Who is the Georgia VIC Visitor?

John Salazar, PhD, CHE
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Ashley Barfield, PhD
Explore Georgia

Welcome

Research Team

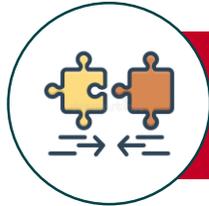Methodology

Insights

Implications

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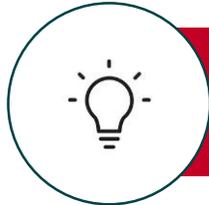
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Research Team

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- John Bergstrom, PhD, Agricultural and Applied Economics
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- Yifei Zhang, MS Student, Agricultural and Applied Economics

University of Chicago Magazine

Our Objective

To identify the prevailing characteristics of Georgia visitors who stop at the state's Visitor Information Centers.

Methodology

- February 2022 to January 2023
- Online surveys distributed by the Explore GA attendants at the 9 Visitor Information Centers (VICs)
- Paper surveys also collected
- 10,160 completed surveys from all 9 VICs

Response Rates by VIC

VIC	Started	Completed	Completion Rate
Savannah	3590	2127	59%
Lavonia	3279	1996	61%
Tallapoosa	1142	758	66%
Valdosta	1911	1145	60%
St. Marys	645	406	63%
Columbus	1629	1086	67%
West Point	1588	909	57%
Augusta	1087	669	62%
Ringgold	1708	1064	62%
Total	16579	10160	61%

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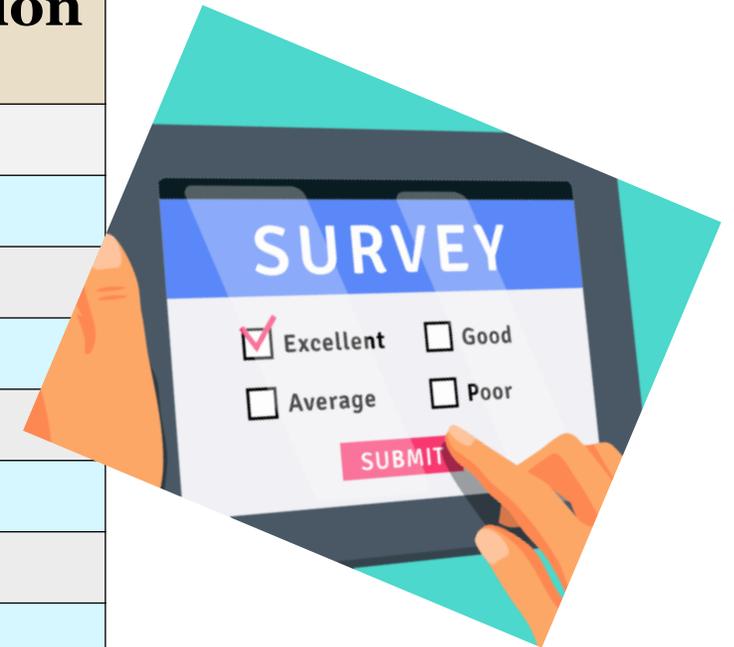
Responses by Season by VIC

VIC	Winter	Spring	Summer	Fall	Total Reponses
Augusta	13.5%	33.6%	31.2%	21.7%	669
Columbus	9.5%	42.9%	34.0%	13.6%	1086
Lavonia	15.4%	35.4%	27.1%	22.1%	1996
Ringgold	14.9%	31.8%	31.0%	22.3%	1064
Savannah (Port Wentworth)	14.2%	31.9%	29.6%	24.3%	2127
St. Marys	18.0%	29.8%	32.0%	20.2%	406
Tallapoosa	13.6%	44.9%	23.4%	18.2%	758
Valdosta	8.7%	37.6%	36.1%	17.6%	1145
West Point	17.9%	30.9%	29.4%	21.8%	909

Seasonality of Arrivals: Overall

The summer season followed closely by the spring season were the most visited time periods for VIC visitation
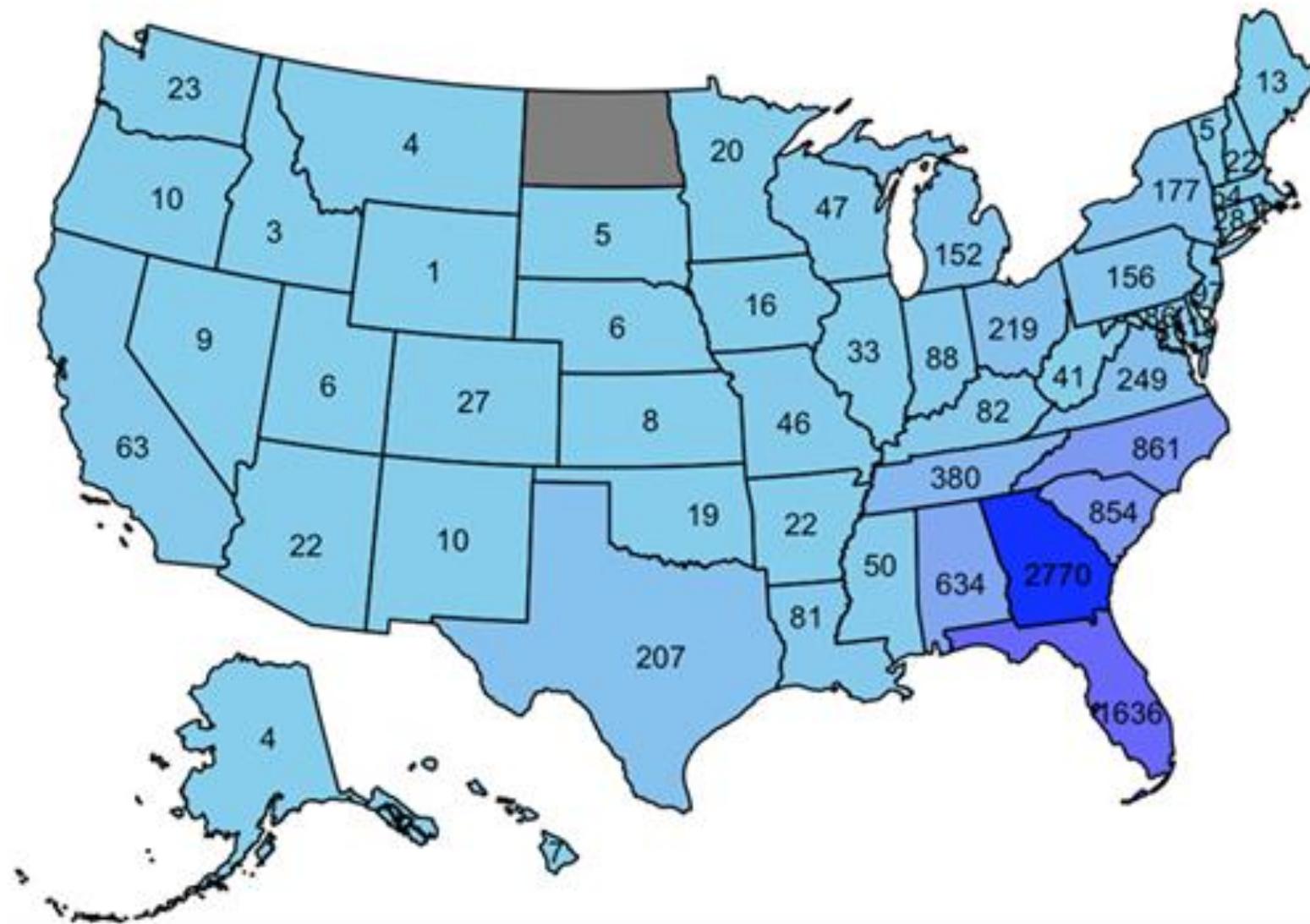
Share of Visitation

Fall: 24%
Spring: 27%
Summer: 29%
Winter: 20%

■ Fall   ■ Spring   ■ Summer   ■ Winter
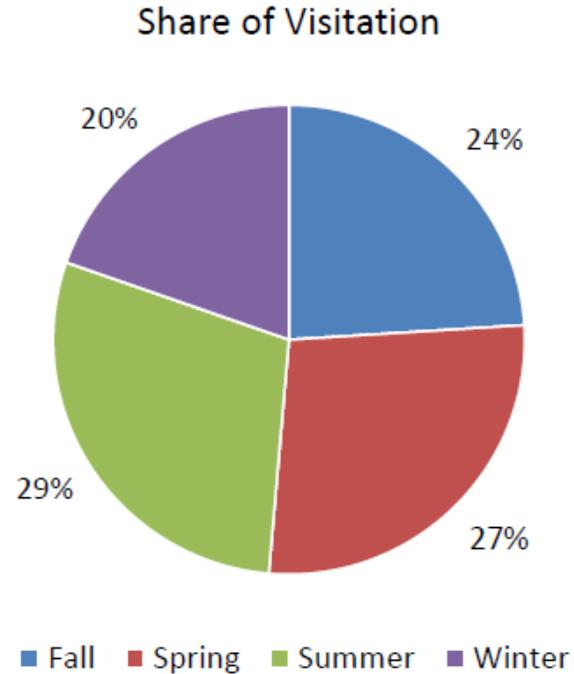
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Insights

Origin by States for all 9 VICs

Country of Origin Outside of US

Country	Frequency	% Respondents
Canada	45	52.94%
Germany	8	9.41%
Mexico	6	7.06%
Netherlands	3	3.53%
United Kingdom	3	3.53%
Puerto Rico	2	2.35%
Venequela	2	2.35%
argentina	1	1.18%
Australia	1	1.18%
Austria	1	1.18%
Brazil	1	1.18%
Denmark	1	1.18%
France	1	1.18%
India	1	1.18%
Kasakshstan	1	1.18%
Korea	1	1.18%
Pakistan	1	1.18%
Other	6	7.03%

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North Georgia MSA Top Origins: Tallapoosa, Ringgold, and Lavonia (2,052 zip codes plotted to 20 MSAs)

MSA	% Share of Top 20 MSAs	Frequency Rank	Affinity % Score	Affinity Rank
Atlanta, GA MSA	41.6%	1	33.5%	1
Greenville-Spartanburg-Anderson, SC MSA	9.5%	2	8.7%	2
Charlotte-Gastonia-Rock Hill, NC-SC MSA	9.3%	3	6.5%	3
Birmingham, AL MSA	6.7%	4	5.0%	4
Nashville, TN MSA	3.8%	5	1.3%	8
Greensboro--Winston-Salem--High Point, NC MSA	3.2%	6	2.4%	5
Knoxville, TN MSA	3.1%	7	2.0%	6
Washington-Baltimore, DC-MD-VA-WV CMSA	3.0%	8	-4.5%	16
Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, FL MSA	2.2%	9	-2.1%	14
Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill, NC MSA	2.2%	10	0.7%	10
Athens, GA MSA	2.1%	11	1.8%	7
New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island, NY-NJ-CT-PA	1.9%	12	-23.1%	20
Detroit-Ann Arbor-Flint, MI CMSA	1.6%	13	-3.2%	15
Columbia, SC MSA	1.5%	14	0.3%	12
Houston-Galveston-Brazoria, TX CMSA	1.5%	15	-7.7%	17
Chattanooga, TN-GA MSA	1.5%	16	0.6%	11
Cincinnati-Hamilton, OH-KY-IN CMSA	1.3%	17	-2.0%	13
Dallas-Fort Worth, TX CMSA	1.3%	18	-8.2%	18
Chicago-Gary-Kenosha, IL-IN-WI CMSA	1.3%	19	-12.8%	19
Hickory-Morganton-Lenoir, NC MSA	1.3%	20	0.7%	9

Ringgold

Lavonia

Tallapoosa

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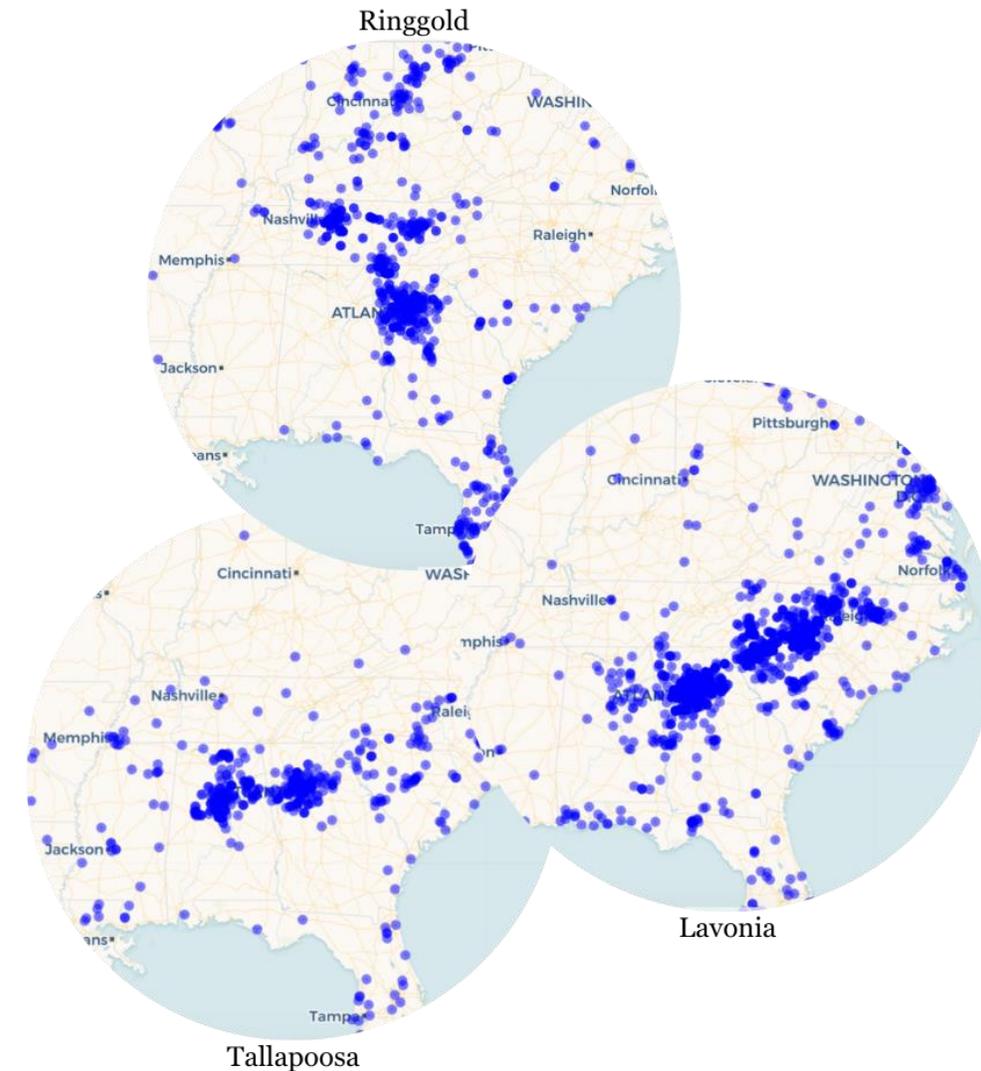
Central Georgia MSA Origins: Columbus, West Point, and Augusta (1,588 zip codes plotted to 20 MSAs)

MSA	% Share of Top 20 MSAs	Frequency Rank	Affinity % Score	Affinity Rank
Atlanta, GA MSA	53.1%	1	31.8%	1
Montgomery, AL MSA	7.7%	2	6.2%	2
Columbia, SC MSA	4.2%	3	1.1%	8
Columbus, GA-AL MSA	3.7%	4	2.5%	3
Pensacola, FL MSA	3.5%	5	1.6%	4
Augusta-Aiken, GA-SC MSA	3.0%	6	0.7%	11
Mobile, AL MSA	2.8%	7	1.5%	6
Charlotte-Gastonia-Rock Hill, NC-SC MSA	2.1%	8	-5.0%	18
Dothan, AL MSA	1.9%	9	1.5%	5
Albany, GA MSA	1.8%	10	1.2%	7
Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill, NC MSA	1.8%	11	-2.1%	16
Houston-Galveston-Brazoria, TX CMSA	1.8%	12	-22.3%	20
Tallahassee, FL MSA	1.8%	13	0.3%	13
Washington-Baltimore, DC-MD-VA-WV CMSA	1.6%	14	-16.2%	19
Birmingham, AL MSA	1.6%	15	-3.0%	17
Charleston-North Charleston, SC MSA	1.6%	16	-1.1%	15
Greenville-Spartanburg-Anderson, SC MSA	1.6%	17	-0.9%	14
Panama City, FL MSA	1.6%	18	0.9%	9
Fort Walton Beach, FL MSA	1.5%	19	0.8%	10
Athens, GA MSA	1.3%	20	0.5%	12

West Point

Augusta

Columbus
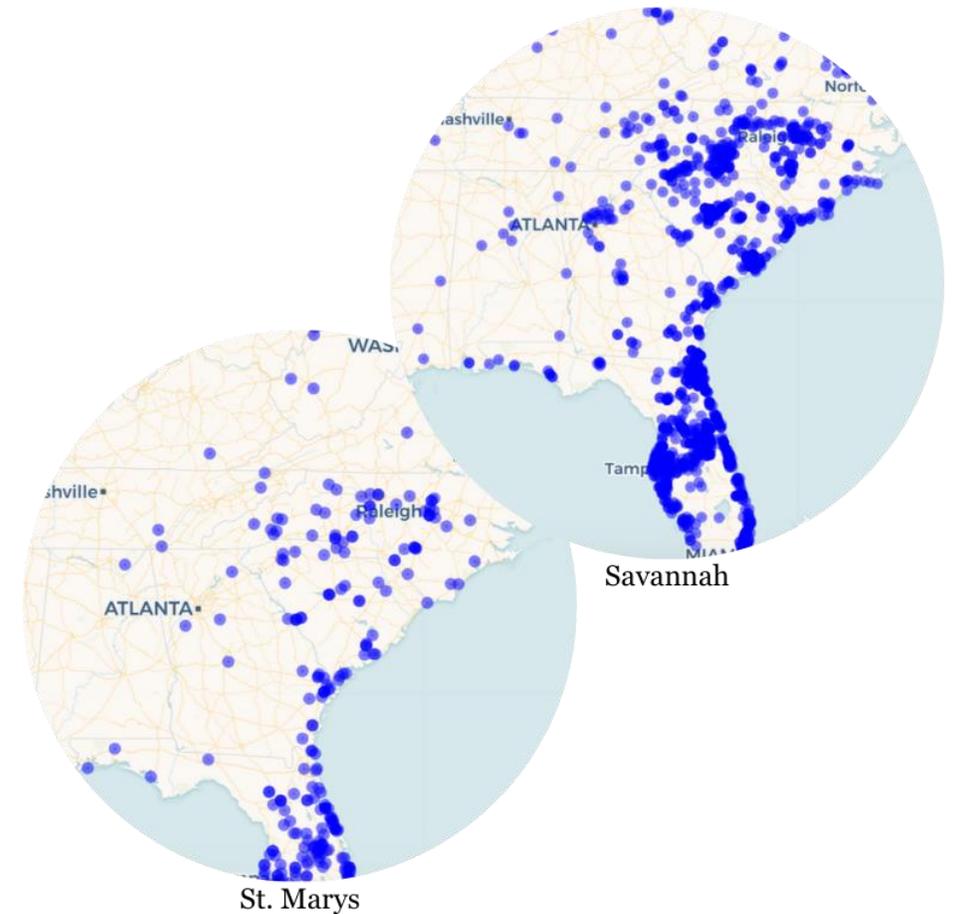
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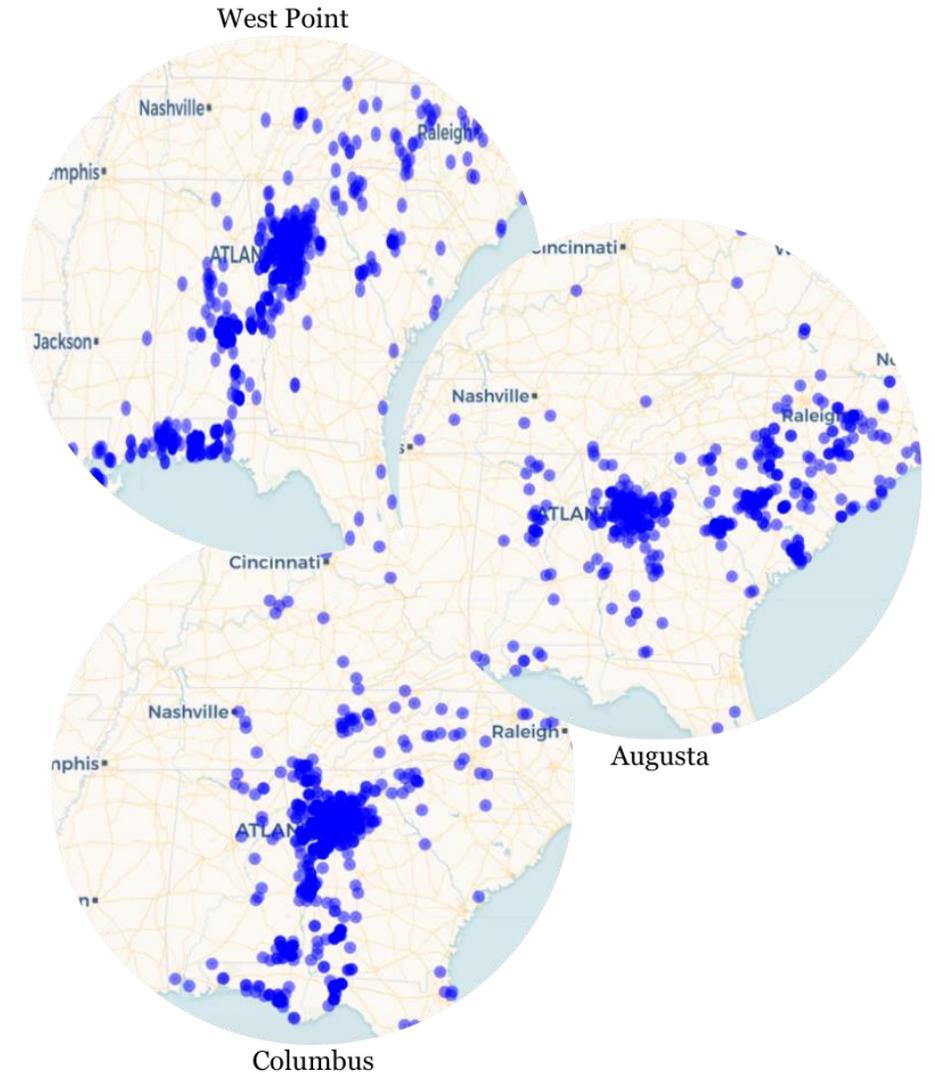
South Georgia MSA Origins:
Valdosta (722 zip codes plotted to 20 MSAs)

MSA	% Share of Top 20 MSAs	Frequency Rank	Affinity % Score	Affinity Rank
Atlanta, GA MSA	29.6%	1	16.8%	1
Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, FL MSA	13.0%	2	6.2%	2
Orlando, FL MSA	11.2%	3	6.0%	3
Jacksonville, FL MSA	6.0%	4	2.7%	5
Lakeland-Winter Haven, FL MSA	4.0%	5	2.5%	7
Ocala, FL MSA	3.5%	6	2.7%	6
Detroit-Ann Arbor-Flint, MI CMSA	3.2%	7	-3.5%	17
Macon, GA MSA	3.2%	8	2.8%	4
Miami-Fort Lauderdale, FL CMSA	3.2%	9	-10.4%	19
Sarasota-Bradenton, FL MSA	2.9%	10	1.2%	11
Nashville, TN MSA	2.6%	11	-1.2%	14
Chattanooga, TN-GA MSA	2.5%	12	1.2%	10
Chicago-Gary-Kenosha, IL-IN-WI CMSA	2.2%	13	-19.4%	20
Columbus, GA-AL MSA	2.2%	14	1.5%	9
Gainesville, FL MSA	2.2%	15	1.6%	8
Indianapolis, IN MSA	2.1%	16	-2.2%	15
Fort Myers-Cape Coral, FL MSA	1.9%	17	0.4%	12
Cincinnati-Hamilton, OH-KY-IN CMSA	1.8%	18	-3.4%	16
Daytona Beach, FL MSA	1.5%	19	0.3%	13
St. Louis, MO-IL MSA	1.1%	20	-5.8%	18

Valdosta

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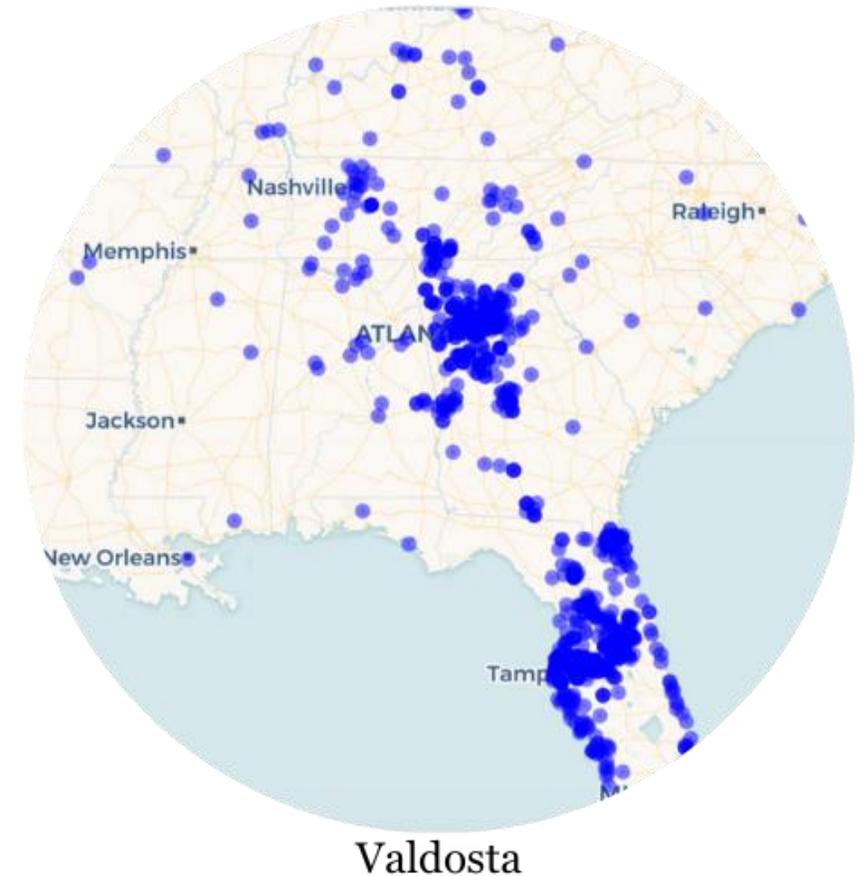
Coastal Georgia MSA Origins:
St. Marys and Savannah (1,351 zip codes plotted to 20 MSAs)

MSA	% Share of Top 20 MSAs	Frequency Rank	Affinity % Score	Affinity Rank
Orlando, FL MSA	9.8%	1	6.0%	3
Jacksonville, FL MSA	9.5%	2	7.2%	1
Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, FL MSA	9.1%	3	4.2%	4
New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island, NY-NJ-CT-PA	8.4%	4	-21.6%	20
Charleston-North Charleston, SC MSA	8.0%	5	6.8%	2
Washington-Baltimore, DC-MD-VA-WV CMSA	7.5%	6	-0.7%	15
Charlotte-Gastonia-Rock Hill, NC-SC MSA	5.5%	7	2.4%	9
Daytona Beach, FL MSA	4.7%	8	3.8%	5
Columbia, SC MSA	4.4%	9	3.0%	6
Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill, NC MSA	4.4%	10	2.6%	8
Melbourne-Titusville-Palm Bay, FL MSA	3.7%	11	2.7%	7
Miami-Fort Lauderdale, FL CMSA	3.6%	12	-6.2%	18
Philadelphia-Wilmington-Atlantic City, PA-NJ-DE-MD CMSA	3.6%	13	-5.9%	17
Sarasota-Bradenton, FL MSA	3.0%	14	1.8%	10
Lakeland-Winter Haven, FL MSA	2.7%	15	1.6%	13
Greensboro--Winston-Salem--High Point, NC MSA	2.6%	16	1.7%	12
Norfolk-Virginia Beach-Newport News, VA-NC	2.6%	17	-0.4%	14
Greenville-Spartanburg-Anderson, SC MSA	2.5%	18	1.7%	11
West Palm Beach-Boca Raton, FL MSA	2.3%	19	-7.5%	19
Boston-Worcester-Lawrence, MA-NH-ME-CT CMSA	2.2%	20	-3.2%	16

Savannah

St. Marys

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Insights: *Was GA your primary destination?*
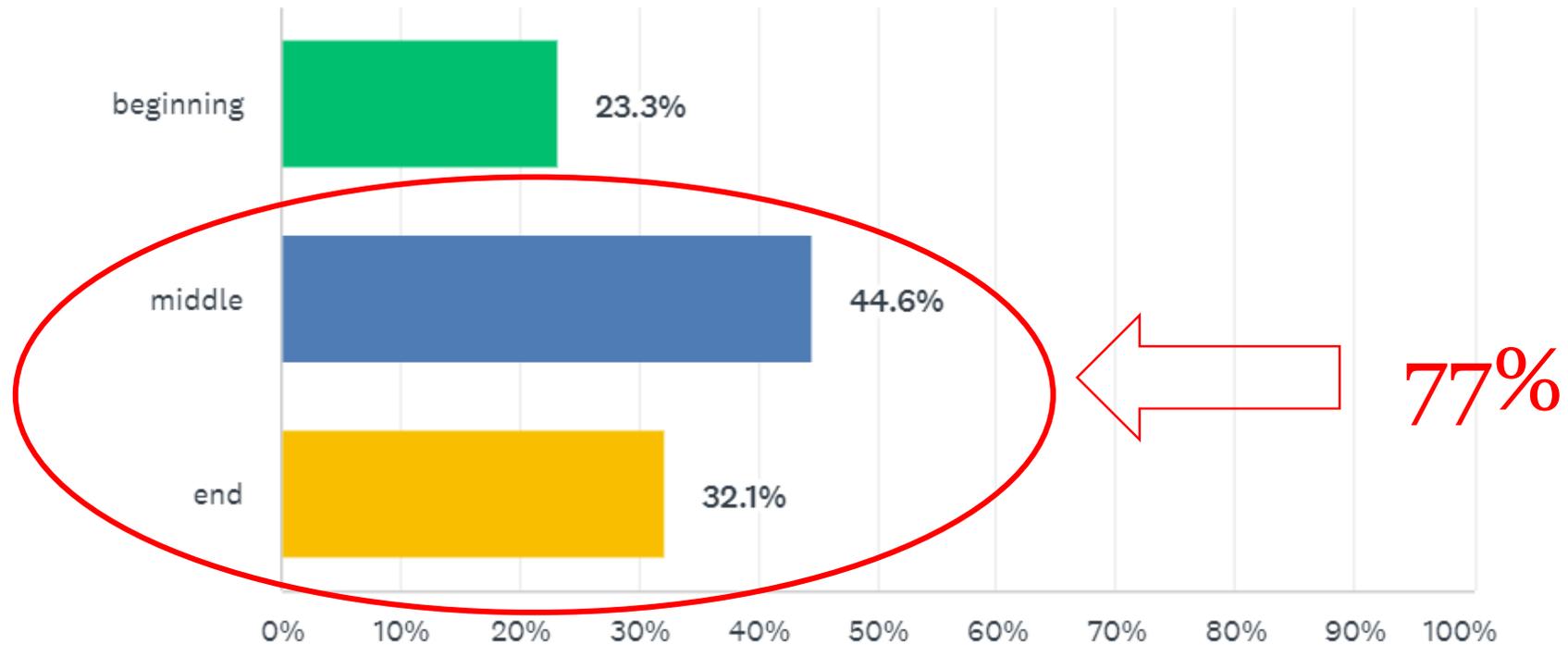
51% Yes

Top 10 GA Destinations

Destination	Responses	%
Atlanta	1043	22.07%
Savannah	335	7.09%
Columbus	195	4.13%
Augusta	112	2.37%
Helen	92	1.95%
Marietta	81	1.71%
Athens	79	1.67%
Cumming	52	1.1%
Blue Ridge	51	1.08%
Macon	47	.99%

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Insights: *What state were you visiting*

*Top 10
Other States*

Destination	Responses	%
Florida	2415	24.5%
South Carolina	628	21.94%
North Carolina	560	19.57%
Alabama	393	13.73%
Tennessee	311	10.87%
Georgia	148	5.17%
Virginia	131	4.58%
Texas	72	2.52%
Mississippi	56	1.96%
Pennsylvania	52	1.82%

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For this trip, are you at the:

Insights: *What is/was the primary purpose of you being in Georgia?*

Purpose	Percentage
Returning Home	25%
Just Passing Through	23%
Vacation, recreation, or leisure/entertainment	22%
Visiting friends or relatives	16%
Other	7%
Combined business/leisure trip	5%
Conference or convention	1%
Group tour	0%

← 48%
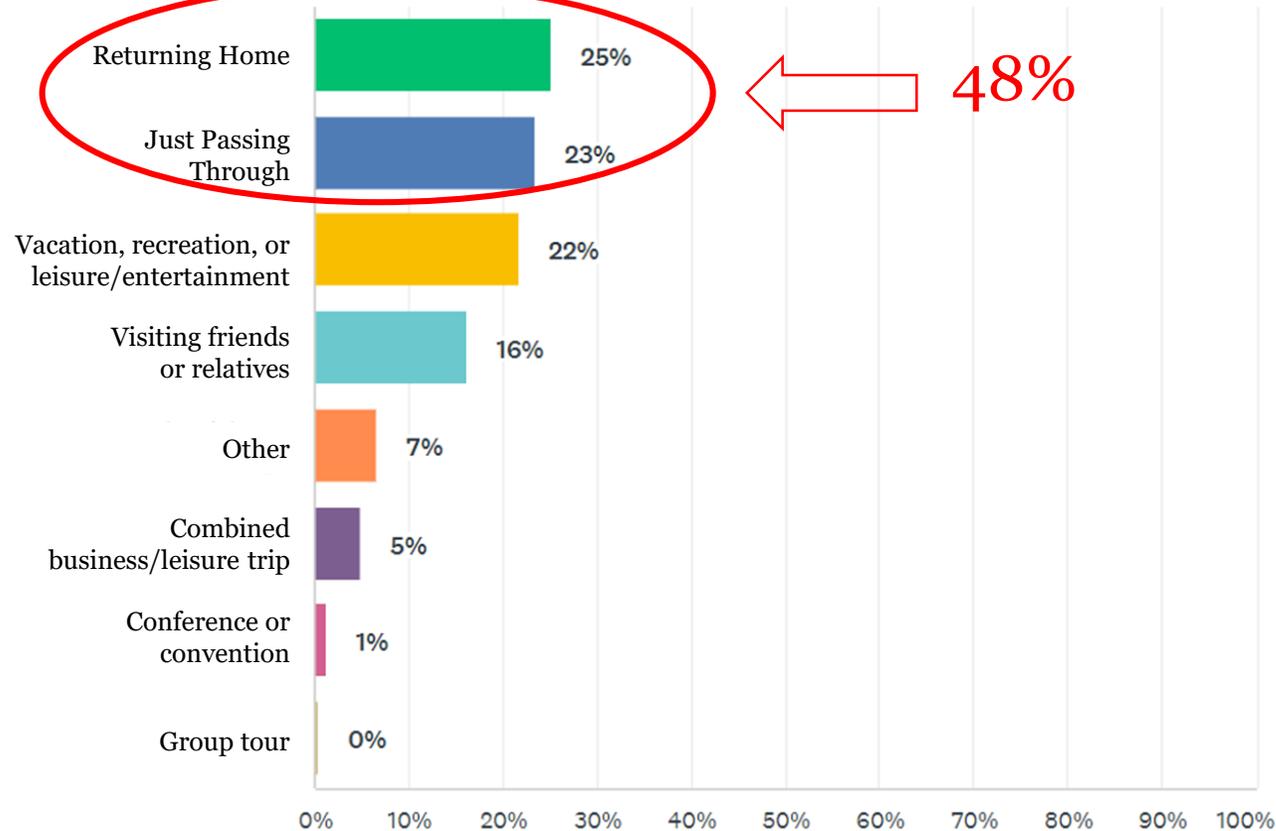
Insights: *Will you be staying/did you stay overnight in Georgia on this trip?*

| Yes | 49% | ← vs. 44% all domestic travelers |
| No | 51% | |
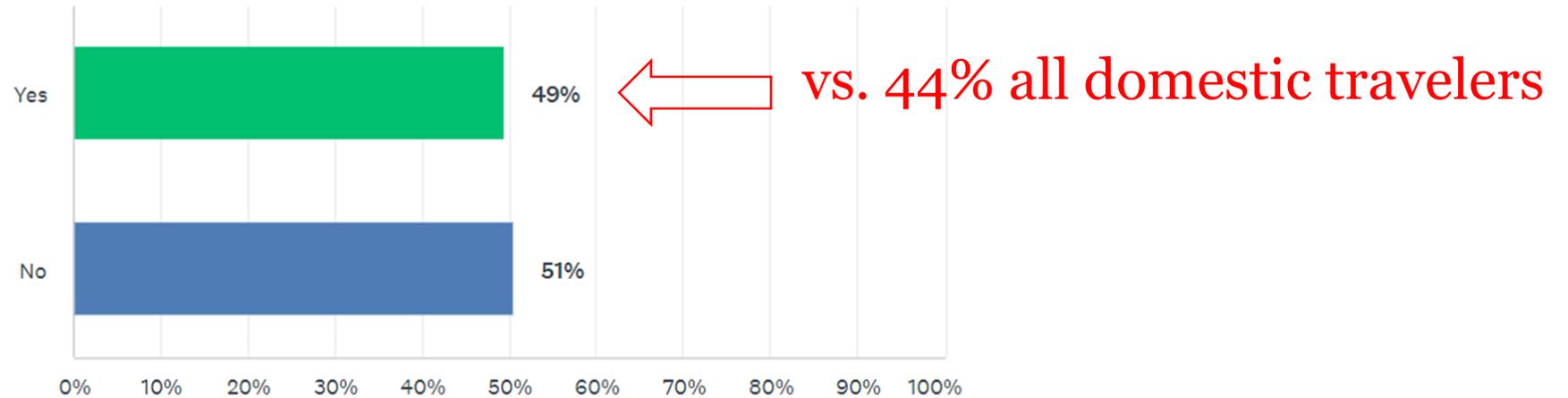
If Yes, how many nights do you intend on staying or did you stay?

| Average Number of GA Nights | 5.7 | ← vs. 3.1 all |
| Median Number of GA Nights | 2 | domestic travelers |

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Top GA Destinations: All Regions Combined

Top 10 Destinations for Region 1: Tallapoosa, Ringgold, and Lavonia

Ringgold

Lavonia

Tallapoosa

Woodstrock
Marrietta
Kennesaw
Atlanta
Decatur
Alpharetta
Buford
Acworth Cumming
Newnan
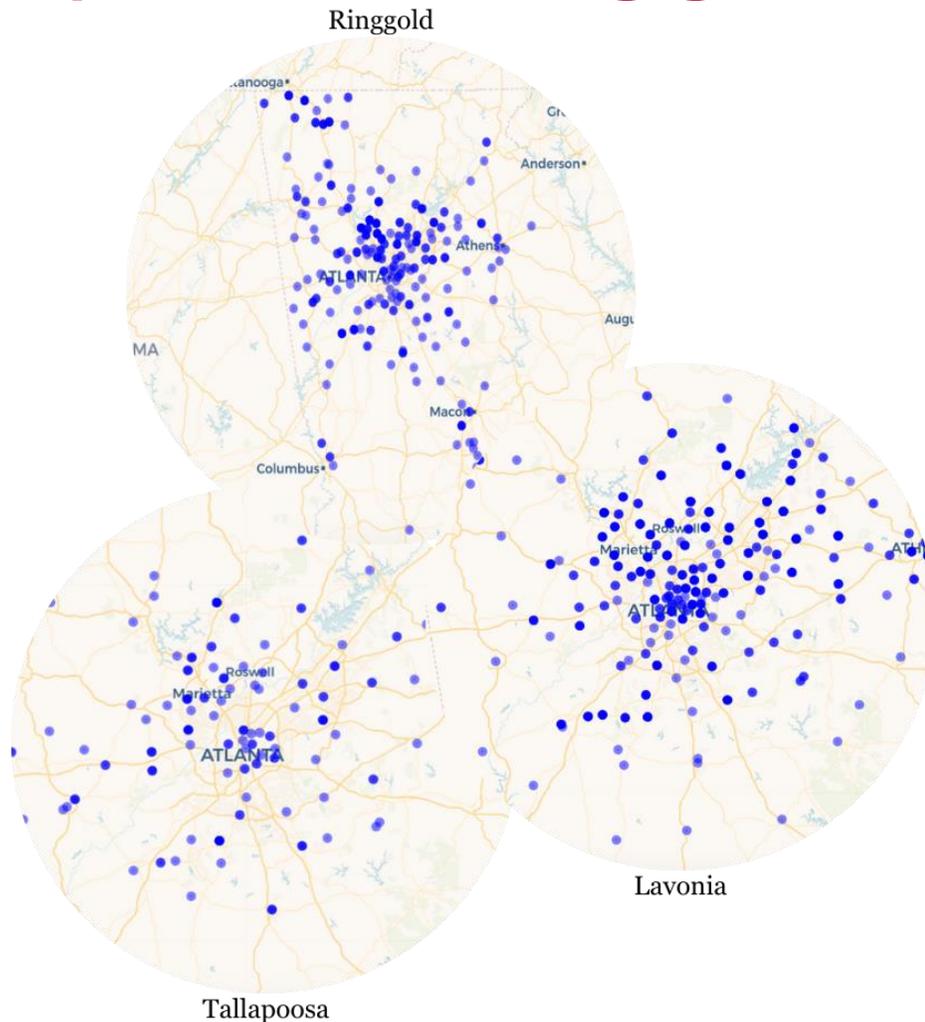
Top 10 Destinations for Region 2: Columbus, West Point, and Augusta
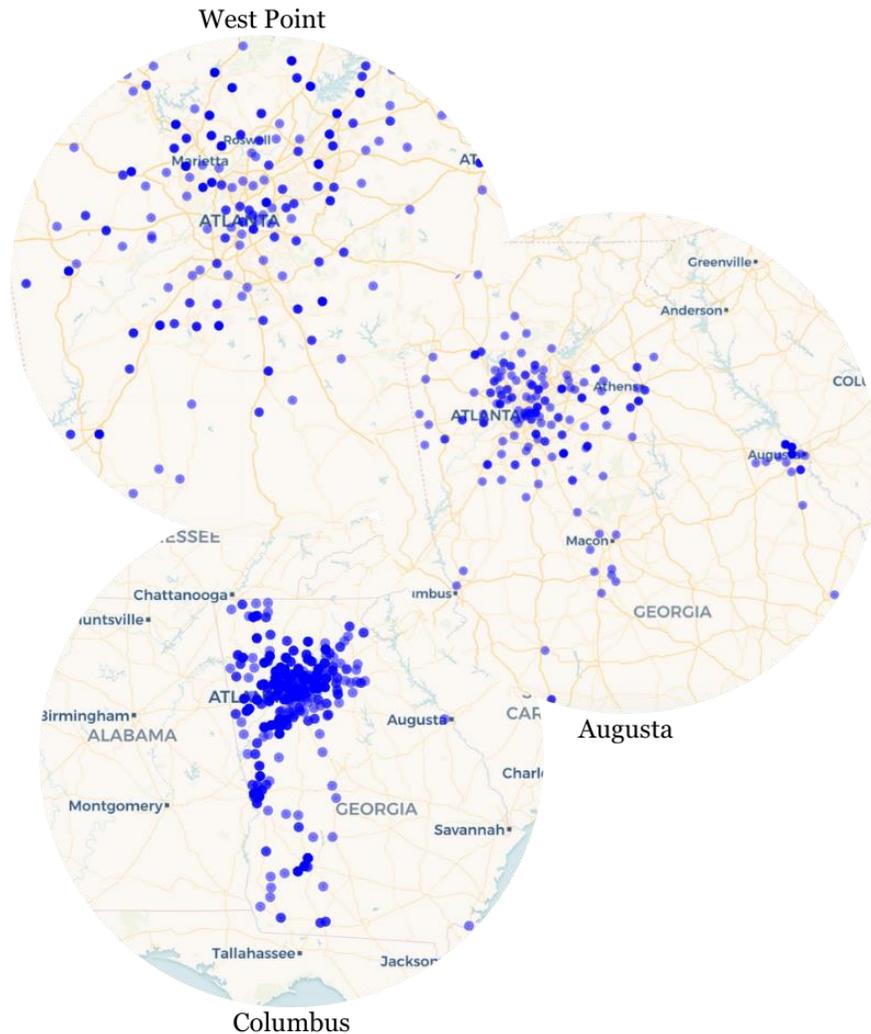
Top 10 Destinations for Region 3: Valdosta

Woodstrock
Cumming
Peach Tree City
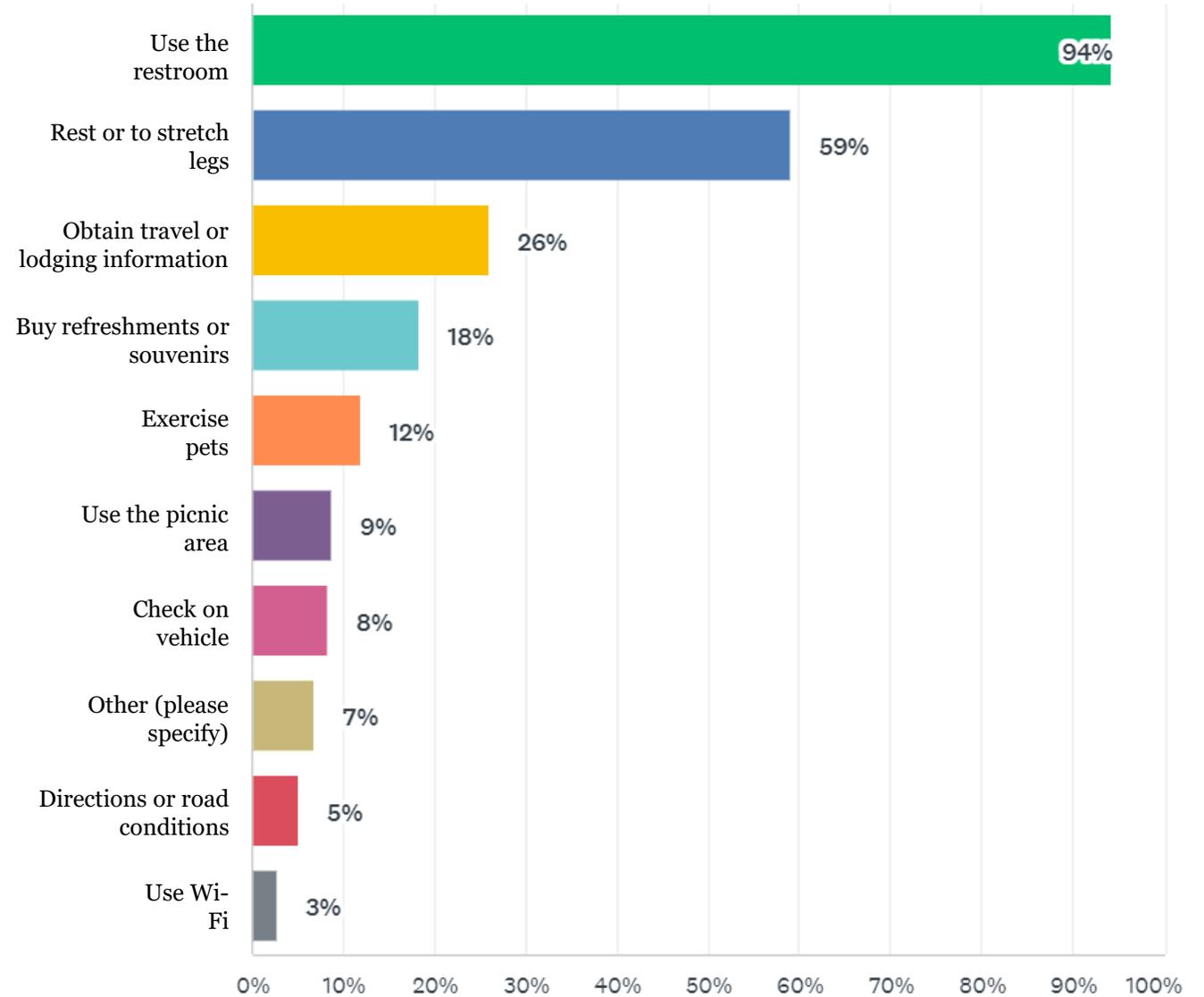Marrietta
Atlanta
Acworth
Cartersville
Gainesville
Buford
Warner Robins
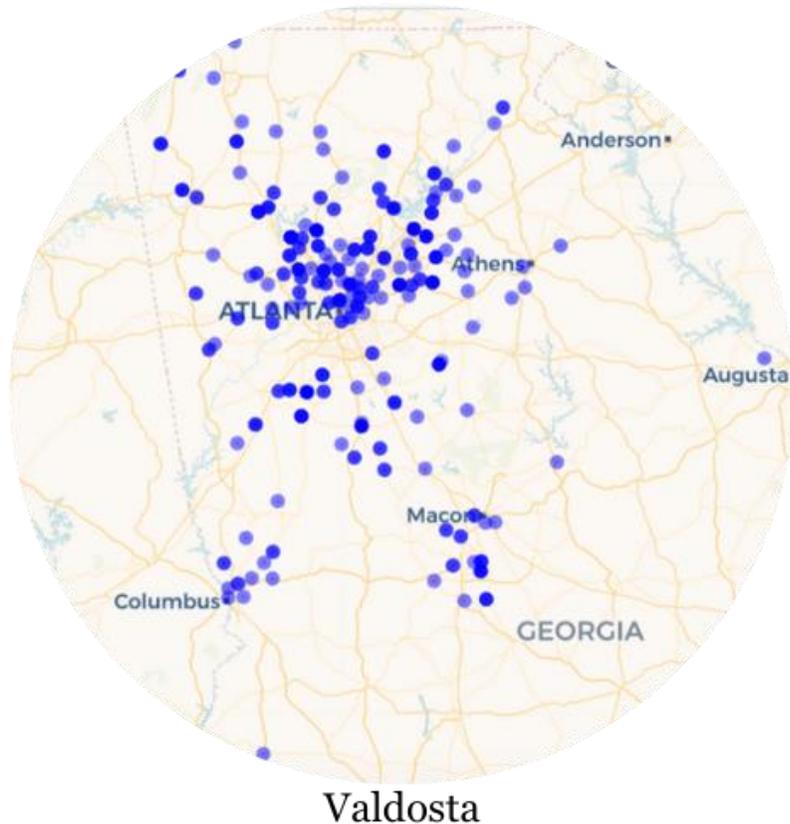
# Top 5 Destinations for Region 4: St. Marys and Savannah
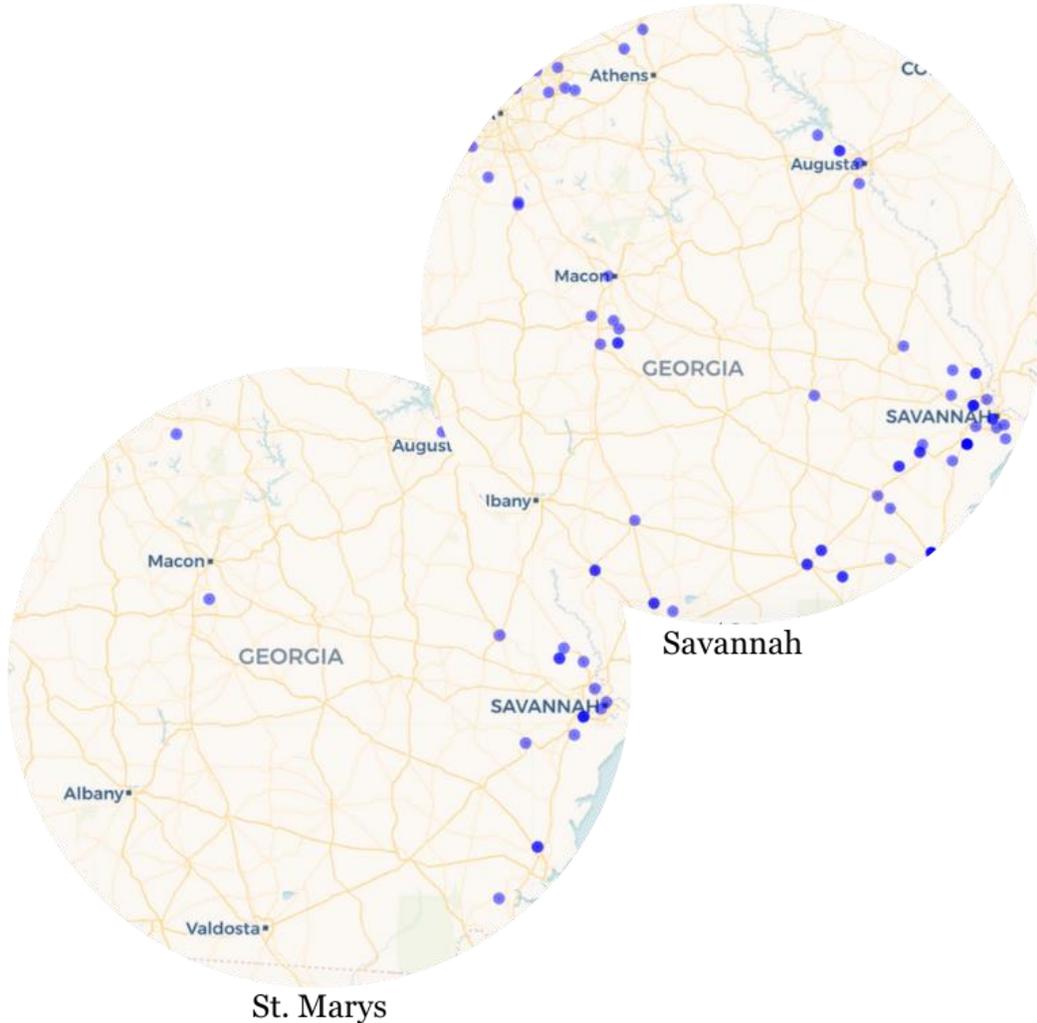
Savannah

St. Marys

Savannah
Guyton
Brunswick
Richmond Hill
St. Marys

Why did you stop at this particular Georgia Visitor Information Center? (check all that apply)

Category	Percentage
Use the restroom	94%
Rest or to stretch legs	59%
Obtain travel or lodging information	26%
Buy refreshments or souvenirs	18%
Exercise pets	12%
Use the picnic area	9%
Check on vehicle	8%
Other (please specify)	7%
Directions or road conditions	5%
Use Wi-Fi	3%

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How frequently do you stop at visitor information centers, welcome centers, or rest stops when travelling?
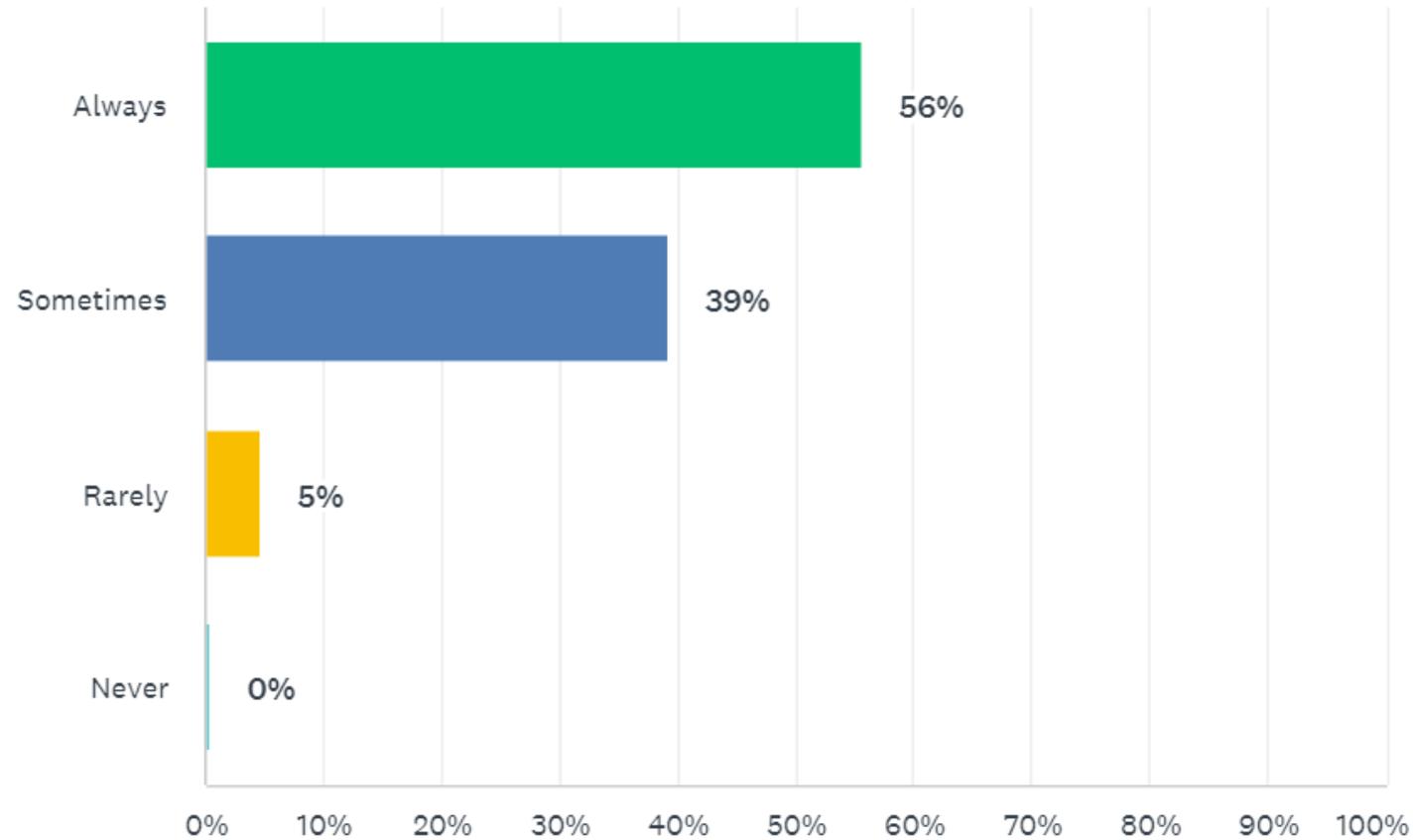
Did you receive any information from the Visitor Information Center that helped your decision to: (check all that apply)

Item	% Responses
Nothing on this trip, but will use the information for future trips	39.32%
Visit more attractions/points of interest than originally planned	36.84%
I did not receive any information from this Visitor Center	24.52%
Dine out at a particular restaurant or bar	10.65%
Shop or spend more on souvenirs	8.85%
Stay at a particular hotel, motel, inn, campground, or other type of lodging	7.73%
Extend this trip longer than planned	4.00%
Extend the distance/range travelled for this trip	3.76%

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If you are extending/extended this trip longer than planned, by how much?

Average Trip Extension in Days	2.07
Median Trip Extension in Days	1

Answered: 562

Average Trip Extension in Miles	164
Median Trip Extension in Miles	60

Answered: 504

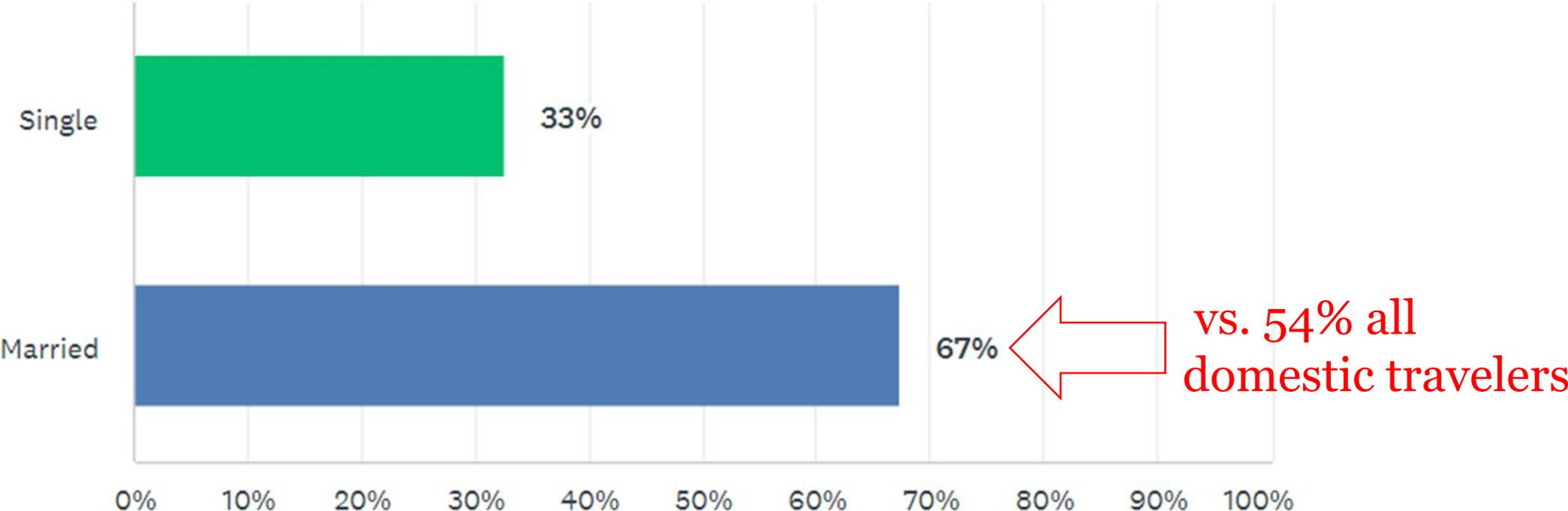UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA 1785

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Demographics

Gender
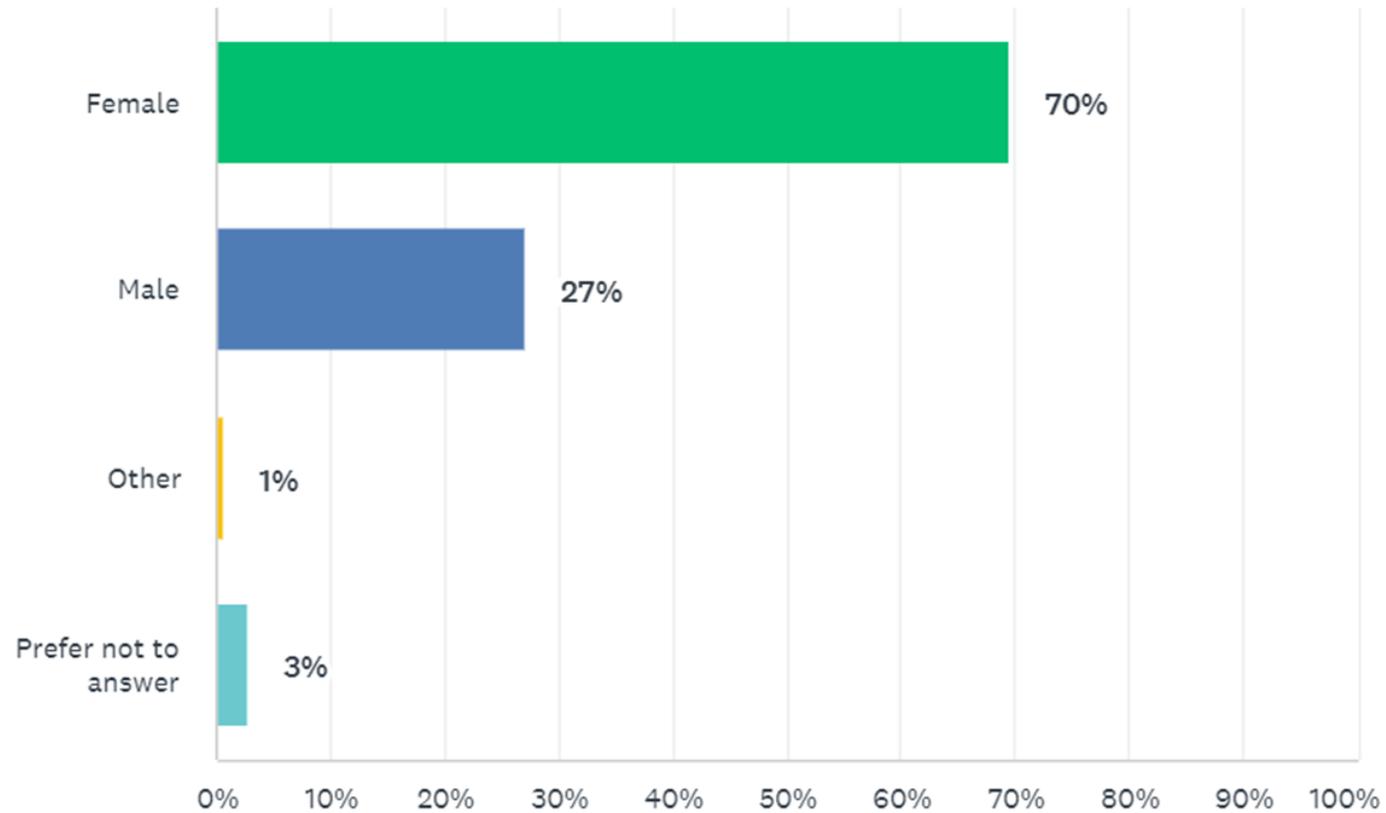
Highest Education Level

57% of respondents had at least a bachelors degree, with nearly a third having some college. A highly educated sample.
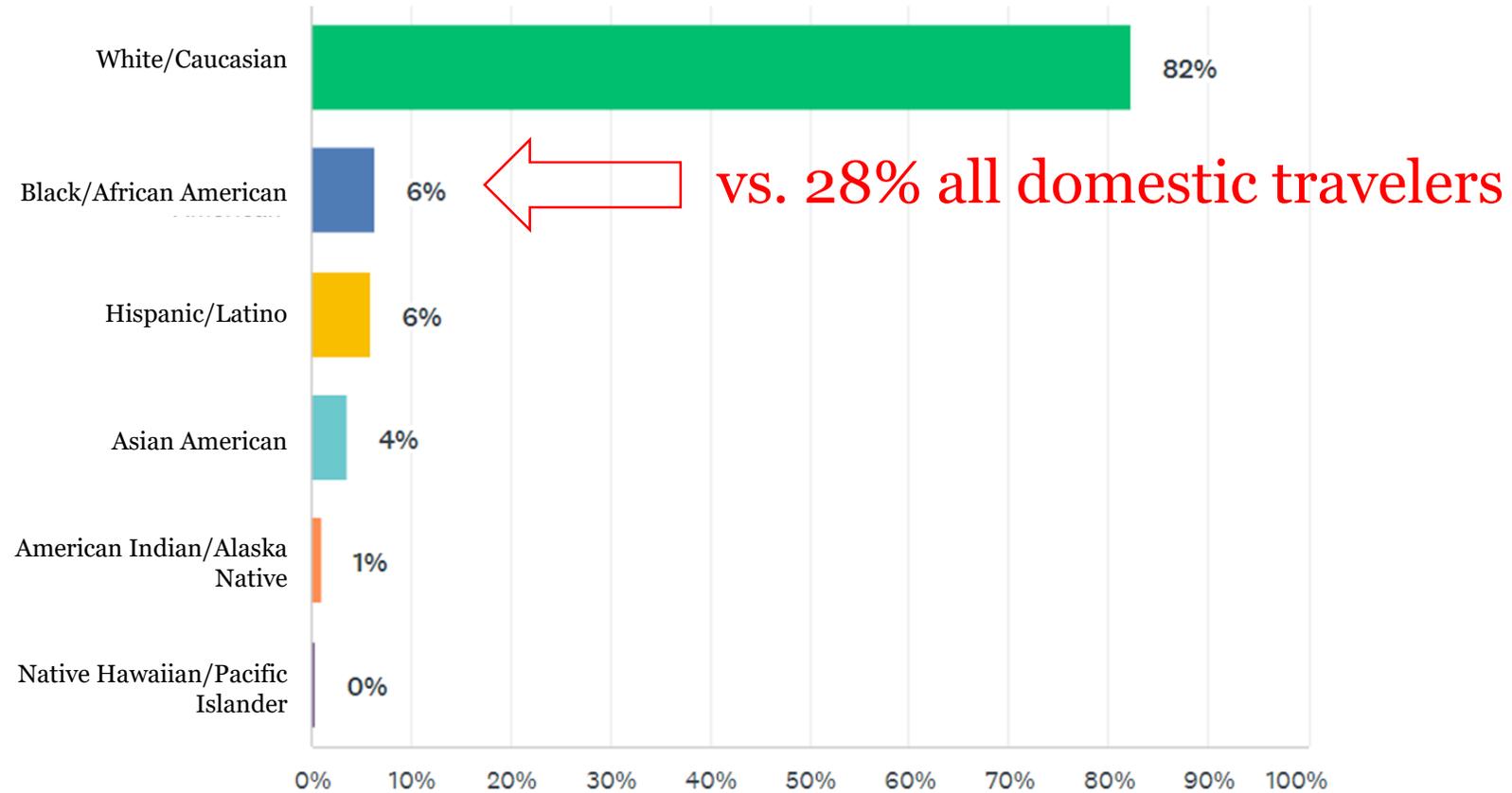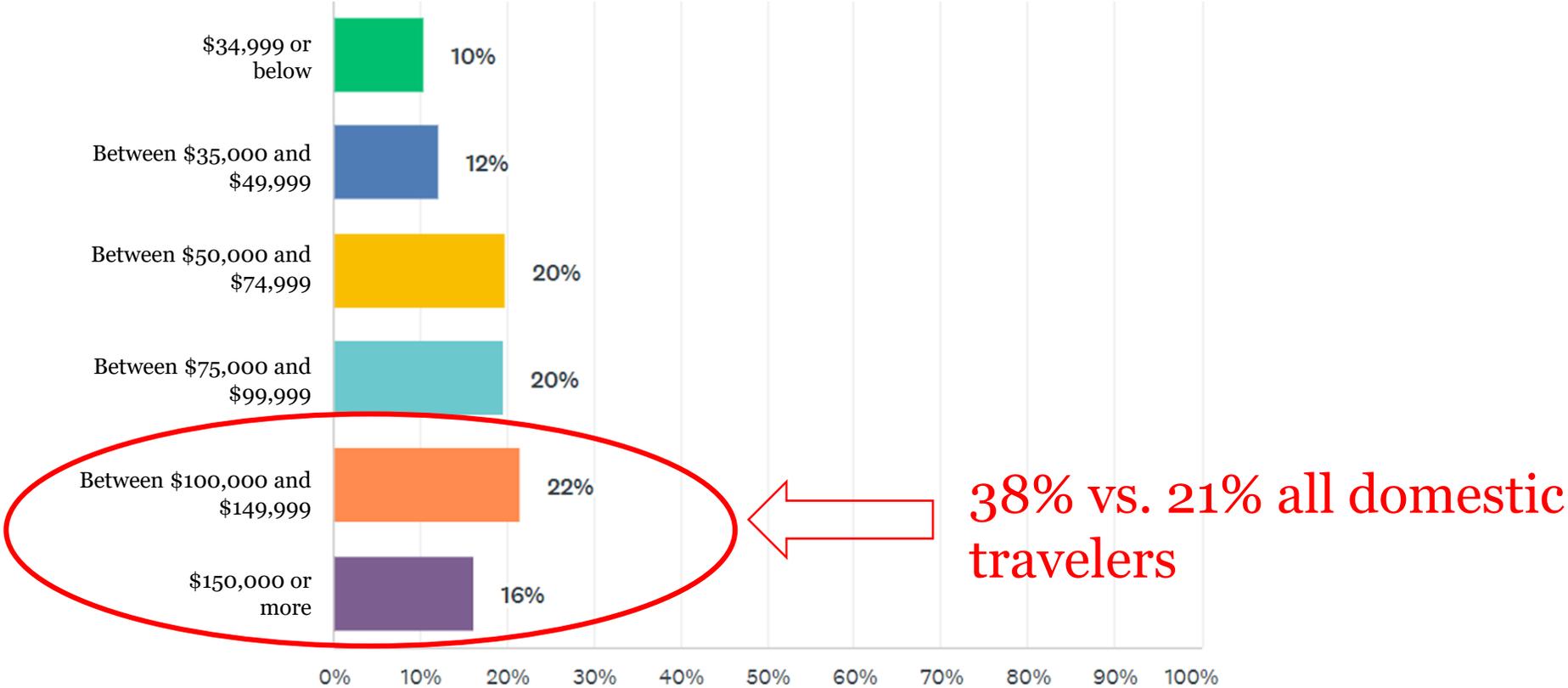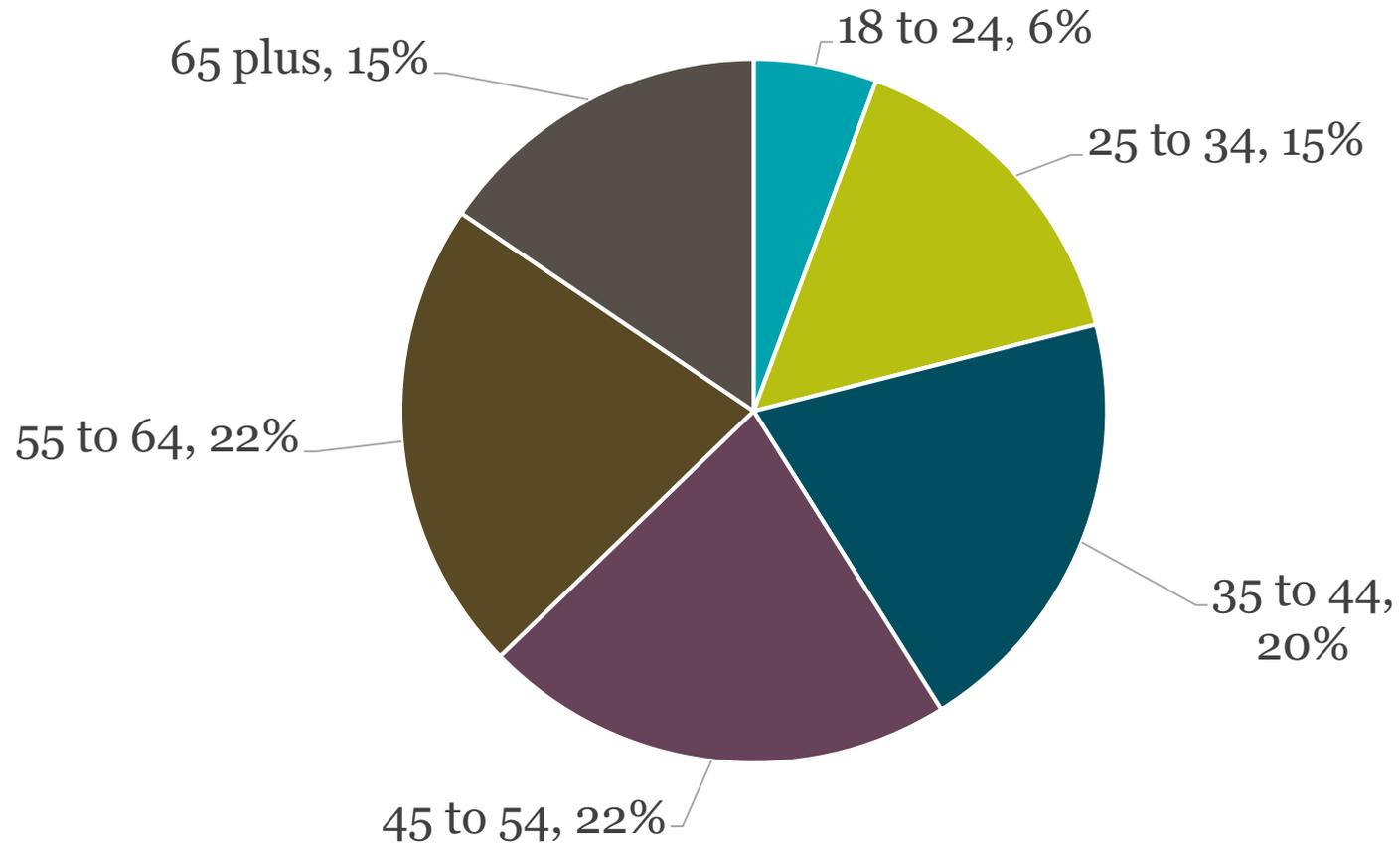
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Employment Status

Marital Status

vs. 54% all domestic travelers

Race/Ethnicity

Bar chart showing race/ethnicity breakdown:
- White/Caucasian: 82%
- Black/African American: 6% ← vs. 28% all domestic travelers
- Hispanic/Latino: 6%
- Asian American: 4%
- American Indian/Alaska Native: 1%
- Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 0%

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Household Income

Household Income	Percentage
$34,999 or below	10%
Between $35,000 and $49,999	12%
Between $50,000 and $74,999	20%
Between $75,000 and $99,999	20%
Between $100,000 and $149,999	22%
$150,000 or more	16%

38% vs. 21% all domestic travelers

Age

18 to 24, 6%

25 to 34, 15%

65 plus, 15%

55 to 64, 22%

45 to 54, 22%

35 to 44, 20%

Average age of all VIC visitors is **48** and just 37% of the visitors are ages 55 and older.

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Do you, or a member of your traveling party, have a disability?
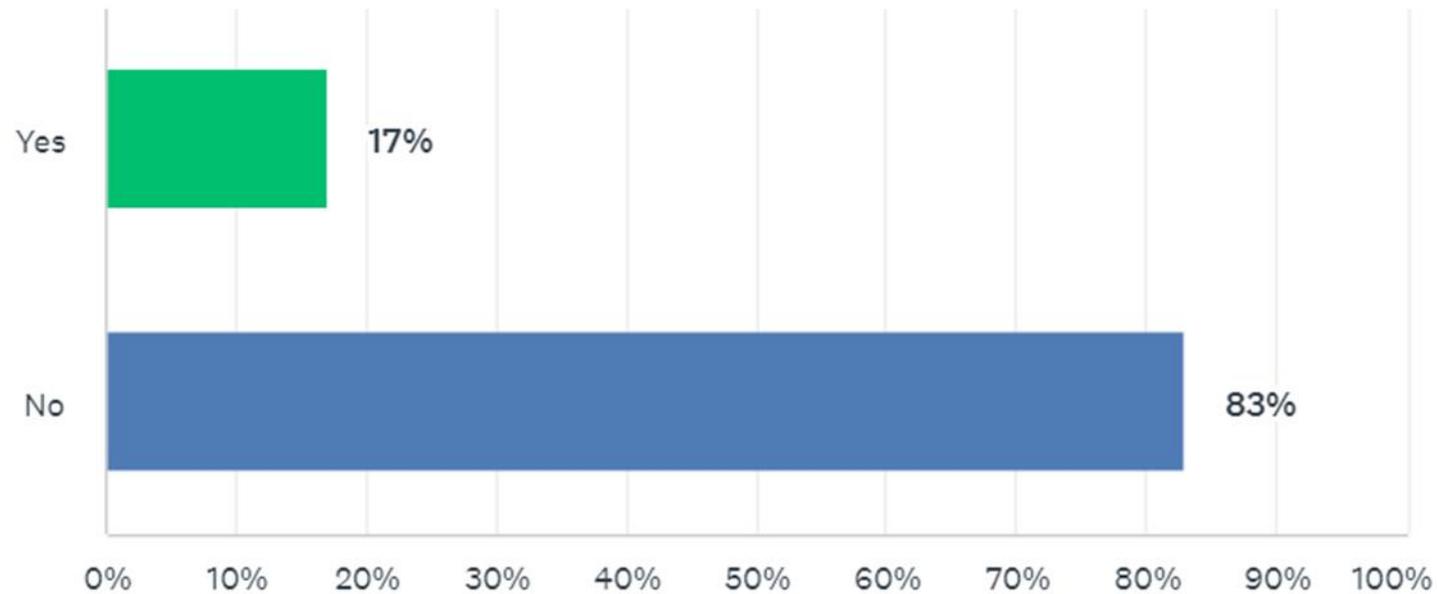
Disabilities
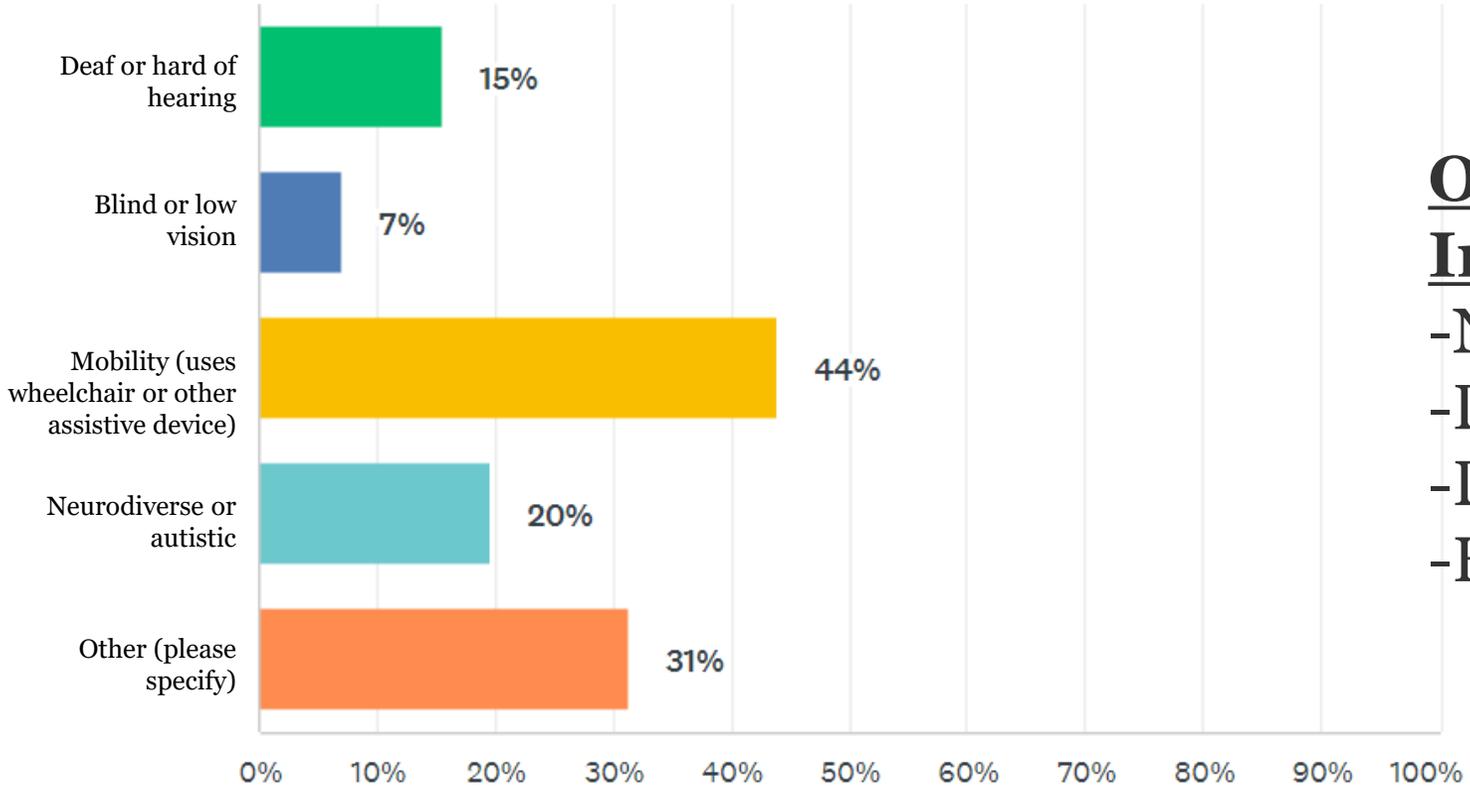
Other Disabilities Included:
-Neck or Back Disability
-Disabled Veteran
-Difficulty Walking
-Heart Condition

Chart data:
- Deaf or hard of hearing: 15%
- Blind or low vision: 7%
- Mobility (uses wheelchair or other assistive device): 44%
- Neurodiverse or autistic: 20%
- Other (please specify): 31%

Word cloud depicting "Other" disabilities of VIC visitors

- 9% described mental health conditions or concerns
- 8% described mobility issues or difficulty walking
- 7% described neck or back issues
- 5% were disabled veterans or had injuries from military service
- 5% diabetes/diabetic

Implications

- Create marketing collateral that is appropriate to the seasonal demands - especially for the increased spring and summer travel seasons

- The GA resident traveler is your best guest!

- Know the MSA origin of your visitors and engage with your DMO and/or Explore GA in strategically marketing your destination to your targeted geographic region

- More guest book signatures doesn't always mean more "love" for your destination – important to remember in off seasons as well

- Know that you have potential to increase visitation or length of stay on the return portion of the visitor's trip since most respondents indicated that they were in the middle of the travel experience

- Atlanta remains a "driver" for GA for 3 of the 4 regions

- The GA VIC traveler is educated

- The GA VIC traveler is not the average GA traveler

Questions