

## French Images of New Zealand as a Holiday Destination.

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### Abstract

An improvement of relations between New Zealand and France, in combination with social, political and economic change in France suggests that the potential of the French, as a market for New Zealand tourism, is growing. Acknowledging this growth and the importance of understanding destination images, this research examines the potential of French air travellers, as a market for New Zealand tourism. This is with the view that investment in marketing would increase the number of French visitors to New Zealand.

In studying the potential of the French market, this research examines the images the French have of New Zealand as a holiday destination. Destination studies give insight into the potential of travel markets and allow marketers to understand how destinations are positioned in the minds of consumers. Images are a pivotal aspect of a promotional campaign, as they are a major determinant of travel behaviour (Goodrich 1978). An understanding of the images potential tourists have of New Zealand is therefore essential to effective promotion and subsequent tourism development.

Specifically, this research examines the images the French have of New Zealand, what they seek in a holiday destination and whether there are segments within the French market that show more potential for New Zealand tourism than others. The images of the French and Dutch are compared, in order to identify preferences and images that are uniquely French. Finally the research examines what French air travellers consider to be the advantages and disadvantages of New Zealand as a holiday destination.

Data for this research was obtained from a self-completion questionnaire administered in Terminal One of Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris — between the 7th and the 21st of June 1998. A usable sample of 367 was obtained from a total of 400 returned surveys. The questionnaire uses a combination of structured and unstructured questions based on a questionnaire designed by Echtner and Ritchie (1993).

Findings show that the French view New Zealand as a calm, quiet, relaxing and tranquil destination. They envisage vast expansive landscapes, characterised by mountains, the sea and a hot sunny climate. It is a place where liberty, freedom, well being and purity can be found, and the unique attributes are its beauty, wilderness, untouched landscape, unpolluted environment, sheep, sea, rugby and the All Blacks.

It was found that French air travellers seek scenic beauty, an interesting culture, welcoming locals, and extensive cultural history, when they are choosing a holiday destination. Within this group, three market segments were identified however. These segments were shown to vary significantly the attributes they seek in a holiday destination. The research identifies the market segments that show the greatest potential and gives recommendations for future promotion to these groups.

The French identified New Zealand's physical environment as its greatest advantages as a holiday destination. The change of scenery that New Zealand can provide also featured. The greatest

disadvantages identified, were the distance and cost of reaching New Zealand and a lack of tourist information.

The implications of the findings of this research are discussed, as are suggestions for the implementation of these findings into tourism marketing strategies. Finally, avenues for future research are identified.