



Building the Future:

Making Trans-Tasman travel seamless to grow tourism

Introduction

Growing New Zealand's tourism industry is a critical part of National's plan to fix the basics and build the future. Tourism is our second-largest export earner and supports around one in nine jobs.

Australia and New Zealand share two of the most closely integrated economies in the world, including each other's largest tourism markets. New Zealand recorded 1.52 million visitor arrivals from Australia in the year ended December 2025, the highest annual result since early 2020. In July 2026, New Zealand recorded 134,900 Australian visitor arrivals, the highest July month on record. Australian visitors spent \$4.2 billion in New Zealand in the year ended March 2026, with holiday visitors spending an average of \$4,397 per trip.

To support our shared tourism industry to keep growing, a re-elected National Government will work with Australia to trial seamless travel for Australian and New Zealand citizens travelling between the two countries.

Making it easier for Australians to visit New Zealand means more visitors exploring our cities and regions which results in more incomes for local businesses, more jobs opportunities for New Zealanders, and a stronger economy.

National's policy

National has already put the foundations in place for seamless travel. In 2009, the National-led Government officially launched SmartGate for trans-Tasman passengers. This was the first step in streamlining travel between the two countries.

In 2024, Prime Ministers Luxon and Albanese endorsed the work of the Trans-Tasman Seamless Travel Group and committed to exploring ways to move closer to seamless travel between the two countries.

A re-elected National Government will deliver on that commitment and work with Australia to trial seamless travel for Australian and New Zealand citizens travelling between the two countries.

In practice, this means a fully digital trans-Tasman travel experience, where eligible travellers can rely on a smartphone, digital credentials and biometric technology through more of the airport journey. This would mean no paper passport required at the gate and faster movement through airports, while maintaining the security and integrity of New Zealand's border and preserving the ability of border agencies to intervene where risk is identified.

With the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2028 to be jointly hosted by Australia and New Zealand from 21 October to 19 November 2028, we are expecting a surge in cross-border travel from Kiwis and Australians. National's objective is to introduce a trial for seamless digital travel prior to that tournament.

How it would work

Eligible travellers (Australian and New Zealand passport-holders) will:

- Provide their passport and travel details digitally before departure, building on information already provided to airlines and through the New Zealand Traveller Declaration.
- Complete their New Zealand Traveller Declaration before flying, allowing immigration, customs and biosecurity information to be assessed earlier.
- Have their eligibility and identity checked digitally, with travellers requiring further examination removed from the streamlined pathway.
- Use a dedicated trans-Tasman arrival pathway at Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Queenstown airports, which are supported by existing eGate and facial-recognition technology.
- Continue to meet all New Zealand biosecurity and customs requirements, including baggage inspection where required. Seamless immigration processing does not mean bypassing biosecurity. Travellers would still have to make the same declarations and could still have baggage inspected or be referred to an officer.

New Zealand already has much of the infrastructure required. The New Zealand Traveller Declaration is linked to a traveller's passport, while eGates use biometric technology to match a traveller's face with their ePassport.

To enable this policy, legislative changes to the Immigration Act 2009 and Customs and Excise Act 2018 will be required, as they currently impose obligations to present a travel document and be presented to a border official on arrival.

International comparisons

- **Singapore** has implemented passport-less clearance in Changi Airport. Arriving and departing Singapore passport-holders can clear immigration simply using facial and iris biometrics, without the need to present their passport. All foreign visitors can also enjoy the convenience of passport-less clearance when they depart Singapore.
 - » With the full roll-out of passport-less clearance at Changi Airport, the average clearance time for each traveller has been reduced by 60%, from 25 seconds to 10 seconds.
 - » International reporting identifies Singapore's passport-free biometric clearance as a leading operational example.
- **Common Travel Area – Ireland and the UK** – there are no routine passport controls in operation for Irish and British citizens traveling between the two countries. However, you must show identification to board a ferry or an airplane, and some airlines and sea carriers only accept a passport as valid identification. You may also be asked by an immigration officer to prove that you are a citizen of Ireland or the UK, so people are encouraged to still carry a passport on them.
- **Indonesia** is the first country in the world to introduce an AI-powered biometric 'seamless corridor' system. This system uses AI-enabled biometrics to validate passenger identities "in motion". AI cameras scan and match your face in real-time as you walk through a wide corridor, so people do not need to stop, pull out their passport, or talk to a border official. This is part of the "All Indonesia" initiative, a major government-led digital transformation aiming at streamlining the entry process for international travellers. Testing shows the system processes over 30 passengers per minute, which is ten times faster than standard e-gates. The initial phase focuses on serving elderly and disabled travellers. The government plans to expand the technology to all international passengers across the country's airport network.

Managing immigration risk

No immigration, customs, biosecurity or law-enforcement powers will be removed. Travellers who trigger a border alert, do not meet the trial criteria, cannot be reliably matched to their passport, make a declaration requiring further examination, or otherwise require additional checks will be diverted into normal border processing.

Historical background

- From **1973-1981**, Australia and New Zealand enjoyed a passport-free understanding where, under the Trans-Tasman Agreement, Kiwis and Aussies could live and work in either country with relatively few restrictions.
- In **1981**, the Australian government announced that all people entering Australia would be required to carry a passport. It was prompted in part by concerns that international terrorists and drug traffickers could pose as New Zealanders and enter Australia.
- In **1987**, New Zealand returned the favour and it became official that Australians needed a passport to visit New Zealand.
- In **2009**, Prime Minister John Key officially launched SmartGate for trans-Tasman passengers. This was the first step in streamlining travel between the two countries.
- In **2023**, the Trans-Tasman Seamless Travel Group was established between Albanese and Hipkins to deliver on Australian and New Zealand's commitment to explore ways to move closer to seamless travel between the two countries. It is chaired by Australian Border Force (ABF) Commissioner and New Zealand Customs Service Chief Executive.
- In August **2024**, Prime Ministers Luxon and Albanese endorsed the work of the Trans-Tasman Seamless Travel Group and its vision for easier travel between Australia and New Zealand while ensuring the highest levels of security at our borders. They announced that governments and industry would implement this vision via coordinated activities to enhance traveller experience. This would include Australia trialling a digital incoming passenger card for the first time, and New Zealand upgrading eGates. Prime Ministers noted these were steps towards 'contactless travel' when passengers would be able to rely on digital credentials throughout the airport journey.