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# Is Wellington Environmentally Friendly? Visitors' Views of New Zealand's Capital

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## **Is Wellington Environmentally Friendly? Visitors' Views of New Zealand's Capital.**

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### **Abstract**

For nearly a decade, New Zealand has been using nature related slogans to market the country's rural environment, or pollution-free image. The constant growth of overseas visitor numbers illustrates that such campaigns appear to be successful. However, limited discussion is provided in contemporary research on visitors' views about environmental issues in New Zealand, and particularly in its capital Wellington. This study examines this dimension from the perspective of 353 visitors travelling to (pre-visit) and from Wellington (post-visit); these respondents completed a questionnaire distributed during August and September of 2006. In this study, comparisons are made between pre- and post visit, and also between domestic and overseas visitors. In addition, written comments on environmental issues about the city of Wellington are gathered from these visitor groups. While the overall results demonstrate respondents' agreement that Wellington is an environmentally friendly city, many participants' written comments also suggest areas of improvement, particularly regarding lack of recycling, congested traffic, noise and building decay. These elements might be currently discouraging some groups of travellers from visiting Wellington, with subsequent potential impacts. Implications for city officials and tourism stakeholders include the need for concerted efforts to improve the city's image and its environmental friendliness.

**Keywords:** New Zealand, Wellington, Travellers, Environmental issues, Visitors' views.

### **Introduction**

Recent developments in the form of serious environmental concerns, including droughts and pollution in different parts of the world have raised the alarm and triggered the need for the recognition among many governments of the crude reality the world faces. At the same time, increasing awareness about the importance of endorsing a 'green' and ecologically responsible attitude has in various cases had an impact on the way some countries present themselves to the world.

Cohen (2002) explains that 'sustainability is a vague concept' (p. 268), and as a result it can lead 'to misuse by interested parties, particularly by tourism

entrepreneurs' (p. 268). However, environmental sustainability, which emphasises the preservation natural resources or 'maintaining natural capital' (Goodland & Daly, 1996, p. 1003), has not only become a trendy expression that pleases tourism entrepreneurs and some tourist segments, but also a priority in many parts of the world. Environmental sustainability is also in several ways related to business sustainability (Deng & Burnett, 2002). Thus, in times where a business image can be tarnished due to behaviour or deeds seen as socially irresponsible, following environmentally friendly steps can indirectly as well as directly impact an operation's long-term development, its image, even its bottom-line. Based on their review of the pertinent literature (Schwartz, 1977, Granzin and Olsen, 1991, Hopper and Nielsen, 1991, McCarty and Shrum, 1994), Minton and Rose (1997) refer to environmentally friendly behaviours

'... as a subset of altruistic or prosocial behaviour ... thereby linking environmentally friendly behaviours with the attitude of environmental concern, values, and various types of social norms' (p. 38).

Shianetz et al., (2007) argue that '... in order to advance sustainability in the tourism industry, approaches are needed that promote stakeholder collaboration and learning on an organisational as well as destination or regional level' (p. 1485). Further, in revisiting previous studies (Lucas, 1985; Hammitt et al., 1996), Hillery et al., (2001) note that tourists' growing awareness regarding environmental impacts 'highlights this issue in planning for a sustainable tourism industry into the future' (p. 854). Hence, environmental sustainability is gaining in strength, and it is illustrated in stakeholders' increasing involvement with environmentally sustainable practices.

Today, despite progress in research and awareness among travellers about environmental sustainability, very little discussion is devoted to determine what tourists' views are about a destination's efforts to follow environmentally friendly approaches. In fact, such an area has been largely neglected in the case of New Zealand, including its capital city, Wellington. This study explores visitors' views about Wellington in areas related to environmental friendliness with the fundamental objective to answer questions including the following:

- What are ways in which Wellington contributes towards New Zealand's clean, green image?
- What are ways in which Wellington does not contribute towards New Zealand's clean, green image?

Information answering these questions could be critical for tourism stakeholders in a number of ways. For example, the identification of visitors' perceptions of the city, including visitors' views of environmental aspects about the city, could assist city officials and tourism agencies in planning, advertising, and, if applicable, in improving efforts to raise the profile of Wellington as an appealing destination.

### **Environmental Sustainability and Tourism**

Growing ecological concerns in recent decades have given rise to a large body of research emphasising aspects of environmental sustainability, environmental awareness, ecological impacts (Ryan, 1991), or 'social sustainability' (Font & Harris, 2004). Page and Thorn (1997), for example, note that 'Sustainability has emerged as a popular term which has become widely used in the academic and popular literature on tourism, planning and development studies' (p. 59).

The links between environmental sustainability and the tourism industry can be very positive in several ways. In fact, those destinations achieving 'enviable growth rates' (Hassan, 2000, p. 240) have 'a strategic focus on environmental sustainability in tourism development' (Hassan, 2000, p. 240). This argument demonstrates the importance environmental sustainability has in supporting the long-term establishment, even success, of tourism operations. Ahn et al. (2002) argue that the bulk of tourism development, involving all major stakeholders such as tourists, tourist operations, and local residents, depends on activities and attractions that to a great extent are connected to culture, heritage and the natural environment (p. 2). These elements have been established and have endured for generations, and can contribute enormously to a sustainable tourism business concept.

However, if resources are degraded, even destroyed, the meaning of tourism is lost in the process (Ahn et al., 2002, p. 2). In addition, environmental sustainability can be manipulated in different ways, or, as Cohen (2002) states, it can be misused. Gezici's (2006) for instance argues that

... the environment is the basis for the natural and cultural resources for attracting tourists... If the natural, historical, and cultural environment cannot be protected, there can be no expectations for sustainability in destination areas (p. 444).

According to Macbeth (2005), 'Sustainable tourism is the slogan of the moment and is 'attached' to government policies throughout the world' (p. 966). Moreover, sustainability has become a popular term in the field of tourism (Saarinen, 2006), gradually replacing previous concepts such as 'carrying capacity' (Brown et al., 1997). The purported critical link between tourism and sustainability is also evident in discussions of sustainable development (Hovinen, 2006), as well as in sustainable tourism development (Ko, 2001).

### **The Emphasis on the Environment to Promote Tourism in New Zealand**

Previous studies have discussed the concept of environmental sustainability in New Zealand in a number of ways (see for example, Page & Thorn, 1997, 2002; Frame & Newton, 2007), also in the context of the tourism industry. Dymond (1997), for instance surveyed the importance of sustainable tourism development in New Zealand, and found that authorities were in general supportive of indicators of sustainable tourism. Becken (2004) studied Australian and New Zealand tourists' views on global climate change, identifying that almost half of responding tourists questioned a relationship between climate change and tourism, in other words, they were contrary to the view that tourism contributed to climate change. Also in New Zealand, Fairweather and Maslin (2005) examined international visitors' awareness of ecolabels, and found that only one-fifth of their respondents, 'recalled any place with ecolabels, and only 13% had ever heard of any tourism ecolabel' (p. 82). However, these authors also found that 61% of their visitors, the 'biocentric visitors' (p. 82) were concerned with the environment in areas they travelled and believed

that ecolabels were needed in New Zealand. Further, respondents were prepared to favour accommodation operations with ecolabels (Fairweather & Maslin, 2005), a demonstration of a certain level of acceptance for environmentally friendly initiatives.

Marketing strategies have been implemented in New Zealand to enhance the nation's image as a destination, often using its extensive, free and green spaces to encourage both domestic and international visitors' travel involvement. For decades, New Zealand has been known for its expansive areas of practically unspoilt nature, an ideal environment for a number of growing tourist activities that include adventure tourism (Cloke & Perkins, 2002). Not surprisingly, campaigns that underline New Zealand's green and natural scenery and landscapes have been ongoing for years (Tourism New Zealand, 2007).

In fact, the '100% Pure New Zealand' campaign (Tourism New Zealand, 2006) was started in 1999 with the primary objective of marketing New Zealand's image to its key target markets. Alternative outdoor recreational activities that, like mountain biking, are growing in popularity, including in the North Island's Manawatu region (Mason & Leberman, 2000) may further contribute to New Zealand's environmentally positive image. The many activities and available natural spaces suggest that New Zealanders are in close contact with nature; however, some studies caution against the assumption that

... New Zealand is a nation of environmentalists. While this perception could be harnessed to protect the environment, instead it seems to perpetuate denial about the very existence of environmental problems and the need for environmental laws (Frieder, 1997, p. 6).

Thus overall perceptions about New Zealand's 'clean and green image' may not necessarily apply to reality, and this nation is not immune to environmental problems that are now commonplace in numerous countries.

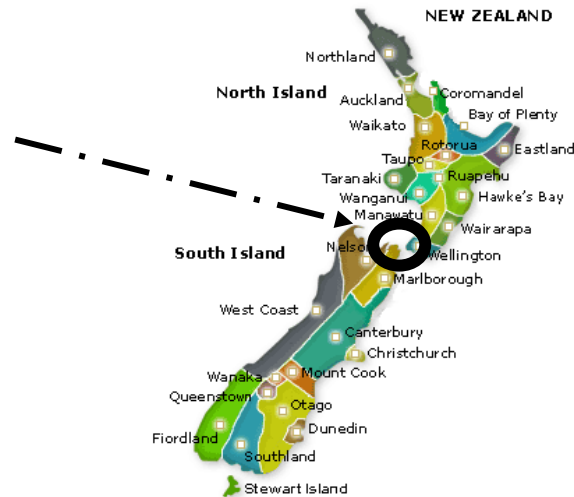
The growing significance of tourism for New Zealand's economy in recent years demonstrates the need for sustained efforts to not only promote the country as a

tourist destination, but also to convey a positive image in regards to environmental friendliness, including in its capital city Wellington. Several reports illustrate the importance of tourism for Wellington, a city that over the years has experienced slow population growth (Lee & McDermott, 1998), and has yet to reach 250,000 inhabitants (Statistics New Zealand, 2001; Absolutely Positively Wellington). As a tourist destination in 2006 Wellington attracted \$1.09 billion worth of visitor spending (Ministry of Tourism, 2007). In the same year, Wellington received 773,900 international visits and 3.56 million domestic visits for a total of 4.34 million visits (Ministry of Tourism, 2007).

Famous for its large variety of cafes and restaurants (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2004; Cossar, 2006; Lee-Frampton, 2006), Wellington prides itself of being a creative, education and cultural capital (Positively Wellington Tourism, 2007). These elements provide potential opportunities for the city's hospitality sector in the form of accommodation and food sales. Forecasts indicate that both numbers of visitors and expenditures might gradually increase through 2013 by 1.2% and 4.8% per year, respectively (Ministry of Tourism, 2007).

### **Methodology**

During the months of August and September of 2006 data were collected from individuals travelling to Wellington (pre visit) from the town of Picton in the South Island, and from those travelling from Wellington (post visit) to the South Island of New Zealand. Figure 1 illustrates the approximate geographic location of the data collection points. Figure 2 shows the compact nature and relatively close distance from both ends of Wellington's central business district. Finally, Figure 3 provides a view of the other data collection point, the town of Picton in the South Island, a departure point for travellers to the North Island by ferry.



**Figure 1:** Geographic location of the study: Wellington in the North Island;  
Picton in the South Island.

Source: <http://www.tourism.net.nz/images/maps/nz-map.gif>

Time and budget constraints were issues that prevented the researchers from using a predominantly qualitative data collection approach, for example, in the form of face to face interviews with passengers at the ferry terminals. A decision was made to use questionnaires to gain insights of visitor views of Wellington both before visitors arrived (in Picton) and after they left the city of Wellington to the South Island. Thus, individuals boarding the ferry to Wellington were to rate their 'pre-visit' views, or expectations; those travellers departing from Wellington, on the other hand, were to rate their 'post-visit' views. The two questionnaires were also designed to allow for comparisons between pre- and post-visit responses, and between domestic and international visitors.





**Plate 1.** City of Wellington (North Island).

(Source: The Author)

Section one of the questionnaire investigated respondents' number of visits to Wellington, their proposed (pre-visit) or actual (post-visit) length of stay, expected (pre-visit) or actual (post-visit) daily expenditure, and size of the visiting party. Section two explored functional and psychological attributes, such as attractions travellers planned to visit (pre-visit) or had actually visited (post-visit), the city's accessibility, cleanliness and nightlife. Previous studies on destination image (Jenkins, 1999; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993, 2003) were consulted in designing the structure and questions of this section.



**Plate 2:** Town of Picton (South Island).

(Source: The Author)

Section three of the questionnaire studied what visitors expected from Wellington as an environmentally friendly destination (pre-visit) and actual views on this dimension from departing visitors. In addition to the core questions mentioned previously, the following questions were also part of this section:

- To what extent is Wellington a clean destination to its visitors?
- To what extent do visitors know about New Zealand's 100% Pure campaign?
- What does the New Zealand 100% Pure camping mean to travellers?

Background information of studies conducted in New Zealand (see, for example, Hinch, 1996; Cloke & Perkins, 2002) provided support and insights in the design of this section.

Section four of the questionnaire sought to collect information of respondents' demographic aspects, including their age, income, education levels, and whether participants were from New Zealand or had travelled from overseas.

The potential limitations of choosing a predominantly quantitative data collection approach to gather visitor data are also acknowledged in this study. However, some sections of the questionnaire provided open-ended questions and space for comments for respondents to indicate their views and opinions. Allowing participants to write their views and experiences provided to a certain extent a qualitative component to the data collection process.

A total of 817 travellers were approached and briefly introduced to the purpose of the study. Each of these individuals was invited to participate in the study completing a questionnaire during their ferry trip from or to Wellington. Potential participants were also informed that they could mail the completed questionnaire during or after their journey in a pre-paid return envelope provided by the researchers. In all, 353 responses were received, representing a 43.2% response rate. In accord with some studies (Field, 2005), independent t-tests (significance level set to 0.05) were run as applicable in sections where a 5-point scale was used, and that achieved a threshold of at least 0.7. Some studies (Ryan, 1995) indicate that such threshold is acceptable in order to consider the data for subsequent tests.

## **Findings**

A first part of the findings relates to respondents' demographic characteristics. From all responses obtained, 168 (47.6%) were from people travelling to Wellington, and 185 (52.4%) from people leaving the city. More international respondents, 187 (53%), than domestic, 165 (46.7%), participated in the study, with one respondent not indicating his / her origin. Table 1 illustrates selected demographic characteristics of the participants. As it would be expected, differences were noticed in the number of previous visits to Wellington between the domestic and international respondent groups, with domestic respondents clearly visiting the city more times than did overseas participants.

Only seven (4.2%) domestic visitors visited Wellington at most once, while the great majority had visited more than once. In contrast, most international visitors had never visited the city, and only 22 (11.8%) had visited more than once. The largest groups of respondents either planned to stay between one and two days (pre-visit), or did in fact stay for this amount of time (post-visit). Also, a lower percentage of international visitors (26.7%) actually stayed in Wellington for over two days. Accordingly, the bulk of respondents was not prepared to spend, or did not spend, more than \$NZ 200 during their visit to Wellington. Additional information (Table 1) shows that international respondents tend to travel in smaller groups and are younger than their domestic counterparts.

**Table 1:** Selected demographic characteristics of respondents.

| How many times respondents had visited<br>Wellington before | Pre visit |      | Post visit |      | Domestic * |      | International * |      |
|---|-----------|------|------------|------|------------|------|-----------------|------|
|   | n         | %    | n          | %    | n          | %    | n               | %    |
| Never   | 47        | 28.0 | 84         | 45.4 | 1          | 0.6  | 130             | 69.5 |
| Once  | 28        | 16.7 | 10         | 5.4  | 6          | 3.6  | 32              | 17.1 |
| More than once  | 86        | 51.2 | 89         | 48.1 | 152        | 92.1 | 22              | 11.8 |
| <b>Length of stay in Wellington</b>                         |           |      |            |      |            |      |                 |      |
| Less than one day   | 49        | 29.2 | 58         | 31.4 | 50         | 30.3 | 56              | 29.9 |
| Between one and two days                                    | 71        | 42.3 | 67         | 36.2 | 58         | 35.2 | 80              | 42.8 |
| More than two days  | 46        | 27.4 | 58         | 31.4 | 54         | 32.7 | 50              | 26.7 |
| <b>Estimated daily budget whilst in Wellington</b>          |           |      |            |      |            |      |                 |      |
| Less than \$NZ 100  | 100       | 59.5 | 82         | 44.3 | 81         | 49.1 | 100             | 53.5 |

|                                 |    |      |    |      |    |      |     |      |
|---------------------------------|----|------|----|------|----|------|-----|------|
| Between \$NZ 101 - \$NZ 200     | 37 | 22.0 | 56 | 30.3 | 42 | 25.5 | 51  | 27.3 |
| Over \$NZ 200                   | 26 | 15.5 | 42 | 22.7 | 36 | 21.8 | 32  | 17.1 |
| <b>Size of travelling party</b> |    |      |    |      |    |      |     |      |
| Alone                           | 49 | 29.2 | 58 | 31.4 | 23 | 14.0 | 24  | 12.9 |
| One other                       | 71 | 42.3 | 67 | 36.2 | 68 | 41.5 | 107 | 57.5 |
| Two or more others              | 44 | 19.1 | 58 | 31.4 | 73 | 44.5 | 55  | 29.6 |
| <b>Age groups</b>               |    |      |    |      |    |      |     |      |
| 18 - 30 years old               | 53 | 31.5 | 61 | 33.0 | 39 | 23.6 | 75  | 40.5 |
| 31 - 50 years old               | 49 | 29.2 | 56 | 30.3 | 53 | 32.1 | 52  | 28.1 |
| 51+ years old                   | 66 | 39.3 | 66 | 35.7 | 73 | 44.2 | 58  | 31.4 |

Note: Due to missing responses, totals may not add up to numbers of pre, post, domestic and international visitors. \* One respondent did not indicate his / her origin.

### **Is New Zealand 100% Pure as the Slogan Suggests?**

A second part of the findings focused on visitors' views on New Zealand's environmental friendliness. The largest group of domestic visitors (57.89%) had heard about New Zealand's 100% Pure campaign before, and only 34 (28.81%) international visitors had done so. When asked to describe what they understood by the statement '100% Pure New Zealand', there was general agreement among domestic respondents that this statement means 'clean,' 'green,' 'natural,' and similar keywords related to the environment and ecologically friendly. However, three domestic participants expressed their disagreement with what they viewed as the reality of the slogan:

- *'Clean and green. We are far from it!'*

- *'Supposedly clean and green but it is not!!'*
- *'Supposedly New Zealand has no pollution, no littering, low impact on environment, environmentally friendly. Not true, but it makes us feel good.'*

International respondents made noticeably fewer comments in this area, but mostly positive, with 29 (15.5%) identifying the 'pure' statement with 'clean,' 'green,' and 'environmental friendliness.' As with their domestic counterparts, critical comments among international respondents in regards to the '100% Pure' statement were also noted, including the following from three different participants:

- *'Less pollution, environmental protection, but that is wrong. It is only superficial';*
- *'I think it was 20 years ago but not now,'*
- *'Public relations stunt to attract tourists.'*

Visitors leaving Wellington were also asked to describe what they understood by the '100% Pure' slogan, with 27 out of the 41 written comments among domestic participants mainly relating Wellington to 'clean', 'green', 'natural' and 'environmental.' Further to these keywords, comments indicated *'A very clean city air, streets, no graffiti to speak of'* and *'An analogy of our 'clean, green' image.'* Similar comments and keywords were identified among international respondents, with 41 out of 49 identifying the 100% Pure slogan with clean, green, space, unspoilt and natural landscapes. Disagreement with the '100% Pure' statement was also included in the comments of some departing domestic visitors:

- *'I do not feel we are doing all we can to protect, preserve, conserve, and work with [the] natural environment.'*
- *'I find this description embarrassing as it is no longer true- e.g., polluted rivers, beaches, waterways.'*

Others believed that the campaign has more to do with marketing strategies to attract tourists:

- *'Have heard this but do not believe it is true, advertising hype I suspect! But we need to justify this claim and we do not!'*
- *'Marketing hype, supposed to indicate clean/green but does not / is not. We are just lucky to have low population density.'*
- *'Purity is without pollutants. This is not New Zealand. Its image is not an indicator of the truth. Purely a marketable ideal.'*

While clearly not a majority of respondents, the negative comments nevertheless suggest that members of the domestic group appear to be frustrated with campaigns that may not necessarily portray the reality of New Zealand regarding environmentally friendliness or environmentally friendly initiatives. Despite such comments, when respondents rated the importance of New Zealand's 100% Pure image using a 5-point scale, where 5= extremely important, 3= neither important nor unimportant, 1= Not at all important, overall respondents were in agreement about the importance of New Zealand's 100% Pure image. Moreover, the mean among participants of the pre visit group was 4.11, while that of the post visit group was 4.24. Further, the mean of the domestic group (4.30) was slightly higher than the mean of international visitors (4.18). For this last group, the natural attributes of New Zealand may be a reason to not consider campaigns such as 100% Pure as critical for New Zealand to advertise itself as a clean, green country.

### **Travellers' Views of Wellington Regarding Environmental Friendliness**

Regarding their views on environmental issues in their visit to Wellington, participants travelling to the capital city expected the city to contribute towards New Zealand's clean, green image. However, while in almost all items in the questionnaire both domestic and international respondents had similar levels of agreement, some differences were however noticed in three areas. First, Table 2 illustrates that domestic visitors expected road congestion in the city to be a problem noticeably more than did international visitors. The more awareness, knowledge or first-hand experience of Wellington's traffic problems appears to be a determining factor for domestic travellers' higher expectations of the traffic issue.

Second, although modest, differences existed between the expectations of domestic and international groups about the potential problem of water pollution in Wellington. Domestic respondents' expectations of water pollution were higher than those of their international counterparts, who may perceive water pollution as a very marginal issue in the city capital. Finally, while in the previous two dimensions domestic visitors tend to have more critical views of the city, this is not the case in regards to expecting Wellington to have an environmentally friendly transportation system. Once again, it must be acknowledged that domestic visitors' more common knowledge of the city, or previous visits to Wellington may have had an impact on their answers in this section of the questionnaire.

**Table 2:** Domestic (pre-visit and post-visit) versus overseas visitors (pre-visit and post-visit) on environmental related issues regarding Wellington.

| Issues   | Origin   | n  | Mea<br>n | SD    | Sig. 2-t    |
|--|----------|----|----------|-------|-------------|
| Road congestion will be a problem in Wellington.                                 | Domestic | 72 | 3.81     | .914  | <b>.000</b> |
|  | Overseas | 69 | 3.19     | 1.019 |             |
| Water pollution will be a problem in Wellington.                                 | Domestic | 60 | 3.32     | 1.000 | <b>.014</b> |
|  | Overseas | 61 | 2.84     | 1.113 |             |
| I expect Wellington to have an environmentally friendly public transport system. | Domestic | 72 | 4.11     | .761  | <b>.035</b> |
|  | Overseas | 71 | 3.85     | .730  |             |

Note: Using t-tests (significance level set to 0.05). Respondents rated items, where 1= Strongly disagree, 3= Neither agree nor disagree, and 5= Strongly agree.

A similar list of items was available for respondents leaving Wellington to complete. As shown in Table 3, overall participants' responses resulted in levels below the



agreement mark (or mean < 4.0). While this set of findings does not identify any statistical significant differences among the different groups of respondents, it is noted that international visitors viewed Wellington as a clean destination as well as contributing towards New Zealand's clean, green image. The higher means scored among domestic respondents regarding road congestion, overcrowding at tourism facilities, noise, and water and air pollution, although modest for the most part, suggest that this group had a more negative stance as compared to international respondents about these same items. One possible reason for such an outcome is that many among the domestic respondents may be living in smaller towns or townships of New Zealand. As a result, they might be enjoying a quieter and healthier lifestyle as opposed to what they regard as life in a big city. For international visitors, on the other hand, the relatively small size of most cities and towns in New Zealand, including Wellington, may offer a more positive image in relation to environmental issues, including the impression of less traffic and less pollution than what they might be accustomed to in their place of residence.

**Table 3:** Post visit respondents' views on environmental issues related to Wellington.

| Statements   | Post visit |      | Domestic |      | International |      |
|--|------------|------|----------|------|---------------|------|
|  | n          | Mean | n        | Mean | n             | Mean |
| Wellington is a clean destination.   | 178        | 3.65 | 77       | 3.39 | 101           | 3.85 |
| Wellington contributes towards New Zealand's clean, green image.                     | 169        | 3.51 | 76       | 3.29 | 91            | 3.70 |
| Wellington has an environmentally friendly public transport system.                  | 126        | 3.49 | 62       | 3.45 | 64            | 3.53 |
| Tourism providers in Wellington actively encourage environmentally friendly practice | 130        | 3.32 | 56       | 3.36 | 74            | 3.30 |
| Road congestion is a problem in Wellington   | 168        | 3.30 | 73       | 3.63 | 95            | 3.04 |

|   |     |      |    |      |    |      |
|---|-----|------|----|------|----|------|
| Noise pollution is a problem in Wellington                    | 165 | 2.92 | 71 | 3.21 | 94 | 2.70 |
| Overcrowding is a problem at tourism facilities in Wellington | 157 | 2.58 | 66 | 2.92 | 91 | 2.33 |
| Water pollution is a problem in Wellington.                   | 134 | 2.55 | 63 | 2.94 | 71 | 2.21 |
| Air pollution is a problem in Wellington                      | 163 | 2.50 | 72 | 2.71 | 91 | 2.34 |

Note: Using a scale, where 5= strongly agree, 1= strongly disagree, and 0= I don't know / no comment

### **Additional Visitor Comments on Wellington's Environmental Issues**

The post-visit questionnaire contained two additional questions for respondents to complete in writing and in their own words. The first question asked participants to indicate some of the ways they believe Wellington contributes towards New Zealand's clean, green image. Several domestic respondents were in agreement that Wellington's geographic and climatic attributes help minimise the capital city's pollution:

- *'As [Wellington] is close to sea and surrounded by a lot of rural [areas] gives clean impression.'*
- *'Beautiful natural scenery- wind blows polluted air away.'*

While the nature of these comments may seem anecdotal, other views emphasise energy conservation aspects of the city. For instance: *'Clean green- beautiful waterfront. Does not [contribute] in traffic area / although electric buses good [sic].'* For a second participant, *'Having the town belt and reserves close to the CBD. Electric buses; marine reserve off the South Coast,'* while another respondent acknowledged the importance of the city's *'Electric buses, electric trains.'*

Some domestic respondents seemed to be more observant or were more aware of recent infrastructural developments in the capital city: *'A recent filtration system using reeds at the gardens by Te Papa [museum].'* *Trolley buses. Fabulous green*

*belts in and around the city. Sewage treatment plant, developing harbour side for tourism.* Additional written comments also illustrate basic efforts to keep the capital city environmentally friendly: *'Always see people cleaning the roadsides.'* *'The streets are mainly litter free and there is an excellent and cheap transport system for visitors to use.'* *'The waterfront is well presented and also is usually very clear.'* *Pedestrian friendly, courteous drivers (especially to strangers), green belt parks, restoration and upkeep of older buildings, Karori sanctuary, preservation.'*

Statements emphasising the capital's cleanliness and environmentally friendlier transportation in the form of electric buses constituted the general tone among international respondents: *'Compared to some capital cities it seems very clean.'* *'Clean city (waste wise) compared to most of the world's capitals.'* *'Clean city centre; lack of traffic; reserves and natural areas, not over developed or dense or overcrowded.'* *'For a capital city it is compact and clean.'* In a study conducted in Canada, Murphy et al. (2000) found that 'Destination, 'environment', in terms of climate, scenery, ambience, friendliness, and to a lesser extent cleanliness, was found to be a key predictor of destination' (p. 50). Thus, the way the city presents itself can impact visitors' views, and demonstrate the need and importance for local authorities to provide a clean environment for both local and visitors alike.

International participants also recognised the importance of recycling as part of one of the city's environmental strategies, as for example four respondents of this group explained:

- *'Importance of recycling is emphasised, petrol station on Wakefield Street had environmentally-friendly solutions.'*
- *'Recycling facilities in the hostel, beautiful botanic gardens, the view of the harbour and surrounding hills looks picturesque.'*
- *'Tram buses using greening diesel. Green open spaces.'*
- *'Transport modes, encouraging sustainability.'*

The second question asked participants in what ways they believed Wellington does not contribute towards New Zealand's clean, green image. Domestic respondents

provided answers including the following: *'Dirty, noisy, not 100% pure.'* *'It is the capital city but it looks very industrial being a port and all the construction going on...'* Domestic respondents also criticised the physical appearance of Wellington: *'Get rid of railway shunting yards.'* *'Gorse covers hills with shabby old houses.'* *'Railway station and ferry terminal (walking to ferries) tired, dirty and in need of upgrade.'* *'One person in every car; no one seems to car pool.'* Finally, other domestic visitors did not seem to be in agreement about the outcomes of the city's recycling efforts: *'Lack of truly integrated recycling system, the untreated storm water.'* *'More needs to go to recycling.'*

International respondents also made critical comments in regards to Wellington not contributing to New Zealand's clean, green image. First, the city's traffic appeared to be a concern among many: *'A lot of traffic, airport close to the city centre, container terminal looks like industrial zone.'* *'Car traffic congestion at peak times.'* *'Congested roads, possible better to provide our town of parking and shuttles buses in? (For tourists / smokers / day trippers).'* *'Do not think much about curbing traffic congestion.'* Wastage was also a concern among international participants: *'High water usage per capita with no restrictions enforced ruing entire year.'* *'Heaters placed outside for smokers in bars etc. are highly polluting and are a waste of a valuable resource.'*

In addition, part of the argument among international participants is that not enough is being done about recycling: *'Hotels don't provide recycling, encourage 'disposable' attitude.'* *'No visible promotion of recycling.'* *'Not enough usable recycling.'* These findings are not isolated but along the lines of recent studies conducted in hotels that conclude that the least popular eco-friendly practices among hotels are recycling, use of solar energy and composting of food waste (Mensah, 2007, p. 20). However, there is clear evidence that visitor groups hold great value for environmentally friendly travel destinations (Chen & Hsu, 2000). Unfortunately, while a number of tourism businesses are able to adopt various environmentally friendly practices, sometimes despite operators' best intentions their actions can only go so far 'because ultimate responsibility for change lies with host governments via legislation' (Forsyth, 1997, p. 270).

Wellington's physical appearance also generated negative comments among international participants: *'The streets (some) are dirty. The place is quite grey. Full of buildings and a bit crowded.'* *'There is a lot of concrete everywhere. Need more green spaces. The botanic gardens could be modernised, seems out of date and unappealing.'* *'From the outset, it looks industrial, especially around the docks. The city centre feels dated.'* Finally, international visitors objected the alleged efficiency and environmental friendliness of Wellington's transportation system in the following comments: *'Public transport should be better promoted.'* *'The public transport can be more clean [sic] and tidy and environmentally friendly, e.g. buses.'* *'The public transport is not that efficient...'*

Overall, the comments of many respondents demonstrate that efforts made towards an environmentally friendly environment might positively contribute to the enhancement Wellington's image. Such positive views might even extend to the quality of visitors' stay.

## **Conclusions**

Environmental sustainability and related dimensions have gained in importance in recent years. Initiatives among some governments and private organisations are being developed and implemented to minimise environmental pressures and to educate the public about the importance of protecting the environment. Some of these developments originate from growing concerns of global warming and the increasing effect of depleting or destroying available natural resources. The protection of the environment has also been extended to market regions and countries as tourist destinations. The adoption of eco-friendly concepts can be a decisive marketing tool that tourism stakeholders cannot afford to ignore, particularly as certain traveller groups may choose an environmentally friendlier destination over another.

This study investigated the views of visitors travelling to and from Wellington about this capital city in environmental terms, an area that has received very limited attention in academic research. Overall, respondents agree that Wellington

contributes to the clean and green image of New Zealand in several ways, including cleanliness and greenness, and efforts to provide an environmentally friendlier transportation system. However, written comments also suggest that more can be done in a number of areas to improve Wellington as an environmentally friendly destination. For example, as one international respondent indicated, Wellington appears to be *'a bit too much of a metropolis in central areas.'* Visitors' comments also identify lack of recycling, noise, and congestion because of the city's traffic. Wellington is considerably smaller in size and population as compared to many other capital cities in the world; however, some respondents also indicated that the city faces similar issues as much larger capital cities. Alternative ways to reduce traffic congestion and resulting noise could provide both residents and travellers with a much friendlier environment and a much more pleasant city experience. Additional comments regarding the lack of recycling, including in hotels, also suggest the need for improvements in this area.

If visitors groups looking for peace, quiet and bonding with nature, heritage and culture avoid certain towns or cities, including Wellington, because of their negative reputation for being noisy, congested or for lacking environmentally friendly initiatives that render them visitor unfriendly then such cities will be at the losing end. An implication of such scenario includes the potential loss of forgone benefits in the form of revenue from accommodation, food and beverage, entertainment and city attractions. Some of the comments gathered in this study suggest that Wellington's noise, congestion and other issues may be discouraging some visitor groups from travelling to the city. Thus, tourism stakeholders and city officials need to monitor and pay attention to visitors' views and impressions of the city in order to enhance Wellington's, environment, and in the process its image as a tourist destination.

This exploratory study provides several avenues for further research on environmental friendliness in urban environments, particularly in the city of Wellington. For example, future studies could be carried out among a larger number of visitors and in different seasons to help determine the importance visitors place on environmental friendliness while travelling in the capital city. Information on a larger scale could be of great use for tourism bodies and agencies, particularly as the level

of competitiveness to attract tourist dollars has greatly increased among different destinations, including those in New Zealand. Also, an extension of the present study could be carried out in other cities of New Zealand. Such extension could prove very useful in providing regional tourism stakeholders with critical information of visitors' views of their city in ecological / environmental terms.

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