

**INFORMATION, WEBSITES AND
CONSERVATION LANDS IN THE
SOUTHERN SOUTH ISLAND OF NEW
ZEALAND**

INDUSTRY REPORT

2007

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INTRODUCTION

Information is vital in the tourism industry for both the supplier and the buyer. It is considered to be "the life-blood of the travel industry" (Buhalis 1998, p.411). The internet, in particular websites, is becoming one of the main channels for distributing and acquiring tourism information. In addition, the tourism industry is vital for the New Zealand economy being the country's single largest export earner. Combine this with New Zealand's "primary resource base" for the tourism industry, New Zealand's conservation lands (Higham 1996), and the result is an essential area for research.

The aim of this thesis was to investigate the online information requirements of visitors to New Zealand conservation land and their expectations as created by their use of these sources of information. This included the following explicit objectives:

1. To develop a profile of users of online information sources for conservation lands in southern alpine New Zealand,
2. To identify the online information requirements of visitors to conservation lands in southern alpine New Zealand,
3. To identify the expectations of visitors to conservation lands in southern alpine New Zealand created by the content (text and images) of websites used by these visitors, and
4. To assess visitors' perceptions of the (real) visitor experience in the context of these expectations.

The general research approach was exploratory and positivist. A quantitative method was used to collect the primary data in the form of a respondent-completed questionnaire (written in English) which was distributed, using a convenience sampling method, at well-known tourism areas on New Zealand's southern alpine conservation lands including Aoraki Mount Cook National Park (35%), Mount Aspiring National Park (9%), Fiordland National Park (40%), Coronet Peak Ski Field (9%) and the Remarkables Ski Field (6%). The survey response rate was 36% amounting to 433 usable questionnaires. The resulting data was analysed using the Statistic Package of Social Science (SPSS) and Importance Performance Analysis (IPA).

GENERAL PROFILES

GEOGRAPHIC: Just 17.3% of the respondents were from New Zealand and 82.7% were from overseas. Of those residing in New Zealand (17.3%), 22.7% lived in Auckland, 10.7% in other North Island areas, 30.6% in Canterbury, 28.0% in Otago and 8.0% in other South Island areas. The overseas visitors mainly came from Australia (36.0%), United Kingdom (24.6%), United States of America (10.5%) and Germany (6.8%).

HIGHLIGHTS

- 82.7% overseas visitors:
 - Australia (36%)
 - United Kingdom (24.6%)
 - America (10.5%)
 - Germany (6.8%)
- 17.3% New Zealand visitors:
 - Canterbury (30.6%)
 - Otago (28%)
 - Auckland (22.7%)

HIGHLIGHTS

- 56.6% female
- All age groups
- High level of education
- 17.7% retired

DEMOGRAPHIC: Just over half the respondents were female (56.6%). No one age group dominated the responses although there were a smaller percentage of those under 25 years of age. However, approximately 60% of respondents from New Zealand, Australia and the

United Kingdom were aged over 45 years and approximately 80% of respondents from Germany were aged under 35 years. The majority of respondents indicated a high level of education, with 75% of these visitors having tertiary or postgraduate qualifications. A significant percentage of the visitors were retired (17.7%) and over sixty percent (62.2%) of the respondents were employed within the groups 1 – 3 of the New Zealand Statistics Department’s major groups of their employment classification: ‘legislators, administrators and managers’, ‘professionals’ and ‘associate professionals and technicians’.

BEHAVIORAL: The majority of respondents were travelling independently (79.9%) compared to 20.1% on package tours. Just over half (52.4%) of the visitors travelling on a package holiday were from Australia, being

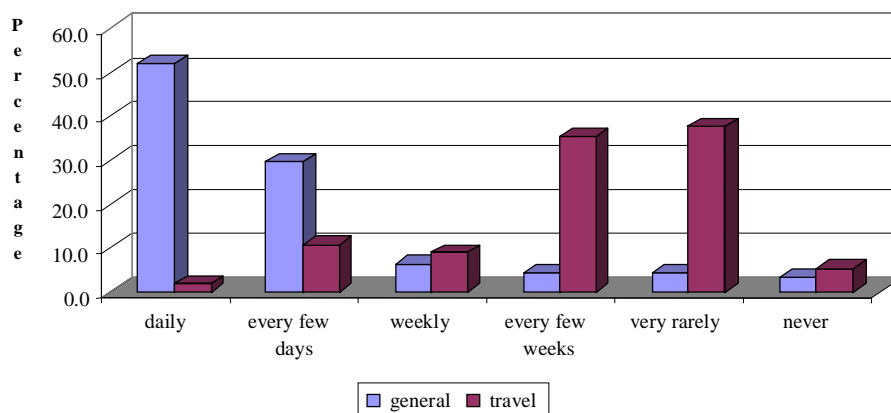
HIGHLIGHTS

- 79.9% independent
- > ½ package tours Australian
- 46.6% with 1 companion
- 68.6% never visited before
- Almost ¾ used 2 or more information sources

35.2% of the Australians. They were also generally older than those travelling independently. Nearly three quarters of the respondents used two or more information sources to search for information. The independent traveller used guidebooks and Visitor Information Offices to a larger extent than the package holiday traveller whereas the package tour traveller used a travel agent more than the independent traveller. Nearly half the visitors in this study (46.8%) were travelling with only one companion. Only 31.4% of the respondents had visited the area before being mainly New Zealanders and Australians.

INTERNET USAGE: Respondents were asked how often they used the internet, excluding email, in general and for travel products. Figure 1 shows that respondents used the internet more often in general than for travel products.

Figure 1 Internet Use



The two areas which showed a significant difference in their use of the internet in general were age (a spread from 25 to 64 years of age using the internet more frequently than their younger and older counterparts) and education (those who had a University, Polytechnic or Post graduate degree used the internet more frequently than those who did not). Age was also an influencing factor when analysing the internet usage with regards to travel. It was a younger age group, 18 to 45 years, that used the internet more often for travel products. In addition, the independent travellers used the internet more regularly than those on package tours.

Approximately half (49.4%) of the respondents did not use the internet for researching or booking and just over half (54.7%) of those felt there was no need to, predominantly New Zealanders. Preferring personal advice was also a reason for not using the internet particularly when it came to booking a product.

INFORMATION SEARCH: Only 4% (17) of the respondents did not use an external information source. Over 70% of the respondents in this study made their decision to participate in an activity on New Zealand's southern alpine conservation lands before they left home, 19.1% while en route and 11.6% at the destination. Those that did leave their decision until they were travelling or at the destination were often from the United Kingdom or Germany. Also more independent travellers left their decisions to later than those on package tours.

HIGHLIGHTS

- 96% used external information source
- > 70% decided on activity before leaving home
- Most popular information sources:
 - Guidebooks (50.1%)
 - Internet (47.3%)
 - Friends & Family (40.4%)
 - Brochures (36.3%)
 - VIO (21.7%)

Travel guidebooks were the most popular information source (50.1%) followed by the internet (47.3%), friends and family (40.4%), brochures (36.3%) and Visitor Information Offices (21.7%). As 71% of the respondents used two or more sources, the total number of responses totaled 225.6%. The internet was the more often used source for those who had visited before while guidebooks were the preference for those who had not visited before. Guidebooks, the internet, family and friends, brochures and Visitor Information Offices were thought to be important and met the respondents' needs. A suggested lack of performance by travel agents, in that they did not rate well in meeting the respondents' needs, is of interest as literature asserts that they are still a well used information source particularly by package travellers.

INTERNET

Fifty percent of the visitors who completed the questionnaires used the internet for research and/or booking and completed the section on internet behaviour. The geographic and demographic characteristics of respondents are shown in Table 1 and the behavioural characteristics of respondents are shown in Table 2.

Table 1 Geographic and Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

	% of Internet Users	% of Non-Users
Country of Residence		
New Zealand	12.7	22.0
International	87.3	78.0
Gender		
Female	55.1	58.1
Male	44.9	41.9
Age		
18 - 24	5.6	7.4
25 - 34	20.8	21.7
35 - 44	18.1	14.7
45 - 54	24.5	18.0
55 - 64	21.3	24.0
65 +	9.7	14.3
Education		
Secondary School	11.7	16.9
University or Polytechnic	43.0	39.0
Post Graduate Degree	36.9	30.0
Vocational or Trade Qualification	7.9	13.6
Other	0.5	0.5
Occupations		
Professionals	39.8	34.3
Retired	17.5	17.8
Associate Professionals and Technicians	13.7	19.7
Legislators, Administrators & Managers	10.9	6.1
Other	18.1	22.1

HIGHLIGHT

Significantly more international visitors used the internet to search and/or book the tourism activity/destination than did New Zealanders.

Table 2 Behavioral Characteristics of Respondents

	% of Internet Users	% of Non-Users
Prior Visits		
Yes	32.9	30.0
No	67.1	70.0
Mode of Travel		
Independent	76.3	83.3
Tour Group	23.7	16.7
Number in Party		
Alone	12.4	10.0
2 people	45.7	47.9
3 - 6 people	26.2	26.0
7 + people	15.7	16.1
Internet Use - General		
Daily	65.3	38.8
Every few days	26.3	32.7
Weekly	4.2	8.4
Once every few weeks	2.8	6.1
Only very rarely	1.4	7.5
Internet Use - Travel		
Daily	2.8	0.9
Every few days	12.3	9.3
Weekly	14.2	3.7
Once every few weeks	39.8	31.2
Only very rarely	29.9	45.1
Never	0.9	9.8
Personal Service - Booking		
not important 1	5.2	5.7
2	10.4	6.7
3	19.0	19.1
4	29.9	24.9
very important 5	35.5	43.5
Personal Service - Search		
not important 1	13.2	8.1
2	21.2	10.0
3	25.5	25.8
4	18.9	22.0
very important 5	21.2	34.0
Time of Decision		
Before leaving home	87.0	56.7
En route	9.3	26.7
At destination	4.7	18.4

HIGHLIGHTS

Internet Users used the internet more regularly in general and for travel.
 Non-users thought personal service was more important in searching for information than Users.
 Internet Users mainly made their decision to participate in the activity before leaving home.

INTERNET USE

HIGHLIGHTS

- 65.9% started search by search engine
- 63.7% searched for destination
- 32.1% searched for activity
- 93.5% searched for information before leaving home

The main reasons given for using the internet were convenience and easy access. The majority of people started their internet search by using a search engine (65.9% of responses). This was followed by company websites (15.4% of responses), the Department of

Conservation website (11.2% of responses) and travel websites (10.3% of responses).

The main categories that the visitors searched for were 'destination' (63.7%), 'activity' (32.1%) or a known website (17.5%). The majority of internet users (93.5%) searched for information before leaving home.

WEBSITE CHARACTERISTICS

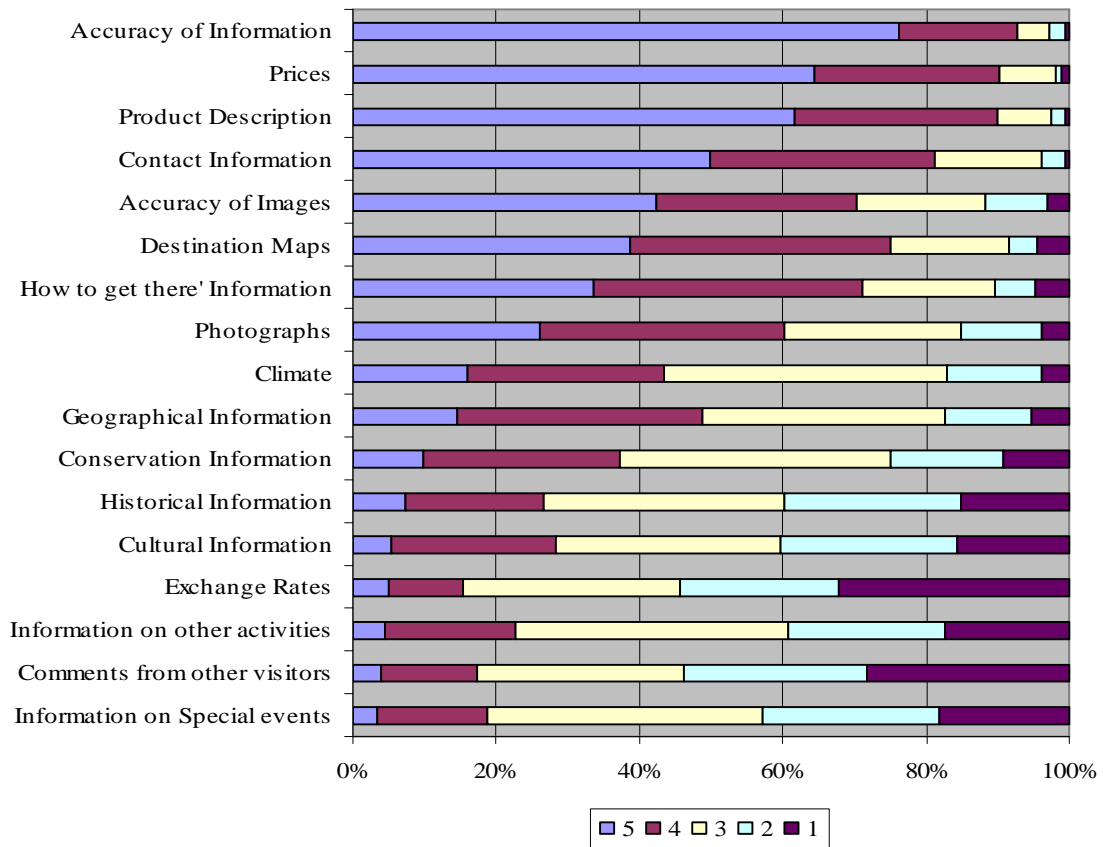
HIGHLIGHTS

- Important Features:
 - ease of navigation
 - secure online payment system
 - speed
 - responsiveness to queries
 - booking facilities
- Unimportant Features:
 - Links to other sites
 - Interactive features

Ease of navigation, a secure online payment system, speed, responsiveness to queries and booking facilities were thought to be important attributes of a website. Contrary to the literature reviewed 'links to other relevant sites' and 'interactive features' were not thought to be particularly important in this study.

The importance respondents placed on **informational content** is shown in the graph below (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Importance of Website Characteristics



(Notes: 5 = very important; 1 = not important)

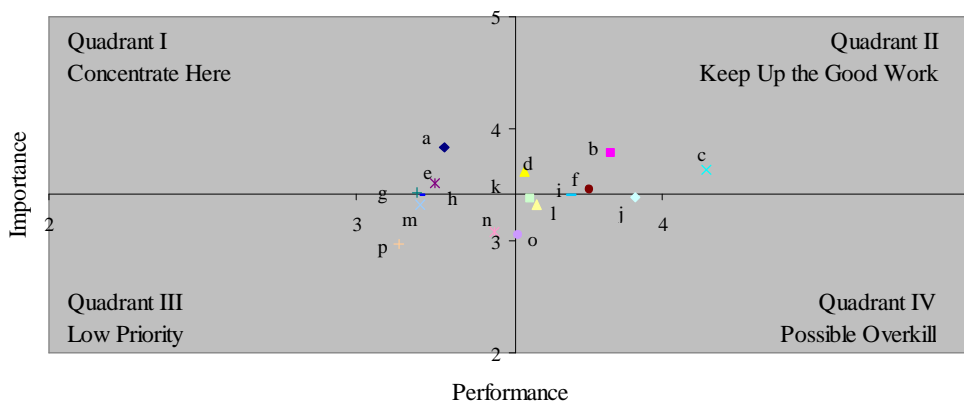
WEBSITE EXPECTATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

Overall, 94% of the internet users thought their experience matched their expectations. The internet was important in creating these expectations particularly for cost, the quality of the activity, scenery and facilities. The reality of the experience more than matched the respondents' expectations of scenery, friendliness and knowledge of the staff, the quality of the activity and service quality. Two categories that thought the internet was more important in creating expectations than other categories, were the 55 – 64 age group and respondents on a package holiday. Attributes that did not perform as well were cost, the length of the activity, physical conditions, distances, difficulty of the activity and the number of other tourists, less than 10% of the respondents rating them as better (5 on the likert scale) than expected.

Importance Performance Analysis was used to analyse and compare the respondents' opinions. Each graph was divided into four quadrants and the attributes plotted into the relevant quadrant. Summarised below are the quadrants, the suggested interpretation of each quadrant (Martilla & James 1977) and the attributes in each quadrant.

- Quadrant I – ‘concentrate here’ – cost, length of activity, physical conditions, difficulty of activity
- Quadrant II – ‘keep up the good work’ – quality of activity, scenery, facilities, knowledge of staff, service quality, friendliness of staff
- Quadrant III – ‘low priority’ – distances, number of other tourists, quietness
- Quadrant IV – ‘possible overkill’ – climate, cleanliness, punctuality.

Figure 3 Importance Performance Analysis of Internet Expectations:



(Notes: a: cost; b: quality of activity; c: scenery; d: facilities; e: length of activity; f: knowledge of staff; g: difficulty of activity; h: physical conditions; i: service quality; j: friendliness of staff; k: climate; l: cleanliness; m: distances; n: quietness; o: punctuality of activity; p: no. of other tourists)

HIGHLIGHTS

- 94% thought their experience matched their expectations
- Successful areas:
 - Quality of the activity
 - Scenery
 - Facilities
 - Knowledge of staff
 - Friendliness of staff
 - Service quality
- Areas to work on:
 - Cost
 - Length of Activity
 - Physical Conditions
 - Difficulty of activity