

Mautohe Cathedral Cove

Monitoring and Evaluation Summary 2024

DOC ran a visitor experience survey this summer 23/24 to test visitor's perceptions of their visit to Cathedral Cove via the beach access. The survey was conducted from 27 January to 29 February 2024 collecting the impressions of visitors who used marine operators to access the Cathedral Cove beach.

The survey used the 'intercept method' for recruiting participants, approaching randomly selected visitors when they arrived back from the Cove to answer questionnaires. A total of 210 questionnaires were completed, which is above the minimum sample size required to provide statistically robust findings.

The results of the survey strongly indicate that Cathedral Cove's status as a pre-eminent New Zealand visitor destination remains unchanged despite the track closure in the last year, with the visitor mix this year being 90 percent international/10 percent domestic. The timing of the visitor survey influenced the proportion of internationals to domestic but only marginally.

Overall satisfaction with the Cathedral Cove experience is the highest for any DOC managed destination. Most visitors plan their visit well in advance, indicating Cathedral Cove's 'iconic' status and more than two thirds of visitors were travelling that day for the primary reason of reaching the Cove.

The main reason visitors come is to experience outstanding scenery/landscapes and how people access the Cove (marine operators, track) doesn't influence their satisfaction rating with their experience. Operators have been limiting visitors to one hour on the sand, so this time limit doesn't appear to have impacted on satisfaction.

There was a significant improvement in visitor's not being disturbed by others (number of people; behaviour of visitors; noise from visitors; human impacts on environment). The beach has been much less crowded than when the track was open, and people have been able to enjoy the limited beach space. Although this has improved, it should be noted that previous surveys have not rated social disturbance as a significant problem either, as visitors are aware of the popularity of Cathedral Cove and expect to be in a relatively crowded environment.

There is an increase in the proportion of visitors in the 60+ age bracket, likely as a result of greater visibility of and expanded scheduling of water taxi services. Trip Advisor commentary prior to track closure has shown that the track can be challenging for those with mobility issues and the beach access option is more achievable for many.



Availability of toilets and affordability of accessing the Cove were problematic for 10 percent of visitors.

These results will inform the options development for the future of Cathedral Cove.