



# Life in an open-bordered Tasmania

The Tasmania Project Report 56

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After shutting in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Tasmanian border fully reopened to the mainland on 15 December 2021. Previous reports of The Tasmania Project revealed a mix of apprehension and excitement among survey respondents prior to the border reopening. This report explores how people are feeling now and how they have changed their activities.

## Key findings

- The largest proportion of respondents (45%) reported that the border reopening went about as they expected; 34% felt it went worse than they expected, and 20% better than they expected.
- Most (73%) of respondents feel safe or very safe in Tasmania, in the context of world events. This is a decrease from 96% of respondents who felt safe or very safe in October 2021.
- Almost two-thirds (65%) of respondents reported feeling less safe than they did prior to 15 December 2021.
- Those who felt safer since the border reopened commonly cited high vaccination rates, adherence to public health protections, and a sense of life returning to 'normal' as reasons why.
- Those who felt less safe were often concerned about their own health vulnerabilities and those of their loved ones. Many felt a loss of trust in the government; some were concerned about geopolitical tensions; and some were concerned about issues exacerbated by COVID-19, such as housing affordability, job insecurity, and increased costs of living.
- Most (65%) respondents reported that they were dining out in restaurants and cafés less since 15 December 2021. 49% reported less shopping in-store (other than for groceries).
- One in four (26%) of respondents were working from home more, 30% were volunteering less, 34% were catching public transport less, and 54% were seeing friends and family in-person less, relative to prior to 15 December 2021.
- More than half (57%) were attending live events (e.g. music, festivals, theatre) less, 54% were holidaying outside of Tasmania less, and 43% were attending sporting events less than prior to 15 December 2021.
- Unsurprisingly, those with health conditions or disabilities that limited their activities were more likely than those without to have reduced activities that involve interactions with others.
- Older people were more likely than younger people were generally more likely to have reduced participation in activities that involve interaction with people.

## Sentiments and safety

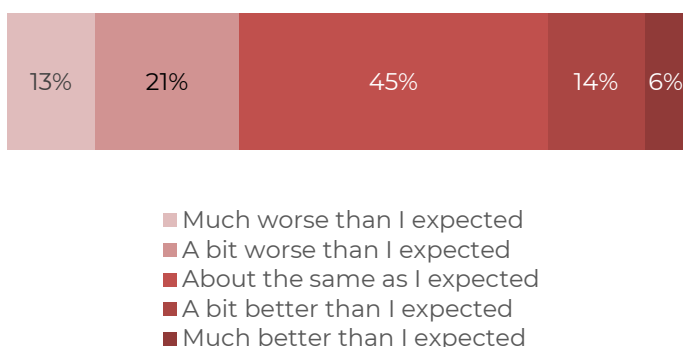
The Reopening Survey was open between 10 February and 2 March 2022, when the border had been open for around 2 months and coronavirus was widely present in the Tasmanian community for the first time in the pandemic. A total of 2043 Tasmanian residents responded to the survey, and their data has been weighted on age, sex, country of birth, and education level to be demographically representative of the Tasmanian population. Full sample and weighting information can be found [here](#).

Previous The Tasmania Project surveys, along with extensive media coverage, indicated that Tasmanians had strong feelings about the border closure to the mainland, and that its opening was a somewhat divisive issue. Many feared the loss of a coronavirus-free Tasmania, while many others looked forward to free movement and the benefits it offered. Accordingly, the Reopening Survey began with the general question: *Overall, how do you feel the reopening of the borders has gone?*

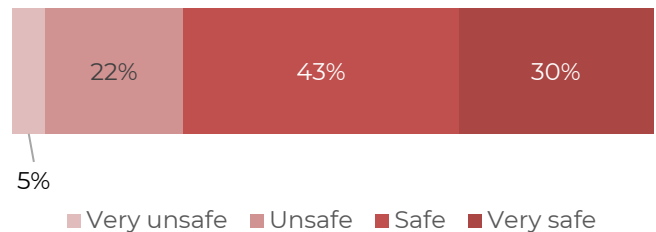
The aim of the question was not to poll how many people felt the border reopening went well versus poorly, but to see how they felt it had unfolded relative to their expectations. The largest proportion of respondents, 45%, felt that the border reopening had gone about the same as they expected. One in five respondents felt the border reopening had gone better than they expected (14% a bit better, 6% much better), and 34% felt it had gone worse than they expected (21% a bit worse, 13% much worse).

Respondents in South East were more likely than those in the West and North West to report that the border reopening had gone better than they expected. Unsurprisingly, people who reported that they had a health condition or disability that

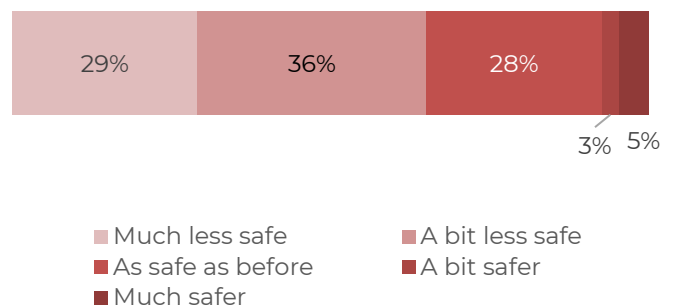
**Figure 1: Overall, how do you feel the reopening of the borders has gone? (n=2043)**



**Figure 2: Thinking about world events, please indicate how safe you feel in Tasmania: (n=1988)**



**Figure 3: Compared to before 15 December 2021, how safe do you feel in Tasmania? n=2043)**



limited their activity were more likely to report that the border reopening had gone worse than they expected.

Throughout The Tasmania Project, we have asked respondents how safe they feel in Tasmania. In the fifth general survey, in October 2021, 96% of Tasmanians felt safe – 41% safe and 55% very safe. Fewer, though still the majority of respondents to the Reopening Survey, reported feeling safe – 43% safe and 30% very safe; 22% felt unsafe and 5% very unsafe.

We asked respondents to compare how safe they feel in Tasmania now compared to before 15 December 2021. Over one third of respondents felt as safe or safer than before (28% as safe, 3% a bit safer, and 5% much safer). Over one third (36%) felt a bit less safe, and 29% felt much less safe than they did prior to 15 December 2021.

People in the Hobart and South East SA4 regions were more likely than those in the West and North West to feel unsafe in Tasmania; women were more likely than men to feel unsafe, and those with a health condition or disability that limited their activity were more likely to feel unsafe than those who did not. Further, those whose health condition or disability limited their activity 'a lot' were

more likely to feel unsafe than those whose health condition limited them 'a little'.

These differences mostly held for the comparison question: women, those with a health condition or disability and those in Hobart were more likely to feel less safe at the time of survey than before 15 December 2021.

Those aged 25-44 were more likely than those aged 65+ to feel less safe in general and compared to before 15 December 2021.

## Reasons for changes to feelings of safety

Those that felt safer since the borders reopened appreciated the ability to travel, high vaccination rates, implementation of and adherence to public health protections, and a perceived cultural adaptation to the next phase of the virus.

*"I had my booster injection and many Tasmanians are now vaccinated."*

*"Am triple vaccinated and avoid large gatherings indoors."*

*"I have to wear a mask every day, especially when I go out and that makes me feel better than before."*

*"More appropriate use of face masks plus social distancing plus Common Sense approach by most people."*

*"Less hospitalisations. It's like catching a normal old virus but you have to isolate for 7 days which is good as it stops it from spreading quicker."*

*"I am less afraid of being restricted or locked in/out. I.e. not being able to travel back home if a family member is sick or getting separated from my partner. With the border opening I feel that my life can start to go back to normal."*

*"That the danger has come close and we are all still surviving and coping well. Much of the "unknown-ness" has gone which has provided confidence that we can cope with the now known."*

*"We seem to be a bit more on top of covid this year compared to last year, we are better informed and have more experience."*

People who felt less safe compared with how safe they felt before 15 December 2021 were largely concerned about the spread of COVID-19 in the Tasmanian community. Some people were concerned due to their own health vulnerabilities, and many were concerned about the vulnerabilities of those in their lives, particularly the elderly, children, and the immunocompromised.

Many people were not satisfied with adherence to public health protections, and some felt that the protections (especially mask wearing) served as a reminder that they were no longer safe.

*"COVID prevalence, people's fatigue re: mask wearing, social distancing, hygiene, etc."*

*"Expected to continue with life as normal without adequate support in the form of restrictions, tracking, quarantine. Socialising, work, etc. goes on despite the risk. And mandates like masks indoors are not taken seriously which impacts how safe I feel.."*

*"Mask wearing, no notification of hot spots, difficulty to obtain RATs, much higher incidence of COVID positive cases, friends not wanting to socialise, restrictions on what activities can be undertaken with a mask."*

*"Masks make it feel more real - higher case loads."*

Several people mentioned feeling abandoned and/or experiencing a loss of trust in the State Government.

*"Loss of sense of community that existed before. Loss in faith in government's interest in social cohesion and development, Government focus on market-led recovery over the social needs of it population."*

*“More restricted / less willing to go into public, less confident that the government has any idea about managing the pandemic or capable of understanding the consequences of their actions on the economy or people’s health.”*

*“The sense that our government is back to its old habits of being run by the tourism/gambling/and so-called ‘hospitality industries with its usual disregard for the common good, for high quality public services available to all, for equity and building up the vulnerable.”*

Some people felt that the government response, and in particular the vaccine mandate, were eroding freedoms and democratic principles integral to Tasmanian and Australian society.

*“Because of the ridiculous mandates which has been put in place, I feel far more restricted where I am living. I don’t feel I can comfortably go out in public and do what I need to do. I can’t study, because I have been forced out of it. I feel that my choice has been removed and I feel discriminated against.”*

*“Enormous overreach by numerous organisations including UTAS backed by government. Unnecessary vaccination mandates and entry requirements pitting hive minded pro mandate supporters encouraged by fear porn and mainstream news narratives against anyone unvaccinated for any reason, painting pro choice supporters as antivaccination and placing many at social and economical disadvantage..”*

*“Vaccine mandates and increased government control. It’s feeling tyrannical, and I do not use that term lightly. We are meant to live in a democratic country. The people need to be given their democratic freedoms back.”*

Some people stated that their sense of safety had been negatively affected by geopolitical factors such as Australia’s relationship with China and the growing tensions in Ukraine (which have since escalated to a war).

*“Also, the opening of international borders now adds to this. The LNP federal government basically picking a fight with China also makes me feel less safe, as does the happenings in Ukraine. Even though a long distance away these events have the ability to negatively impact us even here in Tas.”*

*“Military aggression by China and Chinese attempts to infiltrate Australian democratic institutions.”*

*“Our Idiot federal government and the stance against China and Russia.”*

*“Political tensions in Europe (Russia/Ukraine conflict)”*

Others attributed their reduced sense of safety to issues that have been exacerbated by the pandemic, such as housing affordability, job insecurity, grocery shortages, and increased costs of living.

*“My hours were significantly cut at work because of how much business dropped, which made me feel unsafe in regards to paying bills and for housing. The increasing and high costs of living in Tasmania contributes to me feeling unsafe in Tasmania. I feel insecure about becoming homeless because of the lack of housing and also because of the rising cost of rentals..”*

*“I’ve lost my job due to mandates and am now unemployed and living in poverty. Fuel prices are high, rental prices high, food has gone up drastically in the last month and no one cares. “*

*“Job security due to economic disruption of isolation restrictions and the likelihood of isolation.”*

## Changes to activities

Many reasons that people cited for feeling more safe or less safe since the borders reopened related to what they felt they were able (or not able to do). Some people who felt safer cited the freedom to move freely within and outside of Tasmania, particularly to see family, without fear of lockdowns or lockouts as why they felt safer. Many people who felt less safe mentioned the things they felt they were no longer able to do now, for fear of COVID-19.

We asked respondents to the Reopening Survey how often they were doing selected things, compared to before 15 December 2021. Figure 4 presents the results for shopping and dining activities. For most of these activities, the majority of respondents had not changed their behaviour since the borders reopened. More than 1 in 5 (22%) of respondents were online grocery shopping more since the border reopened (69% were online grocery shopping the same amount as before, and 10% were doing it less than before). While most respondents (55%) were getting takeaway food from local restaurants the same amount as before 15 December 2021, 30% were getting takeaway less and 16% were getting it more. One third (34%) of

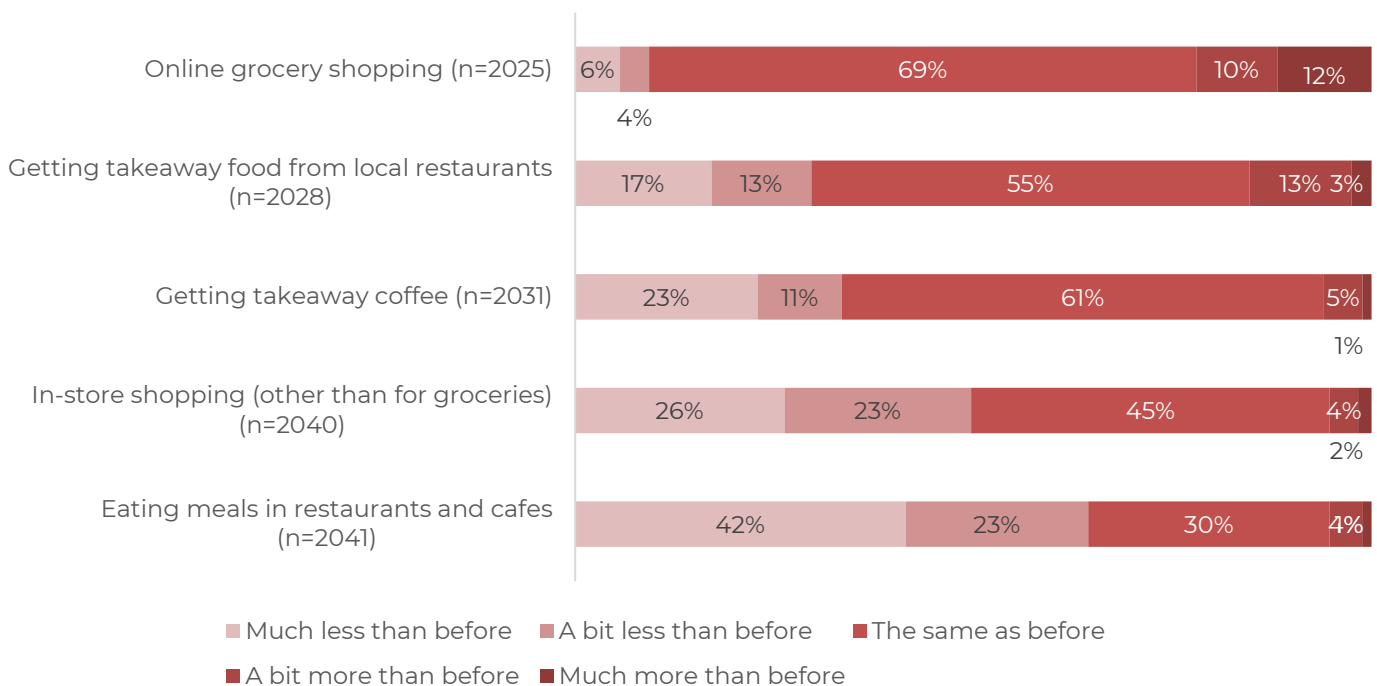
*"I rarely go downtown and have not had my daily coffee at my favourite cafe since the borders opened. I only shop once a week late in the afternoon when the shops are nearly empty."*

*"The fact that the borders are open! It is so much better to be free to come and go as one wishes."*

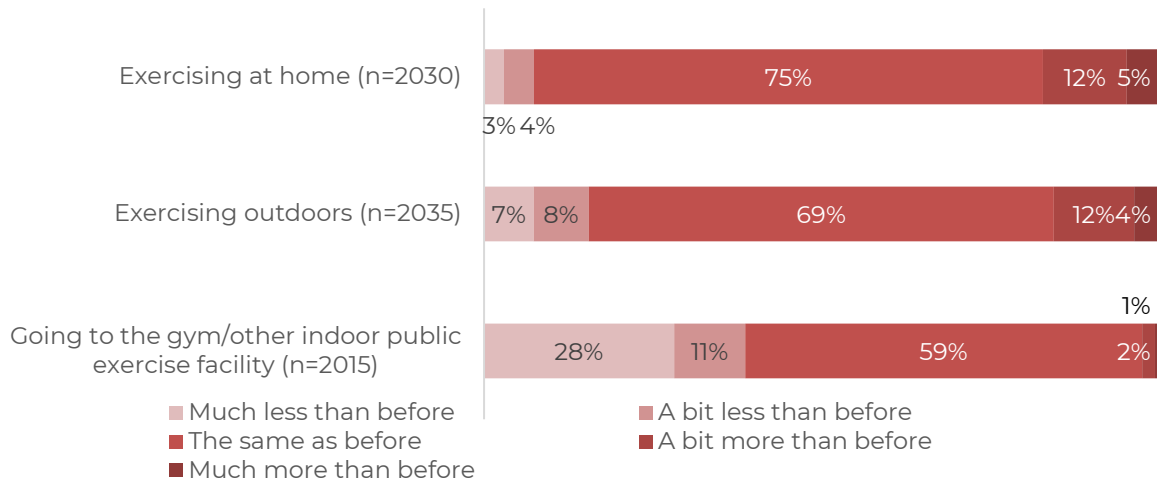
respondents were getting takeaway coffee less than before the border reopened, 61% had not changed, and 6% were getting takeaway coffee more than before the border reopened. Almost half (49%) of respondents were in-store shopping (other than for groceries) less than before, 45% the same amount, and 6% reported that they had increased their in-store shopping. Two-thirds (65%) of respondents reported that they were eating meals in restaurants and cafés less than before 15 December 2021, 30% had not changed their dining out behaviour, and 4% were doing it more.

People under 65, women, and those with health conditions or disabilities that limit their activities 'a lot' were more likely to have

**Figure 4: Compared to before 15 December 2021, how often have you been doing the following things?**



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increased online grocery shopping. Women, those with health conditions or disabilities that limited their activity ‘a lot’, and those aged 45-64 were more likely to have decreased in-store shopping (other than groceries), while those aged 18-24 were less likely to have decreased in-store shopping. Those aged 18-24, those without health conditions or disabilities that limited their activities, and men were less likely to have reduced dining out in restaurants and cafés. Those aged 45 and over, women, and those with health conditions or disabilities that limited their activity ‘a lot’, were more likely to have reduced getting takeaway food while those in Hobart were less likely to have reduced getting takeaway food.. Those aged 25 and up, women, those in the West and North West (compared with those from Hobart), and those with health conditions or disabilities that limited their activities ‘a lot’ were more likely to have reduced getting takeaway coffee.

Figure 4 outlines respondents’ changes to exercise behaviour since 15 December 2021. Most respondents had not changed how often they exercised across the three exercise venues (home, outdoors, and gyms/other indoor public facilities). Only 3% had increased their gym/indoor public facility use, while 39% had decreased it. Similar proportions had increased and decreased their outdoor exercise (16% and 15%, respectively), while 17% were exercising at home more than before 15 December 2021 and 7% were exercising at home less.

People aged 25-44, women and those with health conditions or disabilities that limited their activity were more likely to have reduced attendance at the gym or other indoor public exercise facilities, while those in Launceston were less likely to have reduced gym attendance

Those with health conditions or disabilities were more likely to have reduced outdoor exercise and those in Hobart were less likely to have reduced outdoor exercise; and under 65s were more likely to have increased home exercise.

Figure 5 outlines the proportion of respondents who were doing selected behaviours related to work and family more, less and the same amount since the Tasmanian border reopened on 15 December 2021. One in four (26%) of respondents were working from home more (7% less and 68% the same amount). Thirty percent of respondents were volunteering their time to support an organisation, club or committee in Tasmania less than before 15 December 2021 (5% more and 65% the same amount).

One third (33%) of respondents were taking public transport less than before, 64% had not changed and 2% were taking public transport more. More than half (54%) of respondents reported that they were seeing friends and family in person less often than before 15 December 2021; 40% were seeing friends and family in person the same amount and 6% more than before.

Work from home was more commonly reported among respondents aged under 65 and less common among those from Launceston and North East; women, those aged 25-44 and those with health conditions were more likely to have decreased public transport use. Women, those with health conditions or disabilities that limited their activity “a lot”, and those in the West and North West were more likely to have decreased volunteering. Those aged 25-64, women, and those with health conditions or disabilities were more likely to have reduced in-person contact with family and friends, while those in the South East were less likely to have reduced in-person contact with family and friends.

**Figure 5: Compared to before 15 December 2021, how often have you been doing the following things?**

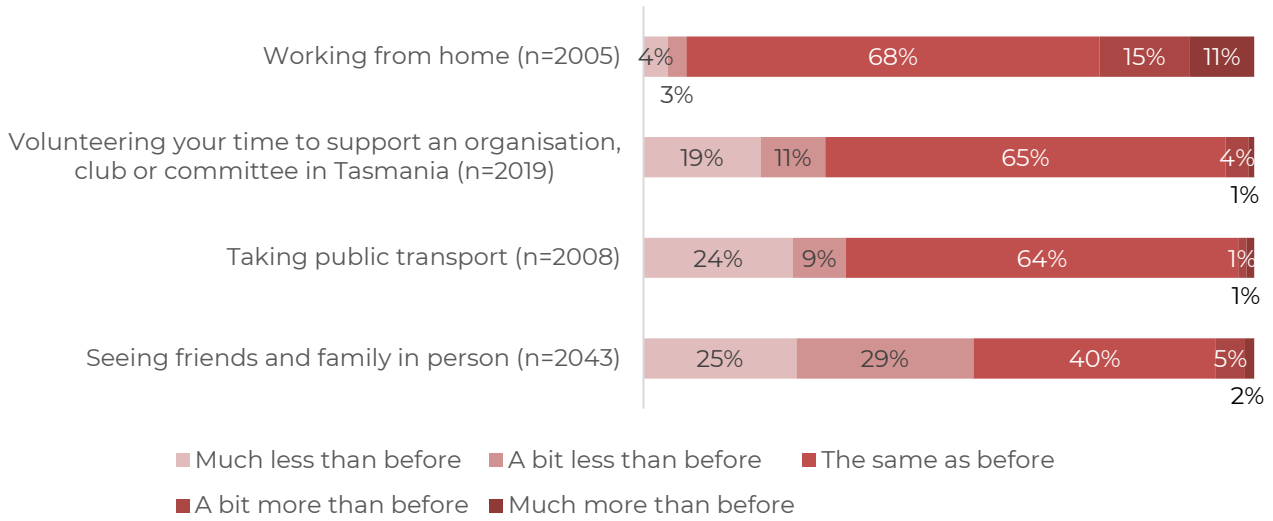


Figure 6 looks at the changes to selected leisure activities among respondents to the Reopening Survey. Over one third (36%) of respondents reported holidaying within Tasmania less than before 15 December 2021, and 16% were doing so more; 43% were attending sporting events less (3% were attending sporting events more). Over half (52%) reported holidaying within Australia, excluding Tasmania, less than before the border opened to the mainland (5% more), and 57% were attending live events such as music performances, festivals and the theatre less than before 15 December 2021 (6% were attending more).

In terms of differences between respondents'

changes to leisure activities, women and those with health conditions or disabilities were more likely to have reduced their attendance of live events and sporting events, and those in Launceston and North East were less likely to have reduced their attendance of such events. People with health conditions and women were more likely to have decreased their holidaying within Tasmania, while those in Hobart and Launceston and North East were less likely to have reduced their holidaying within Tasmania. Women, those aged 25 and up, and those in West and North West were more likely to have decreased their holidaying within Australia (excluding Tasmania).

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