

INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS' EXPERIENCES OF THE HERITAGE BUILDINGS IN HAWKE'S BAY, NEW ZEALAND.

Research Summary

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Research Aims.

The main aim of this research was to gain a deeper understanding of the influences of heritage buildings in shaping the nature of experiences gained by international tourists visiting the Hawke's Bay region. The three specific objectives that guided this research were as follows:

- To explore the influence of heritage buildings in shaping international tourists' experiences of Hawke's Bay;
- To gain insight into the specific attributes of Hawke's Bay's heritage buildings that influenced the experiences of international tourists visiting the region;
- To examine the relative importance of heritage buildings for international tourism to Hawke's Bay, as perceived by international tourists visiting the region.

Contribution of Research.

This research is much needed in terms of meeting key priorities identified by The Tourism Research and Development Strategy 2002 and The New Zealand Tourism Strategy 2010 (NZTS). Specific priorities addressed by this research include:

- Assess the importance of New Zealand's cultural and historical based products with the aim to "differentiate New Zealand in the global marketplace" (NZTS, 2010, p.32);

- Encourage regional differentiation, and to assist in tourism growth by “increasing yield, addressing seasonality and regional spread issues” (NZTS, 2010, p.32.), and
- Recognise the ‘customer’ perspective in all tourism research. (NZTS, 2010).

Research Methods.

A mixed-methodology comprising of 354 questionnaires, 50 semi-structured interviews and 66 photograph-supported interviews was adopted. A mixed-methodology approach has been used and recommended in a number of previous studies of tourists’ experiences.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Hawke’s Bay’s heritage buildings enhanced the experiences of **every** respondent interviewed. Even respondents who reported little or no interest in the region’s heritage buildings made comments such as the heritage buildings “*were nice to look at*”; “*enhance the atmosphere*” and “*make Hawke’s Bay an interesting place to explore*”. This is significant, as the biggest market segment of any heritage attraction is usually the general interest visitor (Balcar & Pearce, 1996).

Hawke’s Bay’s heritage buildings were found to be both nationally and internationally unique by a majority of respondents. Indeed, 62.4% of questionnaire respondents felt they had gained a New Zealand unique experience from Hawke’s Bay’s heritage buildings, while 55.9% of questionnaire respondents felt they had gained a world unique experience from Hawke’s Bay’s heritage buildings. It was felt that Hawke’s Bay was nationally unique because “*there’s not anywhere else that has got so much of the architecture and the style*”; “*Hawke’s Bay has that heritage and history side, more of a building history that New Zealand lacks*” and “*The buildings fill a gap, the other New Zealand towns are very practical and sensible, but this has an age to it, a historical theme*”. This is significant as previous research has argued that there is an inherent interest in any type of unique or rare object (Patterson &

Bitgood, 1988). Furthermore, it means Hawke's Bay holds a point of differentiation, nationally and internationally.

Importantly, Hawke's Bay's heritage buildings reportedly caused respondents to stay longer, or want to stay longer in the region. Comments included "*I probably wouldn't have stayed an extra day if it weren't for the buildings*" and "*There's so much to see here, you need four or five days to really take it all in*".

Three encompassing experiential themes emerged from respondents' reported experiences of Hawke's Bay's heritage buildings. These are 'visual appeal', 'personal reflections' and 'engaging experiences'.

Visual Experiences.

A large number of respondents commented on the natural scenic beauty of Hawke's Bay and explained that the region's heritage buildings complemented the natural scenery. Comments included "*The scenery here is stunning*" and "*the buildings look nice, they are clean and uniform*". Indeed, 94.0% of questionnaire respondents strongly agreed or agreed that Hawke's Bay's heritage buildings were pleasant to look at.

The visual appeal of the heritage buildings made everyday activities more pleasurable for international tourists. Comments included "*It's so nice just to take your time and stroll around looking at the buildings*" and "*It's just nice to be able to sit here and have a coffee and look at things*". This finding also suggests that heritage buildings enhance the experiences of everyone, not just visitors to the region.

When interviewees were prompted as to "what makes you feel the heritage buildings are visually appealing?" most respondents mentioned the colours of the buildings, which were also perceived to be unique. Comments included "*You see really drab colours on the buildings these days; these are something different*". In particular, it was the bright pastel nature and "*cake-like*" quality of the colours that respondents' found to be visually appealing. Respondents were more likely to talk about buildings that had unusual colours.

Further attributes of Hawke's Bay's heritage buildings that respondents found visually appealing were the unique styles and cultural blends of the buildings. Comments regarding the styles of the buildings included "*I love the repeating patterns*"; "*The sharp edges and detail on the buildings are amazing*" and "*The uniformity of lines is splendid*". Respondents felt the cultural blends of the buildings "*gave the buildings a New Zealand feel*" and respondents enjoyed seeing Maori designs on some of the buildings.

Respondents generally could not select one or two buildings that they felt stood out from others. As with previous research (Grant, 1996; Fisher, 2000), it was the close proximity and buildings as a collective that respondents enjoyed the most. The number and proximity of the buildings was also a further way in which Hawke's Bay's heritage buildings were perceived to be unique; "*The buildings can't be found anywhere else in the world. You might find buildings here and there but never this concentrated*" and "*We don't have Art Deco cities like Napier; we have nothing on this scale. It would take a long time to see Art Deco available in England because there's nothing centred like this*". The small "*human-scale*" of the buildings also enhanced respondents' experiences; "*We have four storey buildings with large roofs and they build them really close together, so that you feel like rats in a cage. Here they tend to be single-story*" and "*In Auckland, you feel a lack of air, but here the buildings are more separated, so you feel you have more space*".

A number of respondents also thought Hawke's Bay 'belonged in a book, television program or movie'. Comments included "*It could almost be a movie set, its not quite real*". For two respondents, Hawke's Bay was "*very Agatha Christie*" and "*The only time we see anything like that (Art Deco Buildings) is when you get repeats of Agatha Christie's Poirot*". Hawke's Bay also reminded respondents of Miami Vice and the time of the mafia in America. Destinations that remind people of scenes from movies or books are likely to distinguish those locations from others (Riley, Baker & Van Doren, 1998) and have the potential to appeal to wide markets (Frost, 2006).

Personal Reflections.

Through their experiences of Hawke's Bay's heritage buildings, a number of respondents gained individualised and personal experiences. This is significant as it is

argued that the most valued and memorable experiences are those that tourists can attribute personal meaning to (Timothy, 1997).

Whilst not a majority, a significant proportion of respondents reported feelings of nostalgia; a yearning for the past. 33.7% of questionnaire respondents strongly agreed or agreed that ‘the heritage buildings in Hawke’s Bay allowed me to reflect on a time when the world wasn’t so complicated’. Comments from interview respondents included “*There’s something about, you know, we’re living in a bulls**t age now, and when you come back to all these simpler things, it’s great to be able to reflect*” and “*The old buildings provide people with the feelings of a simpler life, not bombarded with technology and the like*”. Older people were more likely to experience nostalgia through Hawke’s Bay’s heritage buildings, although some younger respondents reported nostalgic experiences. While the nostalgic stimulus of the heritage buildings was indeed strong, it could be heightened further through the use of supporting stimuli, such as vintage cars of the period and period clothing.

22.4% of questionnaire respondents strongly agreed or agreed that ‘the heritage buildings in Hawke’s Bay allowed me to reflect on my past’. This is significant, as reminiscing is generally a pleasurable experience (Tannock, 1993). It was particularly older English respondents that were likely to recount personal memories by viewing the region’s heritage buildings, probably because of the large numbers of Art Deco style buildings, in particular, that were reportedly present in England during the youth of these respondents. Respondents from Wales, Ireland, Scotland, U.S.A., and Scandinavia also experienced personal reminiscences through Hawke’s Bay’s heritage buildings. Consequently, Hawke’s Bay’s heritage buildings are not solely of importance to New Zealand but to the wider travel experiences of individual tourists.

A minority of particularly English respondents also reported feeling ‘familiar’ with Hawke’s Bay; that they had almost ‘seen’ this destination before. This was usually attributed to the heritage buildings and the perception that Hawke’s Bay reminded them of a book or movie. Familiarity can reduce tourists’ anxiety and increase their relaxation and enjoyment of a region (Baloglu, 2001).

Engaging Experiences.

A number of the reported experiences gained from Hawke's Bay's heritage buildings involved respondents being mentally stimulated. It was found that these experiences were particularly rich, because respondents became involved in creating their own experiences.

It was found that tour guides, particularly of the Art Deco guided walk in Napier, strongly enhanced the experiences gained by respondents. Comments included "*The tour guide was really good; she was very interesting and told some really interesting stories*" and "*We picked up a lot from the tour that we couldn't have got from just walking around ourselves*". In particular, it was the stories and information given by tour guides that most enhanced the experiences gained by respondents. The way tour guides dressed also added to respondents' experiences and acted as a nostalgic stimulus; "*The tour guide was all dressed up and wore a bowler hat. That added to the experience!*"

Some respondents also gained strong educational experiences from Hawke's Bay's heritage buildings. These respondents were able to learn about the history of Hawke's Bay, such as the Napier Earthquake and were able to visualise New Zealand's society in the 1930's. Comments included "*It all adds to your experience, the knowledge of the whole country*" and "*It makes the trip more interesting if we can learn things as we travel around*". This finding is significant, as a number of people travel to learn more about other countries, and the 'interactive traveller' demands opportunities to learn about a country's history and culture.

The majority of respondents wished to somehow preserve their experiences of Hawke's Bay's heritage buildings, often through taking many photographs of the buildings. This finding is important, as tourists generally show their photographs to friends and family. As such, the taking of photographs acts as free promotion for the region.

A small minority of respondents also reported that they had a 'specialist interest' in the region's heritage buildings. For example, 13.7% of questionnaire respondents belonged to at least one cultural or heritage group. A small number of respondents

were professional architects, and thus experienced the heritage buildings through ‘different eyes’. Essentially, it is important to recognise that certain specialist interest groups are drawn to Hawke’s Bay’s heritage buildings.

Improving the Heritage Building Experience.

No negative comments were revealed in the interview transcripts about any of the activities associated with heritage buildings in Hawke’s Bay. However, it was found that 20.6% of questionnaire respondents stated they would like to see more activities created associated with the region’s heritage buildings. Many of these suggestions related to the enhancement of existing activities, such as including evening guided tours, the changing of street signs to 1930’s style, dance events held in the buildings and more festivals incorporating items from the 1930’s such as jazz bands and vintage cars. Essentially, a number of suggestions expressed the demand for authenticity of the 1930’s experience. The most common suggestion for the improvement of the heritage building experience was for the opportunity to see more of the interiors of heritage buildings. Comments included *“I’d love to go inside some of the older houses but haven’t had the opportunity”* and *“You look at the outsides of them but it would also be nice to get a feeling of what they look like on the inside as well”*. It appears that these respondents wished for a ‘more complete’ heritage building experience, perhaps because they sought a fuller ‘story’ of each building. While a number of the interiors of Hawke’s Bay’s heritage buildings have been altered from their original state, when asked ‘would the interiors still be of interest if they had been largely modernised?’, opinion was mixed. Comments included *“I suppose if they haven’t kept the original features inside them, there’s no point in really recreating it”* and *“Well obviously we live in a modern world and if you want to change the interiors, fine, but don’t change the façade.”*

As was perhaps to be expected, the heritage buildings in Hastings formed a less substantial part of respondents’ experiences than those in Napier. When asked in the photograph-supported interviews to select any photographs that they felt most strongly represented their experiences of the region, 29 out of the 37 (78.4%) respondents interviewed in Napier selected at least one photograph of a heritage building unprompted. Conversely, 17 out of the 28 (60.7%) respondents in Hastings

District selected at least one photograph of a heritage building, and of these respondents, 13 (76.5%) selected at least one photograph of Napier's heritage buildings. This confirms that when discussing heritage buildings in the region, respondents nearly always focussed on Napier. However, the comments received about Hastings' heritage buildings, and particularly the Spanish Mission style, were positive.

Importantly, a number of respondents missed the opportunity to experience Hastings' buildings because they did not know of their presence. Comments included *"Do you have heritage buildings here? Where?"* and *"I'm surprised there's so many of them (heritage buildings) in Hastings, so maybe Hastings needs to make a bit more of it"*. Indeed, it appears there is an opportunity to enhance the profile of Hastings' heritage buildings. However, one issue of concern for Hastings is word-of-mouth recommendation. Comments included *"We asked if we should go to Hastings and we were told there's nothing to do there, don't waste your time"* and *"The owner of our home-stay commented that there wasn't much to do in Hastings and not to waste time there. That clouded our perception from the outset"*. It can be argued that the negative comments about Hastings given by New Zealanders are possible examples of 'cultural cringe'.

International Tourists' Level of Interest in Heritage Building Attributes.

Questionnaire respondents were asked to indicate their level of interest in a range of heritage building attributes. The largest percentage of respondents indicated their interest in heritage buildings' **architecture** (N= 308; 94.5% were very interested or interested), **stories** (N= 287; 87.7% were very interested or interested), and **associated history** (N= 282; 86.8% were very interested or interested). There were also very high levels of interest in heritage buildings' **exteriors**, and **'the desire to see something different'**. It could be argued that international tourists are most interested in those attributes of heritage buildings that potentially allow them to gain highly personal and memorable experiences. Of least interest to respondents were attributes that potentially gave them the least engagement with the buildings, such as **the age of the buildings** and **'to see what purpose the buildings are being used for'**. Arguably, if the level of engagement was increased for these attributes, for

example, by offering interior tours where tourists could have a more complete understanding of the modern use of the buildings, levels of interest might increase.

Respondents aged 50 and over were slightly more likely to be interested in the **architecture, associated history, interiors** and **exteriors** of the heritage buildings than those aged less under 50 years of age. Furthermore, female respondents were more interested than males in heritage buildings' **interiors** and **colours**. These findings support previous research that there are often differences in interest in heritage across age and gender.

Interestingly, it was found that Australians were more likely to be interested in heritage buildings' **interiors, exteriors** and **colours** compared to respondents from Europe, the United Kingdom, and particularly North America. These results may possibly be because Australia has markedly different styles of architecture than what is found in Hawke's Bay. Thus, the opportunity to 'gaze upon the distinct' may have been particularly strong amongst Australians.

Not surprisingly, respondents who had been on a guided tour were more likely to be interested in heritage buildings' **stories, exteriors, interiors** and **colours** than those who had not been on a guided tour. Conversely, respondents who had self-guided themselves around Hawke's Bay's heritage buildings were only more likely to be interested in heritage buildings' **colours** than those who had not.

Significantly, the majority of respondents held an interest in the listed heritage building attributes, regardless of their level of education. The same is true for whether respondents belonged to a cultural or heritage group, their accommodation type, travel style, number of nights spent in the region, whether they had visited Hawke's Bay before and whether they had been on a self-guided drive. A higher proportion of respondents travelling alone or as a couple were interested in heritage buildings' **interiors** compared to those travelling in a group size of three or more. This may be because those travelling in larger groups must accommodate the needs of all group members, and thus may not have the perceived required time to view building interiors.

In terms of the style of heritage buildings, 82.8% of questionnaire respondents indicated being very interested or interested in **Art Deco** buildings. This compares with a 71.8% level of interest in **Victorian** buildings, 65.3% interest in **Spanish Mission** buildings and 62.9% interest in **commercial** buildings.

Influences on level of interest in types of heritage buildings were similar to the influences on level of interest in heritage building attributes. Females were slightly more likely to be interested in **Art Deco** and **Spanish Mission** buildings compared to males. Respondents aged 50 years and over were more likely to be interested in **Art Deco** and **commercial** buildings compared to those aged under 50 years. Those with a tertiary degree (partially or fully completed) or higher were more likely to be interested in **Art Deco** and **Spanish Mission** buildings, compared to those with a lesser qualification. Respondents who went on a guided tour were more likely to be interested in **Art Deco**, **Spanish Mission**, and **commercial** buildings than those who had not; respondents who went on a self-guided walk were more likely to be interested in **Art Deco** buildings compared to those who had not, and respondents from Australia were more interested in **commercial** buildings than respondents from other countries.

Experiences Gained by International Tourists from Hawke's Bay's Heritage Buildings.

Results found that a pleasant visual experience of Hawke's Bay's heritage buildings was the most prominent experience gained by most respondents (N= 285; 94.0%). This was closely followed by respondents strongly agreeing or agreeing that they had experienced a unique townscape (N= 272; 89.8%). A large proportion of respondents also felt that from Hawke's Bay's heritage buildings they had learnt about the region's history (N=257; 84.3%), heard or read a number of interesting stories (N=229; 75.8%), and learnt more about New Zealand (N=203; 66.5%). Not surprisingly due to variations across age, the experiences gained from Hawke's Bay's heritage buildings by the lowest proportions of respondents were being able to reflect upon a time when the world wasn't so complicated (N=98; 32.6%) and reflect upon their past (N=67; 22.2%).

The experiences gained by respondents from Hawke's Bay's heritage buildings were not influenced by respondents' demographic characteristics. Specifically, their experiences were similar irrespective of their gender, age or level of education. Furthermore, there was found to be no influence by respondents' membership of a cultural or heritage group, number of nights spent in Hawke's Bay or whether they had previously visited Hawke's Bay. However, there were found to be eight significant differences between experiences gained and whether respondents had been on a guided walk.

Specifically, respondents who had been on a guided tour of Hawke's Bay's heritage buildings were more likely than those who had not been on a guided tour to strongly agree or agree with the statements; 'The heritage buildings in Hawke's Bay.... **were pleasant to look at** (N= 84; 98.8 compared to N= 200; 91.7%), **created a unique townscape** (N= 55; 76.4% compared to N= 37; 32.5%), **contained a number of interesting stories** (N= 80; 94.1% compared to N= 148; 68.5%), **helped me learn about New Zealand's history** (N= 65; 76.4% compared to N= 137; 63.1%), **gave me a world unique experience** (N= 60; 70.6% compared to N= 109; 50.2%), **have a good number of activities associated with them** (N= 48; 57.1% compared to N= 74; 34.6%), and **allowed me to reflect upon my past** (N= 29; 34.1% compared to N= 37; 17.3%). This again shows the important role played by Hawke's Bay's tour guides in enhancing international tourists' experiences of the region's heritage buildings.

The Importance of Hawke's Bay's Heritage Buildings to International Tourists.

A significant proportion (N= 169; 50.7%) of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the region's heritage buildings had a very strong or strong 'influence in motivating me to visit the region'. Only a small proportion (N= 50; 15.0%) indicated that Hawke's Bay's heritage buildings had no influence on drawing them to the region.

The overwhelming majority (N= 279; 85.9%) of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that 'the presence of Hawke's Bay's heritage buildings has added to my overall experience of the region. Only a handful of respondents (N= 4; 1.2%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

Visiting heritage buildings was the third most popular listed activity amongst questionnaire respondents with 176 (50.3%) indicating that they had actively visited at least one heritage building prior to answering the questionnaire. This was behind going shopping (N= 195; 55.7%) and going to the beach (N= 184; 52.6%).

There were no significant differences between visitor demographics, the influence of Hawke's Bay's heritage buildings on drawing them to the region, and the extent to which the region's heritage buildings added to respondents' experiences of the region. However, it was found that those who had been on a guided tour, or self-guided themselves around the heritage buildings were more likely to have been strongly influenced or influenced to come to Hawke's Bay because of its heritage buildings and to strongly agree or agree that Hawke's Bay's heritage buildings had added to their experiences of the region. Interestingly, a higher proportion of respondents travelling free and independently throughout New Zealand indicated being very strongly or strongly influenced to come to Hawke's Bay because of its heritage buildings (N= 149; 55.2%) compared to those who were travelling by either a fully-packaged or semi-packaged tour (N= 17; 30.9%). This is perhaps because respondents travelling free and independently would be likely to have more choice as to which regions they would visit than those travelling by tour.

Only a small minority of respondents either stayed in heritage accommodation while in Hawke's Bay (N= 30; 8.9%), or had eaten in a heritage restaurant (N= 25; 7.4%). The majority of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statements 'I prefer to stay in/eat in/shop in heritage buildings'. However, a slightly higher proportion of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed to these statements, compared to those who strongly disagreed or disagreed.

Willingness of Respondents to Pay to Preserve Hawke's Bay's Heritage Buildings.

Respondents were asked to 'imagine that you had already booked accommodation to stay in Hawke's Bay for a holiday, but had found that all the heritage buildings in the region were due to be completely modernised'. They were then asked if they would be willing to pay any amount and then, secondly, a selected random amount on top of

their cost of accommodation to ensure the heritage buildings were preserved for their holiday. A majority of respondents (N= 173; 55.9%) indicated that they would be 'willing to pay some money' to ensure that the heritage buildings were preserved for their holiday, while, notably, a higher proportion of respondents (N= 194; 63.4%) indicated that they would be willing to pay the random amount included in the questionnaire. The minimum and maximum amounts included in the questionnaire were \$1 and \$50 respectively, and increased by \$1 intervals. A higher proportion of questionnaires contained amounts between \$1 and \$20 in order to ensure a sufficient sample size at these amounts so that conclusions could be drawn. The majority of questionnaire respondents would theoretically be willing to spend an extra \$1-5 (N= 91; 79.8%), \$6-10 (N= 33; 62.3%) and \$11-15 (N= 25; 56.8%) on top of the cost of their accommodation per night to ensure that Hawke's Bay's heritage buildings were available for them to enjoy while in the region. Willingness to pay reduced significantly when the amounts contained in the questionnaire went above \$20. However, the fact that willingness to pay amounts up to and exceeding \$20 on the cost of accommodation is a notable finding for preservation bodies in the region. Future research is required, however, to validate these findings.

Conclusion.

While this research yielded results that support that there is an emphasis on the visual elements of tourists' experiences, it argues that international tourists engage with heritage buildings in a more holistic way. In particular, it was found that a built townscape is not a passive space. Heritage buildings render the townscape an experiential space filled with emotional, mindful, engaging and personally imbued significance. In particular, it appeared that international tourists helped to create their own experiences by making the environment relevant to a context they were personally interested in. Thus, the experiences gained from heritage buildings are highly personalised and of significant value to international tourists. Furthermore, it illustrates that tourists are increasingly concerning themselves with being able to actively participate in, learn and experience the destinations they visit.

The research findings have important implications for destination promotion and management. It is argued that because heritage buildings allow visitors to imbue their

feelings and thoughts onto their gained experiences, townscapes consisting of heritage buildings can differentiate themselves experientially, which is of significant importance in a global marketplace (Wilson, 2002). Furthermore, these findings suggest that heritage buildings are not solely of importance to a national or regional history; they are resources that can become personally meaningful to any visitor through individual interpretation. Indeed, because Hawke's Bay has a significant concentration of particularly Art Deco buildings that are perceived to be unique, the region has a significant tool of differentiation.

The finding that townscapes are more than passive spaces also has important ramifications for product development. Specifically, it presents potential opportunities to enhance the level of engagement visitors have with heritage buildings, through, for example, an increase in interior tours. Although a number of Hawke's Bay's heritage buildings' interiors have been altered from their original state, the fact that tourists are able to imbue their own personal thoughts and situations onto the heritage experience, combined with the finding that there is a notable demand for more interior tours, means that most international tourists still feel Hawke's Bay's heritage buildings have maintained their 'spirit'. This has implications for the promotion and preservation of heritage buildings, as although a number of buildings will be altered for inevitable 21st century progress, if what is special about the building is maintained, it is still a valuable tourism resource. Indeed, if heritage buildings are not preserved, not only will a country lose a valuable resource that has value to visitors and locals alike; it will lose a part of its history and what makes it unique.

This research has addressed the gap exploring the relationship between heritage buildings and tourism, and has determined that heritage buildings are a valuable resource for tourism. Future research into the nature of experiences gained by visitors and locals from townscapes, and the perceived importance of elements within the townscape to them is warranted. There is also a need for similar research to be undertaken in different case study areas to build upon the results discussed here.

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