Australian Government

Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism

Tourism Research Australia

Barkly Region

TOURISM NT

NORTHERN TERRITORY AUSTRALIA

Visitor Profile & Satisfaction (VPS) Report

ENHANCING AUSTRALIA'S ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

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VPS Program and Benchmarks

The Visitor Profile and Satisfaction (VPS) Program

This VPS project was completed as part of the Destination Visitor Survey Program (DVS) run by the Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism. The project was co-funded by the DVS program and Tourism NT.

VPS Benchmarks

Since 2006 about 70 VPS projects have been completed in Australian regional tourist destinations. Data from these projects have been collated to establish the VPS Benchmark Database.

Comparisons against VPS benchmarks are made throughout this report. The Barkly Region Benchmark Summary is available in conjunction with this report. This summary provides a full set of comparisons for Barkly results against the benchmarks.

Project objective

To provide detailed profiling and satisfaction information for the Barkly region.

- With the broader aim of assisting in developing destination marketing plans and identifying areas for product development and service delivery improvements.
- Additional focus on:
  - travel paths and themed drives
  - accommodation

Survey Methodology

Recruitment

Basic demographics
Expenditure

1. Face-to-face intercept interviews at selected locations

2. Self-completion packs left at different locations

Main Survey

Self-completion

- Two different recruitment methodologies
- All questionnaires were self-completed by respondents and posted back

Survey methodology

- Two waves:
  - Shoulder season
    - April/May 2009
      - n = 162
  - High season
    - September/October
    - n = 320

- Recruitment locations:
    - Battery Hill Mining Centre, Nyinkka Nyunyu, Outback Caravan Park, Threeways Roadhouse, Karlu Karlu, Eldorado, Tennant Creek Caravan Park, BP Roadhouse

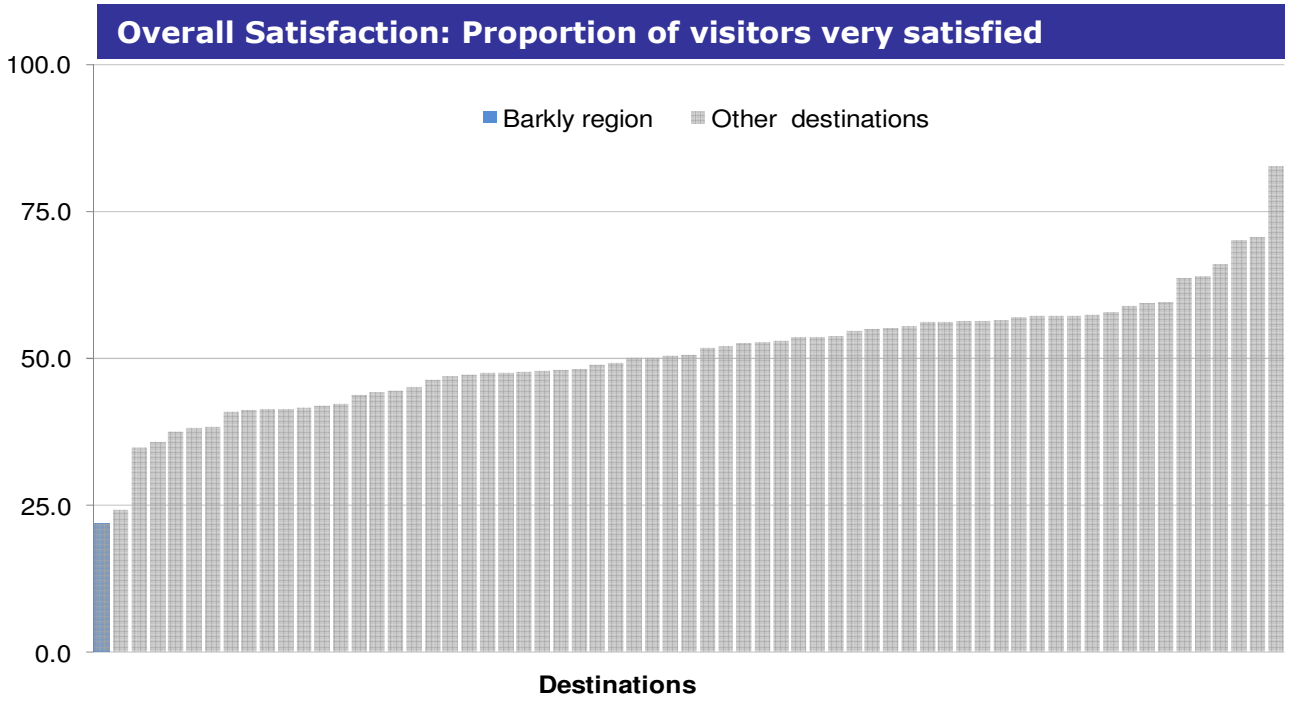
Discussion of findings

Unlike many tourism destinations in Australia the Barkly region attracted a remarkably homogeneous group of visitors, arguably a significant benefit in terms of managing the destination. During the two survey periods the Barkly visitor profile was dominated by older Australians who had driven to the Northern Territory and were typically on long trips away from home. Eighty percent of them were towing a caravan or driving a campervan and most of those stayed in a caravan park.

The majority of visitors who stayed overnight in the Barkly Region cited the main reason for being there was that it was a convenient stopover point. Nevertheless they spent an average of 4 nights in the region and almost 70% of them visited Karlu Karlu (Devils Marbles). Just under half of them also visited other attractions such as Battery Hill Mining Centre, Wycliffe Well and the Overland Telegraph Station.

Discussion of findings

There were some very significant issues with visitors' satisfaction with their stay in the Barkly Region. The overall satisfaction score for the region was relatively low - in fact the region received the lowest proportion of 'very satisfied' visitors of all the destinations in the VPS Benchmark database.



Discussion of findings

Approximately 60% of the survey respondents volunteered that they were unhappy about something with their stay in the Barkly Region. The more detailed results point towards several factors that contribute to this result.

Accommodation

As with most destinations the commercial accommodation experience has a significant impact on satisfaction with the destination. In this instance the accommodation experience relates to caravan parks and commercial camping grounds. About 1 in 6 guests (16%) stated that they were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their accommodation experience. The benchmark is 5%. Only 20% reported that they were 'very satisfied' with their accommodation compared to the benchmark of 43%.

The major themes of dissatisfaction were prices, quality and cleanliness of ablutions blocks and customer service. There was concern that the caravan parks did not have appropriate star ratings.

Discussion of findings

Roadside rest stops

The amount of commentary on this issue from respondents makes it clear that rest stops are very important to these types of travellers. The main concerns were that they were too far apart, there were not enough toilets at them and they generally lacked shade. A number of people commented that they were situated too close to the road.

Cleanliness of the region

Many respondents expressed shock at the amount of rubbish they saw on the roadsides in the region.

Discussion of findings

A few other issues were frequently raised although not as often as those listed above:

- Concerns about safety in Tennant Creek – this was a perception, no actual events were cited
- Lack of mobile phone reception
- Lack of public toilets and cleanliness of them
- Petrol prices

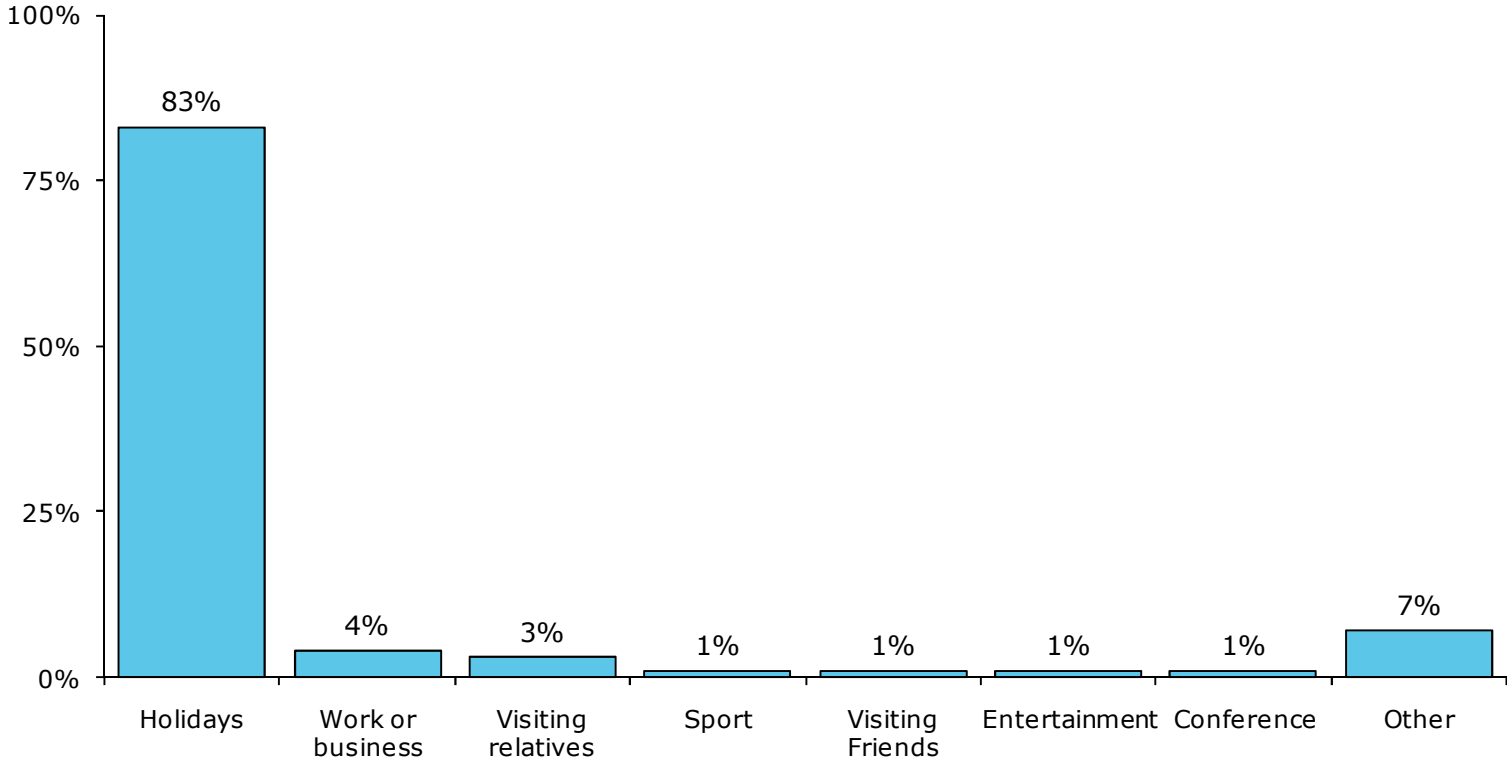
When considering satisfaction data it is easy to focus on the negative only. There are of course features of the Barkly Region that visitors were typically happy with. They include:

- The friendly/hospitable people in general.
- The beauty of the natural features.
- Signage and Roads in the region scored well above VPS benchmarks.

Who were the survey respondents?

More than four in five respondents went to the Barkly Region for a holiday

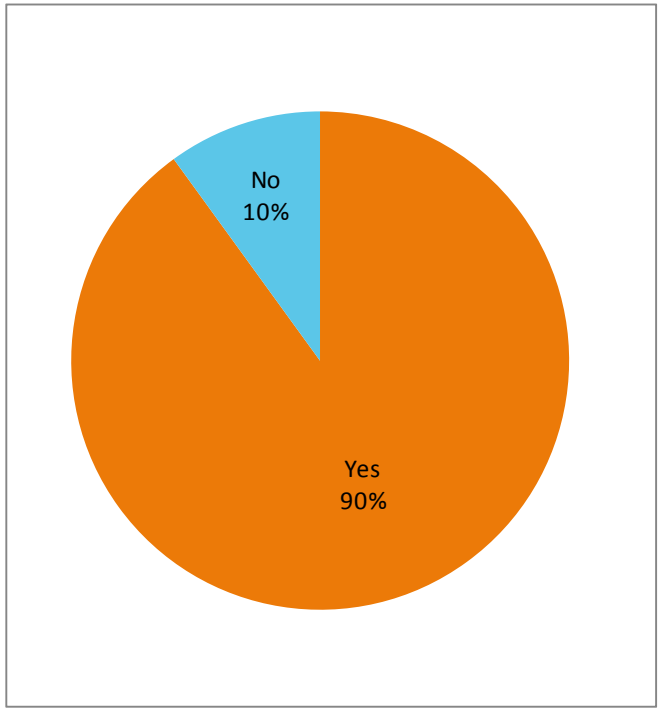
"What was the main purpose of the trip?'



Base n=481

Visitors are from all over Australia

"Do you reside in Australia? "



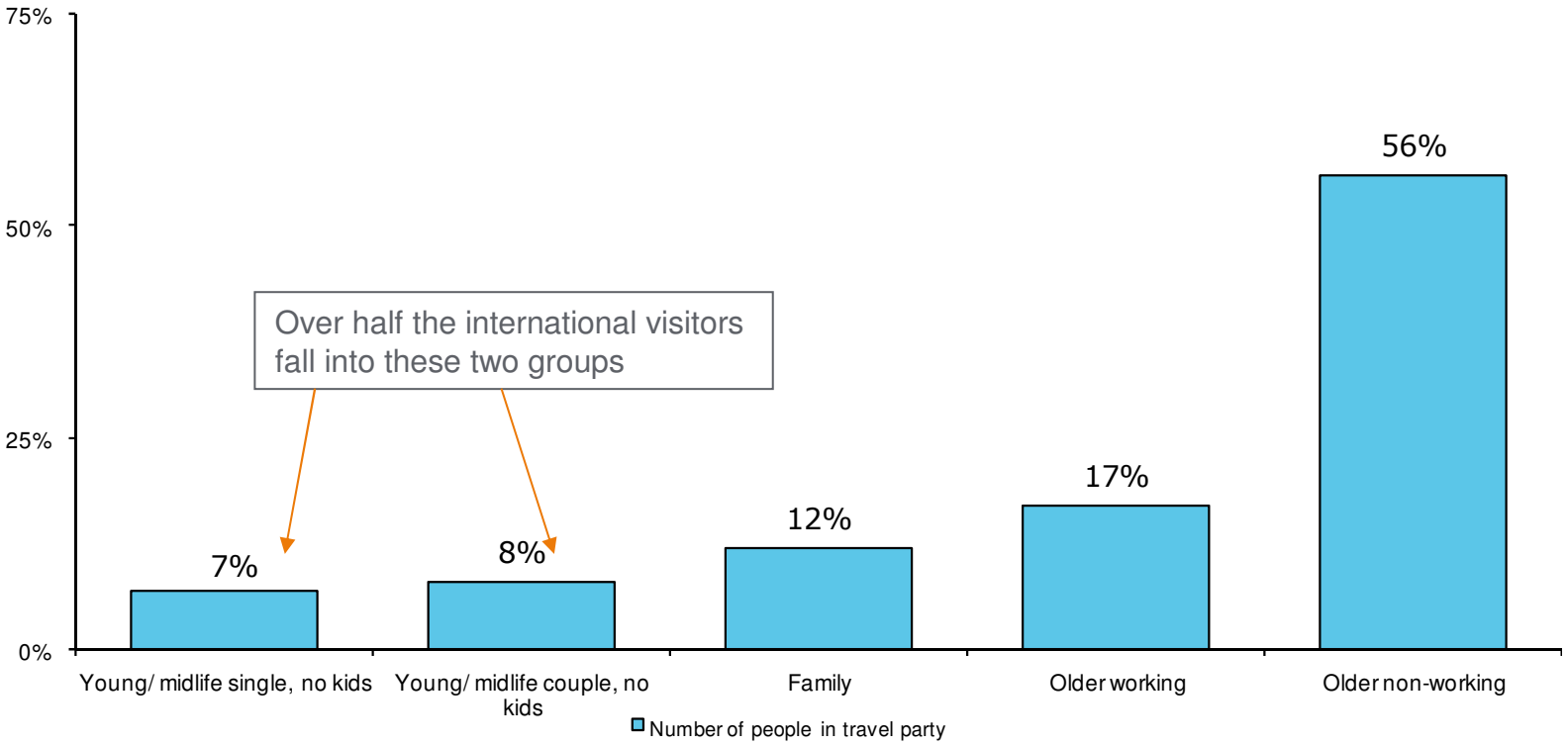
"In which State or Territory do you reside? "

Victoria	***23%***
Queensland	***22%***
New South Wales	***22%***
South Australia	***15%***
Western Australia	***9%***
Northern Territory	***4%***
Australian Capital Territory (ACT)	***3%***
Tasmania	***2%***

Base n=427

A higher percentage of Victorians in the high season (27% high vs 15% shoulder)

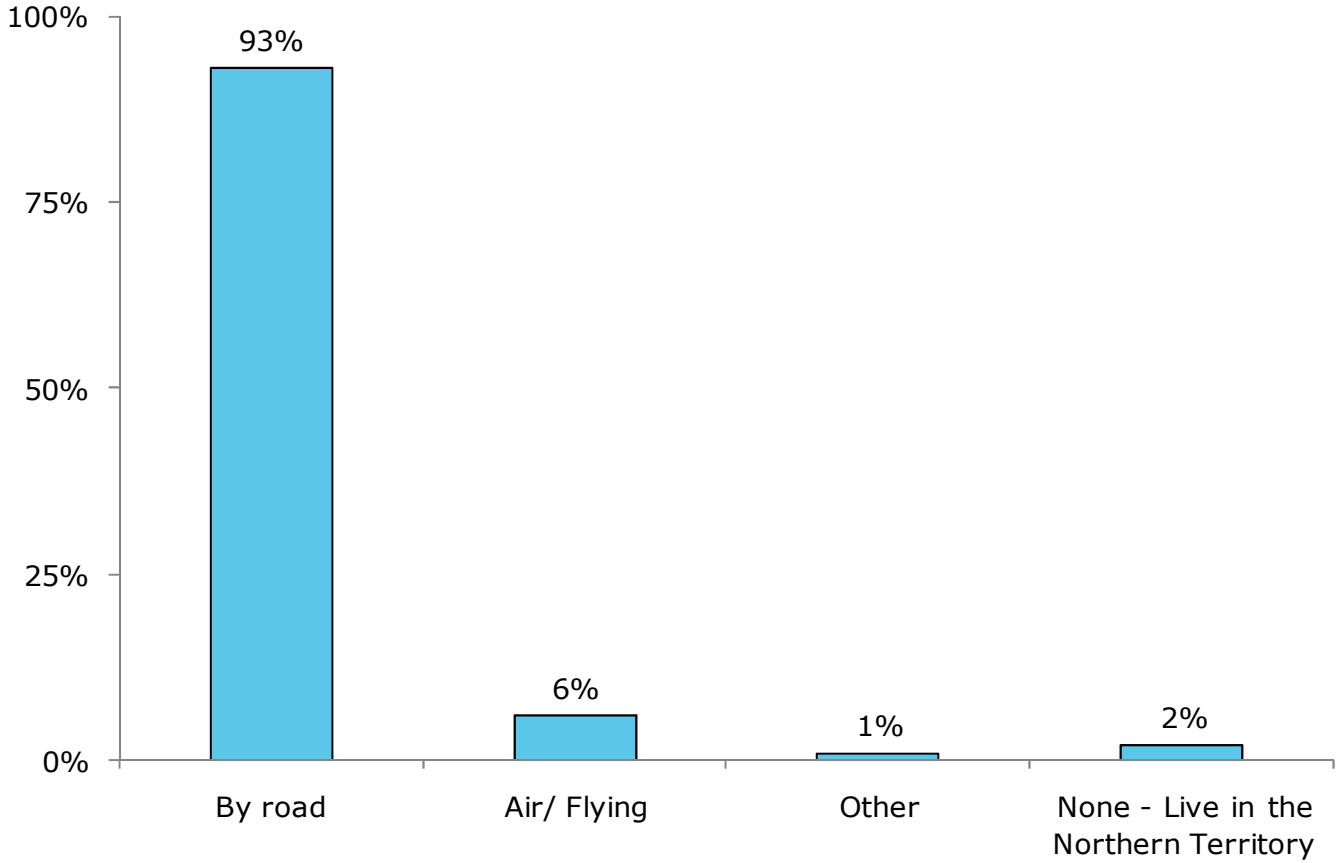
The majority of visitors are older (except for internationals)



Base n=440

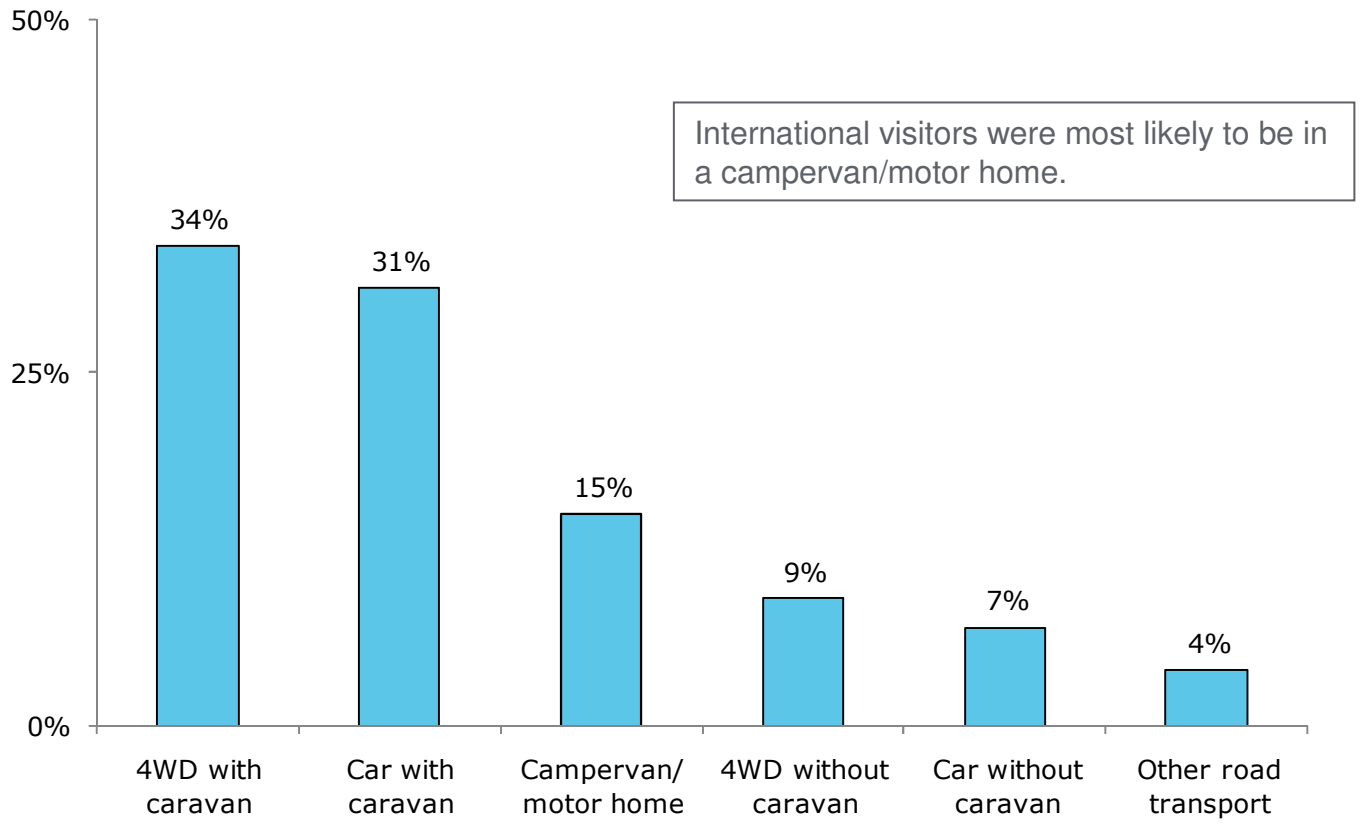
Road was the main mode of transport to enter the Northern Territory

"How did you enter the Northern Territory?"



Most visitors are towing a caravan – evenly split between 4WD and cars

"How did you enter the Northern Territory?"



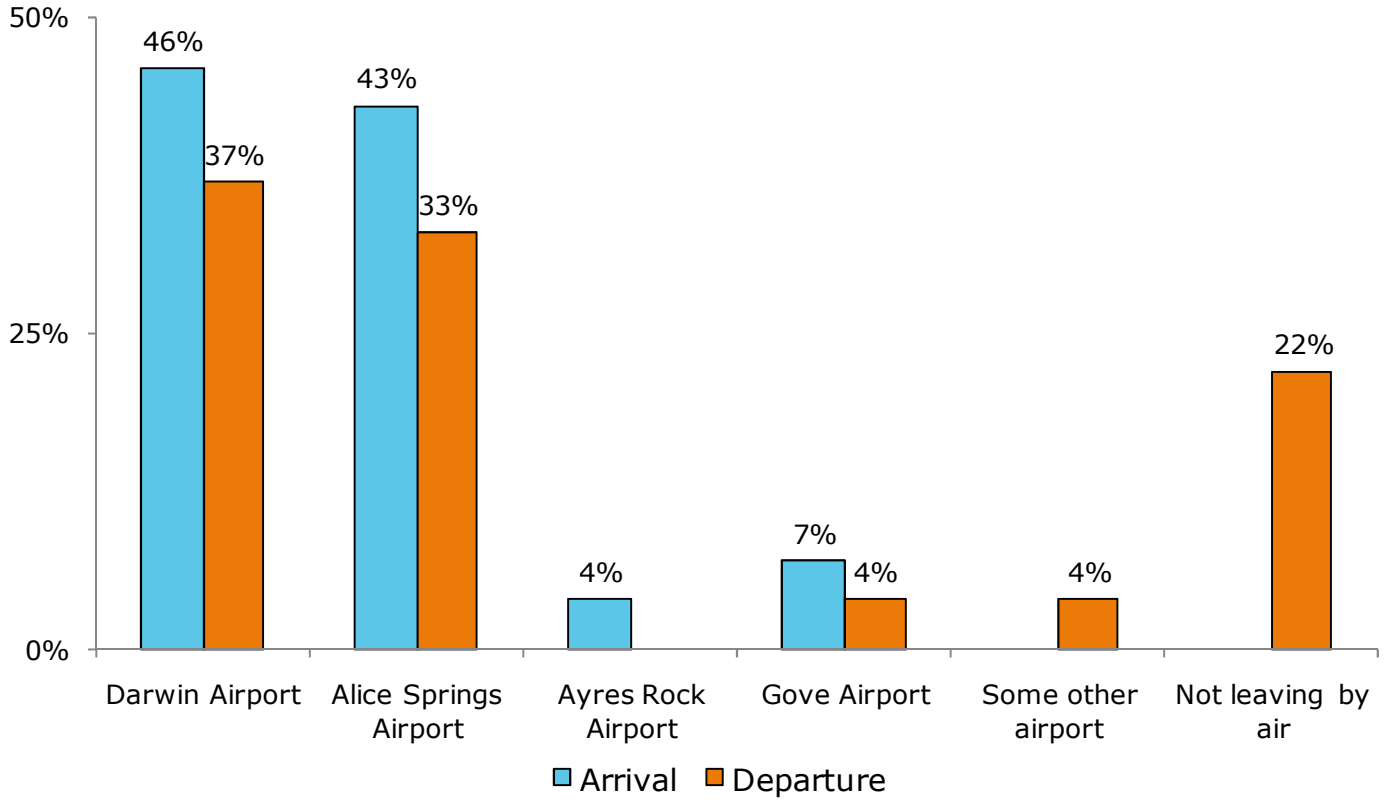
International visitors were most likely to be in a campervan/motor home.

N=477

Those who travelled by air mostly arrived at Darwin or Alice Springs Airports and were planning to depart from them as well

"At which airport did you collect your luggage?"

"At which airport did/do you plan to depart the Northern Territory?"

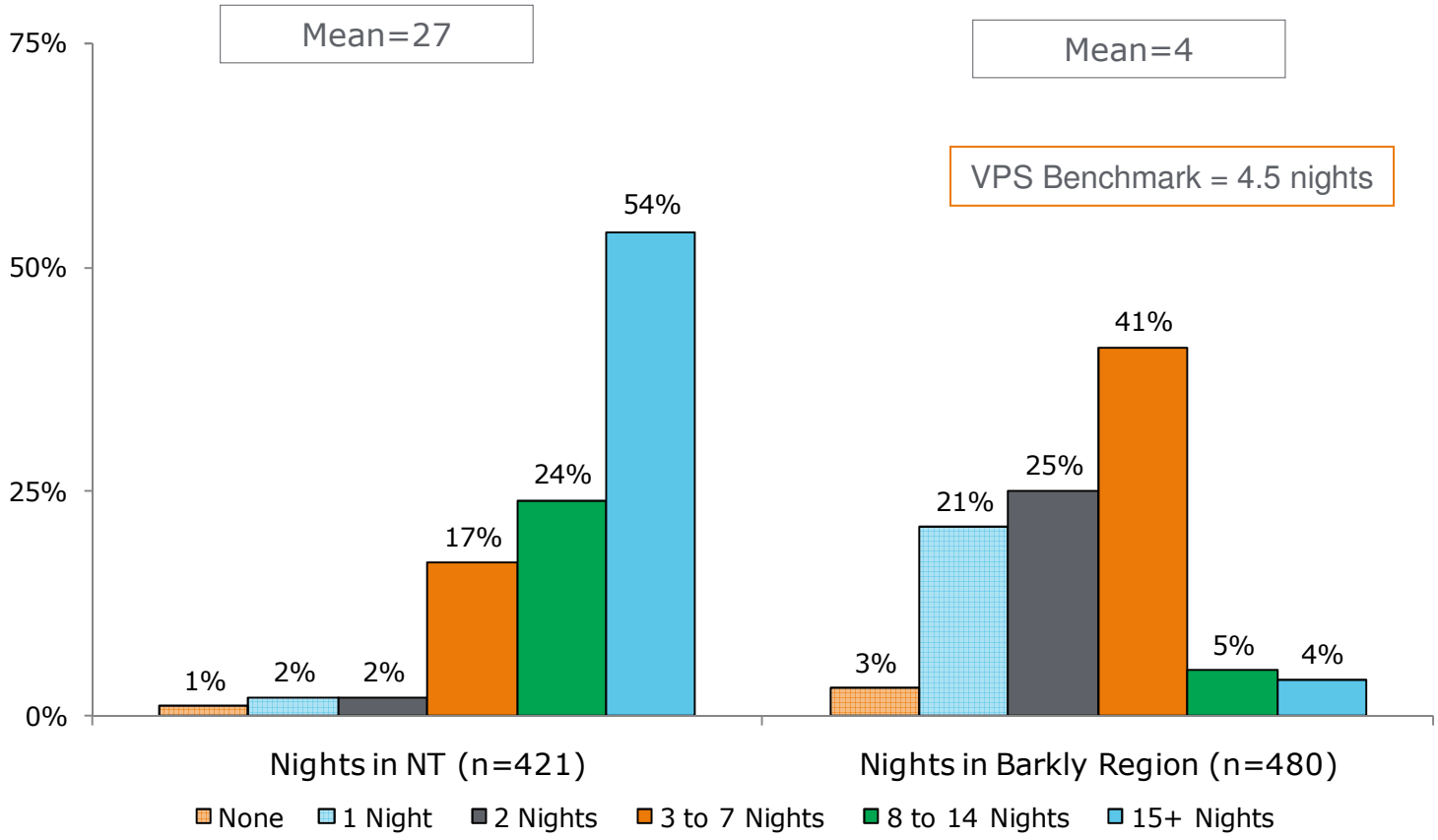


Arrival base n=28 Departure base n=27

* Caution extremely low base

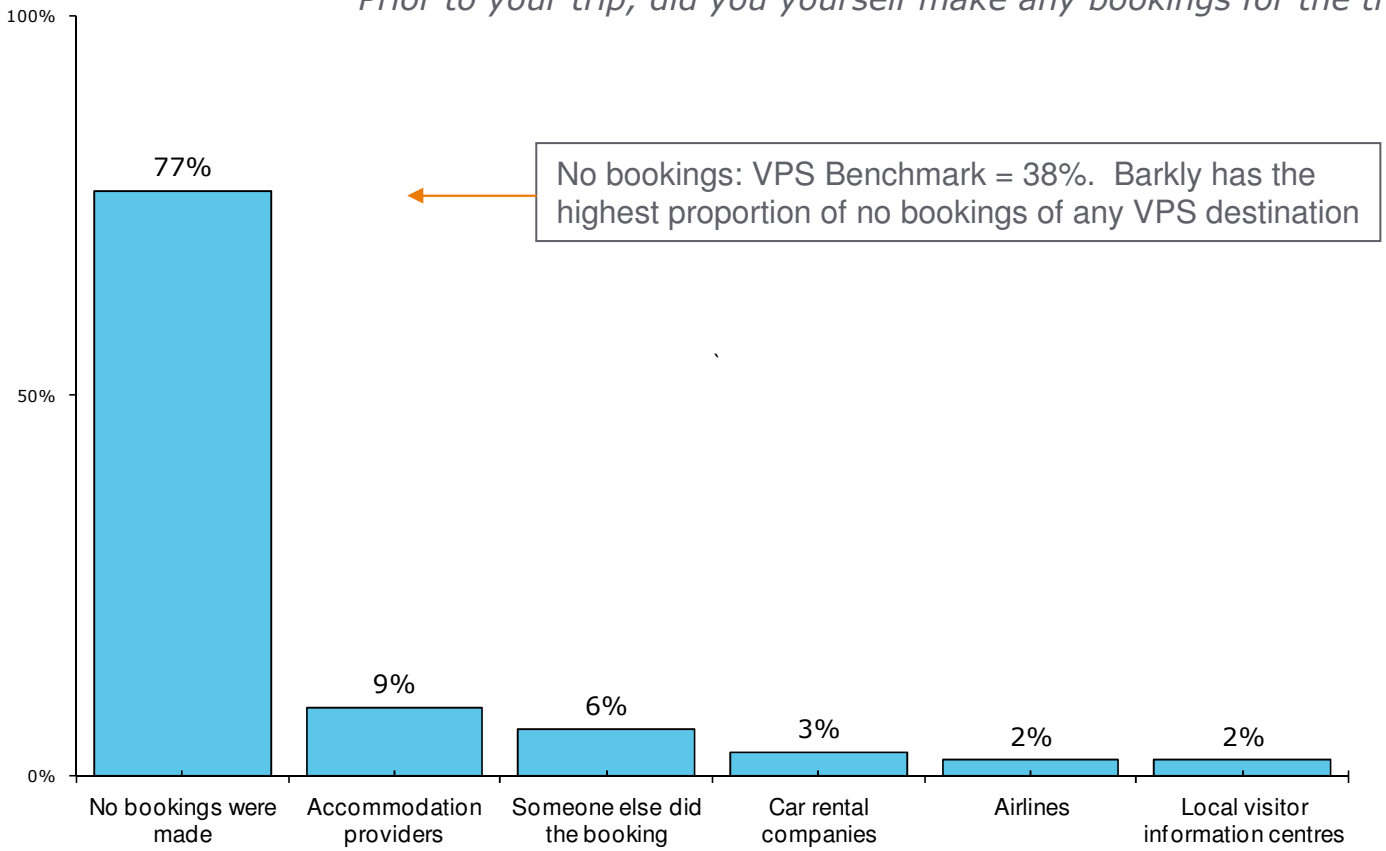
The average length of stay in the NT was high

"How many nights will you stay in the Northern Territory this trip?
"How many nights did you stay in the Barkly Region during this trip?"



Most respondents did not make any bookings prior to their trip

"Prior to your trip, did you yourself make any bookings for the trip with…?"



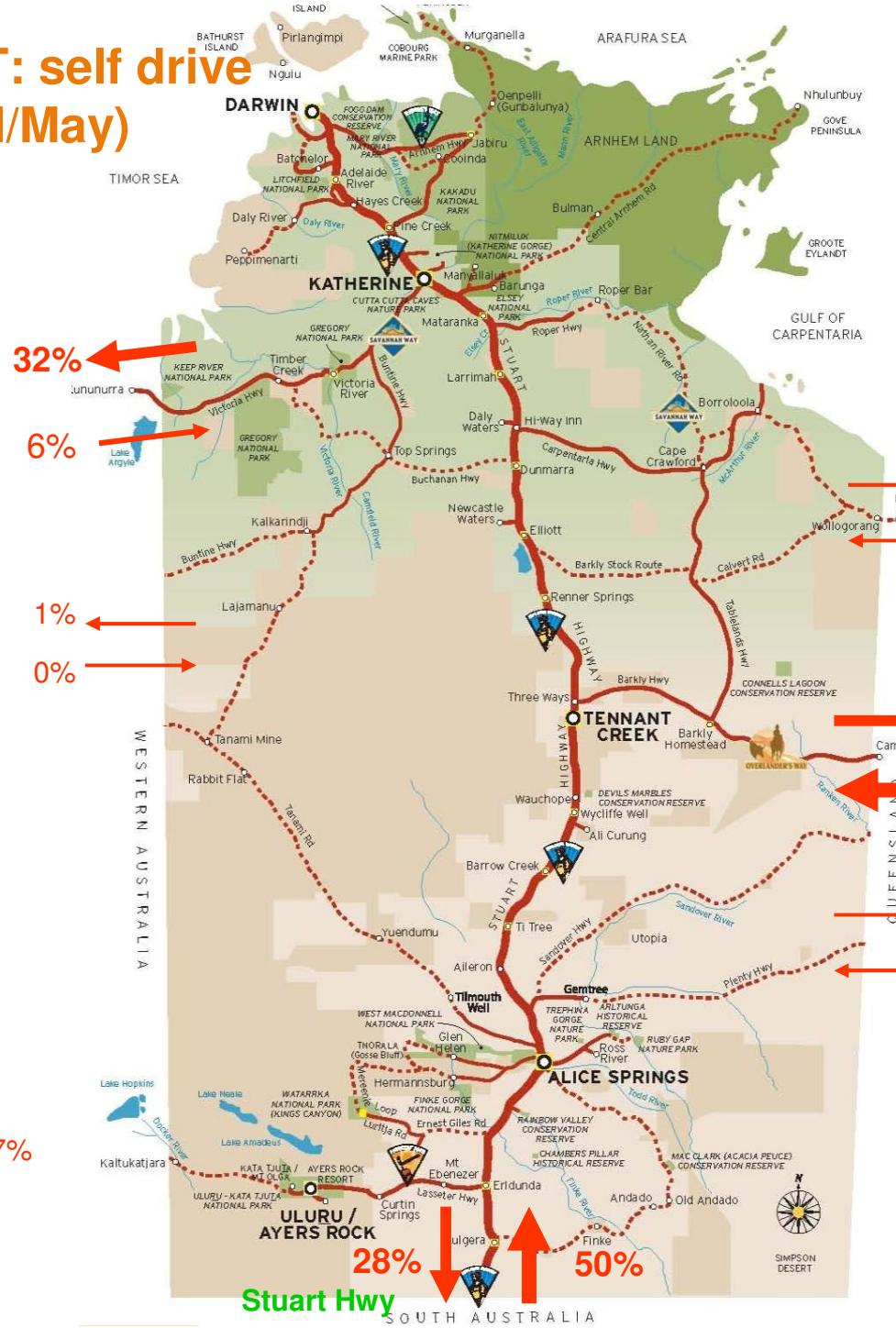
No bookings: VPS Benchmark = 38%. Barkly has the highest proportion of no bookings of any VPS destination

Base n= 469

* Table does not include mentions that are <2%

Travel paths and themed drives

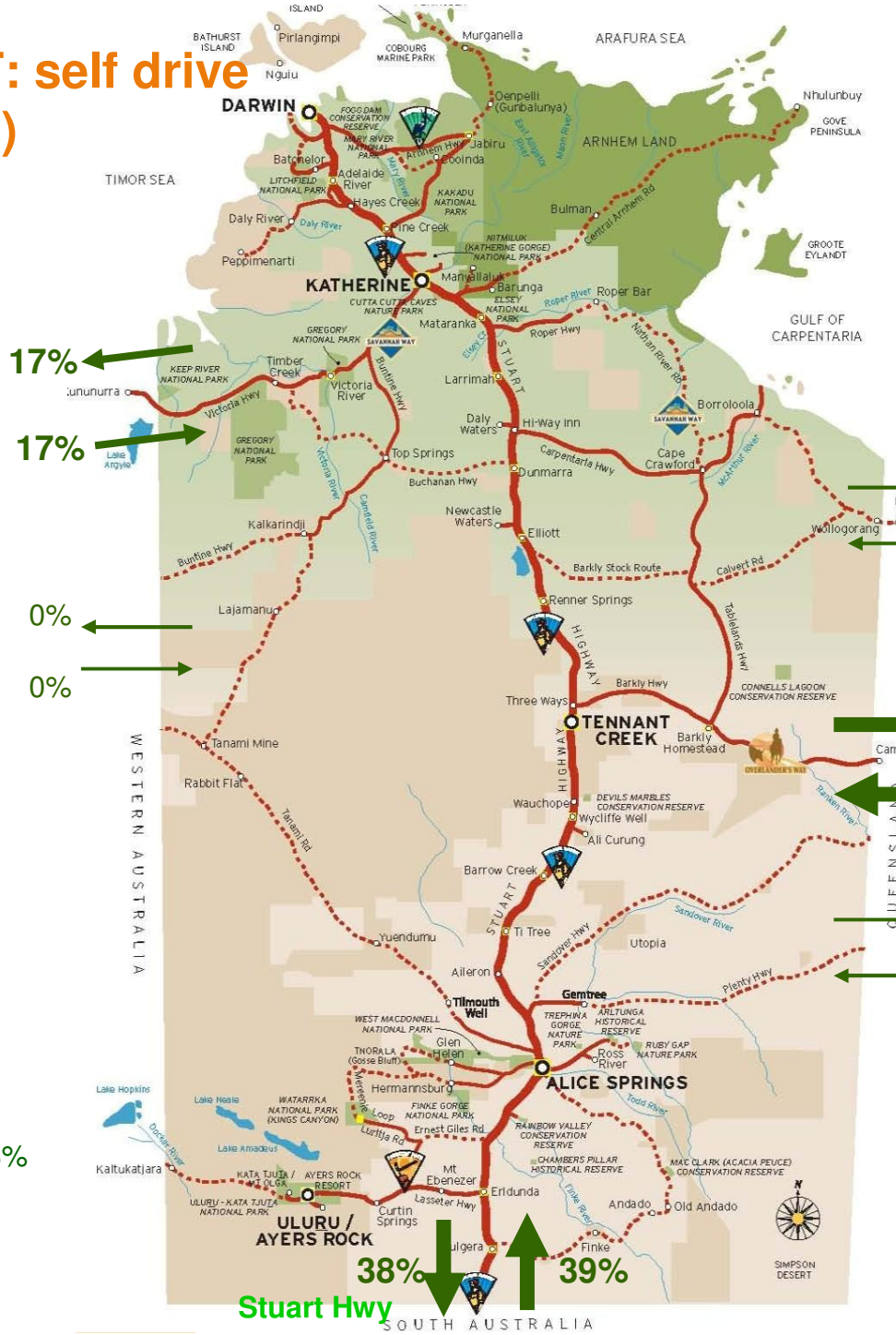
Enter/Leave NT: self drive Shoulder (April/May)



Not leaving by road: 7%

IA'S ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

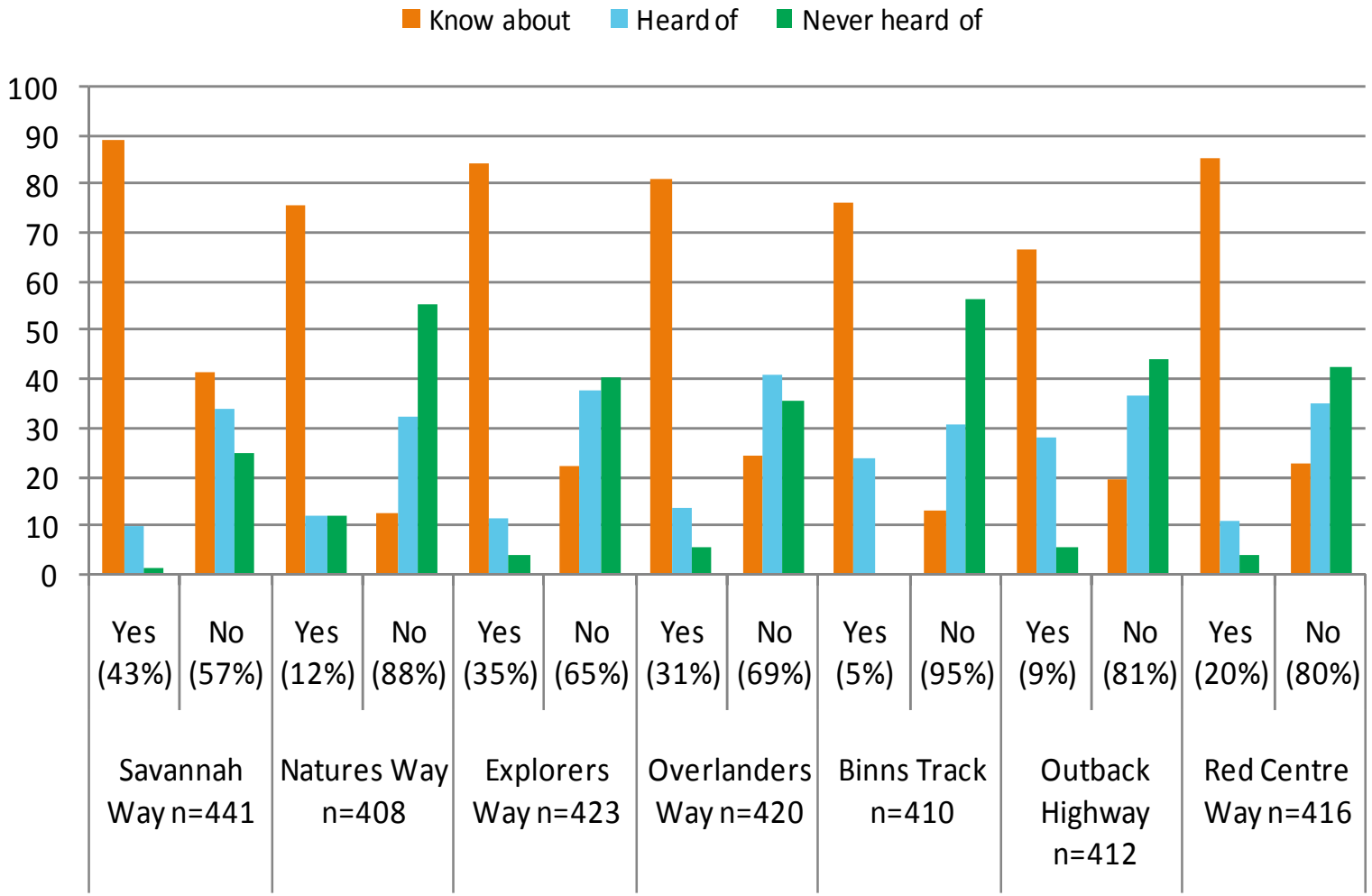
Enter/Leave NT: self drive High (Aug/Sept)



Not leaving by road: 3%

IA'S ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

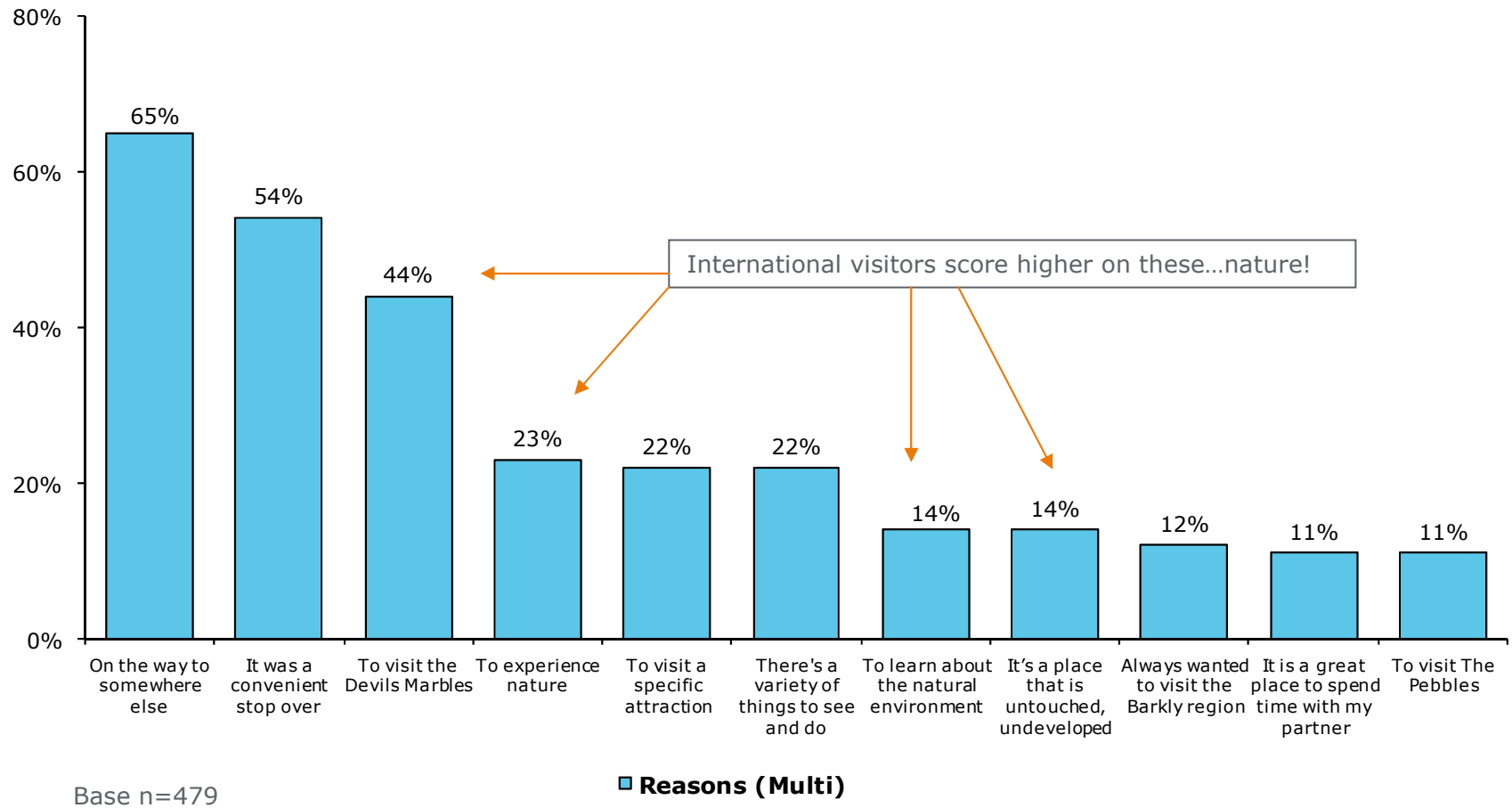
High awareness of themed drives amongst users, Savannah Way has reasonable awareness amongst non-users



Why did they chose to visit the Barkly region and what they did?

Aside from ‘stop-over’ Karlu Karlu is a common reason to visit

*“Why did you choose to visit the Barkly Region?” - **Top 11 Reasons** -*

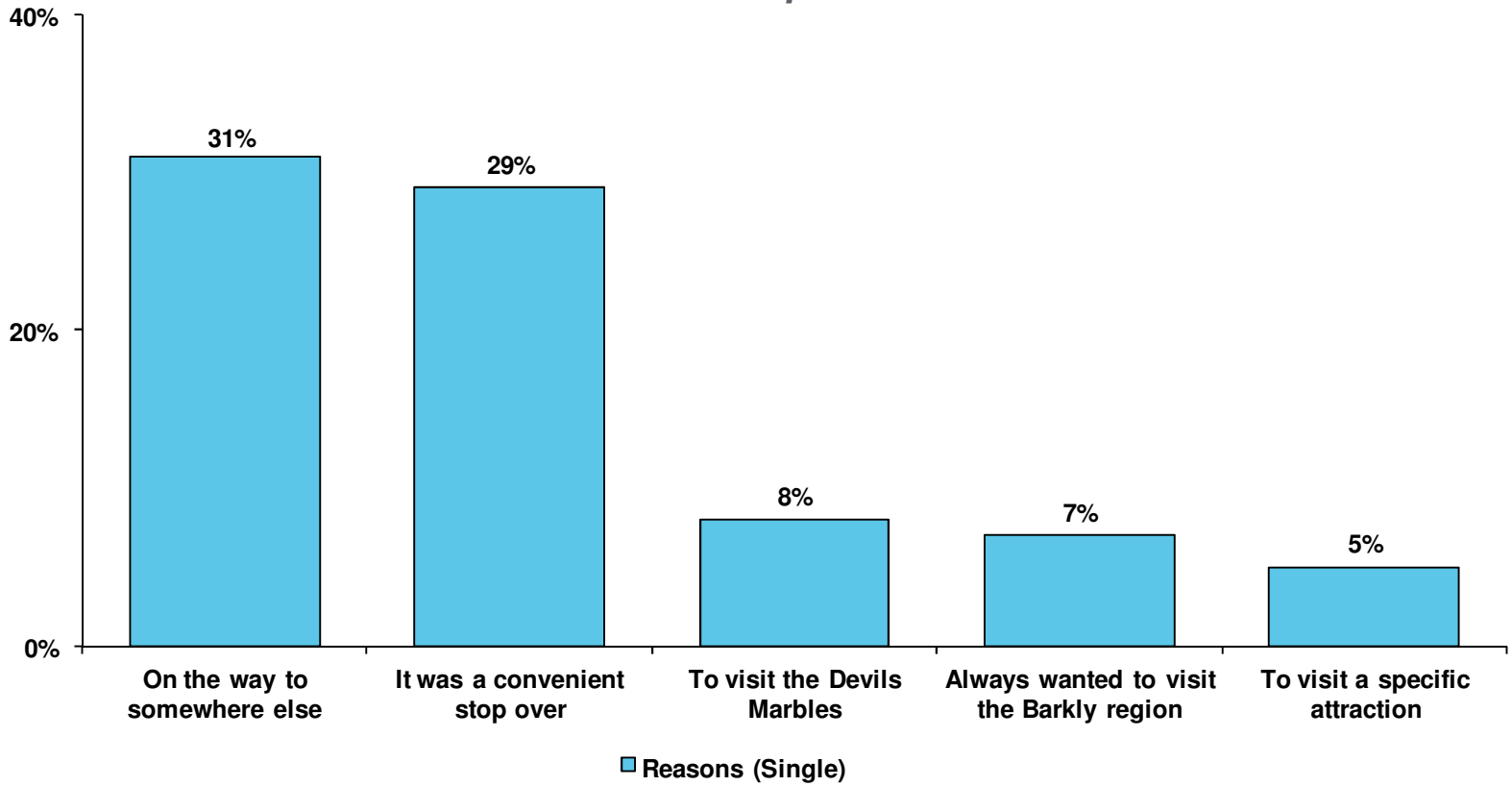


Base n=479

‘Stop-over’ dominates as the main reason for being in the Barkly Region.

“Which of the following was the most important in choosing to visit the Barkly region?”

- Top 5 Reasons -

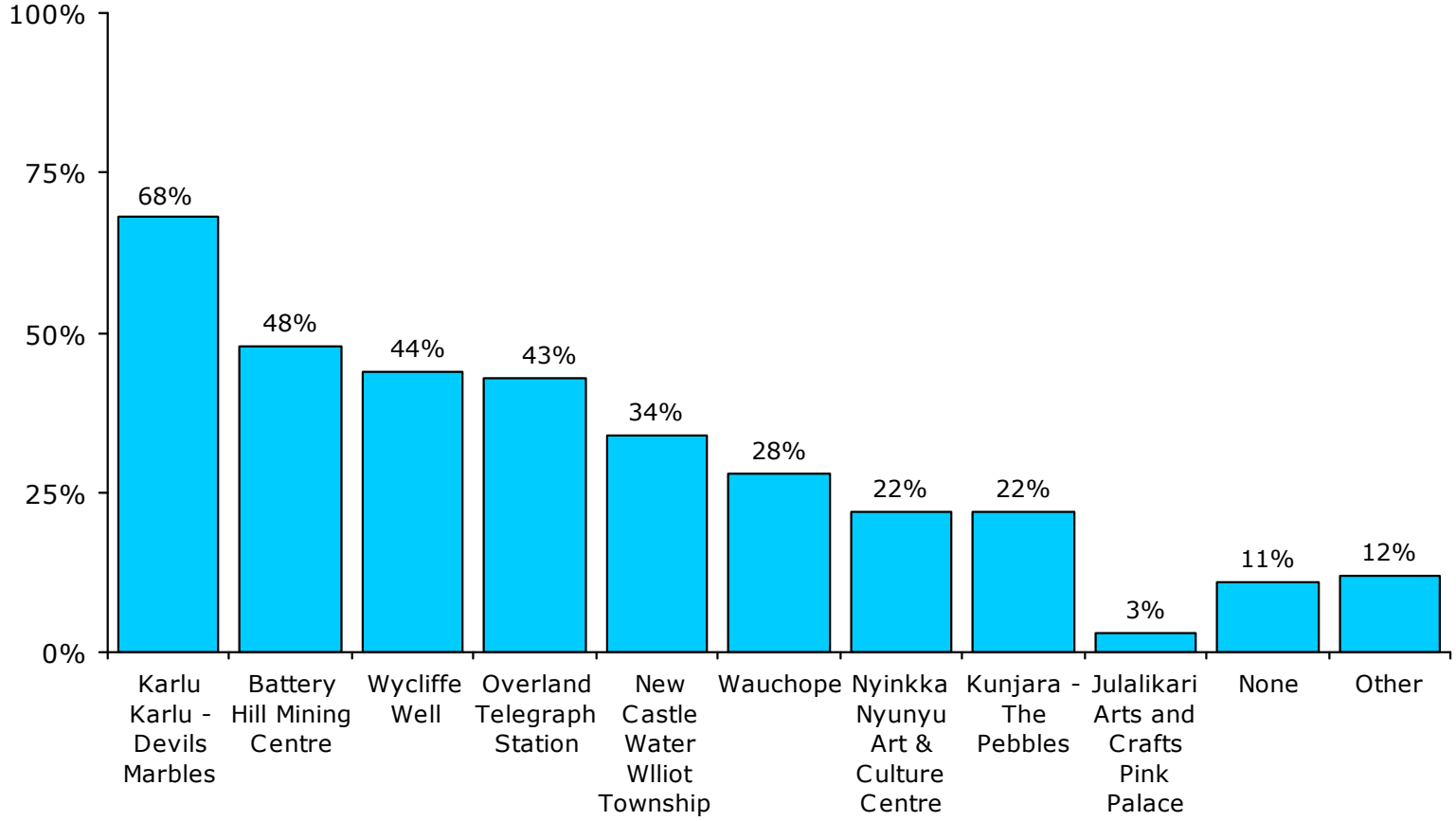


Base n=313

***This chart contains information from wave 2 only.**

Despite being a ‘stop-over’ a lot of attractions were visited.

“On this trip to the Barkly Region, which attractions did you visit?



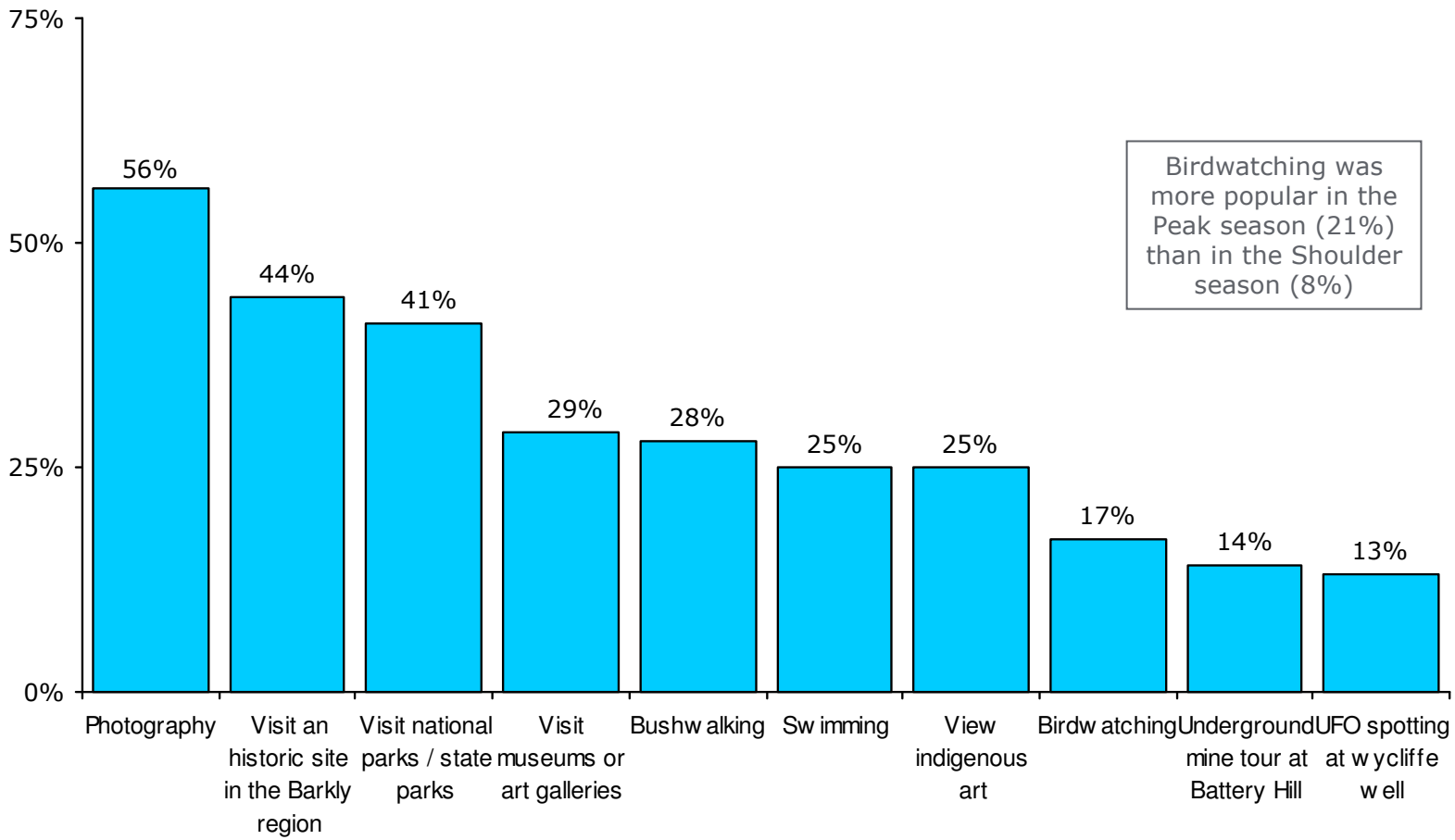
Base n=473

*Table does not include mentions lower than 11%

Activities are mainly centred around natural attractions

"On this trip to the Barkly Region, which of the following activities did you undertake?

- Top 10 Activities -



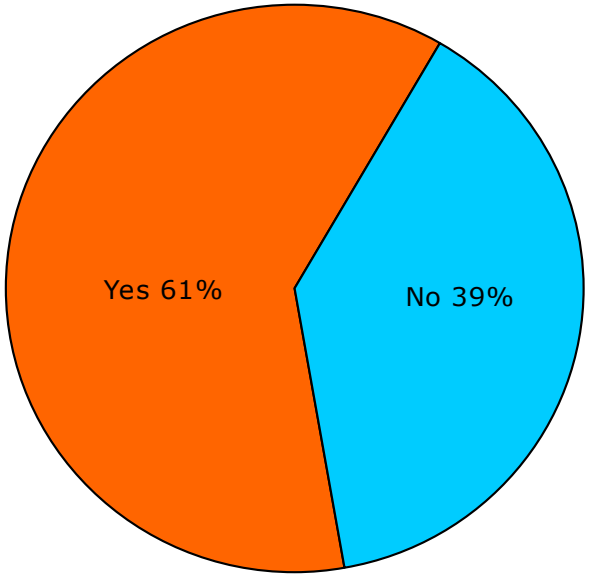
Birdwatching was more popular in the Peak season (21%) than in the Shoulder season (8%)

Base n=474

Accommodation in the Barkly Region

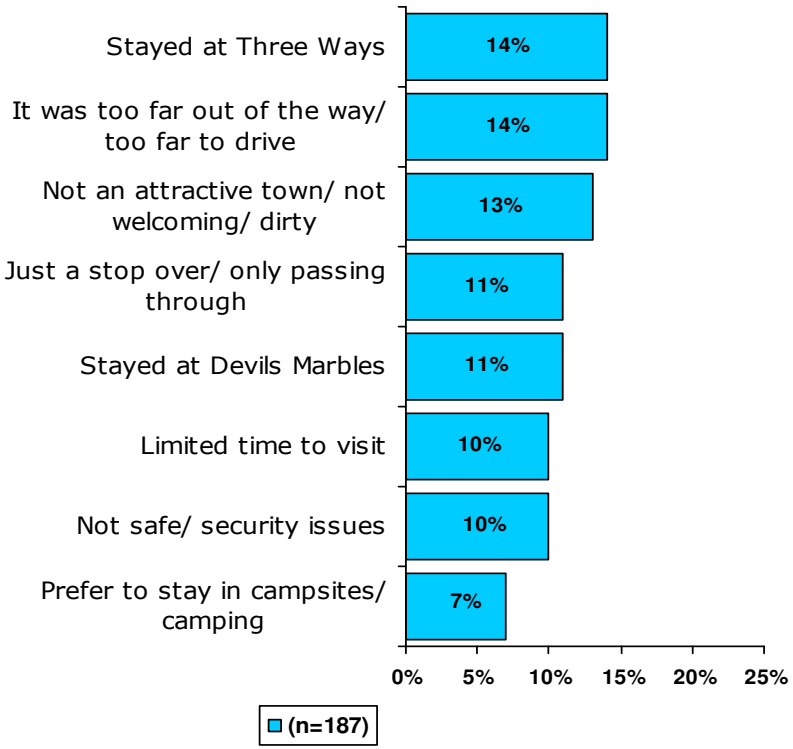
Two thirds of visitors indicated that they stayed overnight at Tennant Creek

"On this trip to the Barkly Region did you stay overnight in Tennant Creek? "



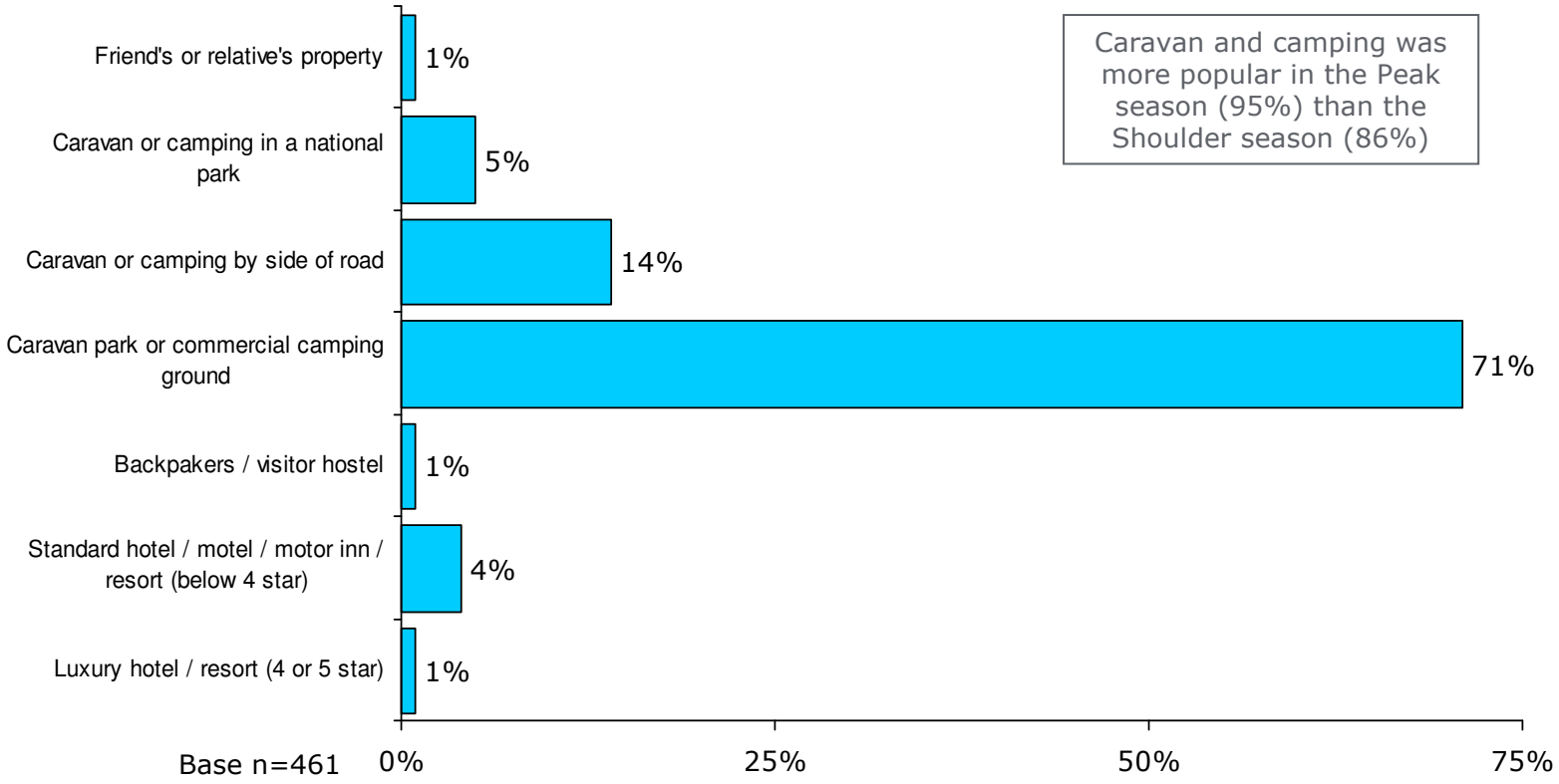
Base n=482

IF DID NOT STAY: Why not?



Caravan parks or commercial camping grounds were the main types of accommodation used

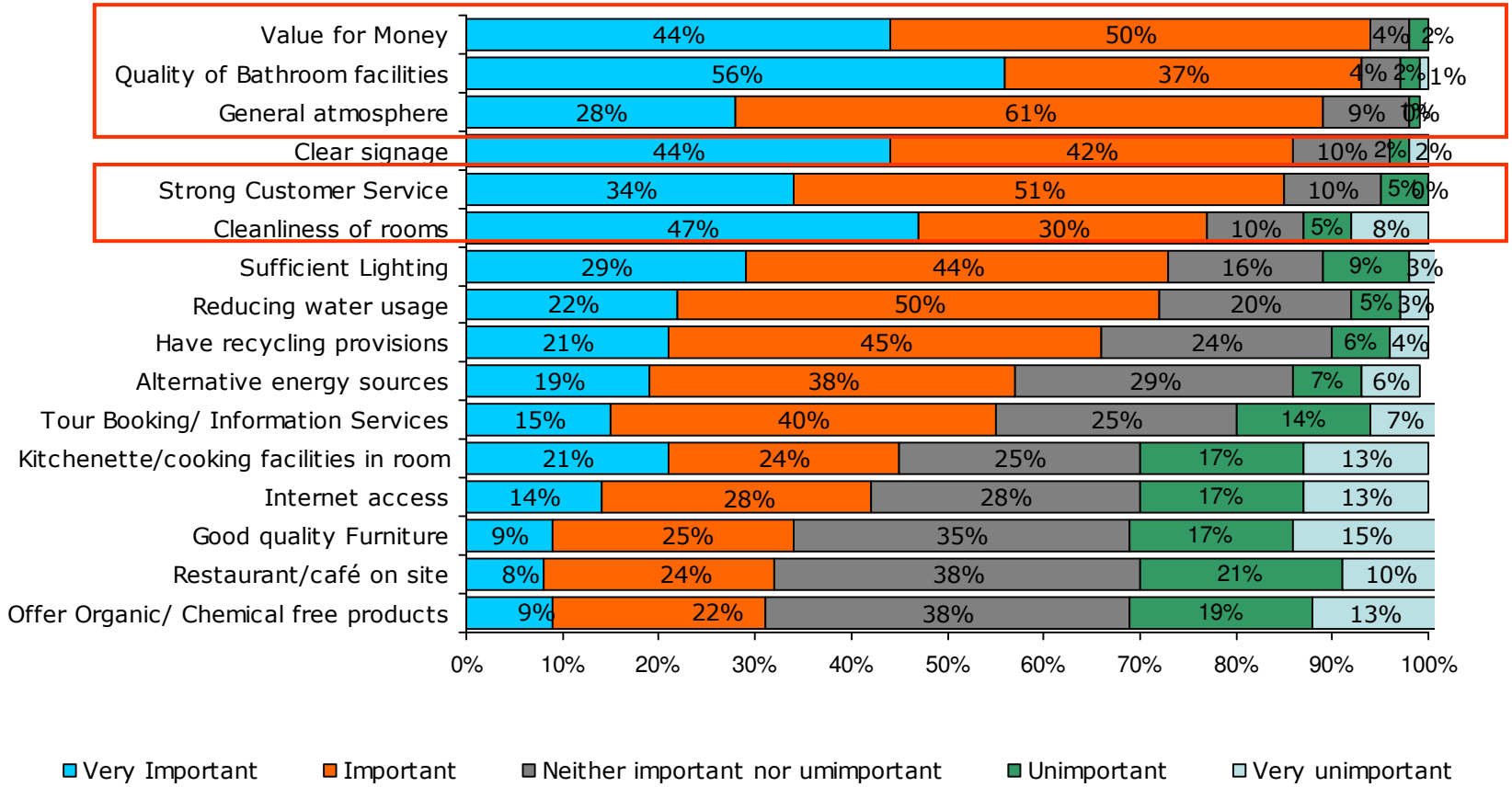
"What type of accommodation did you mainly use in the Barkly Region? "



Caravan and camping was more popular in the Peak season (95%) than the Shoulder season (86%)

Importance of accommodation aspects - Commercial caravan and camping

"Thinking of holiday accommodations in the Barkly region, how important or unimportant was …"

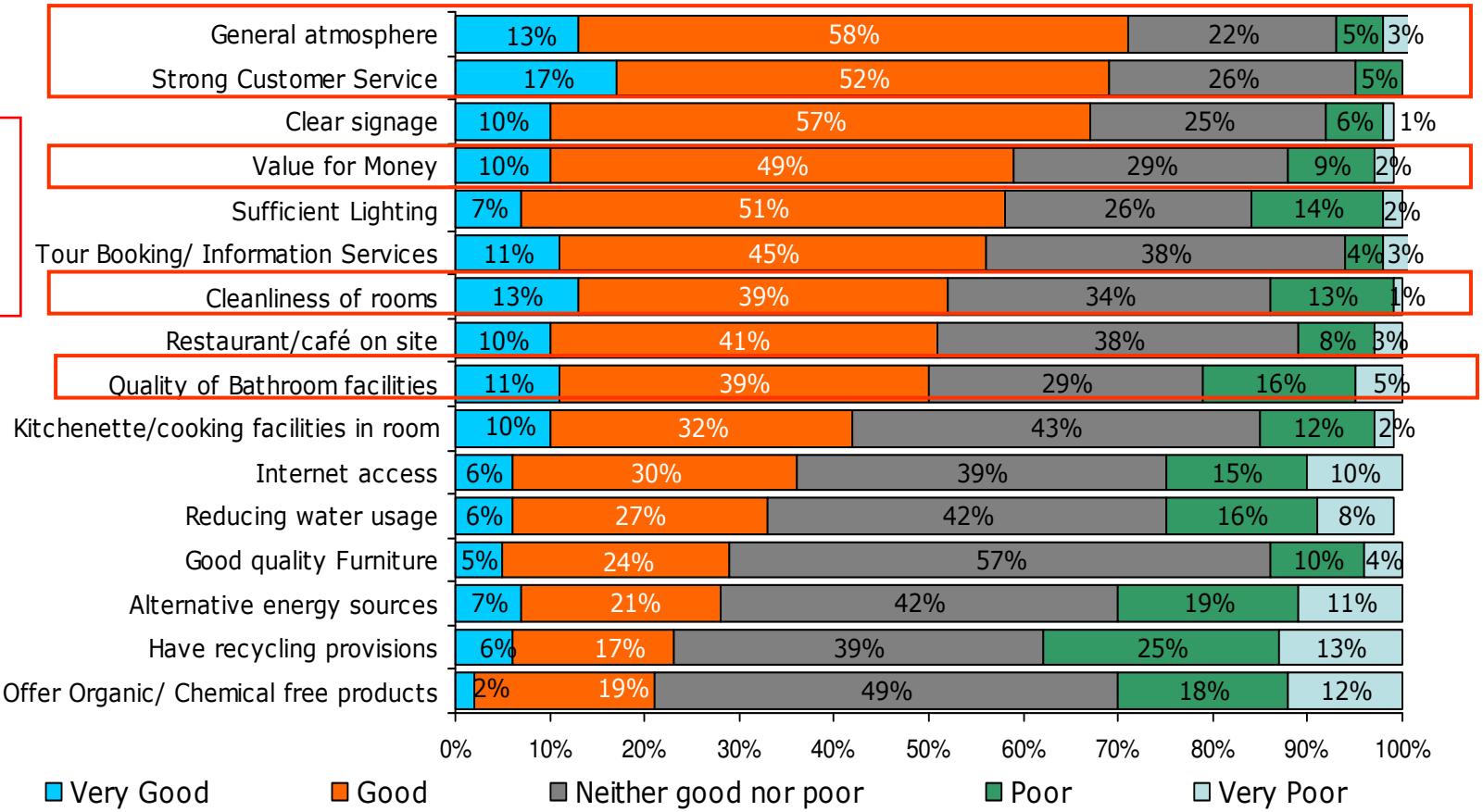


Aspects which are most highly correlated with overall satisfaction with accommodation

Rating for accommodation aspects – Commercial caravan and camping

""And thinking about the main type of accommodation you stayed at in the Barkly region how would you rate the accommodation on each of the following …"

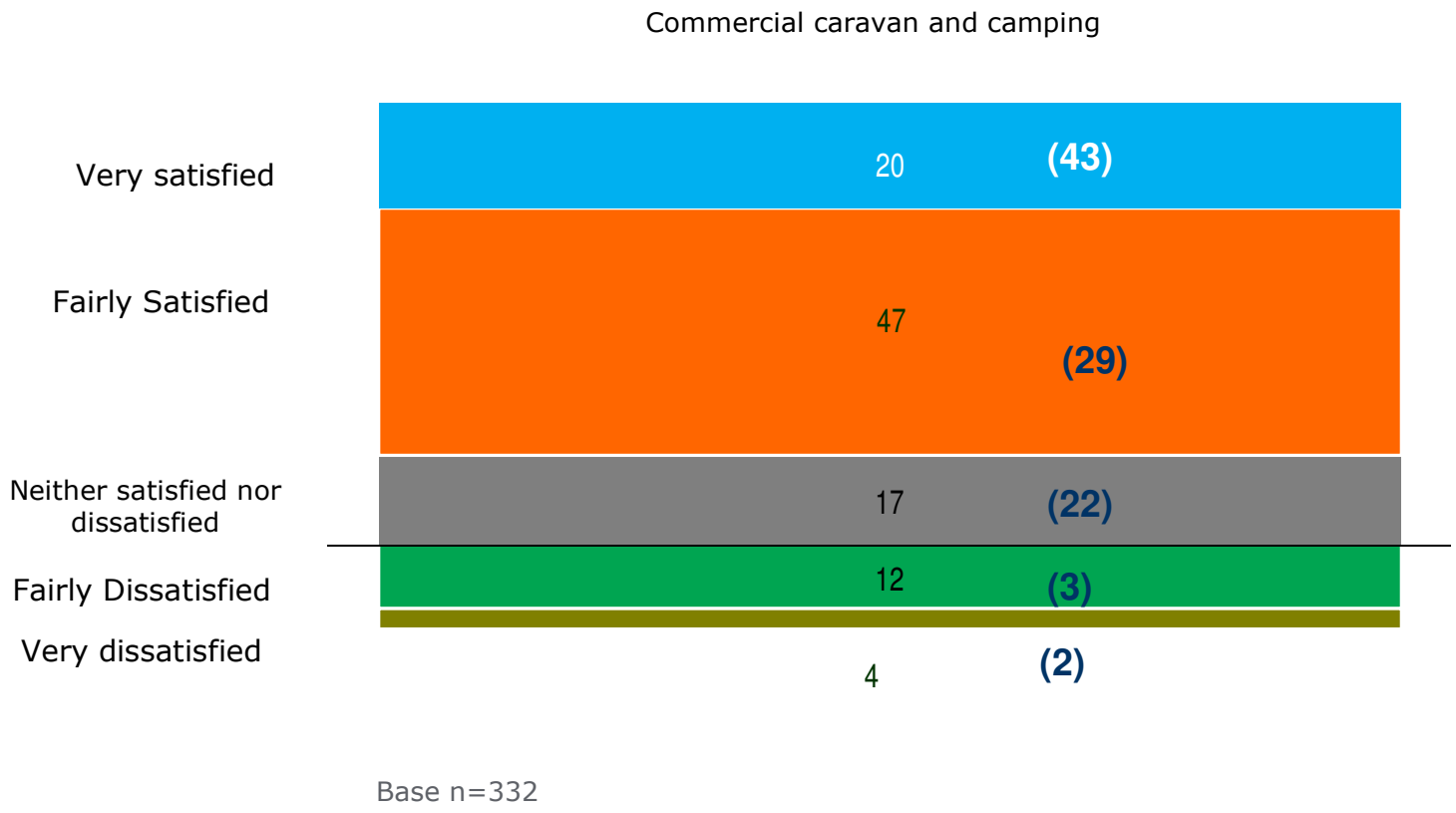
Aspects which are most highly correlated with overall satisfaction with accommodation



Please note that- non, commercial, other commercial and other non-commercial have not been charted due to small base

Overall satisfaction with accommodation in the Barkly Region is well below VPS benchmarks

"Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with accommodation in the Barkly region?"



(Numbers in brackets are VPS Program benchmarks)

Themes of dissatisfaction with commercial caravan and camping*

- **Price (over-rated, expensive, poor quality)**
  - *The quality and cleanliness of amenities in caravan parks and roadhouses is not up to the standard that the park rates – cost (is high) even allowing for the remoteness of some locations cost (Domestic, 54-64 years)*
  - *…caravan park advertised as 'Top notch amenities'..they weren't, camp kitchen dirty, shower block..awful. (International, 15-24 years)*

- **Amenities (cleanliness)**
  - *Poor standard of…van park, particularly the dirty and badly maintained amenities and poor standard of customer service. (Domestic, 65+ years)*

* Note: the themes take into account open ended responses from visitors as well as responses to coded questions. The selected quotes reflect the general theme of dissatisfaction.

Themes of dissatisfaction with commercial caravan and camping*

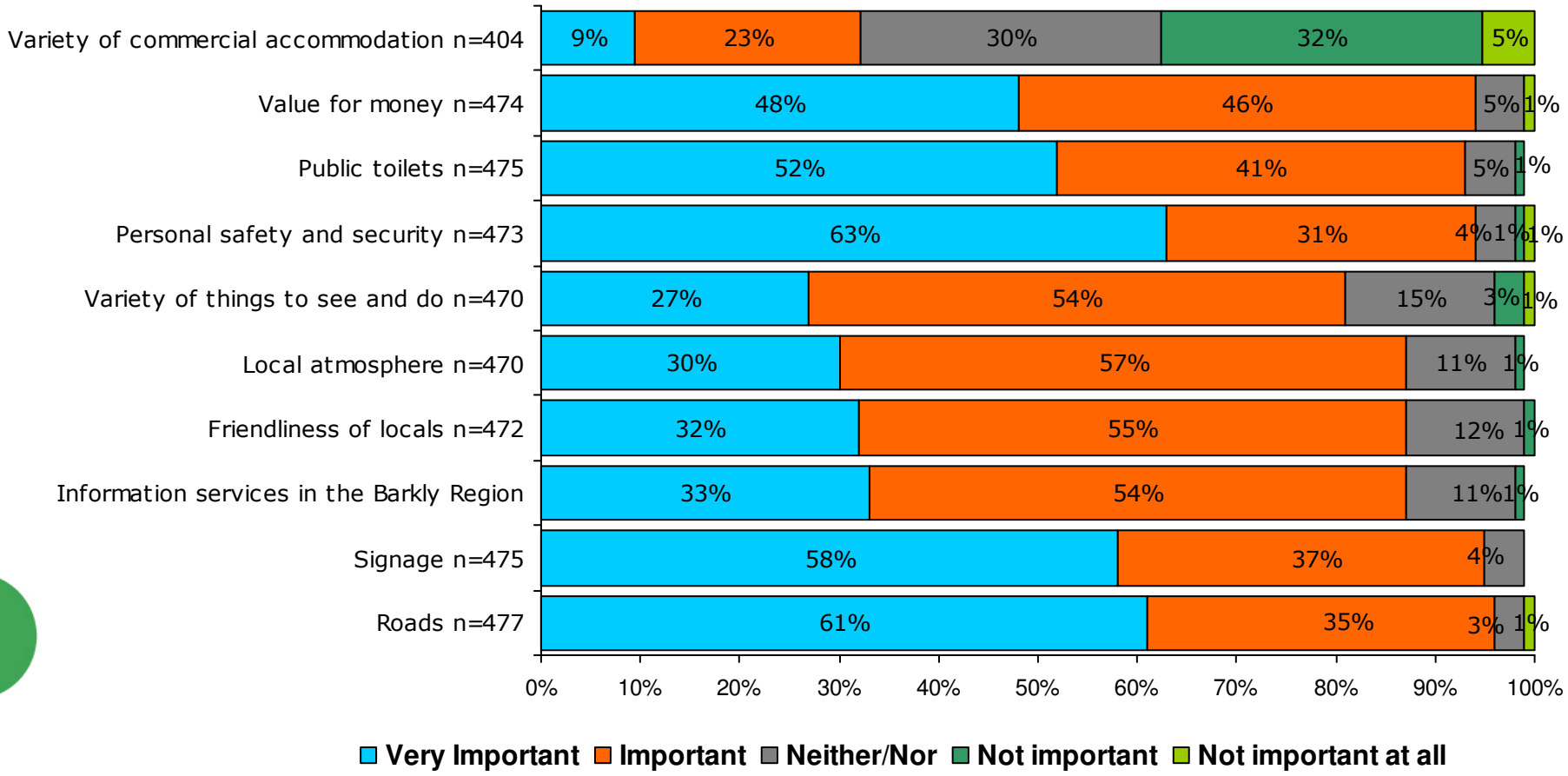
- **Service (poor, unhelpful)**
  - *…the manager was either drunk or had a terrible hangover (Domestic, 55-64 years)*
  - *…manager very rude and had a big attitude problem (Domestic, 55-64 years)*
  - *Service generally poor and expensive. Take it or leave it attitude of service providers. Nothing has changed for years. Tourists not valued. (Domestic, 55-64 years)*
  - *The unfriendliness of service…and the poor quality of the amenities…how did it ever get a 4 star rating. (Domestic, 55-64 years)*

* Note: the themes take into account open ended responses from visitors as well as responses to coded questions. The selected quotes reflect the general theme of dissatisfaction.

Satisfaction with the Barkly Region

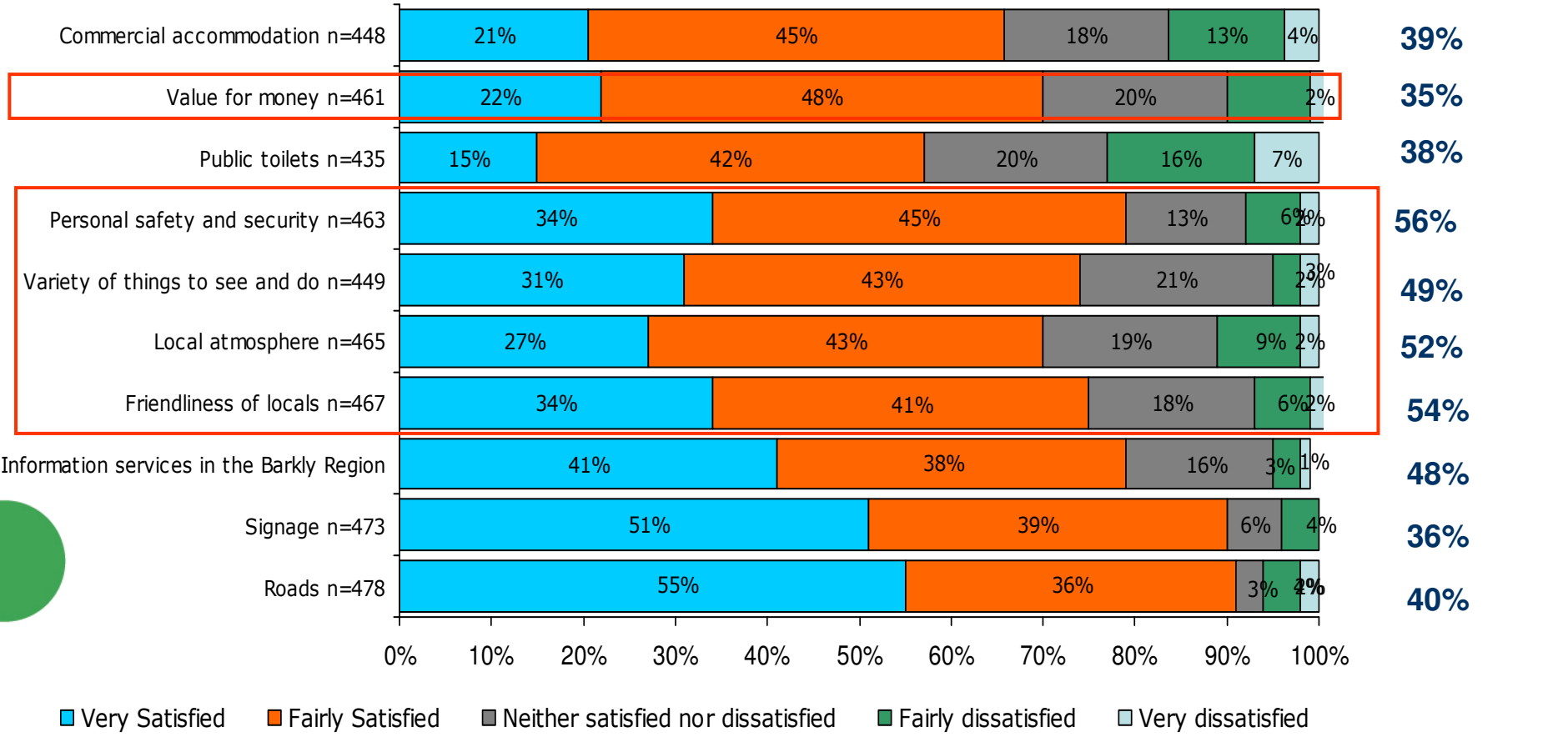
Importance of Trip Aspects

"How important or unimportant was.... "



Satisfaction with Trip Aspects – most are below VPS benchmarks

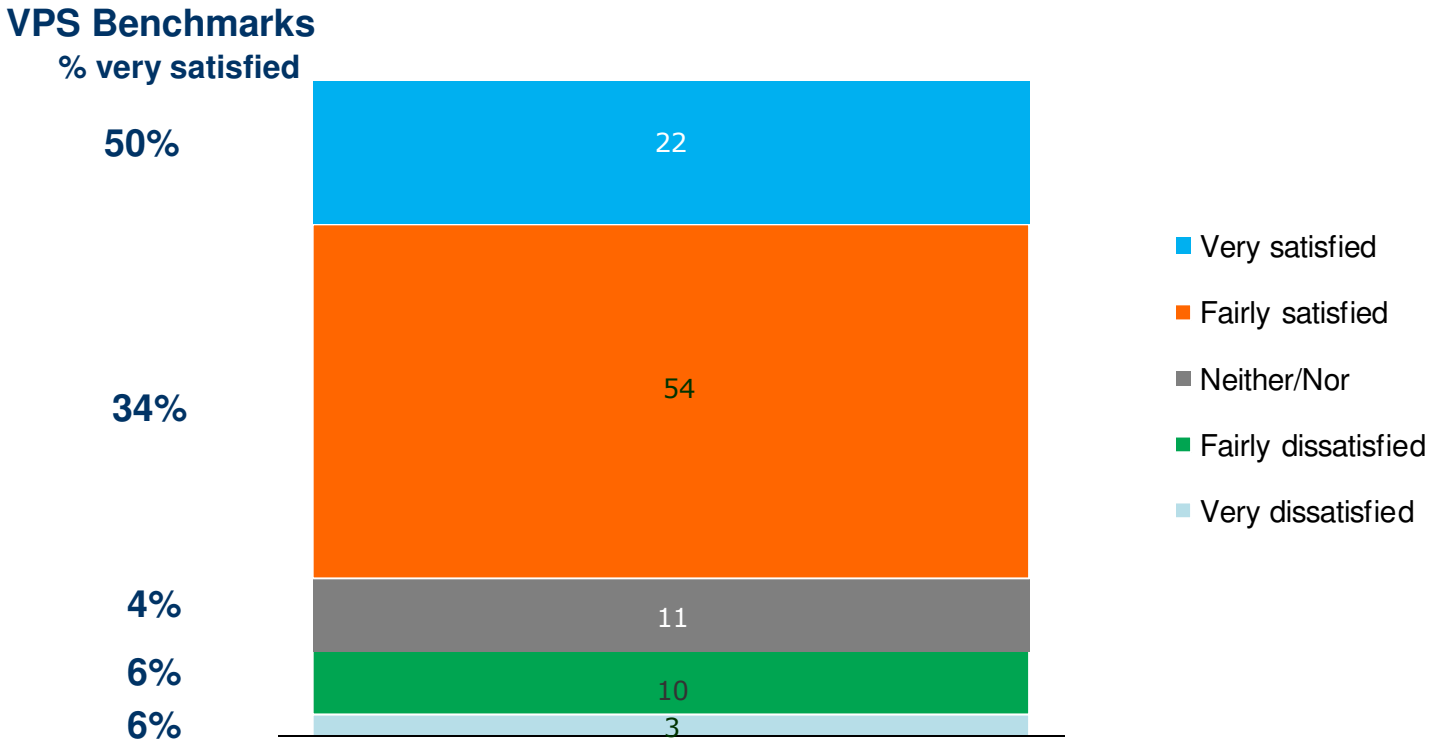
"And how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with…. "



Aspects which are most highly correlated with overall satisfaction

Overall Satisfaction

"Overall how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with your experience in the Barkly Region? "

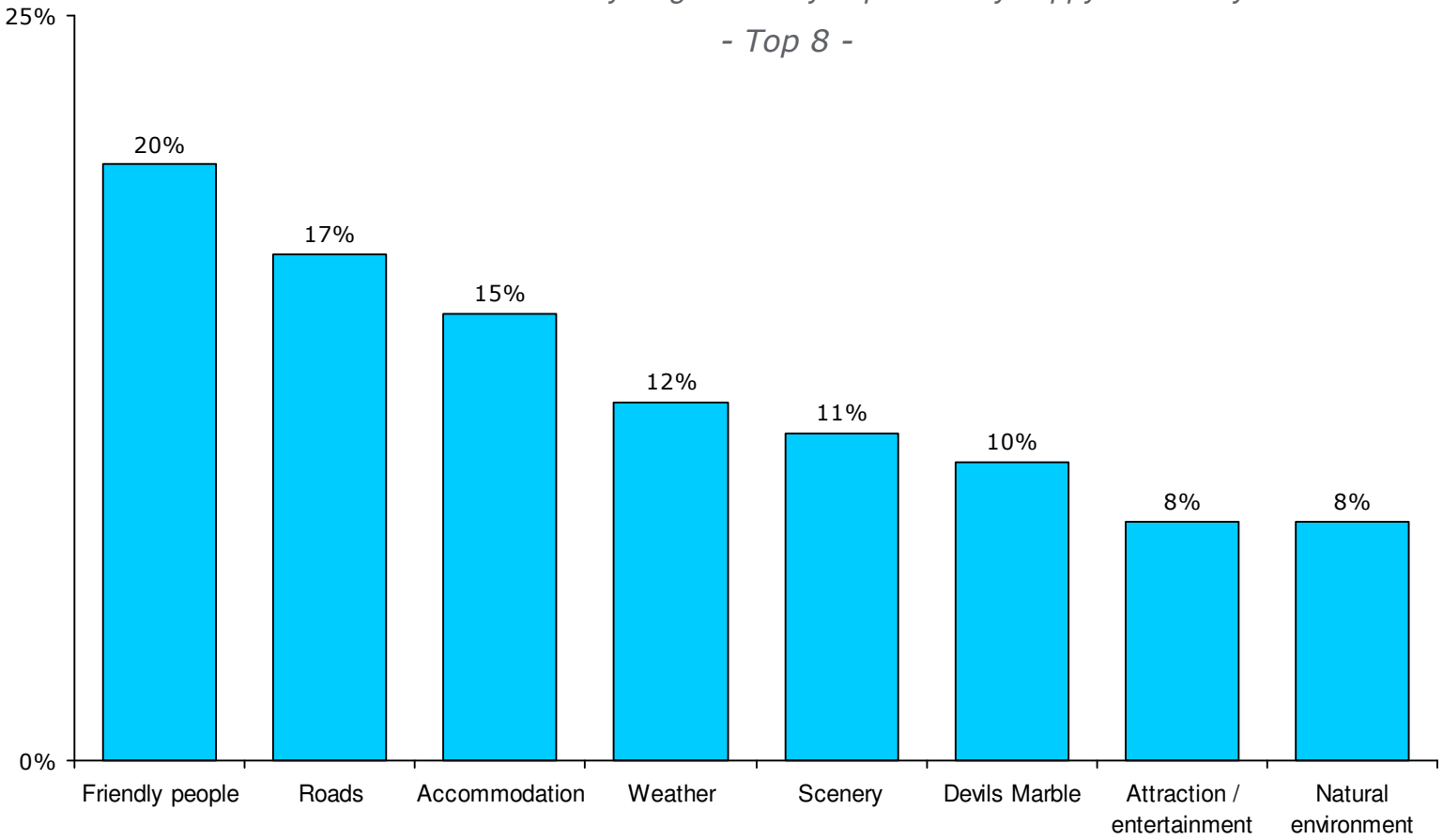


Base n=835

What are Respondents particularly Happy about? (summary of open ended responses)

"What else about the Barkly Region were you particularly happy about on your recent visit?"

- Top 8 -



Base n=333 Only includes those who answered the question

Themes of satisfaction with Barkly Region*

- **Friendly people**
  - *The people in business trying to be ambassadors for the Barkly Region. (Domestic 65+ years)*
  - *Bridgestone shop – very helpful man. (Domestic, 45-54 years)*
  - *Info centre was really good, helpful staff….(Domestic, 45-54 years)*
  - *Great hospitality, great people, many thanks. (Domestic, 55-64 years)*

- **Roads**
  - *Roads - great. Devils Marbles -good. Battery Hill - excellent lookout. … (Domestic, 45-54 years)*
  - *Stuart Highway – excellent condition – well signed – making stress free/safe driving" (Domestic, 55-64 years)*

* Note: the themes take into account open ended responses from visitors as well as responses to coded questions. The selected quotes reflect the general theme of satisfaction.

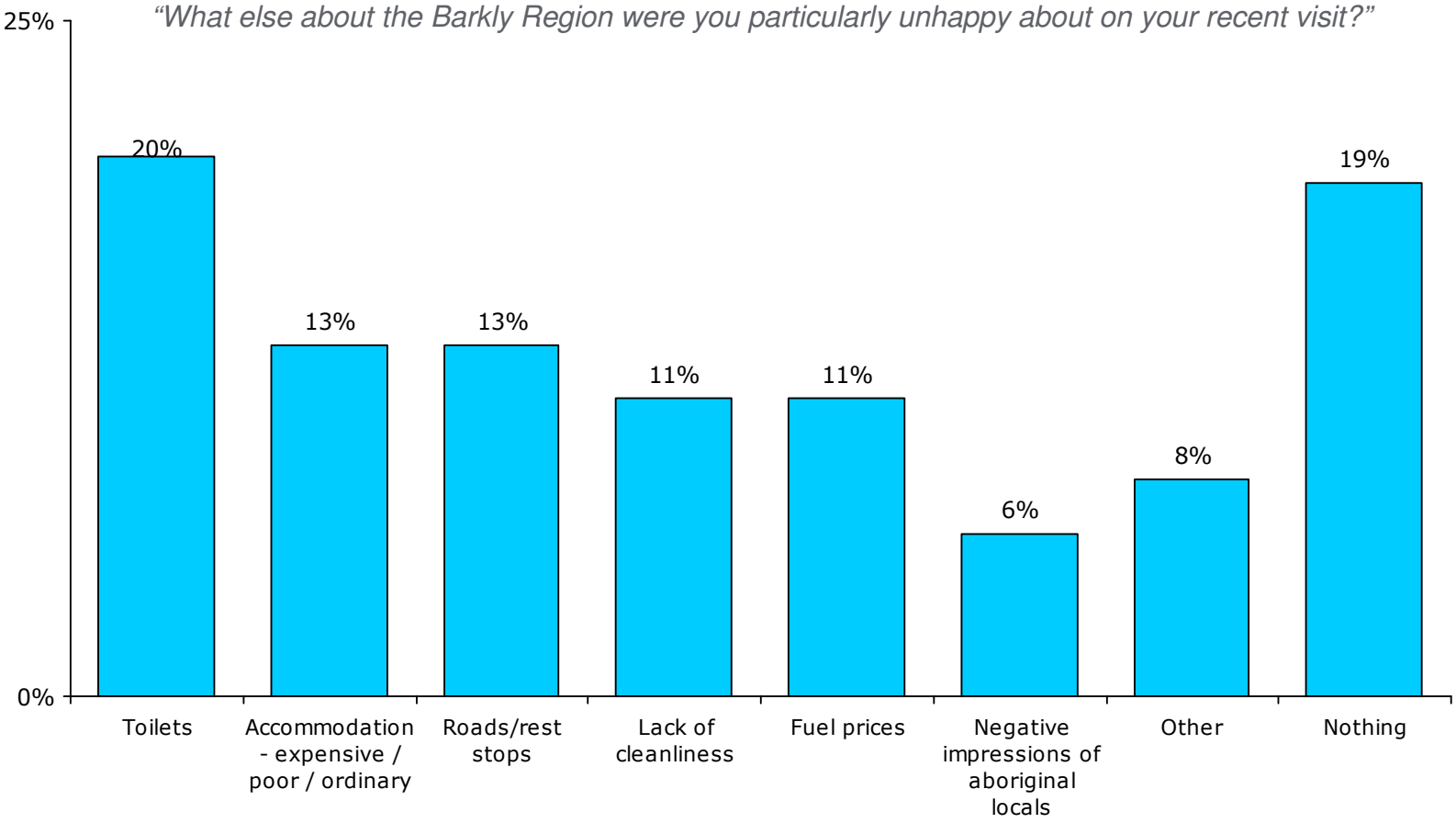
Themes of satisfaction with Barkly Region*

- **Attractions/general**
  - *Nice to see grass green in town centre. The Battery Hill Mine and the Devils Marbles where exceptionally good. The people who set up the mine should be very proud of their achievement. (Domestic, 35-44 years)*
  - *Pleasant weather – ideal conditions for camping and caravanning. We enjoyed the ever changing scenery – geographically, vegetation and land use. Stuart Highway – excellent condition – well signed – making stress free/safe driving (Domestic, 55-64 years)*
  - *Plenty to see and do, weather great! (Domestic, 55-64 years)*
  - *We were impressed with this region especially Devils Marbles (Domestic, 45-54 years)*

* Note: the themes take into account open ended responses from visitors as well as responses to coded questions. The selected quotes reflect the general theme of satisfaction.

What are Respondents particularly Unhappy about? (summary of open ended responses)

"What else about the Barkly Region were you particularly unhappy about on your recent visit?"



Base n=351 Only includes those who answered the question

Themes of dissatisfaction with Barkly Region*

- **Rest stops (not enough, lack of toilets and shade, rubbish, too close to road)**
  - *Roadside rest areas need maintenance, lack of toilets (Domestic, unknown age)*
  - *…not enough rest areas with toilets (Domestic, 55-64 years)*
  - *There is a definite need for more toilets at the roadside rest stops. This is most important to most of the caravan travelers. (Domestic, 65+ years)*
  - *Lack of adequate shade and tables at rest stops along the Barkly Hwy. (Domestic, 55-64 years)*
  - *Off road parking – generally too near the road and not too many available. Look to safety, WA does it better: A combination of free parking and caravan parks within town would get more into towns ." (Domestic, 65+ years)*

- **High fuel prices**
  - *Cost of fuel – they see you coming…(Domestic, 25-34 years)*

* Note: the themes take into account open ended responses from visitors as well as responses to coded questions. The selected quotes reflect the general theme of dissatisfaction.

Themes of dissatisfaction with Barkly Region*

- **Rubbish**
  - *All the rubbish on the floor near the road. (Domestic, unknown age)*
  - *The amount of detritous cans, bottles and rubbish of all kinds still litters roadside in NT.. (Domestic, 65+ years)*
  - *In Tenant Creek even though locals are friendly, town has appearance of war zone (Domestic, 65+ years)*

- **Indigenous issues**
  - *Unhappy to see indigenous population with no incentive to achieve or work. (Domestic, 55-64 years)*
  - *The local Aborigines fighting all night made me feel very unsafe (Domestic, 45-54 years)*

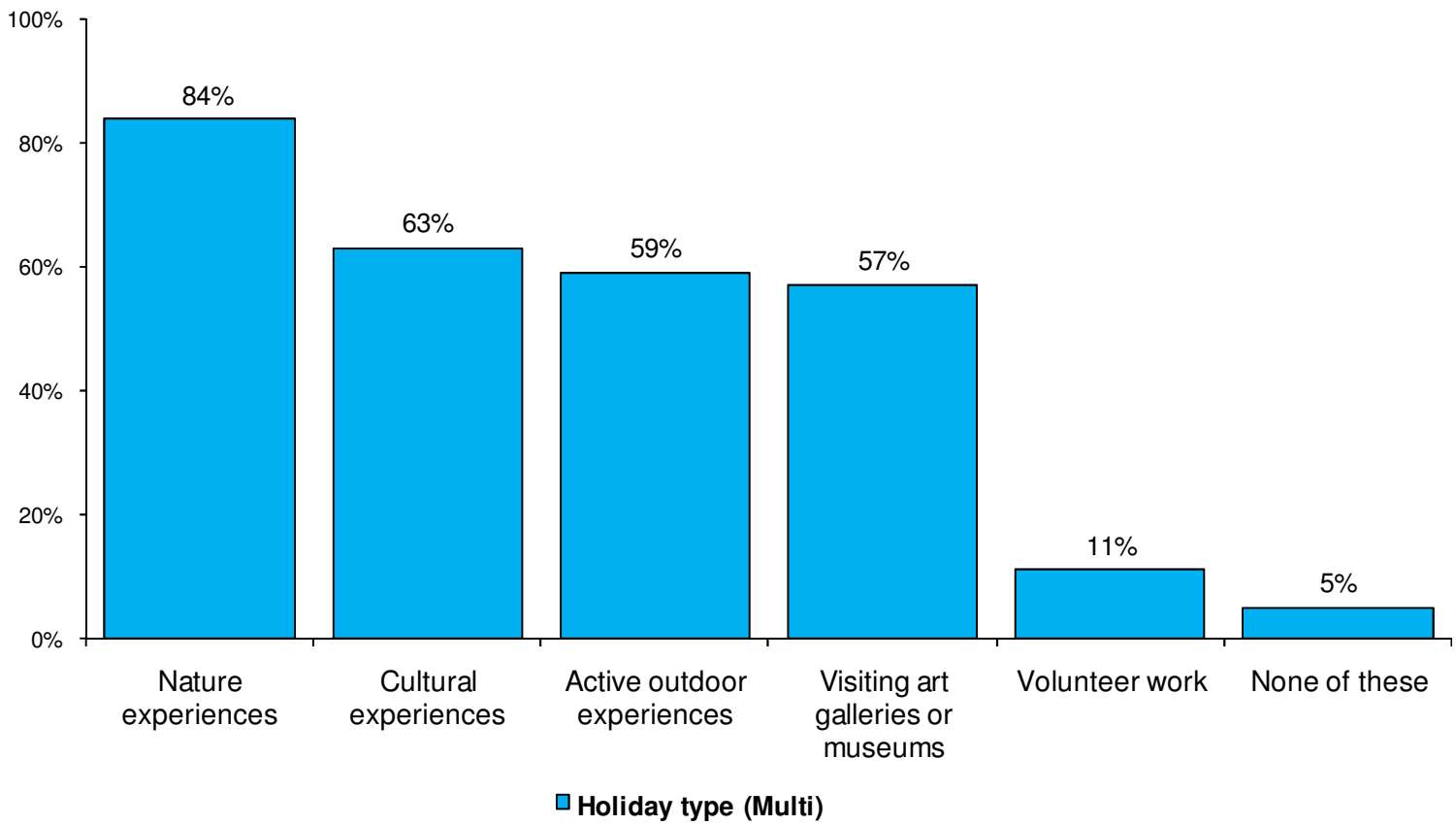
- **Others**
  - Mobile phone reception
  - *No mobile phone reception (Domestic, 65+ years)*

* Note: the themes take into account open ended responses from visitors as well as responses to coded questions. The selected quotes reflect the general theme of dissatisfaction.

Preferred experiences

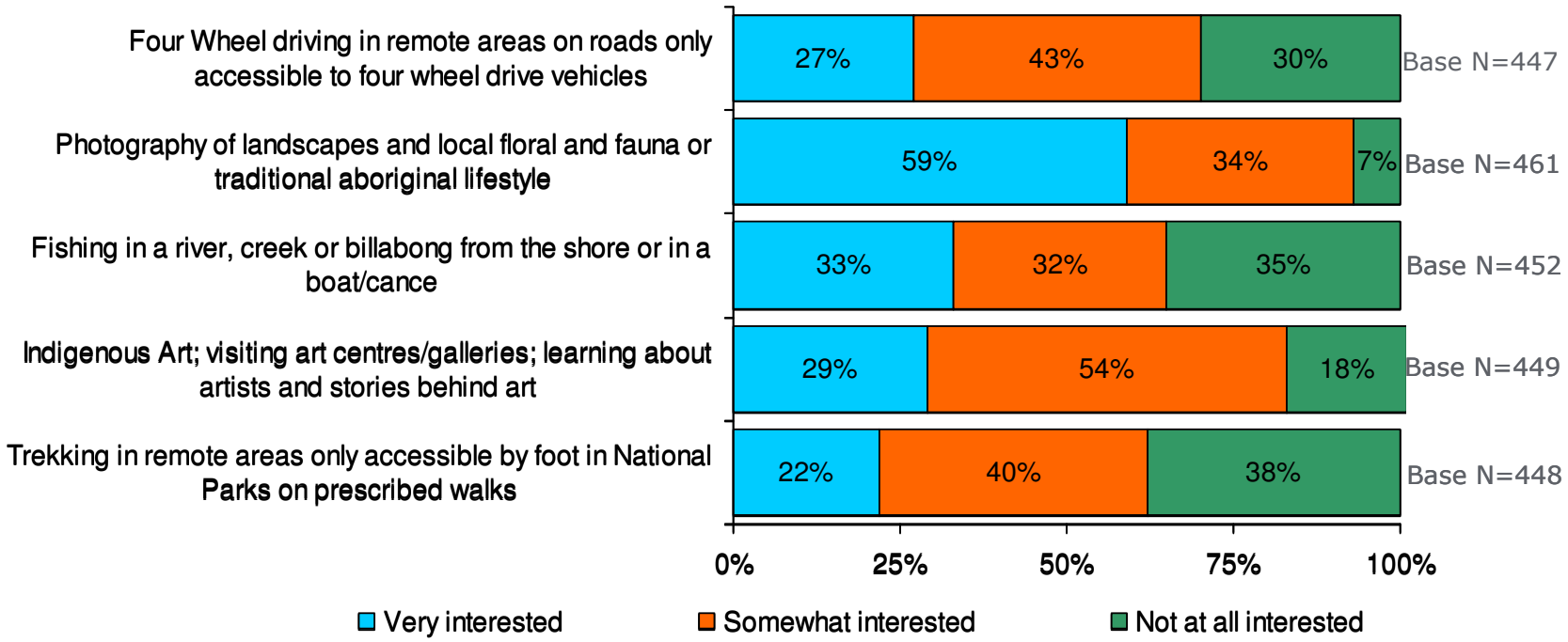
Preferences for holiday types or travel experiences

"Which of the following types of holiday or travel experiences do you like?"



Base n=479

Preferred holiday types

Preferred holiday types

"How interested are you in doing each of the following?"