

The Seedlings of Private Garden Tourism. A Study of Private Gardens that are Open for Public Viewing in the South Island of New Zealand.

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Abstract

Twenty years ago it would be difficult to find a private garden in New Zealand that was open for public viewing. In 2000 there were over 1500 nation-wide in New Zealand with 350 the South Island. As a result New Zealand gardens are becoming world renowned and visiting gardens is becoming a popular pastime for both the domestic and international visitor.

The aim of this research is to undertake an exploratory study of private garden tourism in New Zealand - a topic that has had little prior research undertaken. The main objectives were to attain motivations and demographic profiles of garden hosts, visitors and tour operators, financial aspects, marketing details and garden development. In addition, another objective was finding out what makes the New Zealand garden style unique.

Questionnaires were designed and posted to 350 garden hosts in the South Island of New Zealand who distributed two questionnaires to their garden visitors, and to 12 garden tour guides who take people on garden tours during the summer of 1999.

Garden visitor findings indicated that those who attend garden tours tend to be older (50+) and female. They are gardeners themselves and like to converse with like-minded gardening people. The garden hosts enjoy the social side of garden hosting over the monetary benefits and they like to show off their gardens, as they are proud of the effort they have put into them.

The garden host and visitor were also asked a series of issue related questions that were raised in the literature review by various authors regarding entrance fees, availability, accessibility, children in the garden, crowding, plant labelling, products for sale, and similarities with gardens internationally with interesting findings. All groups agreed that private gardens are 'where you meet the 'real' New Zealander' and disagreed that some 'private gardens are becoming too overcrowded'. With regard to entrance fees, nearly all respondents thought that there should be entrance fees to view private gardens commenting that 'gardens cost money to keep up'.

The garden tour operators are usually limited to one or two per region throughout New Zealand and they are in the business because they have an interest in gardens and thought they could combine this interest with making an income. They are also in the business simply because 'no one else was offering such a tour'. Three of the ten respondents offered tours internationally with tours going to the United Kingdom, Australia, Italy, Spain, South Africa, Holland, France, and Hawaii. Marketing the tours was mostly done in garden magazines, leaflets or brochures, and newspapers with budgets ranging from \$200.00 to \$12,000.00 annually.

This thesis has covered many areas of private garden tourism finding that there is potential in the future. However, it has emerged that there is the need for additional support and promotion from outside the garden host's home. This thesis also supports the Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture's recommendations that a database and support base be set up for garden hosts.