



## COVERSHEET

<b>Minister</b>	Hon Louise Upston	<b>Portfolio</b>	Tourism and Hospitality
<b>Title of Cabinet paper</b>	Overseas Travel: Hon Louise Upston – April 2026	<b>Date to be published</b>	30 June 2026

### List of documents that have been proactively released

<b>Date</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Author</b>
January 2026	Proposed Overseas Travel: Hon Louise Upston – April 2026	Office of the Minister for Tourism and Hospitality
27 January 2026	Proposed Overseas Travel: Hon Louise Upston – April 2026 CAB-26-MIN-0006 Minute	Cabinet Office
May 2026	Report on Overseas Travel: Hon Louise Upston – April 2026	Office of the Minister for Tourism and Hospitality
18 May 2026	Report on Overseas Travel: Hon Louise Upston – April 2026 CAB-26-MIN-0167 Minute	Cabinet Office

### Information redacted

**YES**

Any information redacted in this document is redacted in accordance with MBIE's policy on Proactive Release and is labelled with the reason for redaction. This may include information that would be redacted if this information was requested under Official Information Act 1982. Where this is the case, the reasons for withholding information are listed below. Where information has been withheld, no public interest has been identified that would outweigh the reasons for withholding it.

Some information has been withheld for the reasons of commercial information and confidential advice to government.

## In Confidence

Office of the Minister for Tourism and Hospitality

Chair, Cabinet

### Report on Overseas Travel: Hon Louise Upston – April 2026

I recommend that Cabinet note this report on my travel to New York, Miami, and Los Angeles, United States of America (USA), from Sunday, 12 April to Sunday, 19 April 2026.

#### Report

- 1 The USA is New Zealand's second largest tourism export market, with around 380,000 visitor arrivals from the USA for the year ended February 2026. The purpose of this visit was to strengthen New Zealand's tourism profile and industry partnerships in the USA, focusing on high-value tourism segments including incentive travel, cruise tourism, and premium long-haul aviation and tourism offerings.
- 2 My engagements in the USA confirmed strong demand for New Zealand visitation across leisure, business and cruise markets, despite being a long-haul destination for the North American market. Stakeholders identified aviation connectivity, events and government/-industry collaboration as key enablers of future growth.

#### *New York*

- 3 New York is an important market for visitor arrivals to New Zealand. In the year ending December 2025, New York was New Zealand's fifth largest state for arrivals from the United States, with 19,200 (5 percent) of total visitor arrivals. New York is our second largest state for potential arrivals to New Zealand, with 10 percent of our Active Considerer<sup>1</sup> pool residing in the state.
- 4 In New York, I engaged with senior executives from incentive travel<sup>2</sup> at a roundtable event and met with group travel and aviation partners to assess demand conditions and growth opportunities in the USA market.
- 5 The incentive roundtable confirmed New Zealand is a highly sought-after incentive destination, with a robust number of direct flights to North America and value for money improving our competitiveness in recent years. I heard incentive programmes can centre on major events, indicating opportunities to better align New Zealand's major events offering with our incentive travel market. These insights will help to inform the events review work currently underway to ensure we can attract high-value visitors to major events in New Zealand.

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<sup>1</sup> Active considerers are people seriously considering visiting New Zealand for their next holiday.

<sup>2</sup> Incentive travel is an all-expenses-paid reward trip for high-performing employees and business partners.

- 6 I attended a trade breakfast with key Air New Zealand trade partners and participated in the launch of Air New Zealand's Skynest<sup>3</sup> product. Skynest generated strong media interest with more than 800 media and online items and over 8.7 billion impressions, reinforcing New Zealand's position as a premium long-haul destination. This response signals the Government's commitment to aviation connectivity in the current climate and its importance to New Zealand tourism.
- 7 Other business meetings with Boeing, GE Aerospace, Internova Travel Group, and media company Mindshare also reinforced strong relationships in the USA market and substantial interest in New Zealand's tourism offerings, as well as the central role of aviation connectivity in supporting growth.

#### *Miami – Seatrade Cruise Global*

- 8 Miami is known as the centre of global cruise operations, with around 75 percent of the global cruise market headquartered in Miami, and Port Miami welcoming over 8.5 million cruise visitors in 2025. In Miami, I attended the largest global cruise conference, Seatrade Cruise Global 2026, to promote New Zealand as a welcoming cruise destination.
- 9 I met with senior cruise line executives from the world's largest cruise companies, including Carnival Corporation, Royal Caribbean Group and Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings as well as smaller cruise lines with strong alignment to New Zealand's visitor and experience offerings. I also met with global cruise industry bodies and the Australian Cruise Association.
- 10 I received very positive feedback on the Government's efforts to ensure New Zealand is a welcoming destination for cruise, including our efforts to turn around the recent decline in cruise visitation to New Zealand. With cruise lines now looking towards deployment decisions for the 2028/29 season, I was pleased to hear there were no significant barriers to deploying cruise ships to New Zealand, assuming regional demand remains strong.
- 11 Cruise lines continue to focus on biofouling management and costs, but senior executives confirmed the new biofouling innovation from Port of Auckland is rebuilding confidence in the market, and that ongoing government and port-led engagement will continue to provide cruise lines with certainty. At the Government-industry Cruise Forum to be held next week on 26 May 2026, I will share these positive reflections and discuss how we can provide more certainty for cruise lines on costs and biofouling processes.
- 12 Discussions with the Australian Cruise Association and the Cruise Lines International Association highlighted the need for close trans-Tasman coordination, as most New Zealand cruise itineraries originate or terminate in Australian ports. Last week, on 11 May, I met virtually with Australia's Minister for Trade and Tourism, Hon Don Farrell, ahead of the Cruise Forum to begin a conversation on trans-Tasman cruise connectivity. I look forward to continuing this discussion with Minister Farrell over the coming months.

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<sup>3</sup> Innovative lie-flat beds allowing Economy and Premium Economy passengers to rest on long-haul flights.

## Los Angeles

- 13 In Los Angeles, I supported engagements with high-profile influencers and travel media to promote New Zealand as a welcoming, world-class destination. These included the Kiwi North media engagement that promoted North Island tourism and *A Taste of Aotearoa* – a joint Tourism New Zealand and Air New Zealand event showcasing New Zealand’s food and beverage offerings. Both events provided opportunities to promote the arrival of the MICHELIN Guide to New Zealand.
- 14 I also attended a roundtable jointly organised by Air New Zealand and Tourism New Zealand called *Competing for traveller attention in the Artificial Intelligence (AI) age*. At this roundtable, Google’s Chief Strategist, Neil Hoyne, provided insights on how the government and industry can collaborate to encourage tourism and hospitality businesses to better utilise AI tools.  
Confidential advice to Government
- 15 Meetings with the Professional Convention Management Association and the Los Angeles Tourism and Convention Board provided insights into emerging industry trends and longer-term opportunities to leverage major and business events. I also visited Culver City, the host city for the New Zealand Olympic team for the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games, to discuss collaboration opportunities in the lead-up to the Games. I will incorporate these learnings into the events review to ensure we continue to attract world-class events that create economic benefits for all of New Zealand.

## Proactive release

- 16 I intend to release this paper proactively (subject to any necessary redactions) on the Ministry for Business, Innovation and Employment’s website. Proactive release is subject to redaction as appropriate under the Official Information Act 1982.

## Recommendation

I recommend that Cabinet note this report.

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Louise Upston

Minister for Tourism and Hospitality