

Families as a nature tourism market segment in North Queensland

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Abstract

Tropical North Queensland (TNQ) offers a large number of nature tourism experiences for visitors, based around reef, rainforest and wildlife attractions. Families comprise a significant and little studied market segment of visitors in Cairns. To address this gap, 211 family groups were surveyed at Cairns domestic airport. This paper provides a demographic and holiday profile of families as a nature tourism market segment in TNQ. Activities considered important were swimming pools, water sports and family friendly accommodation. The main reasons for visiting Cairns were the reef and rainforest, and also spending time with the family. Many respondents considered environmental aspects in choosing a holiday destination such as Cairns and were concerned with the impacts of climate change. The study found TNQ needs to better target marketing and services for the family nature tourism segment.

Keywords: families, nature tourism, North Queensland, market profile, environment

Introduction

Tropical North Queensland (TNQ) offers a large number of nature tourism experiences for tourists ranging from wildlife parks, marine activities within the Great Barrier Reef, rafting and river cruises, walking tracks, waterfalls and other activities in the Wet Tropics rainforest. Family based nature tourism in TNQ is a subject that has received little coverage or research attention. Family tourism can generally be described as “a type of tourism where accommodation, meals, recreational activity and prices are specially adapted to suit the needs and comfort of families with children” (Rural Europe Library, 1999). This paper provides a demographic and holiday profile of families as a nature tourism market segment in TNQ and also their level of concern for the environment in choosing a holiday destination.

Tourism in Tropical North Queensland is a substantial source of income for Cairns and the region as a whole. In 2007, tourism accounted for \$2.2 billion per year to the TNQ economy being “almost 15% of the gross regional product” and it “directly employs around 20,000 people in TNQ” (Tourism Tropical North Queensland, 2008). In 2007 the TNQ region attracted over 2.3 million visitors, with 64% being domestic Australian visitors and 36% being international visitors (TTNQ, 2008). Statistical information on tourist activities, economic contribution, visitor numbers, seasonal trends and demographic descriptions etc. in TNQ are readily available from sources such as Tourism Queensland’s Tropical North Queensland Region Update (Tourism Queensland, 2007). These tourism reports are generally based on the single person or couples, with little information available about the family market segment.

Results of a visitor survey compiled in 2007 by Tourism Research Australia profiling 783,000 international visitors, 874,000 domestic overnight visitors and 701,000 domestic day visitors to the Cairns Local Government Area (CLGA) showed that over a three year average up to June 2007, international family groups of visitors averaged around 121,000 people per year. It should be added that of the total number of international visitors to the CLGA,

458,000 visited national parks and state parks and also 441,000 went snorkelling. Further results from this CLGA survey revealed that domestic family groups belonging to the life cycle group of a "parent travelling with their youngest child being under six" totalled 84,000 visitors and the lifestyle group "parent with the youngest child of six or more" totalled 177,000. Domestic family groups otherwise totalled 153,000, being 17% of the total visitor numbers to the CLGA (Tourism Research Australia, 2008). A few tourism studies about TNQ do include families. Between July and November 2001, a survey was completed of 809 GBR visitors which found that 25% of nature tourists visiting the Great Barrier Reef "travelled in a family group" thus forming a considerable quantity of this reef tourism market (Gallety & Hildebrandt, 2002, p.3). In 2007, the GBR had 1,999,132 visitors (GBRMPA, 2008). Some 18-24% of all self-drive visitors to Cape York Peninsula, north of Cairns, also travel with children (TQ, 2003). Overall, families represent about 20% of all visitors to Cairns and Tropical North Queensland.

Families in Nature Tourism

Articles on family tourism assess vacation decision-making by families (Bronner & de Hoog, 2008; Nanda, Hu & Bai, 2006; Nickerson and Jurowski, 2001), family satisfaction with amenities at resorts (Brey & Lehto, 2008; Meng, Tepanonn & Uysal, 2008), the social benefits of family travel (Shaw, Havitz & Delemere, 2008) and children learning through travel experiences (Byrnes, 2001), and the environmental practices of family-owned rural tourism enterprises (Carlsen, Getz & Ali-Knight, 2001). Few studies have examined or considered families as a nature tourism market segment. Currie, Reichard and Wesley (2008) explored family-oriented nature tourism experiences available in Costa Rica. The authors conducted a survey of 46 respondents (42 adults, 4 children) staying at the Flamingo Marina Resort located near the Guanacaste National Park, Costa Rica's sixth largest national park. The survey examined the purpose for the trip to Costa Rica, activities undertaken, type of accommodation used and the number of children in each family. All of the survey participants came from the Americas with the majority from the USA (70%). The majority of respondents (82%) were over 40 years old and had a higher than average annual family income of US\$90,000. Their findings

also highlight that “85% of the respondents want their children to experience ecotourism” and that “if families have the disposable income and the desire for these experiences for their children, an ecotourism experience specifically targeting them might prove viable” (p.17). Their study stressed the need for more research on families as a segment of nature tourism.

In a an applied study focussing on the nature-based tourism market of the Fiji Islands, Bricker and Kerstetter (2004) surveyed 350 visitors via questionnaires distributed by 34 nature tourism operators. The questionnaires included a section on socio-demographics, duration of stay, number of previous visits, the quality of the visitors' nature-based experience, and an evaluation of cultural and environmental interpretation given by the operators. They found that a total of six factors were dominant including “adventure”, “tranquillity”, “eco” (responsible tours, interpretation and involvement with natural surroundings and also to be in a natural setting), “cultural”, “guides” and finally “family” (spend time with friends or family). The results from the respondents were clustered into four categories, with the largest market segment being ‘Eco-Family travellers’ (25%) who “were so named because of the importance members placed on the “eco’, ‘cultural’ and family dimensions” (p. 3). Other studies suggest that “families with small children might be keenly interested in ecotourism but not have found an offering in the marketplace that suits their special needs”(Juric, Cornwell, & Mather, 2002, p.268) suggesting that products for this family market segment have been neglected regarding nature tourism holiday tours.

Family size, costs and proximity to nature-based destinations may also be significant variables in explaining nature tourism participation decisions (Juric, Cornwell & Mather, 2002; Luzar, Diagne, Gan & Henning, 1998). Families in developed countries are decreasing in size. In Australia in 1911 the average household was composed of around 4.5 people but today the average household size is around 2.6 (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2008). In terms of holiday destination choice, families, depending on family size, children's ages and parents' incomes limit their choice of holiday locations and activities. However, “there is a strong demand for nature holidays which

are suitable for families that are also affordable and not too physically intimidating” (Preece, van Osterzee & James, 1997). The smaller size of most families may influence their growing participation in nature tourism activities.

Methodology

With limited existing data on family based tourism in TNQ, a family tourism survey was carried out by the first author of this paper which was conducted in Cairns Domestic Airport (CDA) and permission to do so had been gained prior to surveying from the Cairns Port Authority (Sibtain, 2008). The visitor survey of families was carried out on the following dates: 30th and 31st of December 2007, the 12th, 17th, 18th and 21st of January 2008, coinciding with the summer School holiday and the Christmas – New Year seasonal holidays, with the remainder being collected on the 28th March, 2008. In this study, family groups were defined as “parents (a father, mother, protector or guardian) and their children, considered as a group, whether dwelling together or not” (Dictionary.com, 2008). This broader definition of families was adopted to cover the wide spectrum of single-parent, foster parent, gay, blended or other family groups. The first author approached all family groups waiting at the airport, where older adults were travelling with children, teenagers or young adults. A total of 211 completed family surveys were collected in this manner. Surveys (written in English only) were handed to both domestic and international families (i.e. adults with young children and/or teenagers) in the waiting area of the domestic terminal and were conducted on a voluntary and anonymous basis. Some adult children over 18 years old travelling with parents were also included in the survey, though most of the families surveyed included teenagers or young children. The visitor survey was in the form of a self-completion questionnaire that contained a total of 26 questions, including the demographics of the participants, the transport and accommodation utilised, their reasons for visiting Cairns, their choice of nature-based activities whilst visiting TNQ, the areas visited within TNQ, the importance of environmental factors in a holiday destination and their opinions about climate change. The environmental quality of the reef and rainforest is of critical importance to Cairns/TNQ as a tourist destination. The first author was present at all times to offer assistance to the participants should they

have had queries regarding the questionnaire. Surveying family groups of visitors in the departure lounge of the Cairns airport also enabled an examination of a post-holiday experience. A total of 42 refusals were given due to potential participants having too little time, wanting to go shopping, having to watch, feed or occupy their children, a language barrier or otherwise they simply had no interest in completing surveys in general. Nonetheless, the survey site at the airport had the advantage of allowing some families the time to participate in the survey in a secure environment, with other locations less suitable due to child-safety issues, hot weather and time limitations. The airport also was less intrusive to families as they were not being disturbed or delayed from participating in other activities or travel within TNQ. This random sample of family visitors surveyed over seven days was an opportunistic set of visitors flying out of Cairns but it is representative of the main groups and nationalities of non-Asian tourists in TNQ (Tourism Research Australia, 2008; TTNQ, 2008). The 211 family surveys were analysed using a Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program.

Survey Results

The results obtained from the 26 questions asked in the TNQ Family Tourism Survey

(n=221) are described in this section. This includes the demographic and holiday profile of international and domestic family groups along with nature-based activities, accommodation and environmental factors important to families visiting TNQ.

Demographic Profile of the Family Tourism Market Segment in TNQ

Out of the 211 respondents, 64% were Australian domestic visitors and 36% were international visitors (Figure 1). The majority of respondents were female (61%) and 39% were male. Of the 130 domestic respondents (who stated their postcode), 44 were from Victoria, 32 from Queensland, 27 from New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory, 17 from South Australia, 6 from the Northern Territory and 4 from Western Australia, with no respondents from Tasmania.

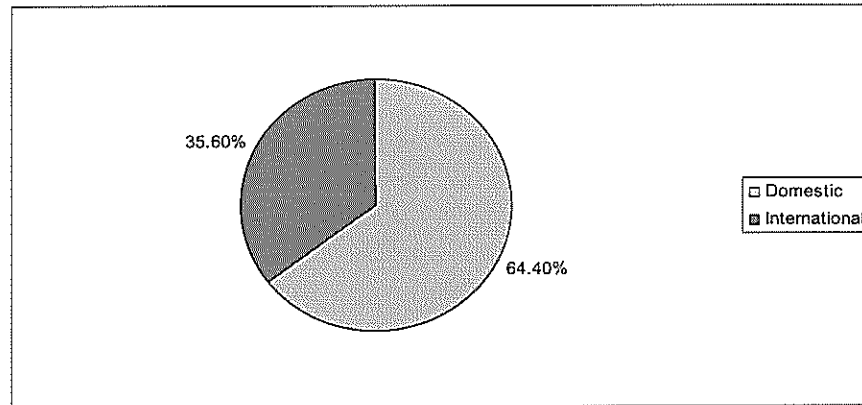


Figure 1: Origin of participants

International visitors originated mainly from Europe (20%), especially the UK (8.5%), Scandinavia (5%) and Germany (2%), from North America (8.5%), and the Asia-Pacific (5%), with other family visitors from South Africa and Brazil (Figure 2).

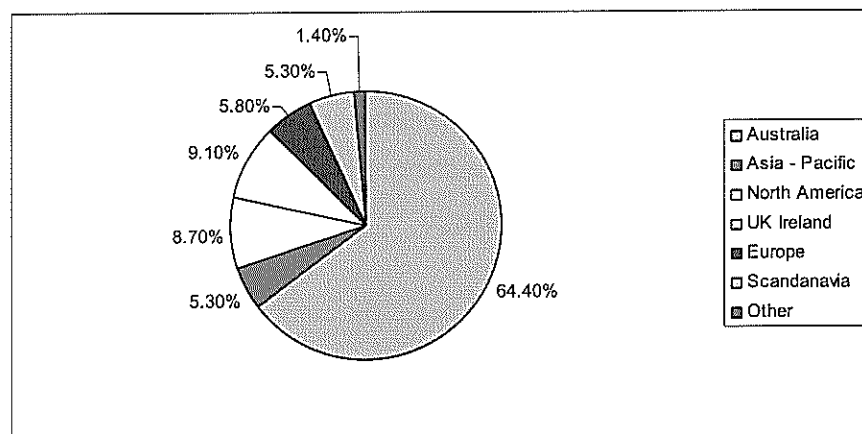


Figure 2: Nationality of visitors

Almost half the respondents in the family tourism survey were aged between 40 and 49 (46.6%), one quarter aged between 30 and 39 (24.2%), while 14.1% were between 50 and 59, 13.6% under 29 and only 1.5% were over 60 (Figure 3).

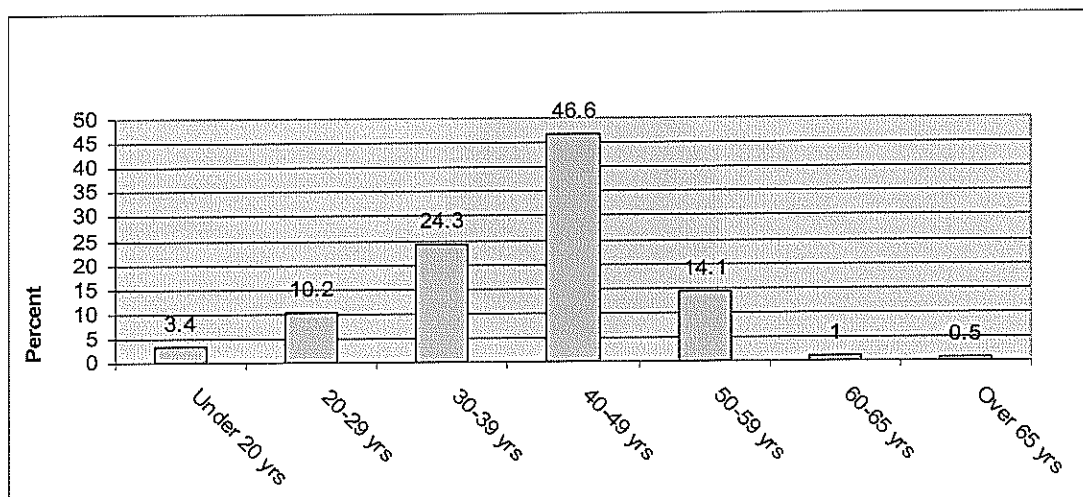


Figure 3: Age groups of respondents

Most respondents described themselves as professionals (25.7%) or self-employed (18.1%) followed by management (12.4%), office-clerical (10%) and domestic duties (9%). Other occupations included public servants, students, tradesperson, and the retail or services industry and manual or factory workers. Retired and semi-retired people made up 1% of the total (Figure 4). “Other” jobs included remote location store manager, commercial property developer, CEO, health worker, teacher, hospital clown/musician, business coach, promotional work, IT and military.

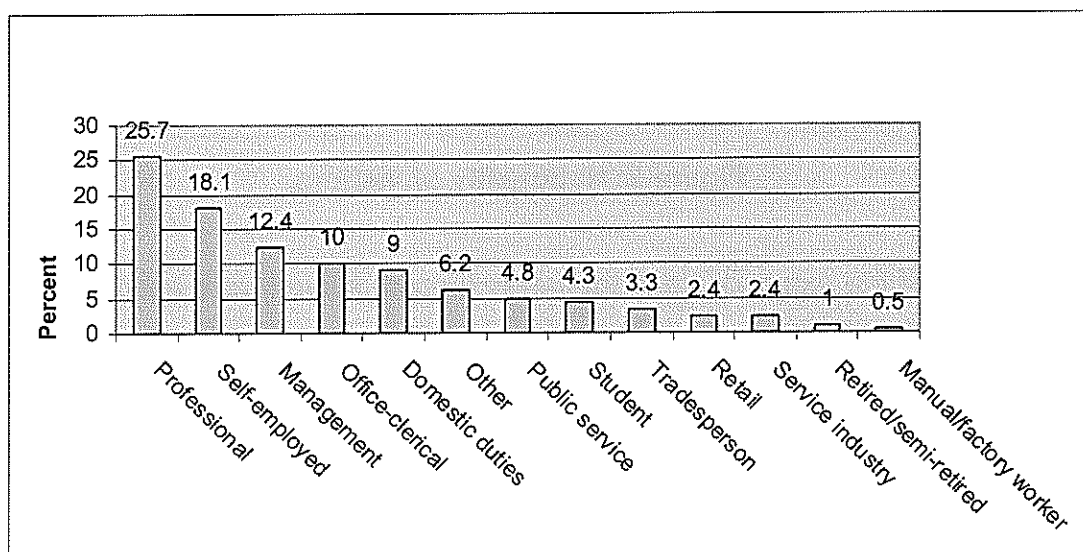


Figure 4: Occupations of respondents

This family tourism survey also asked the age of respondents' children in the travel group. The oldest first child was aged 34, the oldest second child 25, the oldest third child 23 and the oldest fourth child 16. The mean ages from each group of children were 12, 11, 10 and 7 accordingly. The youngest children were 1 year or below (Figure 5). The age of children determines the type of family holiday activities.

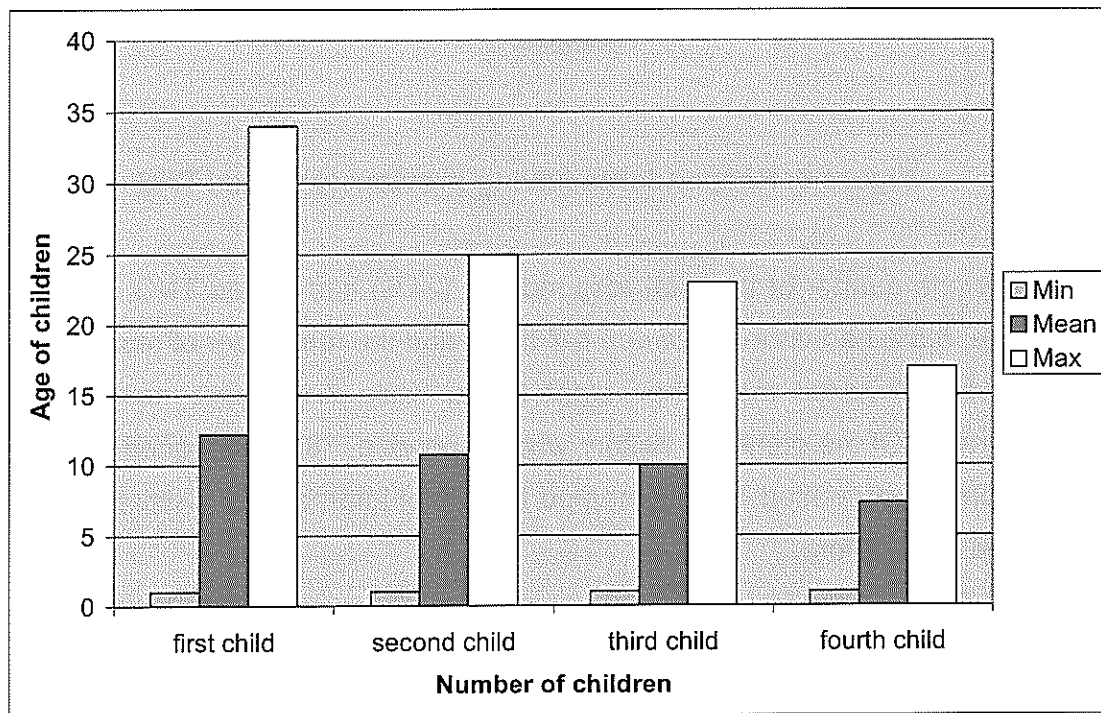


Figure 5: Ages of children

Holiday Profiles of Family Based Groups Visiting TNQ

Of the 211 people surveyed, this was the first visit to TNQ for almost half of the respondents (49%) with 51% already having previously visited TNQ (Figure 6).

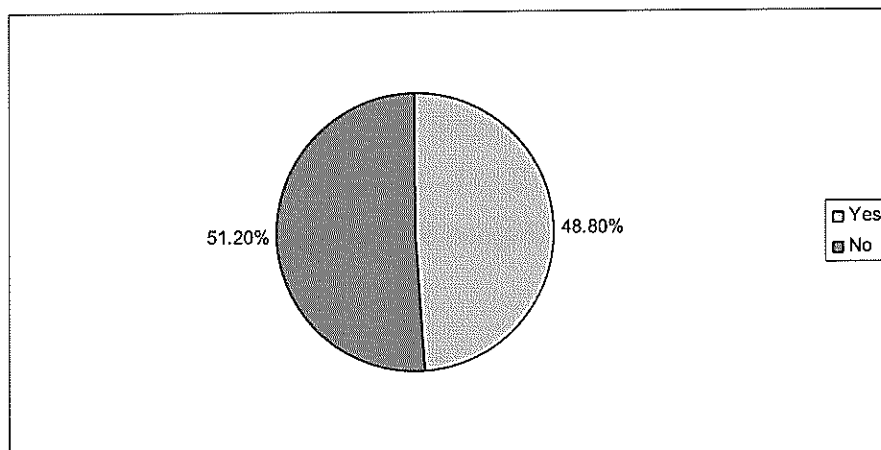


Figure 6: Respondents having previously visited TNQ

About one quarter of the total respondents (24%) had visited TNQ 1-3 times before, 8.5% had visited between 4-7 times and the remainder of respondents (6.7%) had visited more than eight times, while 7.1% gave no response (Figure 7). Of the domestic visitors who responded, 78% mentioned that they had previously visited TNQ compared to 22% of international visitors that had visited TNQ before.

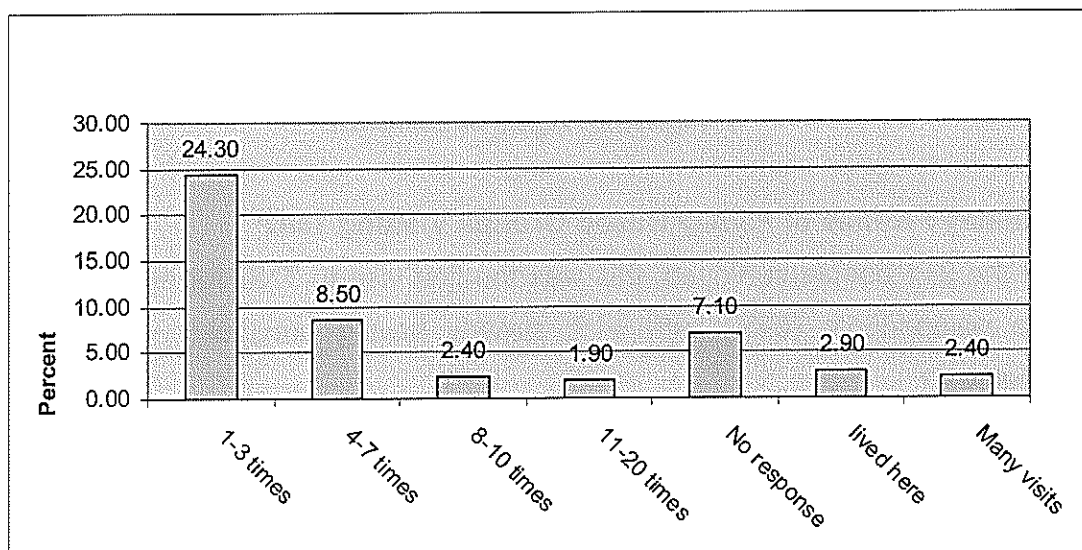


Figure 7: Previous visits to TNQ

Most of the domestic respondents on their holiday in Australia spent between 4-10 nights (73%) away from home while the majority of international visitors tended to stay away for longer periods of time, for example 65% stayed away

from between 11-28 nights and 31% were away from home for a total of 30 days or more (Figure 8).

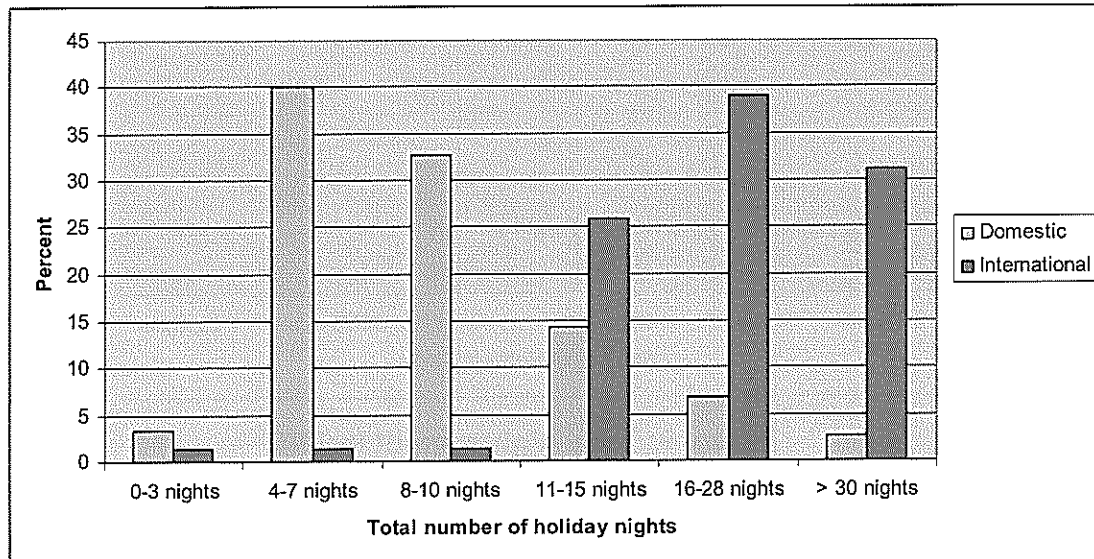


Figure 8: Total holiday time

This survey further showed that respondents intended to spend between 4-7 nights of their total holiday time in TNQ (international 19%, domestic 5%) with a substantial number of domestic visitors (90%) staying between 4-15 nights in TNQ. This is due to the distance that most visitors travel to get to Cairns and the wide variety of reef, rainforest and other activities in TNQ. The majority of international visitors stayed for up to a week (82%). A total of 6.6% including both international and domestic visitors stayed longer than 16 days in TNQ (Figure 9).

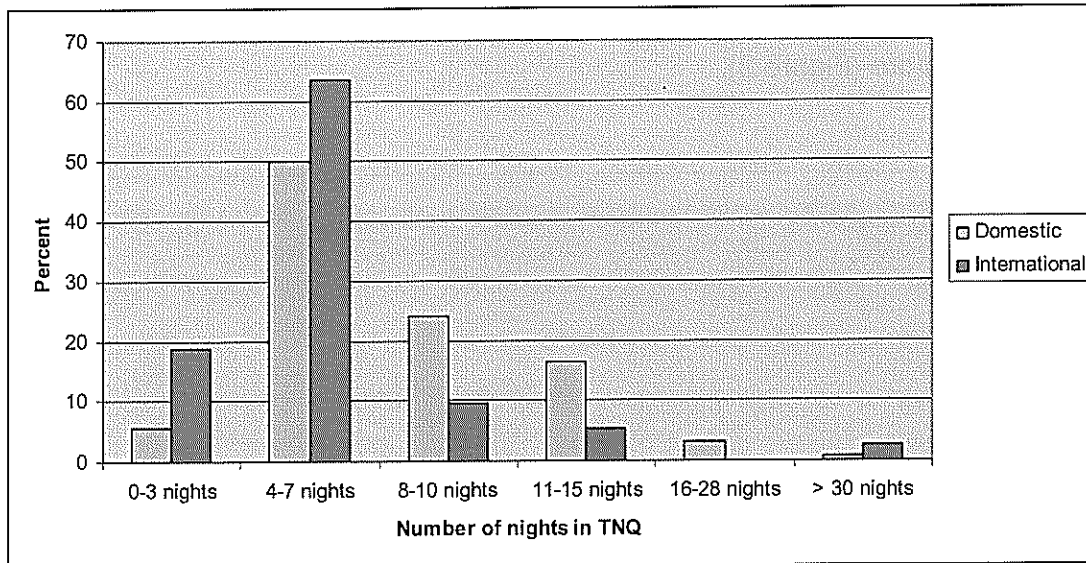


Figure 9: Total nights spent in TNQ

Some 58% of family visitors spent their total holiday in TNQ, while 38% intended or had visited other destinations and 3% made a stopover in TNQ (Figure 10).

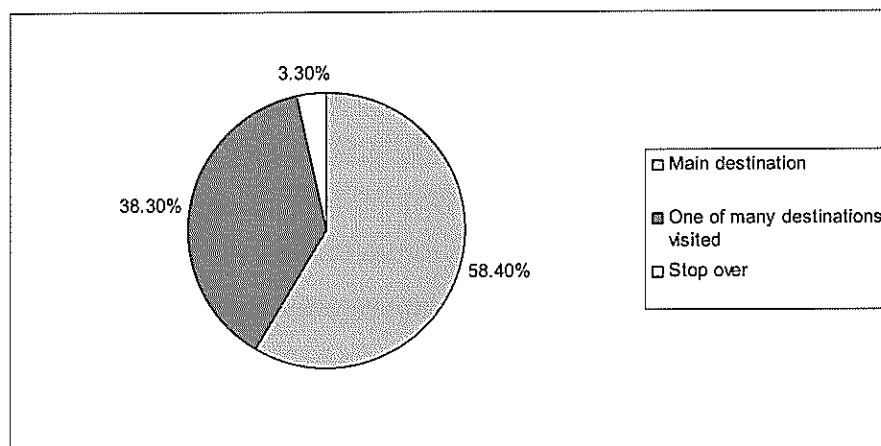


Figure 10: Description of visit to TNQ

Most families visiting TNQ chose to stay in resorts (34%), hotels (26%) or in holiday apartments/units (24%). This highlights the importance of family-friendly accommodation in Cairns. Staying with friends or relatives in TNQ was the other main type of accommodation for 10.5% of the respondents while the rest stayed in caravan parks/cabins (4.3%), backpacker hostels (1%) or B&Bs (0.5%) (Figure 11).

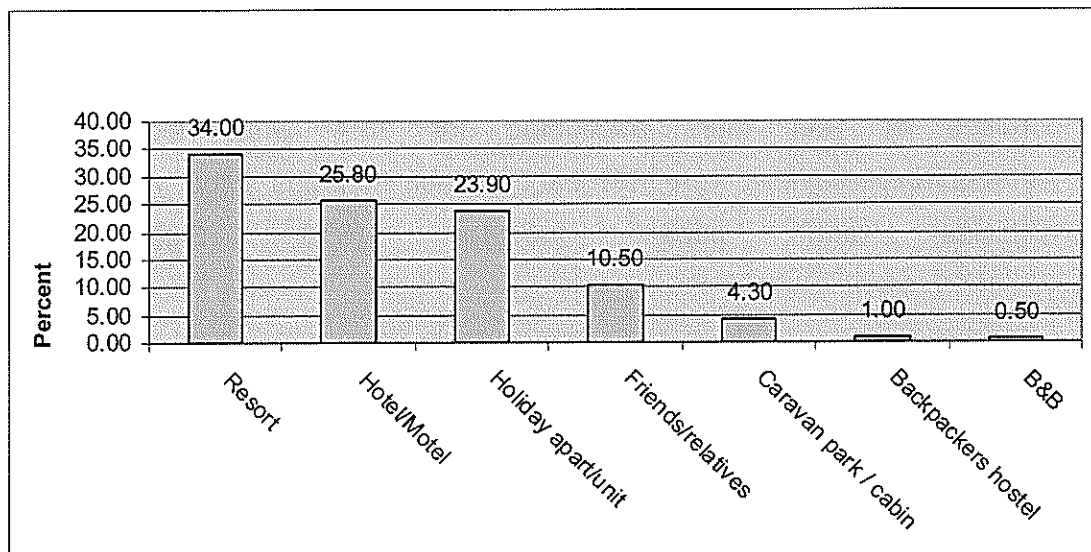


Figure 11: Main type of accommodation used in TNQ

Air was by far the most popular form of transport used in travelling to Cairns (82%), given that respondents were surveyed at the airport. The city of Cairns is a popular fly-in, fly-out destination for both international and domestic tourists, given its distance away from other Australian cities (i.e. 1,500km north of Brisbane). Rented cars accounted for 10.5% of the holiday transport used to travel to Cairns while bus/coach, private vehicles, rented campervan/caravans and other forms of travel (i.e. walking and push bikes) totalled only 7.7% (Table 1).

Table 1: Transport used travelling to Cairns

Transport	Percent
Air	81.8
Rented car	10.5
Bus/coach	3.8
Private vehicle	2.4
Rail	0.5
Rented campervan/caravan	0.5
Other	0.5

Respondents were asked to state all methods of transport used in TNQ and the results show that using

rented cars was a popular method of transport (55%) along with walking (28%). The Skyrail (20%) and Kuranda's scenic railway (18%), which can be a combined method of transport to and from Kuranda, were also popular. Cruises or reef tours accounted for 18% while bicycles and campervans/caravans were 1% each. Other methods used were private vehicles and public transport (5%) (Figure 12).

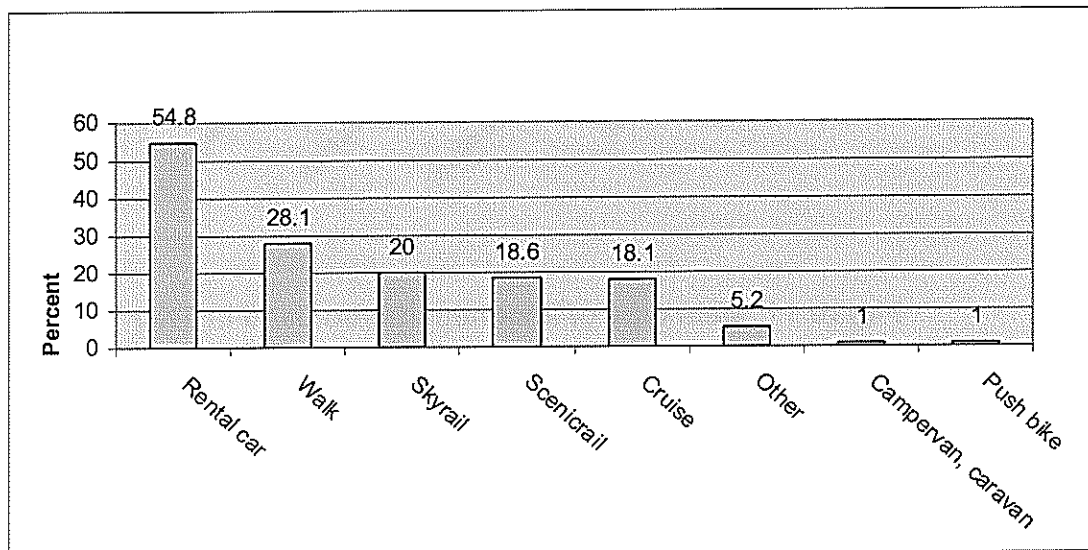


Figure 12: Transport used around Cairns

Most respondents gained their destination knowledge regarding TNQ from friends and relatives (44%), the Internet (42%) or had been here previously (36%). Other popular sources of information were travel agents (27%) and guidebooks (25%). Further sources included printed advertising (7%), TV documentaries (6%), visitor centres (6%), and advertisements on either TV or radio (4%). Other sources of knowledge about TNQ were stated such as "being Australian" and school (Figure 13).

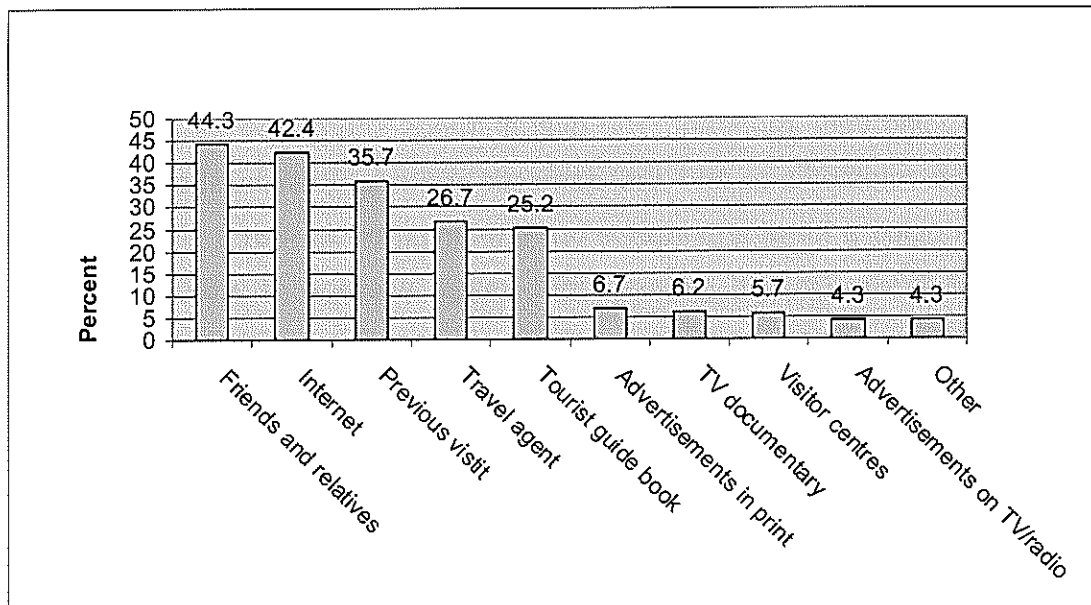


Figure 13: Source of information regarding TNQ

A total of 79% of international respondents and a total of 84% of domestic travellers responded when asked about their holiday budgets. The majority of domestic tourists spent from between \$2501 and \$5000 (51%) but 45% of international tourists spent from between \$10,001 and \$30,000 on their total holiday. It should be noted that international travel costs account for part of these higher holiday costs (Figure 14).

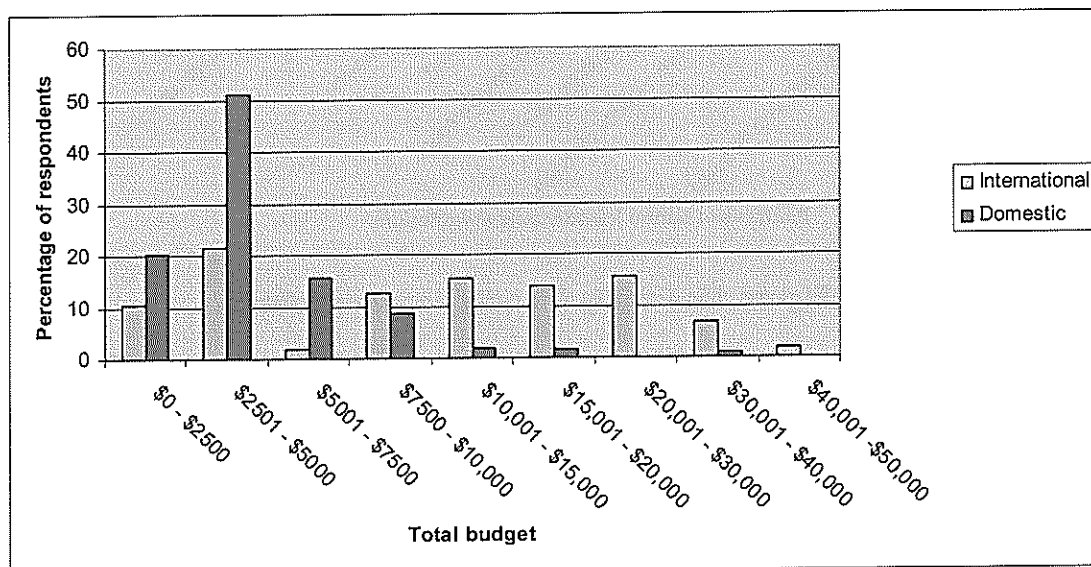


Figure 14: Total holiday budget

In regards to choice of accommodation, respondents were asked about the importance of certain features on a scale of 1-5, 1 being not at all important and 5 being very important. The overall trends seemed to be the same with both the international and the domestic visitors. Results show that family groups place a lot of importance on: swimming pools with a lifeguard (mean total of 4.34), TV and games room (mean average of 3.39) and in-room entertainment (mean average of 3.38) (Figure 15). “Other” aspects (3.75 mean average) of good family accommodation included easy access to beach and restaurants, own kitchen, clean and good rooms, self contained, laundry facilities, cot, prams and highchairs, a pool table, comfort, DVD player, healthy kids menu, service, toys, bikes, bar, gym, television in room, foreign television channels, Internet, Foxtel, pay TV and space for kids. Entertainment facilities and services at accommodation, including pools, are important for families.

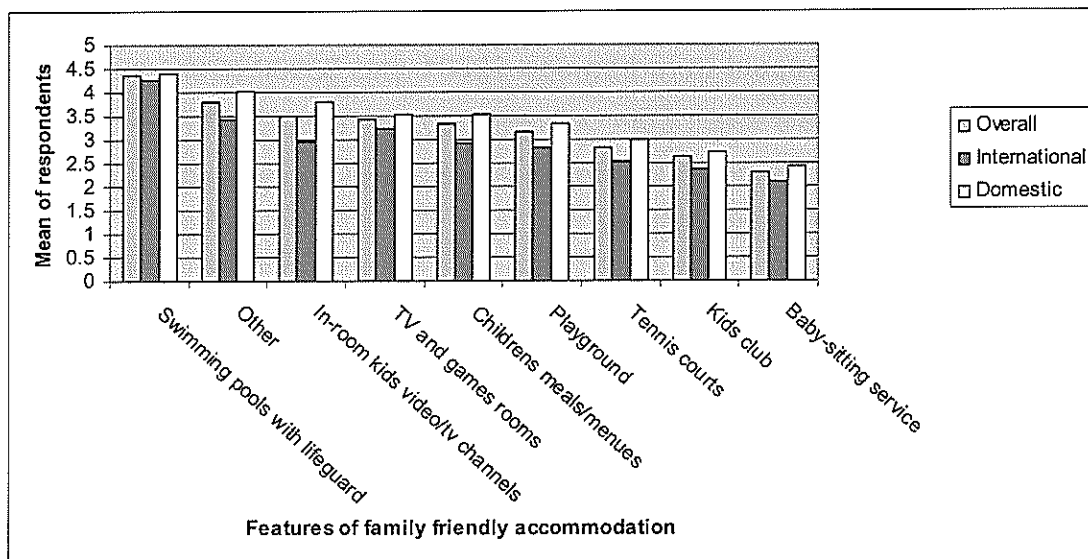


Figure 15: Family friendly accommodation

Other Destinations Considered Before this Holiday in TNQ

The respondents were asked to mention three other destination choices they had considered before choosing to visit TNQ. Some 21 domestic tourists mentioned that the Gold Coast had been a possible destination followed by Broome, Perth and Sydney (10 respondents each) and Tasmania (7).

International locations considered were Fiji (14), New Zealand (12), Thailand (10), Bali (6) and Vietnam (5). Out of the top ten domestic and international destination choices, 59% considered visiting other Australian locations and 42% had considered holidaying overseas (Table 2).

Table 2: Other destinations considered by Australian domestic tourists

Rank	Domestic		International	
1	Gold Coast	21	Fiji	14
2	Broome	10	New Zealand	12
3	Perth	10	Thailand	10
4	Sydney	10	Bali	6
9	Tasmania	7	Vietnam	5
6	Adelaide	5	Vanuatu	3
7	Noosa	5	Europe	2
8	Brisbane	4	Mauritius	2
9	Hamilton Island	4	Hawaii	1
10	New South Wales	4	Hong Kong	1

International tourists overwhelmingly considered visiting Sydney (29 respondents) as their main alternative destination (before visiting TNQ) followed by Melbourne (12), Brisbane (11) and Uluru (9). International destinations considered were New Zealand (11), USA (5), Fiji (4), Thailand (4) and finally Hawaii, Hong Kong, Singapore, Canada and Bali (Table 3). These other destinations also focus on nature tourism.

Table 3: Other destinations considered by international tourists

Rank	Domestic		International	
1	Sydney	29	New Zealand	11
2	Melbourne	12	USA	5
3	Brisbane	11	Fiji	4
4	Uluru	9	Thailand	4
9	Gold Coast	6	Hawaii	3

6	New South Wales	3	Hong Kong	3
7	Perth	3	Singapore	3
8	Whitsundays	3	Canada	3
9	Adelaide	2	Bali	3
10	Tasmania	2	India	2

Importance of Holiday Activities for Families Visiting TNQ

The key motivation factors for families to visit TNQ, regarding choice of activities as an influencing factor were asked, using a mean measure of 1 = not at all important and 5 = very important. The responses were much the same between international and domestic family tourist who both placed high importance on swimming pools and water sports (domestic = 4.45, international = 4.29), and family friendly accommodation (domestic = 4.42, international = 4.16) (Figure 16). Other activities rated as important by families visiting TNQ were patrolled beaches, family-friendly activities in national parks, family discounts/passes to attractions, walking tracks, wildlife parks/zoos and BBQ/picnic areas.

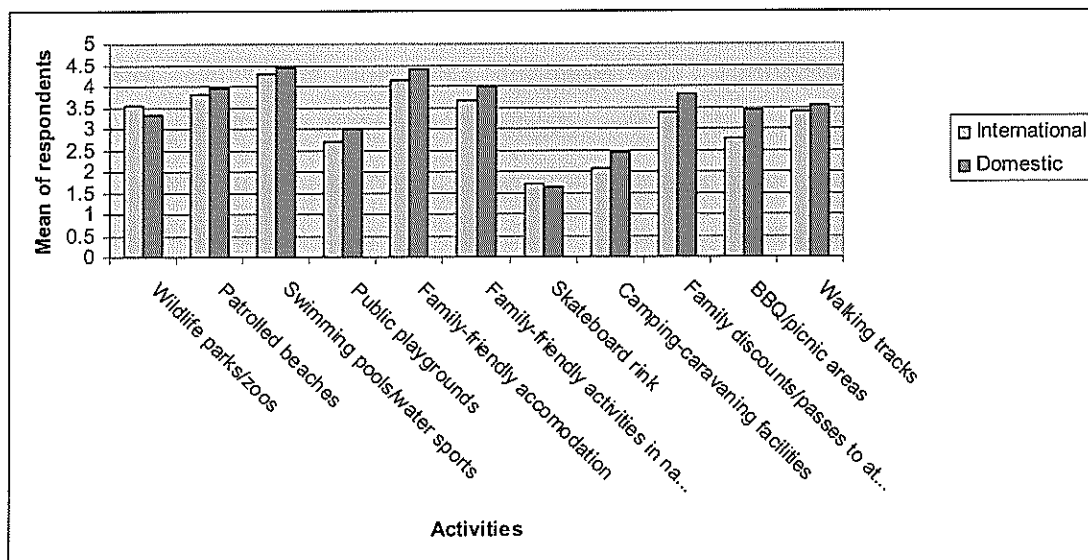


Figure 16: Activities that motivate destination choice

Both domestic and international visitors were similar in half of the responses about their decisions to visit Cairns, but there were, however, some significant differences. For example, both groups rated visiting the GBR as a major factor in their decision to visit Cairns but it should be mentioned that this was given the highest rating by international visitors (4.73) over domestic travellers (4.06). Other activities rated of higher importance for international family tourists in TNQ were visiting rainforest, seeing native fauna, experiencing Aboriginal culture, snorkelling and diving, visiting beaches and the warm climate. Domestic travellers (mean = 3.91) considered a price in their budget more important than the international visitors (mean = 3.23). The need to rest and relax was a major factor for domestic family respondents visiting TNQ with a mean of 4.48 against the international visitor mean of 3.82. This opportunity to rest and relax was an important part of the overall family holiday. Spending time with their families was also a more important consideration for domestic visitors (mean = 4.67) over international respondents (mean = 4.29). Regarding TNQ being a good place for children, domestic visitors responded with a mean of 4.19 and international visitors 3.67. Visiting family and friends in TNQ was of higher importance for domestic visitors (mean 2.82) than international respondents (2.37) (Figure 17).

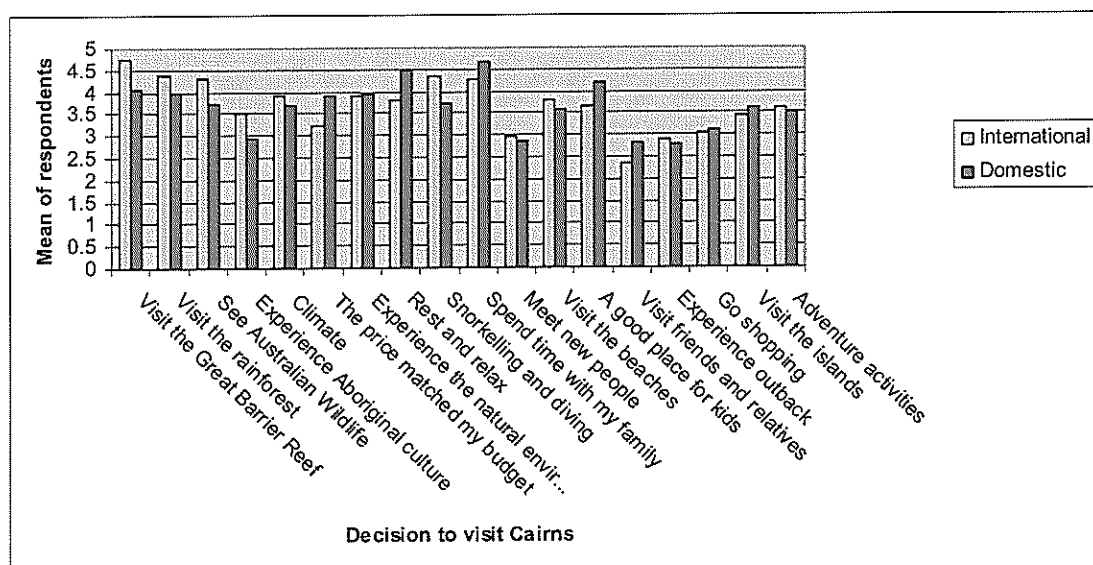


Figure 17: Importance of features in decision to visit Cairns

Family visitors to TNQ were asked to indicate the activities in which they had participated. Swimming rated as the key priority for both domestic and international visitors (83%) and visiting the beach also displayed similar results (69%), for relief from the hot and humid weather. However, domestic tourists regarded visiting local markets (domestic=74%, international=54%) and shopping centres (domestic=76%, international=55%) as much more important than international visitors. A trip to the reef was an important activity for both segments but more so for international visitors (78%) than domestic tourists (51%). Rainforest national parks were popular with 74% of international visitors and 61% of domestic visitors. Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park was of strong interest for international visitors (20%) but less so for domestic visitors (8%). The activity of least interest for both groups was to visit the Cairns Night Zoo (domestic=1.5%, international=6.8%), possibly due to the heat (Figure 18).

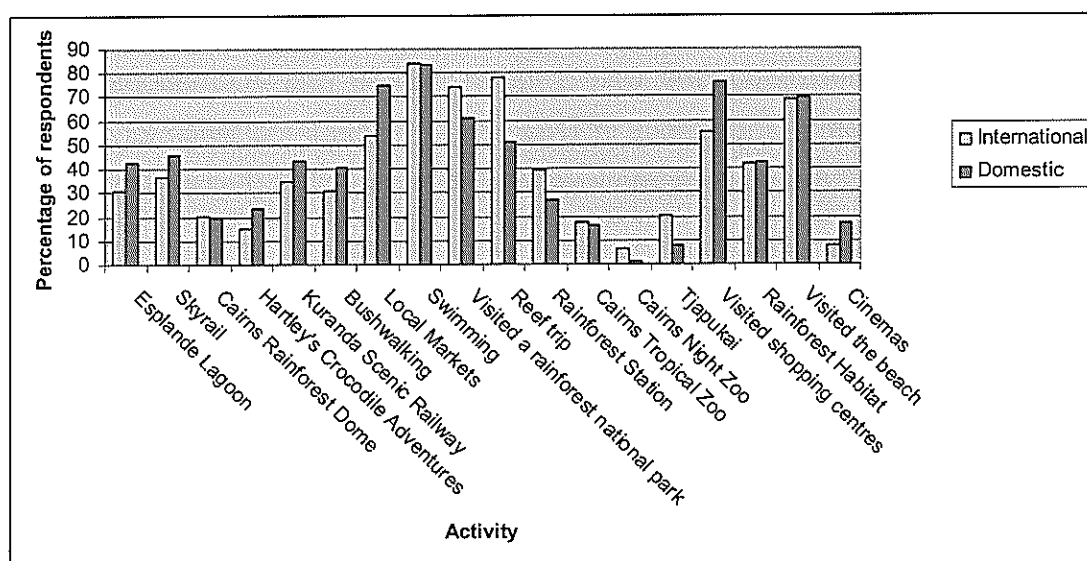


Figure 18: Activities in which visitors participated

In response to being asked about other places visited in TNQ, both Kuranda (81 domestic, 34 international) and Port Douglas (80 domestic, 42 international) were the most popular followed by the Cairns Esplanade (67 domestic, 32 international) and the Northern Beaches (63 domestic, 22 international). The Atherton Tablelands and Cape Tribulation were also popular. The places least visited by families in TNQ were Mission Beach (21

domestic, 12 international), the Daintree (13 domestic, 5 international) and Cooktown (10 domestic, 2 international) (Figure 19).

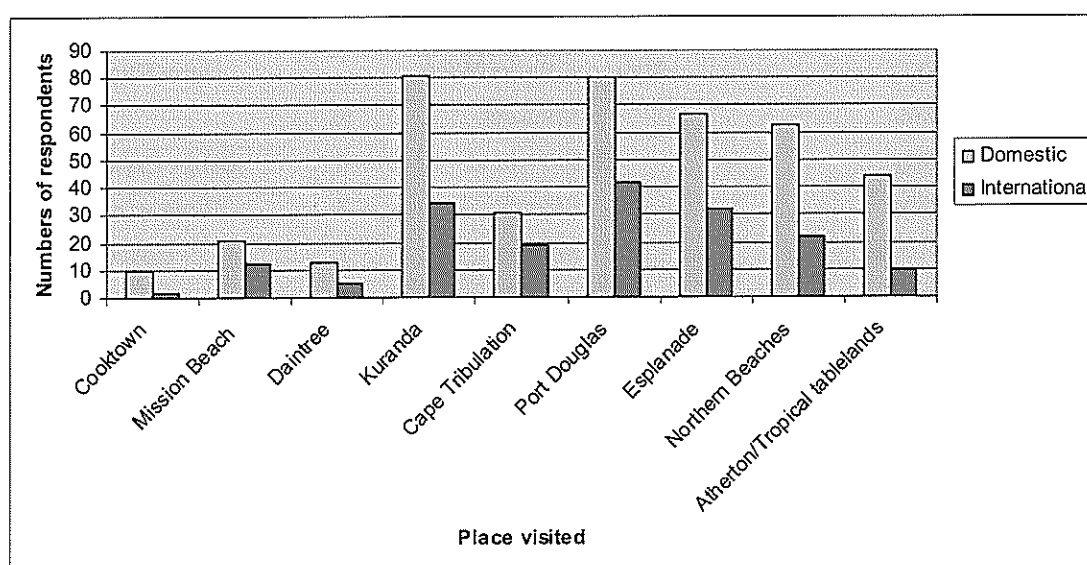


Figure 19: Other places visited in TNQ

The activities providing the best family holiday experiences in TNQ, stated by the respondents in response to an open-ended question, were the GBR (n=33), snorkelling (n=18), swimming (n=9) and diving (n=9). Hartley's Crocodile Adventures was the most popular wildlife park (n=4), followed by the Australian Butterfly Sanctuary in Kuranda (n=3). The rainforest (n=15), Green Island (n=8), Skyrail (n=7) and the Daintree (n=7) were the best national park or World Heritage experiences. Guided tours that provided the best experiences were Quicksilver Cruises (n=3) and Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park (n=2). Other important experiences were listed as spending time with the family (n=7) and relaxing (n=4) (Table 4).

Table 4: Visitors' best holiday experiences in TNQ

Activities		Zoo/Wildlife Park		Guided Tours	
GBR	33	Hartley's Crocodile Farm	4	Quicksilver	3
Snorkelling	18	Butterfly Sanctuary	3	Tjapukai	2
Swimming	9	Cairns Night Zoo	1	Kuranda Scenic Rail	2
Diving	9			Skybury Coffee	1

Shopping	2			Passion of Paradise	1
Helicopter to GBR	2			Mike Ball	1
Glass bottom boat	2			Captain Cook Reef tours	1
White water rafting	1			Billy's Tea Adventures	1
Rafting	1	National Parks/WHA		Haba Reef Tours	1
Quad bikes	1	Rainforest	15	Other Experiences	
Parasailing	1	Green Island	8	Time with family	7
Horse riding	1	Skyrail	7	Relaxing	4
Holding a Koala	1	Daintree	7	Weather	3
Fishing	1	Mossman Gorge	4	People	2
Cable skiing	1	Cape Tribulation	3	Food	2
Bungy	1	Kuranda	2	Resort	1
Breakfast with the birds	1	Barron Falls	2	Meeting new friends	1
4WD to Cape Tribulation	1	Undara	1	Facial for daughter	1
Mangroves, Port Douglas	1	Dunk Island	1		

Five respondents mentioned that the worst activities experienced were ocean swimming problems due to "stingers" (venomous jellyfish), a further five respondents listed GBR reef trips, four visitors wrote that seasickness was their worst experience and a further four mentioned that the shops closed too early. Five respondents stated that the Kuranda Scenic Rail was a bad experience, due to heat and humidity problems in Cairns during the wet season. In regards to other worst experiences, the hot summer weather (23 respondents) was most frequently mentioned (Table 5).

Table 5: Visitors' worst experiences in TNQ

Activities		Zoo/Wildlife Park		Other Experiences	
Swimming (stingers)	5	Hartley's Crocodile Farm	2	Weather	23
GBR reef trips	5	Cairns Zoo (no a/c)	1	Sea sickness	4
Shops closed too early	4	Cairns Wildlife Dome	1	Windy roads	2
Atherton Tablelands	1			No flood warnings	2
Sugar world unsafe	1			Children safety on reef	2
Saw no crocodiles	1	National Parks/WHA		Traffic lights	1
Fishing	1	Kuranda	3	Police harassed Aboriginal	1

		Cape Tribulation	3	High tides	1
		Green Island	2	Harassed by Aboriginal man	1
Service					
Restaurant (poor)	10	Skyrail (acrophobia)	1		
Price of meals	7	Mossman Gorge (floods)	1		
Poor public transport	4	Malanda Falls	1		
Resort (poor)	4	Barron Falls (no water)	1		
Rental house	1				
Jetstar luggage charges	1				
Hotel booking wrong	1	Tours			
Dirty public toilets	1	Kuranda Scenic Rail - heat	5		
Delayed flight	1	Tjapukai (bad attitude)	1		
Children's prices	1	Quickcat reef trip	1		
Car hire	1	Daintree (river trip)	1		
Airport	1	Cairns Diving Centre	1		

On a scale of 1 -10 (1 being not at all satisfactory and 10 being highly satisfactory) about visitor satisfaction with TNQ, international visitors responded with a mean of 8.35 and Australian domestic visitors 8.31 giving a total mean average of 8.33.

Importance of Environmental Factors in Destinations

When responding to concerns about the impact of climate change on the environment, a total of 75% were either concerned (38%) or very concerned (37%) about this issue.

This response reflects the widespread media coverage of global warming and climate change. Respondents were not asked how they were addressing climate change through pro-environmental actions in their daily life (e.g. recycling) or on their holiday (e.g. carbon offsets on air travel). Only a total of 19% were either not at all concerned (4%) or only a little concerned (15%) about the environmental impacts of climate change (Figure 20).

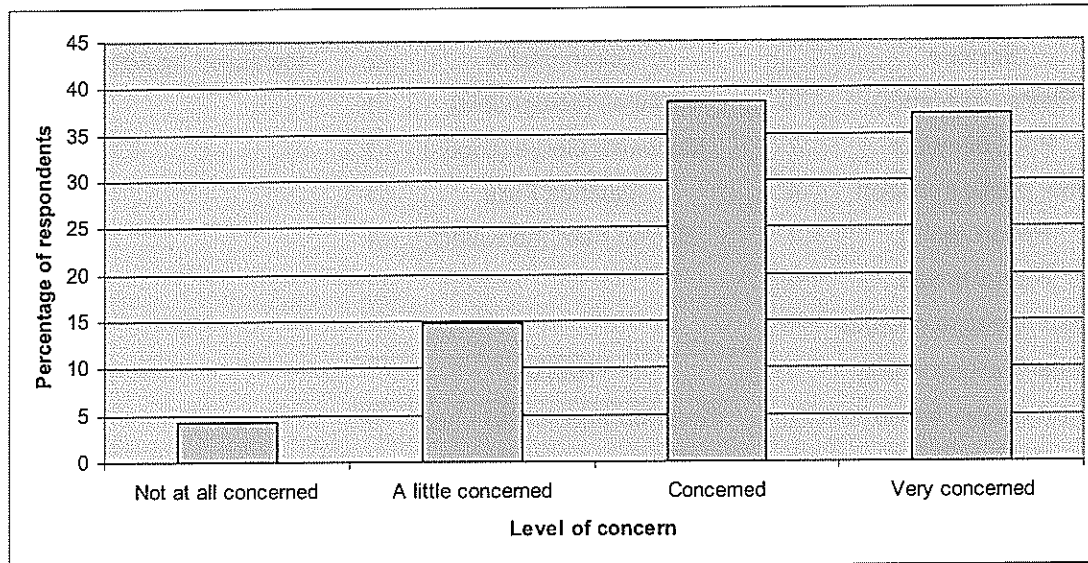


Figure 20: Concern about the impact of climate change

Respondents were also asked if their choices in family holiday destinations were affected by the efforts the potential destination made in protecting the environment. The majority (59%) of family visitors considered environmental quality always or most of the time in choosing a holiday destination. Some 42% answered that they considered this aspect most of the time while a further 34% considered this matter only sometimes. Interestingly, 17% always saw this as a vital issue when choosing a holiday destination. However, another 6.6% never considered environmental protection at destinations important at all (Figure 21).

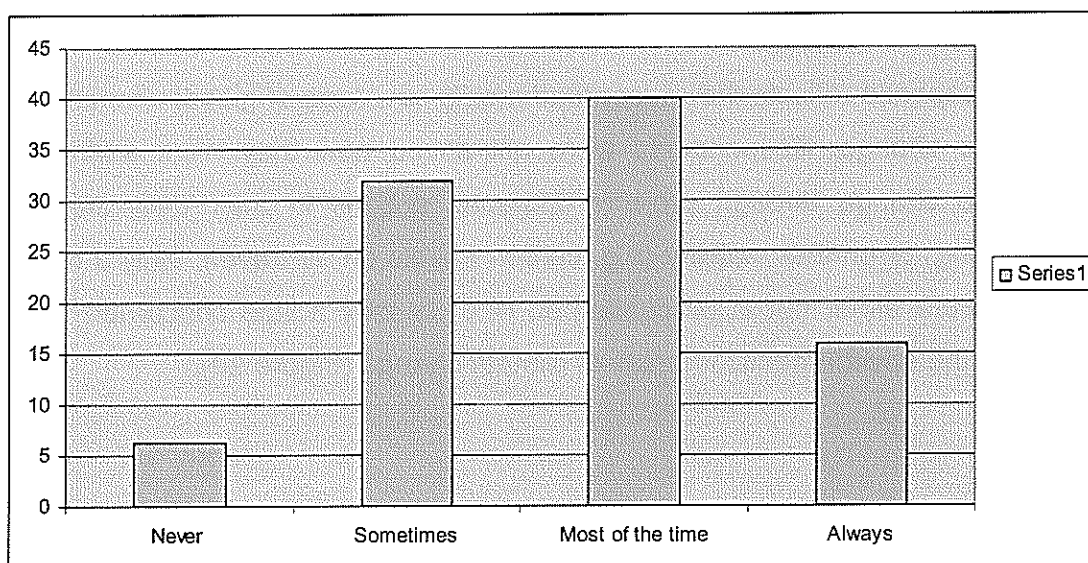


Figure 21: Visitors choice for destinations protecting the environment

Discussion

The results of the family tourism survey (n=211) showed that the majority of families visiting TNQ were Australian domestic visitors (64%) with the rest from overseas (36%). In 2007 the TNQ region attracted over 2.3 million visitors, with 64% being domestic Australian visitors and 36% being international visitors (TTNQ, 2008). The age of respondents in the family tourism survey was mainly 40-49 years being, in terms of occupation, predominantly professionals, self-employed or managers. Families with up to four children were surveyed with the oldest of the children being 34 years old, however, most of the families surveyed had teenagers or younger children. Almost a quarter of the total respondents had previously visited TNQ. International visitors tended to be travelling for longer periods of time in total, but the proportion of holiday nights in TNQ was similar to that of the domestic markets. While the majority of family tourists noted that TNQ was their main destination, almost 40% stated that this was one of many destinations being visited in their holiday. Resorts and hotels were the most popular form of accommodation totalling around 60% of respondents. Families also considered swimming pools and entertainment as important when choosing accommodation. Most of the travellers to TNQ came by air (82%), with Cairns a major fly-in fly-out destination, and almost 55% used a rental car when travelling in the Cairns area. In making their choice of visiting TNQ, most visitors came by word of mouth recommendations from friends and family, using the Internet, or as a result of previous visits. International visitors tended to spend considerably more money on total travel costs when travelling to and around TNQ. Activities considered important in TNQ were swimming pools and water sports followed by the need for family friendly accommodation. The main reasons for visiting were the reef and rainforest, and also time with the family scored highly. Popular activities were reef trips, visiting rainforests and national parks, beach visits and shopping. Popular places included Kuranda and Port Douglas, both offering shopping possibilities and wildlife parks. Best experiences included the GBR, snorkelling, swimming and diving, national parks, visiting the rainforest and Green Island followed by Skyrail. Worst

experiences included the presence of stingers, GBR trips, seasickness, the early closing times for the shops, weather, heat and humidity.

Marketers and tourism agencies in TNQ seem to be overlooking this substantial family nature tourism market segment in favour of high income couples from the southern states of Australia and overseas. Tourism Tropical North Queensland's current 'Change your Latitude' campaign focuses on attracting couples and not family groups (Tourism Queensland, 2006). The TTNQ-operated visitor centre in Cairns also provided no marketing information for this family travel segment or indeed any advertising literature that targeted families for nature tourism. A travel agency in Cairns, "Travel with Kidz" also failed to provide specific literature aimed at family-based nature tourism in TNQ thus showing a gap in this area. The authors found only one private travel website that featured "Family Travel," with a list of family-friendly activities and attractions in the Cairns region (Cairns Unlimited, 2008). An Australian travel magazine, *Holidays with Kids*, also had very limited information on the Cairns area (Wagstaff, 2007). A new website, Cairns Family Holidays (2008), lists family attractions in TNQ and an activity age guide (3, 6, 10, 14) for outdoor activities. Juric, Cornwall and Mather (2002) mentioned that "families with small children might be keenly interested in ecotourism but not have found an offering in the marketplace that suits their special needs" (p. 268), while Currie et al (2008) found that "85% of the respondents [surveyed in Costa Rica] want their children to experience ecotourism" (p.17), further arguing the need to address this family segment for nature tourism.

Results from the family tourism survey show that the majority of respondents (75%) are clearly concerned with the impacts of climate change. The majority of respondents (59%) also added that if destinations protected their environments, this would be a key factor in their choice of a holiday destination. Dolcinar and Leisch (2008) also identified a market segment of "Nature Lovers" (17%) that chose vacations based on the environmental quality and appeal of destinations. This study of family tourism, however, did not evaluate if families chose eco-certified tourism operators in TNQ, or

whether they donated money or time to nature or wildlife conservation efforts. A number of studies have found that nature tourists are environmentally conscious and not just interested in the environment solely as a holiday experience. In research about nature-based tourism completed in Fiji, other reasons including culture, 'eco' and family were identified as primary motivations by a range of participants that included "eco-families" (Bricker & Kerstetter, 2004). Nature-based attractions and accommodation in Cairns could develop new hands-on conservation activities (e.g. tree planting, wildlife care) and learning experiences targeting these eco-families.

Conclusion

This study provided an insight into the choices, motivations, and reasons for families participating in nature tourism activities while visiting Tropical North Queensland. It highlighted the importance of family-friendly amenities and nature activities for this group. Most families considered environmental factors as important, both in terms of climate change impacts, and also in choosing an environmentally friendly destination. These results can be used to specifically market TNQ to family groups, and improve the level of facilities and services offered to families at nature-based accommodation and attractions. Similar surveys of families as a nature tourism market in other holiday locations around Australia and also other international destinations would be of value for both marketing and further research purposes. This would further confirm the size and significance and specific needs of families as a nature tourism market segment.

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