

Feature: New Zealand tourism suffering tougher, longer winter over COVID-19

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WELLINGTON, July 24 (Xinhua) -- Running a cozy home lodge at the lakeside of Wakatipu in Queenstown, New Zealand, Mrs. Cheung could enjoy the view of the snow-capped Mount Remarkable through the window.

Her four luxurious rooms were always fully booked during the ski season when skiers from all over the world swarmed in the town, but not many have come this year after the COVID-19 lockdown, even during the New Zealand school holidays. The winter of this southern hemisphere town seemed even colder than ever.

Jim Boulton, mayor of the Queenstown Lakes District, told Xinhua that the town was New Zealand's fastest growing economy during 2014 to 2019. It contributed 11 percent to the National Tourism GDP and had the lowest unemployment rate in 2019. It is estimated that 63 percent of jobs in the district were directly related to the tourism industry. Indirectly that number could rise to over 80 percent.

The closure of New Zealand's borders has had a devastating effect on many businesses. Boulton estimated pessimistically that without the return of international visitors, locals might face up to 7,900 job losses and more than 270 million New Zealand dollars in lost earnings given that the permanent residents in the district is only 40,000.

According to the Stats NZ, for the year that ended March 2019, tourism generated 16.2 billion dollars, or 5.8 percent of the country's GDP. The indirect value added from industries supporting tourism generated an additional 11.2 billion dollars, or 4.0 percent of GDP. International tourism expenditure was 17.8 billion dollars, and 229,566 people were directly employed in tourism, accounting for 8.4 percent of the workforce.

The New Zealand government has launched a domestic tourism campaign to mitigate the negative impact on tourism. However, not many people in the business think it could even possibly cover the gap of international expenditure.

Adrienne Young-Cooper, acting chair of Queenstown airport, said that hopefully the number of passengers could get back to around 900,000, 40 percent of the previous years in the next 12 months to Queenstown airport.

Tourists from Australia, China and the United States used to be the top three sources of Queenstown airport foreign passengers, she said, calling on the government to lift the border ban on passengers from countries that have similar COVID-19 tracing systems, quarantine measures and better control of the virus.

To promote local tourism, Boulton even made a Bungee Jump himself on the first day when New Zealand lifted the compulsory lockdown to tourism. During that time, he was also busy lobbying the government for extending wage subsidy to help local businesses remain open.

"We are working very hard to diversify our economy. We have an enormous number of proposals ranging from technology development to medical tourism and will continue this very important work," the district mayor said. "I would be very pleased to see measures developed that allowed for the safe arrival of international visitors supporting our economy in fields such as the

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Young-Cooper said it was crucial to "keep link alive" in the post-COVID era to the targeting customers, especially those who had had tourism experience in Queenstown and the South Island. She suggested contributing more attention to those digital apps and platforms on which the younger generation spend more time and consume more money.

Lisa Lee could not agree more on this point. Running tourism in New Zealand for more than 10 years, she is the chief executive manager of CYTS NZ, a big agency that mainly depends on tourists from China and Chinese communities.

She said the consumption behavior of the tourists has changed permanently after the pandemic. From last month, Lisa decided to change the business model thoroughly by doing online trading via the popular digital apps that Chinese younger consumers are used to.

"Tourists won't come back as long as the border closure remains. But trade will continue. Virtual touring on internet will possibly lead to online purchasing. Thanks for New Zealand's renowned scenery, revenue then pops up," Lee said.

"It is so important to a tourism agency at the moment. We don't have many choices to survive." Enditem

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