

**2022 REGIONAL TRAVELER DATA/
MARKETING ANALYSIS:
*ESSEX and HAMILTON COUNTIES, NY-
ADIRONDACK REGION***



Photo credit: ROOST

**Prepared by: PlaceMaking
April 2023**

BACKGROUND

The Regional Office of Sustainable Tourism (ROOST) managed the marketing tourism assets for the Essex and Hamilton County, the Village of Tupper Lake and the Village of Saranac Lake in Franklin County, New York state in 2022. The agency commissioned a study as it has for the past seven years, to determine visitor information at the county levels and to gauge key regional marketing program statistics.

ROOST contracted with PlaceMaking, a regional community and economic development research firm to complete this research. ROOST sent a jointly created survey tool to a sample of its 2022 leisure travelers to the region. Visitors were requested to complete an online survey (via social media and email) and the results were compiled from the responses received specifically from visitors who spent most of their time in the Adirondack region.

Results from 2022 visitation saw a return to more normal activities for visitors following two heavily impacted pandemic years. Regional traveler data and a summary marketing/return on investment (ROI) analysis are provided in this briefing. The data excludes group and business market segments.

The end-product of this research includes detailed visitor information, estimated traveler expenditures and analysis, and an estimated return on investment (ROI) for the region's marketing expenditures. ROOST measured a total of 215,944 traceable leads who were interested in visiting the region in 2022. PlaceMaking also compiled similar research for Essex and Hamilton counties individually, which are available under separate covers.

METHODOLOGY

The Regional Office of Sustainable Tourism (ROOST) engaged PlaceMaking to conduct research through a visitor survey for the eleventh year. The study has employed similar methodology with comparable results for 19 years. The survey instrument was designed collaboratively by PlaceMaking and ROOST to gather information from its leisure travelers and to measure regionally the return on investment of marketing expenditures.

Survey results are parsed by where the traveler indicated spending the most time to achieve individual county level results; these results are analyzed together as the basis for this report. It is acknowledged that this is not an exact measure, but the researchers believe that this provides reasonable results as the methodology is consistent per county and has shown reliability across multiple applications over time.

The survey was distributed electronically by ROOST to a sampling of its electronic database of visitors or parties inquiring about visitation to this Adirondack region during 2022. Surveys were collected quarterly throughout 2022. Within the month following each travel quarter, the survey was delivered electronically to a sampling of visitors who had inquired about traveling during that period. This manner of collection allows surveys to be modified slightly by seasonal activities and particularly to improve trip data recollection near to their actual date of travel.

Those invited to participate in the survey represent traceable direct inquiries generated by the office's marketing efforts. This includes respondents who requested travel information through the internet, by telephone, through social media outlets (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram), website, printed materials and in-person visits. These potential visitors provide their contact information so they may be identified as unique respondents. This study does not take into consideration the potentially large group of individuals who view travel materials and are then subsequently influenced to travel to the area, but do not provide traceable information.

The survey instrument was predicated on national and regional research with a similar purpose and refined based on the experience of tourism professionals. The online survey was attractively designed and provided unique Adirondack- related incentives to randomly selected respondents for survey completion. The opinion of the researchers is that incentives contribute to a relatively higher survey return rate without skewing data.

Approximately 215,000 invitations were sent by ROOST for the regional survey. Nearly 6,000 responses were received. This results in an approximately 3% response rate. Approximately half of these were from those who visited this portion of the Adirondacks during the 2022 year at least once. This is a lower survey pool than seen in recent years. Overall travel leads were higher and general survey response is increasingly difficult to maintain. While researchers prefer at least a 5% response and as large an actual visitor pool as possible, the results appear to be valid in comparison to many years of data collection and external data review.

The project team for this research is consistent with previous years of study, including project manager Victoria Zinser Duley- AICP, Principal with PlaceMaking and John Parmelee, CHIA- faculty member of the SUNY Plattsburgh Department of Hospitality Management.

SUMMARY TRAVELER DATA

Highlights of 2022 visitation to the region included:

Demographics and Visit Information

- Average traveler party age of respondents was 58 years old, slightly older than the five-year average.
- The average reported total traveler party size was 2.7 adults and 0.7 child, for a total of 3.4 persons. This represents two years of smaller average party sizes from these data.
- Respondents included 58% females, 42% male.
- Ninety-four percent (94%) of visitor respondents were of white ethnicity; with approximately 1% each reporting Native American, Asian and Hispanic. Less than 1% of respondents reported African American/Black and 2% reported mixed race.
- Reported visitation by respondents from New York state fell to 69% from 2022, marking two years of decline since a notable high of 80% during the height of the pandemic in 2020.
- Visitors traveling from northern and central/western New York comprised the largest group of these respondents at 33% each.
- Northeastern state visitors outside of New York state were consistent from the year prior at 18% of respondents. Visitors reporting from states outside the Northeast rose slightly to 8%. Five percent of these visitors traveled from the southern U.S..
- Canadian visitation rebounded somewhat with a reported 2% of visitors from Quebec and 2% from Ontario.
- Stay length reported by 2022 travelers increased slightly from that reported in 2021, to 3.7 nights. 2021 average reported stay duration was 3.4 nights. This is closer to the five-year average duration of stay.
- For the second consecutive year, reported peak fall visitation in September/October (29%) exceeded reported summer visitation in July/August

(23%). May/June (16%), January/February (10%) and March/April (8%) stayed fairly consistent from prior years. Reported November/December visitation climbed from 8% to 11% among 2022 visitors (compared to year prior). The shift in stronger fall visitation is a point which researchers are continuing to note and focus for future investigation.

- Hotels/motels remained the most frequently reported lodging choice among 2022 traveler respondents (38%), but still decreased from five-year averages as other market share has grown.
- Reported stays in short-term rental lodging increased to 18% (from 16% in 2021). Other lodging types stayed consistent with recent years with 14% reporting staying with family/friends, 15% in camping/RVs. Visitors reported staying in second homes slightly less from 2021, with 12% indicating this lodging choice.

Interests

- The highest ranking attraction to visit the region continued to be outdoor activities, with 62% of respondents selecting this draw to visit.
- “Relaxing, dining and shopping” remained another frequently expressed reason to visit the area by 58% of respondents. Sightseeing (47%) and visiting friends (27%) rounded out the top four areas of interest. Thirteen percent (13%) of respondents reported visiting Olympic sites and events as an attraction. Reported interest in heritage attractions rose slightly from prior year to 12%.
- Seventy-nine percent (79%) of respondents who indicated that they came to the area for outdoor activities stated that hiking was an activity of interest. Reported interest in canoeing or kayaking was the next most common reported outdoor interest (35%), followed by boating (16%).
- Fishing was expressed as an outdoor activity of interest by 13% of respondents. Eleven percent (11%) of respondents indicated interest in birding and ten percent (10%) indicated interest in cross-country skiing/snowshoeing.
- A question regarding hiking preferences continues to indicate a strong

preference in casual hiking, with 71% of respondents indicating interest in day hikes, 31% leisure and hard surface hiking and 24% family hikes. Forty-sixer level hike interest raised in 2022, to 21% of respondents.

Traveler Spending and Conversion

- Increased expenditure levels were reported by 2022 visitors in comparison to the 2021 year. The average daily traveler party spending in 2022 was estimated at \$459. This is a new high level among recent years of data collection.
- The total estimated reported trip expenditure was \$1,697. Visitor spending has increased for the past five years, including an even larger spike during 2020 substantially due to longer stays.
- Reported spending on lodging (\$787) represents a remarkable 23% increase in this spending from the year prior. Reported meal spending also climbed 7% from the year prior to \$298. These data are supported by the increases in revenue substantiated by ancillary research.
- All other expenditures categories demonstrated increases as well, resulting in a strong expenditure profiles. This includes shopping (\$218), entertainment (\$89), transportation (\$140) and attraction/events (\$90).
- Conversion measurement, representing the percent of travelers who stated that the information or marketing viewed either reinforced potential plans to visit or helped them decide to take an unplanned trip was 82%, just above the 5-year average of 81%.
- Over 215,000 individuals contacted ROOST via its various outlets for travel information about the region in 2022. This is a near record level and a 2% increase from the prior year.

ESTIMATED TRAVELERS

The 2022 estimated traveler count is tabulated by multiplying the number of *traceable* leads generated by ROOST (those who contacted their office during 2022 for

information through all sources) by the conversion factor and by the average party size (determined by the survey).

215,944 (direct leads) X 82% (gross conversion factor) x 3.4 (average party size)

Estimated travelers in 2022 = 602,052

The number of travelers influenced by ROOST in visiting the region in 2022 is estimated at over 602,000. This is very near to estimated visitors influenced by ROOST to the region from 2021 data.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Researchers measured return on investment (ROI) by estimating expenditures generated by direct expenditures of travelers and divided by the total marketing dollars spent by ROOST.

The first step in this process is to estimate total revenue generated by leisure travelers to the region who were influenced by ROOST marketing materials. This is done by multiplying the number of traceable inquiries by the average gross conversion rate, daily traveler expenditures and length of stay:

*215,944 (number of direct, traceable inquiries) x 82% (gross conversion factor)
x \$459 (mean traveler party expenditure per day) x 3.7 (mean length of stay in nights)*

= \$300,724,910

(total estimated revenue generated by travelers influenced by ROOST in 2022)

The second step in this process is to divide the total revenue generated by travelers by the marketing dollars spent by the total ROOST marketing budget:

\$300,724,910 (total estimated traveler revenue) / \$3,188,710 (total ROOST marketing expenditures)

Return on Investment (ROI) = 94:1

The above calculations show that the total estimated revenue generated by travelers influenced by ROOST was over \$276 million in 2022, a 13% increase from the 2021 estimated revenue. This produces a conservatively- estimated ROI of \$94 in leisure

traveler-related revenue for every marketing dollars expended. This includes only direct spending impacts, not the secondary or tertiary multipliers that result from this direct spending that would create a much greater impact.

CONCLUSIONS

ROOST has played a key leading role in promoting tourism and the return to broader markets as the world moved out of the pandemic in 2021. As began during that time, data from 2022 visitors show a return toward more typical visitor patterns. A return to sports tournaments and events provided a boost to visitor numbers and dollars spent.

Smith Travel Research (STR) is the world leader in producing lodging data. The areas of measure are RevPAR (revenue per available room) which is a factor of both occupancy percentage and the average daily room rate. STR also measures the supply and demand of rooms available in the market.

The RevPAR for Essex County¹, as a representative for the region, has been steadily increasing since the Pandemic effect of 2020. The county has experienced a 25% growth in Rev PAR since 2019 and it has increased 14% since 2022. The room supply has maintained at a stationary level for the last few years however the room's demand has increased 10% since last year alone. All five of the STR data indicators show very favorable trends for the region. Overall occupancies saw a full recovery to pre-pandemic levels in 2022.

The demographics from survey respondents indicates a return of visitors from areas further afield than New York state in the region during 2022. The longer stays reported in 2020 and larger visitor party sizes, as expected, have returned to more typical 3-to-4-day averages and visitor party sizes of 3 to 4 persons. These data show further evidence of a shift back to more typical visitor, post-pandemic patterns.

Short-term rentals continue to be a growing portion of visitor accommodations. For the first time in this data collection, nearly one in five respondents reported staying in a short-term rental. This impact to the region continues to be an area that ROOST works to improve and manage in conjunction with local governments. For a second year, visitors who reported traveling in peak fall exceeded those who reported visiting in peak summer. This shift to an extremely strong fall visitation is notable. Visitation in the shoulder seasons to summer and fall has stayed consistent.

Most expenditure categories reported all-time highs. Reported lodging expenditures made a dramatic (39%) increase from the prior year. These increased levels have the

added benefit of improving the occupancy tax revenues that the region can employ to further improve marketing and attraction efforts. Daily expenditure levels have been on a steady growth trend even before the recent year and a half of inflation. This is a strong position for continued regional economic impact.

The U.S. Travel Association predicts domestic travel to stay strong in 2023 and a slow continued improvement of business travel. Sluggish recovery of international travel is predicted as well, which impacts expected Canadian visitors to the region to some extent. Statista reports the travel market expanding substantially due to greater ease of mobility and improved awareness of destinations due to widely accessible information³. Preferences include higher levels of hygiene and contactless services, as well as sustainable practices.

ROOST has well-positioned its marketing to address this Adirondack region's travel opportunities. Estimated spending rose 21% in 2022 in comparison to 2021. The year's return on investment (ROI) from marketing expenditures is 94:1. This is well above the 5-year average of 77:1. These figures show growth in reaching visitors and positive revenue impacts.

The research team continues to discuss the broader impact of regional tourism on Adirondack regional visitor assets and areas by which to expand traveler data collection accordingly. The higher levels of daily spending and returning visitor patterns from pre-pandemic times are a strong point to continue to grow the regional economy. These data can continue to be used to enhance and evaluate future marketing efforts, techniques, and marketing channels for the agency. Considering the global pandemic, these data show a bright spot for economic recovery in the tourism industry in the region in 2023 and beyond.

The ability of the region to continue strong visitation during a pandemic is notable, as are the longer stays and resulting increased expenditures. This is encouraging in terms of marketing strategies and future growth. These data can be used to enhance and evaluate future marketing efforts, techniques, and marketing channels for the agency.

The study at a regional level provides a benchmark in measuring ROI on marketing investments for the two-county region and the Villages of Tupper Lake and Saranac Lake in Franklin County. It may also enhance and improve evaluation of future marketing efforts, techniques, and marketing channels for 2022 visitors and beyond. Five-year key statistics data are attached in Table 1.

SOURCES CITED

1. Smith Travel Research, Inc. - "Trend Report Essex County NY". 2022.
2. U.S. Travel Association. "Travel- Forecasts" ustravel.org 11/29/22
3. Statista.com. "Domestic Travel Summary"

TABLE 1. 5-YEAR SUMMARY TABLE OF KEY REGIONAL ROI DATA

| | 5-Year Average* | 2022 | 2021 | 2020* | 2019* | 2018* |
|--|------------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Number of Completed Survey Responses | 4,167 | 3,293 | 6,161 | 3,593 | 4,449 | 3,339 |
| Median Income of Respondents (by \$10,000 range) | \$100,000 | \$100,000 | \$100,000 | \$100,000 | \$100,000 | \$100,000 |
| Mean Age of Respondents | 56 | 58 | 58 | 53 | 56 | 55 |
| Direct Inquiries to ROOST for Region | 256,645 | 215,944 | 211,930 | 168,089 | 367,288 | 319,976 |
| Average Night Stays/ Party | 3.9 Nights | 3.7 Nights | 3.4 Nights | 6.7 Nights | 3.1 Nights | 3 Nights |
| Average Party Size | 4 Persons | 3.4 Persons | 3.7 Persons | 5 Persons | 3.5 Persons | 4.1 Persons |
| Conversion Factor Rate | 81% | 82% | 80% | 82% | 80% | 77% |

| | | | | | | |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Average Daily Expenditure per Party | \$381 | \$459 | \$421 | \$283 | \$383 | \$358 |
| Average Total Expenditure per Party per Trip | \$1,419 | \$1,697 | \$1,390 | \$1,667 | \$1,191 | \$1,151 |
| Occupancy Tax Marketing Budget | \$3,728,907 | \$3,188,710 | \$3,232,178 | \$3,266,422 | \$4,512,724 | \$4,444,201 |
| ROI | 77:1 | 94:1 | 75:1 | 70:1 | 74:1 | 73:1 |
| *Data from 2018 and 2019 also included Franklin County | | | | | | |