

DEVELOPING A NEW DIPLOMA OF SPA HEALTH AND WELLNESS

1. BACKGROUND

The global wellness market is worth \$4.4 trillion – three times the value of the pharmaceutical industry. The market covers spas, anti-aging, weight loss, alternative therapies, wellness tourism, fitness and healthy eating. People are becoming more focused on taking proactive management of their health and wellbeing to avoid illness and disease, and the size of the market potential reflects that.

A small but important segment of this market is the thermal/mineral springs segment. The number of global thermal/mineral springs properties grew from 26,847 in 2013 to 34,057 in 2017 and earned \$56 billion in 2017. Those establishments that offer spa services account for a much greater share of industry revenues (66%) and also experienced higher revenue growth (7.4% average annual growth versus 0.5% for those without spa services, over 2015–2017) (All figures from the Global Wellness Institute).

New Zealand is well-placed to capitalise on the growth within this sector, based on our reputation as an outdoor, nature-based destination and our access to geothermal taonga. However, the supply of adequately trained and qualified staff is a barrier to growth for many businesses operating in this sector.

2. NEED IDENTIFIED

In the wake of the COVID outbreak and with the reopening of international borders, the thermal bathing, health and wellness sectors are facing significant growth as people seek rejuvenation and deeper connection through travel. There is also a renewed interest in holistic wellness for preventative care and as a means of responding to the effects of chronic conditions, such as Long COVID.

Businesses in these sectors have identified a significant shortage of suitably experienced and qualified workers. As international visitor numbers start to build to pre-COVID levels, the spa industry needs to be restaffed to welcome back visitors and provide the level of expertise and service that is expected at an international level.



New Zealand's wellness tourism industry supports the development of a Level 5/6 Diploma in Spa Health and Wellness. This qualification will support workers to gain the skills and knowledge to provide world-class experiences and perform a range of treatments and therapies safely and competently across the hot springs, health, wellness and spa industries.

Based on development plans for the next 5 years, staffing numbers at New Zealand's spas (representing a cross-section of domestic and international markets) are projected to increase considerably over the next 12-48 months – incorporating a mix of full and part time employees. This growth comes from both the expansion of existing spas and the opening of a new facility in Rotorua in 2023.

SIZE OF THE OPPORTUNITY

According to Colmar Brunton's DGIT tool, there are 8.2 million potential visits from New Zealanders who are interested in either a health or day spa, or bathing in hot pools. 334,000 of those are motivated to travel domestically to pursue wellness of mind, body or spirit. Overall, there are 1.36 million potential domestic visits overall motivated by the quest for wellness.

International visitors are forecasted to return to 86% of pre-COVID levels by YE May 2024 and almost 100% by YE May 2025 (although projected overall visitor spend will be at 57% and 97% respectively (TECNZ). Staff requirements will continue to grow to service the needs of this expanding market.

In addition, medical tourism is a high-value travel proposition that New Zealand is not currently competitive in. According to the Medical Tourism Association (MTA), every year around 14 million people globally travel to other countries for medical care. The global medical tourism market is projected to grow from \$13.98 billion in 2021 to \$53.51 billion in 2028.

In many European countries, Balneotherapy and Spa Therapy have a long tradition as an integral part of the health care system, recognised by state authorities. Within New Zealand, we need more specialised clinical training to support that recognition (and secure the associated healthcare funding).

CURRENT TRAINING OPTIONS

There are currently no fit-for-purpose accredited qualifications that are specifically tailored to the thermal bathing, health, and wellness industry. For example:

- Health, beauty, and personal therapy courses do not fully cover the holistic aspects of wellness
- Tourism related courses do not cover bathing and geothermal industries
- Sports and recreation courses do not cover geothermal waters and bathing requirements
- Existing OHS modules do not cover the specific health and safety aspects in the outdoor thermal bathing environments exposed to weather conditions throughout the year.

While New Zealand currently offers a Level 5 Certificate in Spa Therapies, this is very focused on the delivery of spa therapy services, with some applied knowledge of skin and body diseases and disorders in order to identify symptoms, provide information and advice, and refer clients to health practitioners in accordance with industry standards relating to scope of practice.

The Certificate doesn't incorporate workplace learning and also restricts the pathway to beauty therapists due to the entry criteria.

Due to the impacts of COVID-19 in the sector, this existing qualification has seen low usage since 2020 and is due a review to ensure that it is fit for purpose. NZQA have deferred the review of this qualification to 2024.

The New Zealand College of Massage is no longer operating since the pandemic, reducing the current training options and calibre of therapists even further.

3. THE OPPORTUNITY

In consultation with the thermal springs and spa wellness industry in New Zealand (including QE Health, Wai Ariki Hot Springs and Spa, Polynesian Spa, Hell's Gate, Hanmer Springs, Maruia Hot Springs, Te Aroha Hot Springs, Taupō Hot Springs) the sector has identified the opportunity to:

- Develop New Zealand's first fit-for-purpose accredited qualification that meets the needs and continued growth of the industry

- Deliver high-quality training to relieve workforce shortage pressures being felt across New Zealand
- Position Rotorua as the industry leader in New Zealand and recognised internationally for producing the highest skilled staff in the sector.

This project seeks to address the significant shortage of suitably experienced and qualified workers in the thermal bathing, health and wellness industry. Education involving the industry is a vital component of growth as the workforce shortage will restrict recovery to its full extent due to untrained or unavailable staff.

This will be the first specialised course in New Zealand to provide training incorporating the workplace and qualified, work-ready staff specifically for the Spa and Thermal Bathing industry. By creating a pathway from other disciplines, this course will draw training and employment back into the industry.

Specialised training provided by this course will support the expansion of the industry with a skilled workforce ready to deliver an outstanding level of care and professionalism. It will provide students/employees with clear career pathways and accessibility into and through the industry from entry-level to those looking to transfer skills from other disciplines, such as clinical health and sports training/therapy.

TRAINING GAPS TO FILL

Skills that are required by industry include:

- history of bathing, global bathing practices and traditions
- water science: hot springs, geothermal waters and associated healthcare benefits
- pillars of wellbeing - Te Whare Tapa Wha
- wellness, holistic, spa and aquatic therapies
- stress, recovery, relaxation, sleep and adaptation
- holistic care
- wellness programming – hot and cold contrast therapies, body clays, Hammam ritual, movement classes, nature immersions

- indigenous (Māori) cultural development and understanding with regards to wellness therapies and training to NZQA standard in therapies such as mirimiri and romiromi
- internal health or immune support
- water safety education and first aid, including dehydration, fainting, signs of bathers in distress, dry and wet rescues, contra-indications for thermal bathing, references to the Aquatic Facility guidelines
- building trust, empathy and creating emotive connections
- clinical knowledge of the impacts of massage and diagnostic basis for referrals to other therapists

This proposal is being developed in conjunction with a parallel project in Australia. Having an equivalent qualification that is recognised by both countries will support further workforce development in both directions and provide cross-border career paths.

4. TARGET AUDIENCE

In addition to wellness tourism employees and traditional spa therapists, this qualification would also be relevant to health care staff, adding to their knowledge around resilience and wellbeing for early stage primary care and preventative care, as well as support for ongoing conditions such as arthritis related conditions, long-COVID, chronic fatigue, pain management, musculo-skeletal acute and chronic conditions, certain neurological conditions i.e Guillain Barre Syndrome.

Other potential growth areas include:

- New opportunity for the geothermal industry
- Provide an indigenous and cultural workforce opportunity
- Provide an economic opportunity for iwi to access the public health dollar
- The new qualification will provide a bridge between registered health professionals, sports science and beauty qualifications
- Potential to build a trans-Tasman qualification. Development alongside Australia, enabling joined up approach to workforce development



While some of the former DHBs provided funding for pain management/rehab programmes at QE Health, Te Whatu Ora has signalled 'post-code' health service delivery has no place in the reformed health environment. This means that Te Whatu Ora and Te Aka Whai Ora will place a high priority on commissioning for equity of services and access.

WHY ROTORUA

Rotorua is well placed to champion the development of this qualification. In New Zealand, there is only one home of significant geothermal activity and 73% of New Zealanders and 47% of Australians associate geothermal activity with Rotorua. Spa and wellness is also well-embedded, with 47% of New Zealanders and 22% of Australians associating these experiences with the destination.

Rotorua has a long history of rehabilitative bathing, going back to the days of the Pink and White Terraces in the 1880s and in pre-European times when hot pools were seen as an integral part of Māori health practices. This strong history of wellness visitation and its influences from mātauranga Māori is an immense strength of the destination and there is significant opportunity in exploring traditional Māori health and wellbeing practices.

With the introduction of the new Wai Ariki Spa and the upgraded QE Health facility, it's important that the destination can take a leadership role in training world-class practitioners to staff these facilities.

Toi Ohomai currently delivers the existing Level 5 Certificate in Spa Therapies and is supportive of the development and future delivery of this new qualification.

This project provides the following opportunities for Rotorua:

- Establish Rotorua as a global leader in the rapidly expanding wellness tourism sector In support of the city's Destination Management Plan
- Position Rotorua as leaders in the spa and thermal bathing sector
- Position Rotorua as innovative leaders in specialised training
- Support expansion of the industry with a skilled workforce
- Support for recognition of Māori tikanga and its connection to wellbeing

- Support training for local urban and regional employment
- Showcase opportunities for investment in the geothermal market.

5. CONCLUSION

The Diploma of Health, Wellness and Thermal Bathing Therapies will be New Zealand's first industry standard course to deliver specialised, high-quality candidates for this emerging and rapidly expanding industry. This fit-for-purpose course will provide a formal, recognised and standardised qualification to enable employee knowledge assessment (e.g. hot/cold water therapies, safety, site management), portability of skills/qualifications, and industry bridging opportunities to staff from other disciplines (e.g. clinical health and sport science).

The spa and thermal bathing industry is a lucrative emerging sector of the visitor economy. General employment without specialised training would risk New Zealand's current opportunity to lead a quality offering. In order to support the growth of the industry, we require a trained workforce ready to take up the many employment opportunities and promote the therapeutic benefits in the spa and thermal bathing industry in Rotorua and New Zealand-wide. Relevant learning opportunities in a live and inspiring onsite training environment provided by this course will maximise learning and application while also increasing student engagement and retention.

The proposed project to develop a Spa, Wellness and Thermal Bathing qualification is the most suitable solution to the industry's future growth constraints as it provides:

- The only fit-for-purpose solution to support 'real world' industry productivity challenges, offering a springboard for innovation and growth of the emerging industry
- Original content and relevant standardised training to enable employers to verify and acknowledge the skills and knowledge for current/future employment opportunities
- A recognised qualification which builds capability within the industry and grows talent capacity, with the potential to attract international students to a unique a course offering



- Pathways into the industry for students/employees from complementary disciplines and other industries
- Developing commercial opportunities for Māori through incorporation of indigenous techniques within the qualification
- Partnership opportunities and workforce sharing between Rotorua and Victoria, Australia, where a similar qualification is under development.

Attached: Letters of support from:

- Toi Ohomai - Te Pūkenga, NZ Institute of Skills and Technology
- NZ Arthritis Foundation
- Guillain Barre Syndrome Association
- Federation of Primary Health Aotearoa