



# Cook Islands Visitor Survey Results

---

**October – December 2016**

**Prepared for Cook Islands Tourism Corporation**

**by**

**New Zealand Tourism Research Institute  
Auckland University of Technology**

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

**February 2017**

## **Acknowledgements**

NZTRI would like to acknowledge the Cook Islands Tourism Corporation (special mention to Metua Vaiimene and Jake Numanga), the Cook Islands Statistics Office, Immigration Cook Islands, and Rarotonga International Airport for their support in this ongoing research. Thanks to Simon Milne, Mindy Sun, Sam Li and Michelle Hunt who prepared the report.

## Executive Summary

This report focuses on the characteristics, expectations and expenditure patterns of tourists who visited the Cook Islands. The data presented is collected from an online departure survey (<http://www.mycookislandsvisit.com>). The survey period covered in this report is 1 October to 30 December 2016. There were 1,243 individual respondents to the survey - representing a total of 2,849 adults and 422 children in the expenditure analysis (this equates to 8% of all visitors during the period – based on the 2016 visitor arrival data for the October to December period from the Cook Islands Statistics Office).

The majority (69%) of visitors surveyed come from New Zealand, 16% come from Australia. Visitors are well educated (70% of visitors have some form of tertiary education) with a relatively high annual household income (47% earn over NZ\$100,000 per year). Nearly half of the visitors (46%) travel with one companion. Solo travellers are relatively rare (6%).

Over half of the visitors surveyed (52%) are first time visitors to the Cook Islands, a further 27% 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 8.8 nights. The majority (93%) of visitors stay either one or two weeks. Twenty one percent of visitors surveyed visited Aitutaki in addition to Rarotonga.

Visitor spend prior to arrival in the Cook Islands (\$2,013 per person) has decreased slightly from the 2015/2016 annual average (\$2,121 per person). Spend on the island (per person per day) is \$158. This spend is higher than the 2015/16 annual average of \$147, and the same quarter for the previous year (\$144 for October to December 2015).

The average local spend per visitor during the entirety of their stay is \$1,393. When pre-paid spend and the local spend are combined, it is estimated that each visitor brings \$2,195 to the Cook Islands economy (or approximately \$250 per day). This figure is slightly higher than the \$2,138 average for 2015/16, and the \$2,104 for the same quarter last year (October to December 2015).

Water-based activities have the strongest participation levels and cultural interactions have the highest overall satisfaction ratings. Overall visitor satisfaction levels with Cook Islands services and experiences are high. The most appealing elements are the local people; environment, cleanliness and weather; atmosphere; activities, attractions, entertainment and events; food and beverage. The least appealing elements are the lack of public services, facilities and infrastructure; rubbish and natural environment care – Muri lagoon; food and beverage; attractions and activities; price of goods and services; accommodation; and stray animals and mosquitos.

Overall visitor satisfaction is very high: 95% of those surveyed state that they want to return to the Cook Islands, and 98% would recommend the Cook Islands to friends or family. The overall satisfaction level remains consistent with the previous year.

## Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	iii
Introduction .....	1
Visitor Characteristics .....	2
Information Sources and Purchasing Behaviour .....	11
Visitor Expenditure .....	14
Visitor Satisfaction .....	18
Most appealing aspects of the Cook Islands.....	22
Least appealing aspects of the Cook Islands.....	28
Suggestions to improve the visit to the Cook Islands .....	33
Reasons to return to the Cook Islands and recommend to others.....	34
Final observations .....	38
Appendix – Cook Islands Visitor Survey .....	39

## Figures and Tables

Figure 1: Country of origin (n=1243) .....	2
Figure 2: New Zealand visitors (n=708) .....	3
Figure 3: Australia visitors (n=180) .....	3
Figure 4: Distribution of age and gender (n=1143) .....	4
Figure 5: Highest qualification (n=1148).....	4
Figure 6: Annual household income in NZD (n=1144).....	5
Figure 7: Main purpose of visit (n=1489).....	5
Figure 8: Travelling with whom? (n=1242) .....	6
Figure 9: Number of companions on trip (n=1470).....	6
Figure 10: Number of visits to the Cook Islands (n=1148) .....	7
Figure 11: Number of previous visits to the Cook Islands – country breakdown .....	7
Figure 12: Length of stay in nights (n=1229) .....	8
Figure 13: Mode of transport (n=1241).....	8
Figure 14: Visited Islands (n=1489).....	9
Figure 15: Average length of stay in the Cook Islands and on each island (n=1225) .....	10
Figure 16: How did you find out about Cook Islands as a destination (n=1242).....	11
Figure 17: How did you find out about Cook Islands as a destination – country breakdown.	12
Figure 18: How important were the following sources of information when planning your trip (n=1239).....	13
Figure 19: How did you purchase your travel to the Cook Islands (n=1242) .....	13
Figure 20: Amount of money spent per person prior to arrival (n=987).....	14
Figure 21: Items included in money spent prior to arrival .....	15
Figure 22: Overall satisfaction with experience of the Cook Islands (n=1377) .....	18
Figure 23: Degree of participation in activities (n range=34-1212).....	19
Figure 24: Degree of satisfaction in activities participated in (mean score out of 5) .....	20
Figure 25: Degree of satisfaction with Cook Islands services (mean score out of 5) .....	21
Table 1: Average visitor expenditure in the Cook Islands (per person per day) .....	16
Table 2: Average expenditure per visitor per day by country of origin.....	16
Table 3: Most appealing aspects of the Cook Islands (n=1070) .....	22
Table 4: Least appealing aspects of the Cook Islands (n=1093) .....	28

## Introduction

The Cook Islands government, local businesses and communities require a clear picture of the characteristics, expectations and expenditure patterns of visitors to the nation. This information enables effective planning and development of the tourism industry and highlights its crucial role within the broader Cook Island economy.

Visitors to the Cook Islands are asked to complete a web-based survey within two weeks of completion of their visit. The Cook Islands online International Visitor Survey has run since mid-2012 and is continuing through 2017.

This report presents the results from October to December 2016. Over this three-month period, 3,746 visitors were contacted by email to take part in the survey, and 1,243 responses were received: a conversion rate of 33.18%. These responses cover a total of 2,849 adults and 422 children. The conversion rate for this period is higher than the 2015/16 annual average (30%) and October to December 2015 quarter (28%).

The data presented includes detailed information on:

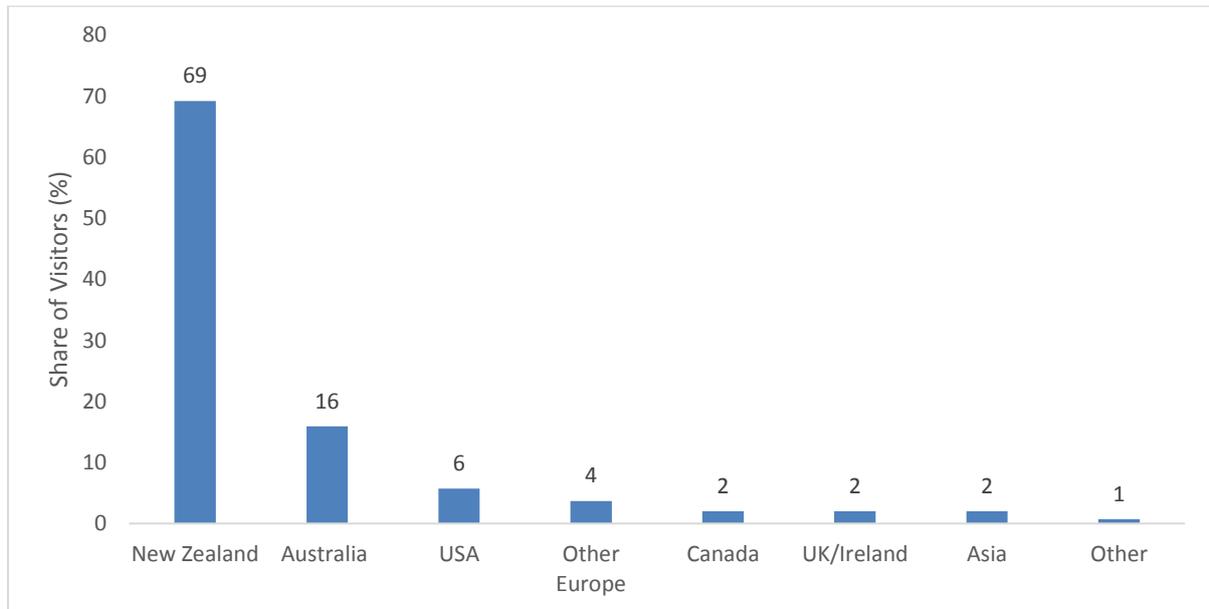
- The characteristics of visitors to the Cook Islands (age, gender, education, country of origin, income, purpose of visit, travelling companions, number of previous visits, length of stay, airline used, islands visited)
- Visitor information obtained about the Cook Islands, the factors influencing in the travel decision making process, and booking information.
- 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 2015/16 annual averages or the 2015/16 October – December quarterly these figures are highlighted in the discussion that follows.

## Visitor Characteristics

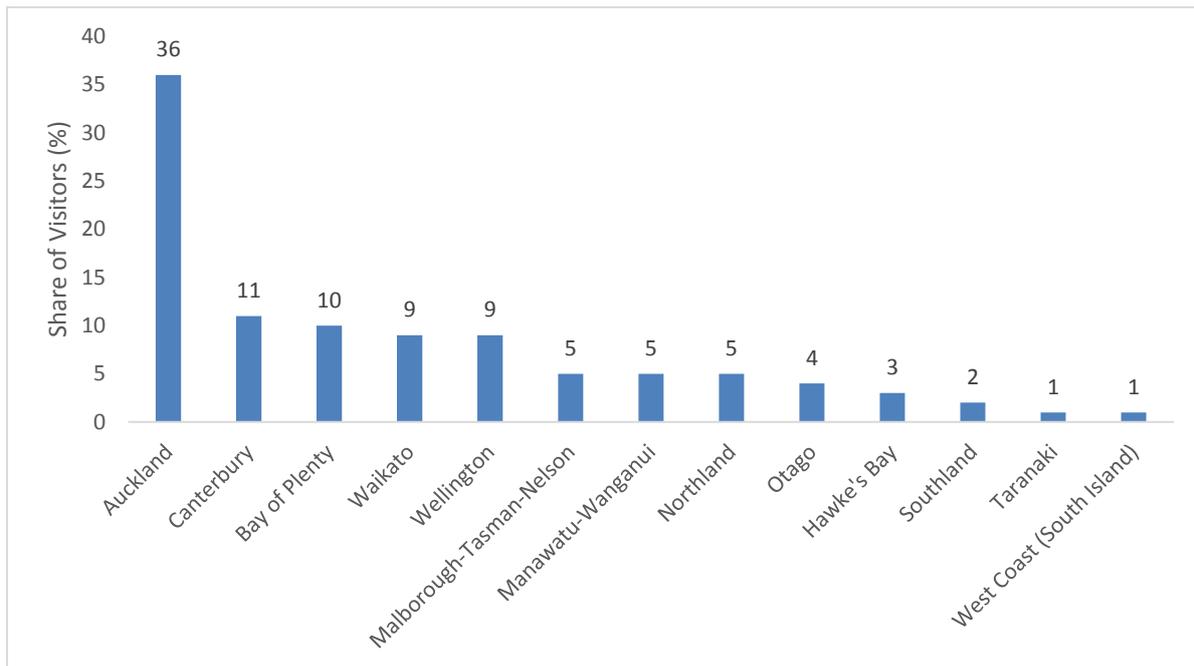
The majority (69%) of the visitors surveyed come from New Zealand (Figure 1). The second largest visitor group is from Australia, with 16% of respondents. USA, Europe, Canada, Great Britain, and Asia represent the other main source markets.

**Figure 1: Country of origin (n=1243)**

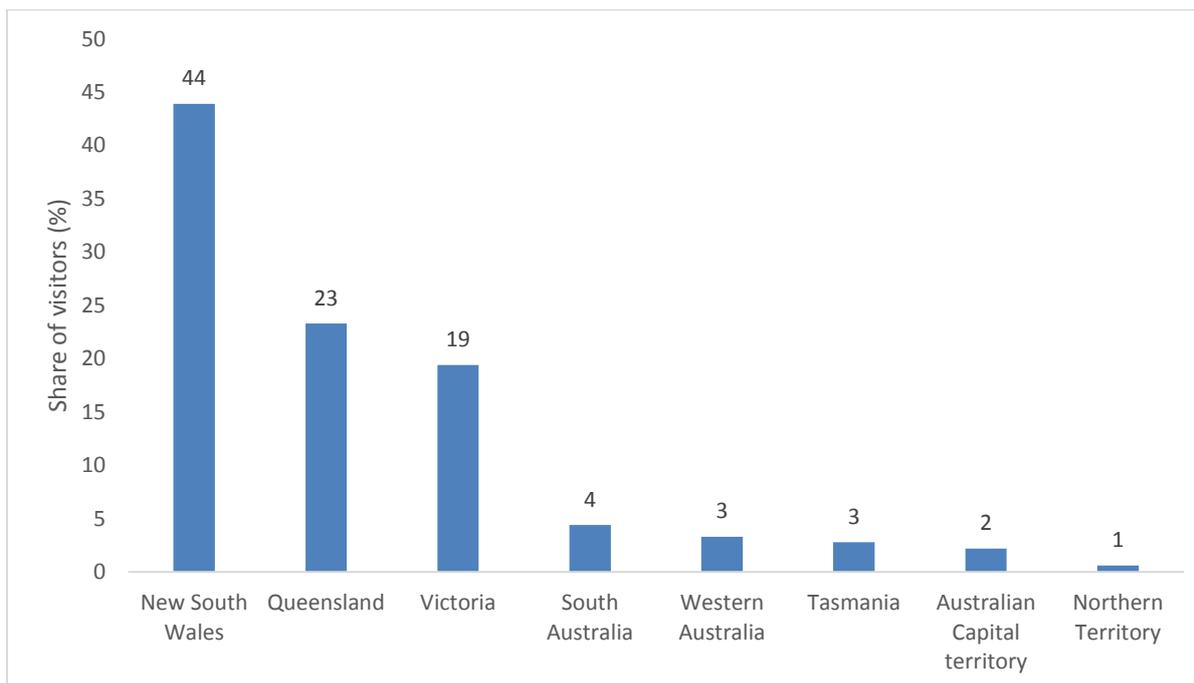


Auckland, Canterbury, Bay of Plenty, Waikato, and Wellington account for 75% of New Zealand visitors. For visitors from Australia, the regions of New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria generate the highest numbers of arrivals (86%) (Figure 2-3).

**Figure 2: New Zealand visitors (n=708)**

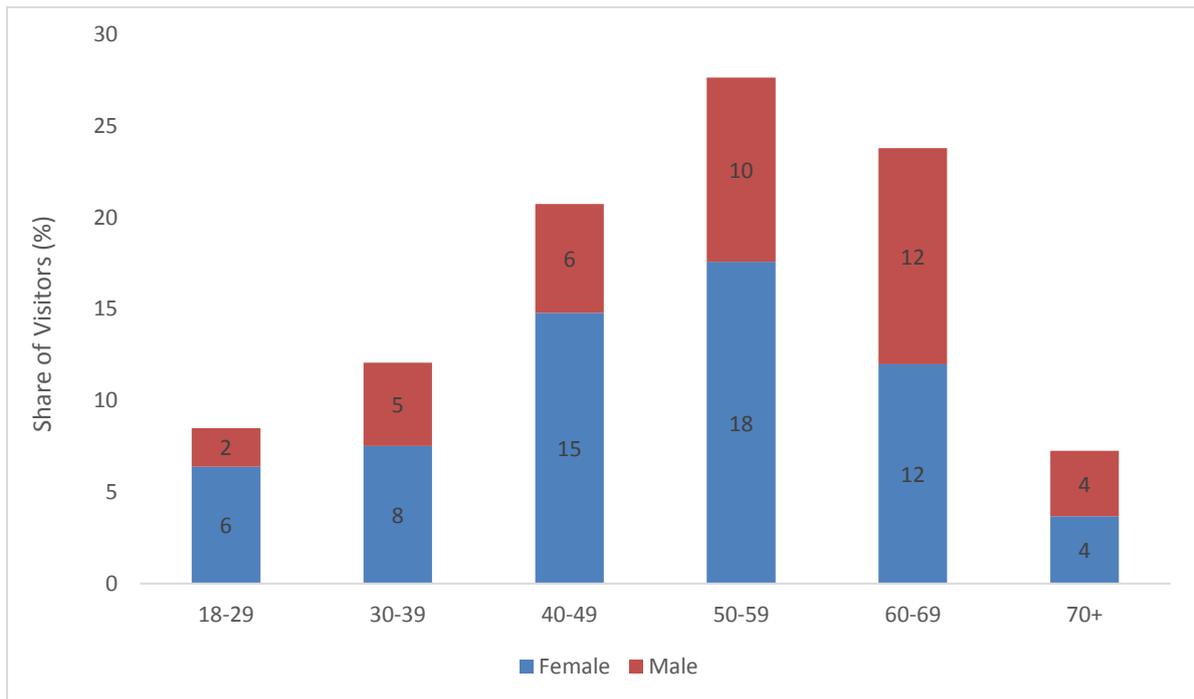


**Figure 3: Australia visitors (n=180)**



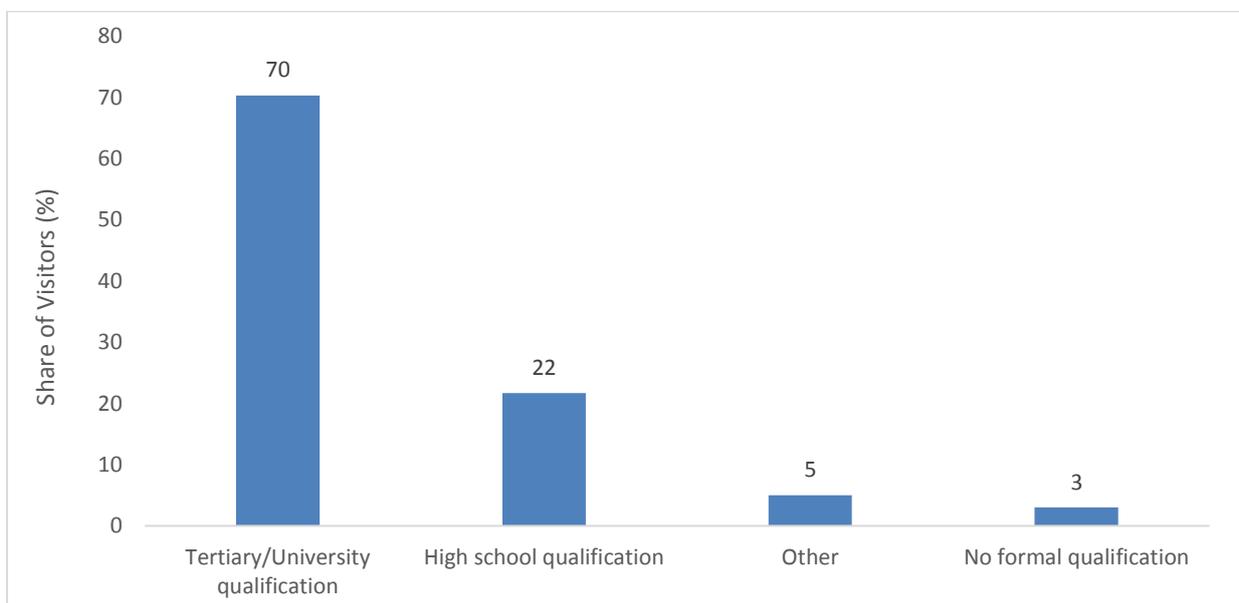
More women (62%) than men (38%) completed the survey (Figure 4). The most significant age categories are the 50 to 59 year (28%) grouping, followed by those aged 60 to 69 (24%) and the 40 to 49 age group (21%). There are relatively few travellers in the 70 plus age bracket (8%).

**Figure 4: Distribution of age and gender (n=1143)**



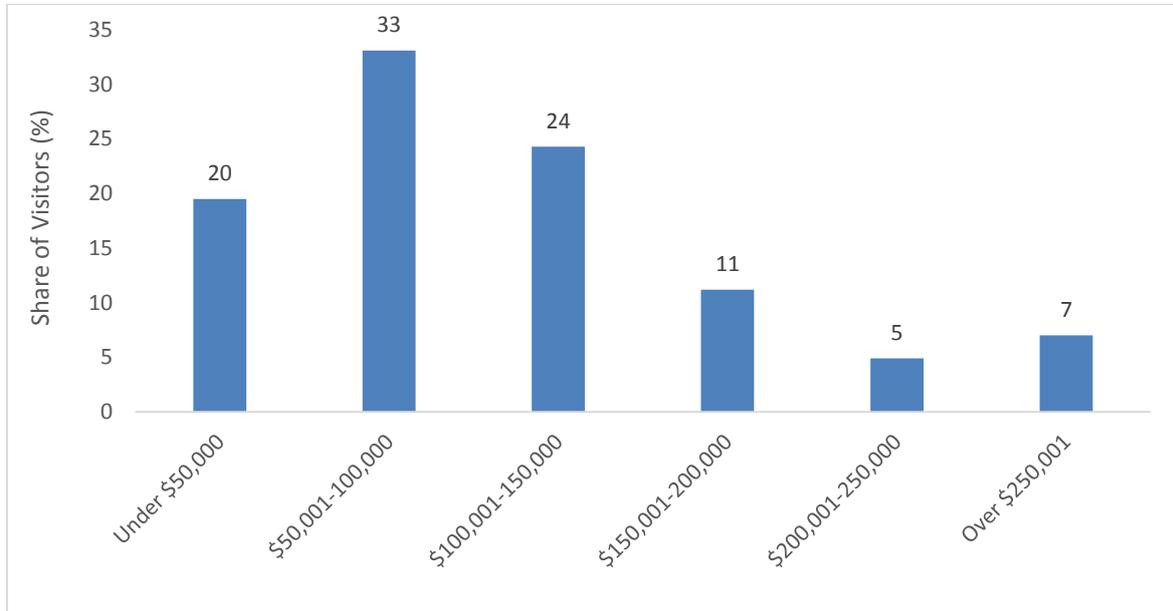
Visitors are well educated: more than two-thirds (70%) of those surveyed have some form of tertiary qualification, with a further 22% having completed a high school education (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Highest qualification (n=1148)**



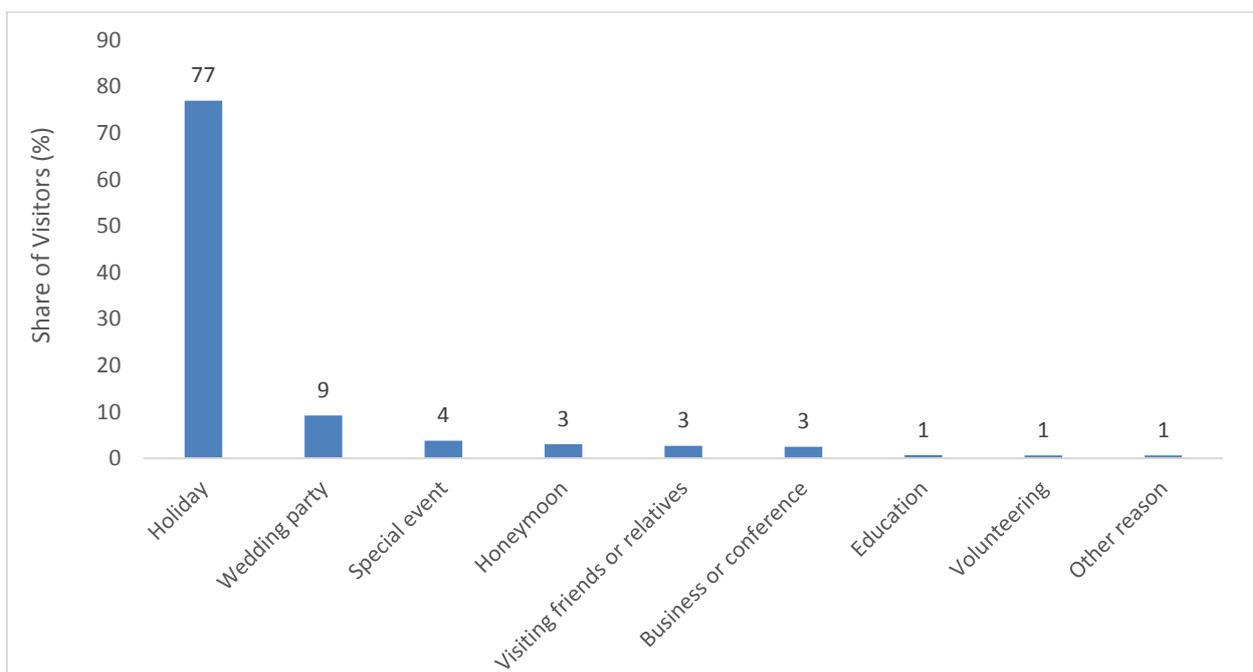
Nearly a third of visitors (33%) have an annual household income of between NZ\$50,001 and NZ\$100,000. Just under a quarter (24%) of those surveyed earn between NZ\$100,001 and NZ\$150,000. A further 23% of respondents have a household income of over NZ\$150,000 per year (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Annual household income in NZD (n=1144)**



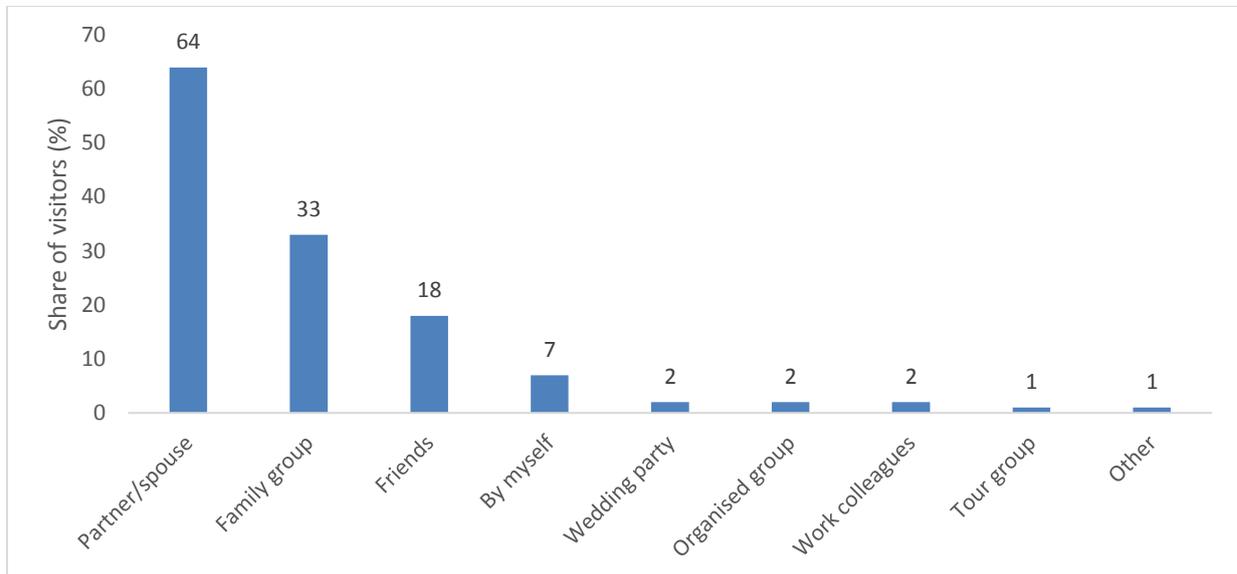
More than three quarters of visitors surveyed come to the Cook Islands for a holiday (77%). Other reasons given include attending a wedding (9%), attending a special event (4%), a honeymoon (3%), visiting friends and relatives (3%), and for business and conference (3%), (Figure 7).

**Figure 7: Main purpose of visit (n=1489)**



Most visitors (64%) surveyed travel to the Cook Islands with a partner or spouse. Visitors also travel with other family members (33%), with friends (18%), or travel alone (7%). Those travelling with colleagues, in an organised group, in a tour group or as part of a wedding party represent a smaller share of the sample (Figure 8).

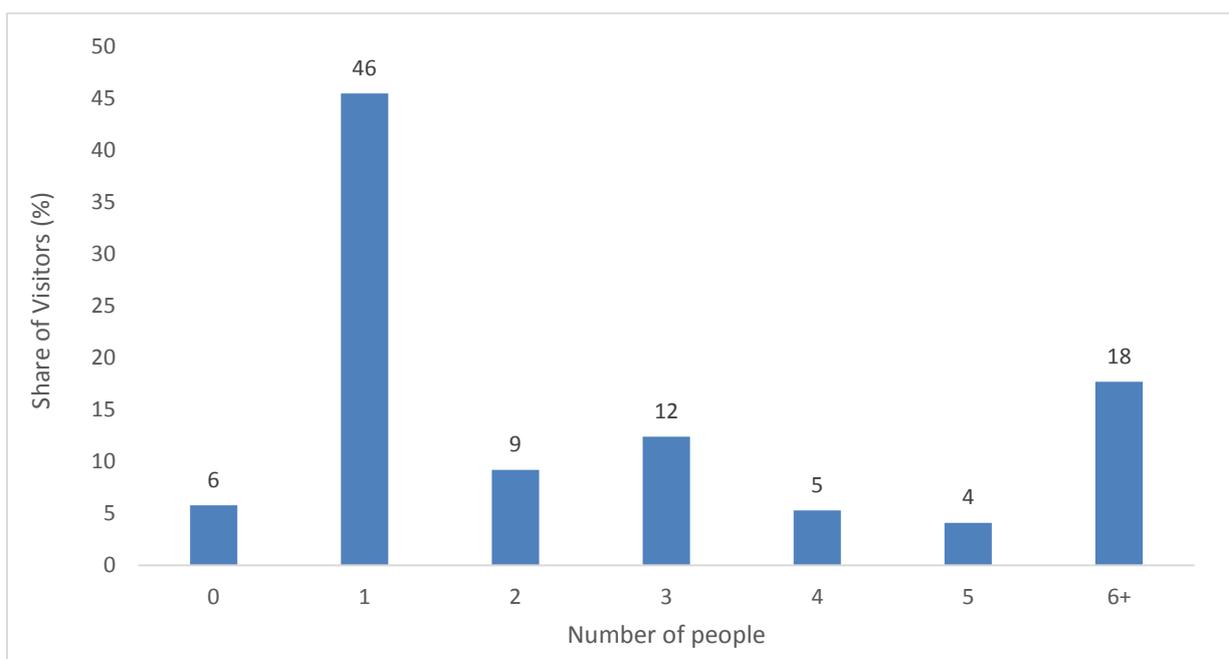
**Figure 8: Travelling with whom? (n=1242)**



*Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%*

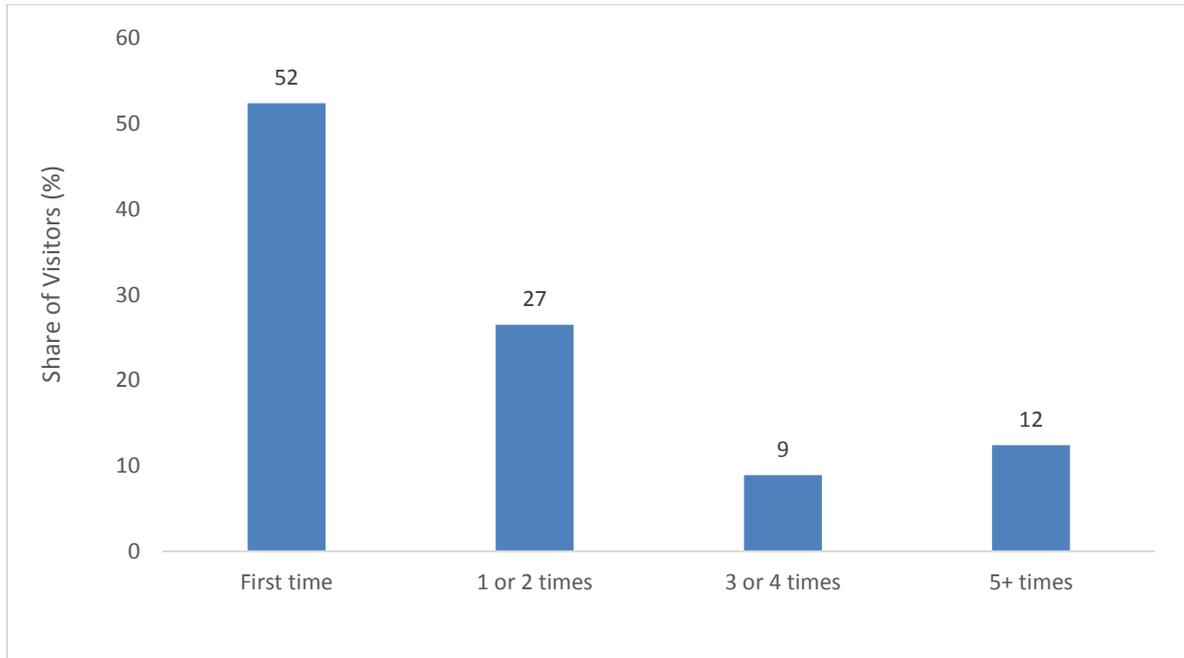
Nearly half of the visitors (46%) travelled with one companion on their visit to the Cook Islands (Figure 9). Travel groups larger than four people are not very common, with the exception of wedding parties.

**Figure 9: Number of companions on trip (n=1470)**



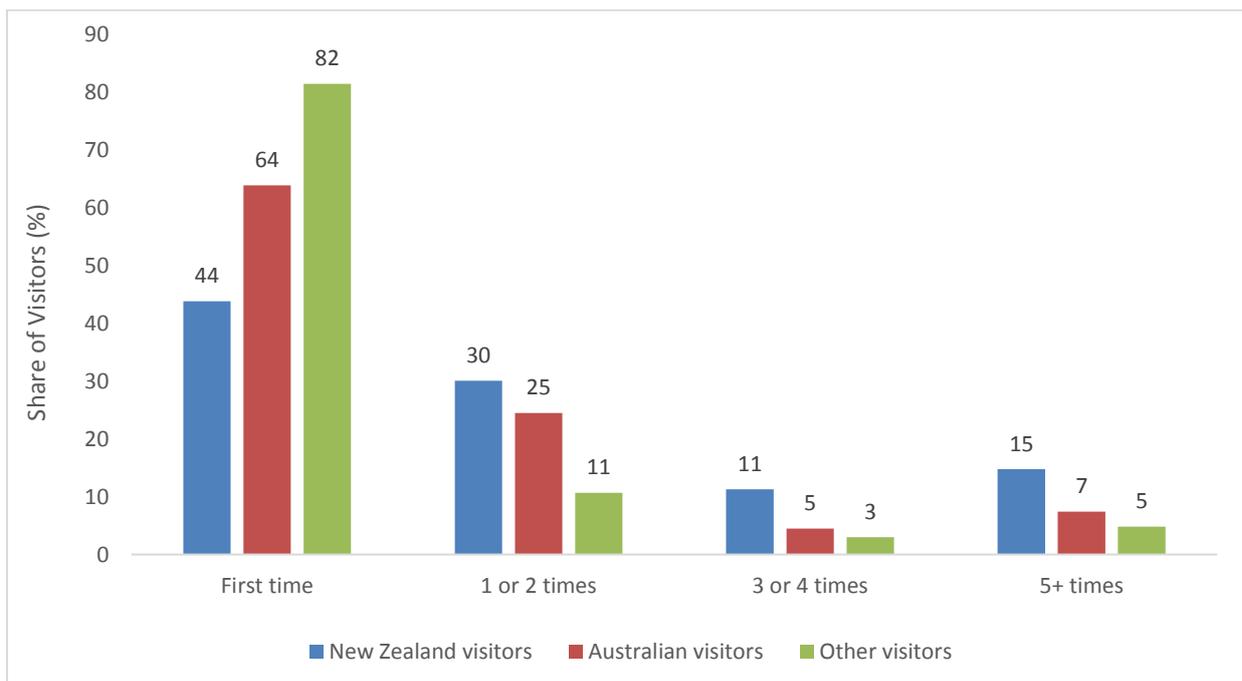
Over half of the visitors (52%) are on their first visit to the Cook Islands. A further 27% have been to the Cook Islands once or twice before. A smaller group (21%) have visited three or more times (Figure 10).

**Figure 10: Number of visits to the Cook Islands (n=1148)**



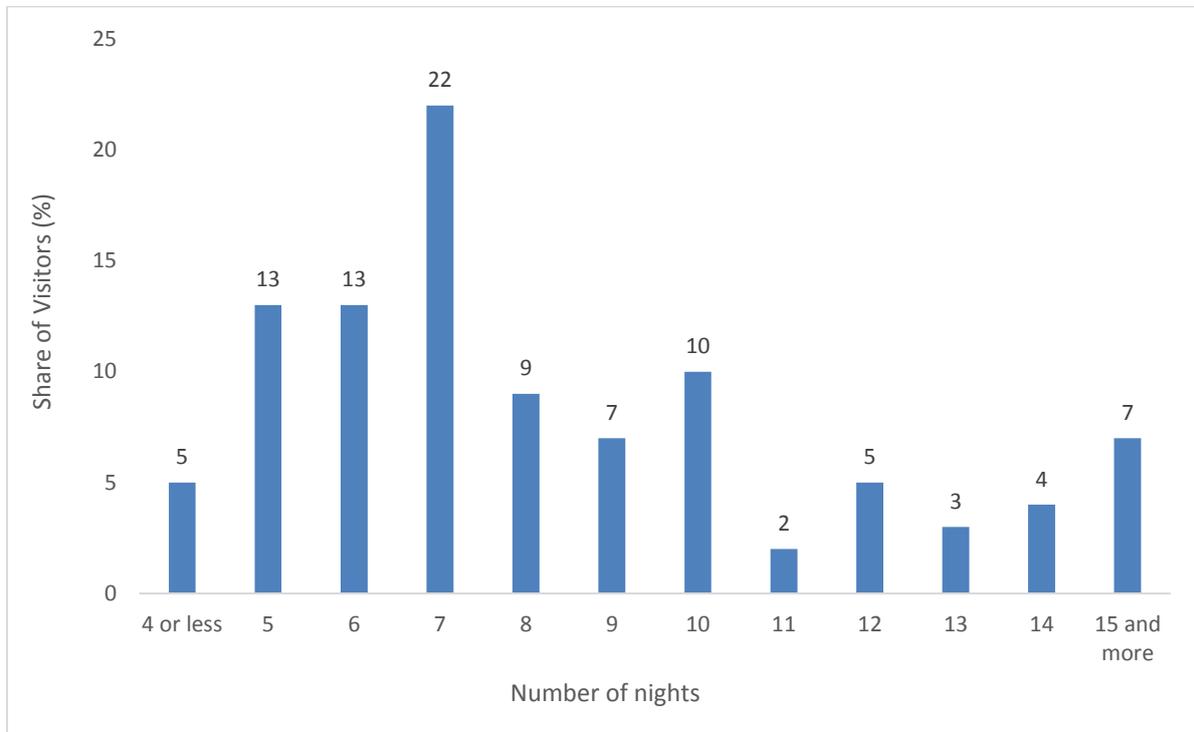
New Zealanders are more likely to be repeat visitors than those from other source markets (Figure 11). Over half of the surveyed visitors from New Zealand (56%) have visited the Cook Islands before compared to only 37% of visitors from Australia and 19% from other countries.

**Figure 11: Number of previous visits to the Cook Islands – country breakdown**



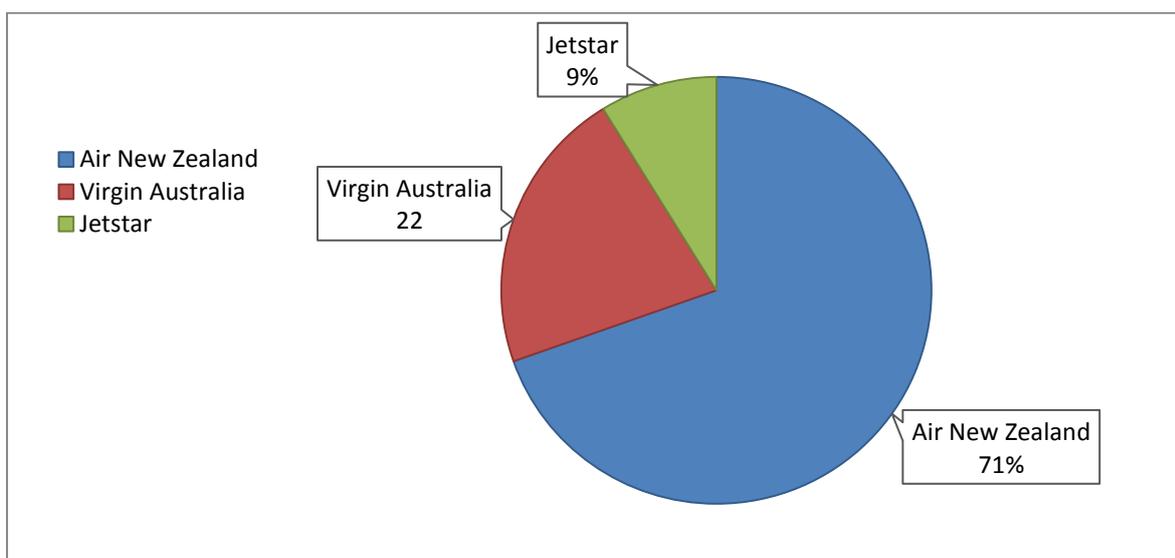
The average length of stay in the Cook Islands is 8.8 nights with 79% of visitors spending 10 or fewer nights in the country (Figure 12).

**Figure 12: Length of stay in nights (n=1229)**



The majority of visitors (71%) travel to/from the Cook Islands with Air New Zealand, a further 22% visitors fly with Virgin Australia (Figure 13), followed by nine percent of visitors travelling with Jetstar. Visitors that arrived by Air Tahiti and private charter plane make up less than 1% of arrivals.

**Figure 13: Mode of transport (n=1241)**

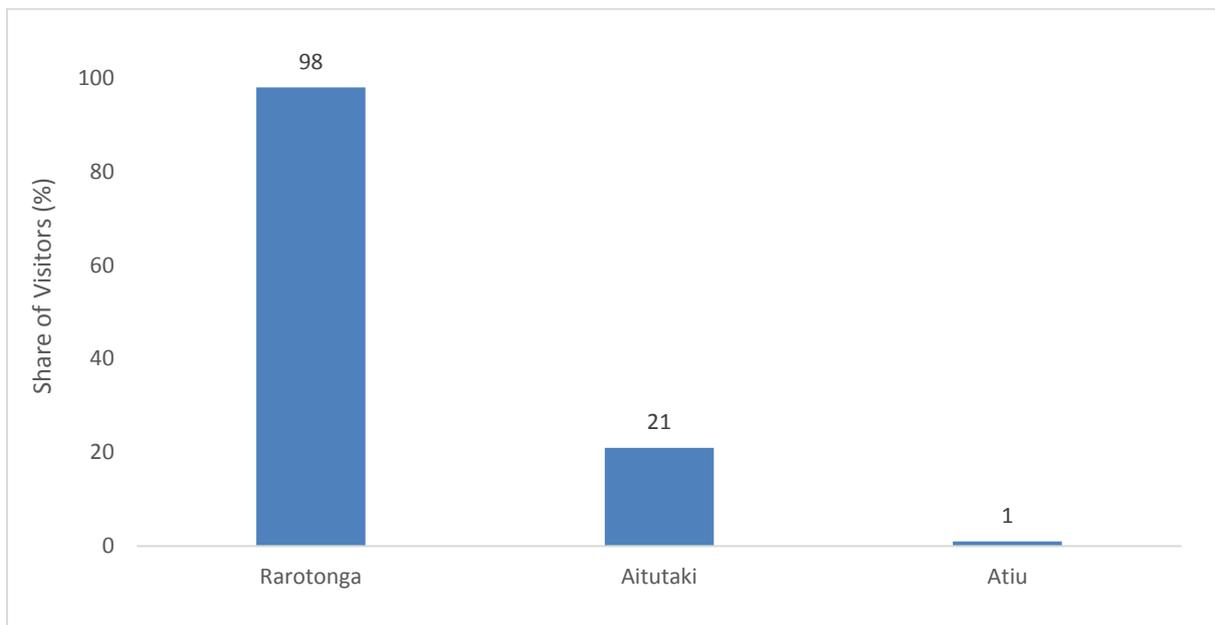


*Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%*

For 89% of visitors, the Cook Islands is the sole destination for their trip. For 11% of the visitors surveyed 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 trip, the top destination mentioned was New Zealand (58%), followed by travel to Australia (25%), other pacific countries (20%), Asian countries (18%), and North America (13%).

The vast majority (98%) of visitors to the Cook Islands spend time on Rarotonga, with Aitutaki being the second most visited island (21%) (Figure 14). Other islands rarely feature in the survey responses, with Atiu for example receiving fewer than 1% of visitors.

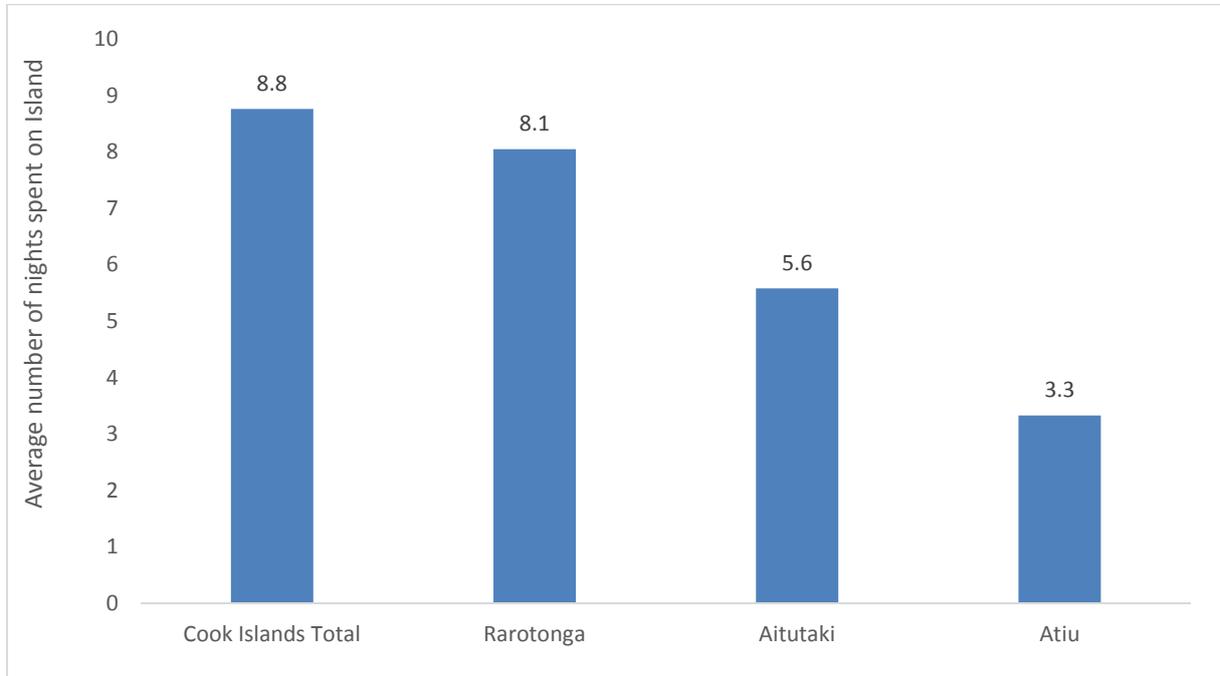
**Figure 14: Visited Islands (n=1489)**



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

The average length of stay on Rarotonga is 8.1 nights (Figure 15). For the visitors that went to Aitutaki, the average number of nights spent on the island itself is 5.6. Visitors to Atiu spent an average of 3.3 nights.

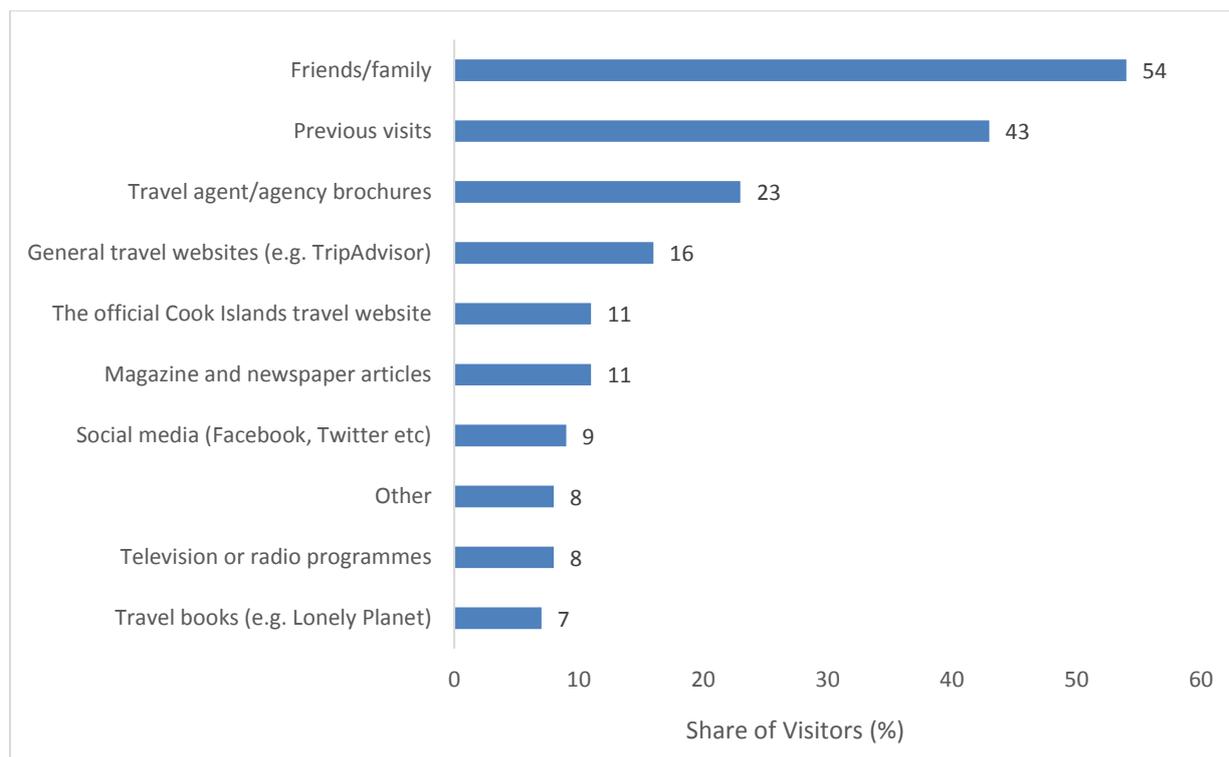
**Figure 15: Average length of stay in the Cook Islands and on each island (n=1225)**



## Information Sources and Purchasing Behaviour

Participants were asked how they had found out about the Cook Islands as a holiday destination for this trip, and to rank the three sources of information that were most important (Figure 16). Over half (54%) of respondents ranked word of mouth from friends and family members as the most important influence, followed by previous experience (43%), travel agents (23%), and general travel websites (e.g. Tripadvisor) (16%).

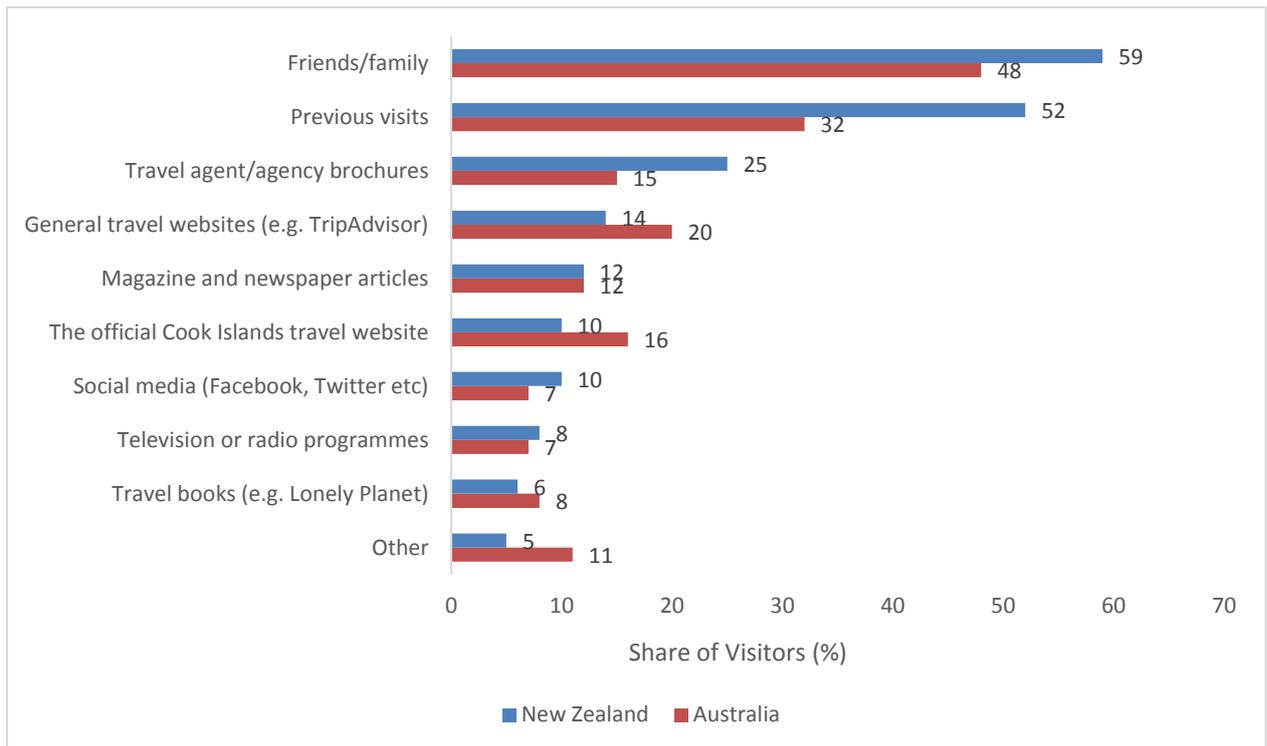
**Figure 16: How did you find out about Cook Islands as a destination (n=1242)**



*Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%*

Visitors from New Zealand are more likely to seek information about a destination via word of mouth from friends and family members (59%). There are more repeat visitors from New Zealand than Australia and this is reflected by the fact that nearly half of visitors from New Zealand (52%) ranked their previous visits as the most important information source (Australian visitors 32%). Australian visitors were more likely to rank travel websites, and travel books as the most important influence.

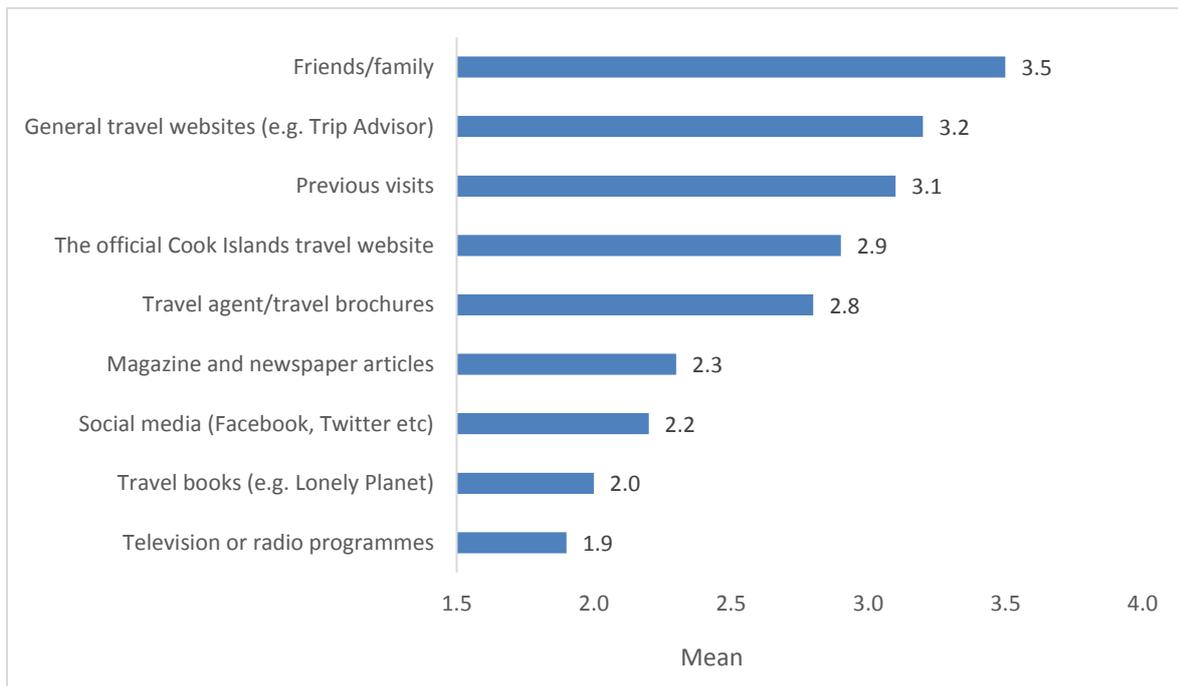
**Figure 17: How did you find out about Cook Islands as a destination – country breakdown**



*Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%*

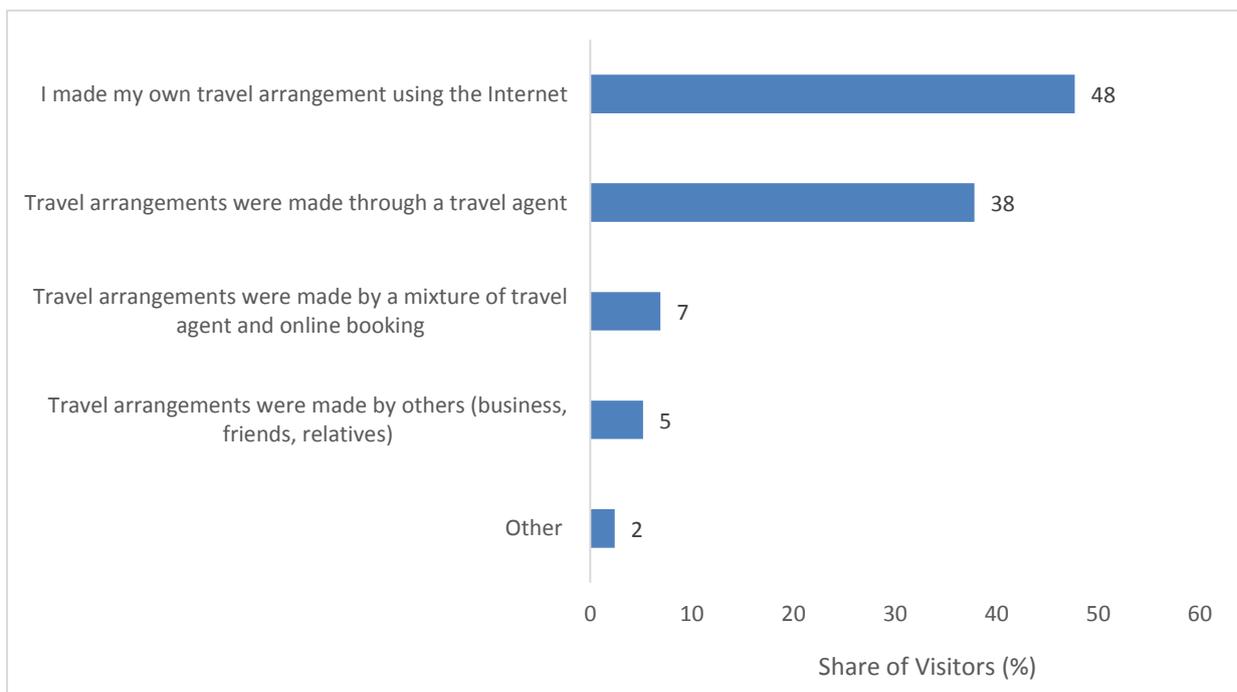
When visitors were asked to rank the importance of the listed information sources used to plan their trip, friends and family members are ranked as the most important source (3.5) (Figure 18). Other important information sources are general travel website (3.2), previous visits (3.1), the official Cook Islands travel website (2.9), and travel agent/travel brochures (2.8).

**Figure 18: How important were the following sources of information when planning your trip (n=1239)**



Nearly half of visitors surveyed (48%) make their own travel arrangements through online websites or have booked directly with hotels or airlines (Figure 19). A smaller group of visitors surveyed (38%) purchased a pre-paid trip through travel agents, followed by 7% of visitors whose travel arrangements were made by a mixture of travel agent and online booking.

**Figure 19: How did you purchase your travel to the Cook Islands (n=1242)**

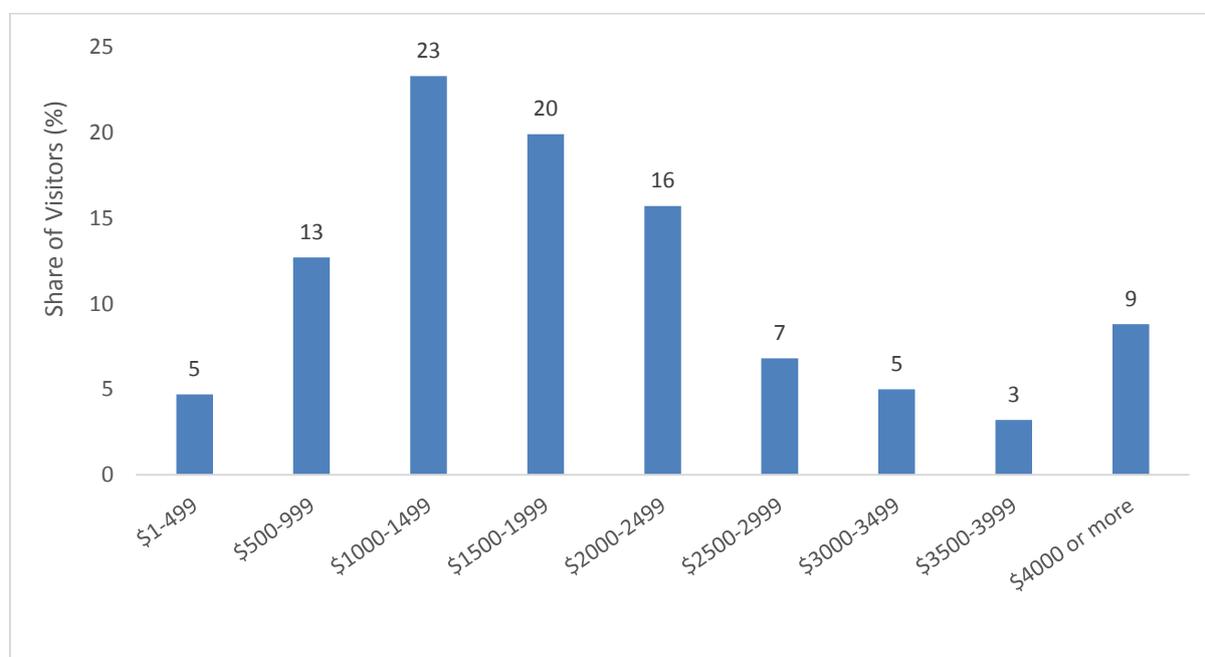


## Visitor Expenditure

The survey asks a range of questions about visitor expenditure, both prior to arrival and while in the Cook Islands. 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: 3,271 people comprising 2,849 adults and 422 children.

On average, visitors to the Cook Islands spend NZ\$2,013 per person prior to arrival. Over half (59%) of the visitors spend between NZ\$1,000 and NZ\$2,500 prior to arrival. These figures are slightly lower than the data from the previous year (average spend of NZ\$2,121 for 2015/16) and in the same quarter for 2015/16 (NZ\$2,090) (Figure 20).

**Figure 20: Amount of money spent per person prior to arrival (n=987)**



In addition to international flights and domestic transport, spending prior to arrival usually includes accommodation: in 89% of the cases for New Zealand and 90% for Australian visitors, and for 89% of visitors from other countries (Figure 21). Under half of visitors prepaid for breakfast and meals prior to arrival (40% for New Zealand, 39% of Australian visitors, and for 40% of visitors from other countries) which is slightly lower than the data from the previous year and in the same quarter for 2015/16. Activities are much less likely to be included in pre-paid expenses.

**Figure 21: Items included in money spent prior to arrival**



*Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%*

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 flowing back to local operators, excluding flights, is NZ\$92 and for the average total visit is NZ\$805 (over 8.8 nights).

The total spend per visitor per day while in the Cook Islands (excluding any pre-paid expenditure) is NZ\$158 (Table 1). This figure is higher than overall spend figure for 2015/16 (NZ\$147) and same quarter in 2015/16 (NZ\$144). The majority of money spent locally is on accommodation (42%), restaurants, cafes and bars (21%), and shopping (8%). These per person expenditure figures are based on 1,065 survey responses covering a total of 3,012 people (2,676 adults and 376 children).

By multiplying daily spend by the average stay (8.8 nights) we can see that each visitor spends on average NZ\$1,393 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 NZ\$250 per visitor per day (\$158+\$92), or NZ\$2,195 (\$1,393+\$805) for each visitor.

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

Expenditure Items	N=1065	
	Mean (NZ\$)	(% of spend)
Accommodation	68	42
Restaurant, cafes and bar	33	21
Shopping	12	8
Activities	10	6
Domestic flights	10	6
Vehicle rental	9	6
Groceries	8	5
Other	3	2
Internet cost	2	1
Cruising	2	1
Petrol	2	1
Public transportation	1	0
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 2 provides an overview of the in-country expenditure by the visitor's country of origin. Visitors from USA/Canada have the highest average spend per day at NZ\$210. By comparison, European visitors spend on average NZ\$57 less per day (NZ\$153).

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

Expenditure Items	n=78	n=164	n=734	n=46
	USA/ Canada	Australia	New Zealand	Europe
Accommodation	107	81	62	83
Restaurant, cafes and bar	37	38	32	20
Shopping	17	17	11	16
Domestic flights	12	12	9	8
Activities	11	11	10	6
Groceries	9	10	7	6
Vehicle rental	7	11	9	5
Internet cost	4	2	2	2
Cruising	2	2	1	3
Public transportation	1	1	1	1
Petrol	1	2	2	1
Other	1	5	3	2
<b>Total spend (NZ\$)</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>153</b>

Average Australian spend per person for this quarter (NZ\$190) was higher compared to the 2015/16 average of NZ\$168 and the same quarter in 2015/16 (NZ\$162). New Zealanders' spend of NZ\$148 per person per day was up from the average of \$143 for 2015/16, and higher than the same quarter in the previous year (NZ\$137). European visitor spend at NZ\$153 per person per day was slightly down from the average for 2015/16 of NZ\$159, and lower than the same quarter in the previous year (NZ\$182). The average spend of NZ\$210 for visitors from USA/Canada for this period was considerably higher than the 2015/16 average of NZ\$155, and the figure for same quarter in 2015/16 (NZ\$173).

## 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 22). Three quarters of the visitors surveyed were 'very satisfied' with their overall experience of the Cook Islands. Very few visitors (2%) were unsatisfied with their visit (a score of 2 or lower out of 5).

**Figure 22: Overall satisfaction with experience of the Cook Islands (n=1377)**

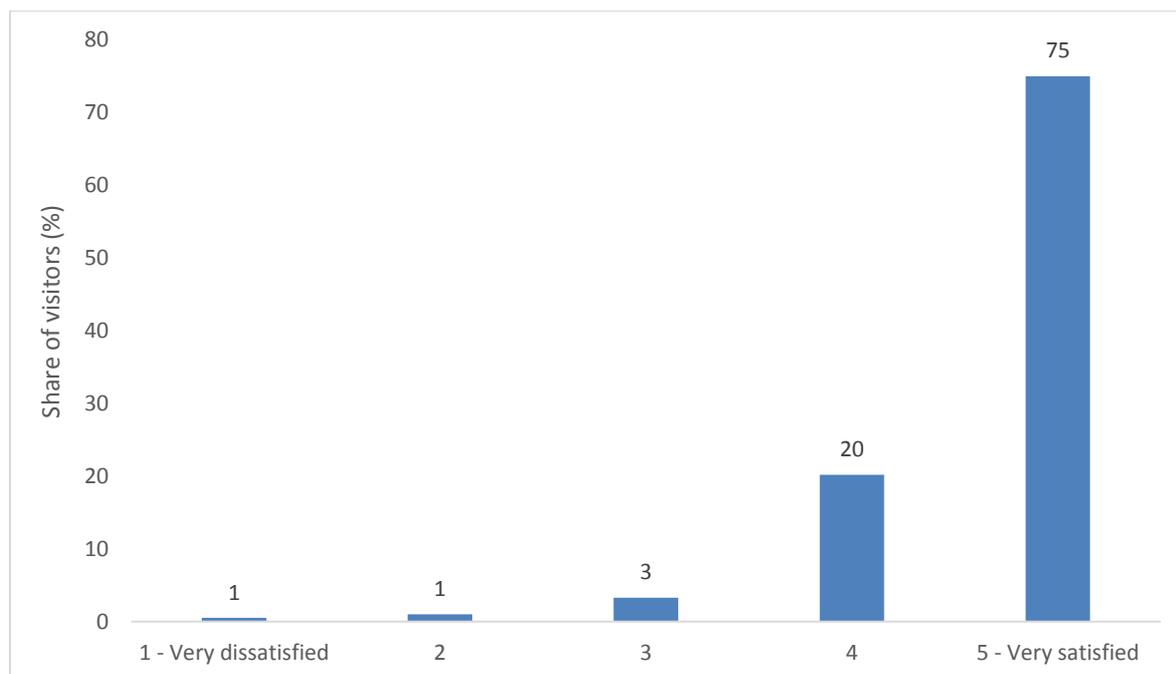
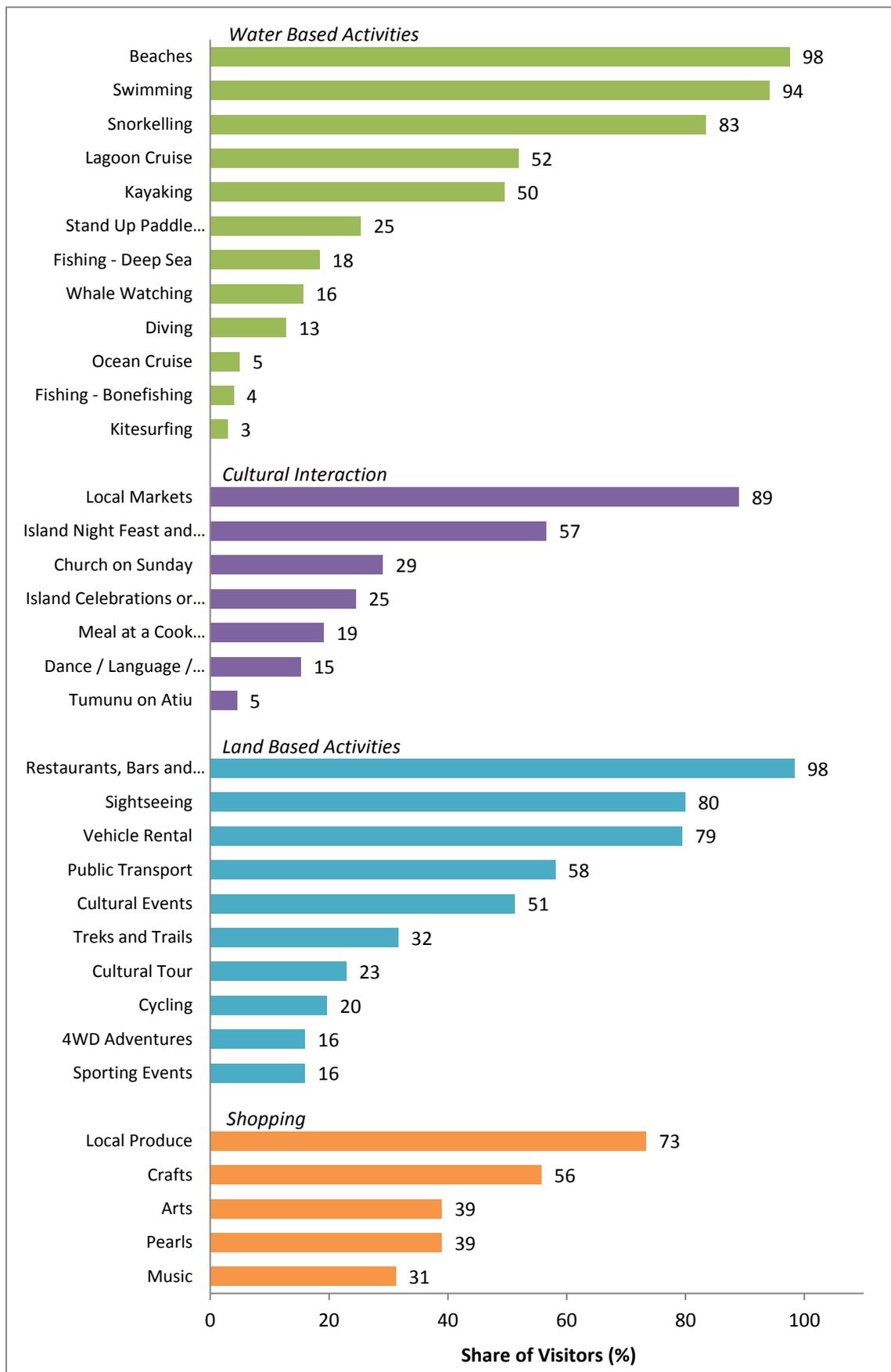


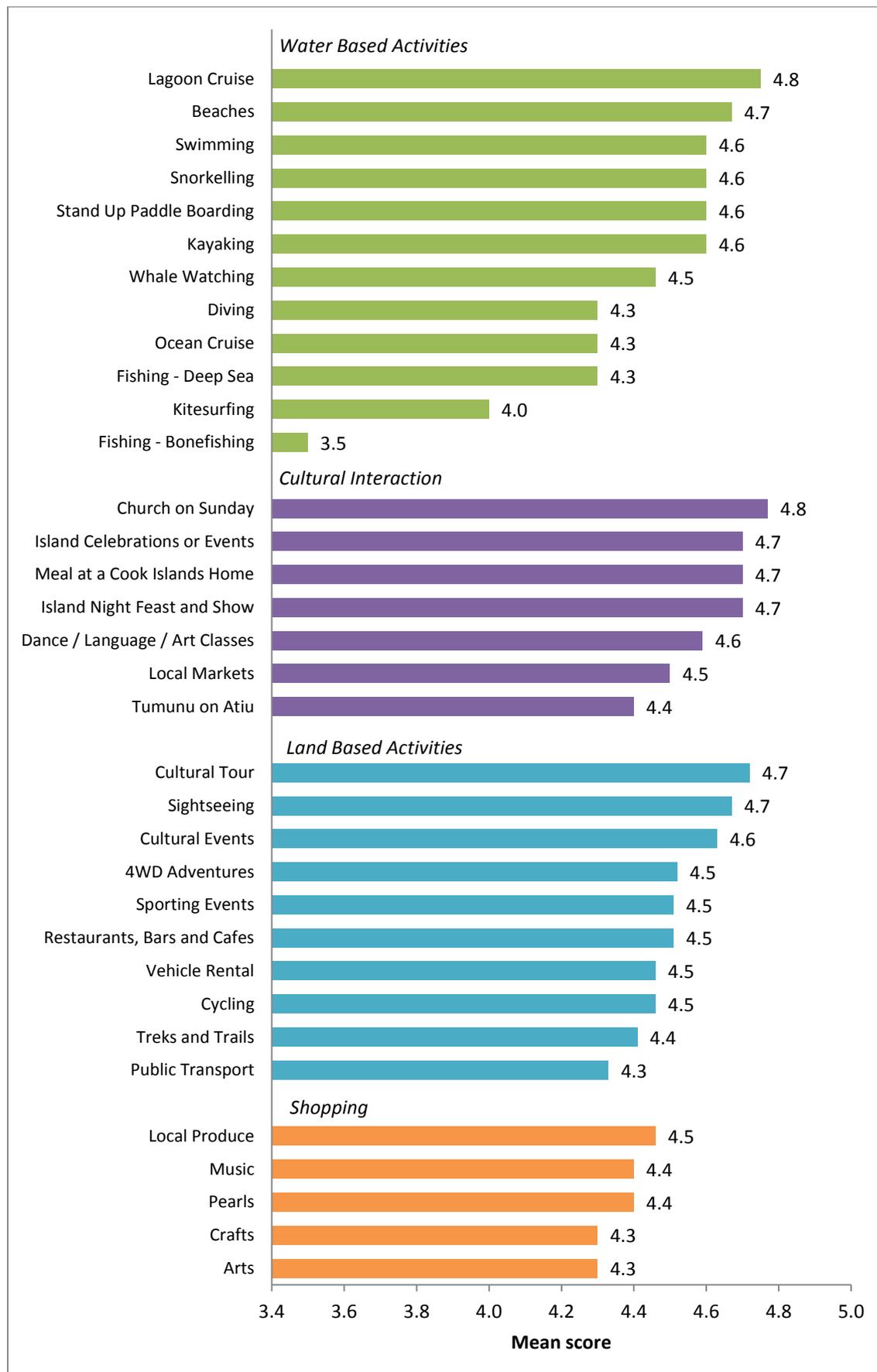
Figure 23 shows the percentage of respondents who undertook specific activities while on their visit to the Cook Islands. Almost all visitors participate in water activities and visit at least one restaurant or café during their trip. Most of the respondents (89%) visit a local market, and 57% of visitors experience an Island Night and Feast Show.

Figure 24 shows the level of satisfaction with these activities. Visitor satisfaction is generally high for all activities undertaken (almost all registering more than 4 out of a possible high of 5). Activities involving cultural interaction (average satisfaction of 4.6) rank the highest, followed by land-based products (4.5), water-based experiences (4.4), and shopping (4.4). It should be noted that some activities e.g. kitesurfing, bonefishing, Tumunu on Atiu and Ocean cruise are characterised by relatively low numbers of participants (n=30-50).

**Figure 23: Degree of participation in activities (n range=34-1212)**



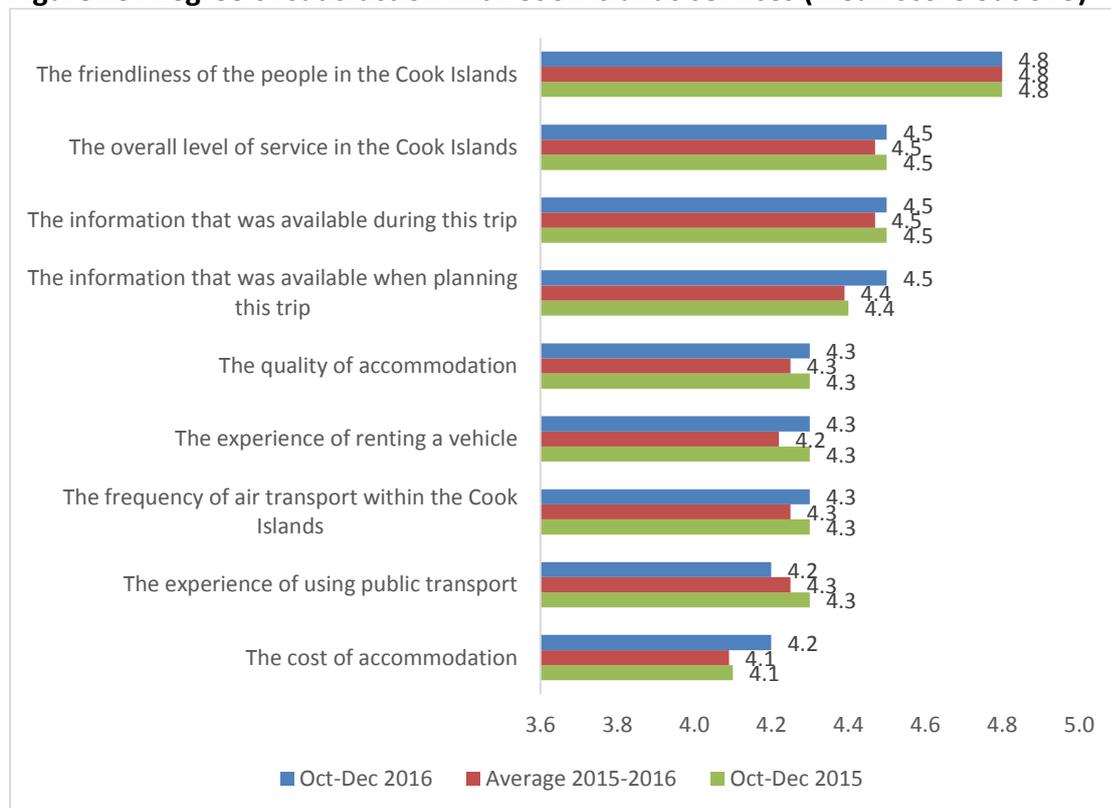
**Figure 24: Degree of satisfaction in activities participated in (mean score out of 5)**



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 October to December are compared to the annual average for 2015/16, and the same quarter for 2015/16 (Figure 25). Respondents have consistently given the friendliness of the people in the Cook Islands the highest score.

As can be seen Figure 25, the level of satisfaction with the friendliness of people in the Cook Islands, the overall level of service in the Cook Islands, the available information during this trip, the quality of information, and the frequency of air transport within the Cook Islands is the same when compared to the average for 2015/16 and the same quarter of 2015/16. Visitor satisfaction level with the experience of using public transport is slightly lower than the same quarter in 2015/16. Overall visitor satisfaction levels are fairly consistent with the previous findings and no rating fell below 4 out of 5.

**Figure 25: Degree of satisfaction with Cook Islands services (mean score out of 5)**



## 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 welcoming 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 food and beverage (12%), accommodation (5%), culture (4%), the convenience and safety of the Cook Islands (4%), and the level of service experienced (3%).

**Table 3: Most appealing aspects of the Cook Islands (n=1070)**

Themes	Share of respondents (%)
Local People	51%
Environment, cleanliness & weather	49%
Atmosphere	32%
Activities, attractions, and entertainment & events	22%
Food and Beverage	12%
Accommodation	5%
Culture	4%
Convenience & Safety	4%
Level of service	3%
Un-commercial	2%
Overall good experience	2%

\* 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%.

### Local people

Just over half of the respondents (51%) 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’, ‘beautiful’, ‘welcoming’, ‘helpful’, ‘lovely’, and ‘happy.’ Comments included:

*“People are beautiful inside and out - friendly and have lovely souls.”*

*“The people were absolutely welcoming and very charming. Everyone was truly so kind and happy to see us. There are few places like that on this planet.”*

*“I was so much surprised about the locals from the Cook Islands. They are soooooo friendly and nice!!! I've never seen more friendly people in the world then on the Cook Islands. I love them!!!”*

*“The people! I can't say more than that! It is the people that make the holiday and Rarotonga what it is! Everything else is a bonus!”*

*"We found people to be friendly, helpful and very welcoming - a highlight of our trip."*

*"People generally are very friendly and obliging. You always feel safe in the Cooks - I hope this is never lost."*

### **Environment, cleanliness & weather**

Almost half of the respondents (49%) considered the destination's 'beautiful' scenery and 'clean' natural environment, and the warm waters and climate to be the most appealing aspects of their Cook Islands experience. Visitors used words such as 'great', 'amazing', 'wonderful', 'fantastic', 'excellent', 'spectacular', '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 unspoilt beauty. Everything blends in to the natural surroundings."*

*"Lovely weather, not too hot. The scent of the flowers. The lagoon at the end of Avana."*

*"Sunsets/beaches/weather/pina coladas on the beach with a good book while sunbathing."*

*"I found the natural beauty of Rarotonga stunning, the standard of living of locals was much higher than other Pacific islands as was their service and friendliness. I have travelled to a number of other Pacific Islands including Fiji, Tonga, Samoa, New Caledonia etc and Rarotonga is by far my favourite destination amongst these."*

*"The Lagoon! We went for a big 10km walk along the beaches from the amazing fish sandwich place up to the Sanctuary Rarotonga. The beaches were just amazing! Spectacular! Others in our wedding trio did the buggies. They said it was awesome, better than the website suggested."*

*"The snorkelling is absolutely beautiful. The amount of different fish species, quality of the water and care for the area is fantastic."*

### **Atmosphere**

A third of visitors surveyed (32%) 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 'peaceful', 'relaxing', 'laid back', 'restful', 'easy', and 'slow pace' to describe the overall atmosphere of the Cook Islands. The notion of 'island time' was also mentioned. Comments included:

*"It was so relaxing, nothing was rushed and everyone was friendly."*

*“There is a good mix of things to do as well as plenty of places to relax so was a well-balanced holiday.”*

*“Peace and quiet and being away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life.”*

*“The local people and the fact that it's a very relaxed place. Also the fact that is a complete contrast to and definitely NOT the Gold Coast.”*

*“Beautiful scenery, laid back & relaxing. The perfect place for a lazy holiday with activities available if you wanted to participate. Very friendly locals, including the dog population!”*

*“Just the tranquillity and peaceful surrounding of where we stayed.”*

### **Activities, attractions, entertainment & events**

Activities, attractions, entertainment and events were mentioned by 22% 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:

*“We loved the snorkelling it was so cool, the cultural night was excellent.”*

*“The beautiful clear water without doubt. We loved snorkelling, diving, kayaking, fishing [my husband], and swimming.”*

*“Our day trip to Aitutaki - amazing scenery, a very well-planned tour but also an amazing tour guide (Ali) who was articulate, knowledgeable, humorous but most of all passionate about the island he calls home.”*

*“Game fishing with a chap called Brendon, He runs a small boat but put in a great effort each time we went out, we found him very knowledgeable and helpful I would recommend him to my friends anytime.”*

*“We loved the Muri night market - great affordable food and an opportunity to meet the Islanders (best banana caramel pie have ever had). The island treks were great fun as was the highland cultural show - a real insight into the history of the Islands. The restaurant and cafe food was exceptional - lime coconut pie was sensational. The church service was up lifting and the opportunity to meet the congregation afterwards was special.”*

### **Food and beverage**

Just over one in ten respondents (12%) 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', 'delicious', and 'fresh' to describe the food. Many visitors commented on the selection of good cafes and restaurants, and on the availability of fresh seafood and tropical fruit. Comments included:

*"The new Bar on the Beach at nikao, the Islander Hotel, great meeting place, the drink prices and atmosphere at both places were great, esp Vianna's as whole families can enjoy a lovely setting. Better food outlets and great fresh food available."*

*"New restaurants excellent. Catching up with friends. Live music was very good. Excellent hospitality and service."*

*"The restaurant and cafe food was exceptional - lime coconut pie was sensational."*

*"Food, Fresh fruit & vegetables."*

*"There are some great places to eat with fresh, quality food. The fresh fruit smoothies at market are beautiful, seeing the coconut chopped open right before your eyes, great!"*

### **Accommodation**

Another 5% 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, the level of service, and the warm welcome from their hosts. Comments included:

*"The setting of the hotel was outstanding."*

*"The hosts at Castaway Villas. The service we received was fantastic."*

*"Club Raro started the trip off well with it's friendly staff and clean and tidy premises every day. Whales greeted our first morning straight out the front of our room."*

*"Being greeted by every member of staff at the resort and friendliness elsewhere!"*

*"I normally stay in a private house and this time I stayed at Pacific Resort, exceptional Staff and facilities, friendly, restaurant and food was awesome. Also won a dance competition and was awarded a night at Highland Paradise Cultural Centre, tour, dinner and show."*

### **Convenience and safety**

The convenience and safety of the Cook Islands as a holiday destination were mentioned by four 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 and the convenience of using the New Zealand dollar. Comments included:

*“The friendliness, the ease of getting around the island, the beauty of the island. Also pleased to see the wearing of motorcycle helmets being enforced - it was a nice experience scooting around with the wind in your hair previously, but it's still lovely with a helmet on and MUCH safer. I hope more people start to see the value in this.”*

*“Climate, ease of getting about and NZ currency, can find some excellent diving, wide range of accessible restaurants and bars etc, able to get about independently.”*

*“Ease of transition from NZ. NZ currency.”*

*“Very easy to get anywhere in Rarotonga. You get to know and love the island.”*

### **Culture**

The island's unique local culture was mentioned by four percent of respondents as an appealing aspect of their Cook Islands visit. Respondents referred to the handmade products, local events, and performance in addition to referencing the overall enjoyable aspects of Cook Islands culture. Comments included:

*“The friendliness of the people and the beauty and culture. Love the music too. It is a special place.”*

*“I find the maintenance of indigenous culture and tradition the most attractive part of the Cook Islands. That and the mamas with their ei katus and big smiles.”*

*“The cook islanders are proud of their heritage, and like to produce foods from their own culture etc. keeping the tradition. Loved that everyone had flowers in their hair and you could buy a handmade pareu etc.”*

*“The local history and culture at the Highland Paradise experience.”*

### **Level of service**

Another three 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, helpful shop assistants, and humour bus drivers. Visitors also emphasised the lack of pressure to buy which made them feel comfortable. Comments included:

*“The tour guides and story tellers are to be commended. The entertainment, food and marae was presented in professional manner. Facilities were of a high standard and the overall experience was breath-taking and memorable.”*

*“No pushy sales people!”*

*“The customer service we received every day in Rarotonga was amazing.”*

*“The laid back atmosphere and the bus driver who sang, joked and gave relevant information throughout the journey-Captain Hopeless?”*

### **Overall good experience**

Two 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:

*“Absolutely fantastic place for a wedding and honeymoon. An awesome holiday destination, and I have highly recommended it to friends and family.”*

*“Loved the whole experience!”*

*“We loved absolutely everything about our visit and had the best holiday ever! The people were wonderfully kind and friendly, the island was beautiful, there are lots of outdoor activities for active people like us (we did LOTS of bicycling, walking, snorkelling, swimming and kayaking). We did not want to leave!”*

*“All of Rarotonga even if in Muri there was a lot of seaweed!”*

### **Not too commercialised**

Another two 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:

*“I love that it is not fully commercialised with Chains of stores - Fast Food Chains like KFC, McDonalds etc.”*

*“The people and how remote the islands are. Please do not modernise or become Tahiti or Hawaii as they are more plastic and more western.”*

*“The relaxed 'Island' time. No big high rise apartment blocks. No shopping malls, not many shops.”*

*“Loved how relaxed it was and there were no take away commercial food outlets.”*

## Least appealing aspects of the Cook Islands

Visitors were asked: “What did you find least attractive or appealing about the Cook Islands on your most recent visit?” Over a quarter (27%) of the visitors surveyed, found “nothing” unattractive, many “loved everything” and “having to go home” was considered the least appealing aspect. Table four summaries key themes respondents felt were unappealing. Comments ranged from issues with public services and facilities, accommodation conditions, rubbish and natural environment care and disappointment with the weather.

**Table 4: Least appealing aspects of the Cook Islands (n=1093)**

Themes	Share of respondents %*
Public services and facilities and infrastructure	17%
Rubbish and natural environment care	15%
Food and beverage	14%
Attractions and activities	14%
Price of good and service	12%
Accommodation	11%
Stray animals and mosquitos	10%
Customer service	9%
Poor weather	5%
Rental cars or scooters	5%
Law and Legislation	4%
Too touristy	3%
Flight related issues	3%
Local people	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 was the lack of public services, facilities and infrastructure in the Cook Islands (17%). Comments included the condition of local roads, particularly potholes. Some people also complained about the lack of footpaths. Others expressed their disappointment with the cost of Internet access, poor public transport and facilities, cleanliness of public toilets, and the bus services. Comments included:

*“The state of the roads. Basic maintenance is lacking.”*

*“The potholes and uneven road service. My husband has a severe back injury and the travel in Rarotonga made the pain a lot worse.”*

*“More footpaths between resorts and restaurants for safer walks home.”*

*“Phones were unreliable, lack of free internet.”*

*"The lack of decent internet and the high cost of Wi-Fi."*

*"Lack of clean Public Toilets."*

*"Buses didn't run on Sunday so had to walk everywhere."*

*"The cost of somethings is excessive (taxis)."*

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

Rubbish and natural environment care (15%) was up from 9 percent in the previous (July-Sept 2016) quarter and is identical to the October-December 2015 Quarter. For the Oct-Dec 2016 quarter we have added Muri lagoon as a specific sub theme. Muri, lagoon and algae made up 7% of the total comments in the overall data set and 48% of the comments related to rubbish and natural environment care theme. Visitors commented on the quality of the lagoon, the beaches and the water. Visitors also disliked the rubbish and the algae, and were concerned about coral and reefs.

*"Muri lagoon water quality"*

*"Weed in the lagoon."*

*"The beach with the black rock was covered in litter."*

*"The condition of water at Muri Beach - slugs and green weed/slime"*

*"I am very concerned about the health of the water, coral and wildlife within the lagoons. As one of the key reasons people visit the Cooks, it should be a critical point for politicians and elders to focus on."*

*"The rubbish at some of the beaches, in the bushes. 😊"*

*Quite a lot of rubbish on road edges.*

*"Maybe that the coral reef was not quite as colorful as expected."*

*"The loss of coral compared to when I was last in Aitutaki."*

### **Food and Beverage**

Issues with food and beverages for made up 14% of comments. Food poisoning, cost, lack of local produce, food service, and quality of food were problems for many.

*"Got food poisoning from local shop sandwich."*

*"Some restaurants were not of the quality for the prices they charged."*

*"Cost of food"*

*"Not enough healthy eating options. Lots of unhealthy restaurants or low quality"*

*dining.”*

*“Lack of vegetables and the cost of dining out.”*

*“Exceptionally poor service at [redacted] restaurant.”*

*“Prices very high on food, quality fair at best.”*

*“Quality of the food”*

### **Attractions and activities**

Fourteen percent of responses complained about attractions and activities. Visitors mentioned the lagoons, fishing, shopping, beaches, water and the markets as unappealing.

*“The deterioration of the lagoon, muri is awful, we were around Nikao and the green weed is increasing there as well, very disappointed, it’s going to spoil the attraction of coming there soon”*

*“Poor fishing around islands due to overfishing”*

*“Shopping is a bit too commercial in regards to the choices. Would have liked more local hand made products.”*

*“The amount of broken glass on the beaches.”*

*“Muri Beach is an Icon BUT at the moment it lacks appeal as far as tourists are concerned and something needs to be done with the water quality, especially at low tide - Seaweed situation needs to be addressed”*

*“The Saturday market has lost its appeal since last time we were there. There is too much stuff that is not locally made and can be purchased at any of the islands. Refrigeration for some of the food stalls should be encouraged.”*

### **Price of goods and services**

Visitors (12%) also disliked the price of goods and services. Comments about the expense of food and restaurants, accommodation, scooters, internet, and cars were common.

*“Was quite expensive for things like food”*

*“Some restaurants were not of the quality for the prices they charged.”*

*“I thought the cost of our accommodation (although luxurious) was a bit steep.”*

*“Tourist tax” on scooter license (cost gone up to \$90!).”*

*“Internet cost extremely high.”*

*“Cost of car hire in Raro.”*

## **Accommodation**

Eleven percent mentioned accommodation as the least appealing aspect of their visit. Visitors surveyed mentioned that the service and cost of accommodation were important factors as to why they disliked their accommodation.

*“Service at the hotel was poor.”*

*“The accommodation was very run down. The rating is too high for the quality of rooms and dining areas and level of service.”*

*“The staff were abusive and intimidating. I have never in my life experienced lack of service at such a high cost. I felt like I had been robbed of my hard earned money and I can never get it back. It left a sour taste in my mouth for my vacation.”*

*“High cost of accommodation.”*

*“Quite a lot of accommodation on Rarotonga is a bit tired and outdated and in need of renovation.”*

*“Staff at resort were rude and acted like we were an inconvenience to them.”*

## **Stray animals and mosquitos**

The stray dogs, noisy roosters, mosquitoes, ants and sea slugs continue to be an annoyance or a worry for 10% of respondents during their time spent on the islands. Respondents mentioned lack of sleep, barking, noise, and animal welfare.

*“Too many roaming dogs seemingly out of control and barking all night. Plus all the roosters crowing. They seem to set each other off and compete with each other to see how many tourists they can keep awake all night.”*

*“Neglected animals eg: tied up goats on short leashes, skinny pigs, dogs, chickens n their chicks.... it would be good to see animal welfare taking care of these animals too !!!”*

*“Stray dogs - it broke my heart even if they all looked so happy.”*

*“Chickens everywhere.”*

## **Customer service**

Nine percent of visitors surveyed complained about the poor customer service received during their visit in the Cook Islands, notably in restaurants, shops, hotels and vehicle rentals. Customer service was considered slow, terrible, and snappy. Comments included:

*“Poor service in the bars and restaurants. Staff often standing around talking with each other while customer is waiting.”*

*"The service at the resort."*

*"Poor food in a lot of restaurants and cafes, very expensive, and generally (especially in our resort) terrible service."*

*"Waiting for bike rentals."*

*"Some of the locals in retail were snappy, bad attitude which was sad."*

### **Other unappealing aspects**

Other unappealing aspects mentioned by visitors include: poor weather (the amount of rain and the wind), rental cars and scooters (quality, cost, service and the process of getting driving licenses), becoming too commercialised/touristy, flight/airline-related issues (influent, cost, arrival and departure times), law and Legislation and local people (unfriendly, hard to get involved with them).

Comments included:

#### Poor weather

*"The weather let us down a little and we were unable to do a few things we would have liked to."*

*"Weather was cooler than we expected with cloud and some rain."*

#### Rental cars and scooters

*"Getting a motorcycle licence was a nightmare, a waste of time and everything bad you can think of. I would think twice about coming back because of this. NZ Car licence should be sufficient."*

*"Having to wear a heavy hot helmet that had just been worn by someone else when hiring a scooter. These should be sanitized in some way. We do agree some form of head protection should be worn but these helmets are over specified for 50 km an hour, and far to hot."*

#### Becoming too busy/touristy

*"Getting a bit too busy with too many tourists."*

*"Complaining tourists."*

#### Flight-related issues

*"Flight times are a bit odd!"*

*"The timing of early morning flight arrivals/departures."*

*"Very slow processing through immigration on arrival."*

## Local people

*"Most locals not very friendly. Some people were very helpful but not many."*

*"The attitude of the locals! Some are incredibly rude and seem to really hate tourists."*

## **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 (43%) of respondents said 'yes'. Of the group that made suggestions 23% focused on public services and infrastructure, environment/safety/animal care also received attention (16%). Entertainment, activities and transport (13%), a longer stay (12%), accommodation (12%), quality/cost of food and beverages (9%), attitude of locals and service levels (8%), flight schedules in and out of Cook Islands (6%), information (4%), and weather (2%) all featured. Comments on these themes included:

*"The public bus timing was on island time (which I get) but when arrangements for dinner etc had been made we had to catch an earlier bus which then cut out spending / shopping down just so we could be back in time."*

*"Cheaper internet access to look up attractions and book tours online."*

*"With the increase in Rarotonga's popularity as a holiday destination the government is going to have to invest in better refuse, water, toilet etc services."*

*"Ditch the requirement for cycle licence - it turns people off!"*

*"We like to cycle but road conditions remain terrible. I went deep sea fishing (Akura) and the deck hand smoked on the back of the boat and then threw his cigarette butt into the sea!! Very poor form on his part, especially in front of tourist."*

*"Clean up the lagoon - if it isn't pristine tourists will stop visiting."*

*"Reduce rosters. Many fellow travellers complaining."*

*"Perhaps more information about the essential things we need to know about the Cook Island. Like a starter pack - bring lots of insect repellent. The environmentally friendly sun block because we were only told about the reserve and that certain sunblock can be damaging to the coral reefs. Right down to bus routes, how much they cost, cannot be wet when you get on etc."*

*"Planning a bit better - we thought we could turn up for things on the day but we missed out on a lot of activities because we didn't book in advance, would have been useful to know it was better to prebook!"*

*"Having safe drinking water available in our accommodation"*

*“Accommodation providers need to get in synch with airlines to ensure guest comfort when flights leave late at night and check out is 10am - this is a horrible way to end a trip.”*

*“More restaurants with specific Polynesian cuisine.”*

*“To see more arts and crafts made by the Cook Islands instead of being imported.”*

*“Very few free activities so the cost of the holiday is very expensive compared with many other destinations.”*

*“Accessibility and activities that caters to visitors with disabilities”*

*“Some tourist operators’ attitudes in final days. Don't realise last impressions can impact your decision to return.”*

*“I would like to see local people be supported to establish their own tourist accommodation - locally owned and operated. Home stays would be fantastic and a much more authentic island experience.”*

*“One week wasn't enough, needed to stay longer!”*

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

The majority of visitors (95%) indicated that they would consider re-visiting the Cook Islands in the future. This figure is slightly higher than the 2015/16 annual average of 94% and the identical quarter in 2015 (93%). The main reasons given by the visitors to return to the Cook Islands are peacefulness and relaxing atmosphere of the islands (33%), the overall great experience that the islands offer and the wish to experience this again (31%), the beauty of the islands (29%), and the friendly local people (21%).

One third (33%) of the visitors commented that the slow pace of life, the relaxed nature, peacefulness and the Cook Islands ‘lifestyle’ are other reasons for visitors to revisit the Cook Islands. Comments included:

*“We love it. Love the place and the people. Most relaxing place in world. You get there and breathe out!”*

*“Great relaxing holiday destination. Ideal for a winter getaway from NZ.”*

*“The relaxation and laid back feeling on the island.”*

*“Just love the relaxed lifestyle and the people and their culture.”*

*“Love the atmosphere, vibe of the island”*

The overall great experience is the major attraction for visitors to return to the Cook Islands, 31% of the comments by visitors were about how great the islands were overall, that they 'just loved it' and that the Cook Islands are the best place for a holiday. Comments included:

*"Love Rarotonga - it's the best place on earth!"*

*"We have been there 3 years in a row and love it...still lots to do, eat and see."*

*"Love everything about the Cook Islands!"*

The beautiful natural scenery and the warm climate of the islands are mentioned by over one quarter (29%) of the visitors as a reason to return to the Cook Islands. Key words used to describe the scenery include 'beautiful island(s)', 'warm climate', 'and unspoilt', 'beautiful scenery'. Comments include:

*"Beautiful islands wonderful waters and lagoon."*

*"Fantastic climate, great place to relax & unwind."*

*"Because it's a 'real' holiday. Please keep your beautiful islands this way!"*

*"It is such an unspoilt beautiful destination in the South Pacific."*

The friendly local people are mentioned by 21% of the visitors as an important reason for their return. The visitors mentioned the kindness and helpfulness of the local people during their stay on the islands. Words used to describe the local people of the Cook Islands are 'friendly', 'wonderful', 'beautiful', 'lovely' or simply that they 'loved the people'. Comments include:

*"Absolutely love the people and lifestyle."*

*"A beautiful place with beautiful people - both are relatively unspoilt."*

*"The relaxing nature of Aitutaki is awesome and unlike anywhere else. The Cook Islanders in Aitutaki are SO NICE."*

Attractions and activities that can be done 'next time' in the Cook Islands or the wish to explore the islands further are also mentioned as reasons to return. Snorkelling is the activity that is mentioned most often as an activity driving a desire to return. Some visitors are inspired by their trip to come back and visit other islands on their next visit to the Cook Islands.

*"Very relaxing and the snorkelling and swimming was amazing. Would also like to visit Aitutaki."*

*"To do more cultural activities, dive with the turtles, go deep sea fishing and kitesurfing."*

*"Loved it. Want to experience more islands."*

Another reason to come back to the Cook Islands is the convenience of a holiday in terms of flight times from New Zealand, the currency and English as the local language. Especially for visitors from 'close-by', e.g. New Zealand, a holiday to the Cook Islands is an easy and loved getaway.

*"Close to NZ and easy to organise - great for a week of relaxation."*

*"Relaxing and friendly. NZ currency made things easy."*

*"Fortunate this time to get direct flight to and from Rarotonga ex Christchurch. Enjoyed the week."*

Other reasons to revisit the Cook Islands mentioned by smaller numbers of visitors are that it is a safe, clean and family friendly destination, local culture is visible, visiting family and friends, food and beverage, affordable, and that the Cook Islands are still 'unspoiled' and not too commercialised.

Of the 5 percent of visitors who added reasons why they would not want to return to the Cook Islands, the majority simply stated that they 'had seen and done it all and wanted to explore other places'. Some visitors commented that a holiday to the Cook Islands is expensive compared to other destinations. Other factors included the long distance to the Cook Islands (from long haul markets) and that some had a bad experience on this visit. Comments included:

*"... saw everything in 8 days. Need a special reason to return as other islands to explore."*

*"Too expensive when compared with similar locations within 6 hours of our hometown."*

*"Would love to but unsure whether we will be able do to cost and distance of travel."*

*"Not sure - Still love the island & the people but we did not enjoy our experience this time."*

Under half (44%) of the visitors mentioned that they would definitely include the outer islands in their next visit. A further 52% of visitors indicated they will "maybe" visit outer islands next time. Most (89%) 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 33%; another 20% of visitors stated that they would like to visit Mangaia, 14% of the respondents would like to visit Mauke. A small number of visitors mentioned Manihiki, Penrhyn, Pukapuka, Mitiaro, or as many as they can visit. Eight percent mentioned the high cost of visiting outer islands as a barrier for not visiting. A number of respondents were not sure which other islands to visit and needed to do some research before deciding. These visitors also noted that there is not much advertising on the other outer islands:

*"We have been to Aitutaki and loved it. Don't know anything about the other islands. Perhaps more marketing on the other options to make it top of mind?"*

*“Need to research the others as don't know anything about them, not advertised like Aitutaki is.”*

Nearly all visitors surveyed (98%) said that they would recommend the destination to their family and friends which is consistent with previous survey periods. Forty-one percent of surveyed visitors stated they would recommend the Cook Islands to others because of the ‘atmosphere’. 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’ and an ‘easy going holiday’.

Thirty-four 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.

Over one quarter (28%) of visitors surveyed stated that they 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 place to visit’, ‘the perfect holiday’, and said that they just ‘loved everything’ about it. These respondents also often described the Cook Islands as a ‘paradise’ and ‘the best place on Earth’.

Twenty-four percent of respondents 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’, ‘warm’ and ‘amazing’.

Other themes that were mentioned included the convenience of the islands as a destination – especially for New Zealanders and Australians (12%), the attractions and activities available (9%), food and beverage options (5%), the ease of using the New Zealand dollar and English language (5%), the affordability of the holiday (5%), some of visitors already have recommended (5%), a safe destination (4%), the islands being a family-friendly destination (4%), value for money of a Cook Islands holiday (3%), good accommodation options (2%), not being commercialised (2%) and the culture of the island (2%). Comments on why visitors would recommend the Cook Islands to others included:

*“Beautiful, mostly good weather, relaxed, some great food, safe, stunning beaches, good snorkelling, fun activities for families, EASY to do from NZ.”*

*“I always tell people how amazing it is, and about 15 people I have recommended to go have been and loved it.”*

*“If you want to de-stress it's the place to go. If you want to experience the friendliness and genuineness of people, it's the place to go.”*

*“...because we love it and great value for money, its affordable even when you live on a pension.”*

*“We think that you should have visited this wonderful place one time in your life.”*

Only 2% of visitors would not recommend the Cook Islands to others and this is largely based on the high prices and lack of environmental care.

## **Final observations**

This report shows that the Cook Islands tourism industry generally performed well during the October to December 2016 Quarter. 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. Visitor yield has remained strong and it will be important to see if this trend is sustained for the rest of the year. The increase in yield over the mid 2015-mid 2016 period is largely accounted for by increased levels of in-country accommodation spend.

Despite the overall positive performance and growth in visitor spend this report again 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 quarter’s research highlights issues around the lack of public services, facilities and infrastructure in the Cook Islands. There are also some concerns from visitors around environmental degradation and the value for money/quality of service provided by accommodation and food/beverage operations that need to be addressed. Perhaps most worrying is the increased level of comment and feedback around the water quality and general cleanliness of Muri lagoon. We appear to be witnessing another spike in levels of visitor concern with the lagoon - similar to that which we saw in the Oct-Dec 2015 quarter.

Overall visitor satisfaction and willingness to return are high. It is vital now to build on this positive performance and to convert it into even greater economic benefits for local people. It is critical to find ways to build on and develop the visitor experience in a manner that enhances local economic linkages. By developing new product offerings, and more importantly, enhancing the quality and ‘value added’ of existing activities and experiences, the tourism industry can increase visitor satisfaction, and enhance the generation of positive local economic outcomes.

## Appendix – Cook Islands Visitor Survey



简体中文

### 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 2017.

This survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

[Take the survey](#)

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.

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 2017.

## 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. 26/06/2015)

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 (1)
- Wedding party (2)
- Business or conference (3)
- Visiting friends or relatives (4)
- Honeymoon (5)
- Te Maeva Nui 2015 (50th Constitution Celebrations) (12)
- Special event - sporting (6)
- Special event - cultural (7)
- Volunteering (9)
- Education (8)
- Other reason, please specify (11) \_\_\_\_\_

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

- Airline - Air New Zealand (1)
- Airline - Virgin Australia (2)
- Airline - Air Tahiti (3)
- Ferry (4)
- Private charter plane (5)
- Private boat (6)

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
- i) Other \_\_\_\_\_

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. How did you find out about the Cook Islands as a destination? (tick as many as apply)

- Previous visits (1)
- Friends/family (2)
- Travel agent/agency brochures (3)
- Social media (Facebook, Twitter etc) (4)
- Television or radio programmes (5)
- Travel books (e.g. Lonely Planet) (10)
- Magazine and newspaper articles (6)
- The official Cook Islands travel website ([cookislands.travel/nz](http://cookislands.travel/nz)) (7)
- General travel websites (e.g. TripAdvisor) (8)
- Other (9) \_\_\_\_\_

8. How important were the following sources of information when planning your trip to the Cook Islands?

Previous visits (1)

Friends/family (2)

Travel agent/travel brochures (3)

Social media (Facebook, Twitter etc) (4)

Television or radio programmes (5)

Travel books (e.g. Lonely Planet) (9)

Magazine and newspaper articles (6)

The official Cook Islands travel website (cookislands.travel/nz) (7)

General travel websites (e.g. Trip Advisor) (8)

9. How did you purchase your travel to the Cook Islands?

- Travel arrangements were made through a travel agent (1)
- I made my own travel arrangement using the Internet (2)
- Travel arrangements were made by a mixture of travel agent and online booking (5)
- Travel arrangements were made by others (business, friends, relatives) (3)
- Other - please specify (4) \_\_\_\_\_

10. 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

11. How many nights did you spend on each island?

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

12. Please select the accommodation(s) you stayed in the Cook Islands? (Hold down the Ctrl key to choose more than one accommodation)

13. How satisfied were you with the following aspects in terms of your recent visit?

The level of service provided at this accommodation (1)

The quality, availability and maintenance of facilities provided at this accommodation (2)

The overall value for money (3)

14. 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:

---

**SPECIAL EVENTS**

As part of the survey, we are helping the Ministry of Cultural Development to better understand the impact of the Te Maeva Nui 2015 (50th Constitution Celebrations). If you participated, please answer the following questions in this section.

What did you attend in Te Maeva Nui 2015 (50th Constitution Celebrations)? Please select all that apply.

- Float parade (1)
- Cultural performances (2)
- Trade days (3)
- Other, please specify (4) \_\_\_\_\_

Answer If Did you attend Te Maeva Nui 50th National celebration while in the Cook Islands? Yes Is Selected

Q77 Did you make any purchases at the Te Maeva Nui 2015 (50th Constitution Celebrations) this year?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Answer If Did you make any purchase at Te Maeva Nui this year? Yes Is Selected

Q78 How much did you spend at Te Maeva Nui 2015 (50th Constitution Celebrations) (in NZ\$)?

Answer If Did you attend Te Maeva Nui 50th National celebration while in the Cook Islands? Yes Is Selected

Q79 Overall how satisfied were you with your experience of Te Maeva Nui 2015 (50th Constitution Celebrations):

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?

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

---

---

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

---

---

17. 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.

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

- a) Adults
- b) Children (0- 16 years old)

18.1 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: \_\_\_\_\_

18.2 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

19.1 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) Internet cost
- l) Other

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

- a) Yes

b) No

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

a) Yes

b) No

If yes, would you include the following outer islands? (tick as many as apply)

Aitutaki (1)

Atiu (2)

Mangaia (3)

Mauke (4)

Other (5) \_\_\_\_\_

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

a) Yes

b) No

23. 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')?

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

---

## **ABOUT YOU**

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

26. Your age group:

a) 18-29

b) 30-39

c) 40-49

d) 50-59

e) 60-69

f) 70+

27. Your gender:

a) Female

b) Male

28. What is your highest qualification?

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

28.1 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

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

*Survey Powered By Qualtrics*