

Sitka Visitors' Survey 2006

Prepared for the Sitka Collaborative Tourism Planning Committee by the Union College summer term on "The Impact of Tourism in Southeast Alaska" (August 2006)

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Background and Methodology

This report is based on a survey conducted by students from Union College--Dana Seidler, Jay Read, Mike Montesano, Laura Hummer, and Derek Johndrow—under the direction of Dr. Sharon Gmelch, a cultural anthropologist. The group was in Alaska on a three-week course examining “The Impact of Tourism in Southeast Alaska” and spent three days in Juneau, one day in Hoonah, and seventeen days in Sitka in August 2006. Rather than undertake individual research projects to fulfill the last of their course requirements, the group offered its services to the Sitka Collaborative Tourism Project (SCTP). At a meeting with its Steering Committee, it was decided that students could best help by administering a survey to visitors which focused on their activities and perceptions of Sitka’s amenities and attractions. The Union group then developed a survey using topics and questions which had been raised at past stakeholders’ meetings, pre-tested the survey on August 12, revised it slightly afterwards, and then presented the final version to the Steering Committee and Stakeholders at a Sitka Collaborative Tourism Project Stakeholders’ meeting a few days later.

The 26-item survey (see Appendix A) was then administered to visitors to Sitka over a five-day period (August 15-19). The definition of “visitor” adopted for the survey was that used by the SCTP: a “non-local who comes to our community for a short-term with a specific reason for being there.” A total of 258 viable surveys were obtained. A small number of surveys were not used because demographic information had not been filled out. An effort was made to contact a broad spectrum of visitors on both heavy and light visitation days (e.g., when three large cruise ships were in port and when only one small ship was there). Visitors were contacted at both cruise ship tendering sites (e.g., Crescent Harbor and O’Connell Bridge), outside the Sitka National Historical Park and the Alaska Raptor Center, on Lincoln Street, on Sitka Tour buses, at Harrigan Centennial Hall, and at the airport and Alaska Marine Highway terminals. An unsuccessful attempt also was made to locate visitors at the Starrigavin campgrounds. Most visitors who were asked to complete the survey were willing to do so; there were a few objections (usually due to time constraints).

As part of the students’ over-all study of tourism in SE Alaska, they met with: Lorene Palmer, president and CEO of the Juneau Convention and Visitors Bureau, Sonya Smith and Frieda Westman of the Icy Strait Point tourism complex, and in Sitka, Fred Reeder (Port Manager), Brian McNitt (Member of Sitka Collaborative Tourism Project Steering Committee), Rick Stone (visiting Educator and Tour Guide), Ellen Frankenstein (Filmmaker), and the following representatives from the Sitka National Historical Park: Greg Dudgeon (Superintendent), Kristin Griffin (Historian), and Clair Roberts (Ranger). As mentioned above, the Union group also attended one Steering Committee meeting and one Stakeholder meeting of the Sitka Collaborative Tourism Project. Students also participated in a number of visitor activities. In Sitka, these included visiting the Sitka National Historic Park, the Raptor Center, the Sheldon Jackson Museum, and the Russian Bishop’s House. They also went on a walking tour focusing on Russian America (with Harvey Brandt), a Sitka Tribal Tour, a Conservation Society-sponsored boat trip along

Kruzof Island, a nature and wildlife boat tour (with Davey Lubin), a bike and hike tour (with Jeff Budd), a tour of the Westerdam cruise ship (arranged by Fred Reeder), and trips and walks at Starrigavin and Harbor Mountain. In addition, they engaged in many informal conversations with visitors, B&B operators, commercial fishers, shop owners, tour operators, the harbor master, and other Sitka residents, as did their instructor Sharon Gmelch. They are grateful to all these people for their help and insights.

Survey Results

1. Demographic Information

1.1 Age and Gender

Gender: Forty percent of the surveys were filled out by male visitors and 49 percent by female visitors. The remaining 11 percent were completed by couples, who jointly answered its questions.

N=255, 3 people did not indicate gender.

Age: Fifty-nine percent of respondents were middle-aged and older (51 years +). A quarter (24%) of the respondents were between 36 and 50 years of age. Only 16 percent were under the age of 35. These figures approximate observational impressions of the ages of obvious visitors walking Sitka’s streets, boarding tour buses, and the like.

Table 1: Age Distribution

| Age Group | Number of Respondents | Percentage |
|-------------|-----------------------|------------|
| Under 25 | 14 | 5 |
| 26-35 | 27 | 11 |
| 36-50 | 62 | 24 |
| 51-65 | 98 | 38 |
| 66 and over | 54 | 21 |

N=255, three people declined to answer the question.

1.2 Origin

Most Sitka visitors (85%) are residents of the United States; only 15 percent had come from other countries. More American visitors came from the states of California (26%) and Washington (12%) than any other state which is not surprising given their proximity to Alaska. Nevertheless, Sitka receives visitors from all over the country. Survey respondents had come from 41 states. Only the states of Rhode Island, Delaware, New Mexico, Nevada, Oklahoma, Mississippi, West Virginia, Nebraska and Arkansas were unrepresented.

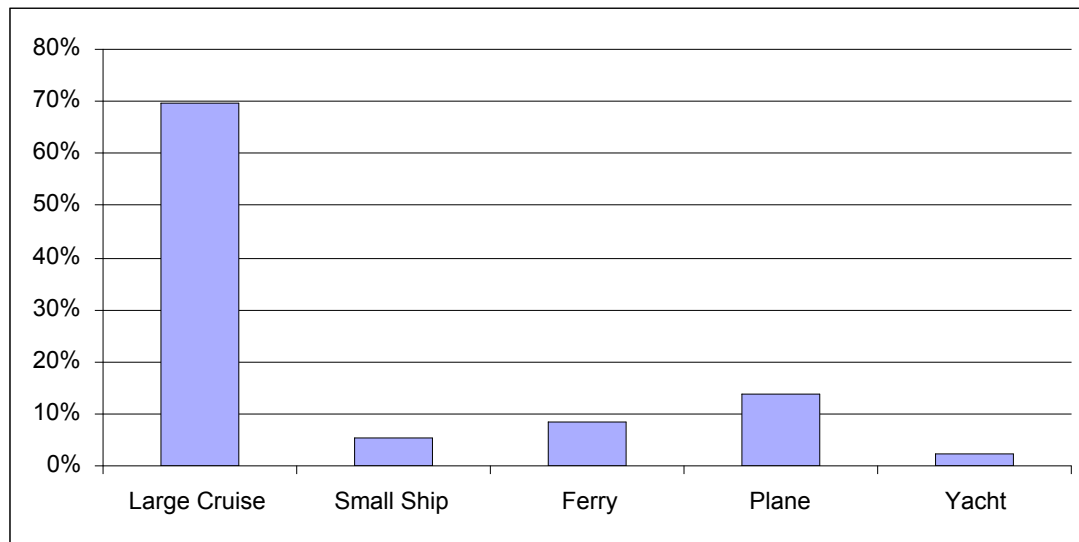
Slightly more than half of Sitka’s foreign visitors (55%) were Canadians. The remaining were largely Europeans (70%) and Australians (18%), with the United Kingdom

contributing the greatest number. Only 2 of the visitors surveyed had come from other parts of the world: one each from Taiwan and Singapore.

1.3 Transportation to Sitka

An attempt was made to survey visitors who had arrived in Sitka by various means of transportation. Fully 86 percent of the visitors surveyed arrived by sea. The majority (70%) arrived aboard large cruise ships such as those of the Holland America Line. Nine percent arrived on Alaska Marine Highway ferries, another 5 percent arrived on small cruise ships (defined as ships carrying 300 or fewer passengers), and 2 percent arrived on private yachts. The remaining 14 percent of those surveyed arrived by air, usually on Alaska Airlines, and were surveyed as they waited to board their return flights. Many of these visitors had come to Sitka to participate in charter fishing trips.

Figure 1: Transport to Sitka

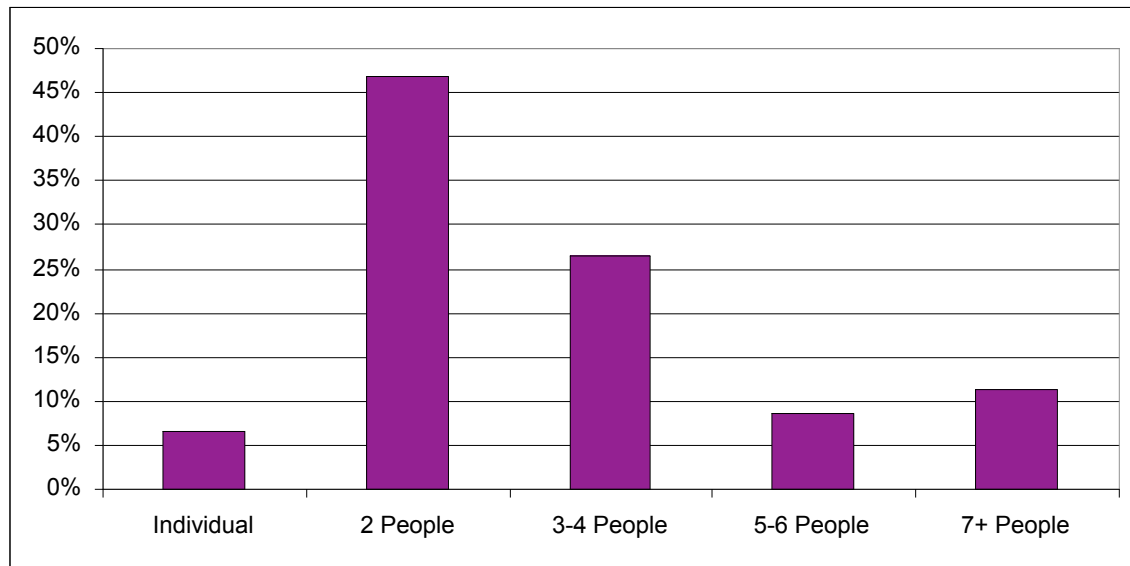


N = 258

1.4 Party Size

Visitors were asked to indicate the size of their “immediate party.” Nearly half (47%) of those surveyed were traveling with one other person, that is, in parties of two. These were followed by groups of three or four (27%), often two couples, and then by larger groups of seven or more people (11%). One group of 48 visitors was the largest reported party. Individuals traveling on their own made up the smallest category, just 7 percent of Sitka visitors.

Figure 2: Party Size



N = 256; two people failed to answer the question.

1.5 Time spent in Sitka

Visitors were asked to indicate the “number of nights” they were spending in Sitka or “if on a cruise, [the] number of hours”. Those not on a cruise, stayed an average of eight nights. Those on cruises spent an average of five and a half hours.

1.6 Previous Experience in Alaska and Sitka

More than two-thirds of the visitors surveyed (69%) had never been to Alaska before. Thirty-one percent were returning visitors.

N = 255; three people failed to answer the question.

An even larger proportion had never been to Sitka before. It was the first visit for fully 81 percent of visitors, while 19 percent had been to Sitka previously.

N = 254; four people failed to answer the question.

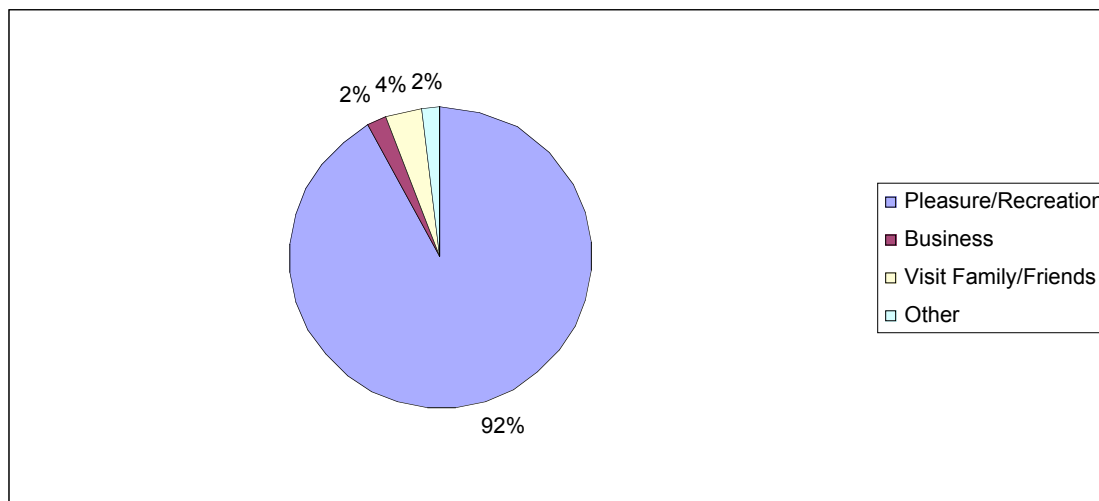
2. Trip Planning

The survey contained four questions relating to the purpose of visitors' trips and to their pre-trip planning.

2.1 Primary Purpose of Visit

When asked to indicate the “**primary** purpose” of their visit to Sitka, 92 percent of those surveyed indicated that they had come for “pleasure/recreation.” Other reasons included “business” (2 %), “to visit family/friends” (4%), and “other” (2 %). Of the five people selecting the “other” category, three indicated that they had come to Sitka to fish, one had come to work for the summer at a local hospital (and should, therefore, have selected “business”), and the last because “it was just a stop on the cruise” (presumably a cruise ship worker).

Figure 3: Reason for Visiting Sitka.

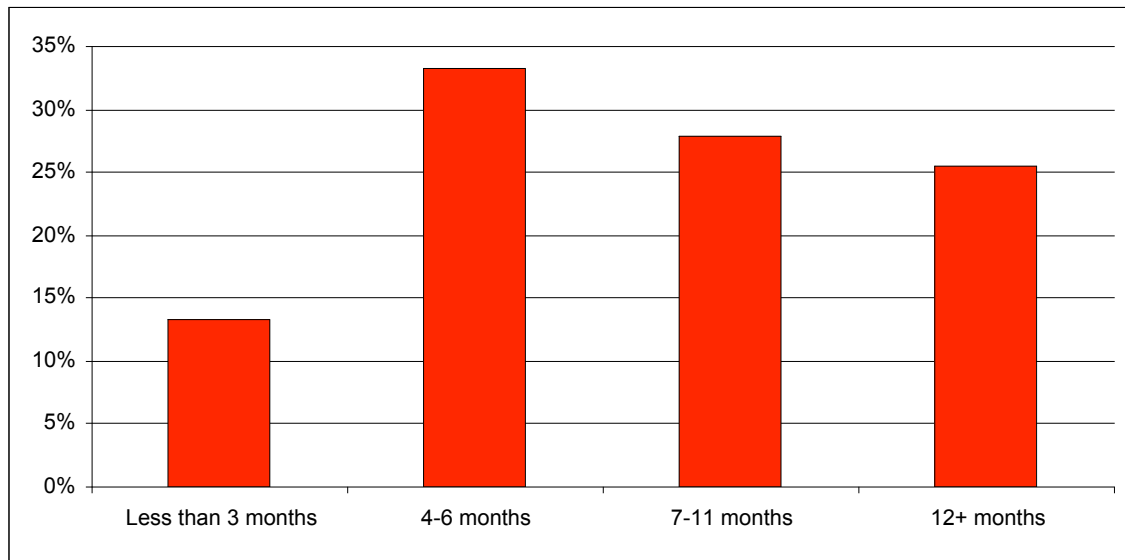


N = 258

2.2 Advance Planning

When asked “how far in advance” they had decided “to come on this trip to Alaska,” 86 percent of visitors began planning at least four months in advance. Of this group, most (33%) made their decisions 4-6 months in advance, 28 percent made them 7-11 months in advance, and 25 percent a year or more in advance. Only 13 percent of respondents reported making a relatively quick decision (“less than 3 months”) to come to Alaska.

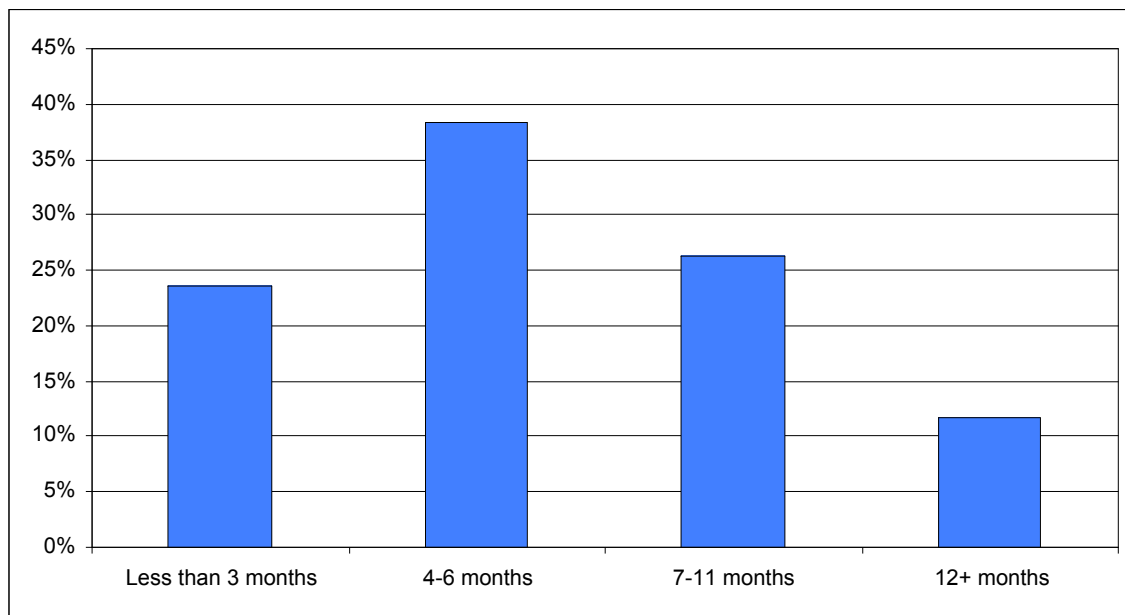
Figure 4: Amount of Time in Advance Alaska Trip was Planned



N = 255; three people did not respond to the question.

When asked how far in advance they had made their **actual travel arrangements**, the largest number (38%) reported booking their trip four to six months in advance. Roughly the same number of people booked 7-11 months in advance and less than 3 months: 22 percent and 24 percent respectively. Only 12 percent of visitors had booked their trip a full year or more in advance.

Figure 5: Amount of Time in Advance Travel Arrangements were Made



N = 258

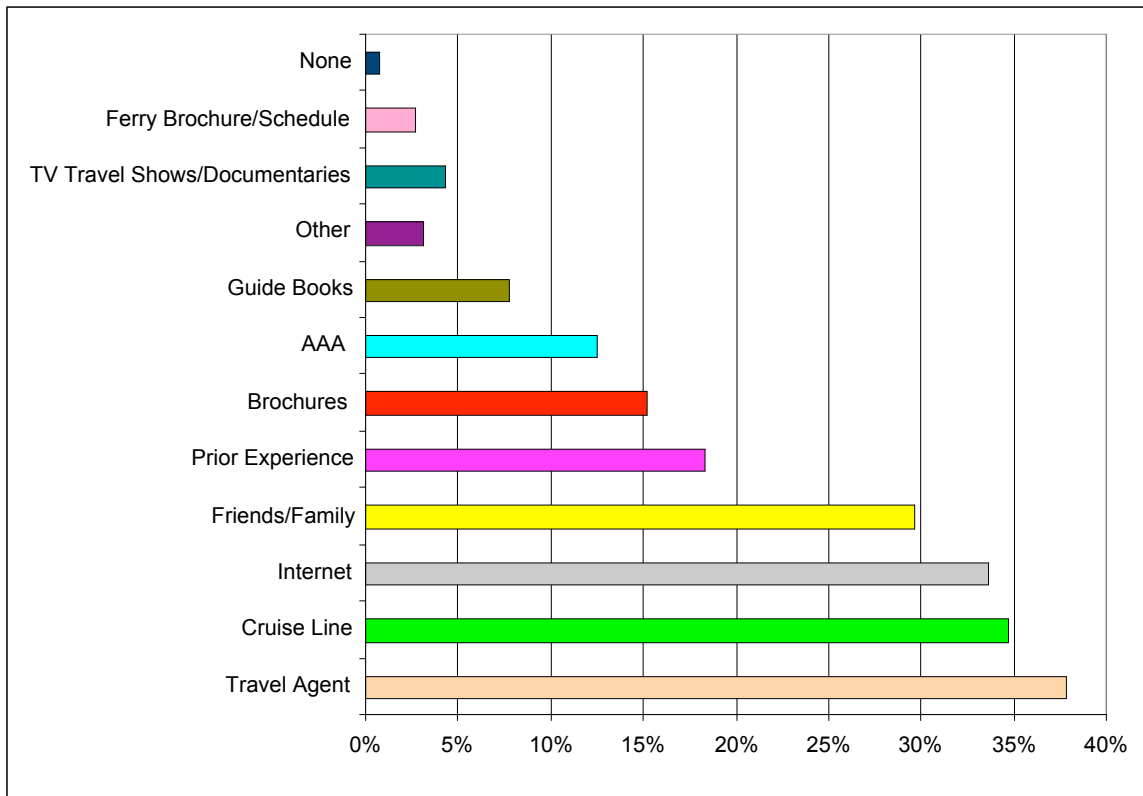
Since the most common time frame for deciding to visit Alaska and for booking major travel arrangements was four to six months in advance, the most effective time for

Alaskan and Sitkan tourism interests to advertise for the coming summer season would appear to be in the winter months of November, December, and January.

2.3 Sources of Information

Visitors were asked “What sources of information about Alaska and Sitka did you **primarily** use when planning your trip? (check all that apply)” The most frequently checked response was “travel agent” (38%). The next most frequently used sources were a “cruise line” (35%) and the “internet” (34%). Respondents also were asked to write in the internet site(s) they had used. Many people reported visiting www.Alaska.com or the website of a specific cruise line, while others used search engines and entered “Alaska” or the specific towns they knew they would be visiting (this was primarily the case with cruise ship passengers). “Friends/family” ranked fourth (30%) as a primary information source about Alaska and Sitka. This was followed by “prior experience” (18%), “brochures” (15%), the American Automobile Association (13%), and “guidebooks” (8%). The remaining sources specified on the survey – “TV travel shows/documentaries,” “ferry brochure/schedule,” and “other” – each had four percent or fewer respondents listing them as their primary source of information. The “other” category gave respondents the opportunity to fill in alternative sources of information; answers included co-workers, charter fishing group, radio, restaurant, tour operator, Alaska Bound, and books.

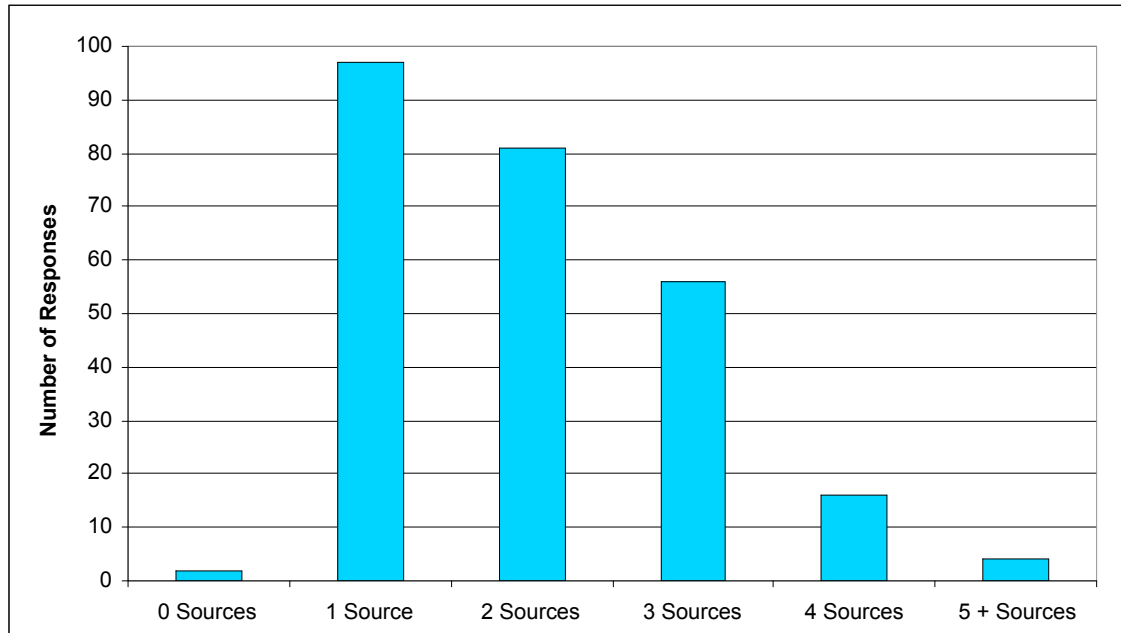
Figure 6: Sources of Information about Alaska and Sitka.



N = 256; two people did not respond to the question

Of the 256 people responding to this question, 61 percent indicated that they had used multiple primary sources of information. Thirty-eight percent, however, used only one source of information, and two visitors (less than 1%) reported not using any information source when planning their trip to Alaska.

Figure 7: Number of Information Sources Used.



N = 256; two people failed to answer the question

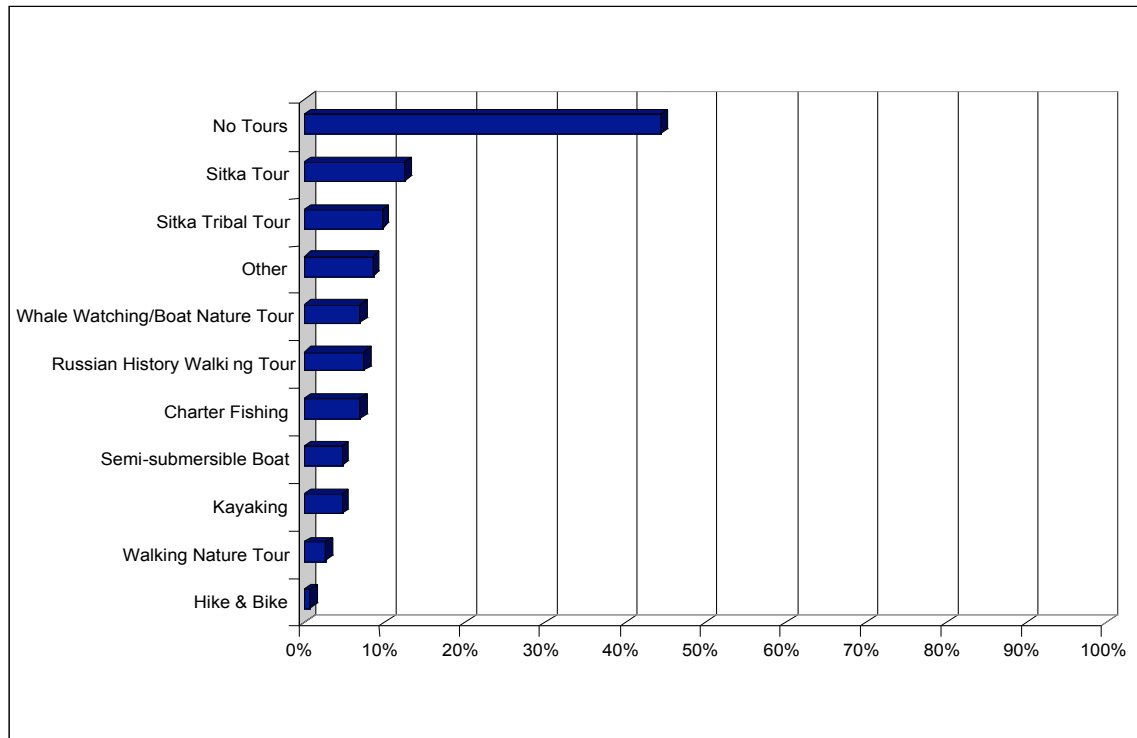
3. Tours and Activities

The survey contained two questions that focused on specific tourist attractions and activities in Sitka that visitors might be expected to undertake. Respondents were presented with a list (Appendix A, Question 7) and asked, “Which of the following guided tour(s) did you purchase?” They were also asked to indicate how much they enjoyed the tour(s) (5=excellent, 4=good, 3=average, 2=unsatisfactory, 1=poor) and how they had purchased it (from cruise line, in Sitka, or on the internet). A second question asked, “What other places or sights did you visit in Sitka on your own (NOT as part of a group tour)?” This question also provided a list of possible answers (Appendix A, Question 8). In both cases, respondents were given an “other” category and space to write in a tour or location that had not been listed. Many visitors did a significant amount of exploring on their own, while other visitors relied completely on the organized commercial tours.

3.1 Commercial Tours

Respondents were asked to indicate which guided tours they had purchased or were planning to purchase and participate in. Fifty-five percent of those surveyed had purchased at least one guided tour. Figure 8 shows the percentage of visitors who took each tour. (The figures do not add up to 100 percent because some people went on more than one tour. Nor does the graph indicate the degree to which a visitor liked or disliked a particular tour, largely because in many instances respondents had not yet gone on or completed their tour.)

Figure 8: *Tours Survey Respondents Participated in during their Visit to Sitka.*



N=256; two people declined to answer the question.

Nearly half of the visitors surveyed (45%) indicated that they had **not** purchased and did not intend to purchase a guided tour. Visitors were not asked to state **why** they had not purchased a guided tour, but common reasons gleaned from informal conversations and observation include a preference for exploring on their own, the perception that tours were too expensive, and the feeling that there was not enough time to take a tour and still do some individual exploring or shopping. The latter was especially the case for cruise ship passengers. Some Sitka visitors, of course, had come primarily to see family or friends or for business. Others had paid to charter fish but did not classify this activity to be a “tour.”

The most popular tour specified by the 55 percent of respondents who had purchased at least one tour in Sitka was the *Sitka Tours* bus ride (13%). This tour takes people through

Sitka and gives them a general overview of the town. It is also the only tour that takes visitors to disparate activities like the Raptor Center and the New Archangel Dancers.

The *Sitka Tribal Tour* was the next most popular tour specified by respondents; 10 percent of visitors had or were going on this tour. The main focus of this tour is the *Sheet'ka Kwaan Naa Kahidi Dancers* who perform for visitors in the Tlingit “clan” or community house. The tour also includes a bus tour through part of the town with some narration and transportation to the Sitka National Historical Park, where visitors are given about 45 minutes to walk through the park, see the totem poles, watch craftspeople at work, and learn something about Tlingit history.

Each of the remaining listed tours was taken by fewer than 10 percent of survey respondents. Many of these tours target visitors with specific interests such as Russian history or fishing. The “other” category gave visitors the opportunity to write in tours that were not specifically listed on the survey. The most popular tours written in were to Kruzof Island and the Silver Bay hatchery.

Tours that involve physical exertion (such as kayaking, bike and hike tours, some walking tours) were taken by smaller numbers of survey respondents. This undoubtedly reflects the audience such tours are aimed at, that is, the more physically fit – and often younger – visitors who come to Sitka. As pointed out earlier, a majority of survey respondents (59%) were 51 years or older which would reduce the number of visitors likely to participate in such activities. Many of these tours also take three to four hours which would deter many cruise ship passengers. Such tours are also much more vulnerable to bad weather than bus tours.

3.2 Places and Sights

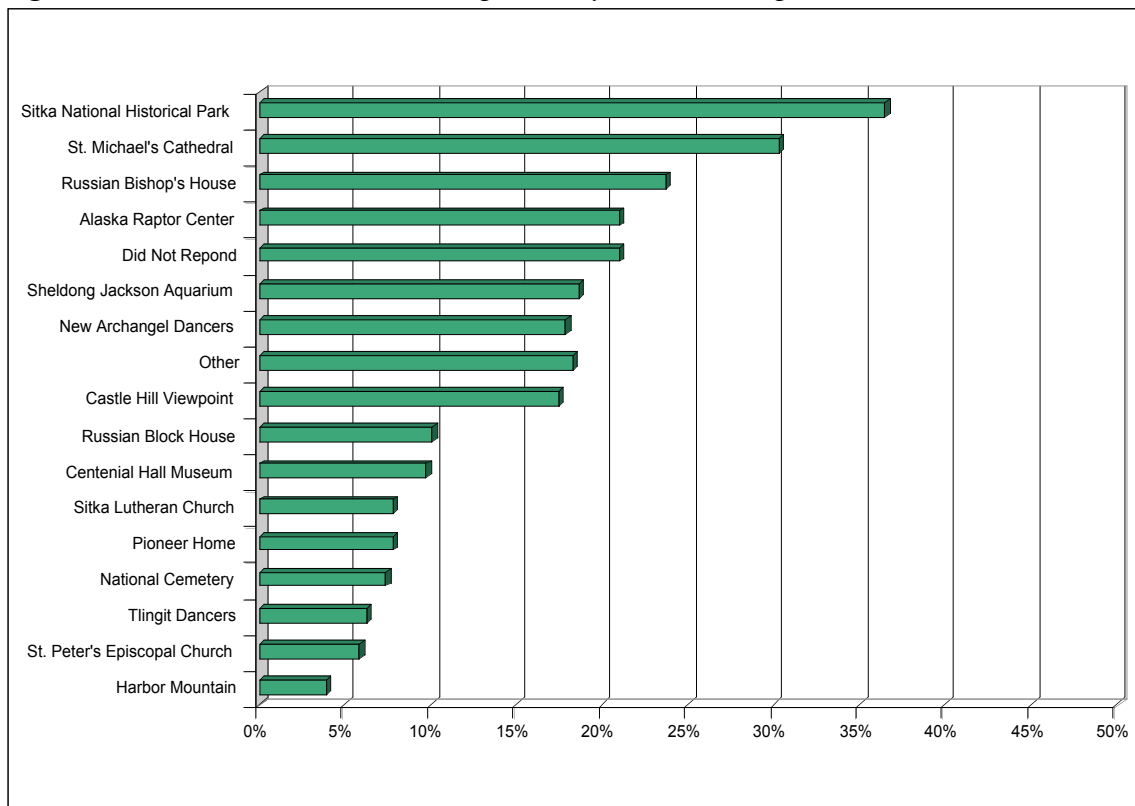
Visitors were asked to indicate which places, activities, or sights they had gone to on their own (“NOT as part of a group tour”). Based on responses to this question, 79 percent of Sitka’s visitors did some exploring on their own. Figure 9 shows the places and sights they visited in descending order of popularity. (The total does not add up to 100 percent because respondents were able to select more than one answer.)

The Sitka National Historical Park was visited by 36 percent of the respondents and was the most popular attraction for people not on an organized tour. (It is also a part of many guided tours). This is not surprising since the park is within easy walking distance of the center of town and offers a mixture of attractions, including a scenic nature walk (which often includes wildlife such as eagles and salmon), totem poles, museum displays of Tlingit history and culture, and live craft demonstrations. Park officials estimate that they receive an average of 300,000 visitors each year.

St. Michael’s Cathedral and the Russian Bishop’s House were the second and third most popular attractions, visited by 30 and 24 percent of survey respondents respectively. This is not surprising either since Sitka’s Russian history is well publicized and is one of the town’s main attractions to outsiders. Twenty-two percent of survey respondents had gone

to a performance by the “Russian” New Archangel Dancers. Nine percent had visited the replica Russian Block House. When visitors were asked in a separate question later in the survey to state what “expectations” they had about Sitka before arriving, many respondents wrote in some variation of “Russian history” or “Russian America.” Some also indicated in their response to yet another question that this had been their “best experience” in Sitka.

Figure 9: Locations Visited Unaccompanied by a Tour Group



N=258

Twenty-one percent of respondents visited the Alaska Raptor Center on their own, making it the fourth most popular attraction. This is somewhat surprising given its inconvenient location on the edge of town. The lack of public transportation also makes it difficult for many elderly and most handicapped visitors to get there without taking a commercial bus tour. The Raptor Center was, however, one of the attractions highlighted in the brochure given to cruise passengers on the Holland America line (and presumably on other cruise ships) prior to disembarking. Most visitors also associate Alaska with wildlife which includes raptors like the bald eagle. Seeing them, therefore, even if while being rehabilitated can be considered a necessary part of an “Alaskan experience.”

Another 21 percent of survey respondents had not visited **any** of Sitka’s attractions or sights on their own. Approximately one third of this group (30%) had not gone on an organized tour either. This means that six percent of visitors to Sitka do not go on any

organized tour **nor** do they visit any of Sitka’s main attractions. Some of these people may be repeat visitors, in Sitka on business, or charter fishermen staying at lodges outside of town. Others may simply prefer to wander the streets, look at the boats in the harbors, or shop. At any rate, only a small percentage of visitors to Sitka (6%) do not bother to visit any of its attractions.

4. Economic Contribution of Tourism

Visitors make a significant contribution to Sitka’s economy each year. In addition to the tours, accommodation, and meals many purchase, almost two-thirds (61%) of those surveyed reported having purchased “souvenirs or other nonfood items (e.g., art)” while in town.

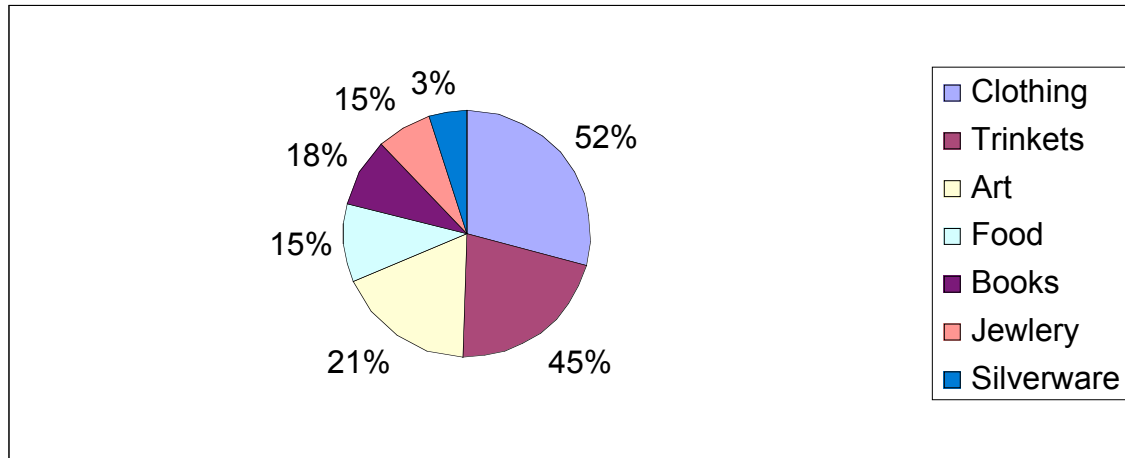
N = 249; 9 visitors failed to respond.

4.1 Souvenirs

About half (41%) of the visitors who reported having bought “souvenirs or other nonfood items,” wrote in what they had purchased. Most of these purchases (52%) were clothing -- primarily T-shirts, sweatshirts, and hats (usually with logos signifying the place visited), but some expensive jackets and furs. The next most frequent purchase (45%) were inexpensive and common “tourist” mementos such as key chains, patches, mugs, magnets, postcards, note cards, stuffed animals, and self-described “trinkets”. Some mementos were less generic and more specifically linked to Sitka or Alaska. These included a local nautical chart, jars of locally-made Devil’s Club ointment, imported Russian lacquer boxes and *Matryoshka* (or *Matrioshka*) dolls, and items like Eskimo ulus. The third most frequent category of purchase was artwork (21%), ranging from \$50 prints and photographs to \$500+ hand-carved masks and ivory or whalebone carvings. Books, usually on Alaskan themes, made up 18 percent of purchases. Another 18 percent of purchases were of jewelry and “silverware.” A final 15 percent of purchases were of what can be described as souvenir foods (e.g., candy, coffee, smoked salmon, locally-made jam).

Figure 10 displays the proportion of purchases in each category. (The total does add up to 100 percent because the visitors who described their purchases typically had bought more than one type of item during their stay in Sitka.)

Figure 10: Merchandise Purchased



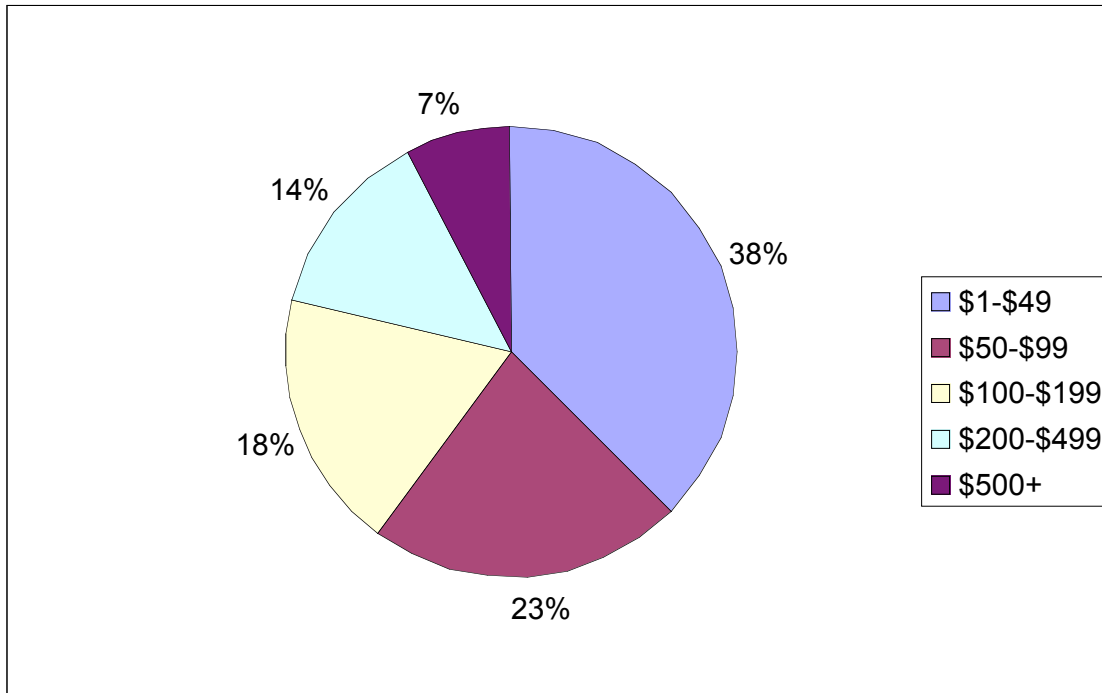
N = 101; multiple visitors reported purchasing more than one item.

4.2 Visitor Spending on Souvenirs

A third of visitors (34%) reported spending **nothing** on “souvenirs or other nonfood items” while in Sitka. (This excludes what some people spent on tours or, in a very few cases, on a charter fishing trip.) Figure 11 illustrates the percentage breakdown by spending category for the two-thirds (66 %) of survey respondents who did make purchases while in Sitka.

Taking an average dollar amount within each spending category (i.e., using \$25 as the average for “\$1-49,” \$75 as the average for “\$50-99,” \$150 as the average for “\$100-199,” \$350 as the average for “\$200-499,” and \$500 as a low “average” for the category “\$500 and over”) and multiplying it by the number of visitors who checked that spending category, yields a rough estimate of the amount each category of spender contributed to this part of Sitka’s economy. Visitors spending between \$1-49, for example, contributed an average of \$44. If visitors who spent **nothing** are added to this group—that is, all visitors spending under \$50 while in Sitka--the average spent per person drops to \$23. In contrast, the far smaller number of visitors spending \$200 or more each spent an average of \$282. This is 6-12 times the amount spent by each thriftier visitor.

Figure 11: Visitor Spending on Souvenirs and Nonfood Items

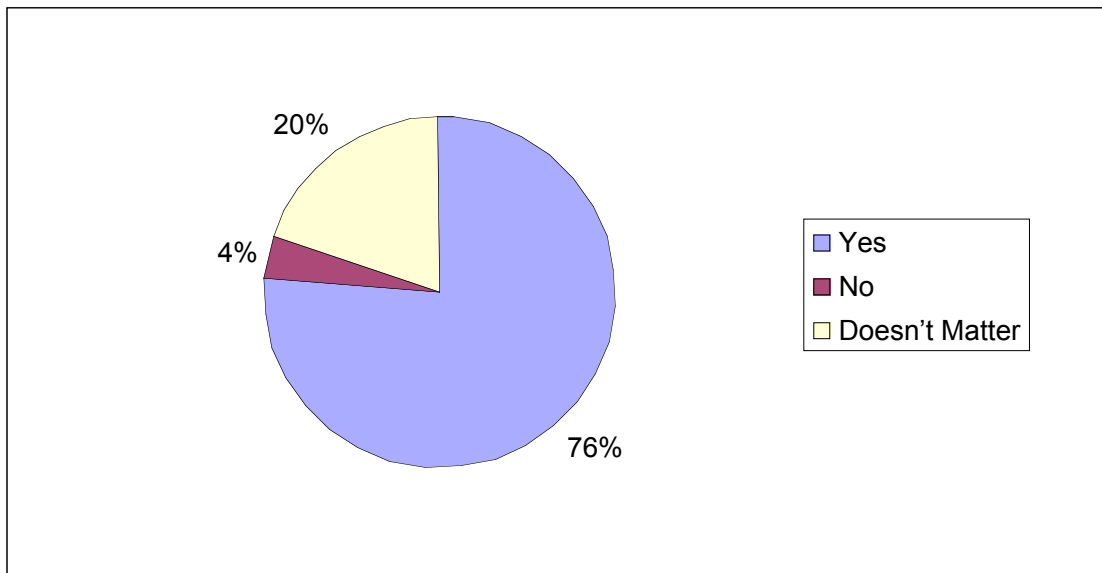


N = 163; four visitors failed to respond.

4.3 Merchandise Preferences

When asked “Do you prefer to buy local or locally-made goods/objects?”, more than three-quarters (76%) said “yes.” Only 20 percent answered “no”; 4 percent indicated that it did not matter.

Figure 12: Visitors’ Preference to Purchase Locally-Made Goods/Objects

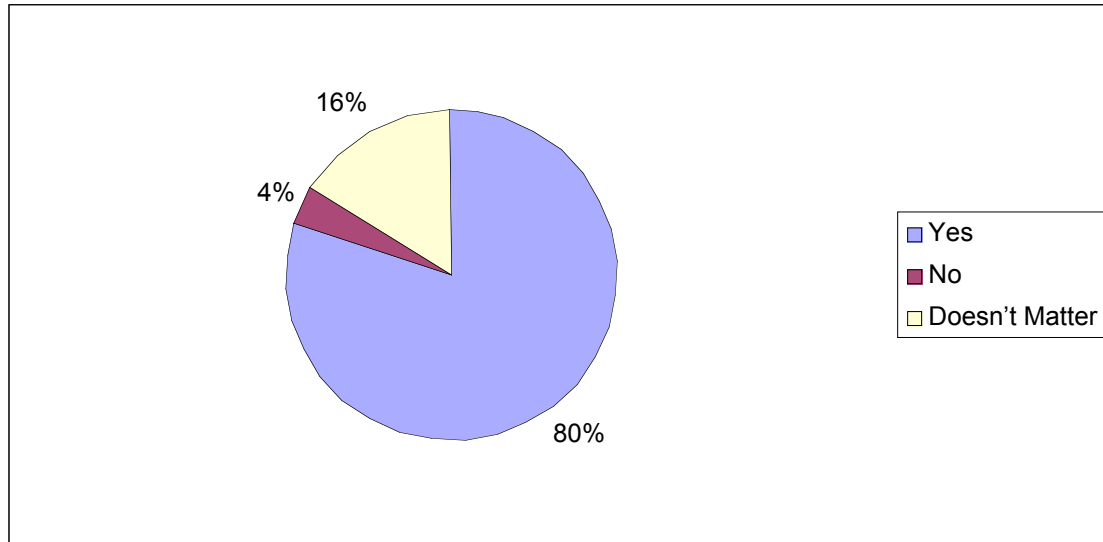


N = 256; two visitors failed to respond.

4.4 Business Preferences

Similarly, a large majority of visitors (80%) prefer to buy from locally-owned stores.

Figure 13: Visitors that Prefer Locally Owned Stores



N = 255; three visitors failed to respond.

Only 4 percent answered “no”, and 16 percent said that it did not matter to them. Many visitors who did **not** buy anything in Sitka nevertheless filled in this part of the survey, indicating that they also preferred to buy locally made goods/objects and to shop in locally-owned businesses.

5. Cruise Ship Visitors’ Perspective on Tendering

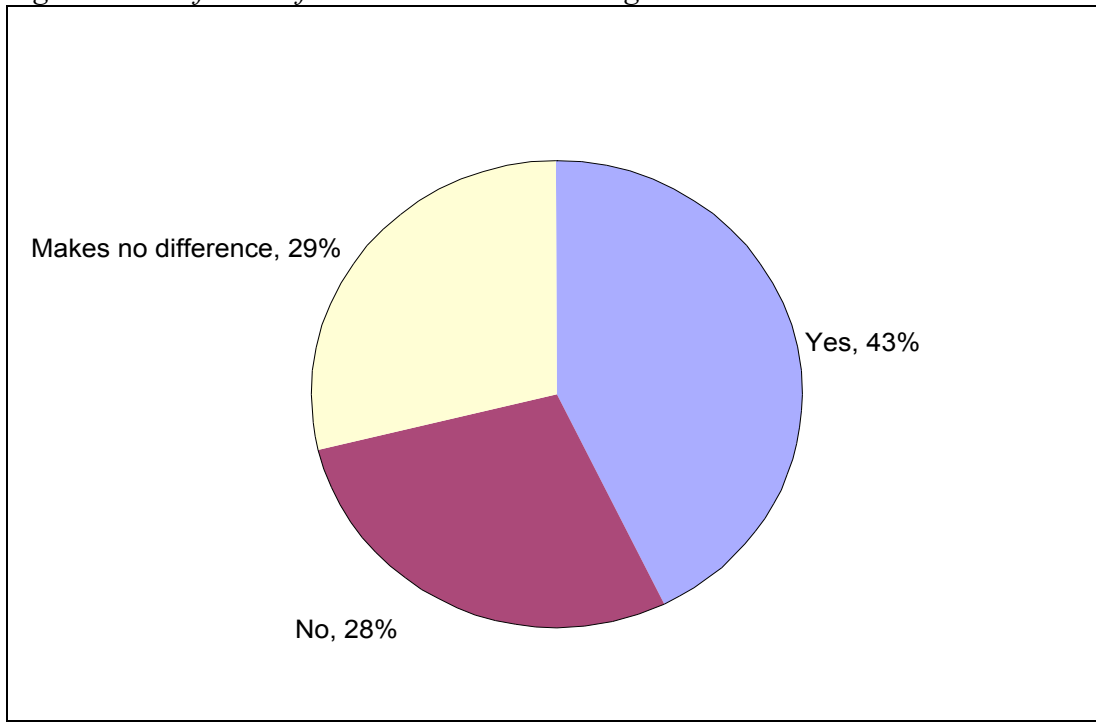
The survey included five questions geared specifically towards cruise ship passengers. The student researchers and their professor had learned that a proposal to build a dock was once again before the public and decided, therefore, to include a few questions related to cruise ship visitors’ experience with tendering to shore. The questions asked about the passengers’ preferences (for tendering or docking), how long they had had to wait for a tender to Sitka, how much they enjoyed the experience of tendering to shore, if they personally knew of anyone who had stayed on their ship while in Sitka to avoid tending, and if they would prefer docking six-seven miles from town and being bused in (as the current proposal, if passed, would require) over tendering.

5.1 Respondents’ General Preferences

When asked “Would you prefer to be tied up at a dock?” a significance majority (57%) of the cruise passengers who answered this question either answered “no” (28%) or “makes

no difference” (29%). Forty-three percent answered “yes,” meaning they would prefer to tie up to a dock than tender to town.

Figure 14: Preference for a Dock over Tendering



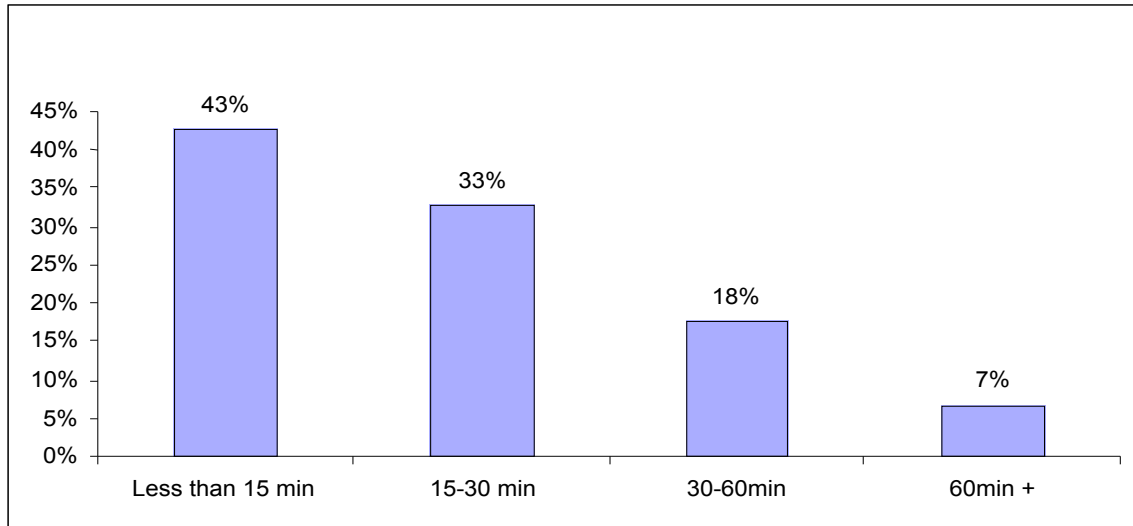
N=180

While touring the *Westerdaam*, we were told that there were never more than 200 passengers on board the ship while in port at Sitka (roughly 8-10 percent of its passengers). Since we did not survey people who did not leave the ship, we have no way of knowing **why** they stayed on board. Factors in support of a dock voiced by some of the visitors we surveyed were convenience and safety for less physically-able passengers.

5.2 Time Spent Waiting for a Tender

Trying to tour Sitka in the short time frame allowed by most cruise lines (i.e., a few hours) is an ambitious venture, and many passengers are understandably eager to get to shore. To service their passengers, each of the large cruise lines provides tenders to ferry them between the ship and shore. Of the cruise ship passengers surveyed, 43 percent were able to board a lighter in less than 15 minutes. The trip itself takes only a few minutes. A third of those surveyed (33%) estimated that they had waited between 15 and 30 minutes to board a lighter. This means that three-quarters (76%) of the passengers surveyed were able to board a lighter in a half hour or less. Eighteen percent said they had waited 30 to 60 minutes; 7 percent had waited over an hour.

Figure 15: Estimated Wait Time for Tender

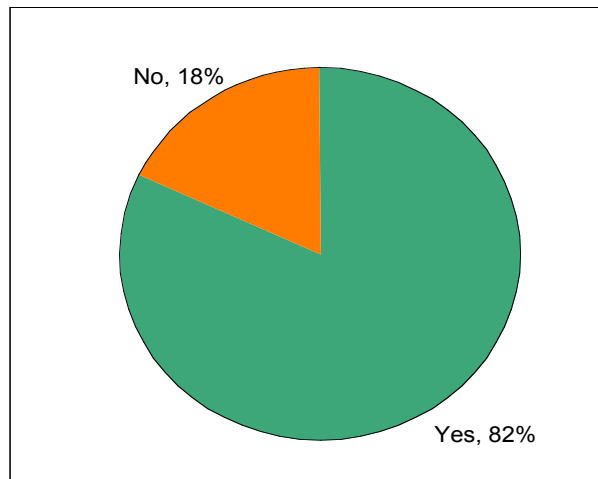


N=180

5.3 Visitors' Opinions about Tendering

The survey asked “Did you enjoy the experience of anchoring in the bay and taking a tender into town?” A large majority of those questioned (82%) answered “yes.

Figure 17: Enjoyed Tendering



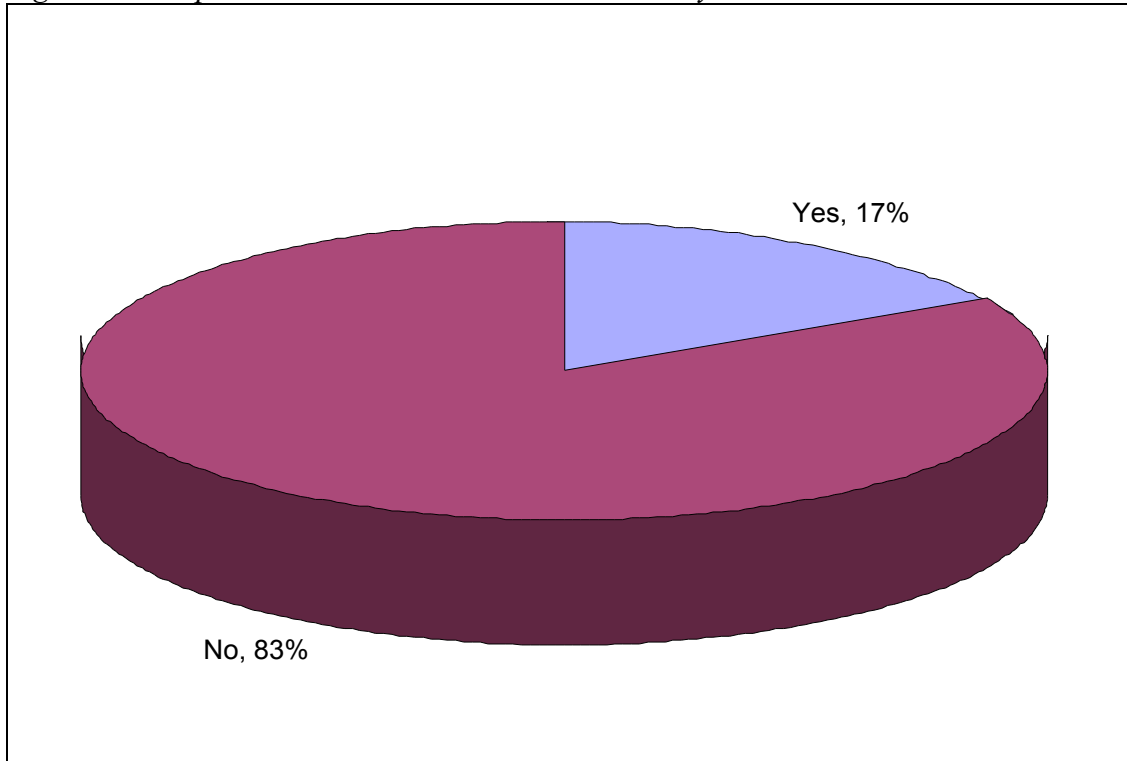
N=178; two respondents did not answer.

5.4 Effects of Tendering

The survey also asked “Do you **personally** know people who stayed on board **primarily because** they would have to take a tender into Sitka?” (emphasis included in the original question). Only 17 percent of cruise ship passengers responding to the survey answered “yes” – they personally knew someone who had remained on board their cruise ship

rather than tender into Sitka. We do not know what aspect of taking a tender (e.g., safety concerns, inconvenience, fear of seasickness, physical handicap) inhibited these passengers nor whether their decision to remain on board also involved additional factors such as having visited Sitka previously.

Figure 17: Respondents Who Knew Someone Who Stayed Onboard Rather than Tender



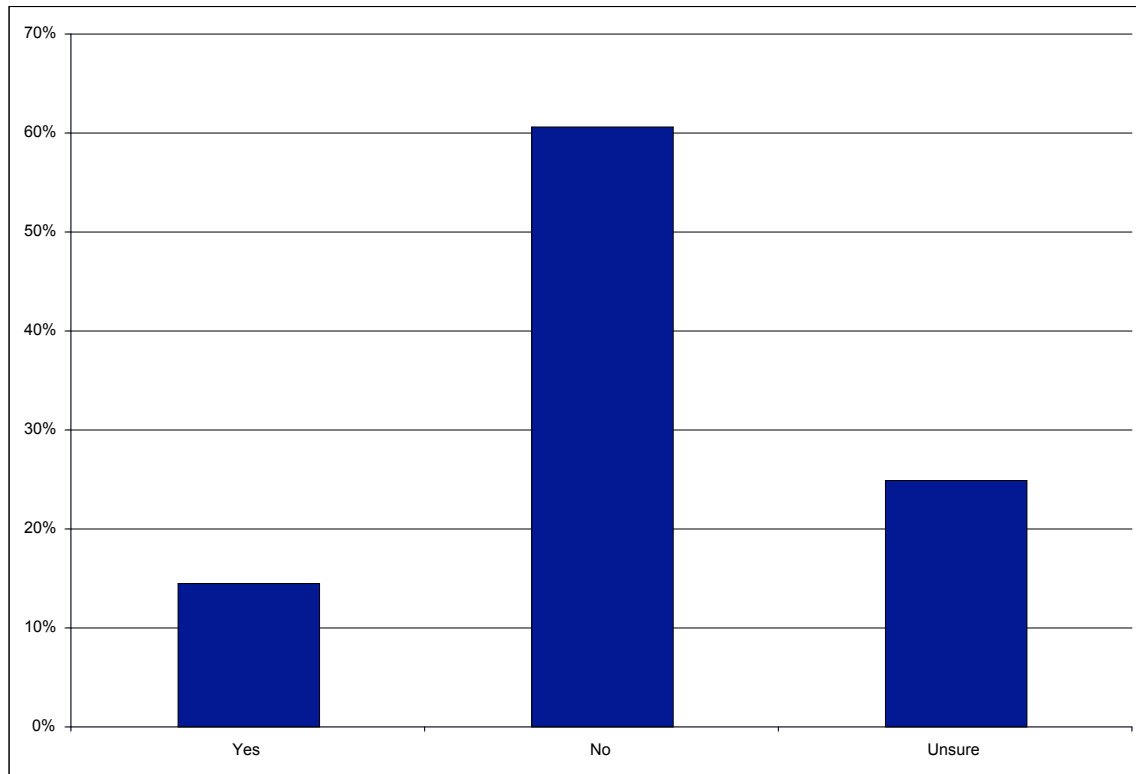
N=178; two respondents did not reply

5.5 Visitor Opinion of a Dock Outside of Town

When discussing the possibility of a dock, location is a significant issue. Sitkans have previously rejected initiatives to build a cruise ship dock near the center of town. A proposal to build a dock on property owned by Sheldon Jackson College was withdrawn after its unpopularity became apparent. Voters also rejected a proposal to build a cruise ship dock near the current tendering facility under the bridge to Japonski Island.

We asked cruise ship passengers if they thought being able to disembark at a dock six to seven miles from town (i.e., as currently proposed for the former pulp mill site) and take a bus or shuttle into town would be an improvement over taking a lighter in from a ship anchored in the harbor. (The exact wording was “If the dock was located 6-7 miles from town and passengers were shuttled in by bus, would you consider this an improvement over using a tender?”) Only 15 percent answered “yes.” Sixty-one percent of the cruise ship visitors surveyed said “no”; another 24 percent were “unsure.” (Of course, the preferences of potential visitors who did not get off their ship are unknown – although their numbers appear to be small compared to the total number of passengers.)

Figure 18: Preference for Dock at Former Pulp Mill Site over Tending to Shore



N=180

6. Visitors' Perspectives of Sitka

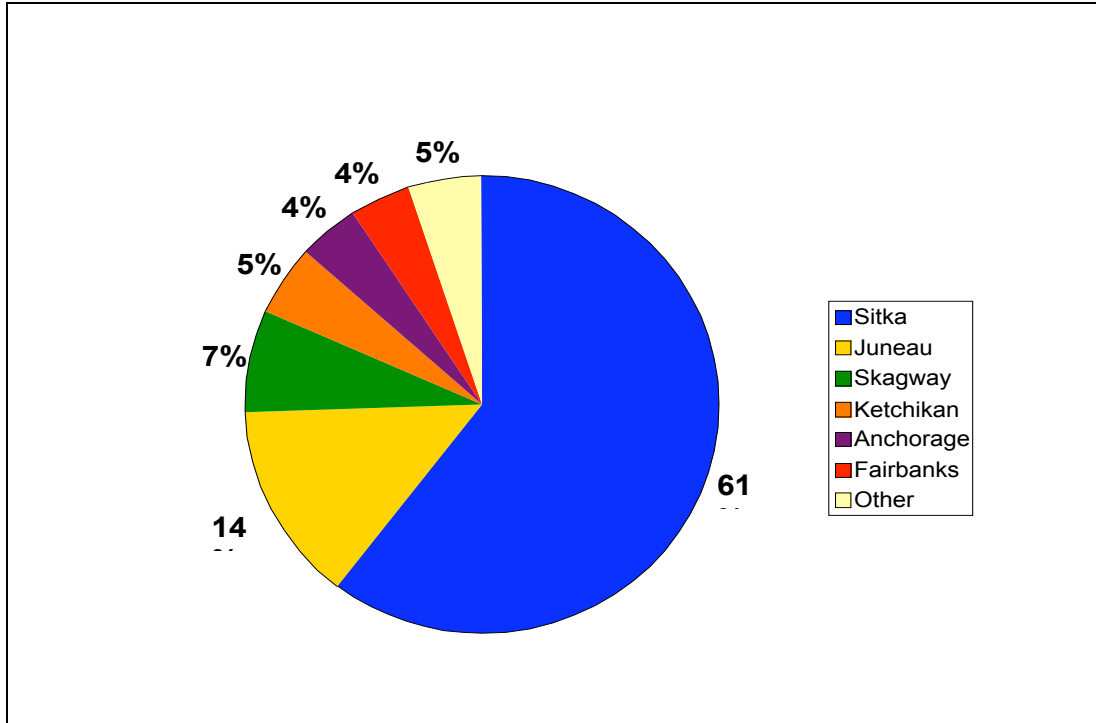
The survey included two questions focusing on visitors' views about Sitka compared to other Alaskan towns they had visited. Visitors were asked, "If you have visited other Alaskan communities, which was your favorite town?" and "Compared to other communities, do you think there is something special about Sitka? If yes, why?"

6.1 Visitors' Favorite Alaskan Town

Only a little more than a third of respondents (35%) answered this question. Many had not yet seen other Alaskan communities and, therefore, had no basis for comparison. But many respondents simply indicated that they had enjoyed **all** the communities they had visited or they thought all Alaskan communities were "beautiful."

Of those who named a community, Sitka was the clear favorite with 61 percent selecting it. Fourteen percent answered Juneau; 7 percent said Skagway; 5 percent responded Ketchikan; 4 percent each answered Anchorage and Fairbanks; and 5 percent gave other responses (including Petersburg, Homer, Palmer, Seward, and Ester). A minority of the respondents who named Sitka as their favorite town also mentioned that they had highly enjoyed Hoonah, Gustavus, and Petersburg.

Figure 19: Percentage of Visitors who Preferred Different Alaskan Towns



N=91; 167 failed to answer the question.

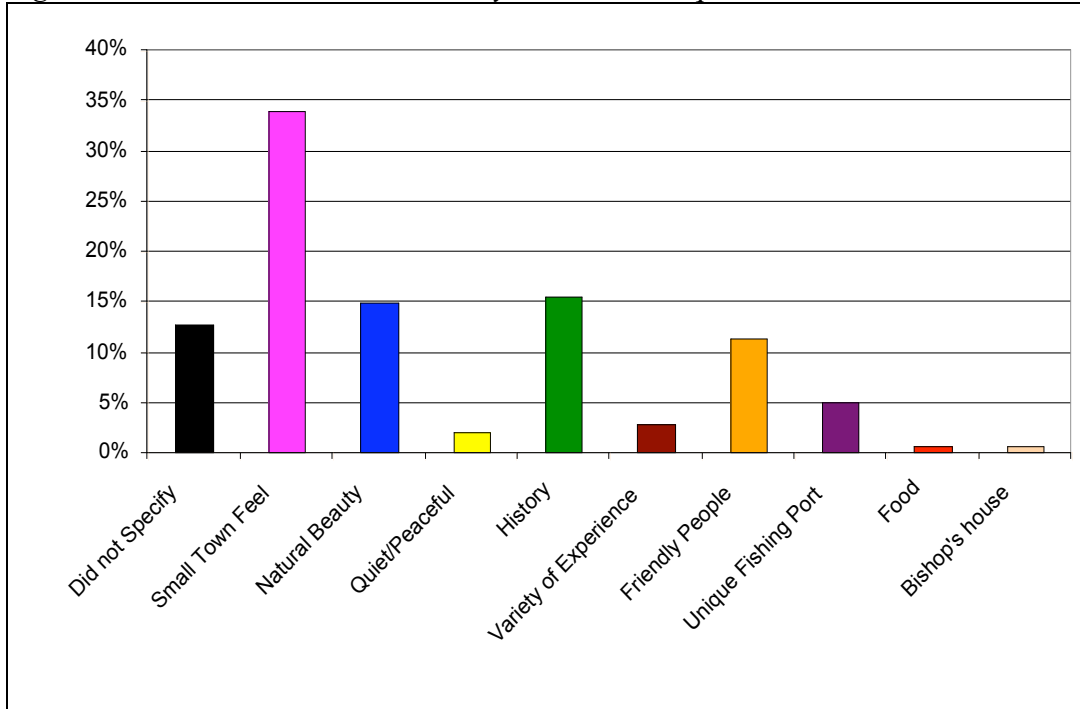
6.2 Reasons Sitka Seen as Unique

Visitors were asked whether or not they thought there was something special about Sitka compared to the other Alaskan towns they had visited. Of those who were able to answer this question (i.e., Sitka was not their first stop), a majority (52%) said “yes.” Only 5 percent said “no,” and 43 percent responded “I don’t know.”

The 115 visitors who thought Sitka was special in some way were asked to indicate how (some people gave more than one reason). The most frequently given reason was Sitka’s “small town feeling”(34%). Many respondents remarked that some of the other Alaskan towns they had visited felt too tourist-oriented. In contrast, they thought that “Sitka is still a **real** town with history and culture,” “It’s not just a tourist town,” and “It’s not overrun by tourists like other towns we have visited.”

Sixteen percent credited Sitka’s uniqueness to its rich cultural history, both Tlingit and Russian. Several people we spoke with had not been aware of Sitka’s Russian colonization before arriving, but after learning about this history it became their favorite “experience” in Sitka. Many more visitors already know something of Sitka’s history. According to Greg Dudgeon, Superintendent of the Sitka National Historical Park, 81 percent of the park’s visitors consider themselves to be culturally and historically-oriented. It is not surprising, therefore, that a percentage of our respondents cited Sitka’s history as the main reason for the town’s individuality.

Figure 20: Visitors' Reasons as to Why Sitka is a Unique Alaskan Town



N=115; 143 visitors failed to respond or could not respond because Sitka was their first stop.

Sitka's natural beauty is equally important to visitors and considered by them to be part of its special charm or character. Fifteen percent of survey respondents believe the mountain, bay and waterfront scenery surpasses that of other Alaskan towns. Some respondents also pointed out that because Sitka's downtown is smaller and more compact than towns like Juneau and Ketchikan, there is more opportunity for visitors to view the entirety of its surrounding natural beauty.

Eleven percent of respondents thought Sitka's residents made the town unique. They found people to be more helpful, pleasant, and friendly than residents of other Alaskan towns. This was especially true of the people visitors most frequently interact with – storeowners and tour operators.

Five percent viewed Sitka as a unique fishing port. Several of the people who responded in this way had come to Sitka specifically to fish (on charter fishing trips) and were happy with the results. Other visitors regard Sitka as a quaint fishing town because there are so many commercial fishers as well as fishing, pleasure, and charter vessels in its harbors. Crescent Harbor is one of the first things cruise passengers see when they arrive in town on a tender.

Three percent of respondents thought Sitka was unique because it offers visitors a wide range of experiences and activities. Unfortunately many visitors do not have the time to

discover all that is available. Cruise ship passengers make up the majority of Sitka’s visitors (and 75% of the survey sample) and have limited time in town.

Two percent of respondents found Sitka to be a quieter and more peaceful than other Alaskan communities. It seemed “quaint” and less “fast-paced.” One percent replied that they enjoyed the food, but did not elaborate. Another one percent singled out the Russian Bishop’s House as making Sitka special because it truly is a unique historical structure and reflects the town’s rich history.

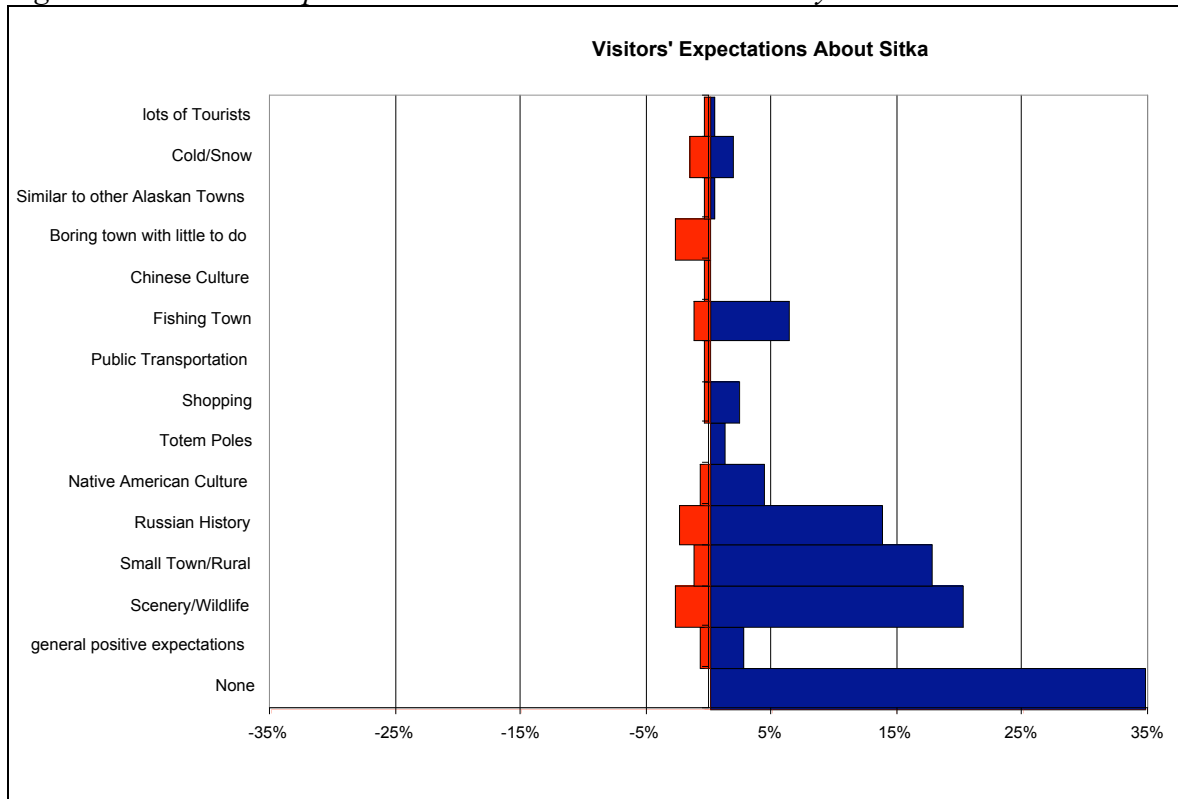
A final 13 percent also felt that Sitka was a unique town, but did not state why.

7. Visitors’ Expectations Regarding Sitka

7.1 Visitors’ Expectations

Two questions in the survey focused on visitor expectations and whether or not these had been met. A third question gave respondents the opportunity to make suggestions about how to improve the visitor experience. Thirty-five percent of respondents said that they

Figure 21: Visitors’ Expectations about Sitka and Whether They Had Been Met



N=253; five visitors failed to fully respond.

had no expectations about Sitka – it was simply a stop on their cruise. The majority of these respondents indicated, however, that they had been pleasantly surprised.

Of the 23 percent who expected beautiful scenery and wildlife, only three percent said their expectations had not been met. This low disappointment rate is somewhat surprising given the wet weather this summer which often obscured much of the view.

Nineteen percent said that they expected Sitka to be a small rural town before arriving; only 1 percent was disappointed, finding it to be too crowded and touristy for their taste. Interestingly, several people (3 percent) reported expecting Sitka to be a boring place with little or nothing to do. All of them said that the cruise lines were responsible for this, telling them—they claimed--that it was possible to see the whole town in fifteen minutes and not worth getting off the ship. All of these respondents were pleasantly surprised to find this was not the case.

Of the 16 percent who expected and looked forward to Sitka's Russian history, only 2 percent were disappointed. These people wanted fewer "touristy" stores in town and felt that these detracted from the town's historical character. In a similar vein, the 4 percent of respondents who indicated that they held generally positive expectations about Sitka before arriving (but did not elaborate) were happy with what they found. The 1 percent of visitors who had been to Sitka previously were disappointed, however, to find it had become busier and more tourist-oriented since their last visit.

Seven percent of respondents wrote that they expected to find a fishing community. Only one percent were disappointed, the primary reason being that they had gone on failed fishing charter trips.

Five percent of survey respondents indicated that they had expected to find Native American culture in Sitka. Most of these people were satisfied with the amount of Tlingit culture they were exposed to (e.g., the *Sheet'ka Kwaan Naa Kahidi* dancers and the Sitka National Historical Park), but 1 percent felt as though there should have been even more Tlingit culture represented in town. Another 1 percent of respondents wrote that they had expected to find totem poles and, of course, they were not disappointed.

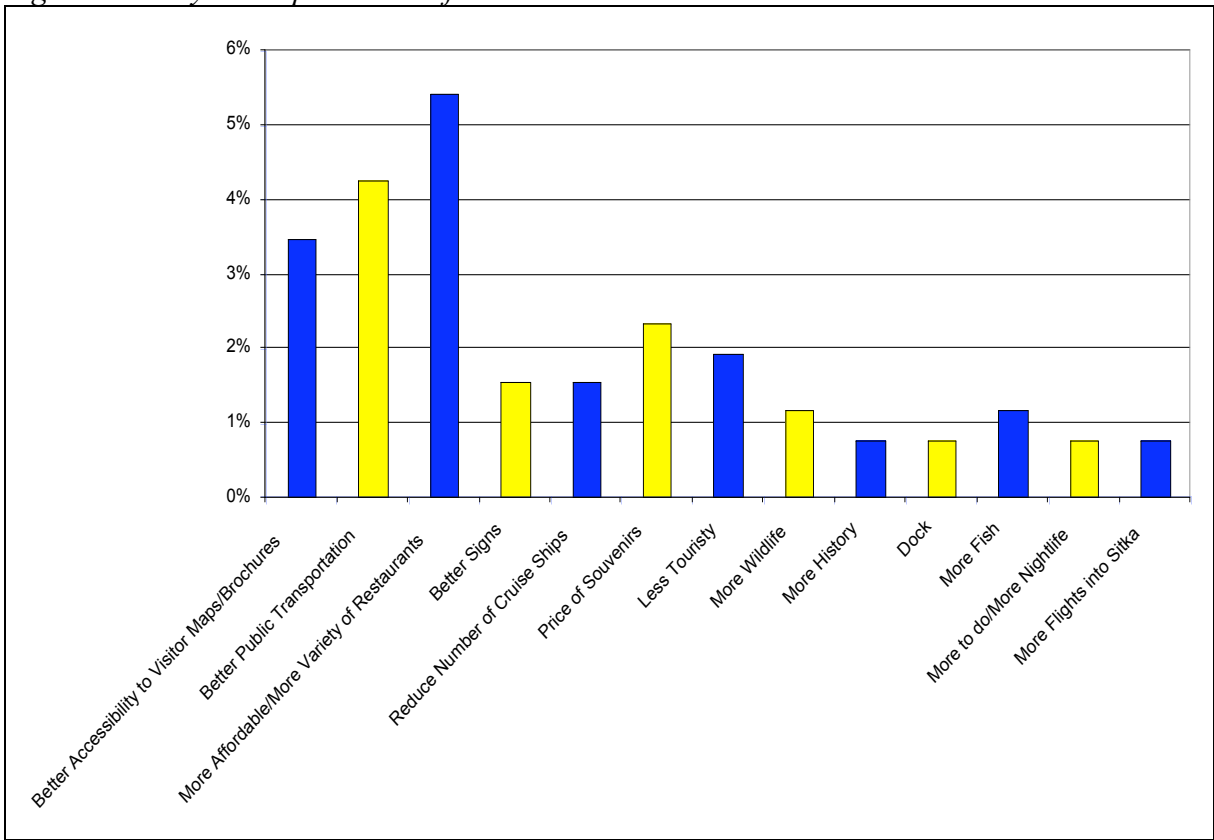
Two percent of respondents indicated that they expected to be able to shop in Sitka, and they were not disappointed. Slightly less than one percent of respondents wrote that they had expected better public transportation in Sitka. They stated that due to their advanced ages, it was difficult to get around and they were disappointed that they had not been able to see more of the town and the surrounding area by public transportation rather than having to take a tour.

Some written responses were surprising. Four percent of respondents said they expected to find snow or cold weather in Sitka; instead they got clouds and rain. About 1 percent said they had expected to find Chinese culture; their expectations were not met.

7.2 Visitors' Suggested Improvements for Sitka

Visitors were asked, “What, if anything, could Sitka do to make the experiences of visitors better?” Two hundred and sixty responses were received from the 258 visitors surveyed. The vast majority of respondents (75%) said they **would not change anything** about Sitka. The chart below shows the responses of the remaining 25 percent.

Figure 23: Ways to Improve Sitka for Visitors.



N=258 ?? N= 65 (Due to the fact that respondents could give more than one answer, the percentages above add up to 101 percent.)

The most frequently suggested improvements involved better visitor directions and signage. Three percent suggested having more visitor maps and brochure available. Many visitors felt somewhat lost when they arrived in Sitka and wanted more readily available visitor maps. Two percent said they would have liked better signs. Some people had trouble finding the Raptor Center, for example, because it is not located in the downtown area and they found the signs and maps that indicated its location to be confusing or misleading. A total of just over 5 percent of visitors made such suggestions.

Four percent of respondents suggested better public transportation. A significant number of visitors are older, obese, or physically handicapped and indicated that they could not walk very well but wanted to get around town without having to take a tour. Other respondents felt they did not have enough money to pay for cabs yet wanted to get to

places that were outside the downtown area such as the campgrounds and walks at Starrigavan.

Five percent of respondents mentioned the need for more affordable restaurants and better variety. Some visitors claimed to find it impossible to find an inexpensive meal in Sitka. Others thought the available restaurant selection to be substandard; certainly not enough to satisfy visitors' differing palates and dietary needs.

Two percent of respondents thought there should be fewer cruise ships because the town, to them, already seemed too crowded. Interestingly, the people who responded this way were themselves cruise passengers. In a similar vein, another 2 percent thought Sitka was already too tourist-oriented, with too many shops in town specializing in selling trinkets and overcrowding in the downtown area. A further 2 percent thought that the souvenirs sold downtown were too expensive, a number claiming that stores in other Alaskan communities were cheaper than in Sitka.

Each of the following points was mentioned by 1 percent of respondents. First, Sitka should do more to highlight its history. The downtown area, these respondents felt, with its many touristy shops and disparate architecture detracted from the town's historic character. Second, some respondents indicated that they would like Sitka better if there was a dock for large cruise ships. Third, some visitors complained about the lack of fish. They had gone on charter fishing trips yet failed to catch anything. Fourth, some respondents (generally people under 35 years of age) found Sitka staid and in need of more nightlife. Fifth, the final 1 percent suggested that there should be more flights into Sitka.

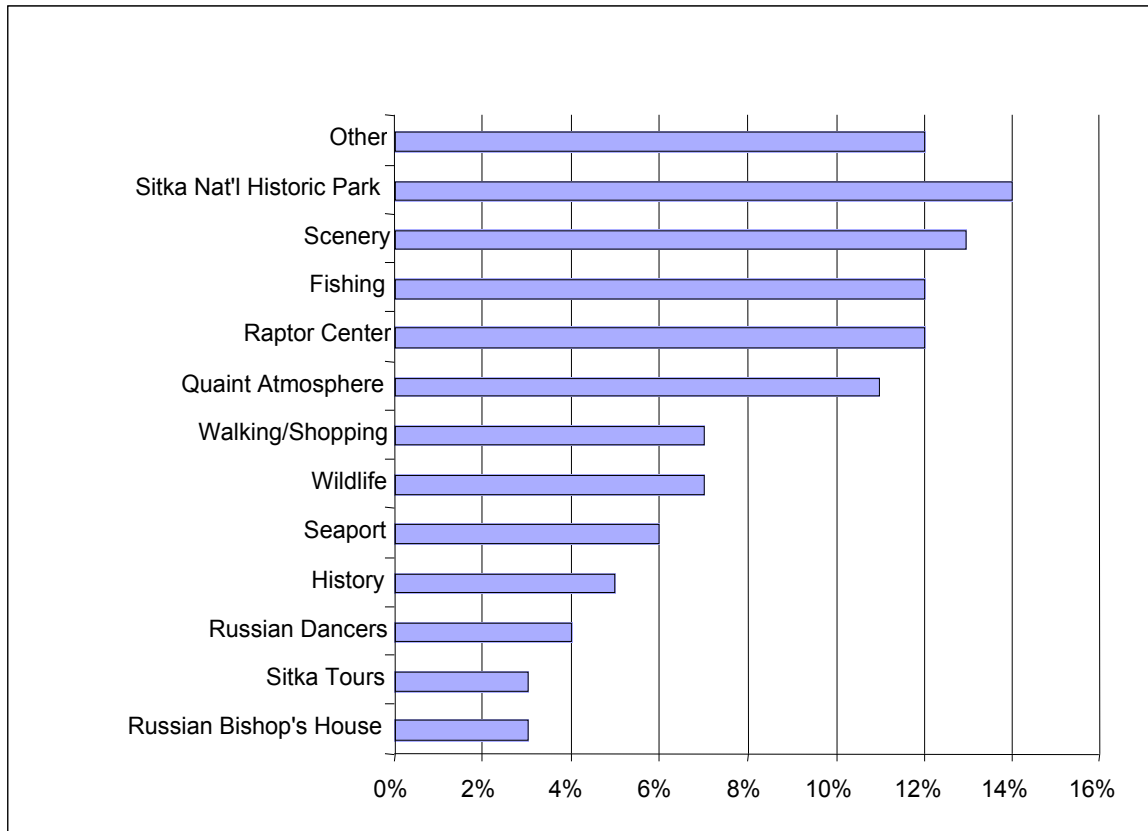
8. Satisfaction with Sitka

Visitors were asked to describe their best experience in Sitka, the degree to which they were satisfied with their visit, and how likely they would be return to Sitka if given the opportunity.

8.1 Best Experiences

The survey asked "What was your best experience in Sitka?" Two hundred and thirty visitors answered this question giving 252 responses.

Figure 24: Best Experience



N = 230; 28 visitors failed to respond.

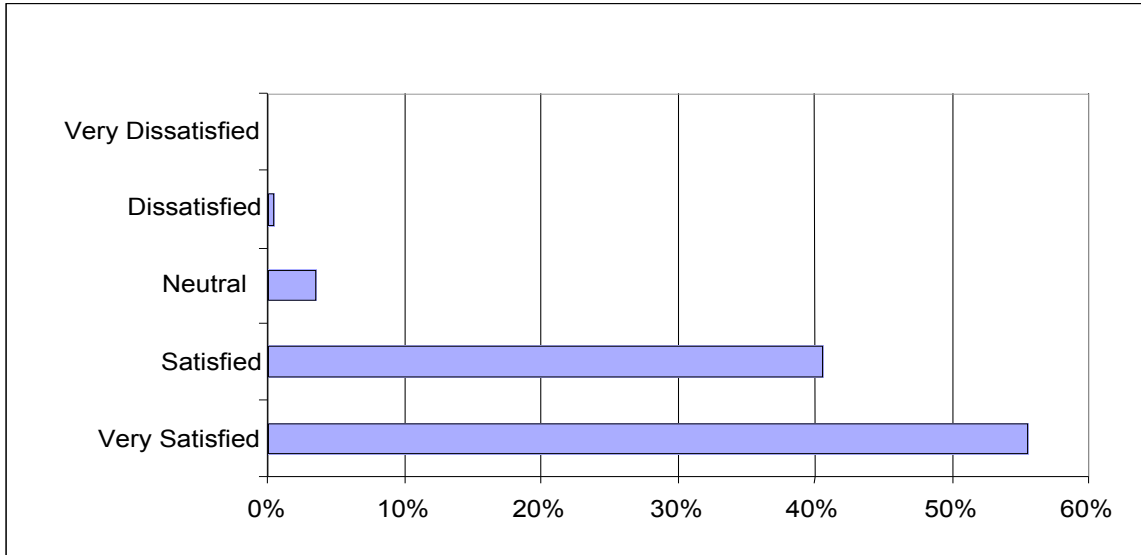
Fourteen percent said their best experience in Sitka had been their visit to the Sitka National Historic Park. Thirteen percent were most impressed by Sitka’s beautiful scenic views. Twelve percent came to Sitka and found the fishing to be their most rewarding experience. An equal percentage (12%) named the Alaska Raptor Center. Sitka’s quaint atmosphere and small town-feeling was the highlight for 11 percent of visitors. Similarly, walking around the downtown shopping area was the best experience for 7 percent of visitors. An equal number (7%) cited the wildlife as their best experience. Six percent found the seaport to be their favorite aspect. Eleven visitors were most impressed by the general Russian history surrounding the community. Five percent of visitors singled out the Russian dancers in Centennial Hall as their best experience in Sitka. Eight visitors choose the Sitka Tour as their best experience. Three percent listed the Russian Bishop’s House. The final 12 percent listed a variety of sights and experiences including: the Sheldon Jackson Museum, Saint Michael’s Cathedral, the grocery store, the fresh air, the Sheldon Jackson Aquarium, the semi-submersible tour, restaurants, the Lutheran Church, Castle Hill, visiting family, and returning home.

8.2 Visitor Satisfaction

In response to the question “Overall, how satisfied were you with your visit to Sitka?”, most visitors (56%) checked “very satisfied.” Another 40 percent were “satisfied,” which means that 96 percent of visitors to Sitka were very satisfied or satisfied with their visit.

Only 4 percent of respondents were neutral or dissatisfied, and not a single visitor indicated that he or she had been “very dissatisfied.”

Figure 25: Satisfaction with Sitka

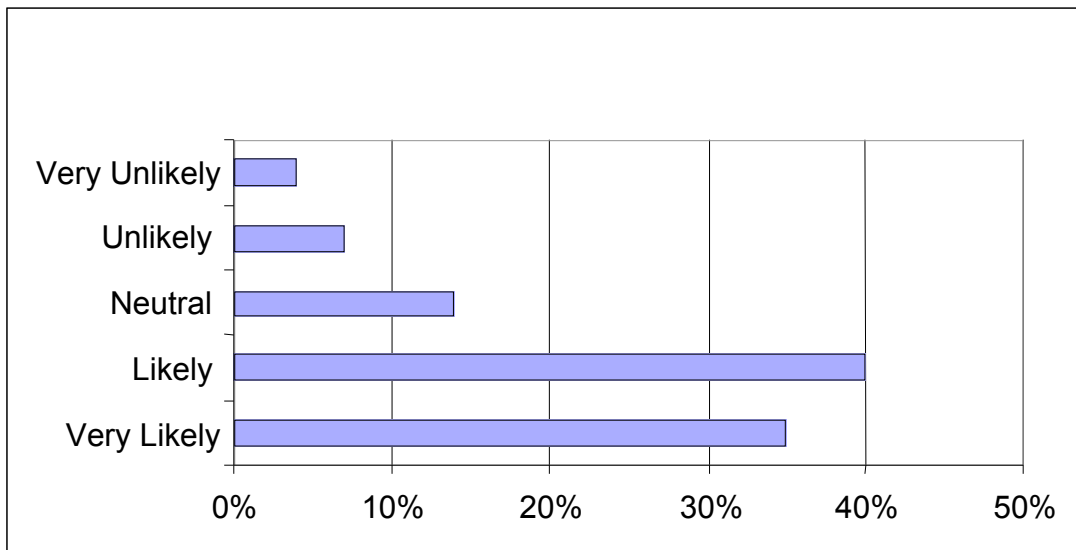


N = 252; six visitors failed to respond.

8.3 Likelihood of Returning to Sitka

Visitors were also asked “If you were able, would you be likely to visit Sitka again?” Three-quarters answered positively: 35 percent would be “very likely” to return and 40 percent would be “likely” to return. Fourteen percent of respondents were “neutral,” while 7 percent would be “unlikely” and 4 percent would be “very unlikely” to return.

Figure 26: Visitors Likelihood to Return to Sitka



N = 252; six visitors failed to respond

Some of the visitors who indicated that they would be very unlikely to return were actually “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with Sitka, but most likely would not return to Sitka for personal reasons (e.g., advanced age, a desire to try new locations, or the fact that Sitka is very far away from their home). The later response often came from visitors from foreign countries.

Appendix: Survey

Sitka Visitors Survey 2006

1. What was the **primary** purpose of your visit to Sitka?
pleasure/recreation business visit family/friends other

2. How far in advance did you decide to come on this trip to Alaska?
less than 3 months 4-6 months 7-11 months over 1 year

3. How far in advance did you book your major travel arrangements?
less than 3 months 4-6 months 7-11 months over 1 year

4. What information sources about Alaska & Sitka did you **primarily** rely on when planning your trip?
 (check all that apply)
none internet (which sites?
 _____)
friends/family TV travel shows/documentaries
prior experience AAA
travel agent guide books (which ones?
 _____)
cruise line ferry brochure/schedule
brochures other _____

5. What expectations did you have about Sitka. In other words, what kind of experience or place did you expect?

6. Has Sitka met these expectations? yes no
 Briefly explain:

7. Which of the following guided tour(s) did you purchase? Please indicate how much you enjoyed the tour(s)
 (5 = excellent, 4 good, 3 average, 2 unsatisfactory, 1 = poor) and how you purchased it.

| | (5-4-3-2-1) | Purchased Cruise Line in Sitka on Internet |
|---|--------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> no tours | _____ | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> native culture / Sitka Tribal Tour | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> whale watching / boat nature tour | _____ | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> hike/bike tour | _____ | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> walking nature tour | _____ | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Russian history walking tour | _____ | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> charter fishing tour | _____ | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> semi-submersible boat | _____ | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> general history / bus tour | _____ | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> kayak tour | _____ | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> other _____ | _____ | _____ |

8. What other places or sights did you visit in Sitka on your own (NOT as part of a group tour)?

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sitka National Historical Park | <input type="checkbox"/> Sheldon Jackson College Aquarium | <input type="checkbox"/> St. Michael's Cathedral |
| <input type="checkbox"/> New Archangel Dancers | <input type="checkbox"/> St. Peter's Episcopal Church | <input type="checkbox"/> Castle Hill viewpoint |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Russian Bishop's House | <input type="checkbox"/> Harbor Mountain | <input type="checkbox"/> Pioneer Home |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Alaska Raptor Center | <input type="checkbox"/> Russian Block House | <input type="checkbox"/> National Cemetery |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sitka Lutheran Church | <input type="checkbox"/> Isabel Miller Museum (Centennial Hall) | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sheldon Jackson Museum | <input type="checkbox"/> Sheet'ka Kwaan Naa Kahidi (Tlingit) Dancers | |

9. What was your best experience in Sitka?

10. Did you buy any souvenirs or other nonfood items (e.g., art) in Sitka? yes no
If so, what?

11. About how much did **you (and your family)** spend on these items in total?
\$0 \$1-49 \$50-99 \$100-199 \$200-499 \$500 and over

12. Do you prefer to buy local or locally-made goods/objects? yes no doesn't matter

13. Do you prefer to buy from locally-owned shops? yes no doesn't matter

14. Is this your first trip to Alaska? yes no

15. Is this your first trip to Sitka? yes no

16. If you have visited other Alaskan communities, which is your favorite town? _____

17. Compared to other communities, do you think there is something special about Sitka? yes no
don't know

If yes, what?

18. Please number those aspects of Sitka you enjoyed in order of their importance to you (1,2,3,....; 1=most important).

- | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> small town | <input type="checkbox"/> accessible trails | <input type="checkbox"/> Russian history | <input type="checkbox"/> Tlingit culture |
| <input type="checkbox"/> friendly people | <input type="checkbox"/> variety of tours | <input type="checkbox"/> beautiful scenery | <input type="checkbox"/> wildlife |
| <input type="checkbox"/> shopping | <input type="checkbox"/> food | <input type="checkbox"/> boat harbors | <input type="checkbox"/> fishing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> accomodation (which type? e.g., hotel, B&B _____) | | | <input type="checkbox"/> other _____ |

19. What, if anything, could Sitka do to make the experience of visitors better?

20. If you were able to, are you likely to visit Sitka again?
very likely likely neutral unlikely very unlikely

21. Overall, how satisfied were you with your visit to Sitka?
very satisfied satisfied neutral dissatisfied very dissatisfied

Your home state or country: _____ state _____ country

Age: under 25 26-35 36-50 51-65 66 and over

Gender: male female

Size of your immediate party: individual 2 people 3-4 people 5-6 people 7 and over

Transport to Sitka: large cruise ship smaller ship (under 300 passengers) ferry plane yacht
other _____

For Cruise ship Passengers only

22. How long did you have to wait on board to get a tender into town?

less than 15 mins. 15-30 mins. 30-60 mins. over an hour

23. Did you enjoy the experience of anchoring in the Bay and a tender into town? yes no

24. Would you prefer to be tied up at a dock? yes no makes no difference

Please briefly explain why.

25. Do you **personally** know people who stayed on board **primarily because** they would have to take a tender into Sitka? yes no

26. If the dock was located 6-7 miles from town and passengers were shuttled in by bus, would you consider this an improvement over using a tender? yes no unsure

This survey is being conducted by Union College students (Schenectady, NY) for the Sitka Collaborative Tourism Planning Group.
