

# Cook Islands Visitor Survey Results

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**April – June 2018**

**Prepared for Cook Islands Tourism Corporation**

**by**

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

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## **Acknowledgements**

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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 April and 30 June 2018. The data presented is collected from an online departure survey (<http://www.mycookislandsvisit.com>). There were 1,159 individual respondents to the survey - representing a total of 2,261 adults and 364 children in the expenditure analysis (this equates to 6% of all visitors during the period – based on the same period of 2018 visitor arrival data from the Cook Islands Statistics Office).

Over half (59%) of visitors surveyed come from New Zealand, 19% 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 (42%) travel with one companion. Solo travellers are relatively rare (13%).

Over half of those surveyed (61%) are first time visitors to the Cook Islands, a further 22% have visited twice or three times before. The main purpose of visit is holiday-making (77%). The average length of stay in the Cook Islands is 8.3 nights. The majority (95%) of visitors stay either one or two weeks. Nearly a quarter of visitors surveyed visited Aitutaki (21%) in addition to Rarotonga.

Visitor spend prior to arrival in the Cook Islands (\$1,911 per person) has decreased from the 2016/2017 annual average (\$2,042 per person). Spend on the island (per person per day) is \$153. This spend is higher than the 2016/17 annual average of \$150, and the same quarter for the previous year (\$143 for April to June 2017).

The average local spend per visitor during the entirety of their stay is \$1,274. When pre-paid spend and the local spend are combined, it is estimated that each visitor brings \$2,082 to the Cook Islands economy (or approximately \$250 per day). This figure is lower than the \$2,150 average for 2016/17 and slightly lower than the \$2,093 for the same quarter last year (April to June 2017).

Overall visitor satisfaction levels with Cook Islands services and experiences remain high. The most appealing elements are environment cleanliness and weather; local people; activities, attractions, entertainment and events; and atmosphere. 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; poor weather; accommodation; and attractions and activities.

The future intentions of visitors remained very similar to the results from the previous year: 92% of those surveyed state that they want to return to the Cook Islands, and 96% 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 a few weeks of the 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 April to June 2018. Over this three-month period, 8,611 visitors were contacted by email to take part in the survey, and 1,159 responses were received: a conversion rate of 13%. These responses cover a total of 2,261 adults and 364 children. The conversion rate for this period is lower than the April to June 2017 quarter (17%). This reduction reflects some unanticipated delays in receiving email addresses for mail out and steps have already been taken to rectify this for future analysis periods.

The data presented includes detailed information on:

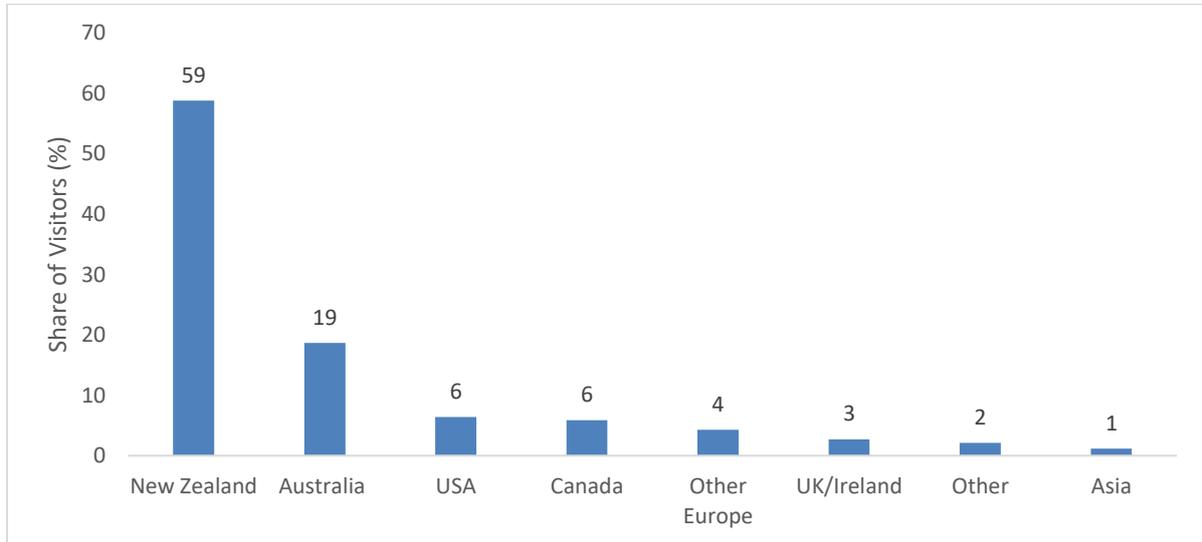
- The characteristics of visitors to the Cook Islands (age, gender, education, country of origin, income, purpose of visit, travelling companions, number of previous visits, length of stay, airline used, islands visited)
- Visitor information obtained about the Cook Islands, the factors influencing in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

## Visitor Characteristics

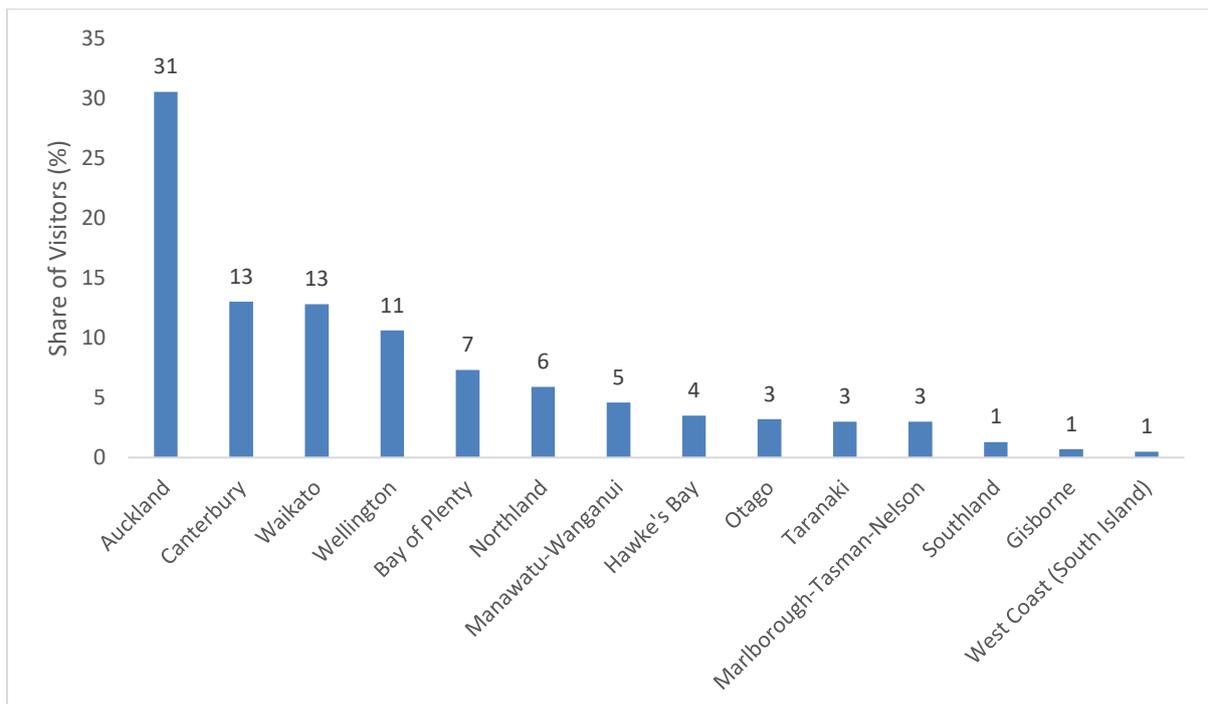
Well over half (59%) of the visitors surveyed come from New Zealand (Figure 1). The second largest visitor group is from Australia (19%). USA, Canada, other Europe, and UK/Ireland represent the other main source markets.

**Figure 1: Country of origin (n = 1010)**

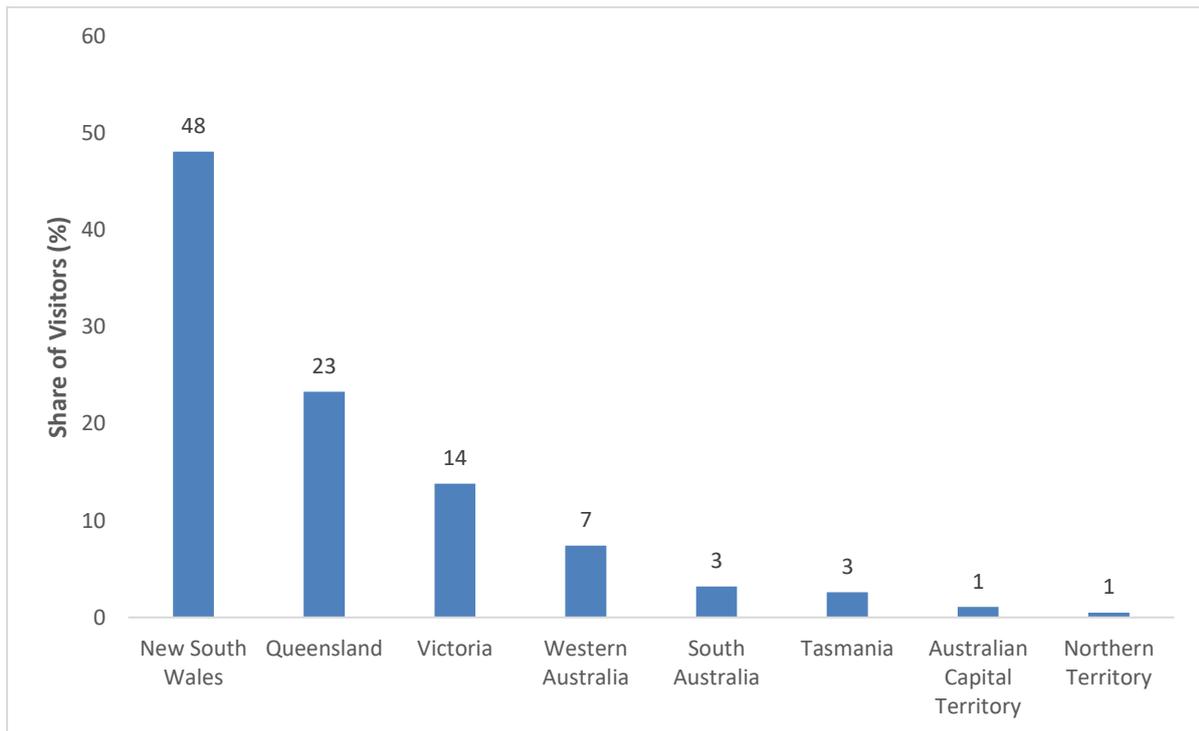


Auckland, Canterbury, Waikato, Wellington, and Bay of Plenty account for 74% of New Zealand visitors. For visitors from Australia, the regions of New South Wales, Queensland, and Victoria generate the highest numbers of arrivals (85%) (Figure 2-3).

**Figure 2: New Zealand visitors (n = 593)**

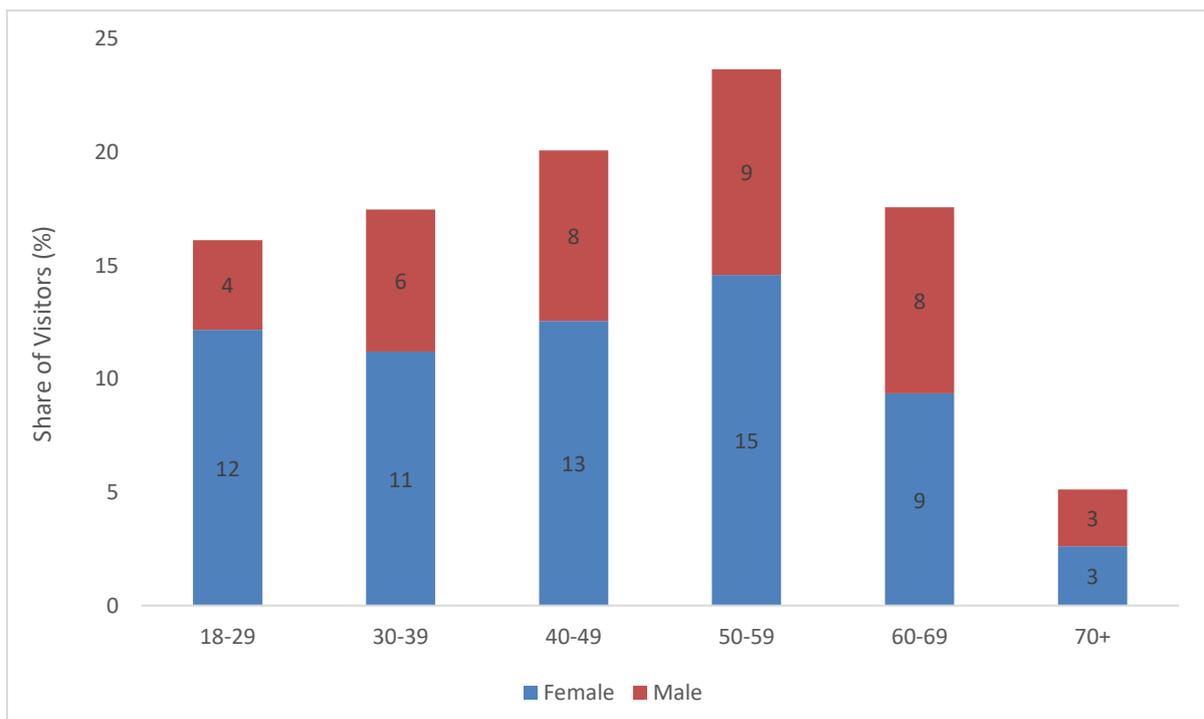


**Figure 3: Australia visitors (n = 189)**



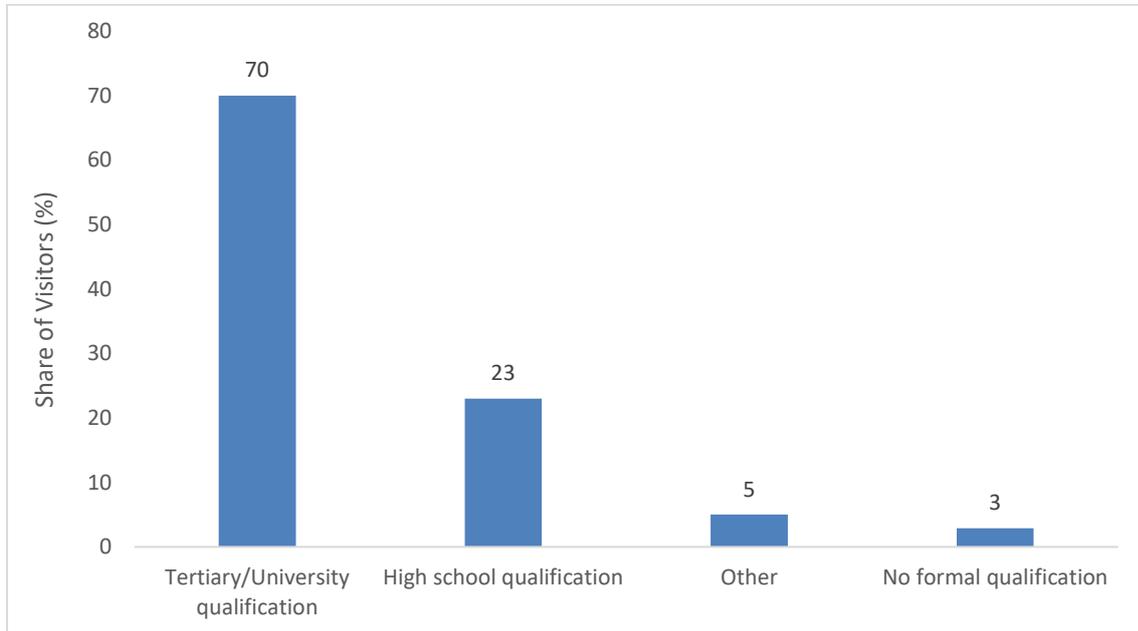
More women (62%) than men (38%) completed the survey (Figure 4). The most significant age categories are the 50 to 59 year (24%) grouping, the 40 to 49 year (20%) grouping, followed by those aged 60 to 69 (18%), 30 to 39 (17%), and 18 to 29 (16%). There are relatively few travellers in the 70 plus age bracket (5%).

**Figure 4: Distribution of age and gender (n = 1036)**



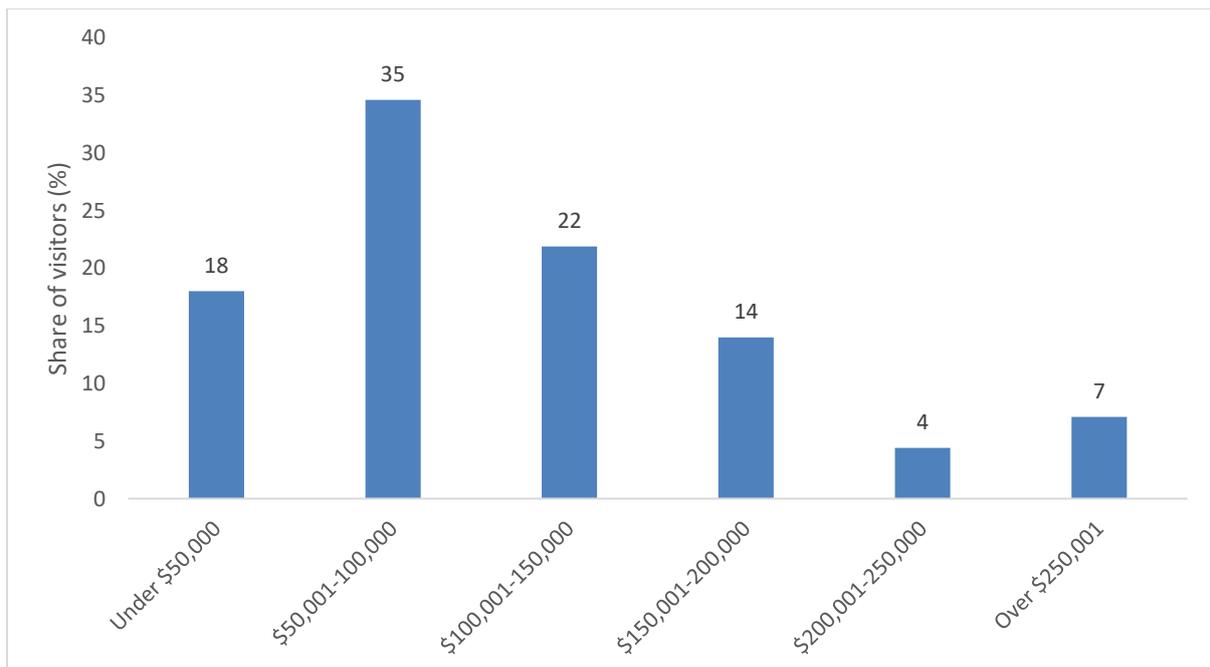
Visitors are well educated: over two-thirds (73%) of those surveyed have some form of tertiary qualification, with a further 20% having completed a high school education (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Highest qualification (n = 1035)**



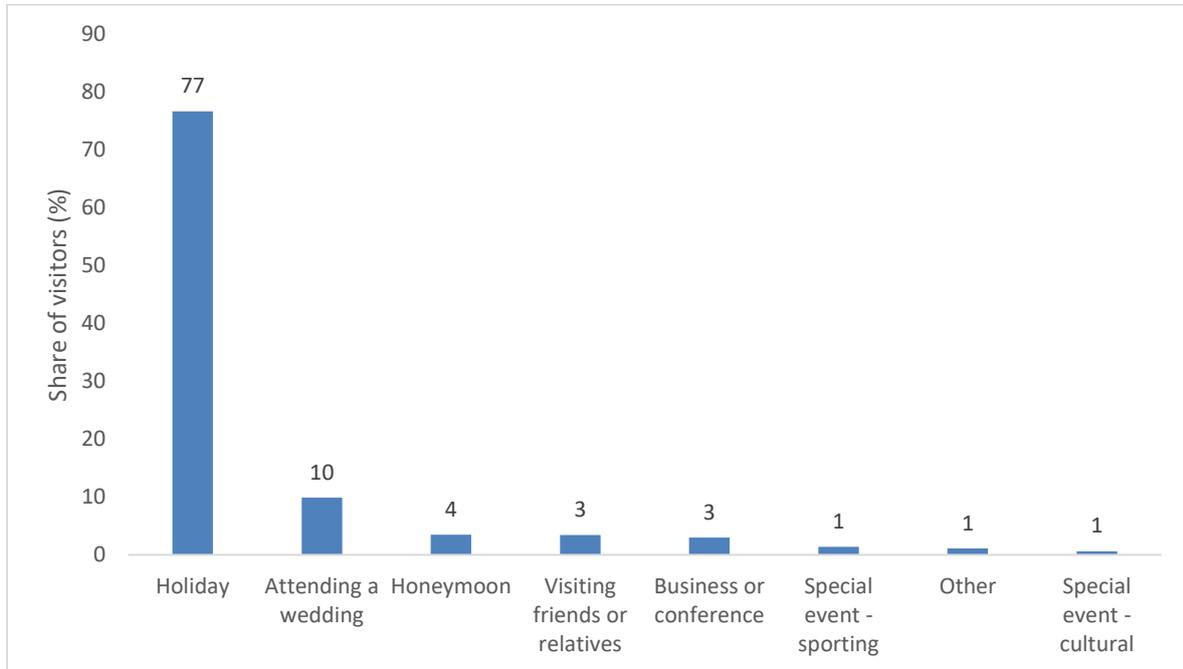
Over a third of visitors (35%) have an annual household income of between NZ\$50,001 and NZ\$100,000. Nearly a quarter (22%) of those surveyed earn between NZ\$100,001 and NZ\$150,000. A further 26% of respondents have a household income of over NZ\$150,000 per year (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Annual household income in NZD (n = 813)**



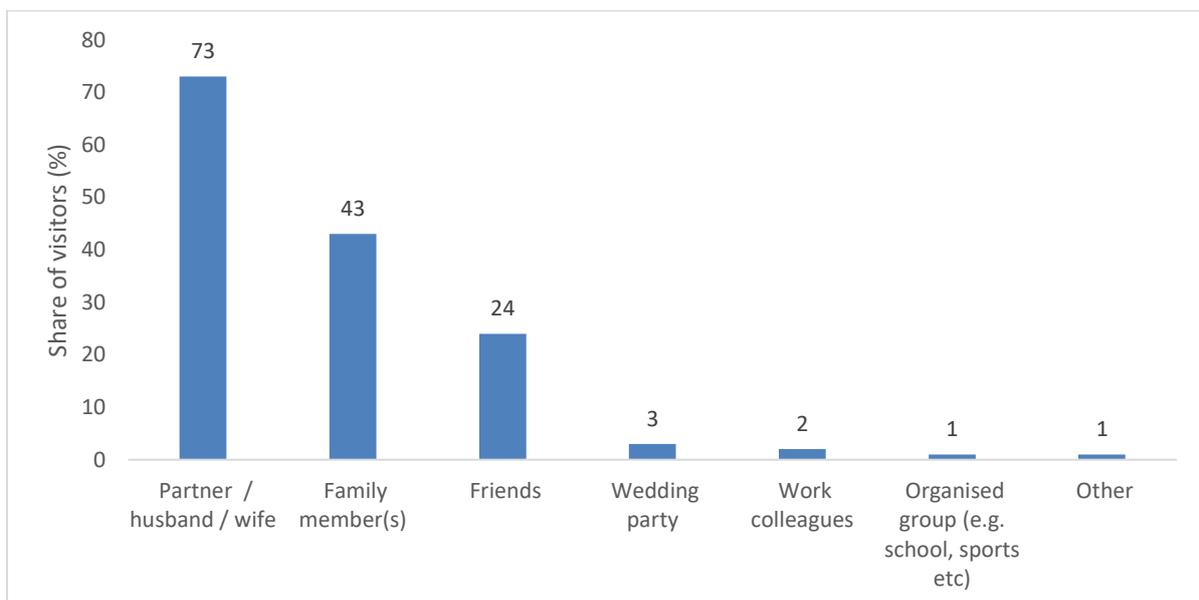
Over three quarters of visitors surveyed come to the Cook Islands for a holiday (77%). Other reasons given include attending a wedding (10%), a honeymoon (4%), visiting friends or relatives (3%), and for business and conference (3%).

**Figure 7: Main purpose of visit (n = 1158)**



The majority of visitors travel with companion(s) (87%). Among these visitors, most (73%) travel to the Cook Islands with a partner or spouse. Visitors also travel with other family members (43%), or with friends (24%). 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).

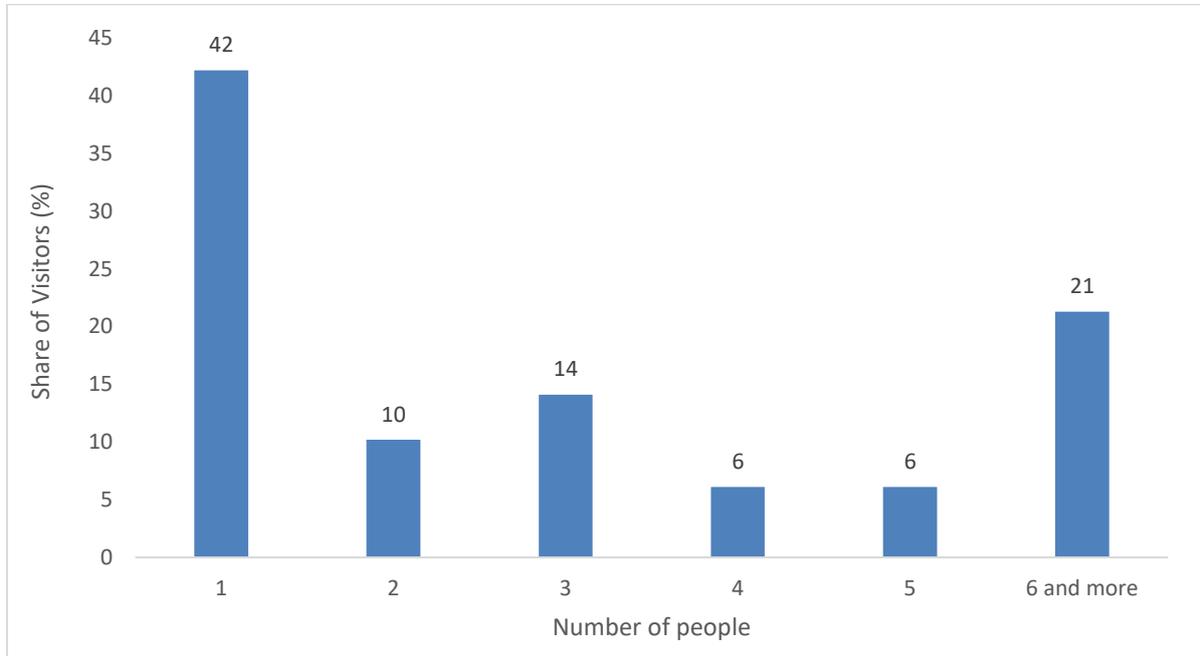
**Figure 8: Travelling with whom? (n = 1008)**



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

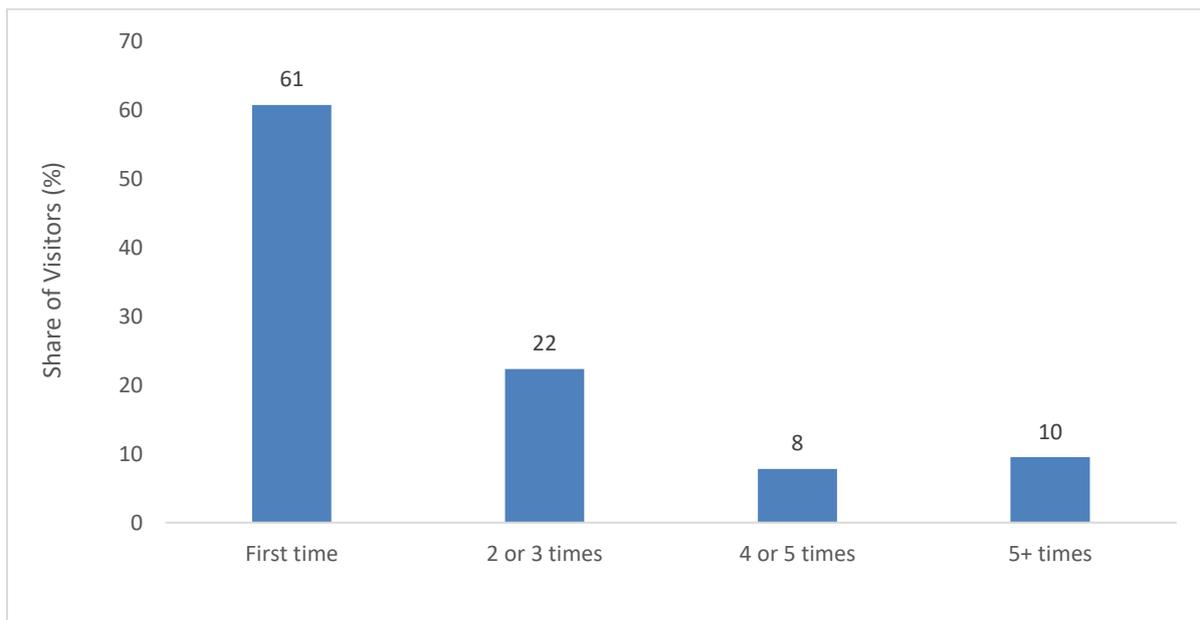
Nearly half of the visitors (42%) travelled with one companion on their visit to the Cook Islands (Figure 9). Travel groups larger than four people are not very common, with the exception of wedding parties.

**Figure 9: Number of companions on trip (n = 931)**



Nearly two thirds of the visitors (61%) are on their first visit to the Cook Islands. A further 22% have been to the Cook Islands twice or three times before. A smaller group (18%) have visited four or more times (Figure 10).

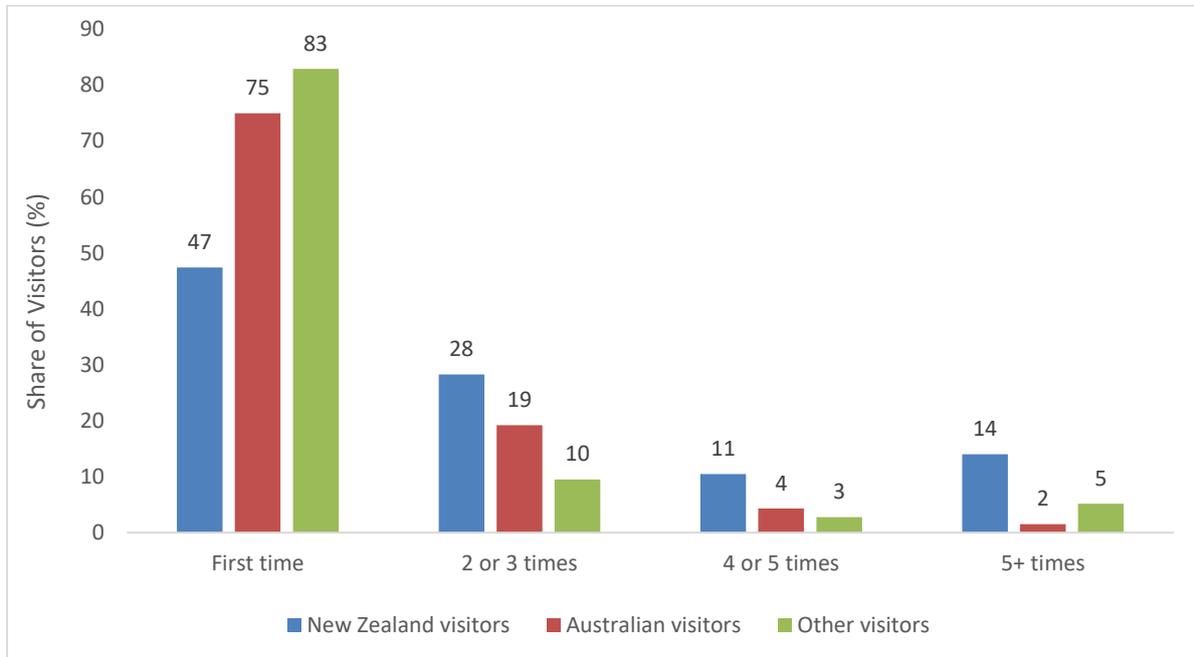
**Figure 10: Number of visits to the Cook Islands (n = 1032)**



*Note: Due to the decimal carry, total does not add up to 100%*

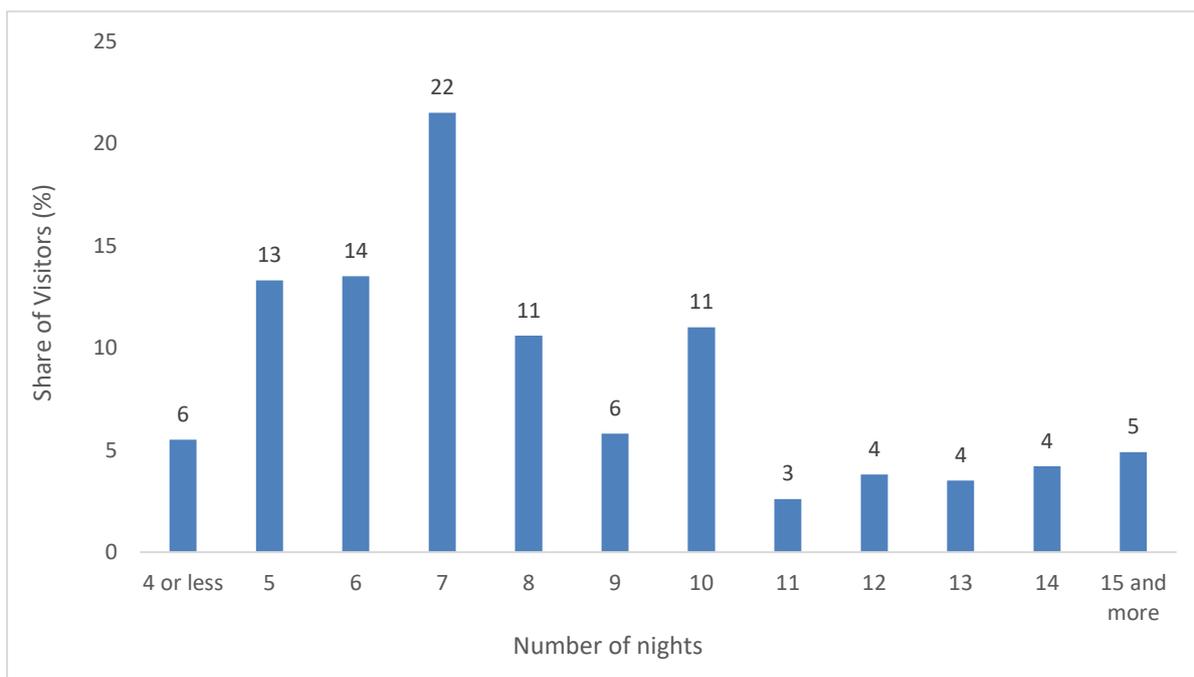
New Zealanders are more likely to be repeat visitors than those from other source markets (Figure 11). Over half of the surveyed visitors from New Zealand (53%) have visited the Cook Islands before compared to only 25% of visitors from Australia and 18% from other countries.

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



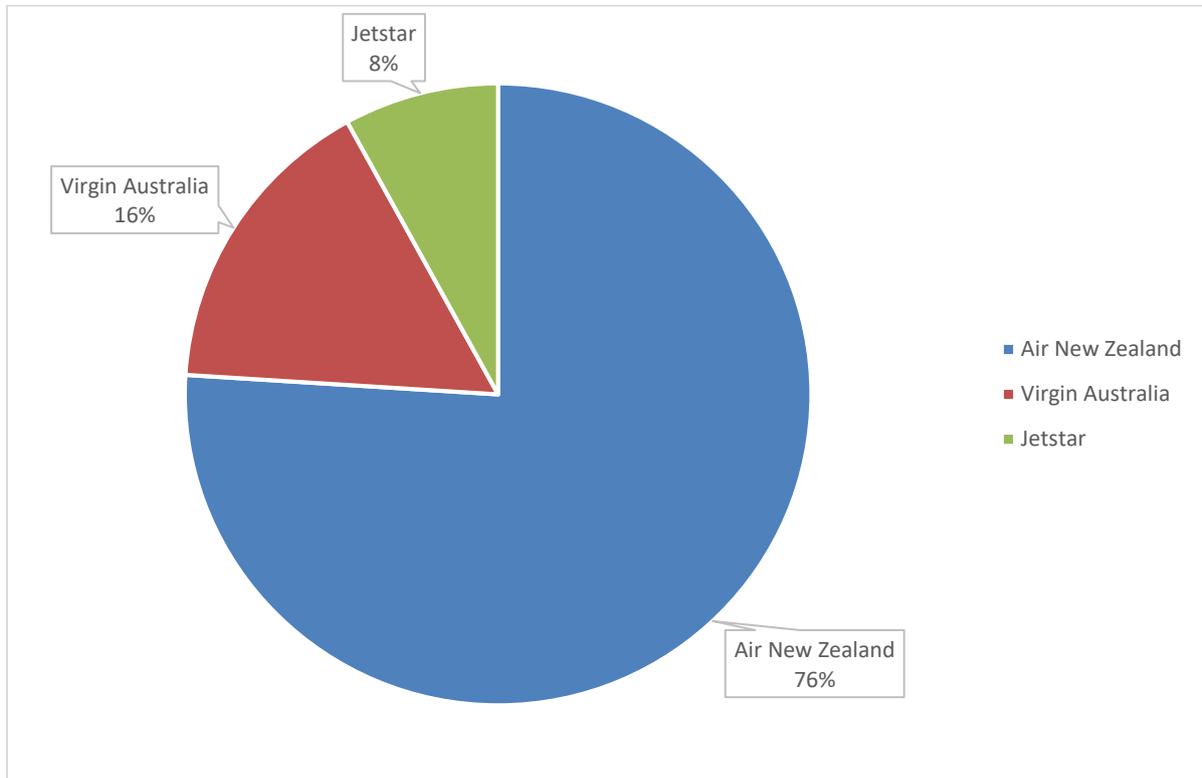
The average length of stay in the Cook Islands is 8.3 nights with 81% of visitors spending 10 or fewer nights in the country (Figure 12).

**Figure 12: Length of stay in nights (n = 1032)**



Over three quarters of visitors (76%) travel to/from the Cook Islands with Air New Zealand, a further 16% visitors fly with Virgin Australia (Figure 13), followed by eight percent of visitors travelling with Jetstar.

**Figure 13: Mode of transport (n = 1157)**

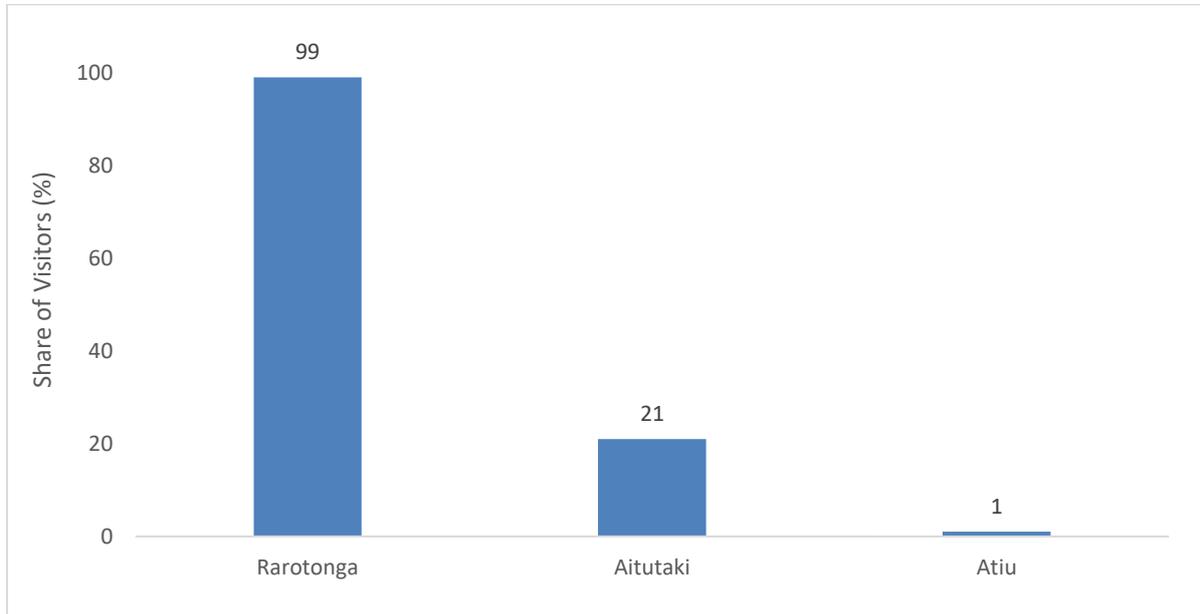


*Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%*

For 84% of visitors, the Cook Islands is the sole destination for their trip. For 16% 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 (77%), followed by travel to Australia (25%), North America (23%), Asian countries (19%), other pacific countries (14%), and Europe (1%).

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).

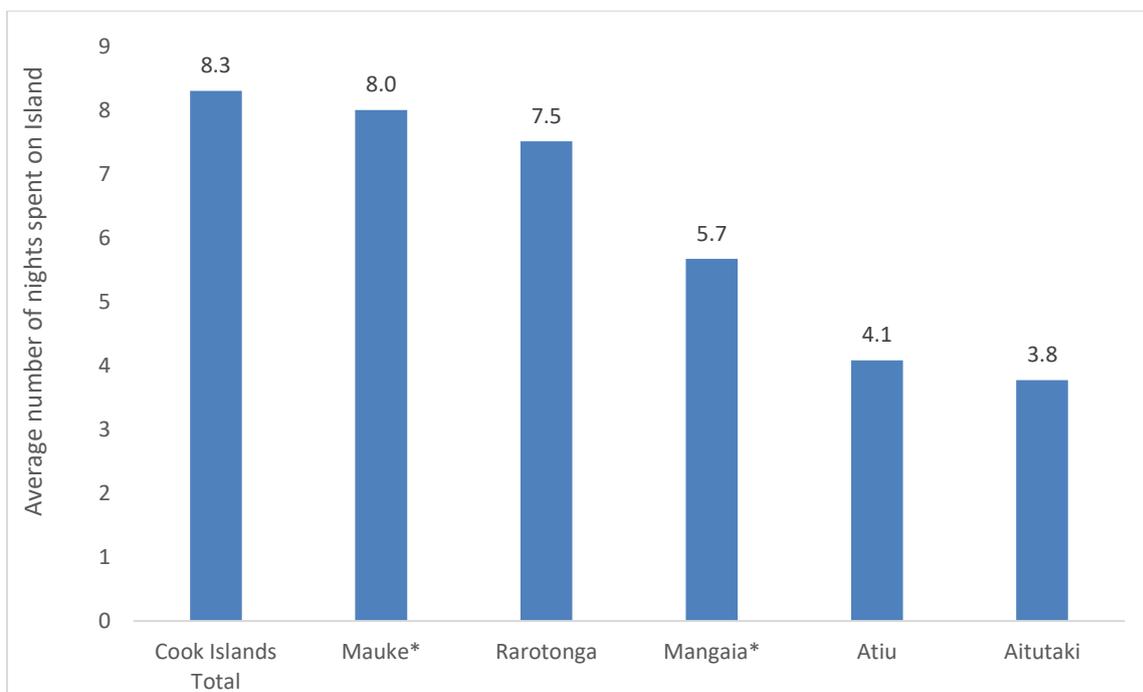
**Figure 14: Visited Islands (n = 1154)**



*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 7.5 nights (Figure 15). For the visitors that went to Aitutaki, the average number of nights spent on the island itself is 3.8. The relatively small number of visitors to Atiu spent an average of 4.1 nights.

**Figure 15: Average length of stay in the Cook Islands and on each island (n = 1134)**

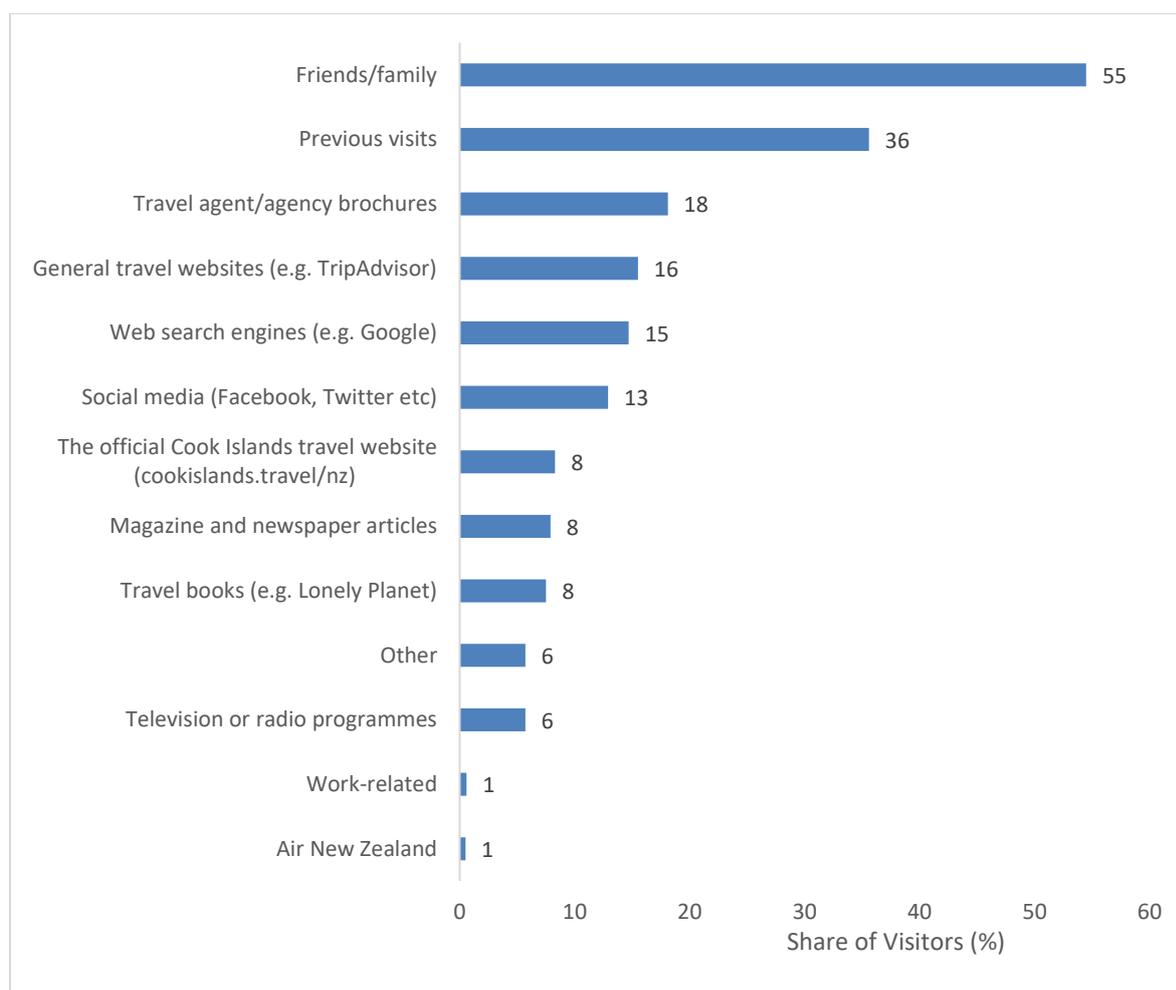


*Note: \*n<5*

## 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 (55%) of respondents ranked word of mouth from friends and family members as the most important influence, followed by previous experience (36%), travel agents (18%), general travel websites (e.g. Tripadvisor) (16%), and web search engines (e.g. Google) (15%).

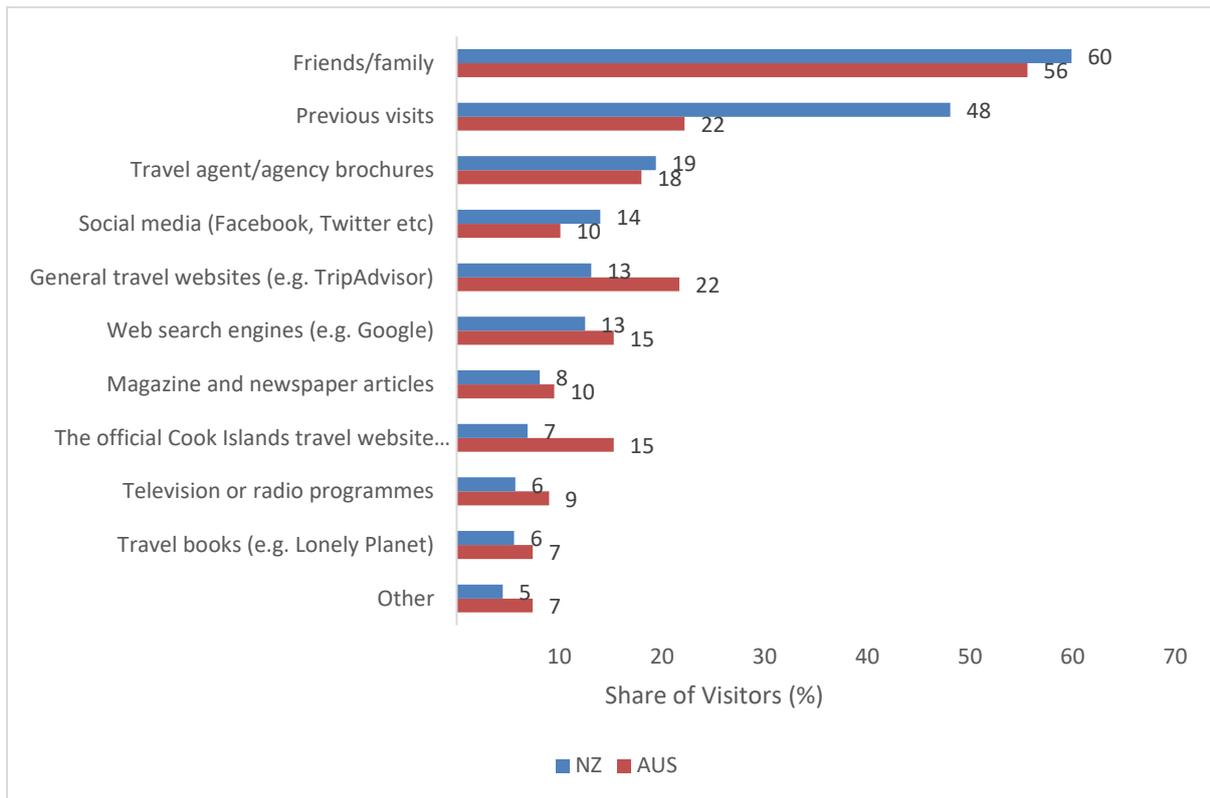
**Figure 16: How did you find out about Cook Islands as a destination (n = 1158)**



*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 (60%). 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 (48%) ranked their previous visits as the most important information source (Australian visitors 22%). Australian visitors were more likely to rank general travel websites, travel agent/agency brochures, travel websites, web search engine, the official Cook Islands travel website, and magazine and newspaper articles as the most important influence.

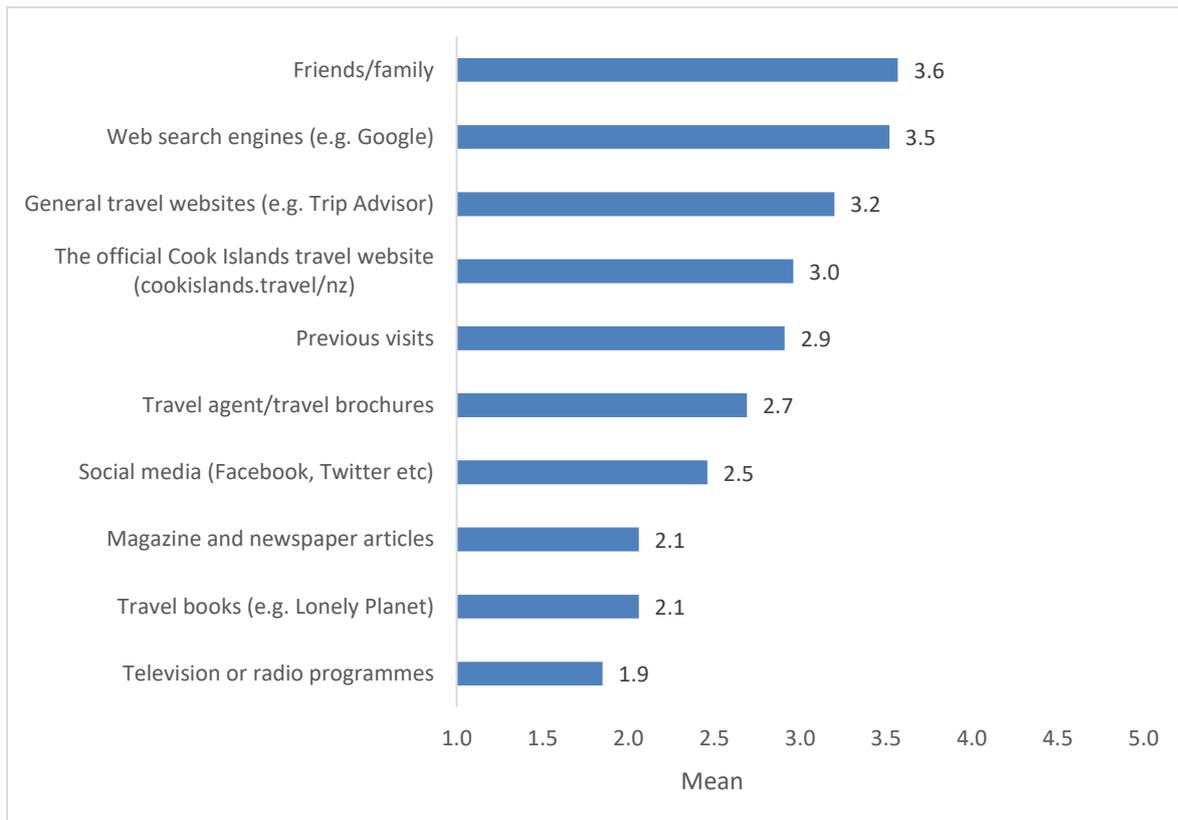
**Figure 17: How did you find out about Cook Islands as a destination – country breakdown**



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

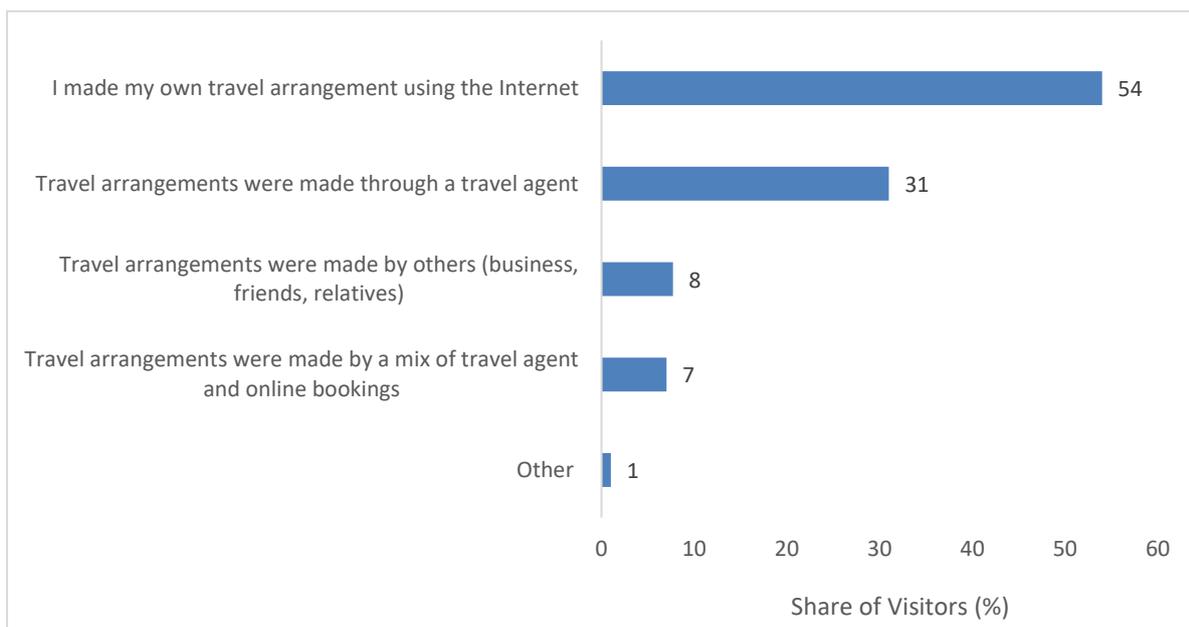
When visitors were asked to rank the importance of the listed information sources used to plan their trip, friends and family members are ranked as the most important source (3.6) (Figure 18). Other important information sources are web search engines (3.5), general travel websites (3.2), the official Cook Islands travel website (3.0), and previous visits (2.9).

**Figure 18: Importance of information source used when planning your trip (n = 1155)**



Over half of visitors surveyed (54%) purchased a pre-paid trip through online websites (Figure 19). A smaller group of visitors surveyed (31%) made their own travel arrangements through travel agents, followed by 8% of visitors whose travel arrangements were made by others such as business, friends, and relatives, or a mix of travel agent and online bookings.

**Figure 19: How did you purchase your travel to the Cook Islands (n = 1156)**

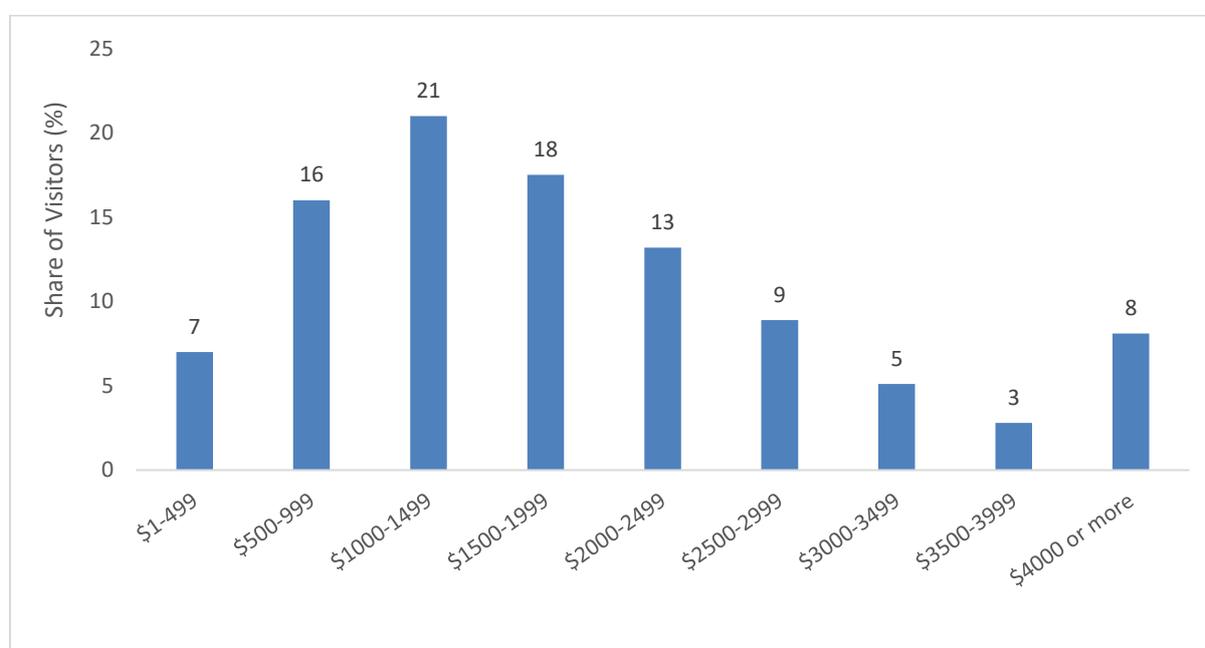


## Visitor Expenditure

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: 2,605 people comprising 2,241 adults and 364 children.

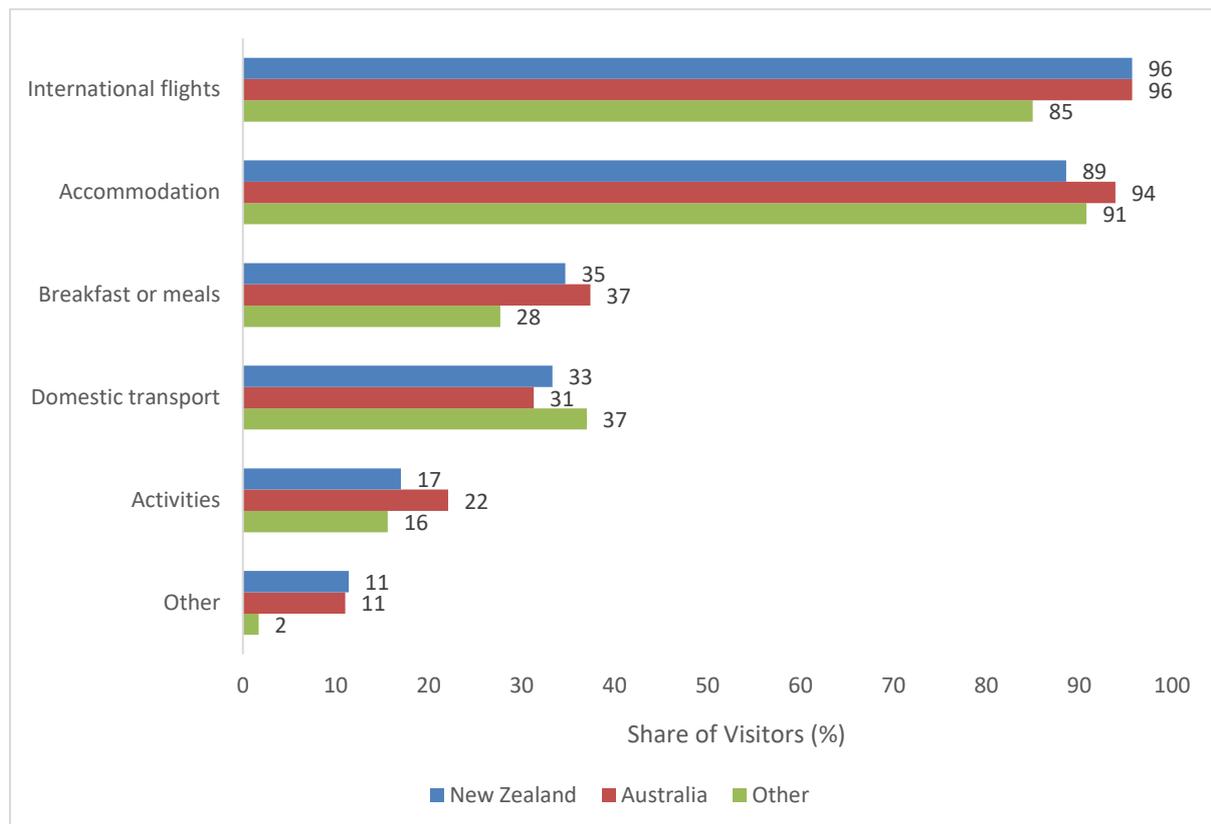
On average, visitors to the Cook Islands spend NZ\$1,911 per person prior to arrival. Over half (52%) of the visitors spend between NZ\$1,000 and NZ\$2,499 prior to arrival (Figure 20). These figures are lower than the data from the previous year (average spend of NZ\$2,042 for 2016/17), and the same quarter for 2016/17 (NZ\$2,075).

**Figure 20: Amount of money spent per person prior to arrival (n = 788)**



In addition to international flights and domestic transport, spending prior to arrival usually includes accommodation: in 89% of the cases for New Zealand visitors, 94% for Australian visitors, and for 91% of visitors from other countries (Figure 21). Over one third of visitors prepaid for breakfast and meals prior to arrival (35% for New Zealand, 37% of Australian visitors, and for 28% of visitors from other countries). 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\$764 (8.3 nights).

The total spend per visitor per day while in the Cook Islands (excluding any pre-paid expenditure) is NZ\$153 (Table 1). This figure is higher than the in-country spend figure for 2016/17 (NZ\$150) and same quarter in 2016/17 (NZ\$143). The majority of money spent locally is on accommodation (42%), restaurants, cafes and bars (21%), and shopping (6%). These per person expenditure figures are based on 1,159 survey responses covering a total of 2,562 people (2,180 adults and 382 children).

By multiplying daily spend by the average stay (8.3 nights) we can see that each visitor spends on average NZ\$1,274 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\$245 per visitor per day (\$153 + \$92), or NZ\$2,038 (\$1,274 + \$764) for each visitor.

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

Expenditure Items	n = 2562	
	Mean (NZ\$)	(% of spend)
Accommodation	64	42
Restaurant, cafes and bar	32	21
Shopping	10	6
Domestic flights	2	1
Activities	9	6
Vehicle rental	1	0
Groceries	2	1
Other	2	1
Cruising	8	5
Internet cost	12	8
Petrol	10	6
Public transportation	2	1
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>100</b>

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\$178. By comparison, New Zealand visitors spend on average NZ\$31 less than Australia visitors per day (NZ\$147).

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

Expenditure Items	n = 233	n = 448	n = 1859	n = 140
	USA/ Canada	Australia	New Zealand	Europe
Accommodation	68	85	59	53
Restaurant, Cafes and Bar	30	35	33	30
Shopping	12	15	12	9
Vehicle rental	9	10	10	4
Activities	12	10	10	7
Groceries	9	6	9	6
Domestic Flights	13	9	7	17
Internet	3	2	2	2
Petrol	2	2	2	1
Other	2	3	2	5
Cruising	2	3	2	2
Public Transportation	1	1	1	1
<b>Total spend (NZ\$)</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>138</b>

Average Australian spend per person for this quarter (NZ\$178) was lower compared to the 2016/17 average of NZ\$185, and higher than the same quarter in 2016/17 (NZ\$160). New Zealanders' spend of NZ\$147 per person per day was higher than the average of \$143 for 2016/17 but lower than the same quarter in the previous year (NZ\$164). European visitor

spend at NZ\$138 per person per day was lower than the average for 2016/17 of NZ\$146, and the same quarter in the previous year (NZ\$148). The average spend of NZ\$162 for visitors from USA/Canada for this period was the same as the 2016/17 average of NZ\$162, but lower than the same quarter in 2016/17 (NZ\$174).

## 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 (67%) of the visitors surveyed were 'very satisfied' with their overall experience of the Cook Islands. Very few visitors (3%) 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 = 1044)**

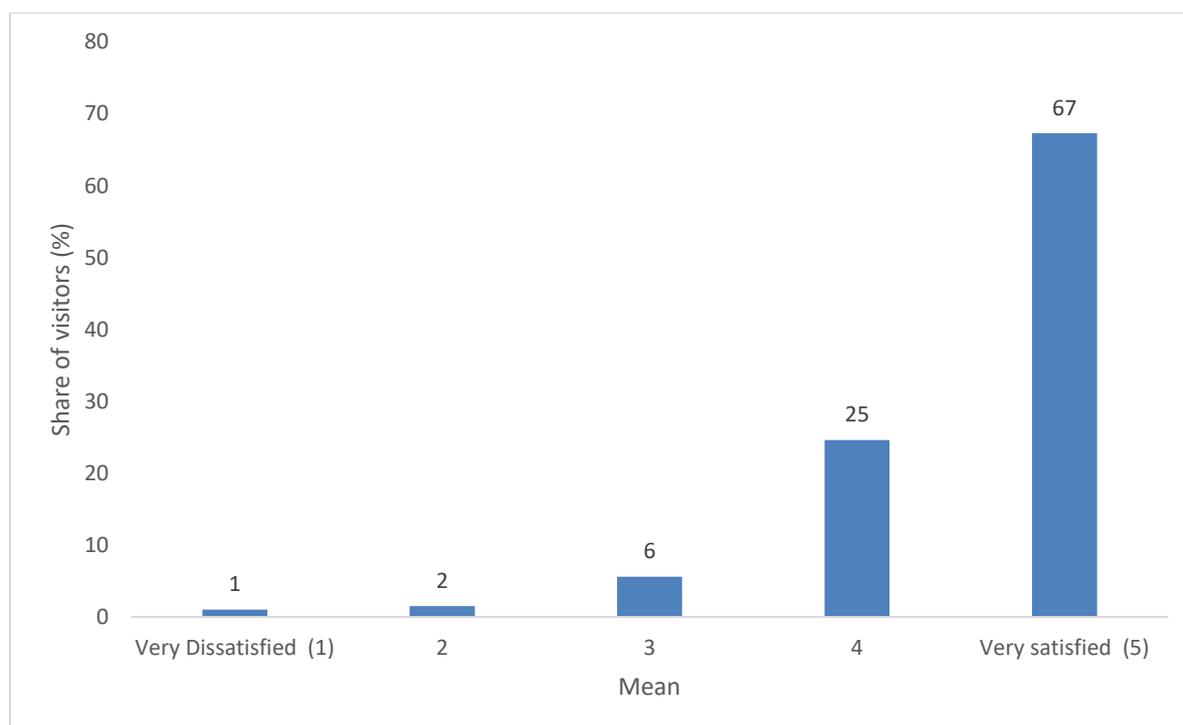
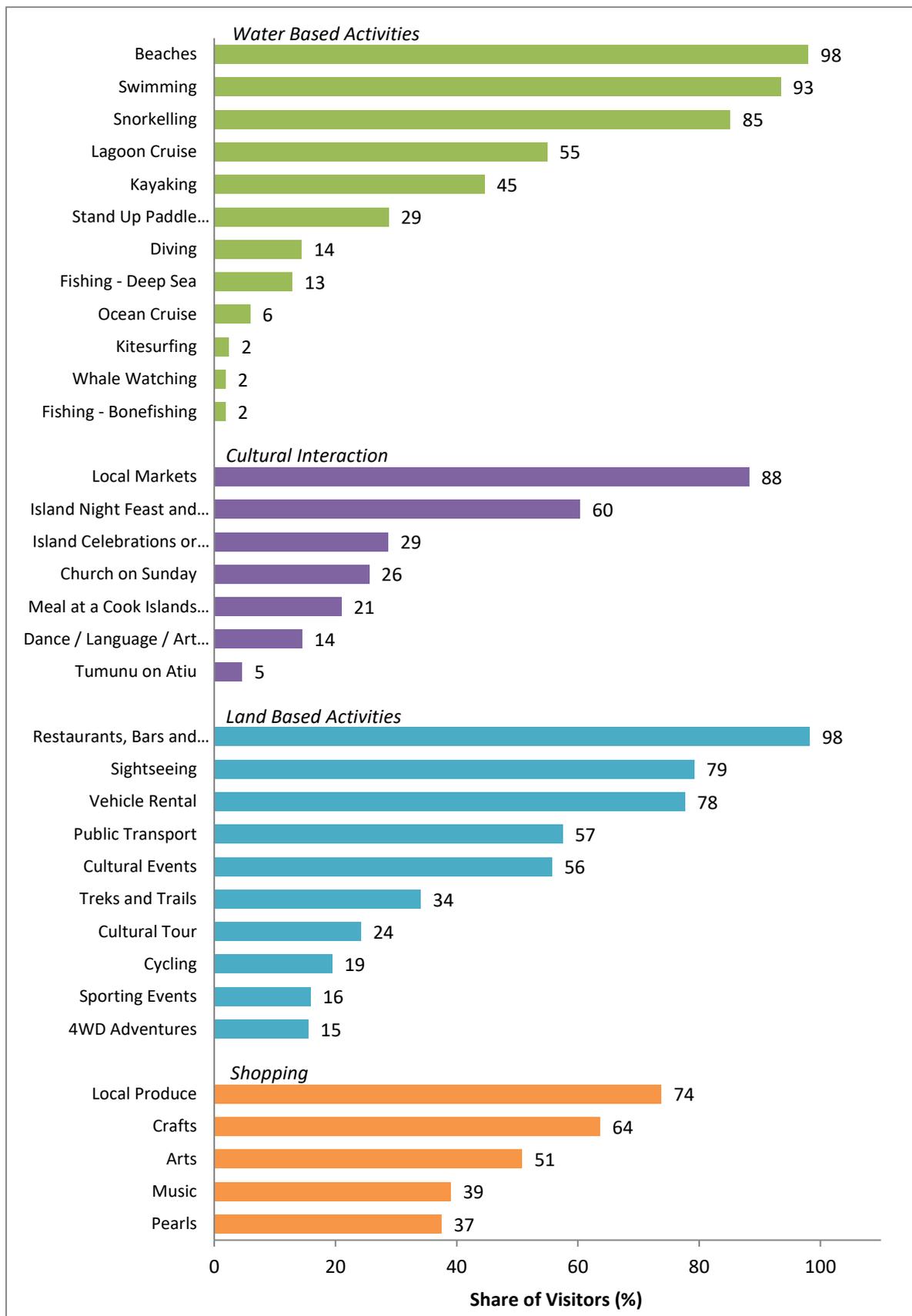


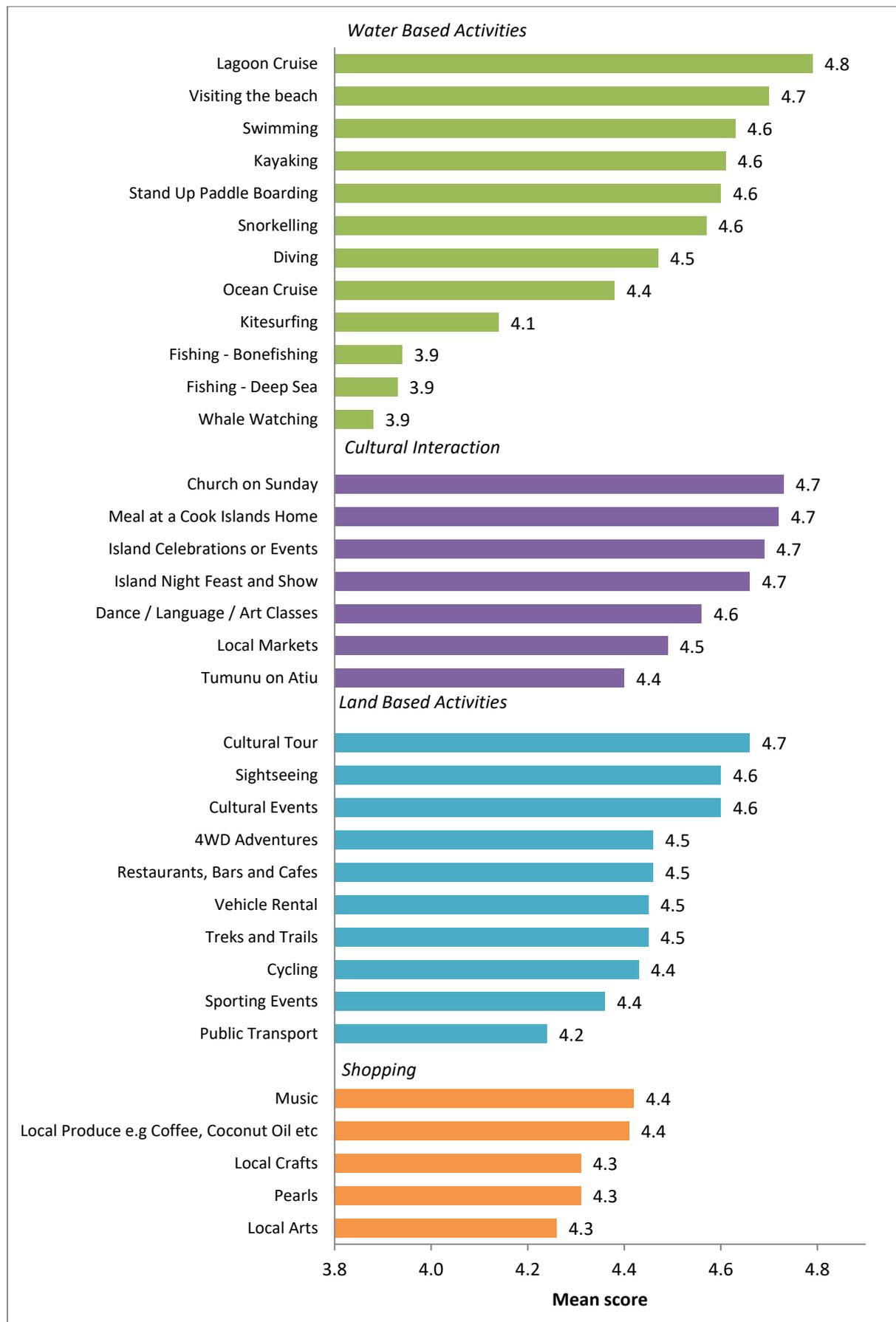
Figure 23 shows the percentage of respondents who undertook specific activities while on their visit to the Cook Islands. Almost all visitors (98%) participate in visiting the beaches and also visit at least one restaurant or café during their trip. Most of the respondents (88%) visit a local market, and 60% of visitors experience an Island Night/Feast Show.

Visitor satisfaction is generally high for all activities undertaken (almost all registering more than 4 out of a possible high of 5 except bonefishing, deep sea fishing, and whale watching) (Figure 23). Activities involving cultural interaction (average satisfaction of 4.6) rank the highest, followed by land-based products (4.5), water-based experiences (4.4), and shopping (4.3). It should be noted that some activities e.g., whale watching, bonefishing, and kitesurfing are characterised by relatively low numbers of participants (e.g. in this case n = 16 - 21).

**Figure 23: Degree of participation in activities (n range = 16-1126)**



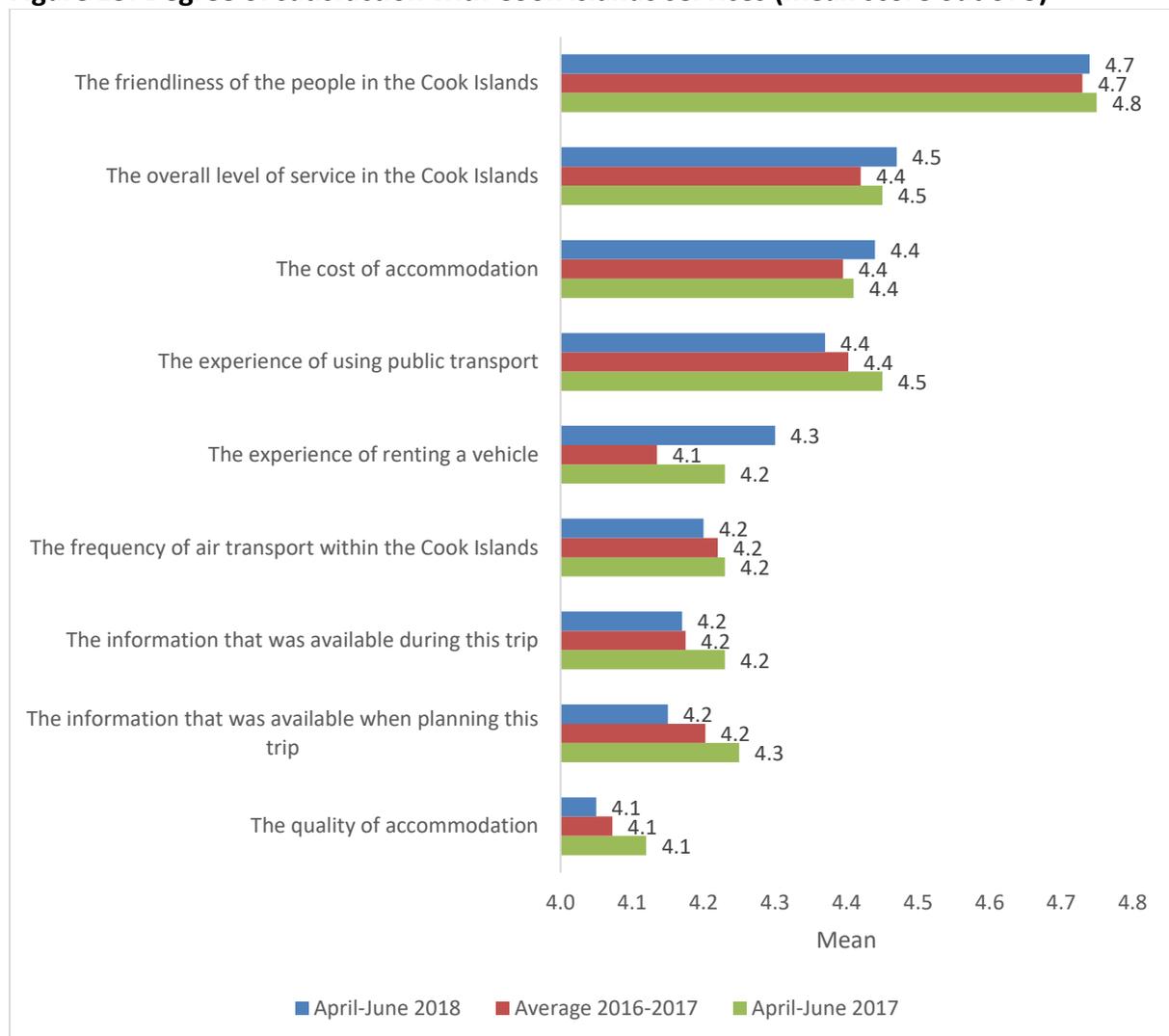
**Figure 24: Degree of satisfaction with activities participated in (mean score out of 5)**



Visitors were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with nine different statements relating to their most recent visit to the Cook Islands. Responses from the period of April to June are compared to the 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 with the overall level of service, the cost of accommodation, and the experience of renting a vehicle are slightly higher than average 2016 to 2017. But the levels of satisfaction with the experience of using public transport and the information available when planning this trip 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 tourist attractions and activities on offer, and the peacefulness and relaxing atmosphere of the islands. Smaller percentages of visitors mentioned aspects such as food and beverage (9%), accommodation (4%), overall good experience (4%), un-commercialised (4%) convenience and safety (4%), and culture (3%).

Table 3: Most appealing aspects of the Cook Islands (n = 1037)

Themes	Share of respondents (%)
<b>Environment, cleanliness &amp; weather</b>	46
<b>Local people</b>	42
<b>Activities, attractions and entertainment, events</b>	27
<b>Atmosphere</b>	22
<b>Food and beverage</b>	9
<b>Overall good experience</b>	4
<b>Accommodation</b>	4
<b>Un-commercial</b>	4
<b>Convenience and safety</b>	4
<b>Level of service</b>	3
<b>Culture</b>	3
<b>Others</b>	2
<b>Price of goods and services</b>	1
<b>Emotional connection</b>	1

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

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

The beautiful scenery, natural environment, the beaches, and gardens in the Cook Islands are mentioned by nearly half of the respondents (46%) as the most appealing aspects for their trip. Words like ‘beautiful’, ‘clean’, ‘paradise’, ‘beach’, ‘weather’ and ‘flowers’ are used to describe the attraction of the local environment. Most comments here focused on the beauty and the cleanliness of the beaches and lagoons, the weather, the scenery, and the landscapes of the islands in general. Comments included:

*“The beaches, variety of restaurants, cafes, takeaways. How everything looked and taste fresh.”*

*“Beautiful picture-perfect beaches with decent washrooms at our favourites.”*

*“The tranquillity the unspoilt beauty of the island, cleanliness, crystal clear water and the colourful fishes.”*

*“Aitutaki... the serene atmosphere quality of the restaurants and the wonderful experience of one foot island. the photos of which I have shared with friends and encouraged them to visit...”*

*“The sun and the people were so awesome. I went swimming every day and enjoyed every bit of it! I [also] [recommend] lots of people to go”*

*“Very friendly people great weather very laid-back lifestyle beautiful plant life beautiful waters [surrounding] just an awesome place to chill out from modern mainland city working life.”*

*“The beautiful beaches and ocean view from my bungalow.”*

### **Local people**

The second biggest attraction for the visitors was their positive experience of interaction with local people in the Cook Islands. Forty two percent of the respondents expressed that the warmth and welcoming nature of local people was an important factor in having a positive travel experience. Key words that dominated the responses included ‘friendly’, ‘helpful’, ‘welcoming’, ‘simply’, ‘happy’, ‘relaxed’, ‘smile’, ‘nice’, ‘happy’, and ‘warm’. Some examples of comments included:

*“The locals, they were all so cheerful, happy and helpful!”*

*“The people. They are absolutely friendly and the staff at Edgewater were amazing.”*

*“The people are so friendly. Saying Kia Orana so often you end up saying it all the time.”*

*“The people are friendly- love the culture and how the islanders are proud of their heritage and their love of life.”*

*“The appeal and friendliness of the local people! A wonderful smile and greeting at every encounter! Nothing ever appeared to be any trouble or effort.”*

*“Meeting the local people and asking them about their lifestyle. Such compassionate and caring locals.”*

*“The people are so friendly and pure, even the dogs were smiling and enjoying their life.”*

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

Activities, attractions, entertainment, and events were mentioned by 27% of respondents as the third most appealing element of their visit to the destination. Water sports including

swimming, snorkelling, diving, fishing, and kayaking were the most frequently mentioned attractions. In addition, land-based activities like hiking, walking, cycling, and markets were also mentioned by respondents. Aitutaki lagoon was a special attraction for visitors. Comments included:

*“The Vaka Cruise - Aitutaki. Our favourite day! The food on the boat, the staff onboard, the information we learnt and the best snorkelling - what an amazing experience! Words can't describe it enough!”*

*“I also went snorkelling with another friend in the Muri lagoon for three hours - right out to the reef. It was magic.”*

*“The diving and the hitchhiking, where we got to know so many nice and happy people.”*

*“Could not fault it and the Lagoon Cruise was just amazing and exceeded all expectations. The people were friendly and caring. We will be back.”*

*“Excellent spectacular native dance event portraying the history of the island. Excellent guide on the inland trip and the people providing the airport transfers. Loved the lagoon for watching tropical fish and kayaking.”*

*“The continuous view on the blue lagoon, while driving a scooter.”*

### **Atmosphere**

Cook Islands was described as a very peaceful, quiet, relaxing, and laid-back destination by tourists and this atmosphere was an appealing factor for twenty two percent of visitors surveyed. People were amazed by the pace of local life and used the words of ‘relaxing’, ‘calm’, ‘chilled’, ‘tranquillity’, and ‘laid back’ to describe the overall atmosphere of the destination. The notion of ‘island time’ and ‘laid back vibe’ was also mentioned. Comments included:

*“Being able to relax and chill”*

*“The friendly laid back vibe”*

*“We also loved the laid back pace of the island.”*

*“The relaxed, friendly atmosphere.”*

*“The peace and calm”*

*“Love the laid-back feel of the island. great place to go to chill out away from the busy-ness of normal lives. love the mix of local life with the holiday resorts.”*

*“The trip to Aitutuki will be something I will remember my entire life. It was*

*incredible. We loved how relaxing and peaceful the whole trip was. It was just what we were looking for."*

### **Food and beverage**

Food and beverage was also identified as an attractive aspect for visitors. Nine percent of respondents mentioned this. Their comments focused on the food variety, quality, and range of fresh food available in the Cook Islands. 'Amazing', 'excellent', 'high standard/quality', 'well priced', 'delicious', 'authentic' and 'fresh' were some frequent terms to describe the attraction of food for tourists. Many visitors mentioned the local sea food and local fruits. Comments included:

*"Variety of restaurants, cafes, takeaways. How everything looked and taste fresh."*

*"The food was fantastic. The Progressive Dinner was a really standout, enjoyable experience."*

*"Food variety and quality exceeded expectation."*

*"People and the food. We found the restaurants, especially in the Muri beach area exceptional."*

*"Food was amazing, mostly well priced."*

*"Weather, cheap alcohol, FOOD is just delicious. You Never have a bad meal in Raro."*

### **Accommodation**

Four percent of respondents expressed that the accommodation they stayed in was an appealing aspect of their visit to the Cook Islands, referring to the related facilities, the location, the environment, and the friendly and supportive staff. Comments included:

*"The accommodation and staff at our accommodation. We loved the beach and snorkelling was a favourite."*

*"Pacific Resort Aitutaki was really paradise on earth."*

*"Our accommodation had excellent private access to the beach which was really lovely."*

*"We were married at the Edgewater and the way everyone made us feel was exceptional! The staff at the resort, plus all activities, asked if there were anyone celebrating special events and made all people feel extremely special. The people are so friendly and accommodating and really go out of their way to make your holiday special."*

### **Not too commercialised**

Four percent of the survey participants specifically noted that the fact the Cook Islands is not over-commercialised or too touristy is one of the attractive factors for them. Some visitors believed that the natural state of the islands brings tourists 'calm' and 'escape' from the business of life. Comments included:

*"It was not invaded by mass-tourism, not too many backpackers."*

*"How it was untouched from commercialism."*

*"Love that it is not commercialised, we can escape the business of life."*

*"The amazing lagoon at Aitutaki and not too many people. I travel a lot and many destinations are overcrowded with too many package tours. Don't ruin The Cooks by more and more tourists. The relative calm is a MAJOR attraction."*

*"The rawness of the islands. It is so refreshing going to a place that is not commercialized."*

### **Convenience & Safety**

The convenience and safety of the Cook Islands as a holiday destination were mentioned by 49 respondents (4%). They referred to the accessibility and ease of getting around the islands. Language, the availability of public transport including scooters, as well as the local use of the New Zealand dollar, were other identified factors. Some tourists emphasised safety, particularly feeling safe at night. Comments included:

*"easy to get around, accessibility"*

*"Easy as we could use NZ dollars and there was no language barrier."*

*"The ease of having everyone at one location, and the amazing/friendly people."*

*"Everything is so close & using a scooter to get around was fun & easy."*

*"Everything was only a short distance. Having the sea almost at my door step."*

*"Hitting up the beaches and being able to safe in the water - no sharks."*

### **Overall good experience**

Another four percent of visitors simply stated that their whole experience was a good one. Comments such as 'everything' and 'it was all so amazing' demonstrated their overall positive experience. Comments included:

*"Everything about this wonderful bit of Paradise."*

*“It was all so amazing!! we cannot wait to come back again!”*

*“We love everything about the Cook Islands and that’s why we return regularly, so relaxing and inviting.”*

*“The people the weather the food everything was great.”*

### **Culture**

The island’s unique local culture was mentioned by three percent of the respondents as an appealing aspect of their Cook Islands visit. The unique local people and their culture is something that appeals the tourists. It is worth mentioning that several comments noted that the cultural shows and cultural evening differentiate Cook Islands from other destinations. Comments included:

*“The people and the culture.”*

*“Even though most cultural shows were heavily tourist-oriented, local people were very involved in and proud of their culture.”*

*“Also the people and culture are as friendly and hospitable as any I have met.”*

### **Level of service**

A relatively small percentage (3%) of visitors commented on the service they experienced while travelling in the Cook Islands. Respondents had positive comments on the local hospitality they experienced. Respondents were amazed by the ‘friendly’ and ‘helpful’ local staff. The quality of service at the accommodations, restaurants, and resort won high recognition from these visitors. Comments included:

*“The accommodation and the friendliness of the staff at Pacific Resort Rarotonga.”*

*“The quality of the service at the accommodation and restaurants. The lagoon was incredibly beautiful.”*

*“We were very happy with our Island night a Te Vara Nui. It really impressed: food was great as was the entertainment and the service was exemplary.”*

## 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?”. Table 4 summaries key themes respondents felt were unappealing. Comments ranged from issues with public services and facilities, price of goods and service, rubbish and natural environment care through to disappointment with safety related issues.

**Table 4: Least appealing aspects of the Cook Islands (n = 958)**

Themes	Share of respondents %*
Public services and facilities and infrastructure	19%
Price of good and service	11%
Stray animals and mosquitos	10%
Rubbish and natural environment care	10%
Food and beverage	9%
Poor weather	9%
Accommodation	6%
Customer service	4%
Attractions and activities	4%
Flight related issues	3%
Too touristy or commercial	2%
Local people	2%
Rental cars or scooters	2%
Lack of information	2%
Law and legislation	1%
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 (19%) 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, street lights, public transport, traffic, poor internet, immigration delays and the bus services. Comments included:

*“Unreliable public transport, but it always arrived in the end!”*

*“Frequency of public transportation”*

*“Limited options for public transport”*

*“Roads had not been upgraded or even fixed since the last time we visited over 5*

*years ago.”*

*“Big potholes! Although they seemed to get fixed pretty quickly when they were really big.”*

*“The roads were in terrible condition. Some of the island tracks need maintenance.”*

*“Traffic and far too many hire cars on unsuitable roads!!!!!!!!!!”*

*“Internet NEEDS to be improved (speed and price).”*

*“The wi-fi connection was poor and overly priced.”*

*“At the time the wifi coverage was down and very limited so keeping in touch with family was up and down. - and the cost for internet/calling from hotel was expensive. No biggy for me but I saw a lot of stressed people.”*

*“The airport terminal and service could be improved. The mobile service and hot spots were TERRIBLE. Airport. Long queues.”*

*“It was so dark and with no street lights, it felt a little unsafe walking home along the roadside.”*

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

Eleven percent of the respondents (11%) noted that the least appealing part of their visit was the price of goods and services with comments focusing on food, transfers, accommodation, flights, and internet. Key words that dominated the responses included ‘pricy’, ‘expensive’, and ‘overpriced’. Comments included:

*“Prices of accommodation are too damn high.”*

*“Too expensive to stay in hotels so we had to stay with family and the food is way too expensive.”*

*“The cost of food and alcohol.”*

*“Expensive food at supermarkets.”*

*“Cost of taxis to and from the airport - \$80 is a rip-off for a 15-minute drive. Charge \$20 per passenger rather than the cost of the taxi. Makes for a poor first impression.”*

*“All the imported products from Tahiti for sale. Also the cost....\$7 for 1 1.5Lt bottle of water is ridiculous!! we spent way over \$100 just on water for us and our children.”*

*“Accommodation is VERY pricy.”*

*"It's quite expensive, but that's understandable because (almost) everything has to be imported from the main land."*

*"The public transportation is quite expensive."*

*"Cost high considering quality, facilities and service."*

### **Stray animals and mosquitos**

Stray animals, noisy roosters, chickens, mosquitoes/insects and sea cucumbers were mentioned by 10% of respondents. In particular, they complained that the dogs roaming on the streets, while mosquitoes and the roosters made some visitors trip miserable. Respondents used a variety of words to describe this theme including 'annoying', 'off putting', and 'excessive'. Comments included:

*"The chickens roaming around pooping in cafes."*

*"The bloody roosters crowing at all hours. It's time to cull them out! They seriously ruin your sleep especially when the dogs reply!!"*

*"The dog situation needs to be remedied. It needs to be taught to the locals that it is not acceptable for dogs to wander, not be treated for fleas etc. The dog situation made me rethink going back to Cook Islands and caused me a lot of anxiety during our trip. Spay neuter clinics should be run more often, the locals need to be educated on proper care of their dogs, and no more animal control officer shooting those wonderful animals..."*

*"The care of some pigs out the back rd....tied in their own muck ....one was dead."*

*"Getting bitten by sand flies and mosquitoes due to rain prior to our visit and so we were not aware to prepare for this issue."*

*"Rocks and potential for stone fish along the shoreline- hard to swim amongst the rocks."*

*"Oh and my friend hated the high number of Sea Cucumbers lurking on the bottom of the lagoon!"*

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

Rubbish and natural environment care were mentioned by 10% 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, allgae, burning of rubbish and threatened marine life concerned a group of visitors. Comments included:

*"I am an avid snorkeller and was disappointed to find the corals were in poor shape."*

*It was somewhat distressing to me to see local youngsters poking at fish in the coral and even attempting to rock a coral I assumed to scare out the fish. I witnessed a lot of walking on coral which is so damaging. Lots of dead coral. I hope the schools will talk to the children about caring for the corals and teach them how not to damage this precious resource. I had always wanted to snorkel in the Cook Islands and was told years ago how wonderful it was. I hate to say that the snorkelling from the beach was just ok. Nothing spectacular. It was a bit disappointing”*

*“Broken glass and rubbish on the beach.”*

*“Also, it's a shame that the beautiful beaches on the island are marred by litter and garbage.”*

*“Too much plastic use in the resorts especially plastic straws, and single use small bottles of water ... with such a beautiful place with the ocean as it's back door, all resorts should ban plastic straws. it was rather sad finding straws and bottle tops on the beaches.”*

*“Sewage smell and polluted water near our resort. Put us off swimming in the sea.”*

*“The burning of rubbish and the smell of it everywhere in the island.”*

*“The burning of toxic smelly plastic rubbish.”*

*“The deteriorating Coral and the Rubbish (plastic) and the apparent lack of recycling.”*

*“Lots of coral damage from swim fins....should be illegal inside the reach area.”*

*“We have been visiting Rarotonga for over a decade, and have noticed a gradual decline of the marine environment especially in the Muri area.”*

*“The Lagoon. It needs serious help. I'm sure I don't need to go into detail.”*

*“Algae bloom in Muri Lagoon, this meant we had to travel in the car to find a beach that wasn't polluted.”*

### **Food and beverage**

Another 9% of respondents noted that the food and beverage available in the Cooks Islands as being the least appealing aspect of their visit - referring to the high prices, the lack of local produce (especially fresh fruit, veggies and fish), limited choice, food poisoning, and opening hours of restaurants. Comments included:

*“Felt like everyone had their hand in your pocket, restaurants were very expensive,*

*did not offer water to drink unless you bought it, every restaurant had the same cocktails all starting at the same price of \$15.00 which is high."*

*"The cost of food is too high."*

*"The breakfast was very ordinary. The other meals were average. Would not recommend it to anyone."*

*"I arrived on Sunday and it was hard to find a meal on Sunday night because we did not know we needed reservations at a resort. We almost did not eat dinner at all."*

*"Choice of food and quality of food was limited. I am a Vegetarian and it was a challenge."*

*"I couldn't find much food (as I don't eat meat fish or dairy). The markets and restaurants had no options for me to be substantially eat for a whole week."*

*"(1) The random availability of fresh fruit (e.g., close to nothing on the market or in shops in Aitutaki, along the road only every other day something was available). (2) Also surprisingly difficult to find restaurants that serve fresh fish in a "catch of the day" style, too often just fish and chips or some pre-defined fish dish."*

*"Also had constant issues with restaurants unable to cater to food allergies. The selection at the supermarkets was also very poor, especially not being able to buy much fresh fruit or produce."*

*"Unable to eat the local fish caught because of the toxin."*

*"Found a worm moving on top of my eggs benedict at the restaurant."*

### **Poor weather**

Nine percent of visitors commented on poor weather while in 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:

*"Too much rain (can't be helped though, it was that time of year)."*

*"We struck terrible weather, 7 out of 9 days rained heavily. Not the islands fault but there was not much else to do when it's raining all day."*

*"Bad experience deep sea fishing with very bad weather, should have not gone out, asked for a life jacket and was handed a raincoat."*

*"Weather. Windy and overcast for the whole 8 days. Temperature similar to Auckland with the exception of last day when it was very hot and humid."*

*"We got unlucky and had very bad weather making everything slippery to many slippery tiles in resorts and shops it's going to be wet so they should use anti slip tiles I had bad fall breaking rib, toe and tailbone."*

*"Weather was very disappointing, windy and overcast the whole 8 days. Temperature similar to Auckland with the exception of the 8th day which was very hot and humid."*

*"Hot nights and no air conditioning."*

*"The heat/humidity... can't do much about that though. The person running our accommodation was not present during the times indicated on the office door."*

### **Accommodation**

Six percent of visitors surveyed (6%) 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:

*"Rarotonga-overpriced accommodation, not really so good value for the money spent."*

*"The heat and humidity rises and so in bathrooms the urea smell gets bigger... things were not sterilized with janola or chlorine, we get the same happen here when our temps go over 26deg... but both rooms had a distinct smell of the urine urea."*

*"For two weeks we stayed at the hotel, our 4th visit to this property...very dissatisfied...the place is going backwards, not enough maintenance and tender loving care to warrant the ever-increasing nightly rate...much better accommodation on the island for that money or less."*

*"We thought the accommodation was very expensive for the quality provided."*

*"We had items stolen while having our rooms cleaned at the hotel. We brought it up with the hotel security and he shrugged it off."*

*"The accommodation we had, the trouble we had and rudeness when we were trying to get it sorted out. The lies from the management. Totally ruined and wasted the first four days of our holiday."*

*"There was no air conditioning in our accommodation. While I was ok, the husband and child suffered. The house was fabulous but air conditioning would have been the icing on the cake."*

*“Our accommodation, I understand there was a bereavement. But if you are happy to take our money, you must offer the standard you advertise.”*

### **Customer service**

A small number of respondents (4%) mentioned customer service as the least appealing aspect of their trip to the Cook Islands. 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:

*“Most of people were very rude. Even at the hotel and bars they seemed to not want to do anything. I understand that this may be the way that they are but with the economy not doing too well we would have thought they would have been a bit more interactive and cared a bit more.”*

*“A lot of the shop owners weren't as friendly as previous visits which was a bit of a let-down and the long wait for food when eating out. Also the restaurant we went to had run out of almost every drink we ordered.”*

*“Some shop attendants and cafe staff still need more training on the exchange of pleasantries while carrying out their duties, and, in the case of cafes, on cleanliness of the table tops.”*

*“The transfer company forgot to pick us up to take us to the airport which caused us a little bit of stress.”*

*“I experienced a bus driver who made fun of me at my expense at a time when I was feeling vulnerable. I did not enjoy this at all. He could see I was upset but continued to draw attention to it for the amusement of the other passengers.”*

### **Attractions and activities**

Four percent of respondents mentioned the least appealing aspect of their Cooks Island visit as the attractions and activities. Comments focused on limited attractions and/or activities, issues with swimming/snorkelling because of environment issues, weather, lack of information, poor services. Comments included:

*“Lack of entertainment in the evenings. It maybe I wasn't aware enough of what was available. Some more options for an evening drink with live music would have been great.”*

*“Difficult to book day trip to Aitutaki last minute - very busy and very very expensive.”*

*“Excessive pricing for deep sea fishing charters. Prevented us going on a fishing trip.”*

*“Snorkling in lagoon Aitutaki was very poor (lagoon cruise was great).”*

*“We missed out on a lot of activities because they were booked out, that was a disappointment for us.”*

*“The new charge to visit the Wigmore Waterfall - was free access in the past.”*

### **Flight related issues**

Three percent of respondents mentioned flight related issues as the least appealing aspect of their time in the Cook Islands. Visitors mentioned the limitations of flights to and from various destinations such as infrequency, cost, arrival and departure times, customer service, lost luggage, and airport facilities. Comments included:

*“ALSO, AIR NZ changed its plane and the seats in economy (which cost a lot of money, compared with other long flights, such as YVR to Amsterdam or other destinations in Europe) were small, cramped and so uncomfortable even my husband had back pain.”*

*“The prices to fly between islands is too high. Air Rarotonga should reduce their fares to encourage tourism to the other islands (and to allow locals to more easily travel).”*

*“Delay at airport which was due to computer system collapse, late flight, missed connecting flights, took far too long to get home.”*

*“The airport schedule for international flights. We were at the airport with like 400 other people for 4 hours due to delays.”*

*“We were looking forward to viewing Aitutaki lagoon from the air but when we got onto our Air Rarotonga flight, our seats did not have any window: (Was very very depressing.”*

*“Our flight arrived so early in the morning and the wait until 2PM to get into our rooms.”*

### **Too touristy**

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

*“Raro is starting to look more “westernised” due to higher levels of tourism.”*

*“The number of tourists - yes I know it's ironic when we are tourists but we have been coming to Raro for over 30 years and I think you should charge more for everything*

*and make it a more restricted experience.”*

*“As visitor numbers have increased, the service has suffered, we have been regular visitors, 9 visits in 14 years, and have noticed a dramatic change.”*

*“I personally feel that the Cook Islands is getting too "touristy". I will be very sad if it loses its island ways and become too commercialised.”*

### **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 unhelpfulness and rudeness of local people, and some social issues. Comments included:

*“Some people friendly, some people didn't seem to want us there.”*

*“Had a minor fender bender auto accident with a local that was her fault. The interaction with her and her husband was somewhat tense as they clearly wanted us to pay for the damage to her car. We did not pay for the damage as it was her fault in our opinion. Dampened our enthusiasm for renting a car after that.”*

*“Some locals, including bus driver, not friendly or kind or helpful which we found unusual.”*

*“Locals also seemed annoyed by the presence of tourists. One we found something in common to connect on, they became friendly - but before that, were very stand-offish.”*

*“Had a sense that some of the islander people were not treated fairly - expected to work long hours and not well paid or respected. They didn't give that impression but overheard employers and there was not much respect in the conversation. We didn't expect this sort of treatment so close to NZ.”*

### **Rental cars or scooters**

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

*“The rental car experience, not sure if we got our deposit back either.”*

*“Waiting for service at rental car office! Wasted so much time and almost missed Saturday market.”*

*“The only thing that I would find a little annoying was the rental car company, When booking only it was advertised as having a 'special' on picking the car up there was*

*no special... I'd call this false advertising! But the car was great, and such a fantastic way to get around the island."*

*"Dealing with the rental company - shoddy load of ancient rubbish supplied for a people mover (7 seater)."*

### **Lack of information**

Lack of information available was mentioned by two percent of visitors surveyed. Areas where information was lacking included attractions/activities available, events happening, public transport, and directional information. Comments included:

*"but we had issues with the bus on weekends as it didn't start as early going anti clockwise, so we nearly missed a planned Dive Trip. There was not enough information on the bus prior to our visit."*

*"Lack of information about public transport."*

*"Lack of tourist information on the more remote islands and the difficulty in visiting them."*

*"I feel like there should be some info at Titikaveka telling people not to stand on or touch the coral and explain why.. Inform people about this special place. And maybe a sign at the top of the cross-island truck telling you which way to go! We nearly got lost!"*

*"So more information to everyone about the fish in the lagging and the corals for the future."*

*"The lack of numbers on letterboxes or buildings to indicate the address."*

### **Law and Legislation**

One percent 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:

*"The requirement of Cook Island driver's license to rent a car disrupted my visit for several hours."*

*"Also the 1 month license limit for a visitor is not in keeping with trying to have long stay visitors come to the Cooks. I will be in Raro for Aug and Sept and will need to go through the process twice rather than hold a 5-year full license as I have in the past. From what I can see Kiwis get a 90-day visa on arrival and I assume the additional 1y renewal is still available for NZ Gold card holders. That means 15 renewals of ones*

*scooter license. The process also takes too long for visitors who tend to be time poor.”*

*“Having to wear a helmet when using the scooter this trip.”*

### **Safety**

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

*“Road safety is negligible.”*

*“The lack of footpaths for walking around the island. And the lack of street lighting at night when walking. The roads were quite busy with cars and as a pedestrian it felt unsafe especially at night.”*

*“That you don’t inform about all the dangerous fish especially to children. Plus you need to be more informative about caring for the reef so tourists especially the Asians who stood on the corals. Have to protect the corals for the future. So more information to everyone about the fish in the lagging and the corals for the future.”*

*“One of our party had cash stolen.”*

## 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 suggestions focused on public services and infrastructure (28%), entertainment, activities, transport (11%), attitude of locals and service levels (11%), accommodation (10%), value for money (10%), a longer stay or to visit more places (9%), availability, quality, and price of food and drinks (8%), weather (7%), environment/safety/animal care (7%), availability of and flight schedules in and out of Cook Islands (6%), information (3%), and law and legislation (1%). Comments on these themes included:

*“Far more attention to Cleaning up the rubbish on the island. Some areas are disgraceful.”*

*“This place is fantastic. One thing that may be worth doing is putting reflective strips on the road around the island. It can be kind of hard to see at night for people that aren’t familiar with the island.”*

*“Attitude of immigration on arrival, quality of airport, plus the extra time required to check bags twice due to restrictions in Sydney on alcohol.”*

*“More public transport, for example motor taxis or more regular buses.”*

*“Mobile phone network was down for visitors. WIFI only.”*

*“Better and cheaper internet connections.”*

*“I would like to see more local crafts that are meaningful. The hand dyed sarongs were the best local artisanal product.”*

*“Maybe some cultural indoor activities or displays for wet weather options.”*

*“Someone needs to set up traditional dance classes. I wanted so badly to learn and asked around everywhere but was told no one teaches it to the tourists.”*

*“The staff at accommodation need to stop complaining to visitors about been on minimum wage and been unfriendly when asking questions about the island, it made my family and I guilty about been on holiday 😞.”*

*“Hotel facilities - only one TV station (kids movies) available, internet was very expensive, hotel should have a shuttle to take you to other parts of the island. Not much to do if it’s raining. Drinking water should be available in hotel room or delivered each day.”*

*“Cheaper activities option so I could enjoy some of them.”*

*“We would have liked to visit Atiu but the cost of flights was very expensive.”*

*“Less cost for services provided.”*

*“That we could have stayed longer and longer!!!!”*

*“Higher health standards food preparation; no food poisoning.”*

*“I honestly expected food prices to be a bit lower. It was challenging to eat a quick, inexpensive meal for a family of four but it wasn't off the charts expensive, just higher than expected.”*

*“Remove rubbish from roadside properties.”*

*“More favourable direct flight times direct from Sydney.”*

*“Resort didn't seem to have much info about basic things like bus timetable and pricing - had to ask other tourists and find the info once we were in town.”*

*“Laws regarding scooter hire on a NZ drivers licence.”*

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

The majority of visitors (92%) indicated that they would consider re-visiting the Cook Islands in the future. This figure is the same as the 2016/17 annual average and slightly higher than the identical quarter in 2017 (91%). Of the 8 percent of visitors who added reasons why they would not want to return to the Cook Islands, the majority stated that did not wish to return because they want to visit another destination. Some visitors commented that a holiday to the Cook Islands is expensive (especially accommodation and food) and that it is not good value for money. Other reasons given for not wishing to return included the degraded lagoon condition, a lack of activities, and poor service. Comments included:

*“Boring not enough to do and needs to have a few 5-star restaurants.”*

*“Not enough activities to do compared to other destinations. Boring in the evenings. Most other people we saw were family groups (e.g., Grandparents, mums and dads in their 30-40s & young children, although we were there in school holidays) and we were aged in our 30's. It felt like a place to go for families, not friends.”*

*“This is the second time we have been and it's lost its appeal. The roads are terrible the cost of doing activities is really expensive for what you get and there is only so much to do. The food needs to be of better quality it's all fried or not cooked well.”*

*“The beaches are very limited, the water isn't deep enough to swim and there is no coral.”*

Under half (46%) of the visitors mentioned that they would definitely include the outer islands in their next visit. A further 51% of visitors indicated they will 'maybe' visit outer islands next time. Of those who said they would, or may, visit outer islands next time, most (92%) mentioned they would like to include Aitutaki. Atiu was the second most mentioned island at 37%; another 24% of visitors stated that they would like to visit Mangaia, 19% of the respondents would like to visit Mauke. A small number of visitors mentioned Manihiki, Palmerston, Penrhyn, Pukapuka. A few mentioned the high cost of visiting outer islands as a barrier.

Nearly all visitors surveyed (96%) said that they would recommend the destination to their family and friends which is consistent with previous survey periods. Only 4% of visitors would not recommend the Cook Islands to others and this is largely based on the relatively high prices, unfriendly local people, low food quality, bad weather and a lack of environmental care.

## Final observations

This report shows that the Cook Islands tourism industry generally performed well during the survey period of April to June 2018. 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 declined slightly but remains relatively strong and it will be important to see if this trend is sustained for the rest of the year. It was also pleasing to see comments emerging around language and local culture, highlighting the value of the Kia Orana Values program, we particularly liked: *“The people are so friendly. Saying Kia Orana so often you end up saying it all the time”*.

Despite the overall positive performance 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, and environmental degradation.

Overall visitor satisfaction and willingness to return are high. For those who would like to return it is good to see the majority expressing their willingness of visit at least one of the outer islands next time. 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. 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](http://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)

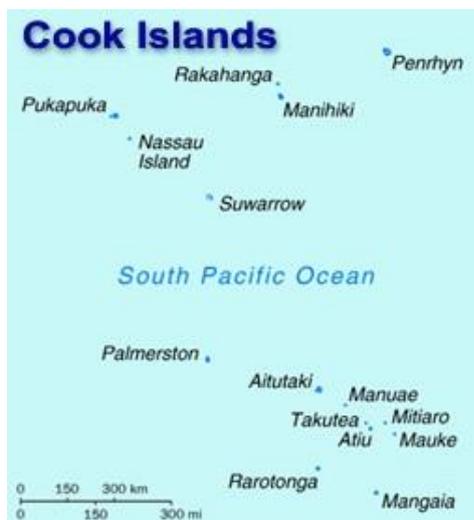
General travel websites (e.g. Trip Advisor) (8)

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 Ratrotonga? (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:

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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?

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

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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).

*Survey Powered By Qualtrics*