

Day Trip Visitors and Short-Term Renters to the Adirondack Region of Essex and Hamilton Counties

Summary Report



ROOST

PlaceMaking-

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BACKGROUND

The Regional Office of Sustainable Tourism (ROOST) managed the marketing tourism assets for Essex and Hamilton Counties as well as Tupper Lake and the Village of Saranac Lake in Franklin County, New York in 2023. The agency commissioned a study to determine leisure traveler information at the county levels and to gauge key regional marketing program statistics. ROOST contracted with PlaceMaking, a regional community/economic development research firm, to complete this research.

ROOST sent a jointly created survey tool to a sample of its 2023 leisure travelers to the region. The agency requested visitors to complete an online survey (via email) and the results were compiled from the responses received specifically from those who visited the region. The survey was sent out at the end of each quarter of 2023 and results aggregated for the year.

The number of potential visitors who inquired about travel to the region in 2023 and provided contact information (traceable leads) was 228,324. Traceable leads do not include the larger audience that could also be influenced by promotional material for the region suggesting that the leads represent a conservative number on which to base study results. Over 19,000 visitors responded to the survey that they had visited the region in 2023, providing a viable roughly 8% response rate of the full data pool.

One component of this research was a cross-tabulation of two subgroups of visitors from the survey response; this subset captures day trip travelers and short-term renters (those who rented private homes for their visit). Survey and project methodology, broader regional traveler data and marketing/return on investment (ROI) analysis for the full visitor group are outlined in a separate report. Analysis of the subgroups of day visitors and short-term renters follows in this report.

DAY TRIP VISITORS

Day trip visitors are those who responded in the survey that they traveled to the area for one day only, staying zero overnights. A total of 736 such responses from 2023 trips were received out of the full regional full-surveyed responses of 4,545 total responses. This is almost 15% of respondents, representing a slight downward

trend in the proportion of day visitors of the total regional respondents (16% in 2022, 17% in 2021, 26% in 2020, and 34% in 2019).

The following summarizes variations of 2023 day trip visitors from the overall regional visitor population:

- Average day trip visitor party size is 2.7 persons, including 2.2 adults and 0.5 child. This is just very slightly lower than the last years' reported visitor party size (2.8 persons in 2022).
- Overall visit expenditures, not surprisingly, continue to be much lower among day trip visitors. The total average reported party expenditure for day travel is \$328 compared to \$491 daily expenditures by all visitors. The daily reported spending by day trip visitors increased over last years' reported levels by a remarkable 25%.
- Meals comprise the largest category of expenditures at \$89, an increase from the \$73 average measured in the year prior. Shopping (\$77) and entertainment (\$76) comprise the next categories of major reported expenditures. Reported shopping levels declined somewhat from the year prior while reported entertainment spending more than doubled from the prior year.
- Outdoor activities (48%) are the strongest reported draws to visit the region by day trippers, followed closely by sightseeing (44%) and relaxing, shopping and dining (41%).
- Beyond these top three categories, most other attractions to visit are much lower, visiting family and friends at 11% and events with 10% of respondents expressing interest. The other categories are less than 10% of response.
- Among day visitors who responded that they were interested in outdoor activities, the interest in hiking was by far the most popular, selected by 77% of respondents. Interest in canoeing/kayaking was selected by 15% of respondents, fishing by 10% of respondents, birding by 10% of respondents, cycling by 9% of respondents and skiing/boarding by 6% of respondents.
- Day trip visitors (at 60 years old) continue to report a slightly higher average age compared to all visitor groups.

SHORT-TERM RENTALS

The visitor survey asked respondents who traveled to the region for overnight stays in 2023 about their primary lodging choice. This section is devoted to the results of those visitors who indicated that they stayed in a private home rental (through AirBnb, AdkByOwner, etc.), referred to here as a “short-term rental”.

Just over 650 (656) respondents, or about 15%, indicated that they stayed in a short-term rental. The following is a summary of visitors who stayed in short-term rentals in comparison to overall regional visitor respondents. This proportion has decreased slightly year-by-year during this data gathering over the past six years.

- Average short-term renter traveler party size is larger with 4.1 persons (3.2 adults and 0.9 children) versus 3.2 for all visitors to the region. This party size has also declined for this group for each short-term rental visitor in the last five years of data collection.
- Total expenditures reported among short-term renters were an average of \$2,815. This is well above the average regional visitor-reported expenditures of \$1,768 per trip. The total expenditure declined in this group from the prior year, however.
- Lodging costs accounted for most of this reported expenditure at \$1,420. Reported average meals were \$451. Both lodging and meals dropped in reported spending among this group from 2022. Shopping, entertainment, and attractions/events all showed slight growth over reported average levels from the year prior. All average expenditure categories reported by short-term renters are higher than averages reported by all regional visitors.
- The reported average length of stay for short-term renters is 4.5 nights, declining from the prior year of 5 nights. Short-term renter stays remain longer, on average, than those of all visitors (3.6 nights in 2023).
- Visitation is more spread out across multiple seasons among these visitors than the entire regional group.
- Outdoor activities (78%), relaxing/dining (54%) and sightseeing (38%) were the highest levels of reported interest to visit the area among short-term renters. This is consistent with the three most common activities reported by all visitors. Visiting Olympic sites (18%), visiting family and friends (17%) and

events (16%) are the next most selected attractions by short-term renters.

- Hiking (80%) and canoeing/kayaking (32%) are the most reported outdoor attractions by short-term renters. These figures are higher proportions than expressed among the full regional group. Fishing (16%) and cross-country skiing/snowshoeing (16%) are the next most selected outdoor attractions by short-term renters.

- While the vast majority of short-term renters indicate that they are white/Caucasian, it is notable that there is a greater racial/ethnic diversity among this group than the full respondent pool. Eight percent (8%) of short-term rental respondents indicate that they are non-white, compared to 5% survey-wide.

- The mean age of short-term renters is slightly younger than the full regional group at 57 years (versus 58).

CONCLUSION

The survey data was cross-tabulated for the purpose of analyzing two subgroups of visitor data. Day trip visitors are a large piece of the visiting fabric of the region and provide substantial economic impact, particularly with assumed proximity to visit and ability to return more frequently. Day trip visitors appear to have declined since pre-pandemic travel and increasingly so over the last several years. This will be an area to continue to follow for longer-term trends.

Day trip visitors, on average, comprise smaller groups and spend less in all expenditure categories, even daily, than all visitors aggregated. Day trip visitors' economic impacts are constrained by the brief time spent in the area and their spending patterns which are both substantiated by this research. The increase in meal expenditures and particularly the high increase in entertainment expenditures are of note for future analysis.

Another interesting note is that the "conversion rate" or measure of effectiveness of marketing materials is lower among this day visitor group (72% who note a positive influence of materials on their travel decisions vs. 82% of all survey respondents).

Short-term renters represent a sizable and continually growing market within the region and nationwide. National data confirms that short-term rentals rebounded faster than hotels¹ as the world moved out of the pandemic. The reported party size remains higher than overall visitors and length of stay remains higher than among all visitors to the region, although both of these figures have declined during the past several years.

The decline in overall reported lodging and meal expenses in comparison to the year prior among this group is a marked change. It may indicate a different visitation pattern for some or many of this group in smaller properties and/or preparing meals instead of dining out.

The “conversion rate” or measure of effectiveness of marketing materials is higher among this group (84% who note a positive influence of materials on their travel decisions vs. 82% of all regional respondents).

The data gathered from this survey shows continued highly positive indications from the short-term renter group and overall continued high expenditure levels across all categories. While regulation and assimilation of short-term rentals presents some challenges to the community, a still stronger economic impact of visitors who choose this lodging type presents positive implications. The limited market for short-term rentals (with a moratorium on new units) in Lake Placid, a hub for much tourism activity in Essex County and the region, surely affected these figures to some extent.

The popularity of short-term rentals continues to grow across the region, especially in more remote locations. Their location and presence provide both opportunities with expanding visitor markets and economic impact; however, these facilities often strain the community infrastructure at scale.

With the intensive workforce challenges across the region in the hospitality and all industries, the expansion of the short-term rentals has exacerbated housing shortages. ROOST was a regional leader in instituting occupancy tax collection many years ago and continues to advocate for solutions that will benefit the region and enrich its tourism assets. The agency and its partners will continue to use collected data to work to improve solutions to the challenges and opportunities for short-term rentals.