

# Cook Islands

International Visitor Survey Report  
July - September 2024



# Acknowledgements

- ❖ The Pacific Tourism Organization (SPTO) expresses its gratitude to all contributors to this report on IVS data from July to September 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 (CIT) 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 analyzed 2,403 responses out of 2,613 collected, representing 9% of actual visitors with a 14% response rate. Among the respondents, 8% were solo travelers, and the average household income was NZD156, 849.
- ❖ Visitors were primarily drawn to the Cook Islands for its warm and sunny weather, reputation as a safe destination, quiet and relaxing atmosphere, and the welcoming nature of the friendly locals. Overall visitor satisfaction was high, with a rating of 4.6 out of 5. A substantial 98% of visitors indicated they would recommend Cook Islands to others, and 93% expressed willingness to return.
- ❖ The average prepaid spend per visitor was NZD 2,570 with an estimated 40% (NZD 1,028) flowing into the local economy. In-country spending per visitor per trip averaged NZD 1,905 with an average stay of 9 nights. This contributed to an *estimated*\* economic impact of NZD 151 million from July to September 2024.
- ❖ Visitors were less impressed with public services, facilities, infrastructure, unfavorable weather, and the declining quality of attractions and activity centers. To enhance the overall visitor experience, they suggested improvements in public services and infrastructure maintenance, upgrades to accommodation standards and hotel services, and enhancements in restaurants and cafes, including greater food variety, more local cuisine options, and better pricing.

# Background

- ❖ The July - September 2024 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 July - September 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 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 July - September 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 (CIT). 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 - September 2024 period was similar, but not exact, to the survey instrument used in the July - September 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 - September 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 (CIT) 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 2024)



**16,848** TOTAL VALID EMAILS SENT



**2,403** TOTAL RESPONSES ANALYZED

*Note: 2,613 responses were received. After data cleaning, 2,403 responses remained.*

**14%**

CONVERSION RATE

## RESPONSES COVERED



**4,004** ADULTS



**743** CHILDREN

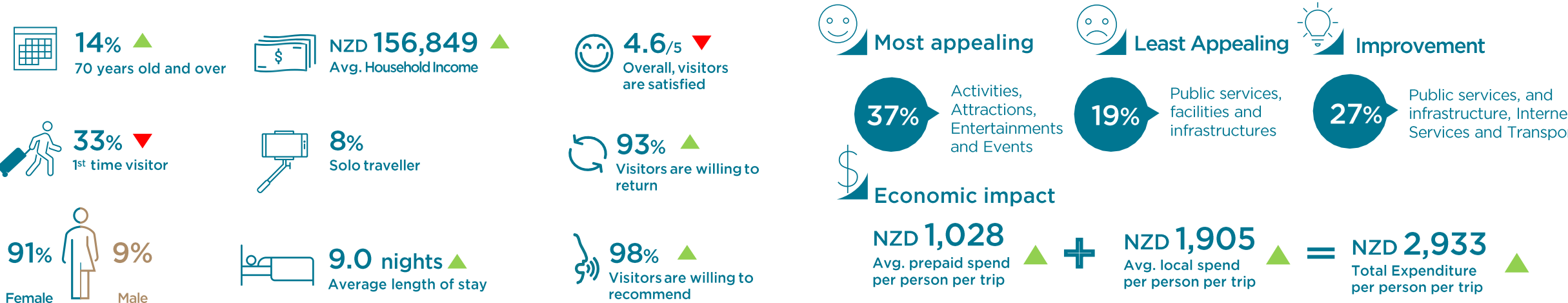
**9%**

OF ALL VISITORS IN THIS PERIOD



# Cook Islands International Visitor Survey

## Snapshot July – September 2024

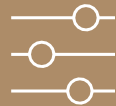


Note: The estimated flow-back rate into the Cook Islands for prepaid spend is 40%. With an average prepaid spend of \$2,570 per person per trip, this equates to \$1,028.

# Report Structure



Visitor Profile



Visitor  
Characteristics  
& Preferences



Information &  
Decision Making



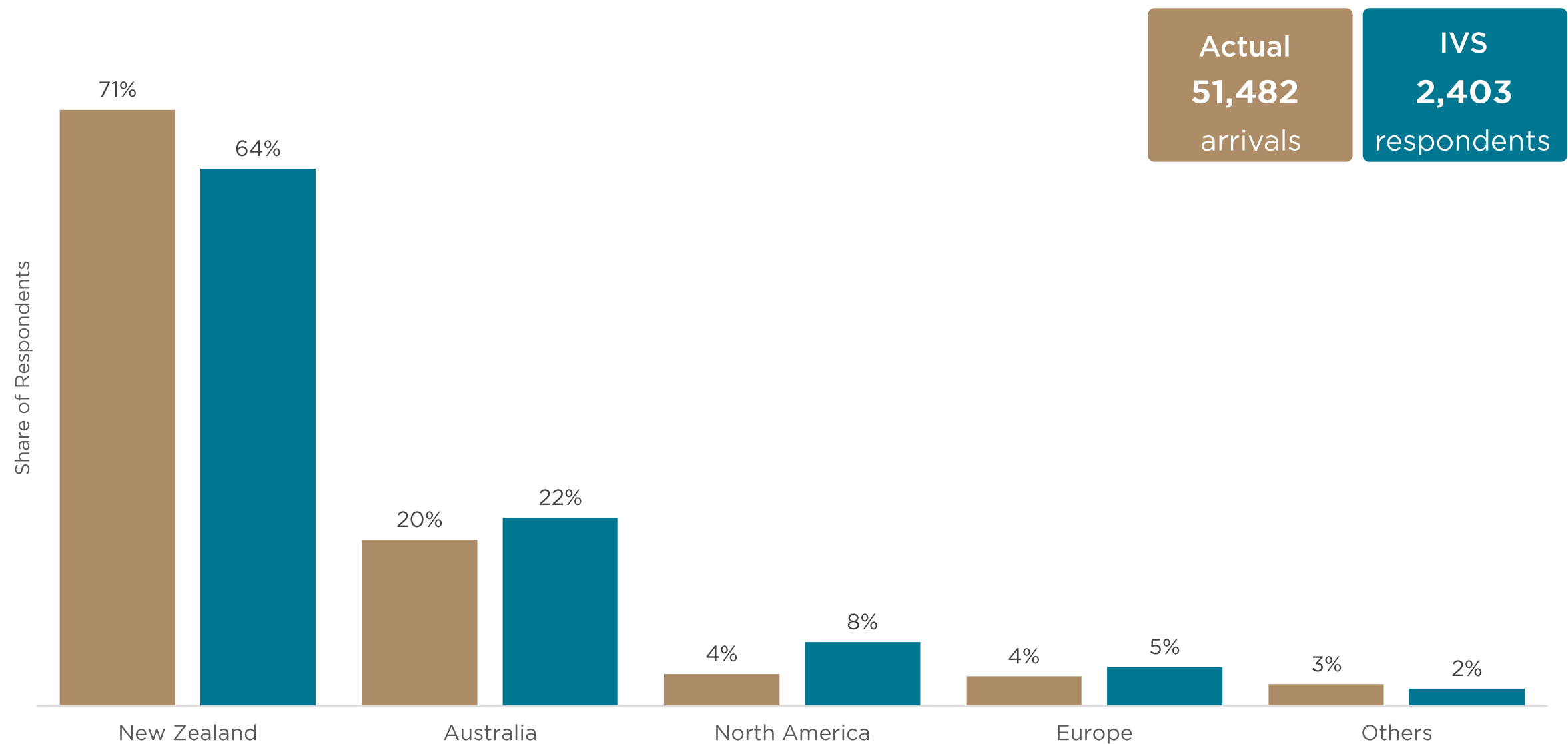
Visitor Spending  
& Impact



Visitor  
Satisfaction

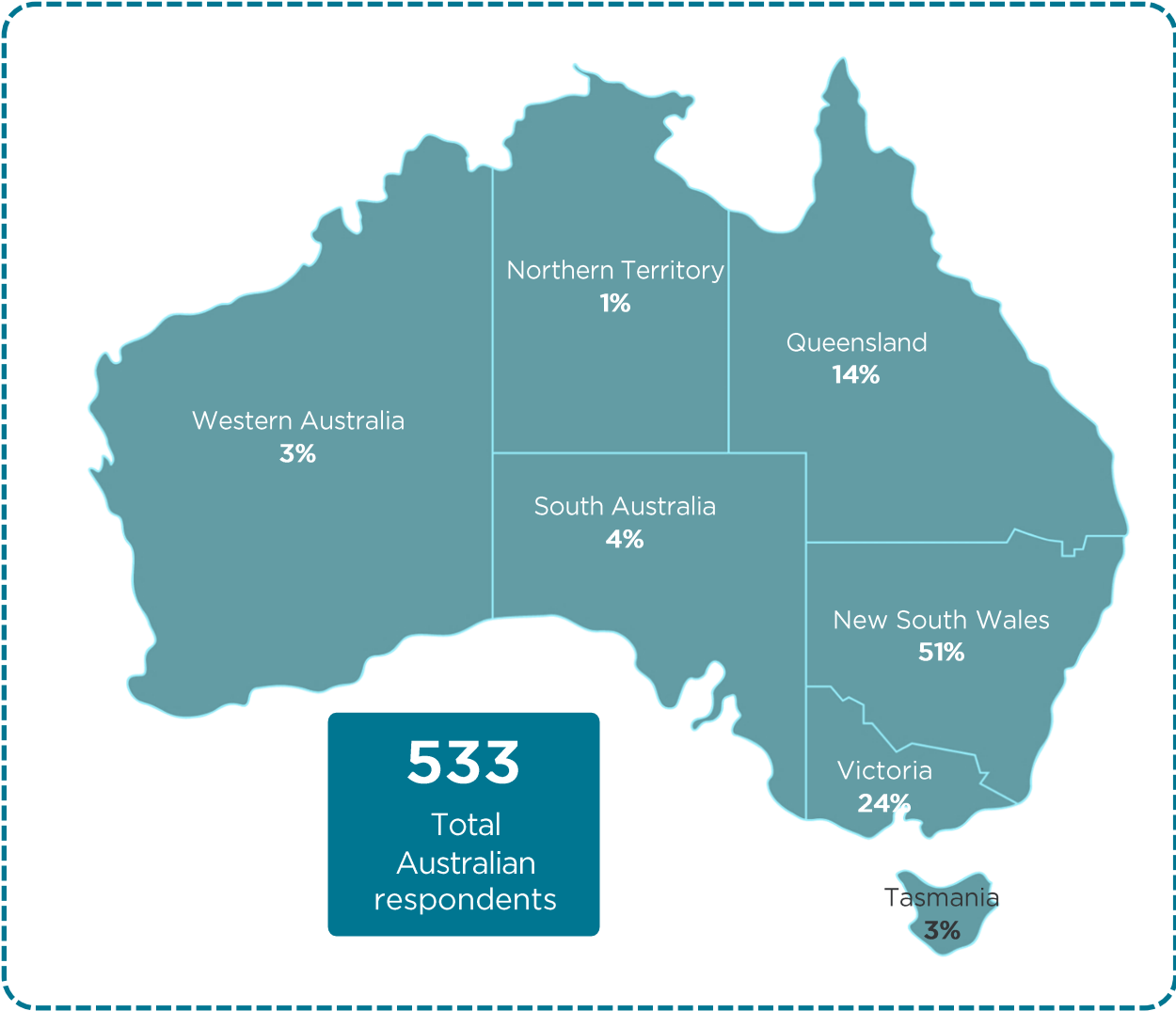
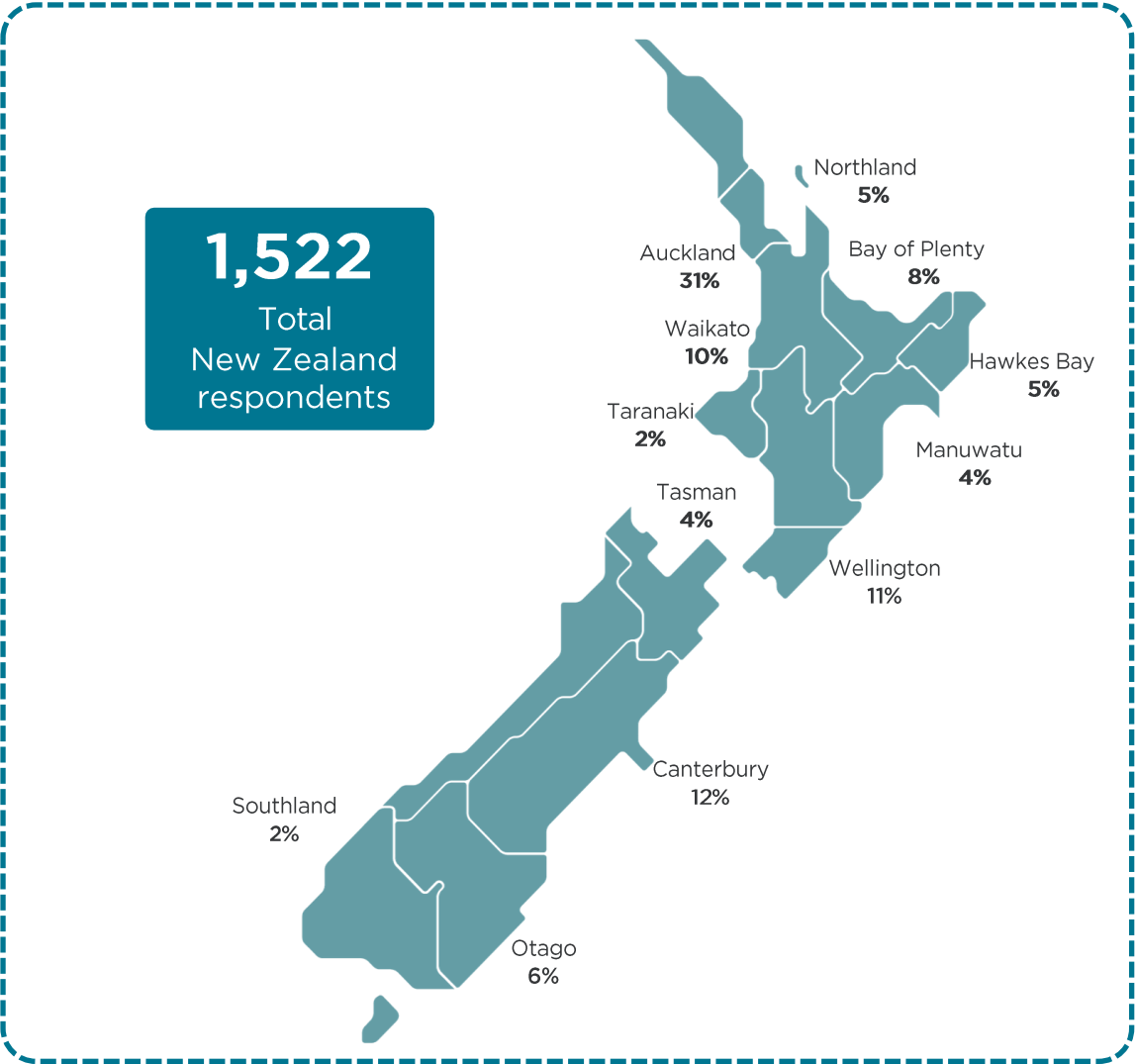


# Source Markets: IVS Respondents vs Actual Arrival



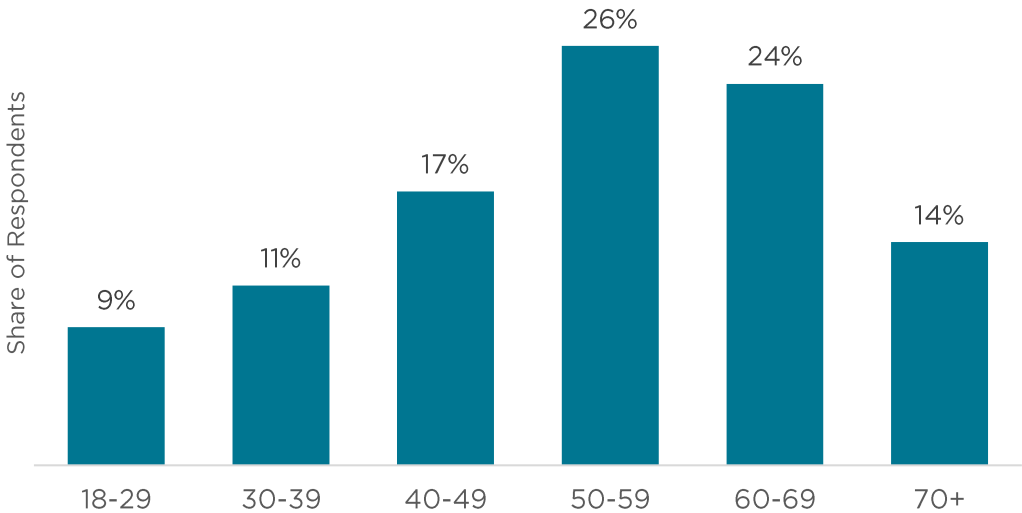
*Note: Due to rounding, some totals do not sum to 100%. No weighting was applied, as the sample data is representative..*

# Top Source Markets

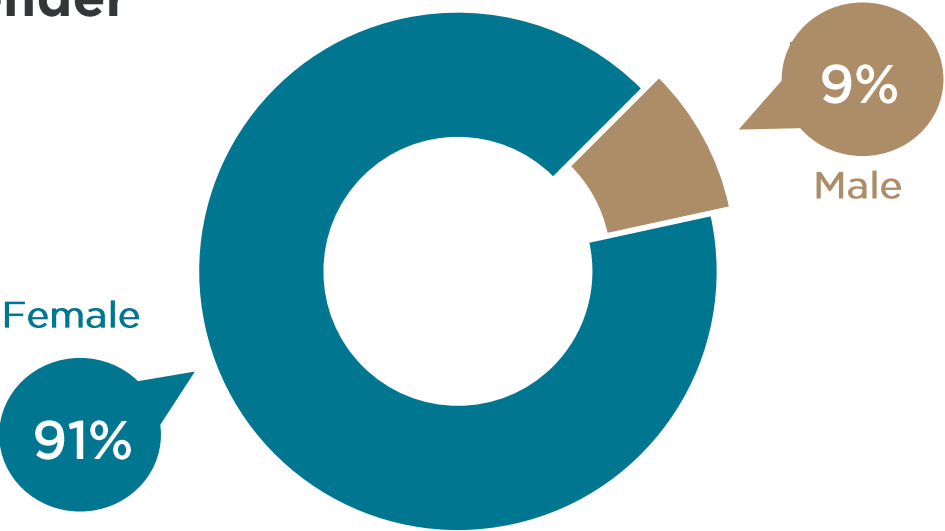


# Respondent Demographics

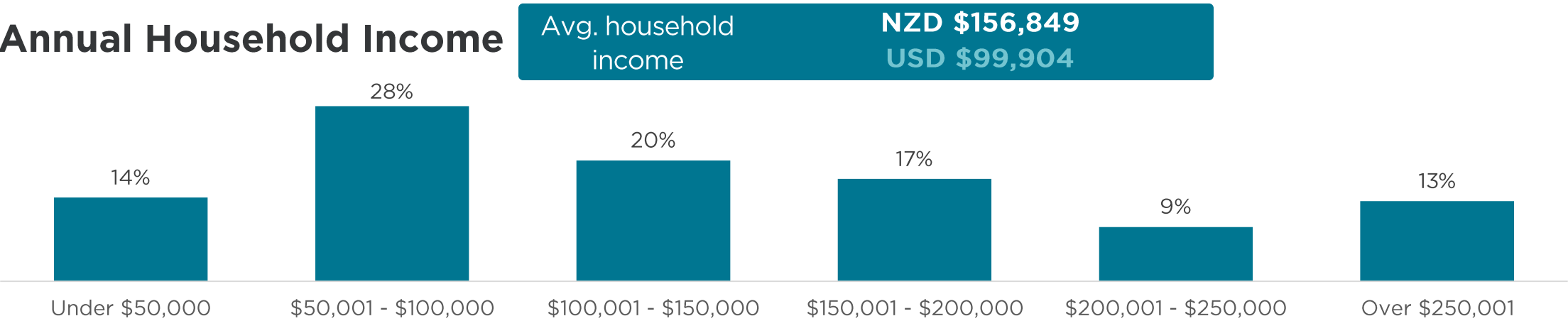
## Age



## Gender



## Annual Household Income



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

# Report Structure



Visitor Profile



Visitor  
Characteristics  
& Preferences



Information &  
Decision Making



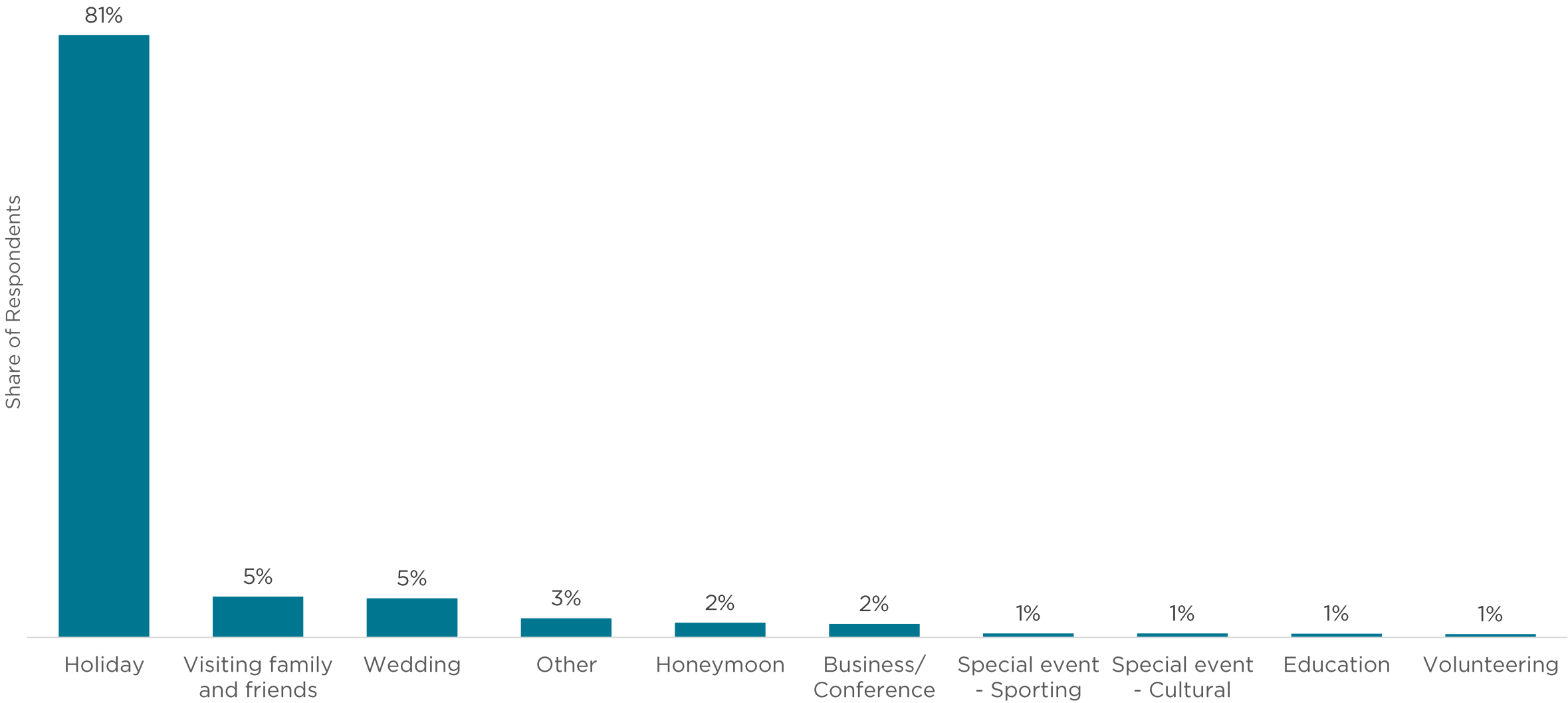
Visitor Spending  
& Impact



Visitor  
Satisfaction

# Purpose of Visit

Q: What was the main purpose of your visit?

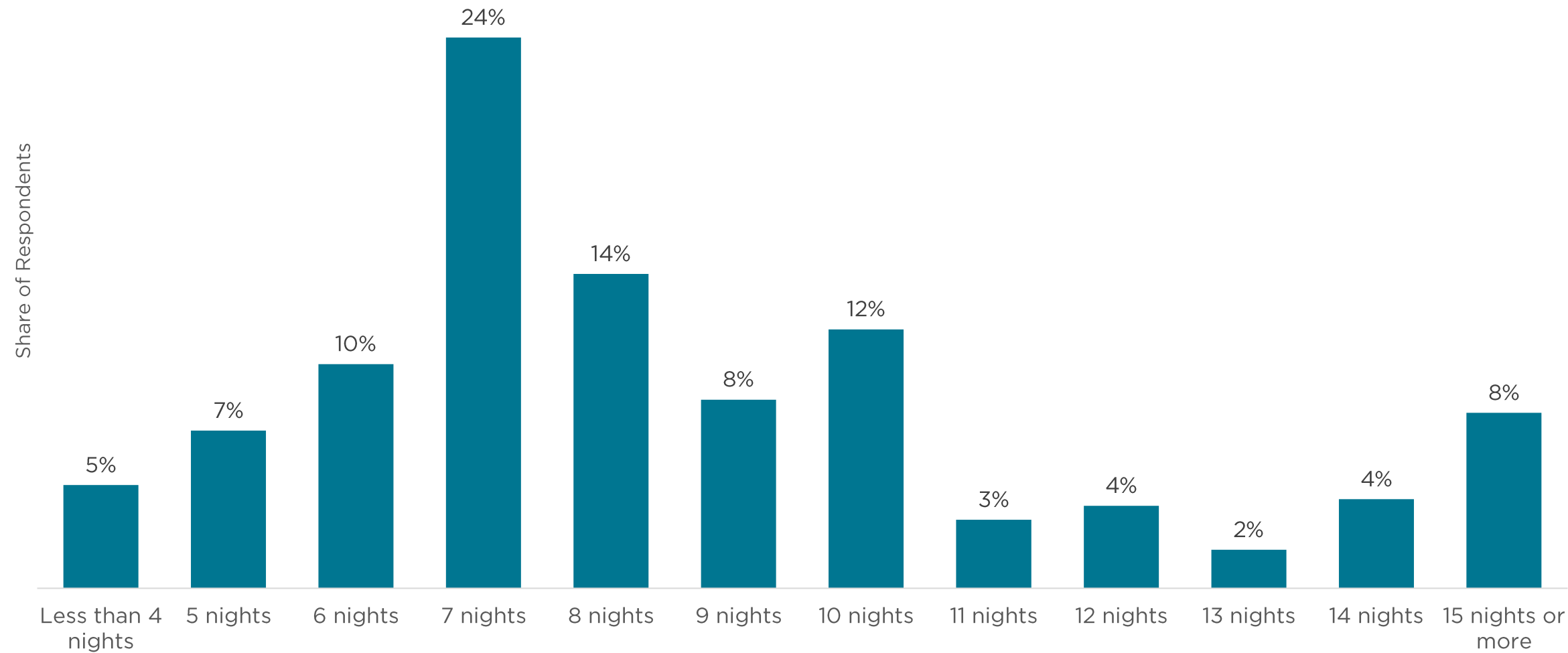


Note: N=2,374. Due to rounding, total does not sum to 100%

# Length of Stay (nights)

Q: How many nights did you spend in Cook Islands?

Avg. Length of Stay  
**9.0 nights**

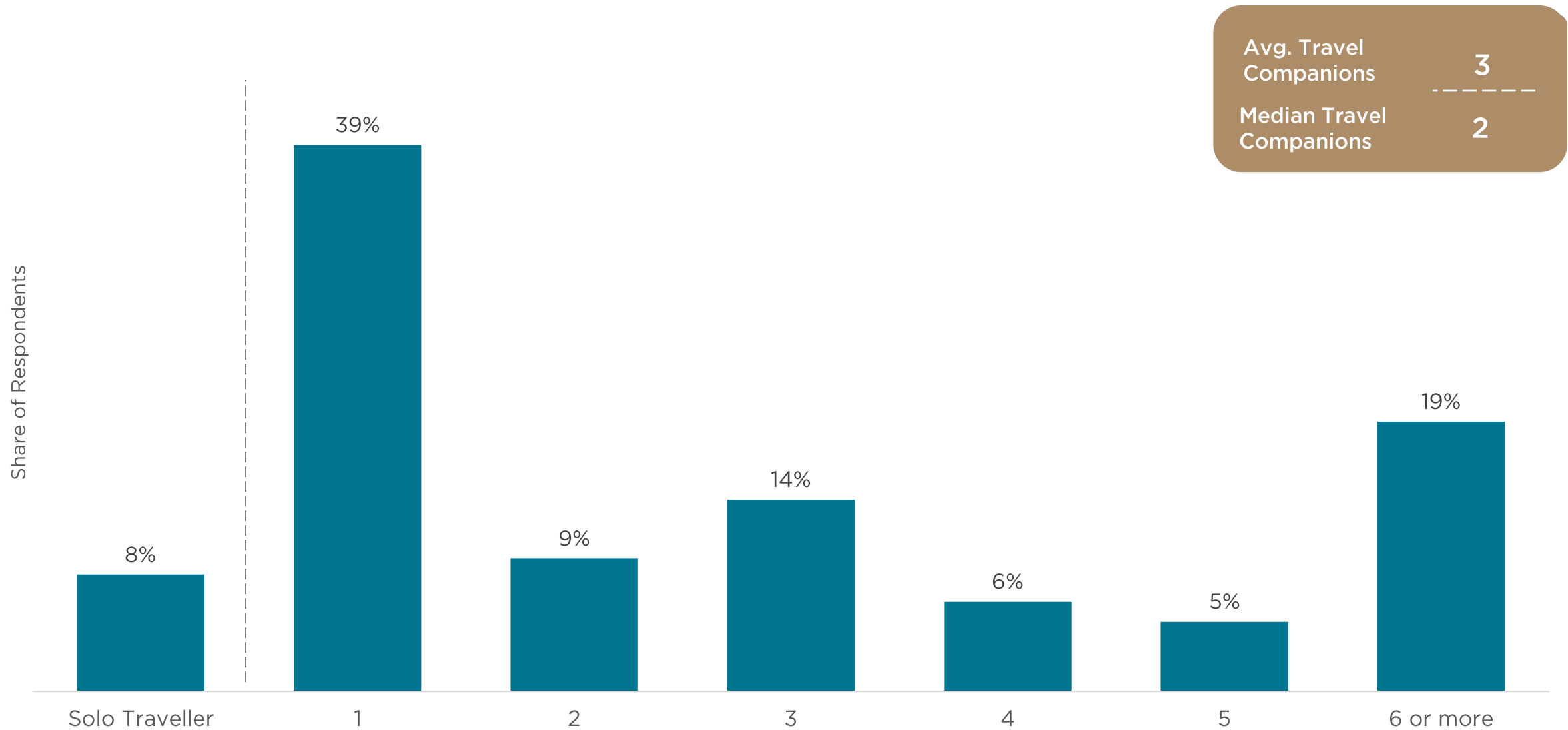


*Note: 31 and 31+ days as outliers were removed for length of stay analysis*



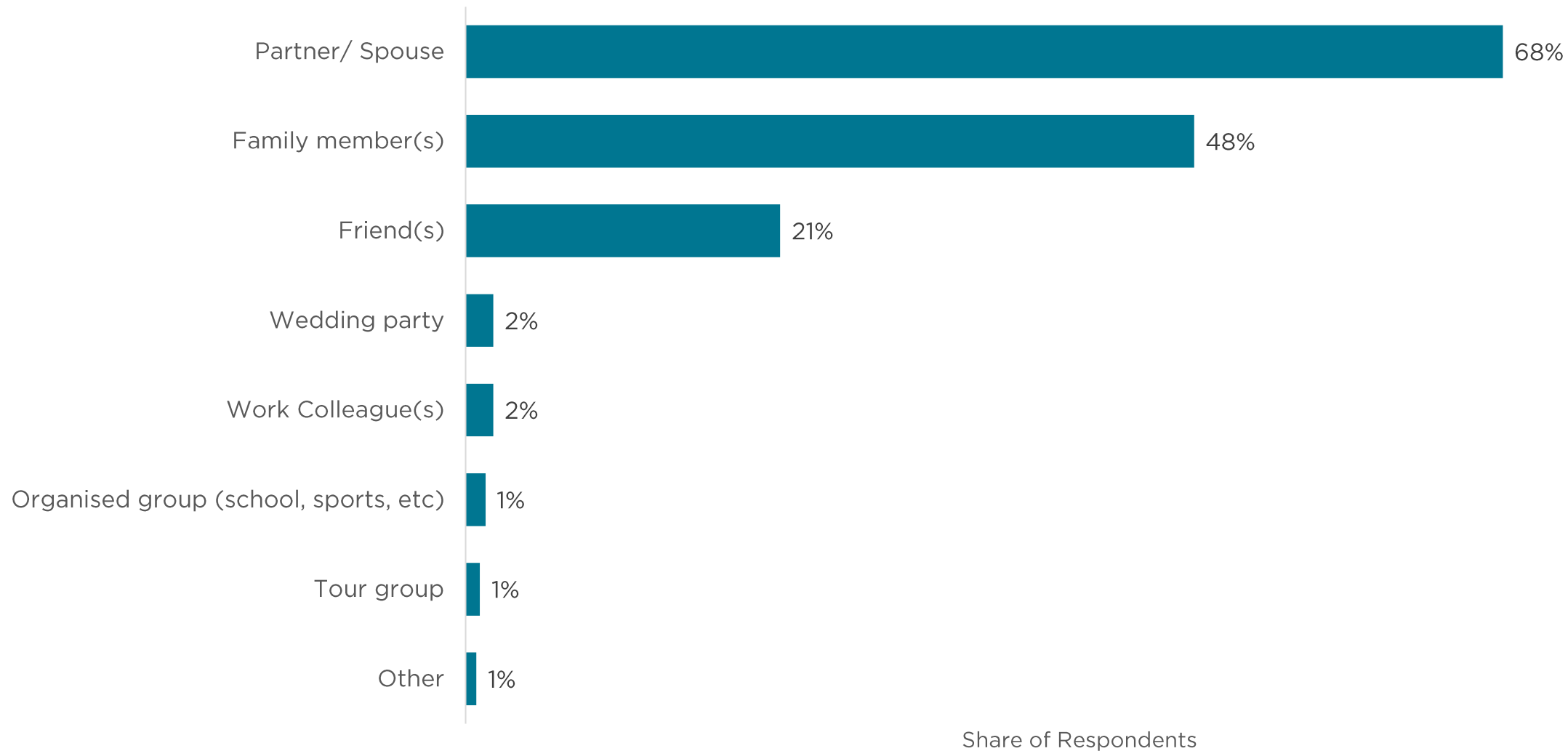
# Travel Group Size

Q: How many people accompanied you on this trip?



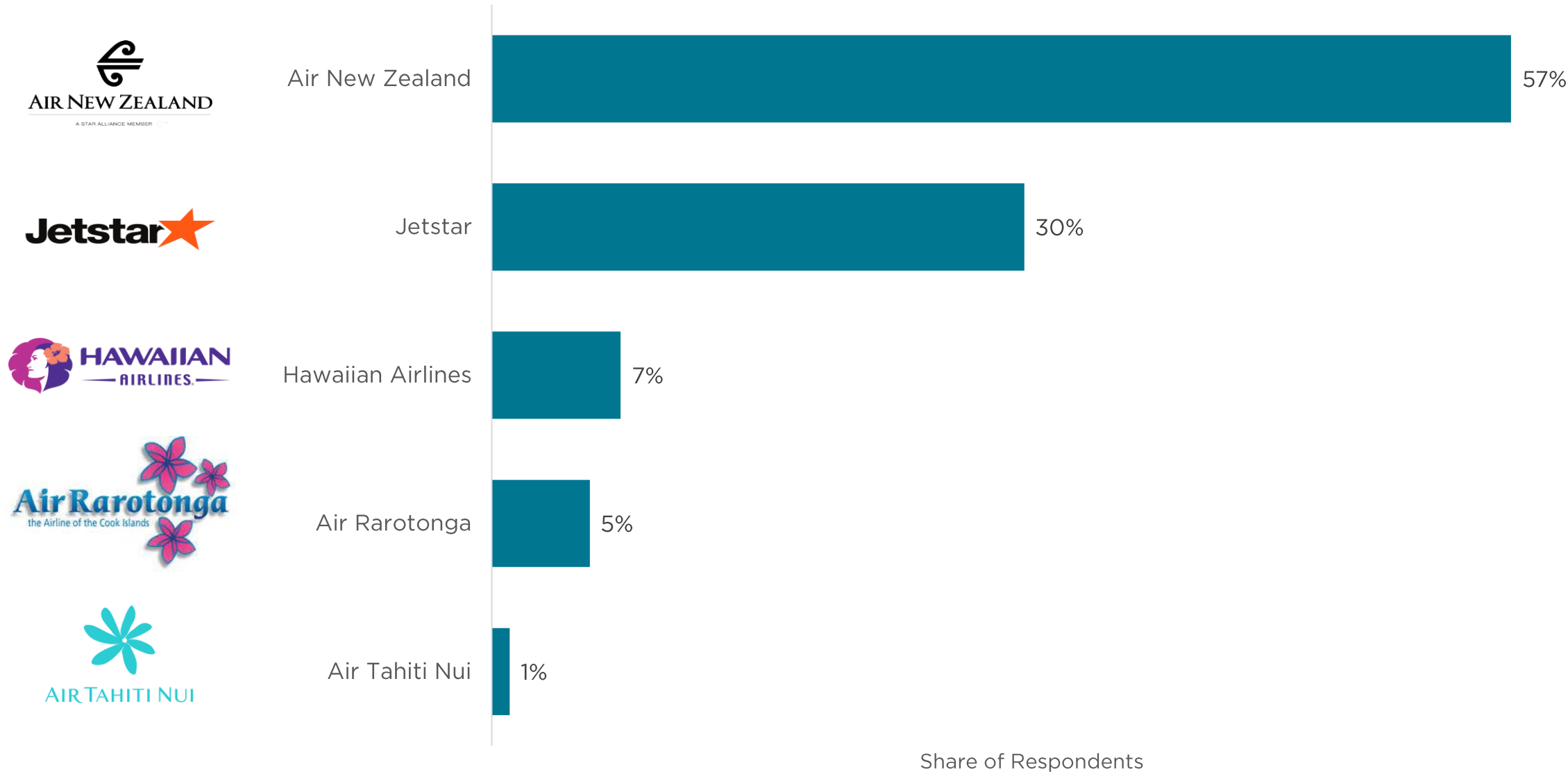
Note: N=2,342. Due to rounding, total does not sum to 100%

# Travel Companions



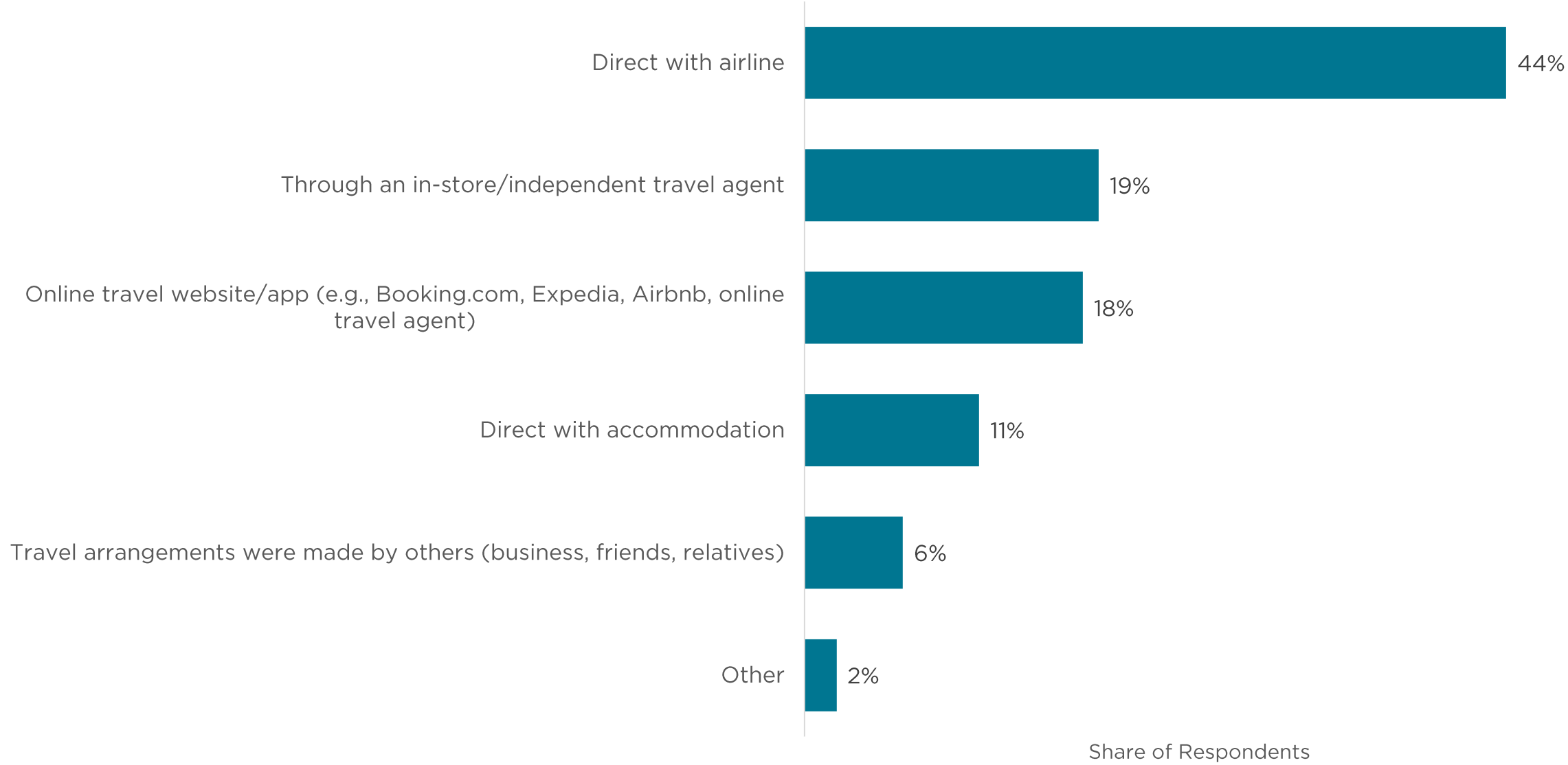
*Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%*

# Airlines Used for Travel



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

# Purchasing of Travel



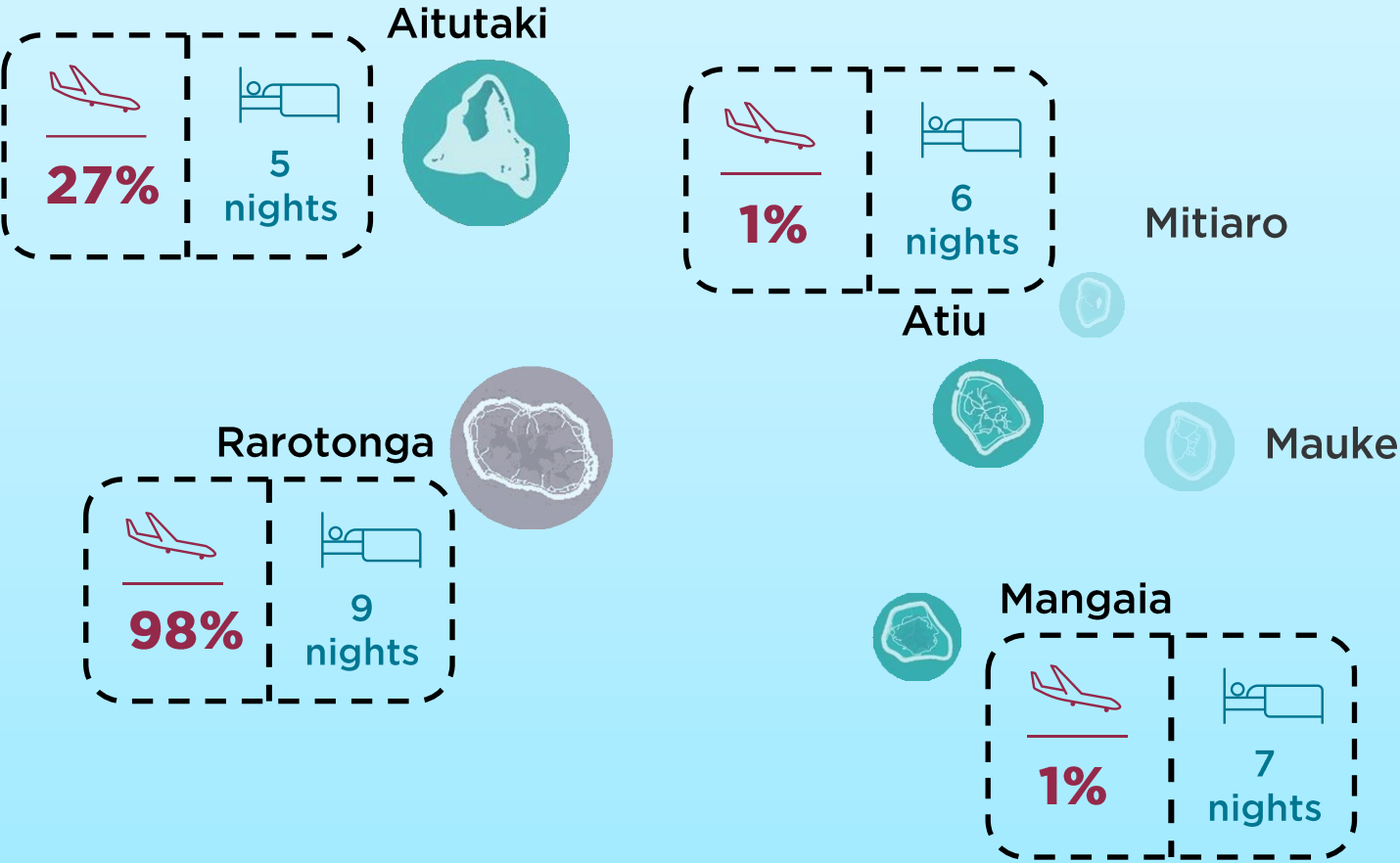
*Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%*

# Islands Visited & Avg. Length of Stay

Avg. Length of Stay  
9.0 Nights

Q: Which island(s) did you visit?

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

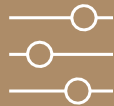


Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%.

# Report Structure



Visitor Profile



Visitor  
Characteristics  
& Preferences



Information &  
Decision Making



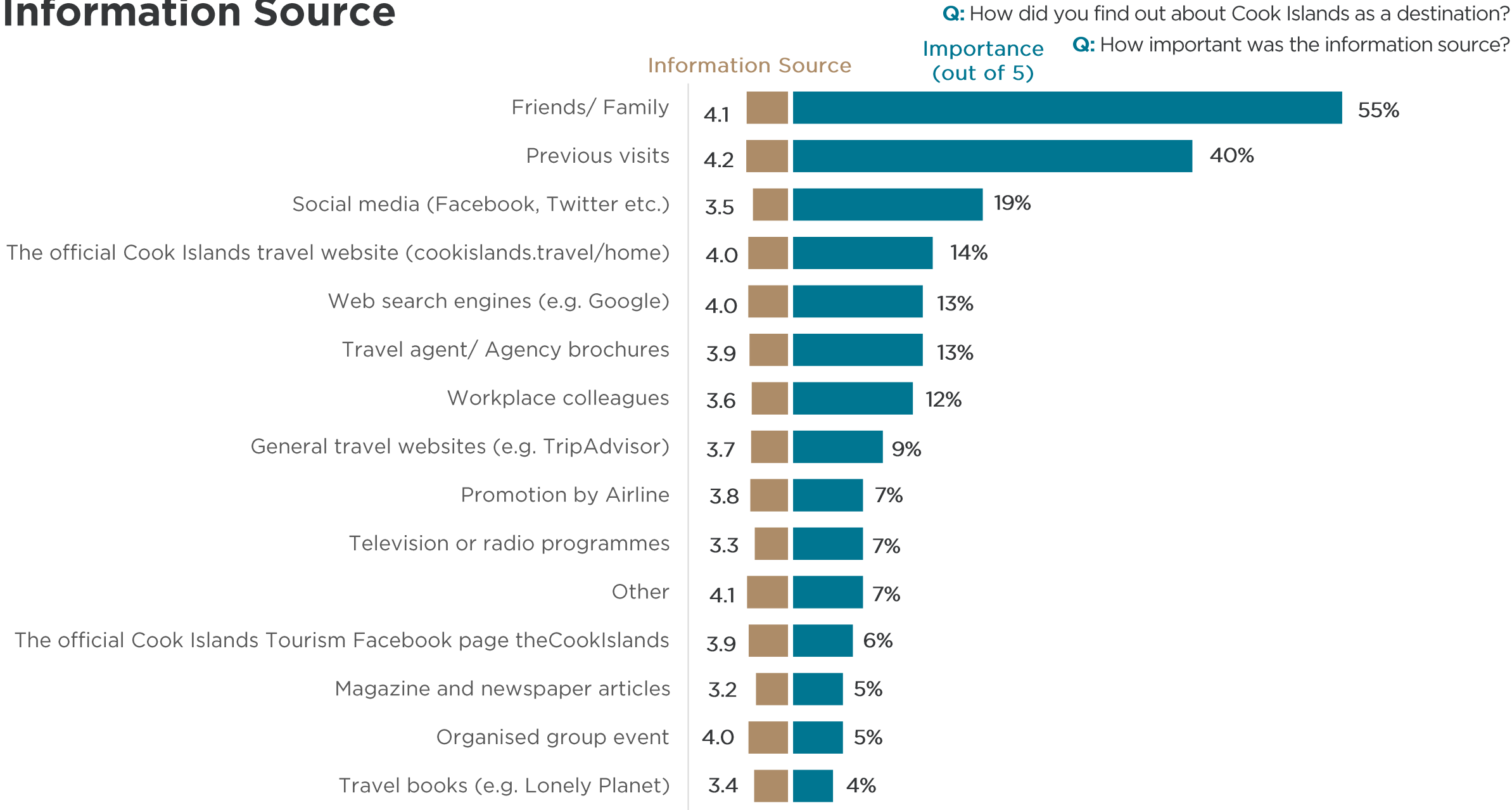
Visitor Spending  
& Impact



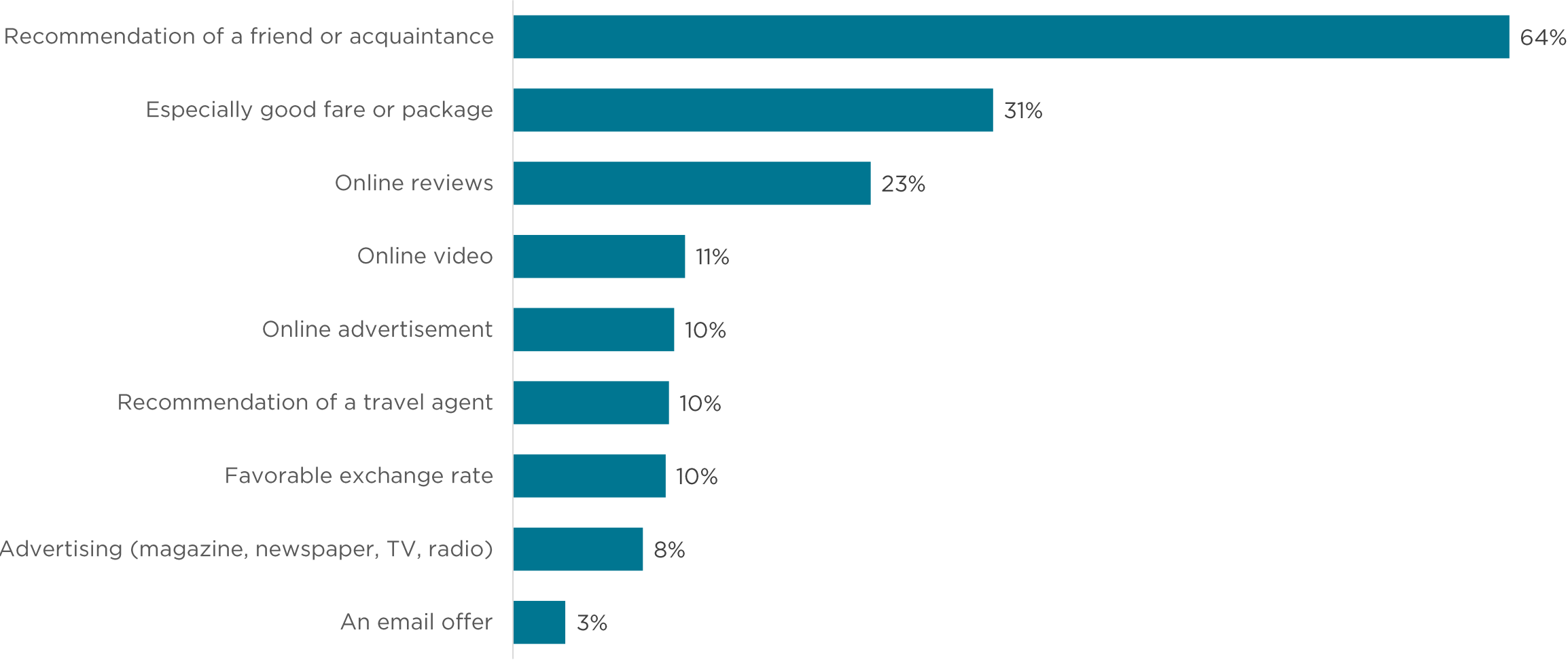
Visitor  
Satisfaction



# Information Source



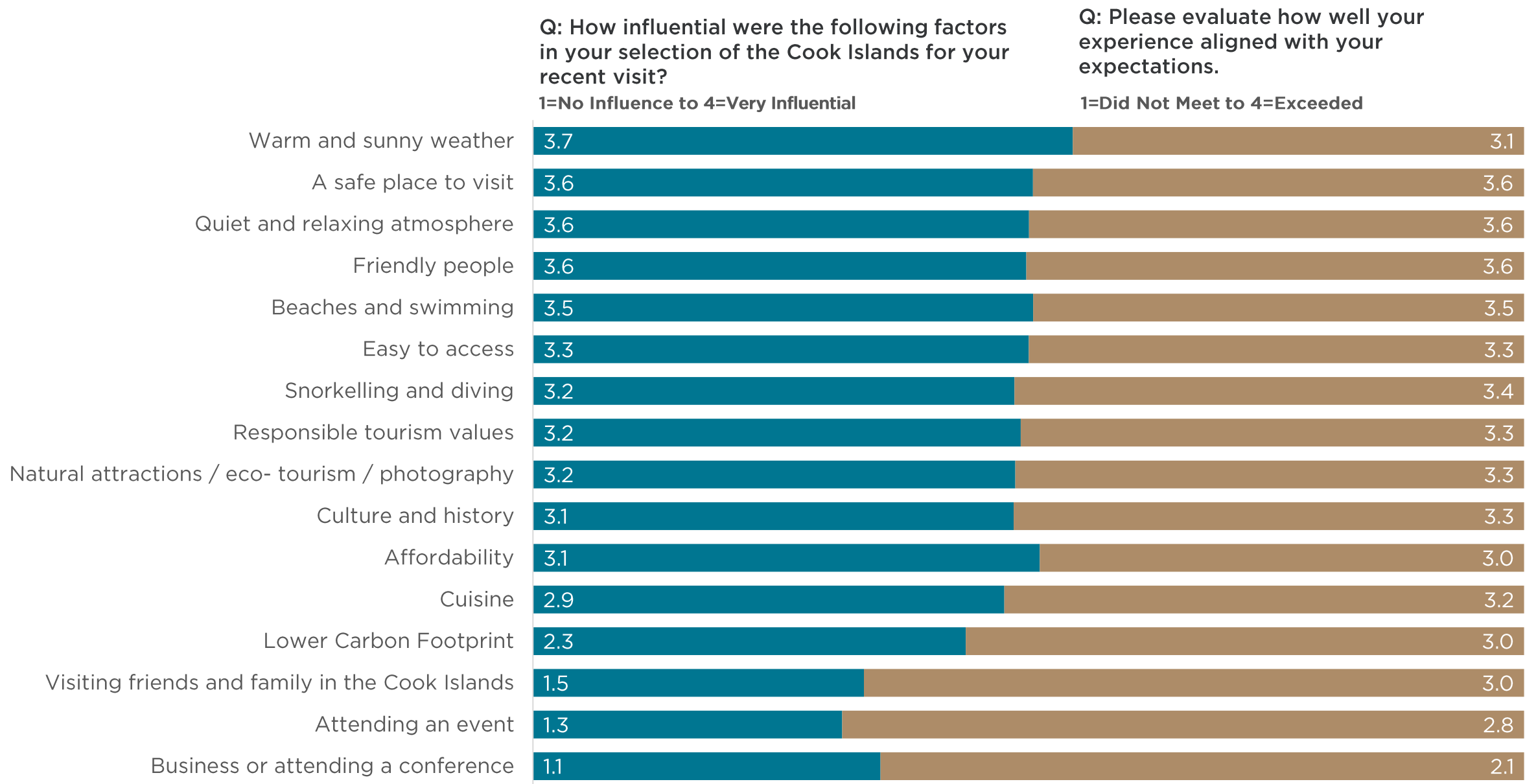
# Important Promotion/Advertising Channels that assisted in selecting to visit the Cook Islands



Share of Respondents

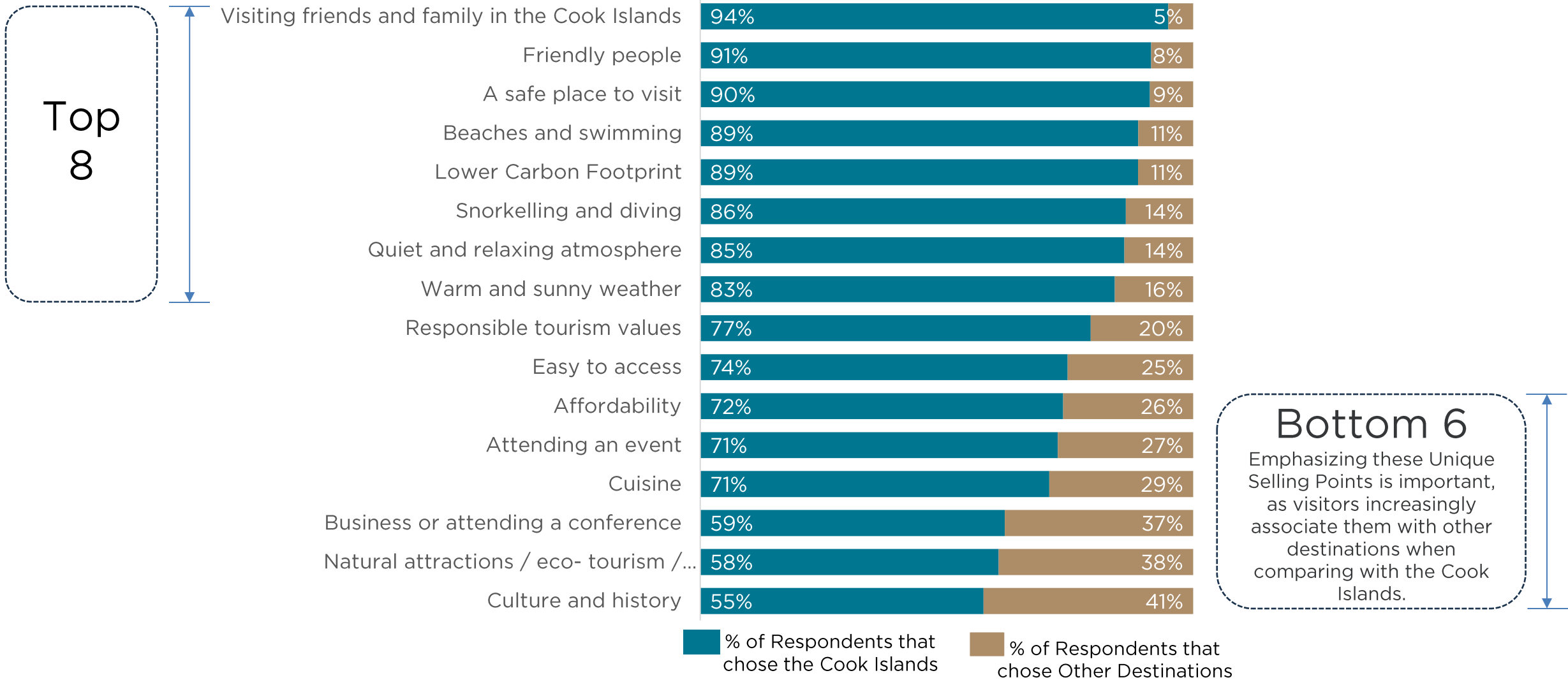
*Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%*

# Pre-Travel Perceptions Vs Expectations



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

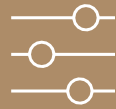
Q: Please attribute each statement below to the country, Cook Islands or Alternative Destination, that best represents its unique appeal



# Report Structure



Visitor Profile



Visitor  
Characteristics  
& Preferences



Information &  
Decision Making



Visitor Spending  
& Impact

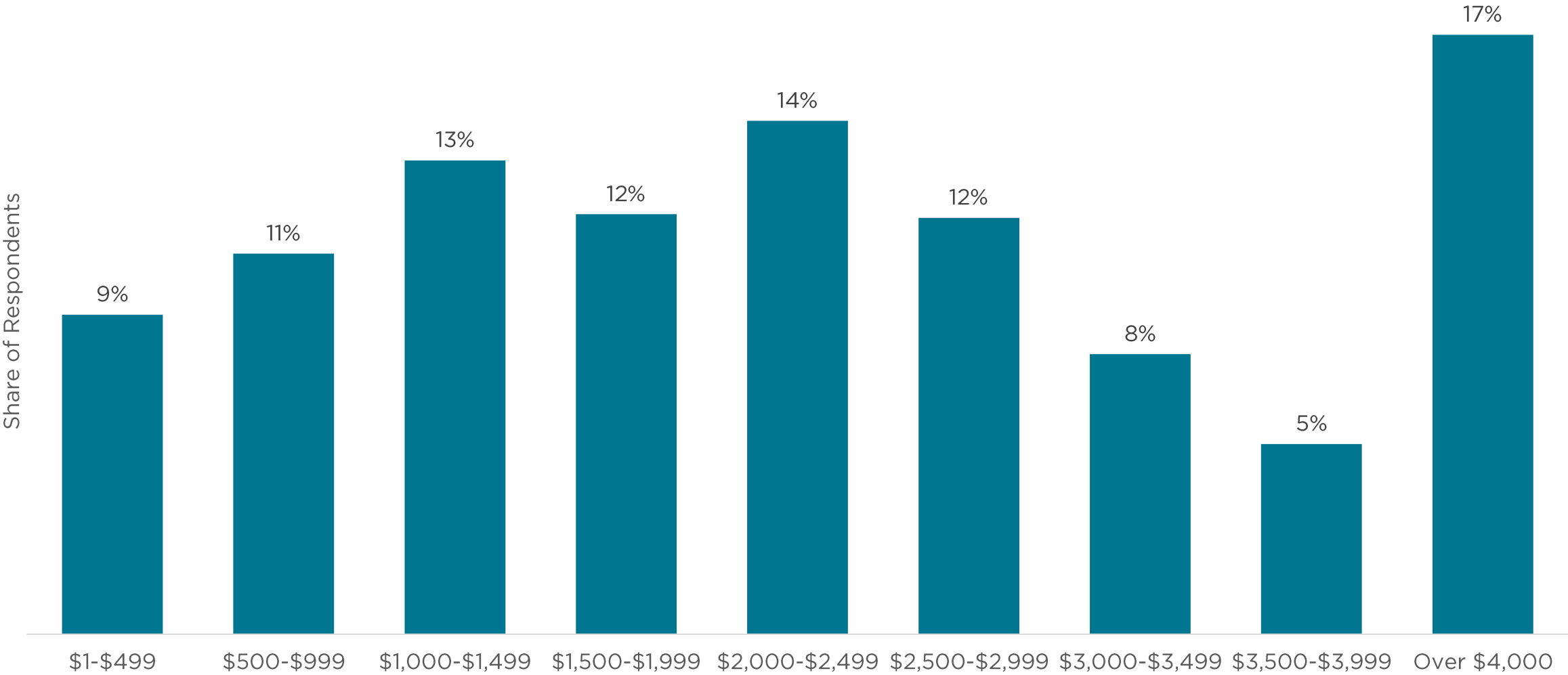


Visitor  
Satisfaction

# Prepaid Expenditure

Avg. Prepaid per Person  
per Trip

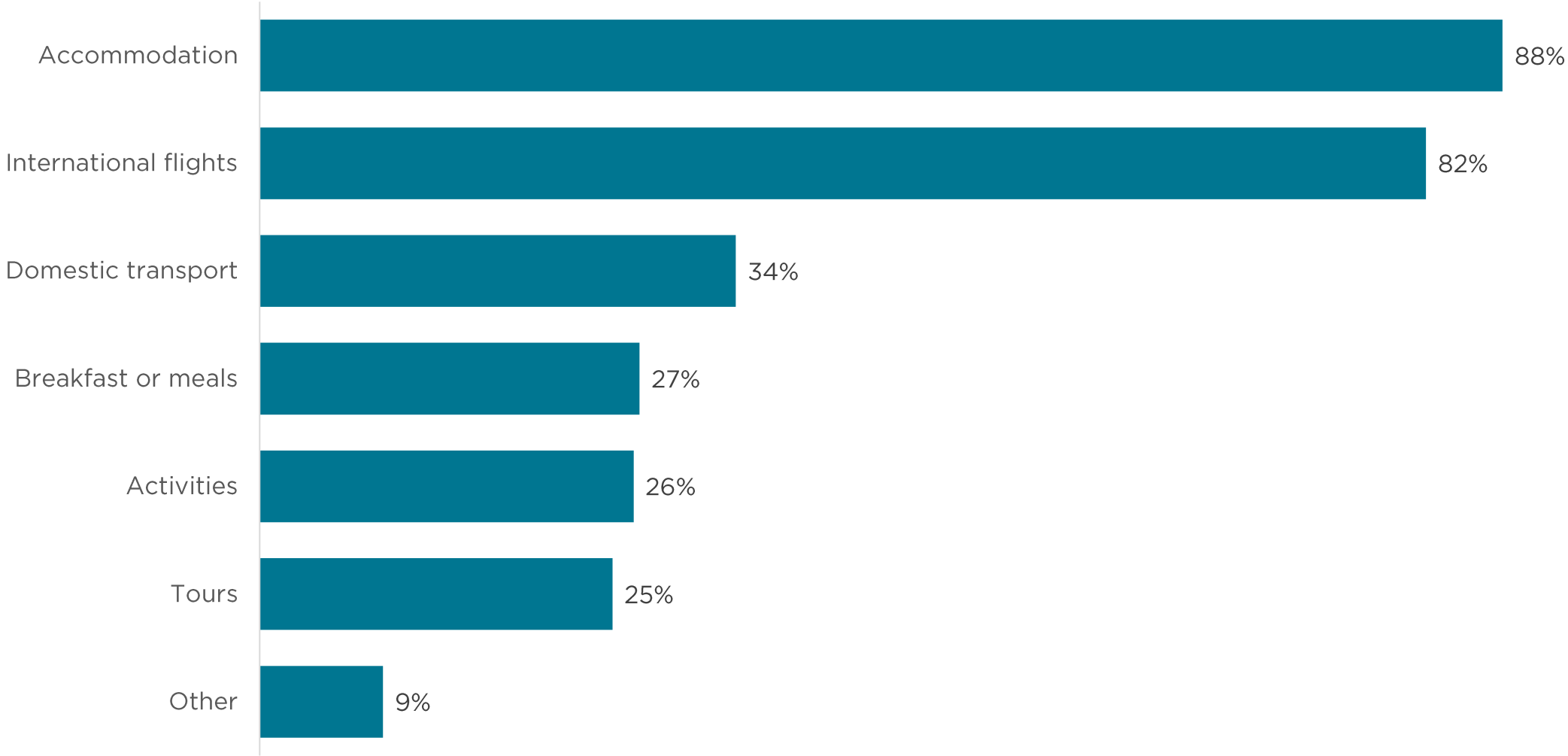
**NZ\$2,570**



*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		
	<u>% of sector</u>	<u>NZD</u>	<u>USD</u>
Accommodation	32	67	43
Restaurant, Cafes & Bars	27	57	36
Vehicle Rental	8	17	11
Petrol	2	5	3
Domestic Flight	4	9	6
Public Transport	1	1	1
Internet Cost	1	2	1
Water-based activities	7	15	10
Land-based activities	2	4	2
Groceries	7	15	10
Shopping	10	21	13
Other	1	2	1
TOTAL		212	135

*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		
	Jul-Sept 24	Jul – Sept 24
Average Spend Prior to arrival	NZD	USD
Per Person Per Trip	2,570	1,637
Flowing into local economy rate – estimated 40%		
Per Person Per Trip	1,028	654
Per Person per Day	114	73
-----		
Average Local Spend		
Length of Stay (nights)	mean 9.0 nights	
Per Person Per Trip	1,905	1,213
Per Person per Day	212	135
-----		
Total Economic Impact-Per Trip	2,933	1,868
Total Economic Impact-Per Day	326	208

July - September 2023

NZD 125 MILLION

FROM VISITORS 47,345

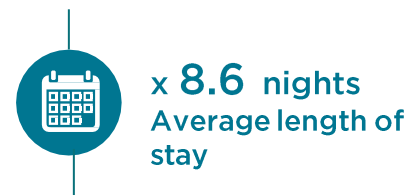
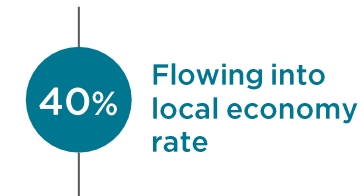


\$2,359

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

July - September 2024

NZD 151 MILLION

FROM VISITORS 51,482 ▲

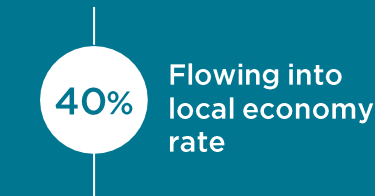


\$2,570 ▲

Prepaid per visitor per trip

\$212 ▲

In-country spend per day



\$1,028 ▲

Prepaid per visitor per trip

\$1,905 ▲

In-country spend per trip



\$2,933 per visitor per trip ▲

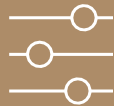
\$326 per visitor per day ▲

Note: NZ dollars. All amounts are per person

# Report Structure



Visitor Profile



Visitor  
Characteristics  
& Preferences



Information &  
Decision Making



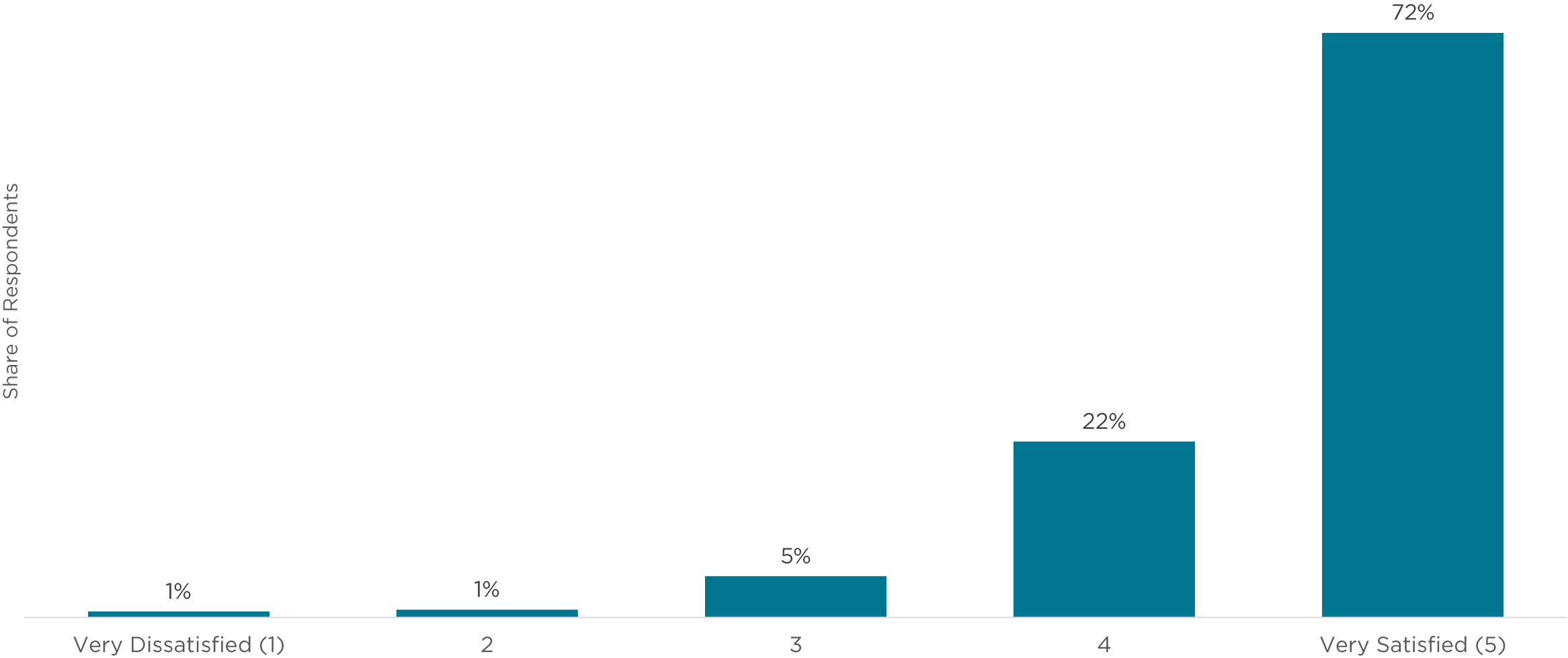
Visitor Spending  
& Impact



Visitor  
Satisfaction

# Visitor Overall Satisfaction

Avg. Overall Satisfaction  
**4.6**

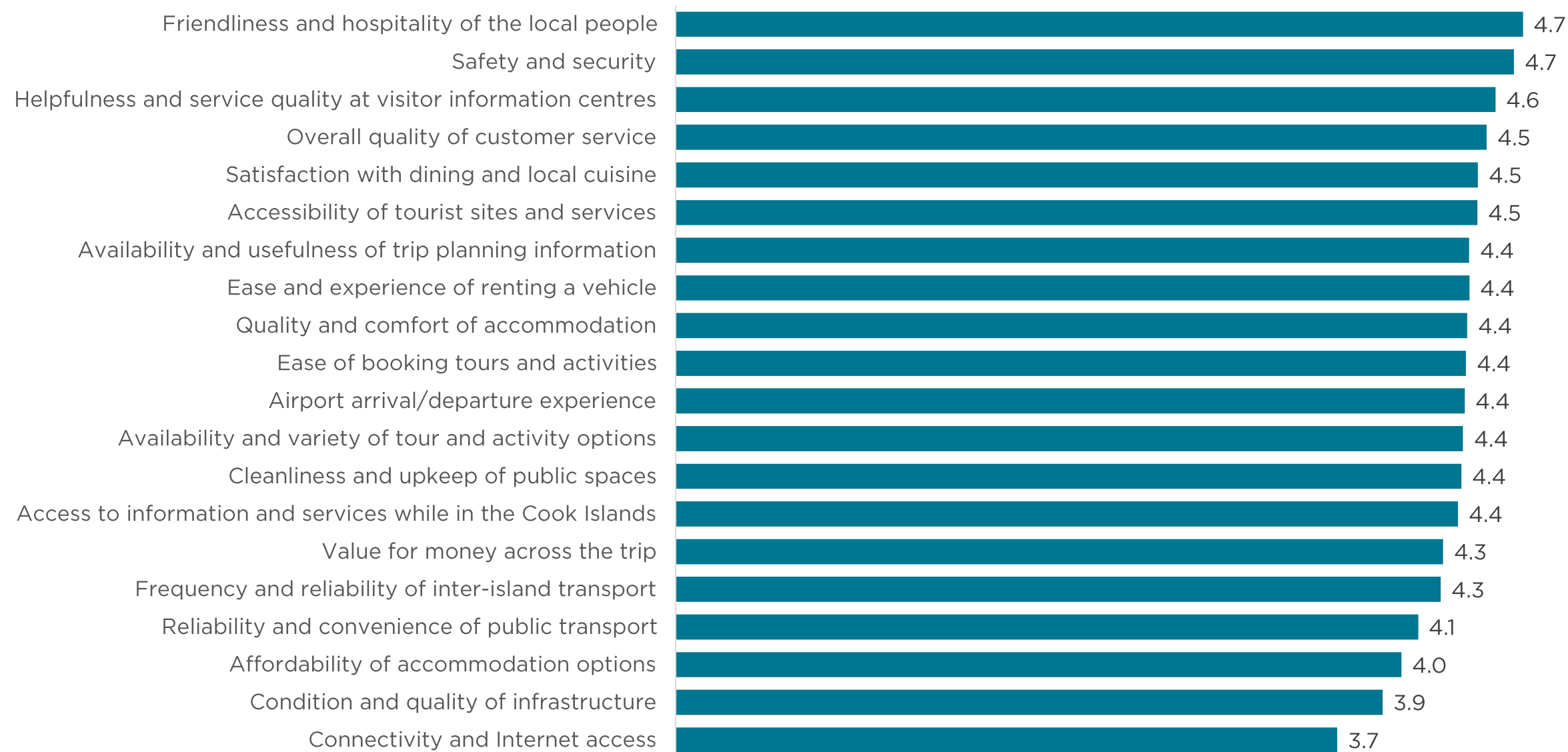


*Note: Due to rounding, some totals do not sum to 100%*



# Satisfaction with Travel Experience

Q: How satisfied were you with the following?

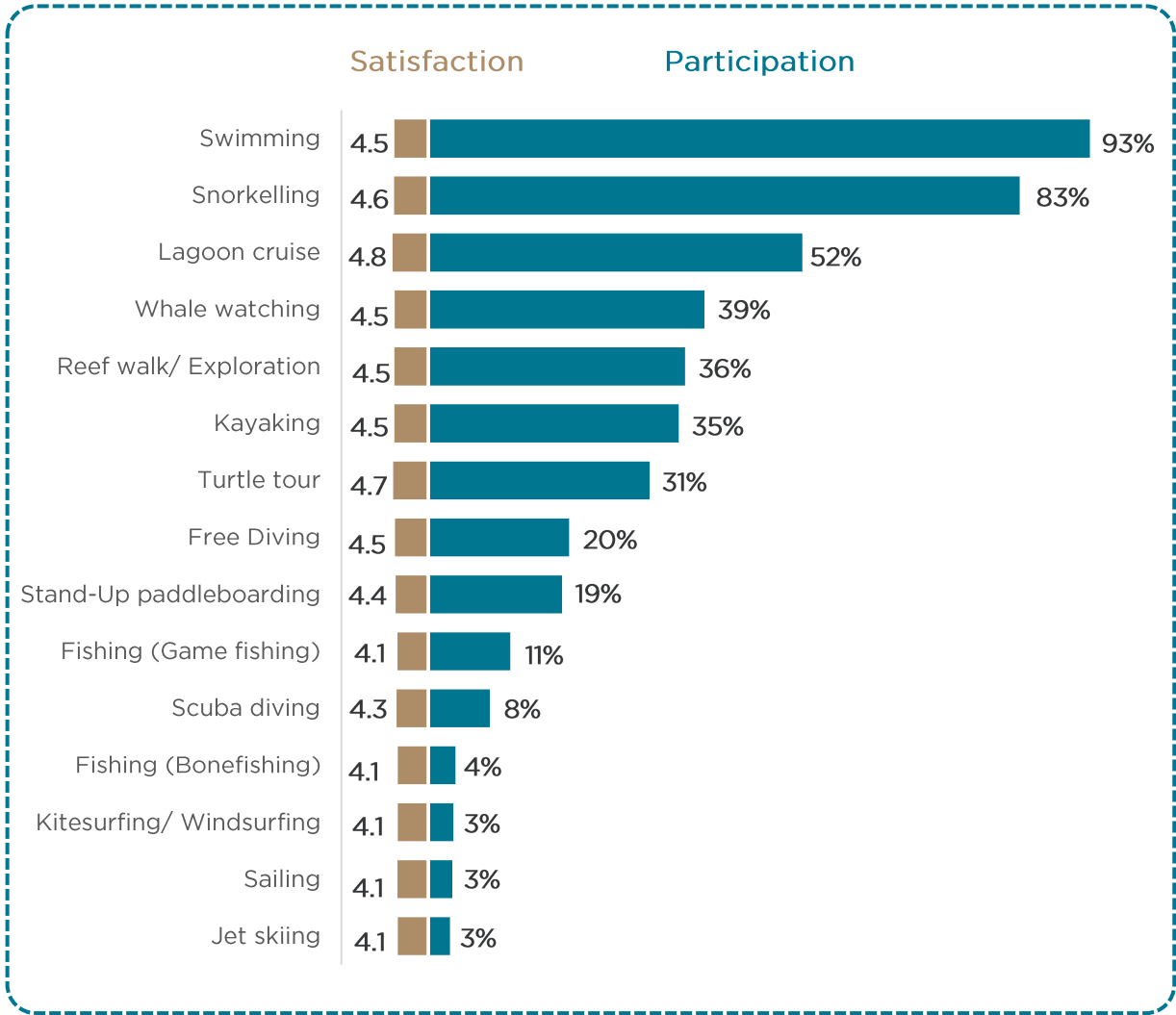


1=Very Dissatisfied to 5=Very Satisfied

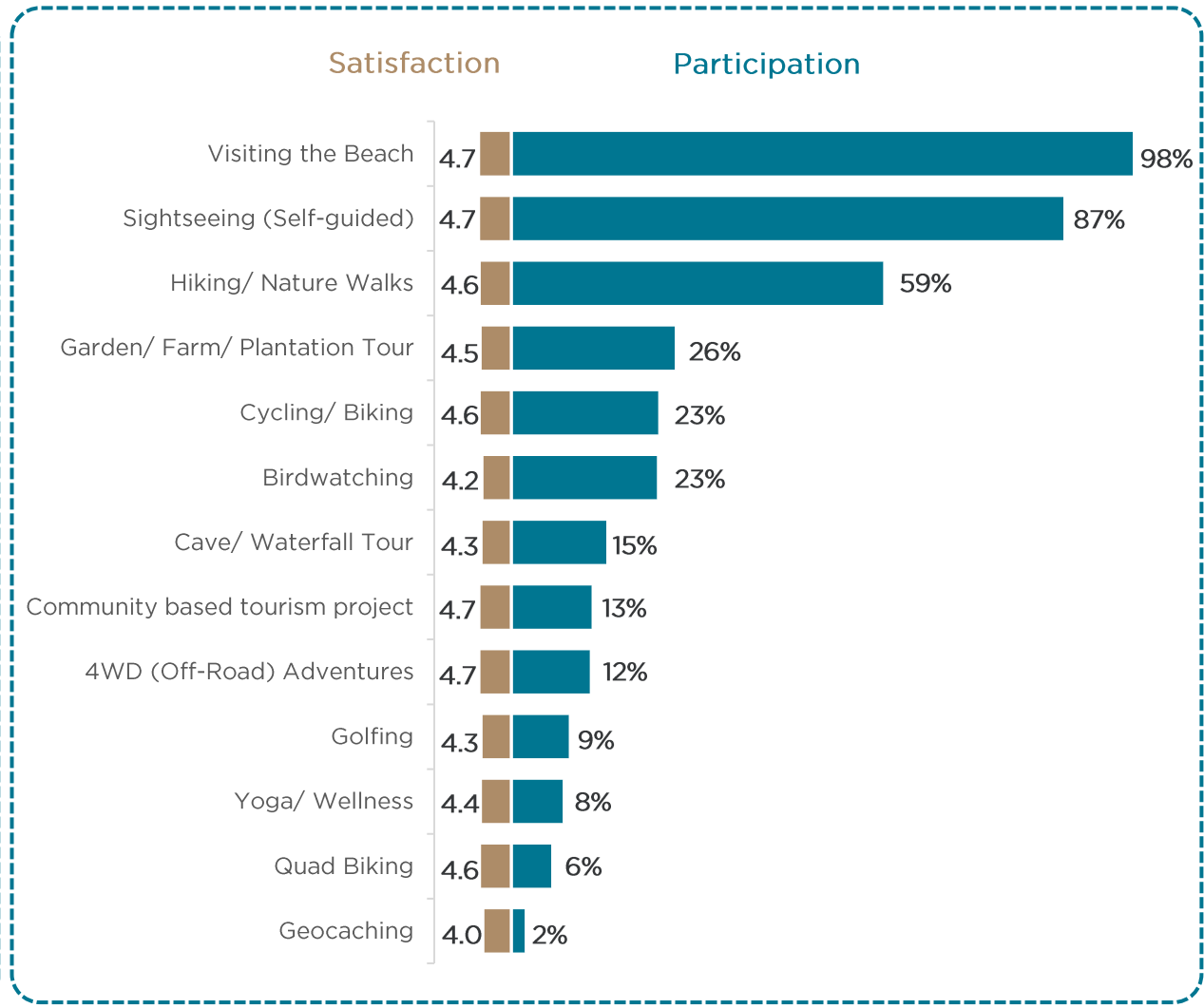
# Satisfaction with Activities

Q: How satisfied were you with the following?

## Water-based activities



## Land-based activities

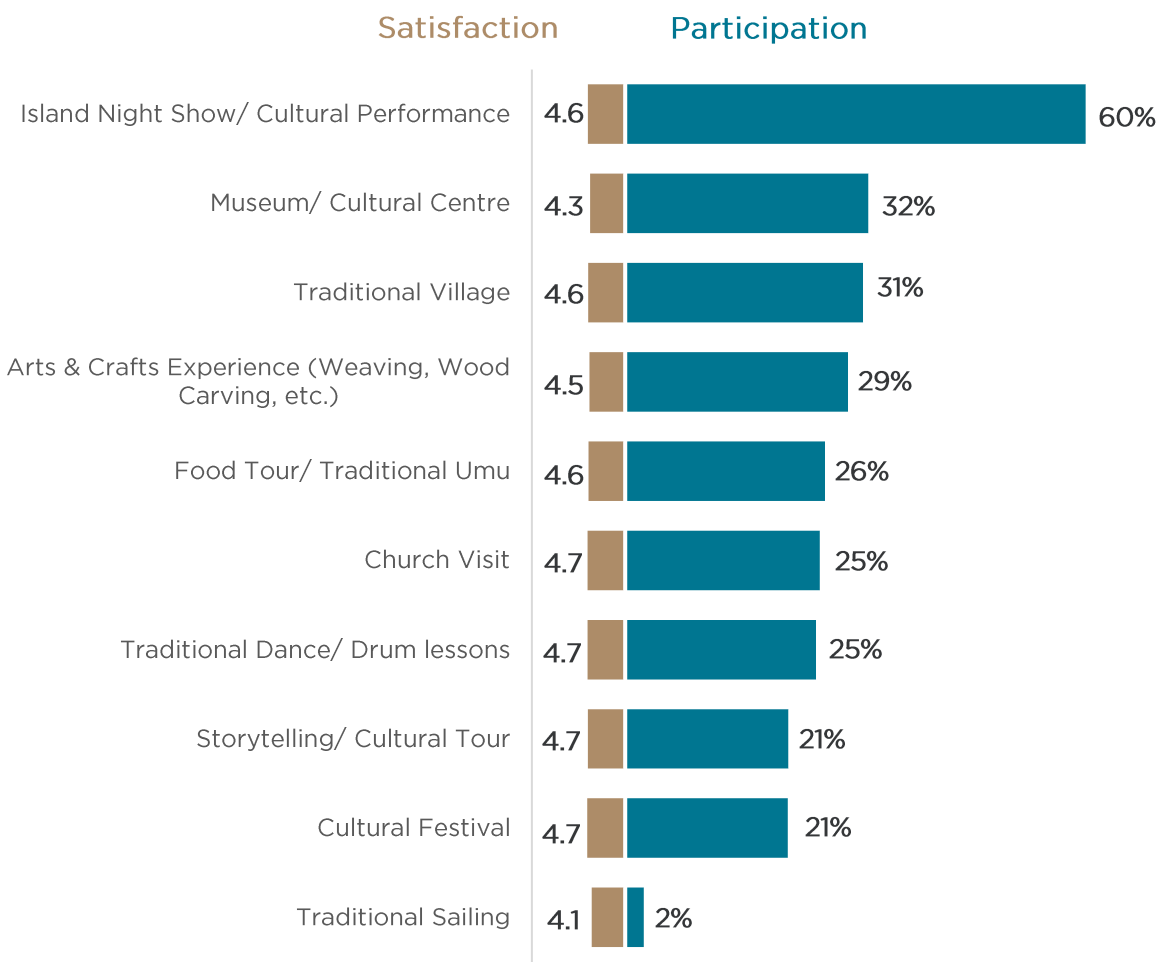


Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%

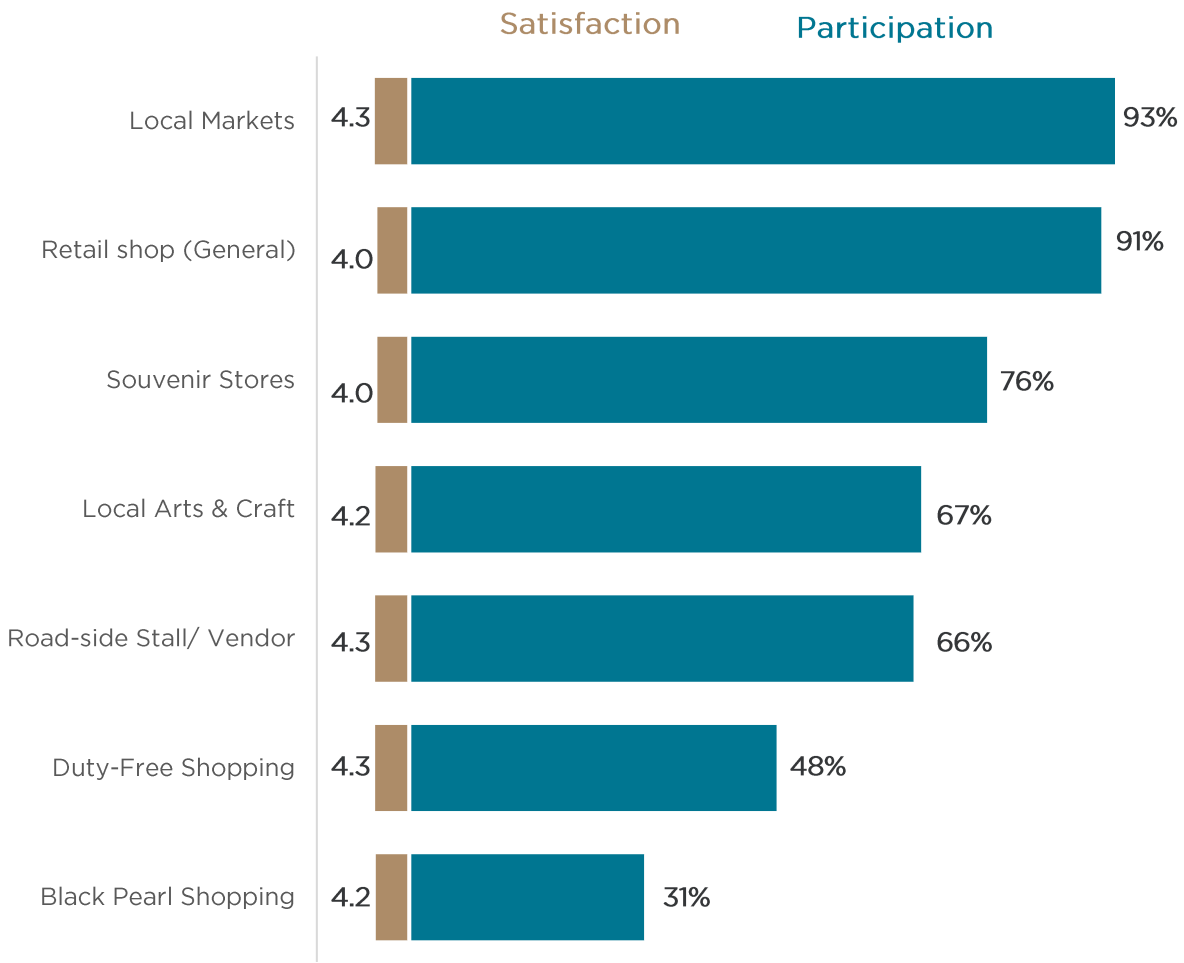
# Satisfaction with Activities

Q: How satisfied were you with the following?

## Arts and Cultural Activities



## Shopping activities

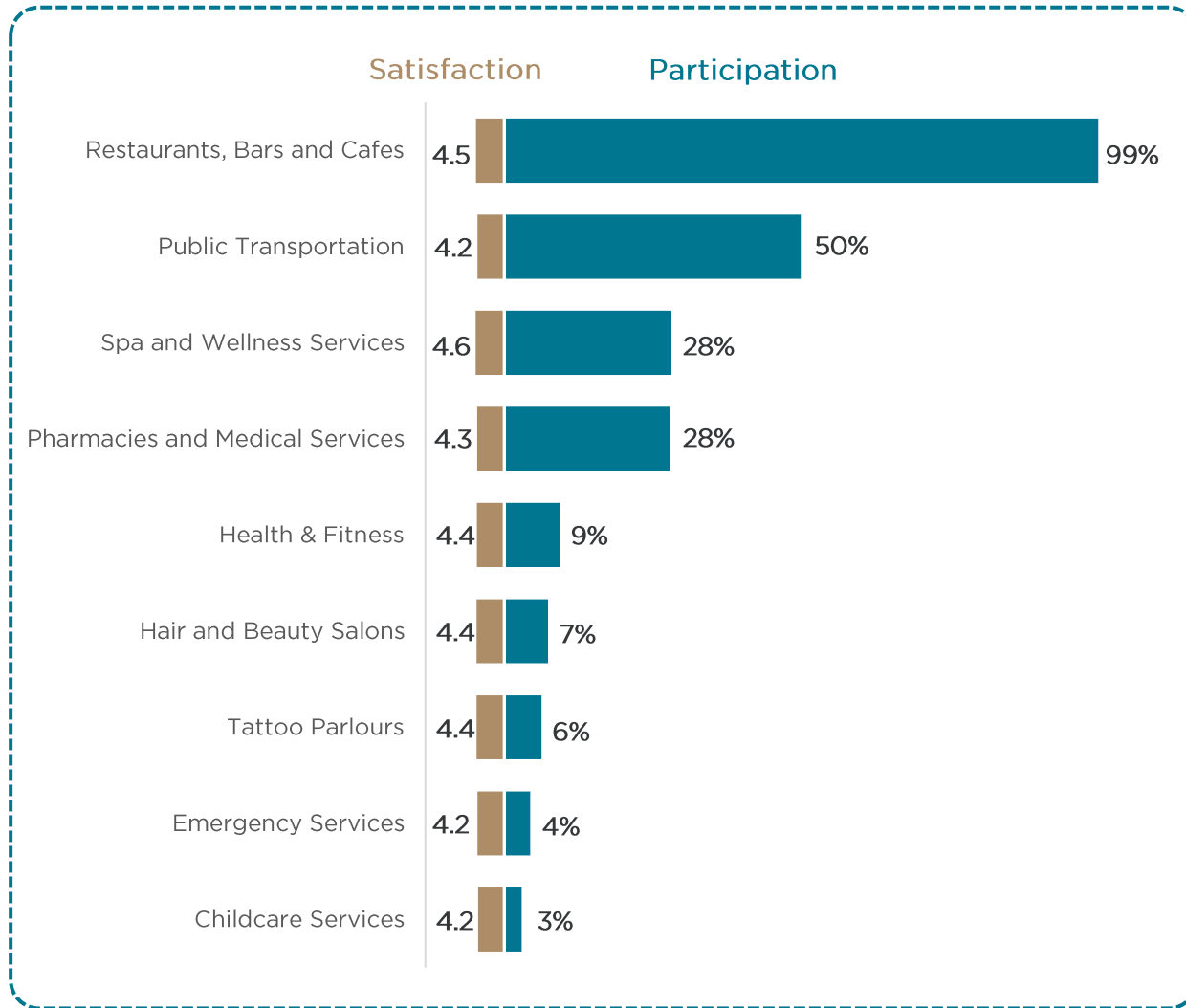


Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%

# Satisfaction with Activities

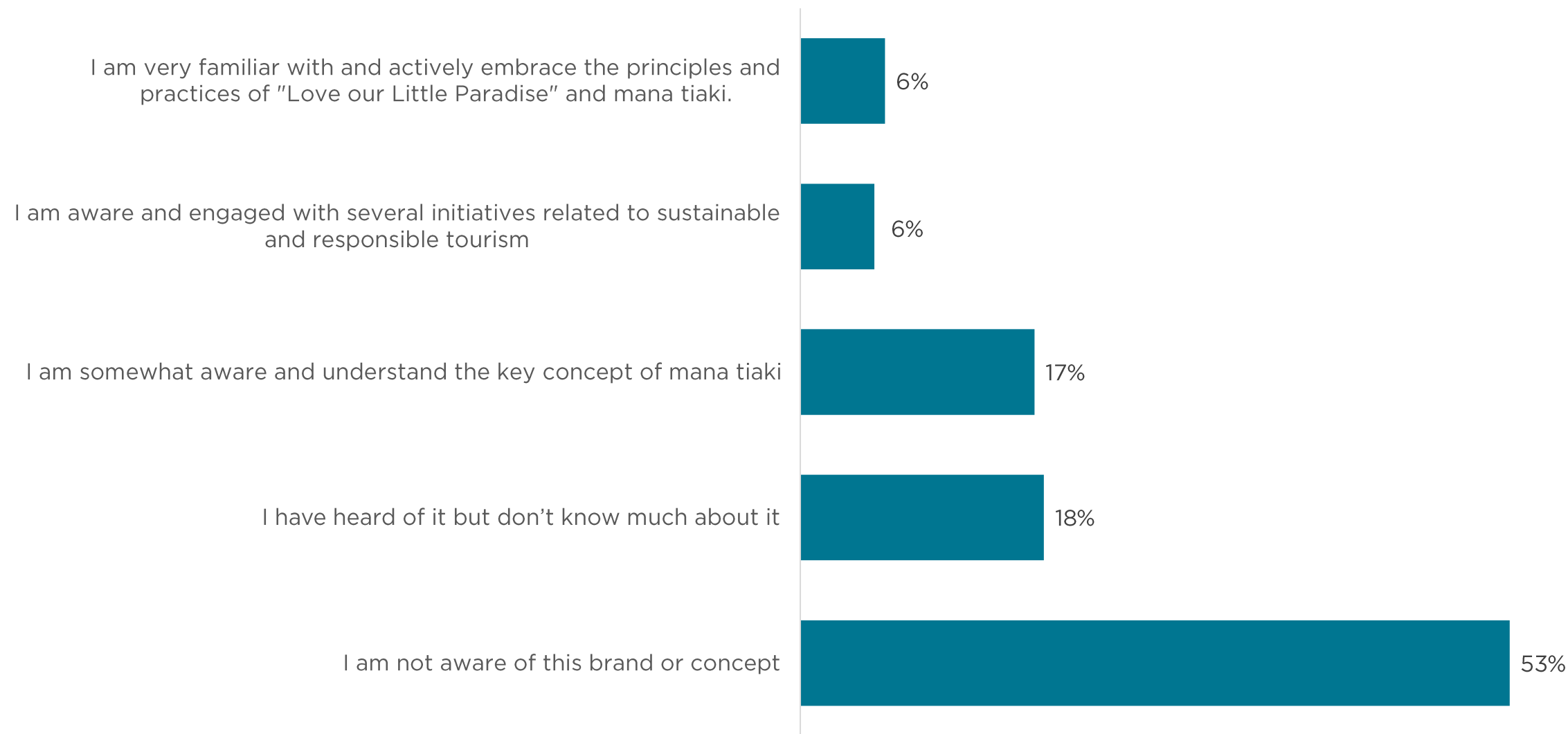
Q: How satisfied were you with the following?

## Services



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

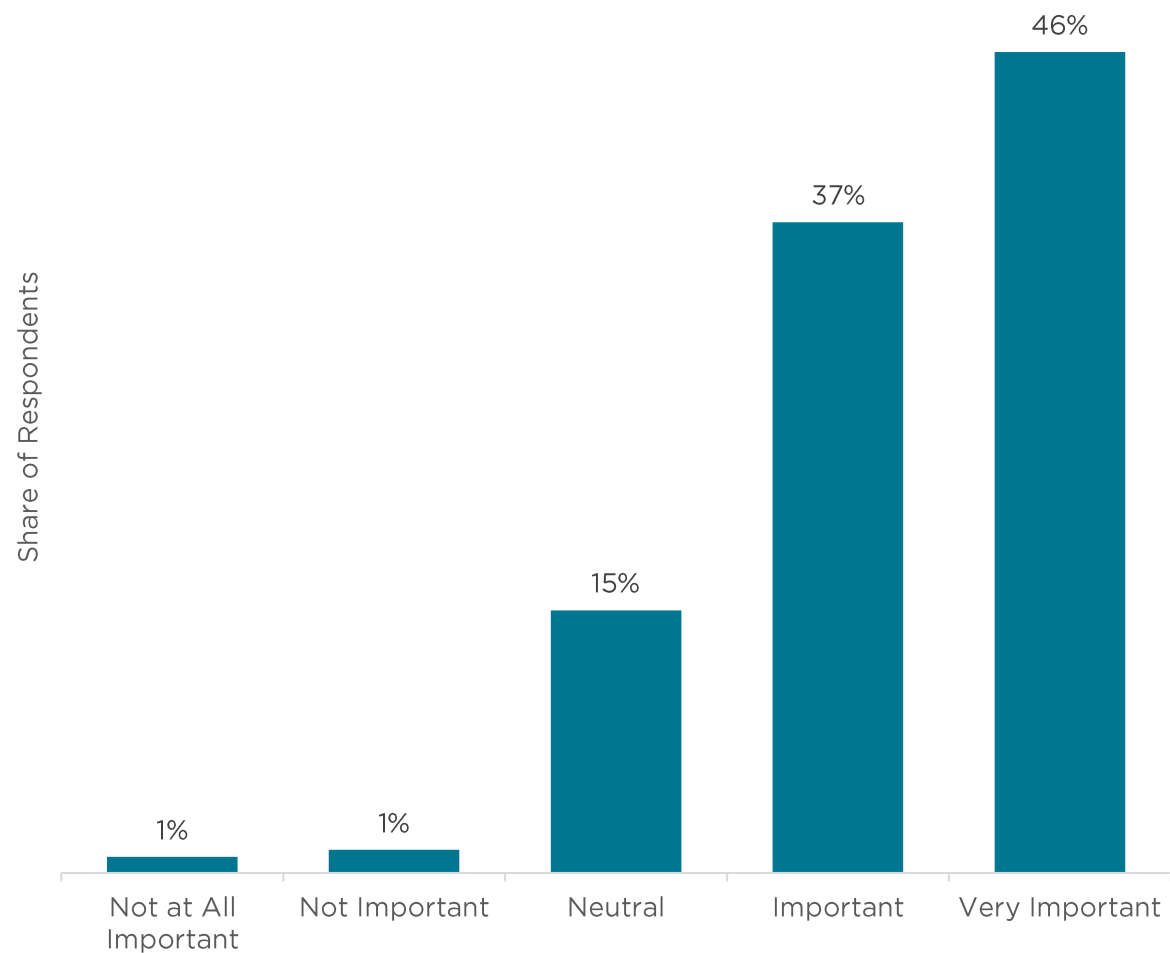
# Awareness of "Love Our Little Paradise" and Mana Tiaki



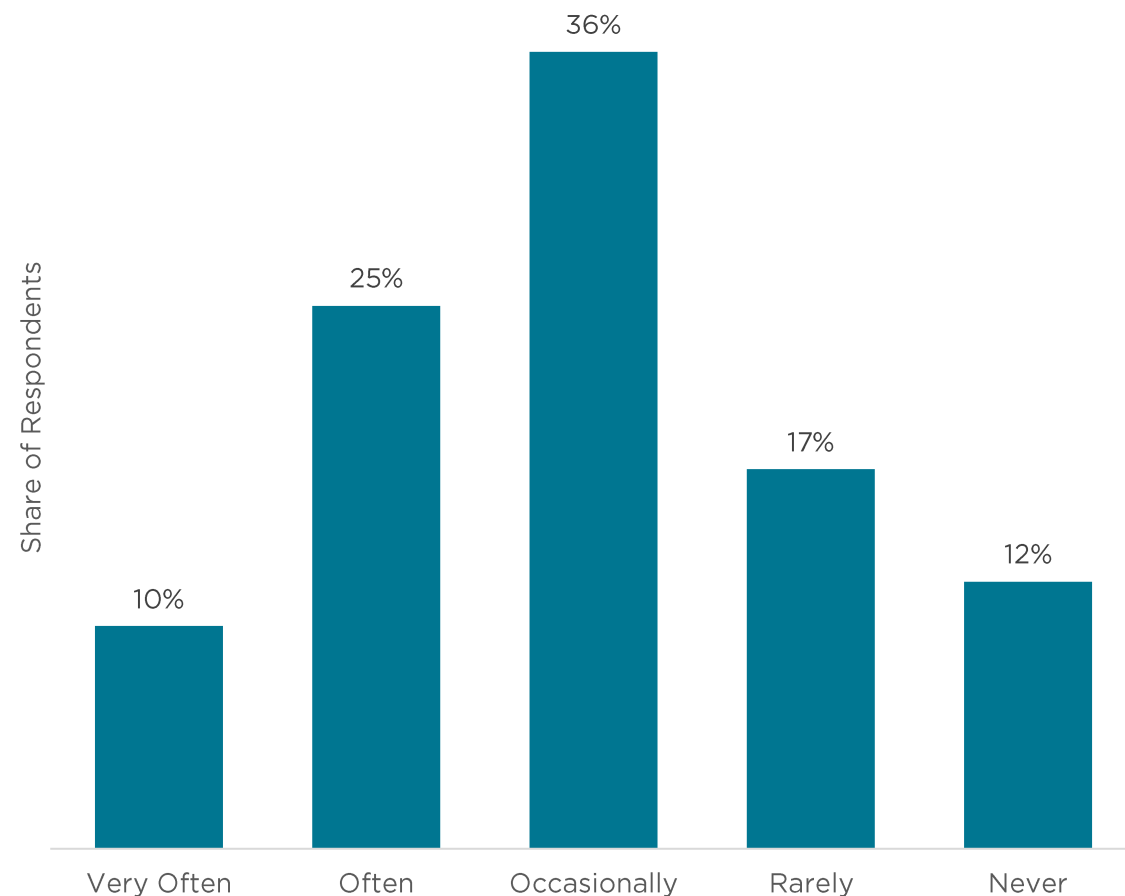
*Note: New variable added for the July 2024-June 2025 survey period to address the question on the "Awareness of the Cook Islands Tourism Corporation branding".*

## Perceptions and Engagement in Sustainable Tourism

**Q:** How important is it to you that the Cook Islands tourism industry operates sustainably and responsibly?

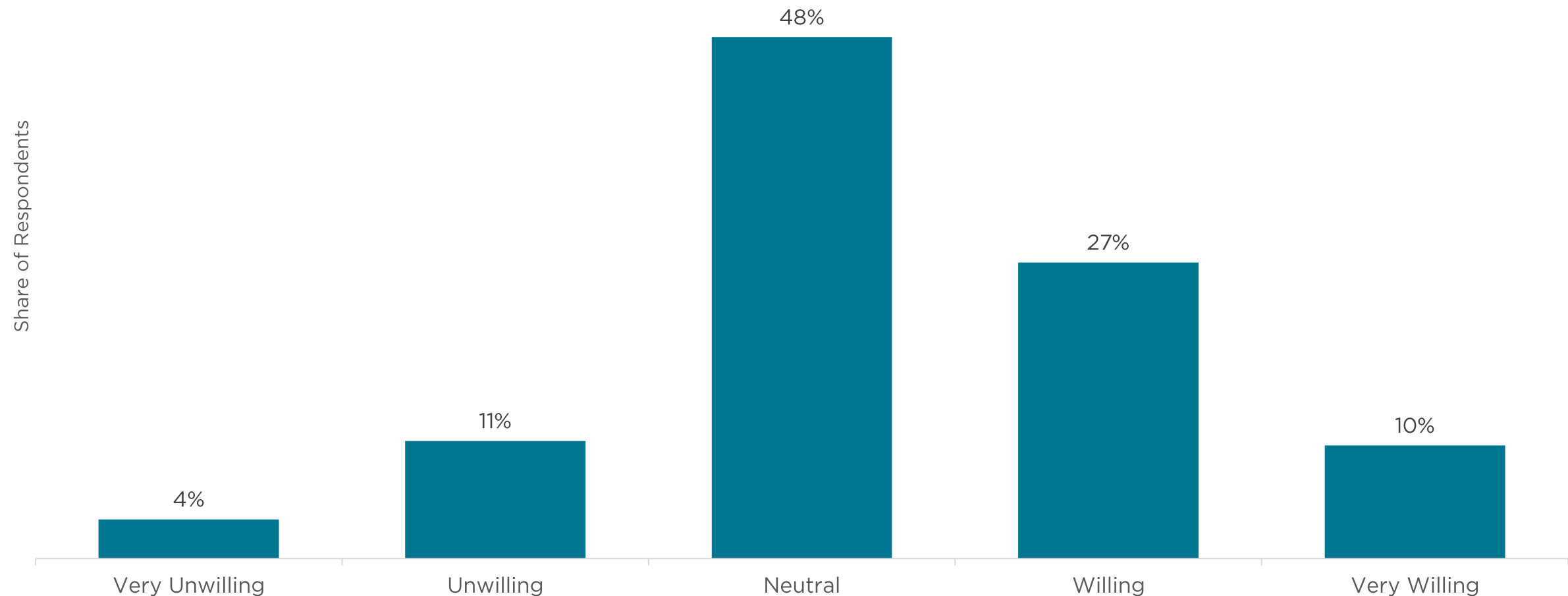


**Q:** During your visit, how often did you observe or participate in sustainable or responsible tourism practices (e.g., eco-friendly accommodations, conservation efforts)?



*Note: New variable added for the July 2024-June 2025 survey period to address questions related to the "Perceptions and engagement in Sustainable Tourism".*

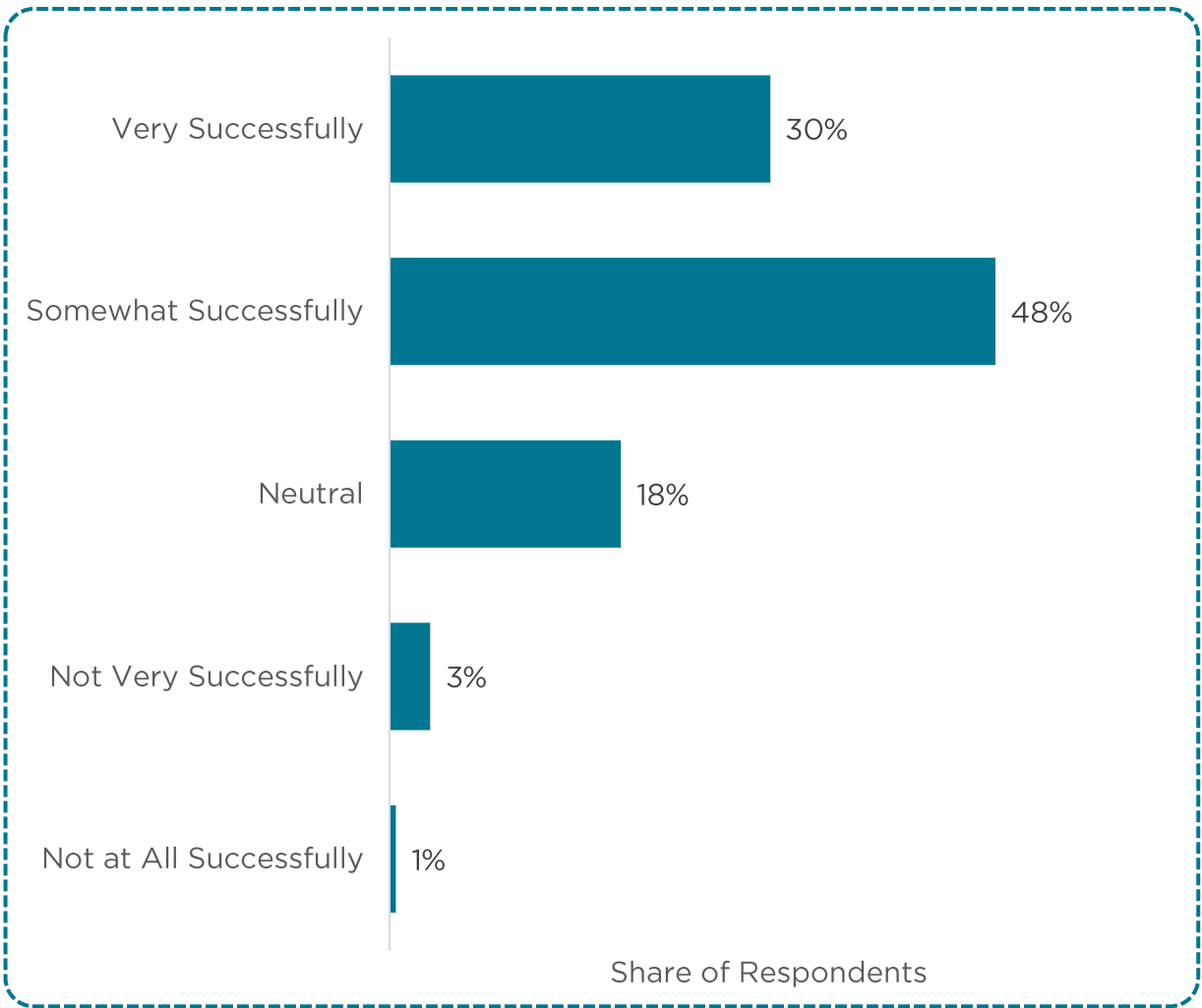
# Willingness to Contribute to Tourism Give-Back Initiatives



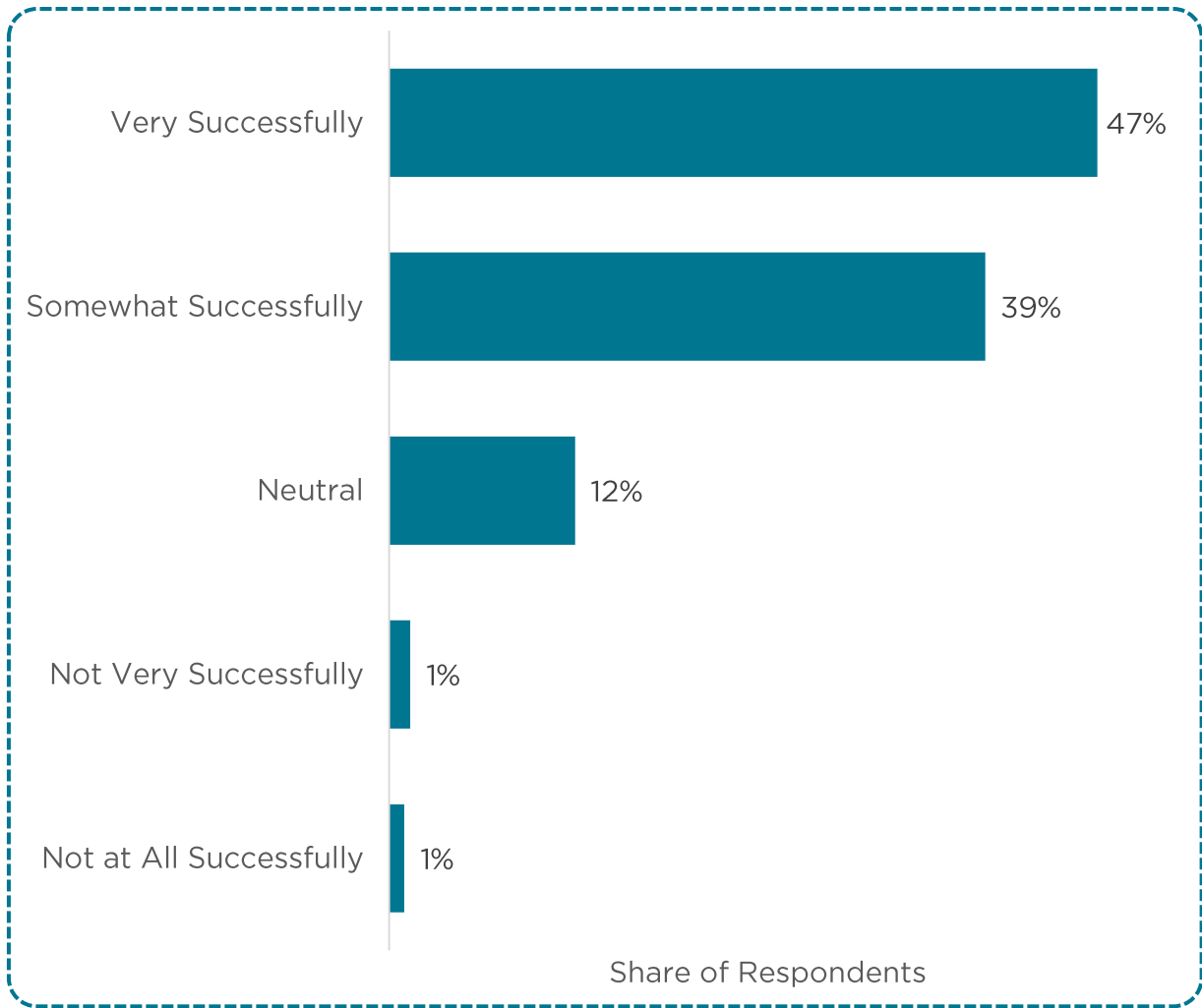
*Note: The neutral bar rating of 48% for “Willingness to Contribute to Tourism Give Back Initiative” indicates a significance portion of respondents are uncertain, presenting an opportunity to engage and address their concerns to shift opinions more favorably.*

# Protecting Natural Environment, Cultural Identity and Supporting Local Communities

**Q:** How well do you think the Cook Islands is protecting its natural environment (e.g., marine life, reefs, forests, beaches)?



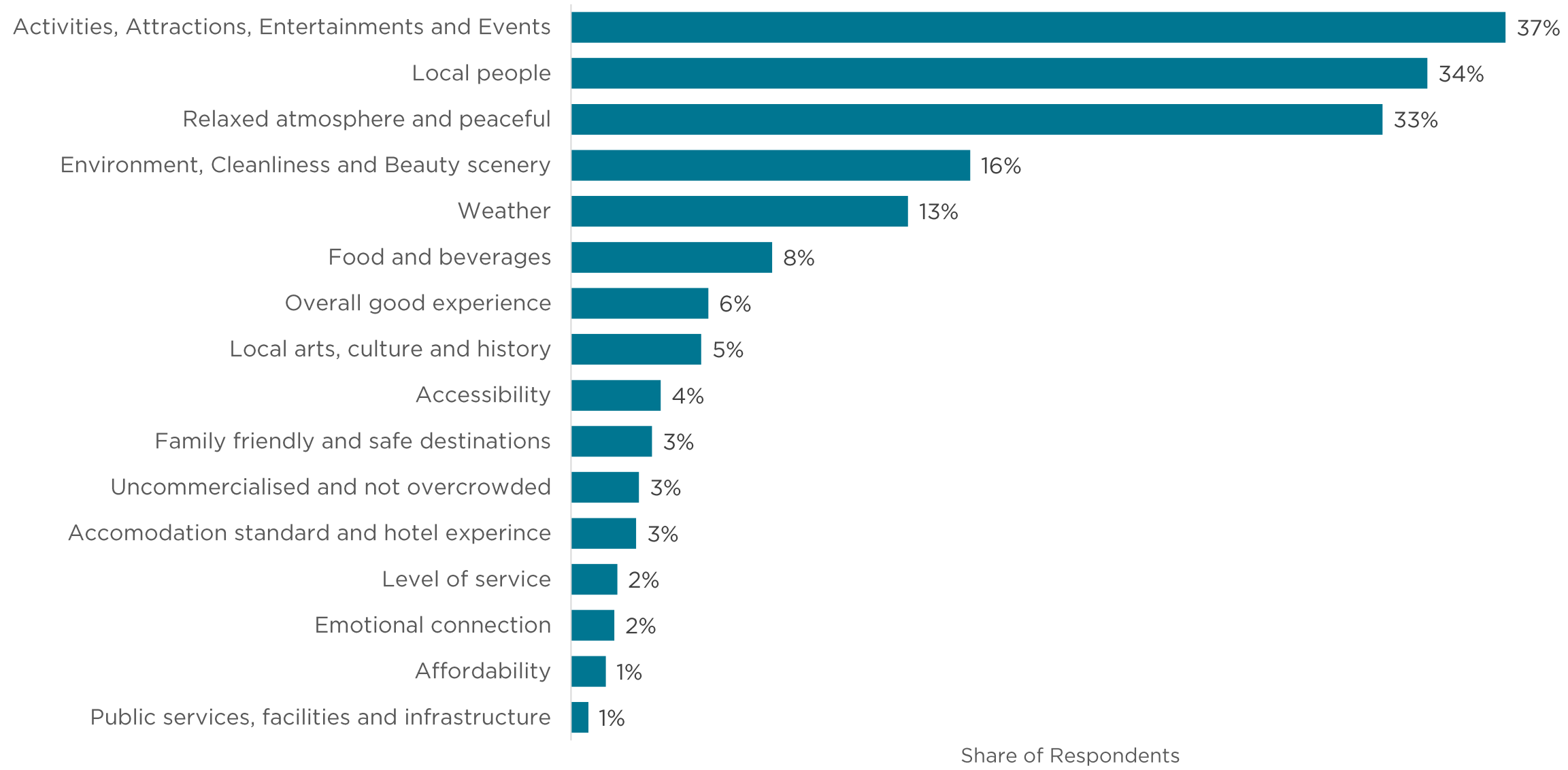
**Q:** How well do you think the Cook Islands is protecting its cultural identity and supporting local communities (e.g., traditional performances, Cook Islands Māori language, local arts and crafts)?



*Note: New variable added for the July 2024-June 2025 survey period to address questions related to the “Protection of the Natural Environment and Cultural Identity, as well as support for Local Communities”.*



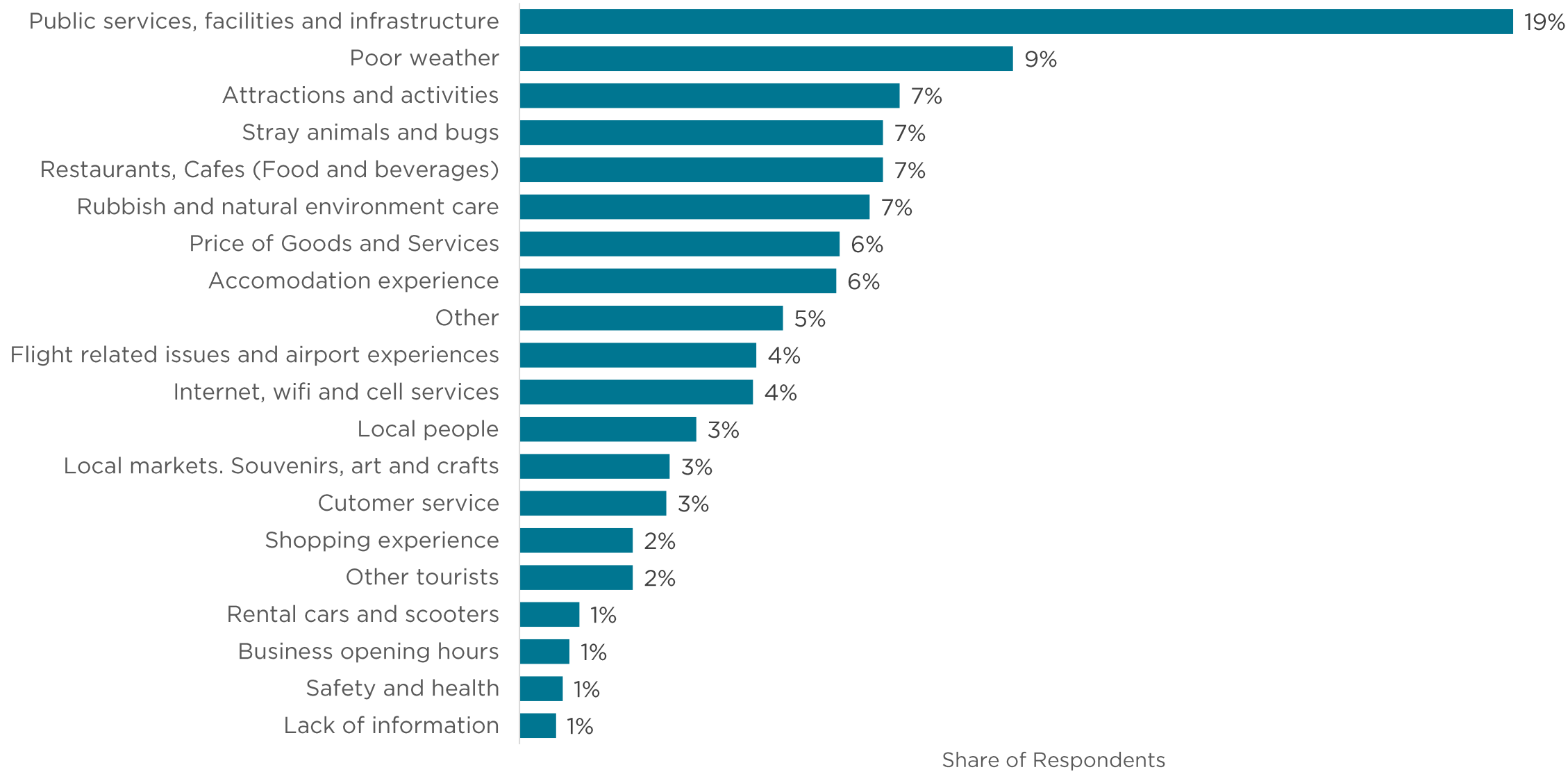
# Most Appealing Aspects



*Note: Total response N=1,726. Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%*



# Least Appealing Aspects



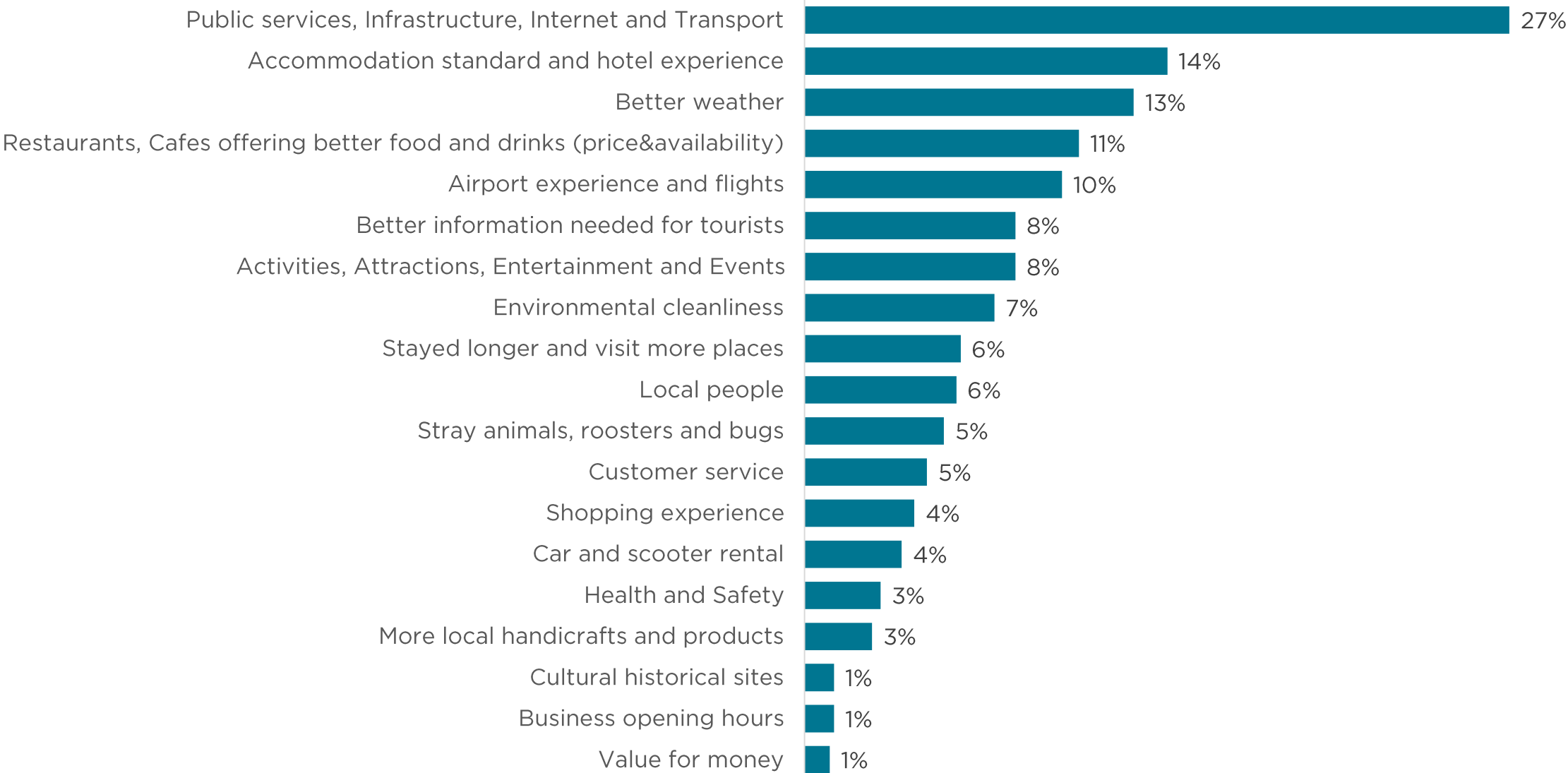
*Note: Total response N=1,602. Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%*

# Quotes for Least Appealing Aspects of the Cook Islands

- + *A lot of litter on beautiful little back roads. I feel some help is needed here. And some of the Turtle Tour operators we watched from our guesthouse, which were clearly operating in a dangerous/irresponsible way! We ended up experiencing both luckily, the not safe and afterwards the most wonderful one!!*
- + *Accommodation is very expensive but worth every cent! Disrespectful pakeha tourists. The owners treat the resort like there own private lounge*
- + *Number of roosters and their noise, woke up every morning around 4:30am because of them, impossible to sleep in. Sleep ability was minimal.*
- + *Attitude of some customer service staff. Too many filipinos on the island, more filipino food being sold in local stores vs island food. Food and groceries are extremely expensive.*
- + *Broken glass on the beaches. My husband and I walked the beach everyday and collected approximately 4 kilo of broken glass.*
- + *Busses sometimes overfilled with people, unsafe because of it. Limited buses, especially on weekends. Cleanness in some places and the busses.*
- + *Internet access expensive and not too reliable. Dogs allowed to run free especially at nighttime, can be a bit scary when walking outside.*
- + *Customs on arrival, the man at the desk was rude when he didn't have to be. Hard to have a good impression of the island when your treated like a criminal on arrival.*
- + *Every Restaurant closed very early in the evening. Later then 9 pm we could not find any restaurant for dinner.*
- + *Food options were a bit average and repetitive. Weather turned sour. Reef snorkeling was shallower than I'd like. Reef health on my SCUBA dive was also average compared with previous dives in Indonesia and Vanuatu.*
- + *Internet connectivity needs improvement as one provider has a monopoly and need more choices.*
- + *Roading need a lot of work. Rarotonga needs. footpaths and Street names & house numbering better road lighting.*



# Suggestions for Improvement



Share of Respondents

*Note: Total response N=619. Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%*

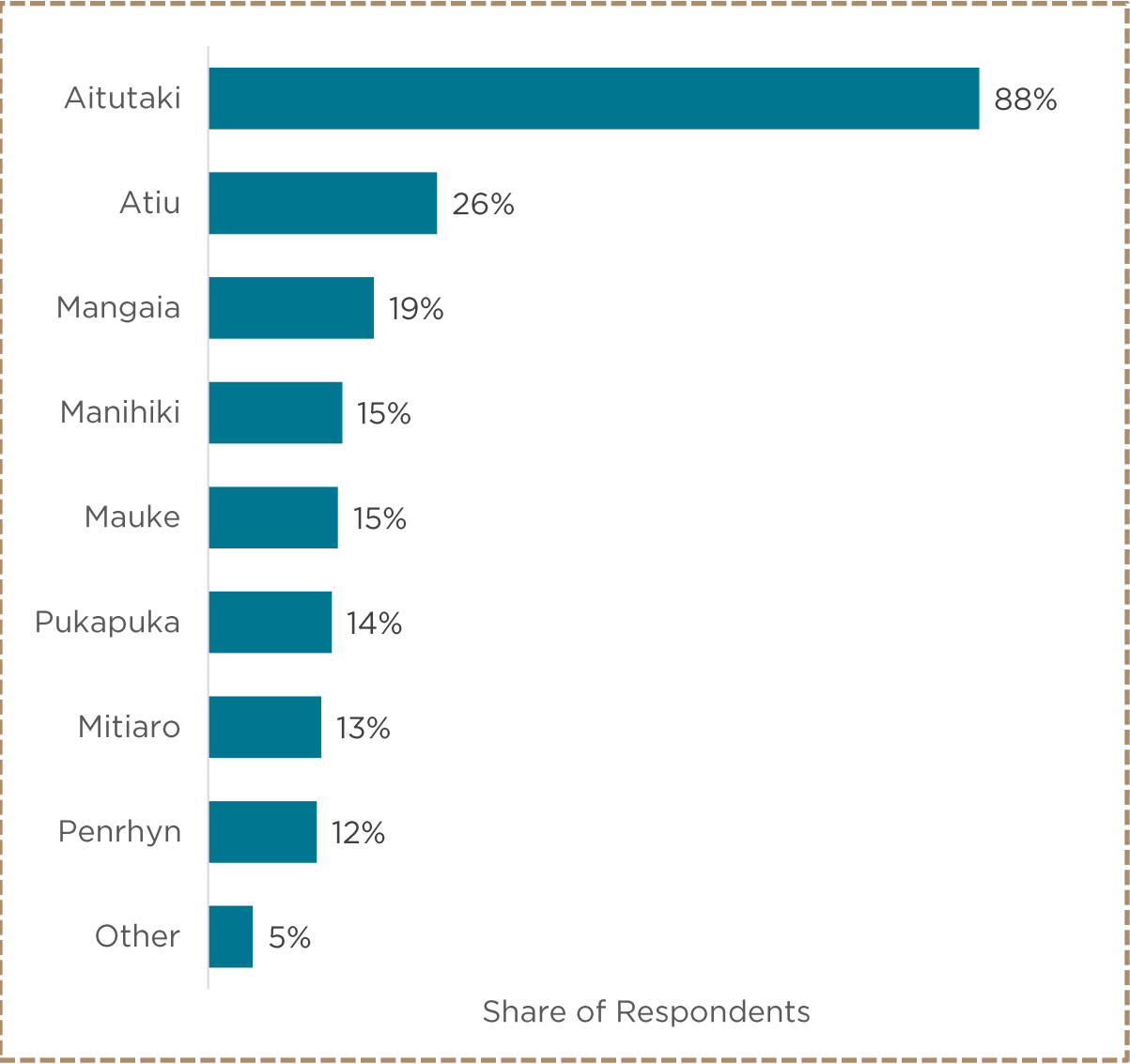
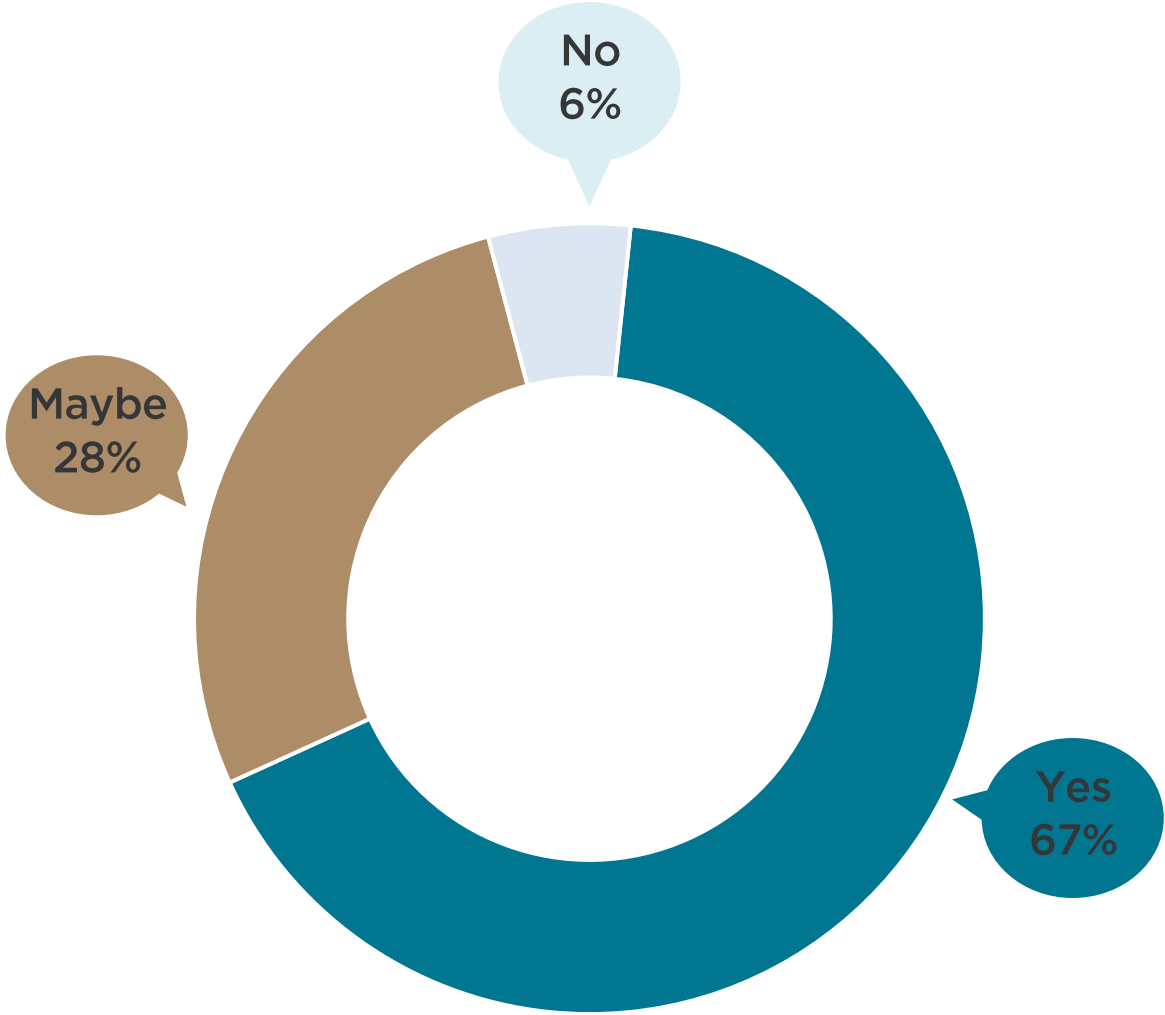


“



- + Make accommodation resorts promise what the advertise, we stayed at the Rarotonga being that the name we thought it would be a beautiful place to stay ,but very disappointed.
- + A group of us caught the flu and at the shops that we were told to get medicine there was very minimal medicine available.
- + Accumulation of unwanted now which is polluting our fragile islands...the more tourism brings people to the cook islands our environment is going to suffer infrastructure now is suffering. Our ocean is being plundered of its resource polluted plastic etc.
- + Accuracy of advertising. We book a honeymoon package at Sanctuary, although heavily advertising on the website it was no provided and when we asked about are we were told it didn't exist, despite it still being advertised.
- + At the airport on arrival the lines are so long. The room so hot but the big thing was no toilets till you have cleared immigration.
- + Better and more accurate information / signs or maps to find places. There are misleading signboards with no information where the places are and that is usually not where the signs are.
- + Better internet access for free with hotel. Less Rooster noise. No requirement for driver licensing for scooters.
- + Cocktails everywhere seem to be similar - with lots of fruit juice. More variety. Cocktail onions. Fresh fruit (like pina coladas from fresh coconut). We knew most would be closed Sunday but was surprised to have so much close at noon at Aitutaki.
- + Dining & food options were poor quality & expensive. Beach access/gear hire seemed restricted outside of resorts.
- + Fly in during the day rather than arrive in the morning, room not ready till after lunch, sitting around waiting after a night flight. Will never do that again.
- + Improve roads and footpaths. Encourage resorts to leverage cultural identity in guest welcome and activities.
- + Inter island flights are expensive and it's hard to fit them in when flights to and from Hawaii are only one ever 8 days. I love the Cook Islands and will continue to come back forever. More promotion of papa Mike and the carving and cultural aspects of the Cook Islands would be great, as well as the voyaging and Marumaru Atua sailing canoe, crew and what they are doing throughout the islands.

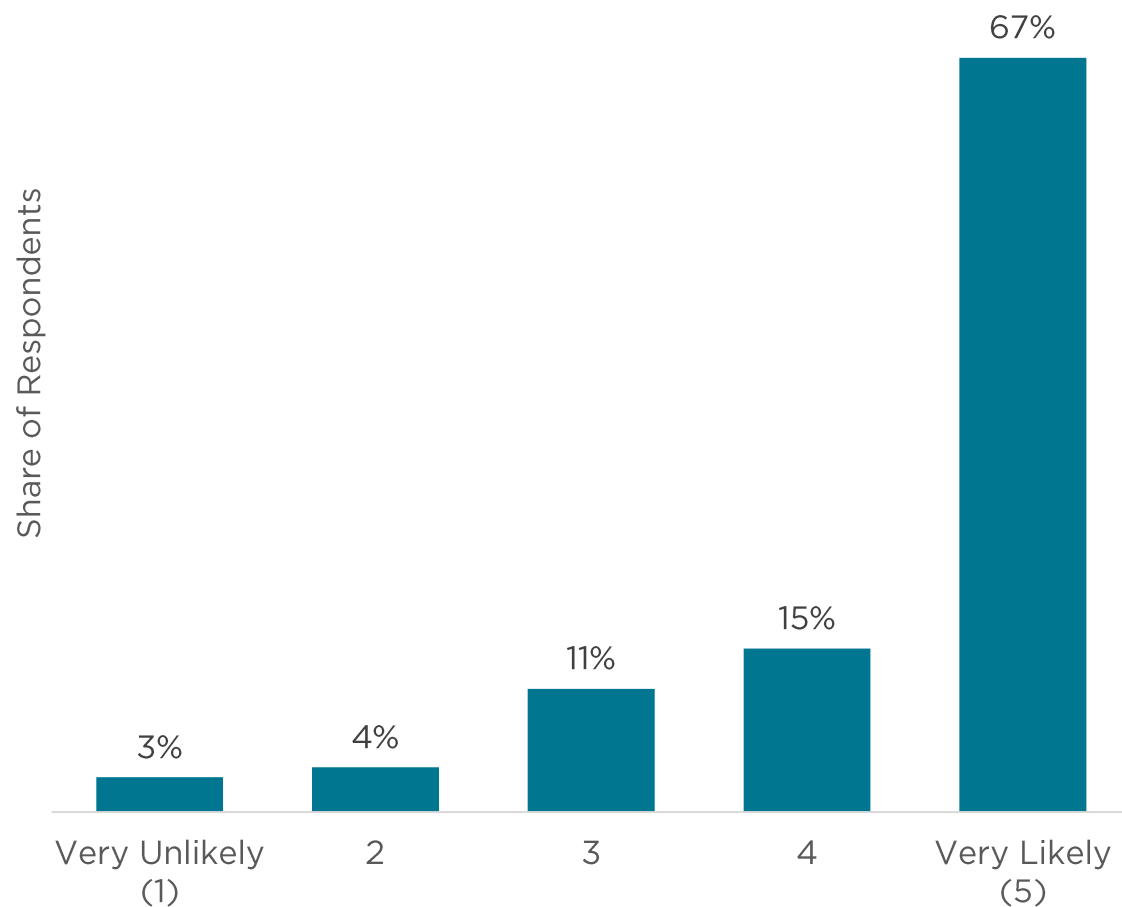
# Willingness to Visit Outer Islands



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

# Future Motivations

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



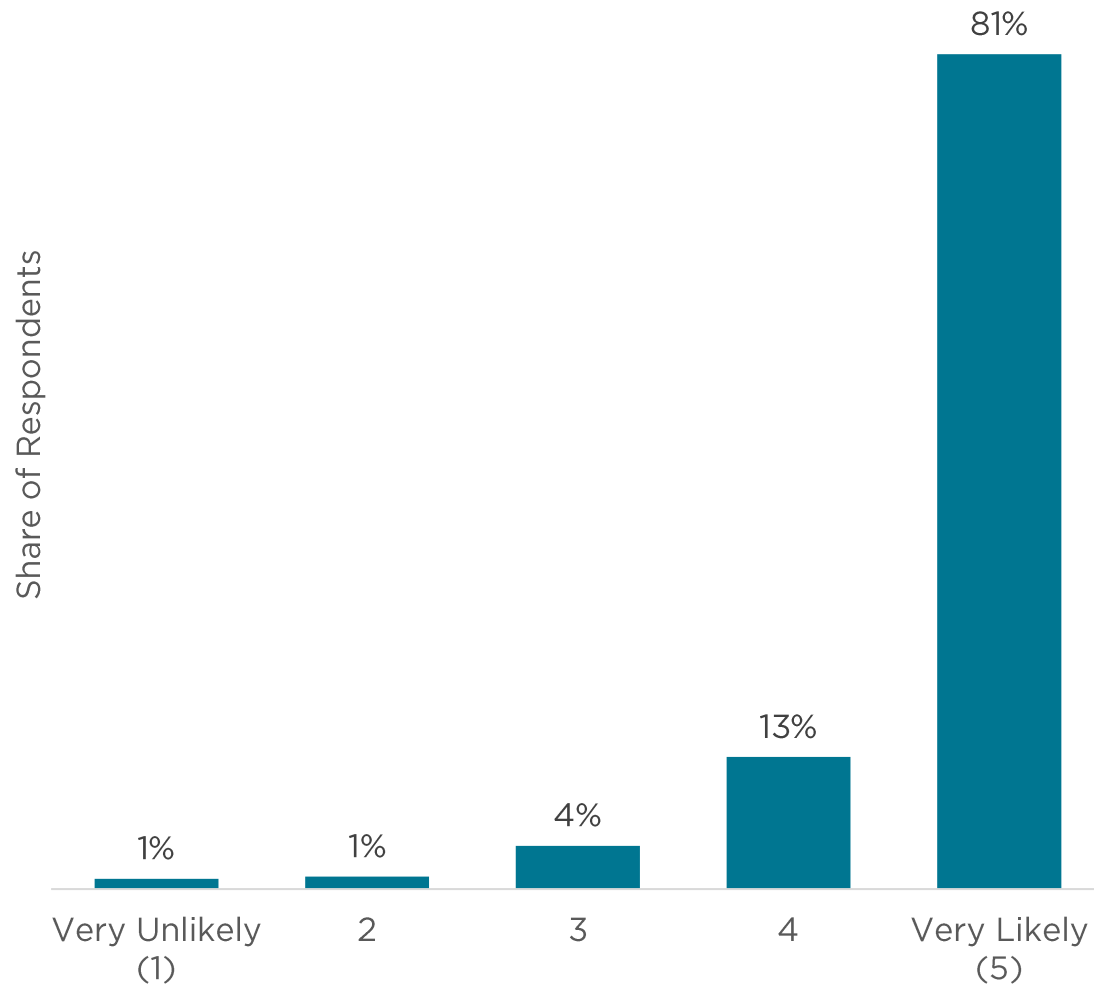
## Quotes: Reasons to not return

- + *I can't handle plastic smoke and rubbish smoking. It was out of control. I wont return unless something is done about this.*
- + *I paid a premium price for the resort and was disappointed that the facilities on offer were basic. The staff looked like they would rather work elsewhere. In general, there is very little other than the cultural show, few markets, and reef activities. I would have expected better dining options. More fun activities on offer. Although brochures said it was the whale watching season, there was no explanation on offer as to why there were no whales to be seen!*
- + *It takes long hours from Japan and costs too much to visit the Cook Islands. Even if this is the first and last time to visit the Cook Islands, I'm really satisfied with this trip!!*
- + *Locals, don't get me wrong I met some awesome people on the Rarotonga turtle tours which was awesome, and the side road local shops were cool but unfortunately there was more negative people then positive.*
- + *More places to see in the world. Prefer warmer dryer weather and water. Like surf and more activities easy to do without a lot of pre-arrangements. A lot of activities I did not do due to lack of availability.*
- + *Value for money is not there, especially for someone coming so far away, sadly!*
- + *We feel like we "did" it. There's nothing left for us to really do or see. The snorkeling was a bummer, it was really windy, it wasn't as warm as we thought and not a lot to do. The people however were exceptional!*



# Future Motivations

**Q:** How likely would you recommend the Cook Islands?



## Quotes: Reasons to not recommend

- + *Beaches too rocky. Inadequate public transport. Difficulty finding cafes that cater for non-meat eaters; especially for breakfast.*
- + *Expensive accommodation, bad food, unreliable public transport, weather not that good.*
- + *No real Infrastructure, houses were run down and dogs everywhere.*
- + *Other places e.g.. Fiji with better access to the sea and snorkeling.*
- + *The Cook Islands in my opinion are not ready for massive amounts of tourism, the grocery stores are severely lacking supplies to support the residents and tourists, additionally finding tourists attractions that were on maps, was nearly impossible (the waterfall in Rarotonga)*
- + *The rubbish burning problem isn't something I would wish on my worst enemy, let alone a friend.*
- + *Our experience with the crime and unfriendly locals.*
- + *Would be nice if the roads had bike lanes for safer cycling. This would likely encourage bike use resulting in less carbon footprint. The airport didn't have much to offer while waiting hours for our flight home ( our flight left very late ).*
- + *People are not friendly, rude customer service by more than one establishment and tour operator.*
- + *Unreliability of water pressure, duty free closed while we all waiting at customs. Why close it just as a full plane arrived. We save our business to spend and support in Rarotonga, but we're very disappointed! Big earning opportunity wasted by Rarotonga now and next time , as we are unlikely to trust it being open IF we visit again! Please explain why it closed ,just a full plane from NZ arrive.*

# SPO



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.

For any queries regarding this report, please contact [PTDI@spto.org](mailto:PTDI@spto.org)

SPTO's Head Office is located at Level 3, FNPF Place, 343-359, Victoria Parade, Private Mailbag, Suva.