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2022 Socioeconomic Research of Great Smoky Mountains National Park—Summer Season

Report on 2022 Data Collection (Revised)



Great Smoky Mountains National Park.
NPS

2022 Socioeconomic Research of Great Smoky Mountains National Park— Summer Season: Report on 2022 Data Collection (Revised)

Science Report NPS/SR—2026/502

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Abstract

A strong mandate and need for socioeconomic monitoring are expressed in the NPS strategic goals for science, in statements by the NPS leadership, and the report of the Second Century Commission. This report informs core issues of visitor use management and develops a deeper, contemporary understanding of who visits Great Smoky Mountains National Park and what they do during their visit. It uses a two-phased survey methodology to capture a representative sample of visitor information, characteristics, and behavior: (1) an on-site intercept survey conducted via tablet, and (2) a follow up (mail-back and/or online survey) for full trip details. The results are organized by these two phases and are intended to assist park managers in understanding current utilization and perception of park resources, operations and potential issues, as well as to facilitate communication and decision-making processes within the park and between the park and its local partners and stakeholders.

The revised version of this report corrects previous errors identified in Figures 9 and 18 and includes minor editorial, formatting, and accessibility updates. No substantive changes have been made to the findings or conclusions presented in the original 2022 report.

Introduction

The National Park Service (NPS) has both a strong mandate and need for socioeconomic research. This is expressed in the NPS strategic goals for science, in statements by the NPS leadership, in the report of the Second Century Commission, NPS Next emphases, and through the Department of the Interior priorities for 2018–2022. Because of these mandates and various acknowledgments of needs to monitor socioeconomic research, parks have conducted various studies of their visitors to better understand their preferences while at the park, information sources used, experiences received, and demographics. This information allows for a more complete understanding of who visits and how the park can better serve them while visiting.

Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GRSM) is the most visited park in the National Park System. This large volume of visitors places an even higher degree of importance to explore what various segments of the visitor base are seeking from their visit to GRSM. Therefore, visitor research is key to the success of GRSM's future goals.

The primary purpose of this study is to inform core issues of visitor use management, management solutions, and to develop a current and deeper understanding of who visits GRSM, what they do during their visit, and their spending profile. The results of the study are intended to assist the park in understanding current utilization and perception of park resources, operations, and issues that may exist due to increasing visitation. These results may also be used to facilitate communication and decision processes within the park and between the park and its local partners and stakeholders. Spending data from this study is presented in a separate report by the NPS.

The study was conducted by a large-scale research team from Otak, Inc., RRC Associates, Inc., and the Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research at the University of Montana.



Visitors gather beside a historic log structure in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, highlighting the park's preserved cultural resources and opportunities for interpretation and education.

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Methods

The study used a two-phased survey methodology to capture a representative sample of visitor information, characteristics, and behavior:

1. An on-site intercept survey conducted via tablet, and
2. A follow-up (mail-back and/or online) survey for full trip details.

This comprehensive two-phase approach provides the necessary information to make on-the-ground decisions using immediate feedback from the intercept survey while also capturing key in-depth information on visitor spending profiles and trip characteristics for long-term planning. Additionally, the tablet survey was kept brief to ensure the visitor's experience was not altered. The methods also permit a larger sample to be collected on key questions of interest.

Study Area

The GRSM local area map is shown in Figure 1. The local area around GRSM consists of Blount, Sevier, Cocke, Knox, and Monroe counties in TN and Graham, Swain, Haywood, Buncombe, and Jackson counties in NC. Within GRSM, the study area was comprised of seven locations. Table 1 shows more details about sampling locations. The locations and volumes of surveyor effort were determined based on historic visitor volumes and distribution across the park's main areas.



A rustic log footbridge crosses a mountain stream in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, providing pedestrian access along the park's extensive trail network.

NPS

Sampling Period and Procedure

Intercept Survey

The on-site intercept survey was developed to collect rapid visitor information via tablet-based responses, which were then analyzed and provided for park managers within several weeks of conclusion of data collection. This effort allowed for immediate management action if needed.

The intercept sampling was conducted during the period of June 4th – June 13th, 2022 and August 4th – August 10th, 2022. Originally, the study was scheduled to run during the June sampling period alone; however, a positive case of COVID-19 among the survey team decreased the ability for the team to cover all dates/locations at that time. Therefore, a smaller research team was sent in August to capture the shifts/locations that could not be captured in June. A comparison of results was conducted and found to be mostly comparable between the two sampling periods.

During the sample period, visitors were intercepted while visiting GRSM across the designated locations listed in Table 1, above. Most respondents were intercepted in their vehicle by stopping them as they entered the park. Surveyors approached potential respondents at the site to introduce the purpose of the study and ask them to participate in a short 5–7-minute survey about their experience

in GRSM (NPS 2022). If the visitor was eligible (at least 18 years of age, not a GRSM employee, and had not previously taken the survey) and agreed to participate in the study, the surveyor verbally administered the survey questions and recorded the responses on a handheld tablet device. If the visitor did not agree, surveyors asked if they would be willing to answer three non-response bias questions (see Non-Response Bias Analysis section). Upon complete or partial refusal, the surveyor would thank the visitor for their time, log the non-response, and approach the next visitor group.

At the end of the intercept survey, visitors were invited to participate in a follow-up survey by mail-back or online response. Those who agreed to participate were given an envelope containing a printed copy of the follow-up survey and hyperlink and instructions for accessing it online. As part of the intercept protocol, surveyors logged a unique identifier (four-digit code) from the envelope into the tablet for future connection to the follow-up survey.

Therefore, four potential outcomes were possible when intercepting visitors (see Table 2):

1. Complete refusal, refusing to answer any questions, including non-response bias questions;
2. Partial refusal, answering non-response questions but nothing further;
3. Complete intercept, but refuse to take follow-up;
4. Complete intercept and take follow-up.

Table 2. Response outcomes—Great Smoky Mountains National Park intercept survey.

Outcome	Total
Eligible visitors contacted	1,918
Complete refusals	136
Partial refusals (non-response questions completed)	185
Intercept surveys completed	1,597
Follow-up surveys distributed	1,429
Intercept response rate	83.3%
Follow-up acceptance rate	89.5%

During the sampling period, five surveyors in June and two in August were stationed simultaneously at different sampling sites. Start times varied day-to-day and by location to capture a diverse sample of visitors across GRSM. Each surveyor worked nine 7-hour days (six hours data collection and one-hour lunch break) and rotated between several sites. During the June sampling period, each surveyor had one day off during the 10-day sampling window. The surveyors in August worked for 5 days to account for lost days from the COVID-19 outbreak in June.

Mail-Back/Online Survey

The follow-up mail-back/online survey was distributed to participating respondents who completed the intercept survey and then agreed to take a follow-up survey after completing their trip to GRSM. This method extended data collection and asked participants to complete the survey after their visit

either through a postage-paid envelope provided to them, or online via a link provided by the surveyor. The follow-up survey covers visitor trip spending details, travel patterns, and perceptions of their recent visit (NPS 2022). Both the intercept survey and the follow-up survey were tagged with a unique identifier (four-digit code) for each respondent so their on-site tablet responses could be paired with their follow-up responses. Joining the two datasets provides a more complete picture of connecting in-park experiences and post-visit perceptions.

At the end of the intercept survey, respondents were asked for their physical mailing address or email address. This allowed for a reminder postcard or email to be sent to all contacts about a week following the end of each data collection period. This postcard or email thanked them for their original participation and encouraged them to complete the follow-up if they had not already done so.

Three weeks after postcard mailing, a second contact (with the same unique IDs) was delivered to all outstanding addresses/emails, noting that the individual's completed questionnaire had yet to be received. The mailed survey packets included replacement surveys and postage-paid, self-addressed return envelopes. A final contact was mailed/emailed to all remaining non-respondents four weeks after sending the second contact (i.e., the first delivery of a full replacement survey). Table 3 shows the response rate for the follow-up mail-back/online survey.

Table 3. Response rate—Great Smoky Mountains National Park follow-up mail-back/online survey.

Outcome	Total
Follow-up surveys distributed	1,429
Valid follow-up surveys completed	409
Response rate	28.6%

Non-Response Bias Analysis

To account for potential biases between respondents and non-respondents, three questions were asked of eligible visitors contacted who did not wish to participate in the on-site intercept survey. These three questions can then be compared to both those who completed the intercept survey only, and those who completed both the intercept and follow-up surveys. An intercept survey response rate of 83.3% indicates little concern regarding non-response bias in the *intercept* data. Tables 4 through 6 below show results of bias testing between intercept-only and full survey respondents.

Table 4. Non-response bias question: “Are you a permanent or seasonal/second home resident of the local area around Great Smoky Mountains National Park?” Note: p-value = 0.98.

Response	Full Survey Respondents		Intercept-Only Respondents	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Yes	77	18.9%	224	18.9%
No	330	81.1%	964	81.1%

Table 5. Non-response bias question: “Do you currently live in the United States?” Note: p-value not computed due to low cell counts in “No” category.

Response	Full Survey Respondents		Intercept-Only Respondents	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Yes	407	100.0%	1172	98.7%
No	0	0.0%	16	1.3%

Table 6. Non-response bias question: “On this trip away from home, have you [and your personal group] stayed, or will you stay overnight away from your permanent residence either in Great Smoky Mountains National Park and/or within the local area?” Note: p-value = 0.22.

Response	Full Survey Respondents		Intercept-Only Respondents	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Yes	329	80.8%	926	77.9%
No	78	19.2%	262	22.1%

A chi-square test for homogeneity was performed to evaluate differences between the groups. Using a p-value of 0.05, the distribution of responses among full survey respondents and intercept-only respondents did not differ between any of the measured variables. Based on the measurements of the non-response questions, there is no bias due to non-response in this study.



Towering trees and dense understory vegetation form a lush forest canopy in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, reflecting the park's rich and diverse forest ecosystems.

NPS / VICTORIA STAUFFENBERG

Results

Intercept Survey Results

The following section provides results of the 1,597 visitor intercept surveys conducted in Great Smoky Mountains National Park from June 4th to June 13th, 2022 and August 4th to August 10th, 2022. All results are presented in this report, regardless of sample size, which varies by question. Caution is recommended in the interpretation of figures with sample size lower than $n = 30$, as there are too few responses to reasonably generalize results to the broader population. Categories on some questions may not sum to 100% due to rounding differences and/or the opportunity to select more than one response option. Differences in bar length for responses with equal percentage labels are due to rounding. To preserve the data for additional analyses, outliers for open-ended numeric questions (e.g., nights spent, days in local area, etc.) have not been removed. Given these outliers, medians are shown instead of means throughout the report, in order to better represent the central tendency.

Questions 1–2: Visitor Residency

First, respondents were asked to indicate if they were permanent or seasonal residents of the local area around GRSM. If they did not reside permanently or seasonally in the local area, they were asked if they currently live in the U.S., and if so, for their ZIP code. Figure 2 depicts responses to this group of questions.

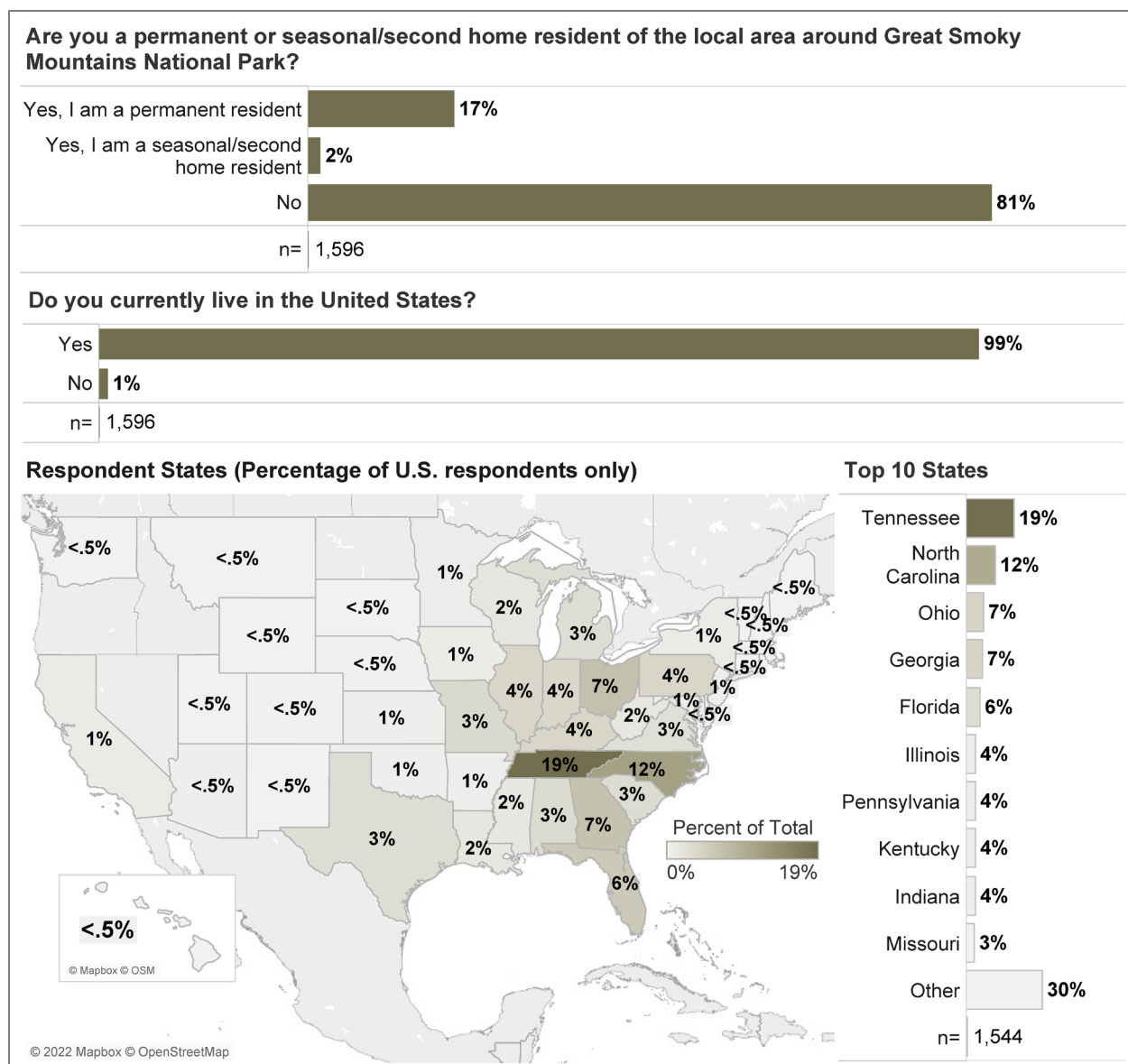


Figure 2. Visitor local residency status and geographic origin of domestic visitors to Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

NPS

- About 1/5 of respondents (a combined 17%) stated that they were either permanent or seasonal residents of the local area around GRSM.
- There was a large geographic concentration of visitors from Tennessee and North Carolina (where GRSM is located).
- Among the 99% of respondents currently residing in the U.S., 19% reside in Tennessee, 12% in North Carolina, 7% in Ohio, 7% in Georgia, and 6% in Florida.

Question 3: Trip Purpose

If respondents indicated that they were not permanent or seasonal residents of the local area, they were asked about the overall purpose for their trip away from home (Figure 3).

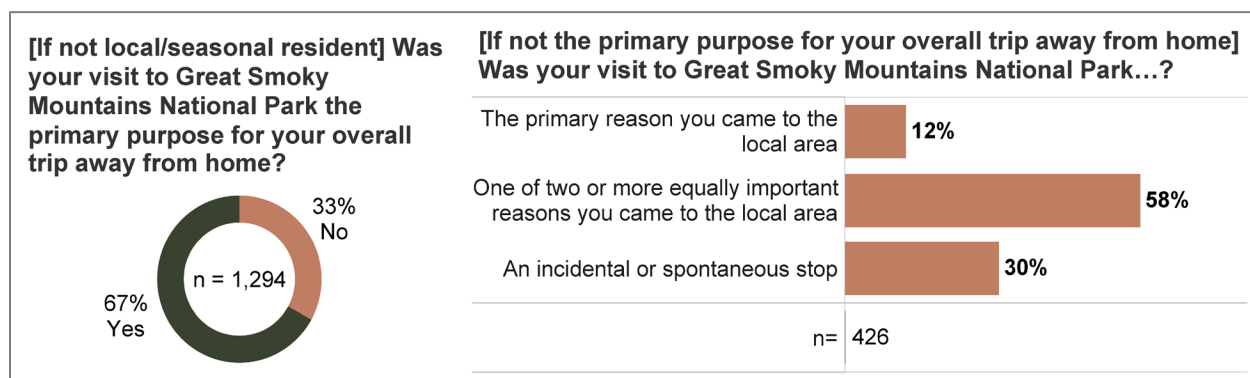


Figure 3. Role of Great Smoky Mountains National Park in overall trip purpose.

NPS

- For 1/3 of non-local respondents (33%), visiting GRSM was not the primary purpose for their overall trip away from home.
- Among those respondents for whom GRSM was not their primary trip purpose, 58% stated that their visit to GRSM was one of two or more equally important reasons they came to the local area while another 30% indicated that it was an incidental or spontaneous trip.

Question 4: Length of Stay

If respondents indicated that they were not permanent or seasonal residents of the local area around GRSM, they were asked how many days they planned to spend within that local area, including days spent in the park. All respondents, regardless of residency, were asked whether they would be staying overnight away from their permanent residence within the local area. Responses to both of these questions are depicted in Figure 4.

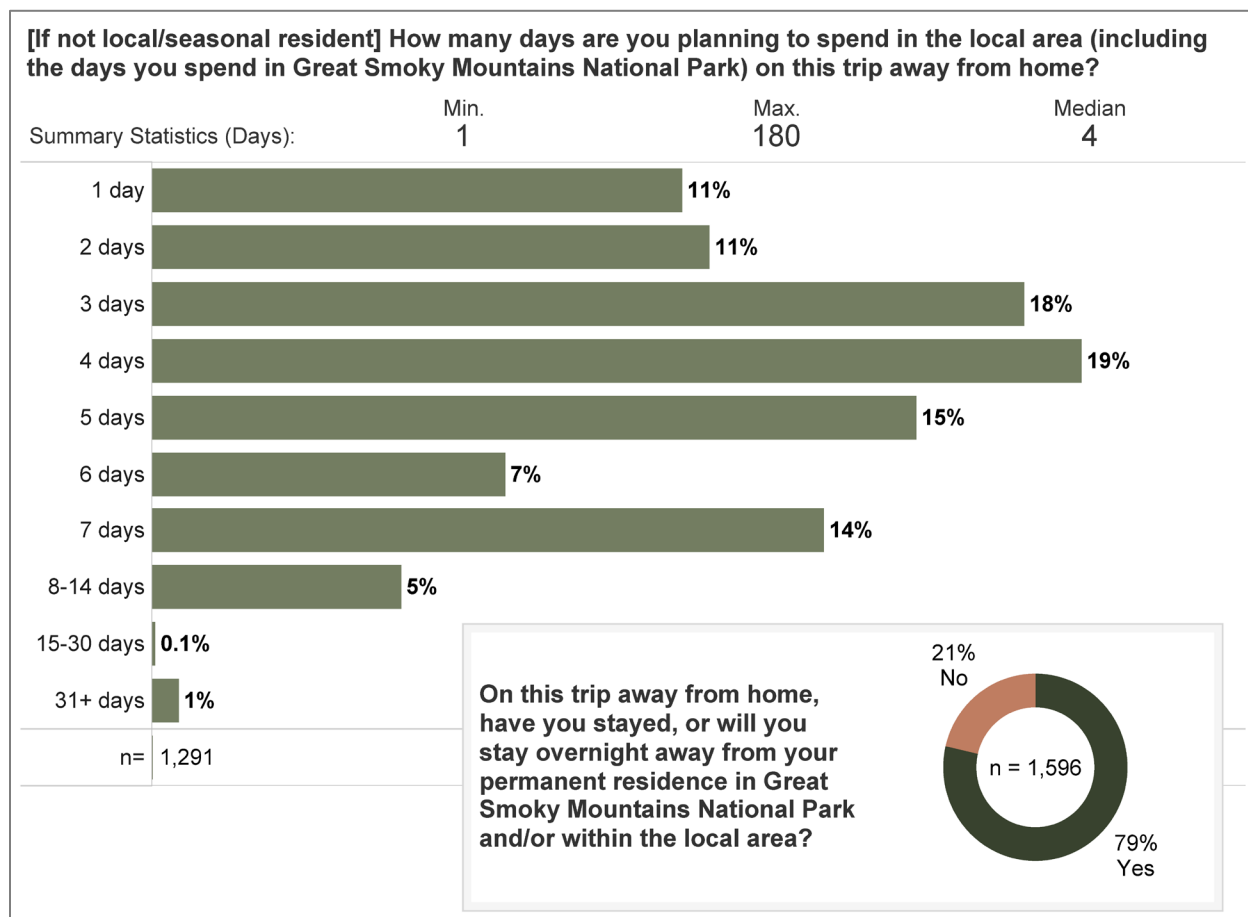


Figure 4. Time spent in the local area around Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

NPS

- 11% of non-local respondents spent one day in the local area, while 11% spent 2 days, 18% spent 3 days, 19% spent 4 days, with the remaining 42% spending 5 days or more. The median length of stay was 4 days.
- Additionally, over $\frac{3}{4}$ of all respondents (79%; including permanent/seasonal residents) had stayed or planned to stay overnight away from their permanent residence in the park and/or in the local area.

Questions 5–6: Overnight Visitors

If respondents indicated that they stayed overnight in the local area, they were asked about the type(s) of accommodation they used or planned to use while there (Figure 5).

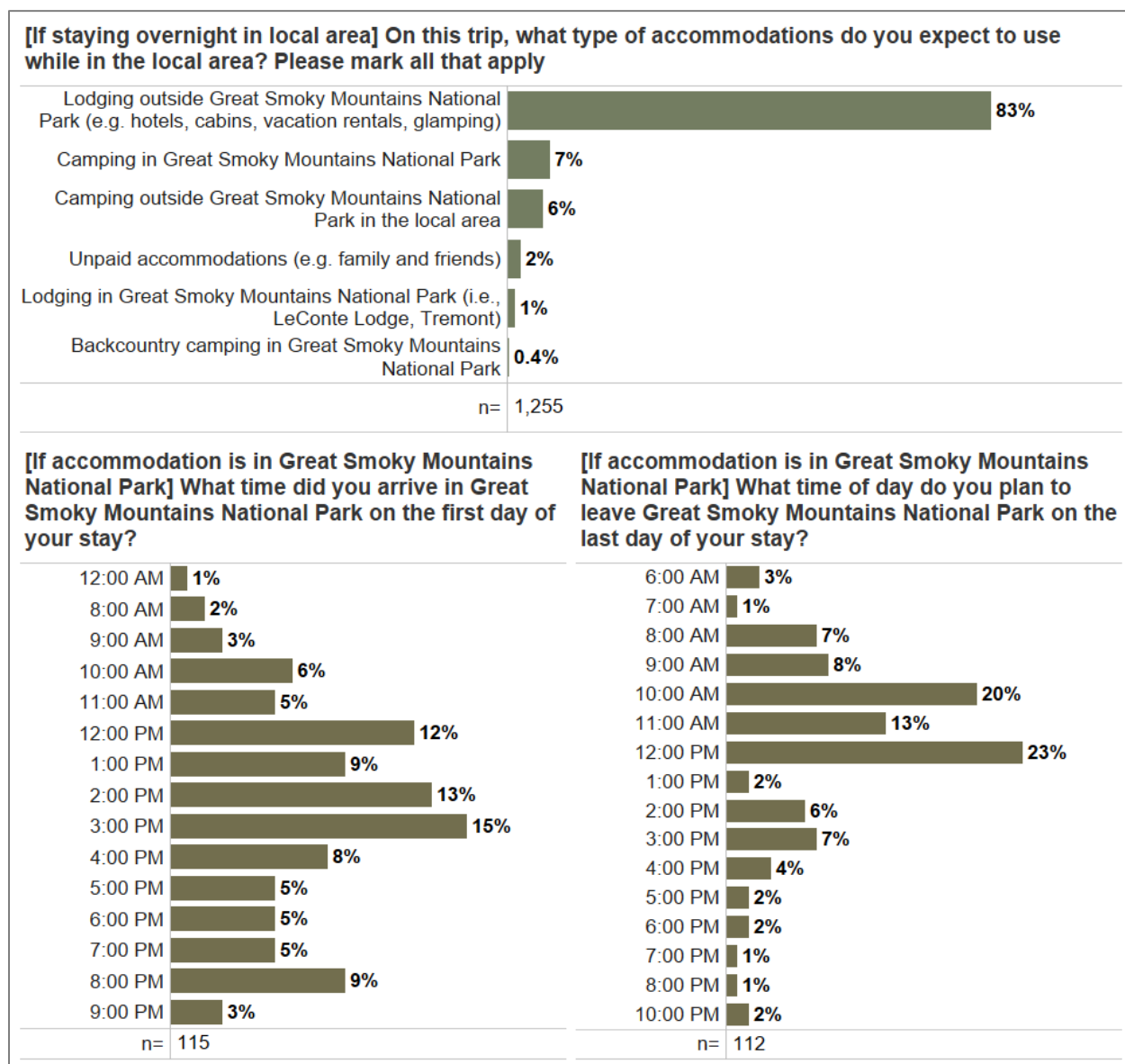


Figure 5. Accommodation types used in local area and arrival/departure times if staying in Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

NPS

- 83% of overnight respondents used lodging outside of the park.
- This was followed in prevalence by camping in GRSM (7%) and camping outside the park (6%).

- Almost half of respondents arrived at GRSM on the first day of their stay between 12:00 PM and 3:00 PM while over half left between 10:00 AM and 12:00 PM on their final day of their stay.

Respondents who camped in GRSM were asked in which campground(s) they had stayed or planned to stay (Figure 6).

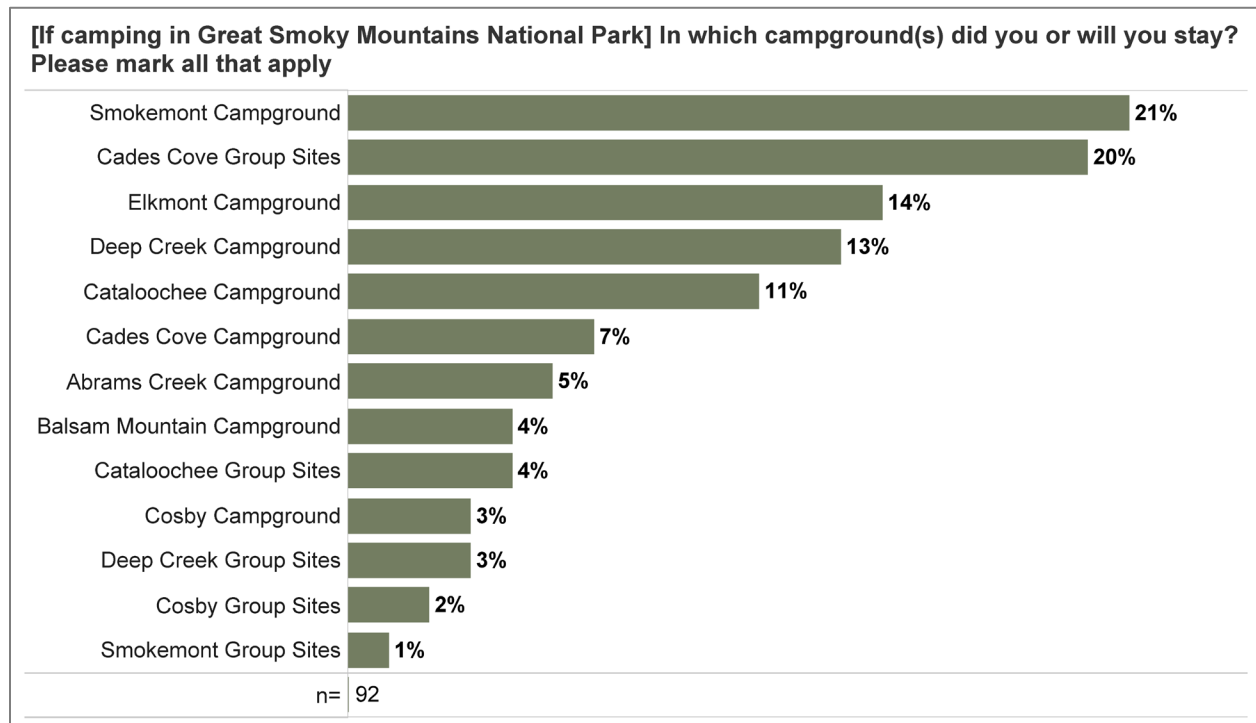


Figure 6. Campground use within Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

NPS

- 21% of overnight visitors camping in GRSM stayed in Smokemont Campground.
- Of overnight visitors camping in GRSM, an additional 20% stayed in Cades Cove Group Sites with 14% in Elkmont, 13% in Deep Creek Campground, and 11% in Cataloochee Campground.

Note: the research team believes some respondents may have been unsure what the “group site” designation at Cades Cove meant, leading to a higher than expected response. Thus, the group sites may have been regular sites instead of specifically group camping.

Respondents were then asked to indicate the number of nights they spent or would spend in each accommodation type (Figure 7).

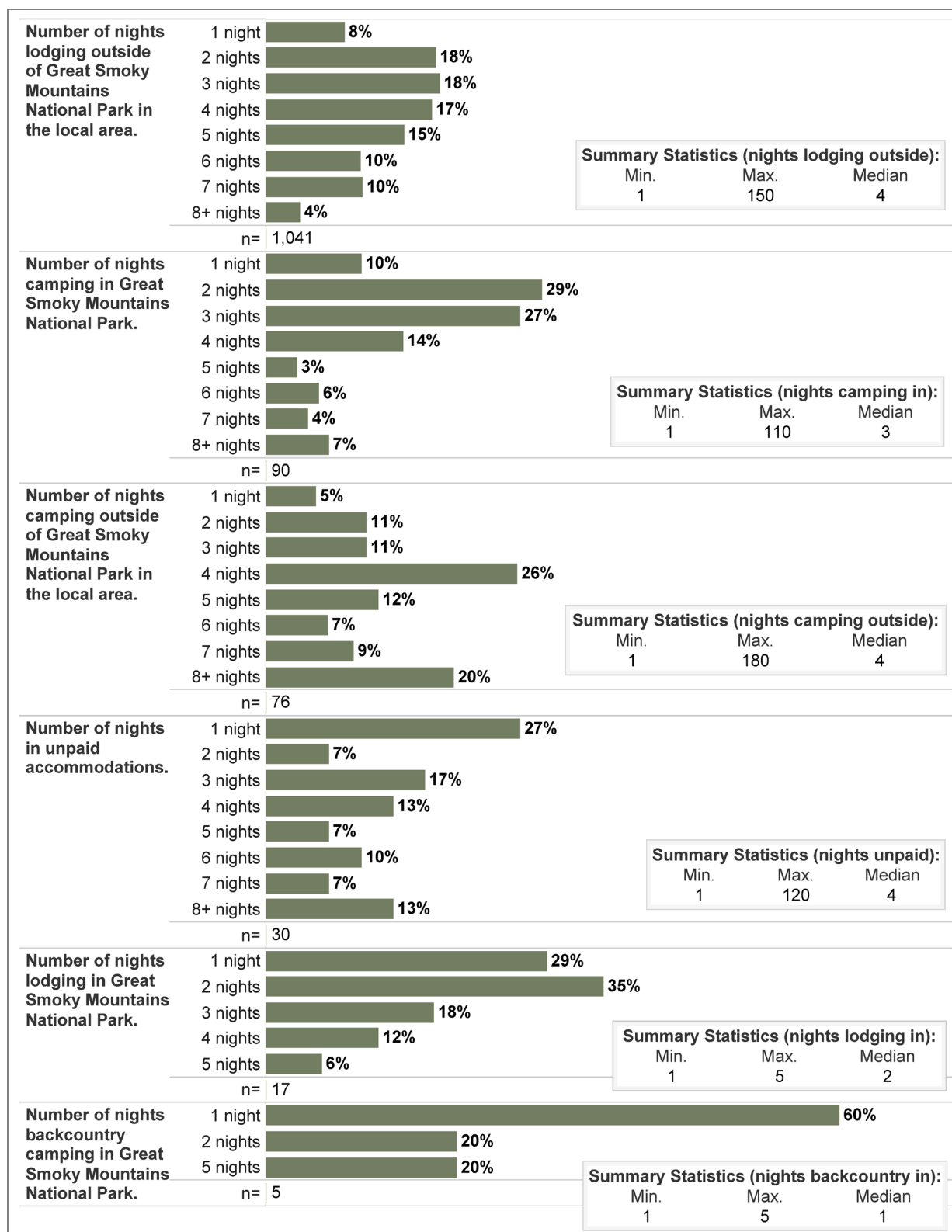


Figure 7. Number of nights spent in the local area around Great Smoky Mountains National Park, by accommodation type. Tabular data shown in this figure are presented in [Appendix A, Table 8](#).

NPS

- Among the 83% of overnight respondents who lodged outside of GRSM in the local area (per Figure 5), median length of stay was 4 nights. Just over ¼ (26%) lodged 2 nights or fewer in the local area this trip; 44% spent 3 nights or fewer.
- Among the 7% of overnight respondents who camped in GRSM (per Figure 5), median length of stay was 3 nights. 39% of campers were spending 2 nights or fewer camping in the park this trip; 66% spent 3 nights or fewer.
- Among the 6% of overnight respondents who camped outside of GRSM (per Figure 5), median length of stay was 4 nights with 53% staying 4 nights or under.
- The remaining options (unpaid accommodations, lodging in GRSM, and backcountry camping in GRSM) composed only 2.4% of all overnight visitors to GRSM with median nights spent at 4 nights, 2 nights, and 1 night, respectively.

Questions 9–11: Party Characteristics

Respondents were asked to indicate how many adults (18 or older) and children (under 18) were in their personal group during their visit to GRSM (Figure 8). A personal group was defined as the visitor and companions with whom they visited the park, such as a spouse, family, and/or friends, but visitors were informed not to account for the larger group with whom they may have traveled, such as a school, church, scout, or tour group.

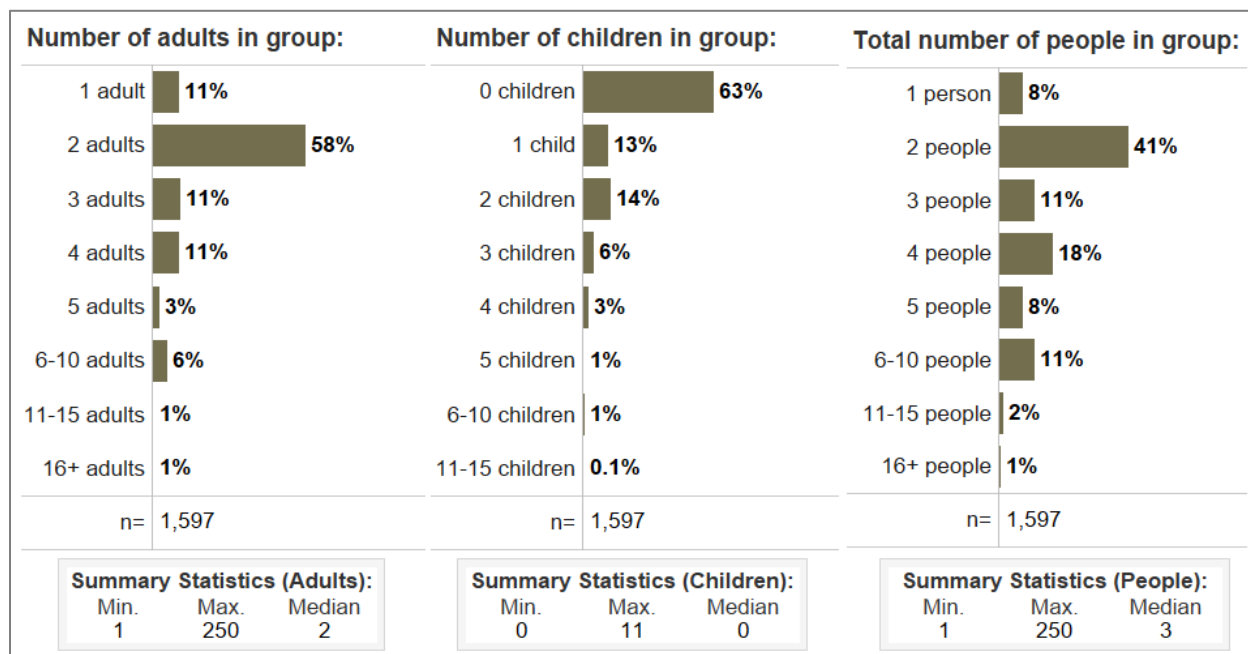


Figure 8. Number of adults and children in respondent's personal group while visiting Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Tabular data shown in this figure are presented in [Appendix A, Table 9](#).

NPS

- The median number of adults per group was 2. Most groups (58%) included 2 adults.
- Most groups (63%) did not include any children.

Respondents were then asked to provide the age of each member of their group (Figure 9).

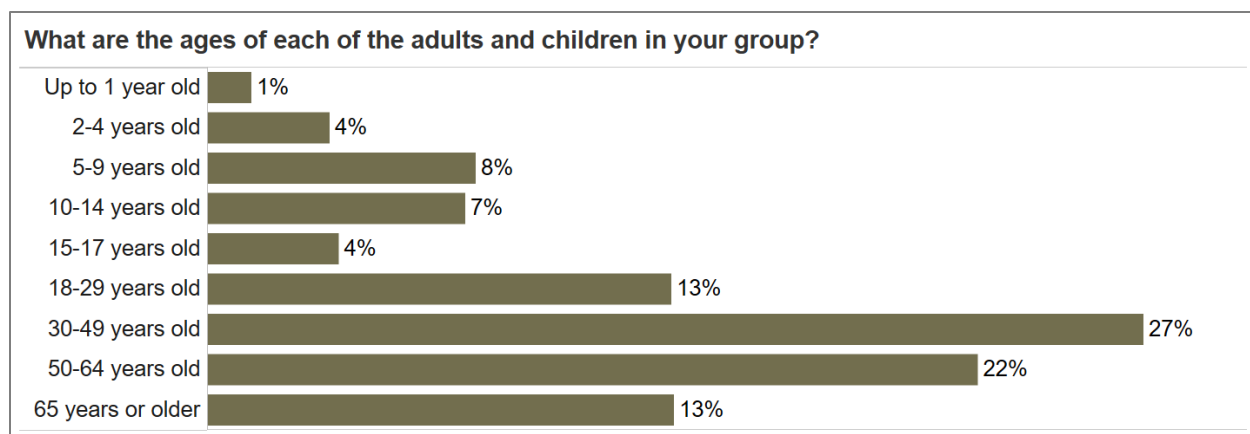


Figure 9. Age distribution of all members of respondent's personal group while visiting Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

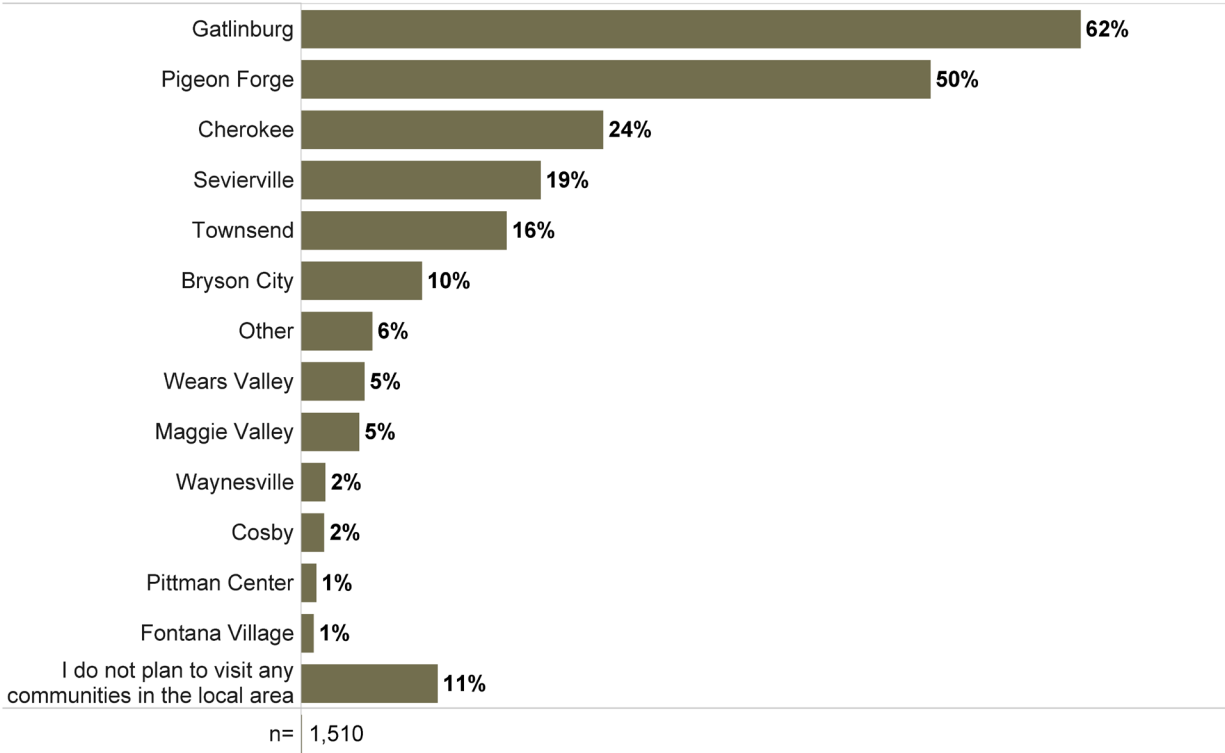
NPS

- The most common age of the adults and children in a personal group was 30–49 years old (27%), followed by 50–64 years old (22%), 65 years or older (13%), and 18-29 years old (13%).
- Children (i.e., visitors under 18 years old) accounted for a combined total of 24% of group members.

Questions 13–14: Local Communities

To build a more detailed understanding of the impact of GRSM on the surrounding local area, respondents were given a list of nearby communities and asked which one(s), if any, they had already visited or planned to visit during their trip. Visiting a community was defined as stopping to do or buy anything, such as purchasing gas or groceries or dining. Those respondents who had previously indicated that they were staying overnight in the local area outside GRSM (i.e., paid lodging outside the park, camping outside the park, or staying in unpaid accommodation outside the park) were then asked which local community (or communities) from that list was (or were) closest to their accommodations. Responses to both of these questions are shown in Figure 10, below.

Which communities have you already visited or do you plan to visit outside Great Smoky Mountains National Park while in the local area? Please mark all that apply



What communities are closest to where you stayed or are staying at your accommodation(s) outside Great Smoky Mountains National Park in the local area? Please mark all that apply

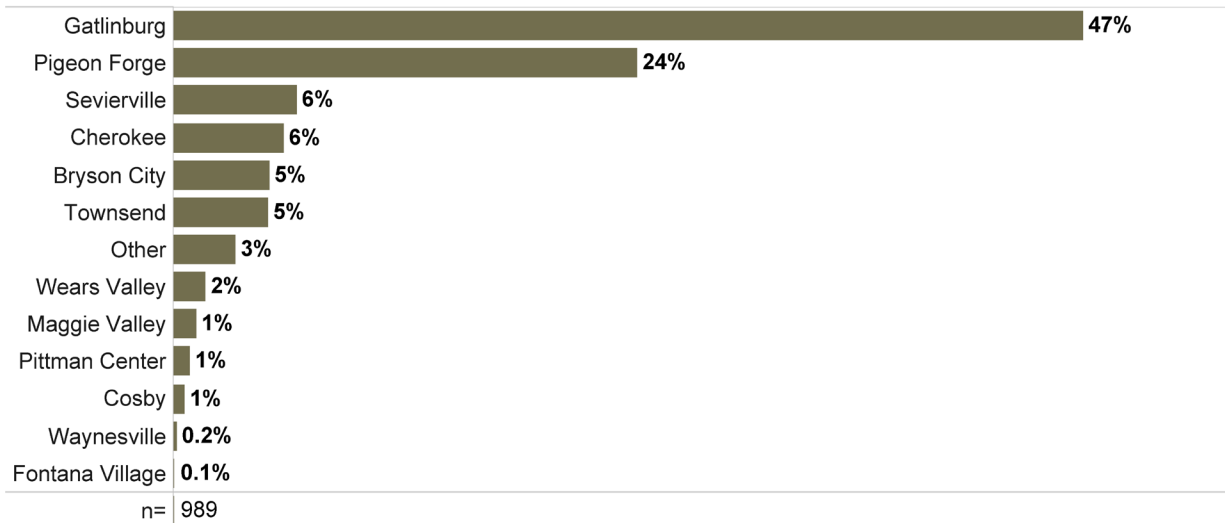


Figure 10. Communities visited outside Great Smoky Mountains National Park while in the local area.
NPS

- Approximately 62% of respondents visited Gatlinburg on their trip to GRSM with 50% visiting Pigeon Forge. Among the lesser visited sites were Cherokee (24%), Sevierville (19%), and Townsend (16%).

- Among those staying overnight, 47% spent their nights closest to Gatlinburg and 24% stated Pigeon Forge.

Questions 15–19: Park Use Characteristics

First, respondents were asked to indicate if they planned to visit GRSM for more than one day, and then a series of follow-up questions about the length of time they might spend in the park (Figure 11 and Table 7).

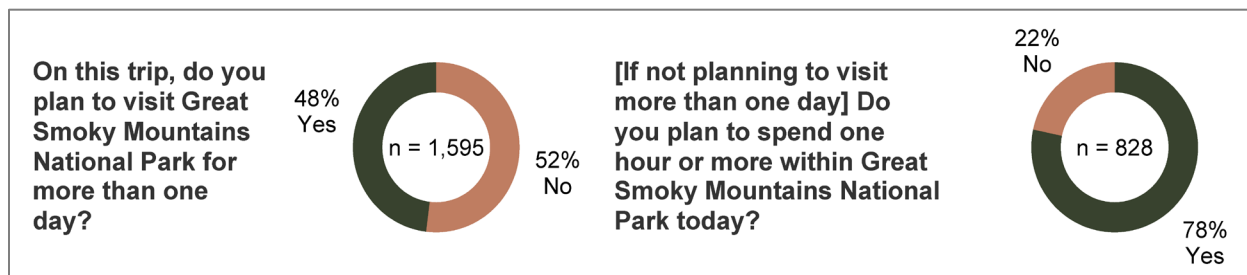


Figure 11. Duration of the respondent's trip to Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

NPS

Table 7. Amount of time spent within Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Question	n	Min.	Max.	Median
[If not planning to spend one hour or more] How many minutes do you plan to spend within Great Smoky Mountains National Park today?	172	3	59	30
[If planning to spend less than a day, but one hour or more] How many hours do you plan to spend within Great Smoky Mountains National Park today?	644	1	12	3
[If planning to visit at least one day] How many days do you plan to spend within Great Smoky Mountains National Park on this trip?	767	1	150	3
[If planning to visit at least one day] On how many different days do you expect to enter the park?	765	1	150	3

- While visiting GRSM, most visitors (52%) did not plan to spend more than one day in the park.
- Among the 52% of visitors who did not spend more than a day in GRSM, over $\frac{3}{4}$ (78%) planned to spend one hour or more in the park. The median length of time spent in the park among this group was 3 hours.
- The remaining 48% of visitors planned to visit for more than one day; among those visitors, the median length of stay was 3 days.
- Those respondents who spent at least one day in the park were also asked on how many different days they expected to enter the park; the median answer was 3 days.

In addition to the total duration of their trip to GRSM, visitors were also asked, more specifically, about the amount of time they planned to spend outside their vehicle while in the park on the day they were surveyed (Figure 12).

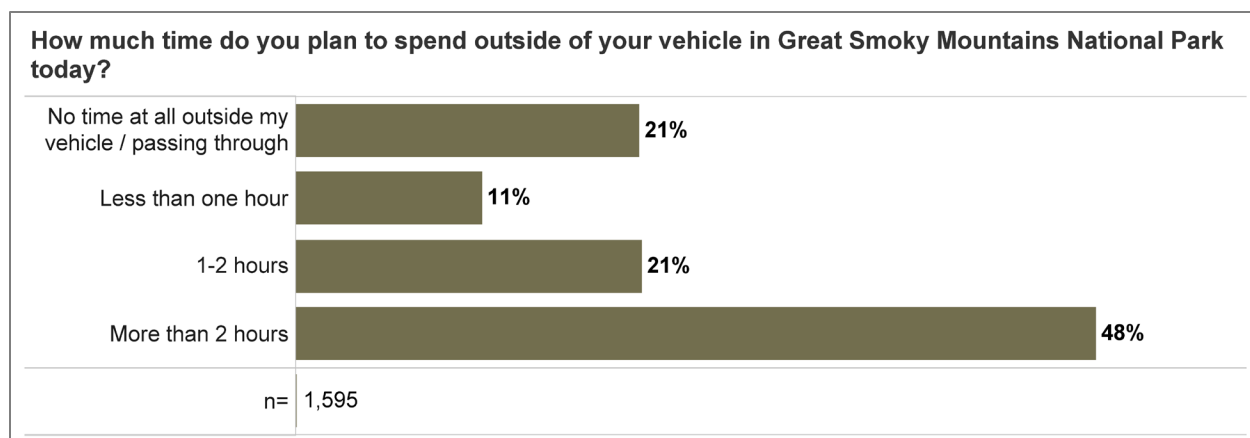


Figure 12. Amount of time spent outside one's vehicle while in Great Smoky Mountains National Park on the day of the survey.

NPS

- Almost ½ (48%) of respondents planned to spend more than 2 hours outside of their vehicle on the day intercepted in GRSM.
- Approximately 21% of all respondents were not planning on spending any time outside of their vehicle or were just passing through.

Next, respondents were asked to indicate the most recent entrance they used to enter GRSM (Figure 13).

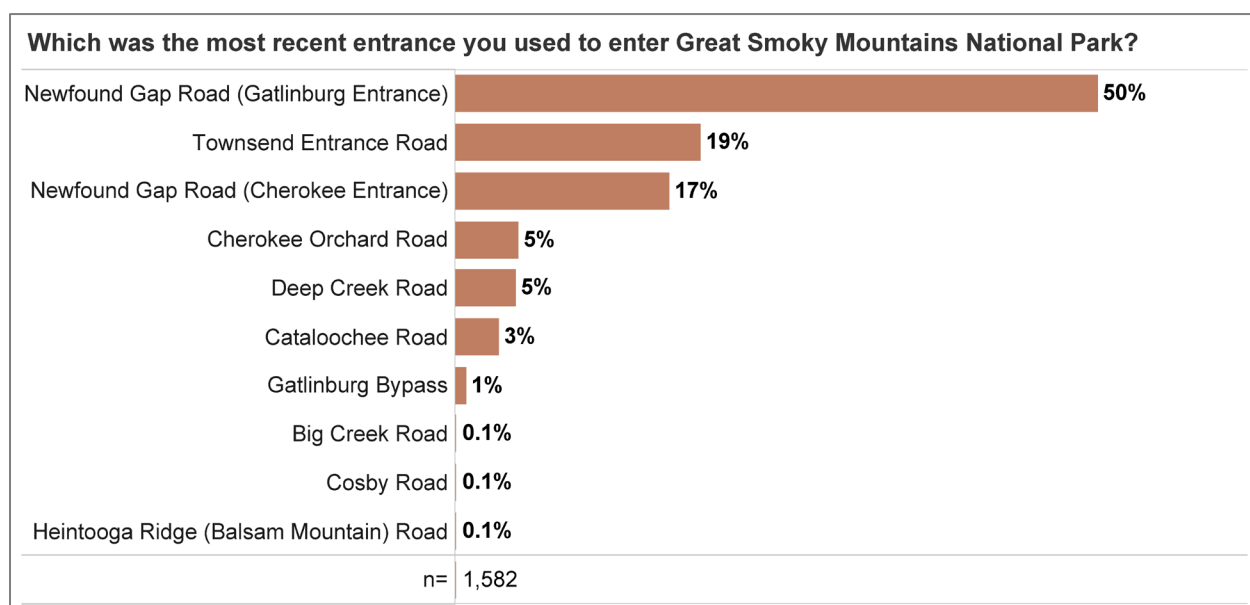


Figure 13. Most recent entrance used to enter Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

NPS

- Newfound Gap Road (Gatlinburg Entrance) was the most commonly used entrance to GRSM (50%).
- The Townsend Entrance (19%) and Cherokee Entrance (17%) made up the bulk of all other entrance visits.
- Due to park geography and proximity of intercept sites to entrances, the results for most recent entrance used were impacted by the volume of visitors intercepted at various sites.

Respondents were also presented with a list of locations within GRSM and asked to indicate if they had been to, or planned to visit them, that day (Figure 14).

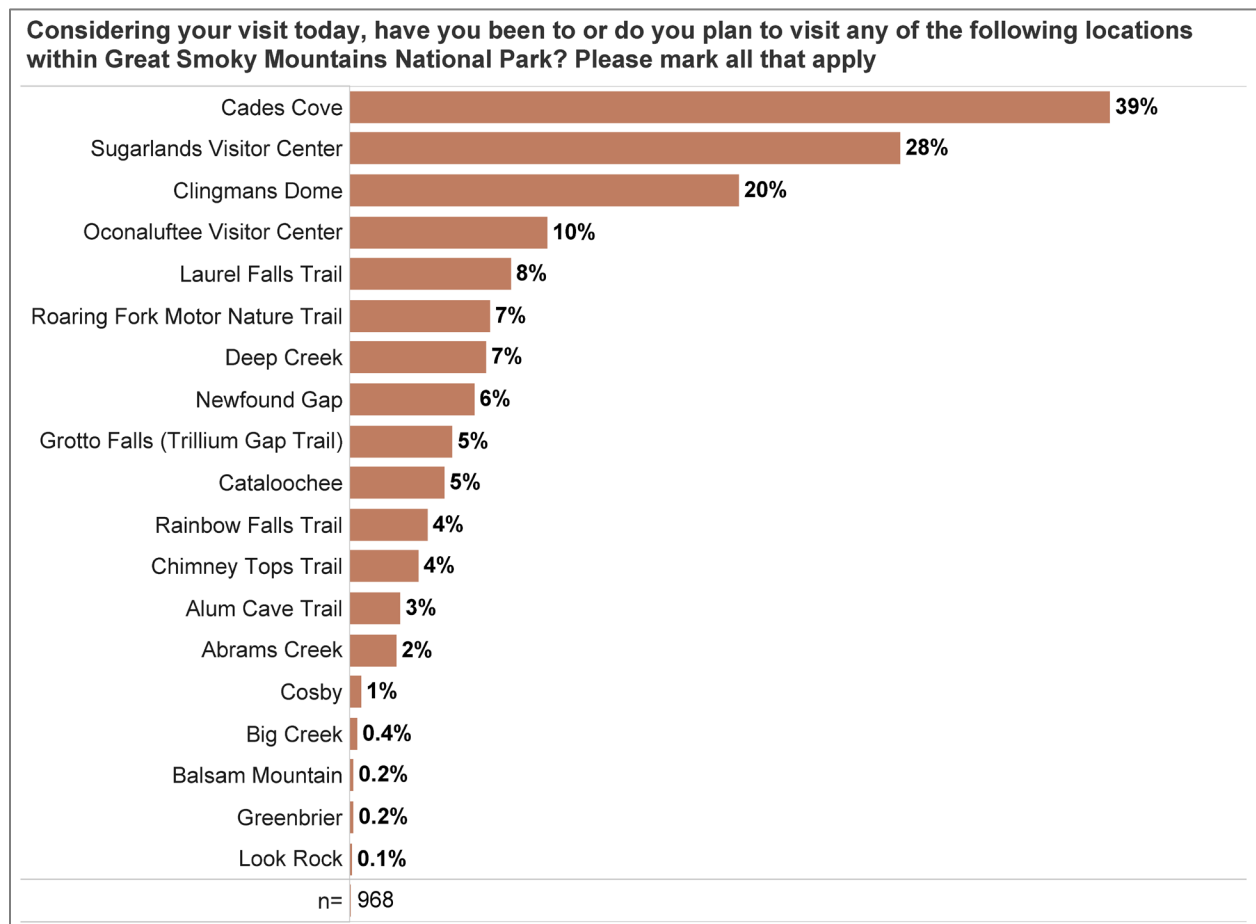


Figure 14. Park locations visited during the most recent trip to Great Smoky Mountains National Park. NPS

- The most commonly visited location in GRSM was Cades Cove (39% of respondents had either been there or planned to visit it on their trip), followed by Sugarlands Visitor Center (28%) and Clingmans Dome (20%).
- Look Rock (0.1%) was the least-visited location from the list provided.

Question 20: Transportation

Visitors were asked about the form of transportation they used to enter GRSM on the day they were surveyed (Figure 15).

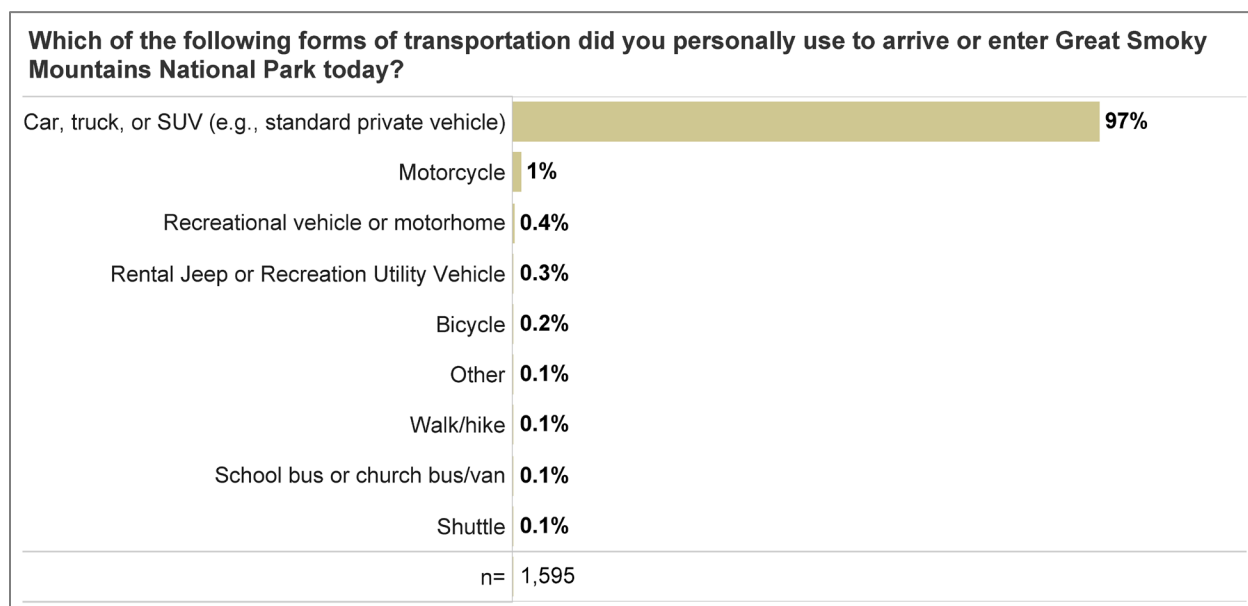


Figure 15. Form of transportation used to enter Great Smoky Mountains National Park on the day of the survey.

NPS

- The majority of respondents (97%) reported that they used their car, truck, or SUV to enter GRSM on the day of the survey.
- This was followed distantly by use of a motorcycle (1%), and recreational vehicle or motorhome (0.4%).
- Respondents would have been asked whether they were on a tour or package vacation if they selected “commercial tour” or “commercial bus” as a mode of transportation option; however, no respondent selected that option and, therefore, was not asked about package or tour options.

If respondents entered the park using a multi-passenger private vehicle (i.e., car, truck or SUV; recreational vehicle or motorhome; or motorcycle), they were asked to indicate how many people were traveling in or on that vehicle (Figure 16).

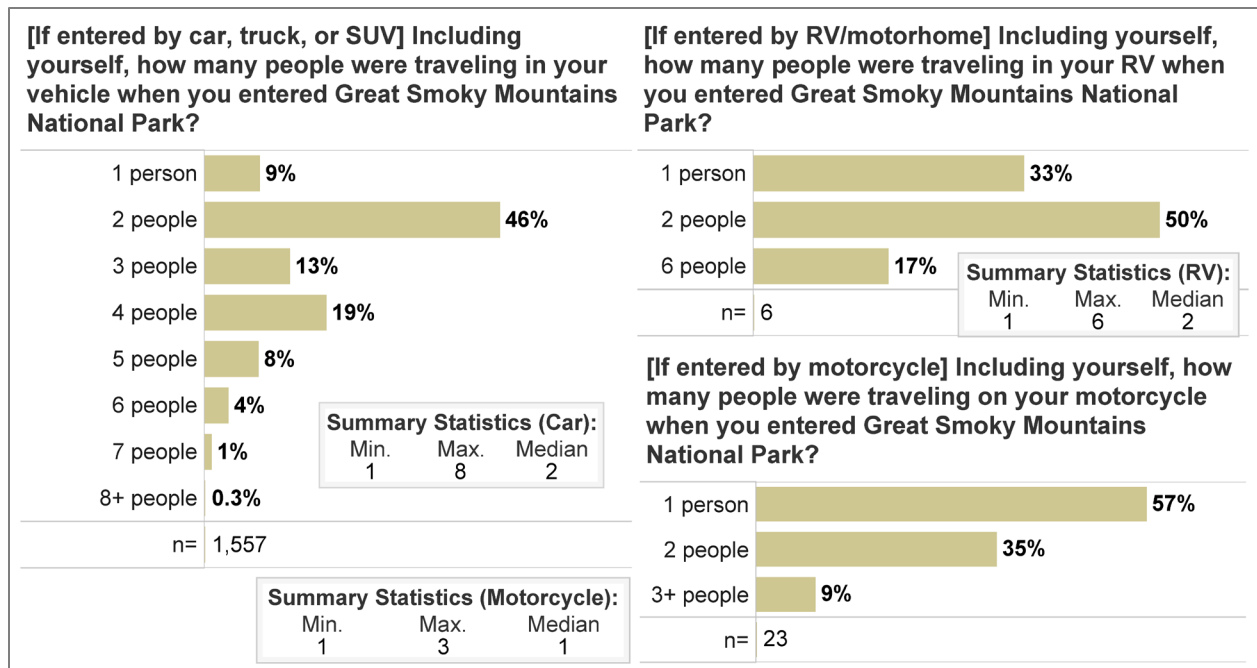


Figure 16. Number of people in or on respondent's vehicle when entering Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Tabular data shown in this figure are presented in [Appendix A, Table 10](#).

NPS

- Almost half of respondents traveling by car reported two people (46%). The next most common group size was four people (19%), followed by 3 people (13%).
- 50% of respondents entering GRSM by RV/motorhome reported traveling in a group of 2 people.
- Most motorcyclists (57%) were traveling on their own.

Question 22: Previous Visits to Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Finally, respondents were asked if they were first time visitors to GRSM. Repeat visitors were then asked how many visits they have made to GRSM in the last 12 months and the last five years (Figure 17).

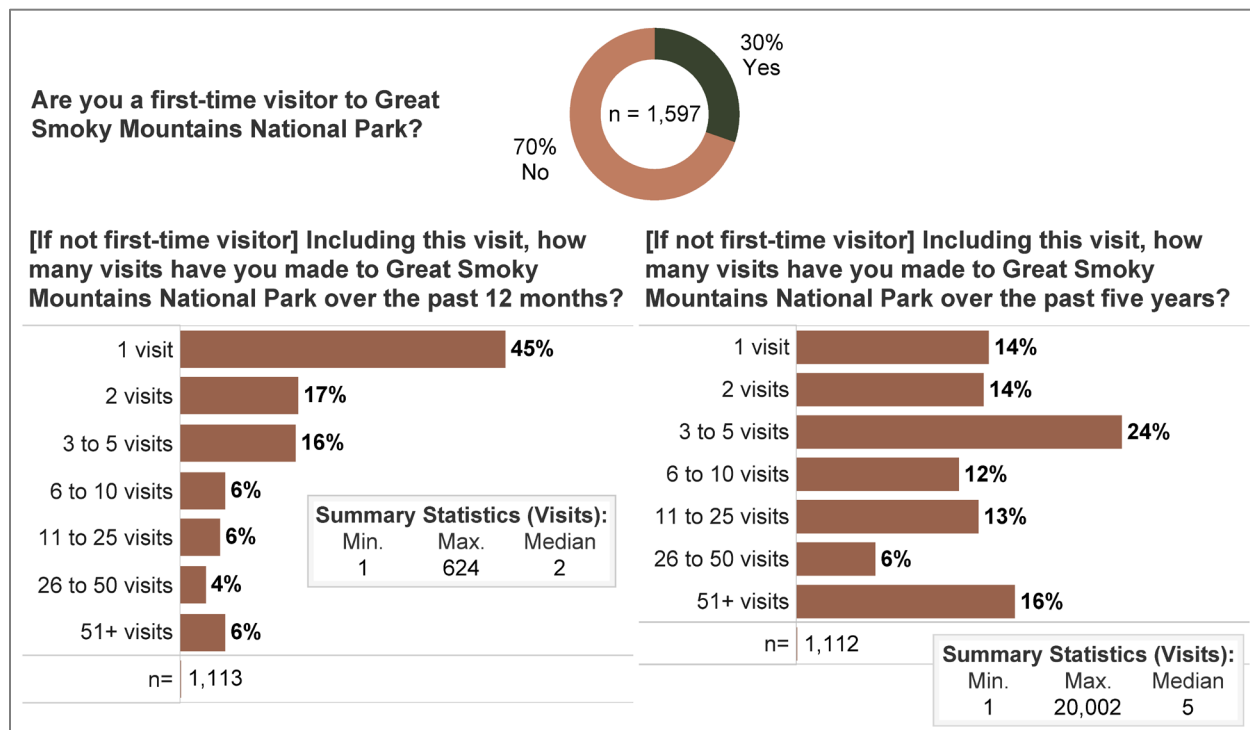


Figure 17. Previous visits to Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Tabular data shown in this figure are presented in [Appendix A, Table 11](#).

NPS

- Over two thirds of respondents (70%) had been to GRSM before, with 30% citing it as their first trip.
- Among the 70% of respondents who were repeat visitors, 45% were on their first visit within the past 12 months.
- However, the largest share of repeat visitors (86%) had visited more than once in the past 5 years.
- The median number of visits made in the past 5 years was 5, including the current trip; 35% of repeat visitors had made more than 10 visits in the past 5 years.

Follow-Up Survey Results

The following section provides results of the 409 follow-up visitor surveys received by mail-back or online following fieldwork conducted in Great Smoky Mountains National Park in summer 2022. Again, caution is recommended in the interpretation of figures with sample size lower than $n = 30$. Additionally, due to rounding differences and/or the opportunity to select more than one response option, some bars with equal response labels may not be equal length and categories on some questions may not sum to 100%.



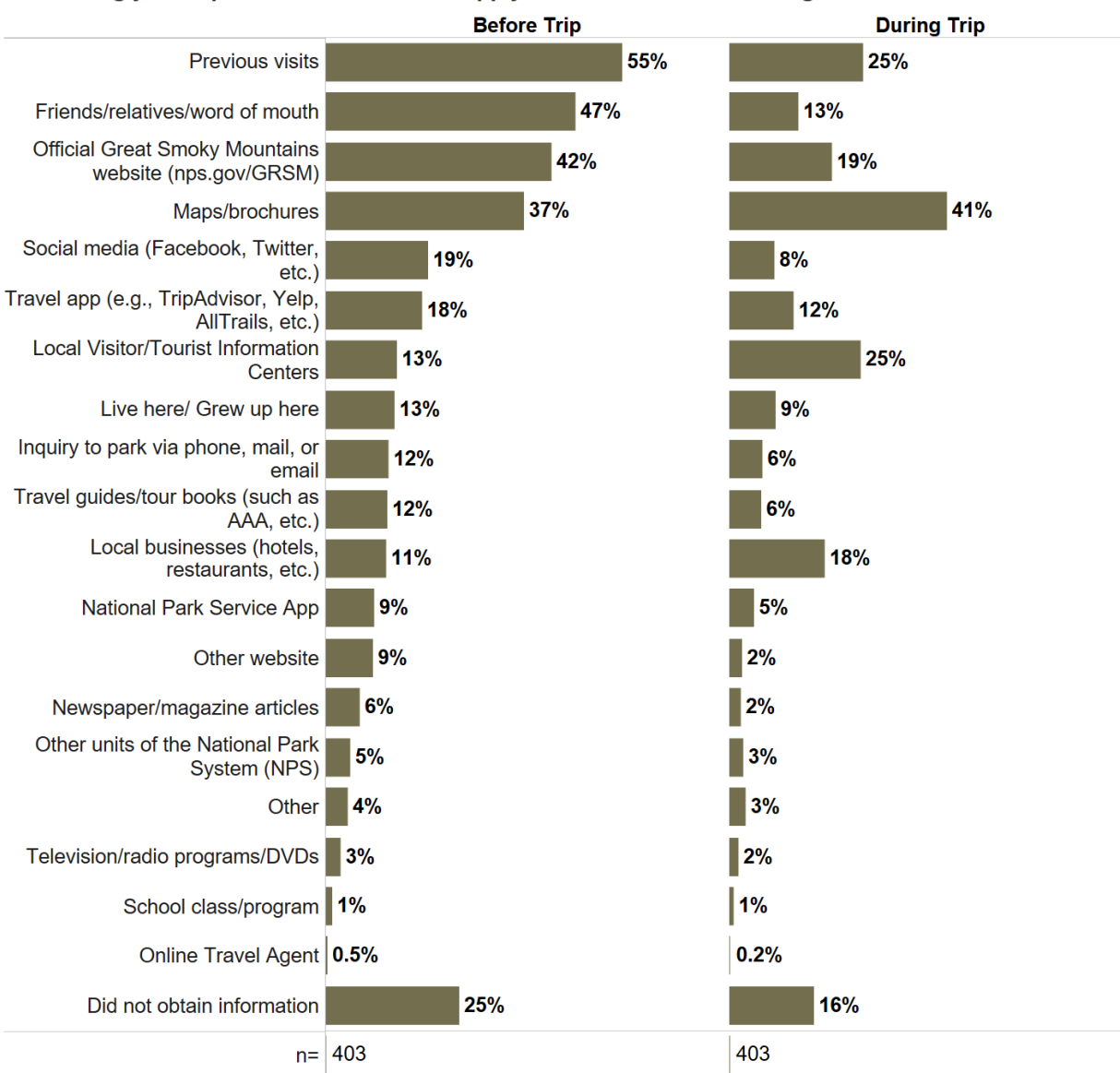
A hiker takes in sweeping views of mist-shrouded, forested mountain ridges from a rocky summit in Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

NPS / ANDREA WALTON

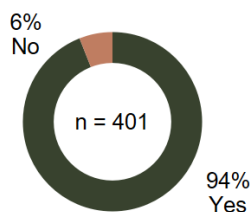
Questions 1–2: Information About Great Smoky Mountains National Park

First, respondents were asked what sources they used to obtain information about GRSM before and during their trip, and whether they had the information they needed on their trip (Figure 18).

What sources did you use to obtain information about Great Smoky Mountains National Park before and during your trip? Please mark all that apply for both before and during



Did you have the information about Great Smoky Mountains National Park you needed on this trip?



Note: Categories above are sorted in descending order by overall share that used each source, either before and/or during their trip (With "Did not obtain" anchored at bottom)

Figure 18. Sources used to obtain information about Great Smoky Mountains National Park before and during the trip.

NPS

- Before their trip, respondents most commonly used information from previous visits (55%) or friends/relatives/word of mouth (47%) to receive information, followed by the official GRSM website (42%), and maps/brochures (37%). Approximately 25% did not use any information.
- During the trip, 41% used maps/brochures with 25% using local visitor/tourist information centers and 18% using local businesses to gather information. Only 16% did not obtain information while on their trip.
- In total, 94% of visitors reported having the information they needed on their trip to GRSM.

Question 3: Transportation

While in the intercept survey, respondents indicated a mode of transportation they used to enter the park on the day of the intercept, the follow-up survey asked respondents to select all forms of transportation they personally used to travel from their home to GRSM on their trip (Figure 19).

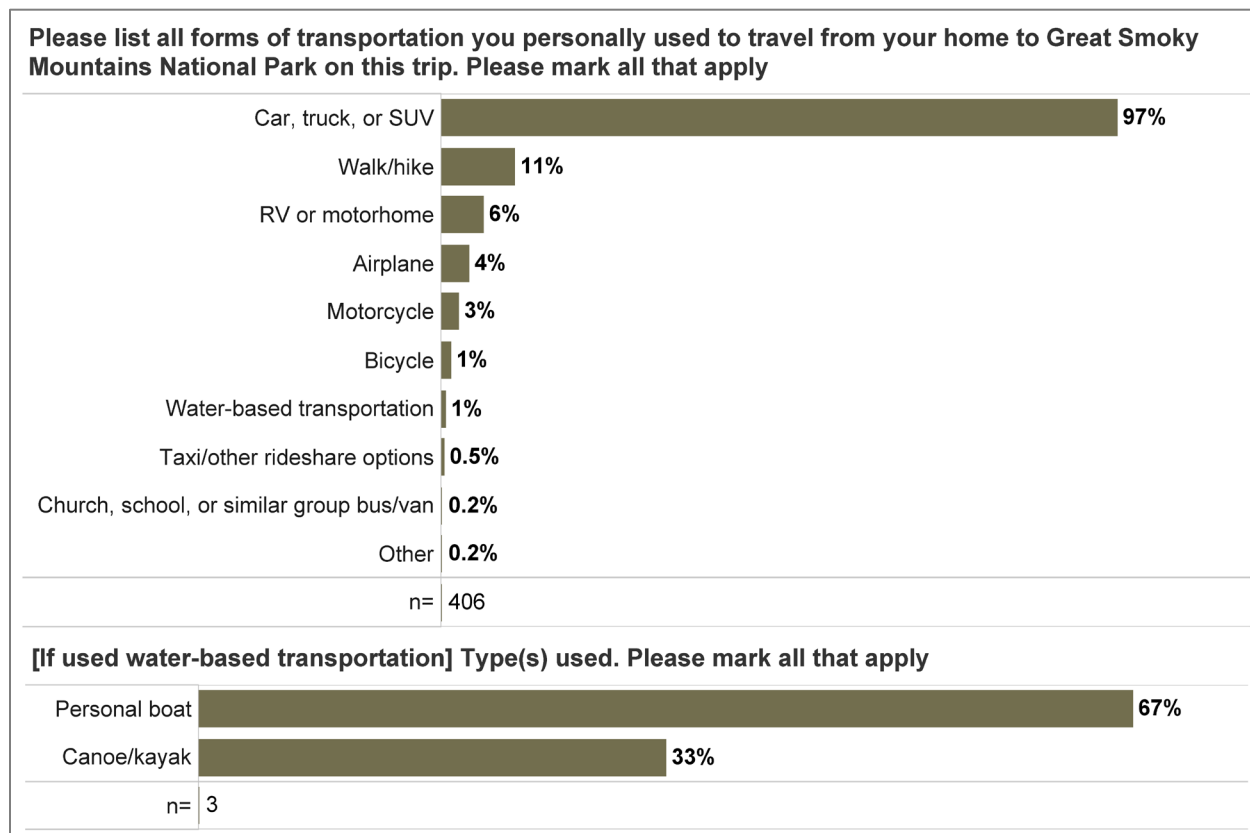


Figure 19. Forms of transportation used to travel from home to Great Smoky Mountains National Park on the recent trip.

NPS

- Nearly all respondents (97%) used a personal vehicle, such as a car, truck, or SUV, at some point during their trip from home to GRSM.
- The second most common mode of travel was walking/hiking (11%), followed by RV or motorhome (6%).

Question 4: Travel Party Composition

Respondents were asked what type of group they were with during their visit to GRSM on the day of the survey (Figure 20).

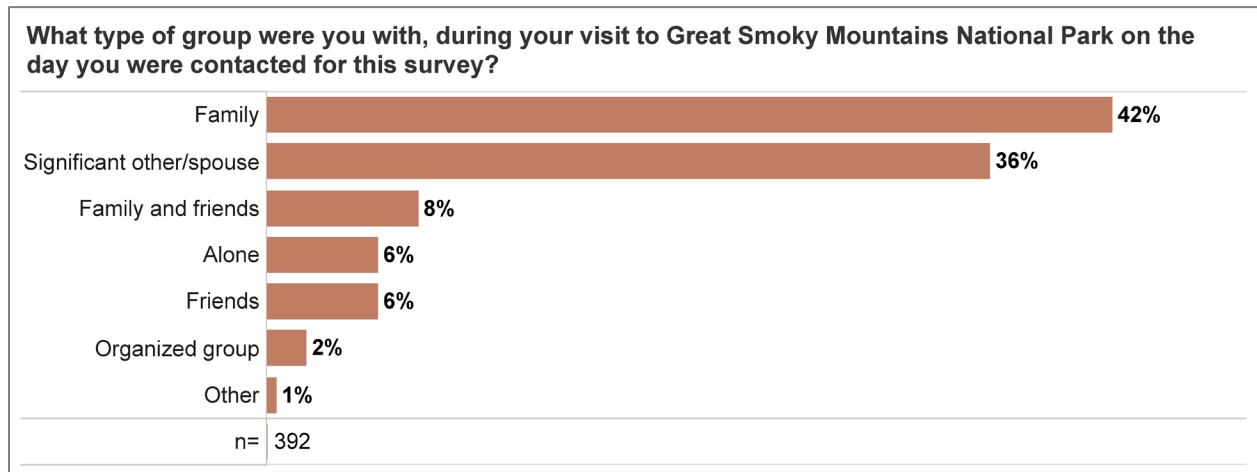


Figure 20. Travel party composition during Great Smoky Mountains National Park visit.

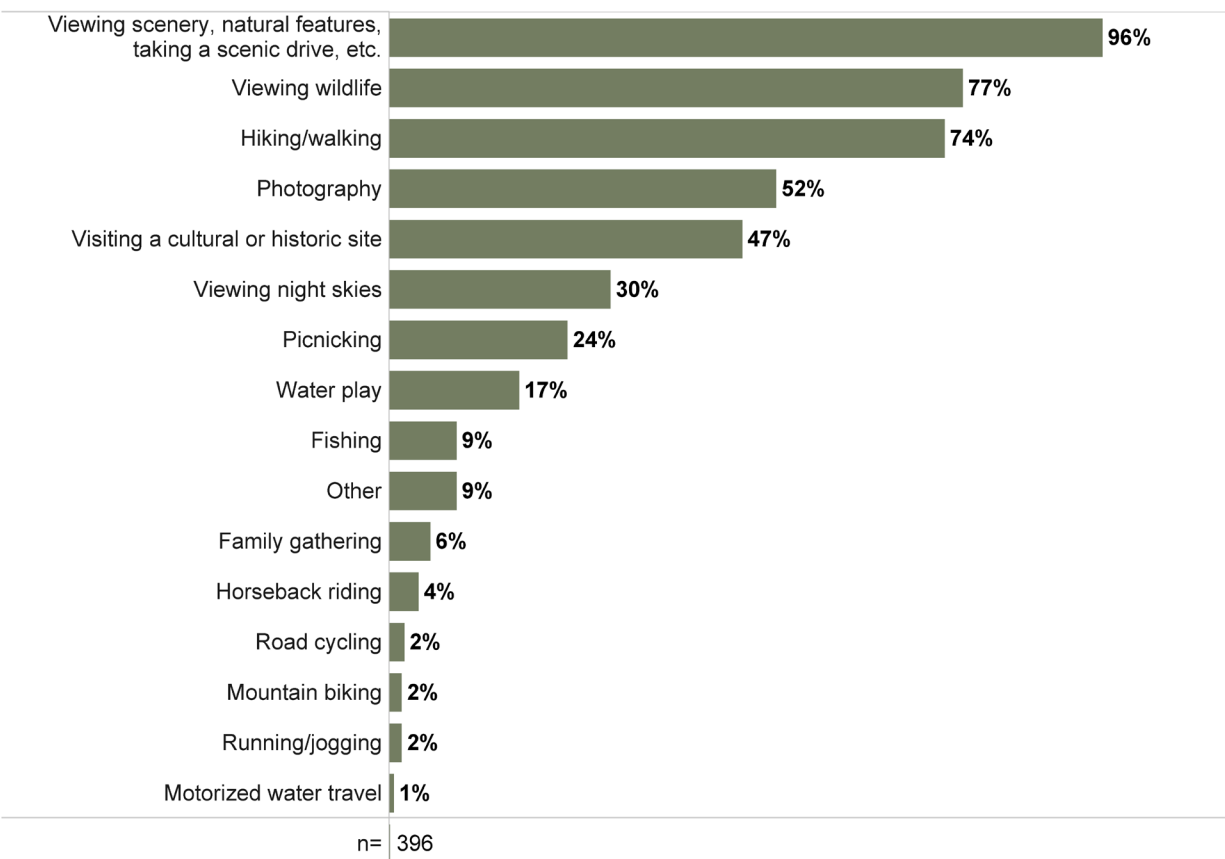
NPS

- Just under $\frac{1}{2}$ of respondents (42%) visited GRSM with their family.
- An additional 36% said they visited with their significant other/spouse and 8% with family and friends.

Questions 11–12: Activity Participation

Survey respondents were asked to identify all activities that they participated in while visiting GRSM, and which of those was their primary activity (Figure 21).

On this trip, in which of the following activities did you personally participate in while visiting Great Smoky Mountains National Park? Please mark all that apply



And which was your primary activity during your visit to Great Smoky Mountains National Park on the day you were contacted for this survey?

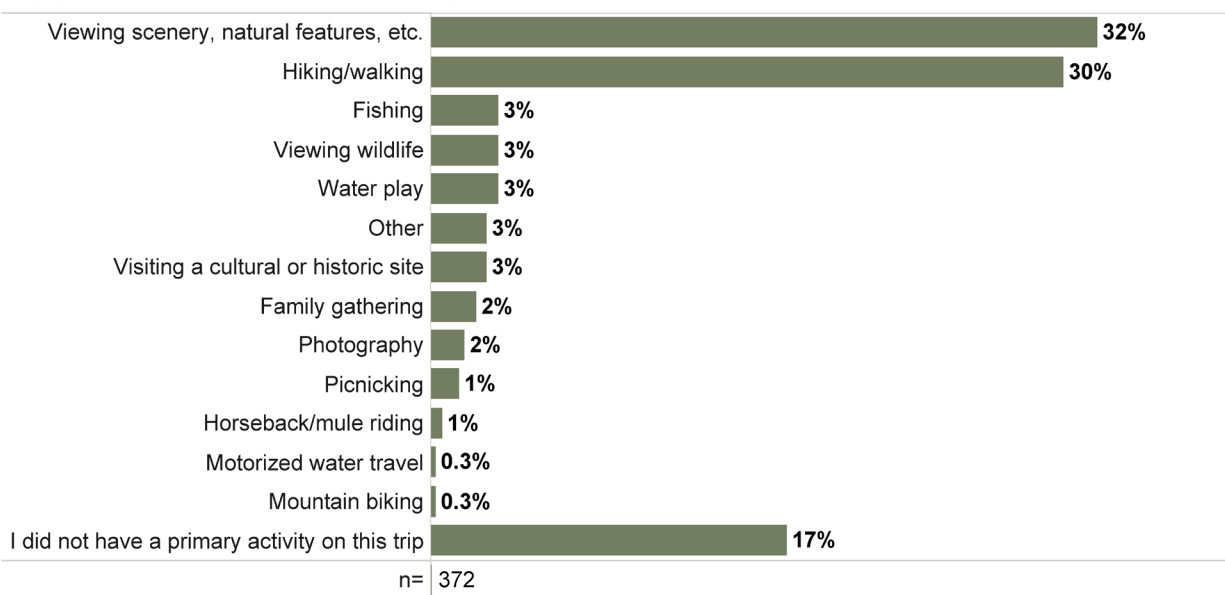
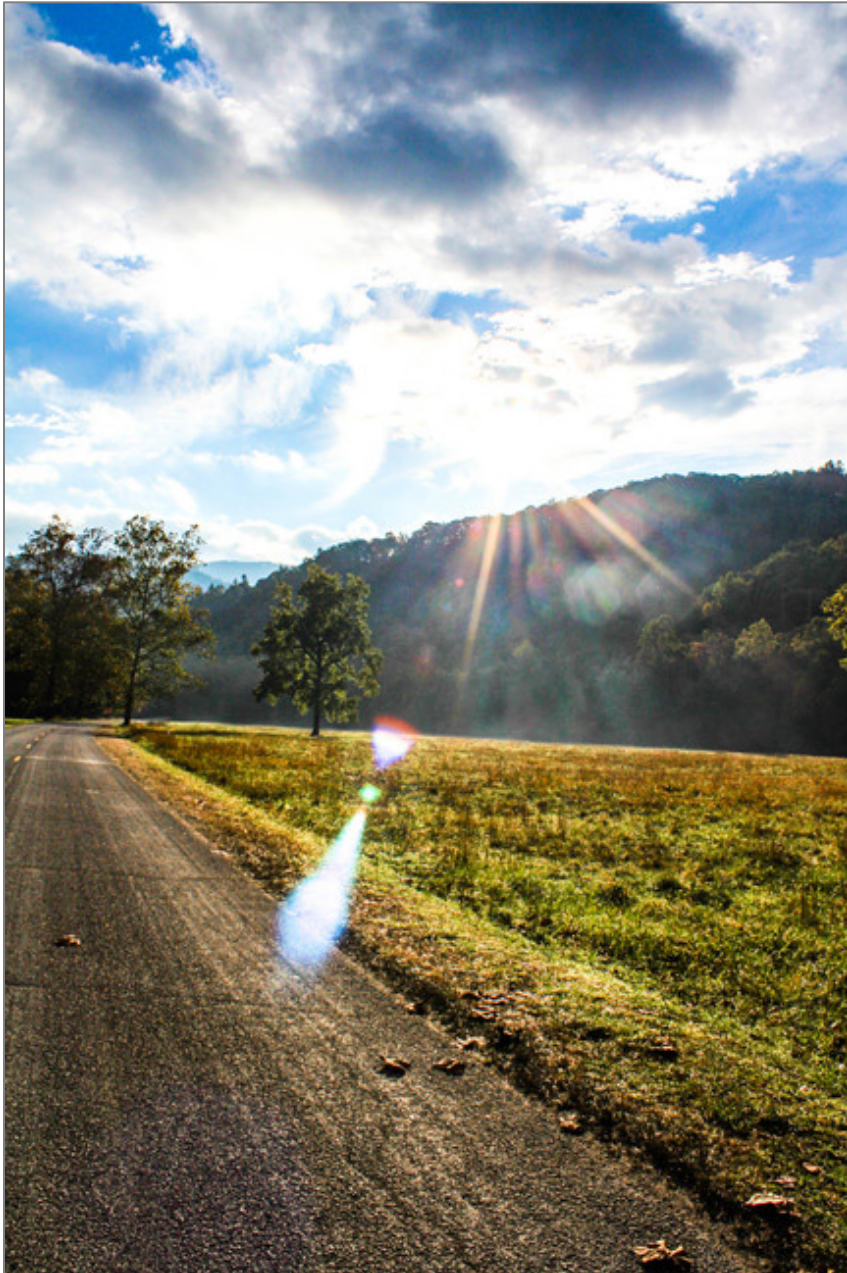


Figure 21. Participation in activities at Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

NPS

- Almost all visitors reported visiting scenery/natural features (96%) while at GRSM. Additionally, 77% reported viewing wildlife with 74% hiking/walking.
- Motorized water travel, running/jogging, road cycling, and mountain biking were all uncommon activities (reported by 2% or fewer of respondents).
- Most respondents (32%) reported viewing scenery/natural features as their primary activity, followed by hiking/walking (30%).



Sunlight breaks through the clouds over a meadow and forested mountain landscape in Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

NPS / VICTORIA STAUFFENBERG

Questions 13–14: Reasons to Visit

Survey respondents were asked to rate the importance of various reasons to visit GRSM on their trip, then asked which of those was the most important reason for them to visit GRSM (Figure 22).

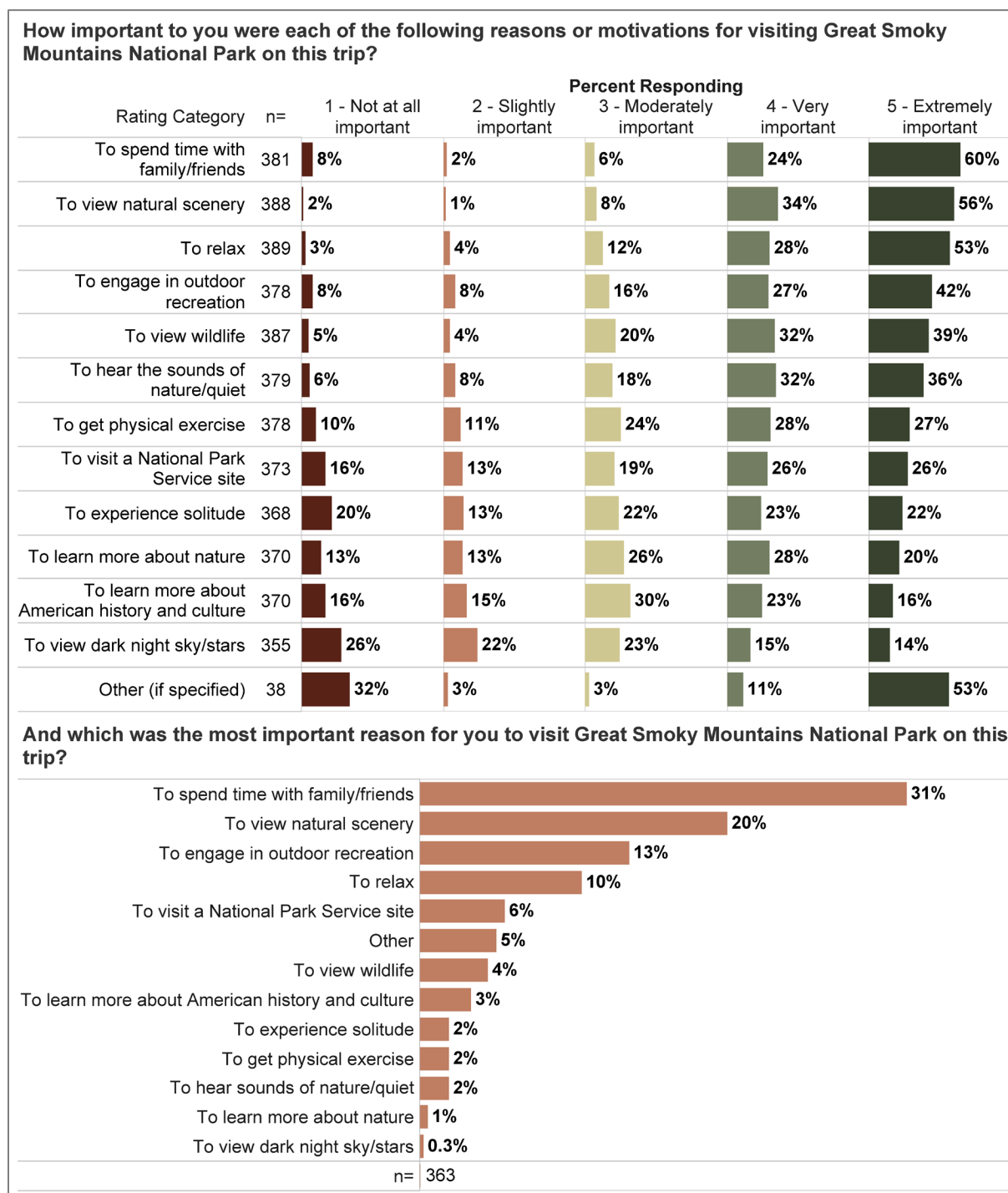


Figure 22. Reasons or motivations to visit Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Tabular data shown in this figure are presented in [Appendix A, Table 12](#).

NPS

- Most visitors chose to spend time with family/friends (60%) and to view natural scenery (56%) as extremely important reasons for their trip to GRSM.
- Other important reasons were to relax and to engage in outdoor recreation (53% and 42% of respondents, respectively, rated the activities as extremely important).
- The least important reasons were to view dark night sky/stars and to learn more about American history and culture (only 14% and 16% of respondents, respectively, reported the activities as extremely important; and 26% and 16% of respondents, respectively, rated the activities as not at all important).
- Among respondents that provided a specification for “other” reasons/motivations (n = 28), many comments elaborated on the general concepts presented in the question by providing specific examples (e.g., to watch fireflies, to hike, to fish, and to get away from people/work).
- The most common response about the most important reason for their visit was to spend time with family/friends (31%), followed by to view natural scenery/features (20%), and to engage in outdoor recreation (13%).

Questions 15–16: Programs, Services, and Learning

Respondents were asked to identify all programs and services that they personally participated in GRSM during their trip (Figure 23).

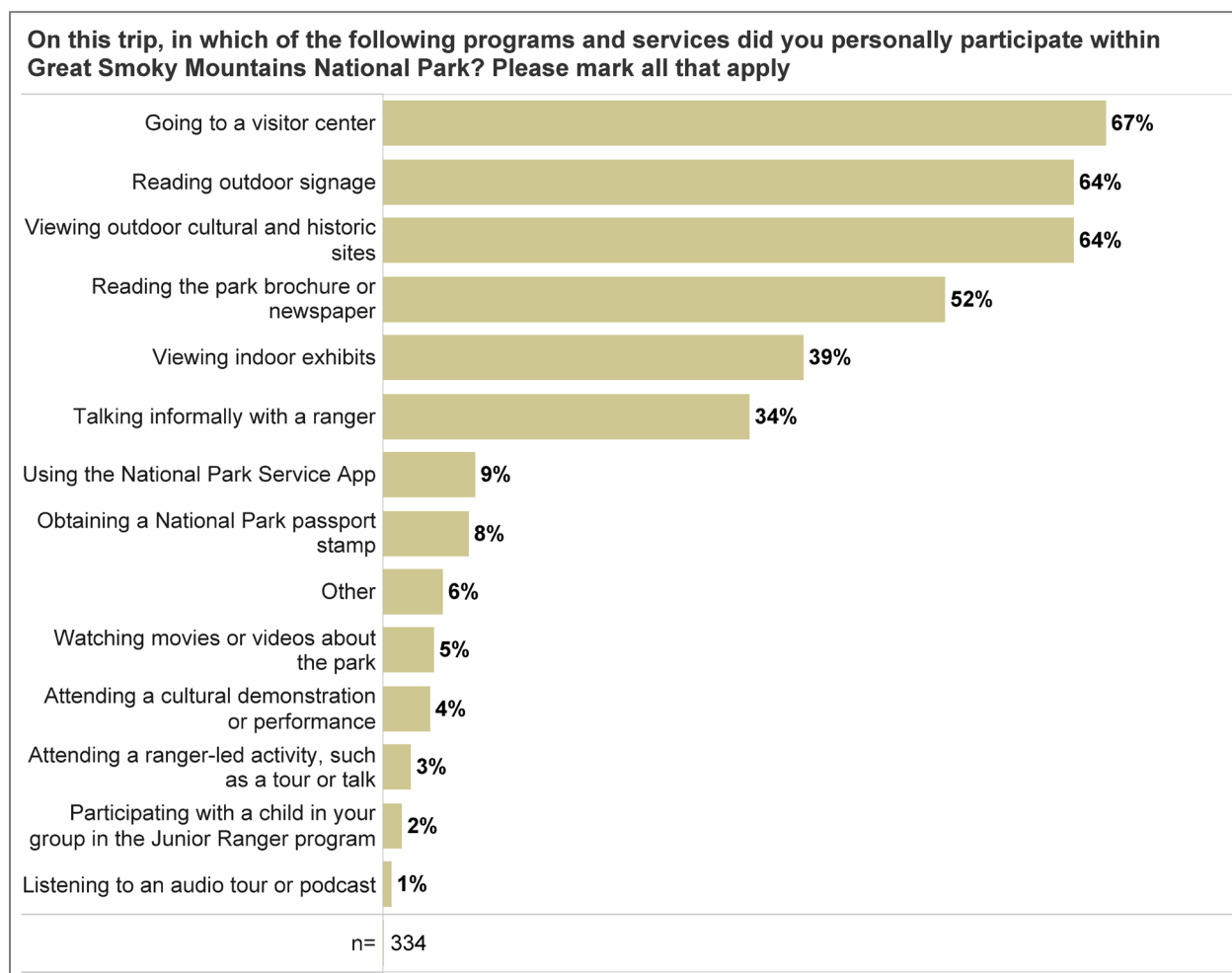


Figure 23. Programs participated while visiting Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

NPS

- The three most-used programs/services were going to a visitor center (67%), reading outdoor signage (64%) and viewing outdoor cultural and historic sites (64%), with approximately $\frac{2}{3}$ of respondents participating in each of them.
- Reading the park brochure or newspaper (52%), viewing indoor exhibits (39%), and talking informally with a ranger (34%) were also relatively popular among visitors.

A follow-up question asked respondents how they would prefer to learn about the various educational aspects of GRSM if they were to visit in the future (Figure 24).

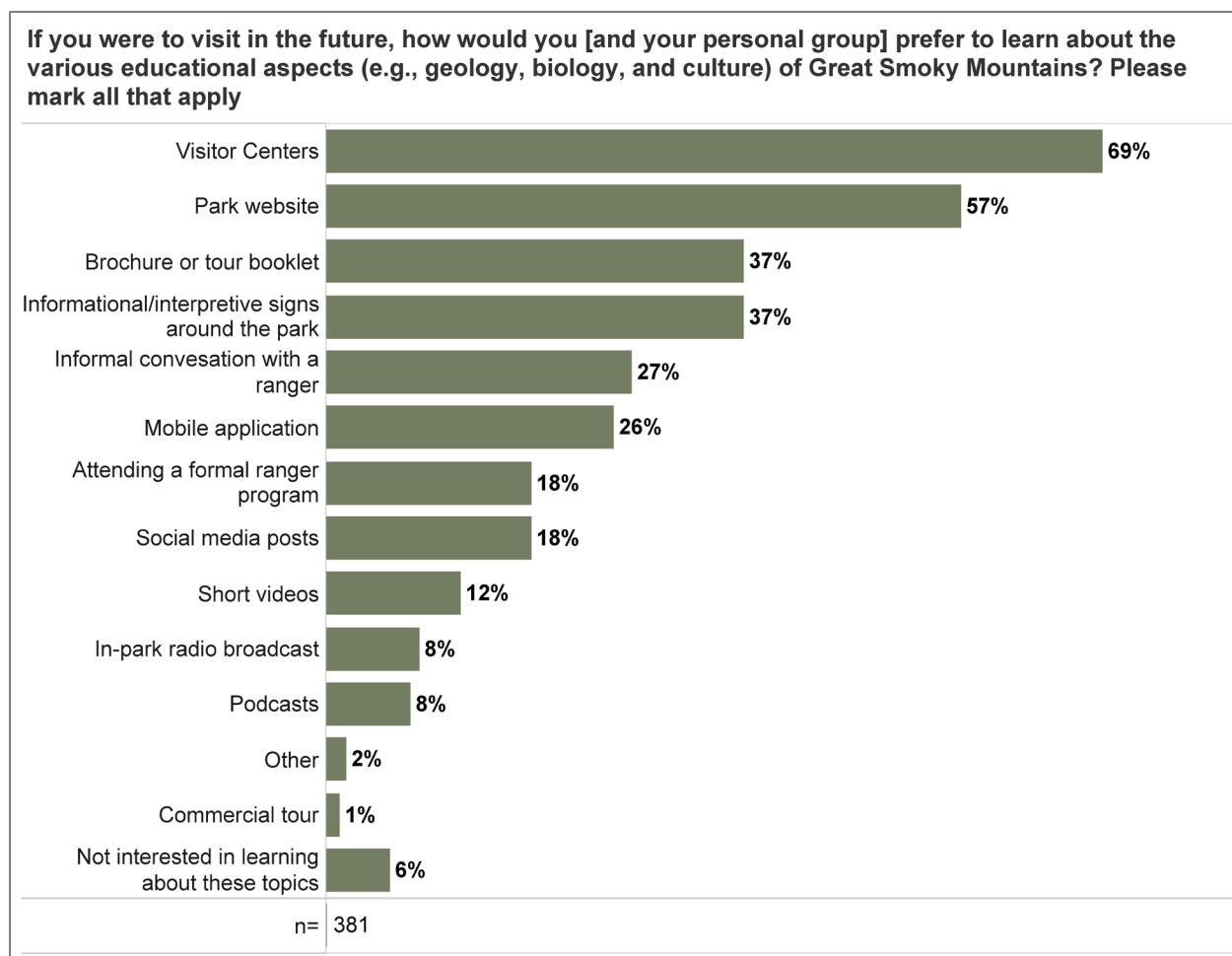


Figure 24. Learning resources.

NPS

- Most respondents preferred visitor centers (69%), the park website (57%), a brochure or tour booklet (37%), or informational/interpretive signs around the park (37%) as means to learn about GRSM.
- Only 6% of respondents were not interested in learning about various educational aspects of the park.

Questions 17–18: Personal Electronic Devices

One survey question focused specifically on the use of personal electronic devices while in the park, while a second pertained more broadly to visitors' feelings about mobile devices. First, respondents were asked which personal electronic devices they used while in GRSM (Figure 25).

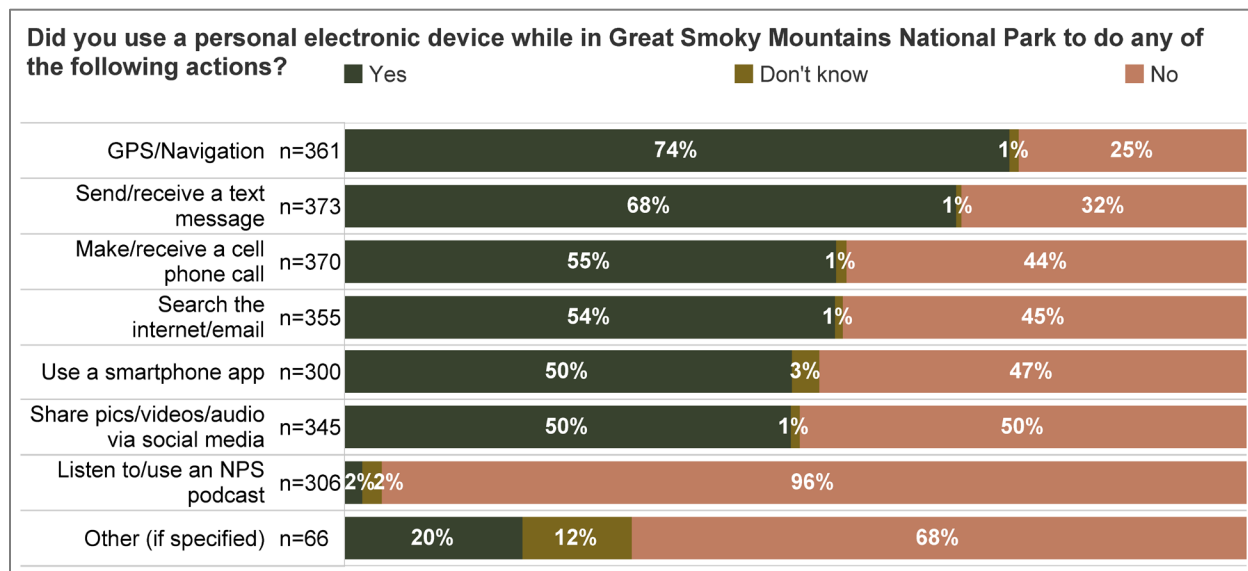


Figure 25. Use of personal electronic devices while visiting Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Tabular data shown in this figure are presented in [Appendix A, Table 13](#).

NPS

- Nearly three quarters of respondents (74%) reported using GPS/Navigation, and over two thirds of respondents (68%) reported sending/receiving a text message.
- Conversely, only 2% of respondents listened to or used an NPS podcast.

Then, respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they agree or disagree with a variety of statements about mobile devices (Figure 26).

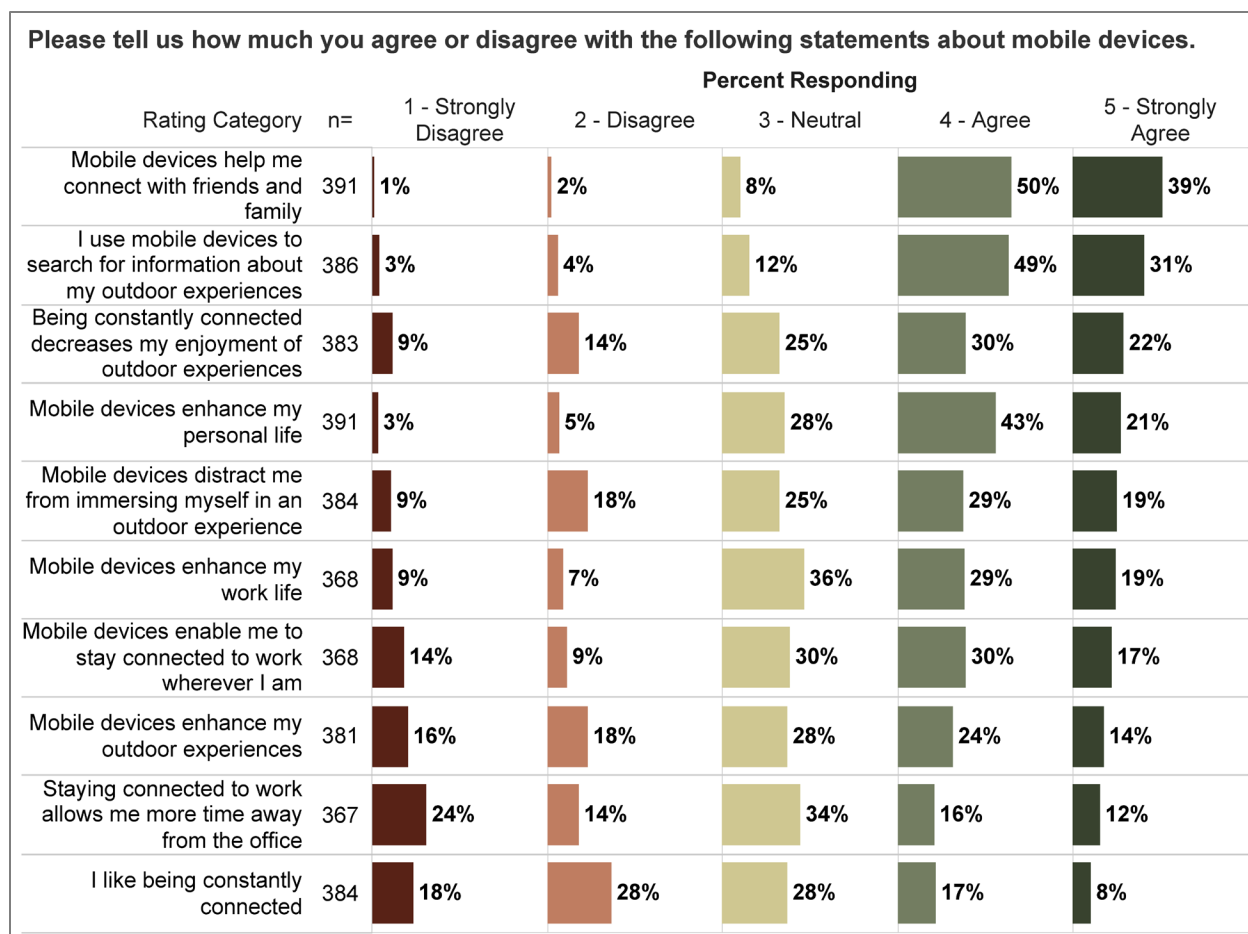


Figure 26. Agreement or disagreement with statements about mobile devices. Tabular data shown in this figure are presented in [Appendix A, Table 14](#).

NPS

- The top-rated statement among respondents regarded mobile devices connecting one with friends and family, with a combined 89% agreeing to some extent. Second, a combined 80% agreed that mobile devices are used to search for information about outdoor experiences.
- The lowest rated statement was related to being constantly connected, with a combined 46% of respondents disagreeing.

Question 19: Physical Difficulties

Respondents were asked if anyone in their personal group had a physical condition that made it difficult to access or participate in park activities or services during their visit to GRSM. If such a condition was identified, respondents were asked to specify the type of difficulty (Figure 27).

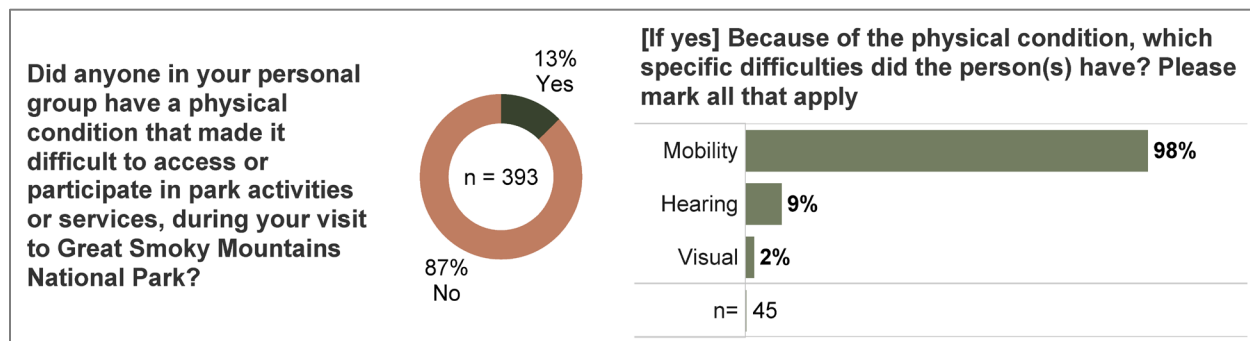


Figure 27. Physical difficulties while visiting Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

NPS

- The majority of respondents (87%) reported that nobody in their personal group had a physical condition that made it difficult to access or participate in park activities or services during their visit to GRSM.
- Among the 13% of visitors who identified at least one difficulty, 98% reported mobility issues in their group, with small portions also reporting hearing (9%) and/or visual difficulties (2%).

Questions 22–27: Visitor Experience

Respondents were asked if their visit to GRSM met their expectations (Figure 28).

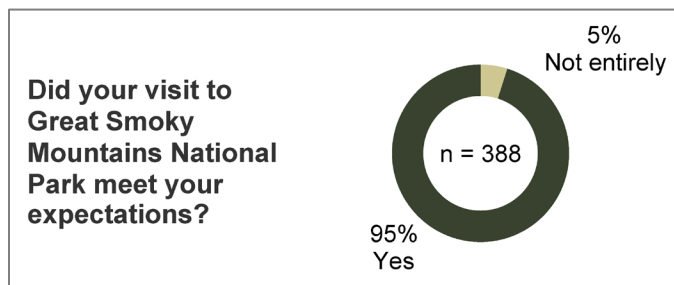


Figure 28. Meeting Great Smoky Mountains National Park expectations.

NPS

- The majority of respondents (95%) reported that their visit to GRSM met their expectations, while 5% of respondents said it did not meet their expectations entirely, and no respondents indicated that it did not meet their expectations at all.
- In an open-ended follow-up question, respondents who indicated that GRSM did not meet their expectations were asked to elaborate. These comments are provided as an accompanying document for review.

Respondents were then given several statements about GRSM and asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with each given statement (Figure 29).

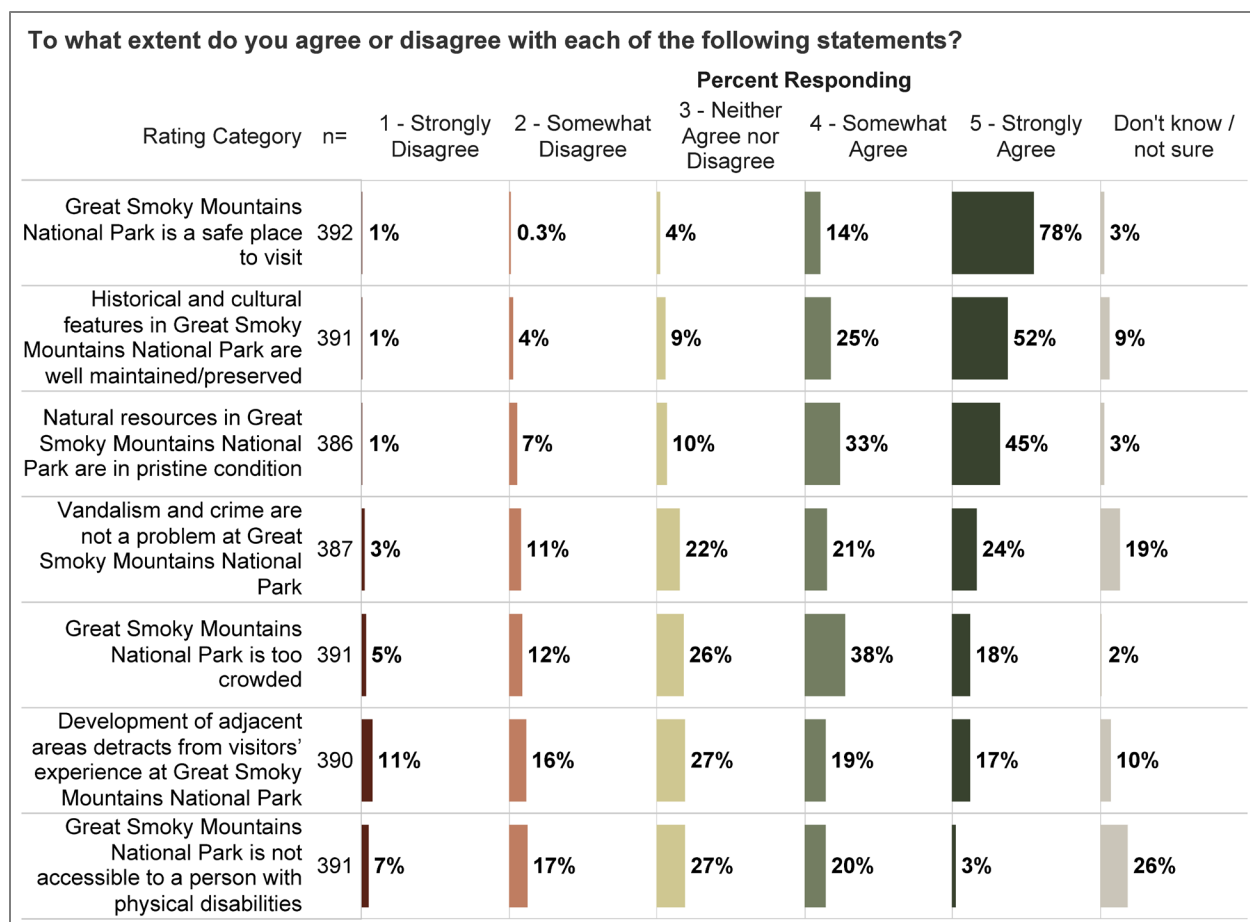


Figure 29. Rating Great Smoky Mountains National Park experience. Tabular data shown in this figure are presented in [Appendix A, Table 15](#).

NPS

- From all the statements listed, “Great Smoky Mountains National Park is a safe place to visit” received the most consensus with a combined 92% of respondents saying they either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed with the sentiment. That was followed by “Historical and cultural features in Great Smoky Mountains National Park are well maintained/preserved” and “Natural resources in Great Smoky Mountains National Park are in pristine condition” (a combined 77% and 78% of respondents, respectively, strongly or somewhat agreed with these statements).
- Conversely, “Great Smoky Mountains National Park is not accessible to a person with physical disabilities” and “Development of adjacent areas detracts from visitors’ experience at Great Smoky Mountains National Park” received the least support.

Next, respondents were asked to rate the quality of park facilities, visitor services, and recreational opportunities in GRSM (Figure 30).

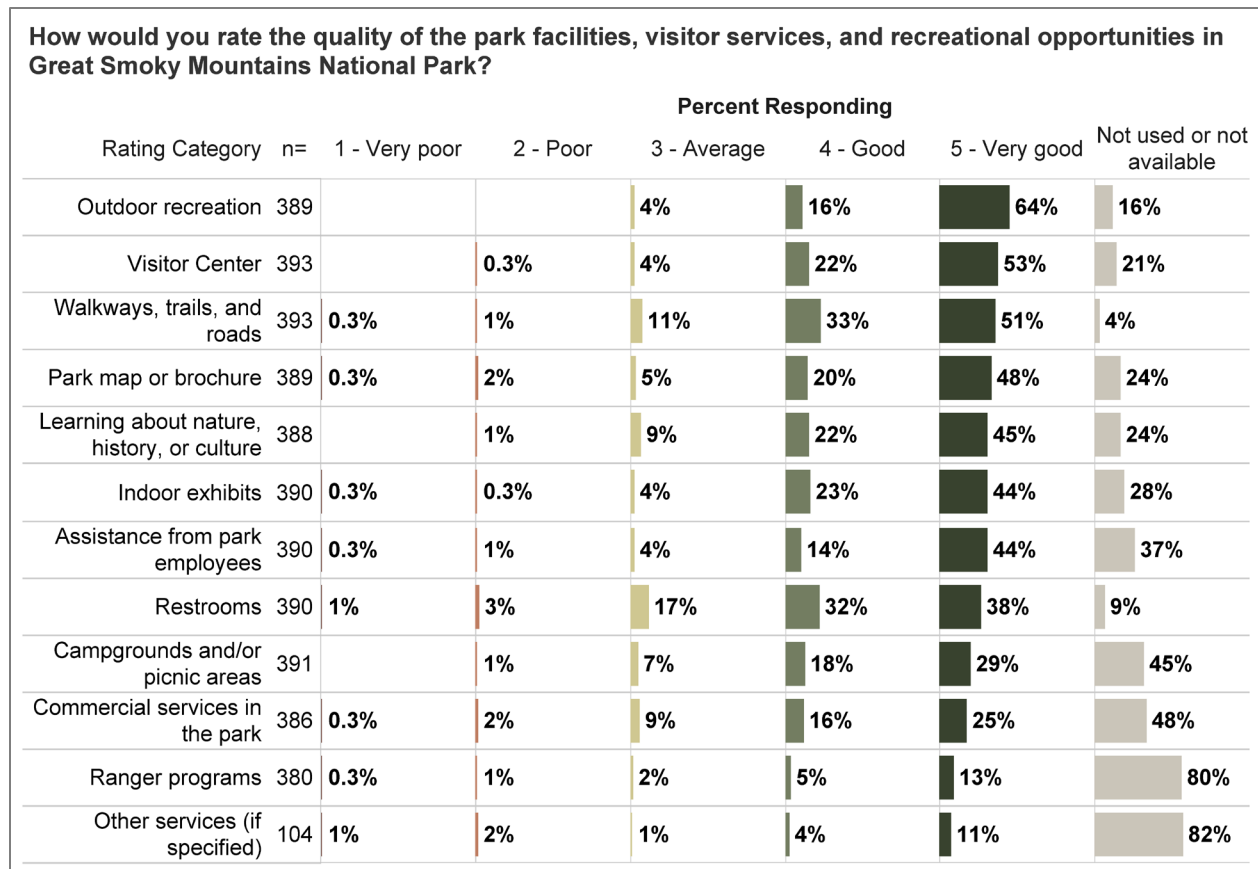


Figure 30. Rating the quality of Great Smoky Mountains National Park facilities, visitor services, and recreational opportunities. Tabular data shown in this figure are presented in [Appendix A, Table 16](#).

NPS

- Over half of visitors (ranging from 51% to 64%) rated outdoor recreation, visitor centers, and walkways, trails, and roads as very good.
- Conversely, lower rated facilities/services included ranger programs (25% very good), commercial services in the park (25% very good), and campgrounds and/or picnic areas (29% very good). For these ratings categories, visitors were most likely to say that they were either not available, or they did not use them. Those who used the facilities were likely to rate them very good.

After rating specific aspects, respondents were then asked to rate overall quality of the park facilities, visitor services, and recreation opportunities (Figure 31).

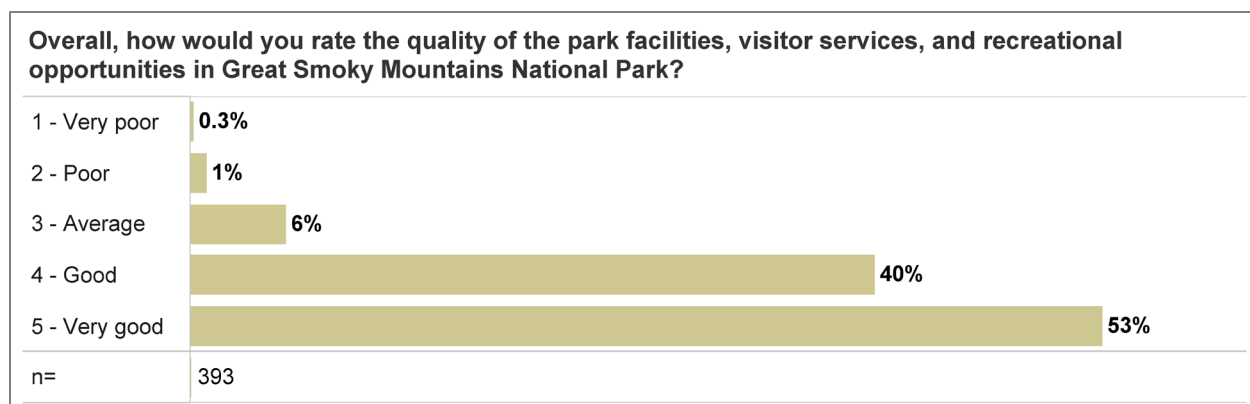


Figure 31. Rating overall quality of Great Smoky Mountains National Park facilities, visitor services, and recreational opportunities.

NPS

- In general, about half of respondents (53%) rated the quality of the park facilities, visitor services, and recreational opportunities in GRSM as very good, and another 40% rated them as good.
- Approximately 7% rated the overall quality as average or below.

Next, visitors were asked what reasons prevented them from visiting a site within GRSM that they had planned to visit, if applicable (Figure 32).

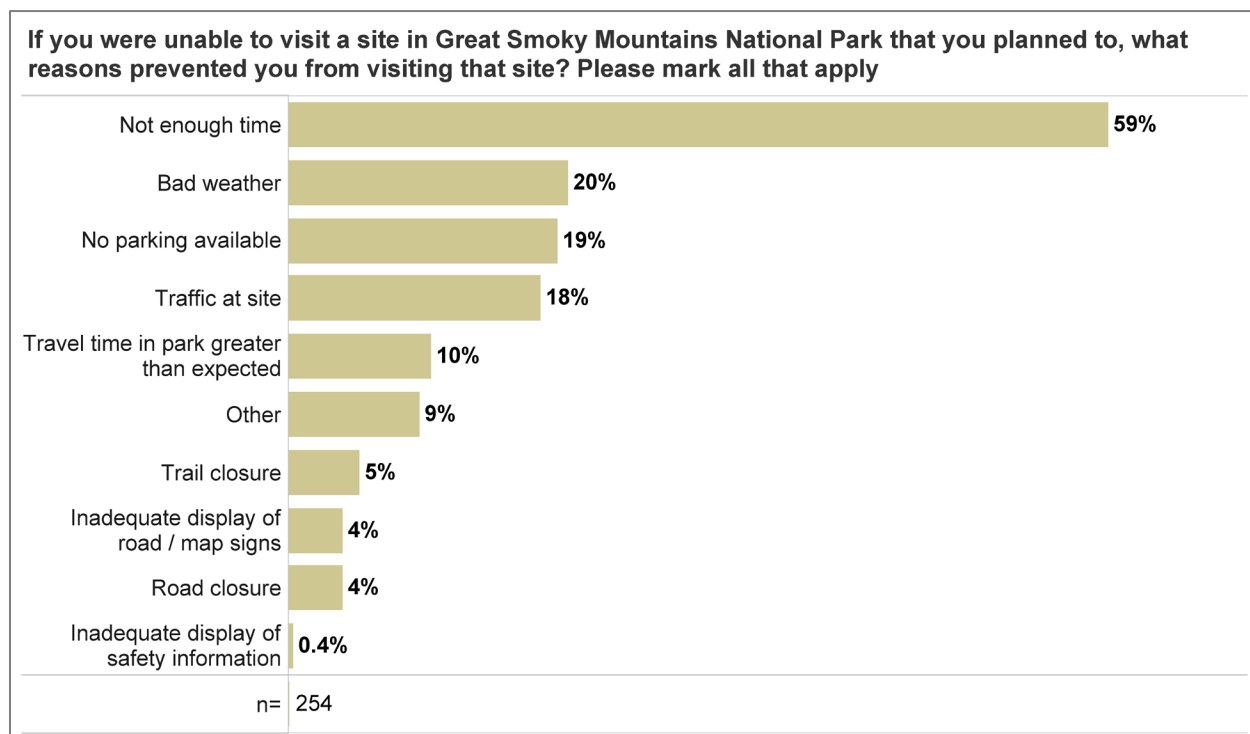


Figure 32. Reasons preventing visiting planned sites, if applicable.

NPS

- The most common reason for not visiting a site was simply not having enough time (59%). Bad weather (20%), no parking (19%), and traffic at the site (18%) also were mentioned by visitors as possible barriers for visitation.
- Road closures (4%), inadequate display of signs (4%) and trail closures (5%) were least common.

Finally, respondents were asked about their likelihood to use a variety of sources to obtain information about conditions at GRSM (Figure 33).

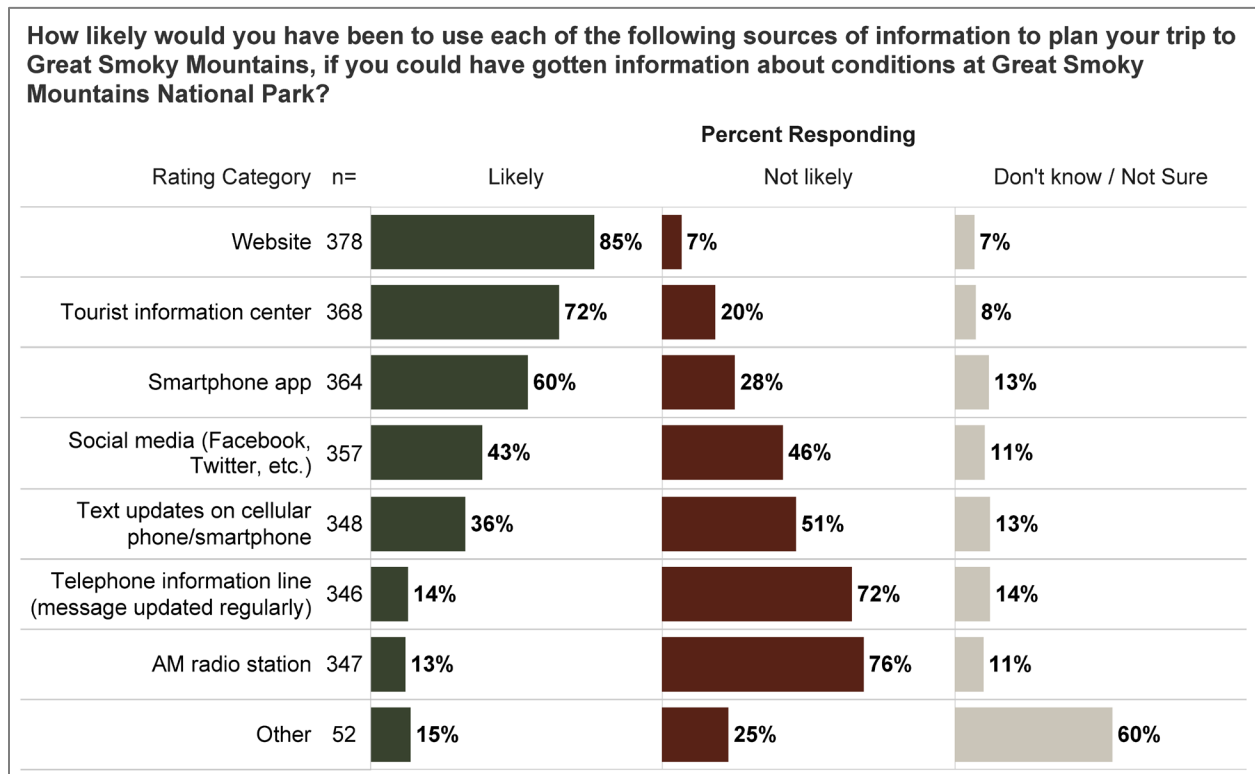


Figure 33. Likelihood to use sources of information to plan a trip to Great Smoky Mountains National Park if such sources gave information about conditions. Tabular data shown in this figure are presented in [Appendix A, Table 17](#).

NPS

- Among all the sources used to plan, respondents were most likely to use the website (85% likely), tourist information center (72% likely), and a smartphone app (60% likely).
- Respondents said they were least likely to use an AM radio station (76% not likely) and a telephone information line (72% not likely).

Questions 28–36: Background/Demographics

In the final section of the follow-up survey, respondents were asked various questions about their personal and household demographics. Figure 34 depicts descriptive statistics for respondent gender, age, and education.

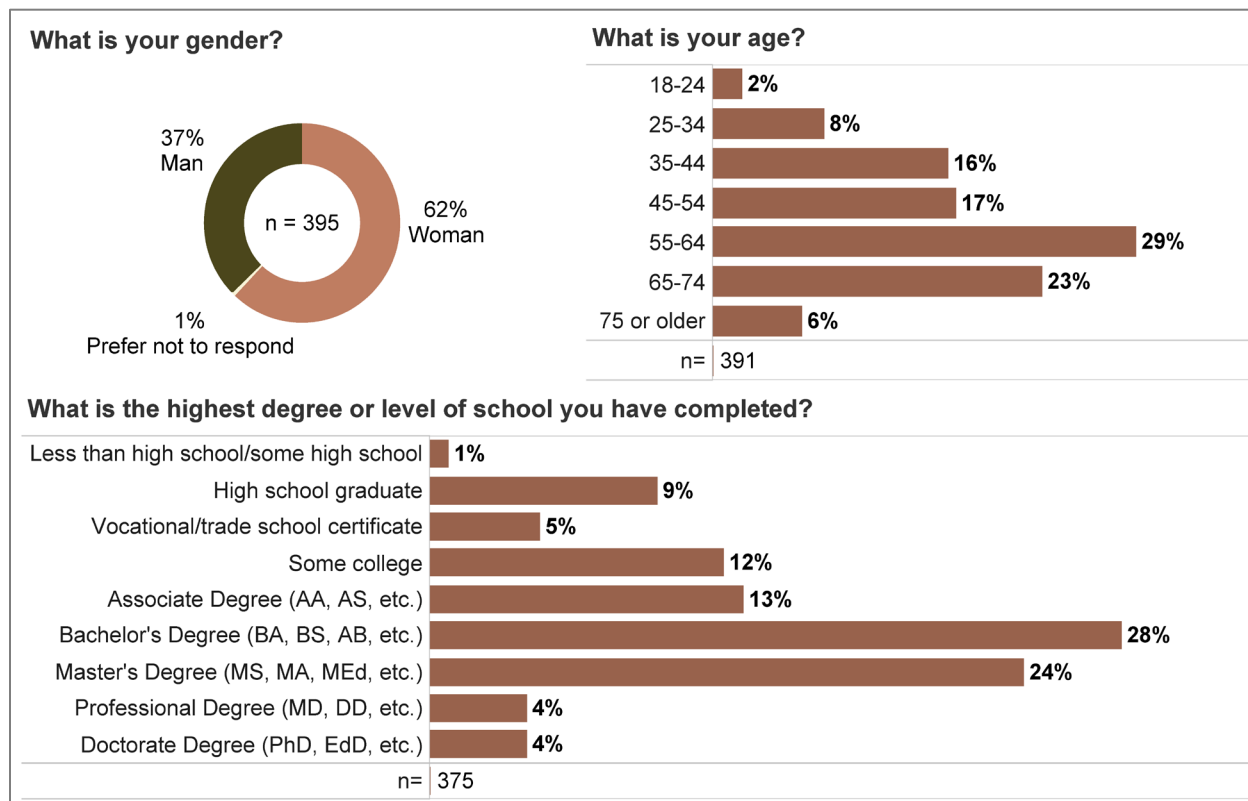


Figure 34. Respondent demographics: gender, age, and level of education.

NPS

- Follow-up survey respondents were slightly more likely to be women than men (62% vs. 37%).
- The most common age categories were 55–64 years old (29%), 65–74 (23%), and 45–54 (17%). The least represented age group were those aged 18–24 (only 2% of the participants surveyed).
- Most survey respondents were highly educated, with a combined 60% having a bachelor's degree or higher level of education.

Respondents were also asked to identify their race(s) and if they were of Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin (Figure 35).

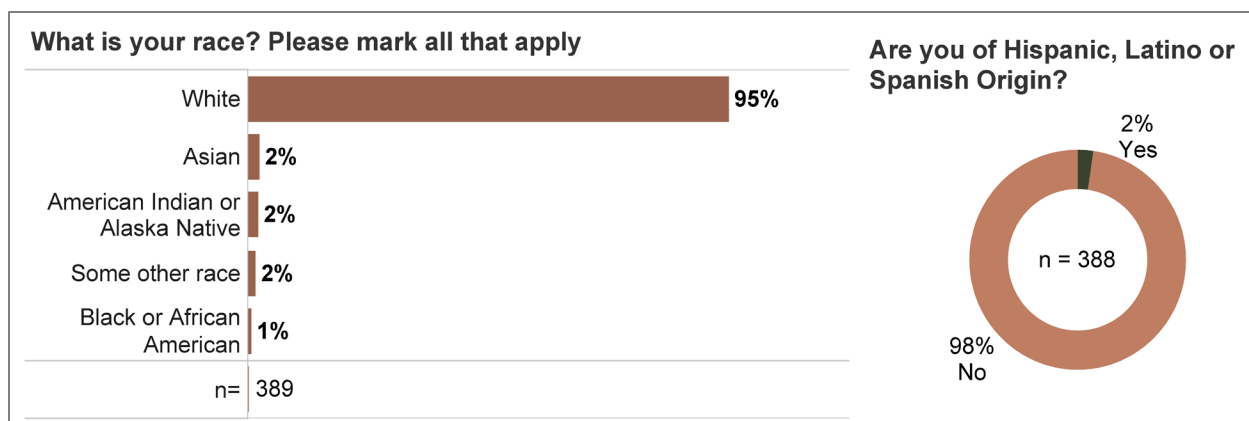


Figure 35. Respondent demographics: race and ethnicity.

NPS

- The majority of respondents (95%) were White, while the remaining 5% of visitors identified as a variety of other races.
- Most respondents (98%) were not of Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin.

At a household level, respondents were asked to report annual income and number of contributors, as well as how many people (adults and children) live in their household (Figure 36).

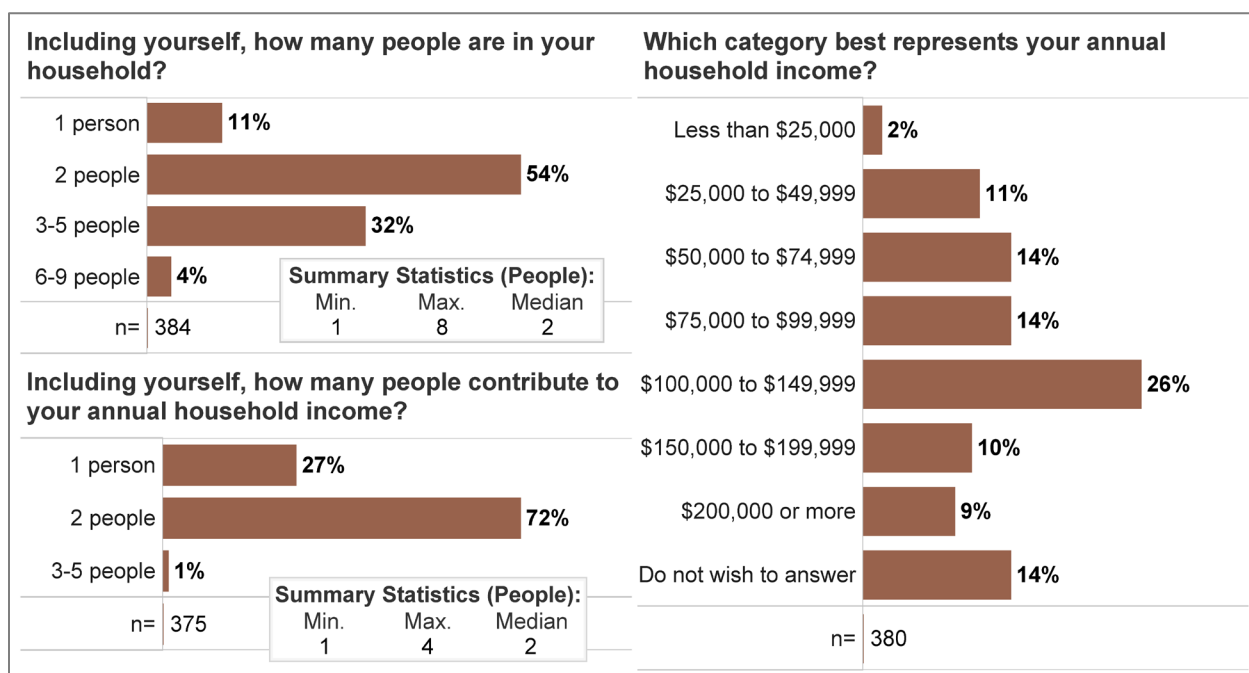


Figure 36. Household demographics: annual household income and household size. Tabular data shown in this figure are presented in [Appendix A, Table 18](#).

NPS

- Over ½ of respondents (54%) had 2 people in their household, followed by 3–5 people (another 32%).
- In addition to being highly educated, GRSM visitors are also relatively affluent. Just over ¼ of respondents (26%) reported that their annual household income was between \$100,000 and \$149,999, and another 19% earned more than \$150,000.
- Most respondents (72%) came from a dual-income household.

Finally, respondents were asked about their language preference (Figure 37).

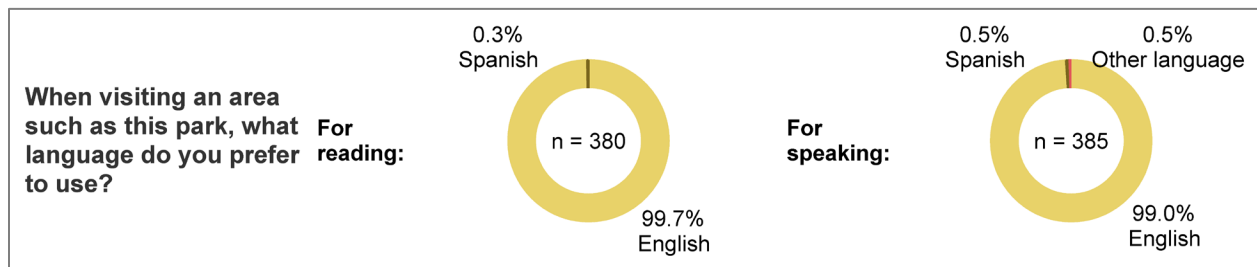


Figure 37. Respondent's language preference.

NPS

- While 2% of respondents were of Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin, the overwhelming majority of respondents (99%+) preferred to use English both for reading and speaking when visiting an area such as GRSM.
- Less than 1% of respondents preferred Spanish for either reading and/or speaking.

Literature Cited

National Park Service (NPS). 2022. 2022 Socioeconomic Monitoring of Great Smoky Mountains National Park: Visitor Intercept and Post-Trip Surveys.
<https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/Reference/Profile/2318806>

Appendix A: Accessible Tables

This appendix contains accessible tables with data from figures found in the body of the report (Tables 8–18). Table captions include hyperlinks to the corresponding figures.

Table 8. Data from [Figure 7](#). Number of nights spent in the local area around Great Smoky Mountains National Park, by accommodation type.

Accommodation Type	n	Min.	Max.	Median
Backcountry Camping in Great Smoky Mountains National Park	5	1	5	1
Camping in Great Smoky Mountains National Park	90	1	110	3
Camping outside Great Smoky Mountains National Park	76	1	180	4
Lodging in Great Smoky Mountains National Park	17	1	5	2
Lodging outside Great Smoky Mountains National Park	1,041	1	150	4
Unpaid accommodations	30	1	120	4

Table 9. Data from [Figure 8](#). Number of adults and children in respondent's personal group while visiting Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Group Composition	n	Min.	Max.	Median
Adults	1,597	1	250	2
Children	1,597	0	11	0
Total People in Party	1,597	1	250	3

Table 10. Data from [Figure 16](#). Number of people in respondent's vehicle when entering Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Question	n	Min.	Max.	Median
[If entered by car, truck, or SUV] Including yourself, how many people were traveling in your vehicle when you entered Great Smoky Mountains National Park?	1,557	1	8	2
[If entered by RV/motorhome] Including yourself, how many people were traveling in your RV when you entered Great Smoky Mountains National Park?	6	1	6	2
[If entered by motorcycle] Including yourself, how many people were traveling on your motorcycle when you entered Great Smoky Mountains National Park?	23	1	3	1

Table 11. Data from [Figure 17](#). Previous visits to Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Question	n	Min.	Max.	Median
[If not first-time visitor] Including this visit, how many visits have you made to Great Smoky Mountains National Park over the past 12 months?	1,113	1	624	2
[If not first-time visitor] Including this visit, how many visits have you made to Great Smoky Mountains National Park over the past five years?	1,112	1	20,002	5

Table 12. Data from [Figure 22](#). Reasons or motivations to visit Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Rating Category	n
To visit a National Park Service site	373
To experience solitude	368
To hear the sounds of nature/quiet	379
To learn more about nature	370
To learn more about American history and culture	370
To spend time with family/friends	381
To get physical exercise	378
To engage in outdoor recreation	378
To view wildlife	387
To view natural scenery	388
To relax	389
To view dark night sky/stars	355
Other (if specified)	38

Table 13. Data from [Figure 25](#). Use of personal electronic devices.

Device Use	n
Make/receive a cell phone call	370
Send/receive a text message	373
Search the internet/email	355
GPS/Navigation	361
Share pics/videos/audio via social media	345
Use a smartphone app	306
Listen to/use an NPS podcast	66
Other (if specified)	370

Table 14. Data from [Figure 26](#). Statements about mobile devices. Scale: 1 = “Strongly disagree” to 5 = “Strongly agree.”

Device Use	n	Average	Std. Deviation
Mobile devices enhance my personal life	391	3.73	0.953
Mobile devices help me connect with friends and family	391	4.25	0.754
Mobile devices enhance my work life	368	3.42	1.139
Mobile devices enable me to stay connected to work wherever I am	368	3.28	1.255
Staying connected to work allows me more time away from the office	367	2.78	1.301
Mobile devices enhance my outdoor experiences	381	3.01	1.272
I use mobile devices to search for information about my outdoor experiences	386	4.00	0.958
I like being constantly connected	384	2.67	1.188
Being constantly connected decreases my enjoyment of outdoor experiences	383	3.42	1.236
Mobile devices distract me from immersing myself in an outdoor experience	384	3.32	1.218

Table 15. Data from [Figure 29](#). Rating Great Smoky Mountains National Park experience. Scale: 1 = “Strongly disagree” to 5 = “Strongly agree.”

Rating Category	n	Average	Std. Deviation
Great Smoky Mountains National Park is a safe place to visit	392	4.73	0.644
Great Smoky Mountains National Park is too crowded	391	3.52	1.073
Natural resources in Great Smoky Mountains National Park are in pristine condition	386	4.17	0.970
Vandalism and crime are not a problem at Great Smoky Mountains National Park	387	3.63	1.150
Great Smoky Mountains National Park is not accessible to a person with physical disabilities	391	2.93	1.023
Historical and cultural features in Great Smoky Mountains National Park are well maintained/preserved	391	4.37	0.884
Development of adjacent areas detracts from visitors' experience at Great Smoky Mountains National Park	390	3.18	1.263

Table 16. Data from [Figure 30](#). Rating the quality of Great Smoky Mountains National Park facilities, visitor services, and recreational opportunities. Scale: 1 = “Very poor” to 5 = “Excellent.”

Rating Category	n	Average	Std. Deviation
Visitor Center	393	4.62	0.594
Indoor exhibits	390	4.54	0.648
Restrooms	390	4.13	0.910
Walkways, trails, and roads	393	4.41	0.728
Campgrounds and/or picnic areas	391	4.37	0.763
Assistance from park employees	390	4.59	0.715
Park map or brochure	389	4.50	0.769
Ranger programs	380	4.44	0.866
Commercial services in the park (food, lodging, gifts, rental, etc.)	386	4.20	0.907
Other services (if specified)	104	4.16	1.259
Learning about nature, history, or culture	388	4.46	0.727
Outdoor recreation (sightseeing, camping, bicycling, boating, hiking, etc.)	389	4.72	0.542

Table 17. Data from [Figure 33](#). Likelihood to use sources to obtain information about conditions at Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Device Use	n
Website	378
Smartphone app	364
Social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)	357
Text updates on cellular phone/smartphone	348
AM radio station	347
Telephone information line (message updated regularly)	346
Tourist information center	368
Other	52

Table 18. Data from [Figure 36](#). Household demographics: annual household income and household size.

Question	n	Min.	Max.	Median
Including yourself, how many people are in your household?	384	1	8	2
Including yourself, how many people contribute to your annual household income?	375	1	4	2

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