

The South Island town that's booming amid economic uncertainty

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Kaikōura continues to be a popular destination despite the economic uncertainty.

ENVIRONMENT CANTERBURY

Kaikōura's tourism sector is booming, despite economic uncertainty and the average summer weather, Destination Kaikōura deputy chairperson Lynette Burman says.

The Whale Trail shared pathway is continuing to weave its way down from Picton to Kaikōura, while new astrotourism ventures are starting up and cruise ships have kept operators busy.

“What I’m loving is the creativity around these new opportunities and the uniqueness of offerings,” she said.

“We need to remain a special destination.”

The Marlborough Kaikōura Trail Trust will mark a “significant milestone” with a celebration in Ward on April 11 with community, council and iwi representatives, said Burman, who is a trustee.

At the Kaikōura end, the trust is working on resource consents with the Kaikōura District Council, Environment Canterbury and Te Rūnanga o Kaikōura.

Options are being explored for the Hāpuku River crossing, including installing a suspension bridge or adding a clip-on to the State Highway 1 bridge.



Whether it is daylight or dark, Kaikōura has plenty to offer.

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The Kaikōura district obtained international dark sky sanctuary status six months ago and it has led to two new business opportunities starting up.

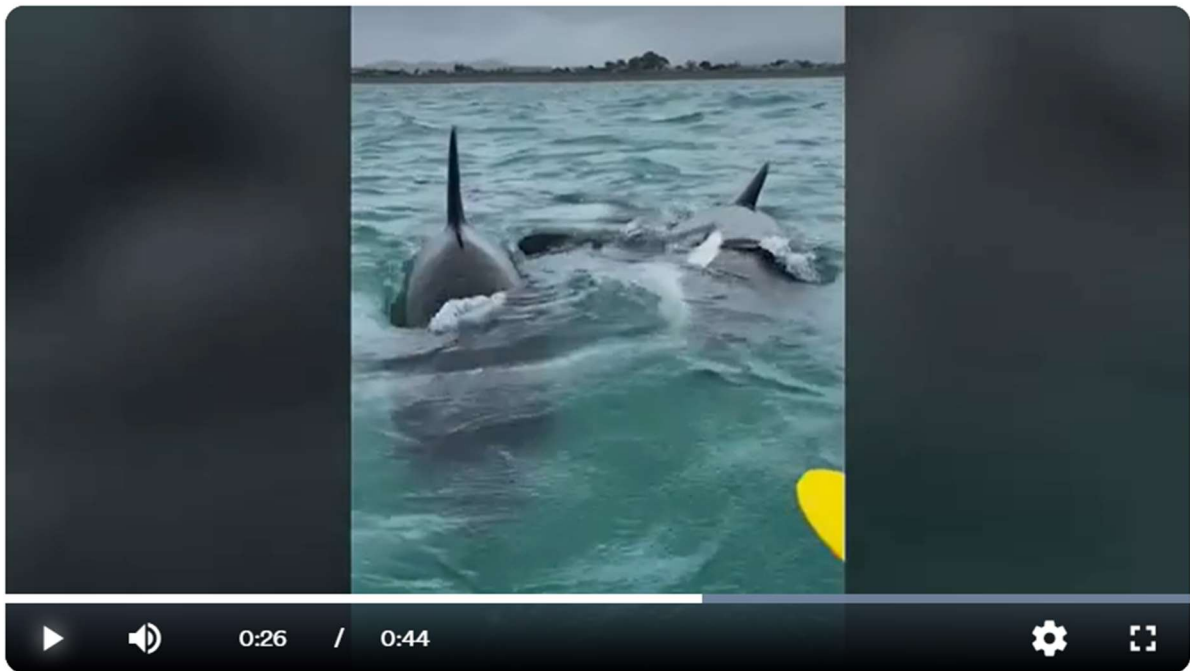
Moana Skies has been running for a few months offering stargazing experiences from an idyllic location just out of Kaikōura.

A new astrophotography initiative was launched last month in partnership with local operator Manakau Lodge.

The town has enjoyed a busy cruise ship season and eight cruise ships are already scheduled for next season, Buurman said.

“Our town does well out of cruise ships, the retailers do well and our operators are busy.

“We are working on our cruise offering and the feedback from the cruise ship companies is that their passengers really like our little town and they have a good experience.



Family of orca thrill Kaikōura tourists in epic encounter

“We are a village, so we can never take the massive, big cruise ships, but we want to be able to accommodate and manage the ones we do get as best we can.”

Buurman said the town could always do with more accommodation, especially with the new tourism ventures popping up.

“I was talking with our MP (Stuart Smith) recently and he was looking for accommodation and the town was full, so he ended up staying in Cheviot.

“Our occupancy levels are good and forward bookings have been strong.”

Destination Kaikōura is the local regional tourism organisation and is a partnership between the Kaikōura District Council and local tourism operators.

While figures are not available for January and February, Destination Kaikōura manager Lisa Bond said December brought an increase in visitor spend (up 11%) compared to last year.

But accommodation levels were below December 2023 at -8% for international visitors and -1% for domestic visitors.



Operators like Encounter Kaikōura have been kept busy this summer, as tourists and cruise ships return to town.

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“This suggests an increase in average visitor spending, a rise in day-trip visitation, or a combination of both,” Bond said.

Spend by United States visitors was up 21%, while the ‘Rest of Asia’ market (excluding China, Japan, and Korea) was up 30%, while the relatively small Canadian market saw an increased spend of 82%.

Bond said the spend by Canterbury visitors continues to be strong (up 3%), while spend by Aucklanders (up 5%) and Wellingtonians (up 11%) was also strong.

“I have been hearing some positive feedback on numbers, aside from a windy period in December and January, which dampened the marine based activities.”