

UNDERSTANDING VISITOR WILDLIFE INTERACTIONS: KANGAROO ISLAND

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Introduction

This study is part of a National Wildlife Based Tourism Project being coordinated by the CRC for Sustainable Tourism. The aim is to collect survey data from visitors about their wildlife tourism experiences so that we can better understand the markets for wildlife tourism opportunities and products, visitor satisfaction with the available opportunities and their evaluations of, and likely responses to, management of visitor wildlife interactions.

This report presents preliminary questionnaire results from 262 Kangaroo Island visitors who were surveyed as they departed the Island from Penneshaw on Sealink ferries. Survey collection took place on weekdays and weekends between 31st May and 6th June 2002. Visitors were approached to complete a survey as they waited to board the 10.30am or 7.30pm departing ferry. Respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire during the ferry trip and to leave their survey on board for research staff to collect at a later stage. Questionnaires were conducted in English only.

Key Findings

- The majority of the respondents were Australian visitors, mainly from South Australia.
- The most important reasons for this visit to Kangaroo Island were *a chance to see wildlife I don't normally see* and *getting close to nature*.
- The opportunity to see wildlife while on holidays in general was considerably more important to the Kangaroo Island sample compared to a database of 2,456 WBT participants.
- Visitors to Kangaroo Island seek natural wildlife encounters with 78% of the sample listing *seeing wildlife in their natural environment* as one of three most important features sought in a wildlife encounter.
- Seals, koalas, and kangaroos were the three most common animals that visitors were hoping to see on the Island. The three animals most commonly seen by respondents were kangaroos, seals, and wallabies, while the most memorable wildlife encounters were with sea lions and seals.
- Visitors gave their overall trip to Kangaroo Island an average score of 8.86 out of 10. Satisfaction was also high for wildlife experiences with an average of 8.74 out of 10.
- Just under three-quarters of the sample listed at least one new fact that they learnt about the most memorable animal they encountered.

Who participated in the survey?

The majority of the sample were Australian visitors (68%) and were predominantly from South Australia (Figure 1). International visitors were mainly from UK/Ireland (9%) and other European countries (10%) (Figure 2). The sample consisted of 57% females and 43% males. The respondents' age ranged from 18 to 84 years with a mean age of 44 years (Table 1).

The majority of the respondents were travelling with a spouse/partner (40%), 23% were travelling with family, 15% were travelling with friends, and 10% were travelling with children (mainly under 12 years) (Table 1). Over half the sample (61%) had never been to see the penguins on Kangaroo Island. Just under a quarter of the sample (23%) were travelling with a tour group.

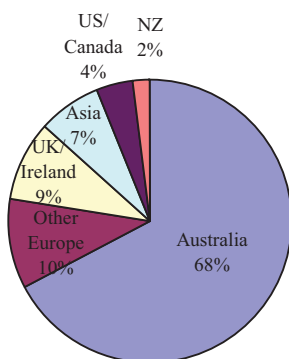


Figure 1: Australian visitor origins

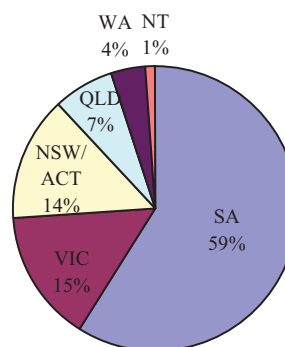


Figure 2: Overall origin of visitors

Table 1: Sample characteristics

Visitor Information	Percent of sample
Age group	
<21 years	3
21 - 30 years	27
31 - 40 years	18
41 - 50 years	16
51 - 60 years	16
> 60 years	20
Travel party	
Spouse/partner	40
Family only	23
Friends only	15
Family and friends	11
Alone	10
Other	3

Interest and participation in wildlife based tourism (WBT)

General interest in WBT

Visitors were asked about their interest in viewing wildlife while on holidays in general. The majority of visitors stated that the opportunity to see wildlife was either included in their travel decisions (54%) or was one of the most important factors in their travel decisions (24%) (Table 2). The importance of wildlife to Kangaroo Island visitors was compared to the importance given to wildlife by 2456 respondents in the WBT database. Table 2 shows that Kangaroo Island visitors gave higher importance to the opportunity to see wildlife while on holidays than visitors from other WBT settings.

Table 2: The importance of wildlife opportunities in holiday destination choice

Level of Importance	% of Sample	
	WBT Database (n=2456)	Kangaroo Island (n=262)
The opportunity to view wildlife is one of the most important factors in my travel decisions	19	24
The opportunity to view wildlife is included as part of my travel decisions	48	54
Viewing wildlife is not included as part of my travel decisions, but I enjoy seeing wildlife while on holidays	31	21
I prefer to avoid wildlife while I'm on holidays / I am not interested in viewing wildlife while I'm on holiday	3	<1

Frequency of participation in WBT

Table 3 shows that there are high levels of participation in visits to WBT sites that can be visited independently. Overall, 91% of the visitors had been at least once to at least one type of place in the last 12 months. Sixteen percent had been to at least one place more than five times in the previous 12 months.

Table 3: Number of visits in the last 12 months to different wildlife viewing settings

Number of Visits To/With	None	1	2-5	6-10	>10
Captive setting	22%	41%	33%	3%	<1%
Commercial wildlife viewing tour	63%	27%	9%	<1%	-
Independent visit to a site specifically to see wildlife	36%	26%	30%	6%	1%
Independent visit to a place wildlife is often seen	22%	28%	36%	8%	7%

Importance of Setting Features

The most important features sought in a wildlife encounter were seeing wildlife in their natural environment, seeing wildlife behaving naturally, and an untouched natural environment (Table 4).

Table 4: Important features of wildlife experiences

Feature	% of Sample listing as 1 of 3 most important features
Seeing wildlife in their natural environment	78
Seeing wildlife behaving naturally	42
An untouched natural environment	32
Being able to get close to wildlife	29
Large variety of wildlife	27
Availability of knowledgeable guides	18
Seeing rare, unique or unusual wildlife	18
Interesting information about wildlife	15
Being able to touch/handle wildlife	10
Large number of wildlife	9
A pleasant environment	7
Wildlife are easy to see	7
Feeling safe	6

Visitor experiences at Kangaroo Island

What do Visitors look for in a Visit to Kangaroo Island?

The most important reasons for visiting Kangaroo Island were *a chance to see wildlife I don't normally see* and *getting close to nature*. Additionally, visitors were looking for an experience that gives them the opportunity to escape the pressures of daily life and a chance to experience wilderness (Table 5).

Table 5: Reasons for this Visit to Kangaroo Island

Factors	% giving very important rating	Mean*
A chance to see wildlife I don't normally see	55	4.26
Getting close to nature	45	4.15
An opportunity to escape the pressures of daily life	44	3.87
A chance to experience wilderness	36	3.91
An opportunity to spend time with family &/or friends	34	3.29
An opportunity to learn about wildlife	29	3.78
Seeing famous scenic landmarks	22	3.51
A chance to visit an historic area	16	3.19
Seeing a major tourist attraction	14	2.80

*Respondents were asked to rate each factor on a five-point scale (1 =Not at all important, 5=Very important)

Visits to Places Where Wildlife Can Be Seen

Respondents were asked to indicate which of seven places they visited to see Kangaroo Island's wildlife. As shown in Table 6, most visitors went to Seal Bay and Admirals Arch.

Table 6: Places visited on Kangaroo Island

Places*	% of Sample
Seal Bay (Sealions)	88
Admiral's Arch (fur seals)	85
Penneshaw Penguin Centre	41
Platypus viewing area (Flinders Chase NP)	38
Penneshaw Penguin colony tour	37
Discovering Penguins tour (Kingscote)	37
Murray lagoon (Bird watching)	23

* Multiple responses allowed

What animals did visitors hope to see and what did they actually see?

The five most common wildlife visitors were hoping to see on this trip were:

- Seals (35%)
- Koalas (30%)
- Kangaroos (25%)
- Penguins (23%)
- Sea lions (19%)

The wildlife most commonly seen by respondents were:

- Kangaroos (70%)
- Seals (57%)
- Wallabies (57%)
- Koalas (45%)
- Sea lions (43%)
- Penguin (37%)
- Echidna (22%)
- Birds (19%)
- Possum (18%)
- Cape Barron Geese (10%)

How did visitors perceive their most memorable wildlife encounters?

The survey asked visitors to name the animal they thought was the most memorable. The most memorable encounters were with:

- Sea lions (26%)
- Seals (21%)
- Kangaroos (12%)
- Penguins (11%)
- Echidnas (8%)
- Koalas (8%)

Less than half the visitors (41%) said this was the first time seeing the animal in the wild. Many visitors (51%) got within 5m of the animal/s in their most memorable encounter. The majority of encounters occurred with less than five other people present (44%), while 6-10 other people were present in 27% of the encounters.

Words used to describe the most memorable wildlife included:

Cute	Fascinating
Beautiful	Playful
Interesting	Lazy
Friendly	Natural
Sleepy	Big

The most memorable wildlife encounters were not particularly unexpected, but were considered to be highly natural and exciting (Table 7).

Table 7: Aspects of most memorable wildlife encounter

Aspect	% giving 'Very' rating	Mean*
How natural was the encounter?	47	7.96
How exciting was the encounter?	43	8.09
How unexpected was the encounter?	17	4.87

*Respondents were asked to rate each factor on a ten-point scale (0 =Not at all, 10=Very)

What did visitors learn about wildlife at Kangaroo Island?

Visitors reported that they learnt a large amount about wildlife on this trip to Kangaroo Island with a mean rating of 7.05 out of 10 (on a scale of 0=nothing at all to 10=a great deal).

Of the 190 visitors who listed something they learnt about their most memorable animal:

- 53 described various facts about sea lions, including 21 comments about feeding habits
- 40 listed things they had learnt about seals, including 16 comments relating to breeding
- 20 recounted various facts about the appearance/behaviour of penguins
- 18 described things they had learnt about the appearance/behaviour of kangaroos
- 15 listed facts about the appearance/behaviour of koalas

Satisfaction with this trip to Kangaroo Island

Visitors reported high levels of satisfaction with their trip to Kangaroo Island with 85% giving their visit a score of 8 or higher out of 10 (mean of 8.86). Satisfaction with wildlife experiences in the region was also high at an average of 8.74 out of 10. Table 8 shows that satisfaction scores for the places visited on Kangaroo Island were the highest for Admiral's Arch and Seal Bay.

Table 8: Satisfaction with places visited on Kangaroo Island

Place	% giving very important rating	Mean*
Admiral's Arch (fur seals)	74	4.67
Seal Bay (Sealions)	74	4.60
Penneshaw Penguin Centre	57	4.19
Penneshaw Penguin colony tour	56	4.21
Discovering Penguins tour (Kingscote)	54	4.00
Platypus viewing area (Flinders Chase NP)	27	3.51
Murray lagoon (Bird watching)	10	3.10

*Respondents were asked to rate each factor on a five-point scale (1 =Not at all satisfied, 5=Very satisfied)

Over half the respondents (54%) said they would definitely like to visit the region again and 26% said they would visit the Island again if they returned to the region. Most visitors (89%) would definitely recommend a visit to Kangaroo Island to their friends and family.

Of the 169 visitors who made a suggestion for improving the wildlife experiences available on Kangaroo Island:

- 20 suggested reduced speed limits and speed bumps to reduce road kill
- 18 said to limit development and keep the Island untouched/natural
- 14 wanted road kill removed/cleaned up
- 12 wanted more information about the wildlife and the Island