

CENTRAL OTAGO VISITOR MARKET SEGMENTATION

DECEMBER 2017



Background

Central Otago is looking to adopt a product-led approach to the marketing of the region - in which visitors are targeted based on their affinity with the region's values and the experiences on offer - rather than a purely market-led approach, in which products are developed in response to the needs of specific market segments and the region positioned to appeal to these groups. In reality of course, once 'best fit' visitors have been identified for Central Otago, there may be further development of infrastructure and visitor products/services needed to ensure that the region fully meets the needs of its target visitors and that it maximises the value captured within the region.

This product-led approach puts the community's values and aspirations at the heart of tourism development in the region, while also recognising the opportunities already available to Central Otago by virtue of its proximity to neighbouring Dunedin, Wanaka and Queenstown in particular.

In a stocktake completed by Angus & Associates for the Strategic Review, it was estimated that Central Otago received approximately 35,000 overnight international visitors in 2016. This was just a fraction of the overnight international visitors received by Queenstown (more than 1.1 million), Wanaka (more than half a million) and Dunedin (almost half a million). The number of domestic overnight visitors to these regions is unknown but likely to be significantly higher than Central Otago's 337,500 (estimated) in 2016.

The volume of visitors to neighbouring regions represents a significant opportunity for "cherry picking" by Central Otago: i.e. for the region to target an existing pool of visitors to the lower South and focus on attracting those who a) value what Central Otago values, and b) are willing to pay a premium for quality, authentic, experiences of the type on offer: Cycling, Food and wine, Arts, Heritage, Landscapes and enjoyment of natural environments (through walking, scenic tours, photography, night sky, camping and other experiences), Sport (motorsports, hunting, fishing), and Events that connect people with, and showcase, all of the previous experiences.

Research Approach

Visitor Segmentation is the process of dividing visitors into groups based on similar characteristics and/or needs. These segments help Regional Tourism Organisations and operators within a region to differentiate between different types of visitors and what their specific needs are. Visitor Personas are semi-fictional characters representing a visitor segment that shares similar values and behaviours. Personas add an emotional and behavioural layer to the segments, to help stakeholders better understand motivations and to provide guidance on how to reach each segment and what will resonate with them.

After working with Tourism Central Otago and operators within the region to refine the definition of target visitor segments for Central Otago, Angus & Associates conducted a series of interviews with New Zealanders and international visitors to New Zealand who matched the characteristics of the region's target visitor segments. Participants were recruited and assigned to a segment through a screening questionnaire with a series of behavioural and motivational questions. Interviews with n=12 New Zealand residents took place in July/August 2017 across three regions (Auckland, Wellington, and Queenstown), while n=5 interviews with international visitors took place in early December 2017 in Central Otago.

The following is a set of Visitor Personas around which to base the marketing for Central Otago. These personas will provide insight and alignment for the region and guidance on where to focus marketing efforts. Each persona is a composite profile of characteristics, needs, motivations and environment, built from interviews with people in each target visitor segment.

OVERVIEW

When not busy working, Angela prioritises finding time to relax and unwind. Getting away for a holiday or short break gives her a chance to escape from the routine and pressures of her busy everyday life to recharge and return home feeling refreshed.

LIFESTYLE

Angela is in her late 30's and lives in the city with her partner. She leads a busy life managing her own business, with several employees reporting to her, and often works 50-hour weeks with only one day off work in the weekends.

Angela has become more focused on her own health and wellbeing over the past few years and has made it a priority to take more time out for herself these days. While Angela enjoys her job, she has been looking for ways to reduce her working hours and stress levels, looking to find a better 'work-life balance'.

In her limited down-time, she tries to keep her calendar clear so she can relax at home – knitting, baking and watching movies. Her ideal Sunday starts slowly with a cup of coffee and a read through the newspaper in the sun, followed by a leisurely walk and an afternoon spent catching up with friends.

TRAVEL

Angela does not get away for holidays or short breaks as often as she would like to – her annual 'long' holiday takes considerable planning with regards to managing business operations. When she does have the opportunity to get away she prefers to leave the city to visit quieter, more sparsely populated, destinations and detach from the everyday to relax and unwind with 'no agenda'.

She sometimes travels with friends or alone to visit and stay with other friends but does prefer to travel with her partner. She searches for accommodation, generally motels, online but will on occasions call operators. Angela prefers more casual dining when on holiday – such as an outdoor café, rather than a fine dining restaurant.

ANGELA

ESCAPE & RELAX

“We might stay in a city for a day but for me it’s about nature... we’ve got enough people around us normally... out in nature you really have your own little world”

TOP DRIVERS:

- **Detach from everyday stress and pressure to unwind in a new environment**
- **Take time out to relax alone or spend quality time with partner**
- **Recharge – getting away is part of a good work/life balance**
- **Connect with the outdoors/nature**

OVERVIEW

Spending quality time with her husband, family and friends is a priority for Helen. She enjoys getting away with groups of friends, with her older children or just with her husband, and participating in activities that they can all do and enjoy together.

LIFESTYLE

Helen is in her early 60s, lives with her husband Mike and works part-time in an administrative role. She has older children who have left home to work in different cities. Her eldest daughter lives in the UK with her 8-month old grandson. They keep in touch regularly through Facebook Messenger and phone calls through WhatsApp.

Helen has become fairly active recently and enjoys hiking and biking in the weekends. She finds time to try new things and is now starting golf lessons after some encouragement from her husband. Helen is keen to make the most of her physical health, spending as much quality time as possible with her husband, family and friends, doing the activities they love while their health still allows it.

TRAVEL

Helen and Mike enjoy getting away. They drive rather than fly, sometimes visiting friends/family, other times to enjoy a weekend cycling together and on occasions taking the campervan. Often travel will be through the scenic route, stopping at small towns for a coffee or to check out a local craft market or museum.

Once or twice a year Helen travels with a group of friends, and often this trip revolves around an activity like hiking/biking. Last year they cycled the West Coast trail after seeing a travel package deal online.

When planning international holidays or to unfamiliar destinations, Helen prefers to use a travel agent. She is happy to pay a little extra to have “peace of mind” and not go through the hassle of online research, leaving it to the experts. She chooses down-to-earth coffee shops/cafes with friendly local service to eat at (or enjoys picnic food), rather than fine dining restaurants.

HELEN

BONDING

“I did the Otago Rail Trail with friends three years ago. One dinner out together with all of us and we said ‘we can all ride bikes, let's go!’. That was many months of planning because of people's holidays and things like that, but that's a memory you never forget. It was just great!”

TOP DRIVERS:

- Spend quality time with family and friends
- Bond over challenging but safe activities that everyone can enjoy – collective achievement
- Make the most of life, by taking advantage of opportunities to participate in new experiences

RYAN

EXPLORE & DISCOVER

“That feeling that you’ve gone somewhere where potentially only a handful of other people have been is a massive drawcard for someone like me”

TOP DRIVERS:

- Discover unique destinations and new experiences
- Connect with local people for an authentic experience
- Connect with nature/outdoors
- Spontaneity/flexibility (‘go with the flow’)

OVERVIEW

Ryan enjoys travelling to unique destinations, exploring and discovering different places and unfamiliar experiences. He appreciates authenticity and seeks a genuine experience. He enjoys coming back from his travels with new knowledge or skills.

LIFESTYLE

Ryan is in his mid-30’s, single, and working in the tourism industry. He lives a full and active life - enjoying mountain biking, hiking, and snowboarding in his evenings and weekends. He would often go out for drives with no agenda, keeping an eye out for things of interest to him.

Having a good time with his friends, keeping fit, and saving/reducing debt are important to Ryan. After finishing university he spent several years travelling overseas ‘chasing the snow’, returning home just over a year ago. He enjoys learning new skills and has recently completed his commercial boating license and scuba diving ticket. Ryan is also interested in improving his photography skills.

TRAVEL

Ryan enjoys getting away for active weekends and short breaks – these usually revolve around mountain biking or hiking, rather than organised activities. He doesn’t tend to take longer trips due to work commitments. He travels with friends, although is equally happy travelling alone. Trips are fairly spontaneous and any bookings are made at the last minute.

Ryan is attracted to destinations that are different and off-the-beaten track. He prefers remote natural environments, rather than ones that have been ‘tracked out’ by visitors before him. He doesn’t mind having to ‘work’ for an experience or to fully appreciate the environment – for example, on a recent trip he got up at 3am to hike up a mountain to catch the sunrise and always catching moments on camera.

Ryan is conscious of costs while travelling and often sleeps in the back of a van or ute to save money on accommodation costs. When booking commercial accommodation, Ryan looks for somewhere basic and affordable - a bed, shower and somewhere to make a cup of tea.

OVERVIEW

Monica is an affluent traveller, looking to visit the more unique places that people talk about and to treat herself by participating in exclusive experiences that not everyone gets to enjoy while travelling.

LIFESTYLE

Monica is in her mid 50's and lives close to the city with her husband David and two children. She works as a national sales manager for a large organisation, a role requiring frequent travel around the country. Monica enjoys her job and is well compensated - providing her with the means to indulge and enjoy herself. The children have nearly finished college and Monica is looking forward to having more time for herself and with her husband.

Monica enjoys a Friday evening glass of wine and meal out with her husband at a local restaurant. Weekends are a time to unwind – walking/jogging, going to the gym, watching the kids play sports, entertaining friends and dining out. Monica volunteers her time to work with troubled youth as a way of giving back to the community.

TRAVEL

While Monica loves her metropolitan lifestyle, frequent weekend getaways allow her to escape the hustle and bustle of the city to switch off and relax. Monica and David like to get away every other weekend, sometimes travelling with other couples, but for the most part just the two of them. They leave after work on a Friday and return again on the Sunday evening - short getaways are easier to fit into their busy calendars than longer breaks and require minimal planning.

While Monica and David do have a few favourite destinations that they return to, more unique experiences (e.g. a recent luxury farmstay with a guided 4wd tour) also appeal to Monica. Travel plans and hotels are booked online 2-3 weeks in advance. Monica likes to indulge and treat herself on these weekends and while they don't tend to have an agenda, unless attending a concert or rugby test match, they do seek out experiences in quieter restaurants or wineries. Monica and David enjoy the social element of travelling, taking the opportunity to interact with locals and other guests.

MONICA

PRESTIGE & STATUS

“What we love is places like Oliver's, you have these beautiful stone walls and these quaint little houses... you tend to find when you come to little places like this the people are a lot more friendly... people aren't run off their feet”

TOP DRIVERS:

- Indulge in a bit of luxury and comfort
- Interact with other guests and locals
- Discover unique and authentic experiences

OVERVIEW

For Nick, holidays are a chance to get outside, get active and make the most of the natural environment. He enjoys pushing his personal limits and challenging himself through physical activity.

LIFESTYLE

Nick is in his early 60s and lives at home with his wife. He is now semi-retired, offering him the work/life balance he wants, with flexibility to change his schedule or take time off to get away. It's not a stressful role and doesn't consume him, so Nick goes into the weekends feeling rested and ready to get out and about. Nick leads a social and active life and enjoys being in the outdoors - cycling, fishing or skiing. Keeping himself physically active and healthy is a priority for him.

Nick enjoys off-road cycle touring and a few years ago cycled from Auckland to Reefton with his partner. He is now planning to build on this and complete the Tour Aotearoa cycle from Cape Reinga to Bluff. Nick has been training for this challenging event with a local cycling club and through an interactive cycling programme where he can connect and compete with others through Facebook. He is a regular contributor to online cycling forums.

TRAVEL

Nick enjoys getting away for holidays and short breaks, travelling both domestically and overseas. He prefers travelling with his partner or friends. While some getaways revolve around physical recreational activities and events, Nick also enjoys more relaxing weekends – where an ideal day might be a light bike ride in the morning, followed by a few hours relaxing in the sun with a book.

Nick frequently visits his family bach which is only a few hours' drive away from his house, but he also makes an effort to explore and get off-the-beaten track, travelling to places he hasn't been before to experience new things. He enjoys cooking for himself, but while travelling does enjoy a meal with a drink at the local pub after a day's ride.

NICK

PERSONAL CHALLENGE & ACHIEVEMENT

“I’ve done quite a few endurance events like Iron Man. I do like a bit of a challenge. This Tour Aotearoa will be challenging but rewarding – to say I’ve cycled 3000km from the top of the country to the bottom. Something about working the body is rewarding... the challenge I suppose.”

TOP DRIVERS:

- Outdoor experiences that provide a challenge
- Tick something off the bucket list - a sense of achievement
- Relax and unwind – experiencing the local area

SEGMENT OVERVIEW	WHO ARE THEY?	WHERE ARE THEY FROM?	TOP TRAVEL DRIVERS	MEDIA/TRAVEL PLANNING	MARKETING PROPOSITION & OPPORTUNITIES
<p>ESCAPE & RELAX</p> <p>Busy visitors from structured environments, looking to escape from the routine and pressures of everyday life and relax.</p>	<p>30-60 years</p> <p>Travel alone or as a couple</p> <p>Busy, structured, time-poor people with stable job/career (i.e. corporate, self-employed)</p> <p>Have wherewithal to escape</p> <p>Appreciate quiet/nature</p> <p>Prioritise improving work/life balance and finding time for self/partner</p>	<p>Domestic – Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, Queenstown</p> <p>Australia – Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, WA, ACT</p> <p>Other Internationals - Large European or North American cities</p>	<p>Detach from everyday stress and pressure to unwind in a new environment</p> <p>Take time out to relax alone or spend quality time with partner</p> <p>Recharge – getting away is part of a good work/life balance</p> <p>Connect with the outdoors/nature</p>	<p>Friends/family are highly influential</p> <p>Social media (Instagram & Facebook) inspire holiday ideas</p> <p>Stay in touch with friends through Facebook Messenger and txt/calling</p> <p>Enjoy movies (both home & cinema)</p> <p>Holidays are planned and booked well in advance – through internet search and direct bookings with operators</p> <p>Limited media exposure when travelling - try to detach when away</p>	<p><i>‘Time to relax and re-charge’</i></p> <p>Nature based experiences</p> <p>Promote the small town experience - to get away from the ‘hustle and bustle’</p>
<p>BONDING</p> <p>Visitors looking to spend time and share experiences with family, friends, or a partner.</p>	<p>Couples, groups of friends, or family groups (older children)</p> <p>Spending quality time with family and friends</p> <p>Enjoy activities/experiences</p> <p>Like to make the most of physical health</p>	<p>Domestic</p> <p>Australia</p> <p>Opportunity to broaden</p>	<p>Spend quality time with family and friends</p> <p>Bond over challenging but safe activities that everyone can enjoy – collective achievement</p> <p>Make the most of life, by taking advantage of opportunities to participate in new experiences</p>	<p>Friends/family are highly influential</p> <p>Group chats on WhatsApp, Viber & Facebook Messenger</p> <p>Close group of friends & family on Facebook – often post updates while travelling</p> <p>Browse for deals on daily deal sites such as GrabOne, Groupon, TreatMe</p>	<p><i>‘Spend quality time with family and friends’</i></p> <p>Development of activities that offer broad appeal and can be done by people of all ages and ability e.g. river/lake cruise</p> <p>May be element of nostalgia/family tradition in choosing Central Otago</p>
<p>EXPLORING & DISCOVER</p> <p>Visitors looking to explore and experience the unfamiliar and leave with new skills or knowledge.</p>	<p>Inquisitive, educated, enjoy learning, creative, sociable</p> <p>Wide age range</p> <p>Get pleasure from accomplishment (learning is its own reward)</p> <p>Like sharing knowledge and being recognised for their knowledge - makes them interesting (social capital)</p>	<p>Strongly domestic</p> <p>And special interest international/niches</p>	<p>Discover unique destinations and new experiences</p> <p>Connect with local people for an authentic experience</p> <p>Connect with nature/outdoors</p> <p>Spontaneity/flexibility (‘go with the flow’)</p>	<p>Moderate/high internet usage – often browsing on Facebook and online</p> <p>Information available at the destination or en route (e.g. brochures from i-SITES) is important - often short lead in times</p> <p>Word of mouth (through other visitors, locals and operators) prior to travel as well as while travelling is influential - enjoy talking and listening to others about experiences</p>	<p><i>‘Discover unique Central Otago’</i></p> <p>Highlight unique offerings (e.g. curling, ice luge)</p> <p>Emphasise history and old townships - possibly a touring route</p>

SEGMENT OVERVIEW	WHO ARE THEY?	WHERE ARE THEY FROM?	TOP TRAVEL DRIVERS	MEDIA/TRAVEL PLANNING	MARKETING PROPOSITION & OPPORTUNITIES
<p>PRESTIGE/STATUS</p> <p>Affluent visitors looking to visit unique places and reward themselves by participating in exclusive experiences.</p>	<p>40-65 years</p> <p>Affluent (or able to prioritise travel)</p> <p>Educated professionals</p> <p>Trend-setters (not just keeping up), brand-conscious (Think they) have a lifestyle that others aspire to</p> <p>Spending quality time with family and friends</p>	<p>Domestic – Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, Tauranga, Queenstown, Wanaka, Hawkes Bay, Nelson</p> <p>NZ based Chinese</p> <p>Canada & US – well travelled</p> <p>Large European cities</p> <p>Australia</p>	<p>Indulge in a bit of luxury and comfort</p> <p>Interact with other guests and locals</p> <p>Discover unique and authentic experiences</p>	<p>Social media - post updates on Facebook to stay connected with friends & family</p> <p>Frequent catch ups with friends in person or by phone (major influencer in deciding where to travel)</p> <p>Regular smart phone and laptop users - pop up news feeds</p> <p>Enjoy reading books (and magazines/newspapers)</p> <p>Enjoy going to the movies or theatre</p> <p>Book travel in advance and will often use travel agents – convenience and confidence (that they have knowledge of the area)</p>	<p><i>‘Indulge yourself’</i></p> <p>Wine tourism</p> <p>Events - Food & wine festivals</p> <p>Luxury stay experiences</p> <p>Immerse in local experiences</p> <p>Build personal relationships – to influence future travel</p>
<p>PERSONAL CHALLENGE & ACHIEVEMENT</p> <p>Visitors looking to push their own personal limits and challenge themselves through physical activity.</p>	<p>Baby boomers & younger generation</p> <p>Heavily involved in outdoor active recreation (e.g. hiking, mountain biking/cycling, snow-based activities, hunting & fishing)</p> <p>Enjoy finding new challenges</p> <p>Work/life balance is important</p>	<p>Mostly domestic and Australian</p> <p>Wider opportunity with targeted events</p>	<p>Outdoor experiences that provide a challenge</p> <p>Tick something off the bucket list - a sense of achievement</p> <p>Relax and unwind – experiencing the local area</p>	<p>Online forums, blogs, clubs, Facebook groups - specific to area of interest e.g. cycling</p> <p>Limited social media use</p> <p>Group chats on WhatsApp, Viber & Facebook Messenger</p> <p>Enjoys reading (e-reader)</p> <p>Watches TV at night to unwind and turn off the brain</p> <p>Holiday planning often is a long process - having to factor in hiring or bringing equipment etc.</p> <p>Don't mind sometimes paying more for operators who offer packages to make life easier</p>	<p><i>‘Challenge yourself’</i></p> <p>Events that embrace and complement what Central Otago is most well-known for (Rail Trail, wine, natural landscape)</p>

SPECIAL OCCASIONS

“People get so caught up in the whole Queenstown/Wanaka experience that they don’t actually realise there are other places. I think it would be awesome to have some venues in Central that could be used instead. Even if it was just a really beautiful venue and then you had glamping tents... that would be unreal! I think there’s massive potential - it’s just educating people and letting people know about it.”

- Wedding Planner (Queenstown)

CENTRAL OTAGO AS A DESTINATION FOR SPECIAL OCCASIONS



Special occasions may include weddings, anniversaries, birthdays, reunions, or any other large-scale celebration.

Central Otago may appeal to different people as a special event destination for different reasons – e.g. stable weather/climate, scenery/landscapes, an element of prestige/status, or nostalgia

CONSIDERATIONS & OPPORTUNITIES



VENUE



ACCOMMODATION



SUPPLIERS

- The three most important factors when choosing a destination for a special occasion are the venue (i.e. view/environment, size of space, décor and flexibility with decorating), accommodation (availability, suitability, and accessibility), and availability of quality suppliers either in the region or nearby (for a wedding this would include a celebrant, photographer, stylists, catering, flowers etc.).

UNIQUE:

- People appear to be increasingly price-conscious when organising events and are also wanting to do things a bit differently. Festival-style events (where guests camp onsite) are becoming increasingly popular.

MARKETING:

- Having a social media presence is now critical for an events venue. Having photos and videos illustrate the different ways that a venue can be used is key. Inviting influential bloggers to come and see the venue, meet the suppliers and letting them take and post their own photos is one of the fastest ways to gain momentum.

“The way things are moving now, it’s all social. You need to have a test-run and photo shoot to show what a venue is capable of. Once people see an idea and it gets blogged or it’s all over Facebook they go crazy because they want that idea. Once it’s blogged, it’s done.”

HENS/STAGS PARTIES:

- For destination weddings, the couple often have a stag/hens event a day or two ahead of the wedding and including these in a wedding package can be very attractive to organisers. Central Otago could be an ideal environment for these events – e.g. girls could go to a winery for a nice lunch followed by spa treatments, while the guys go 4WD-ing, shooting or to visit Highlands Motorsport Park.

CONFERENCE & INCENTIVE

“For conference & incentives, we’re competing against the rest of the world. We all need to band together and work as a group to sell the South Island.”

- C&I Organiser

CENTRAL OTAGO AS A DESTINATION FOR CONFERENCE & INCENTIVE



The barriers for Central Otago as a destination for conference & incentives are primarily the lack of suitable group accommodation and the time constraints for daytrips, based on the additional travel distance from Queenstown.

There are plenty of opportunities for experiences to include in a conference or incentive travel package (e.g. Highlands, cherry-picking, snowmobiling, curling, Old Cromwell Town, restaurants) but the distance and time to travel between them is limiting for a large group on a tight schedule.

“You need more than just one thing. You need to have a whole hub of different options for people.”

- C&I Organiser

CONSIDERATIONS & OPPORTUNITIES

COLLABORATION

- With international airfares becoming increasingly affordable, C&I organisers are competing not just against other New Zealand locations but against the rest of the world. Central Otago needs to work together with both C&I organisers and neighbouring RTOs to sell the wider region.

TRAVEL ITINERARIES

- While there are limited opportunities to hold large-scale conferences in Central Otago, there are plenty of opportunities to work with C&I organisers to get Central Otago on delegate itineraries for personal travel pre/post conferences in Queenstown or Dunedin. Example - for a large upcoming conference in Dunedin, C&I organisers posted a sample itinerary of a two-day drive from Queenstown through Central Otago on the conference website.

BRAGGING RIGHTS

- Corporates on incentive travel programmes need an experience that is beyond what they could do themselves, so they can go home with ‘bragging rights’. Consider what can be offered that’s different and how experiences can be packaged together to give something extra. Example - It’s not enough to say ‘I visited Old Cromwell Town’, but if corporates could say ‘I visited Old Cromwell Town and then went on a behind-the-scenes guided tour of the Clyde Dam’ that would take it beyond what every other traveller can do.

GENUINE/AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCES

- Visitors want a genuine/authentic experience, not a sanitised ‘show’. Work an experience around what is actually happening in the region. Example - ‘A day in the country’ where the rural community work together to showcase whatever is happening at local farms/orchards that day and visitors can travel between them for an authentic rural experience.

What is Central Otago?

There appears to be considerable confusion around what areas are included in Central Otago, with a misconception that the Queenstown-Lakes district is part of Central Otago.

“Central Otago is the likes of Queenstown, Wanaka, wines...”

Top-of-Mind Perceptions

Once the region has been clarified, the first things that come to mind when New Zealanders and international visitors think of Central Otago are the Rail Trail, the wineries (especially Pinot Noir), the fruit orchards, the small townships and the dry rocky tussock landscape, which is unique to the region.

“I think of Central Otago in the summer and all the nice fruit, the beautiful colours of the trees. Beautiful part of the South Island”

“It’s not a green and luscious land, if people don’t get dry landscape, with tussocks and the colour of that, they’re probably not going to get Central Otago... but you go through and you think, wow this is New Zealand”

When prompted, other experiences and activities associated with the Central Otago include the Clyde hydro-dam, mountain biking, curling, and gold panning.



Compared to other regions in New Zealand and around the world, Central Otago is seen to have a genuine small-town feel and a slower pace of life, with friendly locals. The small towns were described as having “stood still” on multiple occasions.

“It’s very quaint, it’s so unlike any other place in the country, it’s almost as if time has stood still, that real old world environment, people aren’t all hustle and bustle and rushed, it’s real family values, there’s no media, or social media, it’s just natural and lovely, just be a bit disconnected from modern day society perhaps, people are just a little slower paced and have a genuine way about them... not just rush, rush, rush, they have time for you, talk to people on the street, welcoming... feel like they’ve maintained the integrity of the town, rather than try and modernise with busy cities”

“We’re so cultured here now and we’re very different in Auckland. You go down there and it’s like you’ve gone back years. It’s not a bad thing. I think it’s good.”

Although in the Winter months this quiet atmosphere can work against the region –

“Lots of even the coffee shops were closed from when we’d been through in the Summer. We didn’t know whether they’d actually closed for good, or just closed for the Winter. They need to have the look I think that they’re still open. You know how things get quite dirty looking. It brings the tone of the town down when there are too many closed buildings.”

Central Otago and surrounding regions have a few things in common – namely wineries and the landscape. Central Otago contrasts the hustle and bustle of neighbouring Queenstown and Wanaka regions, providing a relaxing escape and a more authentic experience.

“A lot of people come to the surrounding areas because of the adrenaline activities and those sorts of things that are around. They’re spoon-fed entertainment and don’t have to do anything or organise anything themselves. Instant gratification”

“If you’re just there for your Instagram go to Queenstown and Wanaka but if you’re not just there for your tick-it-off-your-list and you actually want to see some authentic Otago, South Island landscape, architecture, history, then Central Otago is where you want to go”

The friendly locals of Central Otago came to mind for many, highlighting both the staff that just had that bit extra time for you and the locals who stop and chat.

“The people have been more accommodating than any other holiday we’ve had... people go out of their way”

Considerations & Opportunities for Central Otago

Central Otago's appeal is in its authenticity. The importance of offering a genuine experience, one where visitors feel they're not just one of thousands of tourists and that the people (locals and staff) have the time to stop and chat to you, where operators "see them as more than money". Not losing sight of Central Otago's natural environment and heritage was also reinforced.

1. Learning & Experiencing

When asked about the types of experiences not currently offered that the Central Otago region could lend itself to, the idea of learning new skills and experiencing the unfamiliar was a key theme.

Several suggested that an opportunity for camping or glamping in the Central Otago environment would be appealing. This could range from guided backcountry camping with cooking on campfires, to a full glamping experience with tents/yrts already set-up and meals provided. An important consideration would be to ensure that campsites were rotated to feel remote rather than tracked out.

"I'm not the sort of person to go tramping and have a pack on my back. I've never been like that, but I could go glamping. That would actually be really nice for me. That's where I'd be at. I think there's a lot of people out there that just they don't want to put the big boots on and tramp, they just want to be partly into nature and enjoy it and have a nice glass of wine at the end of it and a nice barbecue in the camp."

Other suggestions included combining a 4wd tour with a camping experience, or providing specialised photography, teaching people to make the most of their own camera and equipment, or astrophotography lessons in the natural Central Otago environment.

Similarly, the opportunity to see or experience day-to-day rural New Zealand life would be appealing – this could range from farm experiences (e.g. sheep shearing) to expanding and promoting the current offerings of picking-your-own fruit from orchards.

"In Cromwell, they've got the self-pick cherries in season and the number of cars that stop there is phenomenal because people don't have the opportunities to do that sort of thing a lot of the time. It's a bit like, when you see kids in schools from other countries and the city and you might ask them where milk comes from and they say, 'Oh, the supermarket...'"

A tour around the Clyde hydro-dam would also have broad market appeal.

2. Group Experiences

The Otago Rail Trail is a popular experience which attracts groups of visitors to the Central Otago region. While feedback on the cycling experience itself is largely positive, some felt that the overall experience in the region could have been improved by a wider range of dining options and activities available at the end of each day riding. Hot pools were one popular suggestion for an activity that would appeal after a day riding the trail and a river cruise was another idea floated.

“It would have been nice to go out somewhere at night. They could say ‘Hey listen, we’re doing a tour of such and such and we’re going to take you out somewhere that includes a restaurant’. You could be out for 4-5 hours. You don’t have to be up until gam to go on the trail.”

Casual, down-to-earth restaurants with good food and wine would appeal to a group. Alternatively promoting suitable group accommodation (e.g. holiday houses or lodges with private rooms) where meals could be prepared would also appeal to groups.

Opportunities also exist to target less active group members - some visitors are not willing or able to cycle the trail, but still enjoy participating in less physical activities during the day and socialising with the rest of the group in the evenings.

“There were eight in our group but two couldn't bike ride, so they decided that they would drive the van and organise our bags and our lunches because they still wanted to be in contact with us. So we sort of picked a spot for lunch and they joined us. Otherwise, they would do whatever they wanted to do throughout the course of the day without us.”

3. Hiking & Mountain Biking

Hiking and mountain biking are popular ways of exploring new areas and the Central Otago region has plenty of opportunities for both. Well-marked trails and tracks with clear information about distance and intensity would encourage people to give it a go. Other than general word-of-mouth, visitors would most likely use internet searches and the Trailforks app (mountain biking) to discover new tracks and trails.

4. Events & Festivals

Many visitors are drawn into the region because of the Rail Trail, wine/food and the natural landscape. Events and festivals that complement and showcase these assets will appeal to many and draw visitors who had not considered travelling to the region previously. Events and festivals would also act as a prompt for those who have considered visiting Central Otago.

