

Urban Visitor Perceptions of Safety during a Special Event

MICHAEL BARKER, STEPHEN J. PAGE, AND DENNY MEYER

The impact of crime on special events in the urban environment has generated a limited amount of research among tourism researchers. This article is an exploratory study of visitor perceptions of crime and safety during the hosting of a special event—the 2000 America’s Cup in Auckland, New Zealand. Using factor analysis and a structural equation model, the authors analyze the factors involved with crimes against tourists in urban areas. The results indicate that distinct differences exist between domestic and international visitors in relation to the perception and experiences of tourism-related crime.

Keywords: *Auckland; America’s Cup; special event; crime*

The growth in event tourism has generated a global interest in the impacts of special events and the economic benefits for destinations. Yet there is increasing evidence that the social impacts of hosting events can be substantial and may generate increases in criminal activity (Burns and Mules 1989; Hall, Selwood, and McKewon 1995; Kelly 1993). Only a limited number of studies examined the perceived impact of crime on the urban community (e.g., Lankford 1996; Snaith and Haley 1994; Madge 1997). This research has not been adequately linked to the hosting of events and the consequences for visitors, although research on residents’ perceptions of crime and safety in urban environments where tourism is present has found that residents often perceive a decline in the level of safety as a result of an influx of tourists (Pizam 1978; Rothman 1978). Conversely, perceptions of safety (Williams and Dickson 1993) for visitors are important because they can affect a person’s behavior, including the likelihood of going out at certain times of the day (Valentine 1989), participation in activities, and the overall satisfaction with an event and destination.

This article reports the findings of a study of visitor perceptions toward crime and safety during a special sporting event in an urban destination—the 2000 America’s Cup in Auckland, New Zealand. The study addressed a number of research questions:

Research Question 1: How did tourists rate issues of crime and personal safety while visiting an urban destination during a special event?

Research Question 2: What relationships exist between domestic and international visitor experiences of crime and safety during a special event, based on a range of demographic and tourism-related variables?

Research Question 3: What relationships could be deduced from the interrelationships between crime, perceptions of safety, and demographic and tourism variables using statistical techniques (i.e., factor analysis and structural equation modeling) to examine the complexity of the tourism-crime-special event nexus during the America’s Cup?

These questions raise the issue of how perceptions of crime, tourism, and special events are conceptualized in the tourism and cognate research literature and how one can understand the relationships that are inherent in the tourism-special event-safety/crime nexus.

Perceptions of Crime, Tourism, and Special Events

Tourist perceptions of safety and fear of crime are arguably as important as victimization in terms of the impact on tourist behavior (e.g., Mirrlees-Black, Mayhew, and Percy 1996). Although tourists may not have been criminally victimized, they may have held fears for their safety or felt intimidated or threatened by crime while visiting a destination. Visitor perceptions of personal safety are imperative for understanding tourists’ awareness of their environment and how their behavior and experiences might be affected according to how safe they feel (Greenberg and Ruback 1992). The threats of crimes against tourists were likely to cluster in areas involving the concentration of tourism amenities and attractions (Schiebler, Crofts, and Hollinger 1996) and therefore by implication are likely to be higher in areas hosting special events.

The limited research literature on the impact of crime on events suggests that events attract large numbers of people and generate hedonistic activities such as alcohol and drug consumption. As a result, events can create the potential for social changes that can exacerbate crime (Kelly 1993; Ryan 1991). An increase in criminal activity associated with tourism during the seasonal phenomenon of special events

Michael Barker was a postdoctoral researcher in tourism at Massey University in Auckland, New Zealand. Stephen J. Page is Scottish Enterprise Forth Valley Professor of Tourism in the Department of Marketing at the University of Stirling in Stirling, Scotland. Denny Meyer is an associate professor in statistics in the Institute of Information and Mathematical Sciences at Massey University in Auckland, New Zealand.

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(Burns and Mules 1989) and holiday periods (Barker 2000; Rothman, Donnelly, and Tower 1979; Walmsley, Boskovic, and Pigram 1983) has been observed, providing a large and potentially transient visitor population that can be victimized.

Within the tourism literature, the relationship between tourism and crime is explained partly by the fact that tourists are disproportionately the victims of crime (Chesney-Lind and Lind 1986) and that tourist areas have a disproportionate amount of crime (Fujii and Mak 1980; Prideaux 1994). In this respect, the urban environment is characterized by the development of areas that are frequented by tourists and other visitors (Page and Hall 2002). The characteristics exhibited by tourists and tourist districts can increase the visibility of visitors as outsiders and make them less confident in an unfamiliar environment. Visitors may also be constrained by language difficulties and have limited knowledge of their locality and environment. Lynch (1960) suggested that this unfamiliarity and difficulties with environmental learning have implications for fear, a sense of security, and emotional stability (see Young et al. 1997 for concepts of fear and concern about crime). As a result, tourists were more likely to enter into casual relationships with strangers, which, according to Fujii and Mak (1979), led to a higher rate of rape and presumably similar increases in assault and robbery offences. The impact of concern or fear for crime on tourist behavior is influenced by perceptions of acceptable risk and environmental learning, and perceptions about the state of the community. As this risk increases beyond the tourist's threshold of acceptable risk, the presence of fear can result in changes in behavior, including the decision to travel as evidenced by the events following the September 11, 2001, events in New York. Fear can place constraints on lifestyle behavior or promote defensive behavior that encourages vigilance about crime, a feature observed in extreme events such as terrorist threats and incidents.

METHOD

The measurement of visitor perceptions of safety is critical to identifying and addressing the needs and concerns of tourists and thereby improving their travel experience. The focal point of this study was Auckland, New Zealand's main commercial center with a population in excess of 1 million and the largest city. The city is a major international tourism destination and the country's principal tourist gateway that receives around 73% of the 1.8 million overseas visitors to New Zealand each year. Hosting special events is a major focus of the city's tourism strategy to augment existing tourism attractions, to increase the visitor length of stay, and to establish Auckland as a destination in its own right (Page 1999).

The data for this study were collected through a convenience sample survey of domestic and international visitors to downtown Auckland during the America's Cup event. The study area of downtown Auckland was adjacent to the central business/retail district and incorporated the Viaduct Basin, where the America's Cup syndicates had their bases and a "Cup Village" was constructed for the event. Therefore, the majority of sample respondents were likely to be visiting the event or its attractions within the Cup Village, although this was not a prerequisite for the study, which was concerned

with ascertaining the scope of visitor safety issues during a special event.

From the survey of visitors, a total of 1,003 personal face-to-face interviews were conducted with nonresident visiting adults to Auckland aged 16 years and older. Part 1 of the survey dealt with a series of statements on which visitors rated their perceptions of safety based on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from *very unsafe* to *very safe*. A second scale rated visitor perceptions from *very poor* to *excellent* based on a series of experiences visitors had in downtown Auckland where the America's Cup and Viaduct Basin were based. The second part of the survey examined visitor concerns for personal safety arising from the potential for criminal victimization and whether these in any way impeded the visitors' intended travel behavior. Concerns for victimization were measured on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from *not at all concerned* to *very concerned* in order to generate a response direction on a scale of concern and because concern can only be measured in a positive direction. Visitors were also asked to indicate whether any concerns they held as tourists were less, the same, or greater than when they were in their home environment. A final section asked visitors whether they had been criminally victimized during their visit in one or more of a range of property and personal crimes.

The analysis of the survey data collected included frequency tabulations for the demographic variables and a comparison of these demographic groups in terms of their perceptions of safety using Kruskal-Wallis tests and in terms of crime experience using chi-square tests of association. A factor analysis was used to identify the underlying attitudes to safety, and the resulting factor scores were used in a multivariate analysis of variance to determine the significant demographic effects and any interactions. Finally, structural equation modeling was used to model the effect of demographics on perceptions of safety and victimization. The next section presents the main findings based on an analysis of these data.

RESULTS

The visitor sample comprised 29.3% domestic tourists and 70.7% visitors from overseas, 34.9% of whom had visited New Zealand before. The nationalities of the international visitors encompassed 45 different countries; however, European and North American visitors were most represented in the sample, while less than 10% of visitors were of Asian or Japanese nationality.

Visitor Perceptions of Safety

The survey derived a number of variables by asking visitors to rate various elements of their perception of personal safety (Table 1). The America's Cup Village, where environmental design, the presence of police, and other tourists created a safe visitor enclave, generated the highest rating of safety. Police statistics reported that only 169 arrests took place in the America's Cup Village in a 5-month period of the America's Cup. Auckland City crime statistics for October 1999 to February 2000 indicated a 3.3% rise in reported crime between 1998-99 and 1999-2000 but a drop of 12.4%

and 2.1% relative to 1996-97 and 1997-98 (Auckland City Police n.d.).

Visitors also rated several experiences of safety they encountered in Auckland related to their overall visit. Perceptions of safety generated the most favorable rating among visitors, with 88% who felt safe in Auckland. The overall mean responses of domestic tourists were less favorable, but in the case of “the number of police and security” ($p = .094$), international visitors would perhaps have preferred to have seen a greater police presence. The literature suggests that public perceptions of safety are heightened by the level of police presence (Barker 2000) and good lighting in public spaces (Evans, Fyfe, and Herbert 1992), and these factors received satisfactory scores from visitors. This also highlights a growing research and practitioner interest in designing out crime and perception of fear from visitor spaces and environments to enhance perception of safety in leisure contexts.

Visitor Concerns for Crime

The survey asked visitors to rate the level of concern they felt in Auckland toward being the potential victim of a series of offences. Visitors were also asked to indicate how this concern differed, if at all, from the concern they felt at their normal place of residence. A concern for personal property being stolen generated the highest concern among visitors, and some 20.5% of tourists considered the risk of property crime greater than when at home.

Visitor concern for physical crimes against the person generated the second highest mean value. The highest proportion of tourists who were slightly concerned or very concerned about being attacked or robbed included 46.4% of Japanese, 43.4% of visitors of other nationality, and 38.9% of other Asians. Furthermore, this risk was considered greater in New Zealand than home by around one-third of other Asian and other origins, and among just 6.9% of visitors from Japan. The threat of sexual harassment or attack was the third concern to tourists overall, and the risk and concern among female tourists was understandably higher than for male tourists. Moreover, 93% of tourists felt that the risk of sexual victimization was less than, or no different from, the risk they would encounter at home.

Visitor Fear of Crime

Fear of crime is related to an individual’s personal fear of victimization, and 10.1% of tourists indicated that they had felt unsafe at some time during their travel. Group size and age were statistically significant at the 10% level, while the failure of some variables to achieve statistical significance may be compounded by low sample sizes. Fear was statistically related to the domestic or overseas status of the tourist at the 5% level of significance ($p = .003$), and domestic tourists were more likely than overseas tourists to experience fear of crime.

In response to safety concerns, 19% of visitors changed their behavior in some way to reduce the risk of possible victimization including taking additional commonsense safety precautions and being more aware of their environment. The visitors who changed their behavior included a higher proportion of women, Japanese and other Asians, as well as tourists staying in backpacker accommodation or camper vans. However, only 1.7% of those who feared for their

TABLE 1
VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY DURING THE AMERICA’S CUP (IN PERCENTAGES)

Perception Variable	SD	M	Un-safe (1-2)	Average (3)	Safe (4-5)
How safe or unsafe do you . . .					
Perceive the America’s Cup Village to be?	.68	4.49	0.9	7.3	91.8
Feel in public in Auckland during the day?	.65	4.42	0.8	6.1	93.2
Perceive New Zealand to be as a country?	.76	4.38	2.4	8.2	89.4
The event atmosphere of the America’s Cup makes me feel	.68	4.19	0.8	12.4	86.8
The large number of people makes me feel	.77	4.12	3.3	12.4	84.3
Perceive Auckland to be as a city?	.82	4.05	4.0	16.9	79.1
Feel compared with in your home country/town?	.97	3.91	10.7	17.4	71.8
Feel in public in Auckland during the night?	.87	3.62	8.4	35.5	56.1
Overall perception of safety during the America’s Cup	.52	4.15	0.6	8.1	91.2

Note: 1 = *very unsafe*, 2 = *a bit unsafe*, 3 = *average*, 4 = *fairly safe*, and 5 = *very safe*.

safety felt a need to restrict their intended behavior because of a fear of potential victimization.

Visitor Experiences of Crime

A separate question on visitor experiences found that 3.3% of tourists in the respondents’ travel group had been intimidated or harassed in some way (although it was not necessarily racially motivated). These incidents were most likely to occur among tourists aged 20 to 29 years and those traveling alone, as noted in research on visitor experiences of intimidation, harassment, and threats (Tulloch et al. 1998). Overall, the incidence of reported crime in the survey was low, with 30 respondents, or 3% of the sample, experiencing a total of 34 acts of crime during their current trip in New Zealand. Despite a reasonable sample population size, the low incidence of reported tourist victimization is consistent with previous research conducted in New Zealand (i.e., Barker 2000).

Due to a relatively small number of victims, the findings related to tourist victimization should be treated as indicative rather than conclusive. Furthermore, victimization experiences reflect reported crimes only and cannot be assumed to be representative of the nature or incidence of unreported crime for which both the incidence and reasons for nonreporting may be significant. These factors aside, tourist victimization was related to the domestic/overseas status of the tourist, age, group size, and accommodation type. Of the crimes recorded in the survey, only 42% were reported to police due to the triviality of the offence and the perception that police were powerless or would not be interested. Having established the profile of visitors and some of the characteristics of crime and safety within the sample, attention now shifts to two statistical techniques employed to understand

TABLE 2
FACTOR ANALYSIS OF VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY

	Factor					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Safety in Auckland as a city?	.785					
Safety in New Zealand as a country?	.719					
Safety in Auckland during the night?	.675					
Safety compared with home country/town?	.598					
Safety in public in Auckland during the day?	.567				.383	
The feeling of safety	.486			.425		
Safety in the America's Cup Village?	.447				.425	
Ever felt nervous/unsafe because of a fear of something happening to you or to your belongings?	-.436					
Attacked or robbed—Is this concern <i>less, the same, or more</i> as when you are at home?		.799				
Theft or burglary—Is this concern <i>less, the same, or more</i> as when you are at home?		.787				
Sexually harassed or attacked—Is this concern <i>less, the same, or more</i> as when you are at home?		.696				
Racially harassed—Is this concern <i>less, the same, or more</i> as when you are at home?		.685				
Concerned about being attacked or robbed?			.826			
Concerned about being sexually harassed or attacked?			.777			
Concerned about having something stolen from you through theft or burglary?			.662			
Concerned about being racially harassed?			.593			
The quality of service from local businesses				.723		
The friendliness of people				.649		
The prices of goods and services				.582		
Felt subjected to the following: paid high prices, overcharging, poor value for money, paid extra, poor service				-.465		
The amount of lighting at night				.450		
The number of police and security				.427		
Does the event atmosphere during the America's Cup make you feel					.779	
Does the large number of people around during the America's Cup make you feel					.749	
Been attacked or robbed by another person?						.672
Been verbally abused, intimidated, or racially harassed by another person?						.540
Had anything stolen, or attempted to be stolen, from your accommodation?						.534
Would you read this safety information?						-.453
Think tourist destinations should provide safety information for visitors?	-.331					-.436
Percentage of variance	11.6	8.3	8.1	7.9	7.3	5.2

Note: Extraction method = principal components analysis.

the relationships that were apparent in the data—factor analysis and structural equation modeling.

Factor Analysis of Visitor Perceptions

A factor analysis of visitor perceptions, concerns, and experiences of safety while traveling was conducted to analyze the types of issues and concerns that arose from the survey data, particularly the relationships that were apparent between the experiences and perceptions of crime among visitors. This analysis used varimax rotation and resulted in the extraction of the six factors in Table 2 that together explained 48.4% of the variance in the data. Factor fragmentation occurred when more factors were considered. These factors are labeled as follows:

- Factor 1: Perceptions of safety in New Zealand
- Factor 2: Concerns for crime while traveling in New Zealand relative to home
- Factor 3: Concerns for crime in New Zealand
- Factor 4: Perceptions of downtown Auckland

Factor 5: Perceptions of safety in terms of the America's Cup

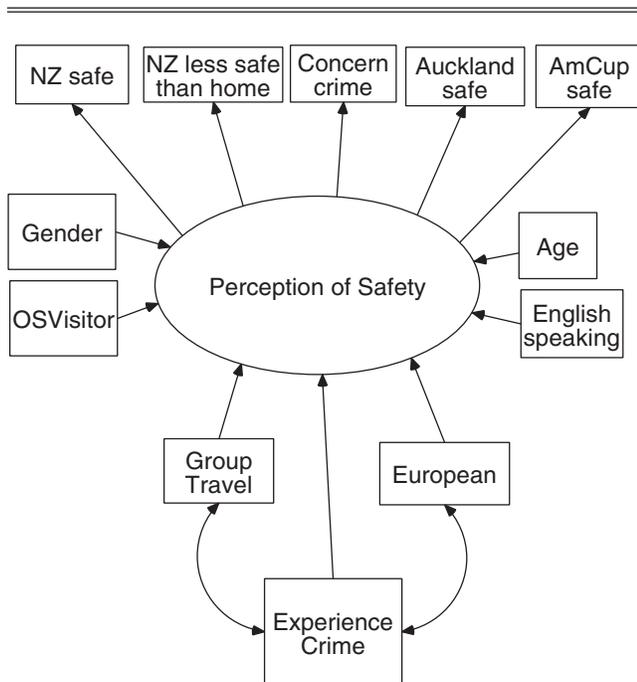
Factor 6: Experiences of crime in New Zealand

Each of the six factors was tested for statistical significance according to the travel and demographic characteristics of visitors as shown in Table 3. None of the interaction effects were significant at a 1% level of significance and have therefore been ignored. For Factor 1, Perceptions of Safety in New Zealand, the lowest ratings were held by women, domestic tourists, and visitors traveling alone. Concerns for Crime Relative to Home (Factor 2) were highest for Chinese visitors, although also relatively high for domestic visitors as opposed to overseas visitors. Concerns for Crime in New Zealand (Factor 3) were found to be higher among women and among African and Japanese visitors. This may reflect a higher concern for physical safety among women generally, while Japanese visitors may express concerns based on their perceived vulnerability and the fact that they come from a country with low crime rates. Perceptions of Downtown Auckland in terms of being a hospitable place to

TABLE 3
SIGNIFICANCE OF DIFFERENCES IN FACTOR SCORES (*p* VALUES < .056)

Visitor Characteristic	MANOVA	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6
Gender	.000	.002		.000			
Domestic/overseas	.000	.000	.000		.000		
Ethnicity	.000		.002	.031	.055	.009	.038
English first language	.005				.005		
Traveling in a group	.005	.032					.002
Age-group	.041				.037		
Accommodation	.305						

FIGURE 1
STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODEL



Note: NZ = New Zealand; AmCup = the America's Cup; OSVisitor = overseas visitor.

visit made up Factor 4. Overseas visitors had higher perceptions of well-being than domestic visitors, particularly among native English-speaking and European groups. This was particularly true of visitors younger than 20 and older than 40.

Perception of Safety due to the America's Cup was identified as the fifth factor. The reactions of the different ethnic groups differed markedly for this factor, with Chinese visitors feeling relatively safe and Japanese visitors feeling relatively unsafe compared with the European visitors. The sixth factor extracted was related to Experiences of Crime in New Zealand. Crimes against tourists were highest for non-Europeans (excluding Chinese) and those traveling alone. Interestingly, tourist victimization was correlated with responses from tourists who were least interested in tourist brochures about safety.

Structural Equation Modeling

In an attempt to relate demographic and travel variables to perceptions of safety while traveling in New Zealand and

TABLE 4
LOADINGS AND CORRELATIONS FOR STRUCTURAL MODEL

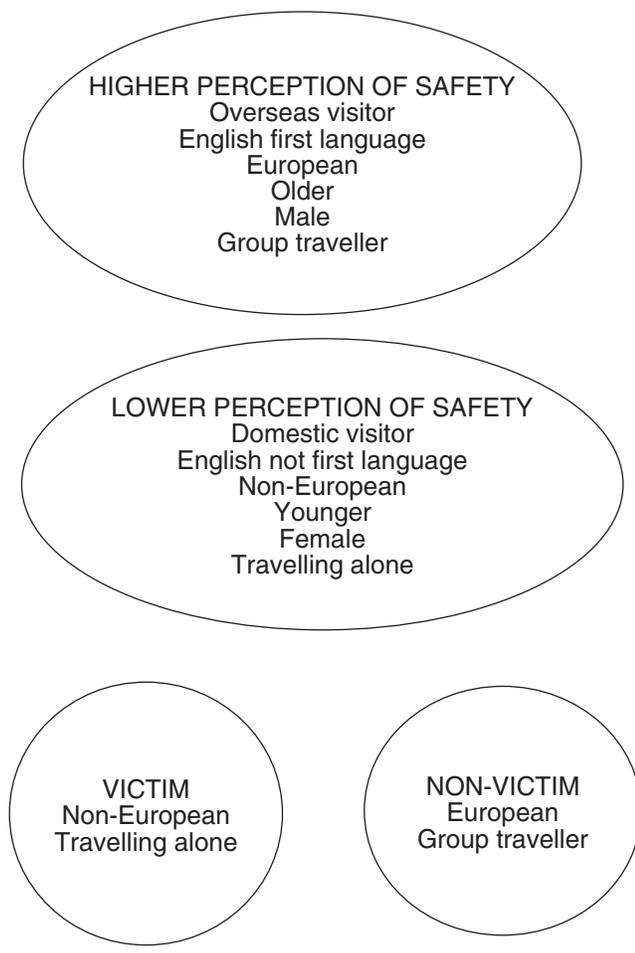
	Standardized Value
Factor loadings on perception of safety	
in New Zealand	.314
in Auckland	.265
in New Zealand relative to home	.246
in the America's Cup village	.085
with regard to crime in New Zealand	.042
Demographic/travel loadings on perception of safety	
Overseas/domestic visitor	.921
English is/is not first language	.283
European/Non-European	.193
Age	.139
Gender	.091
Travel in group/alone	.084
Crime experience	.022
Correlations with crime experience	
Travel in group/alone	.149
European/non-European	.129

crime victimization, a structural equation model was fitted to the data (Figure 1). This model was based on the factor scores, with Factors 1 through 5 used to measure perceptions of safety and Factor 6 used to measure experience of crime. The demographic/travel characteristic linkages included in the model are based on the general linear model analyses for the factor scores.

The model fit was barely adequate with a root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) of .096. Values above .10 for the RMSEA are generally considered unacceptable according to the AMOS4 help files. However, all the usual fit indexes are well above .90, indicating that this model is useful. Table 4 shows the relative importance of each factor and the significance of demographic/travel characteristics in describing perception of safety, as well as the relative importance of ethnicity and mode of travel on experience of crime.

The results suggested the Figure 2 profiles in descending order of importance. Perceptions of safety and crime experience appear to match up fairly well in that non-Europeans and visitors traveling alone feel less safe and appear more likely to experience crime. The relatively low proportion of non-European faces and the large crowds in the vicinity of the event (America's Cup) may have contributed to reduced perceptions of safety and greater exposure to crime for these

FIGURE 2
SAFETY AND VICTIMIZATION PROFILES OF VISITORS



two categories of visitors. However, the fact that domestic visitors feel less safe than overseas visitors appears to be unsupported by their crime experience.

DISCUSSION

An examination of the research data reveals that differences in ethnicity, age, accommodation choice, communication skills, and the number of traveling companions affects tourist perceptions and concerns regarding crime and safety. Similarly, differences in domestic/overseas status, age, accommodation choice, and the number of traveling companions affects the risk of criminal victimization of visitors. This suggests a relationship between a tourist's risk of crime, his or her subsequent perceptions, and likelihood of experiencing crime. This supports previous studies that report a relationship between risk, fear, and actual victimization (e.g., Young et al. 1997). It also implies that visitor concerns about racial harassment may lead to similar concerns for victimization because of the underlying motivations associated with such offences. As a result of this vulnerability to crime, Prideaux (1994) noted that "Japanese come from a culture with low rates of crime . . . [and] should be made aware of the need for even basic security precautions" (p. 258).

One of the major findings of the survey was that although concerns for crime and safety were not high, the level of concern and fear of victimization differed markedly between tourists. Differences in the perceptions between domestic and overseas visitors may reflect the type and duration of exposure to different forms of media whereby overseas visitors have a limited local knowledge of crime risk. It is also encouraging that some of the most vulnerable tourists appear to acknowledge their perceived risk and take additional precautions to reduce their risk of crime without actually limiting their travel behavior (i.e., women, backpacker tourists, and non-Europeans). In a similar way, a high importance was placed on demands for safety by overseas tourists, including provisions taken by the destination (e.g., police presence) and safety precautions that tourists are responsible for taking (e.g., based on provision of safety information).

The relationship between tourist confidence, compatibility in language and communication skills, and subsequent perceptions of safety was not a major feature in this study, although findings by Demos (1992) and Pinhey and Iverson (1994) highlighted the significance of such a relationship. The importance of understanding tourist confidence toward travel and safety is also likely to increase the tendency to take higher personal risks such as staying in lower-security accommodation, which affects the likelihood of victimization. This makes it difficult to isolate the causal factors in tourist criminal victimization and the degree to which the factors of confidence, youth, solo traveling, and the selection of backpacker accommodation are interrelated. This is compounded by a study sample with a high representation of these apparently high-risk groups that may inflate the actual risk of victimization in the total population. What is more, differences in a tourist's travel characteristics (e.g., length of stay) affect the exposure to risk and need to be considered in any interpretation of relative levels of risk faced by tourists.

Typical problems of crowding and congestion at events with foot traffic had enhanced the festive and safe atmosphere of the event. The America's Cup appealed to family groups who demand a high degree of safety, and their presence may also add to its perception as a safe environment. The similar motivations of visitors also reduced the potential for crime and made potential offenders more conspicuous in the vicinity of the Viaduct Basin. The presence of police had an important role in dictating visitor perceptions of safety during the America's Cup. Indeed, an increased presence and interaction between the police and the community can raise public perceptions of safety (Pizam, Tarlow, and Bloom 1997; Tarlow 2000) as well as attitudes toward police. These were among the major objectives identified by the New Zealand Police during the America's Cup.

As the police provide a sense of security and protection, improved policing was considered one of the social benefits of tourism (Turco 1998). The presence of tourist enclaves (e.g., Viaduct Basin) can also increase tourist confidence both in the physical environment and from the ratio of other tourists. The nature of the event may cause spatial and temporal changes in crime, whereby the location of the event, the visitor demographics (e.g., ethnicity), and the relocation of security measures such as police may attract and displace certain types of offending. Tourist enclaves and police presence can lead to the displacement of crime, whereby the highest risk of criminal victimization is no longer confined to the event area but at peripheral areas as visitors return to

vehicles, accommodation, or visit other attractions of the city. In these areas, security is less concentrated, and public perceptions of safety may differ significantly.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has examined tourists' perceptions, concerns, and experiences of crime and safety during a special event. It has been highlighted that one of the common weaknesses in the literature was a general failure to identify visitor perceptions and concerns of safety, and the characteristics of tourists as victims of crime. The study found that the level of reported tourist crime was low during the America's Cup in Auckland. It emphasized that the perceptions of crime by tourists are critical to understanding and satisfying their intrinsic needs for safety.

This research has allowed police and the tourism industry to better identify where crime prevention and education efforts are required. It is expected that the study's findings will also assist the tourism industry to identify factors that will help them provide an environment for tourists. It may also help to provide an environment that is safer and perceived as safe for an increasing number of tourists and where tourists are aware of safety but not overly concerned about being victimized.

The research presented in this article provides baseline data for the next hosting of the America's Cup in 2002-3, which will allow important longitudinal comparisons of event-related safety in a single destination. The study has also been useful as it has assessed the impact of special events on crime and analyzed the intricacies of crimes against tourists in urban areas. It demonstrates the critical role of research on tourist crime for planning and forecasting the impacts on future special events in relation to the development of tourism in different destinations. An understanding of the tourist experience as it relates to safety is an invaluable framework for this research as it provides a holistic perspective of how perceptions of safety and risk within the urban environment affect visitor satisfaction.

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