

# Samoa International Visitor Survey

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**January – December 2018**

**Prepared for Samoa Tourism Authority**

**by**

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[www.nztri.org](http://www.nztri.org)

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## **Acknowledgements**

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## Executive Summary

This report focuses on the characteristics, expectations and expenditure patterns of international tourists who visited Samoa by air between 1 January and 31 December 2018. The data presented is collected from an online visitor survey ([www.samoasurvey.com](http://www.samoasurvey.com)) completed after departure. There were 7,982 individual respondents to the survey (5 % of visitors during the period) - representing a total of 12,598 adults and 2,847 children in terms of local expenditure analysis (the latter figure equates to 9% of all visitors during the period – based on national visitor arrival data from the Samoa Bureau of Statistics).

Over three in five (62%) of visitors surveyed come from New Zealand with 22% coming from Australia. Visitors are well educated (75% of visitors have some form of tertiary education) with a relatively high annual household income (the average figure is SAT\$216,020/NZ\$120,263). Nearly half of the visitors (43%) travel with one companion. Solo travellers make up a quarter (25%) of those surveyed.

More than half of respondents (51%) are first time visitors to Samoa, a further 18% have visited two or three times before. The main purpose of visit is holiday-making (54%). The average length of stay in Samoa is 8.2 nights. Over three quarters (77%) of visitors stay either one or two weeks. Nearly a third of visitors surveyed visited Savai'i (31%) in addition to Upolu.

Average visitor spend prior to arrival in Samoa is SAT\$2,461 (NZ\$1,370) per person, we estimate that 55% of this amount - SAT\$ 1,353 (NZ\$754) reaches the Samoan economy (SAT\$ 165/NZ\$92 per day). The average spend while in the country is SAT\$1,296 (NZ\$722) per visitor or SAT\$158 (NZ\$88) per person per day. If the pre-paid spend and the in-country spend are combined, it is estimated that the total spend per visit is SAT\$2,649/NZ\$1,476 (or SAT\$323/NZ\$180 per person per day).

Overall visitor satisfaction levels with Samoa services and experiences are high. The most appealing elements are environmental cleanliness and weather; local people; activities, attractions, entertainment and events; and culture. The least appealing elements are the lack/quality of infrastructure; rubbish and natural environment care; social issues; food and beverage; cost of goods and services; stray animals and mosquitos; and customer service.

Visitors' future intentions are very positive with 91% of those surveyed stating that they would return to Samoa, and 95% saying they would recommend Samoa to friends or family.

This report can be read in conjunction with a variety of presentations based on the annual data set, these can be viewed at: <http://www.nztri.org.nz/5603353-ptdi-samoa>

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## Introduction

The Samoa government, local businesses and communities require a clear picture of the characteristics, expectations and expenditure patterns of visitors to the nation. An important part of this program is helping businesses and the public sector to have a better understanding of the role that the industry plays in the local economy and how industry performance may be improved. The information reported here from the Samoa International Visitor Survey (IVS) is designed to support better decision making at government, business and community levels.

The Samoa IVS involves international visitor data being collected via an online survey. Visitors to Samoa are asked to complete a web-based survey within a few weeks of the completion of their visit.

This report presents the results from January to December 2018. Over this one-year period, 42,452 visitors were contacted by email to take part in the survey, and 7,982 responses were received: a conversion rate of 19%. These responses cover a total of 12,598 adults and 2,847 children.

The data presented in this report includes detailed information on:

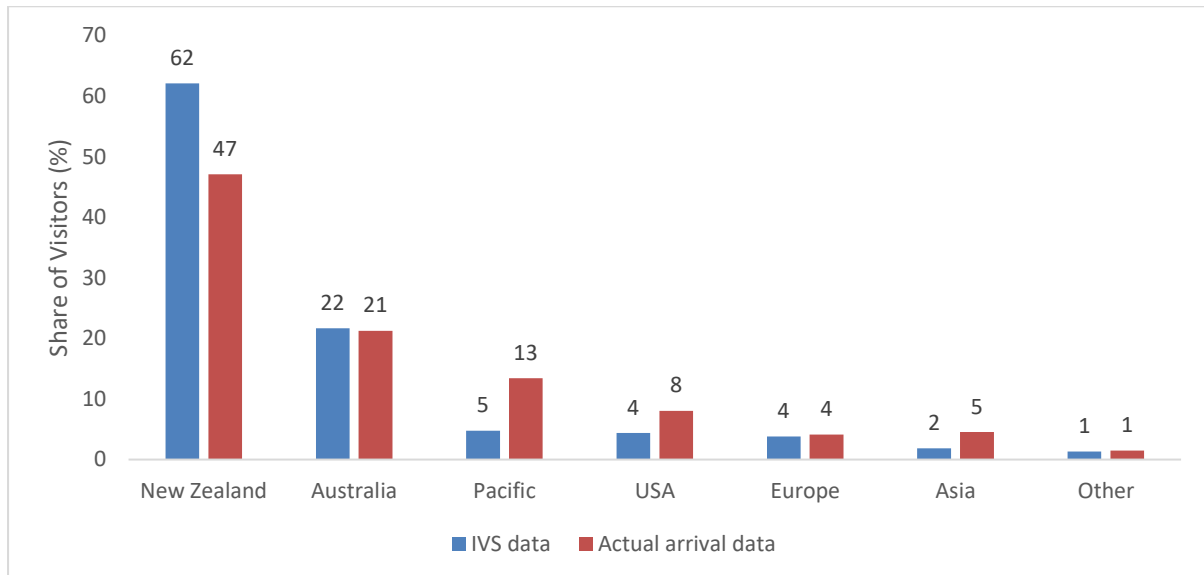
- The characteristics of visitors to Samoa (age, gender, education, country of origin, income, purpose of visit, travelling companions, number of previous visits, accommodation types, length of stay, airline used, islands visited, and destinations visited)
- Visitor information obtained about Samoa, the factors influencing the travel decision making process, and booking information and sources
- Visitor expenditure (amount of money spent prior to arrival and while in Samoa and the breakdown of spending)
- Visitor satisfaction (most and least appealing elements of the visit, overall satisfaction, satisfaction with activities)

Data have been weighted based on actual arrivals by country of residence over the same time period. This ensures that results are representative of all visitor arrivals, thereby ensuring that over-sampled or under-sampled countries of residence are adjusted accordingly.

## Visitor Characteristics

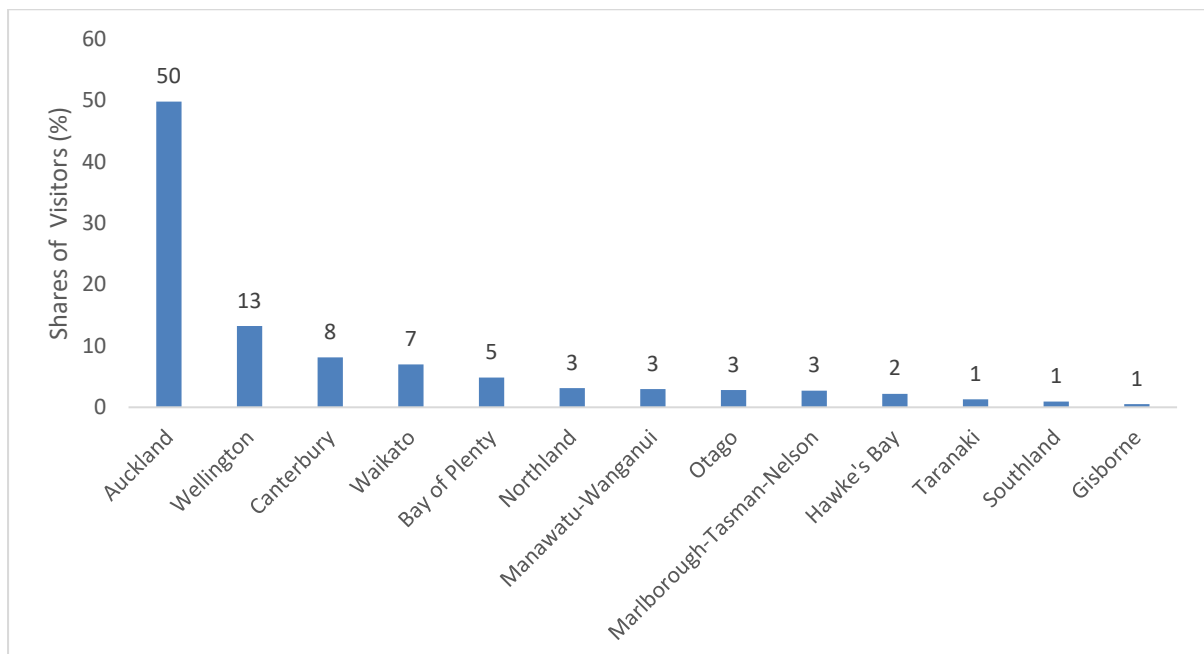
Over three in five (62%) of the visitors surveyed come from New Zealand (Figure 1). The second largest visitor group is from Australia (22%). Pacific, United States of America, Europe, and Asia represent the other main source markets.

**Figure 1: Country of origin**

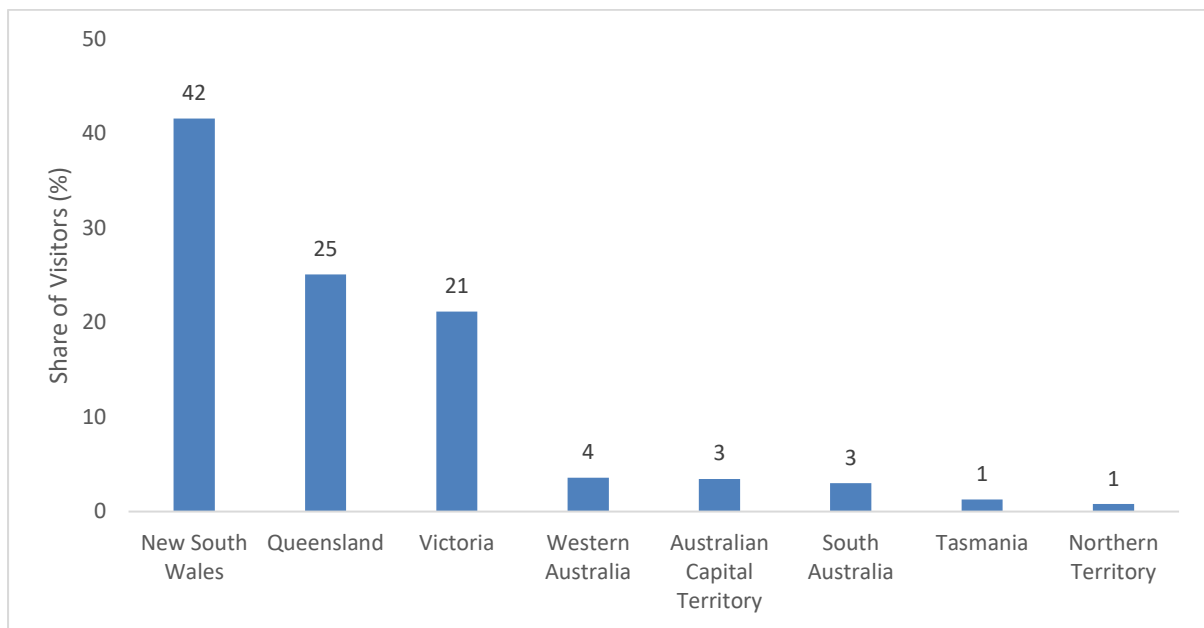


Auckland, Wellington, Canterbury, Waikato, and Bay of Plenty account for 83% of New Zealand visitors. For Australian visitors, the regions of New South Wales, Queensland, and Victoria dominate (88%) (Figure 2-3).

**Figure 2: New Zealand visitors (n = 4,323)**

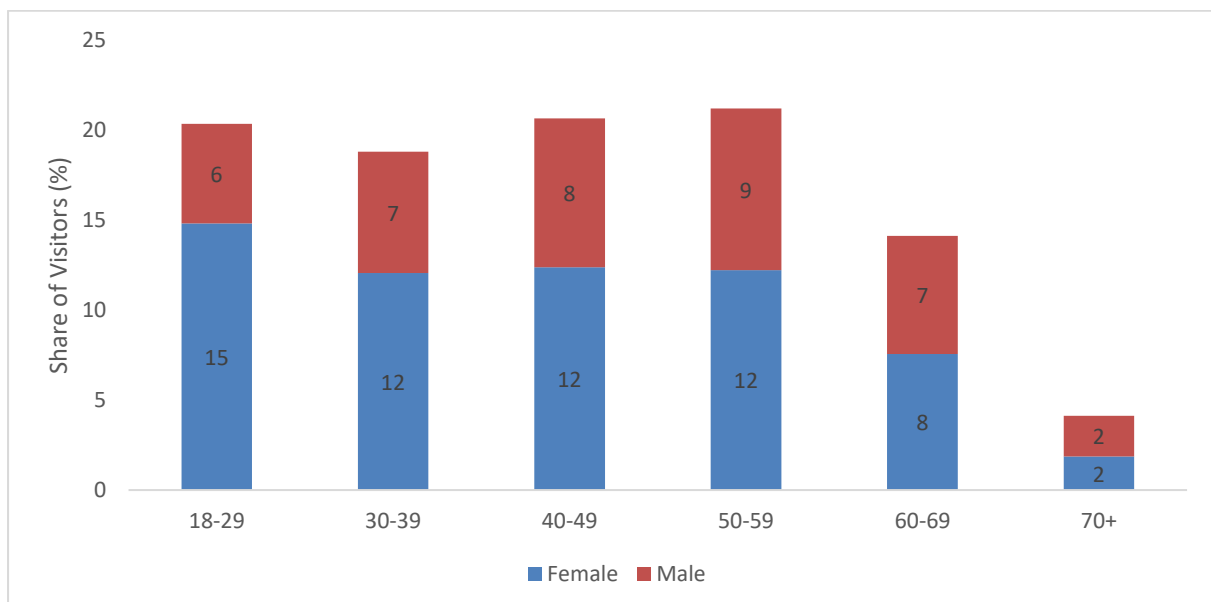


**Figure 3: Australia visitors (n = 1,502)**



More women (61%) than men (38%) completed the survey, with 1% of visitors selecting “gender diverse” (Figure 4). The most significant age categories are the 18 to 29 year grouping (21%), the 50 to 59 year grouping (21%), and the 40 to 49 year grouping (20%), followed by those aged 30 to 39 (19%), and 60 to 69 (15%). There are relatively few travellers in the 70 plus age bracket (4%).

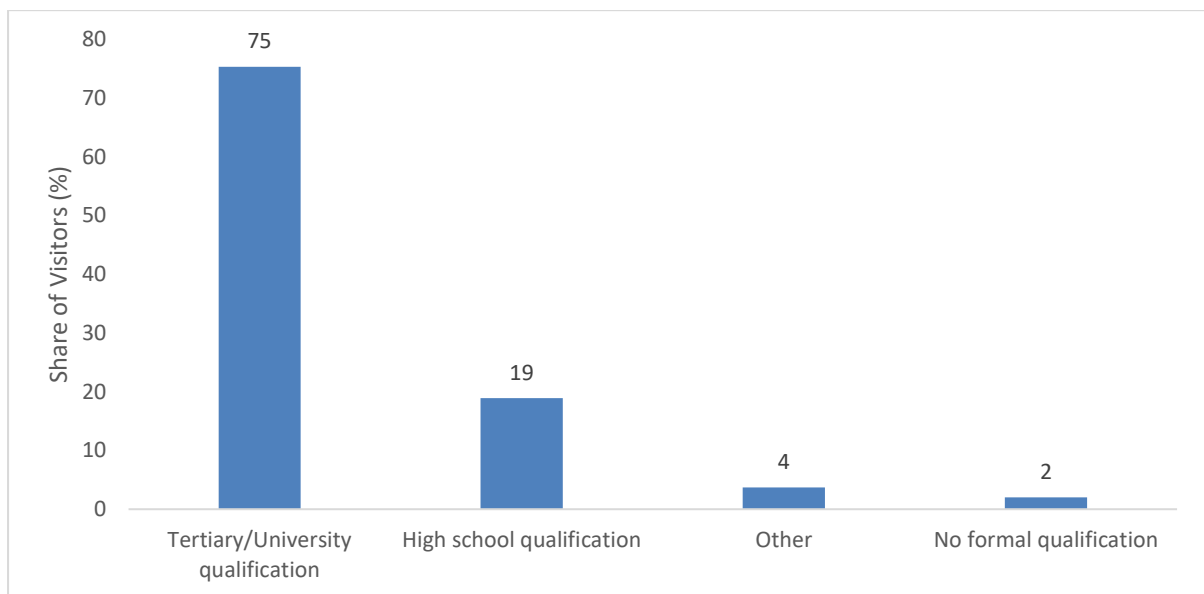
**Figure 4: Distribution of age and gender (n = 4,206)**



Visitors are generally well educated: three-quarters (75%) of those surveyed have some form of tertiary qualification, with a further 19% having completed a high school education (Figure 5).

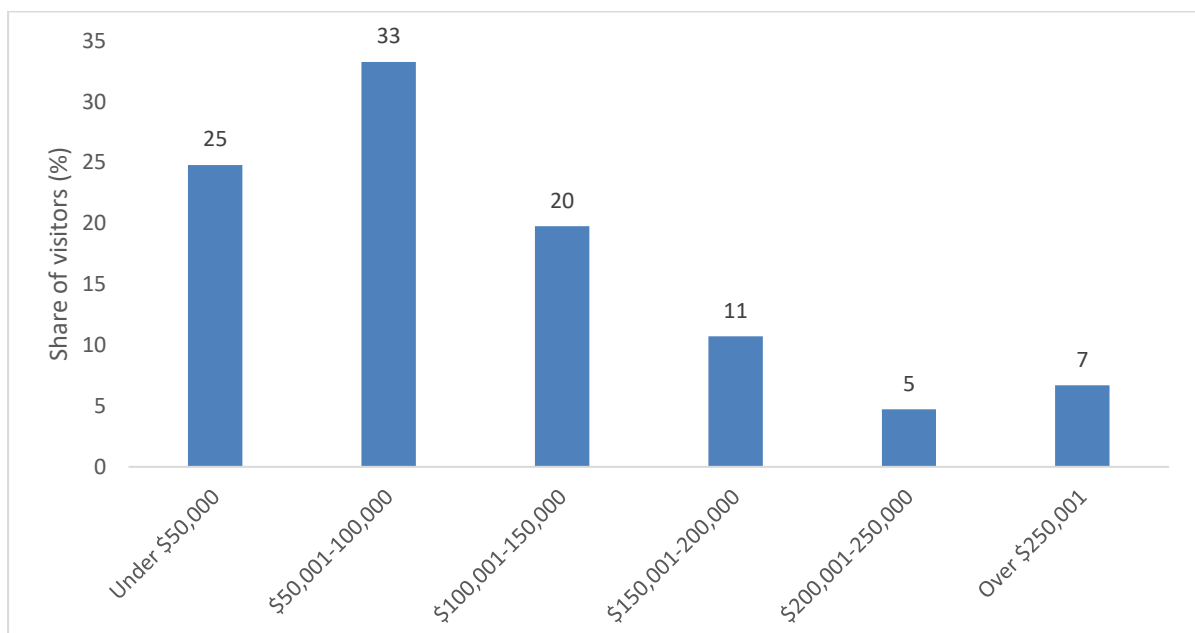


**Figure 5: Highest qualification (n = 6,986)**



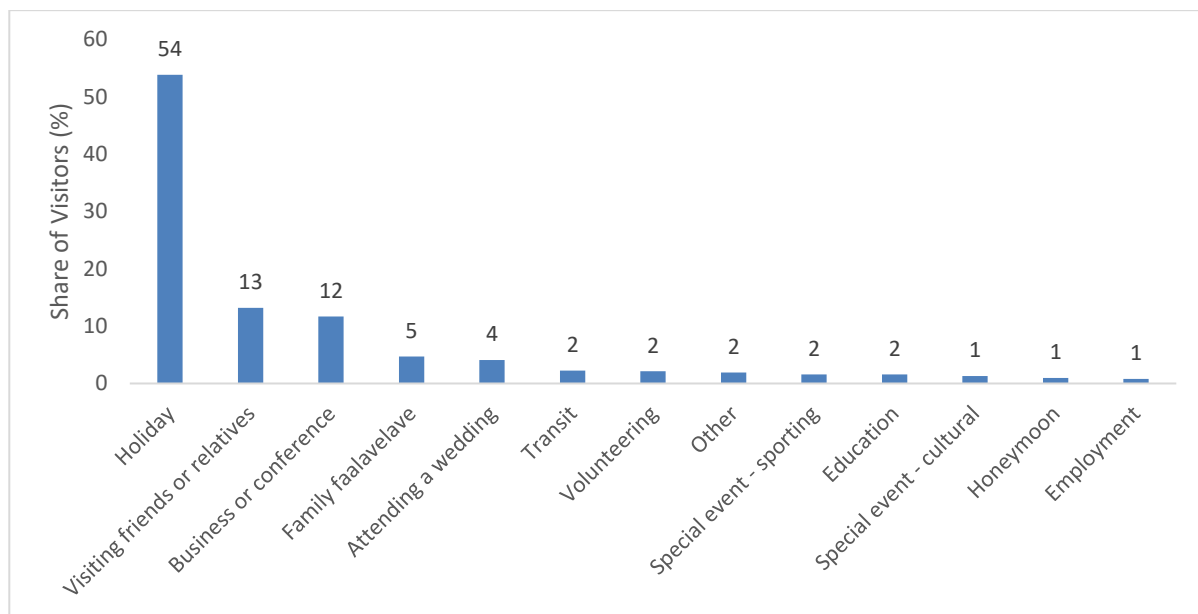
The average annual household income of the visitors surveyed is SAT\$216,020/NZ\$120,263. About a third of visitors (33%) have an annual household income of between NZ\$50,001 and NZ\$100,000. A quarter (25%) of those surveyed earn less than NZ\$50,000. One fifth of visitors (20%) have a household income of between NZ\$100,001 and NZ\$150,000. A further 23% of respondents have a household income of over NZ\$150,000 per year (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Annual household income in NZD (n = 5,931)**



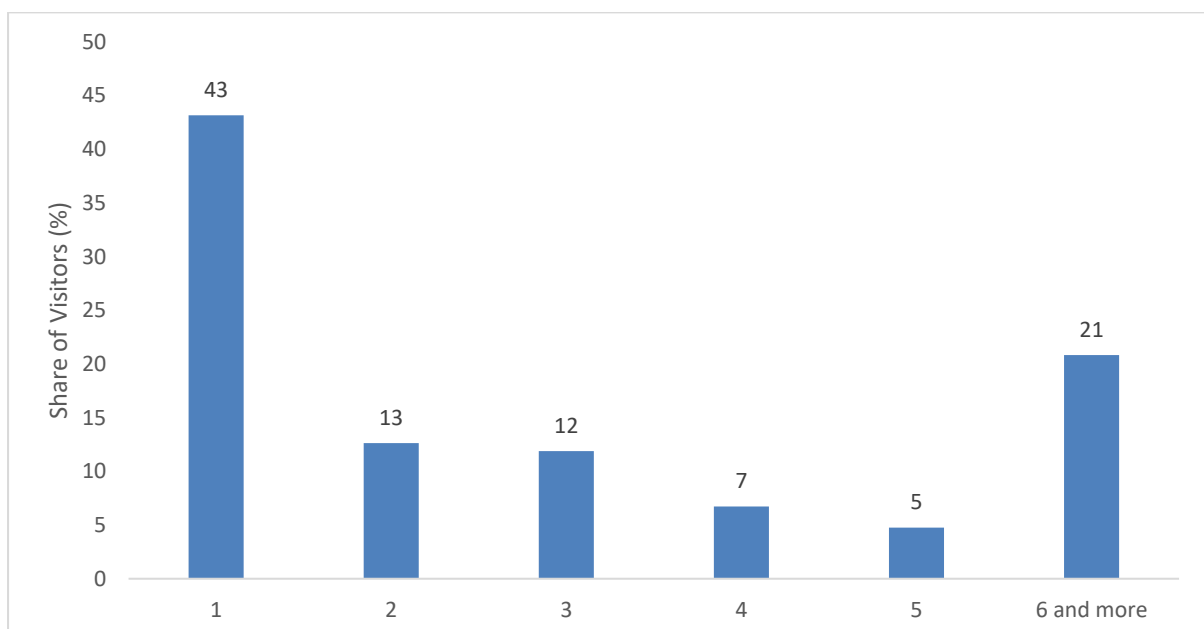
Over half of visitors surveyed come to Samoa for a holiday (54%) (Figure 7). Other reasons given include visiting friends or relatives (13%), business and conference (12%), family fa'alavelave (5%), attending a wedding (4%), and transit (2%).

**Figure 7: Main purpose of visit (n = 6,981)**



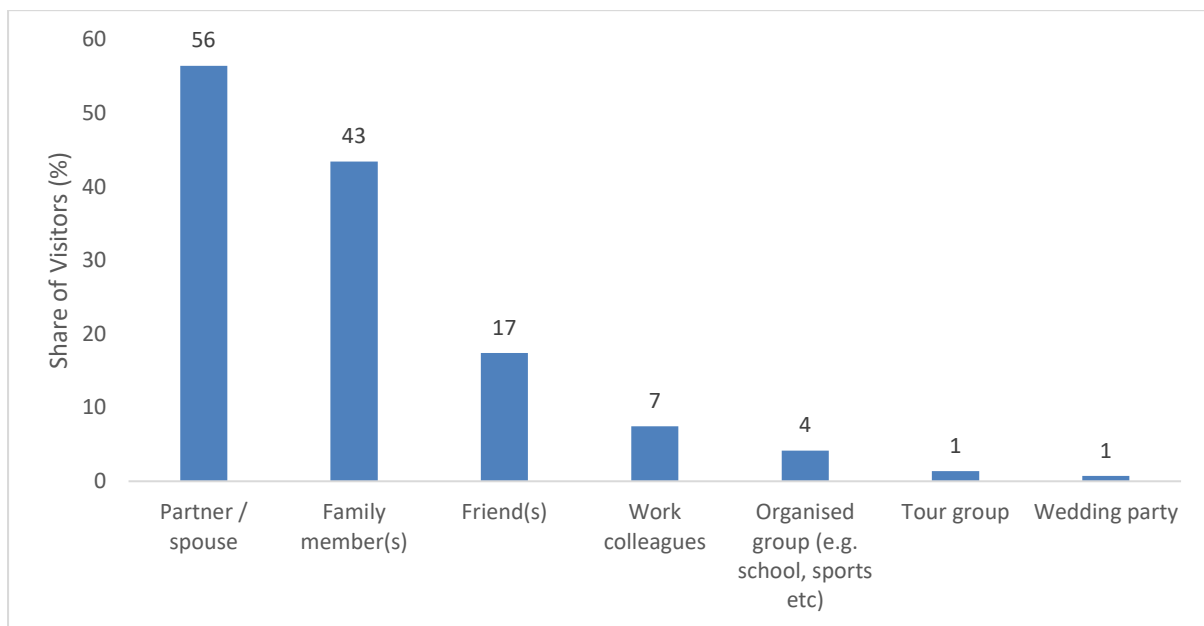
One quarter of the visitors travelled alone (25%). Of those who travelled with companion(s) to Samoa (75%), 43% travelled with one companion (Figure 8). Travel groups between two and five people are relatively common. Over one in five (21%) of the visitors surveyed travelled with six or more people and were often visiting for family fa'alavelave, family reunions, as part of tour groups or wedding parties.

**Figure 8: Number of companions on trip (n = 5,003)**



Among these visitors, the largest group (56%) travel to Samoa with a partner or spouse. Visitors also travel with other family members (43%), or with friends (17%). Those travelling with work colleagues, in an organised group, in a tour group, or for a wedding party represent a smaller share of the sample (Figure 9).

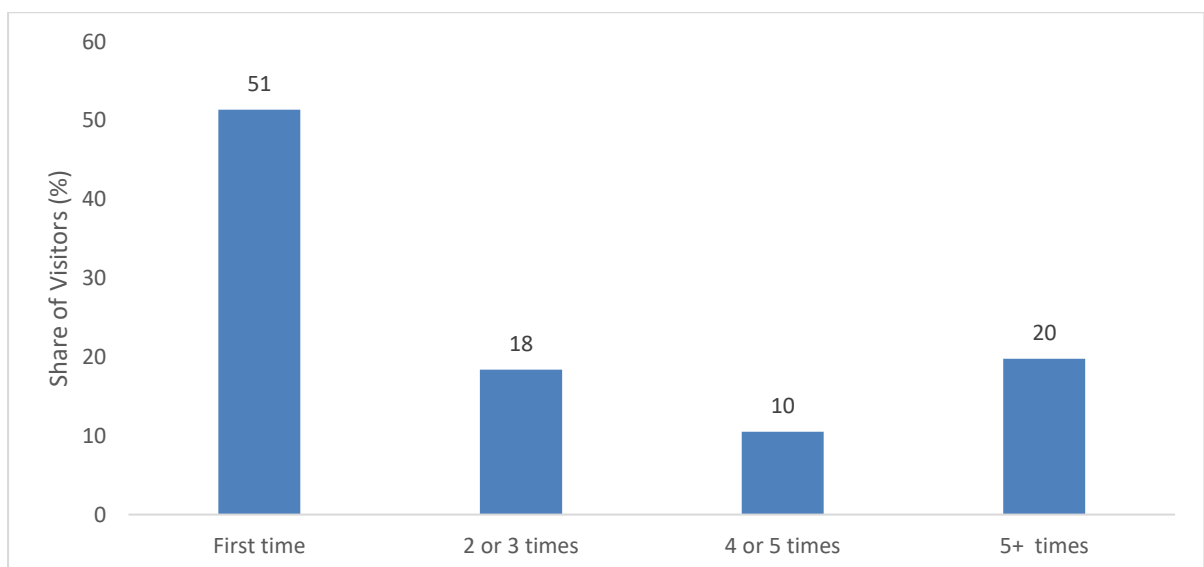
**Figure 9: Travelling with whom? (n = 5,218)**



*Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%*

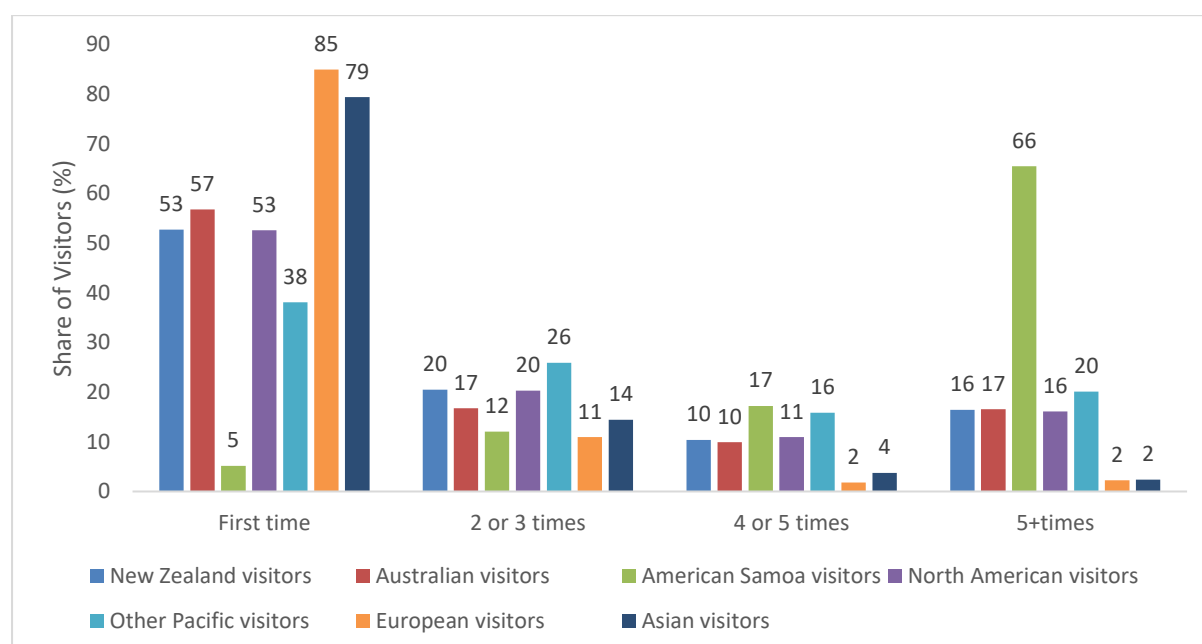
More than half of the visitors (51%) are on their first visit to Samoa. A further 18% have been to Samoa twice or three times before. Nearly one third of respondents (30%) have visited Samoa four or more times (Figure 10).

**Figure 10: Number of visits to Samoa (n = 6,891)**



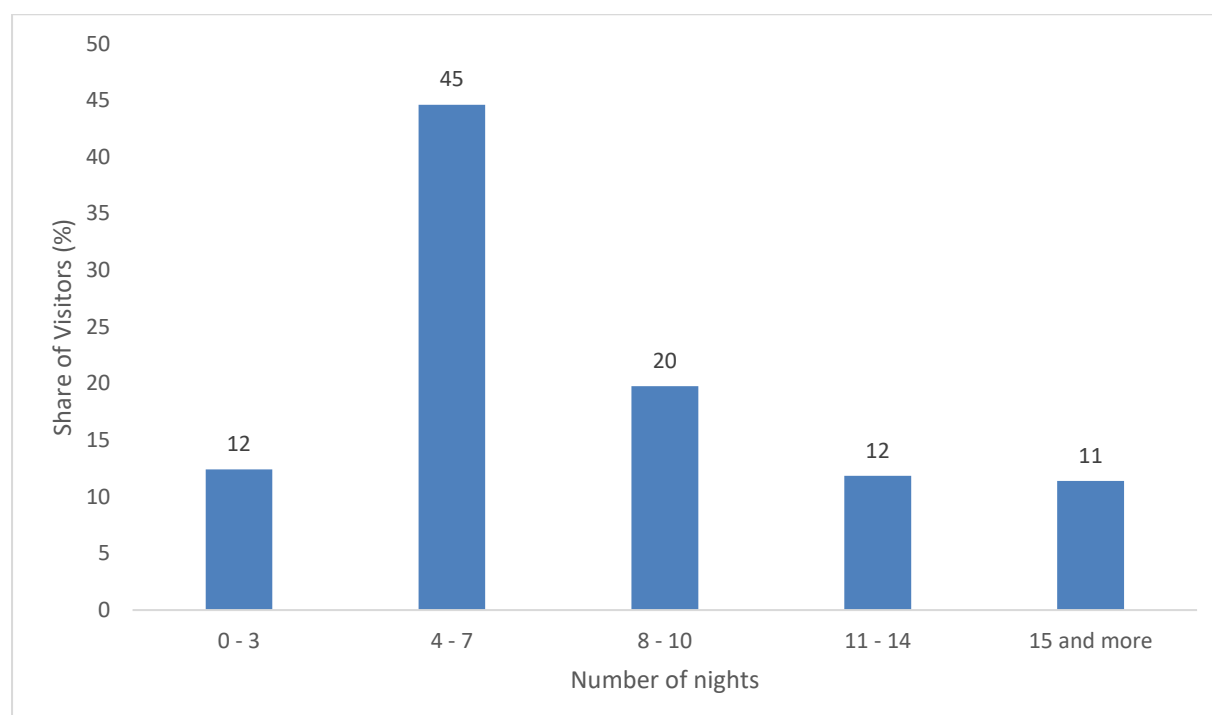
American Samoa visitors are more likely to be repeat visitors than those from other source markets (Figure 11). Most (95%) of the surveyed visitors from American Samoa have visited Samoa before, compared to only 15% of visitors from Europe and 20% of respondents from Asian countries. Nearly half of New Zealanders (47%) and Australians (43%) are repeat visitors to Samoa, with return visitation by North American visitors also strong (47%).

**Figure 11: Number of previous visits to Samoa – market breakdown (n = 6,892)**



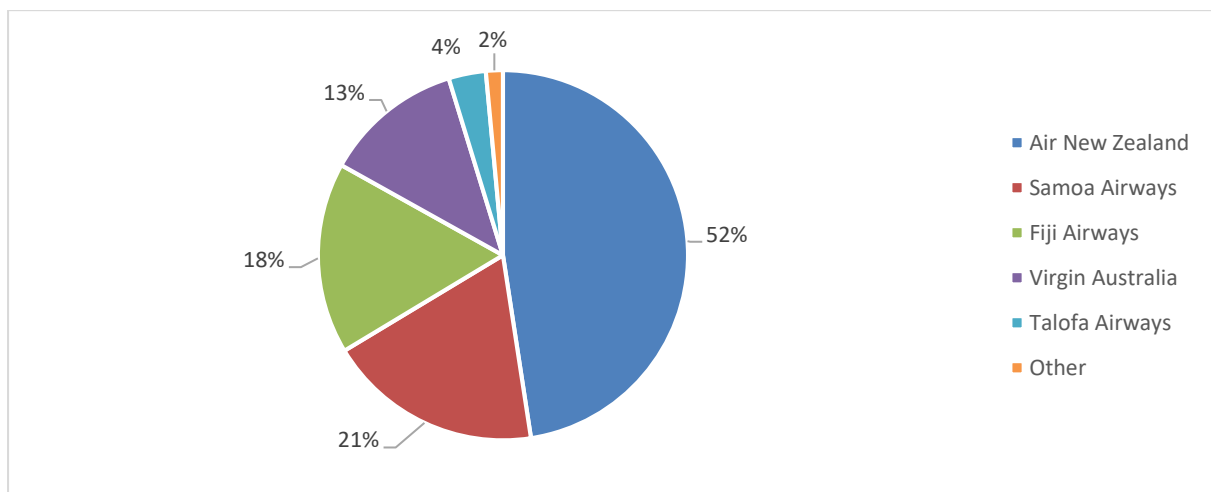
The average length of stay in Samoa is 8.2 nights with 77% of visitors spending 10 or fewer nights in the country (Figure 12).

**Figure 12: Length of stay in nights (n = 6,890)**



Over half (52%) of visitors travel to/from Samoa with Air New Zealand, a further 21% of visitors fly with Samoa Airways, followed by those visitors travelling with Fiji Airways (18%) and Virgin Australia (13%) (Figure 13).

**Figure 13: Mode of transport (n = 6,983)**

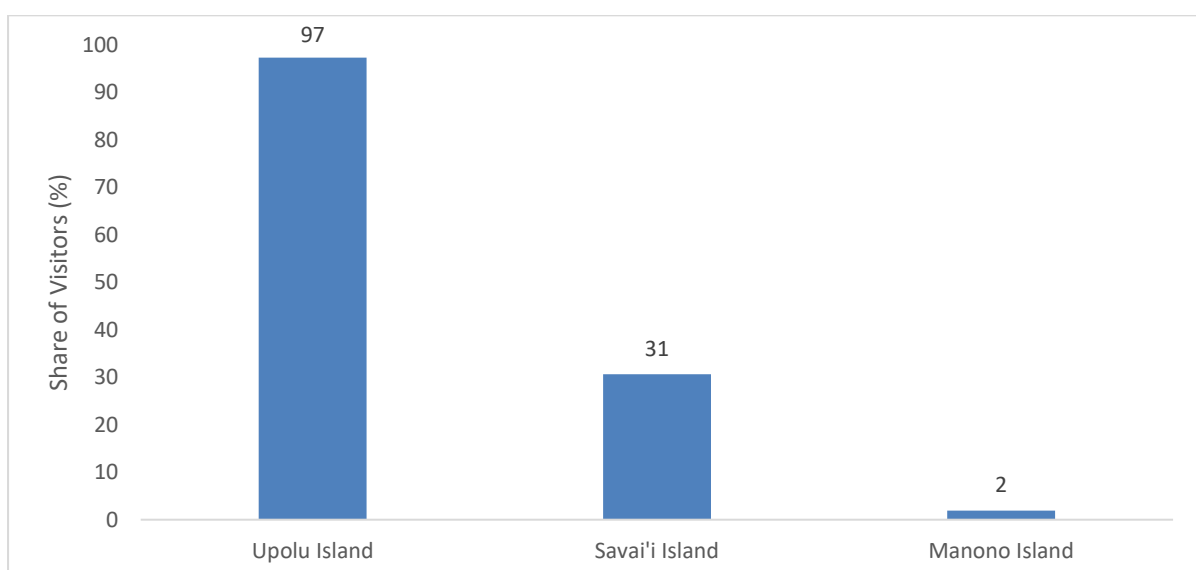


*Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%.*

While 20% of the visitors surveyed said their trip to Samoa was part of a larger journey, 80% of visitors stated that Samoa was the sole destination on their journey. Of those who said they were on a broader trip nearly two in five (38%) mentioned their travel destinations included Fiji. 'New Zealand' was the second most mentioned destination at 30%; another 16% of visitors stated that they visited other Pacific countries along with Samoa. Fifteen percent of the respondents visited Australia. A small number of visitors (13%) mentioned American Samoa and six percent of the visitors mentioned the United States of America as a destination.

The vast majority (97%) of visitors to Samoa spend time on Upolu, with Savai'i being the second most visited island (31%) (Figure 14). A small percentage of visitors spend time on the Manono (2%), while even fewer visitors travelled to Apolima (less than 1%).

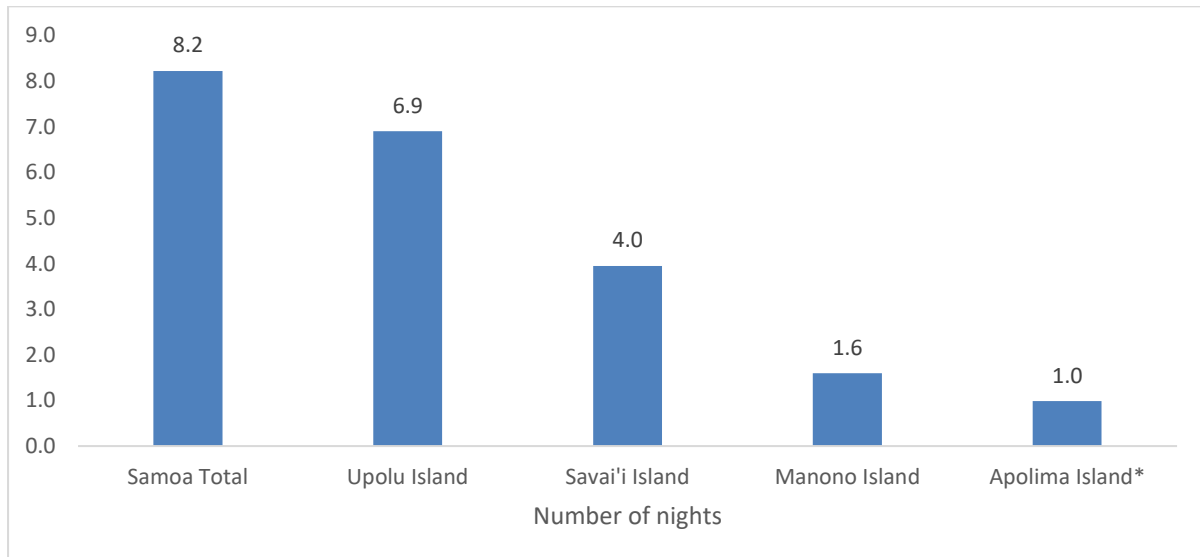
**Figure 14: Visited Islands (n = 6,770)**



*Note: Respondents could visit more than one island, so total may not add up to 100%.*

The average length of stay on Upolu Island is 6.9 nights (Figure 15). For the visitors that visited Savai'i, the average number of nights spent on the island itself is 4.0. Visitors to Manono Island and Apolima Island spent an average of 1.6 nights and 1.0 nights respectively.

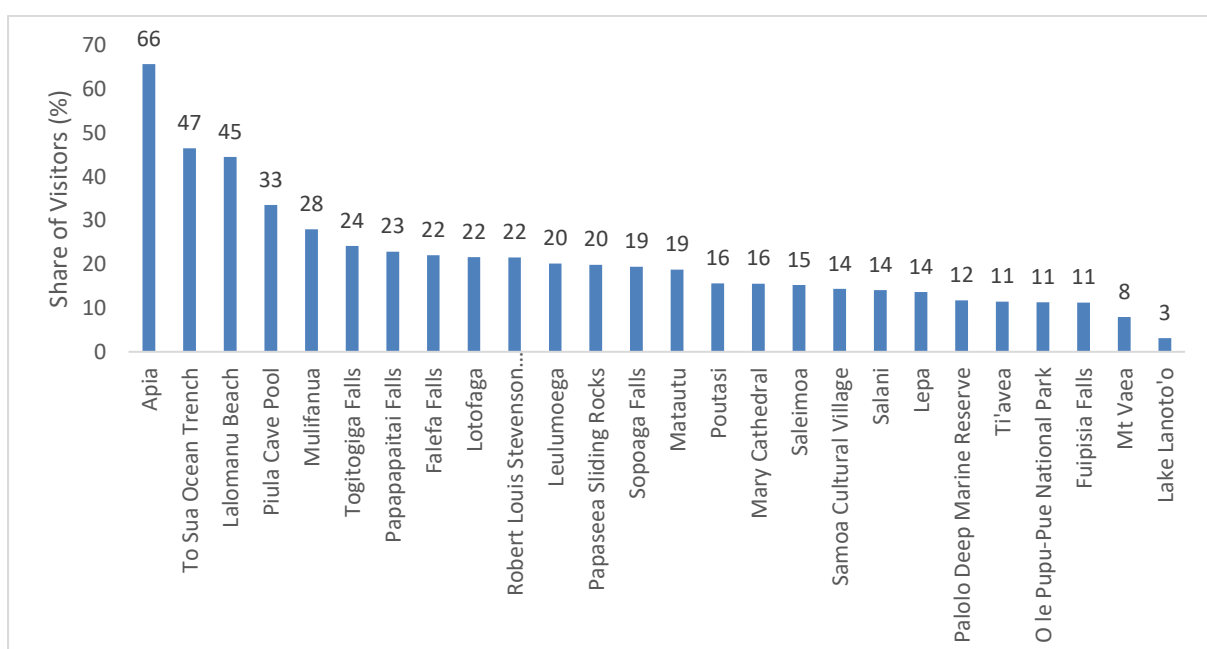
**Figure 15: Average length of stay in Samoa and on each island (n = 5,888)**



Note: \*n=15

Visitors who travelled to Upolu and/or Savai'i Island were asked to provide information on which specific destinations they visited on each island (Figure 16). On Upolu the capital city of Apia was most commonly visited (66%), the five other most popular attractions are: To Sua Ocean Trench (47%), Lalomanu beach (45%), Piula Cave Pool (33%), Mulifanua (28%), and Togitogiga Falls (24%).

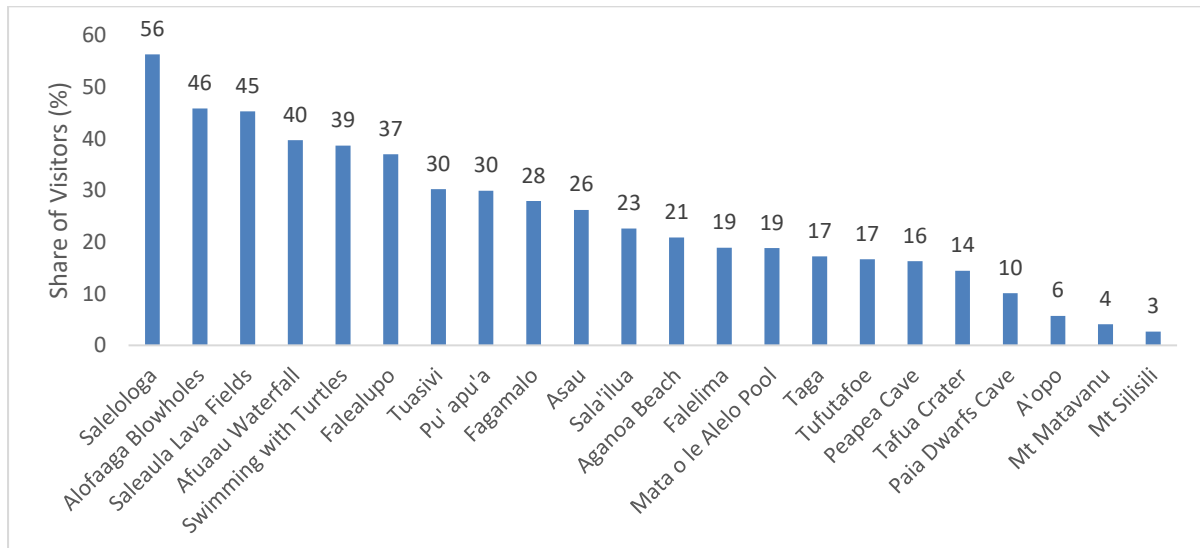
**Figure 16: What place(s) did you go to on Upolu Island? (n = 6,399)**



Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%.

For those visitors to Savai'i Island (Figure 17), nearly three fifths (56%) have been to Salelologa. About half (46%) of visitors have travelled to Alofaaga Blowholes, followed by Alofaaga Blowholes (45%), Afuaau Waterfall (40%), and swimming with turtles (39%).

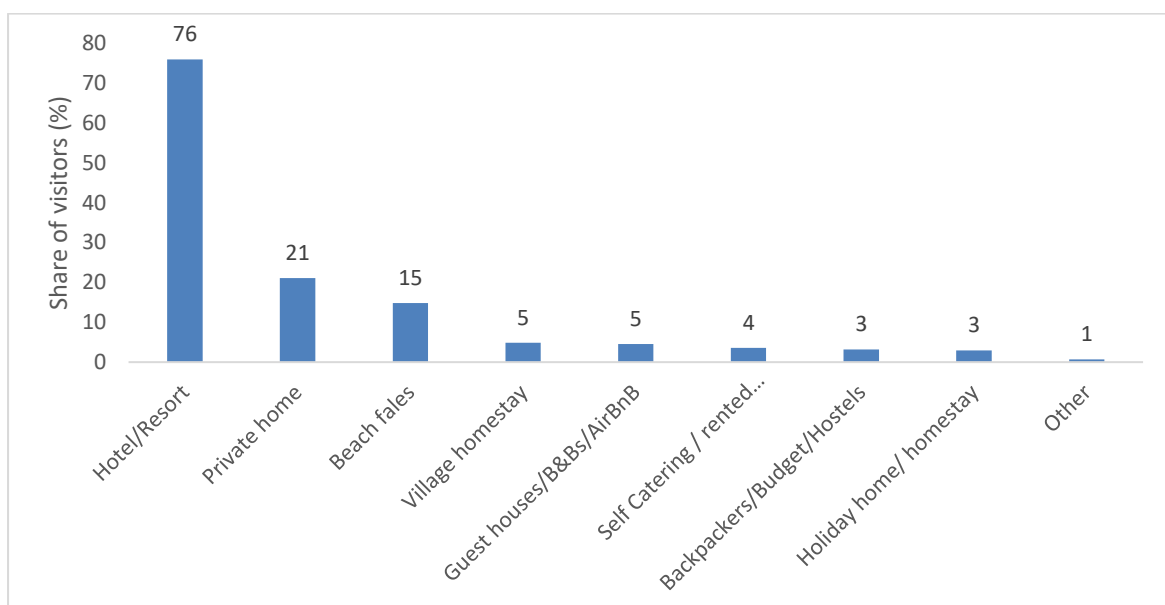
**Figure 17: What place(s) did you go to on Savai'i Island? (n = 2,008)**



*Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%.*

Visitors were asked to select the types of accommodation they used during their stay in Samoa. Over one in five (21%) visitors surveyed actually stay in a private home (Figure 18). For those who stayed in commercial accommodation hotel/resorts are most popular (76%), followed by beach fales (15%). The remaining types of accommodation used include: Village homestay (5%), guest houses/B&Bs/AirBnB (5%), self catering/rented accommodation (4%), backpackers/budget/hostels (3%), holiday home/homestay (3%), and others (1%).

**Figure 18: What type(s) of accommodation did you stay in? (n = 6,945)**

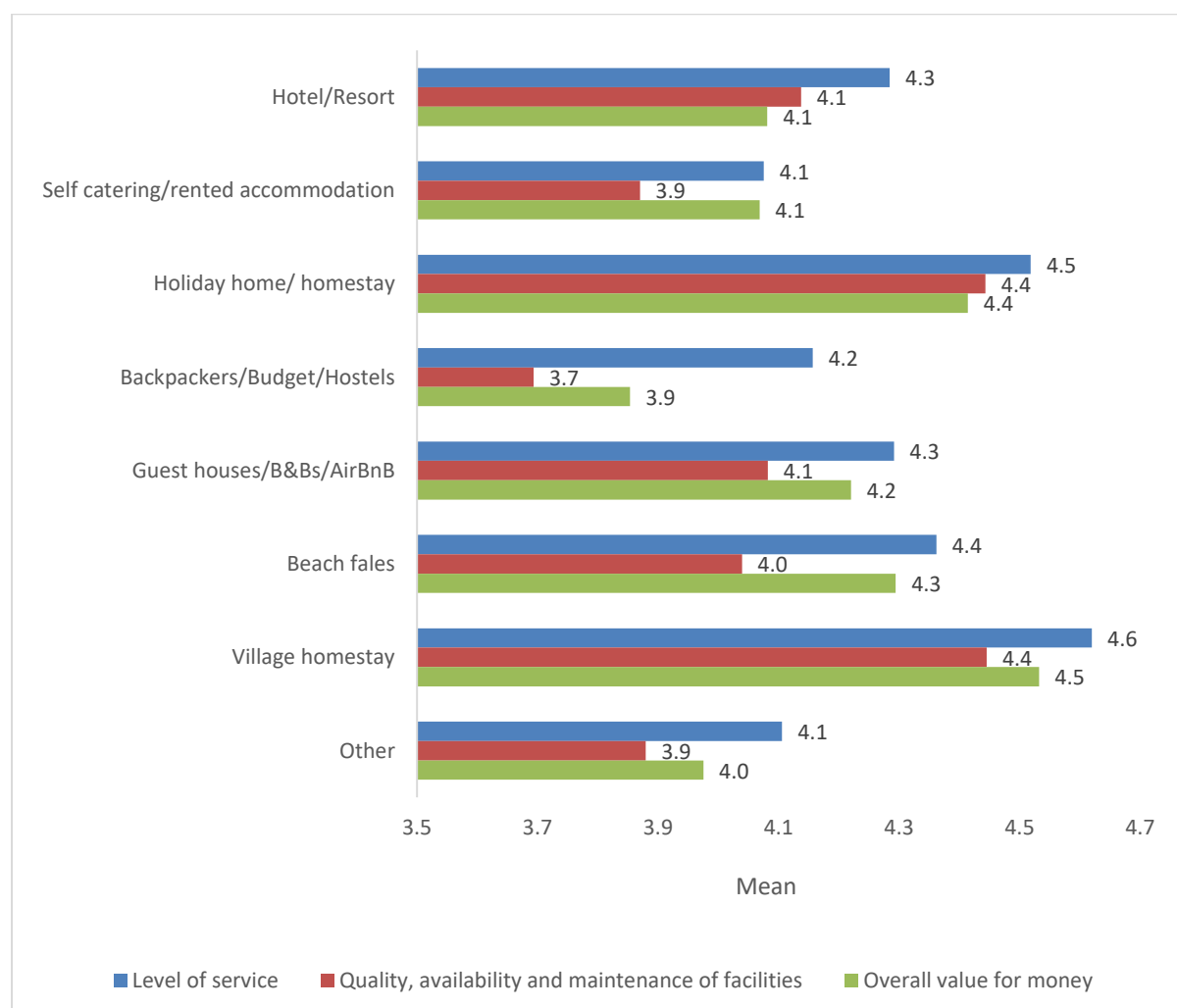


*Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%.*

Respondents were also asked to indicate their overall satisfaction with their accommodation on a scale from 1 'Very Dissatisfied' to 5 'Very Satisfied'. Around 90% of visitors surveyed are either 'Satisfied' or 'Very Satisfied' with either their Holiday home/homestay or village homestay experience, while visitors staying in the self catering/rented accommodation show the least overall satisfaction among all accommodation types.

Figure 19 shows that visitor satisfaction is universally high for most Samoan accommodation types in terms of level of service, quality/availability and maintenance of facilities, and overall value for money. From the perspective of level of service, village homestays receive the highest mean value (4.6), closely followed by holiday home/homestay (4.5), beach fales (4.4), and hotel/resort (4.3). For the quality, availability and maintenance of facilities, most accommodations are either equal to 4 or greater than 4 with the exception of backpackers/budget/hostels (3.7), self-catering/rented accommodation (3.9), and 'other' forms of accommodation (3.9). In terms of overall value for money, most accommodation categories are graded as 4 or above out of 5 with the exception of backpackers/budget/hostels (3.9).

**Figure 19: Degree of satisfaction with accommodation used (mean score out of 5)**





## Information Sources and Purchasing Behaviour

Participants were asked how they had found out about Samoa as a holiday destination (Figure 20). Over half (51%) of respondents indicated they had heard about Samoa via word of mouth from friends and/or family members, this was followed by previous experience (33%), work colleagues (17%), travel agent/agency brochures (12%), and web search engines (e.g. Google) (11%).

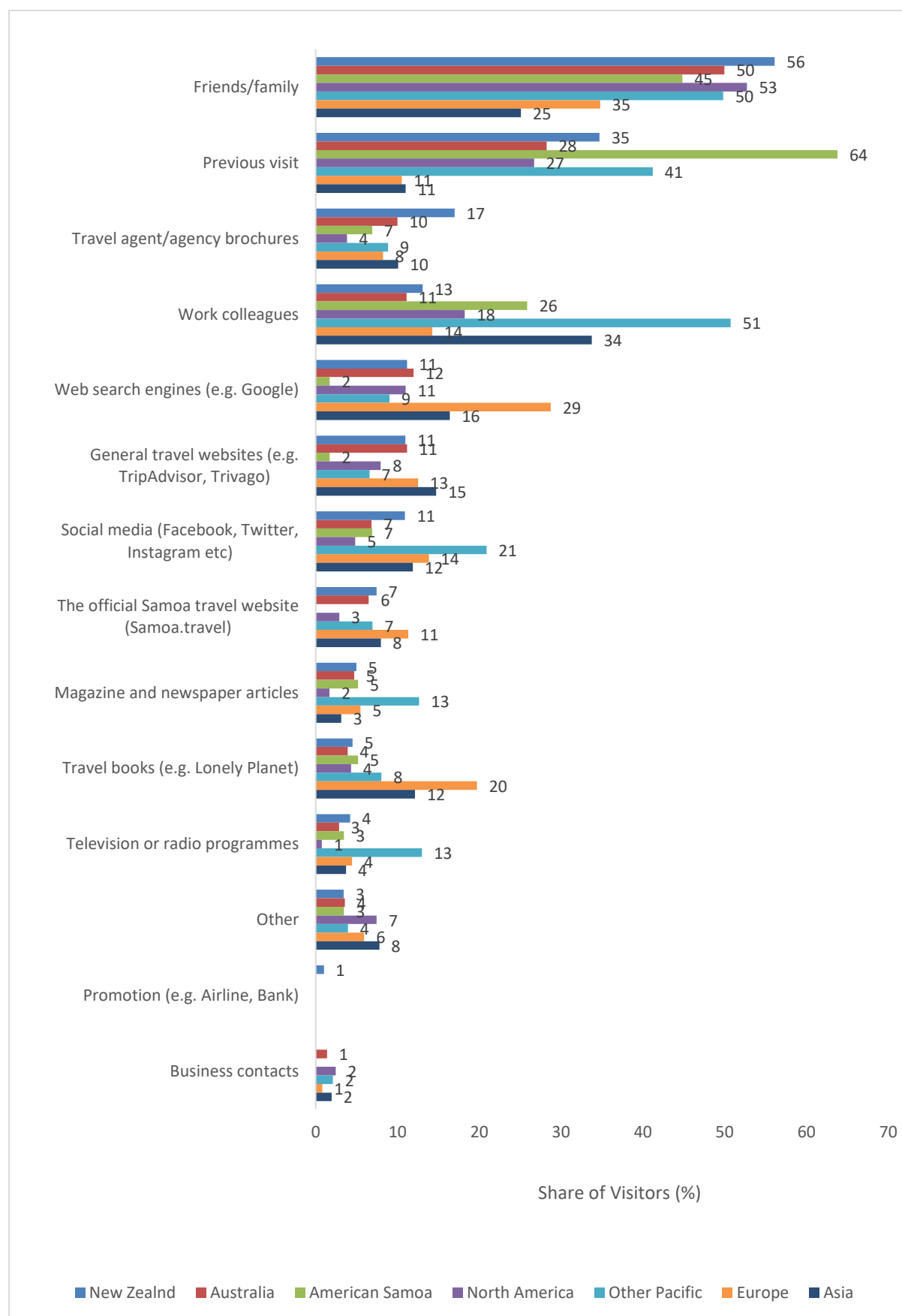
**Figure 20: How did you find out about Samoa as a destination (n = 6,976)**



*Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%.*

Visitors from New Zealand are more likely to seek information about the destination via word of mouth from friends and family members (56%). There are more repeat visitors from American Samoa and this is reflected by the fact that 64% of visitors from these markets ranked previous visits as one of the most important sources of information, compared to only 11% of European visitors and 11% of Asian visitors. Other Pacific visitors (51%) were more likely to rate work colleagues as one of their most important sources for searching Samoa, following by Asian visitors (34%) and American Samoa visitors (26%). European visitors (29%) were more likely to rate web search engines as the most important source of information for finding out about Samoa. A very small number of visitors from New Zealand (1%) mentioned that they got the information about Samoa by way of holiday promotions provided by airlines or banks (Figure 21).

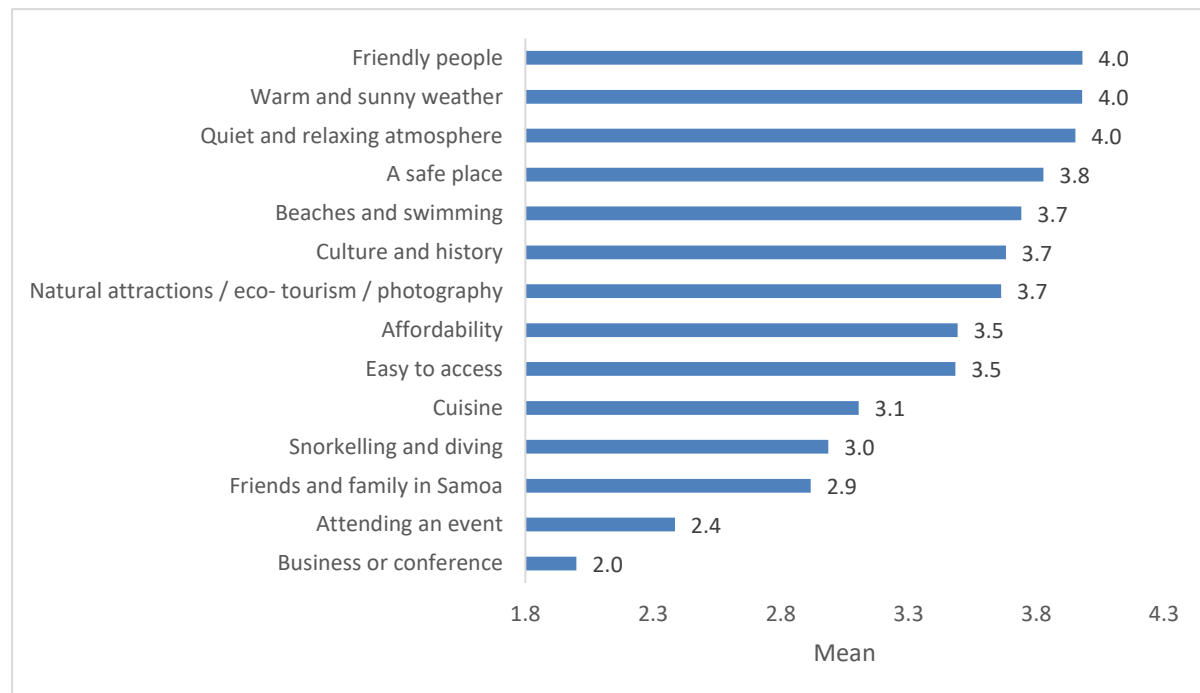
**Figure 21: How did you find out about Samoa as a destination – market breakdown**



Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%.

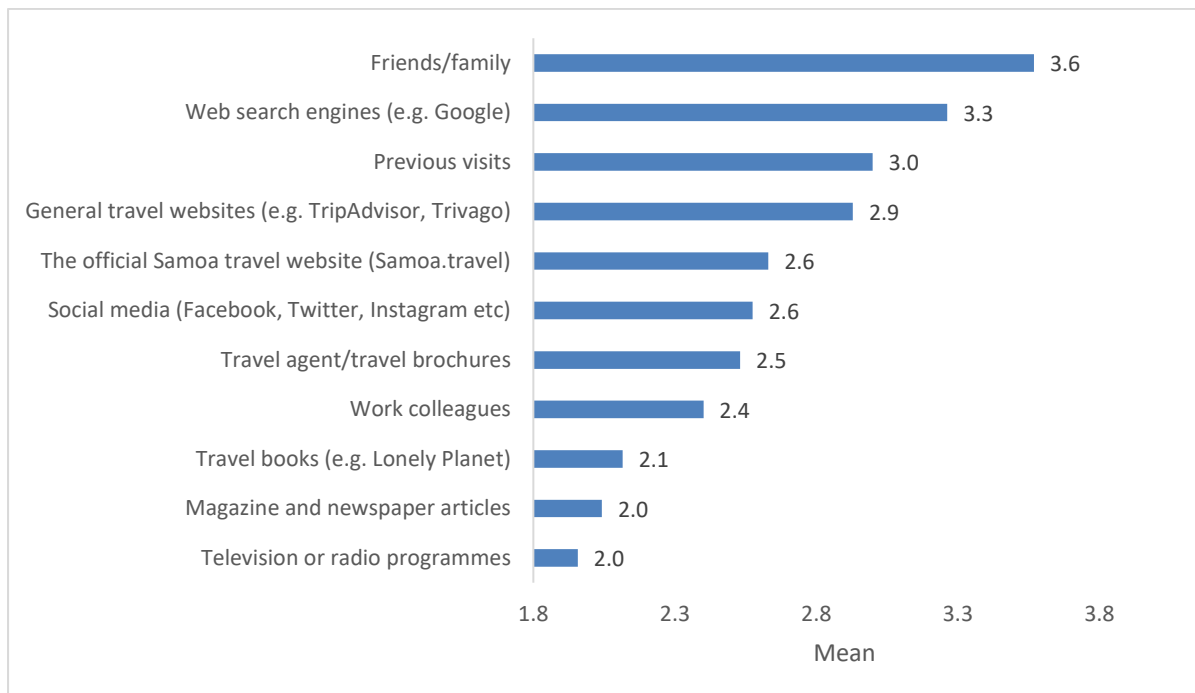
Visitors were asked to think about how influential a variety of factors were in their choice to visit Samoa (Figure 22). A variety of factors influence visitor decisions to visit Samoa, including the top three with a ranking of 4.0: friendly local people; warm and sunny weather; and quiet and relaxing atmosphere. A safe place (3.8), beaches and swimming (3.7), culture and history (3.7), natural attractions/eco-tourism/photography (3.7), affordability (3.5), and ease of access (3.5) also exert influence people's choice to visit Samoa. Attending an event and business/conference factors are not so influential with scores of 2.4 and 2.0 respectively.

**Figure 22: Influence of factors in the choice to visit Samoa (mean score out of 5)**



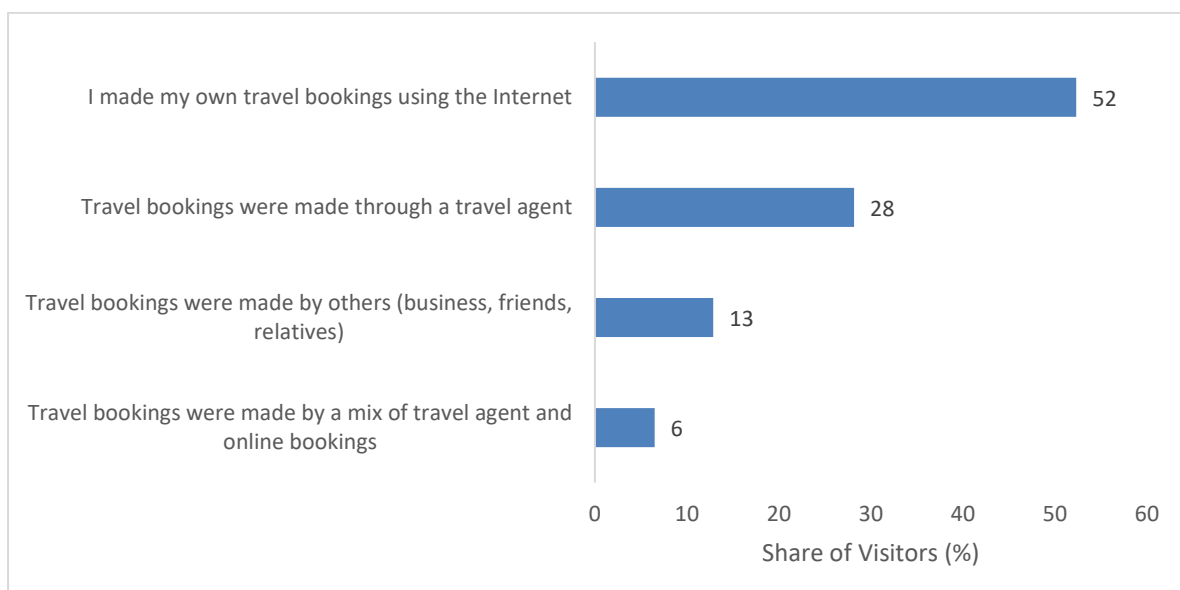
When visitors were asked to rank the importance of listed information sources used to plan their trip, friends and family members are ranked as the most important source (3.6) (Figure 23). Other important information sources included: web search engines (3.3), previous visits (3.0), general travel websites (2.9), the official Samoa travel website (2.6), and social media (2.6).

**Figure 23: Importance of information source used when planning your trip (mean score out of 5)**



Over half (52%) of visitors made bookings for their Samoa visit through the Internet (Figure 24). A smaller group of visitors surveyed (28%) made their own travel arrangements through travel agents, followed by 13% of visitors whose travel arrangements were made by others such as business, friends, and relatives, or those who used a mix of travel agent and online bookings (6%).

**Figure 24: How did you purchase your travel to Samoa (n = 6,981)**

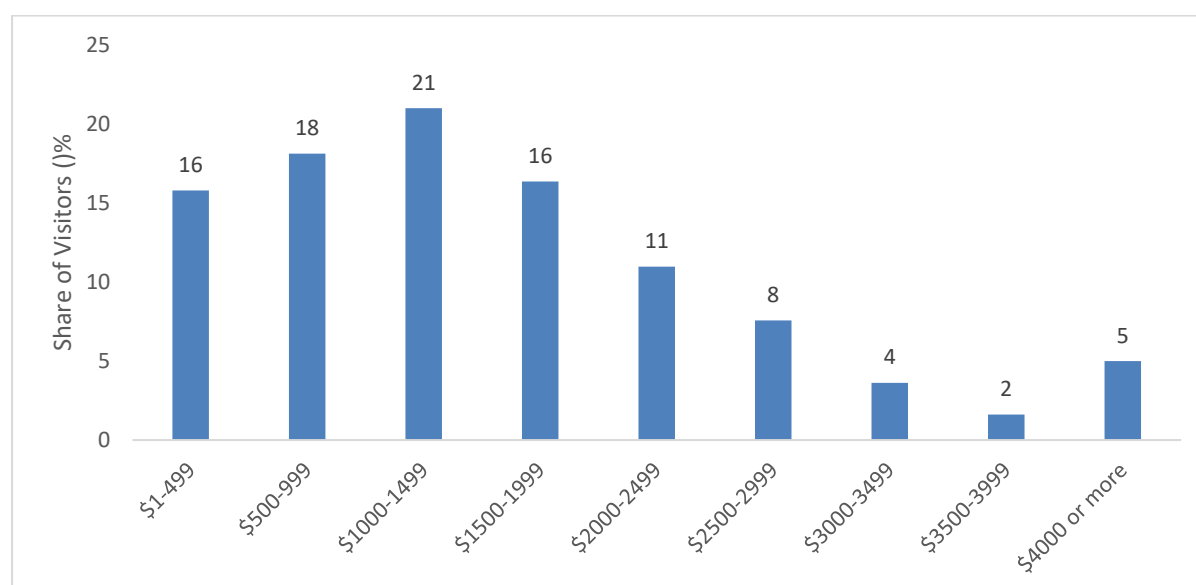


## Visitor Expenditure

The IVS asks a range of questions about visitor expenditure, both prior to arrival and while in Samoa. All the figures below are based on respondent estimates of their own spending and any others they spent money on (e.g. spouse, children). The following pre-paid expenditure section is based on the number of adults and children that respondents included in their cost estimates: 10,636 people comprising 9,023 adults and 1,613 children.

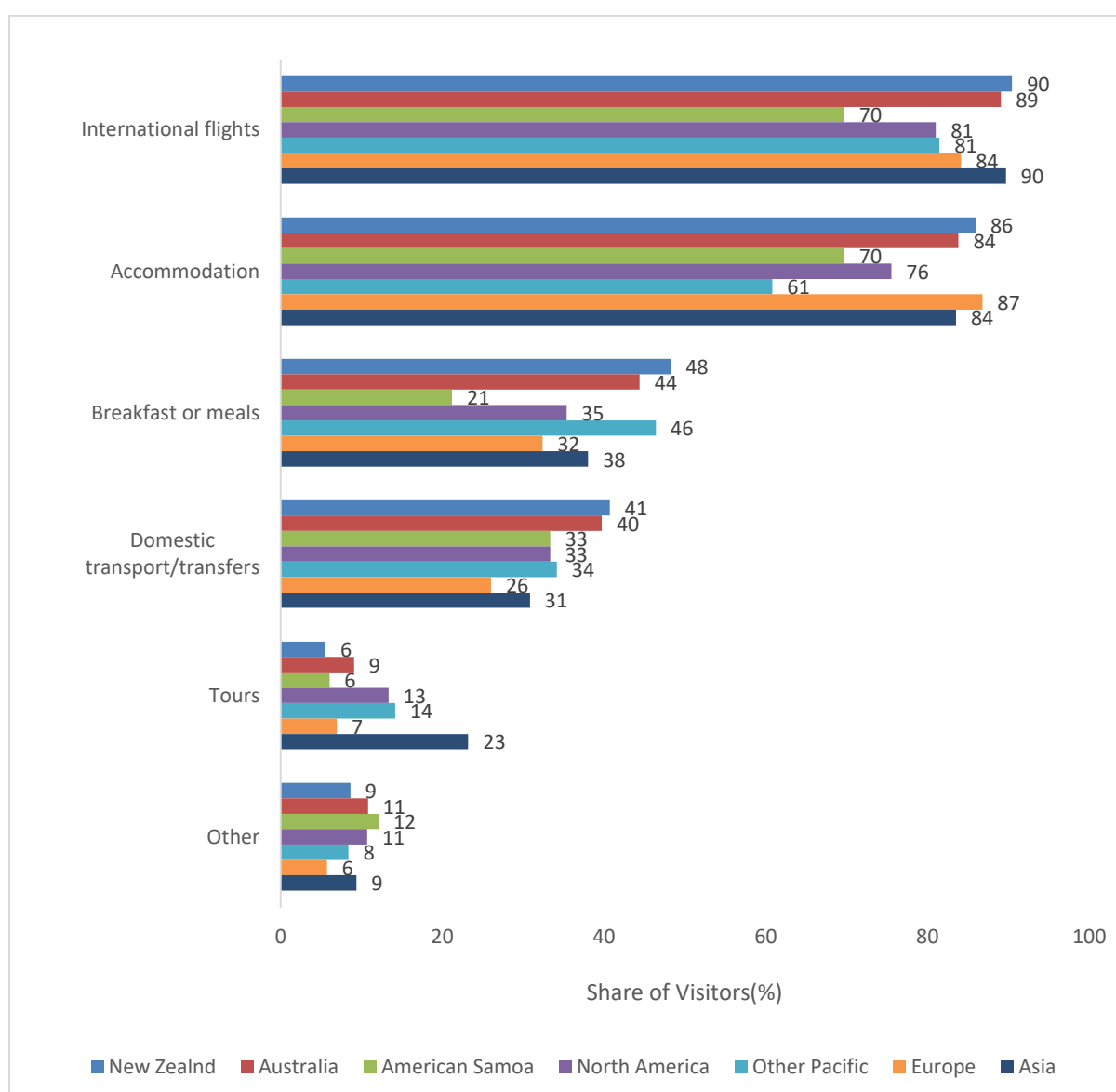
On average, visitors to Samoa spend SAT\$2,461 (NZ\$1,370) per person prior to arrival. Nearly half (48%) of the visitors spend between NZ\$1,000 and NZ\$2,499 prior to arrival, 34% of visitors spend less than NZ\$1,000, and nearly 19% of visitors spend NZ\$2,500 or more (Figure 25).

**Figure 25: Amount of money spent per person prior to arrival (n = 4,306)**



In addition to international flights, spending prior to arrival usually includes accommodation: 86% of the cases for New Zealand visitors, 84% for Australian visitors, 70% for American Samoa visitors, 76% for North American visitors, 61% for other Pacific visitors, 87% for European visitors and for 84% of visitors from Asian countries (Figure 26). Over one third of visitors (38%) have prepaid for breakfast and meals prior to arrival (48% for New Zealand, 44% for Australian visitors, 21% for American Samoa, 35% for North American visitors, 46% for other Pacific visitors, 32% for European visitors and for 38% of visitors from Asian countries). Activities are much less likely to be included in pre-paid expenses with the exception of those visitors from Asian countries (23%).

**Figure 26: Items included in money spent prior to arrival – market breakdown**



*Note: Multiple responses, therefore total does not add up to 100%.*

It is difficult to estimate accurately the proportion of the pre-paid spend that flows to Samoa. For the purposes of this study, and based on previous IVS research in the region, we conservatively estimate that 55% of total prepaid spend flows back to the Samoan economy. In summary, for every pre-paid 1 SAT\$, 55 cents flow back to the local economy. We estimate that the pre-paid spend figure flowing back to the local economy, is SAT\$165 (NZ\$92) per day, and SAT\$1,353 (NZ\$754) per visit (8.2 nights).

The total spend per visitor per day while in Samoa (excluding any pre-paid expenditure) is SAT\$158 (NZ\$88) (Table 1). The majority of money spent locally is on accommodation (30%), restaurants, cafes and bars (21%), and vehicle rental (10%). These per person expenditure figures are based on 7,982 survey responses covering a total of 15,445 people (12,598 adults and 2,847 children).

By multiplying daily spend by the average stay (8.2 nights) we can see that each visitor spends on average SAT\$1,296 (NZ\$722) during their time in Samoa. The total figure of what is spent locally and what flows back to Samoa from pre-paid expenses is therefore SAT\$323 (SAT\$165 + SAT\$158) / NZ\$180 (NZ\$92 + NZ\$88) per visitor per day, or SAT\$2,649 (SAT\$1,353 + SAT\$1,296) / NZ\$1,476 (NZ\$754 + NZ\$722) for each visitor.

**Table 1: Average visitor expenditure in Samoa (per person per day)**

Expenditure Items	Covering people 15,445	
	Mean (SAT\$)	(% of spend)
Accommodation	47	30
Restaurants cafes & bars	33	21
Vehicle rental	16	10
Shopping	15	9
Groceries	13	8
Other	9	5
Tours/activities	8	5
Donations	6	4
Petrol	5	3
Bus/taxi	3	2
Internet/telecommunication	1	1
Ferry	1	1
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 2 provides an overview of in-country expenditure by the visitor's country of origin. Visitors from Asia have by far the highest average spend per day at SAT\$337, followed by other Pacific visitor spend per day of SAT\$179 and European visitor spend per day of SAT\$178. Average North American (USA and Canada) spend per person is SAT\$169 which is slightly higher than Australia visitors per day (SAT\$154). By comparison, both New Zealand visitors and American Samoa visitors spend least with an average of SAT\$146 per day and an average of SAT\$148 per day respectively.

**Table 2: Average in-country expenditure per visitor per day by country of origin (SAT\$)**

Covering people	n=7,746	n=3,462	n=1,399	n=1,367	n=546	n=392	n=400
Markets	New Zealand	Australia	American Samoa	North America	Other Pacific	Europe	Asia
Accommodation	44	42	37	52	46	72	115
Restaurants cafes & bars	35	32	22	25	29	39	69
Vehicle rental	16	17	11	17	10	16	33
Shopping	12	14	22	21	28	11	33
Groceries	11	13	18	18	24	9	22
Tours/activities	8	7	3	6	6	7	37
Other	7	12	11	4	19	4	6
Petrol	5	6	4	5	5	6	7
Donations	5	7	9	13	2	5	2
Bus/taxi	2	2	4	4	5	4	7
Ferry	1	1	1	2	1	2	3
Internet/teleco mmunication	1	1	4	2	3	1	3
<b>Total in-country spend (SAT\$)</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>337</b>

Table 3 presents an overview of the average total expenditure per visitor per day by country of origin. As noted above, we estimate conservatively that 55% of prepaid spend flows back to the Samoa economy. We then combine this figure with the daily spend in-country to provide a total per person per day spend figure. Visitors from Asia have the highest average spend per day at SAT\$521. American Samoa visitors spend the least at SAT\$208 per day.

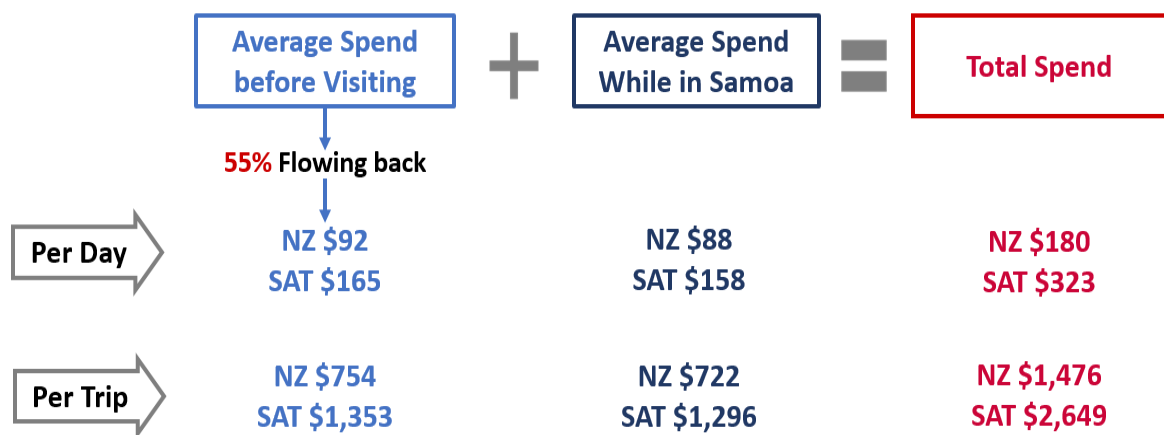
**Table 3: Average total expenditure per visitor per day by country of origin**

Covering people	n=7,746	n=3,462	n=1,399	n=1,367	n=546	n=392	n=400
Markets	New Zealand	Australia	American Samoa	North America	Other Pacific	Europe	Asia
55% pre-paid expenditure	154	200	60	196	148	215	184
In-country spend	146	154	148	169	179	178	337
<b>Total spend (SAT\$)</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>354</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>365</b>	<b>327</b>	<b>393</b>	<b>521</b>

The average overall visitor spend per person per day and per visit is presented in Figure 27. Total spend per person per day is SAT\$ 323 while the total spend per Trip is SAT\$ 2,649.

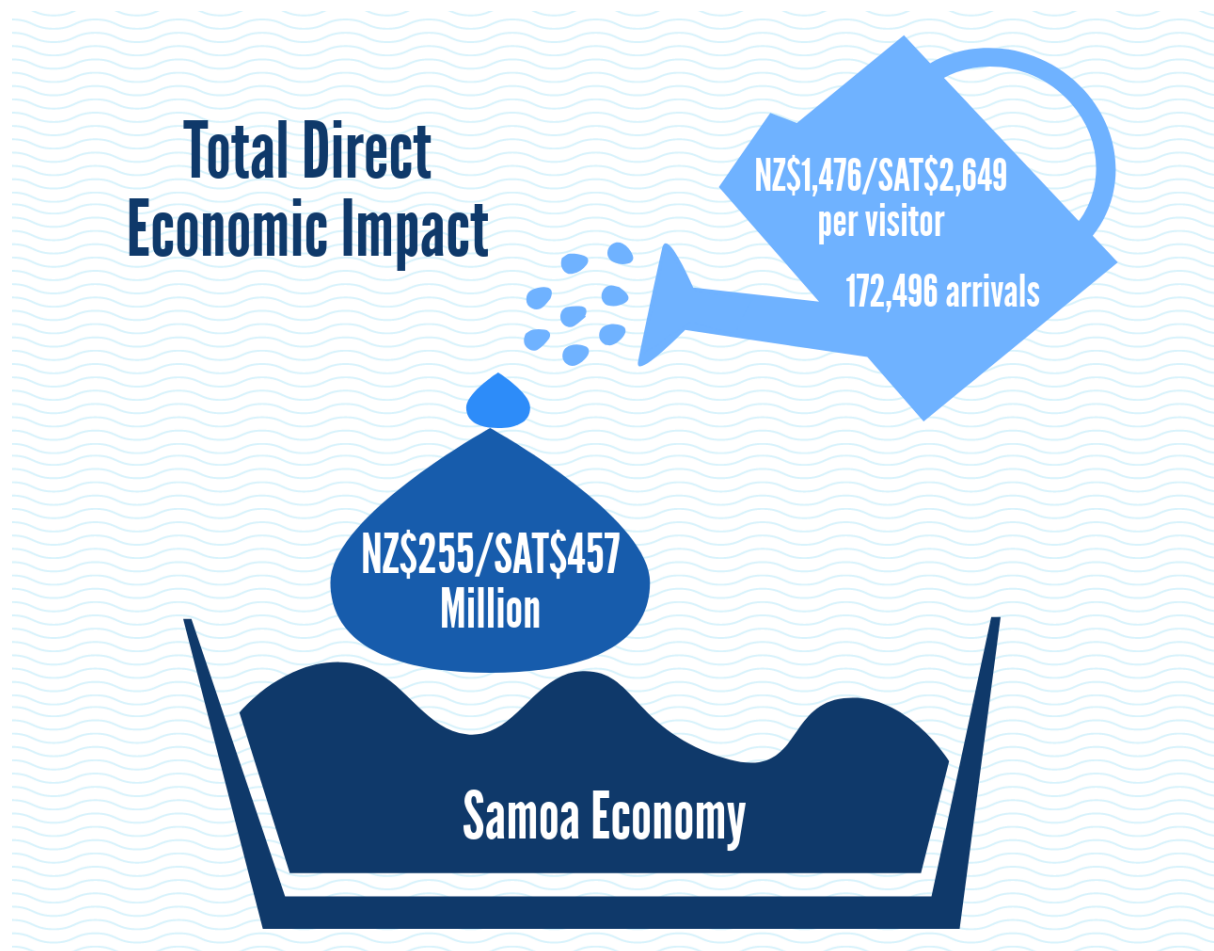


Figure 27: Visitor expenditure flow



When the average spend per visit is multiplied by the total number of annual visitor arrivals during 2018 we are able to provide an estimate of the total direct economic impact of visitor spend on the Samoan economy. For 2018 we estimate that the total value of visitor spend (not including any indirect or induced dimensions) is SAT \$457m or NZ \$255m (Figure 28).

Figure 28: Total direct economic impact



## Visitor Satisfaction

Visitors were asked to indicate their overall satisfaction with their experience of Samoa on a scale from 1 'very dissatisfied' to 5 'very satisfied' (Figure 27). The vast majority (86%) of the visitors surveyed indicated they were either "satisfied" (32%) or "very satisfied" (54%) with their Samoa experience. Very few visitors (4%) were unsatisfied (a score of 2 or lower out of 5) with their visits.

**Figure 29: Overall satisfaction with experience of Samoa (n = 6,965)**

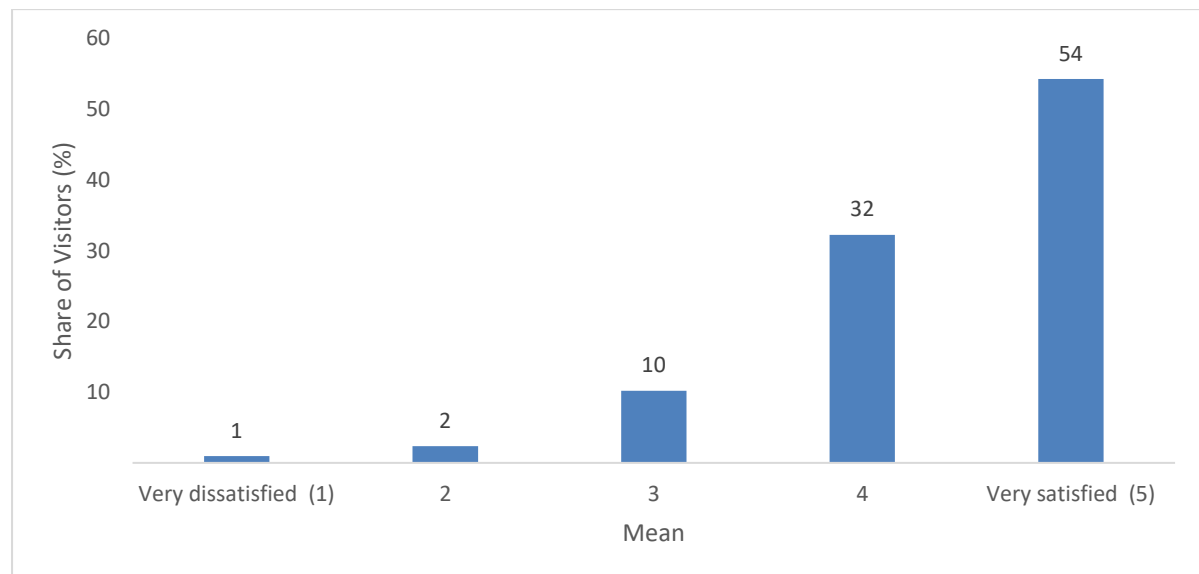
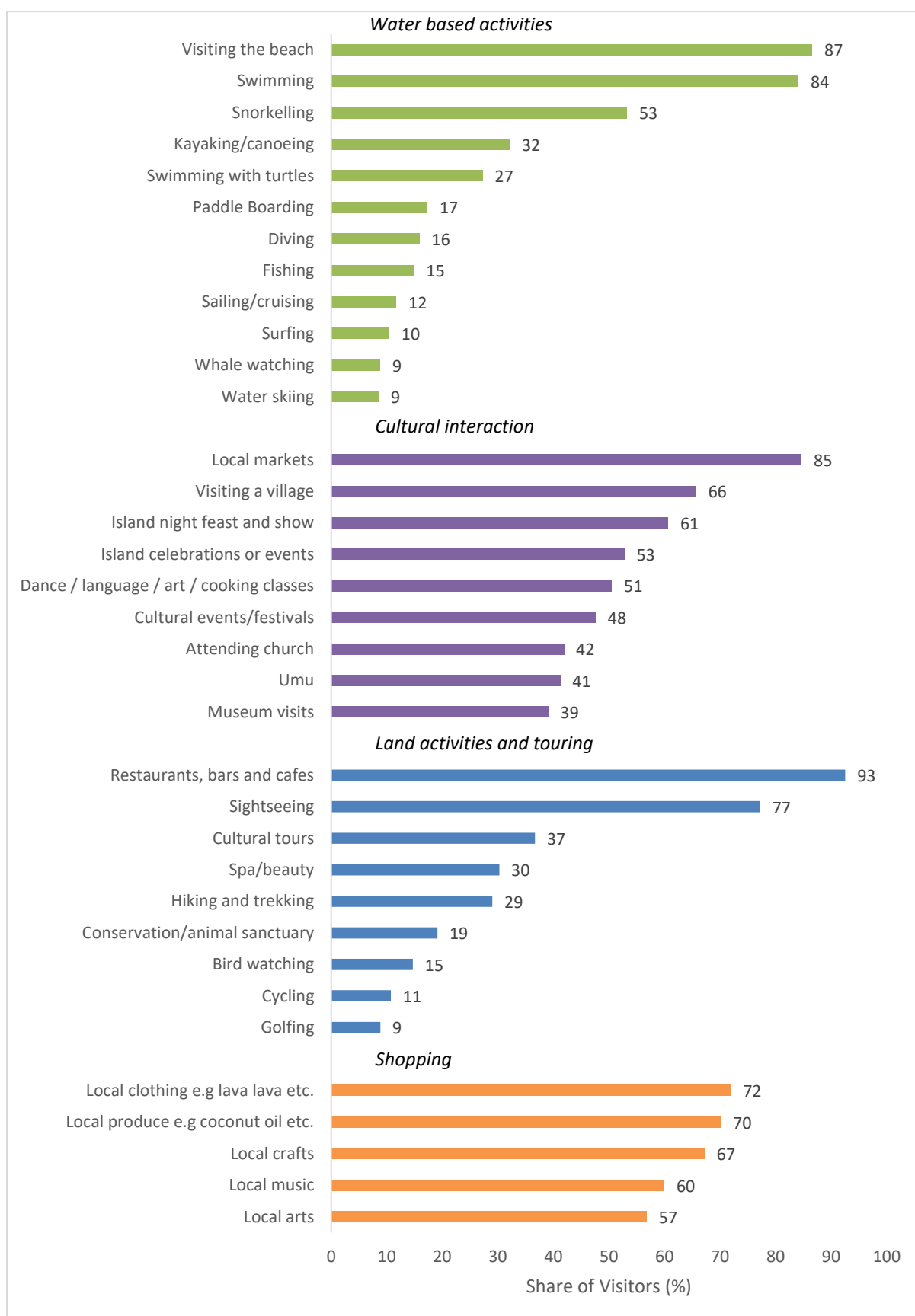


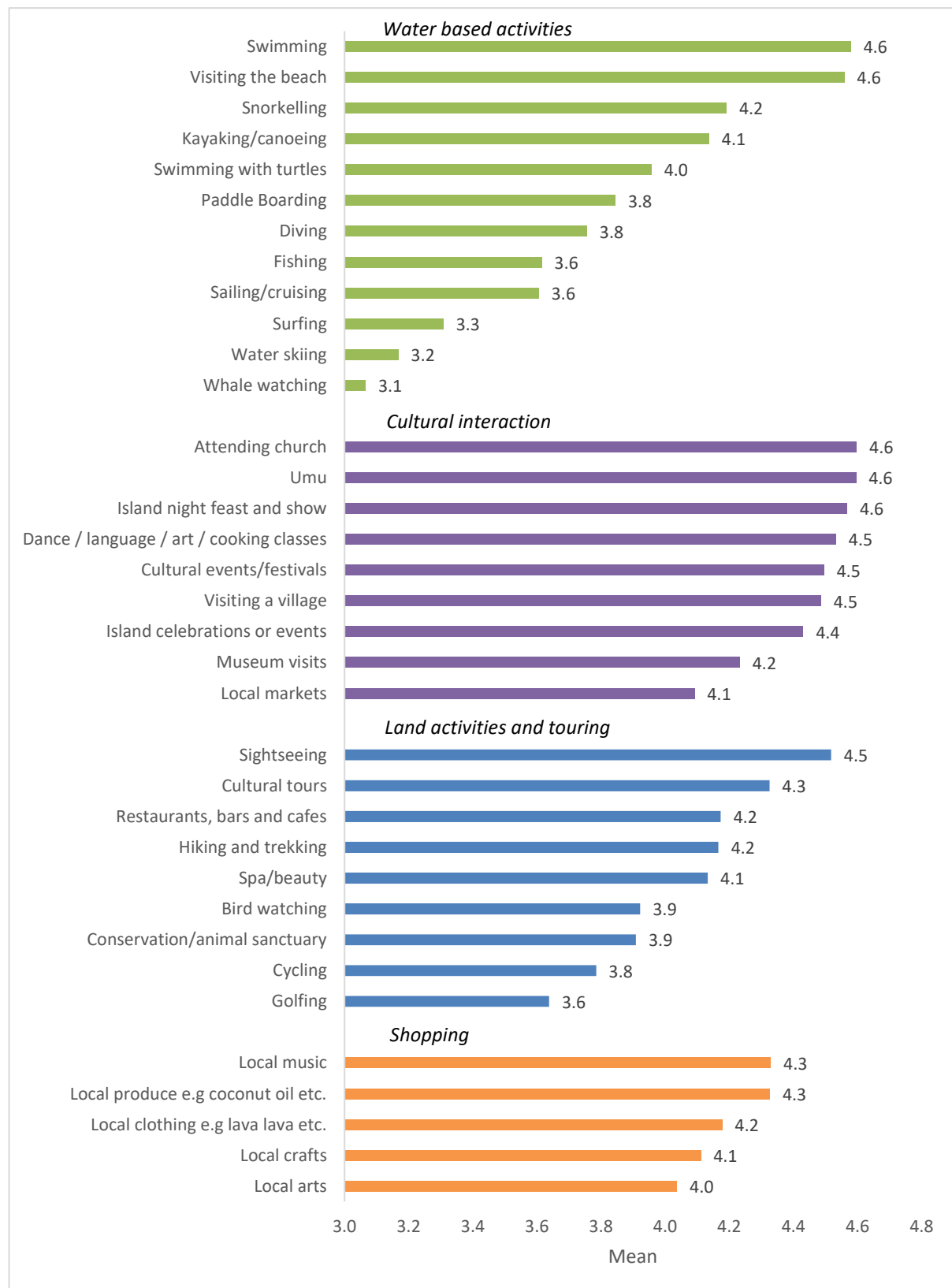
Figure 28 shows the percentage of respondents who undertook specific activities while on their visits to Samoa. Almost all visitors visited at least one restaurant, bar or café (93%) during their stay. Most of the respondents (87%) visit beaches and local markets (85%), and nearly three quarters of visitors (72%) note that they shopped for items of local clothing e.g. lava lava.

Visitor satisfaction is generally high for all activities undertaken. Most activities register more than 3.5 out of a possible high of 5 with the exception of a few less common activities including surfing, water skiing, and whale watching (Figure 29). Activities involving cultural interaction (average satisfaction of 4.4) rank the highest, followed by shopping (4.2), land-based products (4.1), with water-based experiences performing the weakest overall (3.8). It should be noted that some activities e.g., water skiing (n=518), whale watching (n=532), and golfing (n=558) are characterised by relatively low numbers of participants.

**Figure 30: Degree of participation in activities (n range = 518-6,368)**

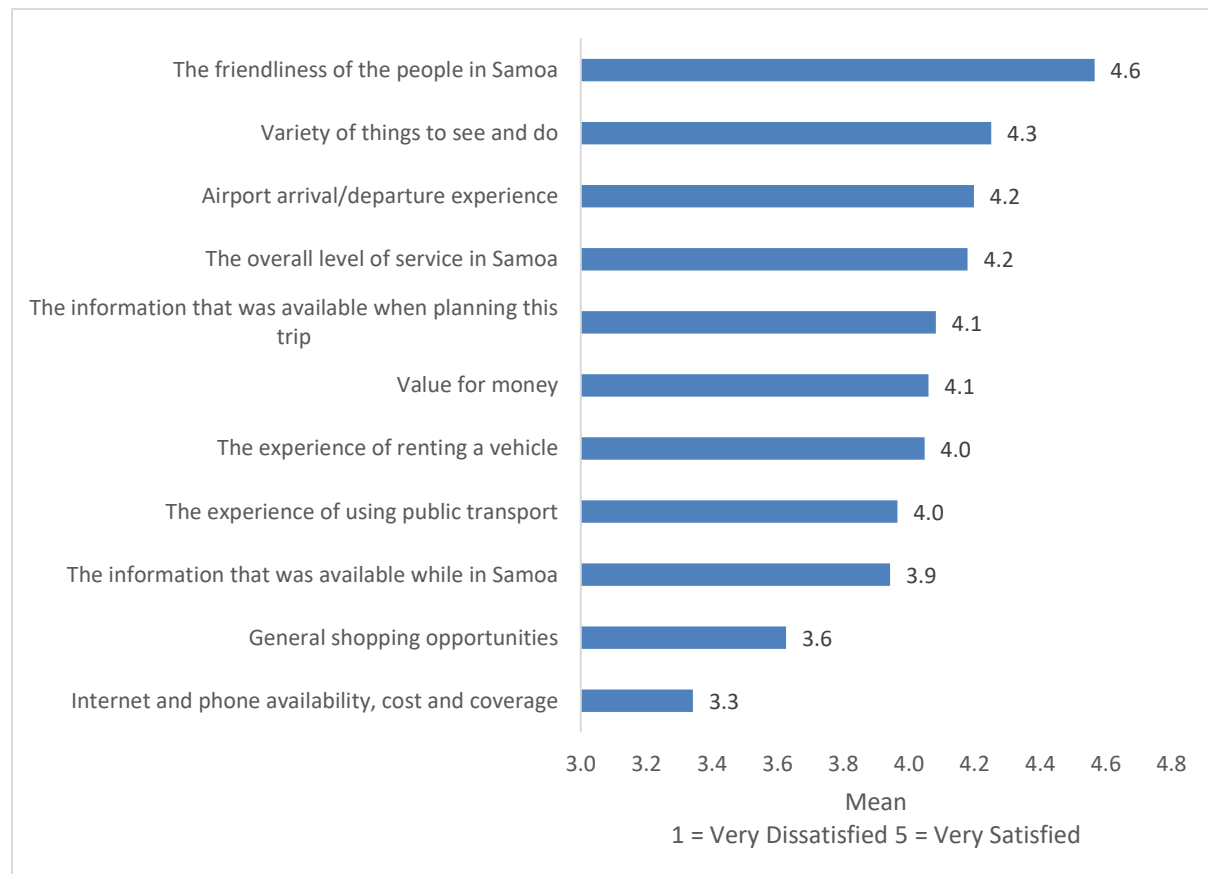


**Figure 31: Degree of satisfaction with activities participated in (mean score out of 5)**



Visitors were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with eleven different statements relating to their most recent visit to Samoa. As shown in Figure 30, respondents rate the friendliness of the people in Samoa the highest (4.6). The variety of things to see and do (4.3), airport arrival/departure experience (4.2), and the overall level of service in Samoa (4.2) are relatively highly ranked as well. Some services scored lower than 4 including Internet and phone (availability, cost and coverage) (3.3), general shopping opportunities (3.6), and the level of information that was available while in Samoa (3.9).

**Figure 32: Degree of satisfaction with Samoa services (mean score out of 5)**



## Most appealing aspects of Samoa

Visitors were asked “What did you find most attractive or appealing about Samoa on your most recent visit?” (Table 4). The most appealing elements of a Samoa experience are the beautiful and clean natural environment with its warm weather and tropical ‘feel’ (55%), the friendly and welcoming authentic local people (39%). Other important factors include: activities, attractions, entertainment and events (21%), the authentic Samoa culture, art and lifestyle (14%), the peacefulness and relaxing atmosphere of the islands (12%). Smaller numbers of visitors mentioned food and beverage (8%), accommodation (8%), customer service (4%), and the ability to reconnect with Samoa culture (4%).

**Table 4: Most appealing aspects of Samoa (n = 4,259)**

Themes	Share of respondents (%)
Environment	55
Local people	39
Activities, attractions and entertainment, events	21
Culture	14
Ambience and Atmosphere	12
Accommodation	8
Food and beverage	8
Customer Service	4
Reconnecting with 'own' Samoan culture	4
Affordable, accessible and effortless	3
New developments	3
Infrastructure, public service and facilities	3
Not overly commercialised and unspoiled	3
Overall good experience	2
Safety	1

\* Share of respondents who made a comment in each theme. Respondents could give more than one answer, so total does not add up to 100%.

### ***Environment, cleanliness & weather***

Over half of the respondents (55%) considered the destination’s beautiful scenery, natural environment, and the warm waters and climate to be the most appealing aspects of their Samoa experience. Visitors used words such as ‘beautiful’, ‘clear’, ‘clean’, ‘stunning’, ‘breath-taking’, ‘amazing’, and ‘unspoilt’ to describe the environment. Most comments here focused on the beauty and the cleanliness of the beaches, the weather, the warm and clear water, and the beauty of the island in general. Comments included:

*“A combination of the beautiful and friendly people and the amazing beaches and waterfalls.”*

*"I found Savai'i to be a beautiful gem for Samoa. Untouched, pristine waters and just everything about the island etc. was amazing!"*

*"The beautiful environment with the sunny weather, clear ocean and golden sand beaches. As well as this, the people were very lovely."*

*"The amazing colour of the sea, the villages, the people but especially the amazing sights."*

*"Samoa is beautiful. It's simply perfect...the beaches, the weather and the views! I love Samoa."*

*"The beautiful scenery, the care that goes into keeping each village clean, tidy and well kept."*

*"The cleanliness of the island and how it was un-commercialised. It was beautiful."*

*"The weather is always lovely, the cleanliness of the beaches, the friendliness of the locals."*

*"The beautiful blue ocean along the cost, the cleanliness of the villages, smooth roads and the amazing churches, unbelievable!"*

*"The weather was amazing as well as most of our dining out, and the beaches are always amazing tidy and the villagers running the beaches and dining facilities give 5-star service."*

### **Local people**

Nearly two in every five respondents (39%) noted that the most appealing part of their visit was their interaction with local people in Samoa, with comments focused on the friendliness, and welcoming nature of local people. Key words that dominated the responses included 'caring', 'friendly', 'beautiful', 'welcoming', 'helpful', 'lovely', 'kind', 'nice', 'happy', 'warmth' and 'accommodating'. Comments included:

*"The people of Samoa are so friendly and welcoming, everywhere we went they were so lovely!"*

*"The friendliness of the people and their willingness to make our holiday exciting and enjoyable."*

*"The people are extremely hospitable, and everything is done to help. This was my first trip to Samoa, and I hope to be able to return."*

*"The friendliness of the staff at our guest house was spectacular...all the locals were friendly, kids were lovely & polite. It was a bit like stepping back 50 years, very laid back & it was great just watching locals living their lives."*

*"The friendliness of the people, at the resort but also anyone we came in contact with, shop assistants, taxi drivers, market stall holders."*

*"The amazingly kind and generous people and incredible tranquillity of beautiful Samoa."*

*"The people are very friendly, easy going and hospitable."*

*"The Samoan life style & the beautiful people of Samoa."*

*"The people and the culture. The whole community work so hard to make it an amazing trip for visitors."*

*"Beaches, scenery and beautiful nature of the local people. Most locals are very friendly. Taxi drivers and hotel staff are helpful as well."*

*"The people are warm and friendly, always smiling and waving."*

*"The friendly people that are proud of their culture."*

*"Firstly, the people - everyone! Resort staff, kids and families along the roads - everyone was friendly and happy. The sun, the sea, everything!"*

*"Interaction with local people, peace and quiet."*

### **Activities, attractions, entertainment & events**

Over one-fifth of respondents (21%) mentioned activities, attractions and entertainment as the most appealing aspect of their visit to Samoa. Key words to describe their participation in activities and attractions included 'things to do', 'attractions', 'activities', 'museum', 'To Sua Ocean Trench', 'pool' and 'Temple'. Comments included:

*"The Waterfalls and To Sua Trench."*

*"Apia Cultural Village, Robert Louis Stevenson House & an Apia Hotel Cultural Dinner & Show."*

*"The vast variety of things to do."*

*"My favourite things were swimming at To Sua and Afuauu waterfalls. And I loved it when I was able to find traditional healthy foods to eat. I also loved the markets."*



*"Pristine beaches. Cultural Village put on by Tourism Samoa was fantastic, attended twice (at the start and end of trip)."*

*"Snorkelling and swimming, warm weather, beautiful scenery."*

*"The most attractive activities are To Sua trench and the blowholes."*

*"Blue Hole, lava flow, snorkelling at various spots. R. L. Stephenson museum was the best, well presented and explained by friendly staff. Very Friendly Samoans"*

*"Natural attractions."*

*"Warm, relaxed, plenty to do ... enough for another trip, friendly people."*

*"Snorkelling at clam farm and swimming at beach in front of Faofao fales, Piula caves, water falls we visited, To Sua trench! It was all amazing"*

*"Some specific attractions and sightseeing like swimming with the turtles, the blowholes, waterfalls and the lovely beaches with really nice snorkelling opportunities. The Robert Luis Stevenson Museum was very interesting. Also, the friendliness of the people and the low tourism. Most of the attractions didn't have more than 5 other tourists at the same time."*

*"We loved the culture show at information centre. So very informative especially the tattoos and being able to actually watch it being done island style and the story behind them. We loved the friendly people. Even the many taxis we caught as I can't walk too far."*

## **Culture**

The island's unique local culture was mentioned by fourteen percent of respondents as an appealing aspect of their Samoa visit. Respondents referred to the authenticity of the culture, history and daily life in addition to referencing the overall enjoyable aspects of Samoa's culture. Comments included:

*"The people, the culture, the interesting and unique lifestyle."*

*"How Samoans are fiercely proud of their culture and way of life. Their friendliness. Traditional UMU Meals, Fresh Chilled Coconut Juice Food and Flea Markets..."*

*"The culture is amazing, people are the most friendly I've ever met, and the island is like paradise everywhere, the experience of sleeping in a fale, and waking up with the sunrise over the sea, the size of the stars."*

*"The culture and the people. The culture and the people are so accessible. You can easily engage with the people and the culture. It did not feel as though there was*

*tourist Samoa, and Samoa, it felt as though as a tourist you were part of the country and in amongst the culture."*

*"The beauty and conservation of their culture."*

*"The rich, strong and vibrant Samoan culture. The wonderful people. How empty and stunningly beautiful Savai'i was."*

*"I admired the way they have customs throughout the village but also, they continue to abide by those ancient customs."*

*"The cultural uniqueness of the Samoan people. The beauty of the people that matched the beauty of the country/sea."*

*"We loved the Samoan people with their strong ties to their culture, values of family and respect. The meeting houses in every front yard are unique. The Samoan Government is doing a great job with beautification program for the villages and supporting Samoan Airways which now has direct flights from Sydney. Lack of Australian tourists was a bonus."*

### **Atmosphere**

Twelve percent of visitors surveyed focused on the relaxed atmosphere of Samoa. They considered Samoa to be very peaceful, quiet, relaxing, and laidback, which made it a good destination to 'chill out' and 'unwind'. Respondents used words such as 'relaxing', 'peaceful', 'laid back', 'slow pace' and 'quiet' to describe the overall atmosphere of Samoa. The notion of 'island time' was also mentioned. Comments included:

*"Quietness, away from hustle and bustle of big cities and crowded towns."*

*"Relaxing atmosphere. The people were so friendly, and we felt safe. The scenery if amazing and unspoilt. Most food was great but variable."*

*"Very relaxing, time to unwind and warmth."*

*"The laid-back atmosphere."*

*"Relaxing pace of life."*

*"Beautiful peaceful place and lovely people."*

*"The relaxed lifestyle, warm weather, friendly people."*

## **Accommodation**

*Just 8% of respondents noted that the accommodation they stayed in was an appealing aspect of their visit to Samoa, referring to the high quality, the location, the setting, the level of service, and the warm welcome from their hosts. Comments included:*

*"The beautiful Resort we stayed at. Friendly staff and excellent service."*

*"The staff and relaxing atmosphere at the resort we stayed at. Needed to relax and fitted the bill."*

*"Friendly people, beautiful remote resort with not too many people. The weather was perfect. I loved the local beer and fresh fish caught each day. It was a warm relaxing holiday and was just what we wanted."*

*"The friendliness of the people, peace and not overcrowded at the resort. The staff were amazing and the beach and overall relaxing."*

*"Our resort. Multiple restaurants/choices of where to eat. Food presentation was impressive! Service was excellent!"*

*"Very peaceful and enjoyable stay at resort. Lovely weather and friendly staff at resort."*

*"... it was everything we needed for a lovely relaxing holiday. We did a few activities and sightseeing but overall could have just stayed at the resort to chill and enjoyed food and amenities."*

*"I found that all of the cafes and food services were excellent. Loved the beach fale experiences and driving up into the mountains."*

*Samoa's customer services at the hotel, bars, post office, banks and other places has greatly improved."*

## **Food and Beverage**

Another eight percent of respondents mentioned food and beverages as the most appealing aspect of their trip. Their comments focused on the quality and range of fresh food available in Samoa. They used words such as 'great', 'amazing', 'excellent', 'high standard/quality', 'good', 'delicious', 'healthy', 'authentic' and 'fresh' to describe the food. Many visitors commented on the selection and variety of options of good cafes and restaurants, about the food markets and on the availability of fresh seafood and tropical fruit and coconuts. Comments included:

*"The natural way of cooking food and mostly fruits and food are organic."*

*“Value for money and cheaper food and drink over Fiji.”*

*“The restaurants and fale along the coast, very friendly with good variety of local foods.”*

*“Good food and plenty of selection.”*

*“I really enjoyed the cuisine and the view from some of the restaurants, but my husband loved the sea, scenery and kayaking.”*

*“And I loved it when I was able to find traditional healthy foods to eat.”*

*“Traditional UMU Meals, Fresh Chilled Coconut Juice.”*

### **Customer service**

Four percent of visitors commented on the service they encountered while in Samoa. Respondents had positive comments on the local hospitality they experienced, especially mentioning the friendly, hospitality, professional and helpful staff at the restaurants, hotels, and resorts. Visitors also emphasised the lack of pressure or hassle to buy which made them feel comfortable. Comments included:

*“For me it's a tie between the lovely, friendly service we received everywhere we went and the amazing food we were able to eat.”*

*“After several trips I also noticed a positive change in customer service - service with a smile at its finest.”*

*“Friendly staff at the resort. They were helpful when I was sick in the middle of the night. Airport workers were very friendly and welcoming.”*

*“Friendly transport operator and hotel staff.”*

*“Our visit to Tanoa Tusitala was very rewarding, meeting with friendly staff who catered for our needs and the relaxing environment. We had a good taxi driver (Enoka) to care for us.”*

### **Reconnecting with ‘own’ Samoan’ culture**

Four percent of visitors surveyed focused on the pleasure of re-connecting with family, friends, and Samoan culture. Respondents used words such as ‘own’, ‘home’, ‘friends and family’, ‘traditions’ and ‘reconnecting’. Comments included:

*“Bringing NZ family and Samoan family together.”*

*"Being able to talk with people who had connections to my mother's family. The excellent road around Savaii, and very little traffic on the day we visited (after leaving the wharf)."*

*"A chance for serenity and learning about my ancestors."*

*"...seeing my family, meeting new ones and reuniting with old ones."*

*"I love spending time with my biological family still living back home. The food yummy never complain last but never the least mangoes season I'm glad that I had heaps of mangoes this time."*

*"As my first trip to Samoa it was grounding to see first-hand where my family originated from."*

### **Affordability and accessibility**

The affordability and accessibility of Samoa as a holiday destination was mentioned by three percent of respondents. In particular, they referred to the ease of getting to Samoa and also of getting around the islands. Comments included:

*"... and the wonderful affordable restaurants as compared to American Samoa."*

*"... affordable, beautiful scenery, easy to get around."*

*"Easy to get to and affordability."*

*"... and it was so easy to find way around the island and tourist attractions."*

*"Ease of travel from NZ, value for money."*

*"Accessibility to NZ - escape from NZ winter... Affordability and charm staying in beach fale."*

### **Not overly commercialized and unspoiled**

Three percent of respondents mentioned Samoa as being a place that is not over-commercialised or too touristy. Some visitors also emphasised the importance of preserving the destination from mass tourism development and keeping the way it is. Comments included:

*"That it is not as touristy as other places in South Pacific and that people still live the same lifestyle as they used to. People are incredibly friendly and kind, and I didn't feel like they are looking at tourists only through prism of money."*

*"A definite bonus of not being too commercialised - loved it."*

*"Untouched land was beautiful hopefully it stays this way."*

*"Samoa feels like an authentic destination, not a tourist trap."*

*"I felt like it's still not overrun by tourist and everything felt natural and not manufactured specifically for tourists."*

*"It is not over commercialized and is an absolute pleasure to visit."*

### **Infrastructure**

Three percent of the respondents considered the infrastructure, public service and facilities to be the most appealing aspects of their Samoa experience. Comments included:

*"The airport, roads, beach resorts, our village."*

*"The feel of the place. Not high rise. The open colourful buses are so charming and should never disappear."*

*"...the cleanliness of the villages, smooth roads and the AMAZING AMAZING churches, unbelievable!"*

*"Easy to navigate roads, airport is looking great."*

*"The excellent road around Savaii, and very little traffic on the day we visited (after leaving the wharf)."*

### **New developments**

Another three percent of respondents mentioned new developments as the most appealing aspect of their trip. Their comments focused on the new developments of the airport. They used words such as 'great', 'amazing', 'modernised', 'huge improvement' and 'progress' to describe the new airport. Comments included:

*"... New buildings in Town, more Hotels/Resorts, more Restaurants and Cafes."*

*"The upgrade of infrastructure and trading hours."*

*"See development of Apia the roads and particularly Atea around Malua. The beautiful two hours spent walking round Manono on an idyllic day...Great airport building!"*

*"Fast adaption to western style of living while retaining heritage and culture."*

*"The upgraded development of the Town of Apia...The modern APIA."*

*"The progress Samoa has made tremendous progress in terms of trade and economics which is good to see."*

*"Better road quality from Salelologa to Asau."*

*"It's a big change with the Faleolo Airport, more space and cleaner than it used to be."*

### **Overall good experience**

Two percent of visitors surveyed simply stated that their whole experience was a good one, and that they 'loved everything'. Some visitors expressed their desire to visit Samoa again in the future. Comments included:

*"Everything."*

*"The overall stay with the local people."*

*"Everything. I was born in Samoa so it's home for me. Loved everything about it."*

*"All of it!"*

*"Friendly people and overall nice experience."*

*"Everything - the climate, the people, you could genuinely relax, no need to rush anywhere. And just how beautiful Samoa is."*

### **Safety**

Feelings of safety within Samoa were mentioned by one percent of respondents. In particular, they referred to the general safety and safety for children and solo woman travellers. Comments included:

*"The people were very friendly, and we did feel safe and secure."*

*"Warm and safe place. People were fantastic."*

*"...And also it was safe to be in your own country."*

*"Cleanliness, friendly people, helpful locals, safety, quality of accommodation."*

*"Friendly people, felt safe cycling through the villages."*

## Least appealing aspects of Samoa

Visitors were asked: “What did you find least attractive or appealing about Samoa on your most recent visit?” Table 5 summarises the key themes respondents identified as unappealing. Comments ranged from issues with infrastructure, public services and facilities (25%), the amount of visible rubbish, and environmental degradation (11%), through to social issues (9%). Other areas included: food and beverage (8%), the cost of goods and services (7%), stray animals and mosquitos (6%), customer service (6%), or feeling unwelcome during interactions with locals (5%). It should be noted here that 14% of respondents took the trouble to note that they found “nothing unattractive or unappealing about Samoa.

**Table 5: Least appealing aspects of Samoa (n = 3,997)**

Themes	Share of respondents %
<b>Infrastructure, public services and facilities</b>	25
<b>Rubbish and natural environment</b>	11
<b>Social issues</b>	9
<b>Food and beverage</b>	8
<b>Cost of goods and services</b>	7
<b>Stray animals and mosquitos</b>	6
<b>Customer service</b>	6
<b>Feeling unwelcome and exploited</b>	5
<b>Attractions and activities</b>	5
<b>Apia</b>	5
<b>Shopping experience</b>	4
<b>Accommodation</b>	4
<b>Bad weather</b>	4
<b>Airport and arriving and departing</b>	4
<b>Safety</b>	3
<b>Lack of information</b>	2
<b>Rental cars</b>	2
<b>Taxi</b>	1
<b>Too touristy or commercial</b>	1

\* Share of respondents who made a comment in each theme. Respondents could give more than one answer, so total does not add up to 100%.

### ***Infrastructure, public services and facilities***

The most common theme recognised as unappealing by respondents was infrastructure, public services and facilities (25%). The majority of these comments focused on road conditions, poor Wi-Fi or communication amenities, a lack of signage, general transport options and poor sewage, drainage and public toilets. To a lesser degree the following were raised: the local ferry, access to water, access to petrol, hospital and disability infrastructure and the local language barrier. Comments included:



*"Terrible state of the roads. Far too many potholes that need filling in or patches of the road resurfaced."*

*"There were so many places I wanted to visit but the condition of the roads restricted me."*

*"Better walking paths in town to access shops and restaurants."*

*"If you want tourists to spend outside the resort make it easy for them to find their way around the Island."*

*"The only down side is the ferry trip between islands."*

*"Difficult to get around on public transport because there are no clear timetables for the buses."*

*"The one standout for me is the need for better hygiene in public toilets. This would make a huge difference to the overall experience."*

*The water needs to be of better quality for drinking and general use."*

*"The cost and reliability of WiFi... severely limits our ability to do business with Samoa from the United States."*

*"Samoa is not at all suited to visitors being disabled."*

*"My friend was admitted to Apia Hospital and it was dreadful."*

### ***Rubbish and natural environment***

A large number of visitors (11%) mentioned that the visible rubbish both inside and outside built areas was a big concern. The amount of rubbish was frequently raised as a scar on the landscape and found to be off putting and saddening from a visitor perspective. Comments included:

*"Overwhelming surplus of rubbish and waste in the streets and near waterways, particularly on the beaches."*

*"The rubbish on the most beautiful beaches in the Pacific, it is heart-breaking."*

*"The plastic rubbish around Apia and coastlines, what a shame to not take this mess seriously, such a shame to mess up this beautiful island with trash and plastic."*

*"Amount of pollution and rubbish for such a small island."*

*"A lot of rubbish in little streams and along the road in Upolu. One waterway in central Apia actually made me gag from the smell of it."*

*"Rubbish/trash everywhere. At the waterfalls - all around the waterfront at Apia - and not once did I find public trash cans in Apia or at tourist areas."*

*"Lack of fish life when diving especially. Where are the fish???? Conservation is low priority here."*

*"The huge amount of plastic rubbish along the roadsides and the beaches. Just masses of it everywhere. You really despair for the oceans when you try and be tidy at home, then you come to an island paradise like Samoa and it gets treated by the locals like a toilet, when they have the most to lose from waste affecting sea life and water quality."*

*"...and use of large amounts of plastic bottles, plastic bags, the imported plastic toys, cheap plastic rubbish in the markets. No obvious recycling system."*

### **Social issues**

The social issues discussed by 9% of respondents included themes surrounding begging (both adult and child), treatment by locals, theft, crime and violence and visible poverty levels. To a lesser degree, comments were also made about public displays of drunkenness and the dominant role of the Church both societally and visually. Comments included:

*"There were children roaming and begging at 1:00am around town."*

*Children and teenagers are out the whole day selling goods to the public, which they should be in school not selling products/goods all over the place.*

*"Seeing poverty, young children having to sell food at markets/wharfs etc. when they could be in school."*

*"Crimes in Samoa is getting worse."*

*"The pay the locals get for working so hard for minimal."*

*"The poor awareness of local people about diet."*

*"I actually think the influence of religion and the churches is the biggest problem Samoa has. Far too much in Samoa is dominated by the churches. It's disturbing to see the ridiculous number of large and fancy churches on the island and the lack of important infrastructure like health care facilities."*

### **Food and beverage**

Of the respondents 8% of them noted that the least appealing part of their visit was food and beverage they experienced. Comments were critical of both the resorts and other restaurants, including a lack of local food, a poor range of options, below average food preparation and even illness resulting from meals. Comments included:

*"Some of the food was trying to be too western. We would have liked to eat more local food."*

*"Less fruits and vegetables available. Farmers and everyone need to be encouraged to grow more food. Agriculture development needs to be seriously looked at. Honey not available but there is so much honey in Fiji why not import from there. I think monitoring also plays a crucial role to see what is in demand then should get more of it. We have to go hunting from one supermarket to the other for one thing or the other, by chance if you get your need, it's like treasure. Varieties of rice hard to get like basmati rice."*

*"Poor range of food at supermarket. We are vegan and found a lack of suitable fresh foods and products ... Vegan options at restaurants would be great for evening meals."*

*"Did not get round to eating fish the way locals eat-all restaurants we surveyed had the big boneless fish to suit the taste of visitors."*

*"Not enough sea food at resorts and the food available is expensive for what it is."*

*"Most of the takeaway food in Apia/ Upolu was highly processed or unhealthy and for someone who likes a wholegrain mostly organic diet rich in fresh veges this was a challenge in Apia."*

### **Cost of goods and services**

A further 7% of the respondents suggested that the cost of goods and services in Samoa was unappealing, referring to the high prices of food, shopping, tourist activities and travel. Many stated that they saw a large increase in the cost of all items and activities when compared to their previous trips to Samoa. Comments included:

*"Cost of goods and services."*

*"More expensive than previous visits."*

*"Found this trip very costly compared to the previous 5 visits. Would be alright if facilities were better. This mean we would probably not come to Samoa again."*

*"The cost of things such as rentals and accommodation especially in Savaii."*

*"Felt the cost of meals and alcohol to be quite expensive."*

*"Paying entrance fees for everything - it adds up a lot over the time you're there!"*

### **Stray animals and mosquitos**

Six percent of respondents mentioned the least appealing aspect of their Samoa visit being stray animals and mosquitos. Comments mainly focused upon the presence of stray dogs, with some noting their presence as saddening, while others found them dangerous and scary. Thin horses and other insects were also suggested as undesirable. Comments included:

*"The government needs to take some action on the wondering dogs. I grew up on a farm with dogs I am not scared of dogs but on 3 occasions in Samoa I was threatened by dogs. This so detracts from the Samoa experience."*

*"Malnourished animals, starving cats and dogs hanging around restaurants looking for food. Very thin horses tied up around houses."*

*"Mozzies - I caught a tropical disease and have been sick for 6 weeks since the holiday."*

*"Dogs barking all hours of the night... can't sleep because the dogs made too much noise."*

*"The lack of animal welfare, very saddened by the number of cats and dogs that are not looked after."*

*"If I am honest the condition of the animals on the island...brought me to tears."*

### **Customer service**

Customer service was mentioned by 6% of respondents as the least appealing elements of their visit to Samoa. Customer service at the hotels, airport and shops concerned visitors. The level of service was found to be "off putting" and "shocking" for many people. Comments included:

*"Service is very slow from the restaurants and hotels. Samoa is a beautiful country with culture but really needs to work on customer service please."*

*"Samoa used to be warm, kind and loving hence why they were referred to as the Heart of the Polynesian. It was mostly those who worked in offices or for the government that were ignorant and didn't act in a professional manner. The people who work at customs are the tourists' first impression of the country. If they are not smiling, it portrays an ugly picture on the rest of the country."*

*"The service is just unacceptable. They need to smile and make people feel welcome. Some employees just stay seated until about half an hour to an hour after you arrived before they come up to serve you and you're trying to search for a smile and a hello."*

*"Government department employees really need to take courses on how to serve customers."*

*"Customer service in Samoa is appalling. Apparent lack of basic customer service such as smiling, friendly and approachable manner - absolutely disgraceful."*

*"Some of the Resort staff didn't really know what they were doing... and sometimes (especially the after payday) they didn't even turn up to work leaving the Resort short staffed."*

### ***Feeling unwelcome and exploited***

A certain number of respondents (5%) mentioned feeling unwelcome and exploited as the least appealing aspect of their trip to Samoa. Their comments mainly focused upon being harassed by con men or businesses seeking money and being overcharged due to their foreign or visitor status. Comments included:

*"I would have to say that the least attractive thing about Samoa was the youth, I've been to Samoa 3 times and every time I've been confronted by youth either younger or the same age as me asking for money and getting aggressive if I don't comply."*

*"The Police constantly pulled our rental car over. I felt we were being picked on as it was clearly visible that we had a rental car and that my husband was a Samoan."*

*"A LOT of unwelcome attention / harassment by men. We are two late 20s/early 30s girls and were dressed conservatively, did not seek out attention etc. but were consistently approached by men wanting to chat and ask us personal questions everywhere we went. It was really discomforting."*

*"Most of the time tourists are "harassed". Tourist have to waste money all the time for everything and people try to take advantage of them."*

*"The main issue that we had was that everywhere we went, and even if we stopped the car to look at the view someone would rush over to us and demand money."*

*"What put me off was at the markets, that if they knew we were not locals they put the price up."*

*"Quite a bit of anti-Chinese sentiment in some establishments so the experience of other Asians travelling to Samoa may certainly differ from white travellers"*

### ***Attractions and activities***

Five percent of visitors surveyed focused on the attractions and activities of Samoa. Visitors mentioned that there was a lack of activity options. Furthermore, there were concerned

comments about the Swimming with Turtles attraction and the animals' welfare. Visitors also found that some attractions were poorly organised, or even scams. Comments included:

*"Very few activities for an island country."*

*"The turtle "Sanctuary" on Savaii. When we realised the environment these animals were trapped in we were horrified."*

*"A prepaid tour to Turtle Island was a let-down with no snorkel gear provided."*

*"Nothing available for a half day trip for example."*

*"The lack of variety in nightlife in Apia."*

*"We were really excited to swim with turtles on Savaii, until we found out how the turtles are treated and that some of them are getting angry and biting people (probably because they're free animals living in captivity). We did not do this activity because of this."*

*"Sightseeing with small children was a bit hard."*

*"We went to the rock sliding, there was no water to slide down the rocks yet the people there took our money and told us to walk down and enjoy, it ended up being a waste of time and money. They should have told us there would be no water down there to slide down. Very disappointing."*

## **Apia**

Apia was mentioned by five percent of participants as the least appealing experience. The main criticism was of the city's appearance and lack of interesting activities. Comments included:

*"The City of Apia is a sleeping giant for tourism."*

*"Apia lacks a strong cultural character as the capital of Samoa."*

*"Probably Apia. It just wasn't the nicest place to visit for shopping or for sightseeing."*

*"The town was looking worn and tired, it needed a clean or some more trees planted."*

*"Town area is always crowded, very hard to find parking."*

*"The capital Apia. It drained my energy. Away from the main road the side streets had broken pavement and it lacked general cleanliness."*

*"Tourist centre in Apia not overly interesting, big let-down."*

### ***Shopping experience***

Another 4% of respondents mentioned the shopping experiences in Samoa as not pleasant. Many found that a lack of local goods and a recent increase in the amount of foreign stores, in combination with undesirable shopping surroundings was not conducive to spending money. Comments included:

*"Lack of gift shops to buy souvenirs."*

*"The Spa didn't use local products - it would have been lovely to support the local economy more."*

*"I'm sure visitors would enjoy the opportunity to spend money in shops selling locally made goods."*

*"The markets don't sell local crafts. Everyone sells the same thing, and I'm pretty sure the products actually come from other places (such as Cook Islands, they aren't local... I'm confident on that)."*

*"The market area. Felt it was very dark. Could be more open & welcoming. More lighting perhaps."*

*"The stores all being closed on Sunday was very inconvenient."*

*"The amount of outsourced local shops owned by non-Samoan folk, this is disappointing from a development perspective and leads to many self-run shops to close as not competitive with warehouse type stores."*

*"The flea markets. The atmosphere was very uncomfortable."*

### ***Accommodation***

Four percent of the respondents found that their personal accommodation experiences in Samoa were the least appealing part of their visit. Common themes were the lack of cleanliness, a small range of options other than the large resorts and poor accommodation quality for the high costs that were charged. Comments included:

*"Need more Hotels."*

*"The lack of hygiene at the spa in the resort."*

*"Maintenance of everything, cold showers."*

*"Sanitary cleanliness and maintenance was questionable, to say the least."*

*"The resort we stayed in, photos had obviously been photo-shopped and the accommodation was below 1 star and not the four they advertised."*

*"Inadequate/insufficient bathroom facilities at Fale accommodation."*

*"The bookings often aren't registered or are changed without warning and you find yourself scrambling looking for somewhere to stay."*

*"Lack of kids clubs /nanny services at hotels."*

### **Weather**

A small number of respondents (4%) mentioned the unpleasant weather in Samoa. The heat and humidity made some tourists feel uncomfortable, and wet weather prevented people from enjoying outdoor activities. Most of the visitors acknowledge that this is beyond anyone's control. Comments included:

*"The weather - it rained all week."*

*"The terrible trade winds."*

*"It rained most of the time and there were very few wet-weather activities."*

*"The heat in Apia."*

*"The heat and humidity were very challenging for biking."*

### **Airport and arriving and departing**

Four percent of respondents mentioned the airport and arrival or departure related issues as the least appealing aspect of their time in Samoa. Visitors mentioned issues with the airport facilities and shopping options, difficulties with dealing with the customs officials and flight-specific issues. Comments included:

*"Arrival into the Airport was a nightmare."*

*"No one knew where to go, what to do, it's still hot with no aircon."*

*"Very uncomfortable waiting, waiting room too small, difficult and noisy with young children."*

*"Duty Free. I may as well have purchased things in Town. There were no deals or special prices for arrivals or departures. Quite disappointed."*

*"Not many food options at the airport for departures."*



*"The airport really lets it down. Stunning building on the outside, nothing at all on the inside! There should be more souvenir/craft shops, and a proper restaurant or café."*

*"The length of time it took to get through immigration on arrival, queues were ridiculous & left a bad taste to start if holiday - almost an hour once we got off plane."*

### **Safety**

Safety of Samoa as a holiday destination was mentioned by 2% of respondents. In particular, they referred to driving, general feelings of unease, illness contracted from unknown sources and harassment by local people to a dangerous level. Comments included:

*"Lack of availability of safe seating for our child prevented us from renting a car and seeing many of the sights that Samoa has to offer."*

*"More information available before you go - not just on the Samoa Tourism website but within other sites such as TripAdvisor...especially safety (what is safe and what you can trust and what you should look out for)."*

*"Consuming tobacco on public transportation and around buildings or in closed areas."*

*"It was very scary driving around the landslide with no street lights and not knowing what happened to the road."*

*"Kids are getting cut feet from all the broken glass."*

*"Biking very risky and unsafe roads."*

*"Not a good first aid kit at resort."*

*"Ladder into trench needs to be made safer."*

### **Lack of information**

Two percent of respondents mentioned a lack of information as the least appealing aspect of their Samoa visit. Respondents referred to the lack of availability of information online, in person and from reading materials. They found that more information was required on public transport, tourist activities, and safety, also suggesting that the Apia information centre was extremely unhelpful. Comments included:

*"Poor information re tours at tourist centre in Apia."*

*"Hard to get information about cultural/art events."*

*"Also, we got very poor instructions from people in the Information Centre on how to get to places and ended up lost a few times."*

*"Difficulty in obtaining reliable information both before and after arrival."*

*"Hard to gain insights on activities and places to see."*

*"Lack of information about attractions that we could visit. A single website with all the restaurants and ratings would be helpful."*

*"Lack of specific details about getting to some locations (lake, waterfall, beach etc). Distance and time to get there based on road conditions etc."*

### **Rental cars**

The theme of rental cars was mentioned by two percent of the visitors surveyed. Price, poor service from the rental agent, difficulties with booking and the actual quality of cars themselves were identified as unappealing features. Comments included:

*"Although rental car companies were supposed to deliver service when we arrived their offices were not open at the Airport as promised. That left me with days of trying to resolve issues of ticketing and cars."*

*"The car we tried to rent was a rip off as had engine lights flashing and bald tyres but they replaced it with a different one."*

*"The poor service from the rental car company, we had two rental cars that had issues/broke down meaning we missed our ferry."*

*"Hard to find a rental car. Company was 2 hours late to drop it off and had not much petrol in it."*

*"The difficulty in renting from a reputable company like AVIS and Budget - their available Fleet was very limited."*

*"The rental agency rented us an unsafe car and were reluctant to discuss reimbursement."*

### **Taxi**

Two percent of visitors surveyed also specifically stated that they had negative experiences with local taxi transport. Drivers themselves were suggested to be too pushy and a lack of consistency around charging was found to be unappealing. Comments included:

*"Least attractive was definitely the differing taxi prices."*

*"The taxis. The drivers need to learn where the places are that people want to go to."*

*"The rip off taxi driver who pretended to be a tour driver, who then sent his wife- who couldn't drive and got lost several times and charged us a \$200 tala for the day."*

*"Tourists to Samoa are ripped off by Taxi Drivers with very high rate of fares. Every time I hired a taxi, it always a 200% more than what the Hotel staff recommended."*

*"Taxi drivers ripping people off with their inconsistent rates, unprofessional and unreliable service. Not a good reflection on the Samoan culture, when taxi driver does not turn up on the morning passengers are due to catch their flight. Not a good reflection on Samoa overall."*

### **Money access**

One percent of respondents mentioned difficulties with local ATM availability and the preference for cash over cards in shops. Comments included:

*"It was hard to find ATM to get local money."*

*"The lack ATM's outside of Apia. No being able to use my credit card or EFTPOS card."*

*"Using a credit card is almost foreign to Samoan establishments and trying to configure a transaction takes way too long."*

*"A learning for us was to have enough cash on hand as we had to find an ATM when we were sightseeing."*

*"My travel card being swallowed by the ATM at the airport on arrival and poor communication in resolving the situation."*

### **Too touristy or commercial**

Less than one percent of visitors surveyed stated that Samoa was too touristy or commercial, mainly in Apia and the surrounding villages. A concern for the loss of heritage and culture was a common theme. Comments included:

*"Little respect of historical past, preserving buildings from 100 years ago. It is part of Samoan history and also appealing for tourists. Preserve the courthouse."*

*"Starting to get commercialised."*

*"The Westernised influence on our culture, language and traditions."*

*"Getting too modernised and losing their culture."*

## **Suggestions to improve the visit to Samoa**

When asked if there was anything that could have improved their visit to Samoa, the following suggestions were made: infrastructure, public services and facilities (39%), customer service (11%), and the availability, quality, and price of food and drinks (10%). Other areas of focus included: information (8%), a longer stay or to visit more places (6%), activities (6%), airport facilities and services (6%), accommodation (5%), overcharging and harassing visitors (4%), social issues (4%), car rentals (2%), stray animals, mosquitos and animal care (2%), safety (2%), weather (2%), banking (1%), and degradation of the environment (1%). Comments on these themes included:

*"There was very little road side signage making it hard to find locations without local knowledge."*

*"Better connectivity to the internet and broader internet range around the island."*

*"Stop polluting areas by not rubbishing your surroundings. Villagers should be educated on personal hygiene especially handling of rubbish. There should be an overall development of farmlands where we can sight overgrown farms along the road side. I believe Samoa is a beautiful country with beautiful people but it needs a lot of education for development regarding individual hygiene in and out which will be reflected in the community and in the country as a whole."*

*"Apia wasn't the most attractive city ... very difficult to know what a shop was and what a house was."*

*"Maybe a bit friendlier service or general customer service within town. The further out you go the better the service is from the small family owned shops and petrol stations."*

*"I would love for Samoan traditional food to be championed more. It would make the cultural exchange more complete and allow it to be economically more accessible. Eating in Samoa is as expensive as an Auckland restaurant but clearly not on the same level. But I'm not in Samoa to eat food I can get at home, I want fresh tropical fruit, umu, palusami, taro, oka..."*

*"Like they have in Niue, one great Brochure for Savai'i with a map, sites clearly marked, Tala price indications to give at sights, all the activity info in one place and all the accommodation possibilities in one place too."*

*"I would have liked more opportunity to meet people and have cultural experiences."*

*"More opportunity to spend money outside of the resort! The RLS museum was great but the Samoa culture museum was very lacking."*

*"I tried to find someone to take me fishing but no one would return my inquiries."*

*"More money exchange locations at airport because both booths available also had long lines to wait in for service."*

*"Improved professionalism of airport workers, specifically immigration officers."*

*"We were quite mucked around with our flights due to an issue with the plane, but communication wasn't great, and we arrived much later than we were told we would be which meant we basically lost a night's accommodation and spent most of our first day catching up on sleep."*

*"Found it quite intimidating when approached by people from nowhere when we stopped on side of road who wanted money to take photos on river or walk on beach - left a bad taste so kept to beaches at hotels, fales we stayed at."*

*"Better wages for the locals."*

*"Tourism hosts limited lack of English language."*

*"The ability to rent a good safe car (without being scammed) at an affordable price."*

*"Women need to feel safe and able to sleep without fear of either locals or tourists. This needs to be addressed urgently."*

*"More freedom to walk the streets without the thought of dogs attacking you."*

*"Not hearing about animal abuse and turtles captured to be kept for tourists to feed on Savaii."*

*"More obvious conservation efforts. I'm sure Samoa is doing a lot, and many tourists would be happy to get involved. Something like participating in coral restoration (like in Mo'orea) would be a really cool thing to do."*

*"More bank ATM's."*

## Reasons to return to Samoa and recommend to others

The majority of visitors (91%) indicated that they would consider re-visiting Samoa in the future. Of the nine percent of visitors who indicated they would not want to return to Samoa, the majority stated that did not wish to return because of a desire to visit other places around the world. Some visitors commented the costs of goods and service, and some respondents consider that there are limited attractions, activities and entertainment to attract them back to Samoa next time. A few visitors considered that Samoa is under-developed in terms of roads, facilities, public services and internet etc. Other reasons given for not wishing to return included the food and beverage, distance, customer service, and social issues. Comments included:

*"I liked it, but I feel as though I explored it all and would prefer to visit other countries than to retrace my steps."*

*"We loved Samoa but wouldn't return in the near future as we want to travel to lots of other countries as well."*

*"Things are very expensive in Samoa and I didn't feel the quality and the service met my expectations."*

*"I found a little too rudimentary - lacking in information about things to see and do so we could make a plan of our time. I like a bit more activity and adventure."*

*"I found it more expensive than Fiji and did not find the people as friendly as Fiji."*

*"Not being able to book our rental car on the ferry before leaving NZ is a big stress and inconvenience."*

*"Not likely. We had shocking weather and found the customer service for what we were paying wasn't quite there. The kids club at the resort was unorganised."*

Nearly all visitors surveyed (95%) said that they would recommend the destination to their families and friends when they return home. Only 5% of visitors would not recommend Samoa to others and here comments largely focused on high costs and a lack of value for money, the lack of attractions and activities, low-standards of customer service, a lack of friendliness among local people, a lack of environmental care, a lack of facilities, safety issues, limited local food, a lack of information, and social issues.

## Final observations

This report shows that the Samoa tourism industry generally performed well during the survey period of January to December 2018. It is clear that the tourism industry makes a vital contribution to the Samoa economy with spend per visitor being substantial. It is essential, however, that further efforts be made to enhance yield per visitor. Such an approach not only creates more jobs and income, it also, inevitably enhances the visitor experience. A higher yield, value added, approach to future tourism development will also place less pressure on the Island's cultural and environmental resources, with the focus shifting away from simply increasing visitor numbers.

There is room to enhance the visitor experience and to increase the economic yield and broader community benefits associated with tourism. Government plays a crucial role in providing infrastructure, enforcing standards, and setting a vision and strategy for tourism. With a significant number of international visitors' perceiving that "infrastructure, public service and facilities" are lacking, and several visitors mentioning their concerns about customer service in Samoa, it is clear that there are measures that can be adopted to improve both visitor and local experiences and that will reap long term dividends for the country. The report also highlights some issues around the availability, quality, and price of food and drinks in Samoa; the lack of information and communication; the limited attractions, activities and entertainment; as well as issues accessing money and using credit cards.

Overall visitor satisfaction and willingness to return are high, with the majority of the respondents expressing a willingness to recommend Samoa as a place to visit to others. It is vital now to build on this positive performance and to convert it into even greater economic benefits for businesses and communities. It is critical to find ways to build on and develop the visitor experience in a manner that enhances local economic linkages. By developing new product offerings, and more importantly, enhancing the quality and 'value added' of existing activities and experiences, the tourism industry can increase visitor satisfaction, and enhance the generation of positive local economic outcomes. As the survey continues it will be possible to explore in more detail the characteristics of different market segments and to measure industry performance over time.