

# Cook Islands

International Visitor Survey Report  
October–December 2023



# Acknowledgements

- ❖ The Pacific Tourism Organization (SPTO) expresses its gratitude to all contributors to this report on IVS data from October to December 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 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.

# Background

- ❖ The 2023 October-December 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 October to December 2023 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 October to December visitor emails were collected through the passenger arrival and departure cards completed by visitors on their arrival into, and departure from, 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 October - December 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 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 October to December 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 October to December 2023 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 (October - December 2023)



**4,900** TOTAL VALID EMAILS SENT



**432** TOTAL COMPLETE RESPONSES

**9%**

CONVERSION RATE

## RESPONSES COVERED



**875** ADULTS



**130** CHILDREN

**2%**

OF ALL VISITORS IN THIS PERIOD

## SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS 2022 vs 2023

# Oct-Dec 2022



### COUNTRY OF ORIGIN



9%

Visitors are 70 years old or over



3ppl

Avg. number of travel companions



\$149,756

Average household income

Note: NZ dollars.

# Oct-Dec 2023



### COUNTRY OF ORIGIN



11%

Visitors are 70 years old or over



4ppl

Avg. number of travel companions



\$139,303

Average household income

# Oct-Dec 2022



## PURPOSE OF VISIT



4.8/5

Overall, visitors are very satisfied



98%

Visitors are willing to recommend



95%

Visitors are willing to return

# Oct-Dec 2023



## PURPOSE OF VISIT



4.7/5

Overall, visitors are very satisfied



99%

Visitors are willing to recommend



96%

Visitors are willing to return

# Oct-Dec 2022

 PREPAID EXPENDITURE

 IN-COUNTRY SPEND

**\$2,555**

Prepaid per trip

**\$201**

In-country spend per day

**40%** Flowing into local economy rate

 X **8.7** nights  
Average length of stay

**\$1,022**

Prepaid per trip

**\$1,749**

In-country spend per trip

 ECONOMIC IMPACT

**\$2,771** per trip  
**\$318** per day

Note: NZ dollars.

# Oct-Dec 2023

 PREPAID EXPENDITURE

 IN COUNTRY SPEND


**\$2,204** ▼

Prepaid per trip

**\$262** ▲

In-country spend per day

**40%** Flowing into local economy rate

 Average length of stay  
Per item under local spend

**\$882** ▼

Prepaid per trip

**\$2,302** ▲

In-country spend per trip

 ECONOMIC IMPACT

**\$3,184** per trip ▲  
**\$362** per day ▲

Note: The spend per day is now calculated by dividing the total sum of each item by the number of people who spent, then further dividing by the average length of stay of those visitors.



# Report Structure



Visitor Profile



Visitor  
Characteristics  
& Preferences



Information &  
Decision Making

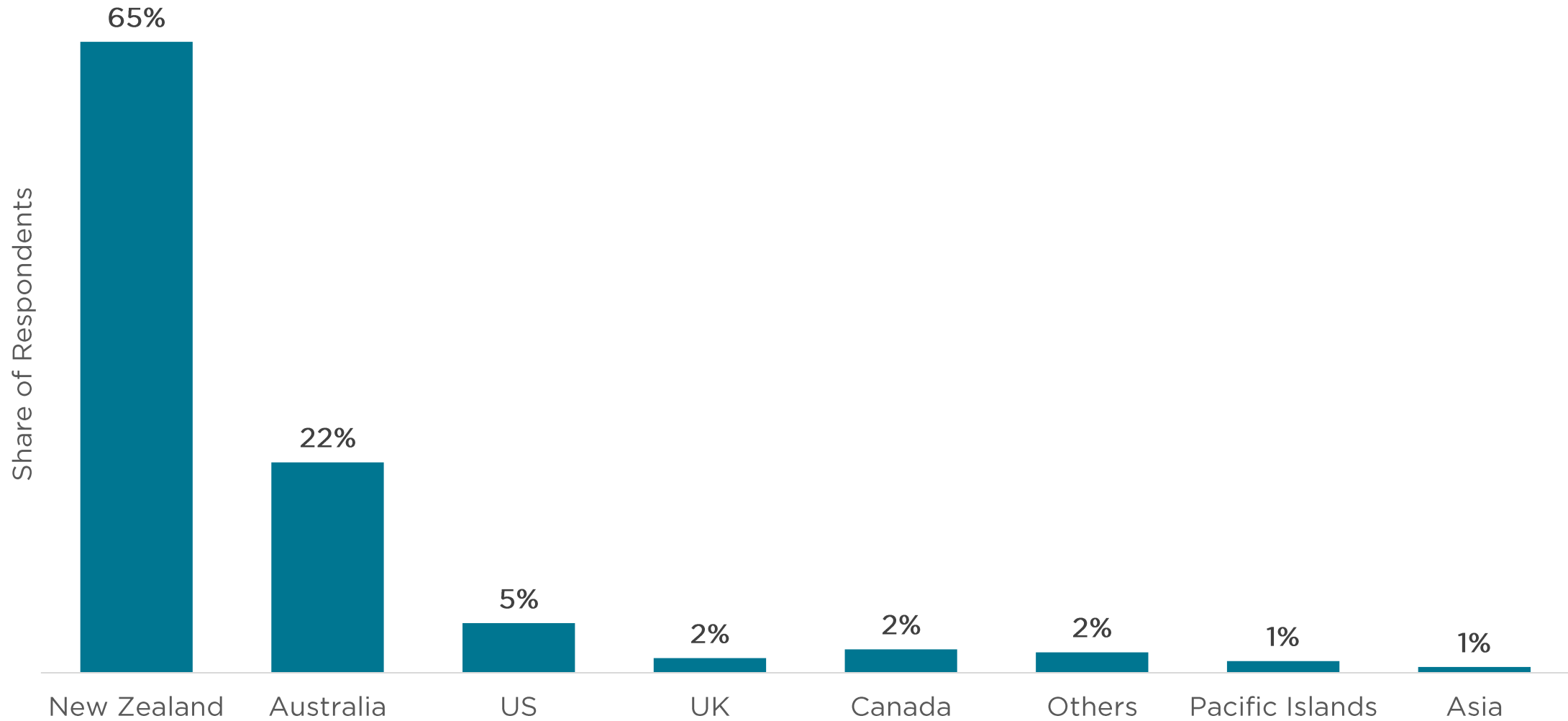


Visitor Spending  
& Impact



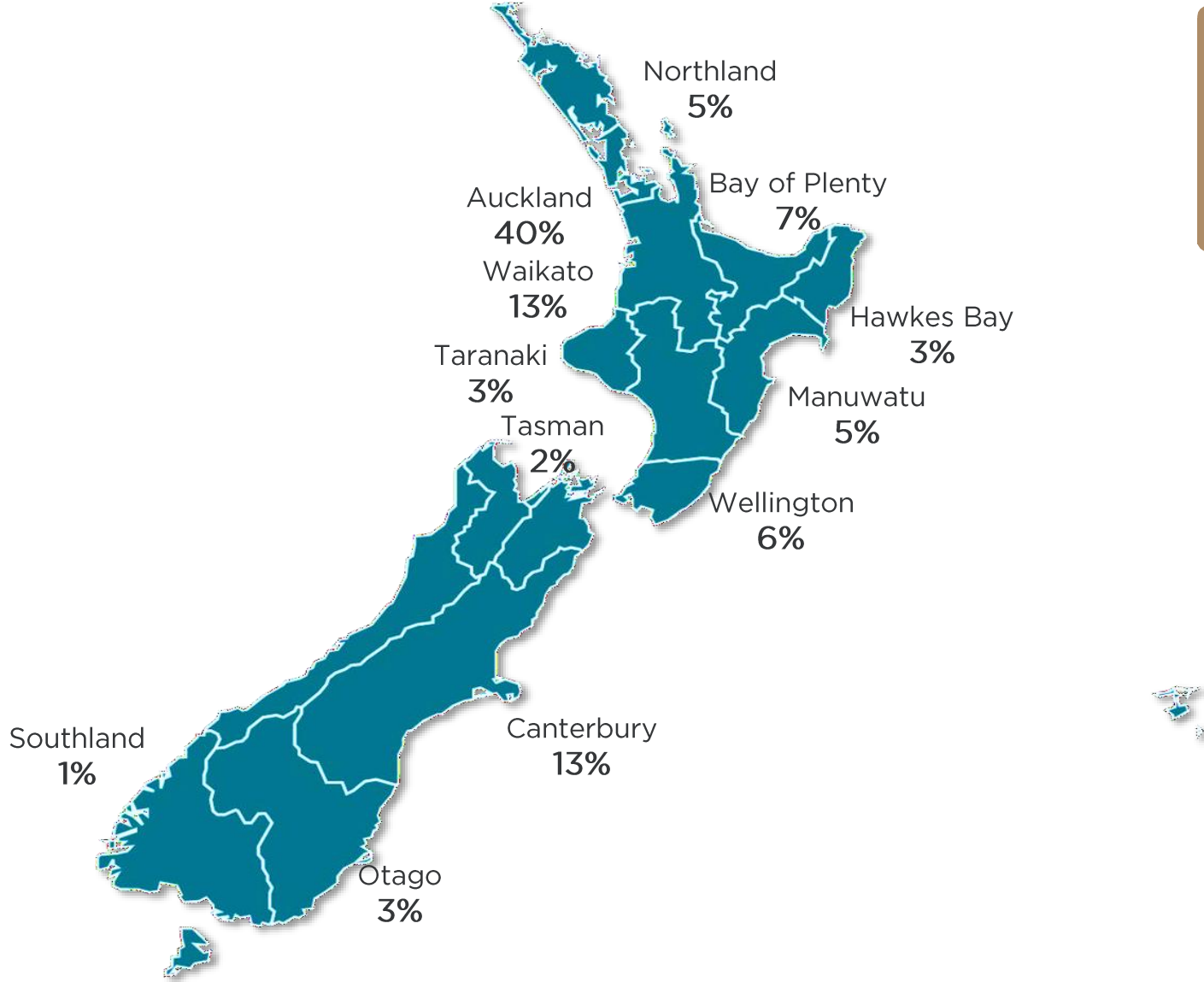
Visitor  
Satisfaction

# Country of Origin



*Note: N=331. Due to rounding, some totals do not sum to 100%. No weighting was applied, as the sample data is representative..*

# New Zealand Respondents - IVS Respondent Data

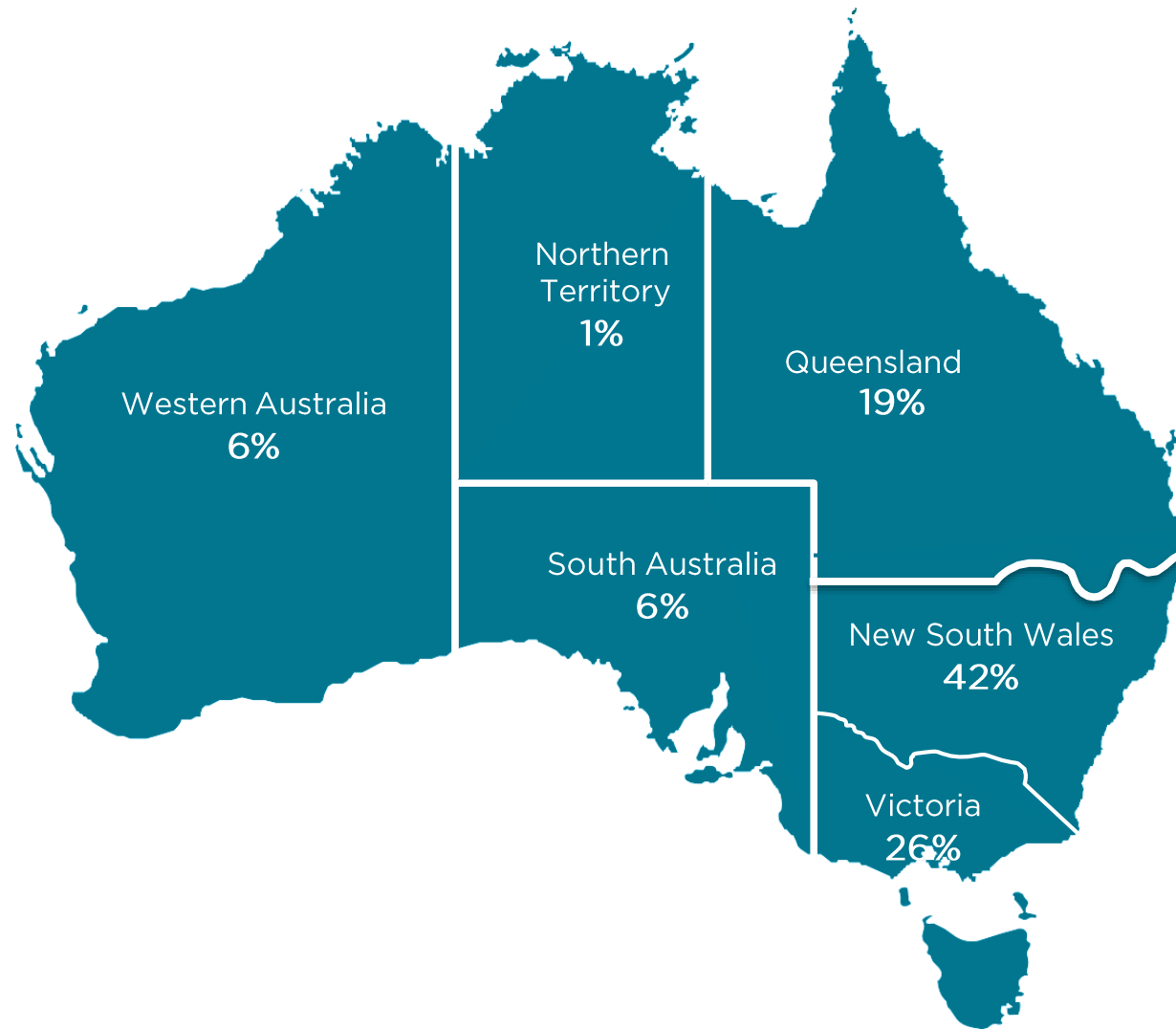


Total  
**216**  
NZ  
respondents

Auckland, Canterbury, and Waikato make up 66% of all New Zealand respondents

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

# Australian Respondents - IVS Respondent Data

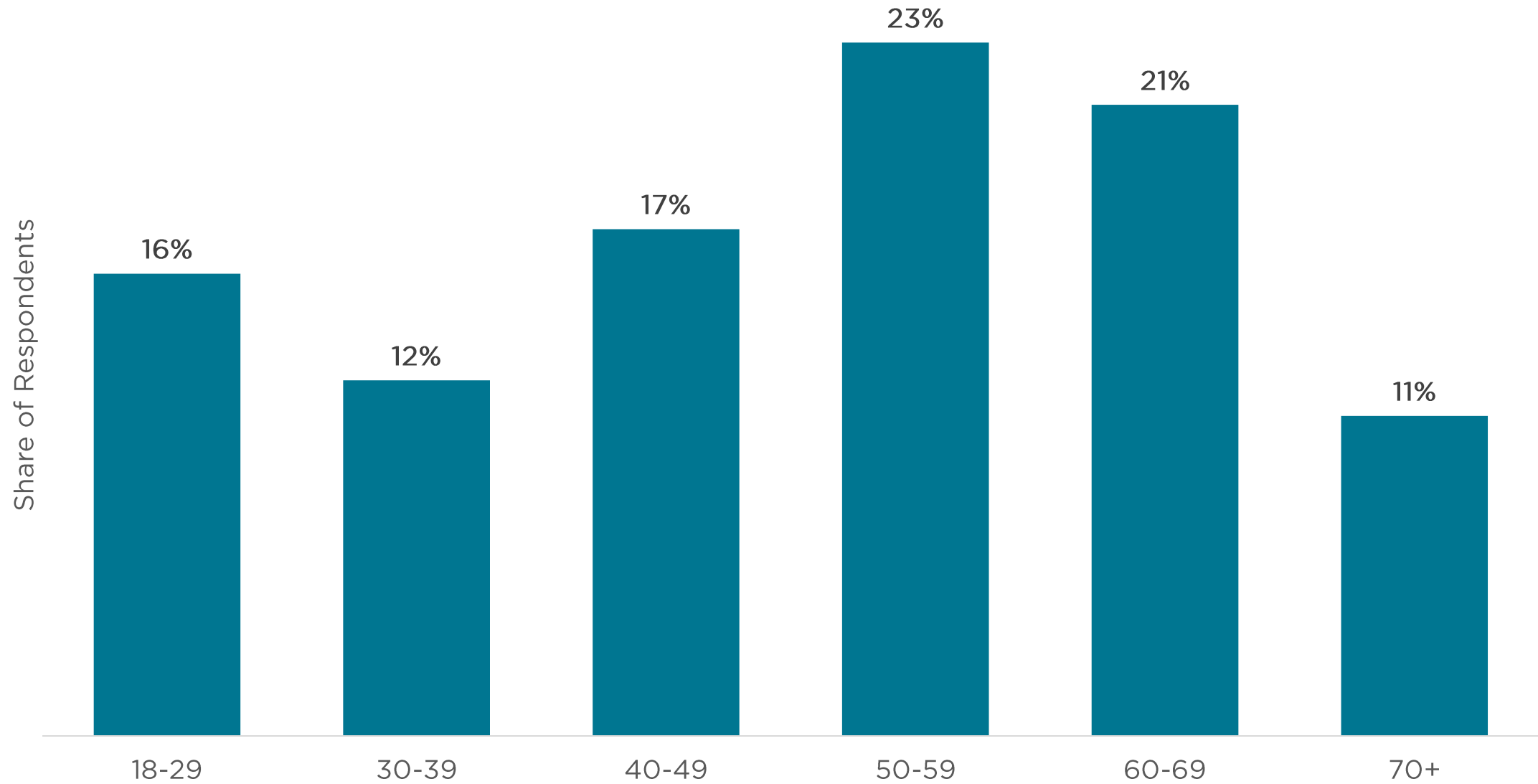


Total  
**72**  
AUSTRALIAN  
respondents

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

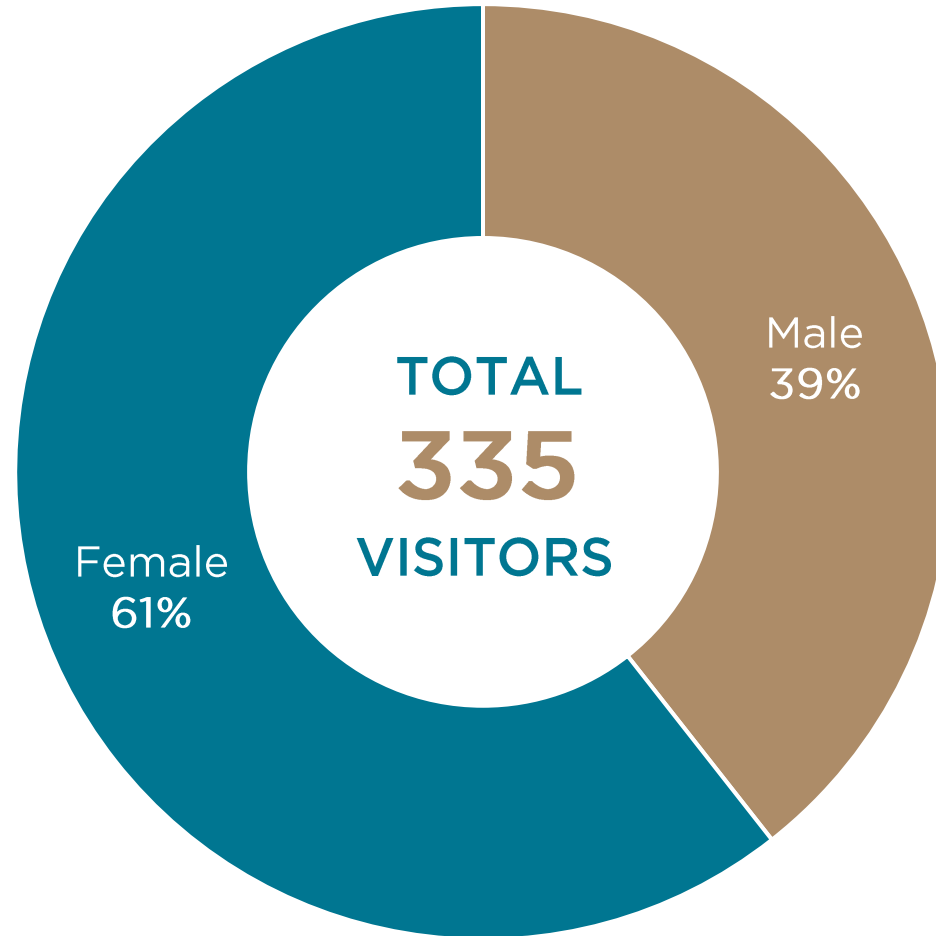
*Note: Due to rounding, total does not sum to 100%*

# Age Group



*Note: N = 334. Due to rounding, total does not sum to 100%*

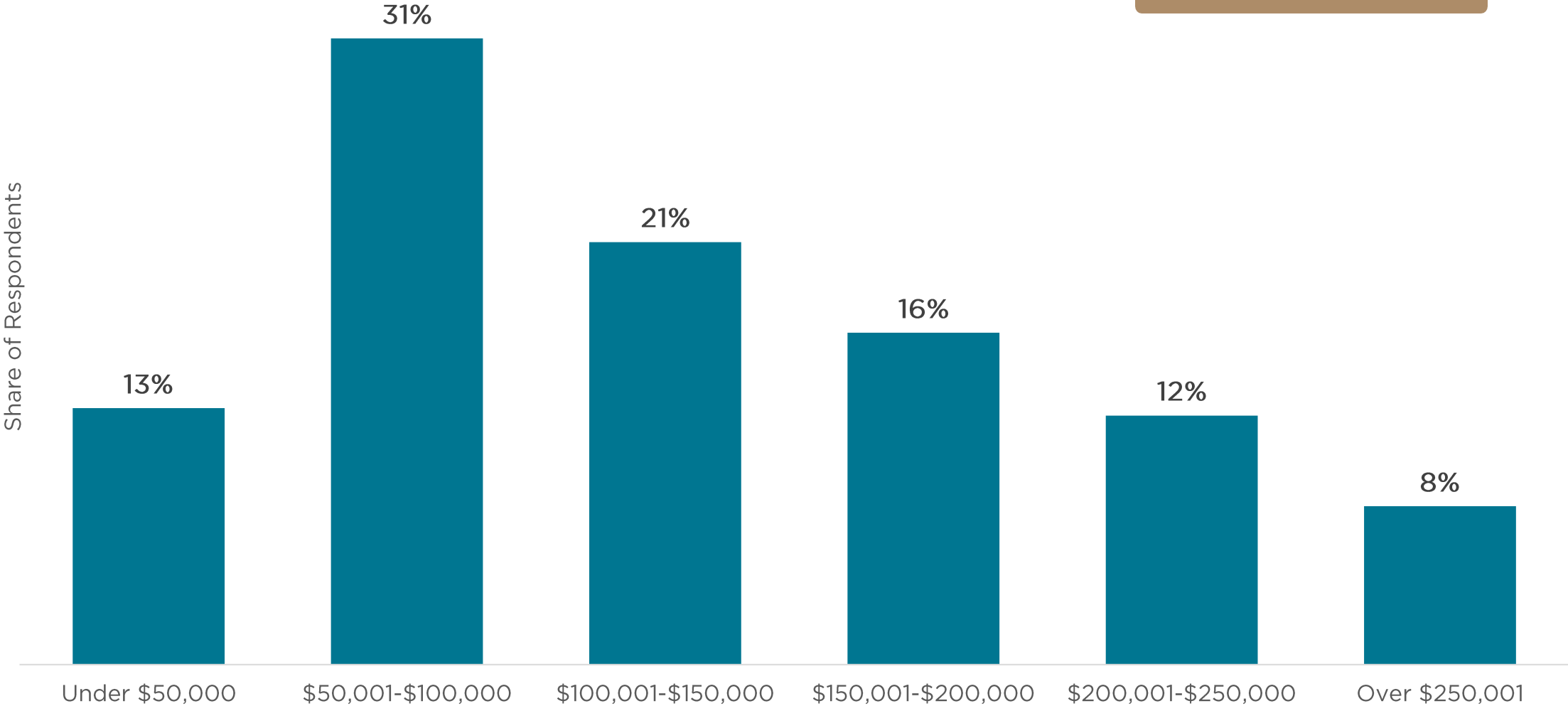
# Gender



*Note: N = 334. Due to rounding, total does not sum to 100%*

# Annual Household Income

Avg. Household Income  
**\$139,303**  
OCT-DEC 2023



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

# Report Structure



Visitor Profile



Visitor  
Characteristics  
& Preferences



Information &  
Decision Making



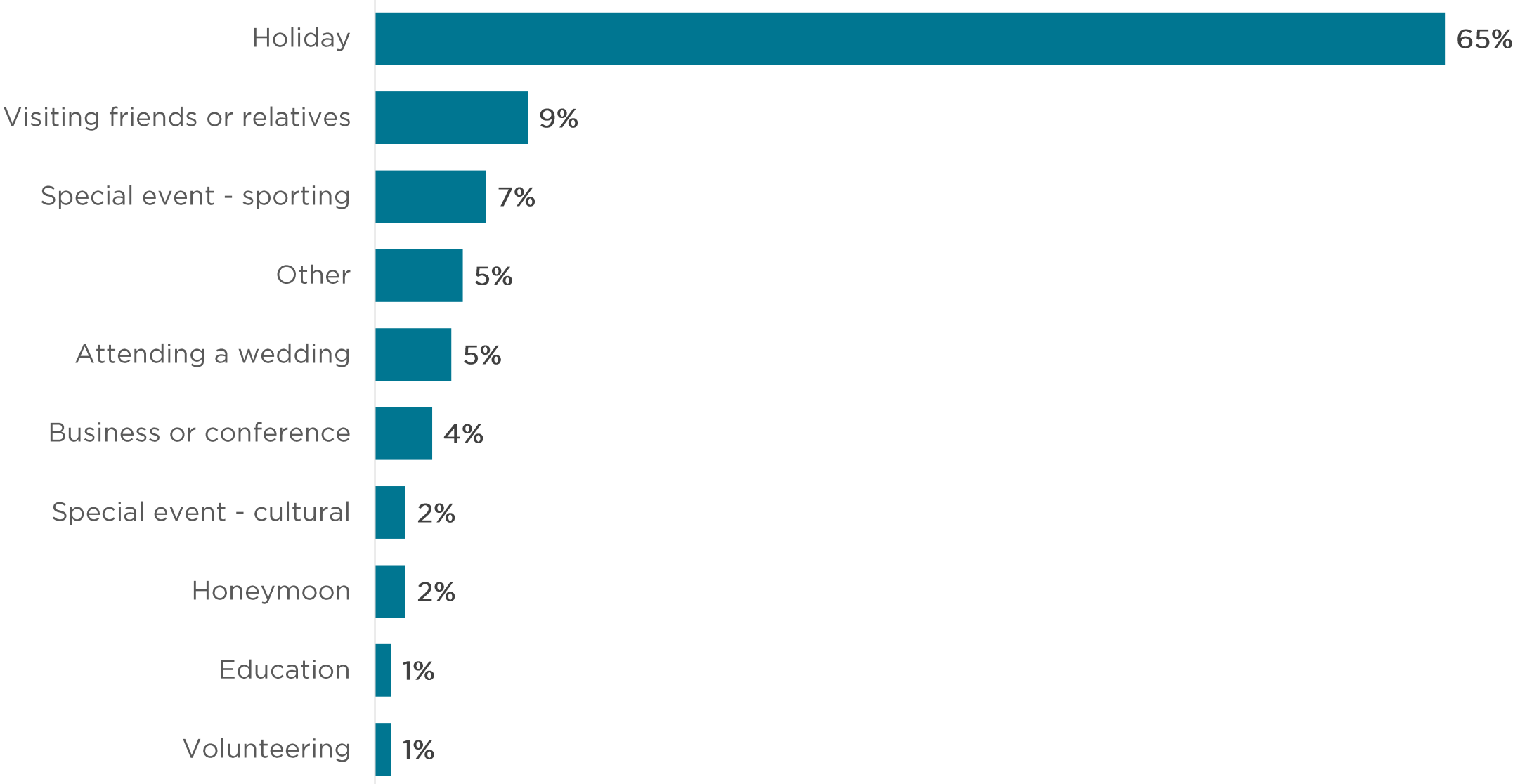
Visitor Spending  
& Impact



Visitor  
Satisfaction



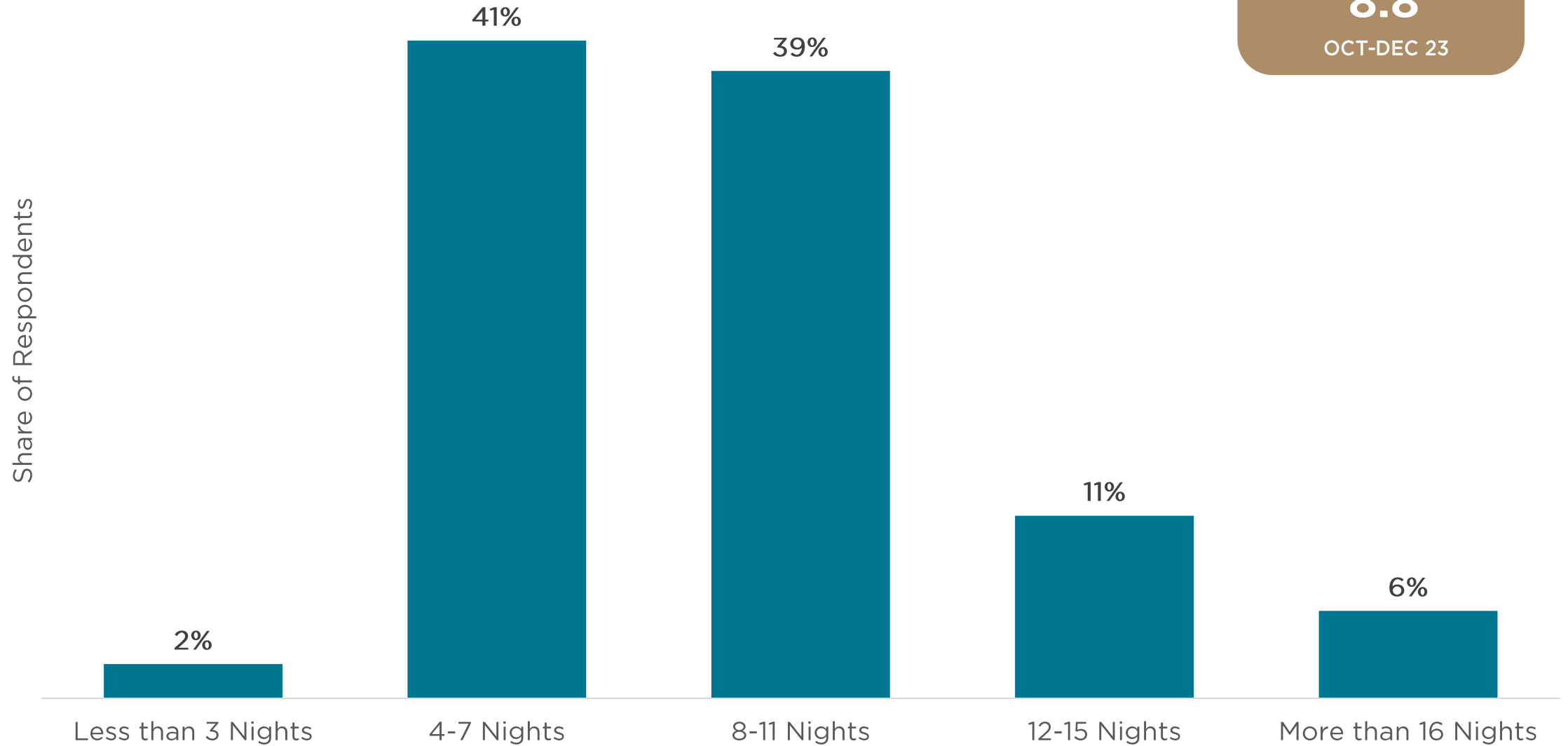
# Purpose of Visit



Note: N=428. Due to rounding, total does not sum to 100%

Share of Respondents

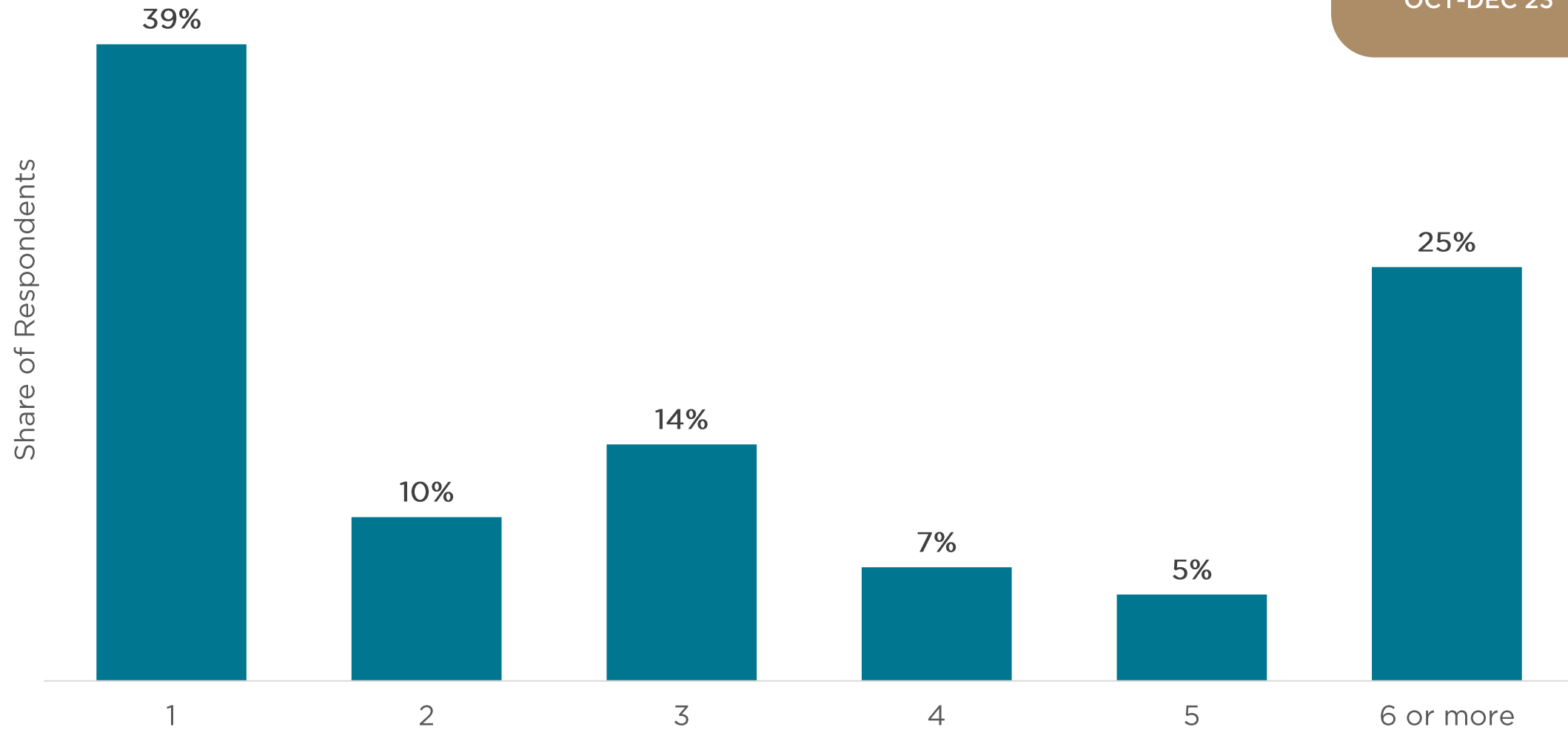
# Length of Stay (nights)



Avg. Length of Stay  
(nights)  
**8.8**  
OCT-DEC 23

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

# Number of Travel Companions



## Travel Companions

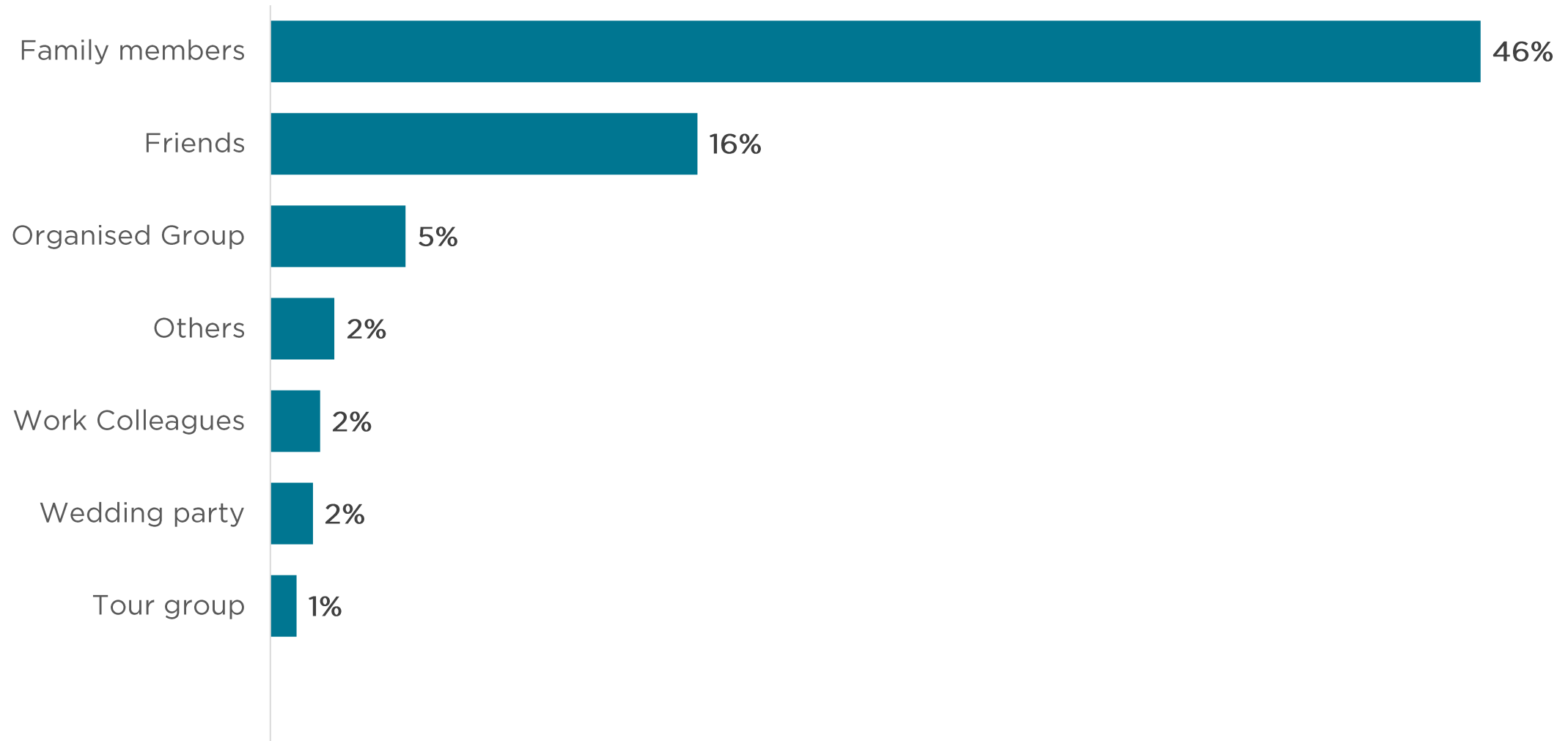
Median **3**

Mean **4**

OCT-DEC 23

Note: N=363. Due to rounding, total does not sum to 100%

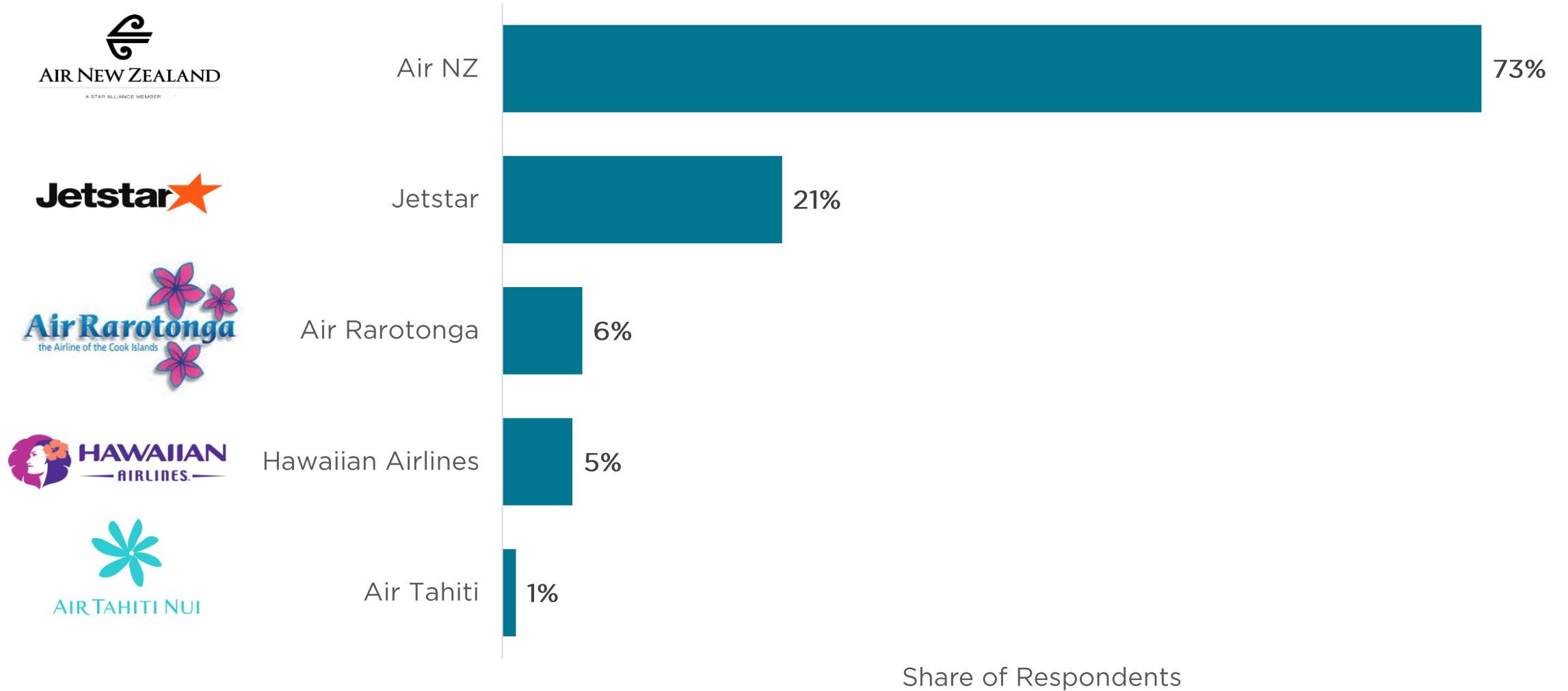
# Travel Companions



Share of Respondents

*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%

# Islands Visited & Avg. Length of Stay

Avg. Length of Stay  
**8.8 Nights**

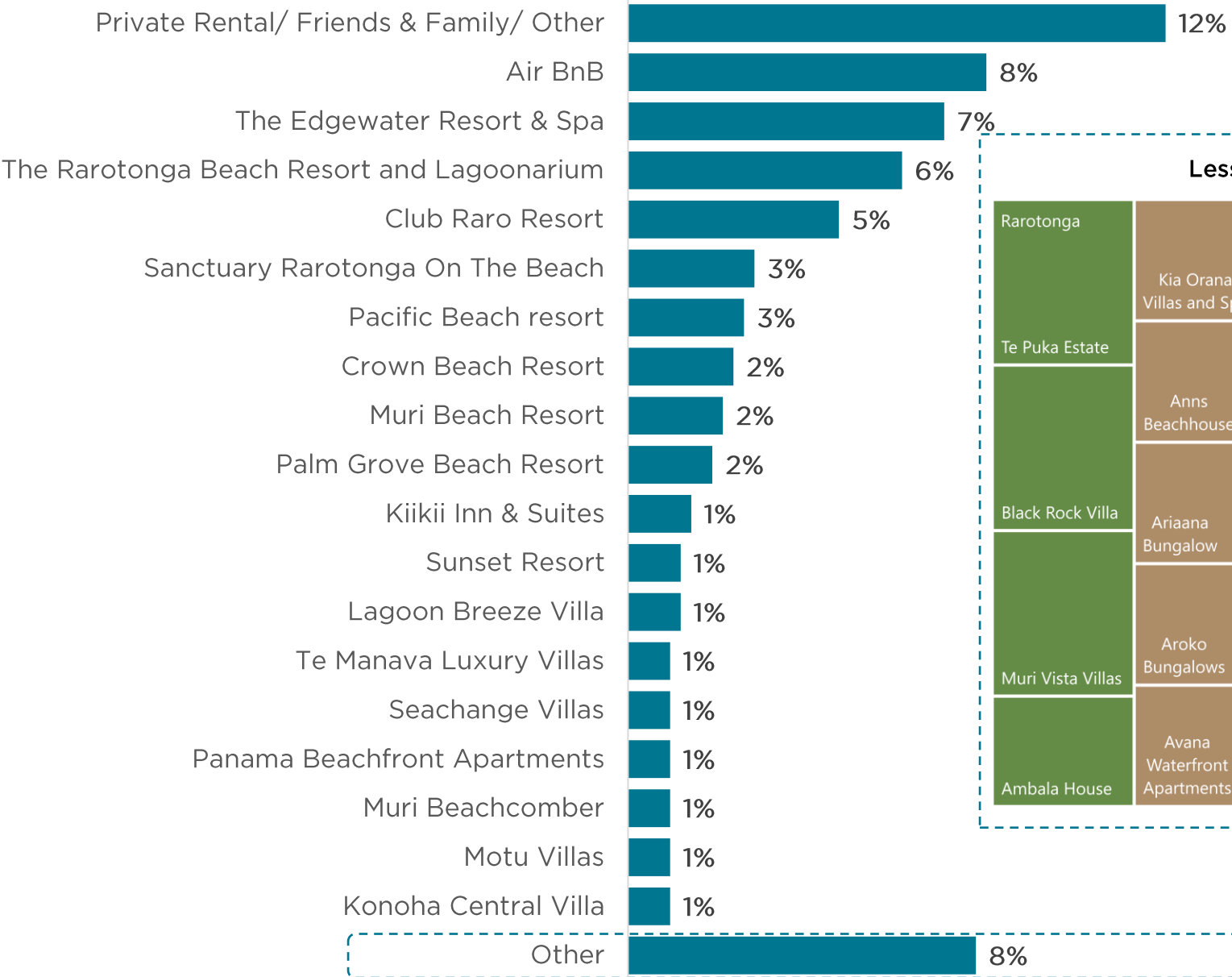
Q: Which island(s) did you visit?

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

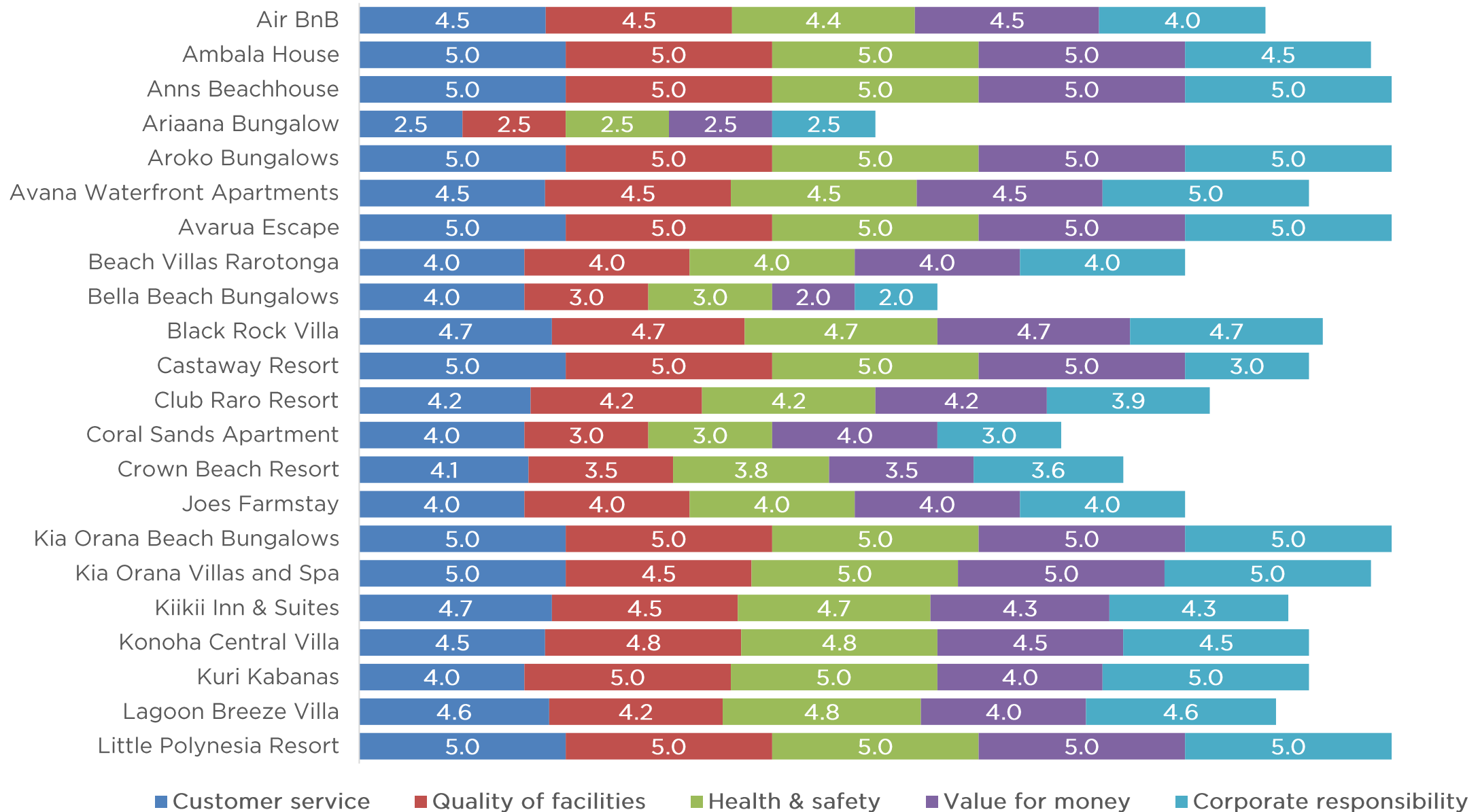


Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%.

# Accommodations Visited in Rarotonga

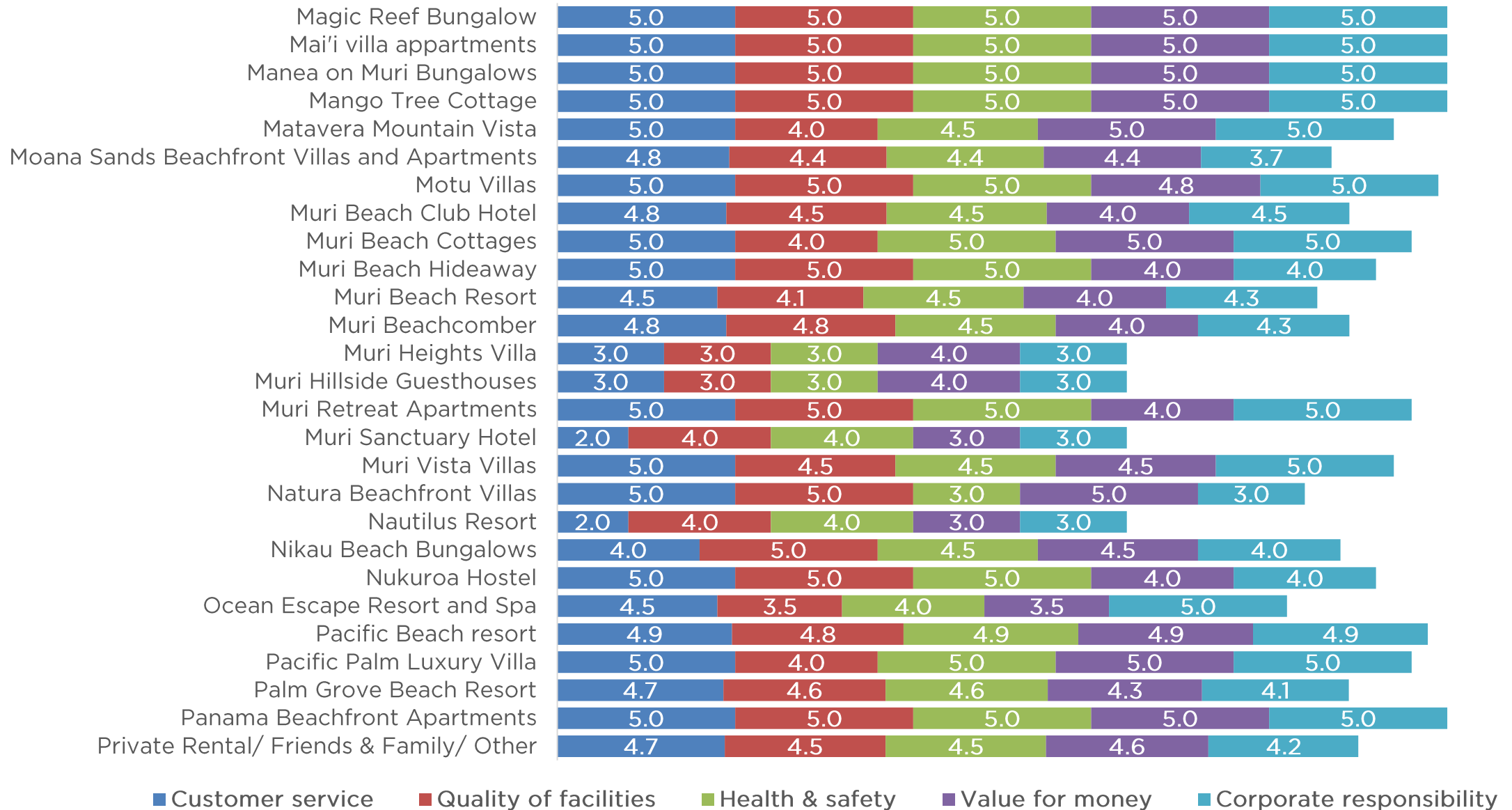


# Rarotonga Accommodations Ratings

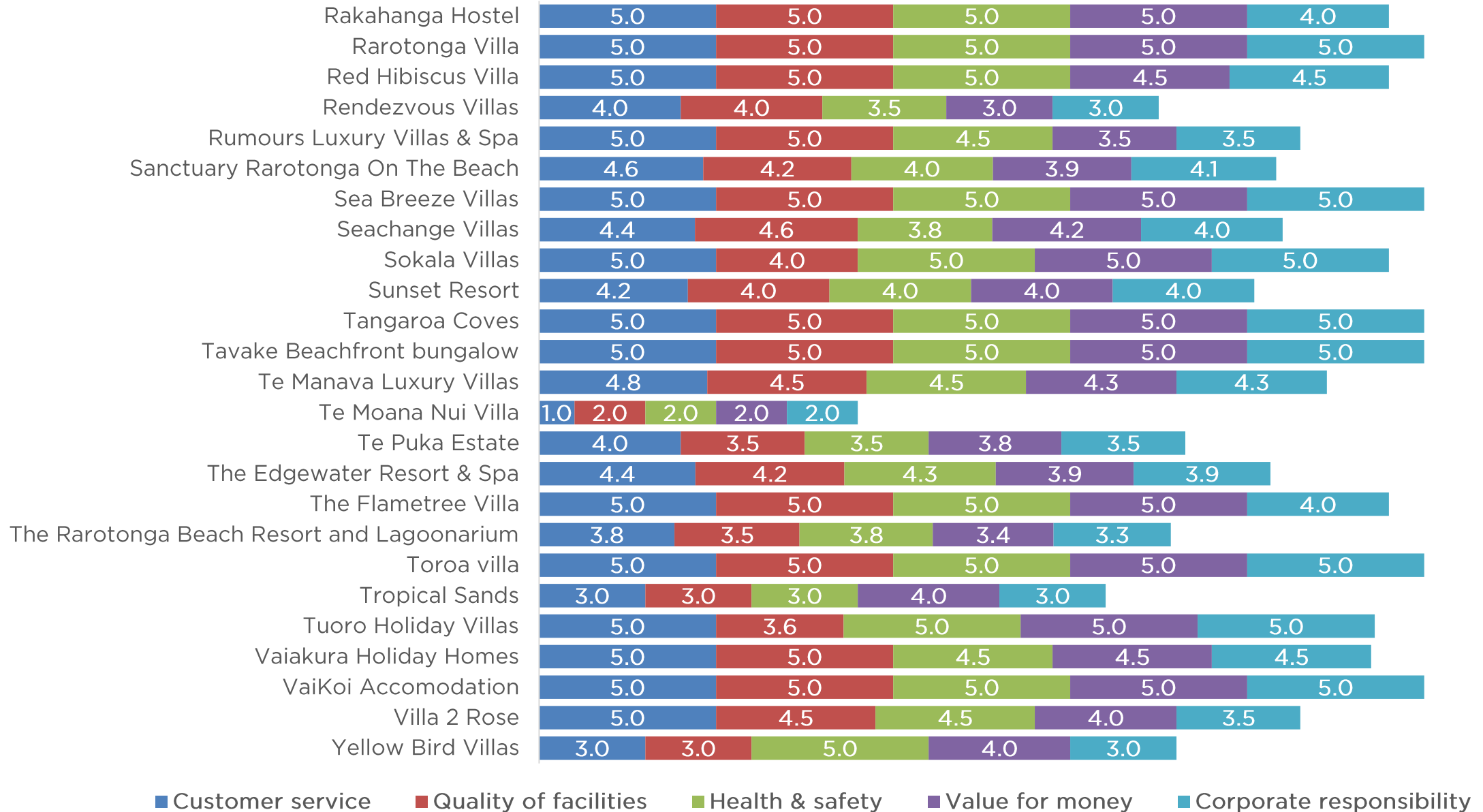




# Rarotonga Accommodations Ratings



# Rarotonga Accommodations Ratings



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

# Accommodations Visited in Aitutaki

Private Rentals/Family & Friends/ Others 4%



Aitutaki Lagoon Private Island Resort 3%



Paradise Cove Lodge 1%



Pacific Resort Aitutaki 1%



Tamanu Beach Resort 1%



Ranginui's Retreat 1%



Airbnb 1%



Tai Roto Bay Beach Villas 1%



Tai Marino Beach Bungalows 1%



Sunny Beach Lodge 1%



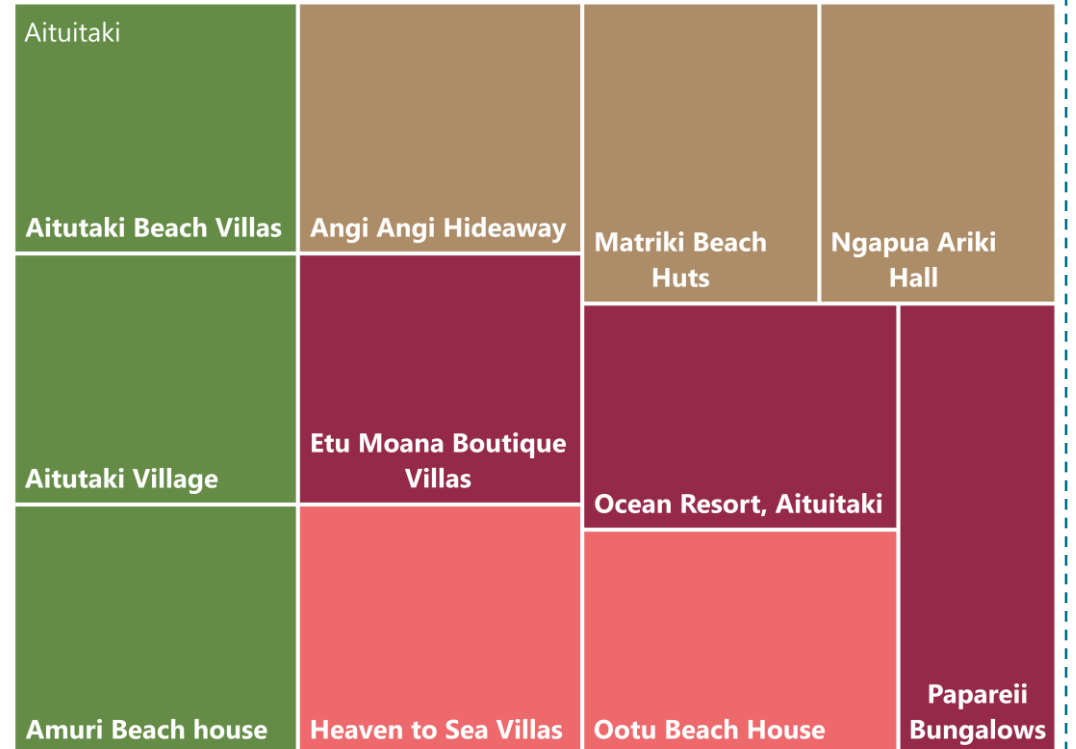
Aitutaki Seaside 1%



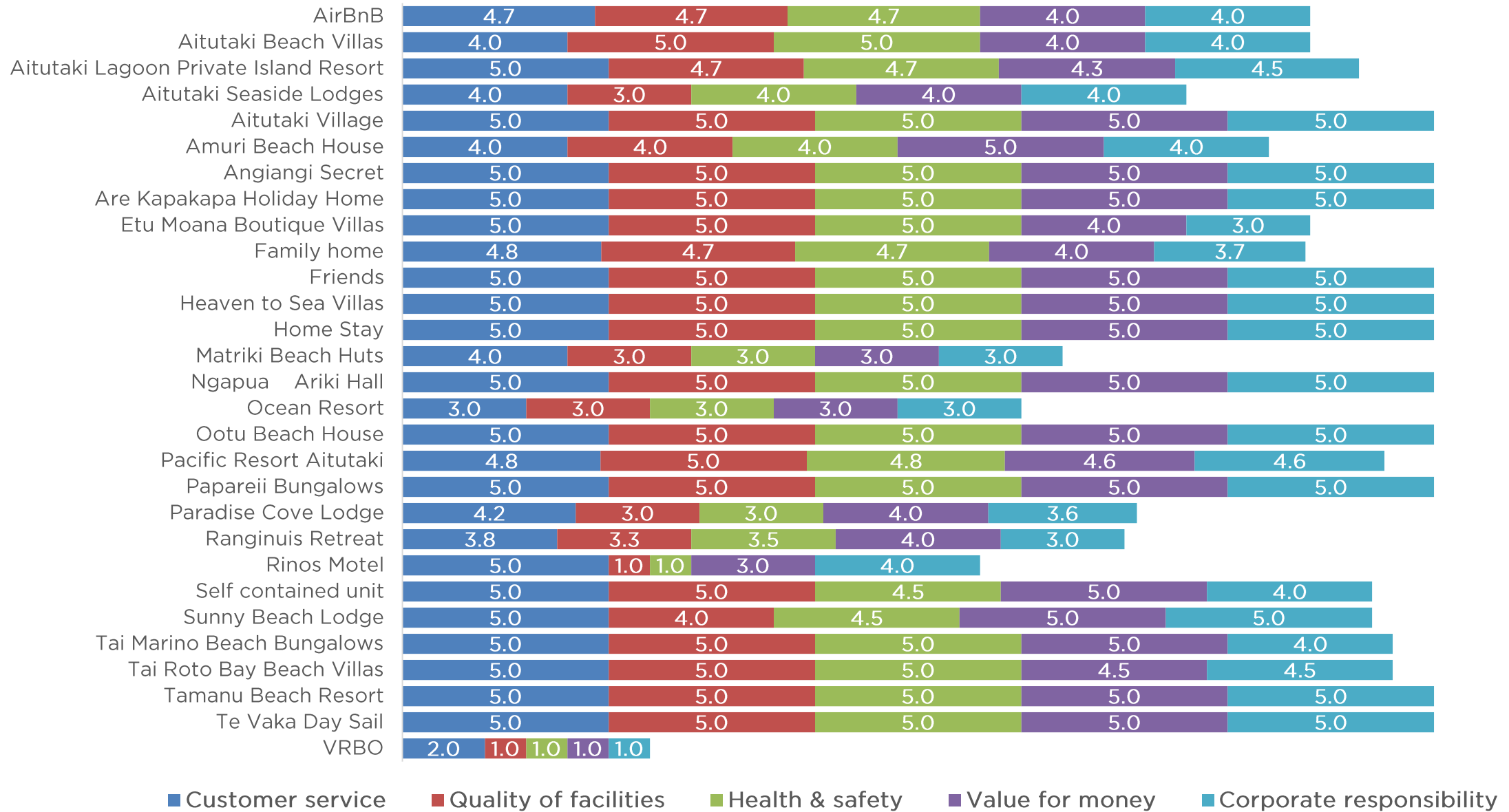
Other 3%



Less than 1% of Visitors stayed at these accommodations



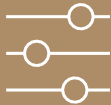
# Aitutaki Accommodations Ratings



# Report Structure



Visitor Profile



Visitor  
Characteristics  
& Preferences



Information &  
Decision Making



Visitor Spending  
& Impact

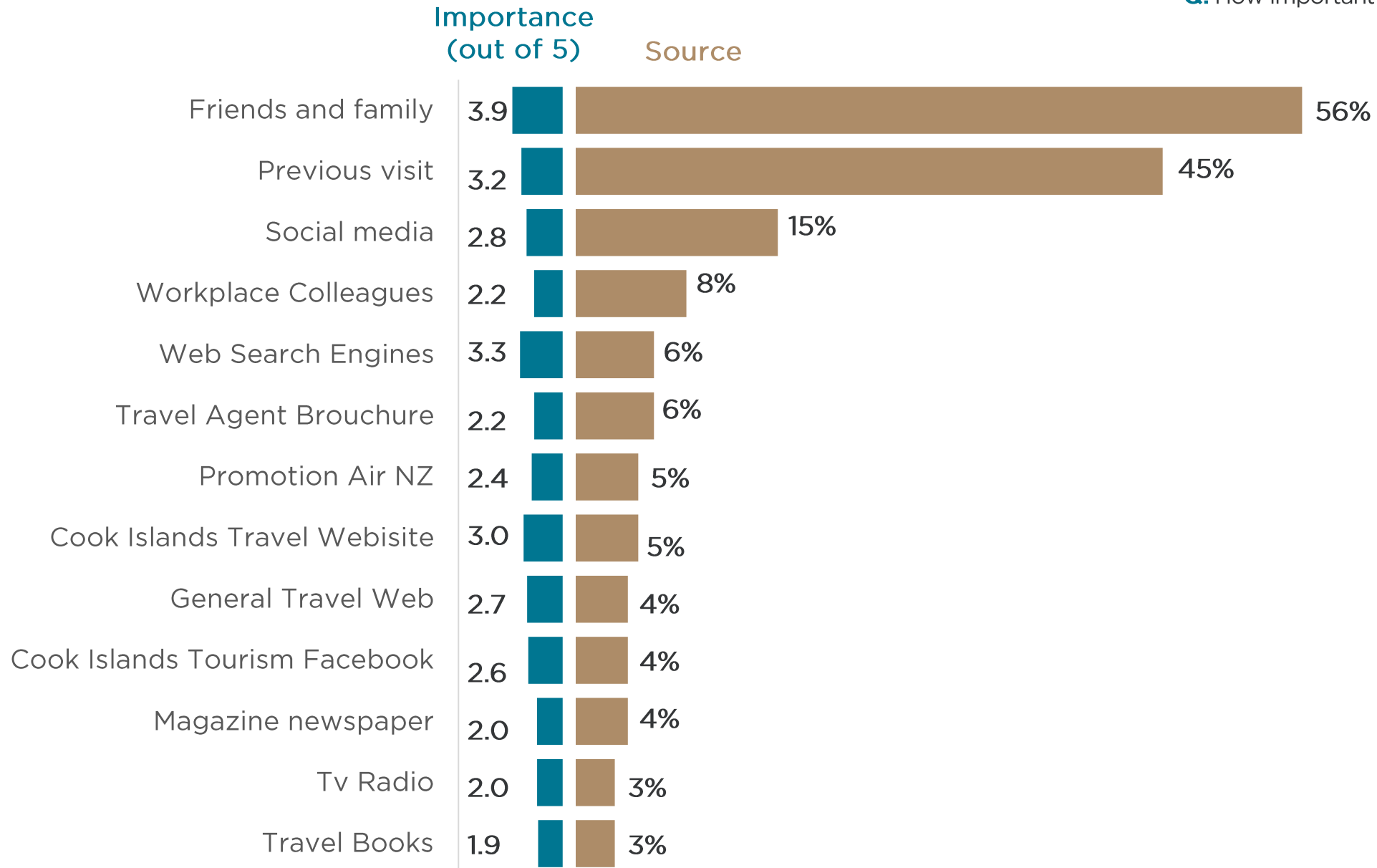


Visitor  
Satisfaction

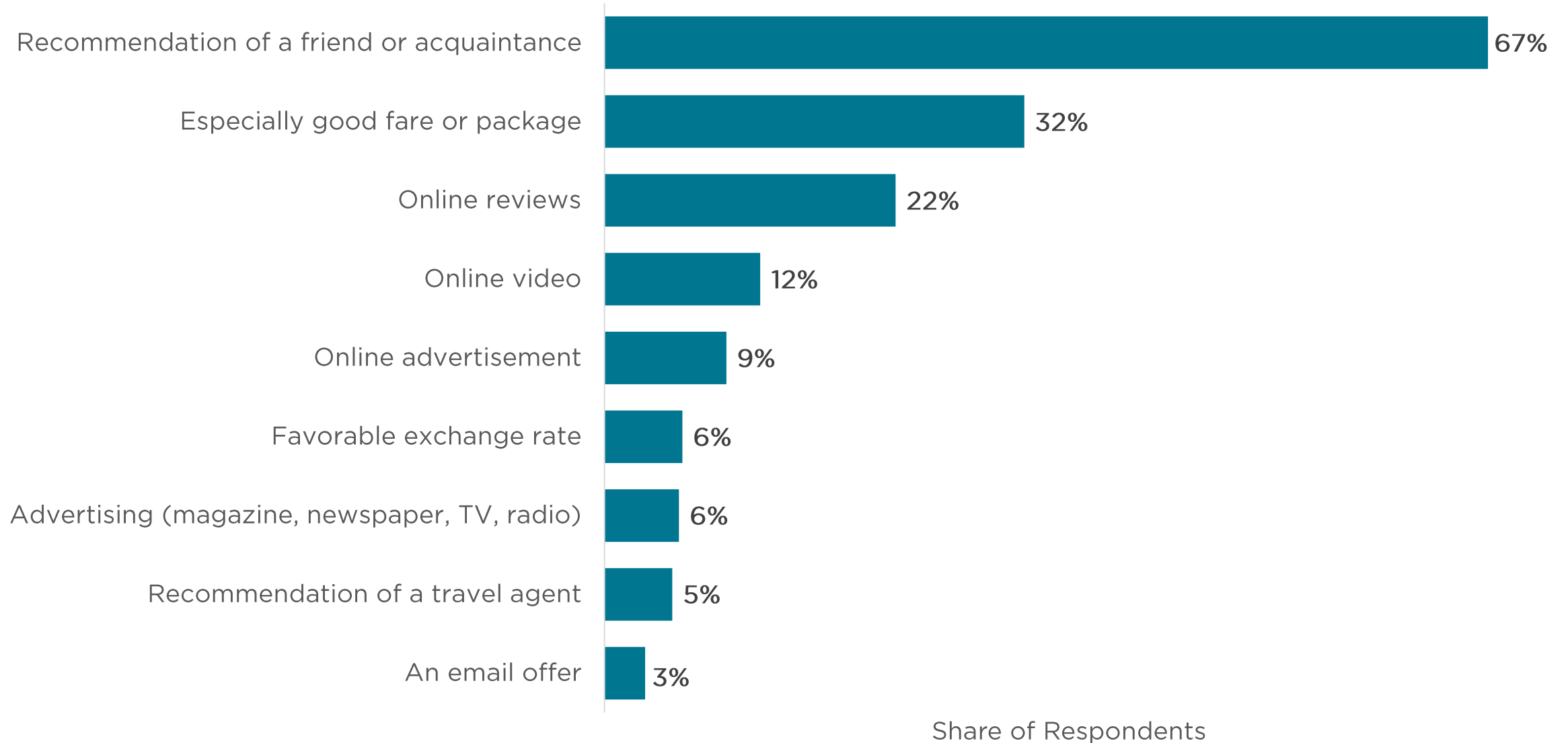
# Information Source

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

Q: How important was the information source?

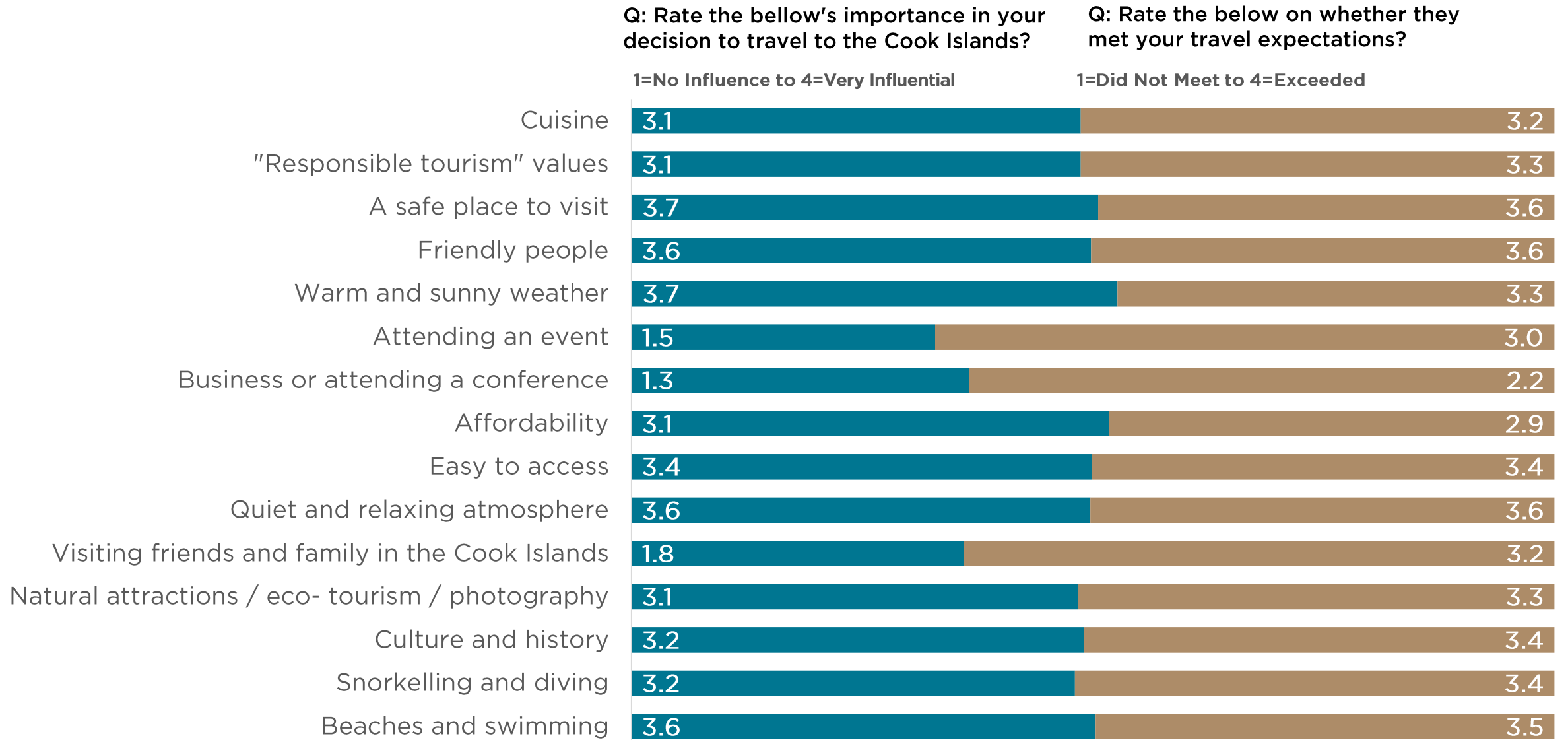


# Important Promotion/ Advertising Channels that assisted in selecting to visit the Cook Islands



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

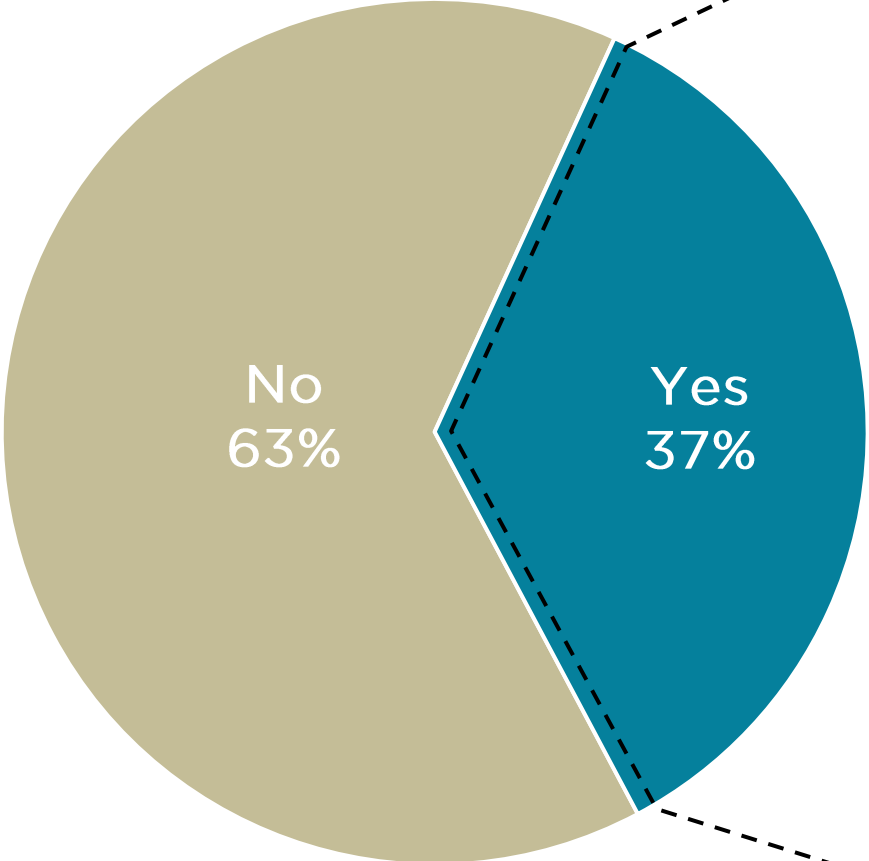
# Pre-Travel Perceptions Vs Expectations



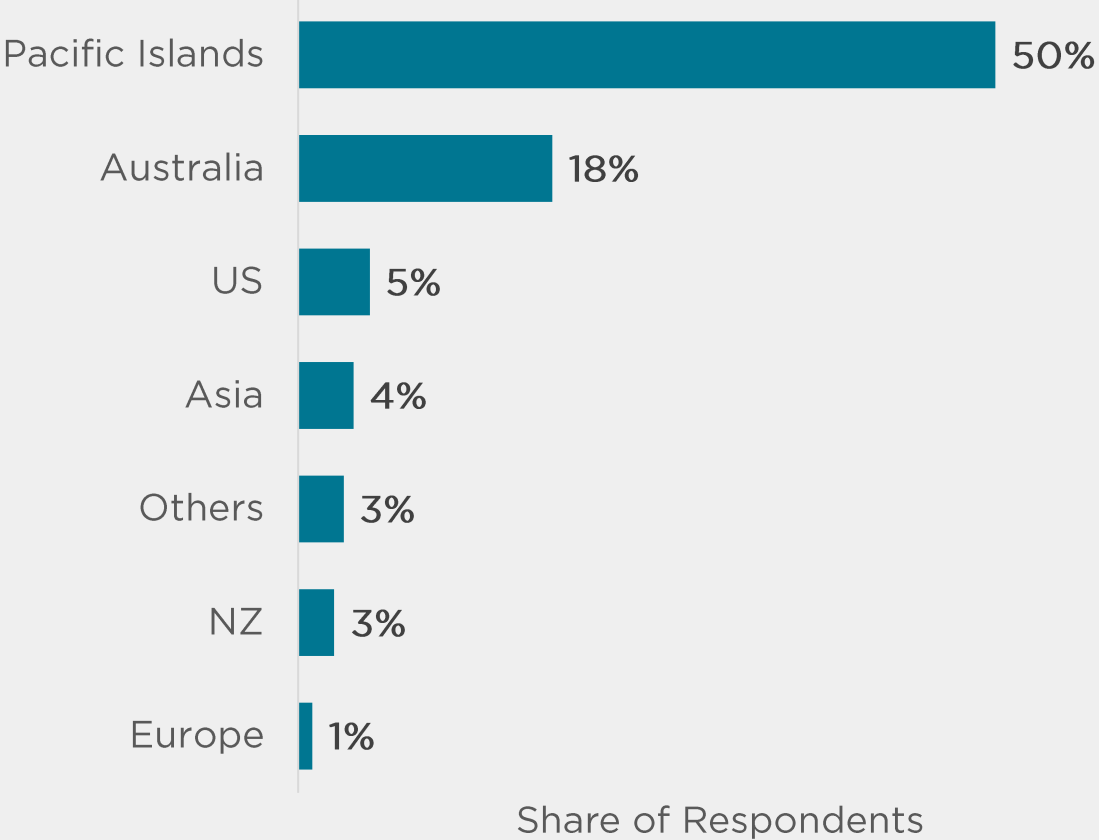


# Other Considered Destinations

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



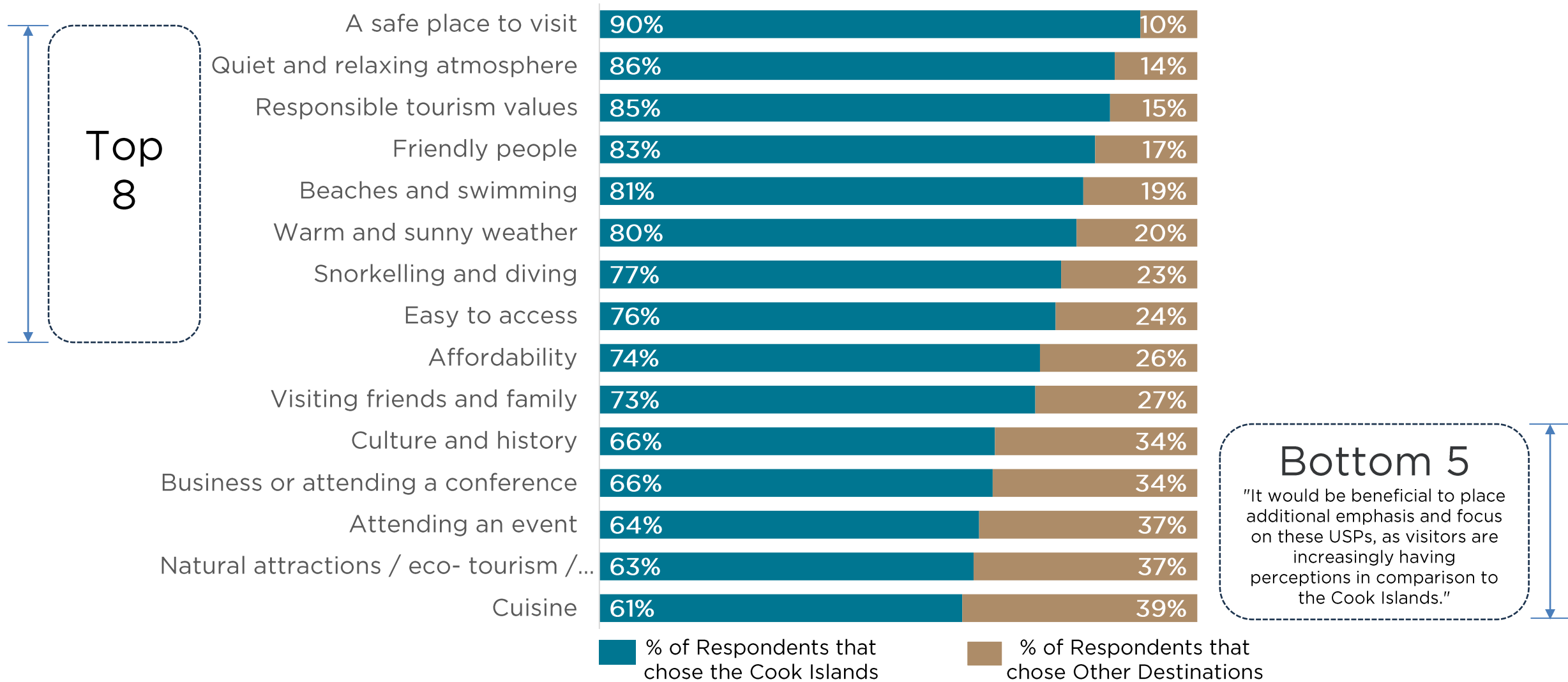
**Q: If Yes, choose at most 3 destinations you considered**



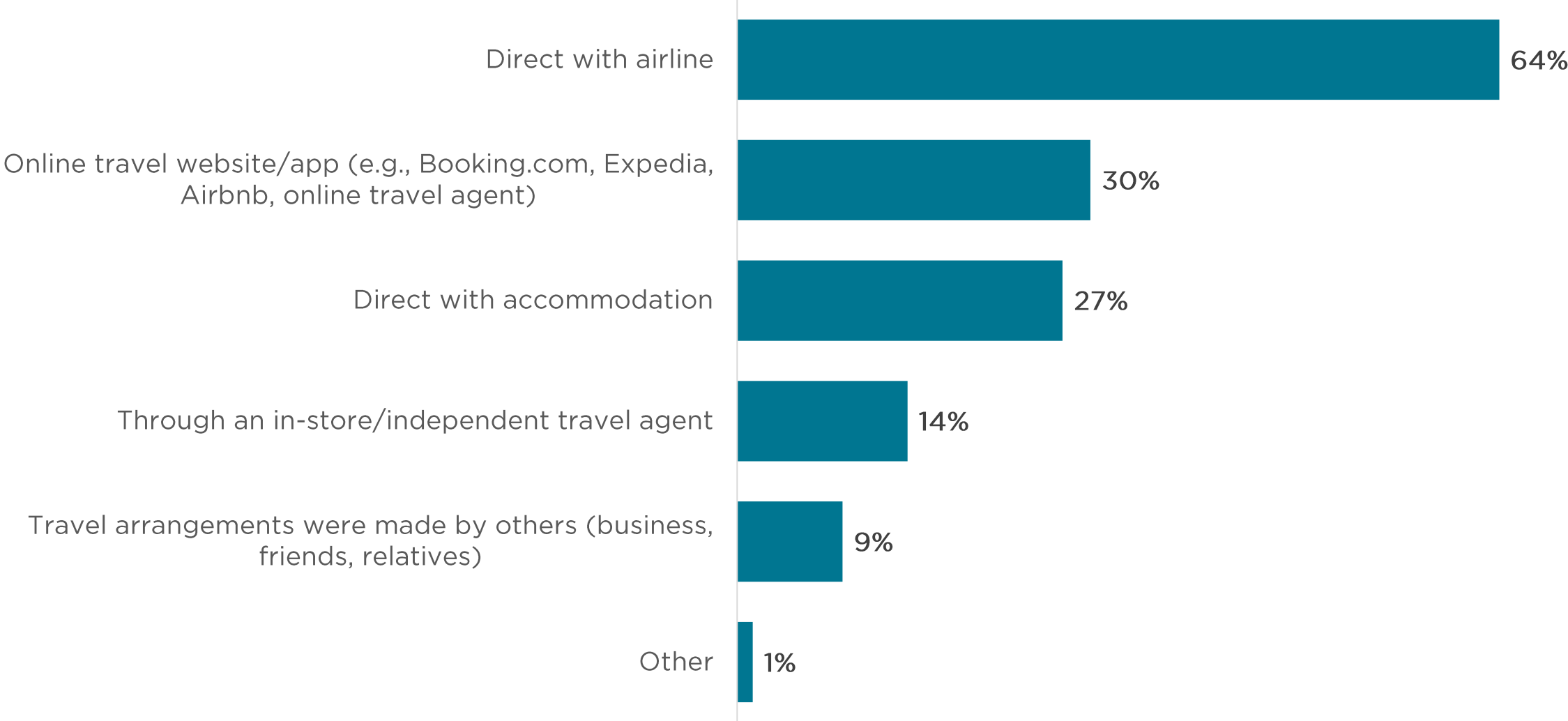
*Note: New variables for 2023*

# 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



# Purchasing of Travel



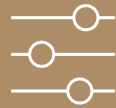
Share of Respondents

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

# Report Structure



Visitor Profile



Visitor  
Characteristics  
& Preferences



Information &  
Decision Making



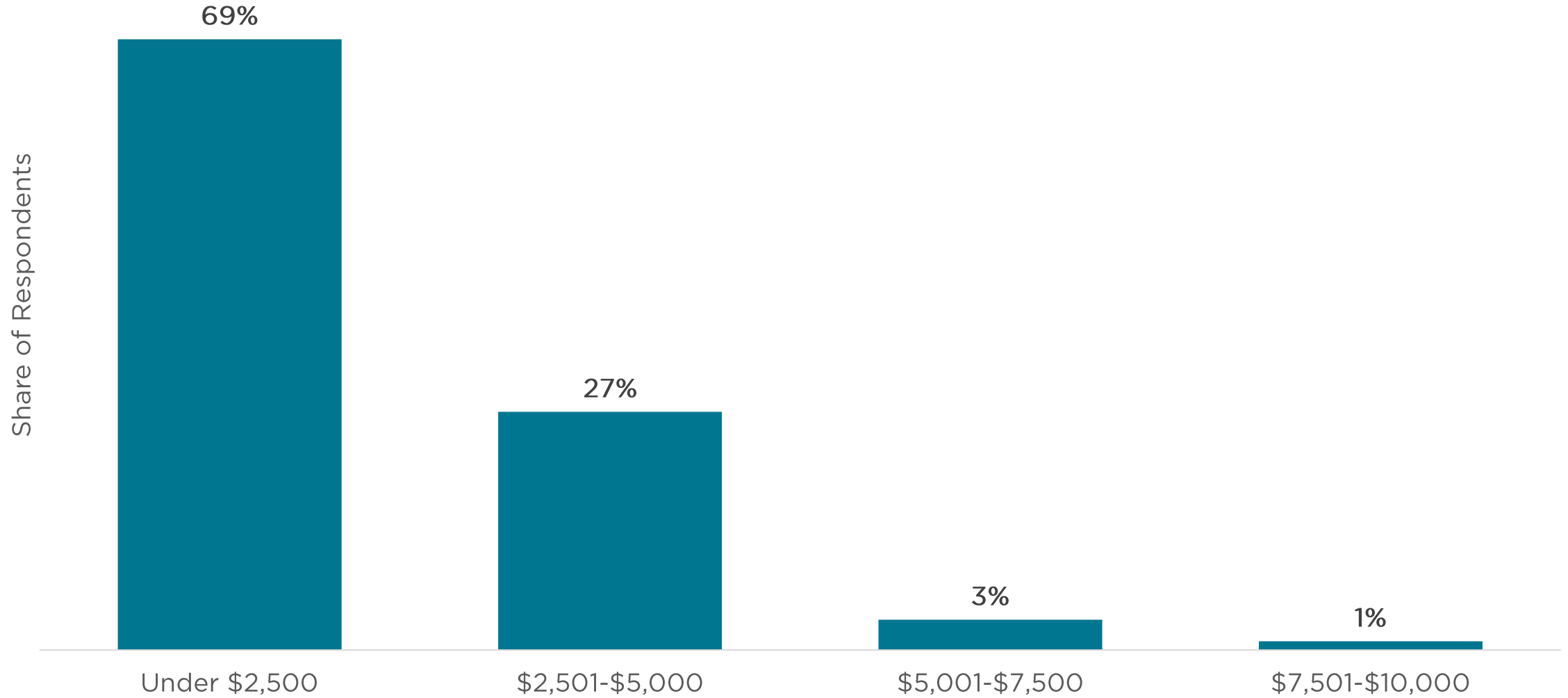
Visitor Spending  
& Impact



Visitor  
Satisfaction

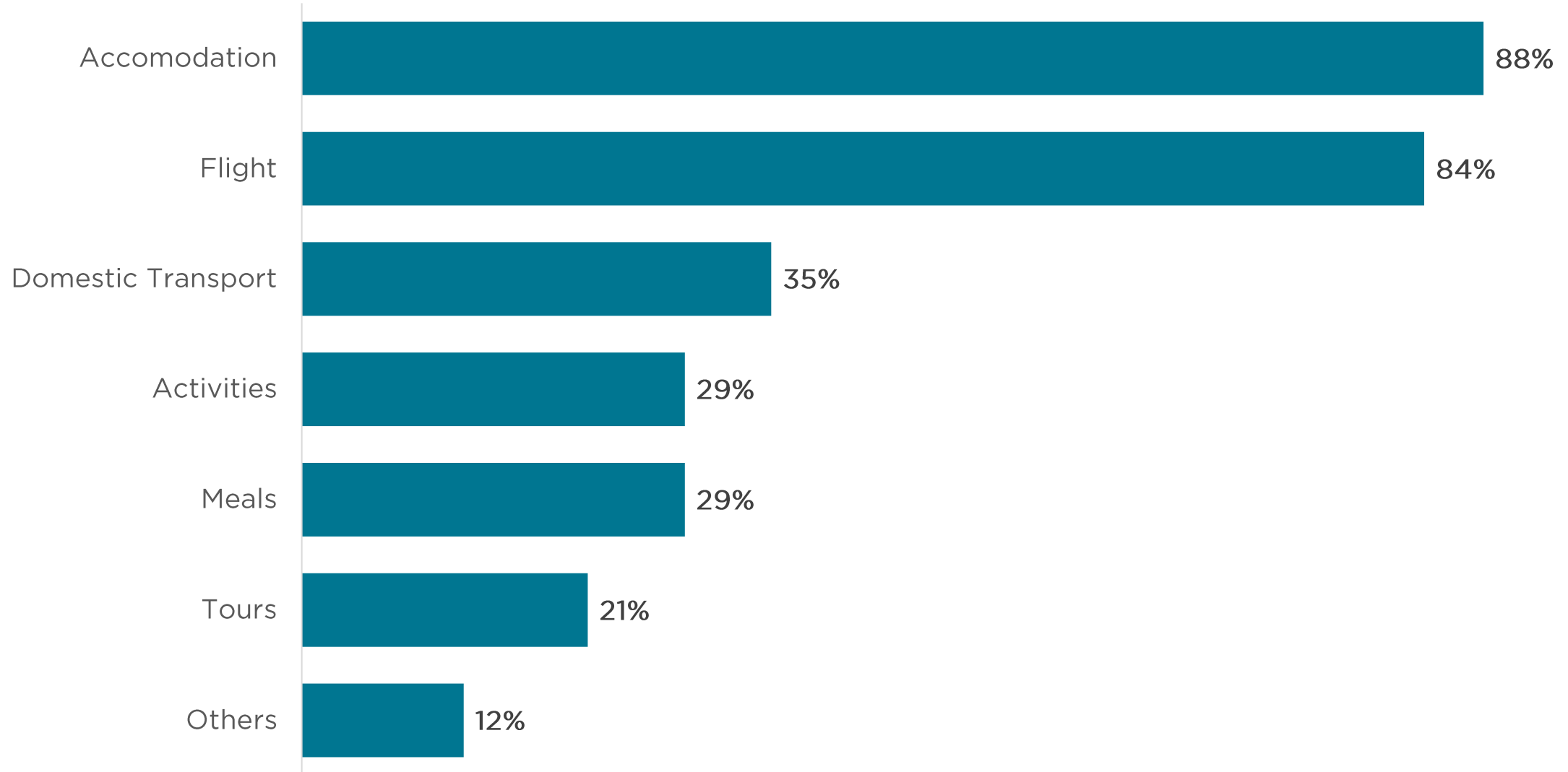
# Prepaid Expenditure

Avg. Prepaid per Person  
per Trip  
**NZ\$2,204**



Note: NZ dollars.

# Prepaid Items



Share of Respondents

*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 (NZD)	
	<u>% of sector</u>	<u>Oct-Dec 2023</u>
Accommodation	39%	\$102
Domestic Flight	15%	\$39
Restaurant, Cafes & Bars	13%	\$35
Vehicle Rental	8%	\$20
Shopping (e.g., souvenirs, clothes)	5%	\$13
Land-based activities	5%	\$12
Groceries	4%	\$12
Water-based activities	4%	\$11
Other	4%	\$11
Petrol	1%	\$3
Internet Cost	1%	\$2
Public Transport	1%	\$2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>262</b>

# Economic Impact - Per Person and Total

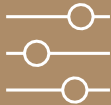
	Visitor Expenditure Per Person & Total	
	Oct-Dec 2022	Oct-Dec 2023
<b>Average Spend Prior to arrival</b>	<b>NZD</b>	<b>NZD</b>
Per Person Per Trip	2,555	2,204
	<i>Flowing into local economy rate - estimated 40%</i>	
Per Person Per Trip	1,022	882
Per Person per Day	117	100
<hr/>		
<b>Average Local Spend</b>		
<i>Length of Stay (nights)</i>	<i>mean 8.7 nights</i>	<i>mean of each item Under local spend</i>
Per Person Per Trip	1,749	2,302
Per Person per Day	201	262
<hr/>		
<b>Total Economic Impact-Per Trip</b>	<b>2,771</b>	<b>3,184</b>
<b>Total Economic Impact-Per Day</b>	<b>318</b>	<b>362</b>



# Report Structure



Visitor Profile



Visitor Characteristics & Preferences



Information & Decision Making



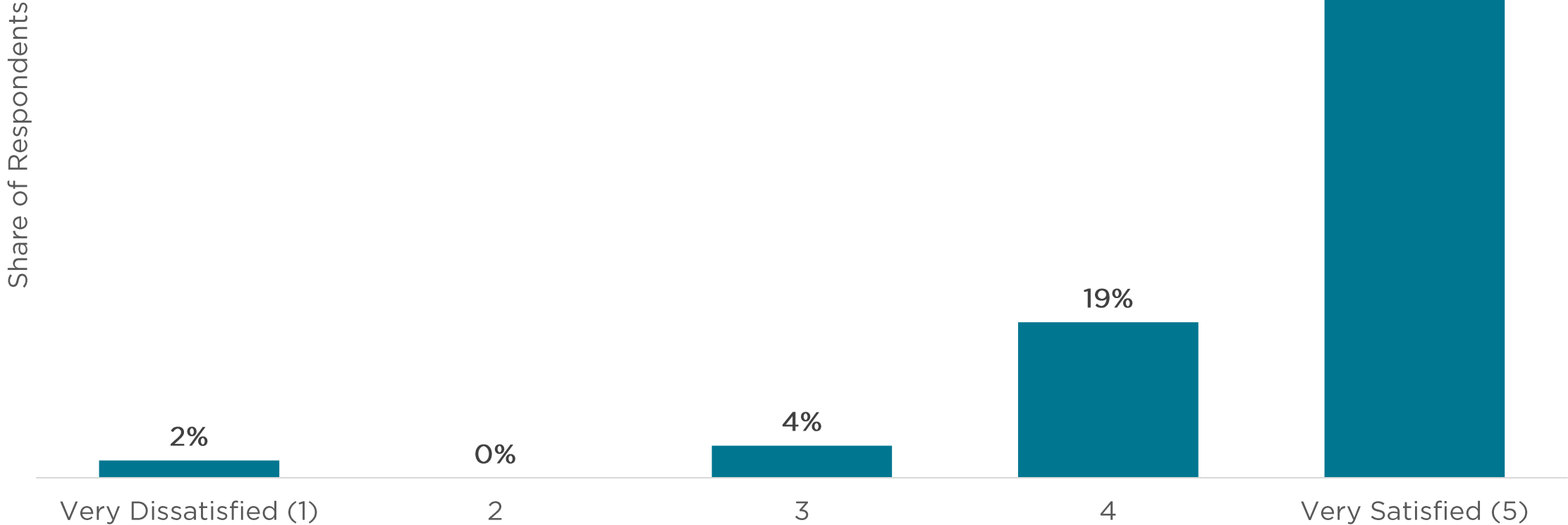
Visitor Spending & Impact



Visitor Satisfaction

# Visitor Overall Satisfaction

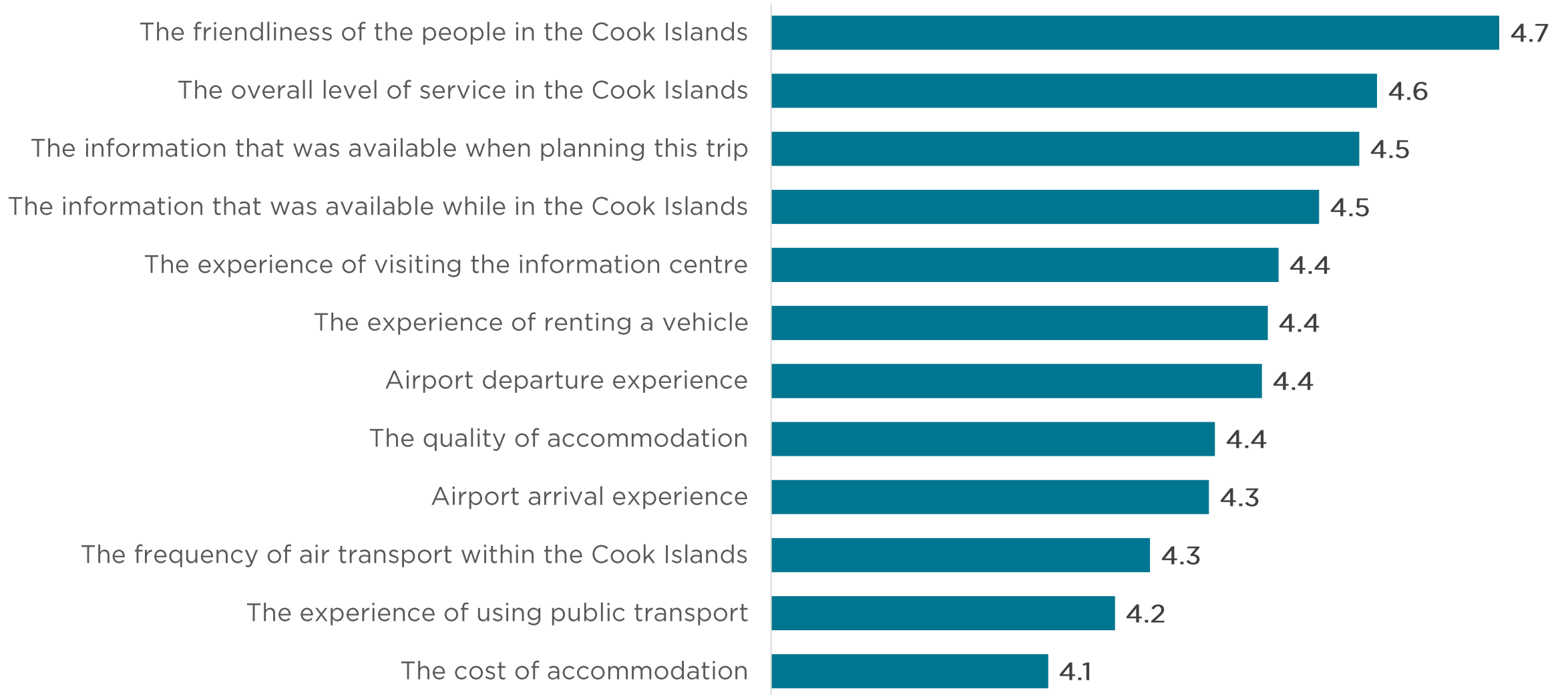
Avg. Satisfaction  
**4.7**  
OCT-DEC 23



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

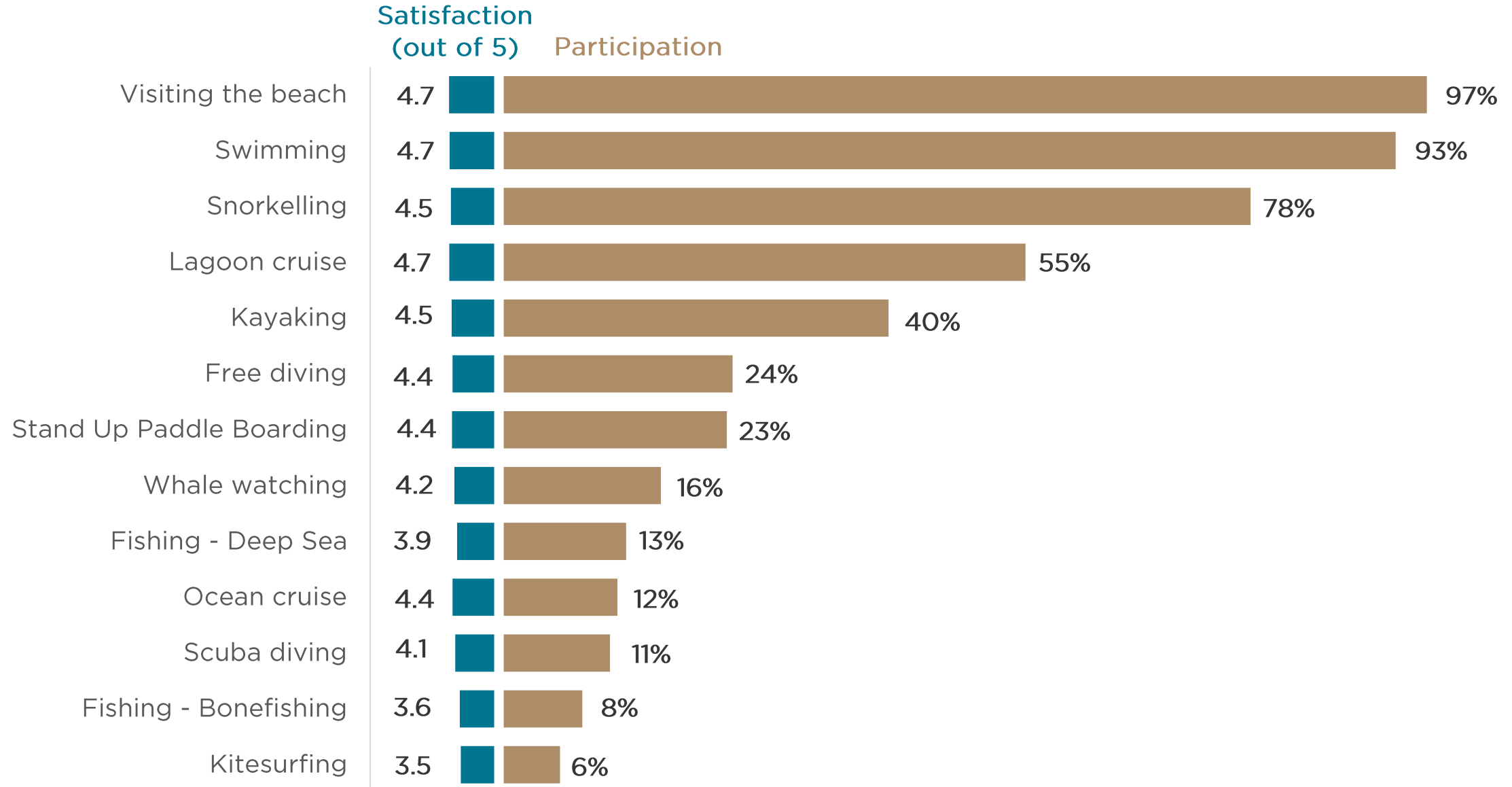
# Satisfaction with Travel Experience

Q: How satisfied were you with the following?



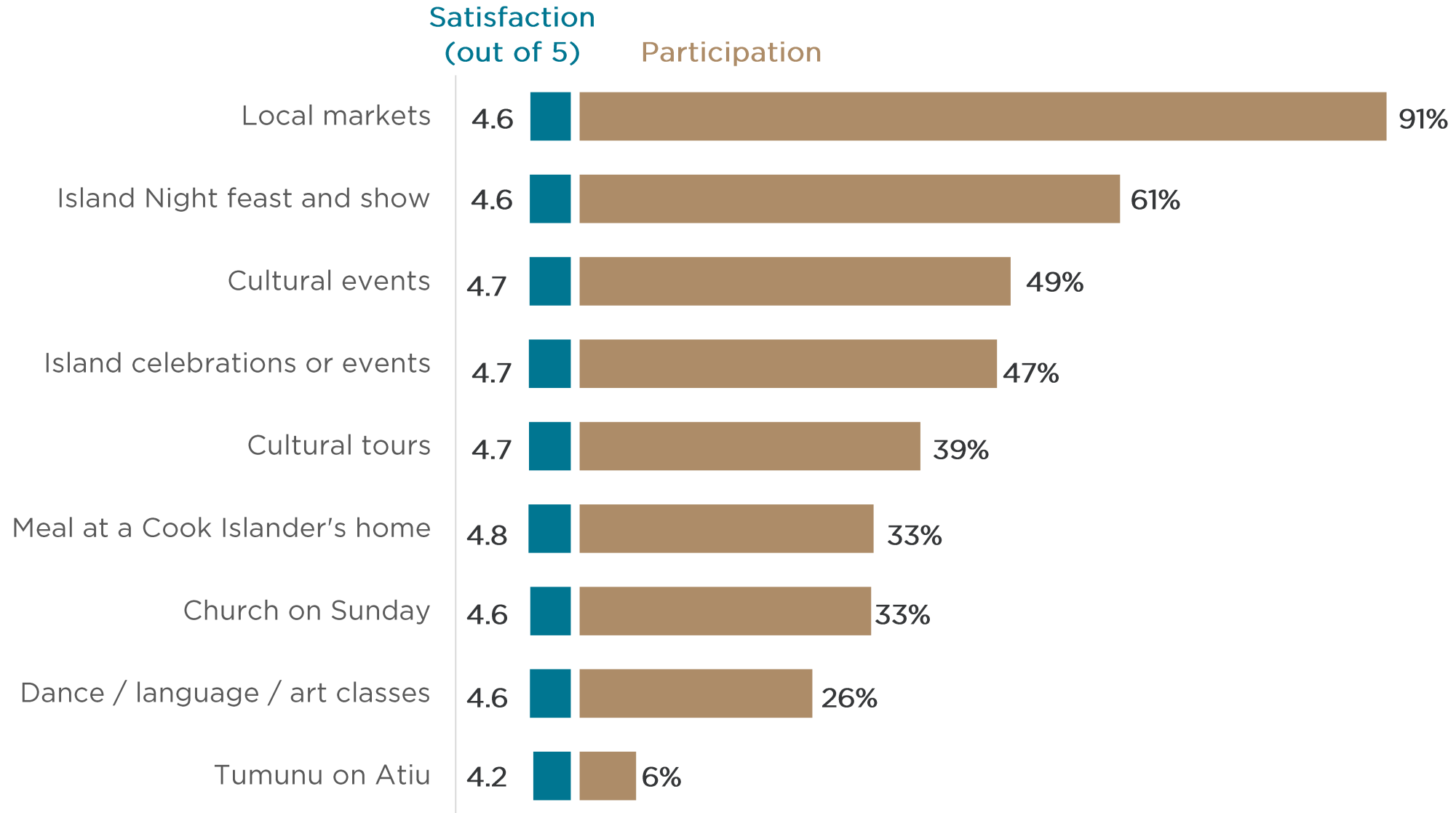
Scale: 1=Very Dissatisfied to 5=Very Satisfied

# Water-based Activities



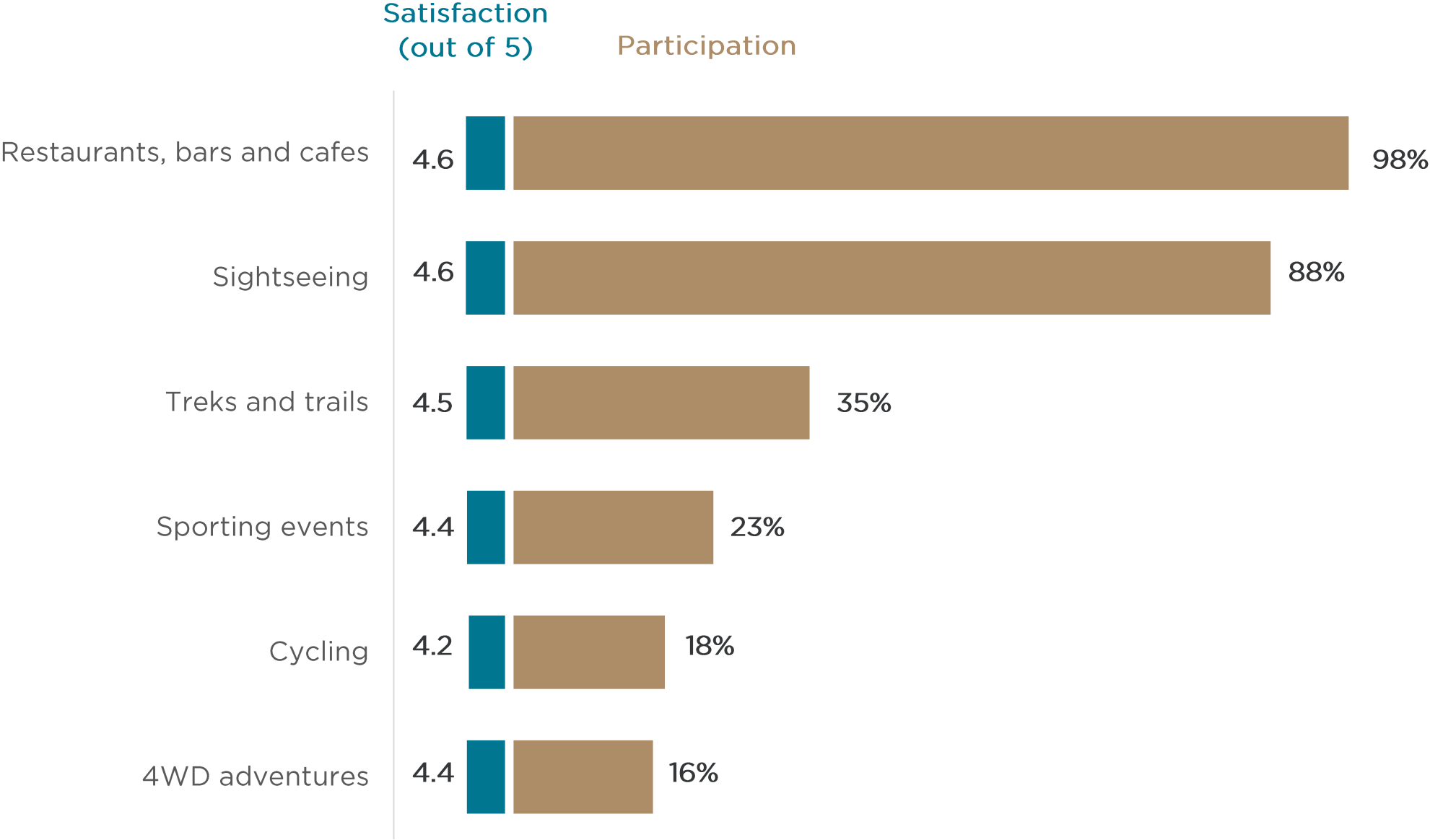
Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%

# Arts and Cultural



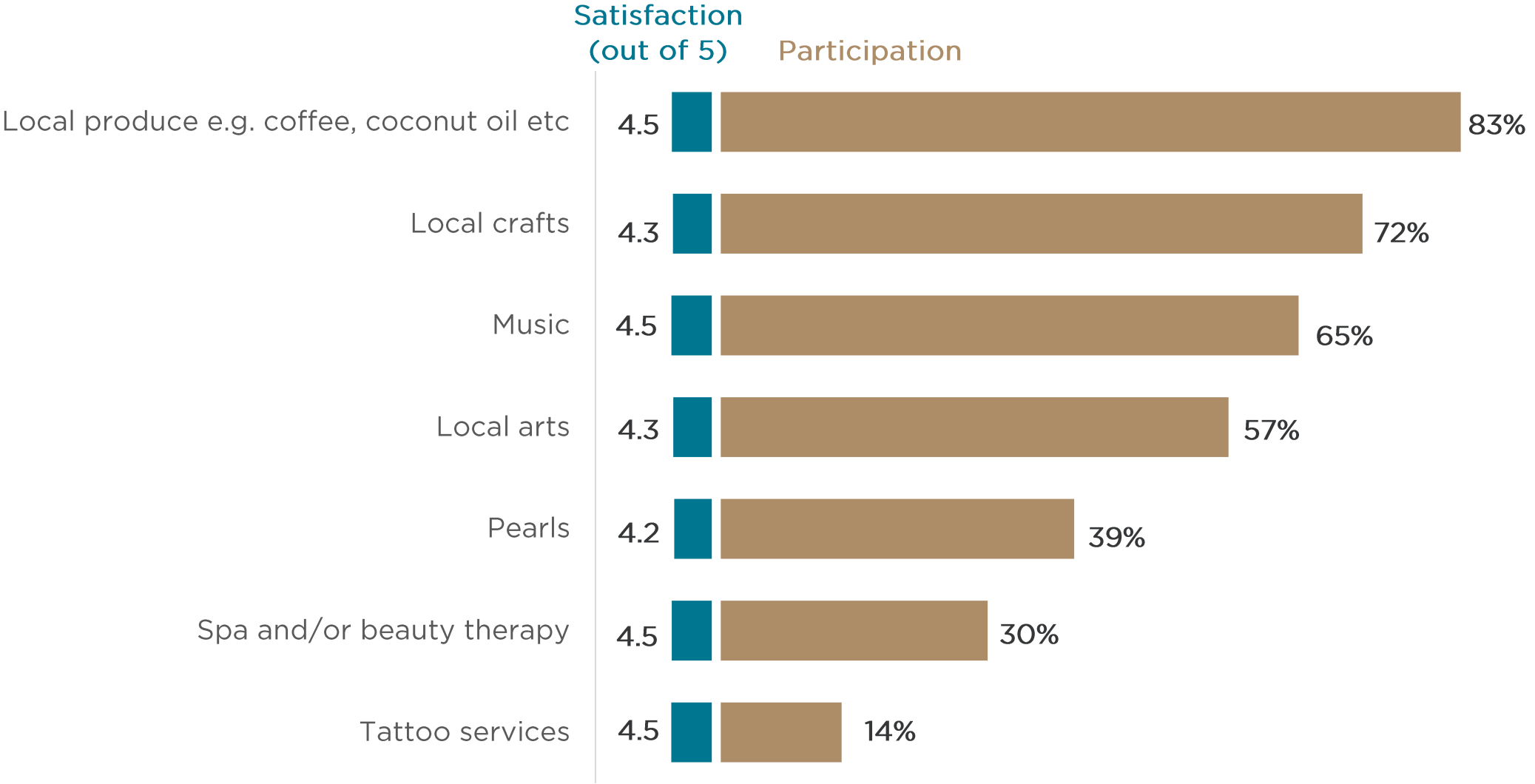
Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%

# Land-based Activities



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

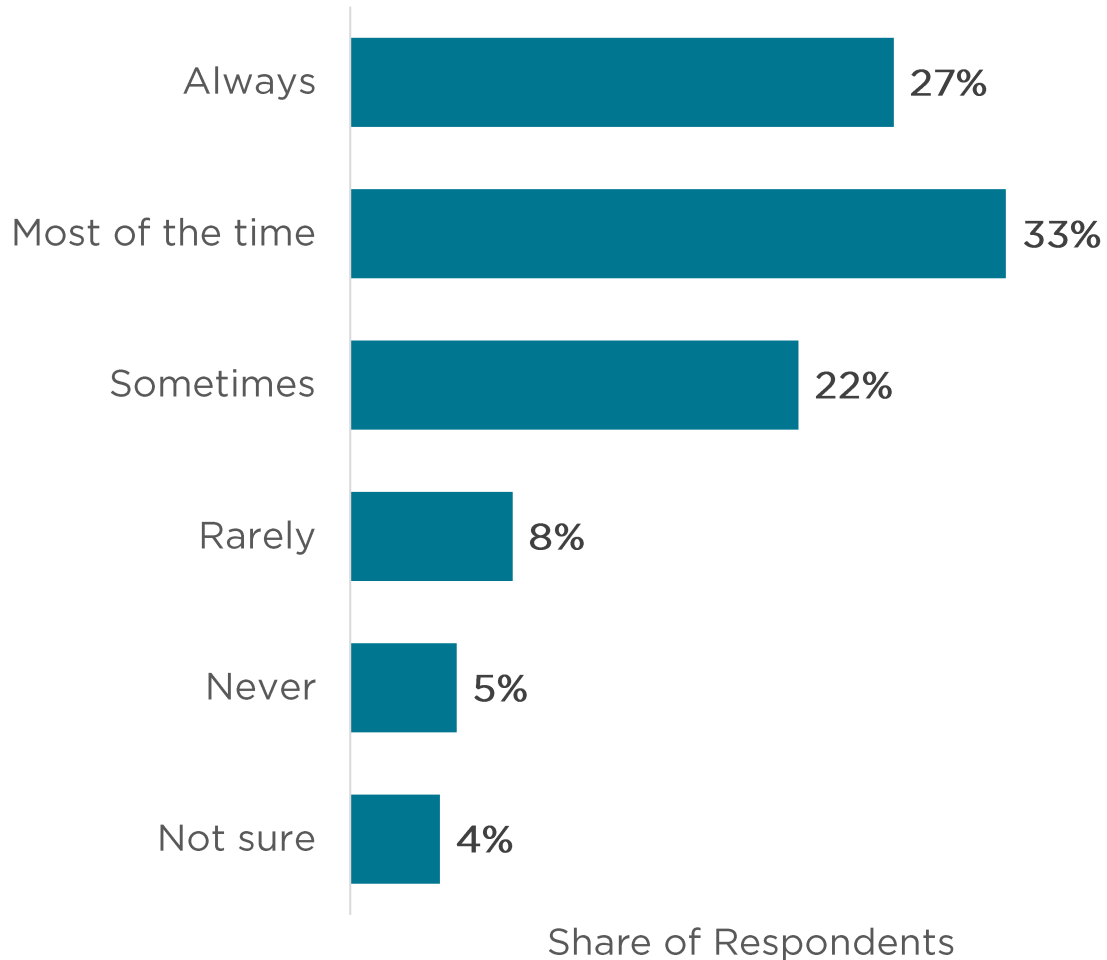
# Shopping Activities



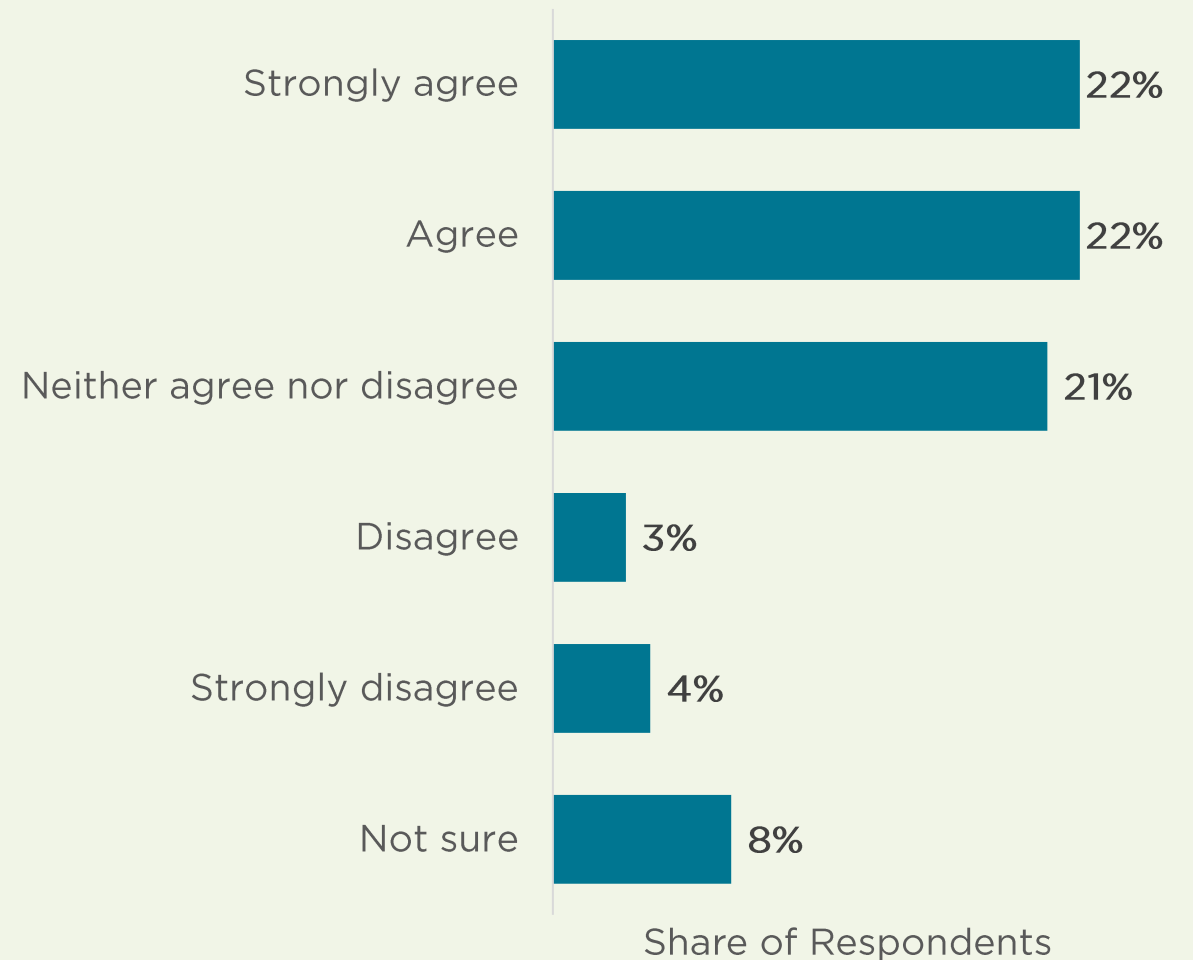
Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%

## 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=349. Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%

# Most Appealing Aspects – Environment, Cleanliness & Weather



- † Natural relatively unspoilt environment. Still holds a simplicity to life.
- † The beauty of three environment and the fact that it's not full of high rises and resort.
- † The relaxed environment and atmosphere. The people are friendly and just mind their own business. Perfect.
- † Snorkeling, weather, relaxation.
- † Overall cleanliness.
- † How lovely everyone was, the cleanliness and respect of the land and ocean, the fresh seafood!
- † Everything the weather was perfect.
- † The atmosphere, the weather, the warm hospitality.
- † The weather and closeness to the beach.

# Most Appealing Aspects – Local People



- † The easy pace of life & the friendly locals.
- † The island time was great. the captain tamas boat was awesome those guys showed such a caring attitude towards us.
- † All locals had a high regard and respect in all contact cases in all class of employees and associates.
- † The people were so friendly and lovely. Buying fresh local produce was wonderful.
- † Friendliness and general atmosphere - feels like a genuine visit to the home of Cook Islanders, not like a holiday to some resort where local people are excluded from their own environment.
- † The entire place. My favorite island in the world, good people and good food as well as the beautiful land which has been preserved and kept mostly true to its people.
- † The relaxed environment and atmosphere. The people are friendly and just mind their own business. Perfect.
- † Everything from the beautiful people to your amazing island.

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



- † The beauty of the Cook Islands, truly Paradise!!
- † The beaches!!!! Titikaveka was my utmost fav followed by going to Muri. Aitutaki though was a whole different level.
- † Water clarity, friendliness, safe feeling, animal welfare.
- † Its a Fun, easy going, friendly place to visit, relaxing and invigorating.
- † Night Market. Captain Tamas Lagoon Cruise.
- † The walking treks, local Saturday markets, local events and night clubs.
- † The water surrounding the cook Islands was unbelievable, it was just stunning.
- † The rest and relaxation. Meeting awesome people and whale watching.
- † Beaches, snorkeling, scuba diving, socializing.

# Least Appealing Aspects



Share of Respondents



Note: Total response N=332. Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%

# Least Appealing Aspects - Public Service, Facilities and Infrastructure



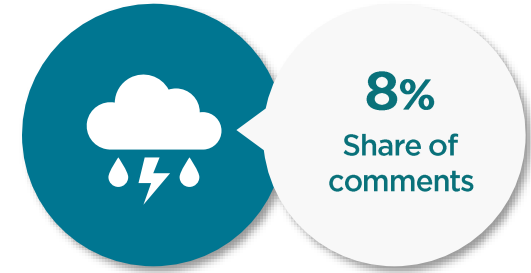
- † Lack of Public transport.
- † That gravel area around Palace burgers is getting greasy...that spot needs a revamp.
- † Traffic is too fast and dangerous on Rarotonga. I did see some mindless garbage tossed on the side of the road. No more hotels, please, the infrastructure cannot handle nor the environment. Lastly, the ghostly remains of the old Sheraton on the westside of the island should be repurposed into an affordable complex of affordable homes. Make itself contained so residents do not have to drive to shop. Since it's quiet, maybe a medical clinic to service the west side of the island.
- † Very limited internet and television options, better internet would certainly have made communication more efficient and affordable whilst on holiday.
- † I didn't find the roads appealing on the mainland. We noticed a lot of stray dogs on the streets. The danger of having loose animals roaming the streets is bound to cause accidents for motor cyclists.
- † The bus, too many cruise passengers and the bus was delayed over an hour.

## Least Appealing Aspects – Price of Goods & Services



- † I didn't like the fact that fresh pineapple were \$35 each at the main market areas.
- † Higher than NZ price of food especially the sugar tax. But good on you for that, I wish our government would do the same for fizzy drinks.
- † Cost of accommodations on Rarotonga.
- † Cost of a Nu – Coconut.
- † The internet services were terrible and if they were available, they were incredibly expensive.
- † The cocktails at our resort were awful, not genuinely made, too expensive.
- † Costs were a bit high for restaurants, so we relied on Vilis most of the time and the cost of produce at supermarkets - basic items e.g., bread.
- † Cost of some food and drink was more than anticipated.

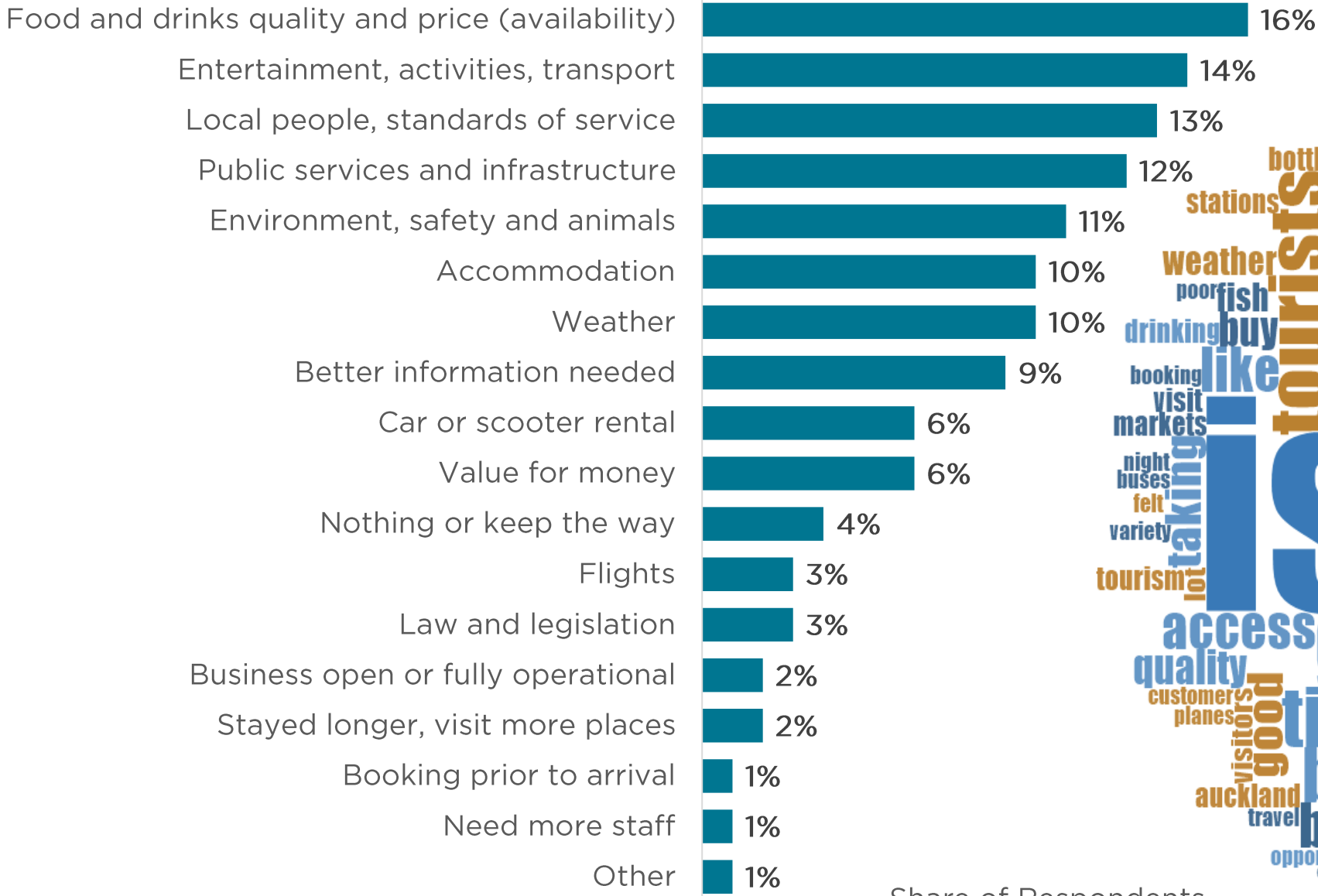
## Least Appealing Aspects – Poor Weather



- † It was windy the whole time and rough ocean.
- † The unsavory weather patterns more wind and rain than sun.
- † Weather was bad when tried to do the needle walk.
- † The weather, but it is what it is.
- † Windy Weather was disappointing.
- † Weather was cold and very windy. Resort pool freezing.



# Suggestions for Improvement



Share of Respondents

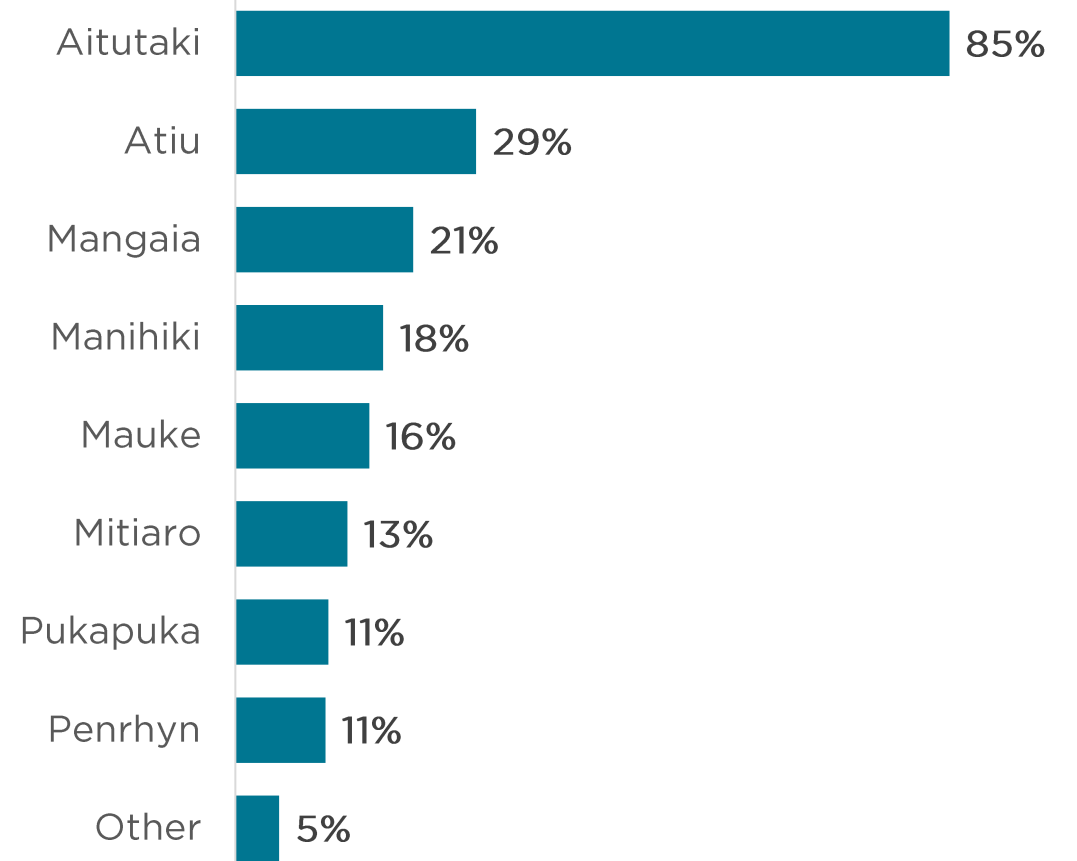
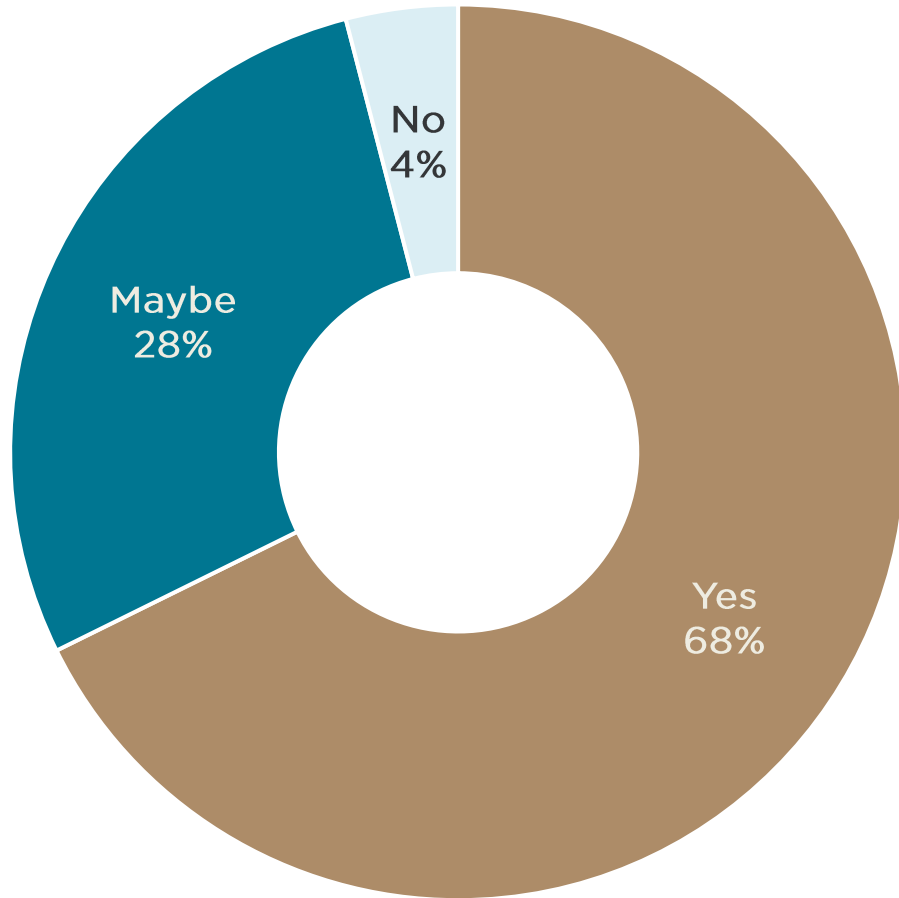


Note: Total response N=114. Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%

# Suggestions for Improvement-Indicative Quotes

- † Access to island food and fresh produce, coconuts, veggies during the week and at market, roadside. People want to experience island food more not just European food.
- † Safety legislation on all tourism activities, mobility equipment for tourism.
- † Dog control. Some were quite aggressive and followed us. I had to tell the kids not to go close to them. There needs to be some dog control on the island.
- † Manage development of properties, grow more coconut trees, look after the waterways.
- † More Rarotongan whānau working in the industry...although we were told that many had left for opportunities elsewhere.
- † Shop keepers are so rude send them back to their country.
- † The accommodation was basic and wasn't very comfortable. The tour advertised lots of things that just didn't happen for a variety of reasons.
- † Quicker processing of arrivals at Raro airport- it took around one hour for all our family to get through immigration. Not a great first visitor experience.

# Willingness to Visit Outer Islands

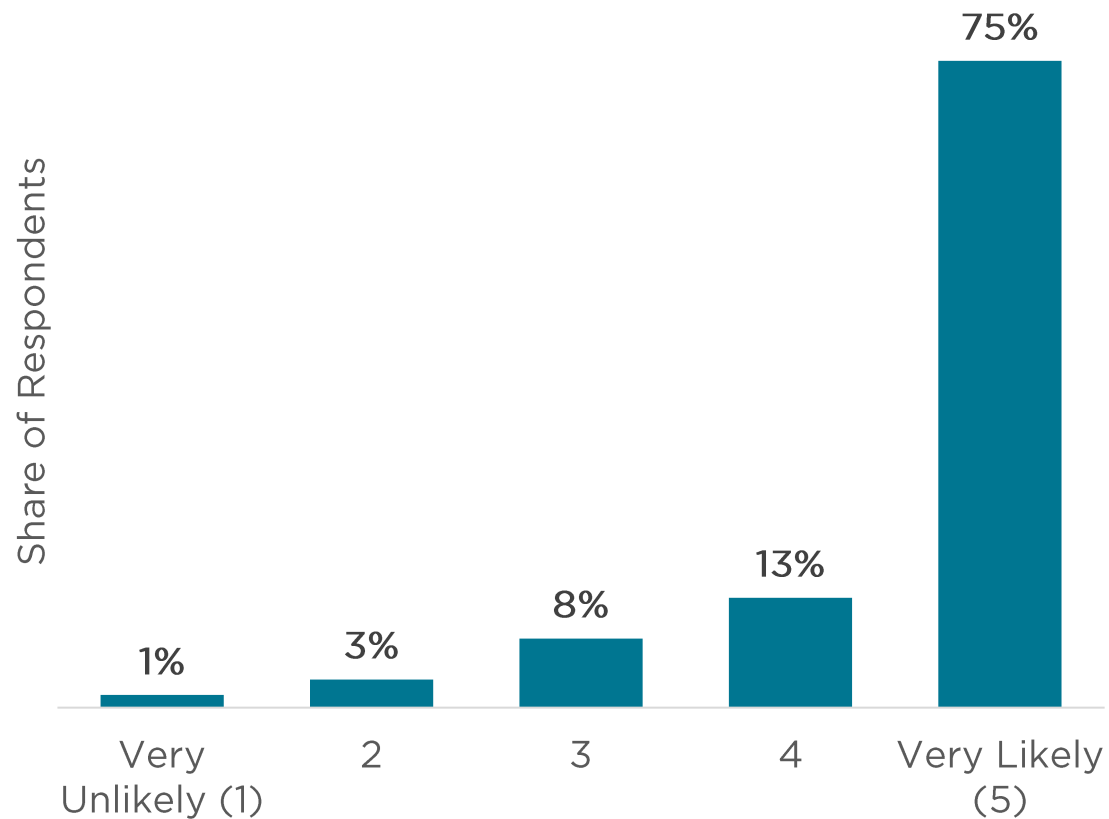


Share of Respondents

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

# Future Motivations

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



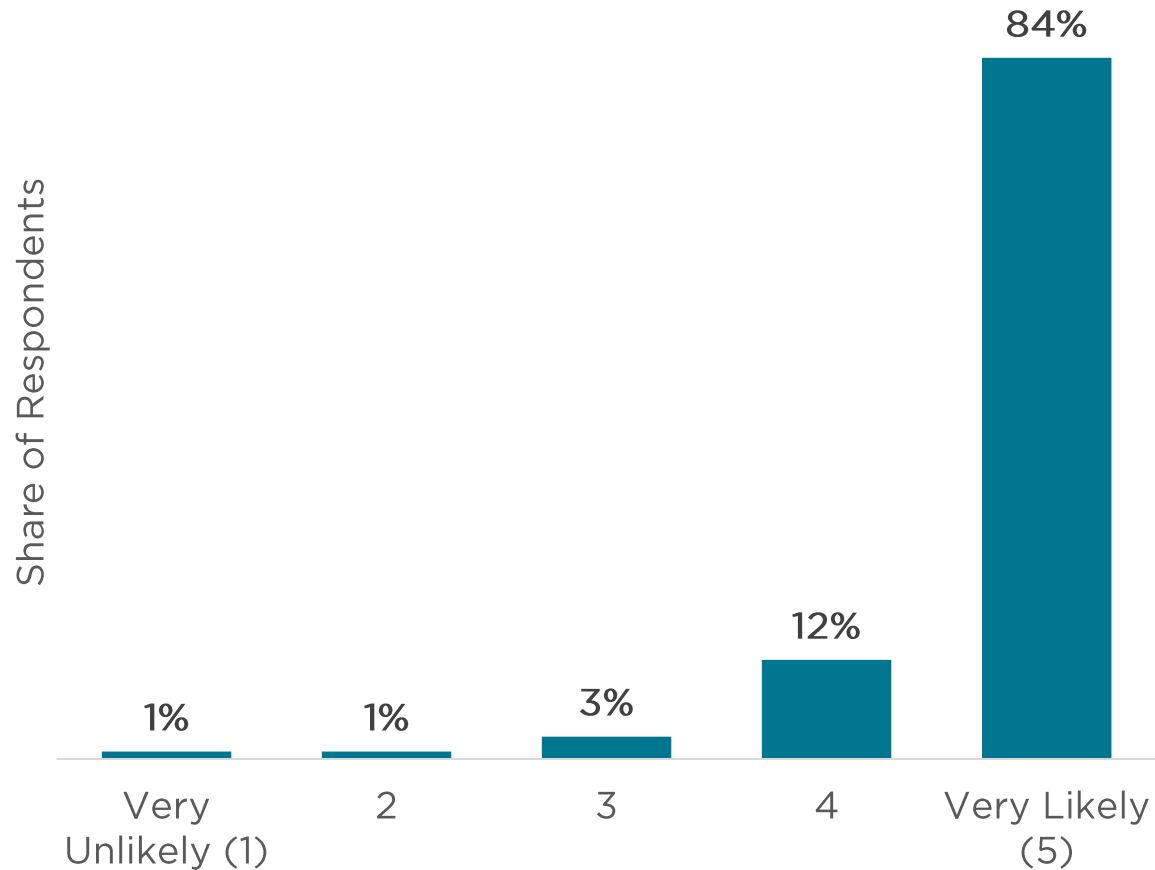
Note: Total response N=339

## Quotes: Reasons to not return

- + We would need to plan for better time of year weather wise and accommodation in town as nothing to do in Ocean Escape.
- + Was way too expensive for such little to do with children. It felt more of an Adult accommodating country.
- + Only would return for work but not as a vacation destination. Preference for Samoa and Fiji Due to family and used to travel there. Difference with cost and access to good island food. Expensive in Cook Islands.
- + Been twice and even going the first time I felt that we had done everything that the island had to offer. Second time was only for Parents vow renewals. There wasn't much else to explore.
- + Live in Hawaii so already have plenty of exposure to water recreation, beaches, etc.

# Future Motivations

Q: How likely would you recommend the Cook Islands?



## Quotes: Reasons to not recommend

- + To expensive, Fiji has more entertaining resorts then just a pool.
- + Prime Minister Brown's seabed mining goals.
- + Cost of travel, expensive. Access. flight schedule is bad.
- + Illegal cannabis/ unrecognized medicinal cannabis.
- + Lots of rubbish on beaches.
- + My visit on the ambase, never had such unfriendliness in my life. Why visit 5 times and not put everything in on form? Also, at arriving in at a home address the boy did not believe me. And then arriving in the night is a hard thing. Have to call up the owner out off their sleep. I travelled 20 countries. And I never had such a thing.



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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