



WAIHEKE ISLAND IDENTITIES AND RESPONSES TO THE PANDEMIC



**THE UNIVERSITY
OF AUCKLAND**

FACULTY OF SCIENCE


School of Environment

Project Forever Waiheke

Research Aims:

- To identify issues relevant to residents related to 2020 pandemic and Waiheke identity
- To introduce Stage 3 U/Grad Geography students to social research practice

Research Approach:

- Online survey disseminated via Waiheke networks
 - Interviews with key informants
 - Mostly open questions for residents' spontaneous views
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RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Use of virtual resources:

- * Online local survey with support from *Project Forever Waiheke*
- * Zoom interviews with key stakeholders

Project Forever Waiheke

Research on Waiheke Island and 2020 developments – Please give your views

Project Forever Waiheke is collaborating with the University of Auckland (Department of Geography) to undertake research on how the Waiheke community and residents' lives are being affected in 2020 – in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism fluctuations, climate change, and other recent local, national and global developments. We are seeking the views of Waiheke locals on a range of topics.



zoom


SURVEY RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS (N=189)

- ▶ 95% full-time residents
- ▶ 68% working on Waiheke, 19% commute to CBD
 - ▶ 46% working full-time, 32% part-time
 - ▶ 50% >55; 25% 40-55; 25% under 40
 - ▶ 59% F; 41% M
 - ▶ 85% Pākehā; 4% Māori

1. COMMUNAL SPACES

- Areas where island identities created
- Valuable sites of connectedness
- No single Waiheke identity, but a range of spaces that foster & reflect common values

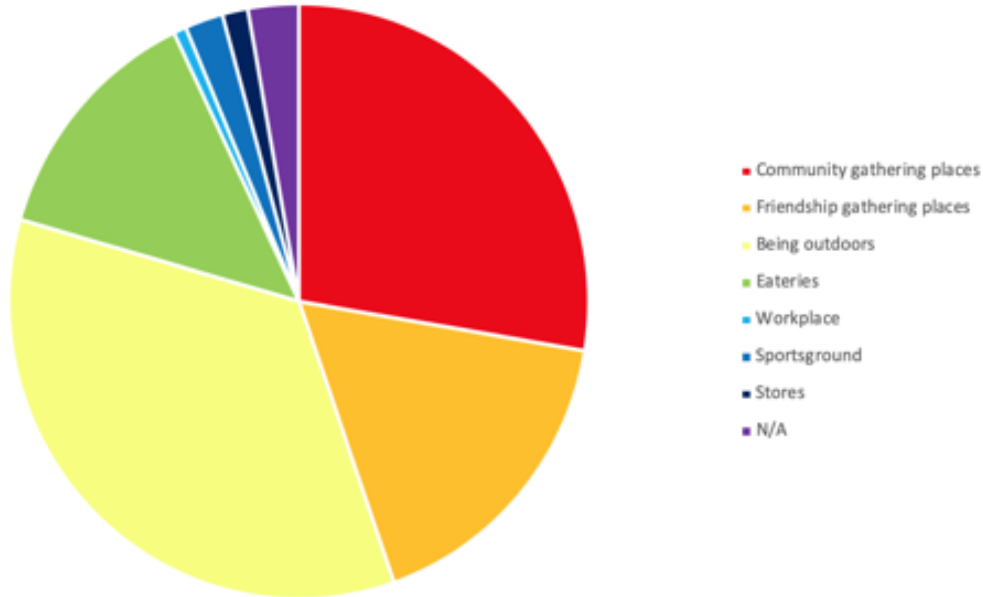


An aerial photograph of a large, turquoise bay filled with numerous small white boats. The water is clear and vibrant, and the boats are scattered across the surface. In the background, a dark, forested coastline is visible. The overall scene is peaceful and scenic.

“Waiheke’s island identity revolves around friendliness, tolerance, being outdoors, sharing, caring for outdoor space and having fun”

WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE COMMUNAL SPACE FOR MEETING PEOPLE?

Favourite communal spaces to meet people



1. Being outdoors

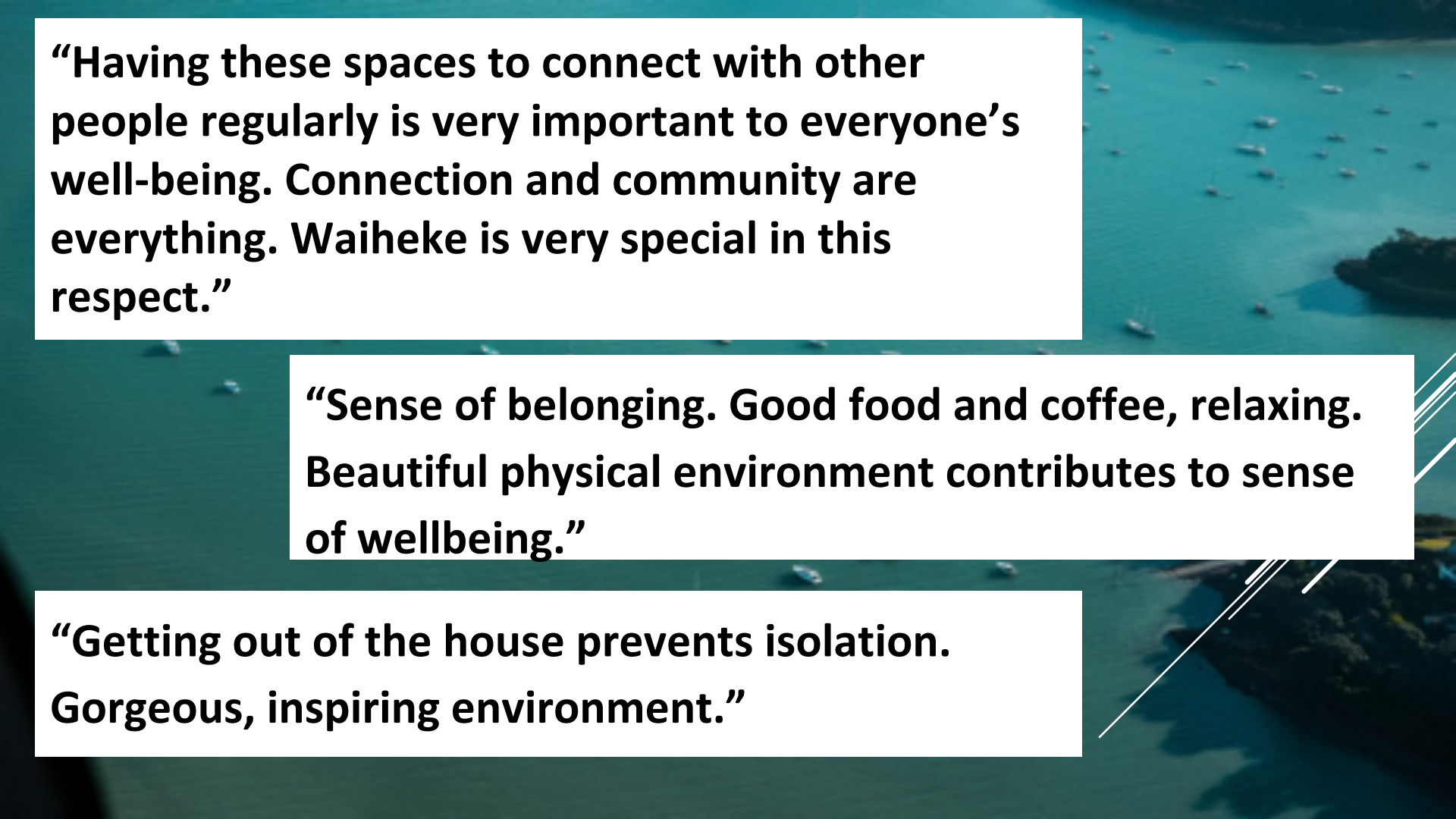
2. Community gathering places

3. Friendship gathering places

4. Eateries

“IN WHAT WAYS DOES VISITING THAT SPACE CONTRIBUTE TO YOUR WELL-BEING?”

- **Community connection**
 - **Being outside**
 - **Personal well-being**
 - **Multifunctional space**
 - **Supporting local community**
 - **Pet friendly**
 - **Sustainable/eco-friendly**
 - **Good food/drink**
- 



“Having these spaces to connect with other people regularly is very important to everyone’s well-being. Connection and community are everything. Waiheke is very special in this respect.”

“Sense of belonging. Good food and coffee, relaxing. Beautiful physical environment contributes to sense of wellbeing.”

“Getting out of the house prevents isolation. Gorgeous, inspiring environment.”

CASE STUDY:

WAIHEKE RESOURCES TRUST

- **Community garden**
- **Classes and workshops**
- **Resident dinners**
- **Kai Conscious Cafe**
- **Ecostore**





**“An inclusive space for the community”
(Governance Group WRT)**

**“The Sustainability Centre and WRT is another system that has evolved from the people and is used by the people” -
(Management WRT)**


“Very welcoming to newcomers, recognize what you might have to offer rather than that you’re going to be a burden to the place.” (WRT new resident dinner participant)

2. WAIHEKE IDENTITIES AND CAFES

Key aspects residents valued the most:

- **The atmosphere**
- **Food quality/locally sourced**
- **The views**
- **Service and staff**



- **'Atmosphere' reflects community**
 - *** Cafés owned and run by locals**
 - *** Being known by staff**
 - *** Meeting friends, by arrangement or by chance**
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- A decorative graphic consisting of several parallel white lines of varying lengths, slanted upwards from left to right, located in the bottom right corner of the slide.

“Indoor/outdoor seating, reliably good coffee, good connection with the passing community”





**“Sea view, great staff
and ambience, treated
like a regular”**

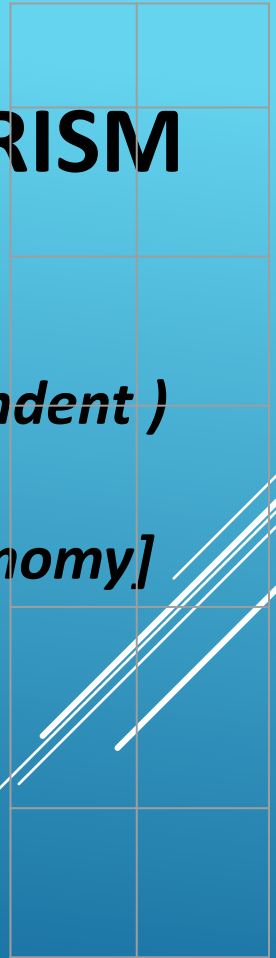
**“Knowing the owners,
their great selection of
food, the lovely
atmosphere”**



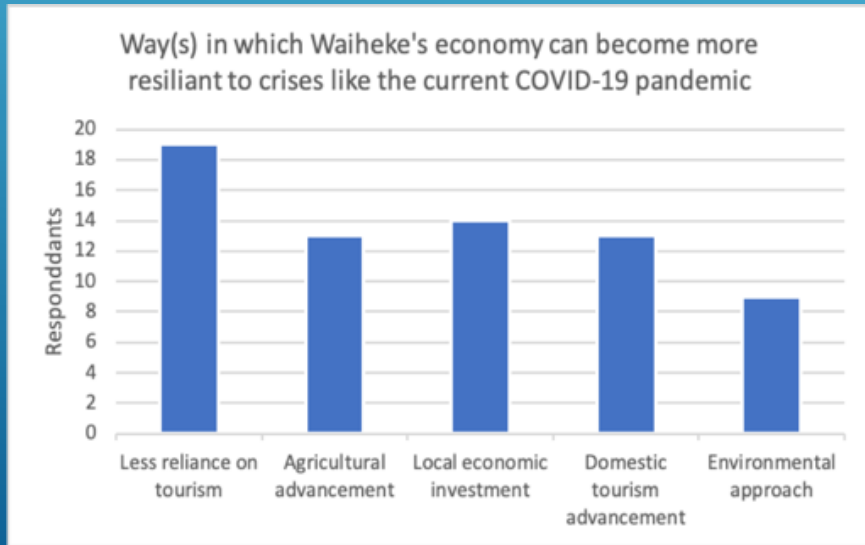
3. ECONOMIC VIEWS ON ISLAND TOURISM

"It's been wonderful [absence of visitors]" (Survey respondent)

*"COVID has made it easier to do so [diversification of economy]
but we would have got there anyway" (Interviewee)*



ASPIRATIONS: LESS RELIANCE ON TOURISM & MORE RESTORATIVE, SUSTAINABLE AND ENVIRONMENTAL APPROACHES



- * Less reliance on tourism
- * Local economic investment
- * Developing domestic tourism
- * Developing island agriculture
- * Environmental approaches

4. PERCEIVED EFFECTS OF TOURISM ON HEALTH & EMERGENCY SERVICES

- Many residents were unaware of impacts of tourism **BUT**
- Service providers identified significant impacts
 - ↪ *“Absolutely, idiots lighting fires and setting off fireworks despite fire bans”*
 - ↪ *“Yes - all [providers] are overworked in summer and get fatigued and annoyed at tourists' stupidity”*

Nurse

“Some of our own patients coming in for regular appointments have had to rebook because we having to deal with an emergency.”

Clinic Manager

“As high as 50% of the people seen [during tourist season] are visitors.”

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Ambulance service

“It can be quite a strain on the resources because we've only got the one ambulance and trying to deal with multiple jobs.”

Coastguard

“It should be mandatory if you own a vessel, just like if you own a car, you should have some sort of license or training.”

5. IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON ISLAND ECONOMY



***Q: Since the beginning of April 2020,
has your personal income from all
sources, including government
subsidies...?***

Decreased substantially 23%

Decreased somewhat 28%

No change 44%

Increased somewhat 5%

MAIN IMPACT OF LOCKDOWN ON HOUSEHOLD INCOME?

15% - lost an income, whether primary or secondary

7% - saved money working from home



“My income has been 'about the same', but lockdown required home-based work, (so) my hunch is a net saving from the break in commuting on the ferry.”

HOW CAN WAIHEKE'S ECONOMY CAN BECOME MORE RESILIENT?



32% - households becoming more **self-sufficient**

19% - **reduce Waiheke's reliance on tourism**

10% - **diversify** island businesses/employment

Also, **cheaper ferry services, developing long-stay tourism, working from home, greater affordability of local services and products for locals, and encouraging more domestic visitors**

OTHER SURVEY RESPONSES

“Be much less reliant on tourism and instead engage in business activities that improve the welfare of the environment and our people.”

“Becoming a more sustainable and self- sufficient island in areas such as housing, transport and food resourcing.”

“Allowing people who normally work in the city to work on Waiheke. Also, make the ferry a public service, not a private one.”

“By not getting another pandemic!”

6. WAIHEKE TOURISM AND COVID-19

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HOW DID THE ABSENCE OF TOURISTS AFFECT RESIDENTS?

- ▶ Negative impacts on:

Income (personal, business), employment, lifestyle, travel, mental health

- ▶ Positives:

Improved QoL, slower pace, relief for environment, improved community spirit, less pressure, less crime/improved public behaviour, more NZ visitors



NEW ZEALAND

Covid 19 coronavirus: Warning to Waiheke Island day trippers - 'I'll see you at the wharf with my pitchfork'

17 Aug, 2020 12:09 PM

5 minutes to read



Aucklanders flocked to supermarkets creating chaos on the roads after new cases of Covid-19 announced. Video / @Julznova / @ruwanjourn

Waiheke residents hold very passionate and strong views on tourism, both positive and critical

COVID-19 has amplified those views

TYPICAL SURVEY RESPONSES:


“Disastrously negative. Tourists were the lifeblood of Waiheke. Many people will now be unable to live here because their businesses have been destroyed.”

“Wonderfully quiet land, peaceful like the old days! However my sales are down because of lack of overseas visitors... However I do not think we should promote more tourism than we had – I prefer less!”

7. CHANGING VIEWS ABOUT TOURISM GIVEN COVID-19

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CHANGING RESIDENT VIEWS ABOUT TOURISM

- **Diverse attitudes to tourism through the pandemic experience**
 - **'Island spirit' seems to be fostered by a decline in tourist numbers, along with the COVID experience**
 - **Lockdowns have offered a window into what Waiheke would be like with less tourism**
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KEY THEMES FROM THE SURVEY

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Q: WHAT WERE THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF ABSENCE OF TOURISTS?

“Crushingly negative. Many businesses have either gone under or are heading that way. Employment has been severely impacted. The economic impact to the general island community has been extreme.”

“Business owners & their employees face a very uncertain future. Returning Kiwis are buying up property with their overseas-earned funds, making it even harder for long-term residents to buy on Waiheke. Infrastructure issues still exist without the tourists!”

Q: WHAT WERE THE POSITIVE IMPACTS OF ABSENCE OF TOURISTS?

“Positive for the environment, local social cohesion and individual well-being. It is pleasing to not have tourists gawking at the locals, dropping litter, adding to island waste stream, becoming intoxicated and behaving badly. The island needs and welcomes visitors who stay the night and spend locally, but not overseas package day trippers who add nothing to the local economy but add to local costs and overburden the infrastructure.”

Q: How did Waiheke avoid COVID cases?

“A respect for others by the majority of islanders has seen most of us caring about keeping to the rules and avoiding those who don't. There is a degree of pride in supporting a virus free Waiheke.”

“The moat.”

“We were our own bubble.”

“[Awareness that] Waiheke would be devastatingly affected if there was a case given the single ferry service, one main supermarket and population density.”

Q: How can Waiheke's economy can become more resilient to crises...?

“Be much less reliant on tourism and instead engage in business activities that improve the welfare of the environment and our people.”

“Buy local. Housing security for renters. And everyone have gardens.”

“... for when tourism returns, small-scale ventures that align with ecological and traditional Maori values.”

“Internet connectivity to improve island wide so we can all work from home. Fullers exempt status to end.”