

Attractiveness of hovercraft trips to tourists

Introduction

In the summer of 2005/06 a survey of 228 people was conducted in Christchurch to investigate potential demand for leisure hovercraft trips. The survey aimed to find out whether people had any interest in going on a hovercraft trip, which elements of some potential trips they found most appealing, and how sensitive their choices were to the price of the suggested trips.

To try to separate price considerations and the attractiveness of certain trip options the people surveyed were first asked which options they would choose if they won a free trip. Later in the survey respondents were asked if they would consider paying for a trip and were asked which trip options they would choose given different prices for different options.

Who was surveyed?

Of the 228 people surveyed 47% normally live in New Zealand (and are classified as domestic respondents) and 53% normally live overseas (international respondents)¹.

- 75% of the domestic respondents normally live in Canterbury, 18% live elsewhere in the South Island and 7% live in the North Island.
- 35% of international respondents came from the UK, 13% each from the USA and Germany, and 10% came from Australia. Other international respondents came from as far afield as Israel, Switzerland and Guam.
- 52% of the respondents were female and 48% were male.

The table below shows the age range of the people surveyed. The youngest person surveyed was 14 and the oldest was 78.

Age of respondents	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Under 25	59	26
25–34	55	24
35–44	39	17
45–54	18	8
55–64	30	13
65–74	23	10
75 and over	4	2
Total	228	100

¹Respondents are classified as domestic or international according to where they said they ‘normally live’. This classification does not take account of nationality or legal residence or citizenship status.

Do people like the idea of hovercraft trips?

Hovercraft trips were less popular, both as free trips and paying trips, than either of the other options offered to respondents.

Respondents were asked whether they would prefer to go on a free hovercraft trip, a free wildlife cruise on a catamaran, or a free kayaking trip². About 20% of choices made were for a hovercraft trip compared with 39% for a cruise, and 40% for a kayaking trip.

Similarly when asked which trip (if any) respondents would consider paying for, 17% of choices were for a hovercraft trip compared with 38% for a cruise and 36% for a kayaking trip (the remainder said they would not pay for any of the trips).

Trip choices made

Type of trip chosen	Free trip (%, n = 235)	Paying trip (%, n = 233)
Hovercraft	20	17
Catamaran	39	38
Kayak	40	36
None	2	9
Total³	100	100

What do people like about the idea of hovercraft trips?

Respondents were asked the reason for their choices. By far the most popular reason for choosing a hovercraft trip was the uniqueness or novelty of the experience. The most popular reasons given for choosing a cruise were the chance of seeing wildlife (dolphins especially) and scenery. The most popular reasons for choosing kayaking were that it is active and that respondents had enjoyed kayaking previously.

Differences between domestic and international respondents

There were some clear differences between international and domestic respondents' attitudes to hovercraft trips.

Domestic respondents expressed more interest in hovercraft trips than did international respondents. Sixty-nine percent of those who said they would pay to go on a hovercraft trip were domestic respondents. This might be explained by the fact that only 29% of domestic respondents had ever been on a hovercraft before, whereas 43% of international respondents had done so. If the main attraction of hovercraft trips is their uniqueness and novelty then they will appeal more to people who have not experienced a hovercraft trip before.

² While most respondents chose one preferred trip, some were unable to choose between the trips and recorded two preferred options; for this reason the number of choices made was slightly higher than the number of respondents.

³ Due to the effects of rounding, totals may not exactly equal the sum of the percentages shown in each column.

The 82 respondents who had been on a hovercraft before were asked *where* they had done this. From the location of trips and the information provided by some respondents it is estimated that 36% of the domestic respondents and 60% of the international respondents who had been on a hovercraft before had been on a hovercraft ferry⁴.

The hovercraft pictured on the visual aids accompanying the survey was a small, brightly coloured craft designed for leisure trips and able to carry a maximum of only 12 passengers. The hovercraft used in ferry services are often much more industrial-looking and larger craft, able to carry several hundred passengers and tens of cars. Picture A below is taken from the survey materials; Picture B is a photograph of the ‘Princess Anne’ hovercraft ferry, which was in regular service between England and France until October 2000, when it was retired due to competition from other cross-channel services.

A: Hovercraft in survey materials



Photograph courtesy of Pacific Hovercraft.
(www.hovercraft.co.nz)

B: Hovercraft ferry



Photograph courtesy of Norfolkline Dover
Dunkerque Ferries. (www.norfolkline.com)

It seems that respondents who associate hovercraft with ferries (rather than with the nippy, little leisure craft portrayed in the survey) are unlikely to be immediately attracted to the idea of leisure hovercraft trips.

Preferred types of hovercraft trip

Respondents to the survey were asked which of three hovercraft trips they would choose to go on if they won a free trip. They were shown brochures for three different trips, which were described as follows:

Pure Adrenaline: ‘Grip the safety rail and let out whoops of excitement as your driver spins the hovercraft around in its own boat length!’

Historic & Scenic: ‘Combine the excitement of an amphibious ride with an insight into the unique cultural and physical history of Banks Peninsula.’

⁴ 16 respondents reported that they had been on a hovercraft ferry; others only mentioned the location of their trip. Some locations (such as ‘Hagley Park’) are unlikely to have been the venue for a ferry service, whereas other locations (such as ‘English Channel’) are likely to have been a ferry service. For those respondents who did not report whether their trip was on a ferry or not this has been estimated.

Cruise & BBQ: ‘Relax and take in the scenery and local wildlife as you glide over the lake and its shores. Then join your crew for a complimentary BBQ or picnic in the stunning surroundings of the lake.’

- 40% of respondents chose the *Cruise & BBQ* option.
- 33% chose *Pure Adrenaline*.
- 25% chose the *Historic & Scenic* trip.
- 3% said they would not go on a free hovercraft trip.

The choice of trip was strongly related to age, with younger respondents preferring *Pure Adrenaline* and older respondents preferring *Historic & Scenic*. While *Cruise & BBQ* appealed across age groups, younger respondents were drawn by the BBQ and older respondents were attracted by the thought of a relaxing trip.

Conclusions

Interest in hovercraft trips is linked to people’s national origins and their age.

Domestic respondents found hovercraft more appealing than did international respondents, who tended to be more attracted to kayaking or cruising options. This may be related to the lower number of domestic respondents who had been on a hovercraft before and to different perceptions of hovercraft as either transport or leisure craft.

Different elements of hovercraft trips appealed to different age groups within the survey. Younger people preferred the *Pure Adrenaline* trip and were attracted by the option of a BBQ. Older respondents preferred the *Historic & Scenic* trip and were attracted by the idea of relaxation.

Over the whole survey, more respondents expressed interest in each of the kayaking or cruising options than expressed an interest in hovercraft trips. However, some respondents did express an interest in hovercraft trips and there may be an opportunity for a hovercraft operator to exploit this market.

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