



Developing place-based, community-led Restorative Marine Tourism in Aotearoa New Zealand

Restorative Marine Tourism (RMT) is a type of tourism that combines fun and meaningful activities with efforts to heal and protect our ocean environments.

Restorative marine tourism:

- **contributes to the restoration and protection of marine ecosystems, enhancing biodiversity and ecosystem services.**
- **strengthens community cohesion and connectivity, providing opportunities for local empowerment and capacity building.**
- **supports sustainable tourism, creating economic opportunities aligned with environmental and social goals.**
- **preserves and promotes the cultural connections and knowledge of tangata whenua and other coastal communities.**

This document summarises a full guidance document that delves into the current state of RMT in Aotearoa, and identifies opportunities, strategies, and characteristics of successful approaches.

Restorative Marine Tourism supports a thriving blue economy

A focus on blue economy tourism should lead with place-based, community-led, and restoration-focused activity, as this approach is best placed to serve our economic, environmental, social, and cultural well-being outcomes now and into the future.

This approach is already being implemented in communities across Aotearoa and this emerging sector promises significant environmental, cultural, social, and economic benefits for Aotearoa New Zealand. The full guidance document has case studies that demonstrate this approach.



Research insights

We've summarised the 'raw' findings from our research that informed that guidance. They include:

- » **RMT can be and is being done successfully:** Numerous examples and our champion profiles, demonstrate successful integration of marine restoration with tourism, highlighting both progress and potential for Aotearoa New Zealand.
- » **RMT is a bottom-up practice:** Community involvement and leadership are crucial for the success of RMT. Initiatives thrive when they emerge organically from within the community and leverage local knowledge and participation.
- » **RMT produces multiple co-benefits:** RMT offers significant co-benefits, including, but not limited to, the restoration of marine ecosystems, strengthening of community connectivity, improved well-being for those participating, and enhanced added value for our visitor sector, blue economy, and regions.
- » **The moana comes first but it's the whole picture that counts:** Effective RMT initiatives adopt a holistic and integrated approach, recognising the interconnectedness of marine and terrestrial ecosystems and fostering deep relationships between people and the moana.

We also identified challenges. Some of the challenges we identified included funding limitations, regulatory and compliance issues, coordination among stakeholders, scalability and sustainability, and challenges with awareness and promotion.

Five core pillars form the basis of all RMT activity in Aotearoa, from small-scale owner-operator businesses to large-scale collaborations. All the initiatives we studied clearly aligned with these pillars.



Image: Pablo Heimplatz / Unsplash

Five pillars of Restorative Marine Tourism

These five pillars are essential to RMT in Aotearoa New Zealand, support our definition of RMT, and help assess whether an activity fits within the framework of RMT that's emerging in Aotearoa.

- 1. Place-based:** RMT is localised, nurturing the unique characteristics and culture of a place.
- 2. Community-led:** RMT starts from within a community, not imposed from outside.
- 3. Restorative:** RMT aims to enhance ocean health, actively participating in restoration.
- 4. Integrated:** RMT sees the ocean, people, and all living things as interconnected.
- 5. Relational:** RMT emphasises the deep relationships between people and the moana.

RMT and Destination Management

The Destination Management (DM) Guidelines produced by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) identifies three interdependent components that form the basis of an integrated Destination Management approach.

- **Visitor experience:** the destination's experience offering, including activities, attractions, supporting infrastructure, services and amenities
- **Marketing and promotion:** the destination's marketing and promotional activity, creating demand and enabling the destination to be competitive, productive and sustainable
- **Resource management:** the destination's strategy, policy and regulatory frameworks, Te Tiriti o Waitangi, organisational structures and the investments that support the destination

We've applied the five pillars of RMT to these destination management components below and you can find case studies in our full guidance document.



This summary is a snapshot of RMT and maps the pillars of RMT to Destination Management. Read the full report on the [Sustainable Seas Website](#) to find out more, including opportunities and champions and what it takes to activate RMT initiatives.

Visitor experience

- **Place-based:** Enhances local visitor experiences by connecting visitors with local people, local knowledge, and local environments.
- **Community-led:** Ensures visitor activities are designed and led by local communities and intended to serve and benefit local communities first.
- **Restorative:** Supports activity that protects and enhances the natural resources that form the basis of our visitor experience in Aotearoa.
- **Integrated:** Encourages visitor education, slower journeys, connections with locals, and experiences that build long-term connections to place.
- **Relational:** Fosters deep connections between visitors, locals and the place, enriching their experience and sense of long-term loyalty.

Marketing and promotion

- **Place-based:** Promotes the unique characteristics and narratives of place, leveraging our tourism brand that promotes our natural environment as a key drawcard for visitors.
- **Community-led:** Creates enriching community connections with visitors and creates local ambassadors to carry local stories and narratives.
- **Restorative:** Increases consumer understanding and demand for restoration by showcasing the potential for positive impact of tourism on marine restoration.
- **Integrated:** Communicates the holistic nature of experiences, integrating land, sea, and people as part of a cohesive story.
- **Relational:** Promotes deeper, enriching, and culturally centered experiences that visitors can have here whilst having a positive impact on the local environment rather than taking from it.

Resource management

- **Place-based:** Creates localised monitoring and citizen science opportunities within place, by both locals and visitors.
- **Community-led:** Empowers local communities to manage resources and initiatives themselves, not rely on external inputs.
- **Restorative:** Focuses on activities that actively restore and enhance marine ecosystems and the renewal of natural resources.
- **Integrated:** Adopts holistic management approaches that consider the entire ecosystem and the wellbeing of natural resources.
- **Relational:** Recognises and enhances the importance of cultural and spiritual relationships in resource management.

