

The Intra-National Travel Patterns of International Visitors to New Zealand.

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Abstract

Tourism is the world's largest industry and New Zealand's leading foreign exchange earning sector ahead of traditional export industries. A great deal of emphasis is currently placed upon tourism as a key industry for future economic development in New Zealand. With ambitious targets having been set for future growth in terms of industry earnings and visitor numbers. In order for such growth to be achieved, planned and co-operative strategies must be followed, of which research is an essential component.

Quality information is a prerequisite for successful planning and development in tourism. Knowledge of the travel behaviour of tourists is of much use, especially for marketing and product development purposes. As New Zealand seeks to further develop its tourism industry, knowledge of the routes by which international visitors travel within New Zealand will become of increasing importance.

This study has established the movement of international visitors within one country to a degree that has previously been unobtained. Cross-tabulating the locations at which international visitors stayed at, over a series of consecutive nights using a secondary dataset, enabled detailed patterns of international visitor movements over a one year period in New Zealand to be established.

The findings revealed that nearly all international visitors arrive in New Zealand at Auckland or Christchurch, and then disperse swiftly throughout the country. Most visitors then tend to tour throughout New Zealand staying at multiple locations rather than a single location. A number of preferred routes between two or more locations have been identified, with many visitors travelling several mini-circuits, linking them together as part of a longer tour circuit.

The largest flows of international visitors within New Zealand moved between Auckland ↔ Rotorua, followed by Queenstown → Te Anau. The Auckland ↔ Rotorua link is a central player in the New Zealand tourism stage, being a common element in the travelling itineraries of many international visitors. Similarly, a number of networks such as Christchurch ↔ Mount Cook ↔ Queenstown or Auckland/Bay of Islands/Paihia/ Russell/Auckland were discovered. It was also found that visitors were generally reluctant to 'backtrack' along routes already travelled, and that a number of locations tended to host visitors at various times within visitors itineraries.

The strengths of this research lie in the fact that it has successfully applied a new tourism methodology within a New Zealand context, not only providing valuable results but also establishing a base from which further research may be undertaken on the spatial aspects of tourism in New Zealand. It has successfully developed a method by which the intra-national travel patterns of visitors to New Zealand can be measured in a manner which may be replicated on an ongoing basis.

allowing time series analysis to take place. The value of the study's findings may further be seen, by the manner in which they can directly be applied in a commercial context in the tourism industry.