

2026

University of Otago –
Department of
Marketing

Milford Sound Experience

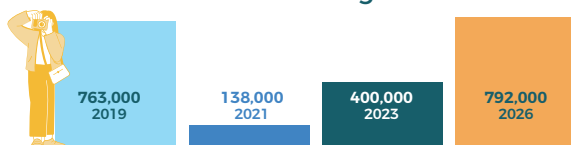
A report by Dr John Williams,
the fifth biennial report



Purpose

Provides insights into visitors' experiences of Piopiotahi Milford Sound, their journey through Fiordland National Park, and perceptions of visitor crowding.

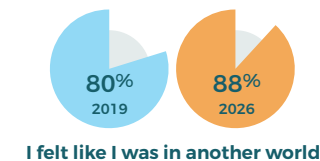
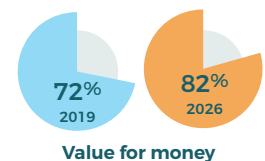
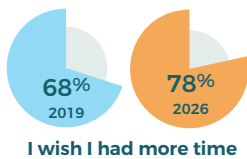
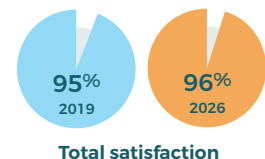
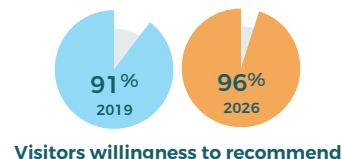
Adult Cruise Passenger Numbers



In 2026, visitor numbers to Milford Sound surpassed 2019 levels, marking a recovery from the decline following the COVID-19 border closures.

1 Satisfaction

Overall satisfaction is made up of 5 single measures:



Comparison is based on 2019 and 2026, as visitor numbers for these years are the closest match since Covid-19 border closures.

2 Nuisance and Crowding

The term nuisance is used rather than crowding because crowding by our measures has occurred only in certain segments of the visitor market, and only to some degree.

Nuisance is measured by asking 4 questions:

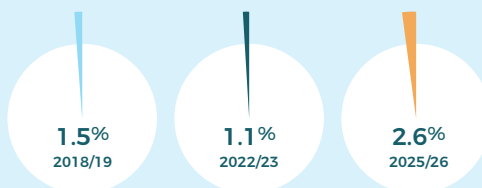
1. I wish I had gone to a less crowded place
2. There should be far fewer people at Milford Sound at any one time
3. The noise from helicopters and planes was annoying
4. Other visitors interrupted my nature experience.

The nuisance measure indicates 'crowding' if at least 10% of respondents 'strongly agree'.



Results by Survey

The evidence of crowding effects on visitors nature experience in the National Park remains below the critical threshold for the majority of visitors.



Visitors' patterns of experiencing Piopiotahi Milford Sound begin to change when experiencing 3,000 other visitors per day and more, based on the current levels of infrastructure and service.

3 The Experience

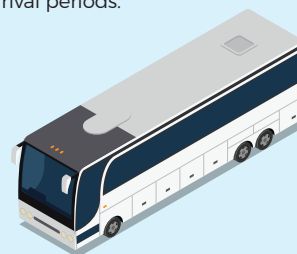
Visitors have consistently rated the boat trip as outstanding over the years, and the latest wave is no exception. For most visitors it's the highlight of their trip to the Milford Sound. Survey responses suggest independent travel remains the most common way to experience Milford Sound, with more than half of respondents arriving by private vehicle (car or campervan). This reinforces the importance of managing parking, traffic flow and peak arrival periods.

4 The Bus Visitor

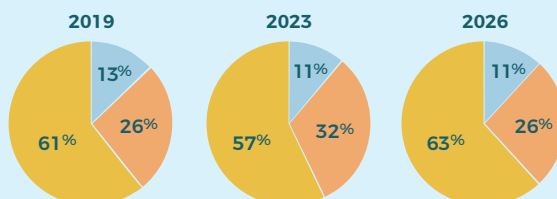
Satisfaction with the bus experience was:



indicating that changes made by the bus operators over the years have had a positive impact.



BUSES ARRIVED FROM: QUEENSTOWN TE ANAU ELSEWHERE



Firmly agreed that the tours were very well organised and appreciated the number of stops on the way to Milford Sound.



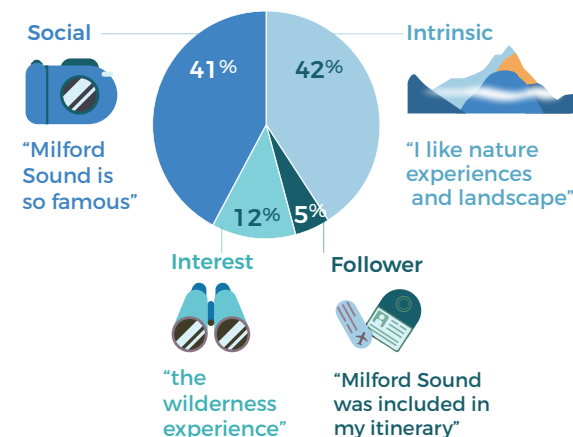
A SUMMARY OF KEY FACTS

Commissioned by
Milford Sound Tourism Ltd

5 Motivations

Visitors were asked the reason for their visit, which was grouped into 4 categories:

Motivational Groupings



Every year, visitors who are interest and intrinsically motivated, experience the highest satisfaction, and in most years the followers and socially motivated have the lowest satisfaction.

6 Net Promoter Score

The NPS score of 69% is well above a widely accepted benchmark for 'excellent' (50%).

