



Western Bay of Plenty International Strategy

2026 - 2028



Purpose

Te pai me te whai rawa o Tauranga Moana ki te ao.

To foster prosperity and showcase the splendour of Tauranga Moana to the world.



Goals

- Develop and strengthen international connections to attract the best people, talent and opportunities to Tauranga Moana.
 - Enrich the wellbeing of our people and communities through greater diversity, new ideas and a resilient economy.
 - Tell the stories of our people and organisations doing great work on the international stage.
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Principles

- The Western Bay of Plenty International Strategy recognises the mana whenua status of Tauranga Moana Iwi - Ngāi Te Rangī, Ngāti Ranginui, and Ngāti Pūkenga.
 - Strategy actions enhance the wellbeing of those who arrive in the Western Bay of Plenty sub-region as well as those who already live here.
 - A collaborative approach to strategy implementation helps ensure we make the most of limited resources and maximise community benefit.
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Relevant Strategies

- Western Bay of Plenty Welcoming Communities Plan
- Tauranga Moana 2050: Priority One Sustainable Economic Development strategy
- Te Hā Tāpoi: Tourism Bay of Plenty Destination Management strategy
- Creative Bay of Plenty Strategic Framework
- Toi Kai Rawa Strategic Plan
- Education Tauranga Strategic Plan

Context

The global economy in the mid-2020s is navigating a complex and rapidly evolving landscape shaped by both lingering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and emerging geopolitical tensions. In the wake of the pandemic, economies around the world have seen a gradual recovery marked by the resurgence of cross-border movement of people and skills.

At the same time, the post-COVID world has seen a marked shift away from the liberal multilateralism that once defined globalisation. Protectionist policies have gained momentum, with major trading partners turning to tariffs, subsidies, and domestic preference laws to shield key industries.

This economic fragmentation is compounded by rising global conflicts and geopolitical rivalries, notably involving major powers and regional tensions, which have disrupted supply chains, increased energy insecurity, and added volatility to global markets. Together, these trends reflect a global economy at a crossroads: one where the free flow of talent and innovation remains crucial, yet where national interests, strategic autonomy, and regionalism are reshaping the rules of global engagement.

New Zealand is positioning itself as a resilient and attractive destination for high-value tourism and investment, whilst targeting innovation-led export growth in sectors like advanced technology, infrastructure, renewable energy, and international education.



Tauranga and the Western Bay of Plenty represent one of the strongest opportunities for sustainable economic growth in New Zealand.

Our location in the Golden Triangle, good climate, and the country's largest port make us an attractive destination for investment, businesses and people. Growth in our area has been rapid in the past few decades. GDP has increased 148% since the year 2000, compared to a New Zealand increase of 87%. In this region, jobs in the economy have grown by 94% (55% for New Zealand), and business units have grown by 85% (60% for New Zealand). The region's population has increased by 77%, double the national rate of 38% in the same period.

The Port of Tauranga enables over 50% of New Zealand's export trade and contributes to the national agenda for doubling export revenue and improving productivity. The region's future growth prospects are equally significant. Growth expectations for kiwifruit are very strong, with New Zealand production expected to double in the next 10-year period. Growing innovative industries, such as aquaculture, will allow increased economic diversity and develop new export streams. International tourism is also expected to grow significantly, with the region currently experiencing a 20% increase in international visitor spend year on year. The region's population is expected to increase in line with forecasts for the upper North Island and will be supported by strong job creation.

This Western Bay of Plenty International strategy helps enable regional prosperity and community benefit by supporting a collaborative approach to international relations amongst local agencies and civic partners.



Strategic Actions

Strategic actions are based around three themes:

1 Trade & Investment Attraction

The sub-region aims to attract investment and skills that support high-value job creation, grow the export economy and deliver the infrastructure enabling future growth.

Key Actions:

- Negotiate a successful City & Regional Deal (Lead: TCC/ WBOPDC/P1)
- Increase the region's profile and reputation as a destination for investment (Lead: P1)
- Enable export and tourism growth by supporting capability, developing talent and facilitating academic exchange and international research collaboration (Lead: Tourism BOP, P1, EMA, University of Waikato)
- Identify opportunities to connect international students with local businesses (Lead: Education Tauranga, P1, Tourism Bay of Plenty)
- Identify opportunities to facilitate cultural exchange through leveraging arts and culture networks (Lead: Creative BOP)

2 Tourism, Talent and Sport Attraction

Attracting high-value tourism and international sporting events improves local prosperity. In addition, the sub-region needs to address long-term skills shortages by attracting and retaining skilled migrants and international students. Key industries such as horticulture, tourism and aged care also rely on temporary flows of migrant workers.

Key Actions:

- Attract high-value visitors to grow visitor spend (Lead: Tourism BOP)
- Attract international sports events and competitors (Lead: TCC)
- Increase the region's tourism product offering, including hotel accommodation (Lead: Tourism BOP)
- Attract targeted skills to meet local business/industry needs (Lead: P1)
- Build Tauranga's reputation as a quality study destination to grow the value of international education (Lead: Education Tauranga)
- Develop a range of distinctive University programmes targeted at international students (Lead: University of Waikato)

3 International relations and city partnerships

Maintaining positive international relationships, including formal and informal relations with overseas jurisdictions can offer valuable opportunities for economic collaboration, youth and cultural exchange, and shared innovation between local governments. These relationships can help attract investment, promote tourism and trade, and strengthen global ties by exchanging knowledge, talent, and best practices.

City to city partnerships typically fall into the following categories:

- a) **Sister City & Friendly City arrangements – Tauranga City Council has three active international city partnerships:**
 - i) Sister City agreement with Yantai, China (established 1986).
 - ii) Sister City agreement with Hitachi, Japan (established 1987).
 - iii) Friendly City agreement with Ansan, South Korea (established 2014).
- b) **Industry sector partnerships – these involve city-to-city collaboration agreements in specific sectors. Current sector partnerships include:**
 - i) International education agreements between Education Tauranga and:
 - (1) Hitachi Education Board, Japan.
 - (2) Yantai Foreign Affairs, China.
 - (3) Yantai University, Waikato University and Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology (2019).
 - (4) Yantai rugby/education agreement with Bay of Plenty Rugby (2019).
 - (5) Ansan, South Korea.
 - (6) Tangshan Education Bureau, China (2019).
 - (7) Suzhou Industrial Park, China (2018).
- c) **Community partnerships – these are international relationships between community organisations. Current examples include:**
 - i) Tauranga Girl Guides and Hitachi Girl Scouts.
 - ii) NZ China Friendship Society (Tauranga) and Nanchung, Jiangxi Province, China.

Key Actions:

- Maintain and grow mutual value from existing sister and friendly city partnerships. (Lead: TCC/P1)
- Lead a delegation from Tauranga City to Yantai, China for the 40th Anniversary of Sister City relations in August 2026. (Lead: TCC/P1)
- Host a Sister City delegation from Hitachi, Japan in Tauranga in October 2026 (Lead: TCC/P1)
- Develop a plan on how best to ensure mana whenua are engaged in representing the sub-region internationally (Lead: Toi Kai Rawa/Creative BOP)
- Identify strategically aligned opportunities for additional international city relationships. (Lead: TCC/P1)
- Map existing international relationships held by strategy partners and identify collaborative opportunities (Lead: Strategy partners working group)
- Refresh the Welcoming Communities Plan with consideration for enabling economic development and engagement of migrant communities (Lead: TCC/WBOPDC)
- Actively support and participate in Global Cities NZ initiatives. (Lead: TCC/P1)
- Identify opportunities to grow international education and youth connections. (Lead: Education Tauranga/University of Waikato)
- Recruit new Assistant Language Teachers for Hitachi when required. (Lead: Education Tauranga)
- Develop a greater understanding amongst strategy partners of exploitation issues and preventative measures (Lead: MBIE)
- Give consideration to the benefits of a sub-regional Population strategy, and how this might be developed (Lead: TCC/WBOPDC/P1)



Monitoring and Reporting

Strategy partners will meet at least three times a year to monitor implementation and ensure international engagement is aligned and effectively leveraged.

An annual outcomes report will be completed covering:

- Relevant metrics and activities undertaken during the year
- Outcomes achieved
- Opportunities or recommendations for the next 12 months

Our Partners

The WBOP International Strategy is supported by the following partners.

- Tauranga City Council
- Western Bay of Plenty District Council
- Priority One
- Tourism Bay of Plenty
- Toi Kai Rawa
- Education Tauranga
- Creative Bay of Plenty
- University of Waikato
- MBIE
- EMA



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