

Tourist habits in the spotlight

A recent survey of visitors to Waiheke has painted a picture of where visitors come from, what they do here and how they spend their money.

Project Forever Waiheke conducted the survey with 441 visitors to the island over Fridays and weekend days in April and May.

The convenor of Project Forever Waiheke Pam Oliver presented their findings to the Waiheke Tourism Forum on Tuesday 18 June, along with the post-graduate tourism management students from Manukau Institute of Technology who carried out the research.

The survey showed that fewer than half the visitors were from New Zealand (45 percent) and, of those, most were from the Auckland region (77 percent), with 18 percent from elsewhere in the North Island.

While nearly one in 10 visitors (9 percent) stayed overnight, the majority (58 percent) came for a whole day, followed by those coming for half a day (20 percent). Fewer came for two to three days (8 percent).

The survey also gave insight into how

much money people spent and what they spent it on. When asked about their daily spend, not including accommodation and ferry fares, the largest portion of visitors (29 percent) spent \$50 to \$100, followed closely by \$100 to \$200 (24 percent) and \$20 to \$50 (22 percent), while 8 percent said they spent less than \$20.

The researchers explained that they found people coming to the island for a business conference didn't need to spend much money because their meal requirements were generally taken care of. They also found that visitors who came in a group tended to bring lunch with them.

In terms of what people spent their money on, the Project Forever Waiheke survey found that food was the most popular purchase (bought by 88 percent), next was buses or taxis (56 percent), followed by wine (46 percent), outdoor activities were purchased by 14 percent of visitors, while 14 percent also spent money on retail shopping and 11 percent purchased art.

The researchers asked visitors 30 questions about their trip details, demograph-

ics, how much they spent and their level of satisfaction. The survey included two open-ended questions around peoples' likes and dislikes.

Objectives of the research were to identify visitor satisfaction, to compare results to a visitor survey conducted by ATEED in 2015 and to identify whether visitor experiences matched expectations.

Outgoing chair of the Waiheke Island Tourism Forum Jenny Holmes said the survey showed higher numbers of overnight visitors compared to other surveys she had seen and higher numbers of international visitors.

ATEED's 2015 visitor survey found that more than half the 211 visitors questioned in that study were from New Zealand (53 percent) and put the average daily spend at \$142.23.

The researchers said that people often commented that visiting the island was more expensive than previously and more New Zealanders than international visitors complained about the higher costs. • Erin Johnson



Visitors were highly satisfied with:

- The scenery on the island (33% of comments).
- Beaches – beautiful, clean, easy to access with lots of space (19%).
- Wine (15%).
- Friendliness of island residents (7%).
- Laid-back, quiet and peaceful atmosphere.
- Slow traffic and being able to walk around safely.

Open, pristine beaches were favourites amongst visitors. Photo Sophie Boladeras

Visitors were dissatisfied with:

- The high cost of almost everything: food, accommodation, ferries and transport to anywhere off the main bus route (34% of comments).
- Unreliable and costly ferry and bus services to/from and on the island (28%).
- Bad weather (16%).
- Difficulties in getting accurate information (7%).
- Limited access to many places, including public transportation not covering desired areas (6%).
- Lack of essential public facilities such as seating and toilets (3%).

Expensive, unreliable ferry service was one of the sore spots in the survey. Photo Merrie Hewetson

