

TOURISTS' USE OF ROADSIDE SIGNAGE: A Case Study of the Great Southern Touring Route



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PREFACE

This report is based on a synthesis of Australian and international research in the areas of self-drive planning, navigation, decision-making practices, signage and route promotion. It is augmented by an Australian case study on the travel experiences of 272 visitors using the Great Southern Touring Route in Victoria. The report includes photographs, guidelines and recommendations to enable users to evaluate and improve drive tourism services and promotion in their region. It is designed to be used by regional and state tourism organisations to inform the development, signing and promotion of themed driving routes in Australia.

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Drive tourism is a key aspect of Australian tourism and incorporates a diverse range of markets, products, locations and impacts (Carson, Waller & Scott 2002). This type of tourism is particularly important in regional areas; consequently, understanding the informational needs, navigational practices, decision-making habits and communication preferences of self-drive visitors is an important step towards ensuring the long-term viability of regional destinations and attractions. As Hardy, Carter, Beeton, Olsen and Horneman (2006) state:

...the conventional way of understanding users of touring routes needs to be replaced with more innovative research, analysis and product development, which focuses on not only conventional tourism variables, but also those that embrace the preference and behaviour of travellers. (p.3)

To date, there have been very few studies either in Australia or overseas that have explored the impact of tourist information on driving tourists' travel planning and navigational practices (Fodness & Murray 1998; Dann 2003). The case study upon which this report is based was designed to address these shortcomings by examining the travel preferences, opinions and experiences of visitors driving parts or the entirety of the Great Southern Touring Route in Victoria. Issues that are addressed include:

- What sources of information do self-drive visitors access when planning their trip?
- Are particular materials sourced at particular points of the journey?
- Are some sources more useful than others?
- How can promotional and navigational materials support roadside signage? and
- What role does signage play in prompting and directing visitation?

It should be noted that this report deals predominantly with the issue of signage and thus does not engage with the wide body of literature in the area of destination branding and regional tourism branding. It primarily focuses on the views, preferences and experiences of drive tourism visitors and seeks to evaluate signage and navigational resources from a visitor's perspective. Examples and findings are based on a single yet comprehensive case study of the Great Southern Touring Route and for this reason some of the points raised may be particular to this route.

Drive Tourists' Trip Planning Practices

The ever-increasing variety and range of products available to prospective tourists (Figure 1) makes accessing travel information both more important and more difficult (Sheldon 1993). Planning a holiday and purchasing travel goods and services is a complex process that involves considerable risk and uncertainty. Unlike other tangible products, tourist experiences cannot be pre-tested or trialled before purchase. Consequently, it is not uncommon for travellers, particularly those visiting expensive or exotic locations, to base their decision-making on extensive information searches (Fodness & Murray 1998; Hem & Iversen 2004; Sheldon 1993).



Figure 1: Visitors obtain travel information from a variety of sources

Travelling prompts a variety of search behaviours. Some visitors meticulously plan their travel, extensively researching destinations using sources such as the internet, travel brochures, maps, recommendations from family and friends, and visitor information centres. Others may largely rely on spur of the moment decisions prompted by signs and promotional material encountered en-route (Zalatan 1996). For most people, planning and researching their trip prior to leaving home is an important part of the travel experience. Indeed, research by Tourism Queensland (2004) revealed that visitors driving through Queensland make 60% of travel decisions before they even leave home. Similarly, Pringle (1999) conducted telephone interviews with 313 people who had travelled through Queensland in 1998/1999 and found that 59% of respondents planned their entire route before leaving home.

Not all travellers conduct extensive planning prior to travel. For example, Hardy et al. (2006) surveyed 480 visitors to Queensland and found that 49% did not plan their trip. The majority of those who did plan their travel (70%) spent less than a week on the task. The researchers reported that similar patterns were evident amongst the 332 visitors they surveyed in Tasmania.

There is evidence to suggest that travel planning varies depending on familiarity with the destination, degree of novelty of the destination, and whether or not travellers are visiting friends and relatives. For instance, Snepenger, Meged, Snelling and Worrall (1990) surveyed 'destination-naïve' visitors to Alaska (first-time travellers who were not visiting friends and relatives). They found that these types of visitors are most likely to consult travel agents (used by 69% of the sample) and tour brochures/guide books (37%). In fact, 44% relied solely on information provided by travel agents. Interestingly, few respondents used State tourism bodies or visitor information bureaus. This highlights the importance of selecting channels of distribution that are both appealing and easily accessible to one's target audience (Bonn, Furr & Susskind 1998). Thus, researchers need to ascertain what sources are most commonly used by drive tourists and whether these vary depending on whether visitors are in the planning or travelling phase of their trip.

A review of consumer behaviour literature by Fodness and Murray (1998) highlighted three dimensions of consumer behaviour that could be applied to travel decision-making. The first dimension is spatial in that consumer decision-making is either internal (based on previous experience), external (based on external sources), or a combination of the two. The second dimension

is temporal—information searches are either conducted pre-trip for the specific purpose of informing the trip or conducted as an ongoing activity unrelated to a specific travel decision. The third dimension is operational and relates to the degree to which information sources contribute to travel decisions. Sources that strongly influence travel decisions are considered decisive, whereas those that stimulate interest but have little impact on decisions are labelled contributory.

Fodness and Murray (1998) used these dimensions to explore the trip planning behaviour of 585 visitors to welcome centres in Florida. Sixty-eight percent of respondents reported using more than one source of information, with 'friends and family' and 'welcome centres' being the most frequently used sources (cited by 48% and 47% respectively). The researchers also explored patterns of use to determine which sources of information tended to be used together. Data analysis revealed that information sources with high levels of interchange (i.e. those that tend to be used in conjunction with each other) include guidebooks, travel guides and brochures. Sources with low interchange include personal experience, travel agents and motoring organisations. The latter sources are rarely used together, suggesting that individually they provide sufficient information to be considered decisive sources of information. It must be noted, however, that 80% of respondents in their study were repeat visitors—sources such as 'personal experience' may not be as influential for first-time visitors. Nevertheless, Fodness and Murray's (1998) research provides a useful model for describing visitors' search strategies and exploring how tourist sites can develop a 'suite' of information resources that effectively complement each other.

A study similar to Fodness and Murray's (1998) was recently conducted in Australia by Ballantyne and Hughes (2007). Users of eighteen visitor information centres in Queensland, Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Victoria were asked to describe their travel planning practices. The researchers found that travellers in Australia also tend to access a 'suite' of travel information sources, and that this suite included an average of 3.5 resources. The most commonly used resources were personal recommendations from family and friends (mentioned by 63% of the 407 visitors surveyed); the internet (61%); travel books (50%); magazines (33%) and television (22%). Ballantyne and Hughes' (2007) study supports Sheldon's (1993) claim that recommendations from friends and family are usually travellers' principle source of travel planning information. It also adds weight to recent arguments that the internet is becoming an increasingly important source of travel information prior to travel, even for those who are familiar with the destination (Gursoy & McCleary 2003; Kerstetter & Cho 2004).

While most research identifies personal recommendations as a key information resource, some studies suggest that commercial sources of information may be equally, if not more, important. Tourism Queensland's 2004 research into the planning practices of drive tourists identified their primary sources of information as maps (used by 47% of respondents), motoring organisation brochures (46%) and previous knowledge (43%). Recommendations from family and friends (30%), other brochures (27%) and the internet (25%) were less important, suggesting that the type of holiday and the route chosen may be important factors guiding traveller's planning practices. Regardless of the order of importance, these studies all support the commonly-held notion that promotional materials such as brochures and websites, and navigational aids such as maps play a key role in informing decision-making prior to the travel experience.

Key points

- Travel is an expensive, high risk activity that often prompts extensive information search
- Tourists tend to use several sources of information to plan their trips
- Research consistently identifies recommendations from friends and family as tourists' main source of travel information
- The internet is becoming increasingly important in travel planning

Using Resources to Navigate Drive Tourism Routes

Research indicates that visitors seek and require information about tourist sites and destinations at various stages in the travel journey. These range from the initial travel decision through to locating access routes, attractions and accommodation at the destination (Sheldon 1993; Findlay & Southwell 2004). Although many visitors plan their travel in advance, the increasing number of tourists travelling independently and 'at the last minute' highlights the importance of providing information at the destination (Sheldon 1993).

There is also evidence that although many travellers make plans, these are often reasonably vague and flexible. As an example, Brown and Chalmers (2003) video recorded and interviewed visitors in Edinburgh and Glasgow's main tourism precincts. Transcription of responses revealed that tourists deliberately develop fluid travel plans to give themselves the flexibility to respond to changing circumstances and conditions. They also found that visitors tend to design a rough itinerary in advance then select specific roads and attractions as they travel. Similar observations were made by Tourism Queensland (2004), who reported that 80% of respondents chose their destinations before considering which route to travel. These recent studies do not support earlier claims that many visitors meticulously plan their itineraries prior to travel (e.g. Pringle 1999), but instead, add credence to the argument that at least some travellers may be more spontaneous and flexible in their travel plans.

Although trips usually have a definite beginning and end, there are many different ways of getting there. Navigation or way-finding involves identifying one's current location and making decisions about how to arrive at a particular destination. Studies exploring visitors' travel planning suggest that some sources of information may be more useful and/or appropriate for navigation than for decision-making. Interviews by Pringle (1999) revealed that, during the trip, visitors rarely use signage to make decisions about attractions, activities and places to visit; however, signage *is* the main source of information for directions on how to get to destinations or attractions. Thus, it seems signs are more commonly used for navigation than for choosing activities, attractions and destinations per se. This is perhaps not surprising given that most roadside signs predominantly convey directional information, as shown in Figure 3.



Figure 3: Roadside signs mainly provide directional information

Many attractions use roadside signage to attract and direct first-time visitors to their site, thus, signs act as pre-arrival or navigational markers, highlighting the easiest route to particular attractions (Findlay & Southwell 2004). Signs can also prompt visits to adjacent destinations and attractions and have been found to contribute to the visitor experience (Tourism Victoria 2002).

There is a range of sign styles used in Australia depending on the attractions or services being promoted. These follow the Australian Standard on Tourist and Service Signs and international road signing standards relating to features such as colouring. Thus, green signs with white lettering (as depicted in Figure 3) are used to provide directions to towns and cities, and facilitate the movement of traffic along the most direct routes (Tourism Victoria & VicRoads 2001). Brown signs with white lettering denote attractions of significant natural, cultural or recreational interest (Figure 4). Blue signs with white lettering direct motorists to facilities and services such as accommodation, service stations, parking areas and rest areas.



Figure 4: Standardised tourist attractions signs

Each Australian state has its own regulations relating to signage size and placement. Many tourism attractions use a tiered approach whereby advance warning sign/s are placed 10-30km from the attraction, followed by signs at key intersections and signage at the entrance (Tourism Tasmania 2002). Careful placement of signs where they can be easily seen and acted upon is critical—focus groups with visitors suggest that signs on Queensland roads are often too close to exits to allow drivers to turn off safely (Pringle 1999). Respondents also felt that in some cases signs were poorly maintained and therefore difficult to read. Ongoing maintenance is a critical aspect of ensuring sign visibility (Dunn 1995; Moscardo, Ballantyne & Hughes 2007).

For themed route signs, the Queensland Government recommends that signs be placed at least every 150km “as a mechanism to provide traveller reassurance” (Department of Main Roads 2001a, p.13). Dann (2003) also recommends placing signs at regular intervals to reduce confusion and anxiety. Like all things, however, too much of a good thing can be overwhelming—some places and attractions are hardly visible through the plethora of signage. In the words of Tourism Tasmania:

...it is not possible to provide—for every tourist attraction or facility—signs on the major roads and follow up signs leading to the property. The cost would be prohibitive and the proliferation of signs would be so great that it would be a major visual intrusion. (Glenorchy City Council 2005, p.i)

Too high a volume of signs can also reduce the effectiveness of signage and pose serious safety risks (Department of Main Roads 2001b). It is important that tourist signage does not detract from road safety signage and that it is clearly visible in a range of traffic conditions such as bright sunshine, rain and fog (Tiffin & Kissling 2005). Placement is particularly important for interpretive signs or those with detailed tourist information—less than 5% of travellers pull over to get information whereas almost 60% will read information signs at natural stopping places and rest areas where they are already stopped (Tourism Queensland 2004). Although people do read signs at roadside rest areas, Pringles' (1999) focus group interviews reveal that few visitors act on the information they read. Furthermore, it seems that to be effective, static information boards need to be located near towns as this tends to be when visitors are seeking information (Pringle 1999).

While signage along the route reassures visitors they are navigationally 'on the right track', signage at the entrance to towns and attractions is used to inform visitors they have arrived at their destination. If well designed, these entrance signs help to create a welcoming environment and enable visitors to orient themselves with the services, events and attractions offered (Figure 5).



Figure 5: Signs on the outskirts of towns inform visitors of upcoming events and attractions

Research in woodland sites suggests that people are more likely to use sites with informative signage and that signage and information boards are particularly valued by less frequent visitors (Ward-Thompson, Bell, Findlay & Aspinall 2002 as cited by Findlay & Southwell 2004). Likewise, a report by the Countryside Agency in Britain found that poor signage and directions prevented potential users from accessing countryside areas (Findlay & Southwell 2004). As Lorenz (2004) notes:

Signage is one of those things you only notice when it doesn't work. If you can find your way through an area that is new to you quickly and without stress, you're unlikely to comment on the effectiveness and style of the signage. But if the reverse is true, it makes for an infuriating and frustrating experience that has people cursing a lack of information. (p.18)

Research by Findlay and Southwell (2004) explored visitors' wayfinding needs and experiences at UK forest recreational sites. They conducted semi-structured interviews with forest users at five sites to document how visitors sourced and used information at different stages of the experience. These stages ranged from visitors' initial decision to travel, through to locating and using the site. The researchers also travelled routes surrounding the sites to locate potential points of navigational confusion and code roadside signage according to its placement, visibility, content and conformity to 'best practice' guidelines. Visitors reported using a range of navigational strategies including maps, verbal recommendations and landmarks. Many respondents were already intending on visiting the site, therefore roadside signage did not contribute to their travel decision. However, visitors did use the signs to locate the attractions and reported difficulties with consistency in the words or names used to describe places. This problem has been highlighted by Standards Australia who state that consistent naming along a route is essential in helping visitors locate their chosen destination. Consistency is particularly important if the route covers several local regions or traverses a state border (Freeman 2005).

Navigational difficulties stemming from poor placement and/or low visibility were also mentioned by respondents in Findlay and Southwell's 2004 study. At several sites, visitors reported having difficulties locating the site entrance. This was predominantly due to poor or no advance notice for entrances—a feature that is particularly important on main roads where visitors are likely to be driving at high speeds. Not surprisingly, studies have shown that the higher the approach speed, the greater the distance from which it must be readable (Freeman 2005). If lettering is too small and/or too closely spaced, drivers will be unable to process the information before it is too late (Freeman, 2005; Moscardo, Ballantyne & Hughes 2007). This is due to the fact that driving is a complex task that requires psychomotor skills to control the vehicle, plus cognitive skills to process traffic behaviour and decode signage information (Dutta, Fisher & Noyce 2004). Unless signs are clear, conspicuous and visible, drivers are unlikely to process or even notice the information presented.

Along with well-placed signage, clearly and accurately presenting distances on other navigational aids such as maps would help alleviate this problem. For example, respondents in Pringle's (1999) study showed a preference for maps that clearly show the distances between signs, point of interest and population centres (similar to the example in Figure 6).



Figure 6: Maps should clearly indicate distances between sites

The role of signage in informing visitors of accommodation (particularly bed and breakfast ventures) is a controversial and often debated topic. Given that many visitors do not book accommodation in advance (e.g., in 1999 only 24% of Queensland visitors surveyed by Pringle booked their accommodation prior to travel), there is considerable potential for signs and other navigational aids to influence visitors' decision-making. The primary sources of accommodation information cited by visitors in Pringle's study included visitor information centres (15%), 'just driving around' (13% of visitors), travel books (13%), signage (13%), accommodation booklets (11%) and maps (11%). Visitors' use of signage and other aids need to be explored further to ascertain the impact of these sources of information on their accommodation choices and to establish which are considered most useful.

To date, there has been little research examining visitors' use of maps and other navigation aids in 'real' situations (Brown & Chalmers 2003). The case study presented in Chapter 2 of this report aims to address this by exploring the planning and navigational practices of tourists travelling along Victoria's main themed tourist drive, the Great Southern Touring Route.

Key points

- Tourists tend to build flexibility into their travel plans
- Signs are used for navigation rather than for choosing attractions, sites and destinations to visit
- Many navigational difficulties stem from poor sign placement and/or problems with visibility

Themed Tourist Drives

Australia has witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of themed drive tourism routes in recent years (Tourism Queensland 2004). Themes in a tourism context are generally defined as underlying concepts or threads that tie together pieces of information. The key hallmarks of strong tourism themes are that they present a single idea or message; they connect the subject with the audience; and they help visitors link together the ideas presented (Moscardo, Ballantyne & Hughes 2007). Themes should also be inherently interesting and should entice visitors to want to learn more about the site, feature, object or event being interpreted.

The intention of themed routes is to use a theme or idea to promote the products, experiences and key attractions that can be accessed via the route. According to Tourism Queensland (2004), themed routes encourage visitors to travel off the main road, make more frequent stops, and increase their spending. For example, in focus group interviews conducted with visitors to Queensland (Pringle 1999), respondents reacted positively to the concept of themed routes, claiming that these routes facilitate pre-planning, offer opportunities for adventure and exploration, and provide safe, high quality experiences. To be effective, however, themed routes must be designed to promote an 'integrated' experience rather than simply advertise one destination or attraction (Department of Main Roads 2001a).

Tourism Alliance Victoria (2005) has outlined the following criteria for selection of 'best practice' self-drive touring routes:

- Routes should offer significant scenic or natural landscape features over the majority of the route that would not be commonly seen elsewhere; and
- Routes should feature attractions that are permanent (i.e. not seasonal).

Themed touring routes are generally promoted in tourist literature (brochures, guide books, maps), websites and visitor information centres. To be successful, materials promoting these themed experiences or routes need to support and complement onsite advertising and navigational aids such

as roadside signage. In other words, tourist road signage, maps, brochures, information bays, visitor information centres and other marketing support materials should all promote or be connected in some way to the route's underlying theme (Tourism Victoria 2002; Olsen 2003).

Many destination marketing bodies develop and design logos to portray the key elements of their themed route. Essentially, logos are graphic designs that identify a particular product and raise consumer awareness of its attributes. Logos often feature on business cards, letterheads, promotional brochures, merchandise and signage, and in many cases are accompanied by a 'tagline' that encapsulates the image being projected (Blain, Levy & Ritchie 2005). These logos serve to reinforce the theme as well as indicate ownership and commitment to the concept of a themed route or region (Victorian Litter Action Alliance 2005).

If well designed, logos attract prospective visitors' attention and enable them to quickly and readily identify associated tourism products and services. They are "one of the main vehicles for communicating image, cutting through clutter to gain attention, and speeding recognition of the product" (Henderson & Cote 1998, p.15). Furthermore, logos stimulate awareness amongst visitors and, by portraying particular attributes, can influence their decision-making behaviour. To do this effectively, however, they must be clearly visible and easy to interpret. Examples of integrated signage and marketing materials from Maryborough, Queensland are presented in Figures 7, 8 and 9. Note the consistent use of the stylised heart shaped M logo and the tagline 'start here'.



Figure 7: Header of the Maryborough tourist information website



Figure 8: Stickers and signage feature the stylised M



Figure 9: Souvenir card fans focus on Maryborough’s heritage

Tourism Victoria cautions that logos are generally unsuitable for roadside signs because they are difficult to distinguish from moving vehicles and recommends that use of logos should be “supported by strategic and sustainable marketing programs to maximise recognition” (Tourism Victoria, & VicRoads 2001, p.18). This is important from a safety and navigational aspect, as roadside signs containing large amounts of information can interfere with drivers’ short-term memory capabilities. To illustrate, Liu (2005) used simulation experiments to test the effect of information volume on 24 students’ visual search and information recall. Results indicated that increasing the amount of information presented on signs slowed students’ visual searching process, increased perceived stress and reduced their recall accuracy. If, however, logos were added rather than words, recall accuracy was improved. These results are similar to those reported by Long and Kearns (1996) who examined respondents’ recognition of signage information in simulated driving conditions. Their research required 28 male and 36 female students to view and describe critical aspects of the sign that distinguished it from other signs and which were necessary to convey its message completely. Responses indicated that standard icons and slightly modified iconic versions were superior to text signage. It seems that logos and symbols help to minimise the number of words needed and improve recall levels.

Recall may also depend on the number of times the logo or sign is displayed. Generally, signs along themed routes are designed to consistently and persistently repeat logos and messages. This

approach serves to reinforce messages, logos and images which in turn assists visibility, recall and navigation. This is an important advantage of themed signage, as focus group interviews exploring perceptions and recall of roadside anti-litter signs reveal that one-off signs and logos are often not seen (Victorian Litter Action Alliance, 2005). This view is reiterated by Cai (2002) who recommends that there be consistent use of a single logo as designing and installing different signs for different sections of the route creates confusion amongst travellers. She claims that if all regions adhere to the overarching logo or theme, advertising power will be strengthened and the risk of confusion reduced.

By themselves, small regional communities may not have sufficient marketing power or attractions to lure travellers, yet if they are part of a larger conglomerate, they can support and complement each other. Thus, using an overarching theme, developing scenic byways and stopovers, and cooperatively marketing the route under one umbrella encourages visitors to travel these routes to sample the regional attractions on offer.

Logos may also be easier to decipher and recall than text if they are familiar. Findlay and Southwell's (2004) study of countryside areas revealed that navigational difficulties at the site largely stemmed from lack of information, unclear information or unfamiliar symbols and icons. In some cases signs were in fact present but were 'lost' in the clutter of other signs. Some visitors felt that the increasing use of symbols did not necessarily enhance comprehension, suggesting that using this as a method of overcoming language difficulties may not be appropriate. The authors observed similar confusion in Western Australia, where signs displaying the lower case letter 't' were common (see Figure 10). Presumably the 't' designated tourism related activities or services, though this could not be ascertained from the destinations signed and was therefore never confirmed.



Figure 10: Icons don't always make signs easier to understand

The ambiguity of sign icons and logos has been documented by several researchers. For example, Bennett (1997, cited by Dann 2003) reported that Japanese visitors interpret the British speed camera sign as meaning a good photo opportunity, while Tourism Queensland (2004) claims there are low levels of recognition for most route logos. This is a concern, as many researchers stress that 'best practice' logos are those that convey the same meaning to a variety of audiences (Henderson & Cote 1998). The importance of using easily recognised graphics is highlighted by Standards Australia (Freeman 2005), and is an area of study that requires further attention.

A study by Woods and Moscardo (1998) suggests that adding illustrations to signs can be detrimental. They asked 76 visitors to the Great Barrier Reef to describe the meaning of eight symbols used on visitor behaviour signs. Results revealed that some behaviour such as feeding fish food scraps and floating safe distances above coral were not well communicated by symbols. Surprisingly, the addition of text to the symbols only served to add confusion. These findings suggest that symbols may not be appropriate for complex messages and, in such cases, should be employed with caution. This supports logo strategy literature that claims simple logos with natural designs are easier to remember than complex or ornate logos (Henderson & Cote 1998). Furthermore, designs that are similar to well-known symbols are also more readily processed, recognised and recalled (see Henderson & Cote 1998 for a full review).

This review demonstrates that selection of logos, promotion of images, and decisions relating to where, when and how information is disseminated all have the potential to guide and impact upon visitors' planning and navigational practices. These factors are particularly important in the case of touring routes, where images and themes are used to gather a range of products, services and attractions under one umbrella. The remainder of this report presents examples and illustrations from the Great Southern Touring Route to discuss the development, design and distribution of 'best practice' navigational and trip planning information.

Key points

- Themed routes use a theme or idea to promote the products, experiences and key attractions along the route
- Logos are often used to stimulate awareness and reinforce the theme
- Logos should be consistently and prominently displayed in materials marketing the route as well as along the route itself
- There should only be one logo per route

CHAPTER 2: CASE STUDY OF THE GREAT SOUTHERN TOURING ROUTE

The Great Southern Touring Route

The Great Southern Touring Route in Victoria is marketed as one of the premier tourist drives in Australia, “a journey that takes in many of Australia’s most famous places in a loop that starts and ends in Melbourne” (Tourism Australia 2007, p.31). Highlights include Geelong, Apollo Bay, the Great Ocean Road, the Twelve Apostles, Warrnambool, Port Fairy, The Grampians and Ballarat (Figure 11).



Figure 11: The Great Southern Touring Route

The committee that markets the Great Southern Touring Route (GSTR Inc.) is comprised of representatives from Shipwreck Coast Tourism, Geelong Otway Tourism, Ballarat Tourism, Northern Grampians Shire Council and Southern Grampians Shire Council. The combined approach to international and domestic marketing from the participating regional tourism organisations has established a cost-effective marketing program that has resulted in the Route capturing a significant share of Australia’s drive market.

The touring route was originally established in 1993 in response to demand from international markets to create short touring itineraries that connected some of Victoria’s major attractions.

In the first phase of the Great Southern Touring Route concept in 1993, there was very little product available in the regions that was ready to trade in the international marketplace. As a result, marketing activities focused on the Great Ocean Road and various spur routes. As product improved in standard

and diversity throughout the touring route, itineraries were developed to help sell the concept to consumers.

In the second phase of the Route's development from 1999 to 2003, products that could be booked were made available to the international trade through initiatives such as product manuals, which have been produced and promoted annually since 1999. With industry participation growing each year, GSTR Inc. was able to consolidate its reputation within the international travel trade. During this period, the move to promote the Great Southern Touring Route in association with the Great New Zealand Touring Route, as the Great Downunder Tour, increased the appeal of the route to international consumers. Developments such as the Otway Fly and 'Shipwrecked'—the sound and light show at Flagstaff Hill—also made significant contributions to the range and quality of attractions in the regions.

From 2003, the Great Southern Touring Route entered the third phase of its market growth, which involved promotion of the route in association with other touring routes, in particular, as part of the Melbourne to Adelaide Touring Route. Working with the South Australian Tourist Commission, regional South Australian partners and Travelink, the Great Southern Touring Route has been involved in a wide range of promotional activities that encourage domestic and international visitors to travel between Melbourne and Adelaide via part or all of the Great Southern Touring Route.

This case study was undertaken to identify the scope and extent of visitors' travel planning, their preferences and needs in terms of travel and navigational information, and sources of signed and non-signed information that influenced their travel decisions and navigational practices.

Method

Visitors were sampled at seven towns and tourism attractions along the Great Southern Touring Route in Victoria: Apollo Bay Visitor Information Centre; the 12 Apostles; Flagstaff Hill in Warrnambool; the Maritime Discovery Centre in Portland; Brambuk the National Park and Cultural Centre at Halls Gap; and Sovereign Hill and The Eureka Centre in Ballarat. Sampling was conducted over the Easter school holidays in 2007. This is one of the main tourist periods, however, it must be noted that the resultant sample may not be representative of year-round travellers on this route. For instance, the respondent group is likely to include more families with children than would be obtained if sampling outside school holidays.

Self-administered questionnaires were designed to explore travellers' planning practices and navigational experiences. A combination of closed and open-ended items was used to question respondents about:

- The nature and duration of their trip planning;
- Sources of information used to plan their trip;
- Their trip itinerary and proposed route;
- Use of roadside signs and other materials to locate tourism attractions;
- Their awareness and perceptions of tourist signage and route logos; and
- Their evaluation of signs and navigational materials, particularly in relation to their planning and navigational needs.

Travellers entering the attraction were approached and asked whether they would be willing to comment on their travel experiences and views about information and navigational materials featuring the Great Southern Touring Route. For the purpose of this study, travellers were defined as visitors driving parts or the entirety of the Great Southern Touring Route. Those who agreed were asked to complete a four page questionnaire (see Appendix A) and to indicate their travel route on the Great Southern Touring Route map (refer back to Figure 11).

Managers at some of the data collection sites were also asked informal questions about:

- The range, scope and effectiveness of signs and non-signed materials used to promote their attraction;
- Whether they thought visitors had navigational difficulties and if so, where and why; and
- Whether they thought icons and themed routes helped to promote their attraction.

This information was augmented by the researchers' personal observations and evaluations of the content, clarity and positioning of signed and non-signed information and navigational materials.

Respondents' Profile

Questionnaires were distributed to 272 visitors travelling the Great Southern Touring Route during the Easter vacation in 2007. Sites chosen for distribution and the numbers of completed questionnaires collected at each site are shown in Table 1. Most respondents were first-time visitors, with almost 60% never having been to the area before. Of those who had visited before, most had only been once or twice (43% and 19% respectively).

Table 1: Number and percentage of completed questionnaires collected at each site

	No. of visitors	Percentage
Apollo Bay	49	18
12 Apostles	100	37
Warrnambool	10	4
Portland	10	4
Halls Gap visitor centre	53	19
Sovereign Hill, Ballarat	30	11
Eureka Stockade, Ballarat	20	7
TOTAL	272	100

The sample comprised 129 males and 127 females. Of the 229 respondents who indicated their place of origin, 107 (47%) were from Victoria, 67 (29%) were from interstate and 55 (24%) were from overseas. Respondents were predominantly aged between 20 and 65, with the largest proportion being in the 36-50-year-old bracket (Figure 12).

Most respondents were in full-time (59%) or part-time (18%) employment. It is expected that these patterns are partly due to the timing of the data collection which was conducted during the Easter school holidays. The proportion of retirees travelling the route was lower than expected (Figure 13), but is likely to be due to the fact that sampling took place during school holidays.

As shown in Table 2, most respondents were travelling as a couple or family. Again, the high proportion of families is likely to be a direct consequence of collecting data in the school holidays. There were very few respondents travelling alone.

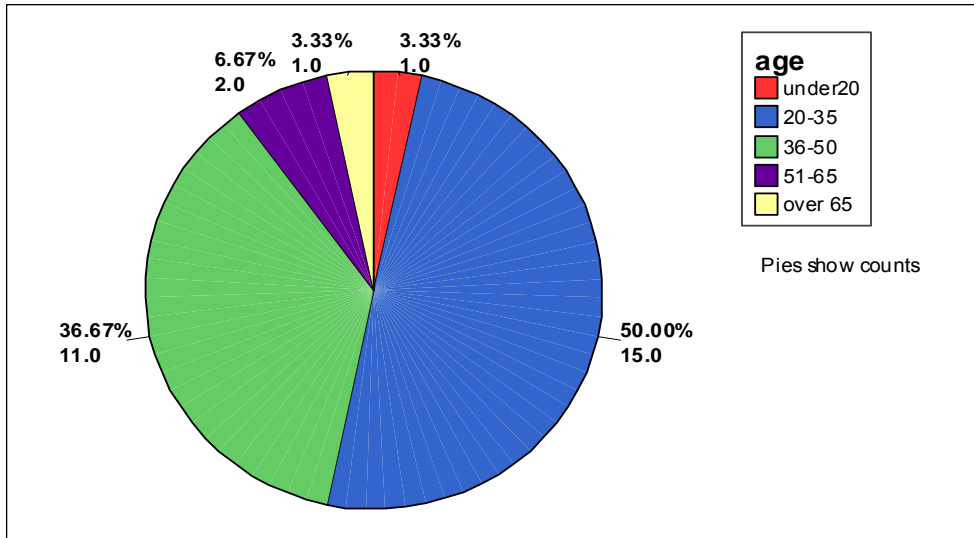


Figure 12: Age distribution of respondents

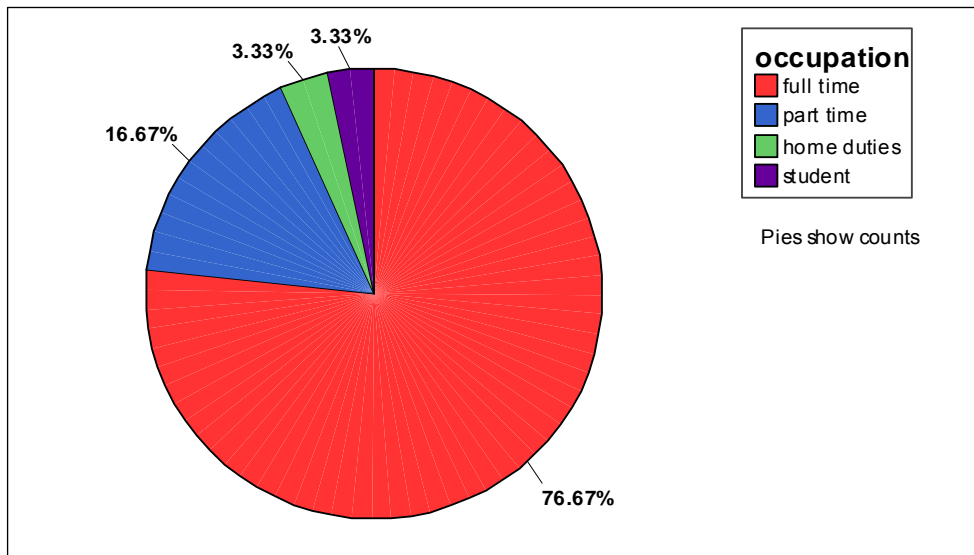


Figure 13: Occupational status of respondents

Table 2: Characteristics of travel party of respondents

Occupants of vehicle	No. of visitors	Percentage
Spouse	116	47.5
Family	84	34
Friends	32	13
Family and Friends	7	3
Alone	6	2.5
TOTAL	245	100

The majority of respondents were spending more than one night away from home, with the highest proportion travelling for two to three days (Table 3).

Table 3: Number of nights respondents planned to be away from home

Number of nights away	No. of visitors	Percentage
1 night	20	8
2-3 nights	72	30
4-6 nights	50	21
1-2 weeks	57	23
3-4 weeks	16	7
More than 4 weeks	28	11
TOTAL	243	100

Tourism Australia markets the Great Southern Touring Route as a seven-day drive. Travel patterns obtained in the present study suggest many visitors only drive part of the route, an issue that will be explored further in the following sections.

Key points

- Most respondents were first-time visitors
- Almost half the sample (47%) was from Victoria, 29% were from interstate and 24% were from overseas
- The highest proportion of respondents were travelling for two to three days

Pre-trip Planning Practices

The Great Southern Touring Route is marketed by Tourism Australia and Tourism Victoria as one of Australia's key drive tourism routes. Marketing is conducted by a consortium and is primarily targeted at international visitors. There is a range of promotional material available to assist visitors plan their journey. For example, the route features prominently in Tourism Australia's recent brochure *Amazing Australian Journeys: Your essential self-drive guide*, plus a range of Tourism Victoria brochures including the Great Ocean Road. There is also a website dedicated to promoting attractions, services and facilities located along the Great Southern Touring Route: <http://www.greatsoutherntouring.com.au/index2.asp>

This section of the results focuses on exploring the travel planning practices of visitors driving the entire or part of Great Southern Touring Route. As depicted in Figure 11, the Great Southern Touring Route incorporates the Great Ocean Road (coastal route between Geelong and Nelson); the Shipwreck Coast (coastal route between Princetown and Port Fairy); the inland route from Port Fairy north to Halls Gap; parts of the Great Grape Touring Route (Ballarat region) and the Western Highway (inland route between Ballarat and Melbourne).

Almost all the tourists sampled (94%) were only travelling a portion of the Great Southern Touring Route. As Table 4 indicates, the majority of those travelling the entire route were international visitors, possibly due to the fact that the route is primarily marketed overseas.

Table 4: Origin of respondents travelling the Great Southern Touring route

Place of origin	Are you travelling the entire Great Southern Touring Route		
	Yes	No	TOTAL
Victoria	3 (19%)	115 (50%)	118
Interstate	4 (25%)	66 (28%)	70
International	9 (56%)	51 (22%)	60
TOTAL	16	232	248

Although research sites were located along the Great Southern Touring Route, there were several respondents who did not use the touring route to get to these sites. Common routes and direction of travel are presented in Table 5. The majority of respondents (68.5%) travelled some portion of the Great Ocean Road. This travel was predominantly from Melbourne, with 147 respondents (82% of all those travelling the Great Ocean Road) starting their trip in Melbourne. Most of these travelled via Torquay, though 26 respondents chose to use the Princes Highway and join the Great Ocean Road at Apollo Bay.

Table 5: Direction and routes travelled by respondents

Route	No. of visitors	Percentage
Great Ocean Road from Melbourne	121	46
Great Ocean Road from west	33	12.5
Melbourne to Great Ocean Road via Princes Highway	26	10
Melbourne to Ballarat—Western Freeway	49	18.5
Bendigo to Halls Gap via Stawell	11	4
Warrnambool to Ballarat via inland highways	9	3
Geelong to Ballarat via Midland Highway	4	2
Other	11	4
TOTAL	264	100

Respondents were asked to indicate how long they intended to be away from home. There was a significant association between the number of nights visitors planned to be away and the route travelled ($\chi^2 = 11.329$, $p < 0.05$). As shown in Table 6, those travelling the Great Ocean Road tend to stay at least four nights (70% of the sample) whereas almost half of those travelling inland sections of the Great Southern Touring Route stay fewer than four nights.

Table 6: Percentage of visitors staying at least one night on the Great Southern Touring Route

Nights away from home	Route travelled		
	Great Ocean Road (n=141)	Inland sections of GSTR (n=95)	TOTAL
1 night	6	12	8
2-3 nights	24	37	29
4-6 nights	22	19	21
1-2 weeks	24	21	23
3-4 weeks	10	2	7
> 4 weeks	14	9	12
TOTAL (n=236)	100	100	100

These travel patterns suggest that drive packages and brochures that include the Great Ocean Road should aim to provide tourist information and itineraries for stays of four nights or more. This could include 'off the beaten track' drives and activities to encourage visitors to fully experience the attractions of the area. Conversely, brochures and marketing strategies promoting other sections of the Great Southern Touring Route are likely to be more effective if they highlight 'short break' packages of one to three nights.

The amount of time spent on travel planning was fairly evenly spread, with nearly half planning for less than a fortnight and the other half taking more than three months (Table 7).

Table 7: Time spent planning trip

Time spent planning	No. of visitors	Percentage
Less than 1 week	56	22
1-2 weeks	57	23
3-4 weeks	14	6
3-6 months	51	20
More than 6 months	73	29
TOTAL	251	100

These patterns do not support Hardy et al.'s (2006) study of Queensland drive tourists in which 70% of respondents spent less than a week planning their trip. However, this could be due to the fact that Hardy et al.'s (2006) sample included a large proportion of Queensland residents and no international visitors. In the present study there were some interesting (although not statistically significant) differences in the planning practices of intrastate, interstate and international respondents. As shown in Table 8, few Victorian visitors planned their trip more than a fortnight in advance. Conversely, those from interstate were likely to spend at least three months planning their trip, with 30% planning three to six months in advance and 45% planning more than six months in advance. For interstate visitors, road trips such as the Great Southern Tourist Route are planned well in advance and are not spur-of-the-moment decisions. This has important implications for accommodation establishments and tourism businesses trying to attract interstate visitors, as it suggests that last minute deals and packages are unlikely to appeal to this market. For Victorians, however, such offers are likely to be highly attractive.

Not surprisingly, international visitors tend to plan their trip well in advance, with 44% spending at least three months gathering information (Table 8). There is, however, a reasonably large group of international visitors (25%) who only spent one to two weeks planning. This suggests that last minute deals targeting international visitors have the potential to be successful.

Table 8: Time respondents spent planning by their place of origin

Time spent planning (%)	Place of origin			TOTAL
	Victoria (n=107)	Interstate (n=67)	International (n=55)	
1-2 days	19	6	11	13
3-4 days	7.5	6	11	8
1-2 weeks	33	10	25	25
3-4 weeks	6.5	3	9	6
3-6 months	17	30	11	19
> 6 months	18	45	33	29
TOTAL (n=229)	100	100	100	100

Unlike previous research (e.g. Fodness & Murray 1997), there was no significant relationship between time spent planning the trip and the number of nights away. There was also no significant relationship between planning time and age. This is surprising given that research consistently indicates that planning time increases with age (Zalatan 1996). It is likely, however, that the lack of support for this view stems from the fact that the data was collected during school holiday and thus the current sample was heavily skewed towards younger adults (see Figure 12). The current study also failed to find a significant relationship between planning time and respondents' occupation.

Although all respondents had conducted some planning prior to the trip, this did not necessarily extend to booking accommodation. Figure 14 illustrates that 40% of respondents had not booked any accommodation and a further 14% had only booked accommodation for some of their trip. These results are surprising given that the data was collected in peak season (Easter) when accommodation is notoriously difficult to obtain. The fact that only 42% had pre-booked all their accommodation suggests that tourists like to retain a degree of flexibility in their itinerary. Similar findings were reported by Pringle (1999) who found that only 24% of Queensland visitors booked their accommodation prior to travel.

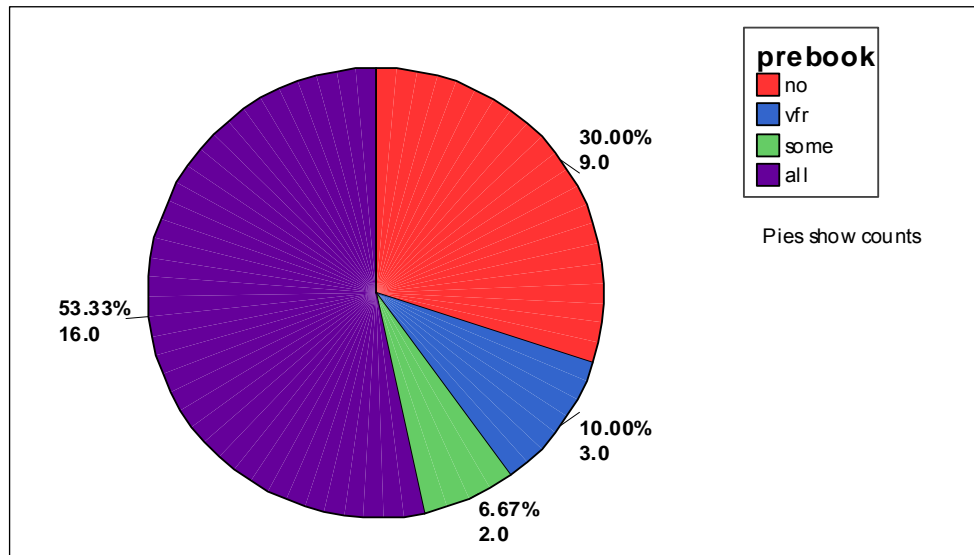


Figure 14: Respondents' accommodation booking patterns

Further analysis revealed significant differences between international, interstate and Victorian visitors in terms of whether they pre-booked accommodation for this trip ($\chi = 39.837, p < 0.000$). As illustrated in Table 9, Victorians were more likely to pre-book accommodation (65% had all their accommodation booked), whereas international visitors were not likely to have booked accommodation (65% had not booked any accommodation). A large number of interstate visitors had also not booked accommodation (41%), which is surprising given that the majority spent more than three months planning their trip (refer back to Table 8). Evidently this planning does not extend to pre-booking accommodation.

Table 9: Percentage of visitors who had booked accommodation by place of origin

Place of origin	Proportion of accommodation booked		
	None	Some	All
Victoria ($n=116$)	27	8	65
Interstate ($n=70$)	41	26	33
International ($n=60$)	65	10	25
TOTAL ($n=238$)	40	14	46

Whether the high number of intrastate visitors who had booked accommodation is due to Victorians being aware of accommodation shortages or having better access to booking facilities than international and interstate visitors is not clear. However, the high number of interstate and international visitors who had not booked accommodation suggests that an accommodation booking service located at the main gateways to the Great Southern Touring Route (Melbourne and Warrnambool) could prove useful and popular. Supporting brochures, maps and signage prominently promoting the Great Southern Touring Route and its attractions would also assist travellers to plan and book their trip at the start of their journey.

There was no significant difference between the age of respondents and their booking patterns, nor their occupational status and whether or not they had pre-booked accommodation. There was also no significant difference in booking patterns between those travelling along the coastal sections of the Great Southern Touring Route and those travelling inland.

Given that information about accommodation along the Great Southern Touring Route is primarily obtained from the internet (Table 10), the tendency to not book accommodation is unlikely to be a consequence of poor access to information. Indeed, the main online accommodation booking services such as VisitVictoria.com (official Tourism Victoria website), Travel Victoria and wotif.com are all easy to navigate and include a wide range of accommodation venues and maps. Interestingly, the latter two websites do not mention the Great Southern Touring Route, suggesting that familiarity with the route and its attractions may be problematic for those relying solely on these sites for information.

The internet was the most popular source of planning information, regardless of whether visitors were travelling from intrastate, interstate or overseas. This suggests that access to information does not account for differences in booking behaviour between local, interstate and international visitors. Other important sources of information about accommodation were visitor information centres (mentioned by 17% of visitors) and tourist guide books such as Lonely Planet (mentioned by 11%).

Table 10: Sources of information used to decide where to stay for the night

Source of accommodation information	No. of visitors	Percentage*
Internet	109	40
Visitor information centres	51	17
Tourist guide books	32	11
Vacancy signs – just saw as driving past	28	10
Brochures	19	6
Roadside signs	15	5
Recommendation of friends/family	13	4
Other	24	7
TOTAL	291[#]	100

NOTE: * Percentage of visitors who mentioned this source of information; [#] Respondents were allowed to nominate more than one source, hence the total exceeds the number of respondents.

Responses in Table 10 are similar to those identified in Pringle’s (1999) study of Queensland drive tourists. Although the internet did not feature in the earlier study, other key sources of accommodation information were visitor information centres, tourist guide books and signage. This suggests that expanding the network of accommodation booking services located in visitor information centres along the Great Southern Touring Route should be considered as many visitors use these centres to find local attractions and accommodation venues. Indeed, Ballantyne and Hughes’ (2007) study of visitor information centres in Queensland, Victoria, the Northern Territory and Western Australia found that 22% of the 407 visitors surveyed specifically stopped at these centres to find out information about accommodation in the local region. The present study found that some travellers relied on seeing vacancy signs, suggesting that it is important that accommodation establishments include room availability information on private property signing.

The responses presented in Tables 8, 9 and 10 suggest that many visitors travelling the Great Southern Touring Route are reasonably flexible. These results also indicate there may be considerable potential for influencing visitors’ decisions to visit particular sites and places. This potential was explored by asking visitors to nominate their style of travel for the current trip (i.e. adhering to a pre-ordained travel plan or following a more ‘laissez faire’ approach). Respondents were given five options and asked to nominate the style of travel most closely resembling their intentions for this particular trip. Responses in Table 11 indicate that the majority of respondents do not rigidly adhere to a planned itinerary, but rather tend to stop at places of interest that ‘catch their eye’ along the way. A large number (36.5%) identified some sites they wished to visit but also allowed time for

exploring additional sites, while a further 36% had not made any specific plans in relation to visiting sites. Of these, approximately half had also not decided where to stay.

Table 11: Respondents' travel intentions for the current trip

Style of travel	No. of visitors	Percentage
Travel between accommodation points, stopping only for food and fuel	14	5.5
Travel between accommodation points, stopping only at planned sites	59	22
Travel between accommodation points, some sites planned but time allowed for additional sites of interest	96	36.5
Travel between accommodation points, no sites planned—just stop when see things of interest	44	17
No accommodation or sites planned	50	19
TOTAL	263	100

These responses indicate that many visitors travelling this route are willing to adjust their plans and itineraries to accommodate sites and places of interest. The findings add weight to Brown and Chalmers' (2003) claim that visitors keep their travel plans deliberately fluid to enable them to take advantage of changing circumstances. They also support Sheldon's (1993) claim that travellers are becoming more spontaneous and that provision of information at the destination is becoming increasingly important.

As most respondents had allowed time for unscheduled stops and additional places of interest, it is important for local and regional tourism businesses and information centres to highlight attractions in their area and encourage people to explore and stay longer. The large number of visitors with reasonably flexible travel plans also suggests there is considerable scope to lure travellers 'off the beaten track'. This could be achieved through information presented in visitor information centres and through brochures, maps and roadside signage. The key requirement is to use popular channels of information dissemination to influence visitors' decision-making both prior to and *during* the trip. The next section addresses the issue of what information sources are popular, and how effective these are in informing visitors' travel decisions.

Key points

- Most respondents planned to travel sections of the Great Southern Touring Route
- Tourists travelling coastal sections of the route tend to stay at least four nights; those on the inland sections tend to stay fewer than four nights
- 40% of respondents had not booked any accommodation
- Most respondents had flexible itineraries

Sources of Information Used to Plan Travel

Visitors were asked to indicate and rate the sources of information they used to plan their current trip. This predominantly refers to pre-trip planning but also included planning conducted during the journey.

Responses revealed that travellers tend to use more than one resource to plan their journey. As illustrated in Table 12, very few used none (7.5%) or only one (17%) source of information. Rather, the majority (60%) used between two and five resources, though some (7.5%) used as many as eleven sources. The average number of planning resources used was 3.2. This supports the findings of Fodness and Murray (1998) who found that 68% of visitors to welcome centres in Florida accessed more than one source of information to plan their trip.

Table 12: Number of travel information sources used to plan trip

No. of sources	No. of visitors	Percentage
0	21	7.5
1	47	17
2	54	20
3	43	16
4	36	13
5	32	12
6	21	7.5
More than 6	17	7
TOTAL	272	100

Previous research consistently identifies recommendations from friends and family as travellers' principle source of travel planning information (Ballantyne & Hughes 2007; Fodness & Murray 1998; Sheldon 1993). In the present study, however, friends and family were a less important source of information than the internet, maps, visitor information centres and brochures. In fact, only 31% of respondents claimed to have relied on friends and family for travel planning information. As shown in Table 13, more than double that number (64%) used the internet to plan their journey. This was the case regardless of whether visitors were travelling from within Victoria, from interstate or from overseas.

Table 13: Sources of travel planning information

Source	No. of visitors	Percentage*
Internet	174	64
Maps	145	53
Visitor information centres	126	46
Brochures	116	43
Recommendations from friends/family	84	31
Guidebooks	81	30
Brown and white roadside signs	64	23.5
Roadside advertising billboards	21	8
Television	20	7
Newspapers	17	6
GPS	17	6

NOTE: * Respondents were allowed to nominate more than one source hence the total exceeds 100%.

The high proportion of tourists using the internet to plan their travel adds weight to recent arguments that the internet is becoming an increasingly important source of travel information prior to travel, even for repeat visitors (Gursoy & McCleary 2003; Kerstetter & Cho 2004; Ho & Liu 2005). Given its rising popularity, there is an urgent need to examine online tourist information search behaviour. To date, very little research has been published in this area (Ho & Liu 2005). The present research indicates that most respondents who use the internet rate it as an excellent or good source of trip planning information (44% and 46% respectively) but further work exploring use of search engines, specific sites accessed and navigational routes taken through these sites is required.

Maps were also an important source of travel information prior to travel, with just over half of the sample referring to them while planning their trip. This supports Tourism Queensland's (2004) research which found that 47% of the drive tourists they surveyed used maps to plan their trip. In the present study there was a significant difference between intrastate, interstate and international visitors in terms of their reliance on maps ($\chi = 11.613$, $p < 0.005$). As Table 14 illustrates, most interstate and international visitors used maps to plan their trip but most Victorian visitors did not.

Table 14: Percentage of respondents who used maps for trip planning

Place of origin	Did you use of maps for planning your trip?	
	Yes (%)	No (%)
Victoria ($n=118$)	41	59
Interstate ($n=70$)	63	37
International ($n=60$)	62	38
TOTAL (248)	52	48

The differences shown in Table 14 may in part be due to familiarity with the area, as Victorians were significantly more likely than interstate or international visitors ($\chi = 54.926$, $p < 0.000$) to have visited the area before and would therefore be familiar with the route (Table 15).

Table 15: Previous trips to the area by place of origin

Place of origin	Have you visited the area before?	
	Yes (%)	No (%)
Victoria ($n=117$)	62	38
Interstate ($n=69$)	30	70
International ($n=60$)	7	93
TOTAL (246)	52	48

Most respondents thought maps were excellent (36%) or good (54%) sources of travel planning information. The main types of maps used were those in brochures (used by 44 respondents or 16%), road atlases (41 respondents or 15%), the Melway street directory for Melbourne (29 respondents or 11%) and RACV maps (27 respondents or 10%).

Table 13 also shows that many visitors (46%) used visitor information centres to plan their trip. Almost all rated these as excellent (56%) or good (36%) sources of trip planning information. As with use of maps, intrastate, interstate and international visitors differed significantly in their use of visitor information centres ($\chi = 9.527$, $p < 0.05$). As Table 16 illustrates, the majority of international respondents (60%) stop at visitor information centres to obtain advice and information but only 36% of Victorians do so.

Table 16: Use of visitor information centres for trip planning by place of origin

Place of origin	Use of visitor information centres for planning	
	Yes (%)	No (%)
Victoria (n=118)	36	64
Interstate (n=70)	50	50
International (n=60)	60	40
TOTAL (248)	54	46

While it is tempting to conclude that visitor information centres are predominantly used by interstate and international visitors, these patterns may simply be a reflection of previous travel to the area. Research consistently indicates that first-time visitors tend to use the services of professional travel advisories (travel agents, visitor information centre staff) while repeat visitors use a range of commercial and non-commercial sources (Kerstetter & Cho 2004). Further analysis shows that previous visitation may indeed be an important factor influencing use of visitor information centres; with first-time visitors being significantly more likely ($\chi^2=15.6$, $p<0.000$) to access the services of visitor information centres than repeat visitors (Table 17). Thus, the current case study supports the widely-held notion that first-time visitors tend to seek the services of professional travel advisors such as those staffing visitor information centres.

Table 17: Previous trips to the area by use of visitor information centres

Use of visitor information centres for travel planning	Visited the area before	
	Yes (%)	No (%)
Yes (n=145)	28	72
No (n=125)	52	48
TOTAL (270)		

These findings indicate that the trip planning services of visitor information centres are mainly being accessed by destination-naïve travellers. This implies that these centres should predominantly design their services, displays and information to meet the needs and travel requests of interstate and international visitors. This assertion is supported by the finding that the majority of interstate and international visitors used brochures to plan their trip (see Table 18). As with visitor information centres, brochures were generally rated as good or excellent sources of trip planning information (57% and 34% respectively).

Table 18: Use of brochures for trip planning by place of origin

Place of origin	Use of brochures for planning	
	Yes (%)	No (%)
Victoria (n=117)	28	72
Interstate (n=70)	43	57
International (n=60)	43	57
TOTAL (247)	43	56

Interestingly, popular media such as newspapers and television were rarely cited as sources of trip planning information by international, interstate or Victorian visitors (refer back to Table 13). This implies that advertising themed driving routes in these sources may not be the most effective means of reaching potential travellers.

While previous research indicates that signs are rarely used to make decisions about attractions, activities and places to visit (Pringle 1999), responses in the current study suggest this may not apply when travelling the Great Southern Touring Route. Table 13 illustrates that 64 respondents (23.5%) stated that their travel decisions had been influenced by brown and white tourist roadside signs. While not a majority, this figure suggests that there is some scope for influencing planning decisions through the use of well-placed roadside signage. While only 21 respondents cited advertising billboards as a source of travel planning information, this may be partly due to the fact that there were few billboards on the route studied.

Research by Fodness and Murray (1998) indicates that some sources are more likely to be used as decisive sources of information (used in isolation) while others are more likely to form part of a 'suite' of travel resources. In the present case study, the most common source of information, the internet, is likely to be used in conjunction with other sources. Only 16% of the 174 internet users reported that it was their sole source of information (Table 19).

Table 19: Number of additional sources accessed by internet users

No. of additional resources	No. of visitors	Percentage
Internet only	28	16
1	35	20
2	27	16
3	28	16
4	22	13
5	18	10
6 or more	16	9
TOTAL	174	100

The additional sources of information most likely to be accessed by internet users were maps (used by 55%), brochures (49%) and visitor information centres (47%). This supports Ho and Liu's (2005) claim that internet users tend to supplement online searches with other sources of information. It also implies that in-situ sources of tourist information such as visitor information centres need to ensure that their location, services and hours of business are clearly advertised on key tourism websites.

Multidimensional scaling (Cox & Cox 2001) also supports the notion that for travel planning, visitor information centres, brochures and maps tend to be used together. That is, visitors who access the services of visitor information centres are also highly likely to use brochures and maps to plan their trip. This implies that these resources should be designed to complement each other. Thus, brochures could list visitor information centres located along the themed route while maps could pinpoint their location.

Key points

- Tourists on the Great Southern Touring Route use an average of 3.2 resources to plan their trip
- The internet is the main source of travel planning information
- Maps and visitor information centres are also important sources of travel planning information
- Visitor information centres, brochures and maps tend to be used together

Navigating the Great Southern Touring Route

As discussed, when *planning* their trip, visitors tend to access several sources of information to inform their decisions. When navigating, however, the majority of travellers use only one or two sources of information. Table 20 illustrates that 33% of respondents relied on only one source of information, while 35% used two sources. Very few (12%) used more than three navigational aids.

Table 20: Number of sources used to navigate trip

No. of sources	No. of visitors	Percentage
0	16	6
1	90	33
2	95	35
3	37	14
4	15	5
More than 4	19	7
TOTAL	272	100

Not surprisingly, the most commonly cited source of directional information used by travellers on the Great Southern Touring Route were brown and white roadside tourist signs (refer to Table 21). This strengthens Pringle's (1999) argument that signage is the main source of information used to locate destinations or attractions. Signs along the Great Southern Touring Route were rated as 'excellent' or 'good' sources of directional information by 40% and 47% of respondents respectively. There was no significant difference between international, interstate and local visitors' use of roadside signs to find directions to tourist sites, with the majority of respondents in each group nominating these as a source of navigational information.

Table 21: Sources used to navigate to tourist sites

Source	No. of visitors	Percentage
Brown and white roadside signs	177	65
Maps	155	57
Visitor information centres	72	27
Brochures	44	16
Guidebooks	38	14
Roadside advertising billboards	35	13
Internet	27	10
GPS	20	7

Further analysis revealed that while 25% of travellers relied solely on signs for navigational information, the majority used at least one other source of information (see Table 22).

Table 22: Number of additional sources accessed by roadside signs users

Number of additional resources	No. of visitors	Percentage*
Roadside signage only	44	25
1	70	40
2	32	18
3	13	7
4 or more	18	10
TOTAL	177	100

NOTE: * Respondents were allowed to nominate more than one source hence the total exceeds 100%.

In most cases (58%), roadside signs were used in conjunction with maps. Indeed, maps were a common source of navigational information, used by 57% of the total sample (refer back to Table 21). Not surprisingly, as Table 23 illustrates, maps were significantly more likely to be used by international and interstate tourists than by Victorians ($\chi^2=8.847$, $p<0.05$).

Table 23: Use of maps for navigating by place of origin

Place of origin	Use of maps for navigating		
	Yes (%)	No (%)	TOTAL
Victoria ($n=118$)	52	47	100
Interstate ($n=70$)	66	34	100
International ($n=60$)	67	33	100
TOTAL (248)	52	48	100

Other less important sources of navigational information were visitor information centres (mentioned by 27%), brochures (mentioned by 16%), guidebooks (mentioned by 14%) and advertising billboards (13%). Electronic sources such as GPS and the internet were rarely used to find directions to sites. The low importance accorded to the latter is surprising given that it was the most common source of travel planning information (refer back to Table 13). It is possible that once visitors have started their journey their access to internet resources is limited. It may also be that travellers prefer to rely on local sources of travel information such as personal recommendations and in-situ advertising once 'on the road'.

This suggestion supports findings from Ballantyne and Hughes' (2007) study which found that visitors did not regard internet facilities as a key feature of visitor information centres. In fact, internet facilities were rated as one of the least important features of information centres, scoring 2.2 on a four-point scale where one is 'not at all important' and four is 'essential'. It seems that the main value of online information is to provide ideas and suggestions *prior* to travel, but while travelling, visitors do not consider this an important or viable method of obtaining information. This could be due to the fact that tourism rates, schedules and events often vary with time and season, therefore visitors may prefer to confirm their plans using additional sources of in-situ information such as visitor information centres, maps, brochures and signage. Specific reasons for using particular sources of information prior to and during travel were not measured in the current case study; however, this is an important area of research that requires further attention.

Signage on the Great Southern Touring Route

While visitors' evaluations of roadside signage on the Great Southern Touring Route were generally positive (35% specifically said they had no navigational problems and 38% commented that the signage is very good), there were nevertheless some difficulties and criticisms. The main problems encountered are presented in Table 24.

Table 24: Problems encountered with signs

Problem/criticism	No. of visitors	Percentage
Signs are not clearly visible from the road	22	9
Signs do not indicate direction clearly	21	8
Signs contain too little information	21	8
Signs do not indicate distance clearly	16	6
Not enough signs once leave main highway	12	4
Signs are too small	8	3
Signs are too close to turn-off	7	3

Problems with visibility were mainly mentioned by visitors travelling along the Great Ocean Road (cited by nine respondents) or through the Grampians (four respondents) and Ballarat (four respondents). In many cases signs are placed near trees or close to other signs. While this may not initially pose a problem, but once the trees grow or the number of other signs increase, directional signs may be overshadowed. Some examples along the Great Southern Touring Route noted by the researchers are presented in Figures 15 and 16.



Figure 15: Trees can easily obscure signs



Figure 16: Regular pruning may be required to ensure sign visibility

These examples highlight the importance of regularly monitoring signs to ensure they are clearly within motorists' line of vision.

Many visitors also found distances and directions were not clearly indicated. Criticisms about distances predominantly related to road signs located near the Twelve Apostles and along the Great Ocean Road. For example, several respondents complained that they were busy looking at the view of the coastline and consequently missed the signs to the car park (Figure 17). This suggests that locating the road signs on the same side as the view might assist visitors with their navigation.



Figure 17: Although clearly visible, many respondents missed signs to the 12 Apostles car park

Complaints about directions were particularly evident at Ballarat, where 13 of the 30 respondents surveyed at the tourist attraction of Sovereign Hill vented frustration at not being able to locate the site. Eight of the 13 had travelled to Ballarat along the main highway from Melbourne, and had found it necessary to go into the Central Business District then follow the signs back to the attraction in the direction they had just travelled. It seems that directional signage to this iconic tourist attraction needs urgent attention to ensure navigational difficulties don't impact upon visitors' satisfaction with the site.

Complaints about directional signage were also mentioned by visitors navigating through Warrnambool; the outskirts of Melbourne; getting onto the Great Ocean Road at Geelong; finding the Otway Fly tourist attraction (especially those travelling the Great Ocean Road from west to east); and areas in the Grampians. The latter was particularly problematic, with visitors commenting that directions were not clear, particularly off the main roads. The researchers noted that on the main road to Halls Gap from Dunkeld there were two routes marked but no indication as to which was the shortest or what difference there was between the two. In such cases, more details about the differences between the two routes would allow drivers to make informed choices about which way to travel.

Lack of information was in fact one of the main complaints raised by visitors (mentioned by 21 respondents). In most cases this related to information about the accessibility of roads and parking areas. Many visitors were travelling with caravans and were reluctant to use roads other than the main highway for fear of not being able to park or make u-turns. These comments were largely made by travellers on the Great Ocean Road wishing to make detours to viewing sites and platforms along the coast. They were frustrated by the fact that they had been forced to avoid potentially interesting or picturesque attractions due to inadequate signage and felt they had been penalised for travelling with caravans or motor homes (see Figure 18 for example of current signage).



Figure 18: Signs on the Great Ocean Road do not indicate whether viewing areas are suitable for caravans

This issue could easily be overcome by inserting a small caravan icon on roadside signs that indicate there is adequate parking and turning areas for caravans or larger vehicles. This would assist travellers to make informed choices and may entice them to travel to areas they would have otherwise

avoided. This is particularly important given that caravan and motor home travellers form a substantial proportion of the tourist traffic on the Great Ocean Road and that travellers in this group are likely to have the flexibility to make detours to place of interest.

There is also some evidence to suggest that the effectiveness of signs on the Great Ocean Road depends upon the direction travelled. It was noted by both respondents and managers of visitor information centres that roadside signage for those travelling the route from Melbourne is generally very good. For those travelling in the other direction, however, signage is less effective. This particularly applies at the western approach to the Great Ocean Road (Portland and Warrnambool) and to attractions off the main route such as the Otway Fly.

As previously illustrated in Figures 15 and 16, effective sign placement involves positioning signs so they are in full view and not 'lost' amongst other signs or landscape features. For roadside signs, this means they need to be visible from a car travelling along the route. In some towns along the Great Southern Touring Route the route signs are non-existent, making it difficult and stressful for first-time visitors to navigate through the streetscape. The popularity of the route through Torquay and Lorne highlights the importance of ensuring that directional signage is clearly visible throughout built-up areas. The researchers noted a number of roundabouts on this route where signage was non-existent. In many cases the signs were placed 200-300m after the intersection. If visitors had failed to select the correct road at the roundabout, these would not be seen. It is therefore recommended that a thorough inventory of all intersections is made to ensure all intersections and decision-making points are clearly marked with the route logo or name.

Driving is a complex task that requires psychomotor skills to control the vehicle, plus cognitive skills to process traffic behaviour and decode signage information (Dutta, Fisher & Noyce 2004). In some towns along the Great Southern Touring Route there are so many signs clustered together it is difficult to hone in on the information required (Figures 19 and 20). This problem is exacerbated by the fact that signs are often located in busy areas where drivers also need to pay particular attention to pedestrian movement and other traffic. An easily identifiable logo placed at key intersections would be of considerable use in such situations.



Figure 19: Signs should not be placed where they can be obscured by parked cars



Figure 20: Locating all the signs together can make it difficult to select the one required

The issue of placement and visibility also relates to accommodation signs. As presented in Table 10 earlier, 15% of respondents made their accommodation decisions based on vacancy signs seen from the road or from roadside signs. This suggests that signs need to be clearly visible from a car and positioned where they will attract attention. The researchers noted that many signs for bed and breakfast establishments were very small and difficult to read, which is unlikely to add to their drawing power.

Research also indicates that there are a number of other features that influence the 'readability' of signs. People are most likely to read signs that are written in legible type, have few words, are divided into sections or paragraphs, and have colour and contrast. Although researchers and designers agree that 'less is more', there is substantial variation in what is regarded as the optimal number of words per sign. For roadside signs, however, it certainly needs to be fairly 'short and sweet' as there is very little time to decode information while driving.

Key points

- The main criticisms of the route's signs were poor visibility and insufficient information
- Signs are particularly poor in the Grampians and Ballarat regions
- Signage is better if the direction of travel is from rather than towards Melbourne

The Great Southern Touring Route Logo

The Great Southern Touring Route logo comprises four pictures, each depicting a particular attraction or theme of the route (Figure 21).



Figure 21: The Great Southern Touring Route logo

These pictures are natural rather than stylised which, according to Henderson and Cote (1998), makes logos more recognisable and memorable. The number of signs on the Great Southern Touring Route featuring the four-part logo is limited. This particularly applies on the section known as the Great Ocean Road, where the anchor and shipwreck logos predominate (see Figure 23 in the next section).

There were several examples of the Great Southern Touring Route logo on signs in inland towns but again, these were limited. This has the potential to create problems, as one of the key requirements of effective branding is to provide numerous exposures so that visitors both recognise and remember logos (Cai 2002). If this route is to be promoted as a touring loop, these logos need to be highly visible on signs, promotional materials and at tourist services and attractions throughout the region. The researchers noted that in many cases, signs depicting the logo tended to get 'lost' amongst other directional signage, as illustrated in Figure 22.

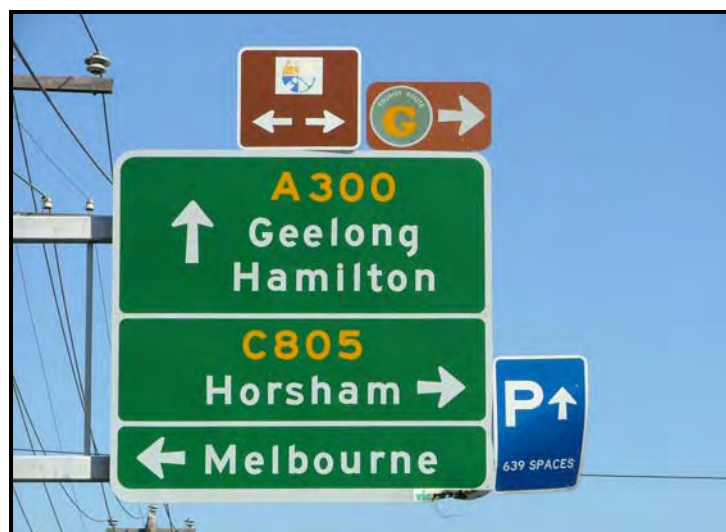


Figure 22: Logos need to be large, distinctive and clearly visible if they are to inform visitors' travel decisions

Table 25: Respondents’ opinion of whether there was a logo

Awareness of logo	No. of visitors	Percentage
Yes	79	31
Not sure	102	40
No	75	29
TOTAL	272	100

The majority of travellers could not confidently state whether or not they had seen a logo on the route’s signs, and a further 29% reported that there were no logos. This suggests there were insufficient signs to create consumer awareness and that many travellers had failed to make an association between the road on which they were travelling and the themed Great Southern Touring Route. This is supported by anecdotal evidence, as when distributing questionnaires, researchers noted many visitors were unaware the roads they had been travelling on formed part of this themed route.

Although not statistically significant, international tourists were more likely to notice logos than domestic visitors, with 42% of international visitors stating that they had seen a logo on the route. Thirty-six percent of interstate visitors recalled seeing a logo, while Victorians were least likely to notice logos (23.5% recalled seeing a logo). The higher proportion of international visitors recalling the presence of route logos may reflect the fact that the route and its accompanying logo are predominantly promoted to international markets.

Tourism Queensland (2004) claim there are low levels of recognition for most route logos. This is a concern, as many researchers stress that ‘best practice’ logos are those that convey the same meaning to a variety of audiences (Henderson & Cote 1998). The poor recognition and recall of the Great Southern Touring Route logo suggests that the logo may not reflect the characteristics of the route itself. If this is the case, tourists will struggle to make the mental connection between logo elements and the tourism products they represent (Hem & Iversen 2004). That is, visitors will find it difficult to perceive a logical link between the logo and features it depicts (Blain, Levy & Ritchie 2005) and, as a consequence, will fail to recall the illustration. This seems to be the case in the present study, as none of the visitors mentioned sailing (top right-hand quadrant) or the Eureka Stockade (bottom left-hand quadrant). The fact that only one person mentioned koalas also suggests this aspect of the logo needs revisiting. It may be that the illustration is too similar to the ‘drive carefully—wildlife’ sign that is a regular feature of Australian road sides and that this similarity could be creating confusion.

Another possibility is that the logo itself is too elaborate and complex to allow for quick and easy recognition. There is limited exposure to the logo for two reasons. First, there are very few signs depicting the logo on the route itself (the researchers only noticed six examples along the entire route). Second, vehicles are likely to pass signs at speeds that prevent the easy deciphering of elaborate illustrations. Unless logos are clear and conspicuous, drivers are unlikely to take the time or effort to process the information they contain (Dutta, Fisher & Noyce 2004). Thus, it could be argued that lack of logo awareness may be in part due to the ornateness of the Great Southern Touring Route logo design (Henderson & Cote 1998).

When broken down into the roads travelled, some interesting patterns emerge. There is a significant difference ($\chi = 33.358, p < 0.000$) between visitors’ awareness of logos depending on whether they travelled the Great Ocean Road from Melbourne, the Great Ocean Road from Portland, or other parts of the Great Southern Touring Route (Table 26). Those travelling the Great Ocean Road were more likely to notice logos than those travelling other sections of the Great Southern Touring Route. These differences are discussed further in the following sections.

Table 26: Respondents' awareness of logo by route travelled

Direction of travel	Awareness of presence of logo			TOTAL
	Yes (%)	No (%)	Not sure (%)	
Great Ocean Road from Melbourne (n=117)	40	41	19	100
Great Ocean Road from Portland (n=30)	53	33	13	100
Other (n=103)	13	43	44	100
TOTAL (n=250)	31	41	28	100

The Great Ocean Road

There are several logos and sign designs on this section of the Great Southern Touring Route, as depicted in Figure 23.

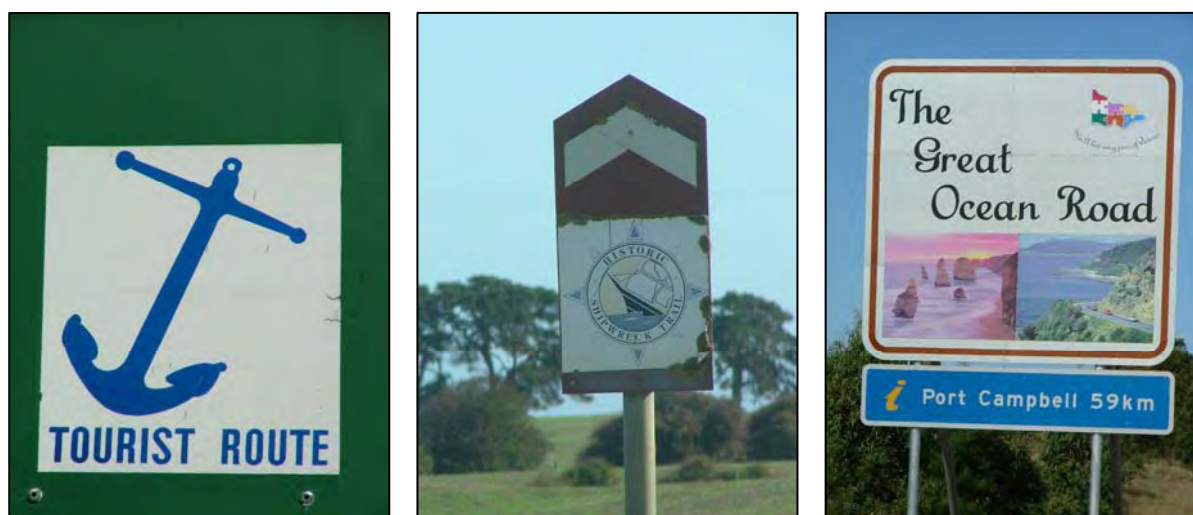


Figure 23: A variety of logos and brand names are used on the Great Ocean Road

Approximately 80% of visitors travelling the Great Ocean Road started their journey in Melbourne. Of these, 40% noticed a logo on the route but the remaining 60% were either unsure or said there wasn't one. Those travelling from Portland were more likely to report seeing a logo, with 53% indicating that there were logos on this route. Even so, this proportion is not particularly high. The fact that most visitors fail to notice these sign features suggests they may need to be made more visible or appealing. This could be done by adding colour or design features to attract attention.

Brand recognition is a critical step in the visitor purchase decision—"logos can create awareness among prospective and actual visitors" (Blain, Levy & Ritchie 2005, p.335). Most of the 63 visitors who reported seeing a logo on the Great Ocean Road associated the symbol with shipwrecks or anchors (Table 27). Just over 20% of the sample assumed it meant the Great Ocean Road but could not elaborate why.

Table 27: Respondents' interpretation of logos on the Great Ocean Road

Meaning of logo	No. of visitors	Percent
Shipwreck	19	35
Anchor	15	27
Great Ocean Road	12	22
Marine life	4	7
Coastal road	3	5
Ocean/waves	1	2
12 Apostles	1	2
TOTAL	55	100

The high proportion of visitors who noticed either the anchor or shipwreck logo (refer back to Figure 18) suggests that these logos are easily recognised and recalled. It is argued that the success of these signs stems from the fact that the logos meet 'best practice' requirements proposed by Henderson and Cote (1998): they are simple, easy to recognise and have clear links to the ocean and coastline they represent.

There were only three people who reported seeing a logo that depicts a road winding between a cliff and the ocean. This logo is featured in tourist brochures about the route but does not feature on roadside signage. This inconsistency between marketing materials and roadside signage has the potential to create confusion and, on a route that already has two logos, could complicate navigation tasks. Indeed, having more than one logo and tagline is a major problem in the branding of this route, as:

[C]onsistent brand elements reinforce each other and serve to unify the entire process of image formation and building, which in turn contribute to the strength and uniqueness of brand identity. (Cai 2002, p.722)

With several different logos and taglines, plus a range of promotional materials all focusing on different elements, it is not surprising that visitors are having difficulty recognising and distinguishing logos. It is therefore suggested that there needs to be consistency between brochures and route signage and that the coastal section adopts one name under which to market itself. Further, if the road signage and navigational aids use an anchor logo to depict the route, then brochures advertising the route should use the *same* logo. Currently, there are no 'anchor' logos featured in the official Great Ocean Road brochures released by Tourism Victoria. Likewise, the Tourism Australia 'Amazing Australian Journeys' features this route but does not include either the cliff/ocean Great Ocean Road logo or the anchor logo.

There is an urgent need to coordinate promotion and present consistent navigational information to assist those who have not visited the region before. While this route is popular with Melbourne residents, it also attracts a high number of interstate and international visitors. For example, it is estimated that each year approximately one quarter of Victoria's million international visitors travel this route (Tourism Victoria, Parks Victoria and Department of Sustainability and the Environment, 2007). Indeed, our research shows that there is a significant difference ($\chi = 37.891$, $p < 0.000$) between the origin of visitors travelling different sections of the Great Southern Touring Route, with the Great Ocean Road likely to attract the highest proportion of interstate and international visitors. As shown in Table 28, 66% of those travelling the Great Ocean Road from Melbourne were from interstate or overseas (30% and 36% respectively). Not surprisingly, the highest proportion of those travelling the Great Ocean Road from the west was from interstate, predominantly Adelaide.

Table 28: Route travelled by place of origin

Direction of travel	Place of origin			TOTAL
	Victorian (%)	Interstate (%)	International (%)	
Great Ocean Road from Melbourne (<i>n</i> =113)	34	30	36	100
Great Ocean Road from Portland (<i>n</i> =28)	25	50	25	100
Other (<i>n</i> =100)	69	19	12	100
TOTAL (<i>n</i>=241)	47	28	25	100

It is interesting to note that the majority of international visitors (79%) in this case study only travel the Great Ocean Road section of the Great Southern Touring Route. Likewise, the majority of interstate visitors (71%) also only travelled this section. Victorians, on the other hand, were more likely to travel other sections of the Great Southern Touring Route than they were to travel the Great Ocean Road.

This highlights the importance of developing separate marketing campaigns and navigational aids for interstate and international visitors. It also suggests that many visitors travelling the Great Ocean Road are unlikely to be familiar with the route and its attractions. Further analysis revealed that this was indeed the case, with the majority of respondents travelling the Great Ocean Road in either direction being first-time visitors to the region (see Table 29).

Table 29: Route travelled by first-time and repeat visitors

Route travelled	Have you been here before?	
	No (%)	Yes (%)
Great Ocean Road from Melbourne (<i>n</i> =122)	66	34
Great Ocean Road from Portland (<i>n</i> =32)	75	25
Other (<i>n</i> =108)	46	54
TOTAL (262)	59	41

NOTE: ($\chi^2 = 13.362, p < 0.005$)

These figures support the recommendation that marketing activities and onsite signage should be consistent and that route identifying logos should be easy to see, recognise and interpret. First-time visitors face a number of challenging situations, including unfamiliar roads, unfamiliar driving conditions and possibly, in the case of international visitors, language difficulties. It is therefore argued that logos and information in brochures, maps and along driving routes need to be simple, consistent and clearly visible in order to effectively assist in the task of selecting and locating tourist attractions, facilities and accommodation sites.

Currently, there are several different logos used on the Great Southern Touring Route, and several different names assigned to various portions of the route. In addition, different regions and/or visitor information centres market sections under different names, creating further confusion. The researchers noted the following names for coastal sections of the Great Southern Touring Route: Shipwreck Coast, Surf Coast, Great Ocean Road and The Great South Coast. According to Keller (1993), to be effective, brand names need to be simple, familiar and distinctive. The value of selecting names that are distinctive has also been stressed by Robertson (1989), who claims that distinctiveness is “the single most important characteristic because of memory, legal, and brand positioning advantages” (p.63). He adds that distinctive, novel and unique names also serve to attract attention.

This has important implications for the Great Southern Touring Route. The variety of names used and the fact that many commence with the words 'The Great' suggests that the current approach is likely to hinder rather than help visitors' planning and navigational activities. Again, if this route is to be effectively marketed, it requires one name and one logo that are used throughout the region to prevent visitors becoming confused and disoriented.

The other reason logos are important is that they can encourage visitors to visit additional attractions and destinations that might not have been part of their original plans. For example, in focus groups interviews conducted with visitors to Queensland (Pringle 1999), respondents felt that themed routes facilitate pre-planning, offer opportunities for adventure and exploration, and provide safe, high quality experiences. In the current study, logos on the Great Southern Touring Route influenced the travel decisions of 21% of respondents who reported seeing them. Some of the ways in which they did this were:

- Assuring travellers they're 'on the right track';
- Enticing visitors to explore the route further;
- Indicating what there is to see in the region; and
- Generating curiosity in visiting additional attractions.

This suggests that creating and marketing a memorable logo and brand name for this route will be critical to the ongoing success of the Great Southern Touring Route.

Inland sections of the Great Southern Touring Route

One-hundred-and-three respondents (25% of the sample) travelled parts of the Great Southern Touring Route that did not include the Great Ocean Road. The majority of visitors travelling on these other sections did not notice logos on directional signage. As illustrated in Table 25, 44% of travellers said there were no logos and another 43% were unsure. The 14% who reported seeing logos thought they meant the following: goldfields (five respondents); shipwrecks (three respondents); tourist travel guide (one respondent); coast (one respondent) and koalas (one respondent).

The fact that some visitors were able to correctly assign a meaning of goldfields to the signs around Ballarat suggests that the simple gold coloured 'G' symbol is relevant and easy to interpret (Figure 24). This symbol is not, however, part of the Great Southern Touring Route logo; rather, it is used to denote the Goldfields Touring Route.



Figure 24: Golden 'G' logo used to denote Goldfields route

As with the Great Ocean Road, some of the difficulty with logo and brand recognition may stem from the fact that there are multiple names for inland sections of the Great Southern Touring Route. For example, the Goldfields Touring Route includes the section from Stawell to Beaufort; the Major Mitchell Trail joins the route near Stawell; and the Great Grape Touring Route incorporates the section from Halls Gap to Ballarat. Thus, some parts of the Great Southern Touring Route around Ballarat have three monikers with three different symbols. As mentioned, this is likely to lead to considerable confusion and navigational difficulties, particularly for first-time visitors, who in this case study made up nearly half of the sample (refer back to Table 29).

The majority of the 75 respondents (79%) who *had* noticed a logo on the route felt that it was effective. The main reasons given were that logos help to define the route (12 respondents); they reiterate the ocean location (eight respondents), they are easy to recognise (four respondents) and the meaning is obvious (four respondents). These responses suggest that it is worth spending time and effort on designing effective logos and signage as an easily recognisable brand has the potential to impact on travellers' decisions and satisfaction with the journey.

The Great Ocean Walk

Although not strictly within the bounds of this research, several visitors expressed disappointment and frustration with the signage on the Great Ocean Walk. Again, this is a premier attraction of this region featured in key tourist brochures, yet the onsite signage is limited. Walkers were particularly annoyed that there were intersections on the route with no signage indicating which path was The Great Ocean Walk. They requested that signs be placed at all intersections as well as at regular intervals to assure walkers they were on the correct route. The current signs depicting a person walking are appropriate, though this needs to be prominently and consistently projected as the logo of the route if it is to be effective. Currently, official Great Ocean Road brochures released by Tourism Victoria do not feature this logo.

Key points

- The majority of travellers did not notice any logos on the Great Southern Touring Route
- There are very few signs displaying the 4-part logo along the route
- There are several logos and monikers used to describe different sections of the Great Southern Touring Route
- The majority of international and interstate respondents only travelled the Great Ocean Road section of the Great Southern Touring Route
- Victorians were more likely to travel other sections of the Great Southern Touring Route than the Great Ocean Road

CHAPTER 3: IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The authors recommend that the following recommendations are considered in conjunction with Tourism Alliance's (2005) *Best Practice Touring Routes Fact Sheet* which deals with a range of related issues including stakeholder consultations.

Travel Patterns

This case study explored and described the planning and navigational practices of tourists travelling Victoria's Great Southern Touring Route. Responses obtained through questionnaires and informal interviews with travellers and visitor information centre staff revealed that there was limited public awareness of the route and its attractions. For instance, many Australian visitors were unaware of the route's name or the regions through which it passed. Levels of awareness were higher amongst international markets, suggesting that current marketing efforts aimed at this audience are having an impact. This issue is discussed further when addressing ways of promoting the route and logo design.

Overall, most visitors (59%) spent less than one week travelling all or parts of the Great Southern Touring Route. The majority of respondents (68.5%) travelled along the Great Ocean Road, and tended to stay at least four nights. Those travelling the inland roads generally stayed three nights or fewer. This suggests that packages featuring 'short breaks' are likely to be effective for this route. Specifically, it is recommended that:

- Brochures and packages for the Great Ocean Road are designed for at least four night stays;
- Shorter 2-3 packages are developed for the inland routes; and
- The Great Southern Touring Route is marketed as a whole to encourage those travelling the Great Ocean Road to extend their trip into the inland regions.

Trip Planning Behaviour

Visitors tend to use between two and five resources to plan their trip. The most commonly accessed of these are the internet, visitor information centres, maps and brochures. Consequently, these resources should be designed to complement and support each other. It is recommended that:

- Tourism websites list and illustrate the location of visitor information centres, the services they offer and their opening hours;
- Regional brochures list visitor information centres located along the Great Southern Touring Route;
- Maps illustrate or list the location of visitor information centres;
- Visitor information centres provide maps and brochures that promote the Great Southern Touring Route; and
- Maps promoting the Great Southern Touring Route are placed outside all visitor information centres for after-hours access. These should indicate road distances and attractions along the route, as illustrated in Figures 25 and 26.



Figure 25: Route map located outside the Toowoomba visitor information centre, Queensland

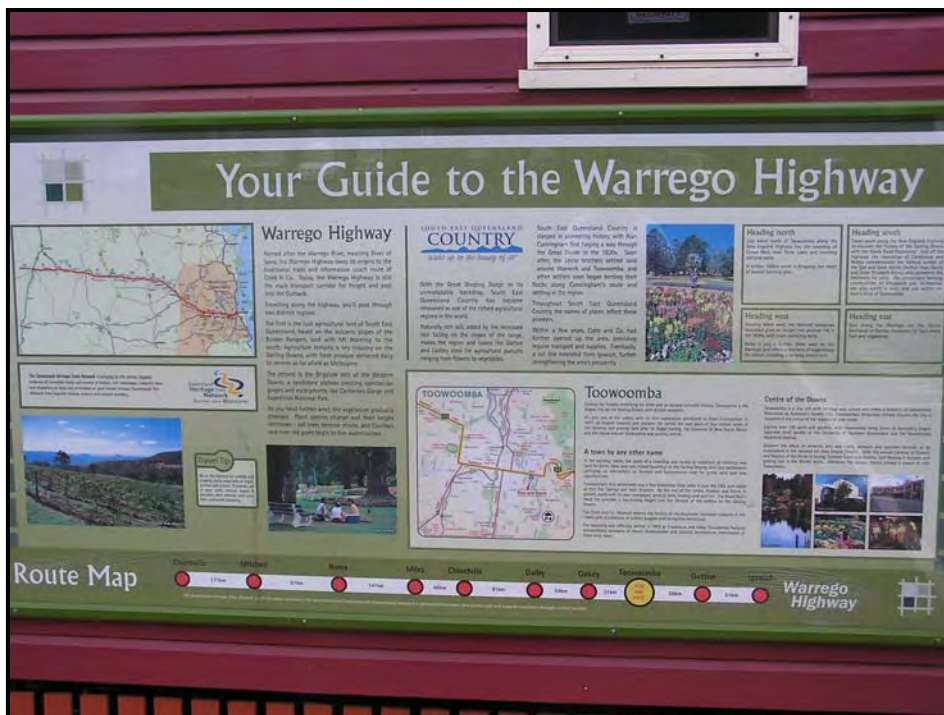


Figure 26: Distances and key attractions are clearly marked

While some visitors spent several weeks planning their trip, a large proportion (45%) spent no more than two weeks on this task. Many visitors, particularly Victorians, do not make rigid plans or pre-book accommodation, even in peak times. For example, 40% had not booked any accommodation, while a further 14% had only booked some. This implies that visitors' plans are reasonably fluid, a claim that

was verified by the finding that 53.5% described their plans as flexible and a further 19% said they had not made any plans at all.

The flexible and somewhat spontaneous nature of travellers' itineraries suggests that the following may be effective for marketing this route:

- 'Last minute' packages and special offers particularly targeting Victorians;
- An accommodation voucher system that allows pre-purchase of vouchers which can be redeemed at a variety of accommodation venues;
- Attractions and activity 'modules' to encourage visitors to travel 'off the beaten path';
- Signage along the route promoting attractions;
- 'Gateway' information centres that promote a range of alternative attractions, activities and detours that can be undertaken; and
- Localised advertising of accommodation to take advantage of the fact that many visitors do not search for accommodation until they reach the destination. This could include roadside signage, tourist information bays at the entrance to towns, and after-hours accommodation information boards outside visitor information centres.

Navigating

Visitors tend to only use one or two sources of information to locate attractions and accommodation. The most commonly used resources were signs and maps. Respondents listed several difficulties with roadside signage along the route, particularly in relation to poor visibility, insufficient information and crowding. As a direct consequence of their comments, the following actions are recommended:

- Amend signs to viewing points along the Great Ocean Road to indicate whether there is sufficient room for larger vehicles or those towing caravans to park and turn around. This could be as simple as adding a 'caravan friendly' icon to current directional signage;
- Undertake an inventory of the placement of route signage in built-up areas and at junctions/roundabouts to ensure there are sufficient signs to facilitate navigation, particularly for first-time visitors. This process should include regularly monitoring existing signs to ensure they are not obscured by parked vehicles, buildings or vegetation;
- Install more route logo signs to aid with route identification and navigation; and
- Examine the location, spacing and visibility of signs to Sovereign Hill, as locating this site was identified as a major navigational difficulty.

Brand Identity

Branding clearly identifies the unique characteristics of the product, differentiates it from competitors, and can be particularly valuable for attracting unfamiliar tourists (Gursoy & McCleary 2003). Responses from this case study suggest that visitors do not recognise or recall the current Great Southern Touring Route branding. Possible remedial actions include:

- The Great Southern Touring Route name should feature prominently in brochures, maps, websites, marketing campaigns and other sources of information to ensure it is fully integrated into the Victorian tourism product.
- There needs to be consistent use of a single brand image and/or name as designing and installing different signs for different sections of the route creates confusion amongst travellers.

- The possibility of changing the brand name 'the Great Southern Touring Route' into something distinctive and different—something that does not commence with the words 'The Great' should be explored. In particular, the name chosen should reflect the route's underlying theme in some way. The current name does not create an image or mental picture of the route, nor does it give any indication of the theme that links the experiences, attractions and sites along the route.

As few visitors are currently aware of the route, the above actions are unlikely to cause major confusion or negative impacts. If, however, routes are to retain their current names and marketing logos, it should be made obvious that the Great Southern Touring Route incorporates the Great Ocean Road.

Development of Route Logos

The current logo for the Great Southern Touring Route does not appear to be attracting visitors' attention. It is therefore recommended that:

- The intricate four-part logo be replaced by one that is simple and easy to recognise;
- The logo is developed in consultation with representatives from the different regions through which the Great Southern Touring Route traverses;
- The logo clearly reflects the theme of the route; and
- The logo is pre-tested with visitors to ascertain
 - whether visitors interpret the logo's meaning correctly;
 - what associations or images the logo creates; and
 - whether visitors think the logo creates a sense of meaning that matches the destination.

Once developed and trialled, there needs to be consistent and persistent use of logos to promote the Great Southern Touring Route and reinforce the brand and its associated images. Specifically, logos should feature prominently:

- At all visitor information centres, attractions, accommodation venues and other tourist establishments that directly or indirectly support tourism in the region;
- In marketing literature, brochures, maps and websites promoting the route;
- On all directional and tourist roadside signage in the region; and
- On souvenirs such as mugs, t-shirts, tea towels, photos/pictorial images etc that are sold in shops and tourist centres along the route (as an example, see Figure 27).



Figure 27: 'Very GC' branding on souvenirs sold throughout the Gold Coast, Queensland.

Further Research

This case study suggests that visitors use a variety of resources and strategies to plan and navigate their drive tourism holidays. However, because the research only focused on one themed route, it is difficult to generalise to other routes in Australia. Further research is therefore required to assess whether the search strategies and navigation practices identified in this study also apply in other regions and states. In particular, future research should address the following issues:

- Why do visitors use particular sources to plan their trip?
- Are particular resources used for particular types of information and types of trips?
- What attracts visitors to drive themed touring routes?
- Does route branding assist with decision-making and navigation?

Although this research was limited to one themed route, results do suggest that online searches, personal recommendations, marketing campaigns, branding and signage all impact upon the decisions and actions taken both prior to and during the travel experience. Consequently, it is important that the development of themed routes is supported by materials and campaigns that clearly project consistent messages, images and themes. This will facilitate the integration of tourism products and ensure the ongoing attraction and success of themed touring routes in Australia.

APPENDIX A: PROJECT QUESTIONNAIRE



THE UNIVERSITY
OF QUEENSLAND

Number:

Site:

1. On the map provided, please indicate the route you have travelled to get here, using arrows to indicate the direction of travel. Where are you going next?

2. Have you been to this site before?

No

Yes → Approximately how many times _____

3. Is this visit

part of a day trip from your home

part of a longer trip → how many nights will you be away?

4. How many days/weeks ago did you start to plan your trip?

5. Which of the following best describes your intentions for this trip (please tick one only)

Travelling from one accommodation point to another, only intending to break for food, petrol and comfort stops

Travelling between accommodation points, having planned which sites you wish to visit along the way

Travelling between accommodation points, with some visits planned but allowing time for additional stops if you see things that interest you

Travelling between accommodation points, with no visits planned, stopping when you see things that interest you

Travelling from a previous accommodation point, with no plans for the next accommodation point and stopping when you see things that interest you

6. Have you pre-booked your accommodation for this trip?

- No
- No, staying with family/friends (go to question 8)
- Yes, some of it
- Yes, all of it

7. How did you/will you decide where to stay for the night? (e.g., use roadside accommodation advertising signs, brochures, Visitor Information Centres, internet, tourist guides)

8. Did you experience any of the following problems with road signs while you were travelling? (please tick any that apply)

- Signs are not clearly visible from the road
- Signs do not indicate direction clearly
- Signs do not indicate distance clearly
- Signs contain too little information
- Signs are too small

Other comments about road signs:

9. Which of the following resources did you use in PLANNING THIS TRIP? (Please tick all information sources used, then rate the ticked items in terms of their usefulness for planning your trip.)

Source	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> if used	Usefulness for planning the trip	Comments (strengths/suggestions for improvements)
Internet	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Poor average good excellent	
Brochures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Poor average good excellent	
Newspapers/ magazines	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Poor average good excellent	
Guidebooks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Poor average good excellent	
Maps	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Poor average good excellent	
Visitor information centre	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Poor average good excellent	

TOURISTS' USE OF ROADSIDE SIGNAGE

Family/friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Poor average good excellent	
Official brown & white road signs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Poor average good excellent	
TV travel programs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Poor average good excellent	
Roadside advertising billboards	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Poor average good excellent	
GPS	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Poor average good excellent	
Other (please specify):	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Poor average good excellent	

10. Which of the following sources did you use to help you find DIRECTIONS TO THIS SITE? (Tick all the sources that you used, then rate the ticked items in terms of their usefulness for finding your way to this site.)

Source	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> if used	Usefulness for finding your way to this site	Comments
Official brown and white road signs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Poor average good excellent	
Roadside advertising billboards	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Poor average good excellent	
Guidebooks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Poor average good excellent	
Maps	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Poor average good excellent	
Visitor information centres	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Poor average good excellent	
GPS	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Poor average good excellent	
Brochures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Poor average good excellent	
Internet	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Poor average good excellent	
Other (please specify):	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Poor average good excellent	

11. Did you use a map to get here? If so, what type of map was it (e.g., RACV map; road atlas; map in a brochure; internet map)?

12. Were there any 'trouble spots' or places where you were unsure of which way to go? Why:

13. Logos or pictures are often used on themed routes (e.g., this sign is used to indicate the Southern Moreton Bay touring route in Qld).



a) Is there a logo for the route you are travelling on? yes not sure no

b) What do you think it means?

c) Do you think it is effective in promoting the route?

Yes → Why?

No → How could it be improved?

d) Has the logo influenced your decisions to visit certain attractions or drive on particular roads?

Yes → How?

_____ No

PLEASE TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF:

Name of home town or city: _____ Country:

Age: under 20 20 - 35 36 - 50 51 - 65 over 65

Gender: Male Female

Occupation (please tick):

Full-time employment Part-time/casual employment Home duties

Student Retired

Other occupants of vehicle:

spouse/partner family friends colleagues other:

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The STCRC has grown to be the largest, dedicated tourism research organisation in the world, with \$187 million invested in tourism research programs, commercialisation and education since 1997.

The STCRC was established in July 2003 under the Commonwealth Government's CRC program and is an extension of the previous Tourism CRC, which operated from 1997 to 2003.

Role and responsibilities

The Commonwealth CRC program aims to turn research outcomes into successful new products, services and technologies. This enables Australian industries to be more efficient, productive and competitive.

The program emphasises collaboration between businesses and researchers to maximise the benefits of research through utilisation, commercialisation and technology transfer.

An education component focuses on producing graduates with skills relevant to industry needs.

STCRC's objectives are to enhance:

- the contribution of long-term scientific and technological research and innovation to Australia's sustainable economic and social development;
- the transfer of research outputs into outcomes of economic, environmental or social benefit to Australia;
- the value of graduate researchers to Australia;
- collaboration among researchers, between researchers and industry or other users; and efficiency in the use of intellectual and other research outcomes.