



Air New Zealand - Te rōpū Te Ara Nui

CULTURAL CELEBRATION FINALIST



THE STORY

By the time Air New Zealand cabin crew trainees graduate they know all about safety in the skies and how to deliver great customer service, but how much do they know about the airline's symbol and what it represents?

That was the question asked by a group of cabin crew trainers in 2017. Cabin Crew Manager Regan Close says they wanted new recruits to understand more about the why the koru was chosen to represent the airline.

“Not only was it the story of our koru, we wanted our employees to experience the culture that sits behind the koru, experiencing the carvings and mātauranga within the marae. We wanted to embed a full cultural experience with a traditional pōwhiri welcome, a hāngi and an overnight marae experience,” says Regan.

“We wanted our new employees to share their excitement of joining an iconic brand with their loved ones and provide their whānau with an opportunity to share and embrace their own cultural identity in a welcoming environment.”

A group of cabin crew and trainers created *The Story of the Koru*, a learning module for all new cabin crew trainees that included face-to-face and online learning modules about the history of the koru and its meaning. The next step on the journey included a proposal to host a cabin crew graduation ceremony on a marae.

The initiative became known as Te Ara Nui (The Great Path) and Te Ara Nui Rōpū created a business case and presented it to Senior Cabin Crew Manager Mark Mayerhofler and GM of Cabin Crew Leeanne Langridge seeking support for a trial run. The initiative was approved and two trial graduations on the marae were hosted by the rōpū.

“Our first two graduations were well received by the business, the community, new employees, whānau and senior leaders who encouraged, supported, and fully embraced this new initiative,” says Regan.

As a result, the cultural graduation ceremony was introduced into the airline’s New Intake Training Programme on a permanent basis.

Te Ara Nui Rōpū numbers have grown and members receive ongoing training. The rōpū has supported the learning of employees, whānau and friends in Māori tikanga through showcasing traditional pōwhiri and hongī, as well as manaakitanga and mātauranga within the whareniui. For many people, the graduation is their first time on a marae.

The initiative has had the ongoing support of senior management.

“Air New Zealand’s Chief People Officer Jodie King attended the inaugural ceremony at the marae where she stayed overnight, learnt and shared a mihi and took part in our Air New Zealand haka,” says Regan. “CEO Christopher Luxon has also attended a Te Ara Nui ceremony, staying well into the evening to speak with the graduates and their families, and then sent a CEO message companywide to share his positive experience.”

The judging panel found that this initiative showed true excellence in celebrating New Zealand’s indigenous culture and using the koru to connect Air New Zealand’s employees to that culture. This was a grassroots action, with senior management support through visibly taking a back seat and allowing the engagement to be driven from within the company.

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THE CHALLENGE

Air New Zealand’s cabin crew trainees graduate with a full knowledge of safety protocols and customer service, but managers wanted to also find a way to connect them with the airline’s koru symbol, what it represents and the unique aspects of being a New Zealand airline.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

- Te Ara Nui is an initiative that includes a learning module within cabin crew training that gives the history of Air New Zealand’s relationship with the koru, and what it symbolises.
- Cabin crew graduations are held on a marae to acknowledge, embrace and uphold the culture of Aotearoa New Zealand.
- Led by Te Ara Nui Rōpū (made up of cabin crew and trainers), the initiative has allowed its members to develop their leadership capabilities in a cultural environment, taking lead roles in its planning, organisation and delivery.

RESULTS AND BENEFITS

- New recruits graduate with a greater understanding of the airline’s cultural component.
- 490 cabin crew, joined by more than 1800 family and friends, have attended marae graduations since April 2018.
- Rōpū members have helped to support other employees to learn and grow in confidence in the use and understanding of te reo.

KEY LEARNING

“It’s not just about what the company is doing to build diversity, but what we do as employees to bring diversity to life and drive initiatives from the bottom up. Te Ara Nui is an example of how a small group of operational staff used their initiative to embed culture that has now grown companywide.” Cabin Crew Manger Regan Close.



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