



WALTON
COUNTY
TOURISM

North Walton Brand Positioning Study

July 2023



STUDY PURPOSE

This research was conducted to identify unique elements of North Walton and understand the destination's draws from the perspective of its stakeholders and partners.

The result will be used to develop appropriate branding for the destination.



An aerial photograph showing a commercial district with several large industrial-style buildings, parking lots, and a road. In the background, there is a large body of water (a lake or reservoir) surrounded by a dense forest of trees under a clear sky.

STUDY METHOD

An online survey was conducted among North Walton stakeholders and partners. 139 responses were collected and analyzed for insights.



First Things That Come to Mind

1. **Nature** – springs, beaches, pine forest, natural lakes, DeFuniak Springs, farms and rural areas
2. **History** – Florida’s oldest working library, historic train station, Victorian homes, Historic District, as well as other historic and cultural assets
3. **Peace & Relaxation** – hometown community with relaxing atmosphere, to unwind and relax, away from the tourists



MOST POPULAR ACTIVITIES

Many partners associate water activities (visiting the natural springs, swimming, river fishing, boating, and kayaking, going to the beaches) and outdoor activities (walking downtown, horseback riding, golfing, sports, hunting, hiking) with vacationing in North Walton.

However, about 1 in 4 partners do not think that there is much to do there.



FEELINGS + EMOTIONS

The positive emotions associated with vacationing in North Walton include relaxation, quietness, freedom, peacefulness, laid back, exploration, engagement, happiness and fun.

The negative emotions mentioned were boredom, anxiousness, frustration, stressfulness, and crowdedness.



NORTH WALTON AS A PERSON

Overall, North Walton is a kind, lovely, friendly, laidback, and grateful person who lives a country life and dresses casual and conservative.

North Walton is seen as a traditional, genuine, hardworking, humble person who loves telling stories of the past and history. They value traditions, passionate about sustainability and nature preservation. They are a bit quiet and humble, but full of character once you get to know them. North Walton has something to connect with everyone.

Values such as family, nature, and community are important to North Walton, as well as activities such as swimming, fishing, and outdoor exploration.





UNIQUE ATTRIBUTES

North Walton offers a unique opportunity to learn about history and cultural heritage, as well as connecting to the great outdoors and natural wonders. The area boasts a variety of natural springs and lakes that suit numerous different outdoor activities.

North Walton may have the potential to become a common destination for families and couples, but some believe in it should be kept the same with less tourism activities.



TOP IMAGES TO DESCRIBE NORTH WALTON

Over 1 in 3 said these pictures are generally true descriptions of North Walton.

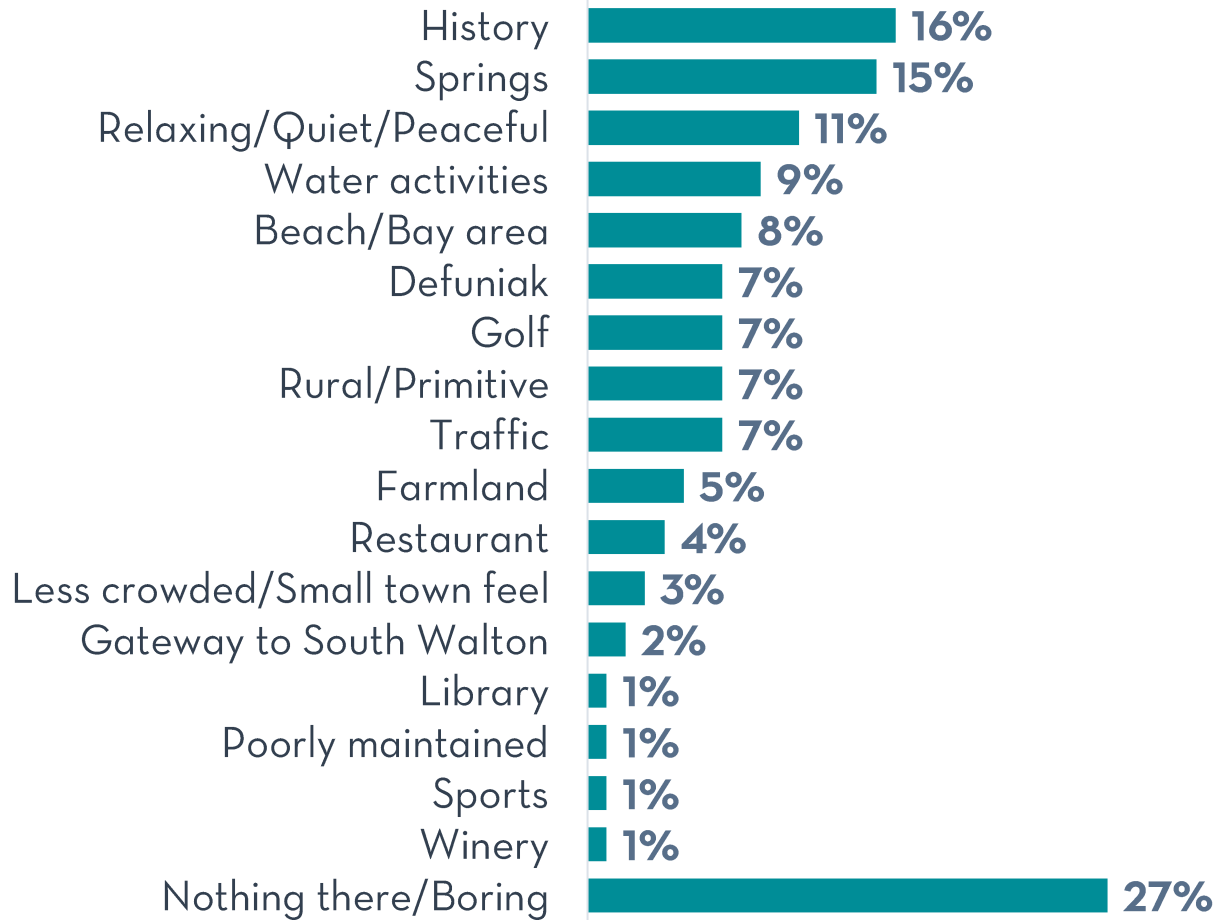
A lot of partners and stakeholders mention the water bodies, feeling of relaxation, exploring arts, cultures, and history as the reasons why they chose the images to describe North Walton.



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DETAILED FINDINGS

FIRST THING THAT COMES TO MIND*



*Please write down the first thing that comes to mind when you think of North Walton as a place to take a vacation/getaway. Coded open-ended response.





“A natural escape to a historic community with a small-town feel.”

“Downtown DeFuniak Springs as a center for arts and culture, shopping, restaurants and lake front events.”

“Easy access to the beaches. Affordable rates. Historic downtown with shops and restaurants. Music and entertainment. Swim, fish and enjoy the historic homes and downtown that make DeFuniak unique and beautiful.”

“Wide open, evergreen forest of pine, wild magnolia and rich oak lends itself to repose. Adding the sun kissed Choctawhatchee Bay and natural lakes throughout North Walton, one finds boating, jet-skiing, fishing, swimming and a myriad of outdoor events. And we are just a short distance for a day of emerald water with white sandy beaches.”

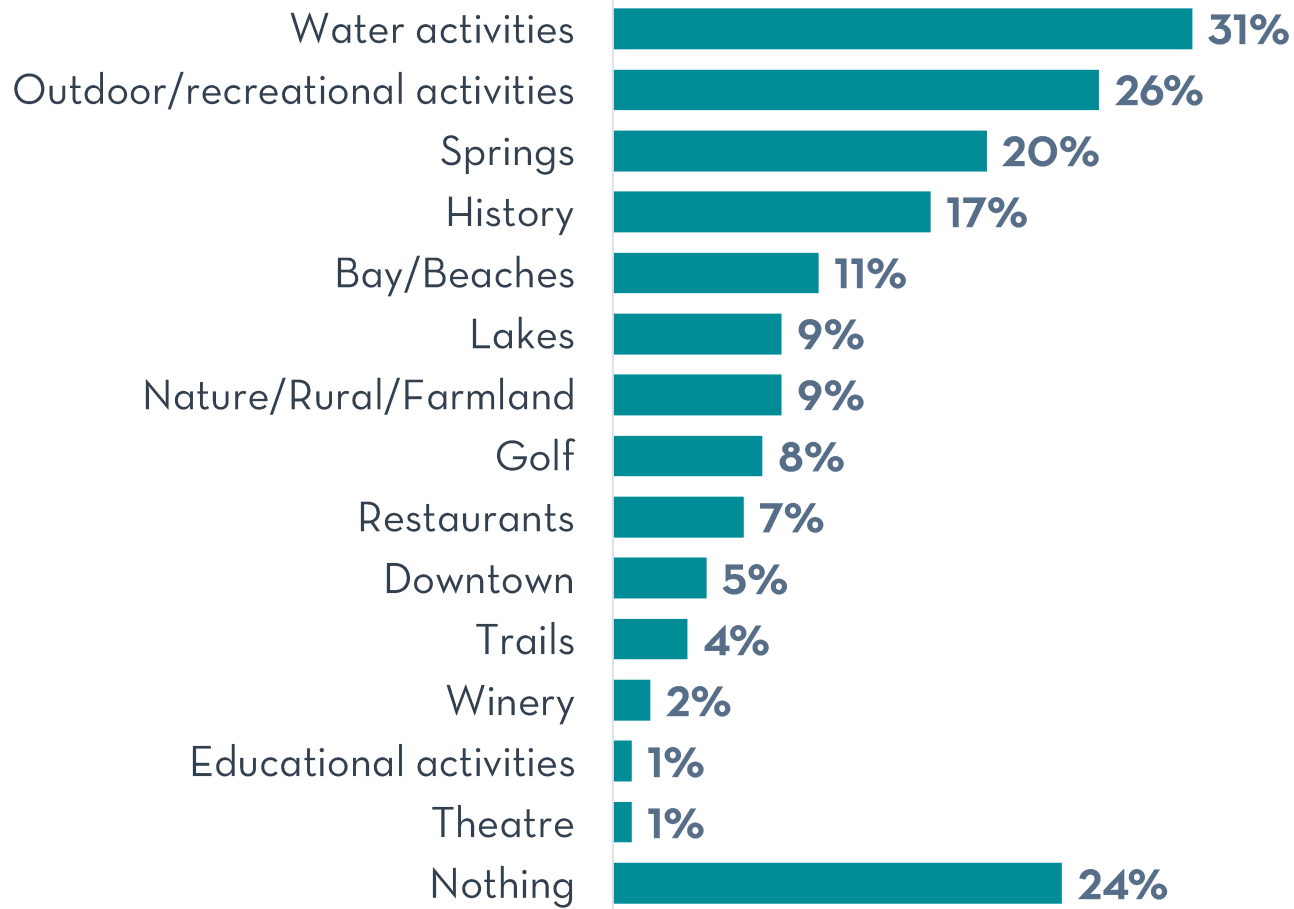


“Rural family farms, farmers markets, food trucks, nothing notable that would make one want to vacation. Most businesses are for locals and close early.”

“Poorly maintained. Code enforcement is nonexistent when it comes to trash covered property and businesses. Take a ride along Highway 20. I'm amazed at the lack of concern by county and city officials north of the bay. This county has the potential to be the jewel of the gulf coast. Living here since 2007 I can tell you that it is getting worse not better.”

“Nothing to do, no place to stay, no restaurants to speak of north of the bay.”

ACTIVITIES ASSOCIATED WITH A NORTH WALTON VACATION*



*What activities do you associate with North Walton as a place to take a vacation/getaway?
Coded open-ended response.



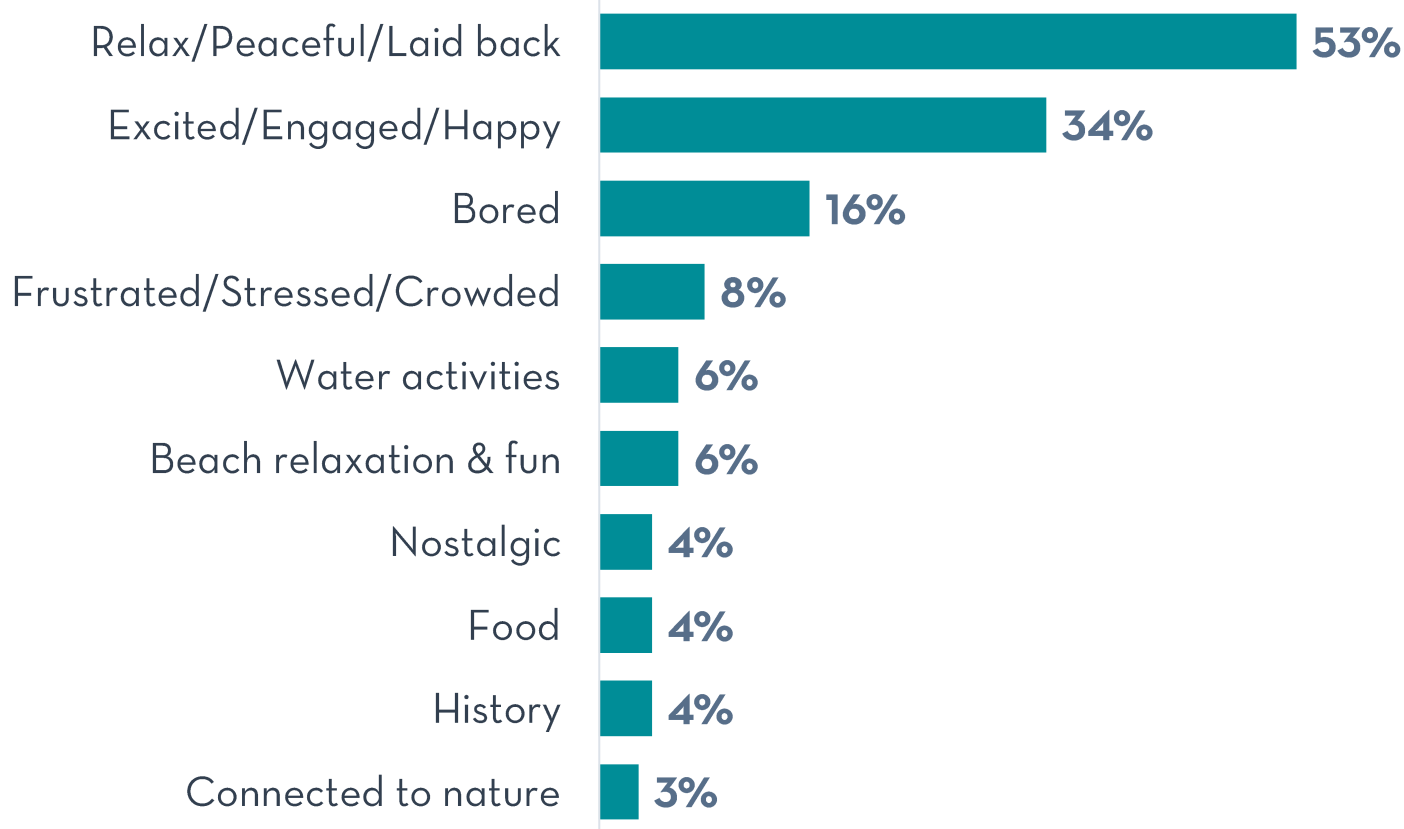


“Other than a couple of nice restaurants in DeFuniak Springs there is not much attraction. Been to the highway point in Florida and it is not been made out as a highlight to visit. The various parks are not pushed very much but there is no standard for each one to be improved to. The county owned golf course in Defuniak has become a favorite of the golfers in Freeport and South Walton. I am impressed with the improvements and the restaurant is very good.”

“The desire to lounge on a porch overlooking the lake yard. Ride a bike. Walk to dinner. Have a modern playground and splash pad. Feed the ducks. Enjoy family time.”

“I live in North Walton. There are several nice springs to visit and lakes etc. However, no really good hiking trails. The land management area have some very nice woods to hike, but nothing is really marketed.”

EMOTIONS ASSOCIATED WITH TAKING A VACATION*



*Think about what you wrote as the first things that come to mind when you think about North Walton. There are emotions associated with taking a vacation/getaway. Get in touch with those emotions. How does taking a vacation/getaway make you feel?

Coded open-ended response.





“Thoughts of being nestled along a meandering river and expansive bay, offering ample opportunities for fishing and paddling, invokes a sense of tranquility and adventure. As I imagine taking a vacation or getaway to such a place, I feel a surge of *anticipation* and *excitement*, tinged with a hint of *nostalgia*. The thought of immersing myself in the rich history of the town, exploring its quaint streets lined with charming architecture, and strolling along the riverbank fills me with a profound sense of *serenity*. The notion of casting my line into the bay, feeling the gentle sway of the boat beneath me, and engaging in the art of fishing evokes a deep connection with nature, evoking a sense of *contentment* and *harmony*. The prospect of paddling along the meandering river, surrounded by lush greenery and the soothing sounds of water, stirs a spirit of *adventure* within me. Taking a vacation or getaway has a transformative power, allowing me to escape the stresses of everyday life, reconnect with myself and loved ones, and create lasting memories. It brings a profound sense of *freedom*, *joy*, and a *renewed perspective* on the world.”



“If it is crowded, busy, congested with traffic I instantly become stressed and it's no longer a vacation it's no longer peaceful or get away. People need rural areas nature to nurture and to relax. Seeing tiny homes, seeing little cottages. A relaxed stress-free lifestyle for me is very relaxing. The hustle and bustle of city life I want no part of. Tourist attractions have their place but does not need to be everywhere. Taking kids to a park where there might be a splash pad or little WOD pond, nature trails, camping, fishing, hunting, archery, walking down the stream with a nature trail. Life is already busy every single day, relaxation is what a vacation is to me.”

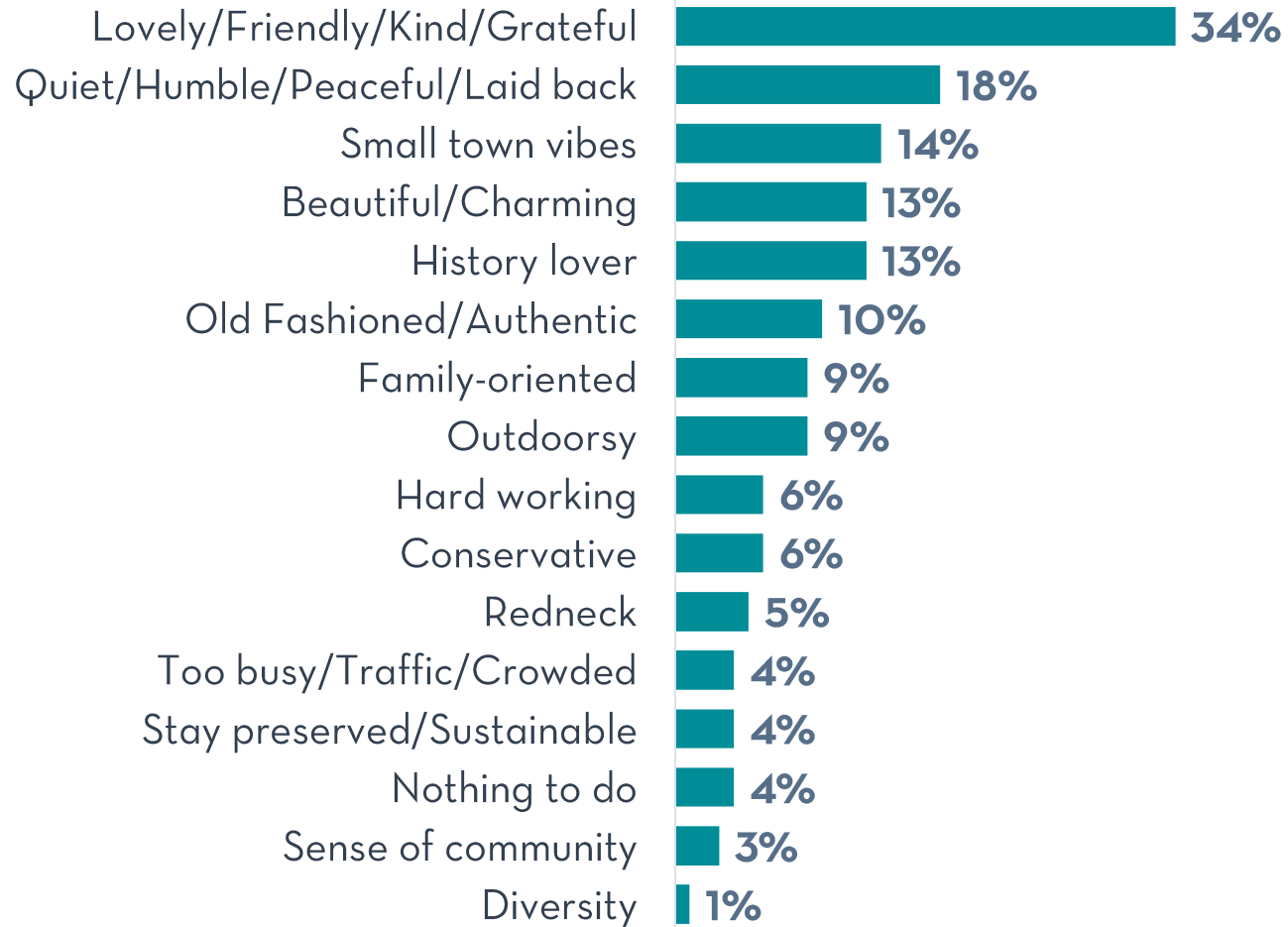
“The idea of taking a vacation is wonderful. However, knowing that I have to drive 45 minutes to an hour to get through traffic to go to dinner and find things for the kids to do makes me feel anxious and very frustrated.”



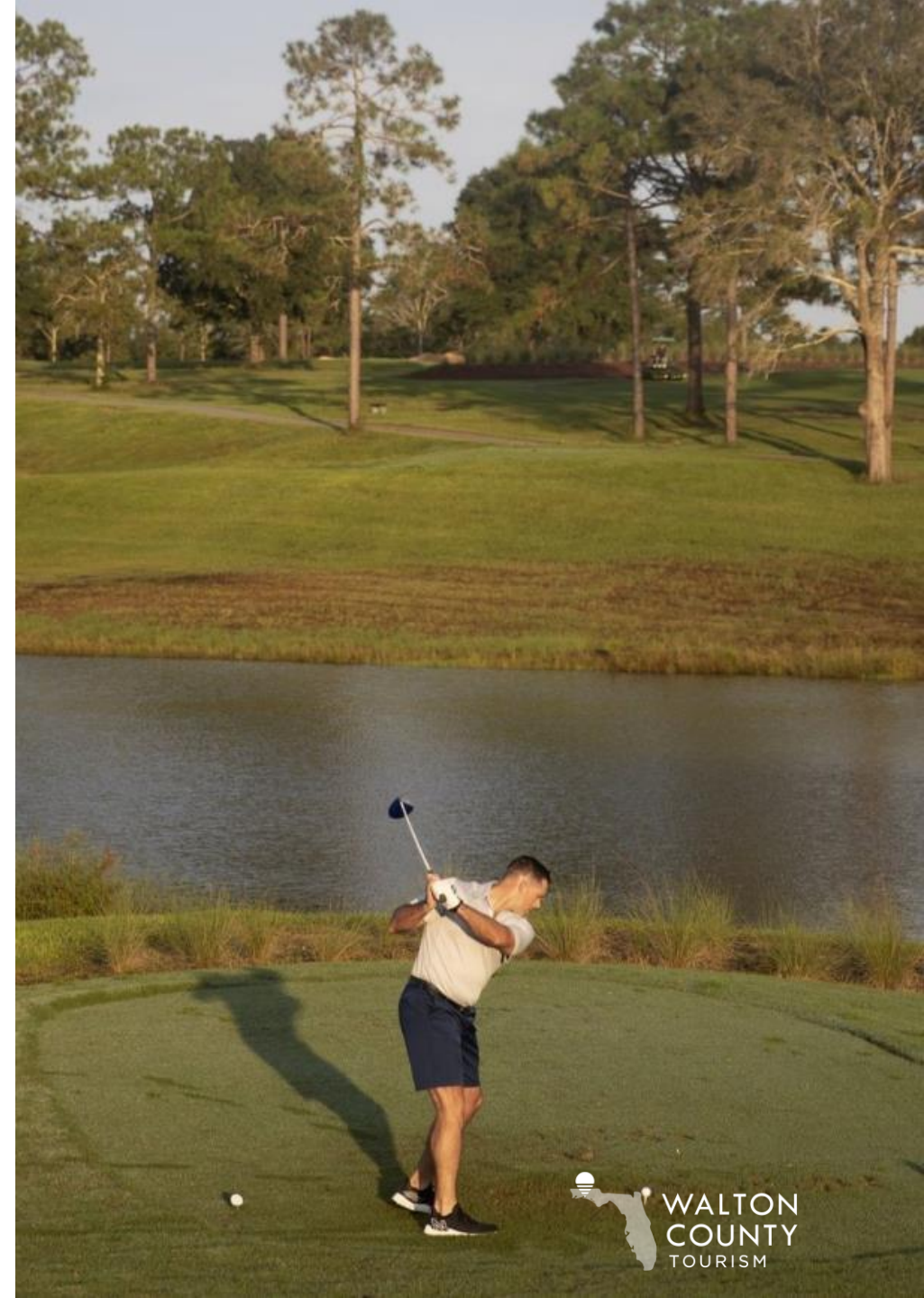
“As a resident of North Walton for over 40 years, I know there are very few areas of interest that anyone visiting would come here for. Amateurish at best for the offerings in DeFuniak. Nothing else within the north of the county has any draw whether on the basis of a historical or vacationing. If I were to vacation, it wouldn't be for North Walton or any other part of the county for that matter.”

“When you take a vacation, you want to go and see and do things. There is nothing in DeFuniak Springs to see or do. The only thing is that train depot and history museum. If you don't live around here, you really don't care about the history of DeFuniak.”

NORTH WALTON AS A PERSON*



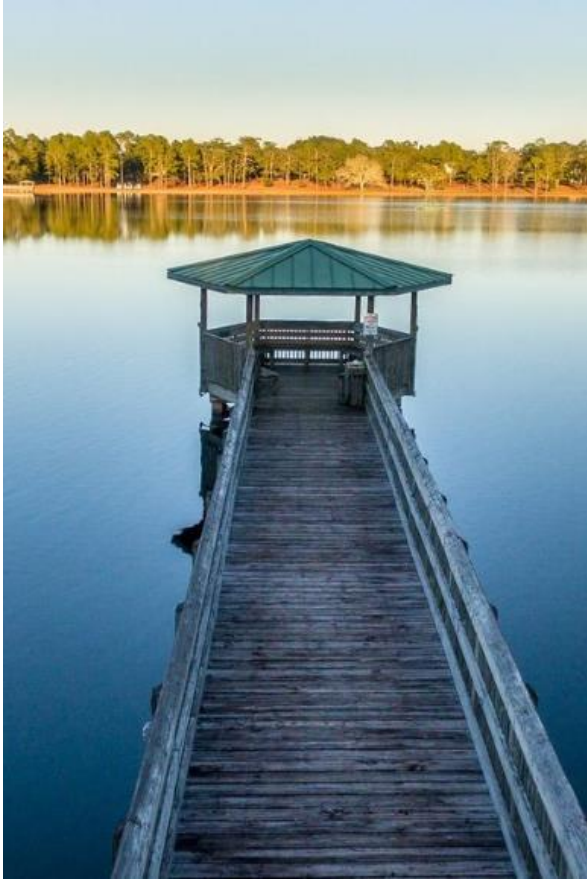
*Describe North Walton as a person - what do they look like - what's their personality, traits, values, activities, passions, weaknesses, strengths, etc.?
Coded open-ended response.





“Hometown, kind, country, rich traditionalists, graciously conservative, hunters, trades people. Weakness: Adverse to change. Strengths: Welcoming, traditionalists, preservationists, kind, passionate, strong, loyal, intense.”

“A sweet elderly Grandmother who takes care of the whole family with a beautiful smile on her face. She is the prettiest lady you have ever seen, and her smile makes her the prettiest lady on earth. She is a strong woman but not formally educated. She loves to tell stories and fun to be around. She is always very grateful that you showed up.”



“North Walton is a debutant with a lot of potential, if correctly managed and developed, can turn into a jewel. She is still developing, friendly, slightly interesting, but a bit conservative to be fully interesting. She needs to focus on her natural beauty and preserve it so that others can enjoy.”

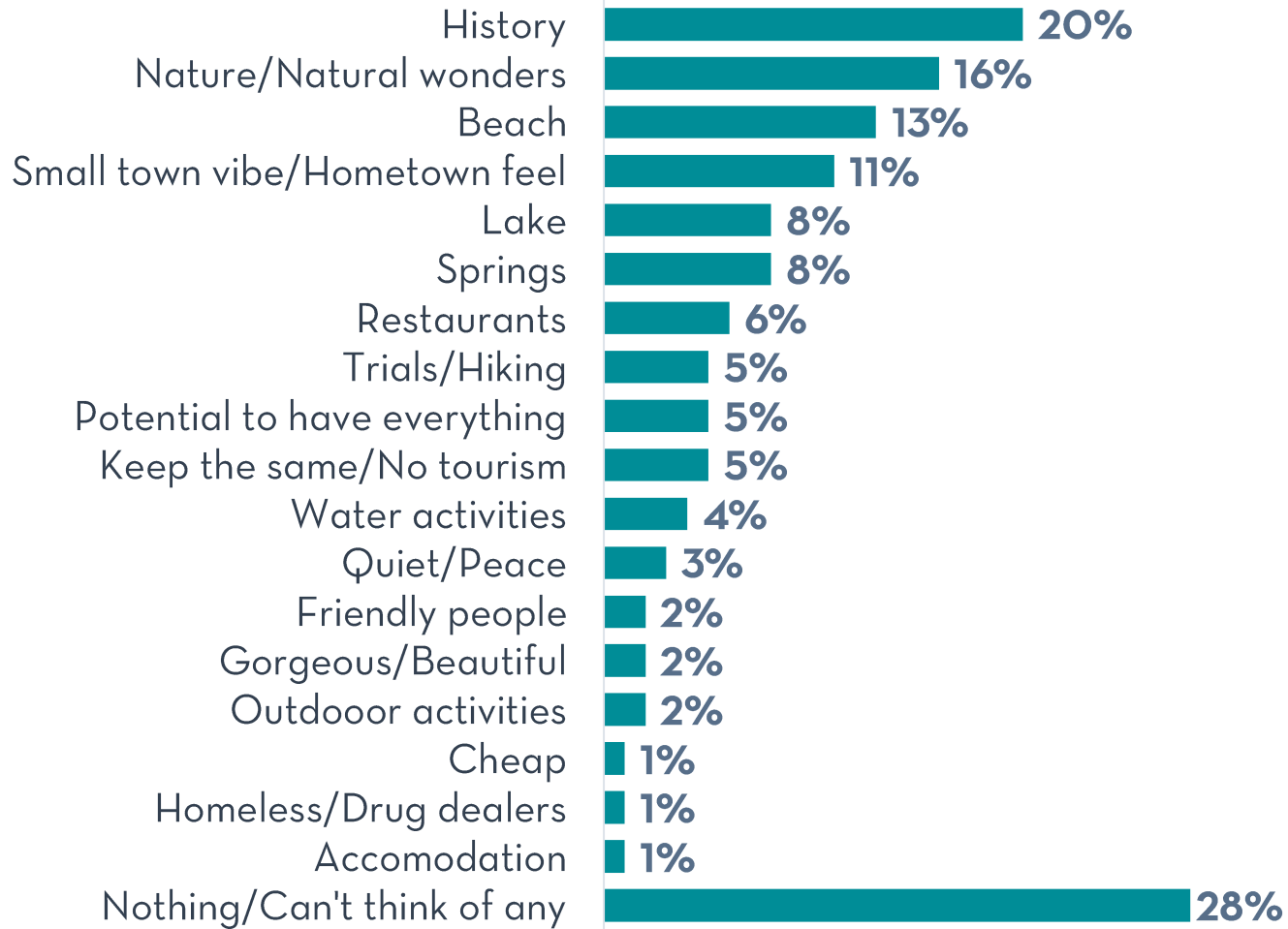
“North Walton is laid back and friendly. They value history and connections but could use a little push to cultivate friendships and partnerships with others who value the same things.”

“There's a little bit of everyone in North Walton. From fisherman to farmer, we are the people of your hometown. The ones who ask about your momma, give you directions and make sure you stop by the Tastee Freeze and get a shake. We are good people who want to see other good people visit and enjoy our town.”



“North Walton is the 'Red Headed Stepchild'. Beautiful as far as nature goes. Parts of North Walton are old and graceful, but the historic sights are not kid-friendly. No museum (1 train car that takes all of 10 minutes to look at), no science centers or zoo, no water or amusement parks. I don't want to hear my kids complaining 45 mins after arriving that they are bored and I don't want to be bored either! I don't know of any cabins in the woods to rent, even though There are acres of beautiful woods to hike or hunt and body of water to fish, swim or boat, it's not advertised or public friendly. The county owns so much land in the north end even waterfront that are not utilized. A lot of potential but no ambition or drive due to the focus always being on the favorite child (South Walton).”

DESTINATION'S UNIQUE ATTRIBUTES*



*What's unique or special about North Walton as a place to take a vacation/getaway?
Coded open-ended response.





“The various bodies of water provide opportunities for a plethora of outdoor activities, including camping, canoeing, kayaking, fishing, swimming, snorkeling, skiing, etc. Additionally, North Walton has a rich history told through our architecture, food, and cultural events.”

“Access to the bay, proximity to the beach without being in the beach traffic.”

“The springs offer some beautiful sights that are rare for visitors from other states. For the family that wants to do more than just sit on the beach, there are lots of other things to see and do right here within a short drive. For a wintertime vacation, there is not a better place than the Florida panhandle.”

“How open and welcoming all the residents are to new visitors. While they do not care much for the opinions of visitors, they do love meeting new people and showing them the things we have in the area that make us special.”



60%*



51%

TOP 5 IMAGES THAT BEST CAPTURE NORTH WALTON'S ESSENCE



42%



33%



31%

*Percentages of respondents who chose each image

28%



23%



OTHER IMAGES THAT BEST CAPTURE NORTH WALTON'S ESSENCE

19%



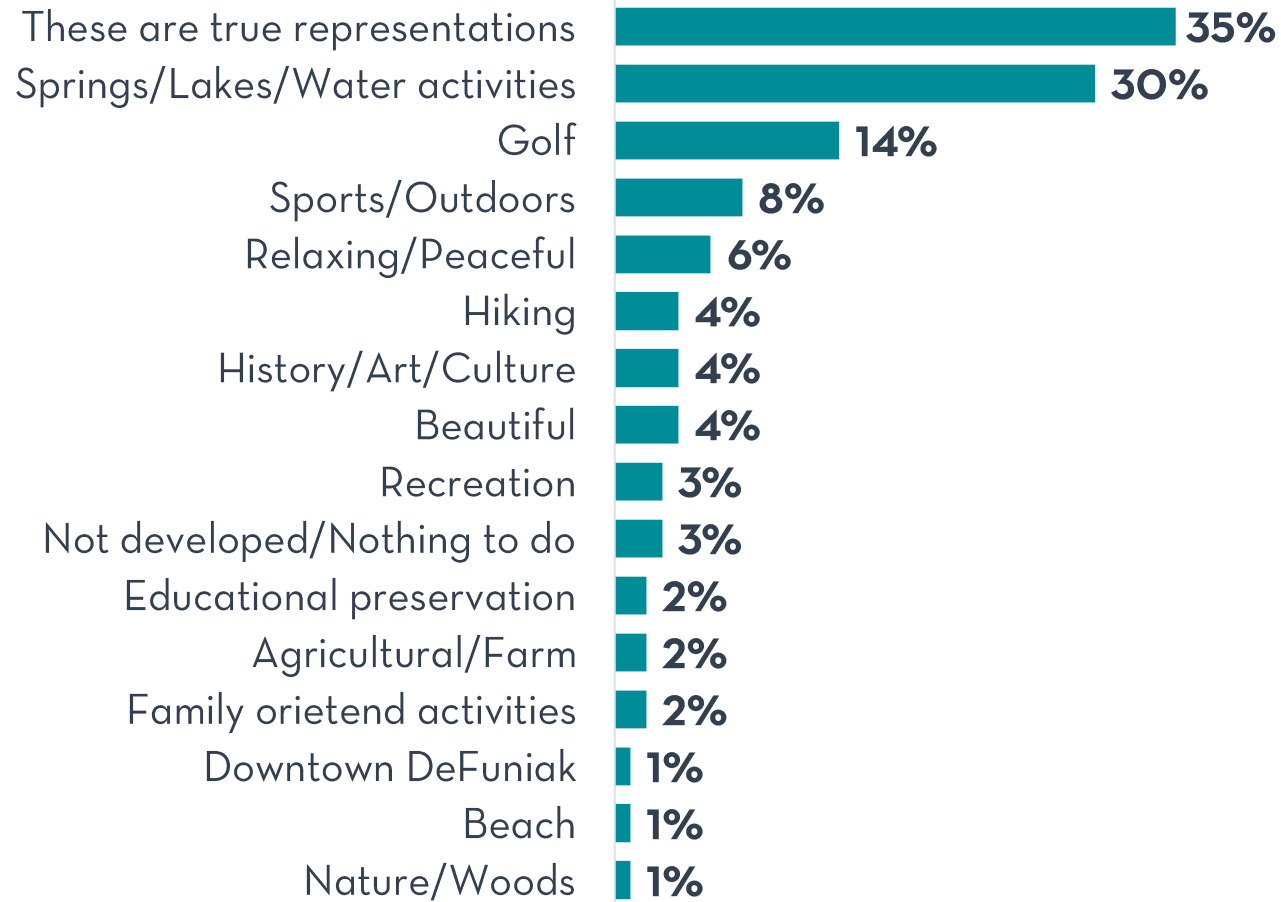
14%



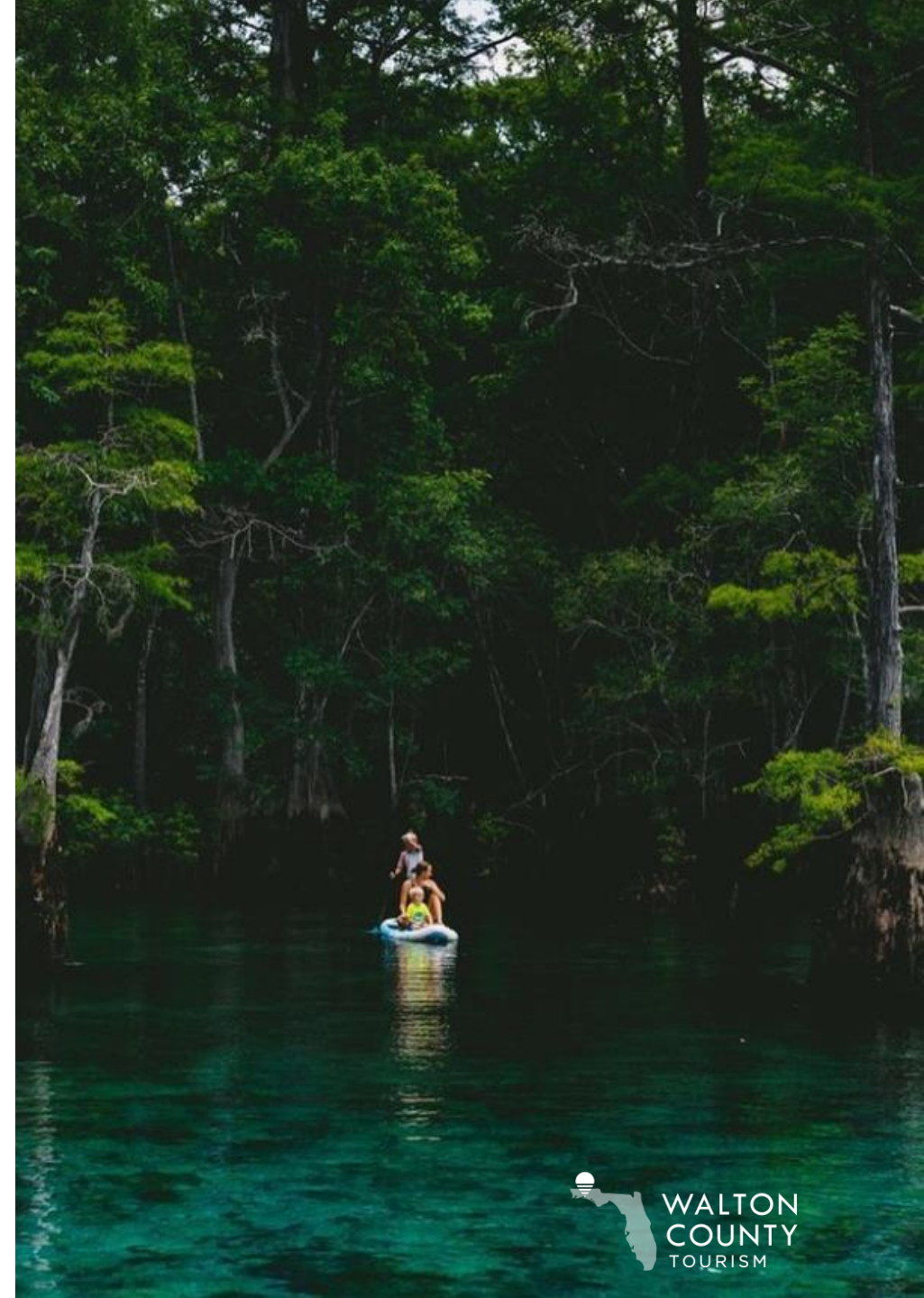
8%



REASONS THESE IMAGES CAPTURE NORTH WALTON'S ESSENCE*



*Tell us why you selected your images.
Coded open-ended response.





“Because they represent the open outdoors and the freedom you would feel while experiencing those areas.”

“History around the lake, photo doesn't do it justice. A great option for golfing most do not know about.”

“The history of NoWal sets it apart from the beaches. The first planned community in Florida birthed arts, education, recreation and religion. Each of those areas are very prevalent when you visit!”

10% said the images were not representative of North Walton

- It's Paxton.....I'm North Walton. A generic basketball picture, golf picture, wave runners are ridiculous. Ain't no one going on vacation to play Eagle Springs. MAYBE windswept.
- Because many of the images are not North Walton.
- No people. No tourism. No greed.
- The Paxton sign was crudely made and shows just you're going to see in Paxton because that is it. The other of the sign that says 'trail' shows more went into the overpriced county signage for a trail that doesn't look maintained. As for the other images provided, they were NOT of North Walton with the exception of the Lake DeFuniak which is false advertising as there is no view of it at that perspective unless with a drone or top of the water tower.
- None selected as none represented North Walton. They were all of what someone that lives on 30A thinks North Walton looks like.
- Could not chose, some photos relate to the southern parts of Walton County! Not the northern part, Walton County does not have the infrastructure to support the residents, much less more visitors!
- It's aerial view and luckily, can't see the filth, houses falling apart, churches in every forsaken corner or traffic. Kuddos to the photographer.
- It's the only 3 that's ever really advertised.
- The others, especially golf course DO NOT represent North Walton.



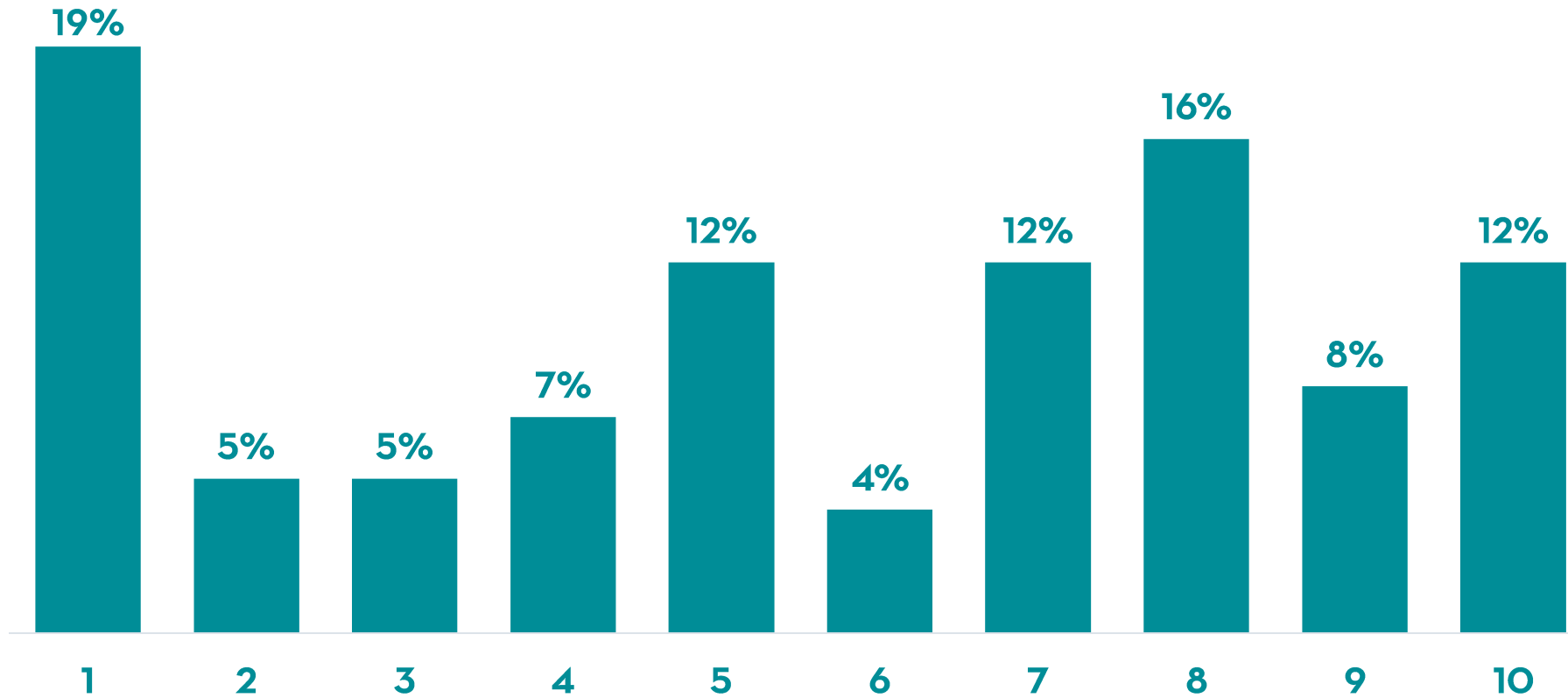
BRAND STATEMENT TESTING

“A wide variety of shopping, dining and activities awaits just above the Choctawhatchee Bay. Encompassing Freeport, Paxton and DeFuniak Springs, these welcoming communities are filled with incredible historic treasures and pastoral landscapes. Tour past the beautiful Victorian homes and the buildings of the former Chautauqua Assembly. Discover the world-class E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center, nestled within a giant nature preserve. Explore Morrison Springs, a 161-acre park highlighted by a crystal-clear, spring-fed pool that attracts dive enthusiasts, eco-tourists and casual swimmers alike. You’ll find a place that perfectly balances all the charm of its colorful past with great amenities and vibrant culture - still within easy reach of the stunning local beaches.”



HOW WELL THE STATEMENT REPRESENTS NORTH WALTON*

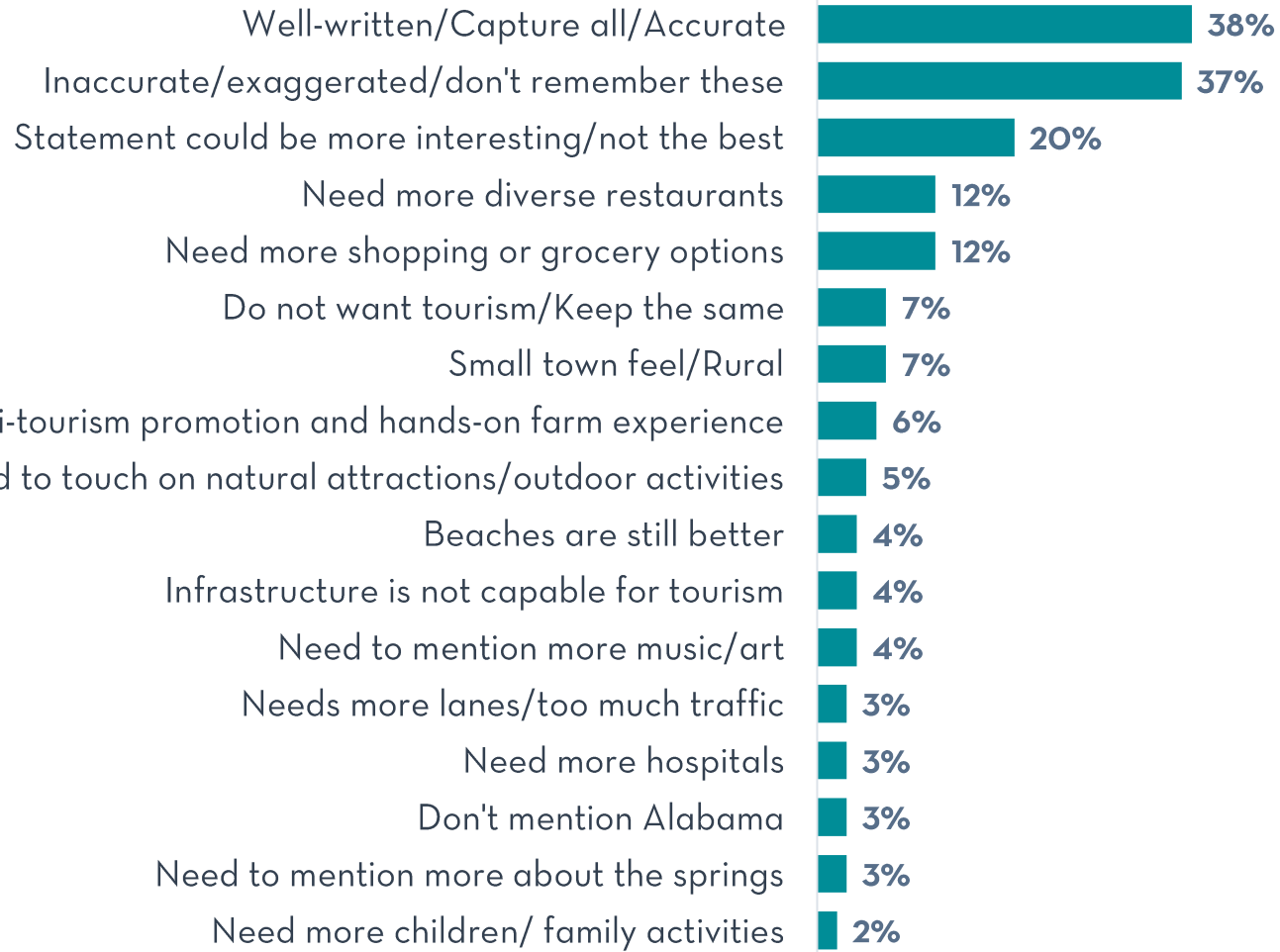
Median Score: 6.0 out of 10



*On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest, please rate how well this statement represents North Walton as a place to take a vacation/getaway?



REASONS FOR THE RATINGS*



*Why did you give it that rating?
Coded open-ended response.



GOOD TO EXCELLENT RATINGS

“It truly caught all the key aspects of what makes the area great.”

“Well written. Did not give it a 10 because DeFuniak Springs has a great history of love and appreciation for music and art that was not mentioned.”

“As a resident here, this statement mentions the things that I appreciate about North Walton.”



FAIR TO GOOD RATINGS

“You got most of it right. Still not touching on new attractions or the small-town feel.”

“There is no mention of agriculture that was the main resource for North Walton county for decades. There needs to be more agri-tourism promotion.”

“Those are a few of the places in specific locations. But for the most part, I look at this area as a perfect residential area. It will not be improved by trying to get tourism a boost. Let sleeping dogs lie. We like our area stagnant.”



POOR TO FAIR RATINGS

“This statement is a 4 because it represents North Walton but doesn't make anyone want to vacation there.”

“I would be disappointed after reading that statement and then coming to the area. It over promises.”

“First, Freeport is not North Walton. North Walton is everything above I-10/Hwy 90. Dining choices are limited to way too many Mexican restaurants, overpriced Bogie's, and a barbecue place that closes on Sundays, blue jean churches. Oh, and let's not forget all those chicken places on the interstate. Morrison Springs is always testing high for E. Coli. and is in the middle of nowhere. That other nature preserve place mentioned that I just asked around 10 other long-time residents have never heard of the place either.”





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