



# Cook Islands Visitor Survey Results

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**April - June 2015**

**Prepared for Cook Islands Tourism Corporation**

**by**

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[www.nztri.org](http://www.nztri.org)

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## Executive Summary

This report focuses on the characteristics, expectations and expenditure patterns of tourists who visited the Cook Islands. The data presented is drawn from an online departure survey (<http://www.mycookislandsvisit.com>). The survey period covered in this report is 1 April to 30 June 2015. There were 891 individual respondents to the survey - representing a total of 1636 adults and 199 children (this equates to 5.3% of all visitors during the period – based on the 2014 visitor arrival data for the April to June period from the Cook Islands Statistics Office).

The survey results for this quarter are similar to those presented in the 2013/14 annual report. The majority (64%) of visitors surveyed come from New Zealand, 22% come from Australia. Visitors are well educated (69% of visitors have some form of tertiary education) with a relatively high annual household income (47% earn over NZ\$100,000 per year). Just under half of the visitors (48%) travel with one companion. Solo travellers are relatively rare (7%).

Two thirds of the visitors surveyed (64%) are on their first visit to the Cook Islands, a further 24% have visited once or twice before. The main purpose of the visit is holiday-making (77%). The average length of stay in the Cook Islands is 8.3 nights. The majority (96%) of the visitors stay either one or two weeks. Twenty three percent of the visitors surveyed visit Aitutaki in addition to Rarotonga.

Visitor spend prior to arrival in the Cook Islands (\$2,005 per person) has increased from the 2013/14 annual average (\$1,985 per person). Spend on the island (per person per day) is \$112 which is slightly higher than the 2013/14 annual average of \$111, but slightly lower than the same quarter for the previous year (\$115 for April to June 2014).

The average local spend per visitor during the whole trip is \$926. If the pre-paid spend amount and the local spend are combined, it is estimated that each visitor brings \$1,728 to the Cook Islands economy (or approximately \$209 per day). This figure is slightly higher than \$1,724 average for 2013/14, and higher than \$1699 for the same quarter last year (April-June 2014).

Water-based activities are characterised by the strongest participation levels. Visitor satisfaction levels with activities and services is high. Cultural activities are characterised by the highest overall satisfaction ratings. The most appealing elements of the Cook Islands experience are the beautiful natural environment, the friendly local people, the peacefulness and relaxing atmosphere of the islands, the activities and attractions on offer, and entertainment and events. The least appealing elements of the Cook Islands experience are considered to be a lack of public services and facilities, stray animals and the poor quality and value for money in terms of food and beverage.

Overall satisfaction on the part of visitors is very high: 93% of those surveyed want to return to the Cook Islands, and 98% would recommend the Cook Islands to friends or family. The overall satisfaction level is consistent with the previous year.

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## Introduction

The Cook Islands government, local businesses and communities require a clearer picture of the characteristics, expectations and expenditure patterns of visitors to the nation. 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. Visitors to the Cook Islands are asked to complete a web-based survey within two weeks of the completion of their visit. This web-based survey ran for 24 months during 2012-2014 with reporting on a quarterly and annual basis, and is continuing through 2014-2015.

This report presents the results from April to June 2015. Over this three month period, 2919 visitors were contacted by email to take part in the survey, and 891 responses were received: a conversion rate of 30.5%. These responses cover a total of 1636 adults and 199 children. The conversion rate for this period is higher than for the 2013/14 annual average (25%) and Jan-Mar 2014 quarter (26.1%).

The data presented include detailed information on:

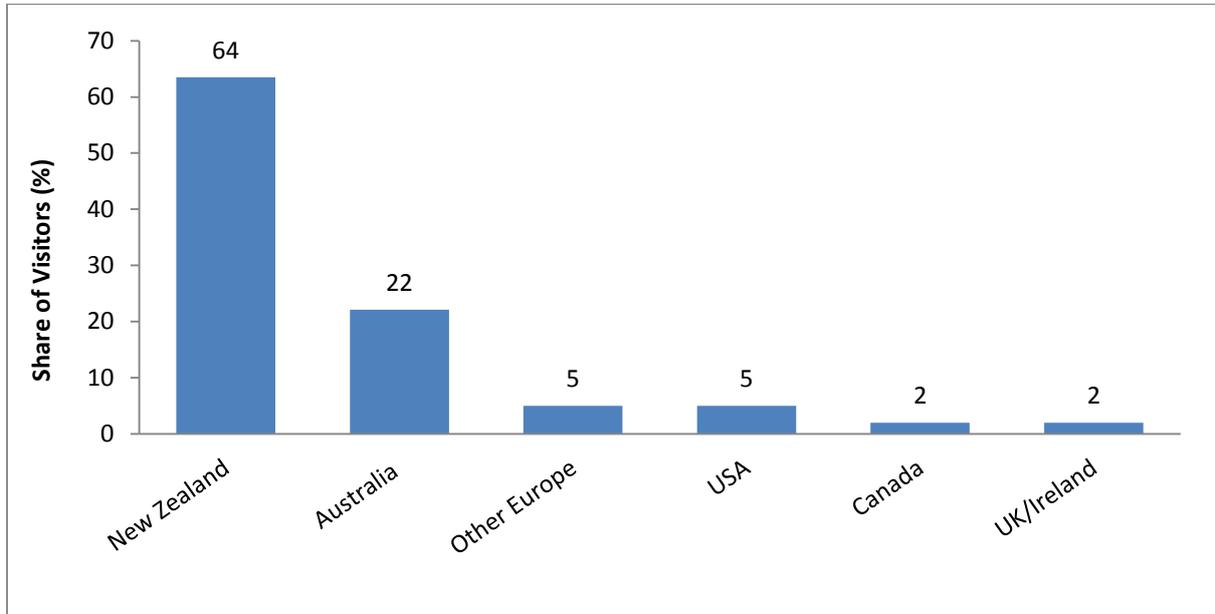
- The characteristics of visitors to the Cook Islands (age, gender, education, country of origin, income, purpose of visit, travelling companions, number of previous visits, length of stay, airline used, islands visited)
- Visitor expenditure (amount of money spent prior to arrival and while in the Cook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

Wherever there are significant and/or notable variations from the 2013/14 annual averages or the 2013/14 April– June quarterly figures these are highlighted in the discussion below.

## Visitor Characteristics

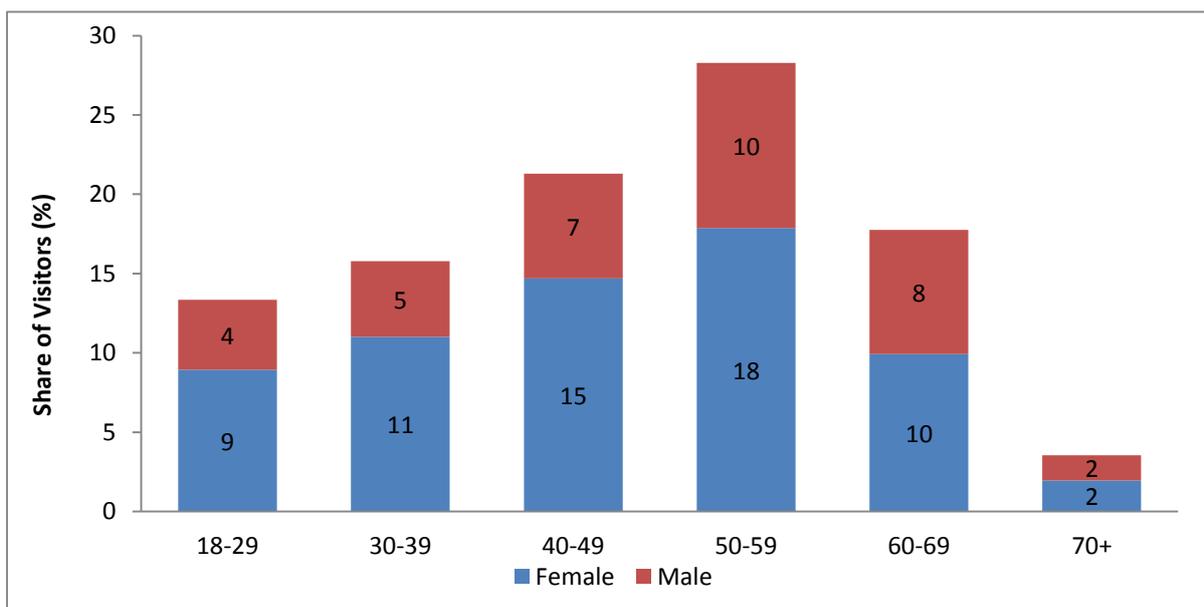
The majority (64%) of the visitors surveyed come from New Zealand (Figure 1). The second largest visitor group is from Australia, with 22% of respondents. Europe, USA, Canada and Great Britain represent the other main source markets.

**Figure 1: Country of origin (n=825)**



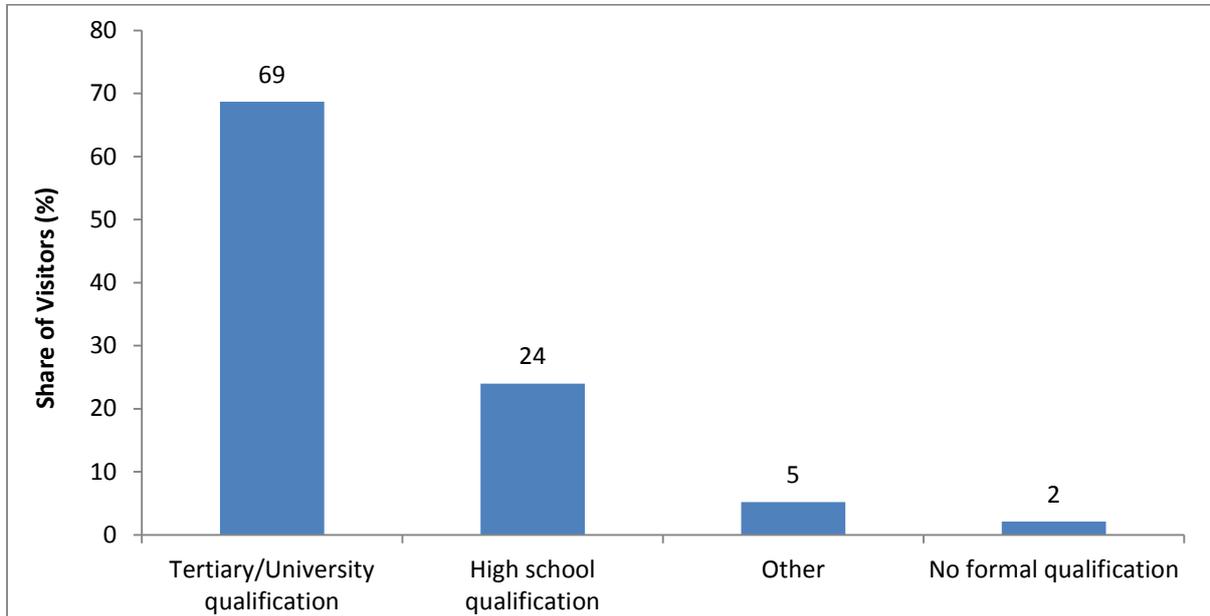
More women (64%) than men (36%) completed the survey (Figure 2). The most significant age group categories are the 50 to 59 year olds (28%) grouping, followed by those aged 40 to 49 (22%). There are relatively few travellers in the 70 plus age bracket.

**Figure 2: Distribution of age and gender (n=817)**



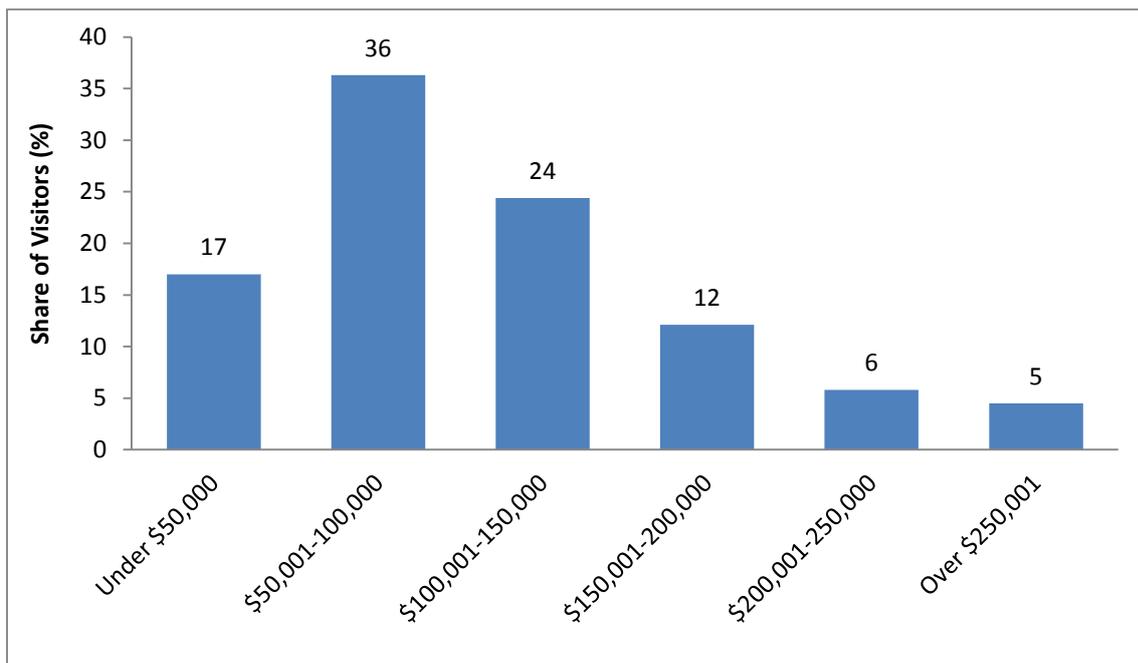
Visitors are well educated: more than two-thirds (69%) of those surveyed have some form of tertiary qualification, with a further 24% having completed a high school education (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Highest qualification (n=822)**



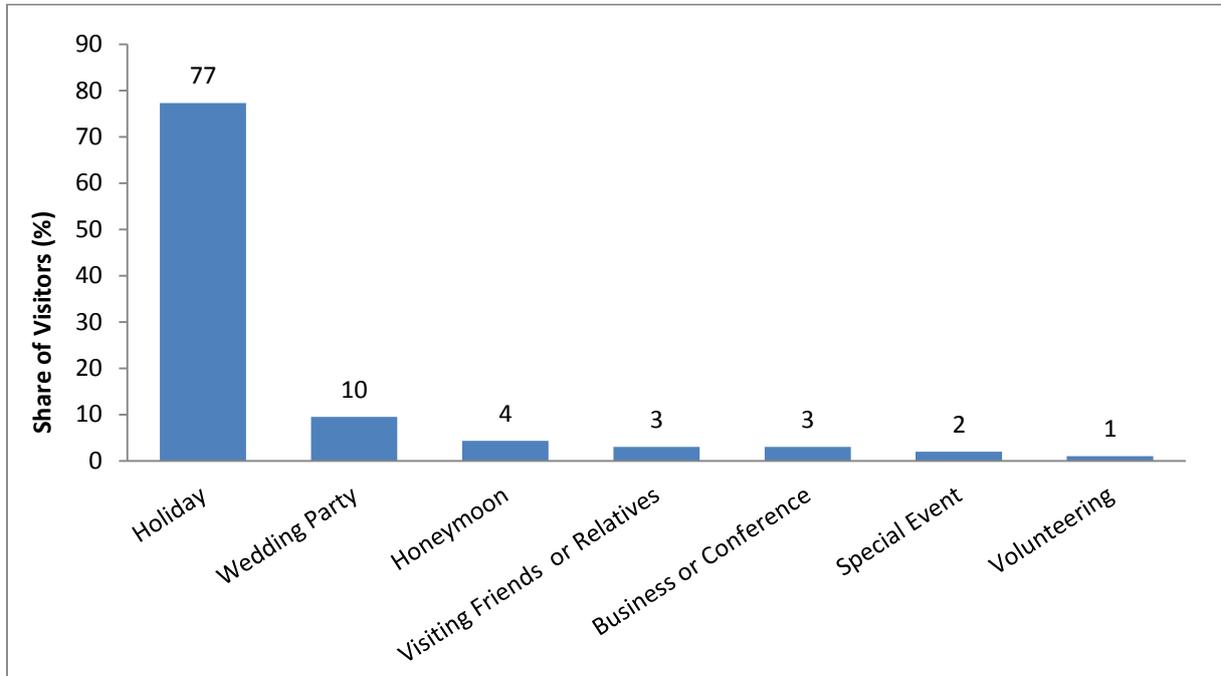
Over a third of visitors (36%) have an annual household income of between NZ\$50,001 and NZ\$100,000. Nearly a quarter (24%) of those surveyed earn between NZ\$100,001 and NZ\$150,000. A further 23% of respondents have a household income of over NZ\$150,000 per year (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Annual household income in NZD (n=694)**



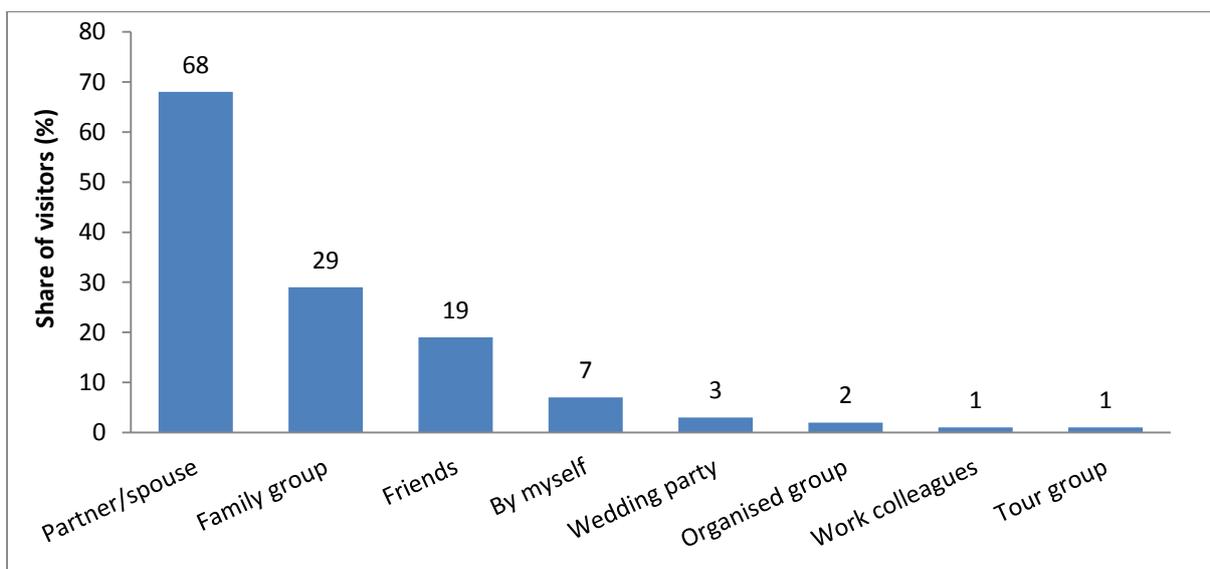
Over three quarters of visitors surveyed come to the Cook Islands for a holiday (77%). Other reasons given include to attend a wedding (10%), for a honeymoon (4%), and to visit friends/relatives (3%). Just 2% of survey respondents came for a special event and 1% came as volunteers during this quarter (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Main purpose of visit (n=891)**



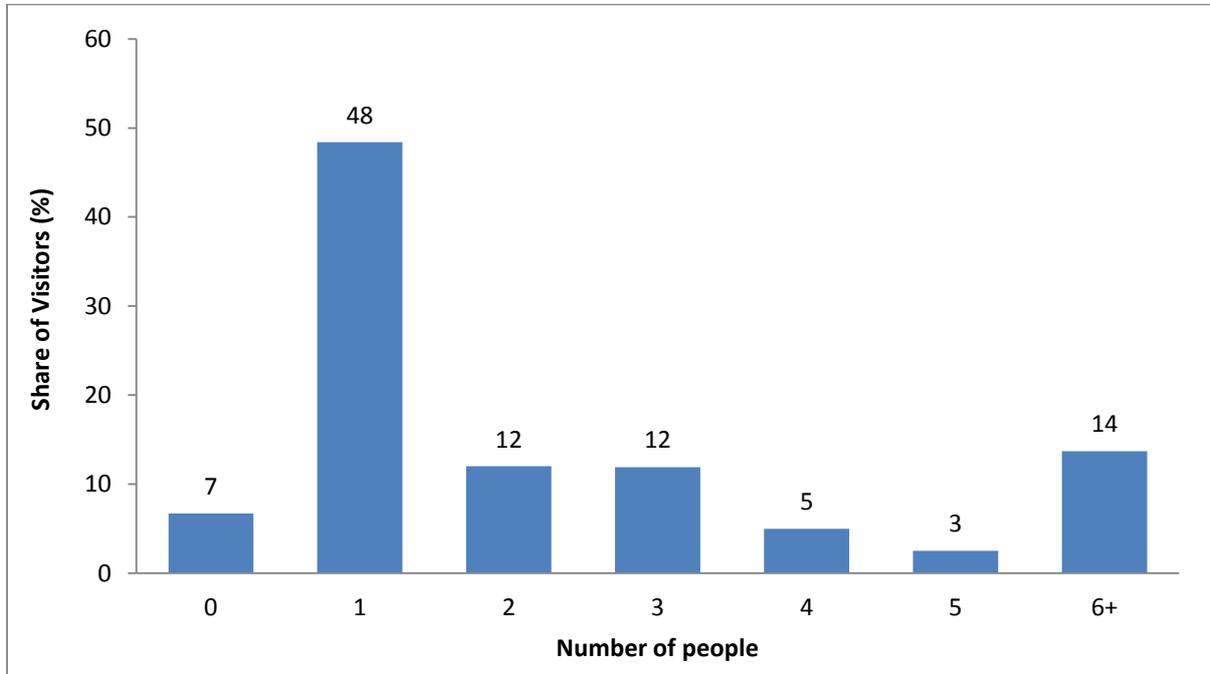
Most visitors (68%) surveyed travel to the Cook Islands with a partner or spouse. Visitors also often travel with other family members (29%) or friends (19%). Those travelling alone, or as a part of a wedding party or organised group represent a smaller share of the sample (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Travelling with whom? (n=887)**



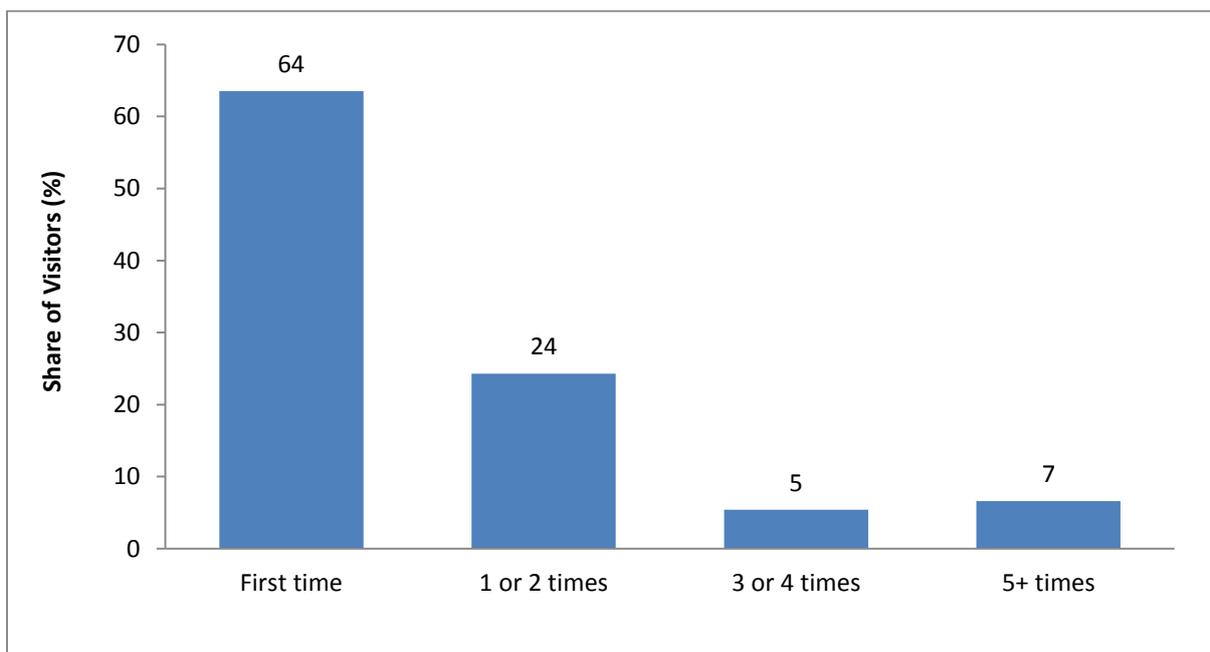
Just under half of the visitors (48%) travelled with one companion on their visit to the Cook Islands (Figure 7). Travel groups larger than 4 people were not very common, with the exception of wedding parties.

**Figure 7: Number of companions on trip (n=885)**



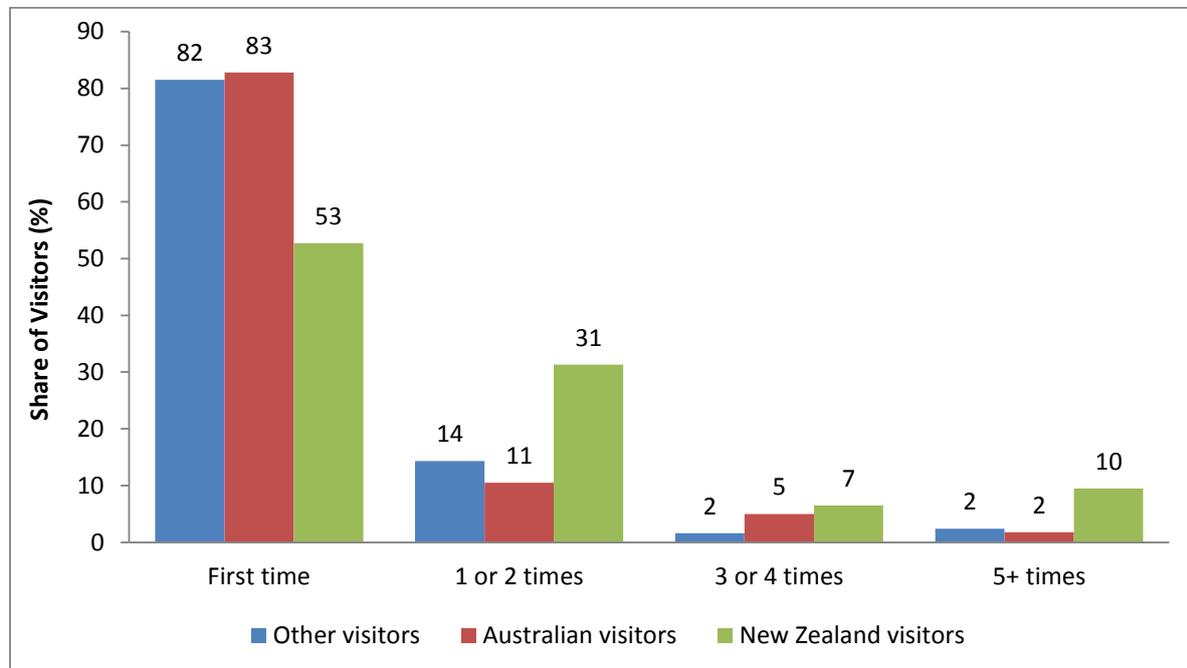
Two thirds of the visitors (64%) are on their first visit to the Cook Islands. A further 24% have been to the Cook Islands once or twice before. A smaller group (12%) have visited 3 or more times (Figure 8).

**Figure 8: Number of visits to the Cook Islands (n=819)**



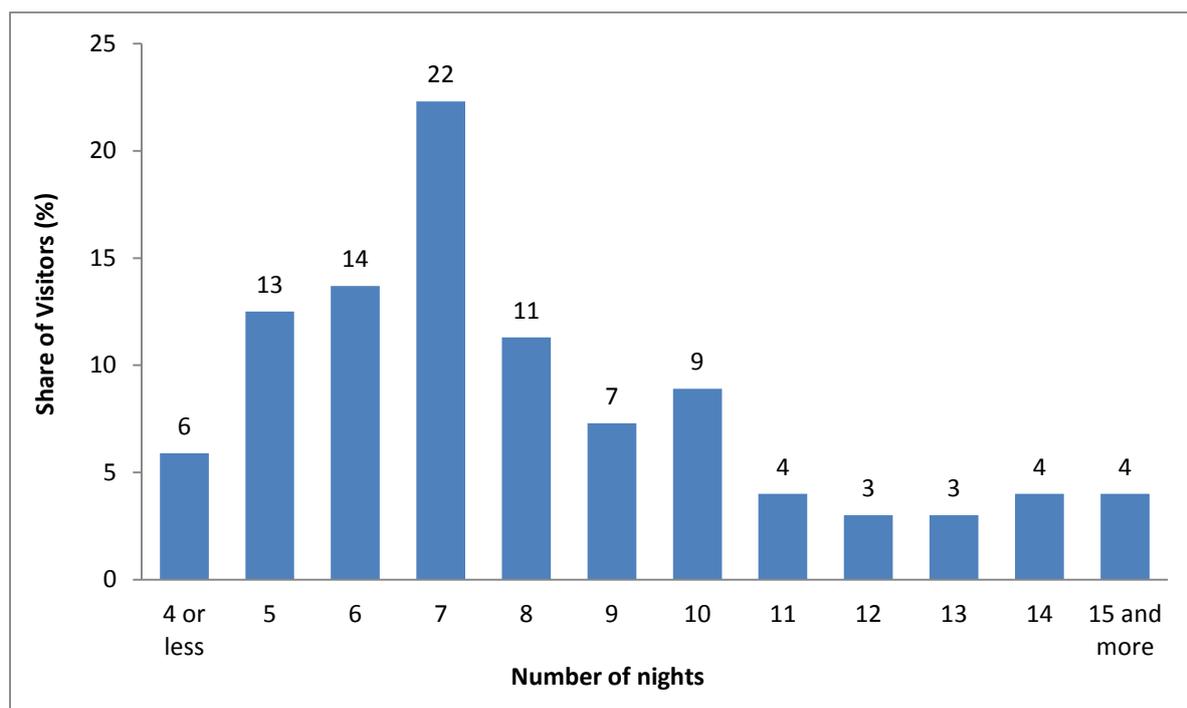
New Zealanders are more likely to be repeat visitors than those from other source markets (Figure 9). Just under half of visitors from New Zealand (48%) have visited the Cook Islands before compared to only 18% of visitors from Australia.

**Figure 9: Number of previous visits to the Cook Islands (n=819)**



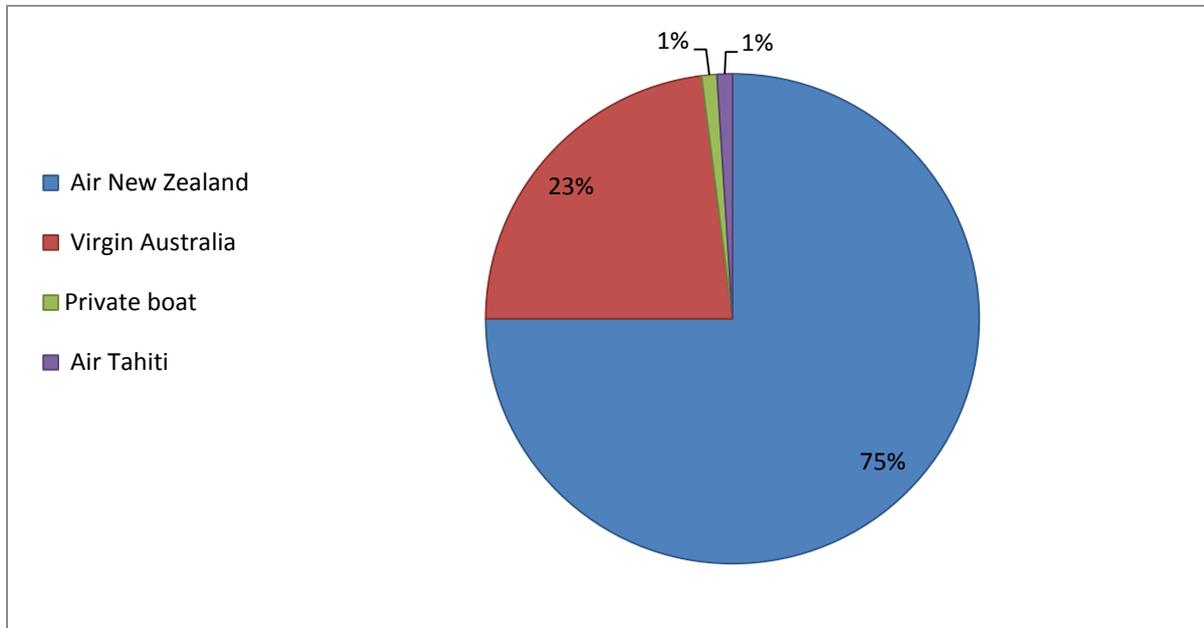
The average length of stay in the Cook Islands is 8.3 nights with 82% of visitors spending 10 or fewer nights in the country (Figure 10).

**Figure 10: Length of stay in nights (n=885)**



The majority of visitors (75%) travel to/from the Cook Islands with Air New Zealand, a further 23% visitors fly with Virgin Australia (Figure 11). Less than 1% of visitors travel with Air Tahiti Nui, or arrive by private vessel.

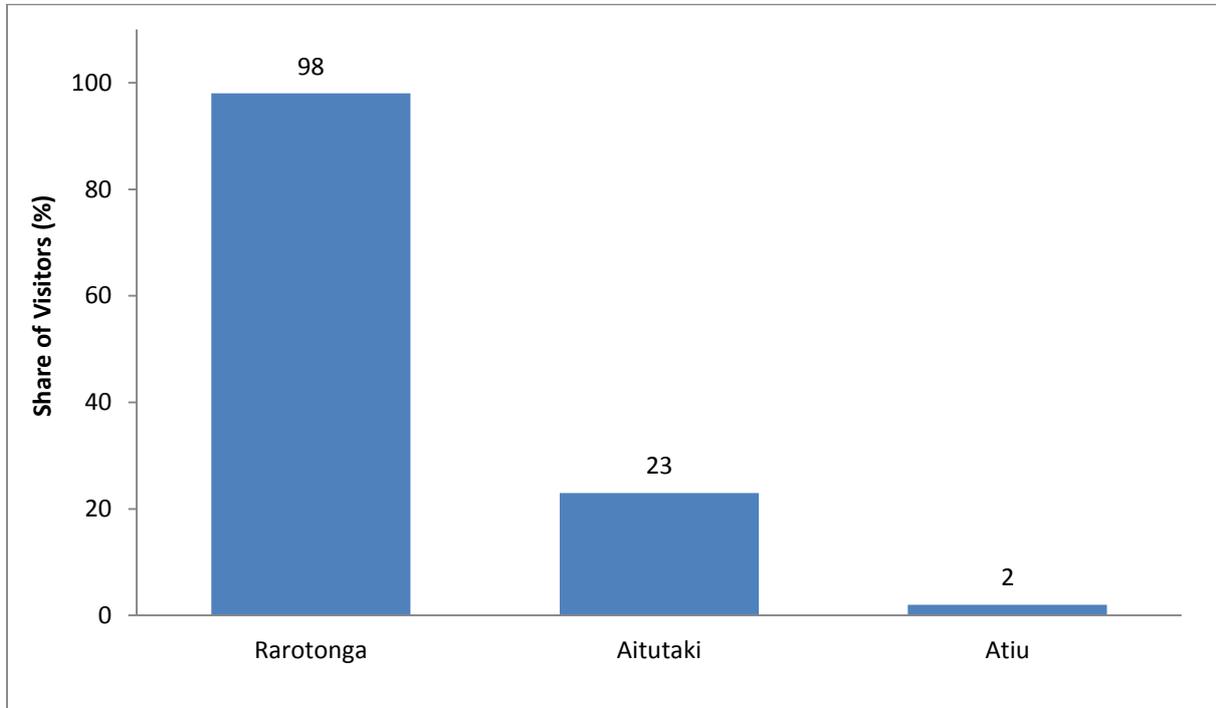
**Figure 11: Mode of transport (n=875)**



For 88% of visitors, the Cook Islands is the sole destination for their trip. For 12% of visitors surveyed during the April to June 2015 period the Cook Islands is part of a larger journey, including some visitors who are on an around-the-world trip. For those travelling to other countries as part of their recent trip, the top destination mentioned was New Zealand (67% of respondents), followed by travel to Asian countries (27%), Australia (26%), and the USA (23%). Just over 20% percent of visitors stated that travel to other Pacific Islands was included as part of their larger trip. Other destinations mentioned by respondents included Europe (8%) and South America (3%).

The vast majority (98%) of visitors to the Cook Islands spend time on Rarotonga, with Aitutaki the second most visited island (23%) (Figure 12). Other islands are rarely featured in the survey responses, with Atiu for example only receiving less than 2% of visitors.

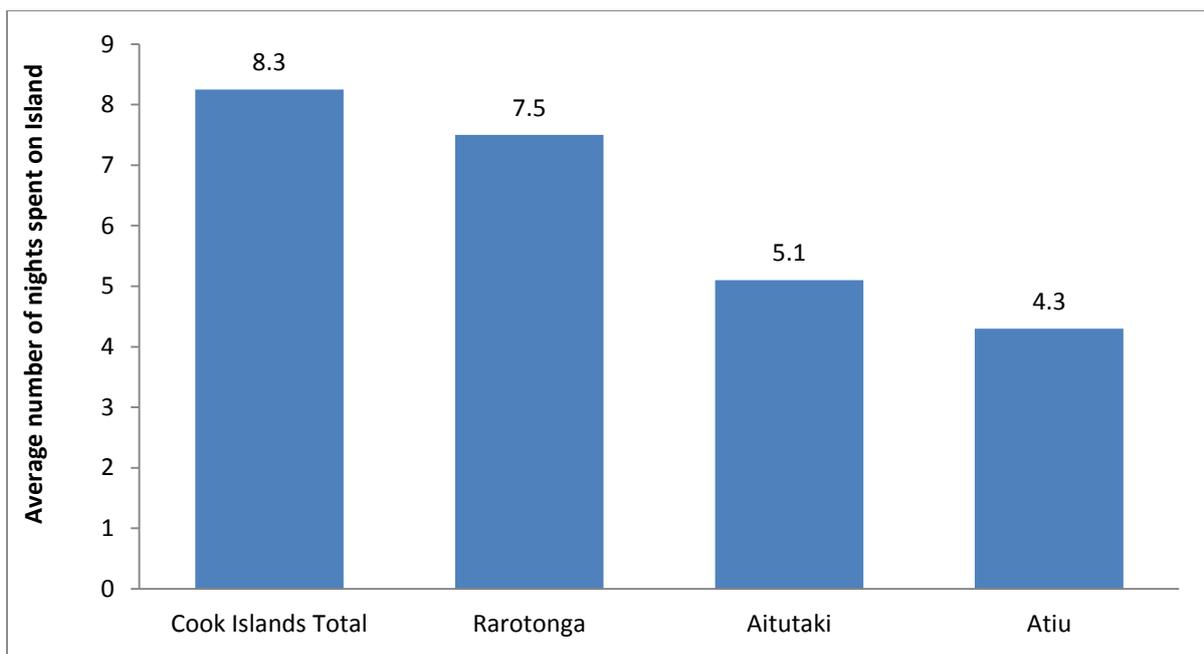
**Figure 12: Visited Islands (n=888)**



*Note: Respondents could visit more than one island, so total does not add up to 100%.*

The average length of stay on Rarotonga is 7.5 nights (Figure 13). For the visitors that went to Aitutaki, the average number of nights spent on the island is 5.1.

**Figure 13: Average length of stay in the Cook Islands and on each island (n=881)**

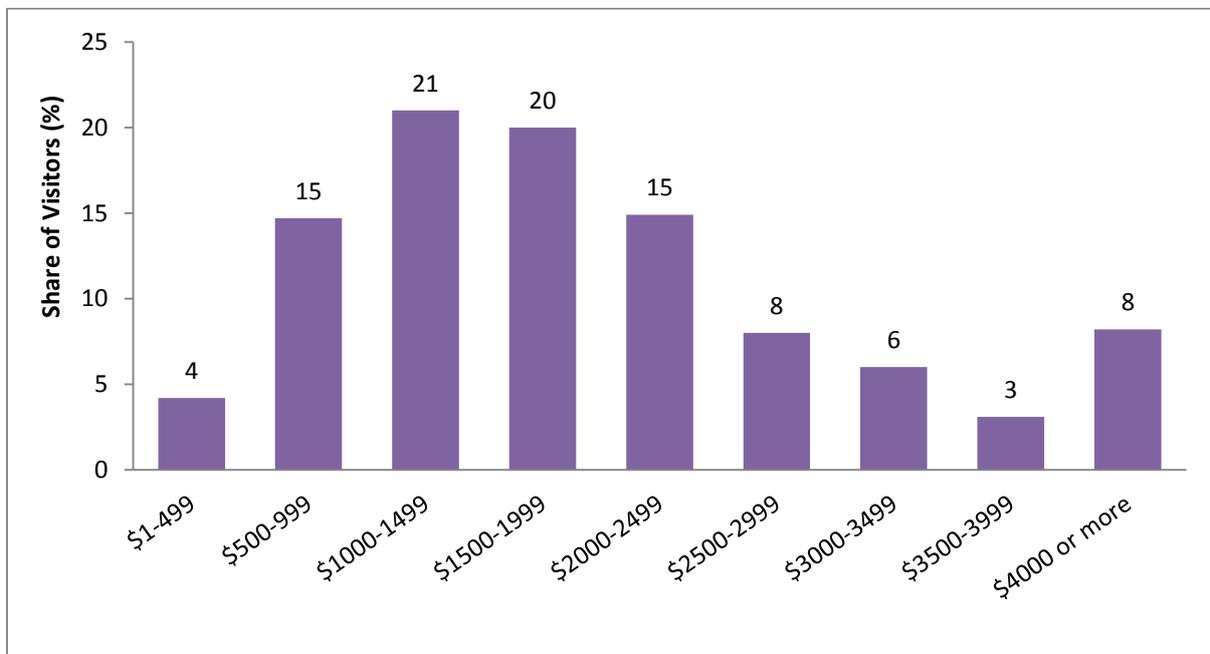


## Visitor Expenditure

The survey asked a range of questions about visitor expenditure, both prior to arrival and while in the country. All the figures below are based on respondent estimates of their own spending and any others they spent money on (e.g. spouse, children). The following pre-paid expenditure section is based on the number of adults and children that respondents included in their cost estimates: 1835 people comprising 1636 adults and 199 children.

On average, visitors to the Cook Islands spend NZ\$2,005 per person prior to arrival. Over half (56%) of the visitors spend between \$1,000 and \$2,500 prior to arrival. These figures are higher than the data from the previous year (average spend of NZ\$1,985 for 2013/14) and in the same quarter for 2013/14 (\$1,879) (Figure 14).

**Figure 14: Amount of money spent per person prior to arrival (n=754)**



In addition to international flights and domestic transport, spending prior to arrival usually includes accommodation: in 88% of the cases for New Zealand visitors, 87% for Australian visitors, and for 76% of visitors from other countries (Figure 15). Meals and activities are much less likely to be included in pre-paid expenses.

**Figure 15: Items included in money spent prior to arrival (n=746)**



It is difficult to estimate accurately 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 conservatively estimate that 50% of the pre-paid spend is allocated to airfares. Of the remaining 50% of the pre-paid spend, 80% of this flows back to local operators. In total this means that for every pre-paid dollar, 40 cents flows to the Cook Islands. We assess that the pre-paid spend figure per day, excluding flights, is \$97 and for the average total visit is \$802 (over 8.3 nights).

The total spend per visitor per day while in the Cook Islands (excluding any pre-paid expenditure) is \$112 (\$111.6) (Table 1). This figure is slightly higher than overall spend figure for 2013/14 (\$111), but slightly lower than the same quarter in 2013/14 (\$115). The majority of money spent locally is on restaurants, cafes and bars (32%), accommodation (21%), shopping (14%), and activities (8%). These per person expenditure figures are based on 891 survey responses covering a total of 1802 people (1612 adults and 190 children).

By multiplying daily spend by the average stay (8.3 nights) we can see that each visitor spends on average \$926 during their time in the Cook Islands. The total figure of what is spent locally and what flows back to the Cook Islands from pre-paid expenses is therefore \$209 per visitor per day (\$112 + \$97), or \$1,728 (\$926 + \$802) for each visitor.

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

Expenditure Items	Overall n=1802	
	Mean (NZ\$)	(% of spend)
Restaurant, cafes and bar	35	32
Accommodation	24	21
Shopping	15	14
Activities	9	8
Vehicle rental	8	7
Groceries	8	7
Domestic flights	4	4
Cruising	3	3
Other	2	2
Petrol	2	2
Public transportation	1	1
<b>Total expenditure per person per day</b>	<b>\$112</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 2 provides an overview of the in-country expenditure by the visitor's country of origin. Visitors from Australia and Europe have the highest average spend per day at \$126 respectively. In comparison, New Zealanders spend on average nearly \$20 less per day (\$107).

**Table 2: Average expenditure per visitor per day by country of origin**

	n=47	n=161	n=480	n=51
<b>Expenditure Items</b>	<b>USA/ Canada</b>	<b>Australia</b>	<b>New Zealand</b>	<b>Europe</b>
Restaurant, cafes and bar	31	38	37	30
Accommodation	39	31	18	47
Shopping	15	17	15	15
Activities	7	9	9	8
Vehicle rental	7	8	9	7
Groceries	11	8	8	6
Other	1	2	4	3
Domestic flights	10	7	3	6
Cruising	0	3	2	3
Petrol	2	2	2	1
Public transportation	1	1	1	1
<b>Total spend (NZ\$)</b>	<b>\$122</b>	<b>\$126</b>	<b>\$107</b>	<b>\$126</b>

Average Australian spend per person for this quarter (\$126) was slightly higher compared to the 2013/14 average of \$125, but lower than the same quarter in 2013/14 (\$130). New Zealanders' spend of \$107 per person per day was up from the average of \$103 for 2013/14 and slightly more than the same quarter in the previous year (\$106). European visitor spend at \$126 per person per day was down from the average for 2013/14 of \$138, and \$131 for the same quarter in the previous year. Visitors from USA/Canada spend of \$122 for this period was lower than the 2013/14 average of \$136, and \$130 for the same quarter in 2013/14.

## Visitor Satisfaction

Visitors were asked to indicate their overall satisfaction with their experience of the Cook Islands on a scale from 1 'very dissatisfied' to 5 'very satisfied' (Figure 16). Over two thirds (71%) of the visitors surveyed were 'very satisfied' with their overall experience of the Cook Islands. Very few visitors (2%) were unsatisfied with their visit, and gave a score of 2 or lower out of five.

**Figure 16: Overall satisfaction with experience of the Cook Islands (n=822)**

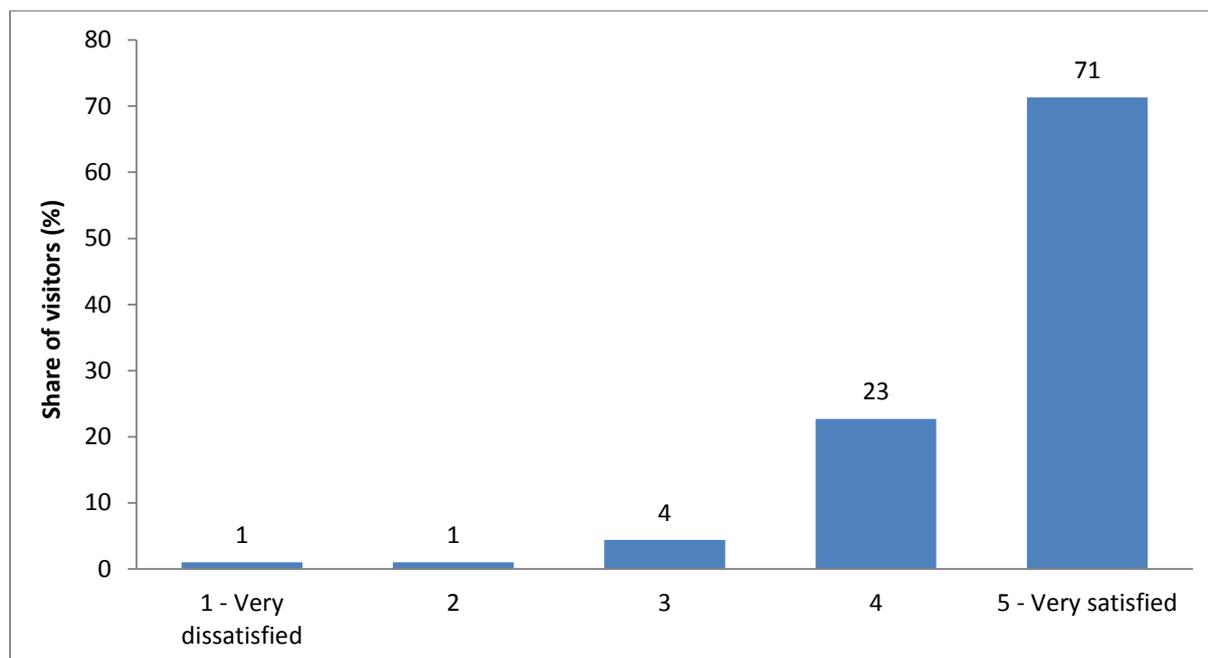
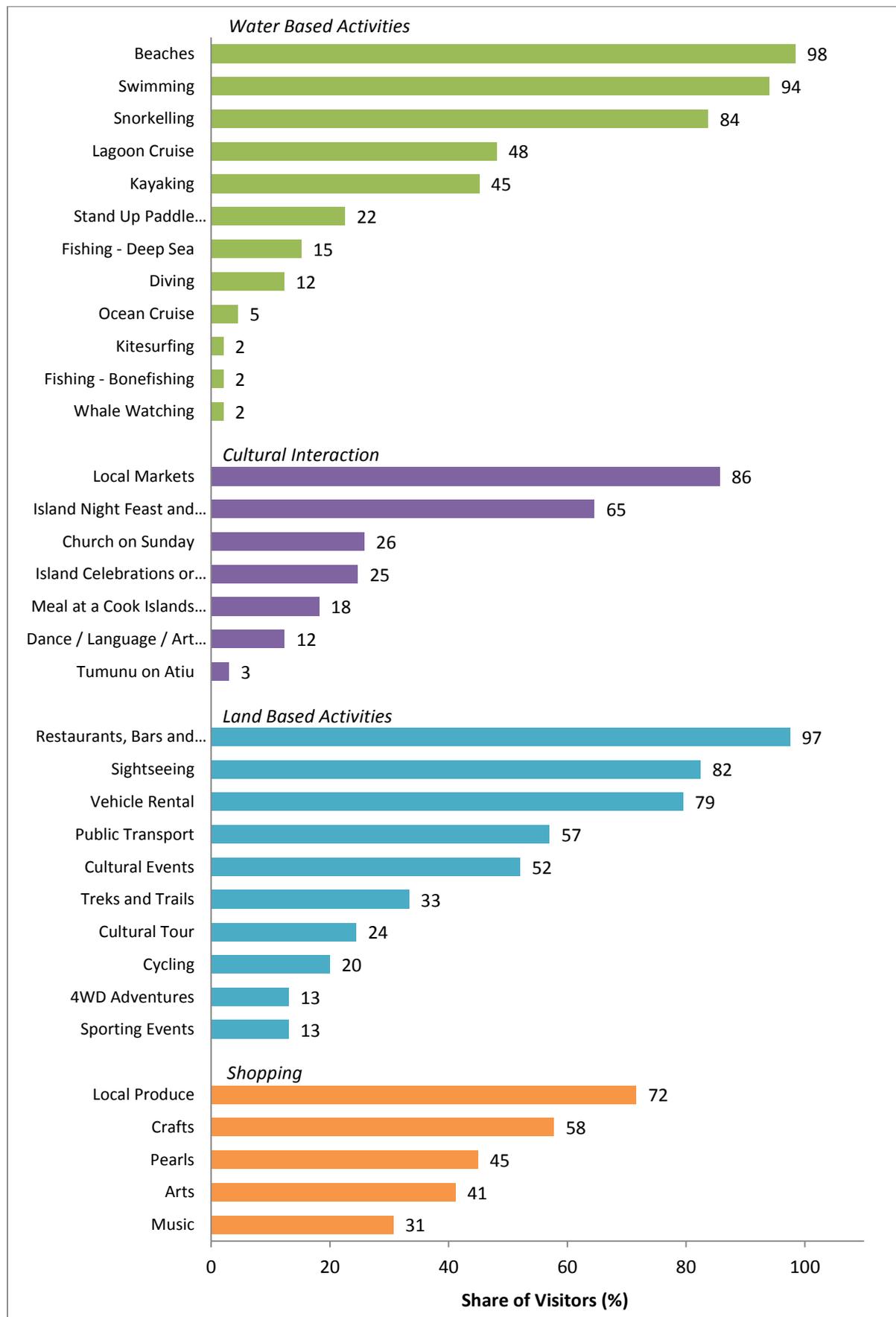


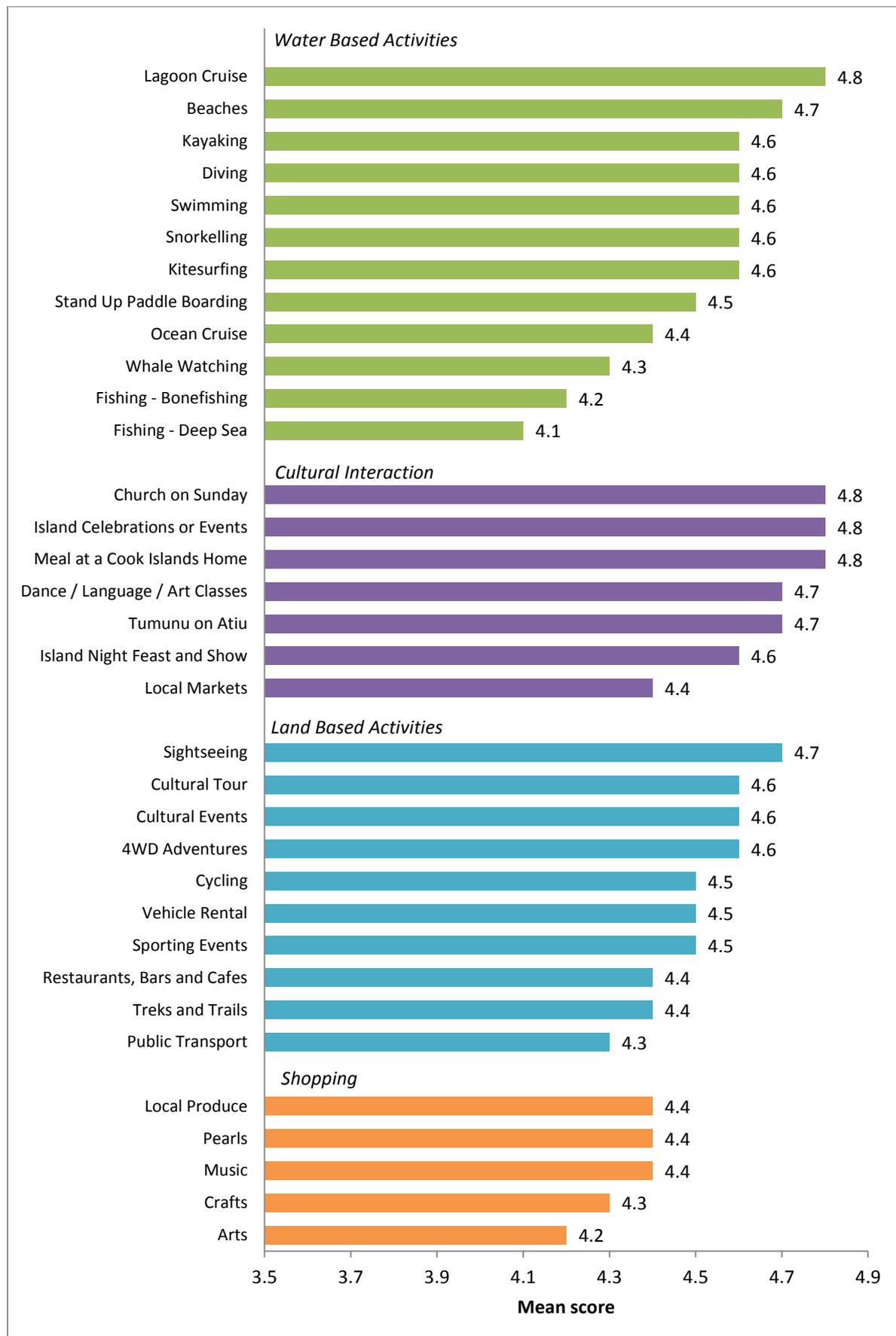
Figure 17 shows the percentage of respondents who undertook an activity while on their visit to the Cook Islands and Figure 18 shows their level of satisfaction with these activities. Almost all visitors participate in water activities and visit at least one restaurant or café during their trip. Most of the respondents (86%) visit a local market, and 65% 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). Activities involving cultural interaction activities rank the highest (average satisfaction of 4.7) followed by water-based activities (4.5), land-based activities (4.5) and shopping (4.4). It should be noted that some activities e.g. kitesurfing, bonefishing, and whale watching, are characterised by relatively low numbers of participants (n=13-14).

**Figure 17: Degree of participation in activities (n range=13-856)**



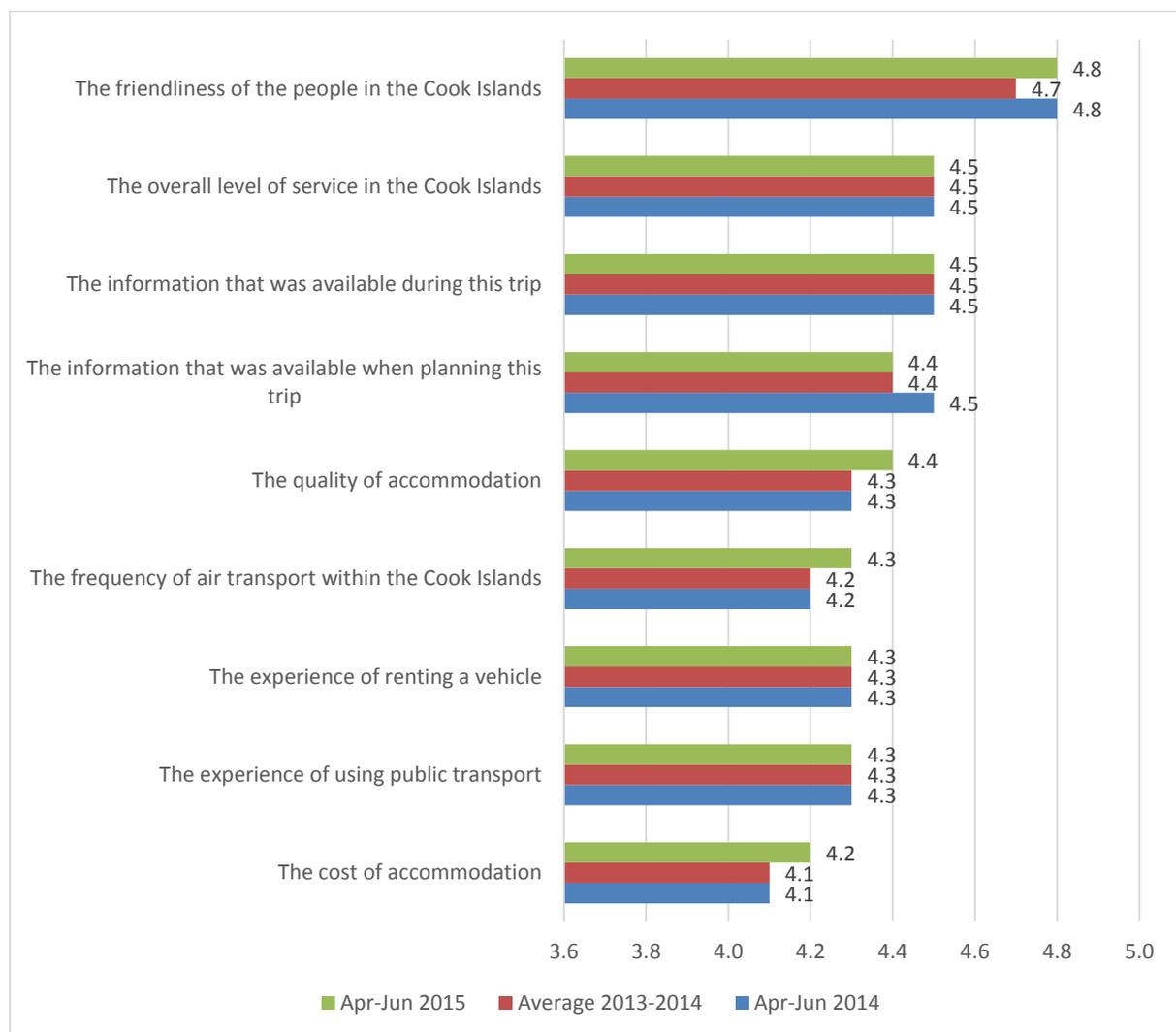
**Figure 18: Degree of satisfaction in activities participated in (mean score out of 5)**



Visitors were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with nine different statements relating to their most recent visit to the Cook Islands. Responses from the period of April to June are compared to the same period of 2013/14, and the annual average for 2013/14 (Figure 19). Respondents have consistently given the friendliness of the people in the Cook Islands the highest score with the April to June 2015 at 4.8 out of 5.

This quarter also shows a slight upward trend in the level of satisfaction with the quality and cost of accommodation within the Cook Islands, and the frequency of air transport compared to the average for 2013/14. Visitor satisfaction levels with the information available when planning their trip was lower when compared to the same quarter in 2013/14. Overall visitor satisfaction levels are fairly consistent with the previous findings and no rating fell below 4 out of 5.

**Figure 19: Degree of satisfaction with Cook Island services (mean score out of 5) (n=890)**



## 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?” (Table 3). The most appealing elements of the Cook Islands experience are the beautiful and clean natural environment, the friendly and helpful local people, the peacefulness and relaxing atmosphere of the islands, and the tourist attractions and activities on offer. Smaller numbers of visitors mentioned aspects such as the food and beverages (11%), the level of service (8%), the local culture, and arts and crafts (7%), and the convenience and safety of the Cook Islands as a destination. These figures are relatively similar to the annual average for 2013-2014 where respondents rated the top three most appealing aspects as the ‘environment’ (50%), ‘local people’ (43%) and ‘atmosphere’ (30%).

**Table 3: Most appealing aspects of the Cook Islands (n=981)**

Themes	Share of respondents (%)
Environment, climate and cleanliness	49%
Local people	40%
Atmosphere	25%
Activities, attractions, entertainment and events	20%
Food and beverages	11%
Level of service	8%
Culture, arts and crafts	7%
Convenience and safety	7%
Accommodation	6%
Overall good experience	5%

\* 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%.

### ***Environment, climate and cleanliness***

Almost one in two respondents (49%) considered the ‘beautiful’ and ‘clean’ natural environment, and the warm and sunny climate to be the most appealing aspects of their Cook Islands experience. Visitors used words such as ‘awesome’, ‘fantastic’, ‘stunning’, ‘amazing’, ‘lovely’, ‘and ‘unspoilt’ to describe the environment. Most comments here focused on the beauty and the cleanliness of the beaches and lagoons, the weather, the pristine water, and the beauty of the islands in general. Comments included:

*“The stunning beaches and water that were not overly crowded. So beautiful!”*

*“The beaches, Aitutaki lagoon - paradise on earth.”*

*“The cleanliness of the main town and the roadsides around the island. Compared to other Pacific islands that I have travelled the Cooks lead them all.”*

*“Lots of nature, bird watching, trekking, and snorkelling.”*

## **Local people**

Over a third of respondents (40%) noted that the most appealing part of their visit was their interaction with local people in the Cook Islands with comments about the friendliness, welcoming nature and helpfulness of local people. Key words that dominated the responses included 'friendly', 'warm', 'helpful', 'beautiful', 'happy', 'cheerful', 'genuine', 'kind', and 'welcoming'. Comments included:

*"Local people are very friendly. Whenever I pass by someone, they say hi and smile. As I am from a culture where people barely say hi unless they really know someone, I felt a bit awkward at first, but I could easily get used to that. Everyone wants to help us and inform us about local culture and history in a friendly manner..."*

*"Meeting Cook Islanders and socializing with them."*

*"The people. You never felt like an outsider. Everyone was more than willing to stop and chat or help you out if you were lost."*

*"The happy and cheerful islanders, the range of activities for tourists, how proud the islanders were of their culture."*

*"The laid back attitude of the Cook Islands people."*

*"My wife & I really enjoyed how relaxing the island is & the people of Rarotonga always made us feel so welcome everywhere we went."*

## **Atmosphere**

A quarter of visitors surveyed (25%) focused on the relaxed atmosphere of the Cook Islands. They considered the Cook Islands to be very peaceful, relaxing, and laid-back, which made it a good destination to 'rest' and 'unwind'. Respondents used words such as 'quiet', 'relaxing', 'laid back', 'easy', and 'slow pace' to describe the overall atmosphere of the Cook Islands. The notion of 'island time' was also mentioned. Comments included:

*"Being left alone, just relaxed and enjoy the slow pace of life."*

*"The lovely laid back atmosphere."*

*"How relaxed things were, no hurry, island time."*

*"Great place to relax!"*

*"Love the relaxing nature of the Cooks. Every time we come it is instant relaxation - even with 3 children with us."*

### **Activities, attractions, entertainment and events**

Activities, attractions and entertainment were mentioned by 20% of respondents as the most appealing elements of their visit to the Cook Islands. Most comments in this category focus on water-based activities such as swimming, snorkelling and lagoon cruises. Land-based activities that respondents mentioned included the experience of travelling around the island by scooter, shopping, walks, cultural tours and local markets. Comments included:

*"... Also loved the beach and snorkelling at our resort - best I've ever experienced."*

*"Lagoon cruise - our guide was amazing and the experience was phenomenal seeing the reef, fish etc."*

*"The Hula Dance Competition Finals."*

*"Hiking Te Manga!"*

*"Cultural shows & the people who are so proud of their culture."*

*"We like to do self-directed, active things. We don't like too much 'tourism' so the Cook Islands are wonderful. Don't spoil it by making it a theme park (no more golf courses please!). I could go for run of a morning, snorkel and kayak, go back to kura and prepare a meal. Maybe go out for dinner. Brilliant."*

### **Food and beverage**

Just over one in ten respondents (11%) mentioned food and beverages as the most appealing aspect of their trip. Their comments focused on the quality and range of food and beverages available in the Cook Islands. They used words such as 'great', 'fantastic', 'amazing', 'tasty', 'delicious', 'fresh', and 'healthy' to describe the food. Many visitors commented on the great selection of good cafes and restaurants. Comments included:

*"Loved that there was a variety of restaurants/takeaways on the island."*

*"Great food options. Beautiful compact island."*

*"The food was fantastic."*

*"Great variety of foods."*

*"The friendly people and delicious food."*

*"Beautiful lagoon, wonderful people, tasty fresh seafood."*

### **Level of service**

Eight percent of visitors commented on the service they encountered while in the Cook Islands as being an appealing feature of their trip. Respondents had positive things to say about the local hospitality they experienced, especially mentioning the friendly and helpful

staff at the restaurants, bars, hotels, and resorts. Visitors also emphasised the lack of pressure to buy which made them feel comfortable. Comments included:

*"The lovely people and the service they provide."*

*"The people, great service and amazing food..."*

*"Loved the casual but efficient service, both at resort, tours, all services."*

*"The friendly, helpful attitude of all the staff and in the various restaurants and shops on Raro."*

*"The hospitality of everyone we came in contact with."*

*"Not being hassled by locals to buy things."*

### **Culture, arts and crafts**

Seven percent of visitors surveyed mentioned the local culture, and arts and crafts as appealing aspects of their visit to the Cook Islands. Comments focused on the unique island culture and lifestyle. Respondents also highlighted the strong Christian and family values that they encountered in the Cook Islands. Comments included:

*"The cultural values and beliefs are stunning! How welcoming the people of the Islands are willing to share non tourism experiences like working in a taro patch, or the 'island way' of doing things."*

*"... The pearl shops and the quality of the pearls and the craftsmanship that the pearls were designed into to make beautiful settings."*

*"Very relaxing and friendly. It was great to go somewhere where the Christian faith is upheld in such a positive way."*

*"The music and dancing at the weekend markets and the friendliness of the people."*

*"That it has a strong family culture."*

*"Unique culture and island lifestyle."*

### **Convenience and safety**

The convenience and safety of the Cook Islands as a holiday destination were mentioned by seven percent of respondents as an appealing aspect of their trip. In particular, they referred to the ease of getting to the Cook Islands, and also of getting around the islands, the wide use of the English language, the convenience of using the New Zealand dollar, and the feeling of safety. Comments included:

*“Ease of getting around the island, family friendly and safe...”*

*“It was easy to get around the island. Everyone speaks English and they use the NZ dollar. It is a great place to relax.”*

*“Easy to travel to from NZ. Uses NZ currency...”*

*“The close proximity to everything.”*

*“Easy to visit, NZ dollars, convenient to get anywhere even late night by bus, safe.”*

### **Accommodation**

Another 6% of respondents noted that the accommodation they stayed in was an appealing aspect of their visit to the Cook Islands, referring to the quality of the offering, the setting and warm welcome from their hosts. Comments included:

*“Our stay at our Hotel. We found the staff friendly, helpful and very cheery. We were always acknowledged by the staff and by the end of the stay it was like leaving behind friends. The meals were great. When we asked for advice we were always helped out. My way would be to say that you should be proud of the staff as ambassadors for Rarotonga.”*

*“The accommodation was fantastic. Everyone was extremely friendly, welcoming. The food in their restaurant was delicious...”*

*“Everything was perfect at our accommodation. The services, the activities provided, the food and the friendliness of the staff.”*

*“We were very happy with our accommodation and enjoyed the paddle-boarding.”*

### **Overall good experience**

Five percent of visitors surveyed simply stated that their whole experience was a good one, and that they ‘loved everything’. Some visitors expressed their desire to visit the Cook Islands again in the future. Comments included:

*“Everything ... loved the island feel, laid back, very relaxing, beautiful place ... didn't want to leave.”*

*“We were on Rarotonga for such a short time, so we did a lot of 'chilling'. Everything was most attractive and appealing, so much so that we would love to return some day (for a longer stay).”*

*“Aitutaki was OUSTANDING! Everything about it was great, even those locals who weren't friendly, were better than Rarotonga. The first CICC [Cook Islands Christian Church] was AMAZING! I couldn't recommend Aitutaki HIGHLY enough!”*

*“The people and places we encountered while on honeymoon were simply amazing. My wife and I couldn't speak highly enough about the time we had on the Cook Islands. I*

*will be recommending the Cook Islands as a preferred destination to all of my friends and family.”*

*“The island and the people's personality....they cannot be described by words. It really can only be experienced. It was beautiful from a people point of view and visually breathe taking. It was the most memorable place we have travelled. I never knew that I could see with my eyes the many various shades of turquoise water, the colour of the fish when snorkelling, and the welcoming hearts of island people. Truly genuine through and through.”*

*“I honestly cannot name any one thing. The whole experience was wonderful. Everyone I met, local and tourist, was friendly. Accommodation, food, service were exceptionally good. I am planning to go back in about 12 months' time.*

*“The friendliness of the local people, with ready, helpful attitudes. The smiles, our service, the cleanliness, the food...can't fault our experience. The whole experience for us was amazing. We still say...we want to come back...and we will.”*

### **Not commercialised**

Four percent of respondents mentioned the Cook Islands as being a place that is not over-commercialised or over-developed. Some visitors also emphasised the importance of preserving the destination from mass tourism development and keeping it the way it is. Comments included:

*“The low level of commercialisation on the island.”*

*“Friendly people. Unspoiled feel of Aitutaki- it hasn't been taken over by large developments or resorts.”*

*“It still feels remote and not touristy.”*

*“The warm temperature, the warm water and the natural and unspoiled way of life. It has not been ruined by millionaires building flash houses and accommodation. Don't allow this to happen.”*

*“Untouched by western influences.”*

### **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?” Nearly a quarter (24%) of the visitors took the trouble to note that they found nothing was ‘unappealing’, that ‘everything was great’, or that the only unappealing aspect was that they ‘had to leave’. These visitors expressed that they “had a fantastic time” and “enjoyed everything”. There were, however, a number of areas that did attract comments (Table 4). These comments ranged from the lack of public services and facilities, the price of goods and services, to fears that the Cook Islands are becoming to

commercialised/ touristy. Each theme is discussed in more depth below the following table.

**Table 4: Least appealing aspects of the Cook Islands (n=770)**

Themes	Share of respondents (%)
Public service and facilities	15%
Price of goods and services	14%
Stray animals and mosquitos	13%
Food & Beverage	11%
Rubbish and natural environment care	10%
Customer service	8%
Attractions and activities	8%
Poor weather	7%
Accommodation	7%
Flight related issues	4%
Rental car or scooters	4%
Local people and social issues	3%
Becoming too commercialised/touristy	1%

\* 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%.

### **Public services, facilities and infrastructure**

One of the least appealing aspects for visitors is the lack of public services, facilities and infrastructure in the Cook Islands (15%). Of these visitors, the majority of comments were about the poor condition of the local roads (9%) with on-going road works, speeding traffic, and the dangerous potholes, especially for scooters at night. Some people also complained about the lack of safe well-formed footpaths. The remaining 6% of respondents expressed their disappointment with other aspects: the lack of Internet access, poor public transport and facilities, such as public toilets. Comments included:

*“Least attractive the condition of the roads, appalling [pot-holes] every-where, locals speeding, but overall time stood still, enjoyable.”*

*“The condition of the edge of the road, no footpath or safe walking path along the road.”*

*“The walking tracks were very poorly marked. They were on maps, but I was unable to find them in real life, or they petered out halfway through.”*

*“The lack of good Wi-Fi and internet capacity. The fact that there is no 3G network and that there is no roaming agreement with my home network operator in Europe.”*

*“Public transport was quite expensive. Would like to see a daily pass available for purchase that would allow 'hop on hop off'.”*

*“The harbour was not adequate for visiting sailboats, lacking fuel and water docks.”*

*"The disgusting toilets at the beach near the Rarotongan. If they're not being maintained, they should be bulldozed. They are public toilets, aren't they?"*

*"Public transport was slower than expected, would be been useful to have more information before going on it"*

### **Price of goods and service**

A number of visitors (14%) mentioned the price of goods and services as the least appealing aspect during their stay in the Cook Islands. These visitors made comments about the costs, the poor value for money and the price of things, especially on items such as public transport, accommodation, food in stores and restaurants, and internet. Comments included:

*"Cost of everything, especially food."*

*"Restaurants overpriced for what was on offer."*

*"Public bus transport too expensive for a family, should have sections or short trip prices available."*

*"The high costs and low quality."*

*"The price of food and accommodation is very high - as a solo traveller, I think I was quite lucky in my choice of accommodation in terms of value for money compared to most other places (that look fantastic but are far out of reach and are much more expensive than on other islands such as in Fiji)."*

*"Don't go to the Cook Islands if you want to shop. It is very expensive as most things are imported."*

### **Stray animals and mosquitos**

The stray dogs, noisy roosters and mosquitoes continue to be an annoyance or a worry for 13% of respondents during their time spent on the islands. This figure is consistent with the last annual average (14%). Respondents used a variety of words to describe this theme including 'annoying', 'unattractive', 'roaming', 'vicious' and 'uncared'. Some visitors also mentioned the mosquito-borne tropical diseases, such as the Dengue fever and the Chikungunya virus, and the lack of information received about this. Comments included:

*"The dogs on the beach - we saw lots of dog poo, several dog fights which were very scary when we had young children with us. The dogs looked wild and neglected and this made us feel uncomfortable when they were hanging around and following us along the beach. But I think the worst was the dog poo - on the beach and all around the streets in the township."*

*"Dogs on the street, most of the time they were chasing you while riding motorcycle. I love running in the morning but I couldn't because of dogs barking and try to attacking me! So not very impressed with that!"*

*“Roosters crowing so loud at all hours of the night. Dogs roaming Rarotonga.”*

*“Too many mosquitoes & geckos. We are girls who are scared of insects. That made us can't enjoy the accommodation & event at night.”*

*“Problems with Dengue fever and associated mosquito borne diseases stopped us from visiting inland- waterfall etc. - also caused worry.”*

*“Family all got Chikungunya which two of us are still suffering from. Made the last few days hell along with the flight home. We still have days we are in pain with moving. This was an eighth trip to the Cook Islands but re-evaluating our favourite holiday destination due to this.”*

### **Food and Beverage**

A number of visitors (11%) commented on the cost, quality and availability of food and beverage in the Cook Islands. Respondents complained about the price and quality of food, the lack of local produce (especially fresh fruit and fish), and the limited eating options available outside the resorts. Some visitors also mentioned the poor customer service in restaurants and the lack of knowledge about food and wine on offer. Responses covered food and beverage options, such as restaurants, resort dining, shops and markets. Comments included:

*“The local holiday period was long and we found nowhere to eat in town outside the resort facilities; tourists expect restaurants and cafes to be open at reasonable times.”*

*“Rarotonga is NOT a foodie's destination: the fresh seafood is not as common as is advertised (I suspect most was frozen) AND we searched in vain for local coffee - the Atiu brand was advertised in magazines but not available anywhere. Local vegetables and fruits are not used enough - you can see them on the roadside but not on menus. The wait staff in restaurants have poor wine knowledge.”*

*“The cost of buying prepared food generally is very high, and access to something simple like eggs is impossible which is crazy considering how many chickens are around. More access to local produce at reasonable prices will allow people to choose than instead of overpriced average food from resorts.”*

*“The amount of processed NZ foods available, would be great to see more local 'value added' food products available - would be good for visitors to eat, and great for locals to make money from.”*

### **Rubbish and natural environment care**

Other visitors (10%) mentioned waste management and the lack of care of the natural environment in the Cook Islands as unappealing factors. Rubbish on the beaches and streets, the burning of trash, and the abandoned buildings were often commented upon. The poor condition of the lagoons and beaches, erosion, polluted water, degraded coral reefs, and threatened marine life also concerned a small group of visitors. Comments included:

*"The rubbish and broken glass on the beaches. What a shame!"*

*"There was a lot of rubbish and debris. It would be a shame to let such a beautiful place be overrun by littering."*

*"Fires burning on the beach."*

*"The pollution in Muri Lagoon. When we first visited 20 years ago we stayed in the Pacific Resort and the lagoon was beautifully blue and clear, not anymore!"*

*"The amount of dead coral."*

*"Lack of sustainable environmental practices."*

*"I was disappointed in the Muri lagoon swimming and snorkelling (my comparison is Bora Bora). There were far fewer reef fish and the presence of sea slugs is so significant as to be disconcerting. How can one species dominate so much? It does not seem natural and spoils the lagoon in places."*

## **Customer service**

Eight percent of visitors surveyed complained about the bad customer service received during their visit in the Cook Islands, notably in restaurants, shops, hotels, vehicle rentals, and at the airport. Visitor commented about 'rude', 'unfriendly', and 'unhelpful' staff. Customer service was considered 'slow', 'inefficient', 'bad', and 'disappointing'. Comments included:

*"Coming from a Customer service position in NZ, I think the customer services in some stores were not up to standard. Although I am a Cook Islander who understands the language, I was appalled that some assistants were ignoring tourists or talking in their own language about the tourists themselves. I have friends who are of different ethnicities and they always enjoy their time in the Cook Islands. They boast about their trip when they return so I think the Cook Islands need to keep up the standards to continue to have happy travellers. Customer service standards in NZ is very high and I believe the Cook Islands need to meet that expectation to encourage tourists to want to come back to the Cook Islands..."*

*"I found most of the bus drivers very rude except one friendly driver. I had been to Rarotonga years ago and people were much friendlier than they were last month. Some of the people who worked in some stores were not very helpful at all."*

*"Rude customer service - I am NZ Maori, my husband NZ born Cook Islander. We felt more than a little let down with the service/interaction from some customer service providers. At supermarkets, restaurants and cafes."*

*"I am a NZ Cook Islander but feel that most of our Cook Islands people in Rarotonga are unhappy. You say "Kia Orana or Good morning" and no reply, no smile....nothing. I was ashamed, as it shows the level or lack of professional customer service. I got top service from the Fijian workers on the island with a simple smile and hello. How sad!"*

### **Attractions and activities**

Some visitors (8%) expressed their disappointment for the degradation and damage of the natural attractions, the lack of variety of activities on offer, particularly at night, on rainy days and on Sundays. Several comments highlighted the lack of local shopping options. Comments included:

*"There wasn't always a lot of options/activities during the night."*

*"The Island Night was so disappointing! The food wasn't overly island (there was pasta salad and bombe Alaska...) and the cultural show wasn't as good as a just a rehearsal that we has seen at the Islander Hotel."*

*"Art or lack of it to buy. Small pieces to take home. Not a great selection of items to buy. Gifts etc."*

*"When it rained, on a Sunday, with no scooter, felt confined to the hotel."*

*"Coral life wasn't as good as expected for snorkelling."*

*"Actually the museum wasn't that interesting, learnt a lot more at the cultural centre (Te Vani Nui) than the museum."*

*"Very few local products to purchase as gifts. We could not find the local coffee."*

### **Poor weather**

A lower number of survey respondents (7%) expressed their disappointment with the weather conditions on the Cook Islands. In particular complaints were made about the amount of rain, the floods, the wind and the humidity, although some respondents acknowledged the weather was seasonal and cannot be changed. Comments included:

*"It rained every day."*

*"The weather!"*

*"The only thing was the weather as it was mostly windy, but no one can help that!"*

*"Unfortunately the weather during our stay was not so good. Rain, cloudy and windy."*

### **Accommodation**

The high cost and poor quality of accommodation was a concern for a number of visitors (7%). Visitors surveyed mentioned that the cost of accommodation is expensive for the value received, that some accommodation places are in need of an upgrade of facilities and services, and that there have been some safety issues. Comments included:

*"As the accommodation prices in the Cooks are so very expensive, the budget accommodation is very basic when compared with similarly priced places elsewhere"*

*in the world. Also, our three days on Aitutaki cost almost as much as the rest of our whole holiday. It's just so expensive to get there and the options for accommodation are limited to the high end."*

*"Our neighbour's villa was broken in to so we were constantly scared someone would try to break into our villa."*

*"Resort standards of service didn't always meet expectations (e.g. inflexibility over meal options and disorganisation about transfers)."*

*"The attitude of the resort staff with the exception of the nice duty manager"*

*"Hotel accommodation is charged at a high rate for basic level accommodation/service."*

Other unappealing aspects mentioned by visitors include: flight/airline-related issues (influent, cost, arrival and departure times), rental cars and scooters (quality, cost, service and the process of getting driving licenses), local people (unfriendly, hard to get involved with them), and the fact that the destination is becoming too commercialised/touristy (over-developed, loss of authenticity).

Comments included:

#### Flight-related issues

*"The information about air travel/transport between the islands."*

*"The cost to get there was very high and the flights very restrictive, the flight home undid all the good of the holiday rest."*

*"Not a big deal, but if anything I guess the Air Raro planes are looking pretty old and tired."*

*"The unhelpfulness of the Air Rarotonga check-in man and the lack of frequency of flights on Sundays."*

*"Flight connection time at Auckland Airport - 4 hours 40 minutes in the middle of the night, with NOTHING open in the terminal building."*

*"...The infrequent flights to Atiu was another unfortunate point because it is such a beautiful place and needs to be better promoted."*

#### Rental cars and scooters

*"Second place we got scooters from gave us bad scooters because they had double booked. They were not very friendly."*

*"The hassle with the rental car."*

*"Seeing how scooters were ridden without helmets, was a bit scary."*

*"The process of getting a drivers licence. Lining up & waiting to apply, then waiting for theory test, the theory test took too long, then lining up & waiting for more paper work, then lining up & waiting for the paperwork for practical test, then waiting & doing practical then lining up & waiting again for the final licence. Took 1 & half hours of valuable holiday time!!! Very frustrating!!!!!"*

*"The run down rental car."*

### Local people and social issues

*"People outside of service industries - no interaction or any courtesy (but I get that we tourists are invaders) tourism brings in a lot of income and it's easy to at least say hi etc."*

*"Unfriendliness of locals on Rarotonga."*

*"We did not get a sense of the culture. The markets were good, but mainly tourists. The local people are friendly but we did not find anyone interested in going above and beyond to assist us, or to get to know us/where we were from (Canada). There were minimal kids' activities that were locally run. Our kids love art, dance and music and we never found anything along those lines that was not a tourist focused activity at a resort. ... I saw triathlons occurring on Saturday afternoons but could not find out anything further from anyone we asked. It was for 'locals only' was all we were told. Likewise finding out about local sporting events was also difficult. We found one local game but were not made to feel welcome when we attended."*

*"Hard to get involved with local people."*

*"The level of service and the friendliness of the local people especially in the resort."*

*"Went on the Friday night party bus and was intimidated by locals to leave the bar as they didn't seem to want tourists there..."*

### Becoming too commercialised/touristy

*"The culture appears to have been maintained only for tourists on Rarotonga. There is no traditional housing anywhere the whole place seems way too westernised. Also the number of tourists is too high. There are more tourists than locals."*

*"It's all very touristy without the real feel of local people and prices are aimed at high spending tourists."*

*"The difference between the affluence of the tourist/resort strips and the lack of money the locals obviously have... that the locals have never been on the cruises/tours etc. - I guess through not being able to afford them. The Christianity of the locals - I am not in favour of missionaries changing the way of life of people they came across and converted."*

*"Other Tourists whinging about this and that."*

*“The island is getting busier with tourism. Please don’t let it get like Fiji, overdevelopment will ruin a beautiful place.”*

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

When asked if there was anything that could have improved their visit to the Cook Islands, just under half (41%) of respondents said ‘yes’. Suggestions mentioned by respondents focused on public services and infrastructure (21%), quality/cost of food and beverages (14%), accommodation (12%), entertainment, activities and transport (11%), friendliness of locals and service levels (9%), weather (9%), environment/safety/animal care (8%), and flight schedules in and out of Cook Islands (6%). Comments on these themes included:

*“Investigate the new Japanese machine that turns any kind of plastic back into motor oil--it may solve a large part of the garbage and the fuel problems. Good luck and I hope to return for a third time soon.”*

*“More knowledge on the islands and/or easier & cheaper internet access to plan activities.”*

*“Knowing how the moped licence system worked, we were disappointed to have missed out on renting a moped for our stay.”*

*“Better knowledge of food and restaurants. Our first night in Rarotonga we took the bus into town but couldn't find any open restaurants so we just got food at the grocery store.”*

*“GENUINE local cuisine showcasing local ingredients - vegetables, fruits, eggs from the free range chooks, shellfish, and coffee. Not just coconut, paw paw and three types of fish (tuna, mahi mahi and parrot fish).”*

*“Facilities at the resort, some of the staff were rude and the accommodation could have been better with comfier bedding and cleaner shower and toilet. Would have been nice to have the option of a bath in the room also.”*

*“Also, some other forms of entertainment, e.g. I would have watched South Pacific or Blue Lagoon happily at an outdoor theatre, especially if snacks and drinks were served. The island is ideal for young people interested in water sports but the older wedding guests are bored quickly. That is why we spent only 5 days while the rest of the party was there for a week.”*

*“The direct flights from Sydney being more flexible so we had more options than to stay less than a week or 2 weeks. The first day was a total waste as we had to fly overnight and arrive at 7am so we were half asleep and unable to do anything that day.”*

*“Trans island track was in terrible condition. Could be improved easily by someone going over it with a chainsaw.”*

*“Better access to the northern group. IF those islands are keen for more tourists, flights of at least once per week with an internal northern connection would be great. Keep the cost high, but make it available and reliable.”*

*“More shops by the local people especially Arts and Craft, government needs to do more to support the people, also, highlight the arts and craft from the outer islands.”*

## **Reasons to return to the Cook Islands and recommend to others**

The majority of visitors (93%) indicated that they would consider re-visiting the Cook Islands. This figure is slightly lower than the 2013/14 annual average of 94%, but the same as the identical quarter in 2014 (93%). The main reasons given for visitors wishing to return to Cook Islands is to enjoy the relaxed lifestyle, the stunning scenery and favourable weather, for the overall great holiday experience, the friendliness of the local people, and for the opportunity to further explore the islands, and recreational activities on offer.

The pace of life in Cook Islands is a major attractor for visitors with nearly 40% of the comments made by visitors spoke of the relaxed atmosphere and the opportunity to escape from the pressures of everyday living. Visitors see the Cook Islands as a perfect place to ‘unwind’ and ‘recharge’ in a relaxed ‘stress-free environment’. Comment included:

*“It was the most wonderful vacation I have ever taken, so relaxing and soothing to the soul.”*

*“Love the pace of Rarotonga. You don't want for anything. Rarotonga is the perfect description of 'paradise'.”*

*“The attraction was in the atmosphere and experience rather than the things to do, so have not got bored with it.”*

*“It seems a place where you can do what you want without being pressured.”*

Adding to the charm of the Cook Islands as a holiday destination is the natural stunning scenery and favourable weather, with over a quarter of the visitors commenting on this aspect of their trip. Key words used to describe the scenery include a ‘beautiful Island paradise’, ‘lovely beaches’, ‘beautiful lagoon’, ‘unspoilt’ and ‘natural’. Comments included:

*“The beauty of it all, only ever saw this in catalogues but to actually see it, mind-blowing.”*

*“Beautiful stunning location with memories to treasure.”*

*“Most beautiful place I have been.”*

Visitors appreciated that the Cook Islands is still relatively underdeveloped in terms of tourism compared to other Pacific islands such as Fiji. Visitors enjoyed the slower pace of the Cook Islands describing it as 'rustic', not 'westernised', 'natural' and 'unpretentious' - an 'entirely unique paradise'. Comments included:

*"It's definitely different from other South Pacific islands we've visited."*

*"We choose to go to Rarotonga rather than anywhere else because it is small, informal, slow paced."*

*"This place is my new "Hawaii" as it is so beautiful and full of life."*

For those visitors escaping cooler winter temperatures at home, the tropical climate made the decision to return an easy one with most commenting on how the 'lovely warm weather' really made the holiday.

For many visitors their overall holiday experience (25%) was just so great they would have 'no hesitation' in returning to the Cook Islands - simply stating that they 'love it'. Return visits are very common with people talking about planning their next trip already and that they 'can't wait to visit again'. Others are more frequent visitors with many returning annually to enjoy the relaxed atmosphere, one respondent was enjoying their twelfth visit. These frequent visitors view the Cook Islands as a 'home away from home', a place where they feel comfortable to simply 'unwind and relax'. Comments include:

*"We come back every year. Love it way better than any other Pacific Island."*

*"In a heartbeat. The beaches, the people, the activities. Will come back again for sure."*

*"Because we love it and feel so at home there. We can really relax yet there's still plenty to do if one feels like it. Absolute bliss!"*

Visitors are also drawn back to the Cook Islands because of the 'warm welcome' they receive, and due to the 'friendliness' and 'helpfulness' of the local people during their stay (20%). Visitors often described the local people as 'lovely', 'friendly', 'wonderful', 'beautiful' and 'happy'. This positive interaction with the local people all contributed to the 'laid back lifestyle' they enjoyed on their holiday. Comments included

*"I love the warmth and friendliness of the islanders."*

*"Locals are awesome."*

*"It is a paradise close to NZ inhabited by the loveliest people."*

*"One of the most beautiful, friendly places I have visited!"*

Other reasons for returning to the Cook Islands included the opportunity to see more, in particular to explore the outer islands (10%) and for water-based activities – mainly diving

and snorkelling (8%). The convenience for New Zealanders especially, in terms of both the flight time and using the same currency is an added incentive for some to return (7%). Cook Islands is also viewed as a safe, clean, and family friendly holiday destination (5%).

Of those visitors who added comments why they would not return to the Cook Islands (6%) the majority felt they 'had been there and done that', in some cases they were already return visitors so wanted to explore other places.

*"We did everything that there was to do. Would go to a different Pacific Island next time."*

*"Third time there and pretty much seen and done everything."*

*"Beautiful island & people, but I feel I have seen and done all I wanted there. Little far from Australia too for what's on offer."*

Some felt that as a holiday destination that the Cook Islands did not offer a big enough variety of activities for visitors especially for those not into water-based sports like diving or snorkelling for example.

*"Not the right activities for our age and degree of mobility."*

Others visitors commented about cost of external flights especially from Australia (lack of direct flights) and internal flights to the outer islands being cost prohibitive.

*"For the cost of going to Rarotonga there's other places I would prefer to visit."*

*"A week is long enough to see Rarotonga and it's too expensive to travel to the other islands and stay there."*

Once in the Cook Islands, some visitors felt it was too expensive as a holiday destination to justify a return visit.

*"Having explored as much as we did we feel our money is best spent going somewhere else."*

*"It was a one off and too expensive."*

Other factors included bad weather conditions and poor service levels.

The majority (82%) of the visitors mentioned that they would like to include the outer islands in their next visit. Most (69%) of the visitors surveyed in this quarter mentioned they would like to include 'Aitutaki' in their next visit to the Cook Islands. 'Atiu' was the second most mentioned island at 9%; another 11% of visitors stated that they were 'not sure' of which islands to include, and 5% of visitors mentioned they would like to visit 'all the islands'. Other visitors mentioned they would like to visit some of the islands belonging to the Northern Group (5%) or the Southern Group (3%). 'Mangaia' was mentioned by 2% of visitors as future

possible destination. Only two percent mentioned the high cost of visiting other islands as a barrier for not visiting.

Nearly all visitors surveyed (98%) said that they would recommend the destination to their family and friends which is consistent with previous survey periods. Over a third (35%) of visitors surveyed stated they would recommend the Cook Islands to others because of the 'atmosphere': this was again described as 'relaxing', 'easy', 'peaceful', 'quiet', 'stress-free' and with a 'laid-back' lifestyle. Respondents felt that the Cook Islands was a great place to 'relax' and 'unwind', and said they would recommend the Cook Islands as a good holiday destination for those who are looking for a 'relaxing atmosphere'.

Thirty-one percent of respondents said that the 'beautiful' and 'clean' natural environment of the Cook Islands was a reason to recommend the island nation to others – including the beautiful scenery, great beaches and lagoons, the warm climate, and its unspoilt natural attractions.

Just under a quarter of respondents (24%) mentioned the 'friendly' local people as a reason to recommend the Cook Islands to friends and relatives. Other words used to describe the local Cook Islanders included 'lovely', 'wonderful', 'great', 'happy', and 'amazing'.

Just over a fifth of visitors (21%) surveyed would recommend the Cook Islands to others based on their own 'great experience'. These visitors described their trip to the Cook Islands as a 'wonderful island experience', and said that they just 'loved everything' about it. These respondents also often described the Cook Islands as a 'paradise'.

Other themes that were mentioned included the safety and convenience of the islands as a destination – especially for New Zealanders and Australians (13%), the attractions and activities available (9%), food and beverage options (5%), the affordability of the holiday (5%), the Cook Islands culture (4%), the ease of New Zealand currency and language (3%), the islands being a family-friendly destination (3%), the fact that the Cook Islands are not too touristy or over-commercialized (3%), and the choice of accommodation available (2%).

Comments on why visitors would recommend the Cook Islands to others included:

*"Beautiful island that has not been over-developed, great hospitality and the amazingly relaxed atmosphere. I also felt completely safe as a solo female traveller."*

*"Wonderful island experience, low crowds, friendly people, English speaking."*

*"For all of the reasons I would return - Beautiful location, warm, welcoming, respectful hospitality, safe, clean. Plenty to see and do, or do nothing at all. No stress - a fantastic place for a relaxing holiday."*

*“Feels safe, friendly, not (ever!) being hassled to buy or trade. Good diving and great snorkelling. Plenty of good tours and self-guided activities available. Good food.”*

*“It's a fantastic place! Have been telling everyone! Great for all, safe for families, relaxed for older people, plenty to do for younger people, something for everyone, cannot think of anyone who wouldn't love it.”*

*“Climate, NZ dollars and family-friendly. Great snorkelling.”*

*Great place to detox, relax, and get thoroughly involved in a rich culture.”*

*“I have travelled a fair bit and this holiday has been my favourite by a mile. What made it was the incredibly friendly staff at the Pacific Resort. They absolutely made the difference - a good holiday became an AMAZING holiday because of the friendliness and helpfulness.”*

*“As beautiful as French Polynesia but more happy people and good money value.”*

*“It is much better than Fiji where most Aussies go. Not as commercial and dirty as most of Fiji has become.”*

Only 2% of visitors would not recommend the Cook Islands to others and this is largely based on the lack of service and poor value for money.

## Final observations

This report shows that the Cook Islands tourism industry generally performed well during the April to June 2015 period. Visitor satisfaction levels and the desire for return visitation have remained very high, and it is clear that the destination is making a generally positive impression on visitors.

Nevertheless this report also highlights that there is room to enhance the visitor experience and to increase the economic yield and broader community benefits associated with tourism. As with previous reports, this research highlights issues around environmental degradation and infrastructure provision that should be monitored and managed carefully. There are also some concerns from visitors around the value for money/quality of service provided by accommodation and food/beverage operations that need to be addressed. The on-going concerns around stray dogs should also be noted. It is worth mentioning about the perceived 'unfriendliness' of some the locals towards visitors especially in Rarotonga and the impact this is having. It is not only about poor customer service levels but there appears to be some animosity towards 'visitors' in general creeping in especially given some of the comments were made by expatriate Cook Islanders who were visiting and expected a 'friendlier welcome'. It is also interesting to note emerging comments and feedback about chikungunya.

Visitor spend prior to arrival in the Cook Islands has increased slightly from the 2013/14 annual average, average visitor spend once on the island is slightly higher than 2013/14 average, but is slightly lower than the same quarter for 2013/14.

Overall the Cook Islands tourism sector is performing well in terms of visitor satisfaction but it remains important to look at ways to increase visitor yield in a sustainable manner. It is critical to find ways to build on and develop the visitor experience in a manner that enhances local economic linkages. The 2014/15 annual report will review this theme in more depth.

## 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.**

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 the end of December 2013.

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 late 2013.

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, e.g. 26/06/2013)

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?

- a) Holiday
- b) Wedding party
- c) Business or conference
- d) Visiting friends or relatives
- e) Honeymoon
- f) Special event – sporting
- g) Special event – cultural
- h) Volunteering
- i) Education

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

- a) Airline - Air New Zealand
- b) Airline - Air Tahiti
- c) Ferry
- d) Private charter plane
- e) Private boat

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

- a) No one - I was by myself
- b) Partner / husband / wife
- c) Family member(s)
- d) Friends
- e) Work colleagues
- f) Tour group

- g) Organised group (e.g. school, sports etc)
- h) Wedding party

6. How many people accompanied you on this trip?

- a) 0 - travelled by myself
- b) 1
- c) 2
- d) 3
- e) 4
- f) 5
- g) 6
- h) 7
- i) 8
- j) 9
- k) 10+

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

- a) Rarotonga
- b) Aitutaki
- c) Atiu
- d) Mangaia
- e) Mauke
- f) Other

8. On your most recent visit to the Cook Islands, please indicate below (on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is 'very dissatisfied' and 5 being 'very satisfied') the activities that you engaged in and how satisfied you were with your experience.

*Water based activities:*

- a) Beaches
- b) Swimming
- c) Snorkelling
- d) Diving
- e) Kayaking
- f) Fishing - Deep Sea
- g) Fishing - Bonefishing
- h) Lagoon Cruise
- i) Ocean Cruise
- j) Whale Watching
- k) Kitesurfing

- l) Stand Up Paddle Boarding

*Cultural interaction:*

- a) Island Night Feast and Show
- b) Meal at a Cook Islands Home
- c) Church on Sunday
- d) Island Celebrations or Events
- e) Tumunu on Atiu
- f) Local Markets
- g) Dance / Language / Art Classes

*Land based activities and Touring:*

- a) Restaurants, Bars and Cafes
- b) Cultural Events
- c) Sporting Events
- d) 4WD Adventures
- e) Cultural Tour
- f) Treks and Trails
- g) Cycling
- h) Sightseeing
- i) Vehicle Rental
- j) Public Transport

*Shopping:*

- a) Pearls
- b) Arts
- c) Crafts
- d) Music
- e) Local Produce e.g Coffee, Coconut Oil etc

Please tell us about any other activities you participated in:

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9. On your most recent visit, how satisfied were you with the following (on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is 'very dissatisfied' and 5 being 'very satisfied')?

- a) The information that was available when planning this trip?
- b) The information that was available during this trip?
- c) The cost of accommodation?

- d) The quality of accommodation?
- e) The experience of renting a vehicle?
- f) The experience of using public transport?
- g) The frequency of air transport within the Cook Islands?
- h) The overall level of service in the Cook Islands?
- i) The friendliness of the people in the Cook Islands?

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

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

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

- a) No
- b) 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)?

- a) Adults
- b) 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 below:

- a) NZD
- b) AUD
- c) GBP
- d) USD

- e) EUR
- f) CAD
- g) Other - please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

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

- a) International flights
- b) Accommodation
- c) Meals
- d) Domestic transport
- e) Activities
- f) Other

15.1 After you arrived in the Cook Islands, how much do you estimate that you spent in each island (Rarotonga, Aitutaki and Other island(s)) in local currency (NZ\$)?

- a) Accommodation
- b) Restaurants, Cafes & Bars
- c) Vehicle Rental
- d) Petrol
- e) Domestic flights
- f) Public transport
- g) Cruising
- h) Groceries
- i) Shopping (e.g. souvenirs, clothes)
- j) Activities (e.g. water sports, sightseeing)
- k) Other

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

- a) Yes
- b) No

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

- a) Yes
- b) No

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

- a) Yes
- b) No

19. How satisfied were you with your overall experience of the Cook Islands (on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is 'very dissatisfied and 5 being 'very satisfied')?

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

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## **ABOUT YOU**

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

22. Your age group:

- a) 18-29
- b) 30-39
- c) 40-49
- d) 50-59
- e) 60-69
- f) 70+

23. Your gender:

- a) Female
- b) Male

24. What is your highest qualification?

- a) No formal qualification
- b) High school qualification
- c) Tertiary/University qualification
- d) Other

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

- a) NZD
- b) AUD
- c) GBP
- d) USD
- e) EUR
- f) CAD
- g) Other - please specify

26. Where do you live? (Please select from list of all countries)

*Survey Powered By Qualtrics*