

The key to outdoor sector success

In a changing world, the competency of outdoors professionals matters more than ever. Immigration, increased urbanisation and an ageing population are all impacting on New Zealand's demographic make-up, and on New Zealanders' interest and tastes in the outdoor sector. By Gillian Wratt.

We are a nation of explorers. With New Zealand's spectacularly diverse scenery, it's no surprise that we enjoy the outdoors and the countless activities that go with it. And we're not the only ones.

Each year, thousands of people come to New Zealand seeking adventure and discovery. Our outdoor sector is an important contributor to tourism and the economy, as well as a pillar of our national identity.

Many of us who have grown up here take our natural environment and the outdoor activities associated with it for granted. But a thriving outdoors sector relies on a great deal more than breath-taking and varied landscapes. Where people are being guided and instructed, we need to ensure that the quality of the experiences on offer is high, so that those taking part are benefiting in ways that count: having fun, staying safe and learning from their experiences.

Enjoyment, safety and education are the key components of any successful outdoor activity. And the way to tick all three boxes is through people: outdoors professionals who are at the top of their game are a critical ingredient.

Our aim at the New Zealand Outdoor Instructors' Association (NZOIA) is to ensure high quality training, qualifications, assessment and registration for the nine outdoor disciplines we cover.

In a changing world, the competency of our outdoors professionals matters more than ever. Demand is shifting. Immigration, increased urbanisation and ageing are all impacting on



Chris Pudden



Matthew Bennett

New Zealand's demographic make-up, and on areas of interest and tastes in the outdoor sector.

Outdoor guides and instructors need to be able to accommodate and support people taking up all types of activities with greatly varying abilities.

With more people living in urban centres, and more newcomers, there are many people who lack the basic skills to make the most of the outdoors, to enjoy it safely.

Others may not share the traditional Kiwi outdoor values. Outdoor professionals have an essential role to play in educating, helping people access positive outdoor experiences, and preventing unnecessary injuries and deaths.

Enjoyable and safe experiences are critical for New Zealand's tourism brand, part of which includes a strong reputation for developing adventure activities.

The Government recently introduced the Adventure Activity Regulations, which require operators who provide adventure activities to undergo a safety audit and become registered.

Part of this process is the requirement to

have competent, appropriately trained, staff. Regulations requiring audited safety plans are of little use unless there are skilled outdoor professionals to guide participants to enjoy, be safe and develop self-sufficiency in the outdoors

Active participation in outdoor activities has social, health, cultural and economic benefits. NZOIA (www.nzoi.org.nz) provides an internationally recognised gold standard guide and instructor accreditation system.

Skilled outdoor professionals promote responsible enjoyment of the outdoors and provide a foundation for our worldwide reputation for safe outdoor adventure activities, as well as developing positive lifelong skills in young people and paving the way for future generations to grow up with a healthy understanding and respect for their natural environment. ■

Gillian Wratt is the chair of the New Zealand Outdoor Instructors Association. She is a former New Zealand white water kayaking representative, Antarctic expedition guide, and former head of New Zealand's Antarctic programme.