

# Itching to travel: What drives people to leave New Zealand



## RESEARCH

‘The Migrant Personality Revisited: Individual Differences and International Mobility Intentions’

by Aidan Tabor, Dr Taciano Milfont, and Professor Colleen Ward (2015)

Published in *New Zealand Journal of Psychology*, 44, 89-95.

## Background

Why do some people choose to travel overseas while others stay in their home country?

In the case of migrants moving from poorer countries to more affluent countries, it is clear that finances and prospects of a more prosperous life are at the core of those decisions. But what about migrants who leave first world countries?

The Centre for Applied Cross-cultural Research, part of Victoria University of Wellington, undertook a study to determine what individual differences are likely to explain international migration of those already living in relatively affluent countries.

## Main research findings

Results indicated that there were several personality factors that predicted New Zealanders’ intention to move abroad. Openness to having new experiences was a good predictor of those who planned to leave, while being more of a traditionalist was characteristic of those who planned to stay. The latter groups’ motivation to stay is likely because they are more content in their environment and form strong emotional attachments, resulting in little desire to move.

For those who did intend to travel or live abroad, persistence was the most common personality characteristic in this group. This could be because people who are persistent tend to focus on goals, overcome obstacles and follow through with tasks, which when combined with a desire to live abroad mean that these people are the ones who will actually complete the logistical processes.

## Relevance of findings to New Zealand

New Zealand is unique in that it is a first world country where emigration is quite common. In fact, New Zealand ranks first among OECD countries for having a large portion of highly skilled citizens living abroad.

For a country of just over 4 million people, having as many as a million citizens living abroad is a startling notion. Cultural factors such as the general acceptance of an overseas experience as a rite of passage for young New Zealanders may contribute to these high levels of emigration.

However, the findings from this study indicate that the desire to leave is actually largely based on personality characteristics, the most influential of which is persistence. This is not surprising as in the New Zealand context, migrants have often been thought of as possessing grit, perseverance, and faith.