



# Cook Islands

International Visitor Survey Report  
July – September 2023



# Acknowledgements

- ❖ The Pacific Tourism Organization (SPTO) expresses its gratitude to all contributors to this report on IVS data from July to September 2023, which provides insights into the visitor experience and tourism recovery in the Cook Islands post-border reopening.
- ❖ Thank you to the visitors for completing arrival and departure cards, enabling this analysis. Special thanks to the Cook Islands Tourism Corporation (CITC) for providing crucial arrival data and visitor emails to enable survey invitations to be dispatched in a timely manner.
- ❖ We also extend our sincere thanks to the New Zealand Government for their support and collaboration.
- ❖ Appreciation goes to the SPTO researchers and analysts for their meticulous work on visitor profiles, decision-making processes, and expenditure and satisfaction.
- ❖ Further research is needed to refine economic impact estimates, particularly the rate of prepaid expenditure into the local economy. Your ongoing support is highly valued.
- ❖ Thank you to everyone involved.



# Background

- ❖ The 2023 July-September Cook Islands International Visitor Survey is an initiative of the Pacific Tourism Data Initiative, funded by the Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (NZMFAT), and is conducted by the Pacific Tourism Organization (SPTO).
- ❖ IVS data from July to September 2023 is analysed to help us understand the visitor experience and gain insights into tourism recovery in the Cook Islands after the border reopening.
- ❖ The report includes key sections on visitor profiles and characteristics, information and decision-making, visitor expenditure and satisfaction.
- ❖ **N.B.** The July to September visitor emails were collected through the passenger arrival and departure cards completed by visitors on their arrival into, and departure from, the Cook Islands.
- ❖ **N.B.** Analyses use IVS respondents, weighted to actual arrival data from July to September 2023 provided by the Cook Islands Tourism Corporation (CITC). Weighting corrects for under sampling or oversampling by source market, ensuring representative sample data.
- ❖ **N.B.** The estimated rate of prepaid expenditure flowing into local economy is 40%, which is observed from other Pacific Island countries. Further research is warranted to establish more accurate estimates.
- ❖ All amounts are reported in **NZD** currency using average rates for the July – September 2023 period.

# Disclaimer

- ❖ **Reproduction of Material** - Information contained within this publication, including all charts, information, and graphical representations, may be used, reproduced, or published without prior approval from SPTO and CITC. However, the information source must be explicitly referenced and acknowledged in all modes of representation.
- ❖ The **survey instrument** used to collect data for the July to September 2023 period was similar, but not exact, to the survey instrument used in the July 2022 to June 2023 period. New questions were added, a handful of existing questions were removed, and the response options for some questions were altered. In those instances where comparisons cannot be made, we report only the results for the July to September 2023 period.
- ❖ Please note that the Pacific Tourism Organization (SPTO) and the Cook Islands Tourism Corporation (CITC) **do not accept liability for any loss or damage incurred as a result of the use of information contained in this report.** Users are advised to exercise their own judgment in the use of any information provided.

# IVS Respondents (July - September 2023)



**6,175** TOTAL EMAILS SENT



**183** TOTAL RESPONSES RECEIVED

**3%**

CONVERSION RATE

## RESPONSES COVERED



**409** ADULTS



**53** CHILDREN

**1%**

OF ALL VISITORS IN THIS PERIOD

## SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS 2022 vs. 2023

# Jul-Sep 2022



### COUNTRY OF ORIGIN



**13%**  
Visitors are 70 years old or over.



**3 ppl**  
Avg. number of travel companions.



**44%**  
Visitors visited for the first time.



**\$141,283**  
Average household income.

# Jul-Sep 2023



### COUNTRY OF ORIGIN



**7% ▼**  
Visitors are 70 years old or over.



**3 ppl**  
Avg. number of travel companions.



**41% ▼**  
Visitors visited for the first time.



**\$149,510 ▲**  
Average household income.

## SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS 2022 vs. 2023

# Jul-Sep 2022



### PURPOSE OF VISIT



4.6/5

Overall, visitors are very satisfied.



98%

Visitors are willing to recommend.



94%

Visitors are willing to return.

# Jul-Sep 2023



### PURPOSE OF VISIT



4.7/5

Overall, visitors are very satisfied.



93%

Visitors are willing to recommend.



91%

Visitors are willing to return.

Note: Question reviewed and changed to Likert scale

JUL-SEP 2022

# NZD 102 MILLION

FROM 41,056 VISITORS



**\$2,073**

Prepaid per visitor per trip

**\$200**

In-country spend per day



**\$829**

Prepaid per visitor per trip

**\$1,660**

In-country spend per trip



**\$2,489** per visitor per trip

**\$300** per visitor per day

JUL-SEP 2023

# NZD 124 MILLION

FROM 47,345 VISITORS ▲

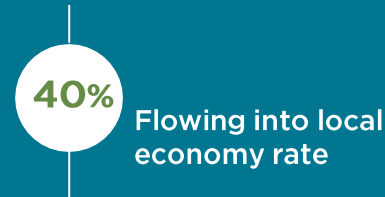


**\$2,359** ▲

Prepaid per visitor per trip

**\$196** ▼

In-country spend per day



**\$944** ▲

Prepaid per visitor per trip

**\$1,688** ▲

In-country spend per trip



**\$2,632** per visitor per trip ▲

**\$305** per visitor per day ▲

Note: NZ dollars. All amounts are per person



# Report Structure



Visitor Profile



Visitor  
Characteristics  
& Preferences



Information &  
Decision Making

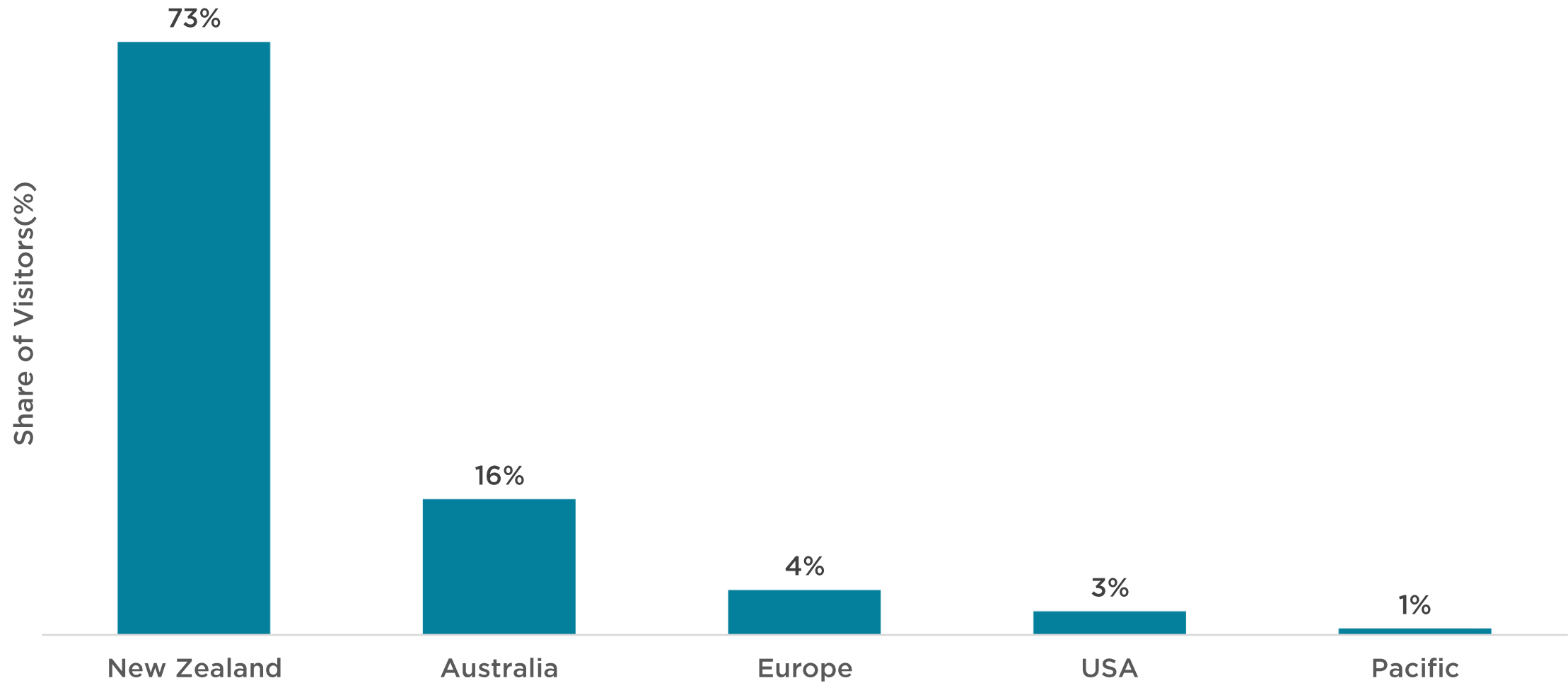


Visitor Spending  
& Impact



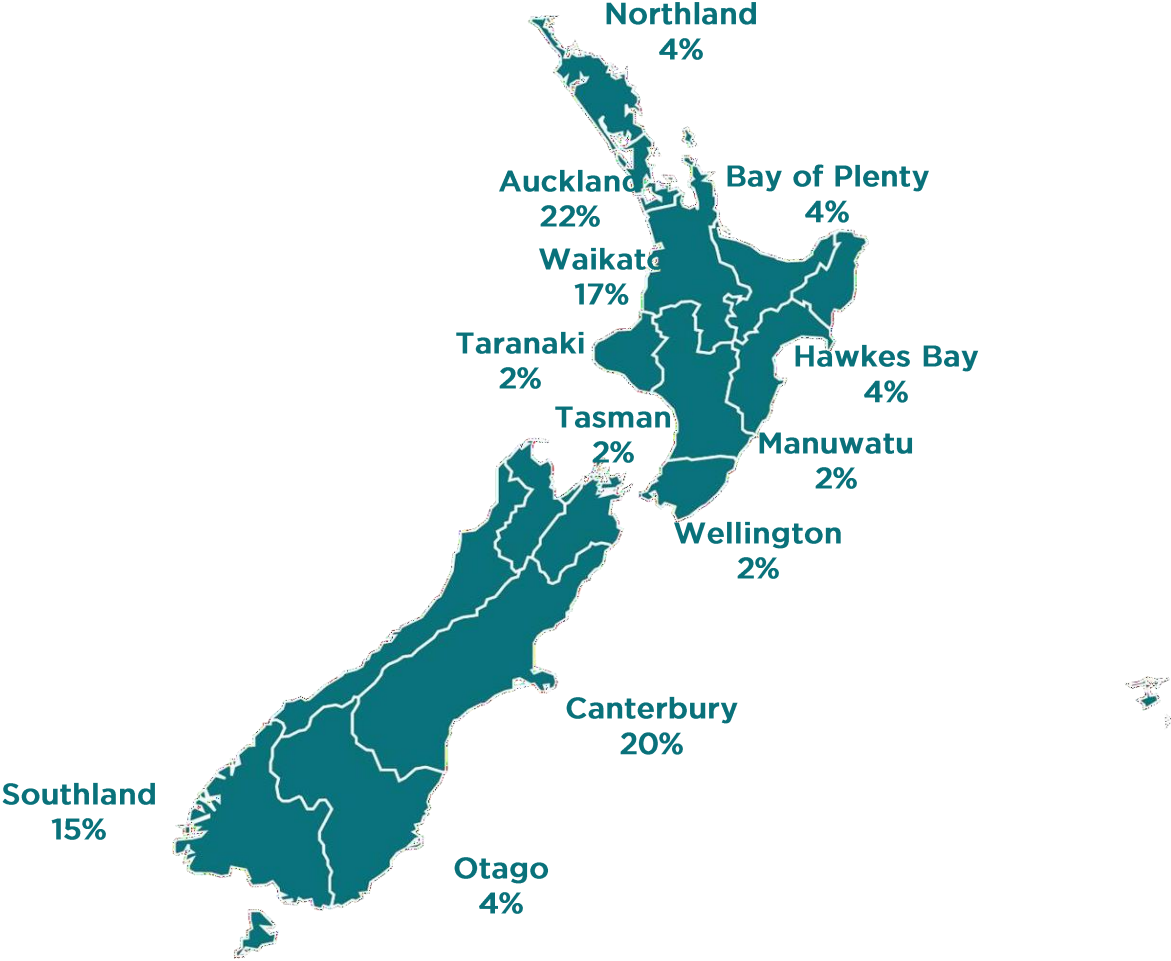
Visitor  
Satisfaction

# Country of Origin: IVS Respondents



*Note: N = 162. Due to rounding, some totals do not sum to 100%. Amount is weighted.*

# New Zealand Respondents - IVS Respondent Data

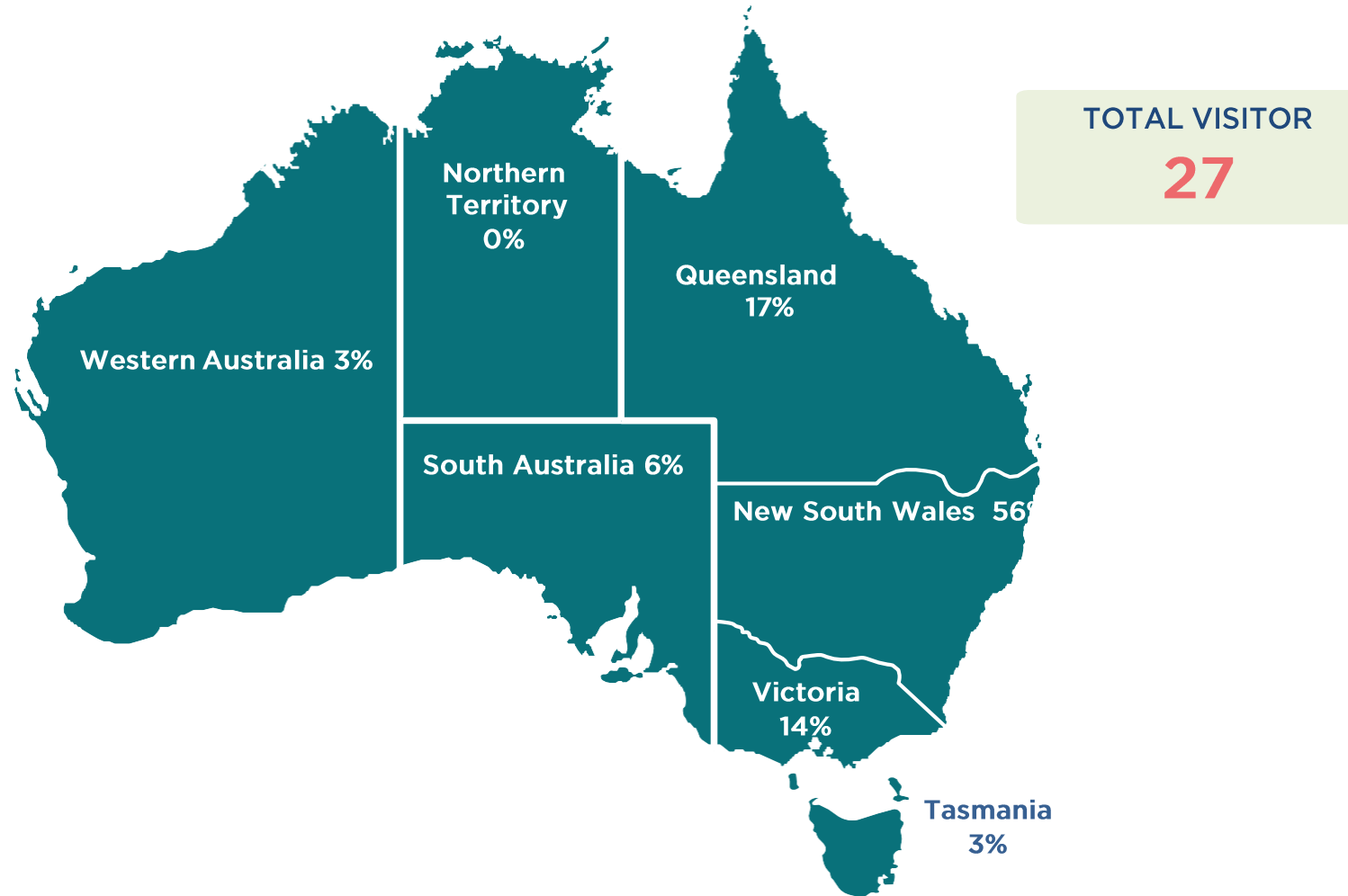


TOTAL VISITOR  
**119**

**Auckland, Canterbury, Waikato and Southland make up 74% of all New Zealand visitor arrivals**

*Note: Due to rounding, total does not sum to 100%*

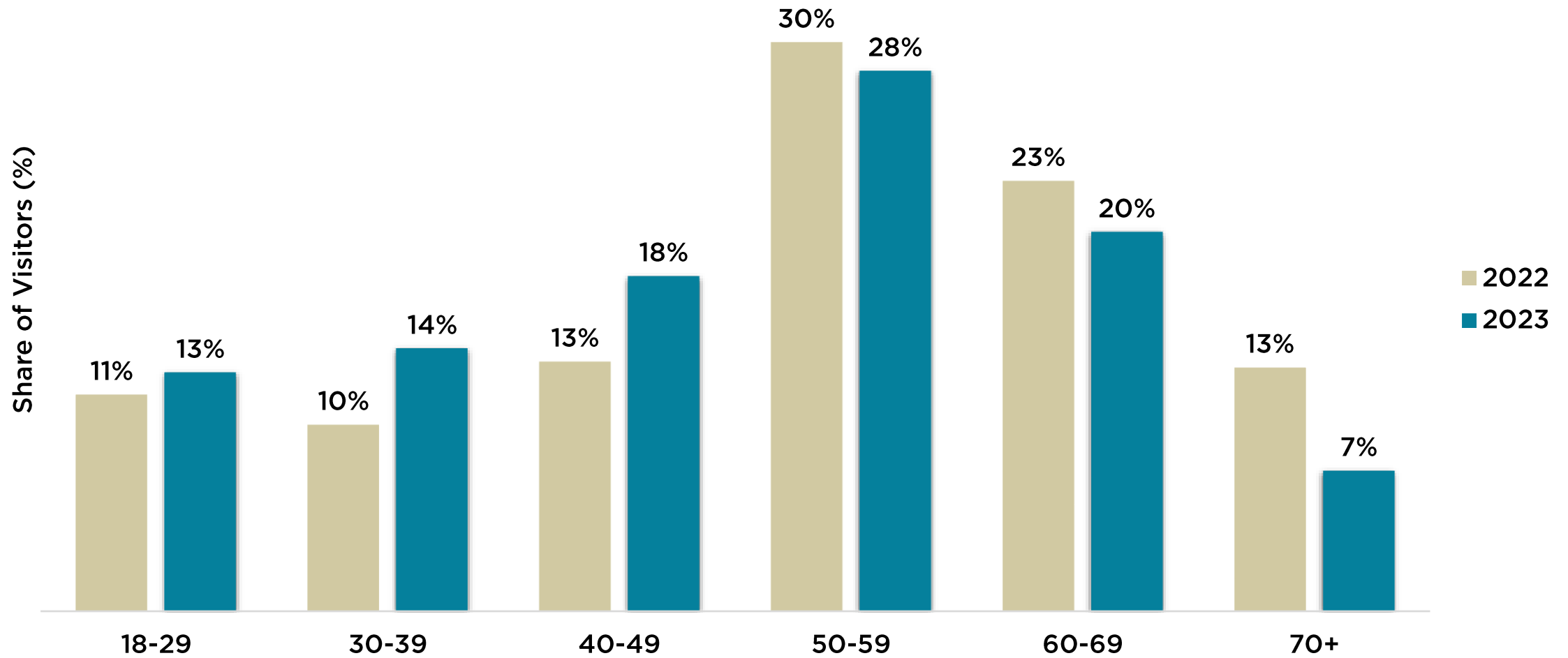
# Australian Respondents - IVS Respondent Data



New South Wales (incl. Australian Capital Territory), Queensland and Victoria make up 87% of all Australian visitor arrivals

*Note: Due to rounding, total does not sum to 100%*

# Age Group



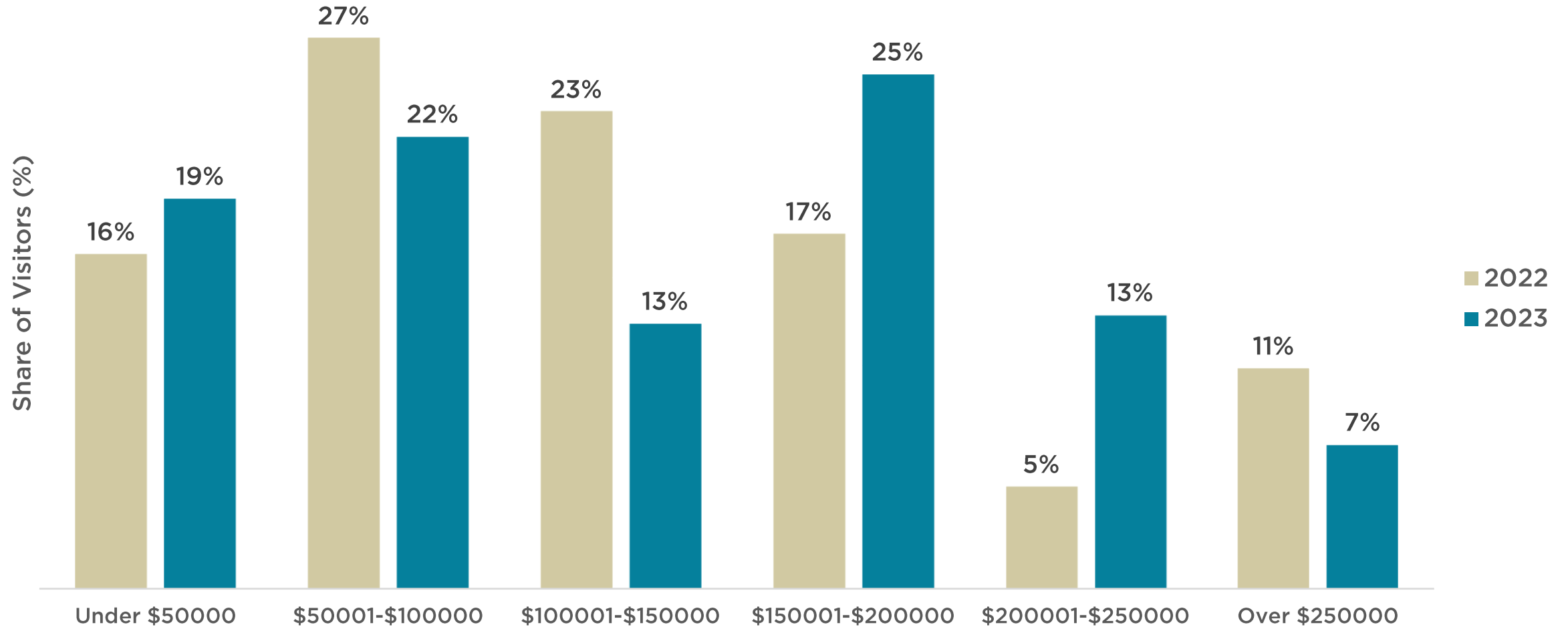


# Gender



# Annual Household Income

Avg. Household Income  
**NZ\$149,510**  
JUL-SEP 2023



# Report Structure



Visitor Profile



Visitor  
Characteristics  
& Preferences



Information &  
Decision Making

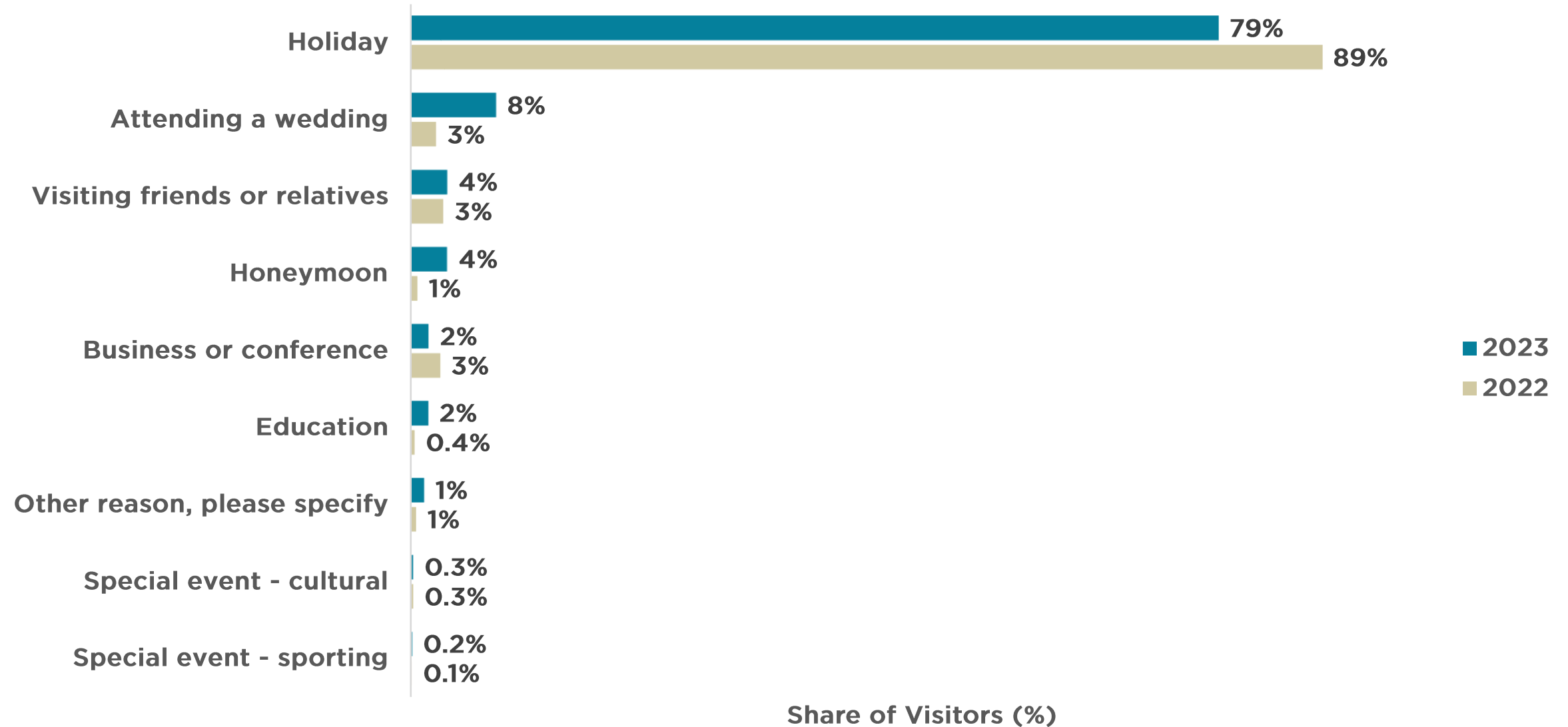


Visitor Spending  
& Impact

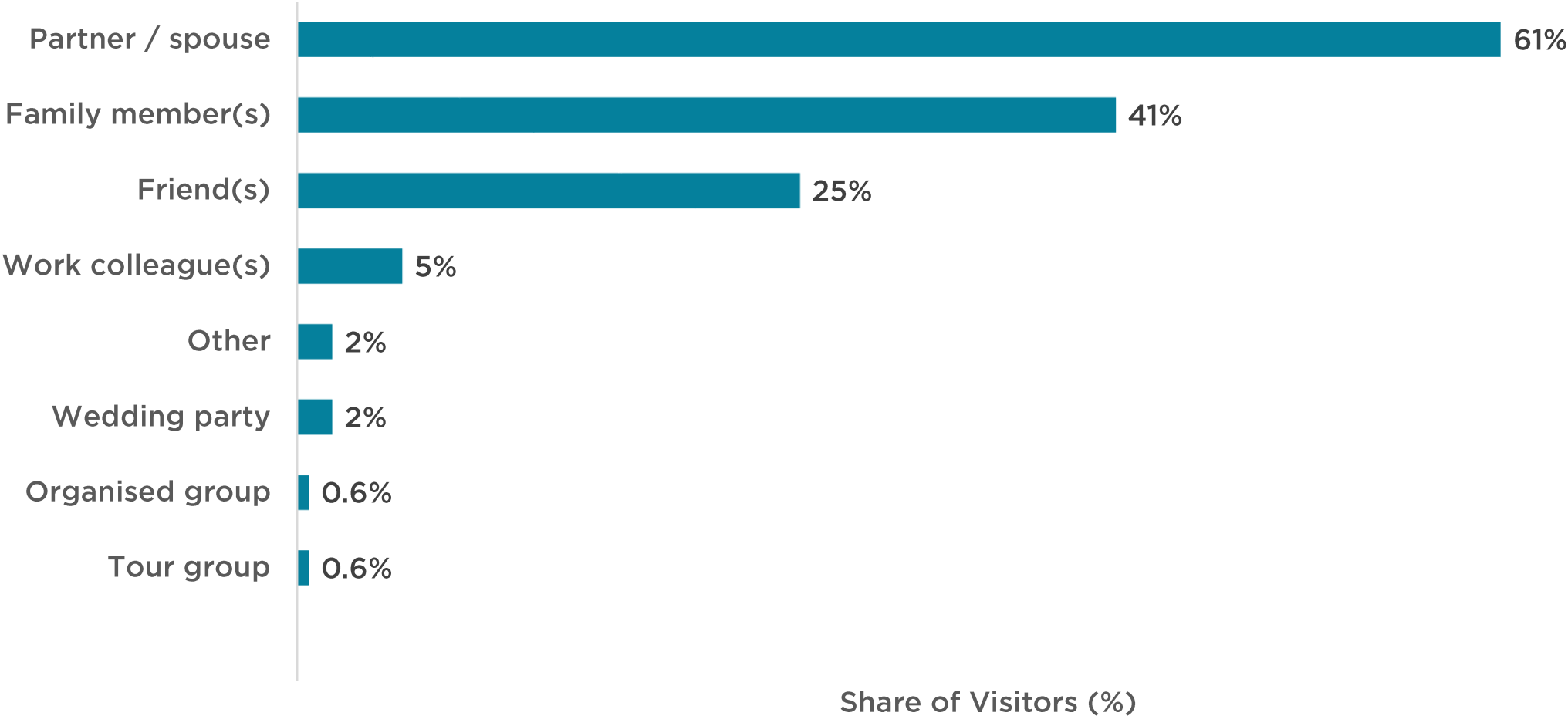


Visitor  
Satisfaction

# Purpose of Visit



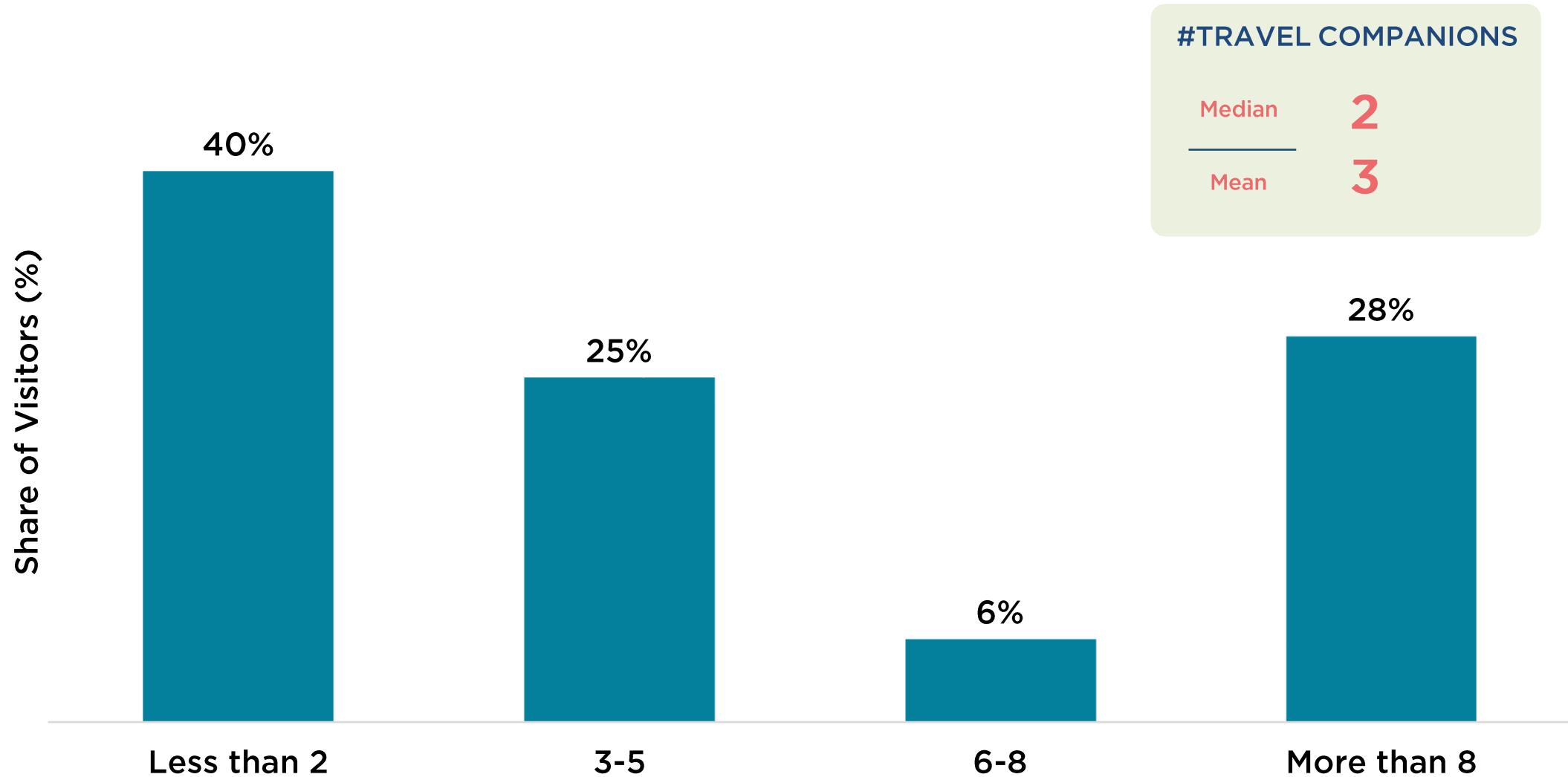
# Travel Companions



*Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%*

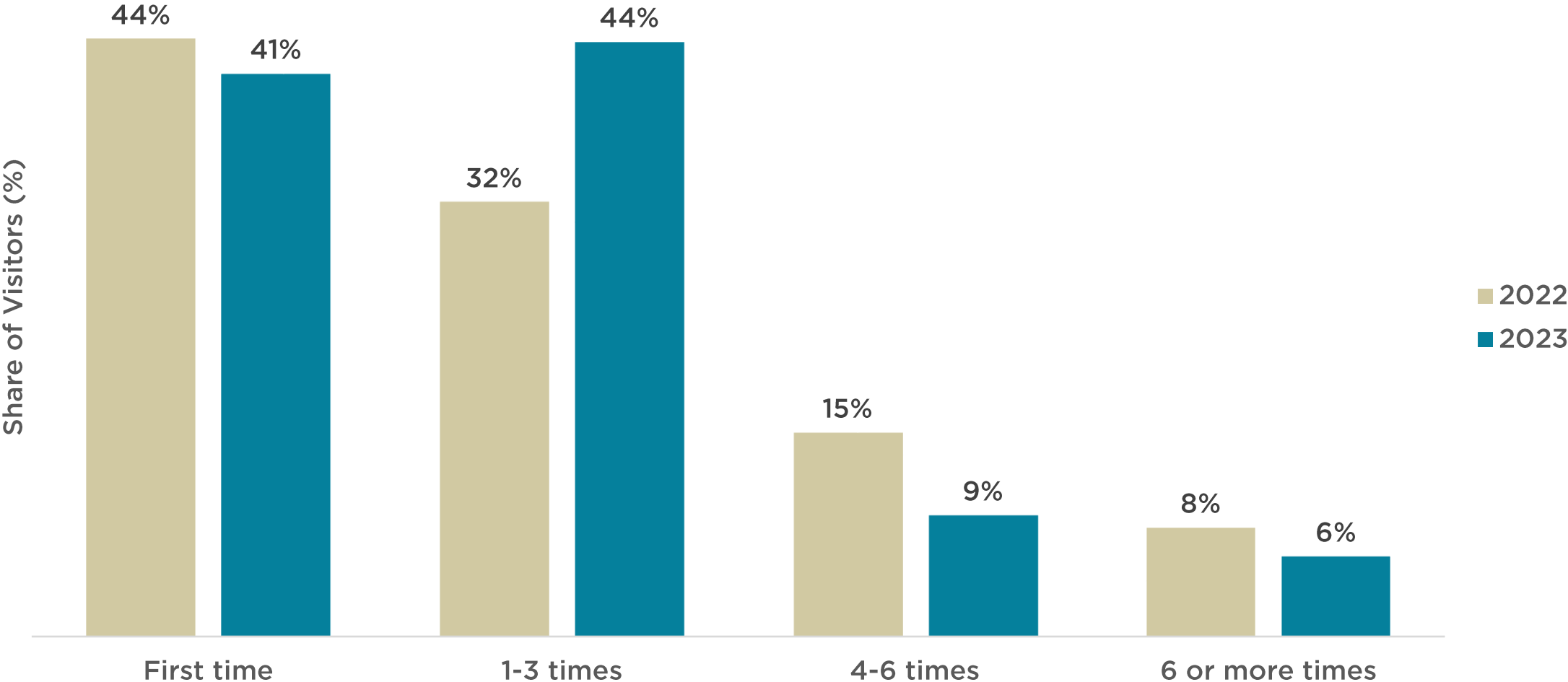


# Number of Travel Companions



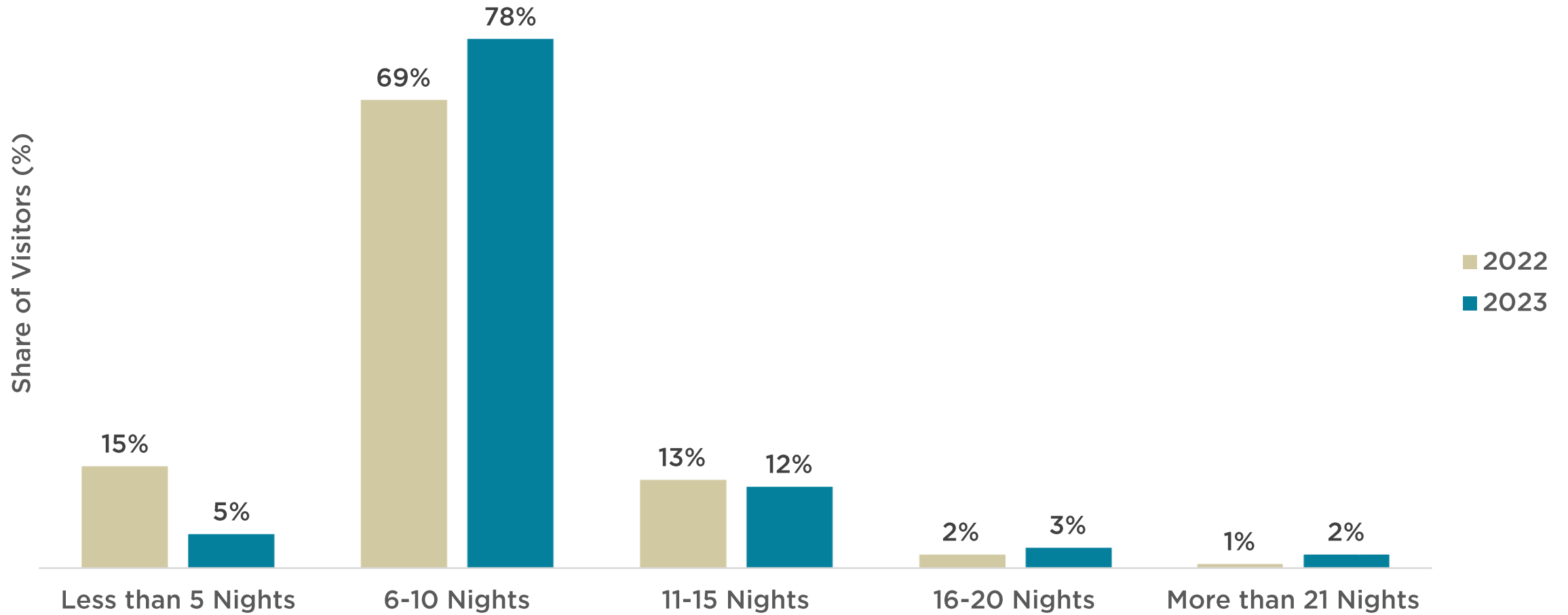
Note: N = 116 (excluding those travelling alone N = 14). Due to rounding, total does not sum to 100%

# Previous Visits

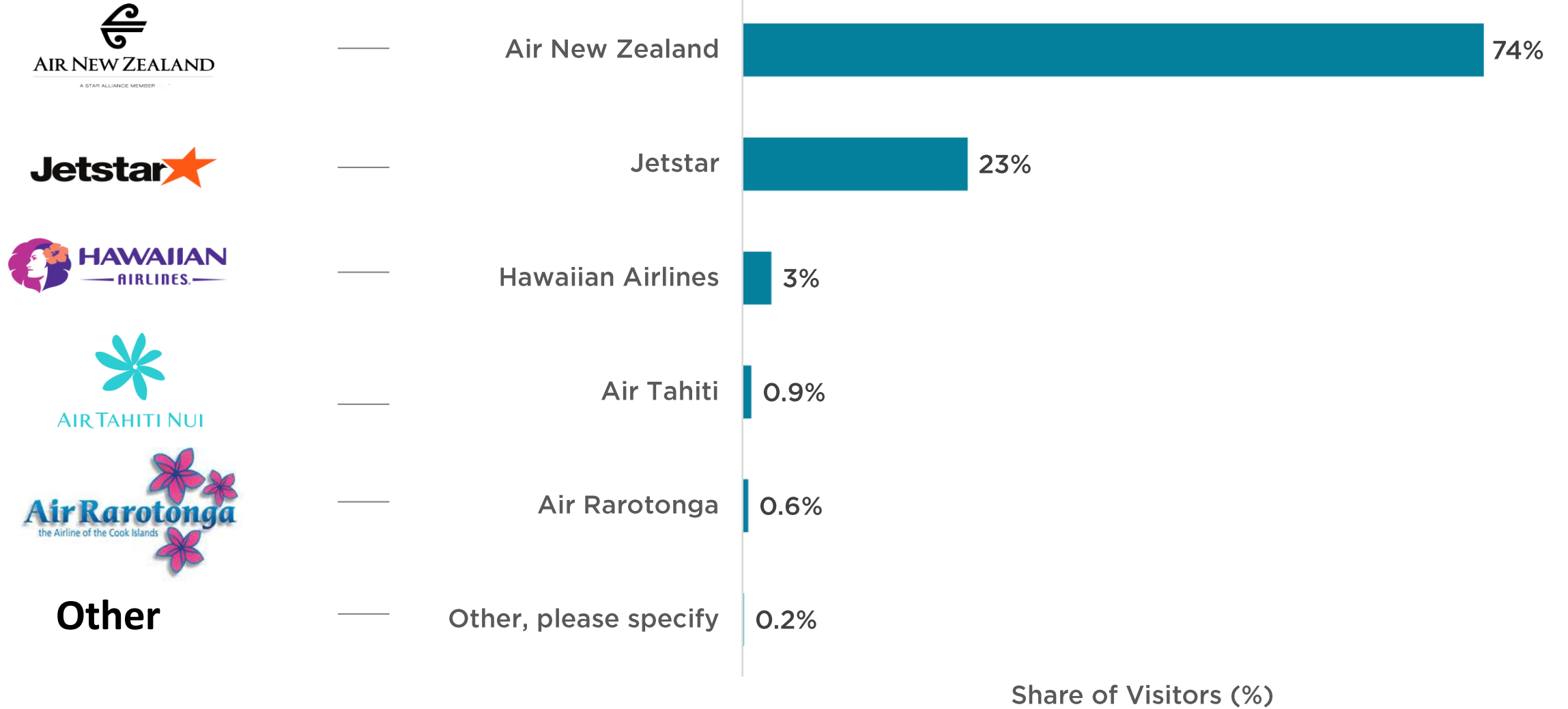


# Length of Stay (nights)

AVG. LENGTH OF STAY  
**8.3** | **8.6**  
JUL - SEPT 2022 | JUL - SEPT 2023



# Airlines Used for Travel



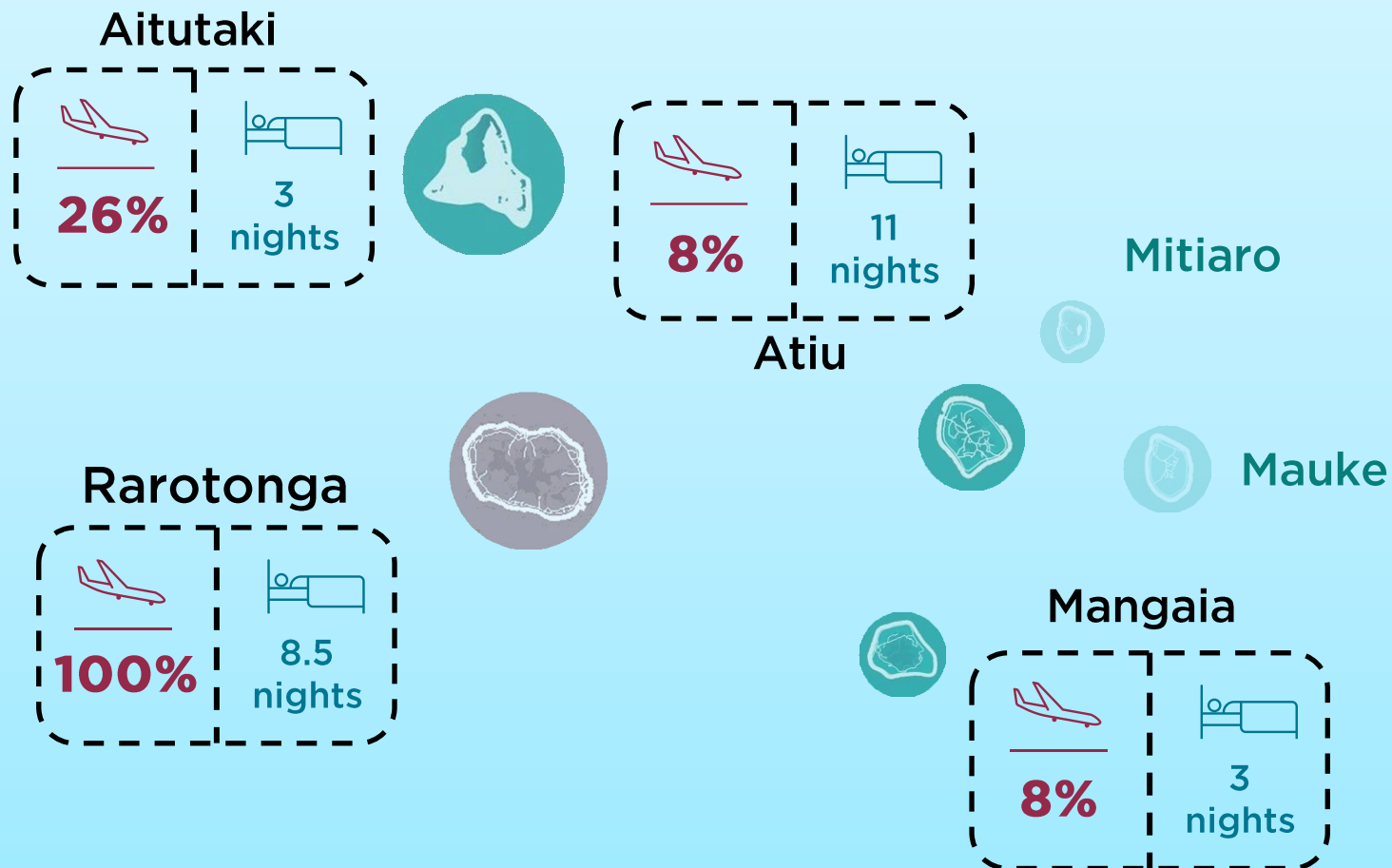
Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%

# Islands Visited & Avg. Length of Stay

Avg. Length of Stay  
**8.6 Nights**

Q: Which island(s) did you visit?

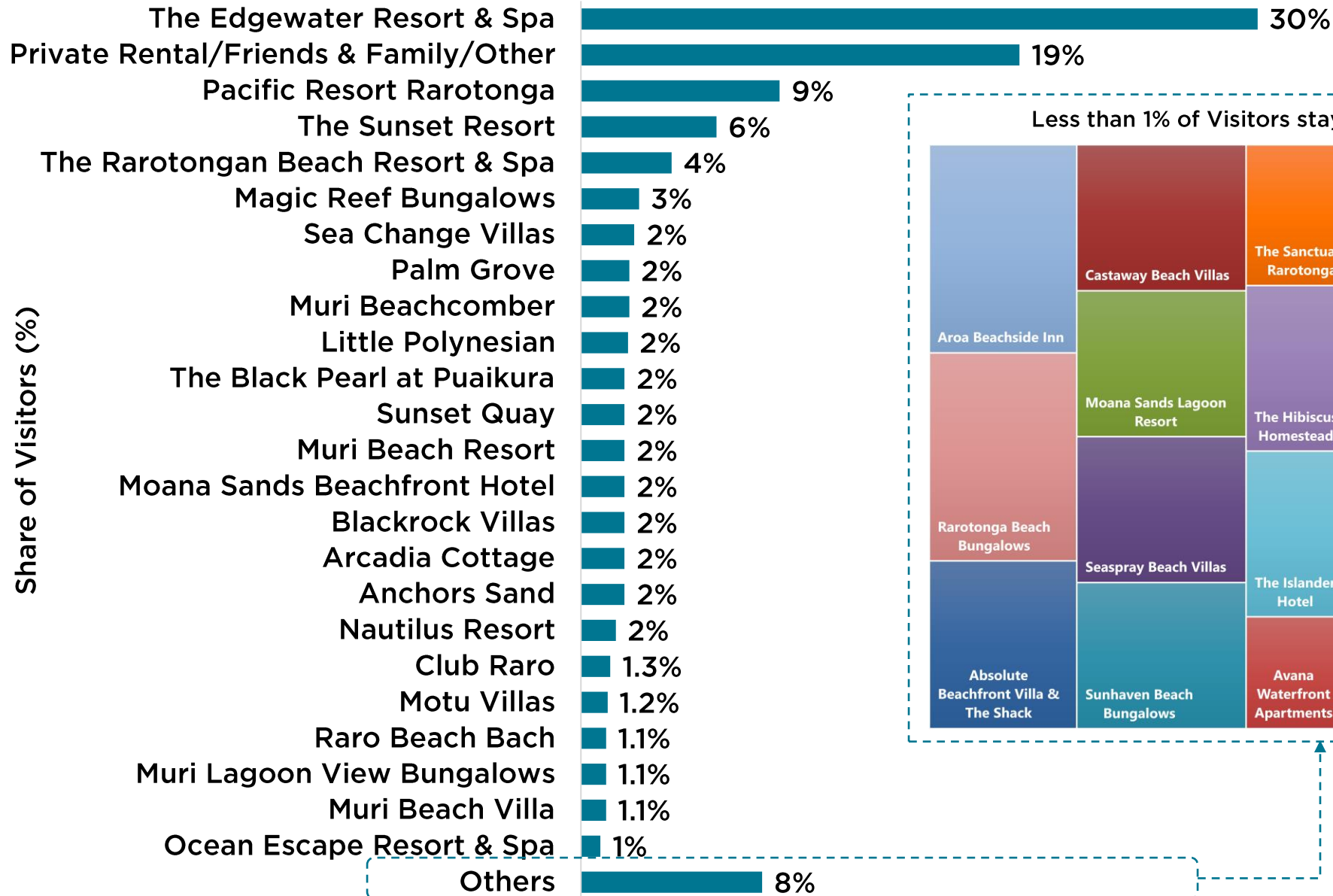
Q: How many nights did you spend on each island you visited?



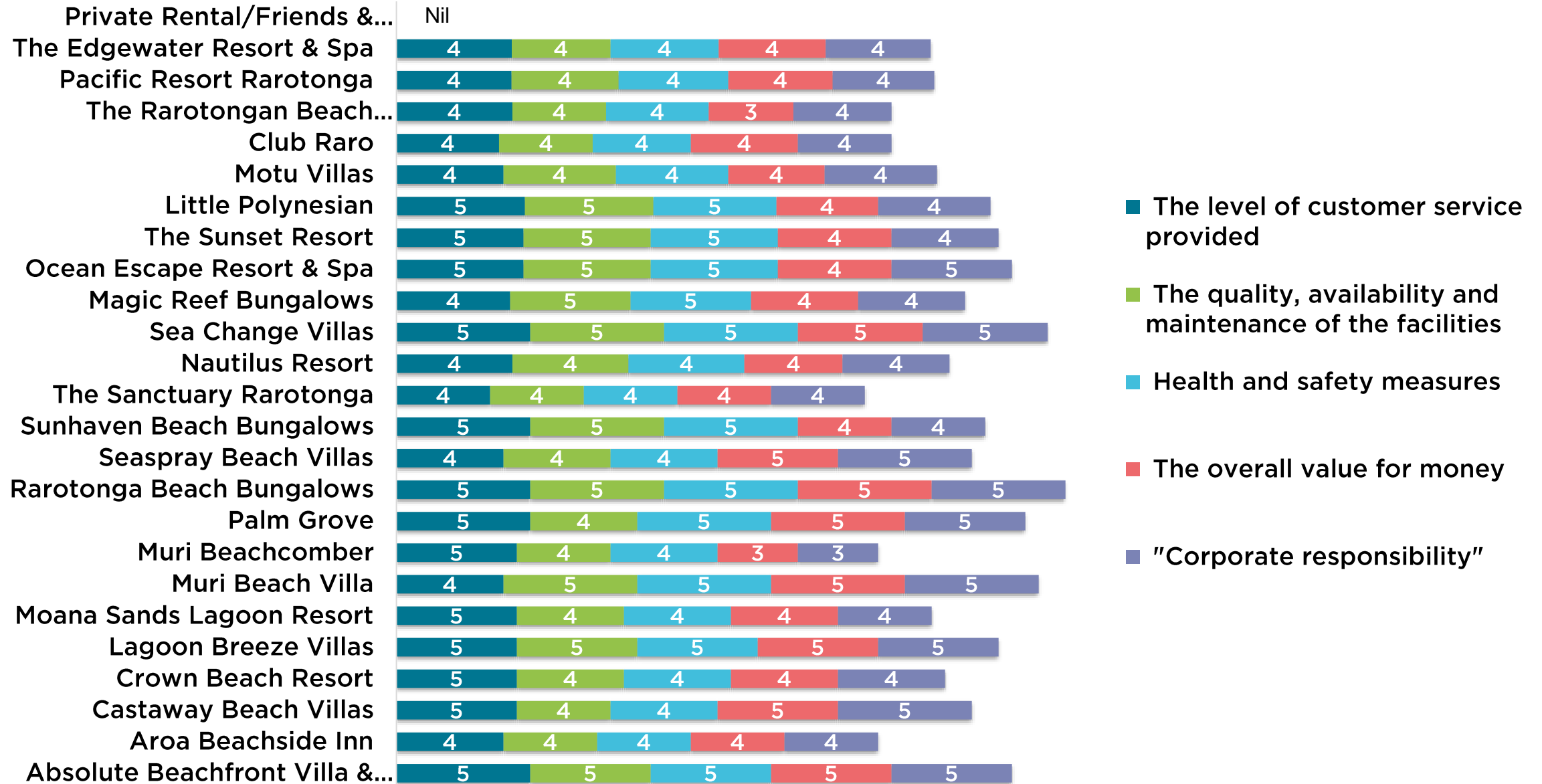
Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%.



# Accommodations Visited in Rarotonga

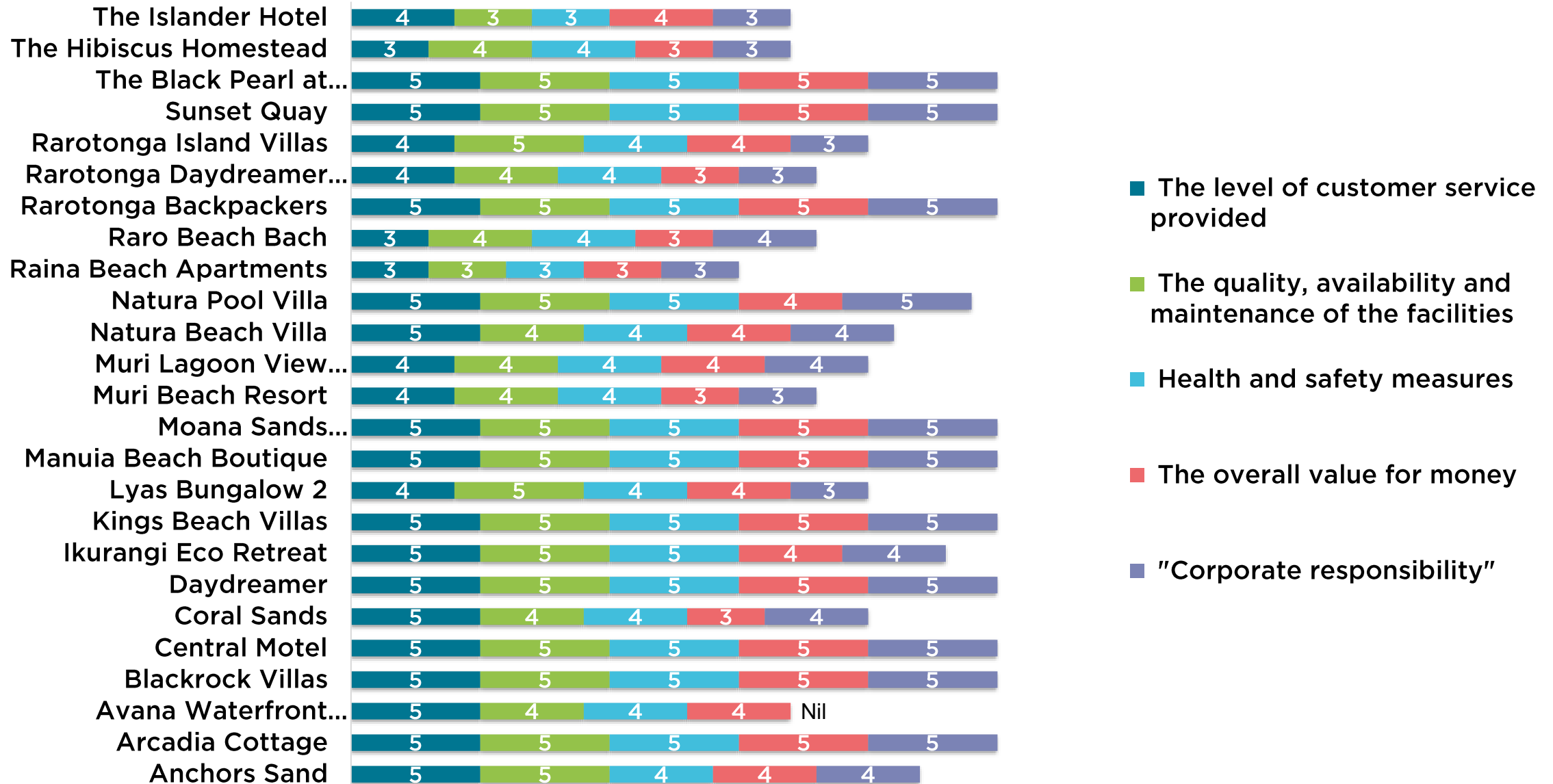


# Accommodations Visited in Rarotonga - Satisfaction Ratings



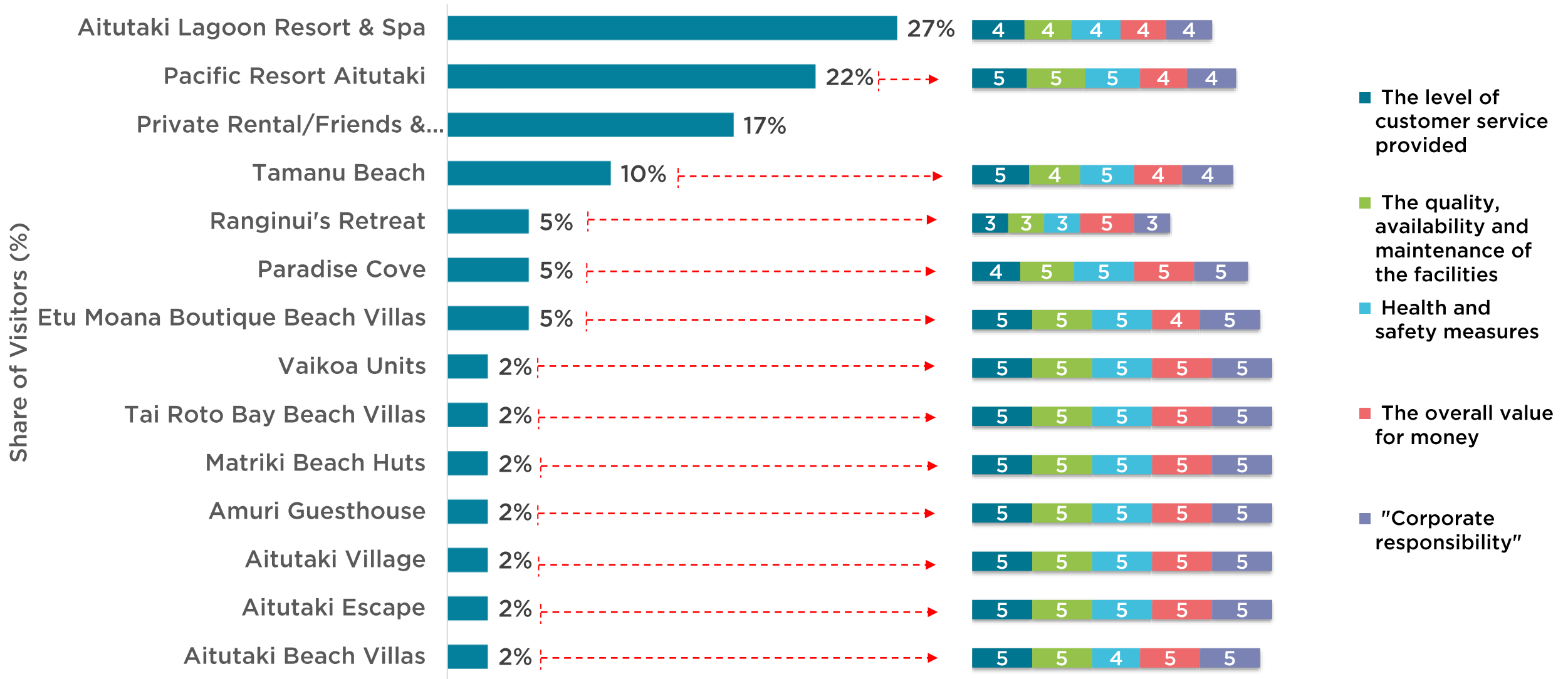
Scale: 1=Very dissatisfied to 5=Very satisfied

# Accommodations Visited in Rarotonga (<1%) + Satisfaction Ratings



Scale: 1=Very dissatisfied to 5=Very satisfied

# Accommodations Visited in Aitutaki + Satisfaction Ratings



Scale: 1=Very dissatisfied to 5=Very satisfied

# Report Structure



Visitor Profile



Visitor  
Characteristics  
& Preferences



Information &  
Decision Making



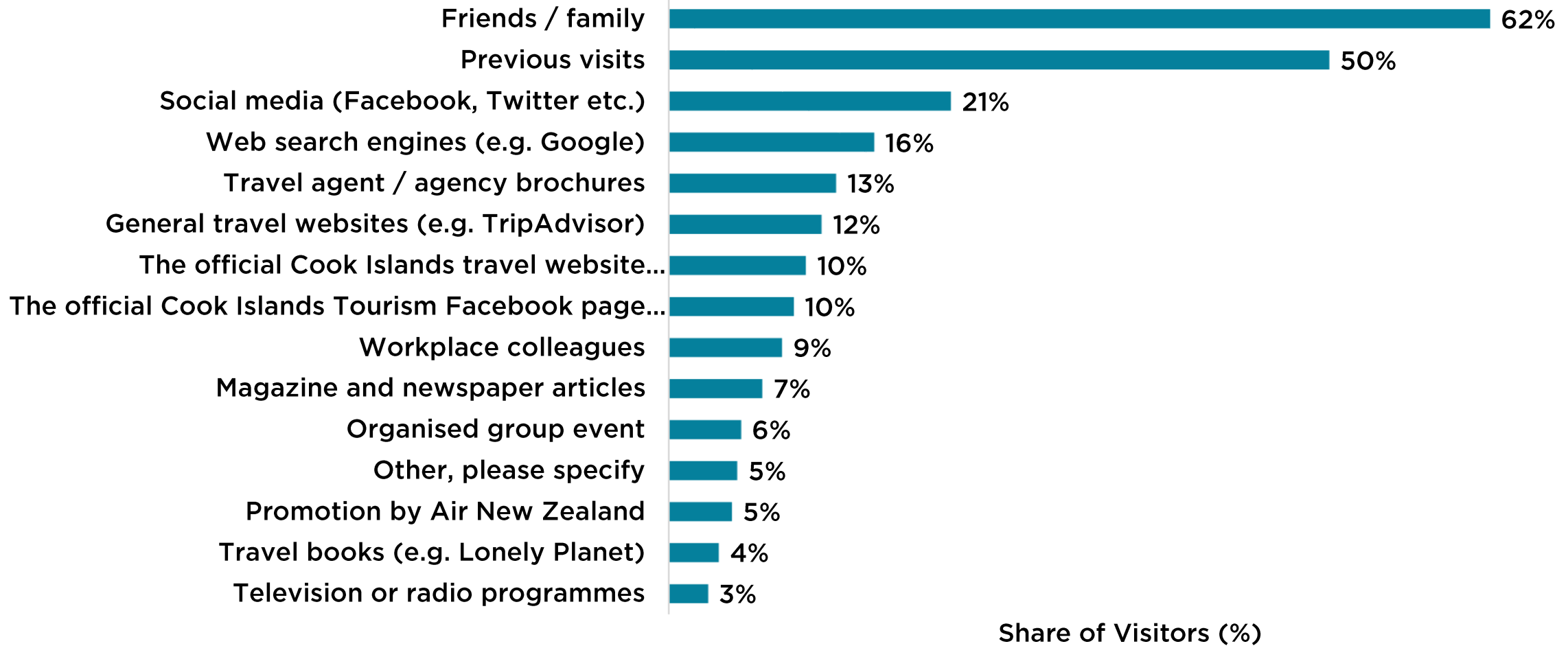
Visitor Spending  
& Impact



Visitor  
Satisfaction

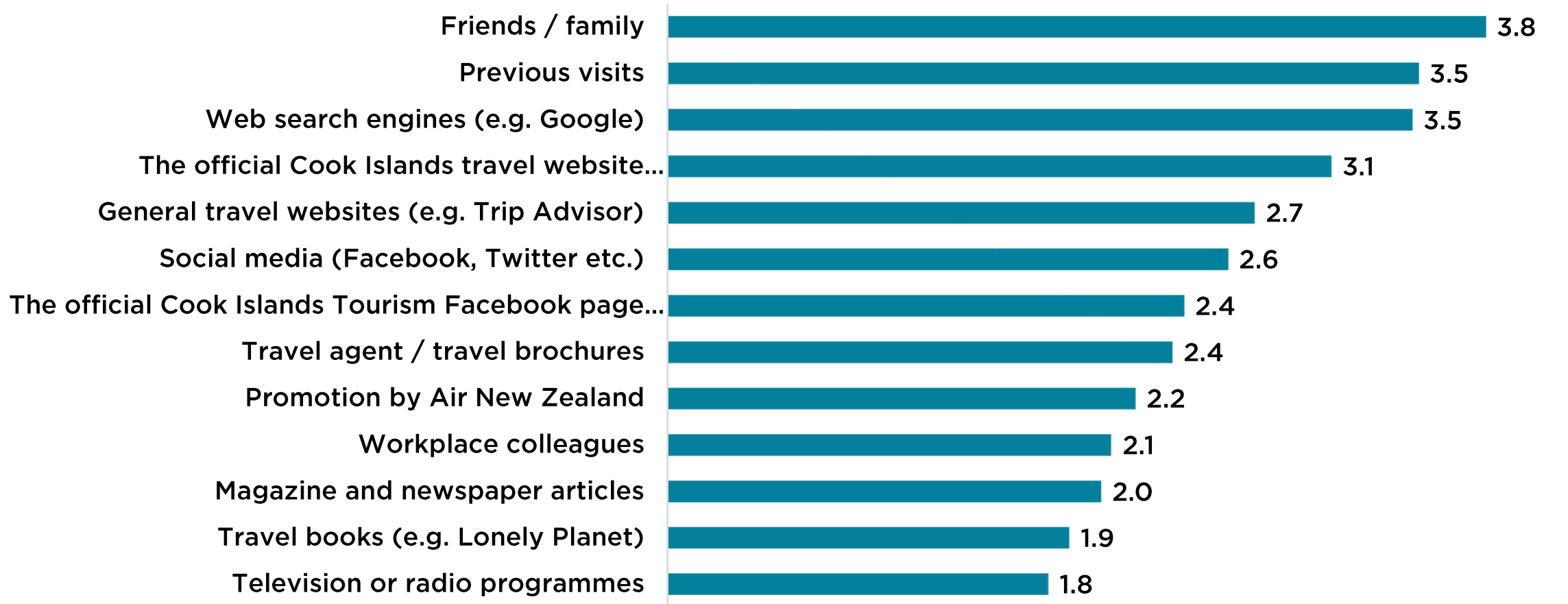


# Information Source: How did you find out about the Cook Islands as a destination?



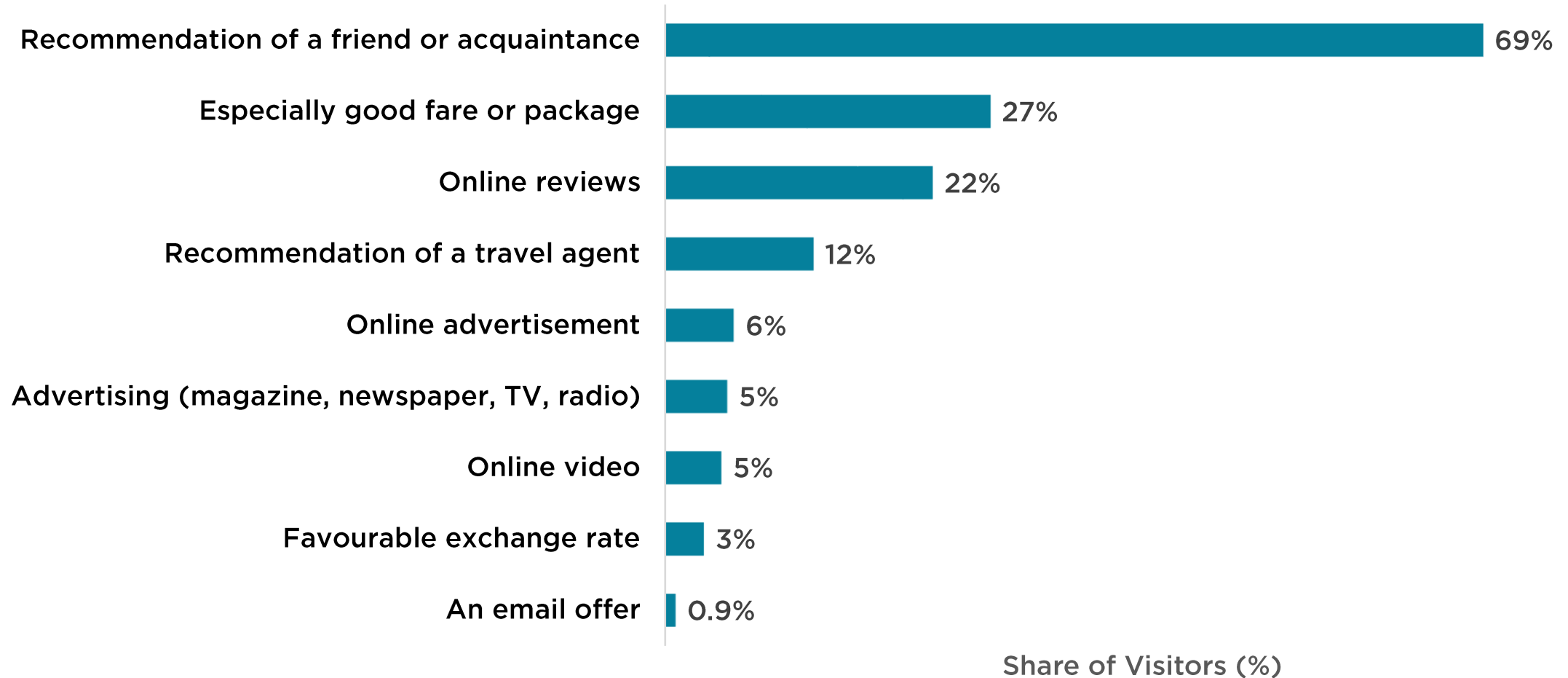
Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%

# Information Source: How important was the information source when planning your trip?



1=Not at all Important to 5=Extremely Important

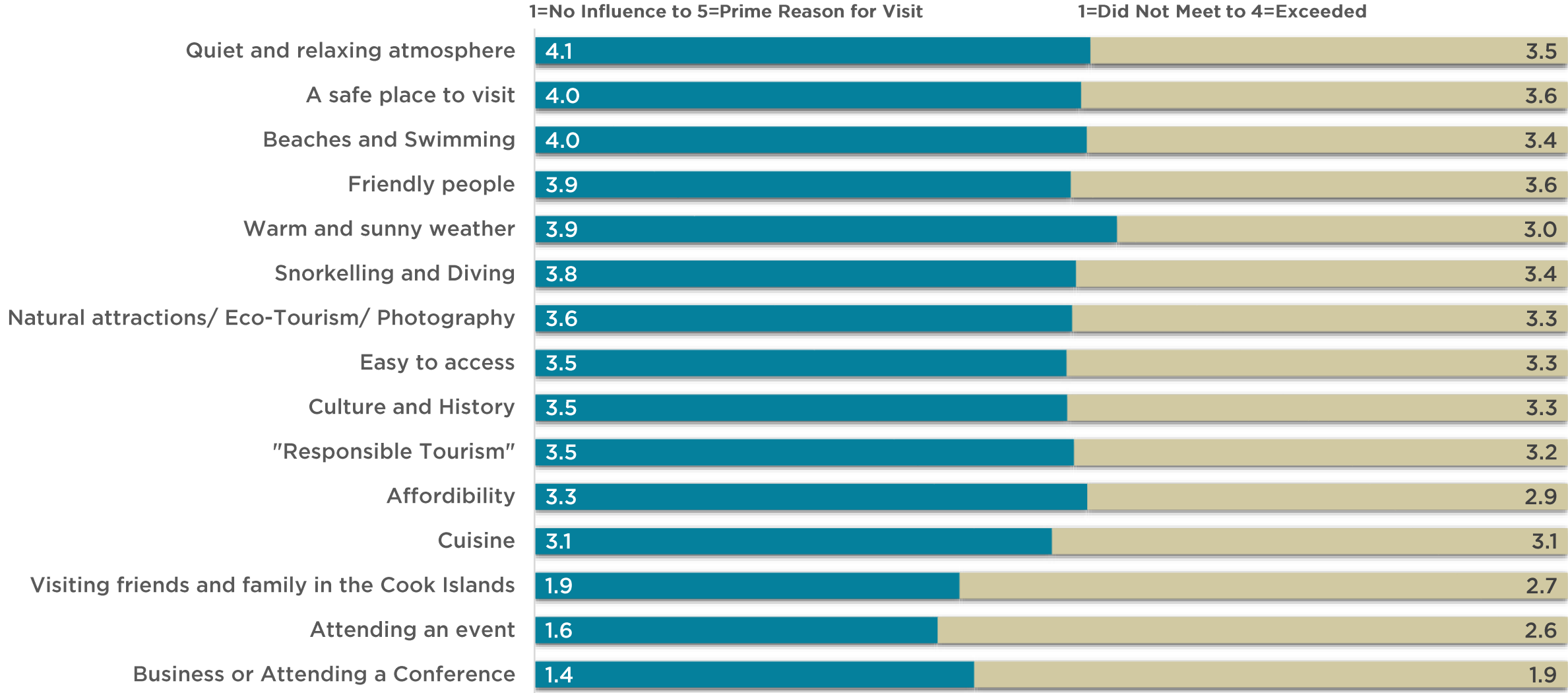
# Important Promotion/ Advertising Channels that assisted in selecting to visit the Cook Islands



# Pre-travel Perceptions v Expectations (Side-by-side comparison)

Q: Rate the below's importance in your decision to travel to the Cook Islands?  
1=No Influence to 5=Prime Reason for Visit

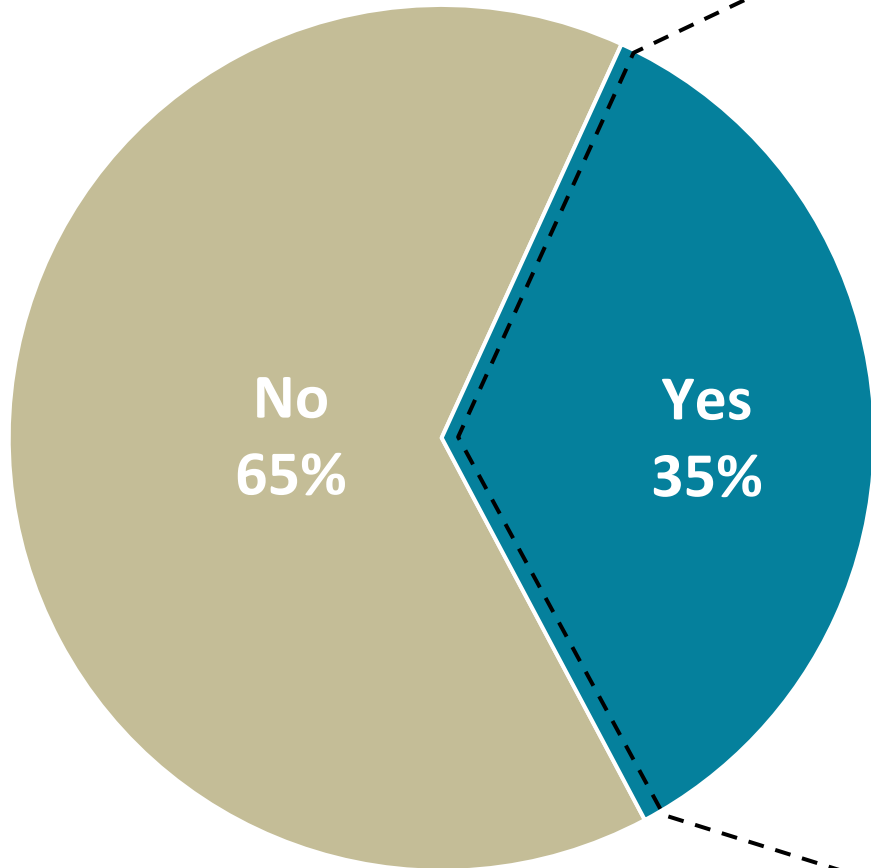
Q: Rate the below on whether they met your travel expectations?  
1=Did Not Meet to 4=Exceeded



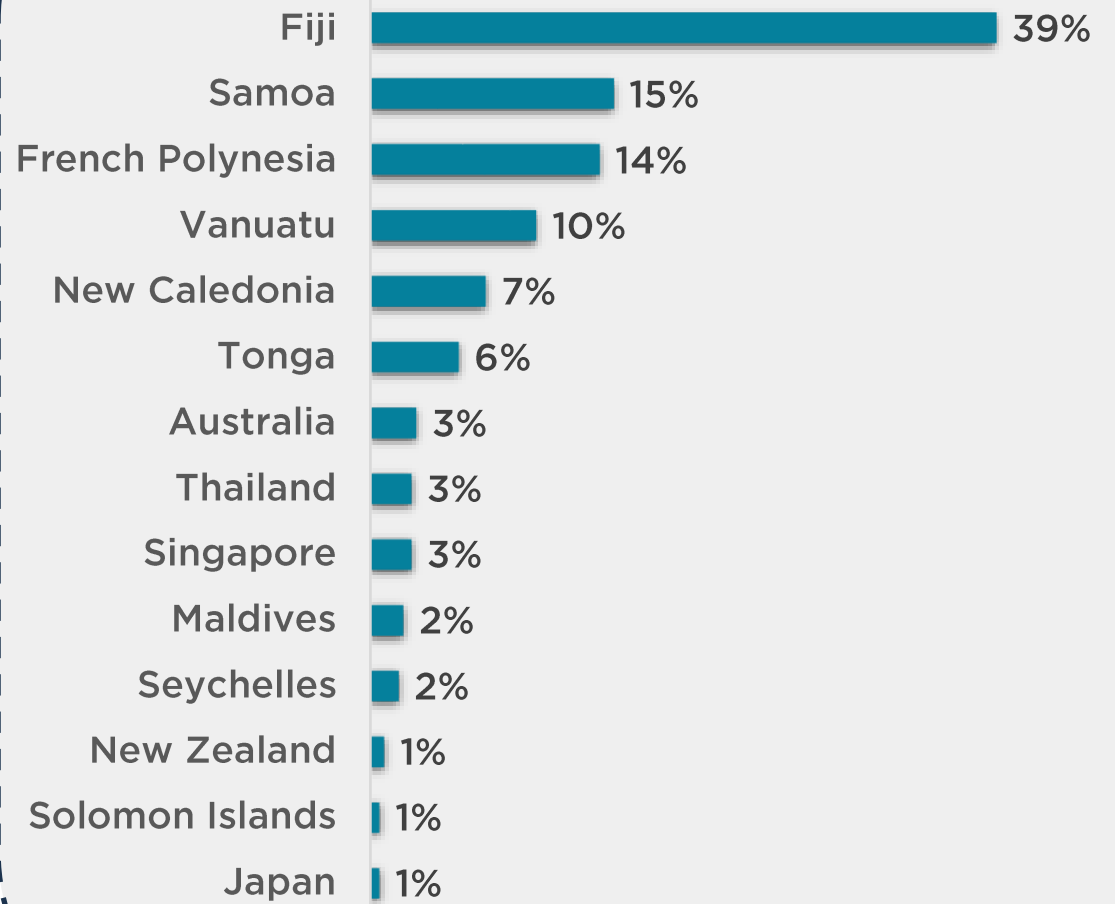
Note: New variables for 2023

# Other Considered Destinations

Q: When planning your trip, were there other destinations you were also contemplating but ultimately chose the Cook Islands?



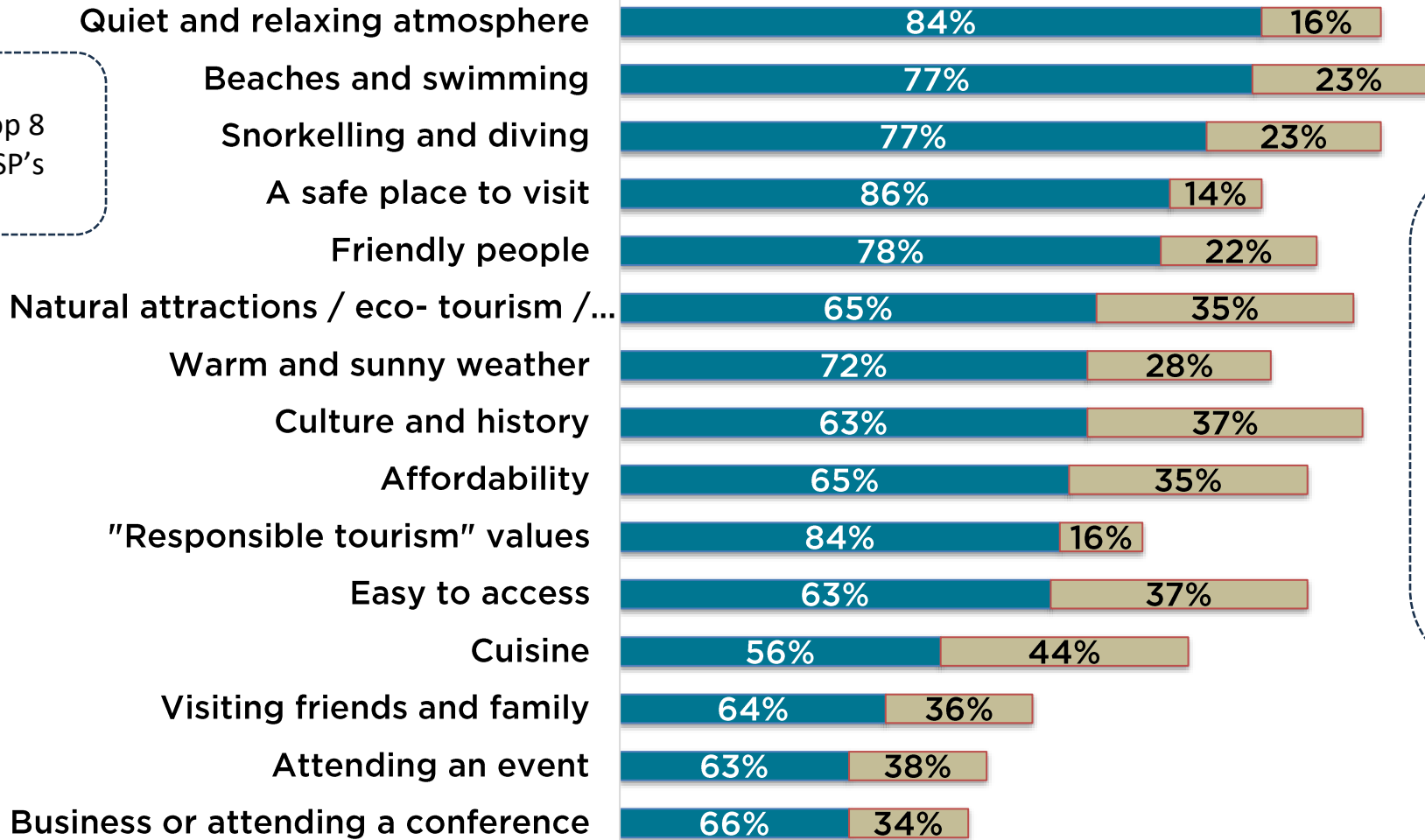
Q: If Yes, choose at most 3 destinations you considered



Share of Visitors (%)

# Consideration Set - Cook Islands' USP's v Considered Destinations

Q: Please attribute each statement below to the country, Cook Islands or Alternative Destination, that best represents its unique appeal



Visitors to the Cook Islands predominantly prioritize the first 8 USP's as representing its unique appeal, indicating their top-of-mind importance. However, this does not diminish the significance of other factors in travelers' decision-making process between holiday destinations.

■ % of Visitors that chose Cook Islands

Note: New variables for 2023

# Consideration Set - Cook Islands USP's v Considered Destinations

Q: Please attribute each statement below to the country, Cook Islands or Alternative Destination, that best represents its unique appeal

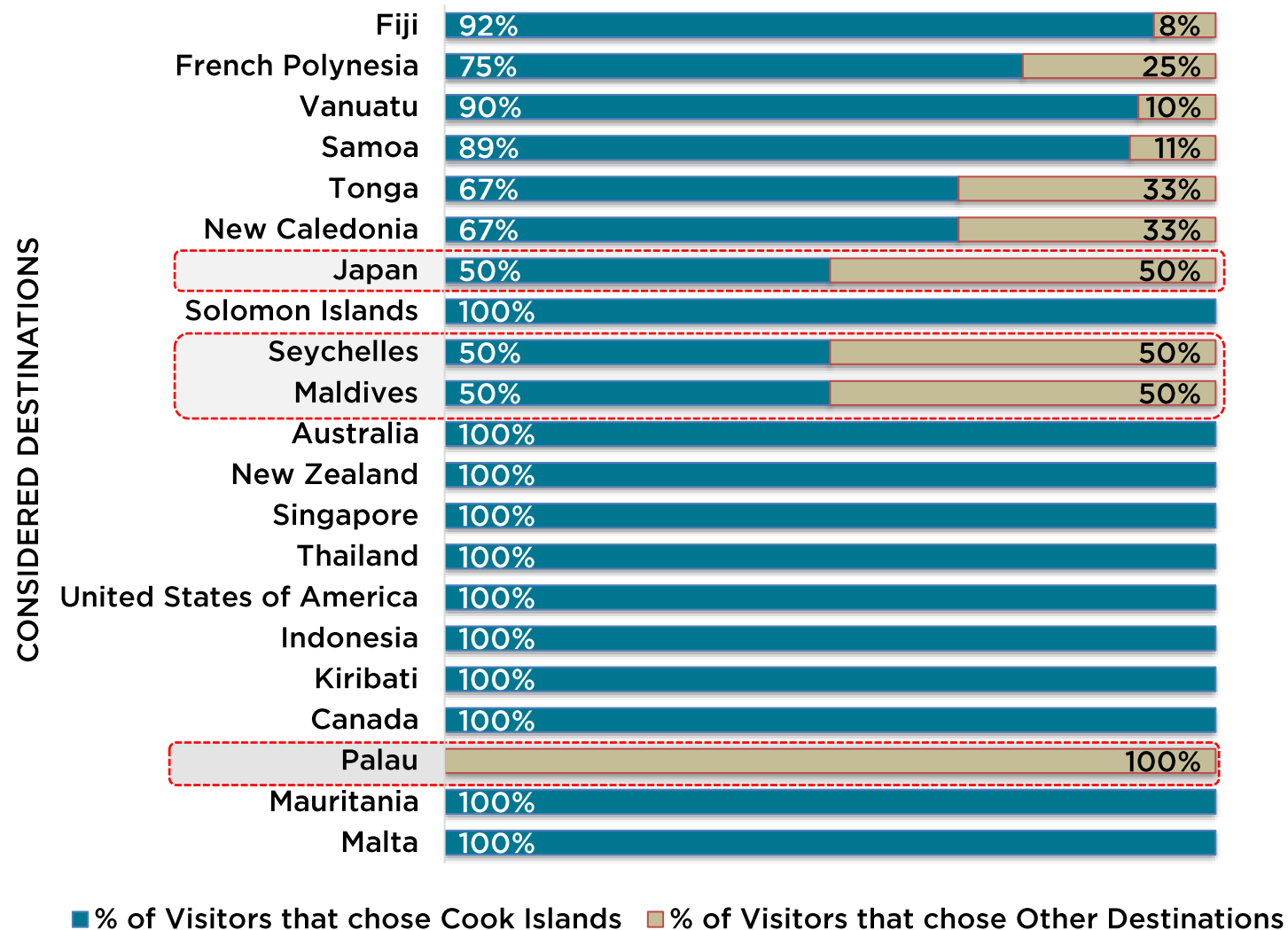


The majority of visitors rated the Cook Islands higher than their alternative destinations across the listed unique selling points (USPs). However, a small portion of visitors who considered Fiji and French Polynesia as alternative destinations attributed the USPs to those destinations rather than to the Cook Islands.

Note: New variables for 2023

# Quiet and relaxing atmosphere: Cook Islands v Considered Destinations

Q: Which country, Cook Islands or Selected Alternative Destination, does a 'Quiet and relaxing atmosphere' best represents its unique appeal?

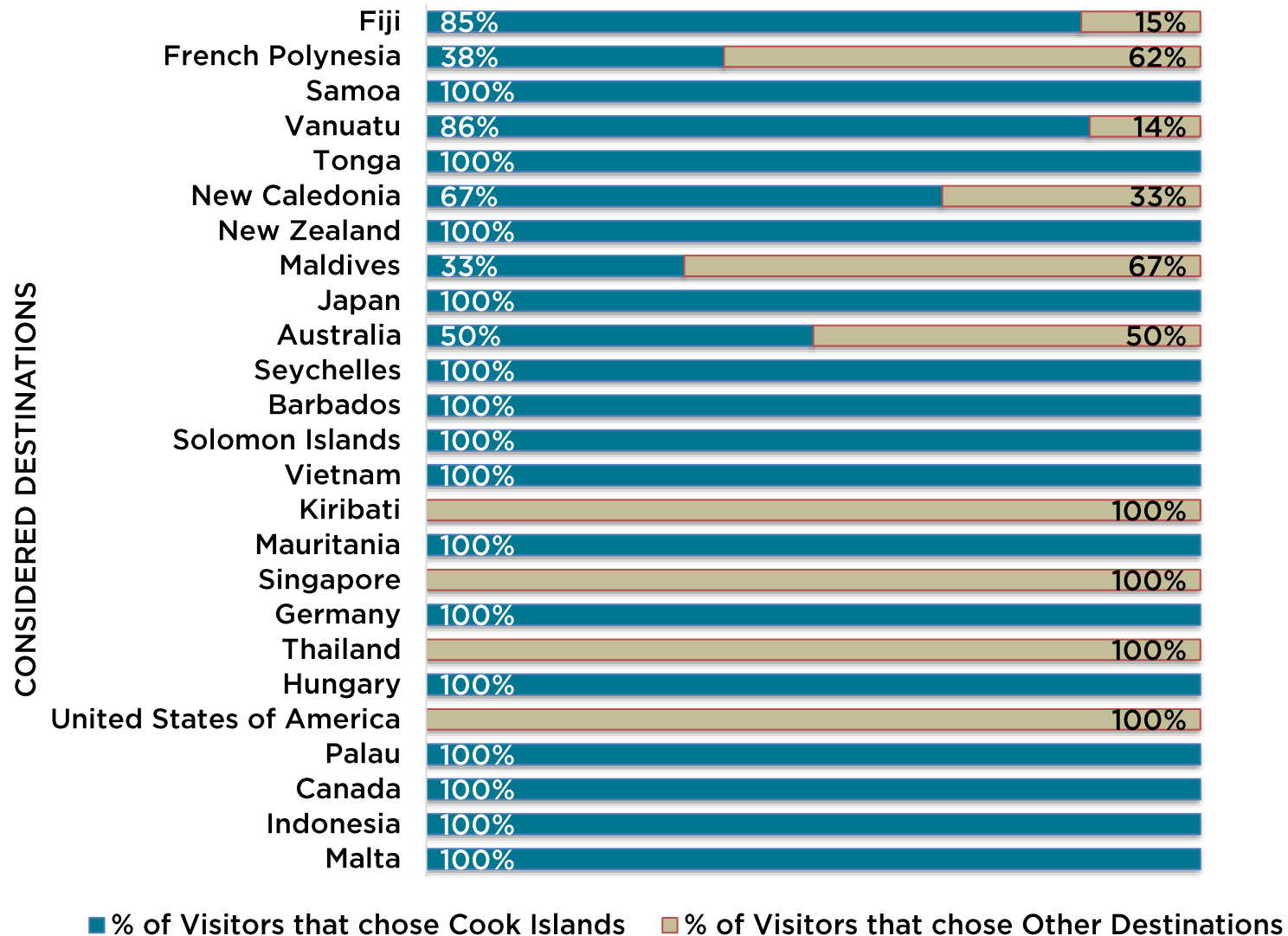


The majority of visitors rated the Cook Islands higher than other destinations for the unique selling point (USP) of a 'quiet and relaxing atmosphere.' However, visitor preferences are more evenly distributed for Japan, Seychelles, and Maldives, with some indicating that Palau offers a stronger experience in this USP. This insight is evident on a country-to-country basis when asked to choose between one alternative destination and the Cook Islands



# Beaches and swimming: Cook Islands v Considered Destinations

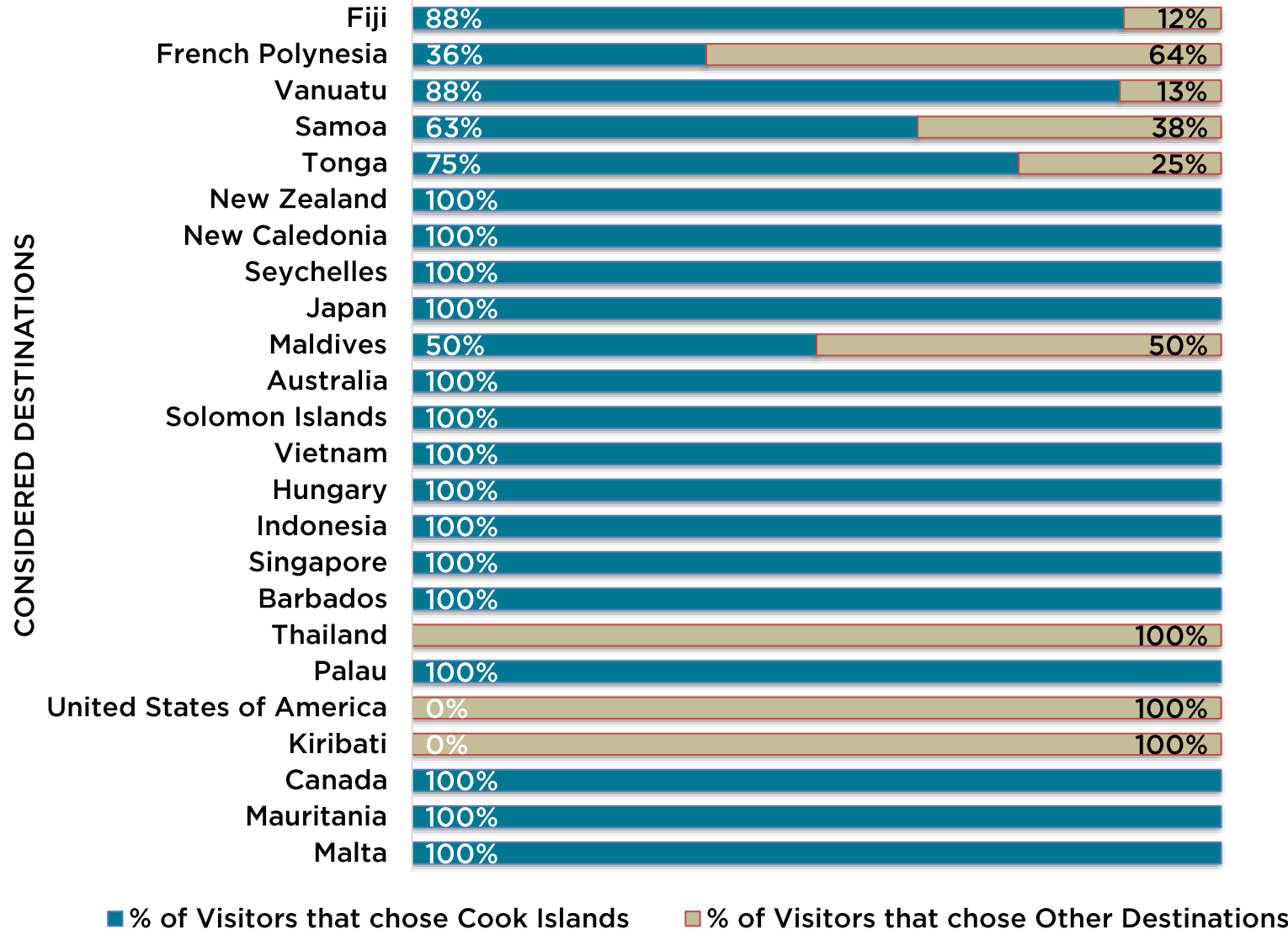
Q: Which country, Cook Islands or Selected Alternative Destination, does a 'Beaches and swimming' best represents its unique appeal?



The majority of visitors rated the Cook Islands higher than other destinations for the unique selling point (USP) of 'beaches and swimming.' However, visitor preferences for Maldives, French Polynesia, Kiribati, Singapore, Thailand, and interestingly, USA suggests these countries offer a stronger experience in this USP. This insight is evident on a country-to-country basis when asked to choose between one alternative destination and the Cook Islands

# Snorkeling and diving: Cook Islands v Considered Destinations

Q: Which country, Cook Islands or Selected Alternative Destination, does a 'Snorkeling and diving' best represents its unique appeal?

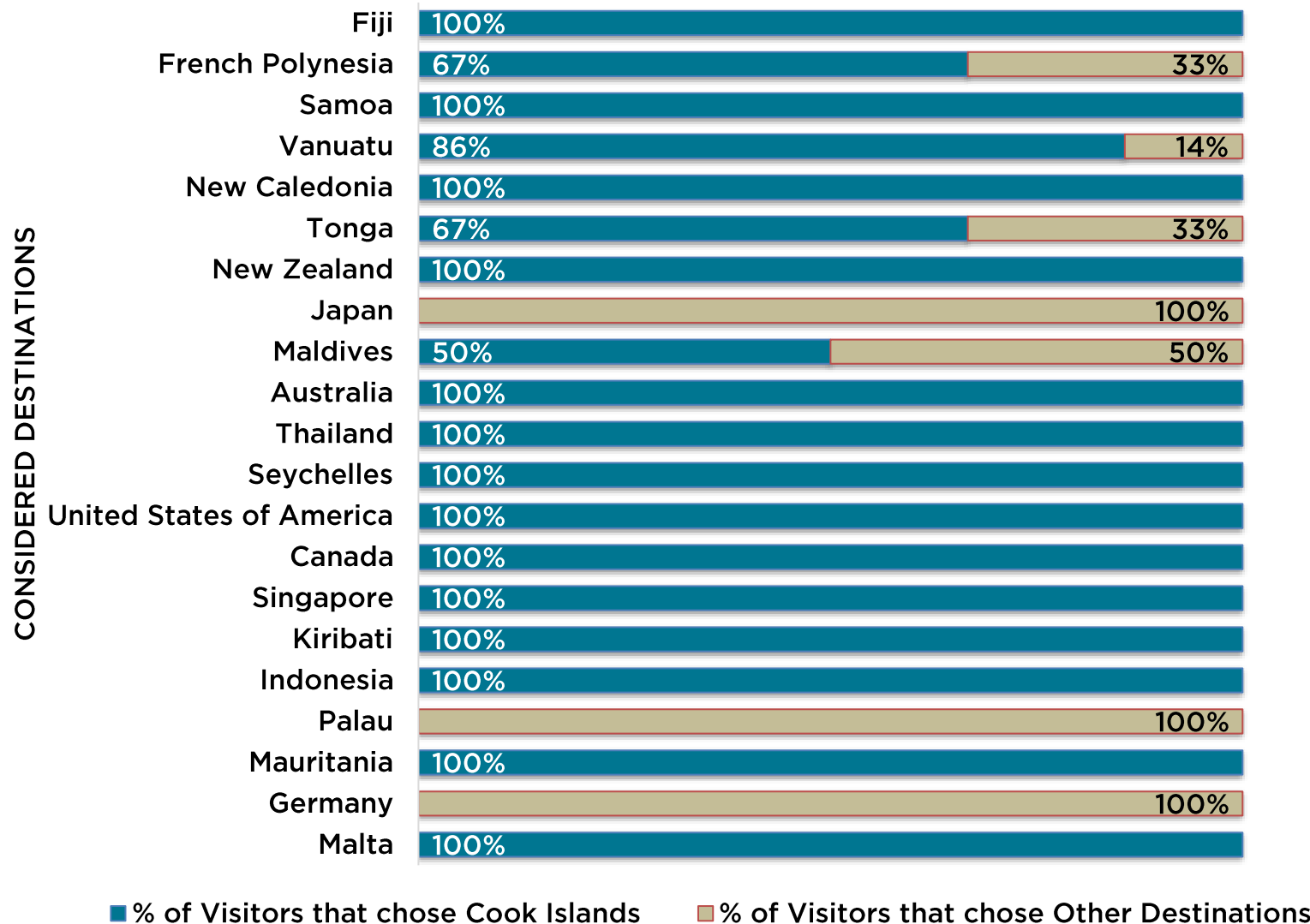


The majority of visitors rated the Cook Islands higher than other destinations for the unique selling point (USP) of 'snorkeling and diving.' However, visitor preferences for Maldives, French Polynesia, Kiribati, Thailand, and interestingly, USA suggests these countries offer a stronger experience in this USP. This insight is evident on a country-to-country basis when asked to choose between one alternative destination and the Cook Islands

Note: New variables for 2023

# Safe place to visit: Cook Islands v Considered Destinations

Q: Which country, Cook Islands or Selected Alternative Destination, does a 'Safe place to visit' best represents its unique appeal?

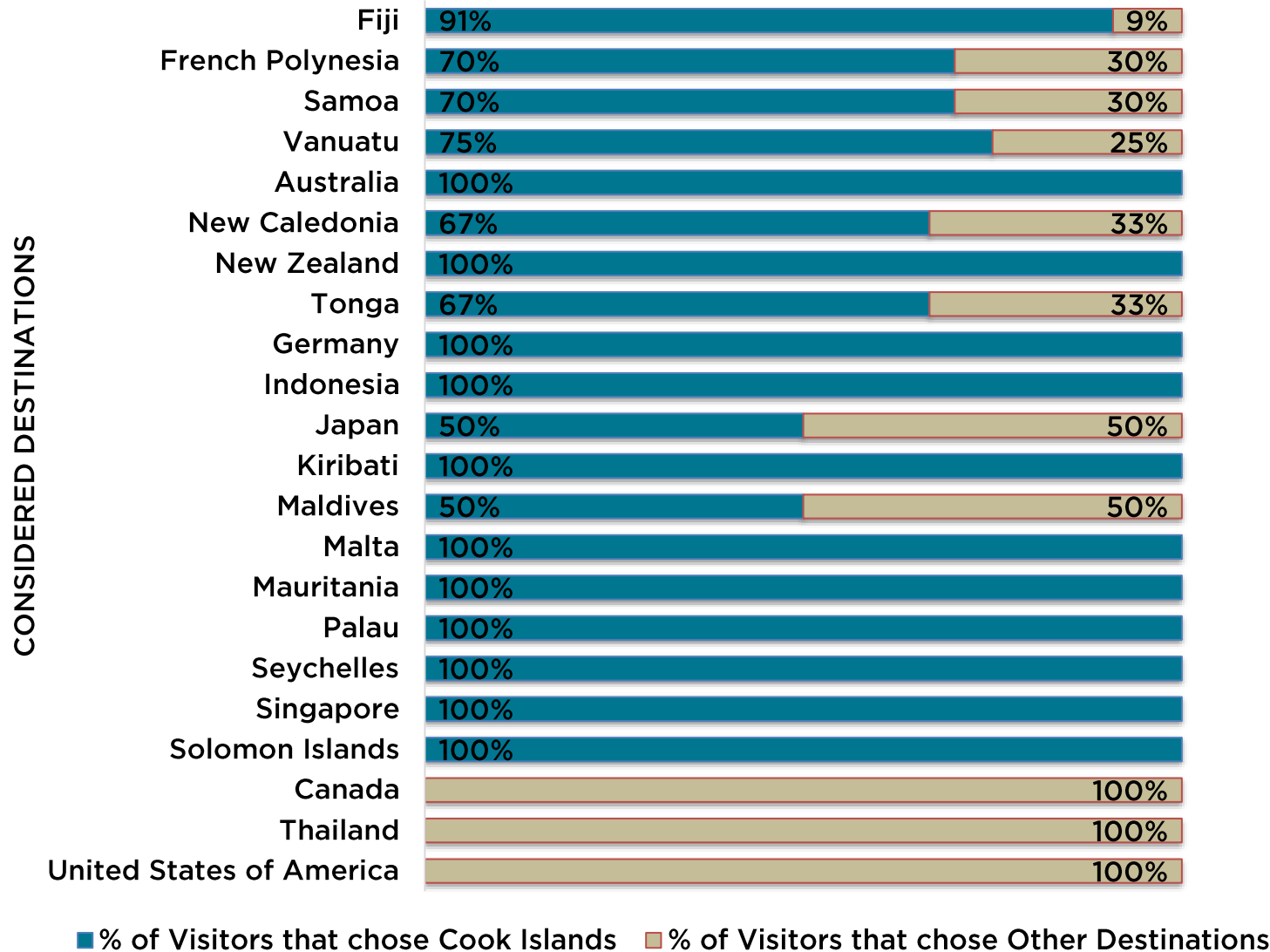


The majority of visitors rated the Cook Islands higher than other destinations for the unique selling point (USP) of a 'safe place to visit.' However, visitor preferences for Japan, Palau and Germany suggests these countries offer a stronger experience in this USP. This insight is evident on a country-to-country basis when asked to choose between one alternative destination and the Cook Islands.

Note: New variables for 2023

# Friendly People: Cook Islands v Considered Destinations

Q: Which country, Cook Islands or Selected Alternative Destination, does a 'Friendly people' best represents its unique appeal?

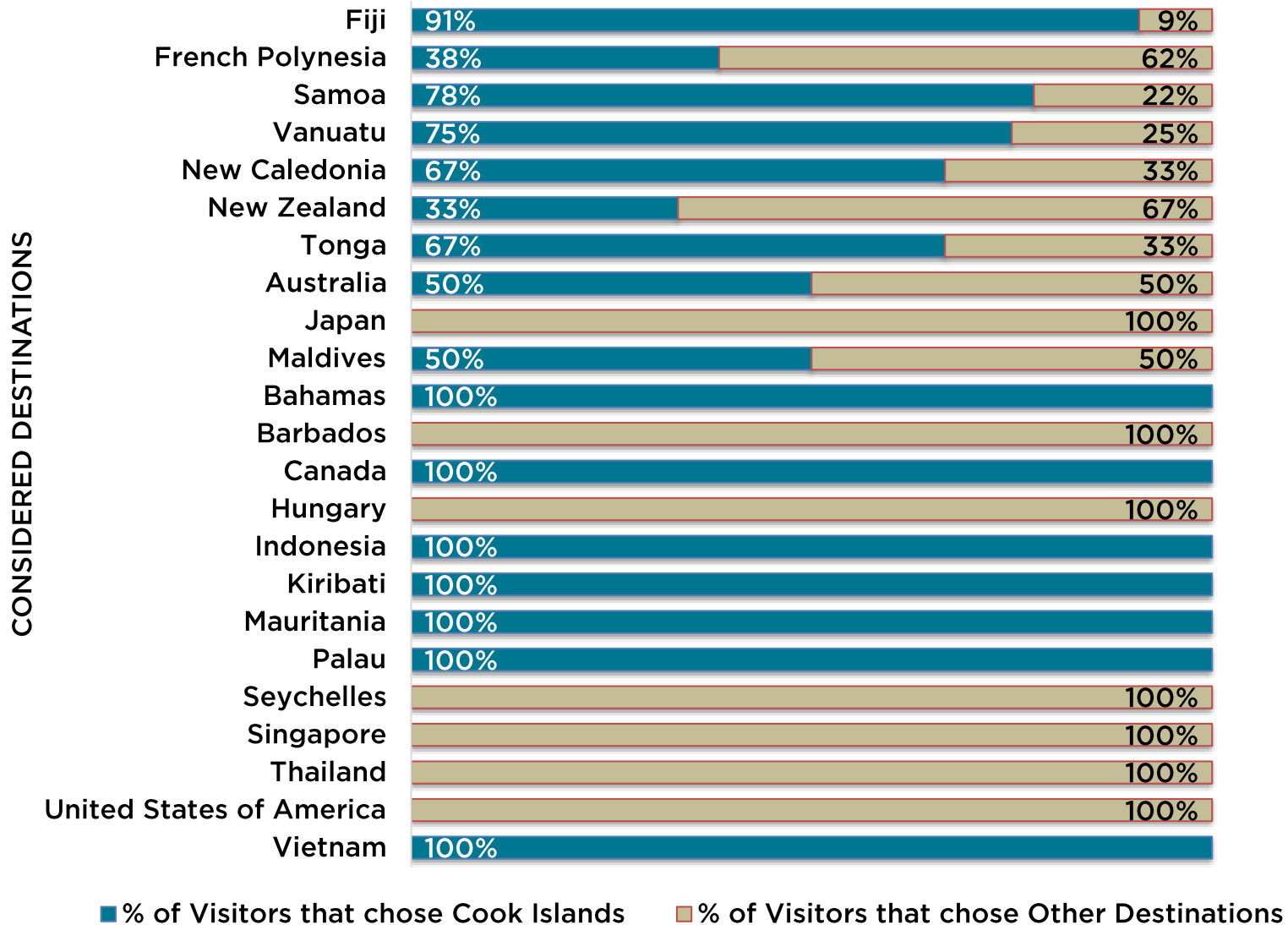


The majority of visitors rated the Cook Islands higher than other destinations for the unique selling point (USP) of 'friendly people.' However, visitor preferences for Canada, Thailand, and interestingly, USA, suggests these countries offer a stronger experience in this USP. This insight is evident on a country-to-country basis when asked to choose between one alternative destination and the Cook Islands.

Note: New variables for 2023

# Natural attractions: Cook Islands v Considered Destinations

Q: Which country, Cook Islands or Selected Alternative Destination, does a 'Natural attractions' best represents its unique appeal?

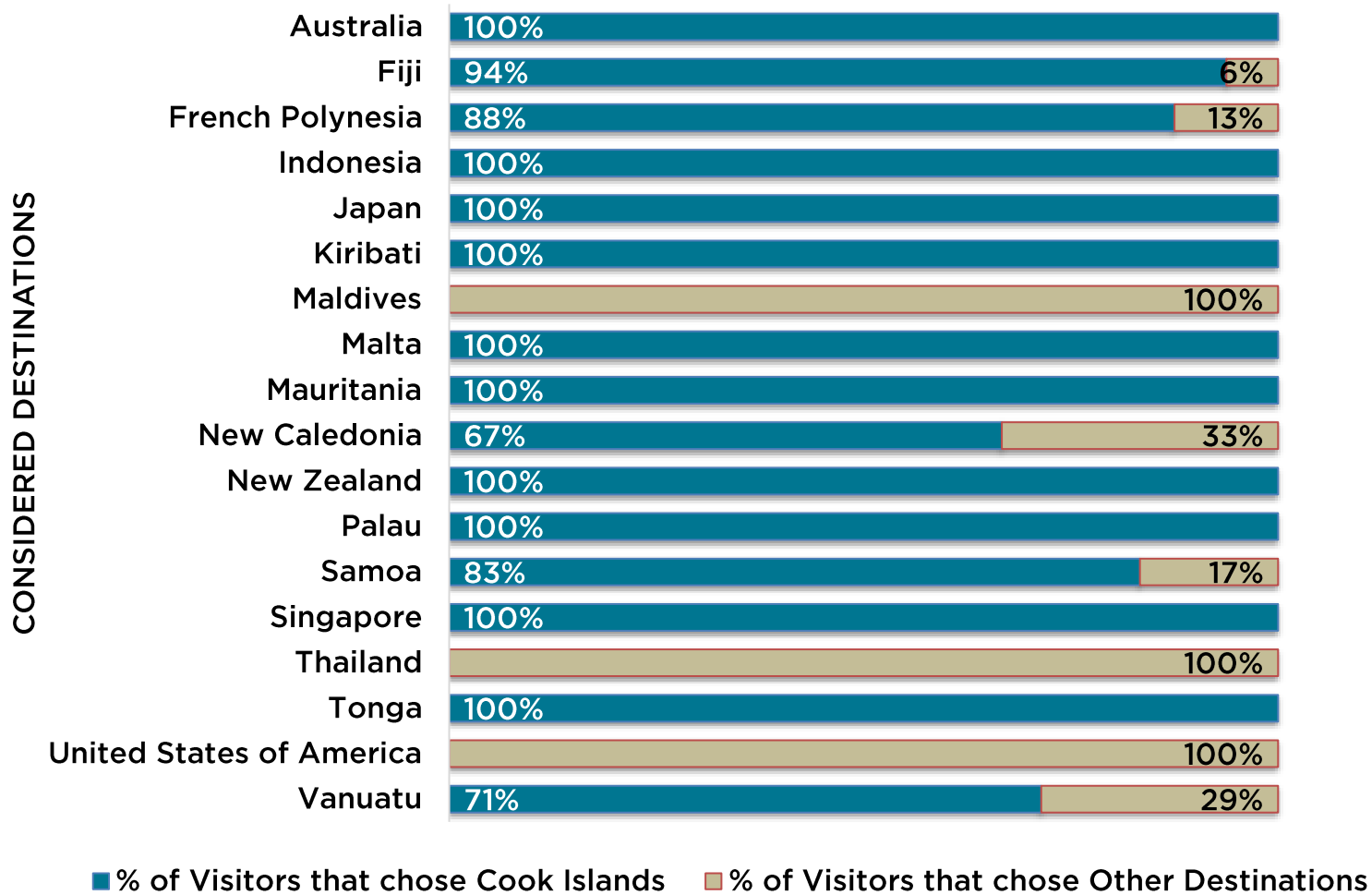


The majority of visitors rated the Cook Islands higher than other destinations for the unique selling point (USP) of 'natural attractions, eco-tourism and photography.' However, visitor preferences for Japan, Barbados, Hungary, Seychelles, Singapore, Thailand, USA, suggests these countries offer a stronger experience in this USP. This insight is evident on a country-to-country basis when asked to choose between one alternative destination and the Cook Islands.

Note: New variables for 2023

# “Responsible tourism” Values: Cook Islands v Considered Destinations

Q: Which country, Cook Islands or Selected Alternative Destination, does a ‘Responsible tourism’ best represents its unique appeal?



The majority of visitors rated the Cook Islands higher than other destinations for the unique selling point (USP) of ‘natural attractions, eco-tourism and photography.’ However, visitor preferences for Japan, Barbados, Hungary, Seychelles, Singapore, Thailand, USA, suggests these countries offer a stronger experience in this USP. This insight is evident on a country-to-country basis when asked to choose between one alternative destination and the Cook Islands.

# Purchasing of Travel



*Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%*

# Report Structure



Visitor Profile



Visitor  
Characteristics  
& Preferences



Information &  
Decision Making



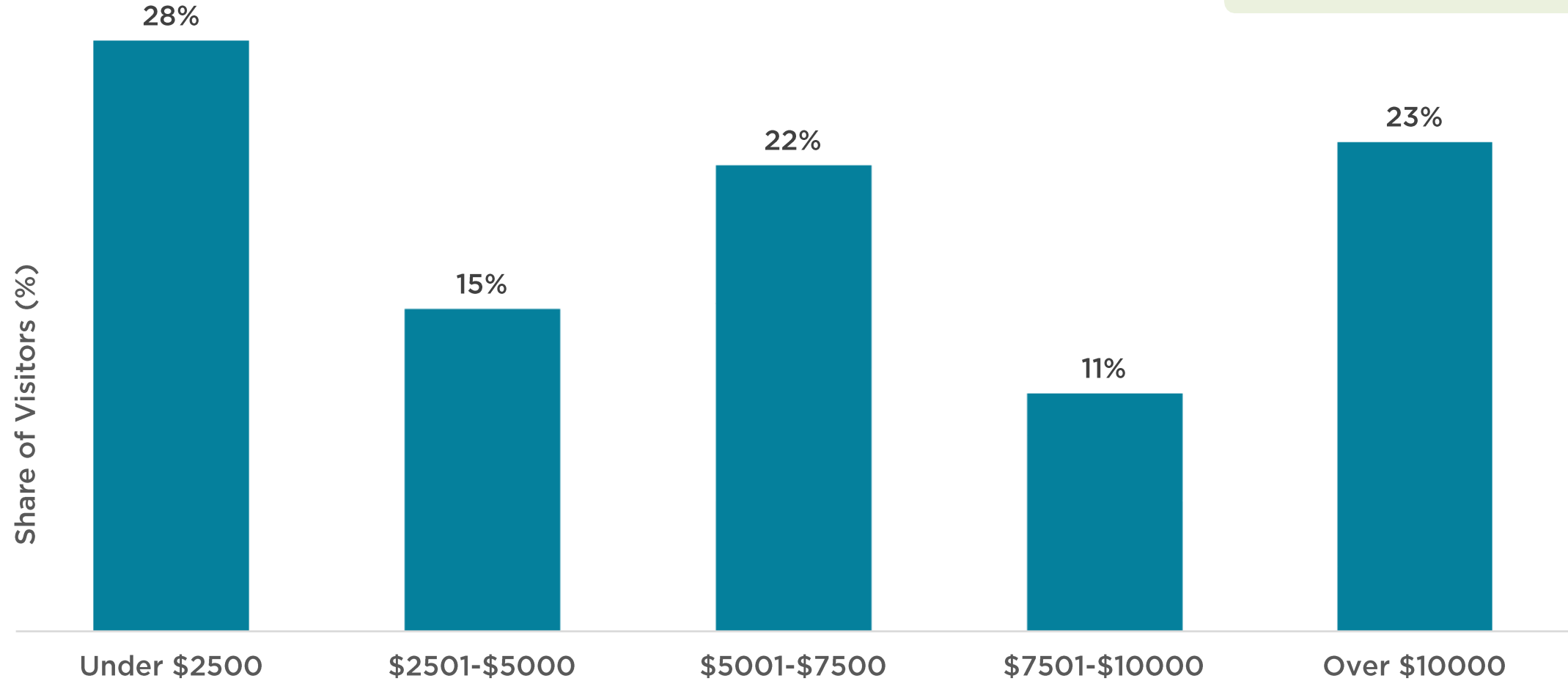
Visitor Spending  
& Impact



Visitor  
Satisfaction



# Prepaid Expenditure



AVG. PREPAID PER  
PERSON PER TRIP

**NZ\$2,359**

# In-country Spend Per Person Per Day While in the Cook Islands

	Local Spend Per Person Per Day (NZD)		
	<u>% of sector</u>	<u>July-Sept 2022</u>	<u>July-Sept 2023</u>
Accommodation	53%	\$86	\$104
Food & Beverage	16%	\$44	\$32
Domestic Travel	4%	\$10	\$8
Retail	4%	\$9	\$8
Souvenir	5%	\$15	\$10
Tour	8%	\$15	\$16
Local Transport	1%	\$1	\$1
Other	8%	\$18	\$16
Internet & Service	1%	\$2	\$1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>196</b>

*Note: Total Economic Impact-Per Trip and Per Day are per-person expenditures. To estimate the total economic impact, multiply Total Economic Impact-Per-Trip by the number of visitor arrivals in the from the official Cook Islands Visitor Arrival statistics*

# Economic Impact - Per Person and Total

	Visitor Expenditure Per Person & Total	
	July-Sept 2022	July-Sept 2023
<b>Average Spend Prior to arrival</b>	<b>NZD</b>	<b>NZD</b>
Per Person Per Trip	2,073	2,359
<i>Flowing into local economy rate - estimated 40%</i>		
Per Person Per Trip	829	944
Per Person per Day	100	110
-----		
<b>Average Local Spend</b>		
<i>Length of Study (nights)</i>	<i>mean 8.3 nights</i>	<i>mean 8.6 nights</i>
Per Person Per Trip	1,660	1,688
Per Person per Day	200	196
-----		
<b>Total Economic Impact-Per Trip</b>	<b>2,489</b>	<b>2,632</b>
<b>Total Economic Impact-Per Day</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>305</b>

Note: Total Economic Impact-Per Trip and Per Day are per-person expenditures. To estimate the total economic impact, multiply Total Economic Impact-Per-Trip by the number of visitor arrivals from the official Cook Islands Visitor Arrival statistics

# Report Structure



Visitor Profile



Visitor  
Characteristics  
& Preferences



Information &  
Decision Making



Visitor Spending  
& Impact



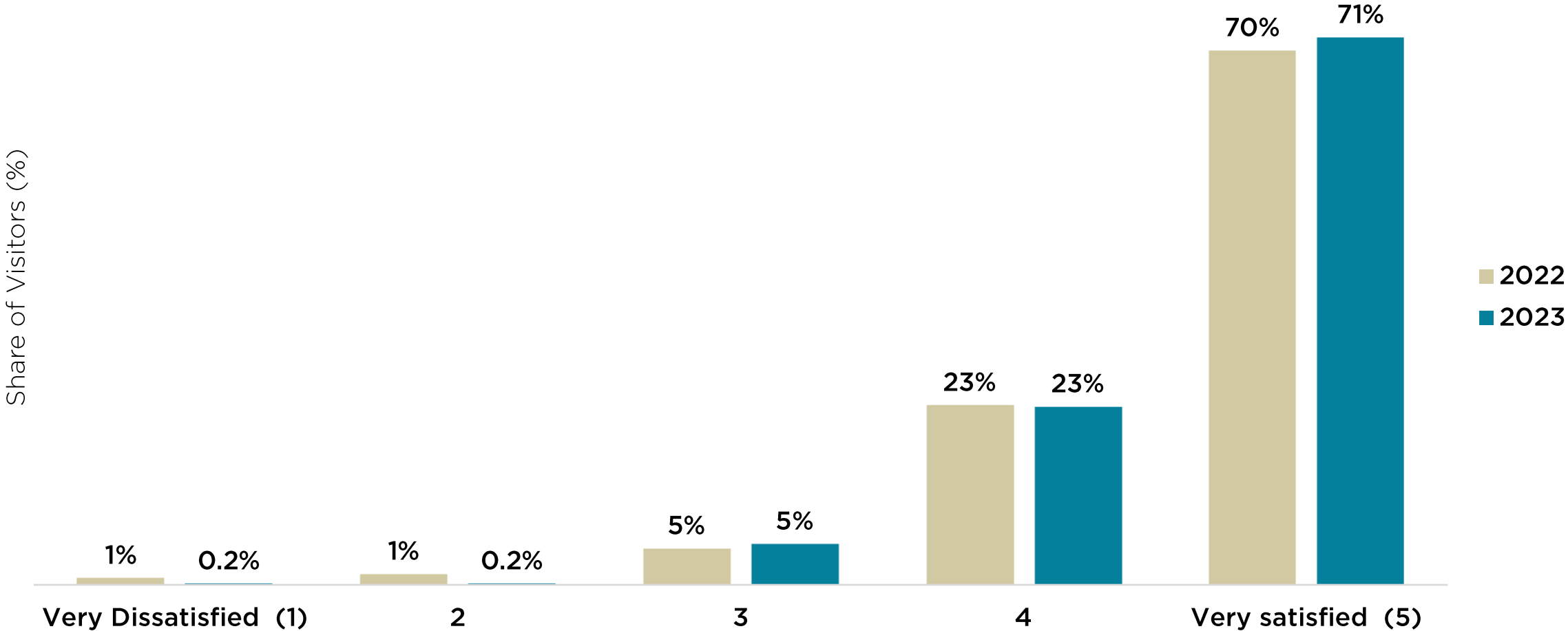
Visitor  
Satisfaction

# Visitor Overall Satisfaction

AVG. OVERALL SATISFACTION

**4.6** | **4.7**

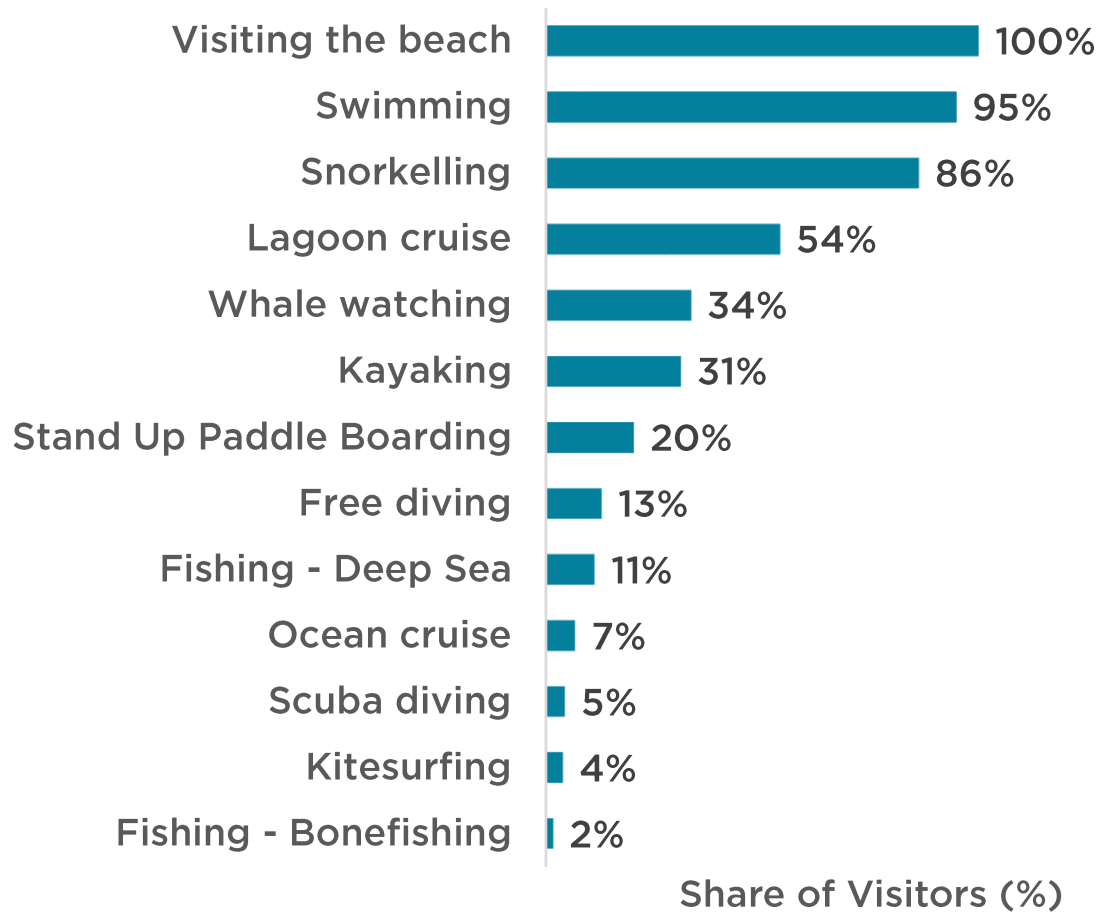
JUL - SEPT 2022 | JUL - SEPT 2023



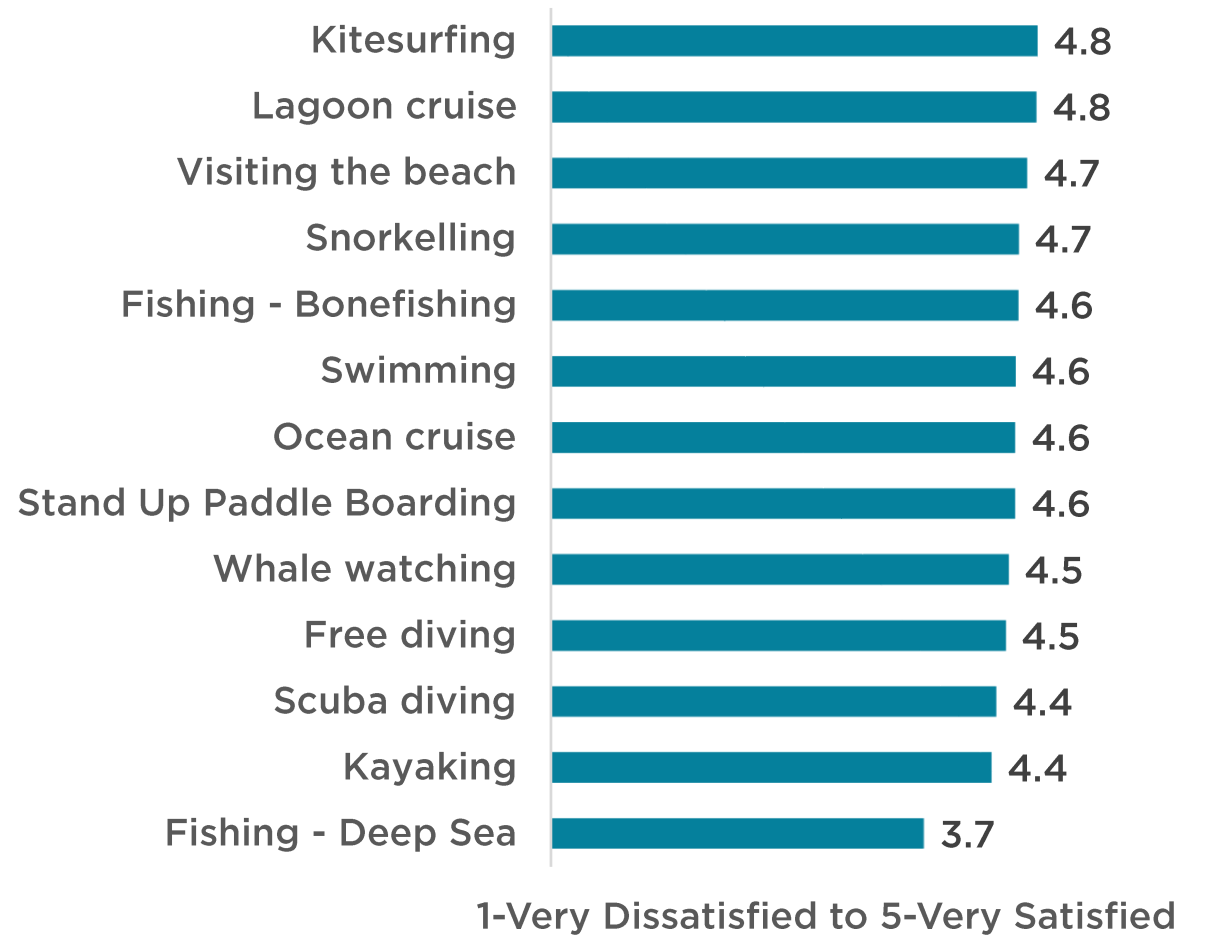
Note: Due to rounding, some totals do not sum to 100%.

# Water-based Activities

## Participation

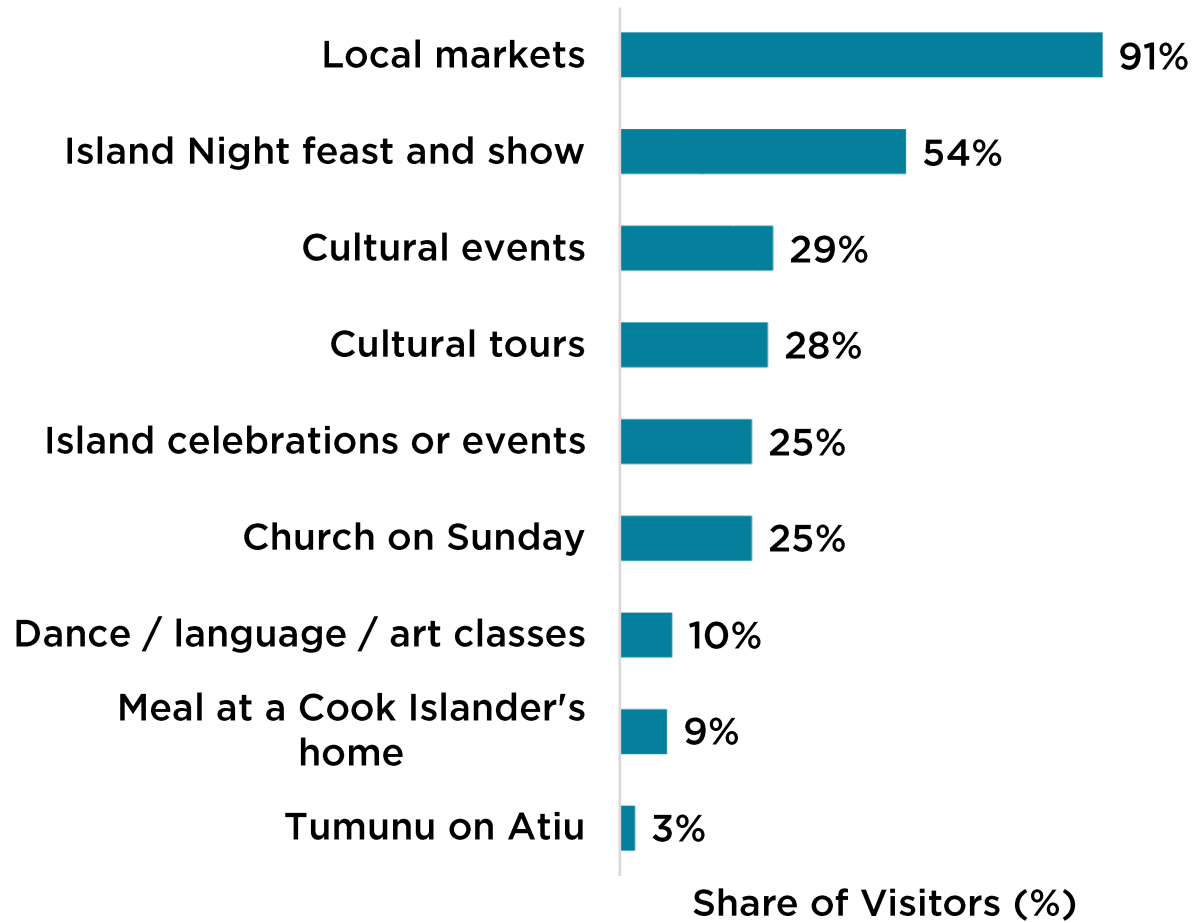


## Satisfaction

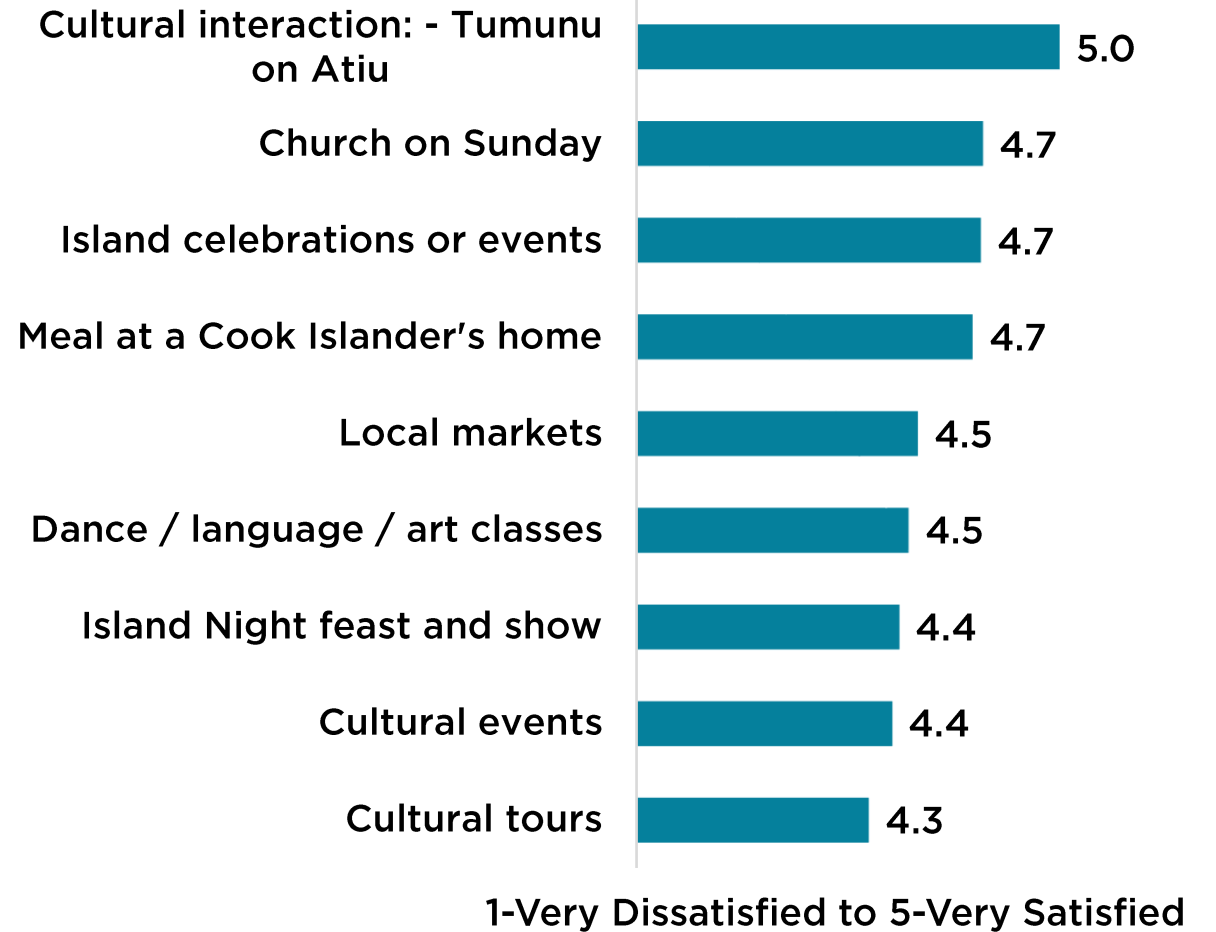


# Cultural Interaction

## Participation

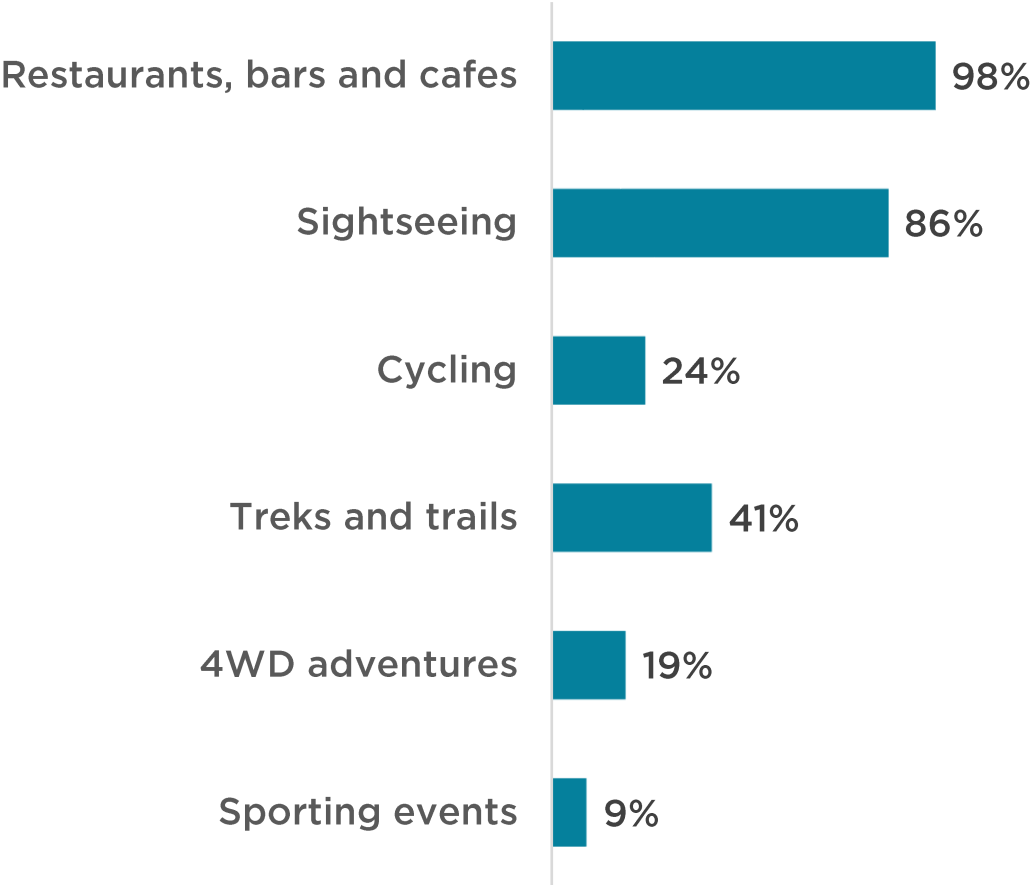


## Satisfaction



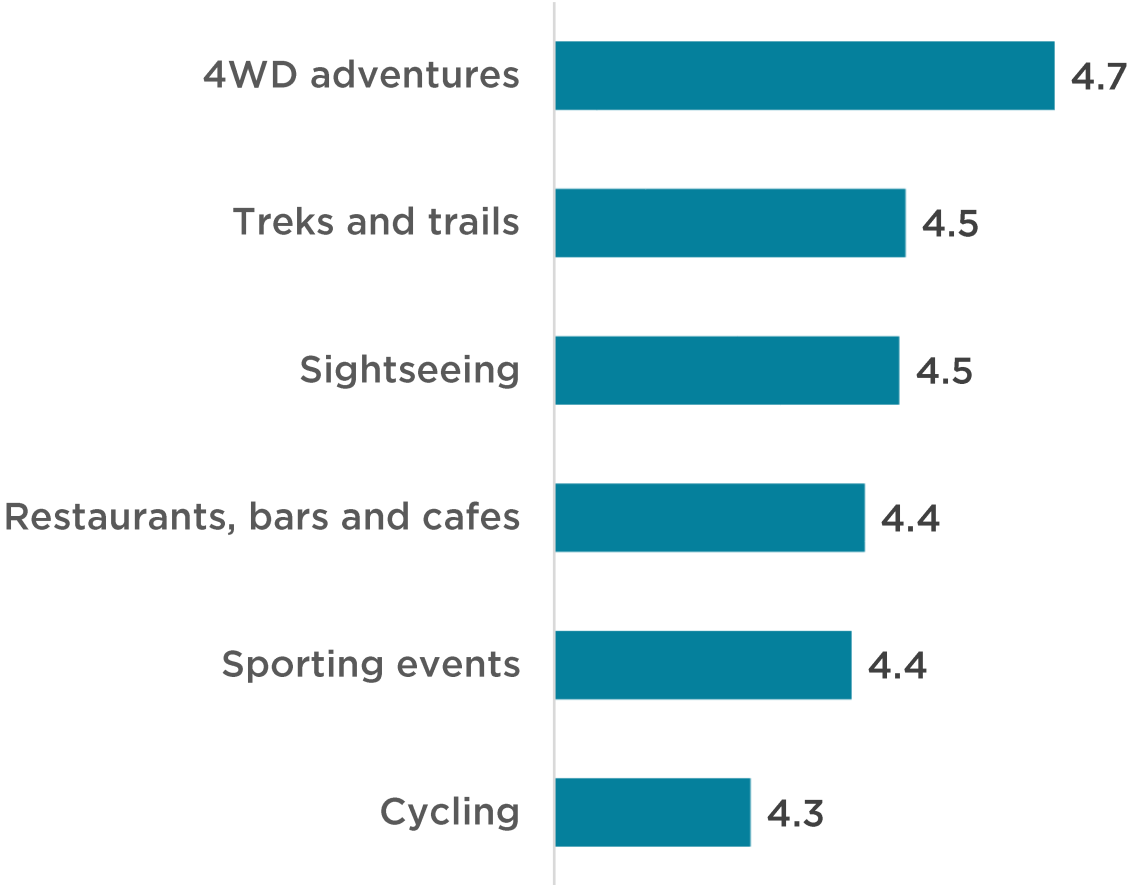
# Land-based Activities

## Participation



Share of Visitors (%)

## Satisfaction



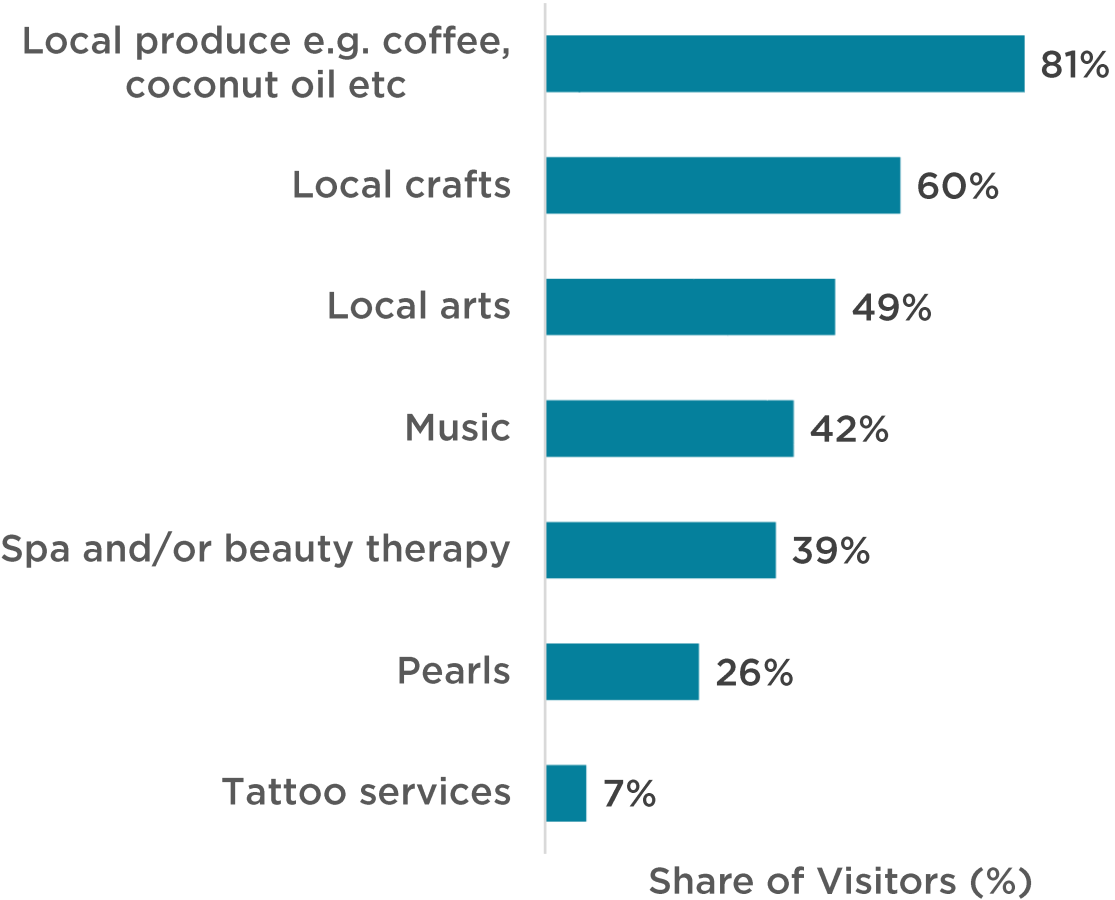
1-Very Dissatisfied to 5-Very Satisfied

Note: Multiple responses, so total does not add up to 100%

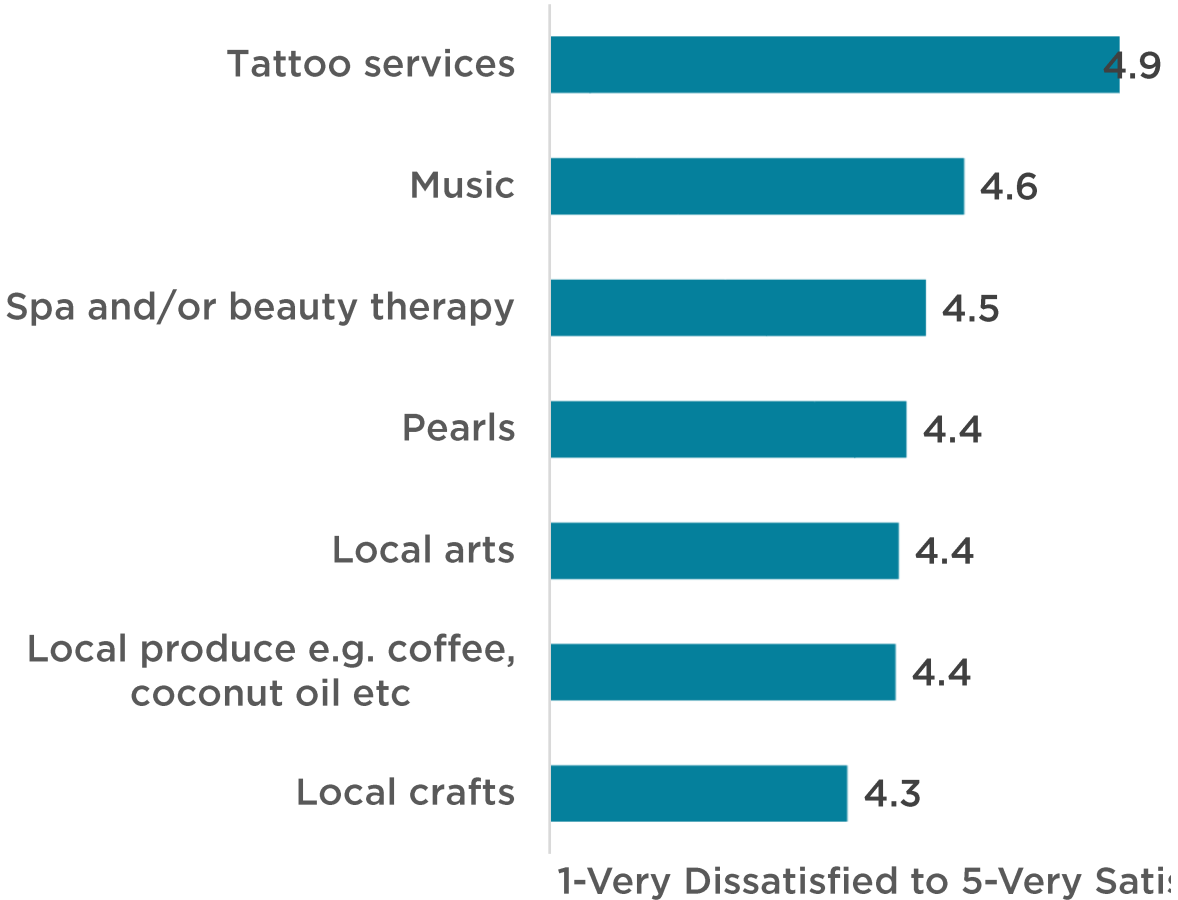


# Shopping Activities

## Participation

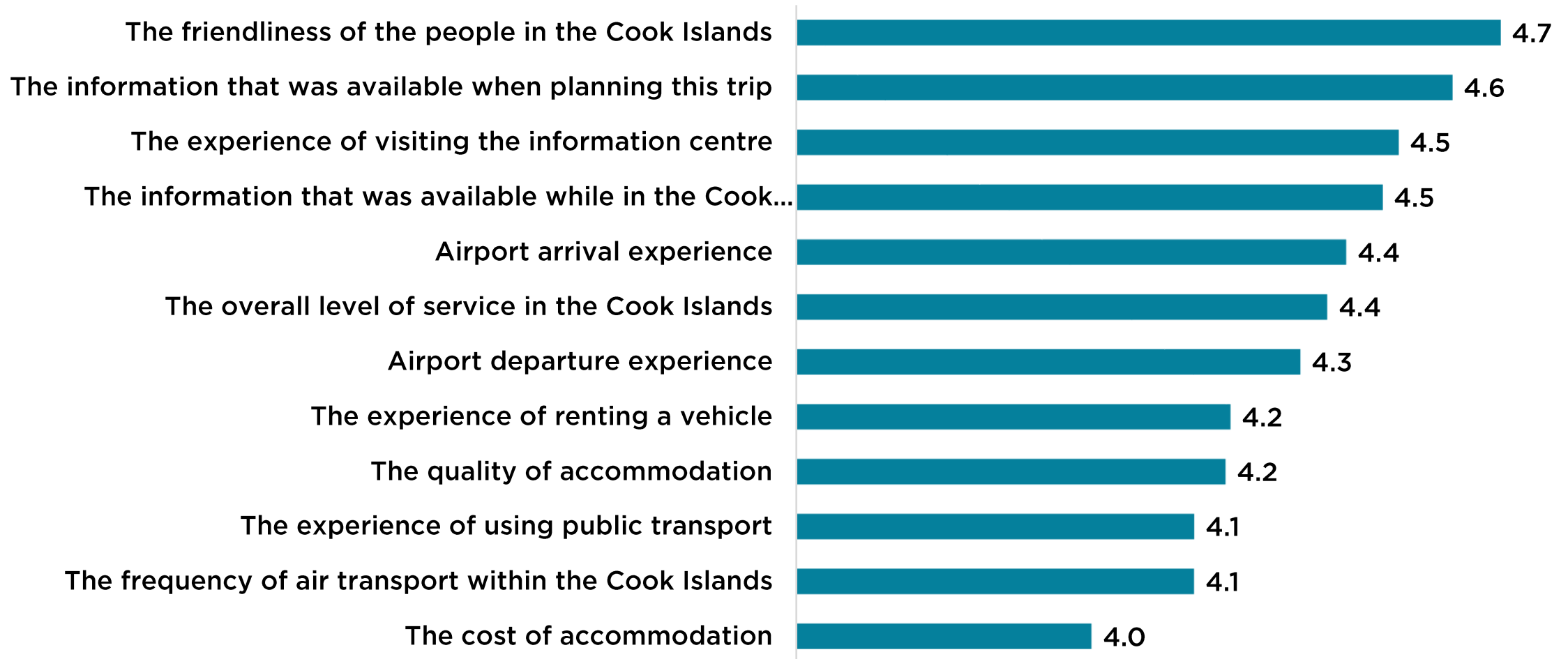


## Satisfaction



Note: Multiple responses, so total does not add up to 100%

# Satisfaction with Cook Islands Services

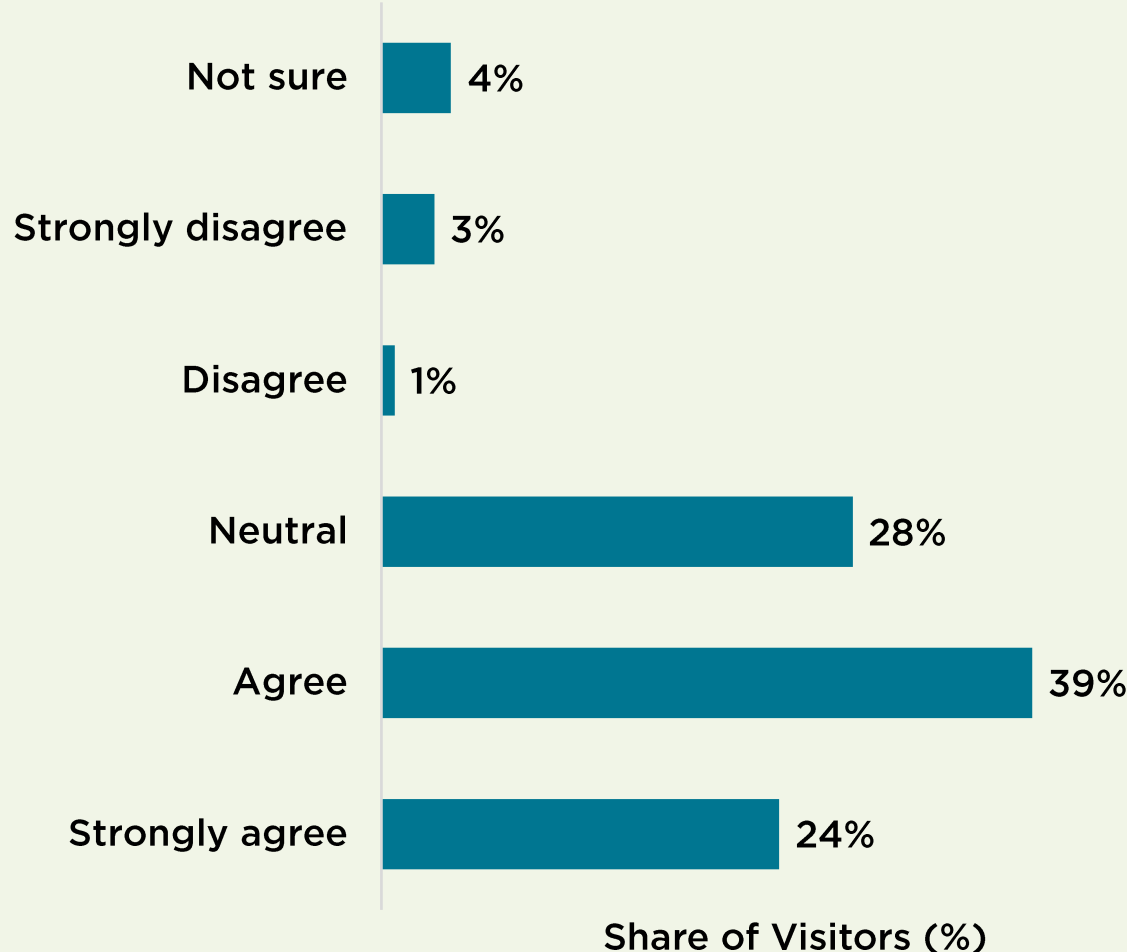
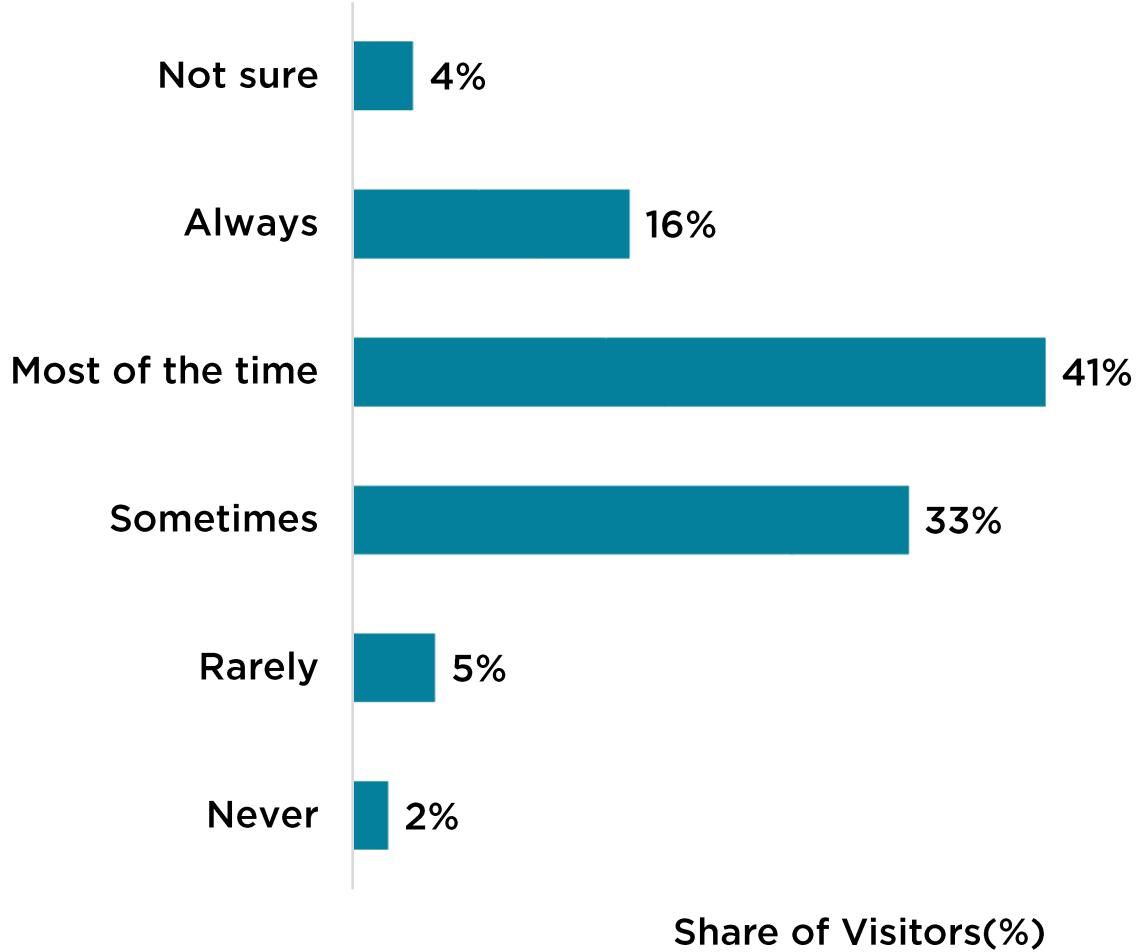


1-Very Dissatisfied to 5-Very Satisfied

# Socio-Cultural and Environmental Awareness

Q: During your trip to the Cook Islands, to what extent did you take sustainability, which includes the environment, the local community, and the culture, into account when deciding what activities to do, things to buy, or services to use?

*"I am willing to contribute to a tourist visitor levy aimed at supporting social, environmental, and cultural regeneration in the Cook Islands, because I believe that tourism can have a positive impact and I want to be part of the solution"*



Note: New variables for 2023

# Most Appealing Aspects of the Cook Islands

Q: What did you find most appealing about the Cook Islands?



Note: Total responses for the question N=174.

# Most Appealing – Local People



- + The friendliness of the people.
- + The people were so friendly and helpful.
- + The people we met.
- + The friendliness of the people.
- + Wonderfully kind people.
- + I loved visiting a school and donating art supplies and doing a few art lessons.
- + Friendliness of people, beauty of the islands and the laid back atmosphere in general.

# Most Appealing – Activities, Attractions and Entertainments



- + Lagoon was very beautiful.
- + Surf and beaches.
- + The lagoon at Aitutiki is spectacular.
- + I loved just relaxing on the beach, reading my books, going out for lunch and dinner. I had the most awesome time and will be coming back this year.
- + Surf, snorkeling, natural environment and beaches.
- + The undeveloped nature of the islands. Other islands are too developed / developing with resorts and all the associated tourist attractions. The reason people go to CI is the relaxed, natural vibe and natural beauty of the CI.
- + The CI strength is your heritage, way of life and natural beauty, these things will set the CI apart from all other island in the Pacific.
- + The lagoon cruise and papa turtle were absolutely highlights of the trip. Such beautiful scenery that we will cherish.
- + Diving experience, safari tour. Great affordable community transport.

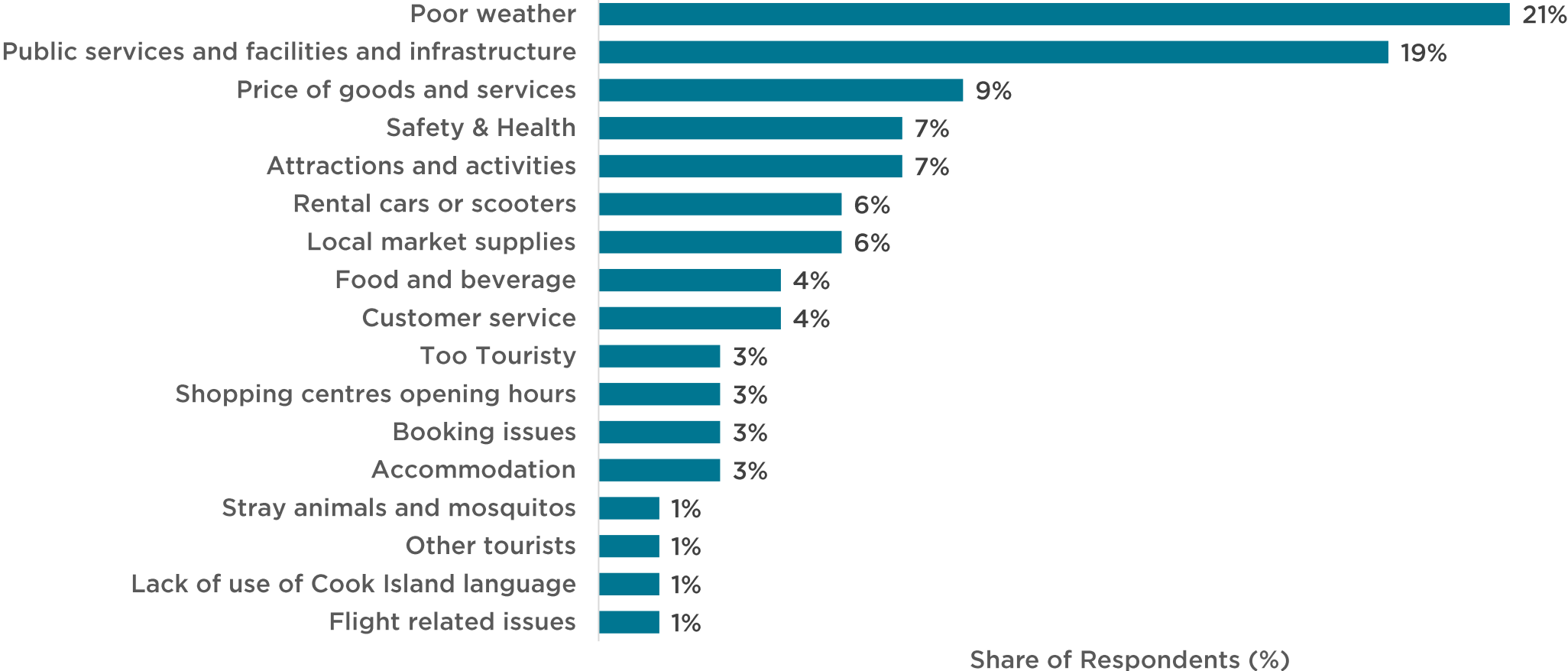
# Most Appealing – Overall good experience



- + Everything. Sorry, but we love Rarotonga. it is what it is and that's why we go back.
- + The very relaxed and slower pace to living.
- + Great island experience.
- + Peace and quiet, no crowds.
- + The overall experience. Weather, beaches and friendly, helpful people.
- + Friendliness, slower pace, beautiful surroundings.
- + Relaxing environment for family holiday.
- + A new and diverse culture I didn't know much about, the sights and scenery, the amazing people willing to go out of their way to help people no matter what.
- + Relaxed Nature.

# Least Appealing Aspects of the Cook Islands

Q: What did you find least appealing about the Cook Islands?



Note: Total responses for the question N=94.

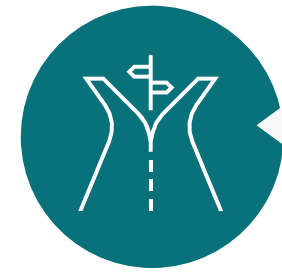


# Least Appealing Aspects – Poor Weather



- + Very windy and rainy. But that can happen anywhere.
- + Poor weather ..weather gods not happy.
- + Unfortunately, the weather wasn't as warm as we thought it would be...more information about best swimming weather and warmth of the ocean would have been helpful. The weather on Aitutaki was disappointing as we had to cancel our lagoon cruise which was THE highlight for us. The fishing boat was more a cruise than fishing and my husband and friend were disappointed as it didn't specify it trawled instead of throwing lines in.... also, had too many people on board and overpriced.
- + Unable to do snorkel trip due to weather - very windy.
- + It was very windy... but not much you can do about that...!
- + Just the wind which prevented us doing a few activities.
- + The weather was windy & cool the whole time we were there, unfortunately.

# Least Appealing - Public Service and Infrastructure



**13%**  
Share of  
comments

- + Lack of street names at street corners, the few signs in existence are too small, not lighted at night, and many are hidden by growing vegetation. Google Earth maps shows names of almost every street and avenue on their map, but it is not so on the terrain.
- + Derelict buildings uninhabitable and just left.
- + How expensive everything was.
- + Dirty roads, half finished buildings, Poor road condition.
- + Difficulty finding phone numbers online i.e. calling a taxi.
- + Restaurants, transport in general, accommodation.
- + Bumpy roads.

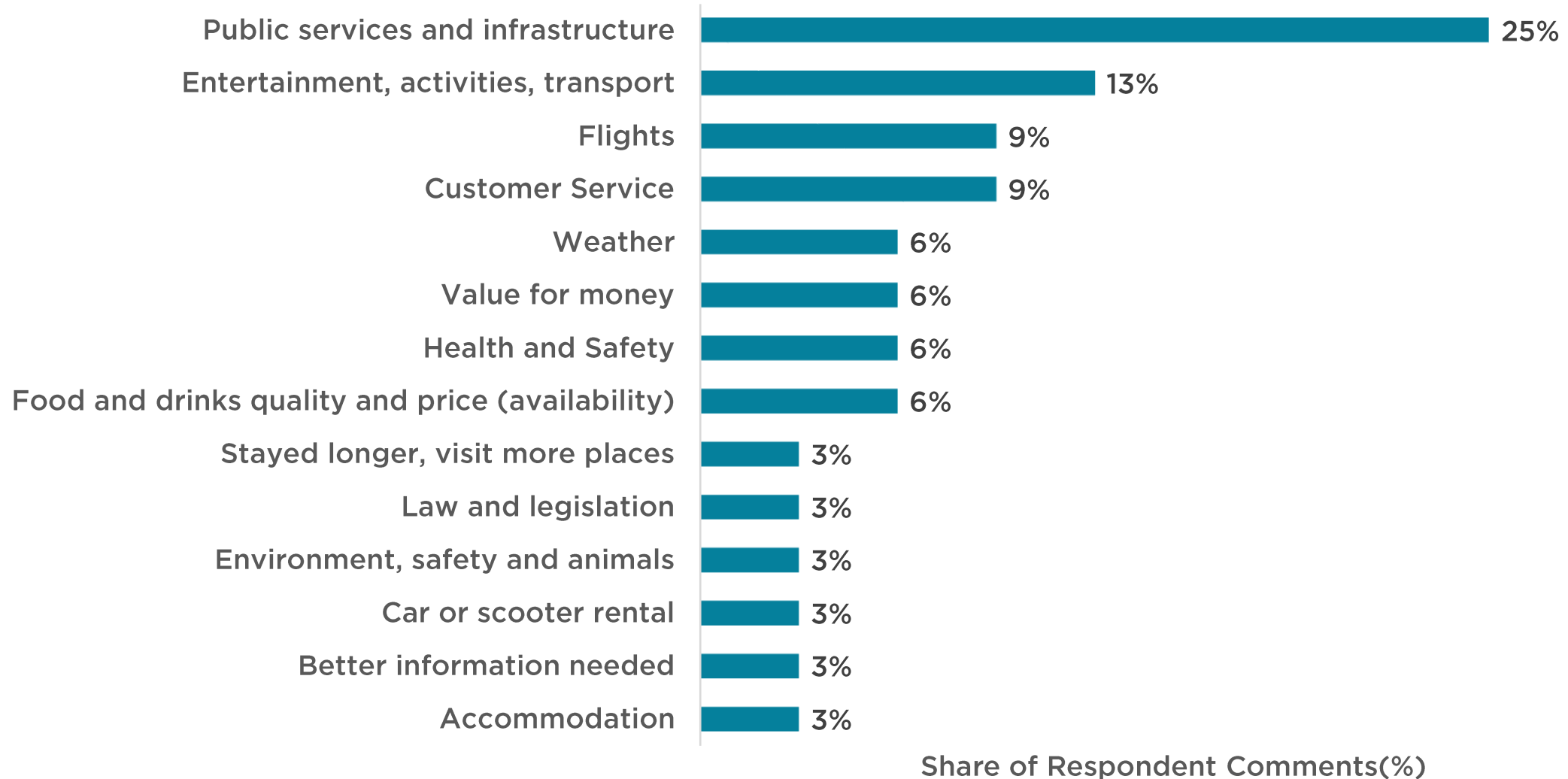
# Least Appealing Aspects – Price of Goods and Services



- + Hotels are outrageously over-priced. We could get much better quality and service for lower prices in Fiji, French Polynesia, the Maldives, and many other tropical destinations.
- + Expensive to visit outer islands.
- + Very Expensive for level of tourism.
- + The cost of internet.
- + Cost and variety of food Cost of the bus \$30 for 10 trips when you could use 5 in one outing.

# Suggestions for Improvement

Q: Is there anything that could have improved your experience of the Cook Islands?

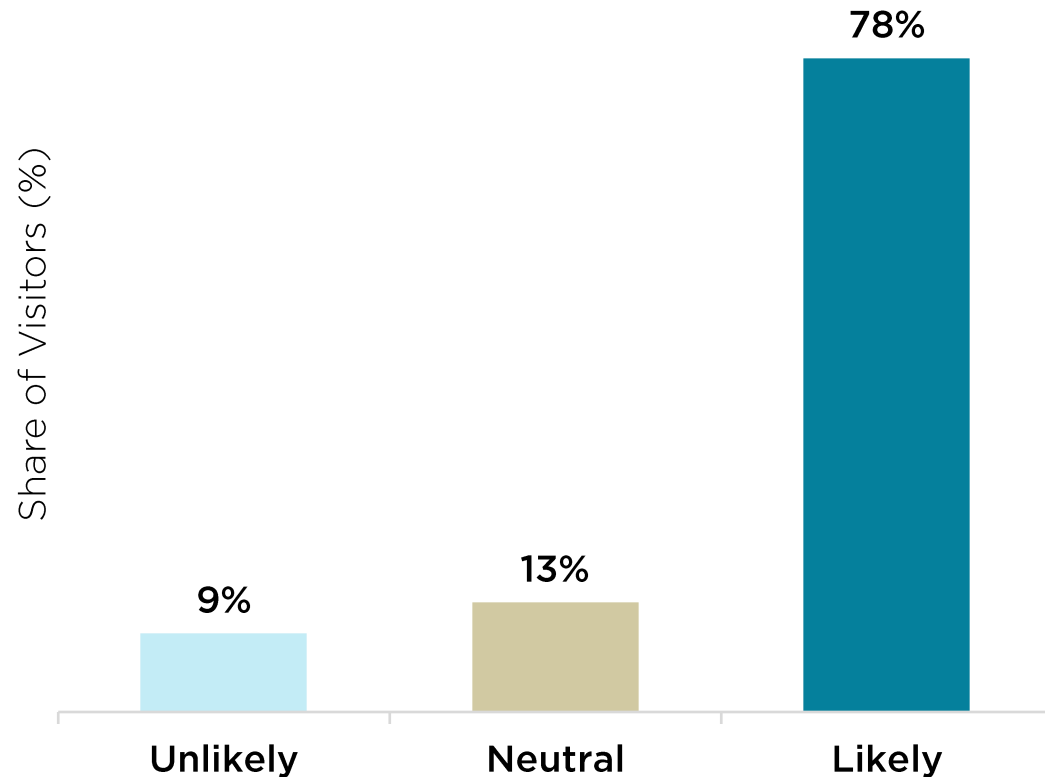


# Suggestions for Improvement - Indicative Quotes

- + More economical transport to visit other Islands.
- + Markets open a little later.
- + Better snorkeling spots.
- + Entertainment and n the hotel. Even the bar closed at 9pm.
- + Better service, especially at big hotels like Pacific Resort, where a lot of employees just didn't seem to care, even though we were paying more than \$1000 per night (five times as much as we pay elsewhere in the world!!!)
- + More counters open on arrival at airport.
- + Direct flights from Australia with a business class option.

# Willingness to return to the Cook Islands

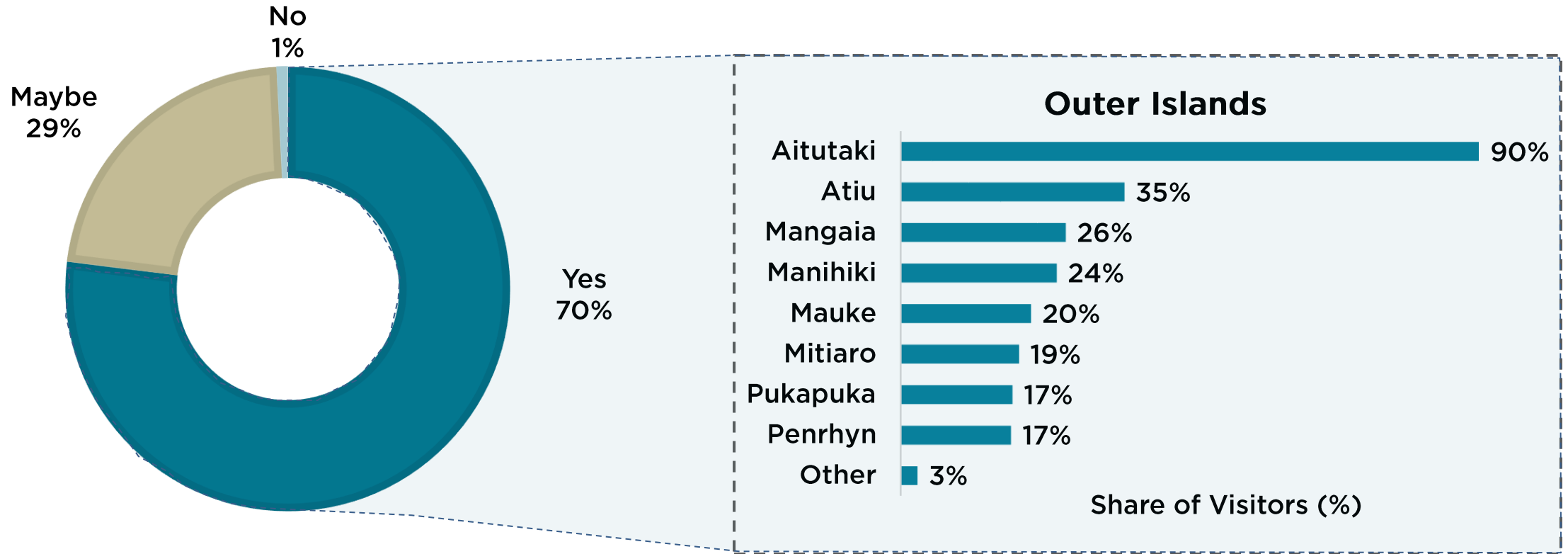
## Willingness to return to the Cook Islands



## Quotes: Reasons to not return

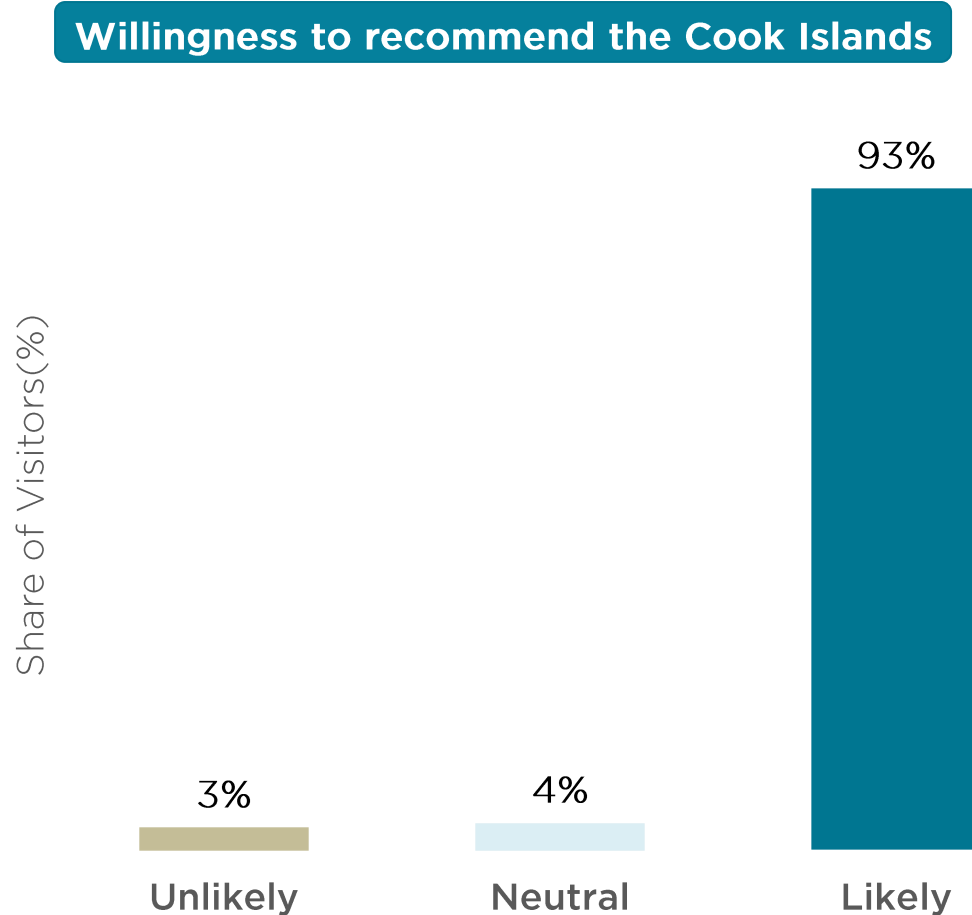
- + Didn't offer anything new. Like other Pacific places weather disappointing & expensive compared to similar places.
- + Did not enjoy the experience at all, native people were rude and not friendly, overpriced for what we spent in cook island could have got so much more at other destination. Resort was nice but for the money per night it was far from luxury standard we expect. food average at best generally below expectation. food at night market was reasonable however most stalls were not run by locals.
- + Not enough fish or palegic life while scuba diving.

# Willingness to Visit Outer Islands



Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%

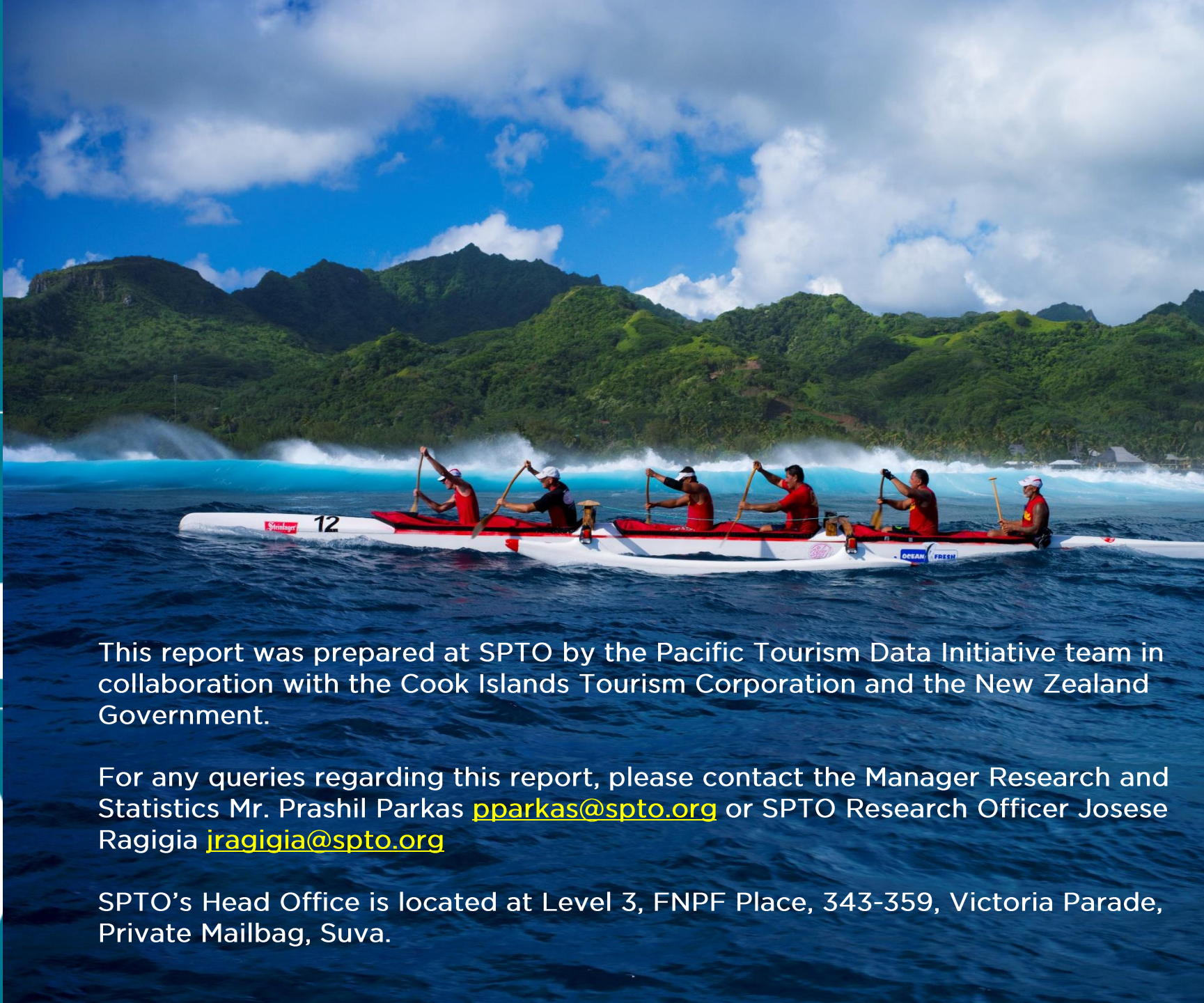
# Willingness to recommend the Cook Islands



## Quotes: Reasons to not recommend

- + Very Friendly People .... Fresh Food not accessible.... Frozen food from NZ & Australia.
- + The value of going to the Cook Islands is much worse than the value of going to other Pacific Islands like those in Fiji and French Polynesia. We stayed in much better hotels in Fiji and French Polynesia for maybe 30 percent of the price of our hotels in the Cook Islands.
- + Did not enjoy the experience, we have travelled to many countries and destinations within Australia and would recommend others, especially if they are not as financially sound as we are, to spend their money travelling Australia or go to Bali for a 3rd of the price.





This report was prepared at SPTO by the Pacific Tourism Data Initiative team in collaboration with the Cook Islands Tourism Corporation and the New Zealand Government.

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