

Sustainability important to international tourists—new research

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New research shows that international visitors to New Zealand value sustainability and protecting the environment but there are gaps and opportunities for local tourism service providers to do more to promote eco-friendly practices.

Canterbury researchers conducted a multi-pronged study to better

understand how much importance international visitors placed on sustainability and their perceptions of sustainability practices in the region. The research was led by Associate Professor Girish Prayag of the University of Canterbury's Business School and Senior Economist Dr. Peter Fieger of ChristchurchNZ, funded by a grant from the Tourism Industry New Zealand Trust.

The Canterbury researchers analysed more than 750,000 visitor reviews on websites like Trip Advisor and Expedia to see if, unprompted, visitors acknowledged or commented on sustainability practices.

"We found that visitors rarely commented on sustainability practices unprompted, and also identified there may be gaps in the market to promote more sustainability options," says Associate Professor Prayag, Associate Head of the Management, Marketing and Entrepreneurship department at UC's Business School.

"For example there may be an opportunity for more carbon-offsetting options or to promote the use of electric vehicles or offer more eco-friendly options. There's an opportunity for the local tourism industry and related service providers to raise awareness of any sustainable features of their product or service."

Four years' of data from the International Visitor Survey was also analysed to see if international visitors' perceptions of New Zealand's environmental practices had changed over time. This analysis found very little change in perceptions over the four years, Associate Professor Prayag says.

The joint study also surveyed 600 international visitors to Canterbury to ask what they thought of the sustainability practices and products they encountered on their visit to the region.

"Visitors have a generally [positive attitude](#) and a willingness to adopt [sustainable practices](#)," ChristchurchNZ Senior Economist Peter Fieger says.

"However, Canterbury tourism businesses may need to provide or promote options for visitors to be more sustainable to enable them to align their attitude and beliefs with their behaviour."

The researchers found that:

- International visitors perceive themselves as placing a high value on protecting and respecting the environment.
- Visitors tended to adopt environmentally friendly practices that were accessible or easy to do, such as using energy-saving products, switching off electrical equipment, reducing consumption of non-essential items, recycling, purchasing local food, and engaging with tourist attractions that support endangered plants and animals.
- Practices that were less likely to be adopted included taking part in a carbon-offset scheme, using electric vehicles or other eco-friendly transport such as bikes, or buying eco-friendly products.
- Overall, [international visitors](#) had favourable perceptions of Canterbury's [sustainability](#) practices, including the encouragement of clean rubbish-free spaces, availability of public toilets, and recycling and waste management.

Provided by University of Canterbury

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