

# The Tasmania Project

Share your experience during COVID-19.

Photo: Laura Purcell.

## Tourism and the Tasmanian community during COVID-19.

Report number: 28 | Date: 15 July 2020 | Authors: Can-Seng Ooi and Becky Shelley

The Tasmania Project's second general survey asked a series of questions about tourism, COVID-19 policy responses, and their impacts. We wanted to know how Tasmanian residents regard the industry and its contribution to life in Tasmania. When should Tasmania reopen, and what changes in behaviour are expected?

Tourism workers, particularly casual workers, have been hit hard by the impacts of the Federal and State Government policy responses to COVID-19. In Tasmania's North-West and West, residents had more stringent measures imposed upon them with a whole region 'locked down' for three weeks.

### Key findings

- Tourism is a priority industry for respondents. 64% feel that tourism and hospitality is important and should be prioritised in the post COVID-19 recovery effort.
- Although tourism is seen as a priority industry for recovery, a majority of respondents do not see the industry improving their quality of life after the pandemic.
- Public health is valued above the economy for all age groups but more so for respondents aged 65 years and over.
- Even though people feel safe, they are not moving about as before the pandemic.
- The COVID-19 restrictions and policies in Tasmania are in line with the general sentiment of the community, regardless of political affiliation and demographic characteristics.
- Tasmanians will advocate for behaviour change in line with health advice.



Photo: Can-Seng Ooi.

## Community sentiments aligned with State Government policy

We asked respondents to indicate whether Tasmania should reopen to tourism (survey closed on 17 June 2020). A clear majority of respondents (71%) disagreed with the proposition that Tasmania should reopen to tourism, while 16% were neutral and 13% agreed. While we might anticipate regional differences between respondents' answer to this question, that was not the case.

***“A majority of respondents disagreed with the proposition that Tasmania should reopen to tourism”***

Clearly, respondents take the risks of the pandemic seriously, despite its social and economic costs. We asked respondents if the Tasmanian Government has been too slow to ease COVID-19 restrictions. 70% of respondents disagreed with the statement, 10% agreed and 11% were neutral. Based on the survey findings, Tasmanian respondents are largely supportive of state policies with regards to border opening and keeping restrictions on tourists re-entering Tasmania.

Interestingly, party affiliation does not influence respondent views. Analysing the data by political affiliation, a majority in each group do not think that the Tasmanian Government has been too slow to ease COVID-19 restrictions. Regardless, there are more Liberal Party supporters who want the restrictions to ease faster (15%), as compared to those who support the Labor Party (7%) and the Greens (6%).

We then asked whether Tasmania's border restrictions should stay in place until COVID-19 is eradicated in Australia. Of the 1254 respondents who answered the question, the answers were divided and provided no clear majority or consensus. While 45% support Tasmania's border restrictions continuing until COVID-19 is eradicated in Australia, the rest of the respondents disagree (35%) or are neutral (20%) on the question.

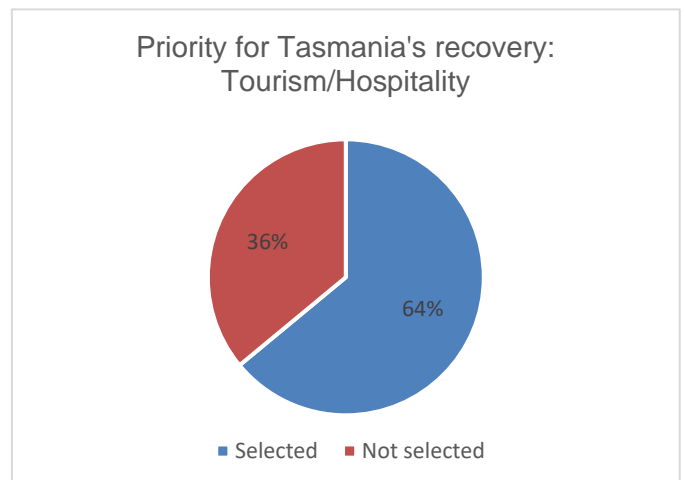
Interestingly, more than half of those aged 44 years or younger want COVID-19 eradicated first before borders are opened. For those aged 45 years or above, less than half feel that way.

## Economic concerns, tourism and public health

We asked respondents if they were more concerned about the economic impacts than the health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey shows that the majority of respondents (66%) prioritise public health over economic impacts.

Irrespective of whether the respondent was employed or unemployed, health impacts were the key concern. 63% of employed respondents and 60% of unemployed respondents feel that way. In contrast, 20% of employed respondents and 26% of respondents are more concerned about the economic impacts than the health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We asked which industries should be prioritised for Tasmania's recovery. Tourism is considered a priority by 64% of respondents, reflecting the importance many Tasmanians place on the industry. It is ranked in the top three, together with education and training (66%) and health care (65%). This is also discussed in [Creativity, culture and the arts during COVID-19](#) (The Tasmania Project – Report 23).



We asked whether Tasmania should re-open to tourism. The majority response was no. Nearly 70% of employed persons do not think Tasmania should re-open for tourism, compared to 62% of unemployed respondents. The result is interesting as there is agreement for Tasmania not to re-open to tourism yet amongst respondents both working and seeking work.

Respondent concerns about COVID-19 are evident in their own habits and practices. We asked whether, despite restrictions easing, they are going out as much as they used to. More than 70% of respondents are largely staying at home and have not gone out as frequently as they did pre-pandemic level despite the easing of restrictions. This cautionary approach contrasts with results that 56% of respondents feel safe in public or shared areas, with only 22% indicating they do not feel safe and 23% neutral.

## Tourism as a community priority

While tourism is considered an important industry in Tasmania by respondents, many do not see the industry as essential to contributing to improving their life on the island. Tourism is predominantly compartmentalised as an economic activity, rather than a potential resource that they can enjoy, such as attractions and enhancement of amenities.

We asked what should be prioritised to improve life in Tasmania. Only, 26% of respondents prioritised tourism, behind affordable housing (61%), quality healthcare (60%), quality education (56%), environmental sustainability (47%), job security (38%), food production (38%), economic growth (29%), and art and cultural activities (28%) and over advanced manufacturing, access to nature, population growth, new infrastructure, sport and recreation, safety and security, community spirit, food and wine culture, and public transport. See [Report 23](#) for further detail.

### To improve life in Tasmania, which of the following do you think should be prioritised?

	%
1. affordable housing	61
2. quality healthcare	60
3. quality education	56
4. environmental sustainability	47
5. job security	38
6. food production	38
7. economic growth	29
8. art and cultural activities	28
9. tourism	26

There was however a small regional variation. North-West and West respondents see tourism as important to improving their life (39%), as compared with respondents in the North (26%) and South (23%).

Tourism contributes to the Tasmanian economy and also to its social and cultural development. A Post-COVID-19 tourism development strategy can work towards integrating resources for community development. It is also important to communicate the social and cultural benefits of tourism to Tasmanians.

## Social pressure and driving behaviour change

Whether Tasmanians should open their borders or not depends also on the community's confidence in managing their public social spaces, tourism assets and resources. We asked whether people feel comfortable telling people to comply with COVID-19 safe practices. 62% of respondents feel comfortable asking others to comply, however, more respondents aged 65 years or older feel that way (69%), as compared to those in the 25-44 years age group (53%). This is perhaps unsurprising as the older age group is more vulnerable to COVID-19.

When the borders do re-open, the experience of being a tourist in Tasmania may change if community members are advocating and monitoring COVID-19 safe practices.

As an indication of how much privacy sacrifice respondents are willing to make to manage the pandemic, about two-thirds of respondents are willing to provide their personal information for contact tracing. The pandemic is seen largely as a public health challenge facing Tasmania, and that is reflected by respondents prioritising health concerns over other aspects of their life, including privacy, freedom of movement, economic considerations and tourism.

*“Two-thirds of respondents are willing to provide their personal information for contact tracing”*

## Where next?

Respondents to The Tasmania Project's second general survey are still concerned with COVID-19 and are not yet ready to leave the house as they did pre-pandemic, despite the easing of restrictions. Respondents generally feel that the authorities are doing the right thing, and most are following their advice. The authorities also appear to have the goodwill of the people when it comes to their approach to public health.

Most respondents are willing to apply social pressures to support COVID-19 safe practices. It is an indication that the community is coming together to promote positive health outcomes for the State.

Findings from this survey support other research showing the Tasmanian community considers tourism to be economically important but that it does not provide social and cultural benefits to the community. Prior to the pandemic the question of social license was an emerging issue for the tourism industry. Developing and building a social license for tourism and recognising community sentiment is critical.

### The sample

The Tasmania Project's second general survey closed on 17 June 2020. More than 1500 Tasmanian residents aged 18 or over entered the survey, with 1258 forming the sample for this report after data cleaning removed incomplete answers.

All local government areas of Tasmania are represented, with residents of Hobart, Kingborough, Launceston and Clarence forming 51% of the total sample. Of our respondents, 61% live in the South, 21% in the North, and 18% in the North-West and west. Respondents name 167 towns, suburbs or areas in which they live.

Of the 1258 respondents, 69% are women and 30% men, with 25% in the 25-44 years age bracket, 49% aged 45-64 years and 24% over 65 years. 2% are aged 18-24 years. One quarter have a bachelor degree level education, 9% have no post-school qualification, and 7% have a doctorate. More than half are employed. More details of the sample and methods are available at the link below.