

Article

Post-Pandemic Recovery: A Case of Domestic Tourism in Akaroa (South Island, New Zealand)

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Abstract: The current pandemic (Covid-19) disrupted businesses and challenged societies all over the world. In particular, destinations are being urged to keep the attraction and value of their products and services in post-pandemic tourism recovery programs. Drawing from a qualitative study based on published reports and research, and using participant observation, this research analyses the situation of tourism in Akaroa, South Island of New Zealand, during the coronavirus outbreak and the first stages of the recovery process. Results of the research show that while crisis management led to the closure of the sector due to strict social and travel restrictions, the confinement measures adopted by the government and the progressive reopening of the country has resulted in a shift from “cruise tourism” into a gradual return of “domestic tourism”. This paper argues that local peoples’ perspectives must be kept in mind when developing a tourism recovery strategy. This case study also shows that because of the nature of changing working environment, there is potential to change local demography in the form of an increase in residents putting pressure on local infrastructure. In a rural and marine environment, local stakeholders’ attention is required to focus on “quality” of tourism rather than “quantity”. Nature-based resources and outdoor activities are expected to be the critical ingredients for tourism’s immediate and sustainable future.

Keywords: Banks Peninsula; cruise tourism; domestic tourism; tourism recovery



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1. Introduction

The global health crisis in the form of the outbreak of Covid-19 has brought the world to a standstill. Extensive lockdowns and social distancing have hurt service industries at both local, national and global levels. According to the World Tourism Organization [1], tourism is the worst affected industry amongst all significant economic activities. Tourism is a ubiquitous industry, and the impacts on and of the industry cannot be attributed to a single agency. Therefore, it is vital to understand the current scenarios of the crisis and mobilise relevant stakeholders to secure the re-emergence of the tourism industry. Among these measures, cooperation among tourism destinations, tourists, and public and private institutions such as transportation businesses is crucial to sustain and make the sector resilient both in the short and long run. Tourism is not a stand-alone sector; therefore, it needs to be considered in conjunction with other economic activities which directly and indirectly support the industry from a local perspective (see, for example, [2–4]). Consequently, local people must be put at the centre of the tourism planning, recovery and regeneration strategies. This paper argues that putting people first will help tourism stakeholders face the crisis from a sustainability and resilience perspective.

Catastrophes are usual in human history, which has experienced both human and natural disasters [5]. It is argued that the tourism industry is fragile and can be quickly impacted by both natural and human disasters. Previous literature suggests that there is a critical relationship between disasters and crisis in the tourism industry [6–11]. The plight of Covid-19 has alarmed the world in general, and tourism in particular, as the virus outbreak has dramatically affected the industry. This is even more relevant in New Zealand,

where international tourism markets stopped abruptly [12]. New Zealand borders have been closed since April 2020 to date. This study debates the initial consequences of the global pandemic and how a local tourism system has responded in the context of Akaroa (South Island, New Zealand) (see Figure 1 below). Akaroa is a coastal destination of New Zealand which became popular for cruise tourism. In recent years, Akaroa has extensively relied on international tourists, mainly cruise tourism. Drawing on a case study design [13] and focused on secondary sources and participant observation, this paper explores how the pandemic situation has been experienced in this destination. Results show that local people acknowledged the controversies derived from cruise tourism, and they also advised for an urgent shift to domestic tourism in line with governmental post-Covid-19 initiatives. This was noticed in previous studies, which argued that domestic tourism will recover first (see [7,14]). The paper concludes with directions for a sustainable tourism recovery. Both theoretical and practical implications, limitations and opportunities for further research are described.



Figure 1. The Banks Peninsula, New Zealand [15,16].

2. Tourism and Crisis Impacts: From Global to Local

The Covid-19 crisis is considered the world's worst global tourism crisis since the record began in 1950. Its consequences will increase the challenge of achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs) around the globe. The UNWTO estimates that international tourism arrivals could fall between 60–80% in 2020 compared to 2019, which has the potential to impact up to 80% of directly tourism-related jobs (100–120 million) and put livelihoods at risk. The World Tourism Organization has downgraded international arrival scenarios several times [11]. In this sense, while 22% of the global destinations were slowly easing travel restrictions in June, two-thirds of the worldwide destination borders remained completely closed for foreign nationals [17]. With the current situation in mind, domestic markets emerge as the main hope for the tourism industry. It is argued that domestic tourism started to recover faster in the final quarter of the year 2020 as compared to international tourism [7]. In this sense, part of the immediate crisis recovery is anticipated to be the small scale of visiting friends and relatives and business travel.

A pandemic is “an outbreak of a disease that occurs over a wide geographic area and affects an exceptionally high proportion of the population” [18]. Historically, catastrophes such as plagues have caused several economic, psychological and social impacts on people and places [19]. Catastrophes such as pandemics are not dependent on physical bound-

aries. The global reach of trade and mass travel has resulted in growing concerns about the potential outbreak of infectious diseases [20] because of people's extensive mobility. This is not the first pandemic experienced recently. The twenty-first century has already witnessed three global pandemics in two decades, namely SARS-CoV, MERS-CoV and Ebola, which, added to Covid-19, have challenged global health security [7]. Consequently, countries experienced a rapid change in consumption patterns derived from economic uncertainty [21] and increasing unemployment [5].

The spread of Covid-19 showed that only three months after the initial outbreak, most of the countries had already implemented confinement rules and travel restrictions [22]. Covid-19 became the deadliest pandemic, also for the world's tourism industry [10]. This has primarily affected tourism [23–26], including transportation and hospitality, gastronomic and leisure services. Since world economies heavily rely on tourism, which accounts for more than 10 percent of global gross domestic product [27], academics and practitioners are urged to analyse tourism recovery processes amidst the second and third waves of the pandemics [28].

Post-Covid-19 tourism is expected to change [29–31]. Nowadays, there is a strong need to work towards a responsible recovery of the industry to make it sustainable and resilient [32–34]. Losing up to 120 million tourism-related jobs in one sector means a global human socio-economic crisis that will significantly affect the long-run [35–37]. With significant travel restrictions still in place, it would be premature to predict the industry's recovery. However, this situation has highlighted issues in lifestyles in general, overconsumption patterns and tourism, and tourism-related livelihoods. For example, previous research [38] looked at the consequences of human-made and natural disasters on livelihood diversification strategies in Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan. Hussain [38] argued for the importance of resilience to ensure long-term sustainability. People and destinations heavily dependent on tourism are more vulnerable than people who have alternative sources of income. In this context, their adaptive nature—both individuals and businesses as part of a destination's tourism system—will demonstrate their capacity of resilience [39] and provide a faster recovery.

The World Tourism Organization proposed a "Tourism Recovery Technical Assistance Package", which promotes economic recovery, market promotion and institutional strengthening, and building resilience as the tools to ensure sustainable tourism recovery [40]. The tourism industry is not a stand-alone industry. The sector relies on several other industries such as air transportation, ground transportation, automobile, manufacturing, banking and finance, and governance. All of these contribute in shaping, defining, and developing tourism products [41–43]. The challenge for tourism recovery is that the industry needs to coordinate and collaborate with all these non-tourism sectors, vital in producing and delivering services and connecting tourists with regions (see, for example, [40]). This preliminary connectivity and mobility has remained an uncertain and challenging issue because of the second wave and the virus's unpredictable evolution [6,24].

Although the UNWTO states that tourism has a proven history of bouncing back, the Covid-19 crisis seems different [44]. While tourism recovers, the new normal is going to be different. Tourism is dependent on person-to-person contact, and the intensity, severity, and spontaneous nature of disease spread are alarming. Because of improved transport infrastructure development, a twenty-first-century virus travels globally in a matter of hours. Despite China's initial efforts to contain Covid-19 in Wuhan, the virus forced the world to shut down [21,24,45]. New Zealand was not an exception with border closure first and robust restrictions and quarantine controls later [46], which have isolated the country from international mobility and tourism with measures that are still active as of the end of the year 2020.

3. Research Question and Method

The paper aims to analyse the pandemic's impacts on the tourism industry in Akaroa, Banks Peninsula, and how tourism recovery has responded in New Zealand from tourism

stakeholders' perspectives. Drawing on a case study design [13,47,48], the research is focused on secondary sources [49,50] and participant observation [51,52], which are techniques widely used in qualitative social research [53–55] (see Table 1). Secondary data analysis is a method to evaluate existing literature and to interpret data based on a research question [56–58]. This study performs the steps recommended by Johnston [49]: defining the research question, identifying the dataset, and evaluating the dataset. In this regard, secondary dataset sources included: reports by civil society on tourism on the Banks Peninsula, local council responses, submissions to Christchurch city council, and newspaper articles on tourism in Akaroa.

Table 1. Methodological steps.

Research Data	Content	Analysis
Secondary	Reports from civil society and local organizations and city council; government statistics; published work; data from newspapers	<p>Process: First, data sets were identified, keeping in mind the objective of the study. Second, related information was extracted. Third, variables required to answer the research question were discussed,</p> <p>Indicators: International and domestic tourism, COVID-19, social, economic and environmental impacts of cruise tourism.</p> <p>Based on secondary sources' information, open questions were identified to inquire after local people's perceptions, including businesses and residents. Hand notes were taken as necessary.</p> <p>Questions:</p>
Primary	Participant observation; unstructured conversations with local people	<p>a. How has COVID-19 affected tourism in Akaroa?</p> <p>b. Perceptions of domestic and international tourism in Akaroa?</p> <p>c. Pros and cons of cruise tourism?</p> <p>d. What are social, economic, and environmental impacts of tourism?</p>

Regarding participant observation, several visits were made to the Akaroa waterfront to observe how busy the town was. The fieldwork was completed between March and August 2020. The visits' primary purpose was to observe the place's rhythms, as suggested by previous research [59]. These visits included passive observation [51,60] and unstructured conversations [61] with local stakeholders, which allowed to capture attitudes and experiences of local people and local businesses.

After analysing both secondary data and participant observations and the hand notes gathered through the conversations, the researchers identified two main concepts: cruise tourism's controversial significance and travel. Thus, the next section discusses the results of these two perspectives. In this sense, both the analysis of secondary sources and the perceptions derived from participant observation provide a comprehensive picture of the relationship between Akaroa, pandemics and tourism, which is discussed in the next section.

4. Results and Discussion: Post-Covid Recovery in Akaroa (South Island, New Zealand)

The strong link between the public health and tourism industry is critical in monitoring the tourism industry's health status and sustainability. Incorporating epidemiological indicators to tourism is crucial to tourism recovery programs that require expertise in planning and implementing recovery strategies [35]. Health safety and hygiene in tourism generating markets, transit regions, and tourist destinations are critical for the industry's responsible recovery. Health and safety protocols need to be put in place to ensure clear communication and marketing processes to build consumer trust and ensure safety.

Tour operators' corporate social responsibility will be a key factor in winning certain host communities' confidence, which were earlier flooded with tourism. This is the case in Akaroa, where 200,000 people used to visit every season [62], with cruise tourists being especially relevant, as described below. According to Statistics New Zealand, cruise ship passengers visiting Akaroa were growing at 15% in 2017 compared to the previous year, 2016 [63]. With this number of visitors, tourism expenditure also increased. Recent data [64] shows that cruise ship expenditure in Akaroa increased in 2019 by 7.9% (\$45,348,000) as compared to 2018 (\$42,016,000). However, due to border closure, the cruise ship expenditure reduced by −17.1% (\$37,606,000) in 2020. In this sense, it is observed that some people in such communities seem to prefer not having too many tourists in those destinations and may not be willing to have tourists back [65]. This urges tourism enterprises to support local communities by engaging them in consultation processes during the different recovery stages.

Similarly, regional tourism-related agencies (public and private) should facilitate businesses advice and tools to survive the crisis and engage them in the recovery process. Since not every individual in a tourism destination is affiliated with tourism-related livelihoods, planning and developing domestic tourist travel patterns are crucial in formulating a domestic tourism marketing strategy. This is also the primary avenue for tourism recovery in Akaroa [66]. Brand image and slogans for the domestic market are critical in turning floating domestic tourists into real customers. Through the research questions posed above, the directions of tourism recovery in Akaroa are investigated from a local perspective. The following two sub-sections reveal a call for more responsible tourism, with international mass tourism substituted for by slow domestic tourism.

4.1. From Cruise Ships

The Christchurch earthquake in 2011 resulted in the damage of Lyttleton port, and consequently, Akaroa started receiving cruise ships. In 2017, Akaroa became the top destination for cruises ships [67]. A local entrepreneur stated that "I started my business because of cruise ships. I know locals do not like cruise ships, but what can you do? There are no other job opportunities in Akaroa". He added that "we should be grateful that cruise ships are coming to Akaroa. It brings so much revenue to the peninsula. Buses, tours, local shops and cafes are busy". Nonetheless, cruise ships are controversial in Akaroa as numerous permanent residents oppose the influx of tourists and crowdedness in the Akaroa township, which means that around 2000 tourists per day walk through the town streets during summer. A local inhabitant said that "Akaroa is too crowded in summer; however, cruise ship passengers do not even spend money in town as everything is provided onboard and is free. So, why one would want to invest money?".

In a letter to the Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern by some civil society organisations in Akaroa, local people claimed:

"The industry promotes the supposed economic benefits of cruise ship visits, with dubious figures claimed for passenger spending. The reality is that cruise ship passengers are tourists who are:

- Based in a floating hotel and spend nothing on local accommodation.
- Very unlikely to buy a meal onshore, given that there is 'free' food onboard.
- Rarely in a port for long enough to make any considered or substantial purchases.
- Take shore excursions which are designed so that the biggest profit slice goes directly to the ship operator" [65].

While the virus has emptied the streets in recent months (Figure 2), Akaroa businesses show significant concerns over tourism disruption, including cruise ships, not only due to the Covid-19 recovery process. A 2019 survey conducted by a local incorporated society showed mixed feelings regarding cruise ships' visitation and number of passengers per day. Most of the interviewees acknowledged the negative impacts of mass tourism (see also [68]).



Figure 2. Akaroa waterfront during 4-tiered (25 March–27 April) lockdown (Photo by Marie Haley).

In parallel, the popularity of tourism in Akaroa has attracted many farmers to progressively diversify towards tourism, including the Seventh Generation Tours Akaroa, Puaa Bay Farm Tours, Akaroa Dolphins, and Pohatu Penguins. Similarly, a venture such as Pipi Journeys Harbour Cruise Akaroa is another example of entrepreneurs diversifying from other tourism branches such as restaurants. Tourism diversification strategies must also include off-season products and marketing. Consequently, there is a need to train local entrepreneurs and develop tourism marketing strategies by differentiating domestic and international tourists. A local tour company owner reported that “I never intended to offer local tours to the cruise ship passengers. I did it because it was easy money . . . I am now restructuring my business and focusing more on the domestic market. I think domestic tourists will have less impact on the natural environment. I will educate them about nature conservation, ecology and the importance of our heritage”.

A greater focus on domestic visitors will allow the recovery of tourism revenue from a more sustainable perspective [69]. It is also essential to diversify livelihood activities to reduce livelihood vulnerability. From an economic perspective, tourism businesses in Akaroa are, to a certain extent, fortunate that the Covid-19 crisis arose at the end of tourist season [70]. This concept is exemplified as follows: “the tourism industry should be relieved that it came at this time of year. Should it have been like two months earlier, it would have been game over for many operators, but . . . it’s towards the end of the summer season, and we’ve had our busiest month for the year already” [71]. Moreover, public and private strategies, such as a considerable discount by campervan providers, resulted in a new wave of people travelling back to destinations like Akaroa [72], as observed in Figure 3 below. The travellers’ return has already started in Akaroa and again generated a mix of feelings amongst the residents.



Figure 3. Akaroa waterfront after 4-tiered lockdown (Photo by Asif Hussain).

4.2. To Domestic Tourism

With borders closed, New Zealand tourism businesses are dependent on domestic tourists. Because the country counts on an already flourishing domestic market, New Zealand seems to be in a good position. According to Tourism Industry Aotearoa, before Covid-19, domestic tourists spent NZ\$23.7 billion annually as compared to international tourists, who spent NZ\$12.7 billion per annum [73]. This means that domestic tourists contribute to two-thirds of tourism expenditure in the country. The government efforts in promoting domestic tourism have revealed a particularly promising outcome in Akaroa. Domestic tourists have made significant bookings in the shoulder season, and Akaroa has had the best winter ever [winter in the Southern Hemisphere runs from June to August]. According to Akaroa District promotion, businesses are “very encouraged about winter and think it will be a great one for us” [72]. For example, motels which were getting cancellations after lockdown were later swamped with bookings and again with the return of harbour cruise activities. In particular, a motel manager revealed that “we were almost full before the madness. However, when the lockdown started, we just started getting cancellations one after another. Even though our cancellation policy states that the guest won’t get a refund, we decided to be flexible. Since we were an essential service, we had to stay open without anyone booking in. We only had a few people who stayed while they were waiting for their flights. We did not know what was coming. Lucky we got the wage subsidy, but it did not cover the building lease which is our main cost”. She added that “it felt like we skipped winter and headed back into summer. Most of the people who travelled during summer were older and retired people or had their tours being cancelled due to Covid-19”.

However, a previous study found that thirty percent of New Zealanders’ decision to partake in tourism activity is influenced by the prices, forcing activity operators to alter their domestic tourist prices [74]. In this context, it is argued that a handful of tourist destinations in New Zealand are entirely dependent on international arrivals. The problems caused by mass tourism, especially cruise ships, are significant in places such as Akaroa [65,68]. That is the reason why initiatives such as Tiaki Promise focus on educating (international)

tourists to protect the natural and cultural environment of New Zealand [69] and advocate for “regenerative tourism”.

With the borders closed and summer ahead, it can be anticipated that it will be challenging for businesses primarily reliant on international tourists. As a consequence, both regional and national strategies are planned for the attraction of national visitors. In this sense, it is critical to recover the image of the destination. Businesses are expected to design and market what efforts are implemented to mitigate the impacts of Covid-19 and offer safe tourism activities and experiences. For example, Akaroa restaurants such as Bully Hayes and Madeira rapidly programmed takeaway and delivery services. The New Zealand Government has also effectively implemented measures to contain, manage, and track the virus. The government seems dedicated to supporting individuals and businesses and encouraging the wellbeing of communities, while at the same time urging them to buy local products and visit local destinations [75,76]. Akaroa’s negative impacts were derived from mass tourism, especially cruise ships and freedom campers [65]. A resident stated that “before Covid-19, cruise ship and freedom campers were Akaroa’s nightmare. They put so much pressure on our resources. Cruise ships damage Akaroa harbour bed, and freedom campers cause litter everywhere. Some even urinate in the bush and by the recreation ground. I came across many such incidents myself while walking my dog . . . ”. Participants unanimously seem to agree on the absence of consultation with community and businesses before and after Covid-19 tourism management and recovery plans.

This study provides insights for drafting a post-Covid-19 tourism recovery strategy in Akaroa. Furthermore, it is argued that there will be significant growth in permanent residents because of Covid-19. As residents would prefer to work from home, this will increase local infrastructure pressure [77]. In this sense, local businesses that rely on tourism to survive are urged to design a recovery plan focusing on “quality” instead of “quantity” to secure a return of tourists who trust.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

This research has identified critical aspects of crisis management in tourism in Akaroa from a local perspective. This paper aimed to explore the directions of tourism recovery in Akaroa based on primary and secondary data. Results confirm that tension between “global” and “local” tourism is present and that there “must” be a shift from “cruise tourism” to “domestic tourism”. The recovery of the tourism industry will be determined by how resilient people are at grass-root levels. The more resilient tourism-related jobs and businesses are, the more resilient the industry is. People affiliated with tourism often look for a quick and easy opportunity to generate income, making them vulnerable when tourism stops [30,78]. Tourism made 30% of the global exports (US \$1.5 trillion) in 2019 and made up to 45% of export services in developing countries [44]. In the aftermath of the Covid-19 crisis, it is vital to carefully manage and mitigate the pandemic impacts at macro and micro levels while providing stimulus to the tourism industry in the recovery processes [40]. Both public and private sectors need guidance and assistance to assess each stakeholder’s impacts, roles, and responsibilities to ensure a recovery while regenerating livelihoods for those communities most severely impacted by the crisis. This will prevent the tourism industry from shocks, and it will perform proactively in response to a similar crisis in the future.

During the second half of the twentieth century, the world airline network’s development has reduced physical distances and eased trade and travel. However, transportation has contributed to the rapid spread of diseases [79]. Thus, both lockdown measures and travel restrictions were implemented worldwide to reduce the impact of Covid-19. When these were progressively waived, the virus’s spread accelerated again [80]. Since domestic tourism is anticipated to play a pivotal role in tourism futures [7], this paper has approached the case of Akaroa’s—a lesser-studied environment—tourism to identify patterns that may guide the recovery of tourism as a driver for economic, environmental, and social wellbeing.

The response needs to serve as a robust and holistic instrument to ensure the long-term resilience of the industry [9,81,82]. The tourism industry needs to learn how to absorb and manage shocks and crisis with local stakeholders' participation [83–85]. The recovery must act as an antidote. Since the first stages of the return of tourism are very recent, the industry will need to evolve with the virus. This paper has approached the case of Akaroa (New Zealand), a destination heavily impacted by tourism closures and travel restrictions because its tourism excessively focused on cruise ships and international arrivals. The impact of Covid-19 on tourism has revealed that, for example, different cruises were affected by the coronavirus spread. Thus, some were not allowed to disembark at their scheduled ports [7,86]. While the cruise industry has put a lot of efforts into securing a post-Covid safe experience [87], the vulnerability of cruise tourism to pandemics is highlighted [26], which suggests the need for a change to *real* regenerative tourism [88].

From a theoretical perspective, this research advocates that Akaroa's tourism faces a recovery process featuring a threefold challenge: a tourism sector whose wealth has recently relied on "mass" tourism formulas; local stakeholders who are critical about traditional tourism development; and a joint confrontation of these factors in a volatile industry, where economic, environmental, and social implications have direct effects on land and people. Participants also reported on the absence of consultation with tourism operators regarding tourism planning, tourism recovery processes, and community engagement. Results of this study showed the primary linkages between pandemics and tourism in this coastal destination. In particular, results revealed that tourism recovery must be built on "slow" rather than "fast", on "walks" rather than "cruise", and on "domestic" rather than "international". This is the main practical implication of this research since Akaroa and the Bays offer a rural and marine environment where people are placed at the centre of visitor experiences and host–guest relationships emerge as critical attributes for a sustainable re-development of tourism.

The main limitation of the paper is its descriptive nature. While both the analysis of secondary sources and the fieldwork carried at the Akaroa waterfront provided valuable results for service industries and are useful to tourism stakeholders in Akaroa and Banks Peninsula, further research opportunities emerge. In this sense, future studies must analyse the relationship between businesses and pandemics from the hospitality and tourism managers' perspective and scrutinise national and international visitors' viewpoints. Moreover, the analysis of both offline and online marketing strategies would help trace the tourism industry's re-evolution during the crisis and contribute to comparative studies among different cultural, geographical, and social environments.

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