

Travelling for *Gold*



Stage and Screen helps Paralympics New Zealand to beat COVID-19 and... bring home the gold!

Group travel is complex. Throw in a pandemic, a snap national lockdown, loads of special equipment and the responsibility of keeping New Zealand's Paralympians healthy and well, before they competed at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games - and you have a moving feast of travel plans harder to navigate than a Japanese recipe for Fugu Puffer Fish.

Despite the challenges, Stage and Screen successfully flew the country's 66-member Paralympic team to Tokyo, where they competed and safely arrived home with 12 medals, six of which were gold.

Stage and Screen's sports industry specialisation, experience in managing group travel itineraries and understanding of how to manage travel expertly during the pandemic created a seamless travel experience for Paralympics New Zealand. The project involved close liaison and daily communication with travel industry suppliers, government authorities and the customer to ensure the New Zealand Paralympic team could travel during a time when international travel was technically banned for most countries globally.

The Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games were held 24 August to 5 September 2021 and included 22 Para sports with 4,403 Paralympians competing. Stage and Screen New Zealand was responsible for managing travel for our team and their support staff.

THE TEAM

Stage and Screen has been working with Paralympics New Zealand since 2017. Stage and Screen manages the organisation's air travel, hotel accommodation and car hire and was appointed to manage the team's travel and logistics for the Tokyo Paralympic Games, which went ahead at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Managing the travel and logistics for Paralympics New Zealand, from Stage and Screen was a highly experienced Travel Manager, Liz Goodall.

OVERCOMING THE WARM-UP CHALLENGES

To overcome the constantly changing national and international Covid-19 travel rules, Stage and Screen held daily meetings with the customer in the lead-up to the team's departure for the Paralympic Games. This facilitated open and frequent communication between stakeholders, kept everyone up-to-date on managed isolation and quarantine (MIQ) rules and where each sport was up to, in terms of itinerary bookings and trip management. The daily meetings also enabled stakeholders to make decisions quickly when travel, quarantine or visa changes were announced.

SCENARIO PLANNING

Part of Stage and Screen's success was its approach to scenario planning. Stage and Screen's pre-trip planning provided Paralympics New Zealand with all potential situations and solutions to ensure the team arrived in Tokyo on time, safely and in good health before competition started. Contingency plans including flight charters were key, especially for Para swimming and Para cycling teams that attended pre-camps.

OPERATING HOURS

The Stage and Screen team working on the project were available around-the-clock to deal with rapidly changing travel conditions. This was extremely helpful for Paralympics New Zealand, particularly during the snap national lockdown that occurred two days prior to the large group departing for Tokyo.

NZ went into hard lockdown 17 August 2021. That night Stage and Screen attended a meeting to talk through what was needed for the Paralympic team's departure including domestic connection changes, communications to each team and what was needed from New Zealand's Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) for travel permissions.

Stage and Screen also devised a new plan for swimming and cycling Para athletes, who were based in Cambridge at their pre-camp and were due to travel to Auckland. A decision was made for the Para swimming and Para cycling teams to stay in Cambridge on the night of the 18th rather than take the transfer up to Auckland. The trip to Auckland was delayed until the day of their international departure. Stage and Screen made the itinerary changes that evening with the relevant travel suppliers and new plans were confirmed and ready for travellers within an hour.

LEVERAGING STRONG SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIPS

Stage and Screen tapped into its network of suppliers for Paralympics New Zealand to ensure any last-minute changes went ahead smoothly, special requests were granted and additional support was made available for the Para athletes.

Suppliers were briefed well in advance of the team's travel to ensure the health and safety of the team at all stages of their journey to Tokyo. This also included one airline representative ensuring the public on board the large group flight, was aware of the contact bubbles the national Paralympians required onboard the aircraft to Tokyo. At the start of the flight the pilot gave a friendly heads up to the public requesting they remained seated to minimise contact between passengers on the flight. Communication between suppliers ensured that the client's Duty of Care policies could be upheld on all international flights.



TRAVEL MANAGEMENT FOR THE WIN

Stage and Screen's valuable pre, during and post-trip support, liaison with suppliers and authorities such as MBIE, made it possible for Paralympics New Zealand to not only travel where and when they needed to during the Covid-19 lockdown but to travel safely and securely.

Paralympics New Zealand also benefited from Stage and Screen's:

- strong supplier relationships and ability to negotiate with suppliers for waivers and favours
- frequent communication between stakeholders, virtually and in-person
- up-to-date and reliable travel, visa and MIQ advice
- flexible travel support from an Account Manager and Travel Consultants who made themselves available out of hours
- project management skills including the consolidation of invoices and post games analysis.

THE GOLDEN TOUCH

As well as bringing home 12 medals, Paralympics New Zealand with help from Stage and Screen achieved **NZD \$80,000 in savings from supplier waivers** for the team's Tokyo trip.

This saving was made up of

- waivers for excess baggage for the Paralympic team, which came to NZD \$67,791 across the two airlines the team travelled on internationally
- waivers for seat cancellation costs and associated fees, which saved NZD \$6,735.

The fact that Stage and Screen delivered significant savings for the customer at a time when travel industry suppliers weren't generating regular income as well as the seamless travel experience provided for the sports team is testament to the expertise and ability of Stage and Screen to overcome travel obstacles. This was specialist travel management at its finest!

"Your contribution to the New Zealand Paralympic team was outstanding and greatly appreciated, we acknowledge that this was not an easy assignment. Nothing was ever an issue and always delivered with a smile on your face. We look forward to working with Stage and Screen as we continue our journey towards Paris 2024 and Milano Cortina 2026."

- Fiona Allan, CE, Paralympics New Zealand