

# THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF DOMESTIC TOURISM ON OTEMATATA (NEW ZEALAND)

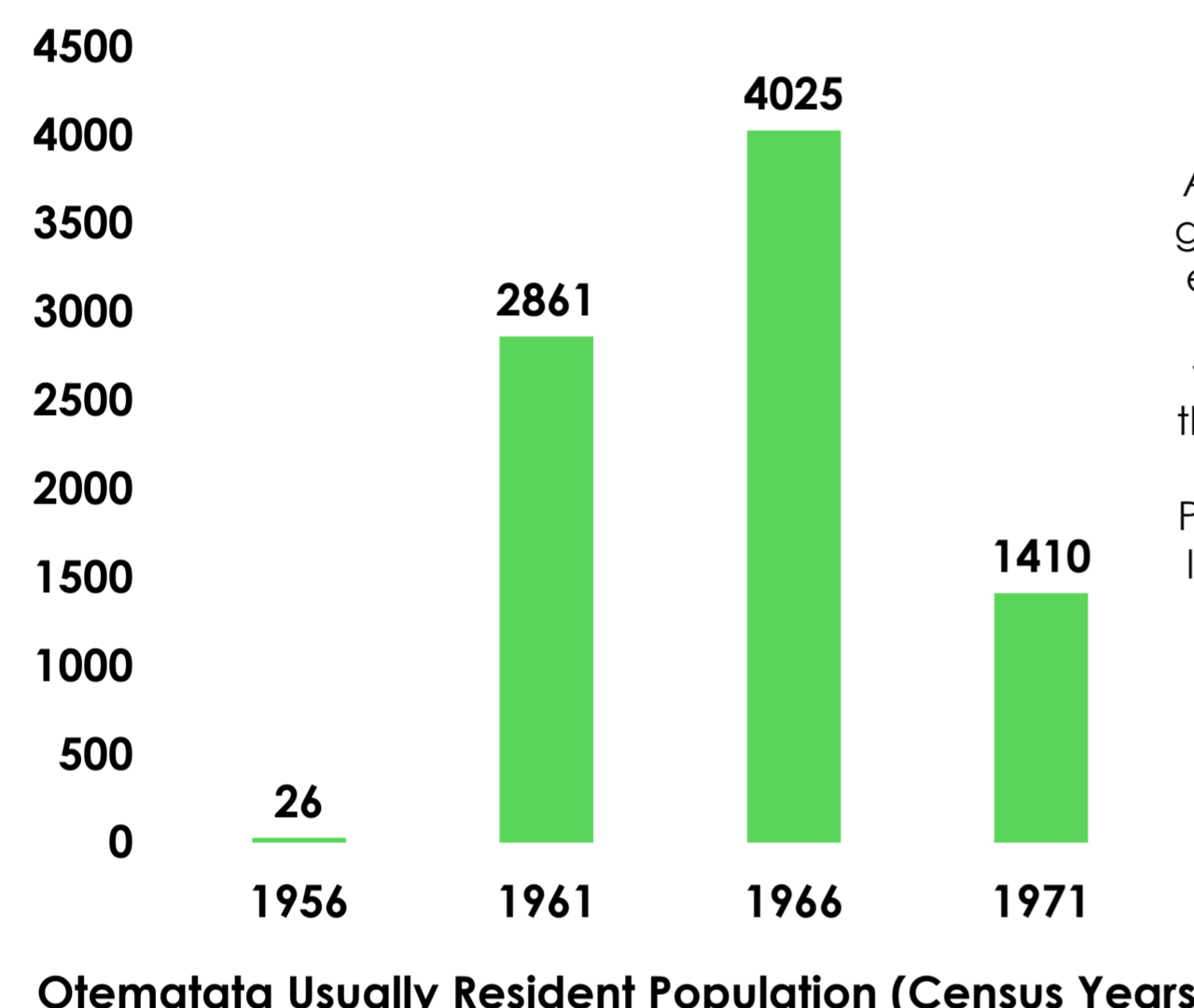
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© Jude Wilson 2015. Benmore Dam, Upper Waitaki Valley, South Island, New Zealand

A SIA in rural New Zealand, combining an analysis of interview, census and community survey data, finds that domestic tourism provides more than economic benefits. Tourist involvement in community activities keeps a small town alive and the wider rural area connected.



### 1950s – 1960s

Otematata was created for the Benmore and Aviemore Dam workforce. The town's population grew quickly, peaking at over 4000 in 1964. Sports events, entertainment and social activity earned the town a positive reputation. Two hydro lakes were formed (Lakes Benmore and Aviemore). In the late 1960's, with the hydro project ending, the population of Otematata dropped significantly. Planned deconstruction of the town began in the late 1960s. An appeal to retain some of the town was successful.

### 1970s – 2000s

Dwellings were sold to ex-dam workers and new holiday home owners. New hydro lakes started to attract domestic tourists/recreationists (in summer), strengthening domestic demand for holiday homes. The permanent resident population continued to decline and services were lost, including the school in early 2000s. Post-construction lakeside enhancement work undertaken. More recent village enhancement projects initiated by permanent residents and holiday home owners.

### Otematata Today

The permanent resident population has declined to just 186. The town remains in its original form, but is showing signs of degradation. Some newcomers have started small tourism businesses, but visitors are scarce in winter. The arrival of dam maintenance teams occasionally boosts the town's population. In March 2015, 400 ex-dam workers and visitors celebrated the town's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. A new cycle trail (Alps 2 Ocean) passes through Otematata and will (potentially) raise its profile, increase visitor numbers and present new tourism business opportunities.

## TOURISM IMPACTS

### Visitor Types

summer campers (often repeat visitors), holiday home owners/users, youth groups, business groups (for team retreats), predominantly regional visitors from Otago or neighbouring Canterbury

### Key Attractions

(hydro) lakes, scenic amenity, climate, rurality, affordability (not a "premier" destination), Otematata "village" – nostalgic link to a previous era, but not hydro history

### Activities

rest and relaxation, outdoor recreation (aquatic/terrestrial), sightseeing, local events, cycling

### Rates take, fees & investment in town

75% of dwellings in Otematata are holiday homes and their owners pay full rates (property tax). This provides Council with a full rates/tax take for (re)investing in the town. Fees are also collected from tourists for the use and maintenance of the local boat ramps and camping sites.

### Small business support and job creation

Holiday home owners are keen supporters of local small businesses. Domestic visitors are often self-contained (e.g., bring own groceries) and, therefore, are not fully reliant on local businesses. Holiday homes directly create jobs for residents (e.g., cleaning, maintenance, security and booking services) but seasonality is a big issue. The new A20 cycle trail seen as a platform for launching new businesses and will potentially attract more domestic and international visitors.

### Social vibrancy created and maintained

Town population greatly increases in peak summer periods. When campgrounds are full and holiday homes fully occupied, Otematata's streets/public areas are filled with social activity (they are otherwise deserted). Locals appreciate having new people around to interact/connect with.

### Strong(er) town advocacy

A high level of place attachment reported among visitors. This affinity with the village translates into a strong commitment to the town. Many visitors belong to the Residents Association. They also support local fundraising initiatives and advocate for the town in local planning debates.

### Sustainability of local clubs and committees

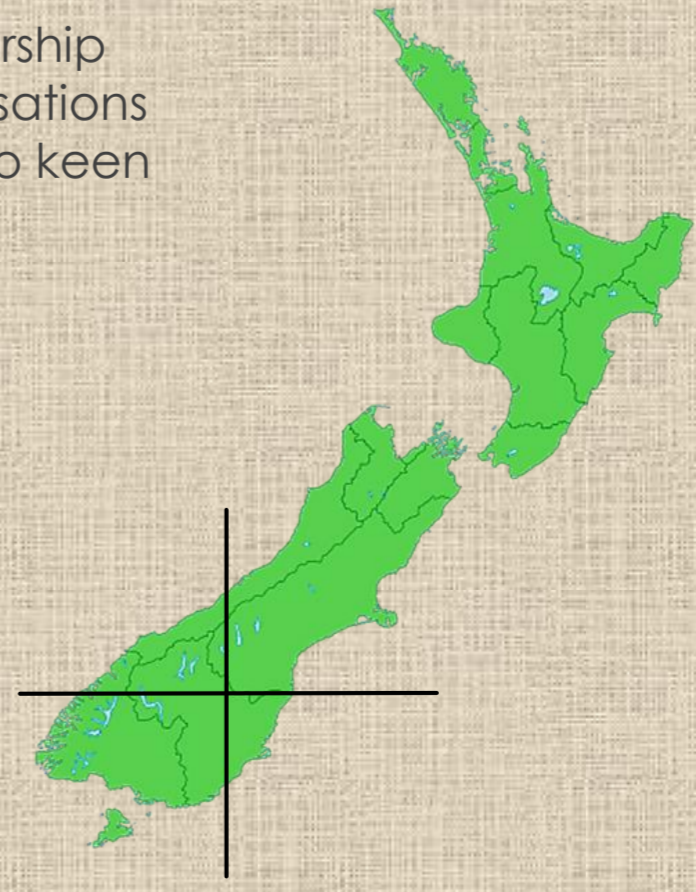
Additional members (i.e., visitors) boost club numbers and generate membership revenue (fees and subscriptions). Holiday home owners support local organisations through involvement on committees and Residents Association. They are also keen to participate in local events.

### Village enhancement

Holiday home owners are often centrally involved (hands on) in community enhancement projects including facilities and public space upgrades (e.g., Wetland Walkway, playground and golf course upgrade). They also keep the aging housing stock in relatively good condition.

### Tourist behaviour

Some visitor cohorts unruly (e.g., youth parties over Labour Weekend). This creates a need for mitigations during tourist season e.g., liquor rules and extra police.



Visitors keep the town alive, but the seasonal nature of tourism in Otematata creates limits to growth, vulnerabilities and local challenges



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