



## Visitor Satisfaction Surveys

### Description

Visitor satisfaction surveys focus on visitors' expectations of, and satisfaction with, particular components (or all) of the range of products, services, activities, places and infrastructure that contribute to their visitor experience.

Visitor satisfaction is key to successful tourism enterprises and to tourism overall. Satisfaction derives from visitors' pre-visit expectations and their actual experiences on the visit. From a marketing perspective, visitors' actual experiences need to exceed their expectations so that they visit again or longer and/or convince others to do the same (word of mouth is still the most important marketing mechanism). From a broader management perspective, evidence of a satisfying experience for the visitor is a key indicator of tourism business performance.

Measuring visitor satisfaction with a survey tool is therefore an important part of business planning and management at individual and collective operator levels if visitor numbers are to be retained and increased. It is also important for private and public sector strategic planning and management at local, regional and national levels, for economic development planning, tourism infrastructure planning and visitor amenity provision.

### How and when the tool is used

The focus of visitor satisfaction surveys can be activity, product, service or place-based and range in scope from single to multiple activities, products, services, or places.

There are a number of possible formats for visitor satisfaction surveys. Most use a majority of multiple-response, closed-ended (or tick-box) questions for ease of application, ease of response and ease of data entry. However, open-ended questions are also often included to obtain more detailed information that reflects the individual experiences of visitors.

Information collected could include demographic details of the respondents, their country/place of origin and their previous travel experiences. Also often sought is their current means of travel, the information they used in planning their current visit, their length of stay and type of accommodation used and the activities they are undertaking. Information on their expectations and experiences can include sources of information and their responses to a range of factors that the survey is specifically interested in (e.g., quality of signage, comfort of bed, thrill of activity, and experiences of encounters with other visitors).

Survey information can be collected through self-completion or interviewer-administered (face-to-face or by telephone) surveys. Self-completion surveys can be made available at point of contact (which is how [visitor centres](#) often survey visitors) or mailed or delivered to respondents or made available on the internet. These latter methods are less practical for visitor satisfaction surveys as visitors are on the move and away from home. Interview-administered surveys are common in the visitor satisfaction area. For instance, many of DOC's satisfaction surveys and the Ministry of Tourism's International Visitor Survey are administered on a face-to-face basis. Individual businesses use a mix of self-administered and interview-administered information collection methods although self-administered surveying is preferred as it better protects the identity of respondents and increases the likelihood of their candidness. Examples of visitor satisfaction questionnaires are available on the internet.

DOC is the major collector of visitor satisfaction information relating to tourism in natural areas. Its visitor satisfaction surveys are generally based on the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) framework. ROS is based on the premise that visitors' needs are best served when a diversity of opportunity is available and this approach assists with [crowding management](#).

Visitor satisfaction surveys are integral to monitoring visitor experiences and responses over time at various levels, including enterprises and sites, as well as for assessing community and regional outcomes of tourism strategies.



## **Application**

Many visitor satisfaction surveys have been carried out in New Zealand natural areas. A common finding is that visitors' experiences are strongly related to their prior expectations, especially in relation to crowding. For instance, the experience of people expecting a wilderness experience is different from that of people without prior expectations. Here are some examples of visitor satisfaction surveying:

- *New Zealand natural areas.* Visitor satisfaction surveys are undertaken in many sites by the Department of Conservation. In particular all the "Great Walks" have been surveyed to determine visitors' experiences, particularly in huts on the route. More recently, a detailed multi-phase approach based on the Limits of Acceptable Change ([LAC](#)) framework was used in planning visitor management at Masons Bay in Rakiura National Park. The method included a two-stage focus group, made up of stakeholders; an on-site visitor survey; on-site observations; and participant observation. The fieldwork programme was designed to gather baseline data on visitor flows and characteristics at Mason Bay, and to address some of the management and stakeholder concerns.
- On the Tongariro Crossing, Tongariro National Park, a detailed case study has investigated walkers' perceptions of their experience - in particular the relationship between visitor profile, enjoyment, expectation and perception of crowding.
- *The Regional Visitor Monitor* is a partnership research project between the Ministry of Tourism, Tourism New Zealand and six Regional Tourism Organisations (RTOs). This survey systematically examines the experiences of international and domestic travellers. Each RTO uses a standardised e-survey to gather data about its visitors while they are actually in the region. Information is collected about visitor decision-making processes, needs and attitudes, behaviour and satisfaction.
- In the United Kingdom visitor satisfaction surveys are now completed by over 50 destinations with the results compared (destination benchmarking) against a number of key criteria. The benefit of destination benchmarking is that it provides a customer-focused and competitor-related basis on which to set priorities for action to improve the destination product.

## **Our evaluation**

Visitor satisfaction surveys are an important tool for management in the tourism sector and for managing natural area destinations. These surveys are closely linked to commonly used management frameworks such as the Recreational Opportunity Spectrum. However, they must be carefully designed, administered and analysed to give useful and clear information that will assist management.