

Half a million, or a million... or even more?

How many visitors do we welcome each year on the mountain? Strangely enough, given the importance of tourism for our local community, no factual information about this is available. Having lived on the mountain for 15 years I have heard every guess between half a million and one and a half million. Just having published a book, *Green Island in the Sky*, also for sale to tourists, it is important to have accurate numbers.

### *Introduction*

In this article I present a model for making a much better calculation, and I explain which sources I have used. Finally I will fill in the figures. I don't pretend to present the gospel truth, but I hope to contribute to get a better insight in the real figures. Anyone is invited to come up with suggestions how to improve the model or the sources of the data. The original data can be downloaded from the author page of my website [GreenIslandintheSky.com.au](http://GreenIslandintheSky.com.au)

Fortunately, the Council is preparing a 'Tourism Strategy', a task outsourced to a business called EarthCheck in Brisbane. They are considered experts in the field of tourism. They have scrutinized both this calculation method and the outcomes, and I will include their major comments at the end. The Gold Coast welcomes about 12 million visitors each year. This number includes regional, domestic and international tourists, people visiting relatives and people visiting the Gold Coast to participate in congresses or other events. The 'Tamborine Mountain calculation' below uses the same definition of 'visitors'.

### *The methodology*

The calculation goes as follows:

1. Count the number of vehicles going up and down the mountain on the four major access roads.
  2. Subtract the heavy vehicles. Then divide the number by two because each vehicle is counted twice (going up and coming down)
  3. Subtract the number of vehicles of local residents.
- This gives us the number of light vehicles going up and down the mountain by non residents.
4. Subtract moves by tradespeople and others coming to the mountain for work (for non-recreation, that is). This results in an annual total of visitor cars.
  5. Multiply this by the average number of visitors per car and we know the total number of independently travelling visitors.
  6. Add the number of visitors arriving per touring car or minibus and Bob's your uncle: this is a well educated guess of the total number of visitors.

### *Next step: where to find the figures?*

1. The QLD government counts the number of vehicles on each of the four access roads 24/7, 365 days/year. The data of 2015 are online available.
2. The same source shows the percentage of heavy vehicles.
3. The Census gives us the number of local vehicles. Because the Census dates from 2011 I have added ten percent. Using an online questionnaire I have asked locals to calculate how often each of their vehicles is taken off the mountain each week. With some basic arithmetic this gives the number of local rides off the mountain.
4. Of all trips to the mountain by non-residents I have guessed that 25% is 'work related': 700 trades people or employees coming to Tamborine Mountain for work only. That sounds like a big number, but I want to make sure that we do NOT over-estimate tourism numbers.
5. Counts on tourist car parks for several hours on several days provided us with the number of people per tourist car.
6. The number of minibus passengers is based on actual data from the biggest company running

these tours, and adding an educated guess of the number by all other – smaller – companies. The number of big buses is based on observations by Gallery Walk shop owners.

In summary: most figures are either hard measured or based on surveys or counts; very few numbers are based on 'educated guess'. To make sure that our estimate is not too high, I have used guesses or educated guesses that will lead to a final figure that is rather lower than higher than reality.

### *The figures*

Each year 1,75 million cars move on and off the mountain (return drives), excluding heavy vehicles. Just under 900,000 of these are locals. That leaves 850,000 return trips to the mountain by non locals. If every 1 in 4 of these, are cars used by people coming for business reasons to our mountain, then 640,000 cars of visitors drive up and down Tamborine Mountain each year.

With an average of 2.8 tourists/car we count 2.1 million visitors. Minibuses add another 20,000 people, and touring cars another 40,000. That makes a total of 2.2, just over two million visitors to Tamborine Mountain.

If this figure is wrong it is most likely because it is too low, unless there is a major oversight in this calculation and measurement.

As stated in the beginning, we had the happy coincidence that an expert business is involved in some work for the council's tourism strategy. They stated that both the methodology and the figures seem to be solid and reliable.

They identified one problem though: in 'worldwide statistics' people younger than 15 years, and people living closer than 40 kms to the tourist destination are not considered tourists. In our case that means that children and Gold Coast residents should not be counted as 'tourists'.

In their response they also suggest that the number of tourist cars should be lower as well as the number of tourists per car. That statement though is only based on comparison with similar data from all over the state, while our numbers are based on measurements and cautious, but well educated guesses with local knowledge. Because of their exclusion of youngsters and GC residents, and slight adjustments to some other parameters, they adjust the findings to 1.3 million for the mountain.

It is therefore safe to conclude that the number of tourists to the mountain is at least 1.3 million per year, and if we accept that children and Gold Coast residents can also be considered 'visitors', then we are getting close to, if not over, 2 million. As far as I'm concerned, that is not a political statement, but a factual calculation. I am happy to get any input that will help to further improve the data, based on facts.

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Original data and this article: download from 'author/contact page' of [greenislandinthesky.com.au](http://greenislandinthesky.com.au)