



PRESS RELEASE

Work commences on Mt Ruapehu's state of the art gondola

MT RUAPEHU, 14 September 2018: A site blessing and cultural induction for the construction team held today on Mt Ruapehu's Whakapapa Ski Area marks the start of the on-site construction of the new gondola, due to open in early June next year in time for the 2019 ski season.

The gondola - on order from Italian based company Leitner - is now under construction and is set to transform the Mt Ruapehu visitor experience. It is one of only two of its design in the world.

Chief Executive of skifield operator Ruapehu Alpine Lifts (RAL) Ross Copland says, "Work preparing for the gondola's arrival will kick off in the next fortnight and will continue throughout the summer with a target launch date of 1 June 2019 to coincide with the ski season opening."

Fifty gondola cabins will feature floor to ceiling glass for breathtaking views, internal ski racks, audio and lighting and individual leather seats offering business-class luxury to passengers befitting of the UNESCO Dual World Heritage status of Whakapapa Ski Area. Each cabin accommodates 10 passengers and even the tallest skiers will be able to stand upright in the cabin with more than 2m of internal clearance.

The gondola will run from the Top of the Bruce base area directly to the award-winning Knoll Ridge Café.

Ross says that the gondola will transform the mountain for skiers as well as sightseers, and also boost the local economy.

"This project will change the traditional flow of visitors throughout the North Island creating a compelling reason to venture off the beaten track deep into the Ruapehu district to experience this world-class attraction and the vibrant communities nearby."

He says that the economic indicators for the region are compelling with the new gondola expected to contribute \$50m per annum of additional visitor expenditure, and an additional 137 full-time jobs in the restaurants, maintenance, sales, retail and transport teams.

Due to preparation on the ski field for the gondola's installation the 2018 summer sightseeing options to visit Knoll Ridge café will be taking a break.

During this time, the Knoll Ridge café building will undergo a refurbishment to better utilise the lower level including a new deck overlooking the Pinnacles and expansion of the food offering.

"The mountain sits within a UNESCO Dual World Heritage Area and its outstanding natural beauty and cultural significance is there to be enjoyed by not only skiers and snowboarders in winter, but also walkers and sightseers in the summer months," Ross says.

As a public benefit entity RAL invests its proceeds back into developing the mountain's facilities and the new gondola forms part of the \$100m reinvestment strategy announced by the RAL board in 2015.

Ross says the business is looking forward to realising the vision of this game-changing investment which has received unprecedented financial backing and support from government through the PGF, local government via both Taupo and Ruapehu District Councils and local investors, all of whom share a common interest in success of the project.

"Our design process involved working closely with Ngati Tuwharetoa and DOC during which time we significantly reduced the number of structures on the mountain, the new installation having less than half of the structures it replaces. We are very pleased to take this opportunity to continue shrinking the presence of infrastructure on the maunga while still meeting the aspirations of visitors to the Tongariro National Park," Ross says.

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