

# **Domestic tourism in New Zealand: The Kiwi family holiday**

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**In New Zealand, 56 % of all tourism earnings come from domestic tourism (Ministry of Tourism, 2009), yet the attention by the government is primarily directed towards international tourism. In fact, Interactive Travellers®, New Zealand's target market, comprise young people and more mature tourists travelling without children (Tourism New Zealand, 2009) creating a gap for families with children. This article looks at the significance of domestic holidays for New Zealand families. It establishes a definition of Kiwi family holidays and explores additional aspects of national and social identity formation.**

## **Introduction**

Domestic tourism in New Zealand remains an under-researched area as governmental attention is on attracting overseas tourists and export earnings. Yet, NZ\$ 8.1 billion was spent by domestic travellers in 2008 making up over half of all the tourism economic activity (Ministry of Tourism, 2009). The family, including children, represents a large domestic market for the tourism industry but gets little recognition largely because family holidays are perceived as less economically valuable than the international tourists coming to New Zealand. This differs from the New Zealanders or Kiwis themselves who perceive the annual family summer holiday as a well-loved Kiwi icon and a symbol of Kiwi identity. Enjoyment of New Zealand's outdoors, and particularly its extensive coastal areas, is considered an essential part of the Kiwi lifestyle (Barnett and Wolfe, 1993). Camping holidays have featured strongly for the Kiwi families over the years and are appreciated for their back-to-basics approach and ability to increase social relationships with family and friends (Department of Conservation, 2006). Domestic holidays must be understood here within the context of New Zealand being an island nation with a small population (4.33 million in October 2009), varied natural resources, and relative distance from other countries. This article is based on a study of family holidays in New Zealand to find out the social experiences and meanings of holidays for all the family members over time (Schänzel, 2009). It highlights the significance of domestic holidays for the families themselves by establishing a definition and giving examples on social connectedness and national identity formation of children.

### **Domestic family holidays in the literature**

The concept of relationships and interaction between family members is considered essential to any notion of family and underlies most literature on family tourism. According to Shaw et al. (2008) parents with children differ from other tourists because of their strong focus on social values like family togetherness and generativity (or guiding the next generation). This indicates a purposive element to family holidaying that involves connections with, rather than escape from, social relations (Larsen et al., 2007). It has been acknowledged in the literature that domestic tourism can produce benefits such as fostering a greater sense of national awareness but little is known about the social processes in which people experience national identity through tourism (Palmer, 2005). Even less is known about how families experience domestic holidays.

### **Methodology and Analysis**

A combination of quantitative and qualitative methodology was used in order to understand the holiday behaviour of families in New Zealand. First, a parental survey through five primary schools in the Wellington region was conducted in November 2006. The questionnaire contained open-ended questions which were coded for key themes. This was followed by three rounds of whole-family interviews with families recruited through the survey over a period of about one year from December 2006 to November 2007 (before and after their summer holiday in January 2007) to capture anticipation, and short- and longer-term recollections of holiday experiences. The inherently private nature of families and their mobility on holiday did not allow for research access during the holiday. The qualitative part of the study was based on 10 families (10 mothers, 10 fathers, and 20 children; 11 boys and 9 girls, ranging from 6–16 years) and involved interviewing all family members as a group (collectively) and individually (sequentially) to ensure that their family group and their personal perspectives were being captured. To give a gender perspective on parenthood, only two parent/guardian families were selected (94% of the 110 survey respondents fitted this family form). This allowed for step-parents, however, no blended families volunteered, meaning the sample was made up of 10 sets of biological parents and their children (between one and three children per family). The participants were all white, Anglo-New Zealand, middle-class, and residents in the Wellington region, making the families relatively homogenous.

The iterative research was analysed using grounded theory methodology. This meant that the successive stages of research involved the concurrent collection and analysis of data informing the next stage or constant comparative analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) which led to the modification of the interview questions as the study progressed. The grounded theory approach resulted in establishing a definition of family holidays based on the parental survey and the whole-family interviews as well as a theoretical framework of the main themes of family time and own time. Family time encapsulated the purposiveness of spending time together with the immediate and extended family and included idealised notions of novelty or change of routine, social connectedness, and social identities. In contrast, own time encapsulated freedom from those family commitments to pursue familiar interests alone or with peers, which increased in importance with age of the child(ren). The themes discussed here and illustrated with selected quotes from the interviews are social connectedness/visiting friends and relatives (VFR) and social identities/traditions which are part of family time or time spent together with the family rather than time apart from the family. New Zealand birds are used as pseudonyms for family names.

### **Sociality in a definition of New Zealand family holidays**

The definition that resulted from the study below establishes that family holidays within New Zealand have a purpose of spending time together ‘with’ the family (including extended family and friends) rather than just an escape/break ‘from’ normal routines (see Larsen et al., 2007). Family holidays, then, offer a social time to (re)connect with people and for parents to spend quality time with the child(ren) for at least a weekend. This might not involve overnight trips but using the home as a base for experiences that are different to normal. Including children in the research process highlights fun as essential to family holidays. For example, an 8 year old said: “*It is not a holiday if it is not fun. If it is fun then it is a holiday.*” Allowing for the perspectives of all family members has ascertained that individual pursuits, compromise, and conflict are as much a part of family holidays as the social and fun aspect. This definition emphasizes the overall importance placed on the social dimension of holidays while also revealing possible negative family group dynamics and individual needs for time away from the family.

*A purposive time, at least a weekend, spent together with the whole and extended family having experiences different from normal routines that are fun. This centres on a balance of time that includes individual pursuits and which may involve compromise and conflict.*

Within a domestic holiday context, VFR and social connectedness played an important role for families to (re)connect with the wider community of friends and family. In fact, all the interviewed families on their summer holiday stayed with, visited, or had family and friends coming along on holiday:

*“We tend to do a bit of a meander around to catch up with people, very much the same way continuing contacts and renewing friendships.”* (Tui mother, final family interview)

*“I like [holidays] because we see all the family and I think we should see them more. I like it because of that aspect. You are so far away nowadays you just don’t get that involvement.”* (Weka mother, post-holiday family interview)

*“Just grandparents and cousins make the holiday for me I reckon.”* (Tui girl, final individual interview)

This highlights the significance that New Zealanders place in using their holidays to reconnect with extended family and friends and as a form of social networking. It also emphasises that families in New Zealand today increasingly live geographically dispersed from the rest of their families.

### **Establishment of national identity as part of social identity**

National identity and traditions were both linked to domestic tourism behaviour and social connectedness. The first was about a national identity and the latter was about a family identity, while together they were about social identities and perpetuating family rituals in the form of a holiday tradition. Family holidays signified a continuation of a Kiwi tradition passed down from generation to generation:

*“I like the idea of having a family holiday every year. That seems to be a good Kiwi thing to do. I grew up with it so it is nice to pass that on to the kids.”* (Kea mother, final individual interview)

*“For me it is a continuation of letting the children enjoy a summer beach holiday which is something of a privilege I had as a child.”* (Kereru mother, final family interview)

Domestic holidays were also about fostering an appreciation of New Zealand or national identity in the children by showing them around the country. This provided parents with a conscious opportunity for guiding their children (or generativity):

*“I guess almost the educational aspect of [holidays] as well. That is our opportunity to teach the kids holidays around New Zealand, to teach them about New Zealand and for us to learn as well.”* (Kakariki mother, final individual interview)

*“I am a big fan of seeing New Zealand and I hear a lot of international people saying that sort of thing too...I want to expose my kids to things within New Zealand.”* (Kea father, post-holiday family interview)

*“New Zealand is stunning and we need to expose our boys to a number of places in New Zealand so they have an appreciation of it...We want them to know and love home. We want them to have that and then go overseas but we want them to go overseas knowing that they have a beautiful place to come back to and to let other people know that it is great. We would actively encourage them to go overseas but they also need to know what New Zealand is first.”* (Pukeko mother, post-holiday individual interview)

For the parents holidays were also about heritage and belonging to an extended family:

*“It adds a different dimension. Also it really helps the kids perhaps reinforce who they are and their heritage gets kind of passed on which to me is important that it reinforces them as a member of this family.”* (Tui mother, post-holiday family interview)

All these responses demonstrate the parents’ deliberate efforts in generativity related to establishing family traditions and social connections as well as national identities in their children. This purposiveness was deliberate by the parents but remained unrecognised by the children. Holidays were also considered a symbolic time out of the normal that warranted remembering and was used for generating social identities in its family members. The social identity encompassed belonging to the immediate and extended family, to a nation, and, ultimately, to a society.

## **Conclusion**

The main conclusions drawn from this study regarding the significance of domestic holidaying were that the Kiwi families defined family holidays as serving the purpose of (re)connecting through tourism. Domestic holidays can be seen as a social practice that involves networking in a New Zealand where extended families live increasingly apart from each other. Holidays for the New Zealand parents became about providing quality time, social connectedness with extended family and friends, and establishing

social identities, and not just as having fun together or pursuing own interests. Instilling a national identity in the children was part of the generativity or guidance of the next generation that parents performed on holiday. This belonged to the purposive nature of family time and reflected obligatory aspects of holidaying as a taken-for-granted aspect of parental responsibility. Holidays, then, were considered a symbolic time out of the normal that was used for generating a sense of belonging in its family members. Domestic holidays were used to foster a greater sense of national awareness or identity in the children by exposing them to different aspects of New Zealand. This was encompassed in the social identity of belonging to an immediate and extended family, to a nation and ultimately to a society. Within this context, the establishment of social capital included membership in a national New Zealand society. The parental intention of a national identity formation, however, remained unrealised by the children.

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Families at hot water beach in the Coromandel



Family holiday on Great Barrier Island near Auckland. Source: Author





Source: Department of Conservation (2006)



At the Wairarapa coast. Source: Author