



BACKGROUND

This study of Visitor Information Centres was commissioned by the Sustainable Tourism CRC and led by Victoria University with assistance from the Centre for Regional Tourism Research at Southern Cross University. The purpose of this study was to understand how visitor information centres (VICs) contribute to increased tourism yield in regional destinations. Changed behaviour which may increase yield includes: increasing length of stay; increasing activities undertaken; and increasing the likelihood of repeat visitation.

The pilot project consisted of ten case studies in Victoria, NSW and the ACT. Each study collected and analysed data to determine the role of VICs in enhancing yield within tourism regions. They aimed to determine the effectiveness of VICs and highlight measurable targets for VICs to increase visitor expenditure and visitor stay. Aspects such as VIC service quality, tourism knowledge and the ability of staff to 'up-sell' tourism facilities such as accommodation, attractions and tour opportunities were investigated. Data was collected through qualitative and quantitative methods and the outcomes were strategies for VICs to increase tourist yield.

WHY DO THE RESEARCH?

Regional destinations invest heavily in Visitor Information Centres (VICs) as key components of their visitor services and product promotion strategies. Previous research in Australia and the United States has established that VICs are important sources of information for consumers. However, little is known about what type of consumers use VICs, or how using VICs influences tourism yield in regional destinations. Literature suggest that: increased length of stay; increased number of activities engaged in; and intention to repeat visitation to the destination all correlate with increased yield. Understanding how VIC contributes to increasing tourism yield in the destination can assist in the planning of VIC services, and can provide evidence for industry and destination marketers of the value of contributing to VIC activities.

CANBERRA AND REGION VISITOR CENTRE: A CASE STUDY

WHAT WAS DONE?

In conjunction with Australian Capital Tourism (ACTC), a survey was administered to 150 visitors to the Canberra and Region Visitor Centre in August and September, 2003. The survey asked visitors about: the nature of their travel party; their travel plans prior to visiting the Centre; and whether those plans had changed as a result of their visit to the Centre. Visitors also answered questions about previous visits to Canberra and the ACT; their level of satisfaction with services at the Centre; and the extent to which the Centre influenced their plans to visit surrounding regions.

WHAT WERE THE RESULTS?

- The market for the Canberra and Region Visitor Centre was primarily self-drive tourists, and adult couples. Family groups were also an important market;
- Over three quarters of visitors to the Centre had visited Canberra and the ACT previously, with half of these having visited more than five times previously. Despite this, nearly 70% of visitors had not visited the Centre on previous trips;
- The Centre was influential in extending the length of stay of more than one third of visitors, and had a similar positive influence on visitor plans to undertake more activities in the region;

	Plan to increase	No change	Plan to decrease
Length of Stay	36%	57%	7%
Activities	56%	42%	2%

- Nearly 40% of respondents sourced information about surrounding regions from the Canberra and Region Visitor Centre, and stated that this information would effect their visit to other regions;
- 81% of visitors stated that their experience at the Centre would encourage them to visit Canberra and the ACT again in the future;
- Between 85 and 90% of visitors rated each of the service attributes of the Centre (staff knowledge; friendliness; touch screens; brochures; and displays of local products) as good or very good.

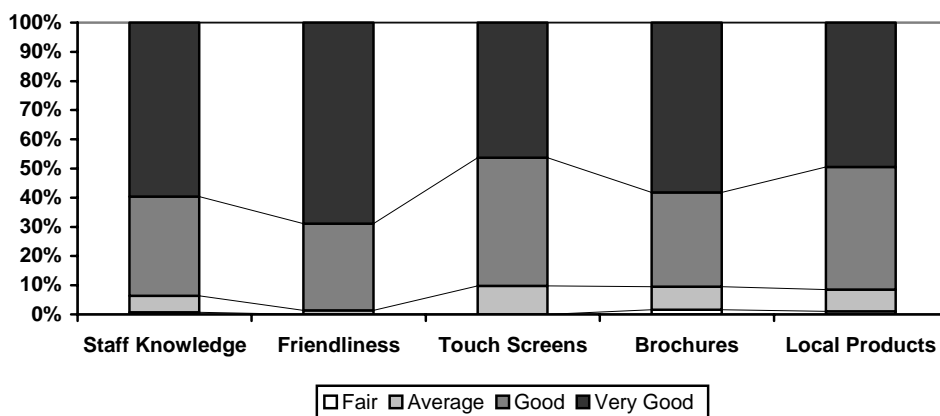


Figure 1: Visitor Rating of CRVC Service Attributes

HOW WERE THE RESULTS USED?

The high level of intention to repeat visitation to Canberra and the ACT was used to initiate the design a customer relationship management strategy, which will provide information to inspire repeat visitors once they have returned home. The results also indicated a need to collaborate with surrounding regions, as self-drive tourists may use VICs to plan for future stopovers, as well as the current destination. This information has been used to facilitate talks to network VIC's in the Capital Region and surrounds. The CRVC has a positive influence of length of stay and number of activities, and can also use this research to encourage further investment in visitor services from both public and private sector agencies.

HOW CAN YOU UNDERTAKE SIMILAR RESEARCH?

The Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) in conjunction with the Centre for Regional Tourism Research is developing a kit to enable VIC's to replicate this research. The kit will comprise of:

- A copy of the survey
- An automated Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to enable you to enter and analyse your completed surveys
- An instruction manual including tips on collecting the information from visitors and what to do with the results of your research

The kit will be available by the end of 2004.

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