

## Information, Websites and Conservation Lands in the Southern South Island of New Zealand.

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### **Abstract**

The search for information is a significant step in the Consumer Decision-Making Process and the internet has become an important channel for both the customer and the marketer in delivering tourism information. This study examines the information requirements of visitors to New Zealand's southern alpine conservation lands in using the internet to search for and/or book a tourism product. Profiles of internet users and non-users are developed and visitors' expectations are examined and compared to the reality of their experiences.

A positivist approach to the research was taken in the form of a quantitative survey. Data was collected from respondent-completed questionnaires and analysed using the Statistic Package for Social Science (SPSS). The analysis included descriptive statistics and an Importance Performance Analysis (IPA) which explored the significance of various attributes for those that had used the internet as a source of information. The number of usable questionnaires returned was 433, a response rate of 36%.

The majority of respondents were from overseas (83%), 80% were travelling independently and approximately two thirds (69%) had not visited the area before. Travel guidebooks were the most often used information source and were also considered to be the most important, followed by the internet, family and friends, and brochures. Over 90% of these visitors used the internet for general purposes daily or every few days but only half searched for information on and/or booked their activity on New Zealand's southern alpine conservation lands. The decision to participate in an activity was most often made before leaving home.

International visitors used the internet more than New Zealanders to search for information and/or to book the tourism activity or destination and this search for information on the internet was mainly carried out before leaving home. Respondents who used the internet wanted websites to be easy, fast and secure and to provide accurate information, particularly about the product and prices. The internet creates expectations of a tourism product through images and text. As such, it was considered by respondents to be most important in creating expectations of cost and the quality of the activity. In matching the expectations created by the internet with the reality of the experience, it was the scenery, the quality of the activity and the friendliness and knowledge of the staff that performed above the respondents' expectations.

It appears from this research that the internet has become one of the main information sources for visitors to New Zealand's southern alpine conservation lands. Therefore it is important for tourism organisations to promote their products on websites that are easy to use, include the informational features that customers most want and, above all, are accurate in the information provided. In addition, the actual delivery of the product by each tourism organisation should match or exceed the description of it on their website.