

Visitors' Interest in Walking Trails and Self-Drive Trips within the Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area

Summary of Visitor Survey Results for 2007

Introduction

This fact sheet outlines visitors' level of interest in various rainforest walking and hiking activities as well as self-drives along rainforest roads in the Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area (WTQWHA) during their stay in North Queensland.

Funded by the Australian Government's Marine and Tropical Sciences Research Facility, researchers from James Cook University collected over 1,400 domestic and international visitor surveys between January and December 2007 at a number of key rainforest visitor sites. The results of these surveys are presented as both annual and quarterly values.

Quarterly surveys were undertaken for January to March (Quarter 1), April to June (Quarter 2), July to September (Quarter 3) and October to December (Quarter 4).

Results are available as quarterly 'Tourism Barometers' based on the findings of the visitor surveys (visit http://www.rrrc.org.au/publications/tourism_barometers.html).

Surveys were conducted on-site at Mossman Gorge and the Daintree Discovery Centre, or administered by staff of a number of participating rainforest tourism operators, including guided tours, accommodation facilities and commercial enterprises, in the World Heritage Area.

Survey results

On a scale of 1 being *Not at all interested* and 4 being *Very interested*, survey respondents indicated they were most interested in short rainforest walks (mean 3.54), followed by self-drives along rainforest roads (mean 3.08) (Figure 1). As shown in Figure 1, seasonality did not greatly influence visitors' interest in any of the posed rainforest activities.

Overall, domestic visitors were more likely to be interested in taking a short rainforest walk when compared to their international counterparts. Domestic visitors were also more likely to take a self-drive along a rainforest road.

International visitors were significantly more interested in other hikes, including one-day guided and unguided walks, and overnight guided and unguided walks. Mean results are compared in Table 1.

Table 2 reveals that a high number of visitors indicated they would participate in a number of rainforest activities in the Wet Tropics, except for a self-drive and guided one-day hike.

Figure 2 compares the gender and origin of survey respondents with interest in the six various rainforest activities indicated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Domestic and international visitors' level of interest in rainforest activities in the Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area. Responses are expressed as mean values of annual and quarterly samples.

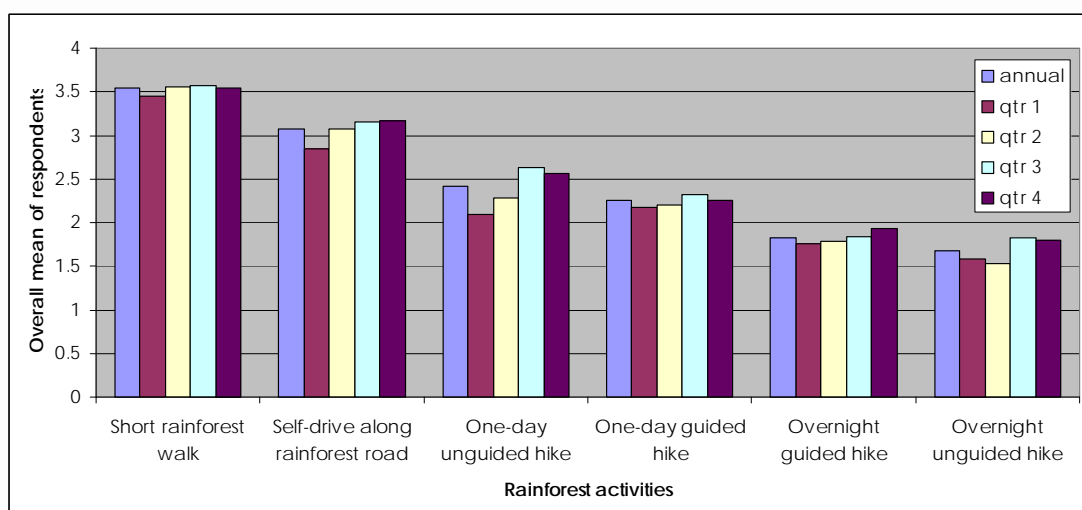


Table 1: Domestic and international visitors' level of interest in rainforest activities in the Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area. Responses are expressed as mean values of the annual sample.

Rainforest activities	Domestic visitors (mean)	International visitors (mean)
Short rainforest walk	3.57	3.50
Self-drive along rainforest road	3.22	2.86
One-day unguided hike	2.34	2.52
One-day guided hike	2.07	2.50
Overnight unguided hike	1.60	1.80
Overnight guided hike	1.63	2.11

Table 2: Visitors' level of interest in rainforest activities in each of the four key Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area regions. Responses are expressed as mean values of the annual sample.

Rainforest activities	Northern Tropics (mean)	Cairns / Kuranda (mean)	Atherton Tablelands (mean)	Central Coast (mean)
Short rainforest walk	3.57	3.32	3.45	3.53
Self-drive along rainforest road	3.21	2.69	2.43	3.57
One-day unguided hike	2.25	2.13	2.30	2.00
One-day guided hike	2.54	2.02	1.91	2.07
Overnight unguided hike	1.75	1.45	1.43	1.52
Overnight guided hike	1.86	1.74	1.69	1.71

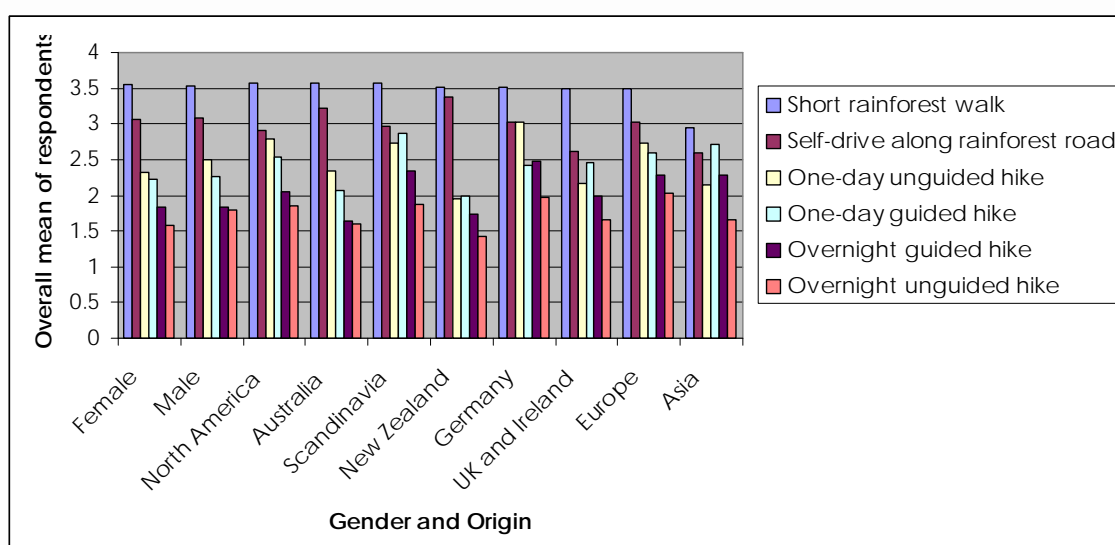


Figure 2: Survey respondents' level of interest in rainforest activities according to their gender and origin. Responses are expressed as mean values of the annual sample.

Overview of Results

Males were significantly more likely to be interested in unguided hikes.

Visitors from New Zealand were significantly more likely to be interested in self-drives along a rainforest roads, whereas North American visitors were significantly more interested in short rainforest walks.

Europeans and Scandinavians were significantly more likely to be interested in all of the suggested hiking activities. For example, German visitors were more interested in the one-day unguided and overnight guided hikes, while Scandinavians were most interested in one-day guided hikes.

An analysis of the age of respondents and their interest in rainforest walks and hikes revealed a number of interesting trends. Visitors most interested in self-drives along rainforest roads were significantly more likely to be middle aged (40-49 years), whereas those who were most interested in short rainforest walks were significantly more likely to be aged between 60 and 65 years. Younger survey respondents were most interested in one-day unguided hikes (30-39 year age group), one-day guided hikes (under 20 years of age), overnight unguided hikes (20-29 year age group) and overnight guided hikes (under 20 years of age).

Moreover, visitors who were 'very interested' in self-drives along rainforest roads also registered a high overall trip satisfaction (8.80 out of a possible 10.00) when compared with the other responses, i.e. 'interested', 'little interest' and 'not at all interested'. This trend was consistent across all six of the walking and hiking options:

- Short rainforest walks (8.75);
- One-day unguided hikes (8.76);
- One-day guided hikes (8.76);
- Overnight unguided hikes (8.63); and
- Overnight guided hikes (8.88).

This clearly points to a strong relationship between rainforest walks and hikes and overall visitor satisfaction on trips to the Wet Tropics region.

Wet Tropics Visitor Survey research is funded by the Australian Government's Marine and Tropical Sciences Research Facility, implemented in North Queensland by the Reef and Rainforest Research Centre Ltd
<http://www.rrrc.org.au/mtsrf/>

Conclusion

This study confirms the importance of rainforest walks and hikes as tourism attractions in the study region. The findings identified visitors' particular interest in rainforest walks and drives.

Longer rainforest hikes are preferred by younger, European travelers. Given the current lack of hiking trails of this nature, there appears to be a case for further investment in short rainforest trails (up to a half-day trail) near the larger population centres such as Cairns, Port Douglas, Atherton and Innisfail.

To address emerging market segments, management agencies should consider developing longer hiking trails (one-day), particularly in the Northern tropics region. They might also assist the tourism industry to develop sustainable overnight rainforest tours. This could well include the re-opening of the CREB Track Walking Trail (with a limited capacity) between Daintree and Cape Tribulation.

Preliminary conversations with local tourism authorities reveal that this would be a welcome suggestion to further promote the adventure and nature-based activities in the Wet Tropics region.

Further information about visitor surveys carried out in the Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area can be obtained by contacting the project researchers:

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