

# Cook Islands Visitor Survey Results

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**Quarterly report**

**April - June 2012**

**Prepared for Cook Islands Tourism Corporation**

**by**

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## Executive Summary

This report focuses on the characteristics, expectations and expenditure patterns of tourists who visit the Cook Islands. The data presented in the report is drawn from an on-going online departure survey. The survey period covered in this report is 1 April 2012 to 30 June 2012. There were 1551 individual respondents to the survey and they represented a total of 3143 adults and an additional 437 children (13 % of all visitors during the period – based on 2011 visitor arrival data).

Over half (63.6%) of the surveyed visitors come from New Zealand, 17.7% come from Australia. This mix is very similar to Cook Islands visitor arrivals data for 2011 (New Zealand 66.4%, Australia 16.4%). The age profile of the sample is fairly evenly spread across the 30-59 range (66%) with the 50-59 grouping dominant (25%). A slightly lower number of visitors are from the 18-29 age group (17%). Visitors under 18 were not surveyed. Visitors are generally well educated (71.6% of visitors have some form of tertiary education) and have a higher than average annual household income (50% earn over NZ\$100,000 per year). Nearly half of the visitors travel with just one companion (47%), most of the time as a couple. Solo travellers are rare (5.8%). Groups of over ten people are not uncommon (17.6%).

Just under half of visitors surveyed (48%) are on their first visit to the Cook Islands, a further 42% have visited once or twice before. Sixty percent of New Zealanders are on a repeat visit. The main purpose of visit is holiday making (68.8 %). The average length of stay in the Cook Islands is 8.2 days. The vast majority of the visitors (94.4 %) stay either one or two weeks. Virtually all visitors surveyed visit Rarotonga, approximately 22.4% visit Aitutaki, only 2.2% visit another island.

On average, visitors to the Cook Islands spend NZ\$1916 per person prior to arrival. Of this, 40% (\$766, or \$93 per day) is estimated to flow to the Cook Islands. While in the Cook Islands, the total local spend per visitor per day is \$140, and the average local spend per visitor during the whole trip is \$1148. If the prepaid spend amount and the local spend amount are combined, it is estimated that each visitor brings \$1914 to the Cook Islands economy (or \$233 per day).

Visitor satisfaction is generally high for activities and services undertaken within the Cook Islands. Water-based activities are characterised by the highest participation and satisfaction levels. Cultural activities, land-based experiences and shopping all receive strong satisfaction ratings. The most appealing elements of the Cook Islands experience are considered to be the beautiful natural environment, the friendly people and the peacefulness of the destination. The least appealing elements of the Cook Islands experience are considered to be the poor quality and value for money of tourism services such as hotels and restaurants, the inconvenient flight times, the presence of rubbish on beaches and the numerous stray dogs. The overall satisfaction of the visit is very high: nearly all visitors would want to return to the Cook Islands (95%) and 98.3% would recommend the Cook Islands to friends or family.

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## Introduction

The Cook Islands government and local businesses require a clearer picture of the characteristics, expectations and expenditure patterns of tourists who visit the Cook Islands. This information is needed to enable the effective planning and development of the tourism industry and to highlight its crucial role within the broader Cook Island's economy.

From April to June 2012, visitors to the Cook Islands were asked to complete a web-based survey within two weeks of the completion of their visit. This web-based survey is currently running on a quarterly basis with potential for expansion into an on-going barometer of the performance of the tourism industry.

Flyers promoting the survey were printed and distributed to hotels and check-in counters at the airport. Email addresses were also collected from departing visitors at the airport. The minimum age to complete the survey was 18. Over this three month period, 3580 visitors were contacted by email to take part in the survey, and 1551 responses were received. The excellent conversion rate of 43.3% shows that visitors to the Cook Islands are very willing to talk about their experience. These responses covered 3143 adults and 437 children.

According to the Cook Islands Statistics Office, there were 28,469 international visitor arrivals during the second quarter of 2011. Assuming that the 2012 data will be quite similar, the sample of this survey represents roughly 13 % of visitor arrivals during the second quarter of the year.

The data presented in this report provides an understanding of:

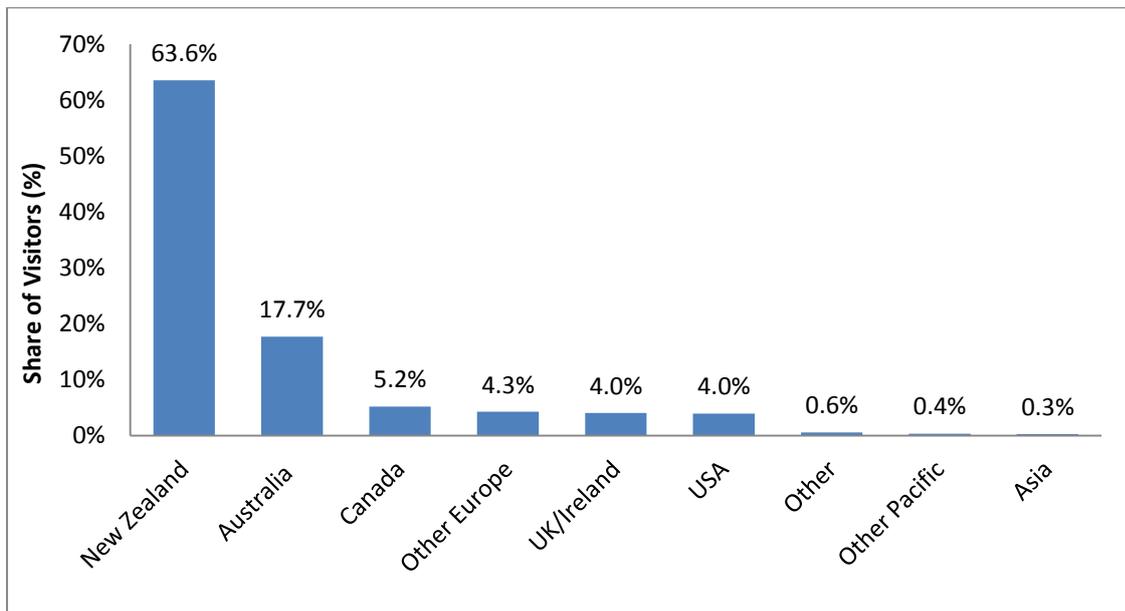
- The characteristics of visitors to the Cook Islands (age, gender, education, country of origin, income, purpose of visit, travelling with whom, number of previous visits, length of stay, airline used, visited islands)
- Visitor expenditure (amount of money spent prior to arrival and while in the Cook Islands, items of spending).
- Visitor satisfaction (most and least appealing elements of the visit, overall satisfaction, satisfaction with activities).

The report only presents findings from a three month period and we therefore do not make overall projections on an annual basis. The strong response rate and active participation of both government and industry in the Cook Islands lead us to believe that survey numbers for the coming quarters will also be very strong leading to an unparalleled insight into the performance and value of the Cook Islands tourism industry.

## Visitor Characteristics

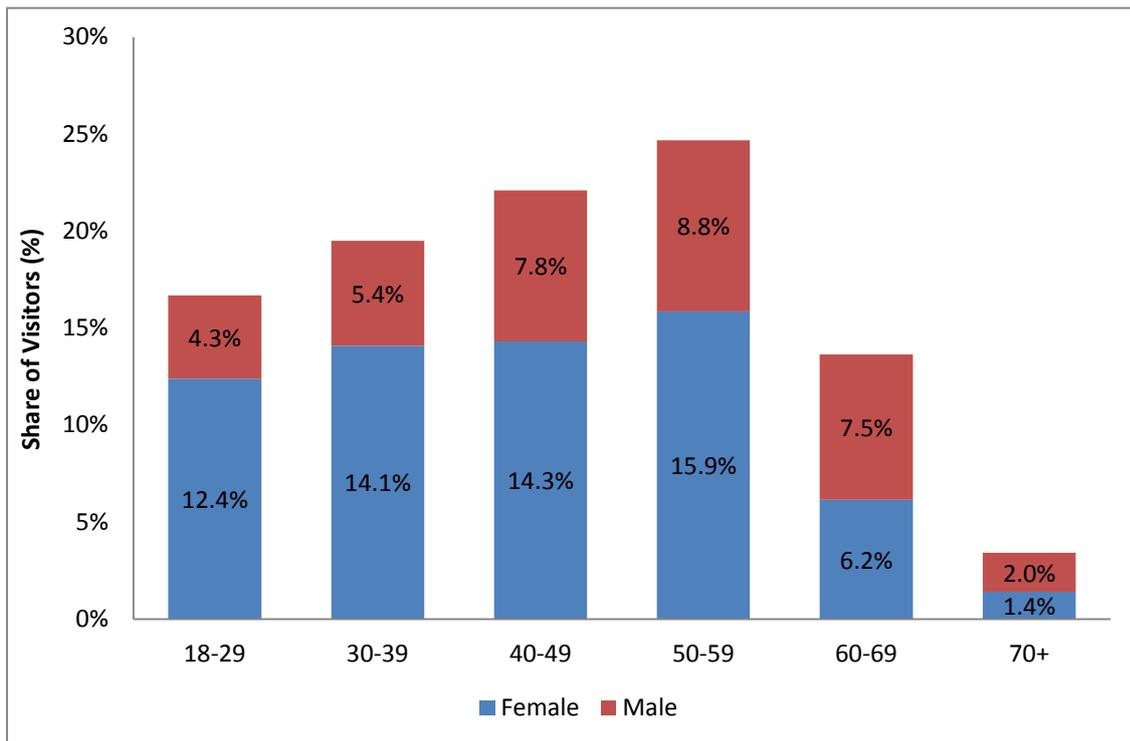
Over half of the visitors surveyed (63.6%) come from New Zealand (see Figure 1). The second most important country of origin is Australia, with 17.7% of respondents. Canada, Europe, Great Britain and the USA are the other key source markets. This mix is very similar to the most recent annual figures for Cook Islands visitor arrivals in 2011 (New Zealand 66.4%, Australia 16.4%) and also close to the figures for the second quarter of 2011 (72.7% of visitors came from New Zealand and 12.5% came from Australia).

**Figure 1: Country of Origin (n = 1361)**



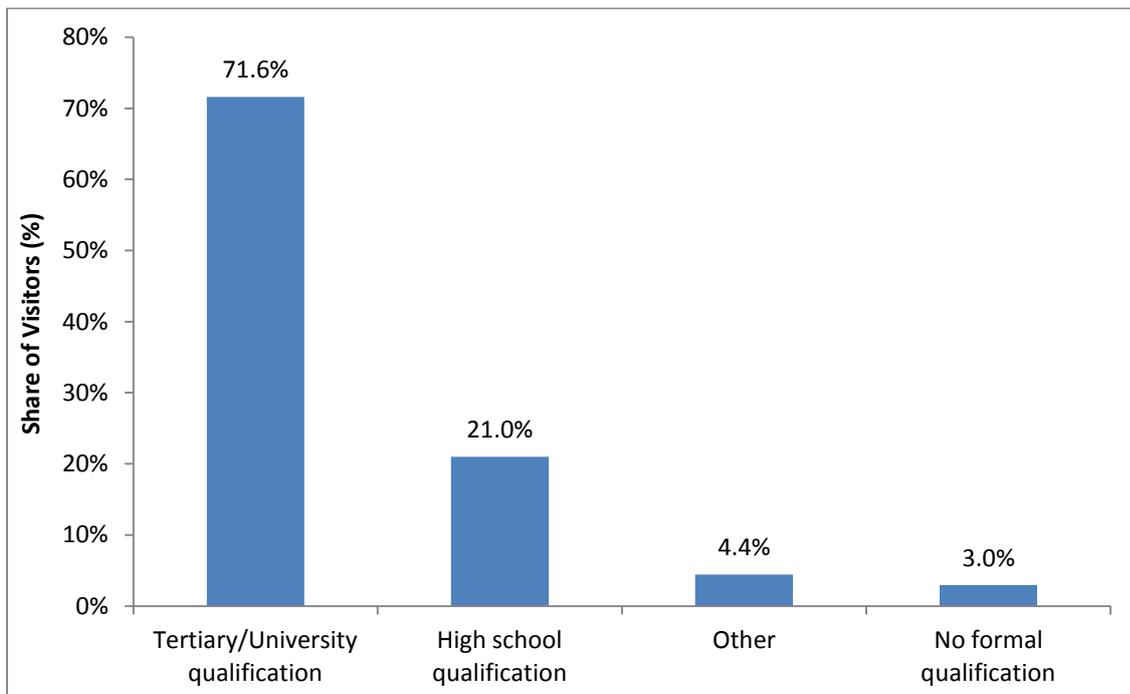
More women (63%) than men (37%) completed the survey (Figure 2). The 50 to 59 years old age group are the most represented, followed by the 40 to 49 years old age group. There are few senior travellers (only 3% of surveyed respondents are over 70 years old).

**Figure 2: Distribution of Age and Gender (n = 1349)**



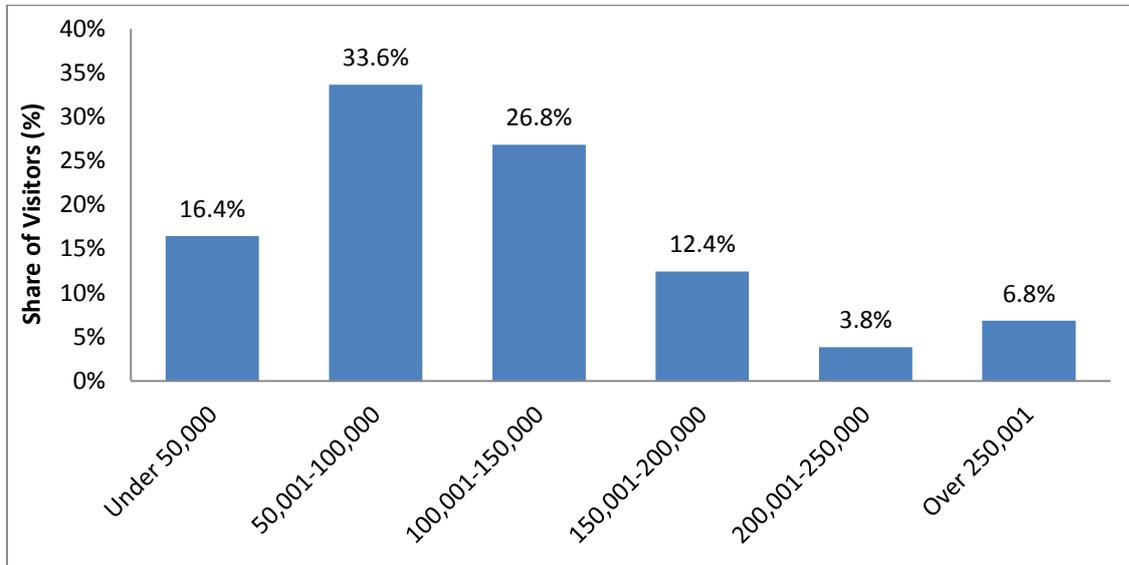
Visitors are well educated. Nearly three-quarters (72%) of the visitors surveyed had some form of tertiary education (Figure 3), and a further 21% finished their education after completing high school.

**Figure 3: Education level attained of Visitors (n=1352)**



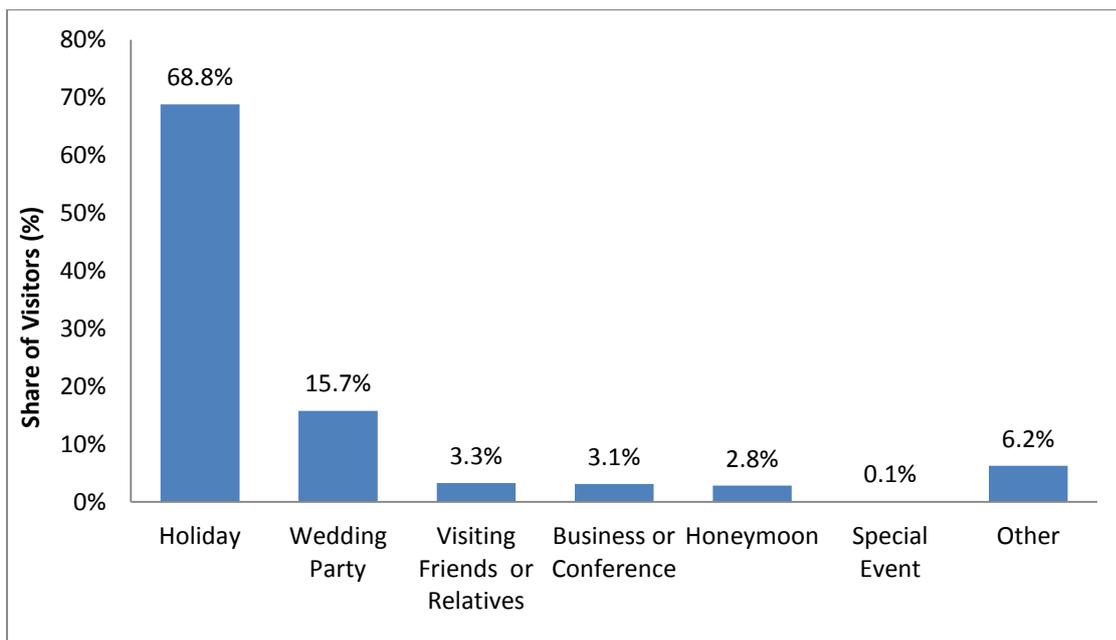
Just over a third (34 %) of visitors have an annual household income of between NZ\$50,001 and \$100,000 (34%). A further 27% earn between NZ\$100,001 and NZ\$150,000 (Figure 4). Nearly one quarter (23%) of the respondents have a household income of over NZ\$150,001 per year. Visitors to the Cook Islands earn significantly more money than the average New Zealander or Australian (latest national statistics show a median household income of NZ\$79,300 and AUD\$83,786 respectively).

**Figure 4: Annual Household Income in NZD (n=1070)**



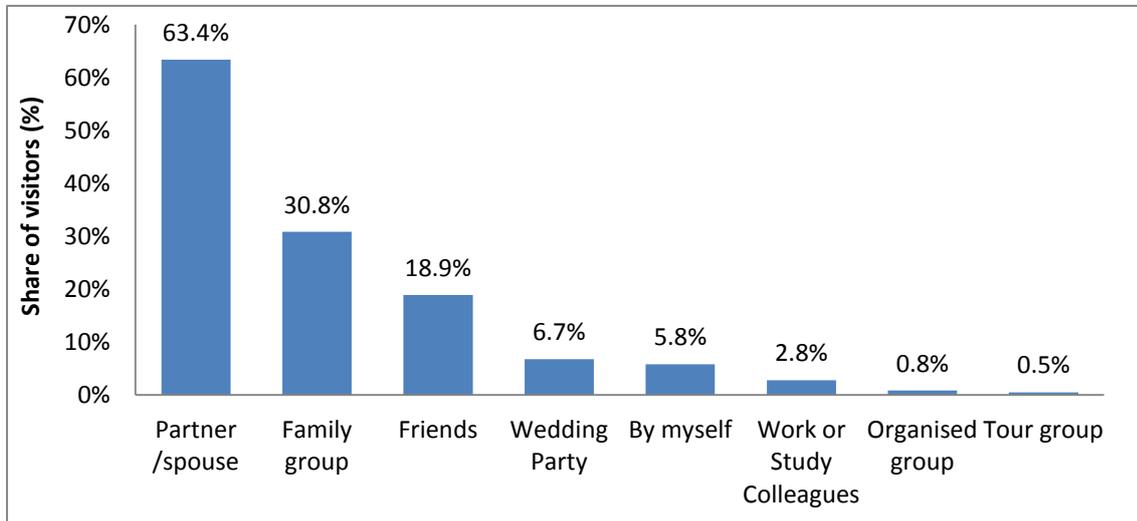
The main purpose of visit for those surveyed is for a holiday (68.8 %) (Figure 5). The next major purpose of visit is to attend a wedding (15.7%), visiting friends or relatives made up 3.3% of the total.

**Figure 5: Main Purpose of Visit (n=1537)**



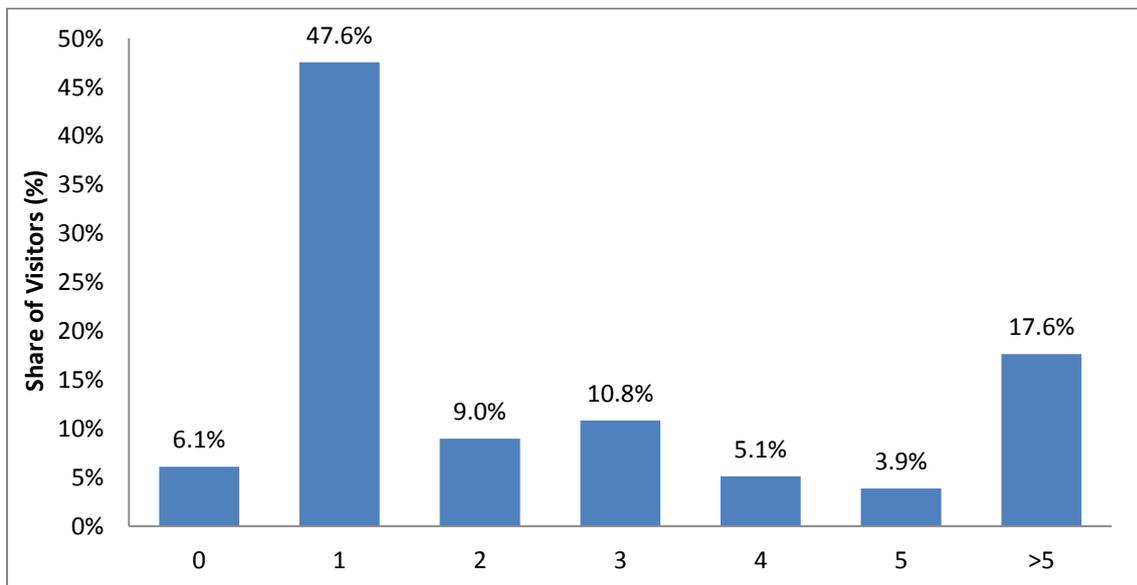
More than half of the visitors (63.4 %) travel to the Cook Islands with a partner, husband or spouse. Visitors also often travel with other family members or friends. Those travelling with a wedding party, alone, with colleagues or with an organised group, represent a smaller share of the sample (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Travelling with whom (n=1453)**



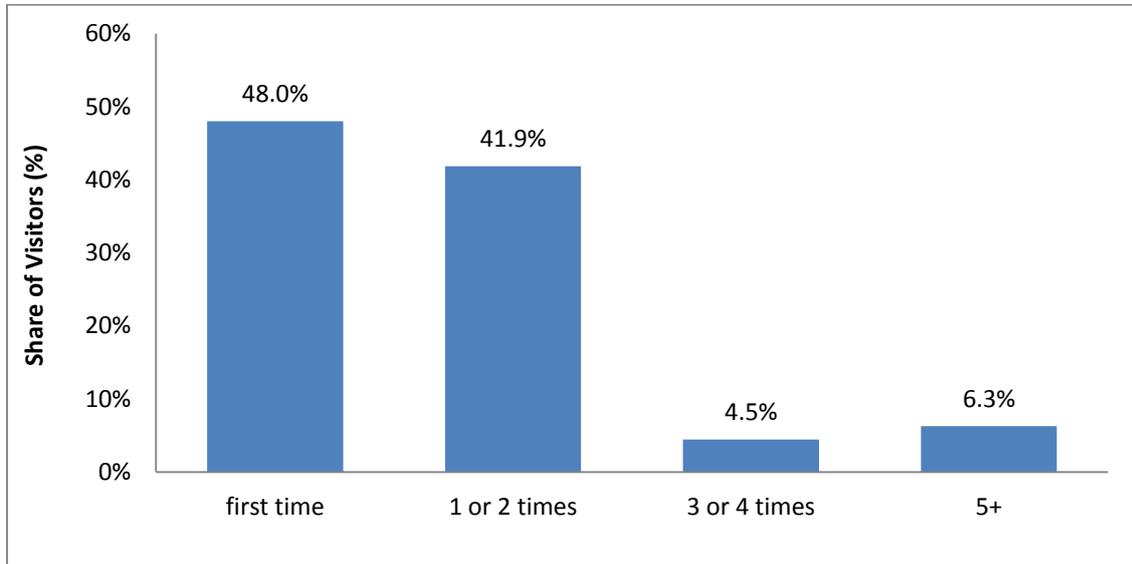
Most visitors travelled with one companion (Figure 7). Travel parties larger than 4 people were not very common, with the exception of wedding parties.

**Figure 7: Number of Companions on trip (n= 1451)**



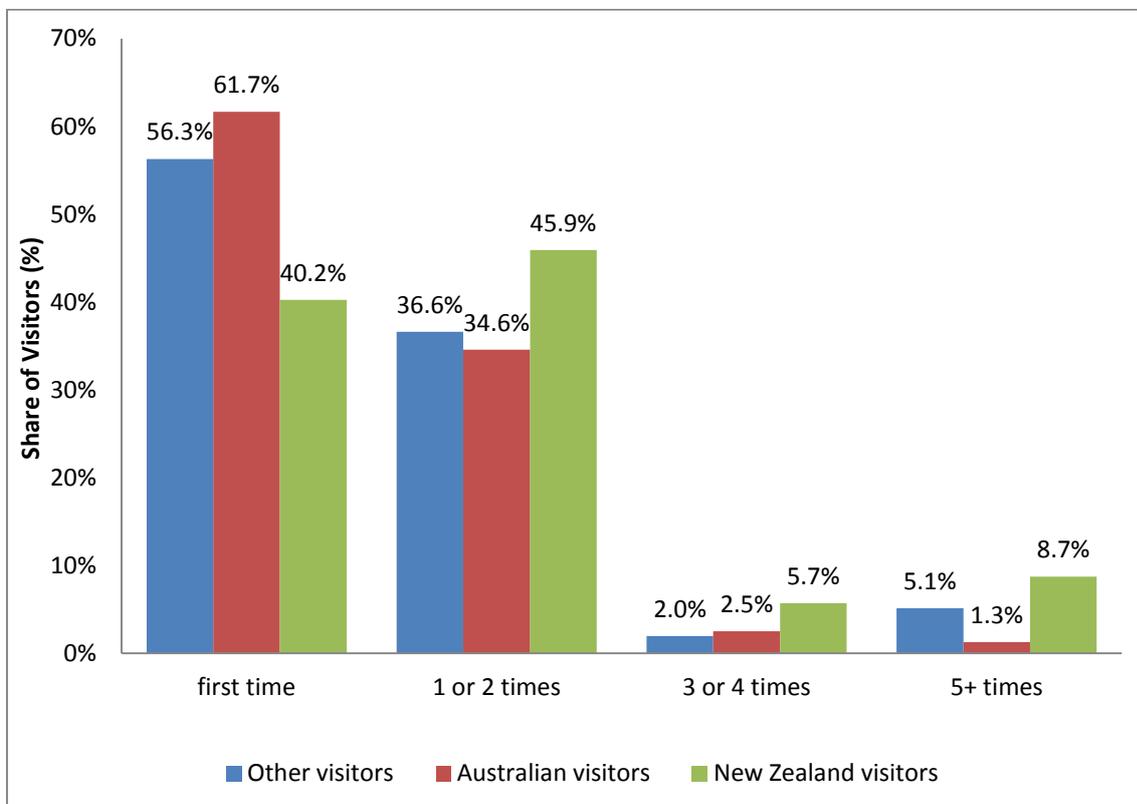
Many visitors (47%) are on their first visit to the Cook Islands. A further 42% have been to the Cook Islands 1 or 2 times previously. A smaller percentage (11%) has visited 3 or more times (Figure 8).

**Figure 8: Number of visits to the Cook Islands (n=1369)**



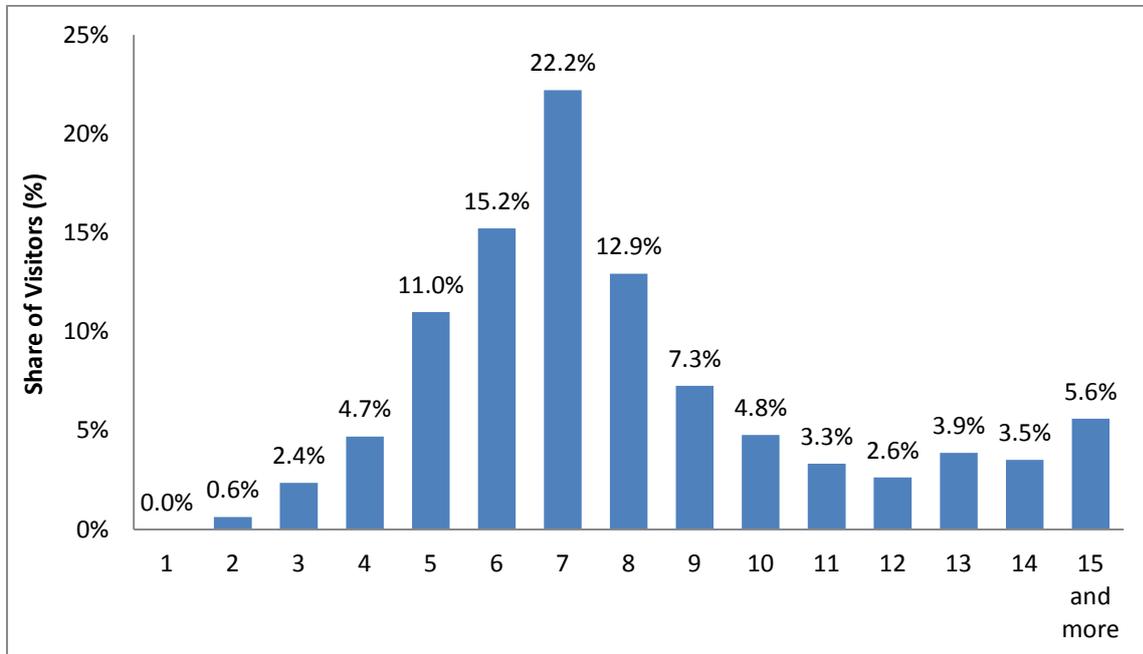
New Zealand visitors are more likely to make a repeat visit than other visitor markets (Figure 9). Most New Zealand visitors are return visitors (60%), whereas only 38% of Australian visitors are return visitors.

**Figure 9: Number of previous visits to the Cook Islands (n= 1324)**



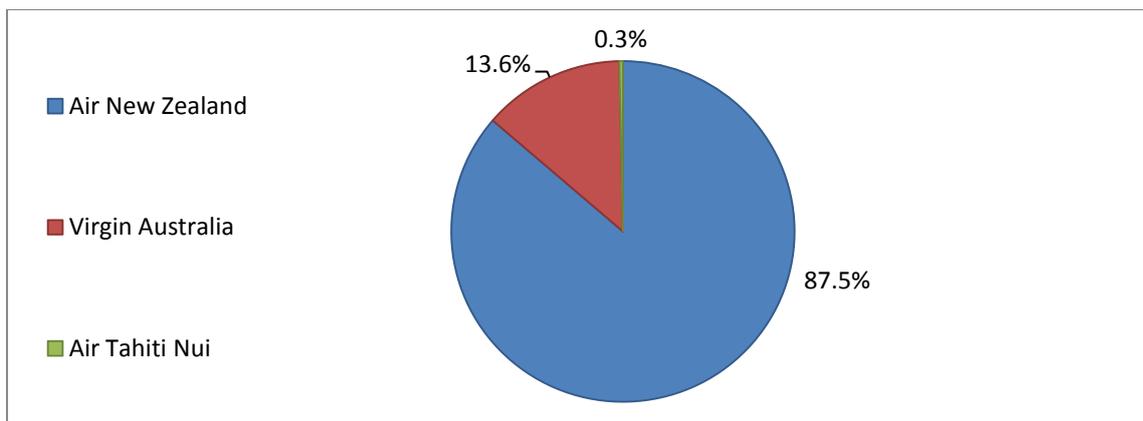
The average length of stay in the Cook Islands is 8.2 days. Most visitors (22.2 %) stay between 6 and 8 days, while only 5.6% of visitors stay longer than 14 days (Figure 10). Visitors who spent more than 30 days in the Cook Islands were excluded from the analysis.

**Figure 10: Length of stay in days (n=1446)**



Most visitors (87.5%) travel to the Cook Islands with Air New Zealand while 13.6% fly with Virgin Australia (Figure 11). Most passengers on those airlines fly out of Auckland or transit through Auckland, since there are only one direct flight to Rarotonga from Australia and Los Angeles per week. Less than 1% of visitors come from French Polynesia and travel with Air Tahiti Nui.

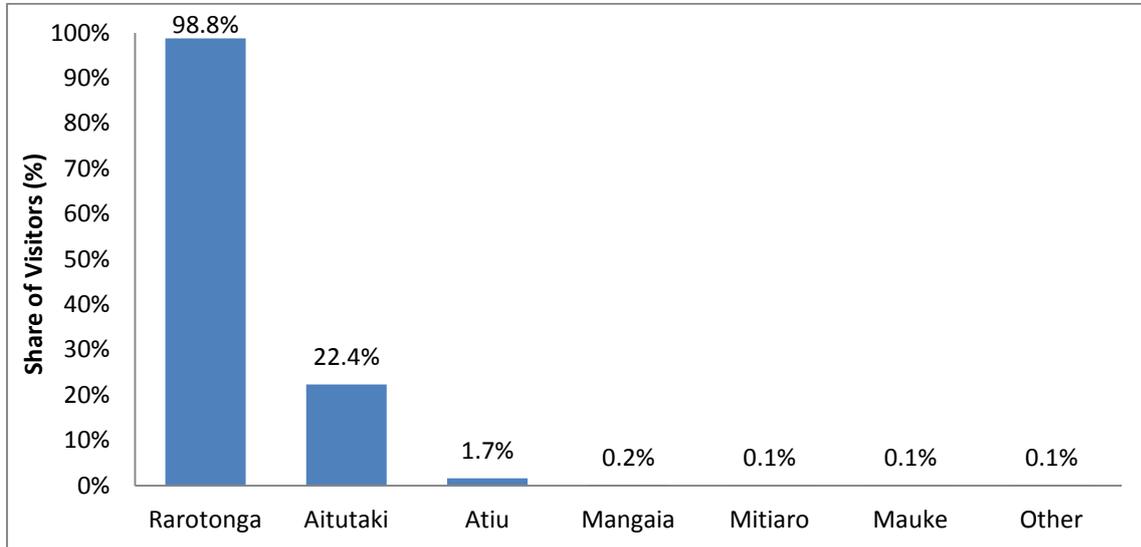
**Figure 11: Airline used (n=1474)**



For 86% of visitors, the Cook Islands is the only destination of their trip. For 14% of visitors the Cook Islands is a stop-over, for instance on a flight between the USA and New Zealand.

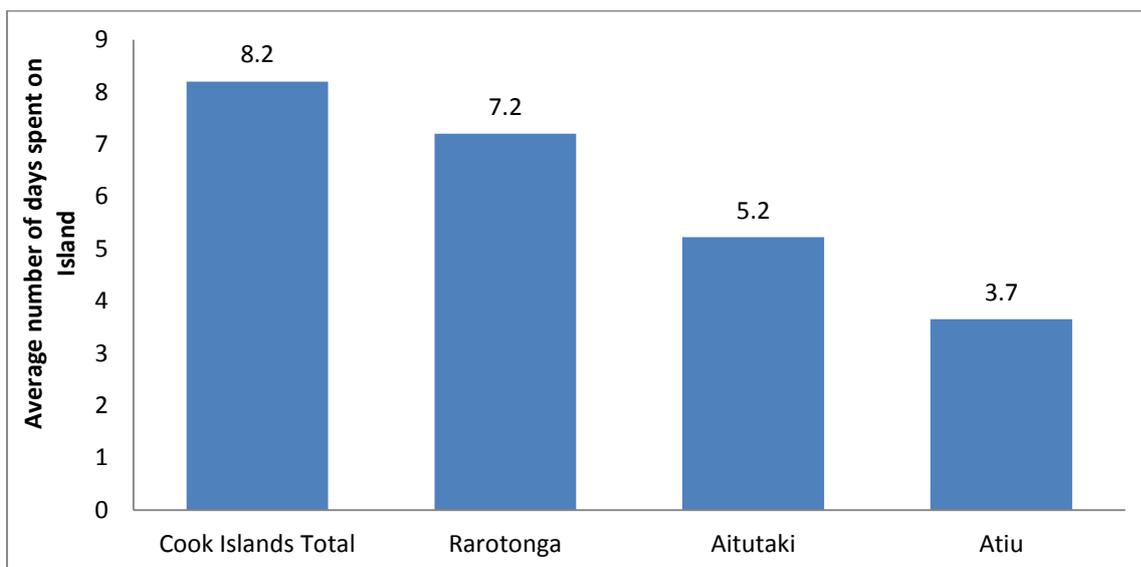
Almost all visitors to the Cook Islands spend some time in Rarotonga (98.8 %), while Aitutaki is the second most visited island (22.4 %) (Figure 12). Atiu was only visited by 1.7% of respondents. The other islands receive very few visitors.

**Figure 12: Visited Islands (n=1454)**



The average length of stay in the Cook Islands is 8.2 days. The average length of stay on Rarotonga is 7.2 days (Figure 13). Most visitors stay in a hotel or resort (63.2%), while 18.4% rent a house or villa, and 11.1% stay in a self-catering accommodation. The average number of days spent on Aitutaki is 5.2 days, with 70% of the visitors staying in a hotel or resort and 20% in a rental home or self-catering accommodation. The average amount of days spent on Atiu is 3.6 days. 47.8% of the visitors stay in a hotel or resort during their stay on Atiu.

**Figure 13: Average length of stay in the Cook Islands (n=1454)**

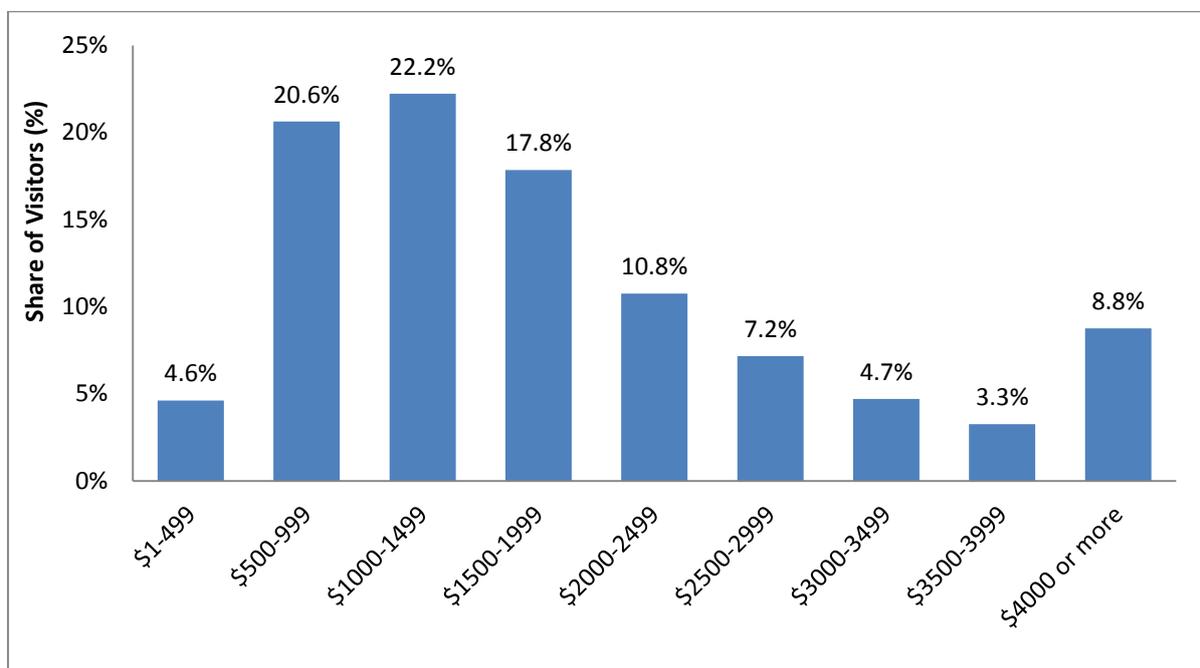


## Visitor Expenditure

The survey asked a range of questions about visitor spend, both prior to arrival and also while in the Cook Islands. All the figures below are based on respondent estimates of their own spending and anyone else they chose to include (e.g. spouse and children).

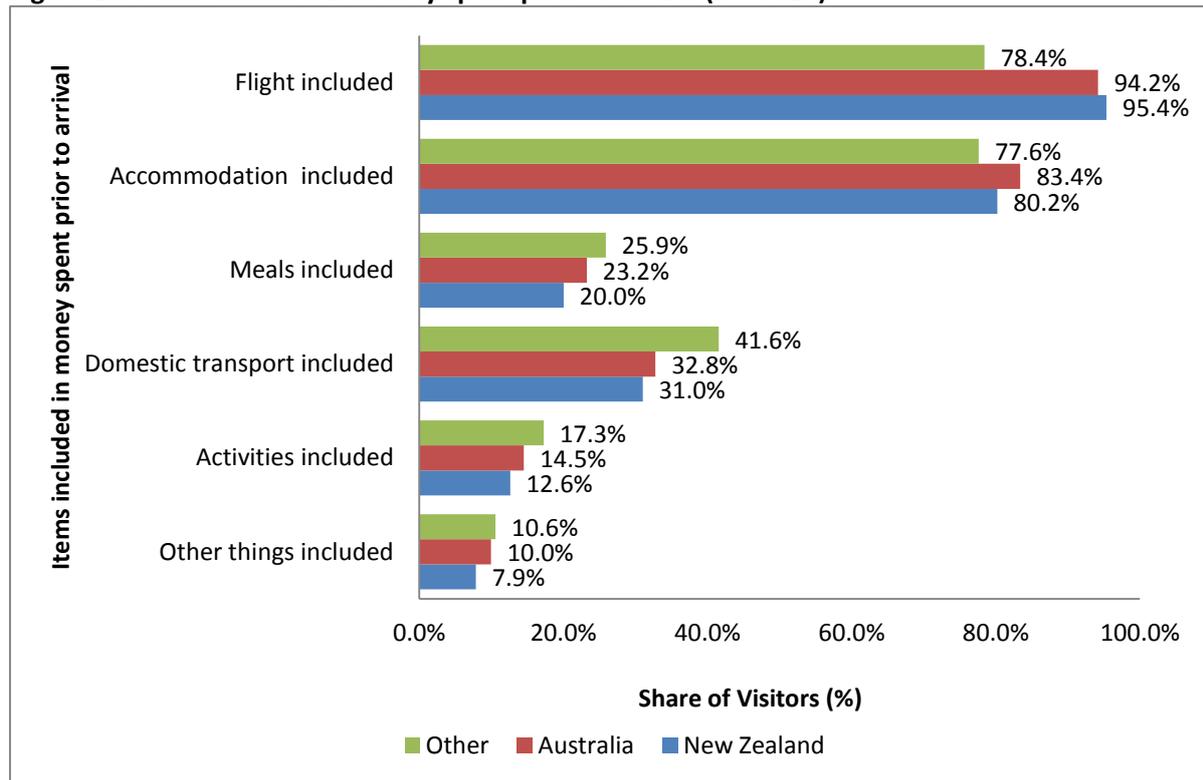
On average, visitors to the Cook Islands spend NZ\$1916 per person prior to arrival, with a range from zero to above \$10,000 per person. Almost all (95.4%) visitors spend at least \$500 per person prior to their trip since they have to pay for their international flights (Figure 14 and 15).

**Figure 14: Amount of money spent per person prior to arrival (n = 3327)**



Spending prior to arrival includes accommodation in 83% of the cases (Figure 15). Meals and activities are less often included in prepaid expenses.

**Figure 15: Items included in money spent prior to arrival (n = 3327)**



It is very difficult to accurately estimate the proportion of the pre-paid spend that flows to the Cook Islands. For the purposes of this study, and based on previous research in the region, we estimate that 50% of the prepaid spend is allocated to airfares, and that 80% of the remaining 50% of the prepaid spend flows back to local operators. In total this means that for every prepaid dollar 40 cents flows to the Cook Islands. We estimate that the prepaid spend figure per day, excluding flights, is \$93 and for the average visit is \$766.

While in the Cook Islands (excluding any pre-paid expenditure), the total spend per visitor per day is \$140 (Table 1) or \$1148 per visit. Most money spent locally is on restaurants, cafes and bars (30.6%), accommodation (24.3%), shopping (14.4%), and activities (8.3%). When daily spend is multiplied by average stay (8.2 days), it can be calculated that each visitor spends an average amount of NZ\$ 1148 during their total stay.

The total figure of what is spent locally and what flows back to the Cook Islands from prepaid expenses is \$233 per visitor per day (140\$ plus \$93), or \$1910 (\$1148 + \$762) per total personal visit.

**Table 1: Average visitor expenditure in the Cook Islands (per person per day)**

Spending items	Overall N= 3327	
	Mean (NZ\$)	(% of spend)
Accommodation	34.00	24.3%
Restaurant, cafes and bar	42.81	30.6%
Vehicle rental	8.81	6.3%
Petrol	2.28	1.6%
Domestic flights	4.71	3.4%
Public transportation	0.92	0.7%
Cruising	2.06	1.5%
Groceries	8.77	6.3%
Shopping	20.12	14.4%
Activities	11.56	8.3%
Other	4.07	2.9%
<b>Total expenditure per person per day</b>	<b>\$140.10</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 2 provides an overview of the in-country spending items per country of origin. Australians and North Americans generally spend more than New Zealanders. Europeans spend the least. Other visitors (mostly Asian) spend the most, but the sample size of this category is very small.

**Table 2: Average expenditure per visitor per day by country of origin (N =3327)**

Spending Items	Other	Australia	USA/ Canada	New Zealand	Europe	Total
Accommodation	77	44	49	28	33	<b>34</b>
Restaurant, cafes and bar	38	48	31	43	43	<b>43</b>
Vehicle rental	16	8	8	9	5	<b>9</b>
Petrol	2	2	2	3	1	<b>2</b>
Domestic flights	37	7	11	3	5	<b>5</b>
Public transportation	1	1	1	1	2	<b>1</b>
Cruising	8	3	2	2	3	<b>2</b>
Groceries	9	8	12	8	9	<b>9</b>
Shopping	79	22	16	20	17	<b>20</b>
Activities	14	12	14	11	10	<b>11</b>
Other	17	9	1	3	2	<b>4</b>
<b>Total spending (NZ)</b>	<b>\$298</b>	<b>\$164</b>	<b>\$147</b>	<b>\$130</b>	<b>\$129</b>	<b>\$140</b>

## Visitor Satisfaction

This section of the report investigates visitor satisfaction with various aspects of the Cook Islands tourism experience. The overall satisfaction rating for the Cook Islands (combining all the separate dimensions) was 4.4 on a scale from 1 to 5, 5 being “very satisfied” (Figure 16). Nearly three quarters (70%) of the visitors ranked their trip with the highest possible score of 5. Very few visitors (1%) were not satisfied with their trip and gave a score of 2 or lower.

**Figure 16: Overall satisfaction with visit to the Cook Islands (n=1393)**

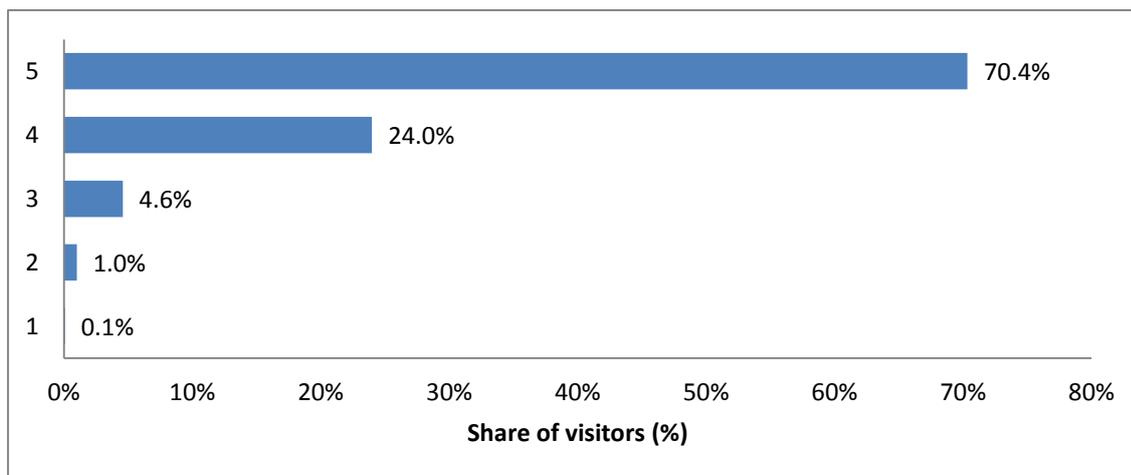
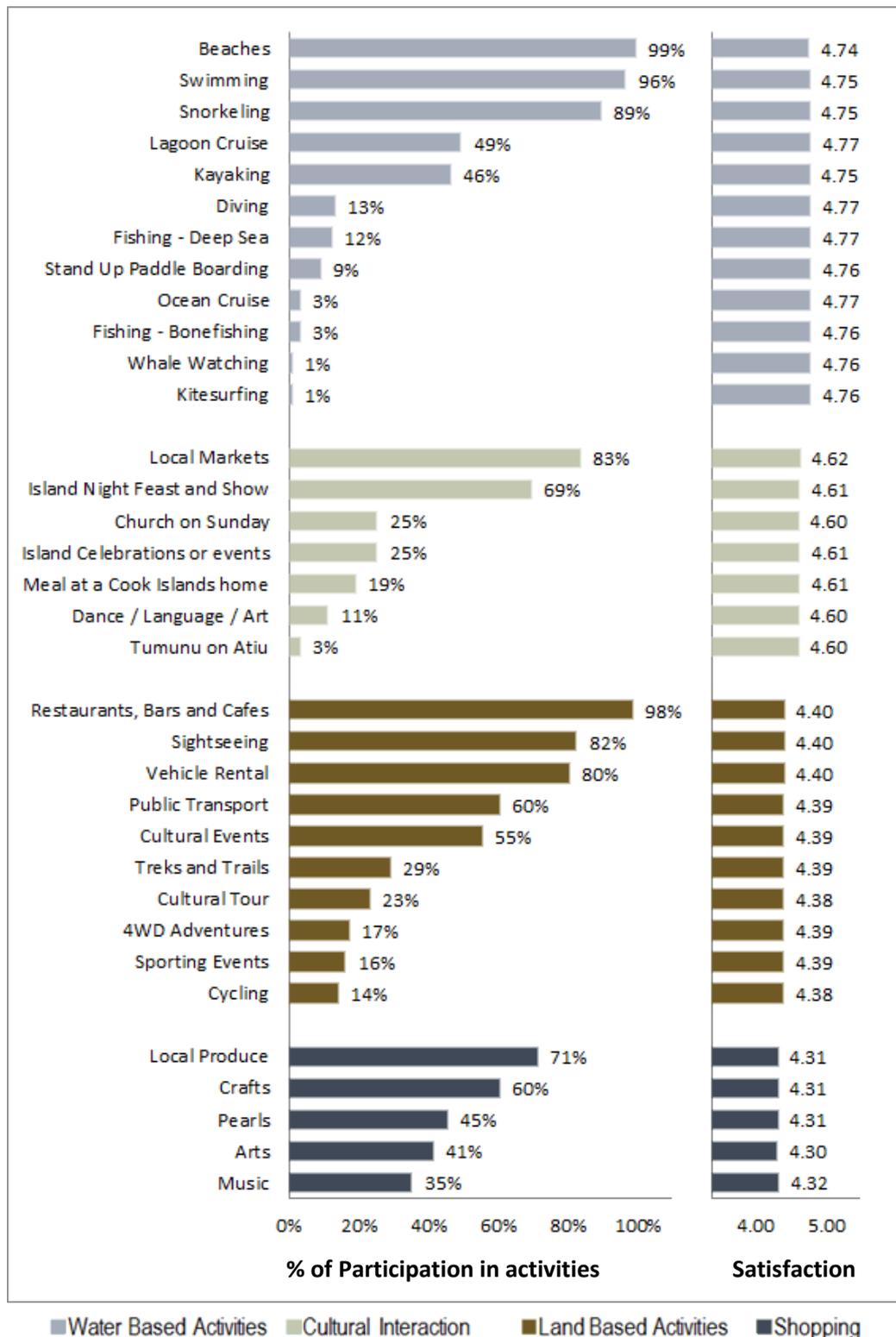


Figure 17 shows the percentage of respondents who undertook an activity and their level of satisfaction. Almost all visitors enjoy swimming at the beaches and snorkelling and visit a restaurant or café during their trip. Most of visitors (83%) visit a local market, and 69% of visitors experience an Island Night and Feast Show. Visitor satisfaction is generally high for all activities undertaken (all registering more than 4 out of a possible high of 5). Water-based activities rank highest (average satisfaction of 4.74/5) followed by cultural interaction activities (4.6/5), land-based activities (4.4/5), and shopping (4.3/5).

**Figure 17: Degree of participation in activities and satisfaction levels.**



\* N (number of responses) was different for each activity. The Average N was 1302.

## Most appealing aspects of the Cook Islands

Visitors were asked “What did you find most attractive or appealing about the Cook Islands on your most recent visit?” The responses were then categorised based on the broad themes they addressed (see Table 3). The most appealing elements of the Cook Islands experience are the beautiful natural environment, the friendly locals, and the peacefulness of the islands. Activities, entertainment and services are less like to be mentioned.

**Table 3: Most appealing aspects of the Cook Islands (n= 1400)**

Theme	
Natural Environment	49%
Friendly people	46%
Peaceful and uncrowded destination	36%
Activities and entertainment	16%
Quality of tourism services	13%
Overall experience	1%

NB. Respondents could give more than one answer, so total does not add up to 100%.

### **Natural Environment**

Survey respondents in general were very positive about the natural environment of the Cook Islands. Half of the respondents considered the environment to be the most appealing aspect of the Cook Islands experience. Most comments were made about the beauty and the cleanliness of beaches and lagoons, the good weather, the amazing sunsets, the rich marine life and tropical flora. Comments included:

*“The natural beauty of the island, the amazing beaches, the mountains and the lagoon. It was like paradise”.*

*“I just appreciated how clean the island was. People are always doing things to keep it up to a tidy standard”.*

*“The island is not over commercialized with high rises.”*

### **Friendly people**

Nearly half (46%) of visitors noted that the most appealing part of their visit was the quality of the interaction with people in the Cook Islands and with the opportunity to get in touch with local culture. Cook Islanders (as well as workers from overseas) are often described with positive adjectives such as “friendly”, “authentic” and “helpful”. For many visitors this is one of the main reasons for their repeat visit or willingness to return. Comments included:

*“I believe the people, and the way tourists are greeted by locals are the best advertisement/ ambassador for any tourist industry and Rarotonga was second to none”.*

*“The friendly people and their readiness to keep alive the Cook Islands culture.”*

### ***Peaceful and uncrowded destination***

Survey respondents appreciate the lifestyle and relaxed atmosphere of the Cook Islands. They considered the Cook Islands to be a very “relaxed”, “stress free”, and “laid back” destination. Another important aspect is the less commercialised atmosphere of the islands, compared to other Pacific Islands such as Fiji. The destination is perceived as being “saved from mass tourism”, “untouched”, “uncrowded” and “well conserved”. Many respondents feel that the Cook Islands is a stress-free destination, and that everything there is “easy”: it is “easy to get around” the island (renting a car, a scooter or with public transport) and the island is a “safe destination to visit”. Many visitors emphasise the importance of preserving the destination from a mass tourism development in the future. Comments included:

*"Few visitors visible; it does not appear as a mass tourism destination!"*

*"I especially liked that there were no fast food restaurant or hotel chains!"*

*"It is easy to travel; pick up from airport and quick rental of scooters! They have the same currency as New Zealand, is easy to get around and locals are willing to help if you look lost."*

### ***Activities and entertainment***

The theme of activities and entertainment was raised in 16% of cases. Most positive comments in this category focus on the water-based activities such as swimming, diving and snorkelling. Other positive comments were made about cruises, guided tours, day trips, shows and dances, walking, relaxing, reading books, travelling around the island by scooter, car or bicycle, and building relations with locals. Comments included:

*"The snorkelling in the lagoon on both Rarotonga and Aitutaki was incredible"*

*"Snorkelling the beaches and the walk across the island with Pa. Zumba with Franki is a must for those who are into fitness."*

### ***Quality of tourism services***

Just over one in ten (13%) of visitors commented that they were satisfied with the quality of customer service they received from hotel and accommodation staff members, and made a note about workers’ friendly attitude. Some positive comments also identified the quality of public transportation, quality of accommodation, variety of markets, restaurants and food available. Some of the respondents underlined the increase of service quality compared to previous visits to the Cook Islands. Comments included:

*"Most of the hotel staff members were very friendly & helpful even if they were not cook islanders."*

*"Restaurants and cafes served great food and the markets were great. "*

*"I appreciate the increased level of service since last being there".*

### **Overall experience**

A small number of respondents could not identify a specific dimension of their holiday that stood out – preferring instead to highlight the whole visit, as they declared to have “*the best holiday ever!*” and that they enjoyed simply “*everything*”.

### **Least appealing aspects of the Cook Islands**

Visitors were also asked “*What did you find least attractive or appealing about the Cook Islands on your most recent visit?*” A quarter of visitors noted they found nothing to be ‘least appealing’ (Table 4).

**Table 4: Least appealing aspects of the Cook Islands (n= 1260)**

<b>Theme</b>	
Nothing to complain about	25%
Poor quality of tourism services	23%
High price of goods and services	13%
Public services and facilities	9%
Flight -related problems	8%
Safety & poverty	7%
Rubbish & lack of environmental protection	5%
Others	16%

\* Share of respondents who made a comment that falls into each theme. Respondents could give more than one answer, so total does not add up to 100%.

### **Poor quality of tourism services**

The next most-cited category was the poor quality of tourism services (mentioned by 23% of respondents). A number of complaints were made about accommodation being run-down and dirty and badly furnished and about the lack of air conditioning. One comment was “*Accommodation/service (at a large Rarotonga based resort) was not up to standard. Would not recommend this resort to anyone.*”

*“We stayed in budget accommodation which appeared to have been set up with real care and creativity, but the owner had really let things run down”*

*“Some of the hotels are showing their age and could do with renovation including new curtains and air conditioner units as the units currently available are old and noisy”.*

Some of the comments highlighted poor customer care skills and professionalism amongst staff members e.g. “*The lack of professional or courteous treatment from staff in shops or the resort. A cheery good morning and using guest names would be very helpful*”.

Other complaints included poor signage to attractions and tracks e.g. *"We tried to follow a path up Rameru but it wasn't very well signed. We had to give up unfortunately."*

Some comments were also made about the poor quality of guided tours and activities, poor condition of rental cars and bikes, lack of tourist information, slow service at restaurants and poor quality and variety of food available.

Some respondents complained about the limited operating hours of shops and restaurants, e.g. *"The early closing of shops is not tourist minded"*. A few visitors also expressed disappointment at the lack of traditional Cook Islands food and local handmade crafts and at the fact that there are so many foreigners working in the Cook Islands at resorts front desk/restaurants/shops. The lack of *"local goods and service"* is something that some visitors did not appreciate. Comments included:

*"Surely when you come to a country you want more specifically to spend your money with the locals and have more interaction with them. I felt that the islanders were in danger of losing the most appealing part of why foreigners come...Local culture should not be sacrificed for the tourist dollar. Perhaps I should have gone to the other islands, as I was told they are less commercial."*

*"Rarotongan appearing items that were NOT made by the locals, but were imported from the Philippines! This is NOT GOOD because people want to support the local people even if it does mean paying a little extra."*

### **High price of goods and services**

A number of comments were made about the high prices meals at the restaurants and food at supermarkets, drinks, souvenirs, handicrafts, hotel accommodation, activities and the internet. A number of visitors mentioned that the Cook Islands was an expensive destination to visit, but did not always provide good value for money sometimes preventing them from participating in activities or going to restaurants and leaving them dissatisfied.

Some visitors who had travelled to the island previously felt disappointed by rapidly increasing prices on the islands. Comments included:

*"Food was extremely expensive and quality did not reflect price"*

*"I have been to the Cook Islands twice now, I think that the cost of things e.g. food, eating out, drinks has increased quite a bit. It makes renting a house and taking food there more appealing."*

### **Public services**

Some survey respondents expressed their disappointment about public services and infrastructure. In particular, several comments related to the bad state of the roads which have *"holes and poor lighting"* and can be *"dangerous"*. Some complaints were also made about the quality of public transport including the poor condition of bus stations, inconvenient timetables, bus drivers' unfriendly manner and high costs.

A few visitors were disappointed by the number of derelict buildings and run down areas which are *"a real eyesore, such as the abandoned Hotel"*. Other less common comments related to public services included: the lack of internet and phone coverage, the condition of public toilets, the

problems of accessibility for tourists on wheelchairs, and the slow process for getting a driver's license on the island.

*"Cost of public transport if you were using few times every day would be more expensive than renting a vehicle"*

*"As I travelled with an infant and child I rented a tandem push chair and used this as my main mode of transport and walked or ran with the children almost everywhere. I was very disappointed with the road surfaces. I think a lot more people would walk with children if the roads were sealed properly along the edge or there was a foot path"*

*"Public transportation was terrible. Bus stops were not posted, they only ran once an hour and there was no way of knowing when they stopped running"*

*"The number of run-down/abandoned buildings"*

### **Flight-related problems**

Survey respondents expressed their disappointment about flights services, including: *"unexpected departure tax", "the cost of internal flights", "delays", "unfriendliness of the staff", "security check point", and "the lack of ATM points inside the International airport terminal"*. Many visitors feel frustrated with the inconvenient flight times.

*"The flight times!! Not enough to stop me from coming back though - but it did cost us 2 nights' accommodation (in our very amazing but expensive villa) which we did not get to make the most of (arriving in around midnight and then leaving around midnight)"*

*"The early morning flight to NZ was not appealing!!"*

*"The surprise departure tax at the airport, \$55 seems very high, and the first I heard of it was at the airport when leaving"*

*"The airport security people. Nasty and very unfriendly"*

### **Safety and poverty**

85 survey respondents expressed their concern about safety, mostly about the presence of stray dogs. Other comments were made about the lack of attention paid to wearing helmets on scooters, and displays of public drunkenness by both locals and tourists.

The perceived lack of benefits flowing from tourism to the local populace was also discussed on occasion.

*"I am sorry but you have to do something about all the dogs straying about."*

*"We feel guilty luxuriating in a resort, while seeing locals working very hard for little money. If I knew the resort was owned and operated by locals rather than profiting foreign ownership, I'd be happier"*

*"Knowing that the money generated by the tourists is not being paid to the people doing the work"*

### ***Rubbish and lack of environmental protection***

Several visitors were very disappointed to see rubbish discarded around the island. In particular comments were made about the “*uncleanliness of beaches*”, the “*rubbish on the beaches*” especially “*broken glass*”, the “*lack of rubbish bins*” and the “*burning of rubbish*”. Some visitors also raised concerns about the lack of environmental protection especially in the marine environment. People noticed the “*dead coral*” “and the “*degraded reef*”.

*“We noticed quite a bit of broken glass on some beaches which is worrying also because that's where you are barefoot. Maybe doing a clean-up of the glass and promoting recycling of glass bottles will help make the beautiful beaches a bit safer for beach goers”*

*“Since my last visit 5 years ago the lagoon has seriously deteriorated. For example, Muri lagoon was an amazing place to snorkel 5 years ago, but now pretty much all of the coral is dead and covered in horrible brown algae, and there are far fewer fish”*

*“Cutting/butchering of trees in Matavera and by the Prison. The environment must be protected. You are the custodians of this piece of paradise”.*

*“Rubbish bins needed. Even out front of restaurants there was rubbish on the beaches, no one picking it up, no bins etc. very disturbing”*

### ***Other comments***

35 survey respondents were unhappy about the noise of roosters, dogs and chickens early in the morning. More rarely comments were made about the presence of mosquitos, sand flies, sea slugs and sea cucumbers.

*“The early wake up calls from the roosters & the wandering dogs”*

*“The noise from (roaming) barking dogs (with and without collars) and crowing roosters at night. We hardly slept as it went on most of the night every night and we warn everyone we tell to ensure they try to find a place where this won't bother them (I suspect that will be difficult!)”*

### **Suggestions to improve a visit to the Cook Islands**

Survey respondents provided several suggestions when asked: *What would improve a visit to the Cook Islands?* Comments emphasized the need to improve the variety and quality of food as well as its pricing and availability. Also some visitors suggested extending restaurant and shop opening hours.

*“The quality of the food in the cafes and hotels and restaurants on Rarotonga needs to be improved significantly”*

*“Restaurant/cafe Opening hours extended for availability of food during the day.*

Many visitors wish to have a closer interaction with the local culture, and especially taste local food and buy local handicrafts.

*“Greater availability of local produce at local prices, especially locally grown fruit and vegetables”*

*“More emphasis on the native history and culture. Each village could provide an experience of its culture”*

Other suggestions about how to improve a visit to the Cook Islands focused on accommodation standards, customer care, the need for improved tourist information (in country) and signage.

*“Our hotel needed to improve staff service and quality and variety of their food”*

*“It would be great if there was a pamphlet (or similar) about ALL of the restaurants/eating places on the island. If the internet was better, a website would be great, with info about each restaurant, and maybe the menu. None of the maps/pamphlets with the bus timetable on them say what happens on public holidays”*

*“More signs/explanations at historic places and more walking tracks”*

## **Reasons to return to the Cook Islands**

A great majority of visitors (95%) indicated that they would consider re-visiting the Cook Islands. Over three-quarters (79%) of the visitors who said they would like to return would also like to include the outer islands to their next visit, and in particular Aitutaki.

Nearly all visitors surveyed (98.3%) said that they would recommend the destination to their family and friends.

When asked why they would return or recommend the Cook Islands to others a range of comments were provided, including:

*“the Cooks have the pleasant, laid back, paradise-like feel of more popular destinations without the crowds or gigantic tourism industry.”*

*“So beautiful, relaxing and tropical with amazing snorkelling and swimming”*

*“It is a place we feel safe and would like our children to join us in the future”*

*“Because it was just amazing! The people make the experience so much more memorable. Well Done Rarotonga, you really are the pearl of the Pacific!”*

*“If people were looking for a restful holiday I would recommend the Cook Islands.”*

*“Because it is a must see of the Pacific and a true demonstration of the hospitality and sincere nature of our Pacific people.”*

## **Additional visitor comments on the overall experience of the Cook Islands**

Visitors were asked to provide additional comments on their overall experience of the Cook Islands. Comments were often of a similar nature to those mentioned above. Some examples of the themes addressed included:

*"I was last in the Cook Islands 25 years ago and was happy to see that it was still much the same in life style and had not been over whelmed with sky scrapers"*

*"Only main negative is the frequent smell of smoke in the air - rubbish burning"*

*"Hospitality - raise the standard of the resorts. Value your staff, they seem unhappy and undervalued and unconnected. Such a shame."*

*"All said above, need to do something with the roaming dogs - it was a very big problem for us, kid's got no sleep too and it did spoil the holiday a lot"*

*"Service industry needs a big improvement as does the quality of food served in restaurants and cafes"*

*"You have a beautiful country. It needs to be protected and nurtured (e.g. stop the Rarotongan Resort feeding the fish in the lagoon - you need to see the virtual underwater desert in the area opposite the resort to appreciate how they have broken the food cycle and destroyed the marine life in that area). You need to educate locals and visitors about this natural resource. Lastly, please don't price things so that only the wealthiest people can visit the Cook Islands - keep prices realistic and you will flourish."*

*"We cannot talk highly enough of the island, the people and the lifestyle as well as the resort staff and services which exceeded our every expectation and will live in our memory forever. Thank you"*

## **Final observations**

This report shows that the Cook Islands tourism industry performed well during the April – June 2012 period. Levels of visitor satisfaction are uniformly high and there is an extremely strong desire for return visitation and/or to recommend the Cook Islands to others. Visitor expenditure is significant and when the next round of survey research is completed we will be able to get a feel for seasonal influences on expenditure and explore spending by different markets in more detail.

The survey research also highlights the importance of not resting on one's laurels. There is plenty of room to enhance the visitor experience and to increase the economic yield and broader community benefits associated with tourism. It is important that product quality and value for money be monitored carefully and enhanced wherever possible. The Cook Islands has become, over time, one of the more expensive destinations in the South Pacific and it is critical that visitor expectations are met and exceeded if market share is to be maintained. It is also important that issues around environmental degradation, visitor safety and infrastructure quality be monitored and managed carefully.

## Appendix – Cook Islands Visitor Survey



### Cook Islands Visitor Survey

#### Information for Participants

Kia Orana and warm Pacific greetings to you. As a recent visitor to the Cook Islands, we invite you to participate in research designed to improve the visitor experience as well as support us to make good decisions for tourism in our beautiful island nation. The research is funded by the Cook Islands Tourism Corporation and conducted by the New Zealand Tourism Research Institute at AUT University, Auckland, New Zealand.

If you are a permanent Cook Island resident, thank you for your interest but this Survey is focused on non-resident visitors to the Islands.

**We would like to know about your most recent visit to the Cook Islands and ask you to complete this Visitor Survey within two weeks of your trip if possible.**

All answers are confidential and can in no way be linked to your personal details. By taking the survey you are giving your consent to be part of this research.

Participation is entirely voluntary. To participate in this research, simply click on the button below. The Survey asks a number of questions where you select your answer from a range of options given. Some questions ask you to type your comments in your own words into the box provided. We would appreciate it if you could fill this survey out as accurately as possible. All questions are optional. The survey will run until 30 September 2012.

This survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

All answers are confidential and can in no way be linked to your personal details. By taking the survey you are giving consent to be part of this research.

[Take the survey](#)

Aggregated results of this research may be used in journal and conference publications. A summary of the results of this research will also be available on [www.nztri.org](http://www.nztri.org) in mid 2012.

For further information about this research contact:

Project Coordinator: Carolyn Deuchar, New Zealand Tourism Research Institute, AUT University: email [carolyn.deuchar@aut.ac.nz](mailto:carolyn.deuchar@aut.ac.nz), phone 09 921 9999 ext 8892

Team Leader: Professor Simon Milne: New Zealand Tourism Research Institute, AUT University: email [simon.milne@aut.ac.nz](mailto:simon.milne@aut.ac.nz), phone 09 921 9245

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 13 December 2011. AUTEK Reference Number 11/335.

## ABOUT YOUR VISIT

This survey is about your most recently completed visit to the Cook Islands. We would ask you to complete this survey within two weeks of your return home if possible.

(If you are a permanent Cook Islands' resident, thank you for your interest but this survey is focused on non-resident visitors to the Cook Islands)

By completing the survey you are giving consent to participate in this research.

1. When did you arrive in the Cook Islands on your most recent visit? (format dd/mm/yyyy, eg. 26/06/2012)

2. How many nights did you spend in the Cook Islands on your most recent visit?

3. What was the main purpose of your visit?

- Holiday
- Wedding party
- Business or conference
- Visiting friends or relatives
- Honeymoon
- Special event - sporting
- Special event - cultural
- Volunteering
- Education

4. How did you get to the Cook Islands? (tick as many as apply)

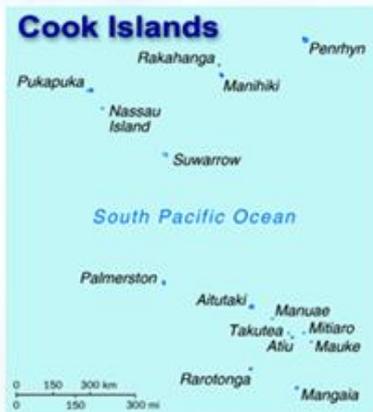
- Airline - Air New Zealand
- Airline - Virgin Australia
- Airline - Air Tahiti
- Ferry
- Private charter plane
- Private boat

5. Who were your travelling companions? (tick as many as apply)

- No one - I was by myself
- Partner / husband / wife
- Family member(s)
- Friends
- Work colleagues
- Tour group
- Organised group (e.g. school, sports etc)
- Wedding party

6. How many people accompanied you on this trip?

7.1 Which islands did you visit on this trip? Please provide additional information when prompted on the following page.



- Rarotonga
- Aitutaki
- Atiu
- Mangaia
- Mauke
- Other

### 7.2 How many nights did you spend on each island?

	Number of nights
Rarotonga	<input type="text"/> ▾
Aitutaki	<input type="text"/> ▾
Atiu	<input type="text"/> ▾
Mangaia	<input type="text"/> ▾
Mauke	<input type="text"/> ▾

### 7.3 Please select the accommodation(s) you stayed in on Rarotonga? (Hold down the CTL key to choose more than one accommodation)

- Aito Apartments Muri
- Aloha Mana
- Anchor's Rest
- Apartments Kakera - Rarotonga
- Aquarius Rarotonga
- Arcadia Cottage
- Are Mango Guesthouse
- Are Renga
- Aremango Guesthouse
- Aroa Beachside Inn

### How satisfied were you with your stay at Aito Apartments Muri?

Very Dissatisfied (1)      2      3      4      Very Satisfied (5)

8. On your most recent visit to the Cook Islands, please indicate below the activities that you engaged in and how satisfied you were with your experience.

• Water based activities:

	Very Dissatisfied (1)	2	3	4	Very Satisfied (5)	Didn't participate
Beaches	<input type="radio"/>					
Swimming	<input type="radio"/>					
Snorkelling	<input type="radio"/>					
Diving	<input type="radio"/>					
Kayaking	<input type="radio"/>					
Fishing - Deep Sea	<input type="radio"/>					
Fishing - Bonefishing	<input type="radio"/>					
Lagoon Cruise	<input type="radio"/>					
Ocean Cruise	<input type="radio"/>					
Whale Watching	<input type="radio"/>					
Kitesurfing	<input type="radio"/>					
Stand Up Paddle Boarding	<input type="radio"/>					

• Cultural interaction:						
	Very Dissatisfied (1)	2	3	4	Very Satisfied (5)	Didn't participate
Island Night Feast and Show	<input type="radio"/>					
Meal at a Cook Islands Home	<input type="radio"/>					
Church on Sunday	<input type="radio"/>					
Island Celebrations or Events	<input type="radio"/>					
Tumunu on Atiu	<input type="radio"/>					
Local Markets	<input type="radio"/>					
Dance / Language / Art Classes	<input type="radio"/>					

• Land based activities and Touring:

	Very Dissatisfied (1)	2	3	4	Very Satisfied (5)	Didn't participate
Restaurants, Bars and Cafes	<input type="radio"/>					
Cultural Events	<input type="radio"/>					
Sporting Events	<input type="radio"/>					
4WD Adventures	<input type="radio"/>					
Cultural Tour	<input type="radio"/>					
Treks and Trails	<input type="radio"/>					
Cycling	<input type="radio"/>					
Sightseeing	<input type="radio"/>					
Vehicle Rental	<input type="radio"/>					
Public Transport	<input type="radio"/>					

• Shopping:

	Very Dissatisfied (1)	2	3	4	Very Satisfied (5)	Didn't participate
Pearls	<input type="radio"/>					
Arts	<input type="radio"/>					
Crafts	<input type="radio"/>					
Music	<input type="radio"/>					
Local Produce e.g. Coffee, Coconut Oil etc	<input type="radio"/>					

• Please tell us about any other activities you participated in

9. On your most recent visit, how satisfied were you with the following?

	Very Dissatisfied (1)	2	3	4	Very Satisfied (5)	Didn't participate
The information that was available when planning this trip?	<input type="radio"/>					
The information that was available during this trip?	<input type="radio"/>					
The cost of accommodation?	<input type="radio"/>					
The quality of accommodation?	<input type="radio"/>					
The experience of renting a vehicle?	<input type="radio"/>					
The experience of using public transport?	<input type="radio"/>					
The frequency of air transport within the Cook Islands?	<input type="radio"/>					
The overall level of service in the Cook Islands?	<input type="radio"/>					
The friendliness of the people in the Cook Islands?	<input type="radio"/>					

10. What did you find **most attractive or appealing** about the Cook Islands on your most recent visit?

11. What did you find **least attractive or appealing** about the Cook Islands on your most recent visit?

12. Is there anything that could have improved your visit to the Cook Islands?

No

Yes

## EXPENDITURE

Information on how much money you spent during your visit helps the planning and development of the Cook Islands economy.

We would appreciate it if you could fill out this section as accurately as possible.

13. In the expenditure estimates you will provide below, how many people are included (including yourself)?

Adults

Children (0- 16 years old)

14.1 Please indicate below the total value of what you paid prior to your arrival to the Cook Islands (including purchases made via travel agents or the internet), in the currency specified in Question 14.2

14.2 Please select your currency:

NZD

AUD

GBP

USD

EUR

CAD

Other - please specify

14.3 What does this amount above include? (tick as many as apply)

International flights

Accommodation

Meals

Domestic transport

Activities

Other

15. After you arrived in the Cook Islands, how much do you estimate that you spent in each island in local currency (NZ\$)?

	Rarotonga	Aitutaki	Other island(s)	Total
Accommodation	0	0	0	0
Restaurants, Cafes & Bars	0	0	0	0
Vehicle Rental	0	0	0	0
Petrol	0	0	0	0
Domestic flights	0	0	0	0
Public transport	0	0	0	0
Cruising	0	0	0	0
Groceries	0	0	0	0
Shopping (e.g. souvenirs, clothes)	0	0	0	0
Activities (e.g. water sports, sightseeing)	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0

16. Was your recent visit to the Cook Islands part of a bigger trip?

Yes

No

17. Would you return to the Cook Islands? Why?

Yes

No

18. Would you recommend the Cook Islands to others? Why?

Yes

No

19. How satisfied were you with your overall experience of the Cook Islands ?

Very Dissatisfied

(1)

2

3

4

Very satisfied

(5)

20. Please add any comments you would like to make about your overall experience of the Cook Islands.

## ABOUT YOU

21. How many times have you been to the Cook Islands prior to your most recent visit?

22. Your age group:

- 18-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60-69
- 70+

23. Your gender:

- Female
- Male

24. What is your highest qualification?

- No formal qualification
- High school qualification
- Tertiary/University qualification
- Other

25.1 What is your approximate annual household income in your home currency?  
Please use the following format: eg. 50,000 and specify currency in question 25.2.

25.2 Please select your currency:

- NZD
- AUD
- GBP
- USD
- EUR
- CAD
- Other - please specify

26. Where do you live? (Please select)