

International Tourists' Environmental Orientation and Willingness to Pay for Conservation: Implications for New Zealand's Tourism and Conservation Policy.

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Abstract

Through books such as Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), environmental disasters such as Chernobyl (1989) and increased scientific evidence of climate change and its consequences (IPCC 2007, UNWTO and UNEP 2008) people have become more concerned about human impacts on the environment. This growing environmental awareness and concern could affect choices towards tourism products and services for example, travel by air. Forsyth et al. (2007) write that environmentally conscious tourists may perceive aviation as increasingly negative and might consider flying less or even boycotting air travel. This attitude would have serious consequences for long distance destinations such as New Zealand. Some airlines have already responded to the more environmentally conscious consumer by launching carbon offsetting schemes. Becken (2004) and Fairweather et al. (2005) have found that some tourists are already willing to pay a voluntary fee to reduce carbon impacts created by their personal travel.

Generally, tourism products and services are increasingly scrutinised and demand is rising for sustainable forms such as ecotourism (Fennell 2003). Ecotourism relies on quality natural environments often found in national parks. According to New Zealand's Ministry of Tourism (2007) over 30 percent of all international tourists visited at least one park while on holiday. Through increased interest in nature experiences pressure rises for park managers to effectively administer the growing visitor numbers. Managers find themselves in the difficult position to protect and care for the natural environment to manage visitor numbers in an equitable, just and effective way.

This research studies tourists' environmental values, attitudes, behaviours and willingness to pay for carbon offsetting services and national park entrance fees. To meet the thesis aim, primary data was obtained using an on-site survey at four visitor centres located in the South Island of New Zealand. Overall, 385 of all 400 questionnaires were fully answered, resulting in a response rate of 95%. Data was described and analysed and the main findings were compared with previous research.

There was evidence for the existence of a pro-environmental orientated tourist in New Zealand, generally supporting findings of Higham and Carr (2002), Luck (2003) and Fairweather et al. (2005).

A strong interest in nature experiences was eminent. Over 80 percent had visited at least one national park while on holiday and were also willing to pay an entrance fee of NZ \$ 10.00 (mean). Most indicated to engage in pro-environmental behaviours. However, only 20 percent of all 385 tourists belonged to an environmental group indicating that a general ideological self-placement does not necessarily result in pro-environmental behaviour. German tourists showed stronger pro-environmental attitudes than respondents of other nationalities which generally supports Luck's (2003) findings. Furthermore, over 60 percent of tourists viewed climate change risks as being negative. Interestingly, over 50 percent were willing to pay a voluntary fee for carbon offsetting schemes.

While an environmental orientation amongst international tourists has been acknowledged, New Zealand's tourism managers should increasingly address environmental standards to meet the expectations of a 'clean and green' image. With regard to national park management in New Zealand it is recommended to re-address a discussion on entrance fees. It should be acknowledged that tourists are willing to pay NZ\$10.00 if money would be directly invested into environmental protection projects