

Maximising well-being post COVID-19

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KEY INSIGHTS

Much has changed in New Zealand since the New Zealand Government imposed a nation-wide lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic on 26 March 2020. Research³ undertaken by social researchers from Manaaki Whenua – Landcare Research and the Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment provides insights into how people navigated their COVID-19 response and what that means for their, and New Zealand's, continued well-being.

Tourism

A key theme noted by participants was that tourism is an important part of our economy, and has been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic:

...we're also a very remote country and we're very heavily reliant on tourism... (MWB41).

I think all indications are that countries that respond better to the health crisis are also responding better economically. Obviously, that's not true of the hospitality and tourism trade, where they really depended on overseas visitors (MWB9).

Tourism was our rising star, unfortunately that rocket blew up mid-flight... (MWB12).

While participants recognised the importance of tourism to New Zealand, they did not want to see a return to the tourism model that operated in New Zealand pre COVID-19:

I hope we can connect to the world. I don't think we have to connect the way we did. I don't think we need to have vans of tourists crawling through our country. But it would be nice to have some return and to be able to, likewise, do some travel overseas. I think it would be good to have the tourist industry do a bit of a reset. And not just think that they want to go back to the way it was... (MWB90).

I also would like to see that we continue to enjoy New Zealand and this beautiful environment that we have and that relying on tourism as such a big part of New Zealand's economy is not something that I would encourage us to do (MWB40).

I get quite annoyed when you get the tourism sector assuming that they will return to where they were because I think there's a huge feeling among probably most New Zealanders that they don't want it back up there....The same with air travel and cruise ships, we're hearing all

³ A background and methodology report is available from StrongeD@landcareresearch.co.nz

the time people seem to be waiting for the same numbers of airplanes to be coming here and cruise ships, and again I think this is an opportunity not to go back to that (MWB56).

Basically, all of the focus that I see and hear is let's get tourism pumped up and running again. No one's asking whether that's actually good for us in the long term (MWB35).

Participants suggested we need to reassess tourism in New Zealand post COVID-19 to consider the impacts current models have on the environment and climate change; the impacts or stress placed on infrastructure due to the large number of tourists; and how those numbers diminish New Zealanders' own enjoyment of or desire to go places:

...tourism was putting a huge pressure on our environment, just the way it was operating (MWB90).

I'm not really crying too much at the loss of tourism...because I think that tourism was always the really – well, it's...very difficult to really address a lot of climate change aspects around travel (MWB2).

I think to see kiwis out enjoying the countryside and perhaps not all the freedom campers everywhere and all the – not so busy on tracks and that sort of thing, I think that's quite cool. It would be nice if we could keep hold of that. A few years ago, when you'd go down to the South Island, and there would be freedom campers all under bridges by rivers and rubbish everywhere and that disrespect for the environment which is so sad to see, I hope we don't go back to that sort of model of mass tourism. I know it's income, but to what detriment? (MWB4).

I guess it's an opportunity to not to trash things and leave them, which it's been like – if you get too many tourists in an area for example and there aren't the structures in place to deal with the waste that goes along with all of those people (MWB13).

...I took advantage of New Zealand not being full of tourists, which I'd really stopped – especially in the Nelson area being close I'd really stopped enjoying travelling there,...there were just so many people everywhere you go, and it means that shops you go to and restaurants and things are quite unfriendly and over people (MWB56).

There was strong support for the current focus on domestic tourism from many participants, although it was recognised that this would not fill the economic void left by the international market. While many felt that this was not necessarily a bad thing, it did not mean they wanted to see an end to international tourism. Rather they saw the need for a new sustainable model that not only addressed impact issues in New Zealand, but also reflected on how and why we as New Zealanders travel internationally, and the impacts we create:

I would like to see New Zealanders...not burning up fossil fuels going off to Europe to play a game of golf. I know people who do things like that (MWB8).

I think that travel is really valuable, but...I think a lot of people go on overseas trips to lie on a beach, and I would like to see overseas trips being something that people get a cultural experience from if they're going to do them (MWB76).

Participants noted that now was the opportunity to start that conversation and develop a new approach to tourism.