figure (Source: Visit Finland)

Regeneration is positioned as a progression beyond traditional sustainability, associated with objectives such as carbon neutrality, local wellbeing, biodiversity protection, and inclusive collaboration. Although the term "regenerative tourism" appears only sparingly, its inclusion signals an emerging discourse. Finland can thus be seen as transitional, which is not yet fully embracing the regenerative paradigm but clearly moving in that direction.

By contrast, Ireland and the United Kingdom currently lack formal policy frameworks or visual models for regenerative tourism. Existing efforts remain fragmented and exploratory, with limited integration into national tourism strategies. Regeneration appears less as a formal paradigm and more as a set of distributed practices across conservation, rural development, and visitor engagement.

In Ireland, former peat extraction sites are undergoing a process of ecological and socio-economic transition repositioned as tourism sites following the end of industrial peat harvesting. A recent report documents how ex-peat farmers now lead bog tours and cultural storytelling, supported by government schemes that require measurable carbon outcomes.[42] Tourism becomes a new lifeline, but one that hinges on emissions accounting. Regenerative potential is assessed not through cultural revival or ecological care, but by quantified carbon savings.

This framing risks recasting regeneration as offsetting-by-other-means. Still, these projects reflect a shift in narrative: from burning peat to narrating peat, from extraction to restoration. Even if embedded in quantification logic, such transitions signal a contested but evolving understanding of regeneration in practice.

In 2024, National Parks UK launched a collective Regenerative Tourism Vision, proposing a shift toward nature recovery, inclusive destinations, and low-carbon travel.[43] The framework outlines measurable priorities: supporting carbon-free mobility, developing "nature-benefitting" visitor experiences, and using data and evidence to measure outcomes.

Despite its rhetorical shift, the approach remains performance-driven, centred on emissions reduction, rural business resilience, and measurable visitor impacts. Regeneration is thus operationalised through carbon logic, rather than biocultural repair or place-based reciprocity. Cultural distinctiveness is celebrated, yet primarily as a tourism asset. Despite these tensions, the adoption of regenerative discourse signals a symbolic departure from sustainability-as-usual.

[42] Reuters. (April 2025). *For Ireland's former peat farmers, tourism affords a new lifeline.* https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/land-use-biodiversity/irelands-former-peat-farmers-tourism-affords-new-lifeline-2025-04-22/?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

[43] National Parks UK. (August 2024). *UK national parks set out new vision for regenerative tourism.* https://www.nationalparks.uk/2024/08/20/uk-national-parks-set-out-new-vision-for-regenerative-tourism/?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

Across these cases, regeneration is framed not as a single paradigm but as a fluid and contested imaginary. Governments adopt the term with varying degrees of ambition, from technocratic carbon governance to ontological rethinking. Whether viewed as structural reform, relational care, or green growth in disguise, the state's role in shaping regenerative tourism remains central. The next section turns to how industry actors are responding, translating, or co-opting these visions in practice.

These governmental framings vary in ambition and coherence, but together they signal a shift: regeneration is no longer a fringe concept. It is entering policy vocabularies, albeit unevenly. The next section turns to the industry sector, where regenerative tourism is increasingly invoked, if not always realised.

2.3.2 Industry Responses and Strategic Translations

Compared to governments and academic institutions, the tourism industry has produced relatively few formal reports on regenerative tourism. This scarcity is not simply due to a lack of interest but reflects deeper structural and epistemic challenges. For many private-sector actors, regenerative tourism remains a loosely defined and highly aspirational term. It is difficult to measure, operationalise, or align with existing business models. Without clear standards or market incentives, most tourism businesses have adopted a cautious, wait-and-see approach.
Moreover, regenerative tourism demands a conceptual shift that goes beyond incremental improvements. It asks industry actors not only to reduce harm, but to actively restore and enrich social-ecological systems. This requires a responsibility that may fall outside the perceived scope or capacity of many businesses. As a result, most industry engagement with regeneration has taken the form of narrative adoption, brand repositioning, or selective borrowing from broader sustainability frameworks, rather than leading-edge innovation or systemic experimentation.
One notable exception to this pattern is Anna Pollock, a thought leader who began advancing the idea of regenerative tourism as early as 2019. In her influential essay "*Regenerative Tourism: The Natural Maturation of Sustainability*"[44], Pollock argues that sustainability, while necessary, has plateaued, having become too focused on minimising harm rather than enabling flourishing. Regeneration, by contrast, is framed as a transformative ethos that recognises tourism as part of living systems, where hospitality becomes an act of care and reciprocity.

Pollock's contribution lies not in offering a standard or framework, but in shifting the conversation. She invites the industry to reimagine its foundational assumptions: What if tourism could heal places rather than merely manage impact? What if success were measured by ecological vitality, cultural revival, and relational wellbeing? Her influence is evident in the emergence of boutique travel alliances and experience-based tourism models that cite regeneration as a guiding principle, many of which trace their conceptual lineage back to her work.

This ethos is further developed by Regenerative Travel, a membership-based alliance of boutique hotels that draws heavily on Pollock's thinking. Across three white papers published between 2022 and 2025,[45,46,47] Regenerative Travel outlines a values-based approach to tourism grounded in

[44] Pollock, A. (October 2019). *Regenerative tourism: the natural maturation of sustainability.* https://medium.com/activate-the-future/regenerative-tourism-the-natural-maturation-of-sustainability-26e6507d0fcb.
[45] King, C., Burns, O. (2022). *Climate Action through Regeneration: Unlocking the Power of Communities and Nature through Tourism*. Washington, D.C., USA and Edinburgh, Scotland, UK: Regenerative Travel, Solimar International, and University of Edinburgh. https://www.regenerativetravel.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/RegenerativeTravel-WhitePaperonClimateAction2022-Compressed.pdf.
[46] Regenerative Travel. (n.d.). *Regenerative Travel Principles for Hospitality.* https://www.regenerativetravel.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/RegenerativeTravel_Principles_for_Hospitality_Whitepaper.pdf.
[47] Regenerative Travel. (2025). *Regenerative Solutions for Transforming Travel.*

systems thinking and concentric circles of effect that extend benefit outward from guests to local communities and ecosystems (**Figure 13**).

Their messaging prioritises cultural storytelling, local partnerships, and design practices that honour the history of place. Yet rather than defining regeneration through measurable impact, they position it as a narrative orientation and brand identity. Hotels are invited to align with regeneration by cultivating practices of care, aesthetic distinctiveness, and emotional resonance, framing regeneration as both ethos and experience.

While Regenerative Travel's reports are philosophically rich and rhetorically compelling, they stop short of articulating systemic accountability or measurable outcomes. Their strength lies in repositioning hospitality as an ethical and relational practice. Yet this comes at a cost: transformation is often narrated, not verified. In this sense, regeneration risks becoming a marker of cultural capital. It is evocative, aspirational, but structurally ambiguous.

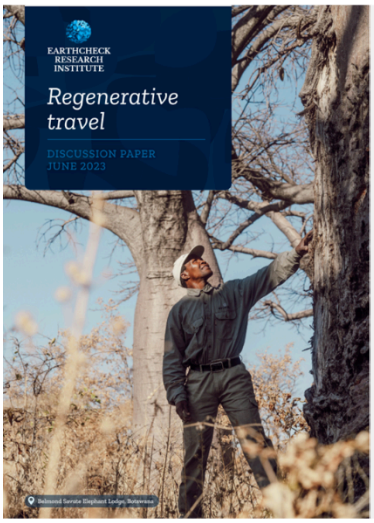
Figure 13: Regenerative Travel Report: Covers and Selected Key Figures (Source: Regenerative Travel)

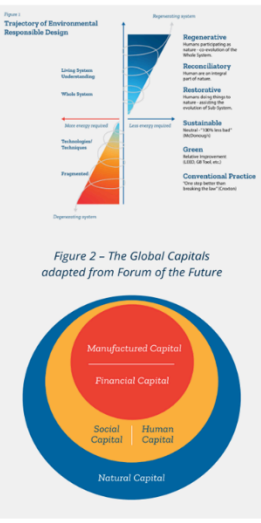
In contrast, EarthCheck, a long-standing leader in sustainability benchmarking, approaches regeneration from within the logic of certification (**Figure 14**). Rather than discarding its foundational "measure to manage" ethos, its *Regenerative Travel Discussion Paper* explores how regeneration might extend or reorient existing metrics.[48]

The report acknowledges the limitations of sustainability as a guiding paradigm, citing the failure to remain within planetary boundaries. It draws on the work of Indigenous thinkers and regenerative economy scholars to suggest that regeneration must be relational, systems-based, and attentive to place. Yet rather than proposing entirely new tools, EarthCheck examines how current indicators might be stretched toward regenerative outcomes.

https://www.regenerativetravel.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Regenerative-Travel-Solutions-Report-2025.pdf.

[48] EarthCheck Research Institute. (June 2023). *Regenerative travel: discussion paper.* https://earthcheck.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/0723_EarthCheck_RegenerativePaper_FINAL.pdf.





EarthCheck Indicators	Regenerative Travel Principles	Example Outcomes
Energy consumption	Resource efficiency and circularity	Increase in renewable energy generation
Greenhouse gas emissions	Climate change mitigation and adaptation	Emissions net-positive (e.g. reducing emissions as far as possible and off-setting the remainder through credible schemes)
Water consumption	Water stewardship and restoration	More efficient use of water
Waste generation and management	Waste reduction, upcycling, and recycling	Removal of waste from landfill
Biodiversity conservation	Ecosystem restoration and enhancement	Net positive increase in ecosystem rehabilitation with native species.
Sustainable procurement practices	Local and ethical sourcing	Sustainable community sourcing of majority of supply
Social and cultural engagement	Community empowerment and cultural preservation	Proactively working with local groups to enhance cultural preservation (e.g. signage in local language, purchasing of traditional handicraft etc.)
Economic performance	Equitable distribution of economic benefits	More than 75% of benefits remain in local area
Accessibility and inclusivity	Inclusive tourism for diverse populations	Provision of support and infrastructure to make accessible to all
Health and safety management	Well-being of tourists, staff, and communities	Community satisfaction & active engagement with tourism
Education and capacity building	Knowledge sharing, training, and local capacity	Contribution to knowledge building and training among local community

Figure 14: EarthCheck Report: Cover and Selected Key Figures and Table (Source: EarthCheck)

A key contribution of the EarthCheck report is its candid admission that many businesses are not yet ready for regeneration. It argues that foundational sustainability systems must be in place first, lest regeneration become a hollow label. In this view, regeneration is not a leap, but a deepening: a recommitment to purpose, values, and transformation starting from existing practice.

Across these industry texts, two divergent but complementary trends emerge. Regenerative Travel adopts a transformational stance, seeking to reimagine tourism's ontological foundations and operational logic. EarthCheck, by contrast, works within established systems, incrementally integrating regenerative thinking into existing protocols.

Both approaches contribute meaningfully. Regenerative Travel expands the conceptual horizon, articulating a bold vision for tourism as a force for planetary healing. EarthCheck ensures that this vision remains actionable, tethered to business realities and measurable outcomes. Still, notable gaps remain. Few reports address structural challenges such as land tenure, capital flows, or tourism's entanglement with extractive economies. And while community and nature are invoked as regenerative anchors, mechanisms of consent, redistribution, and long-term governance are less clear.

2.3.3 Summary

Comparing government and industry responses reveals both convergence and divergence (**Table 1**). Government reports, especially in Aotearoa New Zealand, Canada, and the Nordic region, frame regenerative tourism as a policy shift requiring cross-sector governance, Indigenous partnership, and climate adaptation. Industry responses, on the other hand, tend to emphasise business transformation, guest engagement, and operational frameworks.

Both sectors struggle with implementation. Governments face fragmentation and jurisdictional limits, which can be further compounded by the political leanings and priorities of the government of the day, while industry actors balance vision with viability. Despite entering from different pathways, both sectors are experimenting with regenerative discourse to move beyond sustainability's limitations. Yet regeneration remains a deeply contested and transitional imaginary. This signals the need for clearer frameworks, stronger institutional coordination, and ongoing dialogue between public and private actors.

Importantly, few initiatives, regardless of being government or industry-led, offer robust mechanisms for institutionalisation, with most remaining at the level of strategic visioning or brand repositioning. While community and Indigenous knowledge are often referenced rhetorically, their integration into decision-making authority remains limited. This signals the need not only for clearer frameworks and stronger public–private coordination, but also for deeper commitments to power-sharing and epistemic plurality in shaping regenerative futures.

Type	Report / Region	Regeneration Framing	Policy Status	Governance Model	Role of Community / Hosts	Use of Indigenous Knowledge	Institutionalisation Level	Success Indicators
Government	MBIE (NZ)	Inclusive growth, wellbeing, long-term system shift	Definition stated, no formal strategy	Centralised, economic ministry-led	Community wellbeing referenced but secondary	Referenced in rhetoric	Definition only, no formal strategy	Productivity, wellbeing, regional development
	DOC (NZ)	Relational repair, grounded in Māori values	Internal reports only	Conservation-focused agency	Central; focus on iwi, hapu, and te taiao	Central to framing (Māori values)	Internal exploratory reports	Mauri, ecological and cultural restoration
	Destination Canada	Living systems thinking, ethic of care, philosophical shift	National tourism agency publication	Public tourism board with systems framing	Implied relationality; guests to community	Philosophically resonant but not explicit	National agency-led publication	Vitality, adaptability, system wellbeing
	Nordic Council (NorReg)	Host-led, place-based revitalisation	Regional pilot project	Collaborative and decentralised	Hosts define regeneration locally	Culturally contextual, not indigeneity-specific	Pilot project, regional collaboration	Community and ecological thriving
	Visit Finland	Sustainability-plus, transitional toward regeneration	Sustainability report with regenerative references	State tourism body, sustainability-led	Beneficiaries, but not decision-makers	Minimal or indirect	Sustainability-aligned, regenerative-referencing	Carbon neutrality, biodiversity, inclusion
	Ireland (Peatland Transition)	Carbon outcomes via ecological repurposing	Carbon-linked rural development scheme	State-subsidised land repurposing	Ex-farmers repositioned as tour hosts	Not present	Carbon funding mechanism, applied locally	Carbon savings (quantified offsets)
	UK (National Parks UK)	Carbon-focused, performance-driven	Vision statement, not a policy	Public parks network	Visitors and rural businesses as targets	Absent	Strategic vision document	Carbon metrics, rural resilience, visitor impact
Industry	Regenerative Travel	Ethos of care, narrative identity, aesthetic distinctiveness	Private alliance; not a policy document	Boutique hotel membership model	Hosts as storytellers and curators of place	Evoked in values, not formally integrated	Brand philosophy, not operationalised	Guest experience, emotional connection, local story
	EarthCheck	Extension of sustainability through deeper purpose and systems	Benchmarking white paper within certification logic	Industry-led, standards-based	Acknowledged as stakeholders, not central decision-makers	Referenced in citations; not operationalised	White paper within existing certification system	Sustainability metrics reoriented for regeneration

Table 1: Summary of Regenerative Tourism across Governments and Industry

Tourism is often classified by its level of environmental or social impact, ranging from **extractive**, **sustainable** to **restorative**, **regenerative** models. In the previous section, these distinctions were introduced using two visual figures grounded in global sustainability discourse. While useful, such frameworks risk flattening tourism into a set of outcomes, overlooking the deeply relational, place-based nature of tourism in Aotearoa.

In Aotearoa, tourism is never only about movement. It is also about relationship. Every journey unfolds across whenua and rohe that carries ancestral significance, Treaty responsibilities, and living systems under active care. For iwi, hapū and whānau, tourism is not merely a sector of economic activity, but a site where whakapapa, mana, and intergenerational obligations are either upheld or disrupted.

This tension is also present in destination communities more broadly, where tourism can support or undermine quality of life, conservation values, and social licence. Across many regions, such concerns are becoming more visible and more urgent.

Crucially, Te Ao Māori is not exclusive to those of Māori descent. Grounded in the responsibilities of tangata whenua, it offers all who live, work or travel here a relational framework for engaging with the land. In tourism, this means recognising that every encounter with place carries both ethical and experiential dimensions. For visitors, this offers not appropriation, but an invitation to learn how to relate to place with care.

While approaches such as EarthCheck focus on certification and benchmarking within existing systems, the Aotearoa context suggests a different pathway. Recognising the place-based values that shape tourism in this region, a shift in framework appears not only appropriate but necessary. Rather than refining current models, regeneration here requires rethinking the foundations of how tourism relates to people, place, and future wellbeing.

This section reframes the four logics of tourism through two models grounded in Māori epistemologies: *Tourism as Raranga* and *Tourism as Whakapapa*. These models shift the analysis from impact to relationship, inviting us to consider how tourism interacts with the living threads of land, kinship, and care.

2.4.1 Tourism as Raranga: Weaving the Fabric of Relationship

To understand tourism through Te Ao Māori, we must look beyond impacts and toward relationships. In this model, tourism is not merely an industry but a form of raranga that expresses how people, land, and knowledge are brought together or pulled apart. A strong weave carries warmth, resilience, and care, while a broken one reveals exploitation and disconnection.

The four logics of tourism can be visualised through the integrity of the weave (**Figure 15**). This metaphor invites us to ask not only what tourism does, but how well it holds and honours relationships over time.

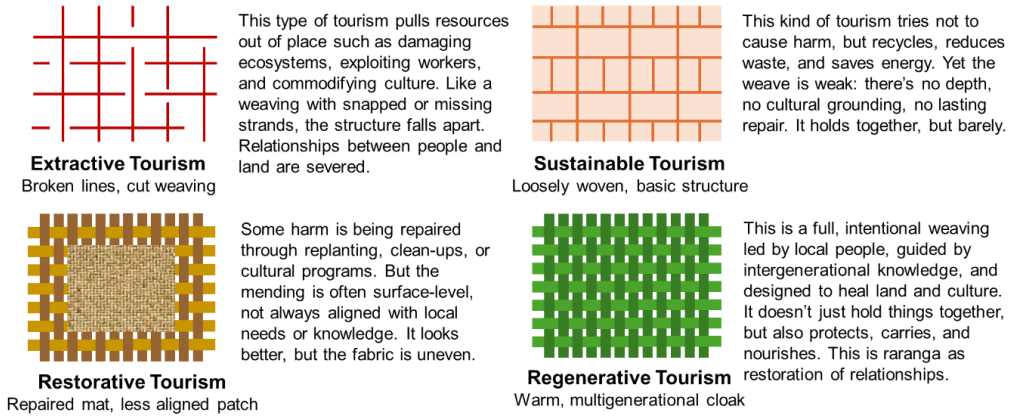


Figure 15: Tourism as Raranga through Four Tourism Logics

Extractive Tourism: Broken Threads, Severed Relationships

Extractive tourism pulls resources out of place, damaging ecosystems, commodifying culture, and undermining local authority. In the raranga metaphor, it appears as a weave with snapped or missing strands. There is no reciprocity, no recognition of whakapapa, and no effort to sustain relationships. The fabric of connection is torn, and tourism becomes an extractive transaction rather than a lived relationship with land and people.

This type of tourism often emerges where visitor volumes are high and time on the ground is brief. Large tour groups are moved quickly through places of deep cultural and ecological significance, often without context, invitation, or understanding. Visitors photograph landscapes layered with ancestral meaning, unaware that these are not neutral spaces. The tourism economy expands, but the threads of relationship unravel.

Sustainable Tourism: Loose Weaving, Weak Bonds

Sustainable tourism seeks to minimise harm, often through recycling and reuse of resource. Yet in this model, the weave remains loose and shallow. The structural form is there, but it lacks integrity. It doesn't draw on local knowledge, doesn't deepen relationships, and doesn't heal past damage. It holds together, but only barely, and often remains a technical fix detached from place-based obligation.

For example, a tourism product may emphasise "light footprint" travel. Reusable bottles, composting toilets, and carbon-offset donations are included in the ticket price. Visitors are told they are treading lightly on nature, and staff are trained in environmental awareness. Yet the itinerary avoids any engagement with the histories of the land or its people. While the business model reduces harm in measurable ways, it remains culturally detached and relationally thin. The threads are present, but they do not hold.

Restorative Tourism: Uneven Patching, Misaligned Repair

Restorative tourism attempts to mend harm through tree planting, clean-ups, or cultural programming. But the patch is often misaligned with the original weave: the materials may clash, the stitching may fray, and the repair may be led by outsiders. Though intentions are positive, the result can be uneven. Without grounding in local governance or intergenerational knowledge, these efforts risk reinforcing the very disconnection they seek to heal.

An example is a visitor-focused conservation project that invites tourists to help restore a damaged landscape. Activities are framed as 'giving back', but the project is designed without guidance from mana whenua. Local native species may be overlooked in favour of fast-growing trees, and tikanga is absent from the process. Though visibly restorative, the project repairs the land on the surface without reweaving the relationships beneath it.

Regenerative Tourism: Interwoven Care, Restored Integrity

Regenerative tourism is an intentional act of reweaving. It restores not just ecosystems, but relationships between people, place, and knowledge. Guided by mana whenua, it draws on Mātauranga Māori and intergenerational responsibility to nourish both land and culture. The weave is strong, warm, and cohesive. It holds, protects, and gives back. This is raranga as the restoration of integrity.

A regenerative approach begins with asking whose land, whose story, and whose future is being engaged. Visitors are welcomed through protocols that affirm their status as manuhiri, not consumers. Activities, whether walking, planting, or learning, are embedded in ongoing, community-led restoration efforts. Revenue supports whānau aspirations and intergenerational knowledge transmission. Here, tourism is not simply a moment of retreat, but part of a long arc of reconnection, where the weave is continually tended and strengthened.

In sum, to view tourism through the lens of raranga is to ask how well the fabric of relationship is being maintained, repaired, or reimagined. The four logics of tourism reveal not only different impacts on land and people, but different commitments to relational integrity. In Aotearoa, regenerative tourism is not an abstract goal, but a daily act of weaving.

2.4.2 Tourism as Whakapapa: Holding the Line across Time

In Māori culture, whakapapa is more than genealogy. It is a foundational concept that connects people to ancestors, to whenua, and to the spiritual and cosmological realms. To engage in whakapapa is not merely to recall lineage, but to live within a network of obligations, care, and continuity.

Through the lens of whakapapa, tourism can be understood as a movement within or against these relationships (**Figure 16**). The four logics of tourism can thus be interpreted as different proximities to relational restoration: from severed ties to intergenerational reweaving.

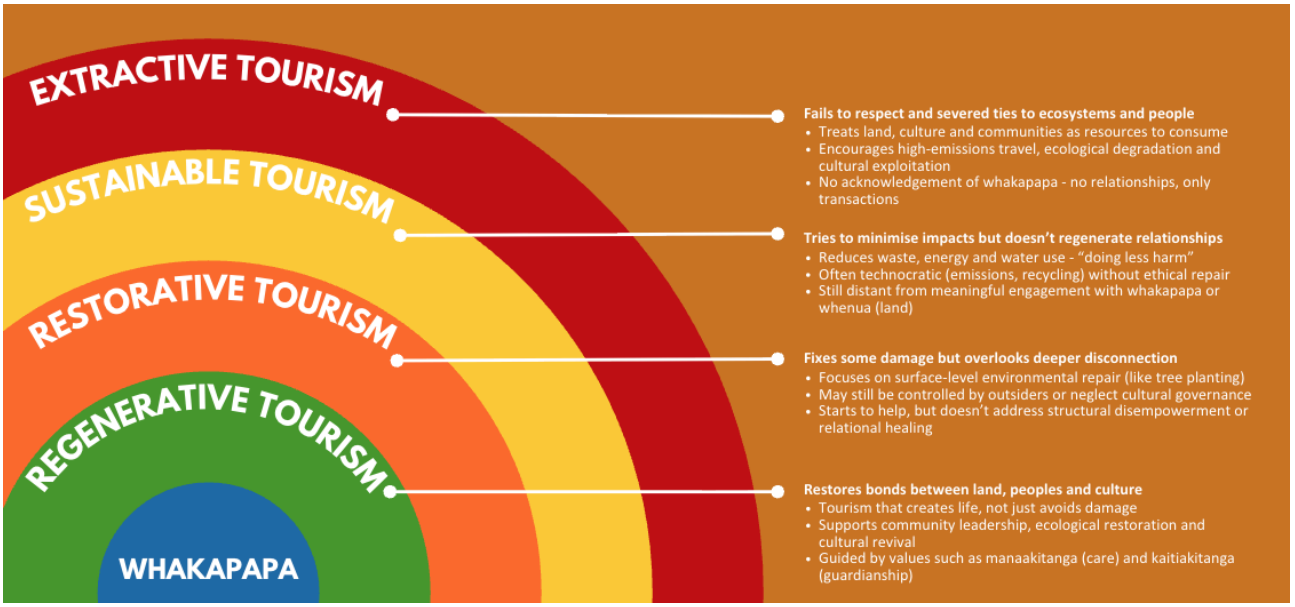


Figure 16: Tourism as Whakapapa through Four Tourism Logics

Extractive Tourism: Cut Lines, Transactional Encounters

Extractive tourism operates outside of whakapapa. It treats land, culture, and people as consumable experiences, not as relational entities. There is no effort to understand whose land is being visited, whose story is being told, or what obligations are involved. In this mode, tourism severs ties to whenua, bypasses tikanga, and leaves no trace of care.

This is often seen in high carbon travel where tourists move quickly through landscapes without consent, context, or continuity. There is no recognition of mana whenua, and no intention to build enduring relationships. Tourism becomes a transaction. It is a moment of consumption rather than an expression of belonging.

Rather than being welcomed through process, visitors arrive unannounced and leave unnoticed. These encounters do not form part of a living relationship with place, but bypass relational time and responsibility. Tourism becomes a form of forgetting: forgetting whakapapa, forgetting place, forgetting obligation.

Sustainable Tourism: Surface Contact, Ethical Distance

Sustainable tourism attempts to do less damage, use fewer resources, and increase efficiency. Yet while its impacts may be lighter, it rarely enters into the realm of whakapapa. It may touch the land but does not bind to it. There is an ethical distance: sustainability as technical management rather than relational repair.

A sustainable tour operator may implement waste reduction, energy efficiency, and carbon offsets, but still offer an experience that is culturally neutral. Visitors are told to leave nothing behind but are also left with little understanding of where they are. The result is tourism that avoids harm but also avoids connection.

There may be good intentions to "respect the environment," but respect is not the same as relationship. Without guidance from mana whenua or engagement with whenua as a living

ancestor, sustainability risks becoming a performance of restraint. It maintains distance, rather than entering into the responsibilities of being in place.

Restorative Tourism: Good Intentions, Partial Reconnection

Restorative tourism begins to acknowledge harm and attempts to mend disconnection. This might include cultural performances, planting initiatives, or partnerships with community organisations. But without alignment with whakapapa, such actions can remain symbolic. The relationship is being remembered, but not fully restored.

In practice, this may take the form of a conservation initiative that invites tourists to give back, yet is designed without strong local governance or tikanga. Cultural stories may be included but extracted rather than lived. The disconnection is visible, but the repair is uneven.

Even when visitors participate in rituals of repair, the process may be shallow if it is not held within deeper lines of obligation and continuity. Relationship is not restored by activity alone. It requires authority, memory, and time. Without these, repair becomes patchwork: visible, well-meaning, but misaligned.

Regenerative Tourism: Walking the Line of Whakapapa

Regenerative tourism does not seek only to reduce harm or repair the past. It seeks to uphold living relationships. It is grounded in whakapapa and guided by mana whenua. It recognises that to be in place is to inherit responsibilities. This kind of tourism does not simply include Māori voices; it supports the restoration of Māori rangatiratanga. Visitors are welcomed through manaakitanga and engage in processes shaped by kaitiakitanga and whanaungatanga. Activities are embedded within long-term aspirations for land, language, and people. The experience is not isolated but part of an ongoing intergenerational journey. This is tourism that not only remembers whakapapa, but strengthens it.

Regenerative tourism does not treat knowledge as content, but as inheritance. Visitors are not passive recipients, but temporary participants in a longer genealogy of care. Their role is not to consume experience, but to contribute to continuity. This is not tourism about place, but tourism in place.

To think through tourism as whakapapa is to ask how tourism participates in lines of connection, memory, and responsibility. The four logics trace not only different practices, but different ethical distances from belonging. Whakapapa reminds us that tourism is never neutral: it either deepens our entanglement with place or disrupts it.

2.4.3 Summary

Taken together, raranga and whakapapa offer more than metaphors. They are relational systems through which tourism in Aotearoa can be understood, challenged, and reimagined. Tourism as Raranga reveals the structural integrity of tourism relationships: whether threads are broken, loosely held, unevenly repaired, or intentionally interwoven. Tourism as Whakapapa traces the depth of those relationships through time whether lines are severed, touched, partially remembered, or lived as intergenerational obligations.

While raranga shows us the pattern, whakapapa shows us the lineage. One helps us see how tourism holds together; the other reminds us of what has been held and who holds it. Both call us to evaluate tourism not only by what it does, but by what is remembers, sustains, reweaves, and consequently, regenerates.


SECTION 3
VIRTUAL TOURISM

Tourism has evolved significantly alongside the rise of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs), which continue to reshape the industry globally. Among these developments, virtual tourism is increasingly recognised for its potential to innovate visitor experience, particularly through the use of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR).

VR refers to the use of a computer-generated 3D environments that users can navigate and sometimes interact with in real time, creating immersive simulations that engage one or more of the user's senses.[49] In contrast, AR enhances the real-world environment by overlaying digital context, such as avatars, 3D models, or interactive features, onto a user's immediate surroundings, typically viewed through a mobile device or headset.[50]

In other words, VR creates the illusion of reality within a fully virtual world, while AR introduces virtual elements into the physical world, layering information or imagery onto what users actually see.[51] While these technologies differ in complexity, they share a common aim: to simulate or enhance access, often from afar, but also for on-site experiences (either in person or in proximity). Before the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual tourism was largely treated as an experimental add-on useful for marketing[52], previewing destinations[53], or enhancing museum[54], theme parks[55], and heritage sites visits[56].

The pandemic significantly accelerated the development of virtual and augmented tourism experiences. As borders closed and in-person travel came to halt, digital experiences temporarily became the only available mode of access. This prompted the tourism industry to adopt virtual platforms as a means of maintaining engagement and supporting recovery.[57] Virtual tourism not only enables groups with limited mobility, such as the elderly and people with disabilities, to access destinations, but also offers a way to experience environmentally sensitive sites without exceeding visitor capacity.[58] In addition, by reducing the need for long-distance travel, virtual tourism can contribute to climate goals.[59]

Amid this rapid expansion, virtual tourism has begun to reconceptualise traditional understandings of space and time. It challenges the notion that tourist spaces are finite and that tourism is merely a temporary escape from work and everyday life.[60] In a digital context, destinations can be

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[60] Mura, P., Tavakoli, R., & Pahlevan Sharif, S. (2017). 'Authentic but not too much': exploring perceptions of authenticity of virtual tourism. *Information Technology & Tourism*, *17*(2), 145-159. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40558-016-0059-y.

accessed instantly, repeatedly, and without physical presence. Yet in reframing space and time, virtual tourism also reopens long-standing dilemmas around equity, meaning, and experience.

While virtual tourism can reduce global and local emissions and alleviate physical pressure on environmentally fragile or culturally sensitive sites, it risks reinforcing existing inequalities[61]. A dual tourism economy may emerge, where wealthier tourists, those with more time, money and digital literacy, use virtual tools to refine their choices before traveling in person. Others, by contrast, may be left with easily accessible but disembodied and standardised digital experiences that offer convenience, but fail to convey the full depth, texture, and meaning of place.

There are also growing concerns around the cultural dimensions of tourism, especially in museums and heritage sites. These institutions are designed to communicate knowledge and facilitate large-scale access to cultural information, functions that virtual tourism can effectively support.[62] In this sense, digital tools are often positioned as natural extensions of heritage interpretation.

Yet tourism is not only about access, but also about presence. While virtual platforms can simulate environments and display artefacts, they must also foster the reproduction of the relational depth that emerges through embodied experiences. In heritage contexts, meaning is not passively received, but actively constructed through subjective, emotional, and situated engagement.[63] This raises a critical question: if tourists' understanding of heritage depends on the meanings they associate through presence and participation, can these meanings be fully created or shared in the absence of physical experience?

These challenges suggest that virtual tourism, despite its technological novelty, may reproduce many of the limitations of mass tourism, which is packaged, standardised, and largely or entirely detached from place. Its appeal to accessibility and innovation risks masking a deeper tension: the substitution of presence with convenience, and of relationship with representation. Without careful design, virtual tourism could become a new frontier for extractive tourism logics, repackaged in digital form.

To contribute to regenerative goals, virtual tourism must move beyond the logic of simulation and access. Some emerging regenerative approaches are beginning to reconceptualise virtual tourism as a connective layer supporting pre-visit education, place-based storytelling, and long-term stewardship in the name of "doing less harm".[64] But regenerative tourism demands more. It is not simply about minimising negative impacts, but about restoring and enriching relationships with people, place, and more-than-human worlds. This requires reimagining virtual tourism not as a content delivery tool, but as a relational infrastructure, one capable of cultivating responsibility, reciprocity, and care across distances.

By fostering this deeper weaving, virtual technologies can help embed tourism within longer arcs of relationships. Rather than detaching visitors from place, they can support processes of mutual learning, cultural respect, and ecological engagement. When designed with care, such tools can strengthen the continuity between virtual and in-person experiences, reinforcing tourism's potential to sustain biocultural regeneration over time.

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[63] Nuryanti, W. (1996). Heritage and postmodern tourism. *Annals of tourism research, 23*(2), 249-260. https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383(95)00062-3.

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SECTION 4

MEASURABLE REGENERATIVE TOURISM OUTCOMES

While regenerative tourism is often framed in aspirational language, its legitimacy and policy traction depend on measurability of outcomes. This section examines how regenerative tourism is translated into measurable action. **Table 2** compares leading government and industry initiatives along four dimensions: timeframe, actor inclusion, outcome orientation, and indicator types. These categories provide insight into how regenerative tourism is rendered governable or deferred in practice.

4.1 Institutional Framings

Timeframe

Across both government and industry examples, regenerative tourism is predominantly framed as a long-term vision. This temporal emphasis reflects an understanding that ecosystem repair, cultural revitalisation, and structural transformation unfold over extended periods.

MBIE (NZ), Destination Canada, and Regenerative Travel all adopt open-ended horizons, often without clearly defined stages or interim benchmarks. DOC (NZ) adopts a long-term orientation through project-based interventions, allowing for more bounded implementation cycles.

Finland and the UK represent partial exceptions: although neither outlines explicit timelines, their alignment with strategic sustainability frameworks suggests medium-term policy sequencing. Ireland's peatland initiative stands out for its five-year funding structure under the EU Just Transition mechanism, directly linking regeneration to defined deliverables, most notably carbon savings in this particular case.

Meanwhile, EarthCheck follows a certification cycle, introducing temporal structure into industry-led regenerative claims. These variations suggest that without specific timeframes or milestone evaluations, many regenerative strategies risk remaining aspirational rather than actionable.

Key Actors

The diversity of actors engaged in regenerative tourism reflects varying degrees of inclusion, decentralisation, and epistemic legitimacy. In some cases, such as DOC (NZ), Indigenous actors (e.g., iwi and hapū) and more-than-human actors (e.g., te taiao) are explicitly recognised as central to both governance and ecological knowledge systems. This represents a significant shift from stakeholder consultation to epistemic co-governance. In contrast, MBIE (NZ) maintains a centralised model in which government agencies retain authority over policy framing and implementation.

Other government-led initiatives exhibit varied levels of decentralisation: the Nordic Council and Visit Finland reference local hosts or regional actors but do not clarify their role in setting or evaluating regenerative goals. Destination Canada positions tourism boards and guests as central stakeholders, yet primarily frames regeneration through the lens of visitor wellbeing, rather than community-led governance.

In the UK, National Parks authorities oversee strategy and infrastructure, with tourists conceived more as users than as co-creators of regenerative value. In Ireland, ex-farmers are repositioned as

land stewards under a state-funded mechanism, suggesting instrumental inclusion.

Meanwhile, industry initiatives like EarthCheck and Regenerative Travel claim to elevate hosts and industry partners, yet differ in practice. EarthCheck engages stakeholders through structured certification, while Regenerative Travel invokes narrative authority without embedding hosts in formal governance structures.

Across these cases, the ability to define, measure, and benefit from regenerative tourism remains unevenly distributed, with many initiatives still privileging top-down authority over genuine relational participation.

Sector	Report / Region	Timeframe	Key Actors	Outcome Orientation	Indicator Types
Government	MBIE (NZ)	Long-term	Central government	Wellbeing, productivity, regional development	Broad national outcome frameworks
	DOC (NZ)	Long-term (project-based)	Conservation agency, iwi, hapu, and te taiao	Ecological and cultural restoration	Internal reports
	Destination Canada	Long-term (transitional vision)	Tourism board, guests	System wellbeing, vitality	Value-based assessments
	Nordic Council (NorReg)	Long-term (pilot stage)	Hosts, local regions	Community regeneration	Case-based evaluations
	Visit Finland	N/A (Sustainability-aligned progression)	Regional actors	Carbon neutrality, biodiversity	EU metrics
	Ireland (Peatland Transition)	Long-term (five-years EU Just Transition Fund)	Ex-farmers, land managers	Carbon savings	Quantified carbon offsets
	UK (National Parks UK)	N/A (strategic timeframe)	Park authorities, tourists	Visitor impact, community resilience	Carbon metrics strategic vision tracking, UN's regenerative tourism principles
Industry	Regenerative Travel	Long-term	Boutique hosts, storytellers	Guest experience, cultural value	No standardised indicators, brand philosophy
	EarthCheck	N/A (certification cycle-based)	Industry stakeholders	Sustainability reframed for regeneration	Reoriented sustainability metrics within certification

Table 2: Measurable Regenerative Tourism Outcomes

Outcome Orientation

The types of outcomes associated with regenerative tourism initiatives range widely from traditional environmental metrics to more abstract notions of vitality, wellbeing, and guest experience.

Government programmes such as Ireland's peatland restoration and Finland's national tourism strategy orient their outcomes toward climate-related targets, including carbon sequestration and biodiversity gains. These are among the few cases to directly link regenerative ambitions with tangible and measurable ecological impacts.

DOC (NZ) also places ecological restoration at its core, but crucially integrates cultural dimensions, reflecting a biocultural understanding of land and wellbeing. Other initiatives adopt broader social framings: MBIE (NZ) aligns regeneration with national productivity and regional development. The UK National Parks case focuses on managing visitor impact and preserving landscape resilience, leaning more toward a preservationist rather than regenerative orientation.

Destination Canada advances a systems-thinking approach centred on community vitality and resilience. The Nordic Council, similarly, foregrounds community regeneration but leaves open the definition of what this entails in practice.

In contrast, industry cases often move away from environmental outcomes entirely. Regenerative Travel frames success through guest experience and cultural storytelling, while EarthCheck reinterprets existing sustainability benchmarks through a regenerative lens, without substantially altering the nature of what is measured.

Across these cases, outcome orientation often reflects the institutional location of the initiative. Governmental programmes favour quantifiable environmental or economic goals, while industry-led models tend to emphasise narrative, experiential, or operational values.

Indicator Types

Despite the proliferation of regenerative discourse, robust and context-sensitive indicators remain scarce. Few initiatives in **Table 2** employ clear, measurable frameworks for assessing regenerative outcomes.

Ireland provides a notable exception, linking peatland restoration to quantified carbon offsets within a state-supported funding scheme. The UK National Parks system also incorporates carbon metrics, albeit primarily for strategic tracking rather than ecological restoration.

Finland's approach gestures toward EU-aligned indicators on biodiversity and emissions, though regenerative aspects remain aspirational. Destination Canada and the Nordic Council adopt broad values-based assessments or cultural revitalisation narratives but do not articulate how these are to be measured.

DOC (NZ) utilises internal ecological monitoring, but these indicators are often qualitative, site-specific, and not publicly standardised. In contrast, MBIE (NZ) lacks formal indicators altogether, instead relying on national-level wellbeing and productivity metrics that offer limited relevance to local ecosystems or communities.

Industry-led models further complicate the picture. EarthCheck integrates regenerative language into its certification cycle but retains sustainability metrics such as resource use and emissions intensity. Regenerative Travel avoids formalisation entirely, relying on storytelling, brand positioning, and guest perception as proxies for impact.

Overall, the indicator landscape reveals a mismatch between regenerative ambitions and evaluative infrastructure. In most cases, regeneration is declared but not demonstrably tracked raising critical questions about legitimacy, comparability, and long-term learning.

4.2 Localised Initiatives in Aotearoa

While national and industry frameworks for regenerative tourism often rely on abstract aspirations or top-down metrics, many of the most tangible outcomes are already being generated at the local level. Small-scale tourism initiatives across Aotearoa are enacting regeneration through grounded, context-specific practices that are not always visible to policy instruments, but which are meaningful, measurable, and embedded in relationships to place.

This section does not aim to provide an exhaustive inventory of regenerative tourism businesses, but instead focuses on four diverse and broadly representative regenerative tourism initiatives in Aotearoa. They include Rotorua Canopy Tours, Kohutapu Lodge and Tribal Tours, Kapiti Island Nature Tours, and the Te Araroa Trail[65]. The initiatives profiled in this section are operational tourism businesses that are selected to illustrate diverse regenerative practices emerging in diverse business contexts. They are not research pilots but rather functioning enterprises that navigate the complexities of balancing economic, cultural, and ecological aspirations.

Several of these initiatives are Māori-led or developed in close partnership with iwi and hapū, and their inclusion reflects the important contributions of Māori values and leadership in shaping regenerative tourism in Aotearoa New Zealand. Their practices exemplify diverse regenerative action orientations and measurable outcomes. Together, they span private and iwi-led enterprises, cultural and ecological priorities, and regional as well as national scales.

[65] The following case studies have been developed in collaboration and with the permission of the four respective operators. Their contributions are acknowledged with full recognition of their mana, autonomy, and intellectual property.


CASE STUDY 1
ROTORUA CANOPY TOURS

Rotorua Canopy Tours operates a commercial zipline experience within Ōkoheriki Forest (Dansey Road Scenic Reserve) on the ancestral land of Ngāti Tura and Ngāti Te Ngākau, administered as public conservation land by the Department of Conservation (Te Papa Atawhai). Since establishment in 2012, the business has integrated sustained pest control and ecological monitoring into its operations. Through the Canopy Conservation Trust, funded primarily by tourism revenue and donations, trapping networks using automated Goodnature traps have been maintained across several hundred hectares[66]. Reduced pest pressure has coincided with early ecological recovery, including recorded native jumping spiders[67] and beetles[68], the reappearance of werewere-kōkako fungi[69], and the return of koekoeā (long-tailed cuckoo)[70].

Restoration governance is formalised through a Community Conservation Agreement between the Canopy Conservation Trust, Rotorua Canopy Tours, DoC, and Tura te Ngākau ki Ngongotahā (the mana whenua representation for the Ngongotahā area, associated with Ngāti Tura and Ngāti Te Ngākau)[71]. Established in 2019 and renewed in 2024, the agreement supports long-term collaboration and a staged restoration pathway, from ongoing predator suppression toward potential future reintroductions of native plants and fauna, aligning local restoration with Predator Free 2050[72] while situating tourism as one component within a broader landscape-scale recovery strategy.

Guiding philosophies and responsibilities

At Rotorua Canopy Tours, guiding philosophies are expressed through a combination of Māori concepts and an internally defined values framework that shapes day-to-day responsibilities. Manaakitanga (caring for our people and community) informs a people-centred approach to tourism, emphasising care, respect, and attentiveness in interactions with staff, visitors, and the wider community. Kaitiakitanga (guardians of our land) underpins how the business understands its obligations to Okoheriki forest and surrounding ecosystems, positioning conservation as an operational responsibility rather than an ancillary activity.

These philosophies are reinforced through a team-led set of five shared values (Proud, Connected, Loved, Energised, Supported) developed collectively and used to guide regular check-ins and internal decision-making[73]. The organisation adopts a continuous improvement ethos across safety, tour delivery, conservation, and sustainability innovation, and encourages staff learning and development as part of collective capability-building.

Practices and ways of working

At Rotorua Canopy Tours, practices are structured to integrate visitor experience, forest restoration, and ongoing conservation as mutually reinforcing components of daily operations.

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[66] Rotorua Canopy Tours. (2026). *Conservation*. https://www.canopytours.co.nz/canopy-conservation-trust/.
[67] Brunton, T. (2025, May 12). *Native jumping spider found in restored Rotorua forest*. RNZ. https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/560268/native-jumping-spider-found-in-restored-rotorua-forest.
[68] RNZ. (2024, November 28). *Tourism company's pest control boosts beetle biodiversity*. https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/ninetonoon/audio/2018966133/tourism-company-s-pest-control-boosts-beetle-biodiversity.
[69] Rotorua Daily Post. (2019, May 9). *Nothing to be blue about as werewere-kōkako mushrooms spotted in Rotorua scenic reserve*. https://www.nzherald.co.nz/rotorua-daily-post/news/nothing-to-be-blue-about-as-werewere-kokako-mushrooms-spotted-in-rotorua-scenic-reserve/6AYKKQ34HMAOH3G4IBPAVIRKIE/.
[70] RNZ. (2020, January 13). *Koekoeā, the long-tailed cuckoo, makes long-awaited return to Rotorua forest*. https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/407211/koekoea-the-long-tailed-cuckoo-makes-long-awaited-return-to-rotorua-forest.
[71] Canopy Conservation Trust. (2024). *Stakeholders*. https://www.canopyconservationtrust.org/stakeholders?utm_source=chatgpt.com.
[72] Predator Free NZ. (2026). *About Predator Free 2050*. https://predatorfreenz.org/about-us/predator-free-2050/predator-free-2050-vision/.
[73] Rotorua Canopy Tours. (2026). *About us*. https://www.canopytours.co.nz/about-us/.

Tourism activities are delivered within an ancient forest system, with infrastructure placement and visitor movement carefully managed to enable access while minimising ecological disturbance. The zipline experience functions as a structured form of engagement, situating visitors within an actively managed forest where conservation infrastructure is present and interpretable. Staff roles extend beyond guiding to include responsibilities for environmental care and interpretation, reinforcing a shared operational understanding that tourism delivery, forest condition, and conservation effort are interdependent.

Conservation practice is coordinated through the Canopy Conservation Trust, which is responsible for implementing sustained trapping, forest restoration activities, and ecological observation across the reserve. A portion of each tour fee is directed to the Trust, establishing a continuous funding stream that supports year-round predator suppression and adaptive management across several hundred hectares. This arrangement links conservation activity directly to tourism operations, enabling restoration work to be maintained as a routine operational function rather than a time-limited project. Predator suppression is undertaken alongside attention to forest condition, including canopy management, forest-floor processes, and ongoing biosecurity surveillance[74]. Together, these practices frame conservation as an iterative, long-term process embedded within everyday operations.

Indicators of progress and accountability

Progress is assessed through a combination of quantitative and ecological indicators that are directly linked to management action. Quantitative measures, such as sustained predator suppression (for example, pest numbers reduced by more than 90%[75]), provide a baseline indication of control effectiveness. These measures are not used in isolation, but alongside indicators of forest condition and biological response over time, which help to assess whether ecological processes are beginning to recover under sustained management.

"A Community Conservation Agreement with the DOC and mana whenua establishes shared oversight and a long-term commitment to restoration objectives."

Ecological response is reflected in the presence, return, and increased observation of native species, including lizards[76], insects[77], birds[78]. Additional evidence includes records of species previously absent or rarely observed in the forest, such as the identification of a new Porrhothele spider and a variation of the pink Entoloma mushroom[79]. Rather than functioning as individual success metrics, these observations are treated collectively as evidence of ecological response to long-term restoration.

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[74] Canopy Conservation Trust. (2024). *Our story*. https://www.canopyconservationtrust.org/our-story.
[75] Canopy Conservation Trust. (2024). *Our achievements*. https://www.canopyconservationtrust.org/achievements.
[76] Rotorua Canopy Tours. (2023, October 19). *Rare lizard spotted at Canopy Tours*. https://www.canopytours.co.nz/rare-lizard-spotted-spotted-at-canopy-tours/.
[77] Rotorua Canopy Tours. (2024, March 24). *NZ native insects found at Canopy Tours*. https://www.canopytours.co.nz/nz-native-insects-found-at-canopy-tours/.
[78] Rotorua Canopy Tours. (2022, November 20). *New Zealand Native Birds: Long Tailed Cuckoo NZ Returns to Canopy Tours*. https://www.canopytours.co.nz/new-zealand-native-birds-long-tailed-cuckoo-returns-to-canopy-tours/.
[79] Rotorua Daily Post. (2021, October 13). *Two new species discovered in Rotorua forest following trapping efforts*. https://www.nzherald.co.nz/rotorua-daily-post/news/two-new-species-discovered-in-rotorua-forest-following-trapping-efforts/ZNYECBXT2SLR7KDUJRUTWWNBWI/.

Accountability is supported through a combination of governance arrangements, public transparency, and external benchmarking. A Community Conservation Agreement with the DOC and mana whenua establishes shared oversight and a long-term commitment to restoration objectives. Monitoring results and species records have been communicated through public and media reporting, providing independent visibility of ecological change. In addition, B Corp certification[80] provides a globally recognised external accountability framework that independently evaluates environmental stewardship, community contribution, transparency, and governance, extending accountability beyond conservation outcomes alone. Together, these mechanisms link commercial activity with credible, long-term restoration outcomes.

Reflections and shared insights

This case shows that regenerative tourism outcomes are strongly shaped by how funding, governance, and operational responsibility are distributed. At Okoheriki forest, restoration delivered through the Canopy Conservation Trust relies primarily on Rotorua Canopy Tours as the Trust's main funder and operational contributor, with visitor revenue contributing the greatest single source of funding to the Trust. While the Department of Conservation provides regulatory oversight and technical guidance, the costs and risks of sustained restoration are largely borne by the enterprise, reflecting a model in which public conservation objectives are advanced through a private business capacity.

At the same time, Rotorua Canopy Tours operates under comparatively favourable conditions. Its proximity to a major tourism centre and the strong appeal of adventure-based experiences enable tourism revenue to support ongoing ecological work, creating a positive feedback loop between visitor demand and restoration effort. These conditions are not widely shared across the sector. Many ecological restoration sites rely on more conventional forms of tourism, face access and scale constraints, and depend heavily on grants or volunteer labour to meet high and continuous restoration costs. Direct comparison risks creating unrealistic expectations that ecological restoration can be self-financing through tourism alone.

For tourism operators, this case highlights the need to assess whether location, product type, and organisational capacity can realistically sustain long-term ecological restoration. For policymakers, it raises a clearer challenge: how funding frameworks and partnership models might better recognise restoration as essential environmental infrastructure, rather than discretionary enterprise effort. Without more durable and equitable mechanisms to share responsibility and risk, regenerative tourism is likely to remain dependent on a small number of well-positioned and visionary enterprises rather than becoming a scalable approach across the sector.

[80] B Corp. (2024). *RCT Group Limited*. https://www.bcorporation.net/en-us/find-a-b-corp/company/skyfly-limited/.

PHOTOS: ROTORUA CANOPY TOURS

PHOTOS: ROTORUA CANOPY TOURS

PHOTOS: ROTORUA CANOPY TOURS

CASE STUDY 2

KOHUTAPU LODGE AND TRIBAL TOURS

Kohutapu Lodge and Tribal Tours is a small Māori whānau-owned cultural tourism enterprise located on the ancestral lands of Ngāti Manawa in the Bay of Plenty region of Aotearoa New Zealand. Established by Nadine and Karl ToeToe, the lodge was founded with the intention of enabling whānau to live and work on their whenua while sharing Ngāti Manawa histories, values, and cultural knowledge with visitors in ways that are grounded in everyday practice rather than staged cultural performance.

The enterprise operates in close relationship with the nearby town of Murupara, a predominantly Māori community shaped by long-term dependence on forestry and subsequent socio-economic challenges following industry decline. Within this context, Kohutapu Lodge and Tribal Tours explicitly positions tourism as a mechanism for community support rather than solely as a profit-driven business. Tourism revenue is deliberately reinvested into local initiatives, including employment and training opportunities, support for rangatahi (youth), contributions to marae, food provision, and broader community wellbeing programmes. Through these practices, tourism becomes a means of strengthening tribal pride and intergenerational continuity within the community.

Tourism experiences at Kohutapu Lodge are closely tied to Ngāti Manawa relationships with land, water, and ancestry. Visitors are engaged through guided encounters with cultural landscapes, storytelling, and everyday practice. These encounters emphasise whakapapa, responsibility, and continuity, situating tourism within ongoing social and cultural obligations that support local futures.

Guiding philosophies and responsibilities

The guiding philosophies of Kohutapu Lodge and Tribal Tours are grounded in Māori values that shape how the enterprise understands leadership, responsibility, and everyday practice within its community context. These values provide a framework for making decisions that prioritise cultural integrity, community wellbeing, and long-term responsibility over short-term commercial gain.

"At Kohutapu Lodge and Tribal Tours, tourism is organised as a practical extension of community life rather than a standalone commercial activity."

Kawanatanga (governorship, authority) is reflected in the enterprise's commitment to equitable Māori representation and voice within tourism systems that have historically marginalised small, Indigenous-led operators. Kohutapu actively engages with external agencies and industry structures while advocating for approaches that recognise Māori authority, lived experience, and local priorities, rather than applying one-size-fits-all standards, while retaining decision-making authority within the community itself.

Manaakitanga (hospitality, care, generosity, respect) guides how the lodge hosts visitors and cares for its people. Hospitality at Kohutapu is understood as a reciprocal relationship that requires respect, responsibility, and accountability from both hosts and visitors. Welcoming manuhiri (guests) does not mean compromising tikanga (customary practices). Instead, the enterprise places equal importance on protecting the dignity, safety, and wellbeing of its guides and whānau, recognising that care must flow inward as well as outward.

Kaitiakitanga (guardianship) informs how the business contributes to cultural, social, economic,

and environmental wellbeing. Tourism is used as a means to strengthen community resilience by creating employment, supporting rangatahi, sustaining connections to whenua, and reinvesting resources into local initiatives. Responsibility is measured through collective benefit rather than individual profit.

Kotahitanga (unity) emphasises collaboration within whānau, across generations, and with partners who share aligned values. Decisions are shaped by shared aspirations and mutual support, reinforcing the enterprise as a collective endeavour rather than a purely individual business.

Rangatiratanga (right to exercise authority) and mana motuhake (self-determination) underpin Kohutapu's authority over how Ngāti Manawa culture, stories, and lands are represented. The enterprise actively sets boundaries around cultural engagement, challenges industry practices that prioritise visitor comfort or convenience over cultural integrity, and asserts its right to define success on its own terms. Guided by the principle to always "lead with love", Kohutapu demonstrates that strong leadership involves care, courage, and responsibility to people, place, and future generations.

Practices and ways of working

"Visitor engagement is managed through systems that protect cultural integrity and staff wellbeing."

At Kohutapu Lodge and Tribal Tours, tourism is organised as a practical extension of community life rather than a standalone commercial activity. Community care, cultural transmission, and visitor engagement are integrated into everyday life, shaping how work is prioritised and how resources are directed.

Tourism functions as a living learning environment. Alongside hosting visitors, the enterprise supports whānau through food provision and a range of intergenerational initiatives. These include providing winter school uniforms for tamariki (children), supporting rangatahi (youth) to participate in overseas exchange opportunities, and offering tourism-based cultural training for emerging kaikaranga (a female ceremonial caller who performs the first call during a welcome ceremony) and kaikōrero (a Māori speaker who delivers formal speeches during a welcoming ceremony on a marae). These activities are embedded within daily operations, enabling cultural confidence and continuity across generations.

Youth engagement is woven into everyday practice. Initiatives such as Manawa Ora Rangatahi (the breath of life/heart/wellbeing of the youth) during the COVID border closure[81], ongoing māra kai (gardening for food) work[82], and Indigenous exchanges through Native Nations United[83] connect

[81] Indigenous Voices on Tourism. (2022, September 12). *Manawa Ora: Life skills for rangatahi at Kohutapu Lodge* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6CXK-Jubr0M.

[82] Kohutapu Lodge – Lake Aniwhenua, Bay of Plenty. (2025, November 9). *Mahinga kai Māori kai sovereignty Level 3 – fees free: Expressions of interest now open* [Facebook post]. Facebook.https://www.facebook.com/kohutapulodge/photos/-mahinga-kai-m%C4%81ori-kai-sovereignty-level-3-fees-freeexpressions-of-interest-now-/1368810621918571/.

[83] Native Nations United, coordinated by Kohutapu Lodge and Tribal Tours, supports rangatahi (youth) from Murupara to walk shared Indigenous pathways through journeys to Australia, Vanuatu and Canada. Through regenerative tourism, the programme enables rangatahi to reconnect with other Indigenous communities and to take part in culturally grounded learning journeys. See: https://kohutapulodge.co.nz/native-nations-united.

tourism with kai sovereignty, leadership development, cultural connection, and place-based responsibility.

Visitor engagement is managed through systems that protect cultural integrity and staff wellbeing. The Visitor Promise, an online cultural learning module completed prior to arrival, shifts responsibility for cultural understanding onto visitors. Designed as a fully digital, low-bandwidth system, it supports carbon-light operations and enables the approach to scale nationally and internationally while maintaining deep cultural authenticity. This digitally enabled, culturally grounded innovation, by Māori, for all, empowers both hosts and manuhiri (guests) to engage respectfully and to uplift the mana of place, people, and culture.

Indicators of progress and accountability

Progress is assessed through a combination of measurable indicators and culturally grounded accountability. Quantitative measures are used to track continuity, scale, and reach, including sustained delivery of community support, participation of rangatahi (youth) in training and exchange pathways, and completion and uptake of The Visitor Promise across visitor groups and partner organisations.

“Kohutapu Lodge illustrates that cultural integrity does not need to be compromised to engage visitors or operate at scale.”

The Visitor Promise provides a particularly important set of indicators. Engagement, completion, and feedback from the platform are used to assess whether visitors arrive better prepared, whether cultural expectations are clearly understood, and whether pressure on frontline guides is reduced. These digital metrics offer consistent signals across sites and contexts, supporting learning at scale without compromising cultural authority.

At the same time, accountability is tested through practice-based judgement. Ongoing kōrero with whānau, staff reflection, and marae-based discussion inform whether tourism activities are strengthening cultural confidence, maintaining tikanga, and delivering upon manaakitanga (hospitality, care, generosity, respect). Indicators are reviewed iteratively, with practices adjusted when cultural burden, risk, or misalignment becomes visible.

In this way, progress is understood not only as measurable output, but as the sustained ability to uphold responsibility while operating across different scales.

Reflections and shared insights

This case demonstrates that regenerative tourism does not rely on goodwill or cultural intent alone, but on deliberate organisational design, clear boundaries, and shared responsibility. Cultural harm in tourism is often systemic rather than incidental, arising from policy and industry settings that prioritise visitor experience and growth metrics while underestimating cultural labour, emotional burden, and the costs of hosting.

Kohutapu Lodge illustrates that cultural integrity does not need to be compromised to engage visitors or operate at scale. By embedding cultural expectations into visitor preparation and organisational processes, responsibility is redistributed away from frontline hosts and normalised within the visitor journey itself. This approach challenges the assumption that cultural safety can be achieved through individual awareness, training, or resilience alone rather than through structural design.

For regenerative tourism, the central question is not only whether Indigenous culture is valued in principle, but how responsibility is organised in practice. Current policy settings tend to externalise the costs of hosting onto Indigenous enterprises, while continuing to define success primarily through growth-oriented and visitor-centred metrics. In the absence of institutional arrangements that recognise cultural protection as core tourism infrastructure, regenerative tourism risks becoming as an ethical overlay on largely unchanged systems of accountability.

Without sustained investment in Indigenous-led cultural systems, workforce pathways, and organisational capacity, regenerative tourism may remain vulnerable to becoming symbolic rather than transformative. Recent research on the cultural exchange programme coordinated by Kohutapu Lodge and Tribal Tours[84] has demonstrated the regenerative impacts that culturally grounded tourism can have on Indigenous youth, particularly in enhancing mana and, cultural identity. However, such outcomes currently depend on exceptional organisational effort rather than on tourism systems designed to support them as a matter of course. Under these circumstances, enterprises like Kohutapu serve as an exemplar of good practice, rather than a model that a rigid tourism system is structurally prepared and resourced to normalise or scale across the sector.

[84] Scheyvens, R., & Kaire Gataulu, T. (2025). Regenerating tourism and regenerating people: how tourism is achieving justice for Indigenous youths. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 1-26. https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2025.2562435.

PHOTOS: KOHUTAPU LODGE AND TRIBAL TOURS

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PHOTOS: KOHUTAPU LODGE AND TRIBAL TOURS

CASE STUDY 3

KAPITI ISLAND NATURE TOURS

Kapiti Island has been home to people and their stories for over 800 years. Since 1820, the Barrett whānau have welcomed visitors to the island, carrying forward responsibilities as kaitiaki of the land and its taonga across eight generations. One of Aotearoa's oldest and most significant nature reserves, the island holds deep human and ecological histories shaped through sustained leadership in conservation.

Central to this leadership is its internationally recognition for its predator-free status, achieved through the removal of possums by 1987[85] and the eradication of rats by 1996[86]. This ongoing intensive biosecurity underpins the recovery of native flora and birdlife, positioning the island as a cornerstone of national ecological restoration efforts. Notably, Kapiti Island has played a critical role in supporting conservation programmes across Aotearoa through the translocation of species such as kiwi[87], extending its ecological significance well beyond the island itself.

Today, this intergenerational ethic of care is expressed through Kapiti Island Nature Tours, a whānau-based operation on Māori-owned land that enables visitor access while actively upholding predator-free conditions, biosecurity vigilance, and restoration outcomes that extend far beyond "a place to visit" and participate in an ongoing system of ecological leadership and responsibility.

Guiding philosophies and responsibilities

Kapiti Island Nature Tours is guided by a kaupapa-based philosophy grounded in whakapapa and long-standing relationships between whānau, hapū, iwi, and whenua. This philosophy shapes why the whānau live and work on Kapiti Island and reflects the shared aspirations of the three-iwi confederation of Ngāti Toa, Te Ātiawa ki Kāpiti, and Ngāti Raukawa ki te Tonga. Operating a tourism business on Kapiti Island carries an obligation to uphold the mana of their iwi and to care for an island that holds significance far beyond tourism.

Key Kaupapa include Tuakiritanga (identity), Whanaungatanga (relationships and kinship), and Ūkaipōtanga (enduring belonging to place), which together emphasise deep connection to whenua, whakapapa, and tribal histories. These principles shape how whānau and staff understand their roles, and how stories of Kapiti Island's human and natural history are shared with visitors.

Manaakitanga (generosity, and hospitality) and Kaitiakitanga (guardianship and intergenerational responsibility) guide how these relationships are enacted in practice, shaping visitor welcome, guided experiences, and commitments to conservation, including pest elimination and the restoration of native flora and fauna.

Rangatiratanga (accountable leadership and self-determination) and Kotahitanga (collective action and unity) frame how leadership is exercised in collaboration with the three iwi, reinforcing shared responsibility for regional wellbeing. All Kaupapa are reinforced through an active commitment to te reo me ngā tikanga Māori (Māori language and customs) as living, practiced foundations of the business, including fully immersive te reo Māori tours that are a source of pride for the whānau.

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[85] Cowan, P. E. (1992). The eradication of introduced Australian brushtail possums, Trichosurus vulpecula, from Kapiti Island, a New Zealand nature reserve. *Biological Conservation*, *61*(3), 217-226. https://doi.org/10.1016/0006-3207(92)91119-D.

[86] Sinclair, L., McCartney, J., Godfrey, J., Pledger, S., Wakelin, M., & Sherley, G. (2005). How did invertebrates respond to eradication of rats from Kapiti Island, New Zealand? *New Zealand Journal of Zoology*, *32*(4), 293-315. https://doi.org/10.1080/03014223.2005.9518421.

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Practices and ways of working

Kaupapa are translated into practice through the design of visitor experiences, governance arrangements, and staff development.
Tourism is used as a vehicle to tell the full human and ecological story of Kapiti Island, including histories of customary occupation, land loss through colonisation, the creation of a nature reserve, and the gradual return of people to the whenua. Guided experiences position visitors within these longer trajectories, linking cultural history, conservation, and contemporary Māori presence as an ongoing process rather than a static attraction.

"Cultural accountability is strengthened through iwi involvement as mentors and assessors, providing guidance on tikanga, storytelling, and responsibilities to whenua and whakapapa."

This business combines whānau leadership with the support of experienced non-whānau tourism practitioners at Board level, enabling Kaupapa-based decision-making while navigating regulatory, commercial, and market environments. This includes innovative digital engagement through collaboration with Minecraft, where Kapiti Island was one of only six New Zealand business locations represented, extending the Kaupapa to global and virtual audiences beyond those physically present.

Tourism products are intentionally designed to prioritise depth, learning, and value over volume, with an explicit aspiration to enhance the mana of all visitors. In response to changing visitor expectations following COVID-19, the business developed the Kapiti Island Heritage Cruise/Tour and the Deluxe Day Tour. These experiences focus on significant sites, Māori settlements, and guided interpretation, delivered through structured itineraries, smaller group formats, and enhanced guiding roles aligned with ecological and cultural responsibilities.

Staff capability and cultural practice are central to operations. Whānau and community staff are supported through ongoing training and upskilling, including participation in te reo Māori and tikanga learning through Te Wānanga o Raukawa. Regular one-to-one conversations and team meetings support learning, communication, and collective responsibility. Operational practices are further shaped through long-standing relationships with the three iwi and engagement with conservation partners and sector organisations.

Indicators of progress and accountability

Progress and accountability are understood as both measurable and relational. The business draws on multiple indicators to assess whether its practices remain aligned with Kaupapa and responsibilities to people, place, and future generations.

Visitor feedback, gathered through post-visit communication and public platforms, provides insight into visitor understanding of cultural narratives, conservation messages, and overall experience quality. External benchmarks, including Qualmark and the Sustainable Tourism Commitments, provide structured reference points for assessing operational standards, environmental practice, and continuous improvement.

Cultural accountability is strengthened through iwi involvement as mentors and assessors, providing guidance on tikanga, storytelling, and responsibilities to whenua and whakapapa. Internal indicators focus on staff wellbeing, cultural confidence, and capability, monitored through regular engagement and review processes. Accountability also extends beyond the enterprise through participation in conservation initiatives, species transfers, and governance roles within sector organisations, reflecting responsibility at a system level rather than solely at the level of individual enterprise performance.

Reflections and shared insights

This case highlights a fundamental tension in how regenerative tourism is currently framed and implemented. While the language of regeneration is increasingly adopted across the sector, the conditions required to realise it are unevenly distributed. At Kapiti Island Nature Tours, regenerative tourism is understood as an ongoing responsibility grounded in whakapapa, place-based relationships, and intergenerational care. This form of regeneration is inherently slow, relational, and resource intensive, requiring long-term commitments that cannot be easily paused or reversed.

A key insight from this case is that regenerative tourism cannot be delivered through individual enterprise effort alone. The expectation that operators will simultaneously restore ecosystems, sustain cultural practice, maintain financial viability, and absorb policy uncertainty places a disproportionate burden on those already acting responsibly. This burden is intensified by a mismatch between the long-term, often irreversible investments required for Kaupapa-based regeneration and the short-term, project-based policy, funding, and evaluation cycles that currently dominate the tourism system. In the absence of consistent sector leadership, aligned policy signals, and mechanisms for shared risk and accountability, regenerative tourism risks becoming an aspirational label rather than a collective practice.

For operators, this case underscores the importance of resisting volume-led growth models and designing experiences around depth, learning, and accountability to place. For policymakers, it raises more challenging questions: how regulatory frameworks, strategic investments, and measurable indicators might be reoriented to support long-term stewardship rather than short-term outputs, and how leadership can shift from promoting “best practice examples” to enabling coordinated, system-wide action. Without this shift, regenerative tourism is likely to remain fragmented, uneven, and carried by a small number of values-driven enterprises rather than embedded across the sector.

PHOTOS: KAPITI ISLAND NATURE TOURS

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CASE STUDY 4

TE ARAROA TRAIL

Te Araroa is one of the world's most diverse long-distance walking trails, extending approximately 3,000 kilometres from Te Rerenga Wairua at the northern tip of Aotearoa New Zealand to Motupōhue in the south[88]. Each year, around 2,000 walkers complete the full trail in a single continuous journey, while many more walk sections over time as part of a lifelong outdoor experience. Te Araroa is positioned to become the world's first regenerative through-hike and is managed by Te Araroa Trust. Although the Trust does not own the land crossed by the trail, it plays a central coordination role by facilitating access agreements with landowners, working in partnership with government agencies and local authorities, and supporting an extensive network of volunteers and regional partners.

Guiding philosophies and responsibilities

Te Araroa is guided by a regenerative trail philosophy articulated through the Te Araroa Whakahou strategy[89], which defines the trail as a journey of regeneration and connection to te taiao (the natural world), grounded in collaboration, partnership and shared stewardship. This philosophy reframes Te Araroa as a network of conservation corridors rather than simply a linear pathway. In this context, regeneration goes beyond minimising environmental harm and seeks to actively contribute to ecological health, cultural connection, community wellbeing and local economic resilience along the trail corridor.

A central principle of this approach is that access to Te Araroa is conditional, relational and shared. The trail exists through ongoing consent rather than ownership, acknowledging that it crosses land held by iwi, private landowners, local authorities and public agencies. Walking access is therefore treated as a privilege grounded in trust, reciprocity and respect, rather than an automatic transactional right.

Under Whakahou, responsibility for Te Araroa is distributed across multiple actors. Te Araroa Trust provides coordination, stewardship and long-term direction, positioning itself as a facilitator of regeneration rather than a traditional asset manager. Mana whenua, Crown agencies, private landowners and local communities retain authority over their land and play a central role in shaping how the trail operates through their rohe, with Whakahou emphasising partnership-based engagement grounded in local aspirations, values and stories. Trail users are also assigned an active stewardship role, reframed not only as visitors but as participants in regeneration, expected to act responsibly, support local communities, and contribute to environmental, social and wellbeing outcomes along the trail.

Practices and ways of working

Under the Whakahou programme, Te Araroa's regenerative philosophy is translated into practice through an integrated set of partnerships, funding mechanisms and on-the-ground initiatives that embed regeneration into trail governance, investment decisions and day-to-day operations[90].

A core focus is strengthening relationships with iwi, hapū and whānau along the trail route. Engagement is framed as ongoing partnership rather than transactional consultation, recognising mana whenua as long-term partners in shaping how the trail operates through their rohe (tribal territory) and how regenerative outcomes are defined and delivered.

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[88] Te Araroa. (2021). *About Te Araroa*. https://www.teararoa.org.nz/about-te-araroa/.
[89] Te Araroa. (2024). *Whakahou strategy (2024-2026)*.
https://www.teararoa.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Te-Araroa-Whakahou-Strategy-Full.pdf.
[90] Te Araroa. (2024). *Regenerative Trail*. https://www.teararoa.org.nz/regenerative-trail/.

To support tangible environmental outcomes, Te Araroa Trust has established partnerships with iwi and conservation organisations along the trail corridor and embedded a dedicated funding mechanism within walker and supporter registrations. Walkers are encouraged to register online for the trail, typically once for the season or for their through-hike, with a portion of the registration fee allocated to regenerative initiatives. Each registration includes a $10 contribution toward nature regeneration, directly linking trail participation with ecological restoration. In the first year of Whakahou, this has supported native planting, biodiversity enhancement and predator control initiatives delivered with iwi organisations, conservation groups and local environmental trusts.

Whakahou also pilots opportunities for walkers to actively engage in regeneration as part of their journey. Volunteer planting days, conservation learning opportunities and community-led stewardship activities are promoted through the Te Araroa website, registration communications, trail updates and partnerships with local host communities. By integrating these opportunities into pre-walk information and on-trail communications including story panels and regional coordination networks, walkers are encouraged to participate in regeneration activities alongside their journey. These initiatives aim to move beyond low-impact use and foster participatory care for te taiao.

Education and behaviour change are supported through the development of story panels along the trail, while funding is being sought to undertake a trail capacity assessment to better understand sustainable walker numbers.

Trail development and maintenance are guided by Sustainable Trail Management Principles[91] that embed environmental considerations into planning, construction and procurement. These principles aim to improve trail quality while reducing environmental impact and supporting local supply chains, ensuring that infrastructure decisions align with broader regenerative objectives.

Education and behaviour change are supported through the development of story panels along the trail, while funding is being sought to undertake a trail capacity assessment to better understand sustainable walker numbers. Governance and accountability are strengthened through Whakahou advisors across key impact areas and the development of measures to track progress toward regenerative outcomes.

Indicators of progress and accountability

Progress under Whakahou is supported by an Intervention Logic Model (ILM) approach that defines desired outcomes across five interconnected impact areas (social, environmental, infrastructure, economic and wellbeing) and identifies measurable indicators for short-, medium- and long-term progress[92]. Developing and tracking these measures enables transparent accountability and supports evidence-based decision-making.

[91] Te Araroa. (2024). Sustainable Trail Management Practice Principles. https://www.teararoa.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Sustainable-Trail-Management-Practice-Principles-Draft-V2.pdf.
[92] Te Araroa. (2024). *Te Araroa Whakahou – Regenerative Trail Outcomes*. https://www.teararoa.org.nz/te-araroa-whakahou-regenerative-trail-outcomes/.

In the social and cultural domain, indicators focus on the strength and continuity of relationships with iwi, hapū and whānau, the co-development of story panels and educational resources, and levels of community participation in trail-related activities. Insights from the Te Araroa Walker Survey[93] complement these indicators by capturing walker understanding of local values, cultural connection and perceptions of respectful trail use.

Environmental indicators track participation in native planting, predator control and other biodiversity initiatives, alongside the growth of partnerships delivering restoration outcomes. Whakahou: Year 1 Progress Report[94] provides baseline data to assess changes over time, including reductions in weed pressure, improved habitat condition and increased involvement in regenerative actions by walkers and communities.

In the infrastructure domain, accountability is supported through monitoring the adoption of Sustainable Trail Management Principles[4]. This includes tracking the use of locally sourced and low-emission materials, reductions in chemical spraying, and the integration of nature-based solutions that lower long-term maintenance needs and enhance ecological outcomes.

Economic indicators focus on engagement with local businesses and contractors, recognition of trail partners and the flow of registration funding into regeneration projects that support local economies. Wellbeing indicators, informed primarily by walker survey data, assess self-reported wellbeing outcomes, satisfaction with the walking experience and perceptions of safety and care along the trail.

Reflections and shared insights

This case highlights that regenerative outcomes can be pursued through governance models that differ substantially from enterprise-led tourism initiatives. While Te Araroa Trust, like some operators, relies partly on visitor contributions to fund regenerative activities, it operates as a multi-actor trail system rather than a single tourism business. This creates greater complexity in coordination and delivery, but also introduces multiple forms of accountability and balance.

Because Te Araroa involves iwi, landowners, local communities, volunteers, government agencies and walkers, regenerative priorities and outcomes are shaped through negotiation rather than managerial control. This diversity can add complexity and slow decision-making, yet it also provides checks and balances that reduce reliance on a single organisational vision and allow ecological, cultural and social considerations to be weighed alongside visitor use.

For policy makers, the key reflection is how existing policy tools align with this type of governance. Short-term, project-based funding and narrow performance indicators sit uneasily with systems that depend on long-term relationships, ongoing consent and shared responsibility. There is scope to better support such initiatives through longer funding horizons, cross-agency coordination, and evaluation frameworks that recognise relational and place-based outcomes alongside quantitative measures.

For industry stakeholders, the case suggests that regenerative tourism need not be limited to enterprise-level models. Participating in shared systems such as long-distance walking and cycling trail networks can distribute responsibility, diversify accountability and create collective pathways

[93] Te Araroa. (2025). *Te Araroa Walker Survey*. https://www.teararoa.org.nz/ta-walker-survey/.
[94] Te Araroa. (2025). *Whakahou: Year 1 Progress Report*. https://www.teararoa.org.nz/regenerative-trail/whakahou-year-1/#programme.

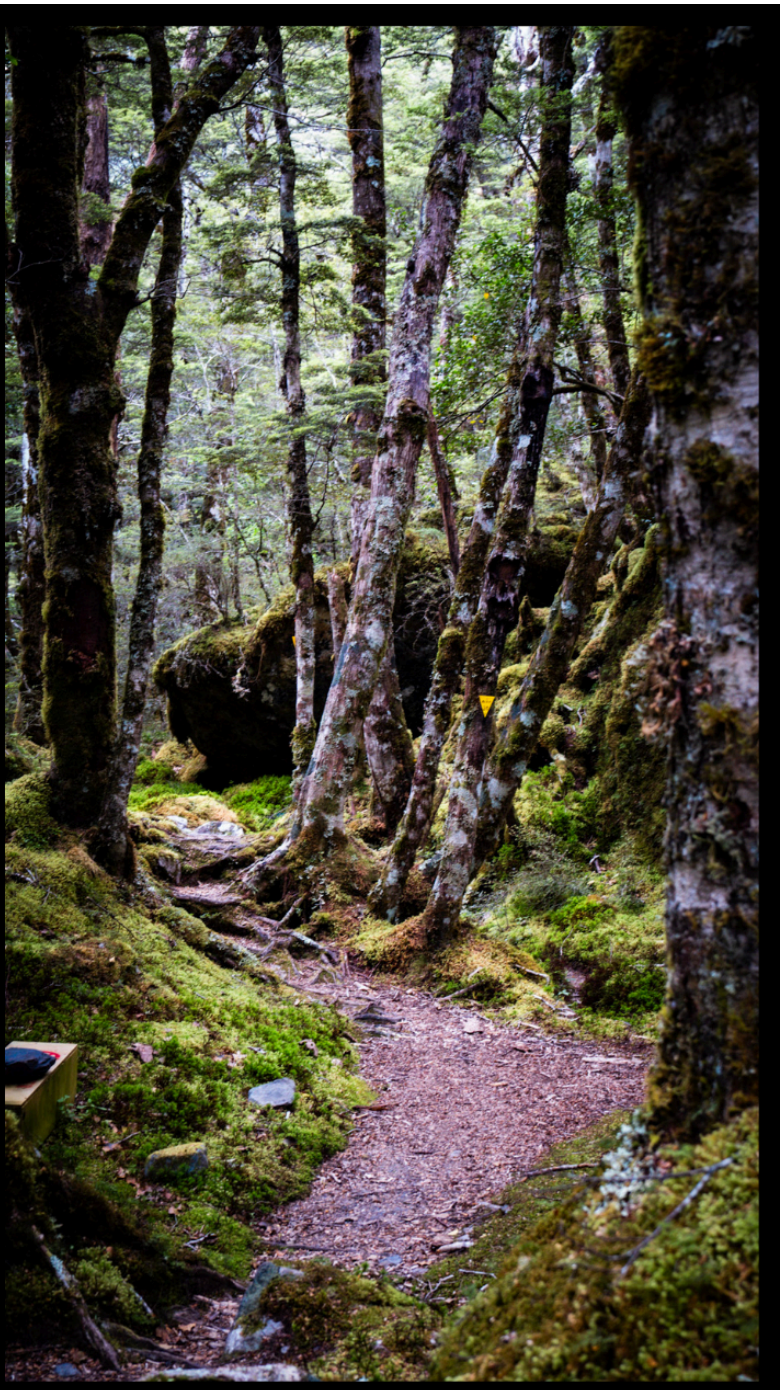
for regeneration that extend beyond individual business operators.

Table 3 combines a typological lens with a multidimensional outcome framework to illustrate how regenerative tourism is operationalised across these four distinct initiatives in Aotearoa. The cases differ in governance structure, ecological context, and cultural orientation, yet each generates measurable outcomes across ecological, social, economic, infrastructural, and wellbeing domains. These findings challenge the notion that regeneration is too abstract to evaluate and demonstrate that local actors are already enacting diverse indicator logics grounded in place, values, and relationships.

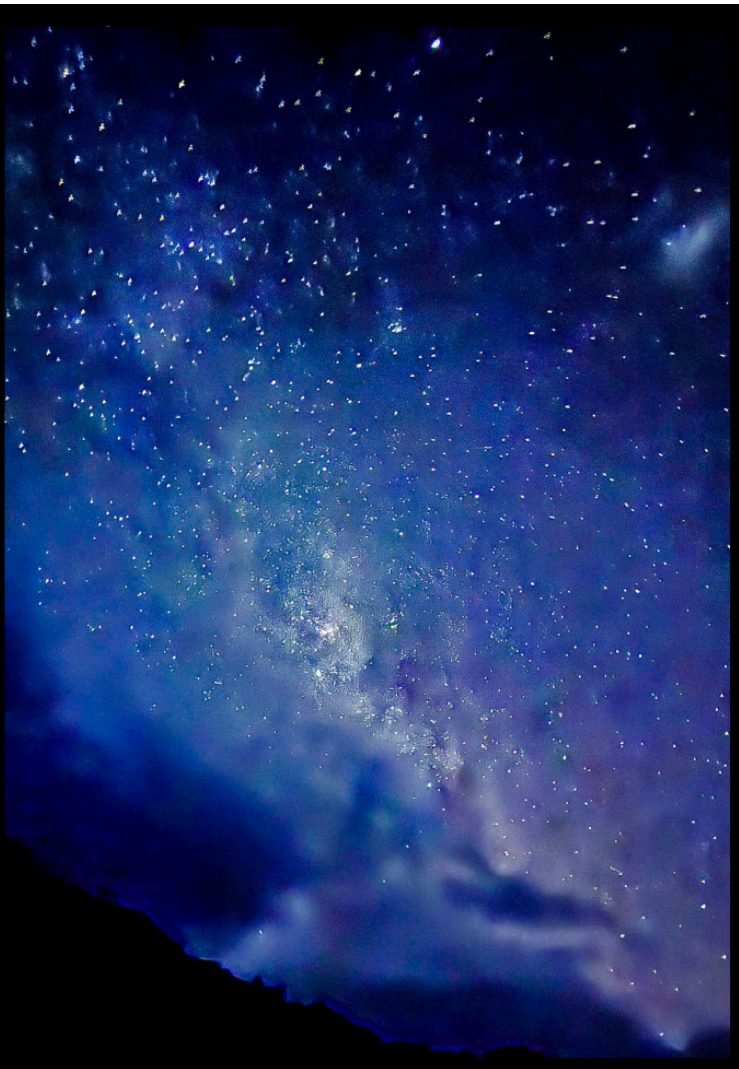
These four local initiatives offer diverse yet complementary models for how regenerative tourism outcomes can be meaningfully measured at the local level. Each operates within a distinct governance structure, biocultural context, and tourism scale, yet all actively translate regenerative aspirations into practice through specific, monitorable actions and context-responsive indicators.

Together, these four cases disrupt the idea that regenerative tourism is too abstract to evaluate. Rather, they demonstrate that regeneration becomes measurable when indicators are aligned with local values, aspirations, and governance arrangements. In each case, measurement logic is shaped by worldview: scientific monitoring in Rotorua Canopy Tours, relational reciprocity in Kohutapu Lodge, ecological sovereignty in Kapiti Island, and distributed cultural infrastructure in Te Araroa.

Across all cases, tangible outcomes (e.g., number of trees planted, predator counts, visitor numbers) are balanced with relational indicators (e.g., intergenerational knowledge sharing, community wellbeing, sense of place, perceived sense of connection). These initiatives show that locally defined outcomes may be more culturally legitimate, socially embedded, and ecologically nuanced than any top-down metric system. Rather than resisting measurement, they suggest that regeneration is best evaluated through plural, grounded, and participatory frameworks.



PHOTOS: TE ARAROA TRAIL (Photographer: Jeffry Leonard)



PHOTOS: TE ARAROA TRAIL (Photographer: Jeffry Leonard)

PHOTOS: TE ARAROA TRAIL (Photographer: Jeffry Leonard)

Table 3: Localised Measurable Outcomes from Four Regenerative Tourism Case Studies in Aotearoa

Case	Governance Form	Impact Area	Key Actions	Measurement Logic	Indicative Indicators
Rotorua Canopy Tours	Private enterprise with formalised conservation partnership (Community Conservation Agreement; Canopy Conservation Trust)	Environment	Predator control; native forest restoration; ecological monitoring	Ecological response to sustained management; external accountability and governance alignment	Sustained pest reduction; trends in forest condition and biological response; species return; Community Conservation Agreement renewal; B Corp certification
		Social	Forest ecology interpretation; visitor education	Knowledge transmission and public transparency	Visitor feedback; media reporting of ecological change
		Infrastructure	Managed infrastructure placement and controlled visitor flow	Low-impact operational design	Access management practices; integration of conservation infrastructure
		Economic	Tourism revenue funds restoration through Trust	Revenue-conservation reinvestment model	Portion of tour fee allocated; year-round suppression sustained
		Wellbeing	Internal values framework; continuous improvement culture	Organisational capability and staff wellbeing	Staff development processes; regular value-based check-ins
Kohutapu Lodge and Tribal Tours	Whānau-owned Māori enterprise grounded in tribal authority and community reinvestment	Environment	Māra kai; whenua-based responsibility	Place-based stewardship embedded in daily practice	Continuity of māra kai initiatives
		Social	Rangatahi engagement; cultural transmission; community support	Intergenerational capability and relational accountability	Participation in youth pathways; community programme continuity
		Infrastructure	Visitor Promise digital learning system	Structural cultural protection through visitor pre-engagement	Completion and engagement metrics; visitor preparedness feedback; evidence of reduced pressure on frontline guides
		Economic	Revenue reinvested into employment, training, marae support	Collective benefit rather than profit maximisation	Employment created; resources directed to community initiatives
		Wellbeing	Practice-based reflection; kōrero; staff care	Relational and cultural accountability	Ongoing whānau dialogue; staff wellbeing signals; iterative adjustment

Kapiti Island Nature Tours	Whānau-led enterprise on Māori-owned land with iwi involvement	Environment	Predator-free maintenance; biosecurity vigilance; conservation participation	Ecological integrity maintained over time	Predator-free status; species recovery; biosecurity compliance
		Social	Kaupapa-based guiding; immersive te reo Māori tours	Cultural oversight through iwi involvement	Visitor cultural feedback; iwi mentorship
		Infrastructure	Depth-oriented, small-group experience design	Stewardship prioritised over volume growth	Smaller group formats; structured itineraries
		Economic	Governance aligned with iwi aspirations and sector standards	Accountability through external benchmarks	Qualmark; Sustainable Tourism Commitments; participation in conservation governance roles; species transfer involvement
		Wellbeing	Staff cultural training; internal engagement processes	Cultural confidence and staff capability	Participation in te reo/tikanga training; regular team review
Te Araroa Trail	Multi-actor trust-based governance (Te Araroa Trust; iwi; landowners; Crown agencies)	Environment	$10 regeneration levy; planting; biodiversity initiatives	ILM-based ecological tracking across trail corridor	Funds allocated to regeneration; planting participation; Whakahou progress data; ILM-defined short/medium/long-term outcome measures
		Social	Iwi partnerships; co-developed story panels; community participation	Partnership continuity and co-developed cultural infrastructure	Walker Survey data; co-developed resources
		Infrastructure	Sustainable Trail Management Principles	Compliance monitoring of low-impact trail practices	Adoption of low-emission materials; reduced chemical spraying
		Economic	Registration funding distributed to regeneration projects	Participatory funding mechanism	Registration revenue allocated; local contractor engagement
		Wellbeing	Walker surveys assessing connection, safety, and experience	Self-reported wellbeing measurement	Surveyed wellbeing outcomes; satisfaction and safety perceptions

Note: This table presents selected regenerative actions and indicative indicators from four Aotearoa New Zealand case studies. Indicators are locally defined and context-sensitive, emerging from practitioner values, cultural priorities, and ecological conditions. They are intended to illustrate how regenerative outcomes can be measured beyond standardised carbon or economic metrics, often combining relational, ecological, and wellbeing-based approaches.

4.3 Summary

This comparative analysis shows that although regenerative tourism is increasingly discussed in policy and industry settings, its implementation remains inconsistent and incomplete. Many initiatives speak to the promise of regeneration, yet few have developed the tools to evaluate what it means in practice or how it unfolds over time.

Timeframes are often ambitious and long-term, but most initiatives lack clear short- or medium-term milestones to guide learning and adaptation. The degree of participation also varies significantly. In only a small number of cases are Indigenous communities or local knowledge holders meaningfully involved in defining what counts as success or how outcomes are assessed.

The goals of regenerative tourism range widely, from restoring ecosystems to improving visitor experiences. However, few initiatives connect environmental, cultural, and social goals into a coherent system of evaluation. In contrast, the four initiatives examined in Aotearoa New Zealand demonstrate that it is both possible and practical to measure regenerative outcomes using locally meaningful indicators. These include not only ecological actions like predator control and native planting, but also cultural and relational practices such as storytelling, intergenerational hosting, and community food sharing. Together, these examples show that regeneration can be assessed through measures that reflect ecological health as well as cultural vitality and social care.

One of the most significant findings is that many existing measurement systems are not keeping pace with the broader ambitions of regenerative tourism. Where metrics exist, they often rely on older sustainability models that emphasise generic or quantitative outputs. What the Aotearoa cases offer instead is a different way of thinking about measurement, one that includes personal experience, community relationships, and emotional connection to place. These are not abstract ideals but emerging forms of knowledge that can support more grounded and inclusive ways of understanding success.

Ultimately, this analysis suggests that regeneration cannot be fully realised without rethinking how we define and evaluate progress. It is not only a matter of developing better indicators, but of changing who gets to decide what matters, how outcomes are understood, and what kinds of relationships are recognised as valuable. Building regenerative futures requires evaluation systems that are rigorous, context-sensitive, and responsive to the diverse ways in which people live with land, culture, and each other.

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