

DOC visitor insights: Summer 2024/2025

A look at visitor activity and experiences
outdoors over peak summer 2024/2025

April 2025



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

**Te Kāwanatanga
o Aotearoa**
New Zealand Government



Poor Knights Island, Northland. Photo: Fraser Clements

Table of Contents

DOC's summer visitor insights report informs staff and New Zealanders about how visitor activity to public conservation land and waters is tracking around Aotearoa New Zealand. This report provides insights gleaned from the 2024/25 peak summer season using the most up-to-date information.

- **Protecting and restoring nature** – how visitors can support nature
- **International visitors** – international visitors in the outdoors over summer
- **Domestic visitors** – New Zealanders' activity in the outdoors over summer
- **Where people stayed** – DOC's booking data for huts and campsites
- **Insight into camping** – what Kiwis love about summer camping

Executive summary

DOC is responsible for around one-third of lands and waters in Aotearoa New Zealand equating to more than 8 million hectares.

Over the 2024/25 summer the North Island had warmer than average temperatures resulting in many New Zealanders heading outdoors. Some parts of the South Island had cooler temperatures.

New Zealanders tend to visit easily accessible places in the outdoors. Many of the top 10 recently visited places are in the North Island, near coastal areas and urban population centres.

“With high visitor numbers – it becomes even more vital people show respect for the park and other visitors.”
Sally Jones, DOC Aoraki/Mount Cook Operations Manager (Dec 2024)

Over the 2024/25 summer, around 45% of New Zealanders visited Protected Natural Areas (such as parks and beaches) each month. Around 30% of New Zealanders visited Protected Heritage Places (such as historic reserves).

Short walks, sightseeing, day walks/hikes, bird/wildlife watching and photography activities were popular.

Tourism recovery continues from the impact of COVID-19 with January 2025 international arrivals at 93% of January 2019.

From October to December 2024, around half of all international tourists visited a national park (52%). International tourists rated natural scenery and wilderness as very good.

“Nature thrives as an interconnected system and we need to work together to protect it... The rules are simple: no fishing, taking, damaging or polluting of marine life inside a marine reserve.”

Stewart Robertson, Ranger Marine Reserves (April 2025)

As visitor volumes increase, it puts pressure at peak times on popular places and facilities, e.g. carparks at Aoraki Mt Cook and Bob's Cove (Queenstown) were over capacity on peak days. Visitor management will be key to continuing to protect our nature and heritage.

DOC manages protected marine reserves across the country. There has been persistent and rising offending by visitors over the recent summer involving illegal fishing and collecting of shellfish.

It is important visitors act responsibly around protected areas. As Minister of Conservation, Tama Potaka points out, “Tourism is a key economic driver, and nature is our biggest draw card for international tourists.”

International visitor activity

This section looks at the [International Visitor Survey](#) (IVS) information relating to public conservation land and waters.

It covers the final quarter of 2024 (October to December 2024). Note, January 2025 arrivals are included and are 93% of pre-Covid arrivals for the same period in 2019.

International visitor arrivals continue to increase

Overseas visitor arrivals in January 2025 (370,200 in total) increased by 43,800 compared to January 2024. January 2025 visitor arrivals were 93% of pre-Covid arrivals in 2019.

Of the 370,200 overseas visitor arrivals in January 2025:

- 38% were from Australia
- 14% were from the United States
- 10% were from China
- 8% were from United Kingdom

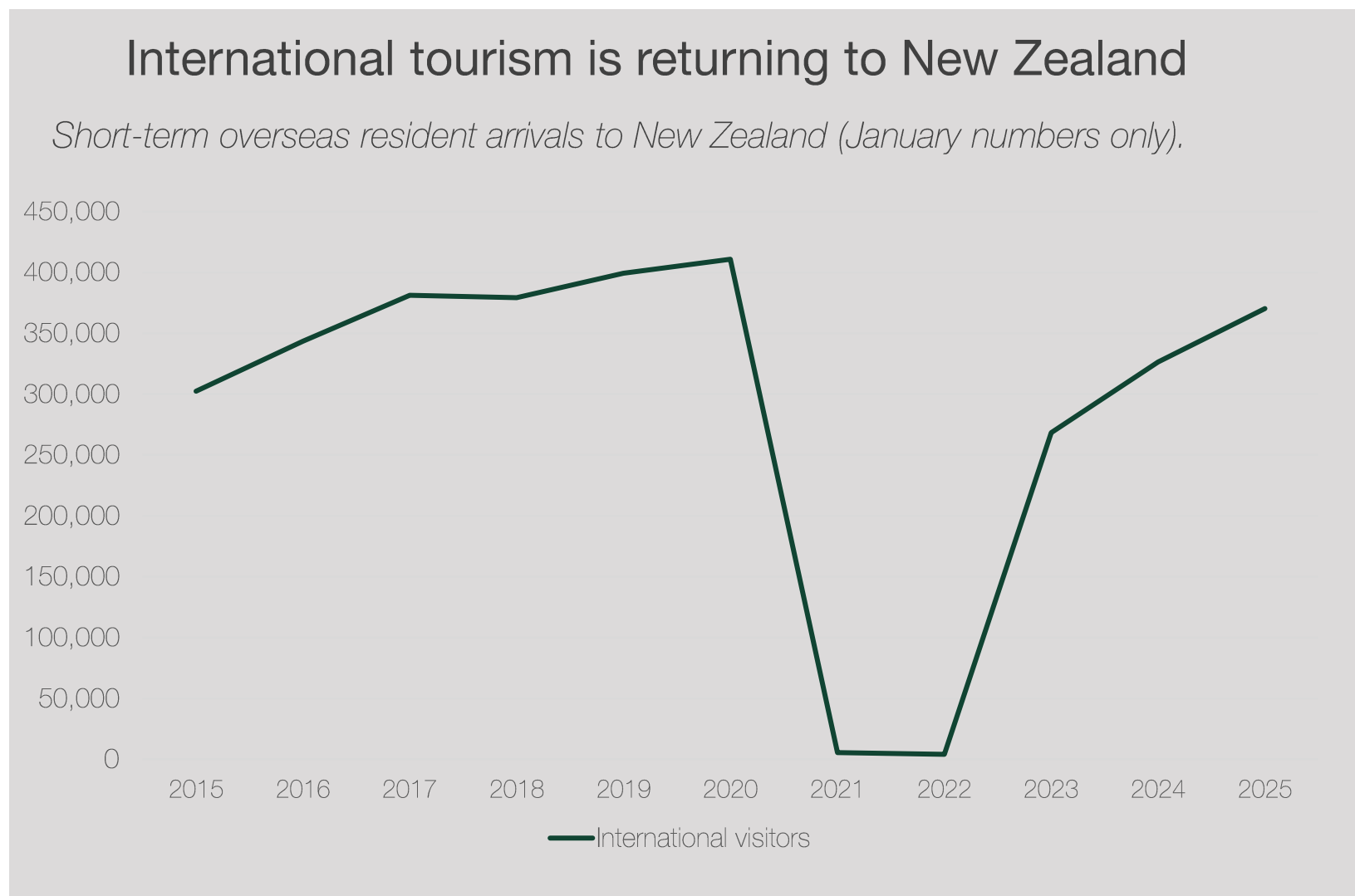


Figure 1: Overseas residents arriving in New Zealand for a stay of less than 12 months in January 2015 - 2025. Source: Stats NZ

Source: [International travel: Jan 2025 Stats NZ](#)

Landscapes and scenery are top attractions

Beaches (57%) and national parks (52%) were the top-visited natural attractions in Aotearoa New Zealand; followed by geothermal parks (48%), places significant to Māori (32%), hot pools (28%) and glaciers (23%).

The percentage of internationals that visited the places shown has not changed significantly from last summer.

Note on IVS data: This and following graphs and percentages are based on weighted data from those who answered the activities section of the International Visitors Survey and represent an estimate of percentages of international visitors. This differs from IVS data presented last year which was calculated from unweighted data and showed percentages of IVS respondents (not of international visitors). Although total international visitors to national parks percentages were likely to be overestimated using unweighted data last year, this, and other differences between weighted and unweighted data, were not large.

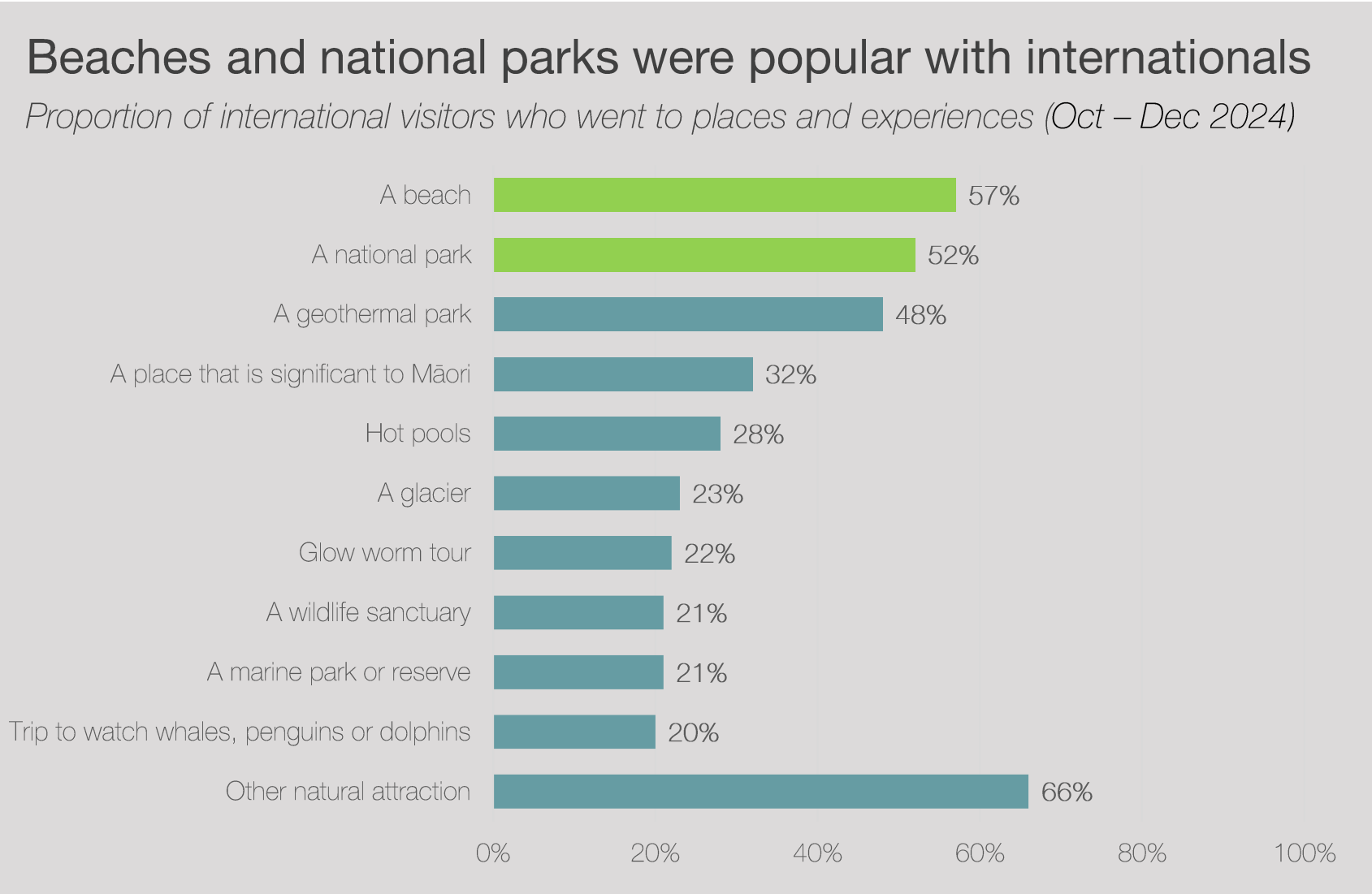


Figure 2: IVS top 10 places visited Quarter 4 2024

International visitor activity to national parks

Around half of international visitors visited one or more national parks and most were satisfied with their experience.

Fiordland and Aoraki Mount Cook National Parks were the most popular for international visitors in last quarter of 2024. Of five most visited national parks, four were in the South Island.

74%

Net Promoter Score* for international visitors to all national parks

*Net Promoter Score measures customer loyalty and satisfaction

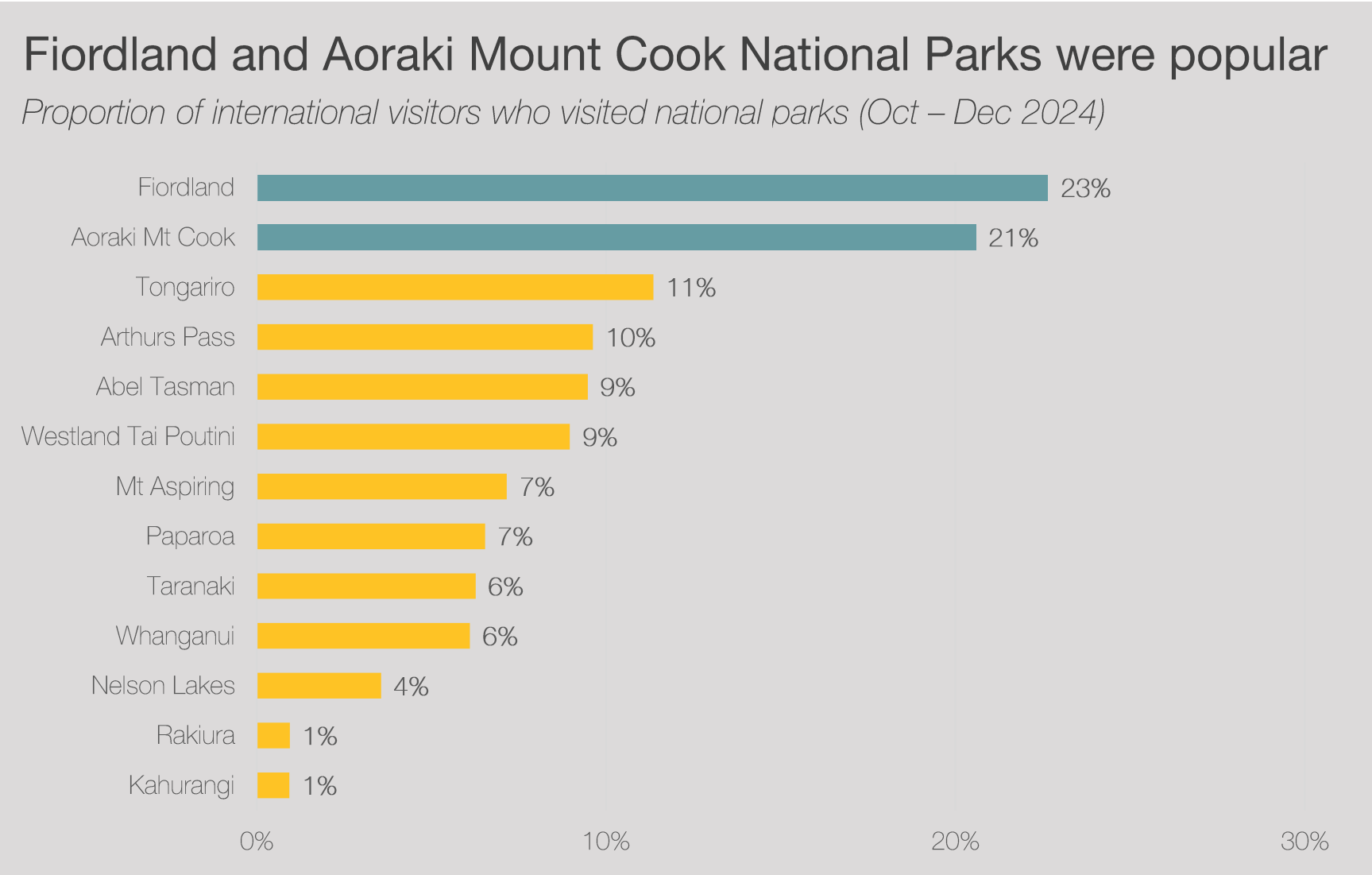


Figure 3: IVS: Activities and experiences, type: National Parks Quarter 4 2024

Walking is very popular for international visitors

These are the top outdoor activities undertaken by international visitors from October to December 2024.

Nearly three quarters of international visitors went for a walk, hike, trek or tramp.

Water activities were also popular, with 17% swimming or surfing, 12% other boating, 10% jet boating and 10% rafting, canoeing or kayaking.

Many international visitors undertook day walks in the outdoors

Proportion of international visitors who undertook outdoor activities (Oct – Dec 2024)

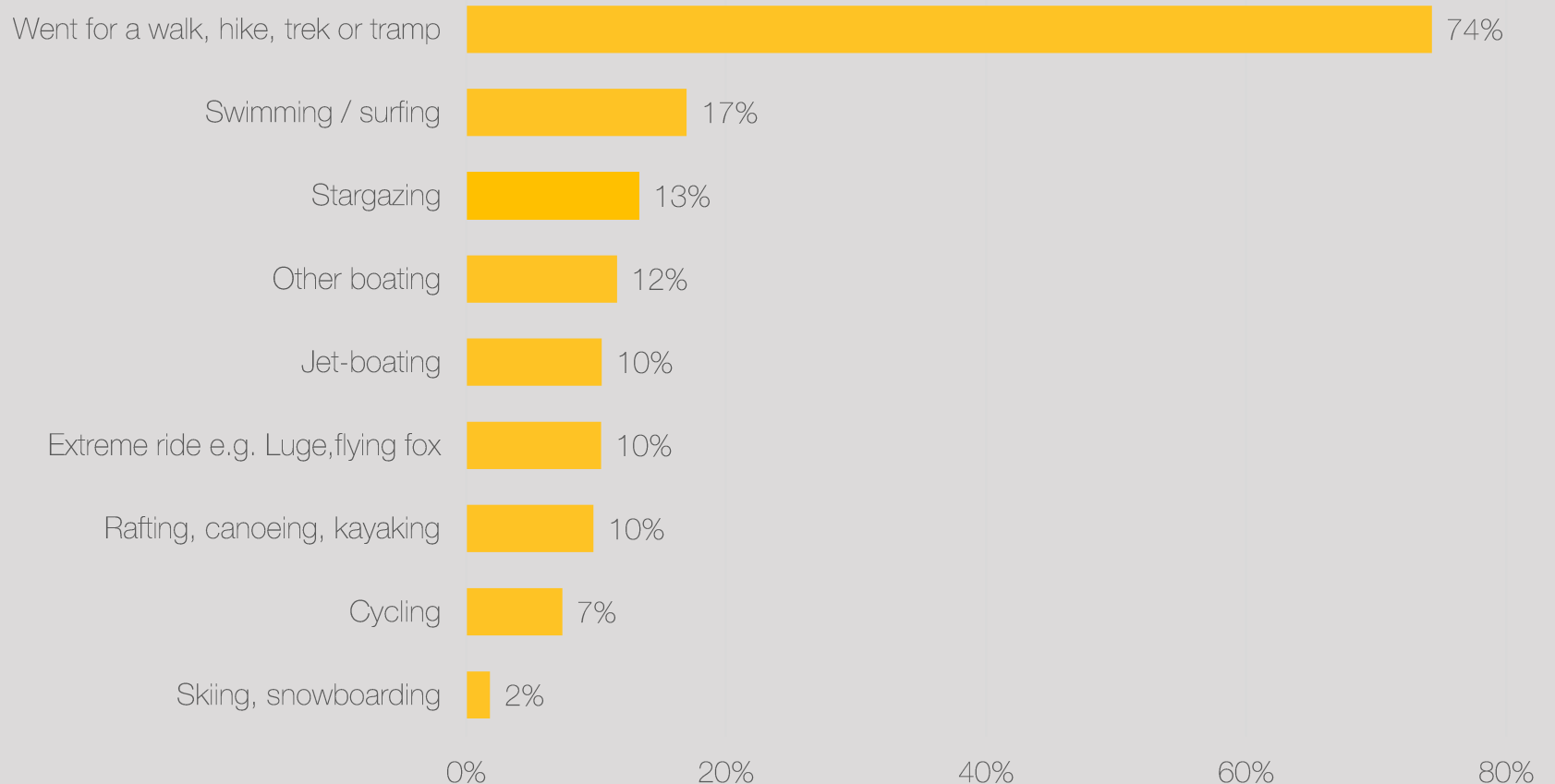


Figure 4: IVS: While you were in New Zealand, which of these things did you go to? [Top outdoor activities] Quarter 4 2024

Short walks were the most popular walk for internationals

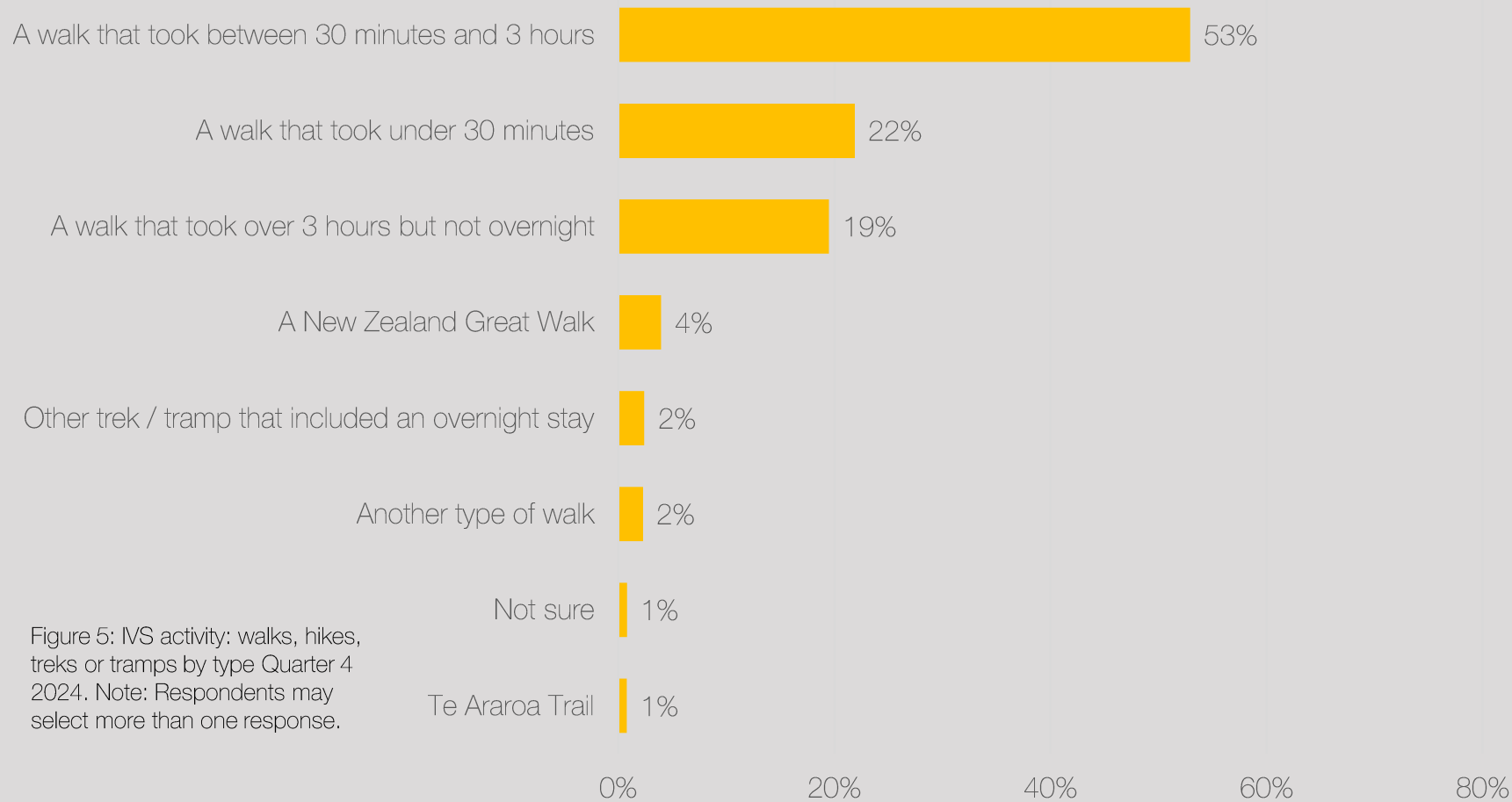
Walks between 30 minutes and 3 hours were the most popular walk, hike, trek or tramp undertaken by international visitors during the last quarter of 2024.

For overnight walks, Great Walks were the most popular, followed by other treks and tramps that included an overnight stay.

19% of international visitors reported taking a walk over 3 hours but not overnight.

Walks between 30 minutes and 3 hours were most popular

Proportion of international visitors who undertook walks (Oct – Dec 2024)



Most visitors rated natural scenery and wilderness highly

Around nine out of ten (87%) international visitors rated the natural scenery and wilderness as very good. This was the highest rated attribute, with almost all visitors (99%) rating it as good to some degree.

While not rated as highly, other environmental attributes were also well perceived – around nine out of ten rated each attribute as good to some degree. The quality of drinking water and availability of public facilities rated worst.

Visitors felt safe and welcomed (94% and 95% respectively rated these attributes as good).

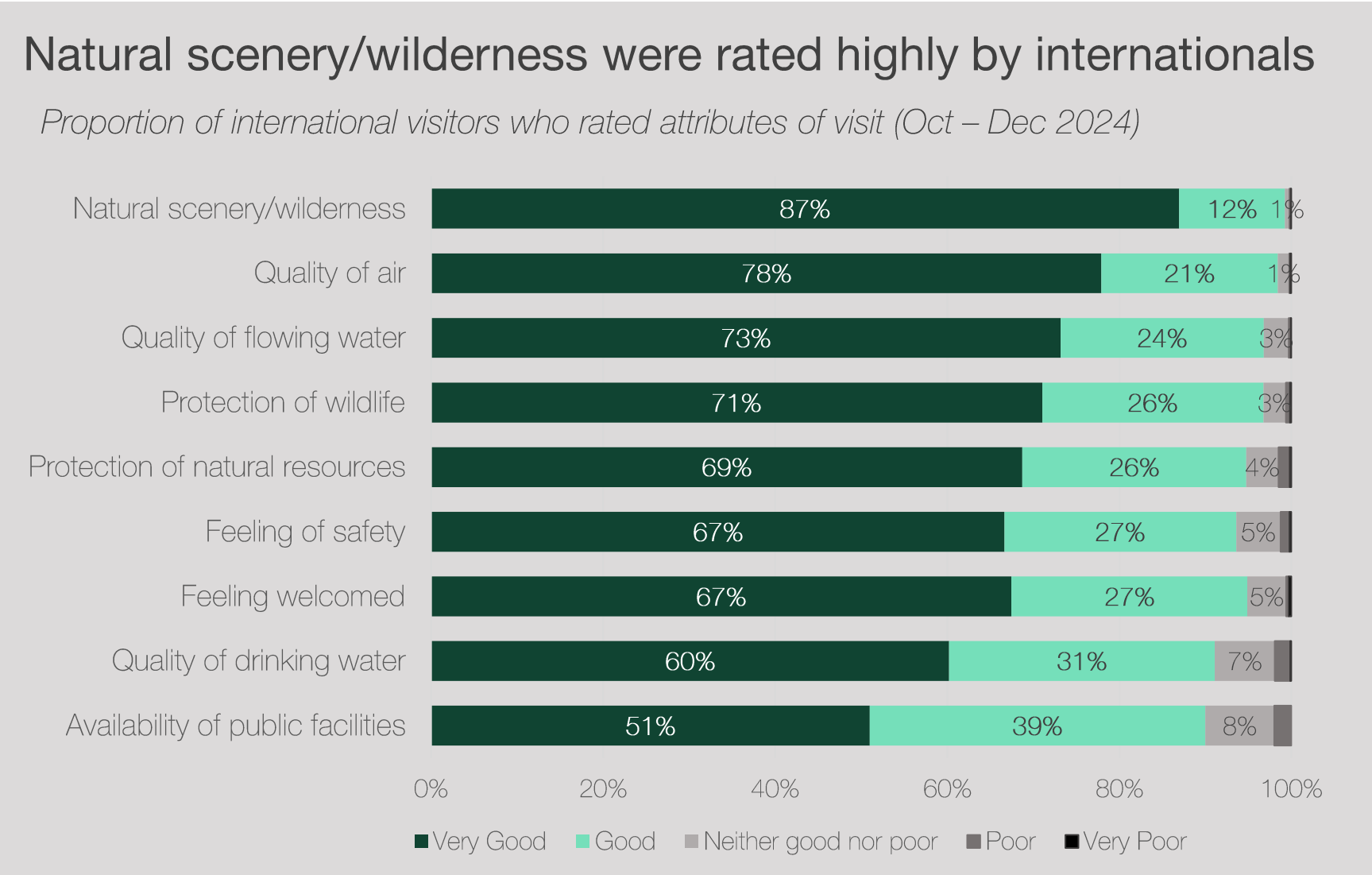


Figure 6: IVS Environment rating by type Q4 2024

Most visitors were satisfied with Aotearoa New Zealand

Nine out of ten (91%) international visitors were either satisfied or very satisfied with their visit to Aotearoa New Zealand. Just under two in three (64%) international visitors were very satisfied.

Of those international visitors who went to Māori cultural experiences* over nine out of ten (93%) agreed they enjoyed their experience.

93%

Agreed they enjoyed their experience of Māori culture*

*Experiences were not limited to public conservation land and waters

9 out of 10 internationals were satisfied with New Zealand

Proportion of internationals satisfied with their most recent visit to New Zealand (Oct –Dec 2024)

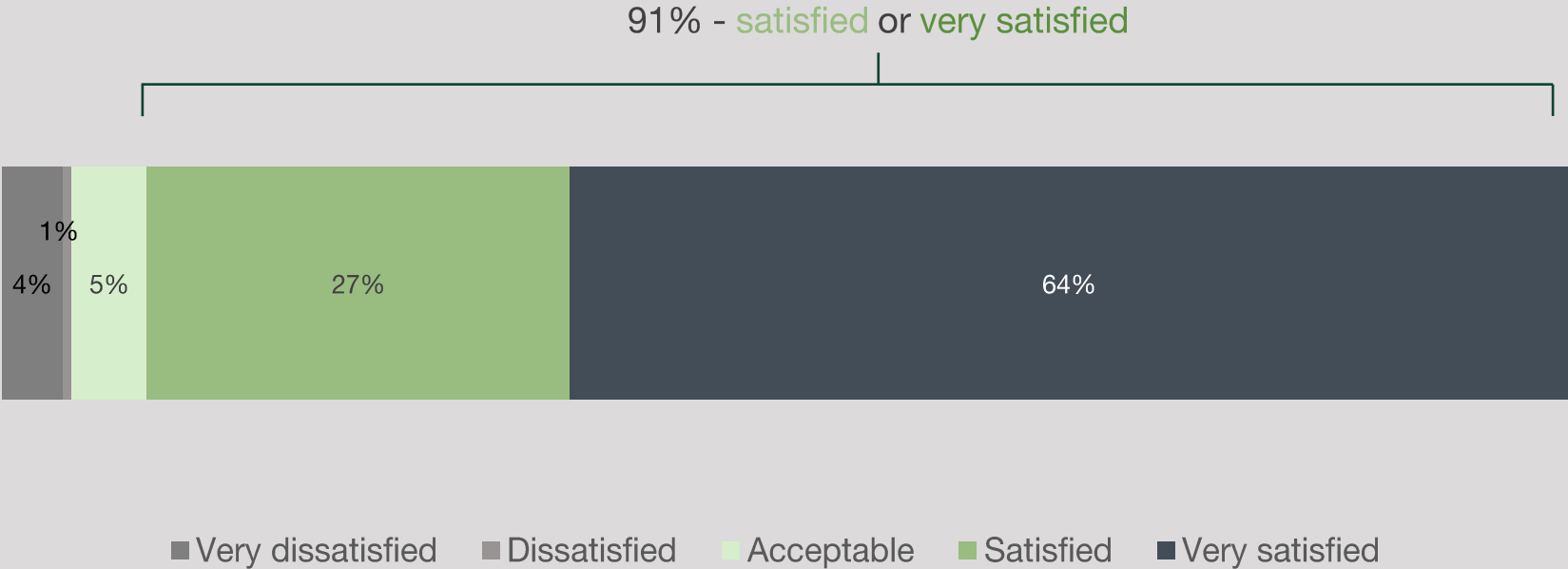


Figure 7: IVS: visitor satisfaction Q4 2024

Emerging travel trends for Aotearoa New Zealand



The Milky Way over Lake Wairarapa. Image: Pete Monk published NZ Herald

1. Astrotourism

Dark sky experiences are on the rise: stargazing tours, night markets, and cosmic events (aurora Australis). Wairarapa has recently become a Dark Sky Reserve. New lighting is being adjusted to meet dark sky standards. Wairarapa Dark Sky Association's Dr Tom Love says light pollution has adverse effects damaging human health and nocturnal native wildlife.

Sources: [Travel Trends 2025 | Our Annual Report On Where People Go & Why - Explore Worldwide](#)
[Wairarapa becomes official Dark Sky Reserve for stargazing in New Zealand - NZ Herald](#)



Tramper, Fiordland National Park. Image: Lyn Trewella | DOC

2. Coolcations

Hotter temperatures and climate change is prompting travel to cooler places. Google Trends has shown a 300% increase in searches for 'cooler holidays' in the last 12 months. This includes walking tours in temperate places. Asian and Northern Hemisphere travellers are escaping extreme heat and Tourism NZ research shows off-peak travel to Australasia has potential to grow.

Sources: Tourism NZ – growing off-peak insights: [PowerPoint Presentation](#)
[Harness the Coolcationing Traveller Trend for New Zealand in 2025](#)

Domestic visitor activity

This section draws on DOC survey data of adult New Zealanders to understand what they did, where they went and how they felt about their recent visit to the outdoors.

- Protected natural areas include national parks, conservation areas and marine reserves.
- Protected heritage places include historic reserves, historic buildings, places important to Māori and places of national significance.

Many New Zealanders went into nature yet fewer than last year

From December 2024 to February 2025, the proportion of New Zealanders visiting Protected Natural Areas (PNAs) each month has been between 40% and 45%.

For the same period, the proportion of New Zealanders who reported visiting Protected Heritage Places (PHPs) was between 24% and 30%.

These proportions are slightly lower than previous years, where monthly visits were closer to 50% for PNAs and 30% for PHPs. The reduced activity for some places is likely weather related.



Figure 8: Proportion of Public Pulse of Conservation respondents who visited at least 1 protected natural area and/or protected heritage place in the last month. Source: Public Pulse of Conservation. (N =3000 for both 2023/24 and 2024/25 data)

Marine reserves were popular with New Zealanders

DOC is Aotearoa New Zealand's largest provider of outdoor visitor activities. We manage 13 national parks, 54 conservation parks, 44 marine reserves and over 14,000 km of tracks.

Of 200 PNAs surveyed, the map to the right shows the top 10 places most recently visited by New Zealand adults over the recent summer (December 2024 – February 2025).

Many of the top 10 recently visited places are in the North Island, near coastal areas and urban population centres.

Long Bay-Okura Marine Reserve (north of Auckland) was the most often cited recently visited area in Aotearoa New Zealand, followed by Rangitoto Island (Auckland) and Taranaki National Park. Many popular locations were in Auckland which reflects where New Zealanders live and visit over the recent summer.

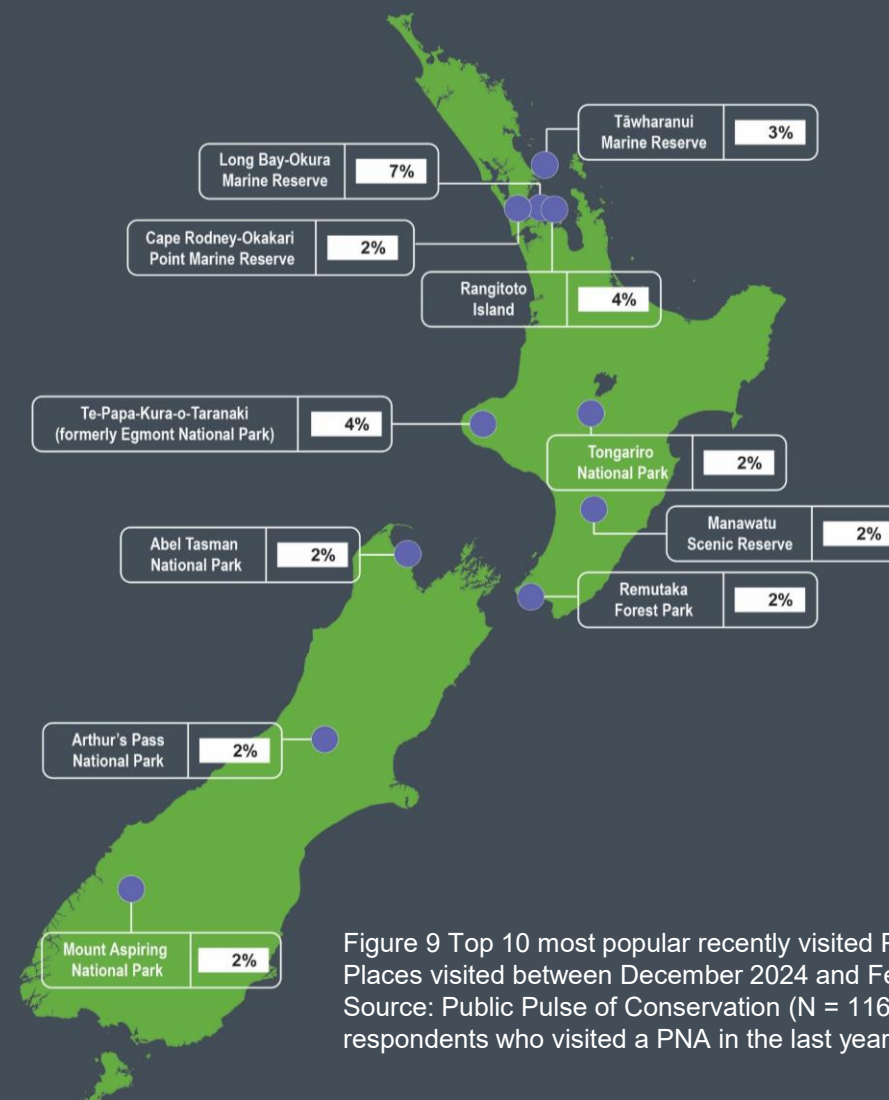


Figure 9 Top 10 most popular recently visited Protected Natural Places visited between December 2024 and February 2025. Source: Public Pulse of Conservation (N = 1164 – number of respondents who visited a PNA in the last year).

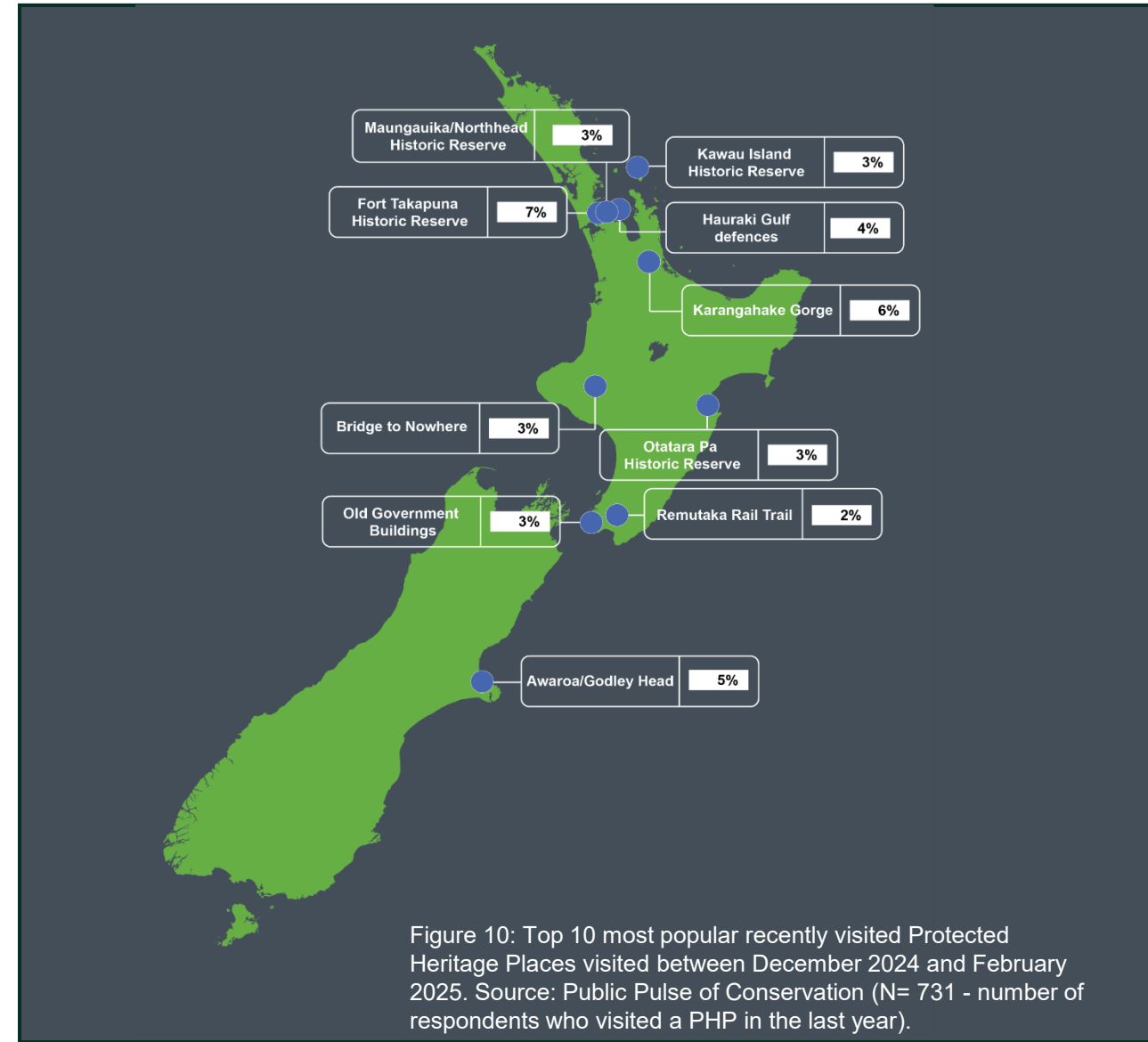
New Zealanders visited heritage sites near urban areas

DOC manages the largest heritage portfolio in the country, including over 500 cultural heritage sites. DOC cares for places that have shaped our history and helps people to learn about the important stories at those places.

Of 200 Protected Heritage Places surveyed, the map to the right shows the top 10 places most recently visited by New Zealand adults over the recent summer (December 2024 – February 2025).

Many of the top 10 recently visited heritage places are located near urban population centres.

Fort Takapuna Historic Reserve (Auckland) was the most often cited recently visited heritage place in Aotearoa New Zealand. Like Protected Natural Areas, this reflects where New Zealanders live and travel over the recent summer.



Shorter experiences remain popular with New Zealanders

Short walks remain the most popular activity undertaken by New Zealanders on their most recent visit to a Protected Natural Area (PNA) and/or a Protected Heritage Place (PHP) over the recent summer (December 2024 – February 2025).

Visitors to PNAs were more likely to report day hikes, bird/wildlife watching and swimming as activities on their recent visit compared to visitors to PHPs.

Visitors to PHPs were more likely to report connecting with (and learning about) history and Māori culture as activities on their recent visit.

Short walks (< 3 hours) remain popular for New Zealanders

Proportion of respondents who engaged in activities during most recent visit (Dec 24 – Feb 25)

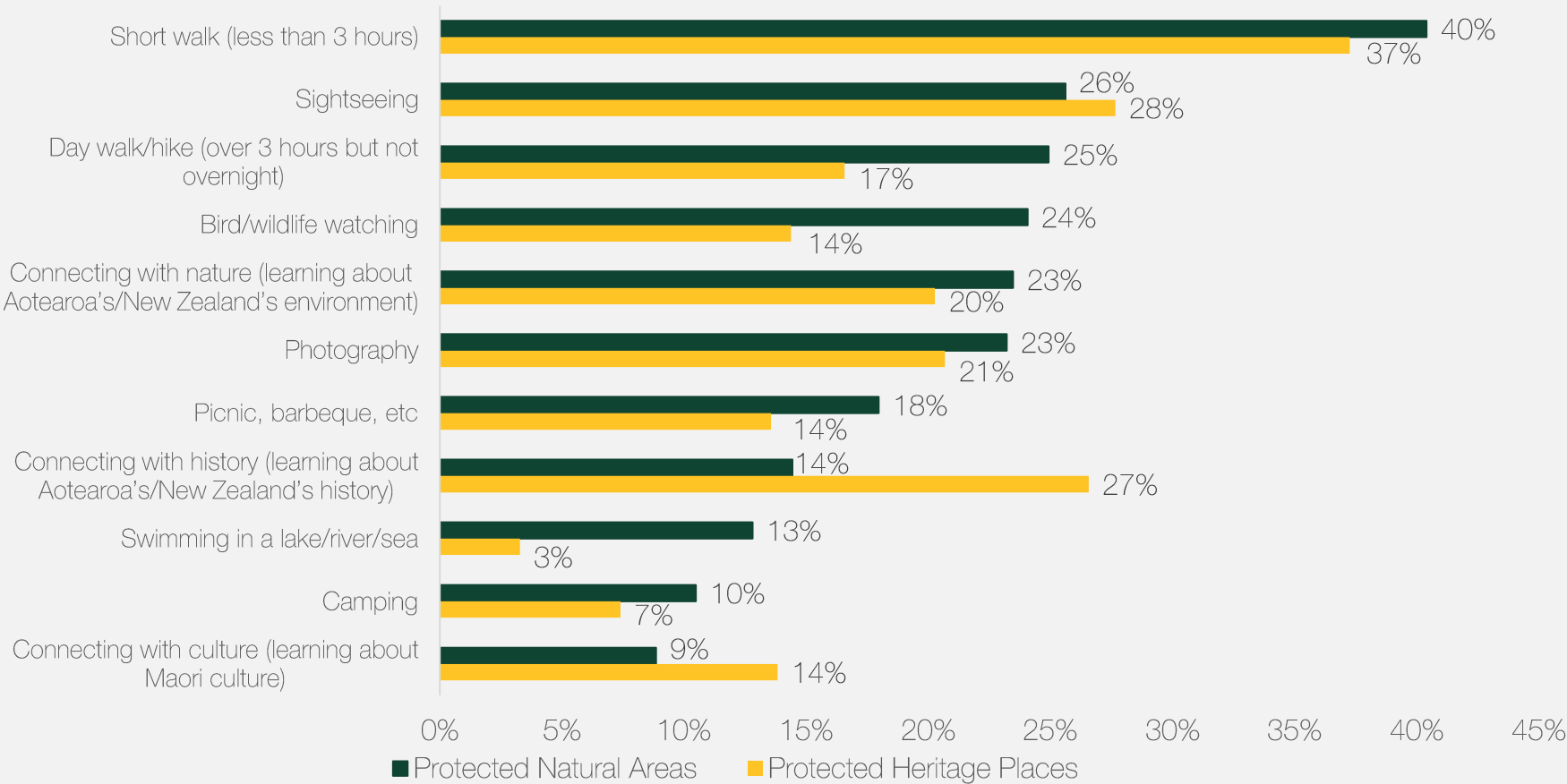


Figure 11: Responses to 'thinking about your most recent visit (to a PNA and/or PHP), which of the following activities did you engage in? December 2024 – February 2025 – Public Pulse of Conservation (N= 1164 for PNA's, N = 731 for PHP's)

Four in five New Zealand visitors had a good time outdoors

Most visitors were either very or totally satisfied with their most recent experience at Protected Natural Areas and Protected Heritage Places.

The Net Promoter Score (NPS) for Protected Natural Areas is 58. The NPS for Protected Heritage Places is 53.

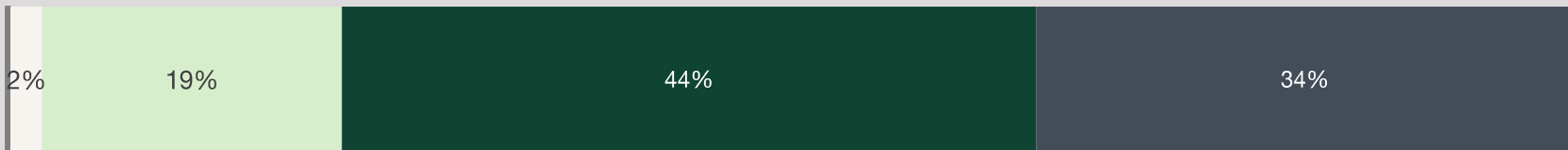
Net Promoter Score (NPS) in the Public Pulse of Conservation:
Q16 and Q28 ask about likelihood to recommend using a standard zero to ten point-scale Net Promoter Score (NPS) question. Respondents are classified as Detractors (0-6), Passives (7-8), or Promoters (9-10). The NPS is an average score where Detractors are scored -100, Passives 0, and Promoters 100.

Most New Zealanders who went to Protected Natural Areas were totally or very satisfied with their experience

Protected Natural Areas



Protected Heritage Places



■ Not at all satisfied □ Slightly satisfied ■ Moderately satisfied ■ Very satisfied ■ Totally satisfied

Figure 12: The proportion of visitors who rated their most recent visit to Protected Natural Areas and Protected Heritage Places from 'Not at all satisfied' to 'Totally satisfied'. December 2024 to February 2025. Source: Public Pulse of Conservation (N = 1164 for PNA and N = 731 for PHP)..

DOC's bookable huts, campsites and lodges

This section contains data and information for the 2024/25 period (1 December 2024 to 28 February 2025) from DOC's booking system data and bookable campsites post-visit survey. Note, this relates to public conservation land only, not all accommodation in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Most Great Walks were at or near full capacity over summer

For December 2024 to February 2025, just under 60,000 people stayed at Great Walk huts and campsites, about the same as the previous year¹.

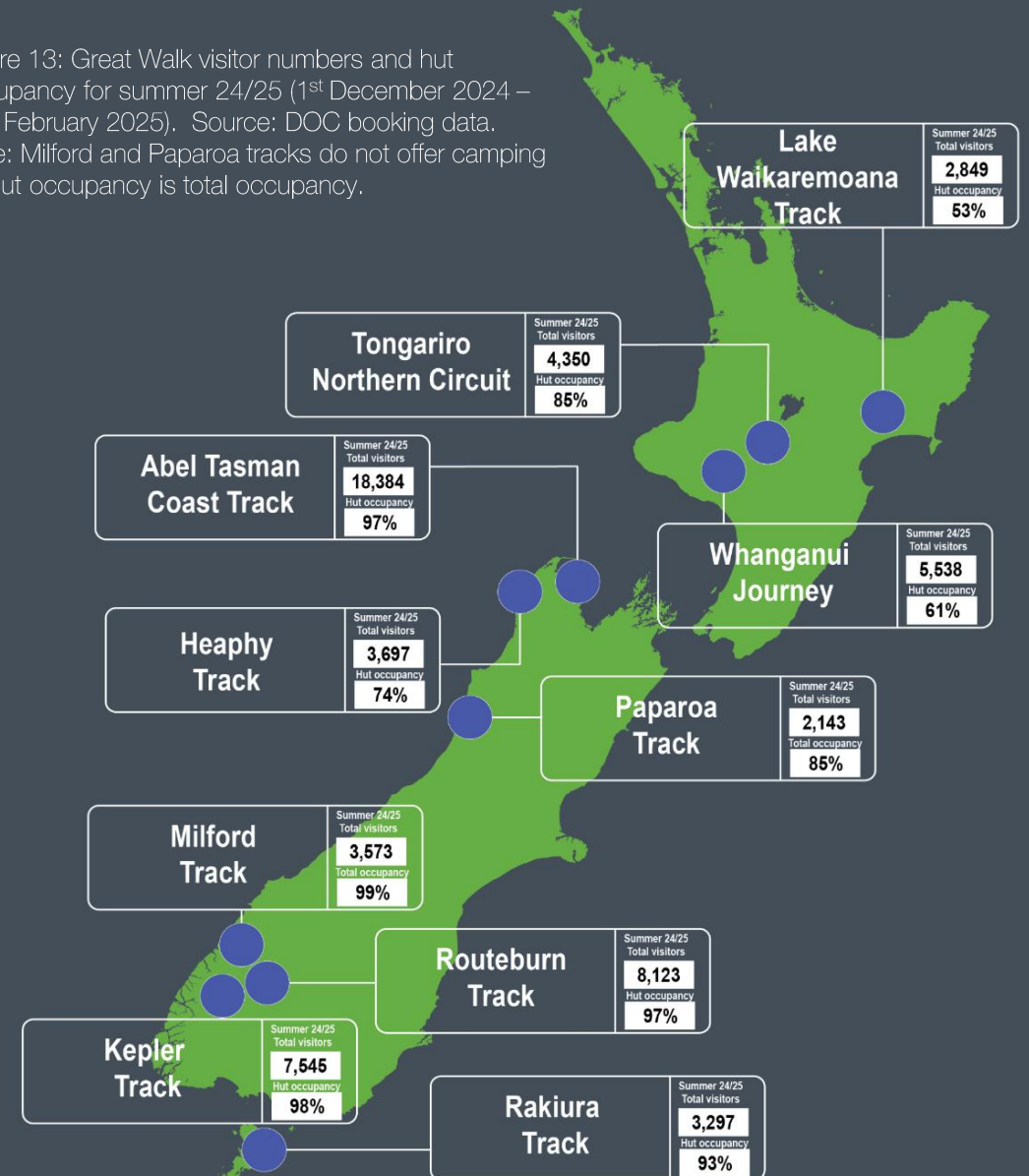
New Zealanders make up 60% of visitors to Great Walks over summer 24/25, this is about the same as the previous year.

Where available, camping on Great Walks is less popular than staying in huts. The total occupancy for camping at all Great Walks over summer was 45%, compared to 85% for huts. This is most likely due to extra equipment (and fitness level to carry equipment) required when camping on a Great Walk as opposed to staying in a hut.

Aside from the Heaphy Track, Whanganui Journey and Lake Waikaremoana, all Great Walks were at or near capacity over summer.

¹Weather events caused the closure of Lake Waikaremoana for a period over the 23/24 season.

Figure 13: Great Walk visitor numbers and hut occupancy for summer 24/25 (1st December 2024 – 28th February 2025). Source: DOC booking data.
Note: Milford and Paparoa tracks do not offer camping so hut occupancy is total occupancy.



Visitors booked huts and lodges in Aotearoa New Zealand

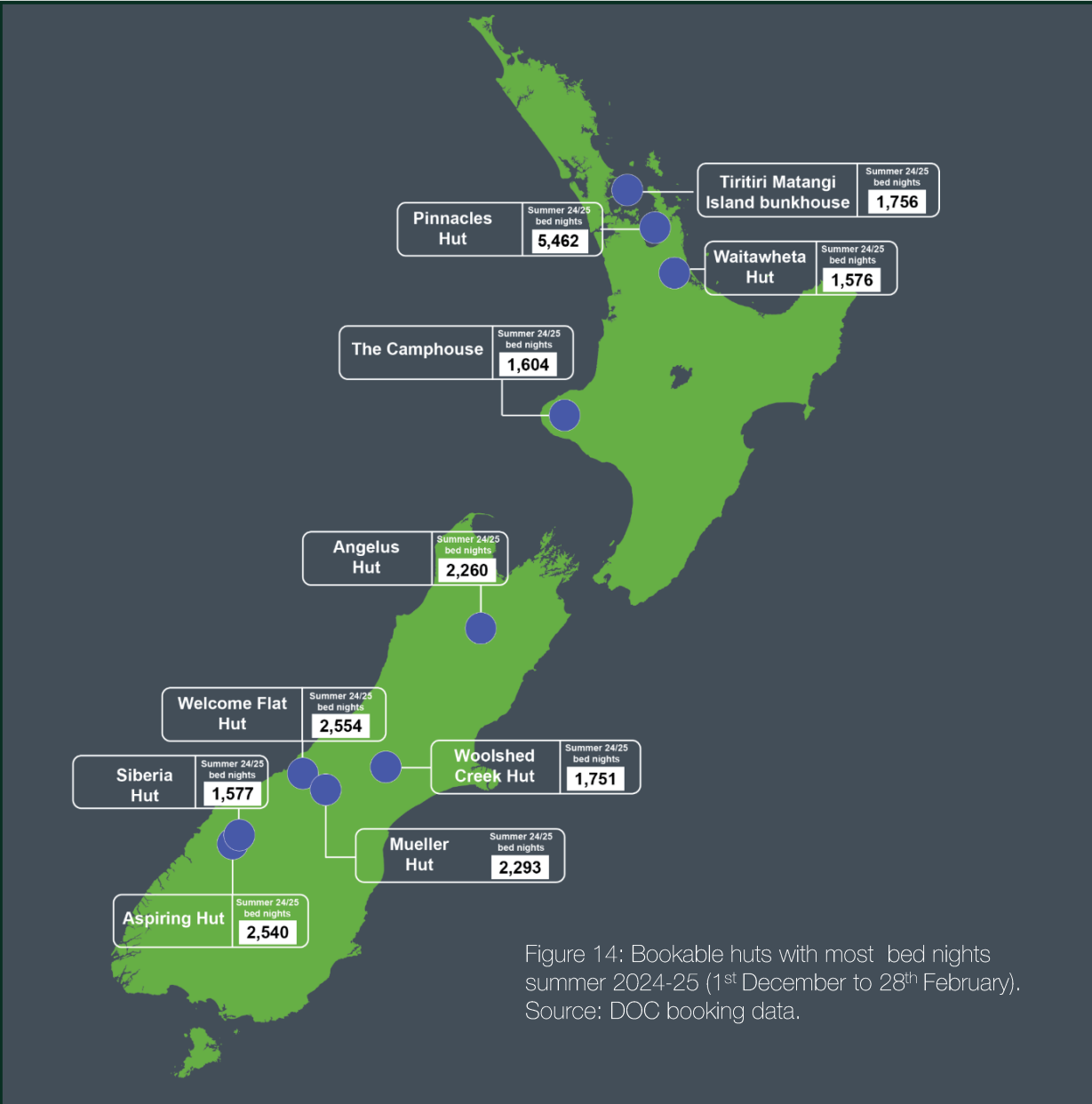
DOC manages over 950 huts. Aside from Great Walk huts, more than 90 of these huts are bookable.

This summer DOC recorded over 70,000 bed nights at bookable huts.

This map shows the bookable huts with the most bed nights recorded over summer (1 December 2024 to 28 February 2025).

The bookable hut with the highest number of bed nights was Pinnacles hut in the Coromandel. This likely reflects the proximity of this hut to major population centres.

Several bookable huts in the South Island had over 2,000 bed nights this summer. These include the following huts: Mueller, Welcome Flat, Aspiring and Angelus.



Camping is popular across Aotearoa New Zealand

Aside from Great Walk campsites, more than 130 of the 326 campsites DOC manages, are bookable.

This summer, DOC recorded over 450,000 bed nights at bookable campsites.

This map shows the bookable campsites with the most bed nights recorded over summer (1 December 2024 to 28 February 2025).

These campsites were evenly split between the North and South Islands, with a cluster of popular campgrounds in the upper North Island and campsites in the South Island tended to be more spread out.

The bookable campsite with the highest number of bed nights was Tōtaranui in the South Island, followed by Uretiti, Waikawau Bay and Otamure (Whananaki) in the North Island.

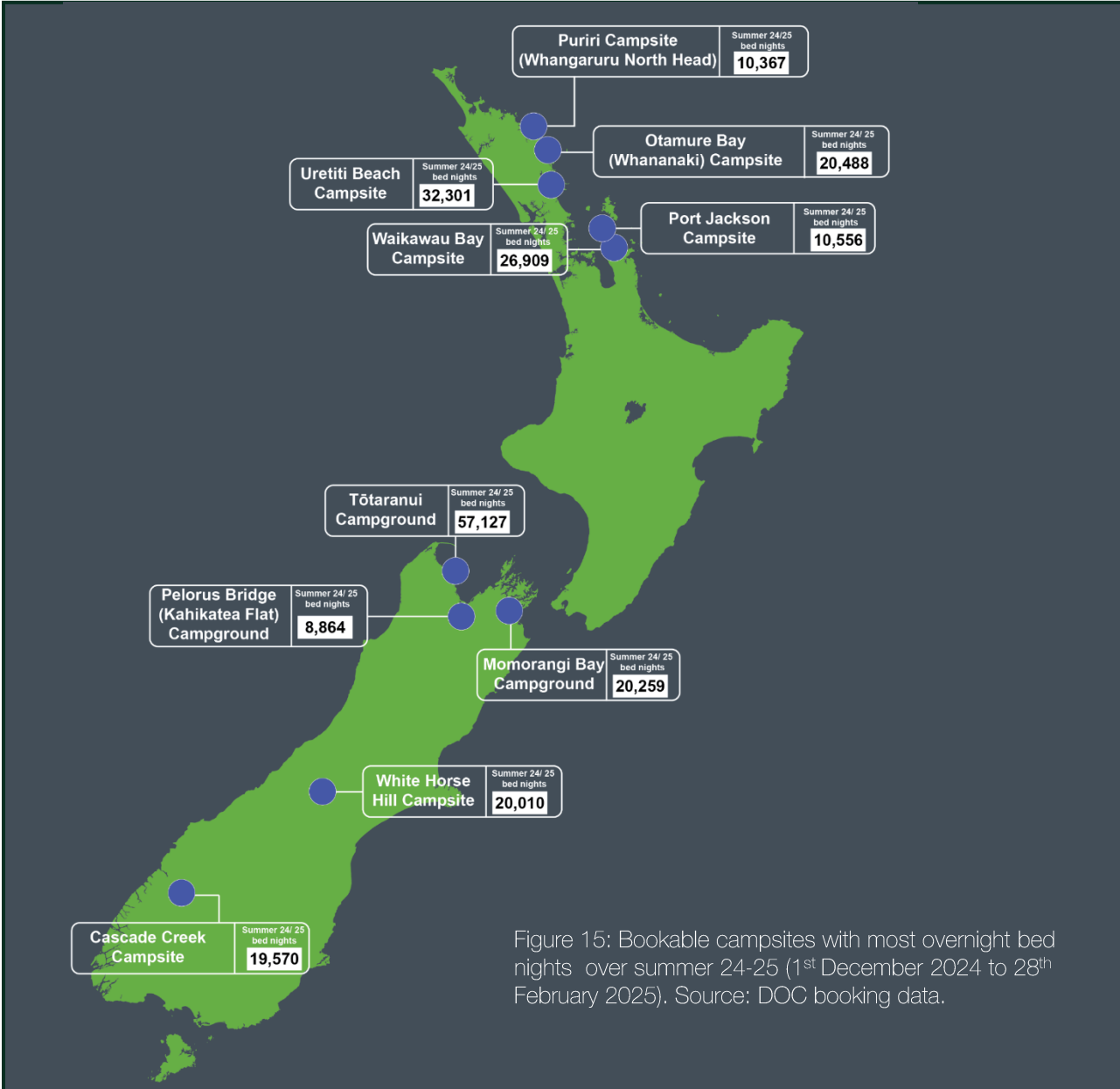


Figure 15: Bookable campsites with most overnight bed nights over summer 24-25 (1st December 2024 to 28th February 2025). Source: DOC booking data.

Kiwis love summer camping!

DOC manages 326 campsites:

- 147 standard campsites
- 70 basic campsites (fewer amenities)
- 53 Great Walk campsites
- 48 backcountry campsites
- 8 serviced campsites

DOC's customer segmentation research from 2018-2020 revealed camping was popular among young families, extended families, and younger adults. These groups found camping to be a relatively affordable and enjoyable way to spend time together and connect with nature.



Fletcher Bay Campsite, Northern Coromandel. Image: DOC

Feedback suggests most campers were satisfied

Campers at bookable campsites that completed a post-visit survey were mostly satisfied with their booked camping experience¹.

The layout of the campsite was an important factor relating to the level of satisfaction for campers that completed this survey¹.

¹ The bookable Campsite survey (pre- and post-visit) uses a non-random non-weighted sample. Conclusions drawn from this survey cannot be generalised to all visitors using DOC's bookable camping products.



Figure 16: Bookable Campsite Post Visit survey – Responses between 1 December 2024 and 28 February 2025 (N=6273)

Protecting and restoring nature

DOC continues to focus its work on protecting and restoring vulnerable native species and habitats. New Zealanders like getting out and connecting with nature however not all visitors behave well. DOC is looking at how to encourage better visitor behaviour. Every New Zealander can make a difference – when nature thrives the visitor experience also thrives.

Visitors need to do their part and camp responsibly

Pristine fragile alpine environments are being damaged by campers. The Valley of the Trolls in Mt Aspiring National Park has become popular, with trampers' camping at scenic and off-track spots. The landscape is a swampy wetland dotted with alpine tarns. It is part of the Te Wahipounamu World Heritage area.

David Butt, DOC Operations Manager for Whakatipu Queenstown points out, *"Once damaged, these places take decades to regenerate. It really is a case of loving something so much we risk losing it."* There are no toilets and it isn't feasible to install them in this area, so visitors camping need to responsibly dispose of their waste.



Valley of the Trolls, Mt Aspiring National Park. Image: DOC



Human waste and tissue at Valley of the Trolls.
Images: DOC



Tourism hotspot struggles with overcrowding

Aoraki Mt Cook

White Horse Hill carpark at Aoraki Mt Cook was well over capacity on peak days during the summer with an estimated 700 vehicles per day. At times there were up to 150 vehicles parked up to 1.5 km down the access road.

Work is needed to safeguard our nature and heritage to ensure Aotearoa New Zealand continues to deliver on its promise to visitors.

Longer term visitor management options are being considered. This includes paid park-and-ride locations, increased capacity at the carpark and other options.



Carparking congestion at White Horse Hill carpark and Aoraki Mt Cook. Images: DOC



Protecting our native species

Significant milestones have been achieved through releasing endangered native birds in the wild:

- 12 February: 18 takahē were released in the Rees Valley near Queenstown to expand the wild population. Takahē are a taonga for Ngāi Tahu. The total population has now reached over 500 with more than half of those living in the wild.
- 31 January: 7 juvenile whio were released in Moeraki Valley near Haast. They are a taonga for Ngāti Māhaki. Whio were once common on South Westland rivers. Predators like stoats are a threat and DOC's regular predator control in the area will help boost whio numbers.



Takahē release in Rees Valley. Image: DOC



The young whio are the first to be released in Moeraki. Image: Cassie Mealey | DOC

Yet, it remains important to encourage every New Zealander to act responsibly around protected species to help create a safe haven for native wildlife.

- 19 March: 9 kiwi were found dead in the area of Purerua, a coastal area of Northland during January to March 2025. DOC rangers met with Far North District Council staff to discuss ways to address uncontrolled dogs in the area.
- Bronwyn BauerHunt, DOC Operations Manager for the Bay of Islands says, *“These recent kiwi deaths are devastating, and we need everyone to play their part in protecting our native wildlife.”*

Challenges around visitor behaviour at marine reserves

DOC is responsible for managing marine protected areas throughout Aotearoa New Zealand.

Marine reserves enhance our unique habitats, natural resources, plants and animals and help to:

- Protect biodiversity.
- Boost fish and food species (increase productivity).
- Allow scientists to study marine environments in its natural state.
- Preserve and/or respond to flood protection, water filtration and geological processes.
- Protect against any threats (ecosystem resilience).
- Support recreation and tourism opportunities.



Fish taken from Te Whanganui-O-Hei Marine Reserve. Image: DOC



Kina taken from Long Bay-Okura Marine Reserve. Image: DOC

There has been persistent offending by visitors to marine reserves. The recent summer shows a rising trend in offences (evidence confirms offence) and infringements (penalty for offence) in some marine reserves across the country. Most offending is illegal fishing (line fishing from vessels or shore) or people collecting shellfish.

For October 2024 to March 2025:

- 101 confirmed offences
- 79 confirmed infringements

Marine Reserves with the highest confirmed offences and infringements by visitors are:

- Te Whanganui-o-Hei (Cathedral Cove)
- Horoirangi (near Cable Bay)
- Long Bay-Okura (Auckland)

Visitors enjoy getting out and experiencing marine reserves. DOC is looking at better ways to manage visitor behaviour at these places.

Data and information sources

- ▶ **Stats NZ International Travel** – International travel covers the number and characteristics of overseas visitors and New Zealand resident travellers (short-term movements) entering or leaving New Zealand. International travel figures are for December 2015 - 2025
- ▶ **DOC Public Pulse of Conservation (n=3,000)** – Delivered by IPSOS Pty Ltd on behalf of DOC. Respondents were recruited from IPSOS and IPSOS partner panels. Interviews were conducted online, via self-completion of a survey questionnaire over multiple days at the start of each calendar month. The sample size for each month is 1,000 respondents. In-field quotas were used to ensure a representative sample.
- ▶ **MBIE International Visitor Survey Q4 2024 (n=8,920)** – The International Visitor Survey (IVS) measures the expenditure, characteristics and behaviours of international visitors to New Zealand. This document contains results for Quarter 4 2024.
- ▶ **DOC Bookable Accommodation** – DOC's booking system currently collects accommodation booking data for huts, campsites and lodges across New Zealand. Estimated visitor numbers and occupancy rates are from 1 December 2024 to 28 February 2025.
- ▶ **DOC Bookable Campsite Post Visit Survey (N=6,273)** - People who booked a bookable campsite via the DOC website were emailed a post visit survey which asked for feedback about their experience at the bookable campsite they booked.