

Cook Islands

International Visitor Survey Report
January – March 2025



Acknowledgements

- ❖ The Pacific Tourism Organisation (SPTO) expresses its gratitude to all contributors to this report on IVS data from January to March 2025 which provides insights into the visitor experience, enhancing our understanding of travel trends and behaviors across the region.
- ❖ Thank you to the visitors for completing the arrival cards, enabling this analysis. Meitaki 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 2,046 responses out of 2,129 collected, representing 14% of actual visitors with a 14% response rate. Among the respondents, 11% were solo travelers, and the average household income was NZD169,021.
- ❖ Visitors were primarily attracted to the Cook Islands for its reputation as a safe destination, its warm, sunny weather, beautiful beaches and swimming opportunities, and its quiet, relaxing atmosphere. Overall visitor satisfaction was high, with an average **rating** of 4.7 out of 5. Notably, 98% of visitors said they would recommend the Cook Islands to others, and 94% expressed a willingness to return.
- ❖ The average prepaid spend per visitor was NZD2,839 with an estimated 40% (NZD1,136) flowing into the local economy. In-country spending per visitor per trip averaged NZD1,447 with an average stay of 9.1 nights. This contributed to an *estimated** economic impact of NZD86 million from January to March 2025.
- ❖ Visitors expressed lower satisfaction with the pricing of goods and services, public services, facilities, infrastructure, and the quality and availability of food and beverages in restaurants and cafés. To enhance the overall visitor experience, they recommended improvements in public services and infrastructure maintenance, better regulation of prices, and enhancements to activities, natural attractions, entertainment, and events.

Background

- ❖ The January – March 2025 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).
- ❖ 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 the 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 – March 2025 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 January – March 2025 period was similar, but not exact, to the survey instrument used in the January – March 2024 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 – March 2025 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 (January – March 2025)



14,463 TOTAL VALID EMAILS SENT



2,046 TOTAL RESPONSES ANALYZED

Note: 2,129 responses were received. After data cleaning, 2,046 responses remained.

14%

CONVERSION RATE

RESPONSES COVERED



3,912 ADULTS



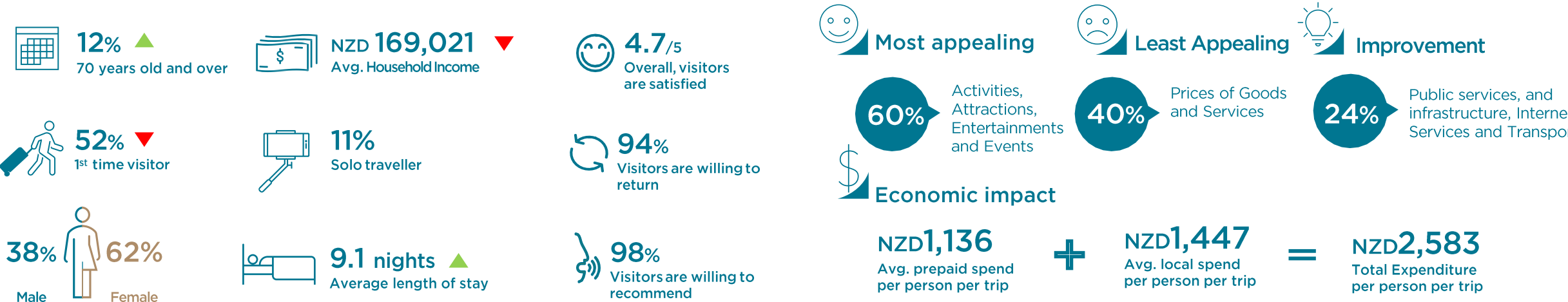
662 CHILDREN

14%

OF ALL VISITORS IN THIS PERIOD

Cook Islands International Visitor Survey

Snapshot January - March 2025

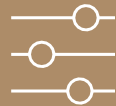


Note: The estimated flow-back rate into the Cook Islands for prepaid spend is 40%. With an average prepaid spend of \$2,839 per person per trip, this equates to \$1,136.

Report Structure



Visitor Profile



Visitor
Characteristics
& Preferences



Information &
Decision Making

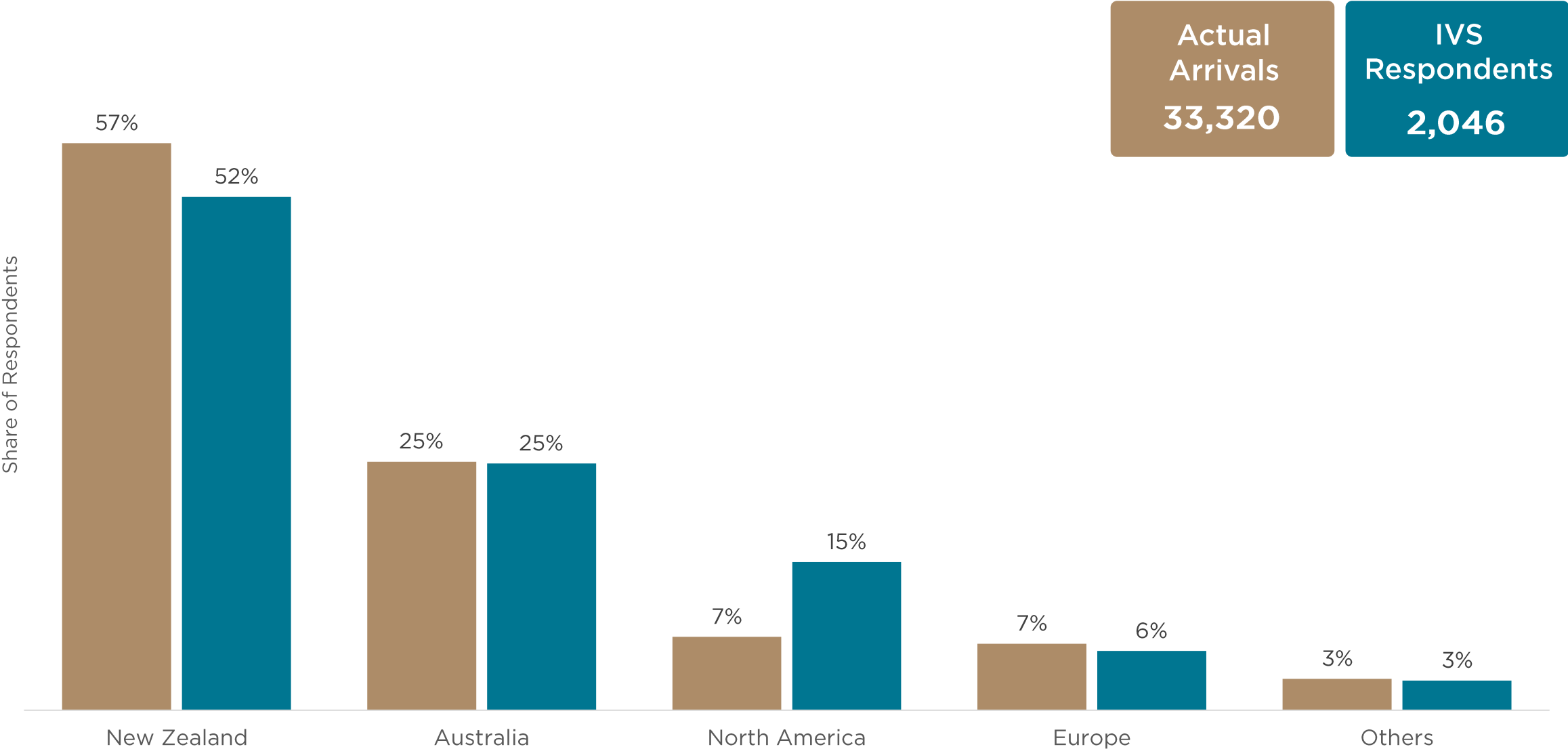


Visitor Spending
& Impact



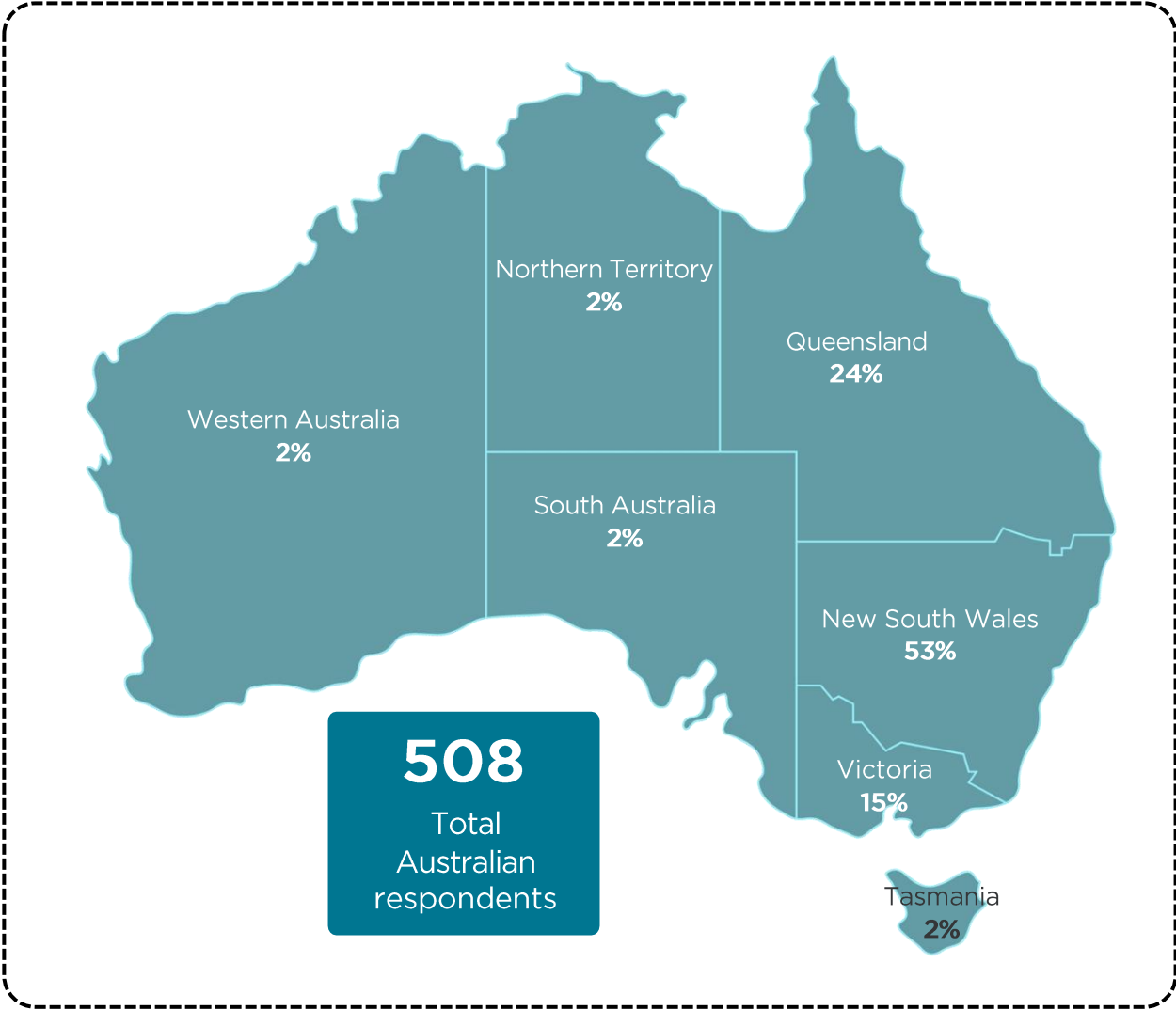
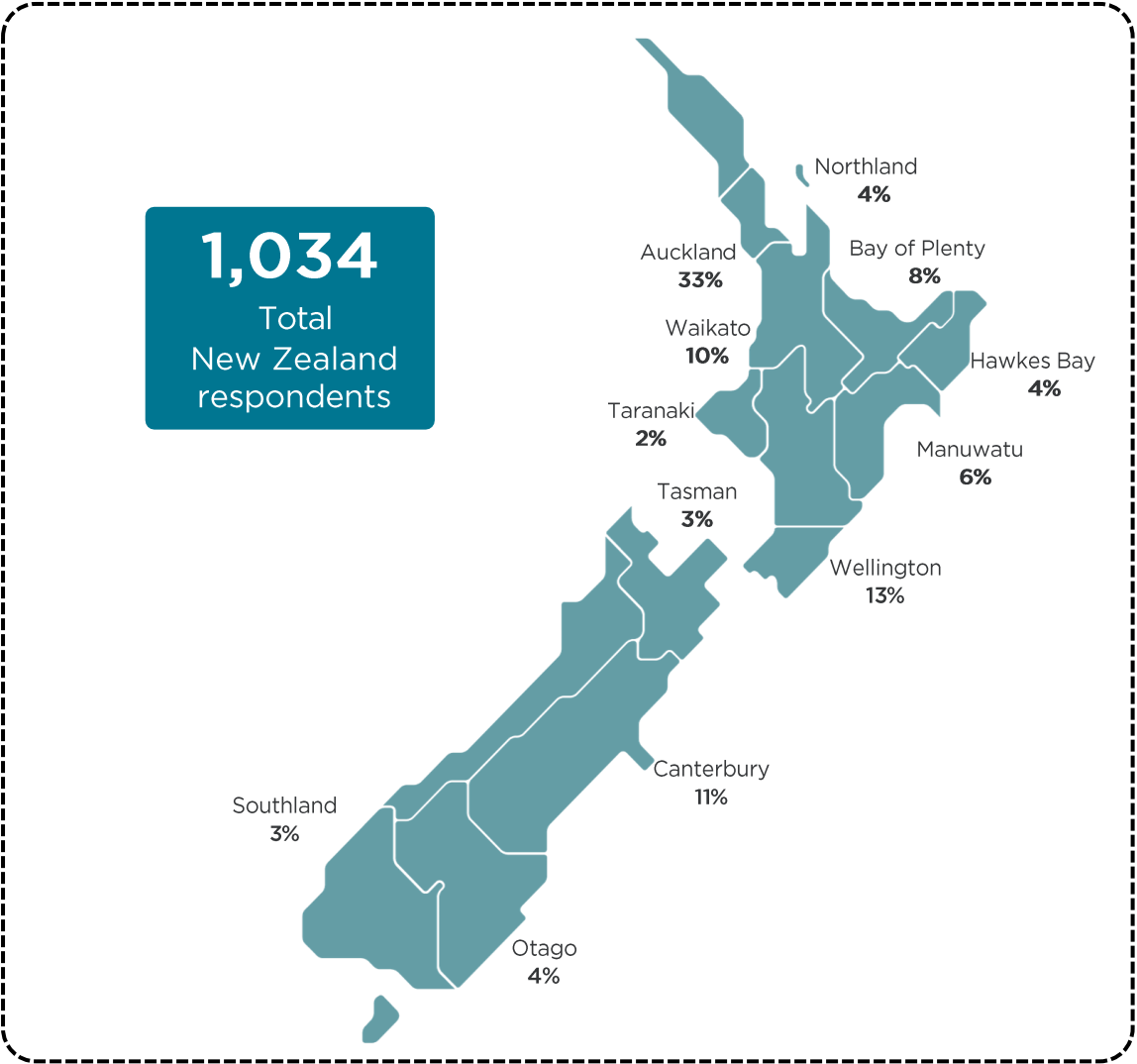
Visitor
Satisfaction

Source Markets: IVS Respondents vs Actual Arrival

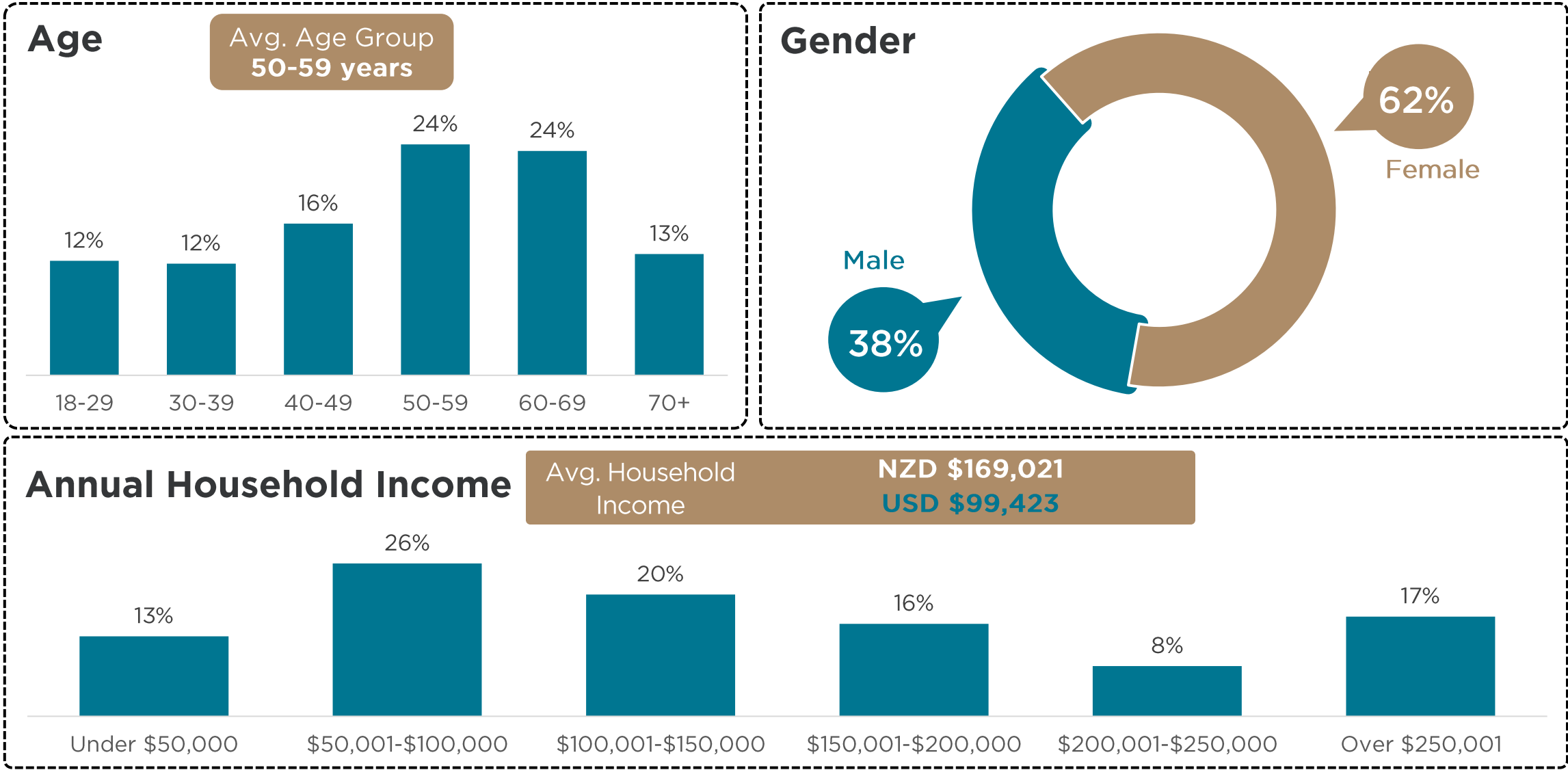


Note: Due to rounding, some totals do not sum to 100%. No weighting was applied, as the sample data is representative..

Top Source Markets



Respondent Demographics



Note: % share of IVS respondents. \$ in NZD. The average exchange rate to NZD and USD for Jan-Mar 2025 was applied.

Report Structure



Visitor Profile



Visitor
Characteristics
& Preferences



Information &
Decision Making



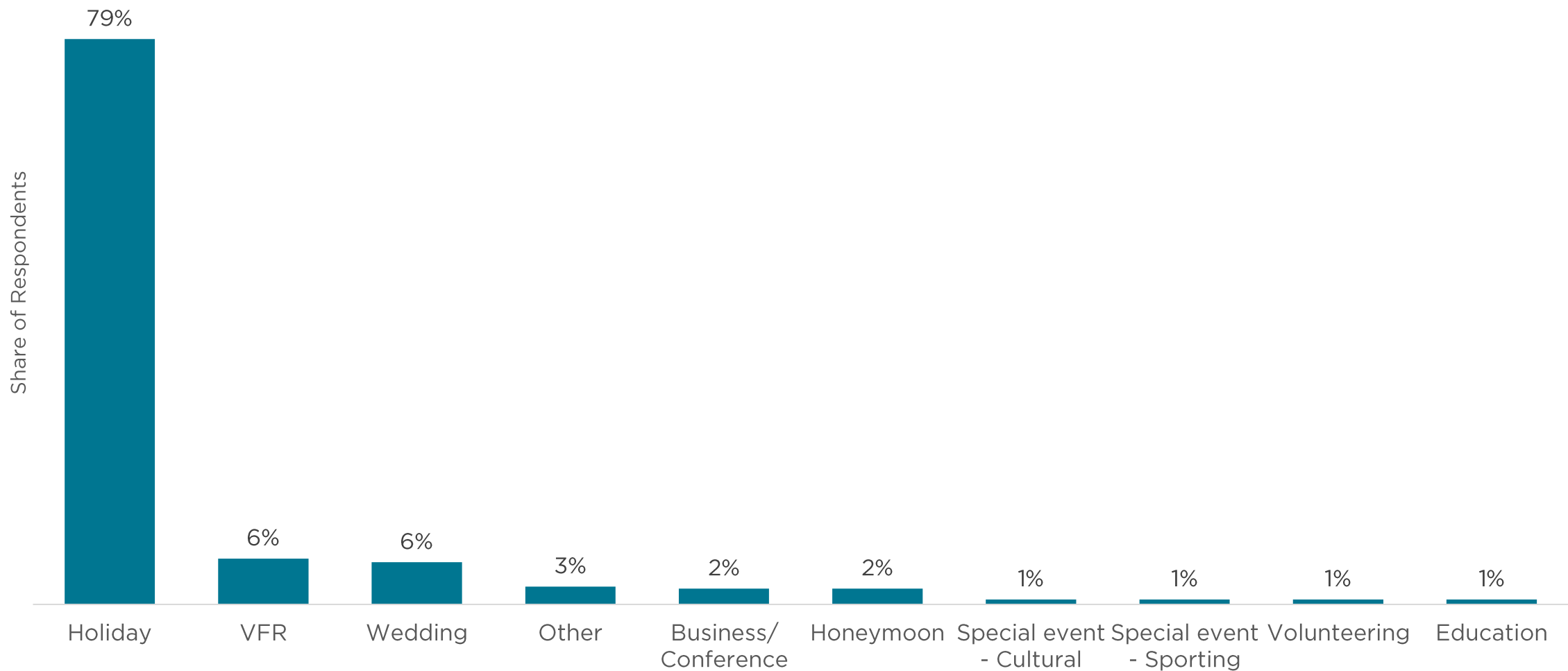
Visitor Spending
& Impact



Visitor
Satisfaction

Purpose of Visit

Q: What was the main purpose of your visit?

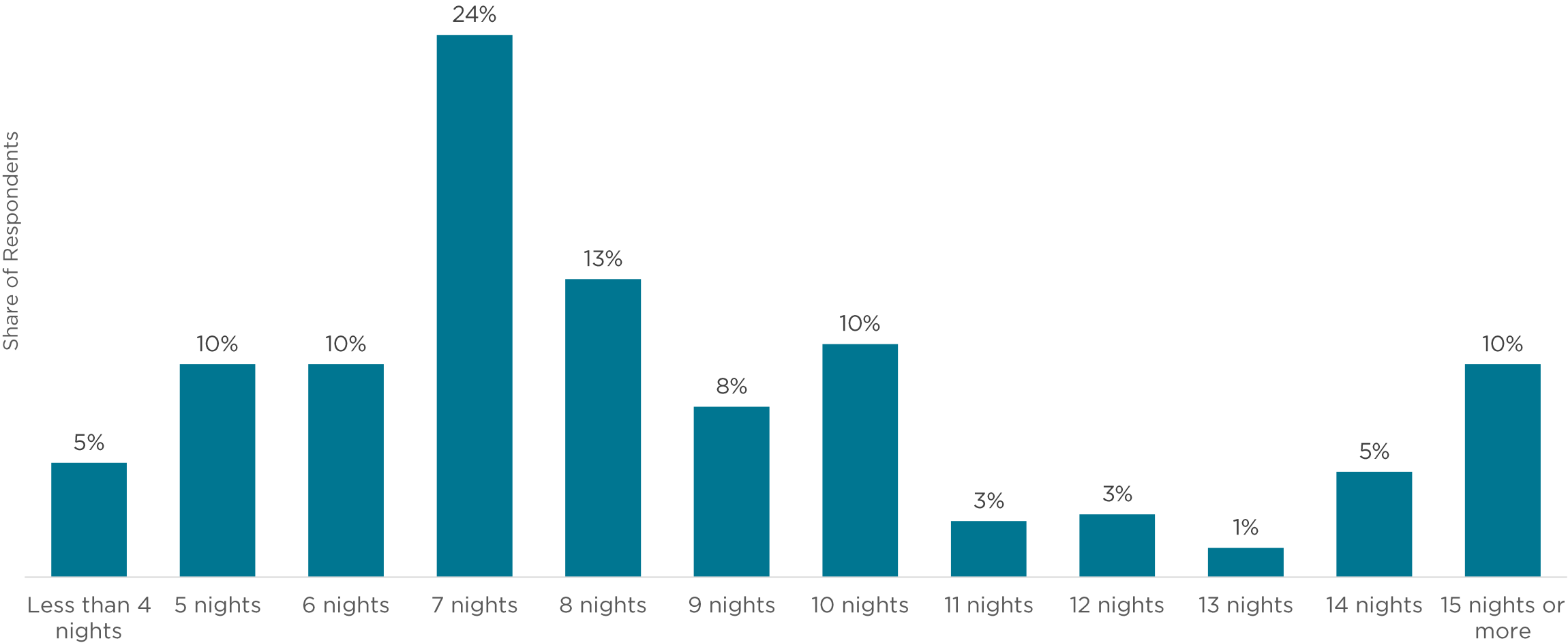


Note: N=2,046. Due to rounding, total does not sum to 100%. VFR stands for "Visiting Friends and Relatives".

Length of Stay (nights)

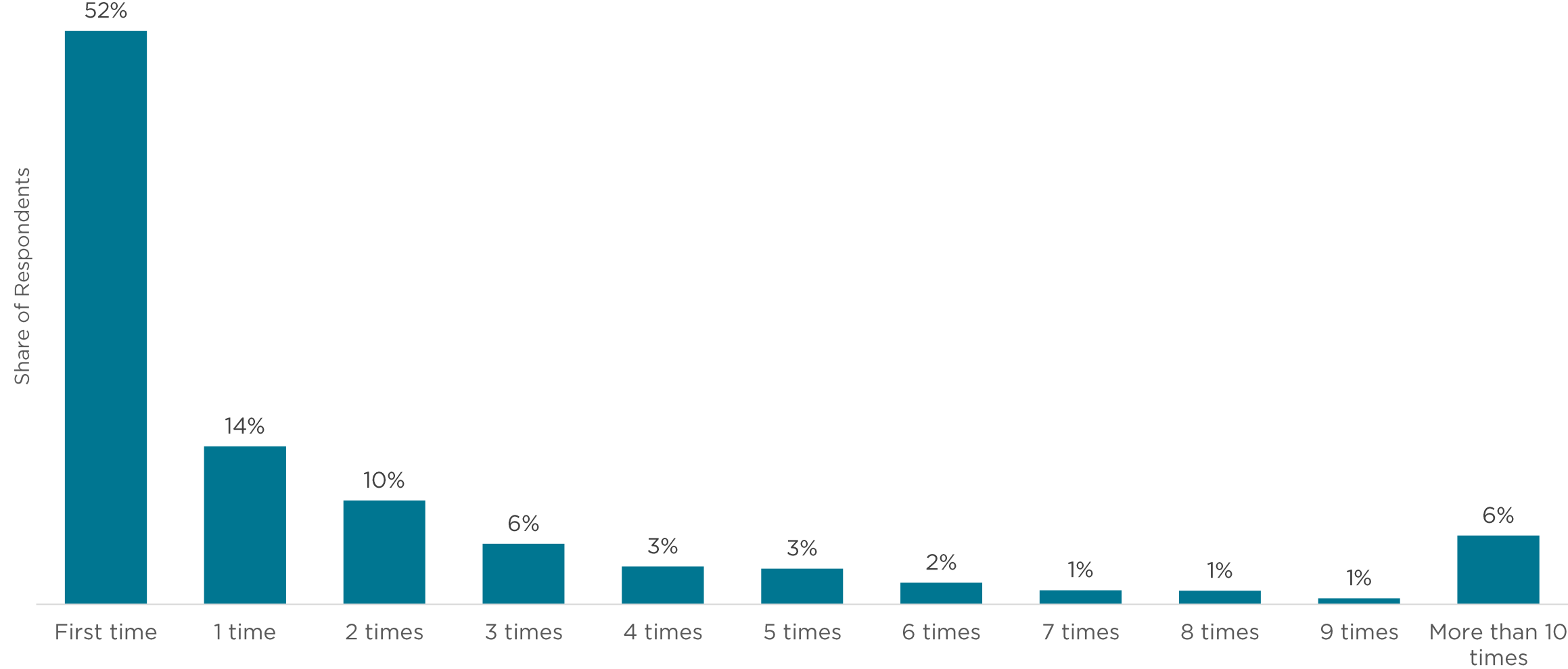
Q: How many nights did you spend in Cook Islands?

Avg. Length of Stay
9.1 nights



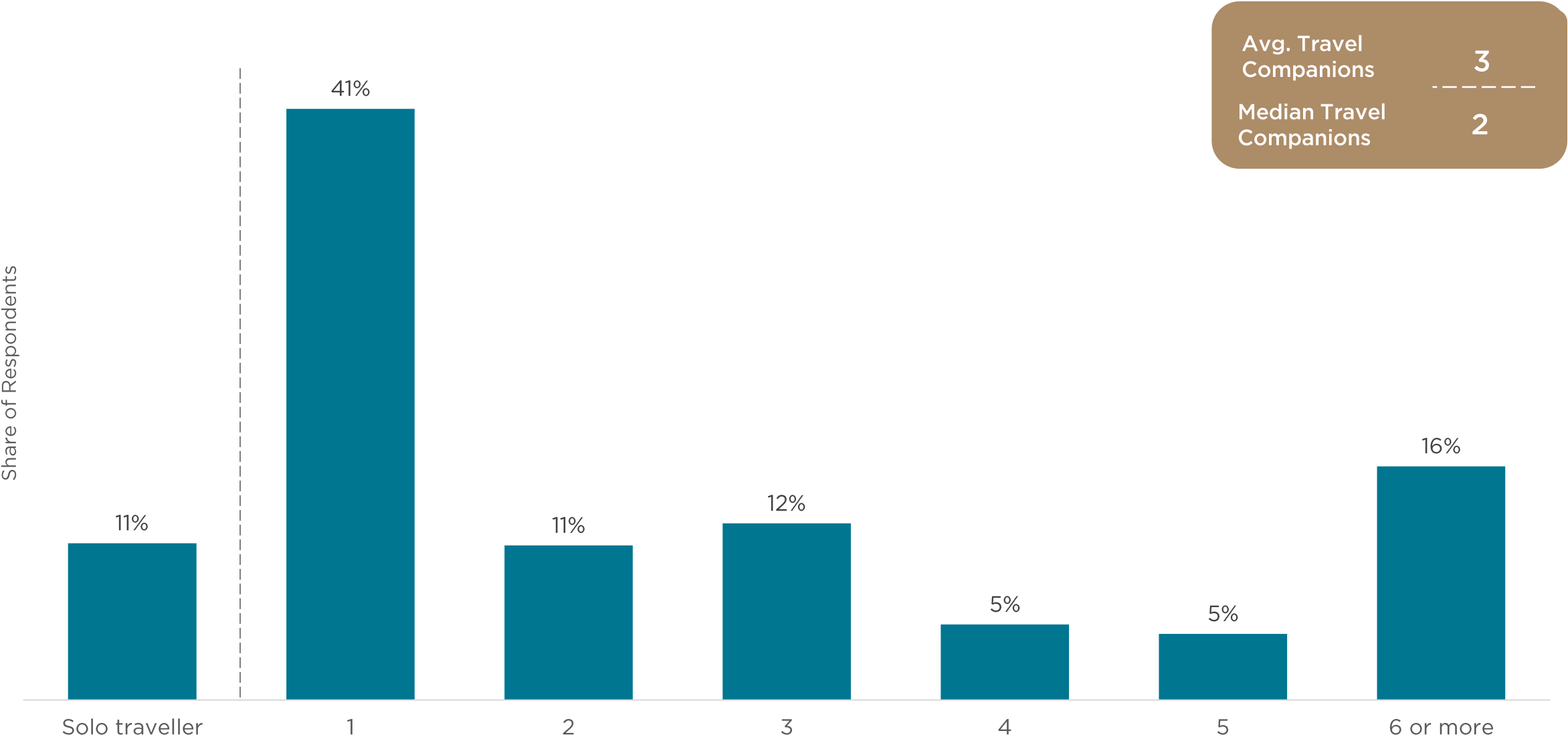
Note: 31 and 31+ days as outliers were removed for length of stay analysis

Number of Visits



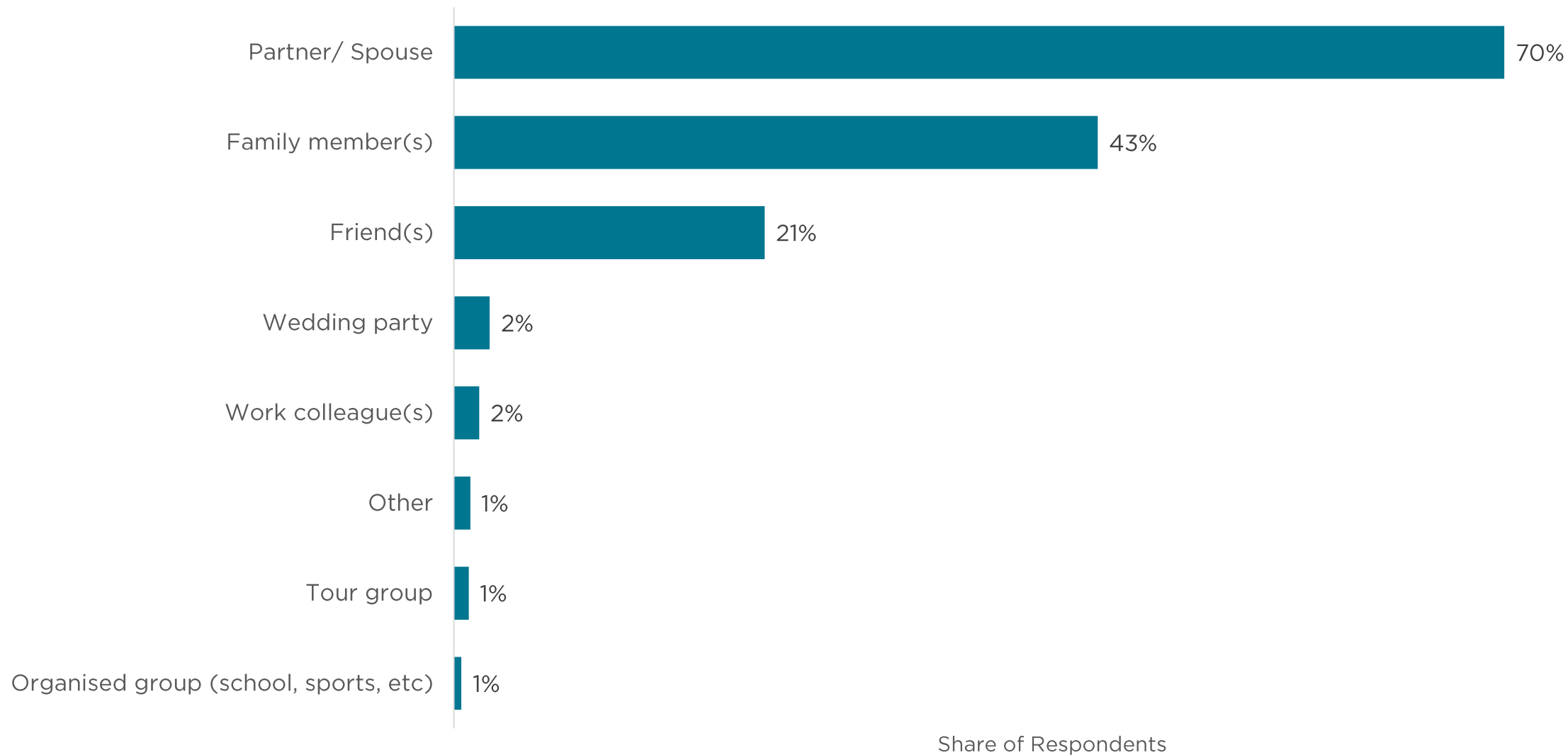
Travel Group Size

Q: How many people accompanied you on this trip?



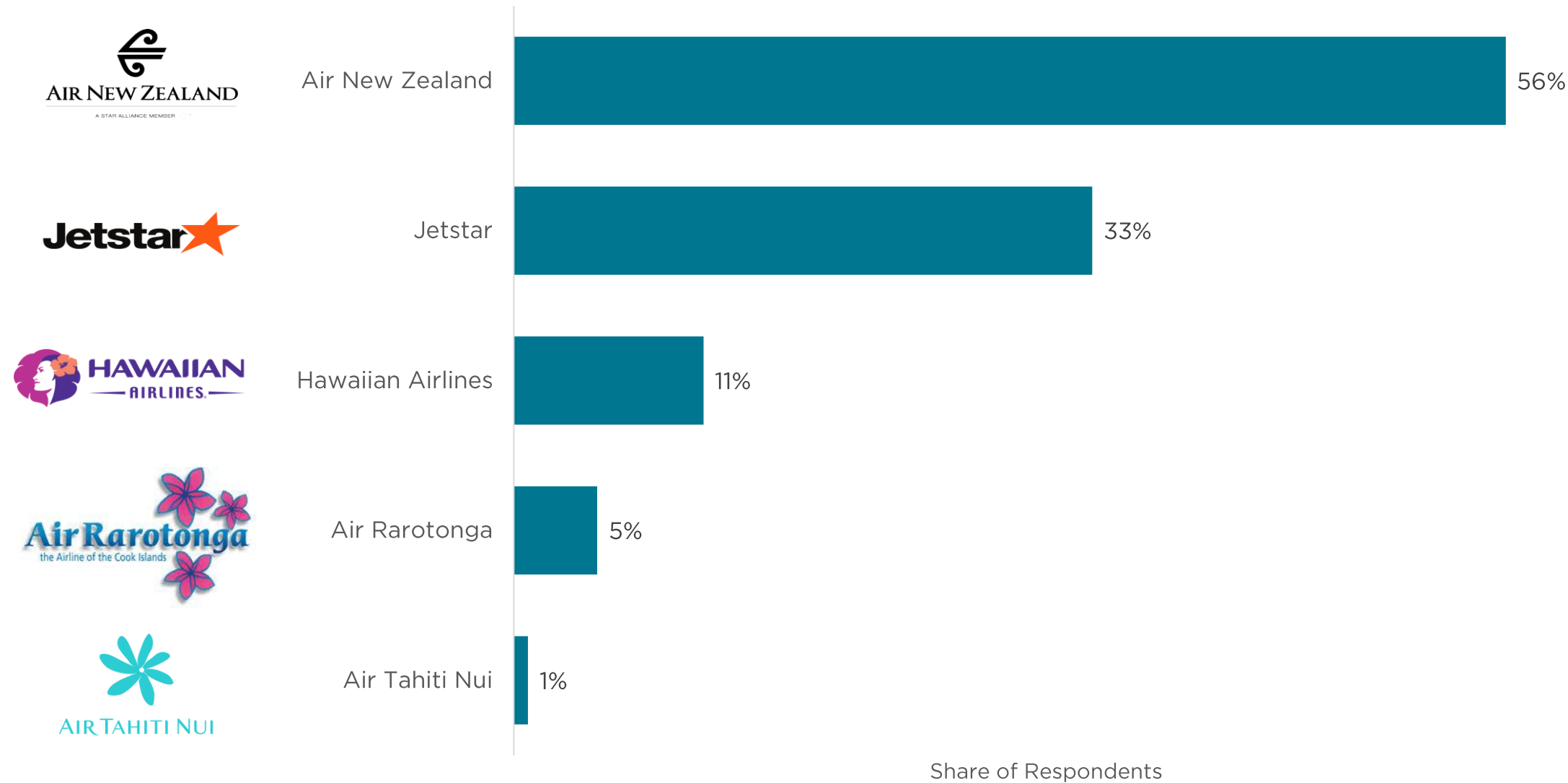
Note: N=2,042. Due to rounding, total does not sum to 100%

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



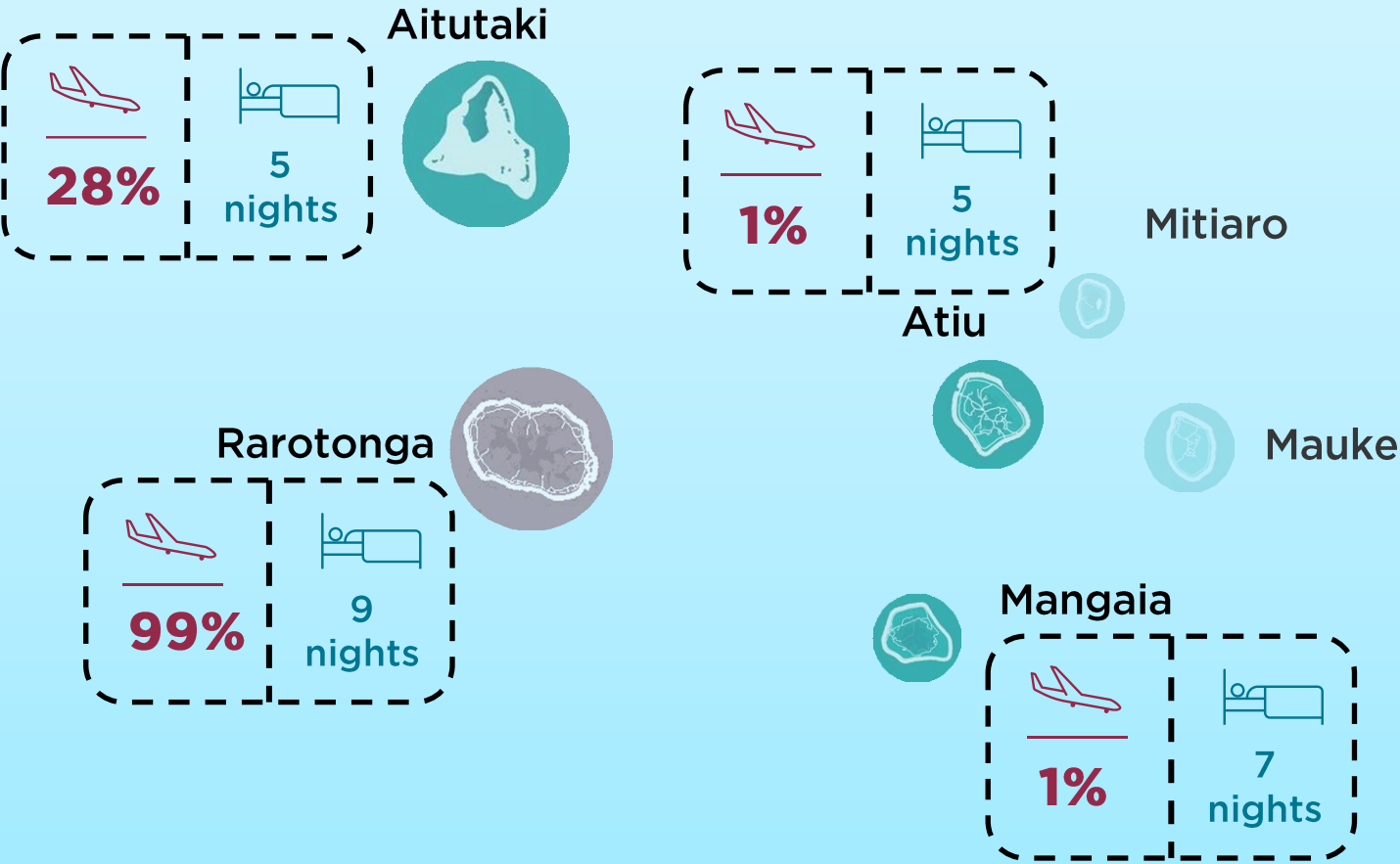
Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%

Islands Visited & Avg. Length of Stay

Avg. Length of Stay
9.1 Nights

Q: Which island(s) did you visit?

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

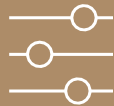


Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%.

Report Structure



Visitor Profile



Visitor
Characteristics
& Preferences



Information &
Decision Making



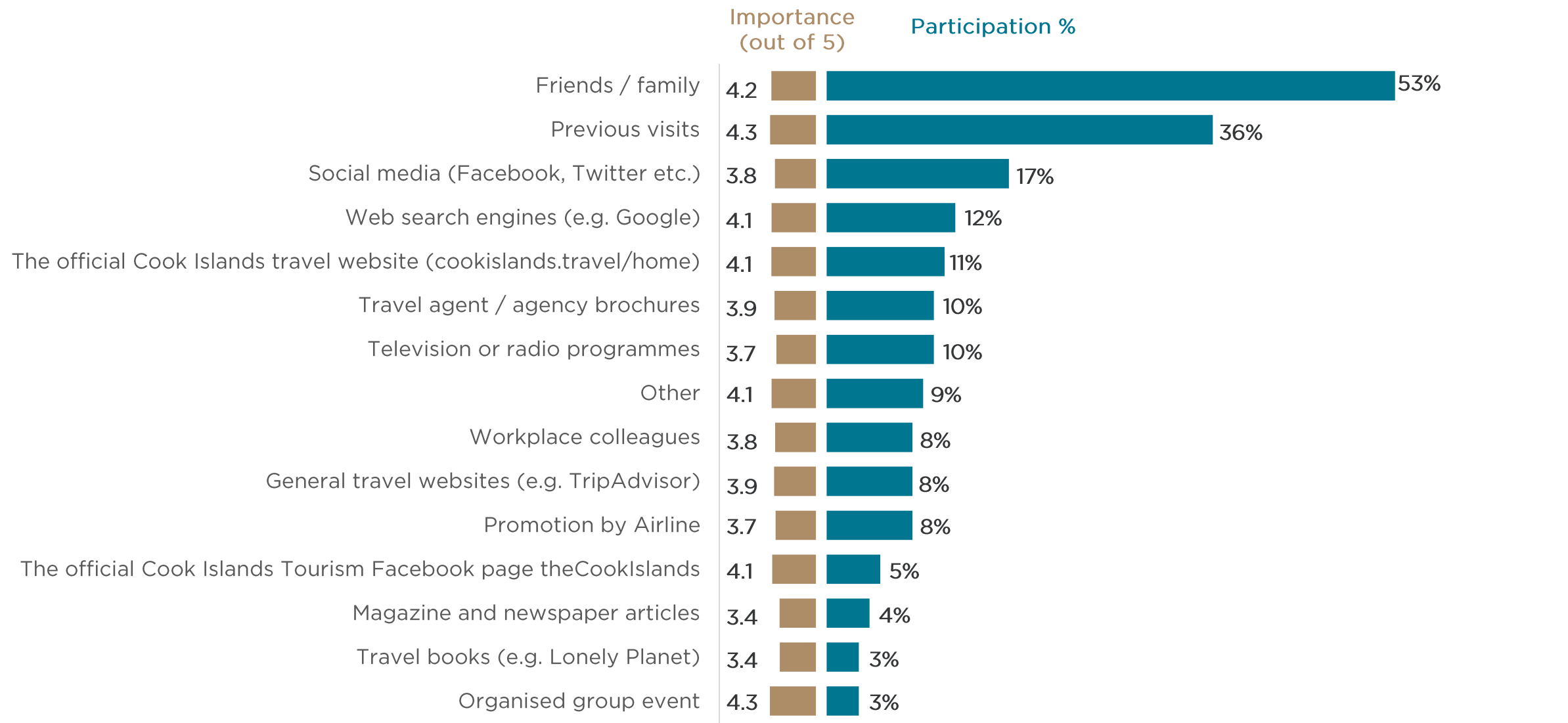
Visitor Spending
& Impact



Visitor
Satisfaction

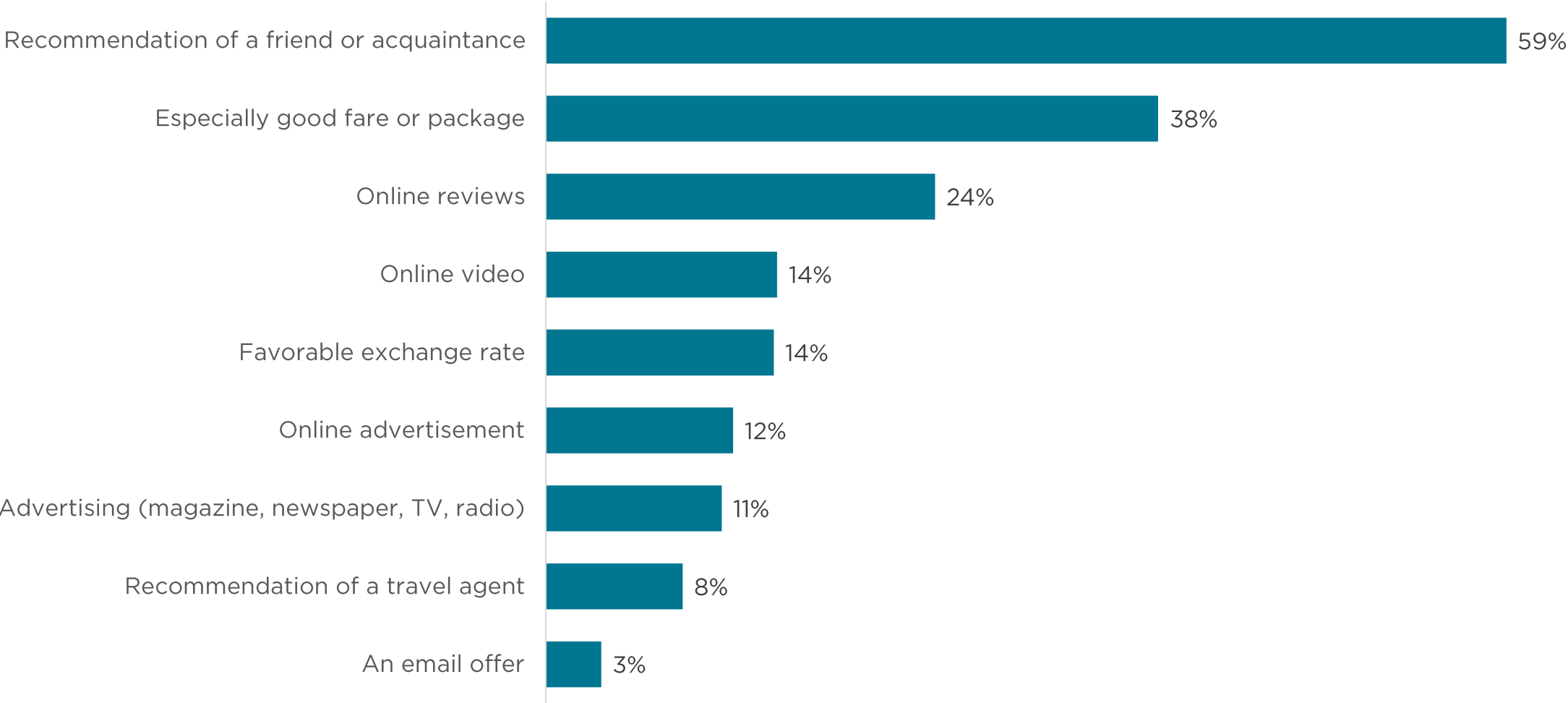
Information Source

Q: How did you find out about Cook Islands as a destination?
Q: How important was the information source?



Note: The satisfaction rate is the average of all ratings given by respondents for that information source

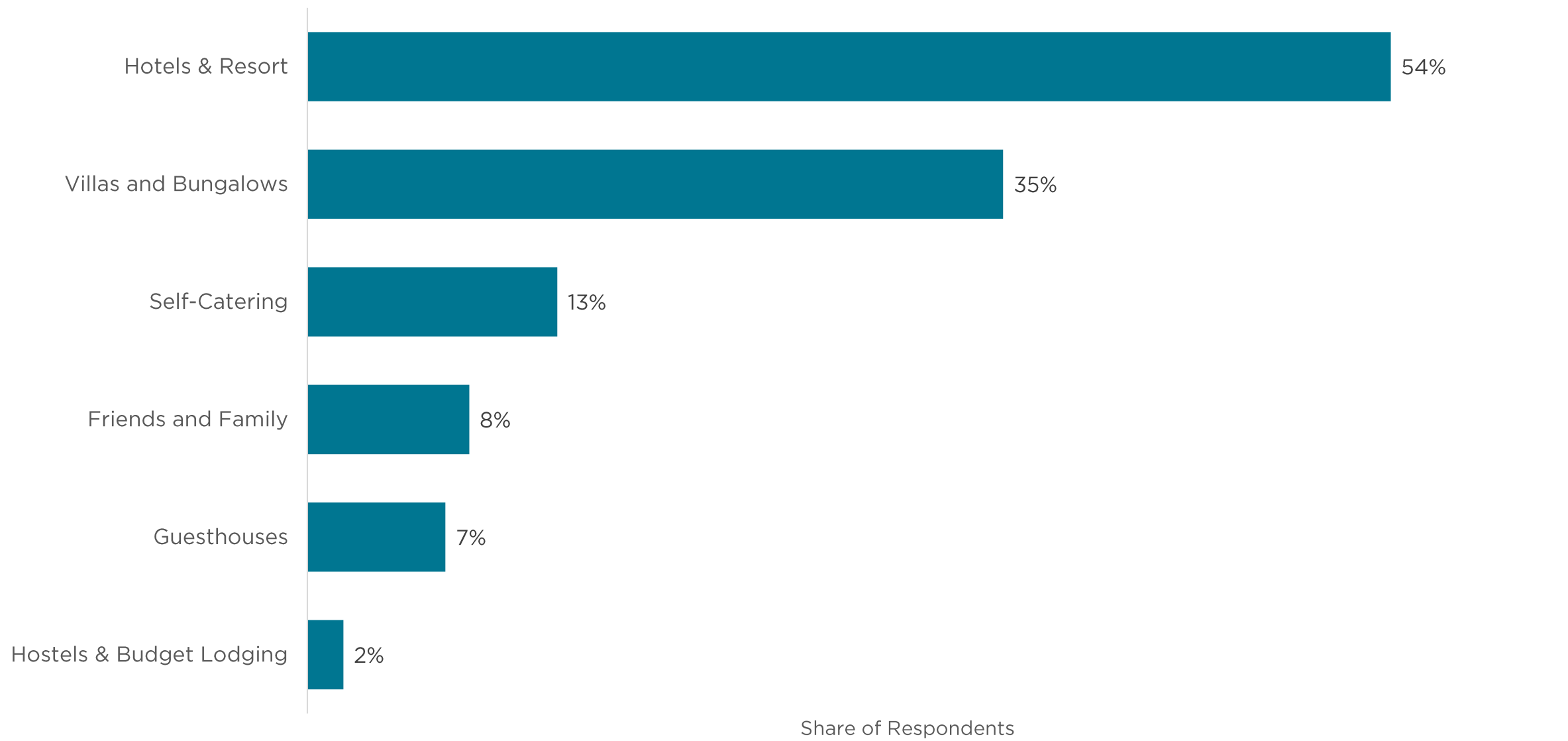
Important Promotion/Advertising Channels that assisted in selecting to visit the Cook Islands



Share of Respondents

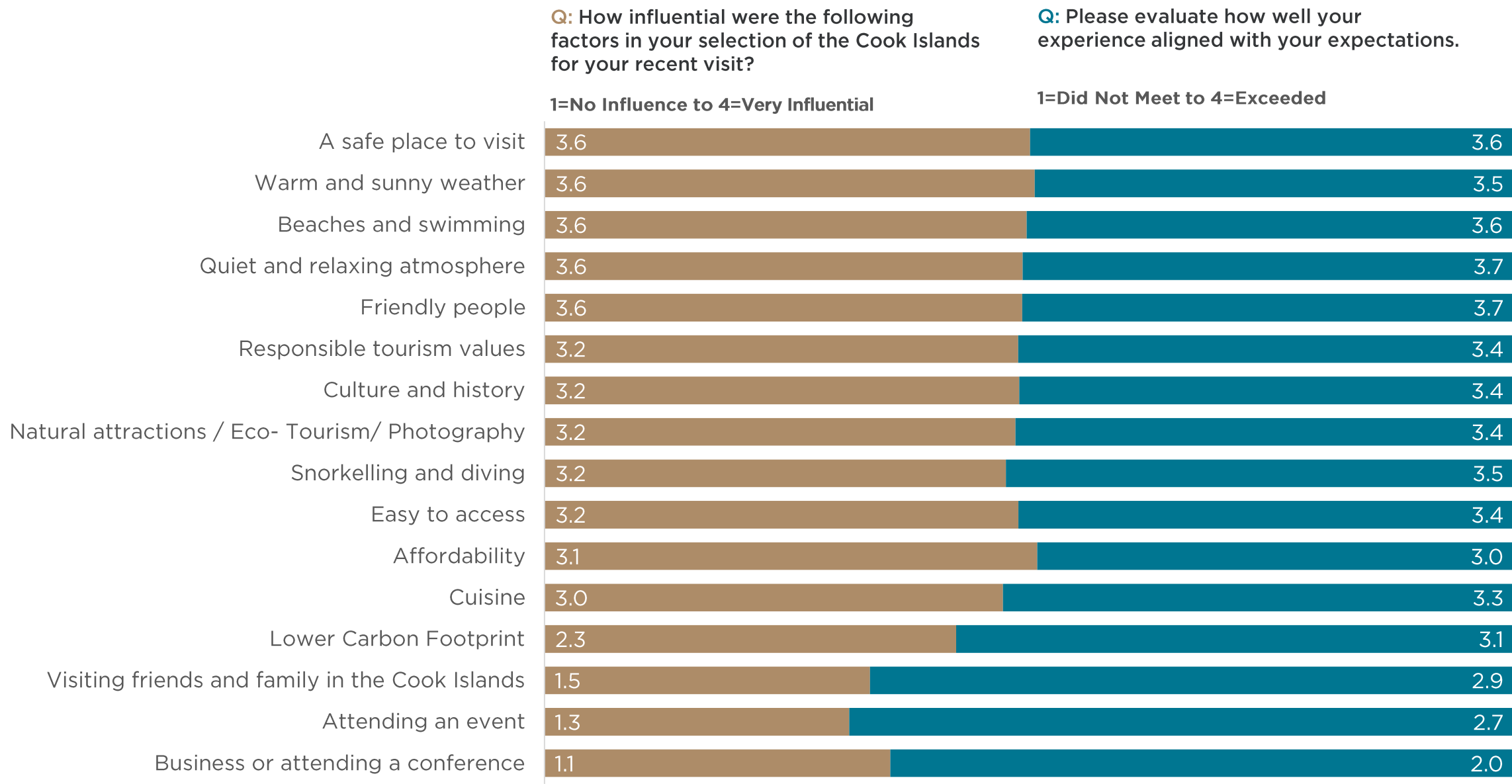
Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%

Accommodation Type



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

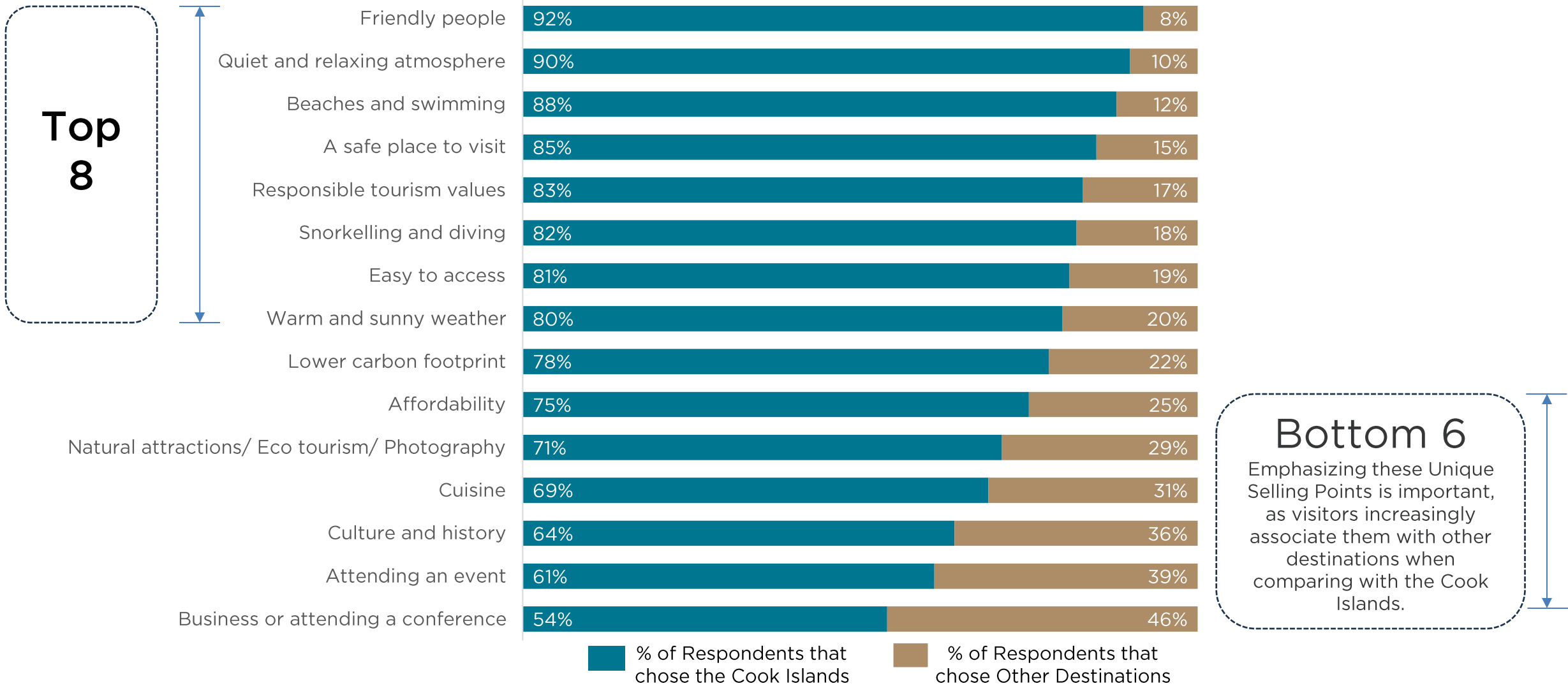
Pre-Travel Perceptions Vs Expectations



Note: The satisfaction rate is the average of all ratings given by respondents for that attribute.

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



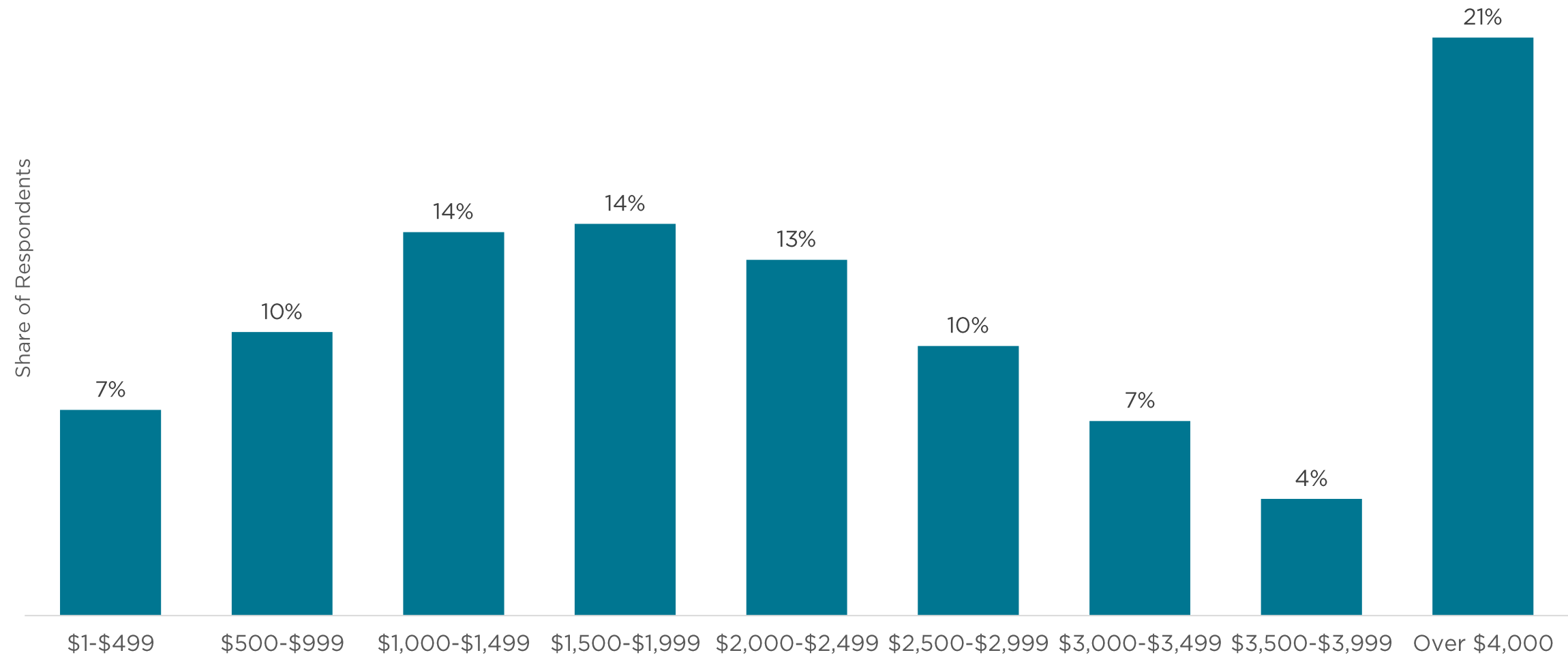
Visitor Spending
& Impact



Visitor
Satisfaction

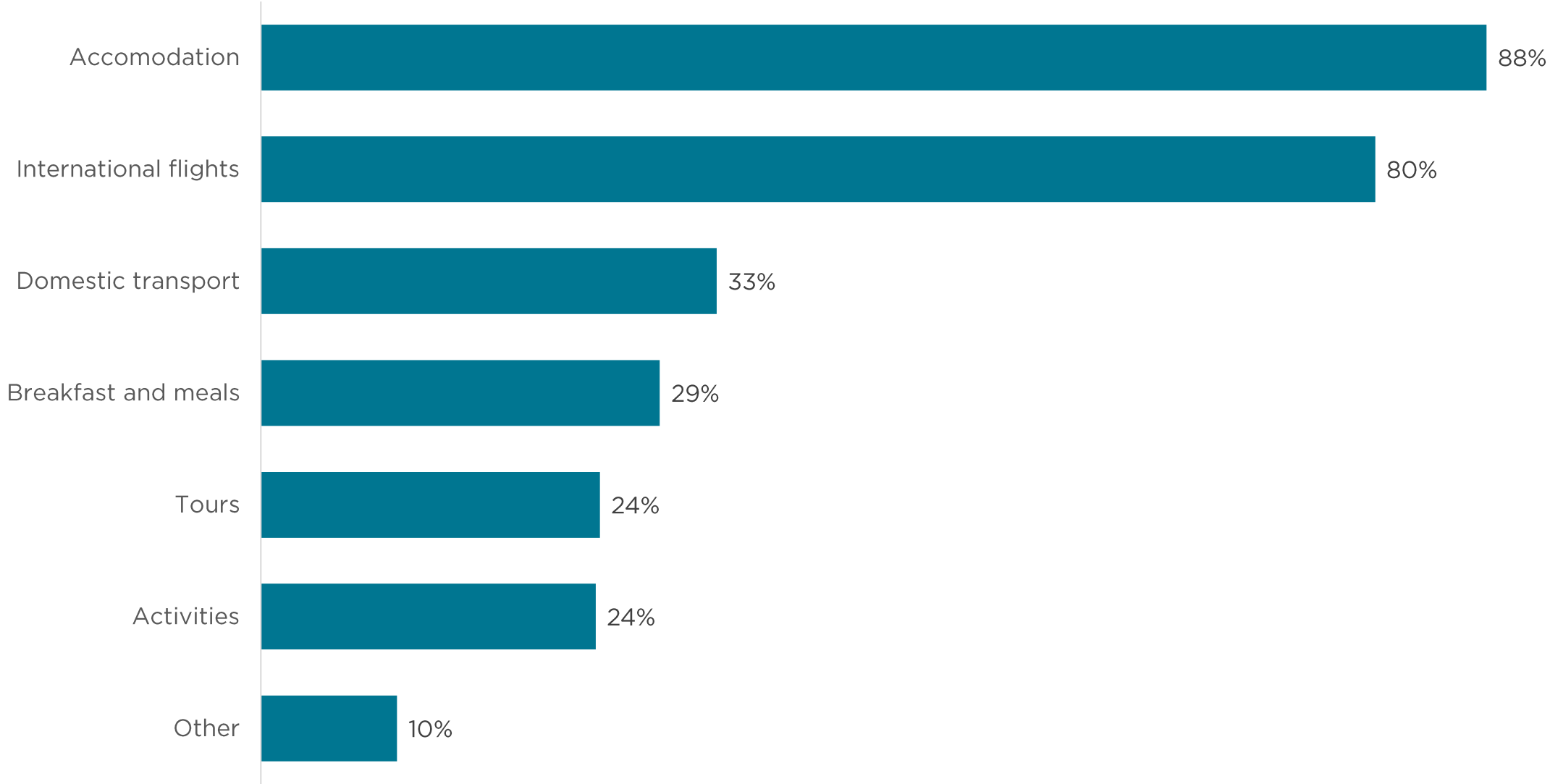
Prepaid Expenditure

Avg. Prepaid per Person
NZ\$2,839



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	28	44	26
Restaurant, Cafes & Bars	27	42	25
Vehicle Rental	9	14	8
Petrol	2	3	2
Domestic Flight	4	7	4
Public Transport	1	1	1
Internet Cost	1	1	1
Water-based activities	6	10	6
Land-based activities	3	5	3
Groceries	8	12	7
Shopping	11	18	11
Other	1	2	1
TOTAL	100%	159	94

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 25	Jan-Mar 25
	NZD	USD
Average Spend Prior to arrival		
Per Person Per Trip	2,839	1,670
Flowing into local economy rate - estimated 40%		
Per Person Per Trip	1,136	668
Per Person per Day	125	74

Average Local Spend		
Length of Stay (nights)	mean 9.1 nights	
Per Person Per Trip	1,447	851
Per Person per Day	159	94

Total Economic Impact-Per Trip	2,583	1,519
Total Economic Impact-Per Day	283	167

January - March 2024

NZD94 MILLION

FROM VISITORS 29,486



PREPAID
EXPENDITURE



IN-COUNTRY
SPEND

\$2,454

Prepaid per visitor per trip

\$252

In-country spend per day

40%

Flowing into
local economy
rate



x **8.8** nights
Average length of
stay

\$982

Prepaid per visitor per trip

\$2,217

In-country spend per trip



ECONOMIC
IMPACT

\$3,199 per visitor per trip

\$364 per visitor per day

January - March 2025

NZD86 MILLION

FROM VISITORS 33,320 ▲



PREPAID
EXPENDITURE



IN-COUNTRY
SPEND

\$2,839 ▲

Prepaid per visitor per trip

\$159 ▼

In-country spend per day

40%

Flowing into
local economy
rate



x **9.1** nights
Average length of
stay ▲

\$1,136 ▲

Prepaid per visitor per trip

\$1,447 ▼

In-country spend per trip



ECONOMIC
IMPACT

\$2,583 per visitor per trip ▼

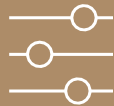
\$283 per visitor per day ▼

Note: The amounts are in NZ dollars. The visitor numbers are based on official statistics provided by the CIT office.

Report Structure



Visitor Profile



Visitor
Characteristics
& Preferences



Information &
Decision Making



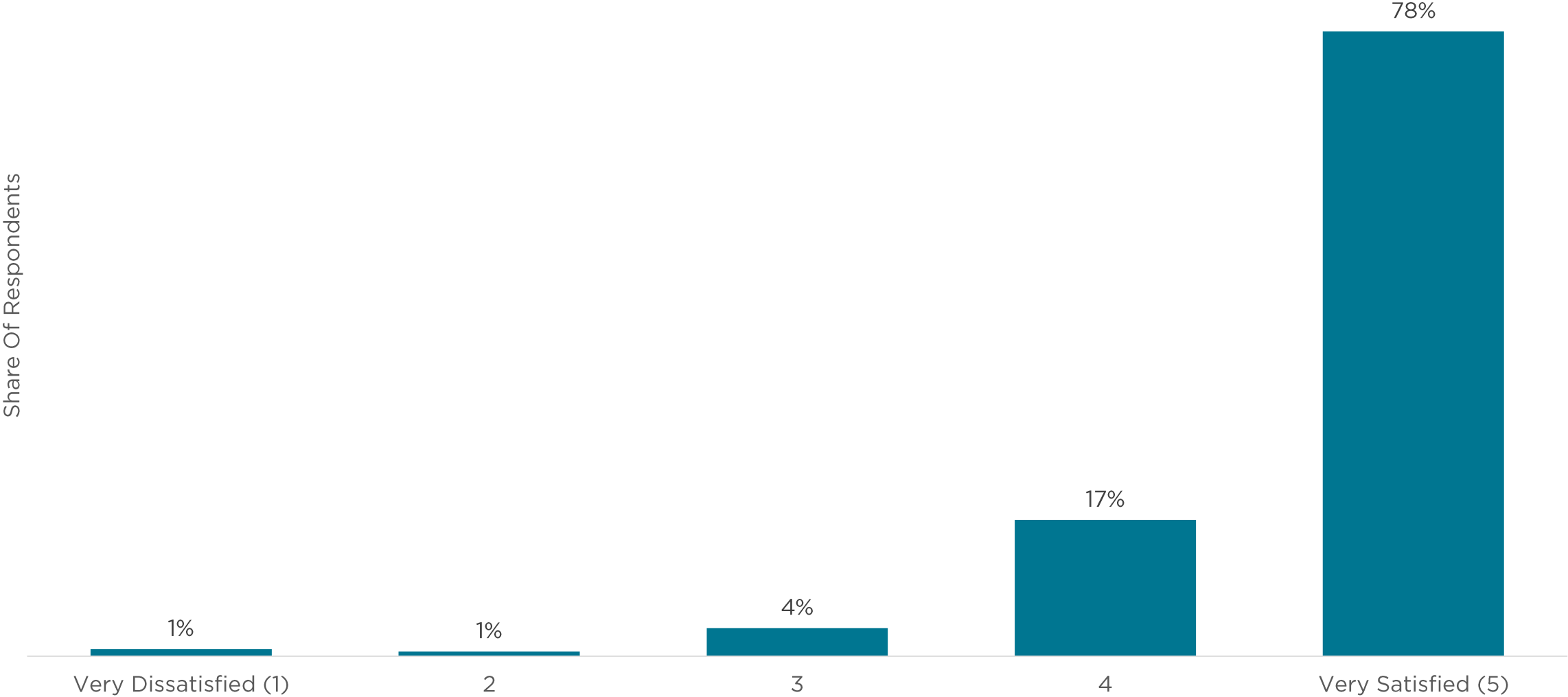
Visitor Spending
& Impact



Visitor
Satisfaction

Visitor Overall Satisfaction

Avg. Overall Satisfaction
4.7

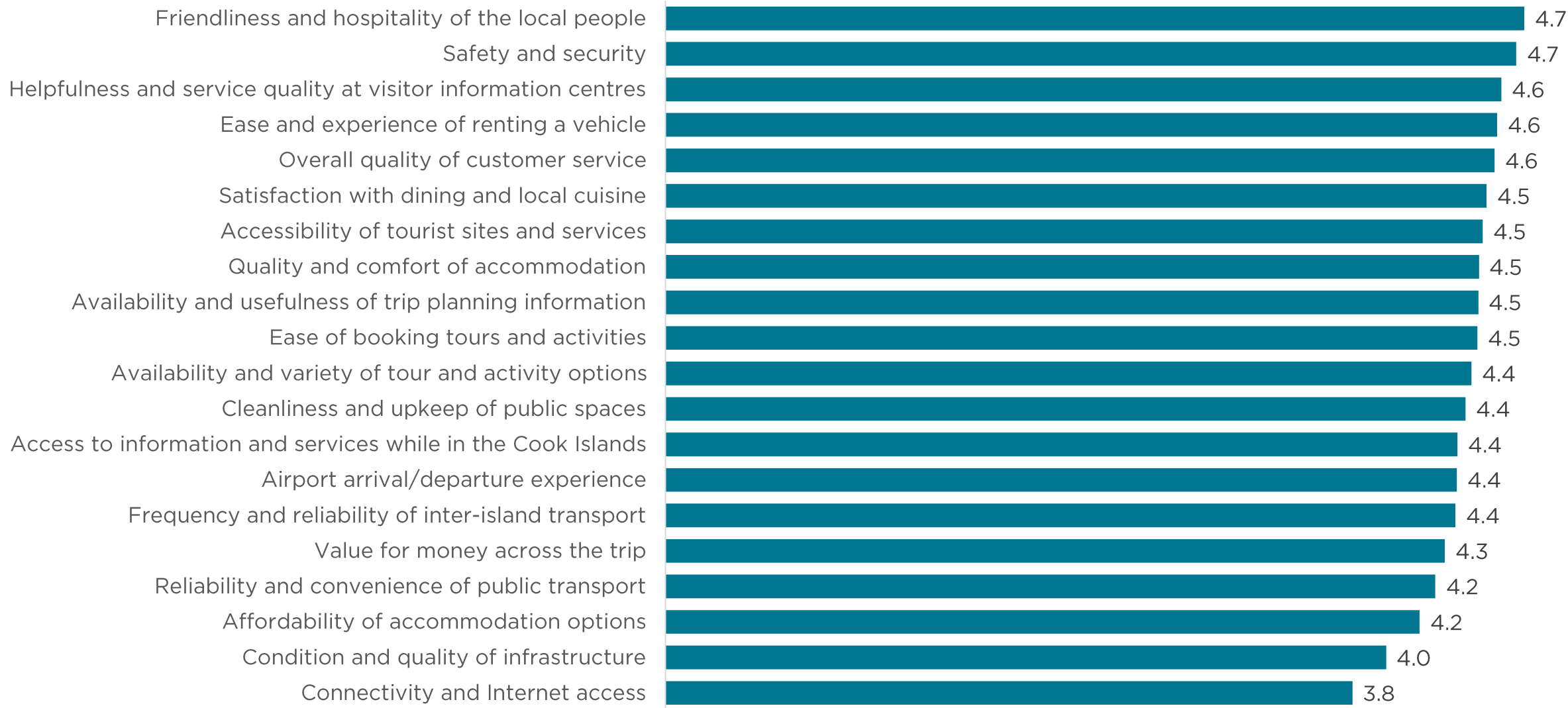


Note: Due to rounding, some totals do not sum to 100%

Satisfaction with Travel Experience

1=Very Dissatisfied to 5=Very Satisfied

Q: How satisfied were you with the following?

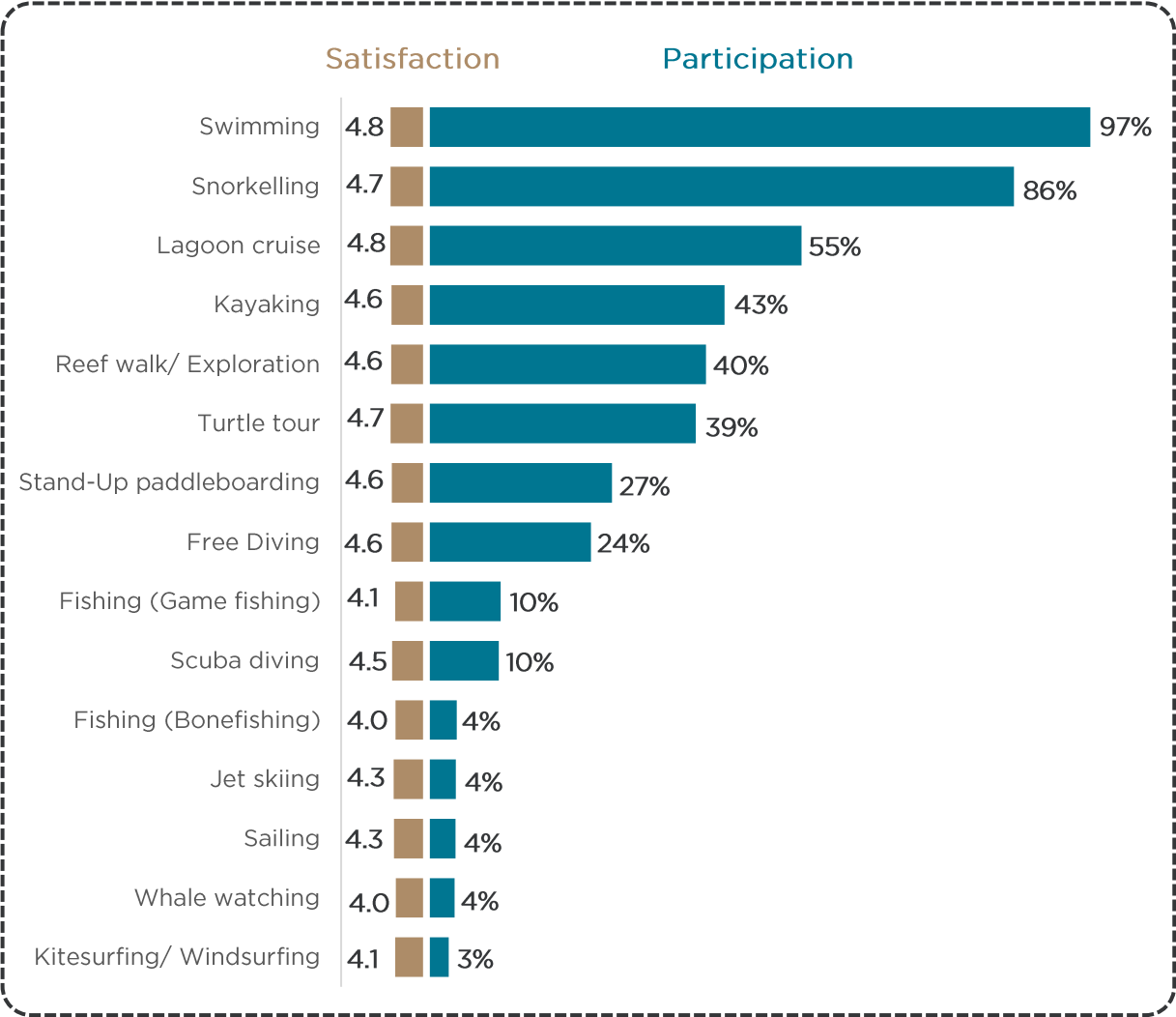


Note: The satisfaction rate is the average of all ratings given by respondents for that attribute.

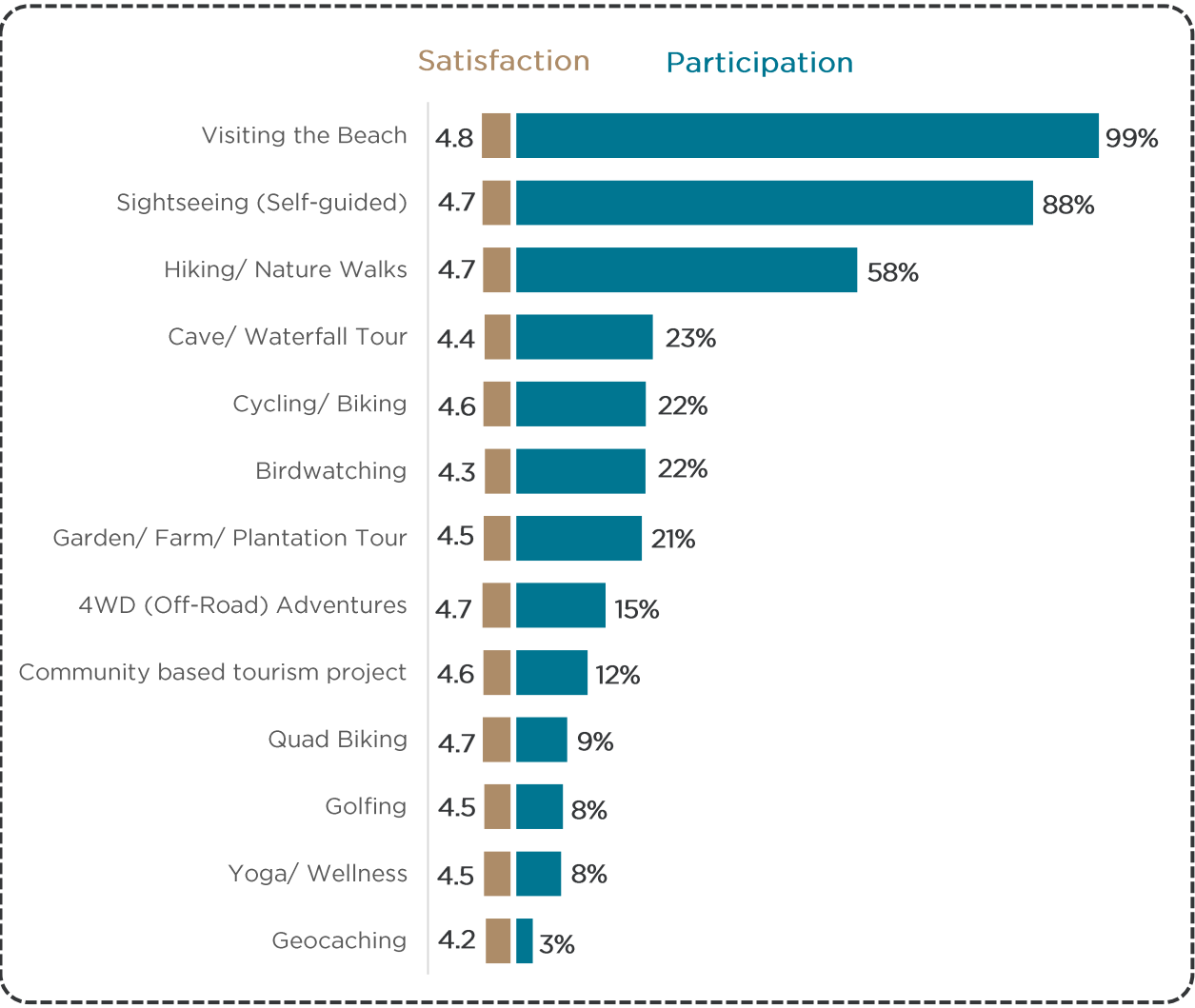
Satisfaction with Activities

Q: How satisfied were you with the following?

Water-based activities



Land-based activities



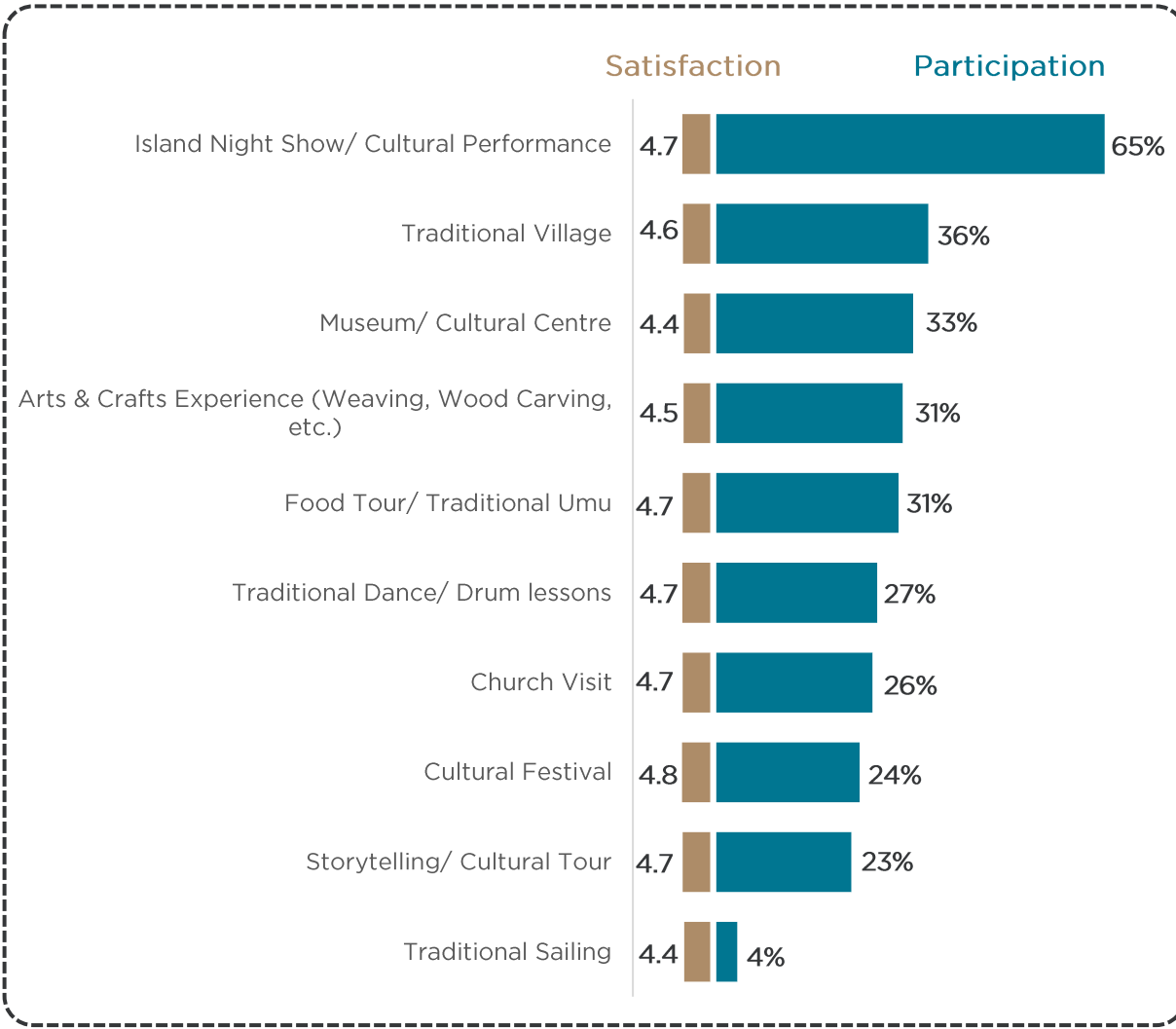
Scale: 1=Very Dissatisfied to 5=Very Satisfied

Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%. Satisfaction is the average of all ratings given by respondents for that activity.

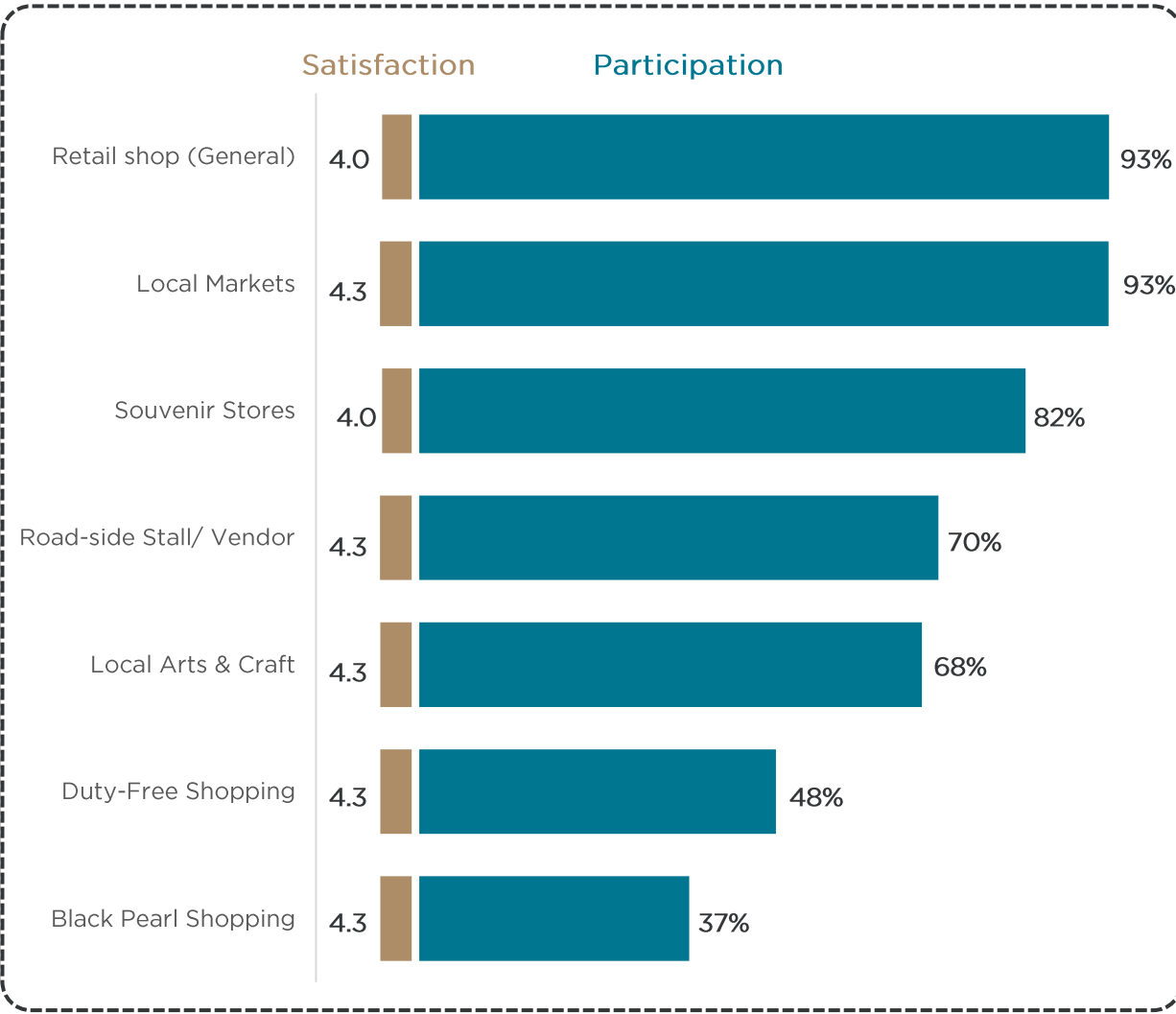
Satisfaction with Activities

Q: How satisfied were you with the following?

Arts and Cultural Activities



Shopping activities



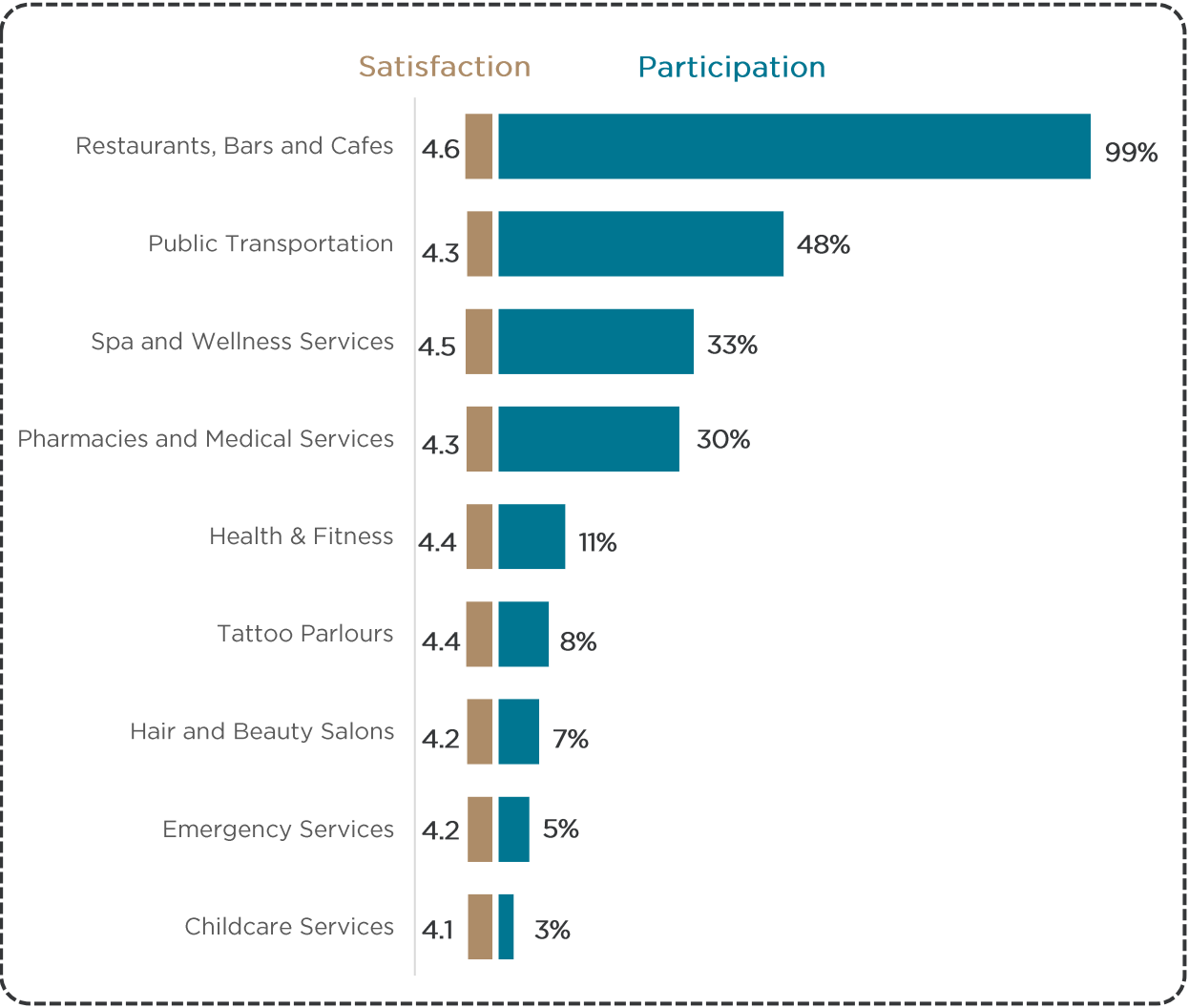
Scale: 1=Very Dissatisfied to 5=Very Satisfied

Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%. Satisfaction is the average of all ratings given by respondents for that activity.

Satisfaction with Activities

Q: How satisfied were you with the following?

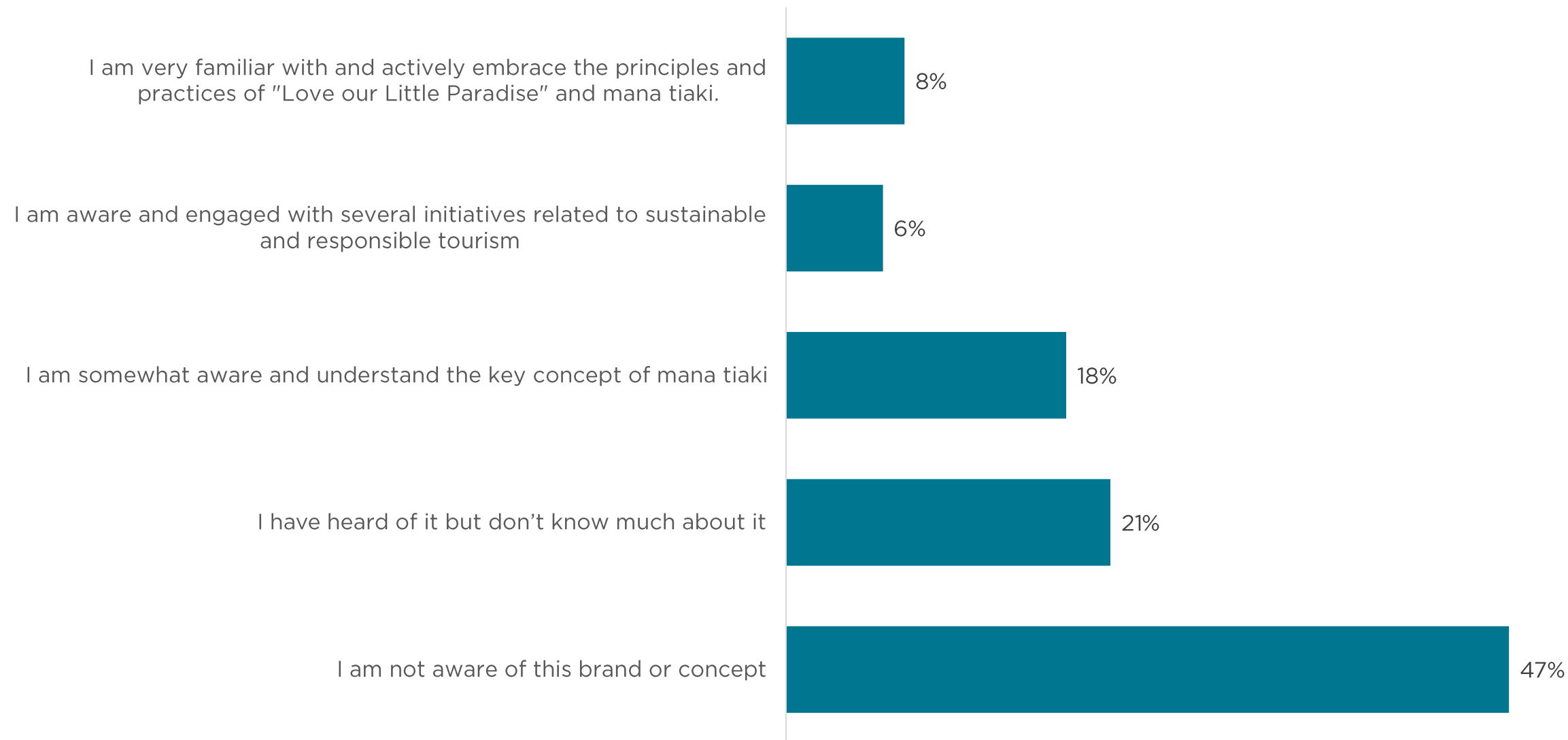
Services



Scale: 1=Very Dissatisfied to 5=Very Satisfied

Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%. Satisfaction is the average of all ratings given by respondents for that activity.

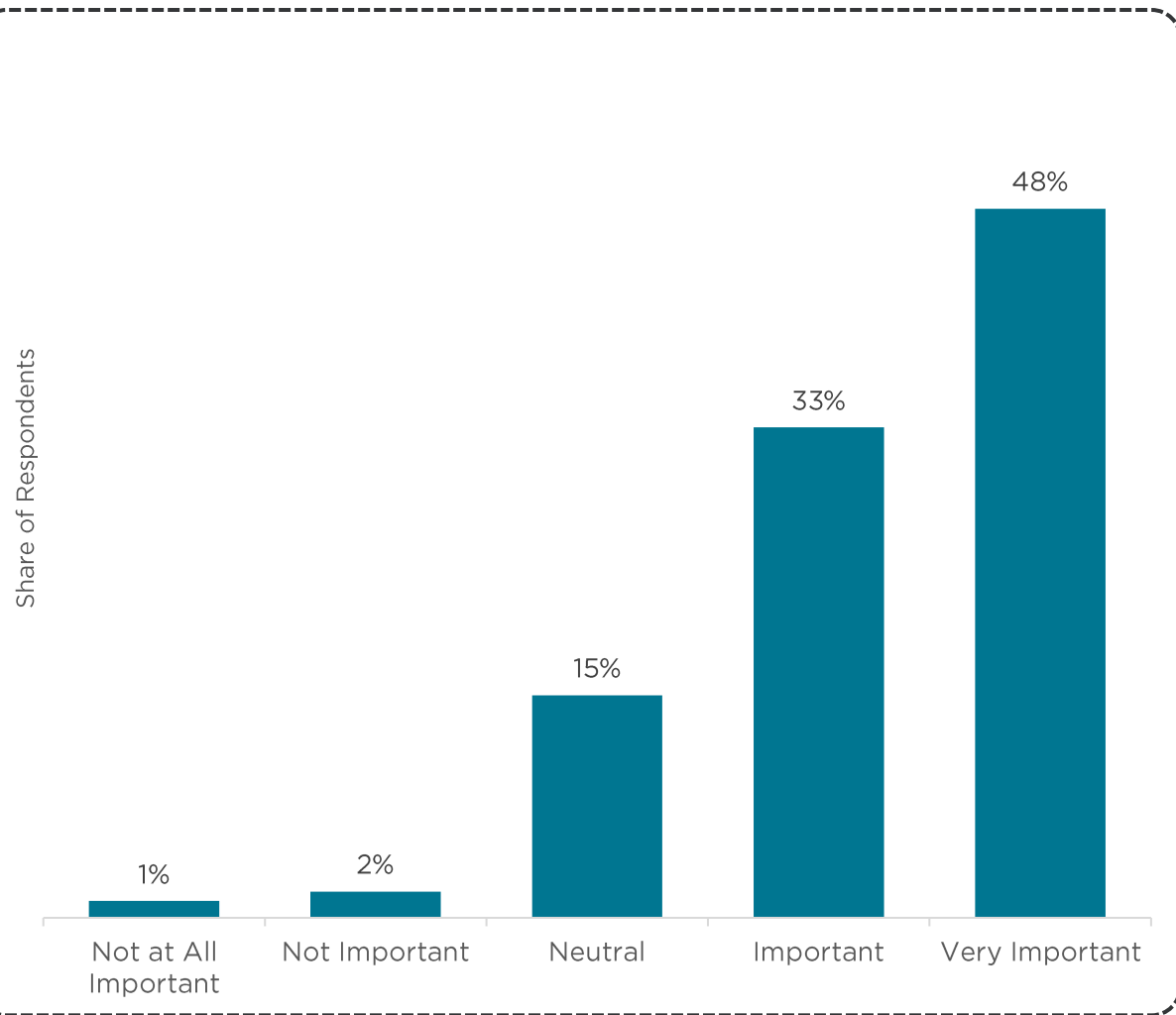
Awareness of "Love Our Little Paradise" and Mana Tiaki



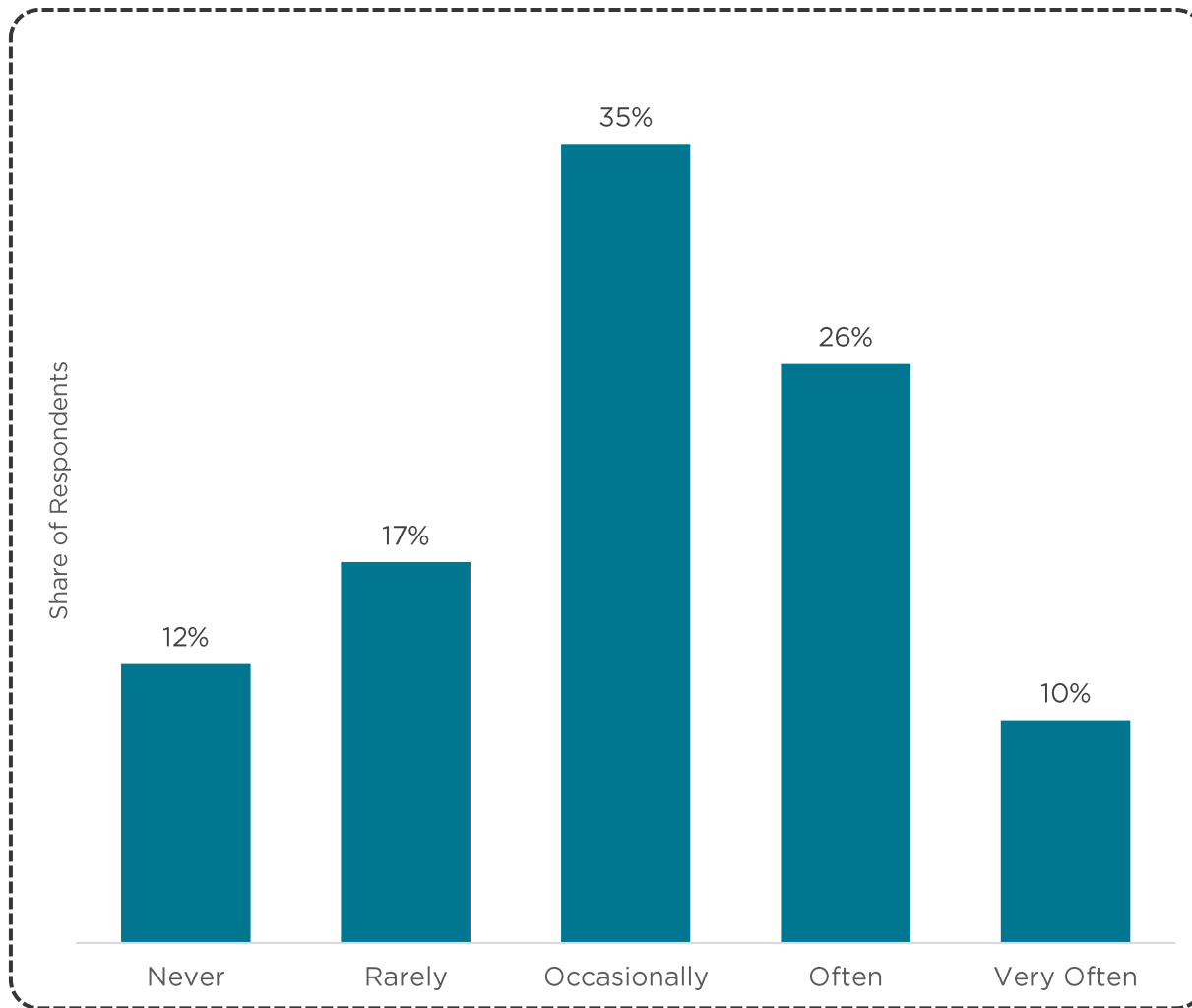
Note: New variable added for the July 2024-June 2025 survey period to address the question on the "Awareness of the Cook Islands Tourism Corporation branding".

Perceptions and Engagement in Sustainable Tourism

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

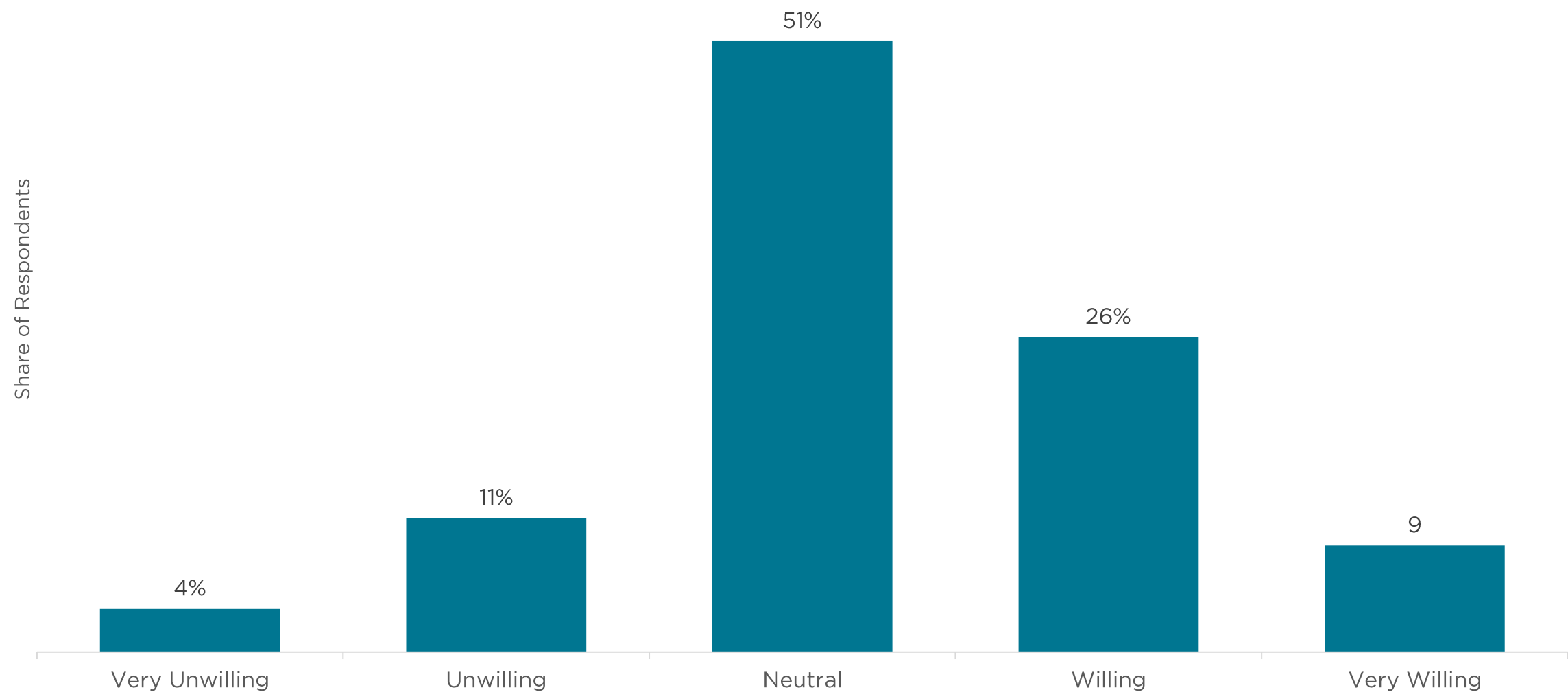


Q: During your visit, how often did you observe or participate in sustainable or responsible tourism practices (e.g., eco-friendly accommodations, conservation efforts)?



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

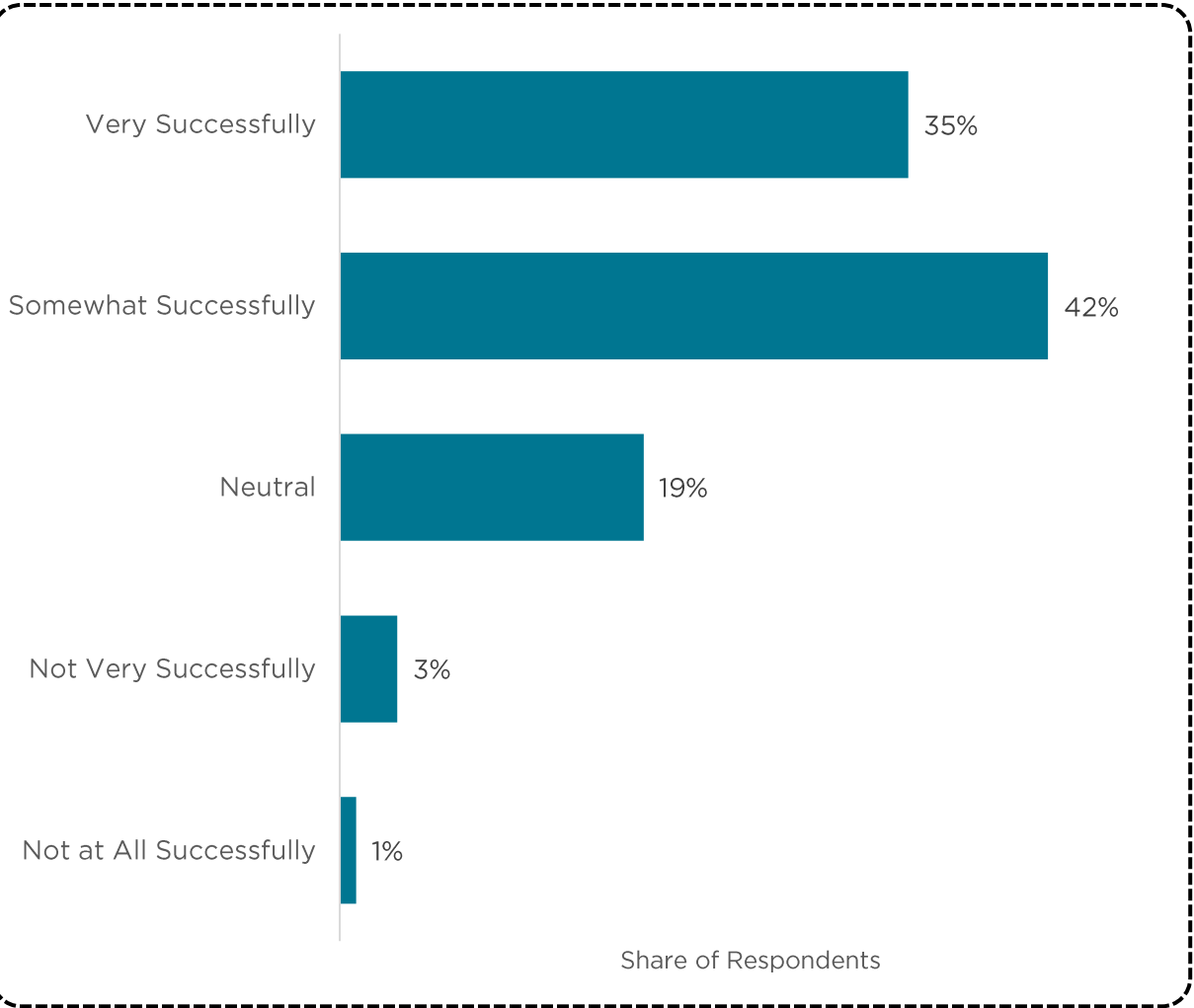
Willingness to Contribute to Tourism Give-Back Initiatives



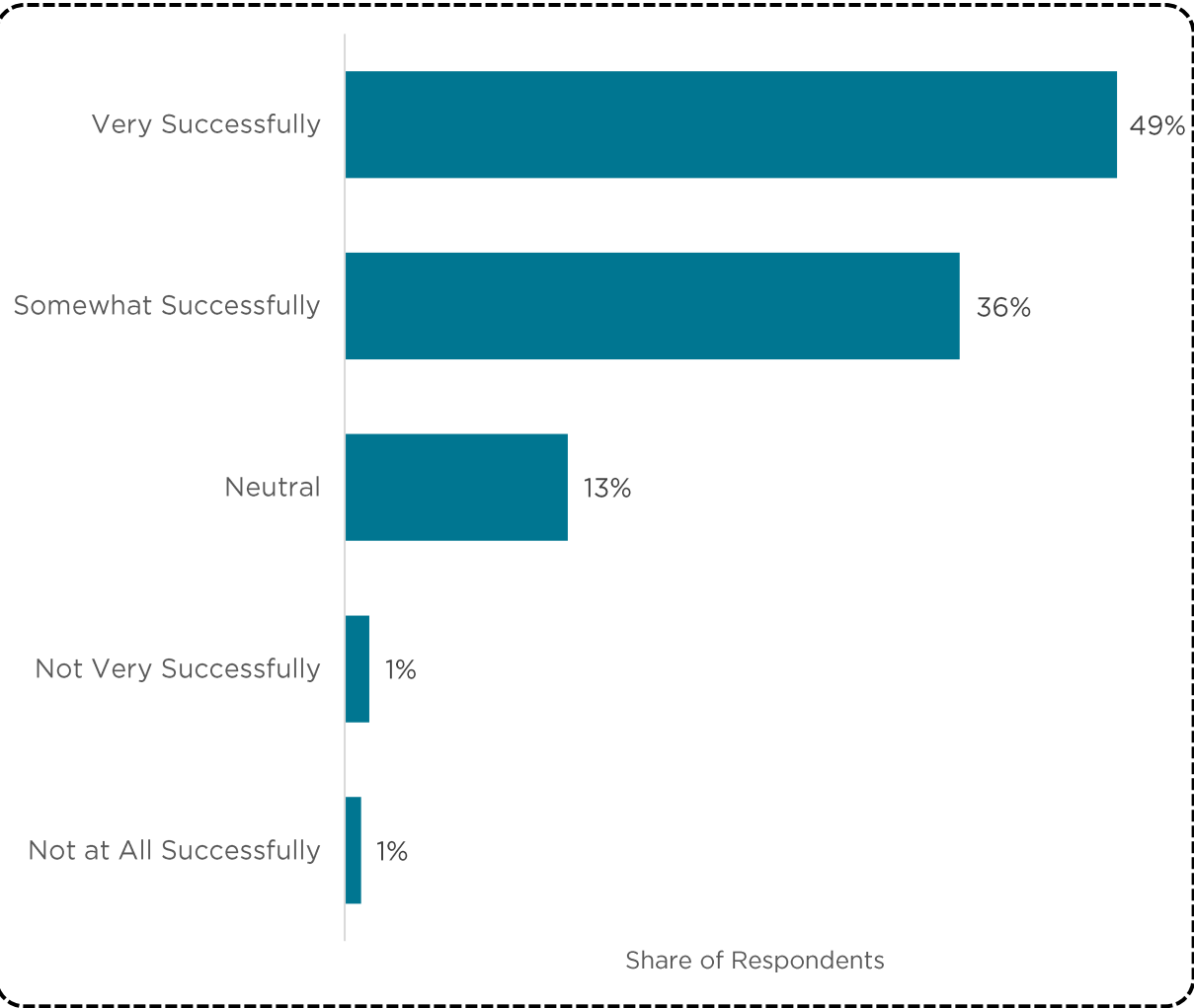
Note: The neutral bar rating of 51% for “Willingness to Contribute to Tourism Give Back Initiative” indicates a significance portion of respondents are uncertain, presenting an opportunity to engage and address their concerns to shift opinions more favorably.

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)?

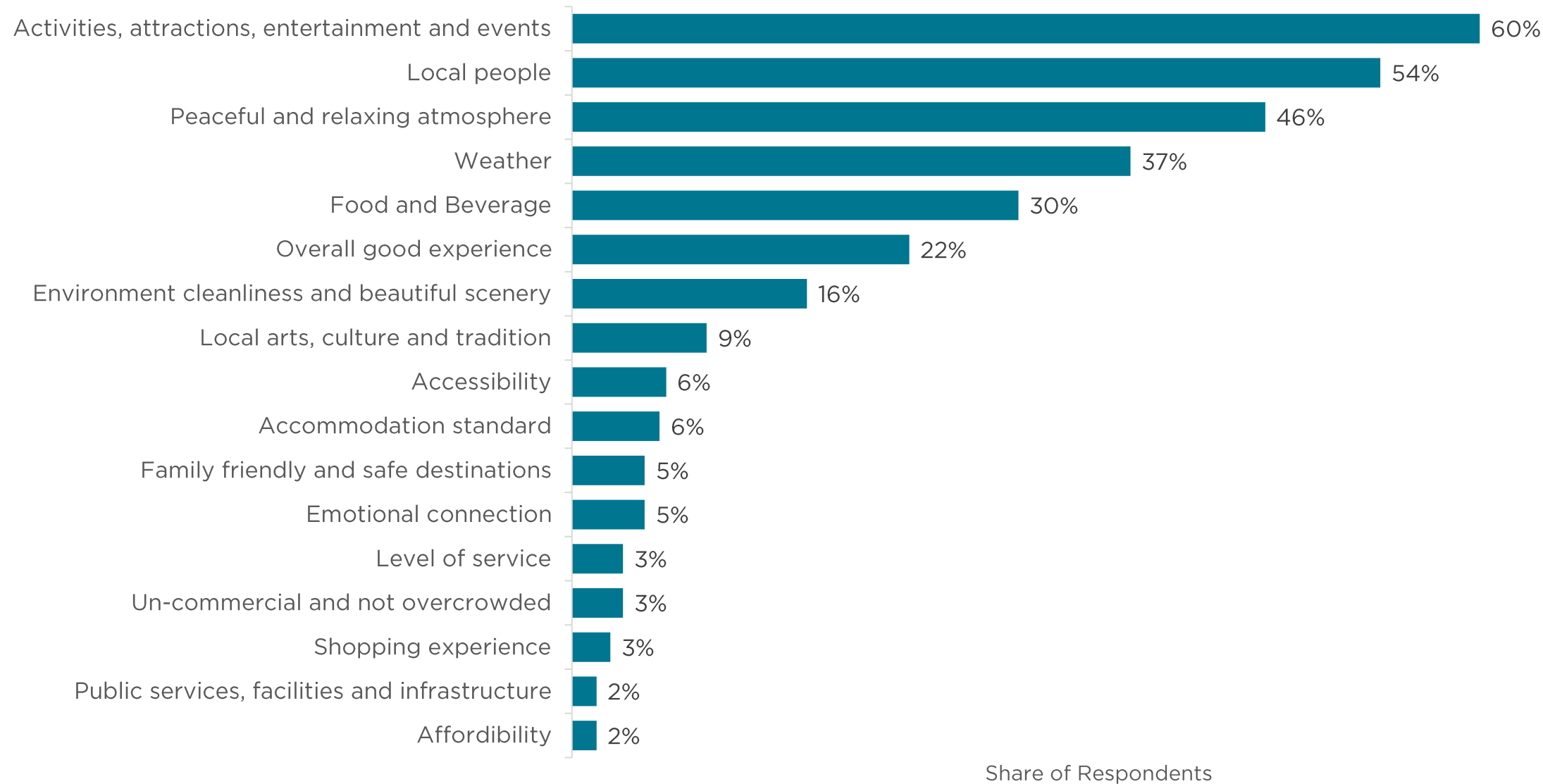


Q: How well do you think the Cook Islands is protecting its cultural identity and supporting local communities (e.g., traditional performances, Cook Islands Māori language, local arts and crafts)?



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



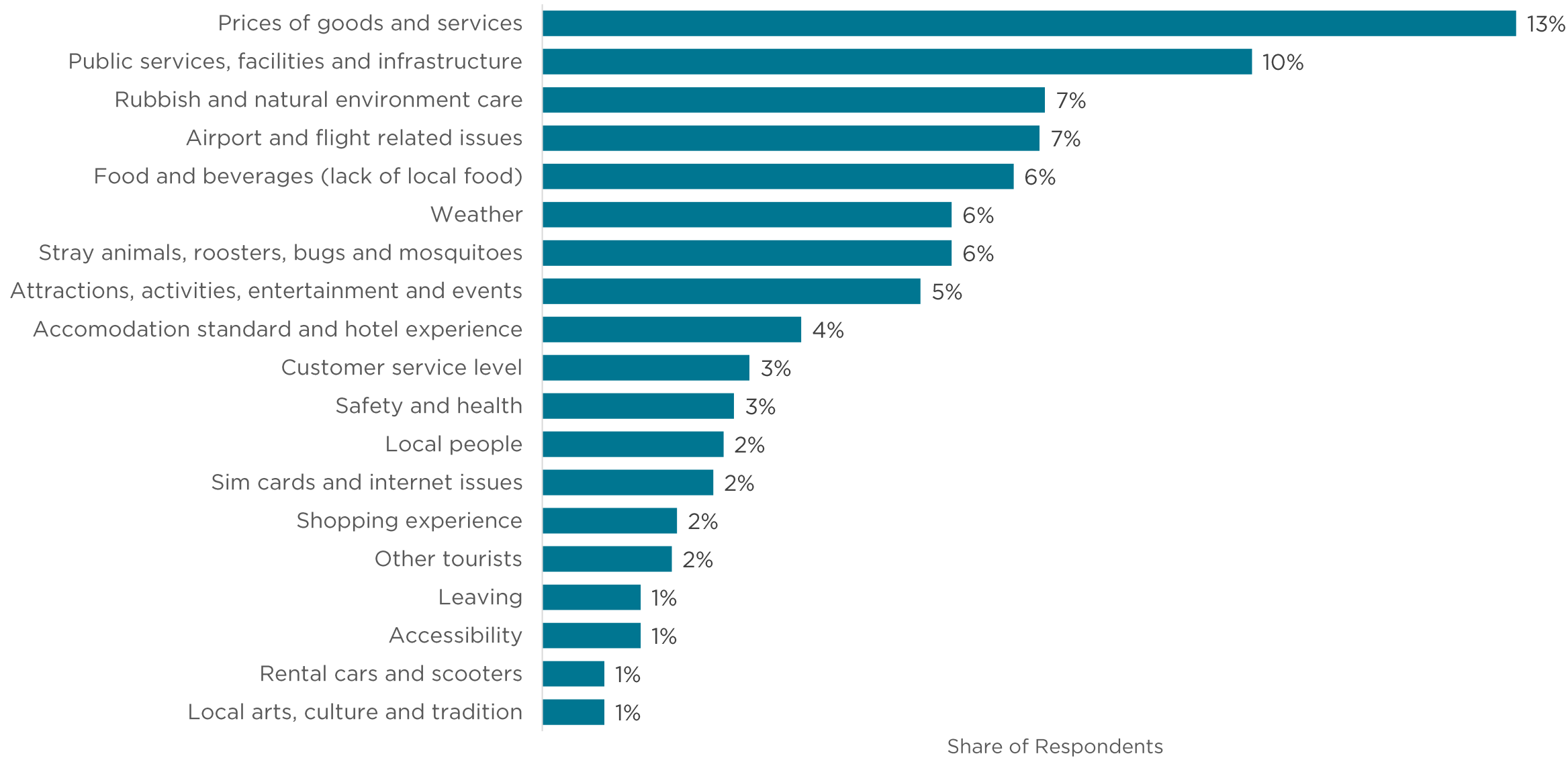
Note: Total response N=1,531. Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%

Quotes for Most Appealing Aspects of the Cook Islands



- + *It was fantastic to see an island not to commercialized, everyone there is so friendly and helpful. The views and water activities were amazing. I really love how Cook Islands is pretty much sun up till sun down. Beautiful quiet and relaxing (not like Fiji or Bali)*
- + *We love the relaxed atmosphere and the swimming and cocktails, snorkeling and you know what you're spending with NZ money we love the people and it's a clean environment and the dogs and cats are looked after properly.*
- + *Just the overall friendly feeling you feel from the locals in the Cook Islands and the many experiences in being able to see the natural views or experience the culture or the cuisine. Honestly just all of it EXCEEDED all my expectations and always have*
- + *The People's willingness to diversify and not rely (fully) on tourism. The Cooks have always been a friendly people - I think the outside influence i.e., gang related activities, has yet to find and stamp its place on Rarotonga (yet) but there is nothing like some good old island justice, with a bit of jandal on the side, to pull people in line.*
- + *Relaxed atmosphere, eat, drink, swim and sleep. The feel of "going back in time" the island has tried to keep its original identity, not too many activities, forced to relax and unwind. The activities that are there are authentic not commercialized.*
- + *Peace and quiet, Aatahua People, Absolutely loved talking to the locals and hearing about there life and adventures, was the highlight of my trip.*
- + *No busy traffic and traffic lights lol, the tropical weather, absolute love how there's always some activity to do everyday, we really love Rarotonga 100%.*
- + *The overall culture of the island and it's people. I describe it to people like it's the animated movie "moana" but in real life.*

Least Appealing Aspects



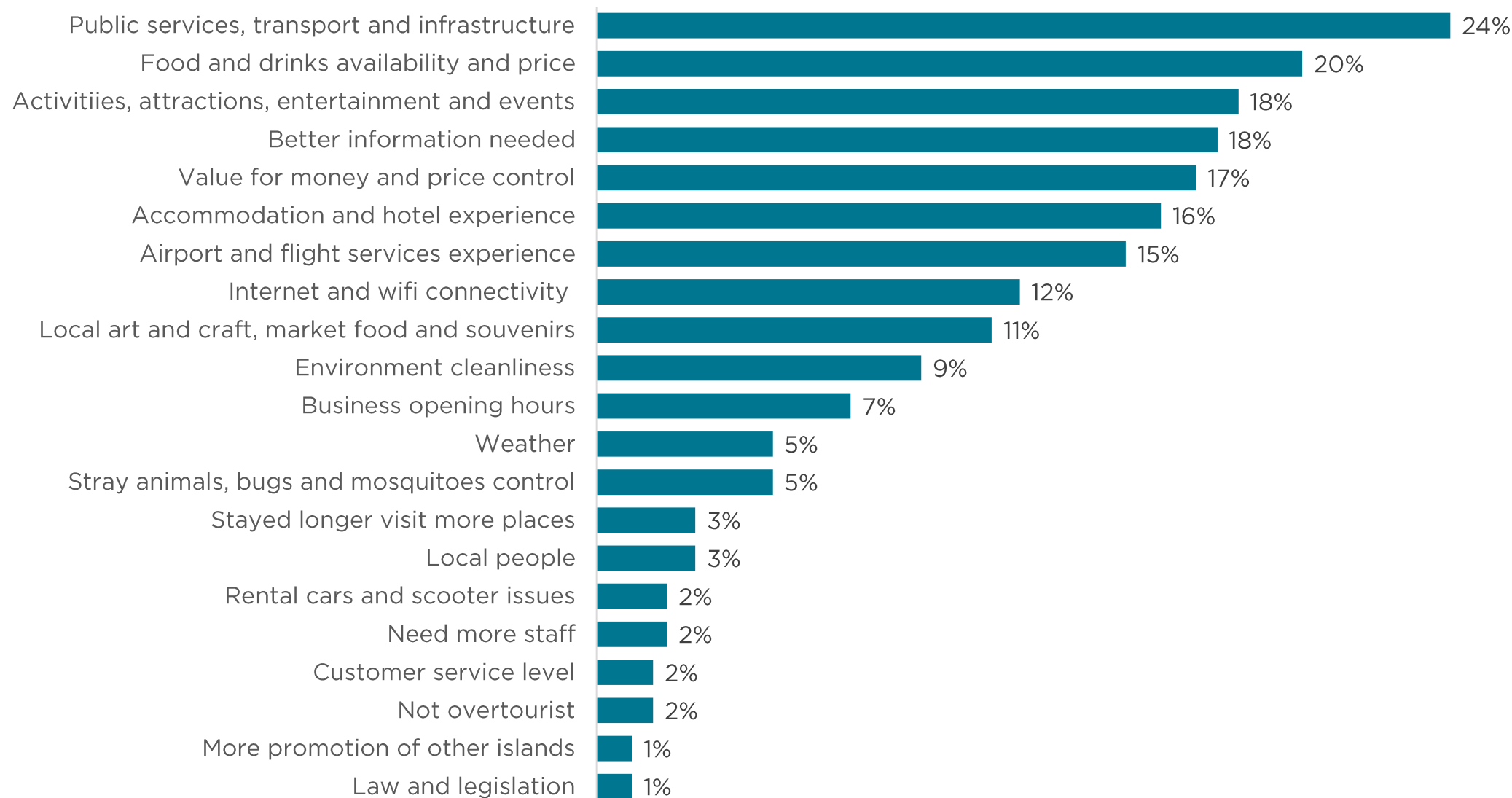
Note: Total response N=1,414. Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%

Quotes for Least Appealing Aspects of the Cook Islands

- + Change in local cuisine available. Fresh local seafood seemed harder to find and was no longer as available on restraint menus as there had been on previous visits. The food most available now at restaurants was mostly deep-fried food and burgers.
- + Feeling unsafe as a solo travelling white young female due to behavior of local men.
- + Food safety standards, poor service in restaurants and bars (*need hospitality training), overcrowded cultural events with overwhelmed staff and poor service. Lack of recycling options. More public garbage can and recycling cans at beaches.
- + Lack of feminine hygiene disposal units and locks on public bathroom doors, local food vendors not giving back change, lack of sunsets, lack of enthusiasm from locals, poor road quality, other tourists, lack of nightlife, food restaurants/vendors inaccurately advertising availability and quality, lack of markets/variety, lack of souvenirs variety, poor airport experience.
- + Lagoon snorkeling tour advertised "see giant clams". Only one dead clam tied to a buoy. Amount of unethical lagoon tours promoting seeing giant clams, purple coral & lots of tropical fish. There was no giant clams, purple coral and a few fish that were not colorful.
- + Local kids dropping plastic bottles and leaving them to drift out through the reef channel by Trader Jacks. This is observed every time we visit.
- + Most saddening: the impending reality of the impact of what the CI government is allowing to happen to the islanders of the future with short term choices regarding sale of Fishing & Mineral Resources.
- + Passport control after long flight, only 2 passport control officers for ~200 passengers and long delays standing in lines. This would make me think again about returning to the Cook Islands.
- + Prices are high compared to other Pacific Islands, but that's ultimately more to do with the good exchange rates from NZD to the other islands currencies.
- + Rubbish every where. Every day I was picking up garbage. Especially around black rock. The rubbish bin was always full.



Suggestions for Improvement



Share of Respondents

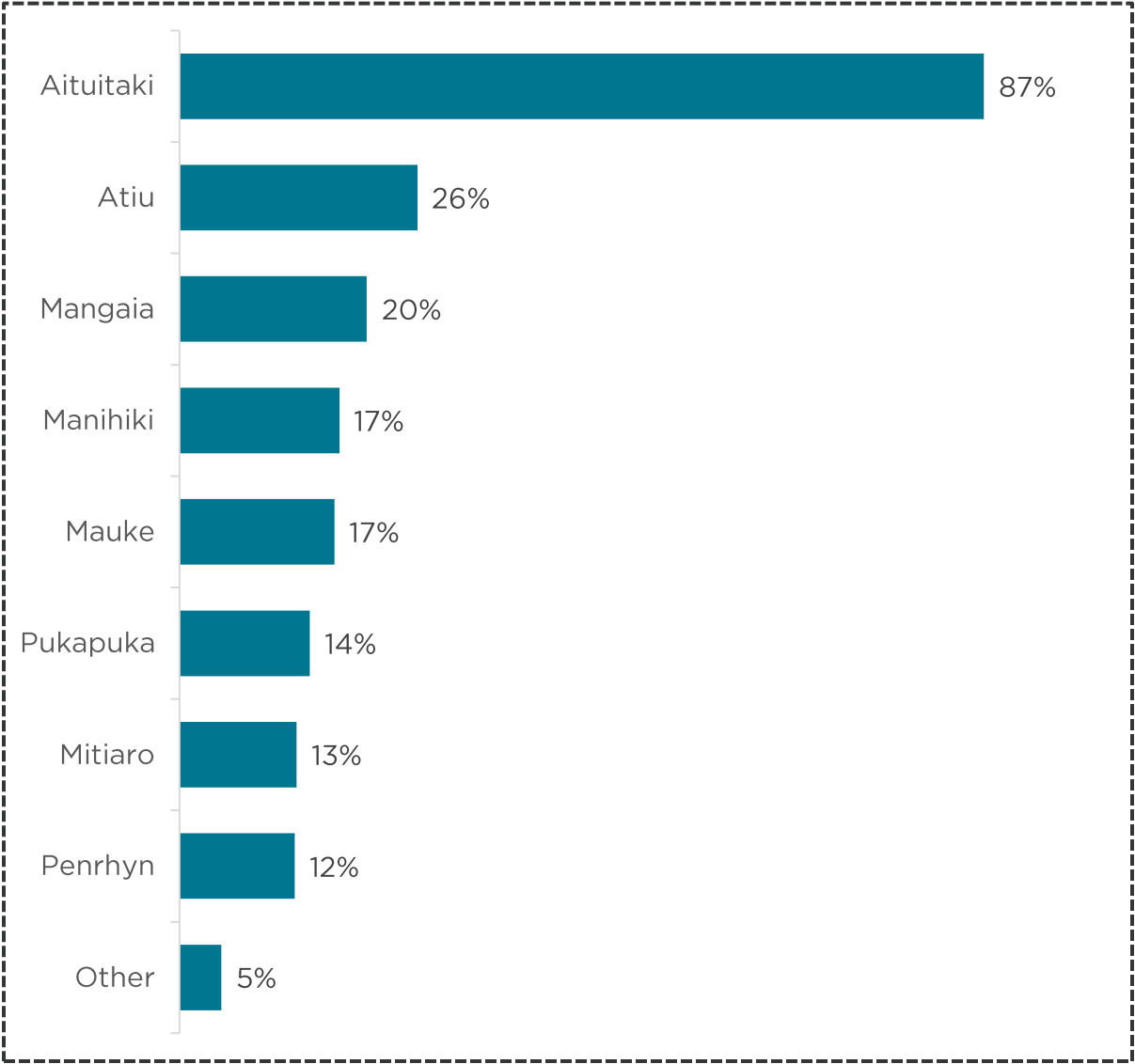
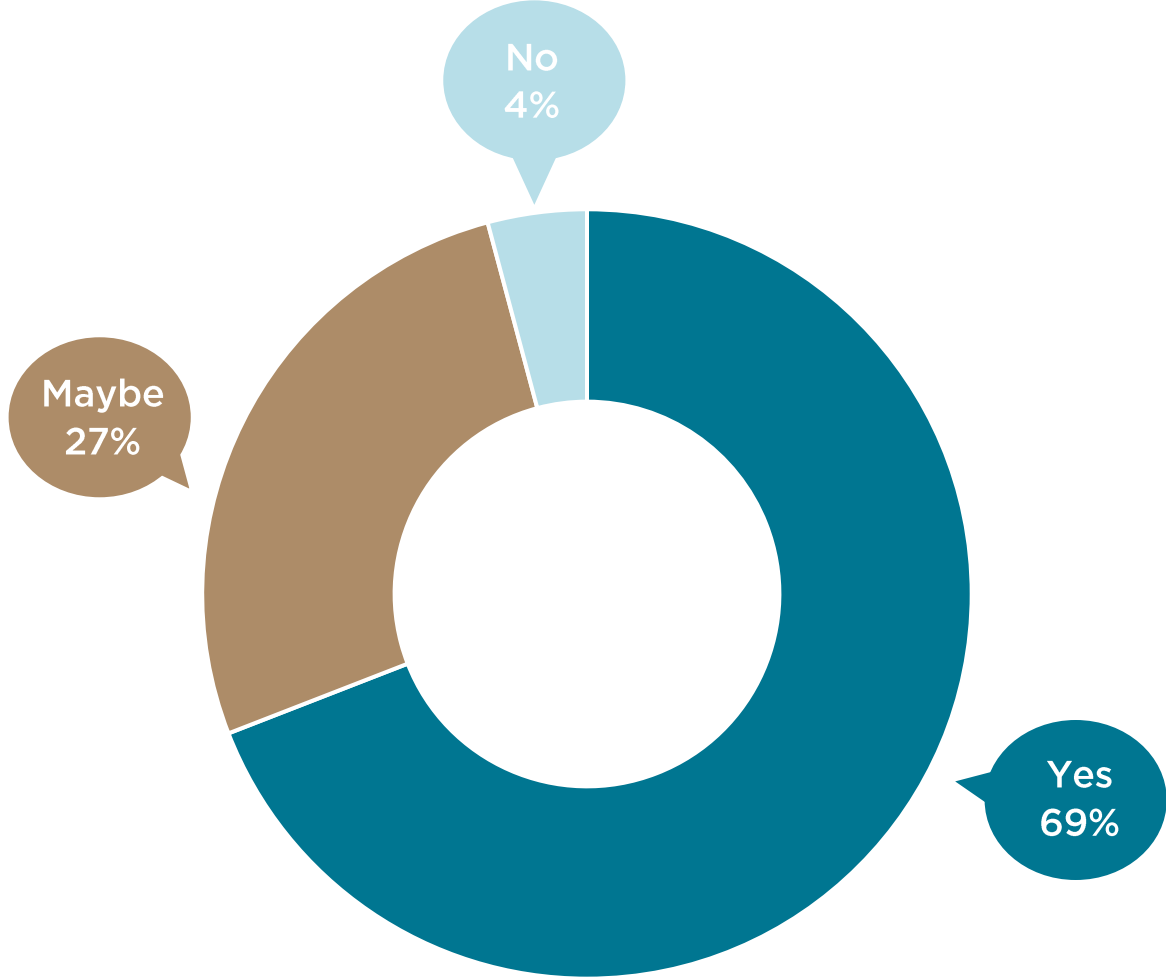
Note: Total response N=495 Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%

Quotes for Suggestions for Improvement



- + Roads need to be improved to stop potholes and flooding when it rains as dangerous to everyone. Protect the lagoon where the turtles live .Make it an official marine sanctuary. Don't let the Chinese get involved in your country as they will ruin it. Ask Australia and New Zealand for financial assistance.
- + Supermarket food and vegetable is very expensive and hotel food needs improvement
- + That is would be easier to get taxis. I was at the Muri Night Market and hoped to get a taxi for the way back. But I did not get. Better public transportation on Rarotonga. Bus was very crowded and goes just once 1 hour. If you make a stop, you must wait 1 hour for the next bus. Another taxi company on Aitutaki.
- + The Jetstar flight arrival time is ridiculous and the total lack of care by hotel staff for arriving guests waiting hours and hours for their rooms is pathetic.
- + The visa permit system needs improving as we did have a letter prior to arrival however Air Canada requires a permit number which immigration didn't prove and said we didn't need it. Air Canada was not going to let us board on the first leg of our flight to connect with Air NZ.
- + The queue time in the arrivals section of the airport which was not air conditioned. The length of the queue wasn't too bad, maybe 30 minutes, but in the heat and the noise of the fans it was not too pleasant. The departures area is great. The car rental was a bit sketchy because clearly the tank wasn't fully topped up, so we ended up paying for more gas than we used. next time I must remember to take note of roughly how many liters we used. The difference was a matter of a few dollars but it's the principle that counts.
- + There was limited variety of food in the shops. Disappointed to find limited fresh fruit given it was summer.
- + The cost of accommodation is high for the quality you get. For tourist destination it is difficult to know where you can get food as they are not open regularly and the sign says open out on the street even when they are not open.
- + Signage at cultural sites along the road - they are hard to find using the tourist map!
- + Remove 18+ age restrictions on restaurants as this is hard for families to eat at the most enjoyable spots. More Coffee cafes. More Scuba diving operators. Safer freshwater access.
- + Please control the dogs on Rarotonga. I saw tourists on bikes often getting attacked by dogs on the loose on the road which is why I never ride a bike or scooter on Tumutevarovaro.

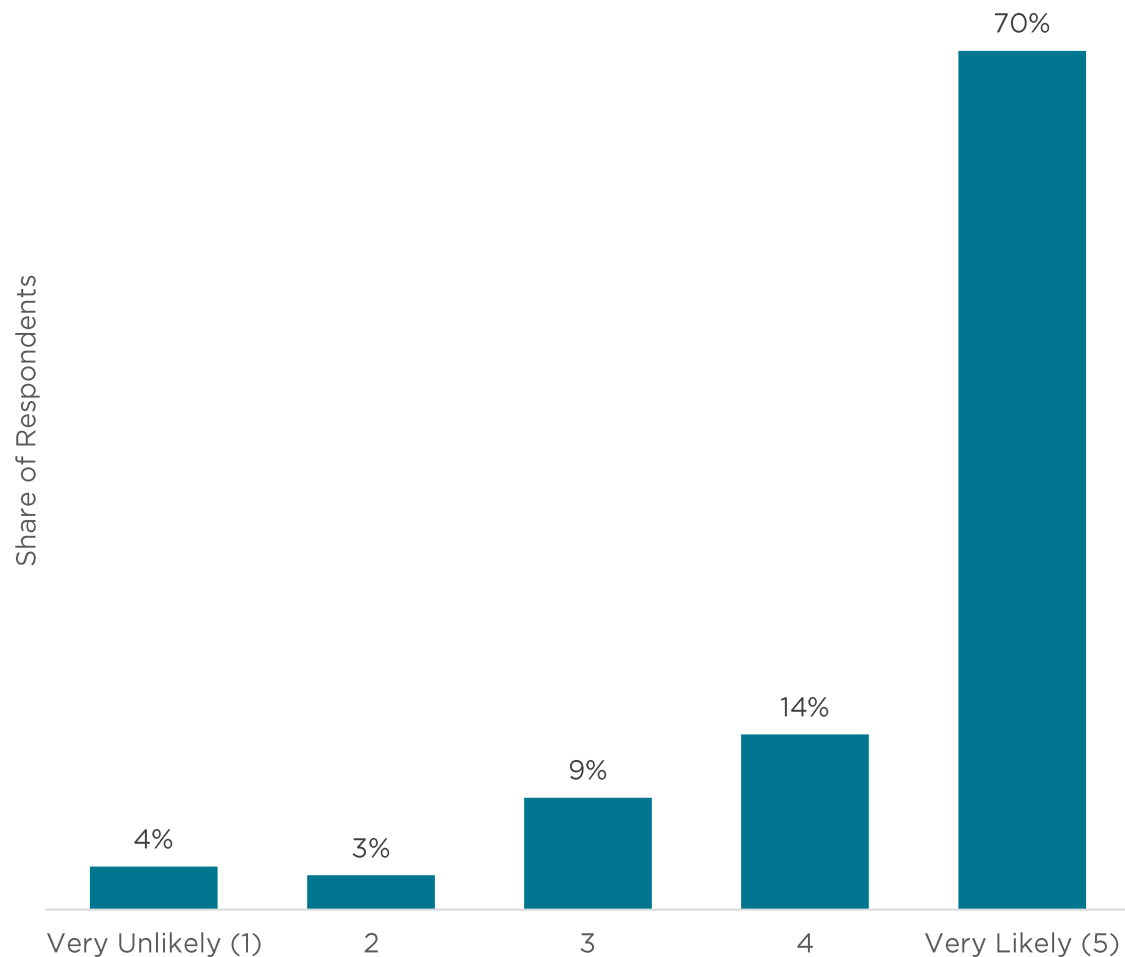
Willingness to Visit Outer Islands



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

Future Motivations

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

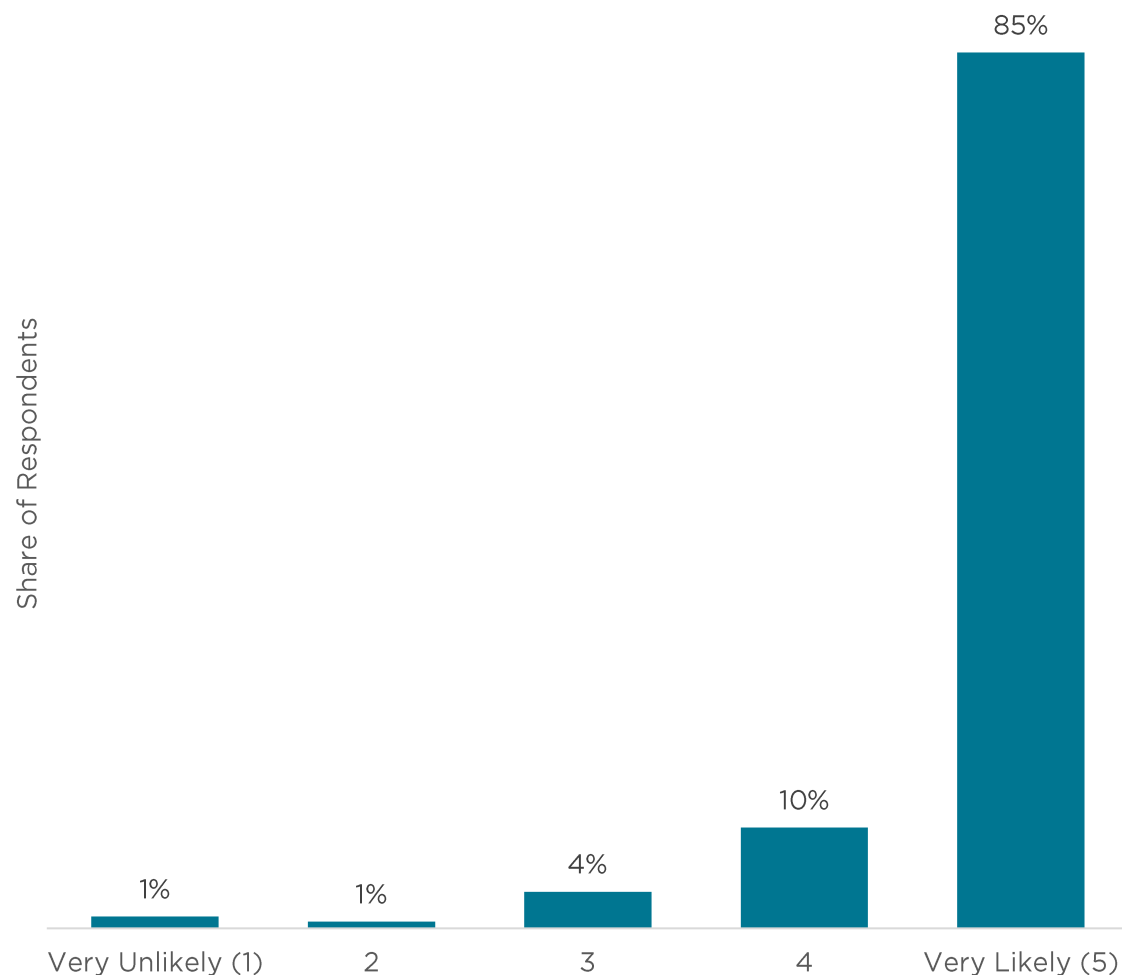


Quotes: Reasons to not return

- + Beach and swimming/snorkeling experience ruined by sea cucumbers.
- + Because of the recent Agreements made with China, I perceive the Cook Islands as greedy, money hungry, ungrateful & disloyal place.
- + Cost, location to Australia. Closer cost-effective destination Bali and Fiji as example.
- + Distance- lots of beautiful places in the world to visit
- + I am from Lebanon and it's so expensive to travel back to cook islands. I can only dream of going back with my family and showing them what I saw and having them experience what peace feels like.
- + I had a very bad experience, the person who i spoke after landing delayed process asking unnecessary things and showed attitude . We were recent citizens of NZ and our Indian passport we were using last time was questioned and even after showing citizenship ceremony email and return ticket , pr of New Zealand he wasn't convinced. In your website it says that accommodations and return ticket only required . But immigration officer was not listening, and he made us to wait long time. I was holding my 5-year-old an autistic high support needed son , he was not showing any courtesy and treated us like an illegal immigrants trying to immigrate to Cook Islands.
- + I had big hopes returning to the Cook Islands - but I just didn't feel the magic this time. The island felt more tired, a lot of the staff at the resort were not cook islanders. I think I'd look at other destinations first.
- + It is a small island, and I am not interested in doing the things I have not done - scuba, lagoon cruises, cultural events. This was a second honeymoon and if I was to bring my children, the resorts seemed expensive.
- + Prefer to visit new places when we could travel. Was very expensive & difficult to find accommodation for a family of 5.

Future Motivations

Q: How likely would you recommend the Cook Islands?



Quotes: Reasons to not recommend

- + *I found the people rude. The airport is a shambles and you can get the food at home also we were unable to book any tours they were all closed the whole week we were there.*
- + *It's good for couples, not families. Too expensive and food is bland.*
- + *There are more affordable and more interesting pacific countries to visit closer to Australia.*
- + *There are more beautiful tropical islands with friendly local people, better infrastructure, better accommodations, higher quality restaurants, fresh vegetables and fruit, greater variety of sea life, care more about their environment.*
- + *With the bitter experience of immigration and expensive for food and accommodation.*
- + *If China get too involved.*
- + *Fishing was not as good as advertised. Food options limited.*
- + *Value for money, food is terrible and expensive. There is no variety, not even at your street markets. I did not find it authentic at all. Hotel breakfast very basic unless you pay. Overpriced.*
- + *There isn't enough to do and it's very far away. I therefore don't feel the need to recommend the Cook Islands.*
- + *Too expensive, reefs are damaged, not environmental conscious.*
- + *Safety for white female travelers and expensiveness.*
- + *Other islands have more appeal, especially Western Samoa and Hawaii.*
- + *I don't tend to make recommendations - not my role.*
- + *Feel I would run out of things to do & it's becoming increasingly expensive.*



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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