

## **Risk Community in the Flight Seeing Industry: A study into the risk communication of the flight seeing industry (in New Zealand) and the impacts these efforts have upon the perception of the risks of participants.**

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### **Abstract**

Accidents and incidents that have occurred in the adventure sector of New Zealand's tourism industry over the past decade, have led to increasing concern that clients may not be fully aware of the risks inherent in the activities that they undertake. Risk communication is key to addressing this concern. This thesis examined risk communication within the flightseeing industry of New Zealand, positioning it as both part of wider tourist sightseeing and the transport sector. The size and growth of the flightseeing industry are used to provide context, and risk communication (as a form of risk management) is examined regarding types used and the extent to which information is received.

Flightseeing in this thesis was defined as "a powered sightseeing flight conducted for hire or reward (as opposed to routine point to point transport), where the main reason for taking the flight is the opportunity it provides for enjoying local scenery". Secondary data determined that the industry in 1993 comprised 45 companies that carried 145,000 passengers on flightseeing trips. This thesis aimed to bring these statistics current.

A three-stage qualitative and quantitative research program was implemented to conduct the primary research. Through a Nationwide Operator Survey (n=5~), Key Operator Interviews (n=6), and an Onsite Participant Survey (n=256), the size and growth of the industry was obtained, as well as information on the current issues and risk communication from both the operators and the clients' perspective. This triangulation maximised the potential benefits of each method, whilst minimising the negative affects of each through crossover while at the same time providing a representative picture of the industry that is vital to contextualise the risk communication findings.

The results found that the current size of the flightseeing industry in New Zealand is 116 companies carrying an estimated 500,000 mostly older, international tourists annually, a growth in carriage of 245% since 1993. It was also found that the industry is rapidly growing with two new companies joining every year, generally occurring in and around the already busy core flightseeing areas of Mount Cook, and Westland National Parks, Queenstown, Te Anau, Rotorua, and Bay of Plenty. Analysis of company data revealed that the industry has a varied and pyramid nature, with regard to staff numbers, turnover, number of aircraft, carriage, and their diversity of business activity. Through analysis of client motivation data and flightseeing's ecotourism properties, it was found that flightseeing is what can be termed 'AcE tourism' in an adaptation of Fennell's (1999) model due to its emphasis on adventure and the environment.

With respect to risk, Priest's (1990) definition of the term, namely "the possibility of injury to the physical or mental self, and/or the loss of something of value", was adapted and modified to include intangible values such as scenic views in order to relate the risk concept to flightseeing. Risk

management is addressed within the thesis, including its origins, and how this body of knowledge can be used within a tourism activity to communicate risk to clients. Focus was given over to mediums used such as briefings and signage.

The results suggested that operators were reluctant to engage in communication regarding the risks inherent in the activity, often citing the passive adventure dimension of flightseeing. Particular findings included a failure to communicate to minorities such as Japanese and South Korean visitors who are poorly provided for via briefings and signage. The most disturbing finding was that the large American market were found to be non-risk aware, meaning that this important and litigious market for flightseeing are currently more likely to sue for damages due to a perceived non-disclosure of the risks inherent in the activity.

Through these findings it is recommended that the flightseeing industry invest in its future through more advanced and quieter plant. an improved infrastructure to cope with growth, and maintain safety. Further to this it is recommended that maximum flight frequency, and sustainable growth rates are established, but most importantly that the risk communication of the industry is improved through the provision of Asian languages, and increased explicit disclosure of the risks to international tourists.