

# Cook Islands

International Visitor Survey Report  
January - March 2024

SOLO



# Acknowledgements

- ❖ The Pacific Tourism Organization (SPTO) expresses its gratitude to all contributors to this report on IVS data from January to March 2024, 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 the 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.

# Executive Summary

- ❖ The survey, conducted from January to March 2024, analyzed 803 responses out of 1,073 collected, representing 5% of actual visitors with a 10% response rate. Among the respondents, 67% were first-time visitors, and the average household income was NZD 162,343.
- ❖ Visitors were primarily attracted by nature attractions, cultural experiences, business opportunities, and connections with family and friends in the Cook Islands. Overall visitor satisfaction was high, with a rating of 4.7 out of 5. A substantial 98% of visitors indicated they would recommend Cook Islands to others, and 94% expressed willingness to return.
- ❖ The average prepaid spend per visitor was NZD 2,454 with an estimated 40% (NZD 982) flowing into the local economy. In-country spending per visitor per trip averaged NZD 2,217 with an average stay of 8.8 nights. This contributed to a total economic impact of NZD 94 million from January to March 2024.
- ❖ Visitors found the activities and attractions, friendly locals, and relaxed atmosphere most appealing. However, the prices of goods and services, food and beverages and unfavorable weather were the least appealing aspects. To improve the overall visitor experience, suggestions included improve accommodation and services, control prices and quality of food and beverages as well as better tourist information to be made available at all time.

# Background

- ❖ The 2024 January-March Cook Islands 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 January-March 2024 is analysed to help us understand the visitor experience and gain insights into tourism recovery 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 January to March visitor emails were collected through the passenger arrival cards completed by visitors on their arrival into Cook Islands.
- ❖ **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 January to March 2024 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 Cook Islands Tourism Corporation (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 January to March 2024 period was similar, but not exact, to the survey instrument used in the January to March 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 January to March 2024 period.
- ❖ **N.B.** All analyses are based on the IVS respondents. No weighting was applied, as the sample data is representative. Therefore, the IVS respondents were not weighted to the actual arrival data.
- ❖ 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 (January – March 2024)



**7,892** TOTAL VALID EMAILS SENT



**803** TOTAL COMPLETE RESPONSES

**10%**  
CONVERSION RATE

*Note: 1,073 responses were received. After data cleaning, 803 responses remained.*

## RESPONSES COVERED



**1,355** ADULTS



**218** CHILDREN

**5%**  
OF ALL VISITORS IN THIS PERIOD

# Cook Islands International Visitor Survey

## Snapshot January – March 2024

### Country of residence



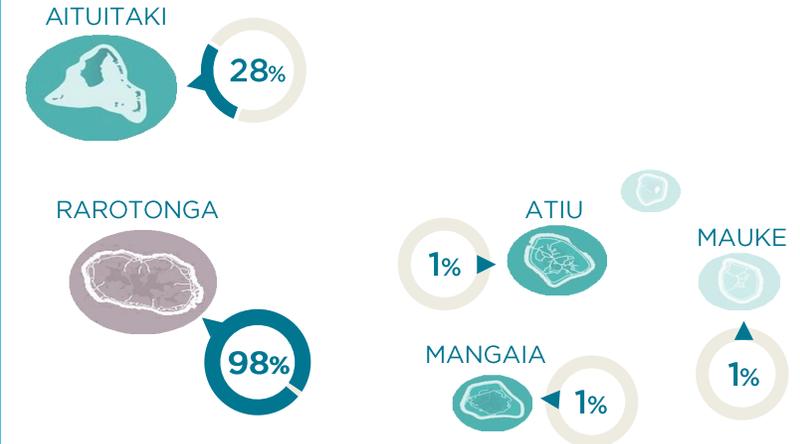
### Purpose of visit



### Most Participated Activities



### Islands visited



### Economic impact

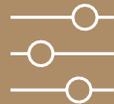


Note: The estimated flow-back rate into the Cook Islands for prepaid spend is 40%. With an average prepaid spend of \$2,454 per person per trip, this equates to \$982.

# Report Structure



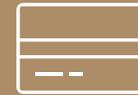
Visitor Profile



Visitor  
Characteristics  
& Preferences



Information &  
Decision Making

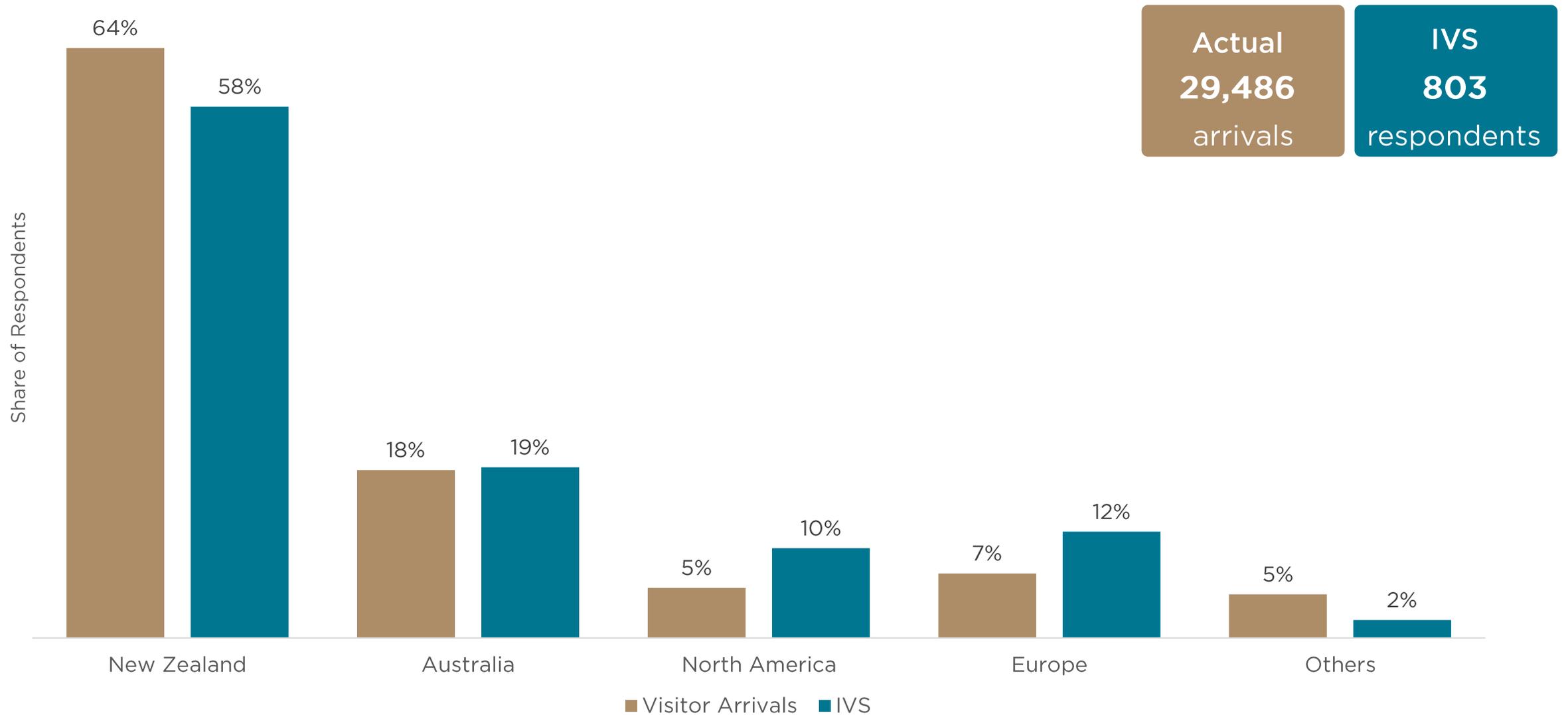


Visitor Spending  
& Impact



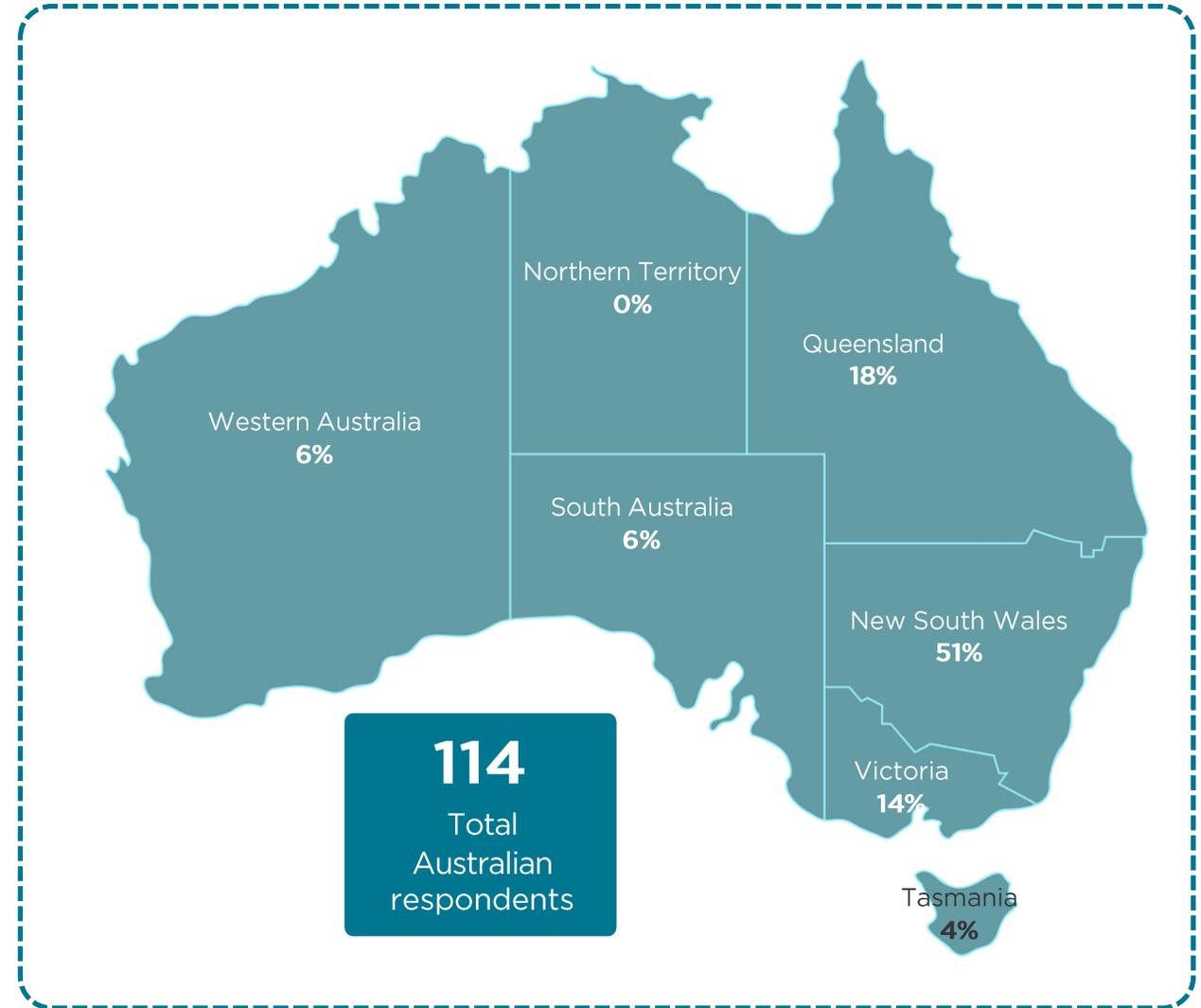
Visitor  
Satisfaction

# Source Markets: IVS Respondents vs Actual Arrival



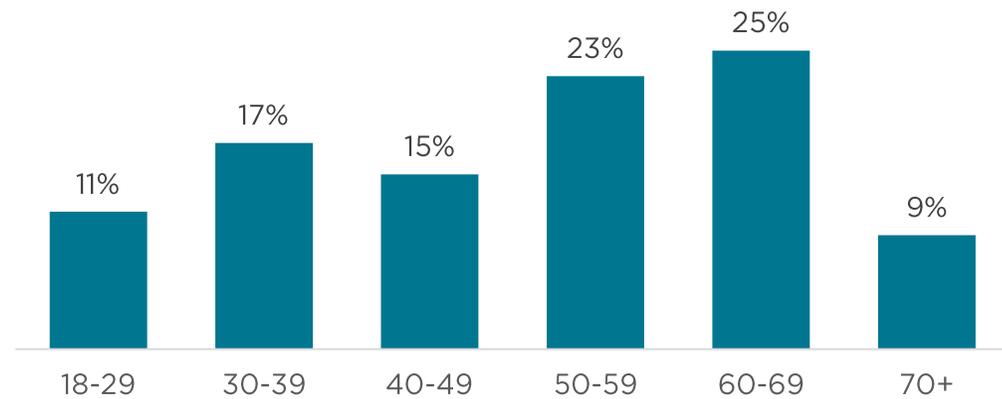
Note: Due to rounding, some totals do not sum to 100%. No weighting was applied, as the sample data is representative..

# Top Source Markets

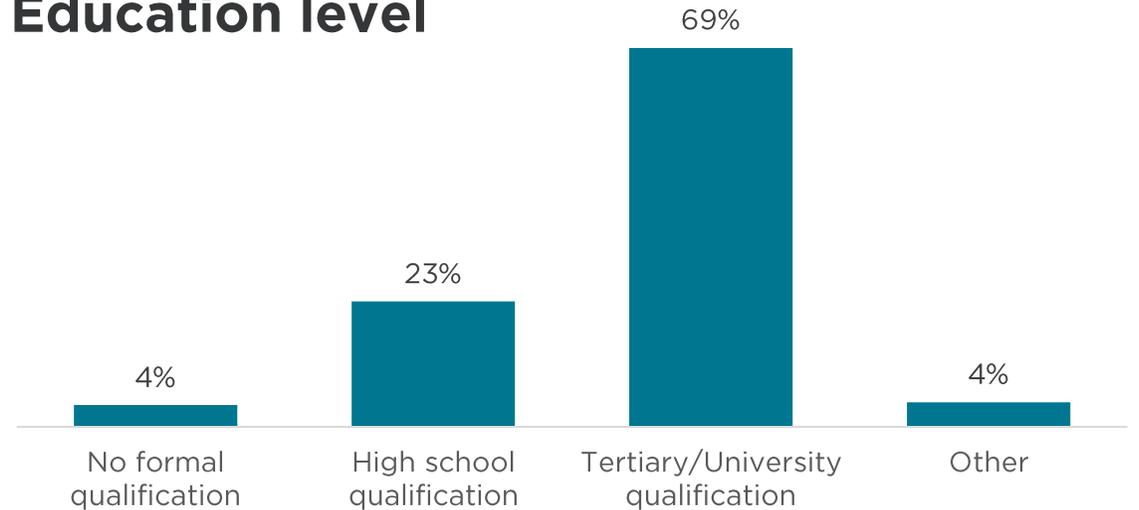


# Respondent Demographics

## Age



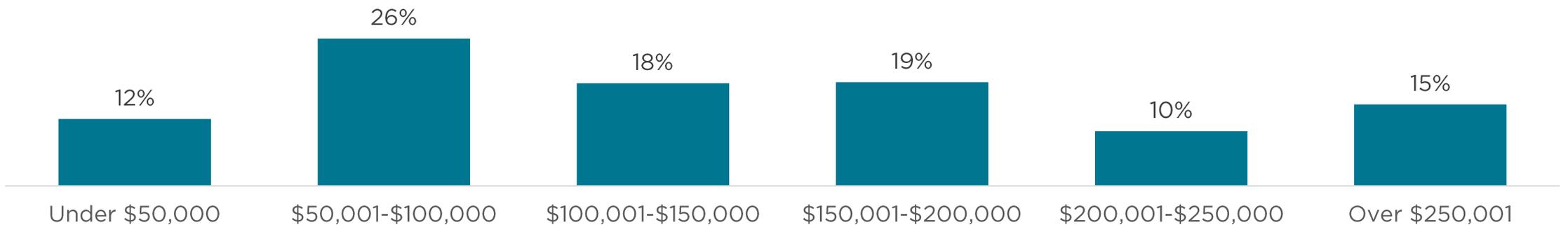
## Education level



## Annual Household Income

Avg. household income

**NZD \$162,343**  
**USD \$271,112**



Note: % share of IVS respondents. \$ in NZD. The average exchange rate to NZD and USD for Jan - Mar 2024 was applied.

# Report Structure



Visitor Profile



Visitor  
Characteristics  
& Preferences



Information &  
Decision Making



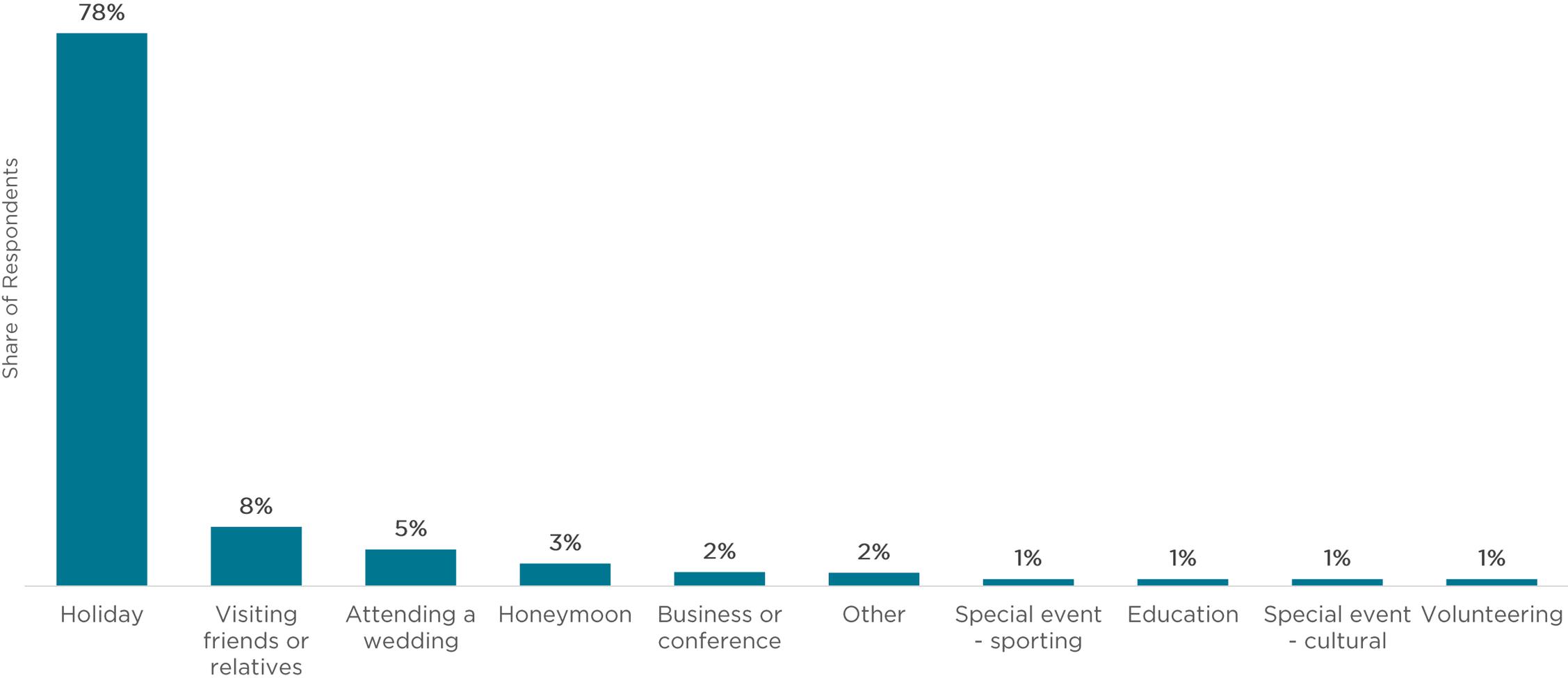
Visitor Spending  
& Impact



Visitor  
Satisfaction

# Purpose of Visit

Q What was the main purpose of your visit?



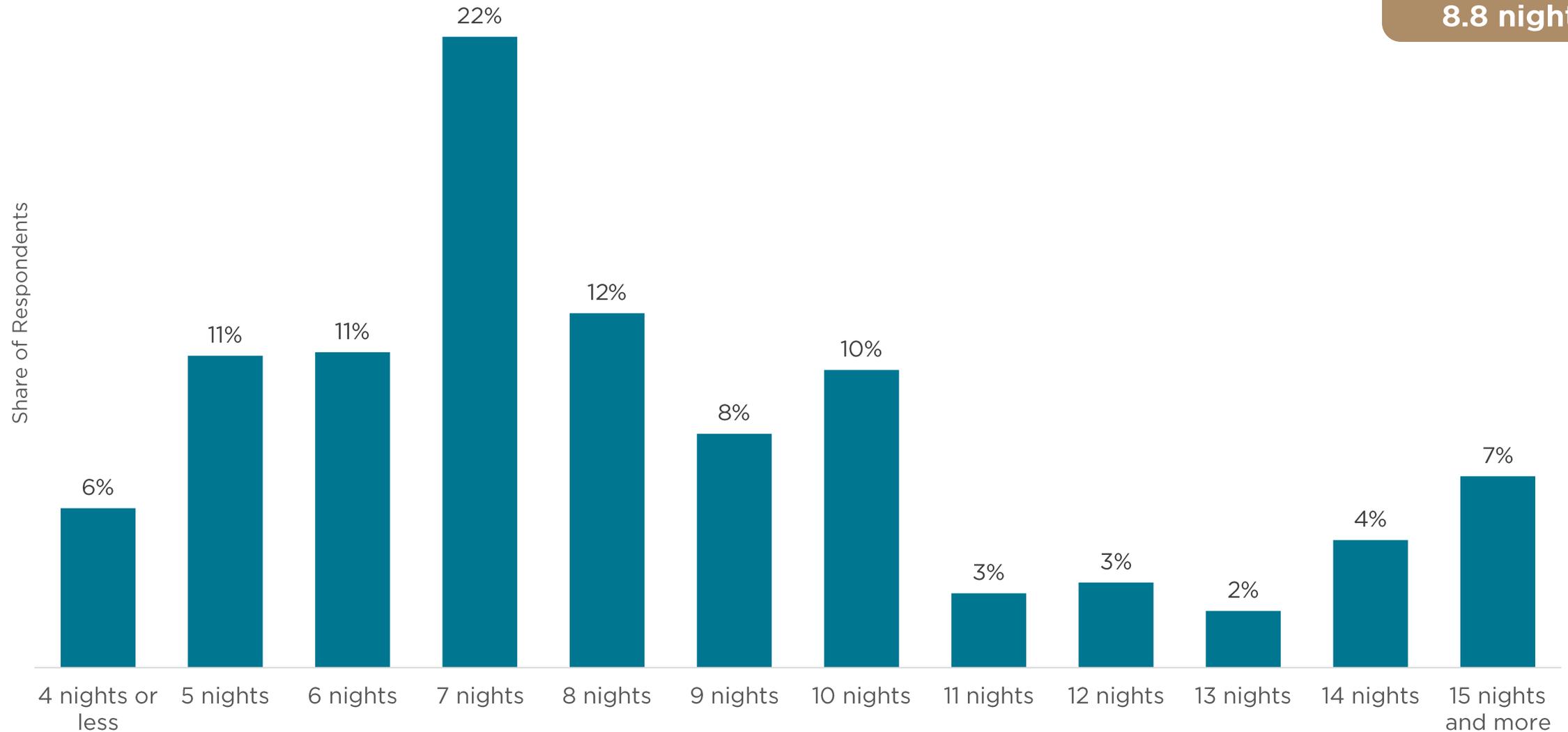
Note: N=802. Due to rounding, total does not sum to 100%

# Length of Stay (nights)

Q How many nights did you spend in Cook Islands?

Avg. Length of Stay

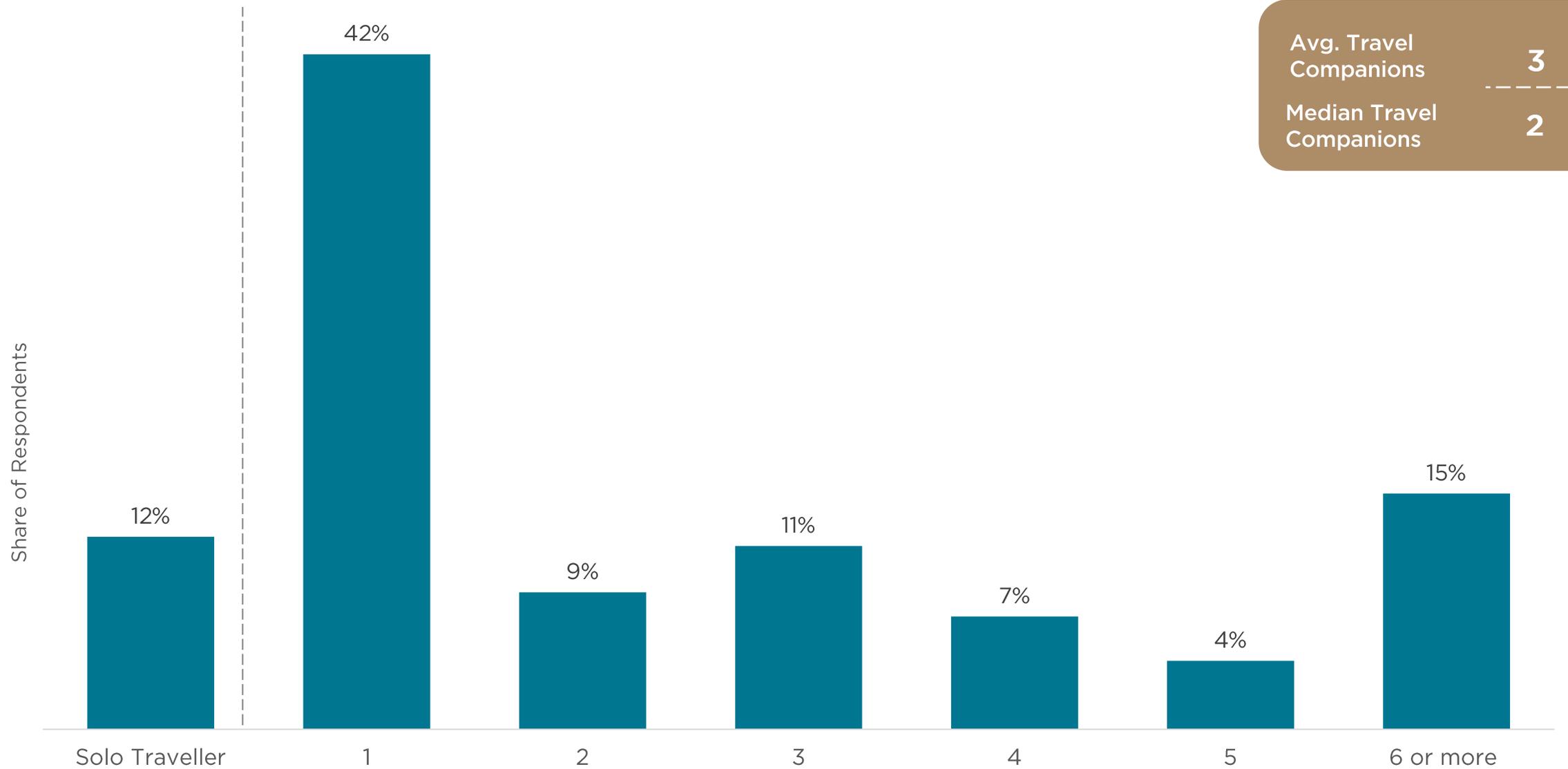
**8.8 nights**



Note: 31 and 31+ days as outliers were removed for length of stay analysis

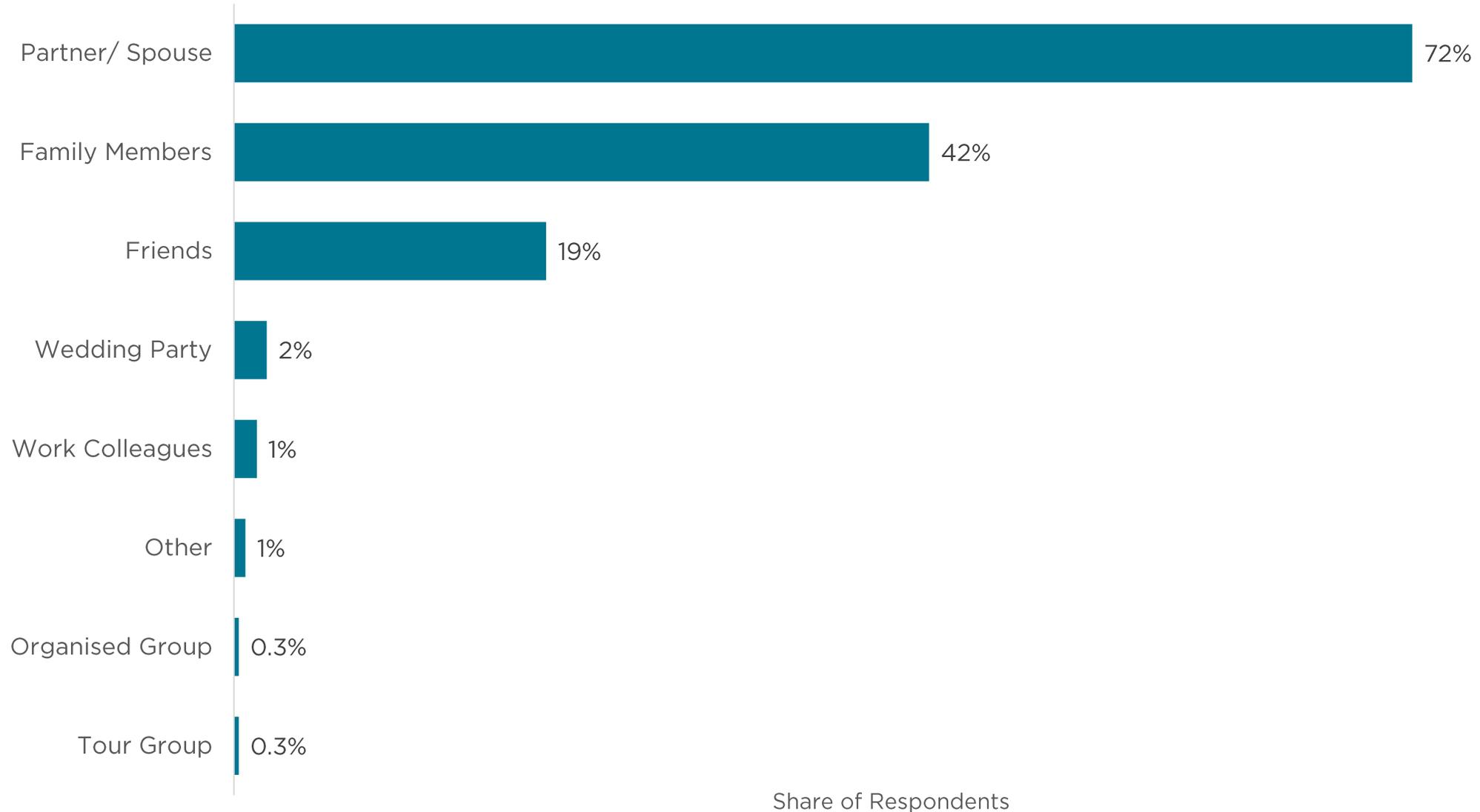
# Travel Group Size

Q How many people accompanied you on this trip?



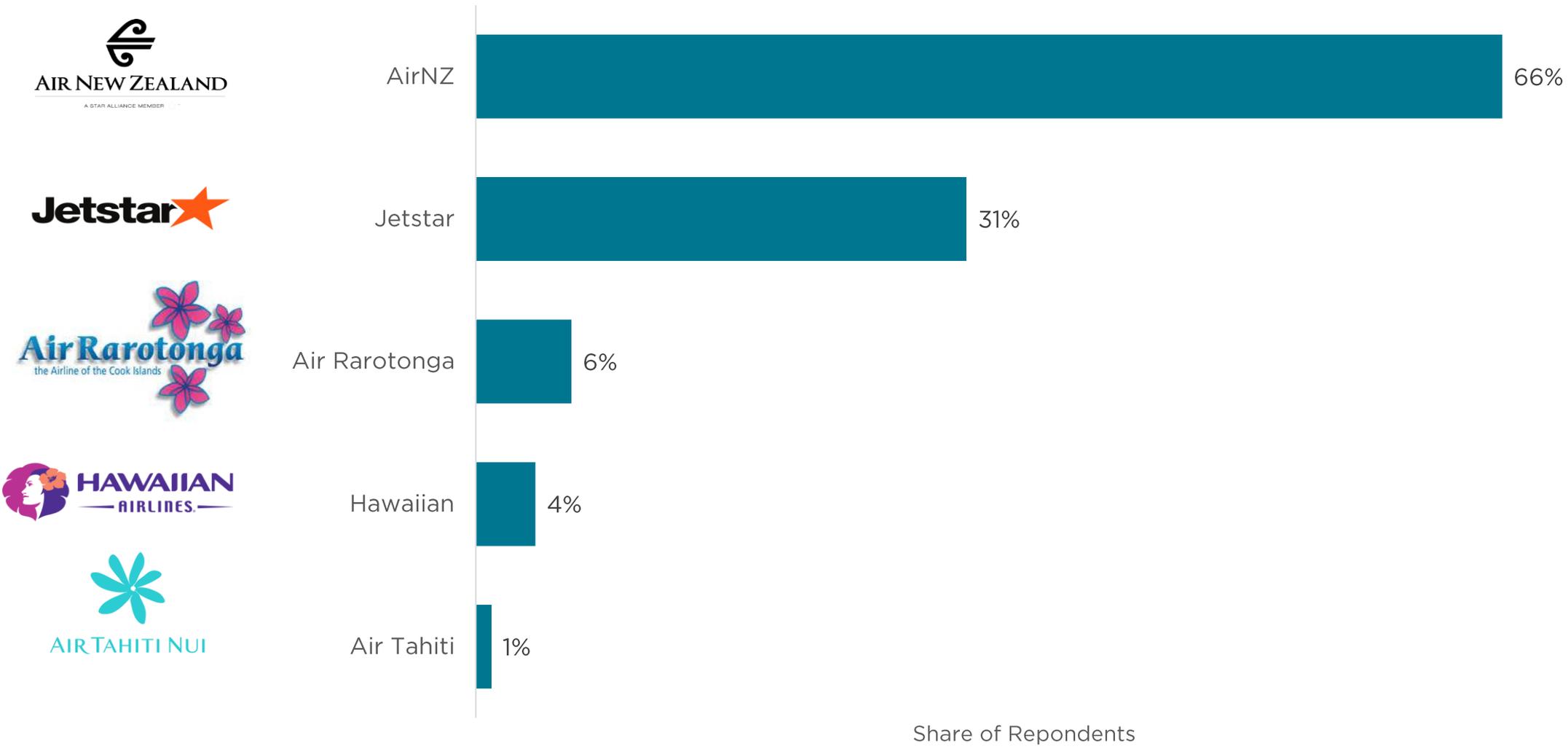
Note: N=701. Due to rounding, total does not sum to 100%

# Travel Companions



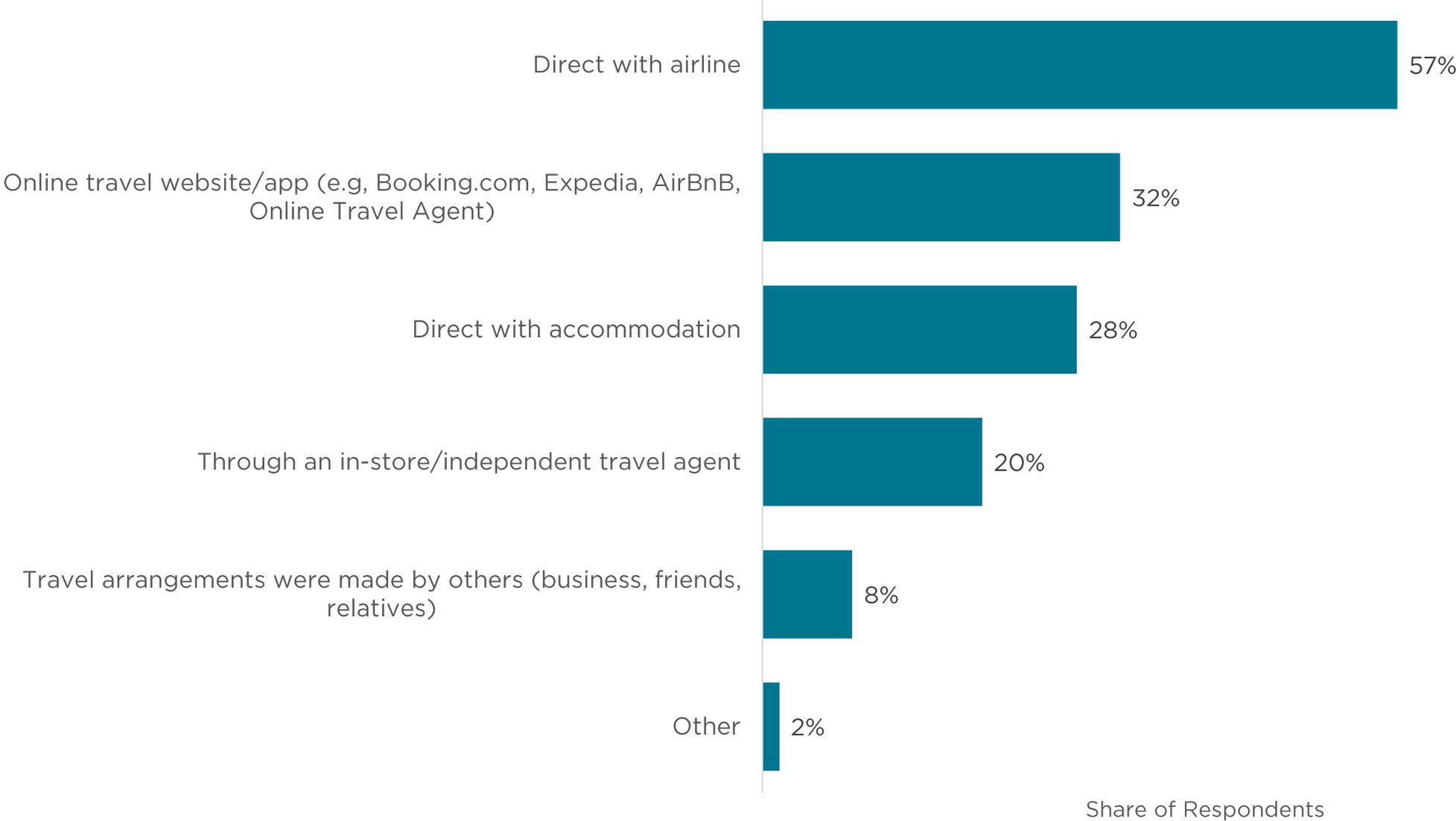
*Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%*

# Airlines Used for Travel



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

# Purchasing of Travel



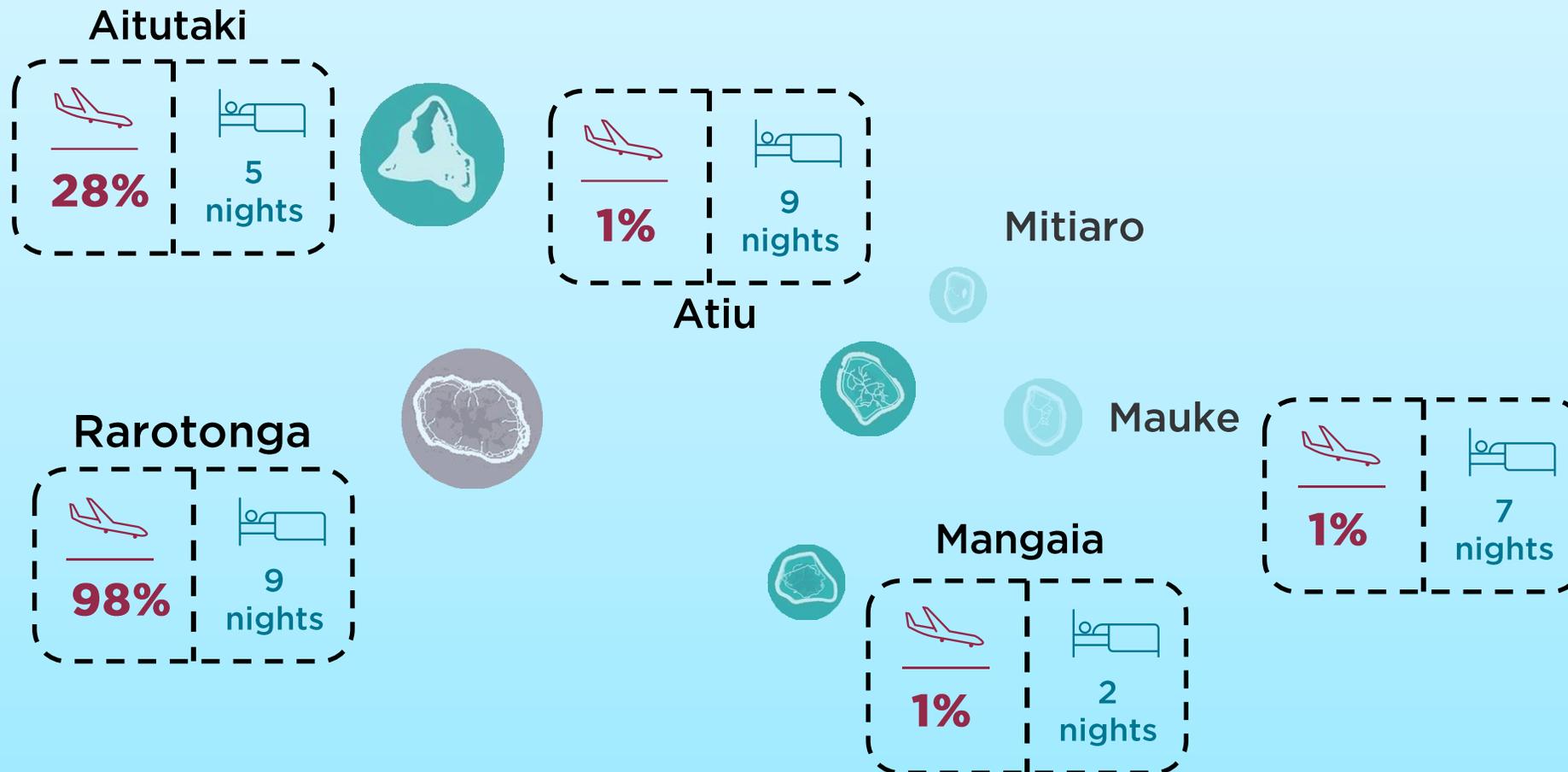
*Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%*

# Islands Visited & Avg. Length of Stay

Avg. Length of Stay  
**8.8 Nights**

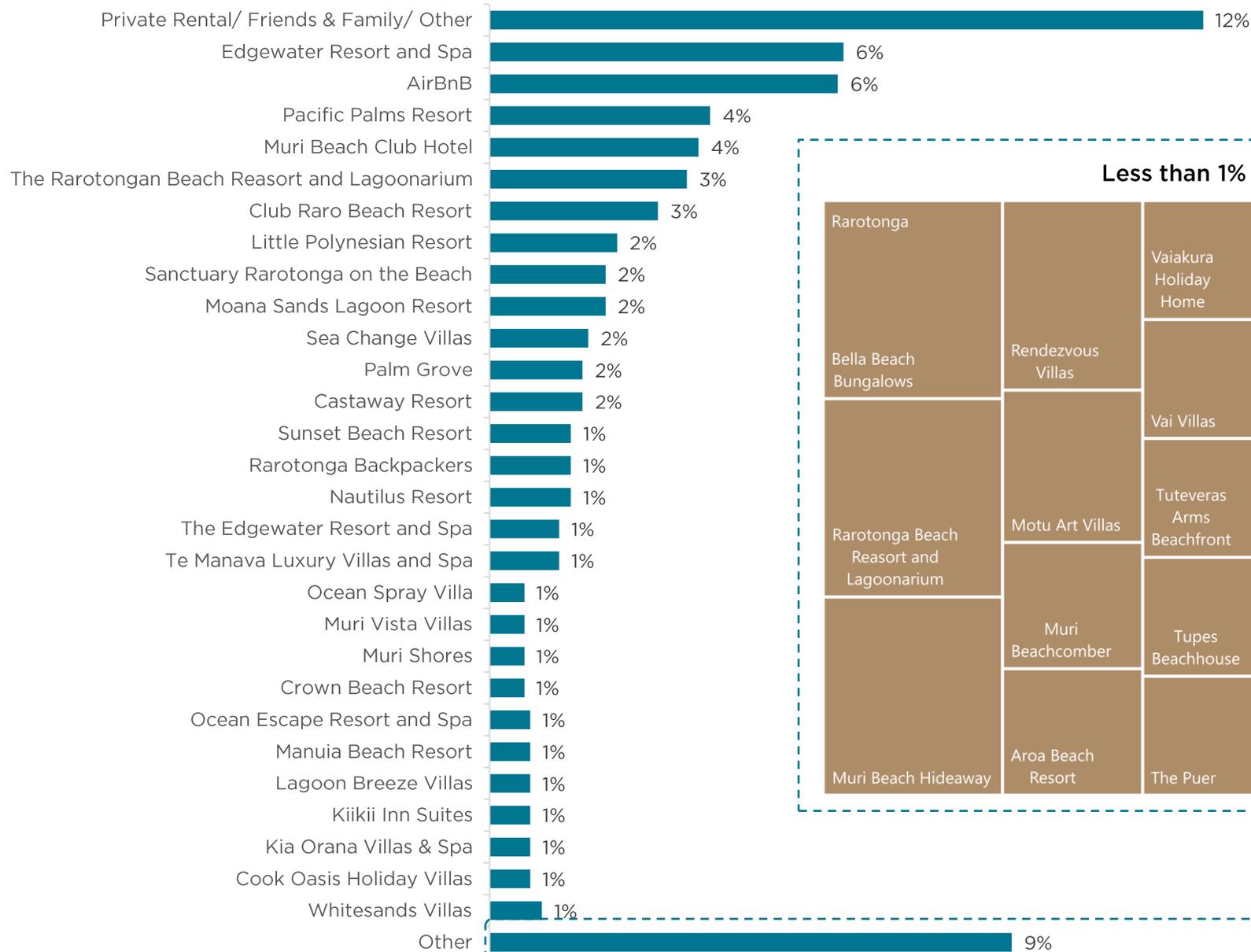
Q: Which island(s) did you visit?

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

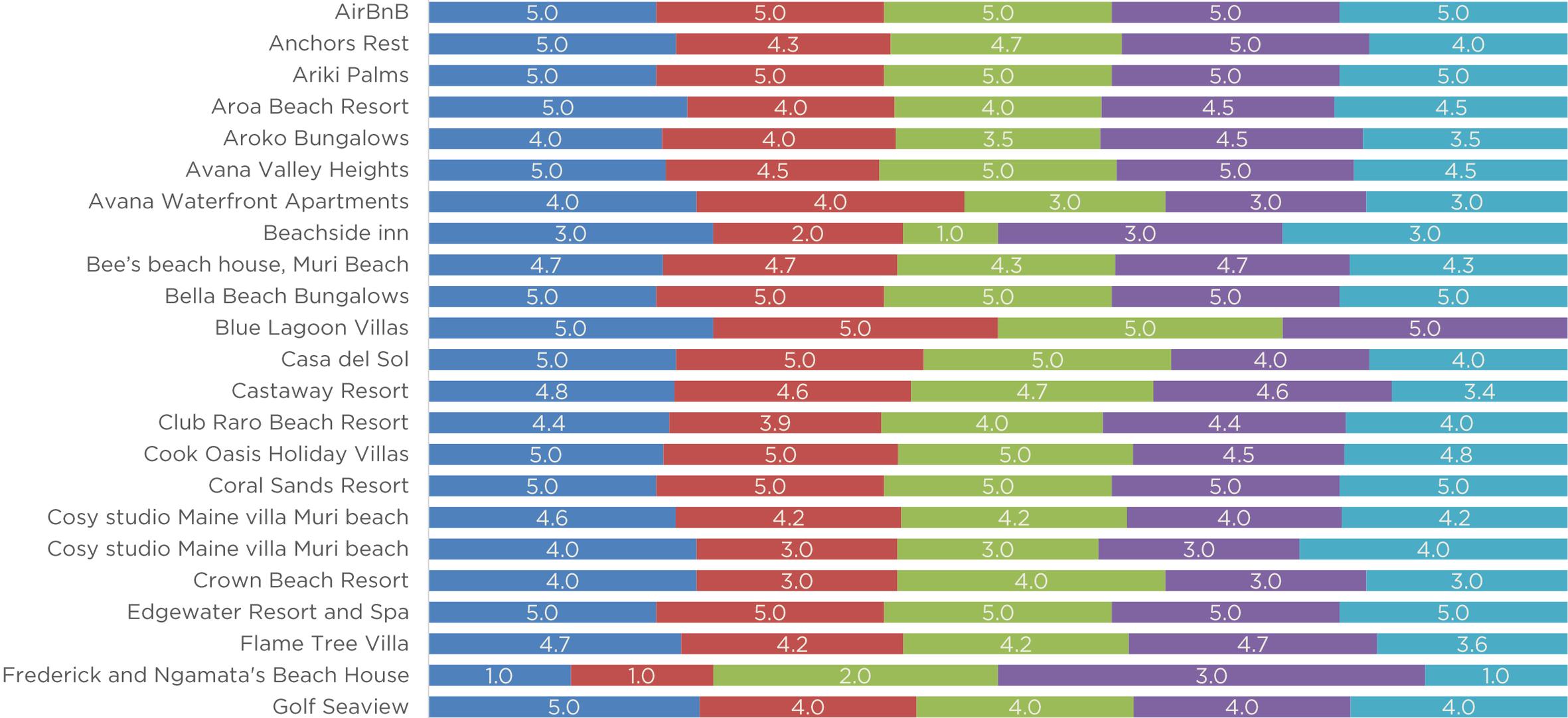


Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%.

# Accommodations Visited in Rarotonga

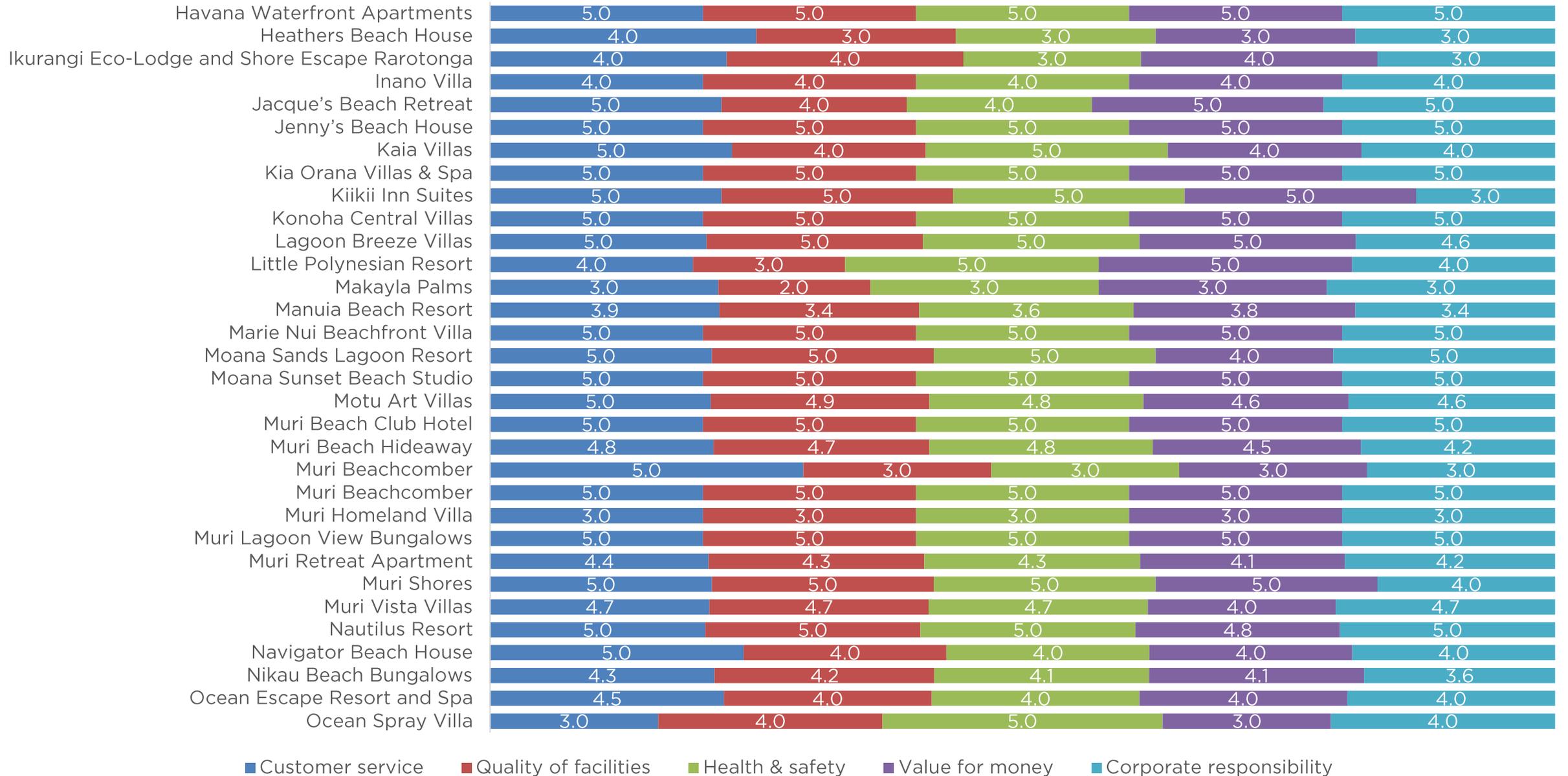


# Rarotonga Accommodations Ratings



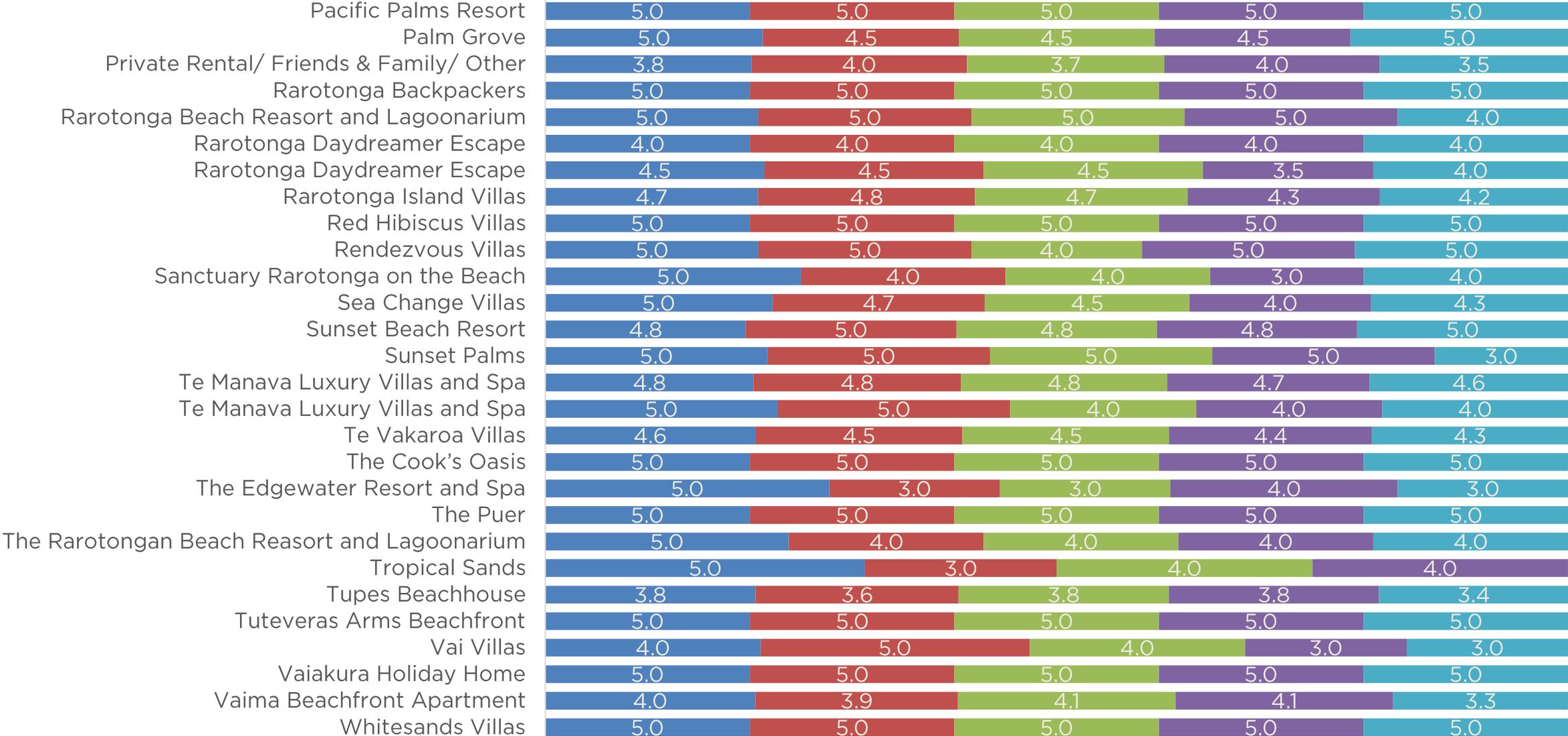
■ Customer service  
 ■ Quality of facilities  
 ■ Health & safety  
 ■ Value for money  
 ■ Corporate responsibility

# Rarotonga Accommodations Ratings



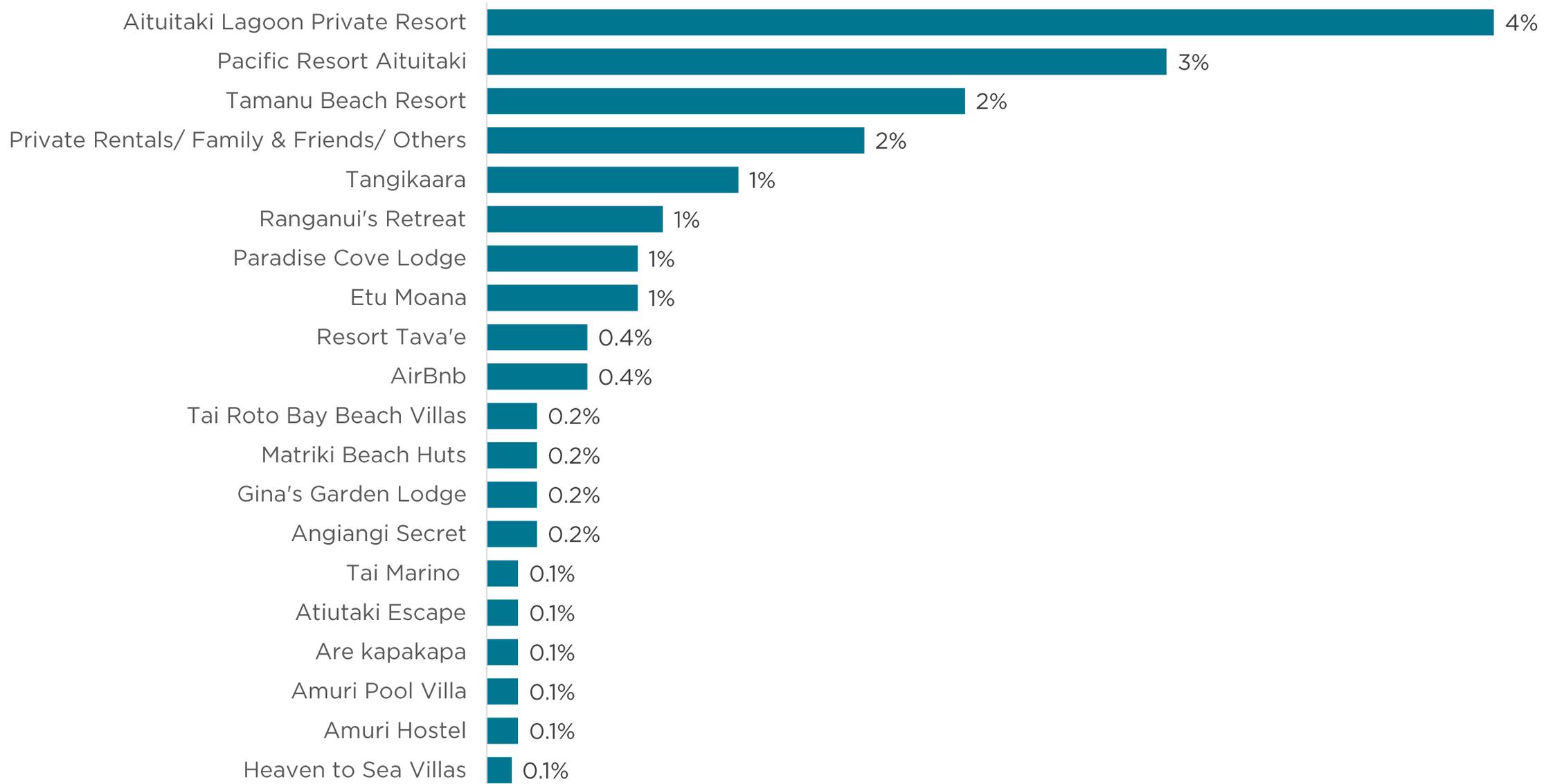
■ Customer service  
 ■ Quality of facilities  
 ■ Health & safety  
 ■ Value for money  
 ■ Corporate responsibility

# Rarotonga Accommodations Ratings



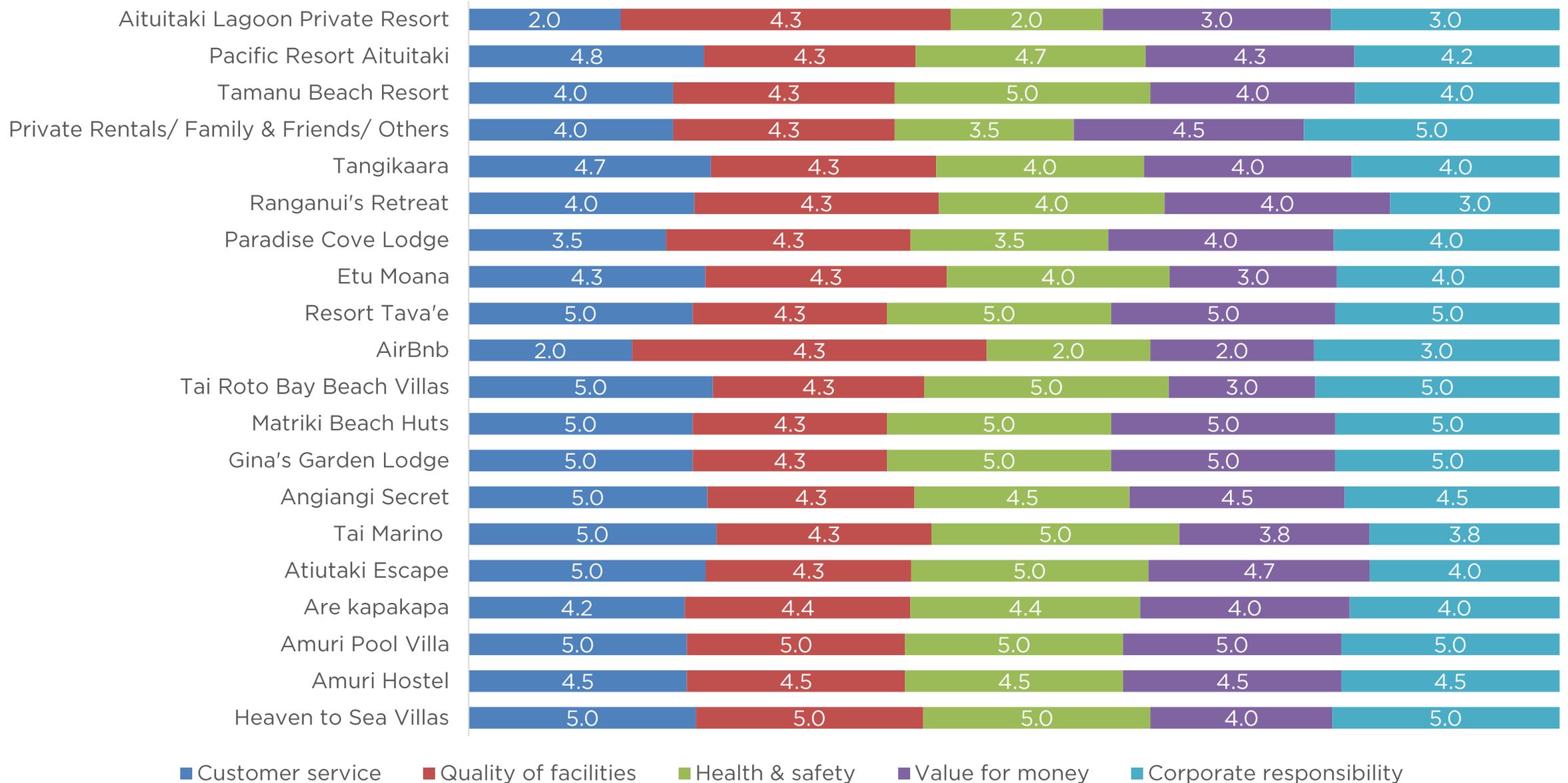
■ Customer service  
 ■ Quality of facilities  
 ■ Health & safety  
 ■ Value for money  
 ■ Corporate responsibility

# Accommodations Visited in Aitutiki



Share of Respondents

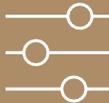
# Aitutiki Accommodations Ratings



# Report Structure



Visitor Profile



Visitor  
Characteristics  
& Preferences



Information &  
Decision Making



Visitor Spending  
& Impact

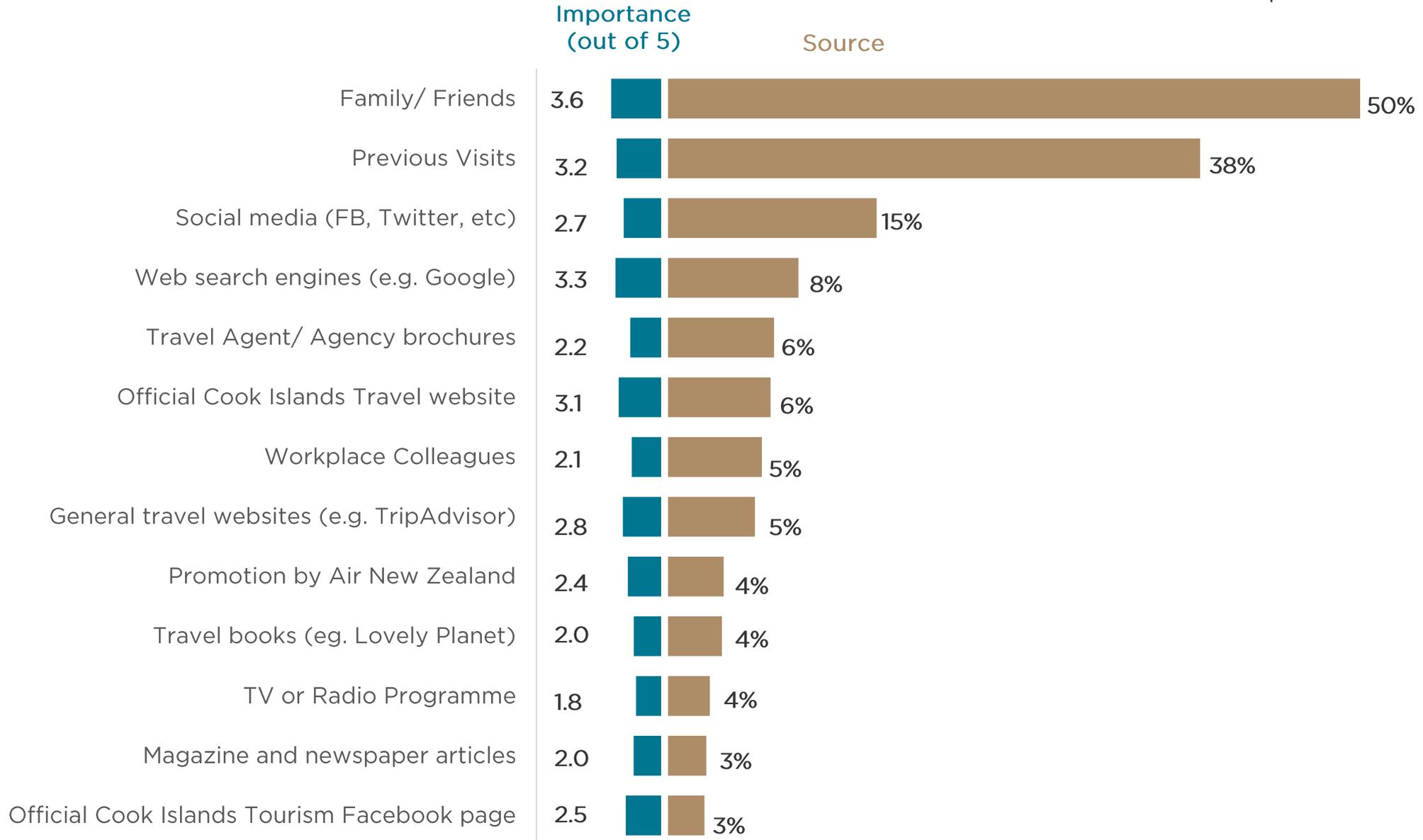


Visitor  
Satisfaction

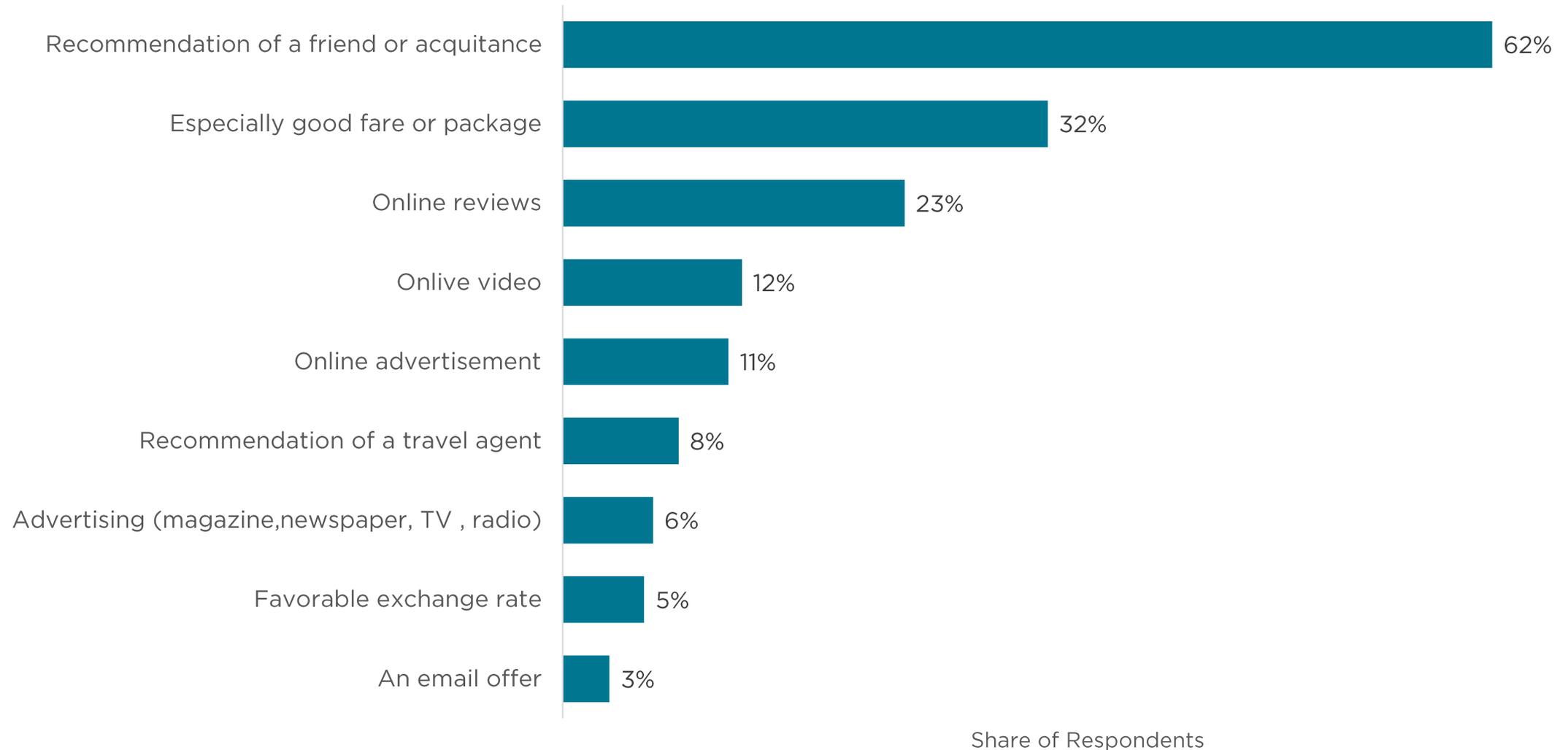
# Information Source

Q: How did you find out about Cook Islands as a destination?

Q: How important was the information source?

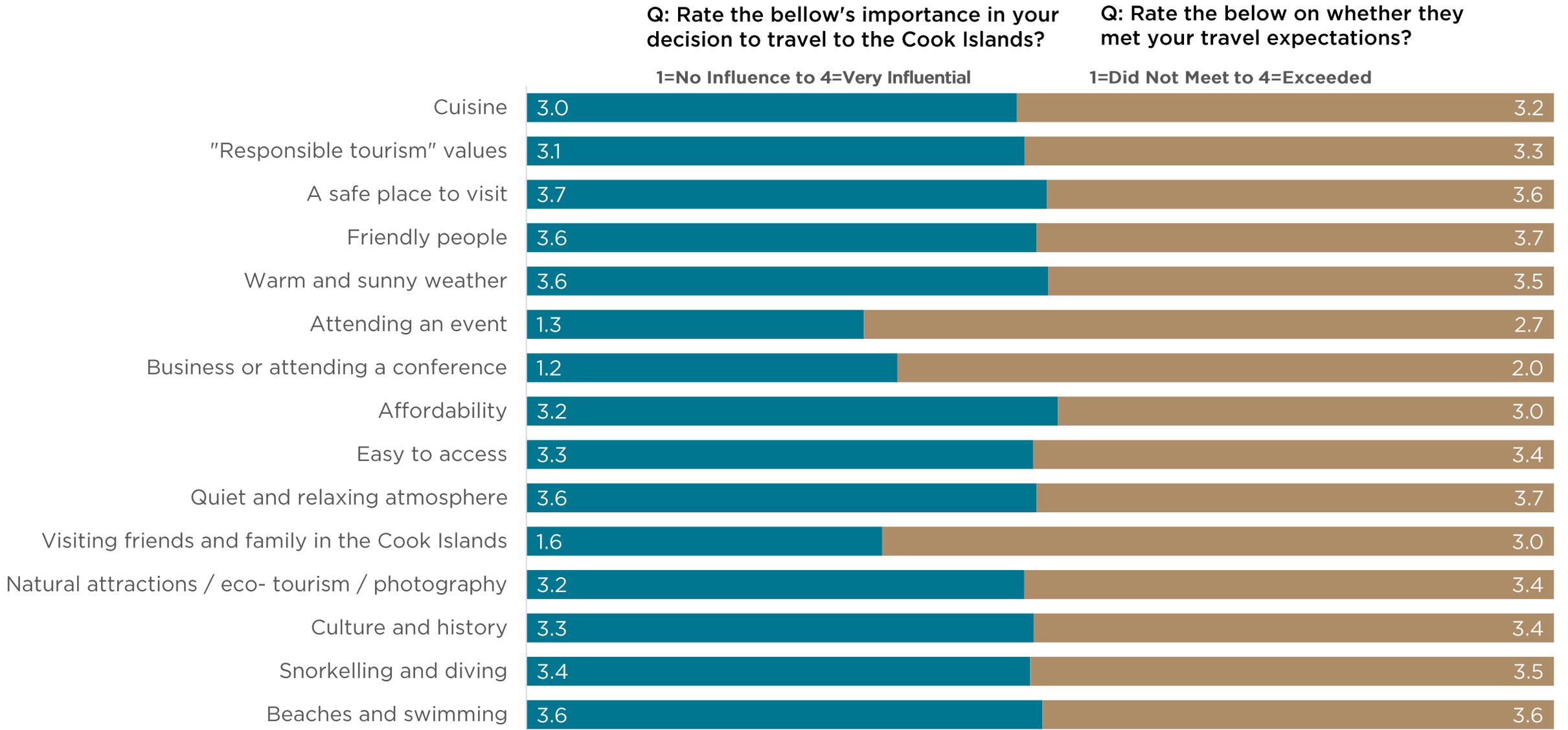


# Important Promotion/ Advertising Channels that assisted in selecting to visit the Cook Islands



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

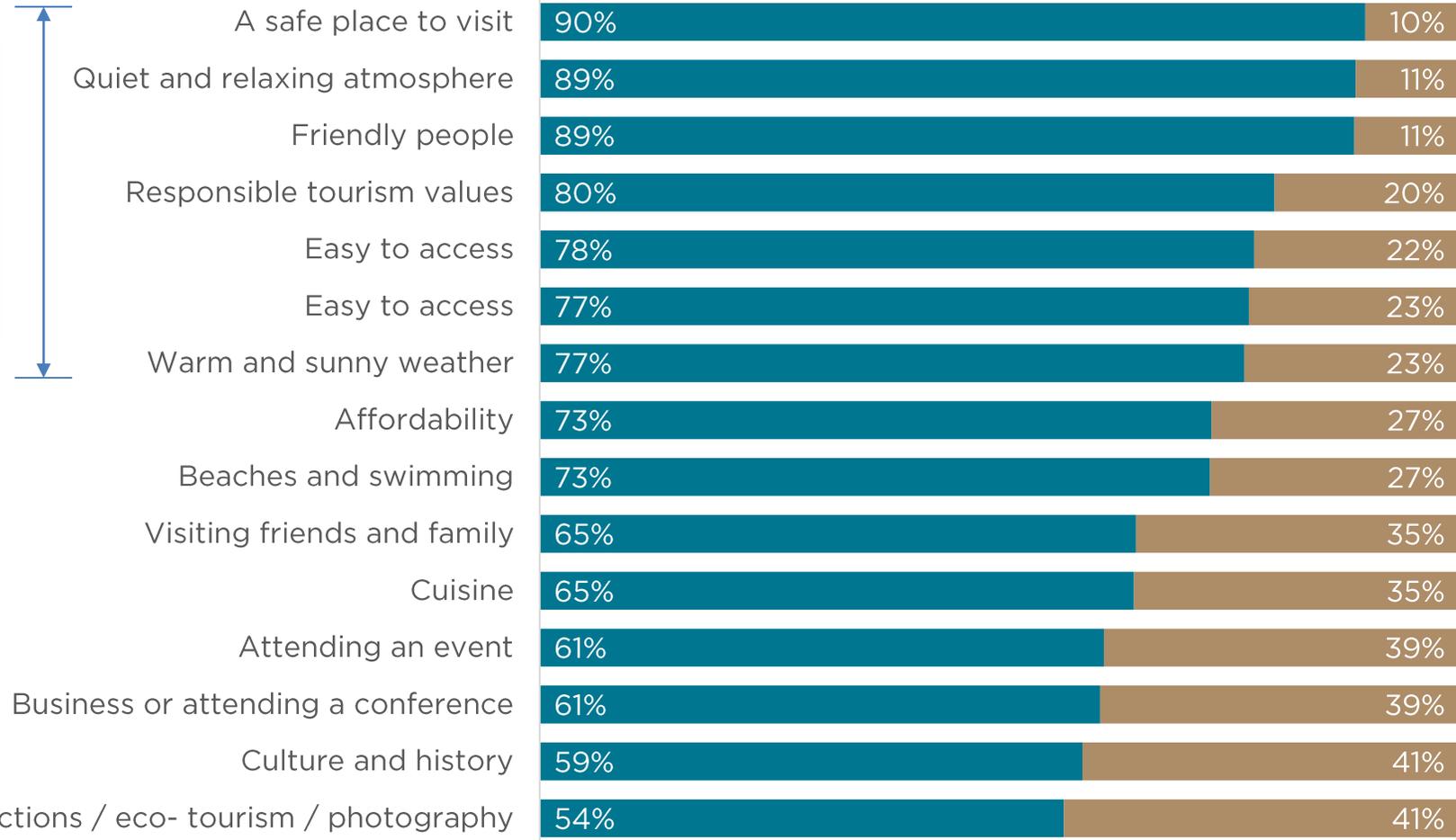
# Pre-Travel Perceptions Vs Expectations



# Unique Selling Points: Cook Islands vs Competitors (based on Visitor Perceptions)

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

Top  
8



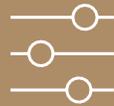
Bottom 6  
It would be beneficial to place additional emphasis on these Unique Selling Points, as visitors are increasingly comparing them to those of the Cook Islands.

■ % of Respondents that chose the Cook Islands      ■ % of Respondents that chose Other Destinations

# Report Structure



Visitor Profile



Visitor  
Characteristics  
& Preferences



Information &  
Decision Making



Visitor Spending  
& Impact

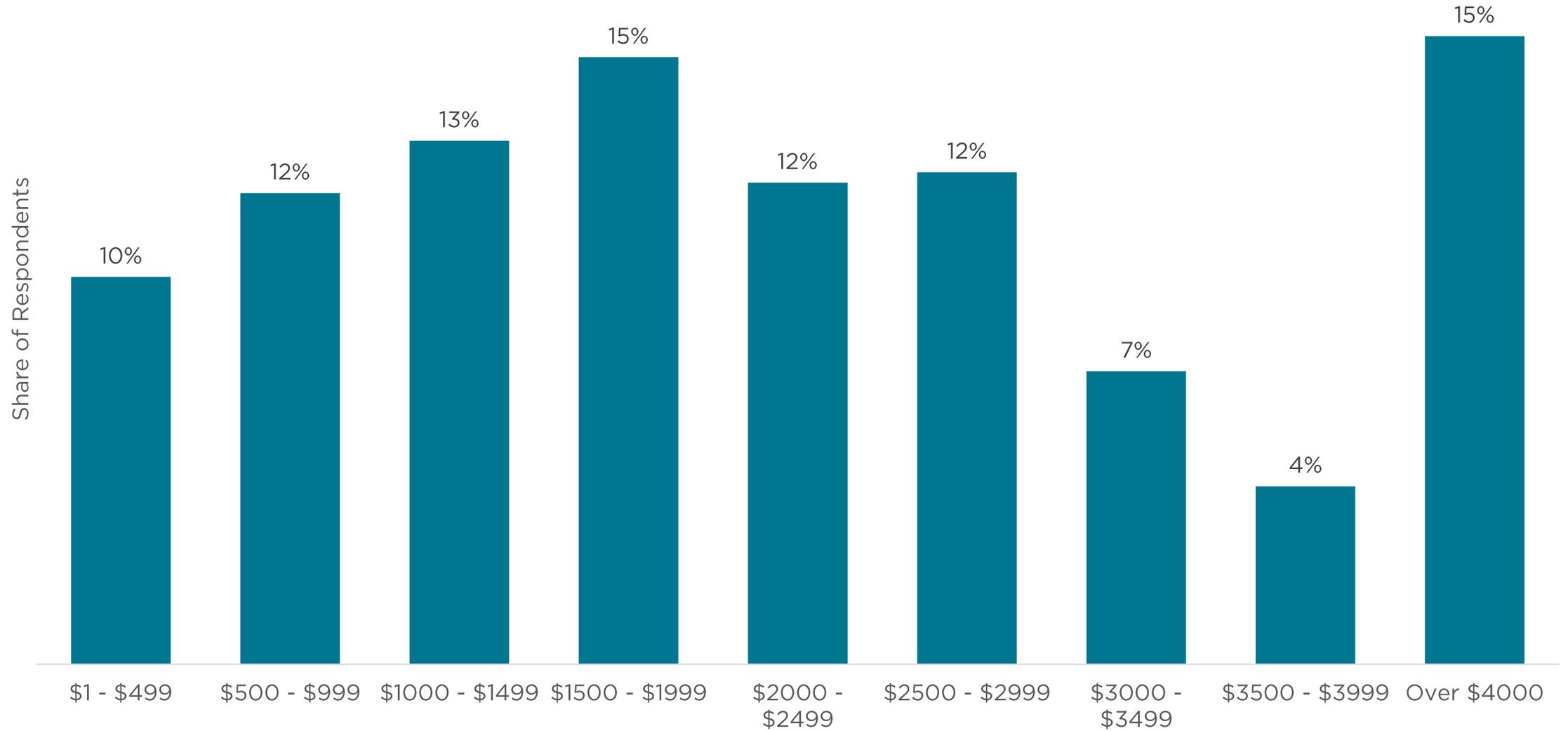


Visitor  
Satisfaction

# Prepaid Expenditure

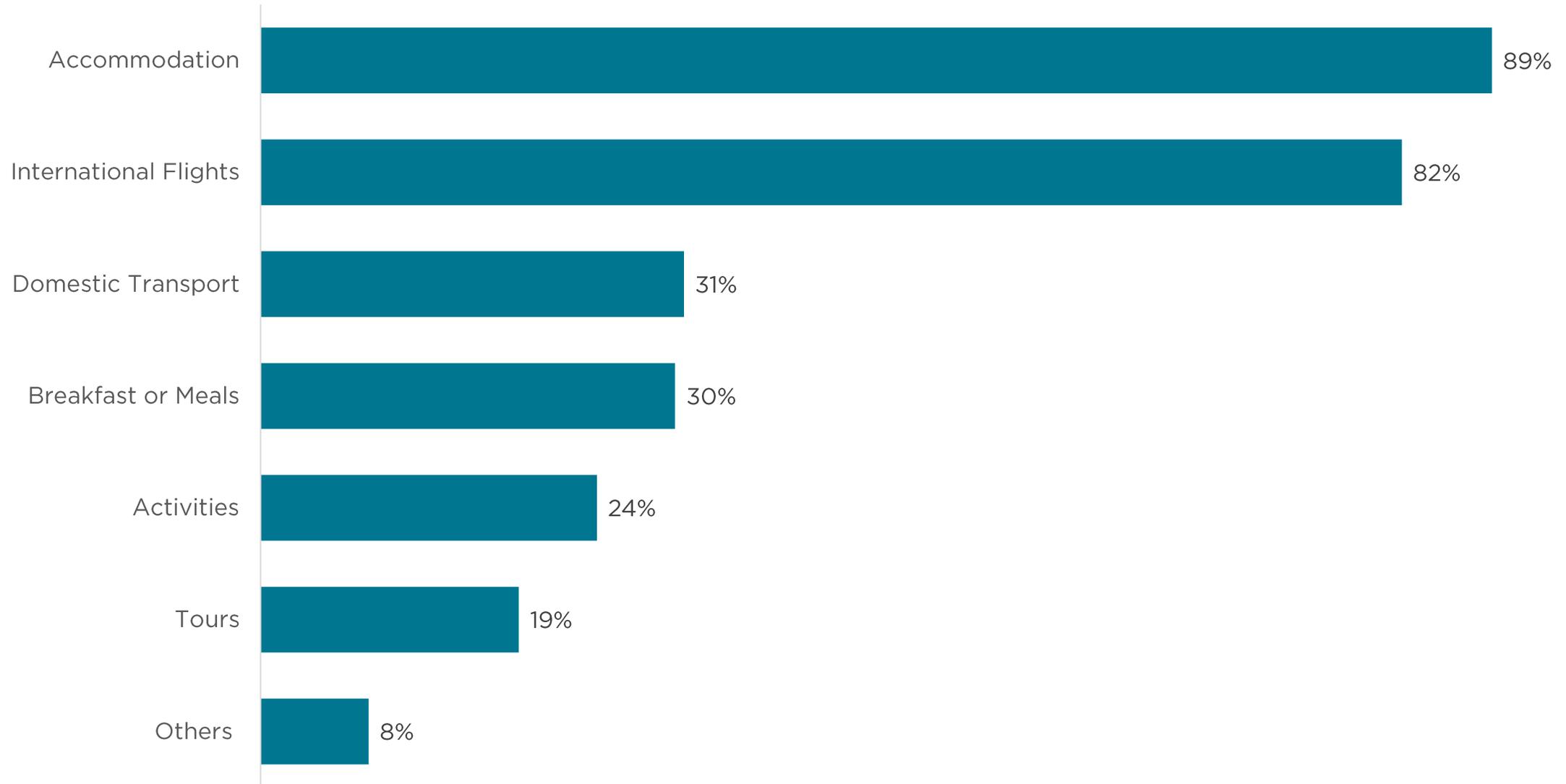
Avg. Prepaid per Person  
per Trip

**NZ\$2,454**



Note: NZ dollars.

# Prepaid Items



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

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

	Local Spend Per Person Per Day		
	<u>% of sector</u>	<u>NZD</u>	<u>USD</u>
Accommodation	40	101	60
Restaurant, Cafes & Bars	20	50	30
Vehicle Rental	9	23	13
Petrol	4	10	6
Domestic Flight	10	24	14
Public Transport	5	12	7
Internet Cost	5	12	7
Water-based activities	4	11	6
Land-based activities	2	5	3
Groceries	1	2	1
Shopping	1	1	0.6
Other	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>148</b>

*Note: Total Economic Impact-Per Trip and Per Day are per-person expenditures and can be used to estimate the total economic impact, through extrapolating to the total number of visitor arrivals during the surveyed period.*

# Economic Impact - Per Person and Total

	Visitor Expenditure Per Person & Total	
	Jan-Mar 2024	Jan-Mar 2024
<b>Average Spend Prior to arrival</b>	<b>NZD</b>	<b>USD</b>
Per Person Per Trip	2,454	1,469
<i>Flowing into local economy rate - estimated 40%</i>		
Per Person Per Trip	982	588
Per Person per Day	112	67
-----		
<b>Average Local Spend</b>		
<i>Length of Stay (nights)</i>	<i>mean 8.8 nights</i>	
Per Person Per Trip	2,217	1,327
Per Person per Day	252	150
-----		
<b>Total Economic Impact-Per Trip</b>	<b>3,199</b>	<b>1,915</b>
<b>Total Economic Impact-Per Day</b>	<b>364</b>	<b>218</b>

Jan - Mar 2023

# NZD 64 MILLION

FROM VISITORS 20,954



**\$2,705**

Prepaid per visitor per trip

**\$216**

In-country spend per day



**\$1,082**

Prepaid per visitor per trip

**\$1,966**

In-country spend per trip



**\$3,048** per visitor per trip

**\$335** per visitor per day

Jan - Mar 2024

# NZD 94 MILLION

FROM VISITORS 29,486 ▲

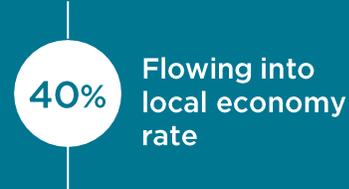


**\$2,454 ▼**

Prepaid per visitor per trip

**\$252 ▲**

In-country spend per day



**\$982 ▼**

Prepaid per visitor per trip

**\$2,217 ▲**

In-country spend per trip



**\$3,199** per visitor per trip ▲

**\$364** per visitor per day ▲

Note: NZ dollars. All amounts are per person

# Report Structure



Visitor Profile



Visitor  
Characteristics  
& Preferences



Information &  
Decision Making



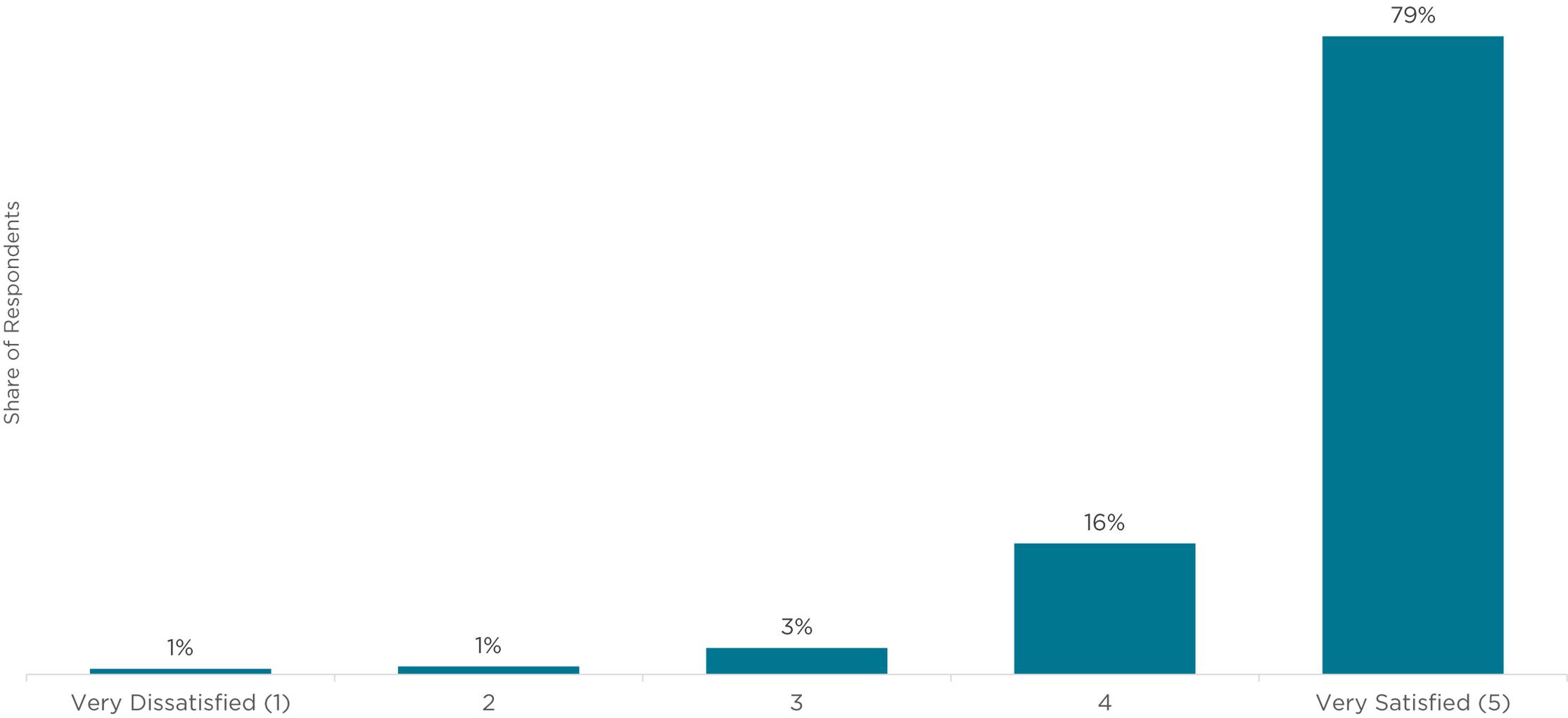
Visitor Spending  
& Impact



Visitor  
Satisfaction

# Visitor Overall Satisfaction

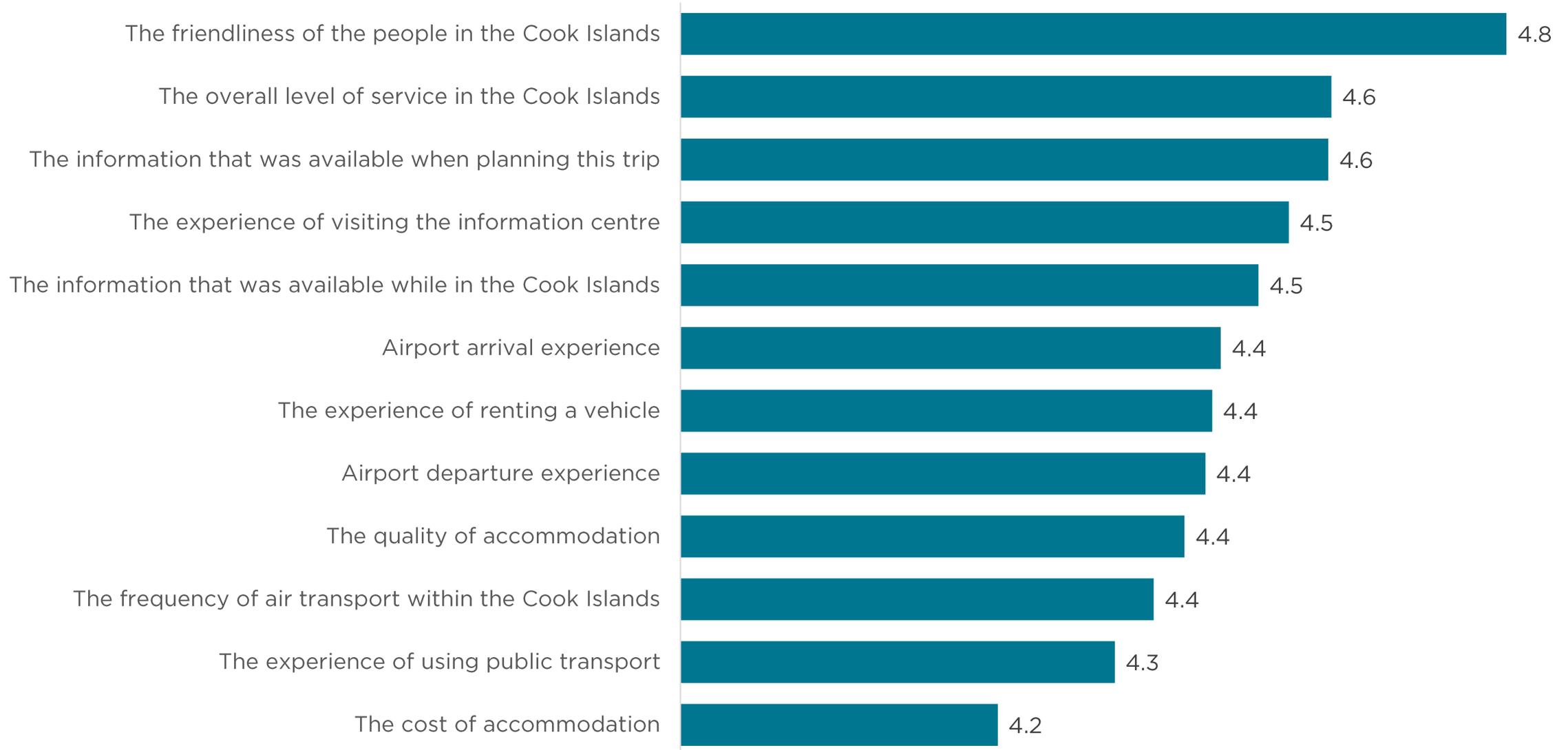
Avg. Overall Satisfaction  
**4.7**



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

# Satisfaction with Travel Experience

Q: How satisfied were you with the following?

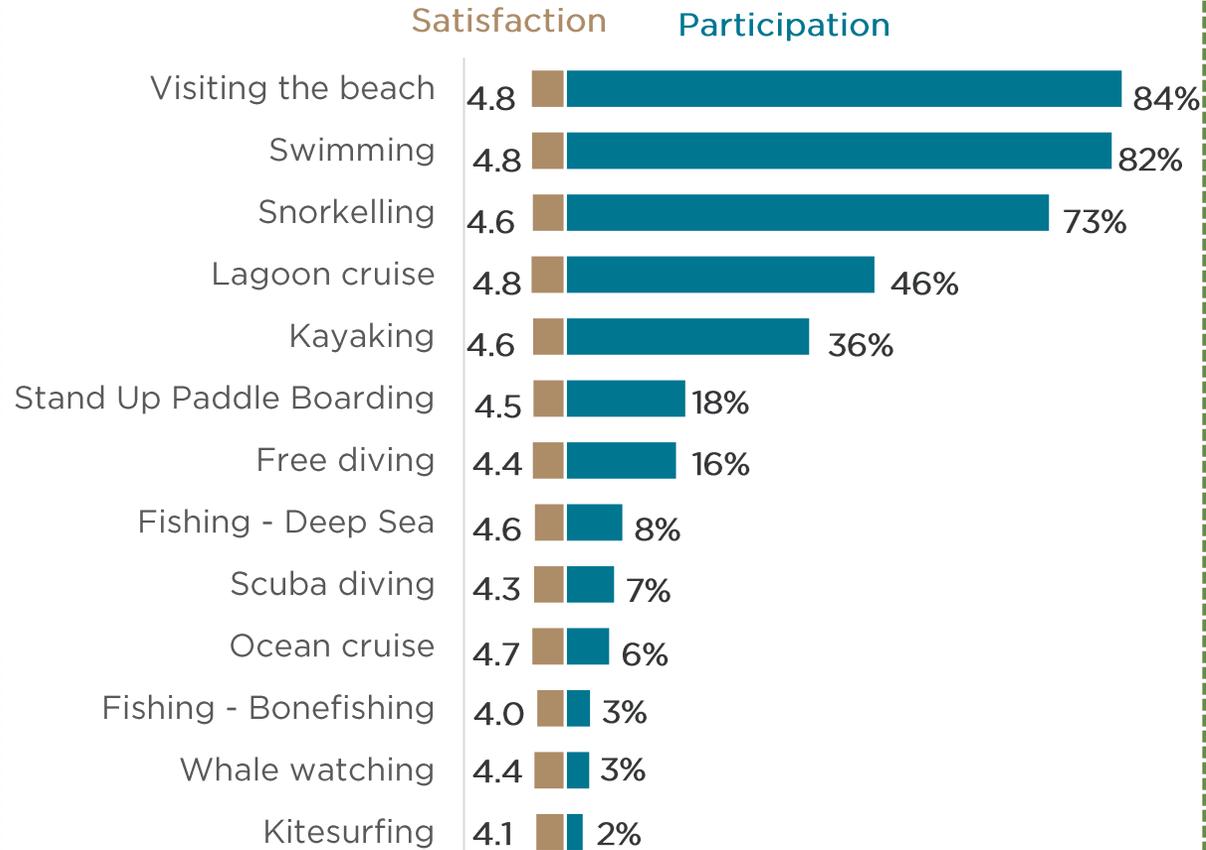


Scale: 1-Very Dissatisfied to 5-Very Satisfied

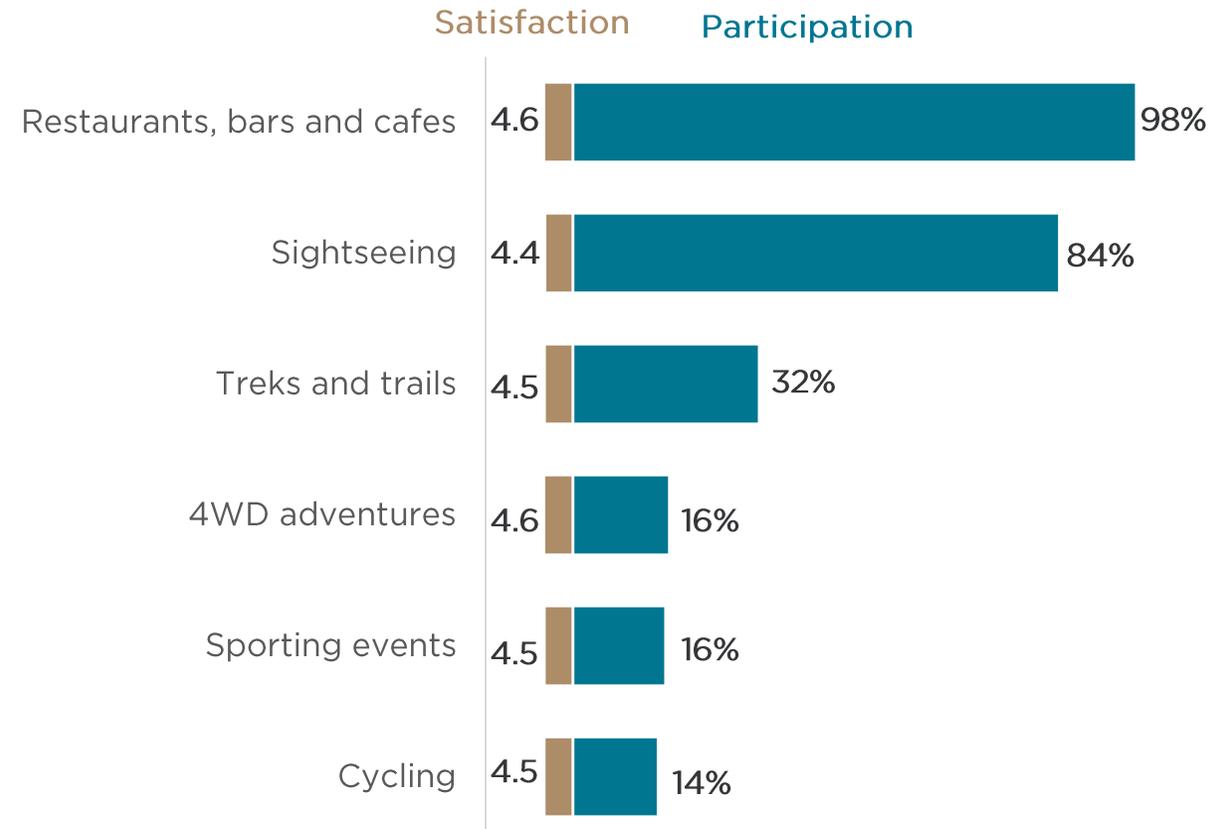
# Satisfaction with Activities

Q How satisfied were you with the following?

## Water-based activities



## Land-based activities

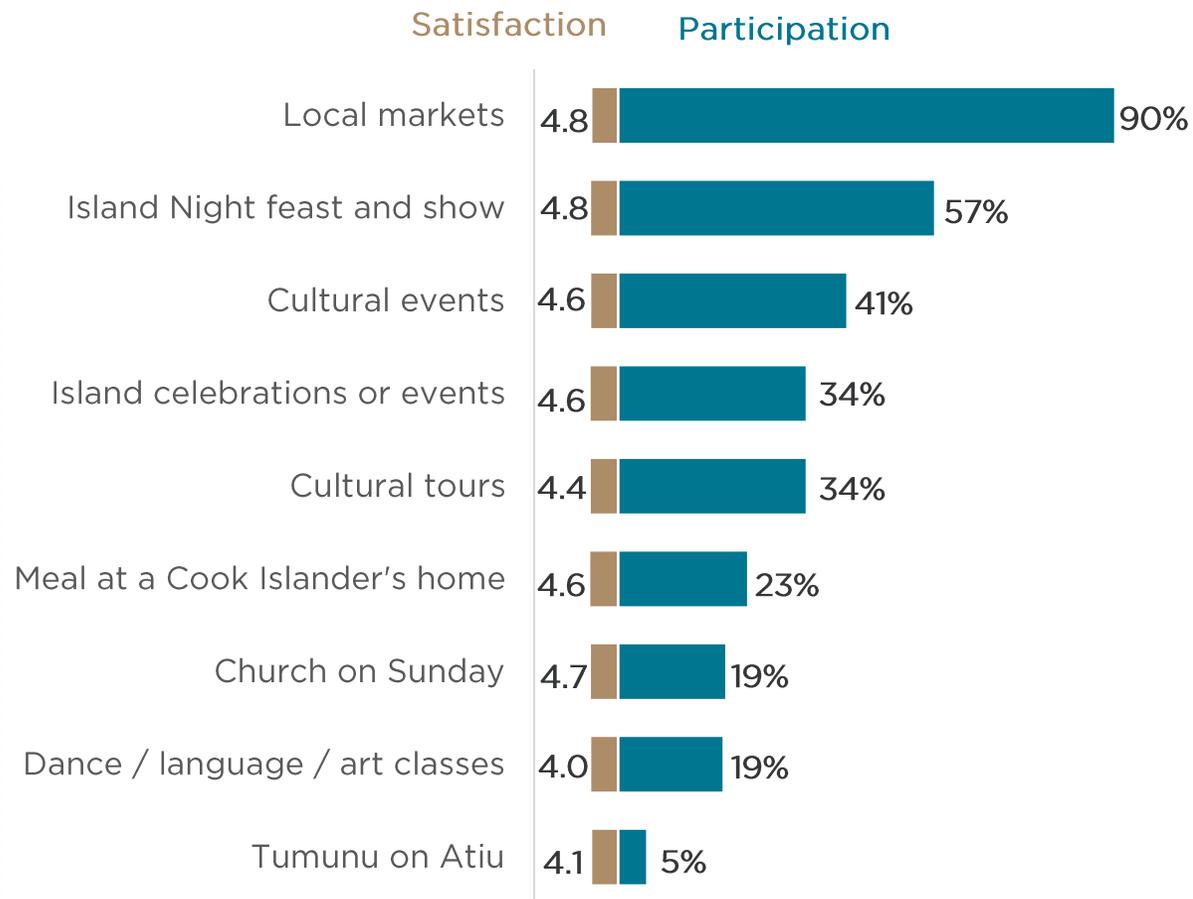


Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%

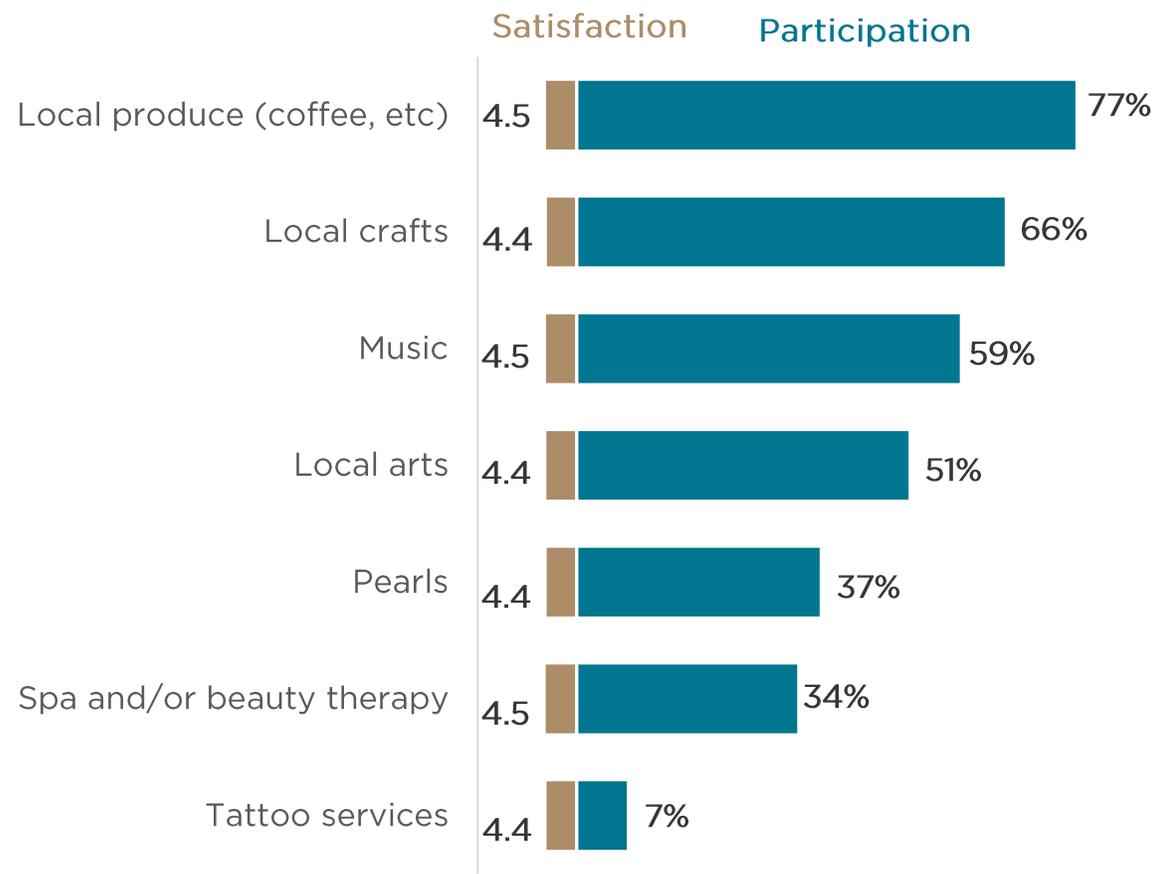
# Satisfaction with Activities

Q How satisfied were you with the following?

## Arts and Cultural Activities



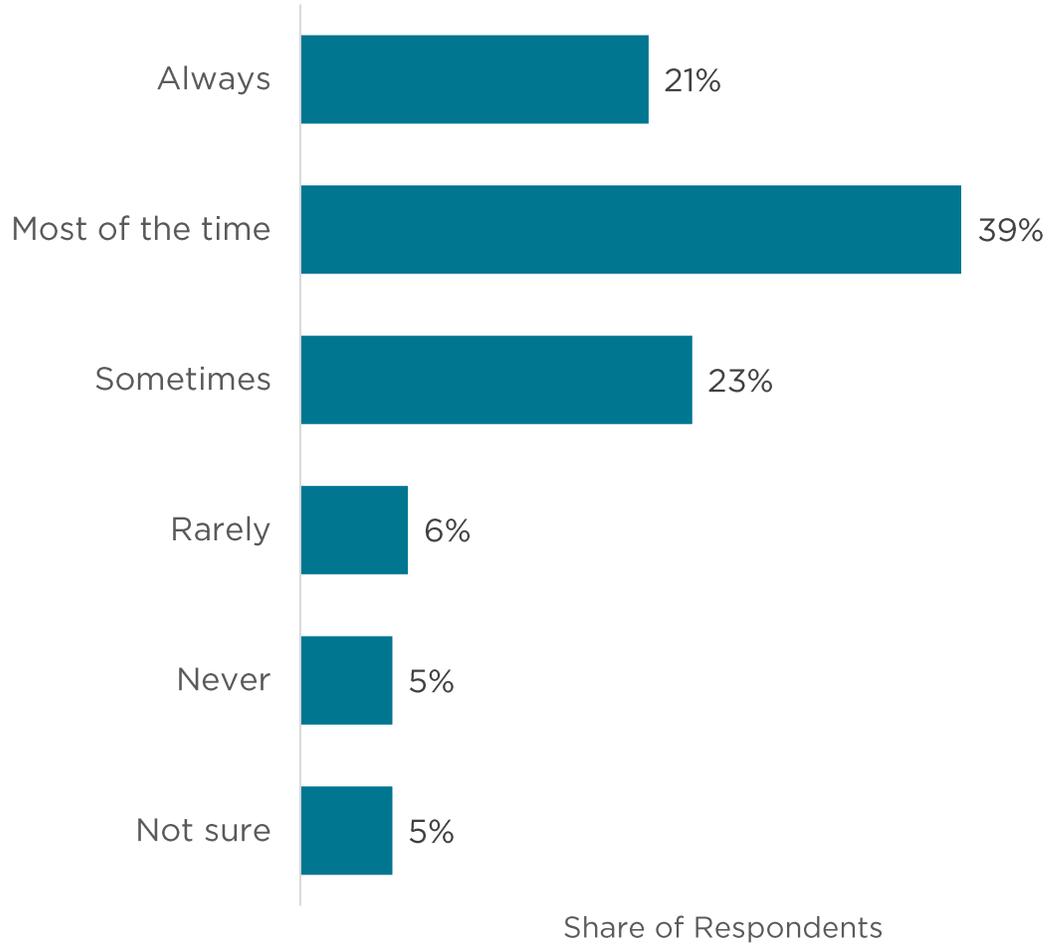
## Shopping activities



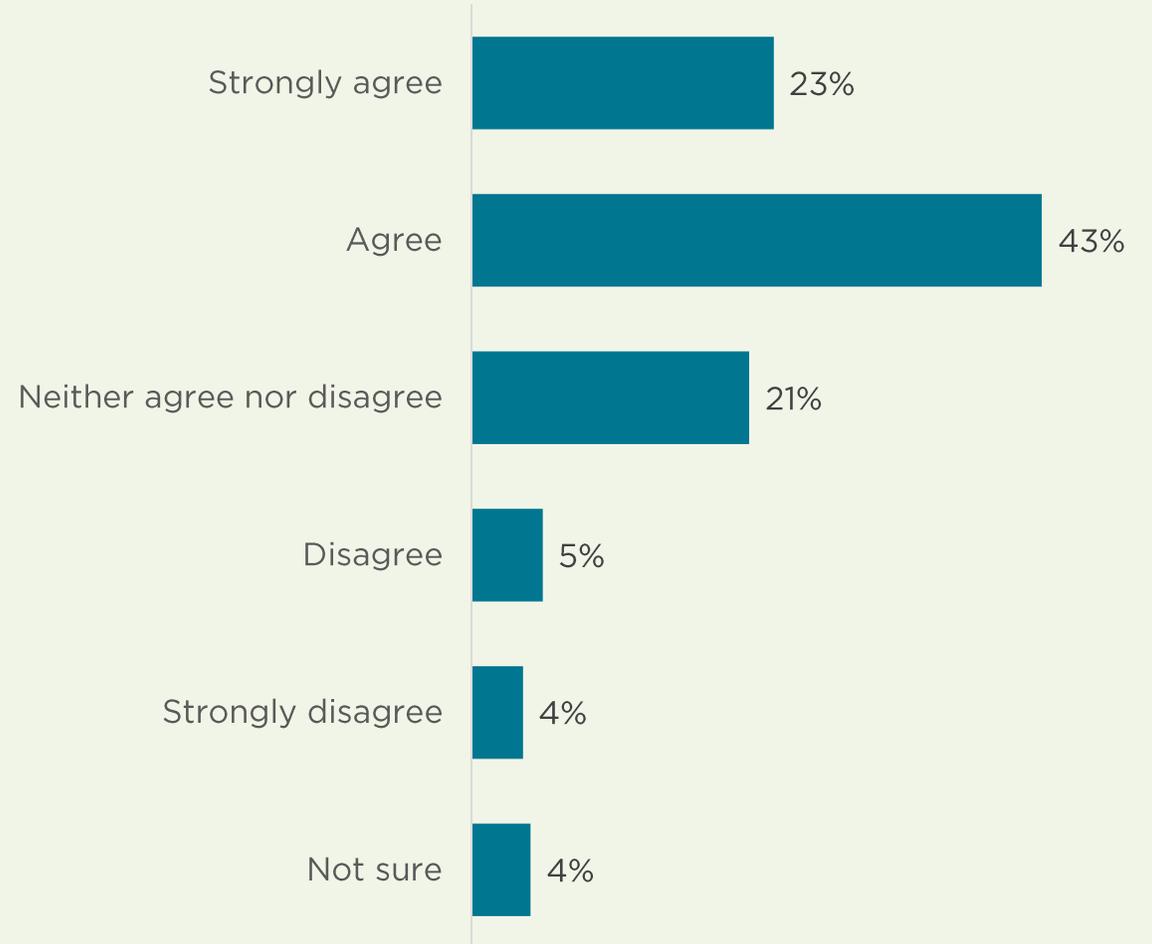
Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%

## Socio-Cultural and Environmental Awareness

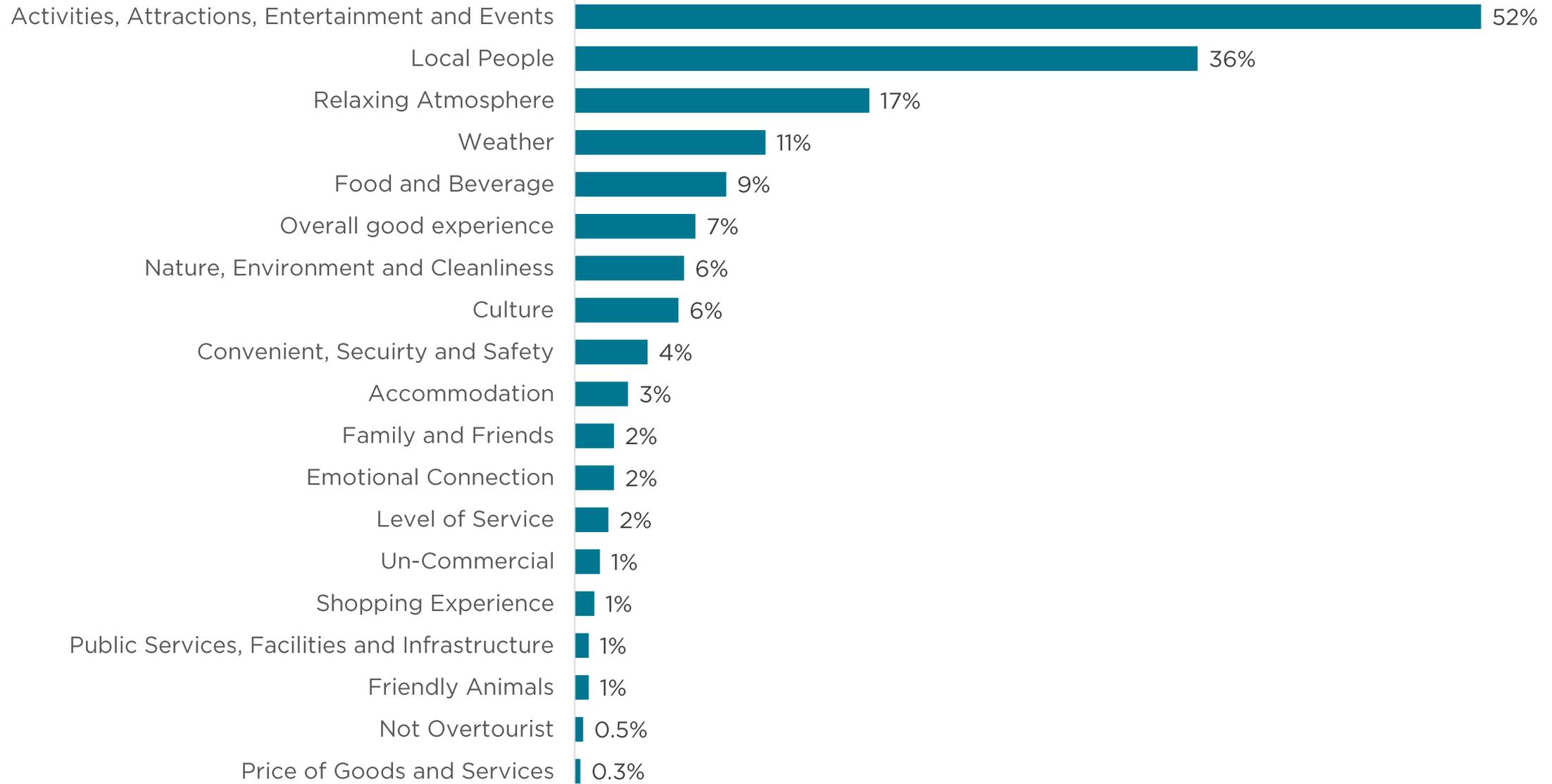
**Q: During your trip to the Cook Islands, to what extent did you take sustainability, which includes the environment, the local community, and the culture, into account when deciding what activities to do, things to buy, or services to use?**



*"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"*



# Most Appealing Aspects



Note: Total response N=625. Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%

# Most Appealing Aspects – Activities, Attractions, Entertainment & Events



- † Staying in a villa amongst the palm trees, walking straight onto a perfectly sandy warm beach with crystal clear water.
- † Fish seen snorkeling from shore. How clean it was.
- † Too many things to note, Turtles, Lagoon trips, cuisine, the people, the culture.
- † The beauty, the weather, snorkeling, meeting up with friends coming from other places, restaurants, the cruises on Aitutaki. Just the overall vibe. It is my favorite place.
- † Scenery, weather, people, Island culture, simplicity, affordability.
- † The kind people, the lagoon cruise, the culture and the atmosphere.
- † The landscape and that there're almost no big and high hotel complexes.
- † Absolutely everything lovely people and beautiful place. I could happily live in the Cook Islands and would come back in a heartbeat.
- † Ika mata, Sunrises, beaches, the mountains all scenery things, foods and amazing people.

# Most Appealing Aspects – Local People



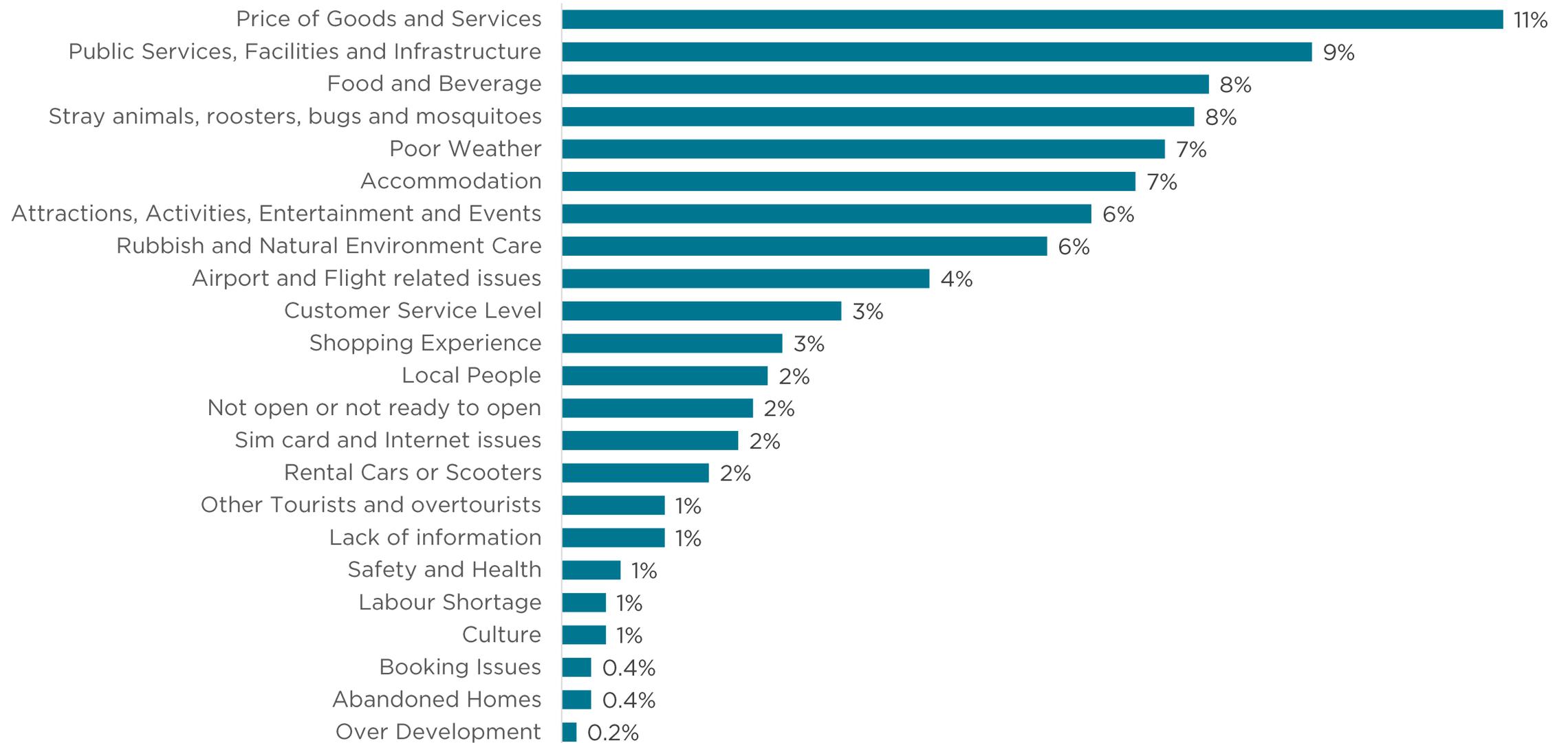
- † The friendliness, honesty, sincerity, common attitude of the people.
- † Culture and how you become immersed within the lifestyle of the people of the Cook Islands, everything is carefree, and people are friendly and welcoming to all.
- † The people, community, friendliness. The water, paradise!
- † The few cool islanders that were working in resorts or stores etc.
- † Friendliness of the people and helpful customer service from local retailers.
- † The people were so friendly. A BEAUTIFUL place to go to for a holiday.
- † The people are very friendly. Nice to meet them. Loved all the singing. Enjoyed the beaches.
- † The cost for a holiday is incredibly fair. Also, the people are incredibly nice. I love how the island is largely owned by locals as well, its a reason why we did not choose Fiji.
- † The people are what make the Cook Is. All the staff are always great and try to help where possible, I always feel my holiday is important to them and they work hard to deliver.

# Most Appealing Aspects – Relaxing Atmosphere



- † The beaches and night-sky were utterly gorgeous. Most relaxing holiday ever due to friendly people and excellent beach activities.
- † The slower paced life, relaxing and beautiful country. So many wonderful people and the seafood was lovely.
- † Swimming with the turtles, Rarotonga Lager, friendly locals, quietness, helpful shuttle drivers, ability to do as much or as little as we liked.
- † Slower relaxed pace. Sunshine, lagoon, food, swimming.
- † Friendliness of its people, beauty, relaxing and casual atmosphere. Resort we stayed at had an adults only section (no kids).
- † Relaxed environment and very friendly people in a beautiful location.
- † Relaxed atmosphere and beautiful weather.
- † The people, the reefs, the beauty of the islands. And peace.

# Least Appealing Aspects



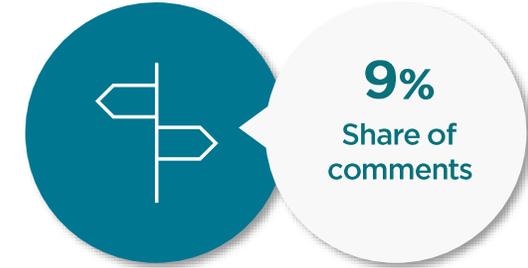
Note: Total response N=569. Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%

# Least Appealing Aspects – Price of Goods & Services



- † Food is expensive and hard to get good local fish. To much imported food.
- † Resorts were very expensive (backpackers was amazing value for money)
- † Prices of some food products in supermarket.
- † Expensive to get too and pricey for accommodation.
- † How expensive everything is!
- † Overall expensive for the quality of accommodation.
- † The cost of flights were higher than other destinations,
- † Maybe alcohol was cheaper than necessities.
- † Exorbitant prices of food and accommodation.
- † The market in Avarua is overpriced.

# Least Appealing Aspects - Public Service, Facilities and Infrastructure



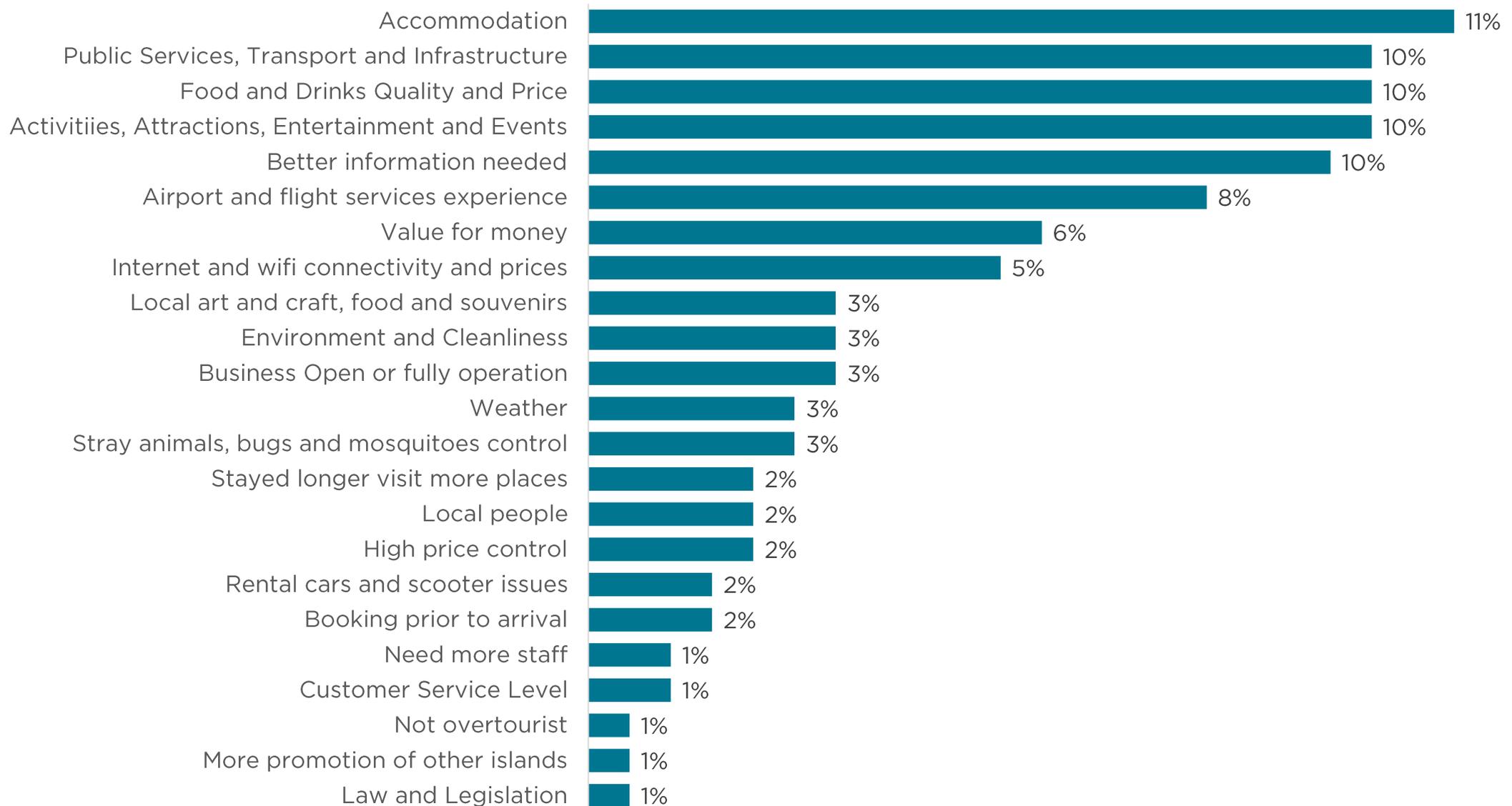
- † Public transport and taxis. It is the same price per person if you go 1 stop or all the way around the island. Very expensive for a group to travel on public transport.
- † Busy main road on Rarotonga and road conditions especially on the west side of the island.
- † Treks and trails not being maintained. Completely impassable.
- † Decaying/deteriorating Chinese Lighting installations. Rusting, nonoperational and an eyesore!
- † Lack of public transport frequency.
- † Lack of transport without renting a car. Cost -we had some difficulty with taxi not coming twice.
- † The power comes from diesel generators instead of wind and solar! And most of the food is highly processed and imported instead of locally grown/caught.
- † Old public buses, abandoned homes, lack of footpaths and the potholes in roads.
- † Bus operations - clockwise quit too early.

# Least Appealing Aspects – Food and Beverages



- † Food is expensive and hard to get good local fish. Too much imported food.
- † Meals are good but lack spice and variety. Good food.
- † Quality of food Maybe alcohol was cheaper than necessities.
- † Lack of fresh veggies and not a lot of fresh fruit.
- † Lack of local grown foods, electricity generated by diesel generators instead of wind, solar, waves.
- † Access to food/supplies, especially due to arriving Saturday night.
- † No fresh food available in local shops, could not find any fresh fruit/vegetables anywhere but shelves were filled with packaged ultra processed food. Accommodation was mediocre and no better alternatives available, food in restaurants was poor even in premium priced outlets.
- † Food was not amazing especially at the hotel. But some of the markets were decent.
- † Poor service at one restaurant. We were ignored for most of the evening and restaurant was not busy.

# Suggestions for Improvement



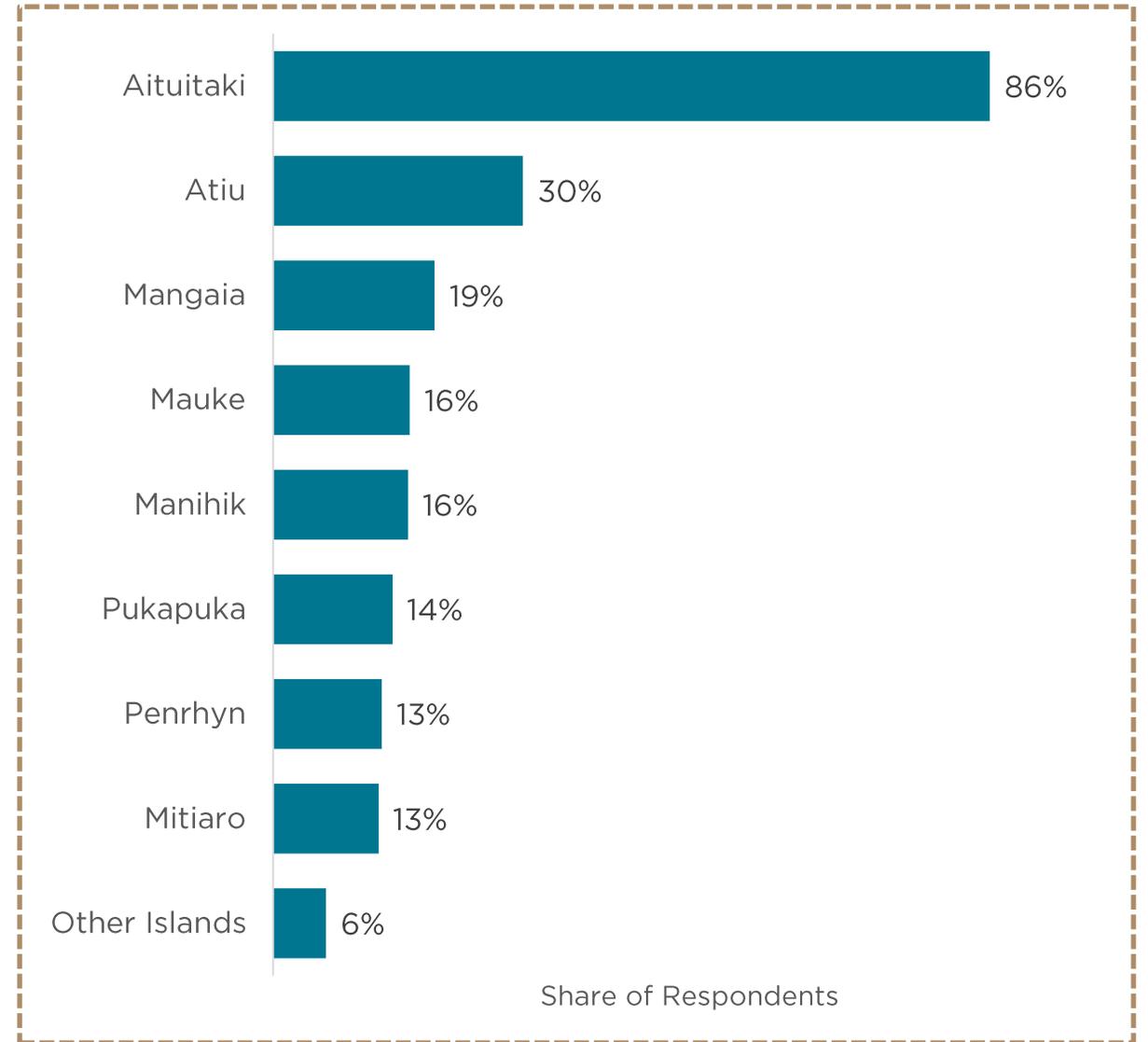
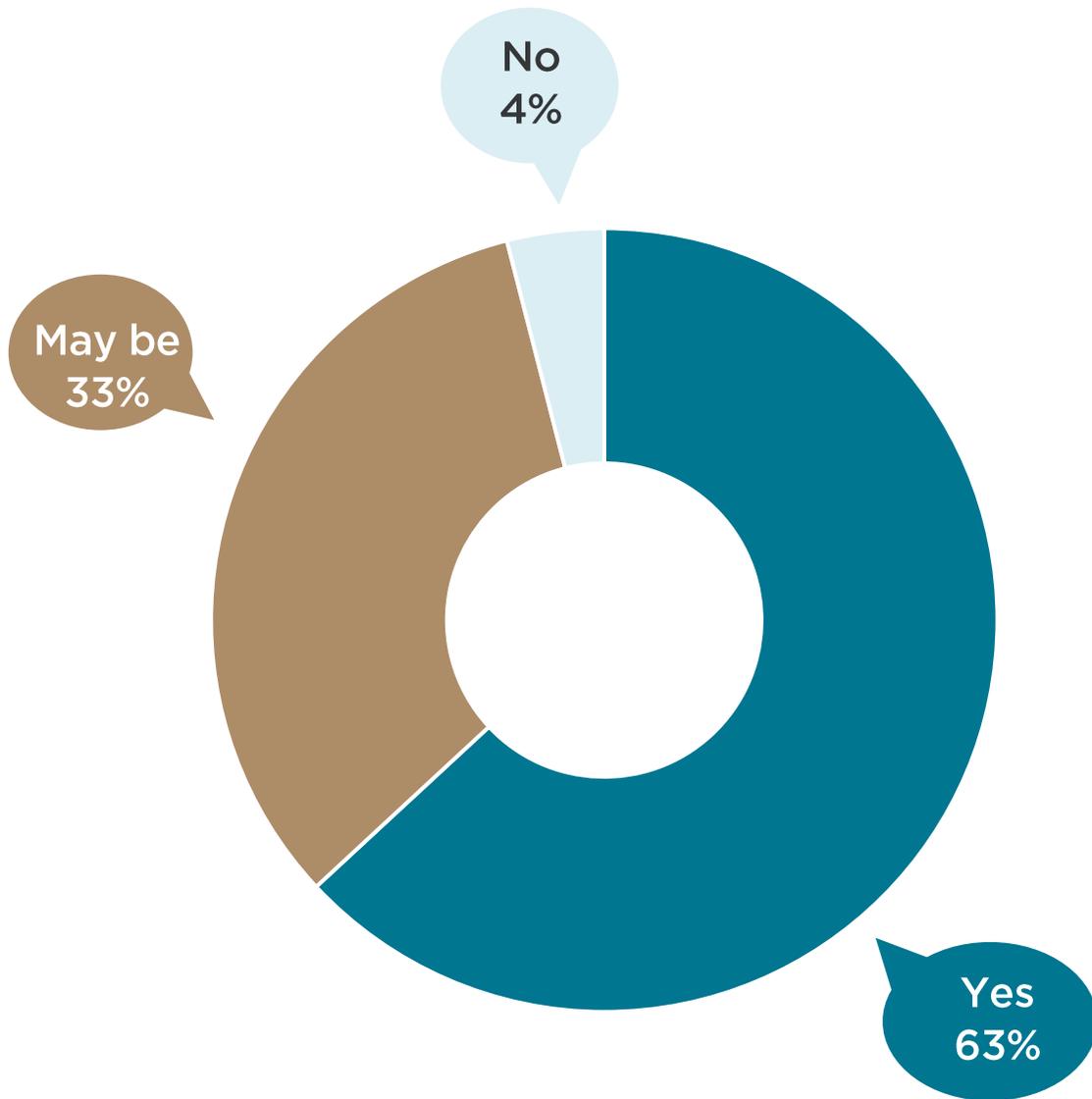
Share of Respondents

Note: Total response N=189. Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%

# Suggestions for Improvement-Indicative Quotes

- † More cultural food available at the markets. More cook island style events, luncheons, dinner etc.
- † Fix the roads, give 90 days visas to Australians at the airport when they arrive.
- † the bus we could not really understand with its timetable I mean. Clockwise, counterclockwise, we were not the best in getting that right. No Wi-Fi at check-in area of airport.
- † If hotels had sunscreen available to guests. My husband forgot his toiletry bag with ours in it and bad sunburn ruined a few days as local shops were either closed or did not have any, nor did our accommodation.
- † The airport service. The delay on the flight caused missing the next flight and buying a new one. Therefore, we didn't get any help
- † Maintenance of the treks and trails Cost of the shared taxi from the airport to our accommodation on arrival was very costly.
- † Fences needs to be removed at some beaches and reduced number of housing / businesses taking over the coastline.
- † Full protection of the natural land and sea environment and resources from foreign interests!
- † Less non cook island people in prominent stores, resorts, accommodation, petrol stations etc. Our first visit was about 15 years ago it was amazing we've been 10 times & the last 2 visits we've been disappointed with the decrease of "local" people "fronting" Rarotonga. Ewe don't plan on returning unless, like this trip, it's for a wedding.

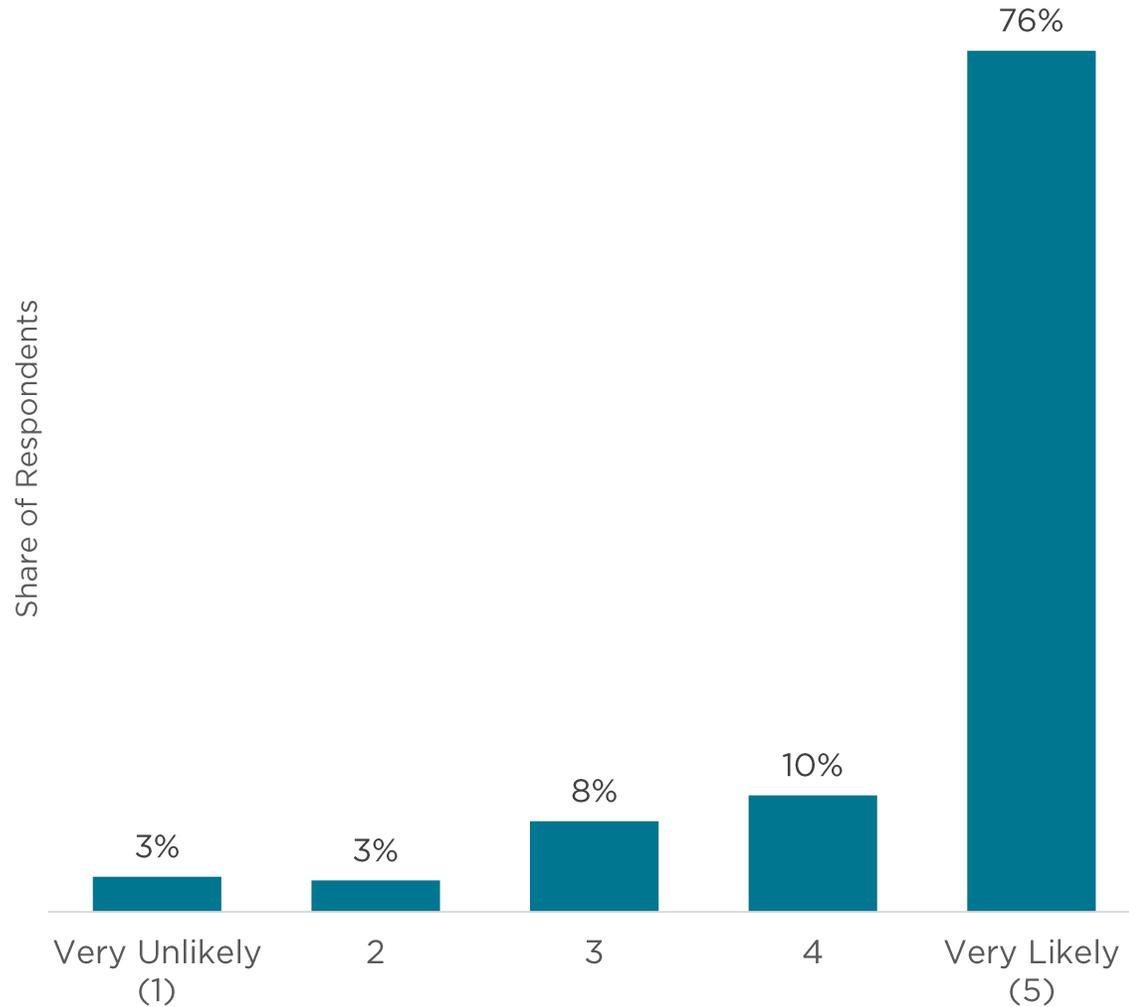
# Willingness to Visit Outer Islands



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

# Future Motivations

Q: How likely would you return to the Cook Islands?

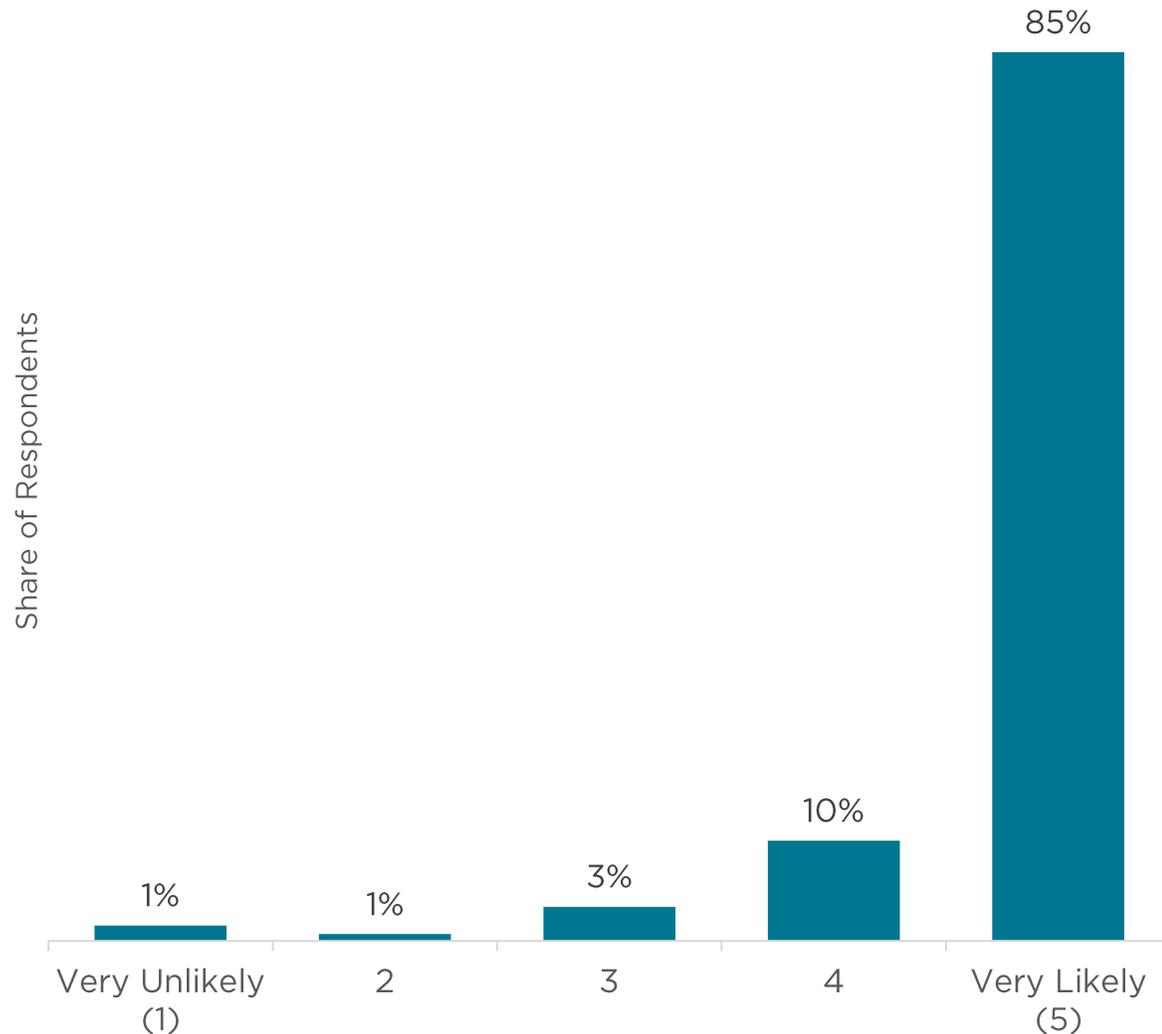


## Quotes: Reasons to not return

- + *We have been to Cook Islands so many times it is always our first choice. I have advised so many friends to visit I give everyone a mini map etc. I basically market the Cooks but last time our departing flight was delayed by 6hrs which meant arrival in Auckland at 1am. We were put in an airport hotel for 4hrs then an early flight to Christchurch. My husband needed a wheelchair at the airport it was a nightmare. Even though I will still recommend the Cooks I'm sad that I won't make the trip again until there is a direct flight from Christchurch for people from the South Island.*
- + *Was way too expensive for such little to do with children. It felt more of an Adult accommodating country.*
- + *Very boring and overpriced place and polluted water in the lagoon.*
- + *Too far from France and too expensive trip but we really enjoyed our stay.*
- + *I don't like being bitten by mosquitoes. When it was dusk, I retreated to my hotel room.*
- + *Didn't enjoy the food rental was really dangerous. Accommodation dated. Some money needs to be spent in the Cook Islands remodeling.*

# Future Motivations

Q: How likely would you recommend the Cook Islands?



## Quotes: Reasons to not recommend

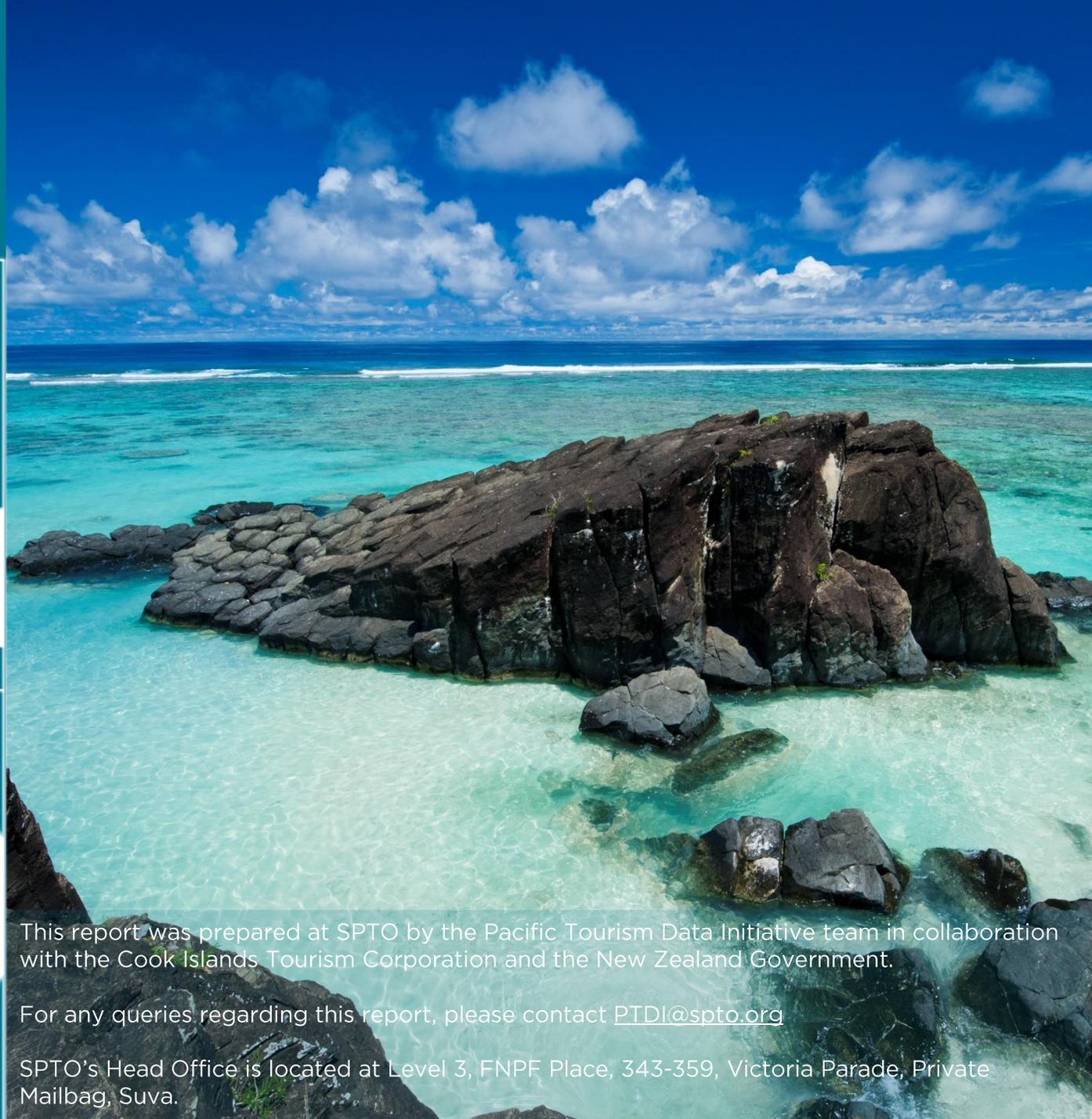
- + *Too many non-Cook islanders running things.*
- + *Overpriced, complicated return flight (via New Zealand), but nice tropical weather and warm water in the lagoon.*
- + *Most of our friends have already visited the Cook Islands.*
- + *I mostly enjoyed the swimming and weather, but you can find that in many islands.*
- + *Expensive and there a better islands to go to with more things to do and more luxury.*
- + *Because of my experience.*
- + *Because it is fabulous and my favorite place!*



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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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