

# **IMAGE OF DUNEDIN AS A TOURIST DESTINATION: CONTENT ANALYSIS OF TOURISM PROMOTIONAL WEBSITES**

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**Abstract:** *Image plays a meaningful role in boosting the competitive edge of a particular tourist destination. As digital media have been receiving considerable importance in supplying information and act as marketing means in tourism, this study aims to explore the image of a tourist destination depicted in the websites by national and local promotional organisations. In investigating the destination image topic, this research explores the image of Dunedin as projected by tourism websites of the official bodies in the promotion of this city. A content analysis technique has been adopted in the assessment of these travel promotional websites. Overall, a very positive image of the city has been projected by both national and local organisations. Findings of this paper revealed that the national tourism organisation highlighted the Scottish origin of Dunedin and labelled the city as the Edinburgh of New Zealand. The primary asset or the unique selling proposition of the city as projected by both organisations is its rare wildlife particularly the penguins. Natural resources such as beaches and other wildlife especially the royal albatross, seals and sea lions and cultural heritage attributes like Larnach Castle, Dunedin Railway Station and Toitu Otago Settlers Museum formed the image of Dunedin as a tourist destination and this observation is reflected in both websites. Compared to the national tourism organisation, the local tourism authority presented more diverse attractions and sites including remote areas and hidden parts of the city. Its local knowledge of the city is further accentuated through the words such as hidden and insiders. In short, both unique features and familiar attributes are presented on the websites in portraying Dunedin as a fascinating and friendly tourist destination.*

**Keywords:** *Destination Image, Destination Marketing, Content Analysis, Dunedin*

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## **Introduction**

As the number of tourist destinations and attractions keeps on increasing, destination marketers around the world are facing intense competition in enticing tourists. In the context of destination marketing, it is argued that image can play an important role for tourists in the

process of differentiating tourist destinations (Kislali, Kavartzis & Saren, 2016). Tourism scholars claimed that a destination's image is one of the main factors which can draw tourist visitations (Ksouri, Ayoun, Storai & Abdellatif, 2015) and can be utilised as a strong means in order to gain advantage from the tourism market (Foroudi, Akarsu, Ageeva, Faroudi, Dennis and Melawar, 2018). It is proposed that the promoted image of a destination to the general public plays a vital role in the process of decision making when selecting a holiday destination (Matos, Mendes and Valle, 2012). In fact, Sonnleitner (2011) states that the function of image is particularly crucial in choosing a destination as services in tourism are mostly intangible. Additionally, destination image is considered significant as it has direct relationships with customers' satisfaction and loyalty to tourist destinations (Lucio, Maria, Miguel & Javier, 2006; cited in Jamaludin, Aziz, Yusof & Idris, 2013).

Although studies on topics related to destination image have been widely investigated by tourism scholars during the past decades, research in this area is still relevant as an image of a particular destination can change over time. Besides, there are top tourist destinations and places which have not been studied particularly via the recent and modern marketing tools such as the online promotional websites and social media. As mentioned by Jenkins (1999), the understanding of destination image is crucial from the marketing perspective as the knowledge is useful in designing suitable promotional strategies, positioning and reaching the target market affectively. Therefore, this study aims to analyse how the image of the city of Dunedin has been projected. Although, New Zealand as a country has been studied by previous scholars, Dunedin as a tourism city has not been explored thoroughly. Thus, this research examines the current image of this city and how it has been represented by the official tourist promotional bodies.

### **Literature Review**

As a concept, "destination image" has been investigated for quite a while by scholars and practitioners in the tourism industry (Dolnicar & Grun, 2013). The acceptance of destination image as a significance research area has inspired a considerable number of studies to be carried out in this field. Hartjes (2014) states that research in the area of destination image has started since the 1970s. It is claimed that destination image is one of the popular area of studies in field of tourism. Since its emergence in the mid-1970s, destination image has become one of the most important concepts in tourism destination marketing (Shani & Wang, 2011). The evaluation and analysis of destination image has been the subject of much attention in related academic literature and has made a significant contribution to a greater understanding of tourist behaviour. Arguably, images have power to affect key aspects of tourists' behaviour including awareness of the destinations, decision makings, levels of satisfaction and recollection (Jenkins, 1999). It is proposed that images have the power to move potential consumers or tourists to take actions based on their perceptions rather than actual or tangible objects (Gallarza, Gil & Calderón, 2002; cited in Sonnleitner, 2011).

In the field of tourism, the knowledge of destination image is significant for academicians as well as industry players (Kislali et al., 2016). This is reflected through the sizeable amount of resources invested to attain and retain a preferred image of a destination (Shani & Wang, 2011). Images are important for several reasons. Firstly, due to the expansion and the fierce competition of the tourism business, tourists constantly experience difficulties in selecting their holiday destinations as there are bombarded with plenty of choices (Shani and Wang, 2011). Secondly, image can act as a mental map which helps potential tourists to select their choice of destination over others (O'Leary & Deegan, 2003; cited Shani & Wang, 2011). Conceptually, scholars claimed that a positive image can assist the selection and buying

processes by making potential tourists conscious and then induce them to particular destinations by setting them apart from competitors (Pikkemaat, 2002; Sönmez & Sirakayas 2002; cited in Pikkemaat, 2004). Furthermore, destination which possesses a powerful and positive image will have a better chance of being considered and selected by potential tourists (Foroudi et al., 2018).

It is difficult to establish the definite meaning of “destination image” as this term has been applied in many different settings (Jenkins, 1999). Image can have different interpretations as it has been utilised in several contexts and fields (Jenkins, 1999). In tracing the meaning of the term from the philosophical perspective, the origin can be drawn from the well-known Greek thinkers Plato and Aristotle who claimed that image lies between the actual and individual perception of something (Rodrigues et al., 2011; cited in Lordanova, 2015). Destination image as a research topic started to be explored since the 1970s and a number of early definitions have been proposed by scholars during that time. The review of the literature uncovered that several core definitions of the term have been presented and commonly cited by previous scholars (e.g. Hunt, 1975; Crompton, 1979; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Garner, 1993). One of the earliest definitions of the term “image” commonly cited by academicians is the one proposed by Hunt (1975). He describes image as “the impression that a person or persons hold about a state in which they do not reside” (1975, p.1). Another well-known definition of the term was proposed by Crompton (1979) who defined destination image as ‘the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of a destination’ (p.18). Kotler, Haider and Rein (1993) explain a place’s image as “the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that people have of a place. Images represent a simplification of a large number of associations and pieces of information connected with the place” (Kotler et al., 1993, p.141). It is demonstrated that although some of the definitions have been established by scholars for a while, they are still regarded important in explaining the meaning of image until today. Basically, the term depicts the general perception of a particular destination or place.

Destination image can be formed from various information sources (Gartner, 1993; Hsu & Song, 2013). It is stated by Reynolds (1965) that image is a creation of a mental map based on encounters with various information sources (cited in Larmolenko & Schneider, 2016). In the context of tourism, several scholars have proposed a number of models relating to image formation. One of the pioneers Gunn (1988) claimed that image is formed from organic and induced sources. The formation of an organic image generated from information sources not related to tourism and destination marketers have no control while induced images are sources of information created for promotional purposes (Pagano, 2014). Induced images are mainly developed to showcase positive projection and to increase visitations to a particular destination or place and these images can be controlled by destination marketers. Examples of organic sources of information include new reports, newspapers, films, past experiences and word of mouth, whereas travel brochures, guidebooks and DMO websites are examples of images derived from induced sources of information.

Garner (1993) hypothesised that destination image is made of three components: cognitive, affective and conative. The foundation of Garner’s (1993) proposition was the work of Boulding published in 1956. However, studies published relatively recently, maintained that destinations are mainly formed from two dimensions consisting of cognitive and affective components (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999, Beerli & Martin, 2004; Puh, 2014). Although many researchers admitted that a destination image consists of both components, Puh (2014) argues that many past studies overlooked the affective components of a destination image. The cognitive component of the destination denotes the intellectual aspect which include

knowledge and beliefs associated with the features of the destination that an individual hold (Pike & Ryan, 2004; Kim & Chen, 2015). Affective image represents the feelings held by tourists towards the destination or the feelings associated with a particular destination (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Kim & Richardson, 2003). The conative component has been described as “the likelihood of trip intention toward visiting a destination within a certain time period that emerges from cognition and affective images” (Kim & Chen, 2015, p.2). The quote demonstrates that the third component is related to behavioural aspect.

According to Mancini (2013) in the past, New Zealand as country was not easy to market because as a destination it was not able to project a strong image as compared to Australia. However, the film “Lord of the Rings” has transformed how the public viewed the country and its natural beauty. In fact, this famous film provides a new perspective of looking at New Zealand and its striking natural resources including those found on the South Island. Tang (2015) argues that Chinese tourists were inspired by the films of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* and they wanted to visit New Zealand and sites where these films were made. Based on the analysis of the travel blogs, she describes that Chinese tourists were motivated to visit because this country has been projected as a place where they can experience simple and rustic ways of life. Similarly, Carl (2004) claims that it is shown in the film that New Zealand is a quiet and calm heaven on earth suitable for tourists looking for an off-the-beaten-track destination.

However, in terms of tourism resources, the former prime minister from the labour government maintained that New Zealand owns more than just beautiful scenery and natural attractions (Hendery, 2000; cited in Ryan & Zahra, 2002). From a geographical view, New Zealand is a country located far away from many generating markets, therefore, Tang (2015) argues that the focus of its tourism via the theme of 100% pure promotion should be on the radar of unique and distinct attractions especially with the Maori culture and spectacular landscape which would inspire potential tourists to come and visit.

As depicted in the film, the South Island is full of mountains and fjords including its very cold weather (Mancini, 2013). One of the well-known tourist destinations in New Zealand is the city of Dunedin. Geographically, Dunedin is located on the South Island and it is the fourth largest city in the country. It is the second largest city on the South Island. Even though the city is not as famous as other cities commonly associated and populated with tourists such as Queenstown and Wanaka, it is claimed that Dunedin is a warm and friendly city relatively easy to reach (Marcus, 2018). Historically, Dunedin has a strong link to Scotland. The name “Dunedin” itself is said to be originated from a Gaelic word meaning Edinburgh (Marcus, 2018). Although Dunedin is a reputable tourist destination in New Zealand and well-known for several key attractions, limited studies have been carried out to analyse the image of Dunedin especially from the lens of tourism promotional organisations which promote the city.

## **Method**

One of the ways to explore how the image of Dunedin has been projected is through analysing the websites of the organisations which market the city. It is important to examine the websites created and maintained by DMOs as their websites are often visited by potential visitors as they consider those websites as the primary source of information to find information about destinations (Choi et al., 2007; cited in Li & Wang, 2010). As consumers have been increasingly using the Internet widely during the past three decades, this trend has triggered interest for researchers to explore topics relating to consumer and tourist behaviour in relation to the Internet (Foroudi et al., 2018). One of the primary approaches to search for tourism

information and project an image of a destination is through the Internet (Blazquez-Resino, Muro-Rodriguez & Perez-Jimenez, 2016). The Internet through the official websites and social media plays significant roles in the formation of a destination image (Molinillo, Liebana-Cabanillas & Anaya-Sanchez, 2017). The Internet demonstrates strong power to influence potential tourists' image formation including providing virtual experiences (Pavlovic & Belullo, 2007). As tourism gets more and more competitive nowadays, it is a requirement for destination marketing organisations to own a website (Li & Wang, 2010). Furthermore, the tourism websites can act as a gateway between potential buyers and destinations by offering information, creating awareness, and shaping the decision making process, with the hope to lead potential visitors to have a good reaction (Faroudi et al., 2018).

Content analysis method is adopted in investigating the image of Dunedin as a tourist destination. The rising of sources of information via online media has provided researchers with rich data for research using a content analysis method. It is claimed that the studies of tourism websites via content analysis technique can offer meaningful information and findings related to images portrayed by destinations around the world (Larmolenko & Schneider, 2010). Content analysis is a quantitative technique which can be adopted to identify and observe the visible content of communications systematically and objectively (Berelson, 1952). However, many scholars have utilised this method to examine the more subtle aspects of messages meaning. For example, Prasad (2008) argues that content analysis is a study of communication content which allows researchers to probe the content of messages. From a qualitative perspective, content analysis can be utilised to classify and extract valuable information from data analysed in order to uncover reasonable and practical findings (Bengtsson, 2016). In general, content analysis can be used to analyse both manifest and latent contents. Manifest content refers to the more direct and apparent aspects while latent content signifies the underlying meanings of textual messages (Ahuvia, 2001). Smith (2010) argues that communication is a leading part of tourism experience. The utilisation of content analysis allows researchers to explore content, what is included in the content and the growth of content (Putra, Saepudin, Adriansyah & Adrian, 2018). It is a tool to examine print or graphic communications. In written or pictorial forms, how it is said and by whom it is said (Smith, 2010). As both textual and visual components are important parts of a promotional effort in destination marketing, these contents play significant roles in portraying meaningful tourism experience to tourists (Hellemans & Govers, 2005).

Examples of communication tools commonly examined using content analysis include popular press depicting travel narratives, guidebooks, postcards, travel diaries, travel brochures, travel blogs and destination websites (Smith, 2010). Thus, in this research, the assessment using content analysis includes investigating official tourism organisations at the national and local levels. Both websites owned by these organisations are examined because they are equally important in forming the image of Dunedin officially and in selecting destination and attractions to be visited. In general, potential visitors usually visit more than the official websites before deciding to visit and in finding information on various aspects such as accommodation, food and beverages and places of interests. Therefore, primary tourism websites which supply information about the city are analysed in this study. In conducting the content analysis technique, both manifested and latent contents presented in the forms of textual and visual images were investigated.

### **Findings and Discussions**

One of the destinations and cities located in the South Island marketed by the national tourism organisation named Tourism New Zealand is Dunedin. Dunedin is promoted as part of the

national campaign, “100% Pure New Zealand”. This website highlighted the city rare landscape, rich heritage, distinct wildlife and peculiar city life. There are three visual images in the main page marketing the city of Dunedin. The visuals of Larnach Castle, Railway Station and Tunnel Beach are the images which appear as the primary attractions of the city. Top eight experiences recommended for tourists visiting the city are also incorporated into the website. Top attractions and activities that should be visited and experienced by visitors have been ranked in this website. It is listed in the website that among the top tourist attractions and activities are: i) wildlife, ii) Larnach Castle, iii) Dunedin railways, iv) City of Literature, v) Dunedin street art trail, vi) Dunedin’s great outdoors, vii) Toitu Otago Settlers Museum and viii) cycling and mountain biking.

The unique nature and culture of Dunedin city are reflected through the primary attractions marketed. Its unique and distinct nature attractions, particularly the wildlife is rated as the number 1 tourist experience that should not be missed when visiting the city. It is stated on the website that tourists have a chance to see penguins either blue or the famous Yellow-eyed, fur seals, sea lions and royal albatross. Sites and tours associated with these wildlife have been integrated and promoted as part of the description of the uniqueness of the wildlife. For example, in relation to the description of the wildlife, guided tours and cruises to see these attractions have been incorporated. The practice of ecotourism and conservation effort is also clearly manifested in the description of penguins. For example, it is stated in the website, “Experience eco-tourism at its finest”. It is described that “the endangered species “Yellow-Eyed Penguin (Hoiho) nest in the coastal vegetation in and around the Otago Peninsula, hidden away from other birds and humans”. Furthermore, the protection of the wildlife is manifested in the website by mentioning groups and organisations involved in conservation efforts such as the department of conservation and local tourism operators in order to safeguard the penguins and give them space to live freely in their habitat.

Natural beauty and landscape are further accentuated through its great outdoors via the promotion of several beaches including the St Clair Beach, Long Beach and Tunnel Beach. The uniqueness of specific beach activities such as surfing, swimming and rock climbing have been mentioned too. Its beautiful landscape and natural beauty are evident through the physical activities recommended for tourists to participate such as cycling and mountain biking where they can enjoy the beautiful scenery and landscape. A combination of nature and culture can be experienced through the description of Dunedin Railways. As suggested by the national tourism organisation in New Zealand, visiting the Dunedin Railway Station and the trips to experience natural attractions and beautiful landscape. Visitors can visit the central Otago across Taieri Plains by boarding the Taieri Gorge Railway to Pukerangi (four hours return), and weekly to Middlemarch (6 hours return). In terms of cultural heritage, tourists of this city can visit the only castle, Larnach Castle. This castle was built by merchants and politicians with Scottish heritage.

Historical and heritage themes are evident in the description of the city of Dunedin. For example, its historical origin and connection to Scotland are mentioned in the website. It is claimed that Dunedin is proud of its Scottish heritage and labelled as “the Edinburgh of New Zealand”. Under the section “Towns in Dunedin”, the line “Journey from Oamaru, making your way south to the Scottish-heritage city of Dunedin” is stated. The history of the city is also described in the section of Dunedin Central. It is revealed that Dunedin is of the earliest three cities constructed in New Zealand. This city is known for its spectacular Edwardian and Victorian architecture and even considered the best in the southern hemisphere. The impressive architecture of the city is because this city was built during the era of gold rush.

The city cultural heritage is projected as among the main attractions of the city. Among the key cultural heritage attractions listed include Dunedin Street Art Trail and Toitu Otago Settlers Museum. This unique museum offers a glimpse of Dunedin past of the native Maori and European settlers until the more relatively modern era. Both history and contemporary culture are represented. One of the uniqueness of Dunedin is that the city has been awarded as the city of literature by UNESCO in 2014. As part of the description of the city of literature, the statue of Scottish poet, Robert Burns located at the central of Dunedin town, the Octagon has been stated as one of the symbols. Other scholarly attractions such as the unique manuscript collections and the traditional Book Bindery and University Book Shop are among the sites to be visited.

Marketing and promotion of the city of Dunedin are few of the tasks of the Local Tourism Authority, Dunedin Enterprise. One of top sections which is visibly on the website constructed by this organisation is labelled as “Uncover#hiddendunedin”. If visitors of this website click this section, they will see a page suggesting readers to discover Dunedin from a whole new perspective. On this page, visitors can explore special features of this city. Three out of 10 subsections listed on this page are labelled as Hidden Dunedin Dining Spot, Hidden Dunedin Video and Insiders Dunedin. Words such as “hidden” and “insiders” highlight the best attractions, sites or food and beverages outlets as viewed and known to locals. Indirectly, these words would suggest to readers that the local tourism authority provides local knowledge to tourists. It appears that the local authority is smart in playing with these words in showcasing they are the expert of the city and potential tourists can experience the best parts of this destination by following their recommendations. The use of the term, “insider”, is further expanded in this website. For example, if visitors click the section labelled as Insiders Dunedin, they can find other subsections called “attractions insider”, “culinary insider”, “shopping insider”, “creative insider”, “active insider”, “student insider” and “business insider”. If visitors click these sub-categories, they can find unique attractions, sites and food outlets to be visited and experienced. Some of these sites and outlets adopted catchy and distinctive names such as Flying Squid, Ice Cream Haven, the Five Seater Tour Bus and others. The utilisation of the word “insider” and portrayal of unique Dunedin attractions and sites as reflected in these categories offer visitors the best and memorable experience of the city.

Projecting remoteness as sites to be visited in Dunedin through the promotion caption, “Best Places to Loss Cell Reception in Dunedin” is also listed under the section attraction insiders. Even this caption has literal and symbolic meanings, promoting remoteness is one of the attributes of the attraction of the city of Dunedin and its surrounding areas. The underlying theme in the description of these attractions is for tourists to experience remoteness rather than connecting themselves to Wi-Fi and posting these fascinating sites on social media. Indirectly, the wording suggests that visitors of these secluded areas will be glad for the lack of reception and will enjoy their time connecting with nature rather than the Internet. This is because in this digital era many people prefer focusing on posting and sharing their travel with their friends and relatives including the world rather than enjoying the moment. Sites such as remote beaches, abundant wildlife cliffs, caves and eco-sanctuaries are marketed to tourists under this category of attraction. However, it is mentioned that along the way of this remote areas, reception can come and go and there will be spots where Wi-Fi connection is available for tourists. Information on the availability of the Internet is supplied to potential tourists in order to provide familiarity element.

Overall, the analysis of the website of local tourism organisation found that this organisation makes an effort to promote various types of attractions, sites and businesses. Numerous categories of attractions from unique features of the city, accommodation, food and beverage outlets to shopping spots as well as basic information of the city have been presented in the website of the local tourism authority. Possibly, the local authority has the responsibility towards tourism growth and long term development of the city, therefore various forms of businesses and attractions have been marketed in their website.

In the analysis of the city of Dunedin as marketed by the national and local authorities, three main themes clearly projected are its spectacular nature, cultural heritage and scenery. In both of the websites examined, attractions and sites associated with these themes are depicted. However, the best asset is the city's wildlife particularly the penguins. Other natural resources, attributes, built heritage, contemporary cultures are projected widely too. Besides, shopping malls, vintage and antique shopping are promoted too. In this digital era, both websites incorporated the advancement of technology through videos in presenting spectacular attractions and sites for visitors to observe more clearly. The local tourism authority even created an Instagram account to for the public including visitors to share stunning and wild images of Dunedin and this accounted is incorporated into this website too. The promotion of Dunedin via website by Tourism New Zealand is more focused and organised, therefore parallel with other destinations marketed by this national tourism organisation. Compared to Tourism New Zealand, words such as "insiders" and "hidden" are a smart choice of words to project the idea that the local authority is an expert about the city of Dunedin in advertising the rare and authentic attractions and sites. Another aspect included in both websites is the commercial element such as promotional tour packages, attractions and sites. All this information will be valuable for potential tourists in their planning and budgeting for their trips and tours. Basic description of the tours and contacts for tours and attractions including free and paid tours are available in the websites.

The analysis of the websites by the national and local tourism organisation for the city of Dunedin demonstrates that the induced type of promotion projected positive tourism image. This is a reflection of statement made by Pagano (2014) that induced images are often created by tourism marketers and therefore only appealing projections of destinations have been chosen to be presented to potential tourists including in tourism promotional websites. As a destination located far away from the many generating markets, many rare and unique attractions have been marketed to tourists. Not only geographically far away from its foreign markets, the location of Dunedin on the South Island requires strong motivation for both the international and domestic markets to reach. This is reflected through the presentation of the rare wildlife and unique landscapes. This finding supports claims made by Mancini (2013), Tang (2015) and Carl (2004) that spectacular natural attributes are important attractions for the tourism industry in New Zealand including the city of Dunedin. These distinct attractions can provide a powerful motivation to lure tourists from far away or those tourists searching for off-the-beaten-track destinations. Destination image plays important roles in attracting potential tourists and influencing selection and decision making processes, therefore destination marketers particularly the official tourist organisation strives to project positive and attractive images of destination like Dunedin. As mentioned by (Foroudi et al., 2018), destination with a powerful and positive image will have higher opportunity of being considered and chosen by potential tourists. As part of the effort of projecting a positive image of a destination, environmental awareness is manifested on the website of Tourism New Zealand. It is clearly

stated that visitors can “Experience eco-tourism at its finest”. The habitat of the colony of the yellow-eyed penguins is situated at a protected site far away from humans and other birds. Penguin conservation is a serious effort made by various parties including the local tourism operator, the department of conservation and other groups. However, aspects of familiarity including basic infrastructure and modern facilities are available in the city. For example, various and modern modes of transportations, food and beverages outlets such as cafés and coffee houses and shopping outlets are incorporated on both websites. In addition to that, familiarisation with European markets is presented through the historical link of Dunedin as the Edinburgh of New Zealand and the Edwardian and Victorian architecture of its buildings. These findings support arguments proposed by Marcus (2018) that Dunedin is a friendly city to tourists and aspects of modernisation have been incorporated into tourism promotion presented in the websites.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this paper analyses how the image of Dunedin as a tourist destination has been presented by national and local tourism organisations through their websites. The assessment of the image of Dunedin as a tourist destination has been carried out using a content analysis method. Findings of the paper revealed that a positive image of this city has been projected by both national and local tourism organisations. Various types of attractions including natural resources, cultural heritage attributes, landscapes and outdoor activities are marketed to tourists visiting the city. However, the main asset or the unique selling proposition of the city Dunedin is the wildlife, especially the penguins. Other primary attractions promoted to tourists include other wildlife such as the royal albatross and cultural heritage attributes like museums, a castle, a railway station and architectural sites. In short, both nature and cultural attractions formed the main parts of the city as a tourist destination. Both unique resources and familiar attributes are incorporated on the websites in portraying a fascinating image of Dunedin as a tourist destination.

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