

3 February 2021

PONANT has 'regretfully advised' that its small expedition ship Le Lapérouse has been forced to cancel her season of seven fully booked expedition voyages in New Zealand for New Zealanders.

The full statement from PONANT reads:

"The New Zealand Department of Immigration has declined to approve visas for 61 of the ship's 90 crew. Visas were issued for 29 technical crew however INZ was not prepared to issue visas to the 61 hotel staff.

Following a detailed application submitted in October, including the numbers, and nationality makeup of the crew to arrive on the ship, the Ministry of Health issued an approval in mid December. The approval's conditions were to operate with a limit of 100 guests, within NZ waters, for Kiwis only. Le Lapérouse and her full complement of 90 crew were mobilised under strict Covid isolation and multiple testing protocols and sailed from her anchorage off Jakarta on January 10 for New Zealand*. Health officials were scheduled to test all crew upon arrival on 30 January.

After travelling more than 3600 nautical miles, the company was advised on 27 January that visa applications for the hotel department officers and crew were not considered critical to the ship's entry to NZ and the applications were declined. The company was advised that the ship must not enter the 200 mile NZ Exclusive Economic Zone otherwise it would face arrest with imprisonment penalties for the ship's officers and company management.

The ship was instructed by INZ to turnaround and go elsewhere. Low on fuel, the only safe option was to apply for entry to New Caledonia which was granted allowing the ship to arrive yesterday.

This forced cancellation is devastating not only to PONANT, but it will:

disrupt the travel plans of some 650+ New Zealanders,
cause up to \$6m in direct economic loss to food, beverage, ground operator SMEs across the country supplying the vessel,
eliminate income (again) from the New Zealand travel agency community, and
be devastating to 16 Kiwis contracted to work onboard for two months, to lose their income.

Worryingly this decision by INZ places great uncertainty about the future for not only the high yielding expedition cruise sector but to the \$670 million economic benefit the cruise industry generates for the country.

PONANT has invested millions of dollars promoting New Zealand internationally, operating in NZ seasonally for the past seven years. We hope there is a quick review of the processes for expedition ships to operate in New Zealand and that the 2021-2022 season can be saved.

*Note. This plan enabled the vessel to enter safely and place no pressure on the in-demand MIQ beds in NZ."