



# State of the Union & Outlook for 2024

Prepared for Branson Convention & Visitors Bureau

Delivered March 2024



THE CLOSEST TO THE CUSTOMER WINS.



# Project Overview

**Purpose.** The purpose of conducting the Traveler Profile research for the Branson Convention & Visitors Bureau is to provide area decision makers with a behavioral and demographic profile of travelers and Branson visitors.

**Target Audience.** This study was conducted monthly using a General Population survey conducted from a representative panel of consumers. The survey screened for travelers – both those who visited Branson as well as those who did not.

**Sample.** A total of 7,006 travelers have been interviewed using this approach including 3,002 responses collected in calendar year 2023 totaling 853 recent Branson visitors, 1,128 lapsed Branson visitors for 1,981 Branson visitors overall. This level of response provides for a maximum margin of error of +/- 1.2% using a 95% confidence interval (and +/- 2.2% among Branson Visitors and +/- 3.4% among recent Branson Visitors).

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# Key Takeaways

- 1. Record Performance.** Branson once again delivered record performance in 2023. But, at +1.1%, the trajectory of increase has lost some steam since 2022 and the first half of 2023.
- 2. Most Travelers Nationwide are Unfamiliar with Branson.** While Branson does well with those who are familiar with the market, it shouldn't be overlooked that more than half (52%) of travelers nationwide are not familiar with Branson as a travel destination, including 62% of those living beyond 300 miles.
- 3. Branson's Brand Health is Strong.** Among travelers familiar with the market, Branson performs quite well. Market Capture (12%), Conversion (29%), Retention (43%) and Share of Voice (24%) all perform well above average.
- 4. Branson's Strengths.** Branson's strengths as a travel destination include its Variety, Safe Environment and Scenic Beauty.
- 5. Branson's Concerns.** Branson's areas of concern include a Lack of Fresh New Product, Affordability, and Ease of Getting There.
- 6. Activities Associated with Branson.** The activities that travelers nationwide most associate with Branson are Live Shows, Wholesome Environment, Original Artists, Silver Dollar City and Shopping.

# Key Takeaways

- 7. Visitor Activities.** Actual activity participation in Branson looks slightly different from the market's brand perception: Shopping, Historic Downtown, Unique Local Restaurants, Silver Dollar City and Live Shows.
- 8. Primary Competition.** Branson's primary competitors include nearby markets like Kansas City and St. Louis much more so than more distant competitors such as the Smoky Mountains and Myrtle Beach.
- 9. Primary Traveler Media Usage.** Travelers nationwide indicate they are most likely to use Search Engines, Friends/Family Recommendations, Specific Websites, Travel Review Sites and Destination Websites to make travel plans. Branson visitors, in particular, would add to that list Television Ads, Print Magazines, the Official Vacation Guide and Social Media.
- 10. Influencers.** Branson Non-Visitors suggest it would take Deals, More Information, Recommendations from Friends & Family, Specific Shows/Performers and/or More Variety to persuade them to visit.
- 11. Barriers to Visitation.** In addition to a lack of familiarity, the barriers that prevent most people from visiting Branson include a Preference of Other Destinations, Lack of Recommendations and Dislike of Country Music.
- 12. Strong Interest But Lack of Urgency.** Interest in visiting is on par with competitors, but intent is rather low (but improving).

# 01. Key Performance Indicators

02. BRAND HEALTH

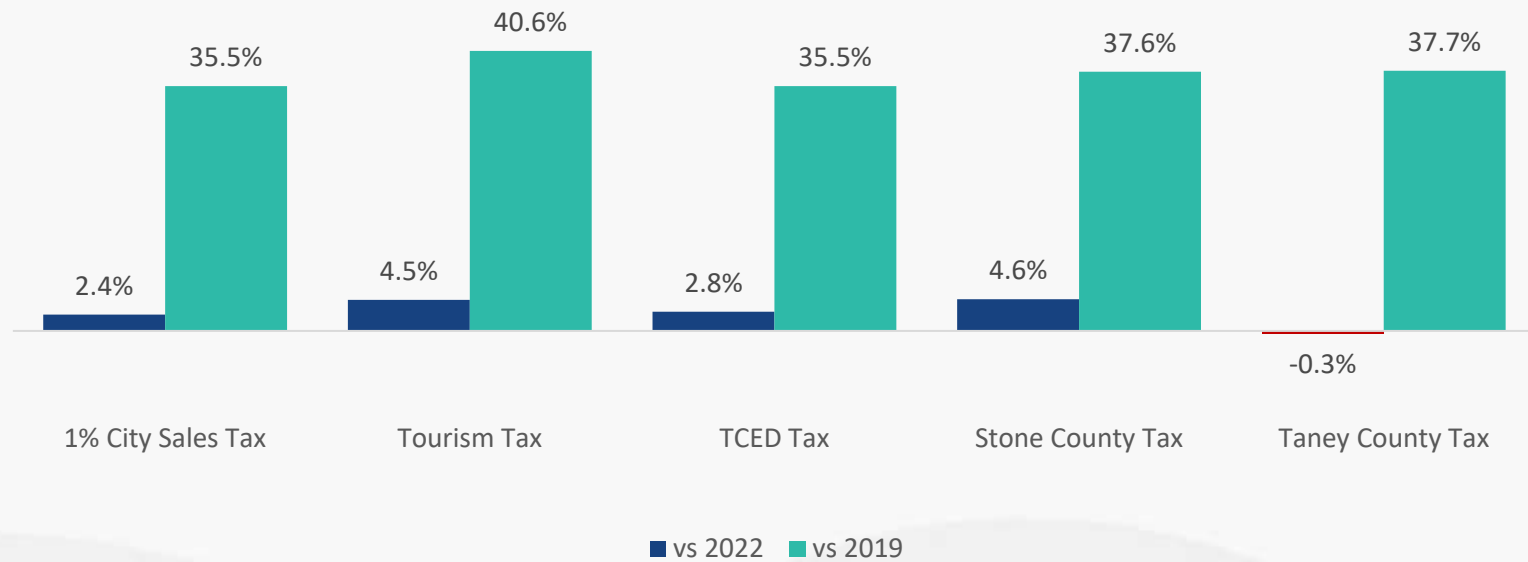
03. VISITOR PROFILE

04. NON-VISITORS

05. OUTLOOK FOR 2024

# Most empirical sales tax sources measured across the region posted year-over-year increases relative to 2022—and 2019.

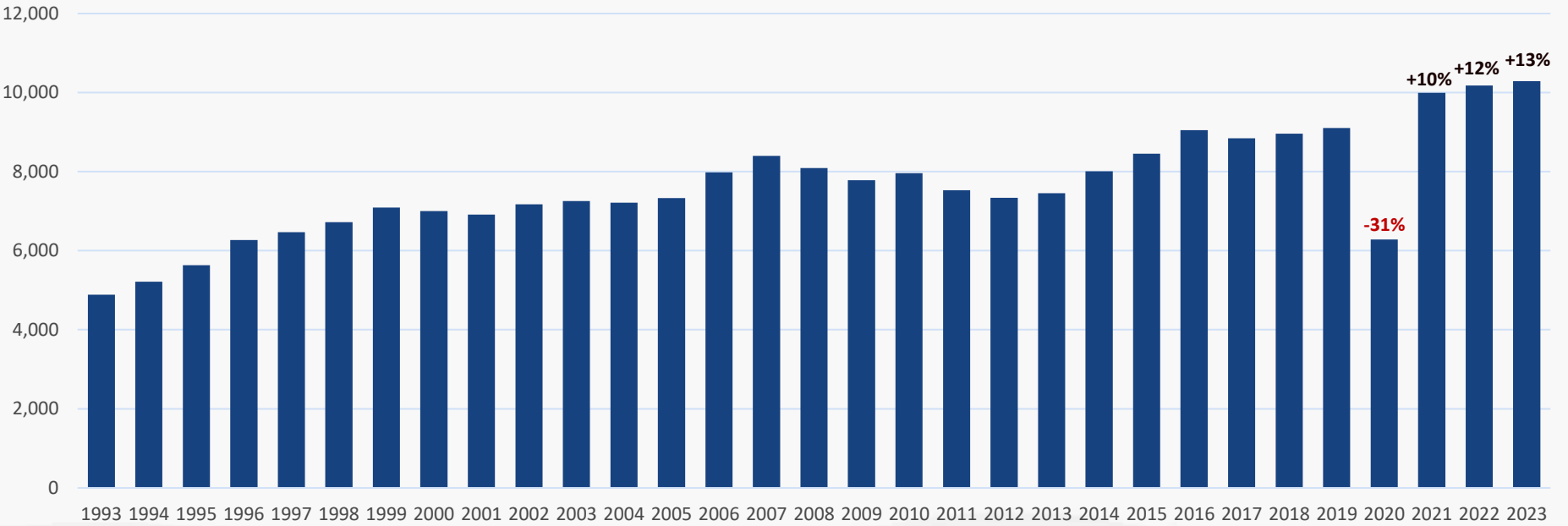
Area Tax Revenues – Variance to 2022 & 2019



# Branson set a new performance record in 2023, reaching 10.29 million visitors which topped 2022 by more than 100k visits.

### History of Branson Performance (000s)\*

% vs 2019



\*Assumes Base=7.0M (2000, DKSA)  
SOURCE: HISTORIC ECONOMETRIC MODEL

Weighted Algorithm: ((50% \* Room Demand % Variance)+(20% \* City 1% Sales Tax % Variance)+(10% \* Tourism Tax % Variance)+(10%\*Taney County Tax % Variance)+(10%\*TCED Tax % Variance))  
U.S. Inflation Rate averaged 8.0% or nearly 4X the 2.2% averaged recorded from 2022-2021.





# How many people visit Branson?

- **No one knows for sure exactly how many people visit destinations annually.** And until they put a fence around every city in the country and force both residents and tourists to check in and out upon entry/exit it is likely to remain that way.
- **In 2000, empirical results zigged when Branson's official visitation estimate zagged.** In the late 1990s, Branson regularly commissioned D.K. Shifflet (DKSA) to provide visitation estimates which were weighted by household population using their proprietary model. But in 2000, Smith Travel (STR) indicated that Branson's room demand fell 4.4%, tourism tax declined by 0.3% and 1% sale tax revenues increased only 3.6%. This was a disconnect with the 14% increase in visitation reported by Shifflet's model in the same year – due, according to DKSA, to newly released census data that adjusted the regional population.
- For this reason, decision makers at that time ended Branson's relationship with DKSA and adopted "around 7 million" visitors as an estimate which was used for several years. Eventually, the City of Branson decided that four key performance indicators (KPI) would be used as the official measurement of performance instead. These KPIs included year-over-year shifts in room demand, tourism tax, 1% Branson city taxes and Taney County sales taxes (and later the TCED tax was added as a 5th metric).
- **A new weighted model based on official KPIs was introduced.** By 2003, however, a new set of decision makers wanted to measure annual visitation in a way that aligned with Branson's key performance indicators which is when the "indexed weighted model" approach was borne. This model uses YoY changes in the results of the five KPIs considered to be the official measurement of performance (proxy for visitation). These KPIs are weighted as follows: Room demand (50%), Branson's 1% City Sales Tax (20%), Tourism Tax (10%), Taney County Sales Tax (10%) and TCED Tax (10%).
- Beginning with 7.0 million in 2000, this performance-based figure has measured YoY increases and/or decreases commensurate with the weighted average trajectory of the collective results from Branson's 5 KPIs. Thus, annual "visitation" now moves in perfect correlation with the empirical data sources used to measure performance. Assuming the 5 KPIs provide an accurate assessment, the weighted approach is a better measure of YoY performance than measure of visitation which is a limitation that has always been accepted. As a result, it is safe to say that if indeed Branson was doing 7.0 million visits per year, then the city is very likely doing 10 million visits today --and there are years of empirical data to prove it.
- **Checks & balances confirmed the model's projection.** Around 2010, Dan Lennon (CMO at BCVB) purchased an updated projection by DKSA and compared it to Branson's weighted model calculations and the results were within +/- 5% of Branson's projected total drawing a conclusion that the model had been working comparatively well for a decade. Of course, at any time area decision makers may choose to change this figure or the model that estimates it and not publish any figure at all, change the weights and/or projections or change the 7.0 million starting figure to whatever number it is guessed to be today. ***A good alternative might be to turn to a service such as Placer.ai to project visitation using cell phone pings.***

01. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

## 02. Brand Health

ALL RESPONDENTS | N=7,006

03. VISITOR PROFILE

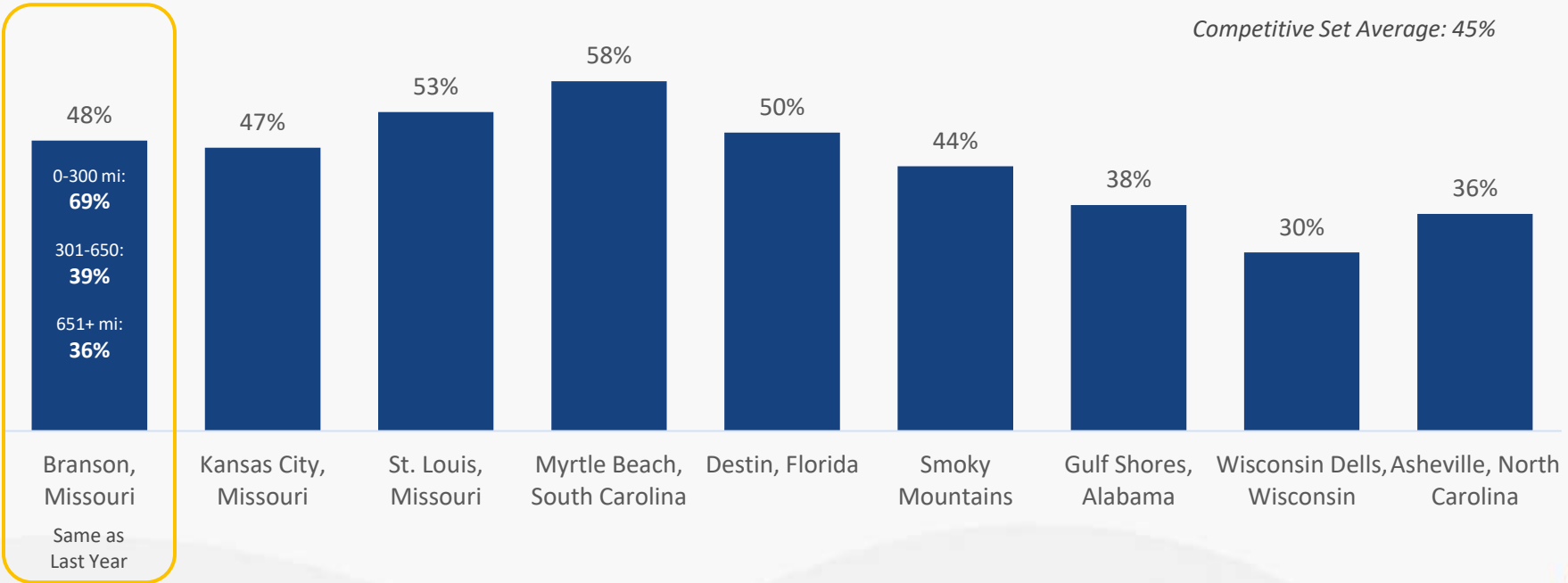
04. NON-VISITORS

05. OUTLOOK ON 2024

Nearly half (48%) of travelers indicate they are familiar with Branson as a travel destination, up from 44% in 2021 and higher than the competitive set average of 45%. But, like all destinations in the comp set, brand awareness did slip in 2023.

### Aided Brand Awareness

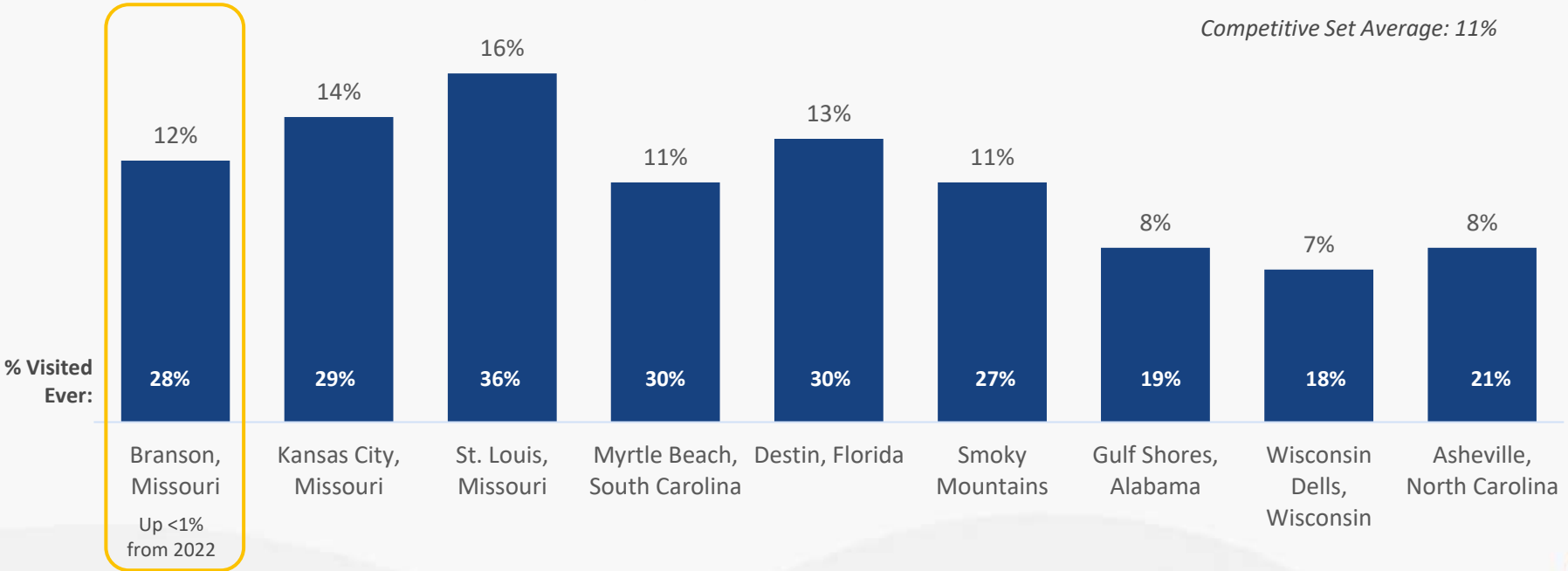
Competitive Set Average: 45%



# Branson (12%) once again earned an above average market capture rate compared to its direct competitive set (11%).

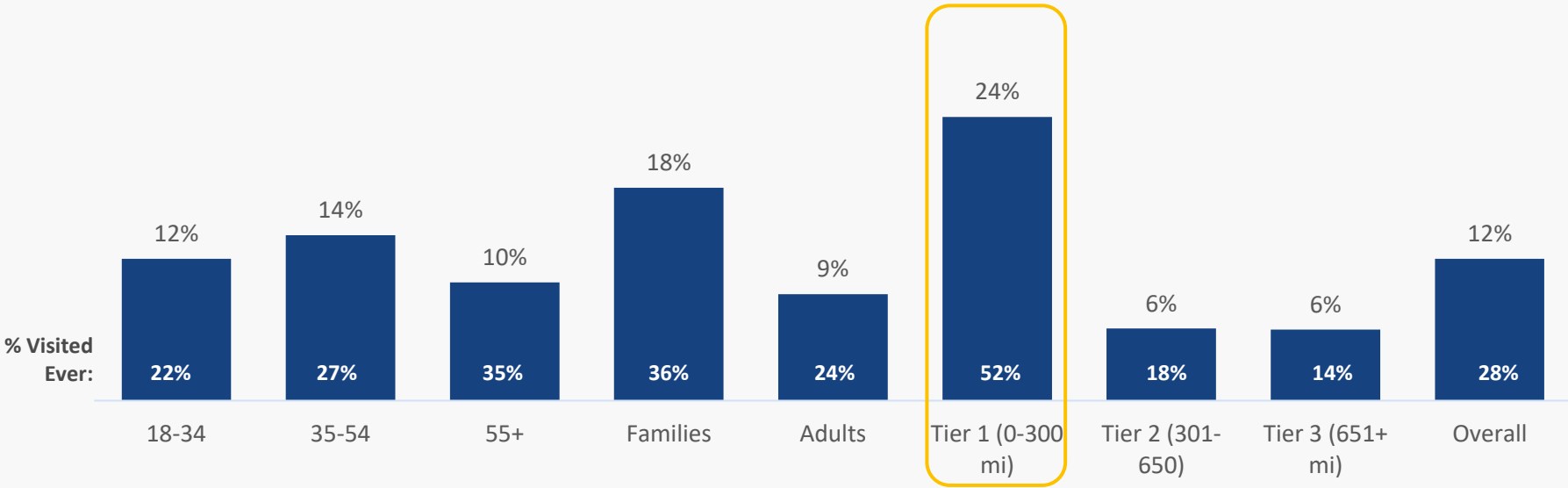
### Market Capture Rate Overall – Visited in the Past 2 Years

Competitive Set Average: 11%

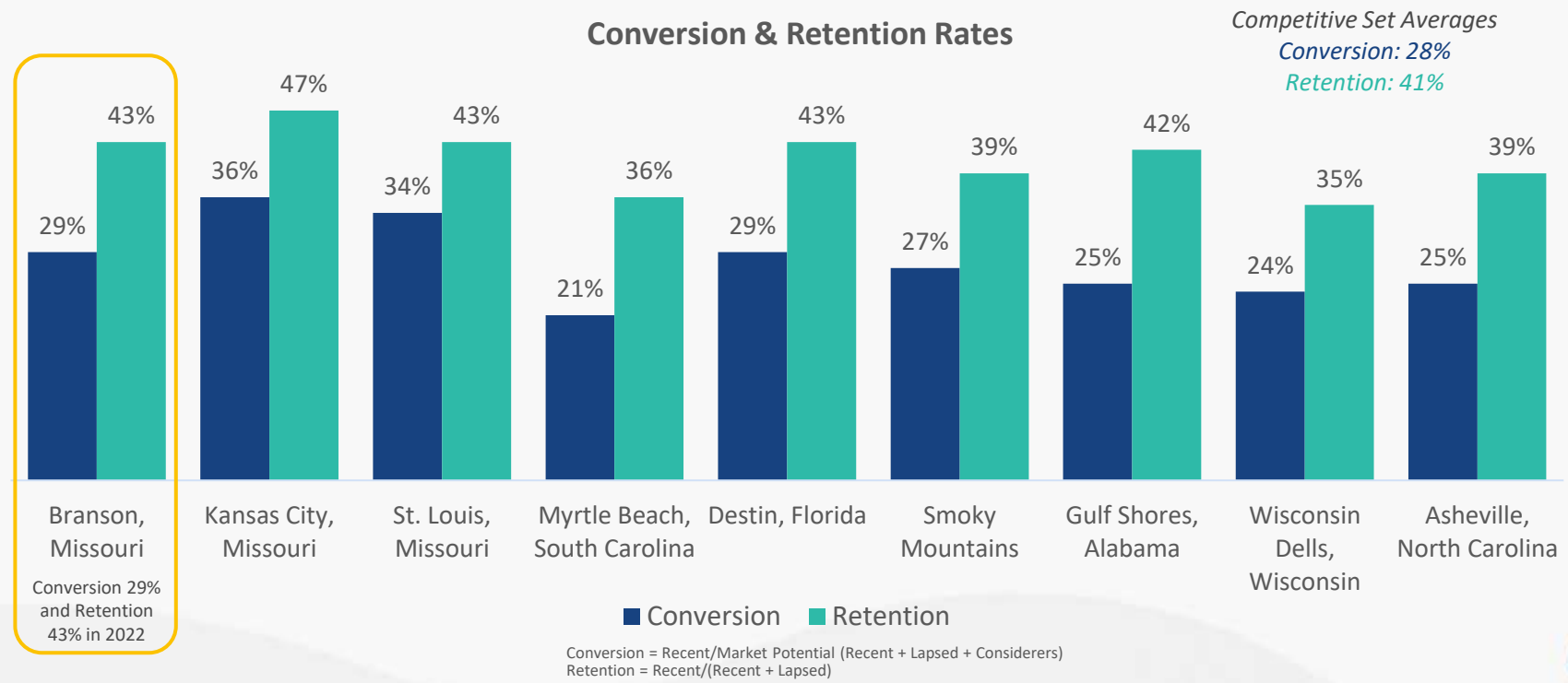


# Visitation continues to be driven by those living within 300 miles of Branson.

### Market Capture Rate by Traveler Niche (Past 2 Years)



**Branson has an above average level of conversion (29%) and retention (43%) relative to the competitive set, both up slightly from 2022.**

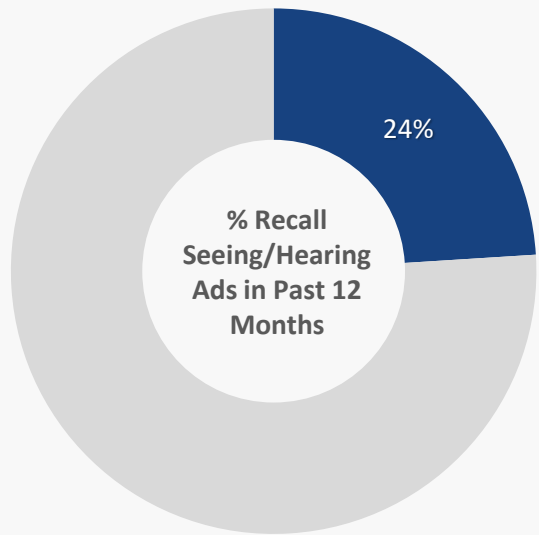


Conversion 29% and Retention 43% in 2022

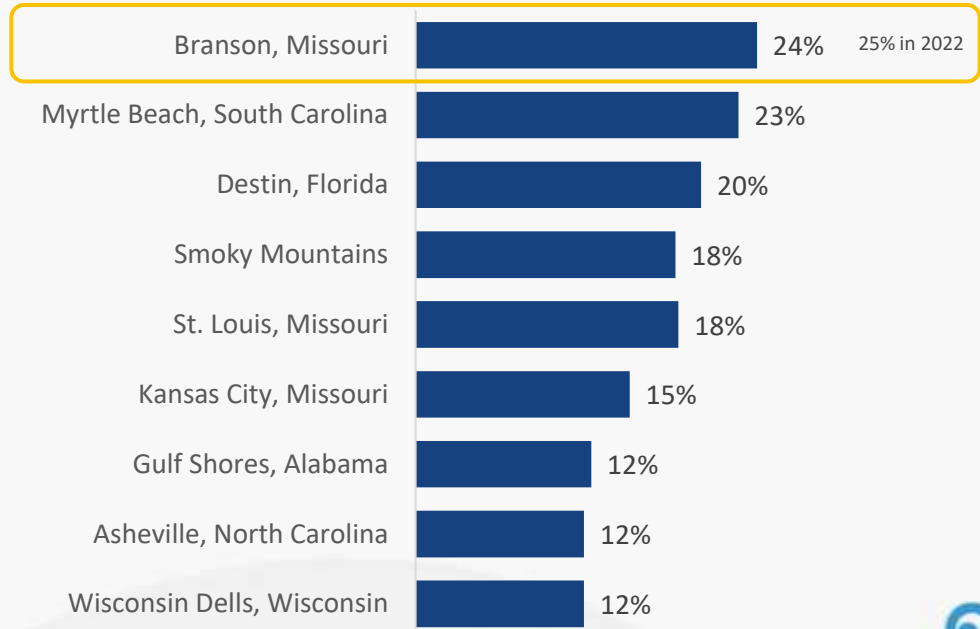


# Branson earned the highest Share of Voice (assisted marketing awareness) among the competitive set at 24%, well above average (17%).

Share of Voice – Branson

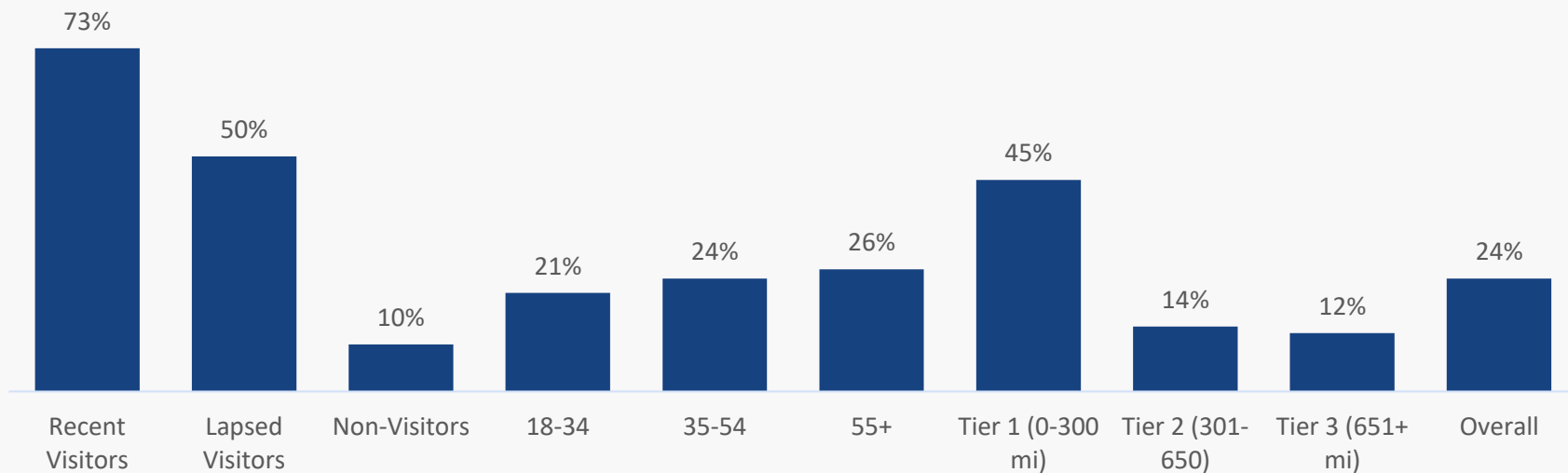


Share of Voice – Competitive Set



# Branson's share of voice is highest among those living in the core and primary markets, recent and lapsed visitors and adults aged 55+.

Share of Voice by Aggregate Consumer Segment





**Branson has a very consistent brand image. It is viewed as being a family friendly destination that has great live music and entertainment, provides a safe and wholesome environment with beautiful scenery and variety.**

### Branson Brand Attributes

*% Describes Very well/Perfectly*



# Branson's Strengths & Areas of Concern

**Strengths** include being Safe & Wholesome, having a Variety of Things to Do and offering Beautiful Scenery.

**Secondary Strengths** include being Family Friendly and offering Great Live Music and Entertainment.

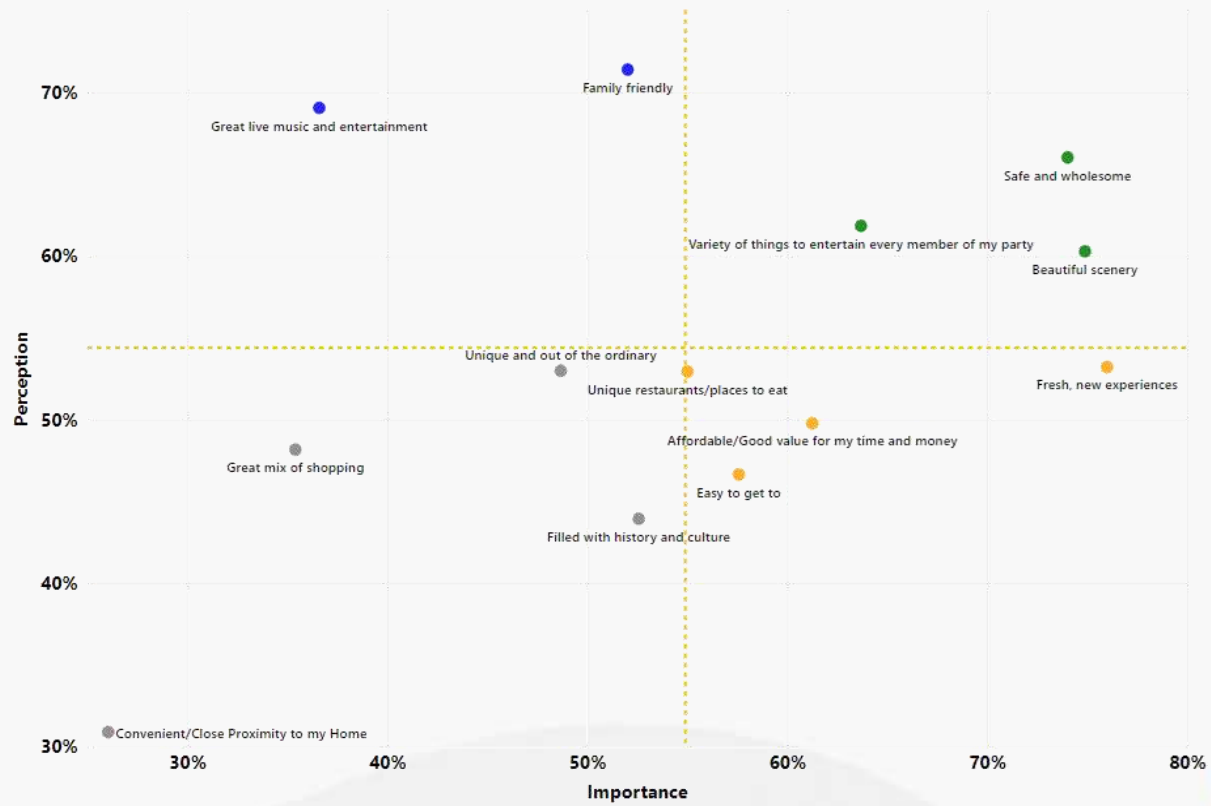
**Areas of Concern (Opportunity)** include Fresh New Experiences, Affordability, Unique Places to Eat and being Easy to Get To.

**Low Priority Issues** include Branson's mix of Shopping, being Unique, being Filled with History and Culture and being a Convenient Place to Visit.



Data YTD Through  
December 2023

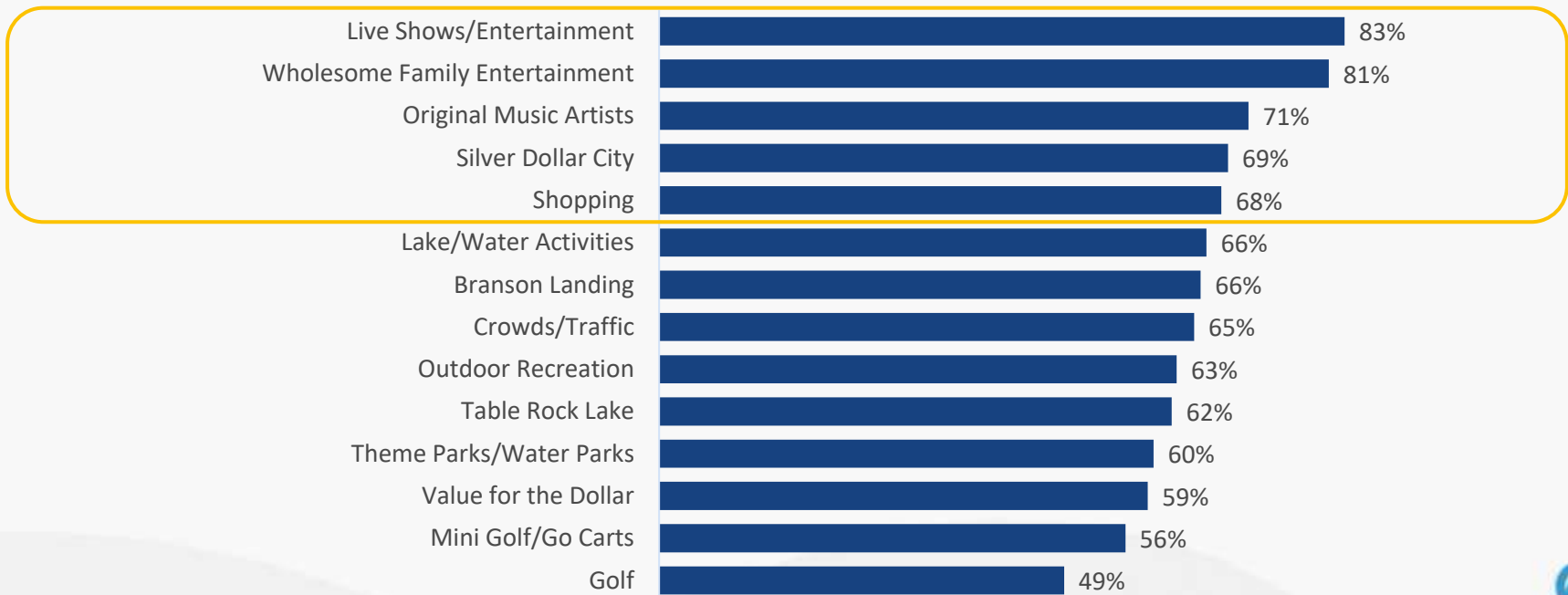
## Traveler Profile Dashboard Non-Visitor Brand Map



# The activities travelers nationwide most associate with Branson are live shows/entertainment, wholesome family entertainment, original music artists, Silver Dollar City and Shopping – all the same as last year.

## Activities Most Associated with Branson

*% Somewhat Associate/Very Strong Association*



01. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

02. BRAND HEALTH

03. Visitor Profile

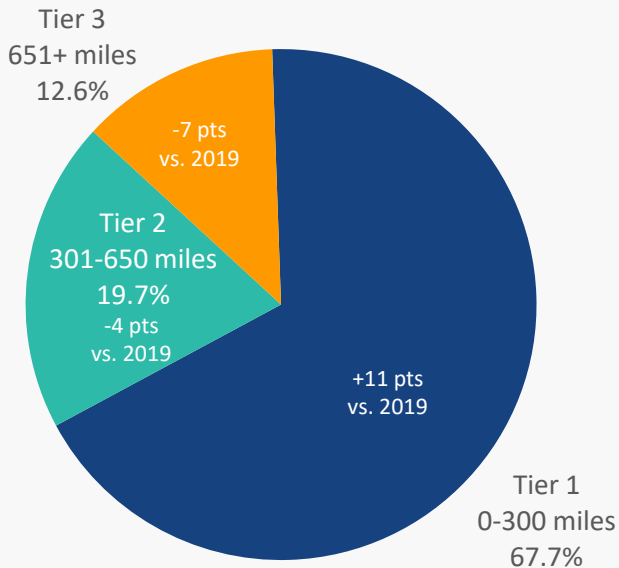
BRANSON VISITORS | N=1,981

04. NON-VISITORS

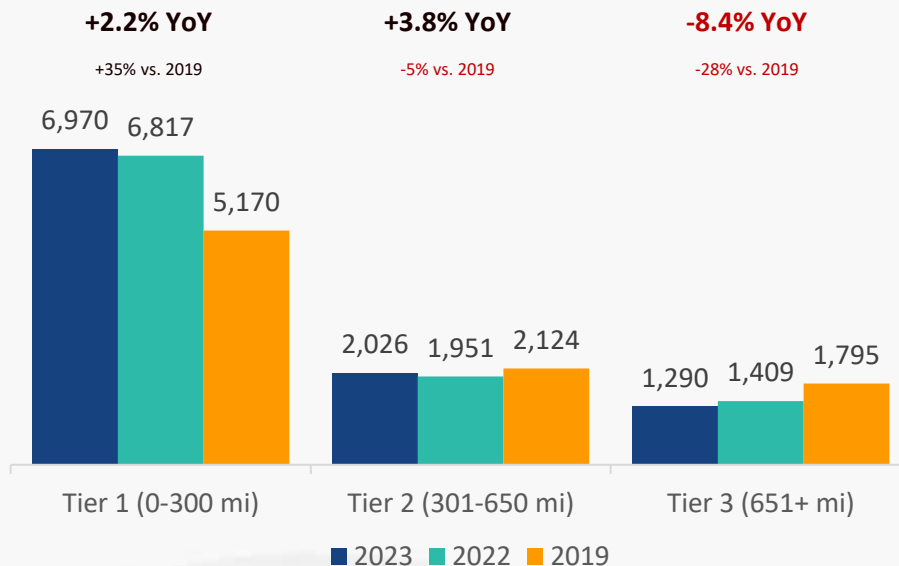
05. OUTLOOK ON 2024

Since the pandemic, Branson has shifted to become more of a regional market. In 2023, 32% of visitors came from beyond 300 miles, down 11 points from 2019.

Distance Traveled to Branson

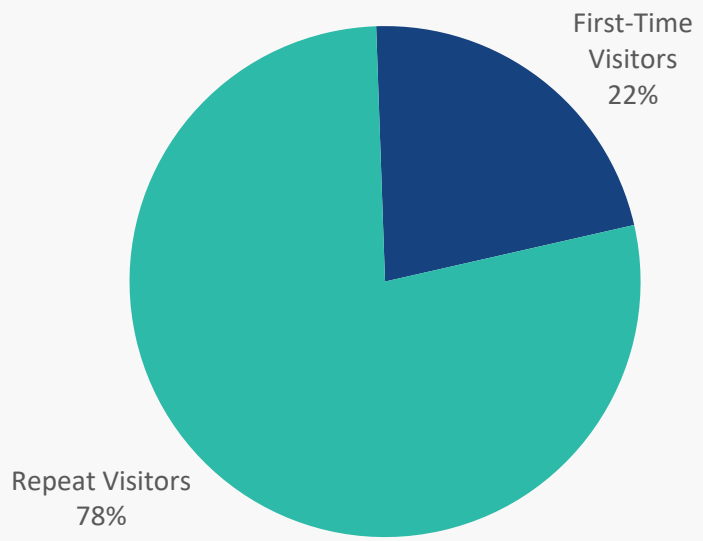


Visitation (000's) by Distance

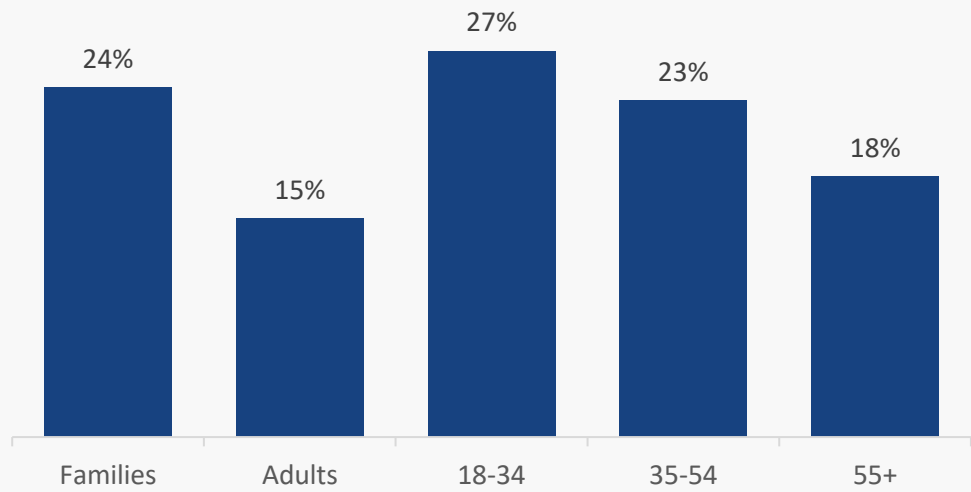


**First-time visitation (22%) rebounded well in 2023 and returned to a level more like years past. Overall, families with children and younger audiences tend to be more likely to be visiting Branson for the first time.**

**First-Time & Repeat Visitors**

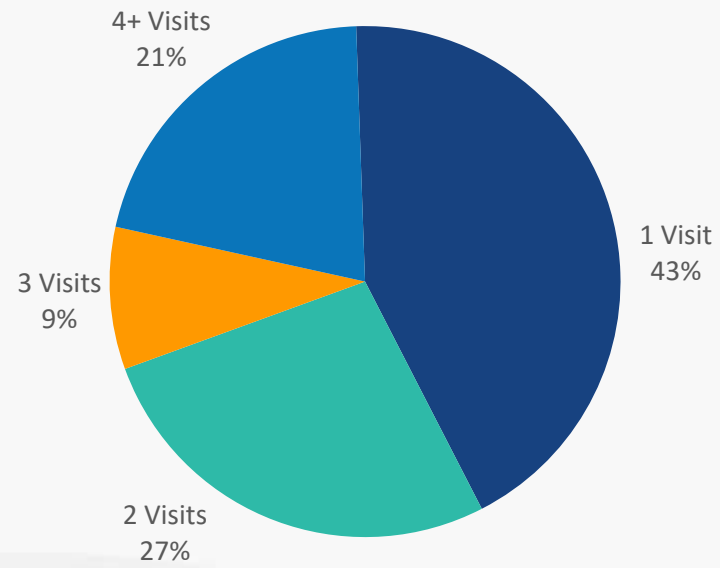


**% First-Time Visitors by Niche**

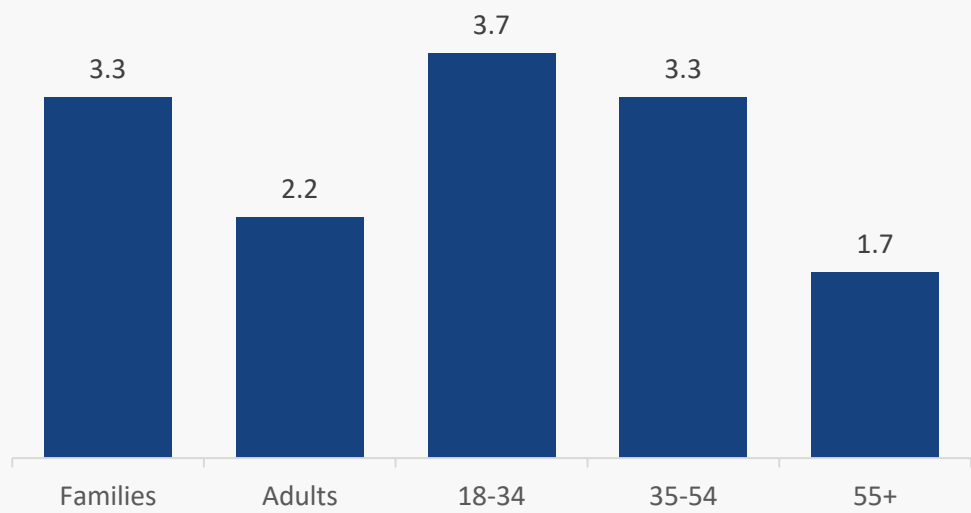


The average Branson traveler visits the area 2.9 times per year. Interestingly, families and younger visitors tend to visit more often than adult couples and older visitors.

Frequency of Branson Visits

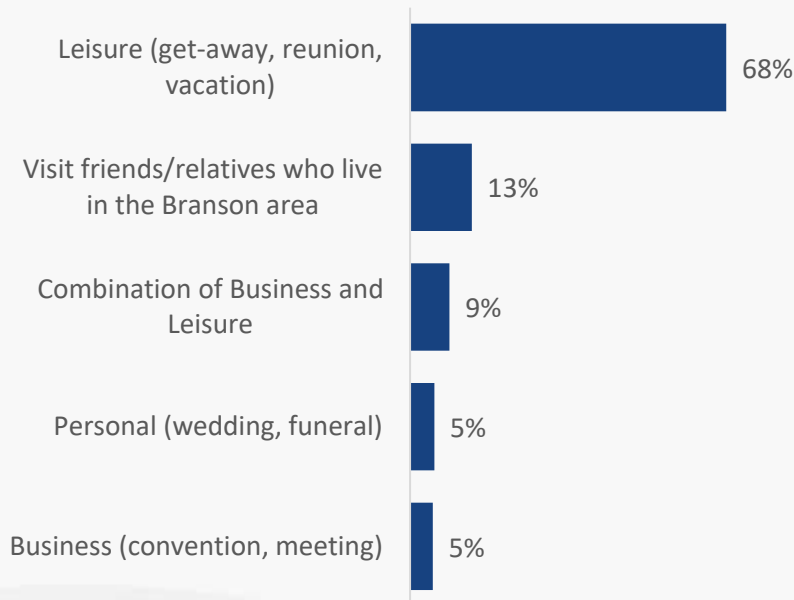


Frequency by Visitors Niche

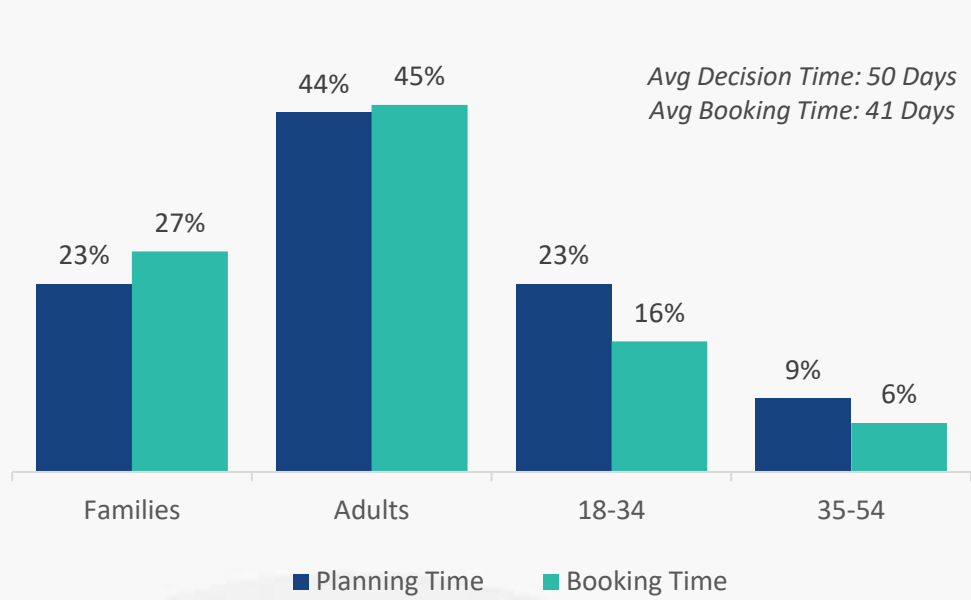


# Leisure remains the primary reason most travelers visit Branson with the average decision time at 50 days compared to an average booking time of 41 days, both up slightly from last year.

### Primary Purpose of Visit



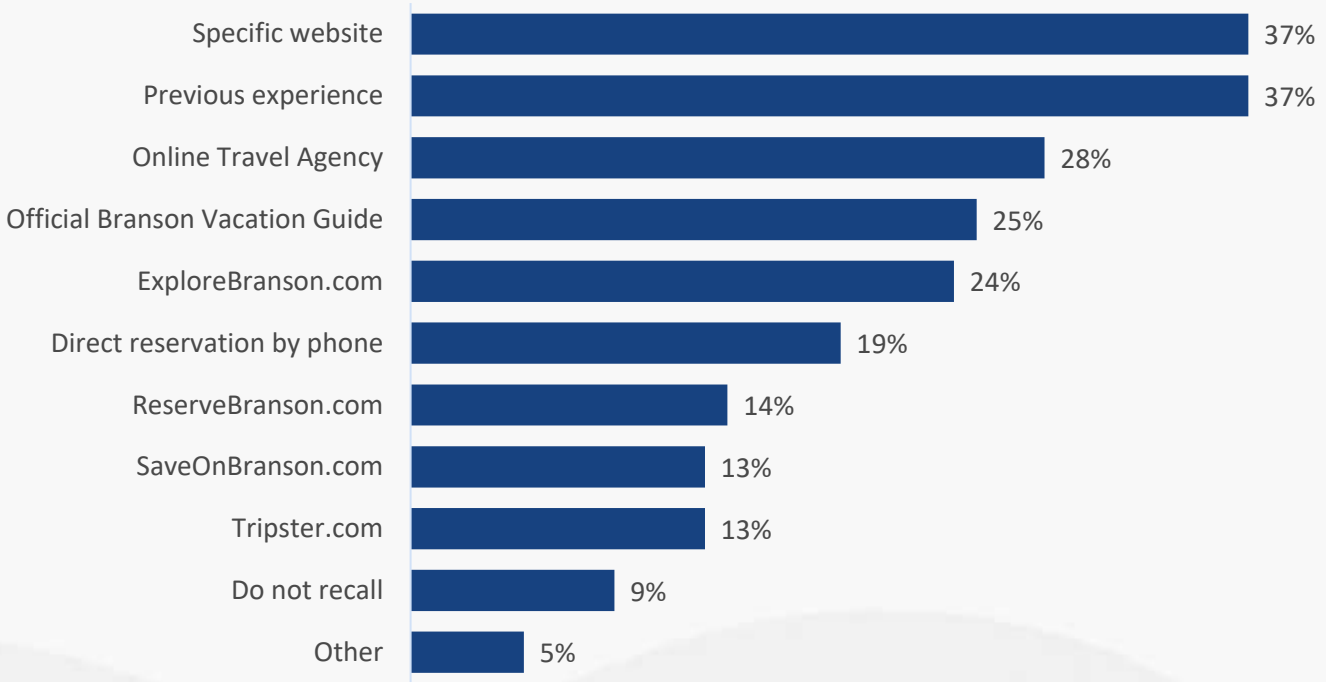
### Days in Advance Decided to Visit/Book





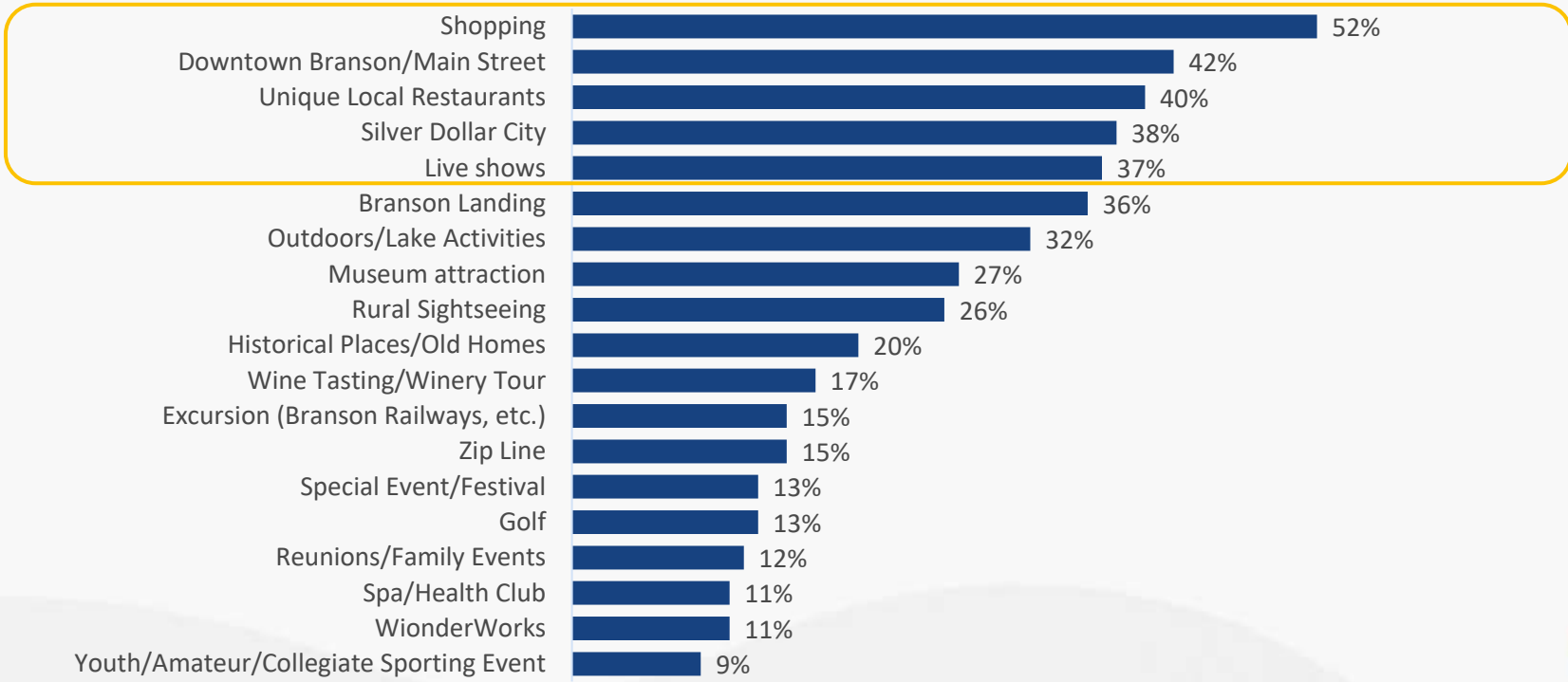
# Visitors plan their trips based on previous experience and by going directly to the websites of the places they want to visit, using an online travel agency or the Official Branson Vacation Guide.

Sources Used Among Visitors to Plan Most Recent Branson Trip



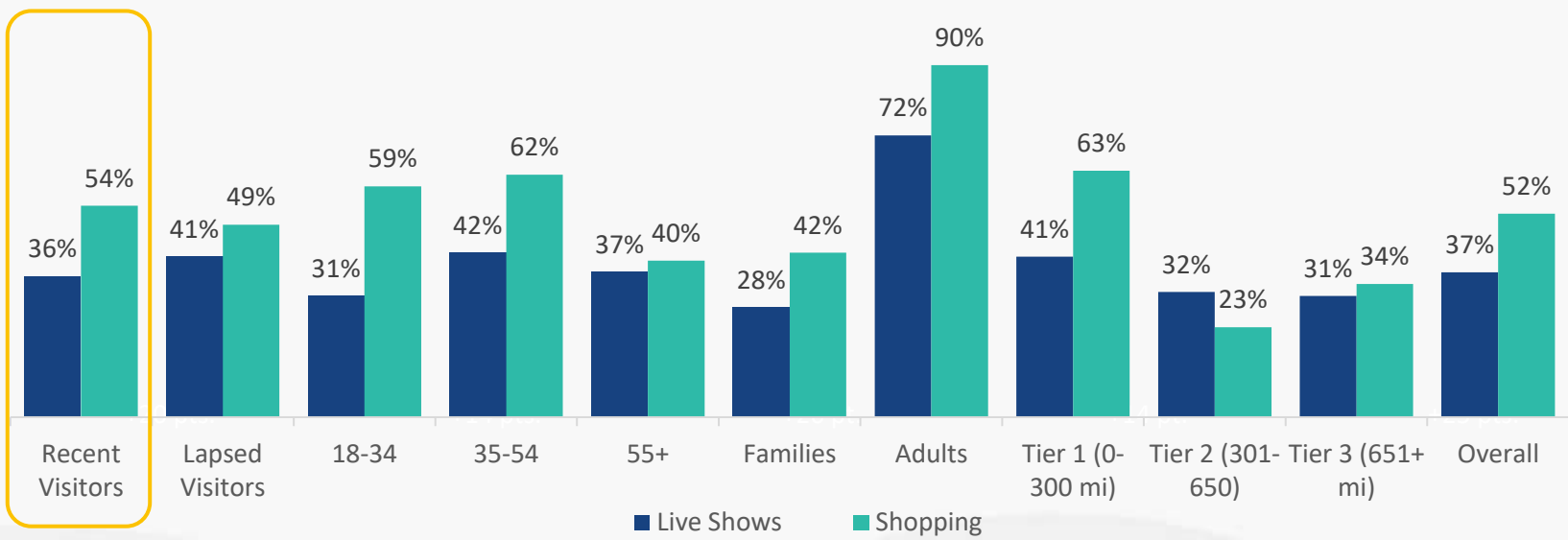
In 2023, Branson visitors are most likely to shop, visit downtown, go to a unique local restaurant, visit Silver Dollar City or take in a live show when they visit Branson.

### Branson Activities Engaged In



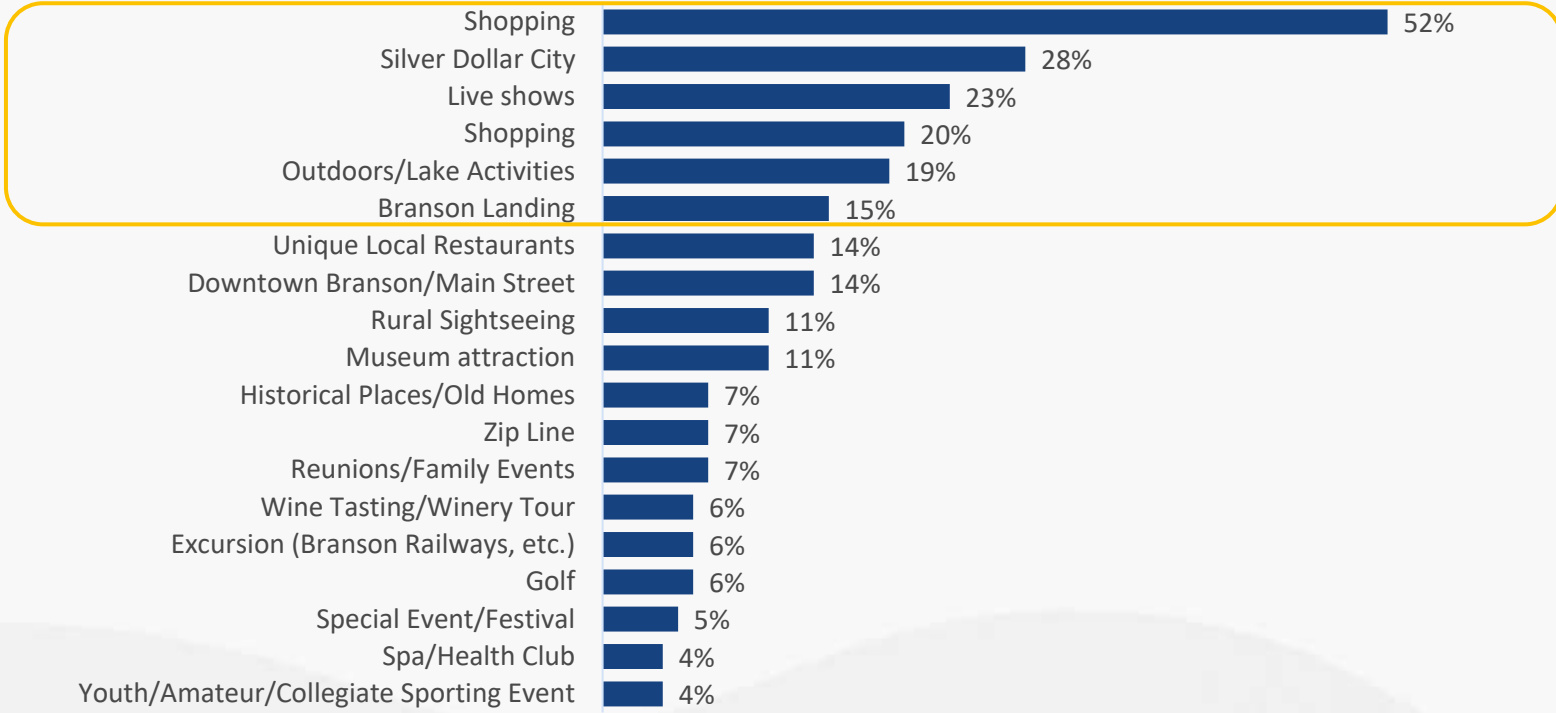
# Typically, those who see Live Shows during their visit skew toward adults, travelers over 35 Years of Age and Travelers within 300 miles.

### Live Shows & Shopping Incidence by Market Niche



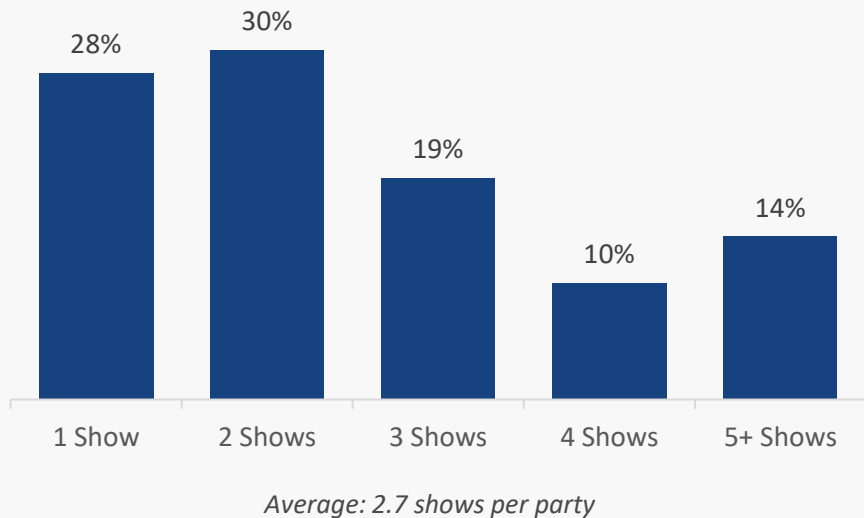
Of the activities of which they engaged, Branson visitors say that Silver Dollar City, live shows, shopping and outdoor activities are the functional drivers most responsible for inspiring a visit to the area.

Branson's Functional Drivers

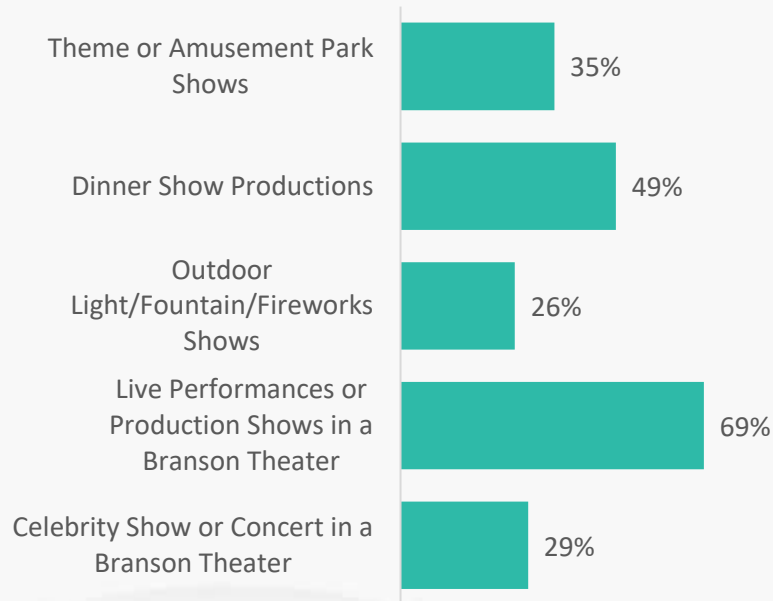


Those who are attending shows in Branson report seeing an average of 2.7 shows per party. These shows predominantly include live performances or production shows (69%), dinner shows (49%) or theme park shows (35%).

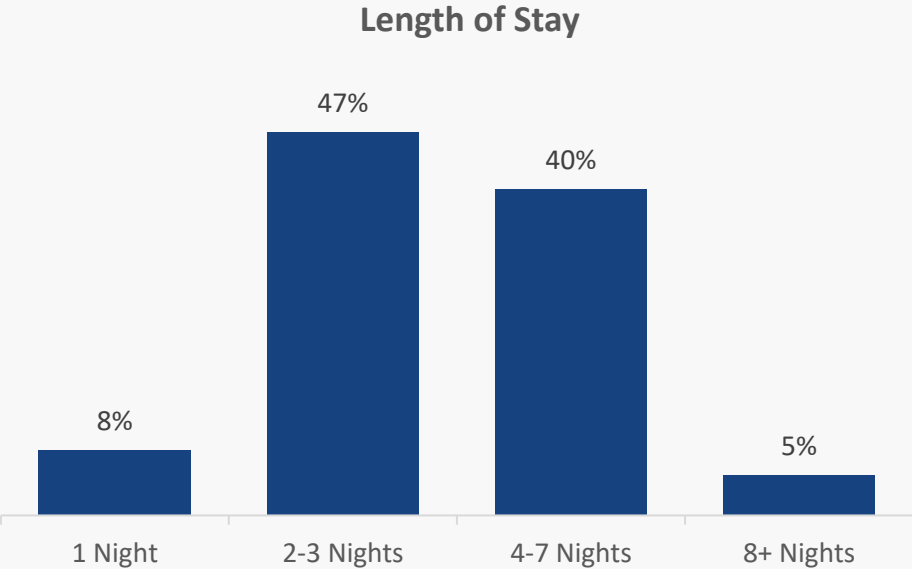
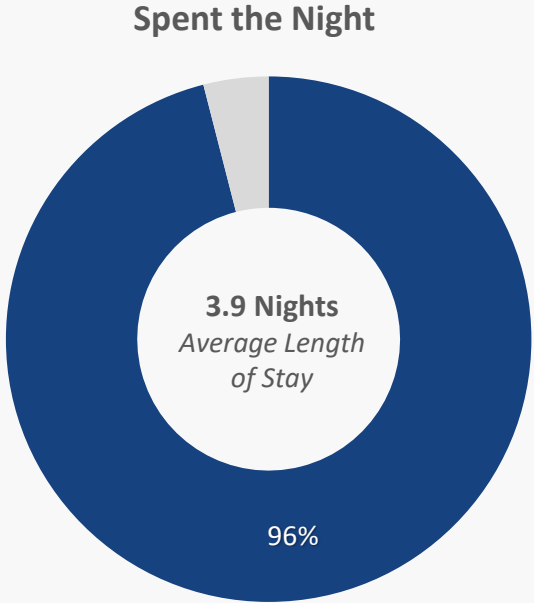
Number of Live Shows Seen on Last Visit



Types of Shows Seen



# Most Branson visitors spend the night and stay for an average of 3.9 nights in the area.



**Branson visitors spent average of \$1,075 per party which equates to \$364 per person and/or \$94 per person per day.**



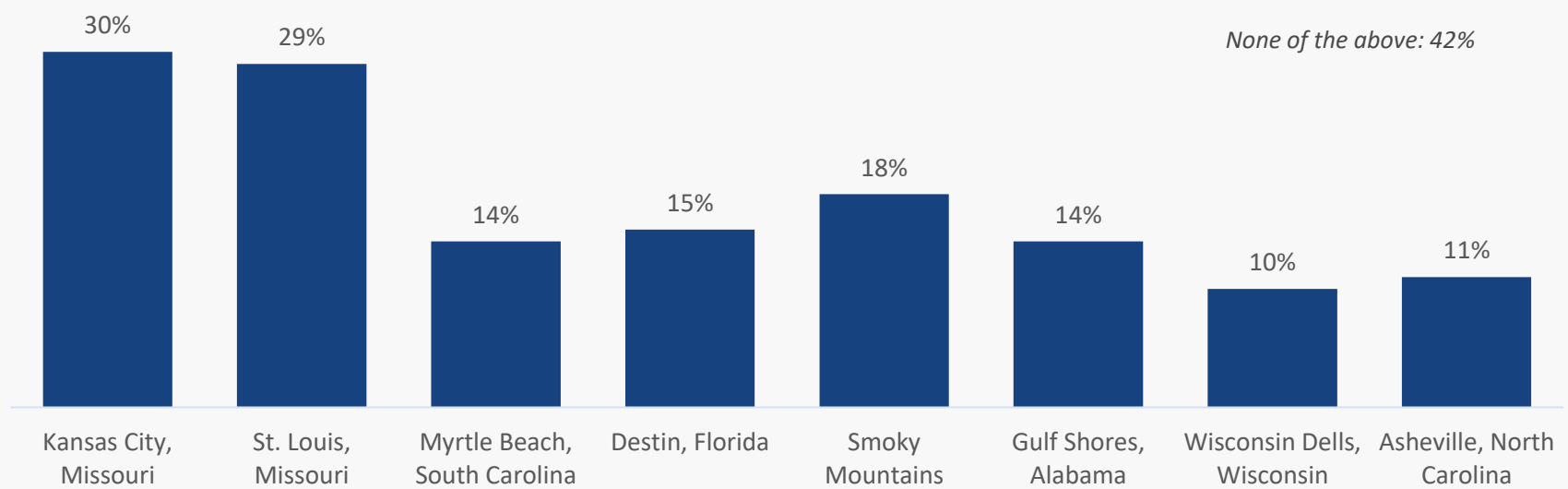
**Party Trip Spending**  
\$1,075



**Per Person Trip Spending**  
\$364 per person  
\$94 per person per day

**While 42% of Branson visitors say they did not consider visiting any other destinations, Kansas City, St. Louis and the Smoky Mountains were among the top destinations considered before choosing Branson.**

**Destinations Considered When Planning Branson Trip**





01. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

02. BRAND HEALTH

03. VISITOR PROFILE

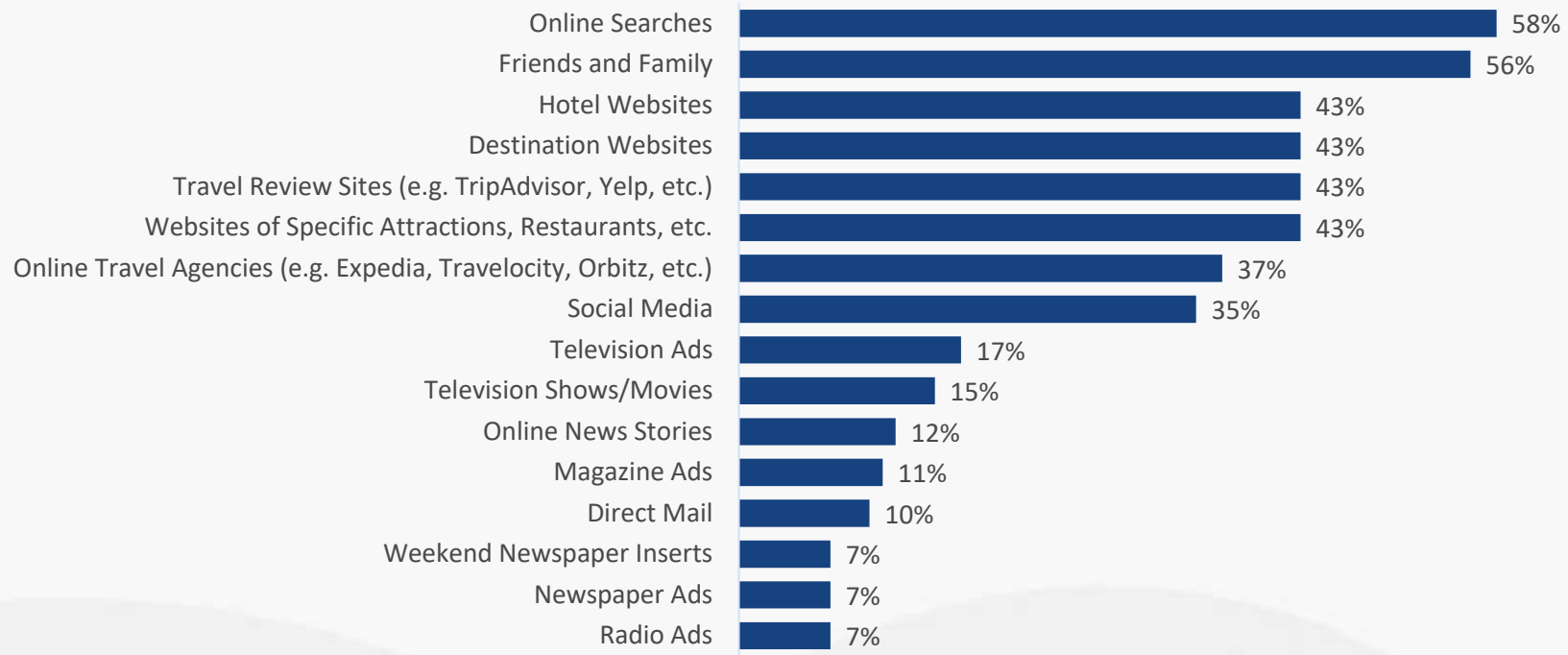
04. Non-Visitors

05. OUTLOOK ON 2024

BRANSON NON-VISITORS | N=5,025

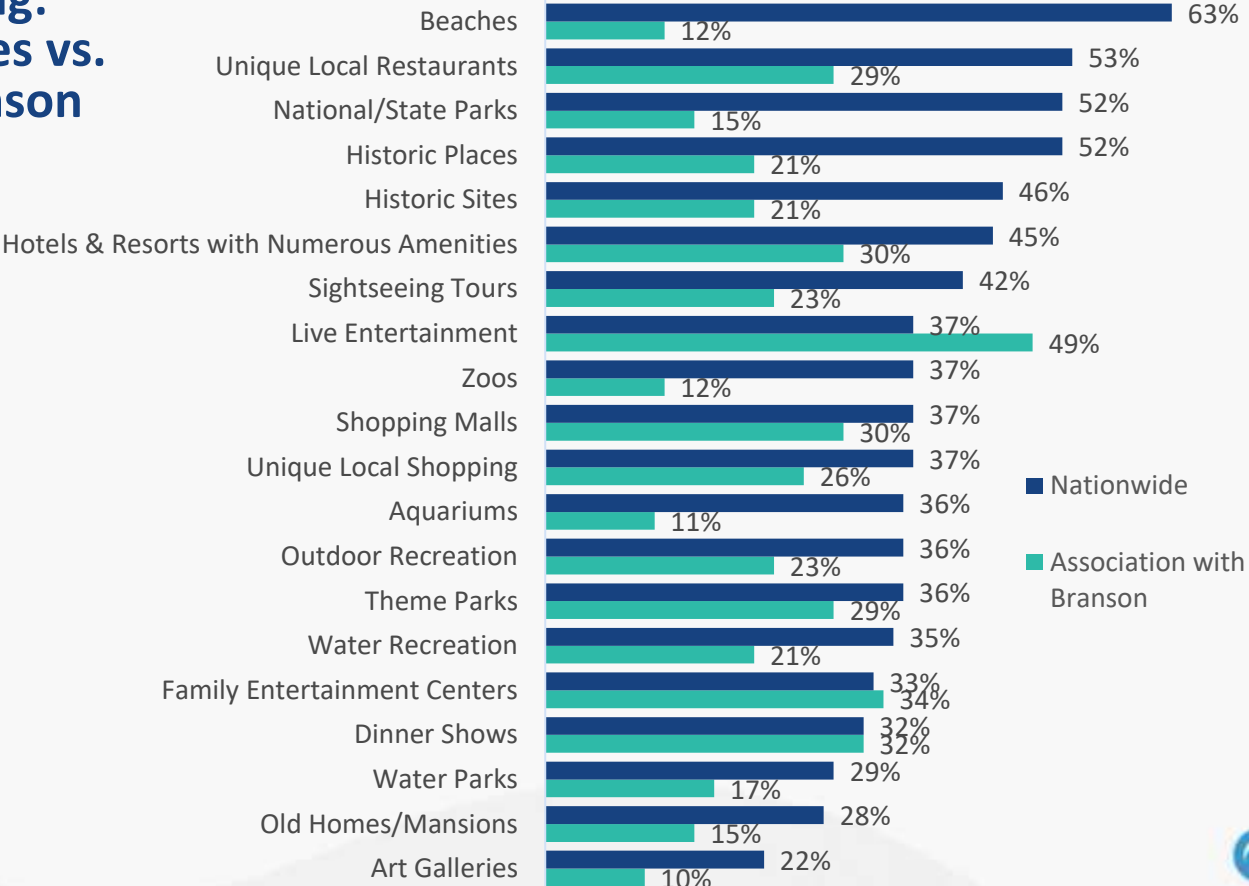
# Among travelers nationwide the most common media platforms used to plan trips include SEO, word of mouth, specific websites and travel review sites.

### Media Platforms by Travelers Nationwide to Plan Trips

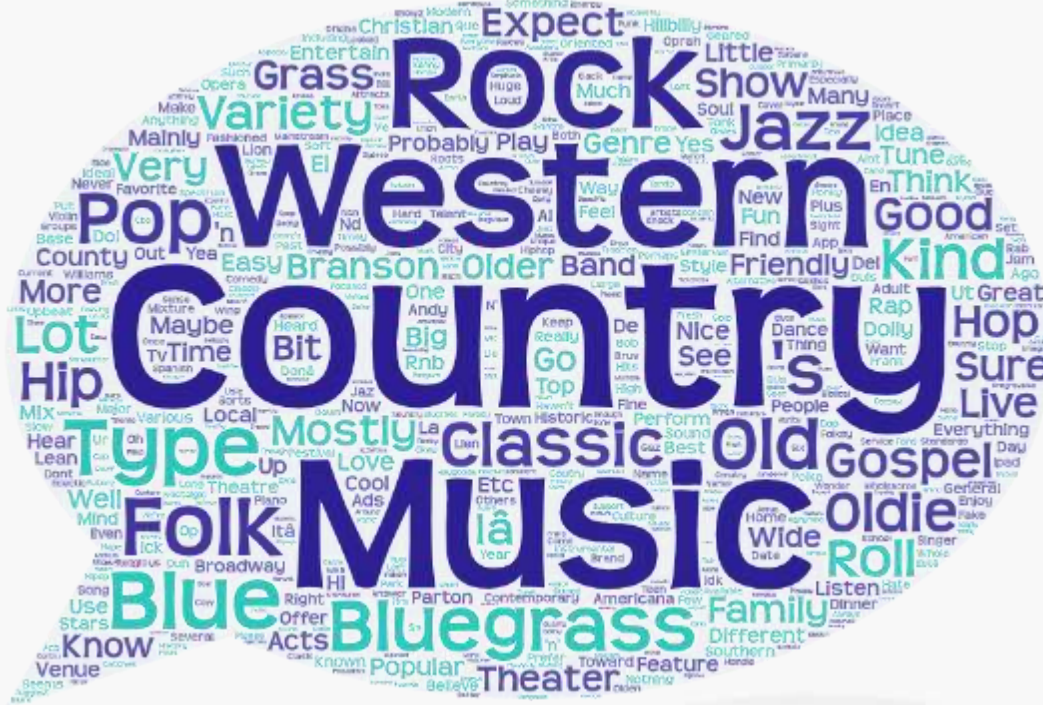


# Popular Activities/Attractions Enjoyed While Traveling: Nationwide Preferences vs. Associations with Branson

The most popular travel activities and attractions nationwide include Beaches, Unique Local Restaurants, Historic Places and National/State Parks. Branson is most associated with Live Entertainment, Family Entertainment Centers and Dinner Shows.

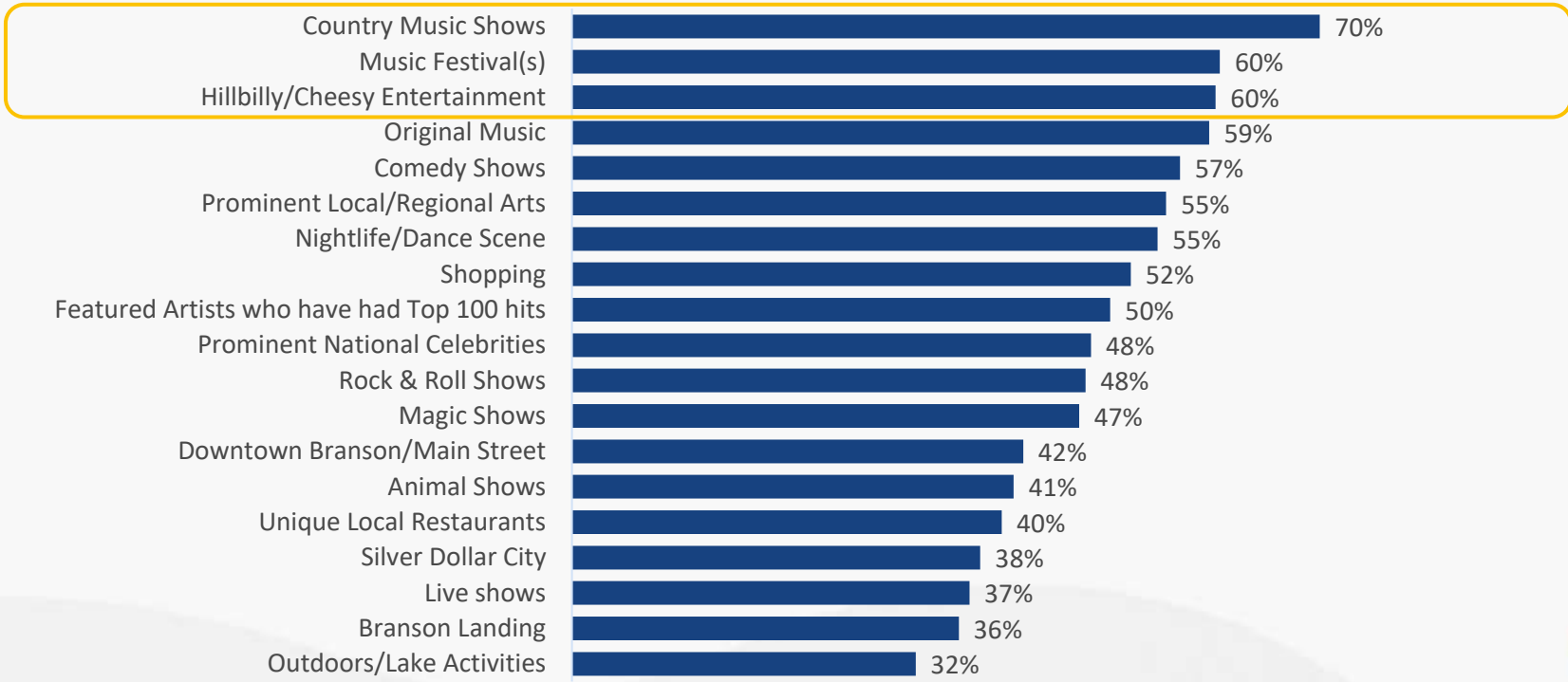


Non-Visitors heavily associate Branson with country music and western themed shows.



# Non-Visitors say they would expect to find country music shows, music festivals and hillbilly/cheesy entertainment in Branson.

### Types of Shows Expect to Find in Branson



# Non-visitors indicated they would be most inspired to visit Branson by having a good discount, more information, recommendations from family/friends, specific performers and/or more things to do not-centered around country music.

**Good Deals/  
Discounts**

*"A deal that is almost too good to be true." "Good deals on lodging."*

**More Info/  
Marketing**

*"More information about what's available (in Branson)." "Seeing pictures of it or hearing about it from friends."*

**Family/Friends**

*"Family or friends recommending it." "A friend invites me."  
"If family came with."*

**Specific Performers/  
Shows**

*"If there was a concert of artists I really wanted to see."  
"A large country music festival."*

**More Things to  
Do**

*"If it wasn't so centered around country music." "Other types of music."*



# The biggest top-of-mind explanations Considerers give for not having visited Branson are price/affordability, lack of time, lack of interest, distance and COVID-19.

Summarized Responses to Open-Ended Question, “Why Have you Not Visited Branson?”



### Prices

Haven't been able to afford.



### Time/Busy

Too busy working



### Priorities

It's not really my kind of scene



### Distance

Too far away

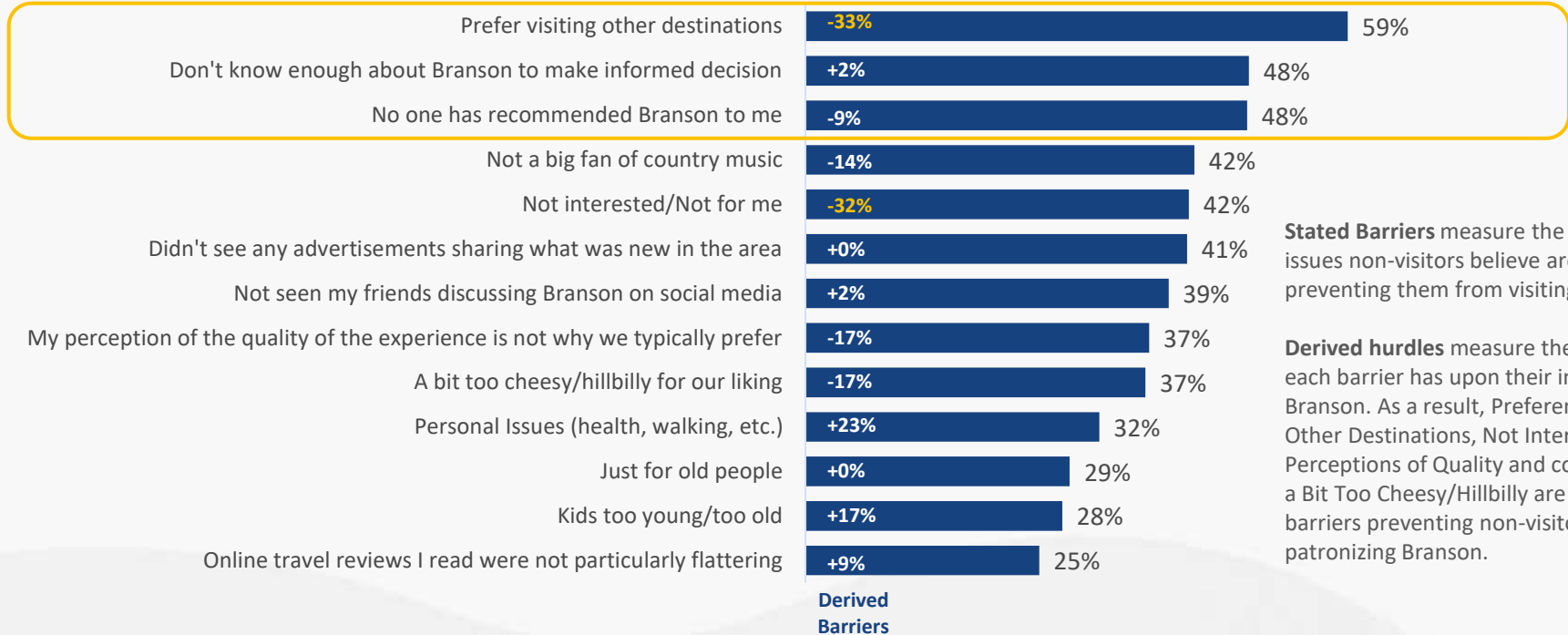


### COVID-19

Tried, but COVID-19 kept us away

# Non-Visitors indicated that the primary reasons they have not yet visited Branson is because they Prefer Other Destinations, Don't Yet Know Enough About Branson or have not Received a Recommendation.

Stated Barriers to Visiting Branson  
% Agree/Strongly Agree



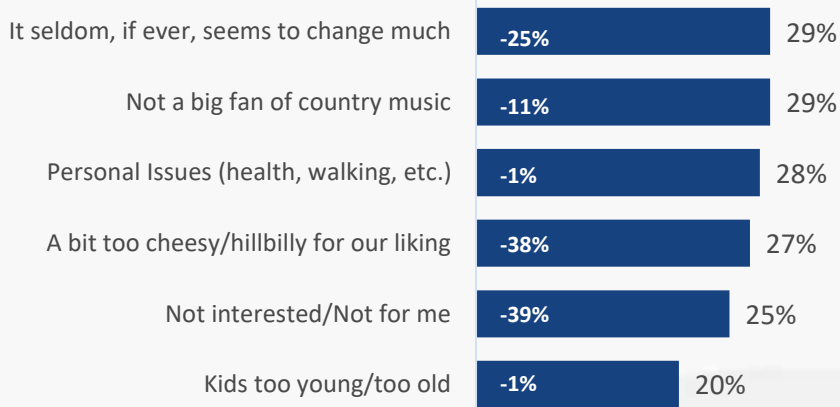
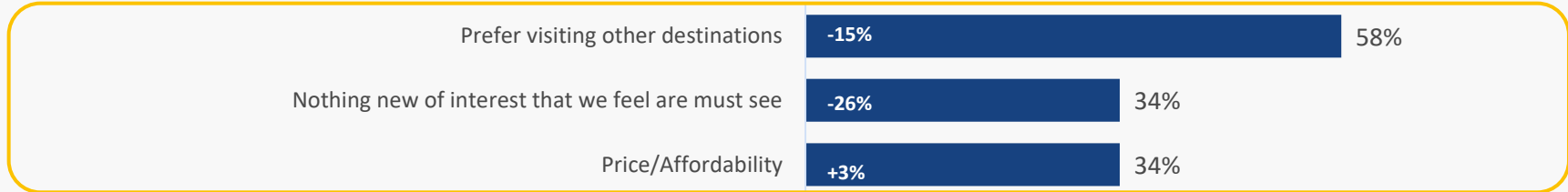
**Stated Barriers** measure the conscious issues non-visitors believe are preventing them from visiting Branson.

**Derived hurdles** measure the impact each barrier has upon their intent to visit Branson. As a result, Preference for Other Destinations, Not Interested, Low Perceptions of Quality and concerns it is a Bit Too Cheesy/Hillbilly are the primary barriers preventing non-visitors from patronizing Branson.



# The most common stated barriers provided by lapsed visitors for why they have not returned to Branson include a Preference for Other Destinations, Nothing New of Interest and Price/Affordability.

Stated Hurdles to Returning to Branson  
% Agree/Strongly Agree



Derived Hurdles

**Stated Barriers** measure the conscious issues non-visitors believe are preventing them from visiting Branson.

**Derived Hurdles** measure the impact each hurdle has upon intent to visit Branson. As a result, Not Interested and A Bit Too Cheesy/Hillbilly are the top 2 hurdles preventing lapsed visitors from returning.

**01. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

**02. BRAND HEALTH**

**03. VISITOR PROFILE**

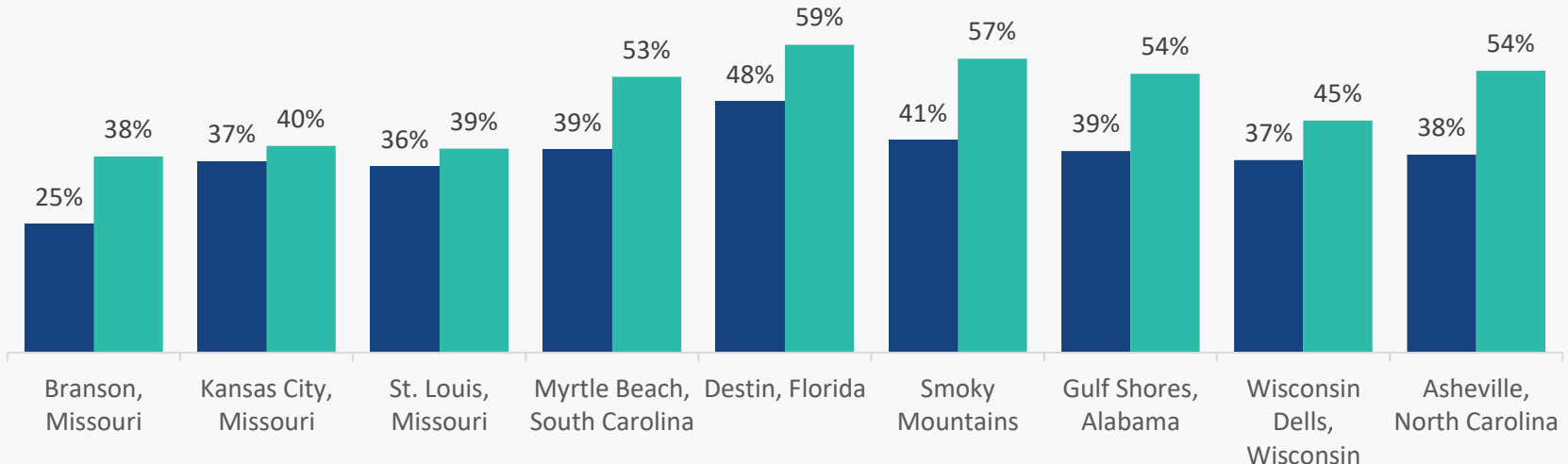
**04. NON-VISITORS**

**05. Outlook for 2024**

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Nationwide, interest in visiting Branson is comparable to that of St. Louis, Kansas City, the Smoky Mountains, Asheville and Wisconsin Dells. But intent to visit is much lower indicating there may be a lack of urgency.

Contextual Interest & Intent to Visit



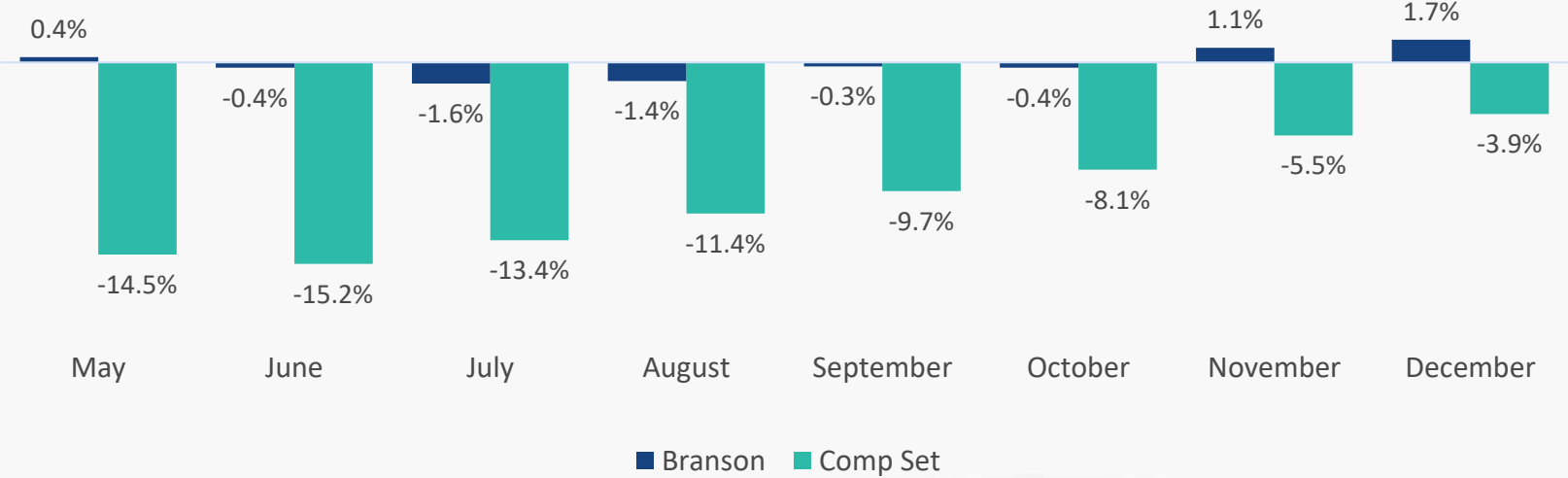
Branson	Interest	Intent
Tier 1	47%	33%
Tier 2	32%	20%
Tier 3	34%	20%

■ Intent to Visit ■ Interest in Visiting



The trajectory of intent to visit steadily increased for Branson and its comp set throughout 2023. In July, intent to visit Branson was -1.6% compared to 2022. But the variance in intent to visit Branson narrowed as the year wore on and ended up at +1.7% (while intent to visit the comp set ended the year down at -3.9%).

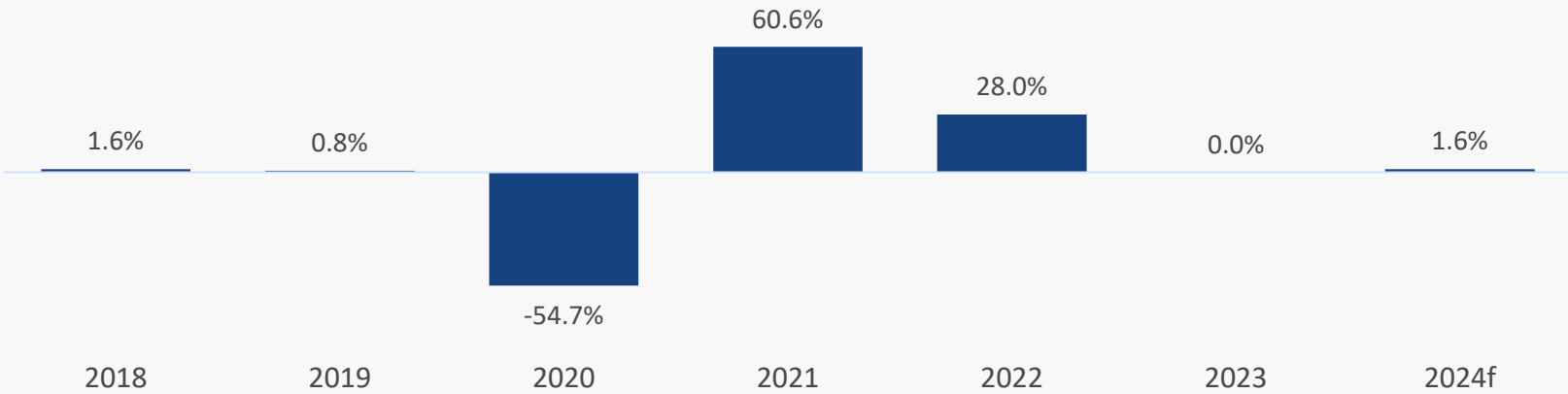
Intent to Visit Branson & Comp Set by Month in 2023



# Attraction **Industry Performance** from VoV

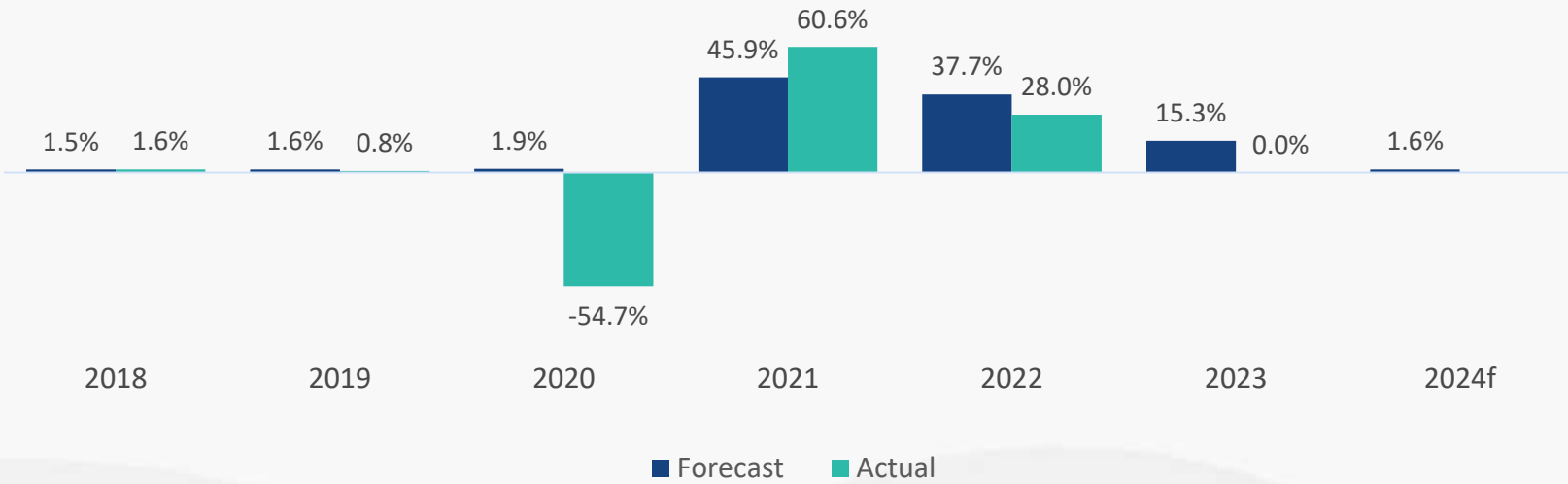
After massive tectonic shifts in attractions industry performance associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, performance and projections of performance have settled down to something much closer to “normal.”

U.S. Attraction Industry Aggregate Performance



Prior to the pandemic, annual forecasts were relatively stable and fairly accurate. Of course, since the pandemic there has been far greater variance between forecasts and actual performance. In 2024, using the same historic model, the forecast is estimated at +1.6%.

U.S. Attraction Industry Aggregate Forecast



# Pent-Up Demand Remains Above the Norm But the Gap is Narrowing



**50%**  
*Historic level of Unconverted Intent Record was 65% in 2020*

**57%**  
*2022 Unconverted Intent*

**54%**  
*2023 Unconverted Intent*

Pent-up demand remains comparatively strong in 2023, but not as strong as in recent post-pandemic years. Once again, more people indicated a desire to visit attractions than those who actually did. This type of unconverted intent remains high (54%) relative to the historical norm (50%) but it is no longer at record levels where it was when it hit 65% in 2020 (or even at the 57% where it was last year).

It is not unusual for attractions visitors' intent to exceed their actual behavior. Consumers are more likely to say they are going to visit than actually visit. But what is helpful is measuring the degree to which consumers overstate their intent each year by comparing intent in 2024 to self-reported incidence in 2023.

Historically, unconverted intent\* has averaged 50%. That is, half of attraction visitors' intent is typically not fulfilled.

In 2020, unconverted intent rose to a historic high at 65% and remained high at 62% in 2021 and 57% in 2022. And in 2023 it stands at 54% which is still well above the norm, yet well below recent highs.

\*Unconverted intent is the ratio of those who intent to visit in the future but did not do so in 2023.



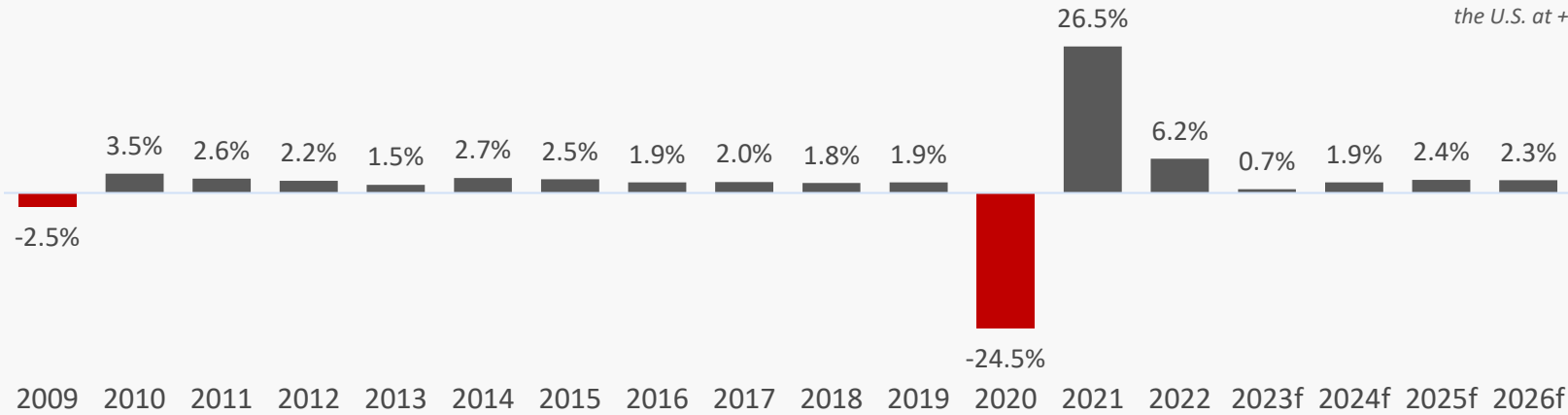


# Travel Outlook (U.S. Travel Association)

# The U.S. Travel Association reports that leisure travel increased by 0.7% in 2023 marking the slowest level of YoY growth seen since 2009.

### U.S. Leisure Travel Performance & Forecast

Since 2014, Branson's average annual increase has been +5.3% or more than double the average leisure travel increased reported in the U.S. at +2.2%.



SOURCE: U.S. Travel Association Travel forecasts updated Winter 2024



# U.S. leisure travel demand is believed to have reached 2019 levels in 2023.

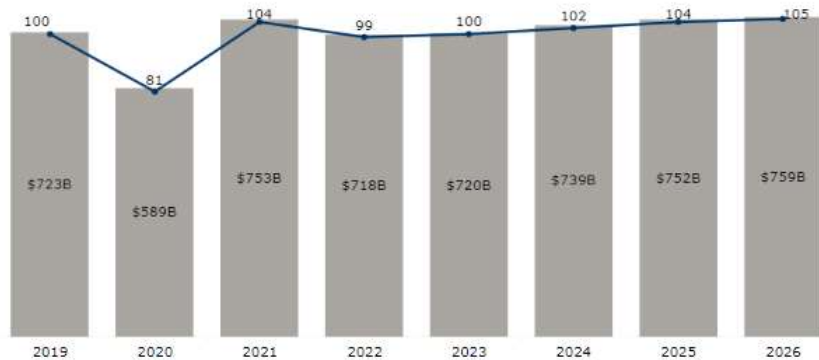
## Domestic Travel Forecast

Forecasted in December 2023



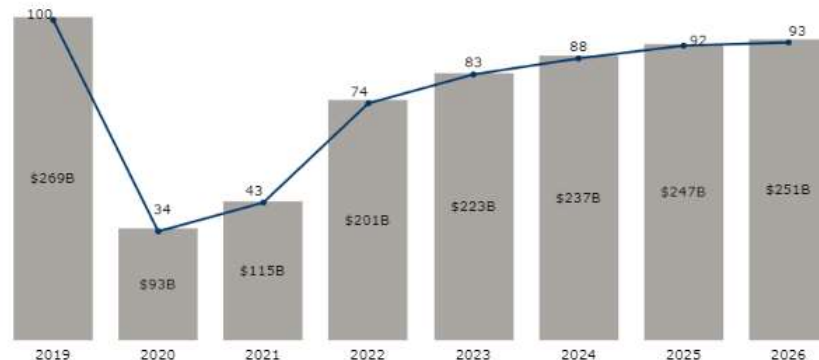
### Real Domestic Leisure Travel Spending

Forecasted recovery, relative to 2019 (index, 2019=100)



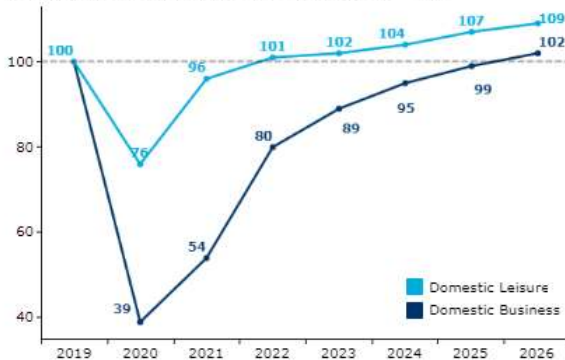
### Real Domestic Business Travel Spending

Forecasted recovery, relative to 2019 (index, 2019=100)



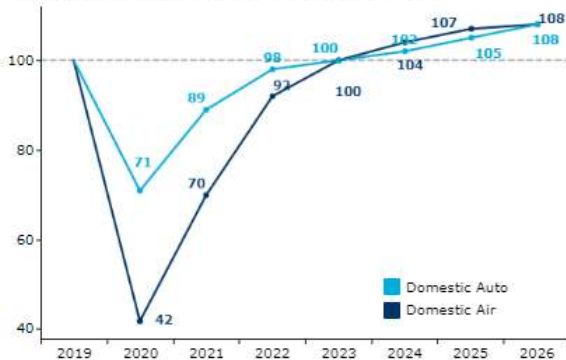
### Leisure vs. Business Travel Volume

Forecasted recovery, relative to 2019 (index, 2019=100)



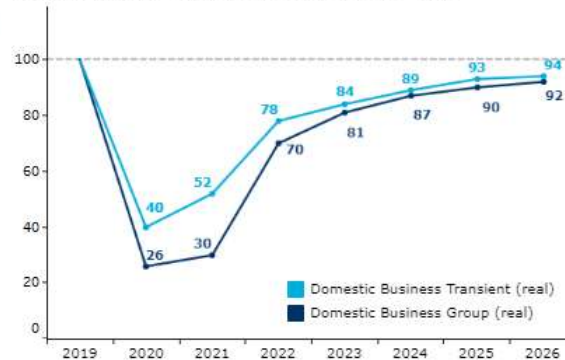
### Auto vs. Air Travel Volume

Forecasted recovery, relative to 2019 (index, 2019=100)



### Transient vs. Group Business Travel Spending

Forecasted recovery, relative to 2019 (index, 2019=100)



## Insights

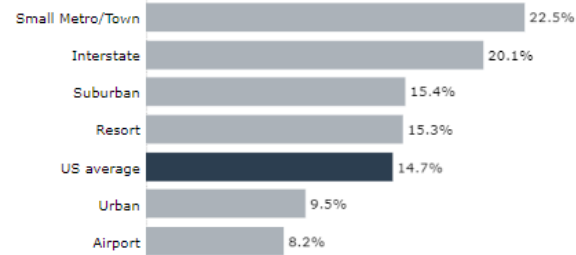
The updated forecast released in November by Tourism Economics and STR anticipates the economy will skirt with recession, but that travel sector improvements, including stronger group activity and returning international visitors, will help offset economic factors, supporting still-solid RevPAR gains.

Overall, room revenue is estimated to recover to 21.9% ahead of 2019 levels in 2024, and 28.5% above in 2025. Adjusted for inflation, this is equivalent to 0.6% below 2019 levels in 2024, and 2.6% above in 2025.

Overall, hotel RevPAR is expected to improve 4.2% in 2024 and 4.0% in 2025, which is consistent with the prior forecast (4.1% in 2024 and 4.0% in 2025).

## U.S. Actual RevPAR Growth by Location

December 2023, % change relative to 2019



Source: STR

## U.S. Hotel Forecast Summary

YOY % change, Forecast released November 2023

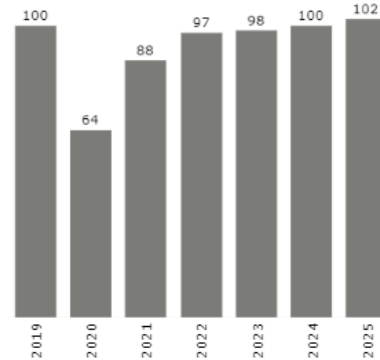
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Supply	-4.0%	4.9%	1.8%	0.3%	0.8%	1.4%
Occupancy	-33.4%	-12.7%	-5.0%	-4.4%	-3.4%	-2.6%
Demand	-36.0%	37.5%	10.8%	0.9%	1.8%	2.2%
ADR	-21.6%	20.7%	20.0%	4.2%	3.0%	3.1%
RevPAR	-47.8%	58.3%	30.6%	4.8%	4.1%	4.0%
RevPAR relative to 2019	-47.8%	-17.3%	7.9%	13.1%	17.7%	22.3%

Note: RevPAR reflects standard methodology  
Source: STR; Tourism Economics

**STR reports that room demand increased by 0.9% in 2023, the slowest rate of growth measured in the past decade.**

## Occupancy Index

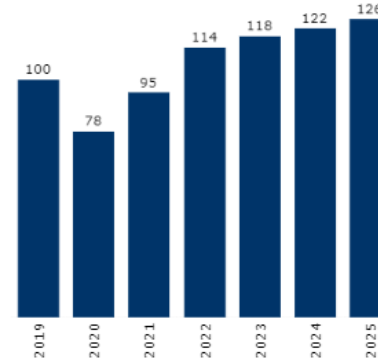
Index (2019 = 100)



Note: RevPAR reflects standard methodology  
Source: STR; Tourism Economics

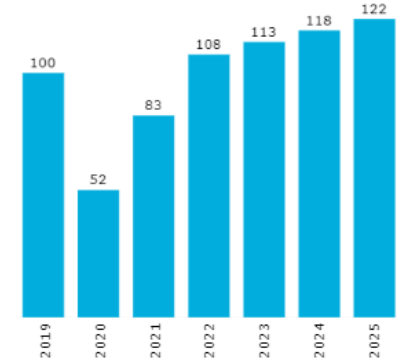
## ADR Index

Index (2019 = 100)



## RevPAR Index

Index (2019 = 100)



## Recommendations for Consideration

# Suggestions for Consideration

- **Aligning the Sample.** The new gen pop survey intentionally covered travelers nationwide since its inception. But now that a solid baseline is in place, H2R will begin aligning the distribution of surveys with Branson's own Scout Report as originally determined. That is, Branson will continue surveying travelers nationwide, but the dispersion of surveys will begin to align with the number of surveys collected each season with the ratio of Branson visits generated per season in the previous year. This is likely to help increase the sample among lapsed and recent Branson visitors while maintaining a national presence.
- **Updating the Questionnaire.** Additionally, as we do every year, now that a solid baseline exists and we know which questions deliver results that seldom change much, the survey has been updated to include a slightly different set of new questions as directed by the BCVB.
- **Placer.ai.** Branson may want to consider replacing the weighted performance model with Placer.ai which projects visitation based upon cell phone pings. And these projections are typically available within a week and can be broken down into days, weeks, months, or any custom timeframe.
- **Measuring Anchor Tenants.** Historically, the Branson traveler survey has seldom asked about specific area attractions. However, that also limits decision makers understanding of its anchor tenants and their target markets. It may be time to consider adding a question that asks about visitation of some of Branson's primary tourist draws.

# Research developed for Branson CVB by H2R Market Research.

Our team loves the magic of data and research. We work until the voice of your customer is clear and you have the answers you need. If you have questions about this report, please let us know:

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