

Even though [it's still uncertain](#) as to when Australian same-sex couples will be able legally to wed, New Zealand's example shows how much this could be worth to our economy.

New Zealand has long been a destination for international wedding tourism. This was boosted from August 2013, when New Zealand same-sex couples could also marry. The majority of same-sex weddings between overseas couples conducted in New Zealand have been between Australian couples unable to marry at home.

In 2016, [2,490 heterosexual couples from other countries](#) celebrated marriages or civil unions in New Zealand, comprising 11% of all heterosexual couples' ceremonies. The proportion of same-sex couples from other countries entering into marriage or civil union in New Zealand has been even higher.

In 2016, 49% of same-sex marriages or civil unions in New Zealand were between overseas couples, and [Australians accounted for 58% of these couples](#). Altogether, Australian couples comprised 29% of same-sex marriages or civil unions celebrated in New Zealand in 2016.

The figures for 2016 are not an outlier: since 2013, Australian couples have made up 25% or more of same-sex weddings celebrated per annum.

All the business of marriage

This phenomenon has both social and economic implications. Trans-Tasman same-sex wedding tourism underlines a real desire for marriage by Australian same-sex couples.

New Zealand wedding operators have been willing and able to absorb this demand. While of course the significance of marriage lies in the couple's enduring commitment and love, supported by family, friends and community, there is also tangible economic value from the wedding celebration.

The wedding industry is a complex network of small and medium businesses. It includes everything from planners, celebrants to florists, photographers and entertainers. Beyond the ceremony itself, the industry also includes operators of honeymoon destinations.

In 2015, [ANZ economists Cherelle Murphy and Mandeep Kaura crunched some numbers](#) on the economic benefits of same-sex marriage in Australia. They used [2011 Census data](#) on the number of same-sex couples in Australia, and we might update their estimate using the more recent 2016 Census figures.

Murphy and Kaura estimated the average spend on a wedding ceremony and reception at A\$51,000. The [2016 Census](#) counted 46,800 same-sex couples.

They applied [other survey findings](#) from 2010, and further assumed that out of the half of all same-sex couples who will want to marry, half will do so in the year after same-sex marriage is legalised.

The sentiments expressed in the 2010 survey findings may have shifted since then, especially in light of the marriage equality postal survey. But let's use that proportion for consistency.

We might suppose 11,700 same-sex couples will marry within one year of the legalisation of same-sex marriage, spending on average A\$51,000, totalling almost A\$597 million dollars in wedding and reception costs.

This does not include honeymoon spending. For those couples choosing to honeymoon within Australia, we can add spending on travel and accommodation.

A 2015 survey by Bride To Be magazine found [the average spend on wedding and honeymoon at A\\$65,482](#). This figure is clearly biased towards dedicated bridal magazine readers – those who might be willing to save up and fork out more for their perfect wedding and honeymoon.

Arguably many would not be able or willing to spend this amount. Nevertheless, A\$65,482 would be equivalent to an annual salary for many, so this is suggestive of how lucrative some segments of the wedding and honeymoon market are.

Apart from what the couple (and their families) spend on the wedding and honeymoon, we might also consider guest spending. Obviously, purchasing wedding gifts contributes to the retail sector.

Out-of-town guests also have to pay for travel, accommodation, food and beverage, and other expenses. Some couples opt for destination weddings, with benefits for tourism operators.

Some operators hope that Australia, like New Zealand, might become a destination for international same-sex wedding tourism, and so provide a boost to the tourism industry.

In addition to this, Murphy and Kaura found other economic benefits of same-sex marriage, such as increased state government revenue from marriage licence fees and ceremonies in state-run births, deaths and marriages registries.

With the debate on same-sex marriage now turning to whether or not businesses will be able to refuse couples based on moral objections, it seems at least the economic case incentive is there for these businesses to say “yes”.

Andrew Gorman-Murray does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond their academic appointment.

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