

# Rusk County Destination Branding Study Final Report

March 17, 2016



***Gathering** information to **create** and **launch** market research insights...  
enabling **better business decisions***

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# Background

## Background

- The Rusk County Economic Development Committee commissioned The Dieringer Research Group (The DRG) to conduct a Destination Branding Evaluation study in order to gain insight into the leisure travel target audience.
- Rusk County, in partnership Pilch & Barnet, is interested in better understanding their target market of visitors, prospective visitors and county residents alike.
  - The findings from this research will be used to help in the development of a new Rusk County branding strategy designed to raise awareness of the area and encourage new visitors to the region.
  - The new branding strategy will also include messaging designed to support business development efforts, helping to grow new business and future job opportunities for current and new residents.
- The primary objective of this research was to better understand the leisure travel behaviors and perceptions among past and prospective visitors to the Rusk County area, as well as understand the unique perceptions of current residents.

# Objectives

## Objectives

- Specific objectives were to:
  - Measure key travel behaviors and preferences among Visitors and Non-Visitors, including:
    - Frequency of leisure travel
    - Awareness and familiarity with Rusk County and key competitor destinations
    - Incidence of past visits to and consideration of Rusk County area
    - Leisure destination selection criteria
    - Participation in a range of leisure travel activities
  - Understand perceptions of Rusk County among both Residents and Non-Residents
  - Assess what differentiates Rusk County from surrounding destinations
  - Identify how Residents and Non-Residents refer to the area by name
  - Understand potential barriers to future visits
  - Gather suggestions for ways Rusk County can improve
- The findings from this research will be used to develop a new Rusk County destination branding strategy and marketing communications that will attract visitors to the area, while resonating with current residents and business owners in order to bring new people to the area to live and work.

# Methodology

## Methodology

- A total of 311 web surveys were completed among the following types of respondents:
  - Past visitors to Rusk County – referred to throughout as 'Visitors' (N=177)
  - WI, MN, & IL residents who have not visited Rusk County – referred to throughout as 'Non-Visitors' (N=95)
  - Current Rusk County residents – referred to throughout as 'Residents' (N=39)
- To qualify for participation in the survey, respondents needed to be 25 years of age or older and travel for leisure at least 1-2 times a year, on average.
- Pilch & Barnet was responsible for sending out email invitations to the survey, which was fielded using existing email lists of past Rusk County visitors, prospective visitors, and residents.
  - It should be noted that, although the sample is among Rusk County's target market, it is not necessarily representative of the general population in the WI, MN, and IL regions.
  - As such, caution should be taken when interpreting the results.
- The questionnaire was designed by The DRG, in collaboration with Rusk County and Pilch & Barnet.
  - The DRG was responsible for programming the survey, monitoring data collection, data processing, analysis of results, and report development.
- Respondents were invited to enter a random drawing for a chance to win one of three \$100 gift cards as a token of appreciation for taking part in the survey.

# Executive Summary & Recommendations

# Executive Summary

## General Travel Behaviors Non-Residents

- Non-Residents are attracted to leisure travel destinations that offer the chance to relax by enjoying a variety of outdoor activities in beautiful natural surroundings.
  - Key factors impacting their destination choice include previous experiences, affordability, recommendations from others, and a place that's easy to reach.
  - Non-Visitors are more likely to be influenced by cost factors and ease of travelling to a destination compared to Visitors.
- They are most likely to take vacations and try new destinations during warmer seasons (Summer, early Fall, late Spring).
  - Nearly all Non-Residents (98%) have travelled for leisure in the Midwest, and almost as many (89%) have visited locations in Northern WI within the past five years.

## Rusk County Awareness

- Most Non-Residents have heard of both Rusk County and Ladysmith, and roughly half have visited the area.
  - Only 1 in 10 are unaware of either Rusk County or Ladysmith by name.
- When referring to the area, both Visitors and Non-Visitors are nearly as likely to call it either Ladysmith or Rusk County; however, Residents are most likely to call it Rusk County when speaking to those not from the area.



# Executive Summary

## Leisure Travel Activities, Experiences & Perceptions

- Visitors and Non-Visitors both enjoy trying new restaurants, shopping, exploring downtown areas, and attending local festivals when vacationing in Northern WI.
  - Non-Visitors participate in a number of water-related activities; about half mention having gone boating, fishing, or swimming in the past five years.
  - However, Visitors are more likely than Non-Visitors to have participated in these sports, as well as nearly all other leisure activities being measured.
- When comparing their experiences in Rusk County to other destinations they have visited, Visitors believe Rusk County is as good a place or better for doing many of the outdoor activities they enjoy.
  - But, when thinking about other common tourist activities like shopping, visiting art galleries, exploring downtown districts, or attending festivals, about a third believe other destinations offer better experiences.

## Accommodation Preferences

- Visitors stay in a number of different types of accommodations when in Rusk County ranging from hotels, with friends or family in the area, at their own vacation property, to cabin resorts and campgrounds.
- By contrast, Non-Visitors would be most likely to stay in either a hotel/motel or at a resort or cabin; relatively few would prefer to stay at a B&B or camping area.



# Executive Summary

## Visitor Experiences & Perceptions

- Visitors' satisfaction with their travel experiences in Rusk County is strong (75%), supported by the fact that most are likely to return in the future (81%) as well as recommend the area as a leisure travel destination to others (82%).
- When looking at the top activities Visitors report as being most important in their decision to choose Rusk County, a mix of outdoor and urban related activities are ranked highest.
  - Specifically, Visitors mention fishing (47%), trying new restaurants (28%), hiking (28%), and attending festivals (26%) among the activities they consider.
  - Some of the activities ranked lower in terms of their influence on destination choice include downhill skiing, cross country skiing, water skiing, and going Geocaching .
- According to Visitors, some of the most enjoyable aspects of Rusk County are its natural beauty and wildlife (34%), outdoor activities (32%), and festivals or other local events (16%).
  - Not surprisingly, these are the same things they are most likely to recommend to others.
- Very few offer suggestions for ways to improve amenities to better attract visitors, with improving hiking/riding trails (10%), and offering more restaurants (9%) being mentioned most often.

# Executive Summary

## Attracting New Visitors

- Relatively few Non-Visitors, who are aware of the Rusk County area, report being likely to visit within the next two years (11%).
- Lack of familiarity with the area is likely a barrier to future visits.
  - More than three-quarters say they are unfamiliar with any of the specific regions or cities in the county.
  - When asked what they do know about the area, 1 in 10 mention its beauty or having seen an advertisement.

## Resident Perceptions

- Most Residents are satisfied with living and working in Rusk County (72%); however, just over half (51%) would be likely to recommend the area to others as a place to come live and work.
- They consider the area's natural surroundings, sense of community, and its recreational activities to be some of the best things about living and working in the county and what differentiates it from other Northern WI destinations.
  - Residents participate in many of the same activities as Visitors, like shopping, visiting farmers' markets, going to restaurants and attending festivals.
- A number of Residents cite the need to bring in new business to the area, provide better job opportunities, and offer more family-friendly activities in order to attract new residents to the county.

# Recommendations

1

Develop marketing **communications focusing on the beautiful and unique aspects of the area's landscape**, like the Flambeau River and Blue Hills to increase familiarity and consideration. Broaden perceptions beyond that of a great fishing destination by touting the breadth of activities the area has to offer.

2

**Personalize the Rusk County brand image** through messaging that centers on the **emotional aspects** associated with visitor experiences including, **peaceful** natural surroundings, **relaxation**, **family-friendly** activities, and **sense of community** among welcoming local residents.

3

**Increase the appeal of downtown areas** by raising awareness of the **shopping, restaurant and cultural activities** the cities in Rusk County have to offer. Partner with local business and government leaders to **support growth in the business sector** of the community.

4

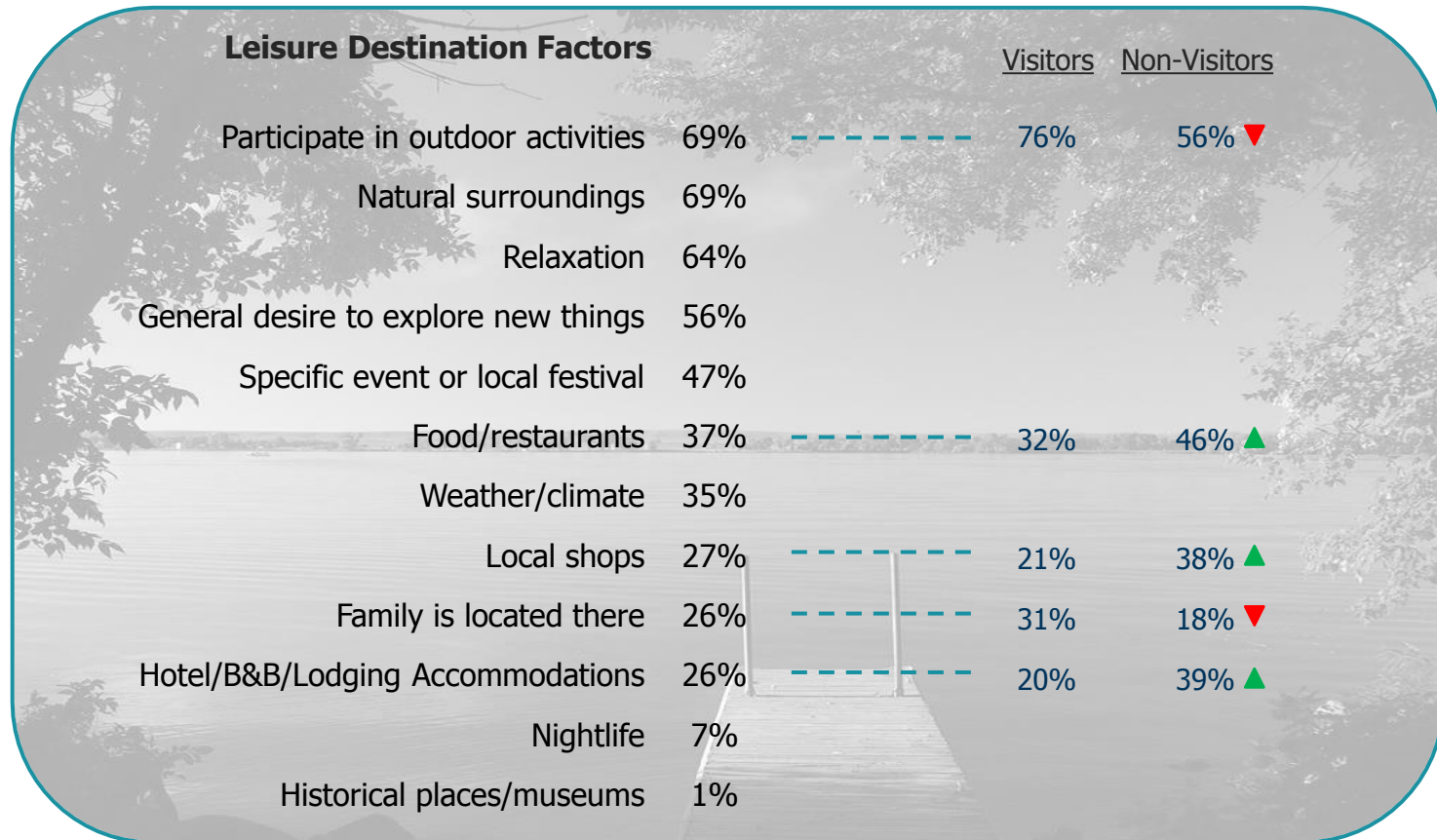
**Leverage the loyalty and passion among Visitors and Residents** to act as Rusk County ambassadors to **help spread word-of-mouth** and raise awareness and interest in visiting. **Reinforce brand awareness** by **referencing the area as Rusk County** to encompass all communities.

## Detailed Findings

# General Travel Behavior Non-Residents

# Enjoying outdoor activities, natural surroundings and relaxation are some of the key attractions to a leisure destination among Non-Residents.

- Participating in outdoor activities is particularly attractive to Rusk County Visitors (76%), although more than half (56%) of Non-Visitors seek them as well.



Q1. When considering leisure travel, what attracts you to a certain destination? (Total Non-Residents N=272, Visitors N=177, Non-Visitors N=95)

# They also look for locations with beautiful natural surroundings, particularly those near bodies of water, that will give them a sense of relaxation.

- In addition to beautiful geography (75%) nearby lakes or rivers (72%), many Non-Residents want to be in a secluded (42%) location.

Many seek a sense of **adventure**, a place that offers a **variety of activities** at an **affordable** price.

For some, being **family-oriented** is important; an area that offers **historical sites** is meaningful as well.

Few are looking for an upscale or hip setting.

## Travel Destination Desires



### Visual Appeal

Beautiful	75%
Near body of water	72%
Secluded	42%



### Relaxation

Relaxation	74%
Escape	55%
Quiet	44%
Low key	37%

The destination needs to be a **relaxing escape** in a calm, **low key** environment.



### Action Oriented

Adventure	49%
Lots of activities	32%
Excitement	19%



### Meets Needs

Inexpensive	47%
Family friendly	31%



### Feeling

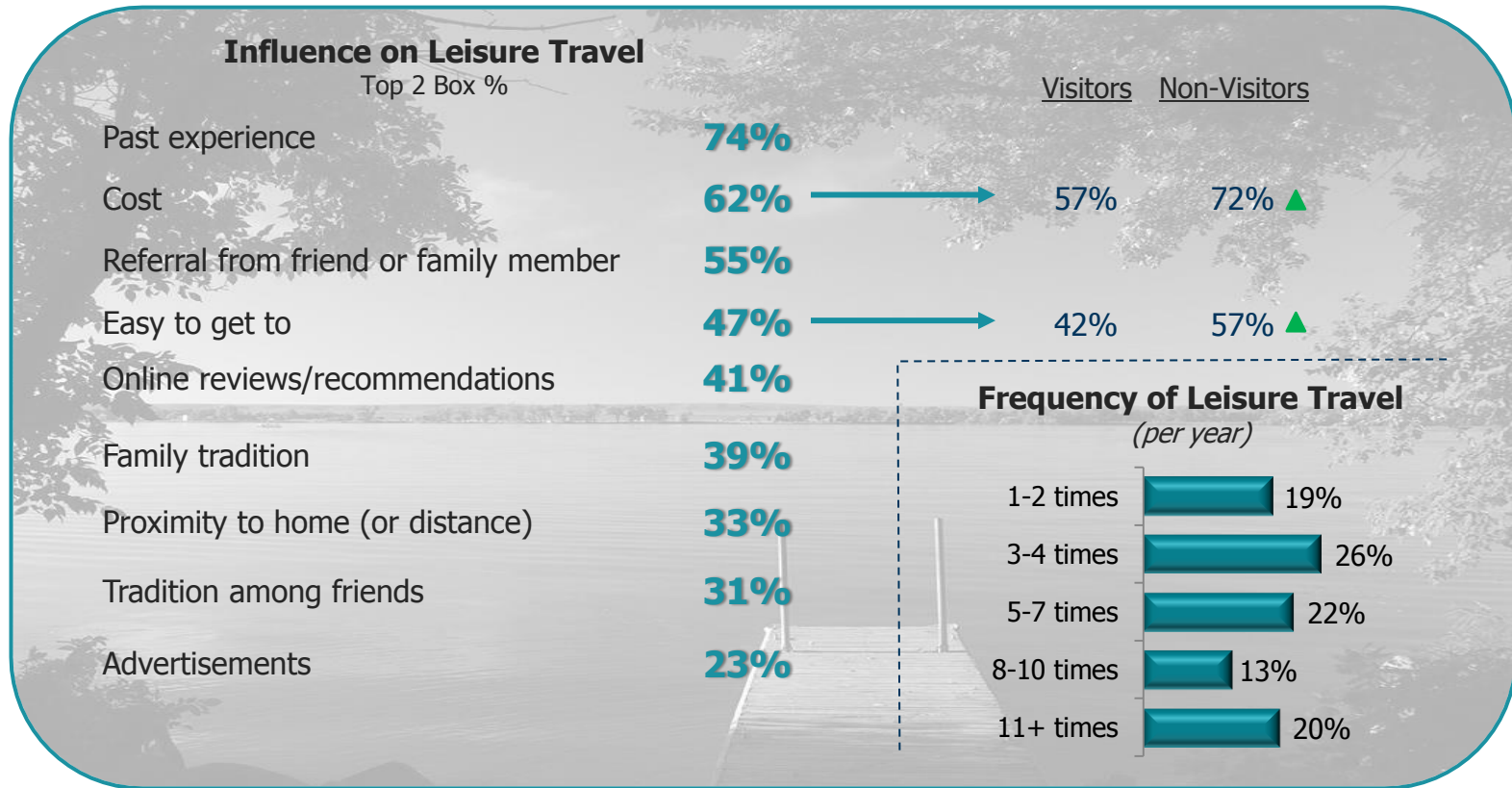
History	38%
Upscale	7%
Hip	1%

Q5. Which of the following words or phrases describe what you look for in a leisure travel destination? (Total Non-Residents N=272)



# Past experiences, overall cost, and word of mouth from friends or family are key factors influencing their destination choice.

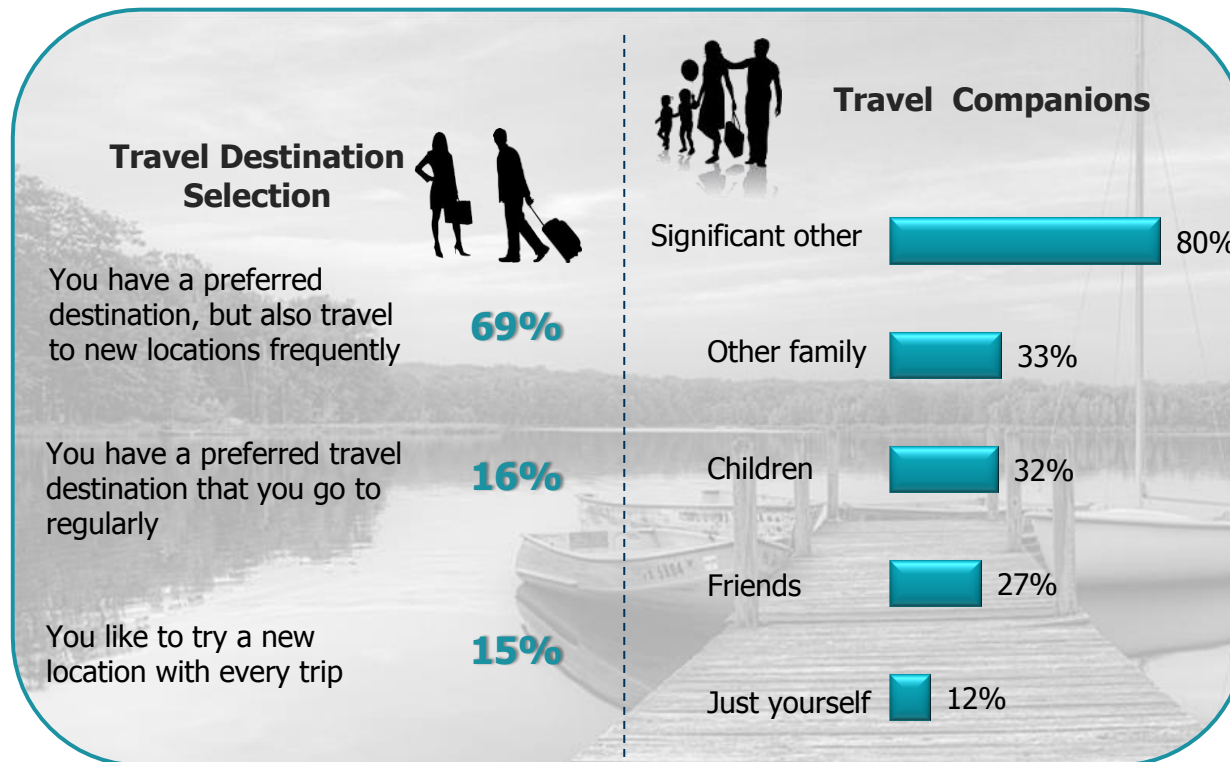
- Non-Visitors are more likely to mention cost (72%) and a destination that's easy to get to (57%) as being influential factors compared to Visitors (57% & 42% respectively).
  - Roughly 4 in 10 cite online reviews (41%) and family tradition (39%) as being influential.



Q2. How influential are the following on your decision regarding where to go for leisure travel? (Total Non-Residents N=272, Visitors N=177, Non-Visitors N=95)  
S5. How many times a year do you typically travel for leisure? (N=311)

# Overall, Non-Residents tend to have a preferred destination in mind, yet they frequently try new locations.

- Among these Non-Residents, most are vacationing with a significant other (80%) and about a third are taking along family (33%) and/or children (32%).

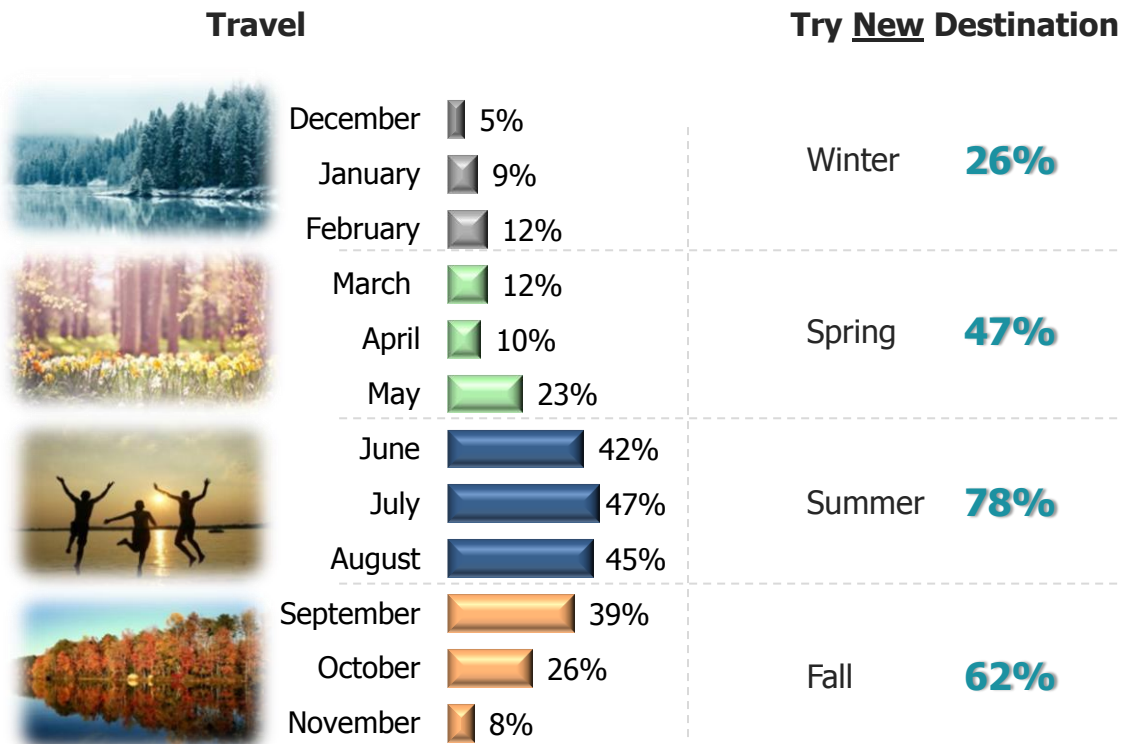


Q3. When choosing a destination for your leisure travel, which of the following best describes you? (Total Non-Residents N=272)  
Q6. Who do you typically travel with for leisure? (Total Non-Residents N=272)

# Not surprisingly, their leisure travel is most likely to take place during warmer months of the year.

- In particular, the summer months of June, July, and August are when Non-Visitors are most likely to consider taking a vacation.

## When Considering Leisure Travel, Season/Month Most Likely to ...



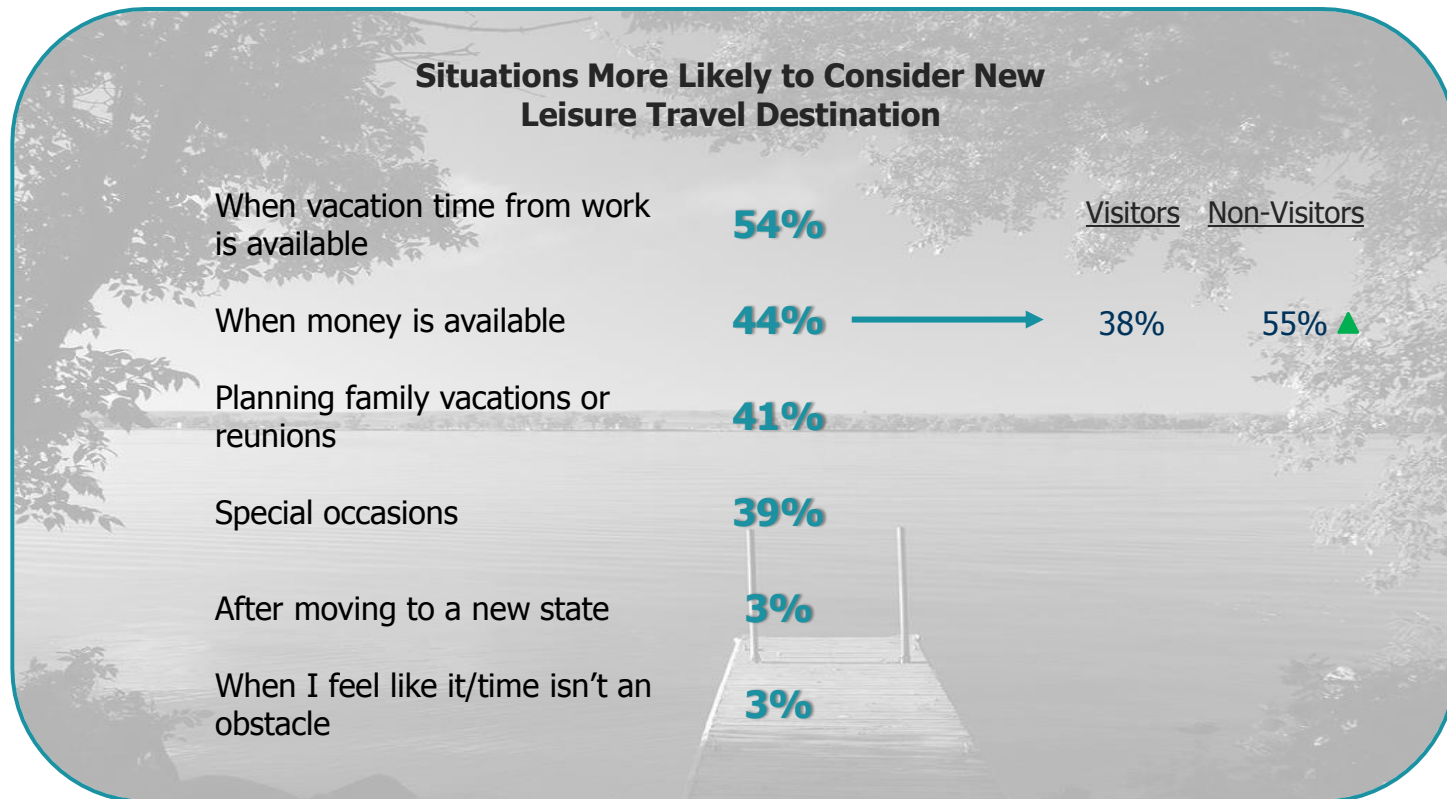
Likewise, Non-Visitors are more likely to try a new leisure travel destination in the Summer (78%) or Fall (62%), followed by Spring (47%).

Just over one quarter (26%) would be interested in going somewhere new in the Winter months.

Q7. In which months are you most likely to be traveling for leisure purposes? (Total Non-Residents N=272)  
 Q4. In which seasons or situations are you more likely to try a new leisure travel destination? (Non-Residents N=232)

# Having vacation time away from work, enough money, or planned family gatherings are times when they might try a new destination.

- Just under 4 in 10 (39%) mention being likely to try a new vacation spot for a special occasion.
  - Very few are likely to say that they would go someplace new “when they feel like it” (3%) or after moving to a new state (3%).

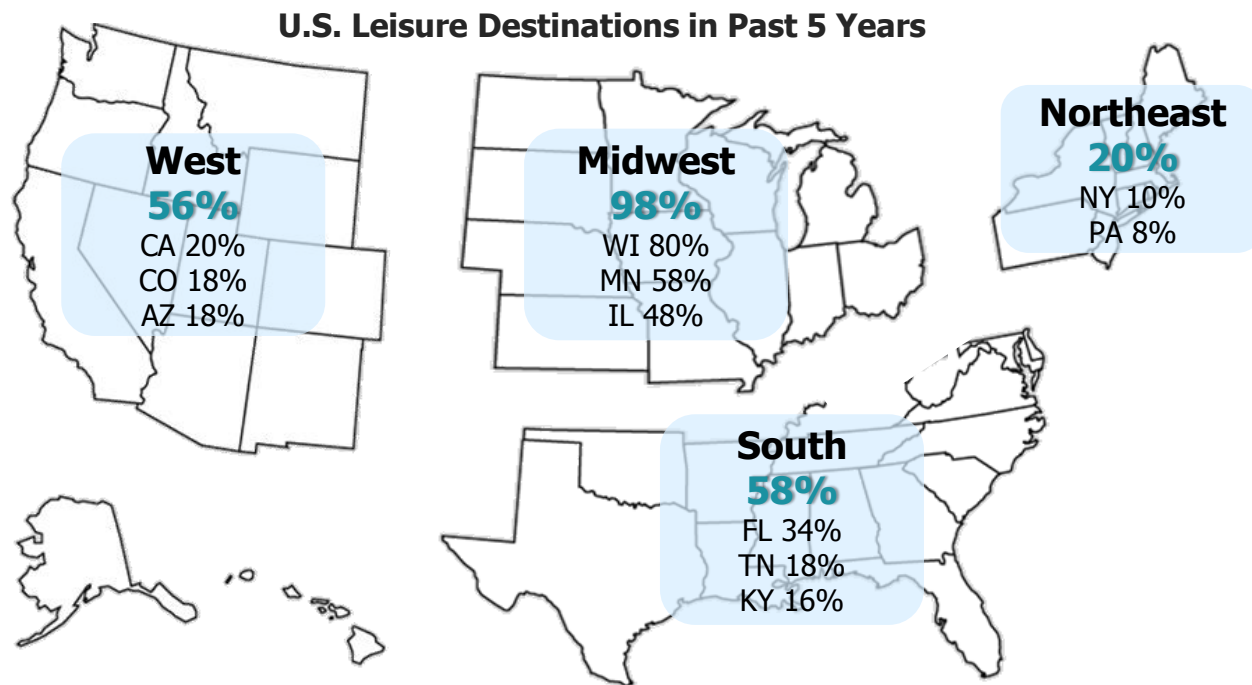


Q4. In which seasons or situations are you more likely to try a new leisure travel destination? (Non-Residents N=232)

# Northern Wisconsin Travel Experience Non-Residents

# Not surprisingly, WI is the most common leisure travel destination among the Non-Residents in the study.

- Most Non-Residents (80%) have visited WI destinations for their vacation travel over the past five years, followed by MN (58%), and IL (48%).
- However, over half have also chosen destinations in the Southern region of the U.S. (58%) and West (56%).
  - Just over 2 in 10 (22%) have traveled internationally for leisure in the past five years.



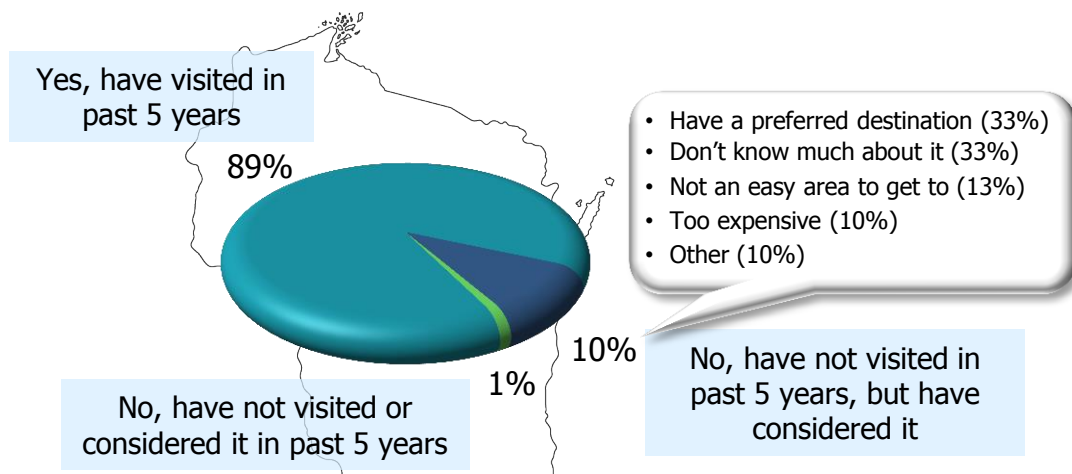
Q8. Which of the following states have you visited for leisure in the last 5 years? (Total Non-Residents N=272)



# In particular, locations in Northern WI are the most common destinations of choice among Non-Residents.

- Nearly 9 in 10 have visited the northern half of the state for leisure within the past five years.
  - When thinking about visiting Northern WI, the most commonly mentioned impressions focus on **enjoying its natural beauty** and the **outdoor activities** it has to offer.
  - Roughly 2 in 10 describe the feeling of **getting away** from it all and its **peacefulness**, followed by activities like **attending festivals or visiting local businesses**.

Visited Northern WI in Past 5 Years



Top-of-Mind Impressions About Vacationing in Northern WI

Beauty/Enjoying the nature	47%
Enjoying outdoor activities	37%
Getting away/peaceful/no crowds	21%
Festivals/local businesses & activities	17%
Relaxing	14%
Visiting towns/villages	8%
Spending time with family/friends	6%
Cabins	6%
Friendly people	4%
Sites (Blue Hills, Flambeau River)	4%
Camping	3%
Driving around to view the scenery	3%
Fun	3%
Enjoying the history	3%
Clean air/water	2%
Other single mentions	14%

Q8a. Have you visited Northern Wisconsin for leisure in the last 5 years? (Total Non-Residents N=272)

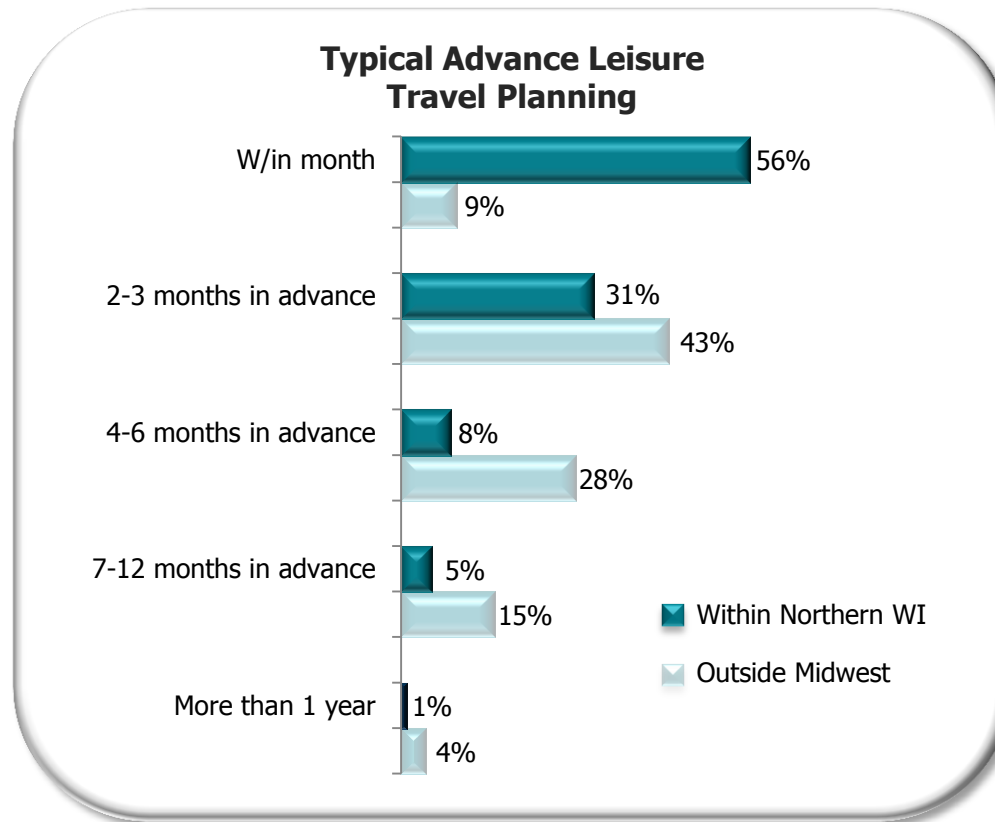
Q9b. Which of the following reasons best describes why you have not visited Northern Wisconsin in the past 5 years? (Non-Residents Not Visiting Northern WI in Past 5 Years N=30)

Q14. When you think of vacationing in Northern Wisconsin, what comes to mind? (Total Non-Residents N=264)



# It's not uncommon for Non-Residents to make their Northern WI travel plans on relatively short notice.

- Over half (56%) say they typically plan their trips "up north" within the same month.
  - Overall, relatively few Non-Residents plan Northern WI trips more than three months in advance.



13. How far in advance do you typically plan your travel to Northern Wisconsin? (*Non-Residents N=264*)  
How far in advance do you typically plan your travel outside of the Midwest? (*Non-Residents N=272*)

# Rusk County Area Awareness & Perceptions

# Green Bay, Door County, and Hayward are the top three most commonly visited Northern WI destinations within this competitive set.

- About half have visited Rusk County (53%) and/or Ladysmith (48%), comparable to past five year travel experiences among competitive cities nearest to Rusk County.
  - Their likelihood to have visited or considered visiting the Rusk County area is similar to that of the six cities near Rusk County, suggesting that competition for visitors is stiff.

## Visitation – Awareness – Consideration (Competitive Northern WI Destinations)

	Have Visited for Leisure	Have Considered Visiting	Haven't Considered Visiting	Haven't Heard of It
<b>Rusk County</b>	53%	24%	14%	9%
<b>Ladysmith</b>	48%	20%	22%	10%
Green Bay	71%	20%	8%	<1%
Door County	67%	24%	7%	2%
Hayward	65%	18%	14%	3%
Minocqua	58%	22%	15%	4%
Eagle River	56%	30%	11%	3%
Rhineland	54%	27%	17%	2%
Bayfield	49%	29%	15%	7%
Chetek	34%	26%	21%	19%

### Barriers to Visiting Rusk County (Among Aware Non-Visitors)

Not that familiar with the area	71%
Chose another destination	25%
Too far away	12%

Q10. Which of the following best describes your experience with the cities and/or areas in Northern Wisconsin listed below? (Total Non-Residents N=272)  
 Q12. Which of the following reasons played into your decision not to visit Rusk County? (Total Non-Residents N=83)

# In addition to Rusk County and Ladysmith, nearly half of Non-Residents mention having visited the Flambeau River.

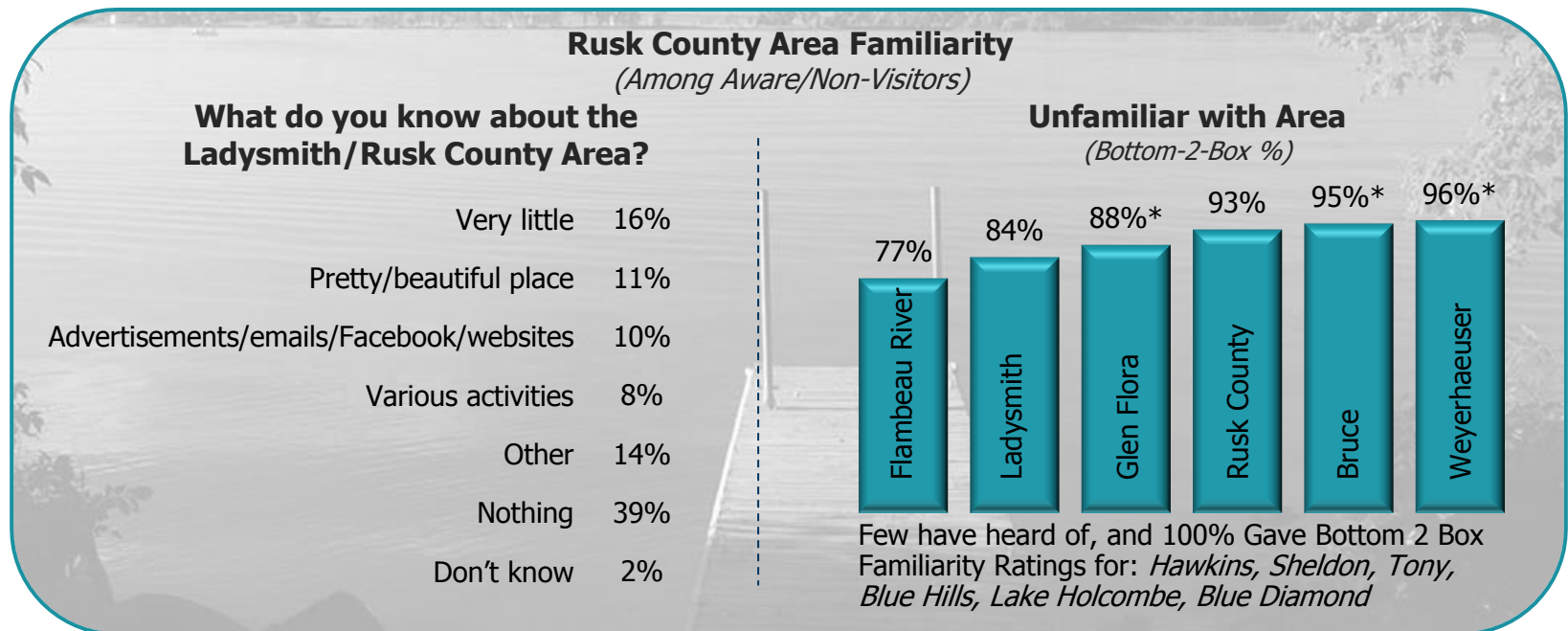
- Just 1 in 10 are unaware of Rusk County (9%), Ladysmith (10%), and the Flambeau River (12%); however, Non-Residents are less likely to be aware or have visited other cities and regions throughout the county.
  - Roughly 3 in 10 have visited either Bruce (32%), the Blue Hills (31%), Lake Holcombe (30%), and/or Weyerhaeuser (28%).

Visitation – Awareness – Consideration (Competitive Northern WI Destinations)				
	Have Visited for Leisure	Have Considered Visiting	Haven't Considered Visiting	Haven't Heard of It
<b>Rusk County</b>	53%	24%	14%	9%
<b>Ladysmith</b>	48%	20%	22%	10%
Flambeau River	48%	26%	14%	12%
Bruce	32%	16%	15%	36%
Blue Hills	31%	14%	10%	46%
Lake Holcombe	30%	15%	18%	36%
Weyerhaeuser	28%	14%	19%	38%
Glen Flora	22%	15%	18%	44%
Tony	21%	13%	20%	46%
Hawkins	17%	17%	19%	46%
Blue Diamond area	15%	13%	19%	53%
Sheldon	13%	19%	22%	46%

Q11. Which of the following best describes your experience with these other areas in WI? (Total Non-Residents N=272)

# However, familiarity with the specific Rusk County areas is very limited.

- Among Non-Visitors who have heard of one or more areas within the county, over 7 in 10 describe being unfamiliar with the destination, in fact, 4 in 10 (39%) are not able to describe the area in any detail.
  - Those who have perceptions of the area think of it as a beautiful place (11%) offering a variety of activities (8%).



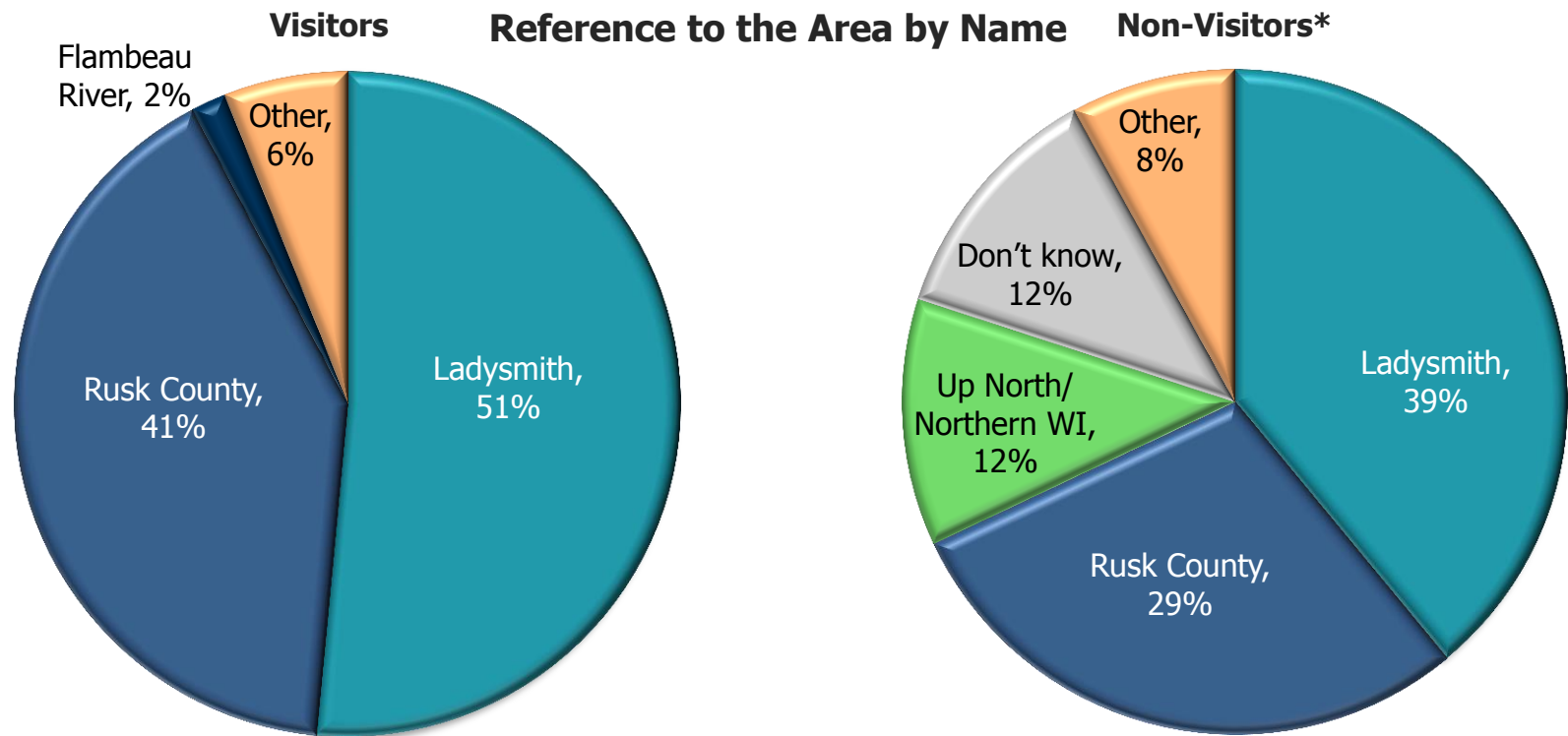
Q16. What have you seen, heard or read about the Ladysmith/Rusk County area? (Aware/Non-Visitor N=83)

Q14a. How familiar would you say you are with the following Northern Wisconsin locations? (Have At Least Heard of City N=14-73)

Note: Totals may not add to 100% due to rounding. \*Caution when interpreting data due to small sample sizes <30

# When referencing the area to others, Aware Non-Visitors are most likely to call it either Ladysmith and Rusk County.

- Nearly 4 in 10 (39%) call the area Ladysmith, while 3 in 10 (29%) simply call it Rusk County.



Q15. When thinking about this are of Northern Wisconsin, do you typically refer to it as..? (Aware/Non-Visitor N=83)  
\*Note: Totals may not add to 100% due to rounding.

# When visiting Northern WI, Non-Residents are likely to participate in a wide variety of leisure activities.

- Typical tourist activities such as trying new restaurants, shopping, exploring downtown areas and attending local festivals top the list of things they have enjoyed doing, followed closely by outdoor activities including boating, fishing, hiking, and swimming.
  - While more than half of Non-Visitors have participated in these activities, participation rates tend to be lower than Visitors and, in particular, Non-Visitors are less likely to even be interested in canoeing (36%), fishing (29%), hiking (17%), or boating (13%).

## Participation – Consideration in Leisure Activities (Past 5 Yrs) (Non-Resident Northern WI Visitors)

	<u>Participated</u>		<u>Considered</u>		<u>Would not Consider</u>		<u>Uninterested</u>	
	Visitor	Non-Visitor	Visitor	Non-Visitor	Visitor	Non-Visitor	Visitor	Non-Visitor
Trying new restaurants	93%	85%	5%	13%	-	3%	2%	-
Shopping	89%	72% ▼	5%	18% ▲	-	4%	6%	6%
Exploring downtown/local community	88%	83%	8%	14%	-	1%	5%	1%
Attending festivals	87%	75% ▼	12%	24% ▲	-	-	1%	1%
Boating	79%	56% ▼	15%	28% ▲	2%	4%	4%	13% ▲
Fishing	79%	50% ▼	12%	19%	1%	1%	8%	29% ▲
Hiking	78%	58% ▼	15%	21%	1%	4%	5%	17% ▲
Visiting farmers' markets	78%	58% ▼	18%	36% ▲	1%	4%	3%	1%
Visiting museums	73%	57% ▼	19%	36% ▲	2%	1%	6%	6%
Swimming	71%	49% ▼	13%	22%	3%	11% ▲	14%	18%
Canoeing	56%	24% ▼	28%	35%	5%	6%	10%	36% ▲

Q9. Which of the following best describes the activities you may or may not have participated in over the past 5 years while away from home on a leisure trip or vacation (in Northern Wisconsin)?  
(Have visited Northern WI in past 5 years, Visitors N=170, Non-Visitors N=72) (Note: A – indicates that zero respondents chose this option.)



# Rusk County Visitors are also more likely to participate in a wider range of outdoor activities than Non-Visitors.

- Interestingly, Non-Visitors are less interested than Visitors in a number of outdoor activities such as hunting, ATVing, kayaking, and water skiing, as well as Winter sports including ice fishing, snowmobiling, and cross country or downhill skiing.

## Participation – Consideration in Leisure Activities (Past 5 Yrs)

(Non-Resident Northern WI Visitors)

	<u>Participated</u>		<u>Considered</u>		<u>Would not Consider</u>		<u>Uninterested</u>	
	Visitor	Non-Visitor	Visitor	Non-Visitor	Visitor	Non-Visitor	Visitor	Non-Visitor
Biking	46%	31% ▼	29%	32%	4%	4%	21%	33% ▲
Hunting	46%	6% ▼	15%	7% ▼	2%	8%	36%	79% ▲
ATVing	43%	11% ▼	29%	19%	3%	6%	25%	64% ▲
Visiting Art galleries/Studios	42%	43%	33%	32%	7%	8%	18%	17%
Ice fishing	42%	11% ▼	22%	22%	4%	3%	32%	64% ▲
Kayaking	41%	18% ▼	32%	36%	5%	8%	22%	38% ▲
Birding	34%	18% ▼	28%	28%	8%	8%	30%	46% ▲
Snowmobiling	31%	18% ▼	32%	8% ▼	3%	1%	35%	72% ▲
Cross country skiing	19%	7% ▼	36%	36%	11%	7%	34%	50% ▲
Water skiing	18%	14%	18%	10%	12%	6%	52%	71% ▲
Downhill skiing	14%	8%	22%	11% ▼	12%	7%	52%	74% ▲
Geocaching	12%	3% ▼	32%	22%	9%	8%	47%	67% ▲

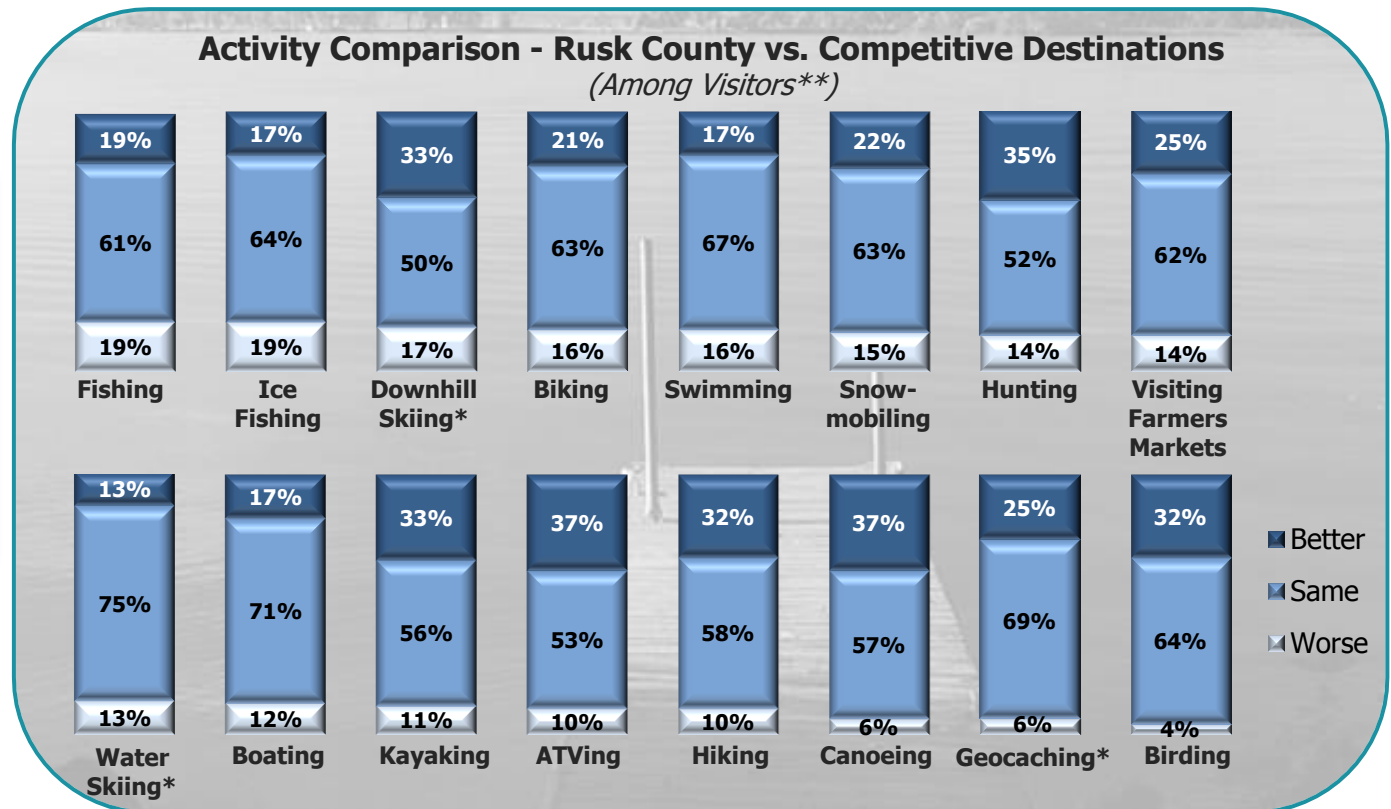
Q9. Which of the following best describes the activities you may or may not have participated in over the past 5 years while away from home on a leisure trip or vacation (in Northern Wisconsin)?  
(Have visited Northern WI in past 5 years, Visitors N=170, Non-Visitors N=72) (Note: A – indicates that zero respondents chose this option.)

# Overall, Visitors consider the activities offered in Rusk County to be on par or better than competitor destinations.

- Travelers who have visited both Rusk County and at least one key competitor destination were asked to compare the activities they've enjoyed in Rusk County to their experience with a competitor location.
- Roughly 8 in 10 Visitors or more say that Rusk County offers as good or better locations to enjoy the outdoor activities shown below.

About one-third or more believe **Rusk County offers better experiences** than competitor destinations for the following activities:

- Canoeing (37%)
- ATVing (37%)
- Hunting (35%)
- Kayaking (33%)
- Downhill skiing (33%)
- Hiking (32%)
- Birding (32%)

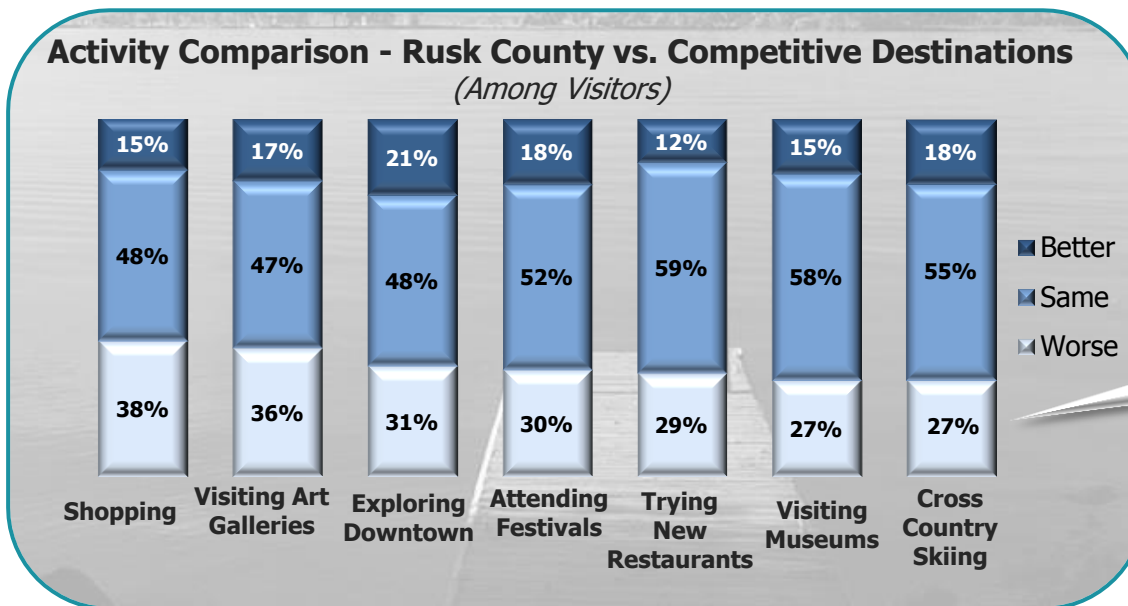


Q22. Based on what you have seen or heard, how does each of the following activities in Rusk County compare to [CITY]? (Visitors N=16-140)

\*Caution when interpreting data due to small sample sizes <30

# However, there are a number of leisure activities where some Visitors express preferences for certain activities elsewhere.

- Visitors tend to be more likely to believe that Rusk County lags other destinations in terms of various urban focused activities including:
  - Shopping (38%)
  - Visiting art galleries (36%)
  - Exploring downtown (31%)
  - Attending festivals (30%)
  - Trying new restaurants (29%)
  - Visiting museums (27%)
  - Attending festivals (30%)
  - Trying new restaurants (29%)
  - Visiting museums (27%)



**Cross country skiing** is the only outdoor experience that trails competitor destinations.

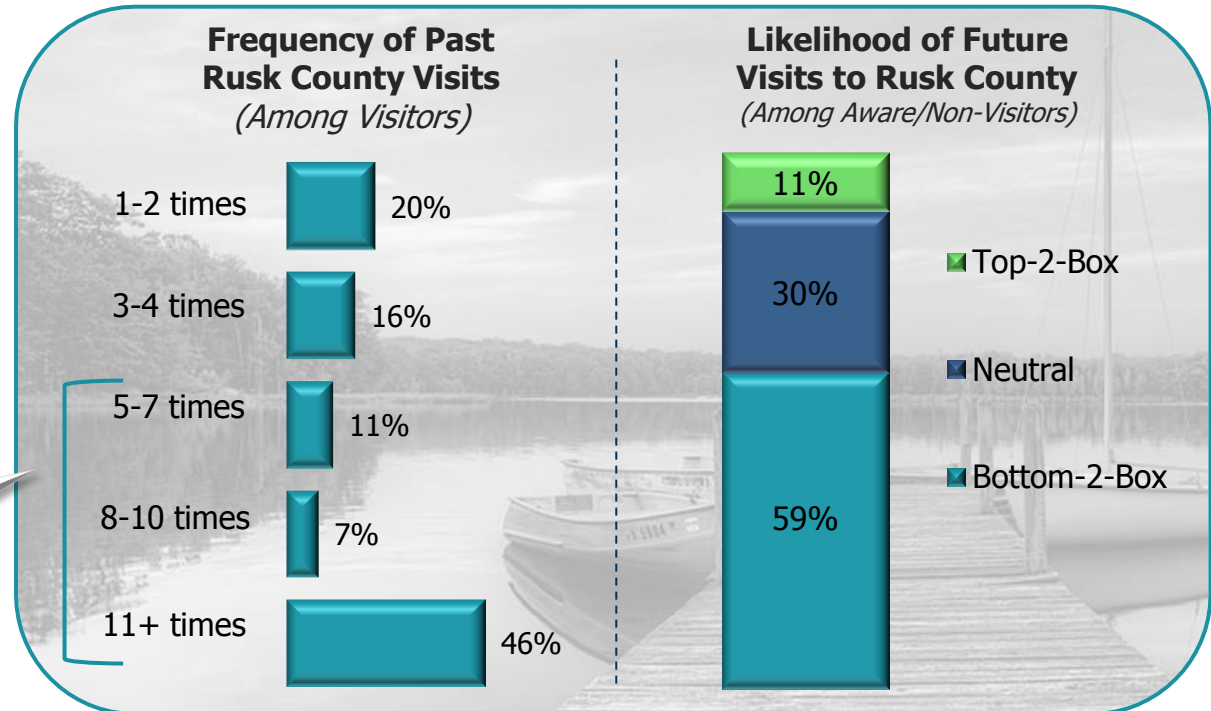
Q22. Based on what you have seen or heard, how does each of the following activities in Rusk County compare to [CITY]? (Visitors N=16-140)

# Overall, these Visitors are rather frequent visitors to the Rusk County area.

- Nearly two-thirds (64%) of Visitors have come to the area at least five times or more, with 46% having visited over ten times.
- When Aware Non-Visitors were asked how likely they would be to travel to Rusk County for a leisure trip in the next two years, 1 in 10 (11%) state they are likely to and 3 in 10 (30%) are ambivalent.
- However, nearly 6 in 10 (59%) indicate they are not likely to choose Rusk County as a leisure travel destination in the next two years.

**64%**

Visitors who have returned to Rusk County 5+ times.



■ Top-2-Box

■ Neutral

■ Bottom-2-Box

Q19. About how many times would you say you've visited Rusk County in the past? (Total Visitors N=177)

Q18. How likely are you to make Rusk County a leisure travel destination within the next two years? (Aware/Non-Visitors N=83)

# Visitors tend to stay in a variety of different accommodations, while Non-Visitors would prefer to stay at either a hotel or resort if they were to visit.

- Staying at hotels or motels (37%) is the most common form of lodging among Visitors and is the most preferred accommodation (41%) among Non-Visitors, followed by resorts or cabins (30%).

Just under one-third of Visitors have either **friends or family** in the area (31%) or **own property** in Rusk County (30%).



## Past Rusk County Accommodations (Among Visitors)

<b>37%</b>	Hotel or motel
<b>31%</b>	Friends or family
<b>30%</b>	Property I own
<b>26%</b>	Resort or cabins
<b>21%</b>	Traditional campground
<b>14%</b>	RV campground
<b>6%</b>	Bed & Breakfast/Inn
<b>3%</b>	Day trip only

## Preferred Rusk County Accommodations (Among Aware/Non-Visitors)

<b>41%</b>	Hotel or motel
<b>1%</b>	Friends or family
<b>30%</b>	Resort or cabins
<b>5%</b>	Traditional campground
<b>10%</b>	RV campground
<b>12%</b>	Bed & Breakfast Inn

Q21b. During your past visits to Rusk County, at which of the following types of accommodations have you stayed? (Total Visitors N=177)

Q18a. If you were to consider visiting Rusk County, at which one of the following types of accommodations would you prefer to stay? (Aware/Non-Visitors N=83)

# The desire for a leisure destination with good fishing opportunities is an important selection criteria among Visitors.

- Almost half (47%) of Visitors include **fishing** among the top three activities that are most important to them when choosing a travel location.
- However, they participate in a wide range of activities besides fishing, including trying new **restaurants** (75%), **shopping** (68%), and **exploring downtown** areas (67%).
- Recent participation is somewhat lower for outdoor sports such as **canoeing** (44%), **ATVing** (34%), **hunting** (30%), and **kayaking** (29%).

**Importance & Participation in Northern WI Activities**  
(Among Visitors)

Activities	Top 3 Most Important	Participated	Aware of Haven't Participated
Fishing	47%	65%	33%
Trying new restaurants	28%	75%	23%
Hiking	28%	56%	39%
Attending festivals	26%	53%	37%
Exploring downtown/local community	23%	67%	29%
Hunting	22%	30%	64%
ATVing	18%	34%	60%
Boating	16%	55%	41%
Canoeing	15%	44%	51%
Shopping	13%	68%	30%
Kayaking	11%	29%	63%

Q21a. Please rank the top three activities (among those you have participated in Northern WI) in terms of their importance in choosing Rusk County as a leisure travel destination. (Visitors N=174)  
Q21. Based on what you know about the area, which of the following activities does Rusk County have to offer and which have you participated in during your most recent visit? (Visitors N=177)



# There are many activities Visitors participate in, although they don't significantly influence their destination choice.

- During their most recent visit to Rusk County, just over half have gone **swimming** (53%), followed by **visiting farmers' markets** (45%), going to **museums** (44%), **biking** (31%), and **bird watching** (29%).
- Not surprisingly, given that Winter leisure travel is less common overall, participation in winter sports is somewhat lower, including **ice fishing** (27%), **snowmobiling** (23%), **cross country skiing** (15%), and **downhill skiing** (10%).

**Importance & Participation in Northern WI Activities**  
(Among Visitors)

Activities	Top 3 Most Important	Participated	Aware of Haven't Participated
Snowmobiling	9%	23%	70%
Swimming	7%	53%	44%
Visiting museums	7%	44%	42%
Ice fishing	7%	27%	68%
Birding	6%	29%	53%
Visiting farmers' markets	6%	45%	44%
Biking	6%	31%	61%
Art galleries	2%	22%	58%
Downhill skiing	1%	10%	67%
Cross country skiing	1%	15%	74%
Water skiing	1%	13%	75%
Geocaching	1%	7%	58%

Q21. Based on what you know about the area, which of the following activities does Rusk County have to offer and which have you participated in during your most recent visit? (Visitors N=177)  
Q21a. Earlier you mentioned participating in the following activities in Northern Wisconsin. Please rank the top three. (Visitors N=174)



# Visitors cite the natural beauty of the region, its wildlife, and outdoor activities as the most enjoyable aspects of their stays.

- These are also the features of Rusk County that Visitors are most likely to tout when recommending things to do if asked by those who have never traveled to the area.
  - Among the relatively few who mentioned any suggested improvements, improving hiking trails (10%), offering more restaurant choices (9%), more activities (7%), and fostering new business development (7%) were mentioned most frequently.

## Most Enjoyable Aspects of Visits<sup>+</sup>

Natural beauty/wildlife	34%
Enjoying outdoor activities	32%
Festivals/local businesses & activities	16%
Getting away/peaceful/no crowds	16%
Spending time with family/friends	15%
Sites to visit (Blue Hills, Flambeau River)	9%
Relaxing environment	8%
Friendly people	8%
Driving around to view the scenery	5%

## Visitor Recommendations <sup>+</sup>

Enjoying outdoor activities (Hiking, fishing, boating)	<b>39%</b>
Sites to visit (Blue Hills, Flambeau River, etc.)	<b>28%</b>
Beauty/enjoying nature (Water, forests, wildlife)	<b>27%</b>
Festivals/local businesses and activities	<b>11%</b>

## Suggested Improvements

Improved hiking/riding trails	10%
More restaurants	9%
More activities/events	7%
More/improved businesses	7%
Advertise more	5%
More shopping	5%
Improve wildlife population	3%
Improve roads	3%
Less crowds/traffic	3%
Nothing, satisfied	39%
Other single mentions	9%
Don't know	5%

Q23. What were the most enjoyable aspects of your visit(s) to Rusk County? (Total Visitors N=177)

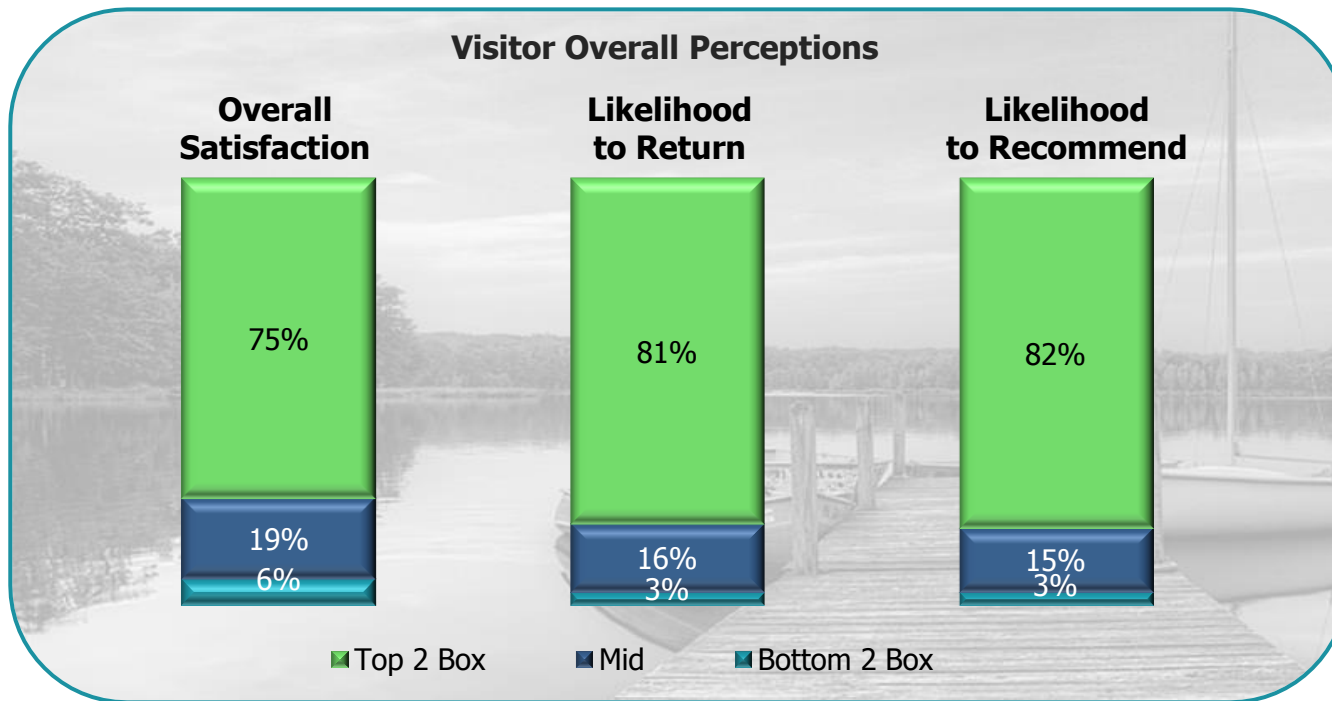
Q25. If you were to tell someone who had never visited the area one thing they should do or see in Rusk County, what would it be? (Total Visitors N=176)

Q24. What would you like to see improved or changed in Rusk County to make your visits there better or more enjoyable? (Total Visitors N=176)

<sup>+</sup>Only showing mentions 5% or more.

# Overall, these Visitors are satisfied with what Rusk County has to offer and are likely to be strong advocates of the area to prospective visitors.

- In fact, just over 8 in 10 (81%) say they are likely to return for visit within the next two years and just as many (82%) would be likely to recommend the area to friends and family.



Q26. Overall, how satisfied are you with Rusk County as a leisure travel destination? (*Total Visitors N=177*)

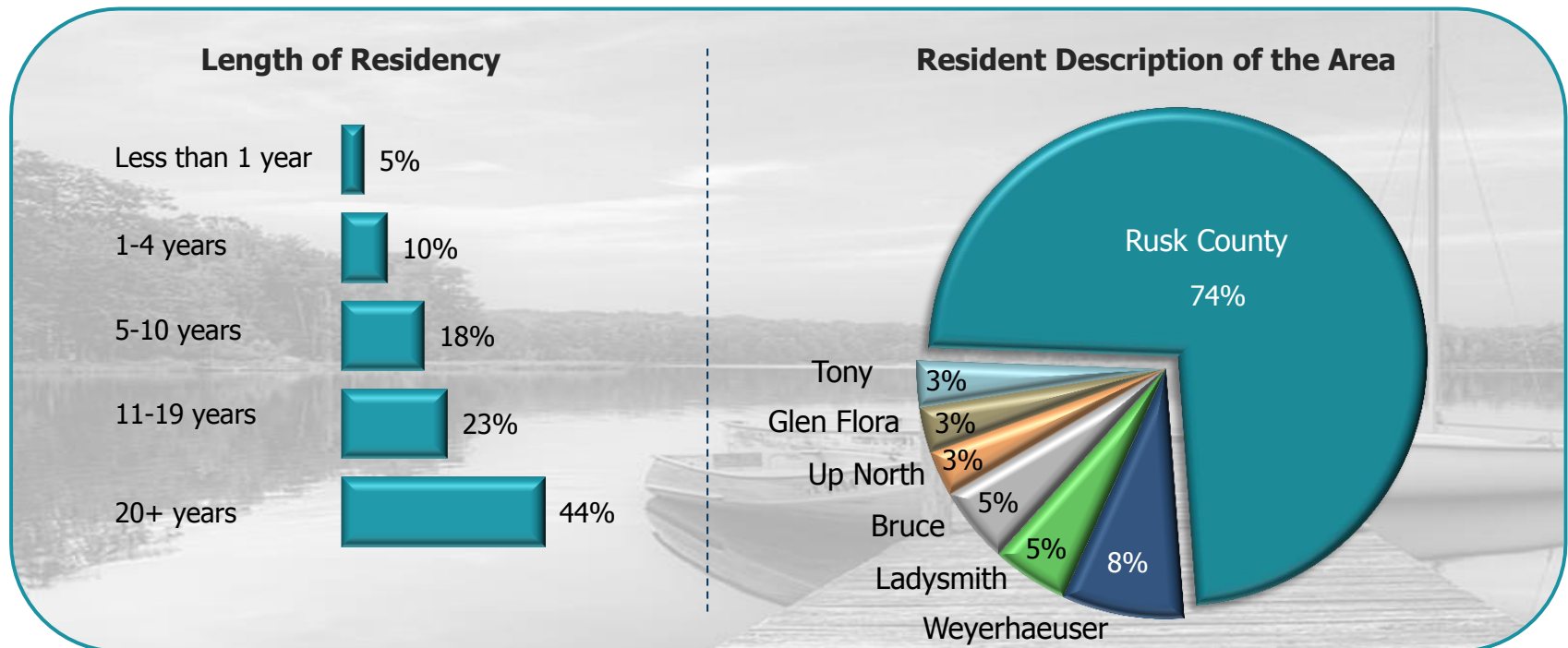
Q27. How likely are you to return to Rusk County as a leisure travel destination within the next two years? (*Total Visitors N=177*)

Q28. If a friend or family member were to ask, how likely would you be to recommend they visit Rusk County? (*Total Visitors N=177*)

# Rusk County Resident Perceptions

# Rusk County resident respondents are predominately those who have lived in the area for over 10 years.

- Most of these residents refer to the area as “Rusk County” when talking with people not from the area, rather than referencing a specific city.
  - Among those who refer to a city, nearly 1 in 10 (8%) talk about Weyerhaeuser, while only 5% call it Ladysmith.



Q30. How long have you been a resident of Rusk County? (Total Residents N=39)

Q29. When talking to someone from outside the community, do you typically refer to the area as..? (Total Residents N=39)

# Residents tout the area's recreational activities, natural surroundings, events, festivals, and friendly people as it's defining traits.

- They are most likely to suggest visitors take advantage of the area's festivals, the excellent fishing the Flambeau River has to offer, and the beautiful landscape of the Blue Hills and it's system of hiking trails.
  - One-third or less consider Rusk County to be unique from surrounding areas in terms of cost, shopping, being family friendly, restaurant options, lodging or nightlife.

## What Differentiates Rusk County

Recreational activities available	74%
Natural surroundings	64%
Local events/festivals	51%
Friendliness of the people	49%
Price	33%
Local shops	31%
Kid/family-friendly	26%
Food/restaurants	18%
Weather/climate	15%
Lodging Accommodations/Hotels	10%
Nightlife	8%

## Recommendations from Residents

Area Festivals	26%
Fishing/ Hiking	21%
The Flambeau River	18%
Blue Hills	15%
Other single mentions	38%



Q31. What differentiates the Rusk County area from other Northern Wisconsin leisure travel destinations? (Total Residents N=39)

Q33. If you were to tell someone not from the area one thing they should do or see when visiting Rusk County, what would it be? (Total Residents N=39)

# Locals are not only advocates of the amenities the area has to offer, they enjoy participating in many of the activities themselves.

- In addition to shopping, more than 7 in 10 have visited local farmers' markets, tried new restaurants, and attended festivals in the area twice or more in the past year.
  - Roughly 6 in 10 explore downtown districts, go to museums or historical sites, or participate in fishing and hiking activities.

**Rusk County Activity Participation in Past Year**

	2+	Once	Not in Past Year		2+	Once	Not in Past Year
Shopping	92%	8%	0%	Hunting	38%	10%	10%
Visit farmers' markets	79%	13%	5%	Birding	36%	8%	18%
Try new restaurants	77%	13%	10%	Biking	28%	21%	26%
Attend festivals/events	72%	26%	3%	Canoeing	28%	18%	33%
Exploring downtown	62%	18%	18%	Snowmobiling	26%	5%	21%
Visit museums/historic sites	62%	18%	18%	Ice fishing	18%	23%	28%
Hiking	59%	28%	5%	Kayaking	18%	13%	23%
Fishing	59%	5%	23%	Cross country skiing	10%	18%	23%
Swimming	46%	21%	21%	Downhill skiing	8%	5%	26%
Boating	46%	18%	26%	Geocaching	3%	8%	23%
Visit art galleries/studios	41%	28%	13%	Water skiing	3%	5%	26%
ATVing	41%	10%	15%				

Residents are somewhat less likely to have participated in a number of other outdoor activities.

Q32. How frequently have you participated in each of the following activities in Rusk County? *N*=39



# Just over half would recommend Rusk County as a good place to live and work.

- However, just over one-fourth (26%) are unlikely to do so, with another fourth (23%) being neutral.
- As mentioned previously, it's the beauty and peacefulness of the area's natural landscape, the friendliness and sense of community among residents that are the best things about living in Rusk County.

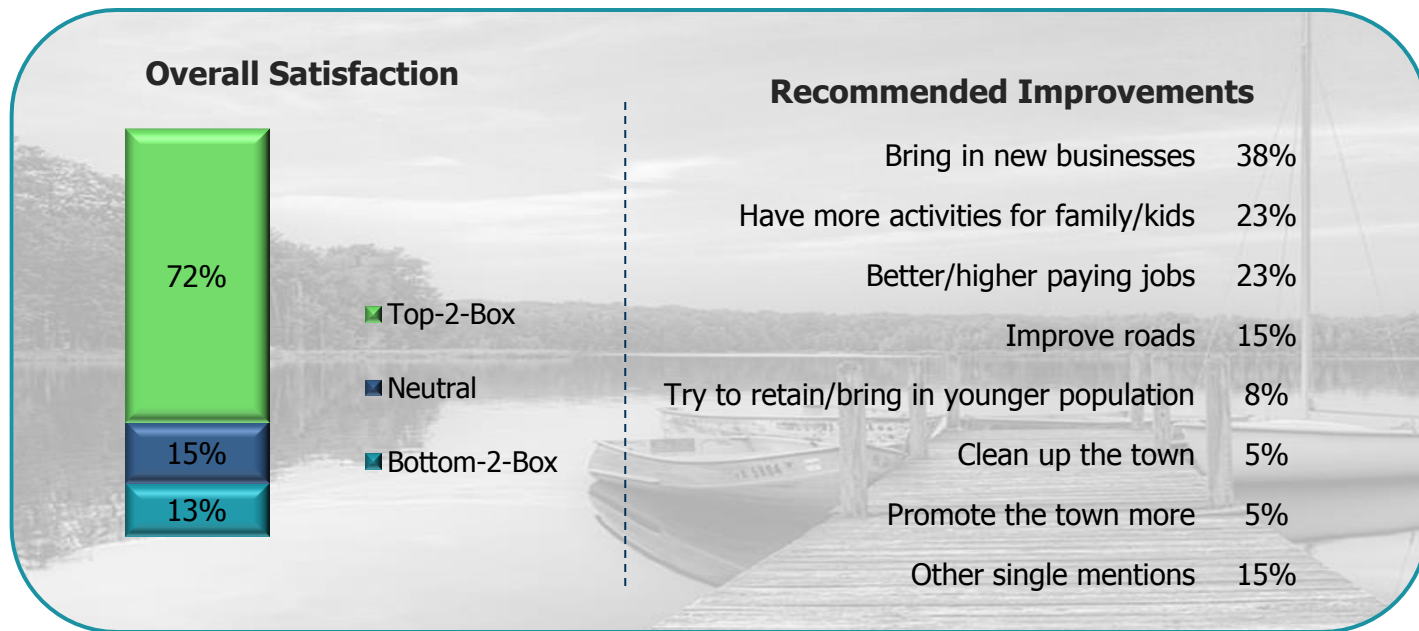


Q37. If a friend or family member were to ask, how likely would you be to recommend Rusk County as a place to live and work? (Total Residents N=39)

Q34. In your opinion, what is the best thing about living and/or working in Rusk County? (Total Residents N=39)

# Most residents are satisfied with living and working in the area, but cite the need to attract new businesses in order to improve and grow.

- Nearly 4 in 10 (38%) want to see new business development in their communities.
- Other suggested improvements include:
  - Increasing the variety of family-friendly activities (23%)
  - Creating better job opportunities (23%)
  - Improving roads (15%)



Q36. Overall, how satisfied are you with Rusk County as a place to live and work? (Total Residents N=39)

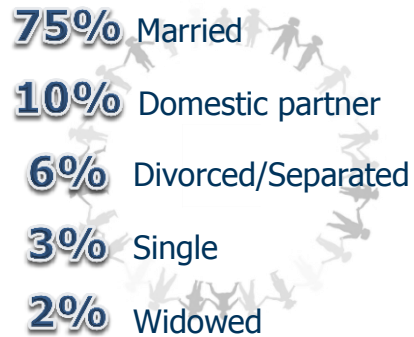
Q35. What, if anything, could Rusk County do or improve to make it a more appealing place to live and work? (Total Residents N=39)



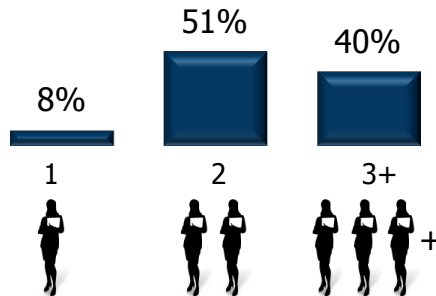
# Respondent Profile

# Respondent Profile\*\*

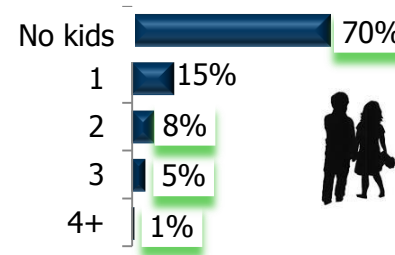
## Marital Status



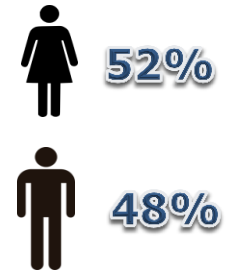
## Number of People in Household



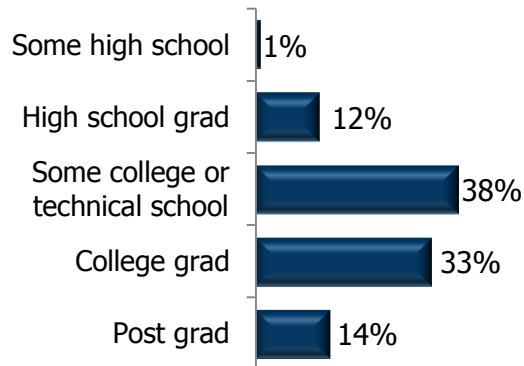
## Children Under 18



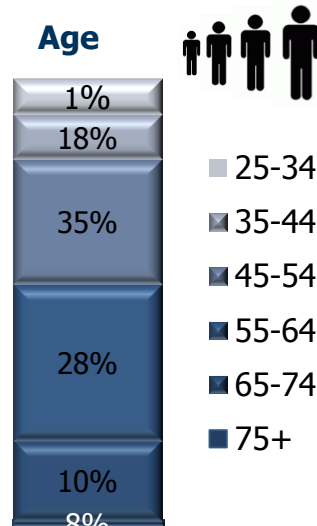
## Gender



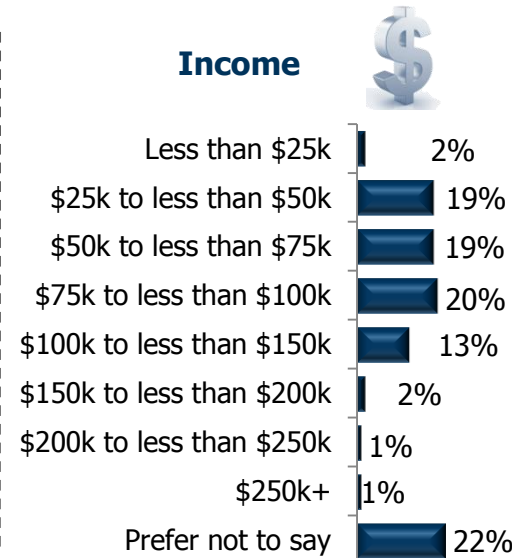
## Education



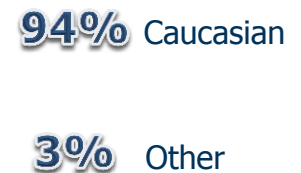
## Age



## Income



## Ethnicity



All base sizes are among total respondents (N=311)

\*\*'Prefer not to say' was generally less than 5% of mentions and is not shown; except for income where it was 22% and noted.

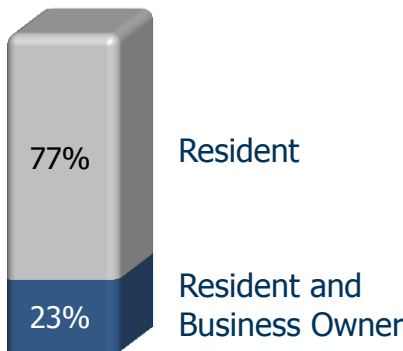
# Respondent Profile\*\*

## Employment Status



57%	Employed full time	4%	Homemaker
24%	Retired	2%	Self Employed
7%	Employed part time	1%	Unemployed
4%	Disabled		

## Rusk County Resident Status



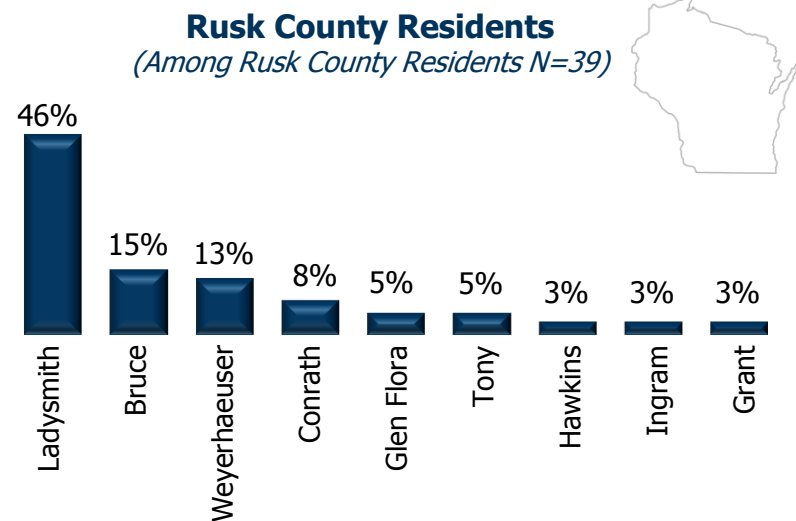
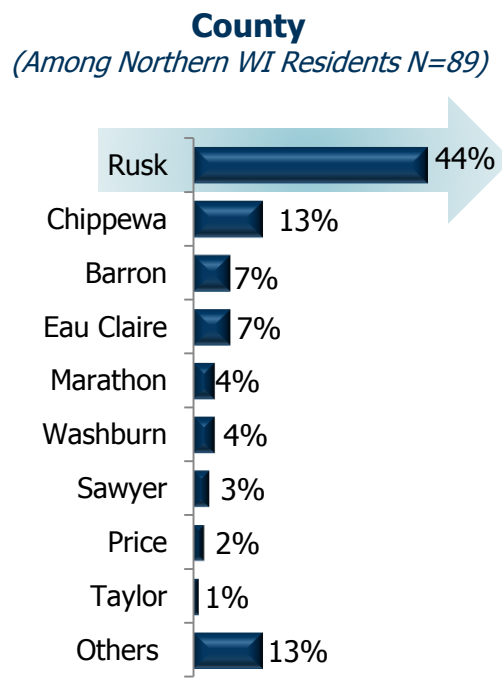
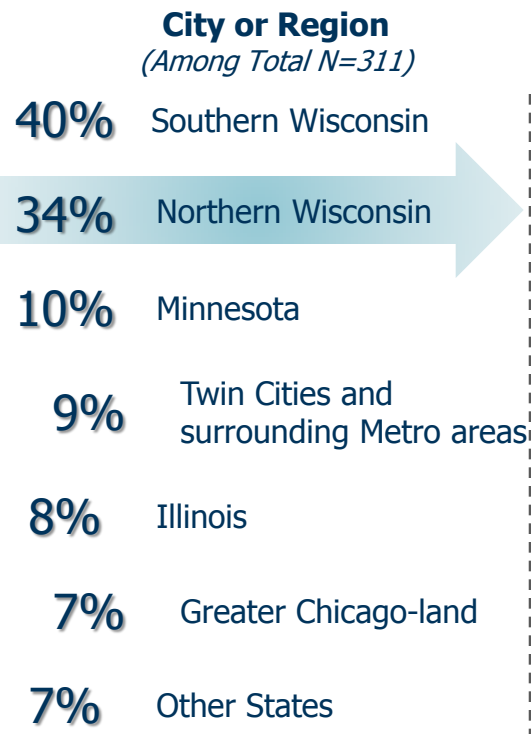
## Occupation/Industry

Health Care, Medical	16%
Manufacturing	13%
Education	11%
Construction	7%
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate	7%
Retail	6%
Information Technology	5%
Agriculture	3%
Government	3%
Professional services	3%
Civic services	3%
Leisure, Tourism	2%
Communications	2%
Legal	2%
Utilities	2%
Wholesale	2%
Transportation	1%
Advertising	1%
Other services	9%
Other mentions	3%

All base sizes are among total respondents (N=311) except Rusk County Resident Status (N=39)

\*\*'Prefer not to say' was generally less than 5% of mentions and is not shown.

# Respondent Profile



# Statistical Reliability and Limitations

Reliability is the degree to which survey sample data reflects the actual population and the true parameters of that population. It is dependent primarily upon survey sample size, along with other factors, including the degree of representativeness of the original sample selection, types of questions asked, answers received, and respondent quality.

For the Rusk County Destination Branding Study, the total sample of 311 respondents yields overall data reliable with 95% confidence and a  $\pm 5.6\%$  sampling error interval.

- That is to say, if a similar survey were conducted repeatedly, results within plus or minus 5.6% would occur for any one question 95 out of 100 times. Looking at it another way, if a question received a 'yes' answer by 60% of the 311 respondents, the chances are 95 out of 100 that between 54.4% and 65.6% of the targeted population would answer a similar 'yes' response, if asked.
- Surveys should also never be viewed as 100% reliable. A small difference between two statistics or findings cannot be considered necessarily meaningful; however, as the sample size or market segment increases, the margin of error (sampling error) decreases, thereby providing more conclusive and reliable data.