

# **Kōrero for Change**

**Advancing Accessibility in NZ**

**Tourism Industry**

**Wednesday 15 October 2025  
9am-12pm | Via Zoom**



# Introduction

Welcome to **Kōrero for Change | Tourism**, a webinar hosted by Access Matters Aotearoa Trust, with support from Whaikaha – Ministry of Disabled People, Spectrum Foundation, Foundation North, and the J R McKenzie Trust.

This event explores the role of the tourism industry in creating equity, access, and belonging for disabled people and those with access needs. Together, we'll engage in courageous conversations about accessibility in tourism, covering booking systems, service design, cultural safety, training, and investment.

With lived experience voices, industry leaders, and changemakers, we will examine both the opportunities and challenges of building a tourism industry where everyone can participate and no one is left behind.

An accessible and inclusive tourism industry recognises the rights, dignity, and autonomy of all people, including disabled people, tāngata whaikaha Māori, whānau hauā, tagata sa'ilimalo, and āiga-tele, d/Deaf, and neurodivergent travellers. Tourism is about belonging, participation, and discovery, and it should be for everyone. Yet across Aotearoa, barriers continue to limit choice, exclude whānau, and restrict full participation.

True accessibility in tourism goes beyond compliance. It requires designing experiences, environments, and services in partnership with disabled communities. It means ensuring people can move, navigate, and engage in diverse ways, supported by accessible transport, inclusive accommodation, adaptive equipment, reliable information, and culturally responsive practices that uphold mana and dignity.

We are proud to feature speakers, panellists, and moderators who will challenge assumptions; share lived experience and drive systemic change toward a more inclusive tourism industry in Aotearoa New Zealand.



**Access  
Matters**  
Aotearoa

**SPECTRUM  
FOUNDATION**  
Ahākoa ko wai te tangata, ahākoa nō hea

**Whaikaha**  
Ministry of Disabled People

**FOUNDATION  
NORTH**  
Pūtea Hāpai Oranga  
Funding to Enhance Lives

**J R McKenzie  
Trust**

# Programme

9 am	<b>Introduction to 'Kōrero for Change' on Tourism, Karakia Timatanga, and Housekeeping</b> <b>Sam Fitness</b>   <i>Disability Advocate</i>
------	---

## What is ableism? Examples of ableism in the Tourism Industry

9.05 am

**Kimberly Graham** | *Accessible Travel Writer, Creator of Grab Your Wheels, Let's Travel*

9.11 am	<b>Speaker on Legislation</b> <b>Melissa James</b>   <i>Founder/Leading Advocate for Accessible Travel, Inclusive Tourism Australia</i>
9.18 am	<b>PANEL ONE + Q&amp;A   The Deciders</b>

- **Lisa Bond** | *Destination Manager, Destination Kaikōura Regional Tourism Organisation*
- **Sudesh Jhunjhnuwala ONZM** | *CEO, Sudima Hotels*
- **Bruce Bassett** | *Chief Advisor, Tourism Industry Aotearoa (TIA)*

**MODERATOR: Teina Boyd** | *Accessibility Advisor for Tauranga City Council*

09.55 am	<b>PANEL TWO + Q&amp;A   The Thinkers</b>
----------	---

- **Dr Brielle Gillovic** | *Senior Lecturer, School of Hospitality and Tourism, Auckland University of Technology (AUT) Te Wānanga Aronui O Tāmaki Makau Rau*
- **Dr Susan Houge Mackenzie** | *Associate Professor, School of Business, Department of Tourism, University of Otago Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka*
- **Dr Eliza Raymond** | *Lecturer in Tourism Management, Programme Director, Wellington School of Business & Government, Te Herenga Waka Victoria University of Wellington*

**MODERATOR: Monica Leach** | *Deaf Advocate, Educator, Director of SignWest, NZSL Board*

10.30 am	<b>BREAK TIME – 10 minutes</b>
10.40 am	<b>PANEL THREE + Q&amp;A   The Creators</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Scott Herschberger</b>   <i>CEO and Founder of Access Maps</i></li> <li>• <b>Olivia Dobbs</b>   <i>Marketing and Events Coordinator, Top 10 Holiday Parks</i></li> <li>• <b>Simon Alefosio-Tuck (Ngāti Raukawa)</b>   <i>Recreation Partnerships Advisor, Rotorua Lakes Council</i></li> </ul> <p><b>MODERATOR: Maria Stevens</b>   <i>Lead Accessible Formats Specialist at Blind and Low Vision Education Network New Zealand (BLENNZ Homai)</i></p>
11.19 am	<b>PANEL FOUR + Q&amp;A   The Doers</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Jeza Williams</b>   <i>Founder and CEO, Makingtrax Foundation</i></li> <li>• <b>Sandy Grant</b>   <i>Owner, Lead Holiday Planner and Tour Guide of Ability Adventures</i></li> <li>• <b>Margaret Hawkes</b>   <i>Managing Director of Freedom Mobility</i></li> </ul> <p><b>MODERATOR: Eamon Woods</b>   <i>Author of A Backpack, a Chair and a Beard</i></p>
11.50 am	<b>Guest Speaker</b> <b>Hon. Louise Upston</b>   <i>Minister of Tourism and Hospitality</i>
11.56 am	Closing Remarks and Karakia Whakamutunga   <b>Amanda Lowry MC</b>
12 pm	<b>Webinar Ends</b>

# Biographies

## Master of Ceremonies

### **Sam Fitness** | *Disability Advocate*



Sam is a passionate advocate for accessible tourism, with a unique perspective shaped by his own experiences as a C5 tetraplegic, full-time wheelchair user. His love for travel has taken him from local trips across New Zealand to international adventures, often with his competitive wheelchair rugby team, where he plays for the both the Bay of Plenty Steamrollers and New Zealand Development team.

Beyond his personal pursuits, Sam is a dedicated voice for inclusion. He completed a resource planning degree at Massey University and is actively working towards a career where he can help create more accessible spaces for everyone. Sam also brings his valuable insights to the Office of the Ombudsman's Disability Advisory Panel, a role in which he provides a crucial youth perspective on identifying, deconstructing and confronting barriers that prevent disabled people from participating fully in society. Sam has a deep belief that travel and sport can significantly expand people's lives. As a last-minute stand in MC, for this Kōrero for Change webinar, he is committed to breaking down barriers and opening up the world for all.

## Speakers

### **Hon. Louise Upston** | *Minister for Tourism and Hospitality*



Hon Louise Upston is the Minister for the Community and Voluntary Sector, Minister for Disability Issues, Minister for Social Development and Employment, Minister for Tourism and Hospitality, Minister for Child Poverty Reduction and Deputy Leader of the House. She has served as the MP for Taupō since the 2008 election. Louise held several Ministerial roles in the Fifth National Government, including the portfolios of Corrections, Education, Land Information, Local Government, Women, and Tertiary Education Skills, and Employment. She also served as Government Chief Whip.

Prior to entering Parliament in 2008, Louise was self-employed as a project management consultant. She also held directorships in a number of trusts and companies involved in property, tourism, management, and consulting. Louise holds an MBA from Waikato University. Louise lives in Karāpiro, south of Cambridge, with her partner Hamish and her children.

## **Kimberly Graham** | *Accessible Travel Writer, Creator of Grab Your Wheels, Let's Travel*



Kimberly Graham is the creator of Grab Your Wheels, Let's Travel, a resource dedicated to showcasing accessible walks, accommodation, transport, and adaptive equipment across Aotearoa New Zealand. With over 20 years of lived experience as a parent and carer, she provides practical insights and reviews that support disabled people, tāngata whaikaha Māori, whānau hauā, and their families to explore New Zealand with confidence.

She is also the founder of the Accessible Travel Forum NZ, a nationwide community of nearly 2,000 members that connects individuals with lived experience, councils, and organisations committed to advancing accessible travel. Through this work, Kimberly has built strong domestic and international networks, advising on projects that improve accessibility across tourism, transport, recreation, and the built environment.

In addition to her writing and forum leadership, Kimberly is a strong advocate for inclusive design in playgrounds, cycleways, and recreational trails. She has contributed to national guidelines and accessibility reviews that inform policy and local practice. Kimberly serves on the Board of the Complex Care Group and is a trusted voice in initiatives led by Access Matters Aotearoa and Recreation Aotearoa. She brings a unique blend of professional expertise and lived experience, challenging ableism and promoting a more inclusive future for all.

## **Melissa James** | *Founder of Inclusive Tourism Australia*



Melissa James is the founder of Inclusive Tourism Australia and a leading advocate for accessible travel. Since 2012, she has championed inclusive tourism after personally experiencing the challenges faced by travelers with access needs. A qualified access consultant with over a decade of experience, Melissa empowers tourism operators to grow their businesses while improving access for people with disabilities.

Her work focuses on identifying barriers and implementing practical, cost-effective solutions. Through tailored strategies, mentoring, and training, she helps build industry capacity and ensures inclusive practices are embedded across tourism experiences. Melissa collaborates with all levels of government, councils, destination management organisations, and operators in accommodation, attractions, events, and experiences to create welcoming, accessible destinations. Her impact spans Australia and the Pacific Region, with clients including Gold Coast City Council, Destination Gold Coast, Bellingen Shire Council, Newcastle City Council, Sapphire Coast Tourism, Phillip Island Nature Parks, North Coast Destination Network, and QLD Parks and Wildlife Services. Internationally, she has partnered with IA-CEPA-Katalis and the Market Development Facility to advance inclusive tourism initiatives. Melissa's work is driven by a belief that accessible tourism is not just a social responsibility—it's a smart business strategy that benefits everyone.

# Panellists

## **Lisa Bond** | *Destination Manager, Destination Kaikōura*



With over 30 years of experience in the tourism industry, Lisa Bond is a passionate advocate for Kaikōura and its people, over this time proudly promoting the region both nationally and on the world stage. Her deep knowledge, genuine care for community, and unwavering commitment to sustainable tourism have helped shape Kaikōura's reputation as one of Aotearoa's most iconic coastal destinations.

From marine encounters to night sky experiences, Lisa has worked tirelessly to ensure the stories of Kaikōura are shared with authenticity and heart. Lisa is not only the Destination Manager for Destination Kaikōura but also a third term District Councillor. Her leadership through challenging times, including natural disasters and recovery phases, reflects her resilience and dedication to both place and purpose. Driven by a love of people and place, Lisa continues to lead with vision, helping Kaikōura thrive as a destination that inspires connection, care for nature, and unforgettable experiences.

## **Sudesh Jhunjhuwala ONZM** | *Founder and CEO, Sudima Hotels and Hind Management*



Sudesh Jhunjhuwala is the Founder and CEO of Sudima Hotels and Hind Management. He began his career in Hong Kong in the Sudima Group's watch business before moving to New Zealand in 2001 to manage the group's property portfolio. That same year, he purchased the group's first hotel, launching what has since become a nationwide hotel brand.

Under his leadership, Sudima Hotels has grown to eight properties across New Zealand. Sudesh is recognised for his values-driven approach, with a strong focus on sustainability, accessibility, and community impact. He is also a committed philanthropist and an advocate for diversity and inclusion. His group partners with organisations such as IHC Choices, Recreate NZ, and the Hidden Disability Sunflower Scheme, and is a founding member of Accessibility Tick.

In 2025, Sudesh was appointed an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to the hotel industry and philanthropy. He holds a BSc in Business Administration from the University of Southern California.

**Bruce Bassett** | *Chief Advisor, Strategy and Policy, Tourism Industry Aotearoa (TIA)*



Bruce Bassett is Chief Advisor, Strategy and Policy, at Tourism Industry Aotearoa (TIA), where he plays a pivotal role in shaping the future of New Zealand's tourism sector. With a background in government policy — especially in tourism — Bruce brings a wealth of experience to the role, combining his public sector knowledge with a deep understanding of industry-focused requirements and solutions.

At TIA, he has been instrumental in progressively updating the tourism industry strategy, currently Tourism 2050 – a Blueprint for Impact, and in developing and supporting the operation of TIA's Tourism Sustainability Commitment. Together, this work recognises that sustainability is no longer optional, but essential for balanced growth and long-term success in tourism.

With his wide experience, leadership, and commitment to the future well-being of tourism, Bruce is a voice for accessible, resilient, and responsible tourism in Aotearoa.

**Dr Brielle Gillovic** | *Senior Lecturer, School of Hospitality and Tourism, Auckland University of Technology (AUT), Te Wānanga Aronui O Tāmaki Makau Rau*



Dr Brielle Gillovic is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Hospitality and Tourism at Auckland University of Technology (AUT). As a critical tourism studies scholar, her research focuses on disability, accessibility, inclusion, and care in tourism. Her honours dissertation examined stakeholder perspectives on accessible tourism in New Zealand, and her doctoral thesis explored the care experience during travel for carers and adults with intellectual disabilities. She has since published peer-reviewed articles in leading tourism journals, presented at international conferences and on panels as an invited expert, secured contestable research funding, and co-authored a book, *The Disabled Tourist: Navigating an Ableist Tourism World*. She is currently co-authoring a second book, *Dementia and Tourism: Transforming Journeys of Memory and Inclusion*.

Brielle supervises postgraduate research students and co-leads AUT's Tourism For All NZ Research Group, which affirms the rights of people with disabilities and chronic or terminal illness to participate fully in tourism as an inclusive leisure activity. Working with the disability community and tourism industry stakeholders, the group advances accessibility, inclusion, and social change through research and collaboration.

**Dr Eliza Raymond** | *Lecturer in Tourism Management, Programme Director, Wellington School of Business and Government, Te Herenga Waka Victoria University of Wellington*



Eliza is a lecturer and the programme director for Tourism Management at Te Herenga Waka Victoria University of Wellington. Prior to joining academia, Eliza worked in the tourism industry for 15 years, including as the co-founder of a social enterprise focused on sustainable tourism.

Eliza's research interests centre around the relationship between tourism and global citizenship, in particular, how tourism can be used to advance cross-cultural understanding. As a qualitative researcher, she is also passionate about innovative research methods and how to include underrepresented voices in tourism research, such as children and young people. Eliza has also published work relating to various research projects with colleagues on sustainable tourism, visitor management, and volunteer tourism.

**Dr Susan Houge Mackenzie** | *Associate Professor, Ōtākou Whakaihū Waka, University of Otago School of Business, Department of Tourism*



Susan Houge Mackenzie is an Associate Professor at the University of Otago School of Business, Department of Tourism. Her research focuses on regenerative tourism, nature-based adventure, and psychological well-being, and developing translational applications for public and private tourism organisations. Susan's academic work is informed by an adventure guiding career in New Zealand, the US, and Chile, and a background in competitive football. Her applied work includes sport psychology for business, risk management for adventure tourism, and consulting with the US Forest Service, Ministry of Tourism, and History Channel. Susan has conducted research with a range of New Zealand regional tourism organisations and served on advisory boards for Tourism Central Otago, Dunedin City Council, the Adventure Tourism Research Association, and a range of tourism research journals. Her most recent translational project focuses on how regional tourism organisations can promote intergenerational community well-being and flourishing via tourism.

## **Scott Herschberger** | *CEO, and Founder of Access Maps*



Scott Herschberger is the CEO and founder of Access Maps, a New Zealand platform that makes critical accessibility information simple to find and reliable to use. He leads a team that works directly with councils, businesses, tourism operators, transport providers, and community groups around the country to publish verified, photo-backed details about step-free entrances, accessible toilets, parking, hearing loops, quiet spaces, staff training, and other critical features.

Scott built Access Maps to solve a basic problem: people with access needs shouldn't have to guess what an organisation or event offers. His work spans product design, partner training, and on-the-ground data collection—tools such as Access Pages and verified Access Overviews helps organisations share accurate information and keep it current. He's helped local governments and industry groups turn accessibility checks into usable public information, so people can plan with confidence.

Practical, evidence-led and user-focused, Scott's approach is about removing everyday barriers so more New Zealanders can connect with each other, attend events, use services and move around their communities with dignity and independence.

## **Olivia Dobbs** | *Marketing and Events Coordinator, Top 10 Holiday Parks*



Olivia Dobbs is the Marketing & Events Coordinator at TOP 10 Holiday Parks, where she leads initiatives to strengthen accessibility and inclusivity across the network. Between 2022–2024, she worked closely with Be Lab to develop a self-assessment tool that helps Parks identify their position in the access tourism space and highlight opportunities for improvement.

Her work has included facilitating workshops, guiding Owners, Managers, and staff to broaden their understanding of access tourism, and running working groups to ensure TOP 10's assessment model and social responsibility pillars continue to evolve with changing social and tourism landscapes. Olivia also oversees internal audits, including the Social Responsibility framework, which places strong emphasis on accessibility and inclusivity.

Passionate about creating welcoming and inclusive tourism experiences, Olivia approaches access tourism as an area of continuous learning and growth. She is committed to helping the TOP 10 group enhance outcomes for travellers and ensure their holiday experiences are enjoyable, equitable, and barrier-free.

**Simon Alefosio-Tuck** (*Ngāti Raukawa*) | *Recreation Partnerships Advisor, Rotorua Lakes Council*



Simon Alefosio-Tuck (Ngāti Raukawa) is a member of the Rotorua Lakes Council Active and Engaged Communities team. Working with the local community to give Rotorua better recreational outcomes. Part of his work includes working on behalf of the landowners and mana whenua of Tītikorangi and Whakarewarewa Forests to provide for recreation in the world-renowned Redwoods, famous for its mountain biking tracks.

Simon has extensive experience working in the outdoors across various roles, including adventure tourism, outdoor education, and with the Department of Conservation in multiple locations. This has given him broad experiences to help provide more opportunities for non-traditional outdoor users.

**Jeza Williams** | *Founder and CEO, Makingtrax Foundation*



Jeza Williams is the founder and director of the Makingtrax Foundation, the only independent organisation dedicated to Inclusion in Tourism and Adventure Travel. A hard-core adventurer, he has had a lifetime in the adventure tourism industry. Following a life-changing canyon accident in 2010, he shifted his focus to dedicating his work to developing Inclusive Tourism and Adaptive Adventure throughout Aotearoa. With over 30 years in the tourism industry, 12 of those dedicated to inclusive and accessible tourism, Jeza is recognised globally as an adaptive advisor and inclusive adventure consultant.

## **Sandy Grant** | *Owner, Lead Holiday Planner and Tour Guide of Ability Adventures*



Sandie Grant is the owner of Ability Adventures and brings more than 30 years of experience in healthcare and tourism to her work in accessible travel. A qualified Occupational Therapist, Sandie has spent over two decades specialising in wheelchair and seating therapy, giving her a deep understanding of the everyday challenges faced by many travellers with access needs. Her passion for travel began at 19, when she guided environmental tours during a summer break. Since then, she has combined her clinical expertise with her love of exploring Aotearoa New Zealand, initially working with Eco Tours and later supporting Ability Adventures before taking ownership of the business.

Originally from the South Island and now based in the Bay of Plenty, Sandie continues to explore the country with her family in their campervan, enjoying tramping, skiing, and discovering hidden gems.

Sandie's unique background means she doesn't just plan trips; she carefully designs experiences that meet the individual needs of her clients. With compassion and professionalism, she ensures every traveller can experience the freedom, beauty, and adventure of New Zealand with confidence and peace of mind.

## **Margaret Hawkes** | *Managing Director of Freedom Mobility*



Margaret Hawkes is the Managing Director of Freedom Mobility Ltd, based in Auckland, New Zealand. She leads an organisation committed to enabling mobility, independence and inclusion for people with disabilities, through disability-adapted vehicles, rentals, vehicle modifications, and accessible transport services.

Under Margaret's leadership, Freedom Mobility has increasingly embraced a strong tourism focus. The company seeks to make it easy for visitors with disabilities to explore New Zealand, offering modified vehicles for hire and providing a "Play and Stay" directory of accessible accommodation and attractions throughout the country. They assist travellers in selecting adaptations such as hand controls, left-foot accelerators, or configurations allowing wheelchairs as passengers – all so that touring NZ "is fun and easy."

Margaret has navigated Freedom Mobility through periods of high demand, supply chain disruption, and rising expectations, while maintaining high safety, reliability and customer care. She is known both for her operational oversight and her personal commitment to improving accessibility, ensuring that freedom of movement is matched by freedom to travel, explore and enjoy tourism opportunities.

# Moderators

## **Tania Boyd** | *Accessibility Advisor for Tauranga City Council*



Teina is an experienced accessibility advisor, disability rights advocate, and proud wheelchair user with over 10 years of lived experience. She currently serves as the Accessibility Advisor for Tauranga City Council, where she has spent the past two years leading work that challenges ableism and embeds accessibility across public policy, infrastructure, and community engagement.

Her mahi spans public, private, and charitable sectors, supporting organisations to move beyond compliance and toward genuinely inclusive practice. She also sits on the Board of Directors for the New Zealand Rugby Foundation, where she works alongside severely injured players and their whānau to ensure access to entitlements and provide ongoing peer-led support.

Skilled in community engagement and facilitation, Teina regularly designs and leads workshops that bring together diverse lived experiences. Drawing on her strong relationships across disabled communities, she helps organisations on their accessibility journeys, grounded in real-world perspectives and honest conversation.

Her passion is rooted in building a more accessible future for generations to come, especially within her own Māori culture. She believes that by challenging exclusion today, we pave the way for stronger, more inclusive futures for all our whānau.

With a focus on systems change, inclusive design, and culturally grounded leadership, she brings lived expertise, authenticity, and a collaborative approach that helps others think more critically and act more boldly for inclusion.

## **Monica Leach** | *Deaf Advocate. Educator, Director of SignWest, NZSL Board*



As a culturally Deaf person and fluent NZSL user, Monica Leach brings a unique perspective to tourism. Deaf and hard-of-hearing visitors often miss vital information, such as announcements delivered only by voice, which can significantly limit their experience.

By sharing lived experience, Monica helps tourism staff understand Deaf culture, improve communication, and make services more accessible. She offers practical strategies, including the use of visual displays, NZSL interpretation, and Deaf awareness training, to ensure everyone can fully participate.

Having Monica speak provides tourism teams with direct insight from a Deaf perspective, raising awareness, fostering inclusion, and enhancing the experience for all visitors. For Monica, accessibility is not just about compliance, it is about creating richer, more engaging experiences for everyone.

**Maria Stevens** | *Lead Accessible Formats Specialist at Blind and Low Vision Education Network New Zealand (BLENNZ Homai)*



Maria Stevens is a public speaker, excellent communicator, and trustworthy celebrant who creates personalised, meaningful ceremonies for blind and vision-impaired communities. Her focus is on meeting legal requirements while ensuring that each couple's unique needs are respected and celebrated. As a celebrant, Maria demonstrates empathy through confidential listening, open-mindedness, and strong writing skills, which together ensure that every ceremony fulfils both legal and personal expectations. She is reliable, flexible, and honoured to be part of life's most special moments, building a business around something she truly loves. Maria values genuine connections and trust, paying attention to every detail so that the little things are done right, making all the difference on a couple's big day.

Having travelled both nationally and internationally as a vision-impaired person, Maria understands first-hand the challenges of accessibility. She recalls being stranded in America when she should have been flying to Canada, unable to access crucial information on airport screens. To manage such barriers, she personally funds a Koru membership to ensure support when flights are delayed, or gates are changed. These lived experiences shape her commitment to inclusion, reliability, and care in everything she does.

**Eamon Wood** | *Author of 'A Backpack, a Chair and a Beard'*



Eamon Wood, 36, grew up in New Zealand and has lived with a spinal cord injury since a car accident at age four. Travel has been a constant in his life, whether representing New Zealand in wheelchair basketball for over 20 years, playing professionally in Europe, or competing in Australia's NWBL with the Manly Wheel Eagles. Earlier in his career, he was New Zealand's number one wheelchair tennis player, which also took him around the world.

Outside of sport, Eamon trained as an engineer and went on to found Nudge Assist, an Australian assistive technology company supplying equipment solutions shaped by lived experience. His interest in travel extends beyond competition and work, at 28 he hitchhiked around New Zealand and later wrote *A Backpack, a Chair and a Beard*, reflecting on his journeys backpacking through the UK, US, and Europe in his chair.

Now based in Sydney with his partner Erica and their two young daughters, Ida and Darcey, Eamon brings both personal and professional insights into the role accessibility plays in enabling people to move, explore, and connect.