

Media Release  
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## **Top tourism towns take the lead in official quality programme**

Queenstown and Rotorua are reinforcing their reputations as quality tourism destinations, as tourism operators in the two towns will soon account for more than half of all businesses joining tourism's new quality endorsement programme.

Qualmark assessors will this week visit up to 14 Central Otago businesses, including around 12 in Queenstown, that have applied for the Qualmark™ since December. With four Queenstown businesses among the very first to join in October and November 2002, the Queenstown tally of Qualmark™ endorsed businesses is likely to rival Rotorua's total of 15 by the end of the week.

"It's still early days for the endorsement system with between 50 and 60 businesses from around the country completing the full quality assurance process," says Qualmark chief executive Fiona Luhrs, who will be in Queenstown this week to talk with local operators.

"Interest has been strong in many parts of the country, including Christchurch, Auckland, Taupo and the Bay of Islands. But Rotorua and Queenstown operators are coming into the system in the biggest numbers so far."

The quality endorsement system is the result of extensive work, lead by the Tourism Industry Association, to develop quality standards for New Zealand tourism operators. Its inclusion in the Qualmark™ quality system, alongside Qualmark's accommodation star grade programme, provides a comprehensive quality assurance system to help international and domestic visitors choose where to stay and what to do in New Zealand. More than 70 accommodation businesses in Central Otago are part of the Qualmark star grading programme.

Businesses that successfully undergo the detailed on-site assessment are licensed to use the official Qualmark™ quality mark, in conjunction with a star grade or endorsement, to demonstrate to visitors that they are professional and trustworthy.

“Adventure tourism and tourist flight operators have given particularly strong support to the development of the new Qualmark™ endorsement system because they want to demonstrate to visitors that they can be relied on to deliver safe, professional and enjoyable experiences,” says Ms Luhrs.

“The national tourism strategy has identified delivering world class products and services as vital in maximising the value to New Zealand of the 2 million international visitors that are now coming here each year. High quality products and services will attract the kind of visitor that will stay longer, spend more and come back again,” says Ms Luhrs.

“Raising and demonstrating quality standards will also give locals more incentive to enjoy their holidays in New Zealand, rather than going overseas.”

### **Queenstown operators see strong benefits**

That sentiment is echoed by Greg McIntyre whose mountain bike tours business, Fat-Tyre Adventures will be among the Queenstown businesses assessed next week.

“People have so many choices for adventure activities. Being part of the Qualmark™ system will help identify those activities that are serious about safety and customer service. It is a quality standard judged by industry peers for all to see.”

Bruce Carpenter of It’s Wine Time wine tours says the official quality endorsement offers real business benefits. “For industry professionals outside the region, such as inbound tour operators, it means here is a wine tour we can sell with confidence either as an integral part of a tour package or as a free day add on.”

Totally Tourism’s Mark Quickfall says the Qualmark™ endorsement assessment of its Queenstown businesses – which include The Helicopter Line, Milford Sound Scenic Flights, Harris Mountains Heli-Ski, Kiwi Magic Movie and Challenge Rafting –

will put operating and customer service systems under the microscope. “Our aviation businesses are already subject to a high level of regulation and auditing but I believe this exercise will really highlight our strengths and weaknesses, and provide us with areas we can work towards to increase our professionalism.”

For 4WD tour operator Nomad Safaris the Qualmark™ endorsement is “a logical next step” to add to its benchmarking in the international sustainable tourism programme, Green Globe 21. “It gives us economic and market advantage and keeps us on track with our philosophy of continuous and never ending improvement,” says Helen Jansen.

Among the other Central Otago businesses seeking the Qualmark™ endorsement are AJ Hackett Bungy, horse trek and events venue Moonlight Country & Stables, helicopter company Over the Top, the Shopper Bus and Browns Ski Shop.

If they achieve the assessment thresholds they will join a small group of other local businesses that were among the very first to receive the Qualmark™ endorsement late last year, including Skyline Gondola, Criffel Peak Safaris, Real Journeys (formerly Fiordland Travel), Wanaka Flightseeing and Glenorchy Air.

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