



AIR NEW ZEALAND VACATION GAP STUDY Background Information

In 2005, executives at Air New Zealand – the flagship carrier of a country that prides itself on celebrating travel and leisure – held a meeting to discuss why the North American market posed an inherent challenge: **Americans don't make vacation a priority.**

As a country, we work more than almost any other nation in the world. Yet, despite the fact that most people recognize they “need” a vacation, many Americans don't even take advantage of their diminutive allotment each year.

This discrepancy challenged Air New Zealand to dig deeper into what they termed the “Vacation Gap;” to better understand the circumstances which prohibit Americans from traveling and be the first organization to scientifically study the psychological and physiological of vacations. The hope was that through its newfound knowledge, the company would not only have a better understanding of its customers and how travel affects them, but also be equipped to provide the best service possible.

To accomplish this feat, Air New Zealand enlisted Dr. Mark Rosekind and Alertness Solutions, an independent consulting firm comprised of former NASA scientists. Together, they joined forces to conduct the most intensive study on vacationers to date.

The project was divided into two phases, a survey and field study.

International Vacation Survey: In early 2006, Air New Zealand analyzed data from a custom survey distributed to travelers from around the United States. The survey was designed to provide insight into people's perceptions of overall vacation enjoyment, including the:

- Planning process
- Transition into “vacation mindset”
- In-flight experience
- Effect of work/stress

Air New Zealand used findings from this survey to provide preliminary insight into the mindset of vacationers. This information then provided a strong foundation as the team moved into the second phase of the project.

Vacation Field Study: In April and May of 2006, Air New Zealand and Alertness Solutions made real the first scientific in-flight passenger study. Using methodology developed and honed at NASA, the team wired 10 passengers traveling from Los Angeles to Auckland with technology designed to continually measure brain, eye, muscle and heart rate activity.

In addition to intensive in-flight monitoring, passengers participated in constant performance tests facilitated through a hand-held device. Testing began two days before travelers left on their trip and continued two days after their return, ultimately providing insight into passengers' alertness and reaction times at various points throughout the vacation process.

To complete the psychological element of the study, the team asked the passengers to keep consistent records in an electronic diary, thereby revealing the effects of a vacation on mood, stress, relaxation and perceived health. As with the performance tests, these entries began before travelers left on vacation and continued upon their return.

The various components of this multi-faceted study ultimately provide the most in-depth look at passengers to-date. While similar tests have been performed on astronauts and pilots, Air New Zealand is the first to use this methodology to better understand travelers and their vacation experience. Air New Zealand plans on using these findings to demonstrate the undeniable benefits of vacations and help further enhance the New Zealand vacation experience.