



NEW ZEALAND TOURISM
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SOLOMON ISLANDS EXPATRIATE DOMESTIC TOURISM

Characteristics, Impacts and Recommendations



January 2019



A report submitted by New Zealand Tourism Research Institute, funded by the Australian Government initiative Strongim Bisnis.

About Strongim Bisnis

Strongim Bisnis works with the private sector to increase economic prosperity in Solomon Islands. Tackling the nation's trade and investment challenges, Strongim Bisnis focuses on providing solutions at an industry and sector level. The program will focus on the business enabling environment, as well as the coconut, cocoa, and tourism industries. Working with each sector to identify the most pressing problems and practical solutions, Strongim Bisnis will make a positive, inclusive and lasting impact. It will enable businesses to grow, while empowering women and youth.

www.strongimbisnis.com.sb

About New Zealand Tourism Research Institute

The New Zealand Tourism Research Institute (NZTRI) at Auckland University of Technology brings together experts from around the world to deliver innovative research solutions for the industry and those who depend on it. Our research enables business, community and government to develop profitable and sustainable industry outcomes.

www.nztri.org.nz

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Executive Summary

This report presents findings from an online survey of 167 expatriates in Solomon Islands. The research is designed to understand the characteristics, impacts and levels of satisfaction associated with their most recent domestic travel within the country. Almost all (95%) of expatriates have been on an overnight trip in the country since living in Solomon Islands, and of that group all indicate that they would likely travel again in the coming year. The majority of overnight trips (67%) are for leisure purposes with most travelling for a weekend/short break. The average length of stay is 3.6 nights.

Ninety-three percent of those surveyed live in Honiara. The most commonly visited Province is Western Province, followed by Central Province (excluding Honiara). Western province has double the length of stay of both Central Province (excluding Honiara) and Guadalcanal Province. Most travel with friends and family including spouses/partners.

For many expatriates, domestic travel represents an opportunity to escape Honiara, engage with nature, experience the local way of life, and relax in places where they can enjoy the beautiful scenery and be in relative isolation. The majority of respondents are satisfied with their most recent travel experience. The highest levels of both participation and satisfaction are with water-based activities. There is less participation in land-based, cultural interaction and shopping activities. While participation in food and beverage activities is high, satisfaction with restaurants/cafes/bars is low. Average spend per trip by those travelling for a holiday is SBD 3,700, for those travelling for business it is SDB 4,902. The combined average spend for visit for all groups is SBD 4,033. Thus for every 1000 expatriate domestic tourism visits we would expect direct economic spend of SBD 4.033 million.

Expatriates enjoy the unspoiled and less 'touristy' nature of Solomon Islands. Travelling within Solomon Islands is not always easy, however, due to infrastructure challenges (limited flights/boat trips, poor roads) and limited access to reliable visitor information making planning and preparing domestic trips difficult. Travelling within Solomon Islands is perceived as poor value for money, with high costs and relatively low-quality accommodation and transport.

To improve the economic benefits from tourism there is a need to provide an excellent visitor experience and increase visitor yield. Focus should be placed on building skills and capacity to improve business performance, upgrading accommodation facilities and improving hygiene, offering better value for money, and providing new products, activities (guided tours, watersport) and quality services (food and beverage) for the expatriate market. Enhancing the customer service skills of accommodation and transport providers and offering better visitor information would also enhance the expatriate domestic tourist experience. It is also vital to continue to engage and involve host communities in tourism development.

Introduction

Expatriates represent an important component of the local economy and population yet little is known about the role that this market plays in domestic tourism within Solomon Islands. The most recent previous research into this market segment was completed well over a decade ago in 2006.

Strongim Bisnis are committed to supporting tourism in Solomon Islands to develop in a more profitable and sustainable manner. Market research and intelligence on tourism markets is an important component to advance this aim. This research is funded by Strongim Bisnis and involves a survey of the expatriate segment of the domestic tourism market in Solomon Islands. The survey is designed to be run on a regular basis in order to provide a useful barometer to measure changes over time.

For the purposes of this report, an expatriate is defined as: *'as someone who is residing/working in Solomon Islands, who is a national of another country'*. Expatriates were asked for the purpose of this domestic tourist research about their most recent overnight trip. A 'trip' is defined as: *an overnight trip within Solomon Islands for the purposes of business or leisure.*

The expatriate domestic tourism survey is designed to provide insights into visitor characteristics including: demographics, information sources used prior to and during the trip, decision-making factors, travel patterns, length of stay, levels of participation in activities, satisfaction levels, and expenditure. The survey also gauges expatriate perceptions of domestic travel within Solomon Islands, and presents their recommendations and feedback on the visitor experience.

Data collection relied on an online survey (English language) run over a five-week period from 1 October to 8 November 2018. A total of 167 useable responses were received. While the total number of expatriates living in Solomon Islands is unknown, it is estimated to be between 1,000-2,000, thus the sample covers approximately 10-15% of the total population of expatriates.

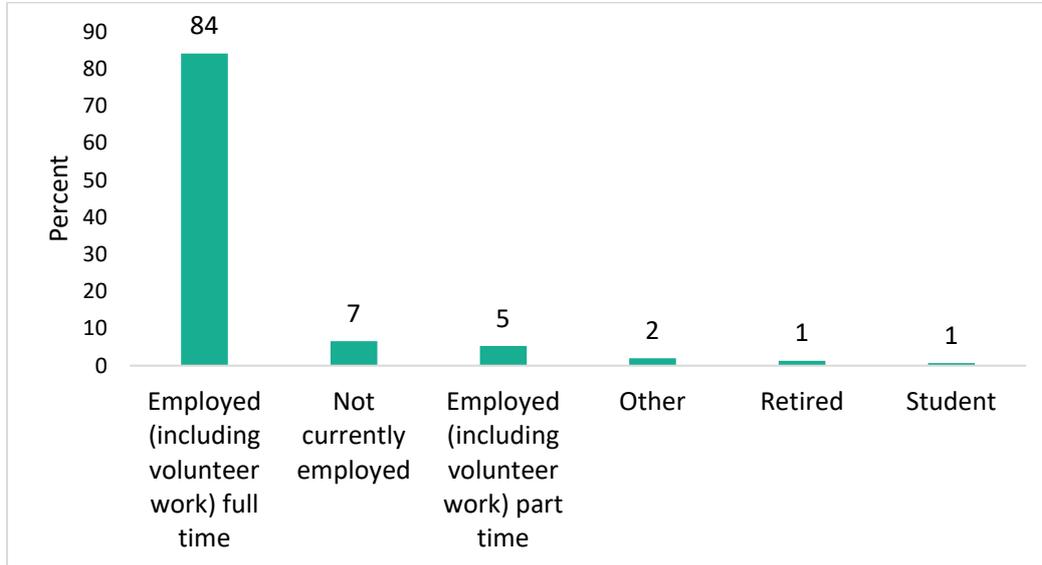
Data collection was promoted via expatriate touch points, organisations/NGOs based in Solomon Islands, high commissions, and international aid providers. A key point of data collection was via an online Google group (expatriate forum). Other survey promotion was done via networks, with people asked to send the link to the survey to expatriates they know who are living in Solomon Islands.

The report commences with a presentation of the key findings of the survey and then concludes with a series of recommendations that are based on insights provided by the research.

Expatriate Domestic Tourist Characteristics

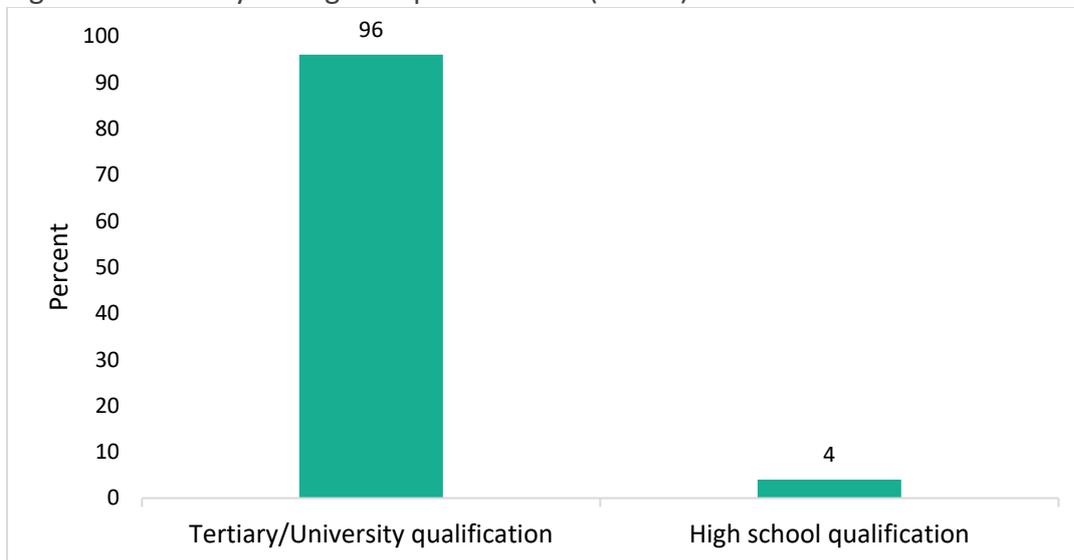
The majority (84%) of expatriates are employed full-time with (5%) in a part-time role. Nine percent are not currently in employment (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Which of the following best describes your employment status? (n=151)



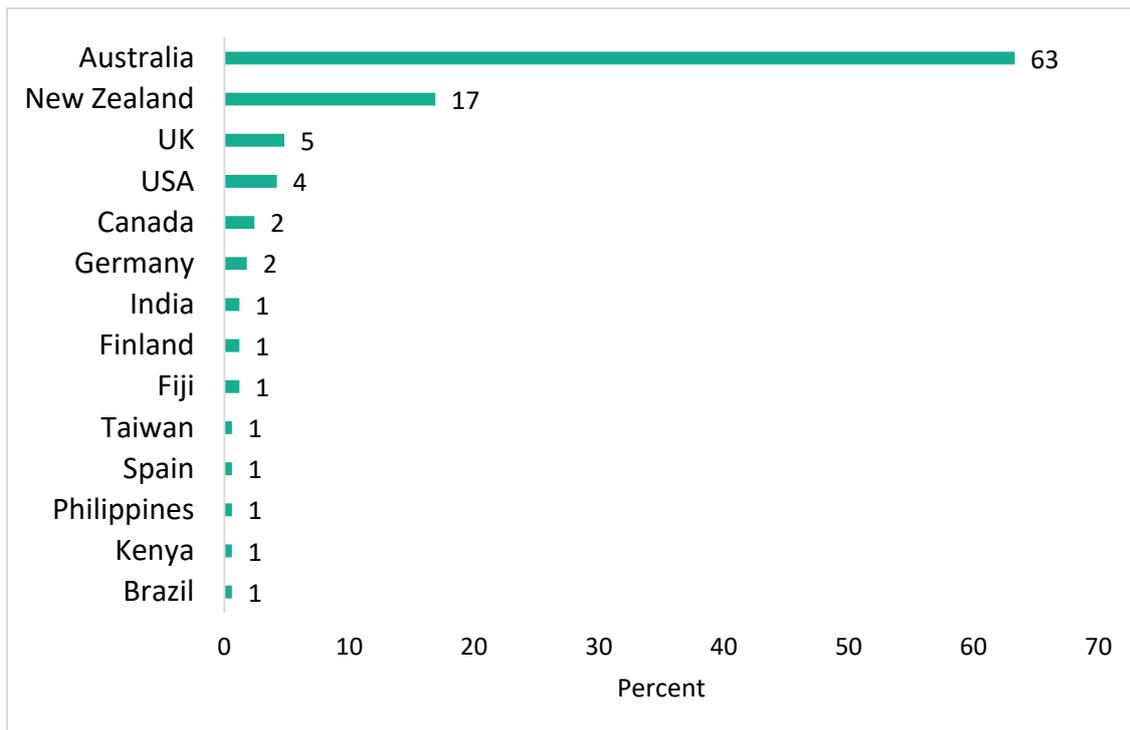
This is a well-educated market, with 96% of expatriates holding a tertiary qualification and the remainder a high school qualification (Figure 2).

Figure 2: What is your highest qualification? (n=149)



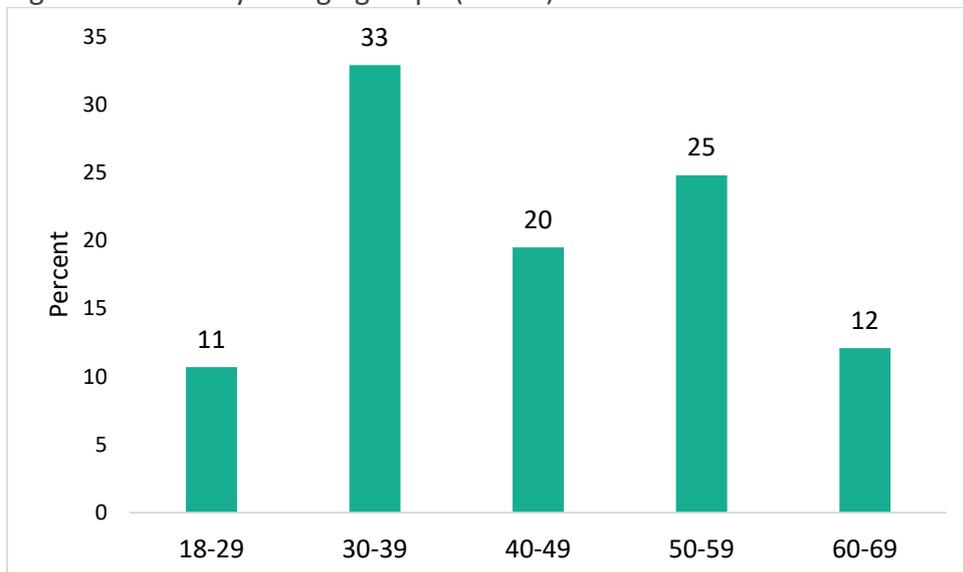
The majority of expatriates responding to the survey are nationals of Australia (63%) and New Zealand (17%) (Figure 3).

Figure 3: What is your nationality? (n=166)



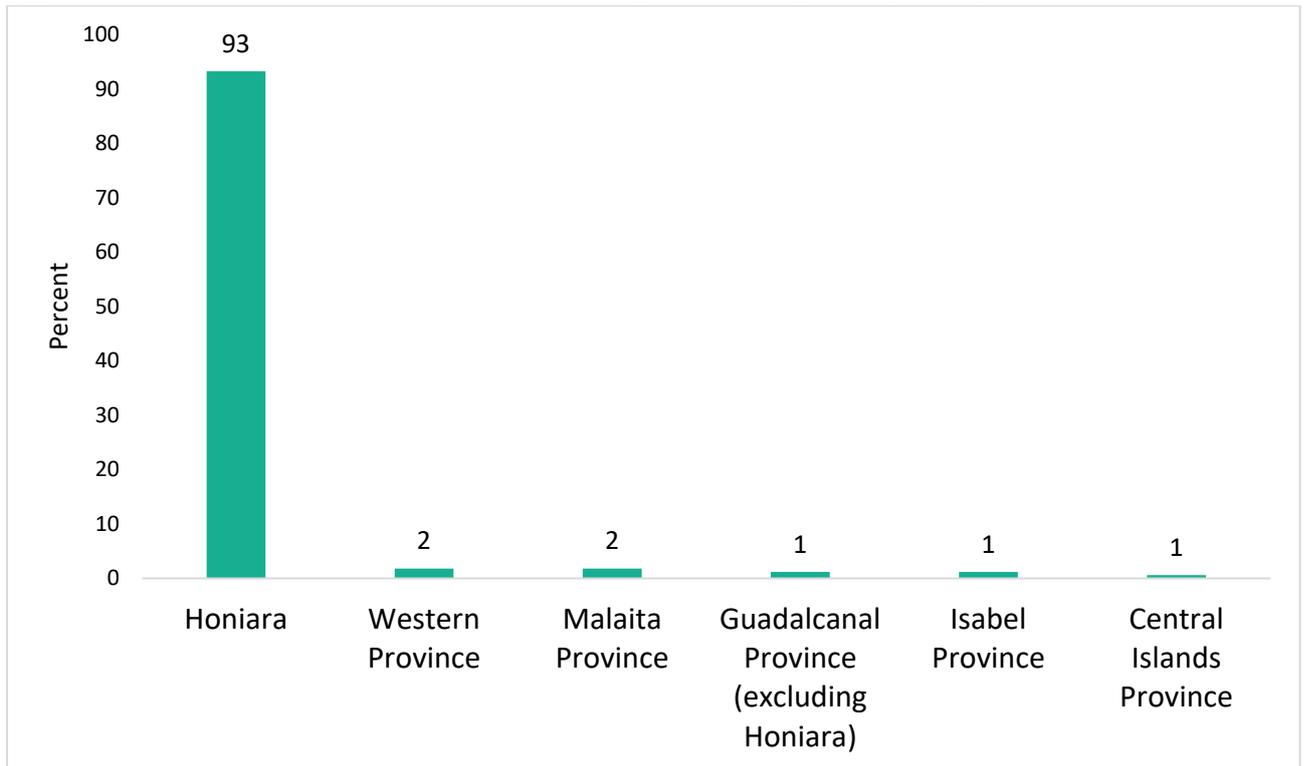
Expatriates are mostly (88%) aged between 30 and 60 years old, with 33% being in the 30-39 bracket, 20% in the 40-49 age group, and 25% in the 50-59 grouping. (Figure 4).

Figure 4: What is your age group? (n=149)



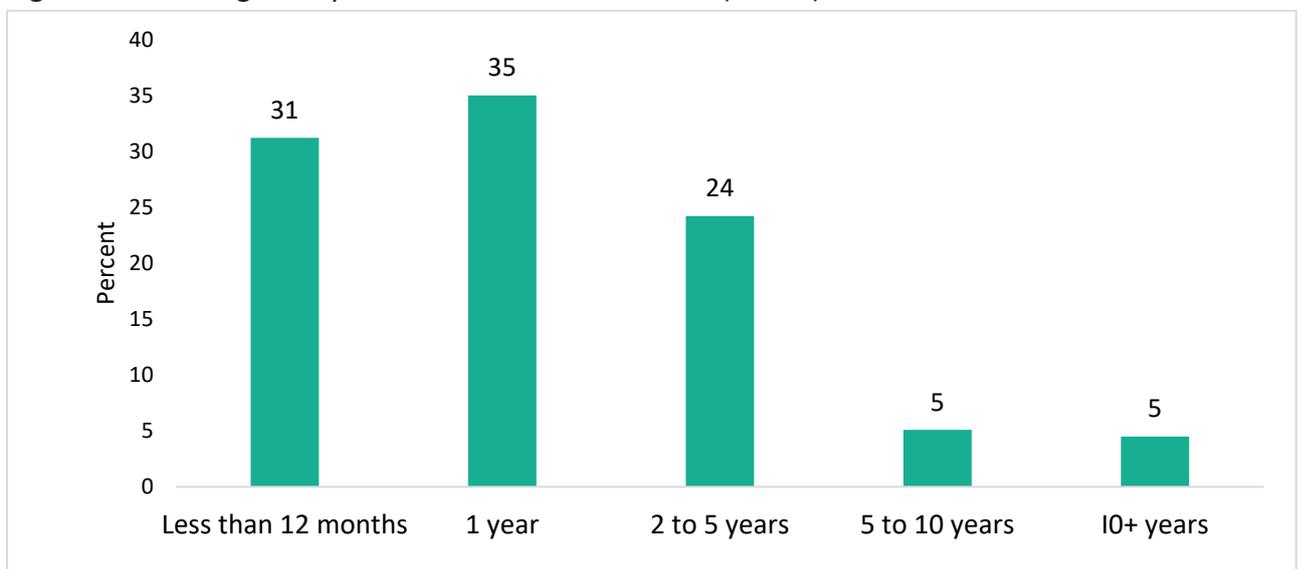
Ninety three percent of expatriates reside in Honiara with others spread across Western (2%) Malaita (2%) Guadalcanal (not including Honiara) (1%), Isabel (1%) and Central Island Provinces (1%) (Figure 5).

Figure 5: In which Solomon Island's Province do you currently live? (n=165)



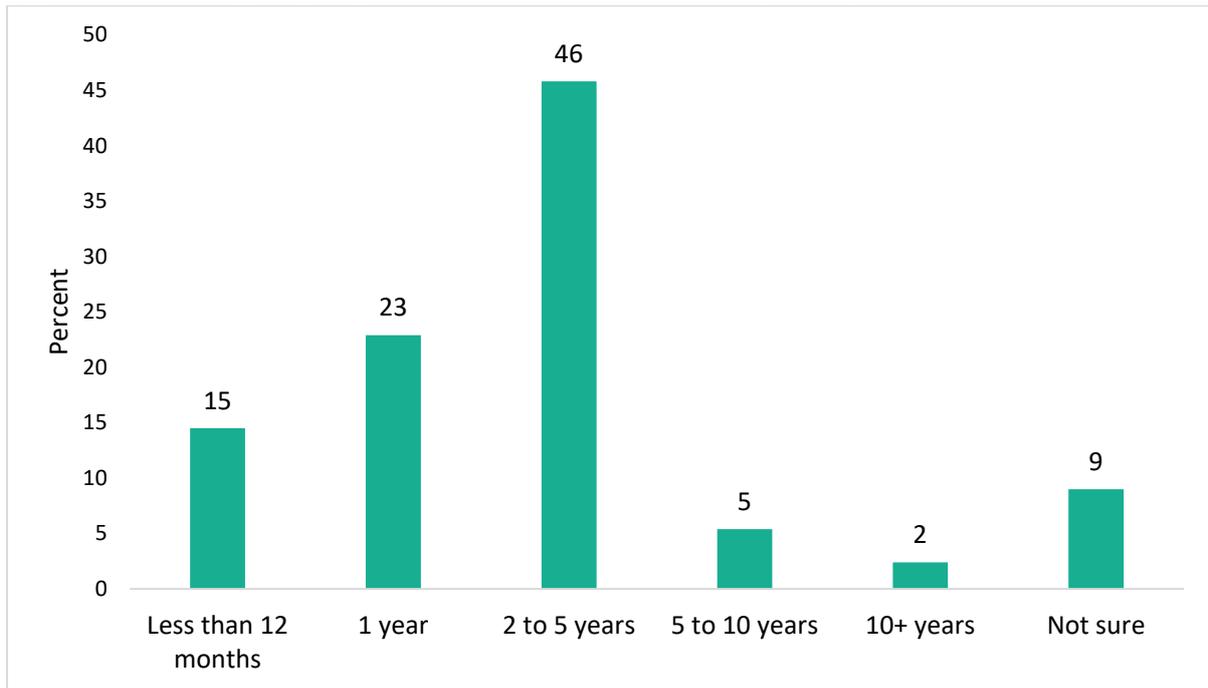
Two thirds (66%) of expatriates have lived in Solomon Islands for one year or less, and almost a quarter (24%) have lived in the country for 2-5 years. (Figure 6).

Figure 6: How long have you lived in Solomon Islands? (n=157)



Almost half of expatriates (46%) plan to reside in Solomon Islands for the next two to five years with over a third (38%) expecting to live there for a year or less (Figure 7).

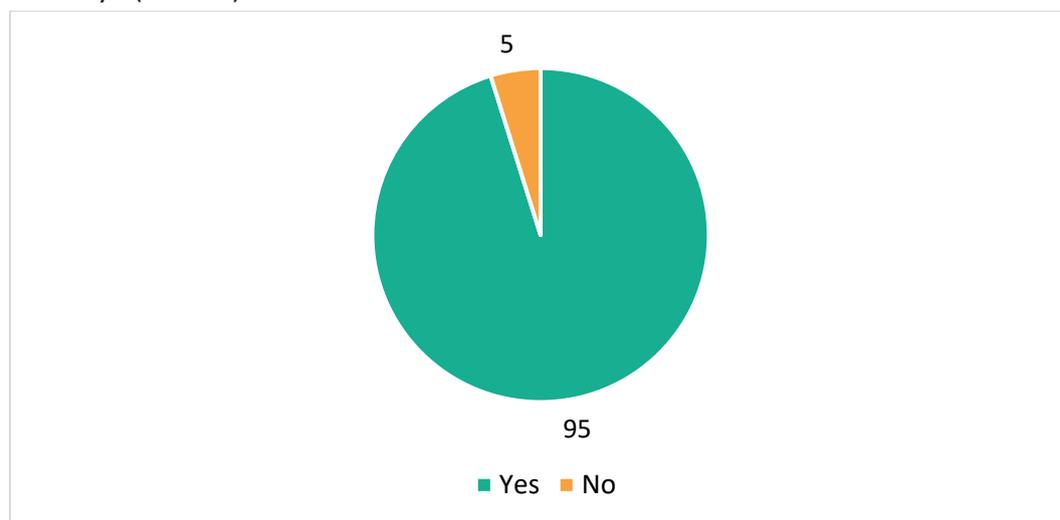
Figure 7: How long do you plan to live in Solomon Islands (n=166)



Domestic Expatriate Tourist Travel Behavior

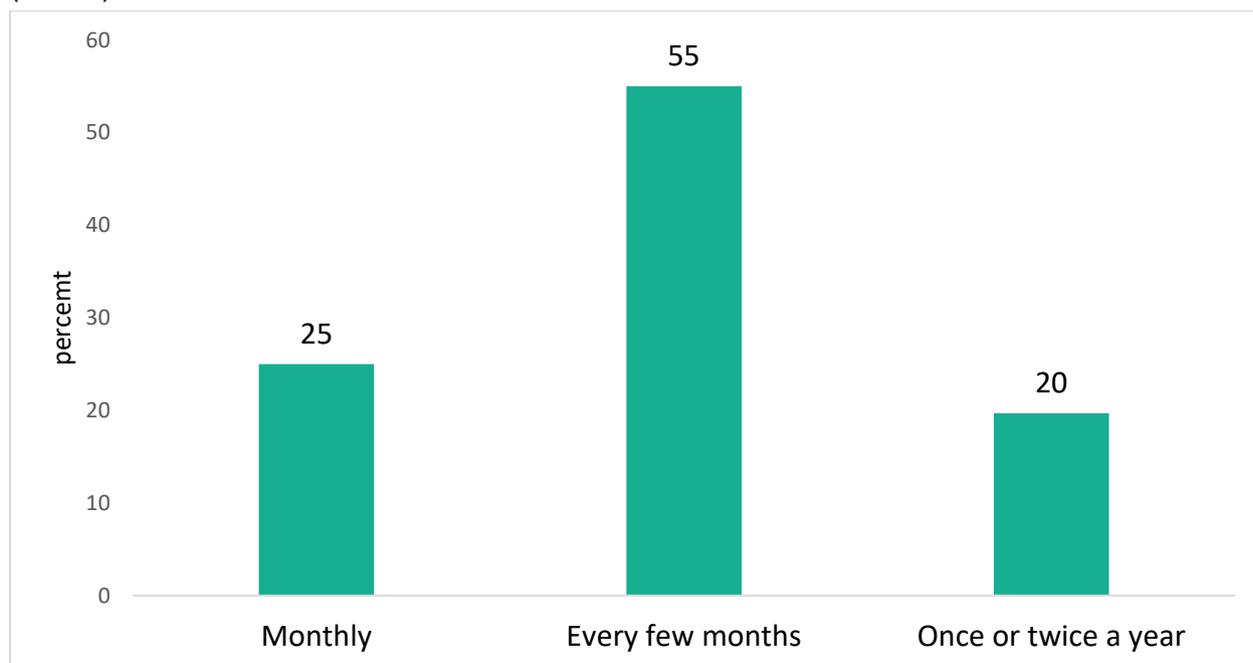
Expatriates were asked since living in the Solomon Islands, if they had been on an overnight trip within the country. Ninety-five percent of expatriates have been on an overnight trip within Solomon Islands (Figure 8). This group that had been on an overnight trip were then asked further details about their most recent overnight domestic travel experience.

Figure 8: Since living in Solomon Islands, have you been on an overnight trip within the country? (n= 166)



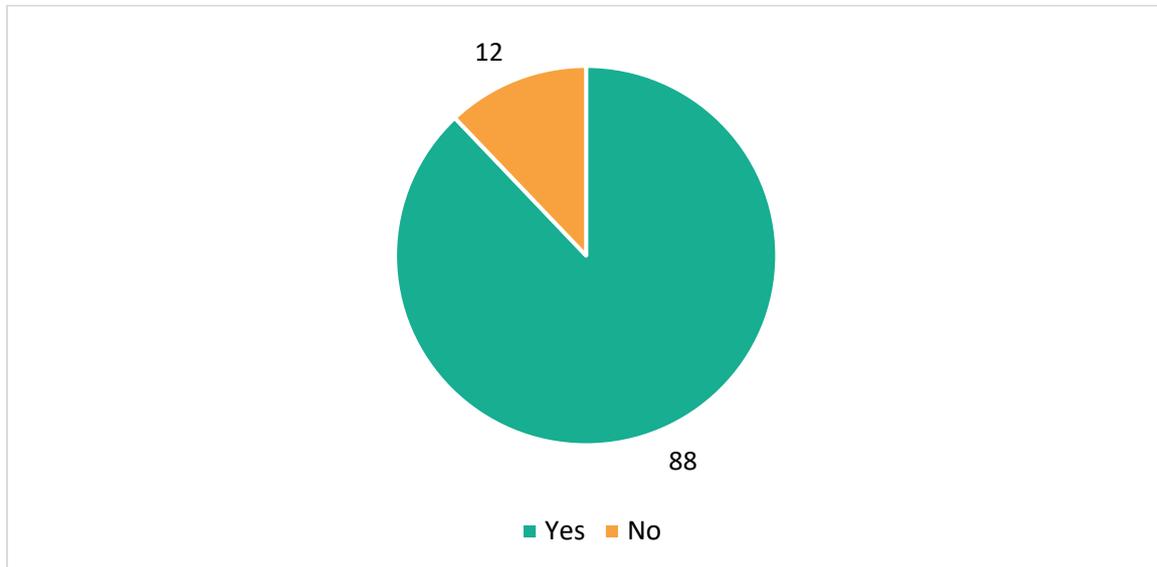
Of the group that had been on an overnight trip since living in Solomon Islands, over half (55%) say they would normally take an overnight trip every 2-5 months, and one quarter travel on a more frequent monthly basis (Figure 9).

Figure 9: On average, how often would you go on an overnight trip within Solomon Islands? (n=157)



Of the small minority (n=8) who had not been on an overnight trip since living in the country, these people were then asked about their future intentions to travel in Solomon Islands. Eighty-eight percent of those who had not yet travelled intend to make an overnight trip within Solomon Islands in the next 12 months (Figure 10).

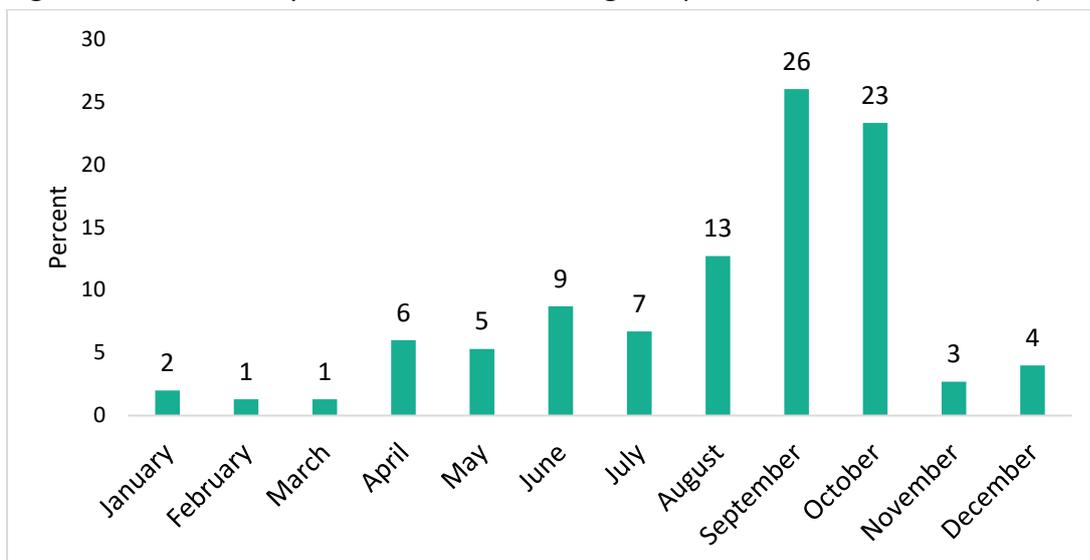
Figure 10: Do you plan to make a trip within Solomon Islands in the next 12 months? (n= 8)



When those that have never travelled previously were asked where they intended to visit, Malaita (reflecting business travelers) and Guadalcanal Provinces dominated.

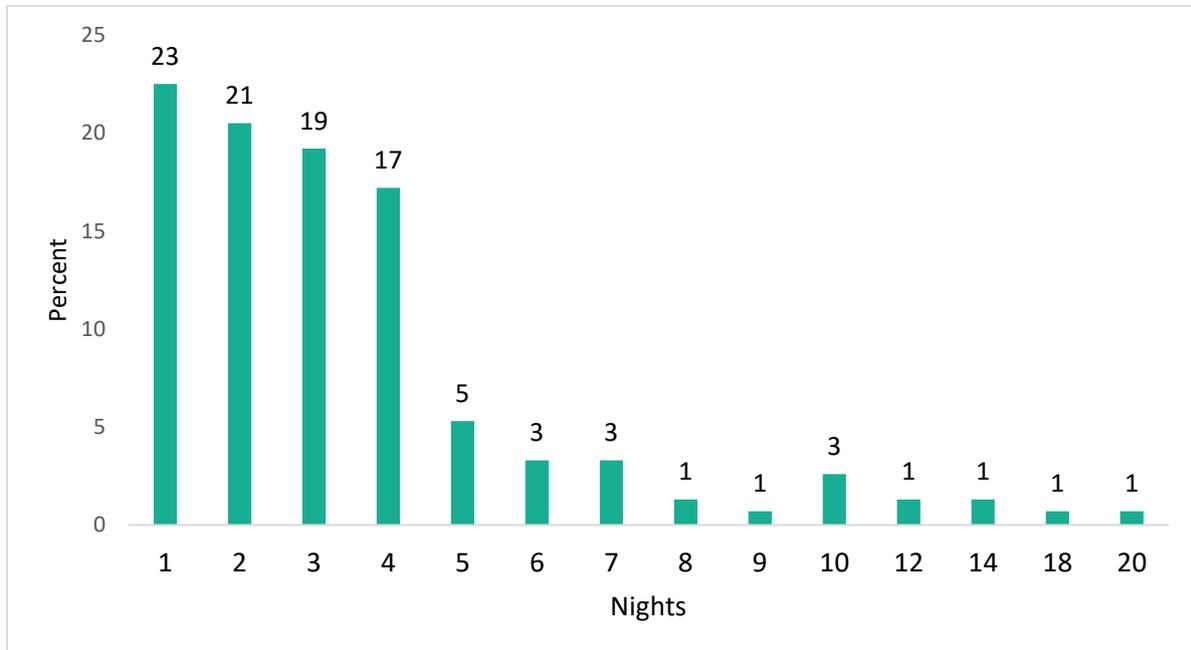
Expatriates that had been on an overnight trip since living in the country were asked when their most recent overnight trip within Solomon Islands occurred. Around half of the trips (49%) were made in September and October 2018 (reflecting the timing of the survey running in October/November 2018) with other trips spread throughout the year (Figure 11).

Figure 11: When was your most recent overnight trip within Solomon Islands? (n=150)



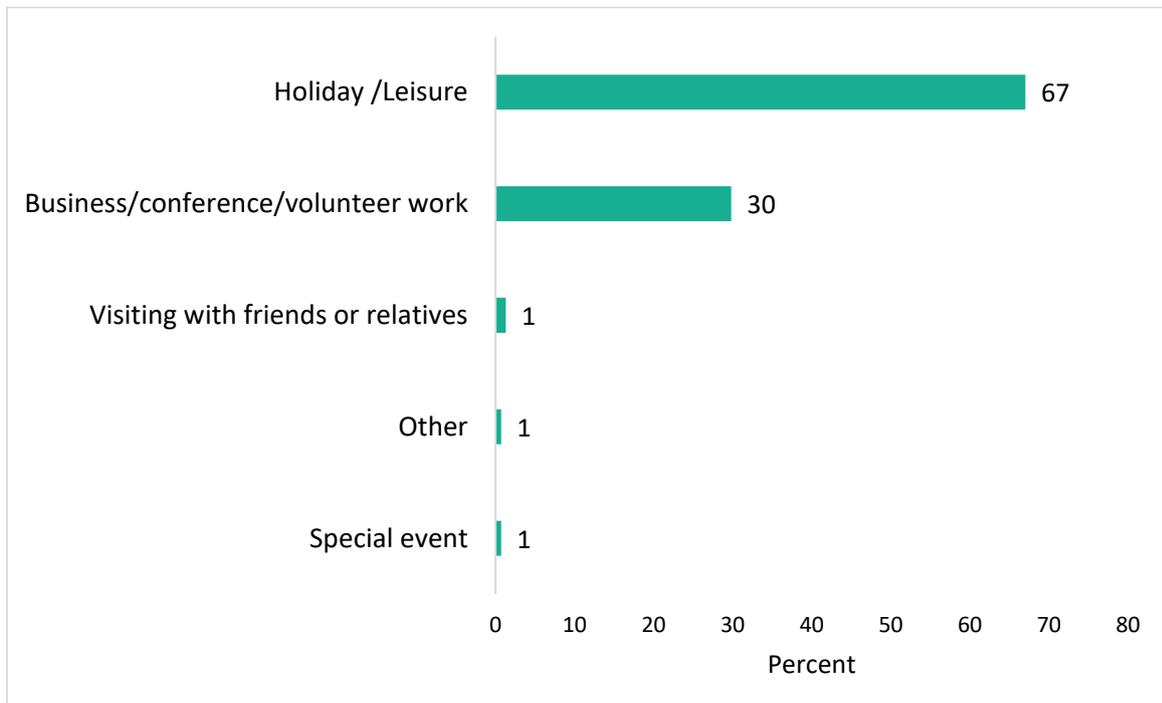
The majority (91%) of overnight trips are for a duration of a week or less, with most expatriates taking short trips of one (23%), two (21%), three (19%) or four (17%) nights (Figure 12). The average length of stay is 3.6 nights.

Figure 12: How long was your most recent overnight trip within Solomon Islands? (n=151)



Most expatriates (67%) travel for leisure, with almost one third (30%) travelling for business (Figure 13).

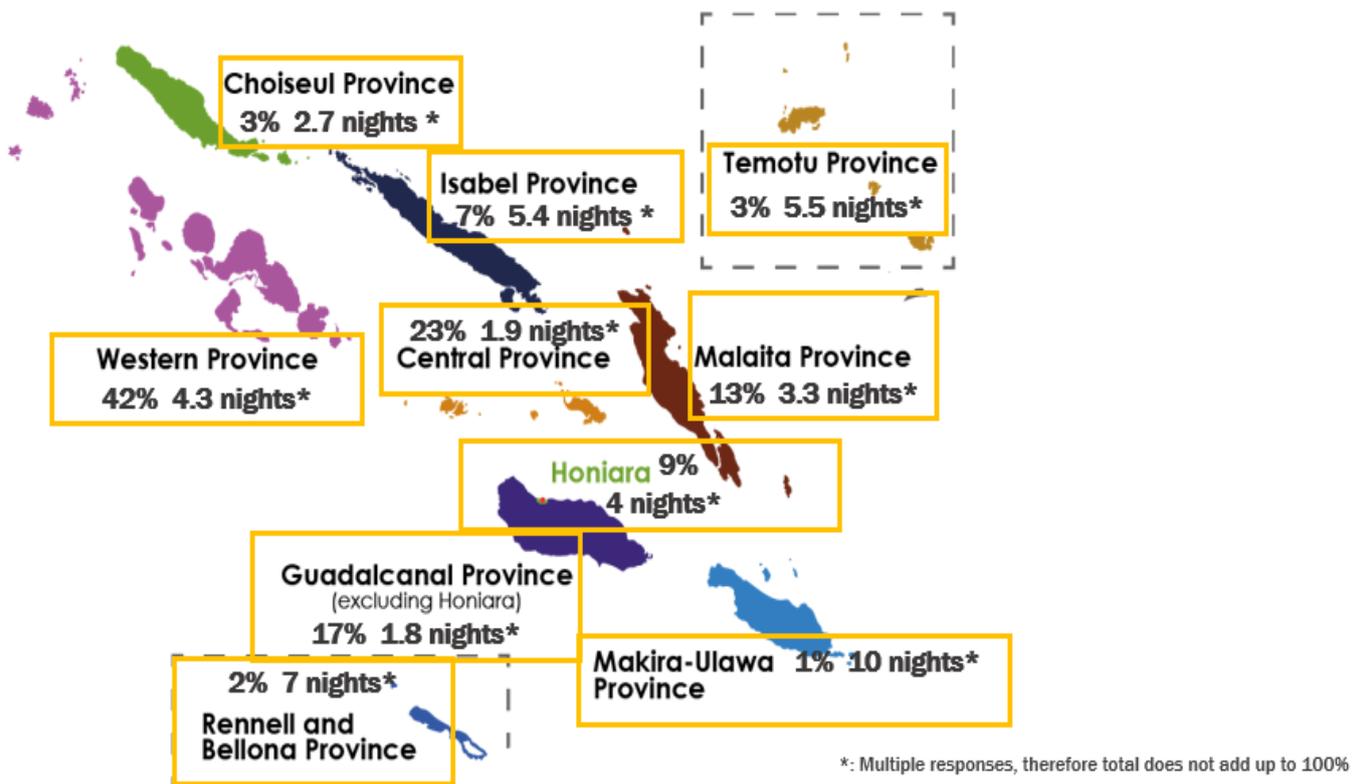
Figure 13: What was the main purpose of your most recent overnight trip within Solomon Islands? (n=151)



Almost half (42%) of expatriates go to Western Province, and around one fifth visit Central Province (23%) and Guadalcanal Province (excluding Honiara) (17%). Fewer respondents go on an overnight trip to Malaita Province (13%), Honiara (9%) (with these people being the ones who live outside of the capital city and stay overnight for work or shopping/supplies), or Isabel Province (7%) (Figure 14).

The length of stay in each province is generally five days or less, except for Rennell and Bellona Province and Makira-Ulawa Province which are characterized by lengths of stay of a week or more (Figure 16). Guadalcanal Province, where the majority of expatriates are located sees short trips of 1.8 nights, reflecting this being a convenient nearby weekend or overnight destination for those living in Honiara. Central Province also has a similarly short length of stay of 1.9 nights. The more visited destination Western Province has a longer length of stay of 4.3 nights (Figure 14). The longer length of stay in Honiara could reflect working visits, or the use of city hotels as a base for getting supplies or further exploration of Guadalcanal Province.

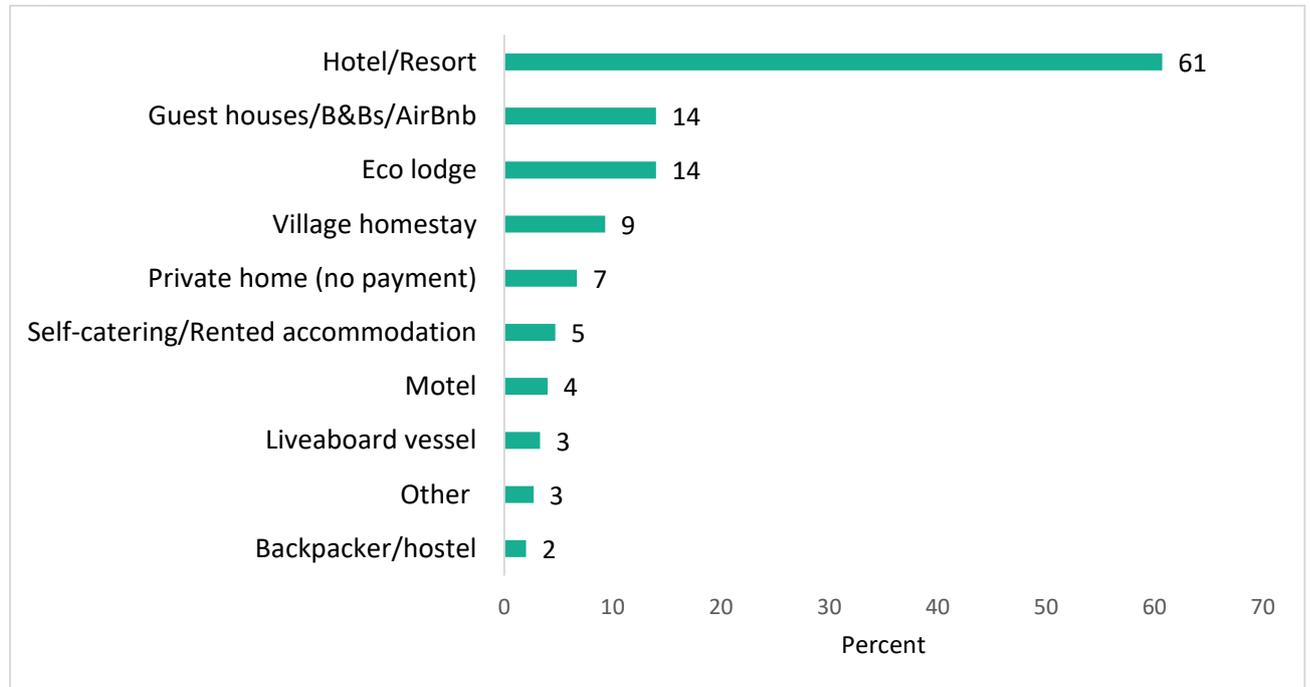
Figure 14: Provinces visited and length of stay (n=150)



Accommodation used

Hotels and resorts are the most popular forms of accommodation (61%). Other forms of accommodation include eco-lodges (15%), guest houses (15%) and village homestays (9%) (Figure 15).

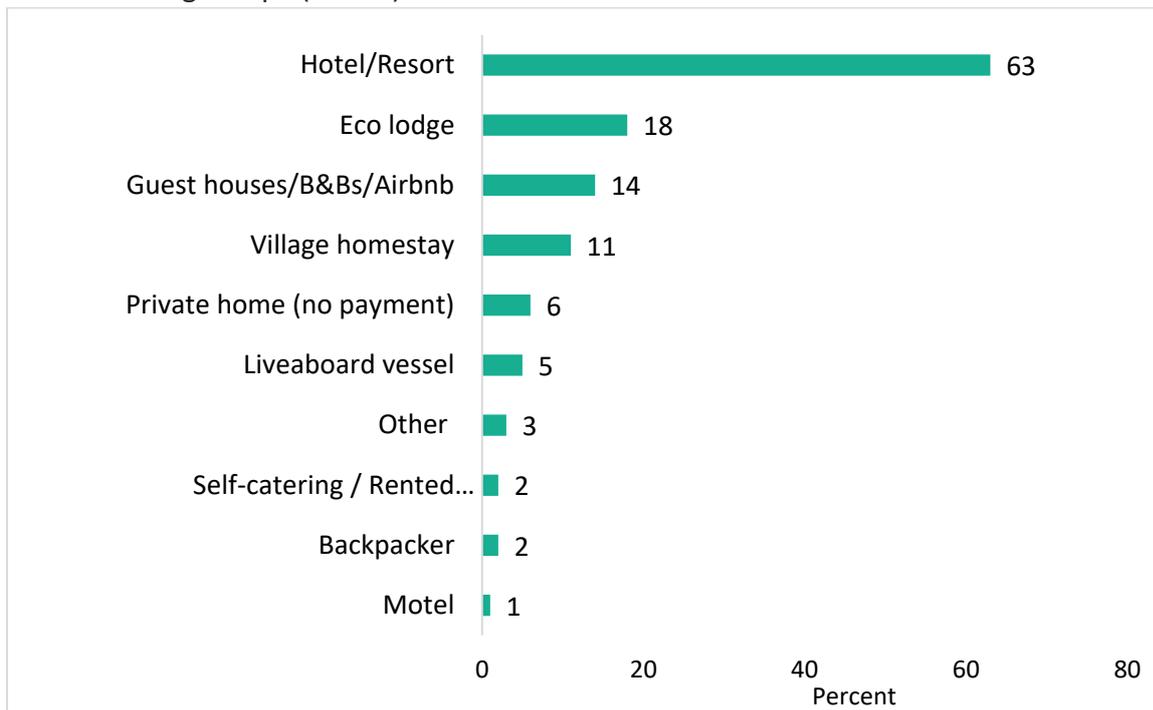
Figure 15: What type(s) of accommodation did you stay in on your most recent overnight trip? (All visitors) (n=150)



Multiple response therefore total doesn't = 100%

Figures 16 and 17 break down accommodation use by holiday and business purpose of visit. Nearly two thirds of holiday visitors (63%) stay in hotels and resorts, with eco-lodges being the second most popular form of accommodation (18%) and guest houses being third (14%) (Figure 16).

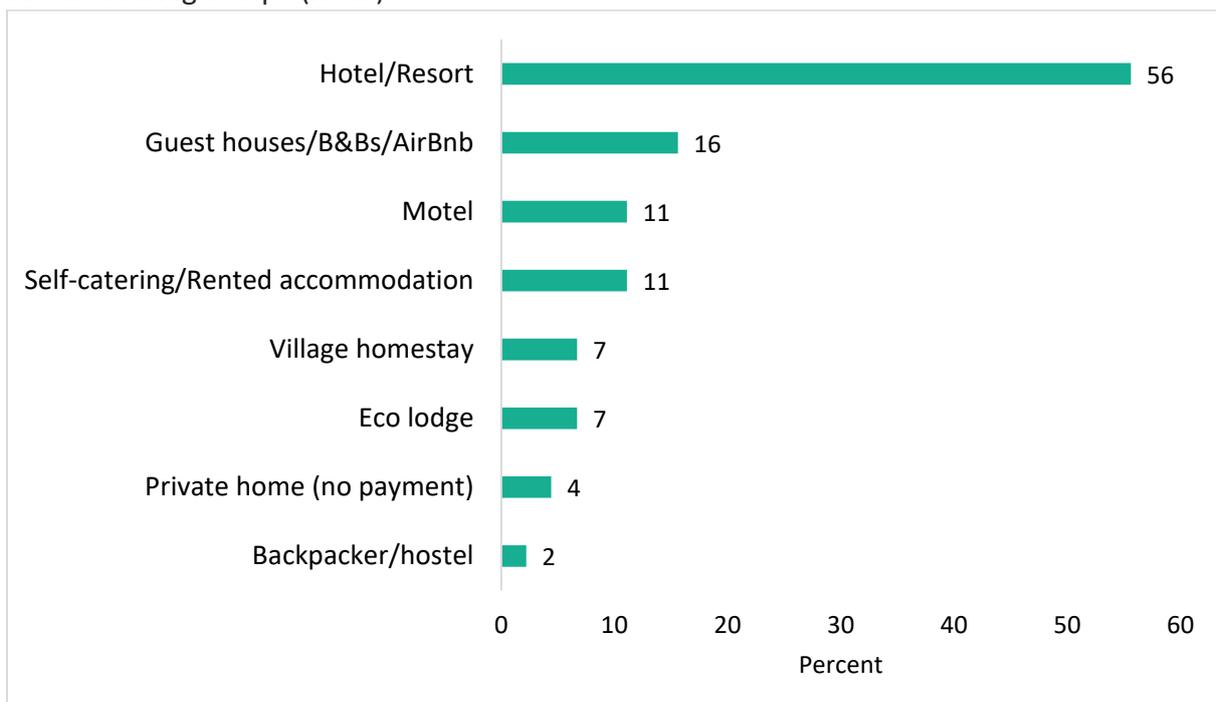
Figure 16: Holiday Visitors: What type(s) of accommodation did you stay in on your most recent overnight trip? (n=101)



Multiple response therefore total doesn't = 100%

Over half (56%) of expatriate business visitors stay in hotels / resorts, 16% stay in guest houses/B&Bs, motels and self-catering accommodation (11%) (Figure 17).

Figure 17: Business visitors: What type(s) of accommodation did you stay in on your most recent overnight trip? (n=45)

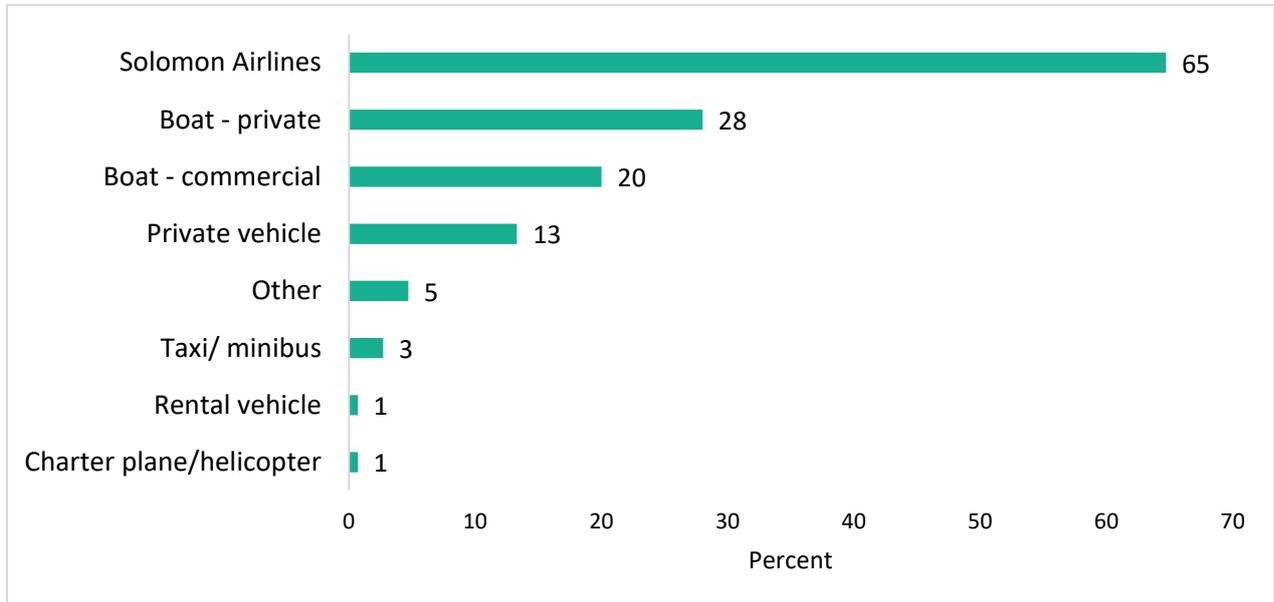


Multiple response therefore total doesn't = 100%

Transport methods

The majority of expatriates (65%) travel with Solomon Airlines to get to their destination, others take a private (28%) or commercial (20%) boat. Fewer respondents use a private vehicle, taxi, or rental vehicle (Figure 18).

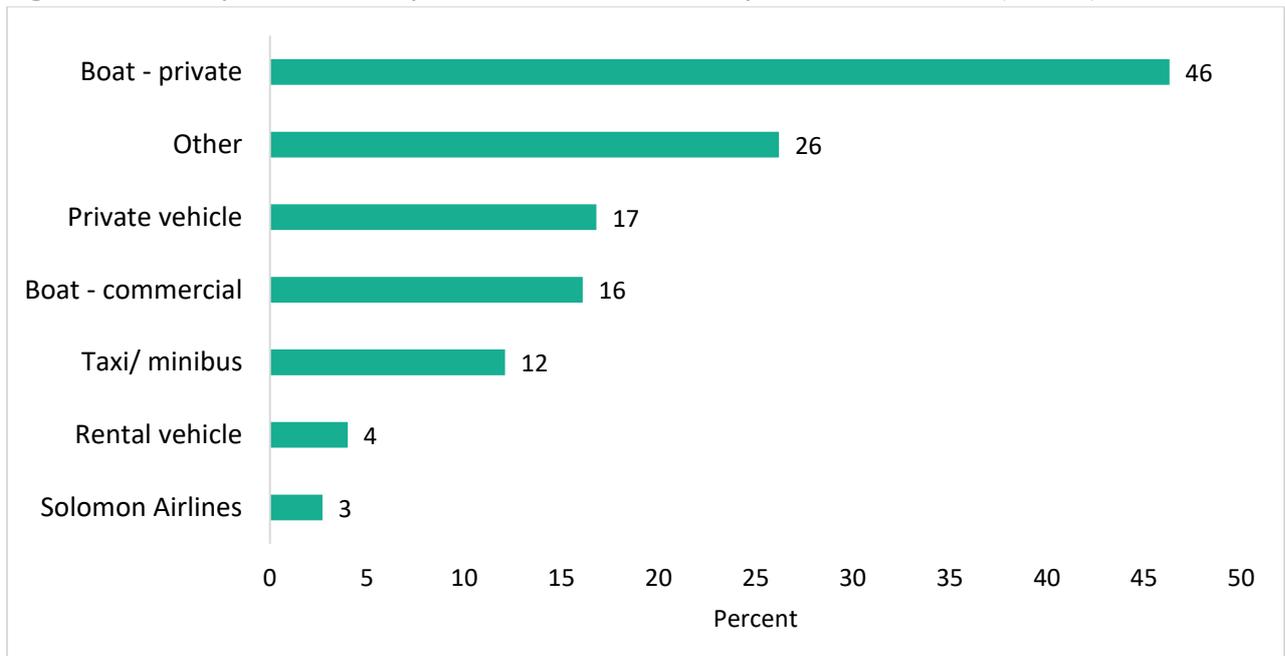
Figure 18: How did you get to your destination on your most recent overnight trip? (n=150)



Multiple response therefore total doesn't = 100%

Once at the destination, transport used mostly involves private (46%) or commercial (16%) boats. A private vehicle is used by 17% and taxi/mini bus by 12%. 'Other' modes used (26%) mostly included walking, with other boats (live aboard vessel/canoe/dive boat) and work cars also mentioned (Figure 19).

Figure 19: Once you arrived at your destination how did you travel around? (n=150)

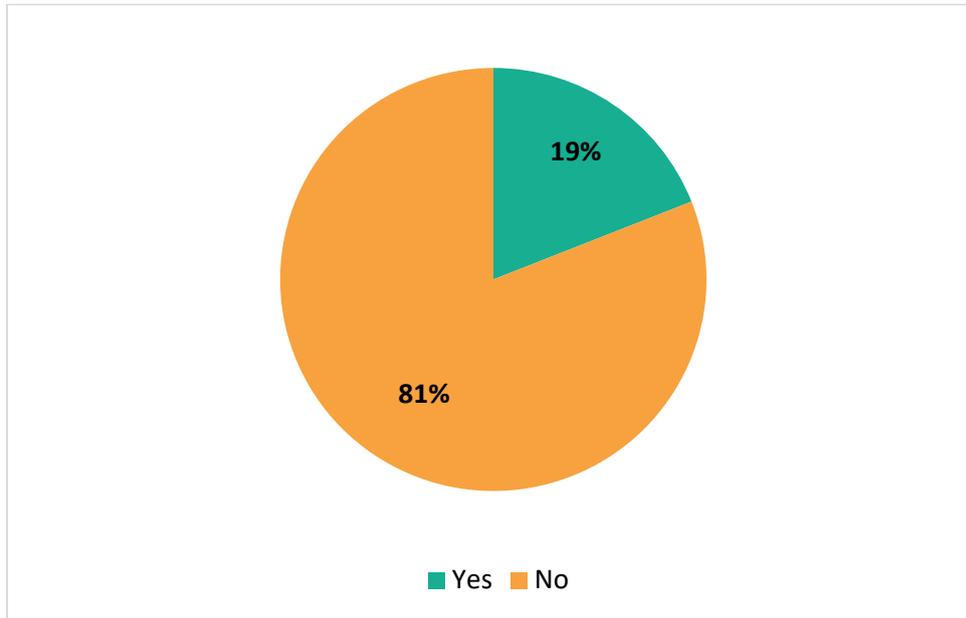


Multiple response therefore total doesn't = 100%

Travel party

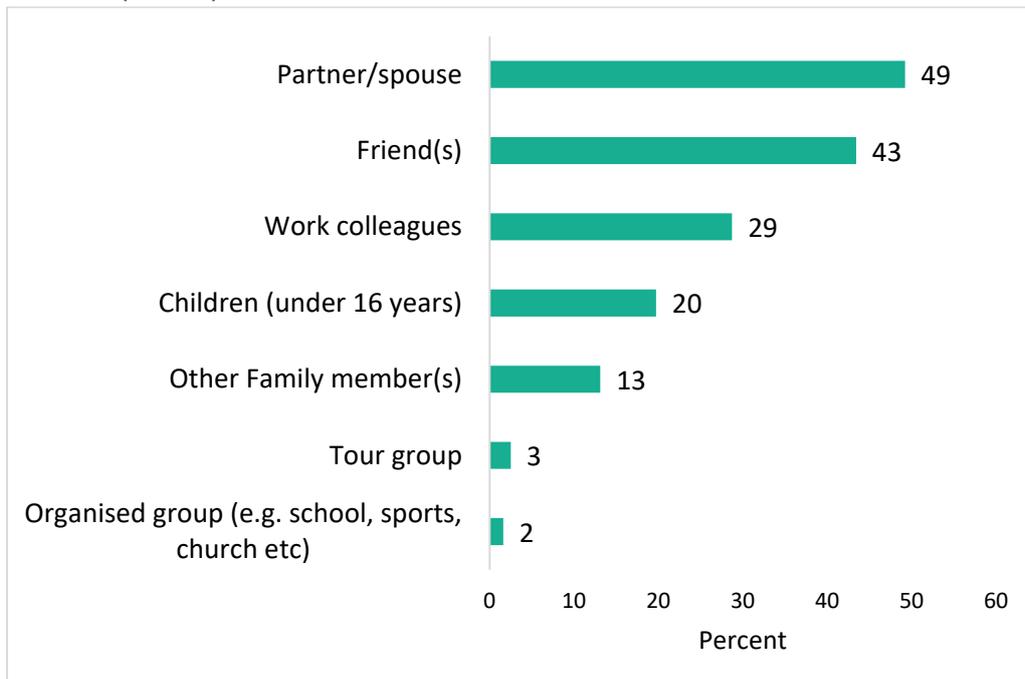
Eighty one percent of expatriates travelled on their most recent trip with others and 19% travelled alone (Figure 20).

Figure 20: Did you travel by yourself on your most recent overnight trip within Solomon Islands? (n= 150)



Among those travelling with others, almost half travelled as a couple (49%) or with friends (43%). Around one third (29%) travelled with work colleagues; and 20% travelled with children under the age of 16 (Figure 21).

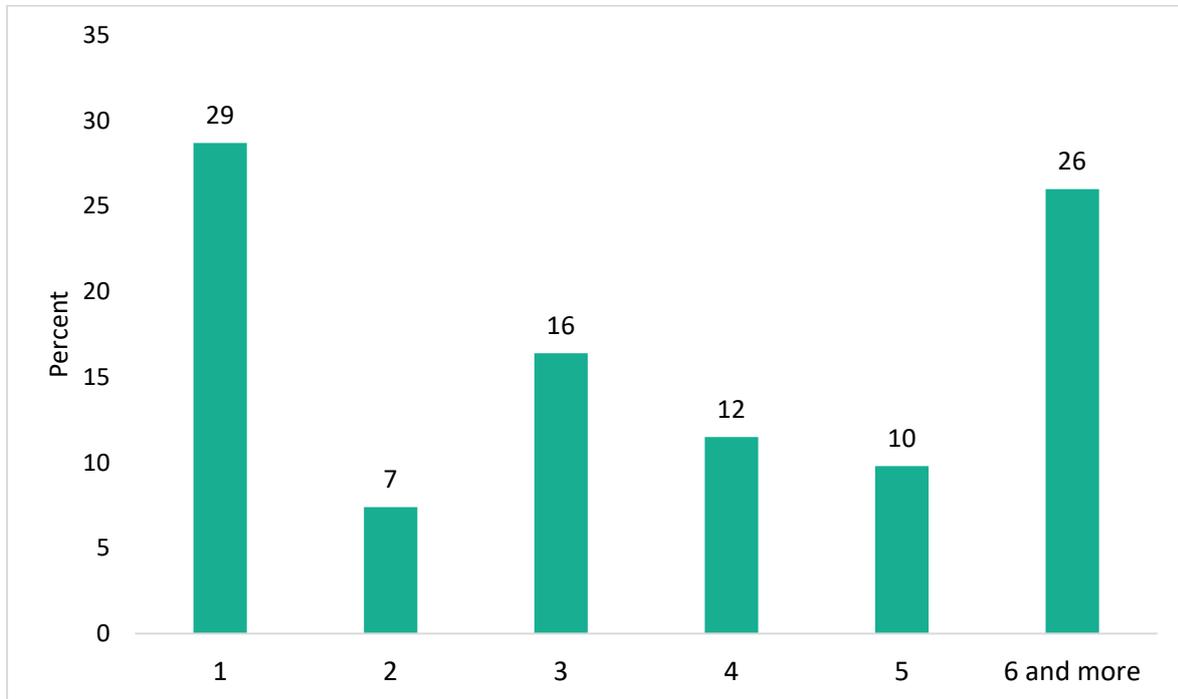
Figure 21: Who did you travel with on your most recent overnight trip within Solomon Islands? (n=122)



Multiple response therefore total doesn't =100%

Travel party size varies considerably with 29% travelling with one more person, 7% travelling with two others and 16% travelling with three companions. Over a quarter of respondents (26%) travelled in larger party of six or more (Figure 22).

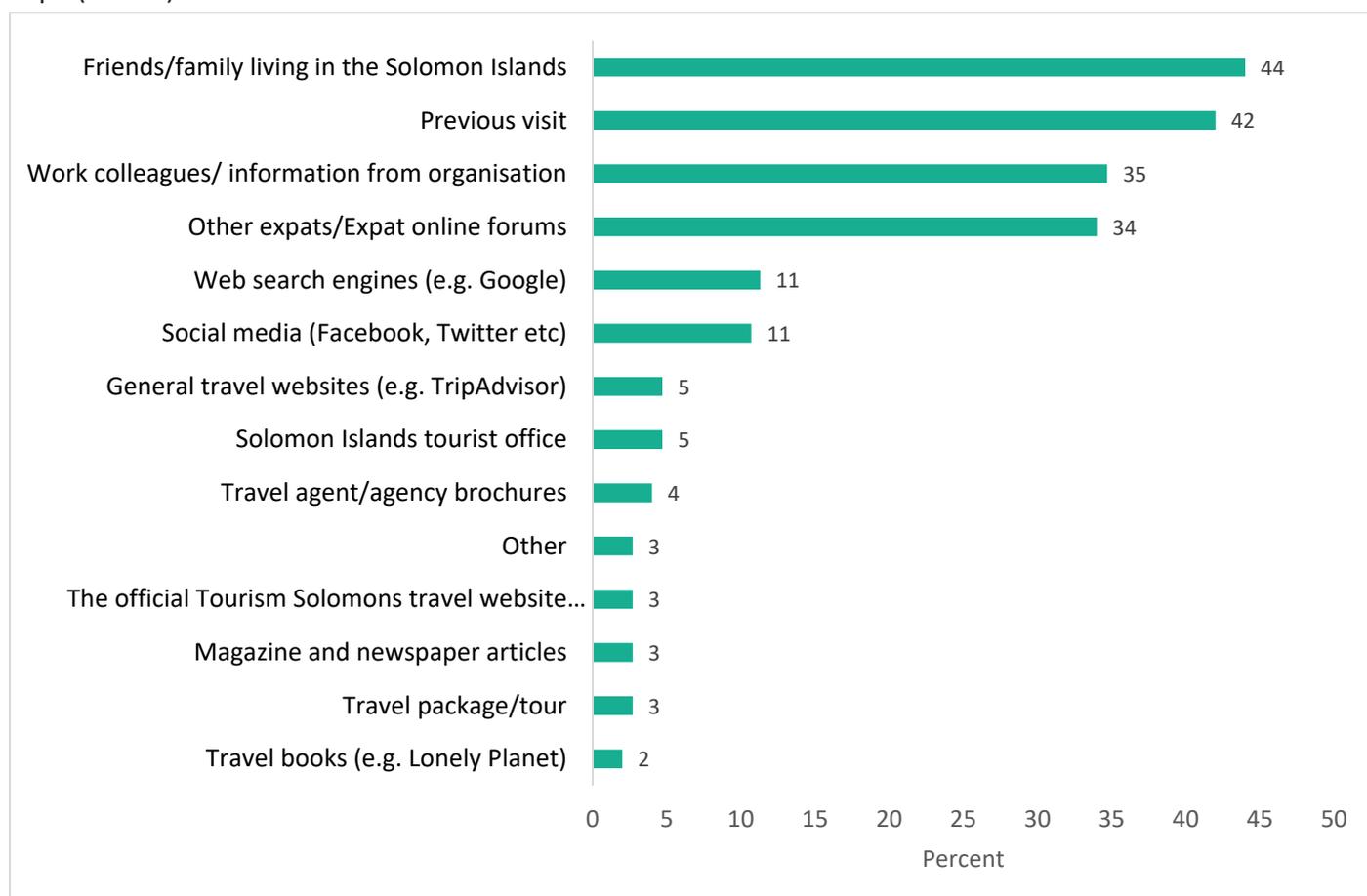
Figure 22: How many people accompanied you on your most recent overnight trip? (n= 122)



Information sources, decision making and trip planning

Expatriates tend to find out about domestic destinations via word of mouth - from friends and family (44%), work colleagues (35%) or other expats (34%). Others have had the opportunity to know about the destination from previous visits (42%). Relatively few expatriates find out about the destination via secondary sources such as Google searches (11%), social media (11%), general travel websites (5%), or Solomon Islands tourist office (5%) (Figure 23).

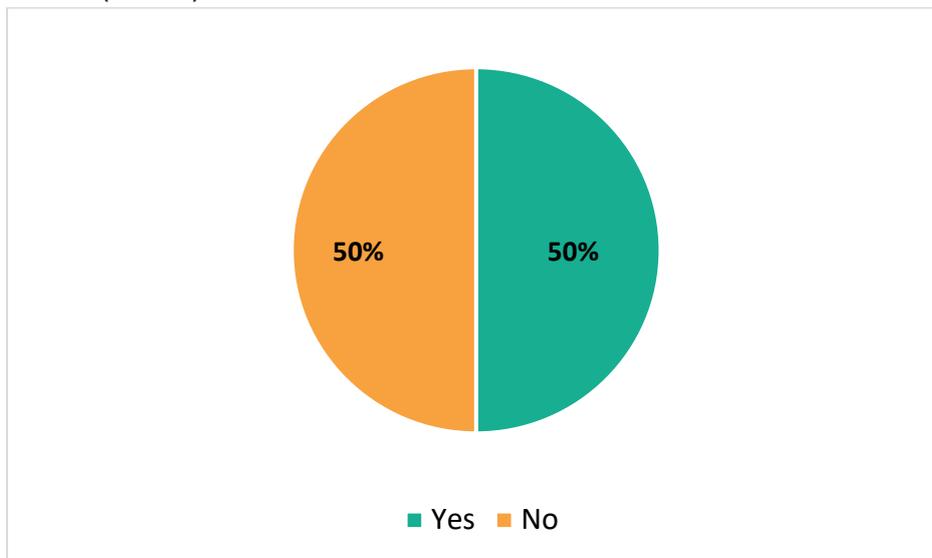
Figure 23: How did you find out about the places you visited on your most recent overnight trip? (n=150)



Multiple response therefore total doesn't = 100%

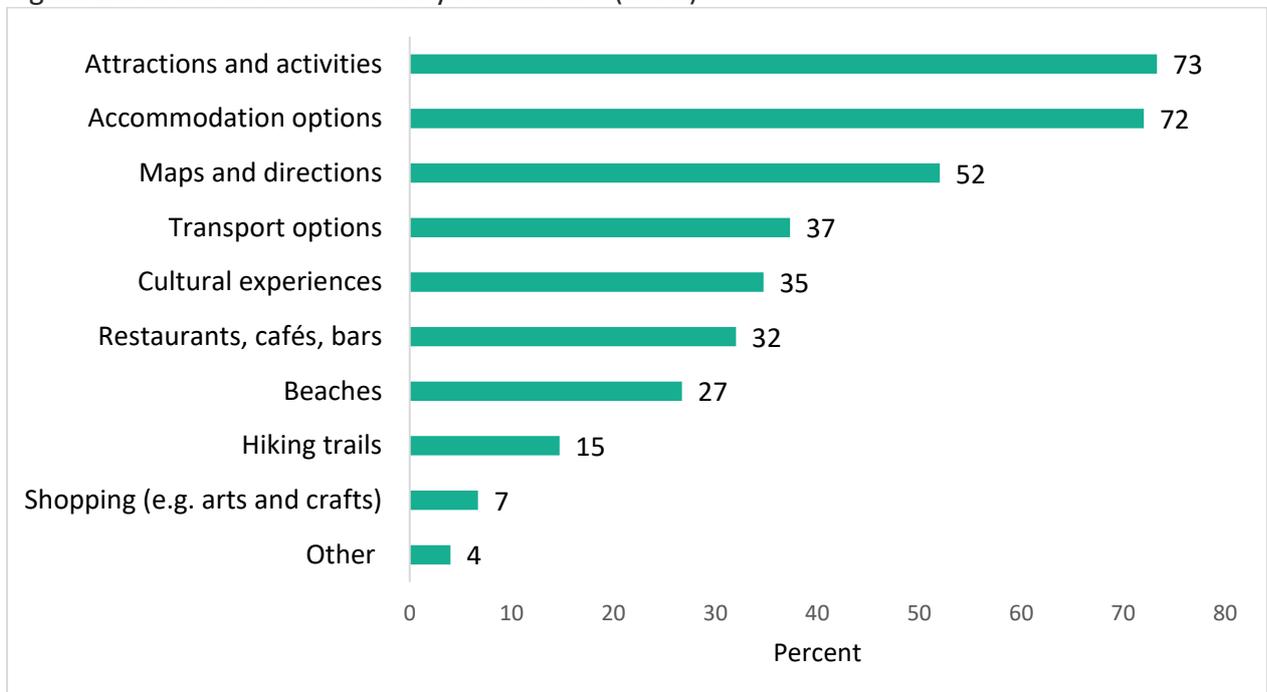
Expatriates were asked if they looked for information about their destination before they went there for their trip. Half of expatriates look for information about the destination prior to visiting (Figure 24).

Figure 24: Did you look for any visitor information about the destination before you went there? (n=150)



Of those that *did* look for information prior to travelling, the majority look for attractions and activities (73%) and accommodation options (72%). Just over half (52%) looked for maps and directions and over one third focused on transport options (37%), cultural experiences (35%), and restaurants cafes and bars (32%). Others looked for information about beaches (27%), and hiking trails (15%) (Figure 25).

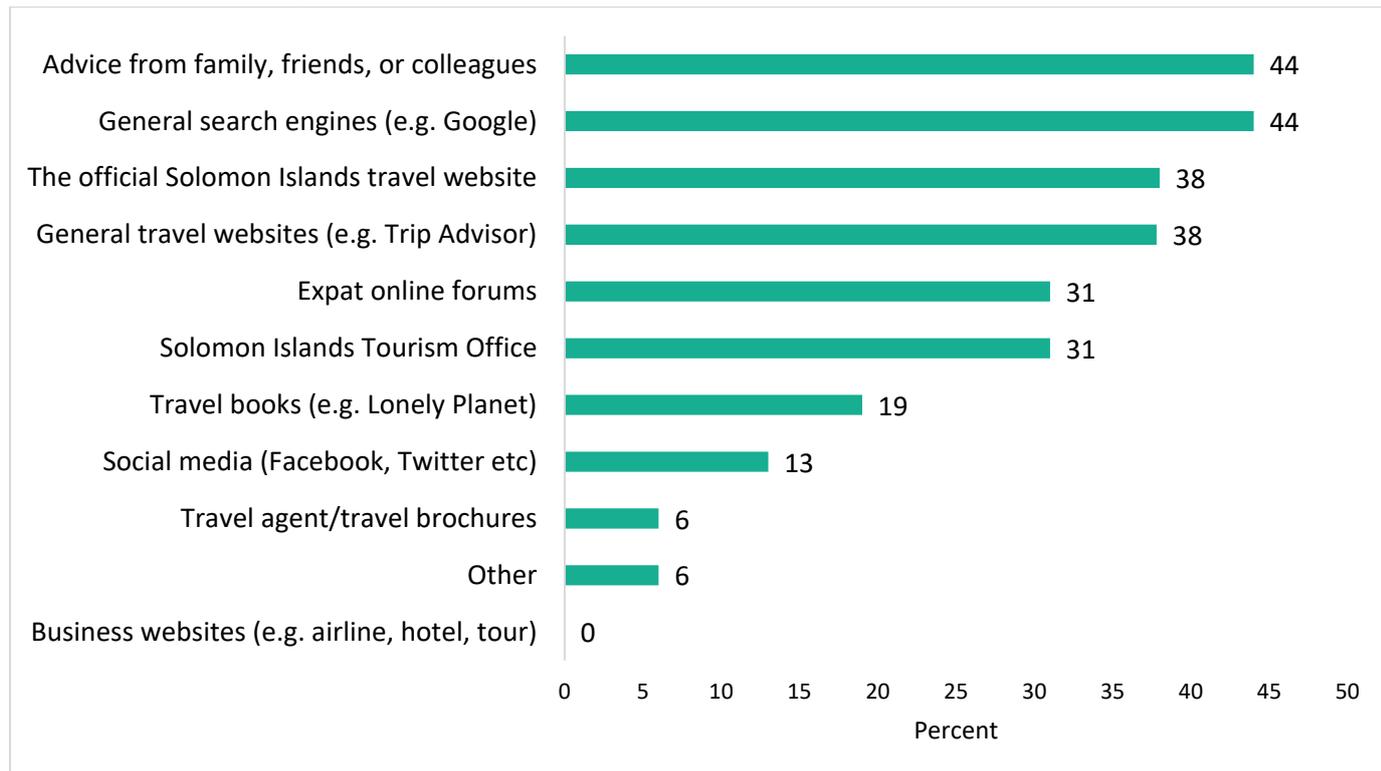
Figure 25: What information did you look for? (n=75)



Multiple response therefore total doesn't = 100%

Advice (guidance/recommendations) from family, friends or colleagues is the predominant source (57%) of visitor information prior to travel. Online sources were also used to find out about the destination with 46% using search engines, 41% referring to expat online forums, 38% going to general travel websites, 30% using the official Solomon Islands travel website, and 20% referring to social media or business websites such as a hotel web page (19%). Twenty-six percent seek information at the Solomon Islands Tourism Office and 20% also source information from a travel agent or from travel brochures (Figure 26).

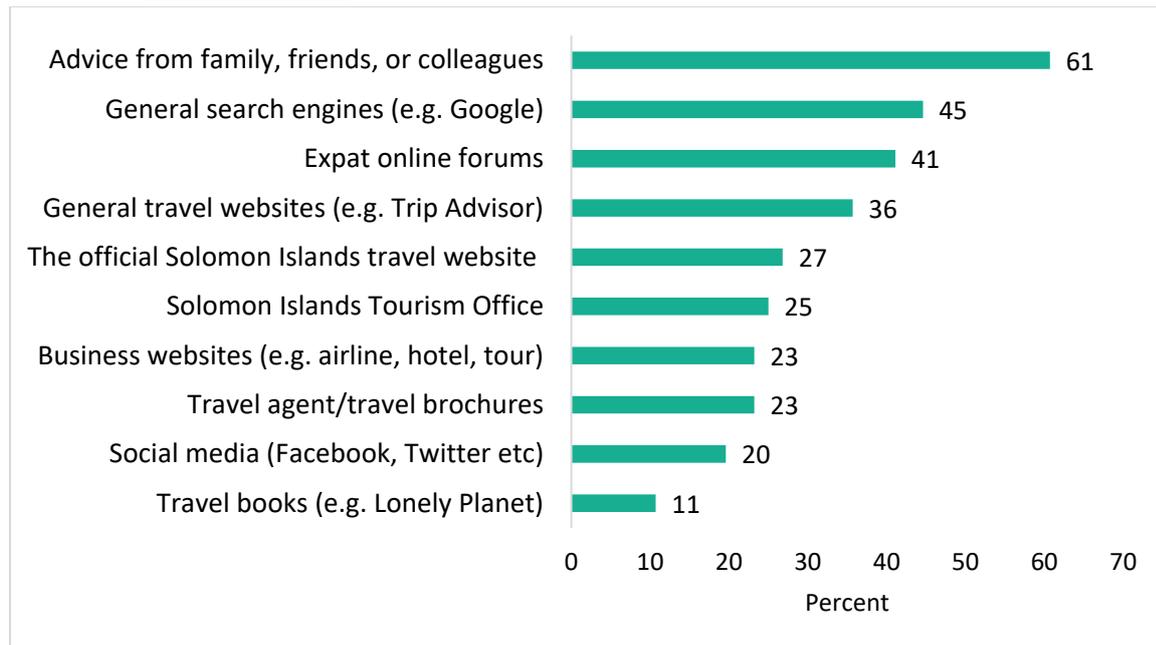
Figure 26: Where did you look for this information? (All visitors) (n=74)



Multiple response therefore total doesn't = 100%

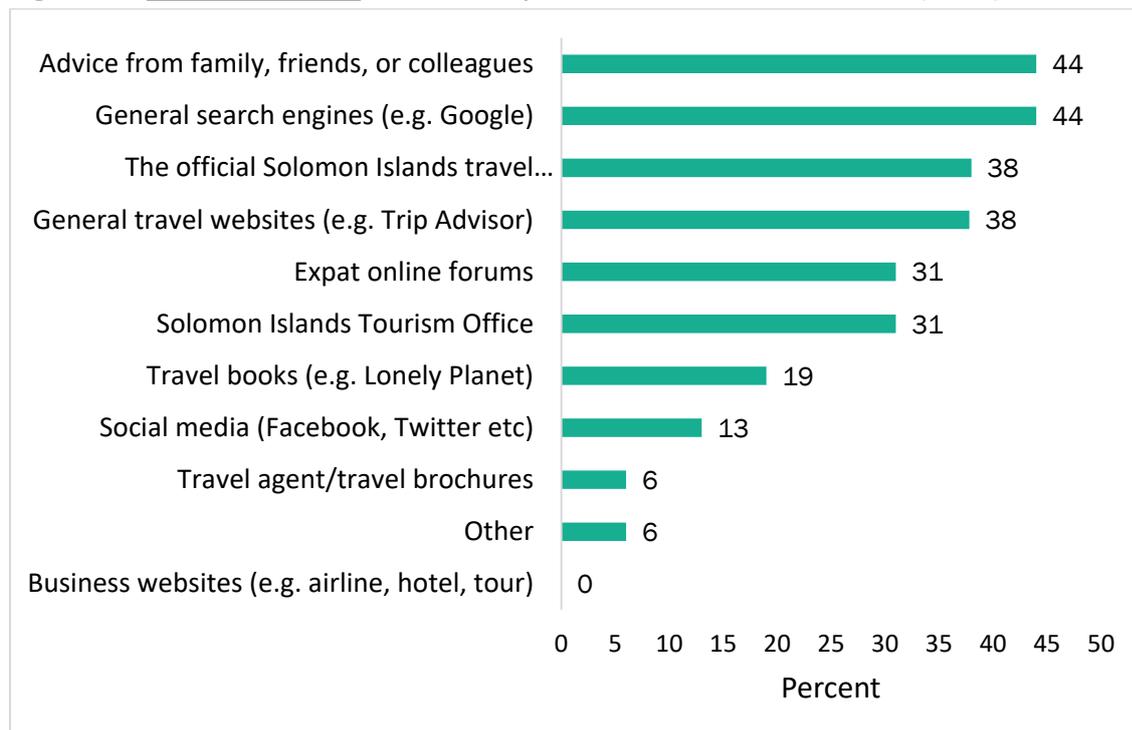
Advice from 'family, friends, colleagues' is an important source of visitor information prior to travel for both holiday (61%) and business travelers (44%). Both business visitors and holiday visitors also rely on online sources for information about the destination prior to visiting (Figure 27/28).

Figure 27: Holiday visitors: Where did you look for this information? (n=56)



Multiple response therefore total doesn't = 100%

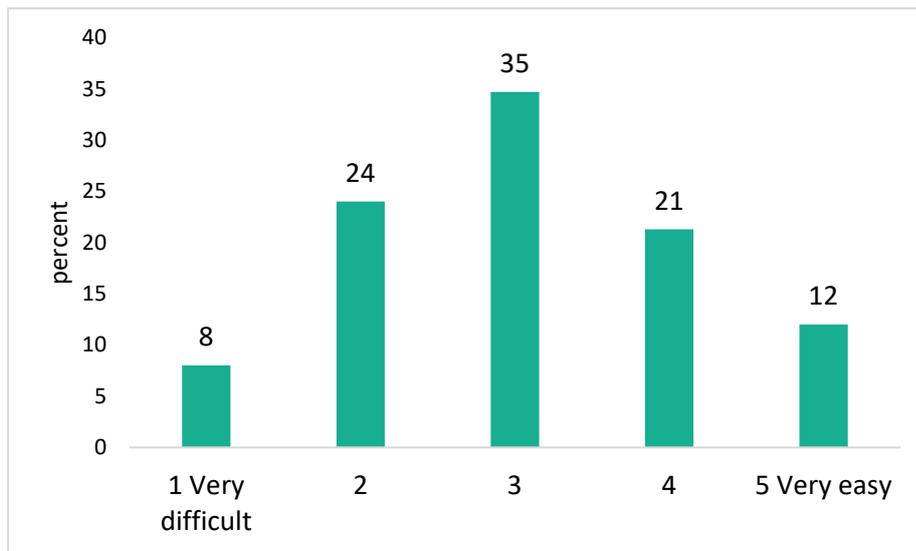
Figure 28: Business visitors: Where did you look for this information? (n=16)



Multiple response therefore total doesn't = 100%

Expatriates are evenly split with regard to how easy information is to find before they travel, with just under one third (32%) finding it difficult, just over one third (35%) finding it neither difficult nor easy, and one third finding it easy or very easy (Figure 29).

Figure 29: How easy was it to find the information? (n=75)



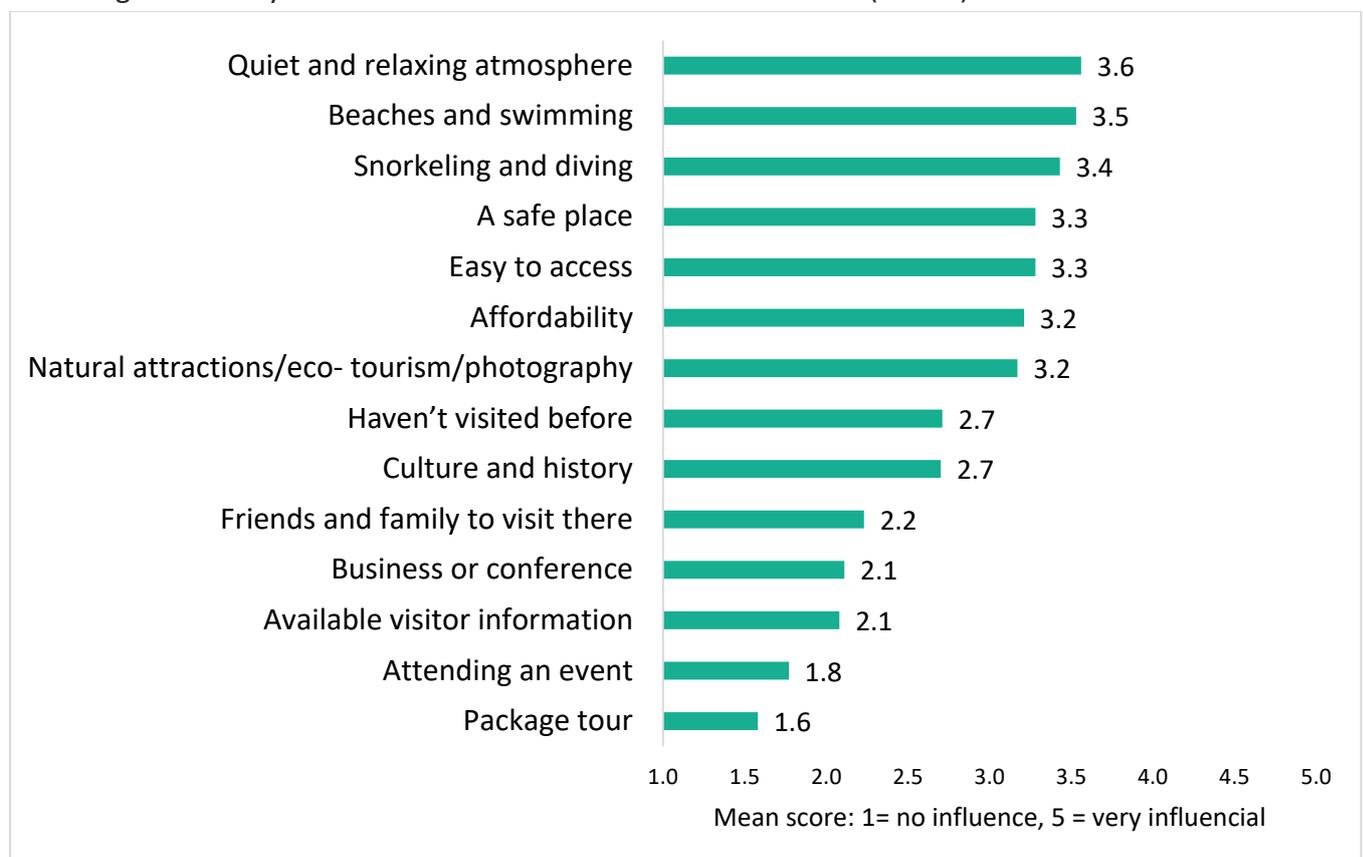
Factors influencing the choice of a destination within Solomon Islands

Expatriates were asked what factors influenced their choice of destination within Solomon Islands using a scale of 1-5 (1 being no influence and 5 being extremely influential).

The most influential factors in choosing a destination within Solomon Islands are a quiet and relaxing atmosphere (3.6), beaches and swimming (3.5), snorkelling and diving (3.4), a safe place (3.3), ease of access (3.3), affordability (3.2) and natural attractions (3.2) (Figure 30).

Cultural and history was rated relatively low (2.7) while a relaxing atmosphere scored was the most influential (3.6) reason to travel within Solomon Islands.

Figure 30: Thinking about your most recent overnight trip, how influential were the following factors in your choice to travel within Solomon Islands? (n=121)

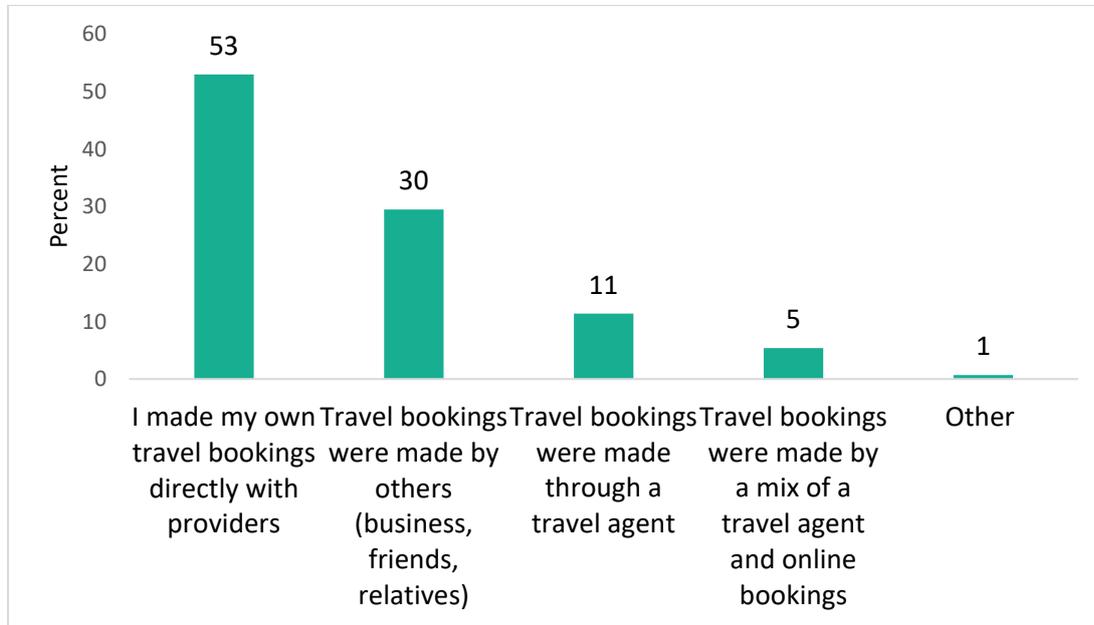


Multiple response therefore total doesn't = 100%

Booking

Over half (53%) of expatriates made bookings themselves directly with providers, and 30% had their travel bookings made by others. Only 11% used a travel agent to make the bookings (Figure 31).

Figure 31: How did you book your travel within the Solomon Islands? (n=149)



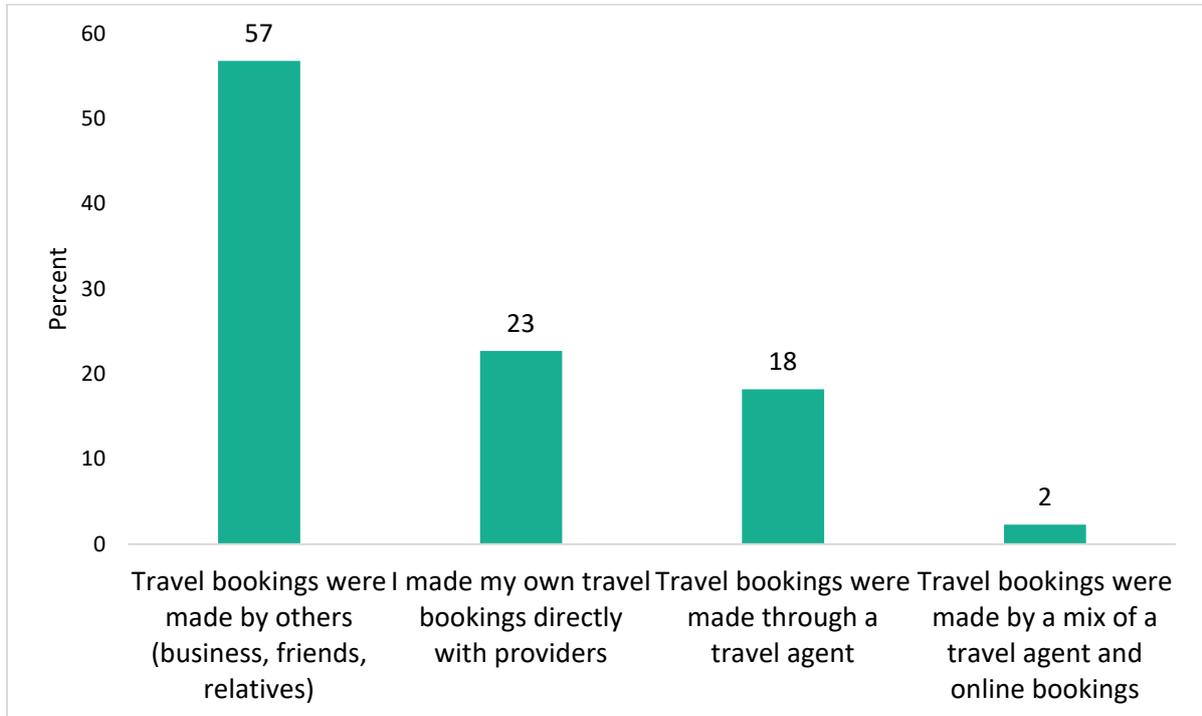
Almost 70% of holiday visitors made bookings directly with providers with few (9%) using travel agents (Figure 32).

Figure 32: Holiday visitors: How did you book your travel within the Solomon Islands? (n=101)



Over half (57%) of business bookings were made by others, and more business travelers use travel agents than holiday visitors (Figure 33). Less than a quarter (23%) of business visitors made their own bookings.

Figure 33: Business visitors: How did you book your travel within the Solomon Islands? (n=45)



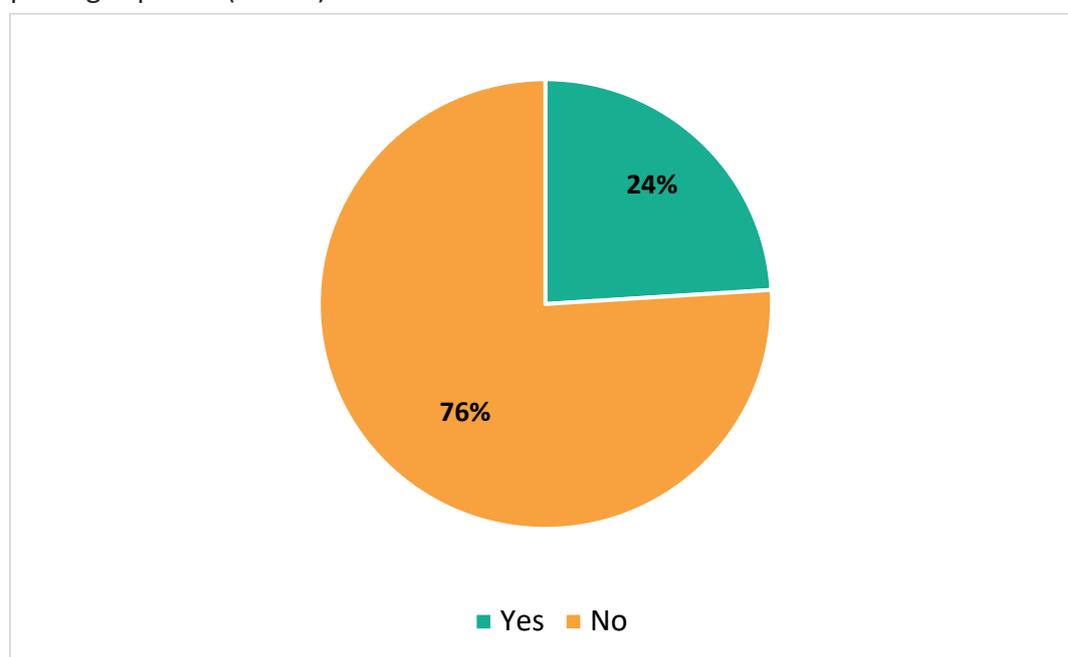
Domestic expatriate tourist spend

Expatriates were asked how much money they spent on their most recent overnight visit within Solomon Islands. The question was asked in two parts, firstly if they had spent money prior to their travel, in the form of a pre-paid elements or a package (accommodation alone or a mix of accommodation and transport, activities etc.), and secondly how much they spent during their trip.

Pre-paid package spend

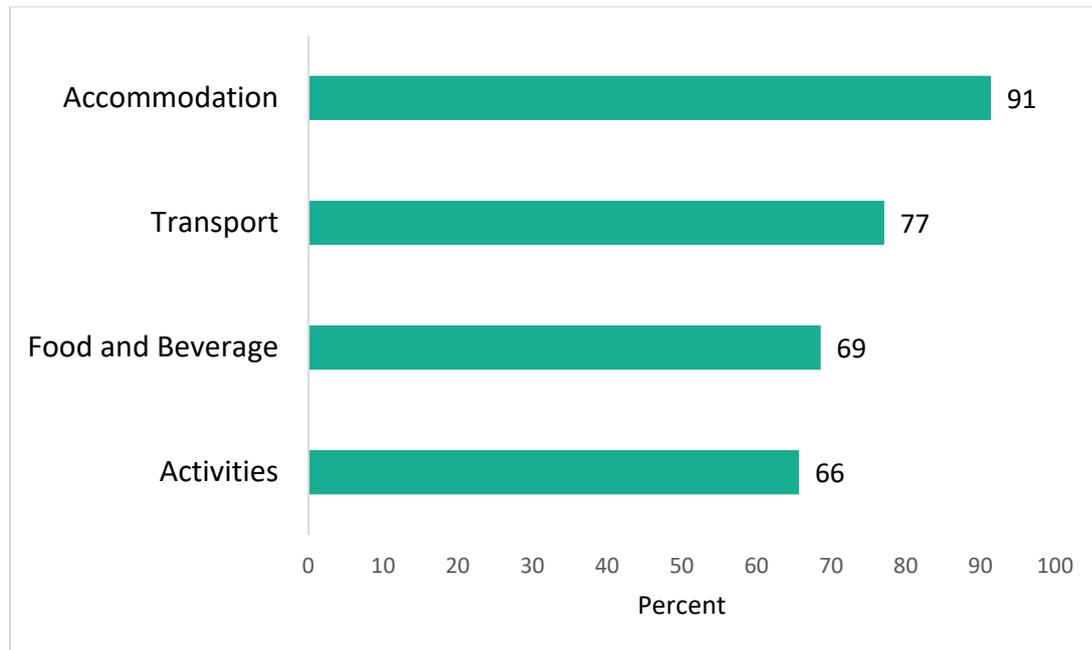
The majority (76%) of expatriate domestic tourist expenditure does not include any pre-paid package spend (Figure 34).

Figure 34: Did your most recent overnight trip within Solomon Islands include any pre-paid package spend? (n=148)



Of the 24% that did pre-pay, this expenditure largely included accommodation (91%), transport (77%), food and beverage (69%), and activities (66%) (Figure 35).

Figure 35: What did your pre-paid spend (package) include? (n=35)



Multiple response therefore total doesn't = 100%

The average prepaid spend across the entire sample (including the 76% that pre-paid nothing) is SBD 1,188 per trip.

Expatriate domestic tourism spend during travel (non-package)

Each expatriate domestic visitor spends on average a total of SBD 787 per day while travelling within Solomon Islands, spending an average of SBD 2,845 per trip (based on average stay of 3.6 nights). The majority of spend is on domestic flights and accommodation (Table 1).

The expenditure outlined below covers a total of 247 people (209 adults and 38 children). All analysis is presented on a per person basis.

Almost 70% (67%) of expatriate domestic tourist spend goes to accommodation and domestic flights. Little is spent on activities, with watersports making up 5% of total spend and only 1% is spent on land-based activities, shopping, tours and sightseeing. Thirteen percent is spent on restaurants/cafes/bars (Table 1).

Table 1: Domestic expatriate tourist spend during travel – all visitors (n=153) (SBD)

| Expenditure Item | Per person per day | Per person per trip | Percentage |
|---|--------------------|---------------------|------------|
| Domestic flights | 270 | 976 | 34 |
| Accommodation | 259 | 939 | 33 |
| Restaurants, cafes & bars | 104 | 376 | 13 |
| Water-based transport (ferry, outboard, charter boat) | 46 | 166 | 6 |
| Water based activities | 38 | 139 | 5 |
| Groceries | 15 | 53 | 2 |
| Vehicle rental | 7 | 25 | 1 |
| Petrol | 7 | 24 | 1 |
| Public transport | 3 | 13 | 1 |
| Shopping (e.g. souvenirs, handicrafts) | 11 | 39 | 1 |
| Tours and sightseeing | 10 | 38 | 1 |
| Land based activities | 7 | 24 | 1 |
| Other | 6 | 20 | 1 |
| Internet cost | 4 | 13 | 0 |
| TOTAL | 787 | 2,845 | 100 |

Based on the above information we estimate that the average expatriate tourist will spend a total of SBD 4,033 per domestic overnight trip (SBD 1,188 pre-paid package plus SBD 2,845 spend during their travel).

Three quarters of domestic tourist business travel spend goes to accommodation and domestic flights. Ten percent is spent on restaurants cafes and bars. Business travelers spend nothing on activities, with only a small spend (1%) allocated to shopping (handicrafts and souvenirs) (Table 2).

Table 2: Business Visitors: Domestic expatriate tourist spend during travel (n=44) (SBD)

| Expenditure Item | Per person per day | Per person per trip | Percentage |
|---|--------------------|---------------------|------------|
| Domestic flights | 521 | 1877 | 38 |
| Accommodation | 497 | 1790 | 37 |
| Restaurants, cafes & bars | 136 | 489 | 10 |
| Water-based transport (ferry, outboard, charter boat) | 82 | 297 | 6 |
| Groceries | 37 | 133 | 3 |
| Vehicle rental | 22 | 80 | 2 |
| Petrol | 17 | 61 | 1 |
| Public transport | 10 | 34 | 1 |
| Internet cost | 10 | 37 | 1 |
| Shopping (e.g. souvenirs, handicrafts) | 20 | 70 | 1 |
| Tours and sightseeing | 3 | 11 | 0 |
| Water based activities | 3 | 11 | 0 |
| Land based activities | 3 | 11 | 0 |
| Other | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| TOTAL | 1362 | 4902 | 100 |

Two thirds (66%) of holiday visitor expenditure goes to accommodation and domestic flights. The highest spend among activities is water-based (7%), with spend in other areas low (1%) and tourists and sightseeing making up 2% of overall expenditure. More is spent in cafés/restaurants and bars (15%) (Table 3).

Table 3: Holiday Visitors: Domestic expatriate tourist spend during travel (n=100) (SBD)

| Expenditure Item | Per person per day | Per person per trip | Percentage |
|---|--------------------|---------------------|------------|
| Accommodation | 211 | 737 | 32 |
| Domestic flights | 214 | 750 | 32 |
| Restaurants, cafes & bars | 96 | 335 | 14 |
| Water based activities | 49 | 171 | 7 |
| Water-based transport (ferry, outboard, charter boat) | 38 | 134 | 6 |
| Tours and sightseeing | 11 | 39 | 2 |
| Vehicle rental | 4 | 13 | 1 |
| Petrol | 5 | 17 | 1 |
| Groceries | 9 | 33 | 1 |
| Shopping (e.g. souvenirs, handicrafts) | 9 | 33 | 1 |
| Land based activities | 6 | 20 | 1 |
| Other | 7 | 25 | 1 |
| Public transport | 2 | 8 | 0 |
| Internet cost | 2 | 7 | 0 |
| TOTAL | 663 | 2322 | 100 |

Overall business travelers spend almost double that of holiday travelers, the majority of this being on more expensive accommodation and domestic flights. Holiday travelers tend to have more of an impact on local economies, spending more on cafes/restaurants/bars and activities.

Table 4 presents the average total spend per day and per trip, and disaggregates between business and holiday visitors. The average spend combines pre-paid spend (money spent prior to arrival) and money spent once on the journey and in the destination.

Table 4: Average total expatriate domestic tourist spend during travel

| Purpose of travel | Per person per day (SBD) | Per person per trip (SBD) |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| All expatriate domestic tourists | 1,117 | 4,033 |
| Holiday/leisure | 1,057 | 3,700 |
| Business | 1,487 | 4,902 |

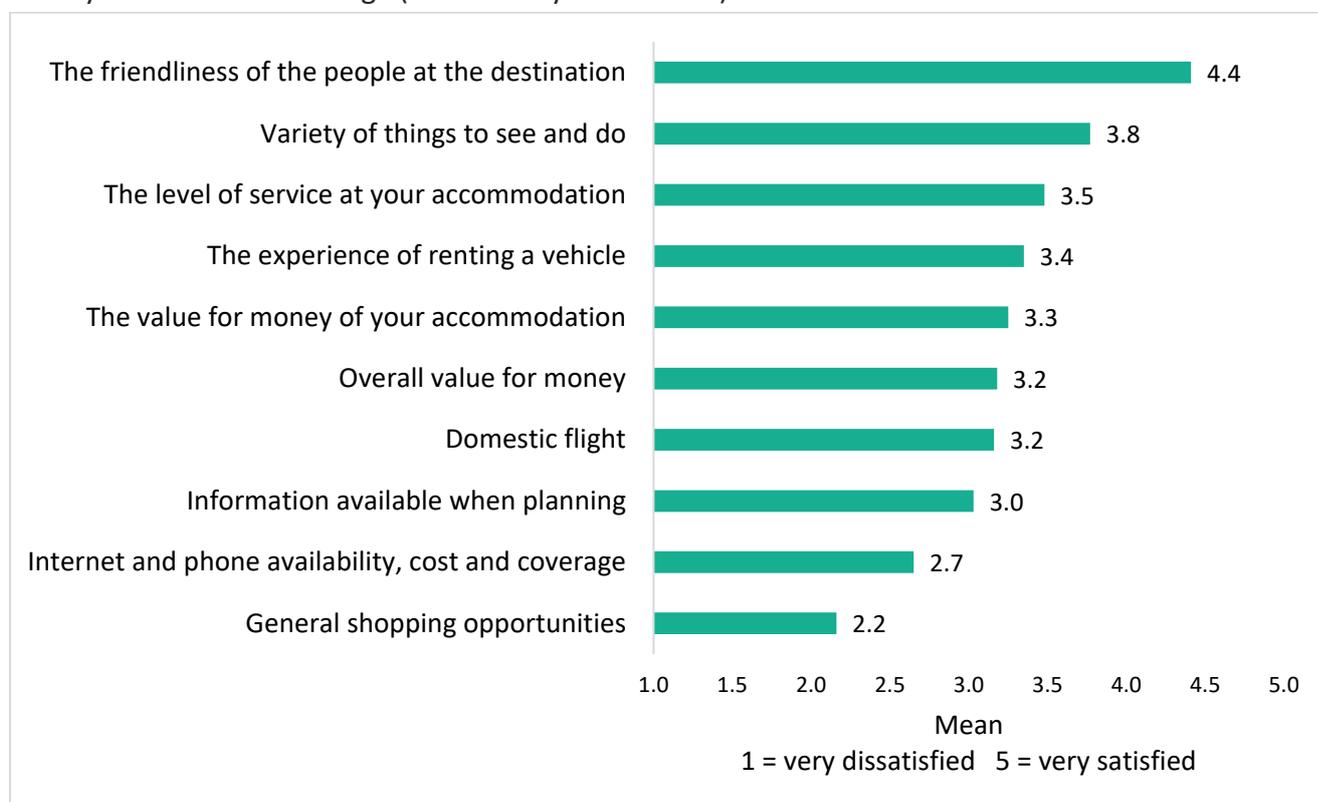
Satisfaction and activities

A key way to grow domestic expatriate tourist spend is to enhance participation in activities and to improve levels of satisfaction. The following sections of the report focus on satisfaction with elements of the travel and lead into a broader discussion of what visitors did or did not find appealing about their experience.

Expatriates were asked to rate their satisfaction with various aspects of their most recent visit on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being very satisfied and 1 being very dissatisfied.

Expatriates are most satisfied with the friendliness of the local people (4.4) and least satisfied with shopping opportunities (2.2) and the availability/coverage and cost of telecommunications (2.7) (Figure 36)

Figure 36: For your most recent overnight trip within the Solomon Islands, how satisfied were you with the following? (n= varies by each factor)



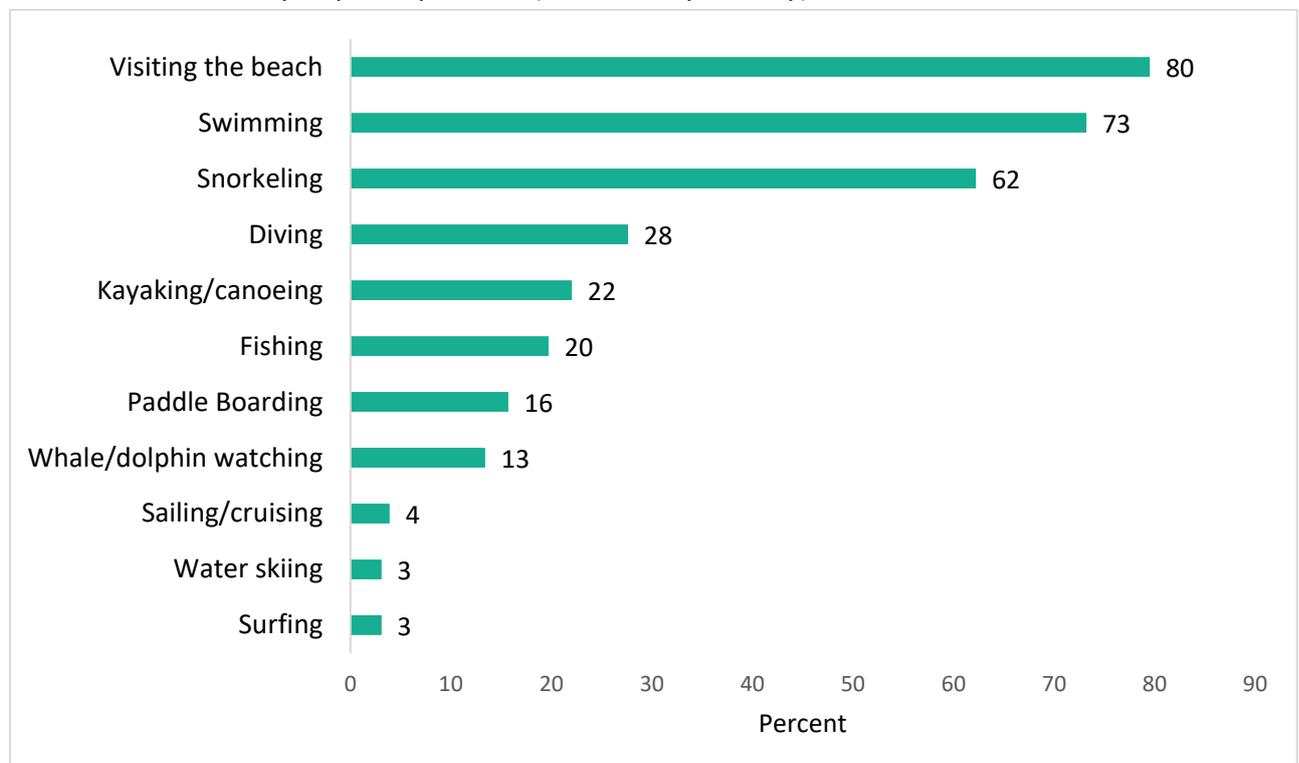
Activities and satisfaction

Expatriates were asked what activities they took part in on their most recent trip and then asked to rate their satisfaction with them. Satisfaction is ranked on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being very satisfied and 1 being very dissatisfied. Activities are broken down into four categories – water-based activities, land-based activities, cultural interaction activities and shopping.

Water-based activities

The majority of expatriates take part in water-based activities including visiting the beach (80%), swimming (73%) and snorkelling (62%). Over a quarter go diving (28%), with around a fifth going kayaking/canoeing (22%) or fishing (20%) (Figure 37).

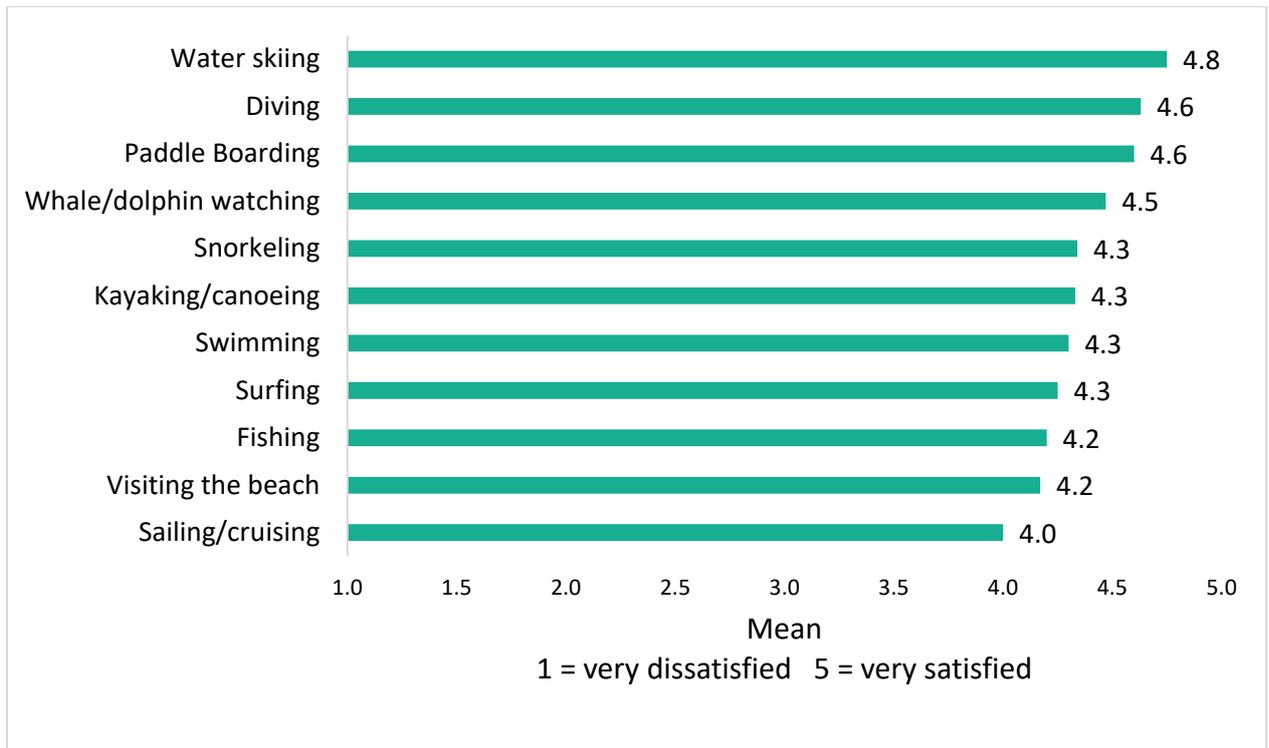
Figure 37: On your most recent overnight trip in Solomon Islands, please indicate the water-based activities that you participated in (n= varies by activity)



Multiple response therefore total doesn't = 100%

Satisfaction with water-based activities in general is very high with all activities scoring 4 or above. Expatriates are most satisfied with water-skiing (4.8), followed by diving (4.6), paddle boarding (4.6), and whale/dolphin watching (4.5). Snorkelling, kayaking, swimming, and surfing all score 4.3 (Figure 39).

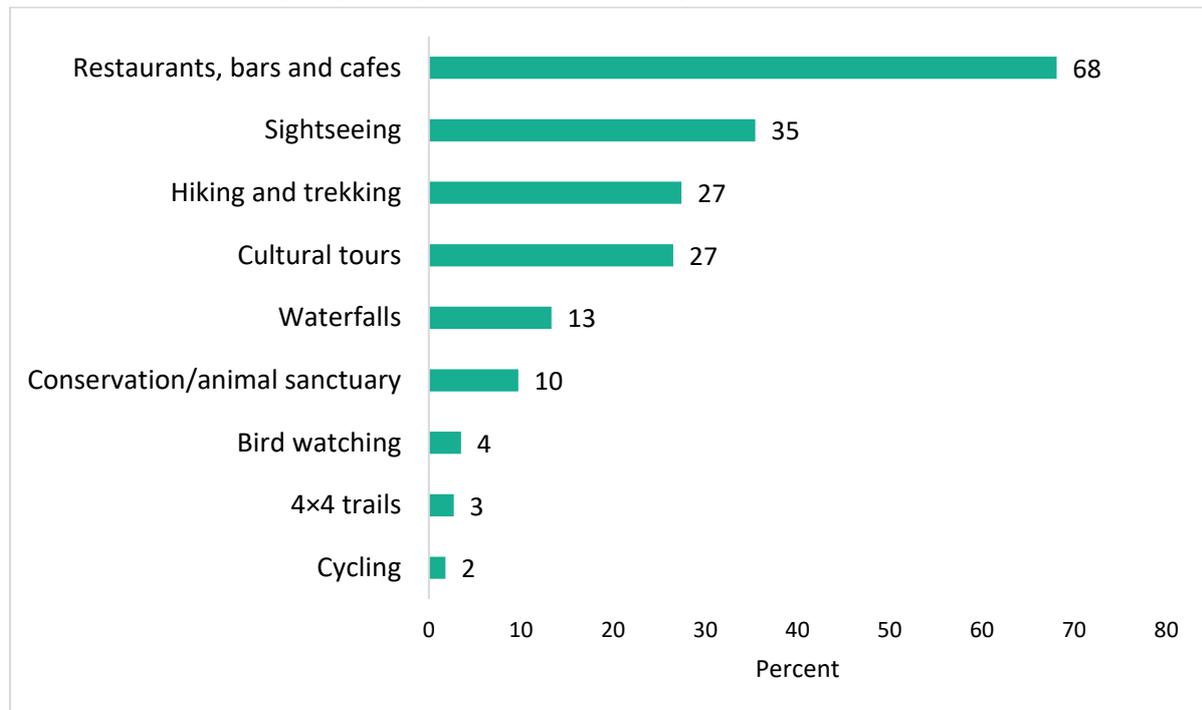
Figure 38: How satisfied were you with your water-based activities experience? (n= varies by activity)



Land-based activities

Over two-thirds (68%) of expatriates surveyed visit a restaurant/café/bar and more than a third (35%) go sightseeing. Cultural tours, hiking and trekking are activities that over one quarter (27%) of expatriates participate in (Figure 39).

Figure 39: On your most recent overnight trip in Solomon Islands, please indicate the Land based activities that you participated in (n=varies by activity)

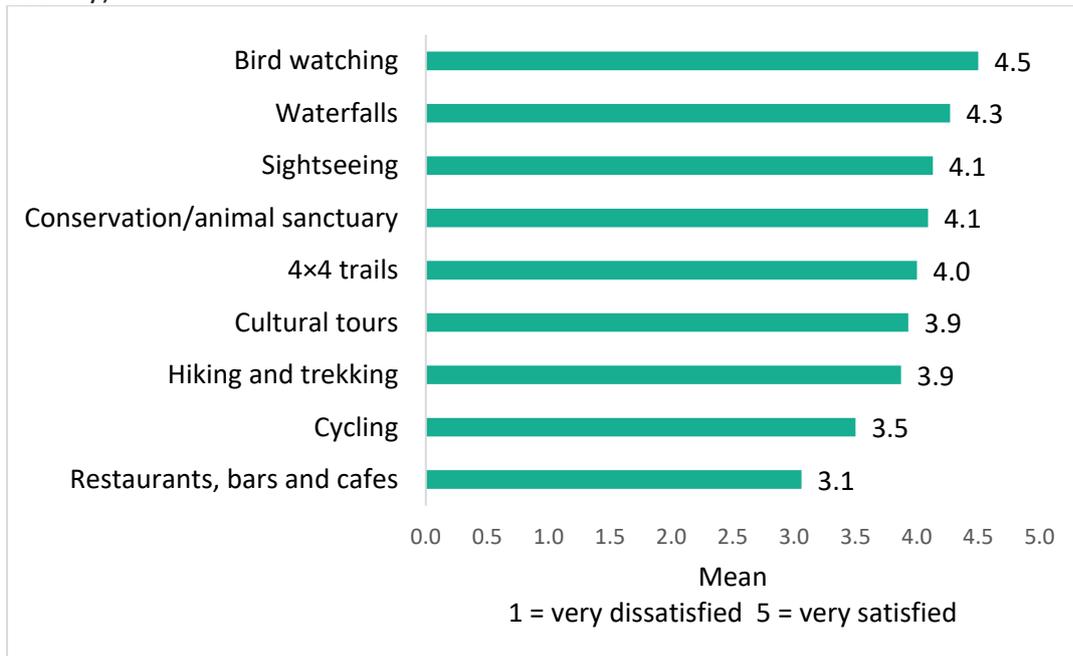


Multiple response therefore total doesn't = 100%

Satisfaction with land-based activities is generally high with over half rating a 4 or above. Bird-watching (4.5), waterfalls (4.3), sightseeing (4.1), and conservation projects/animal sanctuaries (4.1) received the highest scores. Four-wheel driving trails also scored 4 out of 5 (Figure 40).

While participation in 'restaurants, cafes and bars' is the highest category (Figure 40) of the land-based activities, it receives the lowest score in terms of satisfaction (3.1). Birdwatching has the highest satisfaction rating (4.6) among land based activities, however it has very low participation (4%). This represents a good opportunity to expand on.

Figure 40: How satisfied were you with your land-based activities experience? (n=varies by activity)



Multiple response therefore total doesn't = 100%

Cultural interaction activities

Fewer expatriates participate in cultural interaction activities than water or land-based activities. Over half of expatriates visit a market (63%) and half visit a local village (50%). Over one quarter visit WW2 battle sites (28%), and 26% attend a village festival or event. One fifth also attend a cultural event or festival (Figure 41).

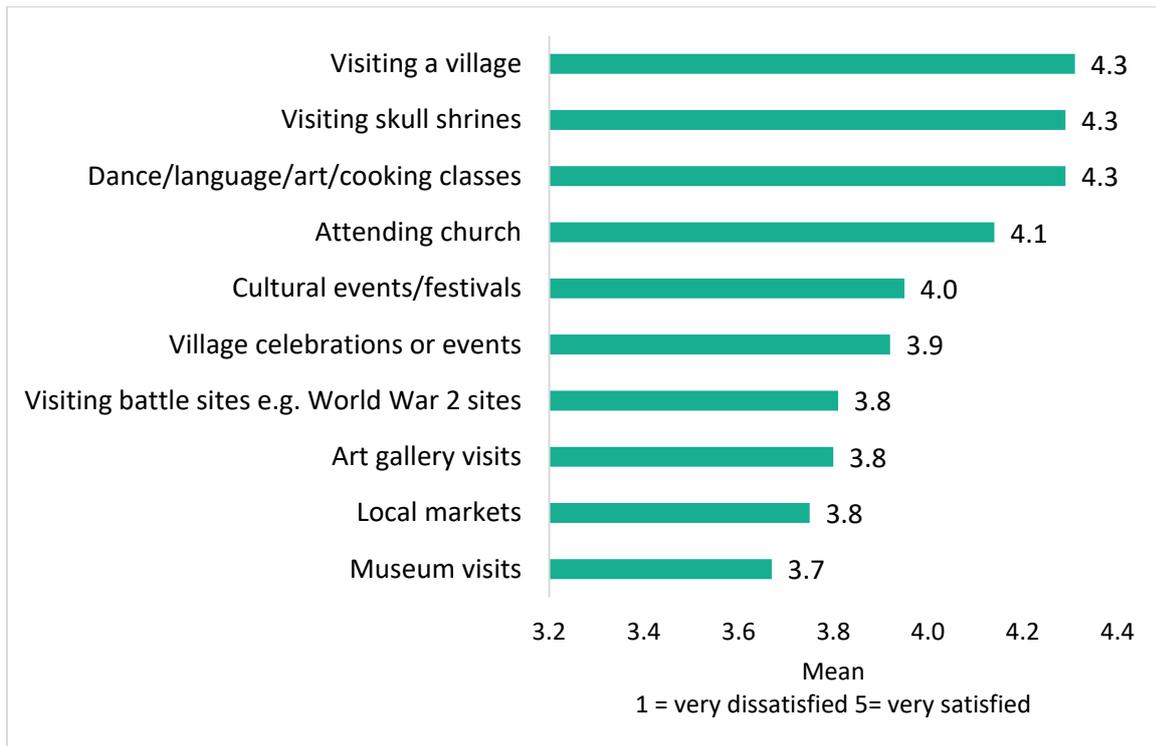
Figure 41: On your most recent overnight trip in Solomon Islands, please indicate the cultural interaction activities that you participated in (n=varies by activity)



Multiple response therefore total doesn't = 100%

Cultural interaction activities also score highly for satisfaction with half above 4 and the remainder scoring above 3.5. The highest rated activities with 4.3 out of 5 are visiting a village, visiting skull shrines and dance/language/art/cooking classes. Expatriates are also satisfied with attending cultural events/festivals (4.0) and attending church (4.1). Village celebrations or events (3.9), visiting battle sites (3.8), art gallery visits (3.8), local markets (3.8), and museum visits (3.7) are activities that visitors are slightly less satisfied with (Figure 42).

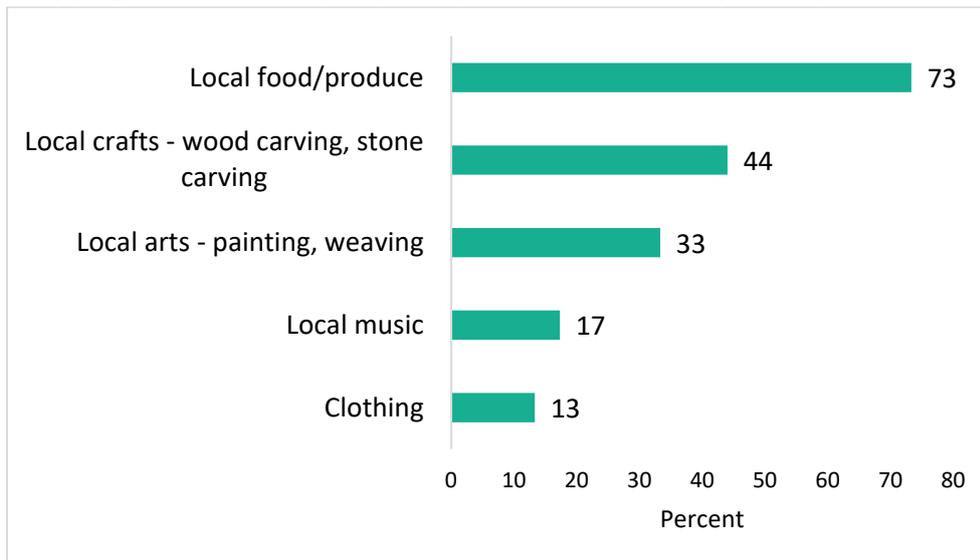
Figure 42: How satisfied were you with your cultural interaction experience? (n=varies by activity)



Shopping

Almost three quarters (73%) of expatriates go shopping for local food/produce. Just under half also shop for local crafts – wood carving and stone carving (44%) and one third shop for local arts such as paintings and weavings. Fewer people shop for local music (17%) and clothing (13%) (Figure 43).

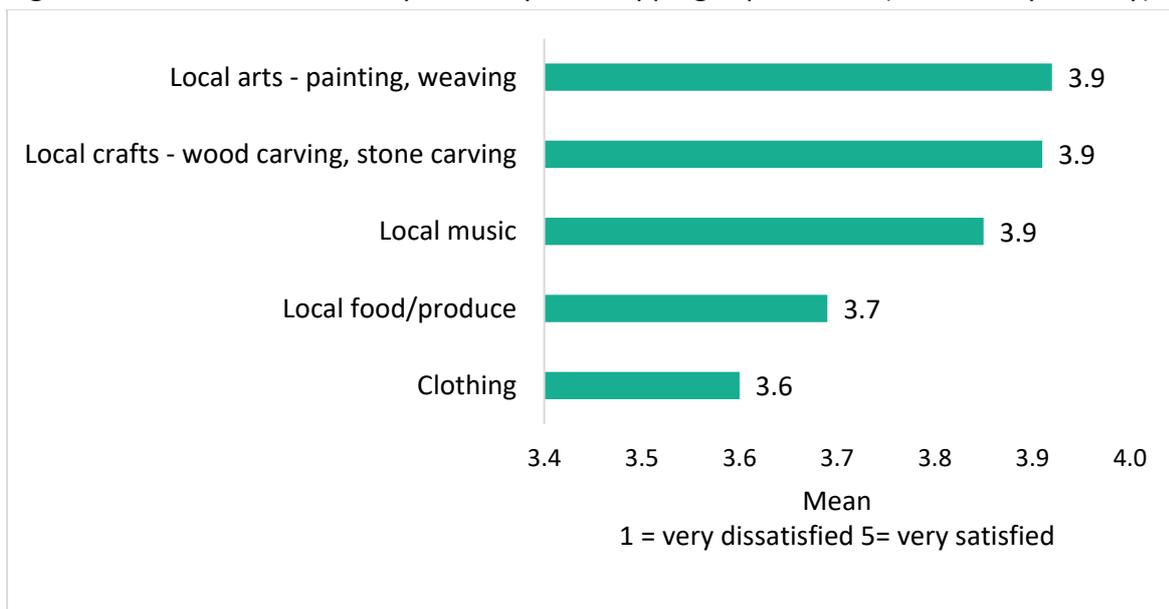
Figure 43: On your most recent overnight trip in Solomon Islands, please indicate the shopping activities that you participated in (n=varies by activity)



Multiple response therefore total doesn't = 100%

Expatriates are most satisfied with shopping for local crafts, art works and music all scoring 3.9 out of 5 (Figure 38), although these areas had relatively low participation (33%). There is high participation (73%) in local food and produce but this scores low on satisfaction (3.7) (Figure 44).

Figure 44: How satisfied were you with your shopping experience? (n=varies by activity)



Activities desired but not on offer

Expatriates were asked what activities they would have liked to participate in if they had been available.

Many expatriates express interest in activities relating to the local place and culture, for instance several mention “guided walks around the local area” or “nature or marine tours”. One mentioned a guided fishing trip or snorkelling trip as an example of the latter. Others suggest cultural activities, such as craft/weaving workshops, and eating and preparing local food. Other examples include listening to and watching panpipes and dancing, arts and crafts markets or art galleries/museums.

Other activities suggested included: offering options to get out on the water via kayak, paddle board, boat or jet-ski, and snorkelling. Additional water-based activities mentioned include guided fishing trips. Land-based activities also feature, including: guided walks of local areas, motorbike or 4x4 driving excursions.

It is worth noting that some expatriates took the opportunity to mention that they are satisfied with what is on offer, and that the lack of structured activities is an appealing factor allowing for relaxation and the simple enjoyment of nature; in several cases visitors are “happy just to chill”.

“I find generally in the Solomons that there are very little structured activities. The attraction of the Solomons, to an extent, is its remoteness and un-spoilt nature.”

Most appealing aspects of the trip

Respondents were asked what the most appealing aspects of their most recent overnight trip within Solomon Islands. Strong themes to emerge from the qualitative data are: the unspoiled and clean environment (air and water); the remoteness and quietness of escaping from Honiara; and the beautiful natural settings (land/sea/islands) with amazing scenery. Interacting with the locals and understanding their way of life, snorkelling and diving are also mentioned as the most appealing aspects of the trip.

Beautiful un-spoilt clean natural environment

Escaping hot and dusty Honiara to relax in “clean” peaceful and beautiful natural scenery is an appealing aspect for domestic expatriate tourists (66%). Expatriates find the ‘less touristy’ nature of Solomon Islands compared to other regional destinations very appealing, the feeling of having “the place to themselves”. The setting, the beautiful and relatively wild and “un-spoilt” natural scenery of the islands including both the ocean, beaches, and forests are highlighted as appealing aspects. Expatriates find the “clean air” and “clean water” and being able to swim and enjoy the beach attractive aspects of domestic travel.

“The beautiful blue clear water, reefs and the colourful fish, and in the islands not seeing rubbish”

“Getting out of Honiara and enjoying some clean air and a clean beach to swim at”

“Beautiful natural environment, I could sit by the beach forever and be happy”

“Total un-spoilt wilderness”

Remoteness and seclusion and relaxation

Several respondents (33%) mentioned that remoteness is an appealing factor, making an overnight trip within Solomon Islands is a relaxing way to get away from it all in a quiet peaceful place, and enjoy the seclusion in a beautiful natural environment.

“Just the solace, the ambiance”.

“The silence of the bush and splash of the waves.”

“Isolation, remoteness, un-spoilt ecology”

“The feeling of going somewhere remote and relatively untouched”

Experiencing the local way of life and interactions with local people

Experiencing local life and culture - especially in villages - is highlighted (33%) as an appealing aspect of the trip, having a “genuine local experience” and an “authentic experience with people and culture”.

“Solomon Islands people and our interactions with them were a real highlight.”

“Being able to walk around and see how locals really live”

“Remoteness, islanders welcoming and the exposure to their way of life”

Marine life – snorkelling and diving

Several expatriates (26%) mentioned that marine life, especially the experience of snorkelling and diving are the most appealing aspects of their most recent trip.

“The untouched and healthy marine life is the biggest drawcard of Solomons.”

“The diving was a once in a lifetime experience!”

“I love water sports and Solomons always provides the best ocean conditions - warm water, clear visibility.”

Several people also mentioned that conservation efforts, and tourism projects that directly support local communities as being one of the most appealing aspects of the trip.

“Locally supported dive operation relying entirely on village resources”

“Uepi also integrates with the local villages and leads and supports many positive initiatives.”

Least appealing aspects of the trip

Expatriates were asked about the least appealing aspects of their most recent overnight trip. Themes to emerge included: not receiving value for money (both accommodation and transport), a poor standard of accommodation, and low levels of customer service and communication from providers. Expatriates also comment that it can be “hard work” to travel, with destinations difficult to access due to unreliable transport and scheduling and limited visitor information. Less common themes related to safety and security as well as rubbish.

Poor value for money

Several expatriates (17%) noted that the trip did not represent good value for money, especially in terms of accommodation and transportation.

“Outrageous cost of poor quality accommodation and food.”

“Price! The cost of accommodation is just bonkers. It's just not competitive when you evaluate what the standard of accommodation is. I do understand that fuel and building materials are expensive here, but I just cannot see how Solomon Island tourism is going to take off with the current prices. It is a real barrier to travel.”

“High cost and poor experience of Solomon Airlines”

A number of expatriates mentioned that it is cheaper to travel outside of Solomon Islands for a holiday while also receiving a better standard of service (accommodation and flights).

“Expensive (accommodation, food, transport) compared to other comparable destinations. Level of service and facilities low for what you pay. Accommodation, food and transport is OK, but there is always something 'not quite right' e.g. low water pressure, food order mix-up, boat engine trouble. If it was cheaper it wouldn't be as irritating, but as you pay first world prices it is more annoying. A similar experience elsewhere in Asia would be half the price or less.”

Expatriates stress that the cost would be more acceptable if the quality of accommodation and standard of service was improved along the value chain. Some expatriates note that

they don't mind paying more for a higher quality experience and one that they know is giving back to the local community.

"It's expensive to travel in Solomons - flights and accommodation costs are prohibitive for the standards and service you get. Uepi is the one place I recommend in the Solomons and I'm happy to pay a bit more for the safety and security, and excellent diving experience, and the positive community initiatives they are involved with."

Poor standard of accommodation

A poor standard of accommodation is highlighted by nearly a quarter (24%) of respondents as a least appealing aspect of their visit. A lack of basic amenities is cited in some cases (no hot water, fan or mosquito net), as are un-hygienic conditions including dirty bathrooms, and bed bugs.

"Absurdly high cost, bed-bugs, dilapidated facilities"

Several people also mentioned that food options were sometimes of poor quality, high cost and were limited in options and choices.

"Cost of meals at the hotel/lack of local alternatives"

Others are constructive in their feedback and mention that relatively simple maintenance and upgrades would improve the experience and allow for more services to be provided for guests.

"A bit more thought, maintenance and touches that do not cost a lot of money could go a long way"

"The eco lodges can each do with a 10-15K AUD investment to provide basic solar power systems to the bungalows, with light and fans, and a solar freezer. This cheap infrastructure magnifies the comfort for the guest and allows the owners new income from selling drinks and better food"

Low level of customer service and communication

Poor levels of customer service received from accommodation and transport providers emerged as a strong theme (16%). This includes general levels of customer service and poor communication before and during the trip. Expatriates in many cases are frustrated by a lack of communication from both accommodation and transport providers.

"Inefficiency!! Always waiting, lack of communication."

"Very poor communication from both the airlines and hotel. "

Difficult to access – unreliable transport, poor information and communication

A further theme (11%) that runs through the 'least appealing' comments relates to difficulty in accessing the destination. This is caused by several factors with the main one being unreliable flight scheduling and poor communication from Solomon Airlines. This is also a problem encountered when travelling by boat, expatriates saying that it is hard to find a reliable ferry timetable to understand how to get to and from their destinations. Another aspect that compounds this issue is poor communication from airlines and accommodation providers on how to reach them. On several occasions expatriates noted that flights are cancelled or overbooked without due notification.

“Solomon Airlines flight was cancelled the day before and we received no notification”

“The flight scheduling is unpredictable, unreliable and flights are expensive.”

A lack of visitor information (both online and onsite) to enable planning of the trip is also highlighted as an unappealing aspect that makes it hard to travel.

“Lack of organisation of some things - such as transport. Information was hard to get in a clear way.”

Further issues impeding easy access to destinations include the poor state of repair of infrastructure both the roads, and the condition of boats and planes.

“We were involved in a boat accident which was pretty scary and resulted in my partner and one of our children being injured. This has dented our confidence in travelling by boat here.”

Rubbish

A few visitors (8%) mentioned the rubbish around the streets and on the beaches as unappealing aspects.

“The rubbish and litter in the towns”

“The garbage in the streets around main area in Gizo and the trash in the water when snorkelling.”

Safety and security

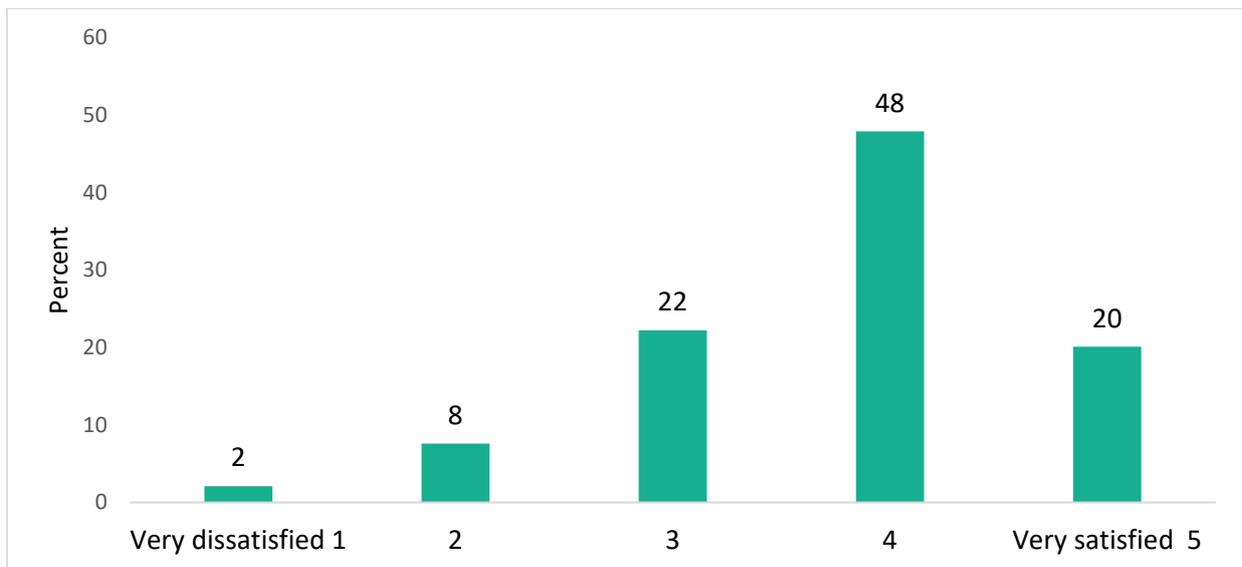
Some respondents (5%) also mention safety issues as a least appealing aspect. This relates mostly to safety on Solomon Airlines, but concerns are also raised about boat safety with one visitor having a boat accident and another raising issues of personal safety (room invasion) at a resort. Other comments related to personal safety in Honiara.

Overall satisfaction and intentions to recommend

Expatriates were asked to reflect on their overall satisfaction with their most recent trip, and if they would recommend travelling domestically in Solomon Islands to others.

The majority of expatriates are either satisfied (48%) or very satisfied (20%) with their most recent overnight trip in Solomon Islands. A minority are dissatisfied (8%), or very dissatisfied (2%), with around one fifth (22%) being neither satisfied or dissatisfied (Figure 45). The average satisfaction rating is 3.8 out of 5.

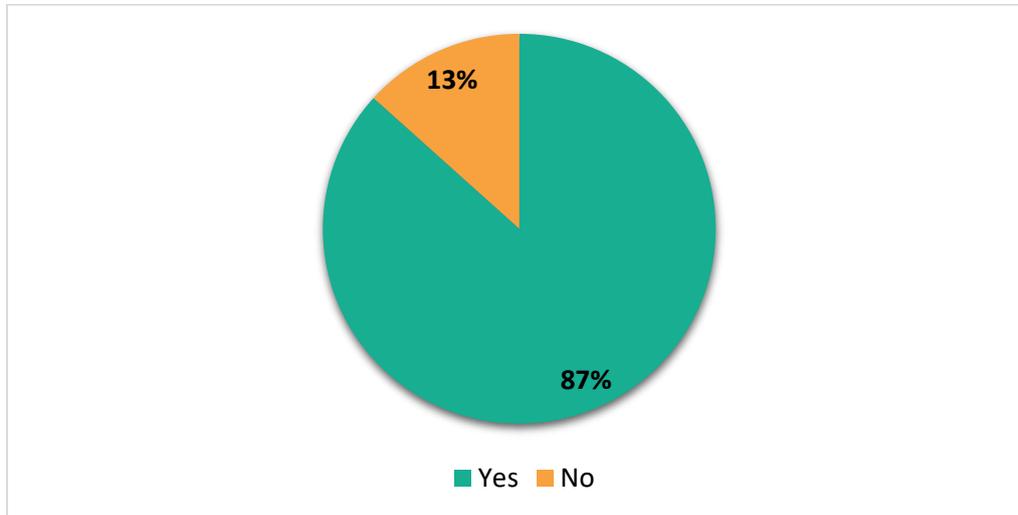
Figure 45: How satisfied were you with your overall experience on your most recent trip within Solomon Islands? (n=144)



Intention to recommend

Eighty-seven percent of expatriates would recommend travelling within Solomon Islands to others (Figure 46).

Figure 46: Would you recommend traveling within Solomon Islands to others? (n=143)



Of the group that would *not* recommend, the reasons given include the poor value for money compared to other neighbouring destinations (such as Fiji, Vanuatu and Asia), and that it is logistically quite challenging to travel within Solomon Islands, being more suited to “adventurous travelers”.

“Too expensive, difficult to travel, unreliable, other places in the Pacific have more to offer - unless you are an avid diver or WWII historian. It is also cheaper, and has better service”

The majority (87%) that *would* recommend travelling within Solomon Islands to others, were then asked who they would recommend to. Most would recommend travelling in Solomon Islands to family and friends (31%). Others would recommend to other expats and work colleagues (9%), several also stated that they would recommend to “anyone” (13%). Some (16%) commented that these recommendations would be directed towards “intrepid travelers” that have a “sense of adventure” and “want to get off the beaten trail”. Such recommendations would include tempering somewhat prior expectations of luxury, ease of travel, and value for money/cost.

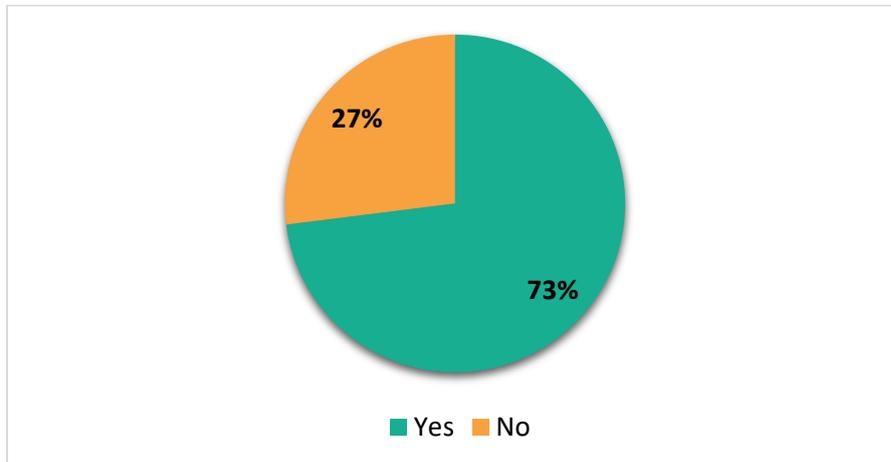
“Intrepid people who aren't high maintenance or don't mind diamonds in the rough”

“Those who are a bit more adventurous, have been to lots of other places in the world and not looking for a luxurious, easy holiday but have to understand that it's an expensive destination”

Suggested Improvements

Expatriates were asked if there was anything that would have improved their most recent visit. Almost three quarters (73%) noted room for improvement (Figure 47).

Figure 47: Is there anything that could have improved your most recent trip within Solomon Islands? (n=131)



The feedback mirrors other qualitative data from the survey and includes a focus on the challenges of finding visitor information, and organising flights and ferries. Other comments suggest that accommodation providers could do more to help make travelling and organising a trip easier, by providing advice and communicating with visitors prior to arrival. Several respondents mention that they rely heavily on friends and others to share information to be able to plan their visit.

“Better communication will greatly improve the experience of guests.”

“More information on local activities for tourists”

The high cost (17%) and poor standard of accommodation (18%) were again highlighted as areas for improvement. Expatriates stress a need for cost to be balanced against the quality of the accommodation received– “it would have been bearable if it was a lot cheaper for what we got”.

Simple suggestions offered include: to improve customer service given by accommodation providers, ensure facilities are maintained and cleaned to a high standard, and generally improve levels of hygiene. Other comments mention the lack of basic facilities such as hot water, air conditioning, fans, and power.

“Running water to the hut, hot water for showers, upgraded accommodation, air conditioning in rooms”

Other clear themes (19%) relate to improvements in transport infrastructure, both sea and air, including better scheduling and communication (16%). A level of frustration is expressed

about the “reliability of airlines and scheduling” and to the challenges involved in getting accurate information about ferry schedules and flight timetables. Some mention that domestic air terminals and facilities on ferries are unhygienic and highlighted issues relating to safety on boats and planes.

“Air safety needs to be addressed”

“Would have been much better if we hadn't had the boat accident (due to lack of maintenance of boat)”

Others mention that shopping options, including more opportunities to buy local handicrafts, would have improved their visit (6%). Further aspects for improvement include more food and beverage (11%) options either at the accommodation or in the surrounding area, along with more activities being available at the destination.

Additional Comments

There was an opportunity at the end of the survey for expatriate domestic tourists to provide further comments about travelling within Solomon Islands. Much of the feedback echoed the themes raised previously. Several respondents also took this opportunity to express their affection for Solomon Islands.

“Solomon Islands is the most beautiful, wonderful, special place I have ever visited or lived in.”

Expatriates feel that Solomon Islands is a place brimming with tourism potential, however there is a feeling that it offers poor value for money and it is hard to access many of its hidden gems. Several people mentioned that travelling within Solomon Islands is greatly facilitated by knowing local people. Many commented that having to work out travel plans by yourself is very hard due to a lack of reliable information - especially how to negotiate getting to a destination and back with certainty.

“Holiday experiences in Solomon Islands are great, but it requires knowing people in order to arrange things. Many holiday experiences are invisible to tourists or expats without local connections.”

Others took this opportunity to provide recommendations related to getting to, staying at, and moving around destinations within Solomon Islands. These include suggestions to improve transport and provide more frequent flights /boats, to upgrade visitor information (especially correct daily schedules for flights/boats), improve and expand accommodation options, and to provide customer service training. Others suggest supporting larger successful operators to grow their businesses, and smaller operators to start up and link to the visitor industry more effectively.

“I travel widely for work and pleasure in Solomons. It is one of the most beautiful countries in the world. Accommodation is very expensive for low quality - and in most places could be easily improved with basic styling, and a little hospitality training.”

“If there were clean safe places to stay that weren’t too difficult or expensive to get too, my family would visit them every month”

“People don't mind spending if they feel they get value for their money.”

Some also noted that safety on transportation and security for travelers should be improved:

“Quick, safe ferry transport to Central Province would be a huge advantage”

While some respondents expressed disappointment over the lack of ‘things to do’ others took a more positive approach and mentioned opportunities that tourism can bring to local people. They also stressed that initiatives should be supported to link local people to the tourism economy giving examples of ways this could be done e.g. local guides, better linking expatriates to local festivals.

“Very few potential activities on offer by locals (like walking tours, bike tours, etc.).”

Other constructive feedback included ways to enhance visitor information with requests for a website or “one stop shop with visitor information including activities, and how to book/who to contact”. One visitor also mentioned that directional signage would assist in finding places of tourist interest.

“Proper permanent signage would help tourists find sites and places of interest (i.e. instead of following directions such as take the second left after the third bridge etc.).”

“Need to have a proper website which provides with details on what one can do in which province plus contacts details of people who can guide you. Tourism is not limited to diving.”

The cost of travelling around Solomon Islands was of concern to many and this was often linked to comments about expensive and often potentially dangerous transport to destinations. The high cost of domestic flights is seen as a barrier to more frequent travel, with some expatriates saying it is not only cheaper to travel outside of the country but the value for money in terms of accommodation and service is higher elsewhere.

“Travelling for leisure can often be hard work, or at least, harder work than it should be. It is such an amazing and untapped place though that is definitely worth exploring.”

“Solomon Islands is a stunning adventure tourist destination; however it is hard work and expensive and often dangerous to travel around by sea or air.”

It is particularly notable when visitors express concern about cost and safety related to tourism. While this does not bode well for the expatriate market this should also be considered as a serious impediment to tourism development in Solomon Islands overall. To make things easier for expatriate domestic tourists, some suggested the further development of local package deals, distributed through travel agents, that are all inclusive and focused on a full itinerary.

“Solomon Islands could use more/better travel agents because package deals (flights, accommodation, meals, everything included) are the best way to organise holidays for remote locations without regular comms and websites. Maybe Solomon Airlines could play that role too?”

Expressing a real passion for the Solomon Islands, expatriates want to add value to local communities through domestic tourism. In this respect people provided suggestions about how tourism could be better linked to local communities.

“Attempts have been made by operators who have no idea of tourism and the local customs and how the two can come together. These people have failed and are failing. Integrated tourism organised and operated by experienced, successful operators is the way of the future.”

“Investment into local Solomon Islanders regards to building capacity relating to hospitality, this would also include much capacity building with local nature base tourism operators in how to manage and look after tourists, currently this is not in place”

“Putting a support network around smaller operators, to link to tourism and to grow could help local communities, an example being ensuring tourists receive the right information about how to connect to the local operators and support local festivals.”

Recommendations

There are several opportunities to develop the domestic expatriate tourism market in Solomon Islands. While this report highlights reasonably high levels of satisfaction with many aspects of the expatriate domestic tourism experience, it is clear that improvements are needed to make domestic travel a more appealing proposition. This will, in turn, generate greater economic benefits for local host populations.

Expatriates told us that travelling within Solomon Islands is challenging due to a lack of visitor information, poor communications, high costs, and the unreliable and sometimes unsafe nature of transport (air, sea and land). Better service and communication are required to assist expatriates in planning their holiday/short break with confidence. Having better visitor information on transport, for example current ferry and flight schedules, and good communication and customer service from providers, will facilitate this.

Existing visitor information needs to be more available and more visible across all channels (online, print, in person). Visitor information on what activities are offered, when and where, who to contact and how to book, will also enhance the domestic expatriate tourist experience. Accommodation providers in the provinces must provide current information about what is on offer and, if possible, add visitor information to relevant websites that are well linked to national and international portals and rank well in google searches. There is also potential for Solomon Airlines to more actively promote visitor activities in provincial destinations. It is also vital that businesses look to work together to develop visitor experiences and enhance satisfaction with expatriate domestic travel. This could be as simple as creating links between websites or could take the form of businesses networking together to provide 'packaged' experiences for the visitor. There are also opportunities for operators to enhance visitor length of stay by collaborating to develop multi-day programmes that provide a richer array of experiences.

In addition to better linkages between local tourism operators, clearer communication with visitors about opening hours and services on offer would help visitors to better link to the economy and boost participation in activities and levels of satisfaction. Enhanced satisfaction and clearer information will, in turn, provide a platform to grow visitor yield and create local economic opportunities.

There are several opportunities to increase the yield of domestic expatriate tourists in Solomon Islands. These include developing niche tourism products around water and nature-based activities (e.g. guided fishing trips, rod hire, ecotourism, guided snorkel tours, kayaking or stand up paddle boarding, and guided tours by boat). It is also vital to develop land based and focused activities – both nature based and cultural. For example bird watching, dance/art classes and cultural/historical tours can the opportunity to learn more about local culture and the everyday life of host communities. Food and beverage spend can certainly be grown and there are opportunities to create a 'deeper' set of culturally

immersive activities for visitors , for example learning how produce is grown and how to cook and prepare local food.

There is an opportunity to link local communities to tourism through the development of visitor experiences that focus on local knowledge and culture and offer locally guided nature-based tours to visitors. There are also opportunities to explore deeper experiences with local arts/crafts/weaving/music and carving. Expatriates highlighted several good examples in Solomon Islands, where local communities are effectively linked to tourism and these could be looked as models for others to follow.

For any form of product development to be successful and sustainable it should be linked to tourism training and capacity building, to ensure that the quality of the experience is of a high standard. Without appropriate levels of service it will be difficult to grow a feeling among visitors that they are receiving 'value of money'. This is arguably more important for the expatriate market than others, given the very significant role that word of mouth referrals play in persuading this group to travel and in influencing their planning and decision making.

Investing in people and upskilling in customer service would clearly enhance the domestic expatriate experience of travel in Solomon Islands. While small challenges are seen by most as being part and parcel of travelling within Solomon Islands, these inconveniences could be reduced by improving service and opening up lines of communication from airlines and accommodation providers. Some mentioned properties that have good customer service and suggested that others could follow suit via basic service training. In order to raise standards of both customer service and also managerial skills there is certainly potential to develop mentoring networks and opportunities.

It is vital that all stakeholders work together to achieve stronger outcomes from the domestic expatriate market in Solomon Islands. By developing effective networks and sharing knowledge it is possible to gain stronger returns from tourism. Each of the broad recommendations presented above has implications for a variety of sectors and groups.

We now present a set of key 'takeaway messages' for the following groups: tour operators, accommodation providers, transport providers, government and other agencies.

Tour operators

- Product development – water-based activities are still the most popular, there is an opportunity to build on these for example with guided local fishing or snorkeling tours
- Trained local guides – there is an opportunity for local guides with appropriate training to take people on guided tours (culture/nature based) of the area, either on foot/cycle/boat and tell stories about their place. This can link to handicraft shopping in villages or at markets.
- Marketing – there are very low levels of prepaid spend and this indicates a significant opportunity to create packages of local experiences for couples and friends and to combine them with transport and accommodation. Packaged short breaks would facilitate greater ease of travel, enable improved information provision and add a level of certainty to aspects of the travel.
- Marketing – word of mouth is based on people having good experiences and experiencing value for money. Effort must go into product development, and crucially people training for customer service. Operators may then ask satisfied customers if they would be happy to provide reviews on trusted user generated content focused websites such as Tripadvisor.
- If possible every effort should be made to develop and facilitate online bookings and credit card payments as this will facilitate easier travel and improve confidence on the part of domestic expatriate tourists.

Accommodation providers

- Information services should be provided both online and onsite with easy access provided to information on opening times, and tours. If possible do not just profile the accommodation offerings but also provide information about surrounding the destination. Key information that should be provided if possible includes: local maps, listings of available activities, and links to destination offerings – shopping, food and beverage etc.
- Upgrade accommodation facilities and ensure they are secure, kept clean with mosquito nets and, if possible, fans. Expatriates stressed that they don't expect luxury, however they do expect clean sheets, clean and working toilets, and a level of comfort (fans/air con/hot water) that is commensurate with the price paid.
- Survey results show that expatriates really appreciate accommodation providers that are giving back to the local community in some way – if you are, tell them about it in promotional materials.
- It is often said that people are more likely to share a bad experience than a good one, therefore it is essential that staff go the extra mile to make the visitor experience a good one. Try wherever possible to upgrade staff skills and to learn from other businesses.
- With a quiet and relaxing atmosphere being important to maintain for expatriate travel, accommodation providers and restaurants/café/bars should consider using solar rather than generator power to reduce noise pollution. This also strengthens opportunities to

market the fact that you are environmentally aware and committed to core principles of sustainability.

- Look for ways to support and develop the surrounding environment and culture
 - keep reefs clean and healthy (clean up rubbish from beach and reefs)
 - consider switching to biodegradable and/or reusable products
 - invest in providing a good food and beverage experience for the visitor as these perform poorly in the survey - try where possible to use local produce and to tell the story of your link to local produce providers.
- It is important to make the visitor experience as 'accessible' as possible for those that are in older age group or who may have some form of disability. Likewise it is vital to ensure that children in family groups are catered for in terms of accommodation design and safety.

Transport providers

- Regularly update scheduling information online and ensure customer service representatives are able to update passengers on the day. Ferry timetables should be made available to tourists through an array of sources including information offices and online
- Communicate as far as possible in advance of delays, and provide suggested alternatives wherever possible.
- Keep facilities clean (i.e. seating areas/toilets on boats or at domestic ferry terminals)
- Improve safety – ensure boats and planes are regularly checked and maintained. Do not take passengers on a plane or boat that is unsafe.
- Continue to focus on enabling access for those who are older or who may have a disability of some kind
- Work closely with accommodation providers and tour operators to provide a seamless experience for the visitor, wherever possible focus on providing the visitor with a sense of certainty about their travels and good value for money.

Government and other agencies (eg local councils, provincial/national government, Tourism Solomons, South Pacific Tourism Organisation, Strongim Bisnis);

- Cleanliness is key – rubbish collection, keeping ocean and reefs clean, keeping city clean
- Improving customer service is something that government can support via training and mentoring schemes – this will, in turn, lead to improved satisfaction and word of mouth.
- Better road signage and maps can help visitors travelling by car or foot explore with confidence and better link to tourism activities and accommodation
- Investment in infrastructure and in particular roading and telecommunications will benefit all tourism markets and destinations the long term.
- The results of the survey show that online information is fragmented. National tourism portals need to have more detailed information on provincial travel.

- Supporting the training of local tour guides is an effective way to open up new land based cultural experiences to visitors. Likewise it is important to support community based or focused initiatives in areas such as agri-tourism, cooking classes, weaving classes or experiencing and learning more about local dance and music traditions.
- Agencies and government can help to facilitate greater networking and information sharing between tourism operators in the provinces. Networking can enhance the visibility of provinces online, strengthen mentoring and information sharing between businesses and also build up a more collaborative industry over time.
- Safety of transport was of concern to several of the expatriate domestic tourists surveyed and it is vital that government and relevant regulatory bodies enforce regulations and strengthen industry awareness of basic safety/maintenance requirements so that expatriates can travel with confidence.
- Support basic improvements in accommodation to enhance the visitor experience. Support for basic maintenance could, for example, assist some accommodation providers in offering a higher quality of visitor experience in areas where options are limited and are restricting opportunities for growth
- Focus on building local community awareness of tourism and working on the ‘co-creation’ of visitor experiences that link to the local economy. Look to develop workshops and provide effective training that can encourage greater understanding of how to engage with and benefit from the visitor economy.

While it is important to highlight sector and stakeholder specific recommendations it should be remembered that tourism really is ‘everyone’s business’. In order to strengthen the return from the domestic expatriate tourism market in Solomon Islands, a collaborative and holistic approach is required to enhance the visitor experience and the benefits accruing to local people. This approach involves strengthening visitor information, improving the booking process, facilitating easier access and safer transport, enhancing accommodation offerings, providing better value for money, building community and SME awareness and strengthening the range and quality of experiences at the destination. Reaching the true potential of expatriate domestic tourism in Solomon Islands requires everyone to work together to create a memorable experience - one that expatriates will want to repeat, and tell their friends about, and one that local communities will benefit from and fully support.

Contact Details

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"Strongim Bisnis is an economic development program funded by the Australian Government. Its goal is to stimulate growth in the tourism, cocoa and coconut sectors through activities that strengthen business and increase women's participation and empowerment."

LOAN OPPORTUNITY FOR TOURISM OPERATORS IN WESTERN PROVINCE

Solomon Islands Tourist Infrastructure Development Fund (SITIDF) is accepting loan applications from accommodation providers in Western province who are seeking to upgrade their existing rooms and/or facilities.

CONDITIONS

Must be an existing accommodation provider in Western province
Must be a registered business and be IRD tax compliant

TERMS

Loans are for upgrading of existing room and facilities only
Loans are evaluated by SITDF board upon submission of a completed loan application
Loans have a 3-6 month grace period of repayment
Loans are at 0% interest as long as the loan repayment schedule is followed without payment delays
Loans are reimbursed in phases based on actual implementation of room/facility upgrades

To express your interest and request a loan application form please email wayne@msca.com.sb or call Ivan Ph: 60021 for the next phase of loans.

Technical support to develop loan applications and strategic business plans will be provided to selected applicants.

