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TOURISM CENTER

Itasca Area Visitor Profile: 2014 Final Report

Authored by Daniel Erkkila, Ph.D., Xinyi Qian, Ph.D., and Somongkol Teng

PROGRAM SPONSOR: College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences, University of Minnesota

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March 10, 2016

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Sponsor:
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Reviewers:
Cynthia Messer
Megan Christianson
Trisha Zimmerman

Editor:
Elyse Paxton

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2014, Visit Grand Rapids, the convention and visitor bureau of the greater Grand Rapids area, collaborated with a variety of entities to fund a profile of visitors to the Itasca area from fall 2014 to summer 2015. Below is a summary of findings from the year—September 2014 through August 2015.

RESPONDENTS

About half (50.8 percent) of all respondents were male. Approximately 20 percent of respondents were in the 41-50 (22 percent), 51-60 (21.1 percent), and 61-70 (19.6 percent) age groups. Forty percent were baby boomers (1945-1964), 32 percent were Generation X (1965-1980), 14 percent were millennials (1981-1997), and 12 percent were greatest and silent generation (1919-1945). The annual household income of 43 percent of respondents was in the range of $50,001-$100,000. Nearly 80 percent of respondents resided in the state, traveled an average of 330 miles from their primary residence to visit the Itasca area, and a majority were repeat visitors, with nearly 88 percent making between one and 10visits to the Itasca area in the past 12 months.

TRIP INFORMATION

A majority of respondents indicated the Itasca area was their primary destination (84 percent) and more than 59 percent spent between one and three nights in the area, with the silent and greatest generations spending significantly more time in the Itasca area during summer and spring than other generations. The most frequently chosen lodging facility is a hotel or motel (40 percent), followed by staying in one's own vacation home (31.4 percent). More than 92 percent of respondents traveled to the Itasca area by car, van, or truck. Thirty-nine percent traveled in a group of two, while 36.6 percent traveled with family. In terms of spending, the highest spending category was lodging, followed by restaurants, transportation, shopping, and groceries. The average respondent spent a total of $142.95 a day in the Itasca area, although this number varies widely from visitor to visitor.

TRIP ACTIVITIES, PURPOSE, AND PLANNING

The most frequently identified trip activity is dining out (79.9 percent), followed distantly by fishing (34.5 percent) and visiting friends and relatives (29.9 percent). Visiting friends and family was the most frequently identified primary reason for taking the trip (21.1 percent). In terms of trip planning, 30 percent of respondents planned their trip less than two weeks in advance, and another 23 percent planned the trip within two to four weeks. Word of mouth was the most frequently used information source (50.7 percent), followed distantly by area/destination website (19.4 percent).

SECOND/VACATION HOMEOWNERS

Second/vacation homeowners made an average of 11 visits in the past 12 months while those who did not own a second or vacation home averaged close to four visits. Second/vacation homeowners visited the area an average of 46 times in the past five years, while all others averaged 13 times. Second/vacation homeowners also stayed longer during their visits, averaging close to 21 days, while all others spent an average of three days. Total spending per person, per day, on the other hand, did not differ significantly between the two groups.

INTRODUCTION

Destination marketers need credible and current knowledge about who visits their region, what they do while visiting, and how much they spend. Research that answers one or more of the "4-P's" of marketing (product, price, place, promotion) generates that identifies the client, his or her preferred travel products and time of year to visit, and how he or she likes to receive promotional information about the locale. In the Itasca area, comprehensive consumer information dates back to 2002 (Tourism Center, 2002). The purpose of this study, which was commissioned by Visit Grand Rapids, is to provide the greater Itasca area with information for better marketing decisions.

The Itasca Area Visitor Profile Study was a four-season effort aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of the characteristics and spending patterns of visitors to the Itasca destination area and neighboring communities. A two-page visitor questionnaire obtained information from visitors at key locations in Itasca County across a 12-month period. Respondents were prescreened to qualify as visitors, which meant they traveled more than 50 miles to the area.

Four separate seasonal reports (see "References" section) were generated from this study and illustrate seasonal variations within the visitor profiles. Seasonal reports are often most helpful when creating marketing campaigns throughout the calendar year. This final report, however, reveals visitor characteristics averaged across the entire year (fall 2014—summer 2015) and includes visitor characteristics not part of the seasonal reports, such as second/vacation homeowner metrics. While the information provided here, and in the four seasonal reports, provides a wealth of information about visitors to the Itasca area, the data set is large enough to support even deeper analyses to answer questions beyond those already studied.

Prior Studies

In early 2000, funding by the (then) Minnesota Office of Tourism and other sources led to a collection of visitor profiles in all regions of the state. Thirteen destinations applied to be part of the statewide project; five were selected. Concurrently, Grand Rapids was working with University of Minnesota Tourism Center, with significant funding from the Blandin Foundation, to conduct a similar (but larger) effort to profile area visitors. That particular study went beyond only assessing demand and profiled the supply of tourism products and services. A community tourism development process helped evaluate and document the region's capacity for effective tourism development and offered recommendations for change, as appropriate. The final report, *Evaluation of the Tourism Market and Development Potential of the Itasca Area*, was issued during fall 2002. That study, and the visitor profile information it contained, has served as a reference for the area's tourism marketing and development planning since then. As Itasca's tourism market changed during the years, and businesses and organizations matured in their understanding and use of reliable market data, the 2002 information became less reliable. This study reflects the Itasca area's need for a fresh look at the demand side of the picture—one that focuses on the traveler.

In recent years, four studies conducted by other organizations in the Itasca area, based on secondary data, reported information that may appear similar or related to this work. These studies are summarized below:

The Economic Impact of Leisure & Hospitality in IRRRB Service Area (Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation Board, 2015) profiled "the significance and effect leisure and hospitality has [sic] on the economy in the IRRRB's service area." Using secondary (existing) data from a variety of sources and dates, the report broadly portrays the state of the leisure and hospitality industries, provides labor market and business health information, and gives gross estimates of the economic impact of these industries on the Taconite Tax Relief Area. The view provided is geographically broad, generalized in scope, and relied on existing data from state sources and impact models.

GRMN Creates: an Arts and Culture Roadmap (City of Grand Rapids, 2015). Described as the first initiative of the City of Grand Rapids Arts and Culture Commission, this report documents a planning process with recommendations based on planning goals, objectives, and strategies. It was developed from interviews, focus groups, a community survey, and meetings, plus a strategic visioning process to focus on the community's intentions for future action relating to arts and culture. Regarding tourism development, most recommendations are building blocks communities can use to create or further enhance the "sense of place" that differentiates their destination from another. This sense of distinction presents a unique experience for both residents and visitors who spend time in the destination area.

Itasca Climate Dialogue (Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, 2015), sponsored by the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy and the Jefferson Center, documents a citizen-driven approach to discussing the implications of climate change in the region. Recommendations relate to a broad array of individual and community actions that mediate or form adaptive strategies addressing future climatic conditions. Specific to tourism, one recommendation suggests being ready to embrace shifts in tourism marketing strategies as environmental conditions continue to change.

The *Grand Rapids Market Area Profile* (University of Minnesota Extension, 2004) is part of the University of Minnesota Extension Market Area Profile (MAP) program to assist communities in developing and strengthening their retail and service sector businesses. Tourism is addressed when discussing how retail and service businesses serve both local residents and travelers to the area. The report provides a comprehensive description of those who shop in and visit the Grand Rapids community, including consumer demographics, purchasing power, lifestyles, information sources, and values—all based on secondary data. The aim of the MAP program is to provide information that stimulates an action plan for businesses and the greater community to better serve customers and increase revenue.

METHODOLOGY

Trained staff administered on-site, in-person questionnaires to Itasca area visitors from September 14, 2014 to August 31, 2015. Fall season included September, October, and November 2014. Winter season included December 2014, as well as January and February 2015. Spring included March, April, and May 2015; summer season included June, July, and August 2015.

Study Setting

Itasca County, with a 2013 population of 45,564 residents, is located in Northeast Minnesota (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Boasting many lakes and the Chippewa National Forest, the county is a major tourism destination in Minnesota and attracts visitors from the upper Midwest and parts of Canada.

Sampling

A convenience sample was designed to reach the breadth of tourists visiting the Itasca area. Based on discussions with Visit Grand Rapids, sample sites were distributed into four quadrants: the city of Grand Rapids, northwest of Grand Rapids, northeast of Grand Rapids, and south of Grand Rapids. Specifically, sample sites were located across eight communities in the Itasca area: Bigfork, Bowstring Lake, Cohasset, Coleraine, Deer River, Grand Rapids, Marcell, and Swan River. Data collection took place on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays, and a small number of weekdays throughout the 12-month period.

Sampling quotas for each quadrant were based upon 2013 lodging tax receipts. Visit Grand Rapids was consulted to provide specific sampling sites (e.g., attractions, lodging facilities, restaurants) and subsequently made initial contact with site management to ask for their participation. Questionnaires were collected at 75 sites throughout the Itasca area. Surveyors hired and trained by the University of Minnesota Tourism Center administered all questionnaires in person.

Approaching and Screening Respondents

Two screening questions assured each survey respondent was an adult tourist (Figure 1). For the purpose of this study, a tourist is anyone who travels at least 50 miles from his/her primary residence to the area. As an incentive, respondents were included in a quarterly drawing to win a $100 gift certificate at participating businesses in the Itasca County area.

1. Do you live 50 miles or less to the Itasca area? ❑ Yes (Thank/terminate) ❑ No (Continue)
2. Are you 18 years old or older? ❑ Yes (Continue) ❑ No (Ask if an adult is present; if no, terminate)

Fig. 1: Screening questions for potential respondents to the 2014 Itasca area visitor survey.

Questionnaire

The on-site questionnaire was developed based on past research and with the assistance of Visit Grand Rapids. Questionnaire sections included trip motivation, spending, activities, accommodations, transportation, group composition, planning and information sources, and basic demographics.

Response Rate

Throughout the 12-month period of data collection, surveyors obtained 3,895 questionnaires from eligible tourists. Eighty-four questionnaires were unusable, resulting in 3,811 questionnaires used for analysis.

Nearly 50 percent (48 percent) of respondents were contacted in the summer and 25 percent in spring (Figure 2). Fourteen percent were contacted in winter, and another 13 percent in fall. Thirty percent of respondents were contact on a Saturday, 26 percent on a Sunday, and 25 percent on a Friday (Figure 3). Ten percent were contact on a Thursday, and another 4 percent were contact on a Wednesday. Approximately 32 percent of questionnaires were collected in lodging facilities (Figure 4). Between 16 and 18 percent of questionnaires were collected at attractions (18 percent), retail locations (17.5 percent), and restaurants (16.3 percent). Small percentages of questionnaires were collected at outdoor recreational sites (6.4 percent), gas stations (5.8 percent), and festivals/events (3.7 percent).

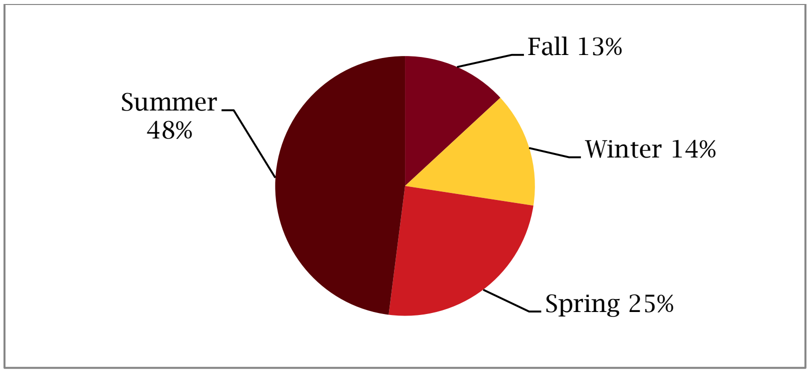

Fig. 2: Distribution of completed 2014 Itasca area visitor survey (n=3895).

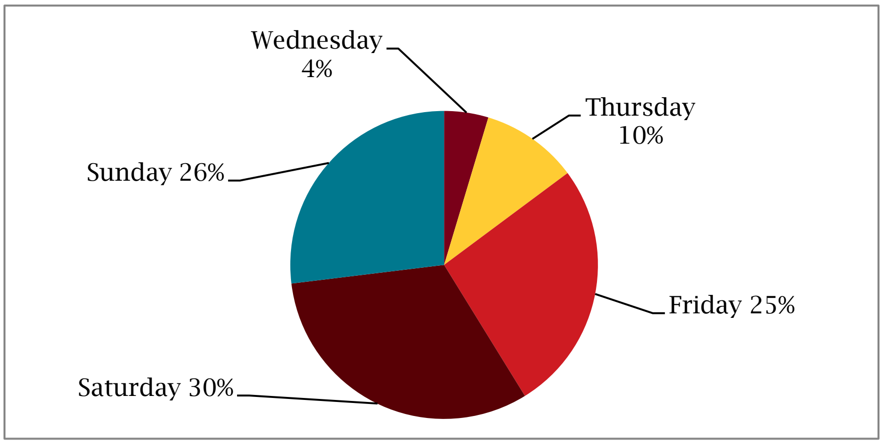

Fig. 3: Day of the week respondents completed 2014 Itasca area visitor survey (n=3895).

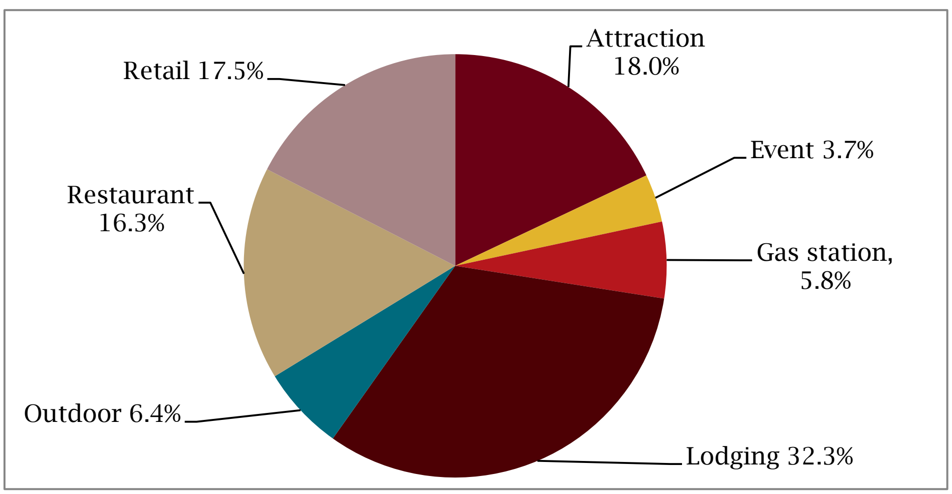

Fig. 4: Locations where respondents completed 2014 Itasca area visitor survey (n=3895).

Analysis

For each season, completed questionnaires were entered, cleaned, and checked in SPSS (version 23.0), a social science statistical analysis software. The four seasonal data files were merged into one file with data from all four seasons. Analysis provided frequencies, means[1], medians[2], and standard deviations[3] to describe the sample and provide information on variables of interest. Two-Factor Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) assessed whether there is a generational or a seasonal difference in the amount of per person, per day, spending and the number of nights spent in the Itasca area. A customized trade area map was created based upon the zip codes of visitors' primary residence.

[1] The mean of a data set is the average of all the data items.
[2] The median of a data set is the value in the middle when the data items are arranged from the smallest to the largest in value (equal numbers of data points above and below the median value).
[3] The standard deviation of a data set is the positive square root of the variance. The variance is the average of the squared differences between each data item and the mean.

RESULTS

Respondent Demographics

About half (50.8 percent) of the 2014 Itasca area visitor survey respondents were male (Figure 5). The average age of respondents was 51 years (*M*=50.8, *Mdn*=51, *SD*=15.2[4]). Approximately 20 percent of respondents were in the 41-50 (22 percent), 51-60 (21.1 percent), and 61-70 (19.6 percent) age groups (Figure 6). Forty percent were baby boomers, and 32 percent were Generation X (Figure 7). Fourteen percent were millennials, and 12 percent were in the greatest and silent generations.[5]

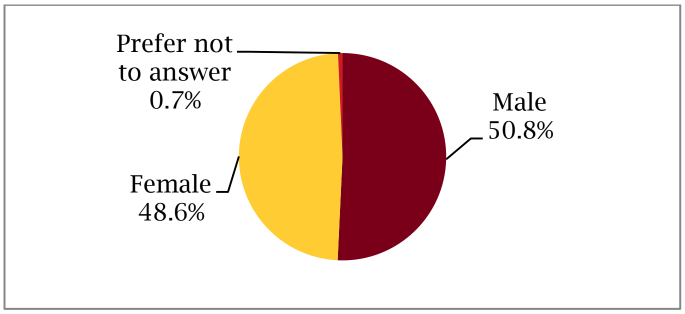

Fig 5: Gender of 2014 Itasca area visitor survey participants (n=3654).

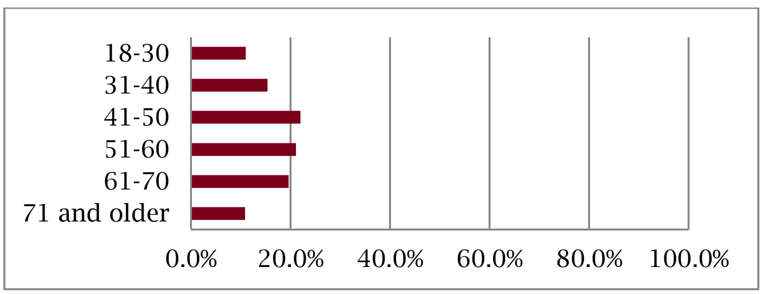

Fig. 6: Percentage of 2014 Itasca area visitor survey respondents in various age brackets (n=3760).

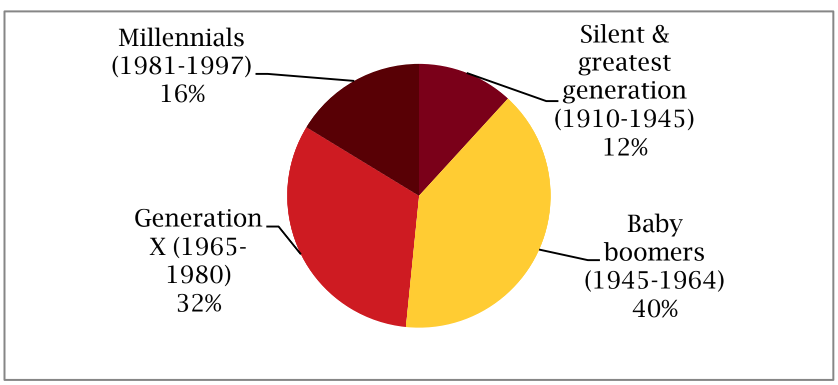

Fig. 7: Percentage of 2014 Itasca area visitor survey respondents in various age groups (n=3760).

[4] M=mean, Mdn=Median, SD=Standard Deviation
[5] Generational definitions are inconsistently defined. The Census Bureau and Pew Research Center were used as sources.

The household income of 43 percent of respondents was in the $50,001-$100,000 range, closely followed by the more than $100,000 range (40.2 percent; Figure 8). The remaining 16.8 percent had an income of $50,000 or less.

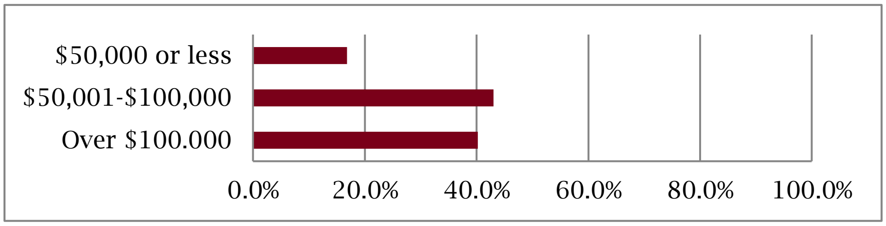

Fig. 8: Percentage of 2014 Itasca area visitor survey respondents in pre-tax income groups (n=3645).

In each season, the highest percentage of the oldest generations (silent and greatest) and millennials were in the $50,001-$100,000 income range (Figure 9). Across four seasons, the highest percentage of baby boomers and Gen X had a pre-tax family income higher than $100,000, with two exceptions. More baby boomers in spring had a pre-tax family income in the $50,001-$100,000 group than in the over $100,000 group. In summer, an equal number of baby boomers were in the $50,001-$100,000 group and the over $100,000 group.

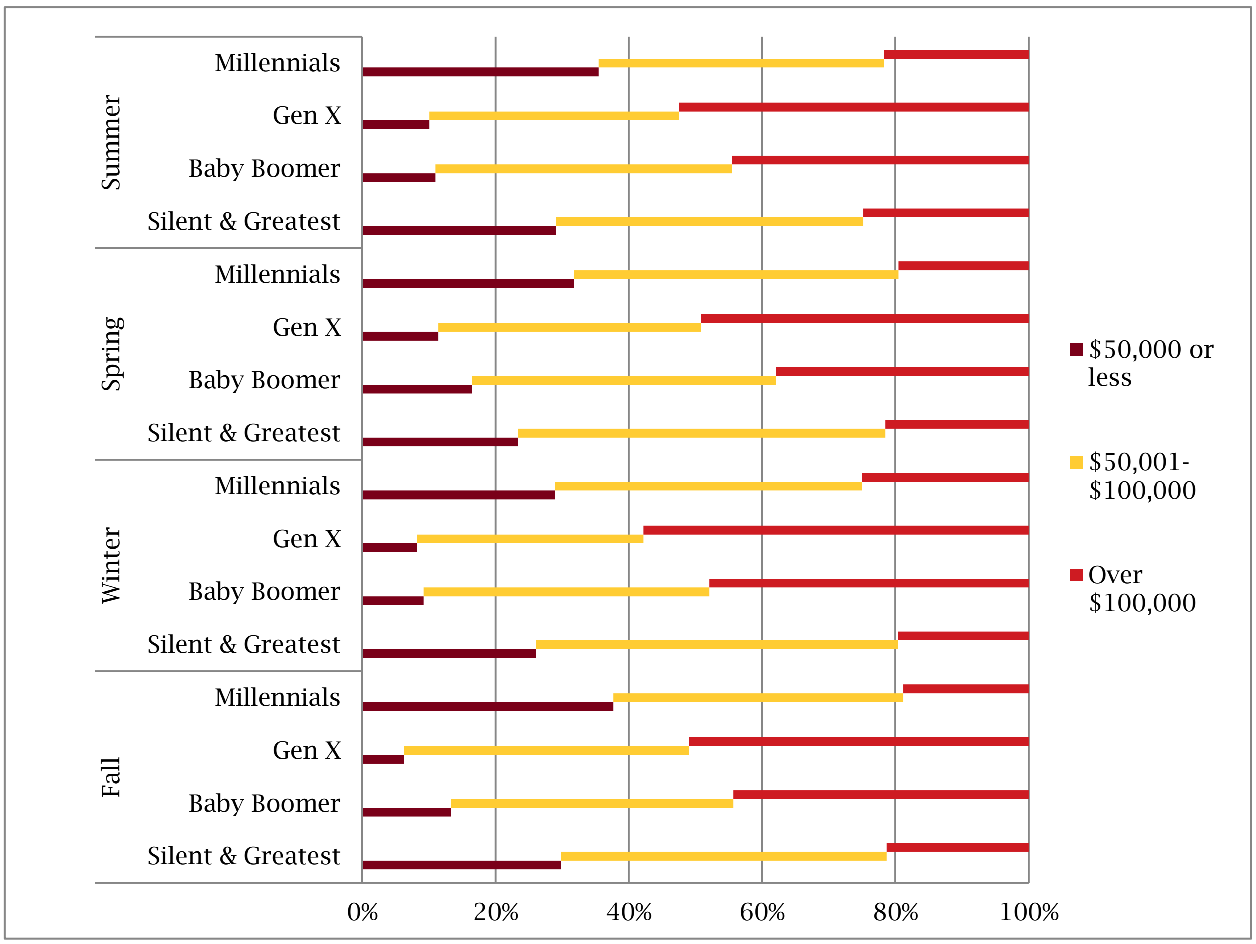

Fig. 9: Percentage of 2014 Itasca area visitor survey respondents in pre-tax income groups, season by generation (n=3645).

Primary residence

Close to 80 percent (77 percent) of respondents resided in the state of Minnesota (Table 1), as indicated by a centroid analysis of respondents' primary zip codes (Figures 10 and 11). Nearly 5 percent (4.7 percent) came from Wisconsin, 2.6 percent from Illinois, and another 2.6 percent from North Dakota. The Minneapolis-St. Paul Core Based Statistical Area (CBSA), which encompasses an 11-county area in Minnesota and Wisconsin, was home to 39.8 percent of all respondents, followed by Duluth, MN-WI (12.15 percent), Brainerd, MN (3 percent), St. Cloud, MN (2.8 percent), and Bemidji, MN (2.6 percent; Table 1).

Table 1: Primary place of residence of 2014 Itasca area visitor survey respondents (n=3652).

Top 5 states		**Top 5 Core Based Statistical Areas (CBSA)**	
State	**Percent (%)**	**CBSA**	**Percent (%)**
Minnesota	77.0	Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, MN-WI	39.8
Wisconsin	4.7	Duluth, MN-WI	12.15
Illinois	2.6	Brainerd, MN	3.0
North Dakota	2.6	St. Cloud, MN	2.8
Iowa	2.2	Bemidji, MN	2.6

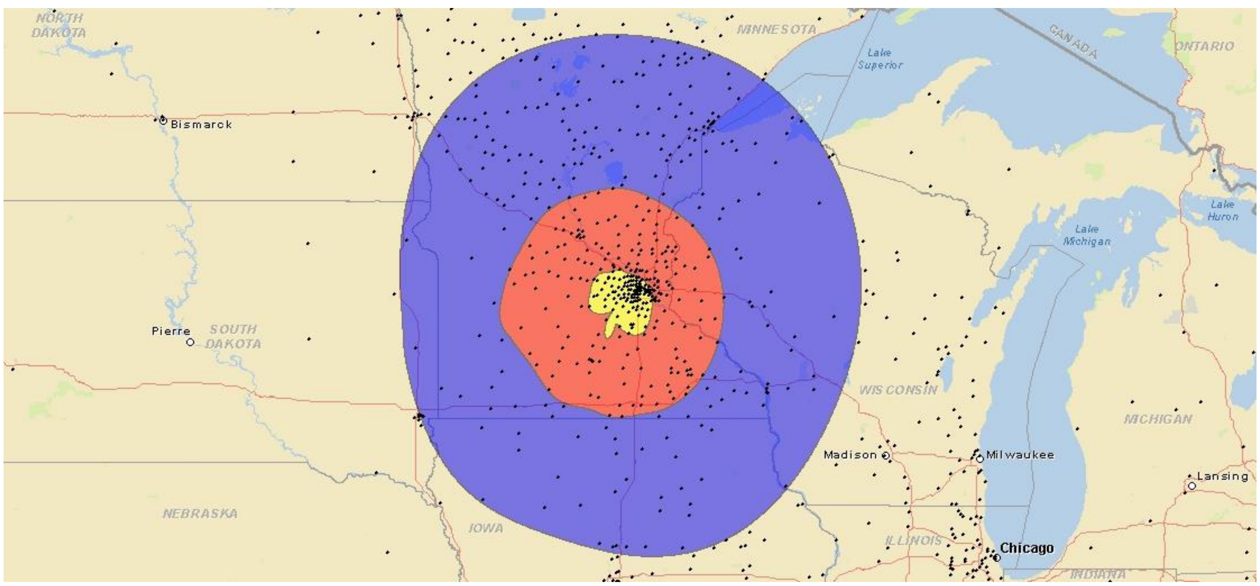

Fig. 10: Trade area of 2014 Itasca area visitor survey respondents (n=3652).

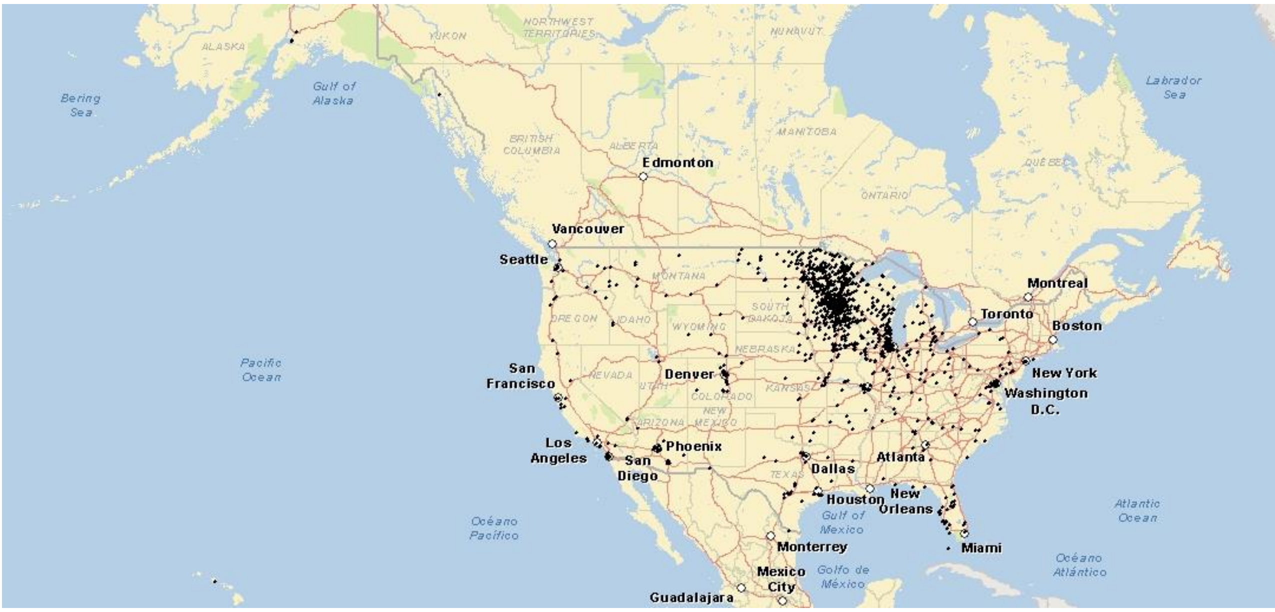

Fig. 11: National distribution of 2014 Itasca area visitor survey respondents (n=3652).

Travel distance

Respondents traveled an average of 330 miles (*M*=329.5, *Mdn*=204.8, *SD*=424.8) from their primary residence to the Itasca area. About 32 percent traveled between 201 and 300 miles, followed by 27 percent traveling between 101 and 200 miles, and another 19 percent traveling between 50 and 100 miles (Figure 12).

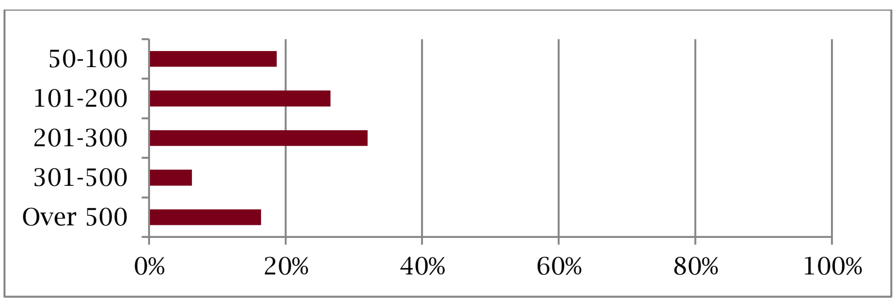

Fig. 12: Categorized driving distance of 2014 Itasca area visitor survey respondents (n=3652).

Across seasons and generations, respondents were most likely to travel 201-300 miles to the Itasca area, with some exceptions (Figure 13). During fall and spring, the highest percentage of the silent and greatest generations traveled 50-100 miles, while during the summer, they traveled more than 500 miles to the Itasca area. The highest percentage of baby boomers traveled 50-100 miles to the Itasca area in winter, and the highest percentage of Gen X traveled the same distance during winter and spring. Millennials, on the other hand, showed their highest levels of travel in spring and summer traveling 100-200 miles to the Itasca area.

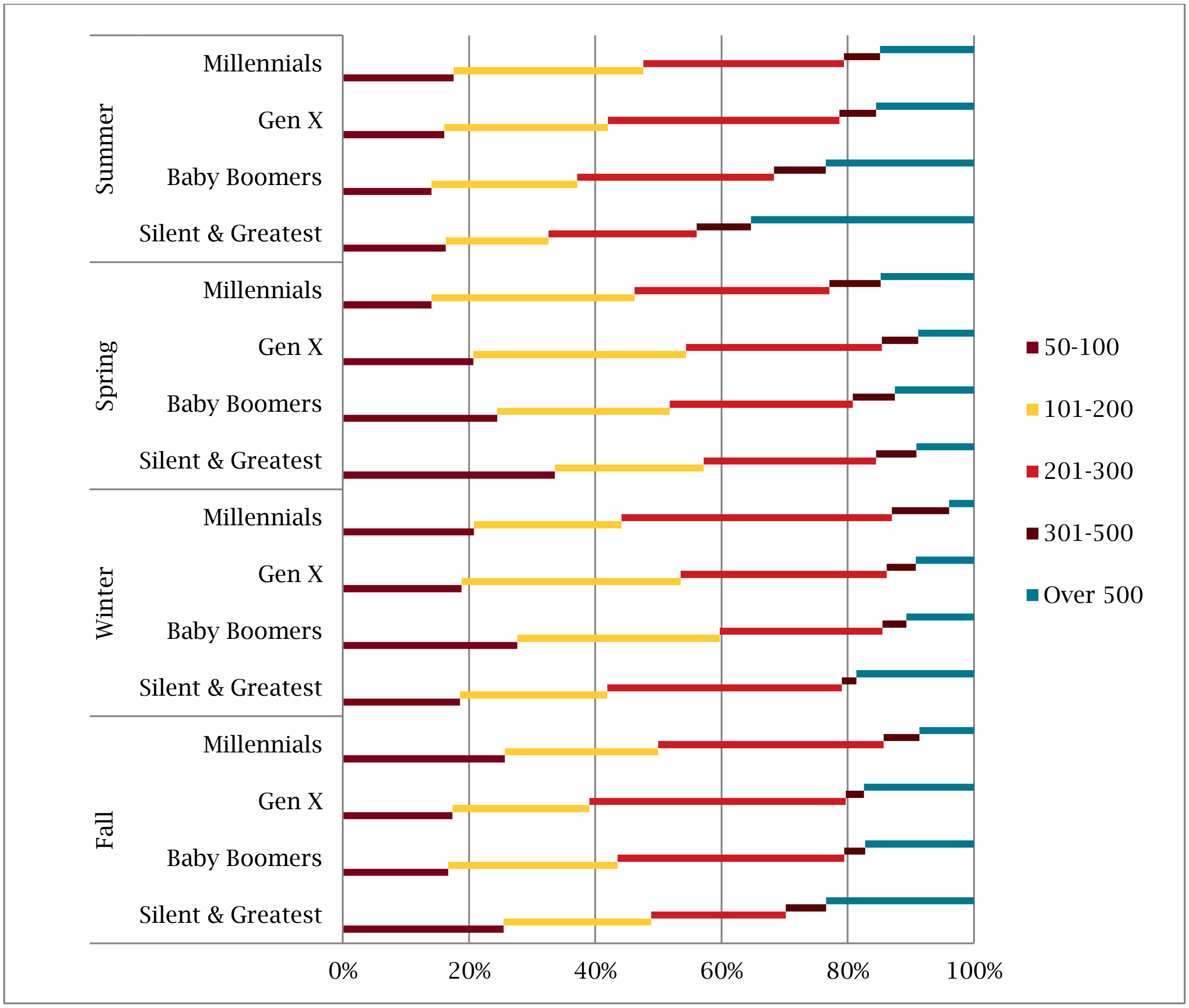

Fig. 13: Categorized driving distance of 2014 Itasca area visitor survey respondents by season and age group (n=3652).

Past visitation

Respondents made a median of two visits to the Itasca area in the past 12 months and a median of six visits in the past five years (Table 2). Specifically, 3.1 percent of respondents made no previous visit to the Itasca area in the past 12 months, 31.9 percent made one visit, and 20.2 percent made two visits (Figure 14). Close to 24 percent made between three and five trips, 11.9 percent made between six and 10 visits in the past 12 months, and six percent made between 11 and 20 visits. Three percent of respondents made more than 20 visits to the area in the past 12 months.

A little more than two percent of respondents (2.4 percent) made no previous visit in the past five years, 12.1 percent made one visit, and another 9.3 percent made two visits (Figure 14). A quarter of respondents made three to five visits, and 17.2 percent made six to 10 visits. Fifteen percent of respondents made between 11 and 20 visits to the area in the past five years, 6.4 percent made between 21 and 30 visits, and another 6.5 percent made between 31 and 50 visits. Close to 5 percent (4.5 percent) made more than 50 visits.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of past visitation by respondents to 2014 Itasca area visitor survey.

	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation
Number of visits in past 12 months (n=3228)	4.5	2	6.59
Number of visits in past 5 years (n=2917)	16.5	6	28.6

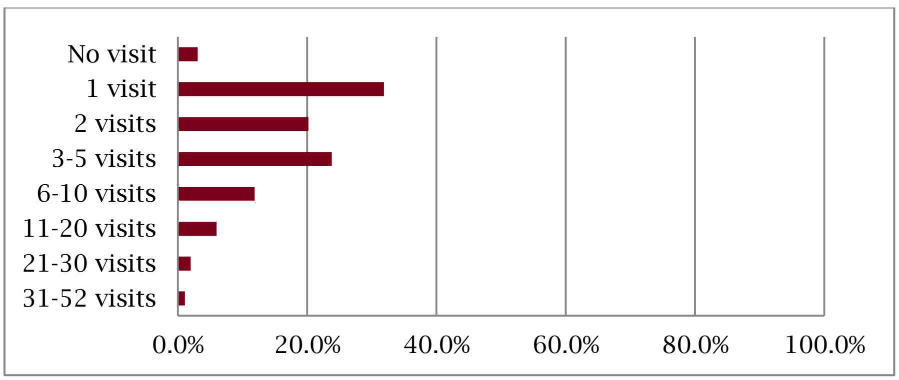

Fig. 14: Number of visits in past 12 months by respondents to 2014 Itasca area visitor survey (n=3228).

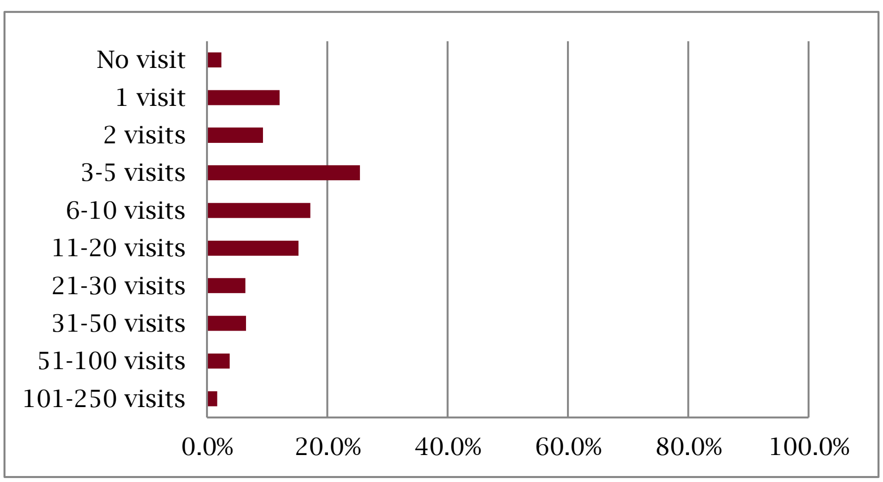

Fig. 15: Number of visits in past five years by respondents to 2014 Itasca area visitor survey (n=2917).

Trip Information

Primary destination

The Itasca area was the primary destination for 84 percent of respondents (Figure 16).

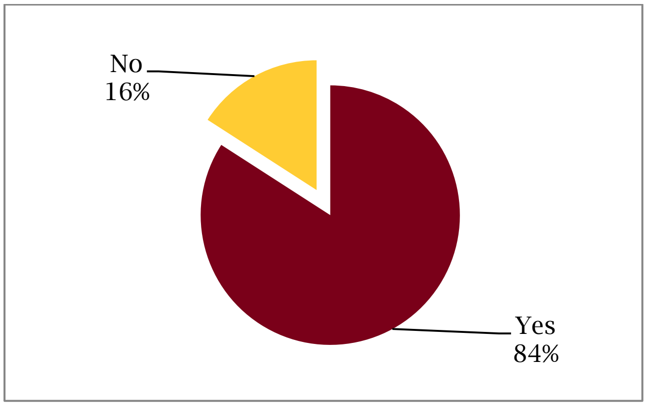

Fig. 16: Percentage of respondents indicating Itasca area was the primary destination (n=3752).

Trip duration

Twenty-nine percent of respondents spent two nights on the entire trip, followed by 16.7 percent spending three nights and 13.4 percent spending one night (Figure 17). Close to 13 percent (12.6 percent) spent six to 10 nights on the entire trip, and another 12 percent spent four or five nights. Meanwhile, 8 percent took a day trip, and another 8.2 percent spent more than 10 nights on the entire trip.

Twenty-eight percent of respondents spent two nights in the Itasca area, followed by 17.4 percent spending one night, and 15.1 percent spending three nights (Figure 18). Nearly 14 percent (13.9 percent) of respondents did not stay overnight in the Itasca area. A little more than 10 percent (10.2 percent) of respondents spent four or five nights in the area, 10 percent spent six to 10 nights, and 5.2 percent spent more than 10 nights in the area.

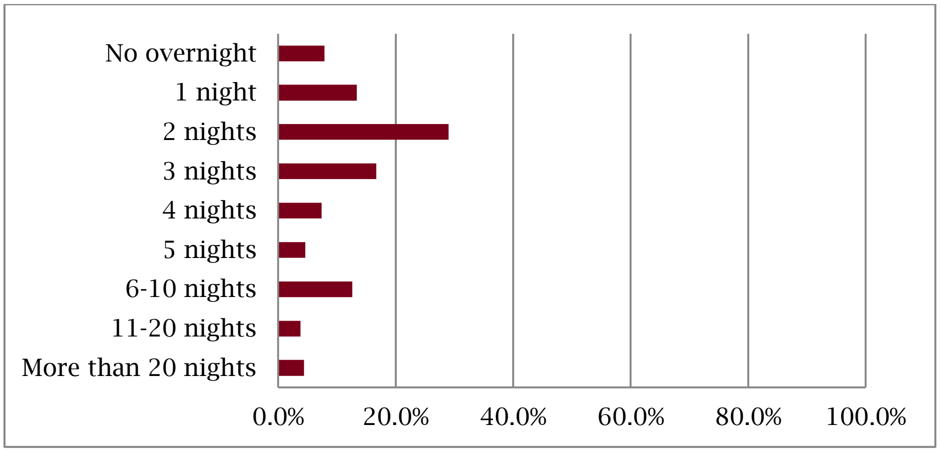

Fig. 17: Total number of nights spent on the trip by respondents to 2014 Itasca area visitor survey (n=3740).

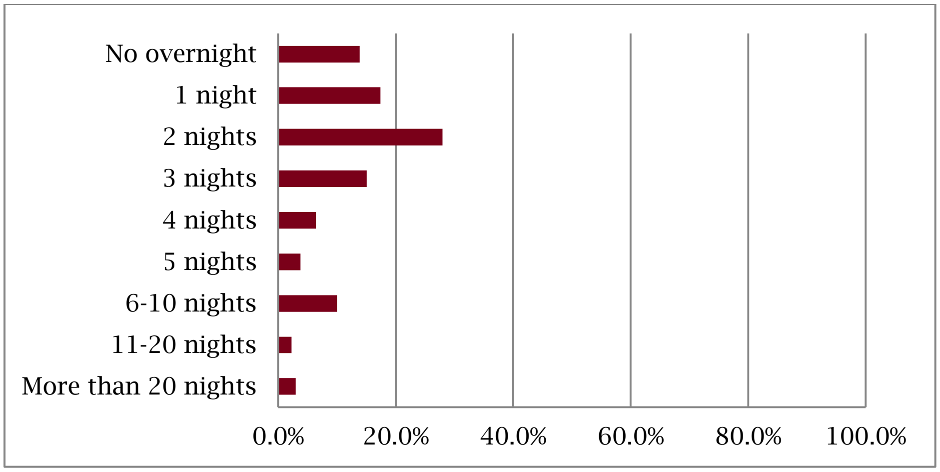

Fig. 18: Number of nights spent in Itasca area by respondents to 2014 Itasca area visitor survey (n=3703).

Two-factor ANOVA analysis found significant difference in the season and generation interaction (F=6.49, p<0.0005). The silent and greatest generations spent significantly more days in the Itasca area in summer and spring than other generations in any other season (Figure 19).

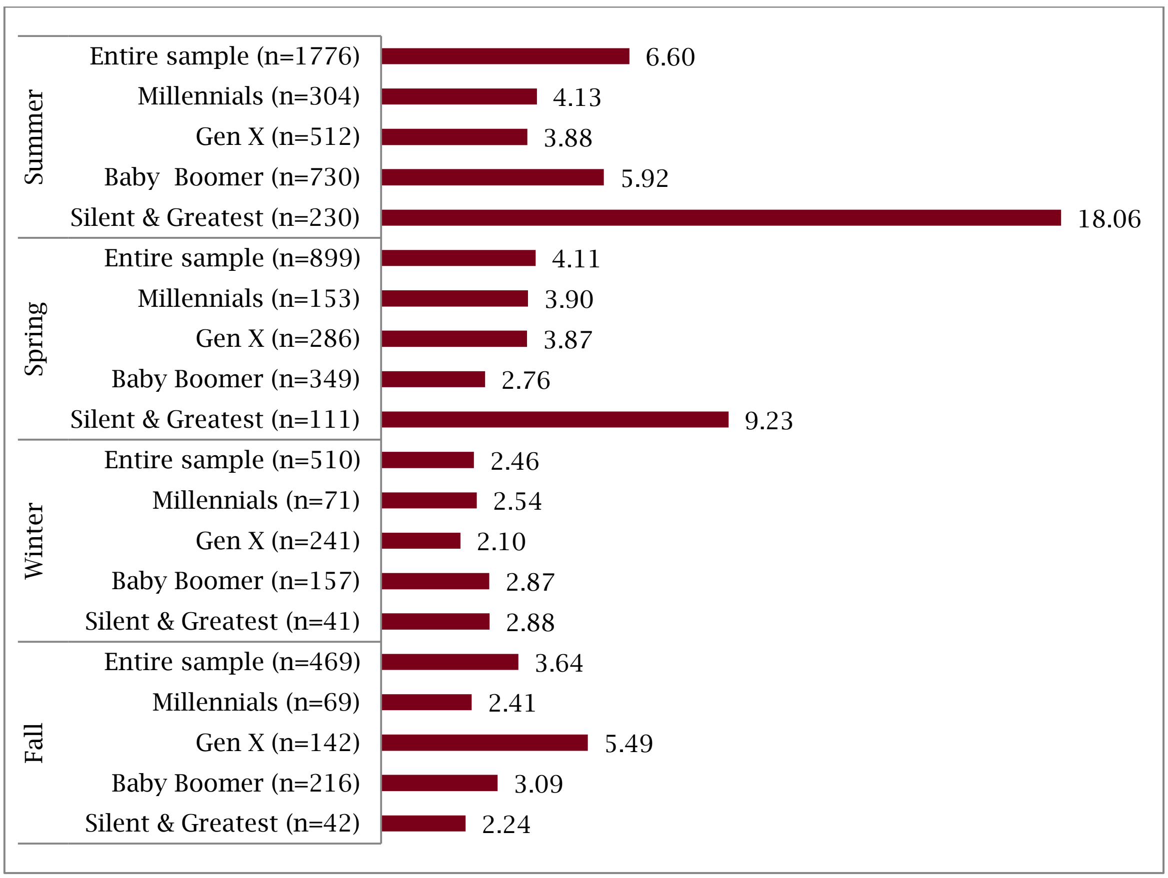

Fig. 19: Number of nights spent in Itasca area by respondents to 2014 Itasca area visitor survey, by season and generation (n=3654).

Lodging

About 40 percent of respondents stayed in a hotel or motel, the most frequently chosen lodging type (Figure 20). More than 30 percent (31.4 percent) of respondents stayed in their own vacation homes, while 13.2 percent stayed at the home of a friend or relative. Close to 10 percent (9.4 percent) stayed in a resort or commercial cabin, and another 7.3 percent stayed at the vacation home of a friend or relative. More than 6 percent (6.3 percent) of respondents used an RV as a lodging facility, 3.2 percent stayed in a tent, and another 1.2 percent stayed in a vacation rental by owner. Only 0.8 percent stayed at a bed and breakfast.

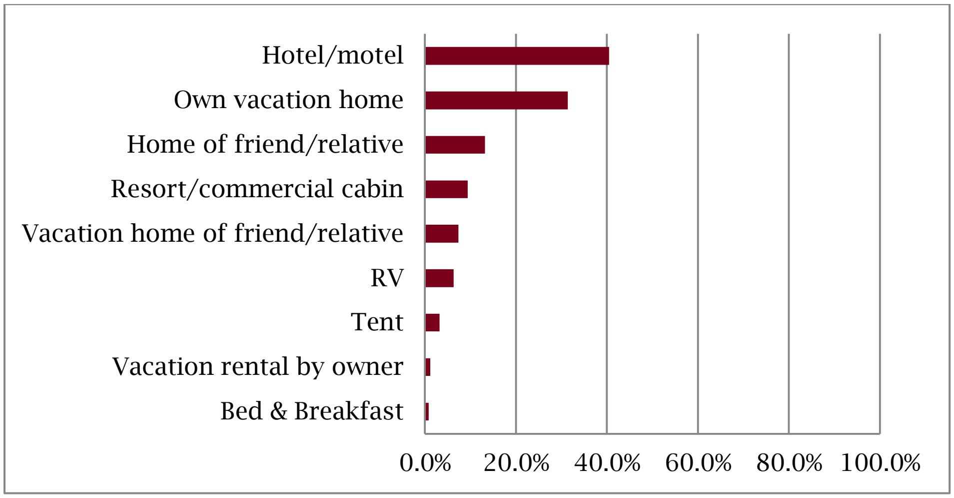

Fig. 20: Lodging type among overnight respondents to 2014 Itasca area visitor survey (n=3811).

Transportation

The majority of respondents arrived in the Itasca area by car, van, or truck (92.7 percent; Figure 21). Close to 4 percent (3.6 percent) arrived by RV/camper, and another 1.4 percent arrived by airplane. Only 0.9 percent arrived by motorcycle.

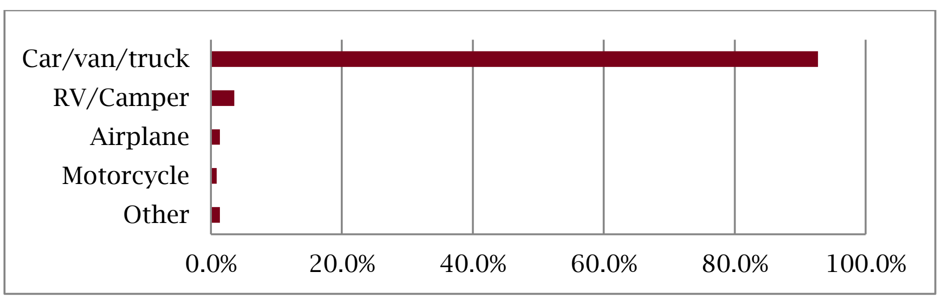

Fig. 21: Primary mode of transportation among respondents to 2014 Itasca area visitor survey (n=3654).

Group composition and size

The average respondent traveled in a group of three people (*M*=3.49, *Mdn*=2, *SD*=3.52). About 39 percent (39.1percent) traveled in a group of two people, and close to 16 percent (15.6 percent) traveled in a group of four people (Figure 22). Close to 14 percent (13.8 percent) traveled alone, and another 13 percent traveled in a group of three people. Close to 9 percent (8.8 percent) of respondents traveled in a group of six to 10 people, and another 6.8 percent traveled in a group of five people. Only 2.8 percent traveled in a group with more than 10 people.

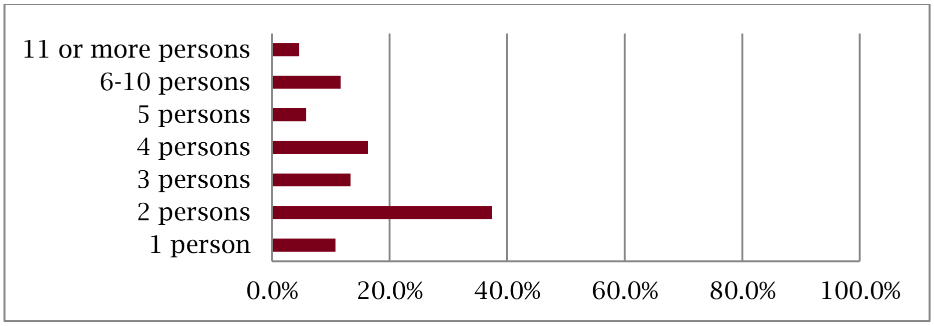

Fig. 22: Travel group size of respondents to 2014 Itasca area visitor survey (n=1523).

Close to 37 percent (36.6 percent) of respondents traveled with family, 24.2 percent as a couple or with a partner, and 12.3 percent with friends (Figure 23). Close to 12 percent (11.7 percent) of respondents traveled with family and friends, while another 11.4 percent traveled alone.

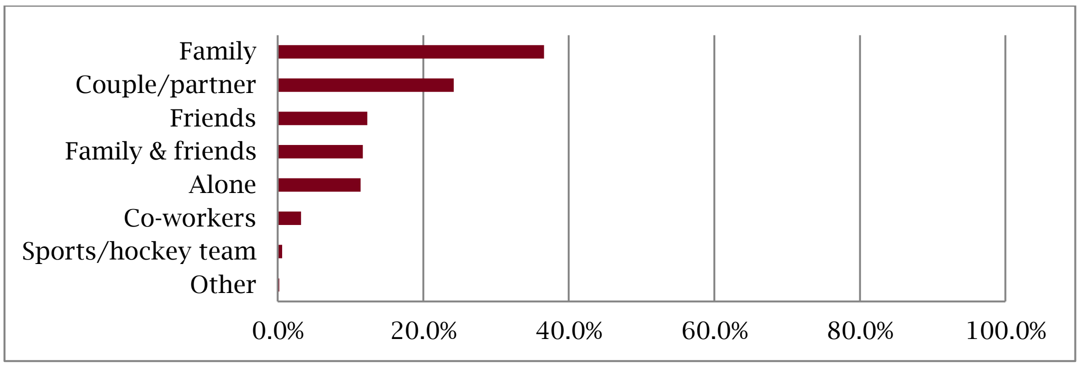

Fig. 23: Travel group composition of respondents to 2014 Itasca area visitor survey (n=3785).

Almost half (49.7 percent) of respondents traveled with adults in the 51-69 age range, and 39.7 percent traveled with adults in the 36-50 age range (Figure 24). About 28 percent of respondents traveled with children under 18 years old, while 20.6 percent traveled with adults between the ages of 26 and 35. Close to 18 percent (17.7 percent) of respondents traveled with adults older than 70, and 12.8 percent traveled with adults in the 18-25 age range.

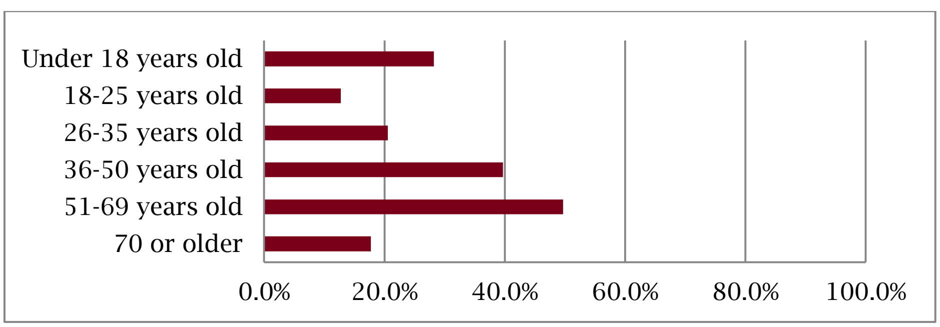

Fig. 24: Age groups included in 2014 Itasca area visitor survey respondents' travel party (n=3811).

Visitor spending

The average respondent spent the most on lodging, followed by restaurant/bar and transportation (Table 3). Specifically, the average respondent spent $51.73 on lodging (*M*=51.73, *Mdn*=15, *SD*=253.71), $24.06 on restaurant/bar items (*M*=24.06, *Mdn*=16.67, *SD*=42.60), $18.95 on transportation (*M*=18.95, *Mdn*=10.00, *SD*=43.05), and $17.47 on retail items (*M*=17.47, *Mdn*=0.00, *SD*=88.24) per day. The average total personal spending within a 24-hour period is $142.95 (*M*=142.95, *Mdn*=88.00, *SD*=465.76).

It should be noted there is considerable variability in spending, as evidenced by the difference between means (averages) and median values (equal number of data points above and below the median value). Also, the larger the standard deviation value, the more the individual data points spread out over a wider range of values from the mean (average). In Table 3, lodging and other fishing-related expenses show a wider range of values when compared to other spending items and, consequently, lead to a wider spread of total spending values.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of spending per person, per day, in various categories by respondents to 2014 Itasca area visitor survey (n=3811).

	Mean ($)	Median ($)	Standard Deviation
Lodging	51.73	15.00	253.71
Restaurant/bar	24.06	16.67	42.60
Transportation	18.95	10.00	43.05
Shopping	17.47	0.00	88.24
Groceries	11.89	0.00	40.61
Other fishing-related expense	7.29	0.00	324.17
Recreation other than fishing	5.58	0.00	75.08
Fishing-related equipment	2.67	0.00	18.38
Miscellaneous	1.55	0.00	22.50
Fishing-related guide service	1.21	0.00	22.79
Total	142.95[6]	88.00	465.76

[6] Total reflects rounding error in component-spending averages.

Two-factor ANOVA analysis did not find any significant difference in total spending per person, per day, by season (F=0.66, p=0.58), generation (F=1.30, p=0.27), or season and generation interaction (F=0.41, p=0.93).

Compared with other generations, Gen X spent the most in fall, winter, and spring (Figure 25). Baby boomers spent more than other generations during the summer. The oldest generations spent the least in all seasons, except summer, and millennials spent the least among all generations during summer.

Gen X and millennials spent the most in the fall. The oldest generations and baby boomers spent the most in summer, and the oldest generations and millennials both spent the least in spring. Baby boomers spent the least in winter, and Gen X spent the least in summer.

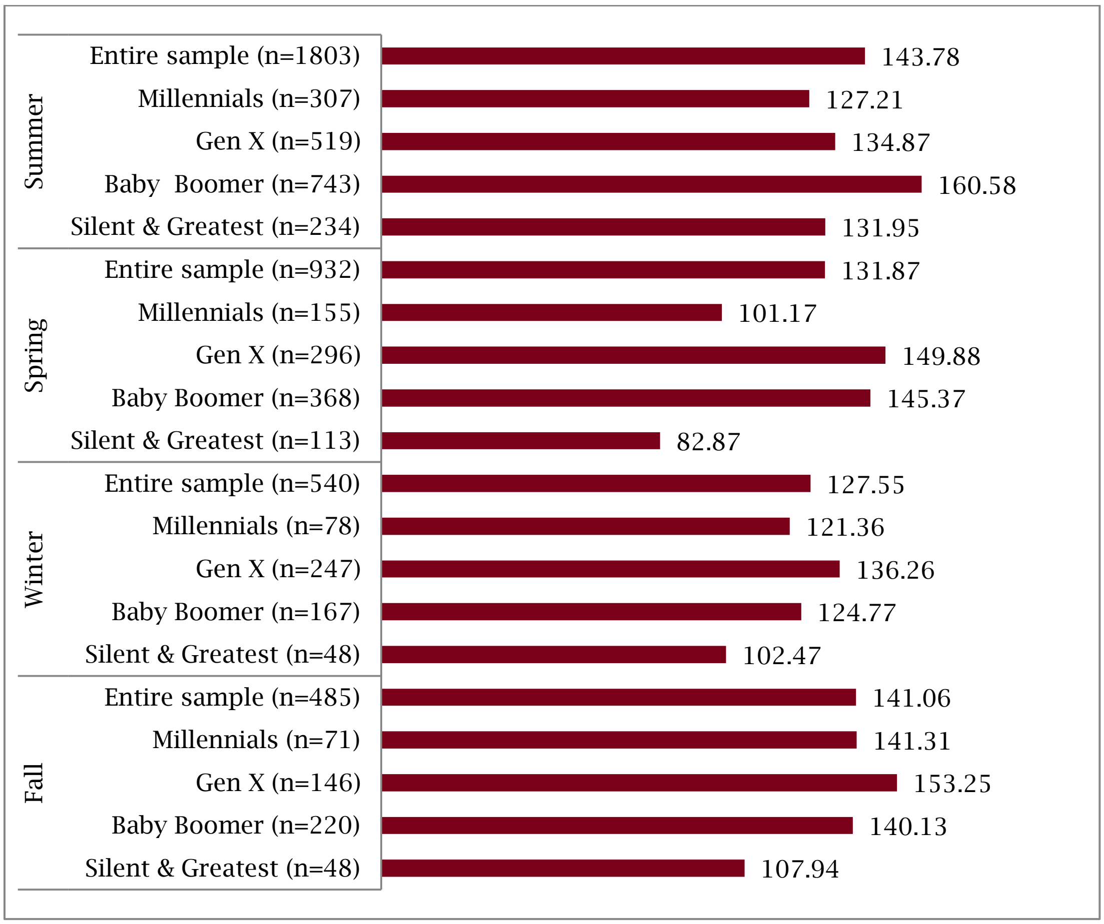

Fig. 25: Average spending per person, per day, by season and generation of respondents to 2014 Itasca area visitor survey (n=3811).

Trip Activities

Respondents participated in a variety of activities during their trip to the Itasca area (Figure 26). The most frequent activity is dining out (79.9 percent), followed by fishing (34.5 percent), visiting friends/relatives (29.9 percent), and sightseeing (22.1 percent). About 15 percent drove on designated byways (16.3 percent) and participated in nightlife/evening entertainment (14.1 percent). Close to 12 percent attended festivals/events (11.8 percent) and visited state parks (11.6 percent). Approximately 10 percent visited historic sites (10.6 percent), Chippewa National Forest (9.3 percent), and museums (9.2 percent). Nine percent also attended sporting events.

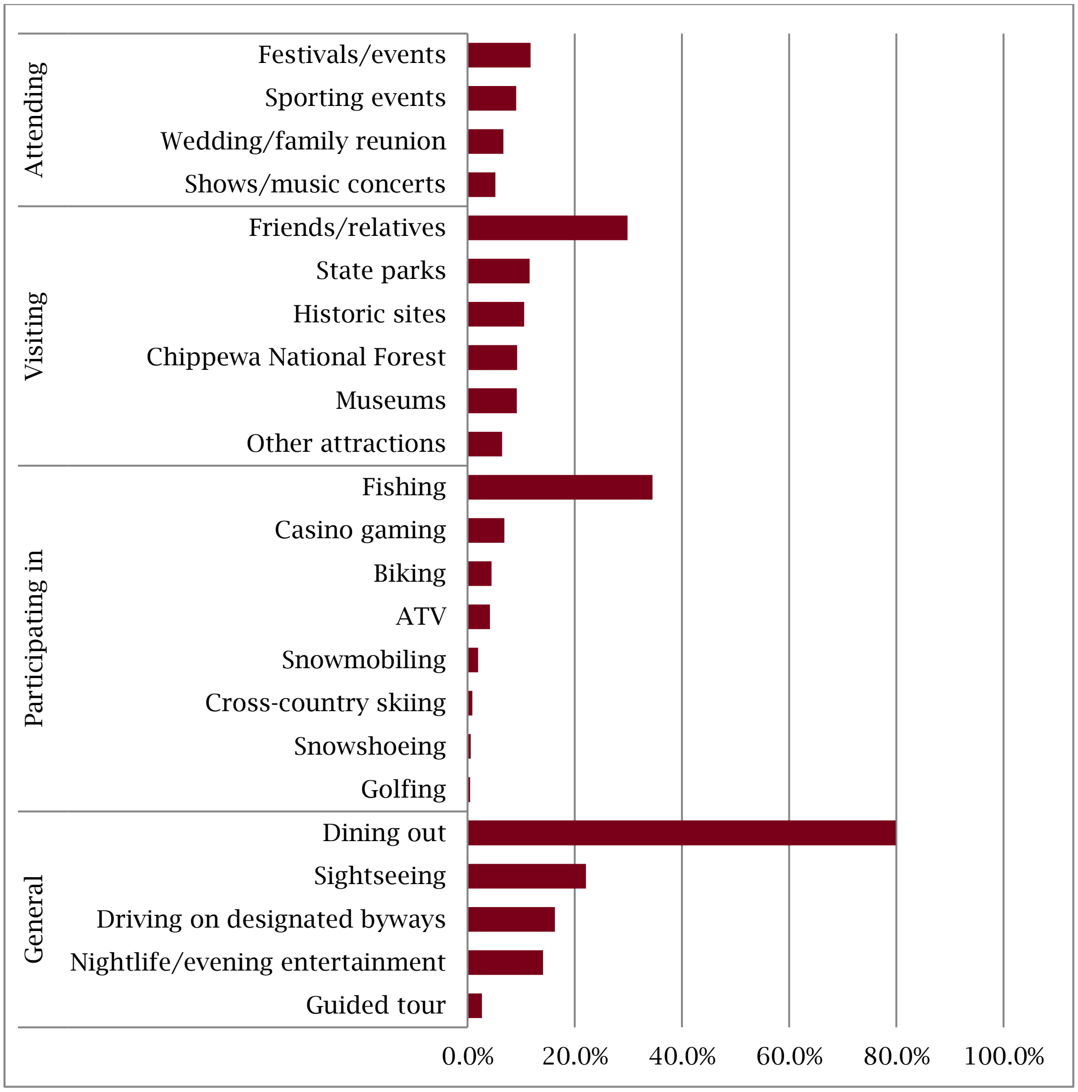

Fig. 26: Activities participated in among 2014 Itasca area visitor survey respondents (n=3811).

The most frequently participated in activity across all seasons and generations was dining out, with a higher participation rate in fall and summer than in winter and spring. During winter and spring, millennials were most likely to participate in fishing; in summer, Gen X was. The highest participation rate for visiting friends/relatives was during summer for all generations. The oldest generations also had a high participation rate for visiting friends/relatives during the winter and spring. For both sightseeing and driving on scenic byways, all generations had the highest participation rate during the summer, and the oldest generations had a high participation rate for the activity during the fall. During the spring, the oldest generations and baby boomers had the highest participation rate in nightlife/evening entertainment; during summer and fall, millennials did In terms of visiting state parks and attending festivals/events, the highest participation rate was in summer for all generations. In fall, Gen X also had high participation rate in visiting state parks, as did millennials in spring. The oldest generations had a high participation rate for attending festivals/events during the spring and fall.

Table 4: Eight most frequently participated in activities among 2014 Itasca area visitor survey respondents, by season and generation (n=3760).

		Dining out	Fishing	Visiting friends / relatives	Sight -seeing	Driving on Scenic Byways	Nightlife/evening entertainment	Visiting state parks	Festival / event
Fall	Silent & Greatest	81.3%	16.7%	25.0%	33.3%	31.3%	14.6%	8.3%	14.6%
	Baby Boomer	85.9%	14.5%	25.5%	23.6%	17.3%	11.8%	11.4%	10.0%
	Gen X	82.2%	16.4%	24.7%	22.6%	17.8%	15.8%	13.7%	8.2%
	Millennials	80.3%	15.5%	29.6%	25.4%	5.6%	18.3%	9.9%	4.2%
Winter	Silent & Greatest	85.4%	14.6%	35.4%	12.5%	8.3%	16.7%	0.0%	6.3%
	Baby Boomer	79.6%	32.9%	12.0%	9.0%	13.2%	9.0%	2.4%	4.2%
	Gen X	76.5%	29.1%	12.1%	4.9%	8.5%	13.8%	1.6%	2.0%
	Millennials	66.7%	53.8%	20.5%	3.8%	7.7%	10.3%	5.1%	3.8%
Spring	Silent & Greatest	79.6%	26.5%	34.5%	14.2%	18.6%	23.9%	10.6%	11.5%
	Baby Boomer	79.1%	35.1%	23.9%	17.9%	14.7%	18.5%	9.5%	6.3%
	Gen X	77.0%	37.5%	28.0%	13.2%	12.8%	13.5%	9.8%	4.1%
	Millennials	69.0%	41.3%	31.0%	20.6%	11.0%	13.5%	14.8%	5.8%
Summer	Silent & Greatest	80.3%	33.3%	49.6%	31.2%	20.1%	6.8%	12.4%	19.7%
	Baby Boomer	83.0%	39.3%	34.7%	28.4%	22.1%	12.7%	15.3%	19.7%
	Gen X	81.5%	45.3%	34.3%	30.8%	17.7%	13.3%	17.9%	16.4%
	Millennials	78.5%	34.5%	35.2%	25.7%	14.0%	19.9%	11.4%	15.3%

Trip Purpose and Planning

Primary reason for making trip

Respondents most frequently indicated the primary reason for their trip was visiting family/friends (21.1 percent), followed by fishing/ice fishing (17 percent; Figure 27). About 9 percent of respondents visited the Itasca area for either business/work (9.5 percent) or sporting events (9.1 percent). At least 6 percent identified second home/cabin (7.5 percent), outdoor recreation other than fishing/ice fishing (6.9 percent), or passing through (6 percent) as the primary reason. Approximately 5 percent visited the area for entertainment (5 percent) or a festival/event (4.7 percent).

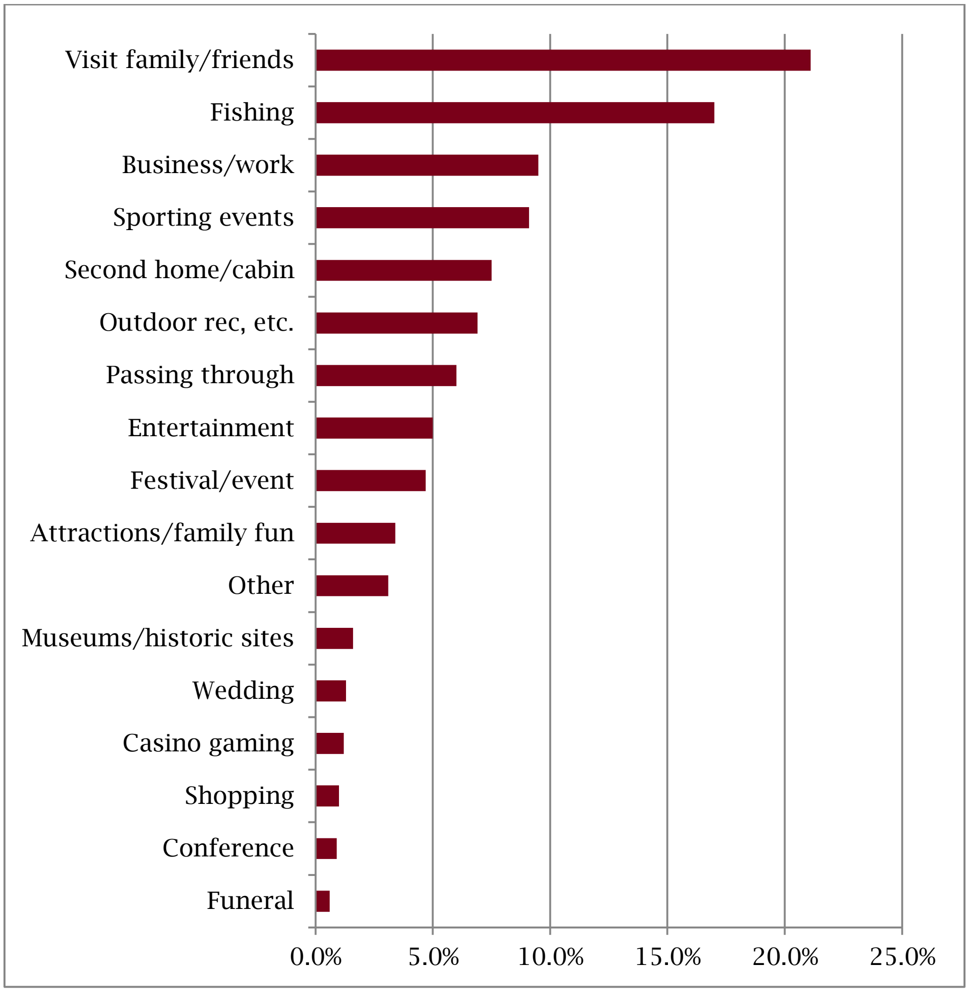

Fig. 27: Primary reason for making the trip among respondents to 2014 Itasca area visitor survey (n=3467).

In fall, the oldest generations and Gen X were most likely to visit the Itasca area for outdoor recreation other than fishing, while baby boomers and millennials were most likely to identify visiting family/friends as the primary reason for the trip (Table 5). In winter, the highest percentage of Gen X visited the Itasca area for sporting events, while the other three generations visited for ice fishing. During spring, the highest percentage of the oldest generations and millennials identified visiting family/friends as their primary reason for the trip, while baby boomers and Gen X were most likely to visit for fishing. In summer, all four generations were most likely to identify visiting family/friends as the primary reason to take the trip.

Table 5: Top six primary reasons for making the trip among respondents to 2014 Itasca area visitor survey, by season and generation (n=3420).

		visit family/friends	Fishing/ice fishing	sporting events	outdoor rec, etc.	business/work	second home/cabin
Fall	Silent & Greatest	18.6%	7.0%	2.3%	25.6%	2.3%	7.0%
	Baby Boomer	24.9%	7.0%	6.0%	14.4%	13.4%	4.0%
	Gen X	16.0%	2.3%	13.0%	22.1%	17.6%	2.3%
	Millennials	31.7%	6.3%	7.9%	25.4%	12.7%	0.0%
Winter	Silent & Greatest	4.4%	15.6%	6.7%	2.2%	0.0%	0.0%
	Baby Boomer	0.0%	27.1%	20.0%	8.4%	6.5%	1.3%
	Gen X	0.0%	19.3%	43.3%	3.8%	4.6%	.4%
	Millennials	1.3%	40.8%	11.8%	3.9%	5.3%	1.3%
Spring	Silent & Greatest	22.2%	14.8%	3.7%	.9%	1.9%	9.3%
	Baby Boomer	16.5%	21.2%	5.9%	3.5%	6.2%	11.8%
	Gen X	20.2%	26.8%	21.0%	3.7%	5.9%	5.9%
	Millennials	26.8%	22.5%	8.7%	6.5%	15.2%	5.8%
Summer	Silent & Greatest	32.5%	11.5%	0.0%	3.3%	2.9%	19.1%
	Baby Boomer	27.0%	15.6%	1.8%	5.8%	8.7%	11.5%
	Gen X	26.7%	15.4%	4.1%	7.8%	12.4%	8.0%
	Millennials	28.1%	15.0%	3.3%	3.6%	20.4%	3.3%

Trip planning timeframe and information sources

Thirty percent of respondents planned their trip less than two weeks in advance (Figure 28). Twenty-three percent planned their trip within a month, and close to 15 percent (14.8 percent) planned their trip within two months. Less than 12 percent (11.5 percent) planned their trip 9-13 weeks in advance, while more than 20 percent (20.4 percent) planned their trip more than three months in advance.

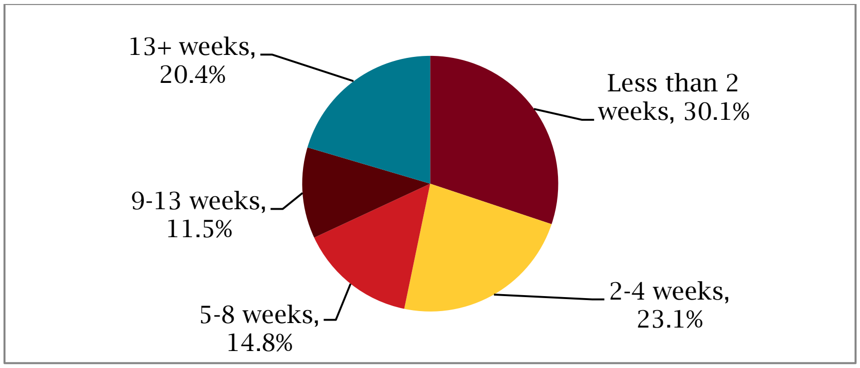

Fig. 28: Trip planning timeframe among respondents to 2014 Itasca area visitor survey (n=3674).

During both fall and winter, the highest percentage of Gen X planned their trip 2-4 weeks in advance, while the other generations planned their trip less than two weeks in advance (Figure 29). In spring, the oldest generations were most likely to plan their trip more than 13 weeks in advance, while the highest percentage of baby boomers planned their trip less than two weeks in advance. Between Gen X and millennials, an equal percentage planned their trip either less than two weeks in advance or 2-4 weeks in advance. In summer, the highest percentage of the oldest generations planned their more than 13 weeks in advance, while the other generations planned their trip less than two weeks in advance. Among baby boomers and Gen X, however, almost as many respondents planned their trip more than 13 weeks in advance.

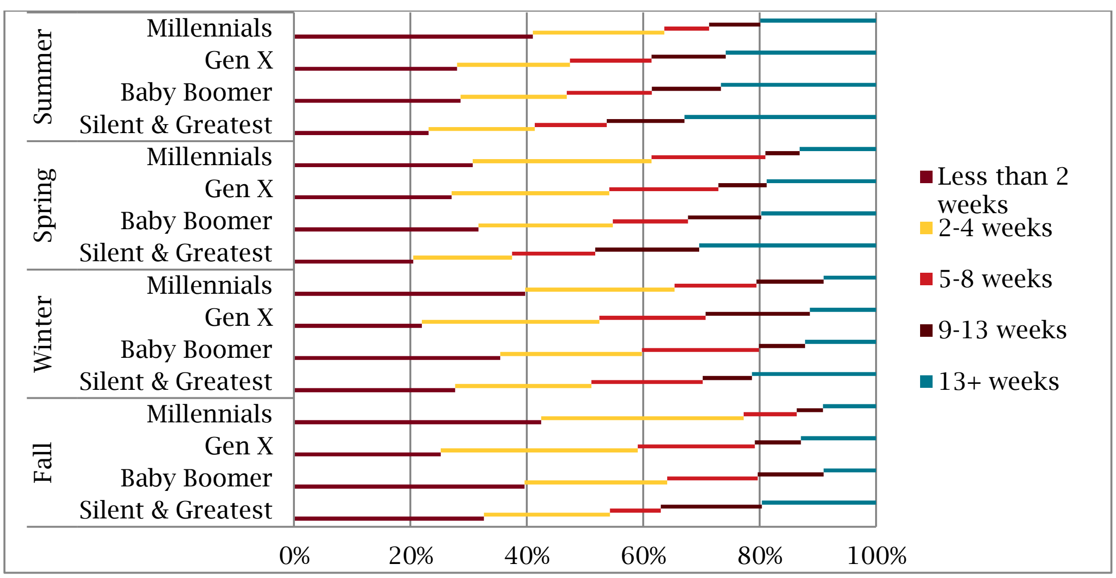

Fig. 29: Trip planning timeframe among respondents to 2014 Itasca area visitor survey, by season and generation (n=3636).

In terms of information sources used to plan the trip, the most frequently used were word of mouth (50.7 percent), followed distantly by area/destination website (19.4 percent; Figure 30). Ten percent of respondents identified web search/Google as an information source. Approximately 5 percent identified Google+ (5.9 percent), area/destination visitor guide (5.5 percent), online travel site (5.1 percent), Facebook (4.8 percent), and past experience/return trip (4.6 percent) as information sources.

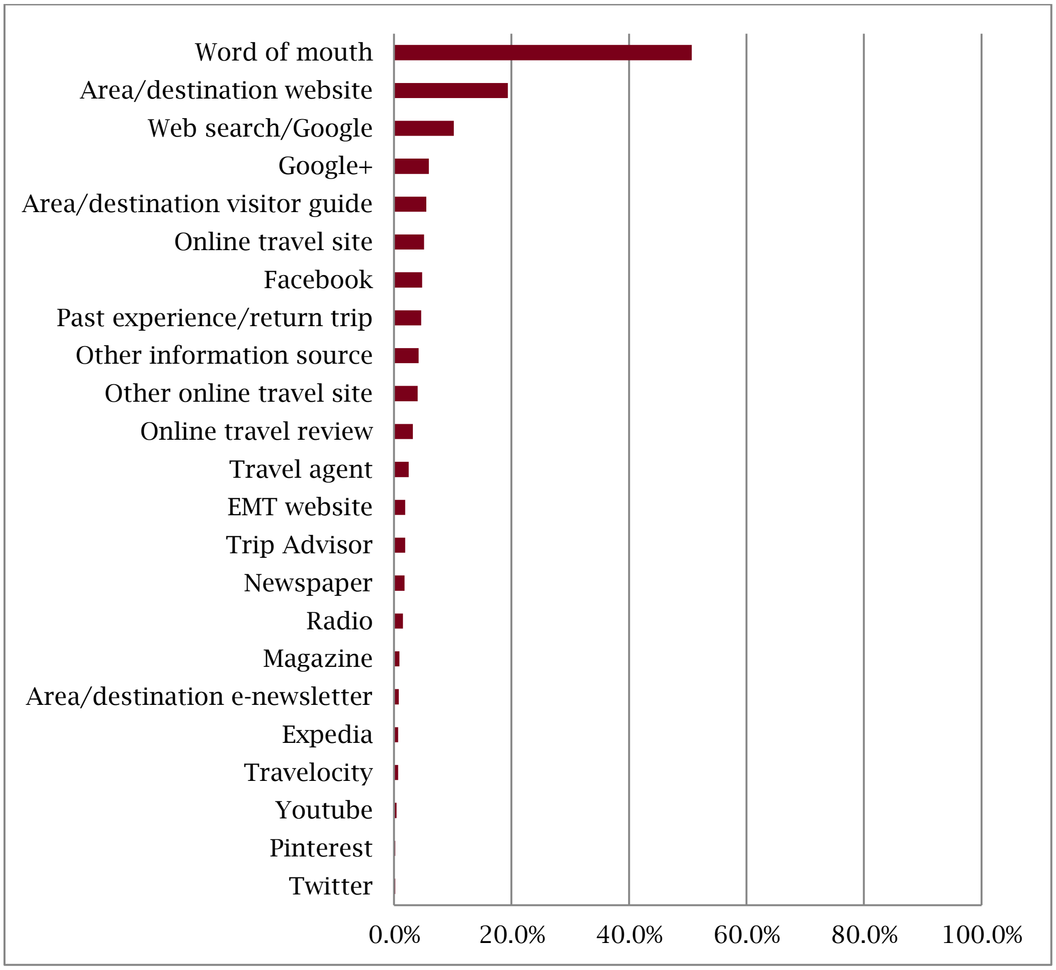

Fig. 30: Information sources used by respondents to 2014 Itasca area visitor survey (n=3811).

Across all generations in each season, word of mouth was the most frequently used information source (Table 6). Baby boomers, Gen X, and millennials frequently used an area/destination website as an information source during the fall, winter, and summer. An area/destination visitor guide was most frequently used by the oldest generations and Gen X in the fall and by millennials in the winter. A web search/Google was most frequently used by Gen X in the winter and summer and by millennials in the summer. There was no usage of Google+ in fall, winter or spring. However, at least ten percent of each generation used Google+ in summer.

Table 6: Top five information sources used by respondents to 2014 Itasca area visitor survey, by season and generation (n=3811).

		Area/destination website	Word of mouth	Area/destination visitor guide	Web search/Google	Google +
Fall	Silent & Greatest	14.6%	43.8%	8.3%	0.0%	0.0%
	Baby Boomer	20.0%	40.0%	6.4%	1.4%	0.0%
	Gen X	17.8%	53.4%	8.9%	0.7%	0.0%
	Millennials	18.3%	52.1%	5.6%	0.0%	0.0%
Winter	Silent & Greatest	12.5%	54.2%	2.1%	4.2%	0.0%
	Baby Boomer	18.6%	50.9%	4.2%	10.8%	0.0%
	Gen X	25.9%	48.2%	4.9%	12.6%	0.0%
	Millennials	24.4%	55.1%	7.7%	9.0%	0.0%
Spring	Silent & Greatest	5.3%	55.8%	1.8%	7.1%	0.0%
	Baby Boomer	13.3%	49.2%	6.0%	10.9%	0.0%
	Gen X	17.2%	51.7%	4.4%	11.1%	0.0%
	Millennials	15.5%	56.1%	1.9%	9.7%	0.0%
Summer	Silent & Greatest	11.5%	45.7%	5.6%	7.7%	10.7%
	Baby Boomer	19.8%	51.0%	6.7%	11.2%	13.1%
	Gen X	19.8%	51.6%	6.2%	16.6%	12.9%
	Millennials	18.9%	58.3%	3.9%	12.4%	9.8%

Impact of social media during trip

The majority of respondents (86.2 percent) did not change their original plans based on social media information (Figure 31). About 12 percent of respondents indicated making minor changes to their original travel plans based on social media while 1.5 percent made significant changes.

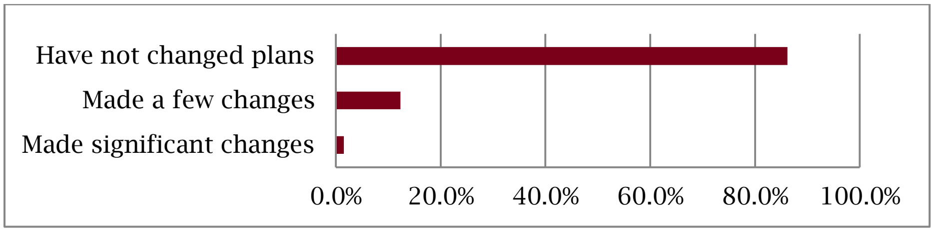

Fig. 31: Impact of social media on original travel plans among respondents to 2014 Itasca area visitor survey (n=3202).

Sharing information about the trip

Approximately two-thirds of respondents (67.4 percent) would share information about their trip via word of mouth, followed by text messages (41.6 percent) and Facebook (39.3 percent; Figure 32). Approximately 8 percent would share information about their trip on Google+ (8.8 percent) and/or Instagram (7.4 percent). No other medium was identified by more than 3 percent of respondents as an information sharing medium.

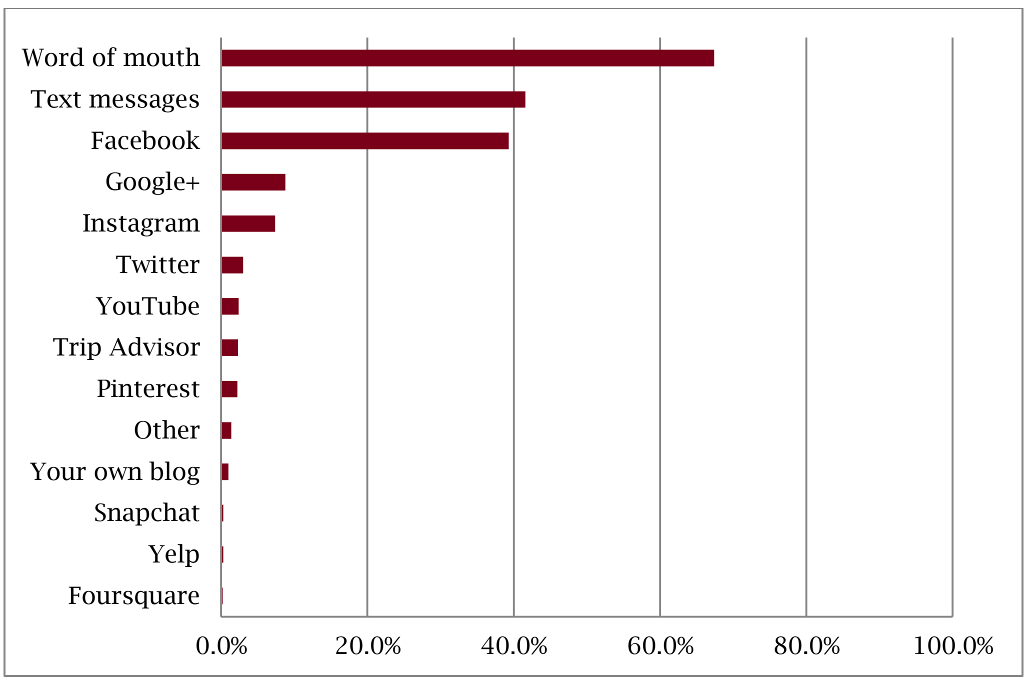

Fig. 32: Information sharing sources among 2014 Itasca area visitor survey respondents (n=3811).

Second/Vacation Homeowners

In this section, second/vacation homeowners are compared to other survey respondents in terms of age, number of visits, length of stay, top activities participated in, and daily spending.

Second/vacation homeowners were significantly older than other visitors (F=54.05, p<0.0005). The average age of second/vacation homeowners was 56; for other visitors, it was 50.

Second/vacation homeowners also differed significantly from other respondents in the number of visits they made in the past 12 months (F=419.22, p<0.0005), as well as the past five years (F=372.98, p<0.0005). Second/vacation homeowners made an average of 11 visits in the past 12 months, while other respondents made an average of nearly four visits. During the past years, second/vacation homeowners visited the area an average of 46 times, while other respondents visited an average of 13 times.

While in the Itasca area, second/vacation homeowners also differed significantly from other respondents in the number of days they stayed in the area (F=434.77, p<0.0005). The former group spent an average of close to 21 days, while the latter spent an average of three days.

Total spending per person, per day, on the other hand, did not differ significantly between second/vacation homeowners and the other respondents (F=0.18, p=0.672). On average, second/vacation homeowners spent a total of $133 per person per day, while the other respondents spent a total of $144 per person per day. When lodging expenses were excluded from total spending, however, significant differences emerged (*statistic*=5.055, p<0.05). Second/vacation homeowners spent an average of $119 per person per day, while other visitors spent an average of $88 per person per day.

Table 7: Comparison between second/vacation homeowners and other respondents to 2014 Itasca area visitor survey in number of previous visits, length of stay, and personal daily spending.

		Descriptive statistics			Statistics	
		Mean	Median	S.D.	Statistic	Sig.
Age	Vacation home owners (n=359)	56.40	58	14.52	54.05	**
	Non-vacation home owners (n=3406)	50.25	50	15.15		
Number visits in past 12 months	Vacation home owners (n=327)	11.16	8.00	10.92	419.22	**
	Non-vacation home owners (n=2901)	3.75	2.00	5.42		
Number of visits in past 5 years	Vacation home owners (n=280)	46.08	30.00	47.67	372.98	**
	Non-vacation home owners (n=2637)	13.38	5.00	23.71		
Number of days spent in Itasca area	Vacation home owners (n=355)	20.60	4.00	39.91	434.77	**
	Non-vacation home owners (n=3348)	3.38	2.00	8.58		
Total spending per person per day	Vacation home owners (n=364)	133.11	72.33	299.84	0.180	
	Non-vacation home owners (n=3447)	143.99	90.00	479.96		
Total spending per person per day, EXCLUDING lodging expenses	Vacation home owners (n=364)	119.08	67.50	233.63	5.055	*
	Non-vacation home owners (n=3447)	87.70	50.00	393.03		

*p<0.05; **p<0.0005.

Compared to other respondents, vacation/second homeowners were significantly more likely to participate in the following activities: dining out, fishing, visiting friends/relatives, driving on designated byways, experiencing nightlife/evening entertainment, attending festivals/events, visiting state parks, historic sites, museums, and Chippewa National Forest, attending shows/music concerts, biking, and riding ATVs (Table 8). Meanwhile, vacation/second homeowners were less likely than other respondents to attend sporting events. There was no significant difference between vacation/second homeowners and other respondents in sightseeing, casino gaming, visiting other attractions, taking guided tours, or snowmobiling.

Table 8: Comparison between second/vacation homeowners and other respondents to 2014 Itasca area visitor survey in activity participation.

	Non-vacation homeowners (%)	**Vacation homeowners (%)**	**Statistics**	
	(n=3447)	(n=364)	χ^2	Sig.
Dining	79.4	84.9	6.24	*
Fishing	31.0	67.0	189.16	***
Visit friends/relatives	28.6	41.8	27.06	***
Sightseeing	21.7	25.3	2.41	
Driving on designated byways	15.9	20.6	5.41	*
Nightlife/evening entertainment	13.5	19.2	8.89	**
Attend festivals/events	11.0	19.5	20.1	***
Visit state parks	11.0	17.6	13.91	***
Historic sites	9.9	17.0	17.75	***
Attend sporting events	9.5	4.9	8.25	**
Museums	8.8	12.9	6.49	*
Visit Chippewa National Forest	7.9	22.5	83.16	***
Casino gaming	6.7	8.8	2.17	
Other attractions	6.3	8.0	1.47	
Attend shows/music concerts	4.6	11.0	27.42	***
Biking	3.7	12.6	61.63	***
ATV	3.2	13.5	85.85	***
Guided tour	2.7	2.2	0.32	
Snowmobiling	1.8	3.3	3.68	

*p<0.05, **p<0.005, ***p<0.0005.

DISCUSSION

The first Itasca area visitor profile, released in 2002, did not report seasonal results like this study. Consequently, there are fewer opportunities for assessing comparative changes during the years. What we can conclude, though, is the following:

- The percentage of Minnesotans visiting the area increased from 64.6 percent in 2002 to 77 percent in 2014.
- In 2002, the majority (47 percent) of respondents traveled between 100-200 miles to visit the area; in this study, the majority (32 percent) traveled between 201-300 miles.
- The Itasca area remained the final destination for 84 percent of travelers in 2014, up slightly from 81 percent in 2002.
- The top three reasons for visiting the area in 2002 were outdoor recreation (18.9 percent), business travel (17.8 percent), and visiting friends and family (14.4 percent). Visiting friends and family was the most frequently identified primary reason to visit the area during the 2014 reporting period (21.1percent), followed by fishing (17 percent) and business/work (9.5 percent).
- Repeat visitors averaged 13.2 trips over a five-year period in the 2002 study—that figure rose to 16.5 trips during 2014's study.
- Hotels/motels remained the most frequently used lodging type, although the percentage decreased from 49.9 percent in 2002 to 40 percent in 2014. Vacation rental by owner emerged as a new lodging option during the 2014 study period, reported by 1.2 percent of respondents.
- Spending per person, per day, rose from $109.32 in 2002 (value adjusted to 2014 dollars) to $142.40 in 2014. Transportation and recreational spending accounted for the largest spending increases.

Study Implications and Use of Information

Seeking seasonal data in this study is a sign of community maturation in destination marketing, proving the Itasca area with a more effective and efficient way to market the community to visitors. Once you understand the type of visitors traveling to your destination, , you can more effectively market your tourism offerings. For communities within the Itasca area, the data in this report provides the basis for sound marketing decisions.

The information included in this study can also help inform individual businesses as well. For example, consider the hypothetical, "average" summer visitor (based on key averages reported for the summer season):

> *The Itasca area summer visitor was between the ages of 51-60, had an annual pre-tax household income between $75,000 and $100,000, had an undergraduate degree and was from Minnesota. The Itasca area was their primary destination and they stayed an average of two nights in a hotel/motel with one other person (a family member) of the same age.*
>
> *While in the Itasca area, they spent $142 per person each day and their most frequent activity was dining out. They came primarily to visit family and friends. They planned the trip within two weeks of when they arrived and received their travel information primarily by word of mouth. They have made four trips to the area in the past year, and anything they learned about the destination through social media had no effect on their plans. They shared trip information mainly by word of mouth and a mobile device.*

The above narrative tells local businesses that baby boomers are still a key demographic with money to spend. Hotels should consider offering two-to-three day packages, due to the group's propensity for staying two nights. Since dining out is an important part of what they like to do, how does the area stack up in terms of dining options? Is there room for more?

Regarding trip planning, most travelers organized their trip within a month of their visit. Since baby boomers typically receive travel information by word of mouth, customer service is very important. Moreover, as local residents become better aware of activities available to visitors, the more customers business owners are likely to see as travelers visit to spend time with friends and family in the area.

Fishing also remains an important activity for visitors to the area, especially during the winter. Generation X, in particular, identified sporting events as a key reason to visit in winter, perhaps a preference tied to the popularity of youth hockey. In general, travelers participated in sightseeing, and this activity preference may have implications for area attractions. While festivals and events was not identified as a key reason to visit the area, once visitors *are* in town, they tend to attend festivals and events.

These findings are just a few that demonstrate how to interpret the study results with an eye towards destination marketing. The data presented in this report shows who is currently visiting the area, but it can also represent the characteristics of prospective travelers who may visit if they had an awareness of the Itasca area. The data allows target markets to emerge, aiding identification of market segments, which are all important piece of a broader marketing plan for the community and its businesses.

Vacation/Second Homeowner Visitors

Vacation/second homeowners are included in this study because they conform to the accepted definition of a tourist—someone who travels more than 50 miles from his or her primary residence. Their impact on communities in which there is a sizeable number of vacation homes is often overlooked—even when that impact is large. As a result, information about this niche group is included in this report. Since second homeowners already have a tangible investment in the area, understanding their preferences, spending patterns, and relationships with prospective visitors should not be ignored.

Data shows that the oldest generation stays in the Itasca area the longest during the spring and summer. The fact that the presence of vacation/second homes is sizeable (31.4 percent), and that the share of vacation rental by owner is small (1.6 percent), suggests that vacation rentals by owner (VRBO) as could grow considerably in the future as a lodging option. Study findings also indicate members of this generation are active participants in the happenings of the area, including outdoor recreation, sightseeing, and festivals and events. Considering them while developing marketing efforts may be a good idea, as they are very much a part of the Itasca area tourist scene.

Sustainability

While this study only focused on the demand side of Itasca area tourism, the supply side—as portrayed in the 2002 report—continues to be important. For example, periodic review of the region's assets and attributes is a good idea and an integral part of the community's tourism plan. How well (or not well) the area's existing infrastructure (e.g., public restrooms, parking) supports travelers is part of an overarching customer service equation, and an effort to maintain and grow this infrastructure will help ensure repeat customers. Additionally, periodically assessing organizational relationships and community leadership across all sectors (public, private, nonprofit) supports and sustains a vibrant and healthy community.

It is important to emphasize that keeping residents engaged and involved in these community processes helps support a sustainable tourism model. It also helps prevent decisions that ultimately work against the community's values and future destination development efforts. Data supports the idea that word-of-mouth and the opinions of travelers' friends and families play a significant role in both attracting visitors to the Itasca area and driving repeat business. As a result, organizations and businesses must maintain positive relationships with local residents. In the end, doing so helps maintain the uniqueness of communities in the Itasca area, as well as reinforce a strong sense of place that continues to draw future visitors.

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