

Cook Islands Visitor Survey Results

October – December 2017

Prepared for Cook Islands Tourism Corporation

by

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Executive Summary

This report focuses on the characteristics, expectations and expenditure patterns of tourists who visited the Cook Islands between 1 October and 31 December 2017. The data presented is collected from an online departure survey (<http://www.mycookislandsvisit.com>). There were 1087 individual respondents to the survey - representing a total of 2,104 adults and 381 children in the expenditure analysis (this equates to 6% of all visitors during the period – based on the 2017 visitor arrival data for the October to December period from the Cook Islands Statistics Office).

The majority (72%) of visitors surveyed come from New Zealand, 11% come from Australia. Visitors are well educated (70% of visitors have some form of tertiary education) with a relatively high annual household income (50% earn over NZ\$100,000 per year). Nearly half of the visitors (43%) travel with one companion. Solo travellers are relatively rare (11%).

Over half of those surveyed (57%) are first time visitors to the Cook Islands, a further 26% have visited twice or three times before. The main purpose of visit is holiday-making (82%). The average length of stay in the Cook Islands is 8.2 nights. The majority (96%) 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 (\$1,831 per person) has decreased from the 2016/2017 annual average (\$2,042 per person). Spend on the island (per person per day) is \$142. This spend is lower than the 2016/17 annual average of \$150, and lower than the same quarter for the previous year (\$158 for October to December 2016).

The average local spend per visitor during the entirety of their stay is \$1,164. When pre-paid spend and the local spend are combined, it is estimated that each visitor brings \$1,896 to the Cook Islands economy (or approximately \$231 per day). This figure is lower than the \$2,150 average for 2016/17 and lower than the \$2,195 for the same quarter last year (October to December 2016).

Overall visitor satisfaction levels with Cook Islands services and experiences remain high. The most appealing elements are environment cleanliness and weather; local people; atmosphere; activities, attractions, entertainment and events; food and beverage. The least appealing elements are the lack of public services, facilities and infrastructure; price of goods and services; stray animals and mosquitos; rubbish and natural environment care; food and beverage; accommodation; attractions and activities; and poor weather.

The future intentions of visitors remained very similar to the previous year: 94% of those surveyed state that they want to return to the Cook Islands, and 98% would recommend the Cook Islands to friends or family.

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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 2018.

This report presents the results from October to December 2017. Over this three-month period, 7,333 visitors were contacted by email to take part in the survey, and 1087 responses were received: a conversion rate of 15%. These responses cover a total of 2,104 adults and 381 children. The conversion rate for this period is lower than the 2016/17 annual average (30%) and also the October to December quarter (33%). This reduction is simply a reflection of the fact that a tick box indicating desire to participate in the survey was removed from arrival cards in November 2016 – thus we get more email addresses originally but a lower response.

The data presented includes detailed information on:

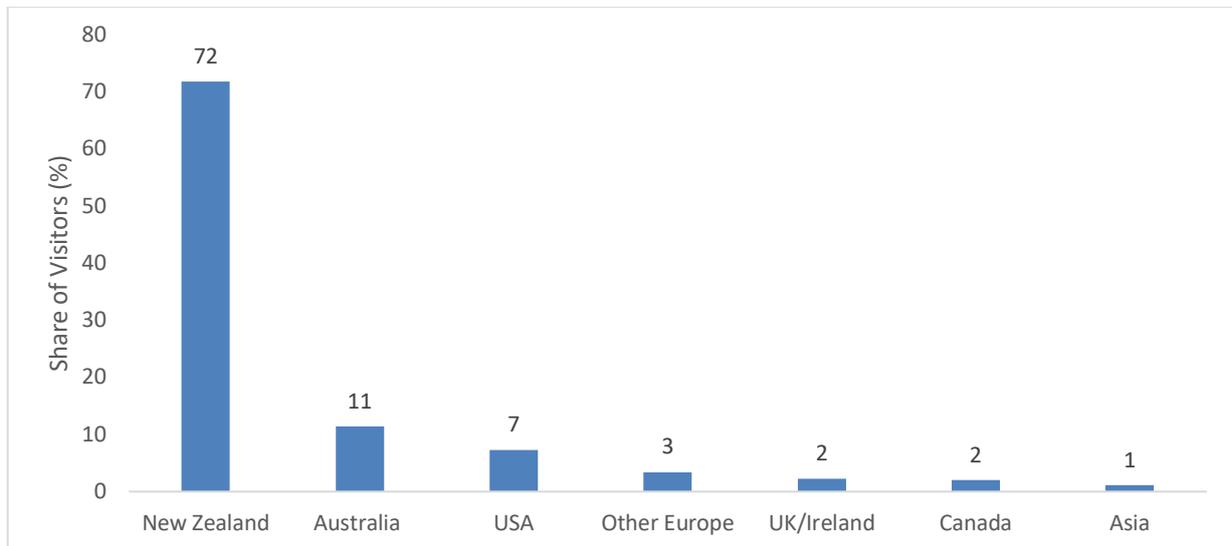
- The characteristics of visitors to the Cook Islands (age, gender, education, country of origin, income, purpose of visit, travelling companions, number of previous visits, length of stay, airline used, islands visited)
- Visitor information obtained about the Cook Islands, the factors influencing in 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 2016/17 annual averages or the 2016/17 October – December quarterly findings these figures are highlighted in the discussion that follows.

Visitor Characteristics

The majority (72%) of the visitors surveyed come from New Zealand (Figure 1). The second largest visitor group is from Australia, with 11% of respondents. USA, Europe, Great Britain, and Canada represent the other main source markets.

Figure 1: Country of origin (n=937)



Auckland, Wellington, Canterbury, Waikato, and Bay of Plenty account for 72% of New Zealand visitors. For visitors from Australia, the regions of New South Wales, Victoria, and Queensland generate the highest numbers of arrivals (81%) (Figure 2-3).

Figure 2: New Zealand visitors (n=673)

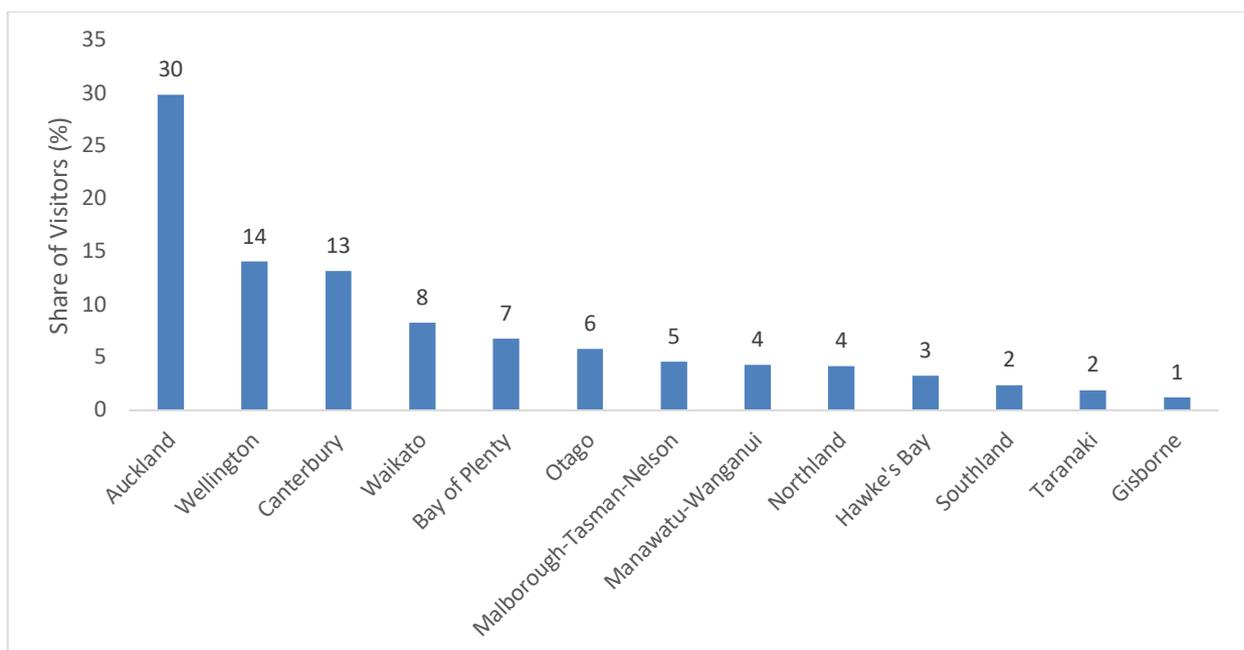
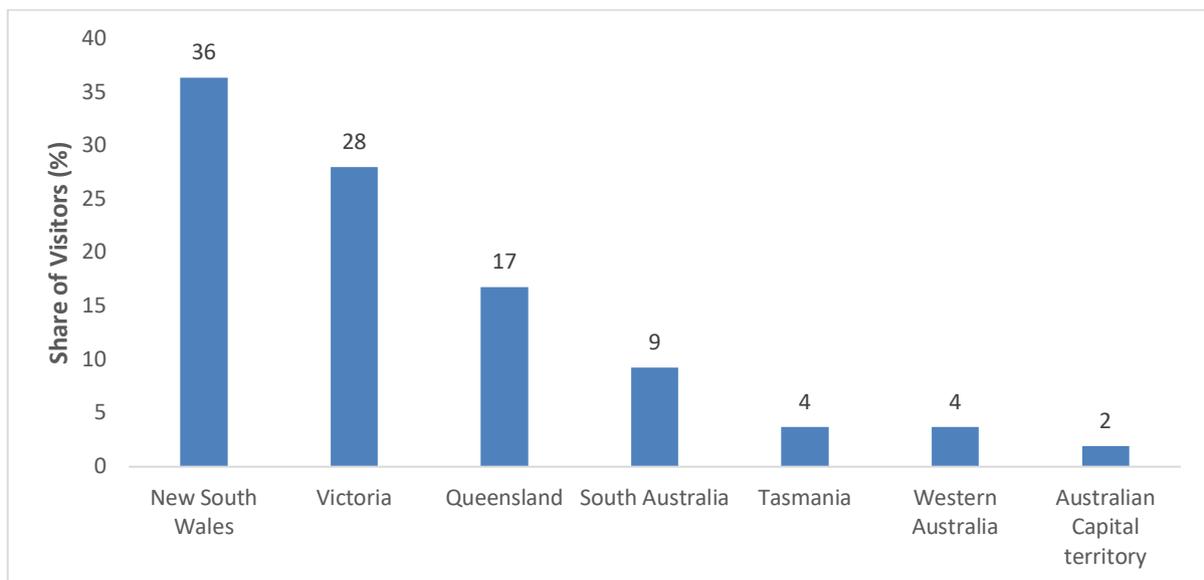
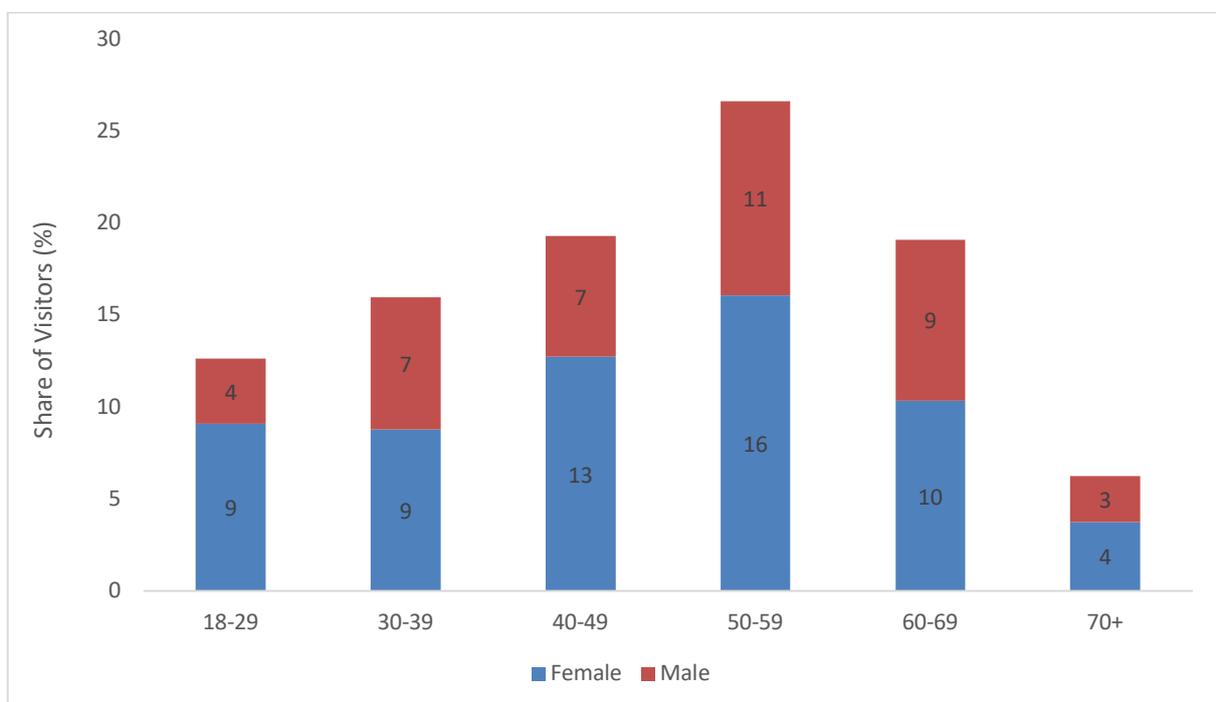


Figure 3: Australia visitors (n=107)



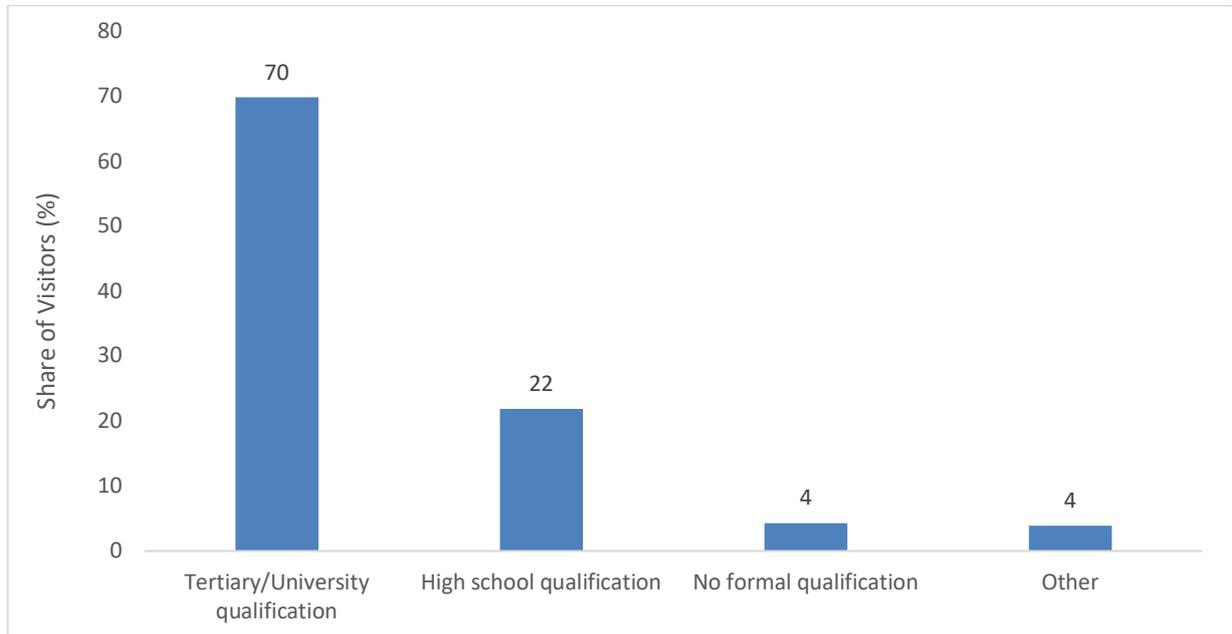
More women (61%) than men (39%) completed the survey (Figure 4). The most significant age categories are the 50 to 59 year (27%) grouping, the 40 to 49 year (20%) grouping, and the 60 to 69 grouping (19%) followed by those aged 30 to 39 (16%) and 18 to 29 (13%). There are relatively few travellers in the 70 plus age bracket (7%).

Figure 4: Distribution of age and gender (n=957)



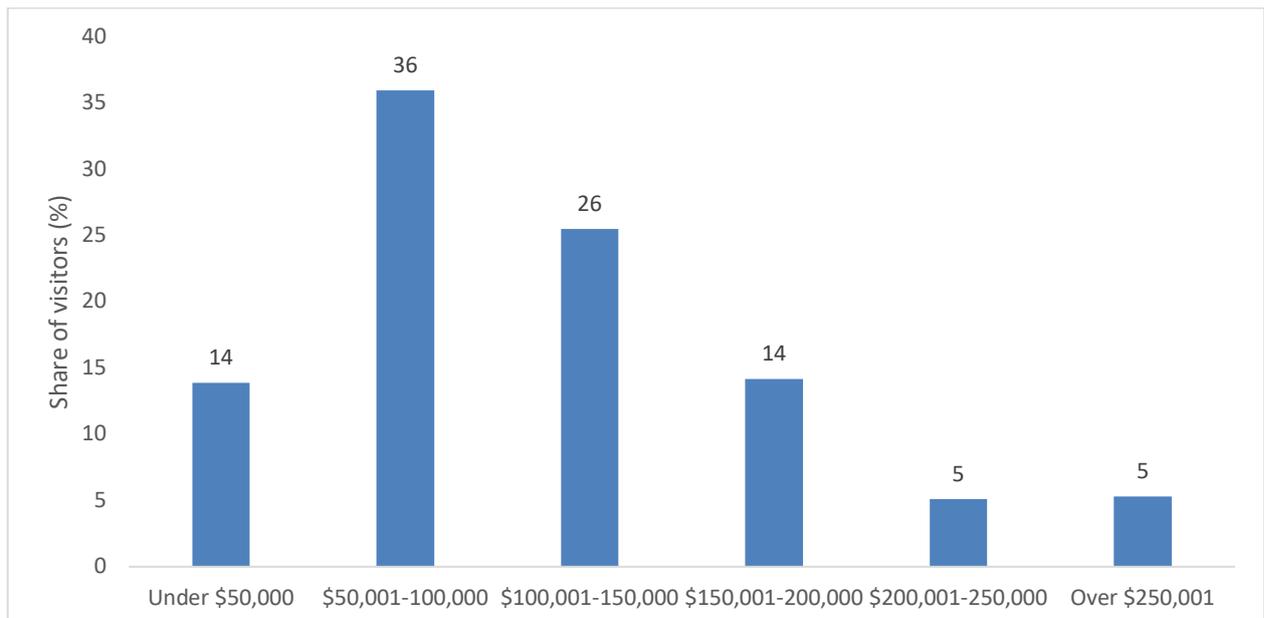
Visitors are well educated: over two-thirds (70%) of those surveyed have some form of tertiary qualification, with a further 22% having completed a high school education (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Highest qualification (n=957)



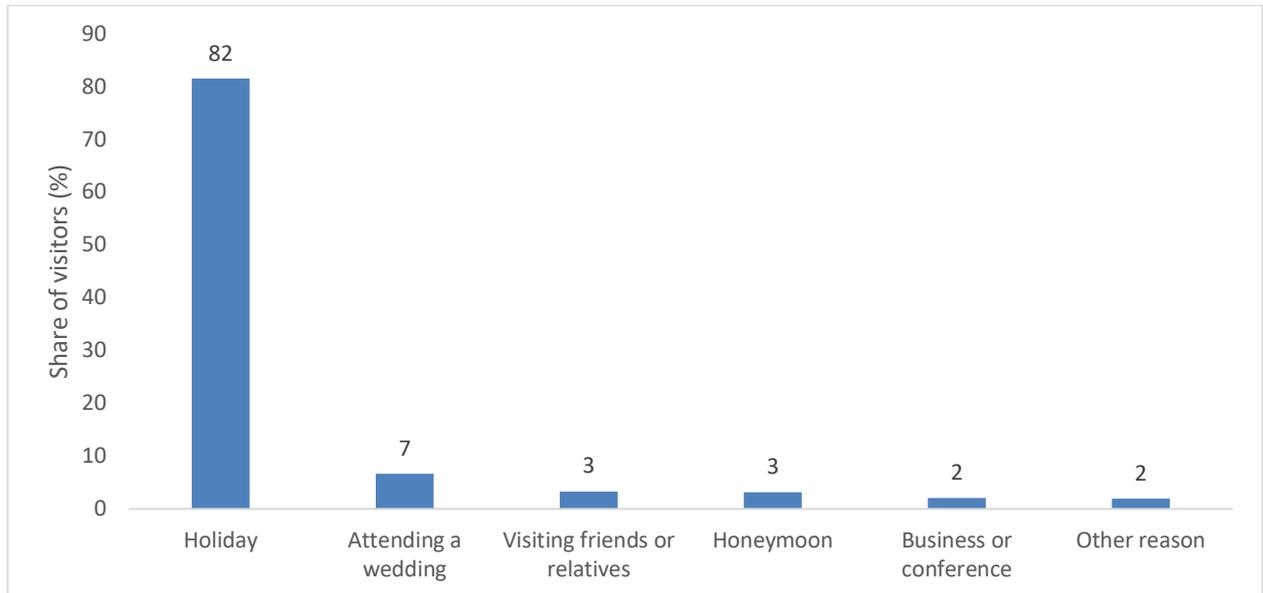
Over a third of visitors (36%) have an annual household income of between NZ\$50,001 and NZ\$100,000. Over a quarter (26%) of those surveyed earn between NZ\$100,001 and NZ\$150,000. A further 24% of respondents have a household income of over NZ\$150,000 per year (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Annual household income in NZD (n=772)



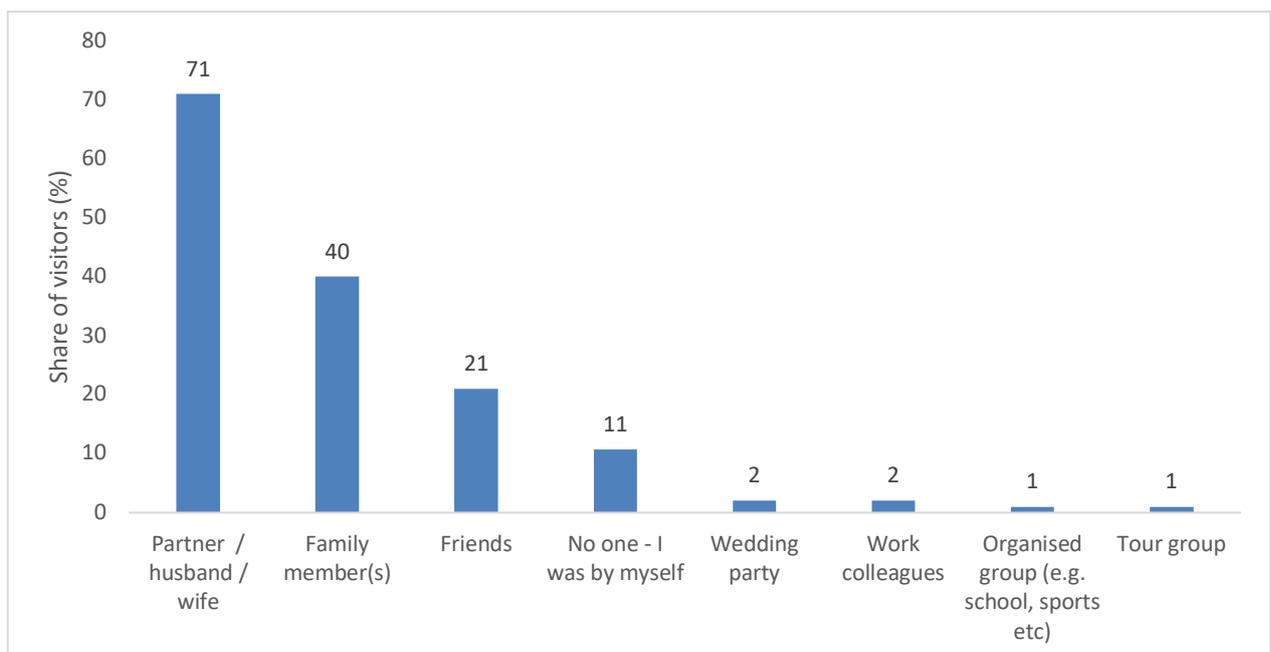
More than three quarters of visitors surveyed come to the Cook Islands for a holiday (82%). Other reasons given include attending a wedding (7%), visiting friends and relatives (3%), a honeymoon (3%), and for business and conference (2%).

Figure 7: Main purpose of visit (n=1075)



Most visitors (71%) surveyed travel to the Cook Islands with a partner or spouse. Visitors also travel with other family members (40%), with friends (21%), or travel alone (11%). Those travelling as part of a wedding party, with colleagues, in an organised group or in a tour group represent a smaller share of the sample (Figure 8).

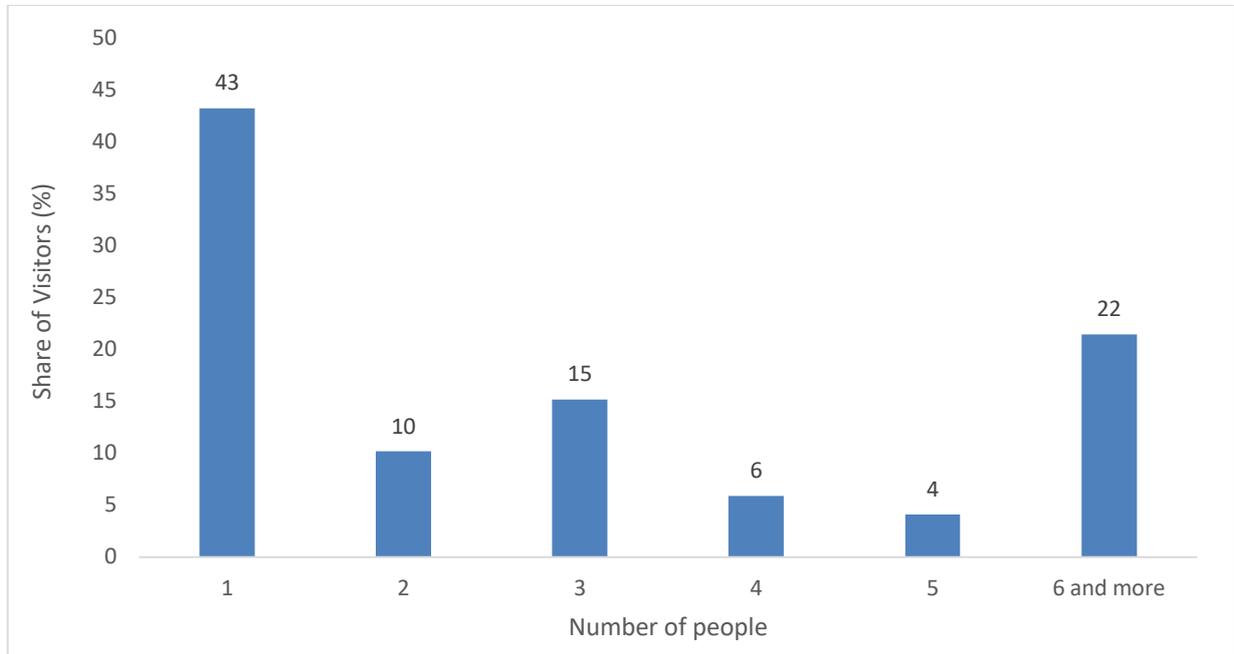
Figure 8: Travelling with whom? (n=956)



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

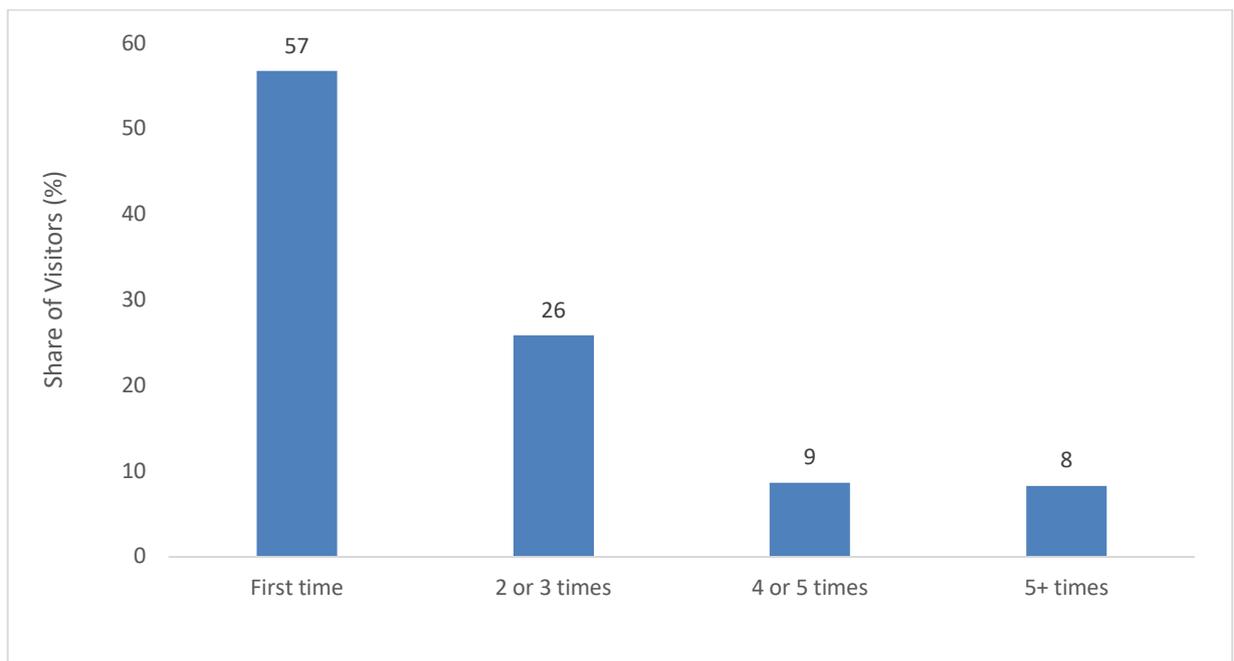
Under half of the visitors (43%) travelled with one companion on their visit to the Cook Islands (Figure 9). Travel groups larger than four people are not very common, with the exception of wedding parties.

Figure 9: Number of companions on trip (n=871)



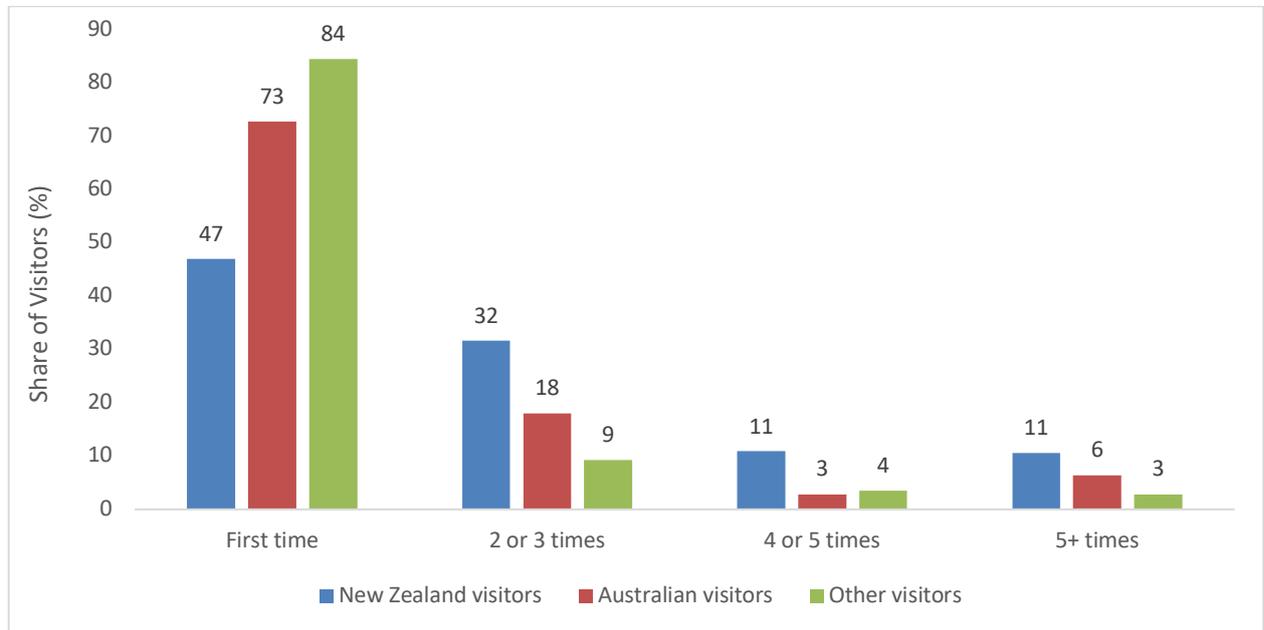
Over half of the visitors (57%) are on their first visit to the Cook Islands. A further 26% have been to the Cook Islands twice or three times before. A smaller group (17%) have visited four or more times (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Number of visits to the Cook Islands (n=959)



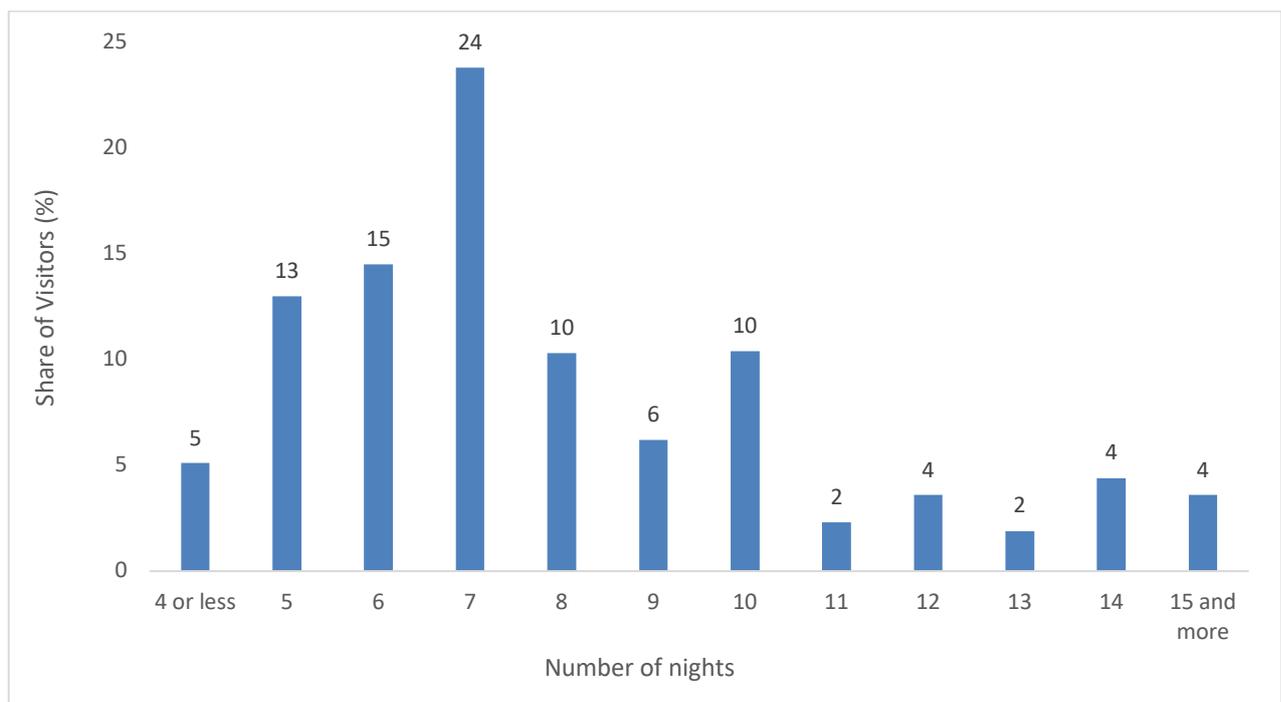
New Zealanders are more likely to be repeat visitors than those from other source markets (Figure 11). Over half of the surveyed visitors from New Zealand (53%) have visited the Cook Islands before compared to only 27% of visitors from Australia and 16% from other countries.

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



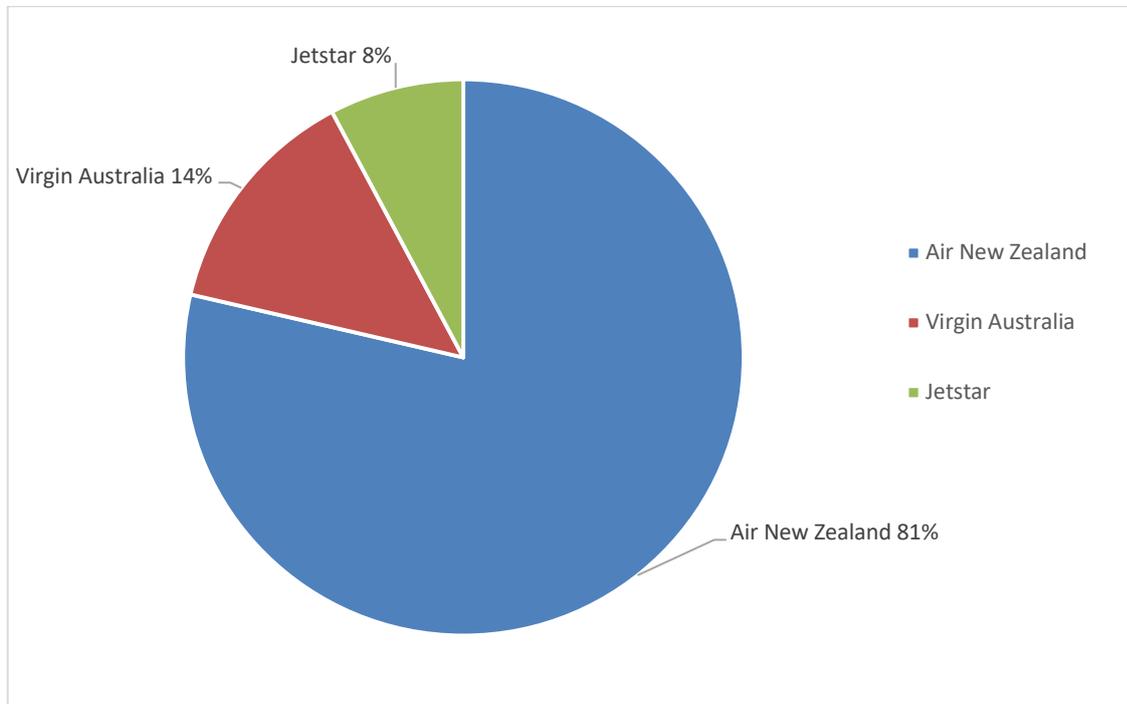
The average length of stay in the Cook Islands is 8.2 nights with 83% of visitors spending 10 or fewer nights in the country (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Length of stay in nights (n=1045)



The majority of visitors (81%) travel to/from the Cook Islands with Air New Zealand, a further 14% visitors fly with Virgin Australia (Figure 13), followed by eight percent of visitors travelling with Jetstar. Visitors that arrived by private charter flights make up less than 1% of air arrivals.

Figure 13: Mode of transport (n=1074)

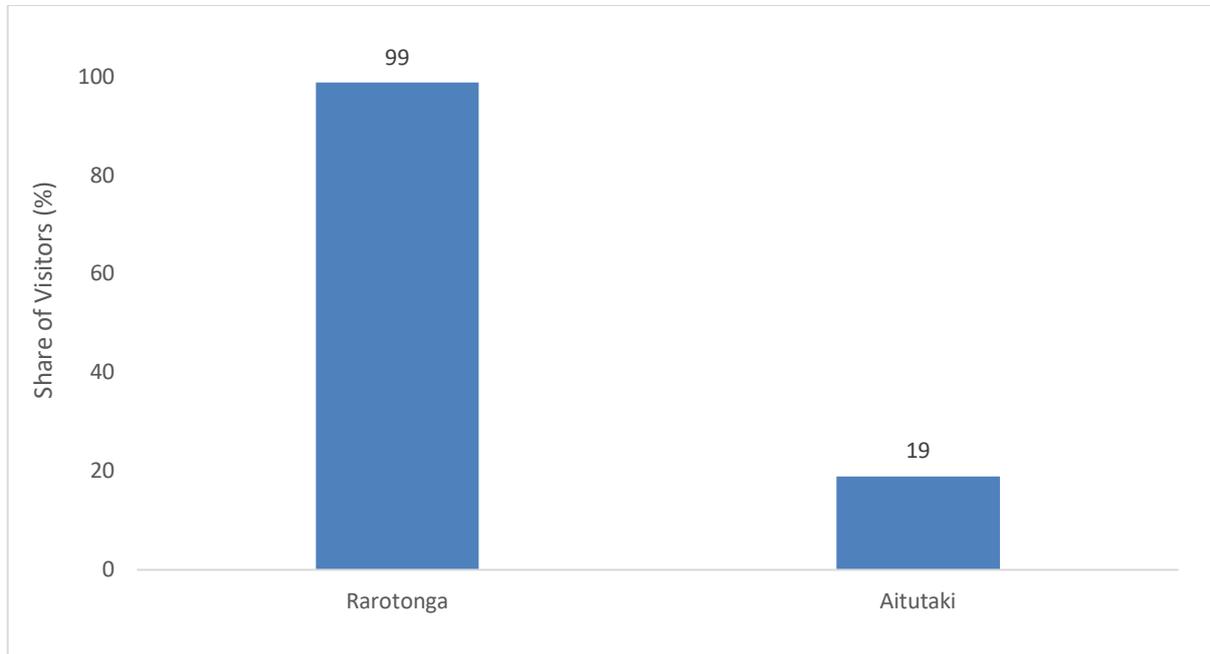


Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%

For 87% of visitors, the Cook Islands is the sole destination for their trip. For 13% 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 (72%), followed by travel to Asian countries (26%), North America (24%), Australia (22%), other pacific countries (16%), and Europe (9%).

The vast majority (99%) of visitors to the Cook Islands spend time on Rarotonga, with Aitutaki being the second most visited island (21%) (Figure 14).

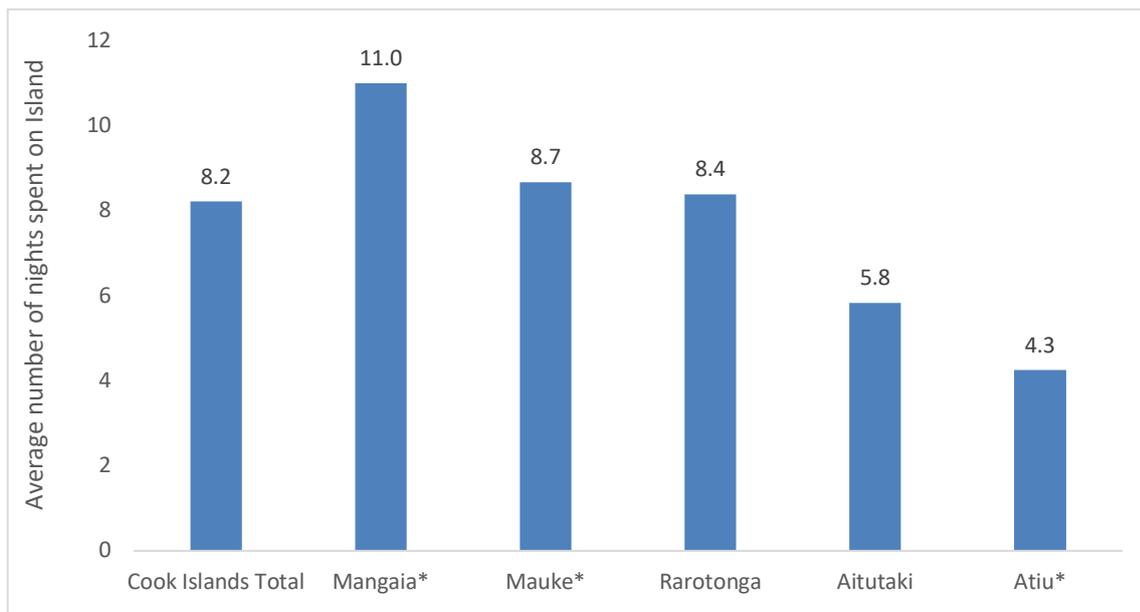
Figure 14: Visited Islands (n=1064)



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 8.4 nights (Figure 15). For the visitors that went to Aitutaki, the average number of nights spent on the island itself is 5.8. Visitors to Atiu spent an average of 4.3 nights.

Figure 15: Average length of stay in the Cook Islands and on each island (n=1049)

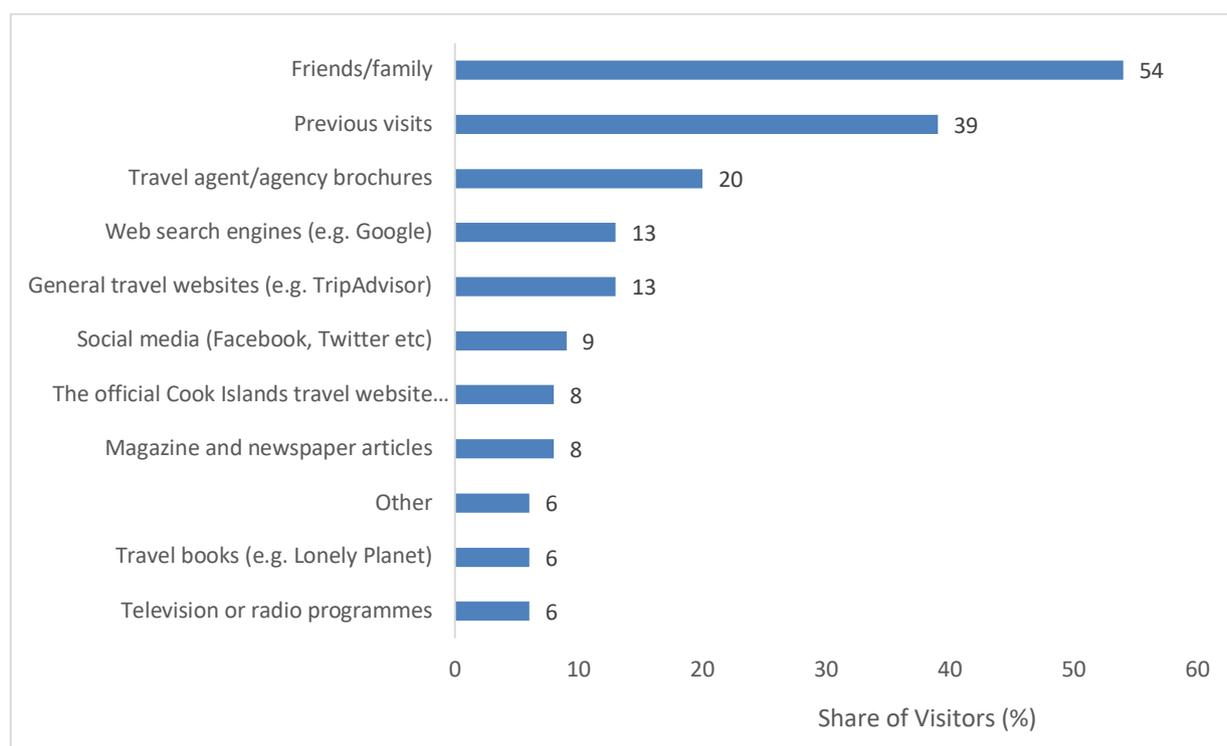


*Note: *n<5*

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 (39%), travel agents (20%), Web search engines (e.g. Google) (13%), and general travel websites (e.g. Tripadvisor) (13%).

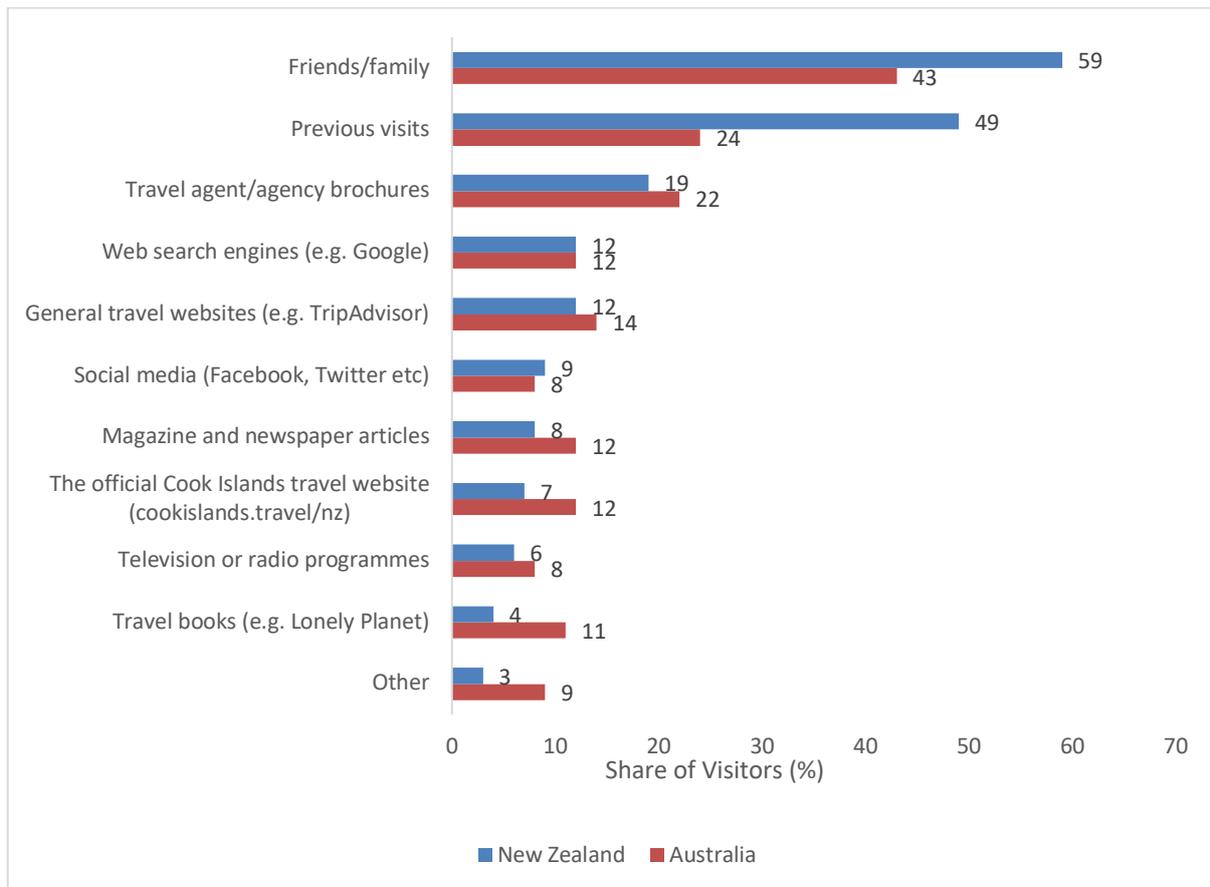
Figure 16: How did you find out about Cook Islands as a destination (n=1069)



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

Visitors from New Zealand are more likely to seek information about the 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 (49%) ranked their previous visits as the most important information source (Australian visitors 24%). Australian visitors were more likely to rank travel agent/agency brochures, travel websites, magazine and newspaper articles, and television or radio programmes, and travel books as the most important influence.

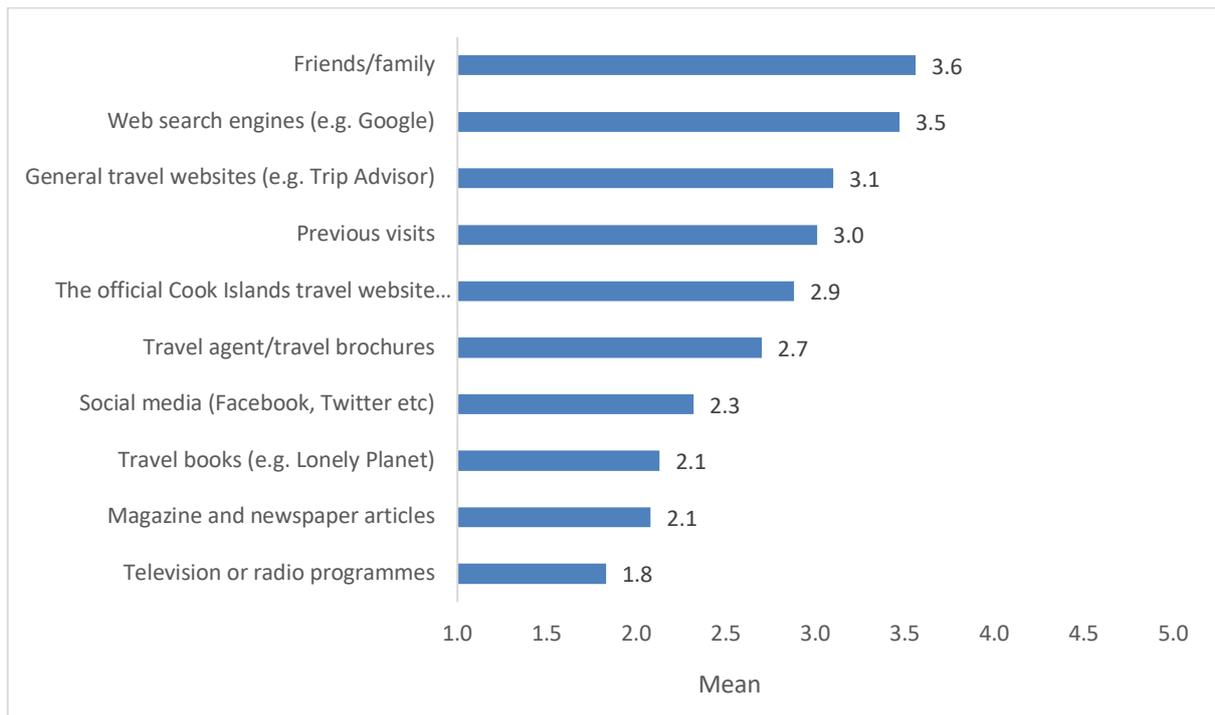
Figure 17: How did you find out about Cook Islands as a destination – country breakdown



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

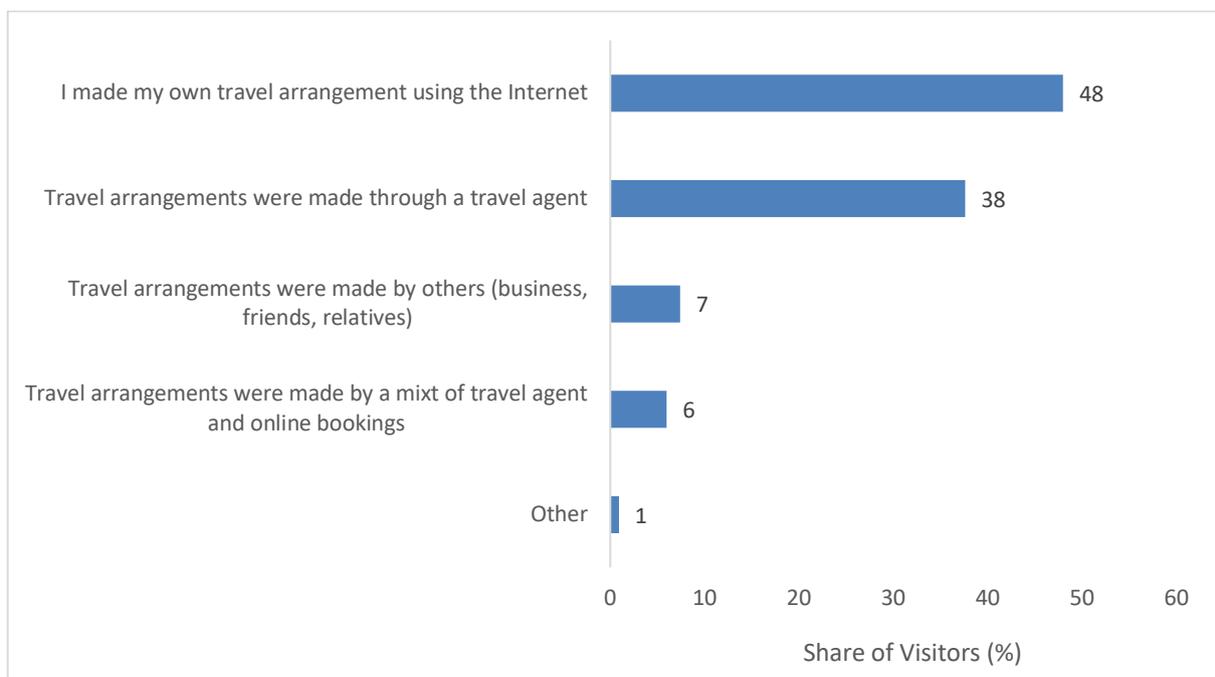
When visitors were asked to rank the importance of the listed information sources used to plan their trip, friends and family members are ranked as the most important source (3.6) (Figure 18). Other important information sources are web search engines (3.5), general travel website (3.1), previous visits (3.0), the official Cook Islands travel website (2.9), and travel agent/travel brochures (2.7).

Figure 18: Importance of information source used when planning your trip (n=726)



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 others such as business, friends, and relatives.

Figure 19: How did you purchase your travel to the Cook Islands (n=1063)

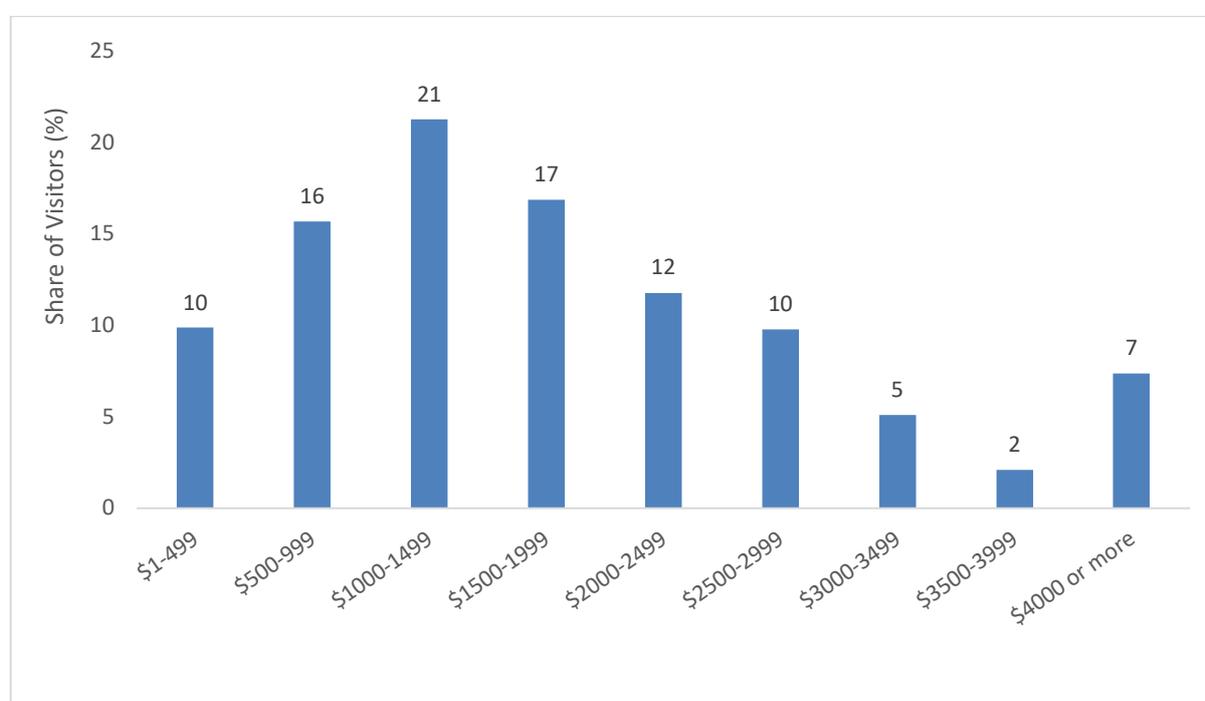


Visitor Expenditure

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: 2,485 people comprising 2,104 adults and 381 children.

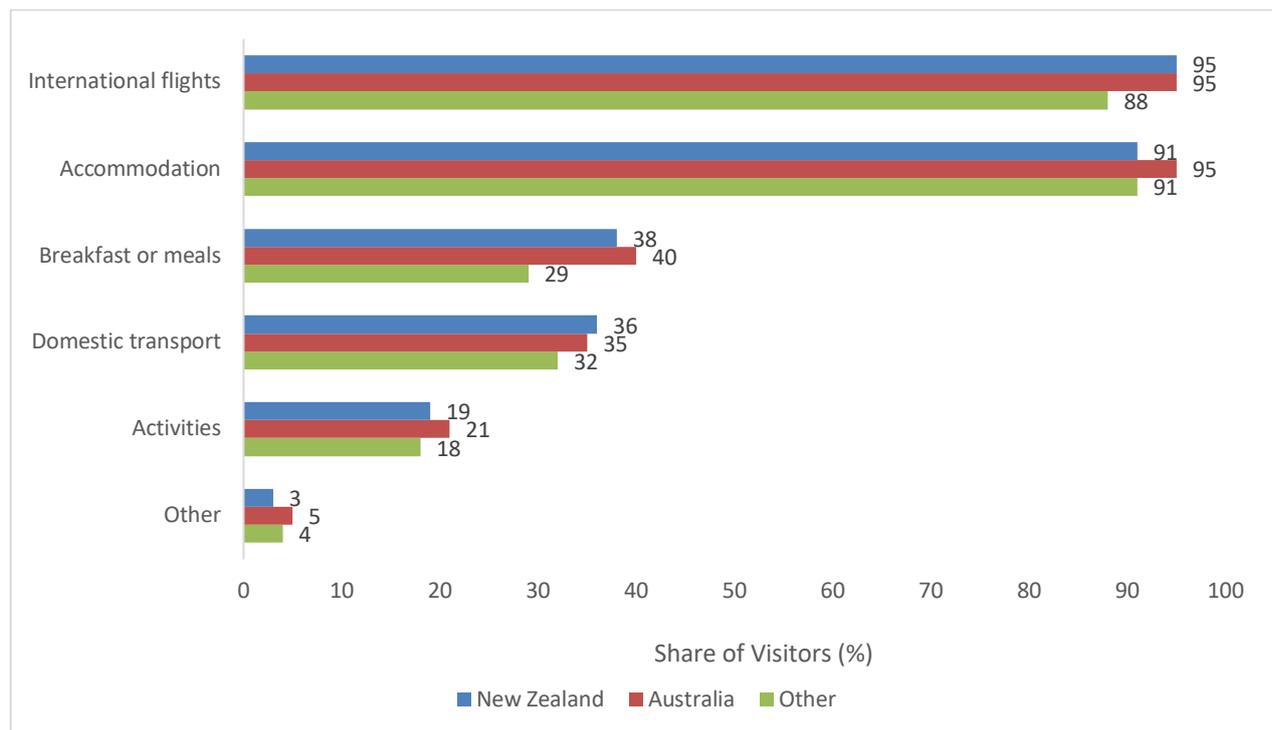
On average, visitors to the Cook Islands spend NZ\$1,831 per person prior to arrival. Half (50%) of the visitors spend between NZ\$1,000 and NZ\$2,499 prior to arrival. These figures are lower than the data from the previous year (average spend of NZ\$2,042 for 2016/17), and the same quarter for 2016/17 (NZ\$2,013) (Figure 20).

Figure 20: Amount of money spent per person prior to arrival (n=705)



In addition to international flights and domestic transport, spending prior to arrival usually includes accommodation: in 91% of the cases for New Zealand visitors, 95% for Australian visitors, and for 91% of visitors from other countries (Figure 21). Under half of visitors prepaid for breakfast and meals prior to arrival (38% for New Zealand, 40% of Australian visitors, and for 29% of visitors from other countries) which is slightly lower than the data from the previous year and in the same quarter for 2016/17. 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\$89 and for the average total visit is NZ\$732 (8.2 nights).

The total spend per visitor per day while in the Cook Islands (excluding any pre-paid expenditure) is NZ\$142 (Table 1). This figure is lower than overall spend figure for 2016/17 (NZ\$150) and same quarter in 2016/17 (NZ\$158). 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 1087 survey responses covering a total of 2,431 people (2101 adults and 330 children).

By multiplying daily spend by the average stay (8.2 nights) we can see that each visitor spends on average NZ\$1,164 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\$231 per visitor per day (\$142+\$89), or NZ\$1,896 (\$1,164+\$732) for each visitor.

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

Expenditure Items	N=1087	
	Mean (NZ\$)	(% of spend)
Accommodation	60	42
Restaurant, cafes and bar	30	21
Shopping	11	8
Activities	9	7
Vehicle rental	9	6
Domestic flights	8	5
Groceries	7	5
Other	3	2
Petrol	2	1
Cruising	2	1
Internet cost	1	1
Public transportation	1	1
Total Expenditure	142	100

Table 2 provides an overview of the in-country expenditure by the visitor's country of origin. Visitors from Australia have the highest average spend per day at NZ\$167. By comparison, New Zealand visitors spend on average NZ\$28 less per day (NZ\$139).

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

Expenditure Items	n=86	n=106	n=674	n=54
	USA/ Canada	Australia	New Zealand	Europe
Accommodation	58	68	59	58
Restaurant, cafes and bar	26	40	29	27
Shopping	10	14	11	5
Activities	13	11	9	6
Vehicle rental	6	10	9	9
Groceries	6	8	8	6
Domestic flights	10	5	7	7
Other	3	3	3	0
Petrol	1	2	2	1
Cruising	1	2	2	1
Internet cost	2	2	1	1
Public transportation	1	1	1	1
Total spend (NZ\$)	138	167	139	121

Average Australian spend per person for this quarter (NZ\$167) was lower compared to the 2016/17 average of NZ\$185, and lower than the same quarter in 2016/17 (NZ\$190). New Zealanders' spend of NZ\$139 per person per day was lower than the average of \$143 for 2016/17 and the same quarter in the previous year (NZ\$148). European visitor spend at NZ\$121 per person per day was down from the average for 2016/17 of NZ\$146, and lower than the same quarter in the previous year (NZ\$153). The average spend of NZ\$138 for visitors from USA/Canada for this period was lower than the 2016/17 average of NZ\$162, and the figure for same quarter in 2016/17 (NZ\$210).

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). 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 (a score of 2 or lower out of 5) with their visit.

Figure 22: Overall satisfaction with experience of the Cook Islands (n=964)

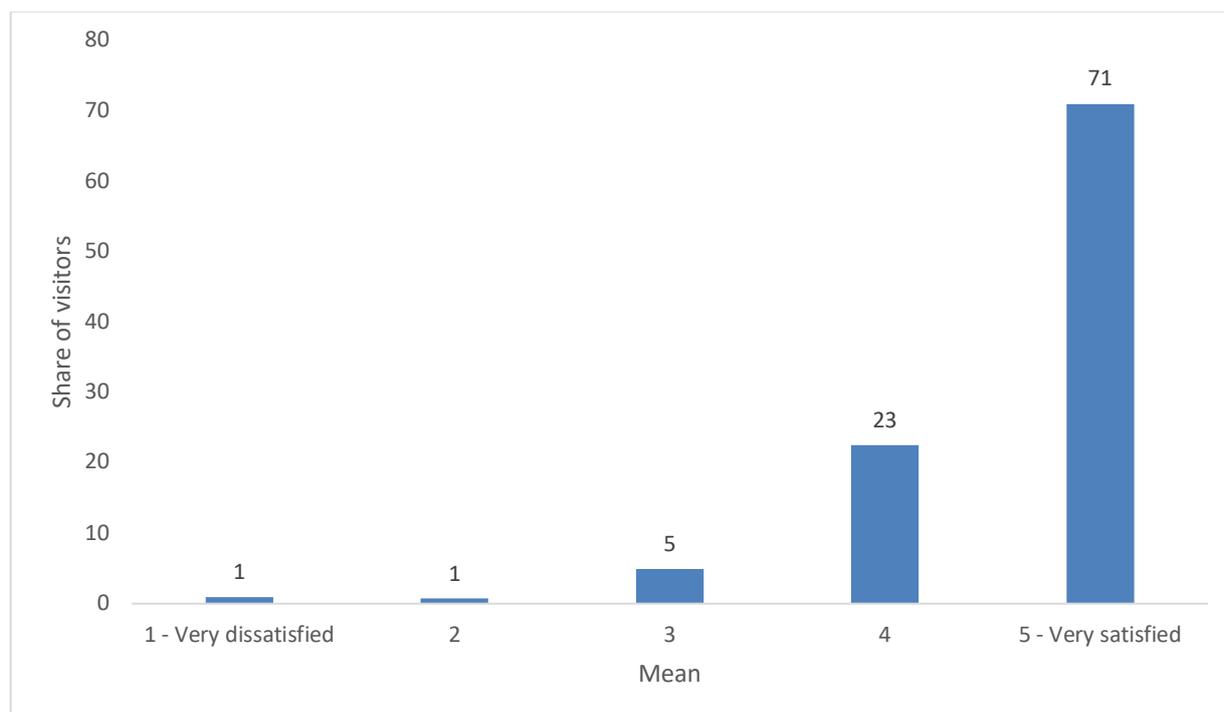


Figure 23 shows the percentage of respondents who undertook specific activities while on their visit to the Cook Islands. Almost all visitors participate in water activities and visit at least one restaurant or café during their trip. Most of the respondents (88%) visit a local market, and 59% of visitors experience an Island Night and Feast Show.

Visitor satisfaction is generally high for all activities undertaken (almost all registering more than 4 out of a possible high of 5 in addition to fishing –bonefishing) (Figure 23). Activities involving cultural interaction (average satisfaction of 4.6) rank the highest, followed by land-based products (4.5), water-based experiences (4.5), and shopping (4.4). It should be noted that some activities e.g. kitesurfing, Tumunu on Atiu, bonefishing, are characterised by relatively low numbers of participants (n=26-31).

Figure 23: Degree of participation in activities (n range=26-1019)

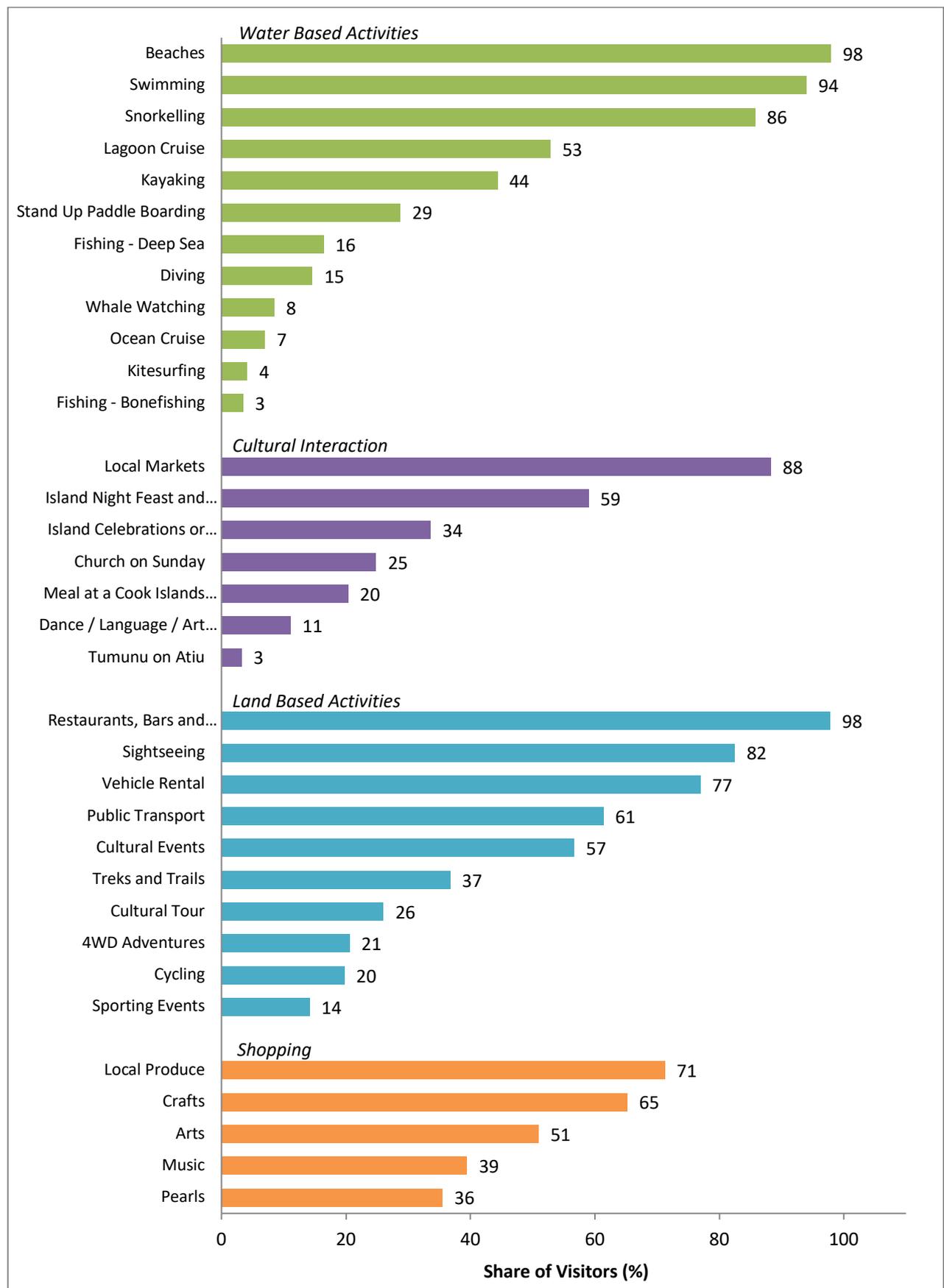
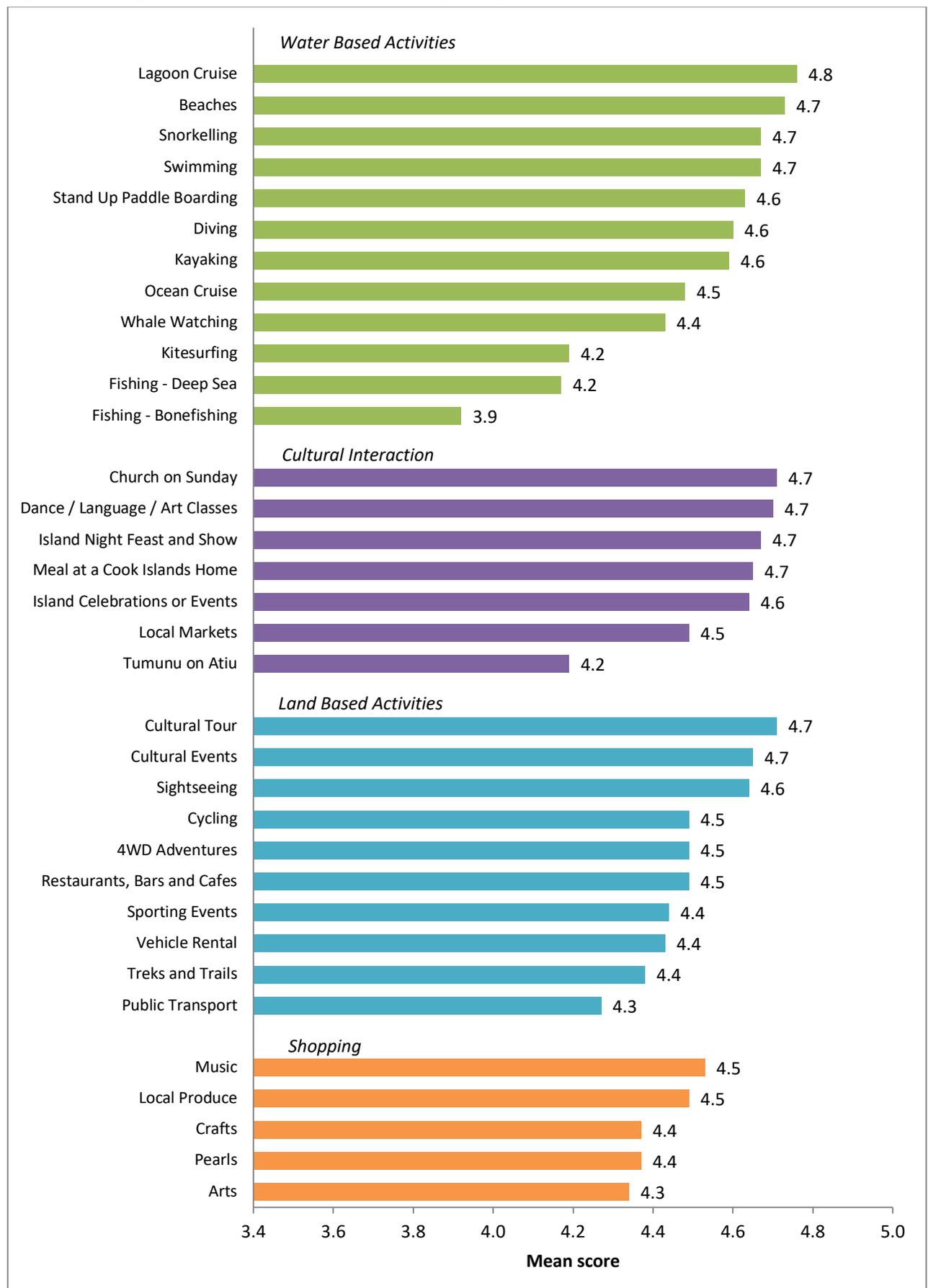


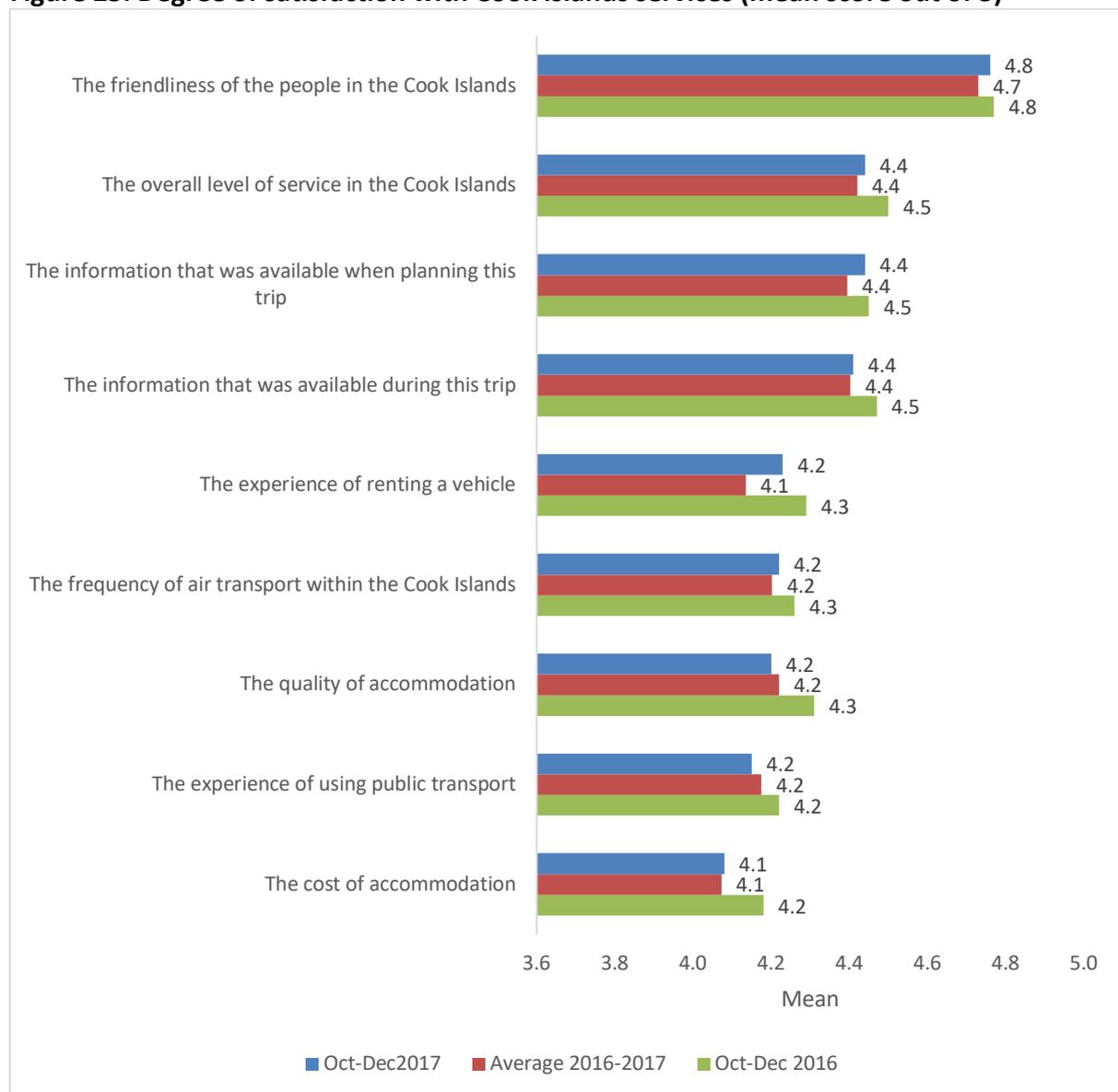
Figure 24: Degree of satisfaction in activities participated in (mean score out of 5)



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 2016/17, and the same quarter for 2016/17 (Figure 25). Respondents have consistently given the friendliness of the people in the Cook Islands the highest score.

As can be seen from Figure 25, visitor satisfaction level with the overall level of service in the Cook Islands, the information that was available when planning this trip, the information was available during this trip, the experience of renting a vehicle, the frequency of air transport within the Cook Islands, the quality of accommodation, the experience of using public transport, and the cost accommodation are slightly lower than the same quarter in 2016/17.

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 were 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%), convenience and safety (6%), culture (5%), level of service (5%), accommodation (4%), not commercialised (3%) and an overall good experience (3%).

Table 3: Most appealing aspects of the Cook Islands (n=974)

Themes	Share of respondents (%)
Environment, cleanliness & weather	51%
Local People	41%
Atmosphere	28%
Activities, attractions, and entertainment & events	21%
Food and Beverage	12%
Convenience & Safety	6%
Culture	5%
Level of service	5%
Accommodation	4%
Un-commercial	3%
Overall good experience	3%

* 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, cleanliness & weather

Over half of the respondents (51%) considered the destination’s beautiful scenery, natural environment, and the warm waters and climate to be the most appealing aspects of their Cook Islands experience. Visitors used words such as ‘beautiful’, ‘clean’, ‘green’, ‘clear’, ‘spectacular’, and ‘paradise’ to describe the environment. Most comments here focused on the beauty and the cleanliness of the beaches and lagoons, the weather, the warm and clear water, and the beauty of the islands in general. Comments included:

“The cleanliness and obvious love and care the residents had for their environment.”

“Beautiful landscape.”

“Clean and Green, Perfect weather.”

“This place is like paradise: white sandy beaches, clear and blue water, sunny weather and cool vibes.”

“The beach and the night sky.”

"The scenery was spectacular."

Local people

A forty one percent of the respondents (41%) noted that the most appealing part of their visit was their interaction with local people in the Cook Islands with comments about the warmth and welcoming nature of local people. Key words that dominated the responses included 'kind', 'warmth', 'friendly', 'proud', 'helpful', 'relaxed', 'smile', 'nice', 'happy', and 'accommodating'. Comments included:

"The culture and warmth of the people are the reason I continue to visit the Cook Islands."

"The people are kind. Love the ukulele welcome at the airport."

"The friendly Cook Islanders especially on Aitutaki. "

"The friendliness of the local residents and their willingness to share their proud culture with you."

"The friendliness of the people. They were always willing to help or interact. One of the bus drivers was one of the best people to talk to."

"The Rarotongan people were very friendly and relaxed."

"The friendliness of the Cook-Islanders. Always a smile, always helpful!"

Atmosphere

Twenty eight percent of visitors surveyed (28%) focused on the relaxed atmosphere of the Cook Islands. They considered the Cook Islands to be very peaceful, quiet, relaxing, and laid-back, which made it a good destination to 'relax' and reduce 'stress'. Respondents used words such as 'relaxing', 'no stress', 'peace', 'remote' and 'welcoming' to describe the overall atmosphere of the Cook Islands. The notion of 'island time' was also mentioned. Comments included:

"The relaxed atmosphere and friendly nature of people. Everything seemed to run on Island time i.e., not to exact timetable which was part of the whole experience. No stress seen anywhere."

"It is SO relaxing!! No Stress. No cell phone. No computer. Peace and quiet. Locals very friendly and helpful."

"Relaxed atmosphere nobody trying to sell, sell, sell."

"It is such an easy and relaxing holiday with plenty to do and see for everyone."

"It was a great holiday destination. But also, a lovely place to get married, no stresses whatsoever."

“The remoteness of the islands while still being able to obtain any necessity.”

“It truly just feels like a relaxing tropical holiday. The people are friendly, welcoming, and everything is so easy to get to.”

Activities, attractions, entertainment & events

Activities, attractions, entertainment and events were mentioned by 21% 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, diving, kayaking, fishing and lagoon cruises. Land-based activities that respondents mentioned included hiking, walking, cycling, cultural tours, events, local breweries and local markets. Aitutaki lagoon is often referred to as an outstanding attraction of the Cook Islands. Comments included:

“Beautiful beaches and sea/lagoon, great for snorkelling and swimming, stunning landscape.”

“The Constitution Week celebrations - the friendliness of the people - the weather!!”

“We were in Rarotonga for the Constitution for the first time ever so the atmosphere was amazing. The vibe and buzz was off the chart and was such a good experience.”

“Aitutaki was our favourite place. The Lagoon is spectacular. We also enjoyed our Dinner and show at Te Vara Nui in Rarotonga.”

“Such an easy place to visit; very relaxing family holiday with grandparents and school-aged kids. Something for everyone and easy to do it.”

“Loved the waterfront location and use of snorkels and kayaks. Loved the slightly old villa, with everything we needed but not much more. Loved the generous, friendly people. Loved the bus and how it would stop when you wanted. Loved attending the church service and how we were invited to eat after. Loved the market... and especially the use of the reusable plates! Also loved the poor WIFI as the kids actually spoke to each other. Loved the chickens, dogs and pigs. Loved the cat and chicken being chased out of the Vietnamese restaurant! Loved the respect to ancestors in graves as part of family.”

“...swimming in the warm water, friendliness of locals, laid back service, enough things to do for a relaxing get away, cute brewery with beer on tap, lush forest, the tracks, it felt isolated in a good way.”

“Relaxed and friendly and plenty of things to do. The street stalls with local fruit and veges. The apparent efforts to be more eco-friendly and to look after the reefs and the sea life.”

Food and beverage

Just twelve percent of respondents (12%) mentioned food and beverages as the most appealing aspect of their trip. Their comments focused on the quality and range of fresh food available in the Cook Islands. They used words such as 'great', 'amazing', 'excellent', 'high standard/quality', 'good', 'delicious', 'healthy', 'authentic' and 'fresh' to describe the food. Many visitors commented on the selection and variety of options of good cafes and restaurants, about the food markets and on the availability of fresh seafood and tropical fruit. Comments included:

"...there is a great range of eating options to suit all budgets."

"LOVED the fresh fish!"

"I also loved the packed lunches at the fuel stations and the night markets. We have never eaten food that has tasted so incredible anywhere in our lives, every restaurant or cafe we ate at was mouth-watering."

"The number of high quality beach-front restaurants."

"The food market at Muri, providing a low cost alternative to the more expensive restaurant dining."

Convenience & Safety

The convenience and safety of the Cook Islands as a holiday destination were mentioned by six percent (6%) of respondents. They referred to the ease of getting to the Cook Islands and moving around the islands, the availability of public transport, the convenience of using the New Zealand dollar. Some tourists emphasised safety particularly feel safe at night. Comments included:

"The remoteness of the islands while still being able to obtain any necessity."

"How quick it is to get there and the use NZ money."

"Close to NZ, you could bring your own food and fly Air New Zealand."

"...a safe feeling, even at night."

"Not having to worry about getting robbed-I can just leave the car and house unlocked."

"For me personally I feel really safe there."

Culture

The island's unique local culture was mentioned by five percent (5%) of respondents as an appealing aspect of their Cook Islands visit. Respondents referred to the local events, history

and performance in addition to referencing the overall enjoyable aspects of Cook Islands culture. Comments included:

“The people, learning more about where the roles they played in society and the meanings of their names, or locations that had significance to their families or communities.”

“Loved the similarities between Maori culture and the Cook Islands.”

“I found the pride that the Cook Islanders have with their culture is to be admired, but it was not thrust upon us ad infinitum.”

“Very relaxing environment around the whole Island was awesome and discovering the history there for me as a Māori did deep spiritual work.”

“The friendliness of the local residents and their willingness to share their proud culture with you.”

Level of service

A five percent (5%) of visitors commented on the service they encountered while in the Cook Islands. Respondents had positive comments on the local hospitality they experienced. Mentioning the ‘friendly’, ‘welcoming’ and ‘helpful’ staff at the restaurants, bars, hotels, and resorts. Visitors also emphasised the lack of pressure or hassle to buy which made them feel comfortable. Comments included:

“The friendly staff at beach bars/restaurants.”

“That staff at places/resorts we had stayed at previously remembered and welcomed us.”

“Resort on Aitutaki awesome staff very friendly and helpful you were made to feel very welcome.”

“The laid-back attitude and the helpful, friendly staff everywhere we went. Nothing was too much trouble.”

Accommodation

Another four percent (4%) of respondents noted that the accommodation they stayed in was an appealing aspect of their visit to the Cook Islands, referring to the high quality, the location, the setting, the level of service, and the warm welcome from their hosts. Comments included:

“Resort had a lot of activities we could do straight out in front of it.”

“The quality of the hotel was outstanding as was the service.”

“Our hotel was perfect for us right on the beach with nice spacious studio.”

Not too commercialised

Three percent (3%) of respondents mentioned the Cook Islands as being a place that is not over-commercialised or too touristy. Some visitors also emphasised the importance of preserving the destination from mass tourism development and keeping it the way it is. Comments included:

“Interaction with the locals and not taken over by corporate models.”

“...loved the unspoiled simplicity of the islands...no building higher than the highest coconut tree.”

“I also loved the lack of commercialization. I don't need to visit chain restaurants or international corporate conglomerate stores or services.”

“Not too commercialised, very relaxed.”

Overall good experience

Three percent (3%) 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! We love the weather, water temperature, snorkelling, relaxed atmosphere and the friendliness of the people.”

“Everything, People food things to do, Kids cannot wait to go back.”

“The people were friendly, and the reef is beautiful. Loved everything. Will be back!”

“The overall island experience. It was exactly what we wanted. Unique and relaxing.”

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?” A quarter (26%) of the visitors surveyed, found “nothing” was considered the least appealing aspect, “can’t think of anything”, “all was good”, or the only unappealing thing was “leaving” or “going home”. Table 4 summaries key themes respondents felt were unappealing. Comments ranged from issues with public services and facilities, price of good and service, rubbish and natural environment care through to disappointment with the safety issues.

Table 4: Least appealing aspects of the Cook Islands (n=894)

Themes	Share of respondents %*
Public services and facilities and infrastructure	15%
Price of good and service	12%
Stray animals and mosquitos	11%
Rubbish and natural environment care	11%
Food and beverage	10%
Accommodation	10%
Attractions and activities	9%
Poor weather	5%
Customer service	4%
Rental cars or scooters	3%
Law and Legislation	3%
Flight related issues	2%
Local people	2%
Too touristy	2%
Safety	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

Most respondents (15%) considered the destination’s public services and facilities to be the least appealing aspects of their Cook Islands experience. Most comments here focused on the road conditions, public transport and poor internet, cleanliness of public toilets, and the bus services. Comments included:

“Infrastructure is obviously a big issue and an expensive one. Two issues stood out for us. Around the shopping area poorly constructed and downright dangerous footpaths. The main road is an ongoing problem and is an obvious issue. As keen cyclists which is the best way to see the Island we had to ride on the verge most of the time.”

“Infrastructure is fairly weak. Roads are unsafe for pedestrians and need proper sidewalks and lighting for the evenings.”

“That airport was awful. Not enough seats, no air-conditioning. Crowded with too many people and hours of waiting. Everything was great about Cook Islands but coming back home that airport ruined my experience.”

“We found the Muri area a bit crowded now. The narrow roads with limited lighting and no side of road markings made driving at night somewhat stressful.”

“The outer loop road around Rarotonga needs some road work repairs.”

“The public transport was disappointing, not enough space on the bus. You could do with putting on more buses when it's market day.”

“Clear information on the availability of fresh drinking water (where you could fill containers for free).”

“The cost of wifi. This stops us coming over as much as we would like as it is just too expensive to keep up with business commitments.”

“Not many public toilets.”

“Out of medical care.”

Price of goods and service

Twelve percent of the respondents (12%) noted that the least appealing part of their visit was the price of goods and services with comments about food, taxis, accommodation and internet. Key words that dominated the responses included ‘costly’, ‘expensive’, ‘overpriced’, and ‘overcharging’. Comments included:

“Restaurant prices were too high, would have eaten out more if more local options.”

“The cost of almost everything - especially food and transport. Especially when the wages for workers is so very very low. Many places are ripping off visitors and local workers.”

“High prices of groceries, especially alcohol. Restaurants, bars, cafes, etc. close too early.”

“Inconsistent pricing in the shops. Prices not marked. We were warned about this practice and avoided some shops because of it.”

“Hiring car was expensive so we used public transport which was inconvenient, slow and expensive as well.”

“The cost to get to the outer islands.”

“Very expensive broadband access.”

“Expensive internet was terrible as I had lots I wanted to read. The cost of this wasn't advertised either. May not go back because of this. Fiji has good internet that isn't an extra cost.”

Stray animals and mosquitos

Stray animals, noisy roosters, mosquitoes / insects and sea cucumbers were mentioned by 11% of respondents. In particular, they complained that the dogs roaming on the streets, mosquitoes and the roosters made their trip miserable at the Cooks Island. Respondents used a variety of words to describe this theme including ‘annoying’, ‘aggressive’ and ‘terrifying’. Comments included:

“As I was relaxing on the beach, one of the dogs attacked me. Its’ owner showed up about ten minutes later. It would be good if owners kept an eye on their dogs however, I have been to the islands before and am aware majority are friendly and this was a one off.”

“The orphan animals there - but so impressed with the local SPCA, doing great work and being great people.”

“The noisy dogs & the odd aggressive dog. Haven't seen that before.”

“The dogs barking, especially at the beaches, I'm absolutely terrified of dogs.”

“Roosters were early raising and making noises which made us wake up early.”

“The roosters I really believe something needs to be done to reduce the numbers, they crow 24/7 .As an owner of a hostel/lodge I was aware of so many travellers complaining and when I said I was going to Raratonga I had many Facebook comments detrimental to the roosters.”

“...apart from noisy roosters - but its their home too so fair enough.”

“I was not keen on the sea slugs in the water.”

“Stone fish - not anyone's fault just nature. I don't get stung but it was always on my mind to be careful.”

Rubbish and natural environment care

Rubbish and natural environment care were mentioned by 11% of respondents as the least appealing elements of their visit to the Cook Islands. The poor condition of the lagoons and beaches, polluted water, degraded coral reefs, and threatened marine life concerned a group of visitors. Comments included:

“There was quite a bit of rubbish around particularly around Muri and the markets etc. Some of it was there as a result of tourist being lazy but a lot was there from the locals. It was a shame as some really nice places had loads of rubbish around.”

“We walked a lot, and the roads had very little shoulder, and rain left water filled potholes. There was lots of litter/garbage dumped in waterways and ditches. People were burning garbage or plastic, smoke nasty sometimes. Reports of Muri lagoon being polluted, but no real information.”

“The obvious reduction in marine life in the Muri Lagoon and other areas due to the water quality.”

“The sea slugs on Muri beach. Plus the water close to shore smells of sewage and is very dirty sometimes which really detracts from the beautiful pristine clear waters out further. You really need to do something about the sewage treatment especially on Muri shores.”

“The reef damage was extensive which was sad. I was on Aitutaki in 1980, which was amazing! While the island has not seen many changes the reef sure has. On the little islands on the lagoon there was lots of garbage, plastic bottles which was also sad. My friend and I went out several times with garbage bags from the hotel and brought all the garbage off the islands. Really disappointing when people don't respect the environment.”

“Lack of care with people standing on coral.”

“The burning of plastic I found despicable. The amount of rubbish lying around was also disgusting. I was also concerned about the septic leachate into the lagoons. I would not return to Rarotonga for the above reasons.”

“It was sad to see so much taken over by mass tourism and some of the environmental impacts. Seeing damaged coral, rubbish, etc. It's important to make opportunities available for visitors obviously and companies need to bring in tourist money, but it's better to have quality over quantity of tourists. Please never let the Cook Islands become anything like parts of Thailand or those other places that have become so over-run that they harm or lose what makes them special in the first place-their culture, their environment, their identity.”

“I guess unappealing for me was the use of a lot of throwaway items like plastic utensils, styrofoam containers, use of plastic bags in the supermarket etc....I know it's a problem everywhere but I reckon there would be a way to cut rubbish. As a small community an environmentally friendly approach to food service etc. would be very beneficial for financial and tourism dollars.”

“Rarotonga is using solar energy increasingly and also making small reserves in areas along the coastline. However these efforts are badly offset by the obvious rise in consumerism and in particular the use of petrol and diesel cars...I suggest a big push for e-bikes, increased use of public transport and e-cars. Keep working on the conservation issues...Keep cleaning the plastic from the beaches. Climate change is here...I know I also felt quite guilty just flying up and even though I contribute to Air NZ's climate offset fund, it's not really enough.”

Food and beverage

Another 10% of respondents noted that the food and beverage at Cooks Island was the least appealing aspect of their visit, referring to the high prices, the lack of local produce (especially fresh fruit, veggies and fish), limited food choice, poor customer services, food poisoning, and opening hours of restaurants. Comments included:

"Was expecting more local cuisine, not Beef Wellington. Restaurant prices were too high, would have eaten out more if more local options."

"Food is pretty expensive and you can't find everything that you want or need. This is the only issue I had."

"...getting fresh fruit and vegetables was a nightmare. I expected there to be a lot but I could only get bananas which were extremely unripe."

"The food, especially in the supermarket, too expensive and too less vegetables and fruits to buy."

"Food at the restaurants - not really healthy options, would have loved to have more options for eating seafood and local produce. In the local store only pawpaw, bananas and onions were the "real local foods". Everything else was packages from mega companies."

"I found it really hard to find genuine Cook Islands products e.g. coffee, crafts. Even at the market it was rare."

"Got campylobacter from a restaurant ended up being sick for over a month."

"We did not think the night market added to the attraction of the area. The restaurants were suffering and the food on offer at the market was very basics. Too many nights with the market there and having an impact on good cafes and hotel food."

"...staff is not encouraged to do anything, birds are flying and eating of the meals for the visitors, not hygienic."

"Lack of honesty in the restaurants when offering water that you are then charged for a \$8.00 coconut."

"Inaccessible to an Umu."

Accommodation

Ten percent of visitors surveyed (10%) focused on accommodation of the Cook Islands. 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. Comments included:

“Accommodations are expensive for what they were. Their level of quality are a bit lower than what actual star rankings.”

“Lack of maintenance to the accommodation - although it was acceptable, the rooms needed a bit of a make-over.”

“Next time I think we will choose live in village but for the backpacker room is not too bad. But the kitchen and shower not really clean”.

“Our accommodation was not up to standard.”

“Visiting alternative accommodation where the owners failed to turn up to welcome us. We then returned to Muri Beach Club Hotel & were made very welcome!”

“The resort appeared to be understaffed. The staff seemed harassed and unhappy and were not as friendly as we had experienced on previous visits. I have the strong impression that pay and working conditions are not optimal.”

“My ranch slider door in the hotel room was left unlocked by cleaners on 2 occasions. The black pearls I purchased from the Saturday Markets were stolen from my hotel room.”

“The dishonest & fraudulent dealings of the accommodation owner with regard to credit card transactions.”

Attractions and activities

Nine percent (9%) of respondents mentioned the least appealing aspect at Cooks Island were the attractions and activities including limited attractions and/or activities, swimming/snorkelling because of the environment issues, weather, lack of information, poor services. Comments included:

“Aitutaki. The environment is not being take care of...locals are desperately setting up businesses to attract tourists and the island is getting dirtier and dirtier. I heard of one operator who encourages people to jump onto the backs of turtles for a ride...after they are chased down and tired.”

“Hustle and bustle in Muri when night markets on, parking is a bit dangerous with pedestrians a wee bit at risk with how people drive bit fast given congestion.”

“I found it really hard to find genuine Cook Islands products e.g coffee, crafts. Even at the market it was rare.”

“We really wanted to check out the waterfall on the Muri beach side, it has however been taken over by locals who demanded money to go up and see the waterfall. My parents visited it on their honey moon a few years ago and it was free to visit. So we were really disappointed we couldn't experience it.”

“To pay to go up to the falls but not told there isn't any water I think is a little unfair.”

“Apart from driving around the Island there is little to do.”

“The family who participated on the fishing charter were disappointed, it was not what they expected they assumed they would be doing proper fishing, not cruising around the island waiting for something to hop on the line.”

“The lack of nice ocean swimming places and the lack of coral to view while snorkelling on Rarotonga. The water is nice but coral is not vibrant. Maybe have to go to another island.”

“Rarotonga is too unique and too beautiful to be known primarily as the go to public partying destination in the Pacific. Shift the tourism focus to the more unique and pristine culturally based aspects of life in Rarotonga - the arts, music, dance, traditions. The reservoirs and water intake areas should now be fenced - there are still too many tourists who do not respect the water catchment area at Turanga using it as a swimming pool! The cross island hiking track should be more closely monitored again to stop tourists creating their own tracks!”

“The float parade was half hearted compared to other years.”

“Advertising about local bars and night life wasn't very good, limited amount of activities to do, no historical walks, no historical setting of how they use to live, beaches are exciting nothing different.”

Poor weather

Five percent (5%) of visitors commented on poor weather while in the Cook Islands. Respondents expressed their disappointment with the weather conditions on the Cook Islands. In particular, complaints were made about the rain and wind, although some respondents acknowledged the weather was seasonal and cannot be changed. Comments included:

“The wind and colder water...thought it was going to be warmer but there was still a chill and made for quick dips rather than leisurely swims.”

“The weather was a bit cold, so it was too cold to swim and enjoy water sports. Being on the beach was the main emphasis of my trip!”

“The weather was not warm enough and it was very windy in July so we were unable to sit on the beach, which is what we had expected to do.”

“The heat. We were present during an extremely hot period which I found difficult I would like to rereturn when the weather is a little cooler and I feel sure I would be much more appreciative of the assets of the Island.”

“It still had high humidity which was unusual for March.”

Customer service

Four percent respondents (4%) mentioned customer service as the least appealing aspect of their trip to Cooks Island. Their comments focused on visitor handling services at the accommodation, transport, airport and restaurants. Most visitors used words such as 'no response', 'long waits', 'rude', 'poor attitude', 'unfriendly' and 'least impressive' to describe the services. Comments included:

"We were disappointed by the customer service & room quality at the resort. We picked it for the 'resort feel' & beach side pool. We never swam in the pool as it was always filthy, and we were made to feel like annoying houseguests by the admin staff (please note all cleaning & grounds staff were ALWAYS polite and friendly. We only found some bar and admin staff were rude). Our room was in disrepair, & when we complained we were made to feel like we were being annoying."

"...and resort staff were rude ie pulling faces behind our backs after making request. Was spotted by another member of our party."

"Waiting time for service. Had to wait for ages to get rental car in the heat."

"Sometimes the relaxed nature of service can just mean incredibly slow."

"Poor service in hotels and restaurants."

"Aitutaki, staff is not encouraged to do anything, birds are flying and eating of the meals for the visitors, not hygienic."

"I had a great time. Black pearl shopping. Some shop keepers seemed to be untruthful about quality."

Flight related issues

Three percent (3%) of respondents mentioned flight related issues as the least appealing aspect at Cooks Island. Visitors mentioned the limitations of flights to and from various destinations such as infrequency, cost, arrival and departure times, customer service, and airport facilities. Comments included:

"There doesn't seem to be a Direct flight Sydney to Rarotonga with good link from Rarotonga to Aitutaki & return. We don't really want to have to go via Auckland and overnight there in winter."

"Late night/early morning flights - they are a killer."

"I find it a problem every time when the plane arrives at 2am there's no public transport available to the accommodation. Using private accommodation due to our family size means that we do put out our hosts somewhat and I do feel guilty."

“Waiting at the airport was a bit painful. Frequency of flights was an issue as we could not match connecting flights and had to wait for a longer period.”

“Did not like the arrival and departure times of the international flights which meant booking a hotel but only being there for a few hours before checkout.”

Law and Legislation

Another three percent (3%) of visitors surveyed simply stated that their whole experience was disappointing because of the Island’s laws and regulations, from wearing helmets, licensing, and shops closing on Sundays. Comments included:

“Inconsistent application of the helmet law - should be one law for everyone (wear a helmet).”

“The new helmet law on scooters.”

“That houses can only be leased and not bought by foreigners.”

“But worse is your driver licensing system. Bring back 5 year licenses. 30 day validity is a waste of time for someone who visits the Cooks regularly.”

“Getting the scooter license - What a crook of shit. That experience ruined part of our holiday. The questions were a mix of NZ, AUS & RARO rules and regulations! I asked if there was any training/learning documentation and got told no. So we were straight away set up to fail.”

“You arrive on a Sunday morning and nothing is open, it felt like you can't do anything or go anywhere.”

“The lack of things to do/see on a Sunday - great when you arrive and all you want to do is settle in but not great if it's the day you're leaving and check out is 10am but your flight isn't until late afternoon. However, I do understand why, from the religious aspect, it's just not something I'm used to.”

Rental cars or scooters

Two percent (2%) of respondents mentioned Rental cars and scooters as least appealing aspect of their Cook Islands visit. Respondents referred to the rental cars and scooters as being highly expensive, unreliable service, old vehicles, and process of getting a scooter licence. Comments included:

“Vehicle rental was a problem. We had booked and paid in advance but on arrival turned out company was no longer operating.”

“Airport transfers via taxi. Airport to the resort was like \$50+. So expensive.”

“Difficult taxi service /cars for hire, especially on Sundays.”

“Trying to rent a car. Waited for ages in the heat at two different firms only to be told nothing was available.”

“Trying to rent a scooter, it took 2 hours for the girl to process our agreement that had already been pre booked via internet.”

“Hired car was very old.”

Local people

Two percent of the respondents (2%) noted that the least appealing part of their visit was their interaction with local people in the Cook Islands. Common themes are the lack of friendliness, unhelpfulness and rudeness of local people, and some social issues. Comments included:

“Threatened by a local for driving down a driveway next to his house.”

“We were deliberately given currency we could not use as change from stores and told it was then not accepted. This seems to be a tourist rip off to make a few extra dollars.”

“Some local through a beer bottle at us while we were riding a bike. I suspect he was a mad man and I don’t blame Cook island people for one idiot.”

“Some of the attitudes of locals to tourists. We were at times treated as a nuisance and just another source of income. It wasn't as friendly as I thought it would be.”

“The people collecting money so you could drive down the Falls road, when it was dry season and there was not any water to make a waterfall.”

“I felt bad that most young adults had to move to New Zealand or Australia to earn money for their families. Also noticed how hard the Cook Islanders with families had to work very long hours for their jobs for little money.”

“The different range of wealth was really noticeable.”

“The accommodation is all over priced. Where does all the tourism money go??!!?? Certainly not on infrastructure.... Locals seemed tired & bored with tourists.”

Too touristy

Two percent (2%) of respondents mentioned the Cook Islands as being a place too touristy, commercialised, and overcrowded with visitors. Visitors also mentioned some negative behaviours from other visitors. Comments included:

“Well, Raro is getting fairly busy these days, but that is a measure of its own success.”

“Very unimpressed with excessive number of visitors on Rarotonga. Will never stay in Rarotonga again...Too overcrowded with visitors.”

“There seemed to be a lot more cars/utes on the roads than in 2009. The beauty of Rarotonga is the quiet laid back feel of the place. It won't be the same if it gets too busy.”

“Some of the other tourists are very demanding, loud and annoying. Not the Cook Islands fault.”

“Arrogant Aussie tourists on the bus.”

Safety

Safety of the Cook Islands as a holiday destination was mentioned by one percent (1%) of respondents. In particular, they referred to increase in crime rate and low road safety as being paramount at the Island. Comments included:

“Sorry to say the theft it is disturbing and frightening! I have had many a person tell me they had there camera stolen mobile phone stolen and so on, this behaviour will let Raro down and harm your tourist industry.”

“Females with infants riding bikes.”

“Very surprised to see children allowed on motorbikes without helmets.”

“The apparent lack of safety for passengers especially children being carried on motorcycles.”

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, over a third (38%) of respondents said 'yes'. Of the group that made suggestions 21% focused on public services and infrastructure, entertainment, activities and transport (15%), accommodation (13%), environment/safety/animal care (13%), a longer stay or to visit more places (12%), value for money (11%), and quality/cost of food and beverages (8%), flight schedules in and out of Cook Islands (6%), attitude of locals and service levels (6%), weather (5%), information (4%). Comments on these themes included:

"Faster processing on arrival and air conditioning in the airport departure lounge."

"Better, easier driver license system and long validity periods."

"Better internet and phone access."

"Better public transportation and frequency."

"More accessible info online about renting scooters so people can prepare ahead of their flight and include the time it takes to secure a license into their schedule."

"Had more hiking and trail walking guided tours. Both easy and moderate trails. You have beautiful mountains but limited guided tours."

"More local and authentic things to buy."

"I would have liked more opportunities for classes in traditional cooking, art, music, etc. I also did not learn about the traditional sailing ship until too late to visit it. Those things are what make the Cook Islands special. But it would have to be a real class, not just a tourist show."

"Urgently attend to pollution/rubbish on land and sea."

"If the motels and hotels are forced to pump their septic tanks weekly to prevent contamination of the lagoons in Raro and Aitutaki."

"The more you develop as an eco-nation, and a nation committed to stopping climate change, the more unique Rarotonga will be."

"Resolve Mosquito/rooster problems"

"Better quality accommodation. Was a bit rough and dated for the price."

"Tell people especially in the hotel areas that foreigners have another standard and probably do not accept non hygienic."

"Easier flight schedules - the very late arrivals/departures are hard."

“Food - was highly dissapointed by the lack of fresh seafood! and traditional Cook Island cuisine.”

“Lower food and drink prices.”

“More information on the internet about activities available.”

“Public relations, sophistication, manners and if you don't want to be employed to perform in tacky weddings, tourism needs to rethink offering this.”

“The locals weren't very helpful when asking questions, the accommodation”

“When hiring a car, there were lots of hidden costs not advertised which would have influenced our car hire more. Also, can only use cash or credit card, no EFTPOS.”

“Cheaper prices of everything will definitely improve the experience.”

“More sun! But obviously the weather is unpredictable!!”

Reasons to return to the Cook Islands and recommend to others

The majority of visitors (94%) indicated that they would consider re-visiting the Cook Islands in the future. This figure is slightly higher than the 2016/17 annual average of 92%, but lower than the identical quarter in 2016 (95%). Of the 6 percent of visitors who added reasons why they would not want to return to the Cook Islands, the majority simply stated that they wanted to visit other destinations (43%). Some visitors (12%) commented that a holiday to the Cook Islands is expensive compared to other destinations. Other factors included have already revisited the Cook Islands (10%), limited attractions and activities (7%), have seen all they could see (5%), the long distance to the Cook Islands (5%), too touristy and commercial (5%), low level of service (3%), and bad weather (2%). Comments included:

"It's nice but there are so many other places in the world I want to go to."

"Everything is overpriced especially flying to Aitutaki and Mauke."

"Have been twice. Not a definite no, but probably would like to visit other Pacific Islands."

"Not many activities to do... not as exciting as other pacific islands."

"Have seen all we wanted to see!"

"To far away from Holland, otherwise I would return."

Under half (41%) of the visitors mentioned that they would definitely include the outer islands in their next visit. A further 54% of visitors indicated they will "maybe" visit outer islands next time. Most (94%) 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 31%; another 20% of visitors stated that they would like to visit Mangaia, 16% of the respondents would like to visit Mauke. A small number of visitors mentioned Manihiki, Palmerston, Penrhyn, Pukapuka, or as many as they can visit. A number of respondents were not sure which other islands to visit and needed to do some research before deciding.

Nearly all visitors surveyed (98%) said that they would recommend the destination to their family and friends which is consistent with previous survey periods. Only 2% of visitors would not recommend the Cook Islands to others and this is largely based on the high prices, a lack of environmental care, touristy, and limited attractions or activities.

Final observations

This report shows that the Cook Islands tourism industry generally performed well during the October to December 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. However visitor spend has dropped from the same period last year and it will be important to see if this trend is sustained for the rest of the year.

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 about the value for money/quality of service provided by accommodation, stray animals and mosquitos; environmental degradation and limitations to food/beverage.

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 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. Using the calendar below, please select the date you arrived in the Cook Islands.

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

3. What was the main purpose of your visit?

- Holiday
- Wedding party
- Business or conference
- Visiting friends or relatives
- Honeymoon
- Special event - sporting
- Special event - cultural
- Volunteering
- Education
- Other reason, please specify _____

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. Did you travel by yourself to the Cook Islands?

- Yes
- No

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

- a) Partner / husband / wife
- b) Family member(s)
- c) Friends

- d) Work colleagues
- e) Tour group
- f) Organised group (e.g. school, sports etc)
- g) Wedding party
- h) Other _____

6. How many people accompanied you on this trip?

- a) 1
- b) 2
- c) 3
- d) 4
- e) 5
- f) 6
- g) 7
- h) 8
- i) 9
- j) 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) (7)
- General travel websites (e.g. TripAdvisor) (8)
- Web search engines (e.g. Google) (9)
- Other (10) _____

8. How important were the following sources of information when planning your trip to the Cook Islands? (from 1 to 5, 1 refers to not at all important and 5 refers to extremely important)

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)

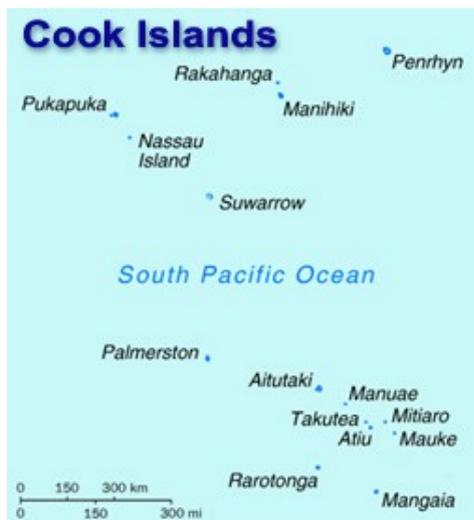
General travel websites (e.g. Trip Advisor) (8)

Web search engines (e.g. Google) (9)

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? (Tick as many as apply)



10.1 How many nights did you spend on each island?

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

10.2 Please select the accommodation(s) you stayed in on Ratorotonga? (Hold down the Ctrl key to choose more than one accommodation)

10.3. 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)

10.4 Please select the accommodation(s) you stayed in on Aitutaki? (Hold down the Ctrl key to choose more than one accommodation)

10.5 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)

10.6 Please select the accommodation(s) you stayed in on Atiu? (Hold down the Ctrl key to choose more than one accommodation)

10.7 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)

10.8 Please select the accommodation(s) you stayed in on Mangaia? (Hold down the Ctrl key to choose more than one accommodation)

10.9 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)

10.10 Please select the accommodation(s) you stayed in on Mauke? (Hold down the Ctrl key to choose more than one accommodation)

10.11 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)

11. 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:

12. 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?

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

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

15. 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.

16. Did you prepay for any of your travel arrangements prior to arrival?

- a) Yes
- b) No

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

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

16.2 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: _____

16.3 Please indicate below the total value of what you prepaid (including purchases made via travel agents or the Internet) (Please enter only numbers in the box provided e.g. 1000).

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

- a) International flights
- b) Accommodation
- c) Breakfast or meals
- d) Domestic transport
- e) Activities
- f) Other

17. Did you spend any money while in the Cook Islands?

- a) Yes
- b) No

17.1 In the expenditure estimates you will provide below, how many people are included (counting yourself)?

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

17.2 During your most recent visit to the Cook Islands, how much do you estimate that you spent in each island in local currency (NZ\$)? Please enter your spend figures in the boxed provided e.g. 1000)

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

18. Was the Cook Islands the only country you visited on this trip?

- a) Yes
- b) No

18.1 What other destinations were included in that bigger trip?

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

- a) Yes
- b) No- please give reasons why not _____

19.1 Would you visit the outer islands next time?

- a) yes
- b) maybe
- c) no

19.2 Would you include the following outer islands? (tick as many as apply)

- Aitutaki (1)
- Atiu (2)
- Mangaia (3)
- Mauke (4)
- Other (5) _____

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

- a) Yes
- b) No - please give reasons why not _____

21. 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')?

ABOUT YOU

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

23. Your age group:

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

24. Your gender:

- a) Female
- b) Male

25. What is your highest qualification?

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

26. 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 26.1.

26.1 Please select your currency

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

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

27.1 If you are from New Zealand, which region do you live in (Please select from the list)?

Please provide your New Zealand post code in the box below. (This helps the Cook Islands to garget its limited marketing budget).

27.2 If you are from Australia, which state do you live in (Please select from the list)?

Please provide your Australian post code in the box below. (This helps the Cook Islands to garget its limited marketing budget).

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