

Risky rides for tourists in 'safe' NZ

by Rachel Sutton

Tourists are being fooled by New Zealand's safe and clean, green image into thinking it is a safe country to hitchhike through.

Websites like nzguide.co.nz say hitchhiking in New Zealand is "relatively safe", but the New Zealand Police strongly disagree.

Community safety officer sergeant Nigel Roe says police definitely recommend people do not hitchhike because of the potential risks.

Sergeant Roe says people, especially tourists, are often unaware of the danger they are putting themselves in by getting into a car with a complete stranger.

"The way New Zealand is portrayed overseas is giving tourists the impression that hitchhiking isn't a risky business," Sergeant Roe says.

"That's not the case at all."

The recent murder of German tourist Birgit Brauer highlights the dangers surrounding hitchhiking.

Her body was found in Lucy's Gully, near New Plymouth, in September last year with multiple injuries, including head trauma and a stab wound to the chest. She had been hitchhiking.

However, if cases such as Birgit Brauer's are not given much publicity overseas, tourists remain uninformed on hitchhiking in New Zealand.

While murder is rare, the police get a large number of reports from hitchhikers who have been assaulted or had property stolen.

Michelle Rau is a woman in her late 20s who says hitchhiking was the only way she got where she needed to go in her teens.

"My parents would never want to drive me anywhere so I



PHOTO: RACHEL SUTTON

HITCHHIKING: A popular but dangerous means for travelling in "clean and green" New Zealand.

always ended up hitching," Rau says.

"Most of the time I got picked up by older men who would actually tell me what a dangerous thing I was doing."

She says now she thinks about it, hitchhiking on her own

was an extremely dangerous thing to do.

"I'd never want my own children to do it," says Rau.

While Telecom has launched a network called 'SAFE', where hitchhikers can register where they are and who they are with

through text messaging, Sergeant Roe says this is not the answer.

"The only way people will keep themselves safe is by ruling out hitchhiking as a travel option and learning to use public transport," he says.

New Zealand youth gamble on their future

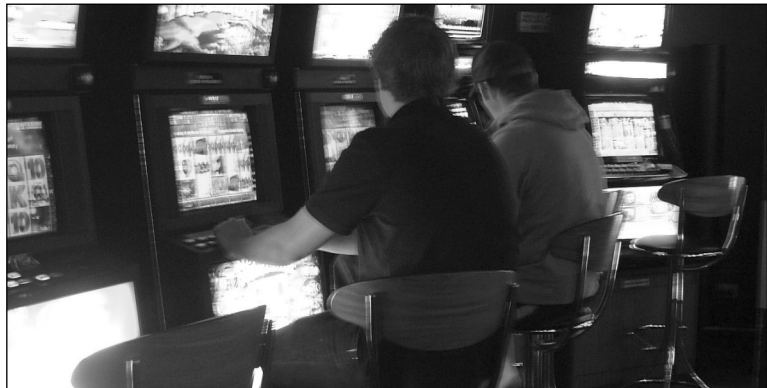


PHOTO: MELANIE ALLEN

GAMBLING: The new past time for bored teenagers.

by Melanie Allan

New gambling technologies like text betting and internet gaming are seducing New Zealand's youth.

More than half of our high-school students have used pokie machines in pubs and other venues, according to the Problem Gambling Foundation.

Lauren Cundall, the youth services project leader at the foundation, says: "I think there has been a huge influx in accessibility."

"Twenty years ago pokies were only just being introduced," she says. "Now pokies are everywhere, we have twice-a-day Keno, Instant Kiwis and even text message gambling."

Cundall believes pokie machines are one of the most attractive and accessible forms of gambling for young people.

"Often no-one is watching, especially in pubs and clubs where the staff are busy behind the bar."

Instant Kiwis are another form of gambling that is easily accessible to young people. Although the age limit for these gambling cards is 18, this is rarely enforced, Cundall says.

"The funny thing is, most of

the time the person selling the scratchies is under 18."

Poker is also becoming more popular with young people, both in groups of friends and at the casino.

"Pokies are really big in the university age group. They can gamble online and quite often they'll find themselves walking past pokie machines and end up gambling instead of going to class."

Aaron Lawton, 21, says he went through a phase in his last year at university where he was betting on four sports events each weekend and going to the casino three nights a week.

"There was something about the thrill of gambling that really attracted me to it," says Lawton.

"A couple of my close mates got into it too so we all encouraged one another."

Cundall says education is the key to reducing the trend towards youth gambling.

The Problem Gambling Foundation has developed a programme aimed at high school students that involves a free teaching manual and DVD on gambling.

"Unfortunately schools have not really picked up on it yet. They still have the mindset that their students don't gamble."

'Big brother' watches over inner-city streets

by Amy Kelley

Security cameras installed in central Auckland streets two years ago have succeeded in preventing and solving crime but have not proved popular with all members of the public.

The closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras have contributed to a 15 per cent sustained decrease in crime in the last three years, according to senior sergeant William Taylor, of the downtown police.

But an informal survey of pedestrians on Queen St conducted by *Te Waha Nui* found that while many appreciate the cameras' safety benefits, some feel they are being "stalked" and their "privacy is being invaded".

Assistant privacy commissioner Katrine Evans says "Big Brother phobias" are not surprising.

"People don't like to feel they're being overlooked all the time," she says.

The CBD has about 50 CCTVs, with another 20 in the Viaduct and 15 along Karangahape Rd.

Heart of Auckland City chief executive officer Alex Swney says the CCTVs are part of a security-boosting initiative.

"We did a piece of research on deterrents to visiting the city," says Swney. "The cost and availability of parking was people's main concern, but addressing that would be a very expensive thing to do."

"The second greatest deterrent was that people felt unsafe in the city. There were ways to remedy this - increasing street

lighting, getting police out onto the street and installing CCTV cameras. We figured that was do-able."

Senior sergeant Taylor says the cameras are not relied upon as a substitute for policing but "they are a valuable tool and do deter crime. They provide the extra eyes that we're unable to provide on a street level."

The cameras are monitored during "peak crime" hours only but all footage is recorded and can be referred to after an incident. Last month they proved useful in the homicide case of Chinese student Wan Biao, identifying several witnesses.

But some Aucklanders do not approve of the cameras.

Street musician Hendrix Potini says he felt he was being "stalked".

The Privacy Commission receives complaints such as these "periodically".

"Most people's concerns are about how footage of themselves can be used and whether they



PHOTO: DANIEL PILKINGTON

EYE ON THE CITY: Surveillance cameras cause controversy.

make this trade-off on her daily walk to Britomart to commute to work.

"At that time of the morning it's sometimes dark and there are still people around who were partying the night before," she says. "So I'm grateful that they're there. They act like a safety valve."

Administrator Heidi Roussel says she has no problem with the cameras either.

"If you're not doing anything wrong, why would you?" she says.

Evans says creating an awareness of the cameras' purpose is the key to reducing public concern.

"If people understand why they're there and what the benefits are, it's okay," she says. "It's when people don't that you get that negative reaction and all those Big Brother phobias."

"It's a trade-off of privacy for safety."

are able to access it," says Evans.

"There are always going to be concerns about privacy but protection of privacy is not absolute," says Evans.

"The protection of property and people must come first. It's a trade-off of privacy for safety."

Auckland central resident and account manager Tris Roberts says she is willing to