



# Cook Islands Visitor Survey Results

---

**April – June 2017**

**Prepared for Cook Islands Tourism Corporation**

**by**

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

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

**July 2017**

## **Acknowledgements**

NZTRI would like to acknowledge the Cook Islands Tourism Corporation (special mention to Metua Vaiimene and Jake Numanga), the Cook Islands Statistics Office, Immigration Cook Islands, and Rarotonga International Airport for their support in this ongoing research. This report was prepared by Simon Milne, Mindy Sun, Sam Li, Sasha Kaalman, Florencia Moscoso, and Gurudatta Vishwasrao.

## Executive Summary

This report focuses on the characteristics, expectations and expenditure patterns of tourists who visited the Cook Islands between 1 April and 31 June 2017. The data presented is collected from an online departure survey (<http://www.mycookislandsvisit.com>). There were 1324 individual respondents to the survey - representing a total of 3,149 adults and 493 children in the expenditure analysis (this equates to 9% of all visitors during the period – based on the 2017 visitor arrival data for the April to June period from the Cook Islands Statistics Office).

The majority (59%) of visitors surveyed come from New Zealand, 13% come from Australia. Visitors are well educated (70% of visitors have some form of tertiary education) with a relatively high annual household income (49% earn over NZ\$100,000 per year). Nearly half of the visitors (44%) travel with one companion. Solo travellers are relatively rare (8%).

Over half of those surveyed (62%) are first time visitors to the Cook Islands, a further 23% have visited once or twice before. The main purpose of visit is holiday-making (80%). The average length of stay in the Cook Islands is 8.8 nights. The majority (92%) of visitors stay either one or two weeks. Twenty one percent of visitors surveyed visited Aitutaki in addition to Rarotonga.

Visitor spend prior to arrival in the Cook Islands (\$2,075 per person) has decreased slightly from the 2015/2016 annual average (\$2,121 per person). Spend on the island (per person per day) is \$143. This spend is slightly lower than the 2015/16 annual average of \$147, and lower than the same quarter for the previous year (\$157 for April to June 2016).

The average local spend per visitor during the entirety of their stay is \$1,263. When pre-paid spend and the local spend are combined, it is estimated that each visitor brings \$2,093 to the Cook Islands economy (or approximately \$237 per day). This figure is slightly lower than the \$2,138 average for 2015/16, and lower than the \$2,157 for the same quarter last year (April to June 2016).

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; atmosphere; food and beverage. The least appealing elements are the lack of public services, facilities and infrastructure; rubbish and natural environment care – Muri lagoon; price of goods and services; food and beverage; stray animals and mosquitos; accommodation; poor weather; customer service; attractions and activities.

The future intentions of visitors remained very similar to the previous year: 91% of those surveyed state that they want to return to the Cook Islands, and 97% would recommend the Cook Islands to friends or family.

## Table of Contents

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Acknowledgements.....  | ii  |
| Executive Summary.....   | iii |
| Introduction .....   | 1   |
| Visitor Characteristics .....                                      | 2   |
| Information Sources and Purchasing Behaviour .....                 | 10  |
| Visitor Expenditure .....  | 14  |
| Visitor Satisfaction .....   | 18  |
| Most appealing aspects of the Cook Islands.....                    | 22  |
| Least appealing aspects of the Cook Islands.....                   | 29  |
| Suggestions to improve the visit to the Cook Islands .....         | 36  |
| Reasons to return to the Cook Islands and recommend to others..... | 37  |
| Final observations .....   | 41  |
| Appendix – Cook Islands Visitor Survey .....                       | 42  |

## Figures and Tables

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Figure 1: Country of origin (n=1178) .....  | 2  |
| Figure 2: New Zealand visitors (n=687) .....  | 2  |
| Figure 3: Australia visitors (n=156) .....  | 3  |
| Figure 4: Distribution of age and gender (n=1186) .....                                     | 3  |
| Figure 5: Highest qualification (n=1186).....   | 4  |
| Figure 6: Annual household income in NZD (n=952) .....                                      | 4  |
| Figure 7: Main purpose of visit (n=1324).....   | 5  |
| Figure 8: Travelling with whom? (n=1324) .....  | 5  |
| Figure 9: Number of companions on trip (n=1307) .....                                       | 6  |
| Figure 10: Number of visits to the Cook Islands (n=1181) .....                              | 6  |
| Figure 11: Number of previous visits to the Cook Islands – country breakdown .....          | 7  |
| Figure 12: Length of stay in nights (n=1315) .....  | 7  |
| Figure 13: Mode of transport (n=1323).....  | 8  |
| Figure 14: Visited Islands (n=1322).....  | 9  |
| Figure 15: Average length of stay in the Cook Islands and on each island (n=1305) .....     | 9  |
| Figure 16: How did you find out about Cook Islands as a destination (n=1324).....           | 10 |
| Figure 17: How did you find out about Cook Islands as a destination – country breakdown.    | 11 |
| Figure 18: Importance of information source used when planning your trip (n=1004) .....     | 12 |
| Figure 19: How did you purchase your travel to the Cook Islands (n=1322) .....              | 13 |
| Figure 20: Amount of money spent per person prior to arrival (n=985).....                   | 14 |
| Figure 21: Items included in money spent prior to arrival .....                             | 15 |
| Figure 22: Overall satisfaction with experience of the Cook Islands (n=1200) .....          | 18 |
| Figure 23: Degree of participation in activities (n range=14-1291).....                     | 19 |
| Figure 24: Degree of satisfaction in activities participated in (mean score out of 5) ..... | 20 |
| Figure 25: Degree of satisfaction with Cook Islands services (mean score out of 5) .....    | 21 |
| <br>  |    |
| Table 1: Average visitor expenditure in the Cook Islands (per person per day) .....         | 16 |
| Table 2: Average expenditure per visitor per day by country of origin.....                  | 16 |
| Table 3: Most appealing aspects of the Cook Islands (n=1229) .....                          | 22 |
| Table 4: Least appealing aspects of the Cook Islands (n=1117) .....                         | 29 |

## Introduction

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

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

This report presents the results from April to June 2017. Over this three-month period, 7,743 visitors were contacted by email to take part in the survey, and 1,324 responses were received: a conversion rate of 17%. These responses cover a total of 3,149 adults and 493 children. The conversion rate for this period is lower than the 2015/16 annual average (30%) and also the April to June quarter (34%). 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:

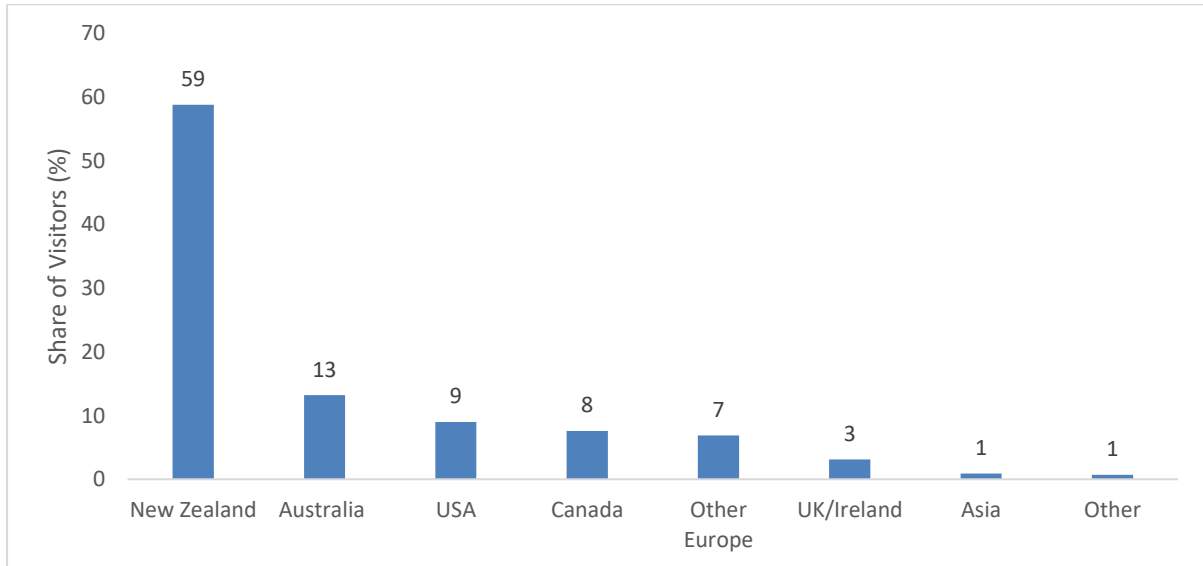
- The characteristics of visitors to the Cook Islands (age, gender, education, country of origin, income, purpose of visit, travelling companions, number of previous visits, length of stay, airline used, islands visited)
- Visitor information obtained about the Cook Islands, the factors influencing in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

## Visitor Characteristics

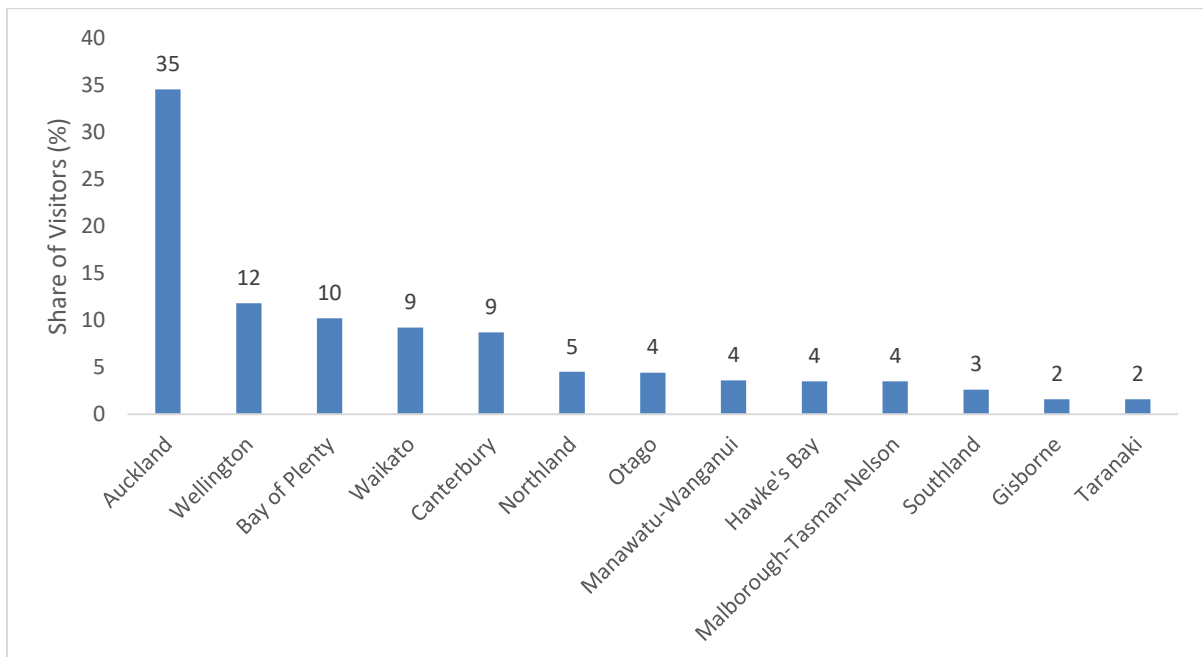
The majority (59%) of the visitors surveyed come from New Zealand (Figure 1). The second largest visitor group is from Australia, with 13% of respondents. USA, Canada, Europe, Great Britain, and Asia represent the other main source markets.

**Figure 1: Country of origin (n=1178)**



Auckland, Wellington, Bay of Plenty, Waikato, and Canterbury account for 75% of New Zealand visitors. For visitors from Australia, the regions of New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria generate the highest numbers of arrivals (83%) (Figure 2-3).

**Figure 2: New Zealand visitors (n=687)**

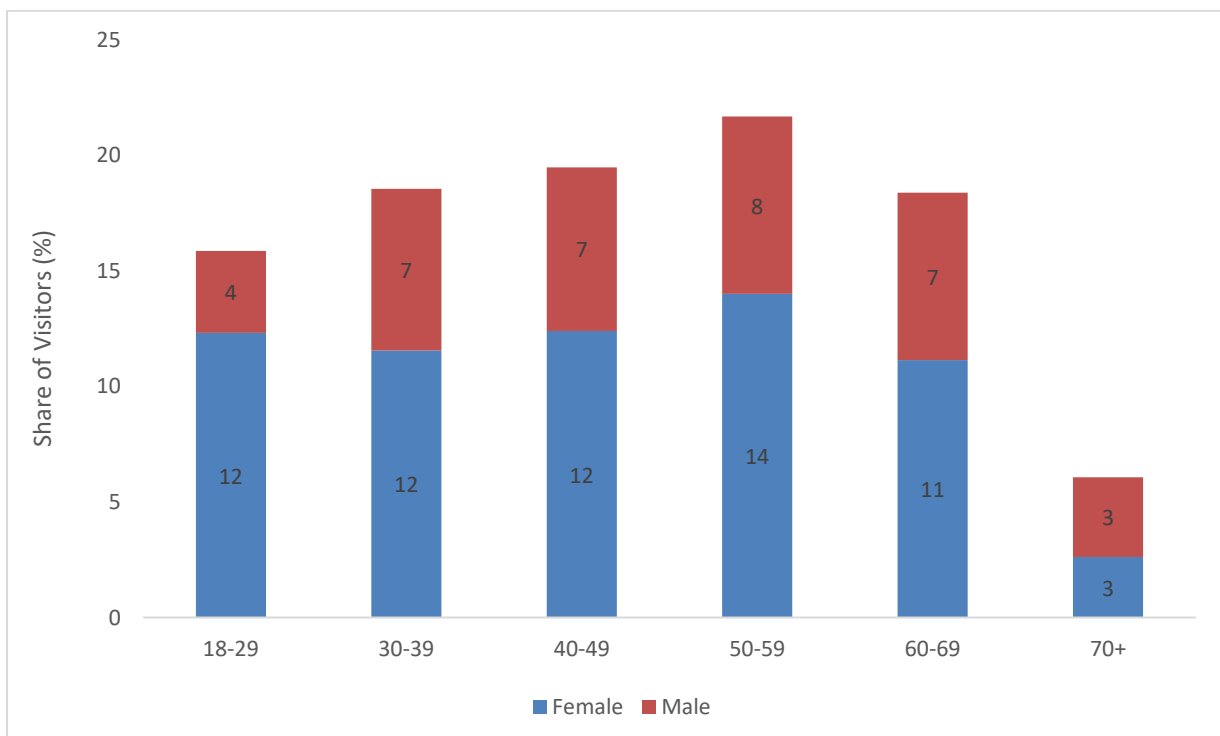


**Figure 3: Australia visitors (n=156)**



More women (64%) than men (36%) completed the survey (Figure 4). The most significant age categories are the 50 to 59 year (22%) grouping, the 40 to 49 year (19%) grouping, and the 30 to 39 grouping (19%) followed by those aged 60 to 69 (18%) and 18 to 19 (16%). There are relatively few travellers in the 70 plus age bracket (6%).

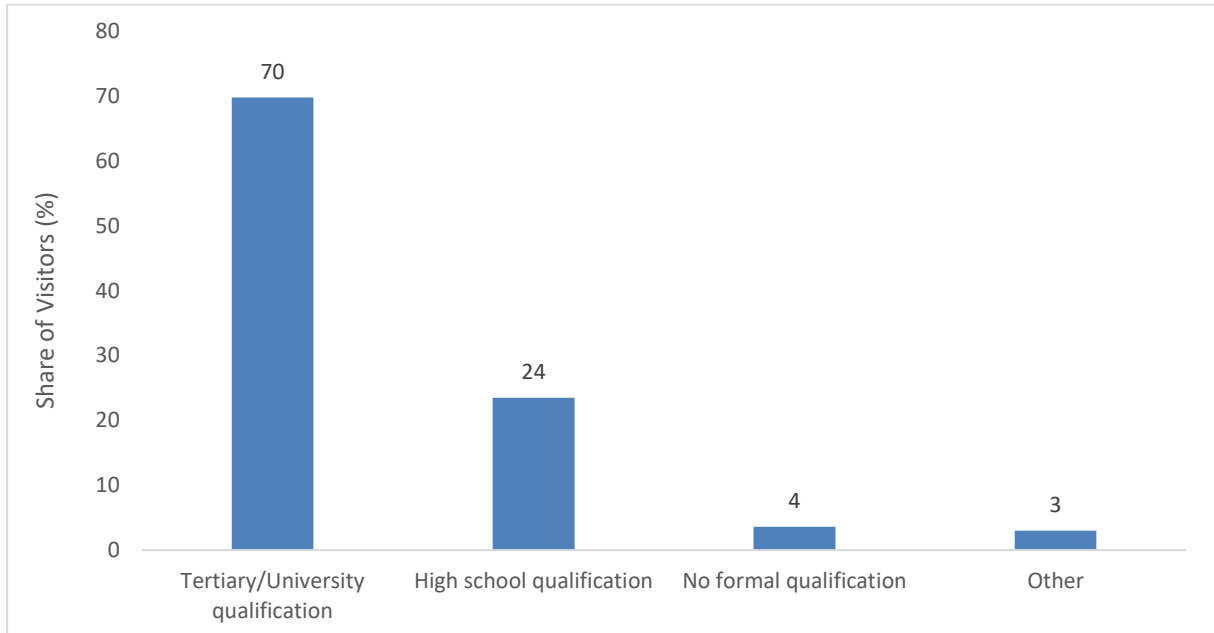
**Figure 4: Distribution of age and gender (n=1186)**





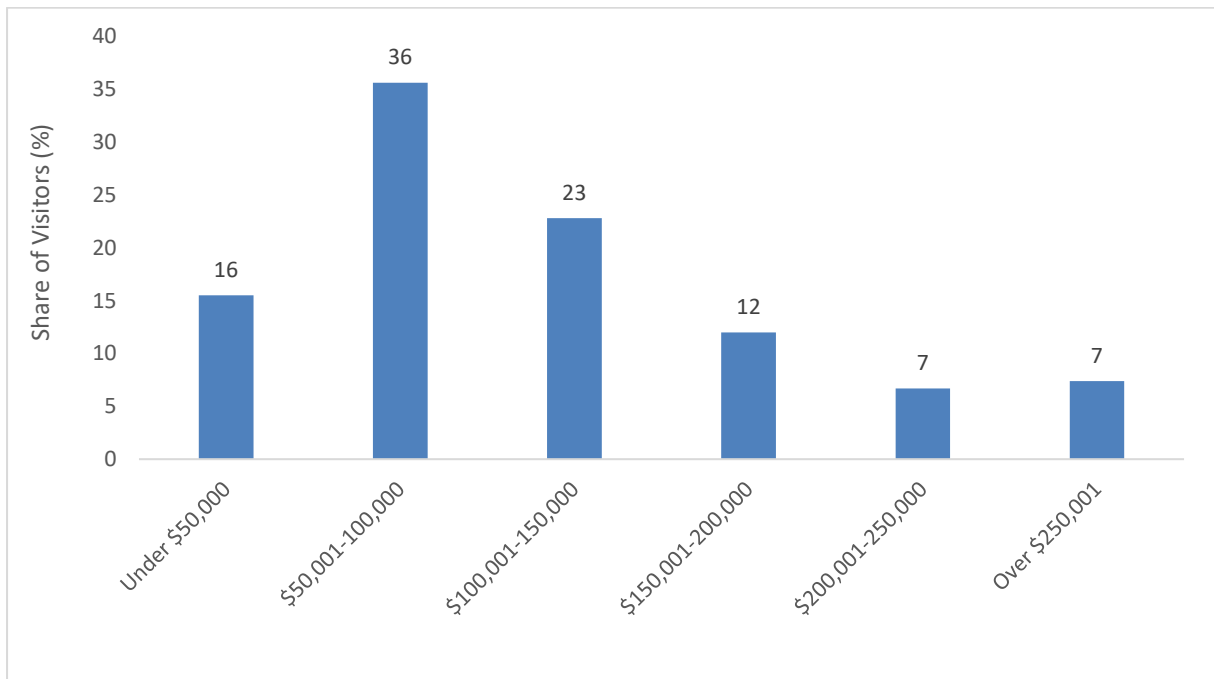
Visitors are well educated: more than two-thirds (70%) of those surveyed have some form of tertiary qualification, with a further 24% having completed a high school education (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Highest qualification (n=1186)**



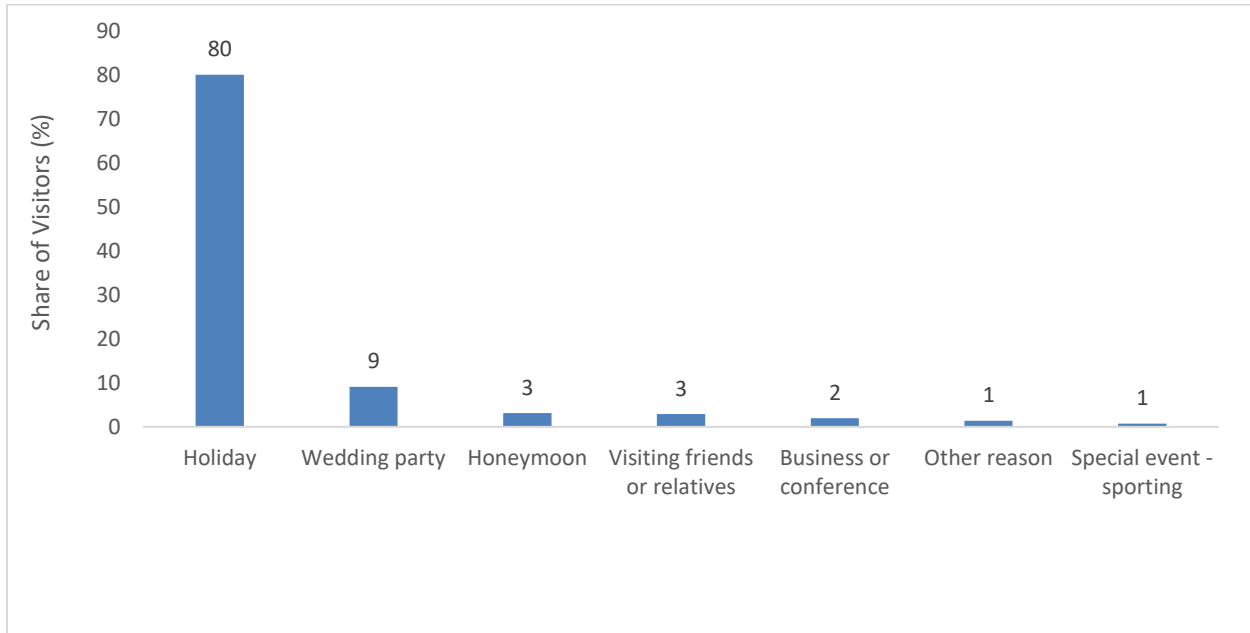
Over a third of visitors (36%) have an annual household income of between NZ\$50,001 and NZ\$100,000. Just under a quarter (23%) of those surveyed earn between NZ\$100,001 and NZ\$150,000. A further 26% of respondents have a household income of over NZ\$150,000 per year (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Annual household income in NZD (n=952)**



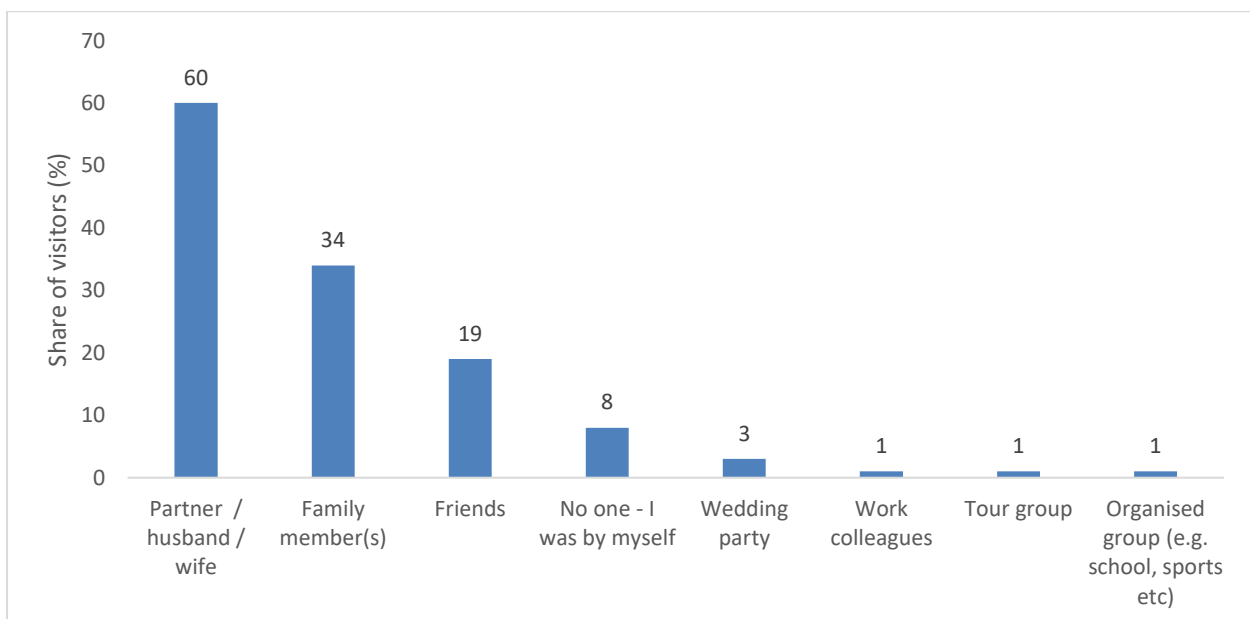
More than three quarters of visitors surveyed come to the Cook Islands for a holiday (80%). Other reasons given include attending a wedding (9%), a honeymoon (3%), visiting friends and relatives (3%), a honeymoon (6%), for business and conference (2%), and attending a special event (1%).

**Figure 7: Main purpose of visit (n=1324)**



Most visitors (60%) surveyed travel to the Cook Islands with a partner or spouse. Visitors also travel with other family members (34%), with friends (19%), or travel alone (8%). Those travelling as part of a wedding party, with colleagues, in a tour group or in an organised group represent a smaller share of the sample (Figure 8).

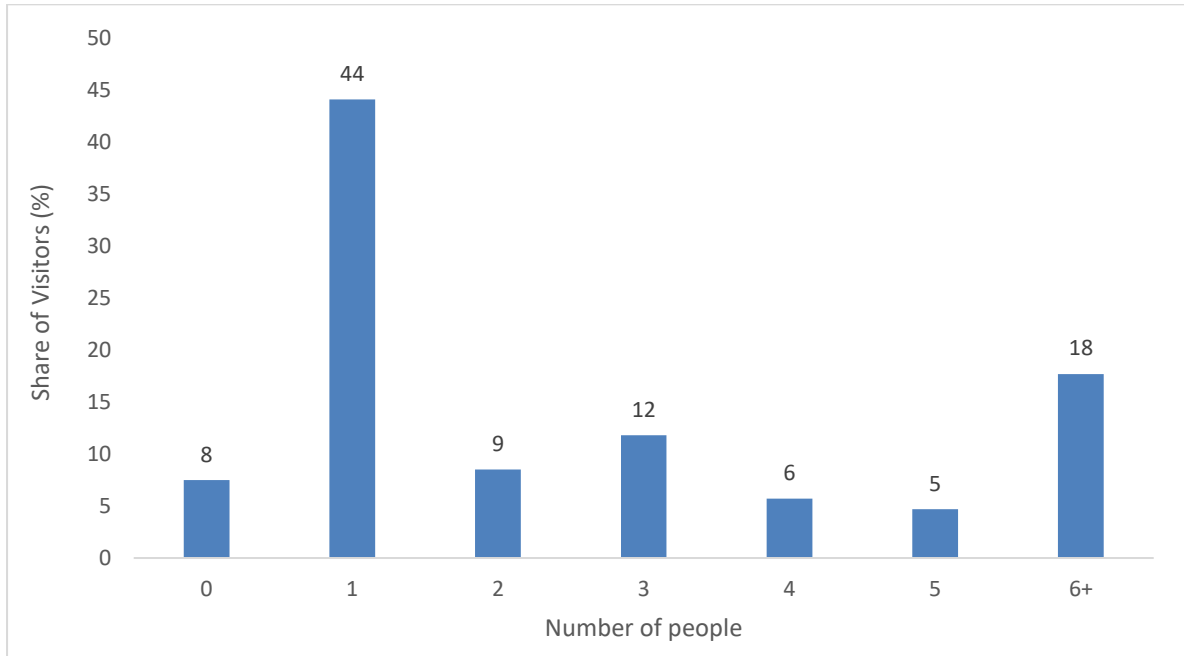
**Figure 8: Travelling with whom? (n=1324)**



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

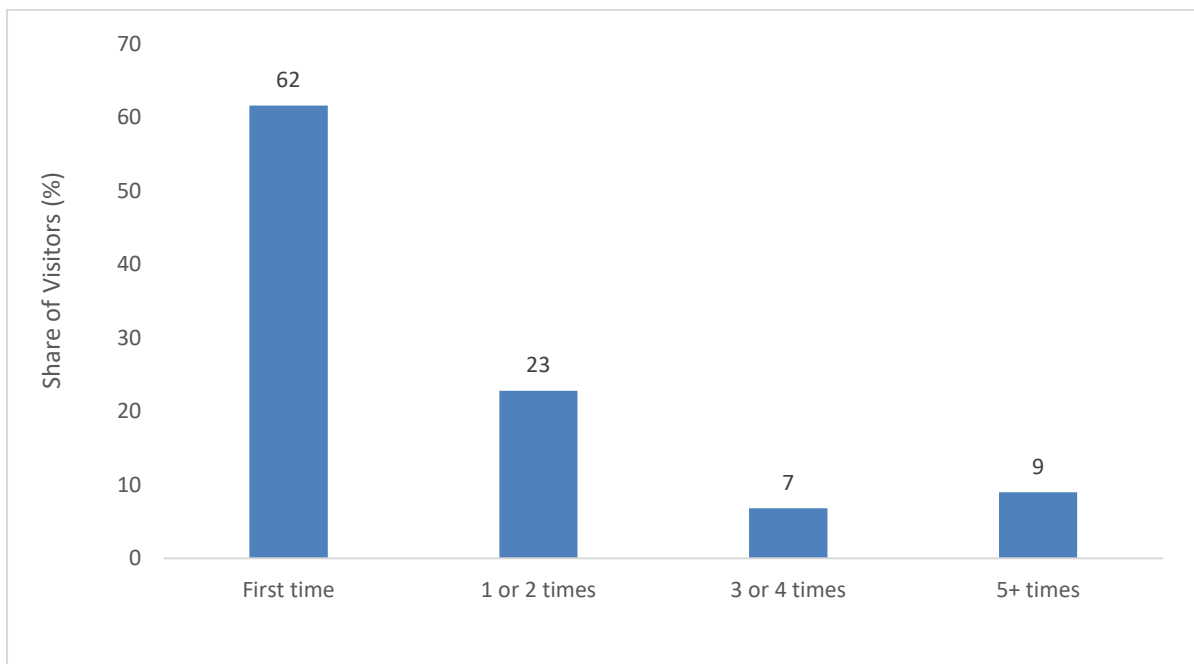
Under half of the visitors (44%) travelled with one companion on their visit to the Cook Islands (Figure 9). Travel groups larger than four people are not very common, with the exception of wedding parties.

**Figure 9: Number of companions on trip (n=1307)**



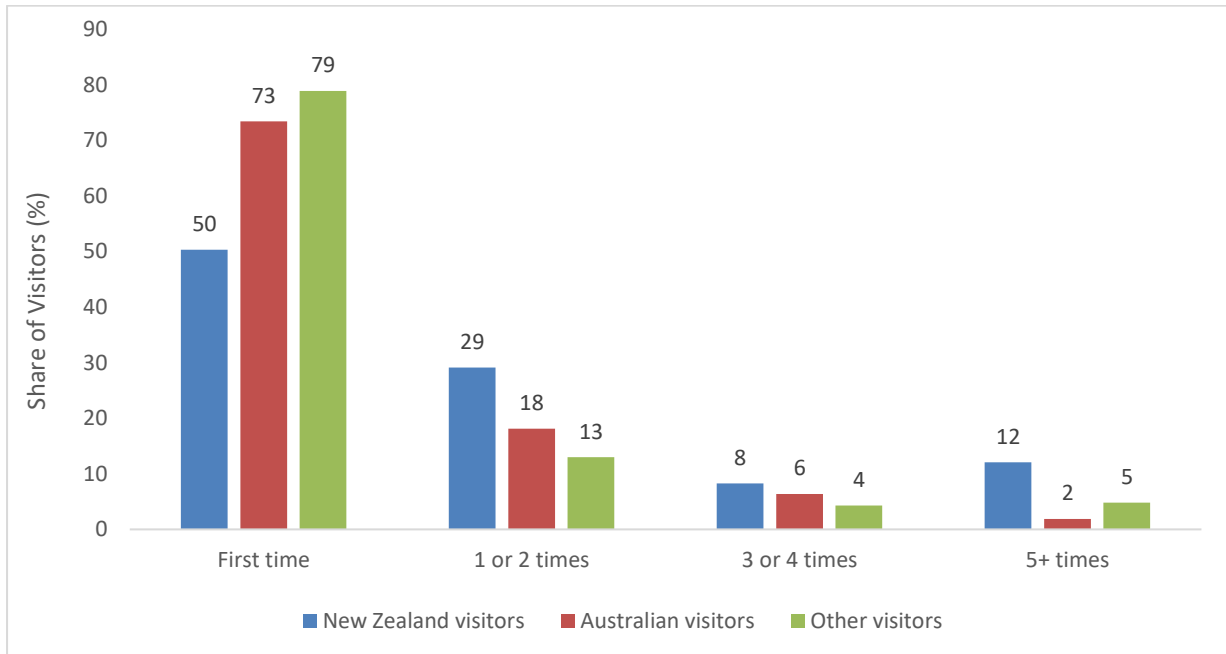
Over half of the visitors (62%) are on their first visit to the Cook Islands. A further 23% have been to the Cook Islands once or twice before. A smaller group (16%) have visited three or more times (Figure 10).

**Figure 10: Number of visits to the Cook Islands (n=1181)**



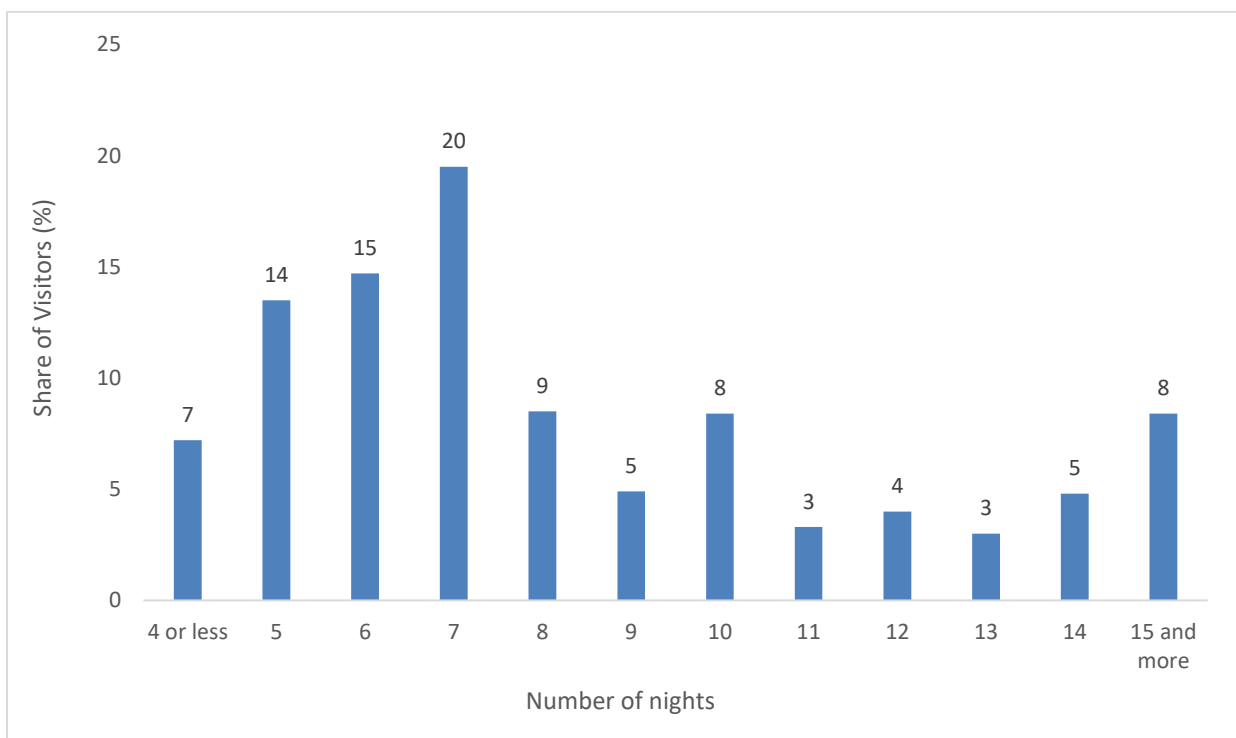
New Zealanders are more likely to be repeat visitors than those from other source markets (Figure 11). Nearly half of the surveyed visitors from New Zealand (49%) have visited the Cook Islands before compared to only 26% of visitors from Australia and 22% from other countries.

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



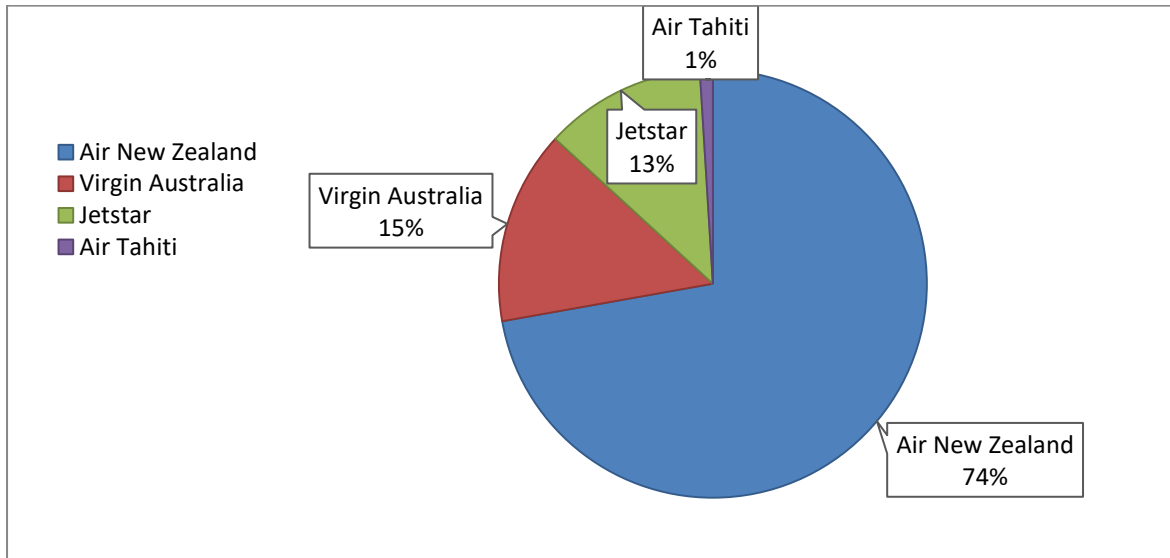
The average length of stay in the Cook Islands is 8.8 nights with 77% of visitors spending 10 or fewer nights in the country (Figure 12).

**Figure 12: Length of stay in nights (n=1315)**



The majority of visitors (74%) travel to/from the Cook Islands with Air New Zealand, a further 15% visitors fly with Virgin Australia (Figure 13), followed by thirteen percent of visitors travelling with Jetstar and one percent of visitors travelling with Air Tahiti. Visitors that arrived by private charter flights make up less than 1% of air arrivals.

**Figure 13: Mode of transport (n=1323)**

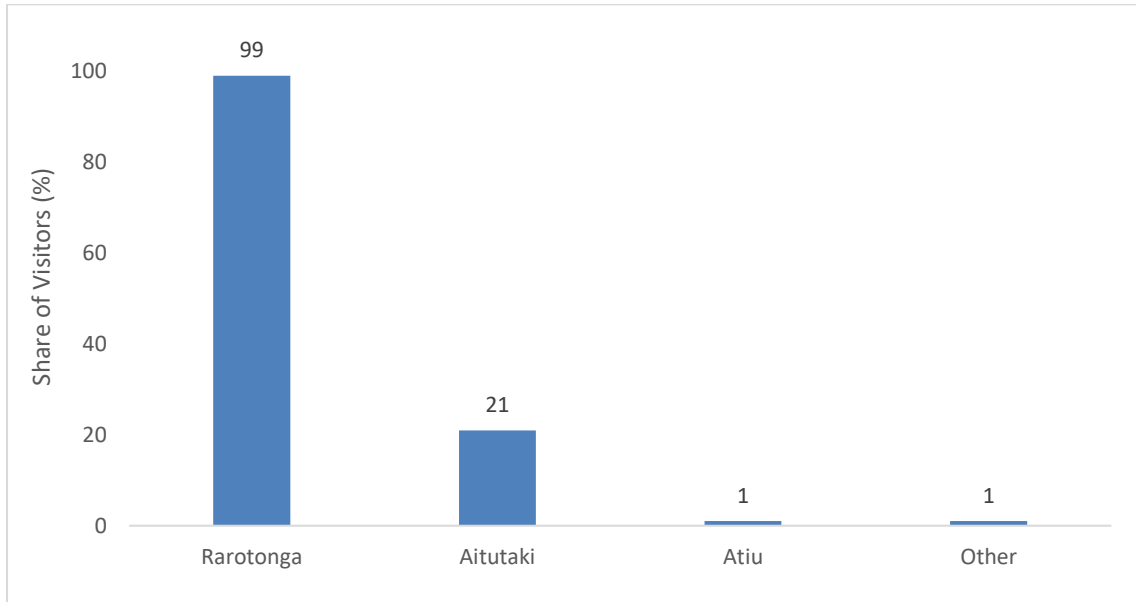


*Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%*

For 82% of visitors, the Cook Islands is the sole destination for their trip. For 18% 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 (81%), followed by travel to Australia (36%), Asian countries (32%), other pacific countries (22%), North America (16%), and Europe (7%).

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). Other islands rarely feature in the survey responses, with Atiu for example receiving only 1% of visitors.

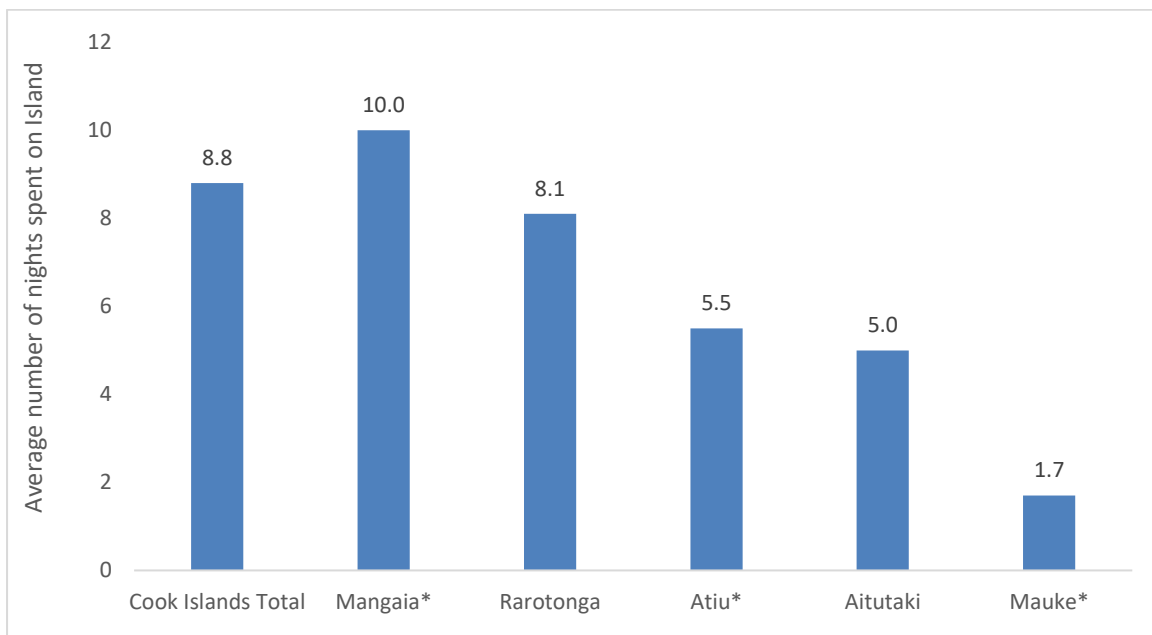
**Figure 14: Visited Islands (n=1322)**



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

The average length of stay on Rarotonga is 8.1 nights (Figure 15). For the visitors that went to Aitutaki, the average number of nights spent on the island itself is 5.0. Visitors to Atiu spent an average of 5.1 nights.

**Figure 15: Average length of stay in the Cook Islands and on each island (n=1305)**

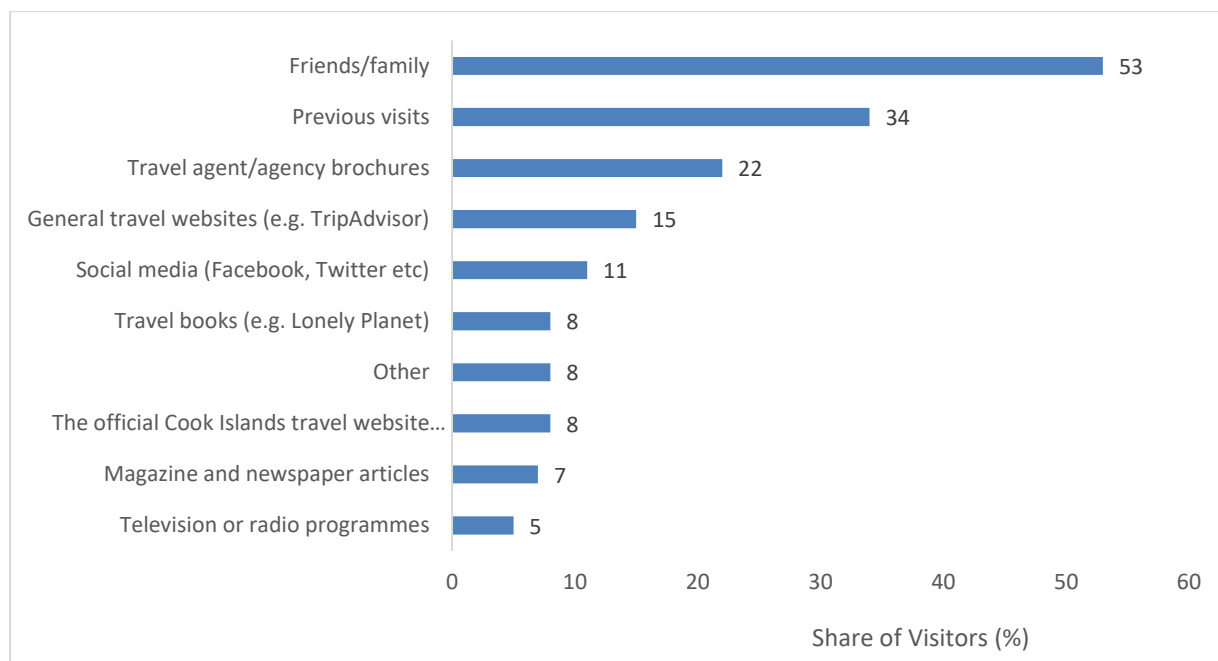


*Note: \*n<10*

## 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 (53%) of respondents ranked word of mouth from friends and family members as the most important influence, followed by previous experience (34%), travel agents (22%), and general travel websites (e.g. Tripadvisor) (15%).

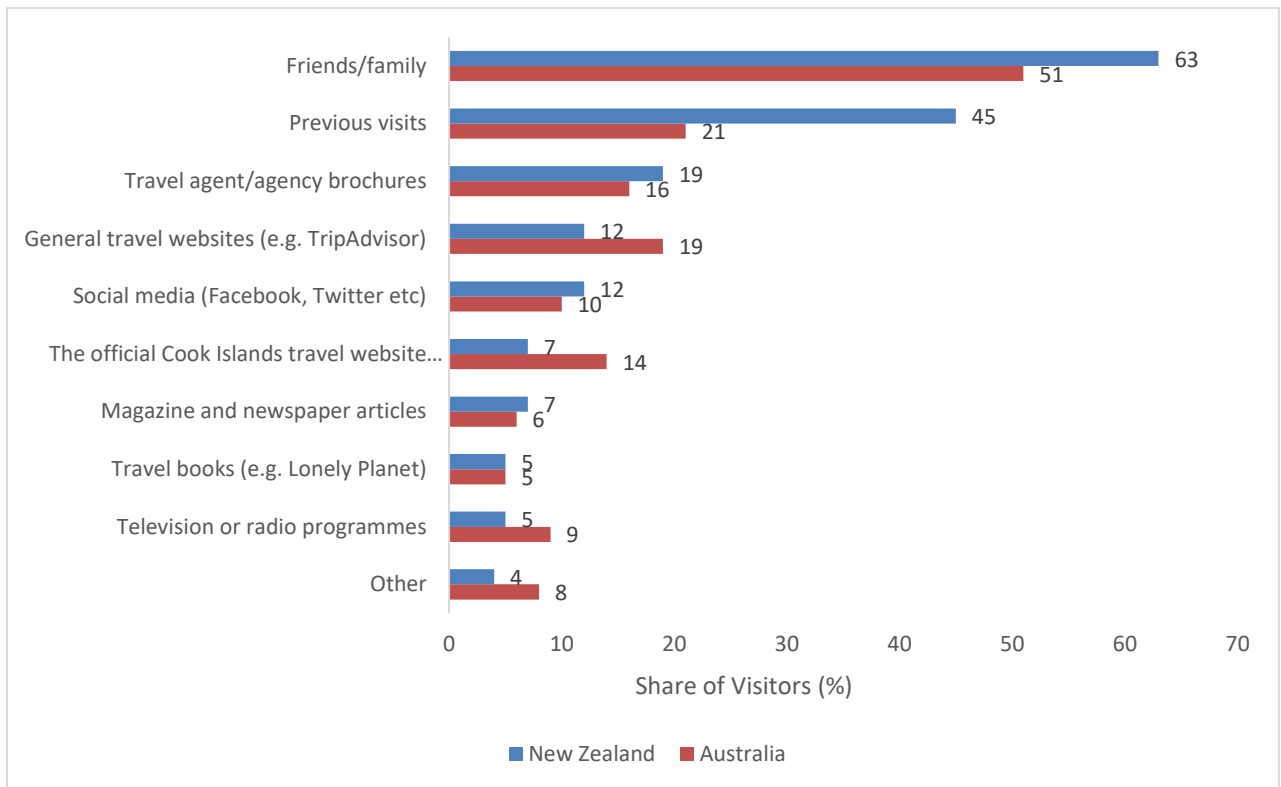
**Figure 16: How did you find out about Cook Islands as a destination (n=1324)**



*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 (63%). 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 (45%) ranked their previous visits as the most important information source (Australian visitors 21%). Australian visitors were more likely to rank travel websites, and television or radio programmes as the most important influence.

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

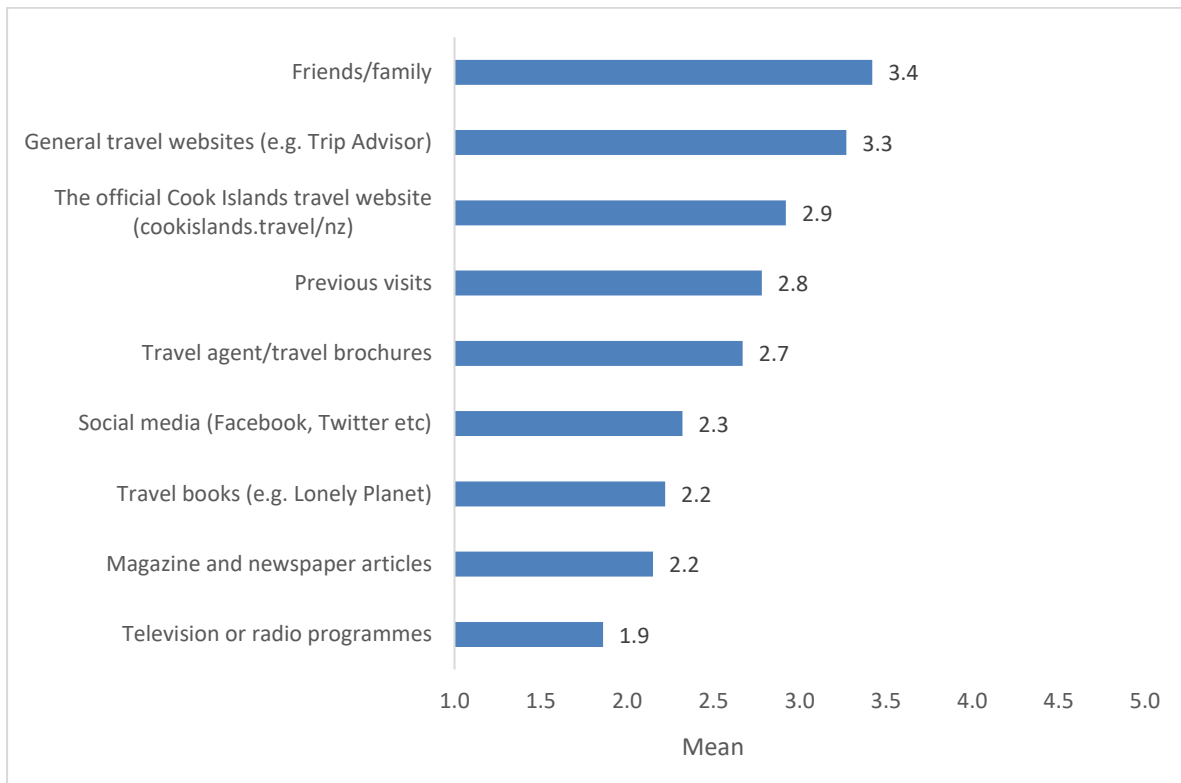


*Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%*

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 (3.4) (Figure 18). Other important information sources are general travel website (3.3), the official Cook Islands travel website (2.9), previous visits (2.8), and travel agent/travel brochures (2.7).

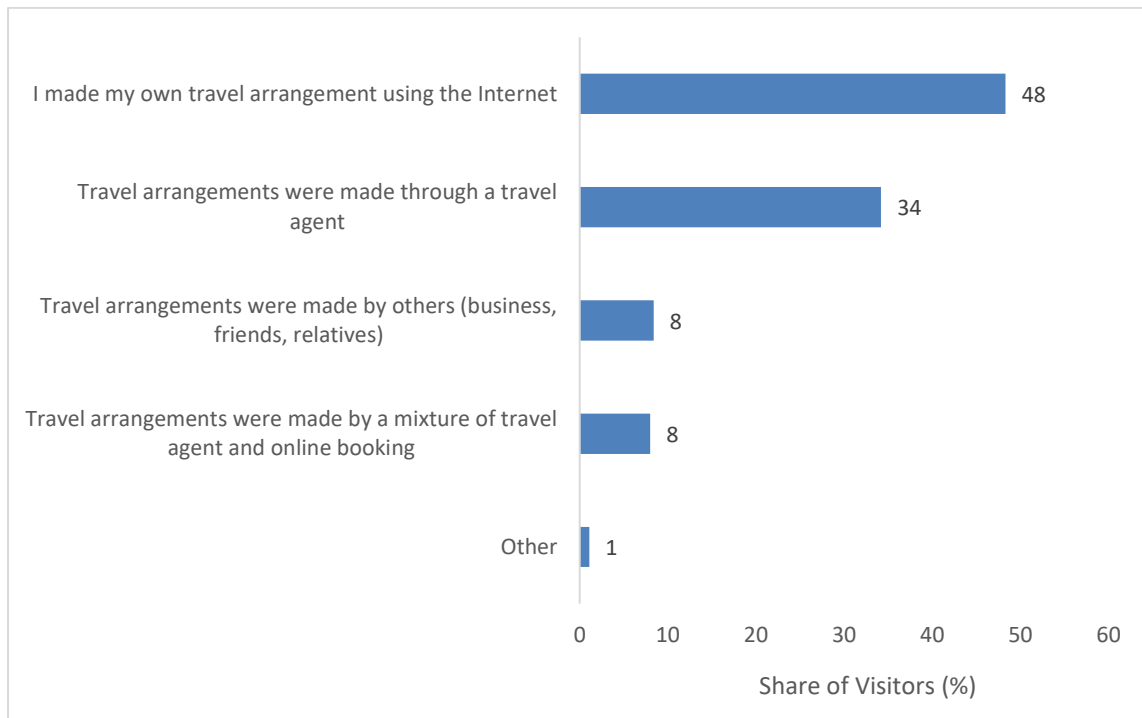


**Figure 18: Importance of information source used when planning your trip (n=1004)**



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 (34%) purchased a pre-paid trip through travel agents, followed by 8% of visitors whose travel arrangements were made by a mixture of travel agent and online booking, and others such as business, friends, and relatives.

**Figure 19: How did you purchase your travel to the Cook Islands (n=1322)**

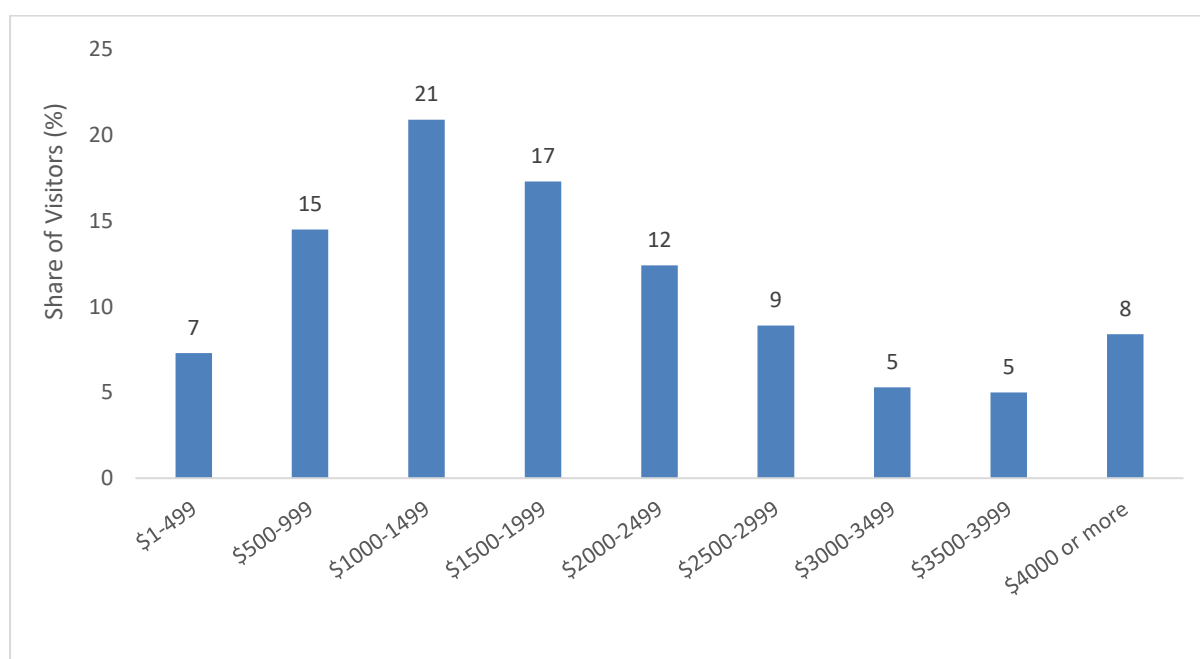


## Visitor Expenditure

The survey asks a range of questions about visitor expenditure, both prior to arrival and while in the Cook Islands. All the figures below are based on respondent estimates of their own spending and any others they spent money on (e.g. spouse, children). The following pre-paid expenditure section is based on the number of adults and children that respondents included in their cost estimates: 3,642 people comprising 3,149 adults and 493 children.

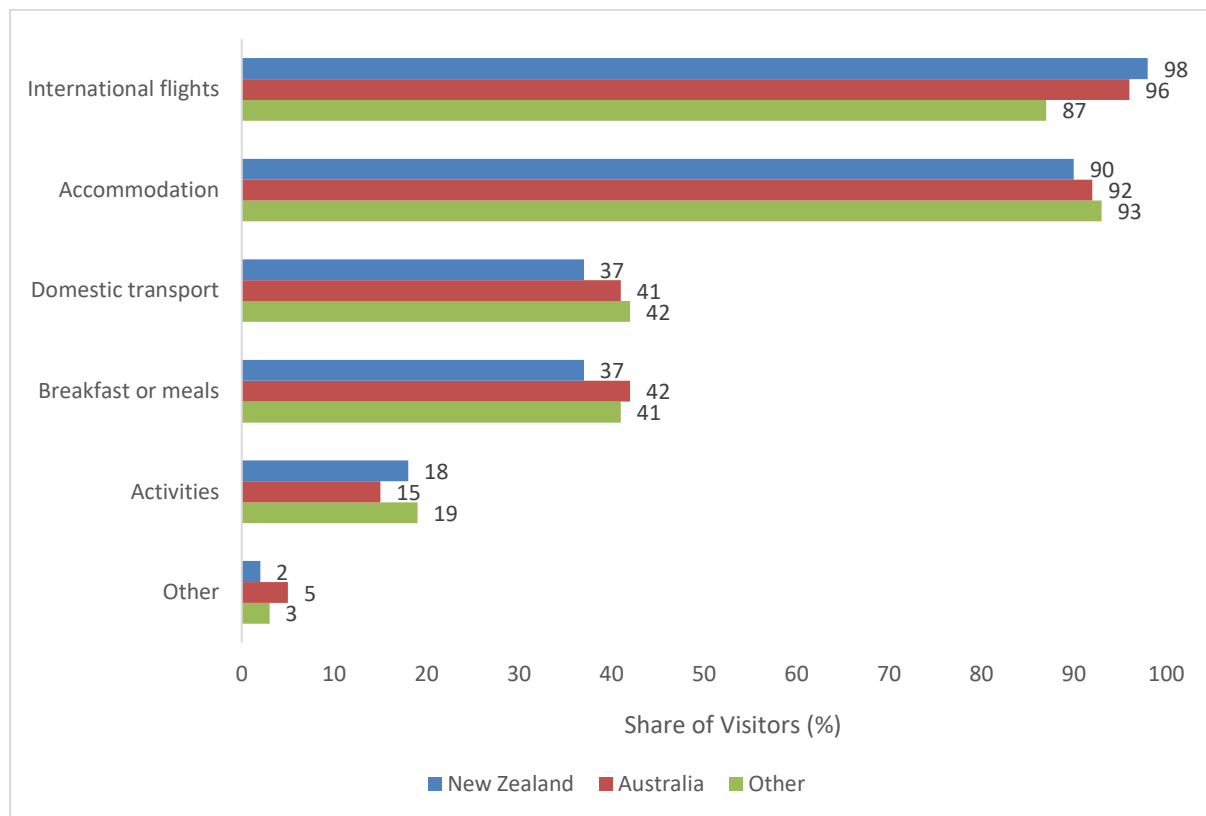
On average, visitors to the Cook Islands spend NZ\$2,075 per person prior to arrival. Half (50%) of the visitors spend between NZ\$1,000 and NZ\$2,499 prior to arrival. These figures are slightly lower than the data from the previous year (average spend of NZ\$2,121 for 2015/16), but higher than the same quarter for 2015/16 (NZ\$2,060) (Figure 20).

**Figure 20: Amount of money spent per person prior to arrival (n=985)**



In addition to international flights and domestic transport, spending prior to arrival usually includes accommodation: in 90% of the cases for New Zealand visitors, 92% for Australian visitors, and for 93% of visitors from other countries (Figure 21). Under half of visitors prepaid for breakfast and meals prior to arrival (37% for New Zealand, 42% of Australian visitors, and for 41% of visitors from other countries) which is lower than the data from the previous year and in the same quarter for 2015/16.

**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\$94 and for the average total visit is NZ\$830 (over 8.8 nights).

The total spend per visitor per day while in the Cook Islands (excluding any pre-paid expenditure) is NZ\$143 (Table 1). This figure is lower than overall spend figure for 2015/16 (NZ\$147) and same quarter in 2015/16 (NZ\$154). 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 1324 survey responses covering a total of 2,895 people (2,510 adults and 385 children).

By multiplying daily spend by the average stay (8.8 nights) we can see that each visitor spends on average NZ\$1,263 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\$237 per visitor per day (\$143+\$94), or NZ\$2,093 (\$1,263+\$830) for each visitor.

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

| Expenditure Items         | N=1324      |              |
|---------------------------|-------------|--------------|
|                           | Mean (NZ\$) | (% of spend) |
| Accommodation             | 60          | 42           |
| Restaurant, cafes and bar | 30          | 21           |
| Shopping                  | 11          | 8            |
| Activities                | 9           | 6            |
| Vehicle rental            | 9           | 6            |
| Groceries                 | 8           | 6            |
| Domestic flights          | 8           | 6            |
| Cruising                  | 2           | 1            |
| Other                     | 2           | 1            |
| Internet cost             | 2           | 1            |
| Petrol                    | 2           | 1            |
| Public transportation     | 1           | 1            |
| <b>Total Expenditure</b>  | <b>143</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\$190. By comparison, New Zealand visitors spend on average NZ\$46 less per day (NZ\$144).

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

| Expenditure Items         | n=195          | n=156      | n=693          | n=117      |
|---------------------------|----------------|------------|----------------|------------|
|                           | USA/<br>Canada | Australia  | New<br>Zealand | Europe     |
| Accommodation             | 53             | 80         | 59             | 60         |
| Restaurant, cafes and bar | 20             | 42         | 32             | 29         |
| Shopping                  | 9              | 14         | 11             | 11         |
| Activities                | 6              | 10         | 11             | 5          |
| Vehicle rental            | 7              | 9          | 10             | 6          |
| Groceries                 | 8              | 10         | 8              | 8          |
| Domestic flights          | 10             | 13         | 6              | 11         |
| Other                     | 1              | 3          | 2              | 1          |
| Petrol                    | 1              | 2          | 2              | 1          |
| Internet cost             | 1              | 3          | 2              | 4          |
| Public transportation     | 2              | 2          | 2              | 2          |
| <b>Total spend (NZ\$)</b> | <b>119</b>     | <b>190</b> | <b>144</b>     | <b>138</b> |

Average Australian spend per person for this quarter (NZ\$190) was higher compared to the 2015/16 average of NZ\$168 and the same quarter in 2015/16 (NZ\$188). New Zealanders' spend of NZ\$144 per person per day was higher than the average of \$143 for 2015/16, and lower than the same quarter in the previous year (NZ\$154). European visitor spend at NZ\$138 per person per day was down from the average for 2015/16 of NZ\$159, but higher than the same quarter in the previous year (NZ\$123). The average spend of NZ\$119 for visitors from USA/Canada for this period was lower than the 2015/16 average of NZ\$155, and the figure for same quarter in 2015/16 (NZ\$154).

## 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 (70%) 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=1200)**

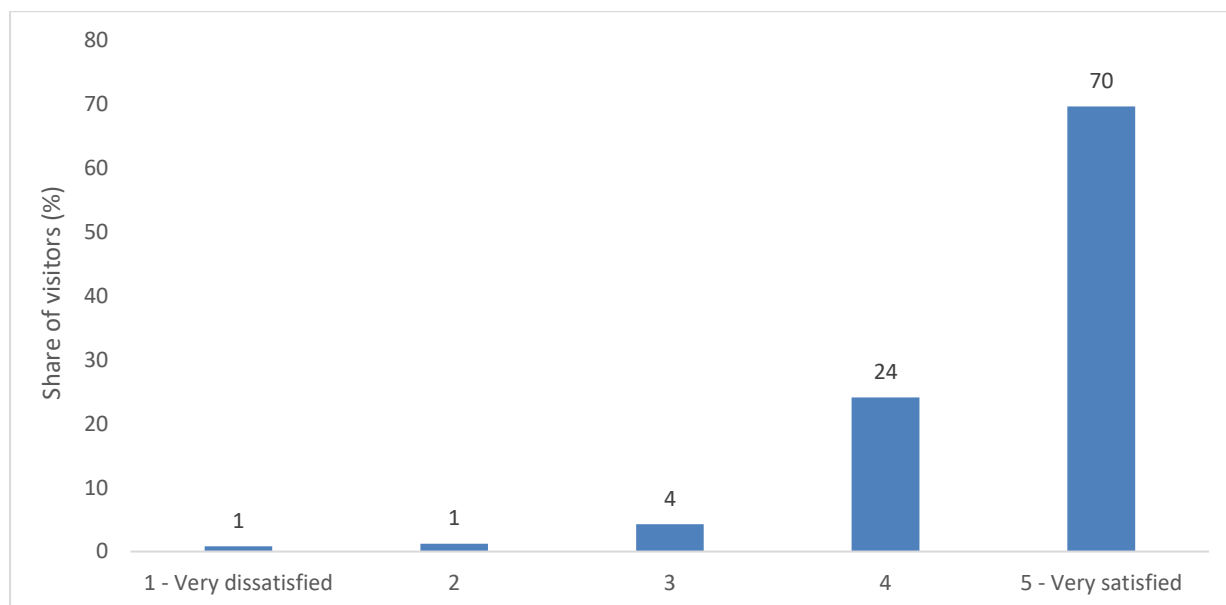
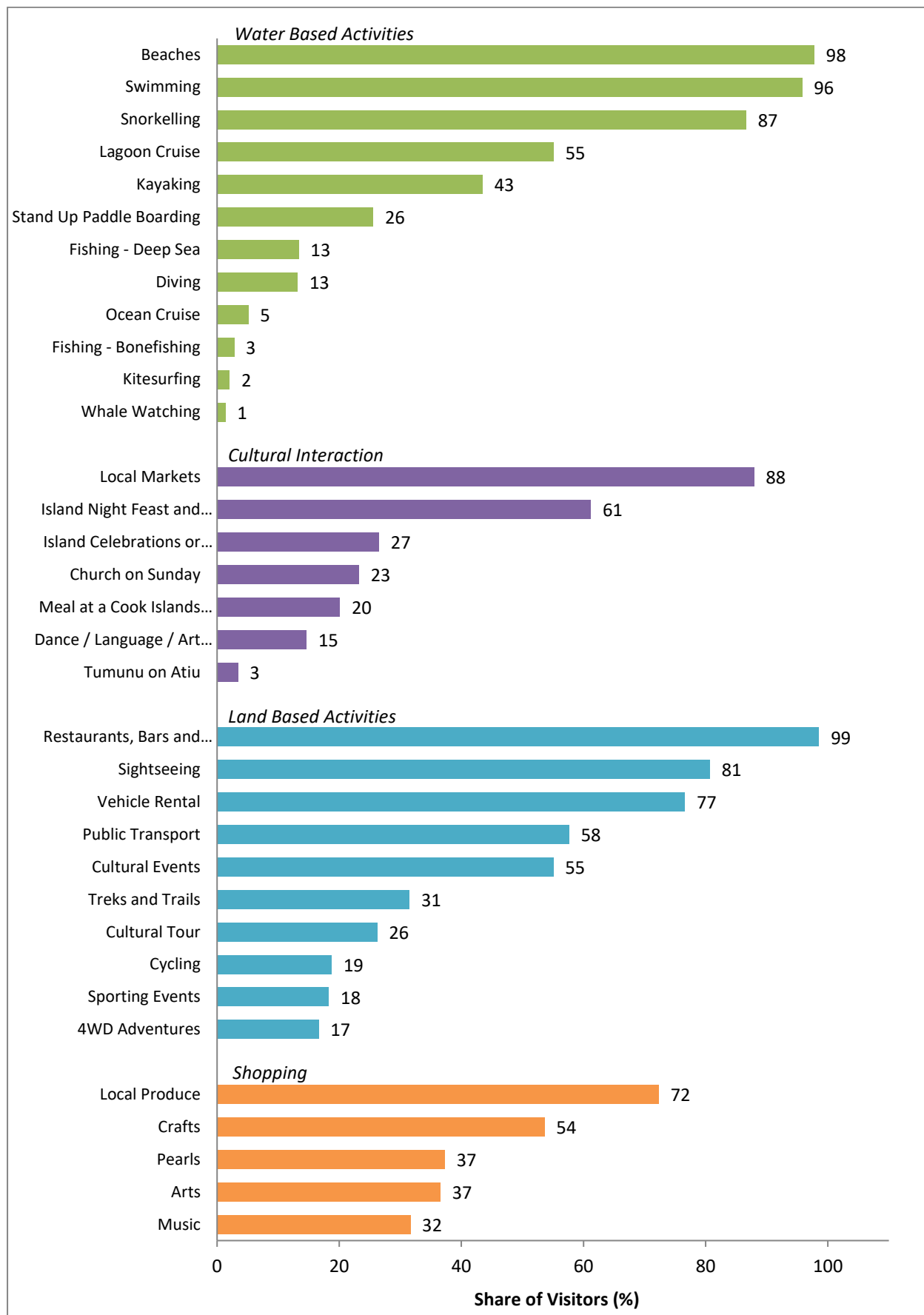


Figure 23 shows the percentage of respondents who undertook specific activities while on their visit to the Cook Islands. Almost all visitors participate in water activities and visit at least one restaurant or café during their trip. Most of the respondents (88%) visit a local market, and 61% of visitors experience an Island Night and Feast Show.

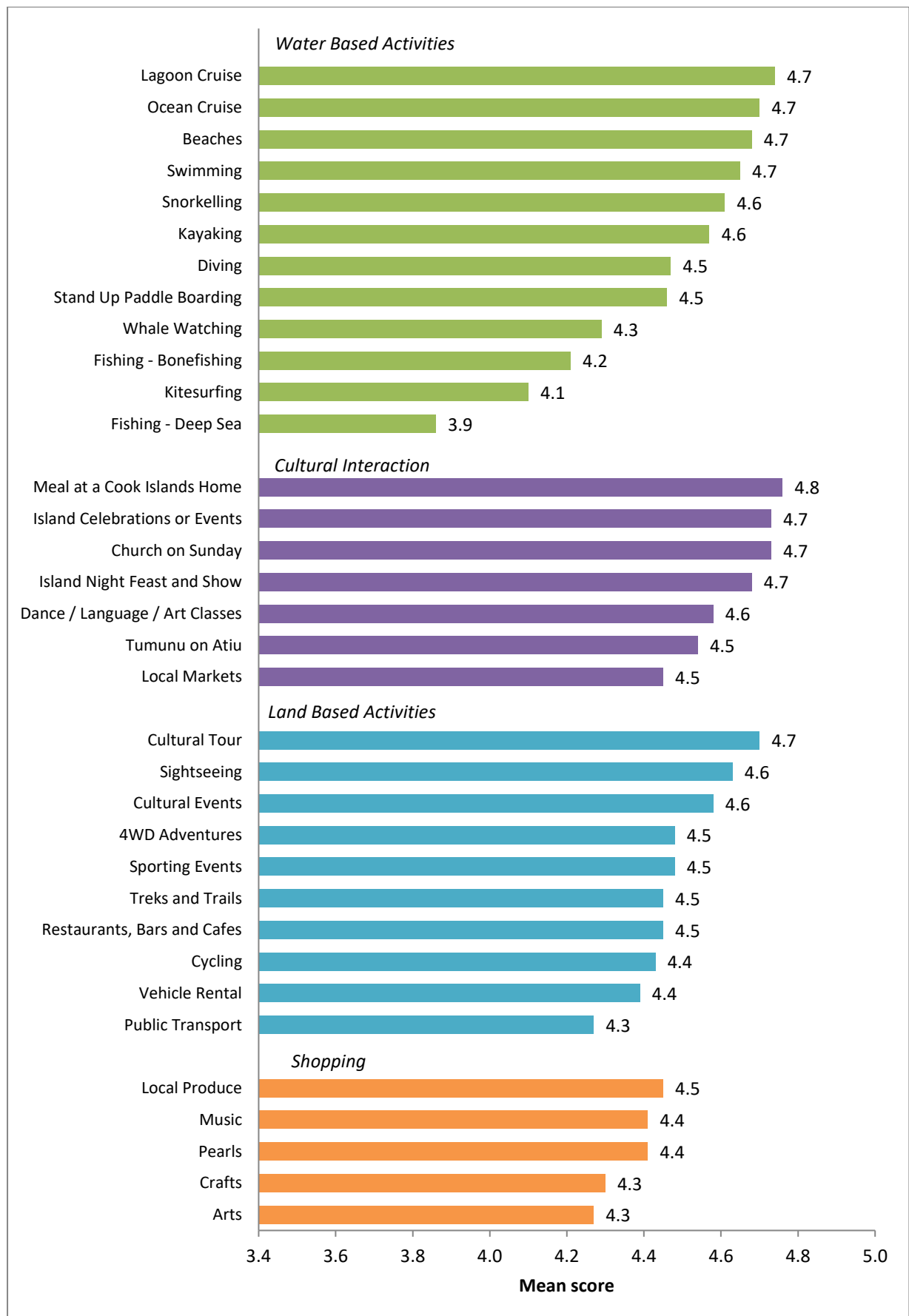
Visitor satisfaction is generally high for all activities undertaken (almost all registering more than 4 out of a possible high of 5) (Figure 23). Activities involving cultural interaction (average satisfaction of 4.6) rank the highest, followed by land-based products (4.5), water-based experiences (4.4), and shopping (4.4). It should be noted that some activities e.g. kitesurfing, whale watching are characterised by relatively low numbers of participants (n=14-21).

**Figure 23: Degree of participation in activities (n range=14-1291)**





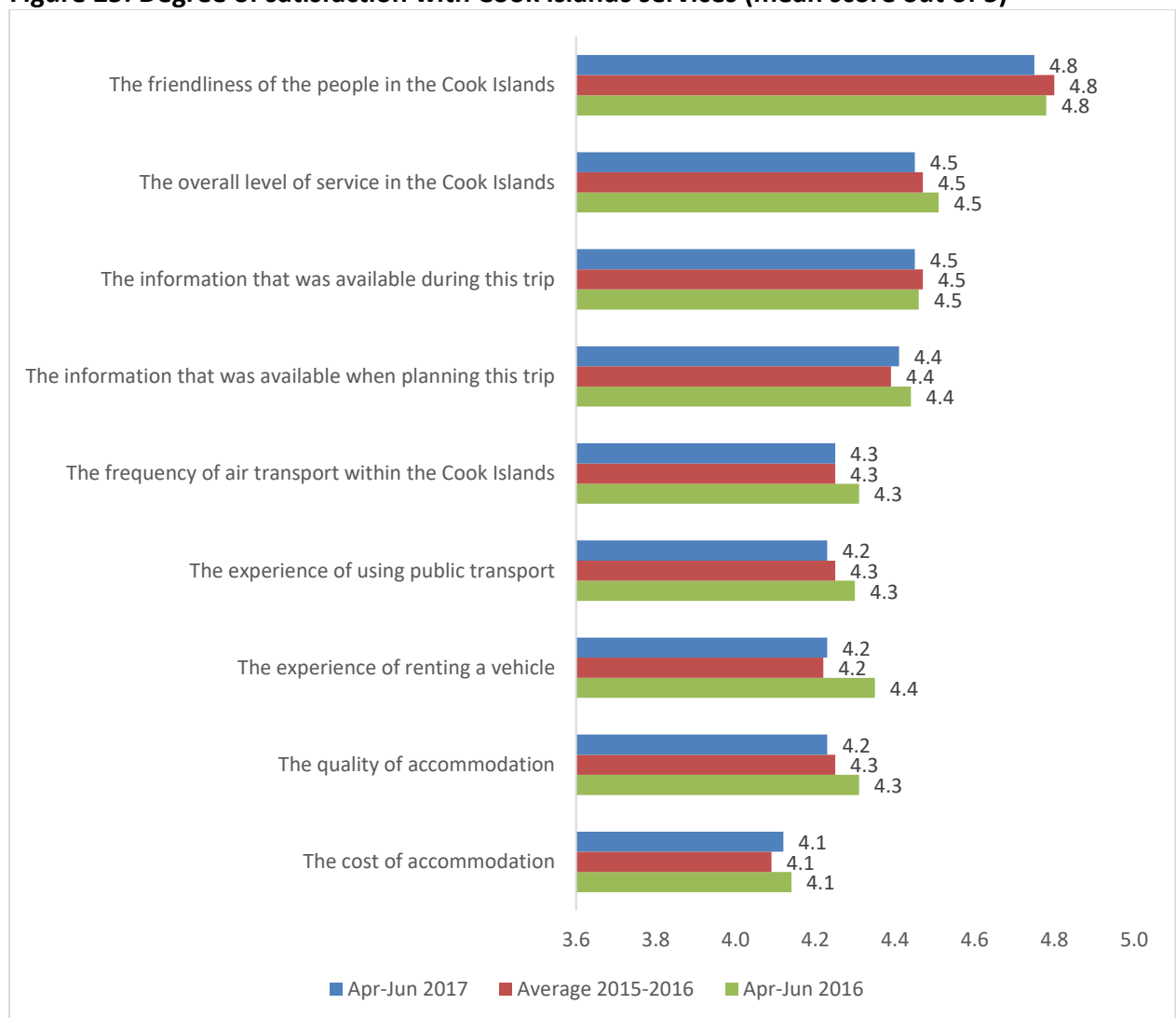
**Figure 24: Degree of satisfaction in activities participated in (mean score out of 5)**



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

As can be seen from Figure 25, visitor satisfaction level with the experience of using public transport, the experience of renting a vehicle, and the quality of accommodation are slightly lower than the same quarter in 2015/16.

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



## Most appealing aspects of the Cook Islands

Visitors were asked “What did you find most attractive or appealing about the Cook Islands on your most recent visit?” (Table 3). The most appealing elements of the Cook Islands experience are the beautiful and clean natural environment, the friendly and welcoming local people, the tourist attractions and activities on offer and the peacefulness and relaxing atmosphere of the islands. Smaller numbers of visitors mentioned aspects such as food and beverage (11%), accommodation (5%), the convenience and safety of the Cook Islands (5%), not too commercialised aspect (5%), the level of service experienced (4%), and culture (4%).

**Table 3: Most appealing aspects of the Cook Islands (n=1229)**

| Themes   | Share of respondents (%) |
|--|--------------------------|
| <b>Environment, cleanliness &amp; weather</b>                  | 54%                      |
| <b>Local People</b>  | 41%                      |
| <b>Activities, attractions, and entertainment &amp; events</b> | 29%                      |
| <b>Atmosphere</b>  | 23%                      |
| <b>Food and Beverage</b>                                       | 11%                      |
| <b>Accommodation</b>   | 5%                       |
| <b>Convenience &amp; Safety</b>                                | 5%                       |
| <b>Un-commercial</b>   | 5%                       |
| <b>Level of service</b>  | 4%                       |
| <b>Culture</b>   | 4%                       |
| <b>Overall good experience</b>                                 | 4%                       |

\* 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***

Under half of the respondents (54%) 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 ‘colourful’, ‘pristine’, ‘clear’, ‘wonderful’, ‘clean’, ‘stunning’, ‘breath-taking’, ‘amazing’, ‘and ‘unspoilt’ 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 natural-ness of the island. Beautiful 'earthy' feeling to the island.”*

*“The beaches are the most beautiful I have ever seen.”*

*“The surroundings of Rarotonga were absolutely breath-taking. It was one of the most beautiful places I have ever seen! Spectacular! Looks just like it does in the photos on the website!”*

*"The scenery! It's Paradise and we were absolutely blown away with how beautiful the Islands are."*

*"The Greenery. The Fruit trees and Vegs growing around. Flowers that were flowering. Nice to see Pineapple plantation."*

*"Its beauty!!! It's a Paradise on Earth!"*

*"A lovely beautiful 'untouched' tropical paradise."*

*"The nature is lovely, from the sea to the mountain."*

### **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 friendliness, welcoming nature of local people. Key words that dominated the responses included 'friendly', 'welcoming', 'helpful', 'lovely', 'kind', 'nice', 'happy', and 'accommodating'. Comments included:

*"The people made us feel so very special from the moment we set foot on the island, we were greeted by a big hug from our tour guide and loved the music that filled the room as we gathered our things to start a holiday."*

*"Clearly it is the people of the Cook Islands that are my favourite part. I feel as though I made an Island full of friends during my time on Raro."*

*"The people are so nice and helpful and like to get in contact with others."*

*"To me the most appealing thing in the Cook Islands were the people. Everyone I met or just crossed on the streets were so friendly and kind that it was amazing. You could really rely on people helping out in any given chance and the locals were very keen n sharing their culture and life in the islands."*

*"... and its beautiful people we find the most appealing. We love the warmth & kindness of the Islanders."*

*"...the people welcome you like a friend or family. Everyone is willing to help and take the time to make you feel right at home."*

*"I would have to say that the people were the most attractive and appealing aspect of my travel. Friendly, helpful, entertaining, polite, courteous, genuine and respectful."*

*"The local people! Loved everyone we encountered so friendly and ready to help."*

*"The locals were friendly, so welcoming, and happy to share their stories and we were*

*humbled by their love of their country, respect and support for their families and by how hard they worked.”*

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

Activities, attractions, entertainment and events were mentioned by 29% 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, and lagoon cruises. Land-based activities that respondents mentioned included hiking, walks, cycling, cultural tours, night shows and local markets. Comments included:

*“We adored our time on the Aitutaki lagoon. Many happy days spent on the beach and in the water. Some great snorkelling on both Aitutaki and Rarotonga.”*

*“The most attractive things were the lagoon tour with Aitutaki Adventure and the bike ride to Rarotonga.”*

*“The lagoon cruise and snorkelling day that we did with Teking Tours on Aitutaki was out of this world - we absolutely loved it and it was our trip's highlight.”*

*“If we wanted nightlife and day trips they were available and easy to access. If we wanted peace, quiet and solitude, it was also available. The balance between the two is important.”*

*“One highlight was visiting the prison to buy a ukulele- entertaining and informative prison guard, really welcoming.”*

*“Loved the museums and learned a great deal. Also was impressed by the leaving place of the Great Migration where I was able to locate the site of the Takitimu, which came to my pat of Aotearoa NZ. The young woman who talked at the queen's palace was most informative.”*

*“...just swimming and walking from resort to other resorts along the sand, also went to the gardens which was really nice.”*

*“The night market was very cool and had delicious food (even for me, a vegetarian).”*

### **Atmosphere**

Over a twenty percent of visitors surveyed (23%) 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 ‘chill out’ and ‘unwind’. Respondents used words such as ‘relaxing’, ‘peaceful’, ‘laid back’, ‘slow pace’ and ‘quiet’ to describe the overall atmosphere of the Cook Islands. The notion of ‘island time’ was also mentioned. Comments included:

*"The Cook Islands for us was a well-deserved break, we didn't want to me running from one activity to the next and the tranquillity that Rarotonga offers is what is really appealing."*

*"We loved how laid back the lifestyle on the island is. We stayed at an Airbnb and lived like locals. It was so relaxing. We were happy to not be bombarded with tourist activities and surrounded by other tourists. We hope you keep this awesome island lifestyle and don't become too big of a tourist attraction."*

*"It was so peaceful, relaxing and was the most beautiful place I have ever visited. I loved that everyone is so relaxed and not in a hurry."*

*"Nice and relaxing no rush or hassle and bustle."*

*"Relaxed approach to life made our holiday so enjoyable."*

*"I found myself relaxing totally from my work stresses and commitments. I am determined to return in future."*

*"I loved the slower pace of life and the whole atmosphere of island living."*

*"It was relaxing atmosphere not busy and noisy."*

*"Love the fact that we can unwind and relax."*

### **Food and beverage**

Just over one in ten respondents (11%) mentioned food and beverages as the most appealing aspect of their trip. Their comments focused on the quality and range of fresh food available in the Cook Islands. They used words such as 'great', 'amazing', 'high standard/quality', 'good', 'delicious' 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:

*"... also all the lovely little beachfront bars and cafes. The abundance of delicious tropical fruits."*

*"Lots of new good value dining options, e.g. cafes and casual dining."*

*"Great choice of dining and drinking options. Very easy to buy good quality food & Veg for self-catering."*

*"...lots of different food venues, good variety of food at supermarkets."*

*"...as well as the high standard of restaurants and coffee."*

*"The availability of such sweet fruit."*

### **Accommodation**

Another 5% of respondents noted that the accommodation they stayed in was an appealing aspect of their visit to the Cook Islands, referring to the high quality, the location, the setting, the level of service, and the warm welcome from their hosts. Comments included:

*"How accommodating our accommodation hosts were."*

*"...high quality of accommodation."*

*"Our accommodation was just what we wanted; quiet, private and well looked after."*

*"Resort was nice, clean and employees friendly."*

*"Makayla Palms was a wonderful place to stay. Grace and all other staff were most friendly and helpful."*

### **Convenience and safety**

The convenience and safety of the Cook Islands as a holiday destination were mentioned by five percent (5%) of respondents. In particular, they referred to the ease of getting to the Cook Islands and also of getting around the islands, the availability of public transport, the safety and the convenience of using the New Zealand dollar. Comments included:

*"I loved the ease of getting around. The two buses were on time and very convenient and there was almost always something within walking distance."*

*"Availability of transport on a relatively small island."*

*"As a Kiwi, it's easy to get to, we don't have to worry about currency and we have a good understanding of the culture."*

*"Close and easy access from NZ."*

*"...also using NZ currency is a plus for us Kiwi's."*

*"It is a very safe feeling place to visit."*

### **Not too commercialised**

Another five percent (5%) 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:

*"...not overcrowded, no large corporations (no McDonald's, for example) so there are lots of small family-owned businesses to support. Please keep it that way!"*

*"The culture and the way that the island has not been commercialized and is committed to the locals."*

*"The 'untouched' feeling of the place. Lack of development/high rise."*

*"We were happy to not be bombarded with tourist activities and surrounded by other tourists. We hope you keep this awesome island lifestyle and don't become too big of a tourist attraction."*

*"...and I love the fact that there are NO Pokie Machines or KFC or McDonalds."*

*"That the island is not over built & over populated."*

*"That it is not too touristy."*

### **Level of service**

A four percent (4%) of visitors commented on the service they encountered while in the Cook Islands. Respondents had positive comments on the local hospitality they experienced, especially mentioning the friendly, hospitality, professional 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:

*"Excellent service and attention to detail and desire to provide us a wonderful vacation. Personal greetings by manager and all employees."*

*"Service was exceptional, tourism operators and locals were very knowledgeable, or directed you to someone who knew more."*

*"The people, the service and generally everything was above our expectations."*

*"Service and friendly staff everywhere."*

*"The level of service was AAA+."*

*"...nobody hassling us to sell us things."*

### **Culture**

The island's unique local culture was mentioned by four percent (4%) 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 fact that the one is immediately immersed in local culture.”*

*“How much their culture is everywhere you go on the island and how everyone is friendly.”*

*“We enjoyed the museums and all of the cultural offerings.”*

*“...the preservation and importance of culture and traditions.”*

*“Great dance and history.”*

### **Overall good experience**

Four percent (4%) 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:

*“Rarotonga is truly a beautiful and amazing place it was the one place on earth I wanted to visit and I did words can't describe how happy I am to have visited the beautiful island of Rarotonga, thank you Rarotonga for the amazing experience.”*

*“The Cook Islands was everything we dreamed of and more, relaxing, inviting, exciting and romantic so we plan to come back again in April 2018.”*

*“I love the Cook Islands and will always visit this island, so everything is appealing to me!”*

*Showing our family around our most favourite place in the world.”*

*“I just love the Cooks. The engagement of everyone at a tourism level is a real asset to the country.”*

*“This was the first time on Cook Island; we enjoyed our trip very much would go any time again.”*

*“There isn't one negative thing I could say.”*

## 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 (25%) of the visitors surveyed, found “nothing” unattractive, with more than one person saying “not a thing I can say that I found unattractive about the Cook Islands” and “having to leave” was considered the least appealing aspect. Table 4 summaries key themes respondents felt were unappealing. Comments ranged from issues with public services and facilities, rubbish and natural environment care, price of good and service through to disappointment with the weather.

**Table 4: Least appealing aspects of the Cook Islands (n=1117)**

| Themes  | Share of respondents %* |
|---|-------------------------|
| Public services and facilities and infrastructure | 14%                     |
| Rubbish and natural environment care              | 13%                     |
| Muri  | 5%                      |
| Price of good and service                         | 13%                     |
| Food and beverage                                 | 8%                      |
| Stray animals and mosquitos                       | 8%                      |
| Accommodation                                     | 7%                      |
| Poor weather                                      | 7%                      |
| Customer service                                  | 6%                      |
| Attractions and activities                        | 5%                      |
| Rental cars or scooters                           | 5%                      |
| Flight related issues                             | 4%                      |
| Local people                                      | 4%                      |
| Too touristy                                      | 3%                      |
| Law and Legislation                               | 2%                      |

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

### Public services, facilities and infrastructure

One of the least appealing aspects for visitors was the lack of public services, facilities and infrastructure in the Cook Islands (14%). Comments mainly included the condition of local roads, lack of pavements and the subsequent dangers these can have on locals and tourists alike. Others expressed their disappointment with the cost of Internet access, poor public transport, lacks of signage and general infrastructure. Some of the comments included were:

*“The roads need to be resurfaced, poor lighting and night when driving. Road markings are very poor. No foot paths to walk on had to walk on the road. Lack of parking due to motor bikes taking up a car space.”*

*“Getting clean water.”*

*“Lack of footpaths. We had a child in a wheelchair and that was difficult”*

*“The internet service when I had to use it for work.”*

*“Difficulty of getting around without a rented vehicle, infrequent public transport.”*

*“Wish taxis were a bit more accessible for late nights when the bus was not an option.”*

*“Rarotonga is losing a lot of its culture and becoming very commercialised but yet the money is not being spent to improve tourism or local aspects.”*

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

Rubbish and natural environment care was down 4% percent from the last quarter (17%). In this quarter, we also added Muri lagoon as a sub theme of the rubbish and natural environment care. Muri, lagoon and algae made up 5% of the total comments in the overall data set and 13% of the comments in the rubbish and natural environment care theme. Visitors commented on the quality of the lagoon, the beaches and the water. Visitors also disliked the rubbish and the algae, and were concerned about coral and reefs.

*“The algal impact on the lagoon. I have faith that the stewards of the Cook Islands will work through the issue and get it resolved. It is wholly important and should be taken up with the most care.”*

*“Yes the reason I am completing the survey is that I have been there twice before and was very disappointed with Muri Lagoon. There was very little coral, it seems to have silted up, lots of sea cucumbers and a frothy brown scum on the shoreline which could only be sewerage. One night I went down after rain and it stunk. Love the Cooks but would not go back to snorkel in sewerage.”*

*“Rubbish and lack of bins at Fruits and North of Muri beach and wharf at the park opposite the church. I was always picking up plastic bottles, 8 in one visit at Fruits. Bigger emphasis on recycling and plastic pollution needed for locals and visitors. And using re-usable bags which we did.”*

*“This visit we felt there was more general rubbish around the Island on beaches and road edges which was a shame.”*

*“Finding lots of green glass (from broken beer bottles) in the water’s edge along the beach. Sad to see pollution and disregard for the environment, marine life and other peoples safety.”*

*“Very disappointed in the water quality at the beach, it has defiantly deteriorated since I was in Rarotonga last. If it doesn't get any better I will probably not come back after my next planned visit in March 2018. Please clean up your waste water systems.”*

*“Sorry to say Muri beach does need work to fix the green weed, and I noticed this trip that the Aitutaki Lagoon on the sunset side was looking a little green as well.”*

*"We picked up garbage on the beach and scattered around the garbage cans at the end of the runway. Unfortunately some locals do not appreciate how special of a place they live in and how it needs to be protected."*

*"The heavy weed infestation/algae in the lagoon area around Muri beach which made swimming and bathing an unpleasant experience. We had to travel to other parts of the island for this."*

*"Muri beach had lots of sea slugs."*

*"A smell is now coming from Muri, it wasn't there on my first visit. Also the beach in Muri has a film on it! I saw a lot more rubbish around, I feel like tourists don't appreciate the beauty of the land."*

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

Visitors (13%) also disliked the price of goods and service. Comments about the expense of food and restaurants, accommodation, internet, scooters and transport were common.

*"Cost of groceries, it was more expensive than anticipated."*

*"Getting motor bike Licence costing \$90 dollars felt like it was just a fund raising venture for local police force this along with cost of motor bike rental left bad taste will most probably not return to the Island because of this."*

*"Very expensive services/food. They were not bad, just very expensive."*

*"Access to fresh fruit and veggies seemed very limited ... And expensive when we did find it."*

*"Expensive - shuttles to and from airport, local buses and food."*

*"Having to pay to drive up to the waterfall."*

*"I understand about Island time but you're paying big city prices for accommodation and food and you don't get what you've paid for at most resorts."*

*"Internet access was minimal at best and expensive."*

### **Food and Beverage**

Issues with food and beverages made up 8% of comments. Cost, lack of local produce, food service, and quality of food were problems for many.

*"That there wasn't as much island food as there was touristy foods i.e. burgers fried chips fried anything."*

*"We were surprised that fish didn't feature more prominently on the menus like they did in our previous visits 14 years ago. There seemed to be much more NZ lamb and*

*beef and international food which has its place but we went to the islands to eat more island style food.”*

*“Not many vegetarian places to eat.”*

*“Need to teach the staff at some resorts how to make cocktails.”*

*“We had a hard time getting produce at the morning farmers market and the grocery store / road side stands had mainly packaged food, not whole foods.”*

### **Stray animals and mosquitos**

The stray dogs, noisy roosters, mosquitoes and ants continue to be an annoyance or a worry for 8% of respondents during their time spent on the islands. Respondents mentioned disturbed sleep, insects & mosquitos, menace due to stray animals on the streets.

*“Nothing really, although dogs and roosters could easily be very annoying at times.”*

*“The presence of mosquitos and the danger of different diseases they could bring with.”*

*“Packs of snarling and uncontrolled dogs, they should be shot, they are a menace, as the owners don't care when they bail of members of the public. Twice I have had dogs rushing and barking at me in a real nasty way, while the owners just stayed on their deck and weakly called the dog, who ignored them.”*

*“The roosters crowing and dogs barking through the night. We did get used to it but it took a few nights of disturbed sleep first.”*

*“The dogs - a real menace. The time before last my husband was bitten quite badly on the calf so we are very wary.”*

### **Accommodation**

Seven percent mentioned accommodation as least appealing. Visitors surveyed mentioned that the service and cost of accommodation, as well as some properties being “worn-out”, were important factors as to why they disliked their accommodation.

*“Seeing the accommodation prices getting higher and higher.”*

*“The service just get worse every time I go there. And nobody seems to care.”*

*“I just feel the resort could work on cleanliness in the hotel rooms. Lots of hair and Dirt under the beds. Also, the drawers were really dusty. Not a clean hotel to go with a 6 month old. Overall was very disappointed with the hotel we stayed at. However, wanted to enjoy our trip and could not shift hotels with kids hence continued to live in the dirt.”*

*I understand about Island time but you're paying big city prices for accommodation and food and you don't get what you've paid for at most resorts."*

*"The hotel was starting to get run down and not up to the standard it was during our previous two visits."*

*"2 of 3 holiday homes we stayed at had no aircon or fans."*

*"Disappointment with the quality of accommodation for price paid and length of stay."*

*"The accommodations on Atiu lacked some of the basics such as bug screens on the doors and windows so one could leave the doors and windows open in order to take advantage of the natural ventilation. The Villas were a little more run down than we expected!"*

### **Poor weather**

About 7% of the respondents stated the weather as one of the least appealing aspects in their comments. This may be due to the fact that January – June sees a lot of rain in the Cook Islands, along with heat and humidity.

*"Not too much to do on a rainy day, but then again we did go in the rainy season."*

*"The mosquitos and humidity. My skin had a bad reaction to the bites and got a major heat rash... I will be prepared with antihistamines next time lol."*

*"Weather was a bit average - but we did travel in cyclone season! The fishing as a result was not good."*

*"It was really hot when we were there so we weren't able to take any hikes."*

### **Customer service**

Six percent of visitors surveyed complained about the poor customer service received during their visit in the Cook Islands, notably in hotels, restaurants and shops. Customer service was considered to be rude, slow and appalling. Comments included:

*"The service level was a bit disappointing. There's "island time" and just bad service. People generally didn't want to serve you even when you're smiling. It's like Rarotonga is stuck in a 90's tourism boom, they want the money but don't want to help you enjoy it."*

*"The staff were unable to give accurate information about dive shop opening hours, rent a bike availability or anything outside of their specific job."*

*"The service in the Hotel was not very friendly. We didn't feel very welcome."*

*"The hotel bar people not as friendly as could be. They appear tired and uninspired."*

*“When out shopping in town having young shop assistants not stopping in their own conversation while serving us.”*

### **Attractions and activities**

Five percent of responses complained about attractions and activities. Visitors mentioned the lagoons, shopping, the markets and the unavailability of tours as unappealing.

*“I don't think the practice of feeding giant trevallies is a good idea. We were aware of 4 people who were bitten by these fish during our week stay on Aitutaki.”*

*“It was a bit difficult finding places to buy local art or local crafts.”*

*“Not that many cultural art as I imagined there would be.”*

*“Not being able to access the waterfall or the Sheraton as we had on other visits due to the charge of locals (rip off for tourists). Unable to do the crossing because refused to pay the toll to be picked up from the waterfall.”*

*“Diving school at the east of my backpacker. Rude and racist, dishonest. Met us drunk few hours before the appointment.”*

### **Other unappealing aspects**

Other unappealing aspects mentioned by visitors include: rental cars and scooters (quality, cost, service and the process of getting driving licenses), flight related issues (odd flight timings, airport experiences), local people (unfriendly, hard to get involved with them), too touristy (commercialisation and experiencing over crowdedness at the destination) and law and Legislation.

Comments included:

#### Rental cars and scooters

*The motorbike licensing has just changed. Wasn't worth spending a day waiting at police station to obtain a Raro drivers licence - particularly when you are only there for 4-5 days. Should be able to ride a scooter on NZ driver licence - the scooters don't go that fast. I think this needs looking at.”*

*“How hard and expensive to get a scooter licence- they were either closed or you had to wait for hours and it cost way more than I thought it would.”*

*“The car rental place we organised the car with, never left the car at the airport for us at midnight so we were stuck at the airport till 2am figuring out how we are going to get to the resort.”*

#### Flight related issues

*“Airport information and service if flight is delayed, we had to wait 3 h without any*

*information.”*

*“Rarotonga's airport had nothing to offer when our flight arrived at 4 a.m. and, as nobody told us about this before, we found ourselves sleeping in the airport.”*

#### Local people

*“Everybody on the island seemed sick of tourists and very unfriendly. It seemed that all they cared about was money tourists had.”*

*“Some of the people working at local shops were a bit rude. Also people were a bit rude towards tourists or who they thought were not locals.”*

*“The Cook island people have lost their enthusiasm, friendliness, sweetness over the past twenty four years. This was my fourth trip to Rarotonga.”*

#### Becoming too touristy

*“The growing commercialism, it's a difficult balance. I have been visiting the Cooks for 20 years and worry about the growth.”*

*“Strong New Zealand/European influence. Not so many local businesses.”*

#### Law and legislation

*“The corruption of the politicians as many people there told us. Very sad.”*

*“Police issuing traffic tickets to foreigners but not locals for same infringements.”*

*“The change in laws for the motorcycle and helmet and the price to get a license. I visit the Cook Islands almost every year so this upset me.”*



## 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 (36%) of respondents said 'yes'. Of the group that made suggestions 25% focused on public services and infrastructure, entertainment, activities and transport (14%), attitude of locals and service levels (11%), the quality/cost of food and beverages (10%), environment/safety/animal care (9%). a longer stay or to visit more places (9%), accommodation (6%), flight schedules in and out of Cook Islands (5%), value for money (4%), and weather (3%). Comments on these themes included:

*"Improve internet hotspot sites."*

*"A little bit more wheelchair accessibility."*

*"Look after the tourists. Build some footpaths so we don't have to walk on the roads and get abused!!"*

*"Some more sign posting of significant sites/landmarks etc would be great. May be a self-tour guide around the island."*

*"Well paved roads all the way around the island for cycling and regular garbage pick up. The smell of burning refuse wasn't pleasant."*

*"Paved roads no pot holes very unsafe in some areas."*

*"Better internet connection and Aps to join different cruises/family events/yoga/trekking."*

*"Airport departure area was hot with limited seating. Not the best last impression of the vacation experience."*

*"More cultural events I.e celebration kind of thing like Te Maeva Nui."*

*"Pay a little more for a resort with people that are attentive towards people staying at the resort. Just a simple good morning or how are you today etc can go along way to making people feel more comfortable."*

*"The staff at our resort made us feel like they didn't want to be there, which really detracted from our stay."*

*"The people need to start to care. Tourism is the islands money bag. It's all naturally there but the people don't seem to care."*

*"Renting a scooter in Rarotonga was more difficult than I thought. There was also a local who was very rude when we inquired about hiking to a waterfall and we even read in the paper he threatened two other tourists with a machete."*

*"A lot more signage especially for people off the ships showing them what is open on a Sunday and where they can shop and eat and change money. Everything was fine for me."*

*"More availability of seafood (Island style)."*

*"The food is not great - too much deep fried."*

*"More authentic, original, fish, healthy food, less burgers!"*

*"Protecting what you have - your beautiful environment and protecting it from the impact of tourism and modern living."*

*"Keep dogs under control."*

*"Would like to have stayed longer. Had no idea there was so much to do but definitely needed a car."*

*"If there was more information available before we went about trips to the other islands."*

*"I think more information about local happenings, attractions and cultural events would be helpful."*

*"I think there should be a tourism office at the airport or in the centre of town which can tell you of local events and happenings during your visit, as well as provide information on tourist activities available and perhaps assist with reservations for activities and dining."*

*"More frequent and easier timed flights in and out would be good."*

*"More value for money accommodation."*

*"Make available for people to go to the other islands with our overcharging them."*

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

The majority of visitors (91%) indicated that they would consider re-visiting the Cook Islands in the future. This figure is slightly lower than the 2015/16 annual average of 94% and the identical quarter in 2016 (94%). The main reasons given by the visitors to return to the Cook Islands are the peacefulness and relaxing atmosphere of the islands (32%), the beauty of the islands (31%), overall great experience that the islands offer (26%), friendly local people (21%), convenience (9%), and attractions and activities (7%).

Nearly one third (32%) of the visitors commented that the slow pace, the relaxed nature, the peacefulness, and the Cook Islands 'lifestyle' are other reasons for visitors to revisit the Cook Islands. Comments included:

*"It is a safe pleasant and relaxing place to vacation."*

*"It is a remarkable place to visit to relax and experience a whole different culture, also my partner is from there so we will be returning every year to visit family."*

*"Love the weather and the relaxing, laid back atmosphere."*

*"Beautiful relaxing place and enjoyed every minute there."*

*"Another great experience in the Pacific Islands and far more relaxing/quiet compared to other island destinations."*

The beautiful natural scenery and the warm climate of the islands are mentioned by nearly one third (31%) of the visitors as a reason to return to the Cook Islands. Key words used to describe the scenery include 'beautiful', 'warm', 'stunning', and 'paradise'. Comments include:

*"A beautiful, fairly unspoilt island with friendly people."*

*"It's paradise! It's beautiful and my family currently live there."*

*"Most beautiful place we have visited to date. Can't wait to come back."*

The overall great experience is the major attraction for visitors to return to the Cook Islands, 26% of the comments by visitors were about how much they enjoy their experiences, that they just 'loved it' and that the Cook Islands are a great holiday destination. Comments included:

*"I love everything about the place. I will definitely be back."*

*"We enjoyed the whole experience and found it very relaxing. We are hoping to go back for longer next year."*

*"The best holiday of my life."*

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

*"Great service and friendly people."*

*"The islanders were very helpful & lovely."*

Another reason to come back to the Cook Islands is the convenience of a holiday.

*"Close to NZ so short travel."*

*"Easy to holiday with NZ dollar."*

Attractions and activities that can be done 'next time' in the Cook Islands or the wish to explore the islands further are also mentioned as reasons to return. Some visitors are inspired by their trip to come back and visit other islands or undertake more activities on their next

visit to the Cook Islands.

*“Leisurely holiday with plenty to do and see and to enjoy the weather. Would love to come back during whale watching season.”*

*“We want to take our son and have more time to explore and go fishing, whale watching and diving ... also to explore culture.”*

*“To do more snorkelling and see the other islands.”*

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

Of the 8 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. Some visitors commented that a holiday to the Cook Islands is expensive compared to other destinations. Other factors included the long distance to the Cook Islands (from long haul markets) and that some had a bad experience on this visit. Comments included:

*“Rarely return to a destination and accommodation is quite costly and we fully explored the island.”*

*“I have visited a number of times now and will look at going somewhere new.”*

*“Too far away.”*

*“The airport when we left was a nightmare because the Wifi wasn't working. We couldn't fly directly to Melbourne and the thought of airport chaos puts us off retuning.”*

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. Most (87%) 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 35%; another 24% of visitors stated that they would like to visit Mangaia, 20% 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. Four percent mentioned the high cost of visiting outer islands as a barrier for not visiting. A number of respondents were not sure which other islands to visit and needed to do some research before deciding.

Nearly all visitors surveyed (97%) said that they would recommend the destination to their family and friends which is consistent with previous survey periods. Thirty seven percent of surveyed visitors stated they would recommend the Cook Islands to others because of the ‘atmosphere’. Respondents felt that the Cook Islands was a great place to ‘relax’ and ‘unwind’,

and said they would recommend the Cook Islands as a good holiday destination for those who are looking for a 'relaxing atmosphere' and an 'easy going holiday'.

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

Over one quarter (27%) of visitors surveyed stated that they would recommend the Cook Islands to others based on their own 'great experience'. These visitors described their trip to the Cook Islands as a 'wonderful place to visit, 'the perfect holiday', and said that they just 'loved everything' about it. These respondents also often described the Cook Islands as a 'paradise' and 'the best place on Earth'.

Twenty-one percent of respondents mentioned the 'friendly' local people as a reason to recommend the Cook Islands to friends and relatives. Other words used to describe the local Cook Islanders included 'lovely', 'wonderful', 'great', 'happy', 'warm' and 'amazing'.

Other themes that were mentioned included the attractions and activities available (10%), the convenience of the islands as a destination – especially for New Zealanders and Australians (10%), value for money (7%), not being commercialised (5%), the culture of the island (4%), food and beverage options (4%), a safe destination (3%), the ease of using the New Zealand dollar and English language (3%), the islands being a family-friendly destination (3%), and good accommodation options (1%), Comments on why visitors would recommend the Cook Islands to others included:

*"The natural beauty of the Islands, the people, and the culture and of course, island time."*

*"Such a friendly place and great environment! Everyone is so nice and the relaxation is amazing."*

*"It's a tropical island paradise that is easy to get to for New Zealanders and has a lot of history that is relevant to NZ."*

*"The Cook Islands and its people are truly amongst the most beautiful in the world and the main services work well."*

*"Enjoyed my holiday there. Good value for money. No issues with currency."*

Only 3% of visitors would not recommend the Cook Islands to others and this is largely based on the high prices and lack of environmental care.

## Final observations

This report shows that the Cook Islands tourism industry generally performed well during the April to June Quarter. Visitor satisfaction levels and the desire for return visitation have remained very high, and it is clear that the destination is making a generally positive impression on visitors. Visitor yield has remained strong and it will be important to see if this trend is sustained for the rest of the year.

Despite the overall positive performance in visitor spend this report again highlights that there is room to enhance the visitor experience and to increase the economic yield and broader community benefits associated with tourism. As with previous reports this quarter's research highlights issues around the lack of public services, facilities and infrastructure in the Cook Islands. There are also some concerns from visitors around environmental degradation and the value for money/quality of service provided by accommodation and food/beverage operations that need to be addressed. Perhaps most worrying is the increased level of comment and feedback around the water quality and general cleanliness of Muri lagoon. It is clear that Muri lagoon algae issue is having a negative impact on the visitor experience. The findings reinforce the importance of factoring the impact of algal blooms into the development of broader tourism development and management strategies.

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

## Appendix – Cook Islands Visitor Survey



简体中文

### Cook Islands Visitor Survey

#### Information for participants

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

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

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

Participation is entirely voluntary. To participate in this research, simply click on the button below. The Survey asks a number of questions where you select your answer from a range of options given. Some questions ask you to type your comments in your own words into the box provided. We would appreciate it if you could fill this survey out as accurately as possible. All questions are optional. The survey will run until the end of 2017.

This survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

[Take the survey](#)

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

Aggregated results of this research may be used in journal and conference publications. A summary of the results of this research will also be available on [www.nztri.org](http://www.nztri.org) in 2017.

## ABOUT YOUR VISIT:

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

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

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

1. When did you arrive in the Cook Islands on your most recent visit? (format dd/mm/yyyy, e.g. 26/06/2015)

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

3. What was the main purpose of your visit?

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

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

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

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

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



- f) Tour group
- g) Organised group (e.g. school, sports etc)
- h) Wedding party
- i) Other \_\_\_\_\_

6. How many people accompanied you on this trip?

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

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

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

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

Previous visits (1)

Friends/family (2)

Travel agent/travel brochures (3)

Social media (Facebook, Twitter etc) (4)

Television or radio programmes (5)

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

Magazine and newspaper articles (6)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The level of service provided at this accommodation (1)

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

The overall value for money (3)

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

*Water based activities:*

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

*Cultural interaction:*

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

*Land based activities and Touring:*

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

*Shopping:*

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

Please tell us about any other activities you participated in:

---

---

**SPECIAL EVENTS**

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

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

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

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

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

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

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

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

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

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

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

- a) The information that was available when planning this trip?
- b) The information that was available during this trip?
- c) The cost of accommodation?
- d) The quality of accommodation?
- e) The experience of renting a vehicle?
- f) The experience of using public transport?
- g) The frequency of air transport within the Cook Islands?
- h) The overall level of service in the Cook Islands?
- i) The friendliness of the people in the Cook Islands?

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

---

---

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

---

---

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

- a) No
- b) Yes

## **EXPENDITURE**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- a) Yes

b) No

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

a) Yes

b) No

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

Aitutaki (1)

Atiu (2)

Mangaia (3)

Mauke (4)

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

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

a) Yes

b) No

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

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

---

## **ABOUT YOU**

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

26. Your age group:

a) 18-29

b) 30-39

c) 40-49

d) 50-59

e) 60-69

f) 70+

27. Your gender:

a) Female

b) Male

28. What is your highest qualification?

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

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

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

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

*Survey Powered By Qualtrics*