

WALTON COUNTY TOURISM

2023 Visitor Tracking
& Economic Impact Study



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Visitor Tracking Study

This report is based on 3,036 internet and in-person surveys of out-of-county guests who stayed at beach communities across Walton County and with visitors at various locations along the beaches between January 2023 and December 2023.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



ANNUAL SNAPSHOT

CY2023



5,170,700

TOTAL VISITORS

vs. CY2022

↓ 2.5%



3,713,200

ROOM NIGHTS

↑ 0.6%



\$4,792,254,400

DIRECT SPENDING

↓ 1.9%



\$6,852,923,700

ECONOMIC IMPACT

↓ 5.2%



\$60,088,287

TDT

vs. CY2022

↓ 4.1%



52.0%

OCCUPANCY

↓ 7.1%



\$384.06

ADR

↓ 7.1%



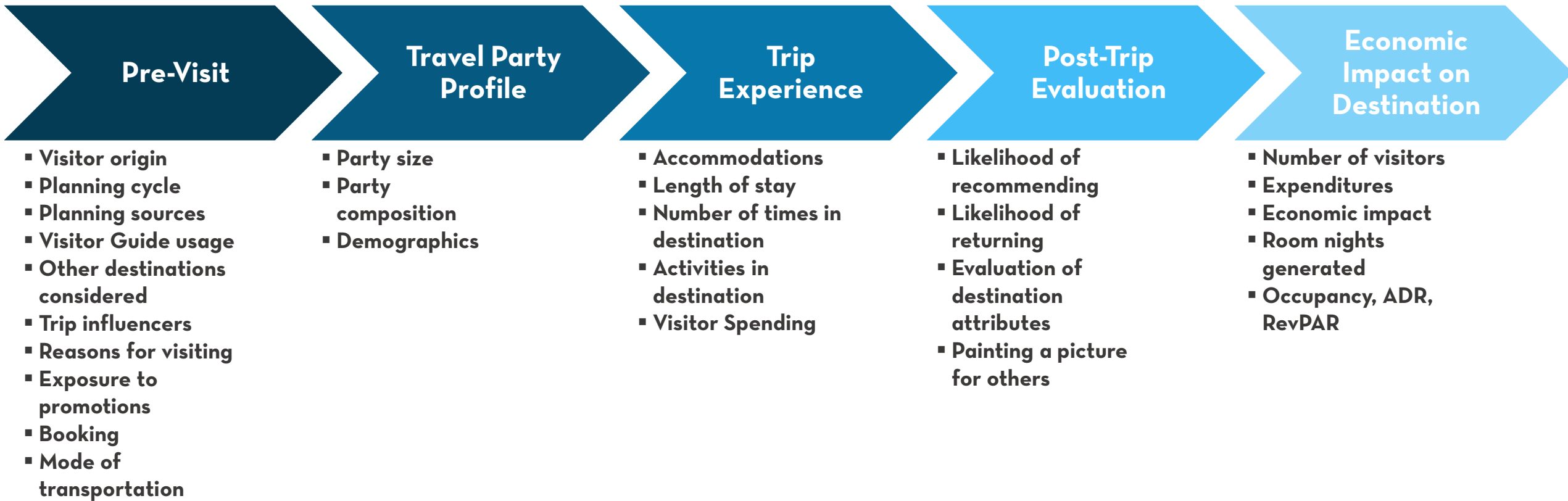
\$199.71

RevPAR

↓ 13.7%

STUDY OBJECTIVES: MAP THE VISITOR JOURNEY

This report is organized along the visitor's journey as shown below.



VISITOR JOURNEY: ECONOMIC IMPACT

The bottom line is the economic impact of the visitor's journey, so we start there.



DIRECT SPENDING

Visitors who traveled to Walton County in CY2023 spent

\$4,792,254,400

in Walton County on accommodations, restaurants, groceries, transportation, attractions, entertainment, and shopping

A decrease of **1.9%** from CY2022



ECONOMIC IMPACT

Visitor spending in CY2023 generated a total economic impact of

\$6,852,923,700

in Walton County

A decrease of **5.2%** from CY2022



VISITORS

Walton County attracted

5,170,700

visitors in CY2023

A decrease of **2.5%** from CY2022



ROOM NIGHTS

Walton County visitors generated

3,713,200

room nights in paid accommodations in
CY2023

An increase of **0.6%** from CY2022



TOURISM DEVELOPMENT TAX¹

Lodging expenditures by visitors to Walton County in CY2023 generated

\$60,088,287

in TDT collected

A decrease of **4.1%** from CY2022



¹Includes TDT collections from North and South Walton.

JOBS & WAGES

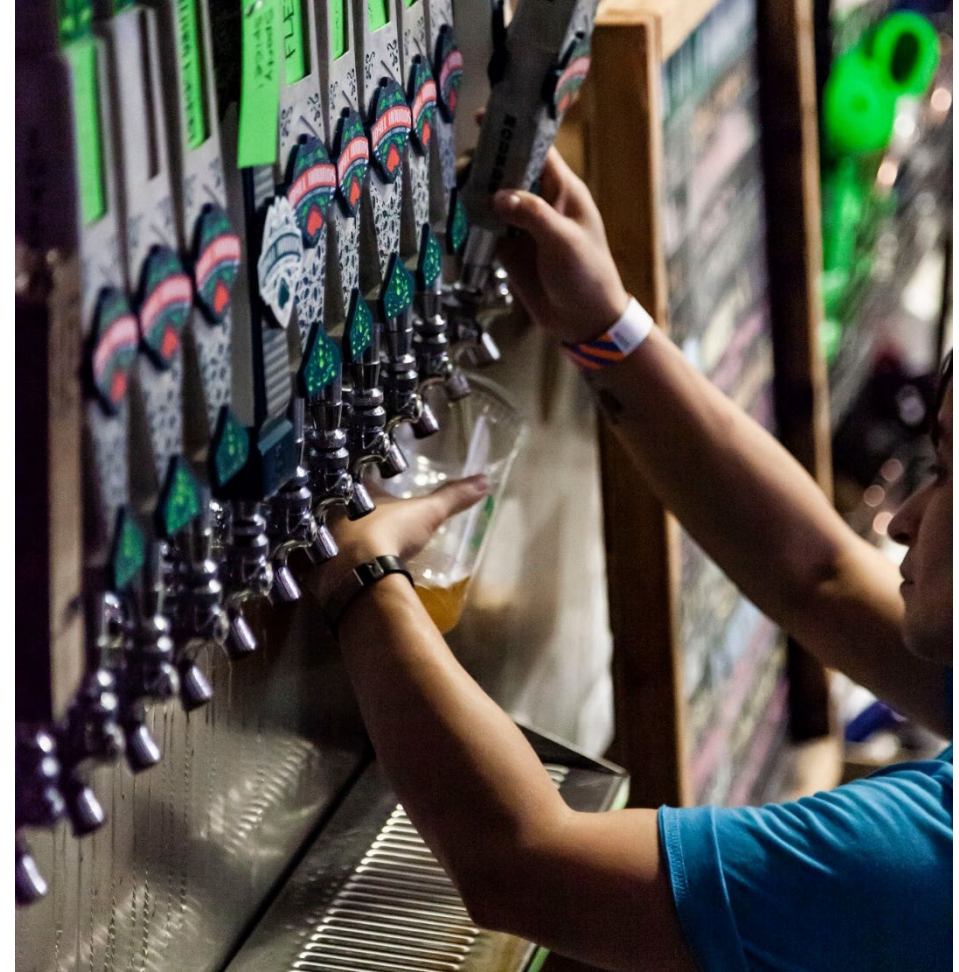
Tourism in Walton County supported

41,600

jobs¹ in CY2023, generating

\$1,251,670,800

in wages and salaries



VISITORS SUPPORT JOBS

An additional Walton County job is supported by every

124

visitors



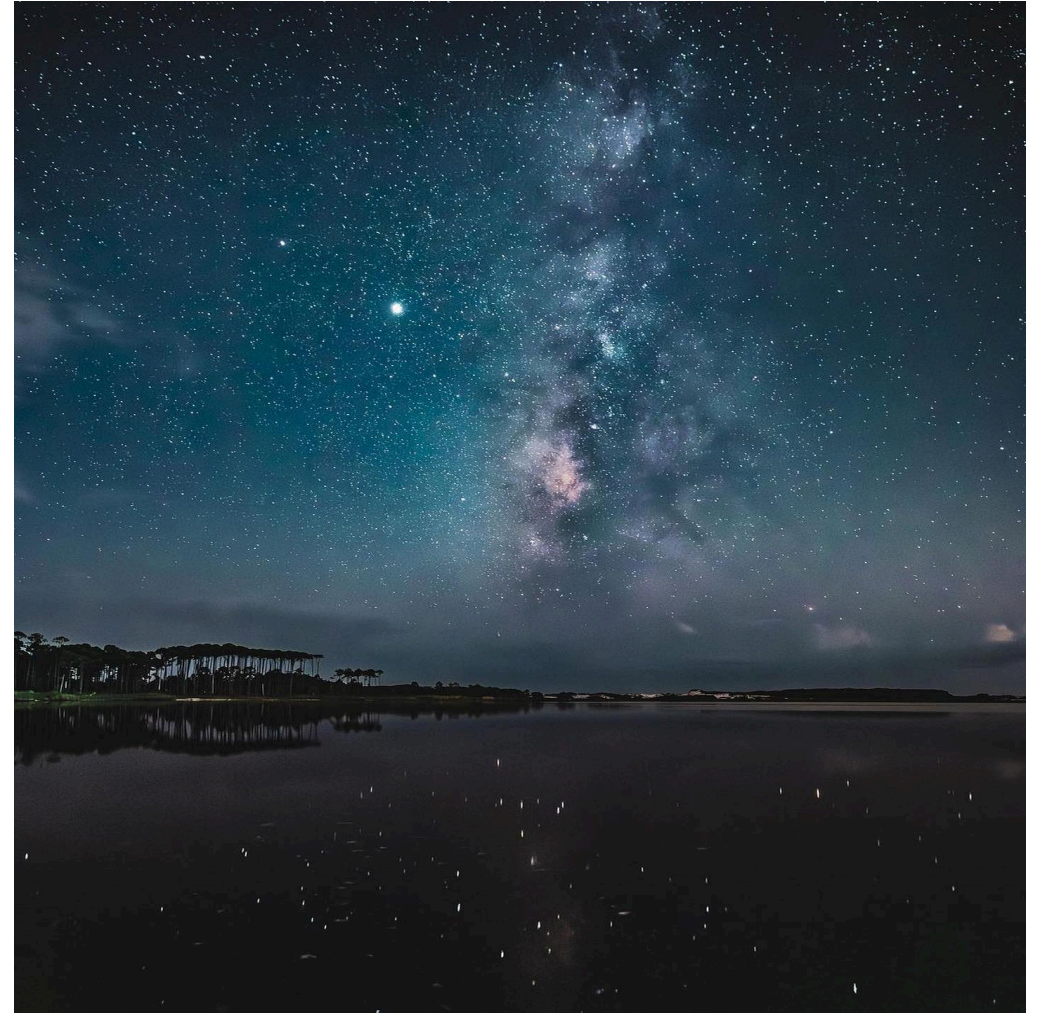
NET TAX BENEFIT¹

Visitors to Walton County in CY2023
generated a net tax benefit of

\$65,577,394

to Walton County government

¹Visitors contribute revenue to Walton County government via taxes and user fees. Visitors, by using county services and infrastructure, cost Walton County government money. The net tax impact of local government revenue for visitors less the cost of servicing visitors is \$65,577,394.



HOUSEHOLD TAX SAVINGS

Visitors to Walton County save local residents

\$2,082

in local taxes per household each year.



¹Revenue to Walton County government emanating from visitors (\$206,271,160), less costs to Walton County government for servicing visitors (\$140,693,766) results a net tax benefit to Walton County government (\$65,577,394); spread across 31,491 households in Walton County translates to a savings of \$2,082 per household in local and state taxes.

VISITOR JOURNEY: PRE-VISIT



PLANNING CYCLE

- » **Nearly 2 in 3** visitors plan a Walton County vacation at least 3 months in advance
- » Average trip planning cycle began **83 days** before the trip
- » **61%** of visitors in 2023 considered only 1 of the Walton County beaches as opposed to deciding among several



TOP TRIP PLANNING SOURCES*



Friends/family **39%**



Search engines **23%**



Website for 1 of the 16 beaches in
Walton County **17%**

WALTON COUNTY VISITOR GUIDE

- » **Over 1 in 5** visitors viewed (mostly online) the Walton County Visitors Guide before going to Walton County
- » Visitors Guide received a rating of **8.4 out of 10¹** (+0.3 points from 2022)



TOP REASONS FOR VISIT*



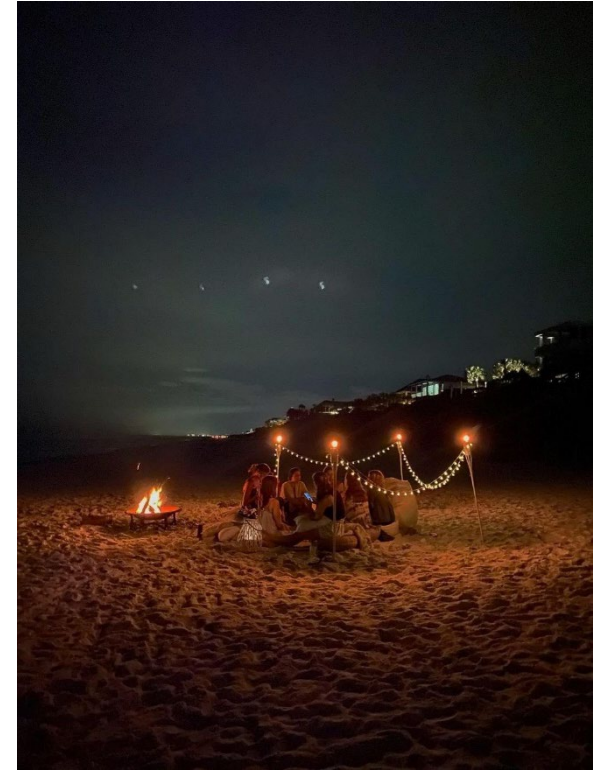
Family vacation **67%**



Relax & unwind **55%**



Annual routine **22%**



Special occasion **13%**

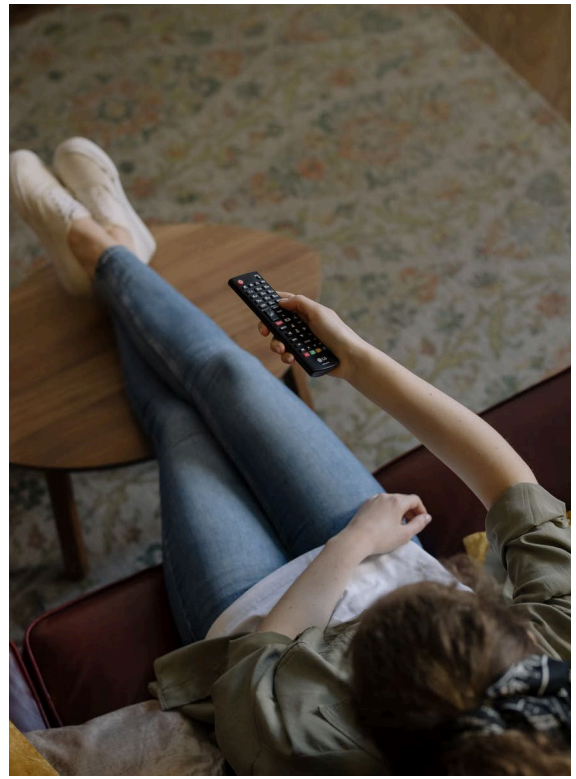
EXPOSURE TO ADVERTISING

- » **26%** of visitors have recently noticed promotions about Walton County
- » This information influenced **7%** of all visitors to visit Walton County



TOP WALTON COUNTY PROMOTIONS*

Base: 26% of visitors who noticed advertising



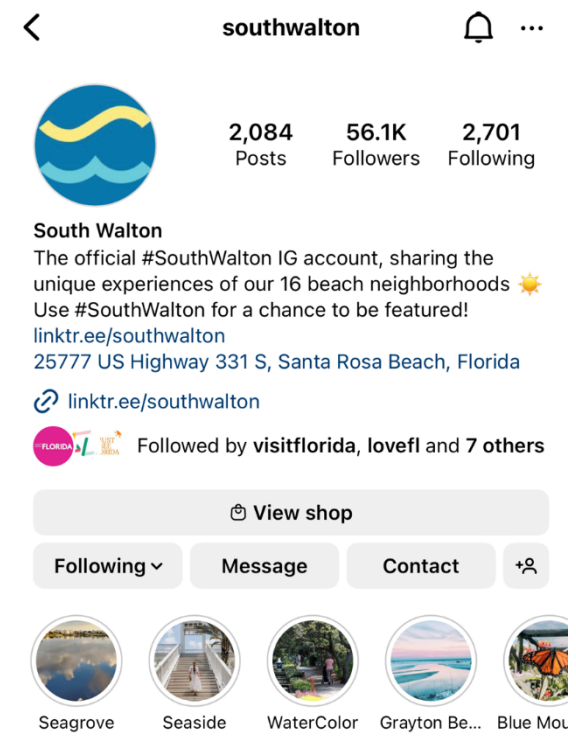
Television **23%**



Other social media accounts **23%**



Magazine article **19%**



Walton County Tourism social media **18%**

*Multiple responses permitted.

TOP BOOKING SOURCES



Vacation Rental Company

60%



Directly with hotel/condo

22%



VRBO/HomeAway

10%

VISITOR TRANSPORTATION

- » **75%** of visitors drove to Walton County
- » **25%** who flew used the following airports:

63%

Northwest Florida Beaches
International Airport



25%

Destin-Ft. Walton
Beach Airport



5%

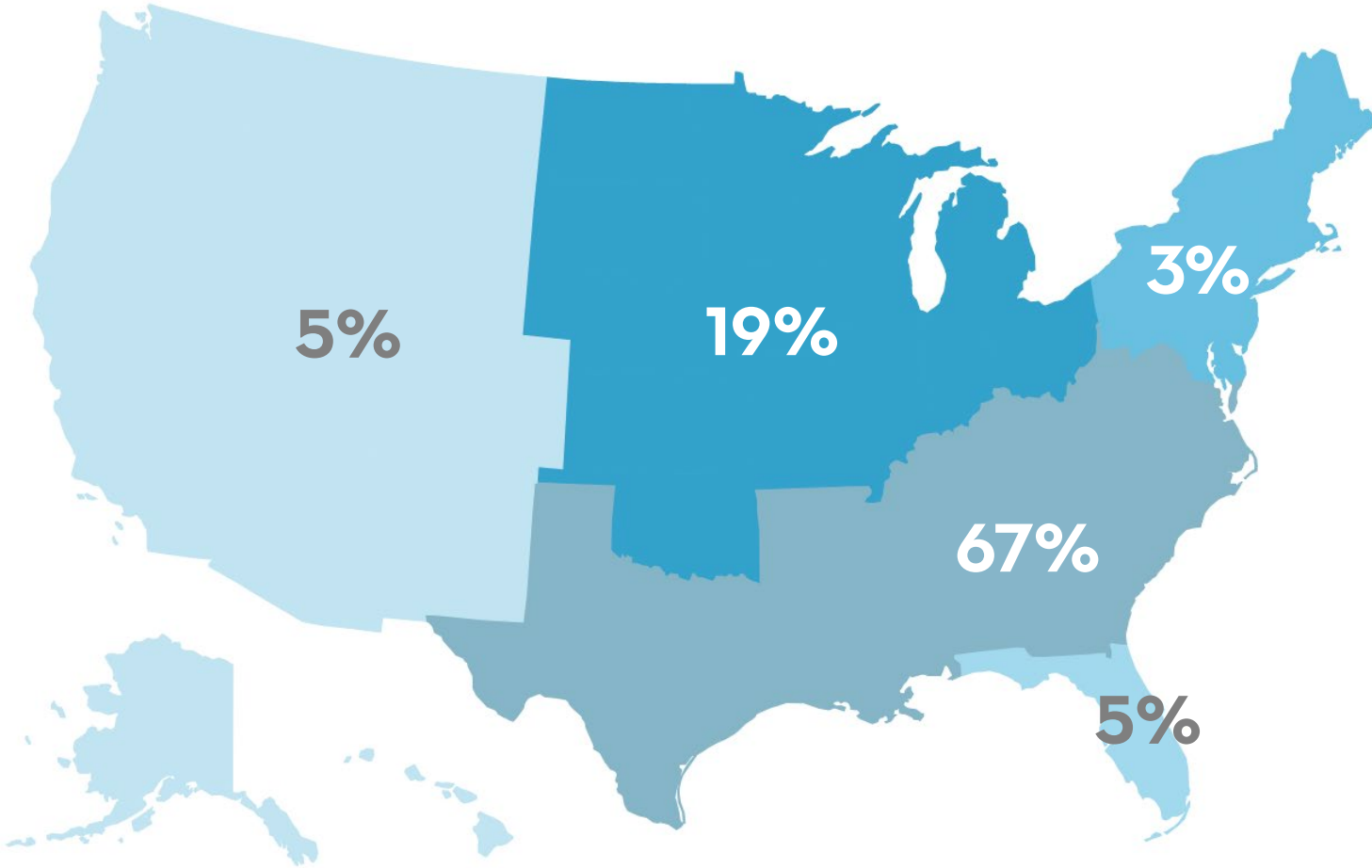
Pensacola
International Airport



VISITOR JOURNEY: TRAVEL PARTY PROFILE

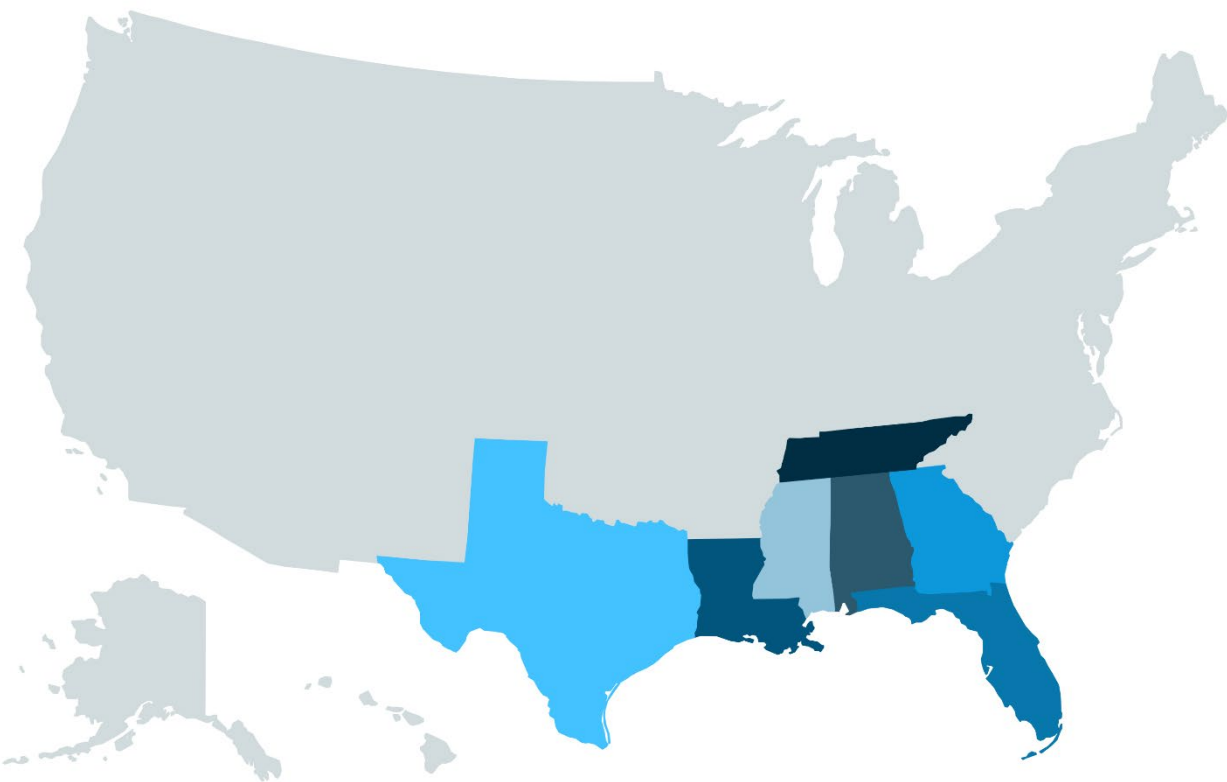


ORIGIN OF VISITORS



1% of visitors traveled to Walton County from outside of the U.S.

ORIGIN OF VISITORS



65% of visitors are from 7 states

- 14%** Georgia
- 13%** Tennessee
- 13%** Texas
- 10%** Alabama
- 5%** Florida
- 5%** Louisiana
- 5%** Mississippi

43% of visitors are from 8 markets

- 13%** Atlanta
- 8%** Nashville
- 6%** Dallas-Fort Worth
- 4%** Birmingham
- 3%** Houston
- 3%** Memphis
- 3%** Mobile-Pensacola
- 3%** New Orleans

TRAVEL PARTY SIZE AND COMPOSITION

The typical visitor traveled in a party composed of **5.0** people



54% traveled with at least one person under the age of 20 in their travel party



2023 VISITOR PROFILE

The typical Walton County 2023 visitor:

- » **53** years old
- » Median household income of **\$156,700**
- » From the Southeast (**67%**)



VISITOR JOURNEY: TRIP EXPERIENCE



TOP ACCOMMODATIONS

64% Condos, rental houses, etc.



15% Personal home/condo



9% Hotels



TOP VISITOR ACTIVITIES*

Beach **92%**



Restaurants **87%**



Relax and unwind **78%**



Shopping **69%**



Family time, reading, cooking **65%**



*Multiple responses permitted.

LENGTH OF STAY

» Visitors spent **5.9*** nights in Walton County



FIRST-TIME AND EXPERIENCED VISITORS

- » **13%** were first-time visitors
- » **35%** had visited more than 10 times



TRAVEL PARTY EXPENDITURES¹

- » Travel parties spent **\$785** a day
- » Travel parties spent **\$4,652** on their trip



¹Visitors who stayed for up to 30 nights. Includes day trippers.

BEACH SAFETY

- » **84%** of visitors know there are flags posted along the beaches to indicate how safe it is to go into the water
- » **Over 4 in 5** visitors are aware of the beach flag warning meanings
- » **63%** of visitors are aware of the consequences of entering the Gulf during double red flag conditions



VISITOR JOURNEY: POST TRIP EVALUATION



VISITOR SATISFACTION

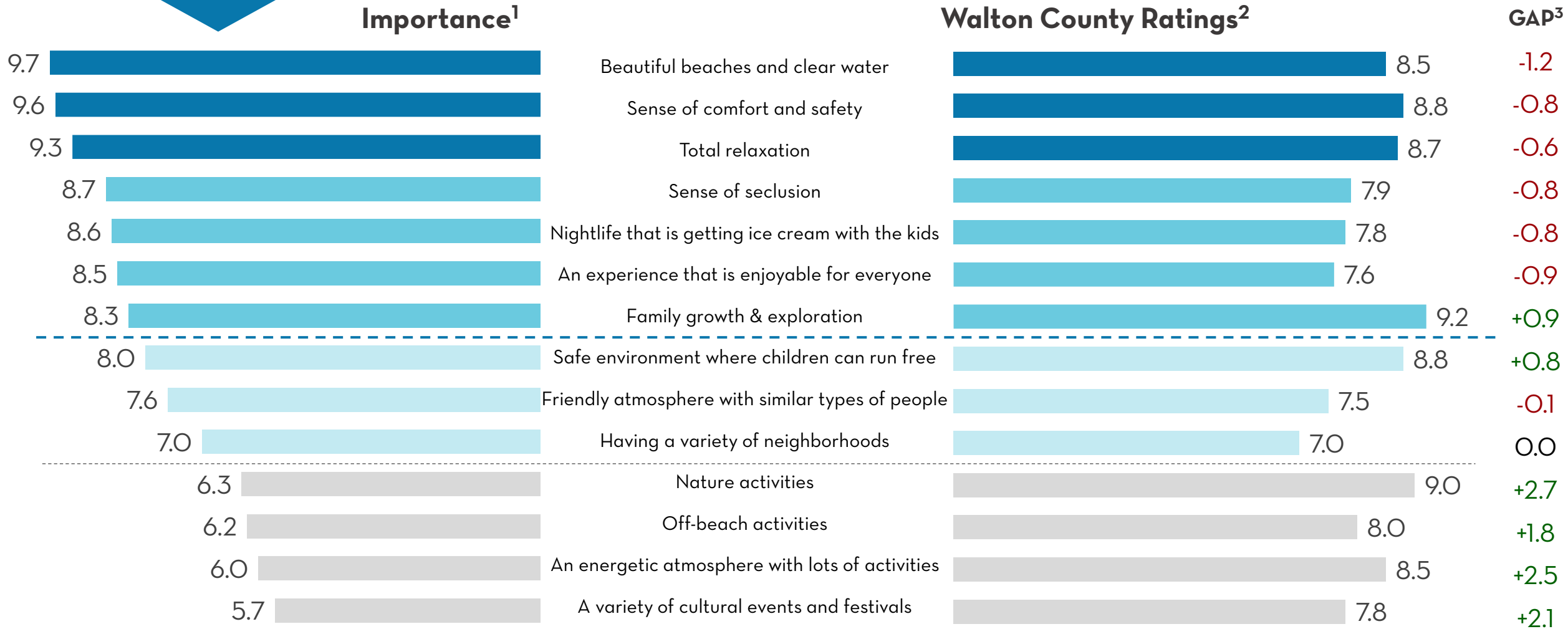
- » Visitors gave Walton County a rating of **9.2**¹ as a place to vacation
- » **78%** will definitely return to Walton County²



¹10 = Excellent; 1= Poor

²3% of all visitors will probably not return to Walton County for the following reasons:
1. Too crowded 2. Too expensive 3. Traffic was a problem.

VACATION ATTRIBUTE IMPORTANCE VS. RATINGS



¹ Rated on a scale from 1 to 10 where 10 is very important and 1 is not at all important.

² Rated on a scale from 1 to 10 where 10 is excellent and 1 is poor.

³ GAP equals the difference between the importance of an attribute and the rating of WC on that attribute.

For example, "beautiful beaches and clear water" is extremely important to visitors with a score of 9.7. Visitors rated WC as 8.5 on the quality of its beaches and water. Hence, the GAP is -1.2.

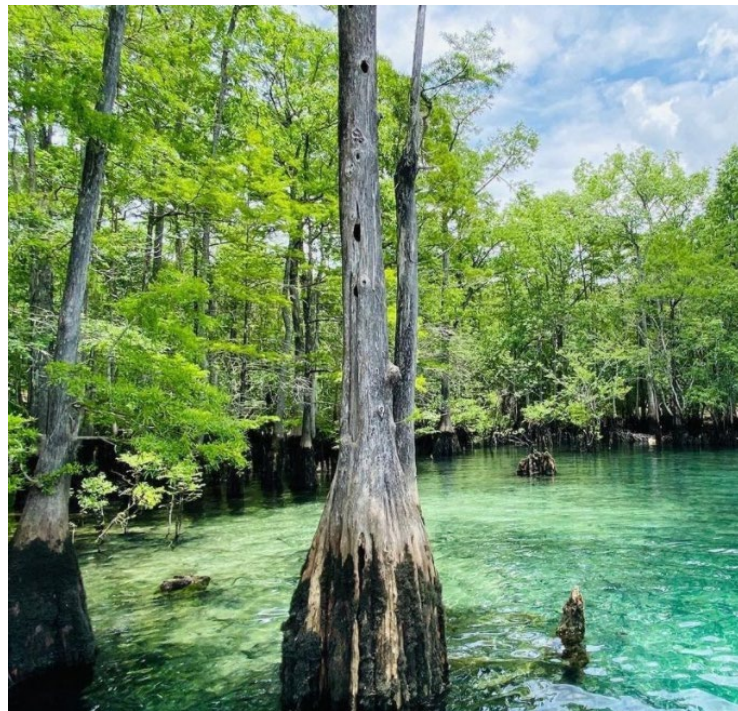
VISITOR DESCRIPTIONS OF WALTON COUNTY



“Perfect slice of Americana – like how it was when I was a kid.”



“Beautiful place with beautiful water and lots of things to do for the whole family.”



“Friendly, quiet, and clean place with a beautiful landscape.”



YEARLY COMPARISONS



VISITOR PROFILE

Visitor Metrics	2022	2023
Travel party	5.4	5.0
Kids <20	56%	54%
Median age	53	53
Estimated median household income	\$168,400	\$156,700
Stayed in condo/rental house	67%	64%
Drove	79%	75%
Nights spent ¹	5.6	5.9
Direct expenditures (travel party for entire trip)	\$4,976	\$4,652
1 st time visitor	13%	13%
10+ visits to Walton County	38%	35%

¹ Visitors staying 30 days or fewer.

VISITOR ORIGIN

Top Origin States	2022	2023
Georgia	15%	14%
Tennessee	12%	13%
Texas	13%	13%
Alabama	11%	10%
Florida	6%	5%
Louisiana	4%	5%
Mississippi	5%	5%

Origins - Regions	2022	2023
Southeast	73%	72%
Midwest	18%	19%
West	5%	5%
Northeast	3%	3%
International	1%	1%

TRIP EXPERIENCE

Top Visitor Activities	2022	2023
Beach	91%	92%
Restaurants	88%	87%
Relax and unwind	81%	78%
Shopping	63%	69%
Family time, reading, cooking	68%	65%
Biking, running	41%	48%
Water sports	21%	30%
Golf or tennis	15%	24%
Bars, nightclubs	24%	23%
Special events	15%	23%
Hiking, nature walks, etc.	17%	17%
Attractions	15%	16%
State parks	18%	14%
Dune lakes	10%	8%
Art galleries, museums, etc.	7%	7%
Spas	6%	7%
Business meetings, conferences	2%	2%
Other	4%	2%

TRIP PLANNING

Visitor Metrics	2022	2023
Will return to Walton County	95%	95%
Rating for overall experience ¹	9.1	9.2
Viewed Visitors Guide ²	21%	21% ²
Planned trip 6+ months out	30%	26%
Used VisitSouthWalton.com	13%	13%
Used 1 of 16 beaches' websites	18%	17%
Use the term "South Walton"	18%	12%

DETAILED FINDINGS



VISITOR JOURNEY: ECONOMIC IMPACT



ECONOMIC IMPACT

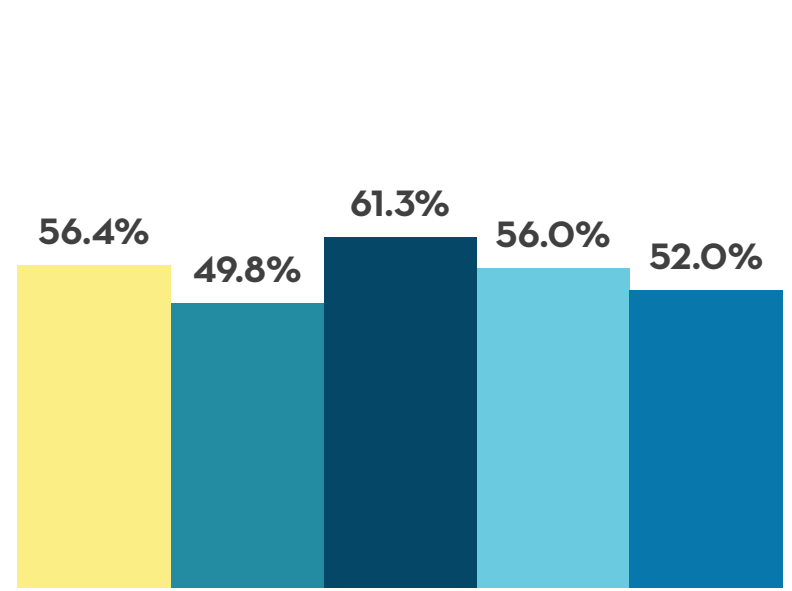
Visitor Metrics	CY2022	CY2023	% Change
All visitors¹	5,303,300	5,170,700	-2.5%
Direct expenditures	\$4,886,893,300	\$4,792,254,400	-1.9%
Total economic impact	\$7,232,602,100	\$6,852,923,700	-5.2%
Room nights	3,691,300	3,713,200	+0.6%
TDT collections	\$62,676,644	\$60,088,287	-4.1%
Occupancy	56.0%	52.0%	-7.1%
Room rate	\$413.29	\$384.06	-7.1%
RevPAR	\$231.44	\$199.71	-13.7%
Direct jobs created	36,900	32,100	-13.0%
Direct + indirect jobs	47,000	41,600	-11.5%
Wages paid	\$1,253,256,600	\$1,251,670,800	-0.1%

Data sources: Walton County government, properties in Walton County that rent to visitors, Key Data, and visitor and property surveys by Downs & St. Germain Research.

¹ Includes visitors staying with friends and relatives and in their own condos and timeshares and day visitors.

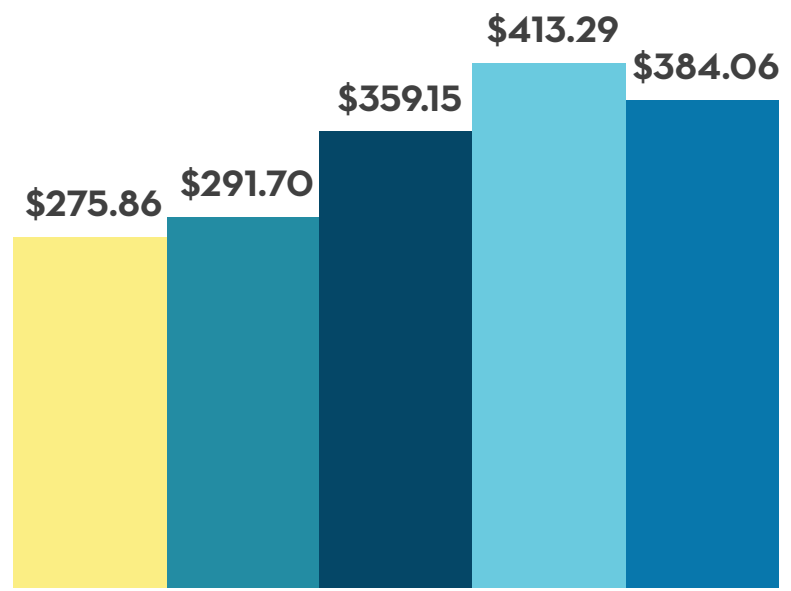
ACCOMMODATION METRICS

Occupancy



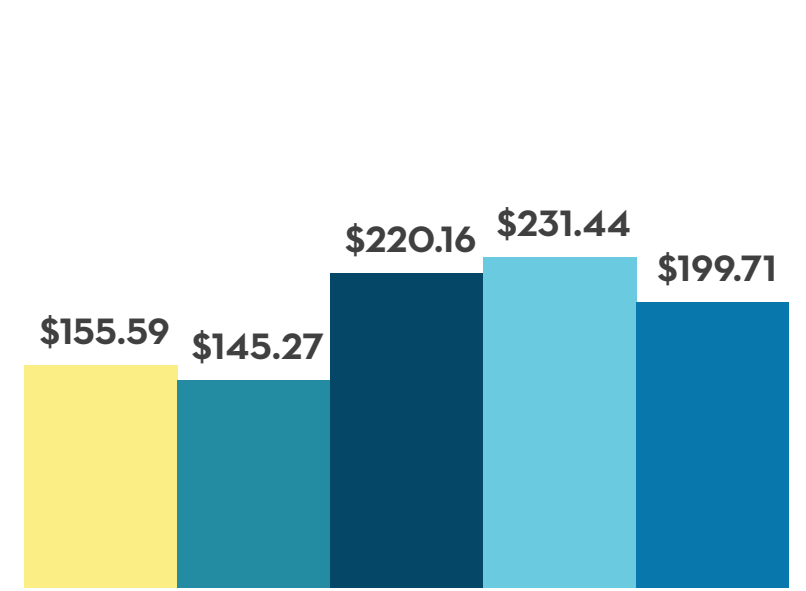
■ CY2019 ■ CY2020 ■ CY2021 ■ CY2022 ■ CY2023

ADR



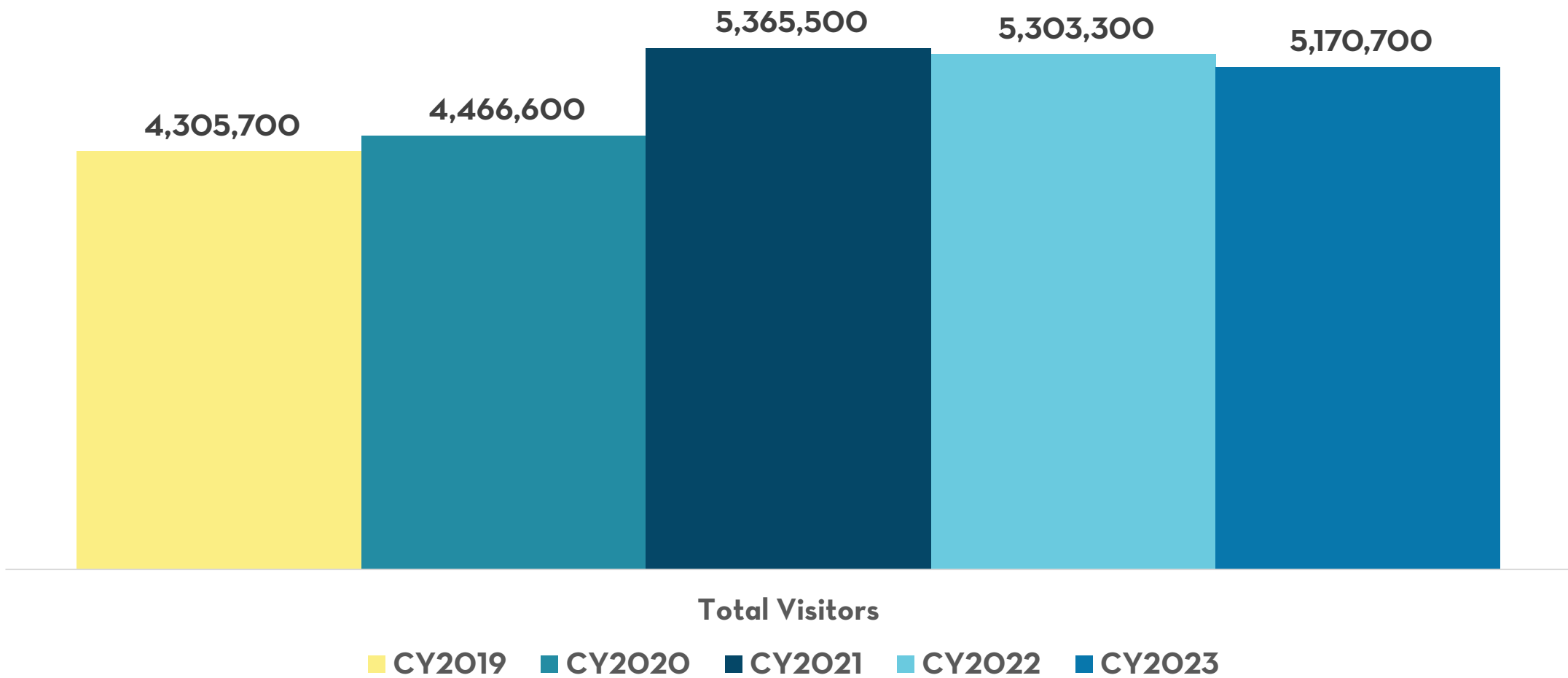
■ CY2019 ■ CY2020 ■ CY2021 ■ CY2022 ■ CY2023

RevPAR

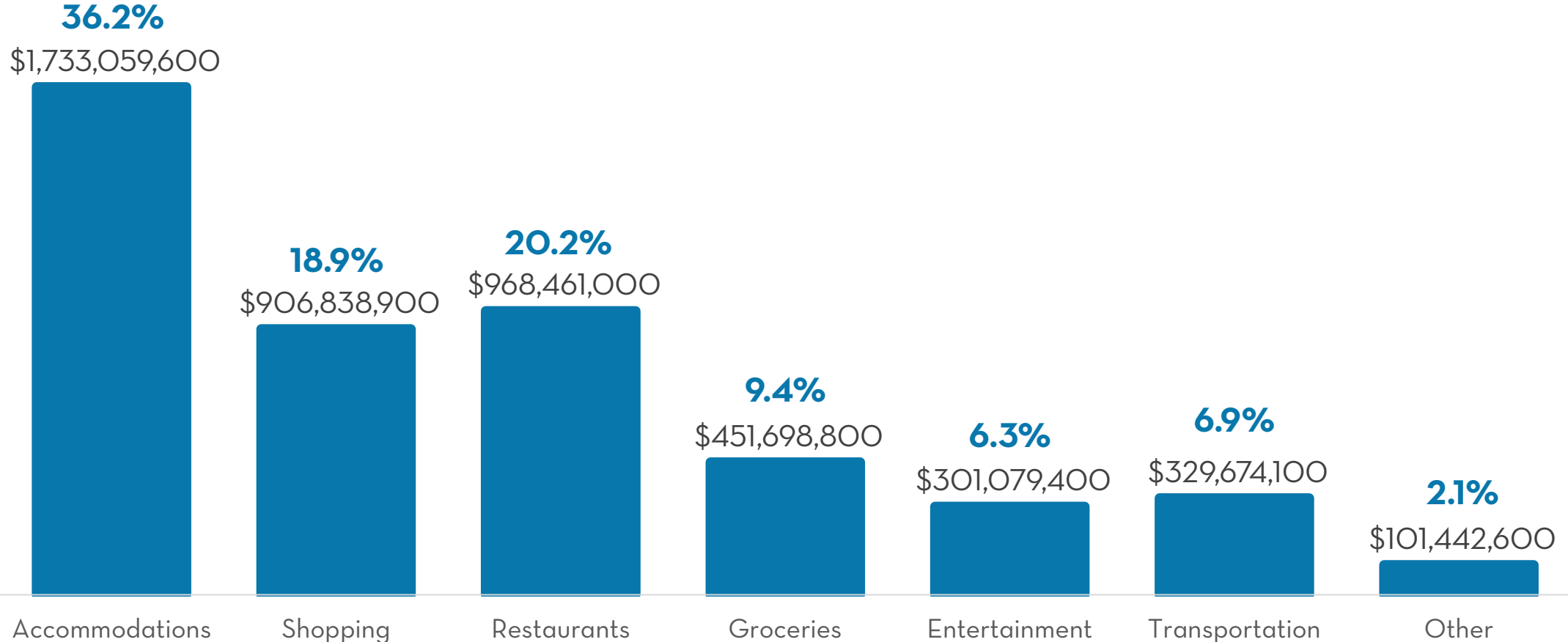


■ CY2019 ■ CY2020 ■ CY2021 ■ CY2022 ■ CY2023

VISITOR TRENDS: CY2019 - CY2023



DIRECT SPENDING

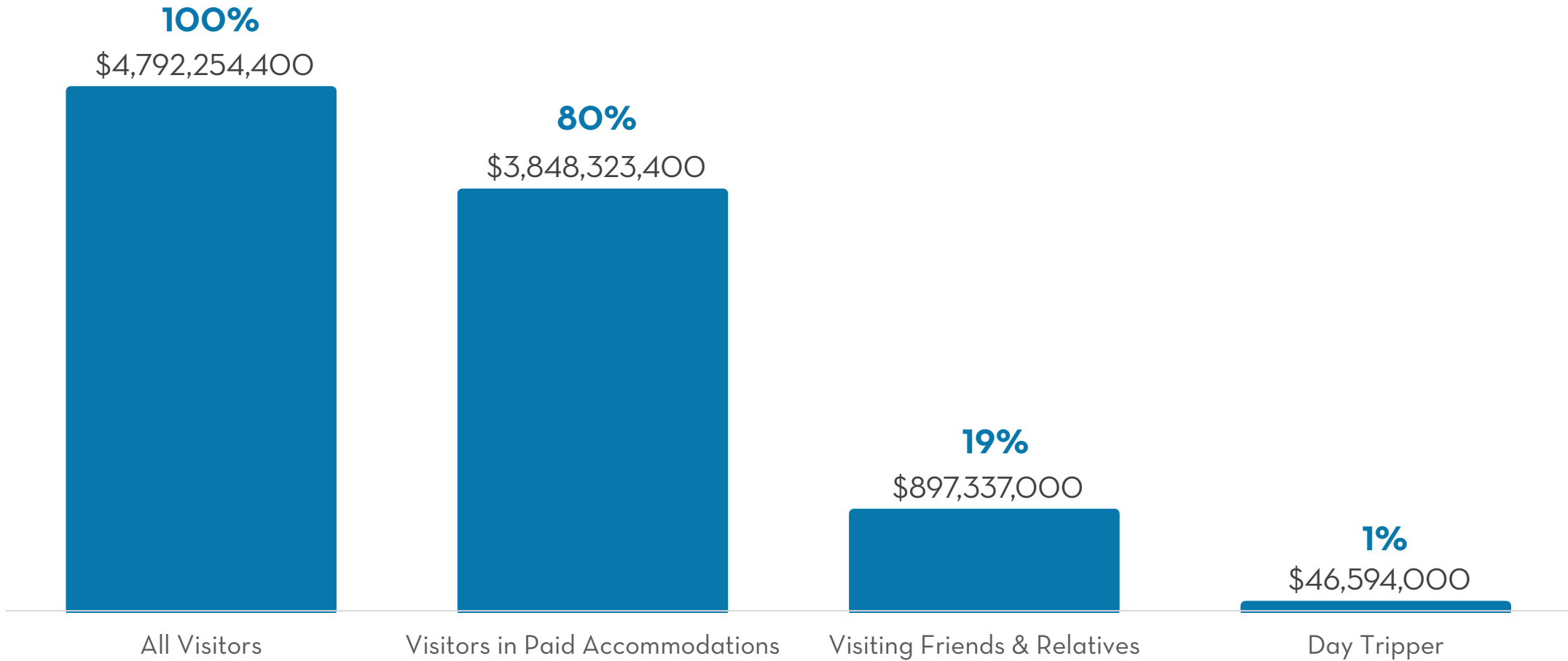


VISITOR DIRECT SPENDING CY2019 - CY2023

Category	CY2019	CY2020	CY2021	CY2022	CY2023
Accommodations¹	\$1,047,287,600	\$1,083,651,400	\$1,781,266,900	\$1,913,198,700	\$1,733,059,600
Shopping	\$680,653,900	\$674,528,000	\$990,284,800	\$918,578,900	\$906,838,900
Restaurants	\$746,329,700	\$767,973,300	\$902,896,600	\$881,579,700	\$968,461,000
Groceries	\$217,241,500	\$454,601,200	\$371,583,600	\$386,399,300	\$451,698,800
Entertainment	\$461,993,100	\$208,797,200	\$371,567,900	\$344,140,900	\$301,079,400
Transportation	\$206,729,900	\$243,310,500	\$322,282,300	\$324,404,500	\$329,674,100
Other	\$143,659,700	\$162,841,300	\$114,185,100	\$118,591,300	\$101,442,600
Total	\$3,503,895,400	\$3,595,702,900	\$4,854,067,200	\$4,886,893,300	\$4,792,254,400

¹Includes room rate, sales tax, tourist development tax, cleaning fees, resort fees, and services such as golf, spa, parking, etc., and some food charges that visitors do not differentiate from their room rate on their invoice.

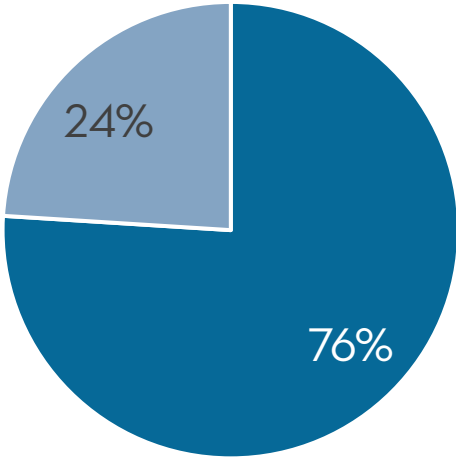
DIRECT SPENDING BY VISITOR TYPE



RETAIL SPENDING IN WALTON COUNTY CY2023

Visitors to Walton County account for over $\frac{3}{4}$ of retail spending in Walton County.

Spending in Walton County	Dollar Amount	Percentage
Local residents' spending ¹	\$1,531,747,400	24%
Visitors' spending ¹	\$4,792,254,400	76%
Total spending	\$6,324,001,800	100%



¹Local residents' spending derived from US Census data; visitors' spending derived from Visitor Tracking surveys conducted for Walton County Tourism by Downs & St. Germain Research.

- Visitors' contribution to Walton County's economy
- Locals' contribution to Walton County's economy

VISITOR JOURNEY: PRE-VISIT



PLANNING CYCLE



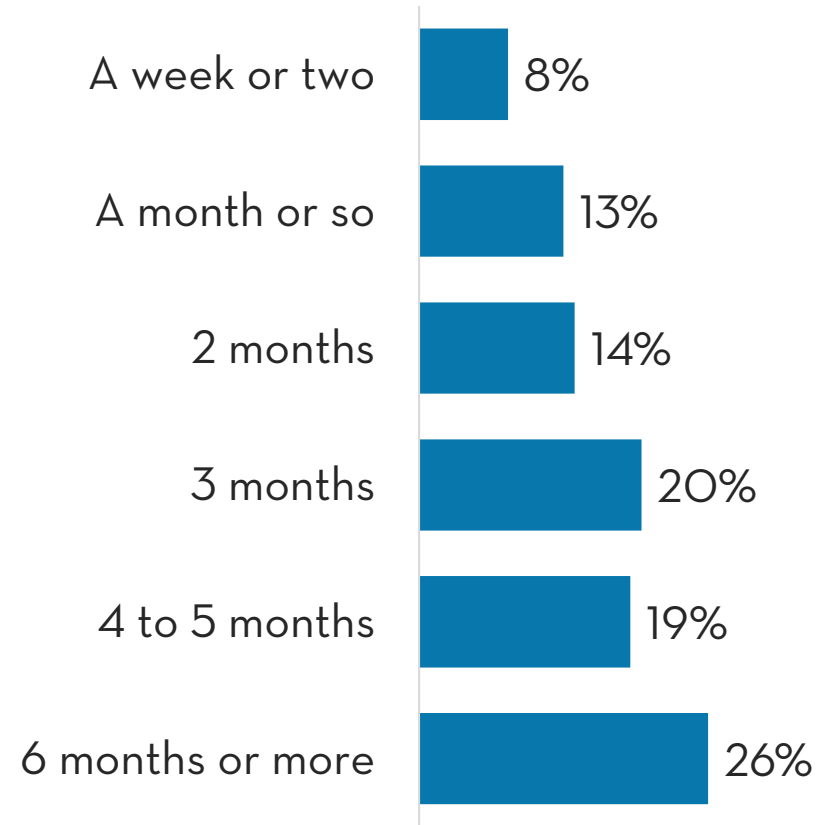
Nearly **2 in 3** visitors plan a Walton County vacation at least **3 months out**



Over **1 in 5** visitors to Walton County have **a short (a month or less) planning cycle**



Average trip planning cycle began **83 days** before the trip



OTHER DESTINATIONS CONSIDERED



61% of visitors only considered 1 of the Walton County Beaches



12% use the term “South Walton” when referring to the area

Only considered 1 of the Walton County beaches

61%

Considered another 1 of the 16 Walton County beaches

31%

Considered vacationing outside of Walton County, but in FL

6%

Considered vacationing at a beach outside of FL

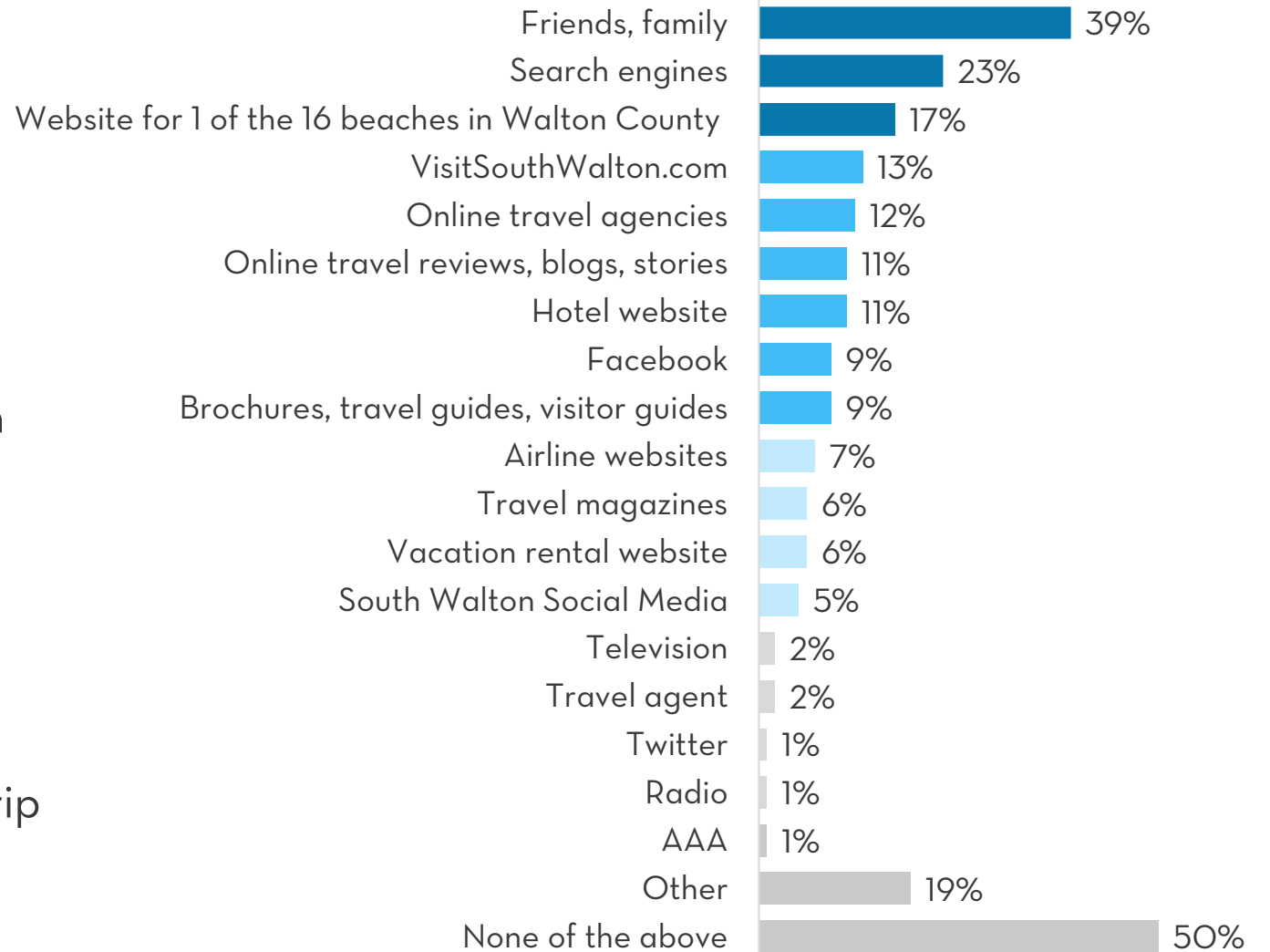
2%

TRIP PLANNING SOURCES¹

Nearly 2 in 5 visitors asked their friends and family for advice to help plan their trip to Walton County

Nearly 1 in 4 visitors used search engines such as Google to help plan their trip to Walton County

Over 1 in 6 visitors used the website for one of the county's beach areas to help plan their trip



¹Multiple responses permitted.

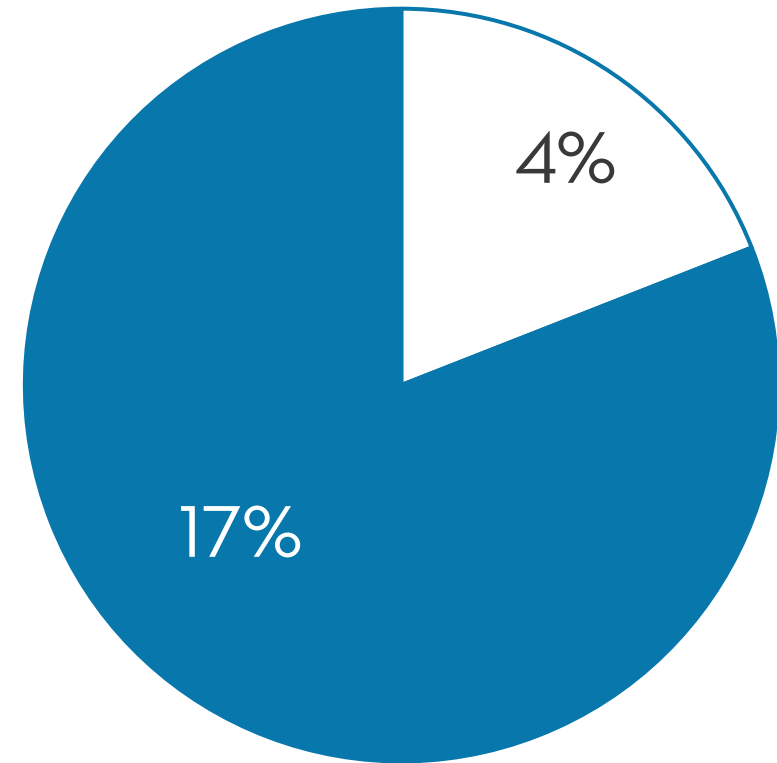
WALTON COUNTY VISITOR GUIDE



Over 1 in 5 visitors viewed a Walton County Visitors Guide before going to Walton County



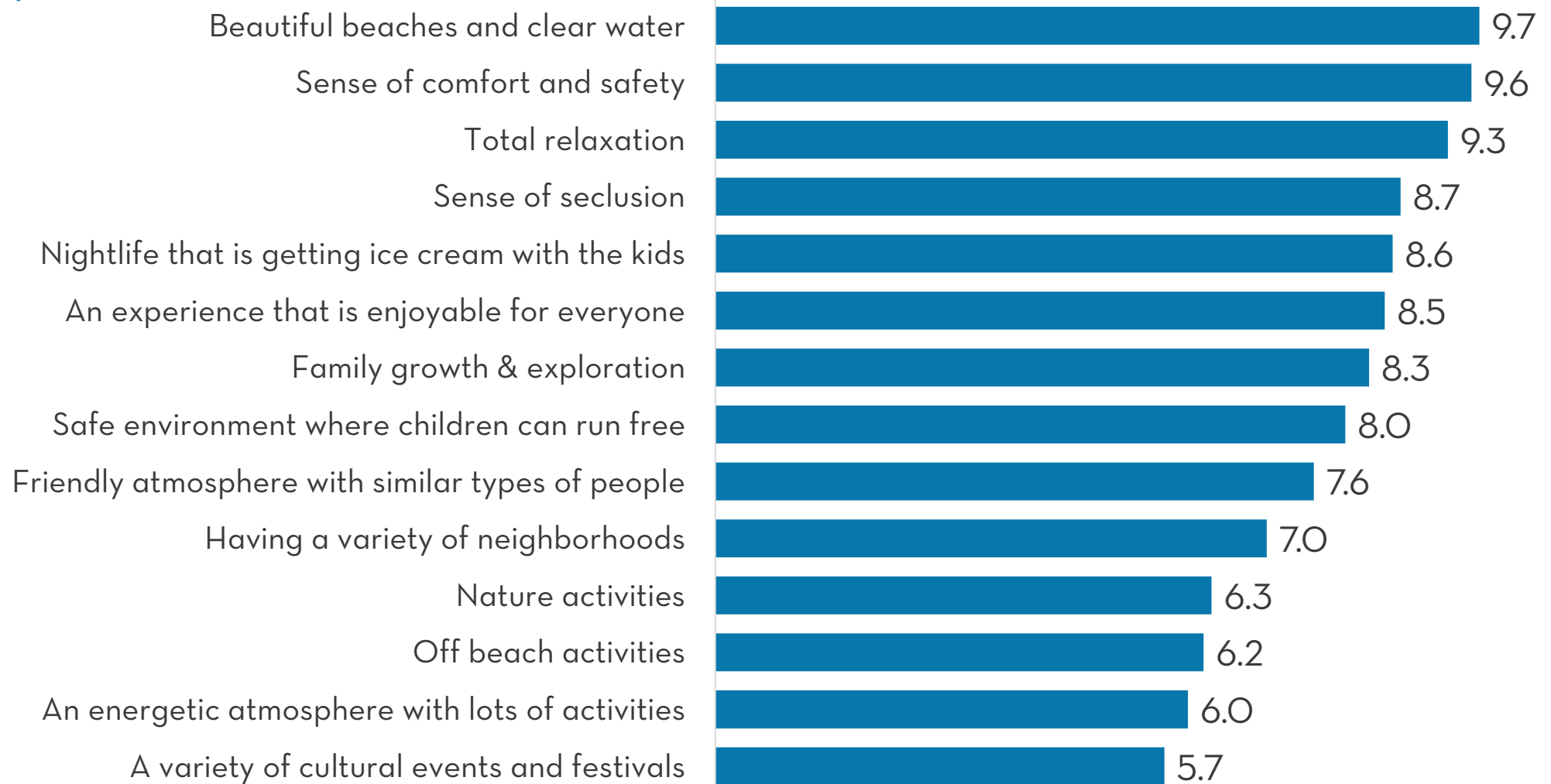
Visitors Guide received a rating of **8.4 out of 10¹**



□ Print version ■ Online version

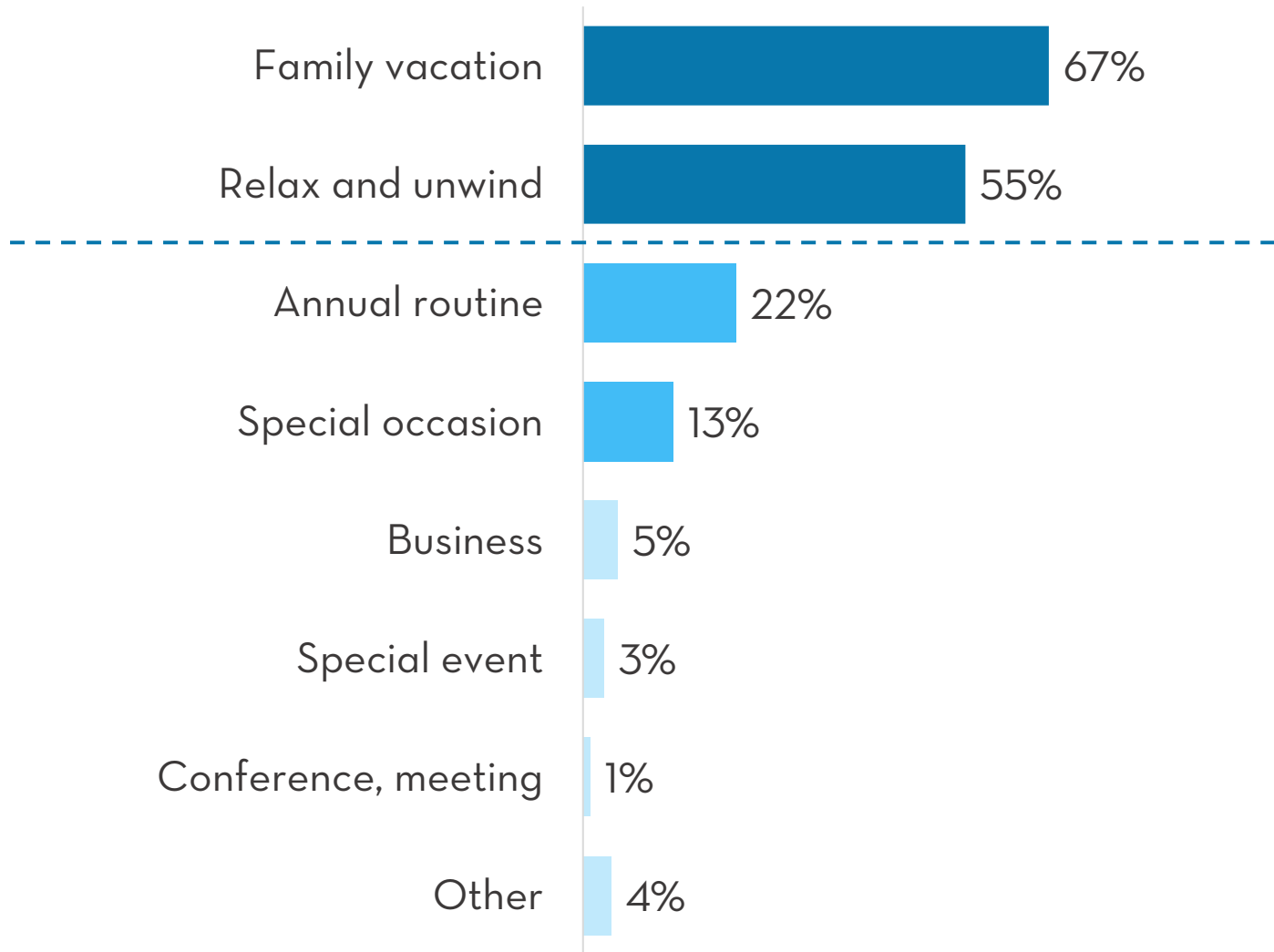
¹Rated on a 10-point scale where 10 is extremely useful and 1 is not at all useful.

IMPORTANT VACATION DESTINATION ATTRIBUTES¹



¹Rated on a scale from 1 to 10 where 10 is very important and 1 is not at all important.

REASONS FOR VISITING¹



¹Multiple responses permitted.

WALTON COUNTY PROMOTIONS¹

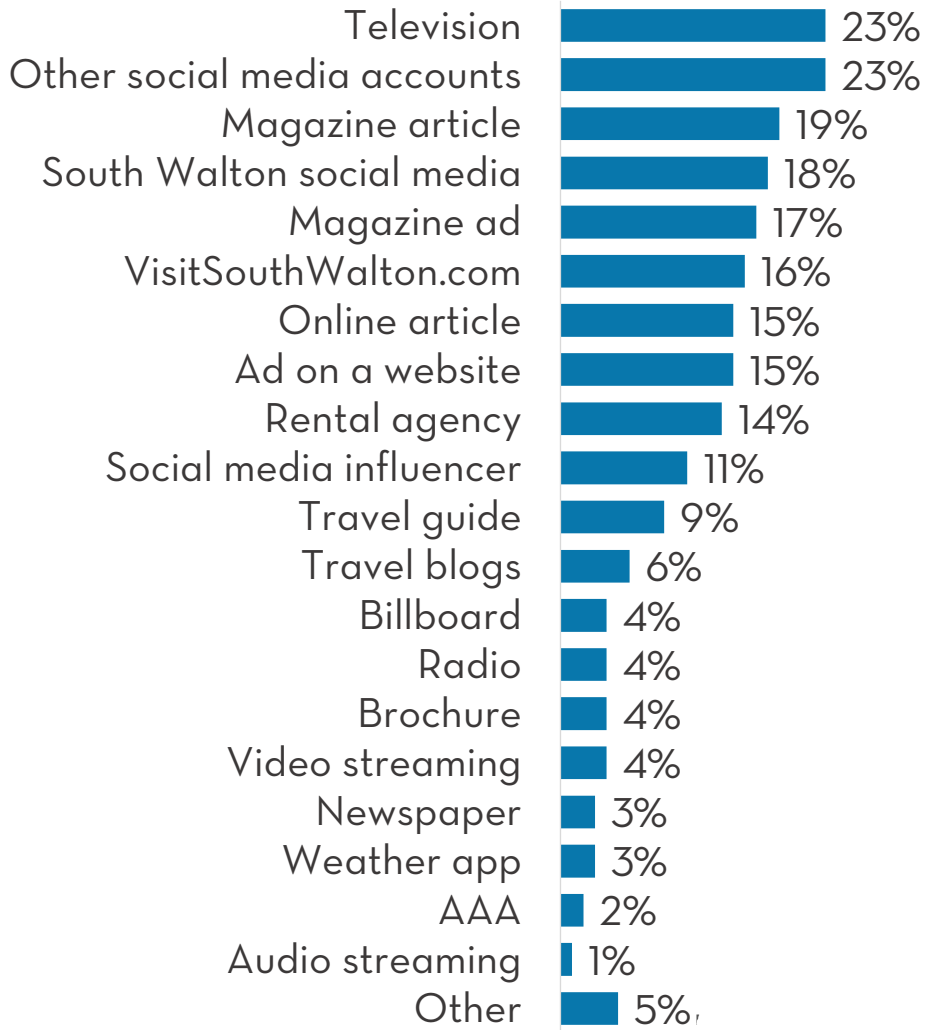


26% of visitors have recently seen, read or heard advertising, promotions or travel stories about Walton County



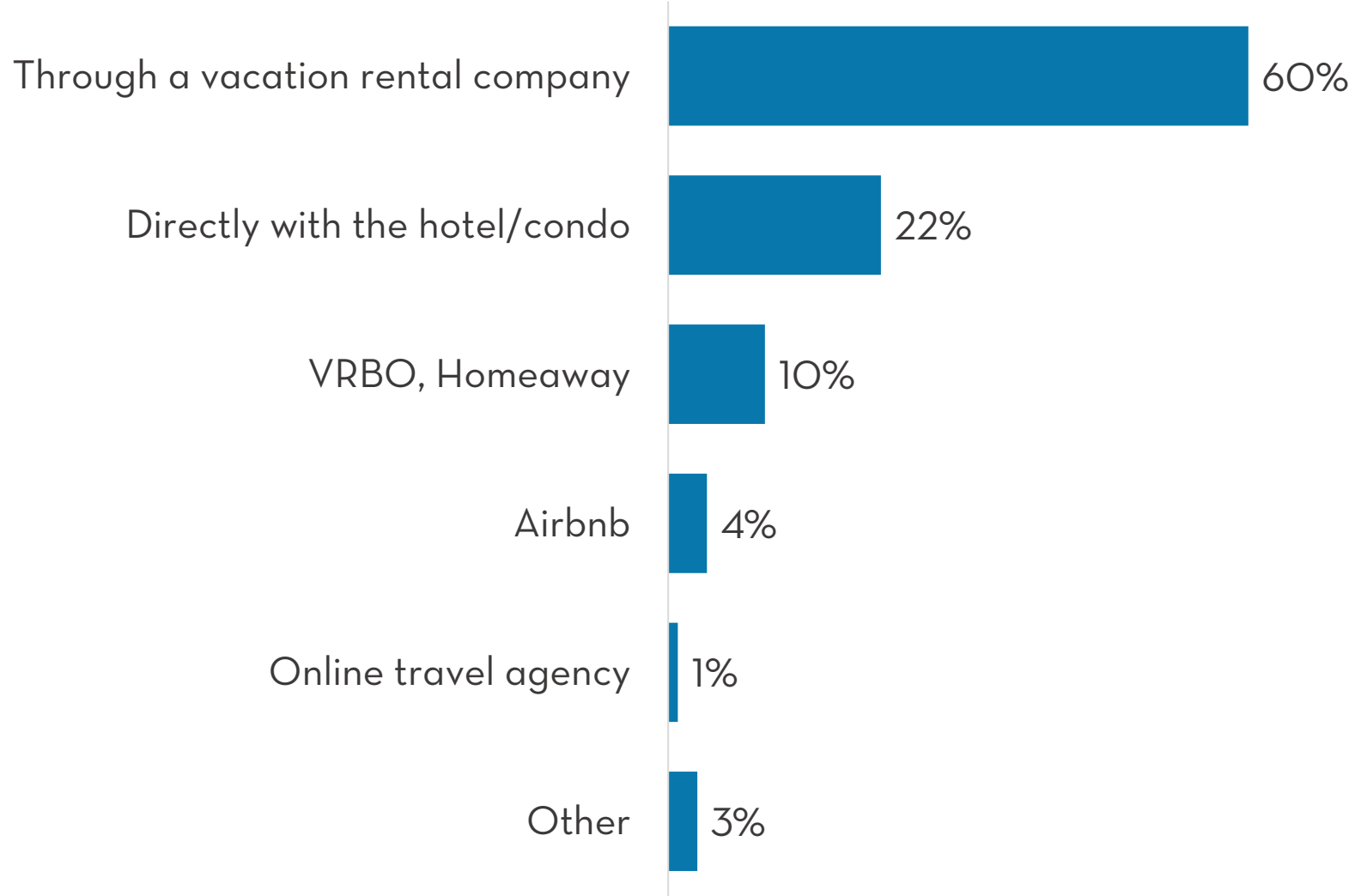
This information influenced **7%** of all visitors to visit Walton County

Base: **26%** of visitors who noticed advertising



¹Multiple responses permitted.

BOOKING ACCOMMODATIONS



VISITOR TRANSPORTATION

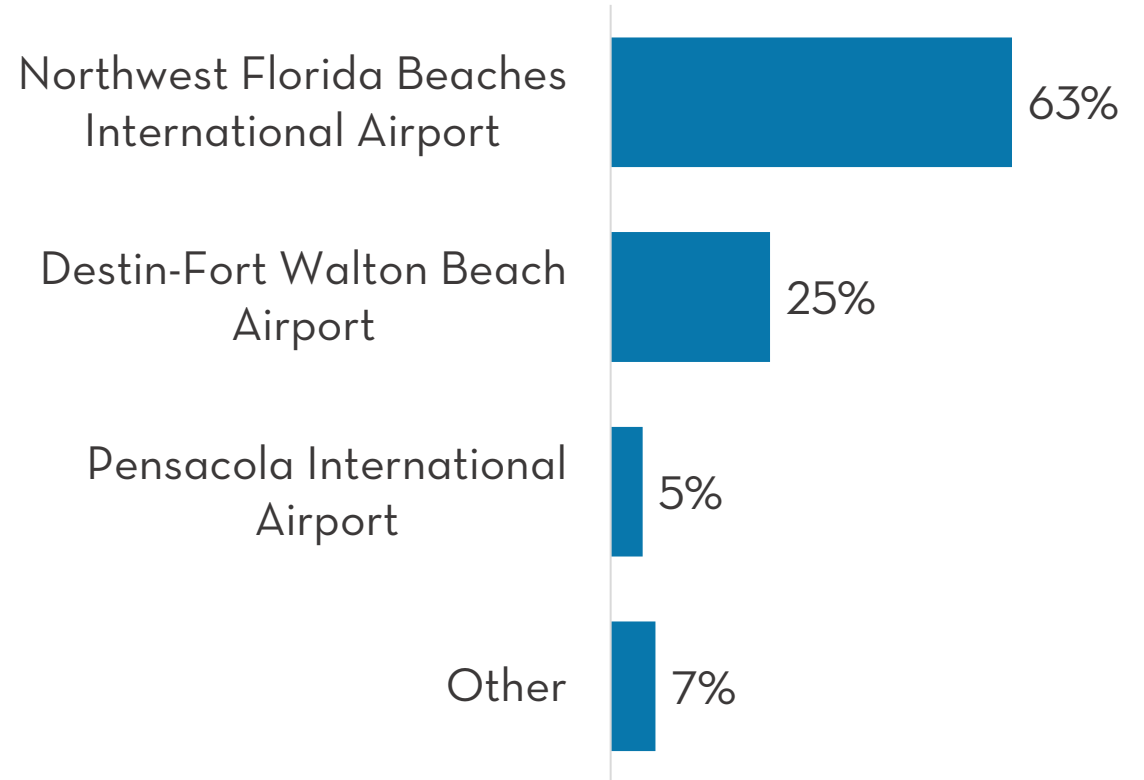


75% of visitors drove to Walton County



32% of those who drove were aware that there were direct flights from their city to the Walton County area, yet **23%** were not sure if there were direct flights available

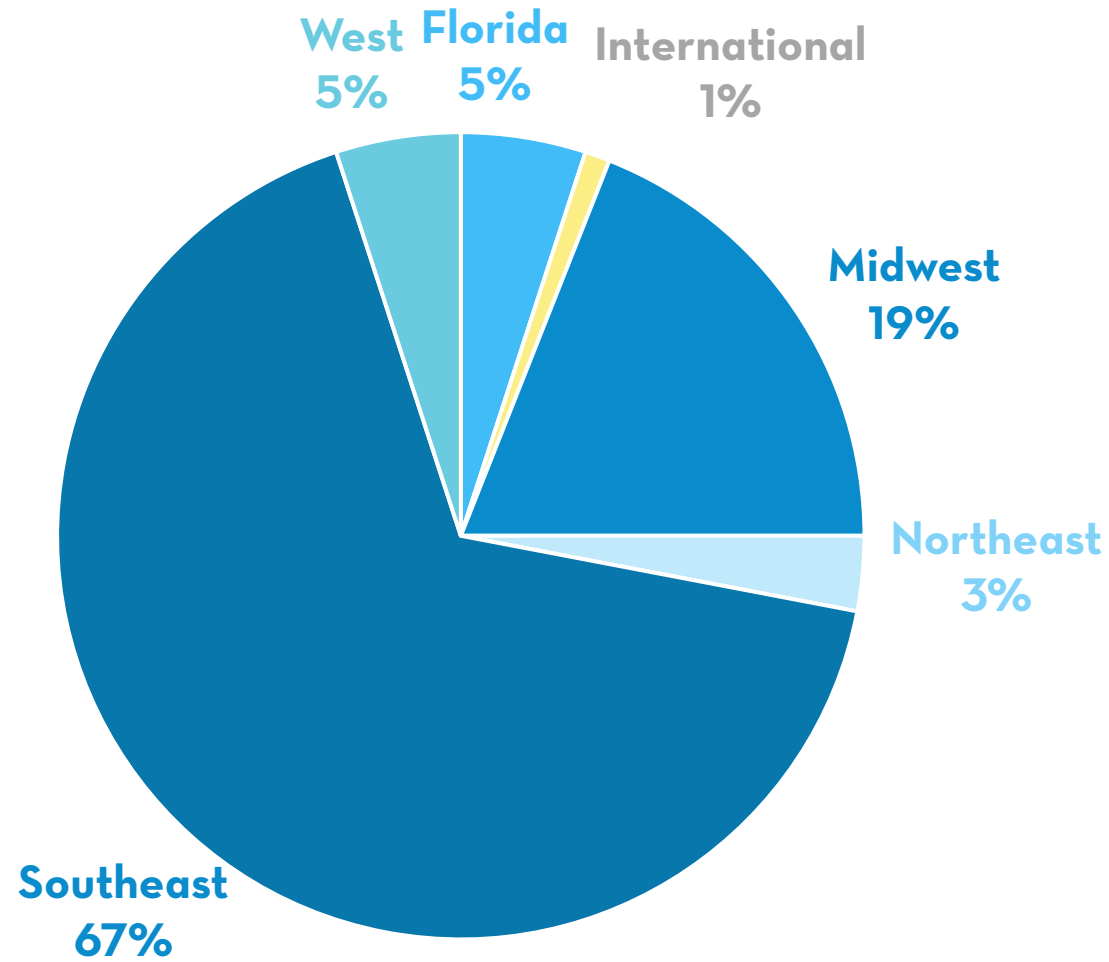
25% who **flew** used the following airports:



VISITOR JOURNEY: TRAVEL PARTY PROFILE

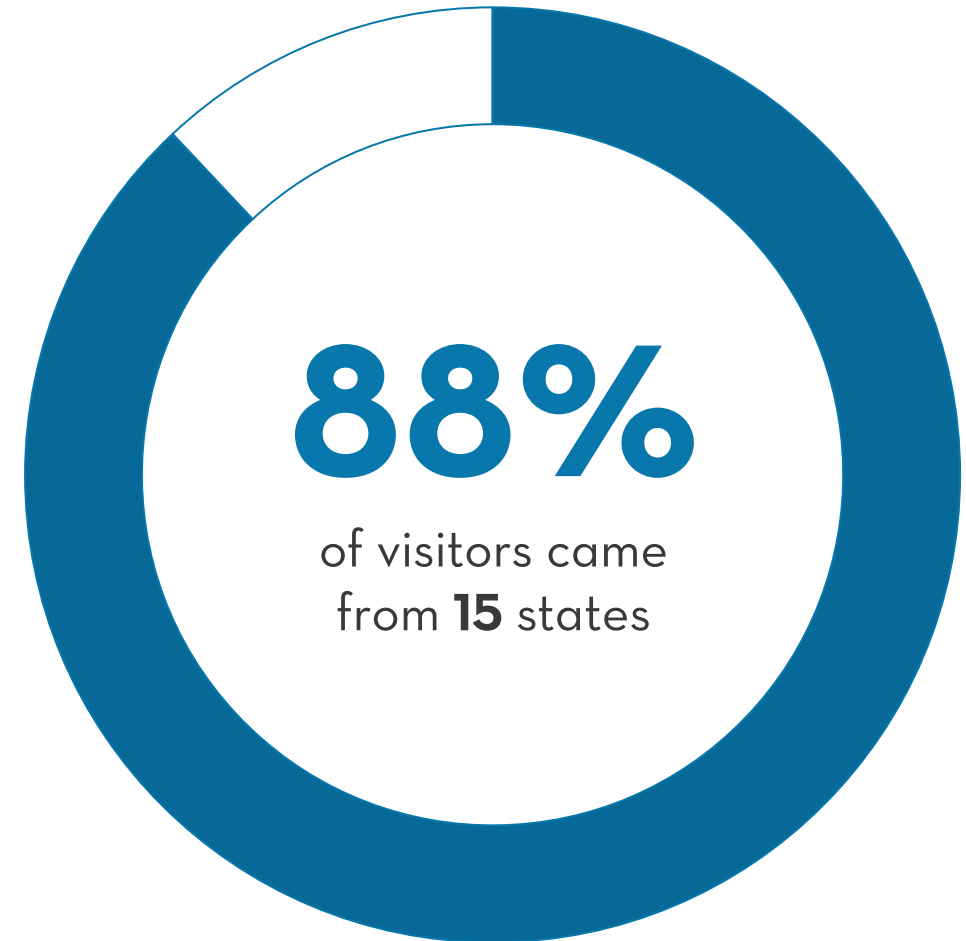


ORIGIN OF WALTON COUNTY VISITORS



ORIGIN OF WALTON COUNTY VISITORS

State	% of Visitors
Georgia	14%
Tennessee	13%
Texas	13%
Alabama	10%
Florida	5%
Louisiana	5%
Mississippi	5%
Kentucky	4%
Arkansas	3%
Illinois	3%
Indiana	3%
Missouri	3%
Ohio	3%
North Carolina	2%
Oklahoma	2%



ORIGIN OF WALTON COUNTY VISITORS

Top Origin Markets	% of Visitors
Atlanta	13%
Nashville	8%
Dallas-Fort Worth	6%
Birmingham	4%
Houston	3%
Memphis	3%
Mobile-Pensacola	3%
New Orleans	3%
Austin	2%
Chicago	2%
Cincinnati	2%
Columbus, OH	2%
Little Rock-Pine Bluff	2%
Montgomery	2%
Saint Louis	2%

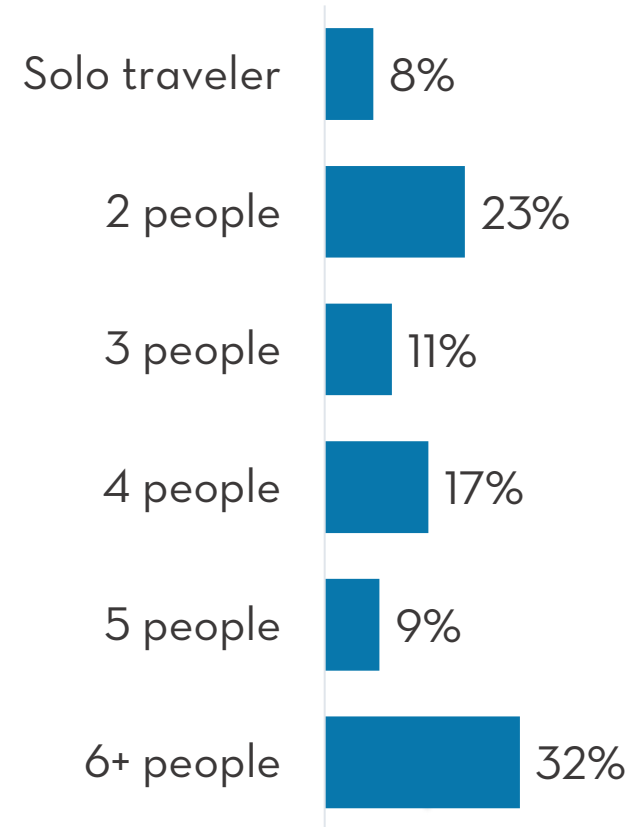
TRAVEL PARTY SIZE AND COMPOSITION



Visitors traveled in a party composed of **5.0** people



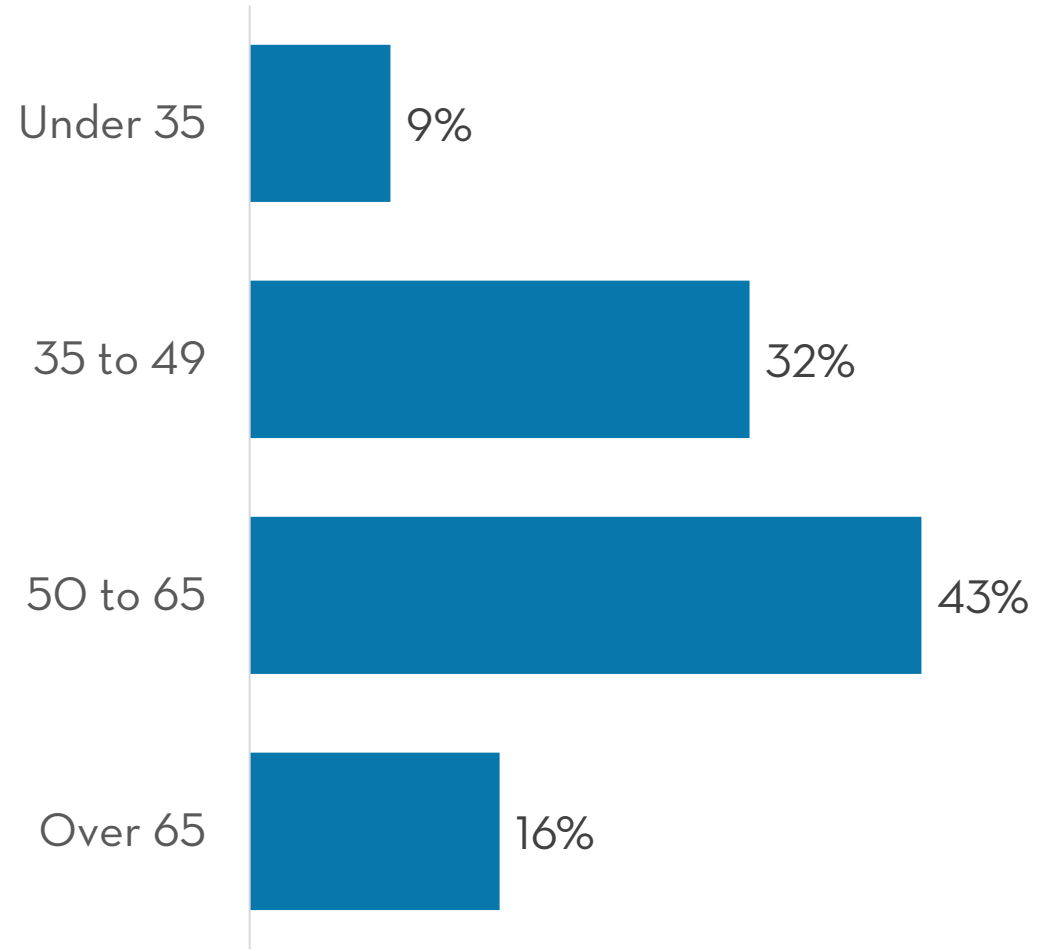
54% of visitors traveled with children under the age of 20



AGE OF WALTON COUNTY VISITORS



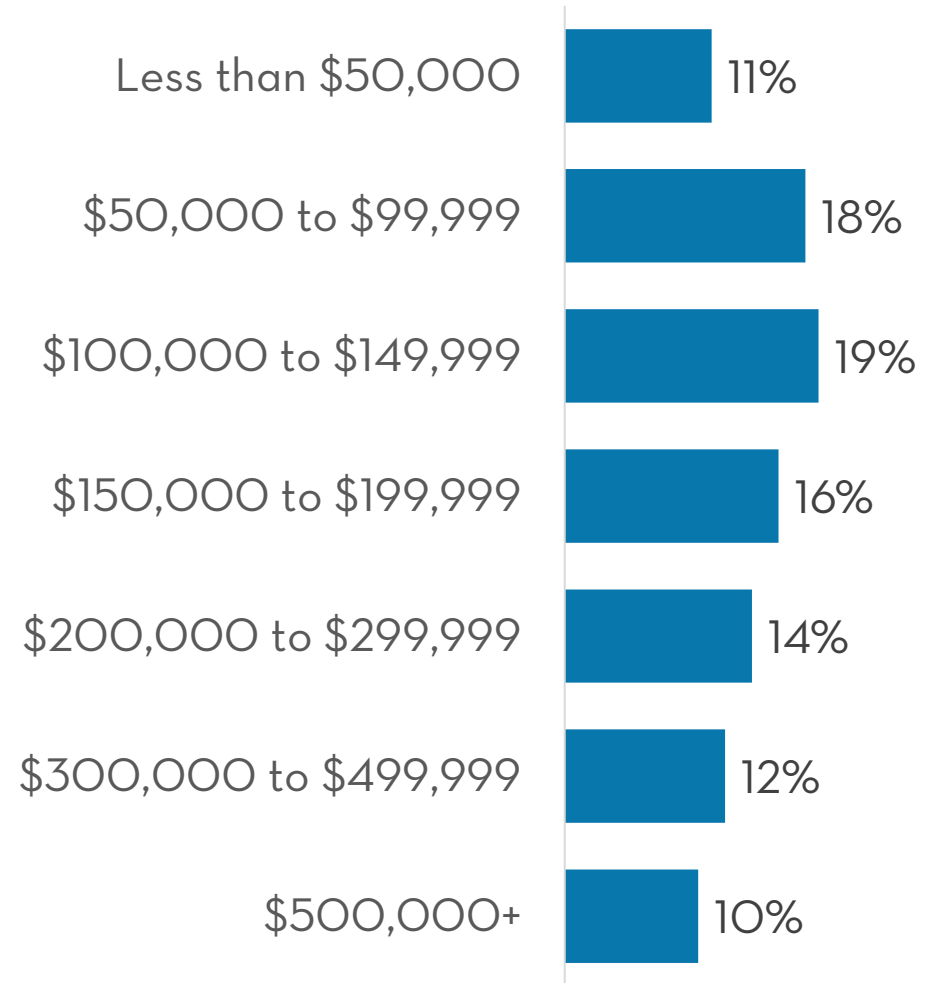
Median age of visitors was **53** years old



TOTAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME



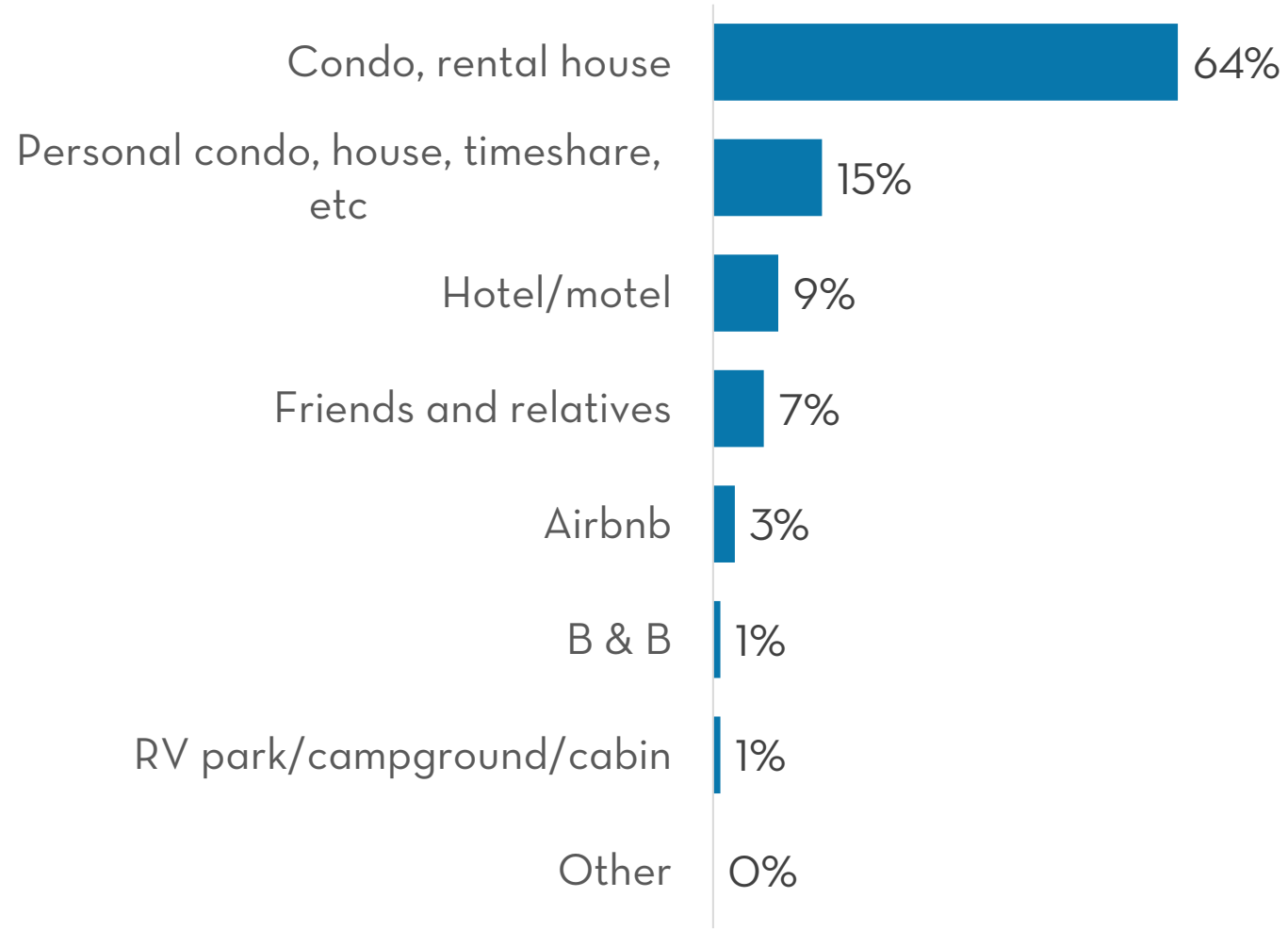
Visitors had a **median** household income of **\$156,700**



VISITOR JOURNEY: TRIP EXPERIENCE



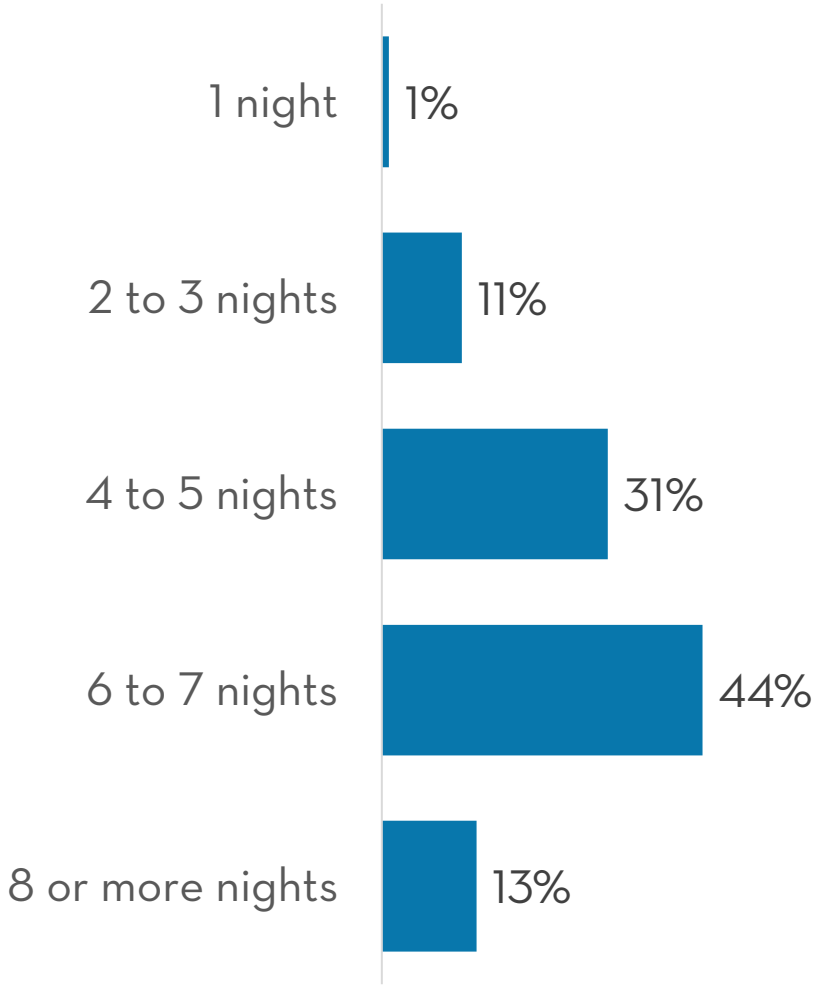
VISITOR'S ACCOMMODATIONS



LENGTH OF STAY



Visitors spent an average of **5.9** nights¹ in Walton County



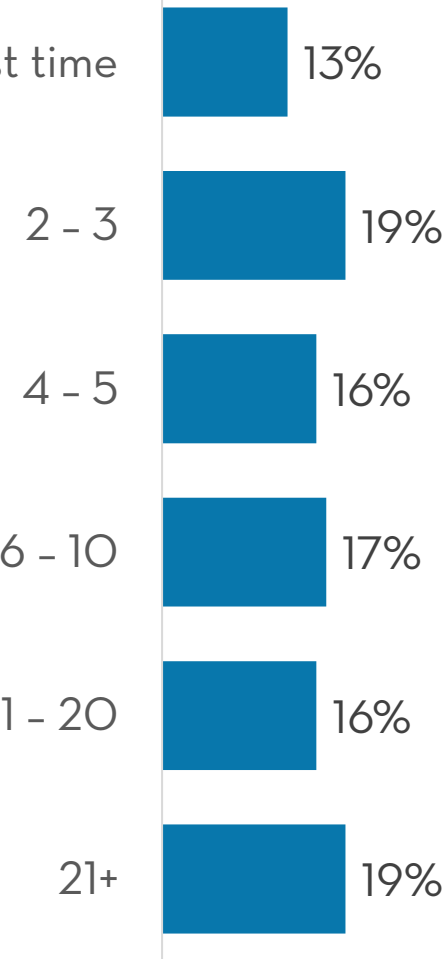
¹ Visitors who stayed in Walton County up to 30 nights.

NUMBER OF VISITS TO WALTON COUNTY

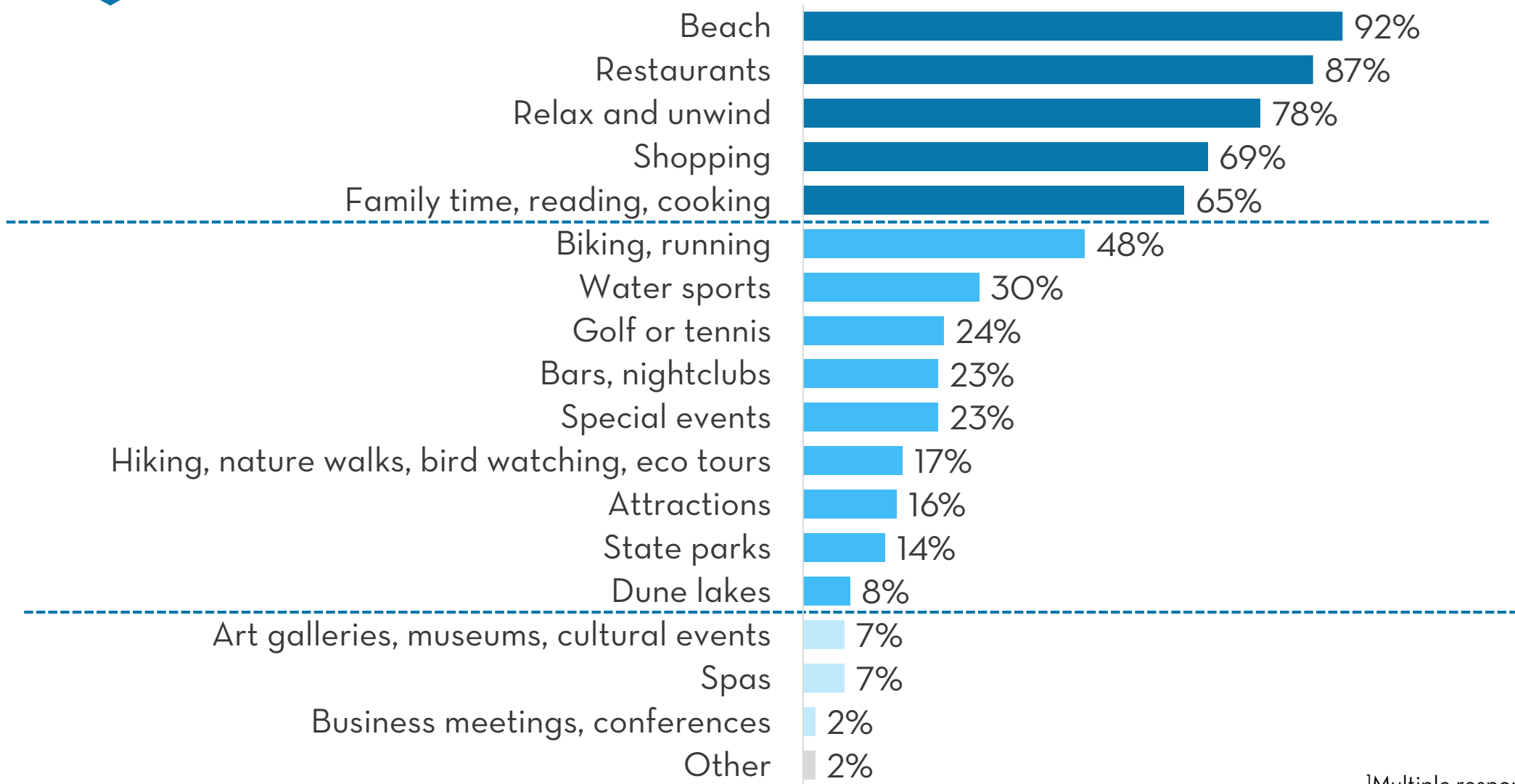
Over 1 in 8 visitors were visiting for the first time

35% of visitors have visited Walton County more than 10 times

That was my first time



VISITOR ACTIVITIES¹

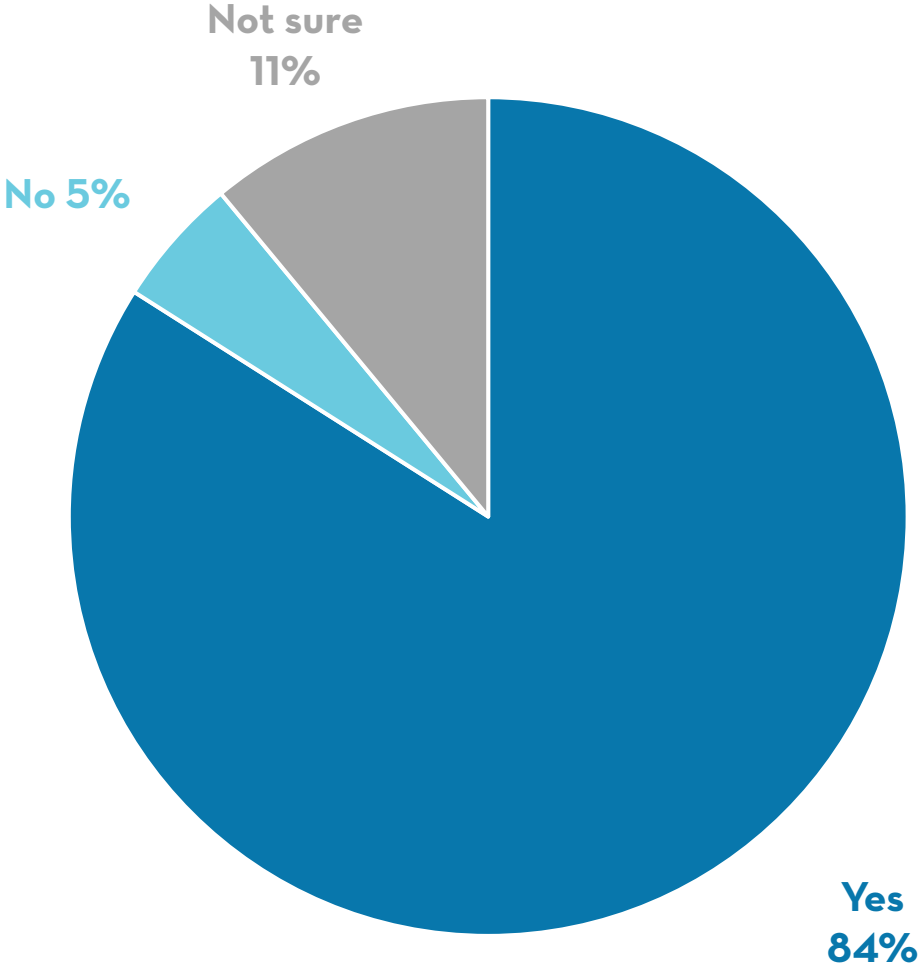


¹Multiple responses permitted.

BEACH SAFETY



84% of visitors know there are flags posted along the beaches to indicate how safe it is to go into the water



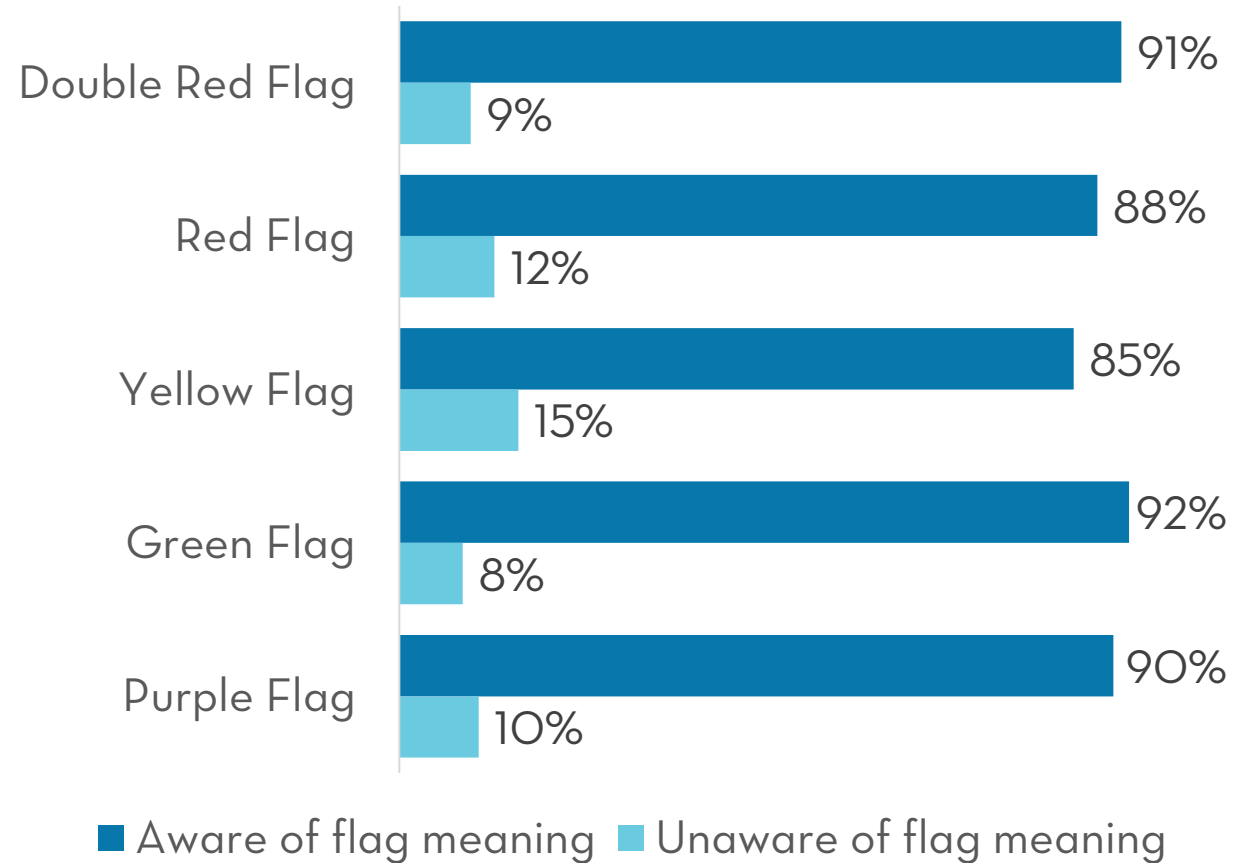
BEACH FLAG AWARENESS



Over 9 in 10 visitors are aware of the meaning of the double red, green, and purple flag colors.



63% of visitors are aware that entering the Gulf during double red flag conditions can result in a \$500 fine and criminal charges



TYPICAL WALTON COUNTY TRAVEL PARTY EXPENSES¹

Visitor Metrics ¹	Average Daily Expenditure	Total Trip Expenditure
Accommodations	\$288	\$1,688
Restaurants	\$159	\$941
Groceries	\$72	\$425
Shopping	\$144	\$867
Entertainment	\$50	\$297
Transportation	\$55	\$332
Other	\$17	\$102
Total	\$785	\$4,652

¹Visitors who stayed 30 nights or fewer. Includes day trippers.

VISITOR JOURNEY: POST-TRIP EVALUATION



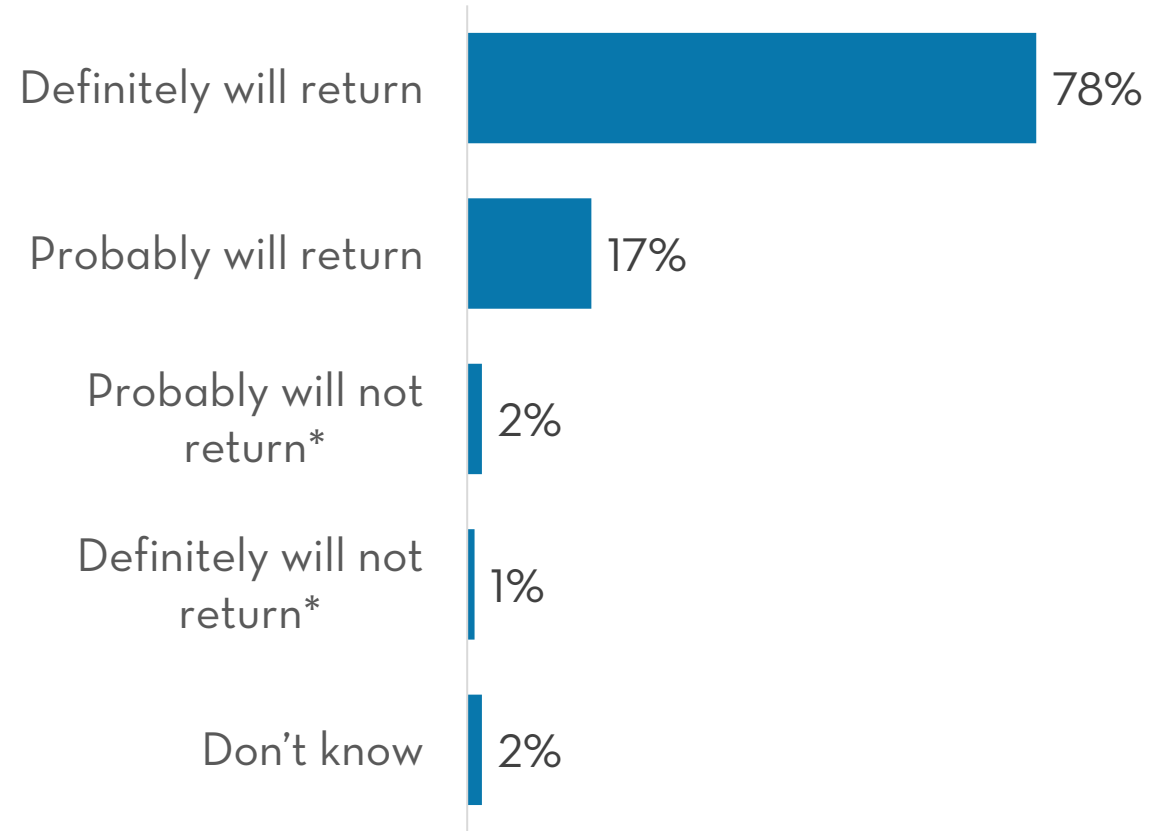
SATISFACTION WITH WALTON COUNTY



Visitors gave Walton County a rating of **9.2¹** as a place to vacation



78% will definitely return to Walton County



¹10 = Excellent; 1= Poor

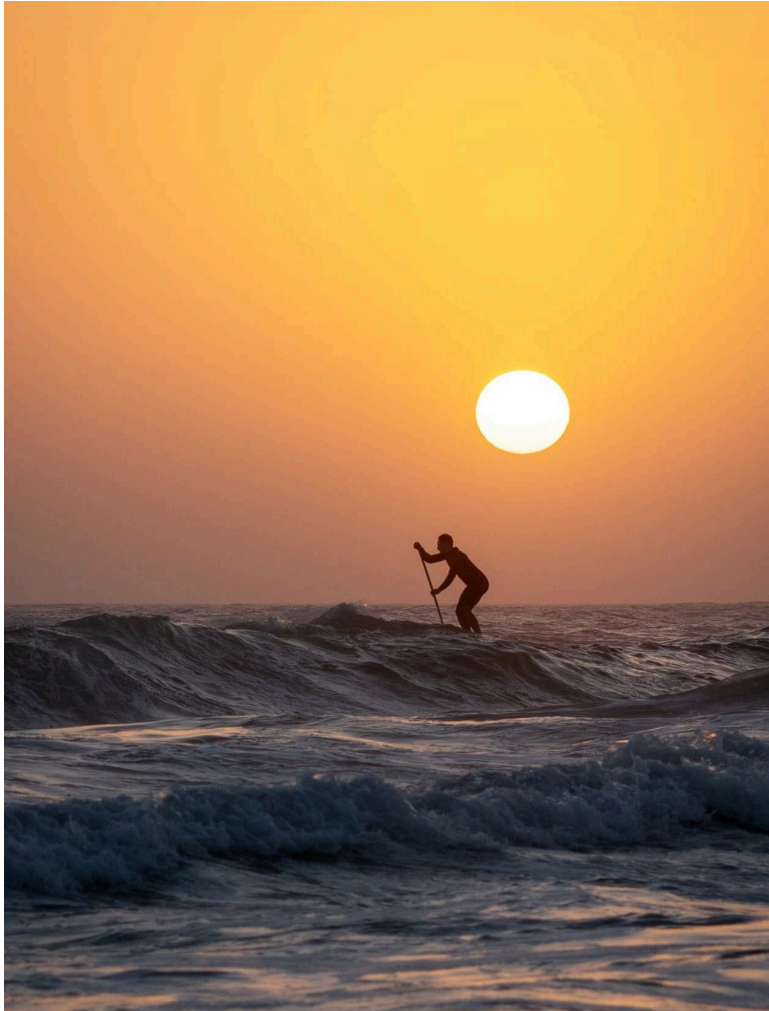
* 3% of all visitors will probably not return to Walton County for the following reasons:
1. Too crowded 2. Too expensive and 3. Traffic was a problem.

RATING WALTON COUNTY¹



¹ Rated on a scale from 1 to 10 where 1 is poor and 10 is excellent.

AREA DESCRIPTIONS



"White sand, emerald water, convenient restaurants. Clean!"

"Friendly, quiet, and clean place with a beautiful landscape. All sorts of activities if you want to do something. Nice food at any establishment."

"Beautiful area with charming neighborhoods. A relaxing place with most everything in walking distance."

"We have been coming to the area since I was a teenager. WaterSound Beach is our 'happy place' - so private, comfortable, and laid back. Perfect spot."

"It is an upscale environment with beautiful beaches, bike paths, and fantastic restaurants."

"Beautiful place with beautiful water and lots of things to do for the whole family. Once you're there, you don't want to come back home."

"Safe environment, beautiful uncrowded beaches."

AREA DESCRIPTIONS



“Wonderful family vacation with lots in walking distance and beautiful beaches & scenery.”

“A wonderful place for a family of all ages to relax and have fun.”

“Safe family place where the kids can run free without worry. Nice early evening curfew to eliminate trouble at night. Amazing place!”

“Small communities with some of the world's most beautiful beaches and luxurious homes. Safe and friendly - plenty to do with the family.”

“Perfect slice of Americana - like how it was when I was a kid.”

“You park your car when you get there, and you really don't need to move it. Everything - a wide variety of restaurants, shopping, groceries, and family fun are all a bike ride (or less) away.”

“Picturesque, idyllic, utopian, family-friendly, upscale.”

AREA DESCRIPTIONS



"Like Mayberry with a beach."

"Quaint beach town, easy to get around, family friendly with lots of teenagers."

"Sweet and charming with curated architecture. It is a unique place that you don't find in many beach towns."

"Like the Caribbean but in the U.S."

"Beautiful beaches and Gulf. Lots of restaurants that are good and near 30A. Lots of fishing, history, golf, and activities available if you want that."

"Gorgeous architecture. Feels like you've traveled abroad. Safe for the young adults to hang out and bike around."

"Perfection! Love the beaches and the restaurants, and love bike riding."

"Beautiful beaches and friendly people. Great restaurants. A great place to relax."

EMOTIONS ASSOCIATED WITH WALTON COUNTY



"Pure bliss."

"Calm and warm feeling."

"Excitement, joy, pleasure."

"Refreshing."

"Comfort and relaxation."

"Calm, romantic, peaceful, beautiful."

"Escape from reality."

"Happy and Blessed."

"Good vibes."

"My feet in sand and listening to sound of waves is pure bliss."

"The more sunshine, the fewer worries."

"Nothing more soothing than laying on beach listening to the waves."

"Peace and tranquility."

"The magic of watching a sunset."

"The excitement and joy once I see water."

WALTON COUNTY TOURISM

2023 Visitor Tracking & Economic Impact Study

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