



For Immediate Release
01 September 2025

Collaboration at the Heart of BYATA 2025 - *Uniquely Placed for Success*

The 14th annual Backpacker, Youth and Adventure Tourism Association (BYATA) Conference broke new ground this year, as delegates gathered in Kaikōura for the first ever national conference in the coastal town. With snow-capped mountains behind the Sudima Hotel and the Pacific Ocean stretching endlessly in front, it was the perfect place to discuss the future of youth and adventure tourism, and to explore how the sector is *uniquely placed for success* in the years ahead.

From the outset, collaboration was the current running through every session, every conversation, and every announcement.

A conference like no other

The event opened with a warm pōwhiri, setting the tone for two days of connection and inspiration. Chair Haydn Marriner reminded delegates that youth and adventure tourism isn't a niche within the visitor economy, but "*the beating pulse*" that sustains regions, fills workforce gaps, and sparks global storytelling about Aotearoa.

Kaikōura itself quickly proved why it was the right host. As Lisa Bond from Destination Kaikōura spoke about the region's unique visitor offerings, a pod of dolphins began leaping offshore, clearly visible from the venue's windows. Delegates laughed, applauded, and reached for their phones to capture the sight. A reminder that in Kaikōura, nature is never just the backdrop.

Insights and inspiration

The sessions came thick and fast, delivering a clear message: the youth market is changing and the industry must change with it.

- Tourism NZ's Bjoern Spreitzer and TECNZ's Lynda Keene called for tighter alignment to keep New Zealand competitive on the global stage.
- Tourism Industry Association's Greg Thomas pushed for one clear, united voice when it comes to government advocacy.
- Travvia's Alisha Palin urged operators to "break the rules without breaking the brand", showing how bold, playful campaigns win with youth audiences hungry for authentic stories.
- TikTok's Maura Halpin described the platform as a cultural phenomenon, where "hidden gems" and unfiltered peer-to-peer content now inspire more trips than guidebooks ever did. Her advice: Don't overproduce "*recut, remix, reimagine*."
- Renee Goodsell and the Tomahawk team revealed how smart AI hacks can streamline everyday tasks, urging operators to see AI as a time-saving ally that grows business impact without adding to the workload.

- Brendan Chang and Ricky Du from Booking.com, brought a global lens: 45% of travellers are 25-44, hostels are the third-largest segment on their platform, and over half of bookings come via the app. Flexibility is still king, but sustainability is rising fast with 69% of travellers wanting to leave a place better than they found it.

Put together, the message was crystal clear: the future is mobile, visual, values-driven, and unapologetically authentic.

Inspiration at the heart

A highlight was the keynote address by Justine Schroder, founder of Mount Fyffe Distillery. A former midwife turned boutique gin maker, Schroder shared how she transformed her family's sheep and beef farm into a sustainable, small-batch distillery. Her award-winning gins now carry international recognition, with every bottle contributing \$3 back into local conservation and health causes.

Her story struck a chord with delegates. Just as youth tourism thrives on authenticity and local connection, Schroder's business succeeds because it is inseparable from the land and community it serves. Her message was clear: authenticity, sustainability, and storytelling aren't just values. They're competitive advantages.

Equally powerful was the session from Rebecca Annan, BYATA's outgoing General Manager. For the first time publicly, she shared her personal journey across family, sport, tourism, and marketing. From working with New Zealand Cricket, Netball NZ, and Gatorade in the UK, to businesses such as Stray Travel, Unleashed Travel, NZ Rugby, and BYATA itself. It was a vulnerable yet inspiring reflection on resilience, leadership, and a lifelong passion for the industry.

The emotion in the room was clear when Rebecca was presented with a pounamu toki, symbolising strength, and honoured with BYATA's first-ever lifetime membership. Her story underscored the legacy of leadership in youth tourism and the importance of recognising those who have helped shape its course.

Building strength together

Collaboration was also evident in announcements from BYATA. A new Memorandum of Understanding with Hospitality New Zealand and a pilot Rotorua Tourism Industry Partnership will give youth tourism a stronger voice.

The spirit of collaboration also extended to the event's sponsors, whose support made the Kaikōura gathering possible: One NZ, Destination Kaikōura, EcoZip, and Booking.com. Each played a role in ensuring the conference wasn't just a meeting of minds, but a celebration of the sector's resilience and future potential.

As one delegate put it: *"The best thing about BYATA is that no one here is competing, we're all paddling the same waka."*

Looking to the horizon

The conference concluded with the launch of the BYATA Strategy 2025–2029, setting a clear direction for the years ahead. With partnerships deepening and the sector united, youth tourism is *uniquely placed for success* and will remain at the heart of New Zealand's visitor economy.

Kaikōura proved more than just a stunning backdrop. It embodied the values of connection, resilience, and collaboration that define youth tourism. With dolphins (and even local seals) interrupting speeches, photos and keynotes grounded in authenticity, this year's conference will be remembered not just for its strategy, but for its sense of place.

That spirit of giving back was also reflected in BYATA's support for the local community. A total of \$750 was donated across three (3) Kaikōura charities, in recognition of the speakers who shared their time and insights, along with \$530 contributed to native tree planting. These initiatives, alongside the generous backing of sponsors, ensured the conference left a legacy in Kaikōura well beyond its two days of discussion.

As Marriner closed: *"We're not just steering through stormy waters, we're heading toward sunrise. Together, we're unstoppable."*

Looking ahead, BYATA confirmed the 2026 conference will be hosted in Tauranga.

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For more information, please contact:

Katie Taylor
General Manager
Backpacker Youth and Adventure Tourism Association (BYATA)
New Zealand
+64 21 130 7864

Backpacker Youth and Adventure Tourism Association - BYATA is a not-for-profit association acting as the independent voice of the backpacker and adventure tourism sector of New Zealand. With a growing member base of 130+ members nationwide, BYATA advocates on behalf of our members with relevant stakeholders including Tourism New Zealand, Immigration, Hospitality New Zealand, and more. BYATA empowers our members to make informed business decisions by sharing specific industry related data with our members. Visit [BYATA's website](#) for more information and follow us on [LinkedIn](#).