

Queenstown leads tourism market

By JOHN EDENS in Alexandra - The Southland Times

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REMARKABLE: In Queenstown, hotel visitor nights – defined as one guest staying for one night – are up 18 percent.

Queenstown is leading New Zealand's tourism market with a massive 18 percent increase in hotel guest nights for the month of April.

Hoteliers said a burgeoning Australian market, a resurgence in conference bookings and easily accessible skifields were key drivers of the increase.

New Zealand-wide, guest nights were up 208,168 on April last year, a 13 percent increase. International visitor nights were up by 20 per cent and domestic visitor nights were up 1.8 percent.

Otago, Southland, Auckland and Canterbury were the only regions that contributed to the increase from April last year. Otago was up 30,000 guest nights, or 8 per cent, while Southland was up by 3000 guest nights, or 4 percent.

In Queenstown, hotel visitor nights – defined as one guest staying for one night – were up 18 percent.

Mercure Resort Queenstown general manager Paul Clark said demand for accommodation in the 148-room hotel was robust and it augured well for the winter season.

Many Australians booked early for a winter break, including repeat visitors impressed by the skifields, he said.

He said the business conference market was also recovering.

"We have a lot of return visitors. The Aussie market is fantastic," he said.

Novotel Queenstown Lakeside general manager Jim Moore said bookings at the 273-room hotel were increasing.

With more flights into the resort town, more holidaymakers needed accommodation, he said.

The Australian market was burgeoning but the European market was "delicate". Visitor numbers from India were increasing and there was potential to grow the China tourism market, he said.

The Rees Hotel and Apartments general manager Mark Rose said 70 percent of bookings for July and August were from Australian customers.

Many Aussies were repeat customers or first-time visitors and he expected winter business to increase by 20 percent on last year.

Mr Rose also said the UK market was struggling with unfavourable exchange rates but tourism operators remained "bullish."

Queenstown Hotel Association head John McIlwain said it was important to bear in mind Easter Weekend and the biennial Warbirds over Wanaka were in April, boosting visitor numbers.