

## Cycle Tourism in the South Island of New Zealand

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### Abstract

Despite the importance of transportation as part of the tourism system and as an important part of the tourist experience, very little research has examined the role of tourist transportation. Cycling has seen a renewed interest in recent decades particularly as a form of tourist transportation in rural areas. It is these rural areas which have been experiencing population and service decline and have looked toward tourism to help diversify their traditional agricultural economic base. Cycling is perhaps a growing form of leisure, recreation and tourism that is more sustainable in an economic, social and environmental sense. Due to the slow nature of this transport mode it takes place in a more remote or rural context than general tourism and therefore can provide social and economic development opportunities for rural regions currently undergoing transition. Nevertheless, although cycle tourism appears to be growing in the United Kingdom, Europe and North America, consideration of cycle tourist preferences and demands have been relatively limited. While in the South Island of New Zealand there has also been little consideration or integration of the demands of cycle tourists with the development of specific tourism product. For the sustainable development of bicycle tourism, product development must be integrated and balanced with the needs of both hosts and guests. Firstly, this involves understanding the needs of tourists and the current and potential interrelationships between the demand and supply characteristics of bicycle tourism.

This thesis has attempted to understand the interrelationships between demand and supply characteristics and examine the possible integration of these demands with product development by conducting research into cycle tourism in the South Island of New Zealand. This thesis examined the demand and supply elements of the bicycle tourism market system in the study area through the use of both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies to examine the independent and organised cycle tour market within the study area in the period of 1996 to 1998.

This thesis identified the distinct preferences, motivations and needs of bicycle tourists, which if not satisfied by the cycle tourism product, could lead to dissatisfaction and negative word of mouth and subsequent loss of appeal of New Zealand as a cycle tourism destination. This thesis also identified that there is a distinct lack of information specifically for cycle tourists, and that they perceive infrastructure supply gaps to exist in peripheral and rural regions that require this form of low impact tourism for regional revitalisation. Therefore, there is a need to educate producers about bicycle tourists and, similarly, there is also a need to educate cycle tourists about the realities of the cycle tourism product in the South Island of New Zealand.

There is a distinct need for further research into this understudied area to help understand the linkages and interrelationships between the demand and supply characteristics of bicycle tourism, and how to facilitate coordination and collaboration between stakeholders. This thesis has illustrated that understanding the interrelationships between the demand and supply side of the market system will assist planners and decision makers in integrating the needs of the guests with those of the host community for the long term sustainable development of this growing leisure recreation and tourism product.